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Title: The year of mutinies: An analysis of the naval mutinies at Spithead and the  
Nore in 1797

Date: 2011

Originally published as: University of Chester MA dissertation

Example citation: Mackie, P. D. (2010). *The year of mutinies: An analysis of the  
naval mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797*. (Unpublished master's thesis).  
University of Chester, United Kingdom.

Version of item: Submitted version

Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10034/322666>

# **THE YEAR OF MUTINIES**

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE NAVAL MUTINIES AT  
SPITHEAD AND THE NORE IN 1797**

Philip Mackie

2010

Word Count: 17,424

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## Introduction

The so-called “great naval mutinies of 1797” marked a significant turning point in Royal Naval history. The events of that year sent shockwaves through the navy and fundamentally altered the attitudes of officers towards their crews, and vice versa, giving ordinary seamen a new voice over issues concerning their pay, victuals and treatment by those above them.<sup>1</sup> The 1797 mutinies were comprised essentially of two separate mutinies; the first at Spithead near Portsmouth,<sup>2</sup> and the second at the Nore near Sheerness.<sup>3</sup> It is the purpose of this paper to provide an analysis of the causes of, the character of, the attitudes towards, and the methods used to counteract the mutinies. It is hoped that these topics of discussion will provide a fresh and up-to-date examination of the mutinies.

The year 1797 was an extremely unstable and fearful one for Britain.<sup>4</sup> The country was in a precarious position with the French poised to invade, Europe quickly crumbling beneath French military action, Ireland plagued by unrest and rebellion, substantial national debt being incurred and heavy shipping losses being sustained.<sup>5</sup> Mutiny on such a scale as that which erupted in the same year was another serious predicament to add to this already extensive list.

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, ‘From the Delegates to the Admiralty, 18 April’ in C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 362-64.

<sup>2</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 16-7.

<sup>3</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 101.

<sup>4</sup> G. J. Marcus., *A Naval History of England, Vol 2: The Age of Nelson* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971), p. 82.

<sup>5</sup> G. J. Marcus., *A Naval History of England, Vol 2: The Age of Nelson* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971), p. 82.

The first rumblings of discontent in the Royal Navy came in the form of petitions sent to Earl Richard Howe,<sup>6</sup> famous victor of the 'Glorious First of June,' who had not long retired from his position as Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Fleet at Spithead.<sup>7</sup> The petitions were sent by men of that fleet, the first batch arriving in February 1797, and they desired an increase in their pay.<sup>8</sup> Howe was later troubled by similar petitions from his old fleet and, clearly unsure as to how to act on them, he submitted them to Earl Spencer, who was then First Lord of the Admiralty<sup>9</sup>, but no action was taken.<sup>10</sup> Without an answer to their early petitions, the orchestrators felt it necessary to adopt more drastic measures of gaining redress for their grievances.<sup>11</sup>

The mutiny at Spithead erupted on 16 April 1797 in reaction to the order from Admiral Alexander Hood (Lord Bridport), Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Fleet,<sup>12</sup> to put to sea, which the seamen of the various ships unanimously refused to do.<sup>13</sup> Delegates were duly elected amongst the mutinous crews and the delegates deemed it necessary that the officers should still remain in command of their respective vessels as usual, with the exception that any order to put to sea would not be followed.<sup>14</sup> The outbreak passed without violence<sup>15</sup> and, after some initial dawdling on the part of the Admiralty, eventually it was determined that a

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<sup>6</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> R. Knight, 'Howe, Richard, Earl Howe (1726-1799), naval officer,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press (2004).

<sup>8</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> M. Lester, 'Spencer, George John, second Earl Spencer (1758-1834),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press (2004).

<sup>10</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 7-8.

<sup>11</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 14-5.

<sup>12</sup> R. Morriss, 'Hood, Alexander, Viscount Bridport (1726-1814), naval officer and politician,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press (2004).

<sup>13</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 22-3.

<sup>15</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 21.

representation should be sent to negotiate with the mutineers in Portsmouth.<sup>16</sup> Despite the occasionally uneven nature of the negotiations, the Admiralty representatives eventually conceded to the demands of the seamen, and the King's Pardon was granted to them.<sup>17</sup>

However, the unrest within the Channel Fleet did not end at Spithead. There was still a minority feeling, even at the termination of events at Spithead, that the Admiralty would try to cheat the seamen.<sup>18</sup> As time passed, the minds of the men grew more and more suspicious that they had been duped and that the Admiralty and the Government were not going to redress their grievances after all.<sup>19</sup> In reality, the seamen had not accounted for the length of time that would need to be taken for parliament fully to redress their demands, and a second mutiny occurred amongst the Channel Fleet after it had repaired to St. Helens (Isle of Wight).<sup>20</sup> This fresh outbreak spurred the Admiralty into action regarding the need to reassure the minds of the seamen that their grievances would soon be passed through parliament and made law.<sup>21</sup> However, this time there was violence when Vice-Admiral Colpoys made an attempt to thwart the mutineers on board his flagship the *London*.<sup>22</sup> Ironically, the only violence that erupted during the affair at St Helens was not provoked by the mutineers, but by those in the navy who opposed them.<sup>23</sup> On 9 May the mutineers were granted their demands by parliament and by 15 May the mutiny in the Channel Fleet was over,<sup>24</sup> marked by a

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<sup>16</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 29-30.

<sup>17</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 41-4

<sup>18</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 41.

<sup>19</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 51.

<sup>20</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 51-7.

<sup>21</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 72-3.

<sup>22</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 62.

<sup>23</sup> N. A. M., Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: a naval history of Britain 1649-1815* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), pp. 446-7.

<sup>24</sup> N. A. M., Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: a naval history of Britain 1649-1815* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), pp. 446-7.

successful reconciliatory visit to the ships of the Channel Fleet by their former Commander-in-Chief, Earl Howe.<sup>25</sup>

The second of the two great mutinies of 1797 occurred among the North Sea Fleet at the Nore, close to Sheerness.<sup>26</sup> The outbreak came about on 12 May after the men of the *Sandwich* gathered on deck and gave three cheers, thereby signalling the start of the uprising.<sup>27</sup> This mutiny seemed from the outset to be comparable in style to Spithead; however, in contrast, it was unfocused and vague as to what it wished to achieve.<sup>28</sup> The Nore mutineers appointed as their president a man named Richard Parker whose position was to be akin to that of an admiral amongst the mutineers.<sup>29</sup> It was eventually agreed that sending an Admiralty representation (the same as that at Spithead) to Sheerness with a royal proclamation of pardon would be the most beneficial way of dealing with the mutineers.<sup>30</sup> The period of negotiation passed without success as neither side was willing to submit to the other.<sup>31</sup> The irrational approach adopted by Parker and the other ringleaders would gradually erode away any unity and public support the mutiny may have had, bringing it to the verge of collapse.<sup>32</sup> This collapse eventually occurred around the 12 and 13 June, and in consequence 28 men, including Parker, were hanged and several more flogged.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 73-9.

<sup>26</sup> G. J. Marcus., *A Naval History of England, Vol 2: The Age of Nelson* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971), p. 88.

<sup>27</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 107.

<sup>28</sup> G. J. Marcus., *A Naval History of England, Vol 2: The Age of Nelson* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971), p. 88.

<sup>29</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 124.

<sup>30</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 150-1.

<sup>31</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 153-5.

<sup>32</sup> G. J. Marcus., *A Naval History of England, Vol 2: The Age of Nelson* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971), pp. 91-2.

<sup>33</sup> G. J. Marcus, *A Naval History of England, Vol 2: The Age of Nelson* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971), p. 92.

Publications whose sole foci are the 1797 mutinies are few, but they are nonetheless a valuable starting point for anyone wishing to study the 1797 Mutinies in detail. The two works which can best be described as key to understanding the subject are Conrad Gill's 1913 book, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797*,<sup>34</sup> and George Manwaring and Bonamy Dobrée's 1935 book, *The Floating Republic: An Account of the Mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797*.<sup>35</sup>

In *The Naval Mutinies of 1797*, Conrad Gill provides a detailed account of the Spithead and Nore mutinies, followed by a thorough assessment of the principal causes of the discontent. The appendix gives a useful selection of some key transcriptions of primary source documents on the mutinies. Gill's account is divided into two parts. The first deals with the Spithead Mutiny, including the later outbreak at St. Helens, and the second part gives an account of the Nore Mutiny. Both accounts are detailed and thorough, and are backed up adequately by primary source material, which Gill often quotes from directly. In his analysis, Gill presents arguments for the principal causes of the mutinies. He reaches the conclusion that the mutinies were brought about by certain long-term grievances, for example the issue of low wages and poor quality provisions.<sup>36</sup> In addition, Gill asserts that the mutinies were inspired in the short-term by political factors.<sup>37</sup>

In their book *The Floating Republic*, George Manwaring and Bonamy Dobrée offer a similarly structured account to that of Gill. Where their work differs considerably from Gill's is in the colourful and often grandiose language, which relies on a degree

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<sup>34</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913).

<sup>35</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935).

<sup>36</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 261-7.

<sup>37</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 299-358.



of descriptive embellishment of events, although it does not in any way fabricate or alter the facts to suit this end. At the end of their account Manwaring and Dobrée argue that although Spithead was perhaps more successful in the short term, the Nore Mutiny helped pave the way for greater reform in the nineteenth century, due to the public outcry and enquiry that followed its events.

Also of note alongside these two works is the *Narrative of Occurrences that took place during the Mutiny at the Nore in the Months of May and June, 1797*, written by Sir Charles Cunningham.<sup>38</sup> In 1797, Cunningham was serving as captain of the *Clyde* when her crew joined the Nore mutiny, albeit temporarily.<sup>39</sup> As Cunningham's narrative is contemporaneous with the Nore Mutiny, then it could quite reasonably be treated as a primary source.

There is a greater abundance of works whose main focus is upon the social history of the navy, including the mutinies as part of their study. Such works include *A Social History of the Navy: 1793-1815* by Michael Lewis, published in 1960,<sup>40</sup> which argues that the introduction of quota men into the navy was the main driving force behind the mutinies. Later works, which contain an examination of the social history of the navy, include Nicholas Roger's 2004 book, *The Command of the Ocean*.<sup>41</sup>

The aim of this dissertation is to analyse the 1797 Mutinies at Spithead and the Nore by taking a fresh look at the primary source material for the subject. The last

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<sup>38</sup> C. Cunningham, *Narrative of Occurrences that took place during the Mutiny at the Nore in the Months of May and June, 1797*. The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, CUN/3.

<sup>39</sup> J. K. Laughton and A. Lambert, 'Cunningham, Sir Charles (1755-1834), naval officer,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press (2004).

<sup>40</sup> M. A. Lewis, *A social history of the Navy, 1793-1815* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1960).

<sup>41</sup> N. A. M., Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: a naval history of Britain 1649-1815* (London: Allen Lane, 2004).

significant and in-depth study of the mutinies came from Manwaring and Dobrée in 1935, and hence this paper seeks to present an up-to-date discussion of the causes, character, attitudes towards and methods used to counteract the mutinies. This paper does not seek to provide a detailed account of all events followed by a concise analysis of the mutinies in the manner of Gill and Manwaring et al, but rather it seeks to give a brief account of the mutinies (in this introduction) followed by a proportionately larger analysis. The analysis, which will comprise the substantive chapters of the dissertation, will call upon the historiography, in the form of Gill and Manwaring et al, to bolster the discussion where necessary.

Initially, this paper will study the causes of the discontent that eventually erupted in mutiny at Spithead, and thus attempt to gain an understanding of the primary cause(s) that ultimately led to mutiny. The paper will also look at the character of the mutinies by studying aspects of them in order to gain a greater understanding of the experiences of the mutineers. It will compare the two mutinies by concentrating on aspects such as discipline, organisation, conduct and militarism on board the mutinous ships. The attitudes of individuals towards the mutinies will be studied in order to establish the presence of any general trends in the way the mutinies were viewed and understood by contemporaries. In addition, the paper will seek to analyse the methods that were employed by navy officials in order to negotiate with, or oppose the mutineers, and to what extent these were adequate in bringing about the best results from the proceedings.

The structure of the dissertation will follow the order of the aims described in the above paragraph. Following this introduction, the first chapter will seek to discuss the

primary causes of the mutinies. The purpose of the second chapter will be to look at the character of the mutinies. Chapter 3 will study attitudes, and finally Chapter 4 will analyse the methods employed to deal with the mutinies. Following the four main chapters will be the overall conclusion for the paper, the purpose of which will be to bring the discussions of the preceding chapters together in a final summation.

As this dissertation is chiefly based upon primary source material, it is worth making a brief outline of the three repositories that have been visited for the writing of the paper. The Sydney Jones Library at The University of Liverpool has provided the majority of the material for the paper in the form of transcribed primary sources compiled in the publications of The Navy Records Society. Within this series of publications, five volumes have been consulted in the writing of this dissertation. Firstly, *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*,<sup>42</sup> edited by Roger Morriss, deals with the correspondence sent to and from the Channel Fleet during the mutiny at Spithead, mostly in the form of letters between Bridport and Spencer. This volume also contains the minutes of the Board of the Admiralty representatives during their period of negotiation in Portsmouth. Secondly, *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*,<sup>43</sup> edited by J. Corbett, take the form of correspondence sent to and from Earl Spencer in his position as First Lord of the Admiralty. The majority of correspondence in this volume concerns the Nore Mutiny, particularly letters exchanged between Earl Spencer and Admiral Duncan, in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief of the North Sea Fleet. Thirdly, *The Keith Papers*,<sup>44</sup> edited by W. G. Perrin, are made up of the correspondence and investigations carried out by

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<sup>42</sup> R. Morriss (ed.), *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).

<sup>43</sup> J. Corbett (ed.), *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)* (London: Navy Records Society, 1914).

<sup>44</sup> W. G. Perrin (ed.), *The Keith Papers* (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955).

Lord Keith during the Nore Mutiny. Miscellaneous references have also been gleaned from *The Naval Miscellany, Volume II*,<sup>45</sup> edited by J. K. Laughton, in which a letter from John Watson to Admiral Robert Digby provides some eyewitness information on the Nore Mutiny. Finally, *Naval Songs and ballads*,<sup>46</sup> edited by C. H. Firth, has yielded some valuable material in the form of a song about Richard Parker and his conduct during the Nore Mutiny.

The National Archives in Kew is a repository of national importance, fulfilling its role as the official archive of the government in the UK.<sup>47</sup> Sources relating to the mutinies at the Archives include the courts martial proceedings for the Nore Mutiny,<sup>48</sup> which detail the declarations made by the seamen under trial. Various logbooks for ships involved in the mutinies exist also, including that of the *Royal George* at Spithead.<sup>49</sup> Extracts of assorted private letters from eyewitnesses or persons involved in the mutinies have also provided valuable information.<sup>50</sup> The National Maritime Museum at Greenwich houses an extensive collection of important maritime documents.<sup>51</sup> The 1797 mutinies are represented by many collections of papers, including an address that was intended to be delivered to the seamen of the navy after the mutinies.<sup>52</sup> Also of relevance is the *Reflections on the Mutiny at Spithead* by Admiral Owen, which

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<sup>45</sup> J. K. Laughton (ed.), *The Naval Miscellany. Vol. II* (London: Navy Records Society, 1910).

<sup>46</sup> C. H. Firth (ed.), *Naval Songs and ballads* (London: Navy Records Society, 1908).

<sup>47</sup> The National Archives, *About us*,

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/default.htm> [accessed 14 October 2010].

<sup>48</sup> *Proceedings at a Court Martial held on board the Neptune in the River Thames August 19<sup>th</sup> 1797. For the trial of William Holdsworth, Henry Freeman, John alias Jonathan Davis, Bartholomew Connery, William Jones, Sampson Harris and Thomas Saul.* The National Archives, Kew, ADM1/5486.

<sup>49</sup> *Journal of the Proceedings of His Majesty's Ship Royal George from 1<sup>st</sup> July 1796 to the 30<sup>th</sup> June 1797.* The National Archives, Kew, ADM 51/1171.

<sup>50</sup> *Extract of a letter from John James to Susanna Johnson, dated 1 June 1797 from the Belliqueux.* The National Archives, Kew, PC 1/38/122.

<sup>51</sup> V. Heal, *Britain's Maritime Heritage: a guide to historic vessels, museums and maritime collections* (London: Conway Maritime, 1988) p. 83.

<sup>52</sup> *An Address to the Seamen in the British Navy* (London: Printed for W. Richardson, at the Royal Exchange, July 1797). The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, MKH/15.

provides an intriguing account of the events that took place.<sup>53</sup> There are also various ship's logbooks available, including the logbook of the *Clyde*, by Captain Charles Cunningham.<sup>54</sup> Various assorted letters, including one from Admiral Nelson to the Duke of Clarence,<sup>55</sup> have provided snippets of information that have contributed to the paper.

The 1797 mutinies were on a scale that far eclipsed that of more stereotypical and infamous mutinies, such as the mutiny on the *Bounty*, and it is the intention of this paper to place the spotlight firmly upon the events that took place at Spithead and the Nore in 1797. The historiography, although somewhat limited compared to the vast amount of works that cover the Battle of Trafalgar, for example, is nevertheless made up of certain key texts that will be referred to in the following discussion. As previously stated, the aim of this dissertation is to provide a fresh analysis of the Spithead and Nore Mutinies, rather than simply providing a narrative of events. In order to achieve this, it has been essential to draw upon original primary source material, both in archive form, or transcribed into relatively recent volumes. The events surrounding the 1797 Mutinies have the potential to increase greatly our understanding of both the military and social history of the Royal Navy, as the following chapters will endeavour to show.

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<sup>53</sup> E. C. R. Owen, *Reflections on the Mutiny at Spithead*. The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, COO/2/A.

<sup>54</sup> *Logbook of the Clyde, Captain Charles Cunningham, kept by John Smith, 1796-1800, with account of the mutiny at the Nore*. The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, BRK/15.

<sup>55</sup> *Horatio Nelson, Viscount: holograph to H. R. H. the Duke of Clarence, dated from the Theseus, 26 May 1797*. The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, AGC/27/24.

## Chapter 1

### The Causes of the 1797 Mutinies

It was on 16 April 1797 that the mutiny in the Channel Fleet at Spithead began.<sup>1</sup> The order to proceed to sea was the trigger that set in motion the chain of events that would comprise the mutiny at Spithead, first in the *Royal Sovereign*, and then subsequently in the other ships of the fleet.<sup>2</sup> The outbreak took place without the slightest hint of violence, and thus the command of the fleet passed into the hands of the seamen.<sup>3</sup> Prior to the start of the mutiny at Spithead, there had been rumblings, largely in the form of petitions sent by the crews of the Channel Fleet to officials, including Earl Howe and the Admiralty, but these pleas had been ignored.<sup>4</sup>

Gill, in his book *The Naval Mutinies of 1797*, argues that many of the grievances were long standing issues that had become embedded in the subconscious of the ordinary seaman.<sup>5</sup> However, the reason why the mutinies erupted when they did could be attributed to additional, relatively short-term political factors that, when combined with the aforementioned long term grievances, resulted in disaffection and mutiny.<sup>6</sup> It is the intention of this first chapter to review this argument by returning to the primary source material and thus establish the primary cause, or causes, that brought about the beginning of the colossal uprisings among the Channel Fleet at Spithead, and later the North Sea Fleet at the Nore. This section will analyse both long and short-term causes that may have been instrumental in inciting the seamen to mutiny in 1797, and will

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<sup>1</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 21

<sup>2</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 21

<sup>3</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 21-22

<sup>4</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 14-15

<sup>5</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 296.

<sup>6</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 357-8.

attempt to draw out the most important and influential sources of the discontent. For the purposes of this analysis, the Nore Mutiny will be treated as a reaction to the Spithead Mutiny, and thus both will be seen as a single event with the same long and short term causes.

Gill argues that the grievances relating to a desire for greater quality in provisions was the principal cause of the mutiny at Spithead, surmounting that of a desire to increase their wages.<sup>7</sup> Gill asserts that because the issue of poor provisions was a daily problem for the seamen, then it must have been foremost in their minds compared to the issue of pay, which would have been of little relevance when at sea.<sup>8</sup> However, this paper argues for the idea that the issue of low wages was in fact the primary cause of the mutinies. The reasoning behind this lies in the early petitions sent by the seamen of the Channel Fleet before the mutiny began. In these petitions, the sole grievance stated refers to a desire for an increase in pay for the common seaman, especially at 'the present interesting moment when their country calls on them so pressingly to advance once more to face her foes.'<sup>9</sup> According to Bridport, petitions were presented six months before the start of the uprising by the fleet at Spithead, and here it appears that the only grievance stated was a request for an increase in seamen's pay.<sup>10</sup> It was only later that additional grievances were placed upon the seamen's petition to the Admiralty, which, in the order that they were laid down, were as follows: the desire for an increase in pay; an increase in the weight of, and greater quality in provisions; no flour be served while in port; a greater quantity of vegetables

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<sup>7</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 265.

<sup>8</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 265.

<sup>9</sup> Anonymous, 'Defence to Admiralty' in *The Naval Mutinies of 1797*, ed. Conrad Gill (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 359-60.

<sup>10</sup> A. Hood, 'Bridport to Admiralty, 17 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 204.

be provided; the quality of care for sick and injured seamen be improved; greater provision for leave on shore should be made; pay for wounded and ill seamen be continued as normal. The petition also mentions that any grievances unique to particular ships be considered alongside the general wishes of the fleet above.<sup>11</sup> That these grievances were added much later alongside the long established wish of an increase in pay represents an expansion of thinking on the part of the mutineers. Why this change of thinking came about is uncertain, but it must have been a subject of much debate and discussion amongst the mutineers' delegates.

A key factor that only served to aggravate the steadily rising discontent among the seamen in the Channel Fleet was the lack of attention that officials in the Admiralty paid to the petitions sent by the men of the fleet.<sup>12</sup>

'Lord Howe, of course, took no other notice of them but by putting them into Lord Hugh Seymour's hands for the private information of the Board and as it appeared impossible to do anything officially on the subject without running the risk of unpleasant consequences by a public agitation of so delicate a topic it was judged most advisable by the Board to take no notice of the circumstance, hoping that it might go no further'<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the Admiralty adopted a deliberate policy of neglect, and hoped that the problem would simply disappear in time.<sup>14</sup> It must have seemed so up until the point

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<sup>11</sup> Anonymous, 'From the Delegates to the Admiralty, 18 April' in C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 362-64.

<sup>12</sup> G. J. Spencer, 'Spencer to Bridport, 14 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 197.

<sup>13</sup> G. J. Spencer, 'Spencer to Bridport, 14 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 197.

<sup>14</sup> G. J. Spencer, 'Spencer to Bridport, 14 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 197.



that the first signs of mutiny appeared on the horizon. This policy was, with hindsight, mistaken and inevitably resulted in the outbreak of mutiny at Spithead. The reasons why the Admiralty, more specifically Spencer, did not consider raising the wages of the seamen is clear in the reply he made to a letter by Captain Thomas Pakenham on the same subject:

‘A very little reflection must I think immediately point out to you the utter impossibility in the present state of the country of adopting the measure you mention of increasing the wages to seamen, the expense of which would, from the great number at present borne, be an enormous increase to our disbursements already sufficiently burthensome.’<sup>15</sup>

From this reply, the stance of Spencer on the issue of raising the seamen’s wages was clear. Spencer also stated that he wished to avoid ‘running the risk of unpleasant consequences by a public agitation of so delicate a topic.’<sup>16</sup> By adopting this policy of neglect, the Admiralty underestimated the potential threat posed by a surprisingly united and highly organised mutinous fleet. Without an answer from either Howe or the Admiralty, the seamen of the Channel Fleet would have felt that mutiny, in the form of peaceful protest, would be the only course of action open to them.

In his analysis of the chief causes of the mutinies, Gill does not touch upon the issue of the blatant lack of communication between officials as a factor that aggravated the rising discontent; however, it is argued here that the initial lack of communication between officials was a prime short-term factor that led to the Spithead Mutiny. A key

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<sup>15</sup> G. J. Spencer, ‘Spencer to Pakenham, 12 December 1796’ in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), p. 108.

<sup>16</sup> G. J. Spencer, ‘Spencer to Bridport, 14 April 1797’ in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 197.

example of the failure of officials to communicate with one another before the mutiny was the fact that both Earl Howe and the Admiralty did not inform Bridport of the petitions that had been sent from his fleet regarding the increase in pay.<sup>17</sup> Bridport was quick to vent his frustration on the disinclination of Howe to even inform him that he had been receiving petitions from men in the fleet that he commanded.<sup>18</sup> 'it is reported to me that petitions were presented six months ago for an increase of pay, of which I was totally ignorant 'till I wrote my first letter on this subject.'<sup>19</sup>

As one of the later supporters of the seamen's cause, possibly due to the fact that he wished to see the business brought to an end, Bridport should have been informed of the petitions and their content from the start. It was he, at odds with the Admiralty, who thought that compliance with the demands of the men was the best policy to adopt.<sup>20</sup> The majority of captains among the Channel Fleet were also firmly of the belief that the men would return to order if the Board complied with their grievances.<sup>21</sup> If Bridport had been kept informed of the petitions that had been sent to Howe and the Admiralty, it is possible that the mutiny may never have come about. This will, however, remain purely speculative. Bridport later made implicit criticisms of the administrative mismanagement of the situation in a letter to William Pitt, wherein he stated that:

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<sup>17</sup> A. Hood, 'Bridport to Admiralty, 17 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 204.

<sup>18</sup> A. Hood, 'Bridport to Admiralty, 17 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 204.

<sup>19</sup> A. Hood, 'Bridport to Admiralty, 17 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 204.

<sup>20</sup> A. Hood, 'Bridport to Admiralty, 16 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 202 (p. 202).

<sup>21</sup> Anonymous, 'The Minutes of the Board, 19 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 206-10 (p. 208).

'I have always considered peevish words and hasty orders detrimental and it has been my study not to allow one or issue the other. I wish that rule had guided the conduct of those in higher situations as I think 'tis wiser to soothe than combat disturbed and agitated minds.'<sup>22</sup>

This statement remains true to the efforts Bridport made to persuade the Admiralty to comply with the demands made by the crews of the Channel Fleet.<sup>23</sup> Although the later visitation of Lord Howe to the fleet in order to declare the King's Pardon and display the newly passed act of parliament<sup>24</sup> somewhat eclipses the efforts of Bridport and others, it must still be borne in mind the extent to which the satisfactory results of the mutiny were down to his labours.

This paper agrees with the argument made by Gill that the mutineers may have been inspired by the ideas that lay behind the French Revolution.<sup>25</sup> The influence of that major event and the revolutionary attitudes of the seditious 'United Irishmen,' coupled with the recruitment 'quota system,' are discussed in the following paragraphs. The United Irishmen were essentially a society that believed they were a primary weapon in the fight against British rule;<sup>26</sup> they desired an independent Ireland and readily became allies of the French.<sup>27</sup> The United Irishmen would go to any lengths to hasten the demise of Britain and bring about the freedom of Ireland.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the presence of members of the United Irishmen within the ranks of

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<sup>22</sup> A. Hood, 'Bridport to William Pitt, 11 May 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 229-30 (p. 229).

<sup>23</sup> A. Hood, 'Bridport to Admiralty, 16 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 202 (p. 202).

<sup>24</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 73.

<sup>25</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 305.

<sup>26</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 329

<sup>27</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 329

<sup>28</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 329

crewmen in His Majesty's Navy could have been potentially damaging should they have been allowed to influence the minds of others.

The fear of revolutionary ideas spreading throughout the navy and, worse still, the actual presence and influence of seditious individuals, were commonplace amongst officials throughout the period of mutinous activity. The attitudes of particular officials towards the idea of sedition in the navy will be discussed later in Chapter 4. In considering the influence of the French Revolution as a short-term trigger for the mutinies, attention must turn to the evidence gathered by particular officials, among them Thomas Pearce. After the Nore Mutiny drew to a close, he became responsible for interviewing certain key mutineers who may have had links to secret societies.<sup>29</sup> In his initial investigations, he stated how the men under interrogation made mention that some influence from external third parties was present during the mutiny.<sup>30</sup> Edward Newenham was an Irish politician who, on 28 April, wrote to Spencer claiming to have evidence that several United Irishmen, sentenced to work aboard a navy vessel, had stated that they could increase support for their cause in such a location.<sup>31</sup> Newenham asserted that 'all that went took with them numbers of that rebellious paper, the Northern Star, and were sworn to that purpose of poisoning the minds of the sailors.'<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> T. Pearce, 'Thomas Pearce to Spencer, 13 June 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 156-7 (pp. 156-7).

<sup>30</sup> T. Pearce, 'Thomas Pearce to Spencer, 13 June 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 156-7 (pp. 156-7).

<sup>31</sup> E. Newenham, 'Edward Newenham to Spencer, 28 April 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 119-20 (pp. 119-20).

<sup>32</sup> E. Newenham, 'Edward Newenham to Spencer, 28 April 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 119-20 (pp. 119-20).

The declaration made by Richard Parker prior to his execution states clearly that the mutiny was not influenced in any way by seditious societies outside of the North Sea Fleet.<sup>33</sup> Parker remained adamant that neither he, nor anyone else in the mutinous fleet, ever received any letters or money from any seditious third parties outside of the fleet,<sup>34</sup> and that the cause was entirely that of the seamen.<sup>35</sup> Whether Parker's declaration can be treated as entirely reliable is uncertain, but as the Admiralty investigators (tasked with discovering the presence of any revolutionary influence after the mutinies had ended) found, there was no evidence for the presence of seditious elements at the Nore,<sup>36</sup> thus Parker was probably telling the truth.

Gill argues that it was the introduction of quota men that may have provided a catalyst by which ideas of reform and individual rights came into the Navy.<sup>37</sup> The quota system was intended to increase the supply of manpower to the navy by offering considerable bounties as an enticement.<sup>38</sup> The system drew men from a variety of backgrounds into the role of ordinary seamen, but typically it attracted individuals who had fallen on hard times, through such means as unemployment and debt, who hoped to better themselves with the promise of a large bounty, a stable job and the chance of acquiring prize money.<sup>39</sup> Due to the desperation of the authorities to provide men for the navy during the war with France, some of the men recruited

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<sup>33</sup> Anonymous, 'The Declaration of Richard Parker' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 160-73 (p. 171).

<sup>34</sup> Anonymous, 'The Declaration of Richard Parker' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 160-73 (p. 170-1).

<sup>35</sup> Anonymous, 'The Declaration of Richard Parker' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 160-73 (p. 171).

<sup>36</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Penguin, 1937), pp. 245-7.

<sup>37</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 317.

<sup>38</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 315.

<sup>39</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 315.

through the quota system were invariably petty criminals of one form or another.<sup>40</sup> Before entering the navy, the average quota man would have spent most (if not all) of his time on land,<sup>41</sup> and his attitudes and values could differ considerably from those of the average long-serving career seaman. It was recognised by officials, during and after the mutinies that the introduction of such men into the ranks of the navy could have served to disseminate new and often revolutionary ideas among the ordinary sailors.<sup>42</sup> Richard Parker himself was enlisted back into the navy as a quota man, an opportunity that enabled him to secure his release from Perth gaol, where he had been confined for his debts.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, a number of men appointed as delegates during both mutinies may have been inducted into the navy by the quota system.<sup>44</sup>

Essentially, the French Revolution and its associated ideology and beliefs, combined with the advent of the quota system, affected the timing of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore, thereby giving credence to the argument made by Gill. Had the revolutionary ethic and the quota system occurred earlier in the eighteenth century, then it seems perfectly reasonable to speculate that a mutiny, largely similar to Spithead in scale and character, could have come about at that time, as the issue of pay would still have been very much ingrained into the minds of the ordinary seaman since it was set during the reign of Charles II.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 315

<sup>41</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 315

<sup>42</sup> A. Duncan, 'Duncan to Spencer, 14 May 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 130-2.

<sup>43</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 126-27

<sup>44</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 316-17

<sup>45</sup> Anonymous, 'From the Delegates to Parliament' in C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 360-2, (p. 360).

Some officials in the Admiralty and within other high stations in the navy, placed the primary cause of the mutiny down to a lack of, or 'relaxation' in discipline.<sup>46</sup> Spencer in particular seems to have promoted this idea in a letter to Bridport.<sup>47</sup> This paper argues that the view that a relaxation in discipline in the fleet was a cause for the outbreak of mutiny is a fallacy, concocted by officials like Spencer in order to explain the largely unanimous uprising in the Channel Fleet. The way Spencer proposed to deal with the issue in the future was put across in a vague and formless way, no doubt in the hope that Naval officers would interpret his words and act accordingly:

'A relaxation of discipline will sooner or later produce mischief and the only way to remedy what is past will, I am fully persuaded, be by a very steady and invariable adherence to the strictest rules of the service.'<sup>48</sup>

The very fact that the mutinies were conducted in a most organised and disciplined way by those in the delegation shows how untrue this statement was.<sup>49</sup> A poorly disciplined fleet would surely have given way to a badly organised rebellion; lack of discipline in the Channel Fleet was not a cause of the mutiny.

There exist several instances of ships' companies who may have wished to take advantage of the situation to place before the authorities their own individual grievances. Some of these were related to the ingrained naval issue of pay held in

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<sup>46</sup> G. J. Spencer, 'Spencer to Bridport, 6 May 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 222 (p. 222).

<sup>47</sup> G. J. Spencer, 'Spencer to Bridport, 6 May 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 222 (p. 222).

<sup>48</sup> G. J. Spencer, 'Spencer to Bridport, 6 May 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 222 (p. 222).

<sup>49</sup> See chapter 2 in this paper, pp. 26-7.

long, drawn out arrears.<sup>50</sup> Pay could be held in arrears for considerable lengths of time, usually up to about two years, although longer periods were known.<sup>51</sup> The importance of the many and varied individual grievances made by crews during the mutinies cannot be underestimated, as even after the general uprisings were dealt with, individual grievances would often remain until rectified.<sup>52</sup>

It was grievances surrounding overdue pay and prize money that initially caused the crew of the *Repulse* to ignore the order to man the capstan at Yarmouth Roads,<sup>53</sup> en route to the Nore. Again, the crew of the *Nassau* at the Nore stated that they would go nowhere until their pay had been received.<sup>54</sup> Also at the Nore, the crew of the *Intrepid* refused to comply with the orders given to them until leave to go ashore for twenty-four hours had been granted.<sup>55</sup> The desire for leave was one entertained by many navy crews, due to the meagre allowance for onshore leave that they were often given, if at all.<sup>56</sup> The fear of desertions meant that for some crewmen in the navy it was a matter of years before they were allowed leave to go ashore.<sup>57</sup> Thus, it is little surprise that crews would take advantage of the mutinous climate of the summer of 1797 to declare their wish for some onshore leave to be granted.

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<sup>50</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), p. 18.

<sup>51</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), p. 18.

<sup>52</sup> A. Hood, 'Bridport to Spencer, 24 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 214-15 (p. 214).

<sup>53</sup> G. K. Elphinstone, 'Examination of Mutineers from the *Repulse*, 10 June 1797' in *The Keith Papers*, ed. W. G. Perrin (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955), pp. 20-21 (p. 20).

<sup>54</sup> A. Duncan, 'Duncan to Spencer, 26 May 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 134-5.

<sup>55</sup> E. Nepean, 'Nepean to Spencer' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 142-3.

<sup>56</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), p. 45.

<sup>57</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), p. 45.



Gill discusses the notion that one of the most referred to grievances of the Spithead Mutineers related to the problem of their mistreatment by autocratic officers and other key members of a ship's crew.<sup>58</sup> The Royal Navy had always had an issue concerning the treatment of crews by their officers, many of whom could exercise their power in a most unpleasant and tyrannical way. A classic example of the kind of misery that an oppressive commanding officer could administer upon his crew can be found in the form of Hugh Pigot, Captain of the *Hermione*.<sup>59</sup> Pigot's treatment of his crew can best be described as callous and brutal, and helped bring about a separate mutiny aboard that ship.<sup>60</sup> The catalyst for that event was Pigot's imposition of the absurd penalty that the last man down from aloft would suffer a flogging, with the result that, in the ensuing race to get down, three men were killed by falling onto the deck.<sup>61</sup> Pigot was then heard to declare an order to 'throw the lubbers overboard,' a statement that ultimately drove his men to usurp his authority.<sup>62</sup> The often autocratic and harsh methods employed by those in command was the product of a lack of standardisation in the way ships were governed,<sup>63</sup> resulting in dissatisfaction among many crews with the way in which their officers treated them.

At Spithead and the Nore, it appears that many of those individuals employed to serve as surgeons in the navy suffered just as much as officers under the various accusations

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<sup>58</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 268.

<sup>59</sup> N. A. M., Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: a naval history of Britain 1649-1815* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), p. 452.

<sup>60</sup> N. A. M., Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: a naval history of Britain 1649-1815* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), p. 452.

<sup>61</sup> N. A. M., Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: a naval history of Britain 1649-1815* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), p. 452.

<sup>62</sup> N. A. M., Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: a naval history of Britain 1649-1815* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), p. 452.

<sup>63</sup> A. Duncan, 'Duncan to Spencer, 17 June 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 157-9 (pp. 157-8).

of the ordinary seamen.<sup>64</sup> Gill is quick to highlight that the dismissal of several surgeons from their ships by the mutineers could be linked to the grievance raised by the seamen concerning the provision of better healthcare for ill or injured seamen at sea.<sup>65</sup> At Spithead, the Captain of the *Royal George* was powerless to prevent their surgeon, one Doctor Johnston, from being hastily put ashore by the crew.<sup>66</sup> At the Nore, the crew of the *Adamant* took it upon themselves to evict their surgeon, and threatened the captain that, should he provide support to the said surgeon, they would do the same to him.<sup>67</sup> Other ship's officers, such as pursers, also became the subject of the accusations and grievances of individual vessels as testified in the objections raised by the crew of the *Saturn*, against their purser, Mr Philip Viscompte 'who had uniformly cheated them in weight and measure.'<sup>68</sup> Other officers were also the targets of the mutineers' purging of those in authority, as attested in a letter by Joseph Wheatley of the *Isis*, at the Nore; 'we have got [what] we desire, that is, the removal of our Master and two of his mates.'<sup>69</sup> Whether these accusations were justified or completely unfounded cannot be ascertained for certain, but it is clear that the beginning of the mutinies would have given many crews the excuse to be rid of those in authority whom they detested.

It is evident that the causes for the outbreak of mutiny in 1797 are more complex and multi-faceted than one would first think. This paper is in opposition to Gill over his

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<sup>64</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 274.

<sup>65</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 274.

<sup>66</sup> A. Hood, 'Bridport to Spencer, 24 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 214-15 (p. 215).

<sup>67</sup> A. Duncan, 'Duncan to Spencer, 14 May 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 130-2.

<sup>68</sup> G. K. Elphinstone, 'Keith to King, June 5 1797' in *The Keith Papers*, ed. W. G. Perrin (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955), pp. 26-28 (p. 27).

<sup>69</sup> *Extract of a letter from Joseph Wheatley to Anne Jackson, dated 30 May 1797 from the Isis*. The National Archives, Kew, PC 1/38/122.

contention that the issue of pay may not have been the primary cause for discontent, as the evidence derived from the various sources seems to support the fact that the desire for an increase in pay was the longest running and most keenly felt grievance that led to mutiny. However, the issue of pay does not entirely explain why the mutinies erupted in 1797. This paper is largely concurrent with Gill that the time in which the mutinies came about can be put down largely to the dissemination of ideas from the French Revolution, as well as the introduction of the quota system, whereby a new breed of seaman not as accustomed to the hardships of life in the navy as those of an older pedigree became the focus of the majority of mutinous activity. This paper argues that administrative error and incompetence served to further aggravate the rising discontent in the Channel Fleet and thus hastened the arrival of mutiny in the short term. There were many grievances that were unique to particular ships (consisting mostly of the desire to be rid of unpopular officers), but these were really only the result of crews taking advantage of the period of mutiny to make their individual grievances known. The idea that a relaxation of discipline in the fleet, as championed by officials such as Spencer, brought about the uprising at Spithead has been found to be a fallacy.

## Chapter 2

### The Character of the 1797 Mutinies

For the majority of seamen who took part in the mutinies of 1797, very little would have changed in their daily routines.<sup>1</sup> This in itself is interesting, as it defies the popular 'Bounty' stereotype of mutiny at sea with romantic characters wielding cutlasses and defying oppressive officers. The character of the two mutinies at Spithead and the Nore have often been compared with one another. The comparison made by Manwaring and Dobrée in the last chapter of their book *The Floating Republic* is a classic example, in which they present the Spithead Mutiny as an exemplar of good conduct met with acceptable methods of opposition by the Admiralty, whereas the Nore Mutiny is seen as an example of bad conduct met with inadequate methods of opposition.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter intends to gain a greater understanding of the mutineer experience. Utilising the primary source material available for the mutinies, Chapter 2 will attempt to paint a picture of the mutineers themselves, how the delegates maintained discipline and organised the fleet, how they managed to sustain unity among themselves and what, if any, militaristic activities were conducted. Through studying these various themes, the Spithead and Nore uprisings will be compared with one another in order to ascertain whether there was much in the way of differences and similarities between them. The sources utilised for this purpose are drawn primarily from the accounts of navy officials whose position was opposed to that of the mutineers.

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<sup>1</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), p. 251.

Through studying the primary source material, it becomes clear that the uprising at Spithead was not a disorganised and confused squabble for control of the fleet. It is evident from a variety of sources, that the outbreak and later continuance of the mutiny was well planned, organised and executed. The very nature of the opening stages of the mutiny shows the considerable planning and communication that must have been invested to make it run smoothly.<sup>3</sup> This plan, the result of close communication between ships in the fleet, was to be initiated when the order to put to sea was declared.<sup>4</sup> When the command to weigh anchor was given, each ship's company was to refuse the order by giving three cheers, the *Royal George* being the lead ship in this process.<sup>5</sup> Two delegates were then sent from each ship of the line to the *Queen Charlotte*, which would act as the nerve centre of the mutinous fleet.<sup>6</sup> The delegates also determined that, should they not receive an answer to their petitions in the allotted time, a combined Union Flag and two-gun signal were to be made aboard the *Queen Charlotte* as an indicator to send the officers of the fleet ashore.<sup>7</sup> The intricacy of these signals is a testament to the organisational skills of the delegates and other mutineers, and clearly shows how efficient and well directed the mutiny was. The oft-performed ritual of cheering in the morning and evening during the mutiny was carried out by the entire fleet,<sup>8</sup> and may have been intended to remind both the mutineers, and those in authority, of the determination of the seamen to have their grievances redressed.

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<sup>3</sup> A. Hood, 'Bridport to Spencer, 15 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 199 (p. 199).

<sup>4</sup> A. Hood, 'Bridport to Spencer, 15 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 199 (p. 199).

<sup>5</sup> A. Hood, 'Bridport to Spencer, 15 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 199 (p. 199).

<sup>6</sup> Anonymous, 'The Minutes of the Board, 18 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 206-10 (pp. 206-7).

<sup>7</sup> A. Gardner, 'Gardner to Pole, 16 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 203-4 (p. 203).

<sup>8</sup> *Journal of the Proceedings of His Majesty's Ship Royal George from 1<sup>st</sup> July 1796 to the 30<sup>th</sup> June 1797*. The National Archives, Kew, ADM 51/1171.

Gill argues that discipline was not lacking within the mutinous Channel Fleet, except with regard to the order for proceeding to sea,<sup>9</sup> and the primary source evidence closely supports this assertion as discussed below. The taking of oaths to secure the loyalty of the seamen and marines serves to illustrate the strict adherence to shipboard discipline that the delegates demanded.<sup>10</sup> Discipline was not in any way lacking amongst the mutinous fleet at Spithead, as observed by Admiral Graham Moore:

‘A most rigid discipline was kept up and any disobedience to the orders and regulations, which they themselves had drawn up, was punished in an instant with great severity. They prohibited spirituous liquors and anything stronger than the common small beer, one of the leading men in the Queen Charlotte received five dozen lashes on board of her for getting drunk, but the common punishment among them was ducking from the yard arm, which was practised with very great severity for every fault almost immediately after its commission.’<sup>11</sup>

A contrasting account of the behaviour of the Spithead mutineers, more specifically the delegates themselves, comes from one John White, whose damning description portrays them as ‘drunken ignorant creatures’ who were ‘goaded by devils.’<sup>12</sup> This unflattering depiction of the delegates at Spithead is contrary to the sources that show them to be responsible and organised individuals. One must infer from the account given by White that the delegates at Spithead, despite their opposition to drunken

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<sup>9</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 43.

<sup>10</sup> A. Hood, ‘Bridport to Admiralty, 17 April 1797’ in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 204 (p. 204).

<sup>11</sup> W. H. Henderson, ‘The Mutiny at the Fleet in Spithead: being extracts from the journals of the late Admiral Sir Graham Moore, G. C. B., K. C. M. G.’ *The Naval Review*, 15(3) (1927), 519-529 (pp. 520-521).

<sup>12</sup> J. White, ‘John White to Spencer, 8 May 1797’ in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 124-6.

behaviour amongst their subordinates,<sup>13</sup> were not obliged to follow the rules so closely themselves. They may frequently have taken advantage of their temporary spell in control of the fleet to partake of drinking a greater quantity of alcohol than would usually be permitted by their officers. At the conclusion of the St. Helens uprising, the delegates of the Channel Fleet wrote a letter to Bridport on behalf of the fleet as a whole.<sup>14</sup> That heartfelt letter of thanks praised Bridport 'for the very open and generous behaviour' he had exhibited towards the mutineers in redress of their grievances.<sup>15</sup> That letter really sums up the attitudes and conduct of the Channel Fleet mutineers towards those in higher stations quite succinctly.

What in actuality separated the Spithead delegates from contemporaries in their organisation, not just at the Nore, but also in other mutinous uprisings of the eighteenth century navy, was that they were desperate to ensure that every man in the fleet would receive the King's Pardon when the mutiny was at an end.<sup>16</sup> The mutiny that took place on the *Culloden* on the night of 4 December 1794 (coincidentally also at Spithead)<sup>17</sup> would have served to remind the Spithead Mutineers of the consequences that could await any group of naval rebels who had not been guaranteed a pardon by the King. That insurrection lasted for five days,<sup>18</sup> and upon its termination it became uncertain whether the seamen were promised a pardon by Captain

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<sup>13</sup> Anonymous, 'The Minutes of the Board, 18 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 206-10 (p. 207).

<sup>14</sup> Anonymous, 'Delegates of the fleet to Bridport, 14 May 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 235-6 (pp. 235-6).

<sup>15</sup> Anonymous, 'Delegates of the fleet to Bridport, 14 May 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 235-6 (pp. 235-6).

<sup>16</sup> G. J. Spencer, 'Spencer to delegates, 21 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 210-11 (p. 211).

<sup>17</sup> J. Neale, *The cutlass and the lash: mutiny and discipline in Nelson's Navy* (London: Pluto, 1985), pp. 77-9.

<sup>18</sup> J. Neale, *The cutlass and the lash: mutiny and discipline in Nelson's Navy* (London: Pluto, 1985), pp. 77-9.

Pakenham, who was sent to discuss terms with them.<sup>19</sup> Even if Pakenham had granted them pardon, they still would not have had the official pardon from the King. As a result, eight seamen were found guilty of mutiny; three of them were pardoned, and the remaining five were hanged.<sup>20</sup> Thus, with the memories of this incident no doubt prominent in their minds, the mutineers at Spithead were wise to demand a full pardon from the King for their conduct.

Organisation and maintenance of discipline at the Nore appears, especially in the initial stages, to have been largely comparable to Spithead. The same rigid adherence to shipboard routine seems to have been continued and, consequently, life for the ordinary mass of mutineers would have remained largely the same as when their officers were in command.<sup>21</sup> Hence, it is apparent that the only noticeable way in which the two mutinies were similar was in the maintenance of discipline by the appointed delegates; however, this was not enough to prevent the huge divisions that existed within the Nore Mutiny.

Gill argues that following the departure of the Admiralty representatives from Sheerness, the more 'rebellious faction' of the Nore mutineers were never able to maintain the same degree of unity that the delegates at Spithead had done throughout their period of mutiny.<sup>22</sup> This paper largely agrees with Gill's assertion as follows. With regards to unity in the fleet, Admiral Duncan (Commander-in-Chief, North Sea

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<sup>19</sup> J. Neale, *The cutlass and the lash: mutiny and discipline in Nelson's Navy* (London: Pluto, 1985), p. 93.

<sup>20</sup> J. Neale, *The cutlass and the lash: mutiny and discipline in Nelson's Navy* (London: Pluto, 1985), p. 114.

<sup>21</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 115.

<sup>22</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 209-210.



Fleet) was 'satisfied the greater part abhors what has been going on.'<sup>23</sup> This statement was certainly true for the vast majority of the crewmen aboard the *Clyde*, whose dislike of the uprising led ultimately to bring about their escape from the rest of the mutinous North Sea Fleet on 30 May.<sup>24</sup> The courts martial proceedings after the mutiny also highlight how little regard some of the mutineers held for the cause that had been taken up by the North Sea Fleet, and many regretted ever having taken part in it.<sup>25</sup> This lack of unity within the North Sea Fleet eventually led to the gradual erosion of support from many crews, resulting in the breaking away of certain ships from the rest of the mutinous cause.<sup>26</sup> The division that prevailed within many a vessel during the mutinies can be illustrated in an incident that occurred among Admiral Duncan's squadron, where two vessels who had erupted in mutiny attempted to send delegations to another two ships nearby, but were rejected.<sup>27</sup> Later, the disobedient vessels declared their loyalty to Duncan, saying that 'they were sorry for what had happened.'<sup>28</sup> This example serves to illustrate the lack of unity that could so often be apparent within, and between ships.

The blatant divisions within the ships that made up the Nore mutiny can partly be explained by the fact that some ships were forced to, and/or felt obliged by threats of violence to join the mutinous proceedings. A crewman of the cutter *Cygnets* recounted

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<sup>23</sup> A. Duncan, 'Duncan to Spencer, 10 June 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 152-4 (pp. 152-3).

<sup>24</sup> *Logbook of the Clyde, Captain Charles Cunningham, kept by John Smith, 1796-1800, with account of the mutiny at the Nore*. The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, BRK/15.

<sup>25</sup> *Proceedings at a Court Martial held on board the Neptune in the River Thames August 19<sup>th</sup> 1797. For the trial of William Holdsworth, Henry Freeman, John alias Jonathan Davis, Bartholomew Connery, William Jones, Sampson Harris and Thomas Saul*. The National Archives, Kew, ADM1/5486.

<sup>26</sup> W. H. Henderson, 'The Mutiny at the Fleet in Spithead: being extracts from the journals of the late Admiral Sir Graham Moore, G. C. B., K. C. M. G.,' *The Naval Review*, 15(3) (1927), pp. 519-529 (pp. 526-527).

<sup>27</sup> A. Duncan, 'Duncan to Spencer, 26 May 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 134-5.

<sup>28</sup> A. Duncan, 'Duncan to Spencer, 26 May 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 134-5.

how they were forced 'under the impression of fear' to join the mutiny.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Alexander Phiney of the storeship *Serapis*, described how he and the rest of the crew were forced to obey the mutineers of the *Sandwich*, and how he was later pressed into becoming a delegate on board the latter vessel.<sup>30</sup> These examples serve to illustrate why particular ships took the decision to make a break for freedom from the rest of the mutinous vessels at the Nore. A quotation from Lord Keith's examination of the crew from the *Repulse* sums up the contrasting loyalties and divisions that were present amongst crewmen throughout the North Sea Fleet:

'The Delegates were Edward Thompson, captain of the maintop, and Kent, one of the forecastle men. They went every day upon the *Sandwich*. I think Thompson was forced to become a Delegate, but Kent seemed active and like a Wapping attorney.'<sup>31</sup>

The extent to which the mutineers at Spithead and the Nore used violence in order to preserve unity or oppose the authorities is a topic also worthy of attention. For the most part, the Spithead and Nore affairs were characterised by peaceful protest. This peaceful protest took the form of a collective refusal to obey the order to proceed to sea.<sup>32</sup> This deliberate disobeying of orders was something that can be observed universally across the various crews that made up the mutinies.<sup>33</sup> Despite the apparent serenity of the mutineers, they did occasionally display a militaristic and overtly

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<sup>29</sup> G. K. Elphinstone, 'Examination of seamen, 3 June 1797' in *The Keith Papers*, ed. W. G. Perrin (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955), p. 16 (p. 16).

<sup>30</sup> G. K. Elphinstone, 'Examination of seamen, 3 June 1797' in *The Keith Papers*, ed. W. G. Perrin (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955), p. 16 (p. 16).

<sup>31</sup> G. K. Elphinstone, 'Examination of Mutineers from the *Repulse*, 10 June 1797' in *The Keith Papers*, ed. W. G. Perrin (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955), pp. 20-1 (pp. 20-1).

<sup>32</sup> A. Hood, 'Bridport to Spencer, 15 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 199 (p. 199).

<sup>33</sup> G. K. Elphinstone, 'Examination of Mutineers from the *Repulse*, 10 June 1797' in *The Keith Papers*, ed. W. G. Perrin (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955), pp. 20-1 (p. 20).

violent side. As will be seen, acts of violence occurred with far greater frequency at the Nore, than at Spithead.

Gill is quick to commend the conduct of the mutineers at Spithead towards their officers, describing how even the unpopular officers were not 'roughly handled or disrespectfully treated.'<sup>34</sup> The evidence seems to support this assertion that the general behaviour of the Spithead mutineers towards their officers can quite reasonably be regarded as normal, and was intended to show the utmost respect and cooperation, except in regards to the issue of weighing anchor.<sup>35</sup> Some officers were even given a hand in organising the proceedings; for example, Vice-Admiral Colpoys was asked either to appoint the delegates of his flagship, the *London*, or to place his seal of approval upon those selected by the crew.<sup>36</sup> Officers were nonetheless turned out of their respective ships in great numbers during the Spithead Mutiny and later uprising at St. Helens.<sup>37</sup> Whether or not all of these evictions were justified remains uncertain. In addition, the mutineers showed themselves as remaining loyal to their country, and their eagerness to meet the enemy was still very much present. As Admiral Moore again observed:

'They behave much better than could be expected, considering that the power is completely in their own hands; regular instructions have gone round to all ships from the Queen Charlotte, recommending the strictest obedience to their officers in everything except going to sea; they declare themselves determined not to weigh their

<sup>34</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 25-8.

<sup>35</sup> W. H. Henderson, 'The Mutiny at the Fleet in Spithead: being extracts from the journals of the late Admiral Sir Graham Moore, G. C. B., K. C. M. G.,' *The Naval Review*, 15(3) (1927), pp. 519-529 (p. 520).

<sup>36</sup> E. C. R. Owen, *Reflections on the Mutiny at Spithead*. The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, COO/2/A.

<sup>37</sup> A. Hood, 'Bridport to Admiralty, 8 May 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 224 (p. 224).

anchors until they are satisfied in their demands unless the enemy appear on the coast. Some of the ships have gone greater lengths than others but hardly any of them have shown any ill will to their officers.<sup>38</sup>

In contrast, Gill condemns the actions of select members of the Nore Mutiny against their officers as the mutiny degenerated.<sup>39</sup> Gill describes brutalities such as tarring and feathering as 'crude chastisements,' that appeared to represent a 'degeneration' in the conduct of the mutiny.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the behaviour and conduct of the mutineers at the Nore presents a distinct contrast to that at Spithead, both in the treatment of their officers and in their dealings with the representatives of the Admiralty. Parker and his followers' irrational behaviour towards Vice-Admiral Buckner<sup>41</sup> (the port-Admiral for Sheerness)<sup>42</sup> and later towards the Admiralty representatives who came to Sheerness, included blatant displays of pomp and ceremony involving music and parading.<sup>43</sup> That behaviour eventually prompted the Admiralty representatives in Sheerness to abandon their visit on the grounds that the conduct of the mutineers was 'improper,' and intended 'to overturn all Naval Discipline.'<sup>44</sup> The mutineers even went so far as to parade into the midst of the garrison at Sheerness when the soldiers stationed there were parading themselves.<sup>45</sup> Acts like these served only to turn the government, and thenceforth the country, against their cause.<sup>46</sup> An account which illustrates perfectly the conduct of the some of the Nore mutineers towards their officers can be found in

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<sup>38</sup> W. H. Henderson, 'The Mutiny at the Fleet in Spithead: being extracts from the journals of the late Admiral Sir Graham Moore, G. C. B., K. C. M. G.,' *The Naval Review*, 15(3) (1927), pp. 519-529 (p. 520).

<sup>39</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 186-91.

<sup>40</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 186.

<sup>41</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 146-7

<sup>42</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 102.

<sup>43</sup> *Memorandum, Sir Charles Grey to Mr Dundas on the Mutiny at the Nore dated from Barham Court 25 June 1797*. The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, AGC/24/5.

<sup>44</sup> E. Nepean, *Letter from Nepean to Bridport*. The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, BRP/18.

<sup>45</sup> *Memorandum, Sir Charles Grey to Mr Dundas on the Mutiny at the Nore dated from Barham Court 25 June 1797*. The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, AGC/24/5.

<sup>46</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pg 154-5

evidence presented by Frederick Watson, a Midshipman on board the *Monmouth*. Watson describes how on 31 May the officers were rounded up and placed in irons by members of the ship's company, now styling themselves falsely under commissioned ranks.<sup>47</sup> Subsequently, many of the officers became the subject of floggings by the crew and one even had his hair ignominiously shaved off.<sup>48</sup> To add insult to injury, the officers were then placed in a boat and paraded around the fleet, where they were subjected to taunting by the crews of the other ships present.<sup>49</sup> Such irrational behaviour towards their officers served to turn the Nore mutineers into figures of hate.

Violence aboard ship was relatively uncommon during the 1797 Mutinies. An incident aboard the *London* during the St. Helens outbreak stands out as the only blot upon the unblemished record of the Spithead Mutiny. This confrontation came about when Vice-Admiral Colpoys, on board his flagship the *London*, ordered his officers and marines to oppose the mutineers.<sup>50</sup> The result of this was a brief but bloody skirmish in which accounts say that around eight people became casualties.<sup>51</sup> Colpoys and one of his lieutenants were threatened with hanging and later confined below.<sup>52</sup> This incident cannot be attributed entirely to the mutinous spirit of the crew of the *London*, as the order to oppose them was given by Colpoys and initiated by the marines; thus, the skirmish cannot be said to have been a deliberate, pre-planned act of violence on the part of the mutineers.

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<sup>47</sup> G. K. Elphinstone, 'Examination of Mr. Frederick Watson' in *The Keith Papers*, ed. W. G. Perrin (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955) pp. 17-18 (pp. 17-18).

<sup>48</sup> G. K. Elphinstone, 'Examination of Mr. Frederick Watson' in *The Keith Papers*, ed. W. G. Perrin (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955) pp. 17-18 (pp. 17-18).

<sup>49</sup> G. K. Elphinstone, 'Examination of Mr. Frederick Watson' in *The Keith Papers*, ed. W. G. Perrin (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955) pp. 17-18 (pp. 17-18).

<sup>50</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 62

<sup>51</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 62-4

<sup>52</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 62-3

Violent altercations between the crews of loyalists and avid mutineers upon certain vessels at the Nore occurred after the recital of the royal proclamation.<sup>53</sup> This highlights the huge divisions within the Nore Mutiny and the lengths that both loyalists and mutineers were willing to go to secure their respective agenda. Admiral Moore recounts an incident which, although not strictly part of the Nore Mutiny, did take place on 26 June; a few days after that mutiny came to an end.<sup>54</sup> An uprising on the frigate *Beaulieu* came about as a result of the confinement of an insubordinate crewman.<sup>55</sup> Wishing to secure the man's release, a group of crewmen succeeded in stimulating a mutinous spirit among some of the ship's company, which eventually erupted into a violent altercation between the mutineers and those still loyal to the officers.<sup>56</sup> The loyalists eventually succeeded in overpowering the mutineers and securing the ship, resulting in casualties of sixteen killed or wounded.<sup>57</sup> Engagements such as this should not however be taken as representative of the 1797 mutinies as a whole. The *Beaulieu* incident was an isolated disturbance that contrasts greatly with the way the principal 1797 Mutinies were conducted.

If any form of violence could be seen as more representative of the mutiny at the Nore, then it would be ship-to-ship action rather than scuffles aboard ships. At the Nore the threat of action against ships was used as a deterrent in order to safeguard

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<sup>53</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 157

<sup>54</sup> W. H. Henderson, 'The Mutiny at the Fleet in Spithead: being extracts from the journals of the late Admiral Sir Graham Moore, G. C. B., K. C. M. G.,' *The Naval Review*, 15(3) (1927), pp. 519-529 (p. 527-528).

<sup>55</sup> W. H. Henderson, 'The Mutiny at the Fleet in Spithead: being extracts from the journals of the late Admiral Sir Graham Moore, G. C. B., K. C. M. G.,' *The Naval Review*, 15(3) (1927), pp. 519-529 (p. 527-528).

<sup>56</sup> W. H. Henderson, 'The Mutiny at the Fleet in Spithead: being extracts from the journals of the late Admiral Sir Graham Moore, G. C. B., K. C. M. G.,' *The Naval Review*, 15(3) (1927), pp. 519-529 (p. 527-528).

<sup>57</sup> W. H. Henderson, 'The Mutiny at the Fleet in Spithead: being extracts from the journals of the late Admiral Sir Graham Moore, G. C. B., K. C. M. G.,' *The Naval Review*, 15(3) (1927), pp. 519-529 (p. 527-528).

the unity of the fleet. James Watson, commander of the tender *Leith* proceeding to the Nore, was forcibly detained by the mutinous ships of the North Sea Fleet, which threatened to sink the tender if he did not submit.<sup>58</sup> The mutineers even went further than threats, and on several occasions actively engaged in firing upon vessels that tried to separate themselves from the mutiny.<sup>59</sup> A classic example of the overt militancy of the Nore mutineers can be seen in the escape of the *San Fiorenzo*, during which a number of the more mutinous vessels opened fire on her; however, she escaped largely undamaged.<sup>60</sup> A verse of a naval song entitled *A New Song on Parker the Delegate, Head of the Mutiny at Sheerness* shows the degree of violence and fear propagated by the mutineers at the Nore:

‘A terror to each merchant ship, detains and doth them plunder,  
And if they offer to sail by, his guns at them do thunder;  
Whate’er he likes he from them takes, and should they dare refuse, sir,  
The captain’s ordered to be flogged, thus doth he them ill use, sir.’<sup>61</sup>

Any paper that studies the mutinies of 1797 cannot fail to take into account the role that Richard Parker, the so-called commander of ‘The Floating Republic,’ played in the mutiny at the Nore. This paper will attempt to discover whether Parker was the true leader of the mutiny or whether he was more of a figurehead, the control of the fleet lying with others among the delegates. In 1797 Parker had been drafted into the navy through the quota system, although it was not the first time he had been in the

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<sup>58</sup> J. Watson, ‘James Watson to Admiral Robert Digby,’ 12 June 1797’ in *The Naval Miscellany. Vol. II*, ed. J. K. Laughton (London: Navy Records Society, 1910), pp. 293-296 (p. 294).

<sup>59</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 158

<sup>60</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 158

<sup>61</sup> Anonymous, ‘A New Song on Parker the Delegate, Head of the Mutiny at Sheerness’ in *Naval Songs and ballads*, ed. C. H. Firth (London: Navy Records Society, 1908) pp. 281-2 (p. 282).

navy.<sup>62</sup> Sources say he was a midshipman during the American Revolutionary War, and he quickly acquired a reputation as a restless, unruly individual, having been court-martialled for insubordination in 1793.<sup>63</sup> Gill rejects the argument that Parker entered the fleet as a puppet of some onshore seditious society in order to stir up a revolution, but rather he enlisted in order to clear his debts and get out of prison.<sup>64</sup> This paper concurs with Gill's argument and, with this in mind, will endeavour to assess his role as president. According to John Snipe, the surgeon aboard the *Sandwich*, Parker referred to himself as the Commander of the North Sea Fleet, but Snipe also stated that 'he does not walk the quarter deck.'<sup>65</sup> Thus it seems that Parker did not place himself directly in the role of a Captain, or even an Admiral. Even so, accounts appear to indicate that there was a significant degree of ceremonial activity associated with his position, as evidenced by Lord Keith's examination of the mutineers on the *Repulse*, in which 'The president, supposed to be Parker, rowed round the fleet with a band of music and was cheered by every ship.'<sup>66</sup>

Encounters with him and accounts of his words show how much Parker was an outspoken and, at times, unstable character. According to the aforementioned John Snipe, Parker was 'constantly haranguing the people from morning 'till night.'<sup>67</sup> Such an exchange between Parker and the other mutineers was included in Lord Keith's 'Examinations of Mutineers from the *Repulse*.' Parker began:

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<sup>62</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 126-7.

<sup>63</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 125-6.

<sup>64</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 127-8.

<sup>65</sup> G. K. Elphinstone, 'Examination of Mr. John Snipe, 3 June 1797' in *The Keith Papers*, ed. W. G. Perrin (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955) p. 17 (p. 17).

<sup>66</sup> G. K. Elphinstone, 'Examination of Mutineers from the *Repulse*, 10 June 1797' in *The Keith Papers*, ed. W. G. Perrin (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955) pp. 20-1 (p. 20).

<sup>67</sup> G. K. Elphinstone, 'Examination of Mr. John Snipe, 3 June 1797' in *The Keith Papers*, ed. W. G. Perrin (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955) p. 17 (p. 17).



'Brethren, I am obliged to you for your conduct. We have grievances which we wish to have redressed. We applied for the Lords of the Admiralty to come to the Nore. They only came to Sheerness and we were not admitted to see them. Lord Spencer and his aide de camp only spoke to us through Admiral Buckner, which was no better than a speaking trumpet. We had sent Captain Knight to get our grievances redressed, but he returned without anything satisfactory, but he brought news that we were all declared rebels to the country'

*Question by Parker.* Is there a rebel among you?

*Answer.* No.

*Parker.* Then if we are not rebels to our country, our country are rebels to us.<sup>68</sup>

Such words show how much Parker succeeded in inspiring the mutineers, which must have prolonged the Nore Mutiny past what a lesser speaker could have achieved. Despite the eloquence frequently expressed through his words, Parker often displayed behaviour indicative of an individual with an unhinged character. James Watson of the *Leith* testifies to Parker's apparent instability:

'During my detention at the Nore he spent much of his time with his old messmates in the tender, through whom, and even personally, I worked upon him by every possible means; but whenever the subject was broached, his brain took fire; he seemed intoxicated with a sense of his own consequence, and uttered nothing but incoherent nonsense, which could be mistaken by nobody but a poor deluded seaman.'<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> G. K. Elphinstone, 'Examination of Mutineers from the *Repulse*, 10 June 1797' in *The Keith Papers*, ed. W. G. Perrin (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955) pp. 20-1 (p. 21).

<sup>69</sup> J. Watson, 'James Watson to Admiral Robert Digby,' 12 June 1797' in *The Naval Miscellany. Vol. II*, ed. J. K. Laughton (London: Navy Records Society, 1910), pp. 293-296 (p. 295).

This strange behaviour may go far to explain a point made by Michael Lewis in *A Social History of the Navy: 1793-1815*, that Parker may have been neurotic.<sup>70</sup> An account from an individual known as Brenton, who knew Parker and observed his character, stated how he had 'no doubt that he [Parker] was at times deranged.'<sup>71</sup> Brenton also notes that Parker had suicidal tendencies.<sup>72</sup> If Parker was indeed neurotic, and therefore mentally unstable, then having him as leader of the Nore Mutiny would have severely undermined the conduct of the affair and presented him as nothing more than a seditious criminal and troublemaker. He was clearly an individual who enjoyed being at the head of the mutiny, and he was a speaker who may have inspired a degree of loyalty in the cause of the Nore Mutineers. Parker's role was not simply as a figurehead, he was an active mutineer and determined leader, although his unstable character did not serve to aid the cause.

Even a cursory glance at aspects of discipline, organisation, conduct and militarism will show that the two mutinies at Spithead and the Nore were very different. The Spithead Mutiny still remains to this day as an example of how best to conduct a mutiny and subsequently evade the noose. Accounts tell of the rigid organisation and discipline that was maintained within the fleet, and of the largely peaceful way in which the insurrection was conducted. In contrast, the Nore Mutiny, despite the similar high standards of discipline, was not conducted with the same degree of rationality as at Spithead. Some of the blame for the poor conduct of the Nore Mutineers must be placed upon Richard Parker, whose seemingly volatile and unhinged character would have served to undermine any integrity the mutiny had. He

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<sup>70</sup> M. A. Lewis, *A social history of the Navy, 1793-1815* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1960), p. 126.

<sup>71</sup> M. A. Lewis, *A social history of the Navy, 1793-1815* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1960), p. 126.

<sup>72</sup> M. A. Lewis, *A social history of the Navy, 1793-1815* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1960), p. 126.

was of course not alone in his irrational behaviour, as displayed by many of the other mutineers whose treatment of their officers could be openly violent and brutal.

## Chapter 3

### Attitudes Towards the Mutinies

Discussion of the attitudes of individuals towards the mutinies is only covered in a limited fashion by the historiography. Attitudes in 1797 were very much concerned with, and centred on, the mounting disaster that was the Revolutionary War.<sup>1</sup> The failure of Lord Malmesbury's peace negotiations with the French had highlighted the demoralizing fact that the war would continue in the same relentless vein, with its soaring cost and ever present threat of invasion from the continent.<sup>2</sup> It is hard to imagine the sense of panic and despair that the eruption of mutiny in the entire Channel Fleet must have caused in the context of such a turbulent time.<sup>3</sup> The intention of this chapter is to examine the varying attitudes towards the mutinies from those navy officials and civilians whose opinions have been recorded in history. The perceptions of contemporaneous individuals will be studied in order to examine the effect of their views as the mutinies progressed. The chapter will take a thematic approach, exploring ideas and opinions across the spectrum of events, and thus will explore the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore as one event, except when comparison between the two is required.

The notion that the seamen of His Majesty's Navy should have their wages increased was not an idea that emerged with the outbreak of the Spithead mutiny.<sup>4</sup> In a letter

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<sup>1</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> T. Pakenham, 'Captain Pakenham to Spencer, 11 December 1796' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 105-6 (p. 105).

from Captain Thomas Pakenham addressed to Earl Spencer, it was clear that such ideas were already established and under discussion amongst many within the upper echelons of the navy who viewed the position of seamen as vital to the day-to-day running of a ship, and whose 'worth is four times the value of the consideration paid to him for it.'<sup>5</sup> It was apparent that such recognition of the need to help poorly paid seamen was born out of the efforts of the officer ranks to gain an increase in their own wages.<sup>6</sup> It was individuals such as Pakenham who understood that 'every rank must seem to them to have their own immediate advantage for its object and to have lost sight in that pursuit of every attention to the underpaid condition of the thoroughbred seaman.'<sup>7</sup> The ordinary seaman was losing out financially compared to other ranks of the navy, such as lieutenants, and the army as a whole.<sup>8</sup> Despite the apparent awareness of their circumstances from particular officials such as Pakenham, the seamen could gain nothing if the Admiralty was unwilling to comply. This indeed was the case, as summed up in the words of Spencer:

'A very little reflection must I think immediately point out to you the utter impossibility in the present state of the country of adopting the measure you mention of increasing the wages to seamen, the expense of which would, from the great number at present borne, be an enormous increase to our disbursements already sufficiently burthensome.'<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> T. Pakenham, 'Captain Pakenham to Spencer, 11 December 1796' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 105-6 (p. 106).

<sup>6</sup> T. Pakenham, 'Captain Pakenham to Spencer, 11 December 1796' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 105-6 (p. 106).

<sup>7</sup> T. Pakenham, 'Captain Pakenham to Spencer, 11 December 1796' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 105-6 (p. 106).

<sup>8</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 264.

<sup>9</sup> G. J. Spencer, 'Spencer to Pakenham, 12 December 1796' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), p. 108.

Unwillingness on the part of the Admiralty to address the problem is something that can be described as a constant up until the point where they were persuaded by the opinions of Bridport,<sup>10</sup> and the majority of captains of the various ships at Spithead,<sup>11</sup> that compliance with the demands of the seamen would be the best course of action to take. The Lords of the Admiralty would have possessed a lack of knowledge as to the true nature of shipboard life, unlike those officers whose position it was actually to serve aboard the ships of the Royal Navy.<sup>12</sup>

It is worthwhile to study the beliefs that the Commander-in-Chief of the North Sea Fleet, Admiral Duncan, held before his squadron erupted into mutiny. Conrad Gill asserts that Duncan was content that the loyalty of his squadron would remain intact.<sup>13</sup> He believed that the prospect of mutiny seemed to have been eclipsed by the belief that the determination of a ship's officers would act as a deterrent, and also prove instrumental in putting down an uprising, should the need arise.<sup>14</sup>

'For my own part [I] have ever thought it impossible for a ship's company to get the better of their officers, and in my time have seen a stop put to mutinies more than once or twice by proper exertion. I will do justice to all my officers, and say I never saw more spirit or determination shewn on such an occasion.'<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Anonymous, 'The Minutes of the Board, 18 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) pp. 206-10 (p. 207).

<sup>11</sup> Anonymous, 'The Minutes of the Board, 18 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) pp. 206-10 (p. 208).

<sup>12</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 261.

<sup>13</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 166.

<sup>14</sup> A. Duncan, 'Duncan to Spencer, 1 May 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), p. 121.

<sup>15</sup> A. Duncan, 'Duncan to Spencer, 1 May 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), p. 121.

In 1797, Duncan would be proved wrong when the majority of the ships from his squadron deserted him to join the mutinous vessels at the Nore, thereby swelling their numbers significantly,<sup>16</sup> leaving him with only two ships of the line and two smaller vessels to carry out his mission of blockading the Dutch Fleet.<sup>17</sup> Duncan, as well as others, also clung to the belief that the news of the enemy putting to sea would restore the mutineers to their duty.<sup>18</sup> The fact that British ships had turned away from their duty and abandoned him was something that Duncan was clearly affected by: 'It would give me double pleasure to give the Dutch a thrashing without the aid of those scoundrels that have so shamefully deserted me, particularly after the promises they gave.'<sup>19</sup> The reason why Duncan was so angered by the fragmentation of his fleet may have revolved around a relatively common view that if the men were at sea and in 'regular and constant employment,'<sup>20</sup> especially with the prospect of facing the enemy, they would be distracted from mutinous thoughts. This would have been more likely to have happened at Spithead as the mutineers had made it clear that they would return to duty should the enemy threaten the British coast.<sup>21</sup> At the Nore, however, the mutineers would probably not have returned to duty in such circumstances due to the disloyal mood of many of the mutineers, including Parker, which almost resulted in many of them deserting to enemy ports.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the blind optimism of Duncan could probably not have been applied to the Nore mutineers, and it was certainly true that his belief in the ability of his officers to forestall mutiny was unfounded.

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<sup>16</sup> E. Nepean, *Letter from Nepean to Bridport*. The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, BRP/18.

<sup>17</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), pp. 178-179.

<sup>18</sup> A. Duncan, 'Duncan to Spencer, 30 May 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 145-6 (p. 146).

<sup>19</sup> A. Duncan, 'Duncan to Spencer, 5 June 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 148-9 (p. 148).

<sup>20</sup> G. J. Spencer, 'Spencer to Bridport, 25 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) p. 217.

<sup>21</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Penguin, 1937), p. 47.

<sup>22</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 221-3

It was all too common for officials to view the mutinies as a cataclysmic and shameful chain of events.<sup>23</sup> One of the strongest voicings of the circumstances was made by Lord Arden who stated that the 'situation forms the most awful crisis that these kingdoms ever saw.'<sup>24</sup> In addition, Duncan called the mutinies 'the most determined act of rebellion ever was known.'<sup>25</sup> These statements, although they seem to be exaggerated to a certain extent, must be seen within the context of the war and its increasingly alarming nature at this period in time. The shame that seems to have been felt by some at the unfolding events is evident through another statement by Duncan that 'The army seems to have behaved nobly. As to our service, it will be long before they will rub this blot,'<sup>26</sup> That the events at Spithead and the Nore were viewed as shameful and embarrassing to the integrity of the navy and its officers is clear to understand when one considers the sheer scale of the 1797 mutinies. These were not simply isolated events concerning just a single vessel. The 1797 mutinies involved entire fleets of vessels. At Spithead, the first petition from the whole fleet mentioned 16 ships that were involved in the affair.<sup>27</sup> After the Nore Mutiny had come to an end, a list of the vessels concerned, including the number of crew court martialled and their various fates, gives a total of 26 vessels.<sup>28</sup> The number of ships involved implies that many officers were affected in some way by the events. That the mutinies were regarded as shameful events is therefore no surprise. Despite this, Gill argues that some individuals were guilty of overreacting and placing a certain degree of

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<sup>23</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), p. 7

<sup>24</sup> C. G. Perceval, 'Lord Arden to Spencer, 10 May 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), p. 126.

<sup>25</sup> A. Duncan, 'Duncan to Spencer, 1 June 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 146-8 (pp. 146-7).

<sup>26</sup> A. Duncan, 'Duncan to Spencer, 8 June 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 150-1 (pp. 150-1).

<sup>27</sup> Anonymous, 'From the Delegates to Parliament' in C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 360-2.

<sup>28</sup> Anonymous, 'Appendix VI' in G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), p. 277.



exaggeration upon the nature of events during the mutinies.<sup>29</sup> For example, to quote James Watson: 'to lay before you the horrid scenes I have witnessed of late, where all order, discipline and subordination has been trampled under foot – scenes I can never think upon but with abhorrence.'<sup>30</sup>

Gill argues that civilian and navy officials were suspicious that there was some seditious element spurring on the vast majority of the seamen to mutiny.<sup>31</sup> This was to a certain extent true, as the presence of quota men testifies, although they can hardly be called 'seditious' in the sense of the United Irishmen.<sup>32</sup> 'The character of the present mutiny is perfectly French'<sup>33</sup> is just one example of the idea, held by many, that men with a 'revolutionary' spirit were attempting to incite the rest to insubordination. This feeling was true to an extent in that revolutionary ideas may have helped inspire the mutineers, but the actual presence of a revolutionary component at both Spithead and the Nore was found to be absent by the Admiralty investigators.<sup>34</sup> The notion of a revolutionary spirit was taken further by Captain John Payne when he compared the Spithead Mutiny with the French Revolution by stating: 'The singularity of it consists in the great secrecy and patience with which they waited for a thorough union before it broke out, and the immediate establishment of a system

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<sup>29</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> J. Watson, 'James Watson to Admiral Digby, 12 June 1797' in *The Naval Miscellany. Vol. II*, ed. J. K. Laughton (London: Navy Records Society, 1910), pp. 293-296 (p. 293).

<sup>31</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 307-8.

<sup>32</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 329

<sup>33</sup> J. W. Payne, 'Captain Payne to Spencer: enclosure to Captain Payne's letter, 18 April 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), p. 112.

<sup>34</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Penguin, 1937), pp. 245-7.

of terror.<sup>35</sup> Payne's view is, with hindsight, very far-fetched and bears little resemblance to what is known already about the mutinies.

That the authorities compared the mutinies with the French Revolution is understandable when one considers the impact of the latter, not just upon France, but also upon Europe as a whole. In 1797, the French Revolution was already eight years old and was responsible for plunging Europe into a bitter conflict.<sup>36</sup> As well as the extensive amount of suffering and turmoil experienced by the population of France during the revolution, secular nobles and clergymen found their position severely undermined as a result of the event.<sup>37</sup> It is therefore little wonder that elites in Britain should have felt anxious to seek out any seditious elements behind uprisings such as the 1797 mutinies.

It was understood during both mutinies that there were two types of mutineer. First there were the rebellious troublemakers whose job it had been to excite the other more loyal, but more impressionable seamen to mutiny, and it was these other seamen who comprised the second type of mutineer.<sup>38</sup> Some naval officers readily divided the mutineers up into 'good' and 'bad' men when describing what they saw as divisions in the mutinous fleets.<sup>39</sup> In reality, divisions were probably far more complicated when one considers that quota men, revolutionary thinkers, troublesome insubordinates and uninterested individuals may have all served to make up the

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<sup>35</sup> J. W. Payne, 'Captain Payne to Spencer: enclosure to Captain Payne's letter, 18 April 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), p. 112.

<sup>36</sup> P. McPhee, *The French Revolution: 1789-1799* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 178.

<sup>37</sup> P. McPhee, *The French Revolution: 1789-1799* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 181.

<sup>38</sup> A. Duncan, 'Duncan to Spencer, 10 June 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 152-4 (pp. 152-3).

<sup>39</sup> A. Duncan, 'Duncan to Spencer, 10 June 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 152-4 (pp. 152-3).

mutinous fleets at Spithead and the Nore. It was also hoped that the 'good' men would keep the 'bad' men in check,<sup>40</sup> which eventually did come about at the climax of the Nore Mutiny, but not until after the 'bad' men had maintained the loyalty of the 'good' men for a considerable time.<sup>41</sup>

An undercurrent that appears throughout the sources consulted for this paper is quite clearly seen in the low regard that many of the naval elites felt for the common seaman. That the seamen were generally held to be inferior is not a revelation; however, the degree in which the mutineers were condescended to, and their importance ignored, is worth studying. The stance of the Admiralty was clear; the men should be grateful for the concessions that had already been granted to them regarding the increase in pay, and any further demands were highly unreasonable.<sup>42</sup> After the mutiny at Spithead had been resolved, the question of what should be done with the many officers who had been ejected from their respective ships still remained.<sup>43</sup> There were those in authority who believed that to court martial the dismissed officers was an injustice as the seamen who had mutinied had been granted a reprieve.<sup>44</sup> There was clearly a significant degree of anger and resentment towards the mutineers, even after the mutinies had come to their eventual conclusion. Despite this resentment, there was a degree of admiration for the seamen of the Channel Fleet within the higher echelons of the navy; for example, Nelson was of the opinion that

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<sup>40</sup> A. Duncan, 'Duncan to Spencer, 10 June 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 152-4 (pp. 153).

<sup>41</sup> C. Gill *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 238-9.

<sup>42</sup> Anonymous, 'Admiralty to Bridport, 24 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) pp. 215-16 (p. 216).

<sup>43</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 78-9.

<sup>44</sup> Earl Chatham, 'Chatham to Bridport, 13 May 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) pp. 232-33 (p. 233).

the mutiny at Spithead had 'been the most manly thing ever heard of, and does the British sailor infinite honour.'<sup>45</sup>

The role of caricature as a reflection of the attitudes of the public towards the mutineers at the Nore can be seen in a hand-coloured etching by Isaac Cruikshank, published 9 June 1797.<sup>46</sup> Cruikshank (1756-1810) was an artist who became associated with the so-called 'golden age of British caricature,'<sup>47</sup> and this particular piece depicts the delegates at the Nore in council with a Navy official, who is probably Admiral Buckner.<sup>48</sup> Richard Parker is also depicted, as well as numerous other historical persons who would not have been physically present, but have been added for reasons of political satire.<sup>49</sup> It is for reasons of satire that an examination of mutineers in the picture reveals much of contemporary attitudes towards them and their cause.

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<sup>45</sup> *Horatio Nelson, Viscount: holograph to H. R. H. the Duke of Clarence, dated from the Theseus, 26 May 1797.* The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, AGC/27/24.

<sup>46</sup> National Portrait Gallery, *Large Image NPG D15627; 'The delegates in council or beggars on horseback,'* <<http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/largerimage.php?mkey=mw72126&search=sa&sText=isaac+cruikshank&LinkID=mp06840&role=art&wPage=0&rNo=6>> [accessed 14 October 2010].

<sup>47</sup> National Portrait Gallery, *'Person - Isaac Cruikshank,'* <<http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp06840/isaac-cruikshank?role=art>> [accessed 14 October 2010].

<sup>48</sup> National Portrait Gallery, *Portrait - NPG D15627; 'The delegates in council or beggars on horseback,'* <<http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw72126/The-delegates-in-council-or-beggars-on-horseback?search=sa&sText=isaac+cruikshank&LinkID=mp06840&role=art&wPage=0&rNo=6>> [accessed 14 October 2010].

<sup>49</sup> National Portrait Gallery, *Portrait - NPG D15627; 'The delegates in council or beggars on horseback,'* <<http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw72126/The-delegates-in-council-or-beggars-on-horseback?search=sa&sText=isaac+cruikshank&LinkID=mp06840&role=art&wPage=0&rNo=6>> [accessed 14 October 2010].



*The DELEGATES in COUNCIL or BEGGARS on HORSEBACK*

*The Delegates in council or beggars on horseback* by Isaac Cruikshank, published 9 June 1797.

The mutineers in the front row of the picture have had their facial features much exaggerated in order to make them appear ugly, uncouth and comedic. The overall effect is not to create an impressionable picture of them, but to portray them as uneducated and brutish individuals in a position of authority around a table, probably in one of the ship's cabins. The mutineers in the back row appear far more repressed and afraid than the individuals in the front row, and are perhaps intended to represent the mass of the seamen who were under the authority of the delegates. The individuals at the back show what the artist understood as the diverse mix of mutineers in the fleet, representing the unruly, terrified and occasionally neurotic nature of many of them. Overall, the picture created of the mutineers by the caricature is not an ingratiating one. In the background of the picture is a portrait of Britannia that has been turned upside down, perhaps representing the idea that the mutineers were

subverting the natural order by rising up against those in authority. Also present is the idea that the mutineers were, to an extent, being controlled by some onshore body, as can be seen by the presence of what may be several political reformers and thinkers hiding underneath the table.<sup>50</sup> One of them is even seen to state; ‘aye, aye, we are at the bottom of [it].’

In summation, the attitudes of those who bore witness to the uprisings at Spithead and the Nore in 1797 seem to indicate that they were, on the whole, both shocked and unprepared for what lay ahead. Certain individuals, including Captain Pakenham, were intuitive enough to realise that the ordinary seaman was not being paid enough in the then current economic context of Britain. These words would fall on deaf ears at the Admiralty. It was believed by Admiral Duncan that no mutiny would get the better of the determination of a group of officers, and he was apparently comfortable to live with this idea until the majority of his squadron abandoned him on his voyage to blockade the Dutch. It was the result of acts such as this that brought about a general feeling of fear and shame among navy officials. Their ideals of honour with the prospect of facing the enemy were smashed when the mutinies occurred and the sheer scale of them led many to view them as ultimately cataclysmic and disastrous. A reason for this may have lain in fact that the mutinies took place within the period of the French Revolution and, as a result, the fear held by those in positions of power was very real. Many held the mutineers in low regard, especially the more rebellious

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<sup>50</sup> National Portrait Gallery, *Portrait – NPG D15627; ‘The delegates in council or beggars on horseback,’* <<http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw72126/The-delegates-in-council-or-beggars-on-horseback?search=sa&sText=isaac+cruikshank&LinkID=mp06840&role=art&wPage=0&rNo=6>> [accessed 14 October 2010].

elements at the Nore, which led to them becoming the subjects of caricature and thus they were portrayed in a less than flattering light.

## Chapter 4

### Opposing the Mutinies

The methods that the Admiralty utilised to act against or parley with the mutineers varied enormously, from the most tactfully employed negotiations<sup>1</sup> to the most inadequate and demeaning of decisions.<sup>2</sup> In *The Floating Republic* Manwaring and Dobrée argue that the methods of countering and dealing with the Spithead mutiny were markedly different from that at the Nore.<sup>3</sup> The argument put forward condemns the Admiralty for acting in a completely inappropriate manner in their dealings with the Nore mutineers but praises them for their conduct during the mutiny at Spithead, (with the exception of the Board's initial neglect of the petitions) describing the decision to send Earl Howe to settle matters with the mutineers as 'approaching genius.'<sup>4</sup>

Up to this point, this dissertation has explored the causes, the character, and attitudes towards the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797. This chapter will attempt to analyse the methodology employed by officials in the Admiralty and commanding the vessels of the Royal Navy in dealing with the mutineers. The question to be explored is whether the methods of opposition and/or collaboration employed at Spithead and the Nore were sufficient to bring about the most fitting conclusion to the mutinies. More specifically, the chapter will endeavour to portray the extent to which ideas of opposition changed over the course of the mutinies.

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<sup>1</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 75

<sup>2</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), p. 251.

<sup>4</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), pp. 253-5.



During the stages leading up to and at the beginning of the mutiny at Spithead, the Admiralty behaved in a way that can only be described as complacent and unprepared for what lay ahead. As has been revealed in Chapter 1, the Admiralty adopted a deliberate policy of unawareness and neglect, whereby they simply ignored the petitions sent by the seamen requesting an increase in wages.<sup>5</sup> The unwillingness of Spencer to raise the wages of the ordinary seamen can be summed up in his reply to a letter sent by Captain Pakenham,<sup>6</sup> whose championing of the seaman's cause failed to win over the Admiralty. Gill argues in favour of this approach, stating how the Admiralty couldn't have been expected to react to 'a few cautious and anonymous petitions.'<sup>7</sup> However, this paper disagrees with Gill's assertion. The inadequacy of that policy was only accentuated by the failure of both Earl Howe and the Admiralty to inform Lord Bridport of the petitions they had been sent.<sup>8</sup> Even though many in the Channel Fleet regarded Howe as still being in nominal command, it was Bridport who was responsible for the day-to-day running of the ships, and he would be the one in charge when the fleet put to sea.<sup>9</sup> The fact that Bridport was kept in the dark over the issue, it is argued, was a grave mistake on the part of the Admiralty in the opening stages of the mutinies and represented a breakdown in communication between officials, which had to be corrected if the mutiny was to be brought to a peaceful and successful conclusion.

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<sup>5</sup> G. J. Spencer, 'Spencer to Bridport, 14 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) p. 197.

<sup>6</sup> G. J. Spencer 'Spencer to Pakenham, 12 December 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), p. 108.

<sup>7</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> A. Hood, 'Bridport to Admiralty, 17 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) p. 204.

<sup>9</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 7.

Despite the Admiralty mistakes that quite clearly brought about the start of the mutiny, their subsequent policies towards the mutineers at Spithead were conducted in a largely commendable fashion. The ensuing period of contact between the Admiralty and the mutineers at Spithead can best be described as a period of negotiation, in which the both sides sought the greatest gain for themselves from the proceedings. On 17 April, the Board of the Admiralty wisely sent a representation to Spithead consisting of Lord Arden, Rear-Admiral Young, Secretary Marsden and Spencer himself.<sup>10</sup> Gill stresses that the decision of the Board to travel to Portsmouth ‘was practically an announcement that they were willing to treat with the seamen.’<sup>11</sup> The purpose of the representation was to confer indirectly with the mutinous Channel Fleet and its officers over the issues at stake.<sup>12</sup> It was deemed necessary to assure the mutinous crews that their petitions were going to be discussed.<sup>13</sup> Despite the efforts of Admiral Gardner to persuade the ‘good and leading’ men in the *Royal Sovereign* to bring the ‘less informed men to a sense of their duty,’ he was rebuffed by the crew.<sup>14</sup> This would not be the last time that Gardner would attempt to persuade the crew himself, as will be seen later.

The mutineers rejected the initial offer of reform made by the Admiralty representatives<sup>15</sup> and it is easy to see why. The offer was nowhere near what the mutineers had asked for and seemed to represent a half-hearted attempt on the part of

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<sup>10</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), p. 42.

<sup>11</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 31.

<sup>12</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), p. 42.

<sup>13</sup> A. Hood, ‘Bridport to crews, 17 April 1797’ in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) pp. 205-6 (pp. 205-6).

<sup>14</sup> A. Gardner, ‘Gardner to Bridport, 16 April 1797’ in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) pp. 202-3 (p. 203).

<sup>15</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 31-3.

the representatives to compromise.<sup>16</sup> It was a gamble on the part of the seamen to reject the offer in the possible face of more forceful reprisals by the Admiralty.<sup>17</sup> It was a gamble that paid off as support from both Bridport, and subsequently from the Captains of the Channel Fleet, put pressure upon the Admiralty representatives to concede to the full demands of the mutineers.<sup>18</sup> It is evident by this move on the part of the Captains that they understood the plight of the ordinary seaman far more than Spencer or any other board member could have done.

As highlighted above, Admiral Gardner had attempted without success to persuade the crew of the *Royal Sovereign* to return to their duty.<sup>19</sup> His next effort, subsequent to the Admiralty agreement to redress the petitions of the mutineers, took him again on board the *Royal Sovereign* with a proposition for the men.<sup>20</sup> Gardner attempted to negotiate with them that they should declare their loyalty by putting their signatures in writing.<sup>21</sup> This was a shrewd move on the part of Gardner to get the seamen to declare their submission without the King's Pardon as had happened in the *Culloden* mutiny.<sup>22</sup> Gardner was, however, unsuccessful in this endeavour as his visit was interrupted by a group of delegates who had just arrived on board.<sup>23</sup> The delegates confronted Gardner and hustled him off the ship, seeing his visit as a deliberate attempt to dupe the men into signing a declaration that had no substance and that

<sup>16</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 31-3.

<sup>17</sup> A. Gardner, J. Colpoys & C. M. Pole, 'Gardner, Colpoys and Pole to Fleet, 21 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) p. 210 (p. 210).

<sup>18</sup> Anonymous, 'The Minutes of the Board, 19 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 206-10 (p. 208).

<sup>19</sup> A. Gardner, 'Gardner to Bridport, 16 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) pp. 202-3 (p. 203). No. 15

<sup>20</sup> Anonymous, 'The Minutes of the Board, 21 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 206-10 (pp. 209-10).

<sup>21</sup> Anonymous, 'The Minutes of the Board, 21 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 206-10 (pp. 209-10).

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter 2 of this paper, pp. 28-9.

<sup>23</sup> Anonymous, 'The Minutes of the Board, 21 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 206-10 (pp. 209-10).

might result in several hangings.<sup>24</sup> Gardner's move was a headstrong attempt at reconciliation, which severely underestimated the awareness and sharpness of the delegates. In order to ensure the full loyalty of the men it would be necessary for the Admiralty to produce an official pardon from the King.<sup>25</sup>

Once the mutiny at Spithead had broken out, officials in both the Admiralty and serving on board HM ships at Spithead, were fixated by the idea that putting to sea would eliminate any seditious or rebellious feelings among the fleet.<sup>26</sup> The officers believed that the 'regular and constant employment' of work at sea would keep the minds of the men occupied and away from thoughts of mutiny.<sup>27</sup> That idea may have had mixed results if the Channel Fleet had been able to put to sea before the second outbreak at St Helens,<sup>28</sup> because the distraction of being at sea did not prevent the break up of Admiral Duncan's squadron after it had set sail from Yarmouth.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the idea that putting to sea would have prevented another outbreak was certainly not foolproof.

With the eruption of the second phase of the Channel Fleet mutiny at St. Helens, command of the fleet was once again passed into the hands of the seamen who, as before, refused to obey the order to repair to sea.<sup>30</sup> The Admiralty was quick to

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<sup>24</sup> Anonymous, 'The Minutes of the Board, 21 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 206-10 (pp. 209-10).

<sup>25</sup> A. Hood, 'Bridport to Spencer, 22 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) pp. 211-12 (p. 211).

<sup>26</sup> G. J. Spencer, 'Spencer to Bridport, 25 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) pp. 217 (p. 217).

<sup>27</sup> G. J. Spencer, 'Spencer to Bridport, 25 April 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) pp. 217 (p. 217).

<sup>28</sup> G. J. Spencer, 'Spencer to Bridport, 4 May 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) pp. 220-1 (p. 221).

<sup>29</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pg. 169.

<sup>30</sup> A. Hood, 'Bridport to Spencer, 7 May 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) pp. 222-3 (pp. 222-3).

recognise the need to embark upon the task of assuring the men in the Channel Fleet that their grievances were actually going to be redressed.<sup>31</sup> The Board made the decision to send Earl Howe 'to enquire into the grievances of the seamen.'<sup>32</sup> Gill argues emphatically that the decision to send Howe 'was a most happy inspiration.'<sup>33</sup> The sending of Earl Howe, who had been dubbed 'the sailor's friend,' was intended to reassure and encourage the mutineers back to loyalty.<sup>34</sup> Howe's visit was a resounding success that ultimately signalled the end of the mutiny and was followed by much pomp and celebration in Portsmouth.<sup>35</sup> With hindsight it is easy to see that the granting of an amnesty to the mutineers of the Channel Fleet was by far the most appropriate policy the Admiralty could have adopted.

These celebrations, although they signalled the termination of the Spithead mutiny, did not bring about an end to a variety of issues that resulted from the mutiny. Foremost among these was the issue of what to do with regards to the complaints made by some ships' companies against particular officers.<sup>36</sup> It was deemed necessary, on the insistence of the mutineers, that officers with accusations against them should be dismissed.<sup>37</sup> This was a wise move on the part of the Admiralty as the removal of unpopular officers would ensure the loyalty of individual ship's companies. It was down to the commanders of the Channel Fleet to remedy the deficiency in officers by employing those who were living on half pay and serving on

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<sup>31</sup> Anonymous, 'Admiralty to Bridport, 9 May 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) p. 225 (p. 225).

<sup>32</sup> *Journal of the Proceedings of His Majesty's Ship Royal George from 1<sup>st</sup> July 1796 to the 30<sup>th</sup> June 1797*. The National Archives, Kew, ADM 51/1171.

<sup>33</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 73.

<sup>34</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 73.

<sup>35</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 79-80.

<sup>36</sup> R. Howe 'Howe to Spencer, 11 May 1797' in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) pp. 230-1 (p. 230).

<sup>37</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 76.

board ships currently under repair.<sup>38</sup> To show how serious the Admiralty and the Government were in their desire to redress the grievances of the mutineers at Spithead and prevent a further uprising, a letter from the Victualling Board to the Admiralty demonstrates the assertiveness of the latter:

‘We have received your letter of the 9<sup>th</sup> instant inclosing an extract of one which the Right Honourable the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty had received from Rear Admiral Sir Roger Curtis, dated Torbay the 7<sup>th</sup> instant representing that fresh beef was not ready to be issued to the squadron under his command, and signifying their Lordships’ direction to us to take effectual measures for supplying the said fleet in a regular and proper manner.’<sup>39</sup>

When the outbreak of mass insubordination that was the Nore Mutiny occurred on 12 May 1797,<sup>40</sup> the Admiralty was more concerned with the delicate negotiations between Earl Howe and the Channel Fleet to pay it due attention.<sup>41</sup> After matters at St Helens had passed, the Admiralty assumed that the mutineers at the Nore would abandon their cause.<sup>42</sup> With hindsight it is easy to see that the assumption was mistaken. However, if one were to view the situation in context from the stance of the Admiralty, that approach was entirely plausible considering that the refractory men of Admiral Curtis’s squadron had returned to obedience upon the termination of the St Helens uprising.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> G. J. Spencer, ‘Spencer to Bridport, 14 May 1797’ in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) p. 235 (p. 235).

<sup>39</sup> Anonymous, ‘Victualling Board to Admiralty, 11 May 1797’ in *The Channel Fleet and the blockade of Brest, 1793-1801*, ed. Roger Morriss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) p. 231 (p. 231).

<sup>40</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 107

<sup>41</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 132-3

<sup>42</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 134

<sup>43</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 134

On 28 May the Admiralty representatives (the same that had been present at Spithead) arrived at Sheerness with the exact same aim of negotiating with the mutineers.<sup>44</sup> The representatives went about their business in the same way they had at Spithead by finding a base and conducting negotiations indirectly through a third party (the third party in question this time being Vice-Admiral Buckner).<sup>45</sup> Manwaring and Dobrée argue that it was during these negotiations that the ineffectiveness and demeaning nature of the Admiralty policy of indirect negotiation was felt the most.<sup>46</sup> The mutineers demanded that they should speak with the representatives directly and not through Buckner, but Spencer refused, except on the condition that the men should immediately accept the King's pardon.<sup>47</sup> Ultimately, the Admiralty refused outright to consider the grievances of the mutineers, and their representatives departed.<sup>48</sup> Overall, the negotiations achieved nothing and with neither side willing to submit to the other, the whole process came to an end.<sup>49</sup> The inadequacy of the Admiralty's policy of indirect negotiation was quickly observed as it undermined the negotiation process from the start.<sup>50</sup> Crucially, the same method of negotiation had been employed at Spithead<sup>51</sup> but, despite the often uneven nature of the debate, the result was far more positive.<sup>52</sup> It is argued that the mutineers at Spithead were possibly more anxious to remain moderate, whereas the Nore mutineers, although they did display some

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<sup>44</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), p. 155.

<sup>45</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), pp. 155-6

<sup>46</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), pp. 155-6

<sup>47</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), p. 156

<sup>48</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), p. 157

<sup>49</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), pp. 158-9

<sup>50</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), p. 156

<sup>51</sup> G. E. Manwaring and B. Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: an account of the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), p. 42

<sup>52</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 42

moderation, often did exhibit irrational behaviour.<sup>53</sup> This paper agrees with Manwaring and Dobrée in that, whether one talks of Spithead or the Nore, the Admiralty policy of indirect negotiation was still very much flawed.

Now that the period of negotiation at the Nore had been brought to an unsuccessful conclusion, it was deemed necessary by the Admiralty to turn immediately to measures of resistance that would serve to undermine, and eventually bring the mutiny to an end. Gill is at odds with Manwaring and Dobrée in that he argues that the Admiralty policy of opposition after the breakdown of negotiations was largely sensible.<sup>54</sup> Gill's reasoning is that the passive measures adopted by the Admiralty would serve to undermine the mutiny without having to use force,<sup>55</sup> and this paper is largely in agreement. By denying the Mutineers a supply of fresh water<sup>56</sup> and meat<sup>57</sup> from the shore, the Admiralty hoped to drive them to abandon their cause. By preventing them from acquiring these essential consumables, the mutineers would eventually come to see that ultimately their support was non-existent, and indeed their lack of fresh water and meat may have been a factor that contributed to the eventual collapse of the mutiny. Those in authority also made moves to stop the mutineers receiving letters from the shore;<sup>58</sup> a tactic that would doubtless cause them to feel a greater sense of isolation than they felt beforehand. An ever present worry for the Admiralty, and the British public as a whole, would be that the mutineers at the Nore would decide to run into an enemy port, thereby depriving the British of several key

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<sup>53</sup> *Memorandum, Sir Charles Grey to Mr Dundas on the Mutiny at the Nore dated from Barham Court 25 June 1797.* The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, AGC/24/5.

<sup>54</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 193.

<sup>55</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 193.

<sup>56</sup> Anonymous, 'The King to Spencer, 30 May 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), pp. 144-5 (pp. 144-5).

<sup>57</sup> *Extract of a letter from John James to Susanna Johnson, dated 1 June 1797 from the Belliqueux.* The National Archives, Kew, PC 1/38/122.

<sup>58</sup> G. K. Elphinstone, 'Keith to Spencer, 2 June 1797' in *The Keith Papers*, ed. W. G. Perrin (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955) pp. 15-16 (p.16).



warships and thus in turn adding to the strength of the enemy.<sup>59</sup> A tactic that the Admiralty employed to prevent that was to remove the navigation buoys from the mouth of the Thames, thereby making any endeavour on the part of the mutineers to desert a foolhardy and extremely hazardous undertaking.<sup>60</sup>

The minds of the Admiralty also turned to the issue of defending the surrounding area, should the militancy of the mutineers get the better of them.<sup>61</sup> From the words of Lord Keith it appears that the authorities struggled to provide aspects of defence due to the lack of 'Ordnance Artillery,'<sup>62</sup> small numbers of soldiers available<sup>63</sup> and, crucially, a deficiency in the number of ships capable of opposing the mutinous North Sea Fleet.<sup>64</sup> Keith also proposed to the Admiralty the drastic measure of equipping several small ships with the capability to become miniature fire vessels.<sup>65</sup> The measures of defence that were taken show how much the Admiralty, and the country as a whole, must have feared the potential militancy of the mutineers at the Nore, especially as they were in control of the greater part of an entire fleet of warships.

A unique source, although not useful for highlighting the methods employed by the Admiralty, does shed some light on the importance of Parker in the minds of some individuals. The source takes the form of a letter from Captain Dixon to Spencer dated

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<sup>59</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 223-5

<sup>60</sup> W. Pitt, 'Pitt to Spencer, 7 June 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914) pp. 149-50 (p. 149).

<sup>61</sup> G. J. Spencer, 'Spencer to the King, 30 May 1797' in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914) pp. 143-4 (p. 144).

<sup>62</sup> G. K. Elphinstone, 'Keith to Spencer, 2 June 1797' in *The Keith Papers*, ed. W. G. Perrin (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955) pp. 15-16 (p. 15).

<sup>63</sup> G. K. Elphinstone, 'Keith to Spencer, 2 June 1797' in *The Keith Papers*, ed. W. G. Perrin (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955) pp. 15-16 (p. 15).

<sup>64</sup> G. K. Elphinstone, 'Keith to Spencer, 2 June 1797' in *The Keith Papers*, ed. W. G. Perrin (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955) pp. 15-16 (p. 15).

<sup>65</sup> G. K. Elphinstone, 'Keith to Spencer, 2 June 1797' in *The Keith Papers*, ed. W. G. Perrin (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955) pp. 15-16 (p. 15).

9 June 1797.<sup>66</sup> In the letter, Dixon essentially offers Spencer his services as an assassin, with the object of killing Parker, and thereby derailing the Nore Mutiny.<sup>67</sup> This radical proposal was understandably rejected by Spencer but remains an interesting source, purely for the bizarre offer of assistance made therein:

‘As the president of the mutineers on board the *Sandwich* seems to guide the others, the destruction of whom might tend to restore the remainder to obedience, I therefore volunteer to perform such a glorious undertaking as the ridding the country of so great a traitor as the delegate Parker.’<sup>68</sup>

As soon as the crews of the North Sea Fleet had been brought back to order, the Admiralty set about the task of securing promises of future loyalty from the mass of the crews and tracking down those who were the most responsible and active of the mutineers.<sup>69</sup> The Admiralty went about this matter in the most thorough and systematic way by ordering the Captains of the North Sea Fleet to muster the companies of their respective vessels and acquire from them a pledge to remain obedient in future and never to take any oaths, unless officially sanctioned by the authorities.<sup>70</sup> Moves were also made to facilitate the delivery of those mutineers who were deemed the ‘ringleaders’ of the uprising at the Nore.<sup>71</sup> Lord Keith was given instructions to repair on board the *Saturn* in order negotiate with the crew to give up

<sup>66</sup> Anonymous, ‘Captain Dixon to Spencer, 9 June 1797’ in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914) pp. 151-2 (pp. 151-2).

<sup>67</sup> Anonymous, ‘Captain Dixon to Spencer, 9 June 1797’ in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914) pp. 151-2 (pp. 151-2).

<sup>68</sup> Anonymous, ‘Captain Dixon to Spencer, 9 June 1797’ in *The Private Papers of George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer (Volume II)*, ed. J. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914) pp. 151-2 (pp. 151-2).

<sup>69</sup> G. K. Elphinstone, ‘Memo to Captains and Commanders at the Nore and Sheerness, 22 June 1797’ in *The Keith Papers*, ed. W. G. Perrin (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955) p. 25 (p. 25).

<sup>70</sup> G. K. Elphinstone, ‘Memo to Captains and Commanders at the Nore and Sheerness, 22 June 1797’ in *The Keith Papers*, ed. W. G. Perrin (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955) p. 25 (p. 25).

<sup>71</sup> G. K. Elphinstone, ‘King to Keith’ in *The Keith Papers*, ed. W. G. Perrin (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955) p. 26 (p. 26).

those men amongst their numbers who were the most active mutineers.<sup>72</sup> The harbouring of, or refusal to give up the culprits, was deemed by the Admiralty to be an offence punishable by death.<sup>73</sup>

The Admiralty would also utilise such conventions as propaganda in the period following the Nore Mutiny. An address to 'the Seamen in the British Navy,' probably intended to be delivered by Earl Howe, showed just such methods at work in the persuasive and patriotic language employed therein.<sup>74</sup> The address acknowledged that the majority of seamen in the fleet were 'misguided' by the 'endeavours of the designing few.'<sup>75</sup> Clearly, the intent of the Admiralty was to highlight the lack of unity and hence the immorality of the Nore mutineers' cause. The descriptive language used to denounce the mutiny was also utilised to great effect: 'I can only compare it to a sudden frost.'<sup>76</sup> Statements, such as the following, were obviously crafted to exhibit the unjust and criminal nature of the Nore Mutiny and inspire a sense of patriotic zeal:

'Rouze, then, ye British Seamen! Go join the brave Admiral Duncan, who, with four sail of the line, blocked up the whole Dutch Naval Force in their own ports, while a British Fleet ingloriously blockaded the mouth of the Thames!'<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> G. K. Elphinstone, 'King to Keith' in *The Keith Papers*, ed. W. G. Perrin (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955) p. 26 (p. 26).

<sup>73</sup> G. K. Elphinstone, 'King to Keith' in *The Keith Papers*, ed. W. G. Perrin (London: Navy Records Society, 1927-1955) p. 26 (p. 26).

<sup>74</sup> *An Address to the Seamen in the British Navy* (London: Printed for W. Richardson, at the Royal Exchange, July 1797). The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, MKH/15.

<sup>75</sup> *An Address to the Seamen in the British Navy* (London: Printed for W. Richardson, at the Royal Exchange, July 1797). The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, MKH/15.

<sup>76</sup> *An Address to the Seamen in the British Navy* (London: Printed for W. Richardson, at the Royal Exchange, July 1797). The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, MKH/15.

<sup>77</sup> *An Address to the Seamen in the British Navy* (London: Printed for W. Richardson, at the Royal Exchange, July 1797). The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, MKH/15.

The Admiralty methods employed at the close of events at the Nore were thorough and swift, and served to deter the seamen from partaking in any future discontent.

In conclusion, it would seem that the methods employed by the Admiralty to counter the mutinies were of mixed effectiveness. At Spithead, the Admiralty policy of neglect was hugely flawed and essentially brought about the beginning of the mutiny at the time it did. Following this initial blunder, the Admiralty must be admired for their swift action in hurrying down a representation to Spithead to discuss terms with the delegates. The representatives' policy of negotiation through a third party was, it is argued, a flawed idea which thankfully avoided causing trouble at Spithead but contributed heavily towards the breakdown of negotiations at the Nore. At Spithead, the initial offers of redress given by the representation were less than adequate to please the seamen, and it was only after pressure from the officers of the fleet that the Admiralty conceded. The Admiralty were quick to reassure the mutineers again during the second outbreak at St. Helens that their demands were being met, and the decision to send Earl Howe to reconcile with them was by far the best move to make under the circumstances. The methods employed at the Nore after negotiations broke down were successful in undermining the mutiny, which collapsed in a short space of time afterwards. Although the Admiralty was perhaps too harsh and unforgiving towards the Nore mutineers, one has to remember their irrational and often violent behaviour towards their officers and each other. Therefore, it is argued that any beneficial manoeuvres that led to resolution of disputes were not weighted towards either one of the two mutinies, unlike the argument made by Manwaring and Dobrée in the introductory paragraph, but rather the actions of the Admiralty during both mutinies were of mixed effectiveness.

## Conclusion

The dissertation has to this point been concerned with providing a fresh, up-to-date analysis of the mutinies, as opposed to an account of the key events. Chapter 1 provides an analysis of the primary long and short term causes of the mutinies. Chapter 2 sets out an analysis of the character of the mutiny at Spithead, compared and contrasted with that at the Nore. Chapter 3 takes the form of a discussion of the attitudes that officials involved in the crisis maintained towards the mutineers and their cause. Finally, Chapter 4 seeks to examine the methods of opposition/negotiation employed by those in authority to deal with the mutinies.

The first chapter has largely drawn the conclusion that the issue of low wages among the seamen of the navy, and their subsequent desire for an increase in pay, was the primary grievance among the mutineers of the Channel Fleet. That grievance appeared on the earliest petitions sent months before the mutiny at Spithead broke out. The issue of low wages represented the most long-term of the grievances that the seamen wished to be redressed since their wages were set during the reign of Charles II.<sup>1</sup> However, this point does not explain 'why' the mutinies took place in 1797, and not earlier or later. This can be explained mostly by new ideas, and a new type of recruit, that acted essentially as a catalyst.

The French Revolution ultimately had an influence upon the attitude of the mutineers, at least upon the ringleaders. In addition, the arrival of men recruited under the quota system who were generally unaccustomed to the rigours of naval life, brought with them a different mindset to that of the long-serving career seamen. Richard Parker, the

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<sup>1</sup> C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), pp. 262-3.

so-called president of the Nore Mutiny, was himself a quota man. It is probably untrue that there was any significant seditious element behind the mutinies, as the Admiralty investigations and Parker's declaration tell of no such thing. There may have been some seditious individuals involved in the mutinies but they would have been a minority group, the majority only being inspired by the ideas of the French Revolution. The failure of the Admiralty and Earl Howe to communicate the arrival of the first petitions to Bridport can be understood to have been a prevalent short term cause for the arrival of mutiny at Spithead. The mutiny also gave the various crews the opportunity of removing those in command whom they detested, resulting in the dismissal of several officers from their posts.

Once the mutiny among the Channel Fleet had erupted, it was clear that a substantial amount of planning had gone into it to make it run as efficiently as possible. The delegates of the fleet also maintained a rigid system of discipline amongst their subordinates, and certain rituals, such as cheering throughout the fleet morning and night, would have served to remind the mutineers of their cause. In addition, Chapter 2 reveals the nature of the mutineers conduct at Spithead to have been wholly commendable with regards to their treatment of the officers of the fleet. The mutiny at the Nore, although it too was well organised, did not succeed in gaining the same kind of loyal following as that which existed among the mutineers at Spithead. This lack of unity would ultimately lead to the fragmentation and collapse of the Nore Mutiny. The reason for this lack of unity can be explained by the fact that certain ships were forced or threatened into joining the mutiny against their will.

Particular acts of brutality serve to illustrate the often violent and aggressive nature of some of the Nore Mutineers against their officers. The mutineers even went as far as to fire upon vessels that attempted to withdraw from the mutiny. Influencing the majority of the events at the Nore is the figure of Richard Parker, the elected president of the mutineers. Contemporaries often portrayed Parker as a highly unstable individual who, despite his position, may have had neurotic tendencies.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the two mutinies at Spithead and the Nore present very distinct contrasts between them, which go some way to explaining why the former succeeded and the latter was met with severe reprisals.

Attitudes towards the mutinies varied greatly from one individual to another. Before the Spithead Mutiny began there was some recognition among officers of the navy that the seamen were underpaid. The Admiralty were, however, unwilling to increase wages due to the poor state of the British economy at that time. Admiral Duncan in particular held the largely false view that any mutiny could be suppressed by the determination of the officers, although as he and others were to discover, the determination of a ship's crew to have grievances redressed would ultimately prevail. During the course of the mutinies several officials were convinced that they represented a cataclysmic and shameful stain on the record of the navy. When viewed within the context of the increasingly disastrous war with France it seems understandable that such views would be held, although some officials were clearly guilty of over-exaggeration.

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<sup>2</sup> M. A. Lewis, *A social history of the Navy, 1793-1815* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1960), p. 126.

It is also understandable that officials should have compared the mutinies with the French Revolution, which was at the time nearing its close, although as before some officials clearly over-exaggerated the threat that the mutinies posed to the political stability of Britain as a whole. There was clearly some resentment towards the mutineers for their conduct, and others divided the mutineers into 'good' and 'bad' categories when describing the internal make-up of the mutinies. However, some officials such as Nelson, held great admiration for the determination and principles of the Spithead mutineers.<sup>3</sup> The role of caricature in conveying attitudes is important due to the messages conveyed through such works. *The Delegates in council or beggars on horseback* by Isaac Cruikshank<sup>4</sup> is one such cartoon that satirises the delegates at the Nore, portraying them in a less than flattering light as the puppets of political reformers.

The methods of opposition and/or negotiation employed by the Admiralty were of mixed effectiveness and appropriateness at both Spithead and the Nore. The Admiralty's neglect of the seamen's early petitions can be seen as a policy that was mistaken, as it ultimately led to the outbreak of the mutiny in the Channel Fleet. However, soon afterwards, the Admiralty acted with a greater decisiveness during the period of negotiation with the delegates of the mutineers at Spithead. The seamen rejected the initial offer of redress made by the Admiralty representatives although eventually the latter were encouraged to concede the full demands of the mutineers in the face of the opinions of the Captains of the fleet. Concession was therefore a wise

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<sup>3</sup> *Horatio Nelson, Viscount: holograph to H. R. H. the Duke of Clarence, dated from the Theseus, 26 May 1797.* The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, AGC/27/24.

<sup>4</sup> National Portrait Gallery, *Large Image NPG D15627; 'The delegates in council or beggars on horseback,'*

<http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/largerimage.php?mkey=mw72126&search=sa&sText=isaac+cruikshank&LinkID=mp06840&role=art&wPage=0&rNo=6> [accessed 14 October 2010].



decision on the part of the representatives. The futile attempt made by Admiral Gardner to get the mutineers to place their submission in writing before they had the King's pardon was unsuccessful, as the mutineers were determined to acquire a pardon before they gave their submission.

Once the grievances had been granted at Spithead, it was deemed essential to get the fleet to sea so that the minds of the seamen might be distracted away from the idea of further mutiny. It is possible that this idea might have succeeded, although it was never put into execution before the second outbreak at St. Helens came about. Subsequent to the outbreak of mutiny at St. Helens, the Admiralty went vigorously about the task of reassuring the mutineers that their grievances would soon be redressed. Part of this plan was the decision to send Earl Howe himself to reconcile with the mutinous crews. This idea was an irrefutable success, which served finally to lay to rest any suspicion the seamen had that the government had duped them.

When the Nore Mutiny broke out on 12 May the Admiralty largely ignored it, instead concentrating their attention on the closing stages of the St. Helens affair. When the disturbance at the Nore showed no signs of abating, the Admiralty were eventually compelled to send a representation to Sheerness. The policy adopted by the representatives was to refuse outright any of the demands of the Nore mutineers, and their method of communicating indirectly with the mutineers (the same method used at Spithead) showed itself to be a mistaken and demeaning policy. Following the breakdown of negotiations at the Nore, the Admiralty adopted a policy of opposition. The measures adopted were to deny the mutineers access to essential supplies as well as to prevent any letters from the shore reaching the ships. These measures served to

isolate the mutineers from any support they had previously been able to call upon. Planning in earnest was also conducted for the defence of the area should the mutineers have felt compelled to use hostile methods against the country. After the end of the mutiny the authorities went about securing the loyalty of the navy through pledges of future obedience and rousing addresses to be delivered to the seamen.

This dissertation has sought to explore the primary source material available for the mutinies with the aim of providing a fresh analysis. Analysis of the causes of the mutinies has shown that the primary long-term cause for the mutinies was the issue of pay, due its long-standing nature. Of importance also was the role played by quota men and the influence of the French Revolution that determined when the mutiny erupted. Flaws in administration and communication also served to provoke the seamen to mutiny in the short-term. Analysis of the Spithead Mutiny shows just how organised and unified it was. The Nore Mutiny, although it was similarly well organised, failed in respect of maintaining unity, a flaw that would ultimately serve to undermine it. The irrational behaviour of the Nore Mutineers would also serve to undermine their cause yet further, while the Spithead Mutineers can be largely commended for their moderation. Attitudes towards the mutinies varied considerably, although common trends seem to indicate that upon the outbreak of mutiny at Spithead many officials were left stunned and largely unsuspecting. The methods employed to counteract the mutinies were mixed in terms of suitability, with both mutinies displaying elements of Admiralty incompetence and success in dealing effectively with the situations. Overall, the 1797 mutinies took place against a background of turmoil and change, and serve to give fascinating insights into areas of the naval history of the period.

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