

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62643-0 - Samuel Pepys and the Royal Navy: Lees Knowles Lectures Delivered at Trinity College in Cambridge, 6, 13, 20 and 27 November, 1919

J. R. Tanner

Excerpt

[More information](#)

LECTURE I

INTRODUCTORY

THE materials for the administrative history of the Royal Navy from the Restoration to the Revolution are largely contributed by Cambridge.

The section of the Pepysian Library at Magdalene which Samuel Pepys classified as 'Sea Manuscripts' contains 114 volumes, the contents of which cover a wide field of naval history. Pepys's leading motive in collecting these is probably to be found in his projected 'History of the Navy.' Early in his career he thought of writing a 'History of the Dutch War,' 'it being a thing I much desire, and sorts mightily with my genius.'¹ Later on the design expanded into a complete naval history, upon which, at the time of his death, he was supposed to have been engaged for many years. Evelyn writes in his *Diary* on 26 May, 1703: 'This day died Mr Samuel Pepys, a very worthy, industrious, and curious person, none in England exceeding him in knowledge of the navy....He had for divers years under his hand the History of the Navy, or *Navalia* as he called it; but how far advanced, and what will follow of his, is left, I suppose, to his sister's son.' Pepys's correspondence with Evelyn and Sir William Dugdale suggests that it would have included in its scope the antiquities of the Navy and possibly the history of navigation, as well as administrative history; and this view is supported by his selection of 'sea' manuscripts for his Library.

¹ *Diary*, 13 June, 1664.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62643-0 - Samuel Pepys and the Royal Navy: Lees Knowles Lectures Delivered at Trinity College in Cambridge, 6, 13, 20 and 27 November, 1919

J. R. Tanner

Excerpt

[More information](#)

These manuscripts may be roughly classified in three groups :

(i) Official documents of Pepys's own time, the presence of which in the Library may be explained by the predatory habits of retiring officials in his day. Among these are to be found collections of real importance for the administrative history of the navy during his time, such as (1) *Naval and Admiralty Precedents* from 1660 to 1688—described as ‘a collection of naval forms and other papers, serving for information and precedents in most of the principal occasions of the Admiralty and Navy calling for the same’; (2) *Admiralty Letters*, 14 volumes containing the whole of the ordinary correspondence which passed out of Pepys's office during his two Secretaryships, 1673–1679 and 1684–1688¹—the equivalent of the modern letter-copying books, but in those days transcribed afresh with laborious care by a staff of clerks; (3) the *Admiralty Journal*, the minute-book of the Commission of the Admiralty from 1674 to 1679; (4) *Naval Minutes*, a volume in which Pepys made miscellaneous memoranda, many of them notes for his projected History; and (5) the *Navy White Book*, in which he noted abuses in shorthand, and wrote down what he called ‘matters for future reflection’ arising out of the Second Dutch War.

(ii) A second group of papers consists of official and unofficial documents—many of them acquired or copied at some expense—brought together deliberately in order to serve as material for the projected ‘History of the Navy.’ These include (1) a copy of Sir William Monson's *Naval Discourses*; (2) copious extracts from naval authorities and historians carefully indexed; (3) Penn's *Naval Collections*, being ‘a collection of several manuscripts, taken out of

¹ Vols. ii.–v. of these letters have been calendared already, and calendars of vols. vi. and vii. are in preparation: see the writer's *Catalogue of Pepysian MSS.* (Navy Records Society's Publications), vols. ii. and iii.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62643-0 - Samuel Pepys and the Royal Navy: Lees Knowles Lectures Delivered at Trinity College in Cambridge, 6, 13, 20 and 27 November, 1919

J. R. Tanner

Excerpt

[More information](#)

AND THE ROYAL NAVY

3

Sir William Penn's closet, relating to the affairs of the Navy'; (4) various volumes relating to shipbuilding and navigation, including the curious and valuable work entitled *Fragments of Ancient Shipwrightry* and Sir Anthony Deane's *Doctrine of Naval Architecture*. This last contains delicate and elaborate drawings of a ship of each rate, and Evelyn records in his *Diary* under date 28 January, 1682, the remarkable impression which a sight of it made upon him: 'Mr Pepys, late Secretary to the Admiralty, showed me a large folio containing the whole mechanic part and art of building royal ships and men-of-war, made by Sir Anthony Deane, being so accurate a piece from the very keel to the lead block, rigging, guns, victualling, manning, and even to every individual pin and nail, in a method so astonishing and curious, with a draught, both geometrical and in perspective, and several sections, that I do not think the world can shew the like. I esteem this book as an extraordinary jewel.' There also falls into this group (5) the large and important collection in eleven volumes entitled by Pepys *A Miscellany of Matters Historical, Political, and Naval*. This contains copies of 1438 documents, transcribed from various sources, and ranging from a complete copy in 114 folio pages of Sir Philip Meadows's work on the Sovereignty of the Seas down to 'A true Copy of the Great Turke his Stile which he most commonly writeth in His great Affaires.' They include documents relating to naval abuses; papers concerning salutes and the history of the flag, shipbuilding, victualling, and finance; a number of patents, commissions, and lists of ships; transcripts from the Black Book of the Admiralty; and collections relating to the Shipwrights' Company and to the Corporation of Trinity House.

(iii) The third group consists of books and papers which specially appealed to Pepys's characteristic curiosity, and have no direct bearing upon naval history. The line between

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62643-0 - Samuel Pepys and the Royal Navy: Lees Knowles Lectures Delivered at Trinity College in Cambridge, 6, 13, 20 and 27 November, 1919

J. R. Tanner

Excerpt

[More information](#)

this and the second group cannot, however, be sharply drawn, as few of the 'Sea Manuscripts' are merely curious, and irrelevant to the history of the navy as Pepys himself interpreted it. The contents of this group are not important for our present purpose, but one interesting fact may be noted. The inclusion in the *Miscellanies* of papers relating to Sir William Petty's calculations and experiments, and of a copy of 'A Discourse made by Sir Robert Southwell before the Royal Society, 8 April, 1675, touching Water,' suggests that Pepys's scientific interests were genuine, and were not due, as has been suggested, to a desire to commend himself to Charles II.

It is fortunate for the student of naval administration during the Restoration period that the 'Sea Manuscripts' in the Pepysian Library include two 'Discourses'¹ upon naval abuses written at the beginning of the period, which enable us to understand some of the difficulties with which Pepys and his colleagues had to contend. The *Second Discourse* by John Hollond, in succession Paymaster, Commissioner, and Surveyor of the Navy under the Commonwealth Government, following a *First Discourse* of 1638, is dated 1659; and the *Discourse* by Sir Robert Slyngesbie, a royalist naval commander, made Comptroller of the Navy on the King's return, is dated 1660. These give us the criticisms of a Parliamentarian of administrative experience and those of a royalist of experience at sea, made at the Restoration and supplying an excellent groundwork for the study of the period which followed it.

There is no time to traverse the whole field of the *Discourses*, but certain points may be considered by way of illustration.

¹ See Hollond's *Discourses of the Navy*, ed. J. R. Tanner, published by the Navy Records Society in 1896. This volume also includes Slyngesbie's *Discourse of the Navy*.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62643-0 - Samuel Pepys and the Royal Navy: Lees Knowles Lectures Delivered at Trinity College in Cambridge, 6, 13, 20 and 27 November, 1919

J. R. Tanner

Excerpt

[More information](#)

AND THE ROYAL NAVY

5

1. They bring into relief the remarkable durability of naval abuses. John Hollond was not the first writer to denounce abuses in the navy. This had been a fruitful topic for anonymous writers long before his day, and if the scattered papers on the subject were collected they would constitute a complete literature. The charges begin at least as early as the time of Hawkyins, and one writer¹ accuses him of what has always been regarded as one of the more modern refinements of cheating—the manufacture of a complete set of false books and vouchers for the purpose of baffling enquiry. The Pepysian Library contains copies of a number of exposures ranging from 1587 to 1611. The Reports of the Commissions of 1608 and 1618, and in a lesser degree of that of 1626, are of special importance in the history of the evolution of fraud. Sir William Monson, who in 1635 ‘turned physician’ and studied ‘how to cure the malignant diseases of corruption’ that had ‘crept in and infected his Majesty’s whole navy,’² assigns some passages in his *Naval Tracts* to naval abuses; and in 1636 the Earl of Northumberland, fresh from the experience of a naval command, denounces them in a state paper to the King in Council³. Hollond only develops in detail earlier themes, and Pepys, who thought very highly of his *Discourses*, ‘they hitting the very diseases of the navy which we are troubled with now-a-days,’⁴ takes up the same tale. And such is the tenacity of life exhibited by a well-established naval abuse, that a Parliamentary enquiry of 1783⁵ into the Victualling Department at Portsmouth revealed malpractices of a kind very

¹ Pepysian MSS., *Miscellanies*, x. 273.

² *Naval Tracts* (ed. M. Oppenheim), iv. 143.

³ See Appendix to Hollond’s *Discourses*, pp. 361–406.

⁴ *Diary*, 25 July, 1662.

⁵ ‘Interim Report of a Committee to inquire into abuses in the Victualling Department at Portsmouth’ (*House of Commons Miscellaneous Reports*, vol. xxxvi. No. 55).

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62643-0 - Samuel Pepys and the Royal Navy: Lees Knowles Lectures Delivered at Trinity College in Cambridge, 6, 13, 20 and 27 November, 1919

J. R. Tanner

Excerpt

[More information](#)

similar to those described by Hollond. The keys of the victualling storehouses had been entrusted to improper recipients, who had access to the stores at all hours; certain persons kept hogs in the King's storehouses, which were 'fed with the King's serviceable biscuit'; planks, spars, staves, and barrels were converted to private use; 'mops and brooms' from the store were appropriated by an official who 'kept a shop and dealt in those articles'; the King's wine was drawn off in large quantities 'in bottles in a clandestine manner'; certificates were granted for stores before they were actually received, and for articles received short, these being signed in blank by the clerk of the check beforehand; it was a 'common practice' to send in bags of bread deficient in weight; the accounts were imperfectly kept, and showed enormous deficiencies of stores; by collusion with the contractor stores were accepted that were 'of improper quality and not according to contract'; and the victualling board paid excessive prices to a bread contractor with whom they were in collusion and refused to allow others to tender.

2. Let me give you next a few illustrations of the kind of abuse which Hollond and his predecessors had pointed out, and with which Pepys and his colleagues had to deal.

(a) Hollond, like Pepys, appears to have had a genuine sympathy for the sorrows of the 'poor seaman,' and he complains bitterly of the long delays in paying wages; the 'intolerable abuse to poor seamen in their wages' by naval captains 'who are of late turned merchants, and have and do lay magazines of clothes,...tobacco, strong waters, and such like commodities into their ships upon pretence of relieving poor seamen in their wants, but indeed for no other reason than their private profit'¹; the practice of discharging sick men without adequate funds to take them home;

¹ *Discourses*, p. 131.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62643-0 - Samuel Pepys and the Royal Navy: Lees Knowles Lectures Delivered at Trinity College in Cambridge, 6, 13, 20 and 27 November, 1919

J. R. Tanner

Excerpt

[More information](#)

AND THE ROYAL NAVY

7

and the payment of wages by tickets instead of cash, thus creating a depreciated paper currency.

(b) Hollond also speaks strongly against the practice of using the State's labour in the gardens or grounds of officials, and the State's materials in repairing private houses or sumptuously decorating official residences, 'by painting, paving, and other ornamental tricking.'¹ Here he attacks a longstanding abuse, for a writer of 1597 had already charged the Comptroller of the Navy with employing five labourers from the dockyard 'by the space of half a year' at his house at Chatham 'about the making of a bowling alley and planting of trees,'² and in 1603 Phineas Pett was accused of appropriating the King's timber 'to make a bridge into his meadow' and to set up 'posts to hang clothes on in his garden,' and also labour for the same³. It is true that Pett's accuser is not above suspicion, for he begins his philippic with an artless exposition of his motives: 'In the last year of the Queen's reign, I, seeing some abuses by Phineas Pett, told him he had not done his duty. He strook me with his cudgel. I told him he had been better he had held his hand, for he should pay for it.' Pett was in some respects a calumniated man, but this particular kind of peculation is more easily justified to the official conscience than any other, and there is nothing inherently improbable in the accusation.

(c) The combination of captains and pursers to return false musters, or to present men to receive pay who never served, was another longstanding abuse. There was in the navy a recognised system of drawing pay for non-existent persons to which no discredit attached, for it was the regular way of giving the officers extra pay. Thus the captains were allowed a 'dead pay' apiece on the sea-books 'for their

¹ *Discourses*, p. 149.

² *A Large and Severe Discourse*, &c. (Pepysian MSS., *Miscellanies*, x. 226).

³ *A Large and Particular Complaint against Phineas Pett*, &c. (Pepysian MSS., *Miscellanies*, x. 257).

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62643-0 - Samuel Pepys and the Royal Navy: Lees Knowles Lectures Delivered at Trinity College in Cambridge, 6, 13, 20 and 27 November, 1919

J. R. Tanner

Excerpt

[More information](#)

retinues'; and in harbour no less than four varieties of dead pay were recognised, including wages and victuals paid to men for keeping ships 'which long since had no being.' We also hear of an allowance demanded in the Narrow Seas 'for a preacher and his man, though no such devotion be ever used on board.' The same principle appears in the 18th century in connexion with what were known as 'widows' men.' The captain was authorised to enter one or two fictitious persons in every hundred men of his ship's complement, and the wages drawn in their names and the value of the victuals to which they would have been entitled were applied to the relief of the widows of officers and seamen who had served in the navy¹. In the 16th and 17th centuries, however, the established principle was liable to a variety of fraudulent applications. A paper of 1603 gives a circumstantial account of a case in which the companies of a squadron of four ships were mustered, and it was found that of 1250 men charged for, only 958 were actually serving, the King being 'abused in the pay of 292 men, which for four months, the least time of their employment,' was £800². The Report of the Commission of 1608 explains how this could happen, for 'the captains, being for the most part poor gentlemen, did mend their fortunes by combining with the pursers'³; and Hollond, in his *First Discourse*, urges as a remedy 'an increase of means from the King' for 'all subordinate ministers acting in the navy,' since 'for want thereof' they are 'necessitated to one of these two particulars, either to live knaves or die beggars—and sometimes to both.'⁴

¹ *Discourses*, p. 140 n.

² *An Account of Particular Abuses to be proved against the Officers of the Navy* (Pepysian MSS., *Miscellanies*, x. 271).

³ C. N. Robinson, *The British Fleet*, p. 347. There are two copies of the Report of 1608 in the Pepysian Library—MSS. 2165, and *Miscellanies*, iii. 355.

⁴ *Discourses*, p. 100.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62643-0 - Samuel Pepys and the Royal Navy: Lees Knowles Lectures Delivered at Trinity College in Cambridge, 6, 13, 20 and 27 November, 1919

J. R. Tanner

Excerpt

[More information](#)

AND THE ROYAL NAVY

9

(d) The danger of collusion among officials was one of the chief difficulties in the way of would-be reformers, and just as collusion between the captains and the pursers defrauded the King in the matter of pay, so collusion between the victuallers and the pursers defrauded the King over the provision of victuals. Sir William Monson, in his *Naval Tracts*, gives instances of such collusion, and shews how easily it can be managed. Thus the victualler and the purser would contract between themselves for the purser to be allowed to victual a certain number of men on board each ship, paying the victualler for the privilege but making his own profit on the victuals he supplied. ‘Which,’ says Monson, ‘besides that it breeds a great inconvenience, for the purser’s unreasonable griping the sailors of their victuals, and plucking it, as it were, out of their bellies, it makes them become weak, sick, and feeble, and then follows an infection and inability to do their labour, or else uproars, mutinies, and disorders ensue among the company.’¹ Even if the officers of the ship did their duty, it was sometimes the case that the higher authorities ashore intervened from corrupt motives. Monson tells us that when the *James* was taking in victuals in Tilbury Hope, ‘there appeared a certain proportion of beef and pork able with its scent to have poisoned the whole company, but by the carefulness of the quartermasters it was found unserviceable. Yet after it was refused by the said officers of the ship, and lay upon the hatches unstowed, some of the Officers of the Navy repaired aboard and, by their authority and great anger, forced it to be taken in for good victuals.... My observation to this point is that, though the Officers of the Navy have nothing to do with the victualling part, yet it is likely there is a combination betwixt the one and the other, like to a mayor of a corporation, a baker, who for that year will favour the brewer

¹ *Naval Tracts*, iv. 147.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62643-0 - Samuel Pepys and the Royal Navy: Lees Knowles Lectures Delivered at Trinity College in Cambridge, 6, 13, 20 and 27 November, 1919

J. R. Tanner

Excerpt

[More information](#)

that shall the next year do the like to his trade when he becomes mayor.¹ Hollond's remedy for these abuses was to abolish the victualling contractor altogether, and for the State to take over the victualling by means of a victualling department². This system of victualling 'upon account,' as it was called, was actually adopted from 1655 to the Restoration, and again after 1683; but the difficulties were not altogether met by the change, for the officials who victualled 'upon account' were liable to collusion with the vendors of victuals from whom they bought, and in this case the King's service suffered in a different way.

(e) The administrative defects of the victualling recurred on almost as serious a scale in the department of stores, and great complaints are made, both by John Hollond and the earlier writers, of the bad quality of cordage and timber and of the frauds connected with their purveyance. Cordage would be entered by the storekeeper as heavier than it weighed; old cordage would be sold at absurdly low prices to the minor officials of the dockyard; and materials still fit for service would be condemned as unserviceable by an official who himself acted as a contractor for purchasing unserviceable stores³. The inefficiency of the surveyors of timber led them to purchase bad materials⁴, and their dishonesty provoked them to glut the King's stores with defective timber at exorbitant prices⁵ in order to favour the monopolist or merchant with whom they were in profitable collusion.

The worst and most corrupt period of naval administration was the reign of James I, and by the Restoration the navy was on a higher plane of efficiency and honesty; but the criticisms of such writers as Hollond and Slyngesbie shew

¹ *Naval Tracts*, iv. 143.² *Discourses*, p. 154.³ Pepysian MSS., No. 2735, p. 65.⁴ Hollond, *First Discourse* (*Discourses*, p. 78). ⁵ *Ib.* p. 67.