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The Victorian Empire and Britain's Maritime World, 1837–1901

Miles Taylor

The Sea and Global History

The Victorian Empire and Britain's Maritime World, 1837–1901

Also by Miles Taylor

THE DECLINE OF BRITISH RADICALISM, 1847–60

ERNEST JONES, CHARTISM AND THE ROMANCE OF POLITICS, 1819–69

THE VICTORIANS SINCE 1901: Histories, Representations and Revisions (*co-edited with Michael Wolff*)

The Victorian Empire and Britain's Maritime World, 1837–1901

The Sea and Global History

Edited By

Miles Taylor
Director, Institute of Historical Research, London, UK

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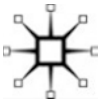

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Notes on Contributors

Jeremy Black is Professor of History at the University of Exeter. His books include *Fighting for America: The Struggle for Mastery in North America 1519–1871* (2011), *George III: America's Last King* (2006), *The British Seaborne Empire* (2004) and *A History of the British Isles* (2nd edn, 2003).

Judith M. Brown was formerly Beit Professor of Commonwealth History at the University of Oxford. She is the author of political biographies of M. K. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, and her works include *The Oxford History of the British Empire, vol. 4: The Twentieth Century* (co-edited with Wm. Roger Louis, 1999) and *Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy* (2nd edn, 1994).

Elizabeth Buettner is Senior Lecturer in Modern British and Imperial History at the University of York. She is the author of *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (2004) and is completing a comparative study of the post-colonial European powers.

Andrew Lambert is Laughton Professor of Naval History at King's College, London. His books include *The Challenge: Britain against America in the Naval War of 1812* (2012) and *The Dreadnought and the Edwardian Age* (co-edited with Robert Blyth and Jan Rüger, 2011).

John M. MacKenzie is Professor Emeritus at Lancaster University. The founding editor of Manchester University Press's *Studies in Imperialism* series (est. 1984), his work includes *Museums and Empire: Natural History, Human Cultures and Colonial Identities* (2009) and *The Scots in South Africa: Ethnicity, Identity, Gender and Race, 1772–1914* (with Nigel R. Dalziel, 2007).

John Oldfield is Professor of History at the University of Hull. His books include *Transatlantic Abolitionism in the Age of Revolution: An International History of Anti-Slavery, 1787–1820* (2013) and *Chords of Freedom: Commemoration, Ritual, and British Transatlantic Slavery* (2007).

Jan Rüger is Senior Lecturer in History at Birkbeck College, London. His publications include *The Dreadnought and the Edwardian Age* (co-edited with Robert Blyth and Andrew Lambert, 2011) and *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire* (2007).

Crosbie Smith is Professor of the History of Science at the University of Kent. He is the co-author of *Engineering Empires: A Cultural History of Technology in Nineteenth Century Britain* (with Ben Marsden, 2004) and the author of *The Science of Energy: A Cultural History of Energy Physics in Victorian Britain* (1998).

Miles Taylor is Professor of History and Director of the Institute of Historical Research at the University of London. His books include *The Victorians since 1901: Histories, Representations and Revisions* (co-edited with Michael Wolff, 2004) and *Ernest Jones, Chartism and the Romance of Politics, 1819–69* (2003).

Introduction

Miles Taylor

'We are fish' declared Lord Salisbury in 1888, and much of the history of nineteenth century Britain is conveyed in this memorable phrase. The navy in particular and the maritime world more generally were an integral part of British imperial dominance in the Victorian era. The navy secured the pax Britannica of trade and diplomacy, whilst British domination of the world's shipping lanes created an international traffic in people, goods, flora and fauna, and all the many phenomena that made up an overseas British world of culture. Yet the watery metaphor also points to some of the anxieties which surrounded Britain's status as a maritime empire in the nineteenth century – the fate of other seaborne empires, the xenophobia and vulnerability of an island nation on the edge of a continent which at times represented an armed camp, and the ever-escalating arms race as other predatory powers sought to catch up. Not since the Wiles lectures of Gerald Graham in 1964, has there been a single volume which attempts to chart the story of the maritime context of the British Empire in the Victorian years.[1] Despite the significance attributed to the navy and sea-power by influential synoptic surveys of British imperialism – notably those of Christopher Bayly, Niall Ferguson and Paul Kennedy – it is true to say that it has been the naval warfare of the eighteenth and twentieth centuries which has attracted most attention.[2] And whilst there is no comparison between the scale of naval engagement in the Victorian era compared with the century spanning the end of the war of the Spanish succession (1714) and the Congress of Vienna (1815) – British naval forces went into battle on approximately 1,630 separate occasions in the period, and only around 300 between 1815 and 1914[3] – there is nonetheless much that is unfamiliar and a great deal that is instructive about the relationship between the sea and the British empire in the Victorian era.

This volume of essays seeks to redress the balance in the historical literature. It serves as a companion volume to the 2007 book edited by David Cannadine which looked at British naval and maritime culture in the eighteenth century.[4] This volume features two main themes throughout its eight chapters. First, how in an age of relative global peace after 1815, the navy and shipping more generally, moved from being the strategic arm of the British Empire to become the agent of cultural imperialism; and second, how, for the Victorians, the sea became not only a source of national identity but also an increasing anxiety as global power became reconfigured by continental land-states such as Germany, Russia and the USA. The global warfare of the eighteenth century led to the pax Britannica of the nineteenth, and the altered state of Britain's maritime empire was evident in all sorts of ways. By 1815 Britain had made territorial gains around much of coastal Africa and India and across the Caribbean, neutralised, for a generation, French activity in the Mediterranean, and protected its growing North American dominion by an audacious attack on Washington in 1814. At peace after 1815, shorn of its mercantilist implications, the older British maxim of 'ships, colonies and commerce' found new resonance in the nineteenth century. Whereas British sea-lanes of the eighteenth century had been peopled by slaves, felons, soldiers and fighting sailors, Victorian ships conveyed emigrants to the settlement colonies, policed the coastlines of Africa and South America for slavers and pirates, and ensured, especially after mid-century, that global trade was safe and secure, even during warfare. By the end of the nineteenth century commercial steam shipping dominated the seas to the extent that when Britain needed to mobilise for war as in South Africa in 1899–1902 and at the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, it turned not to the navy but to the private passenger lines for sending out troops. As the seas became freer of conflict, British foreign policy became less focused on the European continent, and relied on limited coastal defence and a 'bluewater' strategy, at least until the 1880s.

Of course, it is easy to exaggerate the degree of change over continuity between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. After all, convict transportation continued until 1868, the suppression of the slave trade at sea by the Royal Navy as often led to the loss of life as successful rescue, and free trade regularly required armed intervention, as in the case of the Chinese wars, or the threat of naval action, for example in South America. Likewise, Britain was not wholly at peace during the nineteenth century. Small colonial wars recurred throughout the Victorian decades, often involving deployment of the navy, the Crimean war saw action at sea on three different sides of the Eurasian land mass (in the Crimea, the

Baltic and the Pacific), and at distinct moments during the American Civil War (1861–65), Britain was only a hair's breadth away from a major conflict in the Atlantic. And for all the international goodwill that characterised the century after the Congress of Vienna, powerful patriotic sentiments remained: the Russophobia of the 1830s, the fears of French invasion plans in the late 1840s, 1850s and 1860s, and the groundswell of jingoism in 1877–78. All assumed a willingness of the British to fight back, and to do so at sea.

However, as the rest of this introduction describes, Britain's maritime empire in the nineteenth century was fundamentally different in scale and in culture from what had gone before. Naval engagements took place, but usually in the pursuit of the new imperial policies and priorities of the period. The navy and its government department, the Admiralty, were not immune to the culture of administrative reform that characterised the Victorian era, and the navy more generally came to occupy a less prominent place in popular culture, especially with the rise of a Christian militarism focused on army heroes. Maritime life within the Empire now took place in and between port cities and their hinterland, and not only at sea. Let us consider each of these areas in turn.

All at sea: policing the Victorian Empire

Britain was a far less belligerent sea power after 1815, but no less global. In the Mediterranean, the policing of the peace settlement of 1815 drew the British navy into conflict in the late 1820s as part of a joint allied effort to support Greece in its struggle for independence from the Ottoman Empire, and to protect the Aegean from Egyptian aggression.[5] Piracy along the North African coast also kept British naval cruisers busy for a longer period than is usually recognised.[6] The primacy of India in nineteenth-century foreign policy meant naval deployment around and beyond the Indian subcontinent, cumulatively a huge area as Judith Brown points out in her chapter in this volume (Chapter 5). In the Indian ocean, alongside the suppression of the East African slave trade, the Bombay marine and the navy of the East India company toiled against piracy, and also gave assistance to land forces in the Scind and Sikh wars of the 1840s, and then again during the Indian rebellion of 1857–58. Fearful of Russian penetration from the north, Britain went to war with Persia, and secured a notable naval victory at Bushire. As far afield as Jeddah in Arabia there was a naval attack in 1858 prompted by unrest following the British removal of the last Mughal king, Bahadur Shah Zafar, in Delhi.[7] Further to the east, the navy was involved in the

three phases of war and annexation in Burma (1824, 1852 and 1885).[8] And in peninsular south-east Asia and down into the Indonesian archipelago, the navy saw engagement at various moments in the nineteenth century, sometimes in the pursuit of pirates or coastal peoples presumed to be 'pirates' as in the case of 'Rajah' Sir James Brooke in Borneo, and often in 'gunboat diplomacy' reprisals against indigenous rulers.[9]

Older naval rivalries did of course linger from the eighteenth century, but they were increasingly pursued through armed deterrent. In retrospect, it seems amazing that there was no resumption of naval conflict between Britain and the USA. There was plenty of potential for a souring of Anglo-American relations throughout the Victorian period: boundary disputes such as the Oregon question, American tacit and explicit support for Canadian separatists, and most seriously of all, disputes over shipping during the American Civil War. However, apart from the British pushing over the Niagara falls a US ship – the *Caroline* – which had been aiding Canadian rebels in 1837, and with the exception of the seizure by the Union naval force of the *Trent* and the compensation claims over the British-built Confederate battleship, the *Alabama* in the 1861–65 war, Anglo-American naval rivalry remained confined to competition over ship technology, as Jeremy Black's chapter shows (Chapter 8).[10] Similarly, despite its intensity, Anglo-French naval rivalry never spilled over into engagement at sea. In the late Hanoverian and Victorian eras Britain went to battle alongside French forces – in the eastern Mediterranean (1827–28), in Madagascar (1845), in the Crimea (1854–56), in the second Chinese war (1860) and in Japan (Shimonoseki, 1864) – rather than against them. Not that such cooperation dampened fears of invasion on both sides of the English Channel, nor lessened the close watch maintained by the British Admiralty and the French Minstère de Marine on each other's changing warship design and strength, especially during the mid-Victorian decades.[11]

There was one major exception to the pax Britannica of the nineteenth century, and that was the Crimean war. Far from being a conflict limited to the Black Sea, the British and French combat with Russian forces was fought out in the Baltic, and to a lesser extent in the Pacific,[12] making it assume some of the more global dimensions of the warfare characteristic of the eighteenth century. The attempt to blockade Russia in its northern and far-eastern ports, constrict its supply lines at sea and weaken its naval fleet at its source, was a throwback to classic naval tactics of the period of the Napoleonic wars, and the Treaty of Paris, which settled the war, was as focused on providing means for resolution of international disputes at sea as much as on land. It is sometimes

overlooked that Russia in addition to the new united Germany after 1871, became a rival to British naval supremacy in the later nineteenth century. As has been recently argued, it was the next manifestation of the Russian threat to the European periphery by land and by sea in 1878, which precipitated changes in the British way of naval warfare, beginning with the recommendations of the Carnarvon Commission of 1878.[13]

Two new dimensions of British naval warfare developed during the nineteenth century: armed action against the African slave trade, and the penetration of coastal China. John Oldfield highlights in his chapter the achievements in particular of the African squadron which policed the west and then increasingly the east coast of Africa, and effectively stemmed the tide of slaves going westwards to Brazil, Cuba and the southern states of America (Chapter 2).[14] This was where most naval resource was concentrated for longest during the nineteenth century: over 1/3 of all British conflict at sea between 1815 and 1914 involved capture of slavers, or raids on slaver bases and ports. There were notable successes – the slaver turned squadron ship, *Black Joke*, was reckoned to be one of the best in the business, freeing 4,000 slaves in a series of interventions in 1829. However, the African squadron did not always have the law on its side, and the act of capture could often prove perilous, with as many slave lives lost as saved. The naval suppression of the slave trade could also prove a handmaiden to territorial annexation by Britain, as in example of Lagos (after 1861) and the sultanate of Zanzibar (from 1890).[15]

If the suppression of the African slave trade supplied the most action at sea in the nineteenth century, then it was the waters around China which increasingly saw the largest deployment of British warships. In the 1860s and 1870s, for instance, British naval stations along the Chinese coast accounted for just under half of total British naval forces globally.[16] The series of wars with China are perhaps the best example of how the Victorian navy came to enforce the 'imperialism of free trade', that is to say commercial monopoly without formal administrative control. The outcome of the wars was that only Hong Kong was annexed as a British colony, and Britain along with other western powers enjoyed exclusive trading privileges in the principal 'treaty' ports. The Chinese wars are also an important reminder of how the opium trade from India demanded armed protection, not only to open up further markets in China, but also to protect British Indian shipping from piracy on the high seas.[17]

A final important theatre of naval engagement in the Victorian era was the south Pacific ocean. A region for exploration and discovery in

the eighteenth century, the islands of Polynesia and Melanesia became destinations of European settlement (in the case of New Zealand) and Christian missionary activity from the early nineteenth century onwards. This was never a particularly peaceful process, and the navy was often required as an adjunct to landed forces (as in the case of the Maori wars of the 1840s and 1860s),[18] or to make reprisals against indigenous islanders who had attacked visiting officials or clergy, most famously following the murder of the Bishop of Melanesia in 1871. At the same time, the navy was also deployed in a more conventional Victorian policing role, carrying out our search and stop missions against 'blackbirding' ships attempting to remove forcibly men and boys from various islands to meet labour shortages in Peru, Fiji and latterly Queensland, Australia.[19]

Thus the navy was no less important to the pursuit and maintenance of British interests in the nineteenth century than it had been in the eighteenth, even if the scale of engagements at sea was much reduced. The variety of different challenges posed to the navy during the pax Britannica point to how flexible a fighting force it was still required to be. The major warfare of the period, such as in the Crimea, required conventional naval battle techniques. And the nineteenth-century arms race especially with France, America and latterly Germany centred on enhancements in the weaponry and counter-attack capability of ships. However, much of the naval action of the era, prioritised speed and accessibility over display of overwhelming force. Victorian naval engagements were often coastal and riverine, or they proceeded by way of bombardment of enemy positions followed by landing of a naval brigade. Nowhere was this clearer than in the involvement of the navy in the scramble for Africa in the 1880s and 1890s, when small fast gunboats were used in Sudan, Somaliland and Nyasaland to enforce the new protectorate zones. Full-scale war at sea was the stuff of eighteenth-century legend and increasingly the preoccupation of late nineteenth-century naval planners. Its prominence in the historiography should not obscure the fact that for most of the period a large but dispersed British navy was fighting small colonial wars. The Victorian era ended in the South African war (1899–1902) – an imperial conflict typical of the period – with the navy blockading enemy supplies, protecting troop ships and providing support to land forces (including hospital ships).[20]

At home with the pax Britannica

Less belligerent at sea, Britain's maritime infrastructure and culture at home saw significant changes during the Victorian era. In government

and in Parliament the navy assumed less importance after 1830 (ironically the year the 'sailor king', William IV, ascended to the throne). The Admiralty was downsized during two waves of administrative reform – under the Whigs in the 1830s, and under Gladstone's Liberal party in the 1860s. Naval expenditure as a proportion of national expenditure fell from 20% in 1815 to 8% by 1839, thereafter (the Crimean and Chinese wars aside) averaging around 14% until it began to climb steadily in the 1890s.[21] Admiralty patronage fell away as well. Before the 1832 reform act, the Admiralty had direct control of eight parliamentary constituencies, and unlike the army, there was no sudden reduction in the number of naval officers in the House of Commons in the decade after 1815.[22] Thereafter, the age of reform did see some alterations. The proportion of naval MPs dropped steadily and Admiralty and Treasury influence was lost completely in several abolished dockyard constituencies and at Harwich, although some influence was retained at Dartmouth, Dover, Hythe, Rochester and Sandwich.[23] Moreover, the large new dockyard constituencies of Chatham and Devonport as well as the largest dockyard seat of all – Portsmouth – swelled the number of government employees, creating a reputedly patriotic but sometimes unpredictable local electorate.[24] And until the mid-nineteenth-century reforms of the civil service, Admiralty officials such as J. W. Croker maintained the old ways of appointment via family and friends.[25]

In the 1820s it had been the spectre of 'old corruption' at the Navy Board and in the government dockyards which had raised radical ire the most. Yet it was the shift from wooden ships to iron, and from sail to steam, that really brought about the redistribution of dockyards and ports around the United Kingdom. Older Royal Navy dockyards at Deptford, Harwich and Woolwich closed down as battleship construction became concentrated at the larger capacity facilities of Chatham, Pembroke, Plymouth, and Portsmouth.[26] Amidst the wave of post-1815 retrenchment, there was some reduction of overseas dockyards, principally in Canada, but in the decades that followed they remained, were established anew or came under British control at Halifax (Nova Scotia), in the Mediterranean (Gibraltar, Alexandria, Valletta), in the Caribbean and North Atlantic (Antigua, Jamaica, Bermuda), the China Sea (Hong Kong) at the Cape (Simon's Town), at Sydney and in Trincomalee (Ceylon), thereby ensuring that a global naval police presence could be maintained. Back in Britain, it was in London that the transformation of the maritime infrastructure was most marked.[27] Although shipbuilding remained on the Thames, principally at Blackwall and Woolwich, London's river became dominated by new port facilities: the privately

owned docks of St Katherine's (1828), Victoria (1855), the Royal Albert (1880 – at its opening the largest dock in the world) – and Tilbury (1889). By the middle of the nineteenth century London was handling the bulk of the world's shipping trade, and the docks became home to one of the largest casual workforces in the country, documented in the 1850s by commentators such as Henry Mayhew, and eventually organised into a forceful union in the 1880s. Elsewhere, other maritime cultures emerged. Southampton, a sleepy spa town in the eighteenth century, grew as a passenger port and by the end of the nineteenth century was the principal departure for troops going to serve overseas.[28] The ports of South Wales became notable entrepôts of imperial trade.[29] The demands of the new shipping technology required yards which were closer to the sources of iron and coal. Harland and Wolff in Belfast, Yarrow's on Clydeside, and Swan and Hunter on Tyneside now dominated the production of commercial good vessels and passenger ships.[30] For all this greater connectivity between British ports and global trade it remains a debatable point whether domestic awareness of empire actually deepened during the Victorian era.

These new economies of shipbuilding and the maritime cultures they created were not only the result of retrenchment and reform in the Admiralty and navy, they were also the outcome of free trade and the break-up of the older shipping monopolies. The ending of the East India Company's exclusive trading rights in 1833 and the repeal of the Navigation Acts in 1849 were two important milestones in opening up the maritime lanes of the world to a variety of shipping entrepreneurs.[31] New lines developed around mid-century to exploit the sources of raw materials and good, new markets, and above all to convey travellers and particularly emigrants. In this volume, Crosbie Smith describes the South American operations of one such company, the Pacific Steam Navigation Company, confirming the general process of a Victorian partitioning of the seas by rival British firms: the Peninsular and Oriental in the Mediterranean and the passage to India, the Castle line in South Africa and Cunard across the Atlantic.[32] In these ways the older domination of the seas by the Royal Navy became supplemented by the domination of private steamship companies, with much of their monopoly spreading out web-like from nodal points across the colonial empire. Shipping crews – navy, merchant marine and commercial – increasingly reflected a more global and imperial sphere of British influence. The end of the Navigation Acts lifted restrictions on foreign crewmen in British vessels, and a diverse maritime labour force now emerged, principally Caribbean and Indian, with a large polyglot European element derived from the

coastal communities of the North Sea and Mediterranean. Colonial labour found its way to the expanding British ports as well, as a sizeable lascar community developed in cities such as London and Cardiff by the close of the nineteenth century.[33]

The pax Britannica produced a very different image of the navy in domestic popular culture. Battle victories at sea had long been celebrated in song, broadside, history and biography, producing a string of Hanoverian naval heroes starting with Admiral Vernon and reaching a frenzy around the death of Nelson at Trafalgar.[34] In the Victorian era the hagiography around Nelson remained, but naval heroism became less focused on warfare and more on the manly and moral exemplary virtues of the great admirals and captains. In the process, the line between heroic men at sea in general, and naval icons in particular, became blurred. The most famous seafarer to capture the mid-Victorian imagination was after all Sir John Franklin, ex-colonial governor and explorer, lost whilst pursuing the grail of the north-west passage.[35] Below deck, a similar process was underway, with the rough-hewn stereotype of 'Jack Tar' giving way, as the navy switched to a more professional manning system after 1852, to a new emphasis on the manly character and physical prowess of the ordinary sailor.[36]

A maritime British world

Just as Britain's maritime culture at home changed fundamentally during the pax Britannica, so too did the sea play a very different role overseas in the settlement colonies and dependencies of the Victorian British Empire. So much of the growth of empire in the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century was centred around coastlines and port cities. In 1800, away from mainland Britain, there were only two cities under British control – Dublin (180,000 people) and Calcutta (45,000) – with substantial populations. Inevitably, by 1900 the picture was radically different, and it was the great ports of the Empire which dominated the demographic transformation: Bombay (just under one million people in 1906) and Sydney, Rangoon and Hong Kong all over 200,000 by 1901. Even in Canada, perhaps in terms of the white settlement empire the most landlocked dominion, the largest city remained Montreal, positioned at the head of the one most navigable rivers in the world.

The phenomenal growth of colonial cities in the nineteenth century points to an apparent contrast between the forced movement of peoples across the seas (slaves, convicts and impressed soldiers

and sailors) before 1815, and the free circulation of emigrants and other travellers in the century thereafter. This is of course somewhat misleading. Although the transportation of slaves in British ships ended in 1807, the transportation of convicts from Britain, including juveniles, continued until as late as 1868.[37] Elsewhere, as Clare Anderson's work has demonstrated, there was actually a 'pan-empire trade' in convicts after 1815, as 80,000 offenders were moved between the Indian subcontinent, the Andaman Islands, Burma, Aden, the Malay peninsula, Mauritius and the Cape of Good Hope to far-flung penal settlements.[38] Judith Brown's chapter in this volume describes another way in which intra-empire migration was not entirely free, through the phenomenon of indentured labour, whereby unskilled male workers – predominantly again from India – were induced to travel overseas to work in East Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific (Chapter 5).[39] And Elizabeth Buettner's chapter the pressures brought to bear on the children and families caught up in the assisted emigration of minors to Canada (Chapter 6). Migration schemes in post-famine Ireland and from the Scottish highlands also shows forces of coercion – both subtle and direct – at work.[40]

Undoubtedly, however, there were huge voluntary flows out of the British Isles via the seas to the white settlement colonies during the nineteenth century. This emigration came in fits and starts initially – to Canada in the 1820s, to Australia in the 1850s – and then more systematically and widespread after 1870.[41] Overall the bulk of emigrants from Britain crossed the Atlantic to North America, and there proportionally more went to the United States than to Canada. Those who did follow the flag to British settlements were often lured by the 'boosterism' of shipping companies, emigration and land agents, and other publicists, who marketed the colonies as little or better versions of Britain.[42] The sea lanes were not all one-way traffic, however. We know from the volume of remittances sent via the Post Office during the nineteenth century that family economies in Britain were often supported by contributions from emigrant relatives. Imperial professional networks and organisations – for example, those of engineers and clergy – were also sustained by the speedier facilities afforded by steam shipping.[43] Similarly, as John MacKenzie shows in his chapter in this volume (Chapter 3), maritime connections across the globe helped to reproduce the material and museum culture of Britain and other European cities in the new colonial world. Indeed, it is hard to understand the forces shaping what has come to be known recently as the 'British world' overseas, unless the maritime influences behind the

spread, diffusion and adaptation of British culture and institutions are factored in properly.

* * *

Between the defeat of Napoleon and the partition of Africa, it is the sea that stands out as the connecting thread of the British Empire. In 1886, the historian and critic, J. A. Froude adopted the title *Oceana* for an enthusiastic account of his tour around the British colonies. In so doing he drew on James Harrington's republican utopia of the same name published in 1656. Froude, however, had good reason to use a maritime analogy to describe Britain's Empire. A native of Devon, the son of a naval architect and as the former emissary at the Cape of the Conservative Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Carnarvon, Froude perhaps knew better than most of the connections between the sea and Britain's imperial realm. Lord Salisbury chose Froude as Oxford's Regius Professor of History in 1892, and amongst the more popular lecture series he delivered at the university during his short stint there was on the subject of 'English seamen in the sixteenth century'. Froude is often described as a key voice in the new enthusiasm for empire in late Victorian Britain. Yet his paean to a modern seaborne empire rooted in a tradition that stretches back to the Elizabethan age of discovery, suggests he was celebrating the loose and informal pax Britannica of the nineteenth century rather than looking forward to the new imperialism.[44] As Andrew Lambert argues in Chapter 1, the rise and fall of maritime states was an irresistible analogy for commentators from the beginning of the Victorian age. And, by the time of its close, as Jan Ruger shows in his chapter which concludes this volume (Chapter 7), British anxieties around empire resurfaced and were focused primarily around vulnerability at sea. It was Froude's political patron, Carnarvon, who in 1878 instigated the beginning of the series of reviews which were to transform British naval strategy in the later nineteenth century, and contribute to the arms race between the great powers. The colonial push for greater imperial defence from 1887, the Naval Defence Act of 1889, the lobbying for increased spending on the navy from organisations such as the Navy League (set up in 1895), and the development of dreadnought technology leading to the building of battlecruisers such as *Invincible* (1907) were to transform the British maritime empire in many ways and for all time. All these later developments are well known and continue to produce a lively historical literature.[45] The pax Britannica of 'ships, colonies, commerce' seems far removed from the realpolitik and

arms race of the Edwardian era, and yet, as the essays in this volume demonstrate, no less worthy of our historical attention.

Notes

1. G. S. Graham, *The Politics of Naval Supremacy: Studies in British Maritime Ascendancy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965). For two studies written in the midst of the second world war: see: F. J. C. Hearnshaw, *Seapower and Empire* (London: Harrap, 1940), ch. 7, and H. W. Richmond's 1943 Ford lectures, *Statesmen and Seapower* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), ch. 8. For other broader surveys, see: Glen O'Hara, *Britain and the Sea since 1600* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); David Killingray, Margarette Lincoln and Nigel Rigby (eds), *Maritime Empires: British Imperial Maritime Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2004); Jeremy Black, *The British Seaborne Empire* (London: Yale University Press, 2004). A notable gap will be filled by N. A. M. Rodger's forthcoming volume on the Victorian period in his naval history of Britain.
2. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (London: Unwin, 1988); C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780–1830* (London: Longman, 1989); Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2003).
3. Calculated from John D. Grainger, *Dictionary of British Naval Battles* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2012).
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1

'Now Is Come a Darker Day': Britain, Venice and the Meaning of Sea Power

Andrew Lambert

As Victorian Britain assumed the mantle of greatness, a rapidly expanding empire of trade, markets, industry and money, bound together by cutting-edge communications technology, and defended by a uniquely powerful navy, the more reflective analysts and commentators began to draw exemplary parallels with earlier maritime empires. The search for a useful past would dominate the development of naval history and political theory throughout the Queen's long reign. Nowhere was this process more marked than in British attitudes to Venice, and by mid-century this long defunct Italian republic had assumed a critical place in the intellectual and cultural world of imperial Britain, an ideal case study of the rise and fall of maritime empires. Consequently the Victorians did not have to wait for the American strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan to tell them that sea power was the product of a total national engagement with the ocean.[1] In truth Mahan took his cue from British intellectuals, and his message found an audience already prepared by half a century of high-level analysis.

Long before Mahan began work, the British had listed the sea powers, and drawn suitable lessons and morals from their decline and fall. Nowhere was this process more obvious than in the case of Venice, the ultimate maritime state. However, well into the 1860s the British believed that Venice fell because the state had become tyrannical and immoral. The overthrow of these mythic pasts, slow but certain, forced British analysts to consider a more alarming truth, that Venice's fall indicated a weakness in sea power itself, that all maritime empires were doomed to be crushed by larger and more populous continental hegemons, that France, Russia or Germany might play the part of Ottoman Turkey, Spain or Republican France in the future fate of the British Empire.

These ideas affected the Victorians at many levels, as Venice loomed ever larger in their world image, and in the minds of their political and cultural leaders. The British elite knew Venice, and everyone came face-to-face with the impact of Venetian architecture on the cityscapes of Victorian Britain.[2] Each generation created its own Venice, viewed through different eyes. The generation that fought Napoleon, and ran the state for the next five decades, saw an idealised world captured in the Canalettos that hung on their walls, trophies of an earlier generation and the Grand Tour.[3] Among the Whig/Liberal elite who emerged after 1815 the dark literary creations of Byron and Shelley, of Samuel Rogers, and the hostile histories produced under Napoleon's aegis held sway. But by the 1860s a new political generation had emerged, men who had been to Venice, read Ruskin's visionary tracts, and seen Turner's alarming canvases. Venice became a critical element of Victorian culture.[4] The giants of Victorian politics, Gladstone and Disraeli, visited Venice, and responded in distinctive ways. By the 1870s mass tourism and the high road to India meant a steady stream of Britons passed through.

Working to an altogether slower tempo, historians began to recreate the Venetian past, a process consciously configured to meet the needs of the present, and debates about the future. The results were, unsurprisingly, pedestrian. Long after the old Queen died the meaning and message of Venice remained unclear, a past in play.

'[A] dying Glory smiles'[5]

In the eighteenth century Venice had been a celebrated destination for young gentlemen on the Grand Tour, noted for carnival, courtesans and conspiracies, and while the very literal image of Venice was widely diffused, by considerable British holdings of local art, not least the work of Antonio del Canal (better known as Canaletto), the city state no longer counted for much in European affairs. Amid the chaos and disaster of the French Revolutionary wars the extinction of the Republic in 1797 did not elicit much comment from British statesmen. This was hardly the time for exemplary history lessons, a task that Gibbon's great book had addressed, and much would be forgotten before peace returned in 1815.

Yet there were deeper currents at work in the rapidly developing national culture. British poets would find new perspectives on the past and new ways to see the future. In 1800 Robert Southey, fresh from a visit to Lisbon, projected 'a monumental work on the history of Portugal and all her overseas territories [...] as Gibbon had become the historian of Rome. Indeed Portugal would provide a modern example of

an Imperial power that had flourished and declined, just as Rome had done.'[6] It hardly needed to be said that Portugal was a maritime empire. In the event Southey only completed the Brazilian section of his plan, but his approach may have inspired others. The poem 'On the extinction of the Venetian Republic', written in 1802 by his friend and neighbour Wordsworth, became a cultural landmark. Although he would not visit the city until 1837, Wordsworth's 14 lines summed up the romantic response, evoking 'the gorgeous east' held 'in fee', and 'the eldest Child of Liberty', given mortal form, running her natural course:

> Men are we, and must grieve when even the Shade
> Of that which once was great, is passed away.

That this was an imaginary vision, part Canaletto, part a growing disenchantment with revolution, became obvious when Wordsworth reached northern Italy in 1820. He decided against visiting the city. In 1837 the weary travel-worn poet finally spent four days in Venice, but he 'was not in the mood to appreciate its shimmering waters, palatial buildings and the sharp contrast of shadowed alleyways and brilliant sunlit piazzas'. Complaining of heat and discomfort he left early and never returned.[7]

Wordsworth's lines inspired a new sensibility. He began the process of recasting Venetian history as an exemplary past, a story with a message, a moral and a purpose. He did not need to see Venice, but his words inspired others to go, and they would find many ways of seeing his imaginary city when they arrived. Poets, artists and prophets wanted to see ahead, to predict and to warn. They would shape the intellectual landscape in which the Victorians came to see their future. British cultural leaders in words and pictures began to mine a new vein of ideas, to see in the fall of Venice a lesson and a warning.

During the Napoleonic wars, Venice had been closed to Britain's visitors, but was increasingly important as a hostile naval base that had to be watched by the Royal Navy. After Captain Sir William Hoste's brilliant victory off Lissa in 1811, the Royal Navy took command of the Adriatic, operated off the Dalmatian coast at the heart of the old Venetian empire and blockaded the Lagoon.[8] In 1815 Britain was content to leave the city of Venice, complete with the important naval arsenal, ships and shipyards on the Lido, in Austrian hands.[9] Instead the British neutralised the Adriatic by retaining the Ionian Islands, until 1797 Venetian territory, centred around the fortified naval base at Corfu.

Austrian rule provided much needed stability for Venice, but it proved politically repressive and economically devastating. As maritime trade

withered, Venice had little option but to become a tourist attraction, cashing in on its past glories for the amusement of rich travellers and dangerous exiles. Few British travellers found anything to complain about; even Lord Byron was left in peace, while others enjoyed the order and the music of Austrian army bands. Instead, under a watchful Habsburg eye, Venice became a city of dreams and decay, the setting for the fourth canto of Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Exiled and disgraced, Byron came to Venice as a refuge from the world, the power of his verse only equalled by the scandal of his life, which oozed into every aspect of the vision he created, a crumbling splendour, slowly sliding into the sea, a metaphor he deployed to sum up his own life, and the fate of his homeland. His words, and not a little of his life, would inspire the transformation of Venice in British eyes. Byron lent the city an air of the fabulous, the decadent and the dangerous.

The decadent, crumbling, ruins of past glory that filled Byron's canto found an echo in Shelley's contemporary 'Lines written among the Eugenean Hills',

> Sun-girt city, thou hast been
> Ocean's child, and then his Queen;
> Now is come a darker day
> And thou soon must be his prey.[10]

Inspired by visiting Byron in Venice, and the death of his daughter, Shelley turned the fall of Venice into a metaphor to reflect grief, frustrated political hopes and a moral repulsion prompted by the decadent atmosphere surrounding Byron. Everywhere he looked, Shelley saw the evidence of tyranny and corruption, of brutal Austrian soldiery and debased locals.[11] Taken in combination with his radical politics the meaning of his message, delivered from a vantage point sanctified by the literary heroes of the ancient world and the Renaissance, was obvious.

Nor were such reflections restricted to poets. The men who would dominate mid-Victorian politics, Benjamin Disraeli and William Ewart Gladstone, knew Venice and, as might be imagined, maintained very different visions. Obsessed with Byron, and busily retracing his steps, Disraeli arrived in Venice in September 1826, and was at once enchanted.[12] His impressionistic, romantic, orientalist response, gathered over the next five days would last a lifetime. He grasped the unique and the essential with Byronic fervour. With *Childe Harold* to hand, Disraeli saw Venice as the gateway to the east, or the 'Levant', an exotic

location associated in his imagination with the original home of his ancestors.[13] He was among the first to recognise Arab and Islamic influences on the architecture and culture of the city, describing San Marco as 'this Christian Mosque'. Venice made him a historian, albeit one of the imagination, able to feel the deeper import of what he saw:

> it is in such places that the mind receives that degree of wholesome excitation which quickens the feelings and the fancy, and which enables the mind to arrive at results with greater facility and rapidity than we do at home, and in our studies.[14]

He was quick to read the many different pasts the Venetians had created, and plundered, in the development of their Republic: to see the Christian, and pagan, the west and the east in monuments and men on the streets – 'the Austrian military band, and the bearded Jew'.[15] Later he would come to believe that his ancestors had hailed from the original ghetto, but such dreams took time and tide to coalesce. The form they finally took had much to do with the fact that his vision was not restricted to the city in the lagoon. Half a decade later Disraeli saw outposts of the old empire, and the strategy that bound them. In 1832 he reached the Ionian Islands, now British but once the bastion of Venetian power at the mouth of the Adriatic. Venetian architecture and a mighty fortress were exemplary guides to the nature of maritime strategy. Economic interests, local trade and the insular nature of the naval base ensured Corfu would be held by successive maritime powers, each anxious to secure the route to the east: 'the lesson was far from lost upon Disraeli as a future imperialist; for he was himself to annex Cyprus to the British Crown for additional protection to the route to India against a possible threat from Russia'.[16]

Disraeli's Venetian visions would come back in fiction, and in fact, for the rest of his life. They shaped his world view, influenced his judgement and changed the course of British history. He would hold 'the gorgeous east in fee' and redefine the very essence of the British Empire. His Venice remained mysterious, oriental, enduring and inspirational. When he seized upon the Venice as his model, Disraeli took a stand against the very different historical vision of another traveller.

Gladstone took in the sights, in his rather pedestrian way, without any of Disraeli's sense of wonder, mystery or magic. A residence of ten days in June 1832 left him with a record of the antique as quaint, not inspirational. On his first day he joined a list of eminent Englishmen who visited the Arsenale, now under Austrian management. It is unlikely

Disraeli found his way there. Guided by his naval brother and an Austrian officer, Gladstone recorded the more abstruse elements of their critique of a new frigate with the enthusiasm of an innocent. His mind pre occupied with the passage of the Great Reform Bill he did not feel the power of the location: 'his imagination must be bold indeed who can plant his illusions amidst the stormy realities of this our time, and who does not rather incline to project them into a more peaceful futurity.'[17] Instead he found his way to the Archives where, impressed by the sheer scale of the Frari, he was shown letters by Frankish Kings and English Queens. The rest of his predictable tour of palazzi, churches, glass works and galleries was aptly summed up by the laconic entry 'we have seen too many good pictures.'[18] At least he had the taste to appreciate Tintoretto. He knew the black legend of the prisons, but not the facts. For Gladstone, Venice was a 'quaint' city of 'motley ornament', 'amidst an air of sombre decay'.[19] Man and location were completely out of harmony; nothing of Byron, or Shelley, and too early for Turner's great images, he merely anticipated Ruskin's discovery of Tintoretto, and left with the revealing complaint: '[t]here is no recommendable restaurant.'[20] Nor would an interval of 30 years and the opportunity to see Corfu and Ionia alter Gladstone's perspective. In February 1859 he passed through Venice on his way home from dissolving England's Ionian Empire, spending two and half days buying china, dining with the Archduke Ferdinand Max, naval officer and Viceroy, later the tragic Emperor of Mexico, enjoying Austrian military music and recovering from perennial seasickness.[21] He found the visit 'in truth a surfeit'. Distressed by the sea, impervious alike to the allure of the past in Venice and Corfu, Gladstone was unable to find the magic. He was equally unimpressed by Disraeli's romantic Victorian Empire and its sea power.

Nor were such fundamentally divergent views restricted to Gladstone and Disraeli, for every Englishman who found inspiration in Venice another came to look at the prisons, and condemn. Among the intellectuals Thomas Arnold, visiting in 1830, was:

> delighted to see the secret prisons of the old aristocracy converted into lumber rooms, and to see German soldiers exercising authority in that place, which was once the very focus of the moral degradation of the Italian race, the seat of falsehood and ignorance and cruelty.[22]

Little wonder he did not see the sea. By contrast Richard Monckton-Milnes preferred Wordsworth's lines, and rated Venice 'the fittest resting

place for an intellectual and poetical man that my eyes have ever rested on.' He would return frequently over the next 40 years.[23]

History

As a self-consciously unique city, Venice was among the first states to create its own past in the modern era. At the dawn of humanism Doge Andrea Dandolo, a correspondent of Petrarch, compiled a suitably legalistic record of the Venetian past, enshrining much that was mythic in the early history of the city as a handy guide for contemporary statesmen. Other state historians followed, generating necessary pasts to order, in a city that dominated the early trade in printed books. This happy state of affairs did not survive the fall of the republic. Napoleon seized large sections of the archive, as part of a pan-European project to centralise historical memory, and generate the past that would sustain his own vision. That a Genoese subject should take revenge on Venice was hardly surprising, while the guilt he felt as the republican who had suppressed the oldest republic was assuaged by damning the victim.

Although he never visited the subject of his work French bureaucrat Pierre Daru's *Histoire de la république de Venise* published between 1815 and 1819, served the needs of the now defunct Napoleonic regime. The exiled ex-emperor was among his readers, his observations being worked into later editions after Lord Holland sent a copy to St Helena. In a work heavily influenced by the opinions and methods of Voltaire and Gibbon, Daru condemned the Venetian state for tyranny and moral corruption, but his approach was that of a past age, more publicist than historian. The whole book was designed to sustain a single message: 'the victim richly deserved her fate'.[24] For a book that was never translated Daru exerted enormous influence in Britain, not only among frustrated romantic republicans and nostalgic Bonapartists. His narrative was evidently in the hands of Byron, and possibly Shelley.

Their poetic vision inspired Turner, the first great artist to see Venice as something more than a glossy backdrop. A close student of Byron, and the illustrator of *Childe Harold*, Turner arrived in Venice in September 1819, at the height of romantic 'decline'. He spent five days capturing the city in pencil and watercolour sketches. There were further visits, in 1833 and 1840. Inspired by English words and Venetian sunsets, Turner's glowing canvasses made Venice live: but the meaning of his art remained trapped behind the dyslexic verse of the 'Fallacies of Hope', a rambling epic in the style of Byron and Shelley that mocked his infirmities, even as it underlined his art. Turner's art matched Byron's for

speed of execution, spontaneity and creative power: '[t]hey shared that century's assumption that art and literature should be concerned with ideas – an attitude that Turner maintained long after it had ceased to appeal to most British painters, or their public.'[25] Art and poetry had established an intimate link between the fate of Venice and the future of Britain by the year in which Queen Victoria was born. That this marked a transformation in attitudes and opinions is nowhere more obvious than in the dismissive lines that Gibbon, the master of such historical lessons, applied to the gothic architecture of the city. Not that Turner was drawn to the Gothic buildings, the Palladian structures were better placed, and commanded the skyscape in a way that the older structures did not.

The link between Byron's line, 'a dying Glory smiles', and Turner's vision was immediate and intimate. The contrast between Canaletto's bright Arsenale Gate, commissioned by the 4th Duke of Bedford, later First Lord of the Admiralty, in 1731, and Turner's sketch of a brooding, garish building, a fiery red fortress 'one flame of spiritual fire'[26] dwarfing modern Venetians reflects the impact of the romantic movement, and encapsulates the last stages of a particular way of seeing the city.[27] Ultimately Turner's perception of Venice provided 'a different truth, more strange and visionary' with colour and shape mixing glory and decay in imaginary compositions held together by ships and boats.[28] The link between sea power and sea pictures was obvious, an artist consciously developing a British national art needed little encouragement to grasp the central role of the sea in British culture.

For Turner Venice replaced Carthage, another maritime empire crushed under the weight of continental military tyranny, as the example to hold up before his countrymen – 'a warning of the destiny that might one day overtake his own country'.[29] This obsession with the fate of maritime empires dated back to the battle of Trafalgar, his Carthaginian and Venetian pictures providing a powerful visual record of his concerns. Curiously no one picked up the deeper, prophetic import of the sea in his art.[30]

Within a decade, Byron's vague allusions and Turner's luminescent opaque would be thrust aside by a new perspective, one that had been prompted by Turner's most profound and poetic vision' of the city, *Juliet and her Nurse* of 1836.[31] John Ruskin's first art criticism was a spirited defence of a picture in which he affected to see the 'souls of the mighty dead [...] wandering in vague and infinite glory' in Turner's mist.[32]

Another devotee and imitator of Byron, Ruskin visited Venice in 1835 and he returned in 1841 having acquired several of Turner's Venetian

pictures, and met the artist/hero. After failing to capture the spirit of the city in Byronic verse or careful drawings Ruskin found his medium in prophetic descriptive prose, part Bible, part Byron, and always attempting to reduce Turner's vision to words. In 1841 he realised that Turner's Venice was largely Byron's, and that Byron had been 'hamming up' the illusion for effect, especially the prison and the 'Bridge of Sighs'. It was all a 'stage dream'.[33]

Where Turner provided a complex vision combining splendour and decay Ruskin focussed on the splendour, and developed a new line of analysis. Nowhere was this more obvious than in his wilful misreading of Turner's last Venetian masterpiece, 'The Sun of Venice Going to Sea' of 1843. Turner's allegory of fate and fall appeared as Ruskin was completing the first volume of *Modern Painters*: thereafter Turner's Venice quickly dissolved into a suggestive indication of shapes and colours, moving ever more slowly, as the city of dreams faded time out of mind. Exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1843 with four lines from Turner's poem *Fallacies of Hope* the 'Sun' reflected the profound emotional significance of Venice, a fallen sea empire to follow his brief fascination with Carthage. He 'saw in the history of both cities a warning of the destiny that might one day overtake his own country', and perhaps linked it to his own mortality.[34] Ruskin, more concerned to analyse the truth in Turner's mastery of water painting, ignored the dark verse.[35] By the time the fifth volume of *Modern Painters* appeared in 1860 Ruskin's tone was altogether closer to Turner's, a dark, despairing vision of the century, made manifest in the work of great artists from Byron to Turner. The prophetic vision of his hero, not least his Carthaginian and Venetian images, lay at the core of those concerns.[36] In the interval much had changed; Ruskin, Venice and Britain had undergone momentous transformations.

Sea power

Just as Turner provided a vital point of entry into the meaning and magic of Venice, another core element of the Victorian exemplary past was delivered by historian George Grote. Drawing on Herodotus and Thucydides, Grote, would be the first to deploy the concept of sea power in English, and use it to emphasise the cultural and strategic differences between states. In his mighty *History of Greece* those states were Athens and Sparta, but the audience lay in Britain, and France.

As we might expect, Grote was no cloistered academic, by turns banker, politician and a founder of University College he lived and wrote in an

age of anxiety, against a backdrop of rising diplomatic tension between Britain and France, sea power and land power made manifest, the threat of war, and pan-European revolution pushing his pen. Beside the liberalism that identified Athens as the exemplary state, the fount of liberty and democracy, were wider reflections on the nature of empire and power directed at the Victorian political elite by a recently retired member of parliament. Furthermore if Grote, an integral part of the London intellectual landscape, recognised the danger of present-minded history, he still cast ancient Athens in the model of Victorian Britain.[37]

It was no accident that Grote provided the earliest references to sea power and thalassocracy cited by the *Oxford English Dictionary*. He drew these terms directly from the ancient authors, but did not feel it necessary to make the link between British and Athenian sea power explicit. None of his contemporaries would have missed the point. Grote elaborated his concept of sea power in 1849, immediately after the latest French Revolution, with a naval race in ferment and an invasion scare well under way. Following Herodotus the critical Athenian decision to become a sea power is linked to the more flexible and adventurous intellect of the sailor, as contrasted with the steady, inflexible landsman. It is not hard to see contemporary party politics in this; land-owning Tory squires were an obvious target for reflections on the military elite as unambitious, dull, disobedient and incompetent.[38]

Athens needed a navy for defence and trade, it established a secure naval base at Piraeus and overseas bases on small, isolated islands with fortified harbours. Readers needed no encouragement to see the analogue with Malta, Bermuda, Hong Kong and Gibraltar. Or, if they were better read, with the maritime domain of St Mark.[39]

Grote traced the decline of Athens to the decision to take on a 'new character [...], as a competitor for landed alliances not less than for maritime ascendancy.' This threatened other, land-based, Greek states like Sparta who allied themselves to maritime Corinth. Even so, the fatal blow came from within the Athenian Empire.[40] There were warnings aplenty. Readers would have made the intended, if unspoken, connection between the fall of Athens and the American Revolution.

If Grote eschewed anything so vulgar as exploiting classical learning for polemical purposes his text is suffused with telling details, details deliberately employed to prompt predictable responses, connecting the 'lessons' that linked Athens with current British experience. He did not need to belabour the significance of the Athenian shift to sea power, his audience was only too well aware of its superior merits, and the book appeared in the midst of a sustained naval challenge mounted by an

unstable, post-revolutionary France. While classical scholars concentrate their criticism on his Victorian version of Athenian democracy and civilisation, Grote's contemporary ideas on sea power and empire were equally influential. Among his correspondents few were as industrious as William Ewart Gladstone, translator of Homer, and retrenching Prime Minister.

The Stones of Venice

In 1845 Ruskin returned to Venice, for a third time, and his eyes soon shifted from Turner to Tintoretto, who swept him into 'the wider sea' of painting 'which crowned the power and perished in the fall of Venice; so forcing me into the study of the history of Venice herself; and through that into what else I have traced or told of the laws of national strength and virtue.'[41] He identified the physical structure of the city itself as the ultimate expression of Venetian history. Turner's allusions were replaced by a more urgent mission, to develop the city as a vast outdoor morality tale for Victorian England. Returning to the lagoon in November 1849 Ruskin realised that art was a more complete and true record of the human intellect than words. He would remain for the next four months, and return again in 1851 for a nine-month research trip. In 1853 he concluded that Venetian Gothic architecture arose out of 'a state of pure national faith, and domestic virtue.' By contrast the Palladian baroque that followed concealed national infidelity and domestic corruption in its search for technical perfection.[42] He would later admit that a strong dose of judgemental Protestantism had coloured his opinions.

In 1849 the theme of decline and fall was all too fresh. The Austrians had just subdued the Venetian republic, not that Ruskin minded. Like most British visitors he preferred Austrian order to Venetian independence, or Italian national aspirations. As with any competent anatomist he preferred his subject matter dead, ready for dissection. Endlessly drawing, photographing and examining the architectural legacy, while consulting the archival expert Rawdon Brown,[43] he began to see there was much more to Venetian history than Daru had suggested, taking his own line on art and architecture. Consequently while he drew key historical themes from Daru he replaced the pedestrian chronology and predictable causation of the French critic with a deeply personal vision of national moral collapse.[44] For Ruskin moral decline was evident in the loss of artistic integrity, his art criticism was driven by historical evidence. The fall of Venice was caused by moral failure, and its most obvious indicator was artistic.

Amidst his idiosyncratic and often inconsistent arguments, Ruskin's central message was clear enough: Venetian Gothic architecture was a truly unique national style, in harmony with the maritime/commercial impulse of the city, while Florentine/Renaissance architecture, an alien import, indicated a vital loss of creative power. *The Stones of Venice* was far more than architectural criticism; it transformed art history and the British perception of Venice, in the process imposing a deeper cultural meaning on the past. While the astonishing impact of the book is most obvious in the mock Venetian edifices that litter every city in Britain, not least his alma mater, Christ Church, it effected a fundamental change in British attitudes. Ruskin's vision transformed Daru's decadent and corrupt city into a shining exemplar of maritime empire, and the pre-eminent morality tale for contemporary British intellectuals. He presaged the overthrow of the 'Black Legend' of Venice.

The key to Ruskin's unique vision of Venice was that he and he alone, among contemporary British observers, could see the sea. This perspective must be attributed to the influence of Turner, the prophetic artist of sea power in decline. Only by turning his back on the remains of glory, and addressing its watery source, could he begin to analyse the unique, the specific, and the beautiful in a critical phase of Venetian history, to recover a sea culture, and find its alter ego in the later, land bound age of Palladian architecture. At first Ruskin saw genius in Turner's treatment of the sea, then in the message of his sea pictures. Turner shifted Ruskin's eyes to the sea, and there he found more than reflections and light, he found the meaning of Empire.

As a pioneer cultural historian Ruskin began with a set of assumptions drawn from poetry, art and first-hand inspection. But they were driven by broader concerns for the present and future. His analysis of Venice opened with an overt sea power theme:

> Since first the dominion of men was asserted over the ocean, three thrones, of mark beyond all others, have been set upon its sands: the thrones of Tyre, Venice, and England. Of the First of these great powers only the memory remains; of the Second the ruin; the Third which inherits their greatness, if it forget their example, may be led through prouder eminence to less pitied destruction.[45]

Thus, 'he was quite clear, from the first time he tried out the opening sentences', as Robert Hewison has explained, 'that there was a parallel between Venice and England. (In turn he saw a parallel between Venice

and the ancient civilisation of the seafaring Phoenicians, whose city Tyre had fallen to the Venetians in the Twelfth century).'[46]

Of course the Venetians had not captured the Latin city of Tyre, only the Genoese commercial enclave, a triumph commemorated by two decorated columns standing outside San Marco. The Genoese columns prompted a connection with the city that Alexander the Great had defeated in one of the most audacious triumphs of land power over the sea known to educated Englishmen. Ruskin's purpose was to use Phoenicia to link Britain, through Venice, with the Old Testament.[47]

The Stones brought Venice back into the intellectual life of Britain in the period between the Great Exhibition and the Crimean War, it made an entire nation see the lessons of a lost empire, and reach for new ideas about themselves. A work at once highly imaginative, inspired by the location, and the most solid forms of evidence, those that required vast expense and sustained effort, he overturned the literary creations of Daru, and the poet vision of Byron's generation, to create a powerful prose elegy for the power 'that held the gorgeous east in fee'. *The Stones* appeared just as Britain took up the Venetian mantle in the Levant, albeit on a larger scale.

Ruskin had been trying to say something to his own society, about the importance of unique individualistic gothic architecture over the mechanical perfection of the Baroque, a moral tale for the age of industrial mass production.[48] In 1860 he closed *Modern Painters* by connecting Giorgione's Venice '[d]eep-hearted, majestic, terrible as the sea' with Turner's London, a profoundly maritime warning that power would be lost if the underlying moral strength were allowed to ebb away.[49] While his audience largely ignored the prophetic matter linking the fall of Venice with the moral decay of Victorian Britain, few were unmoved by the sonorous and powerful prose that greatly enhanced the place of Venice in British cultural life. Perhaps only a tithe of his readers picked up the sea and naval power, exemplary pasts and moral decay, but they made a difference, he ensured 'the story of Venice was warning for his own time.'[50]

Modern history

Despite angry counterblasts from Venetians and the critique of Leopold von Ranke, Daru's history held the field for three decades. In consequence, whiggish English historians like Henry Hallam were as happy to accept his interpretation as Byron. Only with the emergence of modern historical methods, and greater access to the archives did a different story emerge. This development would coincide with a

growing sense of unease among British intellectuals, anxious to predict the future of the imperial maritime hegemon they began to reflect on the nature of sea power, the key instrument of her greatness. The inspiration came from the calamities of the Crimean War (1854–56), a costly success rather than a catastrophic defeat it should be stressed, the development of historical scholarship, and the growing realisation that Gibbon may have chosen the wrong model for his exemplary study of imperial hubris.

The attraction of Gibbon's classical lesson had been obvious, it related to an age that lived in the minds of the Victorian elite, drawn from texts that they had learned as schoolboys. Venice did not possess the same linguistic fascination, if the British knew Italian it was not the Venetian dialect, but Tuscan that they had mastered. Furthermore the naval history of Venice was largely unknown. Given unlimited access to the archives by the brief republican government of 1848–49 Samuel Romanin met their political agenda with a ringing endorsement of the Venetian system.[51] His document-rich ten-volume history, published between 1853 and 1861, replaced Daru, and completed the process begun by Ruskin, of rehabilitating Venice, and making it into a safe source of exemplary history. For Romanin, the end of the Republic had been no more than the recognition of overwhelming force.[52] Once drawn into the light of historical research and shorn of dark myths of tyranny, immorality, corruption and inhumanity the republic finally emerged as a fully fledged member of the new British thalassocracy list.

In 1858 a new British history of Venice appeared. Unfortunately William Carew Hazlitt's book, despite being revised and extended three times, remained unremarkable, lacking any sense of history as a debate. Instead he developed Venice as an analogue, 'in many things [...] our mistress and teacher', an object lesson, mixing in a good deal of Daru's 'dark prisons and cruel laws'.[53] Ultimately, he declared 'I call this book a History. It may also be treated as a monument and a Lesson; a monument to what Venice accomplished: a lesson to shew how the errors of States are punished, and how power and wealth may come and go.'[54] Better suited to bibliographic compilation than analysis, Hazlitt simply failed to see the sea, or the imperial lessons. Little wonder John Stuart Mill read Venice as an exemplary bureaucratic state.[55]

Modern navies

The emergence of industrial naval technology prompted fresh thinking on the nature of sea power. After a decade serving in the Ottoman navy,

including the Crimean War, Captain Sir Adolphus Slade produced the book *Maritime States and Military Navies* of 1859 which offered a cultural analysis of sea power, contrasting Britain as a maritime state, with imperial France, which had exploited steam battleships, the latest developments in naval technology and the much vaunted French *Inscription Maritime* to create a military navy for the invasion of Britain. Slade backed his argument with historical examples of maritime states that had been defeated by military powers from the Vandal kingdom of Africa to Venice. The Venetians, Slade argued:

> attempted too much and reflected too little on the connexion between causes and events. They weakened themselves by their lust of foreign dominion, and betrayed themselves by their carelessness about the growth of the Turkish naval power, the most remarkable triumph ever achieved by system and perseverance over disinclination and inaptitude.[56]

Furthermore he, like so many Victorians, invested the process with a moral quality:

> Venice had a source of weakness traceable more or less in all maritime states. She was given in her palmy days, to sacrifice principle, to expediency; to allow calculations of present loss and profit to obscure comprehensive views. She thus demoralised herself and forearmed her enemy. In the rise of Venice and Genoa, their merchant princes were animated by higher sentiments; they made commerce the handmaid of patriotic ambition; but when sated with wealth and fame the commercial element preponderated and made peace at any price a tolerated expression.[57]

There is ample evidence here to suggest that Slade had read Ruskin, replacing the enervating effects of Baroque architecture with 'expediency', while his impression of the Turks as seafarers had the advantage of being first-hand. Unfortunately Slade's attention soon wandered to naval architecture, a subject that more frequently formed the core of pamphlets by unemployed officers.[58]

After *The Stones* and Romanin's recasting of Venetian history the Byronic vision, compounding Daru's critique with enervating corruption and decay, vanished into one of Turner's ethereal mists. And with it went the comforting notion that the fall of Venice had been caused by internal factors, not least Catholicism and oligarchy. Romanin's analysis

was truly alarming: Venice had been slowly crushed and then suddenly killed by vast continental states, Ottoman Turkey, Habsburg Spain and revolutionary France. Suddenly it seemed that sea power was not the answer, it was necessary to find another answer. Contemporary political developments provided emphasised this shift of focus. As Italy moved towards unification it revived the naval glory of the old Republic, naming warships for Venetian heroes.[59] The 'Black Legend' was finished, and interest in the reality of Venetian sea power developed apace.

Once Ranke had shown the way, inspiring a new sense of the truth of the past in the process, the British were quick to inspect the Venetian archives. Initially they were looking for material to illustrate their own history, rather than exemplary evidence of the decline of maritime empires. This was the more curious when earlier generations of British observers had been quick to see the obvious connections. In truth much that the British 'discovered' in the second half of the nineteenth century had already been seen, and analysed. After many centuries in close contact, not infrequently squabbling over trade, the British were already heirs to much of the Venetian naval legacy, of its ideas and ambitions, with England/Britain finding much to admire in the older sea power. For Tudor England, Venice was Christianity's bulwark against the Ottoman Turks and the Arsenale was not as the eighth wonder of the world. They recognised Lepanto to be a great event long before Sir Edward Creasy enshrined it in his *Decisive Battles of History*, while the link between the *Bucintoro* and the Stuart parade ship *Prince Royal* was clear.[60] John Evelyn made extensive notes on the Arsenale, and the 'Wedding of the Sea' but eighteenth-century author and statesman Joseph Addison drew a more portentous lesson. Visiting the city in 1705, Addison examined the defences of the island and emphasised the convenience of the lagoon for commerce. That said, he saw all the obvious signs of a third generation maritime economy, high tariffs, nobles unwilling to sully their hands with trade, and the loss of industrial primacy in key manufactures. Little wonder the Arsenale was full of obsolete guns, swords and suits of armour. His keen eye spotted the weakness of the position, drawing a lesson that would be appropriate to his own time in high office.

> It was certainly a mighty error in this State to affect so many conquests on the *Terra Firma*, which has only served to raise the jealousies of the Christian Princes, and about three hundred years ago had the like to have ended in the utter extirpation of the commonwealth; whereas, had they applied themselves with the same

> politics and industry to the increase of their strength by sea, they might perhaps have had all the islands of the *Archipelago* in the hands, and, by consequence, the greatest fleet, and the most seamen of any other State in *Europe*.[61]

While this theme had been developed in Venetian literature the acuity with which Addison seized upon it, and the inference that it could be applied to his country, was important. He saw the question in simple terms: sea power versus land power. When Addison held office in the 1710s, Britain took a clear decision to favour naval power, maintaining a mighty fleet far larger than any possible rival. While Addison's insight would be left in the obscurity of contemporary publications, until a collected edition appeared in 1914, a foppish young visitor to Byron's ruinous city would introduce another Venice to the audience created by the second reform act in 1867, taking as his theme:

> in the fall
> Of Venice think of thine, despite thy watery wall[62]

After more than four decades the power of the city lived on, it had inspired Disraeli's literary career, now it would inform a decade of political power. In February 1871, Disraeli, leader of the opposition in the House of Commons, considered the effect of the Franco-Prussian war on Britain's position in the world. In a brilliant overview he made a contemporary analogue with the situation of Venice facing the League of Cambrai. The old balance of power, which Britain had maintained for so long, had been destroyed by the new nation states and mass conscript armies. In the hands of a master of dramatic tension the fatalistic import of such analogies may have been emphasised for political effect, 'I cannot resist the conviction that this country is in a state of great peril', for the growth of large national states had been a key issue in the decline of Venice. He subtly differentiated his example and his country, following Daru he portrayed Venice as corrupt and tyrannical, while Britain was free. Nor were his words lost on a wider audience, the *Times* carefully explaining the lesson to its readers.[63] But like most commentators the 'Thunderer' missed the key point. Disraeli highlighted the reality of British power, the accumulated wealth of half a century which would allow the country to defend itself 'we would enter into a third campaign without finding the sinews of war fail us.'[64] This was the reality of Victorian Empire, one that Britain shared with Venice at the height of her power, the strength of money.

Ruskin had already shown the way, using his inaugural lecture as Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford in 1870 to preach the gospel of colonies and empire. A treasured off-print of Ruskin's text inspired Cecil Rhodes' vocation.[65] A new kind of empire was taking shape, not the informal links and white settlements of the early Victorian age, but a new, expansionist spread of control and authority across Africa and Asia. For Rhodes the fear of an imperial fall, and an inadequate education, prompted him to have Gibbon's sources translated into English.[66]

Since the new histories demonstrated that Venice had not been brought down by corruption and tyranny, it was necessary to identify failures of policy. Here Daru provided a new critique, one Addison had anticipated: the decision to acquire possessions on the Italian mainland, at the expense of ships, trade and empire, 'the true foundations of its power'. The moral took hold in the 1870s because it met the needs and anxieties of an age obsessively fixated on visions of imminent collapse. Such ideas would endure down to 1914, not least because they were enshrined in the *Cambridge Modern History*. The lesson was obvious long before Althea Weil gave it a book-length endorsement in *The Navy of Venice* in 1910. Venice, like Britain, worked best as an imperial power in 'splendid isolation' from the affairs of the continent.[67] She found the failure of Venice to produce a history of the Navy, 'the expression par excellence of her peculiar character, the instrumentality by which she both built up her actual fabric and shaped her destiny' 'strange and curious'. Through 'neglect of this same navy, Venice fell away from her high estate and ceased to rank as a sea power in the history of Europe', a failure attributed to 'indifference and apathy'.[68] The following year Edward Hutton's *Venice and Venetia* made the message stark and clear, the future of Britain was simply a question of 'Command of the Sea'.[69]

For all the literary warnings the real question was how to respond to the 'lessons' of Venetian history. The answer was provided by Disraeli: in power between 1874 and 1880 he initiated a new wave of suitably imperial projects. His diplomacy consolidated and secured the commercial links and frontiers of India, linked them to the crown by rendering Victoria an Empress, and repulsing a serious threat to a major trading partner. Unlike the Venetians in 1453, Disraeli did not let Constantinople fall to the barbarians. When the crisis ended Disraeli took Cyprus as Britain's reward, an act so quixotic as to confound contemporaries and historians alike. Few recognised the Venetian link, his visit to Cyprus in 1831, the heroic last stand of the Venetians at Famagusta, and the importance of the island

as a way station between Alexandria and the Greek bases. During the crisis of 1876–78 the Cabinet had frequently lamented the lack of a convenient military station in the eastern Mediterranean, cursing Gladstone for giving up Corfu. They were persuaded, by Disraeli, that Cyprus was 'the key to Western Asia'. The choice was neither quixotic, nor unexpected. He had predicted it in his novel *Tancred* some 20 years before – linking the history of Venice with British strategic requirements.[70]

The most important British historian of the 1870s was the first since Grote to deploy the concepts of sea power and thalassocracy, making explicit connection between past empires and British prospects. John Robert Seeley, Regius Professor of History at Cambridge (1869–95) belonged to a generation that looked back to the glorious beginning of the British Empire in the age of Drake and Raleigh, and stressed the connection with the modern situation.[71] For Seeley, as for Grote, sea power was an obvious theme. The major point of departure was Seeley's belief that modern history was a superior base for education, glorying in its present and future utility.[72] More explicitly polemical than Grote he declared: 'history is the school of statesmanship'.[73] His method was suitably direct: sweeping away 'the purely popular, romantic and fantastic views of the subject which prevail and bring out clearly the exact questions which need to be investigated.'[74] As one might expect from an imperialist who conceived history as a social science, Seeley made a significant contribution to sea power theory. In an aside ignored by historians and strategists alike he stressed that thalassocracy, which Grote had borrowed without question from his ancient sources, should be limited to the Mediterranean, literally tied to that sea, as distinct from oceanic power in the Atlantic age. The emergence of oceanic trade and empire, he argued, had affected Holland and Britain much as the Mediterranean had invigorated the intellects of Greece and Rome. Furthermore Britain's advantage over France as an imperial power lay in her single minded pursuit of sea power, exploiting her geographic good fortune to avoid costly European commitments.[75] Britain was an oceanic power, not a land or mixed power.

For Seeley this was a question of pressing contemporary significance. There were now two great continental land powers, Russia and America:

> Between them, equally vast, but not as continuous, with the ocean flowing through it in every direction, lies, like a world-Venice, with the sea for streets, Greater Britain.[76]

Sea power had important political and cultural consequences, but they were frequently fleeting. For all their brilliance the achievements

of Athens and Venice ended when larger states arose to suppress their liberty. Following Ruskin, Seeley used Venice to argue that a larger British imperial state was the only way to compete with the emerging superpowers.[77] His message that a Greater Britain based on oceanic power was the only safeguard for the future was widely consumed. While he warned that a serious commitment to Europe would constitute a critical danger to the Empire, this remained a dim menace in an age when the threat of a French invasion had but recently receded. If he could not foresee the political patterns of 1914, he had the prescience to note: 'sooner or later we must lose India because sooner or later some war in Europe will force us to withdraw our English troops.'[78]

At heart Seeley's key texts *The Expansion of England* and the posthumous *Growth of British Policy*, were extended investigations of the rise and fall of nations, with the explicit purpose of avoiding a Gibbonian fall.[79] Little wonder *Expansion* sold over 80,000 copies in two years, and secured him a constellation of admirers among politicians, journalists and empire builders, from Lord Rosebery, Joseph Chamberlain and W. T. Stead to Alfred Milner and Cecil Rhodes.[80] The ability to reach such a broad audience was unusual, while his popularity helps to explain his marginal position in British historiography. Historians tracing their professional antecedents have set him aside in favour of Acton, his elemental successor at Cambridge, and Stubbs' professional followers at Oxford. It was at this point that English history assumed an academic form, leaving polemical, present-minded writing to other disciplines, amongst which naval history soon found itself. Since 1890, sea power has been contested ground.

Convinced that history could offer lessons, and that these were best drawn out through political science methods Seeley was out of step with his discipline-hardening peers.[81] His approach foreshadowed modern multidisciplinary approaches like war studies. Seeley used sea power sparingly, subtly and with powerful effect. Many of those Britons who were so struck by Mahan were already predisposed to the theme by Seeley and Grote, Thucydides and Herodotus.

Long ago we learned that there are no lessons of history, no simple solutions that can be deployed to solve the problems of the present and future. History, a contingent record of the past as chosen to recreate it, serves a higher function. As Clausewitz and Burkhardt, the nineteenth-century masters of strategic and cultural history, agreed, history makes us wise forever by educating our judgement. Did the Victorians use Venice as a morality tale replete with lessons, or an educational tool to tease out insight and ideas? The answer is both, a fact made manifest in the shape and structure of the empire Victoria bequeathed. The Victorians lived in

a very different world, and despite their hopes and fears, signally failed to recover the reality of Venetian sea power. In that sense Venice was a useful example, but not an accurate one. The connections were far closer than they knew. The reality of Venetian sea power would take far longer to recover; ultimately it would take a historian of total war a lifetime to deliver a comprehensive analysis of the link between Venice, the sea and empire.[82] By then it was all too late, and the historian in question was an American.

After 1918 the intellectual milieu moved on. As academic history took command of the past, Venice told no more moral tales. The great modern sea power had been tested and had been found, if not wanting, then dull and sadly inglorious. The cultural meaning of Venetian sea power was gone – but the carnival lives on.

Notes

1. A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783* (London: Sampson Law Marston, 1890). Mahan did not examine the Venetian experience.
2. Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem: The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2004), pp. 88–91, 155–91, 264.
3. The 4th Duke of Bedford's Canaletto collection included the Arsenale Gate (commissioned, 1732).
4. Comparing vol. 6 (The Romantic Age in Britain) and vol. 7 (Victorian Britain) of Boris Ford (ed.), *The Cambridge Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) demonstrates the sudden emergence of Venice at mid-century.
5. Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, 4th canto, 1st verse in *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron*, 10 vols (London: John Murray, 1866), vol. 2.
6. Malcolm Jack, *Lisbon: City of the Sea, A History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), p. 114.
7. Juliet Barker, *Wordsworth: A Life* (London: Viking, 2000), pp. 539, 689.
8. L. Sondhaus, 'Napoleon's Shipbuilding Program at Venice and the Struggle for Naval Mastery in the Adriatic, 1806–1814', *Journal of Military History*, 53 (October 1989), 349–62.
9. Andrew Lambert, *The Last Sailing Battlefleet: Maintaining Naval Mastery 1815–1850* (London: Conway, 1991), pp. 4, 17–18.
10. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Sensitive Plant [Lines Written among the Euganean Hills]* (1818) in *The Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London: John Abraham, 1834), pp. 221–33.
11. Richard Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), pp. 447–49, 569 et seq.
12. Robert Blake, *Disraeli* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1966), pp. 51–54.
13. D. Sultana, *Benjamin Disraeli in Spain, Malta and Albania, 1830–3: A Monograph* (London: Tamesis, 1976), p. 4.

14. Disraeli to Isaac Disraeli (September 1826) cited in W. F. Monypenny, *Life of Benjamin Disraeli vol. I 1804–1837* (London: John Murray, 1910) p. 105.
15. Ibid., p. 104.
16. Sultana, *Disraeli in Spain*, p. 50.
17. Diary entry for 18 June 1832, M. R. D. Foot (ed.), *The Gladstone Diaries, vol. 1* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 527.
18. Diary entry for 19 June 1832, ibid., p. 529; Richard Shannon, *Gladstone I: 1809–1865* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1982), p. 38.
19. Diary entry for 25 June 1832, *Gladstone Diaries*, p. 533.
20. Ibid., p. 532.
21. Shannon, *Gladstone,* pp. 373–74; H. G. C. Matthew (ed.), *The Gladstone Diaries vol. V* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), pp. 370–72.
22. Arthur Stanley, *Life of Thomas Arnold, Head-master of Rugby* (London: John Murray, 1901), p. 236.
23. T. W. Reid, *The Life, Letters, and Friendships of Richard Monckton Milnes, First Lord Houghton* 2 vols, (London: Cassell, 1891), vol. 1, pp. 98, 106, 143, 153, vol. 2, p. 270.
24. G. P. Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Longmans, 1913), pp. 160–61.
25. Lindsay Stainton, *Turner's Venice* (London: British Museum, 1985), p. 8.
26. John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, 3 vols, (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1853), vol. 3, *The Fall*, p. 280.
27. Stainton, *Turner's Venice*, plate no. 75. The sketch is estimated to date from 1840.
28. Ibid., p. 27.
29. Ibid., p. 71.
30. The importance of Dutch marine painting in Turner's technical development is well-known, but Ruskin's vilification of the Van de Velde father and son has obscured the deeper meaning of this choice.
31. Stainton, *Turner's Venice*, p. 32.
32. Ibid., p. 27.
33. Robert Hewison, *Ruskin's Venice* (London: Pilkington Press, 2000), pp. 15–16.
34. Stainton, *Turner's Venice*, p. 71.
35. John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* edited and abridged by David Barrie (London: Pilkington Press, 2000), pp. 177–79.
36. Ibid., pp. 589, 583.
37. Joseph Hamburger, 'Grote, George (1794–1871)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn., http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/printable/11677 accessed 10 February 2008.
38. George Grote, *History of Greece* 5 vols, (London: John Murray, 1849), vol. 5, pp. 67–70.
39. Ibid., p. 408. See also p. 333 on the fortification of Megara in Greece.
40. Ibid., pp. 431–33, 464–65.
41. John Ruskin, *Praeterita: Outlines of Scenes and Thoughts Perhaps Worthy of Memory in my Past Life* (Orpington: George Allen, 1885), p. 372.
42. Francis Haskell, *History and Its Images: Art and the Interpretation of the Past* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 309; Hewison, *Ruskin's Venice*, p. 35.

43. Ralph A. Griffiths and John E. Law (eds), *Rawdon Brown and the Anglo-Venetian Relationship* (Stroud: Nonsuch, 2005).
44. Haskell, *History and Its Images*, pp. 321–24.
45. John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, vol. 1 *The Foundations*, p. 1.
46. Hewison, *Ruskin's Venice*, p. 38.
47. John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, vol. 2 *The Sea Stories*, p. 141.
48. Hewison, *Ruskin's Venice*, p. 37.
49. Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, p. 550.
50. Hewison, *Ruskin's Venice*, p. 60.
51. John Pemble, *The Mediterranean Passion: Victorians and Edwardians in the South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 96.
52. Gooch, *History and Historians*, p. 440.
53. A. W. Reed, 'Hazlitt, William Carew (1834–1913)', rev. Nilanjana Banerji, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/printable/33780, accessed 30 January 2008; W. C. Hazlitt, *The History of the Origin and Rise of the Republic of Venice* 2 vols, (London: J. R. Smith, 1858), vol. 1, preface p. xiii.
54. Hazlitt, p. xxiii.
55. Pemble, *Mediterranean Passion*, p. 98
56. Adolphus Slade, *Maritime States and Military Navies* (London: James Ridgway, 1859), p. 12.
57. Ibid., pp. 13–14.
58. Ibid., dated Constantinople, 25 August 1859, p. 58.
59. Most notable were 'Venizia', 'Dandolo', 'Lepanto', 'Barbarigo', 'Pisani' and 'Morosini'. See R. Gardiner (ed.), *Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships 1860–1905* (London: Conway, 1979), pp. 334–59.
60. G. Bull, *Venice: The Most Triumphant City* (London: Folio Society, 1980), pp. 45–79.
61. Joseph Addison, 'Remarks on Italy' in A. C. Guthkelch (ed.), *The Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Addison* 2 vols, (London: G. Bell, 1914), vol. 2., pp. 52–64. Addison was in Venice in the summer of 1705.
62. Ibid.
63. *Hansard*, 3rd ser., vol. 204 (9 Feb. 1871), cols. 82, 93; *Times*, 14 February 1871, p. 8.
64. *Hansard*, 3rd ser., vol. 204 (9 Feb. 1871), col. 94.
65. R. Symonds, *Oxford and Empire: The Last Lost Cause* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 26.
66. Ibid., p. 162.
67. Alethea Wiel, *The Navy of Venice* (London: John Murray, 1910). A daughter of Lord Wenlock, Wiel had married a Venetian archivist and settled in the city: Pemble, *Mediterranean Passion*, pp. 103–4.
68. Wiel, *Navy of Venice*, p. viii.
69. Pemble, *Mediterranean Passion*, pp. 104–5.
70. Disraeli to Queen Victoria, 5 May 1878, cited in G. E. Buckle, *The Life of Disraeli. Vol. VI.* (London: John Murray, 1920), p. 291, see also, pp. 251, 299.
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Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 231–50.

72. Deborah Wormell, *Sir John Seeley and the Uses of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 41–42; J. R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (London: Macmillan, 1883), p. 1.
73. Wormell, *Seeley and the Uses of History*, p. 43.
74. Ibid., p. 90.
75. Seeley, *Expansion of England*, pp. 89–97.
76. Ibid., p. 288.
77. Ibid., pp. 300–1.
78. Ibid., pp. 291–92.
79. Wormell, *Seeley and the Uses of History*, p. 129.
80. Ibid., pp. 154–56.
81. Ibid., pp. 179–80.
82. Frederic C. Lane, *Venice: A Maritime Republic* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

2

After Emancipation: Slavery, Freedom and the Victorian Empire

John Oldfield

In the 26 years between 1807 and 1833, Britain not only put an end to its involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, but also abolished slavery in the British Caribbean. These momentous events figure largely in the nation's imagination and, indeed, its memory. But instead of seeing 1807 and 1833 as acts of closure, as happened in 2007 when the nation paused to mark the bicentenary of the 1807 Abolition Act, it is perhaps more meaningful to see them as part of a broader historical narrative (a specific national history) that spoke to and reinforced Britain's tradition of humanitarian interventionism. Though it is sometimes easy to forget, Britain would retain a close interest in the slavery question after 1833, not least through its involvement in the suppression of the international slave trade. This complex history is perhaps best explained in terms of four broad and interrelated themes: humanitarian effort on the part of British abolitionists, official government policy, naval suppression of the slave trade and empire. As we shall see, emancipation came to define the morality and purpose of the Victorian Empire, lending it a legitimacy that justified not only its imperialistic ambitions, but also its ability to speak for those who were too weak to speak for themselves.

Abolitionism progressed in a series of phases or cycles. The first of these was the campaign to end the transatlantic slave trade, which reached its climax in 1807.[1] The decision to attack the slave trade rather than colonial slavery was deliberate, the thinking being that if the British Parliament banned the slave trade then colonial planters would be forced to improve the treatment of enslaved Africans, thereby paving the way for their eventual emancipation. In this sense, abolition of the slave trade was seen as a strategic step, the ultimate goal being the extinction of colonial slavery itself. Outlawing the slave trade would remain a preoccupation of British abolitionists for the rest of the

century. Thanks largely to their efforts, involvement in the trade was made a transportable offence in 1811 and then, in 1824, a capital crime. Abolitionists also targeted the inter-island trade. In 1812, an Order in Council set up a slave registry in Trinidad, and by 1817 all of the British Caribbean islands had a system of public registration, which in each case required regular reports of any changes in slave holdings, whether through births, death, purchases or sales.[2]

By the 1820s, however, it was apparent that this indirect approach (attacking slavery through the slave trade) was not working. In 1823 a group of leading abolitionists, among them William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson, set up the Anti-Slavery Society, or, to give it its full title, the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions. Modest in their ambitions, at least by later standards, the members of the Anti-Slavery Society called for the adoption of measures to improve the condition of slaves in the British Caribbean (education, religious instruction, protection from mistreatment), together with a plan for their gradual emancipation. British abolitionists pursued this moderate policy of 'gradualism' for nearly a decade. Between 1828 and 1833, when slavery was finally abolished in the British West Indies, Parliament was deluged by over 5,000 petitions against colonial slavery, signed by one-and-a-half million Britons. Unprecedented numbers of women were also involved in the campaign. The national female petition of 1833, for instance, contained 187,157 signatures, making it the largest single anti-slavery petition ever to be presented to Parliament.[3]

This kind of pressure clearly had an effect, although government ministers worked at a much slower pace than British abolitionists would have liked. In 1823, George Canning, as foreign secretary, introduced a series of resolutions calling for the 'amelioration' of the slave population in his majesty's colonies. These were followed a year later by an Order in Council for improving the condition of slaves in Trinidad, which, as a Crown Colony, was more easily managed than those colonies with their own legislative assemblies. The Colonial Office monitored amelioration schemes closely but, in truth, progress was slow and halting. Official returns produced in 1826 indicated that while many of the smaller islands had largely complied with the government's recommendations, Barbados and Jamaica remained firm in their resistance. Part of the problem here was that while many planters supported amelioration, if by that was meant efforts to improve the economic efficiency of plantation slavery, most of them strenuously opposed anything they thought would threaten either their property or basic white principles of

authority and subordination. Religious instruction was a particular bone of contention, not least because the government's proposals seemed to sanction, if only indirectly, the work of dissenting missionaries, many of whom, like the Baptist, William Knibb, proved a major irritant to the West Indian plantocracy because of their abolitionist sympathies.[4]

Frustrated at the lack of progress in the Caribbean, in 1831 some of the Anti-Slavery Society's younger and more radical elements organised the Agency Committee, which formally separated from the parent body in 1832. Revivalist in tone, the Agency Committee took abolition out into the country and, to this end, employed its own lecturers or 'agents'. More controversially, it also committed itself to a much more radical and far-reaching measure, namely the immediate and unconditional abolition of slavery. The Agency Committee was ideally placed to exploit the struggle over the reform of Parliament and to win over the votes newly enfranchised by the reform act of 1832. Its efforts paid off. The first reformed Parliament was clearly sympathetic to emancipation; perhaps just as important the Cabinet was ready to accept the idea, even if it was not prepared to embrace immediatism. In May 1833, Lord Stanley, as colonial secretary, presented a plan to Parliament, which finally passed into law on 29 August. The 1833 act provided for the gradual abolition of slavery in the British West Indies (under the terms of the act, everyone over the age of six on 1 August 1834 was required to serve an apprenticeship of four years in the case of domestic and six years in the case of field hands), as well as £20 million in compensation to colonial planters.[5]

Important as the 1833 Act was, if left many abolitionists angry and frustrated, a lot of that anger being channelled into a brief and successful campaign to end the apprenticeship system.[6] By 1838 slavery in the British Caribbean had been swept away. Flush with success, the following year abolitionists set up a new organization, the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, which was to prove the most enduring of all anti-slavery societies. As its name suggests, the BFASS committed itself to the eradication of world slavery, although initially its energies were directed at emancipating slaves in Cuba, Brazil and the United States. The problem with attacking American slavery, however, was that there was very little that British abolitionists could do but affirm their distaste for the institution and their support of those who attacked it. This sense of helplessness on the part of British abolitionists goes a long way to explain why many auxiliaries of the BFASS began to flounder during the 1840s. But this slump was not solely attributable to the remoteness of the American issue. To judge from annual subscription lists, organised

anti-slavery also suffered a generational decline evident in the retirement or death of older members and the tendency of the younger generation to channel their enthusiasm into what seemed to them more pressing types of humanitarian endeavour.[7]

Nevertheless, it is important not to underestimate the strength of abolitionist feeling in Britain, even during the 1850s. Victorian abolitionism was also energised by two external factors. One of these was the increasing number of black American abolitionists who visited Britain after 1840, among them figures like Frederick Douglass, Sara Remond and William and Ellen Craft. Most of these men and women had a story to tell and most of them took to the lecture circuit. What is also interesting is how well they were received. According to newspaper reports, black abolitionists spoke to crowded audiences, so crowded in some cases that they were asked to speak a second or third time.[8] The enormous popular success of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) was a further reminder that abolitionism remained a powerful transatlantic phenomenon, and one capable of arousing the deepest emotions. As Marcus Wood observes, '[t]he fragmentation and adaptations of the text in [Britain] were even more diverse than in the States.' There was 'Uncle Tom' stationery, jigsaws and board and card games. There was even a clothes shop in London advertising 'Uncle Tom's New and Second Hand Clothing'.[9]

The American Civil War (1861–65), and the emancipation of America's 4 million slaves, marked the end of another important phase in British anti-slavery. Nevertheless, the campaigning carried on. New scandals emerged, among them forced labour practices in Peru and the Belgian Congo. At the same time, British abolitionists (through the BFASS and, after 1909, the Anti-Slavery Society) continued their century-long struggle against the international slave trade, particularly the East African or Arab slave trade.[10] Abolition, in other words, remained part of the web and weave of Victorian politics. Drawing on wide-scale public support – Howard Temperley estimates that between 1839 and 1868 the BFASS had over 100 local and regional auxiliaries – abolitionist leaders were able to exert considerable pressure on government ministers, as well as on the formulation of policy. By mid-century, abolition had become a British orthodoxy. To judge from debates in Parliament over issues like the sugar duties (1840–54), an outright indifference to anti-slavery was impossible to maintain, at least with any vigour.[11]

Ministers could ill afford to ignore abolitionist sentiment. As the Duke of Wellington put it to the Earl of Aberdeen in 1828: 'We shall never succeed in abolishing the foreign slave trade. But we must [...]

avoid any steps which may induce the people of England to believe that we do not do everything in our power [...] to put it down as soon as possible.'[12] Yet in saying this, men like Wellington also had their own and the nation's interests to think about, particularly after 1807. From that date, suppression of the international slave trade became an active British policy, which is why the issue was raised successively at the Congresses of Paris and Vienna in 1814–15, and again at Aix-la-Chapelle in 1818.[13] The declarations against the slave trade that emanated from these congresses, however, were unaccompanied by any means of carrying them into effect. Instead, successive British ministers had to negotiate effective suppression treaties, including the right of search, with each foreign power. A key figure here was Henry John Temple, the third Viscount Palmerston. Palmerston was a cautious if committed abolitionist. He had doubts about immediate emancipation, for instance, and made it his business to resist any attempts to dilute or alter the programme proposed and adopted by the government in 1833, including the apprenticeship system. Nevertheless, he pursued suppression of the slave trade with a dogged determination, emerging as one of its most vocal proponents.[14]

Palmerston's approach to suppression was essentially pragmatic. In 1807, Britain had adopted an advanced position with respect to the slave trade: Denmark had abolished the trade in 1803 and the United States was expected to follow suit in 1808. But that was all. The problem for ministers was to ensure that, as a result, Britain was not disadvantaged, or, worse, ruined by what she had done. None of this is to suggest that Palmerston's interest in suppression was calculated or insincere. But there is little doubt that Britain's exposed position gave his abolitionism a decided focus, or that it determined his priorities even after 1833. Indeed, it is arguable that Emancipation convinced Palmerston that in global terms the only sure way of protecting Britain's commercial interests was to strike at the international slave trade. And, in a sense, of course, he was right. The United States, to take the most obvious example, proved that slaveholders were not likely to give up slavery without a determined fight. As *The Times* put it in 1859, surveying the 25 years since emancipation in the British Caribbean: 'it [slavery] is remunerative, and as long as it is so there is not the smallest chance for the Abolitionists.'[15]

Prior to 1830, Britain had concluded 12 suppression treaties, although, as Palmerston liked to point out, all of them contained only 'general engagements'. As Foreign Secretary from 1830 to 1841, and again between 1846 and 1851, Palmerston set out to remedy this situation. On the one

hand, he extended Britain's slave suppression policy; in all, 18 new treaties were concluded between 1831 and 1841, including treaties with France, Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain, Chile, Uruguay and Mexico. On the other, he insisted in each case on the right of mutual search. As Palmerston recalled in 1845, 'we knew that unless all the Powers having flags upon the ocean joined in this arrangement, our endeavours would not be entirely successful.' There were, besides, treaties made with African chiefs (many of them involving bribes of one description or another) binding them to put an end to the slave trade in their respective territories. Palmerston also threw his weight behind the Quintuple Treaty of 1841 between Britain, France, Russia, Prussia and Austria, which extended the right of search and declared the slave trade as piracy.[16]

As is well documented, Palmerston was prepared to be ruthless to achieve his aims, although those same aims were often inextricably linked to broader foreign policy considerations, as in the case of Portugal. Frustrated with Portuguese intransigence over a number of issues, ranging from Portuguese tariffs against British goods to the slave trade and debts owing to British subjects for their services to Portugal during the Peninsular War, Palmerston at last resorted to unilateral action. In 1839 he introduced a bill in Parliament, which gave the British navy power to stop and search Portuguese ships on the high seas, and to seize any which were found to be carrying slaves. Palmerston was equally ruthless in his dealing with the United States. In 1840, he recognised the newly independent republic of Texas (Texas, in return, agreed to suppress the slave trade), partly as a means of counteracting the growing influence of the United States, but also by way of registering his protest against the American government for refusing to concede the right of search.[17]

By 1882, Britain was party to some 30 treaties and conventions dealing with suppression of the slave trade, including treaties with Brazil, Portugal, Spain and the United States. Moreover, the Slave Trade Department, which sat within the Foreign Office, had its own network of ambassadors, consuls and commissary judges who, for the most part, were enthusiastic anti-slavers and constituted, in Richard Huzzey's words, 'anti-slavers in disguise'.[18] If interpreting and enforcing slave trade agreements sometimes proved difficult – some permitted reciprocal right of search, others did not – this should not detract from the importance of figures like Palmerston in building an international wall against the slave trade, or in turning Britain into an 'anti-slavery state'. Palmerston does not usually figure in histories of British anti-slavery, or, if he does, he is usually relegated to a footnote. As Christopher Lloyd rightly points out, Palmerston's methods were a 'mixture of bully and

bluster'. But, in truth, he was the architect of Britain's suppression policy. Few men were more determined opponents of the slave trade. 'During the many years that I was at the Foreign Office,' he later wrote, 'there was no subject that more constantly or more intensely occupied my thoughts, or constituted the aim of my labours.'[19]

Putting an end to the international slave trade, however, required the exercise of naval power, and without the cooperation of the Royal Navy, Britain's suppression policy would have proved nothing more than an empty gesture. Initially, at least, the navy's efforts were directed at the west coast of Africa, although what is usually referred to as the African Squadron did not come into existence until 1819, when six ships were put at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief of the West Indies station. Reorganised in 1841 and 1844, when the squadron was increased to 13 and then 21 ships, it existed as an independent command until 1870.[20] Despite this, the African Squadron laboured under a number of obvious difficulties, one of them being the size of its task, namely to patrol 3,000 miles of coast. In addition, many of its ships were not fit for purpose. Palmerston complained in 1860 that 'the Board of Admiralty have never cared a farthing about the suppression of the slave trade, and have considered the Slave Trade Suppression Service as a sort of penal duty and have sent to it all the old tubs that were fit in their opinion for nothing else.'[21]

Suppression of the slave trade was further hampered by defective treaties. Experience showed that it was almost impossible to condemn slavers unless they were caught in the act – that is to say, it was not enough to prove intent. Later treaties sought to close this loophole by inserting 'equipment clauses', meaning that shackles, bolts and other equipment (including spare planks, large numbers of mats or matting, and 'extraordinary' amounts of rice) could be used to condemn slave ships.[22] In this sense, suppression was a dynamic process, experience on the ground shaping diplomatic activity, and vice versa. As slave suppression policy evolved, moreover, it became more effective. Through diplomatic pressure and the presence of the Royal Navy, Britain gradually brought Spain, Brazil and Portugal to heel. By 1853, the only significant traffic remained the American-flagged one to Cuba. The final blow came with the onset of the American Civil War. In 1862, the Lincoln administration agreed to a search treaty, the Treaty of Washington, which effectively signalled the end of USA involvement in the trade. At the same time, the US undertook to maintain a sufficiently strong naval squadron on the west coast of Africa. By 1870, the Atlantic slave trade had been defeated, although there would always remain an illegal traffic.[23]

As we shall see, Britain's slave trade suppression policy was not without its critics, but from the outset it was also represented as a heroic activity. Significantly, many of the exploits of the African Squadron were celebrated in prints and drawings. Typical of the genre was William John Huggins' magnificent oil painting of HMS *Buzzard* capturing the slaver *Formidable* in December 1834 (Figure 2.1). Many of these scenes were also produced as prints, as in the case of Nicholas Matthew Condy's hand-coloured lithograph of His Majesty's brig *Acorn* in pursuit of the slaver *Gabriel*, 1841 (Figure 2.2). Beautifully realised, such images came to embody a certain kind of British philanthropy and, just as important, a certain kind of Britishness. But, equally revealing, was what they left out. Very few of these early prints and paintings depicted the victims in these tragic encounters, that is, the slaves themselves. There are no images of enslaved Africans huddled on deck, or in the process of being liberated.[24] Instead, the activities of the African Squadron were wrapped into a more recognisable tradition of British marine painting that evoked the excitement and danger of chasing and capturing enemy ships. In most cases, it is only the titles that locate these prints and paintings within a specific abolitionist discourse.

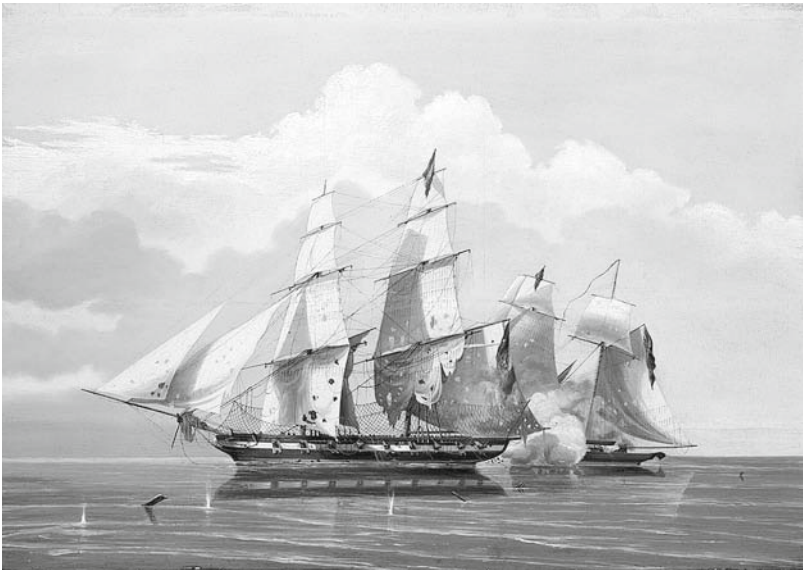

Figure 2.1 William John Huggins, *The Capture of the Slaver* Formidable *by HMS Buzzard, 17 December 1834*, National Maritime Museum, BHC0625

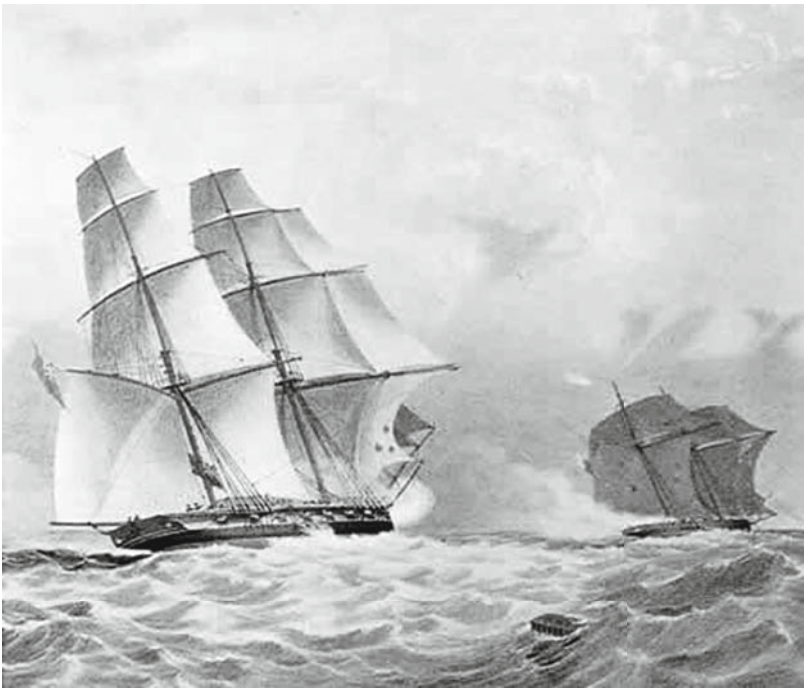

Figure 2.2 Nicholas Matthew Condy the Younger, *The Capture of the Slaver* Gabriel *by HMS Acorn, 6 July 1841*, National Maritime Museum, BHC0628

After 1865 Britain's suppression policy shifted to east Africa, although the Royal Navy had been active in the Indian Ocean from at least the 1820s, when it had been deployed to end the supply of slaves to French-owned sugar plantations in Mauritius.[25] The suppression of the Atlantic slave trade, however, signalled the start of a fresh campaign, aimed principally at suppressing the Arab trade between Zanzibar and Oman. Handicapped by inadequate resources (before the introduction of steam, Arab slave dhows were much quicker than the ordinary types of naval brigs) and shifting political allegiances, suppressing the East African slave trade proved a hugely costly and frustrating task. Much, it seems, depended on the resolve of British officials. A case in point is Colonel Charles Rigby, whose three years (1859–62) as consul at Zanzibar coincided with a concerted attempt to suppress the Arab slave trade, which, Rigby calculated, amounted to about 150 dhows a year, or roughly 10,000 enslaved Africans. With the cooperation of the Royal Navy, Rigby made significant inroads into the northern trade – in the autumn and spring

of 1862 two naval brigs, the *Lyra* and the *Sidon*, between them captured 25 slave dhows – but Arab traders quickly reasserted themselves.[26] In 1874, Admiral Cockburn told the Admiralty: 'I assure your lordships, it is a matter of sneer and jeer by the Arabs, our impotent efforts to stop that horrible abomination; yes, my lords, even the Sultan says the English will talk and bully, but can't or won't stop the trade.'[27]

Under increasing pressure to respond, in 1871 the government set up a Select Committee to consider the East African slave trade. The result was an increase in the size of the squadron and the introduction of more steam launches, which together were designed to blockade the coast around Kilwa, and so restrict the flow of slaves from the mainland to Zanzibar.[28] Key to these operations was the *London* (Figure 2.3), an old wooden line-of-battle ship, which arrived at Zanzibar in 1873, with a special fleet of launches and a 'steam factory' to service them. The launches worked in rotation. As *The Illustrated London News* explained: 'The method of operations is to send out boats from the *London*, which cruise along the coast for a month at a time, and are provisioned for that period, after which they return to the *London*, and other boats take their

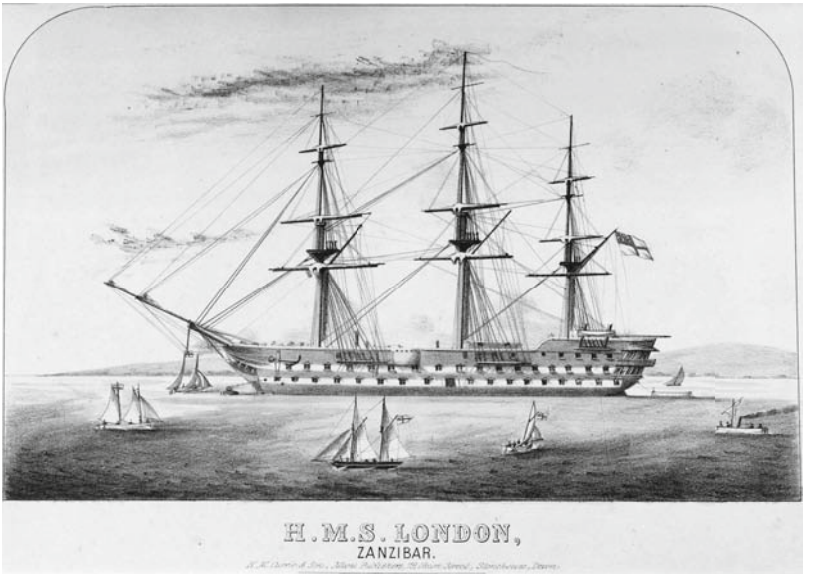

Figure 2.3 *HMS London, Zanzibar*, hand-coloured lithograph, published by H M Currie and Sons, London, c. 1875, National Maritime Museum, PAF8085/PW8085

place.' The work was tedious and often highly dangerous. Skirmishes were common, as was the case in 1881 when a steam pinnace ran alongside a dhow full of slaves flying French colours, only to meet fierce resistance. In all, four men lost their lives in the ensuing 'battle', among them Captain C. J. Brownrigg, a highly distinguished officer who had previously served in China, Australia and Africa.[29]

The *London* would remain at Zanzibar for nine years, during which time it succeeded in suppressing the greater part of the Arab slave trade, particularly the northern trade. When the *London* was withdrawn in 1883, the anti-slavery squadron came to an end but British ships would continue to make some captures on the east coast of Africa right up to 1900.[30] *The Illustrated London News* reported in 1889 that the efforts to suppress the eastern African slave trade 'had not been wholly effective'. In the same year, Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, on behalf of the BFASS, called upon England, in conjunction with Germany and France, to declare slave-trading piracy. 'Let her issue a proclamation along the coast that, after a certain date, the crews of captured slave dhows will be tried by court-martial, and, if found guilty, summarily dismissed,' he argued, 'and there can be little doubt that in a short time the transmarine trade will be extinct.' Such hopes were to prove illusory, but in 1890 15 nations signed the General Act of the Brussels Conference, which committed the signatories to 'putting an end to the crimes and devastations engendered by the traffic in African slaves'. The dance was over – or, so it seemed at the time.[31]

What about those who were given the task of enforcing Britain's slave suppression policy? What do we know about them? Judging from their letters and journals, many Royal Navy officers were personally committed to suppression. A case in point is Captain Edward Columbine, who became Governor of Sierra Leone in 1809. A close friend of William Wilberforce and a member of the African Institution, Columbine clearly regarded suppression as the logical extension of his abolitionist beliefs, just as he regarded legitimate trade and European missionary work as the keys to the civilisation of Africa.[32] Perhaps more revealing still are the diaries of George King-Hall, commander of HMS *Penguin*, which saw service off Zanzibar throughout 1888. King-Hall delighted in the success of his command. On 14 May he confided that it had been a 'great pleasure' to see a group of 'captured children' enjoying themselves. He went on: 'My heart was full at hearing them sing of *Isa* [Jesus] when I remembered they had all been rescued from slavery by our cruisers.' King-Hall was also careful to do what he thought was his duty. In one telling incident, he reluctantly agreed to return a woman to her master,

but not before he had 'taken securities from the Arab, making him swear on the Koran she would not be ill treated by his mother or wife from whom she had run away but that she should be in his *Harain*.'[33]

Committed to Britain's civilising mission in Africa, King-Hall took the trouble to visit mission stations in the interior and on one occasion was invited to address a congregation in the Wanika Country, taking the opportunity to speak for a quarter of an hour on Jesus, 'what he is to me and to them'. 'It was indeed a pleasure being there,' he noted in his diary, 'and my heart was full and tears came into my eyes when the service finished up.' King-Hall also spent a lot of time with missionaries, both black and white. On 18 June, for instance, he paid a visit to Mbweni at the invitation of Archdeacon and Mrs. Hodgson and visited again in July. Though hardly uncritical of missionary activity on the east coast of Africa – as an Evangelical he was particularly suspicious of what he regarded as High Church influence – King-Hall nevertheless dismissed any suggestion that the missionaries should be withdrawn. Such talk, he believed, was a mistake. He was equally critical of local government officials, many of whom struck him as being too preoccupied with winning the good favour of the Sultan, thereby 'sacrificing strict enforcement of the slave trade'.[34] For King-Hall, like Columbine, suppression was not simply a bargaining tool, something to be followed or sacrificed, as circumstances dictated, but a Christian responsibility and, as such, a sign of Britain's good faith towards 'benighted Africa'.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to conclude that all officers shared these views, or that they percolated down through the ranks. For many, suppression was a business and a lucrative business at that. Under the terms of the Tonnage Act of 1838, those engaged in slave patrols were entitled to prize money, £5 per slave and £1 10s. per ton for captured vessels, £4 per ton if the vessel was empty and had already landed its slaves.[35] Understandably, officers and ratings were keen to take advantage of this legislation. Midshipman Tristan Dannreuther, for instance, who served on HMS *Garnet* off Zanzibar during the 1880s, kept meticulous records of his prize money, noting down both his own successes and those of his rivals. As Dannreuther's correspondence makes clear, Royal Navy personnel on the east coast of Africa operated in a competitive market, vying with each other for the largest prizes. In June 1888, HMS *Garnet* captured three dhows containing 136 slaves. Dannreuther revelled in the *Garnet's* success, boasting that she was 'the luckiest ship on the Station and the other ships with us are jealous'. Sometimes, however, the shoe was on the other foot, leaving Dannreuther downcast and irritated. He was clearly bothered by the successes of other ships in the squadron,

just as he resented the interference of diplomats and, sometimes, even officers in deciding not to board suspected slave dhows.[36]

Letters and journals hint at something else, namely that for some, suppression was a kind of sport. As Tracy Fash has recently pointed out, Dannreuther's correspondence is littered with hunting tropes: he writes frequently of 'stalking' and 'chasing' slave dhows and, on one occasion, of following their 'tracks'.[37] King-Hall sometimes uses the same language. In a diary entry for August 1888, for instance, he describes a 'most exciting chase' that took place in Mkokotoni harbour:

> The Dhow crew had 400 yards start and off they went for the bush. Hibbert headed our men and we were most excited at seeing the chase. I fired a rifle to stop them getting ahead of the fugitives. They all disappeared into the bush and I sent another boat and brought a good fat Dhow alongside, containing 28 slaves. Hibbert returned having collared one of the fugitives, a slave. They had a tremendous run over the coral in their bare feet.[38]

As this account suggests, slave patrols often involved dangerous and thrilling encounters, despite the bouts of tedium. For many, it was the element of risk, the thrill of the chase, which made suppression bearable. None of this is to deny the importance of religious motivations, or, indeed, deeply held religious beliefs, only to suggest that slave trade suppression was at root a human endeavour that, like all human endeavours, defies easy explanation, particularly when it comes to motives.

More pressing, certainly for those 'at home', was the purpose and utility of suppression. Official reports suggest that the African Squadron liberated approximately 160,000 slaves between 1816 and 1865. The captures from the Arab slave trade were significantly smaller, and probably did not exceed 12,000 slaves.[39] Nevertheless, these successes came at a price. It has been estimated that between 1816 and 1865 suppressing the slave trade cost the British taxpayer a minimum of £250,000 a year in 1821–25 prices. There was also a human cost. The Royal Navy committed up to 13% of its total manpower to its African Squadron and between 1811 and 1870 lost about 5,000 seamen, most of them to disease.[40] Counting the cost of slave suppression understandably led some, so-called 'Anti-Coercionists', to question the wisdom of the policy. During the 1840s, for instance, free traders led by William Hutt, MP for Gateshead, called for the immediate withdrawal of the African Squadron and, with it, the expansion of commercial intercourse with Africa. Others, principally the Quakers who dominated the London Committee of the BFASS, opposed

suppression of the slave trade on pacifist grounds or because it seemed to them impractical.[41]

The 'anti-coercionists' were to prove an influential lobby, particularly between 1845 and 1850, but significantly government ministers held firm. They did so, in part, because many of them believed that slave trade suppression remained the best way of ending slavery. As Palmerston put it in 1845, the slave trade was 'the root which gives life, and spirit, and stability to the condition of slavery'. 'Seek to upheave a vast living tree, whose mighty roots are strong, vigorous, and deeply imbedded in the soil,' he went on, '[and] it will baffle the utmost exertions of your strength; but lay your axe to the root, cut off the supply of nourishment, and the tree will sicken and die, and you will no longer find difficulty in bringing it to the ground.'[42] But this was not all. Suppression also reinforced Britain's naval supremacy and the legitimacy of the nation's imperial mission, or, if you will, its peculiar role in the world. Prime Minister Lord John Russell touched on this when he rose to make what turned out to be a crucial contribution to the Commons debate on slave trade suppression in 1850. 'It appears to me,' he told the House, 'that if we give up this high and holy work, and proclaim ourselves no longer fitted to lead in the championship against the curse and crime of slavery, that we have no longer a right to expect a continuance of those blessings, which, by God's favour, we have so long enjoyed.'[43]

Suppression, in other words, was inextricably linked to the morality and purpose of the Victorian Empire. After 1833, Britons were forced to reorder their priorities, as they adjusted to the reality of an empire without slaves. In practice, this meant absolving themselves of responsibility for slavery and, instead, highlighting the role that the British had played in bringing slavery to an end. Perhaps just as important, it also meant placing those who were held responsible for slavery, both Africans and Europeans, beyond the pale of 'civilisation'. In other words, Britons substituted for the indignity of transatlantic slavery – and its role in transforming Britain into a major mercantile power – what might be described as a 'culture of abolitionism'. Emancipation marked the nation out. Such selfless actions, it was argued, legitimised Britain's role in the world, the country's stewardship over countless millions in Africa, India and the Caribbean, and, no less important, its particular claim to speak for those who were too weak to speak for themselves.[44]

As Russell's remarks suggest, this culture of abolitionism was already well established by 1850, if not before. We come across it again in 1859 when abolitionists (or, at least, some of them) paused to mark the 25th anniversary of Emancipation. George Thompson spoke for many when

he argued that 'even should our political economy be false, the principle on which the anti-slavery cause was based would stand unshaken, for that principle was that emancipation from bondage was the right of the slave, and that his enslavement was a crime to be abolished, not an evil to be mitigated.' Echoing these sentiments, the London *Morning Star* heralded emancipation as 'one of the greatest events in the history of England' and one that 'exalted this nation high above the other civilised nations of earth'. Over the years, this moral argument would come to dominate public discourse on Emancipation (and hence transatlantic slavery). Calmly and deliberately, the clamour over the economic benefits of Emancipation, which had still been an issue in the 1850s, was set aside and forgotten. In its place, Britons substituted an imperialistic discourse – sometimes referred to as the 'new imperialism' – that celebrated the nation's moral leadership, as well as its strength and superiority. As *The Times* put it in 1884: 'There is no nobler chapter in the history of English freedom than that which ended fifty years ago in the emancipation of every slave within the Imperial dominions of the British Crown.'[45]

If anything, the expansionist mood of the 1880s served to reinforce the legitimacy (and, at the same time, the desirability) of Britain's slave suppression policy. By century's end, the Empire had become an infatuation with the British public. Magazines and newspapers ceaselessly promoted imperialistic sentiments. To quote Jan Morris: 'The weekly full-page feature of the *Illustrated London News* was repeatedly devoted to imperial topics: The Punitive Expedition to Benin, The Massacre in the Niger Protectorate, The Indian Famine, The Plague in Bombay, Lord Roberts on his Arab Charger, Prospecting for Gold in British Columbia, Dervish Fugitives Fleeing Down the Nile, On the Way to the Klondike, Fighting in a Nullah on the Tseri-Kando Pass.'[46] Similarly, *The Illustrated London News* devoted a lot of space to slave trade suppression, and specifically to suppression of the east African slave trade. In the process, the activities of the Royal Navy, as well as those of consular officials, became an essential part of an imperialistic discourse that invited little criticism and even less opposition, certainly from the popular press.

Significantly, *The Illustrated London News* presented slave suppression as a heroic activity and, equally important, one that was a test of Britain's civilising mission. Many of its stories focused on the more prosaic elements of suppression policy. In December 1881, for instance, the paper carried an illustrated story entitled, 'The East African Slave Trade: Examination of Captured Slaves in the British Consul-General's Court at Zanzibar'.[47] Here the emphasis is on justice and fair play. In

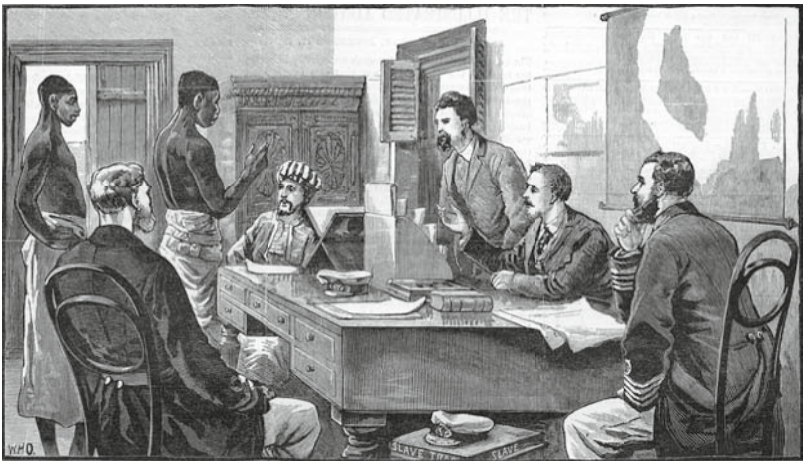

Figure 2.4 'The East African Slave Trade: Examination of Captured Slaves in the British Consul-General's Court at Zanzibar', *The Illustrated London News*, 17 December 1881

the accompanying image (Figure 2.4), the liberated slaves appear before British officials who sit behind tables and desks, as if to mimic a court of law. The scene is one of order and decorum, of restraint and civilisation. The liberated slaves, we are reassured, will receive a fair hearing, hence the presence of an interpreter. Equally important, everything is carefully noted down and recorded and, as we know, those notes will eventually find their way back to London, and form the basis of parliamentary reports and inquiries. The scene depicts the British Empire in action: a force for good that through its representatives links the centre with the periphery and, in the process, brings order and stability to even the remotest corners of the world.

More often than not, however, these stories highlight the romance and danger of slave trade suppression. Take, for instance, a story that the paper published in 1889 entitled, '[t]he Blockade on the East Coast of Africa: Overhauling the Papers of a Suspicious Slave Dhow', together with a large two-page illustration (Figure 2.5).[48] In the centre of the image, Arab traders loudly protest their innocence with a local interpreter, while in the background we catch a glimpse of an enslaved African. We can imagine the noise and confusion but, at the same time, we are reassured that justice will prevail. There is a strength and determination about the British seamen who have secured the slave dhow. More arresting still is the image of the officer, who leans forward, revolver in

Figure 2.5 'The Blockade on the East Coast of Africa: Overhauling the Papers of a Suspicious Slave Dhow', *The Illustrated London News*, 9 February 1889

hand, to engage with the 'enemy'. Here are Britons in heroic mode: fearless, independent, idealistic, and brave. As an image of the liberator this illustration is hugely compelling, and over romanticised though it may be, it captures perfectly what slave trade suppression came to represent, namely what the Prince of Wales described in 1884 as 'the civilising torch of freedom'.[49]

If there is a comic book quality about some of these images that is hardly accidental. Children's literature of this period is full of stories about imperialistic adventures, of daring escapades, often involving encounters with colonial 'others', good and bad.[50] In these and other ways, slave trade suppression helped to shape Britain's imperialistic vision, as well as its altruistic presence in Africa, India and the English-speaking Caribbean. These enthusiasms, and the ideals and values that supported them, were to prove infectious, as the diaries of figures like George King-Hall attest. Suppression, in other words, helped to define Britain's national and imperial identity, her tradition of humanitarian interventionism, and, no less important, her status in a rapidly changing world. Such assumptions were at the heart of the 'New Imperialism' of

the late nineteenth century, and they continued to influence the actions of the British state down to the 1930s and beyond.

By century's end, 'abolition' had become one of the common denominators that held the nation and the Empire together. Much later, following the Second World War and the onset of decolonisation, this sentimental discourse would come under increasing attack, not least from those at the margins of empire, and here one thinks of black intellectuals like Eric Williams and C. L. R. James.[51] But all of this was in the future. Even as late as 1933 it was still possible to view slavery and the slave trade through the moral victory of emancipation. As the Oxford historian, Reginald Coupland, explained to a meeting in Kingston-upon-Hull, on the 100th anniversary of Emancipation, the lives and works of William Wilberforce and 'the Saints' were 'certain proof that not merely individuals but the common will, the state itself, *can* rise on occasion to the heights of pure unselfishness'.[52] Emancipation not only singled Britain out, it also shaped the Victorian Empire, lending it a moral authority that transcended the narrow confines of colour, class and religion. This, after all, is what Lord John Russell meant when he described suppression of the slave trade as a 'high and holy work'. Such language left an indelible mark, reinforcing imperialistic notions of stewardship, while at the same time reminding Britons of their peculiar claim on the past and, indeed, the present and the future.

Notes

1. For the early abolitionist movement, see Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company 2005); J. R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787–1807* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760–1810* (London: Macmillan, 1975).
2. 51 George III, Cap. 23 (1811) and 5 George IV, Cap. 113 (1824). For slave registration, see David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 211–12, 237.
3. Howard Temperley, *British Anti-Slavery, 1833–1870* (London: Longman, 1972), pp. 9–12; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 355; Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780–1870* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 62–71.
4. Temperley, *British Anti-Slavery*, pp. 11–12; Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, pp. 214–21, 237; William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment, 1830–1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 104–10. See also J. R. Ward, *British West Indian Slavery, 1750–1834: The Process of Amelioration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

5. Temperley, *British Anti-Slavery*, pp. 13–17; Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, pp. 233–33, 238.
6. Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, p. 238; William Law Mathieson, *British Slavery and Its Abolition, 1823–1838* (London: Longman, Green, 1926), pp. 282–90.
7. A number of historians of British anti-slavery have drawn attention to the decline of organised abolitionist activity during the 1840s. See, for instance, Temperley, *British Anti-Slavery*, p. 167; Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 166. More recently, Richard Huzzey has argued that this decline should be offset against the rise of what he describes as an 'anti-slavery state' in Britain between 1838 and 1874. See Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2012).
8. Peter C. Ripley, *The Black Abolitionist Papers, vol. 1, The British Isles, 1830–1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); R. J. M. Blackett, *Building an Anti-Slavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830–1860* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana University Press, 1983). Douglass delivered no less than 300 lectures during his first 19-month tour of Britain in 1840–41.
9. Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780–1865* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 146–47.
10. Temperley, *British Anti-Slavery*, pp. 263–69.
11. Ibid., p. 80; Paul Michael Kielstra, *The Politics of Slave Trade Suppression in Britain and France, 1814–48: Diplomacy, Morality and Economics* (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 9, 149; Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, pp. 98–113.
12. Quoted in Kielstra, *The Politics of Slave Trade Suppression*, p. 109.
13. Temperley, *British Anti-Slavery*, pp. 8–9.
14. J. R. Oldfield, 'Palmerston and Anti-Slavery' in David Brown and Miles Taylor (eds), *Palmerston Studies II* (Southampton: Hartley Institute and the University of Southampton, 2007), pp. 32–4.
15. Ibid., pp. 35–36.
16. Ibid., pp. 29–30.
17. Jasper Ridley, *Lord Palmerston* (London: Constable, 1970), pp. 192, 267.
18. Christopher Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade: The Suppression of the African Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1949), p. 287; Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, pp. 42–51.
19. Quoted in Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade*, p. 60.
20. Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade*, pp. 61–78.
21. Quoted in Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade*, p. 243.
22. Robert Blyth, 'Britain, the Royal Navy and the Suppression of Slave Trades in the Nineteenth Century', in Douglas Hamilton and Robert J. Blyth, (eds), *Representing Slavery: Art, Artefacts and Archives in the Collections of the National Maritime Museum* (London: Lund Humphries and the National Maritime Museum, 2007), p. 80.
23. Ibid., p. 84.
24. By contrast, many of the images of slave trade suppression in the 1880s, particularly those published by journals like *The Illustrated London News*, concentrate on the plight of the liberated slaves, either on board captured

slave dhows or appearing before tribunals. This shift in emphasis warrants much greater scholarly attention.

25. Blyth, 'Britain, the Royal Navy and the Suppression of Slave Trades in the Nineteenth Century', pp. 84–85.
26. Mrs Charles E. B. Russell, *General Rigby, Zanzibar and the Slave Trade* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1935), p. 184. Despite these successes, Rigby was highly critical of the quality of the ships put at the Royal Navy's disposal. Echoing Palmerston's comments earlier in the century, he described the *Sidon* as 'an old tub that any dhow on the coast could beat'. The British squadron, he claimed, was the laughing stock of the Americans, French and Germans. See Russell, *General Rigby*, p. 184n.
27. Quoted in Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade*, p. 256.
28. Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade*, pp. 261–68.
29. *The Illustrated London News*, 17 December 1881, p. 586; 24 December 1881, p. 636.
30. Blyth, 'Britain, the Royal Navy and Suppression of the Slave Trades in the Nineteenth Century', pp. 88–89.
31. *The Illustrated London News*, 23 February 1889, p. 226; Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade*, p. 273.
32. Mary Wills, 'Edward H. Columbine and the Royal Navy's Suppression of the Atlantic Slave Trade, c 1809–1811', unpublished conference paper, Cape Town, South Africa, 20 November 2009.
33. Entries for 14 and 20 May 1888, King-Hall Diaries, http://www.kinghallconnections.com/10-pe.html (accessed 21 November 2009).
34. Ibid., entries for 15 May, 18 June, 3, 15 July 1888.
35. Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade*, p. 81. If a slave was dead by the time the prize reached port, the captor was only entitled to £2 10s. Critics of the Tonnage Act, including some Royal Navy personnel, pointed out that it encouraged the capture of full vessels that had already put to sea, instead of preventing actual embarkation, which many considered the only effective means of suppressing the slave trade.
36. Tracy Fash, 'The "Sport" of Dhow-Chasing: An Examination of late Victorian Attitudes to Slavery in East Africa by Reference to a Case Study of an 1880s Royal Navy Anti-Slavery Patrol' (unpublished MA dissertation, Birkbeck, University of London, 2006), pp. 49–53. Dannreuther's papers (DAN/1 to DAN/276) are in the National Maritime Museum, London.
37. Ibid., pp. 47–49.
38. King-Hall diaries, entry for 17 August 1888.
39. David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 98; Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade*, pp. 275–77, 278; Blyth, 'Britain, the Royal Navy and the Suppression of Slave Trades in the Nineteenth Century', p. 89; Raymond Howell, *The Royal Navy and the Slave Trade* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), pp. 220–21.
40. Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, p. 96. Eltis puts the total cost of suppressing the transatlantic slave trade (1815–1865) at somewhere between £12 million and £13 million, including bounties for naval crews, compensation for wrongful arrest, and the money paid to other governments to obtain treaties to end the slave trade. This sum, he argues, was roughly equivalent to what Britain received in profits from

slave trading in the 50 years up to 1807. See Eltis, 93–98. For casualty rates within the Royal Navy, see http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/history/battles/royal-navy-and-the-slave-trade (accessed 7 December 2009).

41. Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade*, pp. 106–14; Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, pp. 113–24.
42. *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, lxxxii, (8 July 1845), col. 143.
43. Quoted in Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade*, pp. 112–13.
44. J. R. Oldfield, *'Chords of Freedom': Commemoration, Ritual and British Transatlantic Slavery* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 1–2, 172–73.
45. *The Times*, 3 August 1859, p. 7; 2 August 1884, p. 9; Henry M. Wheeler, *The Slaves' Champion: A Sketch of the Life, Deeds and Historical Days of William Wilberforce* (London: printed for the author, 1860), p. 160.
46. Jan Morris, *Pax Britannica: The Climax of an Empire* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), pp. 447–48.
47. *The Illustrated London News*, 17 December 1881, p. 581. This image, like many others published by *The Illustrated London News,* is based on actual events. To the left stands the officer who captured the slave dhow, at the centre, behind the desk, Colonel Miles, Acting Consul-General, and at right Captain C. J. Brownrigg.
48. Ibid., 9 February 1889, pp. 176–77.
49. *The Times*, 2 August 1884, p. 9.
50. See M Daphne Kutzer, *Empire's Children: Empire and Imperialism in Classic British Children's Books* (London: Routledge, 2000); Mawuena Kossi Logan, *Narrating Africa: George Henty and the Fiction of Empire* (London: Routledge, 1999); Kathryn Castle, *Britannia's Children: Reading Colonialism through Children's Books and Magazines* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).
51. See Oldfield, *'Chords of Freedom'*, pp. 121, 164–66.
52. Reginald Coupland, *The Empire in these Days: An Interpretation* (London: Macmillan, 1935), p. 268 (emphasis in original).

3

Cultural, Intellectual and Religious Networks: Britain's Maritime Exchanges in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

John M. MacKenzie

The overall title of the lecture series upon which this book is based is full of clear and striking signifiers: 'Victorian empire', 'Britain's maritime world', 'the sea and global history'. I should like to add another, which is emblematic of the Victorian era and the contemporary British Empire, and that is the bourgeoisie. The nineteenth century in British history is often seen as the period when power passed from an old landed aristocracy to the middle classes, not only the *nouveaux riches* of the industrial and commercial system, but also higher order professionals, particularly lawyers. In the colonies, bourgeois formation was also taking place throughout the territories of white settlement and only now are these processes beginning to be more fully understood. In India and the so-called dependent Empire, bourgeois officials, merchants and traders, professionals and military officers (though many of the latter also sprang from older gentry and aristocratic families) found a vast new field of endeavour, ensuring that the growth in the bourgeois public sphere, to use the phrase of Jurgen Habermas, was a global phenomenon.[1] It was global in both macro and micro ways: it was occurring on a world wide basis, but it was also a highly instrumental development in each colonial city and town.

By the end of the century, we may note that settler colonies were forming new identities, based upon the activities, predilections and ideas of their middle classes. These groups came to dominate the politics of such territories of white settlement as the institutions of representative and responsible government spread around the world. The

unattainable ideals of a united empire receded in the face of such identity formation, leading to the twentieth-century emergence of nations and nationalities. But we should not be obsessed with the colonial nation state. As elsewhere, civic and provincial loyalties and pride were also significant for the bourgeois promoters of local institutions and associations. Moreover, the white bourgeoisie was not alone. About the same time, indigenous middle classes educated in the Western fashion were beginning to appear in India and elsewhere, ultimately producing similar or more highly developed effects. This is not to say that imperial, national and class identities were incompatible. They often coexisted; indeed they were invariably mutually constituted.

If we think primarily in terms of towns and emerging cities across the Empire, it is clear that these bourgeois groups required institutions through which they could express their common culture, their respectability, their communal sense of progress, and their affiliations with each other. Such affiliations were developed in all sorts of ways, through the emergence of a critical mass of such figures in any given town or colony, through an unquestionably international sense of the manner in which Victorians should project their adherence to new definitions of what constituted civilised behaviour and its attendant interests. In these ways they could project their devotion to the global culture of the British world. Worship at these bourgeois cultural shrines could be expressed in professional and educational, intellectual and religious, social and recreational ways. All of these required organised, regulated and codified institutions through which this rapidly growing bourgeoisie could express themselves. At its most basic, they were institutions where they could meet both to socialise and to engage in a meeting of minds.

Such institutions included libraries, art galleries, museums, scientific and other societies, clubs, schools and universities. In these, as in the eighteenth-century salon, bourgeois interlocutors could treat each other as equals in a cooperative attempt to study and debate interests of common concern.[2] If these societies tended, at least initially, to be male-only bodies, social events like the universal conversaziones in galleries and museums also involved women, and, since certain disciplines – such as botany - came to be areas of female endeavour, they quickly became concerned with botanic gardens, herbaria and museums. Women were also inevitably consumers of cultural institutions and were soon involved in them, if initially in auxiliary ways. Another great Victorian phenomenon which brought men and women together was the extraordinary tradition of the mounting of commercial and industrial exhibitions in the period, often with additional cultural,

ethnographic and gendered dimensions. Such exhibitions, which are often mainly studied in their metropolitan context, became almost a rite of passage throughout the Empire, an expression of the respective colonies' capacity to plug themselves into global systems. These visual encyclopaedias of products, commerce, ideas, art forms and 'curiosities' became a classic habitat of bourgeois endeavour, sometimes with working-class consumers, and often with a variety of significant ethnic dimensions.[3] The spread of all of these institutions on a transcontinental scale and their rapid development into prime markers of the spread of Western civilisation and respectability requires a good deal more study than it has received to date. Yet an analysis of their largely spontaneous growth is vital to a full understanding not only of the character of the British world, but also of the emergence of new identities that would achieve fruition in twentieth-century nationalisms.

There may seem to be some drift from the sea here, but it is the purpose of this chapter to tie this institutional growth into those key concepts of this volume, maritime and global influence. The notions of rapid infrastructural and technical developments associated with the sea have generally been applied to political, administrative, military and above all economic contexts. From the days of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, writing in *The Communist Manifesto*, the role of the new technologies in creating multilateral commercial relationships across the globe has been much commented upon. Daniel Headrick saw the new technologies of the nineteenth-century, 'the tools of empire' as he called them, as promoting the extension of imperial rule itself.[4] For him means and motives were intertwined, the means serving to ratchet up the motives, the motives searching for the means of achieving them. Later, in a work resulting from a National Maritime Museum conference, Robert Kubicek created the concept of the 'ship nexus' which neatly described the networks of shipping and other capitalist organisations in the linking of metropolis and colonies and colonies with each other.[5] In the same work, I pointed out that we tend to concentrate on the great deep-sea vessels and their companies, but that we should also notice the significance of coasting, riverine and island-hopping shipping concerns, not to mention 'native craft' – as they were usually called-which often successfully competed with steam.[6] I also pointed to the ethnic dimensions of employment in the transcontinental, trans-colonial and more local 'ship nexus'. I suggested that there were 'invented traditions of ethnic specialisms' which would repay further examination. These questions of ethnicity (through ethnography) are indeed bound up with the institutions which lie at the core of the present argument.

Thus, if we are back in these same shipping lanes, as it were, the new concern is with cultural and social, intellectual and religious maritime history, with the manner in which the British world was strikingly consolidated by the dissemination of aspects of metropolitan culture, by the transmission throughout the globe of these new intellectual ideas and their related institutions, by the facilitation of missionary endeavour and other religious exchanges, and by class formations which created a global community. Of course all of these went through processes of adaptation, modification and development in the colonies, and in many cases there was a reverse flow of new ideas back to the imperial metropole.

The extension in scale and growing significance of the bourgeois sphere was unquestionably forwarded by the development of faster and more reliable communications around the Empire. Obviously, this operated in differential ways according to the proximity of the colony to Europe. The maritime colonies, later provinces, of Canada and the St Lawrence system, embracing Quebec and Ontario, had rapid communications with Europe from the 1860s, while the further increase in ships' speeds soon brought these territories within not much more than a week of British and European ports. Apart from the Mediterranean colonies and, above all Egypt, Cape Colony was also tied closely to Britain and the rest of Europe, particularly after the establishment of ever-increasing shipping services. Clearly Australia and New Zealand were more distant, but any examination of their institutions reveals that personnel involved with them began to move more regularly back and forth. Western Canada was connected not only to the western seaboard of the United States, but also to the Far East. The Australasian and Pacific connections with South and South East Asia were facilitated by some smaller-scale shipping companies such as Burns Philp and the Straits Steamship Company. Singapore operated as a significant hub of the entire Asian system with connections to India, the Far East, Australasia, the Pacific, and western North America.

The speeding up of shipping services greatly encouraged the mobility and effectiveness of the bourgeoisie. Westward journeys to Canada were reduced from three or four weeks in the 1820s to eight days in the 1850s and six or seven by the end of the century. By that time, the long-standing disparity between west- and eastbound journey times was being evened out. If we take the Cape run, as it was often called, we find that sailing vessels early in the nineteenth century could take three months from the United Kingdom to Cape Town, following the winds round by Rio de Janeiro. In 1857, a steamship could accomplish the

journey in 44 days while a mere 15 years later it had been almost halved to 24 days. From 1891, it was regularly accomplished in 15 with two weeks soon becoming the standard and surviving as the norm until well past the middle of the twentieth century. The journey to India could take from four to six months early in the century and went down to 63 days for a steamship via the Cape in the 1850s, somewhat less using the Mediterranean and overland route from Alexandria to Suez. Clippers could reach Australia in 100 days, faster than other sailing vessels, and the earliest steamers from 1852 could still take 75 days. This came down to 40 by the 1870s and just over 30 by the 1890s, the fastest time being 27 days. In the 1880s, New Zealand could be reached in about 44 days. Some of these reductions in travel time are impressive in themselves, but the key point was reliability and regularity. It was now possible to book a departure for a given day with the reasonably confident expectation of arriving at the destination at a prearranged date. That had never been possible with sailing vessels and the effects are striking.

Sir Sandford Fleming, the Scots engineer, surveyor of the transcontinental railway, and proposer of the concept of time zones, emigrated to Canada at the age of 18 in 1845. It took him until 1863, when he was 36, before he returned to the United Kingdom. His westbound journey in 1863 took him one-sixth of the time of his original crossing in 1845, a notable fact on which he commented at the time.[7] Thereafter, until his death in 1915 he made no fewer than 43 transatlantic crossings. Such an amazing regularity of travel was obviously only open to the wealthy, but still this represented a frequency of journeys back and forth unheard of in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, except perhaps by seafarers themselves. There can be no doubt that such speed of ocean travel enabled Fleming to develop his theories of global time, to consider his ideas for cable networks, to play his role in scientific developments both in Canada and in London, and to develop his interests in natural history and geology. He also became obsessed with notions of Canadian nationalism within an imperial and international context. Other striking examples follow below.

The phenomenal speeding-up of travel is well known, but the effects on the transfer of knowledge and of artefacts are less so. My recent study of the development of museums around the British Empire has illustrated the significance of accelerated travel to the development of the bourgeois sphere, the foundation of a network of related institutions, and the transmission of information and specimens across the globe.[8] It is surely significant that the great development of scientific institutions, libraries and museums took place between the 1850s and the 1880s. It is

true that there were of course earlier manifestations of these phenomena. The Asiatic Society of Bengal was founded in 1784 and its associated museum in 1814.[9] But even in Calcutta, a reasonably well-funded and impressive museum did not appear until 1878. Elsewhere, other early efforts were tentative and often temporary. At the Cape, the Governor Lord Charles Somerset, always anxious about the potential for the spread of Jacobinism in any association bringing people together, refused to countenance the founding of a Literary and Scientific Society in Cape Town in the 1820s.[10] An early example founded in Sydney, New South Wales, in 1821 failed, as did the Singapore Institution of 1823.[11]

A few decades later there were no such inhibitions. After the pioneering Tasmania, which had a Natural History Society from 1838 and a museum from 1843, others swiftly followed. In Melbourne, scientific institutes were founded in 1854 and once amalgamated in the following year spawned a museum. Similar developments took place in Queensland in 1855, South Australia in 1856 and Western Australia in 1860. A Literary, Scientific and Medical Society was founded in Grahamstown at the Cape in 1855 and the town soon boasted a museum. A more firmly constituted South African Philosophic Society emerged in Cape Town in 1877, following the opening of a library and museum in 1859. In New Zealand, an early attempt was made in the South Island's Nelson, a settlement intended to be much more significant than it subsequently became. An Institute was founded in 1842 and provincial funds were found for a library and museum in 1855. The Philosophical Institute of Canterbury was founded in 1862 with the German Julius Haast, later a naturalised British subject and knighted, at its head. A museum soon followed, located in a fine building as early as 1870. The Auckland Philosophical Society was founded in 1867 and, with its name changed, was soon affiliated with the New Zealand Institute of the same year. In Upper and Lower Canada – Ontario and Quebec – as well as in the Maritimes, the situation was more diffuse, with many educational museums founded in the 1850s. Victoria, British Columbia, had its museum from 1856, Elora, Ontario from 1873, and the Toronto institutions were to be drawn together into what became the Royal Ontario Museum in the Edwardian years of the twentieth century.

Almost all colonial museums negotiated favourable shipping rates – or in many cases altogether free transport – for the specimens that they were exchanging with Europe, the United States, and with other colonial museums. Sometimes this was facilitated by the fact that individuals associated with shipping companies also supported museums or served as trustees. Two examples will suffice. Charles Fairbridge, a highly

successful attorney at the Cape, acted as legal adviser to the Union and Castle Lines. He was also a trustee of the South African Museum and a friend of one of its curators, Edgar Layard, even going so far as to help with the classification and arrangement of specimens in the museum. He negotiated free transport for such specimens, however large, on the companies' ships. George Gould senior in New Zealand was a director of the New Zealand Shipping Company and similarly organised free transport for the products of the considerable network of exchanges organised by the dominant director of the Canterbury Museum, Sir Julius Haast. Haast was fortunate enough to be sitting on, almost literally, vast numbers of bones and complete skeletons of that amazing flightless bird, the extinct moa. He used these as a form of currency, transmitting them to other museums across the globe as exchanges for other specimens.[12]

Australian museums used the rich fossil resources of that continent in a similar way, while all museums became highly active in dispatching ethnographic items in all directions.[13] It may well be imagined how far this was facilitated by favourable or free shipping rates. Almost every museum I included in my research, and that included institutions in Canada, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and India, made similar arrangements. Shipments of library books or of school text books were similarly transported free. The library in Singapore negotiated such an arrangement. This system also prevailed in the world of botanic gardens and plant transfers. One striking example resulted from the travels of the great botanist Joseph Hooker, who was able to negotiate free transport on P&O for his parcels and plant specimens collected on his extensive journeys in the northern regions of South Asia between 1847 and 1851.[14] (His other travel costs were covered by the Government.) Many other examples could be found of this apparent shipping company largesse.

Why did the companies do this? There seem to me to be a number of reasons ranging, as always, from the self-interested to the altruistic. Generally, these examples of free transport related to specimens which would often receive press coverage. By these means, as well as through favourable mentions in annual reports and other semi-official documents, the companies secured positive public visibility. Imperial shipping companies were, after all, early examples of private/public partnerships. They were private companies which were invariably developed with the help of the British government and colonial administrations, through subsidies, mail contracts, as well as the carrying of officials and of troops. In any case, many captains and directors had specific interests in natural history or in ethnography. They were sometimes collectors

themselves and they clearly sought to combine personal fascinations with colonial ambitions to establish museum collections – and in some cases library holdings too – by ensuring the help of their companies.[15] But it might also be said, more widely, that shipping companies were eager to contribute to the creation of the colonial institutions which would serve to foster the deeper inclusion of these territories within the British world and the apparently growing circle of a transposed European civilisation. To do so, as many argued at the time, could only serve to increase the possibilities of economic development, thereby stimulating migration and commerce, as well as helping to develop the bourgeois sphere upon which all this seemed to depend.

Moreover, a new breed of bourgeois governor, quite unlike the aristocratic Lord Charles Somerset, shared the interests of these professional groups and often encouraged the development of associations, libraries, museums and the like. The classic case would be Sir George Grey (1812–98).[16] Born at the time of the Peninsular War, possibly in Lisbon, his life spanned the decades of rapid change. An army officer with an Irish background, service in Ireland convinced him of the necessity of emigration to alleviate Irish misery and help people escape from baleful landlordism.[17] He led unsuccessful exploratory expeditions in Western Australia (1837–39), developed theories on the cultural and economic assimilation of indigenous peoples, and became the governor of South Australia while still in his twenties (1840–45), governor of New Zealand (1845–53), governor of the Cape (1853–60), next governor of New Zealand again (1860–68). Then he settled in New Zealand and entered settler politics. He was superintendent of the Auckland Province in 1875 and premier of the colony from 1877–79. During all these years, he returned to Britain on several occasions, even contriving to stand unsuccessfully for parliament as a Gladstonian Liberal. In the 1890s, he left his New Zealand home on Kawau Island, Hauraki Gulf, where he had made many environmental experiments, to spend his last years in London, and died there.[18]

Such a career was remarkable enough, but Grey was additionally an amateur scientist with fashionable interests in natural history and botany. He was a philologist who wrote about Aboriginal languages and learned to speak Maori. He made large collections of manuscripts and rare books, donating collections to the libraries in Cape Town and Auckland. In South Australia, the Cape Colony and New Zealand he encouraged the founding of scientific societies and of museums, often releasing government funds for the purpose. In Cape Town he was instrumental in the funding and building of the fine classical building which

once housed the library and museum (now a branch of the National Library of South Africa) and his statue duly stands outside it facing into the Government Gardens and towards the later museum building on the other side. Grey's mobility, his scientific and other interests, and his consequent influence upon contemporary developments were very much the product of the age of steam.

The development of the scientific ideas, represented by both the amateur Grey and his many more professional contemporaries, was of course closely bound up not just in museum exchanges of specimens but also in the transfer of information about the geology, palaeontology and exotic biota of distant colonies. An interest in natural history, in all its branches, was the marker of the cultivated Victorian, and that meant equally the cultivated Victorian imperialist or colonial migrant. Many combined this with a desire to hunt, shoot or fish, pastimes which were often justified both by the apparently scientific entrées which their practitioners secured and by the ways in which these were confirmed by a conspicuous display of trophies in domestic or sometimes public settings.[19] In the latter case, one thinks of official residences, government offices even, hotels, clubs and museums. The development and international integration of the bourgeois sphere was furthered by the capacities of imperial civil servants to move rapidly around the globe. Although Grey was a remarkable example, he was not unique. The biographer of Sir Bartle Frere, celebrated as the Governor of Bombay and of the Cape in the 1860s and 1870s, remarked on the extraordinary length of time it took the young East India Company cadet to reach India in the 1820s, before both the age of steam and the opening of the Suez Canal, and his subsequent steam journeys to India and the Cape.[20] Frere originally left England on 3 May 1834, travelling by the Mediterranean and Egypt, and did not reach Bombay until 23 September that year, though he was intentionally leisurely in his travel.[21] Evelyn Baring, later Earl of Cromer, commented on the fact that he considered other imperial positions, including the Viceroyalty of India, but always turned them down because he found it convenient to remain Consul-General in Egypt, within easy reach of Britain, where he could have his annual shooting holiday in Scotland.[22]

There was another dimension to the increasing mobility of these relatively speedy communications. One of the most successful of all colonial museums, and perhaps the only one to vie with the great emporia of cultural eclecticism in Europe and the United States, was the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. In the early years of the twentieth century, moving slightly beyond the Victorian era, this museum was set to

achieve its international status. A number of factors contributed to this. One was the emergence of an aggressively acquisitive director, Charles Trick Currelly, who had a background – not particularly professional it must be said – in Egyptian archaeology, having been an associate of Flinders Petrie. The second significant development was that members of the bourgeoisie of Toronto, more than most other colonial cities, had reached the status which we would now call super-rich. Many had a considerable interest in their local museum and art gallery, keen to promote their civic pride by aspiring to match the institutions of New York City and Chicago if they possibly could.[23]

They did more, however, than simply contribute funds. Their wealth enabled them to move back and forth regularly between Canada and Europe and parties of them even went as far as Egypt. They bought items for the museum. Currelly kept his eye on auction catalogues and could activate some of his rich associates by cable if attractive items came up for sale. He even on occasion took a ship to Europe to acquire such items himself. One good example occurred when Currelly spotted that a Viking sword was coming up for sale in London. He discovered that his wealthy associate Sigmund Samuel was in the capital, cabled him, and the latter went to the auction and bought it for Toronto. In other words, the proximity of eastern Canada to Europe bore dividends in ways that were not possible for museums in more distant colonies. The Royal Ontario Museum also capitalised later on the activities of an ambitiously avaricious Anglican missionary bishop, Bishop White of Honan, who acquired large quantities of Chinese artefacts, which were duly shipped across to Western Canada and across the transcontinental railway to Ontario.

We should of course always be wary of the trap that simply because events take place at the same time they are somehow automatically connected. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the rate of technological change in marine engines and architecture and the consequent advances in steam communications in these years greatly encouraged these developments. The evidence suggests that the increasingly rapid and frequent services of imperial shipping transformed the pursuit of bourgeois interests and their associated ideas transfer. We only have to consider the length of time that Sir Joseph Banks spent on the first Cook voyage (from August 1768 to May 1771) or the years passed by Charles Darwin on *The Beagle* with Captain Fitzroy between December 1831 and October 1836. It is perhaps not surprising that neither of them sailed again, although Banks might have gone on Cook's second voyage but for his demanding requirements being declined.

Later in the nineteenth century, many who travelled in pursuit of scientific interests were able to do so again and again. Another intriguing contrast is between Charles Lyell's epoch-making work *Principles of Geology*, published between 1830 and 1833, which went around the world much more slowly than Darwin's *Origin of Species*, although Darwin did lay his hands on Lyell's books while still on the *Beagle* and was greatly influenced by them. Darwin's *Origin* reached the colonies within weeks of publication in 1859 and quickly stimulated controversies there. Indeed, it is possible to draw up almost a fever chart of Darwinian debate in the scientific centres of imperial territories. It is noticeable, for example, that museum curators and their scientific associates in Canada and New Zealand accepted notions of evolution by natural selection much more rapidly than their equivalents in New South Wales and Victoria.[24] The elite in the two latter colonies, where palaeontological riches ensured that they remained much more under the spell of Darwin's enemy, Richard Owen, vigorously resisted evolutionary ideas until the end of the century.

Moreover, the dispersal and local production of books was greatly encouraged by the existence of libraries almost everywhere. Thus, the diffusion of what has been called 'print capitalism' was not the least of the features of the age. If newspapers, broadsheets and other forms of street transmission of information were established in the eighteenth century, papers and journals emerged everywhere in the nineteenth.[25] And as in Europe, the journals covered all forms of scientific and other concerns, often associated with the Institutes I have already listed. Moreover, while some of the leaders of the early intellectual and scientific endeavours were often maverick and virtually frontier figures, greater speed of communication ensured that museums, educational bodies and other institutions began to recruit internationally. The personnel so recruited similarly became more mobile. As well as making visits to the United States and to Europe to study advances in their fields, they also sometimes transferred back to Britain or to other colonies. The same would be true of professorial and other staff in the new colleges and universities. By the 1890s, figures such as Baldwin Spencer, the evolutionary biologist who combined a professorship at the University of Melbourne with the directorship of the Museum of Victoria, travelled regularly to keep abreast of his research interests, not only in biology, but also in museum management and display, as well as in his passionate interest in anthropology.[26] He had begun to make a notable contribution to the latter field through his journeys in the interior of Australia and his work on Aboriginal ethnography and its presentation in the museum.[27]

His counterpart in Adelaide, Edward Stirling was a medical man and co-founder of the University of Adelaide medical school, but he was also honorary director of the museum and similarly made regular visits to Europe and to North America. Contacts were made with other museums by both Spencer and Stirling and active collecting and exchanges were the result.[28]

Another area where mobility was of the essence was in the organisation and mounting of the exhibitions mentioned earlier. All the dramatis personae I have referred to would have been caught up in these in some way. They were certainly well aware of them and probably visited several in the course of their lives. These exhibitions operated in all sorts of complex multilateral ways, displaying the colony to the metropole and to other European countries as well as the colonies to themselves and to each other. For example, a collection of products, curiosities and other materials was gathered together from the Auckland province of New Zealand for the 1851 Crystal Palace exhibition and was displayed there before being shipped overseas. It had a notable effect on the local populace and made many feel that such an assemblage should be kept at home to form the nucleus of a museum. Similar arrangements in other colonies produced the same kind of reactions. They also promoted the idea of holding exhibitions within colonial territories themselves. Victoria was never backward in this. The first exhibition was held in Melbourne in 1860, followed by the Inter-Colonial, an evocative name, in 1866. Cape Town held an exhibition as early as 1877. This was followed by Sydney (1877–78), Melbourne (1880–81), Calcutta (1883–84), Adelaide (1887) and Melbourne again in 1888–89. Toronto had a permanent exhibition site. There were to be many more, but it would be tedious to continue the listing. The significant thing is that they were major markers in the development of the British and global worlds. Shipments of large quantities of products and much else were vital to their success. Commissioners travelled about representing their own territories and these commissioners were invariably closely bound up with the various institutions already described. Two examples will suffice from the many colonial exhibition commissioners who moved about at this time. Sir Redmond Barry, an influential judge who was at the centre of all cultural developments in Melbourne, acted as the commissioner of Victoria to the 1862 London Exhibition while Sir Julius Haast, the Director of the Canterbury Museum, performed a similar function for New Zealand at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886. Such a planned mobility of goods and of people would have been impossible in the days of sail.

To turn to religious connections, we have already seen how Bishop White was an avid collector in China. Many other missionaries in India, South East Asia, the Pacific, Africa, North America and Australasia also collected ethnographic items, sometimes for their own collections, sometimes for their societies, and often for museums. Some such assemblages were sold to the museums. In this they were joining the many ships' captains, engineering officers and even sailors in the merchant marine and on naval vessels who similarly collected, sometimes for sale, for both metropolitan and colonial museums.[29] For the missionaries, such collecting activities often had significant instrumental ends. Cultural artefacts offered insights into the societies whose members they were attempting to convert. It is interesting that missionaries often collected items important for an understanding of the role of women in indigenous societies, given that it was among women that they sometimes felt the most influential conversions could take place. This helped to expand the range of museum anthropological collections.

But the mobility of missionaries was also enhanced by the new marine technologies. When the Baptist missionary William Carey went to India in 1793, travelling on a Danish Indiaman to Serampore because of the British East India Company's ban on missionaries, he did so never to return. He remained in India until his death in 1834.[30] The lives of later missionaries were very different. For example, the Scottish missionaries on the Eastern Cape made repeated visits home on furlough in order to recuperate their health and strength, in order to issue propaganda for their missions and, most importantly, raise funds.[31] When in Britain, it is striking that their lectures and sermons often received extensive publicity in the local press, not to mention in the almost ubiquitous missionary journals. There were also specialised missionary exhibitions in which artefacts, photographs and literature from the mission fields were exhibited to a visiting public. Soon vast numbers of postcards of missionary enterprises were being collected and transmitted through the post.[32]

More comfortable journeys enabled larger numbers of independent women, not just missionary wives in other words, to join the missions in a variety of capacities, as teachers, nurses and doctors. Talented African pupils at mission schools were often sent to Scotland for further studies, some of them with the purpose of being ordained. This had started as early as the 1840s, but the numbers built up with swifter passages later in the century. Missionaries also used coastal voyages, river and lake steamers, sometimes owned by their societies, to penetrate the interior of Africa, Asia and elsewhere or conveniently visit island archipelagos,

as in the Pacific. Some such steamers were the product of new prefabricated construction methods and the development of smaller, more portable boilers. Moreover, wealthy individuals who funded missions occasionally visited the objects of their largesse. A good example is the visit to South Africa by members of the family of the wealthy Scottish shipbuilder Alexander Stephen in 1886.[33] Stephen's daughter, Mina, had married the influential if cantankerous missionary Dr James Stewart, ensuring a steady flow of funds. Mina's brother, his wife and two children not only moved among the colonial elite, but also visited the missionary institutions which their family had helped to fund. Stewart himself became the moderator of the Free Kirk and frequently went to Edinburgh to preach and to deliver lectures. Ease of travel ensured that some influential missionaries also visited mission fields on other continents to secure some impression of the wider thrust of their society's policies, sometimes to write reports and influence developments.[34] We know from recent research that these phenomena were also much in evidence in Wales and England as well as in Scotland.[35]

In conclusion, it may be objected that the rapid flow of ideas and practices was not primarily based upon the development of steam, that in some respects at least, these phenomena were not entirely new. C. A. Bayly has commented upon the extraordinary speed with which ideas were transmitted around the Empire in the late eighteenth and early- nineteenth centuries, in the days of sail, thereby promoting the dawn of a modern global system.[36] We know that philosophical and religious ideas, not least of the Scottish and other Enlightenments, were transmitted to the 13 colonies in North America relatively quickly throughout the eighteenth century. But it is my contention that such a diffusion of ideas and institutions was considerably stepped up in the second half of the nineteenth. What had happened in the past in relatively piecemeal ways, in forms that were not necessarily integral to the structures of empire, now occurred much more systematically. The dispersal aided by the 'ship nexus' and other new technologies was much more comprehensive and considerably more significant for the structure of empire itself, for the transmission of ideas about the colonies to the metropole, and for the free flow of intellectual, scientific and religious ideas. All of these were inseparably connected to the growth of the bourgeoisie. Obviously, swift, reliable and global postal systems also benefited these transfers – the correspondence of colonial scientists with Charles Darwin or Richard Owen, among others, gives a strong impression of this. Later the same conditions were influential in the development of national identities within colonies. Thus we face the common paradox

of empire: that which operated as apparently unifying forces – warfare is a good example – actually contributed to the growing nationalism and yearning for at least some forms of self-determination within the colonies. All of the examples cited above reflect aspects of these striking, and often paradoxical, effects. The ship nexus and the developments in marine technologies at one and the same time promoted both forms of integration for the British World, not least in the bourgeois mind, but also served ultimately to advance its destruction. A great deal has been written about shipping and migration, often of ordinary migrants either driven from their homes in Ireland and Scotland or other parts of the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe (invariably promoting the survival of sailing ship passenger connections), or alternatively of 'elective' migrants who travelled in order to improve their lot. Some of them, of course, used colonial opportunities to advance themselves into the bourgeoisie. Others left Britain already conscious of their middle-class status and eager to secure further financial and social advance. Perhaps we need a greater understanding of this group, their cultural, scientific and religious interests, their ambitions, and their desire to create new forms of identity overseas. This distinctively Victorian complex not only advanced the processes of globalisation, invariably by maritime means, but also created international communities, albeit securely based in their localities, which promoted the free flow of ideas and things. Britain's Victorian maritime empire embraced a good deal more than the flow of migrants, an accelerating commerce and an expansion in the transfer of raw materials and trade goods. But we should not leave these in separate compartments.

Marine technology and the development of the capitalist ship nexus have generally been considered in commercial and economic ways. In shifting the focus in the direction of the cultural, intellectual and religious aspects of imperial history, it should be made clear that we are not dealing with two separate phenomena. Economic history must be set into its cultural context and equally the historical characteristics considered here cannot be fully understood outside the economic formations vital to their full comprehension. We can certainly be quite clear that the bourgeois elites around the British Empire would have made no distinction. In pursuing their examination of environmental, natural historical, scientific, ethnographic and spiritual characteristics of their world, they were convinced that they were operating within a seamless web of understanding that could only increase the range and significance of their economic operations. Thus, we should recognise that the emergence of the distinctively Victorian interests of the

bourgeoisie should not be compartmentalised, but are part of the whole maritime nexus of imperial social and economic life. It is this complete picture which is surely vital to a true understanding of the processes of globalisation through the enhanced maritime connections of the Victorian age.

Notes

1. Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989), first published in German in 1962.
2. These concepts are discussed in great detail in Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, passim.
3. There is now an extensive literature on such exhibitions. For ethnic dimensions, see John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), ch. 4 and Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: the Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), ch. 4 for ethnic displays and ch. 7 for exhibits of women's work and life. The development of the exhibitions marks the point at which bourgeois scientific, commercial and cultural ideas became commodified for a larger audience.
4. Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981). See also Headrick, *The Invisible Weapon: Telecommunications and International Politics 1851–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) and Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989). None of these works, however, pay much attention either to the class dimensions of these technical developments or to their influence on nation-forming and the development of national identities.
5. Robert Kubicek, 'The Proliferation and Diffusion of Steamship Technology and the Beginnings of "New Imperialism"' in David Killingray, Margarette Lincoln and Nigel Rigby (eds), *Maritime Empires: British Imperial Maritime Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004), pp. 100–10.
6. John M. MacKenzie, 'Lakes, Rivers and Oceans: Technology, Ethnicity and the Shipping of Empire in the Late Nineteenth Century' in ibid., pp. 111–27.
7. Clark Blaise, *Time Lord: Sir Sandford Fleming and the Creation of Standard Time* (London: Phoenix, 2000), pp. 61–63.
8. John M. MacKenzie, *Museums and Empire: Natural History, Human Cultures and Colonial Identities* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).
9. [Anon.], *The Indian Museum 1814–1914* (Calcutta: Indian Museum, 1914, repr. with additions in 2004).
10. Saul Dubow, *A Commonwealth of Knowledge: Science, Sensibility and White South Africa 1820–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), ch. 1. See also John M. MacKenzie, with Nigel R. Dalziel, *The Scots in South Africa: Ethnicity, Identity, Gender and Race* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 73.
11. MacKenzie, *Museums*, chs 6 and 10. The succeeding paragraphs are based on the same work.

12. Richard Wolfe, *Moa: the Dramatic Story of the Discovery of a Giant Bird* (Auckland: Penguin, 2003); Susan Sheets-Pyenson, *Cathedrals of Science: the Development of Colonial Natural History Museums During the Late Nineteenth Century* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), pp. 29–50, 81–83; MacKenzie, *Museums*, ch. 9.
13. Amiria Henare, *Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) deals with the example of New Zealand, but largely from a metropolitan point of view.
14. Mary Gribbin and John Gribbin, *Flower Hunters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 292.
15. Examples of collecting by mariners can be found in John M. MacKenzie, 'Imperial Objectives and Settler Identities: Re-enacting Empire through the Colonial Museum', unpublished paper delivered to a National Maritime Museum/ and Institute of Historical Research seminar series, 18 March 2008. See also Zachary Kingdon and Dmitri van der Berselaar, 'Collecting Empire ?: African Objects, West African Trade, and a Liverpool Museum' in Sheryllynne Haggerty, Anthony Webster and Nicholas J. White (eds), *The Empire in One City: Liverpool's Inconvenient Imperial Past (*Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), pp. 100–22.s16. Because of his extensive career, entries on Grey can be found in the Dictionaries of National Biography of South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. What follows is based upon a combination of these. See also Dubow, *Commonwealth* 64–70 and MacKenzie, *Museums* pp. 83–86.
17. Some revision of this view, together with much useful information, can be found in Leigh Dale 'George Grey in Ireland: Narrative and Network' in David Lambert and Alan Lester (eds), *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 145–75.
18. I am grateful to Professor Tom Brooking for information about George Grey's activities on Kawau Island.
19. John M. MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).
20. John Martineau, *The Life and Correspondence of Sir Bartle Frere* 2 vols, (London: John Murray, 1895), vol. 1, pp. 11–12, p. 47.
21. An attempt to catch a new experimental steam ship from the Red Sea to India failed when it did not turn up.
22. Earl of Cromer, *Modern Egypt* (London: Macmillan, 1908).
23. An account of these developments can be found in MacKenzie, *Museums*, ch. 3.
24. The contrasting reception of Darwin's great work in different colonies is examined in MacKenzie, *Museums*, passim.
25. Chandrika Kaul (ed.), *Media and the British Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) contains a number of chapters relevant to this dispersal. See also J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. van Arsdel, *Periodicals of Queen Victoria's Empire, an Exploration* (London: Mansell, 1996).
26. D. J. Mulvaney and J. H. Calaby, *'So Much that is New': Baldwin Spencer, 1860–1929* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1985).
27. W. Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (London: Macmillan, 1899).

28. This and the material in the succeeding paragraph can be found in MacKenzie, *Museums*.
29. See note 15.
30. Edward A. Annett, *William Carey, Pioneer Missionary to India* (London: National Sunday School Union, n.d.).
31. MacKenzie, *Scots*, ch. 4.
32. The author owns a collection of such postcards.
33. MacKenzie, *Scots*, p. 131.
34. For example, Alexander Duff travelled extensively throughout the British empire reporting on missionary developments. A. A. Millar, *Alexander Duff of India* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1992).
35. Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in 19th century England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Norman Etherington (ed.), *Missions and Empire* Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Andrew J. May, *Welsh Missionaries and British Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 262 and passim.
36. C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

4

'We Never Make Mistakes': Constructing the Empire of the Pacific Steam Navigation Company

Crosbie Smith

> STEAM POWER is undoubtedly *the* feature of the nineteenth century, and steam navigation is by far the most important aspect of that feature. The extension of steam navigation with different parts of the world will, in all probability, accomplish greater good for humanity than any invention, or the application of any power since the days of Guttemberg [sic] or Caxton. Business, commerce, health, pleasure, social intercourse, international peace, enterprise, civilisation, and Christianity, are alike interested in this extension.[1]

'We never make mistakes'. These are the oft-repeated words of a certain Captain Mitchell, wearer of white waistcoats and the Oceanic Steam Navigation Company's marine superintendent in the port town of Sulaco in the Republic of Costaguana, once part of the Spanish Empire on the West Coast of South America. Señor Mitchell, the creation of Joseph Conrad in his epic novel *Nostromo* (1904), used the phrase to capture, for the benefit of a wider public, his unqualified pride in his company's standing. According to the narrator, the name of the OSN (as it was known in 'familiar speech') 'stood very high for trustworthiness as they seldom failed to account for the smallest package, rarely lost a bullock, and had never drowned a single passenger [...] People declared that under the Company's care their lives and property were safer on the water than in their own houses on shore'. On the other hand, the saying 'took the form of a severe injunction' when addressed by Captain Mitchell to the Company's officers: ' "We must make no mistakes. I'll have no mistakes here" '.[2]

As always, Conrad chose his names with multiple resonances to real life. The 'Oceanic Steam Navigation Company' was the official name of Thomas Henry Ismay's famous White Star Line. Ismay, who had once run sailing ships to the West Coast of South America, bought the White Star Line of sailing packets to Australia in 1867 and two years later founded the line of transatlantic steamers beginning with the first *Oceanic*.[3] Conrad's reference to the safety record of the OSN, on the other hand, alluded to the Cunard Line's achievement of never losing a passenger in their care through shipwreck or other disaster at sea – as well as to Mark Twain's remark that 'he felt himself rather safer on board a Cunard steamer than on dry land'.[4] There was, however, considerable irony in Conrad's usage in *Nostromo*: as the novel showed, life onshore in Costaguana, with its highly unstable politics and its threat of successive revolutions, *was* far less safe than life on board any of the OSN steamers. And Señor Mitchell, in the narrator's words, regarded these 'frequent changes of government brought about by revolutions of the military type' as 'most unfavourable to the orderly working of his Company.'[5] Neither a representation of White Star or of Cunard, Conrad's OSN Company was unmistakably a thinly disguised portrait of the Pacific Steam Navigation Company (PSNC), founded in 1840 to trade along the western seaboard of South America from Panama to Valparaiso.

In *Nostromo*, aptly subtitled 'A tale of the seaboard,' the town of Sulaco, at the head of the deep Golfo Placido, had for centuries been insulated from a busy trading world by virtue of the 'prevailing calms of its vast gulf'. But, as the narrator explained, 'the very atmospheric conditions which had kept away the merchant fleets of bygone ages induced the OSN Company to violate the sanctuary of peace sheltering the calm existence of Sulaco.' The variable airs of the Gulf 'could not baffle the steam power of their excellent fleet'. And so '[y]ear after year the black hulls of their ships had gone up and down the coast', a geographically ironbound and mountainous coast which, in the absence of roads and railways, gave to the steamship a long-term monopoly over mail and passenger movements.[6]

In this new world of steam, Sulaco now had a wooden jetty, a fleet of lighters and OSN offices represented by 'a strong building near the shore end of the jetty'. From the San Tome silver mine, operated by the Englishman Charles Gould with support from American capital, 'treasure' flowed to the customs house – and, under the ever-vigilant eye of Señor Mitchell, headed outwards on OSN ships. In the republic of Costaguana, 'material interests', embodied in steamships, railroads and electric telegraphs, worked to increase the cultural distance between the

'occidental province' and the rest of a republic 'unaffected by the slight European veneer of the coast towns'. In Sulaco, capital of the 'occidental province', Mitchell represented 'the allied and anxious goodwill of all the material interests of civilisation'. And, according to one of the principal advocates of an independent occidental province, Mitchell and his men at the harbour stood as 'active usher[s]-in of the material implements for our progress'.[7]

'Spanish America is free'

Having spent some 15 years of his earlier life sailing under the red ensign, Conrad had observed and witnessed the practices of nineteenth-century British maritime commerce at close quarters. His account of Captain Mitchell should therefore remind us of just how central, yet fragile, were notions of trustworthiness to the making and sustaining of commercial maritime empires, especially those, such as PSNC, which operated in geographical regions with relatively tenuous links to a distant Britain. This chapter aims to analyse the very early years of building the empire of PSNC. The project represented an unusual mix of United States vision, British capital and post-colonial enthusiasm from the local merchants and leaders not long 'liberated' from centuries of Spanish rule. Able at first to fund only two steamers for a projected service along thousands of miles of little-known coastline with little local fuel, few repair facilities and a Board of Directors a world away, PSNC has been the subject of limited scholarly attention, principally focused on the Company's projector, New Englander William Wheelwright.

Wheelwright, most recently, is represented as 'a forward thinker' whose 'persistence gave PSNC the breathing space it needed until technological developments and the securing of reliable sources of good coal made its services more practical'. His 'forward thinking', moreover, was exemplified in his advocacy of iron hulls for the first steamers, a choice overruled in his absence by the PSNC Board. Thanks in large part to Wheelwright, indeed, PSNC from its inception is portrayed as 'one of Britain's most technologically innovative shipping companies' with a policy of 'continued innovation and willingness to invest in the new products of British industry'.[8]

Such representations of both Wheelwright and PSNC, I argue, are historically misleading. They presuppose an essentialist view of technology in which more efficient steam engines have a real existence some time in the future. This assumption is then used to explain the early financial struggles and technological shortcomings of the Company which, in

the mid-1840s, precipitated a move from London to Liverpool and a near-complete revolution of the Board. Furthermore, the implication that a choice of iron hulls at the time was superior to the choice of wooden hulls ignores the very severe reservations concerning, in particular, the potentially disastrous compass deviations associated with iron ships.[9] In what follows, therefore, I attempt to escape from such retrospective judgements and focus instead on the manifold tools with which PSNC's principal managers promoted confidence in the unstable project. As we shall see, William Wheelwright and George Peacock used print cultures (including pamphlets and prospectuses, maps, statistics, and newspaper and magazine articles) to persuade investors, Government, shippers and the wider travelling publics that the enterprise was trustworthy. In many cases, indeed, Peacock seized on contingent events in the early history of the company to highlight his (and the line's) skill at turning seemingly inevitable defeat into hard-won victory. At the same time, they enhanced the company's credibility by introducing and sustaining new practices into the world of long-distance steam navigation.

Born at Newburyport, Massachusetts, in 1798, William Wheelwright hailed directly from English dissenting stock blended with a strong New England seafaring and mercantile tradition. The Wheelwrights' ancestor was the controversial seventeenth-century Rev John Wheelwright, formerly of Lincolnshire, whose radical preachings in favour of salvation by faith rather than by works led to his trial, conviction and banishment from Massachusetts. Integral to Wheelwirght theology was his belief that assurance or evidence of salvation must come from the Holy Spirit and not from arbitrary signs of an individual's holiness.[10] William's affiliations were altogether less controversial. The eighteenth-century Wheelwrights were members of the Old South Church in Federal Street, the meeting house of the First Presbyterian Society and famous in the eighteenth-century for its associations with George Whitefield, close ally of the Wesleys. William himself was baptised (and later married) in the church.[11] The family's evangelical zeal found new expression in William's own generation. A younger brother, Isaac Watts Wheelwright, was not only named after one of Protestantism's most famous hymn writers, but became a preacher for the Bible Society of America. In later life, William generously funded the translation of the Gospels into Turkish as a means of offering Protestant Christianity to the decaying Ottoman Empire.[12]

Wheelwright's mother, Anna, was the daughter of New England shipowner William Coombs, while his father, Ebenezer, commanded one of Coombs' vessels in the West Indian trades with which Newburyport

was closely associated. William himself began his sea-going career at 16 in one of the family's ships. Surviving shipwreck in the Caribbean the following year, by 19 he was in command of a barque trading to Rio de Janeiro. While master of the Newburyport barque *Rising Empire* in 1823, he again survived shipwreck, together with all his crew, when the vessel ran aground in the River Plate. Taking passage from Buenos Aires to Valparaiso, he found his way north to Guayaquil, where he developed a successful mercantile company and became United States consul in the recently independent republic of Ecuador. After the business failed while he was back in Massachusetts for his marriage, Wheelwright returned to sea in a 60-ton schooner, the aptly named *Fourth of July*, and traded on the west coast. There he built up a line of sailing packets which earned a reputation for comfort and reliability.[13]

From 1833, Wheelwright promoted the introduction of steam navigation on the Pacific coast. In June 1835, a meeting, possibly attended by Captain Robert Fitzroy of HMS *Beagle* (engaged in surveying the coasts of South America) and in the presence of Chilean statesman Diego Portales, took place in Valparaiso at the house of British merchant Joseph Waddington to discuss details of the project. Portales indicated that the project would have the support of the Chilean Government, an assurance that enabled Wheelwright to petition the state for privileges and exemptions. When Chile and Peru both granted these, Wheelwright won the support of merchants in the two republics. On the strength of the credit thus built up on the Pacific coast, he turned first to the United States but found insufficient enthusiasm from his countrymen during a period of financial crisis there. He then travelled to Britain in search of capital.[14]

A few years afterwards, one commentator noted Wheelwright's 'great difficulty in forming a company [...] Unfortunately for the projector, the extreme pressure of the money-market at that time, coupled with the distance of the intended scene of operations, the want of confidence in the grants of South American states, and the political changes to which they were exposed, all conduced to impede the enterprise.' Only at the last moment, 'when his capital was nigh wrecked', had Wheelwright the 'good fortune to meet with the late Lord Abinger, who, together with the noble members of the Scarlett family, warmly espoused the undertaking' and brought to bear the support of other friends to form the Pacific Steam Navigation Company in London.[15]

James Scarlett (created Baron Abinger in 1835) had been born and brought up in Jamaica, educated at Trinity College Cambridge, married a daughter of Peter Campbell of Kilmory, Argyll, and entered on a very lucrative career as a barrister. Indeed, he was regarded on account of

his powers of persuasion as the most successful advocate of his time, grossing at the bar some £18,500 in his best year.[16] A strong supporter of the Whigs, Scarlett entered parliament in 1819. But it was under the liberal Tory prime minister George Canning that he served as attorney general (1827–28). He also agreed, somewhat reluctantly, to serve as attorney-general under the Tory Duke of Wellington (1829–30). A hesitant opponent of the reform bill in 1831, Scarlett increasingly aligned himself with the Tories in the 1830s. He was nevertheless appointed lord chief baron of the exchequer at the end of 1834 under the Whig ministry and held the post for over nine years. Scarlett, however, confessed in the late 1820s that his sympathies lay above all with Canning's political outlook.[17]

While Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Canning had famously proclaimed in 1824 that 'Spanish America is free, and if we do not mismanage our affairs sadly, she is English.'[18] It was Canning too who, just as Scarlett's youngest son Peter Campbell was concluding his undergraduate days at Trinity College Cambridge, persuaded his father to direct him into the diplomatic service. By 1834, Peter Campbell was an attaché in Rio de Janeiro and the following year travelled across South America to the Pacific coast where he met Wheelwright for the first time.[19]

When the younger Scarlett published the account of his travels early in 1838, he received a very favourable and substantial notice in *The Times*. '[The two volumes] abound with anecdotes and descriptions which will afford both information and amusement to almost all classes of readers,' enthused the paper. 'The most important part of the work, however, consists in observations on the possibility of establishing a communication between the eastern and western coast of the American continent, by cutting a canal across the isthmus of Panama, or by forming railroads, and, in plans and statements annexed to the second volume, for establishing steam navigation on the Pacific.' This last portion was 'extremely valuable', bringing 'into one point of view the arguments in support of the possibility of forming the proposed communication', and including discussion of 'the objections to the plan with fairness'. It also 'furnished the inquirer with statistical tables and statements collected with great industry, and calculated and arranged with accuracy and care'.[20]

In fact, the steam navigation section was largely the work of Wheelwright and appeared as a separate pamphlet (dated 22 October 1838) accompanying the PSNC prospectus issued in the same year. Wheelwright made clear that the British Government had instructed British Consuls General in Chile and Peru to 'inquire into the best means of establishing a communication between Great Britain and the

Western Coasts of South America, by way of the Isthmus'. To fulfil this requirement, 'public meetings of the British and Foreign merchants were convened' in the two countries and committees appointed to examine Wheelwright's plans and statements. Following 'the fullest investigation', these were 'unanimously approved of, and sanctioned at, subsequent general meetings'.[21]

The introductory part of Wheelwright's pamphlet set out to persuade potential investors of his high credibility. First, he had 'carefully considered' steam navigation in the Pacific for four years, as witnessed by 'the extent and minuteness of my calculations'. Second, 'the evidence of disinterested parties', characterised by 'probity as well as practical knowledge of the subject', offered 'the best assurance that my data have been fully and fairly examined'. Third, 'Her Majesty's Government considering the advantages that must accrue to the trade of this country with the Pacific, and to commerce in general, by the establishment of a more prompt communication, has deemed the undertaking entitled to its support, and conferred on the Pacific Steam Navigation Company a Royal Charter'. Finally, for much the same reasons, the governments of the Pacific states have granted 'exclusive and valuable privileges for the navigation of their coasts'.[22]

Wheelwright argued that the simultaneous establishment of steam-packets from Britain to the West Indies and on the Pacific coast would reduce communication time between Britain and Chile from some 4 months to 30 or 40 days. This 'accelerated and easy communication' promised benefits both to British merchants and manufacturers and to local trade along the Pacific coast. For British interests, it would enable 'frequent and regular' notices of commercial transactions to be transmitted in either direction as well as the financial returns on shipments to be available three or four months earlier than at present. It would thus largely eliminate the 'uncertainty and fluctuations which at present attend all mercantile operations with those now distant markets'.[23]

On the west coast itself, steam navigation would establish 'a regular interchange of [commercial] advices [...] every fifteen days, and many voyages would be performed in forty or fifty hours, which now occupy twenty or twenty-five days'. Thus the current long detentions of vessels in port and lack of knowledge about changes in markets could be avoided. Here Wheelwright offered his readers compelling visual evidence in the form of a chart of the western coast displaying both the tracks of existing sailing vessels and the proposed steamers. The former, he showed, followed vastly longer tracks which took them far westward

in pursuit of the winds of the deep ocean while the latter, in contrast, simply set a course coastwise from one port of call to the next.

Accompanying this visual evidence were detailed tables underwriting the credibility of the project. 'Schedule A' provided the estimated annual expenses of four steamers (450–500 tons each) of which one would be held as the reserve vessel. A separate estimate set out coal consumption for three steamers, each with two 80 horsepower engines consuming 12 tons per day. Based on 24 annual voyages from Chile to Peru (requiring 14 days per voyage) and 12 annual voyages from Peru to Panama (again at 14 days per voyage), the total annual amount of coal consumed came to 7,000 tons. The combined costs of officers, men, coal, provisions, agencies and insurance amounted to £47,326. 'Schedule C' offered an approximate calculation of the annual receipts of three working steamers from passengers (estimated for each stage of the voyage), freight and postage. Derived from minute estimates (including 72,000 letters to Britain and 20,000 to Europe per annum), total earnings came to £93,390. The estimated annual profit was therefore a very gratifying £46,064.[24]

A further table provided comparisons of the time now taken, and the projected time to be taken, to cover the distances between key ports of call. The same tables also showed comparative rates of passage money. For example, the time of the 1,486-mile passage from Valparaiso to Callao would fall from 11 days to 6 days and 6 hours with a corresponding fall in costs from $68 to $42 (with a pound sterling worth about 5 dollars). Similarly, the 1,656-mile run from Panama to Callao would fall from 30 days to 8 days 15 hours and the cost from $150 to $102. Indeed, most of the rates between ports showed a reduction of up to 50% on present charges.[25]

The project, Wheelwright claimed, promised to benefit two other broad matters of importance to both Britain and the local states. First, 'loans to the amount of millions of British capital have been made, for which no return has been received; nor, till an amelioration of [the different states] [...] domestic and international affairs be brought about, can any such be expected.' On the one hand, it was the absence of prompt communication that provided 'One great cause of the political instability of the South American governments'. Thus 'the efforts of the executive to suppress rebellion are constantly frustrated'. On the other hand, however, the coming of that prompt communication 'would be, to strengthen the executive authorities, to promote the industry of the people, and to contribute to an improved state of public and private credit'.[26]

Second, the Pacific coast steamers opened up the promise of 'an accelerated and easy communication which can be effected between the Pacific coast, Australia, New Zealand, and the various islands in that ocean'. As evidence, Wheelwright included in his pamphlet a letter from Captain Fitzroy, with annexed chart showing 'the courses by which vessels sailing between Australia and the west coast would generally meet with favorable winds'. Passengers would thus cross the Pacific eastwards to Callao by sailing vessel, travel from Callao northwards to Panama by PSNC steamer, cross the Isthmus and return to England aboard the West Indies mail steamers. By so doing, 'the long and turbulent passage round Cape Horn would be avoided, and the period of four months now occupied in performing the voyage from England to those distant parts of the world, would be reduced to about sixty or seventy days.'[27]

Wheelwright, committed to the causes of evangelical Protestantism, emphasised that such an integrated service would advance 'the civilisation of the inhabitants of the numerous islands of the Pacific, to which the Missionary Societies have, for a considerable time past, been directing much of their attention'. In contrast to the past, the new service would replace a 'tedious and painful voyage' with one of 'comparative ease and comfort; and the difficulty of access, which now so much obstructs their labours, will be greatly diminished'.[28]

The final part of Wheelwright's promotional pamphlet focused sharply on five proposed means of fulfilling PSNC's promised actions and thereby sustaining and strengthening investors' trust in the project. First, he addressed the fundamental question of fuel. 'Coal exists in Chile in great abundance, and is obtainable at a very cheap rate,' he asserted with confidence. Here he was drawing on Fitzroy's authority expressed in his letter claiming 'the existence of coal in abundance [...] and that its quality is sufficiently good to make it available for steam-vessels.' Wheelwright, however, offered additional assurance by telling his readers that 'it may also be had from England at a moderate price; while the nature of the trade between the west coast and Australia, would ensure an abundant and cheap supply from that colony in case of need.'[29]

Second, he raised the question of security afforded to the merchant and manufacturer at such long distances from home. At present, he reminded his readers, 'goods are often deposited for lengthened periods in the public custom-houses, and frequently sent to the interior on long credits.' Yet shipments from England continued to increase, thereby offering 'the best proof of the security' afforded to commerce with the Pacific coast. How much greater security, he asked rhetorically, will be

afforded to the company, and thus to the shippers, 'whose vessels will sail under the British flag, be under the protection of a British squadron, and possess the special guarantee of the separate local governments [?]'.[30]

Third, Wheelwright assured potential sceptics concerned about the means to repair and overhaul steamers at such a distance from the marine engineering establishments of Britain. He pointed especially to Guayaquil, with which he himself was very familiar, as 'an excellent arsenal, and particularly favourable for the repair of steamvessels; while some of the ports of Chile offer in this respect almost equal advantages'. Although he probably intended his use of 'arsenal' in its old sense of 'house of industry', its military connotations as a store of weapons and ammunition might well have raised anxieties among investors regarding the instability of the continent. His fourth point therefore confronted, head on, the reality of war in the region.[31]

'War unfortunately exists, at the moment, between Peru and Chile,' he admitted, 'but its termination before the operations of the Company are carried into effect, is anticipated with every certainty.' Whatever the circumstances, however, 'from the neutral character, as well as from the peculiar privileges of the Company, there is no reason to apprehend any interference on the part of the respective Governments.' Indeed, he argued, because local vessels would be most likely diverted for military purposes, the purely mercantile role of the Company's vessels would mean that 'the pecuniary receipts of the Company would be little, if at all affected by the war'.[32]

Finally, the decrees issued by the respective states provided for the establishment of hulks 'for the reception of coal, provisions, water, and cargo'. These retired ships 'will greatly facilitate the despatch and convenience of the steamers; and by having the supplies afloat, a greater degree of independence in their operations, and of economy in the arrangements will be attained'.[33]

Taken together, then, these five points –relating to fuel supply, security at sea, repair and maintenance, political instability on land, and independence of servicing and provisions in major ports – offered investors as much reassurance as Wheelwright had within his power. He therefore concluded on a note of high optimism for the success of the project and the fulfilment of its promises: 'Nature thus seems to have intended for steam navigation that great line of coast, the physical difficulties of which oppose an almost insurmountable barrier to any other mode of prompt communication.'[34]

Within two weeks of Wheelwright's manifesto of promise, *The Times* offered a favourable report on the latest developments. Not only had

the republican states of Chile and Peru 'conferred upon Mr William Wheelwright, the father, we believe, of the company [...] a 10 years' monopoly of steam navigation', but the British Government had now granted a charter to his steamboat company for navigation on the Pacific coast of South America. The columnist also observed that coast charts showed some 35 ports along the seaboard from Panama to Valparaiso, a direct distance of over 2,500 miles. Inland communication, he noted, 'is everywhere difficult and expensive; and communication by sailing vessels is rendered most tedious by the continual prevalence of the light south wind and the long calms on the Pacific. These, often insuperable difficulties, are no impediments to steamers.'[35]

During the previous year, the *Nautical Magazine*'s 'Naval chronicle' section published a summary, much of it echoing Wheelwright's own phrases, entitled 'Steam navigation in the Pacific'. It highlighted the ten-year 'exclusive privilege' granted to Wheelwright by Chile and Peru 'to navigate by steam' with the same present and future 'exemptions and privileges allowed [...] to national merchant vessels'. The article affirmed that '[e]veryone who has visited the "Pacific" shores of South America, between Valparaiso and Panama, knows full well that it would be difficult to find another part of the world so admirably calculated for steam navigation'. It noted that the proposed twice-monthly calls at some 18 intermediate ports would impart 'new life and vigour to a hitherto dull and inactive trade' and in addition cited Wheelwright's figure of 92,000 sheets of British and European correspondence passing annually through Panama.[36]

The Times article also included the full text of Fitzroy's letter to Wheelwright. Fitzroy endorsed the Wheelwright project as promising 'a very important saving of time in communicating with Peru and Chili [sic], together with a regularity of intercourse which cannot fail to cause a vast augmentation of trade, as well as a material improvement in the state of those countries.' To these ends, the existence of 'a sufficient supply of fuel, smooth sea, a regular trade wind, and a great number of safe ports extremely easy of access' appeared to be the key to the 'successful accomplishment' of the project. Thus Fitzroy's authoritative endorsement was made public in Britain's leading national newspaper for all potential investors to see for themselves.[37] In fact, an article entitled 'The Beagle's voyage' had recently been published (taken in abridged form from the *Geographical Society Transactions*) in the *Nautical Magazine*. There Fitzroy had stated that '[S]team navigation may render the numerous interior passages [on the Chilean coast from the north end of the country to the eastern entrance to the Straits] useful.'[38]

A week later, however, an anonymous letter to *The Times* denounced Wheelwright's prospectus as speculative humbug. While 'laid before the public in a very plausible shape', the plan was designed to induce 'some of the seagulls and land-boobies to embark their surplus capital in a steam company called the Pacific Steam-navigation Company'. The critic identified several specific weaknesses. First, he asked 'how are steamers of 400 or 500 tons, with heavy machinery, to get round Cape Horn without being torn to atoms by the incessant gales – constantly blowing off that headland.' Second, he alleged that anyone 'must be demented who would place any confidence in a [South American] Government whose public and private engagements with foreigners have been stamped with the basest perfidy.' And third, he drew readers' attention to the unhealthy climate of the isthmus of Panama and reminded potential investors of the ill-starred Darien scheme almost a century and a half earlier when shipwreck, war and disease wreaked havoc on Scottish colonists and impoverished Scotland's economy for decades to come. On the other hand, he appeared to admit that if the 'plan of cutting a ship canal across the Isthmus of Panama can ever be accomplished, it will contribute largely to civilise the immense continent of South America, at present inhabited by a hoard of semi-barbarians'.[39]

Wheelwright and an anonymous 'Merchant' both seized the opportunity to crush a range of actual and potential criticisms. The 'Merchant' pointed out that outward-bound steamers would not have to round Cape Horn but would instead avoid 'all risk' and save time and distance by passing through the Magellan Straits in a couple of days. For his part, Wheelwright asserted that steamers with heavy machinery 'have heretofore doubled Cape Horn as well as the Cape of Good Hope'. Both correspondents countered the critic's mistrust of the South American governments. 'It is true they have not paid their debts, and it is true that at the commencement of their revolutionary war many cases of undue interference with foreign property arose,' Wheelwright admitted before delivering, with the 'disinterested' authority of a United States citizen, a rhetorical *coup de grace*. 'But when we consider [...] that for many years back British and foreign property [...] has been invariably respected – when we know that the trade under this security goes on yearly increasing – when we bear in mind that a British squadron, in case of need, is always ready to afford protection to British interests – and when, in conclusion, we can announce that the company's vessels will sail under the *British* flag, and that the *British* Government will be ready to give cordial support and every due assistance when required to the undertaking, [...] it will be admitted that the fears [...] are exaggerated and unreasonable.'[40]

PSNC's Prospectus named eight directors of the Pacific Steam Navigation Company, including the Hon P. Campbell Scarlett; Captain Horatio T. Austin, RN; George Brown and J. Todd Naylor. Scarlett's older brother Robert, as an MP, had been largely instrumental in winning Government approval for the Company's Royal Charter which released prospective shareholders from the risk of unlimited liability. Captain Austin had acquired expertise in commanding some of the Royal Navy's earliest steam vessels (discussed below) while Brown was also closely involved in establishing the new West Indies Royal Mail Steam Packet Company. Todd Naylor, based in Liverpool, alone seems to have represented interests outside the capital. The family firm of Naylor, Boardman and Company, merchants, were strongly connected with South America and Frederick Boardman had been closely involved in promoting the project in Valparaiso.[41]

Constructing credibility: seamanship and showmanship

Captain George Peacock, PSNC's first commander and second superintendent, was not only a master of showmanship but also of seamanship, navigation, surveying, salvage and engineering practice. Born in 1805 as the son of a Devon shipmaster and shipowner, George acquired his extensive maritime expertise through his father's ships trading to the Mediterranean and east coast of South America. In 1826, for example, he kept a meticulous log of the brig *Fanny* on a voyage from Liverpool to Naples, Messina and back while serving as chief mate under his father, Captain Richard Peacock. Two years later he entered naval service as second master of the steam vessel *Echo* (a ten-gun brig) which he later described as the 'first S. S. that ever hoisted a Pennant under the Admiralty'. Again he maintained a meticulous log of the vessel's activities which included surveying the Thames estuary. He also recorded in May 1829 that 'Mr Maudslay came on board to survey the engines'.[42] Distinguished partner in Maudslay Son and Field, Maudslay was almost certainly the means by which Peacock gained early hands-on experience working a lathe and assisting in the construction of marine engines at the Lambeth works of the famous marine engine builders.[43]

Very rapidly, Peacock not only began to align himself with steamship projectors but also built a reputation for skills and expertise in the practice of marine steam engineering. In late 1831, he wrote to Captain William Oldrey, RN, stating that he 'would take the liberty of strongly urging on His Majesty's Government to have a correct survey made of this important place [Victor Cove on the east coast of the isthmus

of Panama], which may in future times, *when steamers cover the seas*, become the high road to China and Australia'. A year later Captain Bullock, Admiralty Surveyor of the Thames, wrote to Vice Admiral Sir Thomas Hardy 'to recommend him [Peacock] for an appointment to a Steam Ship on the basis of utility, as being himself somewhat of an Engineer, and perfectly acquainted with the Steam Engine, he is likely to become very efficient in this branch of the profession.'[44]

Realising that the *Nautical Magazine* provided both naval and merchant service officers with a powerful forum for mutual communication, Peacock himself began contributing. In 1837, for instance, he published a letter detailing an experiment which he had recently conducted aboard the steamer HMS *Medea* with the intriguing title 'On propelling steam vessels without the aid of steam'. His method was to harness about three dozen crew members to the crank shaft in such a manner as to turn the paddle wheels and thus to propel the vessel within sheltered waters without the aid of tugs:

> I do not think her greatest velocity exceeded two knots [...] but of course it could not be expected this rate could be kept up for any length of time, for the labour of walking along the deck in a hot sun is alone very great, to say nothing of the hauling part of the business. [...] The men, on being asked the question, declared it to be hard work; but it must be observed that nearly all hands had been down with influenza [...] which, added to a first trial, offered great disadvantages both as to speed and labour. [...] [The system is above all] simple and economical, and I hope may be found serviceable.[45]

Peacock's other contributions to the *Nautical Magazine* reflected his service with the Royal Navy in different regions of the northern hemisphere. Thus in 1838, he gave an account of his salvage of the sailing ship *Andrew White* which had gone down in the St Lawrence at Quebec. The magazine also printed a notice concerning the award of a Royal Humane Society Silver Medal to Peacock for rescuing a boatswain's son who had accidentally fallen overboard at Sheerness. In 1838–39, he reported on the work of the survey aboard HMS *Andromache* of Pictou roads and harbour in Nova Scotia. The following year he published both an evaluation of a new design of ship's anchor and a practical description of how to refloat a naval vessel which had run aground on a rock.[46]

Throughout this period Peacock's career in the Royal Navy seemed set fair. In addition to his growing list of contributions to the *Nautical Magazine*, he had received a gift of 'two elegant gold snuff boxes' from

the kings of Bavaria and Greece for navigating them in the Adriatic and the archipelago in the winter of 1835 and a 'handsome donation for surveying, buoying and beaconing the harbours of Charlotte Town and Three Rivers P.[rince] E.[dward] I.[sland]'.[47] His commander on HMS *Medea*, Horatio Austin, had written to him in 1835 to express his view that Peacock's 'zealous professional conduct should not be passed over' without expressing 'the great satisfaction you have at all times afforded me as also the high opinion I entertain of you'.[48] Reporting to the Admiralty in the same year, Austin lavished praise on Peacock's skills and attainments, including his general trustworthiness as a pilot: 'Most trustworthy in every way – I have never hesitated to enter a port without a pilot, which he had visited before.'[49]

What Austin had described as Peacock's 'zealous career', however, came to an abrupt halt in the winter of 1839–40 after he failed to obtain an appointment to HMS *Blenheim* on China service. The ostensible reason for the rejection was youth and want of experience. Privately, he later expressed himself 'disgusted with the Royal Naval service' and felt badly treated by the Admiralty generally '*for want of influential political friends*.' The correct sequence of events seems to be that Peacock retained his command of HMS *Andromache* until the Admiralty refused to grant him leave of absence to command the first PSNC steamer, the *Peru*, on her passage to Valparaiso. Only then did he resign his commission in mid-February 1840.[50]

Captain Austin, recently appointed a PSNC Director, constituted, along with Wheelwright, the Line's committee overseeing construction of the first two steamers.[51] Early in January 1840, Austin informed Peacock of two opportunities for an ambitious ship master in commercial service. First, the world's largest steamer, the *President*, was due to make her maiden transatlantic crossing from Liverpool that summer. Austin therefore advised Peacock to come 'to town speedily' in order to call 'privately on Mr [Macgregor] Laird, the acting director of the Transatlantic Steam Company in London'. Were Laird to tell his visitor that 'the "President" has no captain appointed', Austin expressed his view that 'by memorializing the Company, they will accept your service'. Failing that, Peacock should 'wait on Mr Wheelwright at the office of the Pacific Navigation Company [...] who will be happy of your services'. The communication also made clear that Captain Austin was 'extremely anxious that some such command may speedily be entrusted to you for which purpose you may command all his [Austin's] influence'.[52]

Fortunately for Peacock, he was not appointed to the short-lived *President*. In submitting his letter to the PSNC Directors, however, he

offered his services 'for the command of one of your Transatlantic Steam Ships'. In an apologetic reply, Wheelwright included his pamphlet and the Company prospectus and made clear that the proposed four new ships 'will be confined to the coasts of the Pacific. The Royal Mail will meet us at Chagres [...]'.[53] Before long, Peacock was appointed master of the *Peru* and the Line's second superintendent.

The Times of 8 July 1840 carried a full report of the *Peru's* 'experimental trip' – clearly intended to impress investors – down the River Thames and back to Blackwall. On board were nearly 200 invited guests including the Earl of Wiltshire; Sir Thomas Cochrane, RN; PSNC chairman George Brown; vice-chairman the Honourable Peter Campbell Scarlett and 'many merchants of London connected with the steam navigation of the Empire'. Entertainment during the trip consisted of an 'elegant *déjeuner à la fourchette*'. Upon their return from this display of steam power, a 'splendid dinner', presided over by the Chairman, awaited the honoured guests at the West India Tavern. *The Times* therefore hailed the advent of the two steamers as 'an era in the history of steam navigation' and a contribution 'in no little degree to civilise the inhabitants and restore good government' in the region.[54]

Within days the *Peru* left the Thames and, after one final call at Plymouth to pick up passengers and mails, set a course for Rio de Janeiro. Early in September *The Times* published an extract from Peacock's highly optimistic report of the first two weeks out. A day or so after leaving Plymouth, the captain ordered both engines to be stopped and the first trial of sailing to begin. The vessel's rolling in the heavy ocean swell prompted Peacock to lower the very tall funnel which, 'when down in the chock, lies within the level of the paddle-box [life]boats, and at a distance would resemble a long midship gun'. The hinged design, reflecting 'the highest credit on Messrs. Miller, Ravenhill, and Co. [the engine builders]' kept the funnel out of the way of working the square mainsail and also facilitated cleaning soot. In the greatest run under sail alone, Peacock reported, the *Peru* ran 225 miles in 24 hours. Under steam, he asserted, we 'only consume half a ton of coal per hour on the average', or about 12 tons per day. The passengers, he insisted, continually expressed themselves 'very contented, happy, and comfortable' while the vessel had enjoyed 'a most prosperous voyage, answering in every respect my most sanguine expectations'.[55]

At Rio the *Peru* rendezvoused with the *Chile* which had left Falmouth in late June. The two steamers then headed for the Straits of Magellan. At Port Famine, part way through the Straits, the two ships anchored

to take on water and wood fuel. Their stay coincided with the anniversary of Chilean independence. Captain Peacock seized the opportunity to celebrate simultaneously both the political event and the advent of practical steam navigation on the Pacific:

> I erected a beacon 25 feet high on the height of Santa Anna, depositing underneath it a manuscript parchment roll, descriptive of the particulars of each vessel. Length of passage, consumption of fuel, &c., together with several British coins of the present year. We then hoisted the Chilian [sic] ensign, and saluted it with three cheers; at sunset we lowered it, gave three cheers for the Pacific Steam Navigation Company, and returned on board, leaving the beacon a conspicuous seamark for the harbour, and a firmly fixed monument, commemorative of the triumph of steam in this part of the world.[56]

Entering the Pacific, the two steamers found themselves separated by heavy weather but ten days later rendezvoused at Talcahuano in Chile. Following a refit, Peacock ordered steam up using a small quantity of local coal obtained from the foot of a precipice. Judging it inferior to Welsh steam coal, he nevertheless reported no difficulty in keeping up the steam. At the same time, he arranged for the ship's surgeon and the British consul to accompany a Polish geologist, Lololscky, who was in the service of the Chilean government to examine coal formations in various other locations along the coast. Their report, claimed Peacock, 'establishes the fact of the existence of coal suitable in every respect for steam navigation'.[57]

Heading north for some 25 hours, the ships were met in the approach to Valparaiso by a boat carrying a letter from the Liverpool merchants Naylor, Boardman and Company, PSNC agents in the Chilean port. 'We beg leave to inform you,' the letter read, 'that his Excellency the Governor of Valparaiso, being desirous that your entrance into this port should be as conspicuous as possible, has commissioned the bearer of this, Mr ES Scott, to wait upon you, and to request that you will be off and on until a signal be hoisted at the lighthouse on the point; whereupon a procession of two lines of boats, decked with flags, will leave the harbour to receive and welcome you, between which [two lines] you may enter.' Mr Scott also provided Peacock with 'a plan of the bay and shipping, and programme of our proceedings'.[58]

Captain Peacock eagerly seized the opportunity for a grand pageant. While awaiting the signal, he hoisted the Chilean ensign, honoured it with a 21-gun salute, and 'performed various evolutions with both

vessels'. Proceeding towards the breakwater (or mole), the two steamers passed in line ahead formation between the British naval flagship HMS *President* and the Chilean flagship *Chili*. The crews of each vessel occupied the rigging in traditional fashion as further royal salutes took place from the guns of various ships:

> We then swept round within a few fathoms of the mole-end, and passed between a line of boats, with bands of music and decked with flags, lying off the beach [...] [and] thence threaded our way in and out the different merchant-vessels, which were ornamented with flags, receiving their cheers, and around the sterns of the men-of-war [...] the shores and every house [...] being lined with spectators, who kept up a continual cheering and waving of handkerchiefs; in short, this reception far exceeded our most distant or sanguine expectations, and I only regret that the worthy projector of the enterprise, Mr Wheelwright, was not present to witness this gratifying display of enthusiasm; all the public offices were closed, shops shut, and business suspended.[59]

Nor did this display end the programme of ceremonies. Peacock promised his readers that on the forthcoming Sunday 'his Excellency the Governor, Admiral Ross, and other public functionaries, with their families, honour us with a visit'. His own plan was therefore to get steam up and give them a turn around the bay. Moreover, 'as we have not had a salute from champagne for a long time, I do not think we can have a better opportunity of so doing'. The PSNC 'fleet' had arrived, their passage from England giving, in Wheelwright's words, 'greater confidence in the Steamers'.[60]

Although such a 'gratifying display of enthusiasm' was by itself no guarantee of a steamship line's long-term prosperity, Peacock never lost an opportunity to promote in the columns of *The Times* the 'historic' character of steam navigation in the service of the Empire and the world. His showmanship served several purposes. For the benefit of the local populations, and especially a variety of public functionaries from the Governor down, the display demonstrated both the practical working of steam – following an ocean voyage of several thousand miles – *and* its capacity to perform in ways unknown to traditional sail. But the coming of the PSNC was about far more than simply the arrival of two ships. Rather, it represented that major shift from the old to the new so desired by friends of what was seen as European progress. Don Vicente Rocafuerte, Governor at Ecuador's port of Guayaquil and

former Mexican ambassador in London, wrote to Peacock in Spanish in 1841:

> It is a happy event [that you discovered] [...] a mine of coal [and deposits of guano on the Island of Amortajado] whilst looking for the most eligible spot to erect a lighthouse, and this new discovery is a certain evidence of the calculations that have served as a basis for the execution of that noble and grand enterprise Steam Navigation in the Pacific, and also contributes well to secure the future interest of the Company, and to promote the progress of science and commerce in general. Steam Navigation being secured in the Pacific as it now is [...] has brought Europe and America nearer together, and has placed the secret and marvellous treasures of nature – that lie hidden in this part of the new world – under the telescope and immediate investigation of the learned men of Europe.[61]

For the benefit of investing publics back in Britain, on the other hand, publication of Peacock's accounts not only reassured readers of the viability of such a project, but of its triumphant inauguration and high symbolic promise as the bringer of British cultural and commercial values to this continent recently 'liberated' from repressive Spanish rule.

When one of the steamers almost foundered, Peacock demonstrated both his own practical expertise and his invaluable capacity to turn a potential disaster for PSNC into a triumph. Towards the end of his life, Peacock published a concise and vivid account of this episode. In early June 1841 the *Peru*, under his command, was approaching Valparaiso after a passage from Callao and *intermedios*. Lying on the beach was the stricken *Chile*, her steam engines running day and night to pump water out of the injured hull. Peacock quickly learnt that she had struck and 'jumped over' the Quintero Reef near the port during a 'heavy norther', the strong north wind most feared by seafarers in that part of the Pacific.[62]

The engineer had immediately shut off the seacocks and instead used the engines to draw condensing water from the bilges, thereby also acting as pumps. This action allowed the master, whose first voyage in command it was, to reach port where the only option to save the ship was to run her bow first on to the beach. Peacock handed over his own vessel to his chief officer and 'took the unfortunate "Chile" in hand'. Having first partly sealed the casualty by placing a sail under her bottom, he refloated her before organising the removal of the engines. Once lightened, he then sealed all the above-water openings prior to

using sheerlegs mounted on deck to heel (or 'heave down') the vessel until the damaged part of the keel and bilges could be repaired. Using 'a preparation of mashed tallow candles, wipings and ashes', Peacock directed his men to 'plaster up' the damaged timbers and plank over the fractured bilges. Finally, they built a watertight bulkhead across the forward end of the vessel from keelson to forecastle deck and replaced the engines.[63]

In the absence of a dry dock at either Valparaiso or Callao, and in view of the very small tidal range which meant that even a vessel beached at high tide would not be high and dry at low tide, the nearest port for permanent repairs, Guayaquil, lay more than 2,000 miles to the north. Peacock's plan involved steaming the *Chile* 'close alongshore, ready to beach should the rocks fall out which were still sticking to her bottom'. But the crew understandably baulked at the very notion. Only when Peacock agreed to tow a large cargo launch filled with provisions and water did the vessel leave Valparaiso. On the first night, however, 'it came on to blow from the southward with a heavy sea, and we lost the launch'. True to his promise, the steamer arrived safely at her destination to be 'thoroughly repaired under my own eye'.[64]

This later account accurately mirrored Peacock's contemporary report of the salvage in the form of a letter to the *Nautical Magazine* in 1842 as well as a detailed memorandum and testimonial from over 30 Valparaiso merchants addressed to Peacock in September 1842. Peacock's *Nautical Magazine* contribution focused on the techniques he deployed to heave down the vessel. Enhancing within the maritime community his own reputation for trustworthiness in the face of adversity, he concluded his letter by pronouncing that 'the Company is in a very flourishing state'. Since leaving England, he claimed, the *Peru* had steamed over 50,000 miles and grossed $120,000 dollars (about £24,000) over 14 months, 'a most excellent beginning'. 'I think we shall do even better yet,' he promised, 'but we want more steamers, and larger ones. It is one of the soundest speculations ever proposed, and although we had a thousand difficulties to contend with, things are now looking well, and people have the greatest confidence in steam. It is a delightful coast for steamers.'[65]

Sustaining credibility: 'An uncompromising adherence to punctuality'

The 'delightful coast for steamers', however, continued to pose 'a thousand difficulties' for the Line which had come within a hair's breadth of losing half its fleet with the damage to the *Chile*. While Fitzroy had

confidently proclaimed in 1838 that the west coast possessed good quality steam coal in abundance together with a 'smooth sea, a regular trade wind, and a great number of safe ports extremely easy of access',[66] these promises now began to sound hollow. All of the 'difficulties', moreover, had a direct bearing on confidence and trust in the regularity and reliability of the service, that is, in those features deemed to make steamship travel superior to sail. PSNC's Minutes of 1842 contained the following directive to its officers:

> The service which the vessels of this Company have to perform is, in itself, a combination requiring the greatest punctuality in their arrival at the different ports at which they have to touch, so as to establish the certainty that passengers who may be induced to travel long journies [sic] from the interior to join the steamers will not be detained at ports where scarcely any accommodation exists for them. *It is therefore evident that the necessity for an uncompromising adherence to punctuality in the departure of the vessels on the days on which they have been previously advertised to sail is paramount to every other consideration.*[67]

The Court therefore directed the Board of Council (responsible for decisions on the west coast) not to sanction any delays 'except on the *most urgent grounds*'. In such cases, the Board was required to transmit to the Court in London 'the fullest explanation of the circumstances', together with supporting documents. It further directed that neither Chief or Second Superintendent nor any other Company officer was to delay a steamer on his own authority, 'the consequences of which can only be a general derangement of the service'.[68]

Derangements to the systematic working of the line, and thus to passenger and investors' confidence in it, came from a variety of directions. One problem concerned inaccurate charts. In 1841, the *Nautical Magazine* announced the availability of a new set of charts (some 15 sheets with ports and roadsteads) for the west coast of South America based on Fitzroy's surveys with HMS *Beagle*. But only in June 1842, a full year after the *Chile* grounding, did PSNC directors order that 'a complete set of new charts of the Pacific Coast, including the Gulf of Guayaquil, be sent to the Chief Superintendent [Wheelwright] for the service of the steamers'.[69]

The principal difficulties, however, related to fuel supplies. Wheelwright's explorations around the Callao region had failed to find coal. Sailing ships took British coal to the Company's depots on the west Coast but the voyage was fraught with the storms of Cape Horn and the

very calms that the steamers had been designed to overcome. Peacock meanwhile reassured interested *Nautical Magazine* readers that he had effectively organised coal mining operations in Chile:

> The coal mine I am working is yielding beautifully. We have now several thousand yards of galleries, and got out nearly 4,000 tons, which answers our purpose very well, as the coal does not cost us more than three dollars per ton. I never tried my hand at this work before, but having resided some years at Sunderland, I found my little knowledge there acquired very serviceable. We have likewise to teach the natives how to work it, for no mine had ever been worked there before. I left one of my stokers as foreman of the work, with directions how to proceed, and as he is rather an intelligent man, we are going ahead famously. I am now building a pier, and making a railway from the mouth of the mine to the extremity of it, so as to save carriage by bullocks, which is very expensive.[70]

The fuel had nevertheless still to be shipped hundreds of miles north to Callao and other ports. Moreover, the problems of quality remained. Valerie Fifer cites an engineer's recollection of a night on the *Chile*, Valparaiso-bound, with Wheelwright and Peacock on board. With Talcahuano coal in the furnaces, the steamer lost power. Wheelwright and Peacock, together with the engineers, worked all night long 'experimenting with different quantities of coal and methods of firing, and making adjustments to the ventilation of the furnaces. It was a sight to see Mr Wheelwright, in his shirt sleeves, his face shining with perspiration, giving the example and working like a stoker, together with his earnest and persevering colleague, Peacock'. By dawn, the vessel was making way again and 'Talcahuano coal had passed the test' [71]

Captain Peacock, resourceful and inventive as always, later considered the potential for vastly more economical arrangements of motive power, initially in the form of auxiliary steamers with a radical departure from paddle wheels *and* screw propellers. As a result of long lonely hours observing and measuring the impressive dynamics of dolphins riding the bow wave of the 9–10 knot Pacific steamers he commanded, he attempted to imitate their tail actions by suggesting a mechanical propulsion arrangement similar to the action of 'sculling' a small boat with a single oar over the stern. The suggestion, however, does not seem to have proceeded any further.[72]

The *Chile* saga had also highlighted the deficiencies at the principal ports for repairs and maintenance. By the end of 1843, PSNC had an engineering works or 'factory' at Callao 'for the purpose of performing on shore such engineering work as cannot be done at sea, and for the object of keeping employed in the service of the Company a sufficient number of engineers so as to guard against casualties in this department by which the voyages of the steamers might be interrupted'. The chief engineer, with immediate charge of the establishment, received £280 per annum (plus £30 for maintenance) which compared favourably with about £200 for a first engineer, £270 per annum for the master, or £120 for the first officer aboard the *Peru*. Engineers not required aboard the ships assisted in the work of the establishment which could take on outside work, the profits from which would be divided among the employees ashore and afloat. The factory also served as a depot both for coal and spare machinery. The Peruvian government, which had agreed to the project and received rent for the site, complained that the works were 'calculated to afford facilities for smuggling' but, despite political uncertainties and threats to its existence, the factory was deemed to be at work in December 1843.[73]

The Government's complaints were a reminder of just how fragile PSNC's relations were with the local, often unstable west coast states. Here the maintenance of trust in the correct behaviour and good intentions of the line were all important. When a Bolivian force occupied the Peruvian port of Arica in 1841, the Peruvians responded with a blockade. PSNC's Board of Council in Lima then allowed Peruvian military officers to be conveyed from Callao to Arica where they disembarked into the Peruvian squadron carrying on offensive operations. In May 1842, the PSNC Court decreed that this action 'seriously affects the neutrality of the Company's vessels'.[74]

This very sensitive issue formed the subject of a much longer internal consideration in October 1843 and prompted the Court to state for the benefit of its agents and officers:

> [...] that the peculiar position of the Company, extending, as its operations do, along the coasts of three independent Governments, and enjoying, as the Company does, in those states, the privileges of national vessels, requires the greatest caution and care should be exercised in deciding upon questions that may differently affect one Government and another, that is, by conceding any point to one that might give umbrage to the others, while it is above all other considerations requisite to preserve the neutral character of

> the Company's vessels, as upon this depends the security of the Company's property.[75]

Crucially, any violation of neutrality in support of one Government could mean that PSNC would lose the trust and confidence of the others. And the spread of mistrust could engender that much-feared derangement of the Company's operations on the west coast.

On the one hand, therefore, the Court resolved that 'a conciliatory and good feeling must be shewn [sic] towards the interests of the Governments [...] but this must be equally and impartially shewn to all; and no concession must be made to one, that would injuriously affect the other'. On the other hand, no concession must be made 'at any sacrifice to the Company's neutrality, which must be maintained by the observance of those general principles that form the basis of International Law'. The adoption, it concluded, 'of any different course would preclude the Company from obtaining the support of the British Government in establishing a claim for any grievances it might sustain'.[76]

In managing its internal affairs PSNC had to communicate at an immense distance, without telegraphy, to and from the Pacific coast – where a Board of Council consisting of superintendents, Company officials, agents and captains met to approve local decisions – and the London Headquarters – where the Court of Directors met. PSNC Directors in London attempted to manage distance by insisting on receipt of abstracts of ships' logs giving voyage details and engine performance. In the summer of 1843, for instance, the *Chile* touched a rock in the approach to Valparaiso but this time escaped without damage. Although the PSNC Court exonerated the first officer, it criticised him for failing to communicate 'without a moment's delay' the occurrence to the Court by inserting the 'particulars in the abstract of his log transmitted with the other documents relating to that particular voyage'.[77]

As a result of this incident, the Court gave stern instructions to Commanders that they must follow this procedure in all similar cases, especially because 'the absence of such communications [...] [is] productive of the greatest evil, as, in such cases, it almost invariably happens that, either through the public newspapers, or through private channels, *exaggerated statements* are transmitted, which the Court, when not in possession of official information [...] is utterly unable to correct or contradict'.[78] Thus when an accident occurred, however minor in terms of physical damage, confidence in the line might be seriously damaged among the travelling and investing publics if untrustworthy accounts of the incident took on a life of their own in the European press.

The superintendents, Wheelwright and Peacock, were, as shipmasters and gentlemen, the very embodiment of trustworthiness. Peacock in particular received the approval of the Court for his 'zealous and extraordinary exertions in promoting the interests of the Company on every opportunity'.[79] But even they came under fire for alleged irregularities of conduct as the directors tried to reassert their authority amid a rapidly deteriorating financial performance. On one occasion, for example, Peacock drew up a report of the proceedings of a Board of Council meeting in Lima. The directors subsequently discovered that the Board had *never actually met*. 'Such irregularities,' the Court declared, 'were calculated to shake the confidence which the Court was disposed to place in their Officers.'[80] On another occasion, Wheelwright was censured for violating directors' special orders to hold a Company vessel until Colonel NH Nugent, sent out as a financial agent by the Court to take charge of accounts in Callao, arrived in Panama from Britain. As a result, Nugent remained stranded at Panama for several weeks.[81] These episodes were symptomatic of a serious and developing breakdown of trust between Wheelwright and the directors in London.

Despite Peacock's continuing optimism on all fronts, the Company was far from flourishing financially in these early years. PSNC's first annual meeting in London in the autumn of 1843 heard the grim news that the Line was £111,630 in debt, that the two steamers had together shown a loss of over £13,500, that insufficient shares had been taken up, and that substantial loans had been taken out from bankers Overend Gurney and the Royal Exchange Assurance Company. The directors outlined plans, based on a form of preference shares, for a belated third steamer but nothing came of the proposal for another two years.[82] Meanwhile, relations between Wheelwright and the directors deteriorated to the point where Wheelwright felt unable even to visit the Company offices. In October, the directors resolved, without further explanation, 'that Mr Wheelwright be dismissed and removed from the agency and management of the Pacific Steam Navigation Company'.[83]

Wheelwright fought back with a printed pamphlet aimed at shareholders. He indicted the directors for unnecessary expense. By building the two steamers of wood on the Thames rather than iron on the Mersey, £6,000 had been added to the project. By purchasing coal at high prices, some £23,000 had been added to operating costs during the first two years. The accident to the *Chile* had lost the Line an additional £9,000 in revenue, especially as there was no reserve steamer. It was a powerful case against an improvident London management from a man who had worked hard on the Pacific coast along with Peacock

and others to render PSNC as trustworthy a line of steamers as it was humanly possible to make it. As a result of this appeal, he was reinstated as chief superintendent.[84]

By the time of the second annual meeting in December 1844, accumulated losses had risen to over £72,000. A month later the directors resigned. The Scarlett family played a major role in forming a new board and by the spring of 1845 the Company had been reconstituted in Liverpool with most of the directors drawn from the local commercial and mercantile communities, including Frederick Boardman of Naylor, Boardman and Company. Symptomatic of the geographical proximity of some of the new Liverpool-based shipowners, PSNC's office in Fenwick Street was located in the same building as that of the fledgling Lamport and Holt.[85]

Wheelwright, appointed joint managing director from the end of 1845, negotiated a British mail contract worth £20,000 per annum for five years covering some 12 ports on the coast between Valparaiso and Panama (where the mails would arrive across the isthmus from Royal Mail Steam Packet Company ships at Chagres on the Caribbean).[86] Captain Peacock, having overseen the inauguration of the west coast mail service between Valparaiso and Panama, returned to Britain at the end of 1846. Two years later he took up a new post, first as dock master and from 1848 superintendent, of Southampton docks, home port for the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company fleet. There he 'had the satisfaction of aiding and assisting in the despatch of HM Mails, by night and by day, *to and from all parts of the world*' as well as ensuring the safe arrival or departure of Queen Victoria, other royalty and members of the cabinet to and from Her Majesty's residence at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight.[87]

Conclusion

'We never make mistakes'. As master of irony and critic of progress, Conrad knew full well the limitations, and dangers, of such claims at every level of human life, not least in matters of ships and the sea. The rise of PSNC from a struggling two-steamer enterprise to one of the British Empire's leading steamship lines by the early 1870s was not a story of inexorable development. Nor should it be written as though the early protagonists were simply holding the enterprise together in the expectation of inevitable technological progress which would deliver more efficient motive power. What we have in this study is, on the contrary, a history of human beings rather than prophetic geniuses. Neither William Wheelwright nor George Peacock (nor any of the other actors) should be credited with prophetic vision. Wheelwright's vision

was neither more nor less than a set of promises which he and his associates set out to make happen. In attempting to realise those visions and fulfil those promises, they were, as human beings, as prone to failures as much as successes. The historian's task is to analyse their, and their contemporaries', representation and readings of those failures and successes and thus to enrich our understanding of Victorian maritime empires. Therein lies a major key to writing credible maritime history.

Notes

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1. [Anon.], 'Steam Navigation', *Nautical Magazine* 11 (1842), 62–64, 62.
2. Joseph Conrad, *Nostromo. A Tale of the Seaboard* (London: Folio Society, 1996), pp. 34–35, 37.
3. N. R. P. Bonsor, *North Atlantic Seaway: an Illustrated History of the Passenger Services Linking the Old World with the New* 5 vols, (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1975–80), vol. 2, p. 732.
4. Edwin Hodder, *Sir George Burns, Bart. His Times and Friends* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1890), p. 301.
5. Conrad, *Nostromo*, p. 36.
6. Ibid., pp. 31, 35.
7. Ibid., esp. pp. 36, 89, 132, 161.
8. David J. Clarke, 'The Development of a Pioneering Steamship Line: William Wheelwright and the Origins of the Pacific Steam Navigation Company', *International Journal of Maritime History* 20, (2008), 221–50, pp. 221–22, 228–29, 236–38, 245, 248.
9. Ben Marsden and Crosbie Smith, *Engineering Empires. A Cultural History of Technology in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 27–33.
10. Michael P. Winship, 'Wheelwright, John (1592?-1679)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/66155, accessed 26 Feb 2010].
11. J. Valerie Fifer, *William Wheelwright. Steamship and Railroad Pioneer. Yankee Enterprise in the Development of South America* (Newburyport, MA: Historical Society of Old Newbury, 1998), pp. 24, 132.
12. [J.B. Alberdi], 'Founder of the PSNC Life of William the Conqueror', *Sea Breezes*, 2, (1920–21), 330–32, 367–69; Ibid., 3, (1921–22), 19–20, 57–60,

98–9, 135–36, 170–71, 212–13, 254–55, 295–97, 326–28 (translated for *Sea Breezes*, the PSNC's magazine, from J. B. Alberdi, *La vida y los trabajos industriales de William Wheelwright en la América del Sud* (Paris: Garnier Hermanos, 1876). See also Isabel Rivers, 'Watts, Isaac (1674–1748)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28888, accessed 10 Oct 2008]. Watts was an independent minister and author of such hymns as 'O God, our help in ages past', 'Jesus shall reign where'er the sun', 'When I survey the wondrous cross' and 'There is a land of pure delight'. He also had strong links with New England.

13. Arthur C. Wardle, *Steam Conquers the Pacific: A Record of Maritime Achievement, 1840–1940* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940), pp. 13–14; Fifer, *Wheelwright*, pp. 7–24.
14. Wardle, *Steam Conquers the Pacific*, pp. 15–20; Fifer, *Wheelwright*, pp. 34–42.
15. See [George Peacock (ed.)], *Official Correspondence, Certificates of Service, and Testimonials of Mr George Peacock, F.R.G.S. Formerly a Master in the Royal Navy of 1835* (printed for private circulation among his friends, 1859), pp. 84–87. This is an excerpt from Hadfield's work on Brazil and the River Plate (1852).
16. G.F.R. Barker, 'Scarlett, James, first Baron Abinger (1769–1844)', rev Elisabeth A. Cawthon, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) [http://oxforddnb.com/view/article/24783, accessed 5 Nov 2008].
17. Ibid.
18. Wendy Hinde, *George Canning* (London: Collins, 1973), p. 368; Alan Knight, 'Britain and Latin America', in Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume III. The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 122–45, citation at p. 122. Knight evaluates the significance of Canning's claim in relation to subsequent Latin American history and its historians.
19. C. A. Harris, 'Scarlett, Peter Campbell,' rev H. C. G. Matthew, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) [http://oxforddnb.com/view/article/24786, accessed 5 Nov 2008]. For mention of the meeting of Scarlett and Wheelwright see Wardle, *Steam Conquers the Pacific*, p. 20.
20. *The Times*, 6 February 1838, p. 6. The work was published as P. C. Scarlett, *South America and the Pacific* 2 vols, (London: Henry Colburn, 1838).
21. [William Wheelwright], *Statements and Documents Relative to the Establishment of Steam Navigation in the Pacific with Copies of the Decrees of the Governments of Peru, Bolivia, and Chile, Granting Exclusive Privileges to the Undertaking* (London: privately published, 1838), pp. 3–4.
22. Ibid., pp. 4–5.
23. Ibid., pp. 5–6.
24. Ibid., pp. 32–36.
25. Ibid., facing p. 36.
26. Ibid., pp. 7–8.
27. Ibid., pp. 8–9.
28. Ibid., pp. 8–9.
29. Ibid., pp. 9–10, 12–13.
30. Ibid., pp. 9–10.

31. Ibid., p. 10.
32. Ibid., 10–11. See Fifer, *Wheelwright*, p. 42 on the war between Chile and the Peru-Bolivia Confederation.
33. Ibid., p. 11.
34. Ibid., p. 12.
35. *The Times*, 8 November 1838, p. 5. I thank Ben Marsden for the phrase 'manifesto of promise'.
36. 'Steam Navigation in the Pacific,' *Nautical Magazine* 6, (1837), 255–56.
37. *The Times*, 8 November 1838, p. 5.
38. 'The Beagle's Voyage', *Nautical Magazine* 6, (1837), pp. 24–31, 97–100, esp. p. 30.
39. *The Times*, 16 November 1838, p. 5.
40. Ibid., 21 November 1838, p. 3.
41. [Wheelwright], 'Prospectus' in *Steam Navigation in the Pacific*, p. 1; Wardle, *Steam Conquers the Pacific*, pp. 22–23.
42. George Peacock, 'Log of the Brig Fanny on a Voyage from Liverpool to Naples and Messina and back', and 'Log of the Proceedings of H. M. Steam Vessel Echo kept by George Peacock Secd Master June 1828', 387 PEA 1/1, Peacock papers, Liverpool Record Office. See also Peta Ree, 'Peacock, George (1805–1883),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21674, accessed 16 May 2008].
43. Wardle, *Steam Conquers the Pacific*, p. 29. Wardle also claims that Peacock served as a stoker and junior engineer on the pleasure steamer *Favourite* between London and Margate.
44. George Peacock to Captain William Oldrey, 14 November 1831 and Captain Bullock to Vice Admiral Sir Thomas Hardy, 28 December 1832, in Peacock (ed.), *Correspondence*, pp. 21–27 (emphasis added).
45. George Peacock, 'On Propelling Steam Vessels without the Aid of Steam,' *Nautical Magazine* 6, (1837), pp. 730–32.
46. George Peacock, 'Raising Sunken Vessels', *Nautical Magazine* 7 (1838), 776–78; 'Pictou Roads and Harbour, Nova Scotia', *Nautical Magazine* 8 (1838), 146–48; Ibid., 8 (1839), 146–48; Peacock, 'Rogers' Anchor,', *Nautical Magazine* 9 (1840), 447–48; Peacock, 'Naval Tactics', *Nautical Magazine* 9 (1840), 599–600. The award is recorded in *Nautical Magazine* 7 (1838), 411, 627.
47. George Peacock, 'Statement of the Services of Mr George Peacock, RN', 387 PEA 1/14, Peacock Papers, Liverpool Record Office.
48. Horatio T. Austin to George Peacock, 24 August 1835, 387 PEA/B68, Peacock Papers, Liverpool Record Office.
49. 'Report of the skills and attainments of Mr George Peacock late acting master of His Majesty's Steam Sloop Medea', 387 PEA/B2, Peacock Papers, Liverpool Record Office.
50. [Peacock (ed.)], *Correspondence*, p. 45; Peacock, *Oxford DNB*. The *DNB* article implies he resigned from the Royal Navy first and only afterwards received an offer from PSNC See also Wardle, *Steam Conquers the Pacific*, p. 30.
51. Minute, 21 February 1839, P. S. N. C. Minute Book No.1, PSNC Papers, Merseyside Maritime Museum. See also Wardle, *Steam Conquers the Pacific*, p. 31.

52. Frederick Robinson to George Peacock, 6 January 1840, 387 PEA/B2, Peacock Papers, Liverpool Record Office. Robinson was communicating on behalf of Austin.
53. George Peacock, 'Statement of the Services of Mr George Peacock, RN,' 387 PEA 1/14, Peacock Papers, Liverpool Record Office; William Wheelwright to George Peacock, 6 January 1840, in Wardle, *Steam Conquers the Pacific*, pp. 30–31. The *President* went missing with all hands out of New York early in 1841.
54. *The Times*, 9 July 1840, p. 6. Also quoted in Wardle, *Steam Conquers the Pacific*, pp. 34–36.
55. *The Times*, 7 September 1840, p. 4. Also quoted in Wardle, *Steam Conquers the Pacific*, p. 38.
56. *The Times*, 29 January 1841, p. 5. Peacock's letter was dated Valparaiso 17 October 1840.
57. Ibid., p. 5.
58. Naylor, Boardman to George Peacock, October 1840, in *The Times* 29 January 1841, p. 5.
59. Ibid. See also Wardle, *Steam Conquers the Pacific*, pp. 40–41.
60. Ibid., p. 42.
61. Vicente Rocafuerte to George Peacock, 13 November 1841, in Peacock (ed.), *Correspondence*, pp. 62–64 (translation by Peacock). Fifer, *Wheelwright*, p. 32, notes that the Government of Gran Colombia had granted a concession in 1824 to Rocafuerte for the introduction of steam navigation on Lake Maracaibo and the Guayas River.
62. George Peacock, 'The foundering of the mail steamer "American"', 387 PEA 3/28, Peacock Papers, Liverpool Record Office (published in *The Shipping and Mercantile Gazette*, 15 May 1880).
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. George Peacock, 'Pacific Steam Navigation Company's Steam-Vessel Chili,' *Nautical Magazine* 11, (1842), 413–15.
66. *The Times,* 8 November 1838, p. 5.
67. Minute, 10 August 1842, PSNC Minute Book No.1, PSNC Papers, Merseyside Maritime Museum (emphasis added).
68. Ibid., Minute, 10 August 1842.
69. *Nautical Magazine* 10, (1841), 494–95, 570; Minute, 8 June 1842, PSNC Minute Book No.1, P. S. N. C. Papers, Merseyside Maritime Museum.
70. Peacock, 'Steam-vessel Chili', pp. 413–15; Wardle, *Steam Conquers the Pacific*, p. 55; Fifer, *Wheelwright*, p. 35.
71. Wardle, *Steam Conquers the Pacific*, p. 57n.
72. George Peacock, 'Notes by 'Mr George Peacock on auxiliary steam power and on the best propellers for use in steam vessels', 387 PEA 3/11, Peacock Papers, Liverpool Record Office. Dated on board *Chile*, Pacific Ocean, 10 July 1845.
73. Minute, 20 December 1843, PSNC Minute Book No.1, PSNC Papers, Merseyside Maritime Museum.
74. Ibid., 11 May 1842.
75. Ibid., 11 October 1843.
76. Ibid., 11 October 1843.

77. Ibid., 20 December 1843.
78. Ibid., 20 December 1843 (emphasis added).
79. Ibid., 12 January 1842.
80. Ibid., 7 June 1843.
81. Ibid., 30 May 1843.
82. Wardle, *Steam Conquers the Pacific*, pp. 62–63 (finances); Minutes, 3 November 1843 (third steamer).
83. PSNC Minutes, 5 October 1843 (minute of dismissal); Wardle, *Steam Conquers the Pacific*, pp. 64–65 (letter of dismissal).
84. Wardle, *Steam Conquers the Pacific*, pp. 63–66.
85. Ibid., pp. 66, 69.
86. Ibid., pp. 69, 73.
87. Peacock (ed.), *Correspondence*, p. 12.

5

Crossing the Seas: Problems and Possibilities for Queen Victoria's Indian Subjects

Judith M. Brown

Introduction

Several years ago I stood on the shore at Cochin, an ancient port south of Bombay, and looked out across the Arabian sea towards the Arabian peninsula, and it became abundantly clear from the many craft, old and new in their design, that this was a gateway, and that the sea was a highway as much as a boundary. Many rulers of India and historians of the subcontinent have assumed that the Indian subcontinent is above all a great land mass – the size of Europe without Russia – and that control of India means control of land. This was not surprising as most premodern invaders made their way into India by land from the north. Even the British, above all a seafaring people, whose control of India depended on their global supremacy at sea, assumed that the heart of India was its villages, and that control of land and its resources, and alliances with groups who controlled those who laboured on the land, were the key to their empire. Moreover, they assumed that most Indians were a sedentary, settled people, tied to their natal villages by bonds of livelihood and emotion. Even as late as 1921 one of the most important European Indian civil servants involved in producing the decennial census that year drew on this long-held imperial assumption and noted 'the home-loving character of the Indian people, which is the result of economic and social causes, and of the immobility of an agricultural population rooted to the ground, fenced in by caste, language and social customs and filled with an innate dread of change of any kind.'[1] Mahatma Gandhi shared this image of India, arguing that the real India lay in its villages, and that renewal of village life lay at the heart of his vision of a free and moral India.[2]

By contrast, one of Gandhi's contemporaries argued that the Indian Ocean was crucial to India's economy and security, and lamented that historians had tended to ignore this, choosing to write the history of India from the perspective of Delhi and its changing dynasties.[3] We should remember that the old imperial India had a very long coastline – over eight and a half thousand kilometres.[4] It was from ports around this whole coastline that Indians had over centuries forged substantial traditions of fishing, trade, pilgrimage and overseas settlement. The *Haj* had taken Indian Muslims to the Arabian peninsula, for example; while trading communities had fashioned links with East Africa in one direction and South East Asia in the other, often creating permanent communities of their kin in these far-flung places.[5] Historians are beginning to look afresh at the importance of the Indian Ocean and to see how it acted as a mechanism to involve India and Indians in interlocking zones or circles of interaction which enabled exchanges of goods, people and ideas.[6]

This chapter examines what difference it made in the nineteenth century that India was incorporated into the world's greatest empire, the integrity and security of which was guaranteed by the British navy's control of the seas. This great strategic change in India's global position was enhanced by the coming of the steam ship in the middle of the same century, which enabled more rapid and far safer voyages for Indians around the globe.[7] Late in Victoria's reign British shipbuilders were the most advanced in the world and built two-thirds of the world's ships. Britain alone owned almost one-third of the world's tonnage. To this technological supremacy was of course added the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 which dramatically cut the travel time and distance between India and England. For example, the Plymouth-Bombay route was nearly 10,500 miles around the Cape, and was slashed to 6,000 miles via Suez. The voyage from Plymouth to Calcutta was cut by 3,670 miles by going through Suez. In the course of the Victorian century sailing times between Britain and India dropped from a possible three months by sail to about three weeks by steam ship – a fact which profoundly changed the nature of imperial rule as well as the potential for the Indian travelling public.

I focus first on changes in India arising from the fact that different sorts of people began to travel and encounter unfamiliar societies and new ideas and ideologies, thus creating wider zones of interaction and incorporating India into new intellectual global networks. Then I shall turn to changes which occurred as more Indians travelled overseas as free or semi-free workers and settlers, laying the foundation of permanent diaspora communities on every continent of the globe. Both these

developments, underpinned by Britain's imperial and naval power in the nineteenth century, have created a subcontinent of global significance which we are recognising today at the start of the twenty-first century.

India and new intellectual and cultural circles of interaction

The title of this chapter hints at the problems as well as the possibilities for Victorian Indians travelling overseas. One of these we must address head-on, as did our new sorts of Indian travellers. Muslims had no religious problems with overseas travel, and this freedom had contributed to the development of Islam as a global religion. But for Hindus, religion was intricately meshed with India as a holy land and Indian society as the one in which true religion could flourish. Deeply embedded ideas of purity and pollution which were linked into the caste division of society meant that high caste Hindus were deeply troubled by the idea of crossing the sea, as it was thought to be polluting. This issue had caused disturbance in the Indian army before the mutiny of 1857. Even as ideas of social reform permeated Indian higher castes, there remained conservative sections who outcasted those who travelled abroad or demanded ritual purification before they could be restored to full social interaction. Even though Gandhi was not a Brahmin, one section of his Gujarati Bania caste tried to stop him going to England to study in 1888 and on his return to India he rather unwillingly bathed in a holy river to remove the so-called impurity, and studiously tried to avoid confronting the conservative group in his caste.[8] (Although his mother recognised that foreign training was desirable for her son and the wider family, she was so alarmed at the prospect of his cultural as opposed to literal pollution that she made him promise a sacred oath to abstain from wine, women and meat.) A few years later, Motilal Nehru, father of Jawaharlal, travelled to Europe in the face of disapproval from the most conservative of his Kashmiri Brahmin caste, and refused to undertake any ceremony of purification upon his return. However, as late as 1902 when the Maharajah of Jaipur attended the coronation of Edward VII he still felt bound by the older rules. The only way he could resolve the dilemma of pollution by the sea journey was to charter a whole ship, the S.S. Olympia, and have it ritually cleansed and consecrated before the voyage, so he could travel on a little piece of India with food and water from India, and cows with their fodder in order that he could drink fresh milk. Ganges water was stored aboard for him to perform his ritual ablutions.[9]

This was a very late and extreme example. Gradually in the later nineteenth century, many more high caste Indians felt confident enough in their reformist, modern lifestyles to travel overseas without such elaborate preparations or fear of ritual consequences. However, cost was another problem, and in general only those with considerable wealth in their immediate or extended families could afford the journeys for education or for pleasure. Gandhi's family struggled to send him to study law in London and he practised very considerable economies to keep going. He described in his *Autobiography* how he decided to live in one room rather than an apartment in London, and to cook some of his own meals, in order to save four or five pounds each month. He had porridge and cocoa for breakfast, bread and cocoa for his evening meal, and ate out only at lunchtime. He also walked between eight and ten miles a day to save on transport. By contrast the young Nehru came from a home where his father had made considerable wealth from his legal practice and could well afford to send his only and treasured son to Harrow, to Trinity College, Cambridge and to the Inns of Court. He gave his son an allowance of £400 a year – in the first decade of the twentieth century – and this was about half a professorial salary! Even so the young man got into financial difficulties, much to his father's anger.[10] My own college in Oxford, Balliol College, had more Indian students than other colleges at either Oxford or Cambridge, from the 1850s onwards. Increasingly they hoped to be Indian Civil Service candidates for entry examination, or to go into the law. Their backgrounds were unsurprising given that their families had to pay their passages, fees and living expenses. Most came from professional families, their fathers often being civil servants or lawyers.[11] They experienced perhaps inevitable loneliness and sometimes cultural confusion. Gandhi recorded how he had no idea how to eat with a knife and fork when he embarked on the ship for London. More profoundly he found it embarrassing to explain to English people that he had been married at 13 and, although a student, was already the father of a son. However, these young men (and occasionally women)[12] found their Western experiences life changing and they were to be of crucial importance to their homeland.

Perhaps the most fundamental – and most easily overlooked – aspect of the experience of travelling to England or other parts of the English-speaking world was the acquisition or development of fluency in English. English education had been available in India for a very few from the start of the nineteenth century, as professional Indian families recognised the importance of learning the language of the new rulers. But exposure to England gave Indian travellers new confidence and a nuanced control

of English which became crucial on their return. English became and still is the one common language of the country where there are over ten major languages according to linguistic regions, and many more regional dialects. Those who knew English were the people who began to formulate new understandings of India as a cultural and political unit, and could cooperate with others across regions in new organizations for politics or for social and cultural reform. The spread of English from these small and elite beginnings has been of profound importance for India's sense of unity but also for the ability of its citizens to become major operators in a world of global markets and communications. The Indian IT (information technology) specialists and call centre operators of our century are the heirs to this early linguistic exposure to a global language, as are the students from the subcontinent in our universities and those of the broader English-speaking world.

Apart from language, those who travelled abroad for education in particular also acquired qualifications and skills which made them into a particular kind of elite when they returned to India. Many of them, as we have already noted regarding those who studied in Balliol, were socially privileged before they arrived in England, and came from families with long traditions of service in India's varied and changing political regimes. Gandhi's ancestors in what is now Gujarat had served princely states. Nehru came from a family of scholarly Kashmiri Brahmins who had moved down from the mountains in the eighteenth century in search of professional employment. His great-grandfather found service with the East India Company in Delhi. By the time Jawaharlal was born in 1889, his father was one of the most successful and wealthy lawyers in the imperial legal structure in north India. The Sorabji Richard and Cornelia who were at Balliol and Somerville respectively in the last Victorian decade were from a Parsi family who had become Christians: they were therefore the heirs of two communities which invested heavily in education, including education for women. Their home was very similar to that of a contemporaneous English home: unlike Gandhi they ate off plates and had no fears of English cutlery. They learned English from very early childhood, read English fairy tales and nursery rhymes, were exposed to the King James version of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. Perhaps it was not surprising that Cornelia did not find it strange when the famous Master of Balliol, Benjamin Jowett, took her under his wing and included her in his exalted social circles. Her Somerville Principal by contrast was deeply aware that such attention to a woman student was highly unusual. Socially privileged Indians who studied in England went on to build on their foreign experience and become

a range of new sorts of professionals under the auspices of the British raj – particularly in the expanding civil service, the legal system and the educational system. In their turn they expected their children to follow in their footsteps, as many of them did. The fact that by the middle of the next century India had an experienced elite who had already participated in the running of a modern state was of incalculable benefit for the survival and flourishing of India after independence in 1947.

It is a truism that leaving your own home enables you to look at it with fresh eyes on your return. This certainly happened in many cases to the Indians who travelled overseas courtesy of Victoria's Empire. As they lived and worked abroad, encountered different people, strange societies and new cultures and religions, they reflected on their own. It is no surprise that many of those who were to become major leaders in many fields in India were the 'foreign-returned' – those who had the opportunity of a different experience which led them to ask new questions and to recognise the possibilities of change. Some also wrote at length about their foreign experiences and their consequent reflections on India. Pandita Ramabhai, a high caste Hindu who eventually became a Christian, studied in England as a widow in her mid 20s. Shortly afterwards she visited America to talk about the plight of Indian women. She wrote a fascinating account of her American experience in Marathi, designed therefore for the literate in her home region but not for the English-knowing elite. At times hilarious in its observations, as in her amazed condemnation of women's corsets, it is a fine work of social observation. What particularly concerned her was the status and education of American women, and it was perhaps this above all that she wanted to share with her compatriots.[13]

Ramabhai's concerns lead us to consider several crucial areas of Indian life to which Indians who had travelled overseas made significant contributions as they reflected on what they had seen abroad and what they saw on their return home. Of course they also worked with compatriots educated solely in India. Moreover, their reflections were part of an ongoing dialogue they conducted as they were incorporated into an English-speaking intellectual world created in large part by the presence of a global British empire. Historians have begun to take seriously imperial global networks of various kinds – trading, educational, political, religious and kinship to name a few. I wish to emphasise here the intellectual networks which developed through personal friendships with people of other nationalities working abroad and in India, who included missionaries and educators, through letter writing and particularly the reading of books. The records of personal library holdings, of

books requested while in prison, the sources noted at the end of books written, and of course the set texts of school and university courses all point to this shared pool of ideas and ideals around the Empire.[14]

Clearly critiques of Indian society emerged as Indians became part of these imperial intellectual networks, though these were matched by highly nuanced assessments of Western societies.[15] Most obviously, there developed movements for social reform, focussing on issues such as caste, the treatment of Hindu widows, child marriage and the lack of education for women. Gandhi and Pandita Ramabhai were in their own very different ways powerful protagonists of change in the lives of Indian women, but they were part of a growing band of Indians who were engaging in social work at all levels of society. Because Indian society and Hinduism were so intimately intertwined, social reform entailed discussions about religious traditions and the authority required for religious change. As Hindus and Muslims debated their own religious traditions and the ways in which it was possible to be both modern and devout, they often reeled from the strong criticisms of both Christian missionaries and more secular ideologies emanating from Europe. Gandhi, who was later in life to be profoundly influenced by Christian teaching and the Bible, was in childhood alienated from the Christian tradition by hearing missionaries speaking on street corners against Hinduism.[16] However, out of contestation and dialogue emerged religious formations which were to prove deep resources for Indians in a changing world. Some Hindus took their newly formulated 'faith' to the world outside India, proclaiming it to be a world religion rather than a tradition tied to Indian soil alone. A major example of a reformer who attempted such a transformation was the Bengali Swami Vivekananda, who went to the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. He was part of the reformist Ramakrishna Movement in Eastern India. In north-western India, the Arya Samaj was particularly influential in working for reform of Hinduism, seeing itself in the light of the Protestant reformation in Christian history. It eventually sent missionaries to parts of the world such as the Caribbean and Natal where Indian indentured labourers had settled and were thought to be practising a degraded form of Hinduism.[17]

Exposure to the wider world inevitably prompted Indians to ask overtly political questions. In particular they debated the nature of a common Indian identity and of an appropriate Indian polity, the reasons for imperial rule, its impact on India and eventually how it could be removed. By the late nineteenth century a growing sense of Indian national identity had emerged, and a deepening critique of British rule.

Foremost among those who took on continental roles in articulating a new national identity and critiquing British rule were those who had travelled abroad and could bring to their understanding of Indian society and government examples of democracy and political freedom.[18] In the early twentieth century the ideology of nationalism and a radical determination to achieve freedom from British rule reached its peak. Again many of the leaders were men born as late Victorians who had travelled abroad for study or work in the context of the British Empire, and had returned radicalised in different ways. Gandhi, for example, had studied law in London, and then spent two decades in South Africa as a lawyer and emerging political activist before he finally returned to India in 1915. The Victorian Empire had given him the space and opportunity to study, read and interact with a wide range of people from different countries, ethnicities and religious backgrounds, to develop professional and political skills and come to a moral critique of British rule. Britain's imperial seaways and possessions quite literally helped to make a failing lawyer into a Mahatma and a skilled nationalist politician who was to make an unprecedented impact on Indian politics. Thus in many ways the ability to cross the seas more cheaply, swiftly and safely, helped to fashion Indians who were crucial to the making of India as we have come to know it.

The making of new Indian communities overseas

Gandhi's career is a prime example of the lasting influence in India itself of the formative power of foreign travel and incorporation of Indians into global networks of interaction in the Victorian age – formative both for individuals and the subcontinent. Because he spent 20 years working among the diverse community of Indians established in South Africa by the late Victorian era, he is also interesting in the context of the second aspect of our topic to which I now turn – the way Britain's control of the seas and her far-flung empire enabled the making of new Indian communities overseas.

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, Indians had settled in small communities overseas for trading purposes before the coming of British rule. But India's incorporation into a global empire bound together by imperial seaways had a dramatic impact on the nature and dimensions of overseas Indian settlement, the result of which are visible in our twenty-first century world.[19] It is convenient to think of this outward movement from the subcontinent under two headings – those who went freely for work either in the service of the Empire or because

its presence gave them new opportunities; and those who went often in great ignorance in unfree or semi-free conditions.

Indians had settled overseas in small numbers before the nineteenth century, but the numbers and diversity of Indians who chose to work and settle freely to make permanent Indian communities across the ocean increased markedly in the Victorian era. Some built on older networks of trade and investment, their presence now encouraged by the incorporation of so many areas around the Indian Ocean into the British Empire in an age of globalizing commerce. The Indian trading and business presence along the African eastern seaboard was one such area. Indian traders had long had a presence in Zanzibar and in smaller trading ports on the coast of the African mainland under the control of the Sultan of Zanzibar. By the late 1870s, the Indian community in Zanzibar numbered nearly 5,500 – far outnumbering the total amount of Europeans who were there. Indian investment was also significant – nearly £2,000,000 in Zanzibar alone in the 1870s. In 1873, a British official sent to investigate slavery in the Sultan's territories reported with amazement the pervasive Indian trading presence. He is worth quoting: 'Wherever we went we found them monopolizing whatever trade there might be, spending and keeping their accounts in Guzeratti, whether in small shops, or as large mercantile houses. Their silent occupation of this coast [...] is one of the most curious things of the kind I know. It has been going on for forty years but I had no idea, till I came here, how complete their monopoly has become. [...] Along some 6,000 miles of sea-coast in Africa and its islands [...] the Indian trader is, if not the monopolist, the most influential, permanent and all-pervading element of the commercial community.'[20] Many of these Indians were predictably from India's western coastal regions, and included Hindus, Muslims and Parsis, as well as Goan Christians. Indians in Zanzibar had enjoyed the protection of a British consul from 1841. But as British imperial influence spread and deepened in East Africa towards the end of the century, Indians migrated to the mainland and gradually infiltrated the hinterlands as general merchants and shopkeepers as well as developing their coastal trading presence. Right down in the south of the continent the Indian presence was also growing. Gandhi's arrival in South Africa in 1893, for example, came about because of the need of a Gujarati-speaking Muslim business firm, Memons from Porbander where Gandhi had been born, for a lawyer who knew both English and Gujarati to help with a large court case. Although many of these Indian traders in Africa would not have thought of themselves as permanent settlers, and although individuals may have returned to India to live, the constant

circulation of mercantile groups often related by caste and kinship had created a permanent Indian presence in East and South Africa.

To the east of India similar developments were occurring, thanks to the security of the seas and growing British imperial control in South East Asia. From Burma down to Singapore, Indian trading communities grew and flourished, bringing not only prosperity to their homeland but opening up a new commercial world in South East Asia, the fruits of which are present today. They came from several trading communities, but foremost among them were Chettiars from Ramnad district in the old Madras Presidency. They had been domestic Indian traders and suppliers of rural credit and now transferred these skills overseas. They migrated in waves from the 1830s, heading for Burma, Malaya and the Straits Settlements, and later to Siam, Java and Indo-China and northern Sumatra. It is impossible to put a figure on this outflow, as merchants were not recorded as emigrants from India. However, their economic influence was very considerable both in supplying credit for commercial growth of rubber, the emerging plantation economy and tin-mining (in Malaya), and for subsistence agriculture and later commercial rice production (in Burma).Their cultural influence was most marked in building magnificent Hindu temples – for example in Rangoon and Singapore. The results of this nineteenth century outflow of people and investment by one caste group were clear in the 1930s when they had 1,650 firms in Burma alone, compared with 1,000 in Malaya and Singapore, 200 in Indo-China, 150 in other parts of East Asia and 500 in Ceylon.[21] Muslim merchant groups were another set of players in the east Asian trade. Some were predictably from southern India, but eastern Indian Muslims also found their way there, among them Memons, Khojas and Bohras from Gujarat. Finding a niche rather different from that of the Chettiars they traded in textiles, rice, diamonds and household goods.

Although these growing zones of commercial interaction and settlement were among the most obvious results of Indian adaptation to the seaborne opportunities of the Victorian imperial age, other Indians responded to the presence of the Empire by collaborating with it overseas in a new range of jobs and professions around the Indian ocean, for which they had been prepared by their experience as Indian British subjects. Punjabis, and Sikhs in particular, had become well known as prime military material for the Indian army, particularly as the British elaborated their theory of certain Indian groups as 'martial races'.[22] When the British began to set up colonial police forces in South East Asia, they turned to the same communities and to soldiers in the Indian army. Sikhs became the core of the Malayan police force. A former British

police officer in the Punjab who worked in Hong Kong in the 1860s instigated the recruitment of Punjabis into the Hong Kong police. As the British imperial presence in East Africa became a reality in the final decade of Victoria's reign, a similar pattern developed there as imperial administrators there sought out Sikhs in particular for their newly formed police and military units.[23] Other Indians were equipped to serve the Empire in civil capacities as a result of their colonial education in English. By the end of Victoria's reign, Indian clerks and lower civil servants were to be found in Malaya and Hong Kong to the west, and in East Africa across the Arabian sea. In East Africa there were soon as many Indian government employees as there were Indian merchants, working in the postal service, the railways and the civil service itself. Given the presence of Indian traders, civil servants and police in East Africa, it was no wonder that one prominent colonial official described late Victorian East Africa as 'the America of the Hindu'.[24] The political repercussions of this on African independence hardly needs underlining. Indians who had prospered in imperial service in Africa paid the price a century later after the end of empire, when the drive for Africanisation led to overt anti-Asian hostility and, as in the case of Amin's Uganda, to draconian eviction of people of South Asian origin.

This discussion of the new waves of seaborne migration out of India in the nineteenth century has so far concentrated on those who went freely, with skills, experience and often considerable capital. For them the emphasis was on the new possibilities Victoria's Empire had opened up for them. We must now turn to those who hoped, often in ignorance, for the possibility of a better life, but who in general encountered such a terrible range of problems and such bad treatment that their experience has been called a new system of slavery.[25] These were the people who left India under different forms of labour contract, the most common of which was indenture, which tied the labourer to service of a particular master for a specified number of years. Pay and conditions were poor even though they were officially regulated, and at the end of the indenture period Indians could stay on as free men and women or receive a free passage home. Indentured labour became economically vital to many parts of the Empire after the abolition of slavery, particularly where there were sugar plantation economies. About 1.5 million Indians left the subcontinent under this system between 1834 and its ending in 1917. The largest numbers went to Mauritius, British Guiana, Natal and Trinidad. Well under half took up the offer of a passage home at the end of their contracts: the majority who remained thus laid the foundations of many of the diaspora communities of today. In 2008,

40% of the population of Trinidad and Tobago were South Asian. In Mauritius the figure for those classified as Indo-Mauritian is 68%. South Africa has 2.5% of its population with Indian origins. (By contrast the settled British South Asian communities are a later twentieth century phenomenon as most Indians in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came for short periods and returned home.)[26]

This is not the place for a discussion of indentured labour in detail. There is serious scholarly literature increasingly available on that topic, ranging from general academic discussions to more personally driven investigations by those who are descended from indentured labourers. Among the latter, I would recommend some of the writings of Professor Brij Lal at the Australian National University. His grandfather was one of the last generation of indentured labourers to go to Fiji at the start of the twentieth century; and he writes with passion and insight about a world he can almost touch through his own family's story.[27]

Most of those who left India under this system were escaping from dire poverty, and many came from areas in northern India where agriculture was fragile and there was increasing pressure on the land. Recruiters[28] held out the hope of a new life and better working conditions, but those who listened to their offers rarely understood what they were signing up for or where they were going. Their problems started before they ever reached their destinations. They were transported on special ships on which conditions were poor, and where none of the conventions of caste society could be observed, and where disease could spread quickly. The voyages were long and sometimes dangerous. Fire and shipwreck could take their toll as well as disease. One of the worst disasters was the fire on the *Shah Allam*, sailing to Mauritius in 1859, when only one out of over 400 immigrants survived. The coming of steam made the voyages quicker and safer. India to Fiji, for example, took 73 days by sail but only 30 days by steam ship. The problems encountered by the indentured Indians, known as 'coolies', grew worse on their arrival. Conditions of agricultural work were harsh, as was the discipline imposed by plantation owners and Indian 'sirdars' or overseers. There were high levels of disease, many of them attributable to poor living conditions and lack of medical care, and the high death rates resulted from disease, accidents, murder and self-harm. The last two causes point to appalling social dislocation and pressure, as coolies were crowded into barracks with little privacy and virtually no chance of normal family life. The latter was compounded by the very low ratio of women to men among recruits. Governments in India and London eventually insisted on something approaching a civilised ratio, 40 women to every hundred men. It was

hardly surprising that these Indian communities overseas took generations to recover from the experience of indenture – to reach a natural gender balance, to recover from ill health and violence, and eventually to establish themselves as both free and economically viable.

Other groups of Indian workers were recruited in the late nineteenth century under a mixture of indenture and other types of contract – for plantation work in Malaya for example, to build the East African railways, or to work in Burma and Ceylon. Between 1840 and 1942 over 1.7 million Indians were recruited to work in Malaya and Singapore, slightly fewer for Burma, and about 1 million for Ceylon. In general, conditions for labour recruited under non-indenture systems were less harsh; but in Malaya, for example, high levels of disease and death told a similar story to that in the sugar colonies. Here malaria surpassed dysentery, pneumonia, TB and anaemia as the main health problems among estate workers. Together they were responsible for over 90% of deaths among adult estate workers. By 1903, nearly 32,000 Indians had been recruited for African railway construction. Most went home when construction was completed, but nearly 8% died and over 20% were invalided home – again a reflection of their working conditions. In East Africa there were the unhappily 'normal' illnesses associated with Indian labour overseas – fever, diarrhoea and respiratory diseases; but these were joined here by bubonic plague and even the danger of man-eating lions. Despite this, nearly 19% stayed working on the railways and helped create the many-stranded Indian presence in East Africa.

Conclusion

We have travelled a long way – in time and space – as we have tracked the movements of Indians who as subjects of Queen Victoria used the imperial seaways as highways, as they travelled to and from India, and visited or settled in many foreign countries. Many of them were the sorts of people who would never have travelled overseas before, bound to India by poverty, a deep sense of possible pollution or by sheer lack of any incentive to travel outside their home regions. The Empire gave them new technologies of travel, new opportunities and new incentives. Our evidence has shown how important this was for the making of our global world. In the first place the trajectories of travel and the incorporation of Indians in new intellectual networks helped to work profound changes within India itself and one might say to lay the foundations of India as the society and democratic polity which we know today, set on becoming a world economic power. Secondly the Empire

offered Indians opportunities for work overseas of a range unknown before. Some of those who took these opportunities were comparatively privileged. Others were often in flight from conditions in India and encountered problems which are almost unimaginable today. But all of them were part of one of the most formative demographic shifts of the Victorian era – large scale migration by sea on a scale never seen before. Just as their British counterparts who left home for Canada, Australia, New Zealand or South Africa formed a new English-speaking world, so Indians who left the subcontinent laid the foundations for a South Asian diaspora which today is not just numerically significant but has become an economic and cultural global force. The subcontinent itself has been profoundly influenced by the descendants of these migrants, for example as a result of remittances from overseas to Pakistan and Bangladesh in particular, and by ongoing marital and kinship links. In India's case, non-resident Indians are not just a source of investment but a powerful political and cultural lobby as the country asks what it means to be Indian in the twenty-first century. The rest of the world has been influenced too. We now, at least in most of the Western world and in Asia, live in plural societies in which people of South Asian ancestry are our fellow citizens, profoundly influencing the linguistic, cultural and religious landscape in which we live. To understand these great changes we have to look back to the Victorian Empire and its maritime world.

Notes

1. The author was J. T. Marten, who wrote the all-India volume of the census: *Census of India, 1921 Volume 1. India, Part 1 –Report* (Calcutta: Government of India, 1924), p. 91.
2. For example, Gandhi talking with Manu Gandhi, 18 April 1947, quoted in Judith M. Brown, *Mahatma Gandhi. The Essential Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 edn) p. 89. For a broad sense of Gandhi's writings on social transformation see Part 3 of this collection of his writings.
3. K. M. Panikkar, *India and the Indian Ocean. An Essay on the Influence of Sea Power on Indian History* (London: George Allen and Unwin, London, 1945), p. 83.
4. By adding together the coastlines of contemporary India, Burma, Pakistan and Bangladesh we reach the figure of 8,626 km.
5. On the creation of these early overseas Indian settlements see Part 2 of *The Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2006), ed. B. V. Lal with P. Reeves and R. Rai.
6. For a starting point see M. Pearson. *The Indian Ocean* (London: Routledge, 2007).

7. On the principal steamer routes and coaling stations by 1889 see A. Porter (ed.), *Atlas Of British Overseas Expansion* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 144–48.
8. Gandhi described this in his autobiography, first published in 1927 and republished many times: *An Autobiography. The Story of my Experiments with Truth* (Ahemdabad: Navajivan Press, 1928).
9. On this episode see Richard Burghart (ed.), *Hinduism in Great Britain. The Perpetuation of Religion in an Alien Cultural Milieu* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1987), pp. 1–2.
10. See Judith M. Brown, *Nehru. A Political Life* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 38, 41.
11. This information can be found in the published College Registers of Balliol College, and gives a wealth of information about their family backgrounds and their subsequent careers.
12. See the experience of Cornelia Sorabji at Oxford, 1889–92, S. Gooptu, *Cornelia Sorabji: India's Pioneer Woman Lawyer. A Biography* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006). Cornelia wrote her own memoir entitled *India Calling* in 1934. This was republished and edited by C. Lokuge (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).
13. R. K. Frykenberg (ed.), *Pandita Ramabhai's America: Conditions of Life in the United States* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003). This is the first English translation and edition of an important vernacular work which seemed to have dropped out of scholarly or popular knowledge.
14. G. Visvanathan has noted the importance of set texts in her *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989). Gandhi wrote a pamphlet on Indian Home Rule, *Hind Swaraj*, in 1909, to which he attached a fascinating list of Victorian sources in English. See A. Parel (ed.) *Gandhi. Hind Swaraj and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Both Gandhi and Nehru did much reading in prison and requested a wide range of books for personal study.
15. See for example Tapan Rauchaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered. Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth Century Bengal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
16. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, part. 1, ch. 10.
17. On the wide range of religious reformist movements in nineteenth century India see K. W. Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). See also K. W. Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab* (New Delhi: Manohar Press, 1976); G. Beckerlegge, *The Ramakrishna Mission: The Making of a Modern Hindu Movement* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).
18. Gandhi is an obvious example of a Victorian Indian whose travels made him into a new kind of Indian leader. In an earlier generation an example was Surendranath Bannerjee, a Bengali who first went to England to take the Indian Civil Service examination in 1868. He became a major nationalist politician and leading member of the Indian National Congress. On these early years see J. R. McLane, *Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977). Many of these early nationalists had been in London studying at the same time.

19. There is a growing literature on the South Asian diaspora as its contemporary importance is recognised. For a broad introduction see Judith M. Brown, *Global South Asians: Introducing the Modern Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
20. Memorandum by Sir Bartle Frere quoted in R. G. Gregory, *India and East Africa: A History of Race Relations within the British Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 40–41.
21. Lal et al. (eds), *Encyclopedia*, p. 61.
22. D. Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj. The Indian Army, 1860–1940* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994). See particularly chs 1 and 2 on recruiting and enlisting.
23. T. R. Metcalf, 'Sikh Recruitment for Colonial Military and Police Forces, 1874–1914' in Metcalfe, *Forging the Raj: Essays on British India in the Heyday of Empire* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), ch. 13.
24. Sir Harry Johnston cited in Metcalf, *Forging the Raj*, p. 262.
25. This phrase was used by Hugh Tinker as the title for a study of Indian indentured labour published in 1974. He first opened up this subject. A more modern introduction is D. Northrup, *Indentured Labour in the Age of Imperialism 1834–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
26. A study of some early Indian travellers to Britain is M. H. Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism. Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain 1600–1857* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004).
27. Full references to Professor Lal's writings are in my *Global South Asians*. He generously allowed me to use a photograph of his grandparents in old age which appears on p. 64.
28. On the recruiting system for indentured labour destined for Natal see the detailed study by T. R. Metcalf, 'Hard Hands and Sound Healthy Bodies': Recruiting "Coolies" for Natal, 1860–1911', in his *Forging The Raj*, ch. 12.

6

Three Weeks' Post Apart: British Children Travel the Empire

Elizabeth Buettner

It is no exaggeration to state that the British Empire and maritime travel were inextricably intertwined. In the nineteenth century, tremendous advances in transport technology – most importantly, the development of passenger steamships – went hand in hand with imperial expansion.[1] Correspondingly, more Britons than ever before participated in imperial migrations across the seas. Men, women, boys and girls all experienced the Empire in ways specific to their time, their circumstances, their gender and their social class. Imperial travels opened up new lives not only to the sailors who manned the ships but also to the countless numbers who became expatriates or settlers.[2] Some Britons made but one journey overseas and lived out their days as permanent residents of the territory where they disembarked; others repeatedly travelled to and fro, periodically returning to their British homeland following time spent in the colonies.

Describing the comings and goings of British middle-class men who administered India and their dependants, Rudyard Kipling's 1890 poem 'The Exiles' Line' alluded to the successive travels they undertook throughout their careers. 'Line', for Kipling, had a dual meaning, encompassing shipping companies like the P&O and the family line that spanned the generations from parent to child:

> And how so many score of times ye flit
> With wife and babe and caravan of kit…
> … Bound in the wheel of Empire, one by one,
> The chain-gangs of the East from sire to son,
> The Exiles' Line takes out the exiles' line
> And ships them homeward when their work is done.[3]

If not en route themselves, imperial migrants made use of maritime postal services to stay connected by letter with those living thousands of miles away. When the cost or duration of a passage proved prohibitive, the price of a postage stamp was inevitably more easily in reach. In an age when growing numbers of even the poorest Britons learned to read and write following the introduction of compulsory education, letter writing, at least in theory, was a cross-class phenomenon. People and the words and stories they committed to paper all embarked on imperial journeys across the seas.

Experiences and meanings of travel, communication and imperial as opposed to metropolitan residence for younger Britons are the focus of the pages that follow. In the second half of the nineteenth century, two groups of children of widely divergent social backgrounds had imperial trajectories extending from India to Britain in the first instance and from Britain to Canada in the second. For British children born into families connected with the Raj in India, imperial residence was deemed deeply problematic; middle-class families who could afford to ship sons and daughters back to Britain at early ages almost inevitably did so. It was widely believed that Britain offered such children numerous advantages over continued residence in India, and parents opted to send them away from South Asia regardless of the deeply regretted emotional consequences of family separations.[4] But for other children born and raised within Britain itself, the overseas empire was seen as providing an escape from what was famously referred to as 'darkest England' – in effect, from a Britain that was a world apart from that to which Raj children were sent. Working-class children from Britain's urban slums were targeted by philanthropic 'child savers' who condemned their physical, moral and spiritual surroundings as irrevocably impoverished. For children labelled 'street urchins' or 'street Arabs', Britain seemed to offer little more than the promise of further degeneration and decline. Hope lay across the seas, largely in Canada, where becoming part of the expanding population of British settlers was imagined both as a means of rescuing vulnerable children as individuals and as furthering the cause of Empire. Tens of thousands of children had already been sent to Canada by 1900, with Barnardo's, the largest of a number of organisations involved in this practice, emigrating an average of 1,000 children each year during this period.[5] Despite the vast social gulf dividing them, British children leaving India for the metropole and those leaving the metropole for Canada had a shared history of imperial maritime migration which, in the nineteenth century, was deemed crucial to a better life.

Maintaining ties: middle-class families in India and childrearing in Britain

Britons who experienced the overseas empire had very different histories of involvement in India and Canada. India, unlike Canada or other selected regions, was never seriously considered as an appropriate arena for white settlement. It was viewed as far too hot, unhealthy and densely populated by indigenous peoples then deemed culturally and racially inferior, to be promoted as a destination for emigrants. Although some Europeans did become domiciled in the Indian subcontinent, this practice was strongly discouraged; not coincidentally, a domiciled status carried strong negative social and racial connotations. Those who counted amongst the domiciled in India were largely 'poor whites' who often could not afford to sail back to Britain. Most were men who had arrived as soldiers or sailors, and many married or cohabitated with Indian or mixed-race women – persons then known as Eurasians but who began to be called Anglo-Indians in the early twentieth century. Those who became domiciled in India were stigmatised by working-class British (or other European) origins and because they and their children merged, socially and racially, with the Eurasian community – so much so that the very term 'domiciled European' sounded like a contradiction to many ears.[6] By the later nineteenth century, those counting amongst the permanently settled as opposed to the migratory sojourner community were widely seen as only partly as opposed to purely of European descent.

Mobility, on the other hand, indicated a much higher position within colonial society than staying put and being domiciled. Conditions in the second half of the nineteenth century strengthened the link between colonial status and cycles of migration between Britain and India.[7] Alongside the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, steamships made undertaking periodic journeys to and from home infinitely more feasible. Earlier generations of colonial Britons had journeyed to India around the Cape – a voyage that lasted several months – or via the overland route through the Middle East, but travelling by steamship through the Suez Canal reduced the trip between London and Bombay to three weeks. Visits home were undertaken more regularly than before, although they remained expensive even for colonial elites. Despite the cost, better-off Britons in India like those Kipling described on board 'The Exiles' Line' travelled to and fro every few years because of the multiple advantages that stemmed from ongoing contact with Britain. Returning to Britain regularly on leave counted as essential for preserving

the colonial community's health and cultural belonging, providing a chance to revitalise energies that allegedly had become depleted in an inhospitable climate amidst an indigenous Indian majority. Alternating time spent in India with leave in Britain concomitantly spelled higher social status.[8]

British children were repeatedly said to be the most vulnerable members of the colonial community, with their bodies, minds and morals all placed at severe risk if they remained in India past early childhood. Colonial families who could afford to pay for their trips home normally sent children back to Britain at the age of six or eight, where they remained throughout their school years. Like the journeys away from India themselves, school years spent in Britain were an essential rite of passage for colonial children. It was crucial that the upbringing of the next generation positioned the sons and daughters – especially the sons – of the rulers of empire as British and white, not as domiciled and possibly Eurasian, or 'corrupted' through prolonged contact with 'natives'; as middle class and transient, not poor and rooted in India. Unlike India, Britain promised a temperate climate, superior cultural surroundings, and desirable schools that could provide children with the social and educational credentials from which their parents had benefited.

While passages from India were seen as social and indeed racial imperatives for British children, these came at a very high price. Families needed to pay for children's fares home and for their school fees upon arrival, but the costs exceeded the financial outlay to exact an emotional toll that many considered to be far greater. Despite all of India's drawbacks and all of Britain's advantages for children who were meant to maintain a British identity following early years overseas, there was one consequence of such childrearing patterns deeply regretted by all: family separations. Most parents found it inconceivable that their children might remain in India as long as sending them home was possible, but the years before children left nonetheless became a source of immense nostalgia and a fondly-recalled time of family unity after they came to an end and parents and children faced years apart. Sometimes mothers resettled in Britain with the children, or else travelled back more frequently and for longer periods than work-bound fathers. Normally, however, women remained in India with their husbands, and parents returned to Britain on leave at intervals of between three and five years. Starting at very early ages, children were looked after by a combination of people acting *in loco parentis*: boarding school staff, distant relations who were virtual strangers, and possibly paid guardians. Born in 1865, Rudyard

Kipling's accounts of his early years in Bombay that ended when he was left in Britain at the age of five with his younger sister to live with guardians at what he later described as the 'House of Desolation' are only the best-known narratives of this form of upbringing.[9] Some commentators described such children as tantamount to orphans, for although their parents had not died, they depended on others to perform many parental functions.[10]

The nuclear family life of British India's imperial elite was sacrificed by parental choices shaped by the social imperative of a British upbringing. Time and again, separations were referred to as the unavoidable 'price of empire'; as one representative commentator put it in the 1880s, the 'loosening of the sacred family bond' was 'the saddest, yet inevitable result of Indian life'.[11] For those whose emotional responses were shaped by a middle-class culture that placed a high value on domesticity, intimacy and family affection, being connected with India meant deviating from widespread social ideals.[12] This was surely an important reason why Kipling considered India to be the 'land of regrets'.

Despite the time and space dividing them, however, parents and children succeeded in staying in touch thanks to the overseas mails. Historians have found surviving family correspondence among the most detailed and revealing sources of information about the private lives of India's colonial community.[13] As John Tosh has pointed out in a different context, physical separation and geographical mobility prompted families to 'articulate so much that they normally took for granted' in letters that shed light on the priorities and values of their authors and recipients.[14] Letters exchanged between parents and children were eagerly awaited and devoured upon arrival, and not simply for whatever news and thoughts they might relate. They were widely treasured as tangible reminders of absent loved ones in and of themselves, regardless of their contents. Most letters focused on unremarkable daily activities that could verge on the banal, but they took on far deeper meanings for their writers and readers. The number of imperial families saving letters for a lifetime, and indeed taking pains to donate them to archives after their writers and recipients had died, provides some indication of their immense personal value.[15]

Parents who left very young children in Britain often had to wait years until they learned to write before hearing from them directly, relying in the meantime upon second-hand accounts from their guardians. When children took their first steps in mastering basic correspondence, their letters became evidence that they had not forgotten their parents who had ceased to be part of their everyday lives. In the late Victorian

correspondence of the Talbot family during Adelbert Talbot's years in the Indian Political Service, his wife Agnes eagerly awaited the first letters of their six-year-old daughter Guendolen. 'I can't tell you how pleased I am to get your letters darling they are my greatest comfort. I like to know that my little girls think of me and remember me now that I am so far away,' she wrote. Like other parents, Agnes Talbot tried to reinforce her daughter's memories of times in India prior to their separation, with the words 'you must not forget' becoming a recurring refrain.[16]

Parents and children exchanged not only letters but also material things, small gifts and mementoes that enabled each to keep track of the other. Children's letters to their parents testified to their progress in school, which was demonstrated through the occasionally enclosed school report and also simply by placing their penmanship, spelling and grammar on permanent display when the envelopes were opened each week.[17] William Beveridge's letters to his mother and father once he and his two sisters had been sent home in the 1880s were written in the German he learned from his governess, testifying to his mother that her wish for her children to learn the language was bearing fruit.[18]

Of all the messages and material items the letters of divided Empire families might contain, photographs had the greatest meaning by far.[19] Running postal commentaries about family photographs illustrate their centrality to the practices of long-distance intimacy. Eagerly anticipated photographs, however, could also provoke anxiety and disappointment once they arrived. When Annette and Henry Beveridge received one taken of their three eldest children in England, Annette's reply alluded to her apprehension that her children might not be well cared for by their guardians, her relief that they seemed to be well, and her concern that they might be unhappy, poorly behaved or simply different than she remembered:

> Today we have been made so very happy by seeing the photograph which Miss Lewin sent [...] I think you all look very well and very much as though everyone was as good to you as possible. Sonnie [William] looks saucy, is he a saucy boy? You [Letty] look as though you had something difficult to think about and a little serious but still our own dear little daughter. As for Tutu, she is very nicely taken and sat very still and we like her very much. She looks rather too tall we think.[20]

Recipients looking for signs that family members and family relationships, conveyed visually, remained unchanged found photographs that

showed parents looking older than children remembered them and children who had become virtually unrecognisable – 'too tall', perhaps – after several years' absence deeply disconcerting. But while photographs provided indisputable evidence of unfamiliarity and estrangement after long separations, they could also function as the most tangible visible substitutes for those long absent.[21] As Guendolen Talbot wrote to her mother from her English boarding school, 'I kiss your picture (and Papa's too) goodnight and goodmorning', 'I often look at your picture; when I feel nasty and unhappy I often kiss the whole family round.'[22]

Both photographs and the letters that contained them, then, provided a material means, however unsatisfying, of sustaining relationships. In the process, they illustrated ideals of togetherness that jostled uncomfortably with imperial daily realities. Guendolen Talbot's longing to be with her parents mingled with statements suggesting that the imperial context that indelibly divided and shaped their lives left her uncertain how any other form of family life might feel. As she wrote at the age of 11,

> I feel as if you were kind of locked up toys that one could not have you don't seem to be real out there only a name. You seem like some beautiful thing one caught a glimpse of now and then. I love you *very very* much you know. I have grown quite used to hardly seeing you now. It seems as ordinary as eating one's dinner. Somehow we are not like other children a bit I don't think. It is almost odd to hear other children talking of their parents as being always with them something too nice for us to enjoy. I seem almost to ache with longing for you. But for your letters and love I should hardly know I had you dear Mama.[23]

For Guendolen, separation had – disquietingly – become the normality that stemmed from the British-Indian family divide, with her mother's and father's letters and photographs being the only things that made them 'real'. In between visits that might occur only every five years, Guendolen's father reassured her that 'we are not much more than three weeks post apart are we?'[24] But despite the way postal communications across the seas could serve as a means of reconnecting divided family members, they invariably fell short of time together.

It must be emphasised, however, that such family separations were undertaken voluntarily, if not by the children then because their parents chose to send them back to Britain rather than keep them overseas.

Failing to abide by childrearing methods that came to be considered *de rigueur* amongst middle-class Britons in India proved impossible to contemplate, for India's risks and Britain's benefits counted as colonial common sense. What is more, children like Guendolen Talbot and her brother and sisters grew up to raise their own children in exactly the same way, despite knowing its emotional costs first hand. All four Talbot children returned to India as young adults, where the girls married administrators and their brother entered the Indian Civil Service; all sent their children back to attend boarding schools and to be looked after by Adelbert, now a widowed grandfather, during school holidays. A new generation at the turn of the century then exchanged letters conveying the same experiences and regrets as those written during the 1880s. Separations were traumatic and described as inevitable, but the fact remains that parents and grown children actively replicated family patterns of imperial careers and prioritised forms of long-distance childreading that counted as higher status. Difficult though separations were, in short, they followed from deliberate family choices. This was not typically the case for British child migrants of another kind, and another class: working-class children sent to Canada, to whom this chapter now turns.

Severing ties: working-class children sent to Canada

The migratory experiences of children sent to Canada from Britain could not have been more different. If middle-class children needed to be saved from the perils of India's climate and 'native' populations by leaving for the metropole, then many working-class youths born at the heart of the Empire itself became seen as candidates for rescue from it. While the middle-class Britain of boarding schools and the respectable homes of relatives or guardians took precedence over an India imagined as a physical and cultural threat, social observers unsurprisingly viewed the working-class Britain of poverty and urban slums in an altogether different light. Starting in the late 1860s – a time of high unemployment, when the condition of Britain's poor attracted immense attention among the better-off – a growing number of philanthropists became involved in saving children from a detrimental environment through uprooting and displacement. Children found homeless, hungry or who were said to be mistreated or neglected by their parents – if indeed they had parents – were taken off the streets or away from homes condemned as inadequate to be placed in children's homes run by charitable individuals and the societies they founded. Middle-class women like Maria

Rye and Annie Macpherson were pioneering figures in this movement, which was particularly visible in places pervaded by deep-seated poverty like London's East End and Liverpool.[25]

Samuel Smith, a wealthy Liverpool businessman turned member of Parliament, made substantial donations to Annie Macpherson's 'Sheltering Homes' in the city. In his article entitled 'Social Reform' written in 1883, he spelled out the problem as he saw it: 'Our country is still comparatively free from Communism and Nihilism and similar destructive movements, but who can tell how long this will continue? We have a festering mass of human wretchedness in all our great towns, which is the natural hotbed of such anarchical movements.' In Smith's view, Britain's 'exemption from social disorder' depended upon Christian philanthropists who rose to the occasion to combat poverty.[26] The question, of course, was how this might be achieved most effectively. The answer, Smith argued, lay with targeting the young: 'The bulk of this human deposit of vice and poverty [...] is bequeathed from parent to child; the habits of the young are formed amid such depriving influences that they can scarcely grow up different from their parents [...] we shall never break the hereditary entail of pauperism and crime in the country until we take *far more stringent means to save the children*.'[27]

For Smith and an increasingly active range of like-minded evangelicals, saving the children meant saving them from the slums and from their own parents alike – as he put it, from the 'corrupting influences at home'.[28] Like other philanthropists who will be discussed below, Smith condemned poor parents as irresponsible creatures of vice, prone to abusing or neglecting their children. Alleged 'vice' walked hand in hand with 'poverty' in his writings, and destitute parents proved ready targets for demonisation as work-shy drunks, prostitutes, or criminals – whether or not such accusations had any proven foundation. Taking children away from such surroundings meant first taking them into the local refuge, or 'Sheltering Home', and then ideally much further away still. Smith continued, 'I point to that Greater Britain beyond the seas, the home of prosperous peoples, honest, industrious, and virtuous': Canada. North America offered the promise of 'a healthy rural life' where 'children are in fact a treasure in a thinly-populated country like Canada, instead of a burden as they often are at home'.[29]

Representative of the attitude of child-savers like Samuel Smith and those who devoted their lives to the cause of poor children was an anonymous poem entitled 'The Departure of the Innocents'. Appearing in the Church of England's monthly journal *Our Waifs and Strays* in 1887, it spelled out the dangers facing Britain's slum children in juxtaposition

with the advantages awaiting them overseas in no uncertain terms, beginning with the following:

> Take them away! Take them away!
> Out of the gutter, the ooze, and slime,
> Where the little vermin paddle and crawl
> Till they grow and ripen into crime…
>
> … Take them away! Away! away!
> The bountiful earth is wide and free,
> The New shall repair the wrongs of the Old—
> Take them away o'er the rolling sea!
>
> Take them away! Take them away!
> The boys from the gallows, the girls from worse,
> They'll prove a blessing to other lands —
> Here, if they linger, they'll prove a curse…
>
> … Take them away! Away, away!
> Plant them anew upon wholesome soil,
> Till their hearts grow fresh in purer air,
> And their hands grow hard with honest toil.[30]

Continuing in the same vein for an additional eight stanzas, neither the message nor the tone of this poem was exceptional. Child saving was a serious matter in late Victorian Britain, for both the future of the nation and the future of the Empire were seen to ride on the next generation.

Life in Canada, as 'The Departure of the Innocents' demonstrated, was imagined as 'wholesome', offering 'purer air' and a morally upright society that, taken together, invigorated the body and – of crucial importance to evangelicals – cleansed the soul. Children removed from 'the gutter, the ooze, and slime', moreover, were said to enjoy the benefits of migration even before they set foot in North America. Not simply a means to an end, the transoceanic journey in and of itself was integral to the process of healing and personal transformation. Describing the first group of boys her organisation sent to Canada in 1870, Annie Macpherson wrote at length about their 12-day Atlantic crossing. While many of the party were plagued by continual seasickness, the trip involved constant Bible classes and prayer meetings along with fresh sea air, yielding moral improvement that more than compensated for temporary nausea, at least in her eyes. 'Each day and hour ever brought out […] fresh phases of character,' she wrote. 'The ocean air did them

good; every mile they neared the free, broad lands, they seemed to become more manly.'[31]

Following their arrival, children whose hands grew 'hard with honest toil' helped increase the population of British settlers and develop Canada's agricultural potential. Boys were placed as farm hands and girls as domestic servants among rural Canadian families. Most advocates of child emigration, moreover, believed it was best for children to go when they were young – ideally between the ages of 6 and 12 – so they would be 'trained from childhood in colonial ways and customs'.[32] Just as important, the earlier they emigrated the sooner they ceased to be a financial burden to local Boards of Guardians and philanthropists at home. The price of a passage from Britain to Canada ranged between £5 and £10 between the 1870s and the end of the century, costing far less than maintaining a boy or girl in children's homes for years at a time. As one emigration enthusiast summarised, 'the ratepayers' burden will be lightened, [and] the children given a start in life under circumstances offering every prospect of their becoming useful citizens of the Empire' – a scenario deemed unlikely were they to remain 'in darkest England'.[33]

As a revealing adaptation of the phrase 'in darkest Africa', 'in darkest England' was only one of the ways Britain's working classes were rhetorically juxtaposed to colonised peoples of the Empire – whereby class differences at home effectively became racialised.[34] Homeless or neglected boys visibly roaming the slums were popularly known as 'street Arabs', while an article recounting instances of parental brutality written in 1886 was suggestively entitled 'The Child of the English Savage'.[35] In a manner somewhat reminiscent of the emphasis placed upon removing British children in India from the supposedly corrupting influence of the 'natives', deprived children from the slums at home needed to be saved from the alleged savagery of their own families and communities – and from replicating their parents' lives of 'vice and poverty'. The 1880s marked a turning point in Britain with respect to the legal constraints placed upon the rights of working-class parents, and parents convicted of cruelty or neglect lost custody of their offspring to care homes. Indicatively, many of the same actors behind the establishment of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) in 1884 and the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act of 1889 were those prominent in the child emigration movement, Samuel Smith ranking high among them.[36]

In contrast to the family separations experienced by middle-class parents and children connected with India – separations repeatedly said to involve the 'loosening of the sacred family bond' and to count as 'the saddest, yet inevitable result of Indian life' – child-savers worried

about Britain's slum children commonly wanted nothing more than to permanently sever their family ties. Perhaps the best-known advocate of this was Dr Thomas Barnardo, whose organisation sent more children to Canada between the 1880s and the early twentieth century – and indeed continued to do so thereafter – than any other. Only about one-third of the children Barnardo arranged to be sent to Canada were actual orphans, while the rest had at least one parent living, if not both. Many destitute widowed mothers, for example, simply could not afford to maintain their offspring on what limited incomes they could earn. But as the title of Lydia Murdoch's outstanding study of the domestic dimensions of child welfare activities suggests, such children were *Imagined Orphans*.[37] Unlike the middle-class children of colonial India who were also 'orphanised' in social terms when separated from their parents, however, in this instance impoverished parents were cast as such detrimental and ineffectual caregivers that they were metaphorically rendered dead.[38] Their offspring were described, and treated, as if they were 'Nobody's Children', with their poverty effectively rendering them 'Nobody'.

Dr Barnardo, meanwhile, positioned himself as acting *in loco parentis* to thousands. 'The policeman is the only human being who exercises over [the street Arab] anything approaching to a parental supervision,' he argued.[39] 'I act as a *father by proxy* towards many a waif who has never known the kindness and love of a true fatherhood or motherhood, to whom the very name of "father" has been a word of terror,' he claimed.[40] For child-savers like Barnardo, many of the children whose parents were still living were seen as more disadvantaged than those whose parents were dead, and certainly as more complicated candidates for purported 'rescue'. Barnardo repeatedly publicised cases involving parental cruelty, desertion, neglect and death; those with living parents were often portrayed as voluntarily transferred to his care, either because parents were glad to be rid of their children or because they realised that sending them to Barnardo's Homes and possibly onwards to Canada was for their own good. While he stressed that most surviving parents consented to turning over their children and to signing what was called the 'Canada clause' permitting their emigration, in practice this often proved not to be the case.[41] Many buckled under the immense pressure to consent to emigration, regretted doing so, and felt they had no other options; others, as even Barnardo had to admit, refused to agree. If this occurred, he not only justified but vehemently advocated what he called 'philanthropic abduction' for the good of the children 'in order to save them [...] from the custody of parents and guardians who were to my knowledge leading infamous or immoral lives'. Far from relatives consenting to have children

taken away, Barnardo encountered 'active resistance at the time, and strenuous efforts subsequently [...] for [their] retention or recovery.'[42]

Sending children to Canada had another appealing quality in light of this: parents condemned as unworthy who fought against losing their children were highly unlikely to retrieve them once they were thousands of miles, and an ocean, away. Barnardo proudly claimed to notify relatives likely to be recalcitrant of their children's departure for Canada only after the ship had sailed. Moreover, in cases where he and his co-workers viewed children's ongoing contact with their families back in Britain as certain to work against the purportedly positive effects of their new lives in the colonies, he actively placed obstacles in the way of further communication. Barnardo wrote of countless instances where receiving letters from 'unworthy relatives or degraded associates of former days' meant children failed to settle down and became 'troublesome'.[43] In consequence, where allegedly bad parents continued to protest their children's emigration and attempted to contact them, Barnardo's organisation tried to prevent them from learning their children's whereabouts in Canada and intercepted their post if need be. In fact, he prided himself on this: writing of one boy continually contacted by his family, Barnardo admitted that 'I moved him up country and took care that the post-office was not too accessible.' Such children, he reported, often claimed to be grateful that such measures had been taken.[44] Ideally, it was said, children should forget what they had left behind to reap the full benefits of the opportunities Canada offered.[45]

Stories of relatives who fought back and tried to send letters suggest that, contrary to portrayals of them as cruel and negligent, they cared very deeply for the children 'philanthropically abducted' from them. Some divided families did in fact succeed in staying in touch, despite the odds; some children later saved up and returned to Britain as adults, or else sent money to relatives so they could join them in Canada. But unlike the middle-class Raj families described above, the obstacles placed in their way meant that many completely lost sight of their natal families. Family separations were the source of intense pain for the working-class just as they were for families linked to India, but the emotions of the poor were generally ignored and devalued by those who cast deciding votes over their lives. The voices of poor children and their parents do survive to some extent in the historical records of the emigration organisations, but historians have relatively little family correspondence at their disposal.[46]

Advocates of child emigration – and not just Dr Barnardo – continually proclaimed their efforts to have been a success in the vast majority

of cases. Writing in 1870, Annie Macpherson described how after one month on a farm in Canada a visitor 'finds a poor, utterly friendless orphan, happily ensconced as one of the family, calling those who had received him "father" and "mother"'.[47] Time and again, children were pronounced as having been 'adopted' by Canadian families, finding a new and better family to replace what they lacked before. Yet as one girl visited put it, 'Doption, sir, is when folks gets a girl to work without wages.'[48] For many if not the vast majority of child migrants, life in Canada was one where, as the author of 'The Departure of the Innocents' quoted above suggested, 'their hands grow hard with honest toil'. Child emigration, in reality, meant the exploitation of cheap child labour. Children were removed from everything and everyone familiar, good or bad, and sent to live in lonely, remote places to live with families who worked them hard, sometimes abused them and commonly viewed them as lowly servants and certainly not as 'part of the family'. Throughout the era of working-class child migration to the Empire, there were those who vehemently contested the practice, described the unhappy results and abuses within the system, and sought its end.[49] Nonetheless, it persisted for the better part of a century, for too many people involved with the movement in Britain continued to emphasise its benefits: benefits for the 'rescued' children themselves, for a Britain worried about the social and political dangers that slum life might produce and seeking a safety valve overseas, and for the Empire overall – for the colonies seeking white settlers, and for 'Greater Britain'. Such children could be transformed from a drain on the metropole into 'Bricks for Empire-Building'.[50]

Twentieth-century continuities and changes

British children travelled the Empire between the metropole and other imperial regions, not just Canada and India. By and large, like India, other Asian and African colonies (especially those not construed as settler colonies) were also considered far too unhealthy and culturally problematic to been seen as appropriate for white children – particularly if they were from middle-class families. As a result, most children were sent away from such environments back to Britain, just as they were from India. Settler colonies and dominions besides Canada, meanwhile, also proved attractive destinations in the eyes of the metropole's 'child savers'. Imperially-minded philanthropists arranged for thousands more working-class children to leave Britain's cities for Australia and also Rhodesia.[51]

But these are largely stories of the twentieth century, not the nineteenth. Indeed, late nineteenth-century India and Canada provided precedents for class-specific imperial childrearing methods that spread to encompass a far wider swathe of territories. Concerns about the effects of Indian residence on children of the colonial community extended well beyond the 1800s, as did the metropole's perceived attractions. Indeed, the Victorian childrearing practices of India's British middle classes were still fully recognisable up until the end of the Raj in 1947, as well as later on in other colonies until they achieved independence.[52] For their part, Barnardo's and other organisations only stopped sending disadvantaged British children to Australia and elsewhere in the 1960s, by which time total numbers had exceeded 150,000.[53] Late nineteenth-century ideas casting different imperial environments as beneficial or detrimental to the future of Britain's youth proved extremely resilient. It was only wide scale decolonisation overseas coupled with new approaches to child welfare at home after the Second World War that drew this era of global child migration to a close.

Notes

1. Ben Marsden and Crosbie Smith, *Engineering Empires: A Cultural History of Technology in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); David Arnold, *Science, Technology and Medicine in Colonial India*: *The New Cambridge History of India* III, no. 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), ch. 4.
2. Robert Bickers (ed.), *Settlers and Expatriates: Britons Over the Seas* Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); A. James Hammerton, 'Gender and Migration' in Philippa Levine (ed.), *Gender and Empire* Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 156–80; Andrew S. Thompson, 'Populating the Empire: Overseas Migration' in Thompson, *Imperial Britain: The Empire in British Politics c. 1880–1932* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), pp. 133–56.
3. Rudyard Kipling, 'The Exiles' Line' in *Rudyard Kipling: Complete Verse: Definitive Edition* (New York and London: Anchor Press), pp. 162–63.
4. Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
5. Roger Kershaw and Janet Sacks, *New Lives for Old: The Story of Britain's Child Migrants* (Kew: National Archives, 2008), p. 90. Between 1869 and 1935, over 100,000 British children went to Canada via emigration schemes (Kershaw and Sacks, *New Lives for Old*, p. 142).
6. On 'poor whites' in colonial India, see especially David Arnold, 'European Orphans and Vagrants in India in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Imperial*

and Commonwealth History 7, (1979), 104–27, and 'White Colonisation and Labour in Nineteenth-Century India', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 9, (1983), 133–59; Harald Fischer-Tiné, 'Britain's Other Civilizing Mission: Class-prejudice, European "Loaferism" and the Workhouse System in Colonial India' *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 42, (2005), 295–38 and his '"White Women Degrading Themselves to the Lowest Depths": European Networks of Prostitution and Colonial Anxieties in British India and Ceylon ca. 1880–1914', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 40, (2003), 163–90. On 'domiciled Europeans', see Satoshi Mizutani, 'The British in India and Their Domiciled Brethren: Race and Class in the Colonial Context, 1858–1930' (unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2004); on the structure of colonial communities and mixed-race persons in comparative context, see Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), and *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).

7. Periodic migrations between metropole and colony were of critical social and cultural significance for colonisers from other maritime empires as well. See Ulbe Bosma, 'Sailing through Suez from the South: The Emergence of an Indies-Dutch Migration Circuit' *International Migration Review* 41, (2007), 511–36. The importance of sea travel to and from Britain in other colonial and trans-oceanic contexts has been examined by Angela Woollacott in '"All This Is the Empire, I Told Myself": Australian Women's Voyages "Home" and the Articulation of Colonial Whiteness', *American Historical Review* 102 (1997), 1003–29, and more generally by Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).
8. Buettner, *Empire Families*; Elizabeth Buettner, ' "We Don't Grow Coffee and Bananas in Clapham Junction You Know!": Imperial Britons Back Home', in Bickers (ed.), *Settlers and Expatriates*, pp. 302–28.
9. See Rudyard Kipling, 'Baa Baa, Black Sheep' (1888) and *Something of Myself* (1935), in Thomas Pinney (ed.), *Rudyard Kipling: Something of Myself and Other Autobiographical Writings* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1990). I have discussed Kipling's upbringing and argued that his descriptions of it influenced the ways later authors reconstructed their own colonial childhoods in Buettner, *Empire Families*, pp. 121–30.
10. As missionary and explorer David Livingstone had reportedly proclaimed, 'nothing but the conviction that the step will lead to the glory of Christ would make me orphanise my children' while away from his family in Africa. See 'The Children of Venture', *Baptist Times*, 10 February 1922.
11. J. E. Dawson, 'Woman in India: Her Influence and Position', *Calcutta Review* 83, (1886), cited in Indrani Sen, 'Between Power and "Purdah": The White Woman in British India, 1858–1900', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 34, (1997), 355–76, 371.
12. On the cultural centrality that intimacy acquired for the British (especially for the middle classes) by the nineteenth century, see especially John R. Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual, and Quest for Family Values* (New York: Basic Books, 1996); John R. Gillis, 'Ritualisation of Middle-Class Family Life in Nineteenth Century Britain', *International Journal of Politics, Culture*

and Society 3, (1989), 213–35; John R. Gillis, 'Making Time for Family: The Invention of Family Time(s) and the Reinvention of Family History', *Journal of Family History* 21, (1996), 4–21; Leonore Davidoff, Megan Doolittle, Janet Fink and Katherine Holden, *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830–1960* (London: Longman, 1999); Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

13. I have focused on letters as forms of historical evidence about colonial families in Buettner, *Empire Families*, as well as in 'The Postman's Letters: Long Distance Intimacy and the Family Lives of India's Colonisers', *Ab Imperio: International Quarterly on the Studies of New Imperial History and Nationalism in the Post-Soviet Space*, 2 (2008), 47–79 (this article appears in Russian translation). On the importance of letter-writing rituals in other colonial contexts, see Poul Pedersen, 'Anxious Lives and Letters: Family Separation, Communication Networks and Structures of Everyday Life', *Culture and History,* 8 (1990), 8–9. An excellent collection of essays on this broader subject is Rebecca Earle (ed.), *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600–1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999).
14. John Tosh, 'From Keighley to St-Denis: Separation and Intimacy in Victorian Bourgeois Marriage', *History Workshop Journal,* 40 (1995), 193–206, 204–5.
15. Two archives holding especially voluminous collections of British family correspondence are the British Library's Oriental and India Office Collections and the Cambridge South Asian Archive, but smaller samples can be found scattered in archives throughout Britain.
16. Letter from Agnes Talbot to Guendolen Talbot, 15 March [1879], British Library, Oriental and India Office Collections (hereafter OIOC), Godfrey Collection, MSS Eur E410/21.
17. Letter from Agnes Talbot to Guendolen Talbot, 7 July [n.d.], OIOC, MSS Eur E410/21; letter from Adelbert Talbot to Guendolen Talbot, [n.d.] OIOC, MSS Eur E410/1.
18. Letter from 'Euer Sohn Willie' to 'Liebe Mama and Papa', 2 Mar. 1885, OIOC, MSS Eur C176/12; letter from Annette Beveridge to 'My dear children', 9 Sept. 1885, OIOC, MSS Eur C176/120.
19. Exchanging photographs, as Elizabeth Edwards notes, allows 'distant kin to participate in the experience and intimacy of rites of passage', at once illustrating and sustaining group cohesion. See Elizabeth Edwards, 'Photographs as Objects of Memory', in Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward, and Jeremy Aynsley (eds), *Material Memories* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), pp. 233–34.
20. Letter from Annette Beveridge to 'My dearest little Letty', 12 June 1885, OIOC, MSS Eur C176/120.
21. Edwards, 'Photographs as Objects of Memory', pp. 224–26, 236.
22. Letters from Guendolen Talbot to Agnes Talbot, 26 Nov. 1883; 2 Dec. 1883, OIOC, MSS Eur E410/33.
23. Letter from Guendolen Talbot to Agnes Talbot, 2 Mar. 1884, OIOC, MSS Eur E410/34.
24. Letter from Adelbert Talbot to Guendolen Talbot, 30 May 1884, OIOC, MSS Eur E410/6.
25. On the child emigration movement, see especially Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869–1924* (London: Croom

Helm, 1980); Gillian Wagner, *Children of the Empire* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982); Philip Bean and Joy Melville, *Lost Children of the Empire* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989); Kershaw and Sacks, *New Lives for Old*.

26. Samuel Smith, 'Social Reform', *The Nineteenth Century* 13, (May 1883), pp. 896–912, p. 897.
27. Ibid., pp. 900–1.
28. Ibid., p. 901.
29. Ibid., pp. 905–7.
30. 'The Departure of the Innocents', in *Our Waifs and Strays: The Monthly Paper of the Church of England Central Society for Proving Homes for Waifs and Strays*, new series, 40, (August, 1887), p. 3.
31. Annie Macpherson, *Canadian Homes For London Wanderers* (London: James Campbell, 1870), pp. 20–22.
32. Smith, 'Social Reform', p. 909; C. Kinloch-Cooke, 'The Emigration of State Children', *Empire Review* 9, (April 1905), p. 238.
33. Kinloch-Cooke, p. 238. 'In darkest England' derives from William Booth's *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (London: Salvation Army, 1890). For analyses of related themes, see Felix Driver, 'Exploring "Darkest England": Mapping the Heart of the Empire', in *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 170–98; Troy Boone, *Youth of Darkest England: Working-Class Children at the Heart of the Victorian Empire* (London: Routledge, 2005).
34. On the analogies made between working-class Britons at home and 'heathens' or 'savages' overseas, see Susan Thorne, ' "The Conversion of Englishmen and the Conversion of the World Inseparable": Missionary Imperialism and the Language of Class in Early Industrial Britain', in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (eds), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 238–62; Lydia Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans: Poor Families, Child Welfare, and Contested Citizenship in London* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), p. 26.
35. Annie Macpherson, *The Little London Arabs* (London: Morgan and Scott, 1870); Cardinal Archbishop Henry Edward Manning and Benjamin Waugh, 'The Child of the English Savage', *Contemporary Review* 49, (May 1886), pp. 687–700.
36. See for example George K. Behlmer, *Child Abuse and Moral Reform in England, 1870–1908* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1982); Harry Hendrick, *Child Welfare: England 1872–1989* (London: Routledge, 1994), 53–54; Harry Hendrick, *Children, Childhood, and English Society, 1880–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 45–47.
37. Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans*. Another excellent discussion of related issues (albeit not focussing specifically upon child emigration) is Seth Koven's *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), especially ch. 2.
38. As noted above, the term 'orphanise' was attributed to David Livingstone, see 'The Children of Venture'.
39. 'The Street Arab', *Night and Day: A Monthly Record of Christian Missions and Practical Philanthropy* (edited by Dr Barnardo), 2 (December 1878), pp. 170–71.

40. Dr Thomas Barnardo, *The National Waifs' Magazine,* 24 (June 1900), p. 18.
41. 'Our Emigration Department', *Night and Day,* 9 (November 1885), p. 139.
42. 'Is Philanthropic Abduction Ever Justifiable?', *Night and Day,* 9 (November 1885), p. 149.
43. Dr Thomas Barnardo, *The National Waifs' Magazine,* 25 (April 1902), p. 62.
44. Ibid., pp. 63–64.
45. As Barnardo noted, '"*Forgetting the things that are behind*" is the motto which I seek to keep before me in dealing with my children.' Dr Thomas Barnardo, *The National Waifs' Magazine* 25 (January 1902), p. 49.
46. On these issues, see also Parr, *Labouring Children*, pp. 62–78; Wagner, *Children of the Empire*, pp. 97, 103, 137–38.
47. Macpherson, *Canadian Homes*, pp. 40–41; see also 'Our Emigration Department', *Night and Day* 9, (November, 1885), p. 144; Smith, 'Social Reform', p. 909.
48. 'Report of the President of the Local Government Board by Andrew Doyle, Local Government Board Inspector on the Emigration of Pauper Children to Canada', *Parliamentary Papers* LXIII, (1875), p. 12, cited in Parr, *Labouring Children*, p. 82.
49. The 1875 report submitted by Andrew Doyle cited above was one such trenchant critique which had only limited immediate effects. Critics of child emigration schemes only became more influential in the twentieth century, with condemnations of resilient practices continuing unabated and their consequences for individuals now widely discussed. On this aftermath, see Kershaw and Sacks, *New Lives for Old*, pp. 230–33.
50. Kershaw and Sacks, *New Lives for Old*, p. 117.
51. Alongside Kershaw and Sacks, *New Lives for Old*, see also Ellen Boucher, 'The Limits of Potential: Race, Welfare, and the Interwar Extension of Child Emigration to Southern Rhodesia', *Journal of British Studies*, 48 (2009), 914–34; Stephen Constantine, 'The British Government, Child Welfare, and Child Migration to Australia after 1945', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 30 (2002), 99–132; Michele Langfield, 'Voluntarism, Salvation, and Rescue: British Juvenile Migration to Australia and Canada, 1890–1939', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 32 (2004), 86–114; Kingsley Fairbridge, *The Autobiography of Kingsley Fairbridge* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927); Geoffrey Sherington and Chris Jeffery, *Fairbridge: Empire and Child Migration* (London: Woburn, 1998).
52. The problems of British childrearing among families based in African colonies in the mid-twentieth century were debated by administrators' wives in Emily Bradley, *Dearest Priscilla: Letters to the Wife of a Colonial Civil Servant* (London: Parrish, 1950), p. 140; Cecily Evans, 'The Problem of Our Children', *Corona: Journal of His Majesty's Colonial Service*, 2, (November, 1950), 412–13; Elizabeth June Knowles, 'Don't Send Them Home', ibid., 3, (March, 1951), 108; Helen Griffiths, 'Educating Our Children', ibid., 3, (April, 1951), 151–52; Ursula Minns, 'Colonial Education: Making the Best of It', ibid., 3 (October, 1951), 390–91. By the early 1950s more parents had begun to question the practice of sending children home at early ages, but doing so nonetheless remained common until decolonisation. For further discussion, see Buettner, '"We Don't Grow 1.2, (November, 1950), Coffee and Bananas in Clapham Junction You Know !".

53. Sam Jones and Aida Edemariam, 'Children Sent to Australia to Get Brown Apology', *The Guardian* (London), 20 February 2010. As this article reports, it took until 2010 for the British government to issue a formal apology to children sent to Canada, Australia, and other Commonwealth countries. Sent out 'with the promise of a better life but [...] often ended up neglected, abused or forgotten [...] the children, most of whom came from poor backgrounds and were already in social or charitable care, were separated from their families or falsely but deliberately told that they were orphans'.

7

Insularity and Empire in the Late Nineteenth Century

Jan Rüger

'Insularity is such a fundamental determinant of British history that it is surprising how little attention historians have paid to it.'[1] Since Keith Robbins wrote this in the early 1990s, a number of authors have explored this theme, most notably Kathleen Wilson in *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century*.[2] Yet as far as the late Victorian and Edwardian periods are concerned, Robbins's statement still essentially holds true: there is no in-depth study that would explore the politics and culture of insularity in late-nineteenth-century Britain.[3] This seems surprising when we consider how closely bound up ideas of nationhood and belonging were with island discourses during this time. Insularity was a key concept in late-nineteenth-century British self-understanding. Indeed, it would not go too far to claim that the Victorians and Edwardians were busy constructing their nation 'as an island'.[4]

Yet insularity was not only a popular, but also an ambiguous concept, both in imperial and national contexts. What exactly the term 'island nation' referred to remained contested throughout the period. This was all the more so since there was a tension, if not contradiction, between the idea of insularity and the idea of empire. In what follows I shall investigate this tension and the contested meanings of insularity in the late nineteenth century. There are worse places to start such an enquiry than at the shore, the borderline between sea and land. It was here, at the natural boundaries of the United Kingdom, that ideas of the 'island nation' crystallised in discourse and experience. The shoreline was again and again invoked for the construction of the nation, most obviously in the case of the 'white cliffs of Dover', that symbolic marker of the border between 'abroad' and England, Britain or simply 'home'. The symbolic value of the cliffs was explored in literature, art and popular culture

long before the first and second world wars. Poems by writers ranging from Shakespeare to Matthew Arnold linked 'the nation' and the cliffs. Powerful debates unfolded whenever this shore seemed threatened. This was the case when foreign invasions were feared or imagined, or when technological innovations made it possible to overcome the 'island status', be it through aviation or the feasibility of a channel tunnel.[5]

A peculiar example of a fin-de-siècle attack on the shoreline has been uncovered by Paul Readman.[6] It concerns the inviolability of the shore as much as the *leitmotif* of the 'island nation'. In the second half of 1900, having secured local leases of land, the American firm Quaker Oats set up large hoardings for advertising above the cliffs of Dover. The billboards caused a storm of indignation. The most vociferous amongst Quaker Oats' opponents was the National Society for Checking the Abuses of Public Advertising (short SCAPA). The society's self-declared aim was to 'preserve' landscape from the 'disfigurement' through advertising posters. The activists of SCAPA seized on the opportunity to demonstrate how England's beautiful countryside was ruined by the modern menace of large-scale advertising.

The local debate provoked by the society became national in two senses. First, Parliament concerned itself with the question and granted the local authority the power to make by-laws for the regulation of 'landscape' advertisements. This opened the way for local legislation on the basis of which Quaker Oats had to remove its advertising from the cliffs in October 1901. Secondly, this was a national debate in that it had at its heart visions of the nation that were wrapped up with one of the strongest natural symbols marking its insularity. The disfigurement of the cliffs had been seen by many as an attack not just on the shoreline, but on senses of self and Englishness. The cliffs of Dover were 'a potent emblem of English national identity, of England's separateness (both physically and otherwise) from the rest of Europe'.[7] Moreover, they were signifiers of the island status that was at the heart of the construction both of English and British identity in this period. As one of the local papers put it, the advertising hoardings were a violation not only of landscape, but also of the 'symbol of the island home'.[8] It was as if the forces of commercialisation and globalisation had to be stopped at the cliffs of Dover, or rather: the cliffs, the most visible markers of Britain's island character, were not allowed to be associated with the very forces that undermined this island character.

The example of the cliffs of Dover shows how closely intertwined geography and ideas of insularity were with the construction of national identity in the late nineteenth century. Nowhere was this more clearly

on display than in what contemporaries described as the cult of the navy. At its heart was a range of public rituals that celebrated the navy and the sea, amongst them fleet reviews, ship launches and naval visits. Situated at the intersection between local, national and imperial contexts, these ceremonies provided an important stage for the politics of national identity in the United Kingdom and its empire. Naturally, public rituals celebrating the navy and the sea were not an invention of the late nineteenth century. Both in the Admiralty's counting and in popular contemporary accounts Victorian and Edwardian naval ceremonials reached back to 1773 when George III had inspected his fleet at Spithead in what became known as the first formal royal review. However, it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that these turned into professionally stage-managed rituals, almost entirely removed from their functional origins, and playing to national and international audiences.[9]

The cult created around this symbol expanded continuously in the decades before the First World War. Its heyday reached from July 1887, when the Royal Navy assembled at Spithead as part of Victoria's Golden Jubilee, to July 1914, when the naval theatre's long season closed with a fleet assembly that turned poignantly from decorum to deployment. During this period naval celebrations became more frequent, more elaborate, more costly and more highly stage-managed than at any time since the late eighteenth century. Their transformation was reflected in increased official documentation, rising costs and a string of newly invented displays and ceremonies. Easily the most spectacular of these was the coronation naval review. When Victoria's successor was to be crowned in 1902, the Admiralty and the court where quick to invent this new public ceremony. Royal inspections of the navy had been held repeatedly during the nineteenth century, with a steep increase in frequency in the two decades before 1914. Yet, to celebrate the coronation of a British monarch with a fleet review was entirely new. This new feature in royal and naval ceremonial was repeated with much pomp in 1909, 1911, 1937 and, for the last time, in 1953. It was part of the process in which the stretch of water between the Isle of Wight and Portsmouth was formalised in the late Victorian period as an arena for the celebration of monarchy, nationhood, empire – and insularity.[10]

The naval theatre was thus a key stage on which ideas of 'the island race' and the 'island nation' were played out. Here, the nation was projected as a clearly defined, physically limited entity, encircled not only by the sea, but also by the navy. If national identity was, amongst other things,

about the relationship between island and sea, then this relationship was displayed powerfully at the shoreline and in the spectacles staged by the navy. Here, vast audiences occupied the shore to marvel at the 'nation's bulwark' commanding the space that set the country apart from others. This naval theatre described the United Kingdom's natural boundaries tangibly and in an emotionally charged way. Just as in poetry, literature and popular culture, the fleet was employed here as a tool of delimitation. The warships were signifiers that hovered around the nation's boundaries, vessels that described again and again the beginnings and ends of the country. They encircled 'the nation', stressing its natural boundaries and offering clear physical limits to what were muddled and contested ideas of nationhood.

The cult created around the navy and the sea offered Britons the possibility to experience and imagine themselves as part of an entity as well-defined and clearly delimited as an island – at a time when such definitions were heavily contested, indeed when the unity of the kingdom seemed more fragile than at any point since the early nineteenth century. This was a kingdom that was increasingly struggling to accommodate its four nations. The conflict about home rule was the strongest factor in this, but by no means the only one. In parallel to the continuing crisis about the future of Ireland, a growing articulation of uncertainty about British identity can be seen in the literature, politics and public debate of the decades before World War I.

This sense of uncertainty or vulnerability was heightened by imperial challenges and international rivalries, but it was also informed by the (often unsettling) experience of technological change. One cannot escape the relevance of the channel tunnel in this context, one of the most profound attacks on insularity that the Victorians had to contend with. Plans for a cross-channel link had been mooted earlier in the nineteenth century. In the 1880s they were revived when Sir Edward Watkin, the director of a number of railway companies, put before Parliament a private member's bill proposing a tunnel. Watkin's proposal provoked strong responses and prompted a debate about what insularity meant for Britain. Of the many contributions to this debate, the most interesting was perhaps by Edward A. Freeman. Freeman was an Oxford historian and a prolific commentator, publishing regularly in the weekly reviews, a key platform for learned debate in Victorian Britain. In June 1882 Freeman was prompted by the discussion about the proposed channel tunnel to write an article for *The Contemporary Review*, which can be seen as emblematic of Victorian views about insularity. 'I am certainly set against the tunnel,' he wrote,

> not on military grounds, of which I am no judge – but from a fear that it may do something to lessen the insular character of Britain; something to take from us, either in our own eyes or in the eyes of others, our ancient position as *alter orbis*, as a separate world [...] We dwell in an island great enough to have always had instincts of its own, thoughts of its own – great enough to impress upon its people a distinct character directly as islanders, irrespective of any other features of character which belong to them through other causes, either of original descent or of later history. It is the insular character of Britain which has, beyond anything else, made the inhabitants of Britain what they are, and the history of Britain what it has been. We are islanders: and I at least do not wish that we should become continentals. [11]

But what exactly did it mean to be 'islanders'? What precisely did the 'feeling of our island being', as he called it, consist of ? As with so many of his contemporaries, Freeman had no direct answers to these questions. Indeed, reading him, one is struck by the impression that what counted mostly was the value of insularity as a carrier of difference rather than content. Being islanders made Britons different from the continent, which was very much an end in itself. There were two aspects to this difference that Freeman elaborated on. First, as opposed to continental nations, insularity was the most important underlying influence on British history. Second, this influence meant a natural predisposition towards empire.

With regard to the first aspect, Freeman stated boldly: 'The greatest fact in the history of Britain is the geographical fact that Britain is an island. This is the ruling fact which has determined the nature of all other facts in British history.'[12] He then paraded a list of key historical events and developments which were subordinate to the influence of insularity. Neither Roman invasions, Norman conquests or the settlement of the Angles and Saxons had altered this influence,

> Not one of those leading facts in our history could ever have had the same character which it actually had, none of them could ever have had the same historic position, the same relation to other facts, if it had happened on any soil but that of an island. Britain has been from the very beginning another world – *alter orbis* – a world which has been felt from the beginning to lie outside the general world of Europe.[13]

Geography thus determined, in Freeman's view, history. Yet this, the late Victorian era, was a time when, arguably, geography mattered less than ever before and when Britain was rapidly becoming less and less insular. Revolutionary changes in technology, transport and communication meant that in many ways the island status seemed less clearly defined, if not even beginning to be eroded. Freeman had little time for such objections. The most decisive factor for the culture, politics and character of Britain, he claimed, was insularity. 'The insular position of Britain has thus always been the leading fact of British history.'[14]

The second aspect that he focused on, the relationship between insularity and empire, offered, in his mind, further evidence. Some of his contemporaries were busy claiming that the 'island character' was hindering rather than helping the imperial project. Was not the widely shared inward-looking, insular attitude the biggest obstacle to a more vigorous and forceful form of imperialism, they asked. For Freeman the answer was a resounding 'no'. There was no contradiction between being insular and ruling a worldwide empire. In fact, Freeman claimed, the 'island character' predisposed the British to be an imperial nation. This was partly because insularity had given the British a secure position from which to build the Empire; and partly because insularity had given them an imperially minded outlook, a mentality that united the Empire. Freeman was certain,

> that this insular character is not merely a characteristic of Britain and of its inhabitants of all its three races, but that it is a characteristic of the English folk wherever they dwell. The great mass of the dependent colonists of Great Britain are geographically islanders; and even those who are geographically continentals are practically islanders.[15]

Freeman then buffered up his thesis about the close connection between insularity and empire by pointing to the ancient Greek example. Here, small islands had become hugely influential by sending settlers to build colonies. As with many of his contemporaries, Freeman saw the parallel between Victorian Britain and ancient Greece as self-evident. It was as if Britain's imperial future lay in the past: just as ancient Greek islanders, the Britons were predisposed to empire building.[16] In short, Freeman read insularity back into the past as the key factor determining British history – at a time when, arguably, the influence of the 'island status' was more undermined than ever before. I have dealt with Freeman extensively here, because he epitomises the Victorian idea of insularity as a

profoundly positive influence, as a source of national character, political wisdom and economic wealth. Views such as Freeman's can be found prominently in Victorian popular culture and political discourse whenever British insularity seemed under threat. When the idea of a channel tunnel resurfaced after the turn of the century, the predominant reaction was again to lament the effect it would have on the 'island character' of Britain. As one commentator put it, the cross-channel link would 'unisland England and join her soil to the Continent while Europe is seething with unrest and complexities and perplexities.'[17]

It was not only the threat of a channel tunnel that provoked such views, but also other technological innovations. The rapid development of aviation after the turn of the century also brought home powerfully that Britain was 'no longer an island'.[18] But technological change also meant a new quality to the *imperial* project. Time and space were no longer insurmountable obstacles to ruling the Empire as one homogenous entity. Distance was less and less of a key problem. For the first time, the Empire could be conceptualised as one coherent community.[19] The effect of all this was that the island character of Britain was slowly but surely undermined: insularity, as a geographical factor, became less and less of an issue in administration and politics, in communication and transport.

At the same time the *idea* of insularity gained unprecedented popularity, not only in political and academic discourse, but also in literature, poetry and popular culture. Henry Newbolt, one of the more popular poets of the period, employed the 'island nation' as a central trope in his work. His collection of ballads *Admirals All* sold 14 editions between 1897 and 1898 alone. In the poem that gave the collection its name, nation and territory appeared demarcated by the 'realm of the circling sea'. Central in this 'Song of Sea Kings', as the subtitle went, was the idea that the sea and the navy defined the British:

> Admirals all, they said their say
> (The echoes are ringing still).
> Admirals all, they went their way
> To the haven under the hill.
> But they left us a kingdom none can take –
> The realm of the circling sea –
> To be ruled by the rightful sons of Blake,
> And the Rodneys yet to be.[20]

Admirals All was followed by the equally best-selling *The Island Race* in which the navy again encapsulated the intertwined issues of national

identity and insularity. Poems in the collection constructed the nation as an island. For example, the poem 'England' identified the nation with a shared experience of insularity, the sea and the promise of empire:

> England
> The sea-born flush of morning,
> The sea-born hush of night,
> The East wind comfort scorning,
> And the North wind driving right:
> The world for gain and giving,
> The game for man and boy,
> The life that joys in living,
> The faith that lives in joy.[21]

In nineteenth-century evocations such as Newbolt's, the 'island race' stood for freedom, both politically and economically: freedom from foreign rule usually implied freedom to sail and if necessary to command the oceans and, by extension, to trade. In contrast especially to continental nations, the 'island nation' had resisted tyranny and absolute rule, it was the home of the 'bold and free', as Newbolt had it in *Admirals All* .[22]

Often enough the nineteenth-century ideology of insularity, as epitomised by Newbolt here, was informed by enlightenment theories that saw island populations as naturally inclined towards the rule of freedom. Rousseau had idealised islands repeatedly in his writing;[23] and Montesquieu had argued in *De l'esprit des lois* that 'island peoples are more inclined to liberty than continental peoples'. In his interpretation insularity offered an invaluable obstacle to tyranny:

> Islands are usually small; one part of the people cannot as easily be employed to oppress the other; the sea separates them from great empires, and tyranny cannot reach them; conquerors are checked by the sea; islanders are not overrun by conquest, and they preserve their laws more easily.[24]

It was not only French philosophers who interpreted islands as naturally favouring liberty and the rule of law. As Kathleen Wilson has shown, the trope of the island emerged in eighteenth-century Britain 'not only as a metaphor, but also as an explanation for English dominance and superiority'.[25] Lord Kames, a prominent figure of the Edinburgh enlightenment, claimed in 1778: 'The nations that may be the most relied on

for an original character, are Islanders at a distance from the continent and from each other.' And William Falconer, a physician interested in the relationship between climate, geography and national character, wrote in 1781, that islanders 'have a higher relish for liberty than those of the continents; and therefore in general are free. Thus the inhabitants of Great Britain were a free people, according to the first accounts that we have of them.'[26] Insularity offered a natural explanation of why the British were not only naturally predisposed to the sea and all things naval, but why they were equally prone to dislike any form of foreign rule or tyranny. In such readings the 'island race' thus appeared equipped with a character that was as much natural as it was national.[27]

Importantly, all these evocations of the 'island nation' left almost always open what island and what nation exactly they referred to. This allowed for a sense of ambiguity or openness, all the more important since there *were* of course different and competing ideas about how the relation between nation and island might be interpreted – particularly so at the beginning of the twentieth century. As Keith Robbins has put it:

> Of course there had never been 'one Island', except for rhetorical purposes. The 'Eastern Atlantic Archipelago' – viewed from the United States – was made up of a cluster of islands ranging in size from Ireland and England/Scotland/Wales as a whole to the Northern Isles (Orkney and Shetland), Anglesey and the Isle of Wight, not to mention the Isle of Man and the Channel Isles. They were all in a sense 'British Isles', but quite in *what* sense was becoming contentious.[28]

The 'island nation' or 'island race' was as geographically imprecise as national identity was contested in the British Isles. This was not necessarily a weakness, on the contrary: precisely because it remained ambiguous, the idea of an 'island nation' could appeal to different senses of belonging and identification, bringing together older ideas about islanders and liberty with nineteenth-century racial thought as well as the doctrine of free trade.

Pervasive as this ideology was, it is important to recognise that it was not uncontested. Insularity could and was repeatedly interpreted critically, as a metaphor for all that seemed wrong with the 'island race'. In 1885, Sir John Robert Seeley, Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge and author of the best-selling *The Expansion of England* (1883), gave a lecture entitled 'Our Insular Ignorance'. Britain, he claimed, was closer to and more well-connected with other countries than ever before. As a

result, the geographical aspect of insularity was less and less important. However, there remained an insular mentality in Britain, which in Seeley's mind was the reason why many Victorians found it difficult to get to terms with the changes around them, which historians now refer to as globalisation. 'We are infinitely more familiar than we used to be with foreign countries, and this familiarity increases every year.' Yet, he lamented, 'how extremely and hopelessly ignorant of each other [we remain]. We know France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy – the mere countries – as our forefathers never dreamed [sic] of knowing them, but in our culture, our reading and views, we are as insular as they were.'[29]

Such readings of insularity as a negative attitude, which held Britain back and made it ill-equipped for the challenges for the modern world became more pronounced after the turn of the century, when the threat of continental rivals and imperial wars made it less self-evident that 'being an island' was only a blessing. Perhaps the most pronounced public debate that demonstrated that there was no consensus about what it meant to be islanders or an 'island nation' broke out in 1902, when Rudyard Kipling published the poem 'The Islanders' in *The Times*. The newspaper believed the poem to be of such importance that it pre-announced its publication. Indeed, it felt it necessary to accompany it with a leading article designed to tone down what it called 'rhetorical exaggeration' and 'scornful language'.

Kipling began his poem with the familiar image of the nation as an island ('Ringed by your leaden seas'). This island status, however, he then associated with a profoundly negative reading of central aspects of Englishness or Britishness (Kipling made no difference between the two). Indeed, the poem was impregnated by bitter, cutting irony directed at 'each man born in the island' or simply 'the islanders'. Kipling called them 'flannelled fools' and 'muddied oafs' who seemed to think of war as if 'it were almost cricket – as it were even your play'. The 'islanders' had rested on their laurels, they had 'set leisure before their toil', and they were still refusing to learn the lesson of the South African war, still not considering military service as a central necessity of modern wars:

> But ye say:-"It will mar our comfort." Ye
> Say:-"It will minish our trade."
> Do ye wait for the spattered shrapnel ere ye
> learn how a gun is laid?
> For the low red glare to southward when the
> raided coast-towns burn?
> (Light ye shall have on that lesson, but little

time to learn.)
Will ye pitch some white pavilion; and lustily
Even the odds
With nets and hoops and mallets, with racquets
And bats and rods?
Will the rabbit war with your foemen – the red
Deer horn them for hire?
The kept cock-pheasant keep you? He is master
of many a shire…

Lest the 'islanders' changed their ways dramatically, Kipling prophesied, they would soon not be ringed by the sea, but 'ringed as with iron' and 'under the yoke'.[30]

The controversy that the poem provoked was about the South African war, the question of conscription as well as national and military efficiency. Yet it was at the same time about national identity and ideas of insularity. Indeed, the reason why Kipling's poem stirred emotions so much was that it castigated the British for a range of traditions and customs that he linked to the 'island status'. The unspoken assumption underlying his attack was that other, continental nations were not corrupted by the islanders' preoccupation with sports and 'trinkets'. It was the scornful attack on the national character of 'the islanders' that readers found 'insulting' and 'abusive'.[31] Kipling had not only taken 'each sacred cow of the clubs and senior common rooms and slaughter[ed] it messily before its worshippers'.[32] He had directly attacked central sources of national identification. He had ridiculed precisely those profoundly positive readings that were at the heart of ideas about what it meant to be an 'island nation'. While many critics agreed that the South African War seemed to call for military reform and some went along with Kipling's call for conscription, only very few shared the outright attack on national characteristics. The debate was thus ultimately about British and English identity and the interpretation of insularity. Himself born outside Britain, as some of the critics were quick to point out,[33] Kipling used 'island' and 'islanders' in a deeply ironical fashion. There might once have been aspects of insularity that made the British great, but they had been squandered. What was left was a form of insularity that was 'arid, aloof, incurious, unthinking, unthanking'.[34]

The controversy provoked by Kipling showed how vulnerable, but also how potent insularity was as a concept and as a source of identity. Because inherently ambiguous, it was a vulnerable concept: not only since there was clearly not one single nation or one single race in the British

Isles, but also since the island status itself, as a rich source of profoundly positive ideas about 'the nation', could be contested – indeed by one of the most prominent public advocates of empire. At the same time, the debate stirred by Kipling's poem demonstrated the potency of the island trope and how closely bound up geography and ideas of national identity were. Readers' responses underlined this. 'Who would be proud of belonging to such a silly country as the England of "The Islanders"?,' asked Sir Herbert Stephen and countered Kipling's attack point by point, concluding that the British had 'at least, as a nation, nothing whatever to be ashamed of'.[35] As with many other readers' letters, Stephen's response seemed mostly informed by the wish to salvage the idea of the 'island race' from Kipling's assault. Others readers asserted the 'insular needs' and the 'character of the British people'.[36] Those arguing against conscription employed the idea of the 'island nation' in a decidedly positive fashion: compulsory military service was essentially un-British, it was against the character of the freedom-loving 'island race', the self-understanding of which had for long been that it did not have a standing army, to be used and abused by monarchs and governments.

This reassertion of 'insularity' as a profoundly positive source of self-understanding was strengthened by the international dimension that was inherent in the 'Islander' debate. Continental and American newspapers paid considerable attention to the debate provoked by Kipling. As the correspondent of *The New York Times* reported:

> The controversy over Mr. Kipling's 'Islanders' shows no signs of diminishing. As was to have been expected, the thousands of men who are interested in cricket and football are extremely indignant at the epithets 'flannelled fools' and 'muddied oafs,' and the indignation of those who indulge in fox hunting and other athletic sports is scarcely less than that of the ball players.[37]

Such international interpretations of the debate, which drew on a long tradition of a decidedly negative reading of 'British insularity', were promptly reported back by the London press, often with the effect that it seemed as if Kipling had validated the negative connotation that English or British 'insularity' had outside the British Isles.[38]

Official responses to Kipling's attack on the 'islanders' were eager to reassert insularity as a positive source of national identity. Thus the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Selborne, gave a speech about imperial and national unity in February 1902, which read like a direct reaction to Kipling's tirade. Selborne offered a decidedly positive

interpretation of what he called 'our insular prejudices' at a Unionist dinner at Oxford. One of the legacies that the South African War had left was 'the welding effect which it had – not only the welding of us to the colonies, but the welding of classes at home'. Insularity meant national unity: the holding together of the United Kingdom's nations and the coming together of its social classes was best expressed in the island image. And, as if he wanted to exorcise the scornful image of 'the islanders' that Kipling had painted, Selborne closed his speech by exclaiming: 'But we were islanders, and therefore would say, "Oh that my countrymen had one hand, that I might grip it." (Cheers).'[39] Despite domestic conflict and foreign rivalry, and despite attacks such as Kipling's, there was, Selborne claimed, the character of 'the islanders' that everyone in the United Kingdom shared and that bound them together.

It was with the stated aim of cultivating this patriotic image of insularity, that the Society of Islanders was founded in March 1909. Its main activity, lobbying for naval expansion, was similar to that of the more well-known Navy League;[40] but the society followed a different, quieter approach: the names of its members were kept secret and the society organised few public events. This reflected 'the private nature of the Society', as the members' journal, *The Islander*, explained.[41] Yet private did not mean ineffective. Under the presidentship of the Duke of Fife, the husband of the Princess Royal, it brought together a large number of members, many of them well-connected. As Admiral Fisher wrote to Arnold White in 1912, 'it is a huge society now and they are so wise I think to keep secret both the names of members and its numbers! It makes the organization much more powerful.'[42] 'Islanders', as the members of the society called each another, were expected to work behind the scenes to create a climate favourable for the navy. Part of their 'Faith' was the creed that Britons were islanders and therefore had to defend themselves.[43] As its quarterly journal, *The Islander*, put it: 'The vital question of the day is the inviolability of our shores.'[44] Apart from its immediate function as a lobbying group, the society is thus perhaps best understood as part of an effort to claim insularity as a political signifier and cultivate it, against negative readings, as a source of national identity. 'The Islanders' were thus an indicator at once for the potency and the ambiguity of insularity as a metaphor.

This essay has argued that the idea of the 'island nation', which clearly has a long tradition and can be traced back to ancient and medieval sources, gained new currency in the second half of the nineteenth century. A profoundly positive interpretation of insularity gained popularity

precisely in a period when Anglo-Irish tensions, international competition, technological change and a first wave of globalisation meant that it is was increasingly impossible to be an island. Yet there remained alternative readings of insularity throughout this period and they became more prominent after the turn of the century. Keith Robbins has suggested that the Easter Rising in Dublin in 1916 and World War I in general posed a turning point. The concept of the 'Island Race', he writes, became 'itself somewhat shaken', since there was now evidently not 'one Island' or 'one Race'.[45] In the light of the material presented here, it makes sense to extend his analysis back to the late nineteenth century when ideas of unity and nationhood were already heavily contested within the United Kingdom. Indeed, it seems that the very idea of 'the island race' gained currency, in historiography as much as in public discourse, in the decades before 1914, a time when the kingdom seemed more disunited than at any time during the nineteenth century.

There remains today a strong tendency to employ the island trope as a convenient metaphor in politics and journalism, but also in historiography. John Keegan's essay 'The Sea and the English' can be seen as representative of this 'form of romanticised patriotism':[46]

> Think of the power of those ideas in English consciousness: lifeboat men, lighthouses, wreck, drowning, rescue. A chief element in that British passion for the seaside with which I began derives, I believe, not from any of the reasons for which the seaside holiday was first propagated [...] but from the exposure it gave to the mystery of the sea and the share it offered in the English triumph over it.[47]

Many of the key elements of the nineteenth-century construction of 'the island nation' can be found in Keegan's essay. Three aspects are notable, apart from the conflation of England with Britain and the underlying belief that the experience of insularity and the sea produced a common bond defining 'the English' or 'the British'. First, the claim that it was insularity that made England/Britain a great power.[48] In reality, it is not so much geography (although it certainly played a role) that explained Britain's rise in the nineteenth century, but the determination of consecutive governments to dedicate a large part of the country's resources towards a strong navy, seeing off competition through accelerated naval building. As Robert Colls has remarked: 'It was not being an island that had delivered Britain from war and incursion (being an island hadn't done Ireland much good), it was the fleet.'[49]

Second, the idea that most people in Britain would have been influenced in a lasting fashion by the experience of the seaside. This is not only an unrealistic view, given Britain's urbanised and industrialised character in this period, but also a rather exclusive one, leaving little space for those not born as part of 'the island nation'. If Englishness or Britishness is defined by maritime heritage, this can easily be seen as excluding those who came to this island as immigrants from less 'insular' backgrounds as well as those who, for mostly socio-economic reasons, were unable to indulge in a life-long 'passion for the seaside'.

Third, the belief that there is something special or peculiar about the English proximity to the sea, as opposed to Scotland, Wales and Ireland, but also to the rest of the world. 'Nowhere in England, geographers tell us, is more than 80 miles from the sea,' writes Keegan.[50] He does acknowledge that other countries have access to the sea, too (in fact, half the world's population live within 37 miles of the sea).[51] However, there is for Keegan a uniquely English experience of insularity. 'Other nations have seasides, of course,' he writes, but '[o]nly in England does the disjunction between land and ocean combine beauty, variety and utility in the striking form familiar to all of us.'[52] Note the use of the 'us' here: those who do not identify or understand the peculiarities of the English shoreline cannot possibly be part of 'us'. All of this seems very close to the nineteenth-century construction of the 'island nation' sketched above, evoking a form of English/British exceptionalism based on the experience of the sea. Yet despite such nostalgic yearnings for a maritime and insular nation (which arguably never was, certainly not in the comprehensive sense suggested by Keegan), the realities of insularity in Britain are less significant than ever before. Whatever survived of the Victorian island character seems to have been eroded since culturally, politically, economically and technologically.

Notes

1. Keith Robbins, 'Insular Outsider? "British History" and European Integration', in Keith Robbins, *History, Religion and Identity in Modern Britain* (London: Hambledon Press, 1993), p. 45.
2. Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003). The interest in insularity is strongly influenced by two impulses. First, the pioneering work by J. G. A. Pocock, followed by a number of authors opening up 'four nations history' as a genre – see the key essays by Pocock, now collected in *The Discovery of Islands: Essays in British History* (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 2005), esp. chs 2 and 7. Second, the recent endeavours to 'historicize the ocean', see Kären Wigen, 'Oceans of History', *American Historical Review,* 111 (2006), pp. 717–21 and Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, 'The Mediterranean and "the New Thalassology"', ibid., pp. 722–40.

3. A number of essays on the topic have appeared, see Robert Shannan Peckham, 'The Uncertainty of Islands: National Identity and the Discourse of Islands in Nineteenth-Century Britain and Greece', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 29 (2003), 499–15; Ken Lunn and Ann Day, 'Britain as Island: National Identity and the Sea', in Helen Brocklehurst and Robert Phillips (eds), *History, Nationhood and the Question of Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 124–36. See also Robert Colls, *Identity of England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 237–44.
4. Peckham, 'The Uncertainty of Islands', p. 505. See also Diana Loxley, *Problematic Shores: The Literature of Islands* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), p. 3 who finds that the 'powerful trope of the island' was 'forcefully entrenched' in nineteenth-century culture, and Cynthia F. Behrman, *Victorian Myths of the Sea* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1977), pp. 38–53.
5. Alfred M. Gollin, 'England Is No Longer an Island: The Phantom Airship Scare of 1909', *Albion* 13, (1981), pp. 43–57; I. F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War: Future Wars 1763–3749* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). On the tunnel see in particular Daniel Pick, *War Machine: The Rationalisation of Slaughter in the Modern Age* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), ch. 10: 'Tunnel Visions', and Keith M. Wilson, *Channel Tunnel Visions 1850–1945: Dreams and Nightmares* (London: Hambledon Press, 1994).
6. Paul Readman, 'Landscape Preservation, "Advertising Disfigurement" and English Identity, c. 1890–1914', *Rural History*, 12 (2001), 61–83.
7. Readman, 'Landscape Preservation', p. 68.
8. *Dover Standard*, 24 August 1901, qtd. in Readman, 'Landscape Preservation', p. 68.
9. For a comprehensive analysis see Jan Rüger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
10. Jan Rüger, 'Nation, Empire and Navy: Identity Politics in the United Kingdom 1887–1914', *Past & Present,* 185 (2004), pp. 159–87.
11. E. A. Freeman, 'Alter orbis', *The Contemporary Review,* 41 (1882), p. 1042. For the background to the debate see Pick, *War Machine*, ch. 10.
12. Freeman, 'Alter orbis', p. 1044.
13. Ibid., p. 1044.
14. Ibid., p. 1051.
15. Ibid., p. 1043.
16. Claiming the Greeks and Romans as ancestors of one's own imperial project was naturally something the Germans, French and Italians, amongst others, were also busy doing. In fact, it is one of the paradoxes of this period that, in their quest for difference, the European nations turned to the same, ancient model. That the meanings of insularity had however been in flux, and at times vehemently contested, in the ancient past is shown by Christy Constantakopoulou, *The Dance of the Islands: Insularity, Networks, the Athenian Empire, and the Aegean World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), esp. ch. 4.

17. James Knowles, 'The Revived Channel Tunnel Project', *The Nineteenth Century and After,* 61 (1907), pp. 173–75, here p. 175.
18. Alfred M. Gollin, *No Longer an Island: Britain and the Wright Brothers, 1902–1909* (London: Heinemann, 1984).
19. Duncan Bell, 'Dissolving Distance: Technology, Space, and Empire in British Political Thought, 1770–1900', *Journal of Modern History,* 77 (2005), 523–62.
20. Henry Newbolt, *Admirals All and other Verses* (London: Elkin Matthews, 1897), p. 7.
21. Henry Newbolt, 'England', in Newbolt, *Island Race* (Elkin Matthews: London, 1898), p. 78.
22. Henry Newbolt, 'Drake's Drum', p. 40.
23. Peckham, 'Uncertain State of Islands', pp. 502–3.
24. Charles de Secondat Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, translated and edited by Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller and Harold Samuel Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), part 3, ch. 5, p. 288: 'On Island Peoples'.
25. Wilson, *Island Race*, p. 5. See also David Armitage's interpretation of the sea as a central source for the ideological construction of the British Empire in *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), ch. 4.
26. William Falconer, *Remarks on the Influence of Climate, Situation, Nature of Country, Population, Nature of Food, and Way of Life, on the Disposition and Temper, Manners and Behaviour, Intellects, Laws and Customs, Forms of Government, and Religion, of Mankind* (London: C. Dilly, 1781), cited in Wilson, *Island Race*, p. 54.
27. See also Stephen A. Royle, *A Geography of Islands: Small Island Insularity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), ch. 1.
28. See Robbins, 'Insular Outsider', p. 51 and Pocock, *Discovery of Islands*, p. 55.
29. John Robert Seeley, 'Our Insular Ignorance', *The Nineteenth Century,* 18 (1885), p. 864.
30. The poem is quoted as given in *The Times*, 4 January 1902, p. 9; cf. *Rudyard Kipling's Verse: Inclusive Edition, 1885–1918* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1922), p. 347.
31. *The Times*, 6 January 1902. See also the rather harsh response in *Punch*, 15 January 1902, p. 42 and 52. For Kipling's reaction see his *Something of Myself*, pp. 223–24.
32. Angus Wilson, *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling* (London and New York, 1978), p. 239.
33. William Dean Howells, 'The Militant Muse', *Harper's Weekly*, 18 Jan 1902.
34. Kipling, 'The Islanders', *The Times*, 4 January 1902, p. 9.
35. *The Times*, 6 January 1902, p. 4.
36. *The Times*, 7 January 1902, p. 10.
37. *The New York Times*, 8 February 1902, p. 14.
38. For an example see *Times*, 8 January 1902, p. 6.
39. *The Times*, 24 February 1902, p. 14.
40. On the Navy League see W. Mark Hamilton, *The Nation and the Navy: Methods and Organization of British Navalist Propaganda, 1889–1914* (New York and London: Garland, 1986), ch. 4; Ann Summers, 'The Character of Edwardian Nationalism: Three Popular Leagues' in Paul Kennedy and Anthony Nicholls

(eds), *Nationalist and Racialist Movements in Britain and Germany before 1914* (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 66–87; Arnd Bauerkämper, *Die "radikale Rechte" in Großbritannien. Nationalistische, antisemitische und faschiste Bewegungen vom späten 19. Jahrhundert bis 1945* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1991), pp. 23–73.

41. *The Islander*, 4 (September 1911), p. 9. It was only when a prominent member had died that *The Islander* disclosed his or her identity, thus in the case of William T. Stead, the journalist, one of the founding members of the society (see *The Islander*, 7 (June 1912), p. 3).
42. Churchill Archives, Churchill College, Cambridge, FISR 15/2/1/7, Fisher to White, 5 January 1912. I am grateful to Hiraku Yabuki for drawing my attention to the material on *The Islander* contained in the correspondence between Fisher and White.
43. On the 'Islander Faith' see *The Islander*, 1 (December 1910), p. 10; Ibid., 7 (June 1912), p. 2.
44. *The Islander*, 1 (December 1910), 'The Question of the Day', pp. 2–4, at p. 3.
45. Robbins, 'Insular Outsider', p. 51.
46. As Lunn and Day, 'Britain as Island', p. 125 have rightly called it.
47. John Keegan, 'The Sea and the English', in E. E. Rice (ed.), *The Sea and History* (Stroud: Sutton, 1996), p. 149. For a similarly uncritical evocation of the 'song of the sea' see Peter Ackroyd, *Albion: The Origins of the English Imagination* (London: Vintage, 2002), ch. 33.
48. Keegan, 'The Sea and the English', p. 144.
49. Colls, *Identity of England*, p. 131.
50. Keegan, 'The Sea and the English', p. 143.
51. Will Hobson, 'Trawling for Facts', *Granta*, 61 (1998), 186.
52. Keegan, 'The Sea and the English', p. 144.

8

The Victorian Maritime Empire in Its Global Context

Jeremy Black

Time and space provide the matrix for history, both for the events of the past and for how we remember and present them. British naval power is no exception. Here the crucial variable is time in the shape of periodisation. British naval power, and its capacity to support a maritime empire, and indeed to help constitute an empire to which naval strength was crucial, looks assured if the period in question is Victoria's reign, which lasted from 1837 to 1901.

The situation is different, however, if the time span is varied, and notably if the period is lengthened at each end. 1815 to 1914 is the conventional chronology. It can be further broken down into phases. The first is little or no peer rival or competition to 1840. The second is that of the rise of France as a potential rival from 1840 through to the Crimean war. The third is additional concern about Russia in the 1880s, and further concern about rivals with the rise of the German navy in the 1900s.

However, to go further back to 1796 is to find Britain vulnerable to the combined naval power of France, Spain and the Dutch, with rebellious sentiment also growing in sections of the fleet, and France able to challenge the British position in Ireland, which made the attitude of the Royal Navy particularly significant. To go forward to March 1917 is to find Britain exposed to unrestricted German submarine warfare, while the German High Seas Fleet remained undefeated, and Britain was not as yet provided with the added naval security that was to be gained when the USA joined the Allies.

These crises can, of course, be re-examined. In 1796, opposing fleets lacked the fighting quality and organisational strength of the Royal Navy, as was to be demonstrated in successive British victories in 1797–98. In 1917, the declaration of German unrestricted submarine

warfare provoked American entry into the war, which greatly affected the balance at sea in both surface and anti-submarine warfare. Moreover, America had for many practical purposes already entered the war on the Allied side by the end of 1914.

Nevertheless, the point about chronology remains. It also underlines the extent to which confidence during the Victorian period in Britain's naval position was enacted against a background that was more troublesome, both in terms of memories of the past and with reference to anticipations of the future. In particular, although remembered in terms of successive victories, notably the climactic triumph at Trafalgar in 1805 imprinted on London's expanding cityscape, the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars had in fact raised successive challenges and provoked a series of crises. These crises did not end with Trafalgar.

If this was one background to the naval perception of Victoria's reign, and indeed helped explain the pride taken in the victories of the recent wars, others related to longer-term issues of naval power. In particular, there were the limitations of naval strength in open waters, and also notably so far as the situation in coastal waters and at the coast was concerned. Wind-powered wooden warships with a deep draft could only accomplish so much in these circumstances, not least due to the constraints posed by a limited knowledge of coastal waters. Secondly, there was the problem of the limited effectiveness of naval operations in affecting the policies, both peacetime and wartime, of opposing states.

The former set of limitations altered during the age of Victoria, and the changes helped provide occasions for important displays of naval power and success. A key limitation for Britain when considering the role of naval power in this period was manpower, specifically the ability of the press to provide manpower was seriously undermined in the period 1815–49 and made manning a vital strategic consideration in most situations. In contrast, steam power greatly improved the manoeuvrability of warships in inshore waters as well as facilitating operations along river systems. Iron hulls proved particularly useful in confronting the challenges of such waters, notably by making it easier to cope with running aground. The charting of waters and mapping of coastlines around the world also proved a major source of information and one that directly facilitated operations. Indeed, the need for such information was an important element in the state drive for knowledge. This was a continuing trend from the second half of the eighteenth century.

In combination, the potential of naval force increased greatly during this period. This increase was of particular significance for two reasons. First, the lack of deep-water engagements focused greater attention on

inshore naval activities. Secondly, economic and demographic developments fostered the already-strong importance of ports and coastal regions. These developments were linked to globalisation, an overworked term but one that is appropriate for this period. The Victorian navy found itself operating on the coasts of China, Borneo, Malaya, Yemen, Syria, Egypt, the Crimea, British Colombia and many other areas. Whether these activities entailed operations against other states, or policing areas in which Britain claimed sovereignty or suzerainty, there was a common theme of power-projection. This power-projection was greatly enhanced by the improved naval capability of the period.

At the same time, it is necessary not to anticipate changes that were to come. In particular, the two decades after the death of Victoria were to see major developments in capability and lethality focusing on radio, submarines and aircraft. Despite earlier work on submarines, none of these capabilities had any real impact in Victoria's reign, where, instead, the sense of continuous change arose as a consequence of developments in propulsion, armour and gunnery. These developments created a sense of reality and fear of obsolescence in the early twentieth century that had been absent in 1815 and, to a considerable extent, still in 1837.

Technological developments, both steam, armour and shell guns, and, later, submarines and aircraft, help produce a focus on change, but, in strategic terms, the limitations of naval power and operations in affecting the polices of other states were more significant. These limitations were scarcely to the fore of popular attention and, indeed, were an unwelcome intrusion of qualification and contingency. It was far easier to consider challenges in terms of, first, moves by other actual or potential naval powers and, secondly and linked to this, responding to technological possibilities, than it was to discuss the very problems of naval power. The latter, ironically, indicated continuity in naval issues, and also, as a related point, the absence of any necessary improvement in the quality of debate. In the 1720s, in contrast, when Britain had been allied to France and opposed, from 1726 to 1731, by Austria, Prussia and Russia, there had been a discussion of these problems, as indeed there had been on later occasions when unwelcome developments had had to be confronted, notably the first partition of Poland, by Austria, Prussia and Russia, in 1772.

This situation had been a constant in the background, albeit one that could be ignored when Britain focused, instead, as it did more usually, on confrontations or conflicts with other Western European states with maritime, transoceanic, empires. The oceanic links of the latter offered a vulnerability to British power, while the naval power of these European

rivals obliged Britain to think of its maritime defence. Thus, the naval rationale of British strategy was understandably well to the fore. In reality, despite hopes of inflicting serious economic and fiscal damage on rivals by damaging their transoceanic trade, as with Spain in 1726 and France in 1747–48, the Royal Navy was not able to force a verdict on Britain's Western European opponents, as their homelands were not seriously threatened by attack.

Amphibious operations were generally insufficient to do more than threaten limited results and were sometimes unsuccessful, for example against Holland in 1799. Yet, virtually all of them had only limited aims, so limited success was all that could be or was hoped for. The 1809 Scheldt expedition fitted into this pattern as it was essentially intended to destroy the shipbuilding facilities at Antwerp.

The vulnerability of states to amphibious attacks remained an issue during Victoria's reign, as did the potential of naval power. As most of the states in question were non-Western, these issues became bound up in the wider question of the relationship between Western and non-Western capabilities. However, there was also the possibility of conflict with other Western states. In the case of the Crimean war (1854–56), the value but also limitations of naval power emerged. Britain could take the war to Russia but needed to use forces on land to defeat her, and the latter outcome required both allies and a propitious international situation. As the Russians remained in port, there were no naval battles. However, the British were able to mount a formidable naval effort in both the Baltic and the Black seas, the latter serving to protect Constantinople (Istanbul), the Ottoman (Turkish) capital, and to permit an attack on the Russian Black sea naval base of Sevastopol. Moreover, the large British fleet sent to the Baltic blockaded the Russians in St Petersburg. Indeed the threat to St Petersburg, the Russian capital, in 1855–56 was an important factor in the end of the war as Britain's ability to threaten coastal attacks helped leverage peace talks and indicated the importance of a potential for harbour attack.

The Crimean War also demonstrated the global range of naval power and the consequent pressures on planning. Russia's position as Pacific, as well as Baltic, Black sea and Arctic power, represented a threat to British trade routes and colonies, and led to attacks on Russian naval bases as well as to Russian fears of an attack on Alaska. Moreover, Rear Admiral Sir James Stirling, Commander-in-Chief in China and the East Indies, responded to the outbreak of the war by taking steps to secure the straits of Malacca and Sunda, so that the routes between the Indian ocean and the South China sea should be under British control. Stirling's concern

about Russian naval strength in the Far East led him to press for the dispatch there of more warships.[1]

Stirling's position was a reflection of the global nature of Britain's empire of the seas, and of its imperial concern to protect interests. This was the case whether the interests were formally part of the Empire, such as Australia, Singapore and Hong Kong; or informally part as a result of being in the British portfolio of interests, as with Chinese trade.

The assessment of capability and the comparative measure of empire was easier when conflict occurred but that was an atypical situation. Instead, in judging the British seaborne empire in a comparative context, it is necessary to consider relative capability without the measure provided by war. In part, this situation represents another instance of the counterfactualism that was so insistent in planning. Counterfactual speculation is pertinent for historians if it returns consideration to the situation of uncertainty affecting contemporary discussion.[2] For Britain, the anxieties and speculations bound up in counterfactualism focused on France. Defeat by Britain and her allies in 1814–15, and by Germany in 1870–71 scarcely made this an inappropriate focus as France appeared the natural rival, if not enemy of Britain, for a number of reasons. The weight of tradition and history were clearly pertinent and helped frame British strategic culture.

So, more pressingly, were the pressures of the present, especially French ambitions, real or feared, and the manner in which these appeared fostered by technological innovations. Armaments, steam and iron all played a part in this challenge, a challenge that focused not on the imperial outliers of power but on the situation in home waters. Indeed, a fear of vulnerability to an invasion by French steamships prompted the construction in the 1860s of major coastal defence works on the south coast of England to protect the naval bases, and especially Portsmouth.[3] These anxieties were a sharper reprise of the peacetime debate in 1785 about the need for such fortifications at a time of apparent vulnerability after defeat in the war of American independence. The stated reason in the 1860s focused not on weakness but on the need to free the fleet for operations without needing to worry about the security of its bases. The fear of French attack without warning was exaggerated, but the basic idea was reasonable and deeply traditional.

As with the army, empire began at home, and home defence was the key basis of strategy. Moreover, in order to support this defence, it was necessary to focus not on distant lands and waters but on those that had excited concern for centuries. This was particularly so as far as France was concerned. Competition with France led to a drive to improve the

British position in the Channel, as with fortifications on Alderney and the development of a base at Portland. Countering the French at Brest and Cherbourg remained a central theme. Imperial ambitions, in addition, might bring the two powers into competition around the world, creating anxieties that helped prompt action. For example, concern about France, helped lead to the mapping of the Suez isthmus by the British in 1836, to naval demonstrations off Tunis in 1836 and 1837, to the annexation of New Zealand in 1840, and to the development, from 1846, of a naval base at Labuan off Borneo, in response to the danger that the French, from their new base at Danang in Vietnam, would threaten the lucrative British commercial route to China.[4] Thus, empire proceeded in this case in the form of counterpointing and in the context of competition.

Armaments provided a good instance of the structural challenge from French innovation, and also of the powerful advantage given Britain by its strong metallurgical base. This example also demonstrated the need to consider Victoria's reign in a longer timescale. Naval ordnance changed radically thanks to the work of the French gunner Colonel Henri-Joseph Paixhans, who used exploding shells, not solid shot. Such shells were not new: the French had first taken shell-firing mortars to sea in the 1690s and many people had experimented with shell guns in the eighteenth century, but the fusing problem was then insuperable. In the early 1820s, in contrast, Paixhans constructed a cannon and a gun carriage steady enough to cope with the report produced by the explosive charges required to fire large projectiles and to give them a high enough initial speed to pierce the side of a big ship and to explode inside. Now, exploding shells could be fired from the main guns, and not from mortars.

Paixhans's innovations were demonstrated successfully in 1824, and their impact was increased by his publications. As in Britain, the calculations of naval power were advanced in public. The dominant nature of British naval power was such that innovations elsewhere challenged Britain whatever their formal rationale. Paixhans pressed for the combination of his new ordnance with the new steamship technology, and he intended that shell-firing paddle steamers should make sailing ships of the line obsolete, destroying Britain's structural advantage.

In 1837, the French established the Paixhans shell gun as part of every warship's armament, but they found it difficult to manufacture reliable shell-firing guns. As a consequence, the hopes of Paixhans's supporters that this new technology would enable France to threaten British naval hegemony proved abortive, even while it underlined the

extent to which France seemed Britain's principal challenger. Moreover, the habitual process by which the comparative advantage of one power was lessened by the diffusion of the new technology it could deploy was shown in this instance as the British adopted shell guns as part of their standard armament in 1838.

Steam also represented a challenge to British power as it apparently increased the danger of invasion. In 1849, in a demonstration of the new capability, the French were able to move by steamships 7,500 troops and supplies rapidly from Toulon to Civitavecchia, the port for Rome, a deployment that led to the fall of the Roman republic. The adoption of the screw propeller, placed at the stern, in the 1840s made the tactical advantages of steam clear cut, as it was now possible to carry a full broadside armament, which had not been the case with the earlier paddle wheel. The first screw-driven ship of the line, the significantly named *Napoléon*, was ordered for the French navy in 1847 and launched in 1850. Investing heavily in new technology and the engineering potential of their economy, the British quickly followed suit in their determination to ensure that the Royal Navy stayed to the fore, heavily outspending the French.[5] Such investment reflected the benefits of economic growth and commercial pre-eminence, as well as the limited amount spent on the British army, which in turn, was an aspect of the contribution made by India to imperial strength.

A competition, born in part of concern, but also of opportunity, kept the naval focus on France even when relations between the two powers were eased by a common enmity to others. In 1853–54, as war neared with Russia, Sir James Graham, the First Lord of the Admiralty, was more concerned by the threat from France.[6]

Indeed, the 1850s were to see a fresh source of technological competition in the shape of the shift to armour in iron. *La Gloire*, laid down by the French in 1858, was a wooden-hulled ironclad as were 14 of the first 16 French armoured frigates. In contrast, the first British iron warship, the *Warrior*, laid down in 1859 and completed in 1861 (and still afloat in Portsmouth harbour today), was an iron-hulled ironclad. This was the pattern for the first British armoured frigates. The French had the infrastructure to build a few big iron ships, but not a new fleet, while the British had been building large iron ships for some time. Alongside the iron hulls, the resistance to penetration of British armoured frigates was on average 60% stronger than their French counterparts.

As a reminder of the fundamentals of naval power, whether imperial or not, and of the linkage of the home front to military capability, the British had the experience of the merchant marine, of skilled

shipbuilding, and of ambitious and innovative ship-designers like Isambard Kingdom Brunel, on which to draw. Brunel's SS *Great Britain* had been launched as early as 1843. There was a major difference in industrial capability. The French challenge encouraged heavy British investment in the navy, and the two powers took part in an ironclad naval race in 1859–65 that was won by Britain with its greater resources and commitment.

This naval race took place at a time when Britain came close to conflict with the USA. The respective capability of the two is significant as it served as a reminder of the extent to which while British imperial power had been established largely at the expense of France, Britain was to be succeeded as the maritime great power by the USA. Having fought in 1812–15, the two powers had thereafter implicitly cooperated on crucial issues, especially in opposing the reimposition of Spanish control in Latin America. Moreover, Britain and the USA both acted against piracy.

However, causes of tension continued, and rose to a height in the early 1840s, notably as the Oregon question opposed American 'manifest destiny' to British interests, especially the presence of the Hudson's Bay Company in the contested area: the modern territories of British Columbia, Washington and Oregon. In 1845, the government responded to the bold language of James Polk, the new President ('54° 40′ or fight', 54° 40′ being the southern boundary of Russian America), by a forceful display of readiness. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the 4th Earl of Aberdeen, who was generally pacific, argued that it was necessary to be prepared for every contingency, adding 'our naval force in the Pacific is ample, and Sir George Seymour [Rear-Admiral; Commander-in-Chief in the Pacific] has been instructed to show himself in the neighbourhood of the Columbia', the river that reached the sea in Oregon. Aberdeen pressed for 'a temperate, but firm language', writing 'we are perfectly determined to cede nothing to force or menace [...] there is a good spirit in Parliament and the public', and that, the previous week, 40,000 seamen and marines had been voted by the Commons without opposition.[7]

Temperate, but firm, was the note the British were repeatedly to try to cite, not least during the American Civil War (1861–65), although this goal, an obvious one, did not necessarily mean that they calibrated the means successfully. In a successful use of deterrence over the Oregon question, the dispatch of a substantial force of warships to Halifax, Nova Scotia, had a sobering effect on the Americans, especially those on the Atlantic seaboard. Pakenham, the British envoy, reported

> except in the remote Western districts which are beyond the reach of warlike operations. I have no doubt that the result will be the same as it has been at Boston, New York and Philadelphia, that of salutary alarm and apprehension.[8]

In February 1846, a report from Louis McLane, the American envoy in London, that Aberdeen had mentioned recourse to 'thirty sail of the line' if America became too aggressive on Oregon and the issue became one of national honour, apparently scared Polk into backing off. Sir Robert Peel, the Prime Minister, observed in March 1846:

> Every speech made in the American Congress – every letter which I see from the US contains an admission that our state or preparation for naval hostilities is far more advanced than theirs. I think it probable that a deep conviction of the executive of the US that such is the case will facilitate a settlement of our present differences with that country – but at any rate I see no such danger of hostilities.[9]

Britain, moreover, faced a more propitious international context than when it had gone to war with America in 1812, as relations with France were initially good.[10] Britain itself was engaged in the hard first Sikh war (1845–46), with difficult victories at Mudki (1845), Ferozeshah (1845) and Sobraon (1846). The second Sikh war followed in 1848–49. However, had Britain fought America either over Oregon or Mexico, with which America was at war from 1846 to 1848, the Royal Navy could have wrecked America's use of naval power and forced the Americans to rely on the overland campaigning against Mexico blazed by Taylor, rather than on Scott's amphibious thrust via Vera Cruz. The closest parallel was the use of British naval and amphibious action against Mehmet Ali of Egypt in 1840 – the blockade of Alexandria, the occupation of Beirut, and the bombardment and capture of Acre, which blocked Egypt's northward advance against the Turks in Palestine and Syria. Nevertheless, already, by the 1840s, the pattern of the 1860s in the case of America was increasingly apparent, with the Royal Navy as a deterrent force linked to the avoidance of war,[11] rather than an asset to be compromised by action.

British naval capability, and the experience of British attacks in the war of 1812, helped explain the costly 'third system' of coastal forts developed by the American Board of Engineers established in 1816, a system that became more pressing with rising population density on the American littoral and with the American failure to sustain their

post-1815 naval plans. This system grew with American expansionism. Fort Brooke was established in Florida in 1824 and the Presidio of San Francisco in 1847. In total $41 million was spent, a substantial proportion of federal expenditure.[12] In turn, the British upgraded the defences of Bermuda, an important naval base, in the late 1840s.

The British preferred to avoid conflict. Thus, in 1854, when an American warship and marines destroyed Greytown, a centre of British influence in what was claimed as a protectorate on the Mosquito (Caribbean) coast of Nicaragua,[13] the British reinforced the West Indies fleet, but neither used force nor pressed for any indemnity.[14] In turn, despite British anger at what was seen as pro-Russian views, the Americans emphasised a strict neutrality during the Crimean War.

The American civil war posed new issues, notably on 8 November 1861 when a Union frigate, the *San Jacinto*, fired across the bows and stopped the British packet (mail) steamer RMS *Trent* in the Old Bahama Channel en route from Havana to Nassau with an onward voyage to Southampton. Acting without orders, the *San Jacinto* took off the *Trent* two prominent Confederate politicians, James Mason and John Slidell, who were being sent to Europe to try to win formal recognition of independence, and their two secretaries, and they were confined in Fort Warren, Boston.

The British government, after a Cabinet meeting on the 28th, demanded the return of the men and an apology. Concerned that the American government, in order to win support through conflict with Britain, would not agree, a longstanding fear on the British part, the British prepared for war. The 12th Duke of Somerset, the First Lord of the Admiralty, ordered Sir Alexander Milne, Commander-in-Chief North America and the West India station, to concentrate naval forces, so that no ship be left isolated and vulnerable to attack. Benefiting from the naval build-up stemming from concern about French plans in 1859 and subsequently,[15] Somerset planned the dispatch of 'our most effective ships and also smaller vessels to operate in shallow waters' and, in the meanwhile, dispatched warships from both the home and Mediterranean fleets, in part to protect the steamships hired to transport troops.[16] Earl Russell, the Foreign Secretary, was confident on the naval side but fearful for an unprepared Canada. From 29 November, reinforcements were sent to Canada and Bermuda, both troops and *matériel*, while the export of munitions to the Union, notably crucial saltpetre from India for gunpowder, were suspended on the 28th. The British imperial system came into play with its multiple interconnections. Coal was sent to the West Indies to support a larger naval presence,[17] while Canadian

volunteer units gained recruits. In the event, the Union government, after a Cabinet meeting on 25 December, apologised, disavowed Wilkes, and released the envoys.

The likely consequences of British entry into the civil war, then or subsequently, are unclear, as is the extent to which steam power and iron ships might have changed the nature of naval warfare by 1865. In part, the Union developed ironclads in order to be able to resist the danger of British intervention, and both built up its confidence in the event of war and reduced Britain's political leverage by doing so.[18] However, aside from the problems of ships overseas acquiring coal when America lacked colonial bases,[19] American ironclads were designed for coastal service and were not really suitable for long-range service on the high seas or, indeed, service in heavy seas.[20]

The overall strategic rationale for the American navy facing the threat of a foreign war was coastal ironclads for defence and commerce raiders for offence, possibly coupled with military operations against apparently vulnerable Canada and perhaps even against British imperial bases in the Atlantic and Caribbean. More British naval bases capable of servicing warships by mid-century created a more visible British presence in the North Atlantic and thus contributed to a deterrent capability. The American navy assumed that a few marked repulses to any British offensives along the eastern seaboard, as well as mounting losses to the British merchant marine worldwide, would eventually dampen any British mandate for war against the northern states.

Much of this strategic assumption was due to developments on a tactical level. American monitor-ironclads were designed to fight at close quarters; 1,000 yards or less. As these vessels were largely submerged below the waterline, offering only a concentrated armour protection scheme along the exposed (18-inches) hull and especially the gun turrets, it was quite reasonable to assume that enemy fire would not be effective against this target profile until the 15-inch guns of the monitors began to tell in response. Naval combat before, during and after the civil war confirmed that reliable naval gunnery was still at the so-called age of sail ranges, despite the advent of rifled heavy cannon. Battle was still confused – noisy, clouded with smoke, and accuracy always at the mercy of the slightest pitch and roll of the vessel. As a result, the raft-like feature of the monitors, as gun-platforms, made them much more stable, and tactically challenging, than the high-freeboard, broadside-ironclads of the European variety.

As for the hitting power of the American 15-inch Rodman (Army) or Dahlgren (Navy) guns themselves, Civil War ironclad engagements

proved time and again that at effective combat ranges no armour afloat could possibly resist a 450-pound shot propelled by 50 to 60 pound service charges. In 1863, the CSS *Atlanta* was reduced to surrender after three hits from the 15-inch gun of the monitor USS *Weehawken*; one of which blasted a 3-foot-wide hole in her casemate armour. True, this armour was laminated: two layers of 2-inch iron plates. But these were rolled, wrought iron plates, backed by 24-inches of wood, and angled at nearly 40-degrees to the horizon on point of impact. Furthermore, the shot in question struck at a compound angle, meaning that even more armour and backing was offered to resist the shot, a cored shot of 330 pounds. The same experiment was demonstrated against the 5- and 6-inch thick armour of the CSS *Tennessee* (at Mobile Bay, 1864) and the 6-inch armour of the CSS *Virginia II* (at Trent's Reach, 1865) with similar results, demonstrating the effectiveness of the American ordnance.

The primary concern for Union ironclad designers, especially the talented John Ericsson, however, was the 4- and then 6-inch armour plating of ocean-going British ironclads, from *Warrior* to *Bellerophon*, the Edward Reed–designed central-battery broadside-and-sail ironclad. While the *Warrior*'s armour, for example, consisted of solid rolled plates of 4.5-inch thickness backed by 18-inches of teak and a thin iron inner skin, the sides of the vessel were vertical; deflection would not assist, as in the case of Confederate casemates. *Warrior*'s plating was also defective at the joints. To confirm by first-hand experience themselves, the American navy, in 1862–63, procured rolled iron plates from the same British and French companies producing armour for their own nations' ironclad fleets. These were then backed by up to 3 feet of wood – and the targets packed against a solid hillside bank of clay. Nevertheless, 15-inch smoothbores tore ragged holes through these structures, not only penetrating the iron and wood but also leaving the plates themselves shattered and brittle around the point of impact.

All of this, however, argued little for actual British ironclads afloat during the American Civil War; namely *Warrior* and her sister-ship *Black Prince*, the *Defence* and *Resistance*, *Achilles*, and a few wooden ironclad conversions – all protected with 4.5-inch iron armour plates. By 1864, the US army and then navy had already produced 20-inch guns that packed approximately double the hitting power of the 15-inch varieties. Rate-of-fire was reduced, but this mattered little when lighter-calibre weapons could effect no appreciable damage in the meantime against the turret armour of the American monitors, by 1864 up to 15-inches in thickness. Armour plates arrayed in a turret structure were also found to be innately stronger overall to resist the force of impact, and therefore

penetration, than thick slabs bolted onto the broadside. Monitor turret armour proved impervious at even point-blank ranges to Confederate 10-inch Columbiads firing shot weighing 168 pounds, as opposed to the 68-pounder smoothbores of *Warrior* and her sisters. Moreover, the monitor-form of ironclad at least enabled upgrades without requiring an entirely new design of ship to float the armour of equal weight.

Thus, any European ironclad would have done well to stay clear of Union monitors, and blockade would have been too hazardous for Britain sensibly to risk capital ships. In order to be any real threat to the Union, the Royal Navy needed to invest in a 'brown water' ironclad force to operate effectively in North American coastal waters.[21] In addition to the problems posed by the American monitors, the fast wooden screw steamers authorised by Congress in 1864 would, it was feared, act as 'a chain across the great lines of commerce',[22] and this concern led to the British building fast unarmoured iron-hulled warships in response.

There was also the Canada issue, notably the danger that, as in 1775, 1812, 1813 and 1814, war would be accompanied by an American invasion, an invasion that greater American economic and demographic strength, as well as the improvement in communications, notably through railways and steamships, and potentially large numbers of battle-hardened troops, made more threatening. British sensitivities led to defence planning, although British vulnerability on the Canadian frontier would have been reduced by the Union's acute need for troops against the Confederacy. There was also a tendency in Europe for armies and commentators to underrate the Civil War, treating it as a conflict waged by amateur militia or to focus on a limited number of lessons, particularly manoeuvre warfare.[23]

In November 1861, Captain William Noble of the Royal Engineers produced a memorandum on the situation on the Canadian lakes, a key element of naval activity in the war of 1812, and the assistance which could be provided by the Royal Navy. He argued that, once war broke out, the British needed to act speedily to capture the fort at Rouses Point at the upper end of Lake Champlain, both in order to protect Montreal and to cut a key link between New York and Ogdensburg, the main American town on the St Lawrence. Noble pointed out that the American presence on that waterway was a threat to British communications, and, indeed, the only railway from Montréal to Kingston and points further west went along the north bank of the river. Noble also saw an American threat to the Welland canal on the Niagara peninsula, the key link between lakes Ontario and Erie and one close to the

frontier. Indeed, the Trent affair led Lyons to fear a filibustering expedition of Irish Americans to attack the canal. In addition, Noble called for a British naval squadron on Lake Huron. There were worries about reported American intentions to establish a naval station and dockyard in Michigan,[24] while the defences of Bermuda were upgraded.[25]

A British memorandum, from December 1861, suggested that six lines of battle ships, eleven frigates, 23 sloops and 20 gunboats would be necessary to blockade the Union's Atlantic ports. That such action would entail cooperation with the Confederacy, a central strategic issue, was recognised by the memorandum's observation that coal could be obtained from its ports if the blockade was raised.[26] Indeed, the following month, Milne pointed out that 'the *daily use of steam* would be a matter of necessity' in any blockade.[27]

Lieutenant-Colonel William Jervois, a key individual as Deputy Director of Fortifications, who visited Canada in the autumns of 1863 and 1864, presented the Royal Navy as a means to help defend Canada. He noted that: 'although, owing to the length and nature of the frontier of Canada, it was impossible to protect it throughout its whole extent, an enemy must nevertheless acquire possession of certain vital points before he could obtain any decided military advantage; – that there are only a few small points.' Jervois regarded these as chiefly Montréal and Québec and the river between, which was to be protected by iron-plated vessels, and argued that, if these were held, there could be 'a successful resistance [...] so long as Great Britain had command of the sea', in other words, the Atlantic. He argued that 90,000 troops would suffice to defend Canada from Kingston to Québec inclusive, whereas the USA would require 250–300,000 to mount a successful attack, and that, at the same time, it would be necessary to protect the coast.[28]

British naval capability thus had both an interior/continental aspect, in the shape of warships on rivers and lakes, and a key oceanic component. The defence of Canada therefore conformed with the British strategic culture outlined in 1856 by Sir John Burgoyne, Inspector-General of Fortifications, who noted that Britain needed to rely for its defence on its navy and fortifications because 'the peace establishment of its land forces is insignificant as compared with those by which it may be assailed; and we may assume that the feelings of the country, its policy, and perhaps its real interests, render it impossible to vie, in its standing military establishments, with the continental powers'.[29] Indeed, Burgoyne commented in 1856 on the threat posed by an oceanic power in a way that threw light on a potential clash later during the Civil War:

> The progress in the state of gunnery and steam navigation renders it necessary to reconsider from time to time the principles of attack and defence of coasts and harbours. Whatever improvements may be made in land batteries, their entire adequacy for the purpose of defence cannot be certain against the rapidity of steamers and the facility of their manoeuvring power [...] but they may be powerful in combination with [...] the floating batteries with their sides coated with thick iron plates[30]

During the Civil War, the Confederacy also used torpedoes and mines to protect its coastal waters, although ultimately they did not prove very successful. Nevertheless, the fate of coastal positions showed the vulnerability of masonry forts to large rifled guns.[31] Indeed, on 23 April 1856, the American envoy in London had been one of the diplomats treated to a display of the new coastal-assault force of steam gunboats and mortar vessels.

Britain's position in the Western hemisphere was very much achieved by contingency, concession and cooperation as much as by force and long-term design. This situation contrasted with the developing British Empire in Asia, Africa and Oceania where force played a more prominent role and there was less of an emphasis on concession. As far as the latter were concerned, the British did not meet with naval resistance from local powers, and in Asia and Africa the process of imperial expansion very much focused on army activity. The latter depended on naval capability, which was measured, however, with reference to other naval powers, rather than with regard to the opponents Britain fought.

Alongside conquering much of the world, Britain retained a clear naval dominance, underpinning its central role in global commerce and communications. The acquisition of Cyprus (1878), the seizure of Egypt (1882) and other territories, the opening of the Suez Canal (1869) and the development of telegraph systems, greatly strengthened Britain's naval position as well as facilitating maritime trade; but Britain's naval dominance was not without serious problems. If put to the test, the Royal Navy was not up to Britain's global commitments. Such an assessment, however, was only pertinent if the commitments were all tested at the same time, which, in practice, was an excessively high bar.

Nevertheless, such a situation came to appear more of a risk thanks to threatening international alignments. In Victoria's reign, there was no repeat of the challenging circumstances during the reign of George III, notably the Franco-Spanish combination in 1762; that of France,

Spain and the Dutch in 1781–83, the late 1790s and the 1800s; and the coincidence of war with France and the USA in 1812–14. Nor was there any anticipation of the conflict with Germany, Japan and Italy in 1942. During Victoria's reign, there were no such combinations, but, nevertheless, threatening alignments were feared. That of Russia and the USA during the Crimean war did not materialise, but the Russo-French alliance of the 1890s posed what seemed to be a clear threat.

Already, prior to that, Russia had appeared to pose a strategic problem that was a different challenge to that from France. The British position in India had appeared vulnerable to France in the early 1780s and late 1790s, but that was a vulnerability expressed in, and able to be countered by, the established repertoire of naval action, amphibious operations, local alliances, and the acquisition of bases. Russia was different as it was harder for Britain to use these means to counter its challenge, although that was what the British sought to do in the Crimean war. The Ottoman empire, Egypt and the Near East were central to the British strategic concern focused on India. In 1877–78, moreover, the Anglo-Russian crisis centred on Russian pressure, at the close of a victorious war over the Ottoman empire, for a greater Bulgaria that would facilitate Russian access to the Mediterranean, notably through a presence on the Aegean. British pressure thwarted the ambition, but the crisis indicated the vulnerability as well as the potential capability and range of naval power. Indian army units were swiftly sent to Malta via the Suez Canal, a newly useful operational tool and thus strategic concern; while, in turn, the Russians planned commerce-raiding in the Atlantic and Indian oceans, and attacks on the ports of the British Empire such as Sydney.[32] In 1885, during the Penjdeh crisis over Russian pressure on Afghanistan's northern frontier, the Royal Navy was placed on full alert. Plans for attack included a bombardment of Kronstadt, Russia's Baltic naval base, as well as amphibious operations against Batum on the Black sea and Vladivostok, the latter to be preceded by the establishment of a British base in Korea.

A different type of challenge arose from France. After defeat by the Germans in 1870–71, in a war waged on land, the French navy was faced by political concern with the German army and the heavy costs of the French response on land. As a result, Admiral Théophile Aube, who became navy minister in 1886–87, and a group of thinkers known as the *Jeune École*, sought to counter British naval strength by proposing a new force structure, notably with a focus on cruisers and torpedo boats. This approach contested naval supremacy not so much by resources as by outthinking an opponent. The *Jeune École*

pressed not for battleships, which continued to attract the attention of British naval professionals, but for the less expensive option of unarmoured light cruisers, which would use less coal and be faster and more manoeuvrable than battleships. These cruisers were also regarded as more flexible, and thus better able to fulfil a range of tasks removed from the ship-killing battle-focus of battleships. Cruisers would be able to protect sea lanes, to advance imperial expansion and to attack the commerce of opponents.

The conceptual and methodological challenge was not only a matter of a different force structure focused on cruisers, but also a mixed-arms doctrine that looked towards twentieth-century doctrine and practice, especially the attempt to combine battleship and submarine operations in both world wars, and the integration of air power in the second. However, with cruisers, the necessary speed and range were obtainable only in big cruisers, which were expensive.

Aube also favoured the torpedo boat and claimed that the self-propelled torpedo made close blockades too risky. Thus, the battleship was nullified and the use of British blockade to close down French options could be overcome; which prefigured German hopes of submarine and air power in both World War I and II. With blockade broken, the *Jeune École* believed that their cruisers would be able to launch a crippling war on British trade.[33]

The Royal Navy had to respond to this change and challenge, but it did so unwillingly. As the practice of close blockade represented a clear strategic capability, there was a reluctance to abandon it. Indeed, it was felt necessary in the exercises of 1885 to plan for the establishment of a defensible advance base, so as to reduce vulnerability to torpedo attack. However, from the 1890s, the threat from torpedo attacks curtailed British interest in littoral warfare.

An awareness of challenge helped ensure that, from the 1880s, public discussion of naval issues increased in Britain. That decade, British naval expenditure was close to the combined figure of the next two high-spending powers, France and Russia. As a result of the Naval Defence Act of 1889, the origins of which can be traced to the near east crisis of 1877–78,[34] British naval estimates rose from £11 million in 1883 to £18.7 million in 1896, and that in a period of low inflation. The number of battleships rose from 38 in 1883 to 62 in service or construction in 1897. These figures were the product of an uneasy relationship between strength and insecurity, the latter borne of international developments as well as the rapid technological change that led to a frequent retooling in order to retain competitive advantage.

The relationship between this pre-*Dreadnought* naval race with possible relegation in the stakes of relative power and, on the other hand, empire was mixed. It is possible to stress global concerns and capability. Economic factors had transformed Britain's strategic situation. Adopting free trade was a huge success in economic terms, but a huge problem for strategy, for it made the country highly vulnerable to any interruption in the supply of food and raw materials. From the 1870s to 1914 and beyond, British strategy revolved around the question of what to do about this. Naval capability played a key role, but so did both international law and global power politics.

In the Victorian period, the development of British trade and empire led to an emphasis on naval power and to the related relays, especially naval bases and coaling depots, such that speed was converted into action at the will of a centre able to articulate a system more effectively thanks to the telegraph.[35] The extension of the network of British coaling stations ensured that their steam-powered armoured warships could be used in deep waters around the world, an extension advocated in 1881–82 in reports produced by the Carnarvon Commission. Indeed, British coal was important to the USA when it sent its fleet across the Pacific ocean, as the network of bunkering coal merchants round the world in the late nineteenth century was under British control, as were many of the colliers.

At the same time, the focus of naval planning remained concentrated on European waters. Policy and strategic reasons framed a planning that also responded to technological developments. The British focused on winning at sea, and thus avoiding the need for a large army and for alliances. Each of the latter was unacceptable for reasons of strategy and policy, notably opposition to conscription. It was also necessary to protect trade. As a result, there was a focus on a large navy able to carry the war to the enemy by close blockade and attacks on enemy warships in or near ports. The renewed focus on battleships in the 1890s, a focus that had never really been lost for the British, also reflected growing awareness of the potential of defences against torpedoes, especially torpedo nets and thick belt armour around the waterline. Electric searchlights were seen as important in detecting torpedo boats, while quick-firing medium-calibre guns could provide a secondary armament for use against them. The advent of smokeless powder eliminated the smoke that the *Jeune École* had assumed would provide cover. Moreover, the Russo-Japanese war 1904–5 and the rise of the German and Italian navies did a great deal to kill off the *Jeune École* by 1909.

Despite the earlier appearance of steam, iron armour and breech-loading guns, the true ocean-going battleship emerged in the 1890s, with better armour as well as improved engines, and more accurate guns and more effective shells. This naval capability proved able to defend Britain's global interests. In 1898, at the time of the Fashoda crisis over competing British and French interests in Sudan, a key element in the scramble for Africa, the channel fleet was sent to Gibraltar in a successful effort to put pressure on the French position in the Mediterranean. In a very different context, a less robust British stance was to be less successful at the expense of Italy during the Abyssinia crisis of 1935–36, although the conditions were very different.

The Royal Navy also provided a vital cover during the South African crisis that centred on the second Boer war of 1899–1902. Naval strength helped mean that there was no prospect of foreign intervention, notably from Germany, a situation that encouraged German naval figures to think of developing a stronger navy. Moreover, unchallenged control of the South African ports allowed the British to bring the resources of their empire to bear. The navy also blockaded Delagoa Bay to prevent supplies from reaching the Transvaal via the neutral Portuguese colony of Mozambique. From 1897, Britain kept a naval force in the bay larger than that of any other power.

These operations were scarcely as spectacular as the total American destruction of Spanish squadrons off Santiago in Cuba and in Manila Bay in 1898, key events in victory in the Spanish-American war. Nevertheless, although the drama of victory was lacking, while future dangers loomed, notably with Germany drafting its first war plan against Britain in 1897, the Royal Navy still dominated navalism worldwide. Indeed, the most influential writer on naval power, Alfred Thayer Mahan, who lectured at the new American Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island, focused on how the USA should draw on the example of Britain to use naval capability best in order to become a great power.

In the Royal Navy, Britain's global power and imperial status were combined. The key element was that of linkage. Naval power enabled Britain to affect and protect the links between interests across the world, links that, in a potent synergy, helped ensure the maintenance of this very power. At the same time, the issues and changes that Fisher brought up at the end of Victoria's reign involved heavy costs in the need to develop technology and entailed a new strategic stance and deployment pattern for the navy. These illustrated to a degree not only what the Victorian global context of maritime empire had been but also how it had to change.

Notes

1. I am most grateful to John Hattendorf, Nicholas Rodger and Larry Sondhaus for their comment on earlier drafts. Stirling to Sir James Graham, First Lord of the Admiralty, 9 April and 27 November 1854, London, British Library, Department of Manuscripts (hereafter BL Add. Mss.) 79, 696 fols. 147, 163.
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21. This section benefits greatly from the advice of Howard Fuller and takes a different view to that of Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, pp. 199–200; William H. Roberts, *Civil War Ironclads: The US Navy and Industrial Mobilization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002). On weakness of American guns, report in April 1865, TNA FO. 5/1017 fol. 226.
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