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HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW

RECENT WORK IN BRITISH NAVAL HISTORY, 1750–1815

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ABSTRACT. *This is a selective survey of books published over the last ten years or so and bearing on British naval history in the second half of the long eighteenth century.*

It is not very likely that the editor of the *Historical Journal*, or any other scholarly publication, would have asked for such an article as this twenty-five years ago, or indeed that it could have been written had it been invited.[1] Even in Britain, where it might be thought to have a natural habitat, naval history was deeply unfashionable, and among academics lay on the bare margins of professional acceptability. The few practitioners tended not to be working in universities, and their work was often narrow and technical in approach.[2] It was notable that a number of distinguished British academic historians had begun their careers in naval history before departing swiftly for other subjects more likely to command respect.[3] All this has changed in recent years. Both popular and scholarly interest has enormously increased; the two-hundredth anniversary of the battle of Trafalgar in 2005 produced important exhibitions in London and Paris,[4] and such a torrent of books as threatens to sweep the stoutest reviewer off his feet. Many of these need not detain the scholarly reader, but at the lowest estimate they are evidence of a huge public enthusiasm for the past that should give pleasure to all historians. Moreover the nature of the serious literature of naval history has greatly changed. Of course biographies (especially of Nelson) and books about battles (especially Trafalgar) have recently been published in large numbers, and in some cases they are of high quality, but it is significant that naval history is

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[1] This is a severely selective survey of books bearing on, or at least closely related to, British naval history in the second half of the 'long eighteenth century'. I have taken as an approximate *terminus a quo* my earlier article 'Recent books on the Royal Navy of the eighteenth century', *Journal of Military History*, 63 (1999), pp. 683–703.

[2] But Professor John Bromley of Southampton was a conspicuous exception to both generalizations.

[3] John Ehrman, *The Navy in the war of William III, 1689–1697: its state and direction* (Cambridge, 1953); Norman Hampson, *La marine de l'an II: mobilisation de la flotte d'océan, 1793–1794* (Paris, 1959); H. T. Dickinson, 'The capture of Minorca in 1708', *Mariner's Mirror*, 51 (1965), pp. 195–204.

[4] Margarette Lincoln, ed., *Nelson and Napoléon* (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, 2005). Jean-Marcel Humbert and Bruno Ponsonnet, eds., *Napoléon et la mer: un rêve d'empire* (Musée Nationale de la Marine, Paris, 2004).

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now being approached from many different directions, and connected to many diverse areas of national history, often by historians who would not regard themselves as being specialists in the subject, but who recognize naval history as having an essential bearing on their interests.[5] In the ten years or so covered by this article, monographs have appeared on social, cultural, administrative, political, and strategic aspects of British naval history, besides numerous biographical, operational, and technical histories. Moreover this renewed interest has spread into other countries such as France and Spain, whose own naval histories are intertwined with Britain's. Though biography remains one of the most accessible forms of history, and anniversaries drive publishing, television, and to a large extent the academic world, there is much more here than simply the pressure to mark the life, battles, and death of Nelson.

Moreover we know now, what scarcely seemed possible ten years ago, that there was still an enormous amount to discover about Nelson and his age. One might have thought that there could be nothing left to say about a man who in death had already faced more biographers than he ever did enemies in life, but in fact the enormous literature about Nelson rested on a relatively narrow evidential base, not recently refreshed by original research. The same short list of printed sources, especially of Nelson's correspondence, and the same long list of sententious anecdotes, mainly drawn from the official biography by Clarke and McArthur,[6] had been endlessly mined and copied. Sometimes they still are, as for example in the recent life by Edgar Vincent.[7] He has read some way into the social history of the Navy, but he has not touched on its structure and administration, consequently he cannot really tell (and does not really ask) what the Navy could do, and how. He has only a very cursory idea of how sailing ships worked, and no idea of how battle tactics were evolving. Most of Nelson's professional life is therefore beyond his horizon, but he writes well and brings his hero to life. Those who have read other biographies will find a lot that they knew already, and one novelty. Vincent is a management consultant, interested in the human relations of leaders and led, and he has illuminating comments to offer on Nelson's personal dealings with subordinates, colleagues, and the Admiralty. This is useful, but it is also a wasted opportunity, for much more could have been made of it by an author who had mastered naval administration. Nelson was an outstanding manager as well as a great leader; the two are not the same, very little has been written about him as a manager, and Vincent could have contributed something original and important. Unfortunately he has few ambitions: he gives us an accessible book which sets out to do again what has often been done before, and which does not demand any unusual effort from author or reader.

Very different in scale and approach is John Sugden's massive biography,[8] taking almost a thousand pages to bring Nelson only to 1797, when the battle of St Vincent first made him a public figure. Another volume as large again is promised to complete his life. Sugden deploys an immense mass of detailed research which tells us more, and more accurately, about many events of Nelson's early life than we have ever known before. At least in this volume, however, he tends not to lift his eyes above Nelson's own perspective as a junior

[5] Examples from outside the period under discussion here are David Loades, *The Tudor Navy: an administrative, political and military history* (Aldershot, 1992); and Bernard Capp, *Cromwell's Navy: the fleet and the English Revolution, 1648–1660* (Oxford, 1989).

[6] James Stanier Clarke and John McArthur, *The life of Admiral Lord Nelson, K. B., from his lordship's manuscripts* (2 vols., London, 1809).

[7] Edgar Vincent, *Nelson: love and fame* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2003).

[8] John Sugden, *Nelson, a dream of glory* (London, 2004).

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officer to ask big questions about why he was important or what difference he made. Nor has he completely emancipated himself from the baleful influence of Clarke and McArthur, with their deadly combination of credulity and dishonesty. For that we must turn to the new life by Roger Knight,[9] who tackles Nelson in an austere spirit of self-denial, which rejects all printed sources not verifiable from manuscript evidence. Moreover he takes no pains to draw the reader's attention to the numerous elements of the traditional Nelson story that he has struck out, or the numerous fresh discoveries that he has inserted. Where lesser writers trumpet some trifling novelty, Knight is content to allow the merits of his book to speak softly to those with ears to hear. This is a quiet, understated life, resting on a huge substructure of scholarship, its judgements mature and balanced. When Sugden's second volume emerges, he will have no rival for scale, but Knight's is likely to remain the standard scholarly life for our generation. Not exactly a biography, but treated by its editor as a sort of epistolary autobiography, is Colin White's selection of Nelson letters hitherto unknown, or known only in the mangled forms offered by Victorian editors.[10] This derives from a large project organized by the National Maritime Museum which has now almost doubled the known corpus of Nelson letters. White's edition is, as its title declares, Nelson's letters, not his correspondence, and it is edited to be read as a work of literature and autobiography, rather than used by historians as a scholarly resource. Opinions will differ as to whether this was the best editorial approach, but the value of the letters themselves is not in doubt. Three other learned contributions to Nelson's life deserve mention. Andrew Lambert's[11] is in the technical sense an apology, but not in the least apologetic. On the contrary, this is an aggressive author in the best traditions of the Royal Navy, who sets out to sink, burn, or destroy the numerous writers who have defamed his hero with 'errors and absurdities', 'gushing romantic nonsense', and 'the mean-spirited carping of disappointed hostile witnesses'. The Victorians are no more spared than those modern writers who have ventured to accuse the admiral of occasional misjudgement or misconduct. Very different in tone is the cool forensic skill of the German scholar Marianne Czisnik,[12] who dissects and connects various aspects of Nelson's real life and posthumous reputation. Her calm but deft analysis of emotional relationships contrasts with the embarrassed fumbling of so many previous writers. Finally there is David Cannadine's powerful collection, the fruit of a lecture series that assembled a range of points of view on the admiral.[13]

Meanwhile the spirit of biography, moving over the face of the waters, has steered other historians towards some of Nelson's neglected contemporaries. Thus David Syrett on Howe,[14] and Kevin McCranie on Keith,[15] give us the first satisfactory biographies of two other leading admirals of the age.[16] Howe, though a major naval and political actor in two successive wars, First Lord of the Admiralty under the younger Pitt and victor of a fleet action, is a difficult subject for a biographer, since he left no papers, and was notoriously

[9] Roger Knight, *The pursuit of victory: the life and achievements of Horatio Nelson* (London, 2005).
[10] Colin White, ed., *Nelson, the new letters* (Woodbridge, 2005).
[11] Andrew Lambert, *Nelson, Britannia's god of war* (London, 2004).
[12] Marianne Czisnik, *Horatio Nelson, a controversial hero* (London, 2005).
[13] Cannadine, David, ed., *Admiral Lord Nelson: context and legacy* (Basingstoke, 2005).
[14] David Syrett, *Admiral Lord Howe, a biography* (Stroud, 2006).
[15] Kevin D. McCranie, *Admiral Lord Keith and the naval war against Napoleon* (Gainesville, FL, 2006).
[16] The only previous efforts were Sir John Barrow, *The life of Richard Earl Howe, K. G.* (London, 1838); and Alexander Allardyce, *Memoir of George Keith Elphinstone, Viscount Keith* (Edinburgh, 1882); neither in the least satisfactory.

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incapable of making himself understood in speech, in writing, or by signal. A contemporary referred to him as 'inaccessible as the Peruvian mountains', and subsequent writers have felt the same. The late David Syrett, a historian of long experience in the period, gives us a learned but restrained biography, which does not really succeed in bringing his elusive subject out of the shadows. Lord Keith, by contrast, left plenty of material for future historians, but has not until now attracted the attention which his very long service deserves. A commander-in-chief of four different squadrons between 1795 and 1815, he was the only British admiral of his generation to hold high responsibilities throughout the long wars against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, and yet he has always been passed over as one of the almost great. He almost fought a fleet action, but not quite; he was dependable rather than brilliant, respected rather than liked. Kevin McCranie does not claim more for him than the traditional estimate, but he provides a thorough, balanced and well-grounded biography that brings the man to life and sets him in his times. One of the abler French admirals of that generation, Latouche-Tréville, has received justice from Rémi Monaque.[17] Though careful and dispassionate, Admiral Monaque does not completely escape the sense of regret that hangs over so much French naval history; regret for what might have been and should have been. Had he not died the previous year, Latouche-Tréville would have been in command of the French Mediterranean squadron and the Combined Fleet at Trafalgar. He was an officer of ability with a good fighting record, and the last admiral left in the French navy with any force of character whom Napoleon had not got rid of. Perhaps things might have been different under his command.

Another, less well-known admiral of the Napoleonic age who has lately been studied is Sir Charles Cotton, Collingwood's successor in the Mediterranean command in the later years of the Napoleonic Wars. Cotton was another safe pair of hands who had no opportunities of fame but competently handled big responsibilities. His 'generally useful, if not brilliant' career has been written in a thoroughly useful, if not brilliant way by a US Army officer, Paul Krajeski.[18] Utterly unlike Cotton in talent and character was the wayward genius Lord Cochrane, who has dazzled generations of popular biographers, to say nothing of novelists like Marryat, Forester, and O'Brian. None of them has ever been able to confront the uncomfortable fact that this most brilliant fighting commander, whose feats in command of single ships and small squadrons have never been equalled, was in his personal life compulsively grasping and dishonest. His mendacious autobiography was written (or rather ghosted by a writer who was being paid on commission) to support fraudulent financial claims.[19] Although contemporaries were aware of much of this, credulous modern biographers have preferred to believe Cochrane's own picture of the fearless campaigner against a corrupt Establishment who suffered as a victim of political persecution. In reality Cochrane the Radical MP was a source of unfailing embarrassment to his friends, and of pleasure to the ministers of the day, who had no interest at all in suppressing him, and no hand in the private prosecution for fraud that finished his parliamentary career. Only now

[17] Rémi Monaque, *Latouche-Tréville: l'amiral qui défiait Nelson* (Paris, 2000).

[18] Paul Christopher Krajeski, *In the shadow of Nelson: the naval leadership of Admiral Sir Charles Cotton, 1753–1812* (Westport, CT, 2000).

[19] Thomas Cochrane, earl of Dundonald, *The autobiography of a seaman* (2 vols., London, 1860). Both this and his *Narrative of services in the liberation of Chile, Peru and Brazil* (2 vols., London, 1859) were ghost-written by George Butler Earp, and were designed to support Cochrane's financial claims against various South American governments.

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has a new life by Brian Vale taken a dispassionate view of this repellent genius.[20] It is particularly strong on his post-war service as a liberator in the navies of Chile and Brazil, which provided fresh proofs of his fighting talents and financial unscrupulousness.

Besides biographies of individuals, there have been some notable essays in collective biography. In the first place of course, one must place the *Oxford dictionary of national biography*,[21] which with over a thousand naval lives, constitutes in itself a naval biographical dictionary. In the original *DNB* all the naval lives were written by one man, Sir John Knox Laughton, whose pioneer use of the naval archives helped to impose his interpretations, and his prejudices, on British naval history for a century. Now revised or replaced in the light of modern scholarship, the naval lives no longer reflect a single dominant point of view, but they represent a huge resource for naval historians, which will probably take a generation to sink fully into the collective historical consciousness. Meanwhile we have several other biographical collections on a more manageable scale. Two, produced by the same team, provide brief lives of British admirals of the mid- and late eighteenth century – the titles inevitably refer to them as 'Predecessors' and 'Contemporaries' of Nelson.[22] Finally there is a large number of books of varying usefulness on the lines of Who's Who at Trafalgar, Men who Fought with Nelson, Men who would have Fought with Nelson had They not been Elsewhere, and so on.[23]

This is perhaps the moment to mention battles. One of the least attractive aspects of the older naval history to the modern scholarly reader was a focus on battles to the exclusion of everything else, and battles too often studied in a narrow, hermetic, and technical manner. In reality this approach was never universal: for every Laughton with his positivist, mechanistic search for the principles of war, there was a Corbett to invoke Clausewitz in search of the essentials of naval strategy.[24] Nevertheless battles acquired a bad name, and one of the features of the revival of naval history has been a rediscovery of their importance. 'Lord Howe's Action' (as contemporaries called it), the 'Glorious First of June' 1794, has received scholarly analysis for the first time.[25] Nelson's battles have naturally not been neglected. An Anglo-Spanish team tackled St Vincent,[26] and we have new treatments of the Nile from both British and French points of view.[27] There has been no new work in English on Copenhagen, but there is a useful collection of short studies in Danish,[28] and Ole Feldbæk's classic account, long the best at setting the battle in its strategic context,

[20] Brian Vale, *The audacious Admiral Cochrane: the true life of a naval legend* (London, 2004).

[21] H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, eds., *The Oxford dictionary of national biography* (60 vols., Oxford, 2004).

[22] Peter Le Fevre and Richard Harding, eds., *Precursors of Nelson: British admirals of the eighteenth century* (London, 2000); and idem and idem, eds., *British admirals of the Napoleonic Wars: the contemporaries of Nelson* (London, 2005).

[23] Some of the most useful are: Nicholas Tracy, *Who's who in Nelson's Navy: 200 naval heroes* (London, 2006); Alistair Wilson and Joseph F. Callo, *Who's who in naval history from 1550 to the present* (London, 2004); Colin White et al., *The Trafalgar captains, their lives and memorials* (London, 2005).

[24] On this the essential reading is still Julian S. Corbett, *Some principles of maritime strategy* (London, 1911).

[25] Michael Duffy and Roger Morriss, eds., *The Glorious First of June 1794: a naval battle and its aftermath* (Exeter, 2001).

[26] Stephen Howarth, ed., *Battle of Cape St. Vincent 200 years* (Shelton, Notts., 1998).

[27] Brain Lavery, *Nelson and the Nile: the naval war against Bonaparte 1798* (London, 1998); Michèle Battesti, *La bataille d'Aboukir 1798: Nelson contrarie la stratégie de Bonaparte* (Paris, 1998).

[28] Søren Mentz, ed., *Kampen i Kongedybet: slaget på Reden* (Copenhagen, 2001).

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has at last been translated.[29] Finally of course there comes Trafalgar, and as with the life of Nelson it is a pleasant surprise to discover just how much new and important material there was to discover about something we thought we knew completely. The new lives of Nelson (especially Knight), and the documentary collections (especially White) have thrown much new light on Nelson's handling of the action. A valuable Spanish conference assembled scholars from three nations, and includes some particularly important new findings on gunnery and tactics.[30] David Cannadine edited another collection on Trafalgar.[31] At the launch of the book he declared that 'the distinguished contributors have never written better: I know, because I re-wrote them myself', and his tight editorial control has indeed produced an unusually coherent volume. Other new studies in English, French, and Spanish have added a great deal to our understanding of the battle itself, and of its strategic context and significance.[32] So also has the massive two-volume collection edited by Admiral González-Aller, retired director of the Museo Naval in Madrid, which prints every document in Spanish archives bearing on the Trafalgar campaign.[33]

The fact that scholars of three nations have been addressing the battle together is one of the most encouraging fruits of the 2005 celebrations. Maritime history is of its nature peculiarly international, and it ought to be a matter of course that all studies of the naval history of the eighteenth-century wars should be based on reading in the appropriate languages. In reality there are still rather too many monoglot contributions, but the situation has certainly changed for the better. It is also fair to say that the worst offenders are not English-speaking writers, or necessarily writers at all. The flat refusal of most French publishers to allow review copies out of the country must by itself be a major contributor to the declining status of French as a scholarly language. Surveying some of the collective volumes and conference proceedings that have recently appeared one can get a flavour of some more or less international approaches. A Spanish collection on the imperial powers in the eighteenth century results from a meeting of the 'Fundación Española de Historia Moderna', and naturally is predominantly Spanish in tone – but most of the contributors were reasonably aware of recent contributions to their subjects in other languages, and some foreigners were invited to speak.[34] A recent French conference was devoted to a characteristically grand theme, *La puissance maritime*.[35] This was an international conference *style français*; non-Parisians were invited, and even some foreigners, on condition of speaking

[29] Ole Feldbæk, *The battle of Copenhagen 1801*, trans. Tony Wedgwood (London, 2002); originally *Slaget på Reden* (Copenhagen, 1985).

[30] Agustín Guimerá, Alberto Ramos, and Gonzalo Butrón, eds., *Trafalgar y el mundo Atlántico* (Madrid, 2004). This includes important new research by Michael Duffy which has since appeared in English: '"All was hushed up …" the hidden Trafalgar', *Mariner's Mirror*, 91 (2005) pp. 216–40.

[31] David Cannadine, ed., *Trafalgar in history: a battle and its afterlife* (Basingstoke, 2006).

[32] Tim Clayton and Phil Craig, *Trafalgar, the men, the battle and the storm* (London, 2004); Brian Lavery, *Nelson's fleet at Trafalgar* (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, 2004); Michèle Battesti, *Trafalgar: les aléas de la stratégie navale de Napoléon* (Paris, 2004); Rémi Monaque, *Trafalgar, 21 octobre 1805* (Paris, 2005); Agustín Ramón Rodríguez González, *Trafalgar y el conflicto naval Anglo-Español del siglo XVIII* (Madrid, 2005).

[33] José Ignacio González-Aller Hierro, ed., *La campaña de Trafalgar, 1804–1805: corpus documental* (2 vols., Madrid, 2004).

[34] Agustín Guimerá Ravina and Víctor Peralta Ruiz, eds., *El equilibrio de los imperios: de Utrecht a Trafalgar* (Madrid, 2005). There are contributions by André Zysberg and the present reviewer.

[35] Christian Buchet, Jean Meyer, and Jean-Pierre Poussou, eds., *La puissance maritime* (Paris, 2004).

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only French. The results are certainly helpful, but do not completely escape the characteristic weaknesses of French conferences: too many of the great and good revisiting a rather well-known *grande thèse*, and too little awareness of the currents of modern scholarship in the outside world. It is an instructive contrast to turn to the *Festschrift* presented to the distinguished Dutch maritime historian Jaap Bruijn, including contributors from at least eight countries besides the Netherlands, many of whom write in English rather than their own languages.[36] Certainly this reflects the wide interests and influence of the honorand, but it also reflects a flourishing international community of maritime historians in which French-speakers are less present than their numbers and talents might lead one to expect. The same point is illustrated by the proceedings of an Anglo-French conference on navies and the Enlightenment; the individual contributions are worth reading, but not many are based on sources from both sides of the Channel, and there is some sense of people talking past each other without a real meeting of minds.[37] In all these cases, moreover, the scholars are more international than their publishers, and not many of the books are easily available abroad.

Recent monographs have explored a variety of aspects of the late eighteenth-century Royal Navy, with the notable exception of the traditional operational history. Jonathan Dull's study of the French navy in the Seven Years War is mainly pitched at the level of diplomacy and grand strategy.[38] Even Christopher Hall's *Wellington's Navy*, as its name suggests, is about naval operations in the context of the Peninsular War.[39] Only Peter Padfield's ambitious two-volume collection conforms more or less to the traditional narrative form.[40] Though, as his titles indicate, he makes large claims for the significance of British sea-power to world history, the claims are not really underpinned by the close argument they require, and the books are best read as straightforward narrative history for the general reader. Other writers have given us some notable contributions to the political and administrative history of seapower. Clive Wilkinson's original study shows how successive First Lords of the Admiralty financed naval supremacy by mystifying the House of Commons with misleading Navy Estimates.[41] He brings in important insights from subjects as diverse as accountancy and climatology, and his work has implications for government and politics that extend well beyond the Navy. Roger Morriss more or less follows Wilkinson chronologically, and deals with a related subject: the origins of Benthamite ideas of individual accountability, not in Jeremy Bentham's writings alone but also in his brother Samuel's work in the dockyards.[42] This too has wide implications, though Morriss's reluctance to engage with politics robs his work of an important dimension. Somewhat narrower in conception is Julian Gwyn's study of the local history of the Royal Navy in Canadian waters; essentially a single study, published in two parts, of the North American

[36] Leo Akveld et al., eds., *In het kielzog: Maritiem-historische studies aangeboden aan Jaap R. Bruijn bij zijn vertrek als hoogleraar zeegeschiedenis aan de Universiteit Leiden* (Amsterdam, 2003).

[37] Pieter van der Merwe, ed., *Science and the French and British Navies, 1750–1850* (London, 2003).

[38] Jonathan R. Dull, *The French Navy and the Seven Years War* (Lincoln, NB, 2005).

[39] Christopher D. Hall, *Wellington's Navy: sea power and the Peninsular War, 1807–1814* (London, 2004).

[40] Peter Padfield, *Maritime supremacy and the opening of the western mind: naval campaigns that shaped the modern world, 1588–1782* (London, 1999); idem, *Maritime power and the struggle for freedom: naval campaigns that shaped the modern world, 1788–1851* (London, 2003).

[41] Clive Wilkinson, *The British Navy and the state in the eighteenth century* (Woodbridge, 2004).

[42] Roger Morriss, *Naval power and British culture, 1760–1850: public trust and government ideology* (Aldershot, 2004).

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Squadron and its base, Halifax Naval Yard.[43] Perhaps the most original and most significant of all the studies of British naval administration is the one least known in Britain: Christian Buchet's study of the Victualling Board, which shows that its tendering procedures were consciously designed to shape the national agricultural market to reconcile two apparently contradictory requirements: a highly competitive market in which wholesale prices could be driven down to a minimum; and one composed of strong, large firms able to supply the very large quantities, high quality, and long credit which the Board demanded.[44] This is a rare work by a French scholar thoroughly at home in the British archives. If it were known and understood by agricultural and economic historians it would have the potential to open up completely new areas of British economic history.

Social history, in a broad sense, has inspired a number of recent studies. Tom Wareham's monograph on frigate captains of the French wars is a valuable analysis of the factors that shaped wartime careers.[45] The cookery writer Janet Macdonald (reversing the usual order by publishing a book before undertaking her doctoral thesis) gives a brisk account of naval victualling, though the foundations of the work are not dug very deep, and this is a subject in which it is important not to get muddled over weights and measures.[46] Markus Eder's narrowly technical study of court martial procedure is emptied of most of its value by the author's wilful ignorance of naval life.[47] John Millyard has edited the picaresque memoirs of a naval surgeon.[48] The publisher obviously thinks that a few brothels will make any autobiography exciting, but this author's lifeless prose proves the contrary. Much more rewarding are the letters and journals of Major Marmaduke Wybourn of the Royal Marines.[49] A team led by Laurence Brockliss combines in a single book a life of the naval surgeon William Beatty, an historiographical study of the influence of his *Authentic narrative of the death of Lord Nelson* which forms a key element of the Nelson myth-history, and a prosopographical study of British naval surgeons of the age.[50] The three elements are addressed to different readerships, and there is scarcely space to deploy the serious study of the naval medical world, which we very much need. Moreover the prosopographical form, and it seems the authors' own preference, incline the study of naval medicine towards an old-fashioned interpretative framework, in which medical history is all about medical heroes, rather than diseases, or patients, or administrative structures, or society at large. For many years now, historians have viewed late eighteenth-century naval medicine as an early chapter in the history of public health, in which admirals and politicians took the

[43] Julian Gwyn, *Frigates and foremasts: the North American Squadron in Nova Scotia waters, 1745–1815* (Vancouver, 2003); idem, *Ashore and afloat: the British Navy and the Halifax Naval Yard before 1820* (Ottawa, 2004).

[44] Christian Buchet, *Marine, économie et société: un exemple d'interaction: l'avitaillement de la Royal Navy durant la guerre de sept ans* (Paris, 1999). An English translation is planned.

[45] Tom Wareham, *The star captains: frigate command in the Napoleonic Wars* (London, 2001).

[46] Janet Macdonald, *Feeding Nelson's Navy: the true story of food at sea in the Georgian era* (London, 2004).

[47] Markus Eder, *Crime and punishment in the Royal Navy of the Seven Years War, 1755–1763* (Aldershot, 2004).

[48] James Lowry, ed. John Millyard, *Fiddlers and whores: the candid memoirs of a surgeon in Nelson's fleet* (London, 2006).

[49] Anne Petrides and Jonathan Downs, eds., *Sea soldier: an officer of Marines with Duncan, Nelson, Collingwood and Cockburn: the letters and journals of Major T. Marmaduke Wybourn RM, 1797–1813* (Tunbridge Wells, 2000).

[50] Laurence Brockliss, John Cardwell, and Michael Moss, *Nelson's surgeon: William Beatty, naval medicine and the battle of Trafalgar* (Oxford, 2005).

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decisions that mattered – but there is no trace of that approach here. Instead we have more than a flavour of the sort of positivist history that was being written by retired medical men forty years ago, before the Wellcome Trust transformed medical history. It is rather a surprise from so eminent a team of scholars.

Several writers have tackled what might be broadly identified as naval culture. Michael Palmer, who has published some valuable articles on styles of command and leadership, now follows them with a book on the same theme.[51] This is an important subject, which embraces the psychology of leadership, the technology of signals and communications, and the practicalities of naval tactics. Unfortunately Palmer's book, on internal evidence, seems to have been written about ten years ago and then abandoned, to be issued now unaltered except for a hasty final chapter. He has read nothing which has come out recently, not even his own work, so that what would have seemed a significant contribution when it was first written, now appears rather dated and inadequate. Margarette Lincoln deals with a different sort of culture, the self-image of seamen and sea officers, and the view of the Navy and of naval men held by outsiders.[52] She draws her evidence both from contemporary publications and from material objects ranging from ceramics to swords. This is a pioneering study, which moves fast and ranges widely, proposing many suggestive connections without staying long enough to establish them securely. Though thin in places, it is always stimulating. The latest 'cultural' approach is taken by Timothy Jenks, who offers 'a cultural history of national identity, a social history of naval commemoration, and a political history of struggles over patriotism'.[53] His ambitious work of self-conscious modernity (and in places of wearisome jargon) incorporates a great deal of reading and some interesting ideas. Unfortunately the ideas are exclusively drawn from the late twentieth century: this is a missionary book in the old Whig tradition, designed to teach the people of the past what they ought to have been thinking. The author is not interested in what they actually did think; he knows nothing of the long and deep English political culture of naval patriotism, and his ignorance of politics and the Navy leads him into some gross errors. (It is characteristic that he is completely gulled by Cochrane.) He does not even realize that patriotism, which he treats as self-evidently belonging to the government and establishment, had only just been captured by Pitt from the opposition whose natural property it had been for 200 years. He is clearly hard working and talented, and this could have been an important book, but arrogance is a disastrous weakness in a scholar.

Behind, or, rather, beneath, the monographs lie the technical works that provide the essential support of scholarship. The Navy Records Society has over more than a century built up a vast corpus of printed documents on British naval history, and continues to produce volumes on this among other periods.[54] From the United States come two

[51] Michael A. Palmer, *Command at sea: naval command and control since the sixteenth century* (Cambridge, MA, 2005); idem, 'Lord Nelson: master of command', *Naval War College Review*, 41 (1988), pp. 105–16; and idem, '"The soul's right hand": command and control in the age of fighting sail, 1652–1827', *Journal of Military History*, 61 (1997) pp. 679–706.

[52] Margarette Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy: British sea power, 1750–1815* (Aldershot, 2002).

[53] Timothy Jenks, *Naval engagements: patriotism, cultural politics and the Royal Navy, 1793–1815* (Oxford, 2006), quoted p. 2.

[54] Michael Duffy, ed., *The naval miscellany*, VI (Navy Records Society vol. 146, Aldershot, 2003); Roger Morriss and Richard Saxby, eds., *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793–1801* (Navy Records Society vol. 141, Aldershot, 2001); David Syrett, ed., *The Rodney papers: selections from the correspondence of Admiral Lord Rodney*, I: *1742–1763* (Navy Records Society vol. 148, Aldershot, 2005). At his death Syrett left a second volume ready for the press and a third partly complete.

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volumes, both edited by Michael J. Crawford, but belonging to different series. The eleventh volume of *Naval documents of the American Revolution*, a series which started in 1964, brings the story only to the first quarter of 1778.[55] Though the editorial standards of this series have vastly improved in recent years, its overall plan remains the same, and still sometimes reminds one of Elbert Hubbard's definition of the newspaper editor, 'whose business it is to separate the wheat from the chaff, and to see that the chaff is printed.' That this is no fault of this editor is shown by his excellent contribution to another series, *The naval war of 1812*, also produced by the US Navy but begun as recently as 1985 on a much sounder plan.[56] Scholarly support of another kind is provided by Eugene Rasor's bibliography of British naval history up to 1815.[57] Since the last work on this subject was published in 1930,[58] and (rather unusually for a bibliography) did not include any books, Rasor's work is a welcome addition to the scholar's resources, even if its coverage, of the older literature especially, is patchy.

Naval warfare has always been the war of high technology, and there is no room in naval history for the sort of historians (not unknown even in this age) who leave the machinery to the chauffeur. Fortunately the complex technicalities of the sailing warship have been made accessible in recent years by a stream of excellent monographs and works of reference. Valuable amongst the recent examples have been Robert Gardiner's latest work on British frigate design, Rif Winfield's list of British warships with lavish details on their designs and careers (continuing a project begun by the late David Lyon of the National Maritime Museum), and a useful analysis of Spanish warship designs.[59] One serious popular misconception which has survived the numerous technical histories published over the past thirty years is the notion that French warship design was better than British because it was more 'scientific'. The reality is that the French indeed placed a high value on pure science, but the mathematicians still knew far too little to be of any practical use to naval constructors. French ships were different from British not because French builders were better or worse, but because their ships were conceived for a different style of operations – the wrong style for the wars with Britain, which was a major reason why they performed so badly. All this has been known to specialists for years, but only now do we have a book by Larrie Ferreiro, who is qualified as a naval architect and an historian, and can give a full account, both of the real achievements of the shipwrights, and of the theoreticians' first faltering steps towards mathematically based naval architecture which eventually, a century later, were to lead to results of practical value.[60] It is too much to hope

[55] Michael J. Crawford, ed., *Naval documents of the American Revolution*, XI (Washington, DC, 2005). At the present rate of publication we may look forward to at least twenty more volumes of this series, spread over not less than a century.

[56] Michael J. Crawford, ed., *The naval war of 1812: a documentary history*, III (Washington, DC, 2002). A fourth volume is planned.

[57] Eugene L. Rasor, *English/British naval history to 1815: a guide to the literature* (Westport, CT, and London, 2004).

[58] G. E. Manwaring, ed., *A bibliography of British naval history* (London, 1930). This eccentric work is essentially a guide to periodical literature and manuscripts.

[59] Robert Gardiner, *Frigates of the Napoleonic Wars* (London, 2000); Rif Winfield, *British warships in the age of sail, 1793–1817: design, construction, careers and fates* (London, 2005); Juan Carlos Mejías Tavero, *Los navíos españoles de la batalla de Trafalgar, del astillero a la mar* (2 vols., Madrid, 2005).

[60] Larrie D. Ferreiro, *Ships and science: the birth of naval architecture in the scientific revolution, 1600–1800* (Cambridge, MA, 2007). The only previous work on this theme by an historically aware naval architect

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that a hardy myth, which flatters so many agreeable prejudices, will be scotched at once, but there will be no excuse now for any scholar to repeat it.

It is encouraging to see that naval history is in many ways becoming integrated into the main stream of national and international history where it belongs. Undoubtedly there remains a great deal to be done, and it is not difficult to point to major gaps in our understanding. Most of the social history of the Navy in this period has never been seriously studied from documents. The manning of the Navy, a thorny subject with political and social ramifications that still have the power to arouse passions, urgently calls for some dispassionate scholarship instead. Lying at the intersection of those great English shibboleths, liberty and seapower, it has the power to illuminate the meaning of ideas in practical politics. The same is true of the great mutinies of 1797, which contemporaries feared, or hoped, would trigger the English Revolution. It is astonishing that no monograph has been devoted to this critical moment in British history since 1913.[61] The effects of seapower, and indeed of war, on the British economy continue to be treated by many economic historians as an embarrassment to be skirted in haste. The fashionable emphasis on empire – a word now used so indiscriminatingly that it has almost been emptied of useful meaning – directs attention to the external account, but few scholars[62] have asked what it meant that British governments raised and spent (to a significant extent invested) such large sums of money in the domestic economy. These and other bridges still need to be built, or rebuilt, between naval history and the other histories of which it ought to be a part. Nevertheless a great deal has been achieved, and a great deal published which deserves the attention not only of specialists in naval history, but of all those who desire to give a full account of British history, and Britain's connections with the wider world.

is in some articles by D. K. Brown, particularly his 'The form and speed of sailing warships', *Mariner's Mirror*, 84 (1998), pp. 298–307.

[61] Conrad Gill, *The naval mutinies of 1797* (Manchester, 1913). The only recent studies of the mutinies are N. A. M. Rodger, 'Mutiny or subversion? Spithead and the Nore', in Thomas Bartlett et al., eds., *1798: A bicentenary perspective* (Dublin, 2003), pp. 549–64; and A. G. Brown, 'The Nore Mutiny: sedition or ship's biscuits? A re-appraisal', *Mariner's Mirror*, 92 (2006), pp. 60–74. There is also a valuable but as-yet unpublished collection of conference papers edited by Ann Coats and Philip MacDougall.

[62] With the conspicuous exceptions of P. K. O'Brien and Paul Kennedy.

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