

ADMIRAL JOHN BYNG'S 'BRITISH' EXECUTION: A CASE OF COMMUNITY,
NATION, AND EMPIRE, 1756-1757

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ABSTRACT

The loss of Minorca at the beginning of the Seven Years' War created a well-documented political crisis culminating in the arrest, trial, and execution of Admiral John Byng. Most of the historiography on this extraordinary event remains, however, mired in political, maritime, and military histories. This dissertation deviates from that trend. If Byng's execution is treated as a deviant case (which it most certainly was) then this remarkable episode can reveal much about several other aspects of eighteenth-century British society that has hitherto remained below the surface. Thus, by way of microhistory, the research presented here looks past the political and military and attempts, instead, to connect Byng to the several other aspects of cultural Britain that allowed his execution to go forward. Communicative cultures remained potent: ballads and sermons are investigated alongside newspapers and pamphlets not only as conduits of information (or misinformation) but in gauging the potency of the messaging. This dissertation also takes an anthropological turn to add to the historical discourse of the eighteenth-century crowd. Thus, what develops is an argument put forward which takes into account individual behaviors as part of a mob scene whether processional or riotous. The Byng affair occurred during a precipitous rise in food prices. Problems of shortages exacerbated a national mood whereby both food riots and Byng protests occurred concurrently. This deviant case study affords an opportunity to compare various types of mob expressions: food riots, protests against the admiral, but also mob violence against impressment gangs as the nation readied for war. Finally, the dissertation addresses manning issues. Sickness pervaded the navy since impressments began in 1755. Economic changes, long in the making, likely contributed to this, explaining why Byng's fleet fell short of over 700 men as he made his way to the Mediterranean.

DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original, except where indicated by special reference in the text, and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other academic award. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.



6 May 2015

Signed:

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Date:

DEDICATION

This work could not have come close to completion were it not for two exceptional people: my wife, Jori Jude Covington-Krulder; and my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Richard Sheldon. On both counts I am the recipient of tremendous patience and dedication toward my academic exploits. No amount of thanks can be given or demonstrated in a single lifetime that would indicate my deep and unbound gratitude to the both of them.

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INTRODUCTION

On the morning of October the 7th, in the year 1758, John Wesley walked with Benjamin Lawrence after an early morning sermon. The two strode past the narrow cobbled streets of the village of Newport, on the Isle of Wight, heading for the island's famed crossroad, the Wootton Bridge. Here, passing time, waiting for a boat that would carry the Methodist minister back to the mainland, Wesley began to pepper Lawrence, a common soldier, with a series of questions about an event that occurred on a small island in the Mediterranean over two years earlier. 'He was in St. Philip's Fort during the whole siege,' wrote Wesley in his diary. The conversation between Wesley and Lawrence must have, a) satisfied the travelling minister's nagging curiosity about this far flung event, and b) found some sort of vindication at solving a festering riddle: how Britain lost the island of Minorca to the French at the beginning of the Seven Years' War. The impact of that morning conversation remained with Wesley throughout the course of his day. Eventually, he traveled by 'cock-boat' on choppy waters across the Solent Strait to Gosport. We 'must have sunk if one large wave had come over her,' he wrote later that night. But it was Wesley's conversation with the soldier Benjamin Lawrence that preoccupied his mind. Wesley carefully wrote down a series of eight detailed observations about the siege and Minorca's loss, all gleaned from his chance conversation with Lawrence. At the end of which, Wesley concluded by exclaiming in his journal, 'O human justice! One great man is shot! And another is made a lord!'¹

¹ Wesley drew these eight accounts from his conversation with Lawrence; '(1) Abundance of *cattle* was left in the fields till the French (long expected) came and took them. (2) Abundance of *wine* was left in the town, even more than the French could use. And there was not enough in the castle, even for the sick men. (3) A large, strong *stone house* was left standing within a small distance from the fort. Behind this the French formed themselves, particularly before the last assault. (4) This might be easily accounted for. We had few officers of any experience, and the governor never came out of his house. (5) The French made two general assaults and were repulsed, and many blown up by our mines. But the mines having never been looked after till just when we wanted them, most of them were utterly useless, so that only two out of three score did any execution. (6) In their third assault (which they were very hardly persuaded to make) Captain _____, who commanded the guard of an hundred men, at the sallyport, ran away before he was attacked, and his men, having none to command them, went after. I was left alone till I retired also. And the French, having none to oppose them, came in. (7) In the morning our men were mad to drive them out, and would have done it in an hour but that they were told that the fort was given up, and ordered to cease firing. (8) We had at the approach of the enemy three thousand eight hundred and thirty-three effective men. And we had very near as many when we surrendered, with plenty of provision and ammunition.' John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, editors, vol. 21 (Nashville, TN., Abingdon Press, 1992), 166-67.

This small occurrence extracted from the pages of Wesley's journal signifies a troubling event in the annals of British military history: the loss of the Isle of Minorca to the French at the beginning of the Seven Years' War. But Wesley's detailed recording of an accidental conversation between two disparate people, also points to two other associated events concerning Minorca: one, the subsequent arrest, trial, and execution of the man who was sent out to save it, Admiral John Byng; and two, the remarkable and unlikely peerage of an octogenarian general who ultimately surrendered it, that of William Blakeney.² 'One great man is shot [John Byng]! And another made a lord [William Blakeney]!' so wrote the minister, John Wesley.

Redolent, therefore, in the minister's telling lay his lingering doubts about the official government line as to what truly happened in the Mediterranean in May of 1756, and why several months later, Admiral John Byng lay dead from an arrest, trial, and execution that many throughout England, its kingdom, and indeed in much of the Western world could scarcely believe. Wesley's travel journal recorded not just a conversation between preacher and sinner, but rather exposed a cleric's festering mistrust of his government, the elites that reigned within it, and also of the British press. Wesley's description of the conversation is also riddled with contextual clues about 'British' culture at the middle of the eighteenth century: the cock-boat and walking for transportation; religion and authority – Wesley himself a promoter of the evangelical revival historians now call the Great Awakening; the camp at Newport filled 'with soldiers,' wrote Wesley, 'the most abandoned wretches whom I ever yet saw. Their whole glory was in cursing, swearing, drunkenness, and lewdness;'³ yet these very 'monsters,'⁴ as he called them, were the plebes, the dregs, the riff-raff, and the poor that he dedicated the bulk of his life to preach to.

Yet, Wesley's recording of his conversation with the lower ranked Benjamin Lawrence also adds another, dare I say, 'multi-dimension' which heretofore has been vacant in the historiography of an admiral executed: the voice of the lower ranks of British society, and the – until recently – curious lack of religion upon a century unto which religion played a leading role.⁵ Let's be blunt, historiography upon events and trends depicting the eighteenth

² After Fort St. Philip capitulated, Blakeney returned to accolades in London. He was made knight of the Order of Bath, and Baron Blakeney of Mount Blakeney in the peerage of Ireland. See, H. M Stephens, 'Blakeney, William,' *National Dictionary of Biography*, accessed 17 January 2013.

³ Wesley, v. 21, 166.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ For example: The very well-written and well-argued paper by famed scholar E. P. Thompson, 'Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle Without Class,' fails to mention religion at all, as if the Sacheverill Riots never happened, or the outdoor proselytizing to the poor by men like John Wesley, or the Great Awakening and its radical messages of ecclesiastic equalities – all of this remarkably absent. See Thompson,

century have, over the past couple of hundred years, been largely written by elites. Such histories tended to be ‘whiggish,’ political, unimaginative toward the poor, and perhaps uninterested, at best, of the significant contribution of religion to the complex histories of the long eighteenth century. Additionally, most of the historiography on Admiral John Byng’s execution appears abridged written with an end in mind – be it politics or, perhaps, sales – rather than with an eye of curiosity, examining more closely the layered and interconnecting pluralities unto which the Byng saga presents.

For example: most histories covering Minorca’s loss mention both the man ‘shot’ and the other ‘made a lord,’ after all, this preoccupied the nation for nearly a year. These histories contend, and correctly so, that the first, John Byng, was sent to give relief to the second, William Blakeney, then the presiding governor of Minorca. Many of the histories also depict Byng’s execution and Blakeney’s elevation to both knight and baron, collectively, as the result of artifice: intense character assassination on the former, and character elevation upon the other. Some of these histories admit that Byng was painted Britain’s villain, though fewer acknowledge the artifice involved in Blakeney’s perceived heroism. Taken as a whole, the historiography on Minorca’s loss tends to be embedded in either military tactics and/or political intrigue.

This largely unsatisfying historiography, then, only serves to heighten Wesley’s journal entry, the conversation between travelling cleric and an experienced foot soldier of quite modest means. To write at night of a conversation that took place in the wee hours of the morning, as detailed as Wesley’s account is, after traveling for most of the day, receiving visitors toward the evening, to finally settle into time alone so as to recollect one’s thoughts, we can safely extrapolate that the small and impromptu question and answer session at the foot of Wootton Bridge lasted far longer than what appears in the journal. But it is also safe to bet, that John Wesley never stopped wondering what truly happened at Minorca, that he very much doubted the events as it appeared in the press or that traveled the country on pure hearsay, rumor, innuendo, song, ballad, or print sheets. Suddenly, before Wesley, stood a lowly soldier, a self-proclaimed veteran of the siege of Fort St. Philip. John Wesley had a witness. Wesley sought answers from Lawrence as to what truly occurred on that island in the spring and summer of 1756, and Lawrence provided them. Wesley concluded that his new found plebeian soldier delivered to him the truth. Or to look at it from another angle – the official line was terribly distrusted. So should much of the historiography written on the Byng

‘Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle Without Class,’ *Social History*, vol 3, no. 2 (May 1978), 133-65.

affair since. What is for certain, none of the history of the history of Minorca's loss involves the point of view of the common: until now.

But if John Wesley was confused about the events that led to one being shot and another made a lord, he was not alone. More than a few contemporaries expressed the implausibility of John Byng's execution. Voltaire was one of them. In his 1759 book *Candide*, a scathing satire that mocked the Western world, the French *philosophe* famously wrote, 'Mais dans ce pays-ci il est bon de tuer de temps en temps un amiral pour encourager les autres.'⁶ In sum, many throughout the Atlantic and Mediterranean worlds found Byng's death sentence excessive.⁷ The author of this dissertation concurs with that eighteenth-century sentiment. But in stating this, I need to point out what this historical excursion is not. The story of the Byng affair has drawn the attention of maritime and political histories through the ages: this dissertation will offer little upon military or polity points of view. Additionally, current military and political histories have of late employed the term 'scapegoat' asserting that Admiral Byng paid with his life for mistakes others made.⁸ There is, and has been, a solid foundation of evidence to support this; some of which is repeated in this dissertation. But this is not the intent of this work to repeat these assertions or to add to them. If, by any remote chance, new evidence of scapegoating Byng by his superiors appears it is truly by accident – as the aim of this dissertation remains solidly fixed on British culture in the mid-eighteenth century as it pertained to the admiral. In other words, what was cultural England like upon the return of Admiral Byng in July of 1756?

The focus from the very start has been to offer a cultural lens to the Byng affair. There has been some work along these lines. Three scholars; M. J. Cardwell, Nicholas Rogers, and Kathleen Wilson, have written about the Byng affair within the scope of cultural explorations.⁹ However, John Byng was deployed as a means to their ends, part of their evidentiary data collected to help explain a greater swath of time and trends. This dissertation will be then, perhaps, the first focused work attempting to explain – culturally – how Britain came to execute an extremely wealthy naval officer, active in war, the son of a peer, who was

⁶ 'But in this country it is good from time to time to kill an admiral to encourage the others.' Voltaire, *Candide, ou L'Optimisme* (Paris: La Sirène, 1759), 183.

⁷ Robert Beatson, *Naval and Military Memoirs of Great Britain, From the Year 1727 to the Present Time*, vol. 2 (London, 1790), 93.

⁸ Michael Scott, *Scapegoats: Thirteen Victims of Military Justice* (London: Elliot & Thompson, 2013); Chris Ware, *Admiral Byng: His Rise and Execution* (Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Books, 2009).

⁹ M. John Cardwell, *Arts and Arms: Literature, Politics and Patriotism During the Seven Years War*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Rogers, *Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1989); Nicholas Rogers, *Crowds, Culture, and Politics in Georgian Britain* (New York, London: Oxford University Press, 1998); Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

well-connected, and a member of parliament. Methodologically, then, the work presented here is microhistory. But here, too, there is a new path emblazed. Interposing the Byng affair within the bounds of microhistory is challenging in that there exists several kinds of microhistories. For example, Philip Greven's, *Four Generations*, looks at one particular locality over a designated period of time.¹⁰ A microhistory of the Byng affair is quite different in that it is concerned with the loss of an island in the Mediterranean and the concomitant reaction by urban, rural, elites, and poor with a very small time frame over a very wide region, including parts of the greater empire. Other microhistories consists of deviant case studies illuminating peasants whose stories were ensnared and captured in perpetuity among various state documents and court records. Perhaps the most famous of these is Carlos Ginzburg's, *The Cheese and the Worms*.¹¹ John Byng, however, was no peasant, and though Byng appeared in court – his unique set of predicaments appeared in other public and private documents: newspapers, pamphlets, ballads, handbills, diary entries, letters, etc. Perhaps this study of the Byng affair is more aligned with the microhistories presented by Boyer and Nissenbaum's *Salem Possessed*, or Robert Gross's *The Minuteman and Their World*.¹² Those two works focused on community and unusual events: certainly the Byng affair fills the definition for an unusual event, but Byng's plight traveled far and wide beyond the borders of English-speaking news, nor were anti-Byng protests centered in any one community. Newer microhistories such as Ulrich's *A Midwife's Tale* attempts to closely analyze the personal and the social over time rather than focus in on any single event, but also employs a thorough contextualization process which leaves a multi-dimensional product.¹³ Though Byng's plight is a single event in history, historiography has yet to prove such a deep contextualization, thus this dissertation attempt. A microhistory where deep contextualization of a single event comes together can be found in Patricia Cline Cohen's *The Murder of Helen Jewett*.¹⁴ Still, unlike Byng, Helen Jewett was not an elite, nor of extreme wealth, title, or

¹⁰ Philip Greven, *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, 1970).

¹¹ Carlos Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, translated (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1980).

¹² Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Robert Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1976).

¹³ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990).

¹⁴ Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998).

rank. Thus, an intense contextualization of the recall, arrest, trial, and execution of Admiral John Byng will be, to my best estimations, something new.¹⁵

In returning to historiography, confusion over Admiral John Byng's actions in the Mediterranean, his recall, arrest, trial, and execution appear in numerous works. Six of these works that focused on the Byng affair were within the living memory of the authors that wrote them. John Barrow (1758), John Almon (1763), Tobias Smollett (1766), John Campbell (1779), David Ramsay (1779), and Robert Beatson (1790) each chimed in on the Byng affair of 1756-7.¹⁶ Their observations were, unsurprisingly, scattered and often factional. There exists little agreement on key points of the affair. Nonetheless, there is some accord on a few basics. All of these accounts agree that repeated warnings had been sent that the French had designs upon Minorca but that the Newcastle/Fox ministry 'seemed to pay no regard to them.'¹⁷ All agree that only when the intent of France became 'universally known,' did the ministry rise from 'their bed of lethargy' and into action.¹⁸ All agree that Admiral Byng was sent with ten ships, and all but Barrow makes mention that the fleet was 'but in very indifferent order, poorly manned, and unprovided with either hospital or fire-ship' and not one tender.¹⁹ All accounts, except that of Ramsay's, admitted that Byng made the attempt to 'convey' a message to General William Blakeney about landing Lord Robert Bertie's regiment of 'fuziliers' to reinforce the castle at Port Mahon.²⁰ All, except Barrow's work, make it known that the ministry 'used every endeavour to foment...the most virulent invectives against' Byng going so far as to hire London mobs to 'hang and burn him in effigy...' ²¹ To reiterate: the agreements within the living memories by eighteenth-century writers find universal agreements that the Newcastle/Fox ministry received repeated warnings of French designs to invade Minorca; that the said ministry responded late; awarded Byng ten ships of questionable readiness; short of men; no tenders, transports, hospital ships, or fire ships; and that the admiral made an attempt to General William Blakeney about landing

¹⁵ Helpful in formulating this microhistorical account was Richard D. Brown, 'Microhistory and the Post-Modern Challenge,' *Journal of the Early Republic*, vol. 23 (Spring 2003), 9-12.

¹⁶ John Barrow, *The Naval History of Great Britain; with the lives of the most Illustrious Admirals and Commanders from the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, vol. 4 (London: James Rivington and James Fletcher, 1758); John Almon, *An Impartial History of the Late War*, (London: J. Johnson, 1763); Tobias Smollett, *Continuation of the Complete History of England*, vol. 1 (London: Richard Baldwin, 1766); John Campbell, *Continuation of Doctor Campbell's Lives of the British Admirals: Containing a New and Accurate Naval History* (London, 1779); David Ramsay, *Military Memoirs of Great Britain: or, A History of the War, 1755-1763* (Edinburgh, 1779); Robert Beatson, *Naval and Military Memoirs*.

¹⁷ Barrow, 322.

¹⁸ Almon, 96.

¹⁹ Smollett, 147. Nor transports.

²⁰ Campbell, 78. The eighteenth-century spelling of 'fusiliers' contained a 'z' instead of an 's', and I have chosen to retain that spelling in the rest of this dissertation.

²¹ Ramsay, 21.

fuziliers to reinforce the only remaining garrison upon Minorca: St. Philips castle at Port Mahon.

One other item of importance and accordance needs mentioning which, surprisingly, finds little investigative work by more recent histories: that of the 1755 Channel campaign. The British admiralty, with ministerial and court backing, designed and implemented a campaign to seize as many French maritime vessels as possible during a condition of peace. Non-combatant trading ships, fully loaded with the vestiges of France's ever-growing empire, were seized upon by two large British war fleets commanded by Admirals Edward Hawke and John Byng. All six living-memory accounts found significant space in their histories to make mention of the 1755 Channel Campaign. But only Robert Beatson cited the role that Byng played during the campaign that captured 300 French merchant vessels. The significance of Byng's efforts in the campaign was twofold: first, Byng took part in the destruction of the *Esperance*, a French seventy-four gun ship of the line;²² second, Byng's fleet remained out at sea until the end of November.

But, and most important, none of the accounts of the 1755 Channel Campaign (not even Beatson's) make mention of the effect that the July through November action had upon the Royal Navy's fleet readiness. I bring this to light in that nearly all historiography pertaining to Minorca's loss makes claims toward Byng's Mediterranean fleet being in a ravaged condition and short of men – but rarely explores why this was so. My last chapter will approach this in detail: but until then, the weather in October and November in 1755 did much to harm those British ships involved in the campaign. Sickness, too, struck the navy and the want of men the following March was a pressing issue that handicapped and delayed Byng's fleet to sail for Minorca.

Aside from these few areas of agreement, these writers' recollections of the Byng affair conflicted upon a number of issues. Whereas Barrow (1758) never mentioned the admiralty's directive to keep the navy close to home as threats of war became eminent, Almon (1763) wrote that it was the 'bug-bear fears of invasion' that 'engrossed all the attention of the ministry...'²³ Herein we begin to view the associated problems inherent within these eighteenth-century accounts: tone. John Almon, more apt to be remembered as the publicist for John Wilkes, his account of the Byng affair appears more partisan and colorful. Compared to Smollett's work, threats of invasion were 'reported'²⁴ and the ministry

²² Beatson, 16.

²³ Almon, 91.

²⁴ Smollett, 138.

‘perplexed’²⁵ as what to do. Campbell claimed the ministry was ‘completely duped’²⁶ by the invasion threats, whereas Ramsay retorted the ministry’s ‘inattention’²⁷ to the matter. Barrow does not mention threats of invasion at all – and to that we can, like Almon, chalk it up to partisanship. We do know that John Byng was denied both men and ships partially over the threats of another Jacobite rebellion associated with a French invasion. The eighteenth century had already witnessed two major attempts (1715 and 1745), and two minor (1708 and 1719). Another invasion therefore was not out of the question. Nonetheless it is difficult to ascertain how threats of rebellion and invasion lent itself into the admiralty’s decision-making process to deny John Byng ships and men based solely on these eighteenth-century accounts.²⁸

But it is their histories that laid a partial foundation by adding confusion and misinterpretations to the Byng affair over the next couple of centuries. Paramount in that telling was the portrayal of Byng himself. Two of them, Almon and Smollett, made reference to the admiral being not ‘at all popular in the navy,’²⁹ or not liked by his peers. Yet Barrow, who’s piece is decidedly anti-Byng, makes no mention of this, nor does Beatson’s apparent pro-Byng stance. The American historian David Ramsay makes no mention of whether Byng was liked or not, and neither does Campbell. Further, Almon and Smollett do not provide any evidence for their assertion. There is, however, a letter dated 1750 written by Fanny Boscawen, Admiral Edward Boscawen’s wife, where she describes Byng as a coxcomb and fop who wore ‘an undressed frock, very richly embroidered with silver, which in my eyes is a strange dress, and his discourse and manner pleased me no better than his garb.’³⁰ But given the intensity of officer rivalry within the British navy, such a stance by a competing admiral’s wife would not be unusual.³¹ Nor does this historiography bear much reality. Byng’s contemporaries certainly assisted or felt moved by his plight, especially Captain Augustus Hervey, Captain Arthur Gardiner, Captain John Amherst, and Admiral Augustus Keppel.

²⁵ Smollett, 143.

²⁶ Campbell, 76.

²⁷ Ramsay, 16.

²⁸ After John Byng’s execution, the ministry faced an official Parliamentary inquiry and was made to make an account of their reasoning for sending so few, so late. In 1913, a collection of documents that the admiralty used in 1757 to defend themselves found publication. See, *Papers Relating to the Loss of Minorca in 1756*, Herbert William Richmond, editor (London: Navy Records Society, 1913).

²⁹ Almon, 196; and Smollett who repeated the line in near plagiaristic fashion, 146.

³⁰ *Admiral’s Wife: Being the Life and Letters of the Hon. Mrs. Edward Boscawen from 1719 to 1761*, Cecil Aspinall-Oglander, editor, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1940), 136.

³¹ N. A. M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy*, paperback edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 274-302.

Byng's second in command, Vice Admiral Temple West came to Byng's defense during his trial. After the verdict, Admiral John Forbes refused to sign Byng's execution order.

Yet, it's the legacy of these early, living-memory historical accounts that have clouded perceptions of Admiral John Byng through the ages. If anything, the Byng affair reveals a point Joyce Appleby was attempting to make about history and truth: 'there are the records of the past and there is the interpretation of those records. The gap between them is the source of concern.'³² What we should gather, then, from these living-memory accounts are not so much the mixed accounts of Minorca's loss, Byng's plight, or the ministry's fall from grace – but rather which of these attempted histories (incorrect or not) survived the ravages of time.

If we focus, for example, on the records themselves, we recognize instantly that there is a glaring absence of Admiral Byng's side of the story. His letters simply do not exist (likely lost in the fire that struck the estate at Wrotham Park in 1883, if they existed at all).³³ Records, quite frankly, exist only to survive. Most die the moment they're created, some will succumb in a week or so, less and less make it past their one year anniversary and then beyond. There's also an unstated ranking system concerning these records. I'm always quite a bit surprised at the number of historians who pay so little heed to this. Quite often, the only reason one record survived over another is that the surviving record was deemed more important. But by whom? Moreover, most reasonable people would admit that the further one goes back into the past, the availability of records decreases due to the ravages of time (war, fire, floods, etc.). Thus the further back a historian goes to search for the past, the fewer surviving documents that historian will encounter. The result is a record whose very survivability carries its own added weight of importance (perhaps even exponentially). In other words, the surviving record's historical importance becomes much elevated – often times made significantly more important than it would have been at the moment the said document was first created.

Then there is the interpretation. Making sense of what records contain is one aspect of what a historian does, but then there is also the telling. Let's face it, the records are scraps and the space between them gaps. Historians interpret not only the scraps but also fill in the gaps. Historians are said then to strive for the truth about the past, usually accomplished

³² Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), 248.

³³ *The Leeds Mercury*, 7 March 1883; see also *The Standard*, 7 March 1883.

through the ‘democratic practice of truth-seeking,’³⁴ otherwise known as peer review. But again, the further back one goes in history, the less likely one historian’s work was ever reviewed by any peer prior to publication.

Which raises the third and most significant problem of all: what if that historian of centuries ago was wrong? What happens when that historian’s work survives the ravages of time (war, fire, floods, etc.)? How does such a history appear to us today when, after decade upon decade, that repeated error is retransmitted? Does it transition into repeated truth?

In the case of the Byng affair (1756-1757), some of the first generation, living-memory history – or, some of that biased and incorrect history – has survived the ravages of time. Byng, as one modern newspaper put it, is still ‘a byword for cowardice,’³⁵ despite the overwhelming evidence against this. Using evidence to disprove Byng’s cowardice is relatively easy, it’s available, it can even be Googled; yet, Byng remains a coward because that oft repeated rumor of the first generation of chroniclers shifted into something ingrained, some sort of cultural truth. Further, the tenacity of this errant ‘truth’ yields little, even to the daylight of the most obvious piece of evidence: Byng’s trial where the charge of cowardice was quickly tossed out.³⁶

Writing history about Byng in the twenty-first-century requires patience: one, for the want of more records and; two, for sifting and then dodging the untruths of historical interpretations that have somehow morphed into cultural acceptance. With Byng, one takes on an altered reality as these historical untruths remain quite extent.

Take for example the following photograph of a plaque (figure 1) as it sat on an historical timeline at the visitor center of Greenwich in London.³⁷ There are but four sentences comprised of a mere sixty-six words. Every sentence repeats the ‘cultural truths’ yet remains as far from evidentiary reality as any public display of Byng maritime history I had yet encountered. The fact that thousands of visitors per day charted a course past this

³⁴ Appleby, *Telling the Truth About History*, 285.

³⁵ Jasper Copping, ‘Executed Byng’s family say he was no coward,’ *The Sunday Telegraph* (June 23, 2013), 16.

³⁶ In fact, nearly all of Byng’s peers who sat in judgment at his court martial balked at the sentence of death. The Admiralty was equally split on the harsh sentence, none more so than Admiral John Forbes who refused to sign the execution warrant claiming ‘having acquitted him of Cowardice & disaffection... it must be acknowledg’d that the negligence employed cannot be Wilfull... for Wilful negligence in Adm. Byng’s Situation must proceed from either Cowardice or disaffection, & he is Escpressly [sic] acquitted of both those Crimes...’ See Caird Library, RUSI/NM/91/C.

³⁷ I took the photo in early May of 2013.

timeline and thus become exposed to the ‘cultural truths’ of Byng, but not its reality, largely contributes to the continued myth-making of Byng’s mal-legacy.³⁸

The plaque claims Byng was charged with ‘treason.’ Admiral Byng was officially charged with cowardice, disaffection, and not doing one’s utmost to defeat the enemy. Though there was initial talk of housing Admiral Byng at London’s famed towers, cooler heads prevailed pointing that it would take a charge of treason to put him there.³⁹ The irony is rich: because Byng was not charged with treason, a rationale surfaced for housing Byng at the navy hospital at Queen Anne’s court – which the plaque was attempting to lay claim to. The second sentence claimed that the admiral refused to fight. Astounding since a battle of over four hours took place in which 42 British sailors died and 38 French counterparts did also. Nearly every newspaper in London and throughout the empire reprinted the 26th of June, 1756 edition of the *London Gazette* which tabulated the number of killed and wounded from each ship. That Byng ordered the engagement was not in question; it was the manner in which the admiral proceeded during and after the battle that was. The third sentence does hold a kernel of truth, the admiral thought ‘his forces were not strong enough’ to find success against the enemy: however, Admiral Byng was not the only one of this opinion, and any cursory glance at war documents, newspapers, and pamphlets will quickly demonstrate that there were many who chastised the ministry for sending so few ships and in such a retched condition. More painful is the plaque’s assertion that Byng withdrew from the battle which carries the not so subtle insinuation of cowardice. Any study of the Battle of Minorca will readily reveal that Admiral Galissonière ordered his fleet to pull full sail and withdraw from the engagement once Admiral Byng was able to reform the line (the line broke when the *Intrepid* lost its main mast). It was the French who withdrew from the fight, not the British. Further, Admiral Byng ordered his squadron to make immediate (though temporary) repairs, converted a frigate into a hospital ship, and remained on station for more than four days thinking the French would return. The last sentence on the plaque asserts guilt by treason. Byng’s execution was remarkable for the fact that the one charge that stuck was simply not doing one’s utmost: execution for treason is understandable, death by firing squad over

³⁸ The agency responsible for the history displays at the center belongs to the Greenwich Foundation for the Old Royal Navy College.

³⁹ In fact, the Lord of the Admiralty, George Anson, pushed for Byng to be held at the tower during the course of the Byng’s awaited trial. Henry Fox argued for an alternative location. See ADD MS 15955, ff. 13-14.

something subjective and immeasurable as doing one's best seemed preposterous then, as it does now.⁴⁰

To the credit of those that oversee such historical representations at the visitor center, changes were eventually made to the plaque at the bequest of the Admiral Byng Committee. The plaque now reads:

Admiral John Byng was held for four months in the Queen Anne Court before his trial for failing to prevent the French capture of Minorca (an important British base) in 1756. Byng tried, but had been given an inadequate squadron for the task and, crucially to his own fate, did not persist. For this he was found guilty of 'not doing his utmost' and executed at Portsmouth in 1757.⁴¹

Though a much better rendition, two errors yet remain: First, 15,000 French troops had landed on Minorca on 17 April 1756 – Byng's fleet does not enter the Mediterranean until 2nd of May (and does not drop anchor in Gibraltar until the 4th of May). He could not have possibly prevented the capture of Minorca as it was already taken. What Byng failed to do was to land a regiment of either marines (which were refused him by the commander at Gibraltar) or fuziliers (Lord Bertie's regiment that were forced upon Byng to make up for the shortage of over 700 sailors when departing Portsmouth in early April.⁴² Landing the fuziliers would have rendered Byng's ability to fight a reappearing French fleet impossible) in support of the British garrison holed up at the castle of Fort St, Philip overlooking Port Mahon. Second, Byng did 'persist.' Again, it was Byng's counterpart, Galissonière, who quit the battle.⁴³ Byng's dispatch claimed that some of his squadron gave chase but could not keep pace. The French squadron was a new one, their design was sleeker, and their hulls unencumbered by barnacles or other sea floss. Byng's fleet, on the other hand, was nowhere

⁴⁰ Of course, this death sentence upon Admiral John Byng is immortalized in Voltaire's *Candide* where the French philosopher explained that in England 'il est bon de tuer de temps en temps un amiral pour encourager les autres.'

⁴¹ Details of this change were sent by Brendan McCarthy of the Greenwich Foundation for the Old Royal Navy College to Thane Byng, an ancestral niece of Admiral Byng, and a member of the Admiral Byng Committee on 24 September 2013, via email.

⁴² Stephen Gradish's groundbreaking work on royal Navy manning and victualling issues during the Seven Years' War used the following Admiralty records, ADM 2/76, pages 21 and 24; and ADM 2/516, page 21, to demonstrate the near reckless disregard the admiralty held toward properly manning Byng's squadron of ten ships. According to Gradish, 'the Admiralty, whether intentionally or not, does not appear to have made much effort to complete his ships, although they were anxious that he should get underway as quickly as possible. Indeed, they appear to have placed some formidable obstacles in his path. Byng assumed that he would be able to take men from other ships to man his own, but upon arrival at Portsmouth he found orders awaiting him which specifically forbade him to do anything of the kind. Moreover, he had been ordered to prepare four ships of the line and two frigates destined for Channel service, before beginning the preparation of his own ships...' See Stephen Gradish, *The Manning of the British Navy during the Seven Years War*, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1980), 36-7.

⁴³ Almon, 101-2.

nears new (Byng's flagship, the *Ramillies* had its keel laid during the reign of Charles II), had been engaged in maritime exercises the summer and fall of 1755, and thus in a state of semi-disrepair. The battle ended on the 20th of May because the French left. Byng sailed for Gibraltar on the 25th of May because the French did not return to fight anew.⁴⁴

Perhaps the cultural truths made over the course of centuries render it difficult for the Old Royal Navy College to alter the plaque in full. Culture is powerful. There exists an unwanted axiom that historians at times must deal with, that history – or in this case, 'truth' – belongs to the winners. Certainly, John Byng did not win the Battle of Minorca, but he did not lose it either. I am thus forced to ask why this recalcitrance, why the cultural pigeon-holing of Byng as traitor and coward? Perhaps the answer is found in debates over nationalism. Returning to Appleby, nations 'use history to build a sense of national identity...'⁴⁵ That Admiral John Byng has remained so long an emblem of cowardice and treason despite the ample evidence, says more about Britain than it does the admiral.

Another case in point: a coffee table book published in 2009 – *The English Country House*. Here, author Mary Miers (and others) portrays Byng's home near High Barnet: Wrotham Park. Admiral John Byng hired Isaac Ware to design and construct the house that the admiral (because of his arrest, trial and execution) likely never lived in. Remarkably, this garden book not only intimates the admiral's cowardice but that 'Wrotham's early years were darkened by misfortune, for Admiral Byng was responsible for the loss of Minorca...'⁴⁶ This glaring inaccuracy thus contains precisely what the Newcastle ministry hoped to secure during the political crisis of 1756-1757, the transference of blame from themselves to Admiral Byng: it appears to have lingered on.

As the nineteenth century began, the history of the Byng affair began to be scribed by those who were not alive in the 1750s. However, the divergence of stories covering the incident began to widen. In one, 'Byng was clearly the victim of a conspiracy.'⁴⁷ In another, the admiral did not tremble 'at danger, - but like many other weak men in high posts he did tremble at responsibility.'⁴⁸ John Campbell's 1814 *Lives of the British Admirals* stated that

⁴⁴ The best surviving renditions of the battle, including diagrams exist in two places. See, *Augustus Hervey's Journal: The Adventures Afloat and Ashore of a Naval Casanova*, editor David Erskine, paperback edition (London: Chatham Publishing, 2002), 203-218. See also, *The Trial of the Honourable Admiral John Byng, at a Court Martial, as taken by Mr. Charles Fearn, Judge-Advocate of his Majesty's Fleet* (London: 1757).

⁴⁵ Appleby, *Telling the Truth About History*, 289.

⁴⁶ Mary Miers, *The English Country House: from the Archives of Country Life* (New York: Rizzoli, 2009), 209.

⁴⁷ James MacKintosh, *The History of England*, vol. 10 (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1840), 336.

⁴⁸ Philip Henry Stanhope, *History of England from the Peace at Utrecht*, vol. 4 (London: John Murray, 1844) 103. **NOTE:** The author was the 5th Earl of Stanhope, Lord Mahon. His distant predecessor was Philip Dormer

Byng's experience, or lack thereof, made him an odd choice to be sent to lead the expedition to save Minorca. Nonetheless, from the instructions that Byng received 'it would appear, that the relief and protection of Minorca was but a secondary object,' made manifest by the 'force placed under his command,' which was 'inadequate to the service.'⁴⁹ This Campbell printing added that the Byng affair placed a 'dubious shade' upon on the character of Lord George Anson, who 'interfered more strongly to procure the death of Byng than was consistent with humanity,'⁵⁰ and alleged that Anson took advantage of his position as Lord of the Admiralty to threaten those jurists who oversaw Admiral Byng's trial and desired to be released from their oath of secrecy. Most of the nineteenth-century accounts remained mired in the political or the maritime, or both: and most offered up points far removed from the evidence. For example, William Goldsmith offered that Byng's war council was held the day after the battle (it was, in fact, held four days following the action).⁵¹ In 1828, a Rear Admiral by the name Charles Ekins, published a book on Britain's naval battles. Byng's tactics were scrutinized by Ekins who concluded that, on the whole, the admiral chose 'the best method of securing a close action,' given that the two fleets made it a race to win the wind (see **figure 2**).⁵² Ekins offered a slight alteration to Byng's insistence on having all his ships tack hard to port and bear down upon the enemy on one signal. Byng had waited until the last ship in the line (the *Defiance*) sailed past the first ship the French squadron (the *Orphée*). The problem with this scheme was that the two fleets arrived at the same point at oblique angles instead of running parallel to one another. The *Defiance's* position to the enemy was thus far closer than that of the *Kingston* eleven ships to the front. Byng's thinking was correct, admitted Ekins, but the oblique angle in which the two forces engaged should have altered Byng's attack. Instead of the last ship (the *Defiance*) attacking the first of the enemy, Byng should have ordered his first ship (the *Kingston*) to take on the *Orphée*, and then every subsequent ship on down the line tacking to attack the next French man of war that next appeared. Ekins' recommendations were, of course, 'soldiering in slippers'⁵³ as Dudley Pope termed it: made

Stanhope, or Lord Chesterfield, a Pelhamite Whig and close associate with Newcastle and Hardwicke who often gave advice during the tumults of 1756-7. See ADD MS 32867, ff. 146-7.

⁴⁹ John Campbell, *Lives of the British Admirals: Containing also a New and Accurate Naval History from the Earliest Periods*, vol. 6 (London: C. J. Barrington, 1814), 306-7. **NOTE:** John Campbell died in 1775, yet the popularity of his books continued on. Numerous volumes and additions, therefore, appeared after Campbell's death all the way to the 1870s, with the authorships remaining unknown.

⁵⁰ Campbell, *Lives of the British Admirals*, 384-6.

⁵¹ William Goldsmith, *The Naval History of Great Britain, from the Earliest Period: with Biographical Notices of the Admirals, and other Distinguished Officers* (London: J. Jaques & W. Wright, 1825), 453.

⁵² Charles Ekins, *The Naval Battles of Great Britain, from the Accession of the Illustrious House of Hanover to the Throne to the Battle of Navarin*, 2nd edition (London: Baldwin & Cradock, 1828), 37.

⁵³ Dudley Pope, *At 12 Mr. Byng Was Shot* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962), 133.

from the comfort of distance and time. Ekins' hindsight also ignored the steadfastness of 'the line' as the premier naval battle tactic employed in the mid-eighteenth century. Had Byng ordered this alteration it likely would have been significantly resisted by his captains.

When Americans of the nineteenth-century looked at Minorca's loss, sympathy for Byng typically rose to the fore. As with Ramsay's account the century prior, ministerial and court corruption played against the admiral. In a publication called *American Advocate of Peace*, the flame against Byng 'was carefully cherished. Emissaries were employed, who mingled both with the courtiers at St. James, and with the mobs in the streets... Agents were employed to vilify his person, in places of vulgar resort, and mobs were hired to hang him and burn him in effigy.'⁵⁴ In short, Admiral Byng was 'rashly condemned, meanly given up, and cruelly sacrificed to vile considerations.'⁵⁵ Similarly, a book published out of Philadelphia stated that the whole affair was nothing more than a 'party question – the ministers... to screen themselves, sacrificed Byng; who was barbarously shot for what at worst was but an error of judgment.'⁵⁶ From Scotland, MacKintosh's *History of England* charge that the government found it necessary to destroy Byng 'in the unprincipled attempt to preserve a tottering administration.'⁵⁷ As for the legality of the conviction, the specific offence 'did not come within the article of war under which he was condemned, and it was only by a strained interpretation of a doubtful statute that his judges could find him guilty.'⁵⁸ Byng's trial also found footing in Peter Burke's 1866 work, *Celebrated Naval and Military Trials*. Here, the author concluded that the admiral received 'unfair cruelty' in regard to 'the little wrong he had done, and [that] the very merits of his family, make his putting to death a very sorrowful and a but little creditable recollection in the annals of our navy.'⁵⁹

But it was not until the twentieth century that two books appeared devoting themselves entirely to the topic of Minorca's loss and the subsequent Byng affair of the mid-eighteenth century. *Papers Relating to the loss of Minorca* (1913) were collected and edited by Captain Herbert William Richmond; and naval historian Brian Tunstall published a political and maritime exposé, *Admiral Byng and the Loss of Minorca* (1928). Richmond's work focused on Parliament's inquiry into Minorca's loss which began soon after Admiral

⁵⁴ 'Influence of the Principle of Honour, Illustrated in the Trial and Sentence of Admiral Byng,' *American Advocate of Peace*, vol. 2, no. 9 (June 1836), 30.

⁵⁵ 'Influence of the Principle,' 33.

⁵⁶ John Jay Smith, *Celebrated Trials of All Countries, and Remarkable Cases of Criminal Jurisprudence* (Philadelphia: L. A. Godley, 1836), 241.

⁵⁷ MacKintosh, 330.

⁵⁸ MacKintosh, 336.

⁵⁹ Peter Burke, *Celebrated Naval and Military Trials* (London: Wm. H. Allen & Co., 1866), 92.

John Byng's execution. The papers presented by Richmond and published in 1913, were those collected by members of the ousted Newcastle/Fox ministry and Admiralty beginning in 1756 and then up unto the time of the inquiry in April of 1757.⁶⁰ They present, according to Richmond, 'exaggerations, mis-statements, and misapplications,' but nonetheless offer 'a considerable light on the way the Administration looked on the problem,' of defending Minorca.⁶¹ Tunstall's account countermanded Richmond's collected papers retorting that the 'late Ministers saw to it that a mass of documents was collected, sufficiently unwieldy and indigestible' which resulted in a governing review that quickly became 'confused, then baffled, and finally bored.'⁶² Tunstall's book remains decidedly pro-Byng. It details not only how the admiral became a victim of 'to the mistakes of others,' but also a victim to the 'truth improver[s]' – historians or, the 'partisans of Chatham and Newcastle,'⁶³ who wished to make the great men greater. Tunstall's work thus became the first dedicated admittance that much of the history surrounding John Byng was incorrect, misunderstood, and worse: continuously repeated. It was Tunstall, after all, who not only pointed out the 'close connection between party politics and journalism' in the eighteenth century (which did much to ensure the 'ignorance of Englishmen about their Navy,' and thereby secure a death sentence upon Byng), but how much of that resonated within academia in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries as historians and scholars jockeyed for patronage (which thereby continued to spread the mal-legacy of Byng).⁶⁴ Tunstall's book was a mission to set the story right.

More than three decades later, two more books appeared in quick succession that dedicated themselves to the Byng affair. *The Martyrdom of Admiral Byng* by Gerald French,⁶⁵ and *At Twelve Mr. Byng Was Shot*, by Dudley Pope:⁶⁶ they appeared in 1961 and 1962 respectively. Both works were, like Tunstall's, pro-Byng and anchored in political and maritime history. Pope's investigation, however, was considerably deeper and more nuanced than French's. While both books accused the Duke of Newcastle with judicial murder, Pope's version granted that Admiral Byng 'had his faults.'⁶⁷ Pope, unlike French, also utilized

⁶⁰ Horatio Walpole advised the first minister, Newcastle, that since there existed a 'Spirit of Disaffection to the Government' by way of addresses to the king, 'there seems no reason to doubt' that an inquiry will be made. Horatio Walpole to Newcastle, 1 September 1756. ADD MS 32867, f. 166.

⁶¹ *Papers Relating to the Loss of Minorca*, xl.

⁶² Brian Tunstall, *Admiral Byng and the Loss of Minorca* (London: Philip Allan & Co., 1928), 6.

⁶³ Tunstall, 2-4.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Gerald French, *The Martyrdom of Admiral Byng* (Glasgow: William McLellan & Co., 1961).

⁶⁶ Dudley Pope, *At Twelve Mr. Byng Was Shot* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962).

⁶⁷ Pope, xi.

primary materials that resurfaced during the course of his investigation: Augustus Hervey's journal, for example; but also documents released by the Duke of Devonshire, letters from Sarah Byng-Osborn, letters from Admiral Boscawen, and ships' logs unearthed at the Public Record Office: all of which was timely and resulted in, according to one reviewer, 'an excellent account of one of the worst disgraceful incidents in English history.'⁶⁸ In conducting my own research, however, I was warned by more than one historian to be wary of *At 12 Mr. Byng Was Shot*, as Pope makes clear admissions to being assisted by those at Wrotham Park and other descendants of the Byng family. As a hopeful historian, I practice skepticism in all that I review – primary or secondary – which includes Pope's work. All said, Pope's inquiries into this incident in English history required him to make contact with the descendants of the admiral, to look for and unearth any possible papers yet unreleased that would shed light on the affair. Pope's work, therefore, remains toward the top of any one's reading list in reviewing the events surrounding Minorca's loss and the subsequent political crisis which resulted in Admiral Byng's execution. Certainly, at times, Mr. Pope's prose appeared a bit forced, tinged, or biased: but what historian can claim otherwise? We are, after all, human. And despite decades of postmodernists attacks equating historians to no better than 'novelist,'⁶⁹ we still have our stories to tell.

Nonetheless; work by Richmond, Tunstall, French, and Pope were political and maritime accounts of the affair. Remaining largely unexplored were the cultural connections that surrounded and expounded upon the historical players and agencies involved in responding to Minorca's loss, and the succeeding tribulations regarding Byng's arrest, trial, and execution.⁷⁰ Though there have not been any books that use a cultural lens to review the Byng affair, there are three notable historians who, in making longer and greater cultural sweeps of Britain's eighteenth-century, have turned the spotlight on Byng in order to make their historical points. Nicholas Rogers, Kathleen Wilson, and M. John Cardwell have produced excellent demonstrations of the cultural forces extent at the time of the Byng affair, and references to their work are scattered throughout this dissertation.

This initial vision for this dissertation was to break down the Byng affair into two parts: first, an attempt to use the plethora of admiralty records located at the National Archives at Kew and the Caird Library at Greenwich to retell the maritime events prior to the

⁶⁸ Review of *At Twelve Mr. Byng Was Shot*, S. W. Jackman, *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 35, no. 4 (December 1963), 405.

⁶⁹ Appleby, *Telling the Truth*, 227.

⁷⁰ Chris Ware published *Admiral Byng* in 2009, but offers little new. It does, however, recap the politics and maritime stories already mentioned.

April departure of Byng's fleet for the Mediterranean. Neither Richmond, Tunstall, French, or Pope make any significant mention of the 1755 Channel Campaign: odd, since the combined adventures of admirals Hawke and Byng, in capturing 300 merchant vessels and sinking one French ship of the line, led to the delays and poor condition of the eventual fleet that Byng was to sail. The second part involved searching for cultural clues as to how a wartime admiral from an honored, distinctive, and well-connected maritime family could be so easily and (I might add) callously given up.

The resulting four chapters only begin to crack to the surface of the Byng affair. The limitations of word count prevented a longer dispensation. Nonetheless, the first three chapters signify a socio-cultural attempt to explain how the Byng affair unfolded. Chapter 1, 'The Streets Swarm so with Lampoons': The Intersect of Byng, Ballads, and Sermons,' focuses on messaging, and how stories of an external empire reach the lowest rungs of Britain's domestic society. This chapter challenges the notion that ballads and balladry were on the wane by the middle of the eighteenth century. The political crisis caused by Minorca's loss demonstrated that ballads were effectively employed by both pro- and anti-Byng camps. In addition, entrenched distributive networks by various religious societies shared both sermons and perceptions of an outer empire to their lay folk. Further, these ballads and sermons made the transatlantic trip. One of the most scathing pamphlets written against the admiral found printing from its originator in colonial Virginia and three printings in London: all made possible by longstanding religious networks that reached as far as the empire would allow.

Chapter 2, 'The Arrival of the Newspaper,' argues that it was not the controversy surrounding John Wilkes that ushered in the arrival of the newspaper as a political potent messaging machine, but rather the hullabaloo surrounding John Byng. The anonymous nature of newspaper reporting supplied a protean and engaging account of Byng, Minorca, and the government which appeared as a blended and traditional mix of orality and print. Both newspaper startups and sales blossomed during the Byng affair, ministers argued to make greater use of them, politicians and factions started their own, and pamphlets began to cite various newspapers as the source of their information. Clearly newspapers arrived during the controversy associated with Minorca.

Chapter 3, 'Byng, Dearth, and Morality' expands upon an observation made by Nicholas Rogers in *Crowds, Culture, and Politics in Georgian Britain*, that at the peak of the

Byng protests, a serious dearth had gripped the nation.⁷¹ Reactions to the dearth and to the loss of Minorca, however, found a similar basis in rhetoric: that of morality. Building upon the first two chapters, ‘Byng, Dearth, and Morality,’ seeks to differentiate the tumults of 1756-7. Microhistory affords the luxury to split hairs, and this chapter certainly makes the claim that there existed significant differences between food riots and Byng effigy burnings, and credible variances between urban and rural/provincial protests.

Chapter 4, ‘‘Hot Water’’: Assessing the 1755 Channel Campaign,’ endeavors to answer why so few ships with so few men were assigned to Byng’s fleet. The chapter also demonstrates Admiral John Byng in an entirely new light: not the coward or traitor much of current British culture conceives of the man, but an efficient administrator, able sailor, and generally well thought of admiral. Byng’s large ‘Channel’ fleet, compared to his small ‘Mediterranean’ fleet a few months later stand in stark contrast, thus allowing the reader a more nuanced view of how Byng’s Med-fleet came together, and how much of it was out of the admiral’s control. This chapter also explores the terrible sickness that plagued the fleets of 1755 (Boscawen’s trip to America which resulted in the capture of the *Alcide* and the *Lys* costs the British navy an estimated 2,000 lives). Connect manning issues to Byng’s time in the channel (late November, storms or no storms), the reader begins to understand why so few ships and why so few men were sent in defense of Minorca.

⁷¹ Rogers, *Crowds, Culture, and Politics*, chapter two.

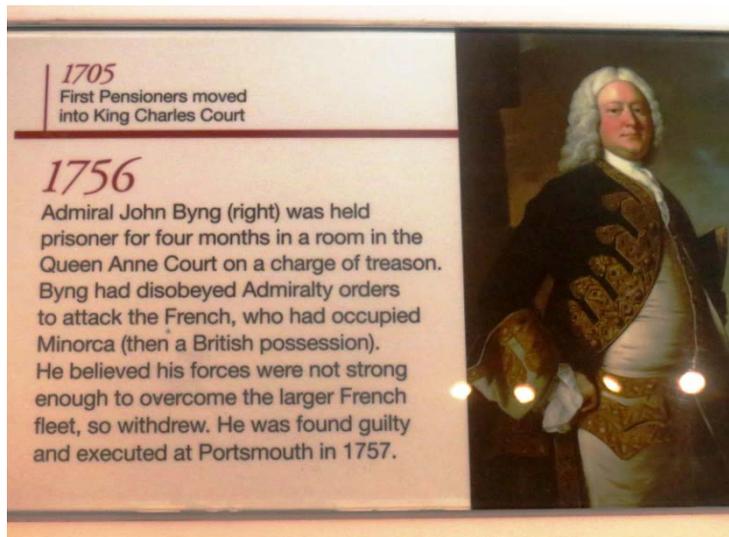


Figure 2 - Description of Byng's timeline at Queen Anne's Court in 1756 according to the Greenwich Village Maritime Visitor Center, London, in 2012.

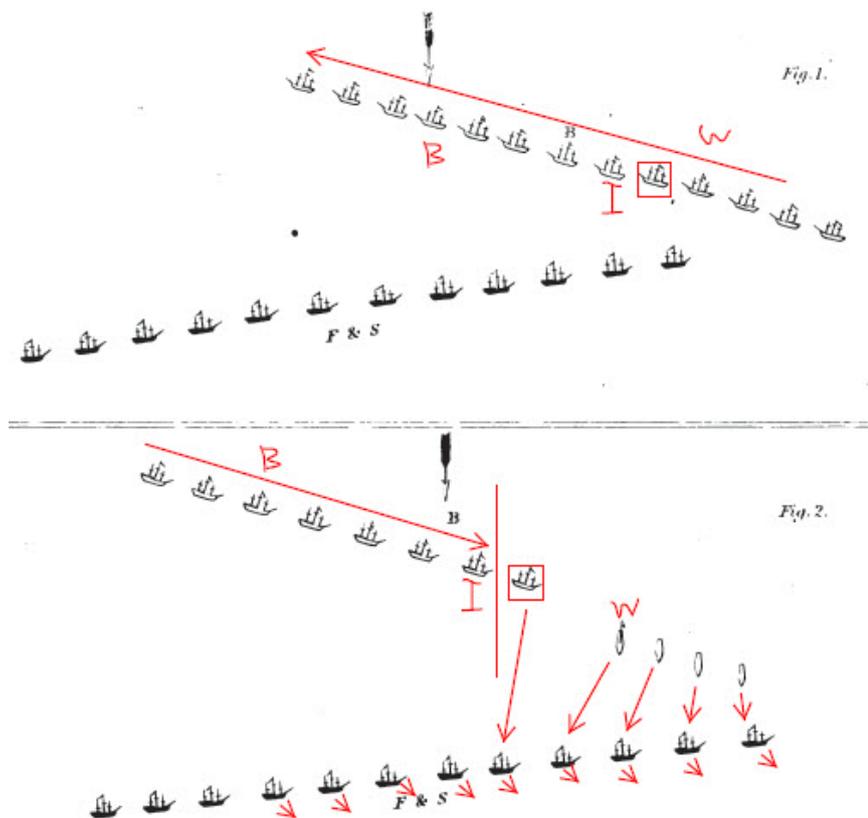


Figure 1 - Byng's fleet won the windward position. The arrows at top and below show the general direction of the fleets. The B, I, and W indicate where Byng and West were in relationship to the *Intrepid*. Once the action began, the French fleet began to 'make a running fight' as Captain Augustus Hervey claimed during the trial. Note the considerable gap in which Byng's squadron had to close compared to West's squadron.

CHAPTER 1
“The Streets Swarm So With Lampoons’: The Intersect of
Byng, Ballads, and Sermons’

My public letter to your Board, will acquaint you in general of our motions, but I think it proper, to let your Lordship know very particularly not only, whatever occurs, but also whatever inducements there may be, to any steps, which may not always be so proper as to go through inspections that a public letter must necessarily do...¹

The approach of this chapter is to recognize how ‘news’ travelled and by what likely mediums information filtered its way to the main participants of the Byng riots of 1756-1757, i.e., the lower ranks of British society. Understanding the breadth of the Byng protests begs an investigation into how the lower ranks came to access information about their localities, nation, and empire. The fall of Minorca and the consequent ease unto which Admiral Byng came to be scapegoated shows that both oral and printed means fulfilled the niche of delivering this news to plebeian society.

As the opening block quote demonstrates, Admiral John Byng’s private communiqué to Lord Anson constituted an acute awareness that his official letter to the board was ‘public,’ and that such letters must necessarily ‘go through inspections’ which ‘may not always be so proper...’ Byng’s letter, thus, constituted an empathetic view by Byng toward Anson: the predicament of having to face the British press concerning Minorca’s outcome.² Byng’s short dictum, however, disclosed his steeped cultural propensity to view the ‘public sphere’³ in terms of press accounts via letters, newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets. What Byng seemed blind to – as too did the admiralty, ministry, and court for that matter – were the other public modes of news spreading: the manner in which most Britons initially hear of

¹ ADD MS 35895, f. 25-6.

² The irony here is rich as Byng would soon face the full brunt of the press. Also, the Anson letter was in addition to the admiral’s official description of the battle and the unanimous decision by he and his officers (at a delayed Council of War) to leave the unfriendly waters of Port Mahon and repair to Gibraltar. See ADD MS 35895, f. 19-24.

³ Jürgen Habermas’s, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zer einen Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Darmstadt and Neuwied, 1962) [later translated, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* by Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence in 1989], opened the door to the phrase ‘public sphere’ which then became all the rage in British eighteenth-century discourses.

newsworthy events, through a culturally embedded blend of oral, visual, and printed media, namely ballads, sermons, and satirical prints.⁴

In fact, The Byng affair not only challenges the historiography over literacy and its meaning, but suggests that the literacy paradigm has been taken to its limits: focusing on information acquisition and any concomitant reaction by those of the lower ranks will certainly demonstrate other information conduits: orality, song, sermons, symbols, even mere rumour. Thus, the focus on literacy, while helpful, must also be seen as diversionary, overemphasized, and anachronistically misallocated. For in the 1750s – which is indeed my focus – just because one may or may not be able to sign one’s name says little in the way in which one accrued the news of the day. Seeking to pin a literacy rate upon a certain group at a certain time may thus distract scholars from investigating how semi-literate and the completely illiterate gained information (not to mention how they acted upon it).⁵ My focus here is to attempt to view the news of Minorca’s loss as it appeared to those from below. Therefore, I’ll start with ballads and shift to sermons before I open the files on mid-eighteenth-century newspapers, as these are the likeliest means by which the poor learned of Minorca’s loss.

I.

I have been but one night in town, and my head sung ballads about
Admiral Byng all night, as one is apt to dream of the masquerade

⁴ Van Horn Melton’s dual ‘publics’ expresses this well, where a ‘burgeoning print culture provided one medium’ but that ‘expanding arenas of sociability like coffee houses, salons, and masonic lodges were another.’ James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1-2. Brewer used the term ‘bridging’ to demarcate the transmission of printed information in oral forms. I would suggest there is more reciprocity than Brewer allows. See, John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 155.

⁵ Langford suggests there was a growing readership among the middling ranks, and those from below were slow on the literary uptake at mid-eighteenth century. See, Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 91-2. But consider Kathleen Wilson’s carefully crafted words that ‘through print culture both the subject’s right to monitor the state and his potential for citizen activism were fulfilled.’ In this telling, ‘subjects’ possess a potential for citizenship via activism. See, Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785*, (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 43. The Byng affair addresses Wilson’s claim head on. Minorca’s loss unleashed massive anti-Byng, and then anti-ministerial protests. These riots occurred throughout England, Wales, Ireland, and even the American colonies during the summer and fall of 1756. The size and breadth of the protests, suggest crowds much larger than the literate. The connection then must be that the lower ranks in the mid-eighteenth century were literate enough to take the ‘test of citizenship’ when informed that an admiral in the Mediterranean allegedly failed to protect state interests. Thus, the initial Byng protests reflected that the ‘bounds of literacy,’ as Charles E. Clark puts it, far exceeded the *Gazette’s* intended audience. See, Charles E. Clark, *The Public Prints: The Newspaper in Anglo American Culture*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1994), 250.

minuet: the streets swarm so with lampoons, that I begin to fancy myself a minister's son again.⁶

Though Walpole wrote from London, the depth and breadth of ballad printing and concomitant networks of distribution throughout the nation (perhaps the empire) should not be underestimated.⁷ Urban and rural printers of ballads found willing and able traders, merchants, postal service employees, members of book clubs, societies, librarians, antiquarians, and collectors to take them off their hands, often to be delivered immediately to alehouses, coffeehouses, inns and other locations of public consumption.⁸ Balladry, perhaps, became the initial and instantaneous path by which news of Minorca's loss reached the lower ranks throughout the empire. The protests that soon followed became a national event: neither localized nor regionalized but, rather, grown upon the ever sophisticated networks of distribution of all things printable. Most ballads consisted of a single sheet making reproduction cost effective, profitable, and easily transportable. The meteoric rise in England of the number of printers, booksellers, and engravers capable of producing ballad sheets ballooned during the long eighteenth century. Whereas a count of 174 towns capable of producing ballad sheets existed in the mid-1740s, 316 towns were printing such sheets by 1790.⁹ Evidence also indicates that provincial printers may have changed the spelling of certain words to more closely match the regional dialects and trends in spelling.¹⁰ Further, the pricing of ballads remained steady throughout the eighteenth century. Daniel Defoe charged but a penny, selling his satirical ballads to London's multitude.¹¹ Prices for both pro and anti-Byng ballads remained also around a penny at mid-century.

⁶ Horace Walpole to George Montagu, 12 July 1756. *Horace Walpole's Correspondence with George Montagu*, W. S. Lewis and Ralph S. Brown, eds., vol. 9, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), 195.

⁷ Recent historiography on ballads since the 1960s includes: Leslie Shepard, *The Broadside Ballad: A Study in Origin and Meaning*, (London: H. Jenkins, 1962); A. L. Lloyd, *Folk Song in England*, (New York: International Publishers, 1967); Roger Fiske, *English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth Century*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1973); Roy Palmer, *The Valiant Sailor: Sea Songs and Ballads and Prose Passages Illustrating Life on the Lower Deck in Nelson's Navy*, (Cambridge University Press, 1973); Leslie Shepard, *The History of Street Literature: The Story of Broadside Ballads, Chapbooks, Proclamations, News-Sheets, Election Bills, Tracts, Pamphlets, Cocks, Catchpennies and Other Ephemera*, (Detroit, MI: Singing tree Press, 1973); Roy Palmer, *A Touch on the Times: Songs of Social Change, 1774-1914*, (New York: Penguin, 1974); Charles Hamm, *Yesterdays: Popular Songs in America*, (New York: Norton, 1979); *Boxing the Compass: Sea Songs & Shanties*, Roy Palmer, ed., revised edition, (Todmorden, UK: Herron Publishing, 2001), first published as *The Oxford Book of Sea Songs*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); Vic Gammon, *Desire, Drink and Death in English Folk and Vernacular Song*, (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2007).

⁸ Wilson, *Sense of the People*, 30.

⁹ Wilson, *Sense of the People*, 29.

¹⁰ Nick Groom, 'The Purest English': Ballads and the English Literary Dialect,' *The Eighteenth Century*, vol. 47, no. 2/3 (2006), 189.

¹¹ Ashley Marshall, 'Daniel Defoe as Satirist,' *Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 70, no. 4 (December 2007), 570.

Accordingly, the popularity of ballads transcended all ranks of British society.¹² Over the centuries, England witnessed the growth of their ‘ballad community’¹³ whereby the elite of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries thought to collect them, the middle ranks who often penned them, and, of course, the greatest consumers of ballads: the populace at large where story and song have long been the purview of the poor.¹⁴ Historians thus looking to retrieve the voice of the underclass in the early modern era must understandably spend time within this genre. The potency of ballads lay within the lay folk, the ordinary, the jack tars and common soldiers celebrating battles and heroes, regaling bravery and courage, but taking the occasional swipe at the political status quo.¹⁵ Colley claims that ballads such as these remained popular well into the nineteenth century.¹⁶ Additionally, ballads functioned as a political outlet in English society for centuries, where plebeian society expressed their dissatisfaction through song, noise, and revelry.¹⁷

He [Admiral Byng] has been hanged, quartered, and burnt in every Part of the City. Every Ballad-singing Throat has been sung hoarse to his Destruction, and Swarms of Hawkers flying all abroad, astonishing the Streets with their Cries, have been let loose, with a design to overwhelm him.¹⁸

Clearly, during the Byng affair, revelry had been let loose by way of balladry: and such a point needs emphasizing. The lower rank’s hunger for ballads demonstrated a further need: their intent upon becoming real-time players in the creation, dissemination and then performance of satirical and potentially libellous ballads in full public venues.¹⁹ The history

¹² Victor E. Neuburg, *Popular Literature: A History and a Guide: From the Beginning of Printing to the Year 1897*, (London: Harmondsworth, 1977).

¹³ Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, (London, 1978), 45, and chapters 5-6.

¹⁴ John Selden collected ballads in the Restoration era; Samuel Pepys purchased Selden’s collection and added a few of his own by the time he passed in the early-eighteenth century. The Pepys ballad collection, all ten volumes of it, is archived at Cambridge in the UK. Phil Withington claims that ‘ballads were appropriated for political purposes’ prior to the English Civil War based largely on the knowledge that ballads were widely popular with the lower ranks of English society. Phil Withington, ‘Public Discourse, Corporate Citizenship, and State Formation in Early Modern England,’ *The American Historical Review*, vol. 112, no. 4 (October 2007), 1021-22. See also, Adam Fox, ‘Ballads, Libels and Popular Ridicule in Jacobean England,’ *Past & Present*, no. 145 (November 1994), 47-83.

¹⁵ Andrew Lincoln, ‘The Culture of War and Civil Society in the Reigns of William III and Anne,’ *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 44, no. 4 (Summer 2011), 459.

¹⁶ Linda Colley, ‘Whose Nation? Class and National Consciousness in Britain, 1750-1830,’ *Past & Present*, no. 113 (November 1986), 100-01.

¹⁷ Groom, 179-202.

¹⁸ Signed ‘Civis,’ *A Collection of Several Pamphlets Very Little Known*, (London: 1756), 41.

¹⁹ Fox, 48. Additionally, the suggestion that plebes as well as patricians authored ballads is derived from numerous sources but especially from Robin Ganev’s, ‘Milkmaids, Ploughmen, and Sex in Eighteenth-Century Britain,’ *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 16, no. 1 (January 2007), 40-67.

of the poor expressing discontent by way of balladry has long been recognized.²⁰ When the Byng affair swept the country, ballad singers were already seen as part and parcel of a criminal subculture routinely rounded up and often imprisoned. For example, when John Webster was accused, in 1721, of striking, cursing, and abusing his own mother (as well as threatening her life), the minutes of the Board of Governors at the Bridewell Royal Hospital in London added that the lad acted mostly as a ‘Common Ballad Singer & being a Loose idle and disorderly person.’²¹ In 1765 Thomas Percy wrote an apologia of sorts for printing his collection of ‘nothing better... than the rude songs of ancient minstrels.’²² John Aiken just a few years later complained that ‘every collection of songs, without exception, was degraded by dullness, or debased by indecency...’²³ Seemingly, buried within ballads, lay contemporaneous recognitions of long existing tensions between the potentially riotous poor and the oft vexed local and state authorities. In the eighteenth century, to get to songs of virtue, one must sift through the centuries of the rude and indecent: those *mobile vulgar* who sometimes dared to mock the powers that be with open displays of regale and balladry.²⁴

Hence, the Duke of Newcastle’s incessant worries about a growing public resentment for his role in Minorca’s loss. His ministers (from the Admiralty Offices to the Secretaries of State) soon expressed dismay at the intensity of the mob’s backlash that followed such confirmation.²⁵ No wonder: with printed sheets (from Lincoln’s Inn Field no less) with titles of ‘The Block and Yard Arm,’ which targeted both Byng (‘a vile Coward’) and Newcastle (‘a Lout’) coupled to a chorus ‘To the Block with N____ and Yard Arm with B____’ sung to the tune ‘Whose e’er been at Baldock,’ the balladry of London’s throats squarely aimed to flaunt their anger at those in power.²⁶ Consequently, the Chief Baron of the Exchequer, Sir Thomas Parker, was tapped to seek out and collect treasonous ballads such as the one sent to him by the mayor of Taunton. The ballad, allegedly penned by an apprentice woolstapler, challenged Britons to send George II back to Hanover: his taxes being too burdensome.²⁷ Such libelous expressions reflect continuity where ballads as far back as the late-sixteenth century: ballads

²⁰ Julian Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty? England 1689-1727*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 442.

²¹ Bridewell and Bethlem, Minutes of the Court of Governors, 1701-1713, *London Lives, 1690-1800*, BBRRMG202040478 (www.londonlives.org, version 1.1, April 2012), 10 March 1721.

²² Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, (London: 1765), iv.

²³ John Aiken, *Essays on Song Writing: with a Collection of such English Songs as are most Eminent for Poetical Merit*, (London: 1772), 2.

²⁴ Stephen David Moore, ‘Losing Minorca: An Event in English Political History,’ (PhD diss., York University of Toronto, 2008), 85.

²⁵ Rogers, *Crowds, Culture, and Politics*, 61.

²⁶ *The Block and Yard Arm. A New Ballad, On the loss of Minorca, and the Danger of our American, Rights and Possessions*, (Lincoln’s-Inn Fields: 1756)

²⁷ Cardwell, 30-1.

such as ‘Long Meg’ or ‘Moll Cutpurse,’ seemed to poke at the socio-political status quo with tales of women of low birth outwitting their male betters.²⁸ In 1711 a vicar from Bristol complained that musicians made themselves ‘mean and contemptible’ by pouring ‘Venom to the Poison’ of poets:

*Profane or immodest Words are bad, when they are in Verse they are so much the worse, and strike more forcibly on the Fancy; but when Musick is added, there seems the highest, most provoking, and daring Pitch of Impiety.... the Author can readily find a Musician, who will without Scruple approve of the Words, increase the Mischief, and be a Partaker of other Mens Sins in Setting it to Musick....*²⁹

Further, the full political potency and social displays of balladry were not lost on Britain’s middling and upper ranks. As Gerald Jordan and Nicolas Rogers remind us, drink and song merging political and public worlds appeared throughout the eighteenth century: for example, Admiral Vernon the hero to the goatish Walpole circa 1740.³⁰ When the Walpole administration resisted entering into an engagement with a despised Catholic enemy, patriotic literature spread by way of the ballad sheet, often depicting female fighters contrasted against a perceived Hanoverian and ministerial timidity.³¹

Contemporary observers of the unfolding Byng affair also took note of the political potency of ballads. ‘If I am not mistaken,’ stated one pamphlet, ‘the Clamour was began against the *Admiral*, by the *Hawkers* and *Ballad-singers*; everyone must remember *Sing Tantarara Hang Byng!*’³² This seemingly innocuous phrasing: an insinuation of protests which ‘began’ only when hawkers and ballad singers took to the streets, accords well with work by M. John Cardwell. Here, above the eighteenth-century newspaper and pamphlet, resided the ballad and poem: the far more ‘dominant genres of political literature.’³³ The challenge to write and sing witty banter via song and rhyme enthralled all social ranks throughout the country. Countless citizens and subjects from nearly every occupation took up pen and prose to exclaim opinion in the public arena.³⁴ The widespread balladry displays protesting Minorca’s loss appeared so universal and so deep (above and below) that there can

²⁸ Helen Berry, ‘Rethinking Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Moll King’s Coffee House and the Significance of ‘Flash Talk’: The Alexander Prize Lecture, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, vol. 11 (2001), 68-9.

²⁹ Arthur Bedford, *The Great Abuse of Musick* (London: 1711), 62-4.

³⁰ Gerald Jordan and Nicholas Rogers, ‘Admirals as Heroes: Patriotism and Liberty in Hanoverian England,’ *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 28, no. 3 (July 1989), 208.

³¹ Dianne Dugaw, *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry, 1650-1850*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 180.

³² *An Appeal to the Nation*, (London: 1757), 2-3.

³³ Cardwell, 4.

³⁴ *ibid.*

be little doubt that ballads played a significant role in spreading the news that a far away island in the Mediterranean fell to the Gallic enemy.³⁵ Certainly scores of pamphlets, newspaper opinions, satirical prints, and one-act plays highlighted the sense of lost pride when Minorca fell to the French, but it was the plebeian ballad performances on the streets that amplified the shock to which the nation reacted to the news.³⁶ Nor was Byng the only political target of balladry in 1756. The Maidstone affair also produced numerous ballads attacking the king's Hanoverian troops, if not George II himself. The Admiralty Office was also ridiculed in ballad form with the reprinting of 'Great Britain's Glory, or the Stay at Home Fleet.'³⁷ As already depicted, ballads such as *The Block and Yard Arm* demonstrated a fervent anti-government mood in the opening throes of the Seven Years' War.

By studying the ballads associated with the Byng affair and connecting these works to events on the ground, scholars may gain greater appreciations of how such songs worked into political discourses at mid-century. The initial Byng protests included balladry: public displays of singing witty verse to known tunes. Those defending the admiral countered with verses of their own, but at a later time in the year, once the admiral came to fully appreciate the weight of the charges levied against him. These pro-Byng verses mostly defended the admiral's honour or chose to elevate issues of justice and liberty, and some did take oblique swipes at the ministry. It remains unclear, however, whether any of the pro-Byng songs experienced public exhortations.

Fortunately, many of the ballads of this crisis still remain thanks to the efforts of past historians and scholars. Charles Harding Firth, more than 100 years ago, collected and published hundreds of maritime-centered ballads.³⁸ In his seminal work *Naval Songs and Ballads*, Firth determined that three classifications of ballads dominated the genre: ballads written by professional ballad writers, ballads written by sailors themselves, and those authored by 'professional men of letters': all of them, said Firth, meant to 'catch the ear of the multitude.'³⁹ The Byng affair bears credence to Firth's assessment, although there exist ballads from this crisis that do not fit Firth's classification system.

³⁵ Cardwell, 54.

³⁶ Wilson, *Sense of the People*, 182.

³⁷ On the Maidstone affair see Mathew McCormack, 'Citizenship, Nationhood, and Masculinity in the Affair of the Hanoverian Soldier, 1756,' *The Historical Journal*, vol. 49, no. 4 (December 2004), 991. On the Admiralty Office refer to *Great Britain's Glory, or the Stay at Home Fleet: A New Ballad* (London: 1756): this ballad was a remake of a ballad of the same title printed in 1729.

³⁸ *Naval Songs and Ballads*, Charles Harding Firth, ed., (London, Navy Records Society, 1908)

³⁹ *Naval Songs and Ballads*, viii-x.

Two ballads that fit Firth's classification of lyrics penned by professionals take opposite sides: one pro-Byng and the other decidedly against. *More Birds for the Cage* attacked Newcastle and laid the blame for Minorca's loss upon the ministry. The ballad charged the ministers with cowardice for making Byng take the fall, for altering the admiral's dispatch which appeared in the *London Gazette*, for sending Byng out too late and with a sorry fleet, and asked for its ballad singers to seek justice. The ballad reads like Byng's defence sheet: its author then most likely Paul Whitehead, hired by Byng's friends to help defend the admiral before the public.⁴⁰ One of the more interesting stanzas reads:

Let Justice and Mercy prevail,
 'Gainst a Faction too powerful grown,
 'Twill soon be too late to bewail - - - -
 Stand up in his Cause - - - - 'tis your own.⁴¹

With prose that pitted issues of liberty against factional politics, *More Birds for the Cage* amplified concerns expressed by many Britons throughout the empire: from displaced rural peasants to out-of-power Tories, but also religious clerics' concerns over fairness in a rapidly changing economic landscape.⁴² A continuity of charges of factions 'too powerful grown' was maintained throughout the Wilkite movement, and colonial resistance to taxation policies after the war equally demonstrated a transatlantic concern over factional favouritism.

On the anti-Byng side, *The Wonder of Surry* (sung to the tune of *Mol Row*) included pejorative lyrics aimed at Byng's war council:

Cornwallis and *Bertie* and *Stewart*,
 With *Effingham Howard* I sing,
 And when in Council they met,
 To Them, thus said A_____ B_____.

Noble *Lords* and *Commanders* so Gay
 shall we give 'em another Drubbing,
 Or else shall we *morris* away?
 'Why let us *March off Mr. Byng*.

Shall I send you to BLAKENEY on shore.
 He'll show you a Caunonading [sic],
 'We like your safe *method* much more
 'So We'll stay with *You* A_____ B_____ ⁴³

⁴⁰ Pope, 192.

⁴¹ 'More Birds for the Cage or, Who'll confess first?' as found in *A Collection of Several Pamphlets, Very Little Known*, (London: 1756), 110-112.

⁴² Discussed at length in chapter 3.

⁴³ *The Wonder of Surry! OR, Who Perswaded A---l B--- to run away*, (London: 1756).

The Wonder of Surry! was most likely written by a professional ballad writer. It opened with a stanza that seemed more apt to denigrate those who sided with Byng: ‘Some People Write Tests for their Readers / Whilst other Folks love for to Sing / The Conduct and Sense of our Leaders, / and the Courage of *Admiral Byng*.’ Interestingly, the next stanza admitted that Byng’s fleet was equipped ‘Too weak, - and Too late in the Spring,’ thus, it was unlikely the ballad originated from the ministry or any of their hired hacks.

Another anti-Byng ballad even made fun of the admiral’s writing style. *The Letter of a Certain Admiral* mocked Byng’s flowery use of language among other things:

Mr. Cleveland, I pray, to their lordships you'll say
We are glad and rejoice above measure:
When you have read what is writ you, you'll laugh till it split you,
And so give me joy of my pleasure.⁴⁴

The ballad also included a passage that poked fun of one of John Byng’s hobbies: collecting porcelain. No doubt then that the author of this ballad knew of the admiral intimately, but with great meanness presented his calumny in rhyme.

Moreover, 'twas plain, three ships in the van
Had their glasses and china all broke;
And this gave the balance, in spite of great talents,
Against us—a damnable stroke!⁴⁵

Given the personal nature of *The Letter of a Certain Admiral*, little doubt that its origin lay somewhere within the ministry, and quite possibly the Admiralty Office.

The pro-Byng camp also released a flurry of ballads late in 1756, just weeks before his court martial. Though anonymous, ‘A Hymn’ sung to the tune of ‘God Save the King’ was likely written by a hired hack and made the rounds in just this manner:

Thou Omnipresent Lord / Thy list'ning Ear accord / Head our
Request / Let Slander hold her Peace / And Defamation cease / And
with thy Arm release / Much injur'd Byng

Let not the pond'rous Weight / Of all the Tricks of State / Fall on
poor Byng / He is of Soul Sincere / His Reputation's clear / It shortly
will appear / Just is brave Byng!

⁴⁴ *Naval Songs and Ballads*, 207-09.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

God save Great George our King / Let all base Traitors swing / God
Save the King! / Let no Delusions sway / Let us the Laws obey / And
let each Briton say / Long live brave Byng!⁴⁶

Following Firth's classification system, some ballads do appear as if they were written by naval officers or sailors. *Boh Peep-Peep Boh*,⁴⁷ appeared bawdy from the get go as it was sung to the tune of *To You Fair Ladies Now at Land*, a popular tune throughout the long eighteenth century used to parody and challenge gender roles.⁴⁸ The song opens with the voice of Byng, 'To you (dear Fribbles) now at Land, / With hasty Pen I write; / That you may timely understand, / How I've been forc'd to fight...' Thus Byng's masculinity was immediately parodied for refusing to engage with the French.

I meant to follow (God well knows!
The Orders I'd receiv'd,
And would have snubn'd my County's Foes
But was by them deciv'd.
'Twas not my Fault we came so near,
Let Mirepoix blame Galissonere.⁴⁹

Nonetheless, both Byng and the ministry are attacked in this piece: Byng's cowardice contrasted to Newcastle's neglect.⁵⁰

But should the D---, who you must know
Is sometimes in a Hurry
Neglect to hear You, instant go
And whisper it to M--r-y⁵¹

Of particular interest, and perhaps yet another reason this ballad may have been penned by an officer or sailor, is the reference to the Mathews and Lestock case stemming from 1744.

Methinks I see N----- frown,
At hearing of this Story;
And swear that I am surely grown
A Jacobite *Tory*,
But tell His grace 'tis no such thing,

⁴⁶ *A Collection of Several Pamphlets Very Little Known*, (London: 1756), 109.

⁴⁷ *Boh Peep-Peep Boh, Or A-----l Bing's Apology to the Fribbles*, (London: 1756).

⁴⁸ Ballads to the tune of *To You Fair Ladies Now at Land* targeted the South Seas Bubble scandal, stockjobbers, the Walpole administration, and now the events surrounding the Byng affair. In 1916, Sir Compton Mackenzie used the song in his novel *The Passionate Elopement*, see Compton Mackenzie, *The Passionate Elopement* (New York: G. P. Putnam's & Sons, 1916), 222-223.

⁴⁹ Misspellings included.

⁵⁰ Cardwell alludes to the title's referencing of a child's game, hide and seek, and ties it to the battle itself where both Byng and Galissonière were accused of not wanting to fight. Cardwell, 62.

⁵¹ The blanks are 'Duke' and 'Murray', the latter being Newcastle's Attorney General.

He'll find no Matthews in his B--g.

In 1744, Admiral Thomas Mathews (a known Tory) gave orders to engage a Spanish fleet near Toulon. His second in command, Admiral Richard Lestock, refused to include his van in forming the line. Mathews attacked anyway but was not able to inflict damage upon the enemy.⁵² The lyrics thus insinuate Mathew's bravery as compared to Byng's alleged cowardice. The reference to Newcastle's frowning arises from the Parliamentary investigation one year after the battle (many sailors followed the news). Mathews was found guilty and dismissed from service while Lestock survived unscathed: the accusation being Lestock, the Pelhamite Whig, had friends in high places of the government.⁵³

Admiral Byng and Brave West compared and contrasted the two admirals over their conduct in the battle off of Port Mahon. Misspellings likely point to an authorship belonging to sailors. More important, however, stood the charge in the third stanza that Byng cut a deal with the French:

Oh ! woe to cursed gold ! ohon ! ohon !
Oh ! woe to cursed gold ! ohon !
 Oh ! woe to cursed gold ;
 For Minorca I have sold,
 That gallant place of old,
 With Mahon !⁵⁴

In early July of 1756, the ghost of Admiral Francis Hosier speaks in verse in a ballad entitled *Sequel to Hosier's Ghost: Or Old Blakeney's Reception into the Elysian Fields*.⁵⁵ Selling for three pence, its anonymous author and concomitant target audience must have been officers of the navy and the political elite, especially those with memories of the original *Hosier's Ghost* authored by Richard Glover in 1740.⁵⁶ Glover's piece was largely an attack over the alleged timidity of the Walpole administration for sending Admiral Hosier with 20 ships to blockade Porto Bello but not to take it which most military historians claim Hosier could have done easily. Instead, Hosier's blockade caused him and about 3,000 other sailors

⁵² Irony – one of Lestock's captains broke ranks and sailed with Mathews to engage the Spanish: that would be Temple West, Byng's second in command at Minorca.

⁵³ William Burney, *Naval Heroes of Great Britain; or Accounts of the Lives and Actions of the Distinguished Admirals and Commanders who have Contributed to Confer on Great Britain the Empire of the Ocean*, (London: 1806), 135.

⁵⁴ *Naval Songs and Ballads*, 210-11.

⁵⁵ The author listed is 'a Patriot of Ireland.' It's quite possible this is the work of Robert Craggs-Nugent, quite close to Henry Fox and part of Newcastle's inner clique as a member of the Lord of Treasury.

⁵⁶ The *Sequel to Hosier's Ghost* was published and released in London on 10 July 1756. Intelligence confirming Blakeney's surrender of the garrison at Minorca arrived in London on the 19th of July. See ADD MSS, 32866, f. 129.

to succumb to yellow fever. Later it was Admiral Vernon who sacked and captured Porto Bello and treated by Britons as a national hero to Walpole's villainy.⁵⁷ In the third verse of the *Sequel to Hosier's Ghost*, the admiral's apparition approaches Blakeney's phantom pointing out past English heroes, including John Byng's father. By the sixth stanza Blakeney reports that 'Underneath St. Philips, crumbled / Into dust by *Richlieu's* fire, / Rest my bones, and with them humbled / Did my Country's hopes expire.' In the eighth stanza Blakeney adds:

Black reflection to a distance,
 How from yon devoted tow'rs,
 I, expecting *Byng's* assistance,
 Number'd o'er the tedious hours;
 How my eyes, still sea-ward bending,
 Saw the wish'd-for succour near,
 Saw, (O spectacle heart-rending)
England's pennant fann'd by fear.⁵⁸

In the next verse among the heroes listening was Byng's father: '*Torrington* his bosom beating, / From the bright assembly fled, / And, Elysian joys forgetting, / Thrust in shades his drooping head.'⁵⁹ Suddenly the spirit of Liberty appears, 'the mover Of mankind' to complain of England's 'Change to weakness, vice and woe.' Of interest, the *Sequel to Hosier's Ghost* appeared in newspaper advertisements. Its listing in the *Whitehall Evening Post* serves as a not so subtle reminder of the popularity of ballads in the open markets of London at mid-century.⁶⁰

A New Song appeared late in 1756, after the return to England of William Blakeney, who surrendered St. Philip on 29 June 1756. Sung to the ancient drinking tune of *Tantarara*, the chorus is particularly damning to Byng. After encouraging the carollers to 'Fill up your glasses to brave Blakeney,' the choral refrain read 'Sing Tantarara shoot Byng.'⁶¹ Anonymous, the ballad did address a late November political concern, the rumoured elevation of Blakeney to peerage.⁶² Eyebrows were raised among some elites. Back in February, Horace Walpole wrote a sardonic letter to his friend and diplomat Horace Mann

⁵⁷ John Campbell, *Naval History of Great Britain: Including the History and Lives of the British Admirals*, vol. iv, (London: 1818), 452. See also, Firth, x.

⁵⁸ *Sequel to Hosier's Ghost*, 4.

⁵⁹ *Sequel to Hosier's Ghost*, 5.

⁶⁰ *Whitehall Evening Post*, July 17-20, 1756.

⁶¹ *Naval Songs and Ballads*, 206-7.

⁶² In early July newspapers began to report the rumor. 'Tis said that General Blakeney, if he gets safe to England, (for his Bravery in defending St Philip's Castle) will be created a Peer, by the Stile and Title of Baron Blakeney, Viscount St. Philip's, with a free Gift of Five Thousand Pounds per Annum for his Life.' See Berrow's *Worcester Journal*, 8 July 1756.

stating ‘We are under some apprehensions of the French having a view on Port Mahon, where the governor is making his best dispositions to receive them.’⁶³ Walpole’s acerbic remarks reinforced observations made by Augustus Hervey who jotted his alarm and disgust with Blakeney’s seeming indifference in preparing a proper defence of Port Mahon.⁶⁴ George II elevated Blakeney in early December.⁶⁵ The timing of the ballad’s appearance demonstrated, perhaps, that *A New Song* was either authored by someone in the failing Newcastle/Fox ministry or a hired hack.

Additionally, the advertising of *Sequel to Hosier’s Ghost* in newspapers exposed an aspect of ballads that Firth failed to classify: those driven by, or in knowledge of, market demands. An example of this can be located in the famous Hogarth print ‘Beer Street,’ a fisherwoman with a full fishtub upon her head is depicted holding a pint while mouthing or singing from a ballad sheet. Hogarth drew in a title, ‘A New Ballad on the Herring Fishery.’⁶⁶ Certainly, the Free British Fishery Society wrote and distributed ballads for the purpose of using crowds to influence parliamentarians to pass legislations favorable to the society itself: but its success in doing so seemed to provide a moment of satirical reflection for Hogarth.

The popularity of ballads can also be seen in advertisements for privateers. On 1 July 1756, George Campbell, a Liverpool merchant and member of its Common Council, launched a privateer. Loaded with ‘16 carriage guns (four, six, and nine pounders), 24 swivels, and 100 men...’ this 150 ton brigantine ship was quickly named the *Anson*.⁶⁷ Merchants in Exeter quickly followed launching their own privateer dubbed the *Hawke*. Campbell, not to be outdone, followed Exeter in launching yet another privateer, the *Brave Blakeney*.⁶⁸ The anti-Byngism leveled in the naming of these crafts remain axiomatic: Anson who joined the ministry in denouncing Byng, Hawke who was sent to replace him, and Blakeney the hero to Byng’s alleged villainy.⁶⁹ Soon, heroic songs emerged championing

⁶³ *Horace Walpole’s Correspondence with Sir Horace Mann*, W. S. Lewis, Warren Hunting Smith and George L. Lam, eds., vol. 20, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 528-29.

⁶⁴ On 5 February 1756, Hervey noted, ‘...from the great indolence of the General.... We had good accounts of the French forces and their designs, and yet nothing was done here. The island was in a very bad condition for want of stores, of officers, of men, of provisions, and in short had been much neglected...’ *Augustus Hervey’s Journal*, 191.

⁶⁵ *London Gazette*, 7 December 1756.

⁶⁶ Bob Harris, ‘Patriotic Commerce and National Revival: The Free British Fishery Society and British Politics, c. 1749-58,’ *The English Historical Review*, vol. 114, no. 456 (April 1999), 295 and 311.

⁶⁷ Gomer Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers and Letters of Marque, with an account of the Liverpool Slave Trade* (London: William Heinemann, 1897), 87.

⁶⁸ Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers*, 88.

⁶⁹ Newcastle signed Hawke’s orders to replace Byng in the Mediterranean on 5 June 1756. Newspapers had announced Hawke’s departure and his orders to supersede Byng. See, ADD MSS, 32865, f. 211.

these vessels, helped along by *Anson's* capture of a French transport bound for Canada on 19 July 1756.

Ye brave British sailors, true sons of the main,
Who scorn to submit to the insults of Spain,
Leave to landsmen their politick schemes and their talk,
And enter on board the *Lord Anson* and *Hawke*.

These two noble heroes, whose names our ships bear,
Made the Spaniards to tremble, the Frenchmen to fear;
Secure of success, then, your fortune ne'er balk,
But enter on board the *Lord Anson* and *Hawke*....

The wages, the ingots, the wealth of Peru,
The Spaniards are getting and hoarding for you;
You shall ride in your coaches, whilst cowards shall walk,
Who durst not engage in the *Anson* and *Hawke*.⁷⁰

References to the Byng affair, though not explicit, appear: 'politick schemes and their talk'; 'two noble heroes...Lord Anson and Hawke'; and 'whilst cowards shall walk' leave little doubt as to the feelings generated by the loss of Minorca. But the purpose of the ballad was to collect men. The captain of the *Anson*, Robert Wapshutt, advertised both his ship and its ballad when he pulled into Bristol in late 1757. In announcing the formalized merriment the ad stated to all potential tars, 'let them immediately repair to the rendezvous, at Mr. Bynam's, the Sign of the Mermaid, on the Back, where they will find all proper encouragement. N. B. Two French Horns, a Drummer, and Trumpeter, will meet with great Encouragement.'⁷¹

Lastly, if rumours make history, John Byng himself may have authored *All is Out --- Or, Admiral Byng*. Like *A New Song* (decidedly pro-Blakeney), the lyrics for *All is Out* were written to fit the ancient drinking tune, *Tantarara*. The myth states that Byng scribbled this ballad into a windowpane at the Talbot Inn in Ripley as a prisoner leaving the confines of Greenwich on his way to Portsmouth for the trial.⁷² They read:

Come all you true Britons, and listen to me,
I'll tell you the truth, you'll then plainly see;
How Minorca was lost, why the Kingdom dose ring,
And lay the whole blame on Admiral Byng.
Sing Tantararara, Rogues all, rogues all,
Sing Tantararara, &c.

⁷⁰ *Naval Songs and Ballads*, 225-26.

⁷¹ *Bristol Weekly Intelligencer*, 10 December 1757.

⁷² Anon., *Notes and Queries*, vol. 4, no. 108 (November 22, 1851), 403.

N_____ and H_____ and A_____ did now,
Preside at the helm, and to whom all must bow,
Minorca besieged who protection will bring?
They know 'tis too late, let the victim be Byng.
Sing Tantararara, &c.

With force insufficient he's ordered away,
He obeys and he sails without any delay,
But alas! 'tis too late, who shall say to the K____
Minorca must fall, why accuse Mr. Byng.
Sing tantararara, &c.

Minorca now falls, and the Nation intraged,
With Justice they cry, let all who engaged;
In traterous [sic] deeds with curst infamy swing,
What none to be found? but poor Admiral Byng.
Sing tantararara, &c.

Then Councils are call'd, and dark Factions engage,
To screen the true Objects from popular rage;
Now all with Clamour, they press on to the K____
With thirst for the Blood of poor Admiral Byng.
Sing tantararara, &c.⁷³

The power of ballads survives even in myths. The potency of ballads was recognized by nearly all Britons: London, provincial, and empire-wide. According to Augustus Hervey, Byng was in 'great spirits' before his trial, certain that his name would be exonerated and that he would be found innocent of the calumny thrown at him.⁷⁴ Fitting then, this myth, that Byng fell to verse on his way to Portsmouth: a parting ballad etched onto a window – perhaps a view he had hoped to see on his way back to London as an innocent man.

The potency of the ballad genre continued to hold immediate and future ramifications within British politics and culture. As the Devonshire/Pitt administration began to form, Newcastle's grip on his faction in Parliament did not dissolve with his departure. Attacks against the new ministry appeared in the press almost immediately, often in tandem with praise for the outgoing Pelham-Holles. *The Test*, a London-based newspaper, charged the Patriot faction of 'flagrant' misrepresentations against the Duke by way of 'the *card*, the *ballad*, the FOXE'S *brush*, and every thing but truth and fair argument...'⁷⁵ The rise of Wilkes in London witnessed a bevy of pro-Liberty songs while an equal number of anti-Bute, anti-Scottish ballads circulated. Newly crowned George III was also targeted as was his

⁷³ *All is Out --- OR, Admiral Byng* (London: 1756?).

⁷⁴ *Augustus Hervey's Journal*, 232.

⁷⁵ *The Test*, 20 November 1756.

mother, the Princess Dowager. Hateful ballads, including Henry Howard's libellous *The Kings A* in 1762, served to remind the new king of a previous monarch, Charles I, and his fate before the people.⁷⁶ And *Yankee Doodle*, a ballad written by British officers to jibe American militia men during the Seven Years' War, became a serious rally cry among revolutionary American just a few years later.

II.

Who would have thought, that *Britain* so superior in naval Power, should have been prevented by a *French Fleet*, from fending timely succours to *Fort St. Philip*, which might have enabled the brave *Blakeney* to hold out the Siege? Especially, who would have expected, that we should have sustained this Loss, not by the superior Power of the Enemy, but by the Cowardice of an *English Admiral*?⁷⁷

Among the many anti-Byng pamphlets, Presbyterian Samuel Davies' *The Crisis* was perhaps one of the most damaging. Known as a New Light preacher with a reputation for Christianizing slaves in colonial Virginia, Davies represented part of a consistent transatlantic ecclesiastical correspondence very much alive and well since (at least) the early days of the Great Awakening. Clerics on both sides of the Atlantic communicated habitually: by letters, by subscriptions, and by sermons often printed in pamphlet form.⁷⁸ Here, located in this heavy traffic of theocratic to and fro, the Great Awakening remained the most steadfast. Clerics communicated with other clerics across the pond offering encouragement as well as angry exhortations against the hydra-headed troubles that supposedly beset the empire. Hence the Davies sermon was not unique. Much of the printed materials that clerics sponsored and purchased were, as M. John Cardwell put it, part of a new sweep of 'militant' nationalism – much of it religious-based – that spread throughout London, the provinces, and beyond.⁷⁹ Both American- and London-based clerics practiced similar intense, if not enthusiastic displays of moral proselytizing, often attacking 'the Manners and Principles of the Whole,'⁸⁰ as Anglican Dr. John Brown put it in 1757. To him, national happiness arose from...

the Manners and Principles of those who *lead*, not of those who *are led*; of those who *govern*, not of those who *are governed*; of those, in short, who *make Laws* or *execute* them, will ever determine the

⁷⁶ John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics*, 155-6.

⁷⁷ Samuel Davies, *The Crisis: or, The uncertain Doom of Kingdoms at particular Times, considered With Reference to Great-Britain and her Colonies in their present Circumstances*, (London: 1757), 16-7.

⁷⁸ See Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *Calendar of the Correspondence of Philip Doddridge DD, 1702-1751*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1979).

⁷⁹ Cardwell, 79.

⁸⁰ John Brown, *An Estimate of the Manners and the Principles of the Times*, (London: 1757), 25.

Strength or Weakness, and therefore the Continuance or Dissolution
of a State.⁸¹

Perhaps, such advice expressed by Brown, Davies, and other religious leaders (directly at or against the state) were deeply rooted in the radicalism of the Great Awakening: but this movement was as much social as it was religious. The key to the Great Awakening resided not within theological arguments over orthodoxy, church corruption, or inherent relationships with the Creator, but rather the radical nature of the movement: the focus by clerics to elevate the target audience: the laity. Clerics preached to the people, made them allies against an orthodox majority, challenging the status quo both in secular and spiritual terms as they did so. In the process – something new: a laity that allied with religious leaders championing reforms on a transatlantic, if not empire-wide scale. Together, evangelical leaders and the people who followed them created a potent and zealous force for change that must be recognized as following the axiomatic definition of what we today call – radical.⁸² By mid-century, both printed and spoken sermons emerged as a powerful and nationalizing force, not only marking calendars or commemorating anniversaries, but calling for the laity to take an active role in ensuring the safety of the state through moral deeds.⁸³ Even J. C. D. Clark, who is loathe to admit an English eighteenth-century nationalist movement, nonetheless recognizes the fervent role religion played in forging a national ‘identity’ prior to the American Revolution.⁸⁴

Aside from its zealotry, however, the Davies sermon signified another important aspect: the breadth of its publication. *The Crisis* was indicative of a mid-eighteenth-century historical imperative: that religious material was more likely to be shared across the Atlantic than political tracts. The distribution of soteriological works was, indeed, the aim of the Society for Promoting Religious Knowledge among the Poor (SRKP), founded in 1750 with the help of Philip Doddridge, of which Samuel Davies was a member.⁸⁵ The SRKP merely

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² Bonomi challenges scholars to consider radicals as those identified in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England as those that challenged the state religion, and hence, the state itself. Patricia U. Bonomi, ‘‘A Just Opposition’’: The Great Awakening as a Radical Model,’ in *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism*, eds. Margaret C. Jacob and James R. Jacob, paperback, (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1991), 227-28.

⁸³ Colley, ‘Whose Nation?’ 107.

⁸⁴ J. C. D. Clark, ‘Protestantism, Nationalism, and National Identity, 1600 to 1832,’ *The Historical Journal*, vol. 43, no. 1 (March 2000), 252.

⁸⁵ Jeffrey H. Richards, ‘Samuel Davies and the Transatlantic Campaign for Slave Literacy in Virginia,’ *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 111, no. 4 (2003), 335. See also, Isabel Rivers, ‘Society for Promoting Religious Knowledge among the Poor (act.1750–1920s),’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press; online edn., May 2013 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/theme/95682>, accessed 1 Dec 2013]

followed the examples set by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), formed in 1698 with the assistance of Dr. Thomas Bray, who also sponsored the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), in 1701.⁸⁶ All three coexisted at the time of the Byng crisis, and were part and parcel of large, extensive networks of both Anglican and Dissenting societies that collected and then spent funds to produce, ship, and distribute chapbooks, hymns, prayer books, broadsides, pamphlets, sermons, letters, religious novels and more during the decade of the 1750s to remote provinces as well as the empire.⁸⁷ Bray's SPCK often printed its own materials for distribution, and in 1702 managed to gain Admiral John Benbow's nod to distribute thousands of religious tracts to the common tars assigned to his fleet.⁸⁸ Philip Doddridge, in a 1737 letter to Isaac Watts, boasted possession of 'a good printing House at Northampton,' the location of his Castle Hill Church and academy.⁸⁹ Religious materials also became stable sources of wealth for London and provincial booksellers.⁹⁰ An early eighteenth-century catalogue from an SPG library (founded by Bray) in colonial South Carolina shows that of the 225 books collected, 142 of them were religious. By mid-century, an inventory of some 2,800 titles of both library and private collections shows the continued importance of religious tracts throughout.⁹¹

Aside from, or because of, the wider circulation of religious materials throughout the empire, similar ideologies seemed to surface on both sides of the Atlantic concurrently. Overt providentialism exuded from the Davies sermon, just as providentialism stuffed the pages of sermonizers in London. In the 1756 sermon, *The Christian's Duty in a time of publick Danger*, the Independent minister (based in Cheshunt, Hertfordshire) John Mason quoted from Psalm 46:10 to assure his flock to 'Be still... and not be afraid,' that Providence was at work as long as they 'Adhered faithfully to him and their Duty.'⁹² In the London printing of *The Crisis*, Congregationalist minister Thomas Gibbons warned readers in the preface that 'At length God had appeared in his Providence with very dark and awful Tokens of his

⁸⁶ Isabel Rivers, 'The First Evangelical Tract Society,' *The Historical Journal*, vol. 50, no. 1 (March 2007), 2. See also James Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society: 1748-1811*, (Columbia, SC: South Carolina University Press, 2002), 34.

⁸⁷ Wilson, 31-2.

⁸⁸ Some of these books included: 'Cautions Against Swearing,' 'Cautions Against Drunkenness,' and 'Perswasives to the Observation of the Lords Day.' Welsh versions of these books were also shipped. See, William Osborne Bird Allen, and Edmund McClure, *Two Hundred Years: The History of The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1698-1898*, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1898), 166-168. Not until 1760 did the SPCK transfer printing duties to John and James Rivington, perhaps the largest printing house in London at the time. See Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers*, 91.

⁸⁹ Nuttall, *Calendar of the Correspondence of Philip Doddridge*, 87.

⁹⁰ James Raven, *Judging New Wealth: Popular Publishing and Responses to Commerce in England, 1750-1800*, (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1992), 104-5.

⁹¹ Raven, *London Booksellers*, 152-3.

⁹² John Mason, *The Christian's Duty in a time of publick Danger*, (London: 1756), 3-5.

Displeasure against us,' naming the havoc of the 'Indian Barbarity' that fell upon the army of General Edward Braddock in America as proof.⁹³ Sermonizing from Virginia, Davies reminded his lay folk that 'whether divine Providence is now about to employ the Power of *France*' against England, so as to chastise and seek vengeance against Britain's sinful ways was still a matter of 'dreadful Uncertainty.'⁹⁴ Such cross-Atlantic providentialism rose, more or less, in parallel with the ever-expanding empire challenging the seventeenth-century cultural affinity for Calvinistic predestination. Religious and fictional literature (and thus English culture) slowly accreted away from the inward, individualistic notions of self, to more expressive and outward demonstrations of larger themes: community, region, nation-state and empire.⁹⁵

Indeed, international events not only fell under the domain of providence, but such beliefs began to permeate English society perhaps as far back as the late sixteenth century in the guise of news reports of far away battles.⁹⁶ Helen Berry points to the early eighteenth century where 'providential occurrences' infiltrated both chapbooks and almanacs.⁹⁷ By November of 1755, the editors of the *Whitehall Evening Post* conjectured: 'when we look around the World; and consider the boisterous Winds and Storms, Thunders, Lightning, Earthquakes, and other Disasters... we have the Greatest Reason to be highly thankful to a kind of Providence that our Fleets... are all safe in our Harbours...'⁹⁸ Richard Sheldon adds that during the dearth of 1756-57, providence was framed as a sort of alternate opposite: it was by artificial and manmade profiteering that England experienced a food shortage which ran directly against the perceived providential bounty to which God always secured.⁹⁹ The

⁹³ Thomas Gibbons in the 'preface' of Davies, *The Crisis*, iv.

⁹⁴ Davies, 18-9.

⁹⁵ Margaret Jacob argues that the examined journals of Joseph Ryder (1695-1768), a clothier from Leeds, reflects the temporality of early-eighteenth-century English culture witnessing both the slow waning of predestination beliefs and the slow waxing of providentialism. See Margaret C. Jacob and Matthew Kadane, 'Missing, Now Found in the Eighteenth Century: Weber's Protestant Capitalist,' *American Historical Review*, vol. 108, no. 1, (February, 2003). Further, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is not secular, but rather the reflected merging of Protestant piety and political acuity resultant of a vacillating nation-state embarked upon global empire-building among competing European powers. Defoe's *Crusoe* arrived when the cross-current of traditional (if not) hyper-religiosity brewed with an equal atmosphere of persistent and insistent scientific and political secularism. *Crusoe* was meant as a parable, an allegory along the lines of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. One's 'Calling,' one's 'Duty,' to God, to parents, to one's station in life, all of these Defoe exposed to his readers – early and often. Instances of 'calling' are scattered throughout *Robinson Crusoe* becoming a major theme: as it does here in the mid-eighteenth-century sermons of clerics on both sides of the Atlantic.

⁹⁶ David Randall, 'Providence, Fortune, and the Experience of Combat: English Printed Battlefield Reports, circa 1570-1637,' *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 35, no. 4 (Winter 2004), 1053-5.

⁹⁷ Helen Berry, 'Rethinking Politeness', 65.

⁹⁸ *Whitehall Evening Post*, 25 November 1755.

⁹⁹ Providence-based arguments were also included throughout the eighteenth-century food riots: see, Richard Sheldon, 'Practical Economics in eighteenth-century England: Charles Smith on the Grain Trade and the Corn

1755 earthquake at Lisbon generated scores of letters written by English merchants living within the Portuguese capital: their poems, prints, sermons, and more soon flooded the British Empire.¹⁰⁰ A quick scan of some of these documents attests to an already inveterate acceptance of providentialism in British culture. Colonialist-born John Dickinson was in London when news of Lisbon's destruction reached the British capital. He wrote home to his father in January of 1756, that the 'curious & learned have their compassion swallow'd up in fresh enquiries, whether these dreadful events are the directions of Providence particularly to punish mankind, or proceed from natural causes. But great God! May not the same instructive lesson be learnt from either, that humanity is uncertainty, and *ad hoc momento pendet aeternitas*.'¹⁰¹ An anonymous pamphlet published soon after the quake began:

When the *Judgments* of GOD are upon the Earth, the *Inhabitants of the World will learn Righteousness*, Is. xxvi. 9. They are sent for this important End, have a tendency to produce this Effect, and therefore we may reasonably look for it. This has been often the Case with Nations and People, who have been visited with awful Calamities and Desolations: They have been affected with the Rod, have heard the Voice of Providence, and have awakened...¹⁰²

A John Biddolf poem warned that Portugal's 'horrid Deeds' caused them to 'be made Examples to the rest,' and 'The Chance was their's – but why to them 'twas giv'n / Remains among the Mysteries of Heav'n / Which hides its Secrets from our erring Sense / For Chance on Earth, in Heav'n is Providence.'¹⁰³ William Romaine, an Anglican divine penned that though earthquakes were not common in London, 'there is a Providence over this country, and when He orders, our land shall shake and reel like a drunkard'; further, of the two quakes that shook the London area in 1750, 'he who sent these can send a third, and London may share the fate of Lisbon.'¹⁰⁴ The Anglican, Reverend William Stukely, added science to his discourse as to the cause of the great quake at Lisbon. He explained Benjamin Franklin's experiments on 'electricity,' and appeared to agree that cloud formation, lightning and

Laws,' *Historical Research*, vol. 81, no. 214 (November 2008), 636-662. See also, Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England*, (Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁰⁰ The Lisbon quake, estimated at 8.7 on the Richter Scale, occurred on 1 November 1755, followed by a tsunami. All told, about a quarter of Lisbon's 250,000 inhabitants perished on that day. See 'Historical Earthquakes: Lisbon Portugal 1755 Nov 1 10:16 UTC Magnitude 8.7,' on the United States Geological Survey web site: http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/world/events/1755_11_01.php, downloaded, 27 October 2013.

¹⁰¹ Or, roughly translated, 'at this moment hangs eternity.' See, H. Trevor Colburn, 'A Pennsylvania Farmer at the Court of King George: John Dickinson's London Letters, 1754-1756,' *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 86, no. 4 (October 1962), 436.

¹⁰² *An Address to the Inhabitants of Great Britain occasioned by the late earthquake at Lisbon*, (London: 1755), 1.

¹⁰³ John Biddolf, *A Poem on the Earthquake at Lisbon*, (London: 1755), 8.

¹⁰⁴ William Romaine, *An Alarm to a careless World*, (London: 1755), preface.

thunder were, indeed, natural phenomena, adding that perhaps the same that can occur in the sky can also occur in the earth. Yet, Stukely then dismissed the science: ‘the finger of PROVIDENCE is notoriously discernible’ for the ‘destination’ of earthquakes appeared ‘directed to *towns* and *cities* where... inhabitants’ are the ‘objects of its motion; not to *bare cliffs*, and an *uninhabited beach*.’¹⁰⁵ George Whitefield scribed *A Letter from a Clergyman at London to the Remaining Disconsolate Inhabitants of Lisbon*, asking pointedly:

... let me beg of you to ask yourselves, if there was not some Cause that might justly provoke the God of Heaven to visit you thus severely? Scarce a Year hath passed over your Heads, in which ye have not been joyful Spectators of poor inoffensive Creatures, your fellow-Creatures, publicly burnt to Ashes?¹⁰⁶

A Thomas Kitchin print entitled, ‘An Attempt to assign the Cause of the late most Dreadful Earthquake,’ (**Figure 3**) brings relief to Whitefield’s most curious charge of a Portuguese inquisition against non-Catholics. As Lisbon continues to crumble and burn toward the right, at left is a handbill held aloft by an English Protestant depicting the ‘Annual Burning of Hereticks at Lisbon.’ A kingly figure, that of Joseph I, with prayerful hands sombrelly takes stock of the handbill and asks ‘what must I do Avert the Repetition of the Divine displeasure,’ to which the Protestant cleric answers, ‘to suppress and Abolish that Infernal Tribunal of the Inquisition & then you may hope for the Divine protection and Blessing.’¹⁰⁷

Thus, providence appeared culturally ingrained both in secular and religious circles. For Davies, located at the fringes of empire, providence helped explain away recent British military blunders. ‘Now these are strange events,’ he wrote unable to fully believe such a run of bad luck as that of Braddock, Byng, Shirley, and Johnson, ‘And therefore, the Agency of Providence is more evident in them.’¹⁰⁸ The Virginia-based cleric spoke of the forthcoming fight between Britain and France in terms of the sublime; thus, the outcome of the war dwelled in the hands of Providence. ‘In the present World,’ argued Davies, it would be God who:

will reward or punish Nations, according to their national Works.... when the Measure of a People’s Iniquity is filled up, and they are ripe for Vengeance. And then the Executioners of divine Vengeance, the Sword, Famine, pestilential Diseases, Earthquakes, and the like, are

¹⁰⁵ John Martyn, *The Philosophical Transactions (From the Year 1743, to the Year 1750) Abridged, and Disposed under General Heads*, vol. 10 (London: 1756), 526-8.

¹⁰⁶ George Whitefield, *A Letter from a Clergyman at London to the Remaining Disconsolate Inhabitants of Lisbon*, (London: 1755), 2-3.

¹⁰⁷ BM, print no. 3329.

¹⁰⁸ Davies, *The Crisis*, 17.

turned loose among them.... Then all the Undertakings of such a People are blasted; and even *the worst* of the *Heathen* succeed against them.¹⁰⁹

Such Providential warnings centered mostly upon church and secular corruption, the latter of which Dissenting clerics increasingly took aim. Clerics of the Great Awakening chose corruption as an issue, boldly challenging both social order and social privileges inherent in state religion, while readily targeting the state itself. With a bevy of powerful and learned orators, backed by an ever growing laity filled with zealotry, corruption became the centrepiece around which calls for national purity were made.¹¹⁰ ‘The Sins of our Land,’ wrote Davies pointing to the empire, ‘the Sins of all Ranks and Denominations,’ so as to spread blame vertically and horizontally, ‘Sins against the Law, and against the Gospel,’ so as to include both temporal and ecclesiastical transgressions, ‘Sins of all Kinds and Degrees, and against all Sorts of obligations... the Sins of many Millions on both sides [of] the *Atlantic!* Our Body politick is a huge Mass of Corruption...’¹¹¹ Further, because such sin ‘has a *direct Tendency, in its own Nature*, to weaken and destroy a nation,’ predicted Davies, God may employ the French to destroy Britain much as God employed, ‘the *Assyrians* and *Babylonians* to punish his People, the *Jews*...’¹¹²

In America, as well as in London, in the passing glow of George Whitefield’s barnstorming (and others who preceded and followed), theologians of different stripes committed themselves to speak as one in lifting the plight of the poor against the perceived corruption and vices of those in power. In 1759, Baptists and Presbyterian ministers found common ground in colonial South Carolina to promote one another, to accentuate Dissenting commonalities in opposition to perceived Anglican corruptions.¹¹³ Rivers’ also suggests that the London-based SRKP consisted of an interdenominational membership: all sects of Dissenters as well as Anglicans ascribing funds and materials for a common cause.¹¹⁴ The point being that it is within this cross-Atlantic, cross-denominational unity of anti-corruption that the Byng affair began to unfold. True, corruption’s centrality invaded sermons since, at

¹⁰⁹ Davies, *The Crisis*, 28-9.

¹¹⁰ Bonomi, 228.

¹¹¹ Davies, *The Crisis*, 29.

¹¹² Davies, *The Crisis*, 32, then 30.

¹¹³ William Hutson and Daniel J. Tortora, ‘‘A Faithful Ambassador’’: The Diary of Rev. William Hutson, Pastor of the Independent Meeting in Charleston, 1757-1761,’ *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, vol. 107, no. 4 (October 2006), 278.

¹¹⁴ Rivers, 5.

least since the late-seventeenth century.¹¹⁵ Charges levied against the leaders of the state as effeminate and corrupt have arisen time and time again. In 1697 before the Society for Reformation of Manners, John Shower charged that: ‘in a time of war’ when subjects should arise to defend their country, a great number:

are effeminated, debauched, diseased, and made incapable of bearing Arms By unrestrained, unpunished Vice and Wickedness, the very Genius of a Nation is changed, a generous and brave People dispirited: By Luxury and Debauchery they are softened and dissolved into Cowardize: They lose their Reputation abroad, and have no Strength at home; and are an easie Prey to Foreign Enemies.¹¹⁶

Thus, with the promise of war’s outbreak, sermonizers quickly pounced upon creating a list of contemporary British failings some six decades in the making. But unlike previous bouts of such religious-based locutions, apprehensions over the growing British and French quagmire (the eventual Seven Years’ War) combined both a literal and figurative turn; in other words, concerns over empire emanated *from* the empire in addition to the usual London-based anxieties. Additionally, these lines of communication between the archipelago and America were steadfastly set by mid-century. ‘...be curious in making observations,’ wrote Doddridge to Thomas Freeman in 1725 as he was about to set sail for the colonies in America, ‘as to anything remarkable in the places you touch at, relating to their air, soil, cities, buildings, plants, commodities, and the religion, manners, customs &c. of their inhabitants.’¹¹⁷ This throng of inquiry and soteriological support so long in the making – from the late-seventeenth century through Byng’s arrest in 1756 – continued to deliver messages of moral order, and of establishing ethical adherences of one’s obligations to both God and man on both sides of the Atlantic. Such messaging, delivered since the age of Tillotson, became intensified during the Great Awakening, absorbed and regurgitated by both Anglicans and Dissenters alike, but additionally amplified by the physicality of ever increasing overseas acquisitions: by mid-century, Britain’s empire was now an empire adorned by letters, subscriptions, pamphlets, newspapers, and print.¹¹⁸ As the Byng affair unfolded, calumny against the admiral existed within this hyper-printed and resoundingly zealous transatlantic climate. Previous bouts of religious upheavals remained largely

¹¹⁵ Stephen H. Gregg, ‘‘A Truly Christian Hero’’: Religion, Effeminacy, and Nation in the Writings of the Societies for Reformation of Manners,’ *Eighteenth Century Life*, vol. 25, no. 1 (Winter 2001), 24.

¹¹⁶ Quote attributed to Gregg, ‘A Truly Christian Hero,’ 13.

¹¹⁷ Nuttall, *Calendar of the Correspondence of Philip Doddridge*, 29.

¹¹⁸ For an excellent discussion on late-seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century sermonizing on charity and moral order that increasingly emanated from British press machines see, James Raven, *Judging New Wealth*, 105-6.

regionalized: the Sacheverell Riots (1710), for example, occurred mostly from the midlands town of Derby southward to London. The Great Awakening, in comparison, swept across the ocean laying the foundation for transatlantic communications between numerous denominations, Dissenting and Anglican, taking advantage of the emerging print market as it did so. Thus empire, religion, and print – like a magnifying glass focusing sunlight on an unsuspecting insect – focused an intense ray of heated discontent upon the admiral who supposedly lost Minorca: John Byng.

The Virginia-based Presbyterian minister, Samuel Davies, sent his sermon *The Crisis* to the Congregationalist minister at Haberdasher Hall in London, Thomas Gibbons. Davies preached this sermon in Hanover, Virginia (north of Richmond approximately twenty miles), on October 28, 1756: a day appointed by the Presbyterian Synod of New York to observe a general fast on account of French and English conflagrations. Thomas Gibbons wrote the preface to the London version claiming that Davies distinguished his sermon with ‘an uncommon Union of Piety, Patriotism, Learning, and sacred Oratory...’¹¹⁹ The London printing of Davies’ sermon blanketed the metropolis by January of 1757 in pamphlet form. Three printers; J. Buckland on Pater-Noster Row, J. Ward in Cornhill, and T. Field in Cheapside, satisfied Gibbons that the sermon obtained the proper coverage: important as Byng’s fate, perhaps, had yet to be determined.¹²⁰ No price appeared listed on the pamphlets.

Thus, in the course of three months, a late October sermon written and spoken in colonial Virginia, the pamphlet *The Crisis* spread through London revisiting and palpably connecting six decades of cleric-driven anti-establishment rhetoric with and to Minorca’s loss. Davies attached Admiral John Byng to a consistent list of national errors allegedly performed at the hands of a parade of British elites. In doing so, *The Crisis* read more like John Brown’s *An Estimate of the Manners*, though Davies’ pamphlet came first. But where Brown wrote bitter satire, Davies spoke from the pulpit. ‘It is the deadly Disease of a Body politic, which will destroy it [the nation],’ complained Davies adding that national sin:

spreads Corruption, Injustice, Treachery, Discord, Confusion, Cowardice, through a Nation; and it destroys Public Spirit, the Love of our Country, Unanimity, Courage, and all the social and heroic virtues which naturally tend to strengthen, defend, and advance a People.’¹²¹

¹¹⁹ *The Crisis*, A2. For Davies’ religious conversions of American slaves see Jeffrey H. Richards, ‘Samuel Davies and the Transatlantic Campaign for Slave Literacy in Virginia,’ *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 111, no. 4 (2003), 333.

¹²⁰ Admiral John Byng’s verdict was read to him in Portsmouth on 27 January 1757. See Pope, 253.

¹²¹ Davies, *The Crisis*, 32.

Davies weaved into this rhetoric a litany of contemporaneous war events. It was ‘Some, in high Places’ Davies charged, that ‘have been suspected of Treachery or Cowardice... particularly in the *Mediterranean*, and at *Oswego*’ and ‘*Crown-Point*.’¹²² Davies merged decades of Dissenting oratory with the perceived sordid affairs incurred by the state during the beginning throes of the Seven Years’ War. Edward Braddock, William Johnson, and the Governor of Massachusetts, William Shirley; added to Britain’s resume of blunders:

...our Defeats and Disappointments, have been equally surprising and unexpected. Who could have expected, that four or five hundred skulking Savages, would have defeated- General *Braddock* with thrice that Number of Men, and with the Advantage of a fine Artillery? Who could have expected, that *Oswego*, garrisoned with fifteen hundred Men, furnished with Artillery and Ammunition for a brave Defence;, and with a Sufficiency of Provisions to hold out a long Siege, would have been taken by an Army of *French* and *Indians*, not above double in Number; and that in two or three Days, and with but little Trouble...?¹²³

Such derisive prose appears out of place, more militant than Christian, and more accusatory than forgiving.

The Crisis, though, unlike *An Estimate of the Manners* was pulpit-driven. This distinction exposed several facets. First, the religious social networks ensured timely printing, breadth of coverage due to pre-existing distribution networks, and the possibility that sermons can be reread or at least borrowed against by other sermonizers. Additionally, printed sermons infiltrated British society by other means. *London Magazine* speculated on the power of printed sermons which were often left at crucial sites of public consumption: coffeehouses. Here, a sermon’s power became elevated, as an idle page-turner landed equally by chance upon periodical or sermonized texts since both shared the same coffeehouse tables.¹²⁴ On the other side of the Atlantic, Jeffrey Richards indicates that Samuel Davies also built ‘reading houses’ where the Presbyter stocked not only ‘a variety of religious texts,’ but ‘the works of contemporary English authors, both novelists (Daniel Defoe, Elizabeth Rowe, and Eliza Haywood among them) and poets (including John Milton and Edward Young), and his own poetry, especially that in his 1752 collection...’¹²⁵ Whether these early Samuel

¹²² Davies, *The Crisis*, 17-19.

¹²³ Davies, *The Crisis*, 16.

¹²⁴ Christopher Flint, ‘Speaking Objects: The Circulation of Stories in Eighteenth-Century Prose Fiction,’ *PMLA*, vol. 113, no. 2 (March 1998), 219.

¹²⁵ Richards, 338 and then 342. Samuel Morris, a bricklayer and laymen built a reading house on his own land in the 1740s, perhaps beginning the trend of such religious –based reading rooms in colonial Virginia, see also Frank Lambert, *Inventing the ‘Great Awakening,’* (Princeton University Press, 1999), 139.

Davies' 'reading houses' distributed *The Crisis* concomitant with its anti-elite and anti-Byng sentiments, the notion is not too far-fetched. Second, calls to action were sometimes written into mid-eighteenth century sermons, and *The Crisis* replicated this rather well. In other words, the laity not only heard or read Davies' sermon but were called to act upon his advices. The tendency for mid-century sermons to solicit action from followers was often common. John Wesley's orations, for example, increasingly stressed moral actions rather than simple professions of faith. The rise of the printed sermon, both Anglican and Dissenting, during the decades preceding the Seven Years' War, thus inculcated a generation of readers (and perhaps listeners) to seek and perform outward displays of good deeds rather than rely upon insular spells of spirituality.¹²⁶

The Sam Davies sermon was no different on this account. Both in its preface, 'we are not to content ourselves with general Declamations against Vice,' and toward its conclusion where Davies asked the laity 'to Produce a Reformation... both personal and national, both within and without...'¹²⁷ Above all, Davies asked the lay folk to pray, otherwise:

how are we to expect his sacred influences? Or in what way may we hope to attain them? The Answer is, PRAY FOR THEM: Pray frequently, pray fervently... Pray in your Retirements; pray in your Families; pray in Societies appointed for that purpose; pray in warm Ejaculations, pray without ceasing.... and who knows but it may avail also to turn away the fierce Anger of God from your Country and Nation?¹²⁸

In London, however, calls for action sometimes contained more temporal requests than spiritual. As news of Minorca's loss circulated, for example, clerics encouraged their laity to act upon this national crisis. In a diary entry, Thomas Gibbons wrote that he preached Ezekiel 9:4 before his flock 'on Account of the Sins of the Nation, the present Situation of the Public.'¹²⁹ It was mid July, 1756 when Gibbons penned this; London and much of provincial England was at the height of the sustained anti-Byng protests that began to cover the archipelago like a pall. 'And the LORD said unto him,' reads this biblical passage, 'Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.' Gibbons fanned the flames against Byng. The 'Sins of the Nation' were being committed by the likes of John Byng, and it was the responsibility of every good Briton to

¹²⁶ Raven, *Judging New Wealth*, 106-7.

¹²⁷ Davies, *The Crisis*, vi and 34.

¹²⁸ Davies, *The Crisis*, 35.

¹²⁹ Dr. Williams' Library of Dissenting Religion, Thomas Gibbons, diary entry, 14 July 1756.

‘sigh and cry’ for all the ‘abominations that be done’ by men like him – within the nation and empire. Protest. Be heard. These seemed to be the commands that Gibbons spoke to those in attendance at Haberdasher Hall.¹³⁰

Nor was Gibbons merely entreating to rally the laity against John Byng. A thorough reading of the Congregationalist minister’s diary shows that Gibbons was active within London’s political throes, especially after the Newcastle/Fox ministry collapsed in late October. Gibbons noted that toward the end of December he ‘Visited the Speaker of the House of Commons. Dined with Mr. Barnard. Met with the Ministers in the Evening.’¹³¹ Thus Gibbons met with Arthur Onslow, London financier Sir John Barnard, and the ministers – though unclear – were likely either Devonshire or Pitt, or both. Shortly after the New Year, Gibbons attempted to summon a ‘Body of the Dissenting ministers...to meet on Account of the Militia Bill.’¹³² Noteworthy is the fact that Gibbons claimed to represent one third of the Committee of Three Denominations: Presbyter, Baptist, and Independent.¹³³ Gibbons noted that all three leaders travelled to Parliament together to place support firmly behind the Militia Bill in mid-February of 1757, whereupon he once again, ‘Met the Ministers at the Amsterdam Coffee House in the Evening,’¹³⁴ and would do so again precisely one week later.¹³⁵

Such entries suggest that politicians in London afforded time, conversation, and respect to those in Dissenting religious circles: but why? And did the conversations between incoming ministers – and outgoing for that matter – have anything to do with the arrest and

¹³⁰ Whether Gibbons did stir protests from the pulpit, at this point, cannot be proved. However, accusations against clerics for doing so did exist and circa the time of Byng’s demise. For example, *Sentiments of a Corn-Factor*, stated ‘And here permit me to observe, that People alarm themselves about Corn without any real Foundation; and to have this matter inflamed by the Pulpit, by the Words, ‘Artificial Scarcity,’ ‘Combinations,’ &c. would be much better let alone, since it is encourageing [sic] the lower Class to cry out, ‘We shall be starved!’ I say No; if they will be quiet.’ *Sentiments of a Corn-Factor, on the Present Situation of the Corn Trade*, (London: 1758), 9-10. Thompson also writes of cleric-driven riots in defense of ‘parish memory’ or customs. See E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture*, (New York: The New Press, 1993), 98-100.

¹³¹ Dr. Williams’ Library of Dissenting Religion, Thomas Gibbons, diary entry, 21 December 1756.

¹³² Dr. Williams’ Library of Dissenting Religion, Thomas Gibbons, diary entry, 6 January 1757.

¹³³ Much more historical work is needed on the purpose and impact of the cooperation exhibited by the Committee of the Three Denominations. For existent works see: Maurice W. Armstrong, ‘The Dissenting Deputies and the American Colonies,’ *Church History*, vol. 29, no. 3 (September 1960), 298-320; Norman C. Hunt, *Two Early Political Associations: The Quakers and the Dissenting Deputies in the Age of Sir Robert Walpole*, (London: Clarendon Press, 1961); K. R. M. Short, ‘The English Regium Donum,’ *The English Historical Review*, vol. 84, no. 330 (January 1969), 59-78; Russell E. Richey, ‘Did the English Presbyterians Become Unitarian?’ *Church History*, vol. 42, no. 1 (March, 1973), 58-72; James E. Bradley, ‘Whigs and Nonconformists: ‘Slumbering Radicalism’ in English Politics, 1739-89,’ *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1 (Autumn 1975), 1-27; J. F. Maclear, ‘Isaac Watts and the Idea of Public Religion,’ *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 53, no. 1 (January – March 1992); Alison G. Olson, ‘The Eighteenth Century Empire: The London Dissenters’ Lobbies and the American Colonies,’ *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 26, no 1 (April 1992).

¹³⁴ Dr. Williams’ Library of Dissenting Religion, Thomas Gibbons, diary entry, 15 February 1757.

¹³⁵ Dr. Williams’ Library of Dissenting Religion, Thomas Gibbons, diary entry, 22 February 1757.

trial of Admiral Byng? Answers to both questions come from Newcastle who complained to Lord Hardwicke (as he was apt to do in August of 1756) that his only ‘valuable Friends’ standing with his government during the ‘Clamorous’ events that summer were ‘particularly the Dissenters.’¹³⁶ This is a telling point given that the placement of Dissenters in society and within the state, where Anglicanism marked the official religion, ensured that religion remained forefront in politics throughout the long eighteenth century. Though, throughout much of the early century doctrinal arguments kept Dissenters divided, upon certain political occasions men such as Isaac Watts, Edmund Calamy, and Philip Doddridge managed to unite disparate sects into similar modes of thinking if not action.¹³⁷ In 1756, Thomas Gibbons grabbed the reins to unite Dissenters upon the topic of Admiral John Byng.

Could it be then, that religions played a more dominant role in eighteenth-century society and politics than most post-modern historians are willing to admit?¹³⁸ How else can one interpret ‘Bung Triumphant,’¹³⁹ (**figure 4**) a scathing anti-Byng print that appeared in the summer of 1756 without admitting religion’s continued stature in English/British culture? Located dead centre is Admiral John Byng, a noose about his neck standing on a platform held aloft by an unruly mob. Standing beside the condemned admiral is none other than John Wesley, the famed Methodist minister with his arms swung wide. This scene connects Byng to a known enthusiast, a man who dedicated a great deal of his Methodism to proselytizing to the poor, indoors or out. This small scene adds insult upon John Byng’s character and stature in British society, explicitly relegating the admiral to the lower ranks by removing Byng from his inheritance (the son of a peer, the brother of the Treasurer of the Navy, his former governorship of Newfoundland, his seat in the House of Commons, etc.) as well as his Anglican roots. ‘Bung Triumphant’ also connects John Byng to politics and in a most condemning way. The triumphant arch (which now stands just outside St. Pauls Cathedral in London) contains a date: June 26, 1756. This is the day the government newspaper, the *London Gazette*, published its calumny against the admiral: his heavily edited dispatch along with a list of damaged ships and men killed which, taken together, made the admiral appear a coward. ‘Bung triumphant’ can also be described as an instruction manual for the poor and for the many ‘nations’ that make up the ‘British’ union. In the foreground are four men dressed in ethnic clothing, speaking in their ethnic brogues and ready to lob their associated

¹³⁶ ADD MS 32867, ff. 118 and 119.

¹³⁷ Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty?* 219-221.

¹³⁸ I use the plural form ‘religions’ in this case to suggest that both Anglican and the many Dissenters forced political, social, and cultural reactions within and upon communities, state and empire.

¹³⁹ BM, print no. 3361.

cultural weapons at the unhappy admiral. Welsh onions, English flints, Irish potatoes, Scottish pebbles are at the ready aiming to deluge the admiral with a prescriptive sentence. This potent nationalist print merges what we ought to consider the Byng Affair's most austere revelation: that politics, religion, and social discontent combined in such a way, a perfect storm perhaps, to make the admiral's actions in the far flung Mediterranean open to unwelcome culpability.

Equally, another print, 'Britannia in Distress,'¹⁴⁰ (**Figure 5**) further reinforces this triple conundrum of politics, religion, and social discontent. A known Patriot Whig print with the added subtitle of 'Under a Tott'ring Fabrck with a Cumberous Load,' the satire depicts Patriots attempting to shore up a crumbling portico labelled 'The State.' Meanwhile, four ministers (Lord Hardwicke, the Duke of Newcastle, Lord Anson, and Henry Fox) heave on ropes marked with ribbons that read 'Min—ca Lost' (Minorca), 'Am—ca Neglected' (America), 'Tr—de not Protected' (Trade): here the blame for Minorca's loss lies not with Admiral John Byng but with the ministers who also fumbled in checking French aggressions in America and protecting trade throughout the empire. The social and religious discontents are combined in what the ministers attempt to pull down: a giant bag of money inscribed with number '80,000,000' the amount of pensions oppositional politicians, Tory as well as Patriot, charged the Whigs of fleecing the state. But surrounding the bag of money is a buffoonery of elites. The symbolism is rich with allusions to corruption, gambling, masquerades and other vices. To the left, though, are two irreligious aristocrats tearing apart the Bible. The pages of 'Acts', 'St. Mark', 'St. Luke' and 'St. Matthew' fall streaming from their handiwork. 'Britannia in Distress' and 'Bung Triumphant' reveal the social angst levelled at elite politicians who, through their ungodly conduct, destroy the very national foundations they are sworn to uphold.

Some, if not most, twenty-first century historians might be too quick to dismiss religion's role during the early to mid stretches of the eighteenth century. Though numerous scholars have attempted to bring religion back in, nonetheless, the tendency to lessen religion's impact and, therefore, to compartmentalize British culture still exist.¹⁴¹ I think it

¹⁴⁰ BM, print no. 3524.

¹⁴¹ Clark observed that 'historically grounded religions were to fade away' with the rise of twentieth-century secular ideologies thus rendering religious contributions to the past as 'ahistorical over time.' Perhaps Thompson's work triggered Clark's scrutiny. For the entire decade of the 1970s, despite titles which suggested perhaps a modicum of pious influences: 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century' (1971); and 'Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle Without Class' (1979), religion appears purposely avoided. J. C. D. Clark, *Our Shadowed Present: Modernism, Postmodernism, and History*, paperback edition (London: Atlantic Books, 2004), 11.

would be best to understand religion as one in the mid-eighteenth century may have perceived it, perhaps much as one perceived wealth disparities: something that was always there though perhaps not always acknowledged. But when acknowledged, it filled one's senses.

Additionally, there is a growing body of scholarship that suggests religion, especially Dissenting religions circa the era of the First Great Awakening, played a significant role in hawkishly promoting British virtues and liberties to the point of intense radicalism.¹⁴² Dissenters had long supported the Hanoverian ascendancy and here in 1756 we see how such support manifested itself during a major political crisis: the loss of Minorca. Instead of stating that the 'intercolonial and transatlantic revival' known as the First Great Awakening 'was over,'¹⁴³ Davies' sermon demonstrated a continued willingness by colonial clerics to thrust latitudinarian opinions into the realm of British politics. Rather than a definitive 1745 ending to the transatlantic religious revivalism,¹⁴⁴ recent works demonstrate to the contrary: that events such as the Jacobite Rebellion, 1745-46; the military drawdown after the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, a process which began in earnest in 1748; the earthquakes that shook London in 1750; the Lisbon earthquake in 1755; and the outbreak of war in America

¹⁴² Kathryn Ready, 'Dissenting Patriots: Anna Barbauld, John Aikin, and the Discourse of Eighteenth-Century Republicanism in Rational Dissent,' *History of European Ideas*, vol. 38, no. 4 (December 2012); Gideon Mailer, 'Anglo-Scottish Union and John Witherspoon's American Revolution,' *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 67, no. 4 (October 2010), 709-746; Dale K. Van Kley, 'Religion and the Age of 'Patriot' Reform,' *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 80, no. 2 (June 2008), 252-295; John A. Rogosta, 'Fighting for Freedom: Virginia Dissenters' Struggle for Religious Liberty during the American Revolution,' *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 116, no. 3 (2008), 226-261; Jessica Lee Flinchum, 'Reluctant Revolutionaries: the Philadelphia Baptist Association and the American Revolution,' *Pennsylvania History*, vol. 74, no. 2 (Spring 2007), 173-193; Thomas J. Little, 'The Origins of Southern Evangelicalism: Revivalism in South Carolina, 1700-1740,' *Church History*, vol. 75, no. 4 (December 2006), 768-808; Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), especially chapters 1-3; Joseph S. Tiedemann, 'Presbyterianism and the American Revolution in the Middle Colonies,' *Church History*, vol. 74, no. 2 (June 2005), 306-344; Douglas L. Winiarski, 'Jonathan Edwards, Enthusiast? Radical Revivalism and the Great Awakening in the Connecticut Valley,' *Church History*, vol. 74, no. 4 (December 2005), 683-739; Douglas L. Winiarski, 'Souls Filled with Ravishing Transport: Heavenly Visions and the Radical Awakening in New England,' *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, vol. 61, no. 1 (January 2004), 3-46; Thomas S. Kidd, "'A Faithful Watchman on the Walls of Charlestown': Josiah Smith and Moderate Revivalism in Colonial South Carolina,' *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, vol. 105, no. 2 (April 2004), 82-106; Ralph E. Pyle and James D. Davidson, 'The Origins of Religious Stratification in Colonial America,' *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 42, no. 1 (March 2003), 57-76; Stephen Conway, 'War and Identity in the Mid-Eighteenth-Century British Isles,' *The English Historical Review*, vol. 116, no. 468 (September 2001), 863-893; Dror Wahrman, 'The English Problem of Identity in the American Revolution,' *The American Historical Review*, vol. 106, no. 4 (October 2001), 1236-1262; Frank Lambert, *Inventing the 'Great Awakening'*, (Princeton University Press, 1999); Patricia U. Bonomi, "'A Just Opposition': The Great Awakening as a Radical Model,' in *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism*, eds. Margaret C. Jacob and James R. Jacob, paperback, (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1991); Donald G. Matthews, *Religion in the Old South*, (University of Chicago Press, 1977), chapter 1.

¹⁴³ Lambert, 253.

¹⁴⁴ As Lambert argues in his epilogue to *Inventing the Great Awakening*.

beginning in 1754, extended an air of continued religious outpourings.¹⁴⁵ Minorca's loss at the outbreak of the Seven Years' War provided clerics on both sides of the Atlantic an opportunity, as Philip Doddridge put it, 'to improve those *publick Alarms*, which remarkable Providences may excite in the Minds of considerable numbers...'¹⁴⁶ The Presbyterian Sam Davies' sermon *The Crisis*, printed in London by his Congregationalist friend Thomas Gibbons, was meant to excite minds, meant to protect the Hanoverian regime of Newcastle and Fox, and meant to subject Admiral John Byng to those public alarms.

Conclusion

Historians err when they consider ballads and their sometime public displays of balladry as somehow on the wane before the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁴⁷ The Byng affair, if anything, proves that this genre remained wickedly potent, especially among the lower ranks. Ronald Hutton makes a similar suggestion about Welsh carolers during the Reformation era: where past scholars have claimed the disappearance of 'Candlemas carols' only to find newer evidence that the practice lasted into the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁸ Perhaps, the healthier outlook, then, is one in which both print and oral foundations coexisted: spreading news, gossip, and information (valid news or mere rumor) about England, Britain, and its ever growing Empire in a powerful tandem.

Additionally, both ballads and sermons remained inexpensive, well within the reach of the lower ranks of British society. Ballads cost about a penny throughout the eighteenth century; sermons near free, either to be listened to on a Sunday or to be read in a coffeehouse or alehouse. The demand for ballads and sermons remained steadfast and booksellers and printers found financial stability in their printing and distribution. Sermons held an additional benefit within the distribution system with the rise of religious networks such as the SRKP, SPCK, and the SPG.

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, Nicholas Rogers, *Mayhem*, chapter four. Harris claims that the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745-6 seemed to act as a turning point in the ramp up of Dissenting and Anglican literature whereupon the success or the failure of the state was linked directly God's judgment. See, Bob Harris, "'American Idols': Empire, War and the Middling Ranks in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain,' *Past & Present*, no. 150 (February 1996), 121.

¹⁴⁶ Quote attributed to Rogers, *Mayhem*, 91-2.

¹⁴⁷ See for example, Joad Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 16-7.

¹⁴⁸ Ronald Hutton, 'The English Reformation and the Evidence of Folklore,' *Past and Present*, no. 148 (August 1995), 97.

From the alehouse to the pulpit, ballads and sermons thus covered a significant portion of the lay folk's time and space. News of the loss of Minorca travelled within the lower rank's most public and sociable locales. Those who charged John Byng with cowardice utilized these networks maliciously. Even before Byng arrived in London from Gibraltar, ballads and sermons had been let loose against him.¹⁴⁹

Further, ballads and sermons during the Byng affair highlighted that the two genres reached a national if not transatlantic audience. In colonial America clerics denounced him, and commoners hung effigies of the Admiral in full public display. Byng's demise, then, hung on whether ballads and/or sermons connected with those who directed the state. But as J. C. D. Clark was apt to point out, religion – both Dissenting and Anglican – had, by mid-century released a torrent of political passions via their 'machinery.'¹⁵⁰ In the eyes of those from below, Admiral John Byng represented the opportunity to publicly air numerous grievances. The demonstrations and balladry associated with Minorca's loss allowed the multitude to express their discontents, but also to flex their political influence upon Parliamentarians, the ministry, and the court. John Byng became their symbol. The lower ranks took interests in his imprisonment and trial.

The blowback struck fear among more than a few oligarchs. A pamphlet complaining of mob violence against numerous Byng effigies explained:

I am sorry I am obliged to say, this Behavior in my Countrymen bears not the Stamp of Christianity. Behavior like this, indicates the greatest Ungenerosity, nay savage Barbarity, and which would far better become the wild *Indians* in *America*, than the more civilized Sons of Polite *Britannia*.¹⁵¹

Yet, the Pandora's Box of political culpability over Minorca's loss had been opened with the targeting of John Byng through ballads and sermons. When the *mobile vulgar* rioted, the state oligarchs severely underestimated the intensity of the multitude's displeasure within England, let alone those that rioted throughout the empire (such underestimations of discontent would be repeated with American colonialists at the completion of the Seven Years' War). Ballads and sermons roused the underclass against the state. Irish freeholders in a pamphlet warned that 'the angry Exertion of popular Zeal is a most dangerous and desperate remedy; never to be used...'¹⁵² Unfortunately for John Byng, that warning came too late.

¹⁴⁹ Byng arrived on the *Antelope* at Spithead on 26 July 1756. See Pope, 168.

¹⁵⁰ Clark not only listed the many variances of Protestantism since the British Reformation, but added their incontrovertible polities, theologies, and different means of soteriological pursuits, all of which, claims Clark, connected religion deeply to seventeenth and eighteenth century political thought and action. See Clark, 272.

¹⁵¹ *A Collection of Several Pamphlets Very Little Known*, 11.

¹⁵² *Some Proceedings of the Freeholders Society*, (Dublin: 1757), 19.

Figure 3 - 'An Attempt to assign the Cause of the late most Dreadful Earthquake,' 1755, British Museum. Source: © Trustees of the British Museum, no. 3329. Reprinted with permission.





Figure 4 – ‘Bung Triumphant,’ 1756, British Museum.
 Source: © Trustees of the British Museum, no. 3361. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 5 – ‘Britannia in Distress,’ 1756, British Museum.
 Source: © Trustees of the British Museum, no. 3524. Reprinted with permission.



CHAPTER 2
'Adjacent Arrivals: The Byng Affair and
the Age of Newspapers'

The Libelous Papers are most provoking & infamous grown stronger now by the Ferment of the People. One thing I am sure ought to be done , & set about immediately; - I mean printing short Papers, in some of the Daily News Papers, in vindication, or by way of true representation, of the Measures of the Administration upon some of these popular Points. I really believe that these short diurnal Libels do more harm than the larger Pamphlets, because they are more read, & spread more amongst the common People.¹

In the summer of 1756, the Newcastle regime felt the stinging rebuke of blowback in its decision to target Admiral John Byng with calumny over Minorca's loss. The opening salvos of government-led, anti-Byng rhetoric beginning in June had, by the end of August, morphed into a crescendo of anti-government cacophonies. Both newspapers and pamphlets played a hugely important role in challenging readers to seek truth in understanding how Minorca fell to the French even before Byng's fleet arrived in the Mediterranean.² The reading public then turned, demanding inquiries from parliament sending the king petitions and addresses to make it so. The level of vitriol against the ministry not only rose, and quickly, but seemed to grow 'most provoking and infamous,' as Lord Hardwicke indicated. As the summer's days passed, charge after charge of past grievances against parliament, the ministry, and even Hanoverians made their appearances.

Yet, surprisingly, the fall of the Newcastle/Fox ministry in 1756 still continues to elude a consensus among historians. Many theories have been offered, but agreements upon its collapse have been far from unifying. J. C. D. Clark claims the Newcastle/Fox ministry fell from within, destabilized by internal politics well before any political crisis arose from without. Kathleen Wilson serves an alternative view, that what eluded the Newcastle administration was its inability to control the press or popular clamor related to Minorca's loss which then brought about its collapse.³ This chapter suggests Wilson is closer to the

¹ Lord Hardwicke to the Duke of Newcastle, 29 August 1756. ADD MS 32867, f. 146.

² Some anti-Byng pamphlets published in 1756 included *A Rueful Story or Britain in Tears, Being the Conduct of Admiral B___, in the late Engagement off Mahone, with a French Fleet the 20 of May 1756*, (London: 1756), and also *An Appeal to Reason and Common Sense: Or, a Free and Candid Disquisition of the Conduct of A_____ B___*, (London: 1756). Some anti-government pamphlets included *A Letter to a Member of Parliament In the Country, From His Friend in London*, (London: 1756), and also *An Appeal to the People: Containing the Genuine Letter and Entire Letter of Admiral Byng to the Secr. of the Admiralty*, (London: 1756).

³ J. C. D. Clark, *The Dynamics of Change: The Crisis of the 1750s and English Party Systems*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 232-6; Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, 180-5.

mark: that the resignations of Henry Fox and Thomas Pelham-Holles resided in the out-of-door pressures which included at least two major elements: the cathartic public and national reaction to what was printed in both newspapers and pamphlets during that long summer of 1756 (as alluded to by Wilson), but also a significant withdrawal of support from London's merchant elites.⁴ 'We took Care to provide for the Defence of *Hanover* by proper Treaties and Alliances,' claimed one merchant pamphlet, 'and surely our own Island of *Minorca* equally deserved our Care.'⁵ The same pamphlet pointed to military precedence: 'for in Case of a War with *France*, it will always be necessary for us to keep 30, 40, or 50 Line of Battle Ships in the *Mediterranean*,' which contrasted starkly with the reality that but one ship of the line had defended the whole of the Mediterranean prior to Byng's sailing to defend it.⁶

Further, the sharp exchanges between the government and those who defended Admiral John Byng played out publicly in London, but also in provincial England and beyond. But for those that study eighteenth-century print culture, it is the Wilkite movement that stands as the earliest representative of the power of the press to influence indoor politics. The passing of the reigns from George II to George III is purported to be a milestone in terms of London newspaper publishing: whereby popular unrest held little sway in London politics during the reign of the former, whereas the clamor in support of John Wilkes and against Lord Bute appeared to signify a greater impact upon the latter.⁷ The Byng affair calls upon us to challenge this and thus becomes a good micro study to test this historical assumption. The intense political crisis of 1756-7 may afford scholars an opportunity to analyze the rising importance of newspapers: a comparative investigation of papers alongside the historical significance of pamphlets.

As the opening block quote testifies, press machine products played upon the minds of those inside the Newcastle ministry during the summer of 1756. Thus, Hardwicke shared, perhaps driven by panic, a moment of desperate observation that the 'short diurnal,' (newspapers) does 'more harm than the larger Pamphlets, because they are more read, &

⁴ Horatio Walpole seemed alarmed at this. In a 1 September 1756 letter to Newcastle, 'relating to an Address to the King; and Instructions to their Representatives; I can see no necessity for either; I can perceive by the Expressions of several of these applications that are printed, that a Spirit of Disaffection to the Government by a coalition of some that are discontented for private views, make use of the calamitous situation of Publick affairs, to Inflamm, & Increase the uneasiness of the People, at a Juncture when all Hearts, & Honour should be unified.' See ADD MSS 32867, f. 166.

⁵ *The Importance of the Island of Minorca and Harbour of Port-Mahon, Fully and Impartially Considered* (London:1756), 51.

⁶ *The Importance of the Island of Minorca*, 44. That ship was commanded by Commodore George Edgcombe.

⁷ Barker states that prior to the 1760s, press responses to political turmoil had 'limited effect' upon government policies or makeup. See Hannah Barker, *Newspapers, Politics, and English Society, 1695-1855*, (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), 145.

spread more amongst the common People.’⁸ Both newspapers and pamphlets, in London and without, actuated by cultural norms of assumed constitutionally-backed press freedoms, wrote willingly and furiously upon a whole host of political issues to which the MP, John Sharpe, then dubbed the ‘great Topicks...’⁹ These pressures, brought to fore by the press in an unrelenting manner, prodded a groundswell of unrest which vented its discontent against politics as usual. This chapter explores the cultural intersects between the press (newspapers and pamphlets), politics (ministry, court and parliament), and the people (a terribly undefined and loaded word in terms of eighteenth-century studies) surrounding the political crisis caused by the loss of Minorca.

I. Newspapers

How can one wonder, That Riots & Tumults should be all over the Kingdom, when Every Daily Paper is full of the most Infamous & Seditious Lies, & Attacks upon all the Proceedings of Parliament countenanced by Addresses, and Instructions from the City of London, & many Counties? Sure, Mr. Attorney General should be directed to prosecute those Daily Papers & Libels; the not doing it must shew Fear in the Government & will be interpreted to be a Consciousness of Guilt.¹⁰

Factionalism had long played a role in determining the contents of newspapers. With Parliament’s failure to restore the Licensing Act in 1695, the first factional newspapers appeared soon thereafter during Queen Anne’s reign: the Whig-based *Observer* in 1702, and the Tory *Rehearsal* in 1704.¹¹ When the Newcastle ministry formed in 1755, a quick search of England’s potentially libelous press was undertaken by those friendly to the government. James West alerted Newcastle that *The Monitor* ‘is wrote by Dr. Shebbeare, as the Assurances of the Chancellor of the Exchequer are there mentioned...’¹² Gauging public opinion via the contents of factional newspapers appeared as the first step toward gaining a hopeful control of government-friendly messaging. At the height of the political crisis caused

⁸ ADD MS 32867, f.146.

⁹ ‘...the great Topicks, it principally rolls upon are the loss of Minorca, the Situation of Affairs in America, the introducing foreign Troops, and the not Arming our own Militia, and the predilection given to Hanoverian preference to Great Britain, and the clashin between the two Treatis with Russia and Prussia, and the not having no great Alliance in Europe to depend upon.’ John Sharpe to Newcastle, 28 Aug 1756, ADD MS 32867, f. 135.

¹⁰ Letter from the Duke of Newcastle to Lord Hardwicke, 27 August 1756. ADD MS 32867, ff. 116-7.

¹¹ C. John Summerville, *The News Revolution in England: Cultural Dynamics of Daily Information*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 124.

¹² ADD MS 32859, f. 10.

by Minorca's loss, John Gordon wrote to Newcastle concerning that 'spirit of faction' which makes 'the most dangerous kind of sedition' thus causing 'such a progress in the minds of the more monstrous rabel...' ¹³ Admiral Byng's defenders hired Paul Whitehead whose prose, in the anonymous guise of 'Britannicus,' made it to the pages of the *London Evening Post*, and thus copied by other numerous provincial and Tory-friendly papers. ¹⁴

The power of the press was a known commodity, the ministry hoping to check it, the pro-Byng faction hoping to utilize it. Scores of articles and opinions against the ministry appeared in numerous London papers and dozens of country newspapers. Londoner's politicos talked of little else. In a letter from William Pitt to Richard Grenville, the following of the political ins and outs of both court and ministry in the London newspapers provided plenty of 'zeal... for the public' especially in light of the habitual barrage of bad news from overseas. ¹⁵ Even papers in colonial America took up factional causes: the *North Carolina Gazette*, which followed and reported on Admiral Byng's trial, pleaded with the new Devonshire/Pitt ministry to 'incline you and your Friends to endeavour to restrain the number of Placemen, that the great Ones riot in Idleness, Debauchery, Gaming and Gluttony, upon the Spoils of an impoverished People.' ¹⁶ In the same issue, the colonial paper reprinted from the provincial press, in this case the *Bristol Journal*, the evils of the previous ministry. ¹⁷ The North Carolina paper also added a warning about the perceived, overbearing influence of George II's Hanover upon British affairs:

Intolerable Places and Pensions, foreign Connections, public Extravagance, Bribery and Perjury, still remained in full Vigor. Corruption became more powerful, and put on additional charms. The leading Man [Newcastle], with a French Cook, and vast Expence, bribed the Bellies of L__ds and M_____rs of P_____, and led them by the Tooth.... This heightened out former Evils, increased our Debt, multiplied our Sins, and hath divert the French King from his Design of invading Hanover. ¹⁸

The London newspapers of August through October of 1756 were filled with accusations and counteraccusations concerning Minorca's loss and Byng's conduct off of Mahon. It was a press war, and by the panicked letters between Hardwicke and Thomas Pelham-Holles in late

¹³ ADD MS 32867, f. 298.

¹⁴ Wilson, *Sense of the People*, 183-4.

¹⁵ *The Grenville Papers*, William James Smith, ed., vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1852), 167.

¹⁶ *North Carolina Gazette*, 15 April 1757.

¹⁷ Newspapers of the mid-eighteenth century habitually copied and plagiarized from one another. See Hannah Barker, *Newspapers, Politics, and English Society, 1695-1855* (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2000); and Bob Harris, *Politics and the Rise of the Press: Britain and France, 1620-1800* (London: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁸ *ibid.*

August, the Newcastle ministry was losing.¹⁹ The Pelhamite Whig lead in Parliament faced reinvigorated factionalism as Patriot Whigs, and Befordites formed a casual relationship with provincial Tories to demand answers concerning Minorca's near defenseless state earlier in the year.

The necessity of trade to the English, then the British post-1707, led newspapers to focus on the importance of foreign news. In 1692, the *City Mercury's* motto emphatically announced its purpose: 'for the Promoting of TRADE.'²⁰ Numerous scholars continue to consistently point to the inclination of English press machines to promote trade. For example; McCusker argues that with the accession of William and Mary, not only was the press 'invigorated,' but bent toward bolstering the most important aspects of Englishness: business.²¹ No wonder, then, that British press machines blatantly bandied about Admiral Edward Vernon's exploits in Central America during the spring and summer of 1740; Vernon's achievements were backed vociferously by traders who saw in the admiral a representation of English manliness and quick monetary opportunities that lay within new territorial dominances overseas.²² Clarke states that the 'social hierarchy of the City' was almost entirely 'based on money, money from overseas trade' which then 'in a very practical sense' linked economic power to politics.²³ Wilson also claims that there was an overt and lively colonial press, in combination with London papers, that expressed deep economic angst concerning imperial possessions in the Americas and French encroachments thereof, well before Minorca fell.²⁴ Newspapers focused on trade, the coming and going of ships, reports of military and foreign policy exploits overseas, all of it actuated by a 'culture of corporate citizenship.'²⁵ Newspaper content, thus quickly filled with stories of far flung places unto which English merchant ships sailed. By the mid-eighteenth century, the habit of placing foreign news on the front page was a cultural mainstay: nearly every paper did so even during domestic political crises. Far from being filler, news that highlighted events on

¹⁹ Indeed, as Professor Gunn once put it, 'the comparatively disorganized Opposition of 1756' not only found a 'triumph of opinion outside of Parliament' but used it as 'justification' for the numerous addresses that then rained down upon the king from all over the country. 'Public sentiment,' according to Gunn, made its voice known 'a good deal more' than 'Bolingbroke's party' in breaking the excise scheme of 1733. See, J. A. W. Gunn, *Beyond Liberty and Property: The Process of Self-Recognition in Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Quebec, CA: McGill Queen's University, 1983), 274.

²⁰ The *City Mercury* also distributed 8,000 printed copies by way of 121 parish clerks weekly. See, Clark, *The Public Prints*, 35.

²¹ John J. McCusker, 'The Demise of Distance: The Business Press and the Origins of the Information Revolution in the Early Modern Atlantic World,' *American Historical Review*, (April 2005), 309.

²² Bob Harris, "'American Idols,' 112.

²³ Clark, *The Public Prints*, 34.

²⁴ Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, 179.

²⁵ Phil Withington, 'Public Discourse,' 1030.

the continent (or further overseas) was one way people could measure the successes or failures of a ministry's and court's particular foreign policies.²⁶

The Licensing Act may have allowed for an increase in the number of periodicals, but the lapse in licensing did not equate to an equal diminishment of government oversight for their contents. As Sommerville highlights, 'foreign reportage' was often the only news editors and owners felt safe to print.²⁷ Even colonial newspapers focused their news content beyond local purview, perhaps fearful of local recrimination lest local political powers disapprove. When Newcastle wrote to the Admiralty in June of 1756 that 'an Enquiry into the Mediterranean Affair will in all probability be one great Subject for Faction to work up next Session,' he did so knowing that the 'great Point must be to convince the Public'²⁸ of the ministry's correctness: the duke was certainly aware that his government held certain checks on the press. But the rapidity and intensity of the blowback for Minorca's loss may have hampered the government's usual means of blocking press freedoms. Newcastle: known to be quite a timid man, overly analytical, and cautious; feared that one tool, the general warrant, would likely stoke the fires already hot against his government. Thus not one general warrant was issued against any newspaper concerning Minorca's loss or the conduct of the government over its actions during the Byng affair. Nonetheless, the ministry fell despite the bevy of government tools available to it to handle an unfriendly press.²⁹

This proclivity to print foreign news on the front page of nearly all periodicals meant that Minorca's status was front and center on the minds of the nation as Byng sailed from Portsmouth in April of 1756. With news that the French landed nearly 15,000 troops at Ciutadella having arrived in London on the 6th of May, the next day in Parliament, William Pitt excoriated the administration for failing to protect British trade in the Mediterranean. Henry Fox, the ministry's representative in the House of Commons, wrote to Newcastle that very night, that Pitt 'takes the liberty to blame your grace as well as others today. I answer'd as well as I could but the loss of Minorca is a weight that is not easy to debate under.'³⁰ From this day forward, Minorca became front page fodder and the nation held its breath as to

²⁶ Clark, *The Public Prints*, 52-3.

²⁷ Sommerville, *The News Revolution in England*, 121.

²⁸ Newcastle to the Admiralty (likely Anson), 30 June 1756, ADD MS 35376, ff. 136-7.

²⁹ See, Frederick Seaton Siebert, *Freedom of the Press in England, 1476-1776*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1965), chapters 15 and 16. For a more updated expository see Barker who claims these tools included general warrants, taxation policies, free or unfree postal distributions, the use of early informants to favored papers and editors, plus the use of government spending advertising dollars with those papers it deemed allied. Barker, 93-4.

³⁰ Fox's tepid defense of the ministry in the Commons in response to Pitt's attack may be due in part that he and the Duke of Cumberland argued for ships to be sent to the Mediterranean as far back as April of 1755. For Fox's letter to Newcastle 7 May 1756, see ADD MS 51379, f. 25.

whether or not Byng's small fleet could undo the government's oversight regarding Mediterranean interests. It was in London, in early May of 1756, that the government's statecraft began to be severely questioned by the periodical press. *The London Evening Post* put it most succinctly:

Have we not been told from time to time, these three or four months past, that the French were equipping a strong fleet at Toulon? And have we not been likewise told, that its destination was against Minorca? Why then was not provision made for the safety of that important island, by sending in time such a squadron into the Mediterranean, as might have blocked up the Toulon fleet, or destroyed it.³¹

For decades the presentation of the nefarious French and British attempts to thwart each other's statecraft had always been plastered on the front page of newspapers for the literate public to read without ever having to turn a page.³² Such reporting caused the Duke of Newcastle, from the beginning of his ministry's tenure, to express frustration at state politics appearing in the press. He wrote to his Chancellor, that 'in our present Circumstances, we cannot enter into a War upon the Continent. But we ought not to proclaim it...'³³ Now the general public; well versed on the importance of trade, commerce, and foreign news, had little choice but to wait for reports of John Byng's attempt to rectify the precarious fate of Minorca.

Anticipation of Minorca's fate, though, was layered atop other aspects of mid-eighteenth century periodical journalism: much of it was anonymous, and all of it lacked any sense of permanency. Orality comingled with the printing press which produced on the pages of newspapers tiny snippets of information, one sentence or two, one after the other, without headlines or subheadings, a stream of consciousness presentation as if two people bumped into one another on the street and began to gossip. As Nicholas Rogers aptly points out, this 'relationship of print to oral culture was not simply one of displacement,'³⁴ but rather a complex blend of older forms of oral cultures to the printed word.³⁵ And just like gossip, newspaper stories can morph, change, and adjust – not only to the news of the day, but to the demands of readers, from one printing to the next.

³¹ *London Evening Post*, 6 May 1756.

³² For more on statecraft and newspaper reporting in the eighteenth century see Clark, *The Public Prints*, 52-3.

³³ Newcastle to Hardwicke, 4 October 1755, ADD MS 32859, ff. 360-1.

³⁴ Rogers, *Whigs and Cities*, 353.

³⁵ On orality as roots to newspaper printing, see also Kevin Williams, *Read All About It! A history of the British newspaper*, (London: Routledge, 2010), 4.

C.E. Clark provided the example of crime reporting in the early- to mid-eighteenth century. On both sides of the Atlantic, the British press machines reported these infractions of the law ‘while preserving the perfect anonymity of the actors and tragedies, without naming victims...’³⁶ Like Rogers, Clark attributes to eighteenth-century newspapers a kind of cultural bridging service where notions of older orality blend ‘in an inchoate way’ the accreting power of the printed word. In stark contrast to pamphlets, newspapers appealed to readers with little time, or perhaps not interested in the finer details or nuances of complex issues. Just knowing *of* a crime was more important than the details of the crime itself. Newspapers thus held a more gossipy feel than that of pamphlets: quick one- or two-liners, devoid of names or details, and more apt to blend the high wit of its editors and writers with the low gossip of a culture still much possessed by oral norms.³⁷

This is important as the whereabouts of Admiral Byng’s fleet and Minorca’s fate became not news, but the usual printed form of hearsay and whereabouts. The *Edinburgh Evening Post*, for example, extracted data from the May 29th *Whitehall Evening Post* about a ‘Captain of a Dutch Ship’ who certified that Admiral Byng’s fleet with ‘a Regiment of Soldiers on board, sailed from Gibraltar for Port Mahon with a fair Wind...’³⁸ Some oppositional papers elevated rumors to the level of scandals while maintaining the oral nature of newspaper reporting. Take this two sentence blurb from the June 18, 1756 edition of London’s *Gazetteer*:

Some say that last winter, all the world knows that last spring, we were told that the French intended to attack Minorca; but till it was actually invaded, we sent no squadron to its relief. So this looks very much like our former practice of staying till the steed is stolen, before we shut the stable door.³⁹

‘Some say,’ is used in place of an authoritative figure; ‘all the world knows’ demonstrates a culture still steeped in orality’s grip; and the common phrase ‘staying till the steed is stolen, before we shut the stable door,’ attempted to relate to a populace a complex issues with easily digestible analogies. The public sphere was primed and ready for news on Byng and Minorca.

³⁶ Clark, *The Public Prints*, 51-2.

³⁷ Sarah Byng Osborn certainly inferred that newspapers were nothing more than gossip machines: in a 1730 letter to her brother Robert, she pointed out that the ‘newspapers have near doubled my Sister Byng’s fortune in point of wealth...’ *Letters of Sarah Byng Osborn, 1721-1773*, ed., John McClelland, (Stanford University Press, 1930), 24.

³⁸ *The Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 3 June 1756.

³⁹ *Gazetteer*, 18 June 1756.

The decision, then, by the ministry to edit Byng's dispatch and 'leak' it the government newspaper the *London Gazette* was nothing short of sinister.⁴⁰ M. John Cardwell writes that the ministry's purposeful release of Byng's whittled down dispatch was done so as to 'convince political opinion...'⁴¹ Its effect was much more than that. The editing and release of the dispatch was a choice made by men of great power to exculpate themselves from the accusatory eyes of a press-hungry, gossip-riddled public. The printing of a disreputable account of the Battle of Minorca allowed the ministry to purposely mythologize events before the public sphere, not just the political one.⁴² The ministers borrowed time while Admiral John Byng, heralded for his efforts in the Channel Campaign a year earlier, swiftly morphed into a demonic coward and traitor for allowing an island to fall that, in reality, was already taken.

Like scripture, the public initially believed the government's account. Like gossip, the story spread quickly and became the emblazoned 'truth' unto which Byng supporters necessarily had to overcome. Take, for example the following newspaper account: 'It is remarkable, that some Time before,' gossiped the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 'as well as since the receiving the melancholy News from the Mediterranean, we have had several very remarkable Storms of Thunder and Lightning, violent Hail Showers and the like.'⁴³ Through hearsay and the cultural grip of orality's chatter, Minorca's loss became equated with the coming apocalypse. But it was the habitual appearance of such hyperbole, implanted with casualness and devoid of any solid references that made the Byng camp's task ever insurmountable.

But unlike the usual newspaper accounts of crime reports, as many contemporaries felt Minorca's loss a crime, the anonymity of the actors in question was quickly ditched. Admiral John Byng was a name, a somebody, the son of a peer. He was the starring actor in the Minorca tragedy fed into the newspaper gossip machine. And because newspapers lacked the fixity of pamphlets, the story of Byng's alleged treachery could change, remain new, the more fantastic the better. From the reader's perspective, newspapers appeared to follow the

⁴⁰ Dudley Pope refers to the decision by the ministry to remove nearly 1/3rd of John Byng's letter as 'utterly immoral.' See Pope, 155.

⁴¹ Cardwell, 48-52.

⁴² Sommerville relates another form of cultural blending, one that took place perhaps a century earlier, that of factual discourse. According to Sommerville; news, science, and other forms of writing began in the seventeenth century to displace the mainstay of printed scripture. 'A whole world of stories, metaphors, practices, values, and roles would cease to give meaning to the lives of English men and women,' states Sommerville, 'while new forms of being and thinking were forged in the press.' But, Sommerville cautions, that this new 'text' was by no means what we would call today 'reality' but, rather, chosen news, or a new kind of 'myth.' See Sommerville, 13.

⁴³ *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 9 September 1756.

news of Admiral Byng: his arrest, detention, trial and eventual execution. And as Sommerville observes, these daily deliverances of news lent an authoritative air to newspaper reporting. The story may change from time to time, sometimes subtle other times not so, but the constant drubbing of the Byng affair and Minorca's loss before the public sphere only institutionalized John Byng's name to the ministry's initial charge of cowardice: newspaper periodicals 'were more slippery, harder to refute than books' or even the pamphlet press.⁴⁴

Further, this calumny of 'news' against Admiral John Byng existed within the reality of Britain's mid-eighteenth-century newspaper trade which is best described as highly capitalistic. This was certainly true in large cities such as London, but was also apparent in many provincial towns such as Bristol, Glasgow or York. During the first half of the eighteenth century, provincial newspapers worked to grow their readership and to influence towns and regions beyond their immediate borders. Even a small provincial paper such as the *Reading Mercury* claimed in 1723 to have agents as far north as Bicester and Aylsbury, as far south as Portsmouth and Chichester, and an east to west distribution that ran from Tenterden and Rye over to Salisbury. Larger provincial newspapers, such as the *York Courant* could claim in 1743 an agency breadth from Scarborough to Manchester, some 115 miles distance, and from Newark in the south to Stockton-on-Tees in the north, or 120 miles.⁴⁵ Work by Colley and Sommerville demonstrate that by the 1720s newspapers commonly formed as joint stock companies with, of course, a focus on profits. By mid century there were upwards of thirty-five daily newspapers operating in provincial Britain, a clear indicator of industry-wide economic sophistication.⁴⁶ By the time Minorca fell to the French, nearly the whole of Britain, from the port cities to its industrial center, enjoyed near daily press accounts that connected the nation to the periphery of empire. In this context, Byng's arrest spread rapidly throughout the news circuit. The slow and measured movement toward war had wetted a national appetite for international news. Overseas events such as Braddock's defeat, capitulation at Oswego, Minorca's loss, and Byng's name provided newspapers with 'commercial stability.'⁴⁷ Newspapers chose to exploit these events for the raising of

⁴⁴ Sommerville, 15.

⁴⁵ For the highly competitive environments of Britain's eighteenth-century newspapers, see Uriel Heyd, *Reading Newspapers: Press and Public in Eighteenth-Century Britain and America*, (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2012), 81. Cranfield explained that an 'agency did not necessarily mean that a newspaper sold many copies in a particular town. It did mean, however, that that town was within the paper's sphere of influence.' For the breadth of claimed agencies and distribution maps of the provincial press see, G. A. Cranfield, *The Development of the Provincial Newspaper, 1700-1760*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 198-202.

⁴⁶ Sommerville, 14; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, (London: Yale University Press, 1992), 42-3.

⁴⁷ Cardwell, 9.

advertising revenue within this highly competitive environment. Exploitation worked: sales of newspapers in 1756 rose an astonishing twenty-five percent.⁴⁸ The pace of provincial startups also quickened, seemingly keeping pace with news of the rising tensions between Britain and France. Seminal work by R. M. Wiles demonstrated the explosion of provincial newspapers during this period: The *Manchester Journal*, Lister's *Sheffield Weekly Journal*, the *Doncaster Flying-Post*, and the *Leed's Intelligencer* all began in 1754. Over the next three years, or when news of the Seven Years' War seemed nearly always negative, provincial startups included the *Hull Courant*, the *Newcastle Intelligencer*, the *Bath Advertiser*, the *Leicester and Nottingham Journal*, Cresswell's *Nottingham Journal*, Eyres's *Weekly Journal*, Williamson's *Liverpool Advertiser*, Schofield's *Middlewich Journal*, Early's *Bath Journal*, Luckman and Sketchey's *Coventry Gazette*, and the *Liverpool Chronicle*.⁴⁹

Often forgotten in British newspaper historiography, however, is the reciprocity of eighteenth-century journalism. Hannah Barker points out, that the 'tenor of public sentiment' was keenly listened to by editors and owners which then drove their decisions upon what to print.⁵⁰ Sales, the call of lucre, the paying attention to public consumption evermore positioned newspapers to seek and hire reporters; those who hung out in coffeehouses, alehouses, or other places of public gathering to report back on what the reading/listening public cackled on about.⁵¹ In this manner, Admiral John Byng became an extended mainstay of journalistic fodder beyond what editors normally would have followed. In other words, Byng became synonymous with controversy, and controversy led to an increase in sales and readership.

Additionally, British newspapers often printed their own self-made juicy tidbits of disaccord. In colonial Boston, the *New-England Courant*, owned by Benjamin Franklin's older brother, James, parodied and attacked itself in broadsides in order to secure and increase sales.⁵² Both the Byng camp and those who promoted the ministry were well aware of the partiality of the British press machines throughout the empire. Byng's name became a

⁴⁸ Michael Duffy, 'Contested Empires, 1756-1813,' in *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. Paul Langford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 226. Similarly, Michael Harris points to the trials of the arrested Jacobites in 1746 with an increase in newspaper sales. London merchant Stephen Monteage, for example, spent an extra 6d per week to follow the special sessions. See, Michael Harris, *London Newspapers in the Age of Walpole: A Study of the Origins of the Modern English Press*, (London: Associated University Press, 1987), 191.

⁴⁹ R. M. Wiles, *Freshest Advices: Early Provincial Newspapers in England*, (Ohio State University Press, 1965), Appendix B, 'Chronological Chart,' 373.

⁵⁰ Barker, 1.

⁵¹ Alvin Kernan suggests that even the eighteenth-century consumptive practice of purchasing books gave readers 'the power to determine what was written, and to judge what would be read and preserved.' See, Alvin Kernan, *Samuel Johnson & the Impact of Print*, paperback edition, (Princeton University Press, 1989), 204-5.

⁵² Sommerville, 15.

hot commodity, Minorca's loss a verifiable source for future sales. In this manner, those who covered the news often manufactured the news. Predictably, publishers of periodicals sometimes commented on the egregious reporting of other papers: newspapers and pamphlets became news on how poorly they reported on the news. The *Pennsylvania Gazette* dutifully reprinted much of the June 26th *London Gazette* when it arrived, yet boldly blasted its London counterpart for...

... the Appetite is rather cheated than gratified. For many Weeks we were distracted for a Gazette, and for many Weeks were disappointed. At length the Press was delivered of a Gazette (after miscarrying, if Fame says true, of another) and such a Gazette was never seen. Common Readers call it a Letter from the Admiral. No Letter, say wiser Heads, but an Extract, if you please, which may be owned or denied, as Occasion requires. That some Things are left out, the Sense, or rather the Want of Sense, renders probable, and if the List of the French Defects were not added, there lurks beneath a Mystery no Oedipus on this Side of the Water can reveal. How long it will be before an Interpreter will arrive from the other Side, able to solve all our Doubts, and by a Supply of Circumstances convert this Cannonading into an Action, and so make this Extract give Pleasure to any but the Writer of it, who can say?⁵³

The *London Gazette*'s sinking reputation and slumping sales suffered a most serious trough at the moment Minorca began to become an issue before the nation. Increased competition within the Metropole plus new upstarts in the provinces, chipped away at the *Gazette*'s audience.⁵⁴ Indeed, newspapers openly mocked the *Gazette*, a seemingly long tradition dating back to 1698 where issues of '*Flying and Lying Intelligences... patch up out of old Gazettes*' to which some people then swallowed 'down as greedily as they do their coffee.'⁵⁵ Concern over the fate of the government's official mouthpiece prompted Edward Weston to advise the paper's current editor to heed some friendly advices. Weston, a former Undersecretary of State and once editor of the *London Gazette* beginning in 1741, wrote to Mr. Brown observing two of the paper's most pressing problems, 'the first Prejudice to the *Gazette*, viz, the scarcity of good & authentic matter. Second is the Pirating of other Papers...'⁵⁶ Weston, who in the same letter bragged of 'having access to the Minister's Correspondence with the Secretary of State,' prodded Brown that these 'Materials' were necessary, more so than to be 'put upon narrating Foreign Gazettes for News...'⁵⁷ Weston

⁵³ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 4 November 1756.

⁵⁴ Wiles, Appendix B.

⁵⁵ Quote from the *English Lucien* attributed to Clark, *The Public Prints*, 38.

⁵⁶ Edward Weston to Mr. Brown, 17 July 1756. See Egerton MS 3437, ff. 334-5.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

then advised Brown a certain formula for turning around both the *Gazette*'s reputation and sales:

...in my opinion the whole depends upon early Publication... to get the *Gazette* out whenever it should be possible by Eight in the Evening, or too late for the Evening papers to steal the Contents of it; And when news should happen to come in upon the *Gazette* day, too late to be published by that Hour, to insert an Advertisement in it... the Contents of which would be published in a *Gazette Extra* and the next morning by Nine. This would I think Secure the Sale of the *Gazette* in London....⁵⁸

Weston's letter to Brown signified that the era of the newspaper had, indeed, arrived. Slumping sales, amidst a sea of competitive papers, forced the government's mouthpiece, the *London Gazette*, to rethink not only the sources of its news but also how to reach an audience – ever shifting (and, perhaps, ever doubting) – ahead of its rivals. The *London Gazette*, in this case synonymous with the Newcastle Ministry, felt clipped by its own sagging reputation: unable to define an overarching national narrative concerning Minorca's loss and hitherto, the ministry's policies. Both the *Gazette* and the government consistently failed to reposition the people's perception that Mediterranean interests, as well as trade with North America and the Caribbean, were held in high esteem by the ministers.⁵⁹

All of this begs the question: who was this audience that the *Gazette* and the ministry attempted to convince? Lord Hardwicke seemingly understood the increasing reciprocity between newspapers and the general populace. 'The Libelous Papers are most provoking & infamous,' he wrote to Newcastle, 'grown stronger now by the Ferment of the People.'⁶⁰ With commanding advice on the one hand, and general disregard that the *Gazette* could ever turn itself around on the other, the Lord Chancellor radically instructed Newcastle to open lines of communication in other newspapers. 'One thing I am sure ought to be done, & set about immediately,' counseled Hardwicke, was the 'printing [of] short Papers, in some of the Daily News Papers, in vindication, or by way of true representation, of the Measures of the Administration...' Hardwicke advised Newcastle not to so much bypass the *Gazette*, but to spread the government's voice to additional newspapers: i.e., some of the *Gazette*'s very competition. Hardwicke believed newspapers were more capable 'than the larger Pamphlets'

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ As the official and lone government newspaper, despite lagging sales and a sour reputation, nearly every provincial and colonial newspaper aptly borrowed from its contents. Cardwell states that Byng's 'censored' dispatch 'appeared in at least twenty other newspapers' throughout the archipelago in June and July of 1756. Cardwell, 51. See also fn. 16 on page 59.

⁶⁰ Hardwicke also linked the lack of governmental attempts to prosecute libels over the previous few years as a reason for this growing reciprocity. See ADD MS 32867, f. 146.

of delivering the government's 'popular Points' simply 'because they are more read, & spread more amongst the common People.'⁶¹

This remarkable attestation, if followed, also demonstrated the centrality of newspapers in British culture prior to the Seven Years' War. Men of great power – as Hardwicke and Newcastle represented – saw newspapers as a means to assuage the common man. The overbearing and cathartic riots throughout London and provincial England during the summer and fall of 1756 struck at the very nerve of ministers who scrambled to defend their policies regarding the defense and trade of both the Mediterranean and North America. Newspapers became, then, weapons by which to deliver governmental messaging.

Other powerful men, too, saw newspapers as just such a means to an end. When William Beckford funded the *Monitor* the year prior, his thrust included enlarging London's merchant voice before both parliament and court.⁶² According to the Dodington diary, Beckford had approached Mr. James Ralph to write for him as far back as May of 1753. The London alderman proclaimed that he and others 'found it necessary to employ the press... that they proposed setting forth a paper,' and most important promised to Ralph 'that he should be thoroughly protected... in both Houses; that his allowance should be handsome...'⁶³ Events forced quicker startups because of the Minorca crisis. When the Newcastle ministry collapsed, the *Test*, begun in November, added yet another voice, 'forcible and energetic'⁶⁴: that of Henry Fox through the paper's editor, Arthur Murphy.⁶⁵ The *Test* attacked the Old Corps Whigs and the Whig Patriot, William Pitt. It was, perhaps, Fox's attempt to distance himself from Newcastle and reposition his political fortune before the court as the best possible politician in which to form a new ministry. Pitt's Patriots, chiefly through the efforts of Owen Ruffhead, responded with a paper of their own to counteract Fox's publication: the *Con-Test*.⁶⁶ Even Newcastle – then out of power – thought of defending his actions with a newspaper of his own.⁶⁷

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² C. H. Timperley, *A Dictionary of Printers and Printing, with the Progress of Literature, Ancient and Modern*, (London: H. Johnson, 1839), 695.

⁶³ Beckford eventually found John Shebbeare to pen the *Monitor* newspaper. See *The Diary of the Late George 'Bubb' Dodington, Baron of Melcombe Regis*, ed. Henry Penruddocke Wyndham, (London: John Murray, 1823), 7 May 1753, pages 208-9.

⁶⁴ Timperley, 696.

⁶⁵ Cardwell states that Fox was 'widely regarded' as the newspaper's patron. See Cardwell, 195-6.

⁶⁶ John Brewer, *Party Ideology*, 9; Richard C. Taylor, *Goldsmith as Journalist*, (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1993), 130; Peter N. Miller, *Defining the Common Good: Empire, Religion, and Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 100.

⁶⁷ Newcastle to John Roberts, 26 December 1756. ADD MS 32869, f. 400.

In the case of the *Monitor*, *Test*, and *Con-Test*, the intended audience was not the common man, but rather those who carried political and commercial weight within the nation's capital. These papers aimed for a particular audience, wrote manifestos explaining their existence, and announced what they considered important issues in hopes of generating particular outcomes. But intended voices land on unintentional ears. Further, these additional readers/listeners to factional and issue oriented newspapers necessarily complicated what Habermas explained as a singular agency: the public sphere. But as Nancy Fraser so eloquently explained, there is no lone public sphere as envisioned by Habermas, but numerous publics and identifiable subcultures from 'nationalist publics, popular peasant publics, elite women's publics, and working class publics.'⁶⁸ Fraser's list begins to crack open the possibilities of numerous competing publics, even beyond her own list, of where and how opinions form and interrelate.

Two scholars, Uriel Heyd and Robert Mitchell help explain how this is possible. The eighteenth-century British newspaper possessed a cultural duality: individuals read them but in similitude with thousands of others. A multiplicity of people, acting independently, daily turned the pages of the same press accounts in unison. Newspaper reading, while mostly an individual act of knowledge absorption, quickly became a communal act of data sharing and dissemination. Opinions form and interrelate within what Heyd dubs a 'social / cultural / political' group. Here, a newspaper invited the whole of its readers to participate in the spectacle of new realities / myths which reoccurred daily for the price of a few pence (or a cup of coffee at the local coffeehouse). Newspapers thus introduced and integrated the multitude upon the important fashions – whether they were on politics, economics, trade, international treaties, or local fare – *du jour*. Mitchell carries this a bit further, in that the daily routine of newspaper reading authenticated 'an environment that favored conceptual mutation.' In other words, while readers searched for 'facts' within a periodical publication, a newspaper – invariably – supplied 'a desired future' for the nation to follow.⁶⁹ In such a manner, then, the printing of purposeful misrepresentations of facts – as the ministry deliberately performed with Admiral John Byng's dispatch - were known to muddle the

⁶⁸ Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,' in Calhoun ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1994), p. 116. Fraser's list is a rejoinder to Habermas' argument that in order for there to be a singular public sphere – or a place where public opinion thrived beyond the reach of state legal repercussions or moral oversights – three conditions had to be met and were met as early as seventeenth-century England: capitalism, the inability of the state to censor most publications, and growth toward literacy. Habermas, 57-60.

⁶⁹ Heyd, 82; Robert Mitchell, 'Beings that have existence only in ye minds of men': State Finance and the Origins of the Collective Imagination,' *The Eighteenth Century*, vol. 49 no. 2 (2008), 131.

reception of new individual realities thereby shaping the national conversation. According to Mitchell, such journalistic freedoms had been learned during the scandal of the South Seas Bubble and then polished during the long and often times controversial reign of Sir Robert Walpole.⁷⁰ Whether the press accounts reported upon were wrong or right mattered (of course), but the subjectivity of these reports mattered much less than the unifying vision they provided to the nation: one person at a time.

We can also learn of the importance of newspapers within the transatlantic British press through the numerous pamphlets that wrote of Minorca's loss. These tracts reveal a significant reliance by pamphlet authors and publishers to utilize newspapers as sources to emphasize points true or untrue. Take, for example, *A Modest Apology for the Conduct of a Certain Admiral in the Mediterranean*; published shortly after the Byng protests broke out in London (July of 1756), it made use of two newspapers: the *London Gazette* and the *Daily Gazetteer*. The pamphlet questioned the authenticity of the government-backed *Gazette* when it 'transmitted to the Public... on Saturday, June 26,'⁷¹ a shortened version of the May 25th dispatch sent by Admiral Byng to London. It used the *Daily Gazetteer* to make mention of a firsthand account of one of the early London-based anti-Byng demonstrations:

I listened some Time, till the Dispute began to grow warm, when on a sudden, hearing a hoarse Noise behind me, I turn'd round, and observ'd a naked Head, bolted thro' a Cobler's Stall, from whence issued the following incoherent Expression; 'Damn my Blood, if *B* don't deserve to be scragg'd for not beating the *French Fleet* to Mummy, and landing his Forces at *Mahon*'. Upon which it immediately began to roar, instead of a Ribbon, he shall have a String, &c. I walk'd off, and could not help reflecting how ridiculous it was, for Men bred Mechanics, to pretend to determine on the Propriety of an Admiral's Motions in naval Affairs.

In this telling, 'Men bred Mechanics' were influenced, as the author then informs, 'by People in perhaps a some what more elevated Sphere in the *Daily Gazetteer*, and other Papers...'⁷² In other words, the news source for those who rioted was none other than the numerous newspapers written and edited by men of good standing.

The *London Gazette*, though, often earned the greatest scrutiny among the many pamphlets. In *A Modest Address to the Commons of Great Britain* the author suggested that there existed an appearance of Byng's cowardice which then possessed 'his councils, of the

⁷⁰ Mitchell used the phrase 'normalized its intersubjective capacities' to explain how the press seeped into becoming a powerful cultural norm by the mid-eighteenth century. See Mitchell, 134.

⁷¹ *A Modest Apology for the Conduct of a Certain Admiral*, (London: M. Cooper, 1756), 9-10.

⁷² *A Modest Apology*, 12-3.

same irresolution and faint-heartedness' were it not for the fact the *Gazette* chose to print extracts, and that 'it is possible [Byng] wrote very much more than was ever yet published, vindicating the motives of his own conduct.'⁷³ In another pamphlet, the *Gazette* was outright accused of unnecessarily inferring guilt upon a possible innocent man.⁷⁴ The condemnation against the *Gazette*'s printing of an abridged dispatch became such a target of ridicule that the government's hired writer, David Mallet, had to address the matter in his pamphlet *The Conduct of the Ministry Impartially Examined*, which argued that omission or not, Admiral Byng was 'already – that is before the engagement – in despair of being able to do anything towards the relief of Minorca.'⁷⁵

Other papers received attention from various pamphlets, too. The 125-page *A Collection of Several Pamphlets very little known* liberally pulled data from several newspapers: the *Gazetteer*, the *London Evening Post*, the *Westminster Journal*, the *Citizen*, the *Daily Advertiser*, and the *General Evening Post* in an attempt to bring forth Admiral Byng's 'Conduct in the Mediterranean, with Optics unprejudiced...'⁷⁶ The virulent anti-Byng pamphlet *Bungiana* pulled accounts from numerous newspapers including the *London Gazette*, the *London Evening Post*, the *Gazetteer*, Williamson's *Dublin Universal Advertiser*, the *Whitehall Evening Post*, the *Evening Advertiser*, and even the *Monitor* to bring together 'the reflections here collected' to 'serve in *terrorem*, to future Commanders, who may hereby be convinced, that a great national resentment will always attend every Breach or Neglect of those duties required by their Country.'⁷⁷

Pamphlets commented on newspaper content as well. On the first page of *A Letter to a Member of Parliament in the country from his friend in London Relative to the Case of Admiral Byng with some original papers*, the anonymous author took offence at newspaper profiteering at the expense of a proper trial:

⁷³ *A Modest Address to the Commons of Great Britain and in particular to the free citizens of London*, (London: 1756), 17.

⁷⁴ *A Letter to a Member of Parliament*, 4.

⁷⁵ *The Conduct of the Ministry impartially examined in a Letter to the Merchants of London*, (London: S. Bladen, 1756), 64. This argument was quickly countered by contemporaries in that the only means by which the ministry could have known Byng was in 'despair' prior to engagement, was through a liberal interpretation of his first letter sent from Gibraltar prior to leaving for Minorca. That first dispatch, by Byng, described the condition of his fleet and the facilities at Gibraltar, both of which were poor. To review that dispatch, see Byng's letter to the Admiralty Office, 4 May 1756, located at ADM 1/383, f. 389.

⁷⁶ *A Collection of Several Pamphlets*, ii.

⁷⁷ *Bungiana, Or an Assemblage of What-d'ye-call-em's, In Prose and Verse: That have occasionally appeared Relative to the Conduct of a Certain Naval Commander, Now first Collected; In Order to perpetuate the MEMORY of his Wonderful Atchievements*, (London: 1756), iv.

...that every Attempt to spirit up popular Prejudice against the Accused, previous to a legal Determination, is not only a Breach of common Humanity, but a Violation of the Law of the Land, which supposes every Man innocent till by a judicial Enquiry he is found to be otherwise. Had our Countrymen been more generally actuated by these just and humane Sentiments, what Reams of Paper had remained unpolluted! What Piles of Fuel unconsumed, and been much more usefully applied, than in the premature Disgrace of a man, who, for ought we yet know to the contrary, may be destined rather a *Martyr* to *private Policy*, than a *Victim* to *public Justice*!⁷⁸

To the author, the calumny against the admiral printed in newspapers had not only prejudiced the country against Byng, but polluted the ‘Reams of Paper’ in which they were printed upon. When a new bout of protests broke out against the admiral in February of 1757, the thinking in the streets was that Byng would be found innocent or receive clemency. To counter these protests, *An Appeal to the Nation* swept through London, published by the pro Byng camp. Here, the pamphlet charged that the ‘publick Papers’ by way of a ‘vocal Gentry’ infected ‘the *Populace*, till nothing but the *Blood* of one or more *distinguished People* can serve to appease them.’⁷⁹

It needs stating that pamphlet use of newspaper accounts covering naval scandals had never before been taken to such extremes. Prior to the Byng affair, a similar naval scandal which involved Admirals Mathews and Lestock arose in 1744 after the botched Battle of Toulon. In the scanning of the numerous published and factional pamphlets concerning the affair and the concomitant court-martial of the admirals and other officers over a two year period, none of these pamphlets included one iota of a thought, statement, or even an apparition of a comment from the world of British newspapers.⁸⁰ The next great scandal of military affairs following the execution of John Byng (namely the failure of the Secret Expedition or the botched landing at Rochefort, France in September of 1757), however, included newspaper content to make stick certain key argumentative points by the authors.

⁷⁸ *A Letter to a Member of Parliament*, 1.

⁷⁹ *An Appeal to the Nation*, (London: 1757), 3.

⁸⁰ Nor did the pamphlets produced come close in number to those printed during the Byng affair. However, here is a short list of pamphlets examined: *Vice Admiral L-st-k’s Account of the Late Engagement Near Toulon, Between his Majesty’s Fleet and the fleets of France and Spain As presented By Him the 12th of March 1744-5*, (London: 1745); *Vice Admiral Lestock’s Recapitulation as Spoke By Him at the Bar of the Honourable House of Commons on Tuesday the 9th of April, 1745*, (London: 1745); *An Impartial Review of the Conduct of the Admirals M—ws and L—k in the Late Engagement in the Mediterranean*, (London: 1745); *Admiral Mathews’ Conduct in the Late Engagement Vindicated Wherein the whole Affair is Compendiously Stated: The Several pieces Published By Mr. Le—k Examined With Candour and His Artifices, and Recriminations set in Proper Light*, (London: 1745); *The Charge Against Vice-Admiral Lestock, to Which is Added the Sentence Pronounc’d by the Court-Martial, Sitting Aboard His Majesty’s Ship, the Deptford, on Tuesday, the 3rd of June, 1746, on the said Vice-Admiral Lestock*, (London: 1746); and *Captain Temple West’s Defence Against Vice Admiral Lestock’s Charge: Relating to His Conduct in the Action off Toulon, between His Majesty’s Fleet, under the Command of Admiral Mathews, and the Combined Fleet of France and Spain*, (London: 1746).

For example, the anonymous pamphlet *Public Injuries Require Public Justice* employed the contents the *London Gazette* as a proper defense thus shielding the actions of the ministry and king from any blame for the ill-success of the attempted invasion.⁸¹ Thus the Byng affair appears to mark a measureable and consequential gain for the newspaper industry as a whole.

The importance of newspapers can also be seen in what followed immediately after Byng's execution: namely the resultant decision by George II to remove Pitt from power in April of 1757, which triggered the Gold Box campaign to reinstate the patriot. Research by Paul Langford offers a substantial number of newspapers that seized upon the campaign, relating the latest efforts by cities, corporations, guilds, and associations to bestow freedoms upon William Pitt and Henry Bilson Legge. Aside from the usual list of London papers, and removing the partisan periodicals of the *Test*, the *Con-Test*, and the *Monitor*, Langford's list includes: the *Bath Advertiser*, Bodley's *Bath Journal*, Aris's *Birmingham Gazette*, Felix Farley's *Bristol Journal*, the *Bristol Weekly Intelligencer*, the *Cambridge Journal*, the *Leeds Intelligencer*, the *Gloucester Journal*, Harrop's *Manchester Mercury*, both papers from Newcastle, the *Courant* and the *Journal*, the *Northampton Mercury*, the *Norwich Mercury*, Jackson's *Oxford Journal*, Berrow's *Worcester Journal*, Williamson's *Liverpool Advertiser*, and the *Salisbury Journal*.⁸² Langford ends his essay cautioning that although 'Pitt unquestionably won the battle for out of doors support' during the Gold Box campaign, 'it was not because his rival [Henry Fox] was either less skilled or seriously less well represented in the press.'⁸³ While true, the bigger historical leap is to admit that both the Pitt and Fox camps eagerly turned to the newspaper industry so as to influence indoor politics with a press-driven out of door campaign. The fervor of the press campaigns during the Wilkite movement certainly pinned the importance of newspapers to reactive indoor politics. But the precedence of concern over sales, over readership opinions, and of the overt factional machinations played out of doors in the public press so as to affect within door parliamentary and court politics already existed: definitively apparent in the political crisis caused by the loss of Minorca.

⁸¹ *Public Injuries Require Public Justice: or, An Enquiry into the Causes of the Miscarraige of the late Secret Expedition to the Coast of France*, (London: H. Owen, 1757), 29-30.

⁸² Paul Langford, 'William Pitt and Public Opinion, 1757,' *The English Historical Review*, vol. 88, no. 346 (January 1973), 54-80.

⁸³ Langford, 'William Pitt and Public Opinion,' 80.

II. Conclusion

The press wars surrounding the loss of Minorca exacted a political toll upon a ministry bent on saving itself. In this endeavor, the Newcastle/Fox ministry failed. For far too long the island of Minorca remained on the front page of nearly every newspaper throughout London, the provincial press, and beyond. The nation literally held its breath waiting to hear if Admiral John Byng could salvage the situation by resupplying an undermanned garrison at Port Mahon while simultaneously hunting down and defeating an elusive, new, and untested French fleet.⁸⁴ With only the words of Byng's counterpart, the French Admiral Roland-Michel Barrin de La Galissonnière, to detail the outcome of the Battle of Minorca, the ministry chose to interpret this foreign dispatch within a closeted sense of overbearing panic.⁸⁵ The 'news' as it circulated throughout London certainly played a part in the decision to sack the officers involved in the outcome of the Battle of Minorca (or at least the French version of it). William Pitt's verbal pillory on the floor of the House of Commons against the ministry's scheme to defend Minorca played out publicly in the nation's newspapers and placed the ministry in the defensive.⁸⁶ Byng's version of the battle arrived in the ministry's hands twenty days after Galissonnière's, on the 23rd of June. Despite major and obvious discrepancies between the two opposing admirals' version of the battle, the ministry chose to stay the course: a course that had likely been developed even before the arrival of Galissonnière's dispatch. On the 17th of May, three days before the battle took place, George 'Bubb' Dodington informed Henry Fox that there was already a 'scape-goat' in mind.⁸⁷ Admiral John Byng was chosen to take the fall for Minorca's loss.

But newspapers in the mid-eighteenth century carried anonymity, embedded still in the old traditions of orality. Newspaper stories most often appeared fluid, gossipy, without much sense of permanency quite unlike their pamphlet counterparts. When the ministry sent John Byng's edited dispatch to be published into the 26 June 1756 edition of the *London*

⁸⁴ As fate would have it, the opportunity to resupply the garrison and fight the French fleet occurred all at once. Evidence demonstrates that Byng was in the process of sending and receiving communications from the garrison at Fort St. Philips when the French fleet appeared on the horizon. He had a decision to make: he could do one or the other, but not both. Admiral Byng chose to engage the French fleet.

⁸⁵ The Galissonnière dispatch arrived via a Spanish ambassador, in London, on 3 June 1756. An 'Inner Committee Meeting' was held at the Duke of Cumberland's London apartment the next day. In attendance were Lord Hardwicke, the Duke of Newcastle, Lord Anson, Henry Fox, John Carteret the Second Duke of Granville, the Northern Secretary Lord Holderness, Sir Thomas Robinson, and of course, the king's son, the Duke of Cumberland. Here it was decided to sack General Thomas Fowke, General James Stuart, and Major James Mace (all hailing from Gibraltar and refusing the order to supply Byng with a regiment of marines destined for Port Mahon), and then Admiral John Byng and Vice-Admiral Temple West, Byng's second in command.

⁸⁶ Pitt spoke in the House of Commons on 7 May 1756.

⁸⁷ See *The Diary of the Late George Bubb Dodington*, 341.

Gazette, it did so, perhaps, without the full knowledge of its repercussions. Still, by this printing, the ministry managed to mythologize the events surrounding the Battle of Minorca. The greater reading public mostly accepted the initial ministry line and, in typical gossip form, began to orally spread the news in the streets that soon morphed into protests. But because of the newspaper's lack of fixity, the story about John Byng and Minorca could not only change and become ever more fantastical, but the institutionalization of the two would become forever bound. Some newspapers achieved commercial stability covering the controversy of Minorca's loss, yet sales often drove the content thereby wild stories concerning Byng were sometimes concocted. A peak in newspaper startups also developed, both in London and in the provinces. But financial success also depended upon a level of reciprocity: newspaper owners and editors listened to the gossip in coffee houses, alehouses, and public markets which further drove decisions to print often incredible tales of calumny against an admiral who became something more of a commodity than a news source. The *London Gazette*'s sinking reputation encouraged the ministry to seek out more newspaper outlets than just the official government mouthpiece. Henry Fox started his own paper, the *Test*, William Pitt the *Con-Test*, and the millionaire alderman William Beckford beat them both with the first publication of the *Monitor* the year prior. Pamphlets, the known and trusted predominant press piece for centuries, turned toward newspapers not only as sources for news but as evidence for rhetorical score. Clearly, the Byng affair was one of the most important historical episodes that heralded forth the era of the newspaper.

CHAPTER 3
'Byng, Dearth, and Morality'

I.

Many of the richest and leading men of our parish (though I think not the wisest) have long since been endeavouring to pull down the price of this and some more poor men's wages... by bringing in many poor into the parish from other parishes, some with certificates and some without, until the parish is full of poor.... Now let any of those cunning men... only lay his hand upon his breast and put it into conscience.... Oh, cruel and inhuman usage, oppression, fraud, and grinding the face of the poor are our guilt! Oh, may the annals of future times never record so much barbarity!¹

Thomas Turner, a pious mercer from East Hoathly, took notice of a sweeping change affecting the reciprocal nature, long-practiced, in the relationship between Great Britain's elites and the obligations practiced in accord with the nation's lower ranks. A deacon of his church, the diarists and parish officer was charged with overseeing the poor.² His entry on 20 October 1756 was a sober reflection upon the increasing rise of capitalistic practices wrought upon his parish. Yet the full entry reveals an ever deeper angst: a man he identified as 'Burrage' left his wife 'with 6 poor helpless children.'³ '...if we only reflect and consider,' he wrote, 'something great must be the reason to force a man from his beloved family...'⁴ Turner had not the words to pinpoint the profound and radical alterations to an older set of values: he only knew that it was 'something great,' forced by 'cunning men,' and though he disapproved of Burrage 'for leaving his family,' he took the time to write in his diary that the 'only thing I wish to endeavour...is the motive which occasioned him to abscond.'⁵

Turner's East Hoathly was not alone in adjusting to newer modes of economic reciprocities. By October of 1756, much of England and portions of Wales had succumbed to the largest and most intense food riots heretofore then seen.⁶ As the dearth deepened, questions arose from nearly all quarters of society seeking the source over the shortage of food: '...the primary Cause of this present State of our Corn Trade,' announced one

¹ *The Diary of Thomas Turner, 1754-1765*, edited by David Vaisey (London: Oxford University Press, 1984), 67-8.

² Introduction, xxii.

³ *The Diary of Thomas Turner*, 67-8.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *An Atlas of Rural Protest in Britain, 1548-1900*, edited by Andrew Charlesworth (Beckenham, UK: Croom Helm, 1993), 86.

pamphlet, was the ‘great Number of Prisoners...brought in, and those increasing afterwards’ which ‘added very considerably to the number of Consumers.’⁷ Thus, fused to a growing food shortage crisis were insistent rationalizations that the war had something to do with it. References to the capture and imprisonment of French mariners and sailors were to be found in exhortations about the scarcity of corn. Thus, according to some British press accounts, the success of the 1755 Channel Campaign in handing France a significant economic blow also held important economic ramifications for the British archipelago.⁸

Herein, then, also resides the story of Admiral John Byng. Two clamorous tumults: food riots and Byng protests occurred in tandem. Yet, the two events appear throughout history as ever separated: one having little to do with the other.⁹ This may be patently unfair to Britons who lived through those seemingly confounding days, to the reading and listening public who learned with all too shocking regularity the dismal news of national events: Braddock, Byng, Oswego, Minorca, militia, subsidies, taxes, debt, war, France, Prussia, allies, enemies, jobbers, crime, corruption, earthquakes, thunder, floods, droughts, riots, food, bread, corn, and dearth. No wonder, then, that much written questioned whether Providence was not at hand for a nation so filled with vice and immorality.¹⁰

This chapter focuses on the Byng protests and the food riots with the following observation, that both ‘Byng’ and ‘food’ were argued by contemporaries upon a single, reflexive, and unifying motif: morality. This differs significantly from past histories whose stories tended to be told through a political lens. The problem with such a purview lie in the source materials: the great politicians themselves. Their letters, journals, diary entries, and other commentaries (readily available and preserved) mostly focus upon singularities. Thus, letters about Minorca tend to be just that, letters about Minorca. Historians then repeat what they read. Hence, by writing within the political paradigm, events tend to get detrimentally separated. Such perceptions also tend to elevate the importance of great men while reducing the possibility of numerous other agencies responding in kind to the same historical crises. This is a skewed reality: the Byng protests and the food riots of 1756-57 were not wholly a concern of those from above, far from it. The fact of the matter is, the main

⁷ *A Compendium of the Corn Trade*, (London: J. Robinson, 1757), 7-8.

⁸ See chapter 4.

⁹ A lone exception is chapter two, ‘The Politics of War and Dearth, 1756-1757,’ in Nicholas Rogers, *Crowds, Culture, and Politics in Georgian Britain* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1998).

¹⁰ See, for example, Dr. John Brown’s bidding where he, and others, lumped Admiral John Byng in with an imagined corrupted state: a region where religion, honor, virtue, public spirit and ‘love of our Country’ no longer existed and, through allegation, were caused by ‘a general contempt for religion by the fashionable world’ a ‘present age deep in the *Speculation of Infidelity*.’ Brown, *An Estimate of the Manners*, 89-90.

participants of both tumults were those from below: the tens of thousands (if not more) of colliers, tanners, weavers, and other general laborers who ardently expressed discontent with the status quo. Fortunately, some of their expressions about British liberties and rights found numerous recorders: newspapermen, pamphleteers, court clerks, church deacons and rectors, diarists, and many more; enough viewpoints to consider reconstructing some semblance of what transpired when looked at from below. It is through this cultural and social lens that may, perhaps, clarify some of the ambiguity associated with the protests against Admiral Byng, and seek to understand the depths of the riots associated with the food shortages of 1756-7.

II. Why we should connect Byng and Dearth

Corn has been sold at 5s. 3d per Winchester bushel, which gives pleasure to the poor, especially as it is hoped our corporation will follow the example of Chatham, having mills of their own, erected by the great Sir Francis Drake, once Mayor of this town, in good Queen Bess's days, and can soon build a bakehouse and hire a good baker, which will effectually prevent the millers from grinding the face of the poor, as lately has been done.¹¹

For more than four decades now, scholars have come to view that the long-eighteenth century represented a series of transformative and often heated intersects. In terms of economics, mid-eighteenth-century Britain was at the crossroad of old and new, where the 'patterns of trading relationships and controls which dated back to the early modern period' (if not earlier) were pitted against an emerging entrepreneurial class bent on pushing forth increased capitalistic practices beyond what the law could claim.¹² If there's an economic norm that can be pinned on eighteenth-century Britain, constant flux fits that bill.¹³ The opening block quote attests to that seemingly ever-morphing change. *Lloyd's Evening Post*, a merchant-driven newspaper, made a serious suggestion to London's corporation to follow Chatham's lead. London! The city of commerce, trade, and empire: here, lectured by a merchant paper to follow the 'moral' economy of old. Appeals to Drake, Queen Elizabeth,

¹¹ *Lloyd's Evening Post and British Chronicle*, 10-12 October 1757. See also, *London Evening Post*, 11-13 October 1757; *Read's Weekly Journal*, 10-12 October 1757.

¹² Adrian Randall, Andrew Charlesworth, Richard Sheldon, and David Walsh, introduction to *Markets, Market Culture and Popular Protest in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland*, (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 1996), 4. See also the introduction to *David Hume: Writings on Economics*, edited by Eugene Rotwein, (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), xi.

¹³ Julian Hoppit, 'The Contexts and Contours of British Economic Literature, 1660-1760,' *The Historical Journal*, vol. 49, no. 1 (March 2006), 107-8.

and government owned enterprises, all in condemnation of millers who allegedly grind ‘the face of the poor’ at a time of dearth. This was the background unto which Admiral John Byng found himself as he was arrested and put on trial for his very life. Dearth and Byng ran alongside each other in newspapers and pamphlets, and in the everyday realities of a tumultuous England. The *Gazetteer*, for example, printed an advertisement for the *Monthly Review*. Here, both Byng and the developing dearth appeared side by side. A list of ‘Articles in the Catalogue’ contained: *An Appeal to the Sense of the People; Remarks on the Conduct of Our Fleet in the Mediterranean; A Letter to a Member, &c. relative to A. Byng*; as well as *An Essay on the Rise of Corn*; and religious pamphlets on *Artificial Dearth &c. Single Sermons*.¹⁴

And yet, the connection of Byng to the food riots of 1756-57 remains largely unexplored. Although much erudition on the political and social tangle concerning food, scarcities, dearth, and riots has been worked through within the last forty years (especially upon moral and cultural grounds), little has been done to bring the same focus upon the Byng affair which ran in tandem. This section is written to argue why such a viewpoint is necessary.

In short, economics is built on consensus. Buyers and sellers, producers and consumers arriving at agreements which allow for transactions: at the basis then is a world filled with reciprocities. For those in the lower economic strata, a defense of traditional market norms reigned paramount. Any perceived threat to customary market arrangements: be it milling, brewing, baking, warehousing, and transport; risked hunger, deprivation, and scarcity.¹⁵ For many of England’s poor, going to market meant operating on these personal and correlative relationships. For some of those of higher economic standings, particularly merchants and financiers, the market was something other: not a place, but an abstract. By the mid-eighteenth century the acclimatization process toward conceiving the market as a place of principle among those in the upper echelons was in full swing. Here, the ‘market’ carried its own laws, its own gravity, its own motions (as in: ‘the market continues to rise’). Plebeian society could scarcely conceive of the term ‘market’ as a force, and most assuredly failed to understand the greater operative power that domestic and international markets held in determining prices, wages, and quality of life. It was this anonymity of the new usage of markets that stirred the ire of those that clung to more customary conventions of the term.

¹⁴ *Gazetteer or London Daily Advertiser*, 3 November 1756

¹⁵ E. P. Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,’ *Past & Present*, no. 50 (February 1971), 78-9.

The very idea of market as a force ‘was a radical one, simply unthinkable to the vast majority of the population who still believed that men ran markets and not the other way around.’¹⁶ The rise of ‘political arithmetic’ and its associations to demography, resources, and empire-building within a bevy of competing European nation-states, allowed for commerce to be unleashed in powerful and innovative ways. So persistent were arguments penned during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by writers and philosophers promoting theories of political economy that conversations about economics in the twenty-first century still revolve mostly around the political rather than any socio-cultural contexts. Sophus Reinert, for example, recently offered that the economy is ‘intrinsically political’ because it is ‘woven together,’ a ‘process by which individuals and communities administer their material lives and engage with those of others...’¹⁷ I would argue that Reinert is correct: economics is ‘intrinsically political,’ but the two are also reciprocal. In other words, politics and economics are not the only ingredients in the historical soup that shaped modern economies. If I replaced Reinert’s ‘intrinsically political’ with ‘intrinsically cultural’ I would do so largely along the very script he employed: economics is intrinsically cultural in that it is ‘woven together,’ ‘a process’ where ‘individuals and communities’ ‘engage with those of others.’ Here is an adequate cultural definition to what occurs within all economic frameworks. Aside from politics, scholars of eighteenth-century economic formation can easily and readily find significant traces of religious, social, and customary influences. These are the small pieces of baggage that individuals and communities brought to market: abstract, physical, or otherwise.

We see in the *Lloyd Evening Post* a posturing to sympathize with the plight of England’s poor and to locate what were then reasonable solutions to an emergent crisis. Many other public papers and pamphlets shared this concern. The *Monitor*, for example, chastised the government obliquely referencing Proverbs 11 and 26, stating that ‘All great and wise kingdoms and states have in their sumptuary laws’ eminent means of ‘assisting’ those less fortunate in times of shortages; and as for a cure, the state should bestow rewards ‘upon the head of him that selleth Corn without grinding the face of the poor.’¹⁸ Appeals to the government in London to assist those starving in the English countryside appeared genuine as ‘The Poor being in no Part pinched more than by what the Millers and Mealmen

¹⁶ Thanks to Richard Sheldon for providing a concise insight into the etymology of the term ‘market.’ Richard Sheldon ‘Artificial Scarcity’, unpublished manuscript, 2012.

¹⁷ Sophus A. Reinert, *Translating Empire: Emulation and the Origins of Political Economy*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2.

¹⁸ *Monitor or British Freeholder*, 6 Aug 1757.

squeeze out of them.’¹⁹ Writing from Cowick, the 2nd Earl Gower, Granville Leveson-Gower wrote to Lord Holderness that ‘this discontent among the lower class of people is the dearness of Corn... owing to a new method of monopolizing the corn that the Millers have got into...’²⁰ Yet, according to Claeys in *Machinery, Money, and Millennium* (1987), significant evidence indicates that this ‘greater sympathy for the Poor’ aptly demonstrated during 1750s and 1760s, was near nonexistent in the rest of the century: beginning and end.²¹ If Claeys’s argument stands: what can explain this oddity?

Perhaps, if we eschew the political and focus instead on the cultural, the answer to that question becomes clearer. Moreover, by focusing on the competing domestic economies of England at mid-century and connect it to the concurrency of Admiral Byng’s arrest, trial, and execution, the analytical narrative that emerges is fuller, more contextual, a three dimensional story whereby both real people and abstract forces combined to shape events.²²

III. Explaining the Intersect of Moral Economy and John Byng

Honestus is a well-meaning and judicious trader, hath substantial goods, and trades with his own stock, husbands his money to the best advantage, without taking all advantages of the necessities of his workmen, or grinding the face of the poor. *Fortunatus* is stocked with ignorance, and consequently with self-opinion; the quality of his goods cannot be suitable to that of his judgment. *Honestus* pleases discerning people, and keeps their custom by good usage; make modest profit by modest means, to the decent support of his family: Whilst *Fortunatus* blustering always, pushes on, promising much, and performing little; with obsequiousness offensive to people of sense, strikes at all, catches much the greater part; raises a considerable fortune by imposition on others, to the discouragement and ruin of those who trade in the same way.

Spectator, 29 July 1712²³

Earlier in the century, the *Spectator* presented to its reading public two examples of English merchants: *Honestus* and *Fortunatus*. The *Honestus* merchant was ‘well meaning and judicious,’ ‘trades with his own stock,’ ‘husbands his money... without taking all advantages of the necessities of his workmen, or grinding the face of the poor.’ Meanwhile, in contrast,

¹⁹ *Schofield's Middlewich Journal or Cheshire Advertiser*, 1-8 February 1757.

²⁰ Gower to Holderness, 1 September 1756. See, Egerton MS 3437, f. 370.

²¹ Gregory Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium: From Moral Economy to Socialism, 1815-1860* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 18-19.

²² The methodology then requires a microhistorical engagement. On microhistory’s efficacy see Brown, ‘Microhistory,’ 18.

²³ *The Spectator*, vol. 6 (London: 1757), 263.

the merchant *Fortunatus* was ‘stocked with ignorance,’ filled ‘with self-opinion,’ always ‘blustering,’ ‘promising much, and performing little,’ and ‘raises a considerable fortune by imposition on others, to the discouragement and ruin’ of many. This compare and contrast exercise between fictional London merchants represented a public pronouncement of the commercial ideal; the dos and don’ts of trader activities in relation to Britain’s growing empire; and a subtle admission by either Joseph Addison or Richard Steele that something new was, perhaps, contributing to the demise of something older.

Additionally, the moral overtones presented in the *Spectator* appear blatantly egregious. Though the date of reprinting was likely coincidental,²⁴ Mr. Spectator’s 1712 moralizing on proper etiquette for traders resurfaced at a time when attacks against millers, bakers, farmers, engrossers, forestallers, jobbers, regrators, and others were at their peak; such didacticisms reentered the public sphere at the moment people severely challenged governance led by an alleged cabal of avarice-filled elites. Both anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian rhetoric surfaced concurrently and struck remarkably similar moralistic tones.

For example; millers, bakers, and ‘Mealmen’ earned the ire of James Manning. Dedicating his pamphlet, *The Nature of Bread, Honestly and Dishonestly Made*, to the Society for the Encouragement of Arts and Manufactures, Manning charged that all three adulterated bread, ‘the most wholesome of all foods.’ Manning was aghast at the physical toll that adulterated bread took upon the human body, ‘so many Disorders among the Robust and Strong,’ he wrote, especially ‘in the last seven Months.’ In his many years of practice, Dr. Manning stated, he had ‘never seen such Havoc.’ Manning claimed that the primary cause of bad bread was ‘the present Age, wherein all regard to Integrity is lost, and the exorbitant Desire of Gain is the universal Principle... Flour is adulterated by the Miller, because the Ingredients are cheap... and again by the Baker, because he finds the same tempting Profit.’²⁵ Compare the previous passage to the following anti-Byng rhetoric.

A modern Philosopher says, that Avarice is big with all Sorts of Villainy, among which Cowardice must be included, for although a covetous rich Coward will strain hard, lye, swear, to get or save Sixpence, with Safety of Life, yet when that is in Danger, his ruling Passion, being the Love of that demeaning Metal Gold; Honour,

²⁴ Reprints of *The Spectator* were common: see London reprints of 1721 and 1739; Dublin publications of 1755; Scotland reprinted the eight volume set in 1745; additionally, web sites such as www.hathitrust.org show nine re-printings of *The Spectator* between 1714 and 1753. There are also Paris-based printings of *The Spectator* throughout the eighteenth century. These serve as examples of *The Spectator*’s continued popularity.

²⁵ James Manning, *The Nature of Bread, Honestly and Dishonestly Made; and Its Effects as Prepared at present On Unhealthy and Healthy Persons* (London: R. Davis, 1757), 6-7.

Glory, the Good of Society, the Love of his Country are as Nothing to him.²⁶

In both of these documents, immorality reigns: 'Gain is the universal Principle' guiding profit-seekers and titled-elites alike. The 'present Age' was filled with dishonesty, where the love of gold ruled above love of country. In short, little distinction was made between those whose occupation was one of bread-making or whose job it was to defend or lead the nation. The attacks against those allegedly responsible for the dearth and for those against Admiral John Byng sprung from the same moral grounds.

One pamphlet in particular, *A Compendium of the Corn Trade* questioned the morality of Britain's leaders in regard to the use of Hessian and Hanoverian troops brought over to defend the island, especially in the face of a national dearth. In mocked tone, *A Compendium* chided 'the Fear of Apprehension of an Invasion from *France*, [which] occasioned a Contract for Foreign Troops, and consequently a Necessity of providing for them...' Foreign troops on English soil in sum with the French prisoners, added to the 'calculated Account of the Consumption rise to about 30,000 Men a Day...' The war effort, in supplying victuals for the 'Stores for the Military Magazines,' prompted contractors to unite with engrossers 'under the Sanction of Power.' Contractors were then alleged to have 'adventur'd to the utmost Extent of their Cash or Credit... constantly attentive to the Markets, the *Corn Jobbers*, their Agents or factors...' further driving up the price of corn and creating an artificial scarcity.²⁷ In *A Modest Address to the Commons of Great Britain*, the author linked how French encroachments in North America allowed the ministry to ask for 'whatever sums of money... whilst people were in this mood,' and from this the 'harvest was now growing ripe for Money-lenders and Jobbers; and Place-men and Pensioners, like a flight of *Egyptian* locusts, were found without number ready for the devouring trough.'²⁸ Fears of war profiteering sent press machines into activity. Here, the author linked 'Money-Lenders and Jobbers' to agricultural metaphors at a time of great dearth.

Another pamphlet charged London's opera goers with expending hundreds of pounds to 'satisfy this silly Passion' rather than bestow 'to the Assistance of those poor Wretches of our Country, who are ready to eat each other for Want of Bread.'²⁹ In xenophobic language London's *nouveau riche* philandered with French performers wining and dining them while

²⁶ Berrow's *Worcester Journal*, 8 July 1756.

²⁷ *A Compendium of the Corn Trade*, 7-8.

²⁸ *A Modest Address to the Commons of Great Britain* (1756)

²⁹ *The Ten Plagues of England, or worse Consequences than those of Egypt* (London: R. Withy and Co. Book and Printsellers, 1757), 24.

Englishmen yet suffered. ‘Shall Signiora *Bawbello*, or Signior *Squawello*, Monsieur *de Jumpedo*, or Mademoiselle *de Caparetta*, devour, at one expensive Meal, what would satisfy the Hunger of forty poor Families of our own Nation, with moderate and wholesome Food?’³⁰ Compare such rhetoric to the moral pen of ‘Brittanicus’ in the *Reading Mercury*. ‘Justice ought always to take a fast and impartial Hold of every Offender, and not, like a Cobweb, catch only small Flies,’ a reference to Admiral Byng, ‘and be broken by great Ones,’ a reference to the corruption of ministers. Brittanicus then shifted the story: ‘To take away the Life of the Poor, who break the Laws for Want of Bread, and to suffer great Traitors to truck away a Nation’s Territories, and plunder the Publick of Millions with Impunity, is great and manifest Injustice...’³¹ Though these public debates grew increasingly fragmented, argument and rhetoric began to anchor themselves on the twin evils of dearth and Byng. Both the internal and domestic problems of food and dearth were wedded to the external and international problems of trade, alliances, and empire: not separated as past scholarly accounts have the habit of doing.

It would be easy to demonstrate hundreds of such written moral expressions from this time period that blended into and out of a whole host of issues: domestic and international, dearth and Byng. But it would also be somewhat teleological unless we bind the meaning of morality in the way it was considered in the mid-eighteenth century. The term ‘moral economy’ is a twentieth century conception, a phrase brought into British historical discourse by Edward P. Thompson.³² The few examples of the primary materials exposed thus far do give us a sense of what was considered moral or immoral in terms of consenting transactions, i.e., economy. But the flood of written literature following the loss of Minorca was, likewise, often crafted utilizing similar moral arguments. Economic morality and political morality merged and coexisted within normative cultural uses of the term. Byng and dearth intersected along these moral lines.

Much economic change occurred between the *Spectator*’s economic moralizing in 1712 and the rise of new economic institutions by 1757. As the essayists in *Stilling the Grumbling Hive* remind us, between the ascension of William and Mary and the outbreak of the Seven Years’ War, definitive ‘lasting structural changes’ took place: ‘shedding labour from the countryside,’ ‘rapid urban growth,’ ‘expanded domestic consumption of non-necessities,’ ‘stimulated manufacturing,’ and ‘the commercialization of English society’ all of

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ Quote attributed to Nicholas Rogers, *Crowds, Culture, and Politics*, 63-4.

³² See his groundbreaking work, E. P. Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy.’

which ‘clearly pre-date the period of the Industrial Revolution.’³³ Concerns over urban poverty and crime, regulation of new industries in the counties, the efficacy of the parish system in dealing with displaced internal migrations, the rise in gin consumption, in-your-face smuggling in England’s Southwest, the morality of turnpikes, waterways and enclosures: all of these and other abrupt changes to the social and economic fabric of the country merely magnified the tumults connected to the food crisis and Byng protests of 1756-7.³⁴

But throughout this several decade-long transition, Thompson argued that rioters were conservators, defenders of customs, and somewhat political exercisers of ‘crowd action’ in order to secure their legitimate rights. Thompson cautioned a new generation of historians not to conceive of the term ‘riot’ as a ‘spasmodic’ reaction to ‘economic stimuli.’ To do so, he suggested, removed the common people, a.k.a. rioters, from becoming or participating as ‘historical agents.’ That the poor, in defending their older and more customary moral economy, did so with goals, with means to their ends, and looked backwards often finding ‘support in the paternalist tradition of the authorities...’³⁵ In terms of the dearth of 1756-57, much of the primary data supports such an assertion.

But what of the Byng tumults? Though there is ample evidence of lower rank participation in protests against the admiral, it is not fully apparent as to their impetus. The protests against Byng do not readily bear out a plebeian defense of anything ancient or customary.³⁶ So where does this drive to riot against the admiral come from, and how are the Byng protests different from the food riots? As we will soon discover, some of the impetus to riot against Byng comes from above: there is enough evidence to demonstrate such interferences. Still, the ‘from above’ retort does not seem to fully satisfy the query concerning plebeian participation in Byng riots as evidence suggest some of those riots did occur without prodding from higher ups. What else, then, would have stirred some of the masses to demonstrate against a wartime British admiral? Are there culturally learned antipathies against authority that auto-trigger such bitter and sometimes violent responses?

³³ Introduction to, *Stilling the Grumbling Hive: The Response to Social and Economic Problems in England, 1689-1750*, editors Lee Davison, Tim Hitchcock, Tim Keirn, and Robert Shoemaker (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), xvi-xvii.

³⁴ *ibid.* But see also: Rogers, *Mayhem*; Douglas Hay and Nicholas Rogers, *Eighteenth-Century English Society*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); introduction to Randall, *Markets, Market Culture and Popular Protest*; Wilson, *Sense of the People*; R. B. Outhwaite, *Dearth, Public Policy and Social Disturbance in England, 1550-1800*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

³⁵ E. P. Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy,’ 76-79.

³⁶ I am not the first to point out Thompson’s apparent overreliance on a simplistic plebeian/patrician model. See Peter King, ‘Edward Thompson’s Contribution to Eighteenth-Century Studies. The Patrician: Plebeian Model Re-Examined,’ *Social History*, vol. 21, no. 2 (May, 1996), 223.

To reconcile these two synchronal protests, criticisms against Thompson's work may redirect our line of questioning, especially in terms of the anti-Byng demonstrations. John Bohstedt offers up the clearest censures. Bohstedt differs from Thompson's view claiming that morality had little to do with food riots. Moreover, Bohstedt charges that the Thompsian camp tends to over-romanticize plebeian culture beyond its historical reality. Rioters, said Bohstedt, looked back 'not for moral legitimacy but for a repertoire of proven tactics...'³⁷ In laying out his counterargument, Bohstedt questioned the Thompson camp's interpretive processes. He stresses a certain teleological bent to those who claim that rioters looked to the past for 'legitimizing notions.'³⁸ If Bohstedt's contention is correct, then the plebeian impetus to riot against Admiral John Byng becomes somewhat less cumbersome and easier to address. The admiral was a 'tactical' target, not a 'moral' one.

Perhaps useful in addressing this debate is Outhwaite's dual approach to the moral economy: price-fixing on the one hand, and state-driven market intervention on the other. Reporting his observations covering two-and-a-half centuries, Outhwaite concluded that rioters did possess a sense of morality when looking backwards: at least one year's worth. Though the prices that rioters imposed upon overwhelmed merchants, traders, millers and bakers 'varied in time and space,' Outhwaite concludes that 'where they can be measured they turn out often to be near the prices of the previous season.'³⁹ Additionally, the early attempts by the Tudor and early Stuart dynasties to fix-prices, were done so with concern toward the lower orders of England. In both cases, whether from above or from below, the commodities in question were nearly always paid for – not stolen and not seized – and the poor thereby continued to subsist, and to return to their daily routine: the riots ended.

Convincingly, primary evidence associated with the dearth of 1756-57, reveals that a strong paternal ideal dominated numerous attempts to locate relief for the poor, especially in the countryside. As Hoppit observed paternalism was part of those 'uncertain hierarchies,' long-practiced traditions that stressed 'reciprocal duties and interdependencies' between rich and poor.⁴⁰ The dearth exposed the fragility of those paternal systems. Newer modes of trade sent agricultural products further and further away from the localities in which they were produced. This tended to upset the stability of a known motif of reciprocities, and it was these landed men who sometimes found themselves at the losing end. In a very direct way, the fight

³⁷ John Bohstedt, 'The Moral Economy and the Discipline of Historical Context,' *Journal of Social History*, vol. 26, no. 2 (Winter 1992), 269-70.

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Outhwaite, 48. Even Bohstedt admits this though with the added quip that 'The moral economy was a correction of capitalist trade not a condemnation of it.' See Bohstedt, 268.

⁴⁰ Julian Hoppit, *Land of Liberty?* 76.

against engrossing and forestalling coupled with the often open promotion of price-setting (by way of assizes, crowd action or otherwise) truly reinforces an argument put forth by Thompson that the gentrified elites in the counties were, to some extent, ‘prisoners of the people.’⁴¹ Price-setting owned a hope of returning order to dearth’s chaos, while also giving relief and reinforcing the paternal nature of county economic patterns. Not only were the poor seeking to adhere to a known moral system of economics, but so too were many of England’s country gentlemen.⁴² As the *Compendium of the Corn Trade* noted, the dearth threatened these paternal structures along two fronts: the ‘Dearness of Corn’ will not only ‘raise the Price of Labour’ but that it will do so permanently, adding to production costs that would fall solely upon the ‘landed Men.’⁴³

So engrained was this moral approach to price-setting that it was often advertised. The *Glasgow Journal* posted an announcement focused on the ‘oppression which the poor suffer’ at the hands of forestallers and regrators,’ and therefore...

...the Magistrates have ordered another public market for selling and retailing of meal, in that place in Candleriggs is to be kept open every lawful day ... that none keep up or conceal meal and other victual intended for sale.... That all and every person who shall be convicted of the same, will be prosecuted by the magistrates, and fined and punished as forestallers and regrators, in terms of law.⁴⁴

In the West Riding of Yorkshire, the mayor gave ‘strict Orders that no Corn should be sold before the Market-Bell rung,’ and that it was ‘to be sold to the Poor only, and no one Person to exceed a Stroke. If these laudable Examples were followed, the Badgers would not have it in their Power to raise Estates by grinding the Face of the Poor.’⁴⁵ A 1757 pamphlet argued for tighter regulations of the market categorizing corn as a necessary which ‘has been in all Ages and Times, and in all Nations, under the more immediate Eye or regard of the

⁴¹ Thompson stated that the presence of so many of the poor in the countryside ‘impinged very generally upon eighteenth-century government and thought, and did not only intrude at moments of disturbance,’ See Thompson, ‘Moral Economy,’ 79.

⁴² The first chapter of *Markets, Market Culture and Popular Protest* makes clear that ‘legatees of a paternalist philosophy... felt obligated to uphold the customary model of social and economic relations,’ despite the investments of ‘progressive landlords’ who ‘were responsible for the enclosures and turnpikes which helped create’ the ‘undermining’ of the ‘paternal and regulatory fabric.’ See, *Markets, Market Culture*, 22. See also, Hay and Rogers, 145-146, where a magistrate’s or JP’s power to adjudicate often banked upon paternal ideals.

⁴³ *A Compendium of the Corn Trade* (London: J. Robinson, 1757), 4-5.

⁴⁴ *Glasgow Journal*, 6 Sep 1756. For a brief on Scotland’s experience and response to the dearth of 1756-7, see: Christopher A. Whatley, ‘Custom, Commerce, and Lord Meadowbak: the Management of the Meal Market in Urban Scotland, c. 1740 – c. 1820,’ *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, vol. 32, no. 1 (May 2012), 1-27.

⁴⁵ *London Evening Post*, 18 Nov 1756; see also the *Gazetteer and London Daily Advertiser*, 20 Nov 1756; and the *Public Advertiser*, 20 Nov 1756. Charging a commission, badgers brokered corn bringing buyers and sellers together for transactions: R.B. Westerfield, *Middlemen in English Business 1660-1760* (New Haven, 1915) p. 136.

Government...’ Corn was that which fed the multitudes and corn was that commodity which grounded national economics along traditional or moralistic lines. ‘Engrossing, regrating, amassing and retaining’ were found to ‘be unreasonable...’ a certain malpractice set ‘to destroy...’⁴⁶ The steadfastness of agrarian culture, despite centuries of enclosures, alterations to roads and waterways with, the infusions of factory villages and towns to rural landscapes, is nothing short of spectacular and a clear sign of the insistence of paternal structures by both the agrarian poor and its landed elites. As Richard Sheldon describes it, economics in the early part of the eighteenth century remained mired in husbandry: an activity of management, something performed to keep one’s house/estate in order.⁴⁷ Even as industrialization flowered in the English countryside throughout the early decades of the eighteenth century, the old paternal economic system persisted, as did the moralistic demands to adhere to an older system of food pricing, distribution, and wages.

The ‘from below’ protests against Admiral John Byng, however, does not seem to offer as clear of a customary and moral basis as that associated with food and subsistence. If we attempt to remove the influence of money and materials provided to public displays against the admiral by those ‘from above,’ then the impetus of the poor to protest against Byng becomes less obvious. Such a murky purview, however, should not prevent a proper moral investigation as to the roots of plebeian discontent against John Byng. But this is a very difficult thing to do. Inductive reasoning lends some results. In a previous chapter, where the illiterate and semi-illiterate learned of Minorca’s loss through sermons and balladeering, it also suffices to state that throughout the eighteenth century Britain’s non-readers also learned of what other ailments plagued the nation. From alehouses to Sunday’s pews, the messages of Britain’s other moral shortages would have filtered through. Prominent on that list was luxury. In Berry’s *The Idea of Luxury*, we learn that Nicholas Barbon’s 1690 *Discourse on Trade* made a valiant attempt to unhitch luxury from centuries of Christian moralization. Barbon’s efforts, however, seemed to rather light a fire under Christian, or even humanist, moralists. The adherence that luxury was a sin to the national fabric remained steadfast throughout most of the eighteenth century and was particularly strong during the Great Awakening seemingly overriding Mandeville’s contribution to the subject.⁴⁸ As James Raven tells it, between Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees* (1714) and John Brown’s *Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* (1757), ‘luxury’ occupied the *mentalités* throughout

⁴⁶ *A Compendium of the Corn Trade*, 6.

⁴⁷ Sheldon ‘Artificial Scarcity’ (unpublished manuscript, 2012), 29.

⁴⁸ Christopher J. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 126.

these decades.⁴⁹ Indeed, Adam Smith and David Hume both seemed to bristle at luxury's debate. Smith regarded 'those melancholy moralists'⁵⁰ with quick suspicion. In his 1759 work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith condemned the practice of moralists from 'perpetually reproaching us with our happiness' and then 'regard as impious the natural joy of [our] prosperity' In his rejoinder Smith argued that for every...

...one man who suffers pain or misery, you will find twenty in prosperity and joy, or at least in tolerable circumstances. No reason, surely, can be assigned why we should rather weep with the one than rejoice with the twenty. This artificial commiseration... is not only absurd, but seems altogether unattainable...⁵¹

Hume also took umbrage over luxury's debate. As he stated in *Of Refinement in the Arts*, luxury may be 'innocent' or 'vicious' but in no way could it be 'exactly fixed, more than in any other moral subjects.' Like Smith, Hume also levied a scathing attack against 'moralists' and their positions on luxury. 'To imagine, that the gratifying of any sense, or the indulging of any delicacy in meat, drink, or apparel, is of itself a vice, can never enter into a head, that is not disordered by the frenzies of enthusiasm.'⁵²

And here is our inductive window into the anti-Byng protests from below. Luxury's debate, as advocated by moralists and enthusiasts, allowed for a certain sense of moral indignation to exist within plebeian society. For those who claimed that luxury inflicted evils upon the nation, John Byng's arrest and awaited trial provided moralists and enthusiasts ample fodder to shore up such an assertion. Thus, Admiral John Byng, as viewed through the calumnious press, personified the ill effects of the luxury debate.⁵³ The stupefied nature of the country, according the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, was caused entirely by 'Luxury and Indolence,' which kept 'the Great' in 'Party disputes' so as 'not to exert themselves to the utmost,'⁵⁴ an argument that became the very foundation upon which Byng's execution went forward. By way of ballads, priests, and the press, the poor learned of Byng's alleged foppish

⁴⁹ James Raven, 'Defending Conduct and Property: The London press and the luxury debate,' in *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, eds., John Brewer and Susan Staves (London: Routledge, 1995), 301.

⁵⁰ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (London: 1759), 215.

⁵¹ Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 215-17.

⁵² See Hume's 'Of Refinement in the Arts,' and 'Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals' for his views on luxury, morality, and the state. Quotes comes from, *David Hume: Writings on Economics*, edited by Eugene Rotwein, (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), 19.

⁵³ According to Sekora, by mid-century, the British periodical press provided ample verification of a culture steeped in anti-luxury rhetoric woven amidst patriotic appeals. See, John Sekora, *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), 155.

⁵⁴ *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 11 September 1756.

dress and his fine collection of porcelain which then became the target of intense ridicule.⁵⁵ In a cartoon attached to a poem, ‘A Late Epistle to Mr. C-----d’ (figure 6), the admiral is seen holding a ‘Cabin Council’ aboard his flag ship. All the officers are dressed in foppish French attire. The port and starboard walls adorned with fine china, and a bust of Byng is situated above his head labeled ‘Porcelain.’⁵⁶ In an oddly named poem, ‘Admiral B—g’s Answer to his Friends, who had sent an Express to acquaint him of the public Resentment,’ luxury, or more specifically, how one filled with luxuries reacts to ill news: Byng tells his friends that heroes, such as he, ‘Get bribes from abroad, and at home we get flags,’ as for the lowly tars, ‘‘Tis enough for the brave to get glory and rags,’⁵⁷ but the jack tar’s lowly status allows them no monetary rewards: not even for a job poorly done. To Byng’s luxury-filled villainy there was General William Blakeney’s good British thriftiness: ‘He was ever a Contemner [sic] of Wealth,’ explained one pamphlet, ‘but not profuse,’ and generous in dealing with rents.⁵⁸ In the ballad ‘The Block and Yard Arm’ both Byng and Newcastle are charged with luxury’s crimes:

To pay thy Duns off and replenish thy Chest,
To wallow in Lux’ry, and feather thy Nest,
If thy Country is ruined thou thinkst it no matter,
So B--- to *Minorca* and flighted the latter.⁵⁹

That Byng was the son of a peer, a member of Parliament, and somewhat wealthy allowed plebeian imaginations to easily associate luxury (and other associated vices) upon the admiral with apparent ease. The moral indignation wasn’t any matter that appeared ancient or old, but rather more fixated upon religious-based nationalisms and xenophobic ends.⁶⁰ Still, from the point of view of the starving poor, if the scarcity of food was manufactured as was often alleged, then it’s because of men who possessed a complete lack of morals: and herein John Byng was resolutely joined up with engrossers, regrators, millers, bakers, jobbers, and the like: the two were one in the same.

⁵⁵ On foppish dress see, Conway, ‘War and National Identity,’ 885; Thomas Wright, *Caricature History of the Georges*, 2nd ed., (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1968), 194; for porcelain see the print ‘A Late Epistle to Mr. C-----d,’ 1756, © Trustees of the British Museum, no. 3358.

⁵⁶ It was then alleged that Byng collected Wedgwood and other fine pieces of porcelain from throughout the empire.

⁵⁷ ‘Admiral B—g’s Answer to his Friends, who had sent an Express to acquaint him of the public Resentment,’ as found in *A Rueful Story*, 11.

⁵⁸ *Memoirs of the Life and particular Actions, of the brave Man, General Blakeney* (London: 1756), 11.

⁵⁹ ‘The Block and Yard Arm,’ (London: 1756)

⁶⁰ For a sense of England’s religious nationalism see Leah Greenfeld’s chapter ‘God’s First Born: England,’ in *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

Thus, the uncloaked and scathing references made by Smith and Hume toward moralists and enthusiasts added economic reasoning to a topic once wholly addressed by religious backers. The moral indignation against luxury certainly tied into (if I could borrow from Dr. Brown) the manners and the principles of the whole. Morality was that maxim embedded within religion. But Dr. John Brown, also, addressed luxury along economic lines. Manners and morality, akin to husbandry (or œconomics), were something worth cultivating, something to employ so as to keep the national house in order. The rise of a new economy based on luxury, trade, and excess consumerism may have nerved some in religious circles. But all the wealth brought about by increased trade could never buy the country military success if something as foundational as manners and principles were not seen as something worthy of some sort of national management. Brown deftly pointed to ‘at present in this Nation a Mass of Wealth at least twelve Times more than the publick Debt.’⁶¹ In rhetoric worthy of Hume, Petty, or Smith; Brown then asked but ‘what can Trade or Wealth do, towards making a Nation victorious?’ High taxes upon the wealthy may provide ‘Provisions, Arms, Ammunition’ and the like, had a minister ‘but the *Will*,’ but for Brown ‘the capital Question still remains, not, ‘who shall pay,’ (for armies and navies) but ‘who shall fight?’ And thus, from this view, ‘that without the internal Strength which Manners and Principles produce, the most exorbitant Trade and Wealth can never be the Foundation of a successful War; or give us any rational Prospect, wither of *Victory* or *Self-Defence*.’⁶² Thus, once again, both domestic economics and international concerns were combined within moralistic reasoning. Brown’s book was the capstone upon a few decade’s worth of attempts by religious contemporaries who endeavored to define a ‘uniform sanctity of manners,’ whereupon Christian doctrine was at the ‘centre of all virtue, and all moral truths,’⁶³ which was as much about the obligations of the state toward its own poor as it was obligations of the state in the field of international competition.⁶⁴ Indeed, Sekora’s work points to this very transition in thinking and argues that John Brown led the way.⁶⁵

The war itself was challenged along these moral lines. One pamphlet raised the specter of Gustavus Adolphus, the Swedish king who was credited with turning the tide of the Thirty Years’ War in favor of those who fought in defense of Protestant ideology. Its anonymous author contrasted the moral righteousness of that war to the one just beginning

⁶¹ Brown, *An Estimate of the Manners*, 196.

⁶² Brown, *An Estimate of the Manners*, 196-202.

⁶³ *Select Pieces on Commerce, Natural Philosophy, Morality, Antiquities, History, &c.* (London: 1754), 252-3.

⁶⁴ Indeed, protests organized by religious clerics of *any* denomination are also largely missing from Thompson’s insistence upon the plebeian/patrician model. See King, ‘Edward Thompson’s Contribution,’ 223.

⁶⁵ Sekora, 93.

with France. 'I shall be well supported in advancing, that the Great Object of the present War is the defence of our Colonies and other British Possessions,' it stated. Meanwhile the pamphlet bemoaned that 'the present State of our Finances, all the Treasure employed on the *Continent*,' which then 'will be alienated from the Great and Necessary Object of the War.'⁶⁶ In other words, the addition of the Hanoverian monarch, George II, complicated the moral perceptions of the Seven Years' War's justness. Quite like his father, George II necessarily elicited condemnations by the turnip-bearing crowds which condemned him for no other reason than his non-English pedigree.⁶⁷

But the dig runs deeper: a passionate fear that trade and wealth, commerce and banking proceeded hither and thither without due deference to moral obligations. Here, then, Tory paternalists associated alongside plebeian demands for a return to economic orders rather than a perceived headlong rush into economic disorders. As E. P. Thompson suggests, the 1750s represented 'a more active, consenting alliance' between the provincial gentry and the crowd where both demanded a return to an older set of economic, social, and political reciprocities.⁶⁸ Further, that it was here in the 1750s where paternal obligations most assuredly clashed with the 'mercantilist imperative to maximize the export of grain.'⁶⁹ Thus, paternal relations, rather than political obligations, may have dictated the Byng protests outside of London. The rural gentry, in order to promote stability, may have donated funds for the dressing of effigies, or even participated in the Byng protests out of self-interest, which harkens back to Thompson's observation that the gentry were often the prisoners of the people.⁷⁰ In this scenario, then, with Byng's name being calumniously spread by balladeers, sermonizers, and an unrelenting press; the admiral may have become akin to a Boxing Day celebration: the servants and lower ranks knocking at a gentleman's door requesting 'gifts' for the denunciation of an admiral, for the admonition of an elite, for the satisfaction of returning some semblance of sense during a time when engrossers, regrators, and jobbers

⁶⁶ George II's Hanoverian lineage seemed to allow the press to take liberties with charging the king as the cause of unnecessary continental expenses. See, *Considerations on the Addresses Lately Presented to His Majesty* (1756), 58.

⁶⁷ Andrew Thompson claims the Georges were haunted by contemporaneous charges of exacting 'Hanoverian priorities' throughout their entire reigns by both popular and Parliamentarian critics. See Andrew C. Thompson, *George II: King and Elector* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 93-4, and 118.

⁶⁸ E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Commons*, 79.

⁶⁹ E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Commons*, 269.

⁷⁰ Rogers provides ample proof of this, 'Some of the anti-Byng demonstrations were certainly orchestrated from above. At Southampton it was reported that the effigy-hanging had been sponsored by 'Persons of the best rank'. At Stokesly in the North Riding of Yorkshire, the anti-Byng skimmington was organized by a club of local gentlemen; in North Shields by master mariners.' Rogers, *Crowds, Culture, and Politics*, 61.

stole from the poor to give to the rich.⁷¹ It is telling that Robin Hood emerged in chapbook form during these days of dearth. Robin Hood (part myth, part real) usually appeared in folklore through song, verse, and ballad and had done so for over five centuries. But in 1757, *The Whole Life and Merry Exploits of Bold Robin Hood, Earl of Huntingdon*, was printed in London. Unsurprisingly, the story of Robin Hood was updated to mirror the times: for not only was the semi-mythic hero endowed ‘with a great deal of Love and Charity to the Poor,’ but was ‘as great an Enemy to the Misers and Engrossers of Corn.’⁷² In *The Whole Life* Robin Hood was at Wantage, a ‘great Market of Corn,’ where, at an inn, he came to know ‘a great Engrosser of the Corn, and who had bought as much Corn in the Market as cost him 80 Marks...’⁷³ Robin claims that the corn is ‘far beyond any he had seen that day’⁷⁴ and paid the engrosser 100 marks on the spot. But Robin knew ‘which Way his Corn Merchant went’ and ‘was soon at his Heels...’⁷⁵ The engrosser ‘trembling like an Aspin-Leaf’ queries Robin Hood ‘whether he thought it Justice to take from him his Goods and Money too?’⁷⁶ The supposed Earl of Huntingdon replies:

...can you assume the Impudence to talk of Justice, when there’s none in the World acts more Injustice than an Engrosser of Corn? Sirrah, there’s no Vermin in the Land like you, who slanders both Heaven and Earth with pretended Dearth, when there’s no Scarcity at all. So talk no more of your Justice and Honesty, but immediately deliver your Money, or I shall crack your Crown for you. Hereupon he delivered him a Bag, in which *Robin* found his own Money, and as much more of it; so away he went with a great deal of Satisfaction.⁷⁷

That chapbooks often targeted readers of lesser means, the messaging of the dearth of 1756-7 through the venerable myth surrounding Robin Hood, reinforced the paternal patchwork between the lower ranks and their perceived lords in the English countryside. As James Raven aptly points out, expectations of ‘anti-trade prejudice’ existed in nearly all genres of literature throughout the eighteenth-century, even in tracts where merchants and commerce

⁷¹ It may have worked the other way, local gentry supplying Byng’s name and effigy during the food crisis to act as a sort of safety valve to release tensions. Helpful in this matter is Frank O’Gorman’s essay ‘The Paine Burnings of 1792-1793,’ *Past & Present*, no. 193 (November 2006), 111-55.

⁷² *The Whole Life and Merry Exploits of Bold Robin Hood, Earl of Huntingdon* (London: Henry Woodgate, 1757), 34.

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ *The Whole Life and Merry Exploits of Bold Robin Hood*, 34-5.

were argued to be beneficial for the greater good of all.⁷⁸ It must have been easy and quick then, as the evidence suggests, for provincial magistrates to rely upon acts passed under Edward VI against ‘Forestallers, Regraters, and Engrossers’⁷⁹ so as to restore order. Or why *Schofield’s Middlewich Journal* printed letters which often pointed to some of the ‘Methods taken to prevent Distress of the Poor in Queen Elizabeth’s Time.’⁸⁰ Clearly, the use of a hearkened past, whether mythical or legal, found usage in attempting to shut down the tumults associated with the dearth.

The main thrust of my argument, thus far, is to relate how the mid-eighteenth-century historical actors linked dearth and Byng within a coherent whole. The primary evidence suggests that morality loomed as the greatest common denominator in expressing discontent about both the food and the Minorca crises. And because food and Byng coexisted within this singular and most national moral framework, both the food riots and the Byng protests became concurrently amplified, perhaps larger and more intense than what would have been produced had any of these crises occurred separately or at very different times. Additionally, the similitude of moral outrage aimed at both the dearth and the loss of Minorca magnified numerous other issues of the day, adding to a chaotic sense of national and moral degeneracy.⁸¹ And last, while many scholars have picked up on the discontent of 1756-7 (quoting Dr. John Brown’s *An Estimate of Manners* comes to mind), connecting the two crises: the food shortage on the one hand and the loss of Minorca on the other remains strangely elusive and steadfastly detached. But Byng and dearth did cohabitate the same space and time continuum. If we run this fact through Thompson’s paternalistic model, then those plebeian expressions against the admiral become easier to comprehend.

⁷⁸ James Raven, *Judging New Wealth*, 89.

⁷⁹ *Public Advertiser*, 30 Nov 1756

⁸⁰ *Schofield’s Middlewich Journal or Cheshire Advertiser*, 28 December 1756 to 4 January 1757.

⁸¹ See fn. 3, page 56.

By the 1750s, the commodification of corn clearly and already existed as a national product well before it was a regional one. Additionally, an argument can be made that through the use (or abuse) of the bounty system, corn was certainly a state commodity prioritized for international markets ahead of local or regional concerns.⁸² As the eighteenth century evolved, it was becoming increasingly difficult for this paternalistic tandem of agrarian poor and country gentlemen to defend their traditional and reciprocal arrangements. Industrial centers began to invade many remote and rural landscapes. In doing so, they altered the customary transactions based upon ancient economic traditions. Moreover, these newer centers of industry were nearly or entirely dependent upon imported corns for sustenance and, therefore, particularly acute to disruptions. In fact, this is where the food riots generally occurred. It was not the rural peasantry that rioted for food: it was the wage earner who could no longer afford the agricultural commodities which were proven scarce in 1756-7. And in the mind's eye of the rural poor, custom still ranked above the new economic stratagems of supply and demand. Both prices and wages were hawkishly watched by those from below to maintain their defined standards of basic human needs.⁸³ When these were threatened, answers were sought.

Byng's name deserves the association with dearth, and not just because of time and space. Byng represented the Empire, and for the moment – those in political and Parliamentary power allowed pieces of that empire to either be threatened or to slip away entirely.⁸⁴ Without a convincing navy to protect Mediterranean interests and trade, Minorca quickly fell into French hands. Trade from the Levant and Barbary coasts crawled to a near halt. In 1750, the *Journals of the Board of Trade and Plantations* revealed that Britain's

⁸² E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy,' 93.

⁸³ Robert W. Malcolmson, 'Workers' Combinations in Eighteenth-Century England,' in *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism*, (London: Humanities Press, 1984), 170.

⁸⁴ Washington's loss at Fort Necessity (1754), Braddock's death and defeat in Pennsylvania (1755), Boscowen's failed attempt to halt French reinforcement to Canada (1755), the loss at Fort Oswego (1756), coupled with the king's failed and ongoing attempts at accruing continental allies had already sullied and soured the national mood.

merchant traders sent to Minorca from the Barbary coasts, ‘corn, bees wax, coral, hides, etc., and employed twenty or thirty ships from 100 to 150 tons burthen annually in the corn trade.’⁸⁵ Minorca’s loss damaged the domestic economy which rapidly shed jobs: 10,000 tanners in Cornwall went idle, worsted workers in East Anglia suffered; Exeter and Devizes laid off workers since Spanish wool and dyes were inputs toward their manufacturing centers.⁸⁶ The promises based of international trade were failing. The press targeted Byng with a bevy of calumny. With jobs on hold or disappearing, with orders halted as the war gained traction, with food stuffs diverted to military succours, or seized by hungry rioters, the moral indignations at dearth’s alleged artificiality coupled to John Byng’s alleged bungling of Minorca’s defense gave rise, in reinforcing tandem, the protests and riots that swept across the British landscapes.⁸⁷

IV. A Contextual Analysis of the Byng Protests

Ye brave British sailors, true sons of the main,
 Who scorn to submit to the insults of Spain,
 Leave to landsmen their politick schemes and their talk,
 And enter on board the *Lord Anson* and *Hawke*.⁸⁸

On 1 July 1756, a privateer was launched in Liverpool.⁸⁹ The brigantine of 150 tons carried ‘16 carriage guns (four, six, and nine pounders), 24 swivels, and 100 men...’⁹⁰ The merchants of Liverpool paid for the vessel and the builder was George Campbell, a member of the city’s common council. Campbell named the ship the *Anson*. In south England, Exeter merchants also launched a privateer they called the *Hawke*, the very name of the commander sent to the Mediterranean to replace Admiral Byng. One month later, back in Liverpool, Campbell launched another privateer, this one dubbed the *Brave Blakeney*. In the context of

⁸⁵ ‘Journal, October 1750: Volume 58,’ *Journals of the Board of Trade and Plantations, vol. 9: January 1750 - December 1753* (1932), 94-109. [http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=81836&strquery=Minorca corn Date](http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=81836&strquery=Minorca+corn+Date) [accessed: 11 August 2009].

⁸⁶ Rogers, *Crowds, Culture, and Politics in Georgian Britain*, 61-2.

⁸⁷ I use British, rather than English, as protest occurred in England, Wales, Ireland and Boston, Massachusetts.

⁸⁸ Firth, 225-6.

⁸⁹ The story of the Liverpool and Exeter privateers appear in the first chapter in the section concerning ballads. In this chapter, we use the same story to deliver its political nature and significance.

⁹⁰ Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers*, 87.

the emerging Byng affair, the naming of these privateers appears outright political. The above ballad, meant for the ears of the lower ranks, carried more than a mere invitation for tavern goers to enlist, for its lyrical content moved beyond that of a typical musical summons.⁹¹ ‘Leave to landsmen their Politick schemes’ coupled with the reference to ‘cowards,’ at the least, brought to the fore a new set of anxieties attached to a growing war that, in its earliest throes, was going rather badly. But the launching of the *Anson*, *Hawke*, and *Brave Blakeney* privateers can be interpreted other ways: namely, that the Byng’s name ran through a national ‘circuit’⁹² of political constituencies slightly ahead or in conjunction of a calumnious press. The naming of these private warships can thus be attributed to a political protest, of sorts, conducted by men of means loyal to the Pelhamite Whig cause. In either case, whether anxiety or politics (or both) fixed these particular names upon these newly launched privateers, they present to historians a considerable problem in how to approach the geographically wide and socially diverse protests that did break out regarding the libel levied against Admiral John Byng. Timing, factionalism, and sloppy reporting courtesy of an anonymous and hearsay-riddled press present additional trouble when attempting to assess not only the antics, size, or symbolic nature of these protests: but the very validity of their existence. Additionally, historiography concerning bouts of Byng street theatre appears concentrated upon a data set of primary materials whose legitimacy, in my estimation, has yet to undergo a serious vetting process. All of which leads me to conclude that comparative to the food riots, the Byng protests were fewer in number, less intense, of shorter duration and, most important, the origin of which decidedly resides not from the lower ranks of British society.

In an essay on ‘History and Anthropology,’ Thompson advised historians to follow the impulse to turn toward anthropology. The pay off, according to Thompson, was to see ‘old problems in ways’ that placed an ‘emphasis upon norms or value systems and upon rituals, in attention to expressive functions of forms of riot and disturbance.’⁹³ Already cemented in looking at the Byng affair through cultural and contextual history, I chose to follow Thompson’s advice with a turn toward anthropology. Current historiography on the

⁹¹ A Bristol newspaper later carried an advertisement about the ‘Successful Anson Privateer,’ which looked for ‘Gentlemen Sailors, Landmen, and Others,’ to enlist. The same advertisement announced that ‘Two French Horns, a Drummer, and Trumpeter’ will be on hand along with the ‘proper Encouragement.’ *Bristol Weekly Intelligencer*, 10 December 1757.

⁹² Here, Barrow quotes Horace Walpole. See, John Barrow, *The Life of George Lord Anson, Admiral of the Fleet; Vice-Admiral of Great Britain; and First Lord Commissioner of the Admiralty, Previous to, and During, the Seven-Years’ War* (London: 1839), 254-5.

⁹³ E. P. Thompson, *Persons & Polemics* (London: Merlin Press, 1994), 203.

Byng affair still remains riddled with inconsistencies. The larger historical blemishes belong to the study of the protests against the admiral. A cursory reading of secondary materials reveals historical practices that have relied mostly upon false sets of empiricisms: or an overreliance on preexisting ideas and notions of how these protests panned out. These accounts often times raise more questions than the number of riots or disturbances that occurred in 1756-7 themselves, and thus my turn toward seeing old problems in new ways.

This is not meant to assign fault or blame upon any school of history, or indeed, any solitary historian. The results of many of these uneven secondary accounts are likely due to the nature of the primary sources. As described in a previous chapter, the mid-eighteenth-century newspaper operated within orality's grip, filled with anonymity, protean prose, hearsay and gossip: all the while newspapers operated within a highly competitive environment where the controversy surrounding Byng merged with sales and the added touch of factional patronage. Thus, descriptions of London-based anti-Byng riots come to us here in the twenty-first century through heavily filtered eighteenth-century communicative realities. Table 1 lists the newspaper accounts used by Nicholas Rogers, Kathleen Wilson, and M. John Cardwell describing the nature and tenor of the Byng riots.⁹⁴ One must, however, punch through the surface of these primary sources and acquire their multi-contexts through heuristic approaches. Such an immersion with the addition of inference can only add to the historical discourse surrounding the Byng affair. I have spent a significant amount of energy and time in tying Byng and the dearth together with the common vice of luxury as that chief unifier. Byng and food were argued upon similar moralistic grounds in defense of older systems of expected reciprocities and norms. But in this section, I am to now pull away from that unification and to focus solely on expressions against John Byng. Yet, it was extremely necessary to have combined the wrangling over food with the protests against Byng, to better understand anti-Byng sentiment in a fuller context.

The first account of a riot against Byng came from far away Yorkshire where 'a certain Admiral has already been hanged and burned in almost every Market Town in that County.'⁹⁵ London's daily, the *Public Advertiser*, and a provincial paper, the *Worcester Journal*, both printed this account word for word: the former on the 30th of June, and the latter the very next day the 1st of July. Both papers indicated that news of these riots came from 'a letter.' The devil is in the timing, and for this I need to go back to when the news of

⁹⁴ Nicholas Rogers, *Crowds, Culture, and Politics*; Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of The People*; and M. John Cardwell, *Art and Arms*.

⁹⁵ *Public Advertiser*, 30 June 1756; and *Berrow's Worcester Journal* 1 July 1756.

Minorca's invasion first appeared, or at least became widely known. News that the French had landed on Minorca reached London in early May. William Pitt excoriated the ministry over the French invasion in the House of Commons on the 7th of May, and portions of his speech were distributed to the press. The news of the Minorca invasion, however, came on the heels of Byng's departure, the 7th of April, setting up an immediate application of the ought versus the is, or Hume's law.⁹⁶ Prior to the news of the French landing so many, there was a public assumption that Byng's fleet 'ought' to save the day. But with 15,000 of the Gallic enemy's troops on the island, this presumed 'ought' faced a new and distinctive 'is.' Hope of a timely success was intruded upon by a glowered reality. According to Wilson, this expectation versus reality conundrum can be seen in the way Byng's effigy was later treated, 'symbolically defiled' so as to further indict the 'ruling councils' that sent him.⁹⁷ In other words, the gap, or as Wilson put it, the 'public alienation'⁹⁸ between the public's expectations and the actions of the state exposed the numerous troubles that the Newcastle/Fox ministry were to face over Minorca's loss. But if this were the case, when news that the French landed 15,000 troops hit the newspapers in early May, protests against the ministry should have begun in earnest. They did not. And though William Beckford's paper, the *Monitor*, was particularly acute in its attacks of a ministry 'so ignorant, as to be insensible in what the chief strength of this nation lies... or so negligent, as to delay the necessary orders for annoying the enemy, and securing our own dominion...'⁹⁹ the latter a direct reference to the delayed departure of Admiral John Byng's fleet: still no protests. *Read's Weekly Journal*, in late May, added that the initial Minorca landing wave of 14,000 French were joined 'by a second which consisted of 3,000 more...'¹⁰⁰ And yet, no out of door expressions of discontent in London against the government.¹⁰¹ Even when the *London Gazette* announced that Byng and Fowke were to be recalled, which occurred on the 6th of June, no indications of Byng protests were mentioned by any London newspaper.¹⁰² This absence of street theatre from early May

⁹⁶ Hume wrote of the 'ought' versus 'is' in *A Treaties of Human Nature* (1739).

⁹⁷ Wilson, *Sense of the People*, 180.

⁹⁸ Wilson, *Sense of the People*, 181.

⁹⁹ *Monitor or British Freeholder*, 15 May 1756

¹⁰⁰ *Read's Weekly Journal*, 22 May 1756

¹⁰¹ Parliament was in session.

¹⁰² Pope, 145. See also the *Whitehall Evening Post* which soured the festive mood of a previously rumored Byng victory when it reported that the Admiralty received an express confirming an engagement between Byng and the French fleet. Ominously, and with no account of what transpired in the battle, the London paper then noted, 'for Truth that Admiral Hawke will set out in a few Days to take on him the Command of a Fleet in the Mediterranean.' What's interesting about this publication is in its timing. Historians have noted that the arrival of Galissonière's dispatch via a Spanish Diplomat landed at the hands of Lord Anson at the Admiralty Office on 3 June. Hawke's orders were decided on the 4th at a committee meeting and a letter with orders sent to Hawke on the 5th by the Duke of Newcastle. From this one can infer that communications between the Admiralty Office

to late June, nearly two months time when news of the French taking nearly the whole of the Mediterranean possession of Minorca had become widely known (at least by Londoners), indicated that the gap between public expectations and government actions concerning Minorca was not so wide as to spur outbreaks of civil unrest, or even mild forms of mock theatre in the streets. But yet, only days after the government newspaper printed an abridged dispatch from Admiral Byng, the 26th of June, does a report surface that some market towns in Yorkshire burned effigies and hung them. John Barrow, in 1839, indicated that the press actions of the government against Byng coexisted with an alert sent by the ministry to all ‘the little attorneys on the circuit’ who then eagerly ‘contributed to blow up the flame against the admiral...’¹⁰³ Cardwell agrees: the ministry had other means in which to notify the Channel ports to keep an eye out for Byng other than advertising his intended arrest in the *London Gazette*, which in and of itself was not printed until the end of July.¹⁰⁴

But it is here that Barrow’s observation and Cardwell’s assessment need expanding, for a circuit of attorneys was not the only set of nationalized connections in existence in the mid-eighteenth century. In fact, one could consider the eighteenth century as the rise and epitome of communicative connectivity – a sort of communications revolution. The history of this is rich: from Colley to Warhman, Thompson to Rogers, numerous historians have unearthed an astounding number and breadth of networks that transcended geographic barriers into an active and quite national ‘associational culture.’¹⁰⁵ There were credit networks,¹⁰⁶ trade networks,¹⁰⁷ political networks,¹⁰⁸ religious networks,¹⁰⁹ radicalized

and some London newspapers were quite open. See *Whitehall Evening Post*, 3 June 1756. Cardwell also alludes to timing claiming that ‘ministerial writers may have been active much earlier, and coordinated their campaign’ with leading newspapers. See Cardwell, 50-1.

¹⁰³ Barrow quoted Horace Walpole. Barrow, *The Life of George Lord Anson*, 254-5.

¹⁰⁴ 24 July 1756, to be precise. See, Cardwell, 58.

¹⁰⁵ Dror Wahrman, ‘National Society, communal culture: an argument about the recent historiography or eighteenth-century Britain,’ *Social History*, vol. 17, no. 1 (January 1992), 55.

¹⁰⁶ Wahrman, ‘National Society,’ 60; Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*.

¹⁰⁷ According to Shammass, Yorkshire’s woolen industry created a network of ‘small local country shops’ for distribution purposes; see Carole Shammass, ‘The Decline of Textile Prices in England and British America Prior to Industrialization,’ *The Economic History Review*, New Series, vol. 47, no. 3 (August 1994), 502; Wilson points to wine and tobacco merchants who created extensive national networks to fight Walpole’s 1733 Excise Act, see Kathleen Wilson, ‘Empire, Trade, and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian Britain: The Case of Admiral Vernon,’ *Past & Present*, no 121 (November 1988), 98; Edward Thompson admits to growing and complex corn trading network in the eighteenth century, see E. P. Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy,’ 93; Linebaugh aptly demonstrates the trade networks of watchmaking where, to bypass urban guilds, the putting out system created over 120 rural outlays synchronous with parts-making. See Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 226-8; for empire-wide trading networks (Bristol to the Chesapeake comes to mind), see Natasha Glaisyer, ‘Networking: Trade and Exchange in the Eighteenth-Century British Empire,’ *The Historical Journal*, vol. 47, no. 2 (2004), 451-476.

¹⁰⁸ Colley gives us some regional political associations, mostly along Tory lines: the Charter Club in Colchester, the Half-Moon Club in Cheapside, the Bean Club in Birmingham, the Independent Electors Society in Coventry

networks,¹¹⁰ secret society networks,¹¹¹ and of course, market or neighborhood networks that spread of gossip by way of the rumor mill.¹¹² There, too, were networks of patronage and dependence within most of the above named associations, clubs, and gatherings. And who can refute that an individual may belong to more than just one of these networks, perhaps even dozens? The point being, that Byng's name ran hot through these mid-eighteenth-century nationalized communication networks, and despite the calumny against his name there is little evidence of effigy hangings or other protest against the admiral much anywhere. For a full month, from 26 June to 26 July, the negative and overbearing press accounts against the admiral found print in nearly every newspaper throughout the nation. Yet, aside from the alleged riots in Yorkshire, no other major anti-Byng protest occurred save the one at Wrotham Park in High Barnet (Byng's unfinished home: and here, too, the evidence of this said occurrence is newspaper-based, scant, and the timing most specious), and the outbreak of violence in Birmingham, hardly a port town, and near the origin of the food riots (Dudley) that would start on the 16th of August.¹¹³ Not until after the *Gazette* advertises for Byng's arrest (24 July) and then the arrival of Byng in Portsmouth (26 July), does the number and

and also in Westminster, the Steadfast Society in Bristol: see, Linda Colley, 'Eighteenth-Century English Radicalism before Wilkes,' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth series, vol. 31 (1981), 7-8. On the Whig ascendancy and an example of their organizational networks see, Ophelia Field, *The Kit-Cat Club: Friends Who Imagined a Nation* (London: Harper Press, 2008); on state communication networks see John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (Harvard University Press, 1988), chapter 8.

¹⁰⁹ Rivers points to numerous religious associations in Britain by the mid-eighteenth century, some that had been around since the previous century, and new religious networks continued to form (Society for Promoting Religious Knowledge Among the Poor in 1750, for example), see Isabel Rivers, 'The First Evangelical Tract Society,' 5. On Methodism, populism, and religious circuitry see Douglas Hay and Nicholas Rogers, *Eighteenth Century English Society*, 168-72; Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers*, 34, 42-3, 88-91.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, the Calves-Head Club of the 1730s: Jason M. Kelly, 'Riots, Revelries, and Rumor: Libertinism and Masculine Association in Enlightenment London,' *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 45, no. 4 (2006), 766; Even workers began creating their own associational culture, see Malcolmson, 'Workers' Combinations in Eighteenth Century England,' 169-178.

¹¹¹ The Society of Dilettanti, and the Medmenham Monks, for example: see Jason M. Kelly, 'Riots, Revelries, and Rumor.'

¹¹² Jason M. Kelly, 'Riots, Revelries.' According to O'Gorman, local 'Loyal Associations' sprang up during the Seven Years' War helping to spread news or rumor. See Frank O'Gorman, 'The Paine Burnings,' 144.

¹¹³ Both riots against Byng were reported from the same issue of Berrow's *Worcester Journal* which seemed to take delight in reporting upon riots and protests throughout the country. See, Berrow's *Worcester Journal*, 8 July 1756. For the beginning date on food riots, 16 August 1756, see Jeremy N. Caple, 'The Geography of Food Riots 1585-1847, Case 3.5, 1756-7' in *An Atlas of Rural Protest in Britain: 1548-1900*, Andrew Charlesworth, ed., (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 86-88, 111. Another example of curious coincidences: both the Byng (1756) and Paine burnings (1792) involved newspaper reports that listed but a smattering of effigy burnings. After about a month, then and only then, did these effigy reports turn into a cavalcade of sightings. More important, and in both instances, the trickle of initial reports about the effigy burnings were brief, anonymous, and sketchy. Only later do effigy reports become detailed within the pages of the press. Further, O'Gorman states that in the case of Paine, the delay from a paucity of burnings to a 'flood' of reports was so that 'Loyalty Associations' throughout the nation could coordinate their activities. See O'Gorman, 'The Paine Burnings,' 119 and 122-3. Did a similar instance of coordination occur prior to and during the Byng burnings thirty-six years earlier?

intensity of anti-Byng Protest begin anew. News of John Byng's arrest and imprisonment, by the *London Gazette* (27 July), not only implicated guilt against the admiral before the public, but according to Cardwell, was part of the government's plan to 'incite opinion against Byng.'¹¹⁴ It worked, for from this date on the number of Byng protests rose significantly. But this key point needs emphasizing: the timing of these initial protests ran parallel with an attempt to affix the blame for Minorca's loss upon Admiral John Byng from those up above.

The pamphlet press alerted readers to this 'Sort of political *Legerdemain*,' stressing how 'ministerial *Hocus-Pocus* has in former Days been played off' so as to divert the 'public attention...'¹¹⁵ Admiral Byng was to be turned from a 'real to an ideal,' the usual '*State-Trick*, for those in Power, to devote some Sacrifice to the popular Resentment...'¹¹⁶ Newspapers, too, were filled with direct or indirect references to those in positions of authority who stirred up the masses in an attempt to implicate Byng. One provincial paper even named names:

A few Days ago several People were assembled in Whitechapel Road, burning Admiral Byng in Effigy, when the Barking Stage Coach coming by, the Coach-Wheel threw down and ran over five Persons; among whom Mr. Glover, belonging to the Victualling Office, had his Thigh broke, and a Woman her Arm; and the others were very much bruised.¹¹⁷

Glover from the Victualling Office was also joined by clerks from the Admiralty Office who distributed money and materials for the making of Byng effigies.¹¹⁸ Calder adds that 'Newcastle and his colleagues' struck at Byng's reputation by hiring agents 'to blacken his name in the alehouses and hired mobs to whip up fury.'¹¹⁹ A contemporaneous engraving entitled 'A Court Conversation' (Figure 7) reinforced the notion that much of the mob violence in London was bought and paid for by members of the Newcastle regime.¹²⁰ At front, Henry Fox (in the form of a Fox) points to the mob outside of the Greenwich hospital with the hapless Byng looking on from his cell in the upper right. The mob burns a well-dressed effigy of the admiral while drinking liberally: a female figure serves herself from a

¹¹⁴ Cardwell, 58.

¹¹⁵ *A Letter to a Member of Parliament*, 1.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, 23 September 1756.

¹¹⁸ Wilson, 181.

¹¹⁹ Angus Calder, *Revolutionary Empire: The Rise of the English-Speaking Empires from the Fifteenth Century to the 1780s* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1981), 584.

¹²⁰ Frederick George Stephens, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*. Vol. 3, Part 2, 1751-1760 (London: British Museum, 1978), no. 3492.

cask – all suggesting that those from above paid for what those from below were enjoying/performing. Yet the Goose, or Lord Anson, reminds Fox that ‘*Not Byng had been burnt – if the truth had been known.*’ Anson holds and points to a paper labeled ‘London Gazette’ with instructions that appear to say ‘Publish Letter,’ a reference to Byng’s dispatch from the battle that was then edited by the admiralty.¹²¹ The broken anchor spills the contents of a box – coins, ink and quill – a jab at the Admiralty Office for paying hack writers to provide calumny against Byng. The idea that Anson directed the fury against Byng also appears in Thomas Wright’s book *Caricature History of the Georges*, where Wright informs us that Anson sent ‘artful emissaries’ directly from the ‘drawing room at St. James’s to the mob at Charing-Cross...’¹²² Some pamphlets alleged that Byng’s fate had already been determined prior to the battle.

...it was thought convenient to implant in the Minds of the People, a Suspicion of his Cowardice, before it could possibly be known, *whether he would fight*; so it was deemed equally expedient, to supercede him, before it could be fairly known, *whether he had fought...*¹²³

George ‘Bubb’ Dodington indicated as much in his diary where, on the 17th of May (three days prior to the Battle of Minorca), he tells Henry Fox that a temperamental Newcastle may not be so unless he ‘had anyone to make a scapegoat.’¹²⁴ The then navy treasury secretary indicated that Fox appeared mortified thinking he was to be that scapegoat. ‘I told him, as the truth was, that I had not *him*, in any degree, so much as in my contemplation...’¹²⁵ Dudley Pope’s acerbic *At Twelve Mr. Byng was Shot* also indicated that the Admiralty Office stood at the vanguard of anti-Byng sentiment. To gain positive public opinion over Minorca’s loss, the office took to releasing unpublished letters from some of the officers involved in the Battle of Minorca. Thus, Captain James Young’s letter was copied and distributed to the ‘fashionable drawing-rooms and the more exclusive coffee-houses’ in London.¹²⁶ It was Young’s ship, the *Intrepid* that lost its main mast and caused the bottleneck delaying Byng’s division to engage the French fleet. Young’s letter complained that Byng would not send assistance to him and that two other captains came to his rescue positioning their ships between the crippled *Intrepid* and the enemy, despite Byng’s insistence to reform the line.

¹²¹ Cardwell claims that Henry Fox edited the dispatch. See Cardwell, 50.

¹²² Thomas Wright, *Caricature History of the Georges*, 190-1.

¹²³ *A Letter to a Member of Parliament in the Country*, 10.

¹²⁴ *The Diary of the Late George Bubb Dodington*, 341-2.

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ Pope, 159-60.

Dudley Pope called the letter ‘smug’ and that the date of the letter shows that it was written ‘after the news of Byng’s recall reached Gibraltar, and it seems that Young wanted to strike while his alibi was hot.’¹²⁷

If the ministry had been shown to be implicated in the attack against John Byng, then the court should be as well. In an exchange of letters between Lord Hardwicke and his hired hack David Mallet, the name of John Cateret, the Duke of Granville, came up. His position as Lord President of the Council certainly implied an active participation by the court of George II in the affairs of the press and therefore the excoriation of Admiral John Byng. ‘I am very glad that my Lord President (then whom no one is a better Judge) has had the perusal’ of the pamphlets, wrote Hardwick to Mallet, yet ‘You don’t point out to me the too [sic] Passages to which His Lordship seems to have some Objection.’¹²⁸ As Walpole detailed in his *Memoirs of King George II*, ‘the impression against Mr. Byng was no sooner taken, than every art and incident that could inflate it, were industriously used and adopted.’¹²⁹ Walpole, in the same paragraph, indicated an irate and seemingly passionate king who threw Byng’s first dispatch from his arrival in Gibraltar to the ground stating, ‘This man will not fight!’¹³⁰ It is not, therefore, too far to infer that George II used his weight in the anti-Byng campaign as well. David Ramsay, the early American historian, offered that even the king was ‘said to have taken part in the cruel persecution of this unhappy man [Byng].’¹³¹ Additionally, Admiralty documents dated 5 April 1756, only a day or two prior to Byng’s departure for the Mediterranean, show twelve transports headed to ‘Stade in the Elbe’ to pick up foot and horse regiments bearing Hessian and Hanoverian flags.¹³² Perhaps the king’s touchiness bore upon the weight that Byng’s fleet left without any tenders or hospital ships, and short over 700 men: diverting men and materials to pick up Germans to defend Britain was not only an already touchy subject, but clearly diverted men and materials that Byng desperately requested but was ultimately denied.¹³³

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

¹²⁸ ADD MS 35594, f. 254.

¹²⁹ Horace Walpole, *Memoirs of King George II*, volume 2, editor John Brooke (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 157-8.

¹³⁰ Byng complained of conditions at Gibraltar as well as Fowke’s refusal to lend a regiment of marines to reinforce Port Mahon as ordered. *ibid.*

¹³¹ Ramsay, *Military Memoirs of Great Britain*, 21.

¹³² The Navy Office asked the Victualling Office to prepare the necessaries for boarding and transporting Hessians numbering 3,457 men and 204 horses. See ADM C 542, 5 April 1756.

¹³³ On the controversy of using German troops to defend England see, *A Letter to the Right Honourable William Pitt, Esq; Being an Impartial Vindication of the Conduct of the Ministry, from the Commencement of the Present War to this Time* (London: 1756), 6-7; a rise in food prices were also blamed on the presence of foreign troops, see *Whitehall Evening Post*, June 5, 1756 - June 8, 1756; Issue 1606. See also: Thompson, *George II: King and Elector*, 234-6; Cardwell, 27-31; Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years War and the Fate of*

With the initial government impetus, and with Byng's name riding upon the 'circuits' previously mentioned; newspapers gladly filled their pages with tales of effigy burnings against Byng, no more so perhaps than Berrow's *Worcester Journal*. These accounts however were charged, amped, and electrified: we in the twenty-first century must use caution and be ever at the ready to ask of them more than what they delivered in print. Take, for example the *Worcester Journal's* reporting of a local Byng protest held at that city's nearby racecourse next to the River Severn. Entitled, '*Mediterranean Farce*,' the editors described how a sort of reenactment of the Battle of Minorca was to take place: only 'one of the *Proxy* admiral's refus'd to engage.'¹³⁴ The paper indicated that at the 'End of one of the Booths on the Course' hung an effigy of 'an *Uncertain Sea Officer*...'¹³⁵ This last booth resided at the end of the racecourse next to the river where there was an expectation of a reenactment. When no mock battle took place it was rather fortuitous – and at the same time – rather instructional to have an effigy of Byng hanging about so 'a vast Number of People, with Sticks, Stones, &c' could pay their '*due Respects*.'¹³⁶ The scene in the *Worcester Journal* is quite clever, but it also has the appearance of planned manipulations by those in positions of authority. Given the troubles with weavers and colliers in the region, would it be too much for modern historians to assert that the authorities, perhaps even the magistrates, attempted to instruct the populace ahead of any possible upheavals over the calumny associated with Admiral Byng?

In another *Worcester Journal* piece, a ceremony at Wribbenhall, near the town of Bewdley, used a 'triple Discharge of some Cannon' to execute an effigy of the unfortunate admiral.¹³⁷ Given the rancor over the Militia Bill, it was extremely unlikely that both powder and cannon could be had by plebes, politically or financially. Thus, the hands of those from above must be here, too. In early September, in Bristol, 'three gentlemen-dealers' led an effigy of a 'high spirited admiral through most of the streets of the city' after which 'he was hung upon a gallows on St. Philip's Plain ...'¹³⁸ Again, a demonstration of men in authority leading, not lagging, to incite 'riots' against Byng, or at least coach where outrage need be aimed. 'Persons of the best rank,' claimed Boddley's *Bath Journal* distributed 'a great Deal of Money' to the 'Populace' in Southampton who then hung Byng's effigy on a 'Sign-Post,

Empire in British North America, 1754-1766 (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 126-8; Richard Middleton, *The Bells of Victory: The Pitt-Newcastle Ministry and the Conduct of the Seven Years' War, 1757-1762* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 4.

¹³⁴ Berrow's *Worcester Journal*, 5 August 1756.

¹³⁵ Italics not mine. *ibid.*

¹³⁶ *ibid.*

¹³⁷ Berrow's *Worcester Journal*, 29 July 1756.

¹³⁸ John Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (1893), 322.

and seven Rounds were fired at him, the Word of Command being given very regular...'¹³⁹ In early August, an 'anti-Byng skimmington' was held in the Hambleton district of North Yorkshire put on by 'a club of local gentlemen.'¹⁴⁰ At Newcastle on Tyne, the proceedings of an effigy burning of the admiral appeared more instructional than guttural. The effigy of Byng rode to the 'Flesh Market' on 'an Ass, preceded by a White Standard' with the didactic inscription 'Oh! back your Sails, for G-d's Sake, a Shot may hit the Ship.'¹⁴¹ Further placard-based messaging instructed 'This is the Villain that would not fight,' whereby 'a Gallows was erected' to hang Byng's effigy 'in the most disgraceful Manner imaginable.'¹⁴² The appearance of this resentment possesses an appearance plebeian origination, yet the gallows and inscribed standard gives pause to consider that these things cost money. The addition of inscriptions and messaging adds a flavor of wit and verticality to the proceedings.

In fact, many of the protests against the admiral were cemented firmly in verticality: held at locales where all stations of British society comingled. On 2 Sep 1756, for example, the *Worcester Journal* gave an account in London where an effigy of...

a certain famous Admiral was, after having been privately shewn to many Ladies and Gentlemen, brought in an open Sedan, guarded by a Number of young Gentlemen under Arms, with Drums beating, Colours flying, to Tower-Hill, where a Gallows was erected for him at Six the same Morning. He was carried round the Hill for the Pleasure of the Merchants Families, and the Gentlemen of the Navy Office, &c. the Populace loudly huzzaing, and the Gentry joining in the Acclamations. He was richly dress'd in a Blue and Gold Coat, Buff Waistcoat, trimmed, &c. in full Uniform. When brought under the Gallows... his Clergyman (a Chimney Sweeper) had given him some Admonitions; when done, he was drawn, by Pullies, up to the Top of it, which was twenty Foot high; every Person expressing as much Satisfaction as if it had been the real Person...¹⁴³

This is not a 'from below' riot. There can be no doubt that a tremendous amount of forethought and money went into this particular production of street theatre. But how many other Byng 'riots,' where verticality and showmanship were on display, have thus been solely and incorrectly attributed to anger demonstrated by those from below?

Even in colonial Boston, accounts of an anti-Byng protest appeared to carry a certain 'from below' tinge. Yet, upon closer examination, the hands of elites were everywhere. First, the said protest occurred on Pope's Day, 5 November 1756. Second, Pope's Day in Boston

¹³⁹ Boddley's *Bath Journal*, 9 August 1756. See also Nicholas Rogers, *Crowds, Culture, and Politics*, 61.

¹⁴⁰ Rogers, *Crowds, Culture, and Politics*, 61.

¹⁴¹ Berrow's *Worcester Journal*, 12 Aug 1756.

¹⁴² *ibid.*

¹⁴³ Berrow's *Worcester Journal*, 2 September 1756.

was a long-practiced festival of anti-Catholic sentiments: a celebration which was, and had been, uniquely ritualized to that city. The theatre was performed by those from below with monetary and organizational input from those of more means. Platforms, effigies, and other ephemera were produced to assist ‘the gangs’ to compete. Two rival gangs, one from the North End and the other from the South, each built stages on wheels. Each stage was to have one chair in which sat an effigy of the pope and behind the pope another of the devil. But in 1756, two other effigies appeared: Admiral Byng hanging from a gallows, and a female figure, that of Nancy Dawson. It’s the appearance of Dawson that is curious as she was a known London actress who later danced the ‘Sailor’s Hornpipe’ in between acts of the famous *Beggar’s Opera*.¹⁴⁴ Perhaps her effigy represented all that was good and virtuous in a sailor’s life whereas Byng was purported to be her opposite – important in a port city such as Boston. Nonetheless, each gang wheeled their stages through certain checkpoints throughout the day. These processions occasionally passed one another in the Boston streets and gave a great show of civility toward one another. At night, however (and perhaps to the amusement of Boston’s betters), these gangs met at designated checkpoints and ‘battle ensued with fists, sticks, and stones’¹⁴⁵ until one gang was able to steal away the other gang’s pope. The addition of Byng and Dawson to this theatre of the streets in 1756 was no doubt great amusement to all, but likely a whim dreamed up by an authority wishing to score political points back in London.

Charges of elite interference – or worse, elite promotions of anti-Byng sentiments, came from numerous members of the upper ranks. A pamphlet that collected numerous city addresses to the king asking for an inquiry over Minorca’s loss claimed that the ‘National Honour and Disgrace are Imaginary Things; useful for the Purpose of Inflaming a Multitude,’ suggesting that ‘Such language as this may have been thrown out already’ by assiduous men who propagate it.¹⁴⁶ Lady Hervey wrote to Henry Fox on 7 August 1756 that in these...

¹⁴⁴ Dawson was the stage name for Ann Newton. See, K. D. Reynolds, ‘Nancy Dawson,’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004).

¹⁴⁵ H. Niles, *Principles and Acts of the Revolution in America: or, an Attempt to Collect and Preserve some of the Speeches, Orations, and Proceedings, with Sketches and Remarks on Men and Things, and Other Fugitive or Neglected Pieces Belonging to the Revolutionary Period in the United States, which, Happily, Terminated in the Establishment of Their Liberties: with a View to Represent the Feeling that Prevailed in ‘The Times That Tried Men’s Souls,’ to Excite a Love of Freedom, and Lead the People to Vigilance, as the Condition on which it is Granted*, (Baltimore, 1822), 499.

¹⁴⁶ The same pamphlet expressed that these assiduous men ‘we may expect, before the Time of the Inquiry approaches’ will work their rhetorical magic so that ‘to hear of the loss of Minorca dwindled into a Matter totally indifferent, or perhaps Improved into a public Blessing.’ See, *Considerations on the Addresses Lately Presented*, 39-40.

...perilous times, my dear sir, God knows what may happen. The suffering, perhaps even encouraging a mob to declare they will have – or otherwise do themselves – what they call justice, is not only the most wicked, but the most weak and dangerous thing imaginable; if they are supported or allowed to make such insolent illegal declarations who knows whose turn may be next? ...I fear, be it how it will, this poor man [Byng] must be the scape-goat. I am sorry for it on his account, I am offended at it for the sake of justice, but I am hurt by it beyond expression as an English-woman.’¹⁴⁷

Lady Hervey’s expressed dismay that elites are ‘suffering, perhaps even encouraging’ mobs to seek ‘what they call justice,’ continues to reinforce the historical strain that I have so far laid: that many of the initial protests against Admiral Byng were elite inspired. Simply stated, press stories, letters and communiqué of paid political partisans rousing the London mobs against Byng appeared so often that some of it was probably true.¹⁴⁸ Further, the violence distributed upon Byng’s effigy, its procession, and eventual burning carried significant political potency. By publicly destroying the admiral’s likeness before large crowds, organizers delivered an important wartime, political message: traitors to Britain, particularly Jacobins or Jacobite sentiments, would not be tolerated.¹⁴⁹ Threats and fears of French invasions still pervaded. Indeed, the ministry especially pushed the invasion angle to deflect the blame for sending Byng’s fleet too late to prevent Minorca’s loss.¹⁵⁰

This is not to say that Byng riots ‘from below’ did not exist – but they were, at the outset, certainly sanctioned by betters. As one city address to the king suggested, it was expedient faction that gave ‘a Direction to this Rage, by Pointing it at the accused Admiral...’¹⁵¹ Paul Langford adds that anger over Minorca’s loss was pointedly aimed at the ministry rather than, or in addition to, Admiral Byng. Tory MP Jarrit Smith of Bristol, for example, fomented some of that city’s ‘local rage’ and aimed it squarely at Westminster.¹⁵² Linda Colley also points towards Tory populism where political stances made by Tories against excise taxes were championed by a bevy of writers: John Shebbeare, Joseph Massie, and Josiah Tucker each claimed that too much of England’s revenue was borne on the backs of the ‘labouring and manufacturing class.’¹⁵³ In this instance, then, there exists an overlap: food riots presented an opening to rail against a whole host of issues – subsistent wages, too

¹⁴⁷ Letter as found in the appendix of *Augustus Hervey’s Journal*, 324.

¹⁴⁸ Sekora, 158.

¹⁴⁹ For more on the political messaging of effigy burnings see David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 162-3.

¹⁵⁰ Newcastle wrote to all members of the Admiralty Board that ‘the great Point must be to convince the Public, that it wd not have been prudent to send out that Squadron sooner or stronger,’ ADD MS 35376 ff. 136-37.

¹⁵¹ *Considerations on the Addresses Lately Presented*, 33.

¹⁵² Langford, ‘William Pitt,’ 65.

¹⁵³ Linda Colley, ‘Eighteenth-Century English Radicalism before Wilkes,’ 5-6.

little work, high food prices, over-taxation, and now imperial matters with the loss of Minorca. Perhaps, then, Colley is correct when she cautiously suggested that ‘popular grievances’ throughout the eighteenth century ‘were lent coherent political expressions’ by a ‘succession of high-level dissidents’ gifted with recognizing opportunities to put pressure on Parliament from out of doors.¹⁵⁴ In this instance, then, the decision by those from below to protest against John Byng becomes somewhat clearer, especially in the English countryside. The dearth presented the landed gentry, those ‘prisoners of the people,’ with a narrow set of choices in regard to overwhelming amounts of Byng calumny. As word spread, as anxieties heightened, those countryside reports of anti-Byng resentments appear upon a closer scrutiny to be directed from above, not below. Thus, the cannon shot in Wribbenhall, the ‘course’ and ‘booths’ along the River Severn, the ‘gentlemen-dealers’ of Bristol, the addition of Byng effigies upon Boston’s ‘gang’ platforms, and gallows and gibbets constructed from Newcastle on Tyne to London, Byng riots appear vertical and instructional.

Impressments, too, add to the list of grievances from those who viewed them as a violation of traditional British liberties: and in regional and provincial politics; magistrates, mayors, and aldermen (again, those from above) often participated in duping impressment gangs of their necessary quota.¹⁵⁵ Within the context of the ramp up to the Seven Years’ War, the demand by the navy for 30,000 additional tars may have provided that additional impetus to protest against a high ranking naval officer reported in the governing press as cowardly and incompetent.¹⁵⁶ An incident in King’s Lynn demonstrated the complicity of provincial authorities to thwart the needs of the navy. Captain John Hamilton wrote to Admiral Hawke investigating how magistrates who ‘applied to Their Lordships of the Admiralty, for a Tender’ with a promise to ‘procure a hundred Seamen for his Majesty’s Service,’ but when the *Ranger* sloop arrived, ‘the Magistrates sent in Sixty Men: but they were in general very bad, Vagrants, gipsies, Parish Charges, Maimed... not ten Seamen in the Number.’¹⁵⁷ Perhaps the zeal of paternalism overrode these magistrates’ initial promise, or perhaps it was mere politics: provincial Tories versus urban/London Whigs, a sort of out of doors protest of their making – perhaps it was both. It needs pointing out, nonetheless, that those in positions of authority at times showed mercy and leniency in their dealing with the poor.

¹⁵⁴ Colley, ‘Eighteenth-Century English Radicalism,’ 4.

¹⁵⁵ Nicolas Rogers, *The Press Gang: Naval Impressment and its opponents in Georgian Britain* (London: Continuum, 2007), 22.

¹⁵⁶ Gradish, 32.

¹⁵⁷ Hamilton to Hawke, 8 June 1755, ADM 1/920.

Thus, the Byng protests were far from reactionary spasms of plebeian discontent. A significant number of the protests throughout the summer of 1756 were elite led, some of whom wielded tremendous political power. Yet, the ministry was taken aback by the candid expressions of thousands from below who targeted them as much as they targeted Byng. A Greenwich mob in mid September attacked the Duke of Newcastle's coach 'who saluted his Grace with dirt, and humbly proposed to his coachman to drive toward the Tower,'¹⁵⁸ that ever-present and proverbial symbol of the London landscape where traitors go to die. Only a week earlier had the duke expressed frustrations over accounts in the countryside where 'the lower sort of People are Outrageous; and that Lord Ravensworth, Sir John Ramsden, and My Lord Downe, are very industrious, and loud, in their Censures, and Endeavours to enflame the People.'¹⁵⁹ Newcastle was losing control, and murmurs arose that the prime minister avoided 'entering into Disquisitions so nice and intricate, as the internal State of the Nation...'¹⁶⁰ The government-led calumny against Admiral Byng had created blowback: likely spirited by country-bound gentry caught between a rock and a hard place in how to deal with the already distressed and afflicted poor over low wages and food shortages coupled against the sour news (courtesy of an overbearing press) that an elite admiral failed to prevent a British possession from falling into Gallic hands. As mentioned before, all the Byng protests could not possibly have been led by those of the upper ranks: plebeian discontent over food and wages likely caused them to express discontent against Admiral Byng without the prodding from their betters.

Still, the case I put forth is that much of it was encouraged, directed or produced by their betters, be it in print or in person dispersing funds to dress up an effigy. A possible exception occurred on the day Byng was returned to Portsmouth. Admiral Henry Osborne intercepted Byng who had already left the *Antelope* aboard a barge. Osborne pointed out to the admiral not only his arrest warrant but a 'vast mob' nearby that had come to do him harm.¹⁶¹ Still, it is difficult to state with 100% certainty that, even here, the mob was not planned. Given the rumor-riddled press and the overwhelming evidences of 'circuits' of communication, aided by tide and winds that made ships' entrances into harbors an all day affair (if not several days), it may be conceivable that a mob had long been in waiting.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Letter from Thomas Potter to George Grenville, 11 September 1756. *Grenville Papers*, 172.

¹⁵⁹ Newcastle to Hardwicke, 2 September 1756. ADD MS 32867, ff. 175-6.

¹⁶⁰ *Considerations on the Addresses Lately Presented*, 51.

¹⁶¹ Cardwell, 58.

¹⁶² Peter Burke shares an interesting anecdote given by a contemporary in 1641, that 'there was a kind of discipline in disorder, tumults being ready at command, upon a watch-word given.' Is this what occurred on Portsmouth upon Admiral John Byng's return? See, Burke, *Popular Culture*, 353.

The bigger weakness in this stance, however, resides in whether or not any sense of inheritable anti-authoritarian culture existed among British plebes at the mid-eighteenth century. But since little exists in archives where the thoughts of the lower ranks survived in written form, we have but guesses (good ones) and arguments to assist in how the lower ranks of both urban and rural societies viewed their betters in the unfolding reality of a new war against France. A cultural and anthropological turn toward ritual – as, indeed, the Byng effigy burnings were – may help to answer the source of plebeian discontent and their anti-Byng participations.

The key to understanding Byng effigy burnings is to recognize that they were public. Through primary and secondary materials I have listed where 36 effigy burnings against Admiral John Byng were alleged to have occurred. In alphabetical order they are: Birmingham, Boston (Massachusetts), Cleveland (ambiguous), Cornwall (ambiguous), Darlington, Devizes, Dublin (Ireland), Dudley, East Anglia (ambiguous), Exeter, Falmouth, Gravesend, High Barnet, Higham Ferrars, Isle of Wight, Leeds, London's five locations: Covent Garden, Greenwich, Newgate, Tower Hill, and Whitechapel; Market Harborough, Newcastle on Tyne, North Shields, Portsmouth, Richmond, Salisbury, Severn River/Worcester, South Shields, Southampton, Stokesly, Sunderland, Tynemouth, Wribbenhall, and York. Missing from this list is any participation by villages or cities in Scotland. Most, if not all, of these burnings were near all day affairs (and sometimes through the night) located in or near civic centers (whether small town or major city). Thus, the burnings themselves occurred in a space and time where nearly all members of a community coexisted. This is a verticality reality that has been missing from most historiographies on the Byng protests.¹⁶³ Additionally, because people of different strata experienced the spectacle of a Byng burning at the same time one can assume that some sort of community consensus was sought. For those that gave direction and oversight to the Byng processions, moving the masses, however temporarily, toward a unified ideal that Admiral Byng misbehaved, may have been just enough to overcome any political, social, or economic divisions that existed among all community members or other parts of the nation.¹⁶⁴ To sociologist Don Handelman, the manner in which Byng's alleged misbehavior was framed is akin to pure public theatre. Byng processions provided a multisensory experience upon participants and

¹⁶³ Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 4; Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 38-9. Both Muir and Bell trace Max Gluckman and Victor Turner in highlighting that rituals can only create, if at all possible, solidarity in places and time where all members of society intersect.

¹⁶⁴ David Kertzer, 1-2.

bystanders alike;¹⁶⁵ they were framed in such a way as to condense the admiral's alleged Mediterranean failures into simplified and easily digestible symbolic-infused parades so as to understand the political and social whole.¹⁶⁶ Also, the all day pomp and circumstance of a Byng effigy burning, due to its verticality, exposed or reinforced numerous as well as particular social codes. As Claude Levi-Strauss exclaimed, such rituals do then possess the potential to fail, especially in deeply hierarchical societies such as eighteenth-century Britain. The solution by ritual-makers was parceling: a means where previous relations to certain symbols helped to resolve complex social problems.¹⁶⁷ An example would be the many Byng processions that involved chimney sweeps acting as clergy.¹⁶⁸ The lowly elevated to the high bringing relief to Admiral Byng's tortured soul. Thus, if it can be proven that most of the Byng effigy burnings were publically ritualized and processional, then the answer as to the source of plebeian rage ought to reside outside of the concerns held by the lower orders. These all day processional affairs and civically-centered rituals played out before audiences composed of nearly the whole of any one community. Consensus and political instructions, through the symbolic desecration of Admiral Byng's effigy, were largely created by those members in positions of authority. That the lower ranks participated informs us that they may have felt anger against Minorca's loss, but should dispel most notions that they were the originators of anti-Byng rituals.

Another way to probe the Byng protests is upon loyalty. In O'Gorman's work on the Tom Paine burnings, loyalism takes center stage. There are also striking contextual parallels to the Byng burnings. Fear of French incursions existed at the beginning of the Seven Years' War as much as they did with the remarkable news of the unfolding French revolts. O'Gorman raises the question as to whether or not the regales involving Paine were staged, intended to target the radicalized poor. During the Paine uprisings, the budding reform societies' loyalties were questioned. Much the same can be asked of the anti-Byng tumults. Though there certainly did not exist any reform societies in mid-eighteenth-century England, there did exist the conditions: high food prices, shortages, dearth, low wages, turnpikes, high

¹⁶⁵ On the multisensory experiences of a Thomas Paine burning see: O'Gorman, 129.

¹⁶⁶ Don Handelman, *Models and Mirrors: Towards and Anthropology of Public Events* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 23.

¹⁶⁷ Bell gives a detailed and condensed explanation of Levi-Strauss' overall theories. See, Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 62-4.

¹⁶⁸ See *Worcester Journal*, 2 September 1756; also the *Leeds Intelligencer*, 17 August 1756; O'Gorman also mentions the use of chimney sweeps acting as clergymen in processions condemning Tom Paine, see 'O'Gorman, 'The Paine Burnings of 1792-1793,' 128. For additional research on the symbolism of sweeps in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries see: Martin Gorsky, 'James Tuckfield's 'Ride': Combination and Social Drama in Early Nineteenth-Century Bristol,' *Social History*, vol. 19, no. 3 (October 1994), 319 and 329; Roy Judge, *The Jack-in-the-Green: A May Day Custom* (Ipswich, UK: D. S. Brewer, 1979), 81.

unemployment, displacements, forced migrations, and impressments (to name a few).¹⁶⁹ Coupled to the emerging food riots those in political power began to worry. Sir John Willes, Chief Justice for the Common Pleas advised Newcastle in late August that ‘I am very sorry to Tell you, (unless I concealed the Truth,) that I never found all sorts of People so Uneasy, and so Dispirited, as They are at present.’¹⁷⁰ The combination of Minorca’s loss and the emerging dearth caused Willes to suggest a steep sentence for Byng in ‘that no lesser Punishment will Satisfie the minds of the People.’¹⁷¹ This may have been part in parcel the mainspring hope of the ministry: that inflicting damage upon Byng would somehow buy them the loyalty they needed to see the mounting number of crises through. Indeed, as O’Gorman points out, political loyalism held deep cultural roots in English politics dating back to William Cecil’s formation of the Bond of Association during the early reign of Queen Elizabeth I.¹⁷² Outside of politics, eighteenth-century associations formed around loyalty’s very word, and as Langford suggests clubs and organizations conducted themselves in an air of surprising verticality to ensure it, especially in the country.¹⁷³ Away from London, provincial England long experienced a significant tenure of independence and self-government: localism in the provinces was equated with loyalism courtesy of paternal largesse.¹⁷⁴ Clerics, too, sermonized on loyalty. Sam Davies, in Virginia, extolled to his lay folk that ‘Loyalty and Unanimity have but seldom been so universal in our Mother Country...’¹⁷⁵ The London-based Anglican Minister John Mason, informed his parishioners that there...

...is not much indeed that we can do towards the publick Safety in a time of publick Danger. But something we may. We may cheerfully bear our Share of the Burden which the calamities of the Times necessarily lay upon the Subject. - We may strengthen the Hands of our Rulers by discovering and promoting a spirit of Loyalty, Subjection and Peace; and by our Influence and Example may discountenance every thing that looks like an ungrateful discontented and factious spirit, under a mild and merciful, a legal and protestant Government...¹⁷⁶

¹⁶⁹ O’Gorman, 113-5, 123. See also King, 217-8; Rogers, *Crowds, Culture, and Politics*, 204.

¹⁷⁰ Willes was also a member of the Privy Council. Willes to Newcastle, 21 Aug 1756, ADD MS 32867, ff. 5-6

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*

¹⁷² O’Gorman, 143.

¹⁷³ Loyalist Associations sprang up during the Seven Years’ War, see O’Gorman, 144; Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, 100; the Society of Arts under the leadership of William Shipley worked to ensure that any prizes or awards were open to the poor, see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation*, 101.

¹⁷⁴ Conway, 864.

¹⁷⁵ Davies, *The Crisis*, 12.

¹⁷⁶ John Mason, *The Christian’s Duty*, 24.

Upon a more secular and perhaps cosmopolitan view, loyalty became a bit more muddled. A pamphlet covering the Minorca addresses to the king warned that loyalty, akin to freedom, can become somewhat confused. ‘In a Tumult,’ it warned, ‘Anarchy is apt to be mistaken for Liberty, and in a Calm it has sometimes happened, that Loyalty has degenerated into a kind of Idolatry.’¹⁷⁷ Is it possible then, that in this national culture of political loyalty, that the calumny spread against Byng was not only assisted but likely revealed itself from time to time in all day processions that ended with the desecration of the admiral’s effigy? This mid-century look at loyalty thus proves complex and shifting and it would play out differently in small town and urban centers. In countryside settings, paternal oversights ensured that Byng protests involved plenty of food and drink, an attempt by landed elites to tie the aggrieved poor back into the communal fold.¹⁷⁸

But referring to the poor as ‘the poor,’ and also to heap upon them, reflexively, the moniker of ‘radicals’ does them significant injustice.¹⁷⁹ In fact, there exists a multiplex of roles, hundreds – perhaps *ad infinitum* – of ways for the poor to gather their own identities through a complex web of relationships with others. In an anthropological point of view, Max Gluckman asserted the obvious, that ‘in real life a man does not wear and act in a particular role as if it were a suit.... A man is known and acts as the occupant of several roles, and he carries all his roles even when one happens contextually to be dominant.’¹⁸⁰ Yet, in pointing this out, Gluckman came to realize that this opaque set of interrelatedness fundamentally created social conflicts. A person can be friends with another in one situation, but act as an enemy to the same when a different set of predicaments bears fruit. Thus, for Gluckman, the roots of ritual often operated to soothe these inheritable social conflicts. Rituals were borne to keep the peace, validate social roles, and ensure identities within a group. If we transfer Gluckman’s observations to the Byng processions and effigy burnings, then we must take stock of the interrelatedness of poor to gentry, poor to farmer, poor to magistrate, poor to cleric, poor to each other: thus, in the country anyway, it is likely that the Byng protests were a means to reinforce the longstanding if not ancient reciprocities – not a burst of outrage against an unfortunately chastised admiral. Further, reconfirming these relationships in the

¹⁷⁷ A wordsmith way to tell the king that it was his ministers who practiced ‘The Extremes, into which Men deviate from the Truth...’ *Considerations on the Addresses Lately Presented*, 7.

¹⁷⁸ O’Gorman suggests that food and drink were ‘part of an established and *expected* tradition to foster festive ... popular entertainments rather than a determined attempt to bribe and bully people into public actions.’ Emphasis on ‘expected’ is mine. See O’Gorman, 141. Catherin Bell states food use in common rituals are meant to define and reaffirm ‘the full extent’ of the community. See Bell, 123.

¹⁷⁹ Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy,’ 76.

¹⁸⁰ Max Gluckman, ‘Les Rites de Passage,’ in *Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations*, edited by Max Gluckman (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1962), 40-2.

face of dearth would have been vital. In the city where numerous press machines and coffee houses competed for the attention of passersby; Byng's name had firmly been attached to a long string of overseas setbacks juxtaposed alongside a coming war with a powerful and threatening French enemy. Fears of invasion, pushed by the ministry in 1755, lasted through all of 1756.¹⁸¹ Urban protests reflected this perfect storm of monumental crises. O'Gorman's accounting of the urban protests against Thomas Paine likely pulled from the precedent of John Byng's effigy burnings: patriotic, anti-Gallican, vertical and therefore instructional, pushing a sense of national rather than local identity.¹⁸² These urban protests were public and non-exclusive. Indeed, the symbolic expressions exposed at a city-based burning likely affected the bystander more so than the core members who performed the actual processional motions of demonstrating and then destroying Byng's effigy. This has repercussions. A bystander may not be certain, initially, as to what's occurring, but by the end of an all day celebration, capped by a burning/execution/quartering, those bystanders likely reattached themselves to prevailing codes of social order; 'reconfirming their relationship' as citizens and subjects of a British nation against a world that was presented as spinning dangerously outside their control.¹⁸³

In such an urban atmosphere; literature, handbills, ballad sheets, and ephemera during the processions then worked to make Byng appear French. A coin (figure 8) shows a foppish Byng accepting Gallic gold in exchange for Minorca on one side, while the flipped side depicts a brave Blakeney who stands fast holding the British flag in the face of French cannon.¹⁸⁴ Note the frilly sleeves beneath the jacket of Byng and the Frenchman, but the lack of frills on Blakeney. Such small details nonetheless went to long and concerted efforts to attach Frenchness to the identity of John Byng: something of an anathema in those xenophobic times. Sales and circulation of ephemera added to the carnival-like atmosphere of an urban Byng burning. By filling the curiosities of participants with trinkets, planners of such events 'bought' their attentions and willingness to hang about, and in doing so worked to create political memory.¹⁸⁵ The selling of small trinkets, ballad sheets, and such should also alert us to the amount of preplanning necessary in order to hold a ritualized effigy event.

¹⁸¹ Gordon to Newcastle, 3 October 1755, '...the Jacobites mingle and ...roare for war in every motion they make it becoming more and more obvious... to get the Pretender a better chance than ever, he had before, of succeeding.' ADD MS 32859, f. 350. 'The bug-bear fears of an invasion engrossed all the attention of the ministry' well into 1758, claimed Almon. see Almon, *An Impartial History of the Late War*, 91-2.

¹⁸² O'Gorman, 155.

¹⁸³ O'Gorman, 115.

¹⁸⁴ Byng coins, or medals, occasionally surface on auction house websites and those of coin dealers. The image used here is courtesy of such a site. <http://www.charlesriley.co.uk/britmedarchive.htm>

¹⁸⁵ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 48-52.

Such a notion then goes a long way in confirming O’Gorman’s observations about the Thomas Paine effigy burnings: that the crowds that gathered to witness such a celebration were not anywhere close to being independent.¹⁸⁶ These events then were not patriotic outburst but were rather conceived intensively: planned for effect, sponsored by numerous elites and associations, made so as to deliver large crowds open to the marketed suggestions of political messaging. These processional rituals where the admiral was poked, prodded, shot, and burned should be considered more as appeals to the conservatism inherent in the mid-eighteenth-century general populace, rather than any radicalized outbreak against the state. This is, in fact, what is generally missing from Thompson’s plebeian/patrician analysis: that the working poor’s call to return to moral, economic, and social orders was largely a conservative movement, a reaction to the massive changes wrought by global and economic morphing. Political consciousness was born amongst the litany of economic liberal sweeps that infiltrated the lives of very conservative people: the poor.¹⁸⁷ That the Byng effigy burnings took place largely in market centers lends some irony to the events. But civic spaces as places of civic engagement and identity date back to Edward I, changing little. So powerful were these civic centers in forging local and civic identities that anthropologists have claimed localized centers of attachment and awareness as more functional than that of ‘religion, king, political ideology, faction, and even family.’¹⁸⁸ The peer pressure, then, to conform to a set point of views during an effigy burning; replete with song, food, banters, drink and ephemera, must have been intense.

But this doesn’t mean that crowds spoke with one mind or did not carry a bevy of grudges underneath: the riots over food make this abundantly clear. The food riots in and near Birmingham coexisted with Byng demonstrations in and near the same locales: Werrybridge, near Walsall, the site where 500 men tore down a boulting mill, was less than seven miles from Dudley, the site of an anti-Byng burning – the two occurring less than three weeks apart.¹⁸⁹ Such near concurrent episodes in both space and time should open us up to accepting the complex nature of relationships within the oversimplified plebeian/patrician

¹⁸⁶ O’Gorman, 136.

¹⁸⁷ Burke claims the bulk of Europe’s populace earned their ‘political education’ between the years 1500-1800, brought about by the steadfastness nature of wars, ever larger armies, continued and increased taxations, the centralizations and codifications of state bureaucracies, that it was both state and commercial changes that intruded upon the peasantry. See Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 10, 353, 358-360, 365.

¹⁸⁸ Muir, 232.

¹⁸⁹ Douglas Hay, ‘Patronage, Paternalism, and Welfare: Master, Workers, and Magistrates in Eighteenth Century England,’ *International Labor and Working Class History*, no. 53 (Spring 1998), 33. See also, Jeremy N. Caple, ‘North Midlands: August and September 1756,’ in *An Atlas of Rural Protest in Britain, 1548-1900*, edited by Andrew Charlesworth (Beckenham, UK: Croom Helm, 1983), 111-3; *Worcester Journal*, 29 July 1756.

dichotomy.¹⁹⁰ The rise of urbanity and the reality of an accreting set of new working reciprocities, particularly in rural landscapes, all contributed to a multifaceted response to Minorca's loss when coupled with the dearth.¹⁹¹ The poor appealed to local magistrates and JPs while simultaneously denouncing the forces within their national government that rubberstamped the myriad of changes which worked to alter the older religious and paternal relationships they were accustomed to. London's confusion over reports of rural rioting in tandem with numerous addresses that called for inquiries from throughout the country lent a gloomy air to the administration's response. There is something telling in a letter to Newcastle from John Gordon of Sempill. In mid-September, Gordon wrote that 'the minds of the more monstrous rabel' or those 'bees unhived' seem to be affected by 'faction' and 'sedition' in the riotous countryside.¹⁹² Equally, though, faction also struck to 'delude people with the Notion, that their hundr'd mouth'd tribe in the city [Parliament], speaks the sence and Meaning of the whole Kingdom' any more than the few addresses sent from the countryside 'meet the general opinion of every one' in the greater nation.¹⁹³ Gordon's contemporaneous acknowledgement of the complexity of eighteenth-century relationships and networks – and their numerous reciprocities – at the least gives modern scholars some relief: we recognize the complexities, but those contemporaries had to live them.

Last, recent resurgences in crowd psychology emphasize the social transcendence that often occurs in large, tightly packed groups. Durkheim's observation from early in the twentieth century lends a possible insight into the crowds that denounced Admiral Byng in the mid-eighteenth. The participant likely and temporarily suspended self-identity and rose 'above himself' so 'that he sees a different life from the one he ordinarily leads.'¹⁹⁴ In other words, the typical individual at a Byng effigy burning might have left his own social world to participate in something new, something possible, something political, something that made him or her gain equal voice – however brief – among a sea of peers from numerous social derivations.¹⁹⁵ In this way Byng was presented upon a people who may never have heard of him, who knew nothing of sailing, of politics, and of empire but, nonetheless, partook of the

¹⁹⁰ '...the 'crowd in politics' signifies a set of activities whose organization, participation, and mobilization is complex, variable and not easily reduced to 'plebian versus patrician' formulations.... it would be more appropriate to see [popular mentalities and structures of authority] as a terrain in which ideology, culture, and power intersect.' See Rogers, *Whigs and Cities*, 350-1.

¹⁹¹ O'Gorman, 113-5.

¹⁹² Gordon to Newcastle, 14 September 1756, ADD MS 32867, f. 298.

¹⁹³ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life: A Study in Religious Sociology*, translated by Joseph Swain (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1947), 220.

¹⁹⁵ J. P. Arnason, 'Canetti's Counter-Image of Society.' *Thesis Eleven*, vol. 45, no. 1 (May 1996), 97.

transcendent high of reveling in important festivities. The crowd had ‘thrived on its own density’ and sense of unanimity.¹⁹⁶ As Byng’s effigy burned, these participants had, in a day’s course, co-opted a mythical version of the admiral’s exploits while experiencing the license to freely call for his blood without fear of social recrimination.

V. Concluding Thoughts

While leading a small detachment of British regulars through Stroud in early November of 1756, the 3rd Duke of Marlborough came across an encampment of hungry colliers and weavers. The two sides gaped at one another: an unexpected meeting for sure. At first some of the poor thought Marlborough was Byng but were quickly resolved of that notion. Marlborough asked a ‘ring-leader’ about a dilapidated effigy hanging from a corner post; he replied it was Admiral Byng and meant no harm, that its presence was to keep up their spirits.¹⁹⁷ The Byng protests had petered out by September’s end, but the dearth had not. Food riots continued for yet another year.¹⁹⁸ But by November of 1756, the tumults of the summer had proved that Admiral John Byng – his reputation, his status, and all that he stood for – had been co-opted, absorbed, and brought into a new fold. Byng had come to represent, deservedly or not, all that was wrong in British society.

I employed microhistory as a line of attack, a method of collecting and examining, closely, the odd collection of clues concerning the Byng protests.¹⁹⁹ Something did not fit. Something still lay hidden. What were the larger phenomena that lay unknown that would then help to explain Byng’s true demise?

The Byng affair occurred in the midst of a major food shortage which challenged prevailing thoughts on the role of the state in regional, national, and international economics. Papers and pamphlets challenged corporations to find relief for the poor, to liberate them from the continued (and alleged) evil-doings of engrossers, regrators, corn jobbers, millers, bakers: i.e., those who ground the faces of the poor. Such telling, however, focuses us upon the shifting – if not radicalized – meaning of the term ‘market’ in the mid-eighteenth century. According to Bohstedt, markets in the 1750s were already national in scope, complex, and –

¹⁹⁶ O’Gorman, 135.

¹⁹⁷ Berrow’s *Worcester Journal*, 11 November 1756.

¹⁹⁸ Caple, 86.

¹⁹⁹ Matti Peltonen, ‘Clues, Margins, and Monads: The Micro-Macro Link in Historical Research,’ *History and Theory*, vol. 40, no. 3 (October 2001), 349.

because of ‘economic specializations’ – relied heavily on regional interdependencies.²⁰⁰ From below, however, the market existed as a physical, local, and personal place of attendance. Just from these two conceptions over market – one a force, the other a location – we can see as Gregory Claeys once put it, ‘the stage was beginning to set for the grand collision of opposing doctrines.’²⁰¹ It is necessary to remember that the ascent of theoretical capitalism labored long and hard against an entrenched milieu of the actual and practiced traditional economies. The case of the dearth in 1756-7 illustrates how the actual trumped the theoretical, and the calls to defend the most conservative elements of moral economics were most loudly expressed by the often starving and riotous poor.²⁰² In this scenario a ‘spirit of political madness’ was spread ‘by suitable agents throughout this country,’ which, according to the dissenting minister Joseph Stennett divided ‘the people’ so that a ‘weak and so wicked a temper prevails.’²⁰³

These tempers, however, had been long in the making. The rise of a commercial ideal worried many enthusiasts and other clerics who denounced the ‘Present Age,’²⁰⁴ where integrity and morality appeared to lose ground against the forces of personal gain. The furor over Minorca’s loss followed this moralistic strain and attached itself to the emerging food crisis. Here, imperial ambitions, or in this case – an alleged lack thereof – became part of the national rhetoric linked to the dearth. War profiteering, victualling contracts, foreign prisoners and foreign troops all placed demands upon food which drove up prices beyond the reach of Britain’s poor. Cries of an artificial scarcity rose: at once xenophobic, anti-wealth, and anti-corruption.²⁰⁵ The domestic tranquility had been beset by the perception that political and economic immoralities intersected, and both John Byng and the dearth resided simultaneously at that cross point.

Thompson’s assertion that rioters were often the conservators or the true defenders of older customs and economies appears to align well with the rural food riots that upset the

²⁰⁰ Bohstedt, ‘The Moral Economy,’ 268. For additional help on this point see, Outhwaite, 2.

²⁰¹ Claeys, 8-11.

²⁰² Helpful on this point was Claeys, 14-5.

²⁰³ Stennett to Newcastle, 5 September 1756, ADD MS 32867, f. 244.

²⁰⁴ For example: John Brown, *Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* (London: 1757).

²⁰⁵ The charge of artificial scarcity held historical leverage. Samuel Pufendorf, in 1672, authored that the ‘chief factor on high prices is scarcity,’ and added, ‘the maintenance of which is considered by some to be one of the secrets of the business.’ Pufendorf, *De jure naturae at gentium libri octo* (1672). Hutchison quoted Gershom Carmichael, circa 1724, who rubberstamped Pufendorf’s assertion that scarcities can be imagined as well as real. See, Terence Hutchison, *Before Adam Smith: The Emergence of Political Economy, 1662-1776* (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 200. Thompson pointed to a 1710 petition in which the poor of Stony Stratford complained that farmers and dealers were ‘buying and selling in the farmyards and att their Barne Doores soo that now the poor Inhabitants cannot have a Grist at reasonable rates...’ See, Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy,’ 85.

country for nearly two years.²⁰⁶ But when it comes to protesting against the admiral, the evidence tends to demonstrate that in the thirty-six locations where Byng was hung in effigy, Thompson's simple plebeian/patrician approach does not easily fit. Bohstedt argued that perhaps the plebes, in looking backwards for justifications, aimed to locate tactics for successes in their rioting rather than rioting over a defense of an ancient and moral economy.²⁰⁷ Byng would then be a tactical target and not a moral one. However, here too, the evidence appears more complicated than what this nuanced approach can supply. Paternal patterns, ever shifting, lend a better clue as to how both food riots and Byng protests proceeded in Britain's rural landscape. Prices were set piecemeal, one locale and/or region at a time. Meanwhile, London sought to intervene on behalf of the nation pulling pre-Elizabethan laws to find some relief for the poor in the face of the dearth. In this guise, the countryside gentleman likely approached the food crisis and the political crisis over Minorca as an opportunity to reinforce paternal relationships. In the case of food, paternalists (in the form of magistrates, JPs, aldermen, or mayors) set the prices, forced open hours upon local markets, and worked to locate additional corns.²⁰⁸ Byng protests in rural locales appear equally touched by paternal interventions: dressing effigies, constructing gibbets, using gunpowder, all in all giving direction to the processions.

Luxury was that moralistic term that united both the riots over food and the rhetoric over Minorca.²⁰⁹ In this debate, Admiral John Byng's name was attached to the sin of luxury. It was, as stated earlier, the *Present Age* where personal gain was put in front of integrity and virtue. John Byng was thus conjoined to engrossers, regrators, corn jobbers and the like: people who, it was alleged, contained a complete lack of morals. This *luxury sin* among elites occurred nationwide and was regarded as self-evident. Proof of Britain's debauched morals cost the state upon the international arena where Braddock's defeat, the fall of Oswego, the lack of continental allies, Minorca's loss, and even earthquakes played into enthusiastic mindsets and sermons.²¹⁰ No wonder, then, Robin Hood resurfaced in chapbooks: the ultimate and mythical paternalist chasing down an engrosser, taking his ill-gotten gain to

²⁰⁶ Thompson, 'The Moral Economy,' 78.

²⁰⁷ John Bohstedt, 'The Moral Economy and the Discipline of Historical Context,' 270.

²⁰⁸ It is worthy to note that in Thompson's later works he came to see that 'while some traditionalist gentry and magistrates invoked it [paternalist social control] in times of dearth, the authority of the theory was fast eroding... The paternal obligations of 'provision' were at odds with the mercantilist imperative to maximize the export of grain.' See E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common*, 269.

²⁰⁹ By Sekora's account; by the time of Byng's trial, there were already 'forty eighteenth-century periodicals' written about luxury which provide ample proof of a culture steeped in anti-luxury rhetoric. See Sekora, 155.

²¹⁰ For an example see, John Mason, *The Christian's Duty*, 6.

redistribute among the laboring poor. From the point of view of the poor, Sir Robin turned the cursed bounty system upside down.²¹¹

Yet, from the naming of privateers to the regale of processions, the bulk of the Byng protests occurred in a burst of time, perhaps little more than three or four months. These effigy burnings against the admiral were fewer, less intense, more vertical, and more likely to be directed from above than were their food riot counterparts. I count thirty-six Byng protests, whereas Jeremy Caple identified 140 food riots stretching across a seventeen-month period.²¹² Exploring the Byng effigy burnings through the use of anthropology, cultural studies, and contextual histories reveal that these Byng processions differed greatly from their food rioting counterparts and in significant ways.

Timing is an important issue, with the exception of three ‘reported’ events, most of the Byng protests occurred after July 24th, which is the day Byng had returned from the Mediterranean at Portsmouth and was promptly placed under arrest. John Barrow charged that the ministry had alerted all the ‘attorneys on the circuit’ to keep a look out for Byng in case he landed in a different harbor. It is here that we need to draw upon the topic of associational culture, these formalized networks of communication that covered a range of activities from credit, trade, politics, and religion – some of it radical and secret – others open to rumor born of popular neighborhood markets. The spread of Byng’s name and the charge that he was to be arrested ran along these associational networks, thus demonstrating that the roots of some of the Byng effigy burning processions were to be found not from below, but from the very offices located at Westminster. Evidence also shows that close members of the king’s Privy Council were involved in spreading the calumny against John Byng. There is also verification to assert that numerous elite hands played a significant role in ‘suffering, perhaps even encouraging’ mobs to seek ‘what they call justice’ against John Byng.²¹³ Add to this the relenting assertion by the government that a French invasion upon Britain was eminent, aided by the ministry’s hyped up rhetoric over Jacobite complicity within England’s borders, it is no wonder then that the Byng effigy burnings had surfaced.²¹⁴ However, where

²¹¹ There did not exist unanimity on the efficacy of the Bounty System at mid-century. See, Richard Sheldon, ‘Practical Economics in Eighteenth-Century England,’ 651-2.

²¹² Jeremy N. Caple, ‘The Geography of Food Riots 1585-1847, Case 3.5, 1756-7,’ 86.

²¹³ Lady Hervey to Henry Fox, 7 August 1756.

²¹⁴ Indeed, much of the ministry’s defense during the inquiry that followed Byng’s trial and execution rested on the poor condition of the British army, ‘for our strength at land was insufficient, it was on that account the more necessary to keep a sufficient and respectable fleet at home.’ See *Papers Relating to the Loss of Minorca*, 9. See also, Wilson, *Sense of the People*, 179.

'riots' against Byng appear to originate from below, the ministers appeared to receive some of the mob's venom as well.

To focus more closely on the crowds present at Byng effigy burnings, I turned to anthropology. This turn was necessary to understand more closely the very public yet processional motifs of these events as were sometimes reported upon in the British press. Usually located in civic-centers such as markets, the burnings proceeded as multisensory experiences replete with simplified symbolism to reinforce social codes all in hopes of gaining community consensus. In this anthropological turn, the motives of plebeian revelers is easier to understand: it was not simply a case of follow the elites, but rather a sense of wanting to belong to something that was bigger than one's self, to feel a sense of identity with hearkened with communal longing. Further, O'Gorman pointed out that loyalty became a front and center issue during the Thomas Paine effigy burnings of 1792-3.

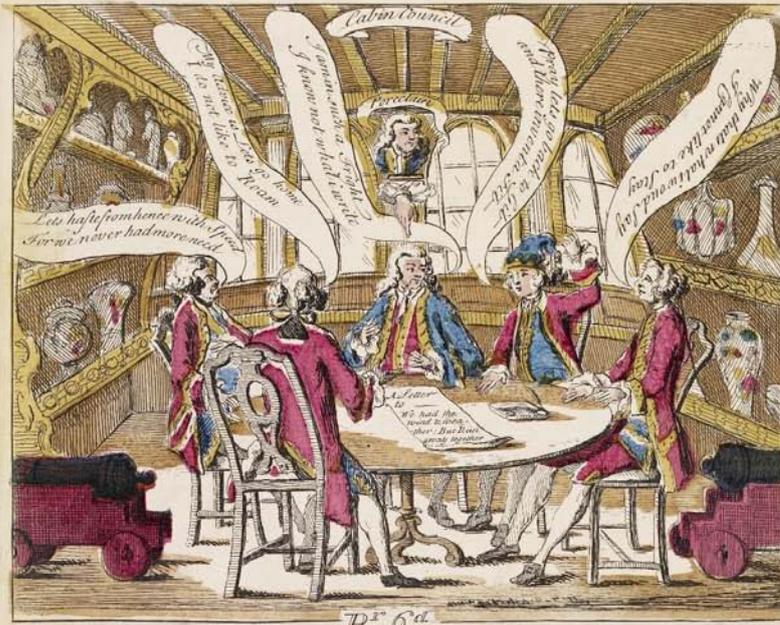
There are, though, striking similarities between the burnings of both Admiral Byng and Thomas Paine, especially on the loyalty issue. Provincial England's independence and governance largely depended on the loyalty that the populace held for certain local lords, magistrates, mayors, or others in paternal positions. The burning of Byng's effigy in the countryside likely reinforced loyalty along these paternal lines. Urban processions appeared different from countryside burnings especially in regard to ephemera: used to create lasting political memory.²¹⁵

John Byng was attached to the dearth by way of moral arguments. In a simplistic sense, in the eighteenth century, food was extremely personal: for most of England's population, it was a hand to mouth existence whereby today it could be called a hand to mouth relationship – the difference is not so difficult to detect. Indeed, it was the not having of it that caused the first, truly, nationwide food riots that racked England. Agricultural regionalism had been nationalized earlier in the century and was already on its way to bridging the international markets as stewarded over by members of the Board of Trade and Plantation. And also in a simplistic sense, this is where John Byng comes in. He represented the ever growing empire, an empire that challenged the imagination, a sublime space that few could conceive of, let alone comprehend how international trade affected the local prices of goods at nearby markets. Contemporaries recognized this: and global commercial competition was admitted by some to be the cause of the Seven Years' War. A letter to the *Gazetteer* from a 'Rev. Mr. Hartley,' prompted an editorial reply. The paper disagreed that 'it

²¹⁵ Kelly asserts that John Wilkes fed the rumor mill machines with erotic fantasies of the Medmenham Order of St Francis knowing openly it would create political memories. See Kelly, 'Riots, Revelries, and Rumor,' 790.

is unlawful for a State to make war upon another for the preservation of its trade.' The paper pointed to France for 'endeavouring to engross the whole commerce of the world to themselves,' though the editor did acknowledge that 'had we not been a venal, corrupt, luxurious, prodigal, improvident, indebted people, our crafty ambitious enemy would not have dared to encroach upon us.'²¹⁶ It is a curious summation of mid-eighteenth-century capitalism: the recognition of its worst parts in an enemy pitted to an expectation of how the English could do it better. Byng would later be accused of cowardly fleeing from the French. He would beat that rap in court. But to the public charges, the ones reinforced by rhetoric and processional protests, the admiral could not escape. In the court of public opinion, Admiral John Byng had been linked to that 'venal, corrupt, luxurious, prodigal' and improvident being: the engrosser.

²¹⁶ *Gazetteer*, 24 May 1756.



P^r 6^d

A Late EPISTLE to Mr. C-----D.

*The better Part of Valour is Discretion, in the which
better Part I have sav'd my Life.*

FALSTAFF.

B UT timely Running's no small Part
Of Conduct in the Martial Art;
By that, some glorious Feats atchieve,
As Citizens by breaking, thrive.
It saves th' Expence of Time and Pains,
And dang'rous beating out of Brains,

For they that fly may fight again,
Which he can never do that's slain:
And they who run from th' Enemy,
Engage them equally to fly;
And when the Flight's become a Chase,
They win the Day that win the Race.

HUDIBRAS.



EAR Sir, 'tis with Pleasure the following I write,
And hope you'll impute my Mistake to my Fright.
On the eighth Day of May we set sail for *Mabon*,
Where we fear'd we should get (as the Wind blew)
too soon;

I was not in Haste; for 'tis always my Way,
To be first at a Feast, and the last at a Fray.
On the nineteenth, at Noon, we discern'd the *French Fleet*,
And judg'd we must now either beat or be beat:
I was then to the Windward, and such was my Play,
That by shifting and shifting I spun out the Day;
On the twentieth again the *French Fleet* was in Sight,
And I found that in Spight of my Fear I must fight;
On comparing our Force, we had one Ship to spare,
And to take the Advantage I thought was unfair,
So I order'd the *DEPTFORD* to get to a Distance,
But not too far off should we want her Assistance.

Mr. W—T, who loves fighting, behav'd like a Man,
Tho' he sail'd in the Rear, yet he fought in the Van;
If I fought, you'll believe the Engagement was hot,
But I wisely kept out of the Reach of their Shot.
Th' *INTREPID*, by Accident, losing her Mast,
Was a handsome Excuse for retreating at last.
A Council was call'd, and we all thought it best,
As they steer'd for the East, we should steer for the West.
This agreed; left their Minds, when recover'd, should alter,
I am sailing as fast as I can to *Gibraltar*:
So have wrote this in Haste, as I thought it expected,
That News of such Moment should not be neglected.
Do your best to enhance my Deferts to the K—,
And in all Things (but fighting) believe me,

Your's, B—G.

To be had at the *Golden Acorn* facing *Hungerford Market*, in the *STRAND*.

By J. K. 1754
June 17 54

Figure 6 - 'A Late Epistle to Mr. C-----d,' 1756, © Trustees of the British Museum, no. 3358.



Figure 7 - 'A Court Conversation,' 1756, British Museum.
 Source: © Trustees of the British Museum, no. 3492. Reprinted with permission.

The Byng Coin



Figure 8 – Ephemera demonstrating Byng’s ‘Frenchness’ (here taking Gallic gold in exchange for Minorca) against Blakeney’s flag-waving patriotism.

Reported by Rogers	Reported by Cardwell	Reported by Wilson
8 July, <i>Worcester Journal</i>	8 July, <i>Worcester Journal</i>	
	12 July, <i>Northampton</i>	
		17 July, <i>Newcastle Journal</i>
	20 July, <i>Belfast Newsletter</i>	
	31 July, <i>Newcastle Journal</i>	31 July, <i>Newcastle Journal</i>
		31 July, <i>Newcastle</i>
2 Aug, <i>Northampton Mercury</i>		
2 Aug, <i>Salisbury Journal</i>	2 Aug, <i>Salisbury Journal</i>	2 Aug, <i>Salisbury Journal</i>
	3 Aug, <i>York Courant</i>	3 Aug, <i>York Courant</i>
5 Aug, <i>Worcester Journal</i>	5 Aug, <i>Worcester Journal</i>	5 Aug, <i>Worcester Journal</i>
	6 Aug, <i>Derby Mercury</i>	
9 Aug, <i>Bath Journal</i>		9 Aug, <i>Salisbury Journal</i>
12-14, Aug <i>London Evening</i>		12 Aug, <i>Worcester</i>
14-21, Aug <i>Newcastle Journal</i>		
16 Aug, <i>Salisbury Journal</i>		16 Aug, <i>Salisbury Journal</i>
	21 Aug, <i>Newcastle Journal</i>	
	21 Aug, <i>Bath Advertiser</i>	
23 Aug, <i>Salisbury Journal</i>		
23 Aug, <i>Northampton Mercury</i>	23 Aug, <i>Northampton</i>	
26 Aug, <i>Whitehall Evening Post</i>		
		27 Aug, <i>York Courant</i>
		28 Aug, <i>Newcastle</i>
		Sep 2, <i>Worcester Journal</i>
3-10 Sep, <i>Derby Mercury</i>	3-10 Sep, <i>Derby Mercury</i>	
11 Sep, <i>Newcastle Courant</i>	11 Sep, <i>Newcastle Courant</i>	11 Sep, <i>Newcastle</i>
	11 Sep, <i>Newcastle Journal</i>	
	11 Sep, <i>London Evening</i>	
14 Sep, <i>York Courant</i>	14 Sep, <i>York Courant</i>	14 Sep, <i>York Courant</i>

Table 1 - Three prominent historians developed their observations on the Byng 'riots' largely on the predominance of these eighteenth-century newspaper reports.



Figure 9 - Distribution map of the Byng protests where effigy burnings took place.

CHAPTER 4
'Hot Water': Assessing the Impacts of the 1755 Channel Campaign

On the 7th of July, 1756, the British Prime Minister, the Duke of Newcastle, opened a Parisian packet labeled 'Advices.' Trusted intelligence from the inner intrigues of Versailles indicated that:

it's not the intention of the Court to really attempt an Invasion, but rather to distress your Government, and keep them in hot water, for there are not vessells in the Ports of the Channel sufficient to embark a great number of Troops...¹

There is no telling how Newcastle received this bit of spy craft: bitterly might be an appropriate word, or at least a word that ought to enter into the equation. After all, the duke, backed by both the king's court and his ministry, worked publicly to press for more than a year that France intended to invade. If those public pronouncements were meant to curry favor with the general populace, the merchant class, or even those within his own political faction, Newcastle was hourly disappointed. When Newcastle opened and read the Parisian intelligence, riots in London, riots in the countryside, and open talk of inquiries against his own ministry pervaded:² much of it concerning the alleged cowardice of Admiral John Byng who, paradoxically, in tandem with Admiral Sir Edward Hawke, used the Majesty's fleets to capture just over 300 French vessels during August through November the previous year. If the French did not have vessels enough to attempt an invasion, the combined efforts of Edward Hawke's and John Byng's seizure of French maritime ships looms as a sufficient reason to explain the missive before Newcastle and, of course, England's good fortune.³

But the Channel Campaign intentionally sought to capture French vessels from the English Channel and down the coast of the French Atlantic: arguably one of the few planned

¹ ADD MS 32866, f. 19-20. Additionally, for the remainder, all spellings are as found in the original documents. Historical empathy dictates preserving the language, idioms, punctuations, and even the misspellings of the era.

² Newcastle certainly felt confined by public opinion. Only the day before, in a letter to his friend William Bentinck, second duke of Portland, the Prime Minister lamented that 'never had This Country so hard, and so Difficult a part to act as at present. Worn out by fruitless Negotiations; Teased with new, & constant Encroachments from the French in America, [and me] reproached at Home....' ADD MS 32866, f. 44-47.

³ Notwithstanding, the duke may also have been relieved, to an extent, for an early ministerial decision in 1755 resulted in what the intelligence from Paris claimed: 'there are not vessells in the Ports of the Channel sufficient to embark a great number of Troops...' Unlike the losses incurred by General Braddock, or the semi-unsuccessful attempt by Admiral Edward Boscawen to prevent a French fleet from reaching North America, the fleets directed by Admirals Sir Edward Hawke and John Byng succeeded beyond the country's expectations. For a copy of the orders to Edward Hawke signed off by the Lords Justices, see SP 42/100/1-3.

military adventures Britain could point to that had any resemblance to the word ‘success’ in an otherwise inauspicious beginning to the Seven Years’ War.⁴ Yet, the Channel Campaign remains highly under-investigated. Too few accounts of the Seven Years’ War integrate the importance of the operation, and those few that attempt to do so, Admiral John Byng often fails to earn a mention. Even the latest Byng biography tallies but a total of four sentences to the campaign and Byng’s name does not appear within them.⁵ Likewise, Fred Anderson’s *Crucible of War* equally ascribes little to the 1755 Channel Campaign other than a single reflective sentence; that the poor condition of John Byng’s ships (as he sailed to the Mediterranean five months later) is attributed to the fact that the admiral’s ‘task force had only recently returned from raiding French commerce in the Atlantic.’⁶

Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to reintroduce the Channel Campaign back into the historical dialogue of the Seven Years’ War. Three parts carry the story forward. The first of these details the drafting of the Channel Campaign orders which shows a much broader and deeper involvement of numerous governing bodies than previously considered. Also, the focus on ‘prizes’ is used to demonstrate the acute cultural/governmental reinforcement of such practices than previous investigations have shown; and finally a small bit about the role of geography. The second part takes into considerations the failures of both Edward Braddock and Edward Boscawen earlier in the year, and how these missteps tended to

⁴ For example; according to some accounts, the defeat of General Edward Braddock in the Ohio Valley was ‘too grievous to allow one to think of any thing else.’ Lady Elizabeth Anson wrote to her brother Lord Hardwicke describing her reaction in a letter dated August 23, 1755: ‘Mr Keppel arrived this morning from America & brings astonishing & shocking news, that our troops under Braddock have been repulsed with very great Loss, himself killed, that is dead of his Wounds, 64 out of 84 officers killed or wounded, 600 men by the nearest accounts that could be got; & all this owing to the panic or our own English Regular Troops.’ See, ADD MS 35376, f. 124.

⁵ Ware, 33. Similarly, Gerald French’s 1961 *The Martyrdom of Admiral Byng*, donates a paragraph, mostly concerning the capture of the *Ésperance*. French, 18.

⁶ Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 170. Equally, David Syrett’s outstanding and useful *Shipping and Military Power in the Seven Years War*, skips nearly all naval actions in 1755 save for a short reference to sending victuals to Gibraltar. David Syrett, *Shipping and Military Power in the Seven Years War: The Sails of Victory*, (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2008), 45; though, Schumann and Schweizer explain with aplomb the decision making process behind the scenes to begin the Channel Campaign, they do not its actual operation nor its significance. Matt Schumann and Karl Schweizer, *The Seven Years War: A Transatlantic History*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 26-9; the recent translation of Christian Buchet’s work, largely a tremendous contribution toward the eighteenth-century British navy’s victualling system likewise misses nearly the whole of 1755, a crucial transition year from peace to war that lamentably remains under investigated. See, Christian Buchet, English edition, *The British Navy, Economy and Society in the Seven Years War*, (Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2013); Middleton’s *The Bells of Victory*, seeking reasons as to the ‘origins of the Seven Years’ War’ mentions Braddock and Boscawen, but not the Channel Campaign. Middleton, *The Bells of Victory*; looking at the war from the French perspective, Jonathan Dull writes extensively of the campaign, but incorrectly lessens the significance of Britain’s success. Jonathan R. Dull, *The French Navy and the Seven Years’ War*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005); Corbett donated 23 pages to the campaign failing to mention Byng’s contribution and incorrectly asserting that Hawke remained at station through December. Julian S. Corbett, *England in the Seven Years’ War: A Study in Combined Strategy*, vol. 1, (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907), 50-72.

amplify numerous challenges to the 1755 Channel Campaign and beyond, particularly to problems associated with manning. Highlights of the navy supply system will be made showing susceptibility to more breakdowns than previous historiographies have reported; and then making the revelation that thousands of Frenchmen were taken prisoners and held in the UK during peacetime. The final part will shine a light on the overtly giddy reaction by the British free press reporting on the successes of the campaign, and then pose to answer the question as to why the French did not declare war. Most important, this last portion of part three seeks to investigate the toll on future manpower and fleet readiness after conducting what ought to be considered a very successful operation.

I. Drafting Orders and Eyes on the Prize

As 1755 began, the Admiralty planned to ready as many as ninety-five ships and to recruit 30,000 seamen for expected actions against France.⁷ Crossed lines in the Ohio Valley gave resolve to many Britons to guard the peripheries of an ever growing Empire. French threats in North America coupled with the failure of a young Virginia militia officer, George Washington, to put a stop to them, caused Britain to authorize and send forces under the command of General Edward Braddock. Soon thereafter, Admiral Edward Boscawen sailed tasked to prevent, capture, and/or rid the oceans of a French fleet sent to reinforce Canada and the Ohio.⁸ One task was untended: how best to guard the home waters, and how to prevent a possible French invasion of the British archipelago. According to Julian Corbett, by July of that year the Admiralty came to a long-debated conclusion. Using the examples of Sir Francis Drake, all three of the seventeenth-century Dutch Wars, and the pre-emptive strikes Britain made against Spain on the eve of the War of Spanish Succession, precedence clearly demonstrated that an attack on French shipping in the English Channel could go forward ancillary to proper justifications.⁹ Already in the American colonies, armies clashed, blood spilt: the point being that the conflict, thus far, remained confined to remote peripheries. Even the sending of Admiral Boscawen's squadron to intercept a French fleet off of Newfoundland

⁷ Gradish, *The Manning of the British Navy during the Seven Years War*, 32. At the end of 1754, the navy payroll showed 10,000. Parliament's 1755 'Committee on Supply,' projected 40,000 by the beginning of 1756. See, ADD MS 32857, ff. 8-34.

⁸ Boscawen sailed on the 21st of April. See ADM 1/919, 21 April 1755, letter from Hawke to Cleveland. Note: In this dissertation, the spelling of John Cleveland's name follows the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry made by Ann Veronica Coats. Most historiographies and primary materials spell his name, John Cleveland. See Ann Veronica Coates, 'Cleveland, John (1706-1763), naval administrator and politician,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed 19 January 2013.

⁹ Corbett, *England in the Seven Years' War*, 50-1.

could better, and much easier, find international acknowledgements that such a stratagem warranted justification. Centrality versus periphery issues, however, amplified the danger inherent in an open attack on French shipping. Clearing ships from waters that lapped the shores of both countries significantly increased the likelihood that war's drumbeats could easily spread across the continent. If Braddock's blood and Boscawen's provocation did not move France to declare war, then the direct and brazen plucking of French maritime ships from its coasts could provide not only the impetus Louis XV needed, but perhaps cost Britain much needed allies in the process. A perceived overly aggressive Channel Campaign jeopardized Britain's hopes to accrue war partners amongst a field of already reluctant European powers.¹⁰

Thus was the dilemma in drafting orders. Locating validation and determining the precise legal wording for the proposed campaign fell upon the Lord Justices. Their words assumingly granted Sir Edward Hawke, the admiral chosen to lead the campaign, the legal justifications for, by all purposes, a preemptive strike which was nothing short of war. Minutes taken in July of 1755 at a meeting of the Lords Justices show a who's who of British nobility. Signatories included Hardwicke, Granville, Marlborough, Rutland, Argyll, Dorset, Rockford, Robinson, Anson, Fox, and Newcastle: all of whom shared interests in the drafting of the first and second set of orders.¹¹ The origins of the 1755 Channel Campaign to seize French ships were thusly a multi-tiered process, complexity added because France and England were officially at peace. According to Corbett, the drafting and wording of orders to Sir Edward Hawke complicated and slowed the process. Political egos became embroiled in the drafting. The Duke of Cumberland argued for a full out assault on all French vessels, merchants included. The Duke of Newcastle, newly appointed to lead the ministry approached the idea with more trepidation, particularly with concerns over the international fallout, Spain's disfavor chief among them. Newcastle argued that Hawke should only prevent the return of Vice Admiral Du Bois de la Motte's and De Guay's French war ships to Brest. A tenuous agreement, seemingly originating from the Admiralty, concluded that the

¹⁰ Newcastle wrote to his Lord Chancellor early in 1755 that 'To Fall upon the French fleet, & much more their trade, without any previous notice, or declaration of war, nay during a negotiation actually carrying on with their ambassador here; contrary to our frequent declaration to our own allies, & even to the very principle upon which we have hitherto acted; would not only, I am afraid, be called a breach of faith, but might justly alarm all other powers, & particularly Spain, who might pretend at least, that the same thing might one day happen to them; & be called the beginning of a war in Europe, where we are entirely unprepared....' See, ADD MS 35414 ff. 272-3; see also, Schumann, 26-9.

¹¹ Holderness acted as the Northern Secretary, but was also a leading courtier to George II, Robinson acted as the Southern Secretary until September of 1755, when Henry Fox took the position. SP 42/100/1-3. Minutes indicated that 'the Lords Justices should direct Sir Edward Hawke to sail, at any Time, that may think proper...' See SP 42/100/9.

ultimate decision to seize ships should be left to Hawke himself.¹² This made sense: once at sea communications with the mainland took days, weeks, or months depending where on the globe an admiral sailed. An admiral at sea was, in essence, the leader – if not king – of a mini-state, responsible for every aspect internal to and external of the immediate fleet under his command.¹³ Still, the first set of orders received by Hawke limited him to actions against French warships only:

proceed immediately to Sea, and cruize between Ushant & Cape Finisterre in order to put in execution the following Instructions.... You are to Protect the Trade and Ships of the Majesty's Subjects; and in case You should meet with the French Squadron under the Command of Mr. de Guay, or any other French Squadron, or French Men of War of the Line of Battle, you are to intercept them.¹⁴

A second set of orders, though soon followed. These instructions given to Hawke reflected a dual nature: to prevent 'the French Squadron under the Command of Mons. de Guay, or any other Squadron of French Ships of War' from returning to Brest or Rockfort; but also to 'take by every means all their Ships and Vessels,' which included 'any Number of French Merchant Ships,' and 'to send them under a proper Convoy directly to Plymouth or Portsmouth...'¹⁵ Hawke certainly concentrated on the latter (as would his replacement, Admiral John Byng).

To be fair to Hawke, the debate and consequent delays in delivering the admiral his orders possibly allowed one of the returning French war fleets to slip through. Hawke wrote to the Admiralty on the 8th of September that 'By the French accounts I have learn'd that the Count de Guay's Squadron was not about a week ago got in.'¹⁶ When Byng replaced Hawke midway through the Channel Campaign, the dual nature of Byng's orders also required him to prevent French ships of the line from returning to their home ports while simultaneously capturing merchant vessels flying the French flag. But just as happened to Hawke, delays in manning and materials kept Byng anchored. From Portsmouth, eagerly attempting to ready a fresh fleet, Byng notified the Admiralty of intelligence he received which indicated 'that besides the three French Ships of War, under the Command of Monsr. Le Motte from America... there are daily expected to return in to the Ports of France, three Ships from the

¹² Corbett, *England in the Seven Years War*, vol. 1, 52-70.

¹³ Rodger, *The Wooden World*, 16.

¹⁴ SP 42/100/9.

¹⁵ By counting the names upon those documents associated with Hawke's orders, more than fifty individuals covering Court, ministers, and various departments underneath the Admiralty umbrella come to light: a broad swath of political, economic, and social realities that existed in mid-eighteenth century Britain. SP 42/100/3-5.

¹⁶ SP 42/100/31.

East Indies, & Several of considerable value from the West Indies...'¹⁷ Yet, outfitting delays, shortages of men, and want of succours kept the bulk of Byng's fleet at Spithead and Portsmouth, even though most of Admiral Hawke's squadron had already pulled in.¹⁸ It appears that delays in men and supplies, and not the actions of the two admirals in charge of the Channel Campaign, allowed French war squadrons to slip back into their home ports. Thus, for Hawke and Byng, the focus on prize taking at the expense of attacking French war ships seems justified.

By early September, newspapers began to tally the carnage of British battleships feasting upon unsuspecting French merchant vessels loaded with goods destined for home falsely believing peace the prevailing current. Boddley's *Bath Journal* alerted readers that:

Prizes are daily bringing in to our Ports by the Men of War. This Day, it is said, there is Advice of three Prizes. His Majesty's Ship the *Centaur* has taken, and sent into Dover, a French Ship called *Le Societe, Dujardain*, bound from Calais for Dieppe. The *Rye Man* of War has brought two French Ships into Portsmouth; and the *Savage* Sloop has brought one into the same Port.¹⁹

This focus on prizes, however, revealed a deep cultural predisposition toward prize taking and, thus, a near instinctive reality that Hawke's fleet may not have busied itself with the government's concern of intercepting French warships returning from the Americas. Twenty-first-century scholars tend to underestimate the cultural proclivity within the eighteenth-century British navy involving prizes. Often the easy route is to arrive at answers explaining the recalcitrance of officers (and perhaps ordinary seamen) in refusing orders aboard men of war preferring, instead, a liking for sloops and frigates because those ships were quick and more likely capable of capturing enemy ships: and thus prize money. Indeed, all the British ships named in the *Bath* posting are frigates or sloops, twenty-guns or less.²⁰

But other facets of mid-eighteenth-century life reinforced this behavior. The Lords of the Admiralty showed great approbation and favor to those officers involved in the seizing of enemy vessels. Not only did the Lords ensure that such men received formal sanctioning, but

¹⁷ ADM 1/88, 2 October 1755.

¹⁸ The *London Evening Post* reported on the 27 September 1755, that 'seven French prizes' were brought in by Sir Edward Hawke as he 'saluted Admiral Byng, who hoisted his Flag Yesterday Morning on Board the *Ramillies*.' *London Evening Post*, 27 September 1755. On the 20th, the *Whitehall Evening Post* informed it readers that 'We are fully assur'd that Admiral Byng having kissed his Majesty's Hand, is gone down to Portsmouth, to take upon him some important command.' *Whitehall Evening Press*, 20 Sep 1755. See also ADM 1/88 Byng for the admiral's letter to the Admiralty announcing his arrival.

¹⁹ Boddley's *Bath Journal*, 8 September 1755.

²⁰ Robert Gardiner, *The First Frigates: Nine-Pounder and Twelve-Pounder Frigates, 1748-1815* (London: Conway Maritime Publishing, 1992).

oft times requested prize accounts to be printed in the newspapers, especially the official government line, the *London Gazette*. In a competitive field of officers looking for advancement, the number of prizes taken lent more than a furtive glance by the Admiralty.²¹ To lure captains and admirals into action against larger ships, particularly ships of the line, the Admiralty incentivized prize collection in other ways. ‘Head money,’ was a five-pound bounty paid for ‘every member of the enemy crew alive at the beginning’²² of action: the larger the ship, i.e. men-of-war, the more head money. A ten-pound bounty known as ‘gun money’ also induced admirals and captains to attack enemy warships and privateers, not just merchant vessels.²³ Thus prize money, head money, and gun money combined in such a way as to promote the attacking and taking of all forms of shipping.

It’s little wonder then that Admiral Edward Hawke drafted an agreement to share prize money among the twenty captains that fielded his fleet. The importance of blockading returning French war ships seemed to crumble under the salivating appetites to take in unsuspecting merchant vessels. ‘...we will equally share amongst the profits that shall arise to us,’ stated the document, ‘or to any of us from the Capture of the French...during the term of our present cruize...’²⁴ Once Hawke’s fleet cleared Portsmouth harbor, sailed beyond Spithead, south of the Isle of Wight, the feasting began. From his flag ship the *St. George*, Hawke wrote to the Admiralty, ‘we have seized, and now sent in under the convoy of the *Lancaster* and *Elizabeth*, the *Hardi* from Newfoundland, the *Duke de Penthièvre*, the *Placelliere* ... and the *Prudent* from Hispaniola.’²⁵

When Byng’s fleet sailed south beyond the Isle of Wight, the feasting on French vessels continued. The *Swan* and *Windsor* immediately seized two French bankers. The *Colchester* took five unsuspecting ships within a week. The *Peace* took in a 350 tonner, the *Captain* another banker. Even Byng’s old flag ship, the *Ramillies*, whose keel and hull were laid during the reign of Charles II, took in a French merchant vessel of over 300 tons, *La Subtille*, laden with sugar, coffee and indigo valued at 200,000 livres. Further, Byng’s

²¹ A. B. McLeod, *British Naval Captains of the Seven Years’ War: The View from the Quarterdeck*, (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2012), 45. For a brilliant example of competition and prize taking among the officer corps, see Rogers’ saga of Captain William Montagu in the Caribbean during the War of Jenkins’ Ear. Rogers, *The Press Gang*, 81-2.

²² David Erskine, introduction to *Augustus Hervey’s Journal*, xix.

²³ ‘Gun money’ was a seventeenth-century creation, but its use waned during the eighteenth-century. See, McLeod, 141-42.

²⁴ NMM, ADL/X/13.

²⁵ 7 September, 1755; SP 42/100/28.

squadron accomplished what Hawke's squadron did not: it took in a French warship, in this case, the *Ésperance*.²⁶

Overall, the Channel Campaign took in 300 vessels: a remarkable number, not only in its quantity, but within time. Capturing ships could be an arduous affair. An unsigned note believed written by Captain Edward Vernon on the taking of the *Ésperance*, shows an all day affair from the moment of spotting, to giving chase, to enacting engagement, and to the final signaling for boarding and eventual capitulation: what started in the morning, ended nearly twelve hours later in the black of night. If Hawke began taking prizes on 7 September, and Byng finished the clearing on 22 November, that's 76 days unto which the campaign operated: a rate of nearly four ships captured per day.²⁷

But the Channel Campaign was timed, tied to a season where prevailing winds blew from the southeast. The riches of the French Empire sailed into home ports on summer and fall trade winds, the Channel Campaign designers took exacting geographic advantage. As Michael Duffy explains, 'the prevailing south westerly winds made the Channel a cul de sac'²⁸ for the French; whereas the English ships sailed straight into Portsmouth or another south facing port, the French had to tack hard to starboard to reach a safe north facing port. Such a tack required nearly a quarter of an hour, fifteen minutes waiting for the sails to refill and the ship to regain its speed lost during the maneuver. French naval officers and strategists learned to be wary since their 1692 defeat at Barfleur-La Hogue: venturing into the Channel with a major fleet on only three occasions during the eighteenth century; once in 1744-5, and then twice during the American Revolution in 1779 and 1781. Thus, geography played a vital role in the success of the 1755 Channel Campaign, taking advantage of the prevailing winds which, in turn, brought home the riches of the Orient and West Indies via a complying and unsuspecting French merchant fleet, without the protections of its navy which, itself, avoided the Channel as if the waters were a sea of plague. Admiral John Byng only ended the Channel Campaign when the weather turned.²⁹

²⁶ ADM 1/88 Byng, from mid-October through the end of November 1755. See also Dull, 39.

²⁷ Captain Edward Vernon was the nephew of the more famous Admiral Vernon. For Captain Vernon's account of the capture, see NMM, HSR/B/3. The number '300' comes from several secondary sources including Pope, 33. SP 42/100/28, and ADM 1/88 confirm the beginning and ending dates of the Channel Campaign. The *Bath Journal* reported on 25 August that the *Eagle* was in 'a hurry' to join Hawke's fleet which had possibly departed one or two days earlier, in which case, counting the time of Hawke's squadron to reach station add 13 to 14 days to the length of the campaign.

²⁸ Michael Duffy, 'The Establishment of the Western Squadron as the Lynchpin of British Naval Strategy,' reprinted in Richard Harding, ed., *Naval History, 1680-1850*, (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 97.

²⁹ On the importance of geography in history see, D. W. Meinig, 'A Geographical Transect of the Atlantic World, ca. 1750,' in Eugene D. Genovese and Leonard Hochberg, eds., 2nd edition, *Geographic Perspectives in History*, (London: Blackwell Publishing, 1992), 185-204. Of note: mercer Thomas Turner noted in his diary on

II. Issues of Manning, Impressments, Desertions, Supplies, and Prisoners

Admiral Edward Boscawen's reputation bound the Admiralty to send him to intercept a French troop convoy in late April, 1755.³⁰ Perhaps, only Lord George Anson, the head of the Admiralty, commanded more respect: both known in eighteenth-century parlance as 'fighting admirals.'³¹ The clear intention of the Admiralty in assigning Admiral Edward Boscawen over all the others was, without a doubt, for want of action. Eleven French ships of the line under comte Dubois de le Motte, Rear Admiral Emmanuel-Auguste de Cahideuc, and Rear Admiral Antoine-Alexis Périer de Alvert sailed from Brest to reinforce Canada, gutting their cannon holds to make room for four battalions or 3,650 men. These 'transport' ships were to be guarded by Jean-Baptist MacNemara, but the Vice Admiral was given only six ships of the line to protect the *en flûte* fleet.³² Crossing the Atlantic to catch them, Admiral Boscawen, from his flagship *Torbay*, called for daily gun drills.³³ Both the Admiralty and Boscawen himself held a significantly high level of confidence in his abilities, and both felt his squadron large enough, nineteen ships of the line, to take on the task at hand: strike a preemptive blow by preventing the French from landing four battalions.

But he failed. For only the second time in his career (the first in 1748 off of Pondicherry, India) the admiral critically misjudged a difficult situation. On the 8th of June, in heavy fog off of Newfoundland, three of the possible seventeen French ships were spotted, the rest of the enemy fleet sailed scattered, taking advantage of the fog to elude the British. It was not the blow the Admiralty hoped for: by the end of the day, the *Alcide* and *Lys* were captured, but only the latter carried troops, no more than 330. The bulk of the French reinforcements made it to Canada, but much worse, Boscawen's attack made British diplomacy and the search for allies irrevocably difficult. An act war had been carried out, with little military success, doing great harm to larger, diplomatic endeavors.³⁴

the 25th of November 1755 that, 'This night has been a very remarkable windy night and a great quantity of rain...' *Diary of Thomas Turner*, 18.

³⁰ Hawke reported to the Admiralty that Boscawen's fleet met with 'a fine breeze of wind easterly, I am in hopes they will get clear of the Wight before night, 21 April 1755. ADM 1/919.

³¹ Tom Pocock, *Battle for Empire: The very First World War, 1756-63* (London: Michael O'Mara Books, 1998), 87-8.

³² Dull, 25.

³³ Rodger, *The Wooden World*, 42.

³⁴ Augustus Hervey noted in his journal that 'news of Mr. Boscawen's having taken two French men-of-war in America... this made great noise everywhere, as a war was inevitable.' Erskine, editor of Hervey's journal, opinioned that 'the danger was that this scheme might go off at half-cock; some officer might misjudge the value of a target and at once do too much for diplomacy to excuse and too little to have any effect on the course

While the ‘fighting’ admiral’s error in judgment cost the British diplomatically, in regards to manning and readiness Boscawen’s misadventure cost the navy men. In the two month plus process of crossing the Atlantic to capture but two French ships during peacetime 2,000 men perished: a haunting number not caused by battle, but rather by disease. Haunting because such numbers indirectly affected Admiral John Byng whose Mediterranean fleet, destined for war, was delayed time and time again for want of men.

General Edward Braddock’s army, too, his ranks decimated in the backwoods of Pennsylvania, lost numerous men belonging to the Royal Navy. Admiral Augustus Keppel had ‘lent’ Braddock men, some of whom held key positions necessary to the success of ship and squadron alike: the ever important carpenters.

Whereas the Carpenter of his Majesty’s ship *Seahorse* who was some Time lent to the Army under the Command of General Braddock is not yet returned and it is doubtful wether [sic] he was not killed in the late Engagement with the French...you are hereby required and directed forthwith to repair on board the said ship and Act as Carpenter of her accordingly....³⁵

If the navy lost men to land battles without a declaration of war, the navy also lost men another way: escape. One of the tried and true methods for landmen and seamen to flee the navy was through the hospital. In 1755, Haslar Hospital in Gosport proved especially porous. So concerned with the number of missing, Sir Edward Hawke took it upon himself to investigate and was shocked to discover that a mere porter, beset with ancillary duties, guarded a gate that ‘had not been properly attended’ where ‘sick people’ had ‘free egress and regress.’³⁶ The contractor countered and complained of ‘Drunkenness & all Sorts of Licentiousness Committ’d by the People sent there,’ charging that ‘many of which are very far from being proper Objects for an Hospital...’³⁷ Furthermore, the ships in Portsmouth and Spithead in early 1755 lacked the proper allotment of surgeons and surgeon’s mate which exacerbated the problems at nearby Haslar. Hawke admitted to the Admiralty that the troubles with desertion and lack of ship surgeons so frustrated himself and the contractor that he begged ‘the favour of their Lordships to hasten the guard of soldiers for it.’³⁸

of the war. This very thing happened when Boscawen took the *Alcide* and *Lys* on their way to Louisburg; he put England morally in the wrong without any compensating military advantage.’ *August Hervey’s Journal*, 182-3.

³⁵ KEP/1, 26 July 1775, orders to Thomas West, a ship’s carpenter. Rodger calls carpenters ‘highly skilled’ men, ‘an essential craft’ unto which ‘all sensible captains’ levied tremendous respect. *Wooden World*, 23.

³⁶ ADM 1/919, Hawke to Cleveland, 31 March 1755.

³⁷ ADM 1/919, Ward to Hawke, 30 March 1755.

³⁸ ADM 1/919, Hawke to Cleveland, 30 March 1755.

The adjustments from a peacetime navy to one ready for war, nonetheless, proceeded slowly. Precisely one year after Hawke's Haslar Hospital hullabaloo desertions continued to rack the system. The Admiralty requested Admiral Henry Osborn, then newly in charge of Portsmouth, to investigate the most likely routes recruits and tars used to flee the navy. After a months-long inquiry to local taverns, inns, and coffee houses, Osborn devised a scheme to cut off the suspected escape routes. He requested from the Admiralty to place 'a Lieutenant and a Petty Officer with a guard of Marines at Portchester, Fareham, Stoke, Burselton, and Warsash ferrys; these being the Avenues whereby they are most likely to make their escape.'³⁹

Invariably, impressments precede desertions: the impressment begun in January of 1755 was no exception. Never popular, resistance to a loss of liberty, real or imagined, radicalized not only seamen and landmen, but magistrates and mayors as well, especially in port towns and villages where political leaders felt more duty bound to the populace than to the central government.⁴⁰ Localities took it upon themselves to take advantage of the demand for men to clear their towns of riffraff. Magistrates from King's Lynn, after a experiencing a bout of rioting in which they themselves 'were Sufferers in their Persons,' applied directly to the Admiralty for a tender. Captain John Hamilton investigated the concomitant fallout. He reported to Hawke that the *Ranger* sloop carried Captain Baird to regulate the press at King's Lynn. The magistrates promptly turned over sixty men who 'were in general very bad, Vagrants, gipsies, Parish Charges, Maimed,' and a few captured during the riots – not worthy of 'the Expence of sending' the sloop: 'the Corporation had failed in its engagement.'⁴¹ To make amends, the magistrates promised to press men 'from the first Ships that should arrive, whether protected or not,' which Captain Baird eventually collected more than thirty. Once in Portsmouth, however, twenty-nine able seamen petitioned that they were taken from merchant ships duly protected. Hamilton confirmed those findings 'though I am aware, that the probable Consequence of my Report will be the Loss of 29 of the very best Seamen I have in the Ship...'⁴² Admiral Hawke wrote to the Admiralty the next day stating that he released 'thirty one men belonging to ships at Lynn.'⁴³

³⁹ ADM 1/921, Osborn to Cleveland, 30 Mar 1756.

⁴⁰ See Rodger's chapter on 'Manning' in *Wooden World*. On the topic of British liberties at odds with central government see Nicolas Rogers, 'The Urban Opposition to Whig Oligarchy, 1720-1760,' in Margaret C. Jacob and James R. Jacob, eds., paperback edition, *The Origins of Anglo American Radicalism*, (London: Humanities Press International, 1991), 156-9. Magistrate and mayoral protections toward seaman during times of impressments may also be associated with cultural paternalism. See chapter three, page eighty-seven.

⁴¹ ADM 1/920, Hamilton to Hawke, 8 June 1755.

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ ADM 1/920, Hawke to Cleveland, 9 June 1755.

Hawke incessantly counted the number of incoming recruits. He took detailed notes on their condition both in skills and in health, and openly lamented to the Admiralty when ships anchored at Spithead with impressed men of inferior constitutions. When the *Barfleur* and *Lancaster* arrived ‘with five hundred and seventy nine Supernumeraries,’ Hawke judgmentally wrote to Cleveland that the men were ‘of such quality, that I am sorry to say, they will prove but a small acquisition of strength.’⁴⁴

The projected need for 30,000 men, however, placed significant strains upon the all those concerned over impressment. Recalcitrant Salisbury magistrates, daily besieged by applications for protection, faced down a *St. George* press gang through legal delays, sending off letters of inquiry to Portsmouth direct before an eventual issuance of a warrant.⁴⁵ The whole process took three weeks by which most able-bodied men took upon a ‘very great Defection,’ though seventeen volunteers were found.⁴⁶

Resistance to impressments took the form of both spontaneous and planned riots. In the Kent County coastal town of Deal, Lieutenant Cunningham and his men found themselves fighting for their lives. Rioters disguised themselves and attacked Cunningham and several of his men simultaneously and at various rendezvous points, including the ‘Dwelling Houses of Captain Boys’ and Cunningham’s quarters.⁴⁷ Several of the Lieutenant’s men were wounded and assistance from nearby soldiers was necessary to finally quell the violence.⁴⁸

Mutiny on tenders transporting recruited men also occurred. The *Tasker* tender sailing from Liverpool experienced a mutiny on the 23rd of May. An alleged ‘man overboard’ threw those on watch into confusion whereupon several men ‘Seiz’d the Sentinalls and Strip’d them of their Armor... and made themselves masters of the Said ship...’⁴⁹ Some sixty three impressed men and volunteers successfully escaped taking with them all the ships muskets, pistols, and as much ammunition as they could carry.

⁴⁴ ADM 1/919, Hawke to Cleveland, 25 April 1755. Supernumeraries covered a wide swath of people unattached to any ship, including newly pressed men. For a better definition of the term see, Rodger, *Wooden World*, 28.

⁴⁵ N. A. M. Rodger states that press warrants were customary and ‘not legally necessary.’ See Roger, *Wooden World*, 168.

⁴⁶ ADM 1/919 Hancock to Hawke, 20 February, 1755, and ADM 1/919 Hawke to Cleveland, 21 February, 1755.

⁴⁷ NMM, ADM/B/150, Stephens to the Navy Board, 23 March 1755.

⁴⁸ *ibid.* Similarly, Nicholas Rogers showed precedence for such riots – at Gravesend during the War of Jenkins’ Ear, for example, a huge mob descended upon a gaol to rescue pressed men. Rogers counted 55 such frays during that war. See, Nicholas Rogers, *The Press Gang*, 82.

⁴⁹ ADM 1/920, Hawke to Cleveland, 2 June 1755.

Despite the unpopularity of pressing recruits, the want of men weighed heavy. The navy soon turned to a less violent and less resistant method of collecting large numbers of men: impressing sailors at sea. Hawke wrote to the Admiralty in late March that...

I have been informed by the Cruizers from this port, that about the 21st of this month there came into the channel together about ten sail of Vessels from South Carolina, and about the same number is daily expected. I hope they will not escape our Tenders.⁵⁰

Newspapers reported on sea-going impressments. Boddley's *Bath Journal* noted the 'Eagle man of war...dispatched with fresh Orders of Admiral Hawke,' pressed a merchant vessel arriving from the West Indies whereby the captain said 'he was very sorry he was obliged to use him so...'⁵¹

Still, shortages of men hastened the Admiralty to occasionally revoke protections from impressment. In May, press gangs had collected over 4,000 recruits during a two week suspension.⁵² Almost immediately a cry of foul went up among manufacturers, merchant men, and even contractors such as Henry Shiffner, hired by the Navy Office to produce hemp rope at the yard in Portsmouth. Shiffner lost twenty-five of his workers to impressment in one day. The Navy Board informed the Admiralty that unless those men were returned, Shiffner would remain 'disabled from Complying with his Contract...'⁵³

The Admiralty also turned toward cities to help find recruits. Bristol's mayor and alderman responded offering 'a Reward of Two Guineas (over and above his Majesty's Bounty) to every able Seaman; and a Guinea and a Half to every ordinary Seaman who shall voluntarily enter himself...to serve on board his Majesty's Fleet.'⁵⁴ In East Riding of Yorkshire, handbills plastered walls, posts, ale and coffee houses announcing that in addition to the King's Bounty, 'Three Guineas' were to be given to 'every Able Seaman that shall Voluntarily enter into His Majesty's Service, and Two Guineas for every Able Body'd Man...'⁵⁵

⁵⁰ ADM 1/919, Hawke to Cleveland, 28 March 1755.

⁵¹ Boddley's *Bath Journal*, 25 August 1755.

⁵² Gradish, 31-2. If Thomas Turner's diary is any indication, the revocation of protection from impressment occurred occasionally. Turner noted in April of 1756 that 'press warrants come to Hastings and Battle,' a press noted by the diary's editor, David Vaisey, where 'all protection being disregarded.' See, *The Diary of Thomas Turner*, 37.

⁵³ NMM ADM/B/150, Navy Office to Cleveland, 16 May 1755.

⁵⁴ *London Evening Post*, 19 April 1755.

⁵⁵ ADD MS 33047, f. 15. In Rogers' *Press Gang*, the scholar detailed the deep roots of merchant-led anti-impressment activities including the '6 Anne' statute of 1708 making it illegal for the navy to impress mariners in the American colonies. Caribbean merchants sued naval officers to prevent impressments. See, Rogers, *Press Gang*, 85-6.

Nonetheless, the need for men remained great throughout all of 1755 and beyond. When the Channel Campaign began, the Admiralty planned to keep Hawke's (then later, Byng's) large squadron out to sea furnished by tenders with a constant supply of victuals, ammunition, and men. From Portsmouth, however, Osborn informed Cleveland in October that there were still not enough men to simultaneously sail the tenders and rig the men of war for future engagements.⁵⁶

In attempting to prepare his own ship, the *Ramillies*, for the Channel Campaign, Admiral Byng found a want for twenty-one marines. The admiral promptly wrote to Major Bendys, the Commanding Field Officer of the Marines at Portsmouth, ordering the major to fill the void in the complement. Bendys refused. He claimed that only Admiralty orders could persuade him to dispatch his marines to any of the navy's ships. 'I acquainted him with the great Inconvenience that would attend so much delay,' complained Byng to the Admiralty, 'especially where Ships are Ordered out upon immediate Service...'⁵⁷ Byng asked the Admiralty to intervene on his behalf, to get to Bendys a new set of orders so that when any Portsmouth-based admiral made a request for marines the billeting could be filled without an unnecessary delay of four days.⁵⁸ Byng was sorely disappointed:

I have received your two Letters of the 8th Instant, Signifying to me their Lordships directions... their recommending to me not to order any Marines onboard any Ship, which have not before been directed, by them, to have their established Proportion.⁵⁹

This would not be the last time Admiral John Byng would be denied marines. Seven months later, General Thomas Fowke, acting Governor at Gibraltar, also refused a regiment of marines to John Byng at a critical juncture. Even though Byng personally handed orders from the War Office to the general requiring Gibraltar marines to be dispatched to his waiting fleet for the purpose of reinforcing the garrison in Minorca, Fowke – by way of a War Council – refused Byng the regiment. The Bendys rebuff, then, must be considered as a possible cause of John Byng's hesitation upon demanding from Fowke the regiment of marines anyway (since Byng outranked Fowke, and had been given charge of all of the Mediterranean theatre).

⁵⁶ ADM 1/920, Osborn to Cleveland, 19 October 1755.

⁵⁷ ADM 1/88, Byng to Cleveland, 7 October 1755.

⁵⁸ At the least: regardless of the time to draft and respond to letters of requests, as far as Portsmouth was concerned, it took two days in post to London, and two days in return.

⁵⁹ ADM 1/88, Byng to Cleveland, 10 October 1755.

If the Admiralty found it difficult to raise men in 1755, it similarly discovered problems supplying the navy with goods. Admiral Sir Edward Hawke complained early and often over a whole host of supply issues which plagued the Portsmouth supply system throughout the remaining year and well into the next. His letters to the Admiralty, therefore, provide ample proof of the difficult adjustments that underscored the transition from a peace time navy to one readied and fitted for war. The Navy Board as well sent letters, not only to the Admiralty Office, but to its own contractors often pleading with them to pick up the pace. Such letters showed that as early as mid-March some contractors were already two months behind in fulfilling orders. An investigation into bedding issues resulted in an admission by the Navy Office that they, too, were ‘Surprised to find so little care hath been taken, to have the necessary Supplies... of Slops and Bedding lodg’d at each port,’ let alone Portsmouth.⁶⁰ But shortages of supplies continued to plague the navy well into the following year. Sailors aboard the *Guarland* were so under-clothed that its commander, Captain Arbuthnott had to purchase ninety-three pounds worth of ‘Sundry Slop cloaths’ from M. Samuel Farmer when he pulled into colonial Virginia.⁶¹

As bedding, slops, and other supplies began arriving in mid-Spring, officers immediately complained of the quality of issued goods. Hawke quickly ordered all ships to survey the goods and report every defect.⁶² ‘The leather of the shoes is so extremely bad in Quality so very Ill drest and so slightly sewed,’ claimed one survey, that the shoes ‘must be absolutely unserviceable.’⁶³ Similarly, slops delivered to the *Lancaster* were deemed to contain ‘a very bad [and] coarse Linnen.’⁶⁴ A rather extensive survey of mainsail, delivered to Portsmouth by a London manufacturer, also found occasion for numerous negative remarks: seams sewn with two threads instead of the required three; errors in the table and reef bands, as well as shoddy bowline pieces, bolt ropes, leech ropes, cringles, linings, and other defects so numerous as to make the sails unusable.⁶⁵ Edward Boscawen added that:

I am always sorry to complain, but I can’t help doing it when I see such constant and repeated roguery.... the Sheets are still the same,

⁶⁰ NMM, ADM/B/150, Navy Office to Cleveland, 10 March 1755. Hawke had little patience for delays and began complaining of shortages as early as February. See, ADM 1/919, Hawke to Cleveland, 23 February 1755.

⁶¹ ADM 106/1118/43, Arbuthnott to Navy Board, 20 September 1756.

⁶² ADM 1/919, Hawke to Cleveland, 29 May 1755.

⁶³ ADM 1/919, Hawke to Cleveland, 2 June 1755.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ ‘An Account of a Survey of a Main Topsail for an Eighty Gun Ship made by Mr. Thomas Turner of London by Contract taken at Portsmouth,’ 18 April 1755, found in ADM 1/919.

rotten, and made out of Rags and Patches taken off the Dunghill, to be sure....⁶⁶

If the product delivered to the ships at Portsmouth arrived in dubious repute, the pace of repair and outfitting frustrated all. This, too, caused Admiral Hawke to launch yet another investigation. Navy Board Commissioner Captain Frederick Rogers complied and soon confessed that as of ‘The Warrant of the 18th September last for the Entry of Ropemakers... only Eighteen’ of the ‘Fifty four’ ships had been entered as completed: nearly a six month lag.⁶⁷ Captain Rogers pinned the blame on an event that happened as far back as December of 1752, ‘That six’ of the yard’s boats ‘were destroyed by the falling of a Wall near the Boathouse’ and had yet to be replaced; thus the reason a majority of ships still had yet to receive the attention due to their rigging and cables.⁶⁸ Nine months later, with Admiral Osborn in charge of Portsmouth operations, the request for yard boats continued:

The want of these is the cause why Ships are not sooner dispatched at Spithead, and the want of Craft in general at the Dock, as the Gunwarf, and Victualing Office, is evident to all the Captains, who have been obliged to wait for their Stores, and Provisions from each of those places, who are repeatedly complaining to me they loose a great deal of time for want of them.⁶⁹

Exploring the Admiralty’s peace to war time adjustments reveals more distress than past historiographies suggest, particularly on issues of manning, though the 1755 contract supply system appears to have fallen short of expectations as well.⁷⁰

For Byng’s fleet, as was the case for Hawke and his squadron, the French ships seized and taken into English ports not only meant the opportunity for an accumulation of wealth through prize money, but the accumulation of men: the thousands of French officers, sailors, and crews that had, until recently, manned a significant portion of their country’s maritime fleet. Nor were they to go home any time soon: England held no qualms about calling these men prisoners of war despite the fact that, officially, the two nations had remained at peace. In fact, while Byng’s fleet waited for its final outfitting at Portsmouth yard, the Admiralty

⁶⁶ NMM, MRF/117, Boscawen to Cleveland 27 April 1756.

⁶⁷ NMM, ADM/B/150, Commissioner Rogers to the Navy Board, 7 March 1755.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ ADM 1/921, Osborn to Cleveland, 8 January 1756.

⁷⁰ N.A.M. Rodger suggests that deep historical analysis is surprisingly lacking on the issue of manning the Royal Navy. Rodger does state emphatically, however, that the ‘story of the manning of the Navy during the Seven Years’ War is one of protracted difficulty rather than failure,’ hardly a stunning endorsement. Rodger, *Wooden World*, 145, 152. On the issue of missing historiography see also, Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750*, (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 13.

relied upon John Byng's administrative skills, to locate and assess sites for a prisoner of war camp. Byng chose nearby Portchester Castle:

upon the strictest examination that Portchester Castle is a Place, when completed, extremely proper for the Reception of Prisoners of War, and is capable according to the present Plan of containing 2,000.... The Necessary Repairs with the additional Buildings of a Storehouse Guard Room and other Conveniencies [sic], will amount to more or less £1,972 : 5 : 0. If the weather will permit it may be completed in Two Months.⁷¹

Still, despite the acquisition and conversion of the castle into a prisoner of war camp, most of the Frenchmen captured during the Channel Campaign remained aboard the ships they were captured in. As late as February of 1756, many Frenchmen suffered from their treatments aboard these floating prisons. Guarding those French prisoners taxed the British readiness already short of bodies. English seamen guarded them; English naval personnel sorely 'wanted to compleat the Complements of His Majesty's Ships,' as the Admiralty Office put it in a letter to James West, requesting that the Treasury 'give Directions that the Custom House Officers, where all such French Ships lye, may take them and their Cargoes into their Custody.'⁷² In April of 1756, George 'Bubb' Dodington, then acting Navy Treasurer, forwarded a bill to the Treasury Department: £6,000 to pay for the 'Subsistence &c., of the Seamen & others found on board the French Vesells which have been or shall be seized by His Majesty's Ships & brought into British Ports.'⁷³ That the administrative networks required to handle the attained prizes and all their associated cargoes, anchorage, and – especially – its men, reflects two aspects of the campaign: one, that Byng and Hawke achieved success beyond expectations; or two, that the numerous governing agencies involved in drafting, executing, and/or supporting the Channel Campaign acted by the proverbial seat of their pants: but it's quite possibly both. The acquisition and conversion of Portchester Castle, unto which Admiral Byng directed, takes on new significance. Certainly as a prison, Portchester Castle did not meet the demands of housing the tremendous number of humans taken during the Channel Campaign. However, Portchester Castle did serve to give some relief to ill prisoners where drafty and chilled ships, especially in winter, served to do them much harm.

⁷¹ ADM 1/88 Byng, 11 October 1755.

⁷² T 1/396/6, Cleveland to West, 13 February 1756.

⁷³ Dodington's forwarding also proved that bills were in arrears. T 1/366/13, Dodington to the Treasury Board, 29 April 1756.

Assessing the number of French taken prisoner during the Channel Campaign adds yet another vital component to its significance. Documents from the Office for Sick and Wounded Seamen, near the war's end, reported to the Admiralty that operations in 1755 netted 7,203 French sailors captured and brought to Britain as prisoners, though no declaration of war existed. **Table 2** shows that the internment of Frenchmen during the whole of 1755 outnumbered the number of French prisoners brought back to Britain the following year when the war was in full effect. Thereafter, from the war years of 1759 through to the war's end, the number of prisoners collected fall short of the number of men captured during the 1755 Channel Campaign. Such a chart is useful and helpful to underscore both major and minor historical errors. The more flagrant appearing mistakes belong mostly to historians no longer living. For example; Sir Evan Edward Charteris, in 1925, authored *William Augustus Duke of Cumberland and the Seven Years' War*, concluding that although orders for Admiral Hawke were drawn up nothing ever came of them:⁷⁴ a charge that H. Trevor Colbourn repeats in 1962.⁷⁵ Less sinister are mistakes that recognize the Channel Campaign but then misdiagnose its significance. For example; Jonathan Dull claims that Great Britain had failed during 1755 to 'inflict major damage on either New France or the French navy.'⁷⁶ Technically correct, but such statements miss the bigger picture. Because of England's Channel Campaign and the successes wielded by both Sir Edward Hawke and John Byng in capturing over 300 French vessels (some of which could have easily been waylaid into carrying troops and/or succours), over 7,200 prisoners, cargo valued at some estimates as little as £650,000 in 1756 money: France could not, absolutely could not, conduct a cross-channel invasion of England.⁷⁷

Thus in July of 1756, when the Duke of Newcastle read from intelligence gathered within Versailles that Louis XV officially scrapped invasion plans (for there were 'not vessels in the Ports of the Channel sufficient to embark a great number of Troops'), he must have known that the admiral, for whose blood the country then screamed for, was precisely one of two that had saved it.

⁷⁴ Evan Charteris, *William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, and the Seven Years' War*, (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1925), 162-166.

⁷⁵ Colbourn wrote that 'Hawke cruised between Ushant and Cape Finisterre fruitlessly, returning to Spithead on Sept. 29.' Colbourn, 'A Pennsylvania Farmer,' 432-33.

⁷⁶ Dull, 79.

⁷⁷ There are, as to be expected, discrepancies between the French and British versions over the monetary value of the captured vessels. The French may have inflated the numbers to prove its injuries to world opinion, the British to downplay to total for the huge monetary payouts owed to officers and seamen. See, T 1/371/82.

III. The Price of Plunder

Admiral John Byng expected orders dispatching him to the Mediterranean much earlier than he had received them, and there were those within the ministry, as well as the Court, that pressed for it.⁷⁸ Some newspapers also anticipated a fleet to be dispatched to those waters. In June of 1755, London's *Public Advertiser* announced that 'Admiral Byng will shortly sail with 12 Men of War to the Mediterranean...'⁷⁹ Intelligence throughout Southern Europe (and beyond) pointed to the certainty of a French invasion of Minorca and the pressure, at this point, for the ministry to do something to reinforce the scant few ships in those seas was not only intense, but already foretold by London papers. The two main reasons for the delay of Byng's Mediterranean excursion resided in Admiral Boscawen's excursion and Lord Anson's assumption that it would lead to war: Anson convinced the ministry that the French were certain to declare it. The ministry, or rather Lord Anson, convinced the power brokers to keep war ships sailing close to home, to prevent an anticipated invasion in case such a war came to fruition. The *Bath Journal*, upon learning of the capture of the *Alcide* and *Lys*, wondered if England ought to 'make a proper Reparation' to France 'for the Insult offered them'⁸⁰ in order to avoid blows. The expectation of war stemming from Boscawen's venture appeared to be on many lips. Thus, when Anson ordered Boscawen to Newfoundland, this put on hold Byng's orders to take ships to protect British interests in the Mediterranean. So while the press had pegged a Byng fleet heading to Minorca in June, the decision to keep ships closer to home had been made perhaps as early as April, if not sooner.

In actuality, Byng joined Admiral Hawke in raiding the English Channel, plucking French merchant vessels at full abandon. The British free press followed the plunder.⁸¹ 'Prizes are daily bringing in to our Ports by the Men of War,' claimed Boddley's *Bath Journal*, 'it is said, there is Advice of three Prizes.'⁸² On 20 September 1755, additional press reports indicated a few French prizes were taken, 'one from Canada... and the other from

⁷⁸ The Duke of Cumberland, for example, discussed reinforcing Minorca as early as April of 1755 with Henry Fox. See Pope, 40.

⁷⁹ The newspaper was some nine months and two ships excess before the mark. *Public Advertiser*, 28 June 1755.

⁸⁰ *Bath Journal*, 18 August 1755.

⁸¹ McLeod correctly points out that British newspapers, as well as other forms of media, placed the taking of prizes well before the public sphere of the mid-eighteenth century. See, McLeod, 138.

⁸² *Bath Journal*, 8 September 1755.

Newfoundland with Fish for Havre.’⁸³ There were ‘five Prizes sent in by Capt. Gardner’ laden with brandy, bale goods, and wine. Even British ships with but a few guns could not help themselves, ‘The *Devonshire*, a Tender, has taken and brought in a small vessel from St. Martin’s for Dunkirk, laden with Brandy and Vinegar...’⁸⁴ By the end of the month, the *London Evening Post* began printing the names of the French ships seized by Hawke’s large fleet:

... the *Duke de Daigets* of 400 Tons, with Sugar, &c. from St Domingo for Cape St. Pere; the *Aimable* from Newfoundland for Havre; the *Placiliare* from Cape Francois for Nantz, taken by the *Lancaster*; the *Mary-Ann*, for St. Malo’s from Newfoundland, taken by the *Lyme*; the *Esperance*, for Havre from St. Domingo, taken by the *Orford*; the *Mary-Ann*, from Bordeaux for Martinico, and the *Katherine*, of Havre, from Newfoundland, both taken by the *Newcastle*...⁸⁵

Port cities along the south coast began to bank on the promises of French prizes. Newspapers talked of corporate-based privateers being launched, the precedence of past prize taking, and of the additional and numerous rewards offered by certain noblemen and merchants to those who seized and brought in French ships as prizes.⁸⁶

As Hawke pulled into port, Byng sailed out to sea to continue the harvest. Newspapers reported that ‘seven French prizes’ were brought in by Sir Edward Hawke and ‘saluted Admiral Byng, who hoisted his Flag...’⁸⁷ The Channel Campaign entertained readers with tales of exotic booty. ‘One of the French prizes brought into Portsmouth is a Guineyman of great Value,’ wrote the London-based *Public Advertiser*, ‘on board of which are two French Ladies and their Maid Servant, a young Elephant, a fine Horse, and a great many Paroquets.’⁸⁸ Later, however, the captured elephant was said to be costly. ‘We have an elephant here,’ explained the *London Evening Post*, ‘which eats and drinks to the Amount of 7s. 6d. a Day, including two Bottle of Wine, which is constantly allowed him, besides other Liquors.’⁸⁹ By early October, the Byng and Hawke raids upon French merchant ships filled

⁸³ *Whitehall Evening Press*, 20 September 1755. Note: Later, in April of 1756, Admiral Osborn wrote to the Admiralty that French ships ‘taken lately with Fish, should be carried out to Sea, and sunk in deep water, to prevent any infection, that might arise from opening their Cargo.’ Osborn asked that such a job should fall to Customs and not the navy. See ADM 1/921, Osborn to Cleveland, 4 April 1756.

⁸⁴ *Whitehall Evening Press*, 20 September 1755.

⁸⁵ *London Evening Post*, 25 September 1755.

⁸⁶ *Bath Journal*, 11 August 1755.

⁸⁷ *London Evening Post*, 27 September 1755.

⁸⁸ *Public Advertiser*, 3 October 1755.

⁸⁹ *London Evening Post*, 21 October 1755. Unfortunately, six months later, when ordered by the Admiralty to release the elephant into the care of Monsieur Beumur, of the Academy of Sciences in France, Admiral Osborn admitted that the elephant died ‘some months ago.’ See ADM 1/921, Osborne to Cleveland, 10 April 1756.

Portsmouth harbor to near capacity. The campaign's success meant that anchorage at Spithead and Portsmouth began to dissipate. Byng informed the Admiralty that when Captain Dennis of the *Medway* pulled in for a cleaning, the ship could not 'come in to the Harbour there being no Mooring clear for her until... some other Ship goes out.'⁹⁰ The *London Evening Post* listed, in an almost giddy sense of fashion, further French vessels taken, their names, and the values of their cargo. '*Le Solide*, Capt. Pierre Barrabe, laden with Sugar and Indigo...computed to be worth twenty-five thousand Pounds.' The *Le Comte de Maurepas* was also calculated at that amount, the *La Puerte* thrity-thousand, and the '*Le Charles*' at 'fifteen thousand Pounds.'⁹¹ Forty-eight French ships: their names, their captains, and the number of men held at Portsmouth (some 937 of them), graced the 4 October 1755 edition of the *Whitehall Evening Post*.⁹² By the end of October, the combination of Hawke, Byng, and other privateer raids upon French shipping in the channel produced a count of 'ninety French Prizes' in Plymouth harbor.⁹³ Newspapers began to tally not just the French prizes, but also the men. '...none of the French Prisoners are permitted to return to France, but such of them as are Merchants, or were Passengers on board the Prizes.'⁹⁴ In the same issue of 16 October 1755, the *Post* informed its readers that the raids by Byng and Hawke were taking their toll in other ways:

The numerous Fishermen belonging to the Fishing Towns near Boulogne, Havre de Grace, and other Ports on the Coast of France, who have been want to maintain themselves and Families by Fishing on our Coast, are reduced to the utmost Extremity, being afraid to venture to put to Sea, lest they should fall into the Hands of our Cruizers.⁹⁵

London-based satirical prints also championed the results of the Channel Campaign. In a print entitled 'The Present Scene or the Pensive Monarch,' (Figure 10) the most striking feature is an English Channel devoid of any shipping: on one side Dover, on the other Calais, no ships in between. For six pence, the buyer read and viewed with seeming jocularly a despondent king Louis XV lamenting and wishing for a 'Pox on their Genius it rises Superiour to Mine, how shall I Extricate myself,' whereupon the king answers his own

⁹⁰ ADM 1/88 Byng, 7 October, 1755.

⁹¹ *Whitehall Evening Post*, 16 October 1755.

⁹² The largest of these, in terms of men taken, was the French vessel *Le Marquis de Beuvron* captained by Etienne Duhalde with 54 men. The smallest vessel was the *La Poli* with 'Dan. Chatallain' as its captain and a crew of only five. *The Whitehall Evening Post*, 4 October 1755.

⁹³ *London Evening Post*, 30 October 1755.

⁹⁴ *Whitehall Evening Post*, 16 October 1755.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

rhetorical question, ‘I would Invade the Haughty Islanders but that they have taken the power from me and are all arm’d against me.’ Kneeling merchants sporting Oriental pigtailed beg the king, ‘Sire, Save you poor Subjects, for the English take all our Ships from us, and French Commerce is Ruin’d.’ At the king’s table are documents, one of which reads, ‘List of the Ships taken by the English,’ which is underscored, then below these three ships appear, ‘Alcide, Lys, Esperance,’ alluding to Boscawen’s and Byng’s capturing of war ships in 1755. On the other side of the channel, Englishmen unite to drive off the symbolic riches of the Far East, precisely some of the French East Indies booty captured during the Channel Campaign. Prints such as these underscore the importance of the Channel Campaign to those who crafted and read them.⁹⁶ Hoppit claims that by the early eighteenth century satire, in all its guises, was used to ‘devastating effect.’⁹⁷ If so, then what effect did this particular satirical print intend to engender? Perhaps it was a mixture of celebration, perchance an opportunity to raise national morale against the backdrop of a promised war with France. Whereas General Braddock lost and Boscawen’s actions off of Newfoundland were digested as a somewhat lukewarm victory, at best; then the contrast of a near, if not total decimation of French maritime shipping certainly needed extolling. In this light, the ‘The Present Scene’ ought to be considered proto-nationalist propaganda celebrating the victories of Hawke and Byng as they directed the resounding successes of the Channel Campaign.⁹⁸

Though true that nearly all of the press accounts focused upon the Channel Campaign appeared overly positive, if not somewhat boastful of the results, one did not. Captain Edward Vernon took offense to an article in the *Public Advertiser* that dared to state the he may have been too harsh in his treatment of the enemy. ‘Now it’s asserted,’ Vernon complained, that the ‘*Lyme* came up with the enemy ... [and] wantonly fired a Broadside,’ after the ship in question, the *Ésperance*, struck her colors as a signal of defeat.⁹⁹ Perhaps Vernon’s apparent reproach by way of the press demonstrates the fickle nature of newspapers in the decade of the 1750s: for as much as John Byng was heralded in the press throughout the latter part of 1755, the admiral would soon be sorely excoriated just a few months later.

Regardless, as long as Hawke and Byng remained at sea, the press continued to place before the public the remarkable amount of ships, cargo, and men seized in the Channel.

⁹⁶ Clark argued that the significance and importance of political satirical prints throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are severely underappreciated. See Clark, *The Public Prints*, 5.

⁹⁷ Julian Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty?* 445.

⁹⁸ Cardwell claims that nationalism in the mid-eighteenth century was not only an embedded feature of British politics, but wielded a sort of practiced militancy – as John Byng would come to find out. See John M. Cardwell, *Arts and Arms*, 113.

⁹⁹ Vernon’s emphasis. Vernon commanded the *Lyme* during the taking of the *Ésperance*. See, NMM, HSR/B/3.

Hawke and Byng received rave reviews in the press. As the weather turned toward mid-fall, *Reed's Weekly Journal* reported that Byng's fleet had cruised as far south as 'the Bay of Biscay,' which adds to historical irony in that the admiral once held 'under his command seventeen ships of the line,' plus, 'tenders to carry a supply of provisions and necessaries for the service of the fleet,' a force more than double the number and thrice the services allocated to him to save British interests in the Mediterranean come April.¹⁰⁰

Throughout all the public jibbing courtesy of the press, plus the loss of three warships, as well as the seizure of 300 of their maritime ships, cargo, and crew, the French did not declare war. This befuddled contemporary Englishmen, many of whom offered theories. Horace Walpole, ever the eminent eighteenth-century observer, noted in late-August of 1755 that 'the French talk of nothing but guarding against our piracies... On their coasts they are alarmed.... Whatever be the reason, they don't declare war...'¹⁰¹ Later that year, in a December letter to George Montagu, Walpole offered to peg the thoughts of why the French inner court refused to declare war upon Britain's provocations. 'The French are thought to have *passed eldest* to England,' stated Walpole, 'and intend *to take Hanover*.'¹⁰² He was probably right: Hanover seemed to hold a special fascination for Louis XV and a few of his courtiers. French naval historian, Jonathan Dull, claims that the French king may have delayed his response to Admiral Boscawen's seizure of the *Alcide* and *Lys* because of his preoccupation with Hanover. Targeting the birthplace of the British Monarch meant that French diplomats worked to ensure that continental alliances adjusted in such a way that France could dodge the aggressor charge if it moved upon that city: the French king was buying time.¹⁰³ Reinforcement for this theory comes from the inner court of Versailles. 'Fontainebleau Advices' received by the Duke of Newcastle in late-September, noted a personnel change within the ministry in France. 'I believe the Marshall de Bellisle will succeed Monsr L. Severin in the Council,' concluding that the preferment to continental engagements over naval battles could be seen with commands 'to buy horses,' for the French army that 'intended to take the field' with numbers that would surpass 'One Hundred and eighty Thousand men...'¹⁰⁴ All of this begged of time, so neither did Boscawen's capture of

¹⁰⁰ Read's *Weekly Journal*, 8 November 1755. Byng sailed with only ten ships of the line, no tenders, no hospital ships, and no fire ships as he left for Minorca.

¹⁰¹ *Horace Walpole's Correspondence with Sir Horace Mann*, Lewis, W. S., Warren Hunting Smith and George L. Lam, eds., volume 20, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 490.

¹⁰² *Horace Walpole's Correspondence with George Montagu*, Lewis, W. S., and Ralph S. Brown, eds., vol. 9, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), 181.

¹⁰³ George II was also the Elector of Hanover. See, Dull, 37-8.

¹⁰⁴ Charles Louis Auguste Fouquet was the duc de Belle-Isle. He soon became the Louis XV's Secretary of War. See, ADD MS 32859, f. 199.

two French war ships off of Newfoundland, nor the capture of *L'Esperance* by Byng, nor the 300 merchants ships hauled in by Byng and Hawke move France to declare war against Britain. To Horace Walpole, the clearing of the Channel by the two admirals created a chilling effect upon the French, 'on their coasts they are dreading an invasion from us.'¹⁰⁵

The success of the Channel Campaign, however, came with a price tag. Both men and the Royal Navy's material readiness suffered significantly prior to and during the Channel Campaign. The personnel losses incurred during 1755 horrified the Admiralty. Anson, in a letter to Newcastle, openly admitted that 'sickness has been a sore enemy to us...'¹⁰⁶ Sickness especially decimated Boscawen's squadron of nineteen ships. Between 4 May and 9 July, thirty-three fell dead onboard the *Torbay*, Boscawen's flag ship. When the squadron pulled into Halifax, it took three days to get 241 men off the *Torbay* and into the local hospital, whereupon five more died in route.¹⁰⁷ All in all, Boscawen's fleet lost 2,000 men either dead or permanently incapacitated. The Admiralty expected Boscawen to return to Portsmouth in early September, but the sickness that so razed his squadron eradicated his ability to sail in a timely manner: as it were he left six of his ships behind in Halifax and pulled into Spithead with a partial fleet, far short of the expected complement, in mid-November.¹⁰⁸ In dispatches to the Admiralty, Boscawen blamed typhoid. The admiral's diagnosis still remains remarkably untested, rather receiving full replay in nearly every historical school ever since. Julian Corbett, in volume one of *England in the Seven Years War* (1907) kept to Boscawen's claim that the 'malignant fever, apparently typhoid,' had swept over the fleet.¹⁰⁹ Christopher Lloyd and Jack Coulter changed the diagnosis to typhus when they published *Medicine and the Navy* in 1961.¹¹⁰ Michael Duffy also claims that typhus racked Boscawen's fleet, and adds the same malady as the likely culprit that swept through fleets in 1740.¹¹¹ Though Boscawen's epidemic is well known among naval historians, few have chosen to connect the outbreak beyond the admiral's North Atlantic fleet: either to examine health conditions elsewhere in the navy, or to conjoin British society at large to a navy newly recruiting to fill 30,000 billets.¹¹²

¹⁰⁵ Horace Walpole's *Correspondence*, v. 20, 512-13.

¹⁰⁶ ADD MS 32865, f. 208.

¹⁰⁷ NMM, ADM/L/T/169, Logbook belonging to Lieutenant William Bayne of the *Torbay*.

¹⁰⁸ Gradish, 32.

¹⁰⁹ Corbett, *England in the Seven Years War*, vol. 1, 57.

¹¹⁰ Christopher Lloyd and Jack L. S. Coulter, *Medicine and the Navy, 1200-1900*, v. III, 1714-1815, (Edinburgh: E. & S. Livingstone, 1961).

¹¹¹ Duffy, 104.

¹¹² Gradish being the exception.

For example, Admiralty documents clearly demonstrate the existence of a pernicious navy-wide sickness prior to Boscawen's departure in late April of 1755. Sir Edward Hawke, then in charge of naval operations at Portsmouth, wrote to Admiralty Secretary Cleveland about four weeks earlier that 'The Sick at the Hospital [is] daily increasing,' and that all of Haslar Hospital's 'cradles, and bedding [are] employ'd...' ¹¹³ Hawke begged to stem the overcrowding by requesting the Admiralty to send as much bedding and cradles as soon as possible 'without loss of time to supply the Hospital, with more of each.' ¹¹⁴ But sickness swept some of the ships belonging to Rear Admiral West, and he was at another port. West blamed the illnesses, in a similar manner, upon a lack of beds and demanded the Navy Board to act. In response, the Board told the Admiralty that:

many of the new raised Men onboard the Ships at Chatham, and the Nore, are dangerously ill of Fevers, occasioned probably by their lying about without Beds, for which he [West] has made frequent application, but the supply has not answer'd the Demand... ¹¹⁵

Thus, the Navy Office attempted to pass the blame for the unusually large number of increased sick sailors and recruits upon contractors who failed to meet the pace placed upon them in a retooling for the anticipated war.

In late May, with Boscawen's squadron already more than one month departed, Admiral Hawke attempted to offer continued explanations for the large number of ill men still clogging the nearby hospital:

many of the men sent in by Justices of the peace and Constables, old, feeble and so afflicted with infectious distempers, besides many boys, that I was at least under a necessity to direct all the officers under my command employ's in pressing not to receive any but able Seamen, ordinary, and able bodied landmen. ¹¹⁶

Thus, Admiral Boscawen was not the only flag officer to deal with a large number of ill men, death, or dying. In fact, once Admiral Hawke received his orders to take up the Channel Campaign, and once put to sea, the sicknesses did not abate. Hawke's Channel Squadron sent another 4,000 men, on top of Boscawen's losses in North America, to nearby sick beds. Initially, Hawke blamed the victuallers for the continued run of ill health; that the malady that infiltrated his squadron was caused by new casks which stored water. Haslar

¹¹³ ADM 1/919, Hawke to Cleveland, 29 March 1755.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ NMM, ADM/B/150, Navy Office to John Cleveland, 22 March 1755.

¹¹⁶ ADM 1/919, Hawke to Cleveland, 29 May 1755.

Hospital continued to overflow and a shortage of bedding persisted throughout Hawke's venturing in the Channel. Haslar had no choice but to turn the sick away.¹¹⁷ Afflicted sailors either remained onboard drafty, ill-fitted ships, or were trusted to go ashore at large for their recovery. Because of the tremendous number of debilitations that coursed through his squadron during the Channel Campaign, Sir Edward Hawke pulled his squadron early, returning to Portsmouth in late September. The baton passed to Admiral John Byng to continue where Hawke left off. Between numbers lost to those serving in the Channel Campaign and those who suffered sailing with Admiral Boscawen, the dead of 1755 tallied 2,162 with another 1,227 discharged as permanently unfit: a count of 3,389.¹¹⁸

In the glaring light of manning deficiencies which the Admiralty and Admiral John Byng endeavored to overcome in March and April of 1756, it is reasonable to ask what were the afflictions that plagued Boscawen's fleet, Portsmouth, and perhaps other home-based ports of the navy in 1755? Seeking to understand where and how the disease originated may not only help to identify the maladies that caused the navy such havoc but to similarly, perhaps, attach a general socio-economic picture which prevailed within the archipelago at the moment of an intensive nationwide naval impressment.¹¹⁹ Though the evidence remains scattered, elusive, and uncertain – there exist enough fragmentary pieces to stitch together a good hypothesis as to where, how, and why an epidemic-like disease appeared in the navy, but not in the general populace.

The simplest query, though, begs whether the disease(s) began internal to or external of the British archipelago. In an early April letter to the Admiralty Secretary (some three weeks before Boscawen set sail), Hawke speculated that squadron suffered greatly from a 'distemper among the supernumeraries already brought from the Eastward.'¹²⁰ Given prevailing contemporaneous attitudes toward close urban quarters, Sir Edward Hawke could

¹¹⁷ Astonishing considering the contractor's pay at Haslar was tied to the number of beds filled. For some further insights into naval hospitals at the beginning of the Seven Years' War, see Rodger, *Wooden World*, 109-12.

¹¹⁸ These numbers do not include the thousands of long or short term ill that either returned to the fleet or deserted. See, Gradish, 32-3.

¹¹⁹ Wrigley warns, and quite right to do so, that associating changes in economic developments with either 'endogenous and exogenous influences on mortality,' is an exercise in ambiguity as the two terms often cross much akin to the determinants of micro or macroeconomics. Nonetheless, most (if not all) scholarship agrees that an undernourished population will succumb to diseases more readily than those that have access to a varied and abundant source of food. E. A. Wrigley, R. S. Davies, J. E. Oeppen, and R. S. Schofield, *English Population History from Family Reconstitution, 1580-1837*, (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 205-6. At the same time, however, Landers correctly postulates that London's mid-eighteenth-century population is an interweave of both demography and socio-economic histories where spatial structures, population densities, patterns of trade and migration are certainly linked to patterns of infectious diseases. John Landers, 'Age Patterns of Mortality in London During the 'Long Eighteenth Century': a Test of the 'High Potential' Model of Metropolitan Mortality,' *Social History of Medicine*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1990), 28-9.

¹²⁰ ADM 1/919, Hawke to Cleveland, 6 April 1755.

only have meant London. All the same, any attempt to address Hawke's conjectural analysis (to locate the source of what distressed the navy) must necessarily recognize the complicated nature of London's urbanity: at once a center of globalized trade, but also the terminus of a century's long process of domestic migrations. In other words, London, with its ever-growing and complex population base, covered both the internal and external sources for any 'endemic foci of infection' that any portion of Britain, the continent, or perhaps even the Empire may have contracted.¹²¹ The simple query, thus, becomes nearly impossible to answer.

Nonetheless, the notion that the disease came from outside of England bares little proof. No European locality, with the possible exception of the Italian peninsula, hosted a hotbed of plague or disease during 1754-55. In December of 1754, the *London Evening Post* reported that the holy city of Rome confronted 'Small-Pox,' which killed 1,897; but by the 'End of October' the disease then morphed into an 'epidemical Distemper more dangerous than the Small-Pox: Tis a malignant Fever, whose peculiar Symptom is a little bleeding at the Nose, and in two Days after the Patient dies.'¹²² Two months later, newspapers reported that Milan experienced an outbreak where, just as in Rome, 'the End of the third Day makes an End of the Patient...'¹²³

But Europeans since the previous century habitually practiced, to significant effect, *cordons sanitaires*, or quarantine. Work in the early 1980s by both Andrew Appleby and Paul Slack endorsed the idea that active state-driven quarantine measures were 'the most plausible' explanation for the slow disappearance of plague from Europe.¹²⁴ Admiral Hawke's quarantine of the *Tryton* tender in June of 1755 survives as a testament to eighteenth-century caution concerning infectious diseases imported from afar. The *Tryton* entered Spithead with twenty-five much needed impressed men collected from a merchant vessel the *Carlisle*; Admiral Hawke ordered the *Tryton* to 'remain at the Mother Bank, till I shall be satisfied, whether or not the master of the *Carlisle* sloop was furnished with a clean bill of health.'¹²⁵ Hawke carried his orders into executions despite the assurances from *Tryton's* commander that the sloop's master's claim of sickness aboard his vessel was

¹²¹ Landers, 27.

¹²² *London Evening Post*, 14 December 1754.

¹²³ *London Evening Post*, 27 February 1755.

¹²⁴ See, Andrew B. Appleby, 'The Disappearance of the Plague: A Continuing Puzzle,' *Economic History Review*, New Series, vol. 33, no. 2 (May 1980), 167-8; and Paul Slack, 'The Disappearance of Plague: An Alternative View,' *Economic History Review*, vol. 34, no. 3 (August 1981), 473-5.

¹²⁵ ADM 1/920, Hawke to Cleveland, 13 June 1755.

nothing more than mere artifice.¹²⁶ Parliament also concerned itself with quarantines. Perhaps distress over the sicknesses that continued to infest the navy, the House of Lords formed a committee in March of 1756 looking to strengthen existing laws concerning *cordons sanitaires* ‘for the better preventing the Plague being brought from Foreign Parts into Great Britain...’¹²⁷ Thus, given both the overt caution regarding outside plagues and the dearth of such disease outbreaks upon the continent during this timeframe, the notion then that any anomalous bout of illness arriving from outside of England to infect the Royal Navy appears weak, at best.

The hunt for the source, then, must be within England itself. Hawke accused an ‘Eastward’ locale, and given his familiarity with London, Chatham, Nore, and other locations east of Portsmouth, it’s a good start. Paradoxically, though, London’s multifaceted urbanity makes it both a likely *and* unlikely source for internal disease origination: much of that due to migration. A city of some 600,000 in 1750, London became the leading focalized point of a set of dynamic, revolutionary and, yet, accretive forces which ‘restructured’ England’s social and economic fabric since at least the accession of William III.¹²⁸ London thus suffered by what some scholars dub an ‘urban’ penalty; that the City, in absorbing ‘up to half of the natural increase of population occurring elsewhere in England’ since the conclusion of the English Civil War, also made amalgamable any migratory health conditions.¹²⁹ While these long series of migrations helped London to grow its population base, relatively little is known in regard to the migrants themselves.¹³⁰ Locating these domestic migrants from the dustbin of history may prove improbable. Yet Landers asserts that ‘a much closer relationship between historical demography’ with ‘social and economic history’ may, in the end, connect ‘infectious disease morbidity and mortality observed on the surface,’ to much deeper human stories involving the underlying agencies that prompted such radical migratory shifts in the first place.¹³¹

¹²⁶ In 1980, Appleby theorized that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century quarantines struck him as ‘the most plausible’ explanation for the slow disappearance of plague from Europe. Andrew B. Appleby, ‘The Disappearance of the Plague,’ 167-8. A follow up piece by Paul Slack conferred upon those findings. See Paul Slack, ‘The Disappearance of Plague: An Alternative View,’ 473-5.

¹²⁷ ‘...whereby the Stationing of Ships infected with the Plague to the Northward of Cape Finisterre is confined to the Harbour of New Grimsby, and removable to no other Place.’ *Journals of the House of Lords*, vol. 28, 507.

¹²⁸ Those forces were ‘essentially commercial, urban and middle class.’ See the introduction to, *Stilling the Grumbling Hive*, xii-xxii.

¹²⁹ Wrigley, 204-5.

¹³⁰ Romola Davenport, Jeremy Boulton, and Leonard Schwarz ‘Infant and young adult mortality in London’s West End, 1750-1824,’ a Newcastle University working paper, *The Pauper Lives Project*, at <http://research.ncl.ac.uk/pauperlives/infantandchildmortality.pdf> (accessed 18 May 2013)

¹³¹ Landers, 28-9. Enclosures may have prompted such migrations. Historically, English enclosures date back to the pre-Tudor years. Enclosures are thus, best seen as a process rather than a ‘movement,’ whereby nearly one in

But this new upsurge of industry-oriented centers of work were often geographically secluded and faced, upon occasion, surprising and sudden scarcities of food usually followed by a rise in prices.¹³² The resulting combination of poor nutrition coupled to horrid work and living conditions occasioned sporadic and quite isolated pockets of disease outbreaks.

Observations on the Low Contagious Fever (1785) told of a typhus epidemic that remained specific to remote boroughs of Lancashire: only the cotton mills and textile production centers witnessed the disease, and the fever spread no further than Lancaster and Backbarrow near Ulverston.¹³³ If there existed any hiccups to food distribution, or if harvests had been low-yielding or had outright failed, then ‘nervous fevers’ were likely to afflict primarily the poor, and ‘especially during winter season,’¹³⁴ which appears, on the face of it, to be about the time the sick started filling up Haslar Hospital near Portsmouth.

The theory, then, is that a possible localized outbreak of severe maladies could have made their way dockside in 1755. The ‘endemic foci of infection’ that plagued the Royal Navy in 1755 may have indeed originated in towns where newly emerging economic and social arrangements (subsistent wages, scarcity of food, bouts of hunger, crowded and often unsanitary living and working conditions) placed an already at risk populace at the mercy of

ten villages ceased to exist under Elizabethan rule, so that by 1600 ‘the amount of common waste to which even the formally landless poor had access’ was likely no more than 5 percent of all arable land. Helpful on this point were Gregory Clark’s and Anthony Clark’s, ‘Common Rights to Land in England, 1475-1839,’ *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 61, no. 4 (December 2001), 1034. See also, Steve Hindle, ‘Dearth, Fasting and Alms: The Campaign for General Hospitality in Late Elizabethan England,’ *Past & Present*, no. 172 (August, 2001), 62. By the mid-eighteenth century, then, larger and more agriculturally productive lands already supported juvenescent industrial centers (Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield) and ever important dockyard towns (Liverpool, Glasgow, Bristol, Plymouth, Newcastle) quite possibly manned with labor that enclosures had shed over the centuries. See the introduction to, *Stilling the Grumbling Hive*, xix-xxi. English poor laws also helped to absorb the brunt of these land reallocations so that, comparatively, the English were ‘quite easily separated’ from the medieval traditions of open and common lands. See Peter M. Solar, ‘Poor Relief and English Economic Development before the Industrial Revolution,’ *The Economic History Review*, New Series, vol. 48, no. 1 (February 1995), 9. Thus, by 1700 propertied men held a cultural view that enclosures benefitted the greater good, and the amount of Parliamentary Acts from 1760 to 1800 (some 1,800 of them) merely placed the exclamation point to this process. See Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty?* 358-9. It is here, then, that the point finally bears fruit: that it was the most vulnerable groups of the rural workforce, the bottom rung of the tenurial system that continually and consistently migrated over the centuries to newly emerging industrial or service sector regions. See Patrick Karl O’Brien, ‘Path Dependency, or Why Britain Became an Industrialized and Urbanized Economy Long before France,’ *The Economic History Review*, New Series, vol. 49, no. 2 (May 1996), 239.

¹³² Sheldon, ‘Practical Economics in Eighteenth-Century England,’ 638-9.

¹³³ By the middle of the eighteenth century, medical practitioners connected the crowded and ill-ventilated working and living conditions of the laboring poor to occasional outbreaks of diseases. ‘Gaol fever’ or ‘ship fever’ reflected the reality of the many crammed workhouses, poorhouse, jails, and maritime ships which sometimes bred and fed contagions which then swept through a populace at the lower rungs of society: mostly ill-paid and thus often nutritionally deficient. See, Guenter B. Risse, ‘“Typhus” Fever in Eighteenth-Century Hospitals: New Approaches to Medical Treatment,’ *Bulleting of the History of Medicine*, vol. 59, no. 2 (Summer 1985), 176-9. On *Observations*, Christopher Johnson spoke before a meeting of surgeons in 1869 Manchester and conferred upon the writings of Dr. Campbell of Lancaster, who, in 1785 published the pamphlet. See, Christopher Johnson, *Remarks on an Epidemic of Typhus, Which Prevailed in the Cotton Districts of Lancashire and was Described by Dr. Campbell of Lancaster in the year 1785*, (Lancaster, UK: G. C. Clark, 1869), 2.

¹³⁴ Risse, 176.

any new and developing contagion.¹³⁵ The notion that localized outbreaks of diseases may have contributed to the woes of the navy is further enhanced by observations put forth by Anne Hardy. Mid-eighteenth-century English medical practices existed within a decentralized framework. When it came to health, Parliament failed to pass any meaningful laws of salubrity. Cities and towns passed the task of health matters down to their local parishes. Thus, health care in the mid 1750s was decentralized, uncoordinated, and inconsistent.¹³⁶ The high infant mortality rates (IMRs) of London, double that of the rest of the nation;¹³⁷ plus the intense impressment along the length of the Thames, certainly gives credence that the navy-wide malady that struck in early 1755 may have originated here. The downside to this argument is that the deaths experienced in London during the winter of 1754-55 do not appear deviant. London newspapers did not report and significant mortality spikes, listing on average about 59 deaths per week due to fever.¹³⁸ These numbers are in line with observations made from Charles Creighton who wrote in the 1960s that ‘fever’ in London since the time of Thomas Sydenham’s observations, was a ‘steady item from year to year, seldom falling below a thousand deaths...’¹³⁹ Thus, I am persuaded to venture that faced with the wholesale, non-discriminatory collecting of men by impressment gangs sent to fill the billeting of 30,000 required men: the possibility that a localized, isolated, and perhaps diseased community delivered the malady to the navy with stunning alacrity is strong.

On the question of victuals as the source of the disease, as Admiral Hawke and others regarded as likely, there is simply too little documentation to support it. Besides, victualling offices were localized, specific to the bases they served be it Portsmouth, Chatham, Nore and others. Any disease outbreak upon the consequence of poor victualling would have been isolated to a particular base or fleet. The navy had long recognized the importance of diet, perhaps even before the medical profession. Whereas in a letter to a peer, John Pringle linked diet ailments: ‘Possible he might have escaped that stroke,’ wrote Pringle in 1762, ‘if he had

¹³⁵ Post claims that nutritional stress associated with socioeconomic conflicts were interwoven in preindustrial England. John D. Post, *Food Shortage, Climatic Variability, and Epidemic Disease in Preindustrial Europe: The Mortality Peak in the Early 1740s*, (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 11-2.

¹³⁶ Anne Hardy, ‘The Medical Response to Epidemic Disease during the Long Eighteenth Century,’ in J. A. I. Champion (ed.), *Epidemic Disease in London: A Collection of Working Papers at the Symposium ‘Epidemic Diseases of London: from the Black Death to Cholera’ held at the Institute of Historical Research, 19 March 1992*, (London: Centre for Metropolitan History, 1993)

¹³⁷ Using parish registers, Bills of Mortality, and Quaker records, Levene was able to state that London’s IMRs peaked at 450 deaths per 1,000 live births during the decade of the 1740s. See, Alysa Levene, ‘The Estimation of Mortality at the London Foundling Hospital, 1741-99,’ *Population Studies*, vol. 59, no. 1 (March 2005), 87.

¹³⁸ The *London Evening Post*, for example, posted ‘Diseases and Casualties this Week’ on their stock prices page. I used this data from the beginning of September 1754 to the end of March 1755 to arrive at the average number of deaths due to fever at 59.

¹³⁹ Charles Creighton, *A History of Epidemics in Britain*, vol. 2 (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1965), 13.

not eat that supper of apples and & milk so improper for a decayed cold & flatulent stomach,'¹⁴⁰ Samuel Pepys nearly a hundred years earlier insisted that 'seamen, love their bellies above anything else... [and] to make any abatement in the quantity or agreeableness of the victuals is to discourage and provoke them.'¹⁴¹ Perhaps this is why the victualling bill just for the 1755 Channel Campaign came to a whopping 'Sum of Twenty eight Thousand eight Hundred Pounds.'¹⁴²

Men were not the only casualty in 1755. Three major deployments left the material readiness of the fleets in a state of seeming disrepair by the end of the year.¹⁴³ The ministry's defense of not protecting British Mediterranean interests sooner than March/April of 1756 (the date Admiral Byng received his orders and sailed), repeatedly rested upon the disrepair of the fleet and manning issues. Curiously, too few historians have bothered to either challenge or confirm the ministry's plea of innocence based on these realities. For example, the only comment about the 1755 Channel Campaign from Fred Anderson's *Crucible of War*, is a single sentence: whereby, the poor condition of John Byng's ships sailing toward the Mediterranean is attributed to the fact that the admiral's 'task force had only recently returned from raiding French commerce in the Atlantic.'¹⁴⁴ This misses the mark. The November of 1755 storms had pummeled Byng's squadron. By the 22nd, the admiral called it quits. He sent a dispatch to the admiralty detailing the damage incurred to the *Buckingham*, *Trident*, *Orford*, *Lyme*, and *Eagle* due to rough seas and heavy gales. 'Upon the whole I looked upon the Squadron as in a great measure disabled and not fit to remain as Cruisers,' said Byng whereby he ordered 'the Major part of the Squadron into Port, and two third Rates, and two fourth Rates under the Command of Captain Harrison to continue Cruising... in the fair way of Brest as long as their circumstances would admit...'¹⁴⁵ One of the ships that sailed with Byng to save Minorca was the *Revenge*. After a November storm, the ship's main mast cracked and splintered and the 'Tallents of the Rudder fetched way as far down as they could see...'¹⁴⁶ Nineteen out of Byng's fleet of twenty-four ships needed refitting once the admiral

¹⁴⁰ Wellcome Library, MS 6867, 28 October 1762.

¹⁴¹ Quote as found in Rodger, *Wooden World*, 82.

¹⁴² Note: The bill for the campaign had yet to be paid a full year after the campaign had begun. See, T 1/371/67, Victualling Office to Dodington, 25 September 1756.

¹⁴³ The deployments were, in order, the delivery of Braddock's army to North America, Edward Boswen's attempt to intercept the French off of Newfoundland, and Edward Hawke's and John Byng's Channel Campaign.

¹⁴⁴ Anderson, 170.

¹⁴⁵ ADM 1/88, Byng to Cleveland, 22 November 1755.

¹⁴⁶ Ironically the *Revenge*'s rudder had just been repaired at Port Mahon, Minorca in the Mediterranean some months before. See, ADM 1/88, Byng to Cleveland, 12 November 1755.

made the late November decision to pull in.¹⁴⁷ Weather ended the Channel Campaign, but left a wake of wrecked ships that needed immediate repairing. When Byng did sail, finally, to the Mediterranean in April of 1756, half of his ships remained in some state of disrepair. To show the extent of the damage in financial terms, Dodington wrote to the treasury Department that ‘On the Head of Wear & Tear.... To pay one Months Course of the Navy ending 30th Novem 1755. . . £58,392 · 3 · 0,’¹⁴⁸ a remarkable sum that indicates the depth of the Channel Campaign’s toll on ships used to capture French prizes.

Conclusion

Little has been written about the taking of French maritime ships prior to the official start date of the Seven Years’ War. Seizing unsuspecting merchant ships in a preemptive blow in hopes of damaging the enemy’s economic abilities to fight is not exactly the type of history to fill the lexicons of heroic prose. The Seven Year’s War, though, is arguably a conflict steeped in economic underpinnings. The peripheral battlefields of Empire determined its outcomes. The decision to attack French shipping concerned money: *bellorum nervi sunt pecuniae*, easily recognized by princes, potentates, and nation-states, as the *sinews of war*. Gian Giacomo Trivulzio reminded Louis XII of France, that in order to invade Milan in the year 1499, ‘Three things are necessary: money, more money, and still more money.’¹⁴⁹ Louis XV lost perhaps upwards of 30 million livres when Hawke and Byng feasted upon his maritime fleet August through November of 1755. France lost 300 ships, its cargo, and some 7,500 men ‘more than half of them trained seamen.’¹⁵⁰ Comparatively, the British lost few ships when France retaliated, perhaps as little as seventeen.¹⁵¹ The Channel Campaign, thus, was an overwhelming and well-calculated success, one of the few that Britain would enjoy in the early stages of a growing conflict that soon would spill into full fledged war.

Further, and in contrast, the Channel Campaign accentuates the comparative disgrace to other naval hopes, operations, and strategies for 1755. Due to manning failures largely caused by some still historically unexplored disease, Hawke missed intercepting the return of Comte Du Guay’s French men of war on their return to Brest. Additionally, because of the

¹⁴⁷ ADD MS 33047, f. 24.

¹⁴⁸ T 1/366/8, Dodington to the Treasury, 22 April 1756.

¹⁴⁹ Quoted in J. R. Hale, *War and Society in Renaissance Europe, 1450-1620* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 232.

¹⁵⁰ These numbers also take into account Boscawen’s capture of the *Alcide* and *Lys*, and Byng’s capture of the *Ésperance*. All others, however, belong to the Channel Campaign. See, Dull, 38.

¹⁵¹ T 1/371/82.

illness that swept through Hawke's Channel squadron, Sir Edward sailed his fleet in ahead of schedule: late September. The Admiralty tapped John Byng, but manning issues again delayed a British fleet, this time by three weeks. In the interim, du Bois de la Motte and Périer de Salvert also slipped through the British blockade. For this reason, French naval historian Jonathan Dull claims that the British severely failed in their objectives.¹⁵² But Dull loses sight of the bigger picture – the one which started this chapter, that the Duke of Newcastle in July of 1756 could read advices from Paris that the French king gave up all hope of invading England, 'for there are not vessels in the Ports of the Channel sufficient to embark a great number of Troops.' In truth, the Admiralty purposely targeted French maritime vessels to cripple the French inability to conduct war both physically and monetarily.

Additionally, as 1755 lapsed, the New Year brought a slight but noticeable change in the Admiralty Office. Admiral Osborne was, perhaps, the first to notice it and he took offense. Secretary Cleveland sent Osborne orders 'not to take any officer or men from the Ships that are in immediate condition for service...'¹⁵³ The job description of portside admirals involved ensuring the readiness of His Majesty's ships, including manning. The New Year missive sent to Osborn infringed upon the sixty-one year old's perceived duties. He fired back complaining, 'What representation have been made to their Lordships I can't say, but to the best of my knowledge, that has been the rules I have gone by ever since I have been here.'¹⁵⁴ The significance of Osborn's affronted tone needs emphasizing as the orders sent to him indicated an Admiralty's not so subtle slide toward micromanaging affairs – even of its flag officers. High concern over the previous year's disastrous manning issues quite possibly forced the Admiralty to take such an unusual maneuver. The inability of Boscawen, Hawke, or Byng to intercept French warships to any significant degree may also have led to the Admiralty's sour mood.¹⁵⁵ Politically, then, the Admiralty must have taken a beating. Years of reform personally pushed through by Lord George Anson now seemed somewhat suspect. John Cleveland, the Admiralty Secretary who, according to Anna Veronica Coats,

¹⁵² Dull, 38-9. See also, SP 42/100/31.

¹⁵³ ADM 1/921, Osborn to Cleveland, 6 January 1756.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.* On the 13th of January, the Admiralty once again ordered Osborn to move men about taking some 600 men from the *Royal George*, *Prince George*, *Essex*, *Trident*, *Prince Frederick*, and *Monarch* to be distributed elsewhere. See, ADM 1/921, Osborn to Cleveland, 13 January 1756.

¹⁵⁵ On Byng informing the Admiralty of the French slipping through, see ADM 1/88 Byng, 12 November 1755.

opened and answered 4/5ths of the letters sent to and from the Admiralty, must have similarly felt the heat.¹⁵⁶

This switch in micromanagement similarly offended Byng, who, two months later, attempted to collect enough men to outfit a squadron heading to protect British interests in the Mediterranean. During the Channel Campaign, Byng had been given ‘seventeen ships of the line, besides twenty-gun ships and sloops’ and a bevy of ‘tenders to carry a supply of provisions and necessaries for the service of the fleet.’¹⁵⁷ In sailing for the Mediterranean, the Admiralty allocated but ten ships of the line, no tenders, no hospital ships, no twenty-gun sloops. The contrast could not be more remarkable. On 11 March 1756, Byng received his orders. Only six of his ten ships were then at Portsmouth, and every one of them undermanned: 865 men from those ships not mustered.¹⁵⁸ Just one week and a day prior to commanding John Byng to form his small squadron, the Admiralty ordered Osborn to transfer 176 men from the *Ramillies*, Byng’s flag ship. If it were indeed micromanaging, it appeared to be done with an ethos of by-the-seat-of-one’s-pants. On the 14th of March, the *Culloden* and *Kingston* anchored at Spithead: later that same day the *Defiance* arrived, but both its foremast and main top mast had been lost to the sea during transit.¹⁵⁹

But ships could be repaired, it was the want of men that continued to plague the Royal Navy: the losses incurred from the diseases that swept through the fleets throughout 1755, became too much to overcome in 1756. Despite continued impressments and further ‘rewards,’ the shortages of manpower remained. Perhaps in panic, with but two weeks before Admiral Byng set sail for the Mediterranean, the Treasury Office announced yet another scheme to extend ‘Twenty Shillings Reward for every Seaman fit to serve His Majesty...not only for Seamen but for Seafaring Men also, upon proper Certificates being produced...’¹⁶⁰ Such recruitment drives serve to highlight the continued dearth of able-bodied men which lasted well into the war. In Minorca’s case, once the ministry and court finally recognized, or perhaps admitted, there was indeed a threat: the want of men hampered their ability to react promptly.

¹⁵⁶ Ann Veronica Coats, ‘Cleveland, John (1706-1763), Naval Administrator and Politician,’ *Dictionary of National Biography*, (accessed 19 January 2013), 2.

¹⁵⁷ Read’s *Weekly Journal*, 8 November 1755.

¹⁵⁸ Those ships were the *Ramillies*, *Buckingham*, *Captain*, *Lancaster*, *Trident*, and *Revenge*. See ADM 1/921, Osborn to Cleveland, 11 March 1756. Also, in contrast, when Admiral Boscawen sailed for North America the year prior, he took nineteen ships of the line plus the *Bacchus* tender. See ADM 1/919, Hawke to Cleveland, 23 April, 1755.

¹⁵⁹ ADM 1/921, Osborn to Cleveland, 14 March 1756.

¹⁶⁰ T 1/369/15, Cleveland to James West, 25 March 1756.

But sailing a squadron short of a full complement, though burdensome and frowned upon, nonetheless was not quite so unusual. Numerous captains and admirals complained of the procedure and the Admiralty usually responded with an order to sail immediately while a sloop or other ship will be sent soon after with men enough to fill the billets. ‘...I have gotten His Majesty’s Ship *Lancaster* in compleat Readiness for the Sea in every Respect that depended on me,’ wrote Captain John Hamilton to Admiral Osborn (back when Osborn held the authority to move men about):

but I must beg Leave to observe to you that she is still upwards of a hundred Men short of her Complement.... the Complement of these new Seventy Gun Ships being barely sufficient to answer every Purpose, even when kept up compleat, I am therefore to make at my Request, as an Essential to being able to perform the Service expected from the *Lancaster*, that you will be pleased to fill her Complement up from the Ships which are to remain behind...¹⁶¹

Hamilton received additional men, but not a full complement. Not until more sailors had recovered and been released from Haslar Hospital did the *Lancaster* receive the men to fill out all the billets, the last of these men arriving by sea.

The manning issues forced the Admiralty into a difficult bind. However, the decisions it made must not be relegated to administrative and military histories alone. The task for scholars is to reconnect the British navy to the society from which it sprung: including the social dross, the men cleared from gaols, those men forced out from the parishes as charges, those men who worked for subsistent wages in a newly emerging economic flux that kept them often hungry, often hurting, and often ready to take matters into their own hands. This reconnection of the eighteenth-century British fleets to the whole of the society from which it was drawn is nothing short of a Herculean task.¹⁶²

In this instance, in explaining the Channel Campaign, and the constant shortages of men in particular, such a reconnection, perhaps, has led to a deeper understanding of not only why so many sick sailors succumbed to disease and perished in 1755, but to also understand how so many men arrived at being ill in the first place during a year (1754) in which harvests were plentiful and food prices had dipped. Sure, the Board of Sick & Hurt Seamen went to Dodington, the Navy Treasurer, with hat in hand with a request for an additional £20,000 for

¹⁶¹ ADM 1/920, Hamilton to Osborn, 29 October 1755.

¹⁶² I wish to thank Richard Sheldon for the vital clue into my theory of how the diseases spread. Food shortages in 1709, 1740, and in 1753 had been ‘largely localized occurrences,’ necessitated by social and economic-geography. Disease outbreaks also followed this pattern. See Sheldon, ‘Practical Economics,’ 643-4.

‘His Majesty’s Sick & Hurt Seamen’ in ‘all the Ports of Great Britain,’¹⁶³ (a radically huge sum and well beyond expectations, reflecting still the tremendous impact of the diseases that had spread throughout the fleets); this is relatively easy to document. What is not easy, but necessary, is to continue to endeavor adding continued historical perspectives as to why and how illness directly affected naval operations in 1755, and thereby hampered the court’s, the ministry’s, and the Admiralty’s desire to send a fleet to the Mediterranean sooner in March of 1756.

Last reflection is something Julian Corbett wrote at the beginning of the twentieth century: his harsh treatment toward Admiral Edward Boscawen:

the Ministers... themselves knew only too well what a blunder had been made. Nothing could justify the step they had taken but complete success; and it failed. They had screwed up their courage to give Boscawen his drastic orders on the supposition that if he attacked at all practically the whole French fleet would be captured, and nearly the whole had escaped.... At such a juncture Boscawen could not have done worse.¹⁶⁴

The famed naval historian goes on to describe Anson’s protection of Boscawen. ‘To do the Ministers justice,’ said Corbett, ‘they did not blame him.’¹⁶⁵ Admiral John Byng would not receive such forgiveness.

In the Year	Number Received	Died
1755	7,203	135
1756	6,942	1,527
1757	15,468	2,078
1758	11,992	1,917
1759	5,357	453
1760	4,741	554
1761	6,724	995
1762	5,946	790
Total	64,373	8,449

Table 2 – French Prisoners brought to the UK during the Seven Years’ War.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ T 1/371/30, Guiguer to Dodington, 4 March 1756.

¹⁶⁴ Corbett, *England in the Seven Years’ War*, vol. 1, 57-8.

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ ADM 98/9, Office of the Sick and Wounded to John Cleveland, 27 October 1762.

CONCLUSION

Parliament is adjourned to the 14th January. Of this you may be assured that England can get no Allies. — The new Secretary at War makes a vast Parade of the Number of Men in their service by Sea and Land. But it is a mere Delusion. They intend to bingyfy Keppell, to all Appearance. But killing him will not mend rotten ships nor make sailors.¹

From a rich suburb of Paris, John Adams wrote letters to his wife Abigail back home in Boston. The American Revolution placed Adams in France to curry favor, weapons, and money for his country's hopeful independence movement. A July 1778 naval battle west of the island of Ushant between France and Britain proved inconclusive: at the British helm was Admiral Augustus Keppel. Like the battle off of Minorca twenty-two years earlier, expectations of victory were high; and like Minorca, the press proved toxic as details of the battle began to arrive. Suddenly, by accusations of neglect brought about by a competing admiral (Sir Hugh Palliser) and a factional press, Augustus Keppel faced a court martial where, like Byng, if found guilty faced a sentence of death.² Keppel had reason to be worried: scapegoating military failures appeared to enter into some sort of European normalization. In 1766, the French execution of Lieutenant-General comte Thomas Arthur Lally (Lally-Tollendal) caught the attention of numerous periodicals and press accounts in London.³ The *London Chronicle* wrote that there certainly existed a 'parallel... drawn there between the fate of Admiral Byng and Lieut. General Lally...'⁴ Like Byng, Lally was given forces, as one academic put it, 'quite inadequate to the task ahead.'⁵ The concomitant surrender of Pondicherry cashiered any French hopes of holding on to India at the conclusion of the Seven Years' War. French ministers, like their English counterparts during the Byng

¹ John Adams letter to Abigail Adams, 30 December 1778. 'The Adams Letters: Digital Editions' *Massachusetts Historical Society*, <http://www.masshist.org/publications/apde2/view?id=ADMS-04-03-02-0115>, downloaded 18 February, 2015.

² Rogers wrote that anti-Keppel protests were 'highly choreographed' from above, by 'bourgeois radicals and Whig aristocrats' disillusioned 'with the American war...' See Nicholas Rogers, *Crowds, Culture, and Politics*, 277.

³ I am grateful to Professor William Doyle for this lead. On the Lally affair see, Thomas Arthur Lally, *Memoirs of Count Lally, from his embarking for the East Indies, as Commander in Chief of the French Forces in that Country, to his being Sent Prisoner of War to England, after the Surrender at Pondicherry* (London: Charles Kiernan, 1766).

⁴ *London Chronicle*, 27-29 May 1766; *St. James Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, 29-31 May 1766.

⁵ Eoghan Ó hAnnracháin, 'Lally, the Régime's Scapegoat,' *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, vol. 56 (2004), 76.

affair, ran a headlong campaign of calumny against Lally in order to save themselves.⁶ Thus, in his letter to his wife, Adams turned Byng into a verb – Byng’s plight struck a chord in the future second President of the United States: European political corruption remained too prevalent to be ignored. To ‘Byngify,’ according to Adams, was to charge an innocent of wrongdoing with public excoriations made via the factional press costing the charged his life which allowed any original perpetrators to escape their due justice.

I would argue that the legacy of the Byng affair remains as potent today as it did in John Adams’ day. For example, John Byng’s condemnations, courtesy of the newspaper and pamphlet world of 1756-1757, were not forgotten by conservative defenders of former president George W. Bush after the invasion of Iraq went awry. In a cyber-article entitled ‘Admiral Byng and President Bush,’ one pundit laid claim that ‘to this day, whenever anything happens not quite according to plan, the politicians and newspapers roll out their guillotines and scream for someone’s head.’⁷ But poor or unfair treatment in the press was not the only corruptive influence that determined the unfortunate admiral’s fate: in addition to an over-abusive press there existed venal British politics, protean and transgressive economics, perverted systems of justice, and a culture addicted to expressions of hearsay and rumor so as to remain willfully ignorant of truth’s possibilities.

We study the Byng affair to gain insights into eighteenth-century corruption. In Bristol, during the elections of 1754, a local newspaper made clear that it frowned upon ‘Knaves,’ and that there existed among the ‘honest, publick spirited Men,’ or politicians, a palpable ‘Fear of offending’ them. Knaves, if offended, would ‘revenge themselves by Action or Information... to expose Men in a publick Manner... destructive of the public Good.’⁸ According to the paper, ‘Knaves’ attempted to bribe a ‘Mayor of a Corporation’ with ‘a Silver Tea Kettle and Lamp,’ a ‘Gold Watch’ and for added measures ‘2500 £ for his Credit and Influence in their Favour...’⁹ Thus, from Bristol, the corruptive practices of men of wealth were knavishly placing the nation’s virtue under constant attack. A week later the same paper made further observations on the election, this time from London. It grumbled about a host of other problems, where:

B___ps vote openly for Jobbs... When the Clergy turn their
Preferments into Sine Cures... When N__s turn Sharpers by Gaming,

⁶ Sidney James Owen, ‘Count Lally,’ *The English Historical Review*, vol. 6, no. 23 (July 1891), 526-7.

⁷ Paul Schlichta, ‘Admiral Byng and President Bush,’ *American Thinker* (September 16, 2005), http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2005/09/admiral_byng_and_president_bus.html

⁸ Felix Farley’s *Bristol Journal*, 6 to 13 July 1754.

⁹ *ibid.*

and Cheats by defrauding Mankind... When the Rep__s__nt__s of the People are not ashamed to say openly, that they but their L_sl_ve seats... When the Magistracy is made a Trade of: when Parish Officers gluttonize on the Revenues of the starving Poor; and even Constables takes Bribes to Protect the Prostitutions they should suppress, [then] who can say a free nation is not in a very dangerous an alarming condition!¹⁰

From colonial Virginia, Presbyterian minister Sam Davies claimed that the ‘Sins of many Millions’ existed ‘on both sides the *Atlantic!*’ and that ‘Our Body politick is a huge Mass of Corruption...’¹¹ Clerics had accused the nation of being held sway under the power of corruption since the outcomes of England’s Civil War.¹² Within a single century, according to more than a just a few contemporaries, the systemization of politics, ‘a system founded on bribery and corruption,’ as one handbill put it, had brought the king and country ‘to the brink of ruin.’¹³

John Byng was a victim of such corruption.¹⁴ His case is our case here in the twenty-first century, given to us so as to understand the power and abuses of corruption within our post-modern society. Byng’s fight to clear his name brought down a ministry. Yet the former ministers and their cabal continued to work diligently behind the scenes to ensure that Minorca’s loss lay squarely upon the admiral, and especially to secure that perception before the people. Ballads were written and sung against the admiral, and sermons delivered to denounce Byng (chapter 1). Falsified papers and skewed press accounts turned attention away from those who had direction and control of re-manning the navy and assigning fleets (chapter 2). Byng was linked to the dearth, and thus became a figure considered as immoral as engrossers, corn-jobbers, and regrators. Processions organized in public squares and markets to instruct and guide the outrage (chapter 3). British corruption utterly allowed the destruction of a man who, since the age of thirteen, donated his entire life to naval service and served admirably abroad (chapter 4).

This dissertation reveals that communication of Minorca’s loss reached all strata of mid-eighteenth-century British society. Further, that the literacy paradigm is, on the main, over-hyped. Ballads, as one conduit, proved an effective way to communicate to the subjects

¹⁰ Felix Farley’s *Bristol Journal*, 13 to 20 July, 1754.

¹¹ Samuel Davies, *The Crisis*, 29.

¹² Gregg, 24.

¹³ *General B--Y’s Account to his Majesty, Concerning the Loss of Minorca*, (London: 1756)

¹⁴ Secondary accounts of corruption in eighteenth-century British society are deep: on corruption in politics and empire see, J. G. A Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), especially chapters 13 and 14; John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power*, chapters 3-5; on literary perceptions of corruption see James Raven, *Judging New Wealth*.

of the realm, whether recruiting for men to volunteer on privateers, or in song condemning an admiral or a ministry (or both) over an island's loss elsewhere in the empire. Print networks easily carried ballad sheets throughout the archipelago as their single-sheet simplicity allowed for low costs and easy transport. Sermons, too, traveled numerous religious networks, including those that crossed the Atlantic. Indeed, the Byng affair proved an associational culture stronger and much more complex than initially conceived. Once the decision had been made by the inner sanctum of the Newcastle ministry to pin Minorca's loss on Admiral John Byng, communication infrastructures took over. Recent historians have uncovered numerous examples of these networks which covered the whole of the long eighteenth century. James Fitts' essay pointed to the rise of 'Loyalty Societies' in defense of the new Hanoverian king in 1715.¹⁵ Frank O'Gorman did the same using the Thomas Paine effigy burnings in 1792.¹⁶ What the Byng affair lays bare then, is the extent, complexity, and dynamic nature of the many mid-eighteenth-century social networks by which news could travel.¹⁷ Newspapers themselves carried the story of Minorca's loss, but within a hyper-competitive and growing field of news outlets. The orality of newspapers simply mirrored Britain's rumor-riddled culture which spread protean quips of Byng's arrest and confinement to those numerous and wild accusations of his command in the Mediterranean: the more ludicrous, the better the sales. Amidst this atmosphere, the *London Gazette* struggled to provide a coherent government purview; its editors worked to strengthen the paper's reputation and sales even as ministry members sought additional outlets in which to spread further Byng calumny. Additionally, the Byng affair demonstrated that pamphlets began to cite and quote from newspapers in a significant way – remarkable when contrasted against the Mathews/Lestock naval scandal just ten years prior, where no pamphlets covering that case cited newspapers as part of their collective rhetorical arguments.

The Byng affair, however, was but one of many national maladies carried by these communicative circuits. Discourses over the dearth of 1756-7 also traveled these same networks. Written comments about Byng and dearth often appeared in the same work, sometimes in the same paragraph, and on some occasions – within the same sentence. Morality bound both Byng and dearth one to the other, and delivered to both of them the stinging rebukes of protests and riots. Peripheral concerns over empire merged with internal anxieties over relatively new market-driven reciprocities, and each amplified the other.

¹⁵ Fitts, 43.

¹⁶ O'Gorman, 119.

¹⁷ Wahrman, 45.

Byng's pedigree was easily tied to luxury which, in the mid-eighteenth century, assured the public's disquiet toward the admiral: unfortunate in an era of anti-trade prejudice. Both the nation's maladies, and Byng's attachment to them, found social and political expressions external of Parliament and London. But it must be recognized that these riots over food and the protests against Byng were both fueled within a culture of rumor and hearsay, traveling numerous associational networks, formal and informal.

Yet, the protests against the admiral differed significantly from the riots over food. Byng protests, though empire-wide, were fewer in number, much less violent, and likely to occur in public places such as market centers or town squares. Whereas food riots occurred for nearly two years, the Byng protests transpired mostly in the summer and fall of 1756. Additionally, the anger against Byng appeared – as did the Paine effigy burnings of 1792 – instructional and processional. Early reports of Byng being burned in effigy were nearly devoid of any significant detail, including locations. Once Byng was arrested, however, details of the Byng protests became more involved and three dimensional. Moreover, there existed an air of verticality to these later newspaper accounts. This is not to state that all Byng protests were vertical. However, by close readings of contemporary newspaper and pamphlet accountings, where details abundantly flow of the Byng effigy-burned proceedings, the majority do appear to be processional – that is, instructional. To better explain the differences between food riots and Byng burnings, a turn toward anthropology assisted in detailing the motivation of the majority of the participants in the anti-Byng demonstrations, whether city or rural, and that would be the poor. It is likely that in rural settings the protests against Admiral Byng occurred within a desire to maintain unfaltering paternal relations in the face of radical economic changes which had already altered the countryside landscapes.¹⁸ Protests against the admiral may have carried symbolic messaging, but the political and social lessons contained within predominated. In other words, numerous Byng protests were expressed in a manner to retain order, to reestablish social ties, to give direction to pent-up frustrations.

The work herein submitted provides a solid foundation from which to sally forth additional research. Closer investigations of the numerous Record Offices throughout all of England may yield new evidence and insights on two accounts: first, the relationships between the landed gentry and rural peasantry facing the dual problem of Byng calumny and dearth;¹⁹ and second, the communicative networks of urban to rural, especially along the

¹⁸ See the introduction to, *Stilling the Grumbling Hive*.

¹⁹ Added here ought to be any of the small but significantly numerous manufacturing centers that dotted the mid-eighteenth-century rural landscape.

lines of the rural lords to the political metropole. For example, this dissertation has provided evidence of significant dissatisfaction against the ministry by rural factions concerning both Minorca's loss and the disruptive dearth. An investigation of RO's would likely yield a much more complex and nuanced response to events in London during 1756-7. Likewise, archives in Boston, New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Charlestown, and other port towns in America could flesh out an empire-wide point of view to the unfolding events surrounding Minorca's loss and London's response to it. Evidence thus far presented shows considerable colonial doubt to the reports emanating from London concerning both Minorca's loss and Byng's arrest, trial and execution.

Additionally, the research suggests that more insights into the political word surrounding Byng may be garnered through that hackneyed nomenclature: merchant. It is a reductive term that rather confuses the matter of mid-eighteenth-century politics, economics, and commerce than clarifies. Thomas Turner, a mercer in East Hoathly has nothing in common with Everard Fawkener, a leading official within the Levant Company and confidant to the Duke of Cumberland, yet both are to be considered part and parcel of the same 'merchant class'?²⁰ Are financiers, bankers and insurers to be poured into the same mold of corn-jobbers, engrossers, and wine merchants? This rhetorical tirade comes loaded with frustrations in attempting to locate this most important voice in mid-eighteenth-century British society. Additional terms such as bourgeoisie or merchant-ranks do little to clarify. If we restrict the term merchant to include only those who, as Cain and Hopkins dub, were 'gentleman capitalist,' those who 'possess great wealth without' showing the 'means of support that was wholly visible,'²¹ – even in that narrow, London-based purview of the term: we know remarkably little of their perceptions of Minorca's loss, and especially of their relationships and contacts within Westminster as the Byng saga unfolded. Tunstall's allusion that 'without the support of merchants no Government of any kind could hope to carry out its duties,' is predominately unhelpful, especially as he referenced the king, George II.²² Numerous primary materials make note of the king and his 'Hanoverian business' and Parliament's adamant refusals to foot any of that bill. Still, recent works on George II gloss over the connections between the king and richest merchants of London however cordial or

²⁰ See *The Diary of Thomas Turner*; on Everard Fawkener see, Norma Perry, 'City Life in the 1720s: the Example of Four of Voltaire's Acquaintances,' in *The Secular City: Studies in the Enlightenment*, edited by T. D. Hemming, E. Freeman, and D. Meakin (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), 51.

²¹ P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914* (London: Longman Group, 1993), 26.

²² Tunstall, 180.

disputatious this relationship may or may not have been.²³ Merchant influence on politics cannot be denied yet we know little of the ‘merchant’ reaction to Byng and Minorca. After all, these ‘merchant’ bankers would become the ‘the acknowledged king-makers of the early nineteenth-century world’ soon to be avidly ‘discussed with awe and some fear...’²⁴ John Barnard and William Beckford may set up what to expect: factionalism and discordances unbridled. But a thorough investigation of the political crisis caused by Minorca’s loss should, and must, discuss the relationship between high finance and British governing at the mid-eighteenth century.²⁵ Thus, the Byng affair, a deviant case if there ever was one, must assuredly crack open this mid-eighteenth-century imperial brew of politics, trade, money, and empire. Admiral Byng may be the key to understanding the relations between London, Bristol, Liverpool, Glasgow, and other merchant-city centers to those who attempted to form trading and foreign policies in the face of war.

Undoubtedly, without that ‘merchant’ voice, the entangled nature of eighteenth-century British nationalism becomes ever more difficult to sort. The Byng affair flaunted numerous versions of the ideal Briton as juxtaposed against the many horrid and artfully painted descriptions of Admiral Byng. But the move to excoriate and blame Byng for Minorca’s loss held serious political pushback and not all of it centered in the Metropole. On this point, Kathleen Wilson reminds us that an opaque existence of extra-parliamentary politics during the Byng crisis derived not from any single political faction, but rather from a most complex culture of mid-eighteenth-century body politics. Appeals to ‘the people’ came from provincial urban centers, rural patriarchs, Westminster politicians, merchant aldermen, religious clerics, numerous societies, moral philosophers, participators of court intrigue, perhaps even the king whose thumbs-down toward a possible Byng pardon was based, allegedly, on George II’s ear which claimed to tune out Parliament and instead tune into the voice of his people on the matter.²⁶ Appeals to the general populace could only happen, however, if there were conduits of information aimed squarely at them: sermons, ballads, newspapers, pamphlets, chapbooks, prints, handbills, ephemera, money and materials,

²³ Both Thompson and Black point to unique circumstances that make it difficult for any historian to study George II and his relationship to others. See the introduction to Thompson, *George II: King and Elector*; Jeremy Black, ‘George II and All that Stuff’: On the Value of the Neglected,’ *Albion*, vol. 36, no. 4 (Winter, 2004), 581-607.

²⁴ Michael Lisle-Williams, ‘Beyond the Market: The Survival of Family Capitalism in the English Merchant Banks,’ *The British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 35, no. 2 (June 1984), 241.

²⁵ Cain and Hopkins claimed two decades ago that ‘There is no study of high finance and high politics in Britain...’ Cain, *British Imperialism*, fn. 43, page 27.

²⁶ Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, 436-7. According to Tunstall, William Pitt attempted to persuade the king that the House of Commons favored a pardon to which the king replied, ‘You have taught me to look for the sense of my subjects in another place than in the House of Commons.’ See Tunstall, 262.

processionals and effigies that sought to borrow ‘the people’ so as grant political legitimacy to those who craved it.²⁷

So let’s call these appeals on terms of what this is: nationalism. Minorca’s loss and the attachment of Admiral John Byng to the perceived national disgrace was but one element upon which moral, political, and/or economic legitimacy had been sought for decades, at least as far back as Queen Ann’s reign. The Whig ascendancy under the Hanoverian regimes favored Whig politics replete with an emphasis upon empire, trade, and commerce; favoring urban cosmopolitanism over rural paternalism; bankers and financiers over landed aristocrats; yet coveting the legitimacy of rooted religion – Dissenter and Anglican – to hold some sway over the many whose very lives had been, for decades, altered by this dynamic assault upon older forms of reciprocities. But this was the nation according to Whigs, yet the Whigs themselves were factionalized, attached and reattached (depending upon political winds) to court intrigues or other moneyed patronages. Out of the many-headed hydra of Whig affairs rose the Patriots whose very existence perhaps can be culled from an Ernest Gellner observation: that those failing to curry political clout ‘fulminate’ at power’s skewed distributions.²⁸ There is no doubting to where Patriot Whigs turned in order to secure a sense of political authenticity: the people. Further, anti-corruption sentiment, practiced and polished during the long tenure of Robert Walpole’s administration, not only remained front and center as a national (if not empire-wide) issue, but carried a distinctive anti-authoritarian tone.²⁹ By the 1750s, political culture arrived at seeking solace from ‘the people’ as a cure against the ill-effects of corruptive influences.³⁰ What emerged, then, from either the defense of Byng or the calumny raised against him was a near unanimous call to present an ‘ethical ideal of citizenship,’ as James Raven called it, before the general populace.³¹

But herein lay a problem that the Byng affair exposes and I have yet to answer: who are these people? What signifies a Briton?³² Pamphlet titles alone indicate the importance of

²⁷ For example; the Duke of Newcastle boasted of controlling ‘Loyal Society’ mobs promoting the Hanoverian secession of 1715. See, Fitts, ‘Newcastle’s Mob,’ 41.

²⁸ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 4 and 85.

²⁹ Colonial newspapers cried corruption in London politics long before the Seven Years’ War. For example, the *North Carolina Gazette*, pleaded with the new Devonshire/Pitt administration ‘to endeavour to restrain the number of Placemen, that ... riot in Idleness, Debauchery, Gaming and Gluttony, upon the Spoils of an impoverished People.’ *North Carolina Gazette*, 15 April 1757.

³⁰ Wilson, 437.

³¹ Raven, 90.

³² E. P. Thompson claimed agnosticism in answering that question despite ‘trying for much of my life...’ See, E. P. Thompson, ‘Which Britons?’ in *Persons & Polemics*, 323.

the ‘people’ in conjunction with the Byng affair.³³ Newspapers, too, founded their sales upon an inherent belief that they – as an institution – represented the voice of the people.³⁴ But this merger of people and state, the enfoldment of subjects and empire, the reciprocal nature of imperial trade, consumption, and conflict (internal and external), especially during the Byng affair, are littered with contemporaneous attempts to define what a good Briton ought to be. Here, too, then, is another necessary investigation and chapter needed to help flesh out an honest discourse on British nationalism.

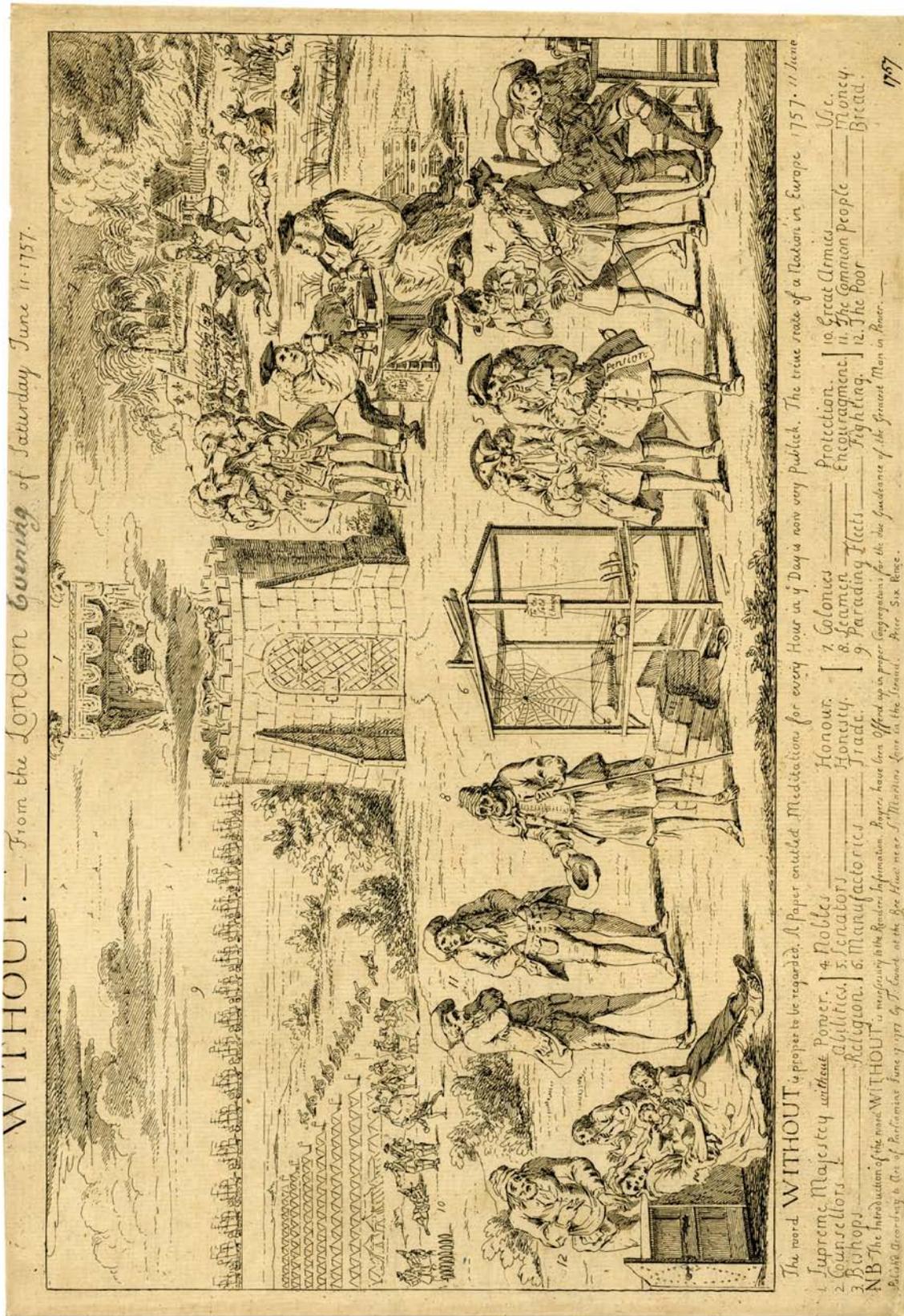
This dissertation started as an investigation into the Byng affair with an aim to look beyond the political and maritime histories which have dominated the story. Its focus on culture, by way of microhistory, has revealed waters deep and rich which have done much to clear some of the murkier questions about England, Britain, and empire in the mid-eighteenth century. A 1757 print entitled ‘Without’ (figure 11) demonstrates that the great issues of 1756 were not solved with the execution of Admiral John Byng. Etched by Thomas Ewart, the word ‘without’ was to be that fill-in-the-blank remark – just follow the numbers. A nation devoid of religion reflects the number ‘1’ where the ‘Supreme Majesty’ is ‘*without* Power’; Courtiers (with duck heads) are without ‘abilities’; Bishops (plump, drinking, and gambling) without any sense of ‘Religion’; Nobles (shown picking the pocket of a sleeping simpleton) are without ‘Honour’; Senators (one counts money, the other points to a pension slip and his large smiley face) are without ‘Honesty’; manufacturers (represented by an idle and cobweb-riddled loom) are without ‘trade’; colonies (in the upper right are in flight from a combined force of French armies and natives) without ‘Protection’; Seamen (depicted by a tar wearing but one good shoe and begging) without ‘Encouragement’; ‘Parading Fleets’ (at the upper

³³ Here are a smattering of examples: *An Appeal to the People: Containing, The Genuine and Entire Letter of Admiral Byng to the Secr. of the Ad_____y: Observations on those Parts of it which were omitted by the Writers of the Gazette: And What might be the Reasons for Such Omissions* (Dublin: L. Flin, 1756); *An Address to the Public in Answer to Two Pamphlets, (Intituled, An Appeal to the People of England, and A Letter to a Member of Parliament, relative to the Case of A_____l B__g) In which is fully proved, That the several Parts of the A_____l’s Letter omitted in the Gazette, were rather of Use, than Prejudice to him* (London: A. Type, 1756); *An Appeal to the Sense of the People, On the Present Posture of Affairs* (London: David Hookham, 1756); James Heywood, *The Happiness and Duty of Britons Under the Present Government: Represented in A Sermon, Occasioned by His Majesty’s late Indisposition, Preached at Chesterfield, in the County of Derby, April 25, 1756* (London: J. Payne, 1756); *The Voice of the People: A Collection of Addresses to His Majesty, and Instructions to Members of Parliament by their Constituents, upon the Unsuccessful Management of the present War both at Land and Sea; and the Establishment of a National Militia* (London: J. Payne, 1756); *Public Injuries Require Public Justice: or, An Enquiry into the Causes of the Miscarriage of the late Secret Expedition to the Coast of France* (London: H. Owen, 1757); William Thompson, *An Appeal to the Public in Vindication of Truth and Matters of Fact* (London, 1761), and *Two Very Singular Addresses to the People of England* (London: 1757).

³⁴ C. John Sommerville, *The News Revolution in England: Cultural Dynamics of Daily Information*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 132.

left) without 'Fighting'; 'Great Armies' (rows of tents and cannons, but folly in the foreground as men play a bowling game, dance with women, and lull about) without 'Use'; 'The Common People' (two figures looking grumbled and bored) without 'Money'; and, finally, 'The Poor' (a man over a woman who leans against an empty cupboard with a dead rat inside, she holds three hungry children) are without 'Bread.' This one image, thus, does much to signify the complexity of problems that soured the mood of a nation that entered into war with France. These issues curdled and turned, twisted and combined, and formed considerable angst all of which worked together to create the political and cultural situation whereby an admiral can be readily shot for the necessity of national encouragement.

Figure 11 - 'Without,' British Museum. Source: © Trustees of the British Museum. Reprinted with permission.



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