

“A true *British* Spirit”: Admiral Vernon, Porto Bello, and British  
National Identity, 1730-1745

A Thesis Submitted to the College of  
Graduate Studies and Research  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts  
In the Department of History  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon

By

Madeleine Peckham

© Copyright Madeleine Peckham, June 2015. All rights reserved

## **Permission to Use**

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Postgraduate degree from the University of Saskatchewan, I agree that the Libraries of this University may make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for copying of this thesis in any manner, in whole or in part, for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor or professors who supervised my thesis work or, in their absence, by the Head of the Department or the Dean of the College in which my thesis work was done.

It is understood that any copying or publication or use of this thesis or parts thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of Saskatchewan in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my thesis.

Requests for permission to copy or to make use of material in this thesis in whole or part should be addressed to:

Head of the Department of History  
Room 522, Arts Building  
University of Saskatchewan  
9 Campus Drive  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7N 5A5  
Canada

## Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without:

*Dr. Matthew Neufeld*, whose supervision of my studies, support for my work, and seemingly inexhaustible patience in listening to my complaints about the Canadian winter, were, in a word, heroic. Thank you for challenging me to be a better researcher, writer, teacher and thinker. I am profoundly grateful for your guidance and expertise, for our shared love of Star Trek, and above all, for your friendship.

*Dr. Martha Smith-Norris*, and my thesis committee: *Dr. Gordon DesBrisay*, *Dr. Larry Stewart*, *Dr. Allison Muri*, and *Dr. Lisa Smith*. Thank you for encouraging me to think critically and deeply, and for your help in making my thesis the best it could be.

*Dr. Ormond Seavey*, Professor of English, and *Dr. Tom Long*, Assistant Professor of History, at The George Washington University, who are everything that professors should be. I treasure many things about GW, but nothing more than time spent in the eighteenth century with you.

*Rev. Pius Schroh*, *Brigid Fuller*, and all of our dear friends at *St. Paul's Co-Cathedral*, who expressed what it means to say that "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Your missionary zeal gave me the courage I needed to pursue Truth in all things.

*Dr. Michael Tobin*, my dearest friend in Saskatoon. Our walks after Mass, "vats" of wine and *Brideshead Revisited*, spirited conversations, and shared disdain for the 1970s hymnal reminded Paul and me that there is life beyond graduate school. Thank you for your hospitality, your prayers, your friendship, and for being, without question, the most extraordinarily larger-than-life person I have ever met.

*My parents*, who are almost certainly the only people on Earth still totally convinced that my research produced interesting conclusions.

*Paul*, who first showed me Saskatoon on a map. I look forward to spending the rest of my life following you into the yet undiscovered frontiers of our hearts.

*Ad maiorem Dei gloriam.*

## **Abstract**

Admiral Edward Vernon's capture of Porto Bello, a Spanish stronghold in the Caribbean, was met with enthusiastic celebration when the news arrived in Britain in early 1740. With just six ships, he had struck a dramatic blow to restore British honor and protect British trade. The response to Vernon's victory was widespread and varied: public rallies, verse, sermons of thanksgiving, annual celebrations of Vernon's birthday, and a diverse material culture. The capture itself accomplished little and the campaign's small gains were entirely erased by Vernon's failures at Cartagena in 1740-41, yet Vernon continued to be celebrated by the British public. It seems surprising that Vernon excited so much popularity and lasting commemoration during the period in which his short-lived successes and catastrophic failures were most obvious and consequential. To explain Vernon's extraordinary and enduring popularity, this thesis employs a variety of primary sources viewed through the lenses of national identity and gender to argue that Vernon assumed lasting political and cultural importance because his admirers interpreted broader meanings from his actions and character.

Celebrating Vernon gave Britons a way to articulate what Britishness meant to them, and what they believed it should mean for others. In chapter 1, I argue that the parliamentary opposition skillfully employed celebration of Vernon after his capture of Porto Bello in 1739 to argue for ministerial change. In chapter 2, I argue that Vernon enjoyed continued popularity in the 1740s in spite of his failures because his supporters argued that he embodied the "publick spirit" of the mercantile empire and aggressive masculinity that many believed had been lacking in public figures of the 1730s. Whatever his real successes or failures, Admiral Vernon became an important rhetorical tool for those who sought to imbue British politics and culture with the "national" values of the mercantile empire, aggressive foreign policy, and bold masculinity that many believed represented the way forward in a period of change and growing imperial challenges.

## Table of Contents

Permission to Use .....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Abstract .....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Sources and Methods .....	12
Argument and Approach.....	18
“With six ships only”: Admiral Vernon, Porto Bello, and the fall of the Walpole ministry, 1730-1742.....	21
The Robinocracy and the opposition, 1724-1733 .....	23
“Prudence and pusillanimity”: Walpole.....	26
“To have the Spaniards blown up”: Porto Bello, 1739 .....	37
“Be brave then, I ask no more”: Vernon.....	39
“Who is to blame but you?": The fall of the Walpole ministry, 1742 .....	50
Vernon’s Glory: “Publick spirit,” masculinity and Britishness after Porto Bello .....	56
British “national” identity before 1757: the case of Vernon.....	57
In search of “publick spirit” .....	62
The hero of Porto Bello.....	73
The making of a celebrity-hero.....	78
“Publick spirit” personified.....	82
The “Man of all Men” .....	88
Conclusion .....	95
Figures.....	97
Conclusion .....	100
Bibliography .....	105
Primary Sources .....	105
Secondary Sources .....	113

## Table of Figures

Figure 1: Medal commemorating Admiral Edward Vernon and the capture of Porto Bello, 1739.....	97
Figure 2: Stoneware mug and teapot showing scenes of Porto Bello, 1740.....	98
Figure 3: F. Chassereau, <i>Fan</i> , paper and ivory, 1740,. ....	99

## Introduction

News of Admiral Edward Vernon's bold capture of Porto Bello, a Spanish stronghold in the Caribbean, arrived in England in the spring of 1740. With just six ships, he had struck a dramatic blow to restore British honor and protect British trade. It was a victory that many saw through the memory and myth of the Armada; a victory pre-ordained to crown with laurels a new Protestant, manly, British hero. The response to Vernon's victory was widespread and varied: public rallies, verse, sermons of thanksgiving, annual celebrations of Vernon's birthday, and a diverse material culture including prints, coins, and ceramics. Vernon's military success in the Caribbean was short-lived—his 1741 attack on Cartagena failed and he returned home with a badly tarnished professional reputation. Yet Vernon's celebrity lived on. Over a year and a half after Porto Bello, London socialite Elizabeth Montagu reported seeing "Vernon, in gingerbread... [and] on a brass tobacco stopper" at a country fair.<sup>1</sup> In 1758, Horace Walpole, no fan of Vernon, jokingly referred to another notable date as having "taken its place in our calendar next to Admiral Vernon's [birthday]."<sup>2</sup> British people in a variety of different circumstances found something in Vernon worth commemorating that outlived his brief success and ultimately unsuccessful war in the Caribbean. Why, then, was Vernon so popular?

An explanation that does not focus solely on the strategic or tactical merits of Vernon's service is necessary. By considering the phenomenon of Vernon's popularity, independent of his personal or professional accomplishments, we can better understand the political and cultural world his celebrity came to inhabit. Rather than investigating Vernon himself, this thesis examines how the admiral's contemporaries interpreted his accomplishments and the rhetoric

---

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, With Some of the Letters of Her Correspondence*, vol. 2, (London, England: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1809), 318.

<sup>2</sup> Horace Walpole, Letter to Horace Mann, Feb. 9, 1758, in *Letters*, vol. 4, 122. *Eighteenth Century: Electronic Edition*.

they used to assign political and cultural meaning to his widespread popularity after Porto Bello. Supporters of the parliamentary opposition argued that Vernon's success vindicated the "national" values that drove their policies, including defense of the mercantile the empire and aggressive foreign policy, using the admiral's popularity to argue for political change during the waning years of Sir Robert Walpole's ministry. Even after Vernon failed to capture Cartagena (1740-1) and Walpole had resigned (1742), the admiral remained a popular figure. Vernon's heroic reputation survived his failed campaign because he reflected prevailing ideas about "publick spirit" in a mercantile age and expressed authentic and aggressive masculinity in a "national" context. Drawing on new approaches in British history, Vernon's celebrity offers an ideal case-study to evaluate the intersection of politics, national identity, and masculinity during this understudied period. The mania over Vernon in the years following Porto Bello is particularly worthy of consideration because historians of British national identity, gender, and the navy have rarely applied these interpretive perspectives to the first half of the eighteenth century.

Scholarship on navy, nation, gender, and heroism in eighteenth century Britain can enable a more comprehensive understanding not only of the causes and impact of Vernon's celebrity, but also of the world it came to inhabit and shape. The naval hero's professional accomplishments and personal history, or his political and diplomatic impact, have long found a place in the work of military and diplomatic historians. Vernon, though not as well-known as other naval figures such as Drake or Nelson, is nonetheless granted serious consideration by a number of naval historians, including Richard Harding and N.A.M. Rodger.<sup>3</sup> While the Royal

---

<sup>3</sup> Richard Harding, "Edward Vernon, 1684-1757," In Peter Lefevre, Richard Harding, ed., *Precursors of Nelson: British Admirals of the Eighteenth Century*, (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2000), 151-176.; N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815*, (London: Penguin, 2006).; Philip Woodfine, *Britannia's Glories: The Walpole Ministry and the 1739 War with Spain*, (London: Woodbridge, 1998).

Navy in the first half of the eighteenth century receives less attention than the period encompassing the Seven Years' War, the French Revolutionary Wars, and the Napoleonic Wars, this bias is not due to a dearth of important events or relevant sources before 1756. The lack of scholarly attention may be a result of the Royal Navy's uneven performance and the contentious domestic circumstances of the time. These factors make this earlier period a less comfortable fit within the traditional, triumphal Whig narrative of British naval supremacy, and thus of less interest to naval historians.

As described by Herbert Butterfield, who originated the term in 1931, Whig historians viewed British history as a story of continuous progress beginning with the Glorious Revolution in 1688, which laid the basis for the ascendancy of Protestantism, constitutional monarchy, and imperial expansion.<sup>4</sup> According to the Whig view, the rise of a militarily successful and politically stable empire was the necessary result of a constitutional monarchy, a natural source of heroic figures, and confirmation of the moral superiority of Anglican Protestantism. This tendency can be seen in the title of the most important recent book on eighteenth-century British naval commanders, *Precursors of Nelson*.<sup>5</sup> Though it offers important insight into the little-known lives and careers of significant eighteenth-century admirals, by starting with Nelson and looking back, *Precursors* nonetheless reinforces an unsubstantiated belief in the preordained success of the British navy. It also assumes that naval heroes became popular in proportion to their technical merits and the navy's overall performance, both of which improved over the course of the century. But this perspective clearly falls short in explaining why people celebrated Admiral Vernon in his own time. An understanding of the nature of naval heroism and celebrity in the eighteenth century, beyond the hero's professional accomplishments and his

---

<sup>4</sup> Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History*, (London: Bell, 1931).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Le Fevre and Richard Harding, ed., *Precursors of Nelson: British Admirals of the Eighteenth Century*, (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2000).

ability to fit into a celebratory, retrospective narrative that was by no means inevitable, invites us to consider other theoretical approaches.

Vernon's celebrity has attracted some interest among historians whose focus is popular politics in the mid-eighteenth century. Celebrations of Vernon's Porto Bello capture, according to Kathleen Wilson, Gerald Jordan, Nicholas Rogers, Bob Harris, and others, represented not only hearty celebrations of a British victory but also demonstrations of public enthusiasm and political investment in the mercantile trade and the "blue-water" naval policy that supported it.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Vernon became a prominent figure of the parliamentary opposition who was frequently invoked against the Walpole ministry. However, the popular enthusiasm for Vernon suggests that there were multiple dimensions to his celebrity both in parliamentary circles and in what Wilson and Jordan refer to as the "extra-parliamentary nation."<sup>7</sup> While the economics of a mercantile empire that motivated celebrations of colonial aggrandizement and political agitation against Walpole certainly contributed to the enthusiasm for Vernon, this alone cannot explain Vernon's celebrity. Historians are right to note that celebrations of Vernon emphasized his role as a protector of British trade, but this focus on the economic and political has significant limitations for understanding the broader meanings of Vernon's appearance in literary works, sermons, mass manufactures, or private letters. Vernon was considered heroic for what his supporters argued he represented, almost independent of his actual professional or personal merits. If we are to understand why people who could not participate in parliamentary politics or were not directly involved with colonial trade wanted to honor aspects of Vernon's character—his manliness,

---

<sup>6</sup> Bob Harris, "'American Idols': Empire, War and the Middling Ranks in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Past & Present*, No. 150, Feb. 1996: 111-141.; Gerald Jordan and Nicholas Rogers, "Admirals as Heroes: Patriotism and Liberty in Hanoverian England," *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 28, no. 3, July 1989: 201-224.; Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).; Kathleen Wilson, "Trade and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian Britain: The Case of Admiral Vernon," *Past & Present*, no. 121, Nov. 1988: 74-109.

<sup>7</sup> Wilson, "Trade and Popular Politics,..." 75.

sincerity, bravery, and good sense— in poetry, song, household articles, and sermons, we must look beyond economic motives and popular politics for a more cultural explanation.

Historians of Britain have long been interested in British identity as evolving from a cultural process, especially during the latter half of the eighteenth century. Benedict Anderson's concept of an "imagined community," described in 1983, is widely used to explain modern national identity. To Anderson, a nation is something that forms over time, maintains a "modular" temporally-specific coherence, and then is transplanted.<sup>8</sup> The idea of a nation as an imagined, linguistic, limited, historical community offers the historian a way to maintain the importance of events, politics, diplomacy, and the usual features of national history while studying it through a cultural lens.<sup>9</sup> Later scholarship, notably Gerald Newman's *The Rise of English Nationalism*, transposes the cultural concept of nationalism onto the eighteenth century in search of its motivating factors and origins, arguing that the national myths on which British identity was built did not arise imperceptibly from a distant ancestral past. Rather, a sense of British nationhood grew out of temporally-specific anxieties of the eighteenth century, including foreign and domestic "Others," a literary community actively helping its readers define themselves, political radicalism, and revolutions.<sup>10</sup> While more recent scholars are reluctant to assign the ideologically-loaded term "nationalism" to this phenomenon, Newman's argument that cultural indicators reflected as well as influenced a broadly understood national identity forming in eighteenth-century England remains compelling. For example, Linda Colley, in *Britons*, describes British identity during the eighteenth century as the result of a process rather

---

<sup>8</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Verso, 2006), 4.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-7.

<sup>10</sup> Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987).

than a permanent mythology.<sup>11</sup> Colley's sees British national identity as "forged" by events and experiences, rather than an abstract cultural process arbitrated by prominent figures. Britishness was "superimposed over an array of internal differences," but it did not supersede them.

The work of Newman, Colley, Kidd, Conway, and others offers fascinating insight into the development of personal identification with a state-oriented "national" group that overlaid existing divisions. This literature also provides an array of places to look for its evidence.<sup>12</sup> Kathleen Wilson's *A New Imperial History* exemplifies recent scholarship on the cultural dimensions of nation and empire, offering exciting interdisciplinary methods to study the intersection of empire, art, warfare, politics, literature, and gender as a way of understanding nation and identity in eighteenth-century Britain.<sup>13</sup> Yet Wilson's wide-ranging approach, in which virtually anything can be read for its "national" relevance, leaves the historian pursuing a smaller-scale investigation with an overwhelming array of possible questions, sources, or methods. To understand Vernon, who was regularly celebrated in contrast to other contemporary national exemplars for his extraordinary displays of masculinity, a gendered approach to national identity is an original and necessary way to add to the conversation.

This thesis seeks to extend the scholarly conversation about national identity into the first half of the eighteenth century through the lenses of heroism and gender (specifically masculinity). Viewing gender, as Joan Scott argues in *Gender and the Politics of History*, as an "analytic category" to be historicized and then interpreted in specific historical contexts, removes the artificial disciplinary barrier between gender and national history. This approach allows us to see

---

<sup>11</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).; Stephen Conway, *War, state, and society in mid-eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Kathleen Wilson, ed, *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

how they are inseparable from one another.<sup>14</sup> Using gender as an analytical category in the context of national identity and male heroes during wartime mitigates some of the methodological difficulties of seeing abstract national themes in cultural indicators. It seems strangely redundant to twenty-first-century people to celebrate the extraordinary masculinity of a wartime hero like Vernon, but the fact that so many of his contemporaries chose to do so needs to be understood as part of a debate in the politically-charged battle to define the elusive quality of British manhood.

Though it is no longer in vogue to insist on normative roles, behaviors, or even anatomical characteristics to differentiate males from females, this study assumes, in deference to its subjects, that gender in the early eighteenth century was understood as synonymous with a person's sex and that male and female comprised the two complementary expressions of the human person. As Samuel Johnson defined it in his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), "sex" was "the property by which any animal is male or female."<sup>15</sup> Gender expressed differentiation, describing "a kind, a sort; a sex."<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, male and female were defined in terms of each other and their sexual anatomy/procreative function. Dr. Johnson defined male as "of the sex that begets young; not female"<sup>17</sup> and female simply as "not male."<sup>18</sup> The adjectival forms of these words underscored the association between gendered traits or behavior and sexual purpose. "Masculine," according to Dr. Johnson meant "resembling man; virile,"<sup>19</sup> while "Feminine" connoted something "of the sex that brings young; soft; tender; delicate. Effeminate;

---

<sup>14</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A dictionary of the English language: in which the words are deduced from their originals, and illustrated in their different significations by examples from the best writers. To which are prefixed, a history of the language, and an English grammar. By Samuel Johnson, A.M. In two volumes. Volume 2. The second edition.* London, 1755-56. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3311953533).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1., (CW3311286173).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, (CW3311952978).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, (CW3311286072).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, (CW3311952994).

emasculated.”<sup>20</sup> The physiological complementarity of the sexes was further ennobled with supernatural dignity by a Christian understanding of Creation: “So God created man in his own image...male and female created he them” (Gen 1:27 KJV). Informed both by knowledge of sexual anatomy and a theologically rich understanding of Biblical complementarity, eighteenth century Britons approached gender within a neat either/or that encompassed anatomy, behavior, social expectations, and metaphysical purpose. The social enforcement of the norms pertaining to men in particular—sometimes referred to as “hegemonic masculinity”—helped identify individuals outside of the mainstream, and situate one’s friends or rivals on a particular side of moral or cultural issues.<sup>21</sup>

Recent work by Alexandra Shepard and others has produced interesting results about the variable nature of masculine norms and the extent to which men (and women) subscribed to them in early modern England. However, the early eighteenth century is notably absent from most of these works.<sup>22</sup> This is an oversight. Questions of gender, particularly masculinity, were an important element in the debate over British identity during the early eighteenth century. Embarrassment over a militarily inept Hanoverian dynasty, concerns about effeminate fashion, art and music from Italy and France, and frustration with the Walpole ministry’s passive response to Spanish aggression combined to bring anxieties about British manhood to the forefront by the late 1730s.<sup>23</sup> Numerous historians have described anxiety about gender roles

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., vol 1, (CW3311286072).

<sup>21</sup> John Tosh, “Hegemonic masculinity and the history of gender,” in Dudink, et al, ed., *Masculinities in Politics and War...*, 41-58.

<sup>22</sup> Alexandra Shepard, *The Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).; Alexandra Shepard, “From Anxious Patriarchs to Refined Gentlemen? Manhood in Britain, circa 1500-1700,” *Journal of British Studies*, 44, (2005): 281-295.; Stefan Dudink; Karen Hagemann; John Tosh, ed. *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, (New York: Palgrave, 2004).; Chris Mounsey, ed. *Presenting Gender: Changing Sex in Early-Modern Culture*. (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Philip Woodfine, *Britannia’s Glories: The Walpole Ministry and the 1739 War with Spain*, (London: Woodbridge, 1998).

later in the century as attempts to mediate issues of empire and nation such as domesticity and the public sphere, courage versus cowardice, and the allegedly emasculating influence of foreign tastes.<sup>24</sup> However, the intersection of gender and nation has rarely been considered by historians as applicable to the British public pre-1756. It is difficult to say whether this is because historians think anxieties about gender were connected to an ascendant British empire, or simply because the period before the Seven Years' War receives less attention from cultural historians concerned with these issues. Nonetheless, the period between the Act of Union and the Seven Years' War (1707-1756) has mostly been excluded from discussion of the connection between gender and nation.

Specifically related to the naval sphere before 1756, Stephen Moore's article "A nation of harlequins?" raises interesting questions about normative masculinity as a "practical political weapon" rather than an expression of a "national mood" during the decades before the Seven Years' War. Moore's work offers compelling evidence for the tension between "gentlemen" and "tarpaulin" officers— those of high social and family influence status set against those of humble beginnings and greater professional skills— that defined naval command during the period. Yet the case against Admiral Byng, Moore's "gentleman" test-case, who was dismissed from the service and executed for cowardice, had political motivations of its own that were unconnected with any alleged lack of mettle on the part of the accused. The language of cowardice used by Byng's accusers and Byng's failure to strike the right "gentleman/tarpaulin" balance were certainly used to legitimize judicial action against him, yet Moore denies that this reflects a heightening of gender uncertainties with the public of the time. Rather, he argues that Byng failed to live up to the norms of the service and was doomed by his unseemly manners as well as

---

<sup>24</sup> Newman, *Rise of English Nationalism*, 1987; Colley, *Britons*, 2009; Jeremy Black, *A Subject for Taste: Culture in Eighteenth-Century England*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).; Holger Hock, *Empires of the Imagination: Politics, War, and the Arts in the British World, 1750-1850*, (London: Profile Books Ltd.. 2010).

his politics.<sup>25</sup> While Moore's caution about extrapolating larger cultural conversations from isolated events is a good one, it would be helpful to test his argument by considering a naval officer celebrated rather than condemned for his character and as his politics. Such a study would enable us to see a cultural conversation on masculine norms that extended beyond the nefarious political motives of a few individuals. The case of Admiral Vernon, whose masculine virtues—interpreted as national traits—were widely celebrated in spite of his overall poor military performance, is an appropriate way to approach these issues.

Another lens to apply to the case of Admiral Vernon relates to the interpretation of heroes in the eighteenth century. While “gender” and “nation” are popular analytic categories used by historians, the analytic strength of “hero” is less clear, and the historiography surrounding it less substantial. There is a small but intriguing body of work on heroes in early modern English fiction and dramatic works, which also identifies a struggle to define heroic figures in early eighteenth-century literature.<sup>26</sup> Who *is* the literary hero prototype of this period? Is he the satirical mock-epic “hero” of Pope's *Dunciad*, the stodgy Classical figure of Addison's *Cato*, the deliciously villainous Macheath of Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, Fielding's anti-heroes Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones, or even the real-life biographical subjects of Johnson and Boswell? Fascinating though these questions are, the problem with studying these literary texts in isolation from a broader historical context is that we risk conflating the authorial struggles over defining a hero (and the author's artistic, political, and pecuniary aims) to the realities, responses, and desires of the reading public. It could be argued that the popularity of the mock epic and the anti-

---

<sup>25</sup> Stephen Moore, “‘A Nation of Harlequins’? Politics and Masculinity in Mid-Eighteenth-Century England,” *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 3, July 2010: 514-539.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Folkenflik, ed., *The English Hero, 1660-1800*, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1982).; Frank Felsentein, “Unravelling Ann Mills: Some Notes on Gender Construction and Naval Heroism,” *Eighteenth Century Fiction*, vol. 19, no.1, art. 24, 2006.; Mary Beth Rose, *Gender and Heroism in Early Modern English Literature*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

hero novel during the first four decades of the eighteenth century shows a certain resonance of these characters with readers.<sup>27</sup> Yet for a historical study of the relationship of literary works to wider cultural conversations during the period, the form, content, and context of these texts must be historicized to a greater extent than appears to interest most literary scholars.

The remaining historical scholarship on eighteenth century military and naval heroes is typically interested in a particular hero's (usually posthumous) impact on art or culture. For example, General James Wolfe and his death at Quebec in 1759 has been explored by Nicholas Rogers and Alan McNairn for what it reveals about Britishness. They discuss a rich commemorative culture more connected to the construction of an "imagined community" than a simply patriotic celebration of a victorious martyred general.<sup>28</sup> Naval figures such as Sir Francis Drake and Captain James Cook have also been studied as key historical figures whose meaning changed over time in relation to the new circumstances.<sup>29</sup> Rarely have historians examined the immediate cultural impact of an eighteenth-century military or naval figure, and even more rarely has this kind of study been applied to a hero living in and reflecting the world of his own celebrity, as in the case of Admiral Vernon.

It is in this overlapping framework—navy, nation, gender, and heroes—that celebrations of Vernon after Porto Bello need to be considered. In rhetoric and content, these commemorations suggested that Vernon's defense of mercantile values, the growing empire, and aggressive masculinity had important implications for British politics and national identity. That so many writers, artists, and private individuals found this something worth emphasizing speaks

---

<sup>27</sup> Folkenflik, "Introduction," in Folkenflik, ed. *The English Hero...*, 1982.

<sup>28</sup> Nicholas Rogers, "Brave Wolfe: the making of a hero," in Kathleen Wilson, ed. *A New Imperial History...* 2004, 239-259.; Alan McNairn, *Behold the Hero: General Wolfe and the Arts in the Eighteenth Century*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999).

<sup>29</sup> Bruce Wathen, *Sir Francis Drake: The Construction of a Hero*, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewster, 2009).; Glyn Williams, *The Death of Captain Cook: A Hero Made and Unmade*, (London: Profile Books Ltd., 2008).

to an active discourse of national identity that emerged long before 1756, and expresses the extraordinarily multidimensional nature of “Britishness” in the first half of the century.

### **Sources and Methods**

There are many sources available for the scholar interested in national identity, masculinity, and popular heroes during this period. Though Vernon remained an important innovator in naval tactics and strategy and a political force until his death in 1757, my study focuses only on sources from the years preceding Porto Bello and immediately following it—1730 to 1745. Focused less on getting to know Vernon himself and more on how Vernon was perceived, this thesis considers a variety of sources between 1730 and 1745 to assess the political and cultural climate of the 1730s, to gauge reactions to Admiral Vernon’s capture of Porto Bello in November 1739, and to explore how opposition writers and politicians used Vernon’s popularity to argue for ministerial and cultural change in the 1740s. For this reason, my thesis draws upon political texts, newspapers, letters, popular verse, literature, dramatic works, and material objects, investigating not only their content but also the implications of form, motivation, and audience that such texts convey about politics, national identity, and masculinity.

Source materials fall into several categories that were accessible mainly through University of Saskatchewan libraries and online databases. First, Vernon’s own words, in speeches, writings, and political statements, present an important staging point for assessing how Vernon intended himself to be viewed. Available in print and online, examples include public speeches and political writings. In addition to putting forth Vernon’s own case for his celebrity,

these materials indicate his political affinities and prescriptive policy goals, especially within the navy, the pursuit of which his popularity enabled.<sup>30</sup>

Because the first chapter of this thesis considers parliamentary politics in the 1730s and 1740s, I rely heavily on records of parliamentary proceedings from this period including Hansard, Cobbett, and Torbuck's eighteenth- and nineteenth century published volumes of debates.<sup>31</sup> In order to verify accuracy, I have attempted to cross-checked the quotations I have included in two or more of these volumes. The diary of John Percival, the Earl of Egmont (1683-1748) also offers a treasure-trove of anecdotes and impressions of goings-on in parliament and London high society during the period. The diary was written regularly from 1730 until the author's death in 1748 and was published posthumously. The Egmont diary provides important information on what Vernon said and did in parliament, especially when he represented Penryn for the opposition in the House of Commons from 1728-32.<sup>32</sup>

Contemporary newspapers also convey how people learned about and were encouraged to view the Porto Bello capture, as well as subsequent Vernon commemorations. These publications are important for their role in shaping the opinions of the literate public and, in the case of opposition-affiliated newspapers, invoking Vernon for political reasons. Available on Eighteenth Century Collections Online are various periodicals including *The London magazine*

---

<sup>30</sup> Some examples include Edward Vernon, *Adm. V---n's opinion upon the present state of the British Navy: in a letter to a Certain Board. To which is Annex'd By way of Illustration, his Letter to the Secretary of the same Board*, (London, 1744), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale (CW3308003242).; Vernon, *A second genuine speech, deliver'd by Adm-----l V-----n, on board the Carolina, to the officers of the navy, immediately after the salley from Fort St. Lazara*, London, 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale (CW3310320390).; *Some seasonable advice from an honest sailor, to whom it might have concerned, for the service of the C-n and c-y*, London, 1746. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale (CW3310320411).

<sup>31</sup> *Cobbett's Parliamentary history of England*, Volume 8, London, 1809-1820. *Making of the Modern World*, Gale, (U3607836584).; *The Parliamentary History of England from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803*, vol. X, (London: Hansard, 1811).; *A Collection of the Parliamentary Debates in England from the Year 1668 to the present Time*, vol. XV, (London: John Torbuck, 1741).; see also Leo Francis Stock, ed., *Proceedings and Debates of the British Parliaments respecting North America*, vol. V, (Washington, D.C.: The Carnegie Institution of Washington).

<sup>32</sup> Viscount Perceval, First Earl of Egmont, *Diary*, (London: Historical Manuscripts Commission, 1920), vol. 1-3. Please see note 65 in Chapter 1 for more information on this source.

and the Fielding's satirical paper *The Champion*.<sup>33</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>- Century Burney Collection Newspapers Collection also has numerous titles relevant to this period, including the *London Gazette*, *Craftsman*, *Daily Advertiser*, *London Evening Post*, and many others. Published commentaries on Vernon and events in the Caribbean are also numerous in the period 1740-1745, ranging from "first-hand accounts" of other participants in the fighting, celebratory essays, or political polemics.<sup>34</sup> These writings offer important evidence of various responses to Vernon, and how his actions were interpreted through the lens of contemporary politics.

To demonstrate the scope and geographical diversity of Vernon commemorations, this study also considers data put forth by Kathleen Wilson in Chapter 3 of *Sense of the People*.<sup>35</sup> Based on the frequency of newspaper accounts describing celebrations of Porto Bello, and later of Vernon's birthday, Wilson has convincingly shown the extraordinary number and variety of these celebrations, making it possible for us to consider Vernon's popularity as a truly large-scale phenomenon with the potential for national impact. These celebrations caught the attention of many people. Numerous letters referring to Vernon commemorations in the 1740s are available, both from public and private individuals. Vivid portrayals of Vernon celebrations in these letters, especially details about them that do not survive in other sources, make these

---

<sup>33</sup>For example, *The London Magazine and Monthly Chronologer*, London, 1736-1746. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale (CW3306875084); "The champion: containing a series of papers, humours, moral, political, and critical. To each of which is added, A proper Index to the Times..." Vol. 2, London, 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale (CW3310895042).

<sup>34</sup> Some examples include: "Officer present at the expedition to Carthagenia," "The conduct of Admiral Vernon examin'd and vindicated: to which is added, two exact lists... By an officer present at that expedition," Dublin, 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale (CW3305055536).; Sir Charles Knowles, "An account of the expedition to Carthagenia, with explanatory notes and observations," London, 1743. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale (CW3300211787).; "England's triumph: or, Spanish cowardice expos'd. Being a compleat history of the many signal victories gain'd by the Royal Navy and merchant ships of Great Britain, for the term of four hundred years past, over the insulting and haughty Spaniards," London, 1739. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale (CW3301880069).; "Merchant and citizen of London," "A supplement to Britain's mistakes in the commencement and conduct of the present war. Wherein the late glorious success of Admiral Vernon at Porto Bello is particularly considered," London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale (CW3306105438).

<sup>35</sup> Wilson, *Sense of the People*..., 1998, 140-165. Also published as an article entitled "Empire, Trade and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian Britain: The Case of Admiral Vernon," *Past & Present*, No. 121 (Nov., 1988), 74-109.

accounts extremely valuable. Examples include letters of the prime minister's son Horace Walpole and socialite Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, as well as many other less prominent individuals.<sup>36</sup> Though these accounts are important as evidence of what happened, they also give insight into contemporary interpretations and attempts to fix meaning on Vernon's extraordinary popularity.

Vernon was also celebrated from the pulpit—*Early Eighteenth Century Collections Online* contains several sermons of the period discussing Vernon and the war in the Caribbean.<sup>37</sup> Because sermons were among the most widely circulated printed works during the period, we can infer that published sermons of this sort may have reflected concerns and interests of the reading public as well as those of the author. The moral undertones of these sermons often referred to anxieties about British character and the penance necessary for the sins, including political corruption and cultural decadence. In the language of theology, these texts conjure the image of a Britain-as-Israel saved by the bold actions of a Davidic Protestant hero from the morally corrupt forces of domestic politicians and foreign Catholic powers. Indeed, it is important to consider portrayals of Vernon as a Christian hero because Britishness during this period was so entwined with Protestantism.

The victory at Porto Bello was also immortalized in consumer products widely available during the period, including medals, ceramics, fans, snuff boxes, and other objects. The collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the

---

<sup>36</sup> Horace Walpole, "Letter to Horace Mann, Nov. 12, 1741," in *The Letters of Horace Walpole*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., vol. 1, *Eighteenth Century: Electronic Edition*; Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, "Letter to Lady Margaret Cavendish-Harley Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, May 30, 1741" in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, With Some of the Letters of Her Correspondence*, vol. 1, (London, England: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1809). *British and Irish Women's Letters and Diaries* (S4949-D049).

<sup>37</sup> A representative example is "The good patriot's security in the time of publick distress. A sermon from Isaiah xxxiii C. 15 and 16 V. preached on the 12th of Novem. 1740. Before A Society of Gentlemen, Met to Celebrate the birth of Admiral Vernon. And Published at their Request," London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale (CW3323004412).

National Maritime Museum contain examples of the diverse material culture surrounding Vernon's celebrity, with images available online.<sup>38</sup> While people of middling-to-higher social status were perhaps less drawn to raucous street celebrations and bonfires, they formed the intended consumer base of commemorative Vernon ceramics, housewares, fashion accessories and medals that were widely produced in the 1740s. Manufacturers channeled Vernon's popularity into an industry aimed at promoting a particular interpretation of Vernon and Porto Bello that enabled self-association through purchasing. Though the reasons a consumer may have purchased a Vernon teapot or decorative fan probably varied from person to person, the sheer number of these objects that were produced indicates that they reflected and influenced national cultural trends. Especially for middling-class Britons, Vernon commemoratives that implicitly or explicitly espoused opposition political themes including defense of trade, aggressive foreign policy, and personal integrity appear to have been popular.

Vernon's Porto Bello victory was also celebrated in an array of popular literary and poetic works.<sup>39</sup> The publication information of many of these poems and songs indicates the extraordinary geographic scope of Vernon commemorations. For example, one poem is dedicated to a "Vernon Club" in Ireland, while another is "To be sung round the bonfires of London and Westminster" for annual celebrations of the admiral's birthday.<sup>40</sup> Some of the poetry

---

<sup>38</sup> Examples of this Vernon material culture include: *Bowl [with inscription "The British Glory Rev: v:d. By Admiral Vernon. He took Porto Bello with six ships only Nov: ye: 22 1739"]*, stoneware, 1740 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), 34.165.60.; F. Chassereau, *Fan*, paper and ivory, 1740, (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London), OBJ0421.; *Medal commemorating Admiral Edward Vernon and the capture of Porto Bello, 1739*, copper alloy, after 1739, (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London), MEC1031

<sup>39</sup> Examples include "Gentleman on Board," "He has kept't his word. A poem. To perpetuate the memory of ... Porto Bello," London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale (CW3314200869).; "Vernon's glory. Containing Fifteen New Songs, occasion'd by the Taking of Porto-Bello and Fort Chagre," London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale (CW3315651016).

<sup>40</sup> Henry Jones, "On Taking Porto Bello by Storm. Inscrib'd to the Vernon Club in Drogheda," 189-191, in "Poems on Several Occasions. By Henry Jones," London, 1749. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale (CW3313800284).; "The true English-Boys song, to Vernon's glory. Occasioned by the birth-day of that brave admiral. To be sung round the bonfires of London and Westminster. To the tune of, come let us prepare, &c," London, 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale (CW3305153044)

surrounding Porto Bello also gives us important insight into the political dimension of Vernon's popularity, celebrating his exploits as a way of criticizing the Walpole ministry, especially its cowardly response to Spanish aggression.<sup>41</sup> By reading these works not just as evidence of celebrations, but for evidence of what was thought to be worth celebrating about Vernon and his victory, we can gain valuable insights about the connection many drew between attributes of Vernon's character and people's hopes about Britishness.

Concurrent with Vernon's celebrity, concerns about male effeminacy, cultural decline, and real external threats to Britain, can also be seen in enduring literary works of the period. The effeminate aristocrat, usually influenced by foreign tastes, and the bluff, manly British hero, were common characters in fiction of the early-to-mid-eighteenth century, figuring prominently in the works of many British authors. For example, the tale of the simple, dignified Horatio and duplicitous, extravagant Bellarmine in Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* cautions against the seductive power of effeminate "French fashion" and its devastating effect on English ladies and their honest English lovers.<sup>42</sup> Gay's *Beggar's Opera* centers on Macheath, a clever highwayman whose extraordinarily corrupt enemies nonetheless encourage the audience to root for him.<sup>43</sup> And from Smollett, whose service as a naval surgeon during the War of Jenkins' Ear is vividly recalled in *Roderick Random*, we are introduced to Captain Whiffle, a naval officer foppishly dressed, offended by unpleasant odors, emotionally effusive, and incapable of carrying out his

---

<sup>41</sup> For examples, see Spiltimber, George. "The statesman: A poem. Humbly inscrib'd to the Right Honourable Sir Robert Walpole. By a gentleman of Gray's-Inn." London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale (CW3315405192).; "The Three politicians: or, a dialogue in verse between a patriot, a courtier, and their friend. Concluding with an exhortation to Admiral Vernon," London, 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale (CB3327668489). Andrew Marvell Jr., "Satirical and panegyric instructions to Mr. William Hogarth, painter, on Admiral Vernon's taking Porto Bello with six ships of war only," London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale (CW3317324197).

<sup>42</sup> Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews; with Shamela and related writings*, Homer Goldberg, ed., (New York: Norton, 1987).

<sup>43</sup> John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera*, in *The Beggar's Opera and Other Eighteenth Century Plays*, David M. Lindsay, ed., (London: Dent, 1993).

duties.<sup>44</sup> Literature of the 1730s and 1740s also betrays an obvious fear of national cowardice brought about by supposedly emasculating foreign influences from continental Europe—Samuel Johnson’s “London” (1738) laments that “English honour [has grown] a standing jest”, while the famous song “Rule, Britannia!” premiered in John Thompson’s 1740 play *Alfred* in the context of rousing an inactive king against foreign enemies.<sup>45</sup>

It is clear that with such a wealth of primary materials available, most of which have never been analyzed in connection with national identity in politics, culture, and gender, the challenge lies in collecting a representative sample. In order to make sense of the array of cultural productions surrounding Admiral Vernon, my reading of them is informed by my understanding of the navy as an institution at the intersection of culture and nation, the idea that gender norms act discursively through otherwise unrelated sources, that the nation was a process forged by events such as the Porto Bello victory, and that heroes like Vernon were important models of national character.

### **Argument and Approach**

In the politically-charged outbreak of war with Spain in 1739, Vernon’s dashing capture of Porto Bello made him a national hero. Though celebration of Vernon was initially spontaneous and disorganized, his popularity endured throughout the 1740s because writers, politicians, manufacturers, consumers, and other ordinary Britons interpreted his achievements within larger political and cultural debate. Supporters of the parliamentary opposition presented Vernon as a new British ideal, defending merchants and the empire, and showing manly courage

---

<sup>44</sup> Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Roderick Random*. O.M. Brack Jr., ed., (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012).

<sup>45</sup> Samuel Johnson, “London” in *Samuel Johnson: The Major Works*, Donald Greene, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2-8.; James Thomson, “Alfred: a masque. Represented before Their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales, at Cliffden, on the first of August, 1740,” London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale (CW3311745479). For extended consideration of “Alfred,” please see chapter 2.

against foreign enemies. This interpretation was designed to marshal “national” sentiment against the Walpole ministry and intensify existing concerns that Walpole was a cowardly and ineffective leader. Even after Walpole’s resignation in 1742, Vernon continued to be evoked as the desired model of British manliness against foreign “effeminate” tastes shared by French and Italian trend-setters, the German-born Hanoverian monarchy, and the increasingly irrelevant, inward-looking British aristocracy. Britons seeking to rediscover a common identity after a century of religious wars, dynastic instability, and the growing commitments of a mercantile empire seized upon Vernon as one of their own. Vernon’s supporters argued that the admiral represented Britishness in a special way because he demonstrated his commitment to the “publick spirit” and won glory for the “nation” in the traditional context of masculine military heroism.

In chapter 1, I argue that the parliamentary opposition skillfully employed celebration of Vernon after his capture of Porto Bello in 1739 to argue for ministerial change. Unsanctioned Spanish violence toward British vessels in the Caribbean caused considerable distress in the mercantile community throughout the 1730s. The Walpole ministry persisted in negotiations with Spain, even as opposition calls for war increased. Supporters of the parliamentary opposition capitalized on Vernon’s popularity to propose him as the vindication of their calls for aggressive foreign policy and mercantile growth. By situating their political rhetoric within celebration of Vernon’s Porto Bello victory, opposition writers and politicians argued that their policies and values, rather than Walpole’s, more closely aligned with Britain’s interests. This chapter considers commentaries, speeches, and other texts to explore the role of British national identity in politics during the late 1730s and how the opposition’s management of Vernon’s popularity helped them argue for ministerial change.

Though Walpole resigned in 1742, in part due to the political impact of Vernon's early success, Vernon's victory at Porto Bello was followed by a series of disastrous combat failures. Despite these, Vernon remained popular at home. In chapter 2, I argue that Vernon enjoyed continued popularity in the 1740s because his supporters argued that he embodied the "publick spirit" of the mercantile empire and aggressive masculinity that many believed had been lacking in public figures of the 1730s. Vernon's capture of Porto Bello seemed to reassure Britons that the values of the mercantile empire could be restored by a return to the bluff masculinity and bold naval heroism they attributed to their ancestors. In the early 1740s, writers and manufacturers capitalized on the admiral's popularity with a diverse array of publications, images, and commemorative objects celebrating the hero of Porto Bello. Though we should be cautious about attributing specific motivations to individual consumers, the availability of mass-produced Vernon commemoratives enabled middling-class Britons to participate in fixing meaning on Vernon's actions and character. It is no accident that the hero who appeared on writings and objects targeted to a middling-class market was in fact widely interpreted as vindicating the mercantile values and national character that many believed underpinned the success of Britain's commercial empire. Vernon did this through literal courage under fire, and his manly courage was celebrated accordingly. Vernon's supporters highlighted the aggressive masculinity implicit in naval heroism to suggest that Vernon, rather than other traditional national models such as the king or aristocrat who were mocked for their extravagant tastes and alleged unmanliness, more accurately represented British character. Vernon's example, then, was presented as a solution to concerns about male effeminacy, foreign cultural influences, and national cowardice.

## **“With six ships only”: Admiral Vernon, Porto Bello, and the fall of the Walpole ministry, 1730-1742.**

Sir Robert Walpole, Britain's first and longest-serving prime minister, was referred to by many of his contemporaries as a “Great Man,” but rarely as a good one. His ministerial genius lay in adaptation and survival rather than displaying heroic public virtue. During his record-setting twenty-one year tenure as prime minister, Walpole weathered several major crises and significant events including the fallout from the South Sea Bubble, Jacobite unrest, and the succession of George II. He successfully kept Britain out of foreign wars and fundamentally changed the nature of British state finances. He reduced his political opponents, Whig and Tory, to two decades of parliamentary obscurity. But by the late 1730s, Walpole's stranglehold on power began to slip. He was forced against his will into a war with Spain in July 1739, and his opponents were vindicated three months later by Admiral Edward Vernon's capture of Porto Bello on 21 November 1739. Vernon became an instant hero and celebrity. Public admiration for the admiral was apparently unaffected by his later failure to capture Cartagena in 1740-41. Rather than blaming Vernon's flawed leadership and poor judgment, the parliamentary opposition blamed Walpole for the campaign's outcome. With support for his ministry all but gone, Walpole reluctantly resigned in February 1742.

Admiral Edward Vernon's capture of Porto Bello, though strategically insignificant, seemed to vindicate the parliamentary opposition's calls for an aggressive foreign policy that reasserted British prestige on the world stage. By shaping interpretation of Vernon's exploits to suggest that he reflected opposition values, Walpole's detractors gave specific political meaning to Vernon's naval heroism. Opposition politicians and writers effectively re-presented their political goals through the lens of the admiral's perceived accomplishments and character.

Vernon resonated with opposition supporters because his longstanding antagonism toward Walpole, short-lived naval success, and public persona embodied the opposition's vision of resurgent national character that Walpole supposedly lacked. Whereas Vernon expressed boldness, honesty, and Britishness, the parliamentary opposition successfully argued that Walpole represented only corruption and cowardice.

This chapter examines a selection of public perceptions of Walpole's permissive response to Spanish "depredations," the immediate public response to Vernon's 1739 Porto Bello victory, and how opposition rhetoric that established a Walpole-Vernon dichotomy made the admiral into a significant political figure. Even after Vernon's subsequent failure at Cartagena in 1740-1, opposition writers and politicians used Vernon to criticize ministerial policies. They argued that Walpole was, or at least could be made to stand for an unacceptable, outmoded image of British manhood. In the wake of Porto Bello, Vernon's supporters celebrated him as a new model of British character that expressed boldness, bravery, and defense of the mercantile empire. By presenting Vernon as the preferred model of British character, opposition enthusiasts made Walpole appear not only ineffective, but also un-British. Rhetoric about the meaning of Britishness that symbolically pitted Vernon against Walpole coincided with increasing unity among opposition factions and with Walpole's already declining influence. In light of Vernon's popularity and how it was politicized with the specific goal of ministerial change, it is not surprising that Walpole's ministry finally fell shortly thereafter in 1742.

### **The Robinocracy and the opposition, 1724-1733**

Sir Robert Walpole presided over a period of remarkable political continuity, if not stability, between 1724 and 1742.<sup>46</sup> Walpole, a Whig, began his parliamentary career in 1701, but rose to prominence after the bursting of the South Sea Bubble (1720). Lords Stanhope and Sutherland, leaders of the ministry, were both implicated in an investigation of the crisis in 1721. Stanhope died and Sutherland resigned, leaving Walpole the most important figure in the administration. In 1721, Walpole was appointed First Lord of the Treasury, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Leader of the House of Commons, thus becoming the first *de facto* prime minister.<sup>47</sup>

The Walpole ministry derived its initial momentum from the general election of 1722, and achieved a virtual monopoly of power from the 1724 “Atterbury plot,” which discredited Walpole’s remaining Tory rivals as potential Jacobite sympathizers.<sup>48</sup> In the early years of the Walpole ministry, Tories—whether actual supporters of the Stuart pretender or not—formed the primary core of the opposition. After the succession of George II in 1727, who was on less cordial terms with Walpole than his father had been, many believed that a Tory ministry (or even a “non-party” government) could be achieved. However, Walpole deftly destroyed opposition hopes by winning the loyalty of the new sovereign, neutralizing the Tory threat.<sup>49</sup> Between 1724 and 1739, the so-called “Robinocracy” exerted near total control of state policy.

---

<sup>46</sup> Historians differ on the extent to which the Robinocracy actually represented a period of stability; for an overview of the key issues, see W.A. Speck, *Stability and Strife: England, 1714-1760*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), and Jeremy Black, ed., *Britain in the Age of Walpole*, (London: MacMillan Publishers Ltd, 1984), especially the introduction.

<sup>47</sup> The clearest account of Walpole’s rise to power is found in Brian Hill, *Sir Robert Walpole: ‘Sole and Prime Minister,’* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1989), especially chapter 8. For a more biographical treatment of Walpole, see also Edward Pearce, *The Great Man: Sir Robert Walpole: Scoundrel, Genius, and Britain’s First Prime Minister*, (London: Random House, 2007).

<sup>48</sup> Brian Hill, *The Early Parties and Politics in Britain, 1688-1832*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 70-73.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-77.

Opposition to Walpole in the 1730s was not restricted to specific party identifications so much as to vague, undefined notions of “Court vs. Country.” Walpole’s support came mainly from his system of patronage, applied to members both of Lords and Commons. In the Commons, Walpole also relied on loyal Whigs outside his direct influence to support his agenda of state-building and favors for the court elite.<sup>50</sup> Walpole’s opponents, however, did not align with clearly defined political parties; the politics of the era did not constitute a simply Whig/Tory binary. Rather, the opposition was a disorganized and incoherent response to the corruption and venality that came to represent Walpole’s majority.<sup>51</sup> Membership in the opposition, often called the “Patriots” or the “Country Interest,” encompassed a wide variety of sometimes contradictory elements, including disaffected Whigs, Tories, Jacobites, and those representing the interests of the mercantile and middling classes.<sup>52</sup>

While the challenges of building a government on such unstable foundations became evident during the rocky years of the Pelham ministry (1742-1754), there were important philosophical similarities that unified Walpole’s antagonists during his ministry. The overarching goal of the opposition was, in the words of historian Bob Harris, “the revival or ‘restoration’ of the primitive constitution, and of the liberty and virtue which supported it... Whig oligarchy was portrayed by it as corrupt, and as a betrayal of the principles of freedom which defined England’s unique constitutional heritage.” This “discourse of restoration” was not simply reactionary nostalgia for the “glory days” of 1688. Rather, it was a forward-looking movement that sought to integrate the remarkable imperial and mercantile developments of the 1720s and 1730s with the

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 58-59.

<sup>51</sup> Christine Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole: Politics, Poetry, and National Myth, 1725-1742*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 20-24.

<sup>52</sup> Bob Harris, *Politics and the Nation: Britain in the Mid-Eighteenth Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 12.

constitutional guarantees of liberty to which many believed credit for the nation's commercial success was due.<sup>53</sup>

The opposition made few measurable gains during the 1730s, with the notable exception of the 1733 Excise Crisis. The “general excise” was Walpole’s most ambitious tax scheme, a levy on a variety of consumer goods intended to help shift the burden of taxation from the land (direct) tax to the excise (indirect) tax. Though Walpole’s excise would have enhanced the burgeoning bureaucracy’s ability to borrow by providing funding for a larger national debt, the plan was poorly pitched and poorly received. Opponents of the excise vociferously criticized the scheme for increasing the cost of manufactures and threatening British merchants’ competitiveness in international markets.<sup>54</sup> Those arguing against the excise protested that Britain’s liberty was reliant on the nation’s commercial prosperity and raised alarm over the proposed scheme’s consequences for both. As Nicholas Amhurst, editor of the opposition newspaper *The Craftsman*, explained, “I find myself running back again to the Subject of *Trade*; and, indeed, the *Liberties* of the whole Nation are so closely connected and interwoven with it, that it is impossible to divide Them intirely from each other.”<sup>55</sup> Public outcry against the excise played an important role in its eventual defeat in parliament. However, even members whose seats were impervious to shifting public opinion became skeptical that the Crown would back Walpole in the crisis. Walpole eventually withdrew the measure. While the consequences were limited—Walpole still commanded a substantial majority in Commons, even after a

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>54</sup> See Nicholas Amhurst, *An argument against excises, in several essays, lately published in the craftsman, and now collected together. By Caleb D'anvers of Gray's-Inn, Esq*, London, 1733. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CB3326189018) and *The crisis: or, the Briton's Advocate*, London, 1733. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3305150237).

<sup>55</sup> Amhurst, *An argument against excises*, 23

disappointing election in 1734—the Excise Crisis showed that opposition arguments about liberty and commerce resonated with the British public.<sup>56</sup>

### **“Prudence and pusillanimity”: Walpole**

The Excise Crisis exposed brewing discontent with Walpole during the 1730s, but it did not bring down the ministry. Rather, the most persistent and ultimately the most damaging criticism leveled against Walpole was that he failed to protect Britain’s overseas trade. Walpole strongly believed that costly military entanglements must be avoided in order to build domestic prosperity. He was willing to overlook occasional provocation from foreign powers and the activities of some evidently overzealous colonial customs officials. From the standpoint of state finances, it was an eminently sensible approach, but it did not endear Walpole to those familiar with the perils of colonial trade.<sup>57</sup>

Smuggling, piracy, and violence were inescapable elements of the Atlantic world during the early eighteenth century. The Peace of Utrecht, which concluded the War of the Spanish Succession in 1713, permitted British merchants a thirty-year *asiento de negros*—the right to supply Spanish Caribbean colonies with African slaves. It appeared to be a major breakthrough for all involved, but the practical consequences of the peace agreement ultimately satisfied no one. While the *asiento* critically weakened the Spanish Caribbean colonial monopoly,<sup>58</sup> British merchants nevertheless complained that the limited nature of the *asiento* stifled their ability to do business. Spanish customs officials in the Caribbean, known as *guardacostas*, were frequently

---

<sup>56</sup> Speck, *Stability and Strife*, 213-215. See also Paul Langford, *The Excise Crisis: Society and Politics in the Age of Walpole*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

<sup>57</sup> John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 122.

<sup>58</sup> Philip Woodfine, *Britannia’s Glories: The Walpole Ministry and the 1739 War with Spain*, (Boydell Press, 1998), 78.

accused of unlawfully seizing British ships and seamen who were suspected of smuggling.<sup>59</sup>

Spanish officials argued in turn, with substantial justification, that self-righteous complaints from British merchants failed to acknowledge widespread British smuggling throughout the Atlantic world.<sup>60</sup> In spite of popular pressure to be more aggressive with the *guardacostas*, Walpole continued to pursue peace between Britain and Spain throughout the 1730s.

Many in the opposition, both in parliament and “out of doors” interpreted this as evidence that Walpole was unable (or unwilling) to secure redress for merchants whose ships had been unlawfully searched or seized by Spanish officials. Opposition writers and politicians took full advantage of the opportunity to paint the ministry’s policies as contrary to the nation’s interest. As criticisms of Walpole’s foreign policy multiplied in parliament and in the popular press, much of the opposition’s rhetoric transformed into personal attacks on Walpole himself. The prime minister’s perceived character—querulous, corrupt, and cowardly—became the opposition’s main point of attack. According to many writers and political figures, Walpole embodied the opposite of what a Briton should be and the failure of his policies reflected this.

Though Walpole’s conciliatory approach may have been sound foreign policy, it did not resonate well with a public accustomed to dramatic stories of Spanish brutality against British merchants in widely circulated newspapers and pamphlets. These abuses were interpreted not only as outrages against individuals, but also as attacks on the British nation. Nicholas Amhurst, of *The Craftsman*, began drawing attention to this issue in the late 1720s, writing in 1729 that “I need not to mention the Depredations of the *Spaniards*, for several Years past, on the *British Trade*... they are too severely felt, and have been too often complained of, though without

---

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 78-79.

<sup>60</sup> Philip Woodfine, “Ideas of naval power and the conflict with Spain, 1737-1742,” In Jeremy Black; Philip Woodfine, ed. *The British Navy and the Use of Naval Power in the Eighteenth Century* (Atlantic Highlands, NY: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1989), 72-73.

Redress, to need any Repetition.”<sup>61</sup> In 1731, The London Evening Post carried the story of Robert Jenkins, captain of the merchant ship *Rebecca*. According to the “authentick Account,” Jenkins’s ship was detained by Spanish *guardacostas* on suspicion of smuggling. When the search failed to yield any contraband, a frustrated *guardacosta* angrily severed Jenkins’s left ear and allegedly “gave him the Piece of his Ear again, bidding him to carry it to his Majesty King George.”<sup>62</sup> In Jenkins, The *Craftsman* found a compelling victim: “The barbarous Circumstances, which attend this honest Man’s Sufferings, and their insolent Defiance of his Majesty, when they bid him *carry his Ear*, after they had cut it off, to *King George*, must fill the Breast of every *Briton* with the most lively Resentment.”<sup>63</sup> Indeed, “lively resentment” and fear of Spanish punitive measures was rapidly becoming a way of life for those involved in the colonial trade in the 1730s.

Public outcry in the press echoed the language of merchant petitions for formal redress presented to parliament throughout this period. Petitions in 1728 and 1730 resulted in renewed diplomatic negotiations with Spain—the Congress of Soissons (June-July 1729) and the Treaty of Seville (November 1729)—though these accords failed to reduce smuggling or illegal customs activity.<sup>64</sup> Petitions from Caribbean merchants continued throughout the 1730s with little result. Parliament’s inaction is not entirely surprising, in part because of the dubious nature of some of the merchants’ claims but also because the diplomatic negotiations of the late 1720s had in fact

---

<sup>61</sup> *Country Journal or The Craftsman*, Saturday, January 18, 1729; Issue 133. *Burney Collection*, Gale, (Z2000132501).

<sup>62</sup> *London Evening Post*, June 15, 1731- June 17, 1731, Issue 554. *Burney Collection*, Gale, (Z2000632245).

<sup>63</sup> Nicolas Amhurst (“Caleb D’Anvers”), *The Craftsman*, vol. 8, London, 1731. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CB3328374573), 31.

<sup>64</sup> For a contemporary account of these early merchant petitions, see *Reasons for a war against Spain. In a letter from a merchant of London trading to America, to a Member of the House of Commons. With a plan of operations*, London, 1737. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3306696178).

mollified some of the ministry's critics.<sup>65</sup> By 1732, however, political controversy shifted from outrage over Spanish abuses to concerns over Walpole's revenue-gathering schemes, culminating in the Excise Crisis.<sup>66</sup>

A renewed push against Spanish interference began with "the Humble Petition of the Merchants and Planters... in the British Colonies in America" of 11 October 1737. Not only were Spanish customs officials charged with "manifest Violation[s] of the Treaties subsisting between the two Crowns," but the "Trade to your Majesty's Plantations in America is rendred very precarious."<sup>67</sup> Walpole was unmoved. Alleged Spanish depredations in the West Indies became the primary issue of the 1738 parliament, but the prime minister called for restraint. "When gentlemen, Sir, see an affair through the mist that passion throws before their eyes," he suggested, "it is next to impossible they should form a just judgment. I believe there is scarce any gentleman here who is... able to judge whether the allegations in this [merchant] petition be true or false." He also questioned the petitioners' motives, asking "Are not the merchants themselves the most proper hands for giving in such representations? Are they not most immediately interested in the facts?"<sup>68</sup> Perhaps Walpole really believed that these petitioners were no more credible than those of the late 1720s. If so, his skepticism was beginning to resemble shyness more than circumspection to many merchants. The anonymous writer of the 1737 pamphlet "Reasons for a War with Spain" spoke for many aggrieved merchants when he

---

<sup>65</sup> Woodfine, *Britannia's Glories*, 88-92.

<sup>66</sup> For analysis of the debates over constitutional liberties that arose from the Excise Crisis, see Langford, *The Excise Crisis*.

<sup>67</sup> Woodfine, *Britannia's Glories*, Appendix 1, 245. The petition was presented anonymously.

<sup>68</sup> *A Collection of the Parliamentary Debates in England from the Year 1668 to the present Time*, vol. XV, (London: John Torbuck, 1741), 491.

wondered pointedly whether “any *Britons* could be so weak, or rather, so wicked as either to deny or justify the *Spanish Depredations*?”<sup>69</sup>

The 1738 accusations, however, were more difficult to dismiss. In order to gather evidence to present to parliament, merchants initiated a public campaign to quantify and document Spanish abuses.<sup>70</sup> In March 1738, the *London Evening-Post* announced that “the Committee of the West India Merchants meet every Day at the Ship [Inn] behind the Exchange, to receive Informations of all Ships and Vessels taken or plunder’d by the Spaniards since the year 1729, in order to make Allegations of their Petition as full as possible.”<sup>71</sup> A list of “British Merchant Ships, Taken or Plundered by the SPANIARDS” published about the same time detailed the circumstances of fifty two separate instances when “the Master and Crew [of British vessels] were used with the utmost Barbarity” by Spanish *guardacostas*.<sup>72</sup> Even Captain Jenkins of 1731 “Jenkins’ ear” fame returned. He was trotted out in a parliamentary committee to testify to the wrongs suffered seven years before. Though there is little evidence that Jenkins appeared on the floor of parliament brandishing his ear in a jar of brandy demanding revenge, as is commonly believed, Jenkins’s ordeal became a striking symbol of Spanish atrocities.<sup>73</sup> His story was evidently familiar to the public; a book entitled *English Triumph, or Spanish Cowardice*

---

<sup>69</sup> *Reasons for a war against Spain*, 10-11.

<sup>70</sup> Woodfine, *Britannia’s Glories*, 98-99. A fascinating early example of what might now be termed “crowd-sourcing.”

<sup>71</sup> *London Evening Post*, March 9, 1738 - March 11, 1738; Issue 1610. *Burney Collection*, Gale, (Z2000637522).

<sup>72</sup> “List of British merchant ships, taken or plundered by the Spaniards,” London, 1738, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CB3327197203).

<sup>73</sup> Woodfine, 90-91. See also *The Parliamentary History of England from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803*, vol. X, (London: Hansard, 1811), 639. This story is also reproduced in many introductory European history textbooks, such as the one used by my students at the University of Saskatchewan: Donald Kagan, Steven Ozment, Frank M. Turner, and Alison Frank, *The Western Heritage*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed., (New York: Pearson Education, Inc., 2013), 498.

*Expos'd* probably anticipated increased sales by claiming as its author "Captain Charles [sic] JENKINS, Who has too sensibly felt the Effects of *Spanish* Tyranny."<sup>74</sup>

Based on his experience in the early 1730s with the excise, it is unsurprising that Walpole dealt so peremptorily with the merchant petitions and popular outcry against Spain in 1737-8. When pressed on the matter, Walpole repeatedly attributed the problems of smuggling and unlawful searches of British ships to the shortcomings of the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht. These explanations became less credible as numerous diplomatic negotiations between Britain and Spain between 1729 and 1738 brought no resolution.<sup>75</sup> In retrospect, it is clear that Walpole's pacific response to the actions of Spanish customs officials was entirely consistent with his efforts to strengthen the British state by keeping reducing spending and avoiding foreign wars. But Walpole failed to account for the popular resonance of his opponents' calls for action. Walpole's opponents successfully argued that the prime minister's foreign policy betrayed a lack of regard for two of Britain's most cherished attributes: mercantile enterprise and the liberties of British subjects.

Britain was a trading nation.<sup>76</sup> Whereas Walpole's diplomacy supported a measured approach to growth, the parliamentary opposition instead pushed for dramatically increasing international trade. However, the political debate lagged behind reality. Mercantile activity in the

---

<sup>74</sup> *England's triumph: or, Spanish cowardice expos'd. Being a compleat history of the many signal victories gain'd by the Royal Navy and merchant ships of Great Britain, for the term of four hundred years past, over the insulting and haughty Spaniards. Wherein is particularly related A true and genuine Account of all the Expeditions, Voyages, Adventures, &c. of all the British Admirals from the Time above-mention'd, whose Successes have already filled all Europe with Amazement. By Capt. Charles Jenkins, Who has too sensibly felt the Effects of Spanish Tyranny,* London, 1738. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3301880069).

<sup>75</sup> *Observations arising from the declaration of war against Spain, with considerations relating to the future management of it on the part of Great-Britain; and the Consistency of the M-y, and their Advocates. In a letter to - By the author of The letters to Sir G- C-, and The conduct of the livery, &c.,* London, 1739. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3304939228), 6.

<sup>76</sup> Paul Langford, *A polite and commercial people: England 1727-1783*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Harris, *Politics and the Nation*, 117.

Caribbean, with or without government support, had already grown enormously in the early eighteenth century. This trend intensified and multiplied violent confrontations with Spanish authorities, demonstrating that the *asiento* system of the Treaty of Utrecht was unsustainable. After many rounds of renegotiated treaties throughout the 1720s and -30s that resolved nothing, Walpole's status-quo approach seemed unable to break the impasse. Opposition supporters of different ideological backgrounds coalesced around this issue throughout the 1730s. For example, Charles Forman, a long-time Jacobite exile, sought to ingratiate himself with the parliamentary opposition when he wrote in 1733, "The Care of our Trade ought to be the principal Object of your [Walpole's] Conduct in all Treaties and Negotiations whatever," implying that it was not.<sup>77</sup> An anonymous pamphleteer wrote shortly after war was declared in 1739, "There is nothing more evident than that the Life of this Country is its Trade. But how well, Sir, has this Maxim been understood by you?... the Commerce of the Nation suffer'd more than it could have done during the Continuance of a War for Years."<sup>78</sup> Walpole's policies also made him appear unsympathetic to the abused and mistreated merchants, "whom you were pleas'd to treat as a Parcel of Robbers and Pyrates."<sup>79</sup>

In opposition rhetoric, national honor was inextricably linked to protecting the trade. Walpole's unwillingness to aggressively right Spanish wrongs was dishonorable to him and Britain. As part of an effort to discredit Walpole, opposition rhetoric in the late 1730s attempted to assert an aggressive sense of "Britishness." Historians have long noted that national identity during this period was defined by identifying what Britishness was *not*, as much as by describing

---

<sup>77</sup> Charles Forman, "A letter to the Right Honourable Sir Robert Walpole, concerning the election of a King of Poland, the claim of King Stanislaus, the views of the House of Austria, and the interest of Great-Britain. By Charles Forman, Esq," London, 1733. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3305552950), 6.

<sup>78</sup> *Observations Arising from a Declaration of War*, 32-33.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

what Britishness actually entailed.<sup>80</sup> Opposition supporters were at great pains to demonstrate that Walpole's foreign policy betrayed the nation's interest and established character. For example, William Pulteney, a "Patriot" Whig member of parliament, frequently accused Walpole of being unresponsive to public opinion on the issue of war with Spain. He observed in the House of Commons in 1738 during a debate on foreign policy that "the wisdom of Parliament, is the wisdom of the nation; and in all national affairs of great importance, surely the wisdom of the nation ought to be consulted."<sup>81</sup> Pulteney may have had a personal hand in swaying public opinion—he co-founded and financed the opposition newspaper, *The Craftsman*, which featured writings from some of the most prominent writers of the day, including Henry Fielding, John Gay, and Alexander Pope.<sup>82</sup> Pulteney's opposition colleague Walter Plummer added during the same 1738 debate, "I must confess, Sir, that I should be not only afraid, but ashamed of being an object of public hatred or contempt; and I should be extremely doubtful about my own opinion, if I found it contrary to the opinion of most of my countrymen... As it is the general opinion in this nation, that we have sufficient reasons for declaring war against *Spain*."<sup>83</sup>

Opposition writers and politicians claimed to wield "the wisdom on the nation" as a force to separate what Walpole represented—diplomatic prevarication, the betrayal of merchants' interests, and cowardice—from mercantile relief and the restoration of national pride. It is perhaps no coincidence that the allegorical female "Britannia" was frequently evoked in this period, representing the feminine aspect of the nation who required a bold, masculine protector

---

<sup>80</sup> Examples include Colley, *Britons*, 5-6; Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism*, 63.

<sup>81</sup> *A Collection of the Parliamentary Debates*, vol. XVI, 28.

<sup>82</sup> Speck, *Stability and Strife*, 220-223.

<sup>83</sup> *A Collection of the Parliamentary Debates*, vol. XVI, 158-159.

to defend her honor.<sup>84</sup> Though passivity or wartime failure during the eighteenth century was often interpreted as a symptom of moral decline,<sup>85</sup> opposition leaders in the late 1730s instead stressed that Britain's dishonor was due to Walpole's own personal cowardice rather than national sins. By refusing, in the words of one pamphleteer, "to compell an insolent and potent Nation to make Reparation for unparallel'd Wrongs, to establish our Commerce and recover our Honour and Reputation in the World," Walpole allowed opposition writers to suggest he was fundamentally antipathetic to Britain's interests.<sup>86</sup> By 1738, support for war was high and Walpole's unwillingness to endorse bellicose calls for action seemed at best unresponsive and at worse the sullen cowardice of a dishonorable man.

Branding Walpole as essentially anti-patriotic sparked a search for nefarious motives to explain his diplomatic passivity. Some opposition polemicists maintained that Walpole actually sought to encourage disloyalty toward the Hanoverian dynasty, that he favored the "Decay of Commerce" to increase his personal power monopoly, or that he simply was clinging to power for its own sake.<sup>87</sup> One anonymous writer even intimated that Walpole might be colluding with Spain, asking of the ministry, "Are not they all *Englishmen*? Have they any Alliances of Blood or Affinity with *Spaniards*? Or, have they any Commerce or Engagement in Foreign Countries, that might tempt them to destroy their own?"<sup>88</sup> Opposition writers generally agreed that Walpole should personally be held accountable. "If the Honour of the Nation has been give up thro' the Cowardice, if her Interests have been betray'd thro' the Ignorance, or her Commerce barter'd away by the Corruption of any one Set of Men amongst ourselves," wrote a polemicist in 1739,

---

<sup>84</sup> Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism*, 77-78. Newman cites Herbert Atherton's mistaken claim that "Rule, Britannia!" premiered in 1745, which situates his analysis of the feminized Britannia figure somewhat later; however, the observation is on-point for the earlier period in which the anthem originated (1740).

<sup>85</sup> Harris, *Politics and the Nation*, 83.

<sup>86</sup> *Reasons for a war against Spain*, 21.

<sup>87</sup> *Observations Arising from the Declaration of War*, 7-8, 16, 19.

<sup>88</sup> *Reasons for a war against Spain*, 22.

“no Art of Power can divert the Punishment that attends them in this Age, and no Art of Corruption can bribe off the Infamy that attends them in the next.”<sup>89</sup> The remedy, according to the opposition was to use “the Fervor and Unanimity of the Nation on this Emergency [to] inspire the Ministry with Reflection and Courage.”<sup>90</sup> If Walpole and his friends could be persuaded to act on behalf of the real national interest, the same pamphleteer argued, “we have the strongest Motives to believe that they will heartily concur with the Nation in all vigorous Measures for carrying on the War, and convince the World, that they are *Englishmen*.”<sup>91</sup>

By 1738, it was clear that opposition explanations for Walpole’s conduct were being taken seriously in parliament. Opposition politicians, including Pulteney, openly questioned Walpole’s motives in the House. Walpole attempted to head them off by explaining that “prudence” motivated his conduct, and that he still had the country’s best interests at heart by keeping the peace with Spain. “I am as zealous in the defence of the rights and privileges of my country, as any man in the kingdom,” he explained, “but I shall never allow my zeal to carry me beyond the bounds of prudence and discretion.”<sup>92</sup> This hardly satisfied the opposition after so many years of unsuccessful negotiations. Pulteney claimed that “our ministry have been guilty of a scandalous breach of duty, and the most infamous pusillanimity.”<sup>93</sup> “Prudence and pusillanimity,” Walpole fired back, “are two words which are easily understood in private life, but in publick life, and in national affairs, it is not so easy to form proper ideas for these two words, and to determine the exact boundaries between them.”<sup>94</sup> Walpole never defined his terms, but the popular press did. “The Pusillanimity of a Ministry, Sir,” wrote one essayist in response

---

<sup>89</sup> *Observations Arising from the Declaration of War*, 4.

<sup>90</sup> *Reasons for a war against Spain*, 21.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>92</sup> *A Collection of the Parliamentary Debates in England*, vol. XVI, 150.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. XVI, 2.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. XVI, 14.

to the speech, “is of worse Consequence to a Nation than that of a private Man can be of to himself or his Family.”<sup>95</sup> Wrote another in 1739, “A *Pusillanimity* in our Conduct, has been the Cause of an *Obstinacy* in theirs.”<sup>96</sup> The nation—composed of ordinary Britons representing the vaguely defined traits that Walpole lacked— was yet again invoked to right Walpole’s wrongs: “The Consequences of Ministerial Pusillanimity are irreparable any otherways than by National Courage.”<sup>97</sup>

The opposition hoped the outbreak of war would “rouze *Britons* out of their Lethargy.”<sup>98</sup> This had an important historic dimension; to the opposition, parallels to Elizabethan glories were obvious. The pamphlet “Reasons for a War with Spain” (1737) invoked the naval triumphs of the Anglo-Spanish war and concluded with the text of Elizabeth I’s famous 1588 Armada speech. The author of “England’s Triumph, or Spain’s Cowardice expose’d” lamented that “Time... has given a different Turn to our Politicks; and Britons, who formerly, were more remarkable for their Ardour and Vivacity in Arms, than their Skill in Wordy Negotiations, now let their Swords rust in their Scabbards, and trust their Interests to the Management of Ambassadors, and the Finesse of Treaty-making.”<sup>99</sup>

The reliance on “Wordy Negotiations” continued one last time in January 1739 with the Convention of Pardo. Whether Spain actually intended to abide by the terms of this treaty is unclear, although Britons both in and out of parliament openly expressed skepticism of Spanish goodwill based on past experience. To address these concerns, Walpole found himself compelled to dispatch additional forces to the West Indies, authorizing their commanders to grant long-

---

<sup>95</sup> *Observations Arising from a Declaration of War*, 43.

<sup>96</sup> *Britain's mistakes in the commencement and conduct of the present war. By a merchant and citizen of London*, London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3305975515), 30.

<sup>97</sup> *Observations Arising from the Declaration of War*, 44.

<sup>98</sup> *Reasons for a War against Spain*, 3-4.

<sup>99</sup> *England's triumph: or, Spanish cowardice expos'd*, 3.

awaited letters of marque and reprisal. He also sent a naval squadron to Gibraltar under Admiral Haddock.<sup>100</sup> In response, Spain revoked Britain's *asiento* and seized all British ships in Spanish harbors. With these actions, war seemed certain. On 20 July 1739, Vice-Admiral Edward Vernon was dispatched with a fleet of six ships to the West Indies.<sup>101</sup> War was officially declared three months later on 23 October 1739. "Spectators expressed their great Satisfaction by loud Acclamations of Joy" as the king's Declaration of War was publicly proclaimed.<sup>102</sup> Far from the cheering, Vernon's fleet lay quietly at anchor in Port Royal, Jamaica.<sup>103</sup>

### **"To have the Spaniards blown up": Porto Bello, 1739**

Admiral Vernon's orders allowed him a great deal of flexibility. Generally instructed to capture Spanish treasure-ships and inflict damage on Spanish shipping and customs activities, Vernon was allowed to use his knowledge of the West Indies and local conditions to determine the best way to proceed. He had no specific instructions to attack Porto Bello, the point of departure for galleons carrying silver from Spanish South America (in present-day Panama), but neither was he forbidden to do so.<sup>104</sup> After he failed to intercept the biannual convoy of galleons returning from New Spain, Vernon sailed to Barbados and then to Port Royal, Jamaica. From there, he concluded that the best way to frustrate Spanish trade with his small fleet was "directly to enter in and endeavor to destroy all the defence[s]" of Porto Bello.<sup>105</sup> He had no intention of holding the position, and in fact could not have done so, even with the small detachment of land forces that he had on loan from the governor of Jamaica.<sup>106</sup>

---

<sup>100</sup> *London Evening Post*, July 12, 1739 - July 14, 1739; Issue 1820. *Burney Collection*, Gale, (Z2000639505).

<sup>101</sup> *London Evening Post*, July 24, 1739 - July 26, 1739; Issue 1825, *Burney Collection*, Gale, (Z2000639561).

<sup>102</sup> *London Gazette*, October 20, 1739 - October 23, 1739; Issue 7851, *Burney Collection*, Gale, (Z2000724243).

<sup>103</sup> H.W. Richmond, *The navy in the war of 1739-48*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920), vol. 1, 43.

<sup>104</sup> Bryan Ranft, ed., *The Vernon Papers*, (London: Navy Records Society, 1958), 6.

<sup>105</sup> Ranft, ed., *Vernon Papers*, 32, Order to Commodore Brown and captains, 7 Nov. 1739.

<sup>106</sup> Richmond, *The navy in the war of 1739-48*, vol. 1, 43-46.

Vernon's squadron arrived off Porto Bello on the evening of 20 November, and attacked at 5 o'clock the next morning. By evening, they had captured the Iron Castle, the port's outer defensive works, but were unable to approach the bay's inner defenses due to contrary winds. They need not have worried. A boat arrived the next morning carrying the terms of the Spanish governor's surrender. Vernon remained at Porto Bello for three weeks to confiscate arms and ammunition and to supervise the destruction of its defenses. By all accounts, he kept to the terms of the surrender and left the town's residents and their property unharmed.<sup>107</sup>

Though Vernon's capture of Porto Bello had the swashbuckling flavor of centuries of Caribbean maritime exploits, the admiral's businesslike plan of attack and careful treatment of the surrendered town suggests that he was aware that his actions were significant both in the West Indies and at home. Vernon understood that his success was a victory not only for Britain, but also for Walpole's parliamentary opponents. He wrote to Sir Charles Wager, the First Lord of the Admiralty, in January 1740 that he would "set out fully disposed to do all in my power to comply with his Majesty's instructions, and in some measure with the impatience you mention in others, to have the Spaniards blown up, and shall have a secret pleasure in humbling their pride and amply retaliating all the unjust injuries and depredations they have been so long practicing against us." Though news of Vernon's victory did not reach Britain for several months, he was justified in "hop[ing] what we have done at Porto Bello may gratify the appetite of the public for the present."<sup>108</sup>

---

<sup>107</sup> Ranft, ed., *Vernon Papers*, 8-9. Richmond, *The navy in the war of 1739-48*, vol. 1, 52.

<sup>108</sup> Ranft, ed., *Vernon Papers*, 61, Vernon to Sir Charles Wager, 18 Jan. 1740.

### **“Be brave then, I ask no more”: Vernon**

News of Vernon’s capture of Porto Bello arrived in Britain in the spring of 1740. He received the grateful appreciation of both houses of parliament and the king, and the public response was enthusiastic and widespread. There were rallies, poems, sermons of thanksgiving, annual celebrations of Vernon’s birthday, and a diverse assortment of Vernon-themed commemorative objects. In the aftermath of Porto Bello, Vernon was widely celebrated as a rough-and-tumble naval officer in the mold of Drake or Raleigh. In reality, his social background and career path were not typical. Unlike most naval officers of his day, who began their careers at age 13 or younger, Vernon had entered the service in 1700 at age 16. Though little is known about Vernon’s early life, he received some formal education at Westminster School, a luxury denied to most of his colleagues. He also had powerful patrons. His father, one of William III’s secretaries of state, probably facilitated Vernon’s swift rise through the ranks—he was made lieutenant in 1701, and was granted his own command in 1706. During the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714), Vernon served in the Mediterranean and participated in the capture of Barcelona and Gibraltar. He also spent a significant amount of time in the West Indies.<sup>109</sup>

Even with the help of well-placed friends, Vernon was subjected to long periods ashore, especially during peacetime. Facilitated by his connections, he became a member of parliament, representing Penryn for the opposition as a Country Whig between 1721-1725 and 1728-1732. Viscount Perceval, the Earl of Egmont, a political moderate and friend of the Court, thought that Vernon was “a remarkable brave man, sober, well experience, and zealous for the honour and interest of his country, as he showed both in war and in the House of Commons, where he sat

---

<sup>109</sup> Richard Harding, “Edward Vernon, 1684-1757,” in Peter Le Fevre and Richard Harding, ed. *Precursors of Nelson: British Admirals of the Eighteenth Century*, (London: Chatham Publishing, 2000), 151-176, 151-155.

when I was in Parliament.”<sup>110</sup> Zealous he certainly was, but Vernon quickly became known as an outspoken critic of the Walpole ministry. Though much of what he said during his years in parliament does not survive, his reputation for haranguing his listeners, raging against the ministry, and working himself into a passion was well established. For example, in 1730, Egmont described in his private diary how Vernon “brought in the Pope, the Devil, the Jesuits, the seamen, etc. so that the House had not patience to attend to him, though he was not taken down. He quite lost his temper, and made himself hoarse again.”<sup>111</sup>

In parliament, Vernon was committed to what he believed was the nation’s interest: prosperous trade, governmental support for the Navy, and, in contrast to Walpole, an aggressive foreign policy. In 1730, he denounced the Treaty of Seville with Spain as “a Treaty which dishonours us by tying down our hands that we cannot exert ourselves in a hostile manner to protect our merchants.” He was equally critical of later diplomatic measures.<sup>112</sup> Vernon also frequently worried about the Stuart Pretender and his allies, the French—a threat he believed could only be addressed by maintaining a strong navy. When the matter of recruiting seamen was raised in 1733, he argued to increase the number of seamen in the Navy with his typical rhetorical flourish, “We have for years past betrayed our King by strengthening France to put upon us a son of a whore [the Pretender]; while our fleets lay idle... Let us show ourselves true friends to his Majesty and his family.”<sup>113</sup> Egmont elaborated on Vernon’s enthusiasm for the Hanoverian dynasty when he described how, “In 1705 [Vernon] had once the command of a man-of-war, and has been twice in the West Indies, where seeing a merchant ship make

---

<sup>110</sup> Viscount Perceval, First Earl of Egmont, *Diary*, (London: Historical Manuscripts Commission, 1920), vol. 3, 76. Egmont kept his diary regularly from 1730 until eight months before his death in 1748. Published posthumously, the diary offers a fascinating, candid look into parliamentary history, the founding of the colony of Georgia, and British high society during the 1730s, and -40s (see Introduction to vol. 1).

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 43-44.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 143.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 17.

rejoicings on the 10 June, the Pretender's birthday, he put the captain in chains, and brought him to England, a zeal not warranted, and which cost him a thousand pounds.”<sup>114</sup>

Vernon also had little patience for colleagues who he thought were corrupt or unresponsive to public opinion, and did not hesitate to publicly admonish them. During a debate over the conversion of South Sea Company capital into annuities in 1732, Vernon insinuated that his fellow MP Sir John Eyles was unlawfully conducting private trade on Company ships—Egmont admitted that Eyles, “by the universal vogue had been greatly guilty in this respect”—but the matter almost came to blows. The two men had to be forced by the Speaker to promise that “nothing should ensue.”<sup>115</sup> Vernon also spoke vigorously against the revival of the Salt Tax in 1732, leveling “several hot and indiscreet expressions” at his opponents and claiming that “ninety-nine in a hundred of the people would not bear the tax, and that he should expect, if he voted for it, to be treated like a polecat and knocked in the head... The Speaker chid[ed] him severely for these expressions, and deservedly,” thought Egmont.<sup>116</sup> In a direct challenge to Walpole, he also called the Salt Tax “a step towards introducing a general excise, which is inconsistent with the liberties of a free people; and Sir, when life, liberty, or property is concerned, it will be found that every man will fight.”<sup>117</sup>

Vernon often displayed a flair for the theatrical, but there is no evidence to suggest that his confrontational style was studied, or a calculated political move. Many, including Egmont, later concluded that Vernon's take-no-prisoners opposition politics seriously damaged his naval

---

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., vol. 3, 76.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 263.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 220.

<sup>117</sup> *Cobbett's Parliamentary history of England*, Volume 8, London, 1809-1820. *Making of the Modern World*, Gale, (U3607836584), 949.

career in the 1730s.<sup>118</sup> Vernon was probably aware that his parliamentary activities made him few friends in the ministry, but he maintained a high opinion of political life, writing privately to his brother-in-law in 1734, “I hope I shall always take a greater pleasure in being a Martyr for the good of my country; than a prosperous slave in contributing to betray its liberty and prosperity.”<sup>119</sup> These were strong sentiments, but he was in no position to make good on them. Having left Parliament in 1732, Vernon’s political career was over and he became an unemployed naval officer without much hope of a commission; an apparent victim of his own anti-ministerial zeal.

Vernon appeared on the national scene again in 1739 in the aftermath of the failed Convention of Pardo. Amidst celebrations of Porto Bello victory, admiring contemporaries perpetuated the idea that Vernon reemerged from private life in the spring of 1739 to volunteer his services to the Crown. If he was called in to advise an Admiralty committee on a possible war in the West Indies, which seems probable, it is not apparent, and no popular publications refer to it until long after his celebrity was established. In light of Vernon’s capture of Porto Bello, many in the opposition press insinuated that Walpole had sent Vernon to the West Indies to rid himself of a troublesome opposition figure. The reporters further alleged that Walpole never believed such a small fleet could achieve much and hoped it would fail. Though Walpole may indeed have been relieved to dispatch noisy, irascible Vernon to the high seas, it is far more likely that Vernon was chosen to lead the expedition because of his experience in the Caribbean and his demonstrated professional competence. As First Lord Charles Wager explained, Vernon was “much properer than any [other] officer we have to send, being, very well acquainted in all

---

<sup>118</sup> Egmont, *Diary*, vol. 3, 76.

<sup>119</sup> Quoted in Harding, “Edward Vernon,” in Le Fevre and Harding, ed. *Precursors of Nelson*, 164.

that part of the West Indies and... a very good sea officer, whatever he may be, or has been, in the House of Commons.”<sup>120</sup>

Vernon’s capture of Porto Bello had few long-term strategic consequences in the West Indies. In Britain, however, opposition politicians and writers seized on Vernon’s victory as a vindication of more than a decade of anti-ministerial rhetoric. The final results of Vernon’s action in the Caribbean were secondary to the impact of his initial victory back home. After Porto Bello, Vernon’s squadron met with little success. Following a minor victory at Fort Chagre in 1740, Vernon failed in three separate attempts to capture Cartagena, the strategic key to Spain’s transatlantic trade. The final assault, an ill-conceived amphibious operation carried out in March-April 1741, was derailed by disease, inter-service rivalry, and the tenacity of the fort’s Spanish defenders.<sup>121</sup> Yet Vernon’s reputation in England suffered little from his failures after Porto Bello. Though the disasters could not be ignored, it was Walpole, not Vernon, who took the blame. Celebrations of Vernon, both in the popular press and in parliament, thus became implicit (and sometimes overt) critiques of Walpole. Whereas the opposition had vigorously criticized Walpole’s foreign policy for betraying British values and character, opponents of Walpole presented Vernon’s capture of Porto Bello as a victory for British liberties, trade, and courage.

Vernon’s success at Porto Bello was generally regarded by the opposition press as the long-awaited revenge for a decade of Spanish attacks on British trade. In this sense, celebrations of the Porto Bello capture represented a refutation of years of Walpolean accommodationist diplomatic policy that downplayed mercantile abuses or half-heartedly attempted to arrange

---

<sup>120</sup> Quoted in Harding, “Edward Vernon,” Le Fevre and Harding, ed. *Precursors of Nelson*, 165.

<sup>121</sup> Richmond, *The navy in the war of 1739-48*, vol. 1, 119-124.

redress with Spain. Though Vernon's attack on Porto Bello did not directly target the customs activities of Spanish *guardacostas*, his action suggested that Britain was finally attempting to right historic and legal wrongs and restore the safety of her trade. "Peace is certainly better than War, especially to a *trading Nation*," observed one anonymous "merchant and citizen of London," "but our present Circumstances shew, that *War* sometimes becomes *necessary for the Support of Trade*, and therefore the *Wisdom of a Nation* does not so much consist in *preserving Peace*, as in *choosing the proper Opportunity for engaging in War*." <sup>122</sup> The proper time had arrived, and the nation joined "Long abdicated Dame/ *Commerce*," in the words of an Oxford undergraduate who fancied himself a poet, to "pay a grateful Sacrifice of Thanks/ To her Preservers." <sup>123</sup>

Vernon's popularity with the opposition was also due to the commonly-held belief that he was acting on behalf of the nation. As one poet put it in 1740: "Remember those Agents long shuffl'd in *Spain*,/ Our Merchants insulted no Redress cou'd obtain: Till from *Clamours without, within Doors* they grew;/ Then a *few Ships* were sent. What with more might we do!" <sup>124</sup> Vernon himself encouraged the popularity of this attitude. He explained in a speech to his fellow officers that he had been dispatched to the West Indies because "The whole Nation... urg[ed] the instant Necessity of rousing the Power of *Great-Britain* to defend her Trade, and retrieve her Glory." <sup>125</sup> Though the war dragged on through 1740 and 1741 without spectacular victories, Vernon still

---

<sup>122</sup> *A supplement to Britain's mistakes in the commencement and conduct of the present war. Wherein the late glorious success of Admiral Vernon at Porto Bello is particularly considered. By a merchant and citizen of London*, London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3306105438), 9.

<sup>123</sup> Lewis Jones, "To! Triumphe! A poem upon Admiral Vernon. By an Undergraduate of Jesus-College, Oxford," London, 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3314478130), 22.

<sup>124</sup> "The Freeholder," in *Vernon's glory. Containing Fifteen New Songs, occasion'd by the Taking of Porto-Bello and Fort Chagre*, London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3315651016), 24.

<sup>125</sup> Edward Vernon, *The genuine speech of the truly honourable Adm[ira]l V[ernon], to the sea-officers, at a council of war, just before the attack of C[artagen]a. As communicated by a person of honour then present, in a letter to his friend*, London, 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3303818523), 4. Though we have no way of knowing exactly how "genuine" this speech is, there is no reason to doubt that Vernon's views are accurately represented. The florid rhetorical style also bears great similarity to other surviving Vernon texts.

expressed confidence in public support for the war. “I need not tell you,” Vernon said in 1741, “that this is the People’s War, begun at their instance, and that they will think no Tax grievous, no Expence exorbitant, that appears necessary for carrying on their darling Schemes of humbling a proud, untractable Enemy.”<sup>126</sup>

To Walpole’s critics, Vernon’s Porto Bello victory soothed wounded national pride. Walpole’s repeated refusal to answer Spanish “depredations” with armed force seemed, to many opposition writers, to be at best inconsistent with British character, and at worst proof of Walpole’s personal cowardice. Implicit in celebrations of the long-awaited naval victory was relief that so many years of inactivity had not withered “traditional” British attributes implicit in naval prowess: bravery, vigor, and strength.<sup>127</sup> That this fear existed in the first place suggests the extent to which many of Walpole’s opponents believed that his policies threatened the nation’s military capabilities and martial character. Vernon’s victory reasserted Britain’s prestige on the world stage, but it also reassured Britons that the rejection of Walpole’s pacific policies was entirely consistent with their ancestors’ great naval exploits.

After Porto Bello, Vernon became a national model who embodied British values that many believed Walpole had suppressed. A collection of anonymous poems entitled *Vernon's glory. Containing Fifteen New Songs, occasion'd by the Taking of Porto-Bello and Fort Chagre*, published in London in 1740, offers a striking selection of pro-Vernon sentiments that emerged after Porto Bello.<sup>128</sup> The writer of “To Admiral VERNON” began his poem by invoking “*Britain’s* bright Genius, and *Vernon’s* just Merit;/ To the Man who retains a true *British* Spirit:/

---

<sup>126</sup> Vernon, *The genuine speech of the truly honourable Adm[ira]l V[erno]n, ... just before the attack of C[artagen]a*, 17.

<sup>127</sup> For a more thorough discussion of British national identity in the 1730s and fears about male effeminacy and impotence, please see chapter 2.

<sup>128</sup> *Vernon's glory. Containing Fifteen New Songs, occasion'd by the Taking of Porto-Bello and Fort Chagre*, London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3315651016).

To the Man of all Men, who deserves our best Praise.” A “true *British* spirit,” to this poet, clearly demanded action to answer affronts. Vernon deserved to be congratulated for his boldness, not his restraint. Although ordinary Britons clamoring for war had been unable to convince Walpole that action was necessary, Vernon demonstrated it with “just Merit” and a “true *British* spirit.” Vernon’s personal “Virtue and Courage” had vindicated Britain’s martial character and “retriev’d our lost Fame.”<sup>129</sup> Vernon personally saw himself as “retrieving the Glory of a martial People,”<sup>130</sup> and many people agreed. As one poet effused, “...the generous Admiral gave;/ That they might all see,/ What ENGLISHMEN be,/ And teach ‘em the Way to be brave.”<sup>131</sup> Vernon accepted his orders, in his own words, “not as a Courtier, who aim’d but to please his Patron, but as an *old-Englishman*, dependant only on God, his King, and his Country.”<sup>132</sup>

Vernon and his supporters agreed that the only thing standing in the way of rebirth of British naval dominance was the revival of Walpole’s own preference for negotiation. As one poet put it, “for in this Contention,/ I may venture to swear,/ Thou has nothing to fear,/ By *St. George*, but another Convention.”<sup>133</sup> Vernon himself framed this outrage about unanswered insults and wounded national pride as a matter to be solved by British courage and virtue rather than diplomacy. Deploying vividly martial language, Vernon assured his officers in 1741 that “[not] even the Rust of a corroding Peace can eat away our Virtue.”<sup>134</sup> Again, he proposed the vigorous conduct of war as the necessary corrective to Walpole’s peacetime diplomacy:

---

<sup>129</sup> “To Admiral VERNON,” in *Vernon’s glory*, 27.

<sup>130</sup> Edward Vernon, *A second genuine speech, deliver’d by Adm[ira]l V[erno]n, on board the Carolina, to the officers of the navy, immediately after the salley from Fort St. Lazara*, London, 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3310320390), 8.

<sup>131</sup> “On the Taking of Chagre,” in *Vernon’s glory*, 32.

<sup>132</sup> Vernon, *The genuine speech of the truly honourable Adm[ira]l V[erno]n... just before the attack of C[artagen]a*, 6.

<sup>133</sup> “A new ballad on the taking of Porto-Bello, By Admiral Vernon,” London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3315388455), 7

<sup>134</sup> Edward Vernon, *The genuine speech of the truly honourable Adm[ira]l V[erno]n... just before the attack of C[artagen]a*, 13.

“Gentlemen, the Vengeance of your Country is in your Hands; the Vengeance of a great People long insulted, long entangled in the Net-work of Treaties and Negotiations, and struggling in vain to let loose the Sword... all the Honour we have lost, is now to be restor’d.”<sup>135</sup> He concluded with damning words for ministry, warning, “backwardness and Neglect, let Politicians answer for.”<sup>136</sup>

Celebrations of Vernon’s martial prowess and bravery were to be expected after his Porto Bello victory. Significantly, however, celebrations of Vernon’s courage and frankness often appeared as a cultural-political foil to Walpole’s cowardice and corruption. Henry Fielding, writing in *The Champion*, noted, “‘Tis observable, likewise, that the Admiral... [was] often speaking his Mind with the true *Bluntness* of a Seaman, and often rally’d by those *fair-Weather* Sparks, who did not recollect that *Action* was his Element, as *Talking* was theirs.”<sup>137</sup> Vernon proudly admitted that he was a man of action, rather than of words. He explained to his officers that, “Talking is not my talent” and that “when I spoke [in parliament], it was in such Terms as the Delicacy of the Age could not bear: I was represented rough as the Element I was bred to; and even the Truths I utter’d from the fullness of my Heart, were looked upon as little better than the Ravings of a Calenture.”<sup>138</sup>

This blunt, simple manner was interpreted by Vernon’s contemporaries as evidence of his honesty and honorable intentions. “[Vernon] had a Mind to retrieve, if possible, the Honour of his Country,” an anonymous pamphleteer claimed, “...in a Sense which, I am convinced, *some*

---

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>137</sup> Henry Fielding, *The champion: containing a series of papers, humourous, moral, political, and critical. To each of which is added, A proper Index to the Times...* vol. 2, London, 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3310895042), 17.

<sup>138</sup> Vernon, *The genuine speech of the truly honourable Adm[ira]l V[erno]n... just before the attack of C[artagen]a*, 1-2, 5-6.

*People did not intend.*”<sup>139</sup> Another polemicist leveled a veiled critique at Walpole’s corruption by attributing to Vernon “no private Motive, His *Britannia* calls... Great without Pomp, whom no Ambition fires,/ But that of dying for the public Weal.”<sup>140</sup> The prime minister, by contrast, had never risked as much for the “public Weal,” let alone his life. The days of Walpole’s empty “prudence and discretion” had passed. Vernon instead demanded of his officers, “Be brave then, I ask no more.”<sup>141</sup>

Vernon was also celebrated for his honesty. Again, this was a trait that opposition writers suggested was notably lacking in Walpole. Walpole had time and again promised redress for merchants’ complaints of Spanish depredations with no appreciable result. By contrast, Vernon’s actions in the Caribbean seemed to vindicate his long-standing support for war with Spain. This is evident, for example, in the public’s enthusiastic acceptance of the almost certainly apocryphal tale that, throughout the 1730s, Vernon had repeatedly promised to capture Porto Bello and Cartagena with a fleet of just six ships. The “six ships” boast became an important part of the Vernon mythology, though it did not seem to trouble Vernon’s supporters that there was no evidence that he ever made it.<sup>142</sup> The “six ships” prophecy was also uncritically accepted by Vernon’s later biographers.<sup>143</sup> It is easy to imagine Vernon making such a claim, yet there is no record of such a prediction in the records of parliamentary debate when he was a member.

References to “six ships” do not appear in the popular press before March 1740. Regardless,

---

<sup>139</sup> *A supplement to Britain's mistakes*, 18.

<sup>140</sup> Jones, “Io! Triumphe!,” 8.

<sup>141</sup> Vernon, *The genuine speech of the truly honourable Adm[ira]l V[ernon]n... just before the attack of C[artagen]a*, 11.

<sup>142</sup> Though referenced repeatedly throughout the 1740s, the circumstances of the “six ships” boast were laid out for the first time in the decidedly partial *The Life of Admiral Vernon. By an impartial hand*, London, 1758. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3302698137), 136-142. The biographer almost certainly fabricated the tale in response to the already existing mythology.

<sup>143</sup> Including Vernon’s most recent biographer, Cyril Hughes Hartmann, *The Angry Admiral: The later career of Edward Vernon, Admiral of the White*, London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1953), 13-15. To his credit, H.W. Richmond, whose *The navy in the war of 1739-48* (1920) remains the essential work on the War of Jenkins’ Ear, makes no mention of this.

Pulteney insisted that the House of Commons' address congratulating Vernon after Porto Bello specifically include the phrase "with six ships only."<sup>144</sup> Rather than an attempt to memorialize Vernon's prophetic boasts, Pulteney likely intended this phrase as a pointed reference to the unfortunate Admiral Francis Hosier, sent to blockade Porto Bello in 1726 with twenty-one ships. It was believed that he and the majority of his men wasted away with disease because they were explicitly forbidden by the Walpole ministry to attempt to capture the port.<sup>145</sup>

Popular writers, however, seized on the "six ships" myth to perpetuate the notion that Vernon had planned the Porto Bello capture all along. His action fulfilled his own prophecy. Wrote one essayist, "It is true, *Mr. Vernon then said*, that he could have taken *Porto Bello* with *any six* of the Men of War belonging to *that Squadron*; and he has now made good what he said, for he had but *six Ships only*." There are dozens of examples of poems employing adulatory references to the six ships and Vernon's integrity.<sup>146</sup> Many writers interpreted Vernon's capture of Porto Bello as evidence that, in the title of a celebratory poem, "He ha[d] kep't his word" to protect British merchants and humble the Spanish.<sup>147</sup> Vernon's vindication of his alleged promise to capture Porto Bello seemed to demonstrate that Walpole's belated support for the war was never sincere. One poet imagined Walpole fuming about Vernon, "'Twas mere Malice to me/ Made you venture to Sea,/ To counfound all my Measures outright:/ 'Twas to prove me a Lyar,/ That you made your damn'd Fire;/ And you storm'd *Porto Bell* out of Spight."<sup>148</sup> The

---

<sup>144</sup> *The Parliamentary History of England*, vol. XI, 578.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. XI, 578. This connection was also made in the popular press—see Richard Glover, "Admiral Hosier's Ghost," London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3313538096) and "To Admiral VERNON," in *Vernon's glory*, 27.

<sup>146</sup> *A supplement to Britain's mistakes*, 21. Representative examples include: "A new ballad on the taking of Porto-Bello, By Admiral Vernon," London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3315388455), 3; "Characteristicks: a dialogue," London, 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3311548163), 13; "Vernon's Glory," in *Vernon's glory*, 4; "To Admiral VERNON," in *Vernon's glory*, 27.

<sup>147</sup> "He has kep't his word. A poem. To perpetuate the memory of ... Porto Bello. Written by a gentleman on board that fleet," London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3314200869).

<sup>148</sup> "Sir Bluestring's Expostulation with Admiral *Vernon*, for taking *Porto Bello*," in *Vernon's glory*, 37.

apocryphal “six ships” boast became an important way to criticize Walpole even after war was declared.

### **“Who is to blame but you?": The fall of the Walpole ministry, 1742**

Vernon's “six ships” victory was not preordained, but the attack had a high probability of success in light of Porto Bello's weak defenses. It was a simple operation compared to Vernon's disastrous amphibious attempts on Cartagena in 1740-1. Those attacks failed in spectacular fashion. Strangely, Vernon's public reputation did not suffer from his failure to consolidate any real gains during his three years of combat in the West Indies. Vernon's continued popularity throughout the early 1740s makes plain the extent to which the symbolic conflict between Walpole and Vernon can be understood as symptomatic of dueling national types as well as specific policy and personality differences. Though Vernon's failures could not be denied, opposition writers and politicians blamed them on Walpole. The reasons were numerous: some believed that Walpole was bent on seeing a political opponent fail, some thought that Walpole was beholden to foreign interests, and all agreed that Walpole himself was a coward.

It is clear that many writers and politicians really believed that Walpole intended Vernon's West Indian operations to fail in order to frustrate the opposition's strategy. Some writers suggested that Walpole tried to deny Vernon command of the operation and never called for an attack on Porto Bello. The latter was technically true, although Vernon's orders allowed for wide interpretation.<sup>149</sup> The small size of Vernon's fleet also led many to question Walpole's commitment to the operation's success. With just six ships and a small detachment of soldiers mustered in Jamaica, the argument went, Vernon's fleet could hardly be expected to attack significant targets or consolidate any gains in the region. “I must think it a little odd, not to

---

<sup>149</sup> Richmond, *The navy in the war of 1739-48*, vol. 1, 41.

provide [Vernon] with those Things that were necessary for making the Success of the Attempt [on Porto Bello] *at least probable...*” wrote “a merchant and citizen of London,” after Vernon’s victory, “Therefore, I must *in Charity* suppose, that he had no such orders.”<sup>150</sup> Though there is scant evidence that Vernon ever requested a larger land force or more ships—and indeed, he generally opposed amphibious combined operations<sup>151</sup> — Vernon himself later played on opposition sentiment by suggesting, “Had I been favoured with a more effectual Force, the War, perhaps, had been ended by now.”<sup>152</sup>

These sentiments were echoed in parliament. A resolution proposed in April 1740 suggested that Vernon’s victory might have been “attended with further and greater successes, if some of our land forces, commanded by experienced officers, had been sent to the West Indies... the sending of no land forces hitherto into America is a manifest piece of ill conduct.” Though the resolution was defeated, it set the tone for attributing future failures to Walpole’s “ill conduct.”<sup>153</sup> John Carteret, who had been outmaneuvered by Walpole in 1724 and became one of the opposition’s main voices in Lords, called Vernon’s victory “a most signal and surprizing service, considering what he was provided; but it was a trifle considering what we might have done, and what he would have done, had he been properly provided; and I will venture to say, it was neither intended nor expected by our minister.”<sup>154</sup> And as the Duke of Argyll, leader of the

---

<sup>150</sup> A supplement to *Britain's mistakes*, 17-18.

<sup>151</sup> Richard Pares, *War and trade in the West Indies, 1739-1763*, (London: Frank Cass & Co Ltd, 1963), 86-87.

<sup>152</sup> Vernon, *The genuine speech of the truly honourable Adm[ira]l V[erno]n... just before the attack of C[artagen]a*, 7.

<sup>153</sup> Leo Francis Stock, ed., *Proceedings and Debates of the British Parliaments respecting North America*, vol. V, (Washington, D.C.: The Carnegie Institution of Washington), 43. See also John Campbell, Duke of Argyll, *The D[uke] of Ar[gy]le's letter to the Right Honourable Sir [Robert Walpole], upon the present intended expeditions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3305240816), 23.

<sup>154</sup> Stock, ed., *Proceedings and Debates*, 53.

Scottish opposition, bluntly asked in an open letter to Walpole, “Should any Accident happen that might interrupt the Success [of war in the Caribbean]... who is to blame but you?”<sup>155</sup>

Some even went beyond conventional political motives and suggested that Walpole’s diplomacy was being directed by Britain’s enemies. The poet of “a new ballad on the taking of Porto Bello” (1740) referred to Walpole as the “blue string’d Cavalier,” a clever title implying that, despite enjoying royal favor—the “blue string” of the orders of Bath and the Garter had been bestowed on him by George II—Walpole was a traitor. “Cavalier” implied association with the Jacobites, harkening back to the Cavaliers who had supported the Stuart royalist cause during the English Civil War, and were supported by Catholic monarchs on the continent in their eighteenth-century exile. For this reason, the poet believed that Walpole had arranged the Convention of Pardo to appease his Spanish patrons: “Hence our Queen did declare/ The blue string’d Cavalier/ Her good Friend, since he serv’d her so well;/ And did kindly incline/ His Convention to sign,/ For his Care to preserve PORTO-BELLO.”<sup>156</sup> Another poet imagined Walpole fuming at Vernon, “How did *Spain’s* Gracious Queen/ Doat on me and *Don Keen*!/ I was priz’d by the Cardinal [Fleury] too,/ At *Versailles* and th’ *Escurial*!/ They are now in a Fury all:/ And for this I’m beholden to you.”<sup>157</sup> Henry Fielding, in *The Champion*, also implied the involvement of France’s Cardinal Fleury in Walpole’s peace diplomacy, noting that “*The Vanity of the French having long induc’d them to believe, that not a since Touch-Hole would take Fire without their Cardinal’s [Fleury’s] Leave.*”<sup>158</sup> The Duke of Argyll wondered why “we have given [France] no great Trouble to cajole us, for we ourselves have assisted them in the Deceit.

---

<sup>155</sup> Argyll, *The Duke of Argyll’s letter to the Right Honourable Sir [Robert Walpole]*, 23.

<sup>156</sup> “A new ballad on the taking of Porto-Bello,” 4.

<sup>157</sup> “Sir Bluestring’s Expostulation with Admiral *Vernon*, for taking *Porto Bello*,” in *Vernon’s glory. Containing Fifteen New Songs, occasion’d by the Taking of Porto-Bello and Fort Chagre*, London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3315651016), 39.

<sup>158</sup> Fielding, *The champion*, 43.

What Infatuation could thus blind any Minister? Was it Fear? If once Timerousness [sic] gets Possession of the Breast of a Premier, was a miserable Condition must the People be in? Yet if it was not Fear, it must be the greatest Baseness of another Kind [i.e. treason].”<sup>159</sup>

Though not everyone subscribed to the notion that Walpole was really serving Britain’s foes, many attributed the poor conduct of the war after 1740 to Walpole’s personal cowardice. Only by removing Walpole, the argument went, could the war be salvaged by men of braver character. The Duke of Argyll, himself an experienced field general, argued pointedly that “it is no Wonder that a Minister, who is entirely unacquainted with the Field, declines Fighting... He knows his own Strength that it consists in Cunning, not in Force.”<sup>160</sup> Walpole committed another misstep when he decided to take a trip home to Norfolk almost immediately after the news of Porto Bello arrived. This extremely ill-timed departure from London seemed to suggest he did not support Vernon’s actions and that he found himself unequal to the demands of wartime leadership. As one poet quipped, “But *Bob*, they say to *Norfolk’s* flown; O! may he there remain;/ And never more see *London Town*,/ ‘Till we have humbled *Spain*!”<sup>161</sup> The language of “prudence and pusillanimity” from the debates of 1738 returned. Walpole’s mettle was weighed against Vernon’s and found wanting. Argyll wondered, “For God’s Sake, what has been done, on any Hand, but what Admiral *Vernon* hath done, and his Actions and Success is entirely owing to his own personal Bravery...?”<sup>162</sup>

Viewed through the prism of Walpole’s own character flaws and policy failings, the disastrous conduct of war in the West Indies convinced many that the prime minister had to go. Vernon himself spoke forcefully about the need for ministerial change. “[I] am fully convinced,”

---

<sup>159</sup> Argyll, *The D[uke] of Ar[gy]le’s letter to the Right Honourable Sir [Robert Walpole]*, 17.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>161</sup> “A New Ballad,” in *Vernon’s glory*, 14.

<sup>162</sup> Argyll, *The D[uke] of Ar[gy]le’s letter to the Right Honourable Sir [Robert Walpole]*, 17.

he said in 1740, “that no Acquisitions here or else where, either of Fame, Wealth, or Dominion, are equal to the removing the Source of all our Mischiefs at Home [i.e., Walpole]... To be instrumental to this great Cure, Gentlemen, I should prefer to all the Wealth this mighty Continent can boast, to all the Glory that ever Commander won.”<sup>163</sup> Vernon’s actions spoke more loudly than his words. The Porto Bello victory, and even the failures at Cartagena, offered the opposition both “in and out of doors” the opportunity to politicize Vernon’s widespread popularity. By contrasting Walpole’s history of pacifism and cowardice with Vernon’s bravery and zeal, the opposition appealed to a nascent sense of British identity connected to mercantile success and naval prowess. Vernon was compelling precisely because he reflected the idealized values of courage, honesty, and boldness that opposition leaders agreed were defining elements of Britain’s national character. He was, in effect, the anti-Walpole. The opposition’s deployment of Vernon’s popularity was a played a critical role in the politicization of Britishness in the 1740s.

After a series of embarrassing votes that demonstrated the extent to which Walpole’s parliamentary support had eroded, he finally resigned in February 1742. In the words of William Coxe, an Anglican minister and historian who published a biography of the first prime minister in 1798, Walpole “retired unwillingly and slowly: no shipwrecked pilot ever clung to the rudder of a sinking vessel with greater pertinacity than he did the helm of the state; he did not relinquish his post until he was driven from it by the desertion of his followers and the clamours of the public.”<sup>164</sup> The ship of state was an apt metaphor; Vernon’s six ships had not only captured Porto

---

<sup>163</sup> Vernon, *A second genuine speech*, 17.

<sup>164</sup> Quoted in *The Parliamentary History of England*, vol. XII, 405.

Bello, but also set Walpole adrift. In the words of one poet, “Fill then to *Vernon’s* Health a Glass,/ And let Sir R[ober]t kiss mine A[r]se!”<sup>165</sup>

---

<sup>165</sup> “A New Ballad,” in *Vernon’s glory*, 14.

## Vernon's Glory: "Publick spirit," masculinity and Britishness after Porto Bello

In 1743, Augustine Washington died, leaving his Virginia plantation to his eldest son Lawrence Washington. Lawrence, a captain of provincial forces, had recently returned from serving in the Caribbean during the War of Jenkins' Ear. He renamed the plantation "Mount Vernon" in honor of his commanding officer, Vice-Admiral Edward Vernon. Washington evidently maintained a high opinion of Vernon, in spite of his firsthand participation in the disastrous Cartagena campaign (1740-43).<sup>166</sup> In 1745, Thomas Scott, an Ipswich minister, called for the admiral's aid in preventing a Jacobite invasion, dubbing Vernon "faithful, vigilant, and brave...born a tot'ring Land to save."<sup>167</sup> Though Vernon's Western Squadron prevented a French invasion, the admiral watched from the sidelines as Jacobite armies advanced south in England—he had resigned his command in protest in December 1745 when the Admiralty denied him the title of Commander-in-Chief.<sup>168</sup> In 1758, during the Seven Years' War, an "impartial hand" penned a hagiography of Admiral Vernon, whose death the year before was deemed "a real loss to the nation, when engaged in [the present] war with France."<sup>169</sup> What service Vernon might have provided had he lived is unclear, as the admiral was dismissed from the navy in 1746 for publically criticizing the Admiralty. Admiral Vernon's enduring popularity is not easily explained.

---

<sup>166</sup> "Release from Lawrence Washington, 17 June 1752," *The Papers of George Washington: Digital Edition*, (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2008), <<http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/default.xqy?keys=GEWN-print-02-01-02-0022>>. When future President George Washington inherited the estate in 1752, he chose to retain the plantation's name.

<sup>167</sup> Thomas Scott, "England's danger and duty, represented in a copy of verses on the present rebellion in Scotland. Inscribed to the Honourable Edward Vernon, Esq; Admiral of the White," London, 1745. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3306828259), i.

<sup>168</sup> Richard Harding, "Edward Vernon, 1684-1757," in Peter Le Fevre and Richard Harding, ed., *Precursors of Nelson: British Admirals of the Eighteenth Century*, (London: Chatham Publishing, 2000), 151-176, 173.

<sup>169</sup> *The life of Admiral Vernon. By an impartial hand*, London, 1758. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3302698137), 250.

Admiral Vernon's capture of Porto Bello in 1739, the opening battle in the War of Jenkins' Ear (1739-1748), made him an instant celebrity. The long-awaited war against Spain began with a spectacular British naval victory, and the British public celebrated their hero accordingly. But Vernon's early success gave way to a series of disastrous failures. Repeated attempts to capture Cartagena, the strategic key to New Spain, were derailed by disease and inter-service rivalry. In 1742, Vernon returned to Britain to justify his failures, insisting that "neither the Guilt, or Blame [for the failed campaign], is to be laid at my door."<sup>170</sup> He need not have worried. Public support for Vernon remained high, especially because his Porto Bello victory played a central role in the fall of Sir Robert Walpole's ministry.<sup>171</sup> Vernon may have been a capable naval officer, but he was a loose cannon on land who alienated politicians across party lines, an outspoken activist for his Royal Navy brothers-in-arms, and a constant critic of the Admiralty's decisions. Yet in spite of his professional failures, political missteps, and forced retirement from public life, Vernon's shadow loomed large in the 1740s.

### **British "national" identity before 1757: the case of Vernon**

Much historical work has recently explored the development of British national identity in the eighteenth century. While the majority of this literature is focused on political figures, Gerald Newman's *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830* and Linda Colley's *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* offer interesting possibilities for analyzing a diverse array of cultural texts.<sup>172</sup> While few scholars would now accept that what Newman studied is "nationalism," his identification of "an intellectual awakening, a growing concern over

---

<sup>170</sup>Edward Vernon, *A second genuine speech, deliver'd by Adm[ira]l V[ernon]n, on board the Carolina, to the officers of the navy, immediately after the salley from Fort St. Lazara*, London, 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3310320390), 16.

<sup>171</sup> Discussed in Chapter 1.

<sup>172</sup> Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987).; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1830*. Revised edition. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, revised edition, 2009).

alien manners and morals, concepts of contamination, disintegration, and decline, and elements of caution, confusion, and ambivalence,” offers a helpful framework to assess the emergence of British national identity. Additionally, Linda Colley’s three main building blocks of British national identity—Protestantism, trade, and the “peripheries”—are, in some measure, the positive restatement of the absences and anxieties Newman identifies. Whether formulated positively or negatively, both Newman and Colley demonstrate that issues of manners, gender-appropriate behavior, and public virtue were debated elements of “Britishness” in the years of imperial development from the Seven Years’ War to the Napoleonic Wars.

Both Newman and Colley argue that the Seven Years’ War (1757-1763) was a turning point for the development of British national identity. This periodization works very well from an organizational perspective, as the Seven Years’ War certainly was a critically important juncture for the growth of Britain’s empire, and provides a nice starting point for a consideration of the last half of the century. However, the Seven Years’ War was not the original testing ground of a nascent British national character, nor was it the first time that the country’s perceived moral failings, such as corruption, foreign interference, male effeminacy, or cowardice were debated in the public sphere. These concerns did not emerge as a consequence of a global war; rather, the elements identified by Newman and Colley as the foundation of “British” identity were debated and assessed earlier, and with particular urgency during the 1730s and 1740s.

There is much evidence to suggest that anxiety about the cultural meaning of Britishness had deep roots in the early eighteenth century, especially during the “Robinocracy.” If, as many historians argue, the formation of British national identity in the eighteenth century emerged in the context of active warfare, further explanation is clearly necessary. Concerns about a

perceived decline in the morality of public figures, threats to Protestantism, or the cultural tastes of the aristocracy for foreign things, for instance, were common themes in texts published during the 1730s and 1740s. While the rhetoric of restoring national honor and bellicose calls for war of the late 1730s were part of the struggle to unseat Sir Robert Walpole, they were also evidence of a larger cultural debate that was not easily resolved. Walpole's resignation did not, as opposition figures hoped, bring an end to political corruption, nor did it reawaken a public commitment to Protestant morality. The incomplete resolution of these concerns in the 1730s and 1740s explains why these issues of national identity continued to figure so prominently post-1756.

The ideal of Britishness that emerged after the Seven Years' War developed in part from an earlier model. The critical figure who shaped these mid-century cultural debates was also a key player in the fall of the Walpole ministry: Admiral Edward Vernon. Vernon's capture of Porto Bello in 1739 was not only a long-awaited naval victory; it was also a demonstration of values on which many Britons prided themselves: courage, martial prowess, cultural superiority to the continental powers, and the defense of trade. To Britons who had failed to find heroes who embodied "national" values in the usual places—monarch, nobles, or politicians—Vernon emerged as the personification of neglected ideals.

Though the concept of a national hero in the modern sense is inextricably linked to Bonaparte, it would be wrong to suggest that heroism expressing emergent or debated national ideals was a purely Romantic development. As Geoffrey Cubitt argues in *Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives*, popular heroes are "products of the imaginative labour through which societies and groups define and articulate their values and assumptions, and through which individuals within those societies or groups establish their participation in larger social or

cultural identities.”<sup>173</sup> Vernon’s heroic status is all the more noteworthy because of his popularity in a time considered by some literary scholars to be “an age without a Hero.”<sup>174</sup>

Vernon after Porto Bello was a hero, but he was also a celebrity. Though the concept of “celebrity” is most often associated with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, recent historical work has reconsidered how celebrities influenced and reflected society in the eighteenth century.<sup>175</sup> There is much evidence that “the publicity apparatus that we associate with celebrity today can be seen as a natural outgrowth of the first experiments with mass media in the early modern era.”<sup>176</sup> Though most of this research has pertained to self-evidently “cultural” figures such as actors, artists, and authors, there is nothing that precludes these historical methods from being applied to a wider array of famous people.<sup>177</sup> The emergence of mass-media and consumer culture in early eighteenth-century Britain both facilitated the widespread dissemination of information about important persons and created a public space for celebration, discussion, and debate.

Vernon’s celebrity status reflected Britain’s growing consumer culture, but it was also made possible by it. Inexpensive publications and souvenirs allowed a variety of people from different social classes to become active participants in Vernon’s celebrity. Some scholars have noted that early eighteenth century Britain’s developing print and consumer culture facilitated

---

<sup>173</sup> Geoffrey Cubitt, “Introduction,” in *Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives*, Geoffrey Cubitt and Allen Warren, ed., (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>174</sup> James William Johnson, “England, 1660-1800: An Age without a Hero?” in Robert Folkenflik, ed., *The English Hero, 1660-1800*, (West Brunswick, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1982), 25-34. For discussion of how other literary scholars have approached this point, see Introduction.

<sup>175</sup> Baerbel Czennia, ed., *Celebrity: The Idiom of the Modern Era*, (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 2013), Introduction, i-xlii.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>177</sup> For a thorough overview of the scope and methods of recent studies of celebrity in the eighteenth century, see Cheryl Wanko, “Celebrity Studies in the Long Eighteenth Century: An Interdisciplinary Overview,” *Literature Compass*, vol. 8 no. 3, (2011), 351-362.

the production of Vernon commemoratives, but few have connected this with national identity more broadly.<sup>178</sup> Though Vernon's popularity was sometimes stoked by opposition politicians, his victory over a foreign enemy gave him a national appeal that transcended political boundaries. Vernon-themed products enabled self-association with the "national" traits that authors and manufacturers argued the admiral represented. The commercial vehicle of Vernon's popularity therefore helps us understand why as well as how he became widely popular.

The mythologized Vernon that many of his contemporaries admired and celebrated bears little resemblance to the admiral's real record of naval defeats, inflammatory political outbursts, and eventual professional disgrace. However, Vernon's supporters successfully built on the spontaneous celebration of the Porto Bello victory to argue that the admiral's courage, martial prowess, defense of trade, and aggressive masculinity reasserted British values in a time that many believed lacked public figures worthy of imitation. Motivated both by opposition politics and broader cultural anxiety, Vernon's supporters argued that the admiral was the personification of their supposedly neglected national ideals and a new model for "Britishness." The rise of a vibrant consumer economy in early eighteenth-century Britain made it possible for Vernon's admirers to widely disseminate this interpretation. Through the purchase of mass-produced commemorative texts and manufactures, middling-class Britons were invited to align themselves with Vernon, and by extension with the national values of trade, courage, and manliness that he personally defended. Vernon's prominence in popular culture during the 1740s and 1750s therefore offers an excellent case for examining mid-century Britons' aspirations about their ideal selves. Vernon remained a compelling heroic figure because he reflected prevailing ideas

---

<sup>178</sup> This issue is raised in relation to popular politics in Gerald Jordan and Nicholas Rogers, "Admirals as Heroes: Patriotism and Liberty in Hanoverian England," *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Jul., 1989), 201-224.

about “publick spirit” in a mercantile age and expressed authentic and aggressive masculinity in a “national” context.

### **In search of “publick spirit”**

Britain in the early eighteenth century had few inspiring public figures. The king, court, and ministry were increasingly removed from the social and economic changes Britain had experienced since the 1690s. The extraordinary growth of the mercantile empire and the profusion of print and consumer culture made particularly evident the perceived shortcomings of traditional national models. As Paul Langford argues in *A Polite and Commercial People*, the middling classes “increasingly decided the framework of debate and the terms of tenure on which the traditional politics of monarchy and aristocracy were conducted.”<sup>179</sup> The cultural consequences of a new commercial society were a subject of widespread debate. Some argued that the mercantile realm offered new possibilities for personal virtue that were not necessarily predicated on land ownership, while detractors cautioned that the influence of the middling classes might compromise traditional notions of gender, patronage relationships, and social stability.<sup>180</sup>

Complaints frequently focused on the foreign-born dynasty, aristocrats with extravagant lifestyles, and the corrupt Walpole ministry.<sup>181</sup> However, public disappointment with these traditional public exemplars rarely implied outright disloyalty to established authority.<sup>182</sup> Rather, the authors of numerous published texts from the early eighteenth century criticized their leaders by evoking a “publick spirit”—stressing the importance of liberty, the vigorous defense of the

---

<sup>179</sup> Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial people: England, 1727-1783*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 68.

<sup>180</sup> Martin Myrone, *Bodybuilding: reforming masculinities in British art 1750-1810*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 3.

<sup>181</sup> Newman, *Rise of English Nationalism*, 63-84.

<sup>182</sup> With the notable exception of Jacobites, who are outside of the scope of this paper.

mercantile empire, and the martial triumphs of their ancestors. Though much has been made of John Brown's famous condemnation of cultural degeneracy in *Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Time* (1757), the concept of a "public spirit" in need of rehabilitation was common in texts from the 1730s and 1740s.<sup>183</sup> The impact of these lesser-known debates over the meaning of Britishness in public life has rarely been explored by historians, especially in the context of heroic figures.

"Publick spirit," in many texts, was the sustaining force of a mercantile nation and the antidote to corruption. Though the term eluded specific definition, many writers suggested that public spirit was intimately caught up in protecting liberty, the growth of enterprise, and acting in the light of loosely-defined past national achievements. "There is no Cure for [corruption], or the like, without a *Publick Spirit* can come in some Measure be restor'd to this Kingdom, and brought more in Fashion, than it has been of late Years;" wrote Thomas Baston in *Observations on trade and a publick spirit* (1732), "the want of which is the true Cause of all our Misfortunes."<sup>184</sup> A ballad written in the midst of the Excise Crisis in 1733, "The Briton's Speech to Sir Politick" reproached the government for its aggressive promotion of the new tax scheme, which was widely believed to unfairly burden those involved in commerce:

What shall I say to you, ye hireling Band!/  
Do ye, for Patriots of your *Country* strand?/  
Are ye the *Guardians* of the *British* Isle,/ Whose Hands, *impure* Gold-Offerings

---

<sup>183</sup> Newman, *Rise of English Nationalism*, 63-77; see also Robert Romani, *National Character and Public Spirit in Britain and France, 1750-1914*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 160-163.

<sup>184</sup> Thomas Baston, *Observations on trade, and a publick spirit. and a Publick Spirit. Shewing, I. That all trade ought to be in common, and the Danger of Monopolies. II. That the Abuse of it, by Publick Companies, was the Origin of Stock-Jobbing. III. Of the Deceits arising from the Encouragement of Projectors, Lotteries, and other Cheats. IV. Of the general Benefit of Trade. V. Of the Selling of Places, Corruptions in Elections of Members, in the Law, in the Commission of the Peace, and Select Vestries. VI. The advantages of a publick spirit, and wherein it consists. Written by Thomas Baston, Esq, London, 1732. Eighteenth Century Collections Online, Gale, (CW3305351510), 51-52.*

defile!/. . . Not so, your Great Forefathers *Pensions* sought,/ When against *Arbitrary* Kings they fought,/ And, *Liberty*, with Blood and Wounds, dear bought.”<sup>185</sup>

On a similar theme, “Britannicus” rallied his countrymen in a 1733 ballad, “Oh! Never let the Fervor of your Zeal/ Grow languid, to defend the *Common-weal*.”<sup>186</sup> Anxiety about a lack of public spirit or national feeling was not resolved with the failure of the 1733 excise scheme. *The livery man; or plain thoughts on public affairs*, published in 1740, warned that “there is nothing more common than to hear Complaints made of the Want of *Publick Spirit* in this Age. . . A *Publick Spirit* is the *Soul* of *Society*, and whenever it is lost, the *vital Heat* is extinguish’d. The outward Form of the *State* may indeed remain, yet is it no longer a *Body*, but a *Carcase*.”<sup>187</sup>

The lack of “publick spirit” seemed to originate at the top. The Hanoverians’ chief claim to the throne was their Protestantism, but they could hardly claim to be British in any meaningful sense. King George II, who succeeded his father on the throne in 1727, was by most accounts an uninspiring monarch. He was militarily undistinguished, excessively fond of his native Hanover, and largely ignorant of the English language.<sup>188</sup> George II made few attempts to endear himself to his subjects, patronizing German artists like Handel and frequently returning to Hanover for extended visits.<sup>189</sup> Many commentators in the popular press decried these continental excursions, which George undertook eleven times during his reign, as evidence of the king’s insufficient interest in his British dominions. The king’s protracted separations from his government also persuaded many who were sympathetic to the opposition that George was either uninvolved or

---

<sup>185</sup> “Britannicus,” “The sly subscription: on the Norfolk monarch, &c. To which is added, the Briton’s speech to Sir Politick,” London, 1733, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3305172103), 45.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47.

<sup>187</sup> *The livery-Man: or, plain thoughts on publick affairs. In which the present situation of things, some late writings concerning the liberty of the press, the general disposition of the people, the insults offered to the city of London, and the true nature and infallible characteristicks of publick spirit, in contradistinction to that of a faction, are consider’d and explain’d. Addressed to the lovers of truth and liberty*, London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3305703462), 1.

<sup>188</sup> Andrew C. Thompson, *George II: King and Elector*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), especially 97-126.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 114-116, 105-107.

uninterested in making British policy.<sup>190</sup> As Jeremy Black observes, “Looking at British politics through the prism of alleged ministerial corruption made Britain seem similar to Continental states, and this provided a context for domestic criticism of the Crown.”<sup>191</sup> The king’s strong support for prime minister Sir Robert Walpole also nettled those supportive of the parliamentary opposition.

Though it might be too much to assert, as Andrew C. Thompson does, that “George II needs to be rescued from the enormous condescension of Whig historiographical posterity,” he was probably not as inept, and certainly not as inimical to good governance, as his eighteenth-century critics made him out to be.<sup>192</sup> However, he had a well-earned reputation for being easily offended, rude, and prone to violent outbursts. He meddled personally in complex military matters (with questionable judgment), and he had little interest in the Royal Navy’s enormous untapped potential to be Britain’s premier fighting force. He enjoyed the pomp and parade of military ceremony but was often ambivalent when faced with potential international conflict.<sup>193</sup>

Jeremy Black argues that George II’s greatest contribution to Britain’s well-being during his reign was his lack of a clearly-defined political agenda.<sup>194</sup> However, many of his contemporaries wished for more active leadership from their king. When the king departed for Hanover in 1740, shortly after war was declared against Spain, one anonymous writer observed that “the [King’s] going to *Hanover* is disagreeable to the People; they could not have believ’d that His M[ajest]y would have left His *British* Dominions in a Time of War, and have left us to

---

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 86-94.

<sup>191</sup> Jeremy Black, *George II: Puppet of the Politicians?*, (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2007), 27-28.

<sup>192</sup> Thompson, *George II*, 3.

<sup>193</sup> Black, *George II*, 108-115.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 115.

have shifted [i.e., fended] for ourselves, as 'tis called.”<sup>195</sup> Though George II presided over a period of stability and growth, he also made it clear that Britain’s interests, if not of secondary importance to those of Hanover, demanded no special attention.

Britain’s aristocracy was hardly a better reflection of what many believed should be the national character by the 1730s.<sup>196</sup> British aristocrats appeared in dozens of plays, poems, novels, and essays of the early eighteenth century as idle, effeminate fops, easily influenced by foreign tastes, who were all too eager to neglect the martial pursuits that conferred nobility on their mythical ancestors. These criticisms sometimes had an origin in opposition political circles, though the gentle sort’s shortcomings were more often culturally construed. Britain’s aristocracy came to be represented, in art and literature, as out of touch with what many believed was nation’s special purpose: the growth and defense of a distinctively British Protestant mercantile empire. Critics zeroed in on what they perceived as some aristocrats’ effeminate tastes and behavior as symptom of their moral decline and practical irrelevance. Dror Wahrman’s so-called “gender panic” has been well documented in texts produced after 1750, but it had well-established roots earlier in the century.<sup>197</sup>

For example, *The raree show, or the fox trap’d*, was a 1739 play by Joseph Peterson that went through multiple editions in the 1740s. It offers a withering critique of British aristocrats that is representative of the period’s dramatic and creative literature.<sup>198</sup> The cast of characters

---

<sup>195</sup> J.G., *The consequences of His Majesty's journey to Hanover, at this critical juncture. Considered in a letter from a Member of Parliament in town, to a noble duke in the country: to which is added, the D-ke of A---le's speech upon the state of the nation: with the reply to it, by Lord \*\*\*\*\**, London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3305346358), 5.

<sup>196</sup> Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism*, 63-84.

<sup>197</sup> Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self : Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-century England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), especially Chapter 2, “Gender Identities and the Limits of Cultural History,” 45-82.

<sup>198</sup> Joseph Peterson, *The raree show: or, the fox trap't. An opera. Written by Joseph Peterson, comedian. The second edition, with alterations*, London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3312923507).

includes the oafish “Squire *Timothy*, Admirer of Dogs and Horses” and “Sir *Fopling Conceit*, a Coxcomb, that thinks every Woman admires him that sees him.” Manly and Belamour, the heroes of the story, are distinguished by their gentlemanly conduct, especially toward women, rather than their inherited fortune or cutting-edge style. The “coxcomb” was a frequent character in plays of the early eighteenth century, exemplified by his unseemly interest in fashion, his unmanliness, and his inability to win the affections of play’s heroine. The 1740 *Companion to the Theatre... Containing the Stories of the Most Celebrated Dramatic Pieces* highlights nearly a dozen popular plays from the Restoration and early eighteenth century in which an effeminate male aristocrat plays a starring role—a significant majority of the collection, excluding perennial favorites from Shakespeare.<sup>199</sup> The popularity of plays lampooning the behavior of British aristocrats reflects the attitudes of many middling-class Britons about their “betters”—that their foreign tastes, idle behavior, avoidance of military service, and effeminacy were signs of cultural decline. The characters also suggest that they were no longer thought to be relevant as arbiters of British behavior, taste, or identity.

Many early eighteenth-century Britons believed that the aristocracy had been irreparably corrupted by the bad influences of the French and Italian fashions they enthusiastically patronized. These continental tastes, communicating baroque extravagance, excessive vanity, and an unmanly lack of seriousness, were seen as incompatible with British character. The poet of “The Modern *Englishman*” (1739) complained, “Such Madness reigns thro’ each revolving

---

<sup>199</sup> *A Companion to the Theatre: Or, a Key to the Play. Containing the Stories of the Most Celebrated Dramatick Pieces. The Plan, Character, and Design of each Performance is Exhibited and Explain’d; with Remarks on Each Representation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3311747118). Other works of drama from the period exploring similar themes include Daniel Bellamy, *The Perjur’d Devotee; or, the Force of Love*, in *The dramatic pieces, and other miscellaneous works in prose and verse, of D. Bellamy, formerly of St. John’s College, Oxford*, London, 1739. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3310219255) and Henry Carey, *The honest Yorkshire-man: A ballad-farce*, London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, (CB3326462663).

Moon, And *Britons* emulate the *French* Buffoon. Oaths, Clamour, Nonsense, Blasphemy, aloud, Proclaim the Age one vast Atheistic Croud! Whose dreadful Van illustrious Heroes grace, Renown'd for Powder, Perriwiggs, and Lace.”<sup>200</sup> William Hogarth, whose satirical paintings and prints, notably *The Rake's Progress*, reflected discontent among artists with the behavior and tastes of the aristocracy, raged in 1737 against the “connoisseurs” who heeded foreign artists that “depreciate every English work... and fix on us poor Englishmen the character of *universal dupes*.”<sup>201</sup> Hogarth's concern may have been based on his own bottom line, but he was not alone in his belief that Britain's elites were being “duped” by imported fashions.

Special disdain was reserved for the wildly popular gender-bending Italian stars of baroque opera, the *castrati*. The undisputed favorite, Carlo Broschi, better known as Farinelli, performed in many of Handel's groundbreaking Italian operas in London between 1720 and 1735. The performances earned the unqualified applause of high society's taste-makers and not a few billet-doux from aristocratic ladies, for whom the obvious lack of *coglioni* was evidently not a deal-breaker.<sup>202</sup> As Paul Whitehead, a poet, complained in 1739, “Who blushes not to see a C[owper]'s Heir/ Turn Slave to Sound, and languish for a Play'r?” An accompanying footnote explained that the “Play'r” in question was “that living Witness of the Folly, Extravagance and Depravity of the *English*, *Farinello*, who is now at the Court of *Spain* triumphing in the Spoils of

---

<sup>200</sup> “The Modern *Englishman*. A Satire, by A.P., Esq;,” London, 1739. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale (CB3326781703), 12. Atheism, regarded as another continental import, was also a pressing cultural and moral concern at the time of Porto Bello. For example, appearing in the “Register of Books in March [1740]” in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the same issue which brought the news of Porto Bello, is *The remarkable life of Uriel Acosta*, a seventeenth-century atheist, whose unorthodox religious notions were rebutted for the benefit of the reader by one of his Anglican contemporaries. See *The remarkable life of Uriel Acosta, an eminent freethinker; With his reasons for rejecting all Revealed Religion. To which is added, Mr. Limborch's defence of Christianity, in answer to Acosta's objections: with an introduction; containing, memoirs of Mr. Limborch's life, and an Account of his Writings*, London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3320674721).

<sup>201</sup> Quoted in Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism*, 64.

<sup>202</sup> Angus Heriot, *The Castrati in Opera*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1956), 95-100.

our Nobility, as their Pyrates are in those of our injur'd Mechants.”<sup>203</sup> Whitehead's somewhat unexpected comparison of the beguiling effect of the castrato and Britain's apparent inability to defend her trade from Spanish attacks is revealing. The invasion of high society with continental cultural crazes that made a mockery of masculinity prepared the way for literal attacks on British merchants.

Whitehead was not alone in his belief that the appeal of unmanly foreign tastes among elites contributed to British weakness. Writers often argued that tastes for the foreign were a menace to Britain's well-being. Continental fashions supposedly withered the hereditary aristocracy's traditional martial character and therefore threatened the nation's security. Henry Fielding's "Captain Vinegar" serial column, appearing in *The Champion* in 1740, satirized the foreign predilections of many aristocrats, remarking of "those *Exotics* transplanted hither from *France*," that "I cannot think 'em the natural Product of our *manly Isle*." <sup>204</sup> Paul Whitehead, in the 1739 poem "Manners: A Satire," decried, "MARK our bright Youths how gallant and how gay,/ Fresh plum'd and powdr'd in Review array. Unspol'd each Feature by the martial Scar..." <sup>205</sup> Homosexuality was also sometimes implied. Tobias Smollett carried criticism of aristocratic dandies a hilarious step farther in his novel *Roderick Random* (1748) with "Captain Whiffle," an well-to-do naval commander whose over-the-top sartorial choices, French valet, and debilitating hypochondria "did not prepossess the ship's company in his favour... [giving] scandal an opportunity to be very busy with his character and accusing him of maintaining a correspondence with the surgeon not fit to be named." <sup>206</sup> And Captain Edward Vernon, a real-life

---

<sup>203</sup> Paul Whitehead, "Manners. A Satire. By Mr. Whitehead," London, 1739. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale (CW3317261816), 8.

<sup>204</sup> Henry Fielding, *The champion: containing a series of papers, humourous, moral, political, and critical. To each of which is added, A proper Index to the Times*. Vol. 2, London 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3310895042), 144.

<sup>205</sup> Whitehead, "Manners," 14.

<sup>206</sup> Tobias Smollett, *Roderick Random*, Ernest Rhys, ed., (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1927), 200.

naval officer, wondered pointedly in the House of Commons in 1732, “Do we think, because a fellow is a beau, and dresses himself up with powder and essences, that therefore he has more courage than another man? I suspect there are many of those fine gentlemen, who are afraid of letting the wind blow upon them, for fear of blowing the powder out of their wigs, that could not, perhaps bear the smell of gunpowder.”<sup>207</sup> Vernon was well positioned to criticize cowardly, foppish aristocrats because he was both from an aristocratic background and a seasoned naval veteran.

It was not a stretch to conflate the flamboyant foreign style many British aristocrats adopted with male effeminacy and impotence, and many made the connection. This anxiety often construed luxurious continental tastes as the antithesis of indigenous English “plainness.”<sup>208</sup> Peterson’s protagonist “Manly” in *The raree show, or the fox trap’d* introduces “Sir Fopling Conceit” with the devastating observation, “I know he has Vanity enough to promise himself Success with half the Ladies in town; and yet has not Wit enough to subdue an Orange Wench [prostitute], who is any Man’s Meat for a Tester. Pshaw! There’s no Danger in such a Coxcomb.”<sup>209</sup> Fielding’s “Captain Vinegar” took up a similar theme in the column of 8 April 1740: “The Conversation of last Night turn’d upon the Degeneracy, Luxury, and *Effeminacy* of the present Time.”<sup>210</sup> The narrator describes a dream in which he imagines, “Such of the *Beau-Monde*, as are commonly taken to be Men, being tir’d with the *impertinent Remarks* and the

---

<sup>207</sup> *Cobbett’s Parliamentary history of England*, Volume 8, London, 1809-1820. *Making of the Modern World*, Gale, (U3607836584), 949.

<sup>208</sup> See Paul Langford, *Englishness Identified: Manners and Character, 1650-1850*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 85-92. However, the link between fears of effeminacy and xenophobia is most often explored by historians in relation to John Brown’s *Elements* (1757). For representative examples, see Newman, *Rise of English Nationalism*, 80-84; Conrad Brunstrom, “‘Be Male and Female Still’: An ABC of Hyperbolic Masculinity in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Presenting Gender: Changing Sex in Early-Modern Culture*, Chris Mounsey, ed., (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2001), 40-41.

<sup>209</sup> Joseph Peterson, *The raree show: or, the fox trap’t. An opera. Written by Joseph Peterson, comedian. The second edition, with alterations*, London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3312923507), 2.

<sup>210</sup> Fielding, *The champion*, 80.

frequent interruption, to their *Self-Admiration*, that they met with from *rude, masculine Creatures* of frightful *English Breeding*, have lately come to a Resolution to constitute a *Society of Coxcombs*, and have had several Meetings for that Purpose...”<sup>211</sup> In order to pick a president, they submit to being judged by ladies. “As soon as we ent’red the the Court of Judicature,” the narrator continues,

I could not help fancying my self in one of the Drawing-Rooms of one of our *friendly [continental] Allies*, by the Mien and Dress of the *Petit-Maitres* present, but was quickly undeceive’d by the following loud Whispers in *English—Teaz’d with Billets—She’s so fond—Dying for me—Cuckold the Alderman—My Amour with the Countess of—Her Grace has capitulated, &c.*— I made what haste I could thro’ the Crowd to get within the Bar, being surfeited with their fulsome Airs, Congees, and Vanity, and almost stifled with the nauseous Effluvia of *offensive Sweets*.<sup>212</sup>

After assessing the competitors, the ladies conclude that “every Pretender to the Dignity in Question was equally qualify’d for the first Honours of the Chair; that the Virgins they debauch’d were still Virgins for them; for that the insipid Things were all of the *Epicene Gender* [i.e., neutered].” The narrator then “immediately awak’d, and was glad to find that what I had heard and seen was only an *idle Dream of Fiction*, no ways *applicable to any of my Countrymen*.”<sup>213</sup>

Criticism of king, aristocracy, and government intensified in the late 1730s. King George II’s eldest son Frederick, the Prince of Wales, became estranged his father and the ministry by his strong support for the parliamentary opposition and by patronizing artists and writers who were critical of the government’s foreign policy. James Thomson’s 1740 masque *Alfred*, commissioned by Prince Frederick and performed at his private estate to avoid the censors, drew an obvious parallel between an ancient English king who was reluctant to make war on a foreign

---

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 86.

enemy and the peace diplomacy the prince's father pursued with Spain.<sup>214</sup> It was no accident that this play premiered in August 1740, well after Porto Bello. Far from being an outdated critique of decades of unsuccessful diplomacy, *Alfred* was a vehicle for claiming Vernon's victory for the opposition and asserting historical backing for the opposition's values and goals. As Oliver Cox explains, "*Alfred* embodied the opposition's interpretation of Porto Bello in masque form."<sup>215</sup> How the royal sovereign responded to his son's thinly veiled insult is unknown; however, in addition to being the vehicle of the wildly popular song "Rule Britannia," *Alfred* resonated with prevailing attitudes that the king's peace diplomacy was a sign of cowardly national leadership inconsistent with British character.

The play's message about effective leadership had a strongly gendered dimension underlying the relationship between courage, authentic Britishness, and masculinity. When King Alfred's wife Eltruda begs him to act against their enemies, he demurs and responds gloomily, "Eltruda, there, I am a woman too: I who should cheer, And shelter thee from every care."<sup>216</sup> When the royal couple is visited by visions of England's monarchs, Eltruda effuses of Elizabeth I, "O matchless queen! O glory of her sex! That great idea... fills my soul, And bids it glow beyond a woman's passions."<sup>217</sup> Though the queen needs no further persuasion, the king still wavers. He is finally inspired to act by the humble bravery of his low-born English comrades-in-arms: "Brave countryman, come on. 'Tis such as thou, Who from affection serve, and free-born zeal, To guard whate'er is dear and sacred to them, That are a king's best honor and defence."<sup>218</sup> The moral of the story was unmistakable—"I see true courage lags not in its course; It stands not

---

<sup>214</sup> Oliver J.W. Cox, "Frederick, Prince of Wales, and the First Performance of 'Rule, Britannia!'," *The Historical Journal*, vol. 56, iss. 4, December 2013, 931-954, 938-940.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 950.

<sup>216</sup> Thomson, *Alfred*, 25.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

weighing actions, with cold wisdom That borders near on cowardice.”<sup>219</sup> By the late 1730s, George II’s stalwart support of Sir Robert Walpole’s peace diplomacy was widely interpreted as cowardice rather than “wisdom.”

By the time *Alfred* premiered, its message had already been vindicated by a British naval victory over Spain. Admiral Edward Vernon had captured Porto Bello on 21 November 1739 and appeared poised for continued success in the West Indies. Britain’s “publick spirit,” national honor, and masculinity seemed restored.

### **The hero of Porto Bello**

News of the Porto Bello capture arrived in Britain in early March 1740. “For two or three Days past it has been reported, that Porto Bello was taken, and several rich Spanish Prizes,” reported the *Universal Spectator and Weekly Journal* from London on 8 March 1740, “so much good News, *all at once*, makes People doubt the Truth of it.”<sup>220</sup> The rumors were soon confirmed. *The London Gazette* broke the news of Vernon’s capture of Porto Bello a week later on 15 March. This matter-of-fact account was then embellished considerably by the *London Evening Post*, lauding the bravery and “humanity” of the “ENGLISH Conquerors.”<sup>221</sup> The government’s response was swift. Vernon was formally recognized in an address to the king, commemorative coins were struck in his honor at the Tower of London, and he was presented with “the Freedom of the City of London in a Gold Box of 100 Guineas Value.”<sup>222</sup>

---

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>220</sup> *Universal Spectator and Weekly Journal*, London, Saturday 8 March 1740, Iss. 596. *Burney Collection*, (Z2001497848).

<sup>221</sup> *London Gazette*, London, 11 March 1740- 15 March 1740, Iss. 7892. *Burney Collection*, (Z2000724435), 1-3.; *London Evening Post*, 13 March- 15 March 1740, Iss. 1925. *Burney Collection*, (Z2000640573).

<sup>222</sup> *London Evening Post*, 27 March 1740- 29 March 1740, Iss. 1931. *Burney Collection*, (Z2000640621).; *London Evening Post*, 15 April 1740- 17 April 1740, Iss. 1939. *Burney Collection*, (Z2000640711).; *London Evening Post*, 25 March 1740- 27 March 1740, Iss. 1930. *Burney Collection*, (Z2000640611), 2. The box itself is now in the National Maritime Museum’s collection: Jasper Cunst, *Freedom Box*, gold, 1740, (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK), PLT0187.

The public was delighted. Impromptu celebrations complete with bell-ringing, bonfires, drinking, singing, and theatrical entertainments broke out as the news traveled across Britain. As the *London Evening Post* reported from Newcastle on 22 March 1740,

On Tuesday Night last, after the agreeable News arrived here of Admiral Vernon's taking and reducing to his Obedience Porto-Bello, the same was taken great Notice of, by ringing of Bells at the several Churches all Night, and other Demonstrations of Joy, &c. amongst the rest we should not forget one very Particular, Mr. Andrew Swadele, a very loyal and weighty Subject (who weighs near 23 Stone) upon hearing the News, ordered a Bonfire, consisting of three large Hogshead and Tar-Barrels, to be burnt before his Door; at the same time came out with a large drawn Back-Sword in his Hand, and challeng'd the Kingdom of Spain, or any that would take that Kingdom's Part, to fight him; upon which was three loud Huzza's, Success to his Majesty's Arms by Sea and Land: After which he broached a Hogshead of Beer for the Populace, and so concluded the Night with loyal Healths.<sup>223</sup>

Vernon was also feted in more restrained fashion by "Persons of Quality" with lavish parties, such as one "sumptuous Entertainment" hosted by George Heathcote, one of the Sheriffs of London. The *piece-de-resistance* was a "Des[s]ert, ... remarkably fine, representing the Town and Castles of Porto Bello, and Admiral Vernon's Squadron before the same."<sup>224</sup>

Celebration of Vernon was widespread throughout the British Isles. Historian Kathleen Wilson has documented celebrations of the Porto Bello victory and Admiral Vernon's birthday in at least fifty-four towns and twenty-five counties in England and Scotland from 1740 to 1742.<sup>225</sup> Even these estimates probably present a limited picture of Vernon's popularity, as there is evidence of Vernon celebrations as far away as Ireland and North America. For example, a poem entitled "On Taking Porto Bello by Storm," in a poetry collection by Henry Jones

---

<sup>223</sup> *London Evening Post*, 25 March 1740- 27 March 1740, Iss. 1930. *Burney Collection*, (Z2000640610).

<sup>224</sup> *London Evening Post*, 8 April 1740- 10 April 1740, Iss. 1936. *Burney Collection*, (Z2000640679), 2.

<sup>225</sup> Kathleen Wilson, "Empire, Trade and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian Britain: The Case of Admiral Vernon," *Past & Present*, No. 121 (Nov., 1988), 74-109, 81.

published in 1749, is dedicated to a “Vernon Club” in Drogheda, Ireland.<sup>226</sup> Henry Fielding joked in *The Champion* in March 1740 that “‘Tis advis’d from *Dublin*, that Twelve Women in a Village near that City, being brought to Bed, in one Week, of six Boys and six Girls, the first were all christen’d by the Name of *Vernon*, and the last by that of *Porto Bello*.”<sup>227</sup> Though colonists in North America, who made up a significant part of Vernon’s naval and land forces, had a closer connected than ordinary Britons to the admiral’s failures in 1740-1742, at least some preserved a fond regard for the hero of Porto Bello—as previously described, Lawrence Washington named his estate “Mount Vernon” after the admiral upon his return to Virginia in 1743. It is also possible that some collectibles or celebratory publications were sold in colonial markets. The hero of Porto Bello remained a popular namesake after his death in 1757, probably because of Vernon’s association with the Washington plantation in Virginia. For example, According to local lore, Vernon, New Jersey borrow its name from the Washington estate.<sup>228</sup> The town of Hinsdale, Vermont was renamed Vernon to honor the admiral in 1802, allegedly at the particular request of Lavinia Hunt, the wife of Vermont’s lieutenant-governor.<sup>229</sup>

The press, popular writers, and booksellers also capitalized on the Vernon craze with commemorative writings, maps, and print images sold individually at affordable prices.<sup>230</sup>

---

<sup>226</sup> *London Evening Post*, 15 April 1740- 17 April 1740, Iss. 1939. *Burney Collection*, (Z2000640711).; Henry Jones, “On Taking Porto Bello by Storm. Inscib’d to the Vernon Club in Drogheda,” 189-191, in “Poems on Several Occasions. By Henry Jones,” London, 1749. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale (CW3313800284).

<sup>227</sup> Fielding, *The champion*. 220-221.

<sup>228</sup> Ronald J. Dupont, Jr., *Vernon 200--A Bicentennial History of the Township of Vernon, New Jersey: 1792-1992*, (The Friends of the Dorothy E. Henry Library, McAfee, NJ, 1992) , 53.

<sup>229</sup> Related with an unfortunate lack of corroborating evidence on the town’s website: Barbara Moseley, “About Vernon,” *Town of Vernon*, <http://www.vernonvt.org/index.php/about-vernon>.

<sup>230</sup> Examples of maps and prints include: *A Perspective view of ye Harbour, Castles & Town of Porto Bello... Vice Admiral Vernon... took the same on 22nd of November 1739... (with key)*, London, 21 April 1740, (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London), PAH7665.; J.C. Morris, *Puerto Bello [Map]*, 1740, (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London), G245:19/33.; Frederick Shantoon and George Forester, *Spanish Insolence chastized or a View of the Town Port & Forts of Porto Bello a----- by 6 of his Majesties Ships of War under the Command of*

Though the admiral remained in the West Indies until 1742, his wife Sarah Vernon was widely celebrated in his absence. As Elizabeth Robinson described in 1741, “All the ladies in Suffolk give place to Mrs. Vernon, even those of the highest rank.”<sup>231</sup> Fielding related in 1741 in his supplement to *The Champion*, the Index to the Times, that, “As an Instance of the Gratitude of the People of *England* for *real* and *apparent* Services, ‘tis worthy Remark, that the Lady of Admiral *Vernon*, coming to the Theatre one Night last Week, was receiv’d by the Audience with an universal Applause.”<sup>232</sup> Medals were struck with Vernon’s likeness, and he appeared on a diverse assortment of household items including ceramics, ink-pots, tobacco stoppers, and even ladies’ fans.<sup>233</sup> Vernon and Porto Bello became popular names for inns and public establishments.<sup>234</sup> Horace Walpole lamented in a letter to Horace Mann in March 1744 that “we have already lost seven millions of money and thirty thousand men in the Spanish war--and all the fruit of all this blood and treasure is the glory of having Admiral Vernon's head on alehouse signs!”<sup>235</sup>

The mania over Vernon had remarkable staying power. The admiral’s birthday became an annual cause for celebration, with the accompanying festivities, plays, and commemorative

---

*Vice Admiral Vernon on ye 21 November 1739*, 3 May 1740, (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London), PAF4571.

<sup>231</sup> Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, Letter, 1741?, in *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, With Some of the Letters of Her Correspondence*, vol. 1, (London, England: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1809),. 318.

<sup>232</sup> Fielding, *The champion*, 276-277.

<sup>233</sup> Over a year and a half after Porto Bello, Elizabeth Robinson Montagu reported seeing “Vernon, in gingerbread... [and] on a brass tobacco stopper” at a country fair, see Montagu, *Letters*, vol. 2, (London, England: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1809), 318.; Other examples include: F. Chassereau, *Fan*, paper and ivory, 1740, (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London), OBJ0421.; *Bowl [with inscription “The British Glory Rev: v:d. By Admiral Vernon. He took Porto Bello with six ships only Nov: ye: 22 1739”]*, stoneware, 1740 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), 34.165.60.; for a thorough overview of Vernon ceramics, see P.D. Gordon Pugh, *Naval Ceramics*, (Bath, UK: Lonsdale & Bartholomew, Ltd., 1971), 6-11.

<sup>234</sup> Wilson, “Empire, Trade and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian Britain,” 85, 88. William Hogarth’s famous painting *Canvassing for Votes* from his series “An Election” shows two drinkers sitting outside of a “Portobello” pub. See William Hogarth, *Canvassing for Votes*, 1755, Sir John Soane’s Museum, London, UK.

<sup>235</sup> Horace Walpole, “Letter to Horace Mann, March 22, 1744,” in *The Letters of Horace Walpole*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., vol. 2, 15. *Eighteenth Century: Electronic Edition*.

souvenirs.<sup>236</sup> The *London Evening Post* described the celebration of Vernon's birthday in London in 1740 as "almost incredible," describing how an effigy of the Spanish admiral "Don Blass was burnt in many Places; and at Chancery Lane End was a Pageant, where was depicted Admiral Vernon and a Spaniard on his Knees, offering him his Sword; a View of Port-Bello, and the Ships and Warlike Implements; over the Admiral's Head was wrote, *Venit, Vidit, Vicit*; and under him, *Vernon Semper Vivet*."<sup>237</sup> A year later, Elizabeth Robinson recounted in a letter to her sister, "Last night being the birthday of the noble Admiral Vernon, we drank his health at noon, and celebrated the same with a ball at night. The Gunfleet was danced in honour of him, and celebrated with extreme joy."<sup>238</sup> Horace Walpole, no adoring fan of the admiral, wrote to Horace Mann in November 1741 that "it is Admiral Vernon's birthday, and the city shops are full of favours, the streets of marrowbones and cleavers, and the night will be full of mobbing, bonfires, and lights!"<sup>239</sup> P. D. Gordon Pugh has documented examples of Porto Bello ceramics produced as late as 1743.<sup>240</sup> Even in 1758, nearly twenty years after Porto Bello, Horace Walpole joked that another celebrity birthday "has taken its place in our calendar next to Admiral Vernon's..."<sup>241</sup>

---

<sup>236</sup> Fireworks, bell-ringing, and bonfires were common: for representative examples see *London Evening Post*, 4 November 1740- 6 November 1740, Iss. 2021 (Z2000641554) and 2026 (Z2000641554); *Norwich Gazette*, 14 November 1741- 21 November 1741, Iss. 1833, *Burney Collection* (Z2000987927).

<sup>237</sup> *London Evening Post*, 11 November 1740- 31 November 1740, Iss. 2029. *Burney Collection*, (Z2000641593).

<sup>238</sup> Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, Letter, 1741?, in *Letters*, vol. 2 (London, England: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1809), 318.

<sup>239</sup> Horace Walpole, Letter to Horace Mann, Nov. 12, 1741, in *Letters*, vol. 1, 126. *Eighteenth Century: Electronic Edition*.

<sup>240</sup> Pugh, *Naval Ceramics*, 11.

<sup>241</sup> Horace Walpole, Letter to Horace Mann, Feb. 9, 1758, in *Letters*, vol. 4, 122. *Eighteenth Century: Electronic Edition*.

### **The making of a celebrity-hero**

Vernon's rise to fame coincided with the rapid expansion of print and consumer culture in Britain.<sup>242</sup> Those marketing print and manufactures to an increasingly consumption-oriented public embraced the hero of Porto Bello as a profitable subject. Vernon's popular status resulted in the production of celebratory writing and objects, and was in turn perpetuated by the profusion of commemoratives throughout the 1740s. Purchasing writings and souvenirs allowed Britons from various social backgrounds to become active participants in discussions of national identity that Vernon's popularity facilitated.<sup>243</sup> Of course, it is important to concede that, in the absence of corroborating evidence, determining what motivated individual consumers to purchase Vernon commemoratives is extremely difficult. However, the demand for writings and objects celebrating the hero of Porto Bello, especially those marketed to the middling classes, indicates that Vernon was a popular celebrity with whom many Britons wanted to signal public association.

The rapid development of consumer culture in eighteenth-century Britain is well-documented. Neil McKendrick has argued that consumer trends usually originated with the upper classes, and that their social inferiors adopted similar styles as a form of imitation.<sup>244</sup> Though aristocratic patrons remained the arbiters of taste for luxury items and fine art in the 1730s and -40s, it would be a mistake to claim that mass-produced goods aimed at those of more modest incomes merely aped the trends of their social betters. As Margaret Hunt argues, "Emulation was a real phenomenon. But it was not universal, and it was only one of a number of

---

<sup>242</sup> Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 9-33.

<sup>243</sup> Noted by James Davey, "The Naval Hero and British National Identity 1707-1750," in Duncan Redford, ed., *Maritime History and Identity: The Sea and Culture in the Modern World*, (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 13-37.

<sup>244</sup> Neil McKendrick, "The Consumer Revolution of Eighteenth-century England," in Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society*, 9-33.

impulses that animated middling people.”<sup>245</sup> Manufacturers who marketed goods to the middling classes were far more responsive to the demands and preferred styles of their more humble customer base than many historians have observed.<sup>246</sup> It is therefore possible to discern a distinct “style” of middling-class manufactures in the early eighteenth century. These producers were influenced by high-society taste, but chose to highlight different values and interests. Moreover, it would be strange indeed if the same Britons who accused their betters of neglecting the nation’s “publick spirit” uncritically accepted aristocratic styles that were allegedly antithetical to national values. The popularity of Vernon commemorative objects after Porto Bello, mass-manufactured for a middling-class market, is suggestive of a distinctive middling-sort consumer aesthetic. It would of course be wrong to suggest that Vernon lacked admirers among the upper classes, or that support of Vernon was part of some anachronistic class struggle. However, it is reasonable to surmise that, by purchasing Vernon commemoratives, middling-class Britons gave a mercantile flavor to developing national culture expressed in consumer manufactures, within reach of their budgets and capable of reflecting their ideals.

The Vernon “material culture” of the early 1740s was extraordinarily diverse. In addition to inexpensive print works such as ballads, essays, and maps, Vernon souvenirs that could be worn or publicly displayed were extremely popular. Scholars of material culture such as Mary Guyatt have noted that “there was a general willingness to ‘show one’s colours’ in eighteenth-century British society... since the Restoration an abundance of material wares had been made for individuals keen to communicate their allegiance with a particular politician or membership

---

<sup>245</sup>Margaret R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 5.

<sup>246</sup>Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 128-131.

of a private club.”<sup>247</sup> The admiral’s image appeared on hundreds of decorative medals, from inexpensive copper and brass examples with simple designs (for an example, see Fig. 1),<sup>248</sup> to luxurious silver medallions with fine detailing.<sup>249</sup> Many of these commemorative medals were mass-produced and widely available. For instance, the National Maritime Museum’s collection includes 185 surviving examples of Vernon medals from the years 1740 to 1742 alone. Vernon medals and buttons were worn and accessorized by both men and women, dressing up pendants, hair-pins, snuff-box lids, and jacket lapels.<sup>250</sup> By literally wearing their hero on their sleeves, Britons who donned Vernon medallions and buttons could participate in a fashionable trend and/or signal association with what the admiral and his capture of Porto Bello represented in their physical appearance.

Images of Vernon and Porto Bello also appeared on household objects and tablewares.<sup>251</sup> There are numerous examples of ceramics bearing images of Vernon and his ships at Porto Bello, including mugs (see Fig. 2),<sup>252</sup> bowls,<sup>253</sup> and dishes.<sup>254</sup> Though some of these objects were

<sup>247</sup> In the context of another popular eighteenth-century medallion with enormous cultural/political significance: Mary Guyatt, “The Wedgwood Slave Medallion: Values in Eighteenth-century Design,” *Journal of Design History*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2000), 83-105, 98.

<sup>248</sup> Examples in copper and brass include *Medal commemorating Admiral Edward Vernon and the capture of Porto Bello, 1739*, copper alloy, after 1739, (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London), MEC1031.; *Medal commemorating Vernon's attack on Cartagena, 1741*, brass, 1741, (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London), MEC1078. An interesting example directly contrasting Vernon and Walpole, as discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis is *Medal commemorating Admiral Vernon and Sir Robert Walpole*, copper alloy, after 1739, (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London), MEC0899. For buttons see Examples include *Button Commemorating Admiral Vernon*, copper alloy, (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London), MEC0892 and *Button Commemorating Admiral Vernon*, copper alloy, (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London), MEC0893.

<sup>249</sup> A representative example is *Medal commemorating Vernon's attack on Cartagena, 1741*, silver, 1741, (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London), MEC1041.

<sup>250</sup> For more on how they may have been worn in gender-appropriate ways, see Guyatt, “The Wedgwood Slave Medallion,” 97-98.

<sup>251</sup> Pugh, *Naval Ceramics*, 8-11.

<sup>252</sup> *Mug*, stoneware, 1740, (Victoria & Albert Museum, London), 414:942-1885.

<sup>253</sup> See *Bowl*, stoneware, 1740, (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London), AAA4355 or *Bowl [with inscription “The British Glory Rev: v:d. By Admiral Vernon. He took Porto Bello with six ships only Nov: ye: 22 1739”]*, stoneware, 1740 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), 34.165.60.

<sup>254</sup> Representative examples include Joseph Flower (maker), Richard Frank (producer), Redcliff Back pottery (manufacturer), *Dish*, earthenware, 1740, (Victoria & Albert Museum, London), C.426-1915.; *Plate [Porto Bello]*, earthenware, 1740, (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London), AAA4353.

functional, others were likely decorative. Made of domestic stoneware, delftware, and earthenware rather than more expensive porcelain and with varying levels of decoration, these objects were mass-produced and geared toward customers of middling-to-modest means.<sup>255</sup> The evident demand for these domestic objects also indicates the important role of women as eighteenth-century consumers.<sup>256</sup> The ritual of tea-drinking, for example, was important to women from a variety of backgrounds, from aristocratic ladies to the wives of artisans and tradesmen, because it was an opportunity to demonstrate the family's best manners and finest possessions. Hosting friends for tea could provide another avenue for Vernon's female admirers to signal their support for their hero in the form of Vernon-themed teapots (see Fig. 2) and related objects.<sup>257</sup> As Maxine Berg observes, "the middling classes turned social practices conveying elite deportment and gentility [like tea-drinking] to their own social assumptions."<sup>258</sup> It is important to recognize that a stoneware teapot alone cannot tell us whether its owner purchased it because he needed a new one, or because his wife wanted to signal her family's political preferences to those invited for tea, or simply because everyone else was getting in on the trend. However, Vernon commemoratives made for the middling classes may have enjoyed popularity because the admiral's capture of Porto Bello was widely interpreted as defending the colonial trade upon which so much of mercantile-class British prosperity depended. Vernon's appearance on mass-produced consumer products of the period correlates with the increasingly national, mercantile "social assumptions" of the middling classes that his supporters suggested he embodied.

---

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>256</sup> Recently surveyed and expanded on by Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 39-40.

<sup>257</sup> *Teapot [with inscription "Porto Bello Taken"]*, stoneware, 1740, (Victoria & Albert Museum, London), 414:984/&A-1885. An identical copy of the same model is in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich (AAA4354).

<sup>258</sup> Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 232.

### **“Publick spirit” personified**

Vernon’s status as a hero-celebrity was thus cemented and perpetuated by his popularity as the subject of consumer objects and manufactures purchased by the middling classes. Britons from a variety of social backgrounds spent money to read about him, accessorize their clothing with his image, and announce that he had taken Porto Bello “with Six Ships only” in their own homes in an attempt to fix meaning of Vernon’s achievements.

But what exactly were Britons celebrating when they commemorated Admiral Vernon’s birthday, bought “Porto Bello” medals and ceramics, or named their taverns after him? Vernon’s extraordinary popularity was not an aberrant mid-century fascination but a direct response to existing anxieties about “publick spirit” and British manhood. Vernon’s admirers believed that his capture of Porto Bello restored “publick spirit,” with its relation to the preoccupations of the growing middling classes: trade, national honor, and liberties. Vernon’s courageous battle heroics enabled his supporters to assert that the shortcomings of Britain’s traditional elites could be overcome by courage, virtue, selflessness, and virility.

Vernon’s capture of Porto Bello exemplified what many believed was the “publick spirit” of the nation. “Publick spirit” and trade were directly linked. Vernon emerged as the champion of this supposedly neglected ideal. The anonymous poem “He has kep’t his word” (1740) described the situation at the outbreak of war as

“While *Depredations*, by the *Spaniards* made,/ Most insolently injur’d *Albion’s* Trade:/  
By Trifling, and by long Harangues, and Jars,/ By *warlike Peaces*, and by *peaceful Wars*;  
/ Our Merchant suffer’d, and did long complain,/ Their *Commerce* ruin’d, still they sigh’d

in vain;<sup>259</sup>

“Vernon’s Glory,” also from 1740, imagined Vernon and his men responding to these provocations with, “Let’s avenge the Wrongs of BRITAIN,/ And support her *injur’d Trade*./ The *true Spirit* of the Nation.”<sup>260</sup> Poet Andrew Marvell Jr. also made the connection between what he dubbed “the nation’s sense” and defending trade in “Satirical and panegyrical instructions to Mr. William Hogarth, painter, on Admiral Vernon’s taking Porto Bello with six ships of war only” (1741), describing the mercantile response to Porto Bello:

*Augusta’s Sons of Commerce* grateful show,/ For many Wrongs reveng’d, how much they owe/ To one Day’s Onset, under VERNON’s Arms,/ Nor feel, for *injur’d Trade*, their old Alarms:/ They thank their KING for giving *such Defence*./ And such still hoping, speak the *Nation’s Sense*.<sup>261</sup>

Though Vernon’s capture of Porto Bello did not directly affect trade, it was widely interpreted as revenge for decades of Spanish abuse of British merchants.<sup>262</sup>

Vernon also answered the demands of “publick spirit” by restoring national honor. Many believed that Walpole’s diplomacy had reflected dishonorably on the nation because it suggested that the ministry was unequal to the task of aggressively defending Britain’s international reputation. In April 1740, just after news of Porto Bello arrived in Britain, the *Gentleman’s Magazine* printed an allegedly “true Copy of a Letter from a Sailor... in Admiral *Vernon’s* Squadron.” Though the letter was almost certainly fabricated, it expressed the widely-held view

---

<sup>259</sup> “He has kep’t his word. A poem. To perpetuate the memory of ... Porto Bello. Written by a gentleman on board that fleet,” London, 1740?. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3314200869), 5-6.

<sup>260</sup> “Vernon’s Glory: On the Taking of PORTO BELLO,” in *Vernon’s glory. Containing Fifteen New Songs, occasion’d by the Taking of Porto-Bello and Fort Chagre*, London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3315651016), 3.

<sup>261</sup> Andrew Marvell, Jr., “Satirical and panegyrical instructions to Mr. William Hogarth, painter, on Admiral Vernon’s taking Porto Bello with six ships of war only. By A. Marvell, junior,” London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3317324197), 19-20.

<sup>262</sup> For more on this point, see chapter 1 of this thesis.

that Vernon's zealous defense of British honor was an ideal example of manly "publick spirit." "Our dear co[c]k of an Admiral has true English blood in his vains an[d] thank god all our captins and officers have to a Man... I am and so is every Man of us resolved either to lose our lifes or conker our enemys. True British spirit revives..."<sup>263</sup> Charles Leslie, in *A New History of Jamaica* (1740), also considered Vernon "intirely well affected to the true Interest of *Britain*." According to Leslie, Vernon "thought the Glory and Honour of his Nation could be no ways retrieved but by a vigorous War... he soon made it evident, that *British* Courage, when free and unrestrained, was able to humble that haughty and insulting Enemy..."<sup>264</sup> Vernon's victory brought relief "That *BRITISH* Spirits still with *BRITONS* stay."<sup>265</sup>

Vernon was also celebrated for acting on behalf of freedom. While the modern reader might be apt to regard "freedom" as a mere patriotic banality, the word had a specific relationship to British identity in the eighteenth century. As Linda Colley notes, due to their unique constitutional history and representative institutions, "an extraordinary large number of Britons seem to have believed that, under God, they were peculiarly free and peculiarly prosperous."<sup>266</sup> The poet of "Vernon's Glory" (1740) made the connection between Vernon's courageous exploits and the renewed defense of Britain's heritage of freedom, asserting, "This Old Truth of *BRITONS* knowing, / *As they're Brave, they will be Free*."<sup>267</sup> Elizabeth Robinson made a similar observation in a letter to her friend the Duchess of Portland in April 1741. Robinson crafted an extended historical metaphor around a description of an old clock in her

---

<sup>263</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, vol. 10. (April), London, 1740. *Internet Library of Early Journals*, <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/ilej/>, 184.

<sup>264</sup> Charles Leslie, *A new history of Jamaica, from the earliest accounts, to the taking of Porto Bello by Vice-Admiral Vernon. In thirteen letters from a gentleman to his friend. ... With two maps, ...*, London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3302609815), 289.

<sup>265</sup> "He has kep't his word," 8.

<sup>266</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 33.

<sup>267</sup> "Vernon's Glory," in *Vernon's glory*, 5.

home that “struck the blessed minutes of the Reformation, Restoration, Abdication, Revolution, and Accession, and by its relation to time seems too to have some to eternity...” But Robinson cautioned, “of late days [the clock] has seldom stirred... it moves no more, but seems indeed to be founded upon steady and fixed principles.” The implication was subtle but clear; as Robinson explained, “I believe it will turn no more except it be for Vernon.”<sup>268</sup> Robinson saw Vernon’s victory within the context of Britain’s constitutional heritage— Vernon was a champion of Britain’s ancestral freedom in an unheroic age. Robinson and others recognized in Vernon the idealized British values of the Glorious Revolution that underpinned “Great [King] GEORGE’s Cause,/ Of Honour, Justice, Property, and Laws.”<sup>269</sup>

Writers of sermons and other religious texts also found much to celebrate in Vernon’s victory. As Linda Colley has observed, many eighteenth-century Britons saw themselves as people of a new Israel, a nation set apart by God for special greatness. Like their Biblical counterparts, they also had a weakness for corruption, idolatry, and immorality.<sup>270</sup> In a sermon preached in a provincial church in January 1740 entitled “National humiliation the best attonement for national sins,” Edmund Arnold inveighed against the “many Monsters of Iniquity ruling in the World; Sins which require a National Humiliation to deprecate their Guilt; Sins, which unless sincerely repented of, must end in National Perdition.”<sup>271</sup> Arnold warned,

---

<sup>268</sup> Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, Letter to Lady Margaret Cavendish-Harley Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, April 3, 1741 in *Letters*, vol. 1, (London: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1809), 304.

<sup>269</sup> “He has kep’t his word,” 5-6.

<sup>270</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 31.

<sup>271</sup> Edmund Arnold, *National humiliation the best attonement for national sins. A sermon Preached in the Parish Church of Mortlake, in the County of Surrey, On Wednesday, January 9th, 1739. Being the Day set a-part by Authority for a Publick Fast. By Edmund Arnold, L. L. B. Curate of the said Parish, and Fellow of New-College in Oxford*, London, 1739 [1740, NS]. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3323153039), 7. Because this sermon was published in January, under the rules of the Julian (Old Style) calendar, in which the new year begins on March 24, 9 January falls in 1739. However, because this thesis refers to dates in the Gregorian (New Style), in the interest of uniformity I have rendered it as 1740. It is unclear why this day was designated a national day of fasting, as war had been declared in October 1739.

If we are not sincere in every Act of Adoration to [God], and Repentance of our Sins, we may yet live to see another Face of Things amongst us; this Nation, in the State of *Babylon*, when fallen, *drinking of the Wine of the Wrath of God*, spoi'd of her Beauty, divested of her Strength; no longer the *Queen of Nations* array'd in all the Splendor of the Merchant, but sunk to the lowest Ebb of Shame and Widowhood, for her repeated Fornications. Consider this, and as ye love your Country, pray for it, that God *would be gracious to this Land, and turn away the Captivity of Jacob*.<sup>272</sup>

Vernon's victory seemed, to many, to restore the "Splendor of the Merchant" and to glorify God, in repentance of the nation's alleged moral transgressions. Later religious writers viewed Vernon's Porto Bello victory through a similar interpretive lens.<sup>273</sup> Vernon seemed to embody the qualities that Arnold suggested were the only hope of the nation's salvation.

Little is known of Vernon's personal faith. Frances Thynne Seymour, Duchess of Hartford (later Somerset) was "pleased to find [Vernon]...attributing his success not to his own bravery or conduct, but to the Giver of all victory,"<sup>274</sup> and Fielding remarked, probably humorously, in the *Champion* that "one of the Chaplains on Board the *Victorious Squadron*, has given his Friends to understand, that we owe the taking of *Porto Bello*... to [Vernon's] *Piety*."<sup>275</sup> Regardless, many writers of published sermons were eager to regard the admiral as a Davidic hero sent to rescue Britain's Israel from sin and iniquity. The anonymous author of a sermon commissioned for a public celebration of Vernon's birthday in 1741 represented Vernon as an Old Testament hero, standing up to corruption at home and demonstrating the character of a "true patriot."<sup>276</sup> "Is there not sufficient Ground for us to thank God," the writer asked, "who, in this Time of Decay of all Publick-Spirit, has yet left *Great Britain* one Man that can *speak* as

---

<sup>272</sup> Arnold, *National humiliation the best attonement for national sins*, 14.

<sup>273</sup> See also *The good patriot's security in the time of publick distress. A sermon from Isaiah xxxiii C. 15 and 16 V. preached on the 12th of Novem. 1740. Before A Society of Gentlemen, Met to Celebrate the birth of Admiral Vernon. And Published at their Request*. London, 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3323004412).

<sup>274</sup> Frances Thynne Seymour, Duchess of Somerset, Letter to Henrietta Louisa Jeffreys, Countess of Pomfret, May 27, 1741 in *Correspondence Between Frances, Countess of Hartford (afterwards Duchess of Somerset) and Henrietta Louisa, Countess of Pomfret, Between the Years 1738 and 1741*, vol. 3, Bingley, W., ed., (London, England: I. Gold for Richard Phillips, 1806), 325.

<sup>275</sup> Fielding, *The champion*, 25.

<sup>276</sup> *The good patriot's security in the time of publick distress*, 7.

well as he can *act*, and *act* as well as he can *speak*... for the Good of his Country?...Is there not a moral Obligation on every *Briton*, to honour as they can so good and generous a Benefactor, as Mr. *VERNON* has been to their Interests?”<sup>277</sup> Through his courageous actions, consonant with British Protestant values and self-image, Vernon contributed to the moral rehabilitation of the “publick spirit.”

Vernon’s victory also provided support for those arguing that “publick spirit” could only be restored if masculine boldness replaced feminine inaction. Many writers deployed vivid figurative language that suggested that Vernon had awoken Britain from the Walpolean influences of passivity and cowardice. The writer of “He has kep’t his word” (1740) described the years of Walpole’s pacific policy as a time “When *Britain*’s Lyon lull’d supinely lay,/ And in pacifick Sloth slept Fame away.”<sup>278</sup> Marvell’s “Instructions to... Hogarth” (1740) described how Vernon had “rais’d his Country’s drooping State”<sup>279</sup> and “Reviv’d [Britain’s] Honour, and restor’d her Fame;/ Again herself, rouz’d from her passive Sleep.”<sup>280</sup> The writer of “He has kep’t his word” (1740) also deployed the language of sleep: ‘Till wak’d by Wrongs *Britannia*’s Genius rose,/ Resolv’d to curb her bold audacious Foes:/ To stop proud Rapine’s foul felonious Course,/ Our gracious *Monarch* sends a *Naval* Force.”<sup>281</sup> And Lewis Jones, an amateur poet and student at Oxford, made an interestingly gendered observation in “Io! Triumphe!” (1741) when he lauded Vernon as “The first who wak’d/ Lethargic Thunders, and dislodg’d the Bombs/ That slept inglorious in their rusty Womb.”<sup>282</sup> Jones presented Walpole’s pacific diplomacy with Spain—

---

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 38

<sup>278</sup> “He has kep’t his word,” 5.

<sup>279</sup> Marvell, “Satirical and panegyrical instructions to Mr. William Hogarth,” 5.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>281</sup> “He has kep’t his word,” 5-6.

<sup>282</sup> Lewis Jones, “Io! Triumphe! A poem upon Admiral Vernon. By an Undergraduate of Jesus-College, Oxon,” London, 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3314478130), 5.

the “rusty Womb”—in deliberately feminized terms that suggested it was disreputable to the masculine character and “thunders” of a martial people.

### **The “Man of all Men”**

Lewis Jones was one of many writers who celebrated Vernon’s manliness. Vernon became an ideal for proper masculine Britishness precisely because his courage under fire reasserted the masculine characteristics Britons traditionally associated with their naval heritage. Though Vernon was hardly the first Briton to embody the connection between naval heroism and masculinity, Britons in the 1740s who celebrated Vernon’s manliness did so because his courage, bravery, and heroism were considered unique among male public figures of his time. Vernon’s masculine courage was also celebrated within larger discussions about remedies for male effeminacy, offering a possible solution to concerns about unmanly behavior and moral degeneracy that contributed to a lack of “publick spirit.”

Vernon became a male role model for the nation because of his courage in battle. Though it is not clear that the admiral’s safety was ever at risk during the bombardment of Porto Bello, his admiring contemporaries were eager to attribute his success to his personal bravery. Vernon’s manly courage assumed symbolic significance that could be applied to the nation as a whole. Charles Leslie in *A New History of Jamaica* (1740) expressed the often repeated view that Vernon “made it evident, that *British* Courage, when free and unrestrained, was able to humble that haughty and insulting Enemy.”<sup>283</sup> In Leslie’s view, Vernon’s valor enabled British courage to reassert itself in its natural form. Vernon also had a personal magnetism: the *Gentleman’s Magazine* in April 1740 published what was probably a fabricated letter from a sailor in Vernon’s squadron that explained, “we have taken Port Belo with such coridge [sic] and bravery

---

<sup>283</sup> Leslie, *A new history of Jamaica*, 289.

that I never saw before, for my own Part my heart was rais'd to the clouds and would ha scaled the Moon had a Spaniard ben there to come at [Vernon].<sup>284</sup> Whether the writer of this piece was actually a seaman or not is immaterial. Published works throughout the 1740s appealed to Vernon's personal courage as a model to be emulated and a rallying point for the nation. Vernon's courage was not simply a subject of admiration; rather, ordinary Britons were encouraged to see themselves in his heroic actions.

The cultural materials extolling Vernon suggested that ordinary Britons could claim a share of his idealized masculinity because it was expressed in a "national" context. The anonymous writer of "To Admiral VERNON" (1740) invoked "*Britain's* bright Genius, and *Vernon's* just Merit;/ To the Man who retains a true *British* Spirit." This poet emphasized that Vernon's naval success stemmed from British characteristics. For embodying a "true *British* Spirit," he was "the Man of all Men, who deserves our best Praise."<sup>285</sup> The poet who wrote "ON the Taking of CHAGRE" (1740) took up a similar theme when he explained, "the generous Admiral gave;/ That they might all see,/ What ENGLISHMEN be,/ And teach 'em the Way to be brave."<sup>286</sup>

Vernon's courage was represented as a renewed call to British manliness in the historically rich language of naval heroism. To many people, the naval hero figure stood for a suite of traits that included courage, selflessness, honor, and a bluff, rugged simplicity that distinguished Britons from their continental neighbors.<sup>287</sup> The "Jack Tar" image of a rough-and-

---

<sup>284</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, vol. 10. (April), London, 1740. *Internet Library of Early Journals*, <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/ilej/>, 183.

<sup>285</sup> "To Admiral VERNON" in *Vernon's glory*, 27.

<sup>286</sup> "On the taking of CHAGRE," in *Vernon's glory*, 32.

<sup>287</sup> For a thorough discussion of naval heroism and national identity in the early eighteenth century sharing many sources in common with this thesis, see Davey, "The Naval Hero and British National Identity 1707-1750," in Redford, ed., *Maritime History and Identity*, 13-37.

tumble sailor-hero had historical roots in English/British culture reaching back to Drake and Hawke, and reflected the popular self-image of British lower-class character.<sup>288</sup> Because officer promotion in the Royal Navy, unlike in the British army, was ultimately dependent on merit rather than capital outlay, it was actually true that naval officers were much more likely to be men of the middling and lower classes than their aristocratic military counterparts, whose commissions were usually purchased.<sup>289</sup> Vernon himself embraced the Jack Tar persona, claiming, in spite of his aristocratic pedigree, to be “rough as the Sea I was bred to.”<sup>290</sup> As Margarette Lincoln argues, the popular image of a seaman, stereotype though it may have been, “operate[d] as an area of exchange or negotiation between classes.”<sup>291</sup> The British seaman was a national figure capable of unifying different social groups around shared patriotic principles. Rather than being a subversive rabble-rouser, the “jolly tar” submitted his earthy, humble, unsophisticated English/British will to the service of the nation, under the command of skilled officers. In this way, he supported rather than threatened the existing social order. It was this character that Vernon sought to appropriate and that many of his supporters attributed to him.

In order to set Vernon apart from other contemporary British public figures, many writers particularly emphasized that Vernon’s naval service demonstrated his supposedly unselfish commitment to the nation. Marvell’s “Instructions to... Hogarth” (1740) characterized Vernon as “Firm to his Purpose, obstinately just,/ How bold he promis’d, how perform’d his Trust;/ Who

---

<sup>288</sup> <sup>288</sup> Margarette Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy: British Sea Power, 1750-1815*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), 29-30.

<sup>289</sup> N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1986), 262. See also N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815*, (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 112-126 for a discussion of the development of the skilled sea officer as the foundation of Pepys’ Restoration navy, and the “gentleman-tarpaulin” tension that was common among commissioned naval personnel.

<sup>290</sup> Edward Vernon, “The genuine speech of the truly honourable Adm-----I V-----n, to the sea-officers, at a council of war, just before the attack of C-----a. As communicated by a person of honour then present, in a letter to his friend,” London, 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3303818523), 6.

<sup>291</sup> Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy*, 25.

spoke, unaw'd by Pow'r, unsway'd by Art,/ Resolv'd from the brave Dictates of his Heart..."<sup>292</sup>

Marvell presented Vernon in direct contrast to politicians and courtiers of the period, describing the admiral's imagined consternation at the debates of the late 1730s:

Now paint the *Man* [Vernon], who anxious for the State,/ Had heard, with trembling Heart, a long Debate;/ Heard from false Schemes what Maxims *Courtiers* drew,/ Haranguing loud on what they nothing knew;/ Raising from their own Fears unjust Alarms;/ Doubting the Prowess of the *British* Arms;/ False to their Country's *Pow'r* and *Naval Skill*;/ For ----- *Britons*, when they dare, are *Britons* still-----/ Draw VERNON here, who with *that Truth* possess'd,/ No more cou'd stem the Torrent in his Breast;/ But native Honour glowing in his Heart,/ He rose and spoke his Thought, nor spoke with Art.<sup>293</sup>

Though Vernon was an enthusiastic supporter of the parliamentary opposition, his naval victory was widely interpreted as being unmotivated by politics or personal gain. Instead, Vernon's capture of Porto Bello reinforced long-held beliefs about the nation's special "*Naval Skill*." Vernon's motives were deemed to have been pure precisely because he acted in what some considered the traditionally English/British naval context.

Writers also deployed Vernon as an exemplar of proper British masculinity to criticize the effeminacy of many British elites who cultivated foreign tastes. This often manifested in outlandish hyperbole highlighting Vernon's manliness. Lewis Jones lauded Vernon in "Io! Triumpe!" (1741) as the "Delight of Nations, Quintessence of Manhood."<sup>294</sup> Marvell contrasted Vernon's bold masculine assertiveness with aristocratic dithering, instructing his imagined Hogarth to "Here let a powder'd *Fopling* seem to prate/ In gentle Tone about the *Nation's State*,/ Say *Wars* and *Battles* are most *horrid Things*,/ But sweet the Charms a blest *Convention* brings,/ That *Trade* and *public Virtue's* all meer *Stuff*----/ If we have *Peace* and ---- *Taxes*,---- that's

---

<sup>292</sup> Marvell, "Satirical and panegyric instructions to Mr. William Hogarth," 5.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>294</sup> Jones, "Io! Triumpe! A poem upon Admiral Vernon," 15.

enough,/ So end his Speech and ----- take a Pinch of Snuff.”<sup>295</sup> Of Vernon, Marvell effused, “let his Form a noble Fire confess,/ A Form that promises a manly Sense,/ Without the Tinsel Pomp of Eloquence.”<sup>296</sup>

The British masculine ideal may have expressed self-possession, self-sacrifice and public virtue, but it also implied sexual potency. Vernon’s manliness was held up as a model for contemporary concerns about effeminacy among Britain’s elites. Fielding’s “Captain Vinegar” column from early April 1740, that judged foppish Francophile aristocrats of the “Epicene gender,” was published just days after news of Porto Bello arrived in Britain. Vernon’s literal bombardment and penetration of the treasure-port was ripe for sexual metaphor.

Though it was not considered an appropriate subject for public discussion, some writers found a way to covertly sexualize Vernon’s achievements. Hidden in the middle of the 1740 poetry collection *Vernon's glory. Containing Fifteen New Songs, occasion'd by the Taking of Porto-Bello and Fort Chagre* is “The Gossips-Toast,” a little masterpiece of *double-entendre*. As in Fielding’s “Captain Vinegar,” within the poem women judge men’s sexual prowess. The anonymous poet imagines two decidedly lower-class women going to drink in a tavern after meeting in the market. “I’ll give, *Joan*, a Man, o’ my Word,” one says to the other, “A man who was ne’er known to flinch;/ As brave and as keen as his Sword,/ I’ll warrant, *a Man ev’ry Inch*.”<sup>297</sup> Using vividly sexual language, the “gossip” describes Vernon’s capture of Porto Bello:

No Lion was ever so bold,/ Yet who brags so little as he?/ When ‘tis *over*, his *Tongue* he can *hold*,/ A better ne’er *plough’d* the *rough Sea*:/ He swell’d with Delight to behold/  
*Porto-Bello*, and swore he would win her,/ He did not come there to catch Cold,/ And wou’d be laid low, or be *in her*./

Soon he made such a *Hole* in her Walls,/ That nothing before him could stand;/ He ply’d with such Cannon and Balls,/ And mounted the *Breach*, Sword in Hand:/ Resistless he

<sup>295</sup> Marvell, “Satirical and panegyric instructions to Mr. William Hogarth,” 8.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>297</sup> “The Gossips-Toast,” in *Vernon's glory*, 19.

*enter'd the Fort,/ And saw her submit to his Pleasure,/ He only desired the Sport,/ And car'd not a Fig for the Treasure.*<sup>298</sup>

According to the speaker's wry telling, Vernon gave of himself to please the ladies of the town:

To the Ladies, who fell in his Hands,/ He shew'd himself courteous and civil;/ Still ready,  
and at their Commands,/ Tho' wide-mouth'd and [illegible] like the Devil;/ The Sport  
then he left, to find out/ The Joys which new Conquest affords,/ But ere he cou'd take  
t'other Bout,/ His Mast it was *brought by the Board*.<sup>299</sup>

In case the reader mistook the intended meaning of "the joys which new conquest affords," the poet delivered the punch-line, "A common Mischance, *Joan*, you know,/ But he is so active and clever,/ Twas *up* in an Instant, I trow,/ And stout and as well fix'd as ever".<sup>300</sup> Though there is no evidence that the poet was actually a woman, people of both genders in the 1740s agreed, "Wou'd *England* with Men did abound,/ Like him, who woul'd play a *Man's Part*,/ All *Patriots* both *Upright* and *Sound*."<sup>301</sup>

Though "The Gossips-Toast" crudely connected Vernon's virility with the unfulfilled erotic desires of English women in a way that would have embarrassed many female readers, it is nonetheless true that women played an important role in Vernon's celebrity and his establishment as a British masculine ideal. Elizabeth Robinson, for instance, considered Vernon irreplaceable, set apart from his fellow British males by his extraordinary manly courage. She wrote to the Duchess of Portland on May 30, 1741 concerned for his continued safety, "Oh! where shall such another be gotten!...for there is none such, no not one, should the Admiral be slain."<sup>302</sup> Producers of Vernon commemoratives also capitalized on female support for the hero of Porto Bello. As previously discussed, women were the intended target for a variety of Vernon-

---

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>302</sup> Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, Letter to Lady Margaret Cavendish-Harley Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, May 30, 1741, in *Letters*, vol. 2., (London: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1809), 304.

related souvenirs including household ceramics, medals, and fashion accessories. Through purchasing, reading, and writing, women participated in the discussion of national identity, cowardice and bravery, and naval heroism that followed Vernon's capture of Porto Bello.

Though the details of female participation in Vernon's celebrity, as in much of eighteenth-century public life, must often be inferred, Vernon commemoratives made specifically for women offer possibilities for exploring women's attitudes about the hero of Porto Bello. One especially illustrative example is a remarkable ivory and paper folding fan (1740), currently in the National Maritime Museum's (NMM) collection (Fig. 3).<sup>303</sup> By the 1730s, mass-manufactured paper fans with printed designs like the one in the NMM's collection had become an affordable feminine accessory. The NMM's fan is printed with a vibrant color image of Vernon's six ships attacking Porto Bello and the text of the 1740 poem "Vernon's Glory." This poem, which amusingly enough appeared in the same collection as "The Gossips-Toast," envisions British sailors rallying each other to defend their country:

Hark the British Cannon thunders / See my lads six ships appear; / Every Briton acting wonders, / Strikes the Southern World with fear. / Porto Bello fam'd in story / Now at last submits to fate; Vernons Courage gains us Glory / And his mercy proves us great. //

The poem also refers to concerns about corruption, disunity, and cowardice at home:

May all English Lads like you Boys / Prove on shore true Hearts of Gold / To their King and Country true Boys / And be neither bought nor sold / Let the landsman without party / Act like Brethren of the flood / To one cause alone by heart / And be that for Britain's good//"<sup>304</sup>

The women who displayed these fans probably did so with varying levels of thoughtfulness and intent; however, the vividly-rendered violent scene and the hawkish poem text on an object for

---

<sup>303</sup>F. Chassereau, *Fan*, paper and ivory, 1740, (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London), OBJ0421. This may have been one of the first examples of naval hero commemorative fans, but it was not the last—Lord Nelson later made a popular subject. Representative examples include *Fan [Battle of the Nile]*, paper and wood, 1798, (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London), OBJ0422.; *Fan [Trafalgar]*, paper and wood, 1806, (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London), OBJ0424.

<sup>304</sup>"Vernon's Glory," in *Vernon's glory*, 3.

use exclusively by women suggest that Vernon's message of manliness, courage, and Britain's "common good" resonated with his female admirers.

### **Conclusion**

Vernon became a popular hero of enduring significance because his actions were represented in ways that resonated with prevailing ideas of Britishness, exemplifying the "publick spirit," mercantile values, and British masculinity. To many of his contemporaries, Vernon's capture of Porto Bello in 1739 represented a tipping point where allegedly "true" British character could reassert itself after years of ineffective political leadership and insufficient cultural example from Britain's elites. Celebration of Vernon's achievements evolved from spontaneous festivities to an industry driven by the sale of commemorative texts and objects. Participation in Vernon's celebrity could become an act of self-association that appealed particularly to people in the middling classes, whose values and notions of British national character the admiral supposedly championed. More broadly, Vernon's popularity arose in response to anxieties about British masculinity during the early eighteenth century. By clashing swords with Britain's enemies, Vernon provided a model for a renewed call to manliness and courage, addressing what many believed was a root cause of national moral decline that invited interference by foreign powers.

But was Vernon really a stalwart defender of Britain's interests, an unselfish national hero who risked life and limb for the liberty and trade? Was his every action motivated by Protestant piety, *machismo*, and the "publick spirit?" We will probably never know. Vernon left few personal papers and his private character remains a subject of speculation. But Vernon's public image assumed a life of its own, becoming a mirror that reflected many Britons' beliefs about their ideal selves. Many Britons looked at Vernon with an eager desire to see their values

and hopes reflected in his actions. Those with a desire to advance a “publick spirit” built on courage, martial prowess, dynamism and manliness took advantage of Vernon’s stardom to propose an alternative model of national character to that being modeled by prevailing social and political elites. As with most celebrities, Vernon’s star eventually faded. However, the model of Britishness that his supporters crafted around Vernon’s short-lived success resonated, if not laid the foundation for later generations of Britons who made national naval heroes of Anson, Rodney, and Nelson.

## Figures



Figure 1: This typical example of a copper Vernon medal shows Spanish admiral Don Blass offering his sword in surrender to Admiral Vernon and Commodore Brown. The text reads “The Pride of Spain Humbled by Ad[miral] Vern[o]n and Com[modo]re Brown.” The reverse depicts in fine detail “Porto Bello tak’n by Admiral Vernon with six ships Nov. 22 1739.” *Medal commemorating Admiral Edward Vernon and the capture of Porto Bello, 1739*, copper alloy, after 1739, (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London), MEC1031.

Image © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK. Available for use under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-ShareAlike (CC BY-NC-SA) license at <http://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/38471.html>.



Figure 2: Stoneware mug and teapot showing scenes of Porto Bello.

*Mug [with inscription "THE BRITISH GLORY: REVIV:D BY ADMIRAL VERNON" on one side, and "HE TOOK PORTO BEL WITH SIX:: SHIPS ONLY: NOV.YE:22 1739" on the reverse], stoneware, 1740, (Victoria & Albert Museum, London), 414:942-1885.*

*Teapot [with inscription "PORTO BELLO TAKEN" and "BY AD[MIRAL] VERNON FORT CHAGRE" on the reverse], stoneware, 1740, (Victoria & Albert Museum, London), 414:984/&A-1885. Image © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK. Used under non-exclusive, non-commercial license for academic purposes ([http://collections.vam.ac.uk/information/information\\_highresolutionimages](http://collections.vam.ac.uk/information/information_highresolutionimages)) at <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O11287/teapot-unknown/>.*



Figure 3: An ivory and paper fan with a printed design of Vernon's fleet at Porto Bello and the text of the poem "Vernon's Glory," which appeared in a poetry collection of the same name in 1740. F. Chassereau, *Fan*, paper and ivory, 1740, (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London), OBJ0421.

Image © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK. Available for use under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-ShareAlike (CC BY-NC-SA) license at <http://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/61524.html>.

## Conclusion

Weighed against the “long” eighteenth century’s most significant naval battles such as Quiberon Bay (1758), the Saints (1783), or Trafalgar (1805), Vice-Admiral Edward Vernon’s capture of Porto Bello in 1739 hardly deserves mention. The capture itself accomplished little and the campaign’s small gains were entirely erased by Vernon’s failures at Cartagena in 1740-41. It therefore seems surprising that Vernon excited so much celebration and lasting commemoration during the period in which his short-lived successes and catastrophic failures were most obvious and consequential. But Vernon’s significance in British popular imagination was never in direct proportion to his achievements. Vernon assumed lasting political and cultural importance because his admirers interpreted broader meanings from his actions and character. In an age when British ascendance on the world stage was by no means a foregone conclusion and many pondered how the values of a rapidly developing metropolitan mercantile society could be incorporated into the nation’s political culture, celebrating Vernon gave people a way to articulate what Britishness meant to them, and what they believed it should mean for others. Whatever his real successes or failures, Admiral Vernon became an important rhetorical tool for those who sought to imbue British politics and culture with the “national” values of the mercantile empire, aggressive foreign policy, and bold masculinity that many believed represented the way forward in a period of change and growing imperial challenges.

The news of Porto Bello had an immediate impact on political rhetoric. Vernon’s capture of the Spanish colonial fort after more than a decade of Anglo-Spanish tension in the Caribbean energized opponents of long-time prime minister Sir Robert Walpole. Both in parliament and in the press, supporters of the opposition eagerly seized on Vernon’s popularity to argue that the admiral’s achievements and character vindicated their anti-ministerial policies. As a former

opposition politician and an advocate for the growing mercantile empire, Vernon offered the opposition a widely celebrated figure onto which they could project their preferred idea of Britishness. Much celebration of Vernon was explicitly political, including important elements of the Vernon mythology such as the admiral's famous preference for fighting over negotiation and the apocryphal "six ships" prophecy. The opposition also deflected the fault for the failed Cartagena campaign from Vernon to Walpole, suggesting that the prime minister's alleged lack of commitment to the nation's interests and his personal cowardice, rather than the admiral's disastrous errors, were to blame. By contrasting their favorable interpretation of Vernon with what they saw as Walpole's many faults, opposition politicians and writers argued that the prime minister was no longer a fit representative of the nation's interests and character.

Representations of Admiral Vernon and the Porto Bello victory also played an important role in discussions of national identity throughout the 1740s. Many writers in the early eighteenth century complained of a lack of "publick spirit" among Britain's traditional elites, arguing that the king, the aristocracy and the ministry were no longer representative of the nation's ancestral martial achievements or of the unprecedented mercantile imperial prosperity Britain experienced during the period. "Publick spirit," in this view, was connected to trade, martial prowess, masculinity, and Protestant morality, and represented an antidote to corruption, male effeminacy, and decadence. When news of Porto Bello's capture arrived in Britain in early 1740, it was greeted with widespread spontaneous celebration. Over time, Vernon's popularity evolved into a thriving commemorative industry, complete with special publications, manufactured souvenirs, and annual events. His heroism had turned to celebrity. Those who produced Vernon commemoratives not only profited from and perpetuated the admiral's popularity; they also fixed it with their own meanings and interpretations. Considering that much

of the Vernon material culture was mass produced and modestly priced, it is likely that Vernon commemoratives that celebrated the admiral's defense of trade and national honor were reflective of some of the mercantile values, styles, and interests upon which the middling classes' prosperity depended. Vernon's admirers argued that his capture of Porto Bello was also a victory for Britain's "publick spirit," in that it restored trade, national honor, and liberty, and demonstrated that the nation's weaknesses could be surmounted by courage, virtue, selflessness, and virility.

Vernon's admirers also presented their hero as a model of British masculinity. At a time when Britain's aristocrats and leaders were widely criticized for their effeminate tastes and behavior and their perceived cowardice, Vernon's supporters argued that the admiral offered a better example of British male character and behavior. Though all war heroes are, to some extent, celebrated for their bravery, boldness, and decisiveness, Vernon's supporters emphasized these features of the Vernon story to suggest that his example, rather than that of Britain's foreign-influenced taste-makers, represented real masculinity. According to this thinking, the kind of British manliness that Vernon modeled was the authentic national character, destined for victory over enemies both foreign and domestic if only it could be unleashed. That this perception survived Vernon's repeated defeats in the early 1740s confirms that the admiral's perceived masculine character had more cultural resonance than his personal battlefield performance. As a naval hero who defeated a hated foreign enemy, Vernon's masculine character existed in a broadly inclusive, "national" context. Vernon's aggressive masculinity thus offered his supporters the ability to rehabilitate the nation's flagging "publick spirit" in a way that all male Britons could contribute by answering the call to bravery, boldness, and virility.

This study is primarily concerned with interpretation of Admiral Vernon in politics and culture, rather than in proving cause and effect that stemmed from his exploits. However, further work on the Vernon phenomenon might consider whether the political rhetoric surrounding Vernon succeeded in uniting opposition factions in parliament. If Vernon rhetoric played a primary role, it would raise important questions about whether the opposition's use of Vernon's popularity facilitated Walpole's downfall in 1742. Evidence for this could be found in the personal papers of parliamentary opposition leadership and in related sources. That Walpole resigned shortly after the rhetoric of Vernon became most intense can hardly be incidental. This link should be more fully explored.

As noted earlier, naval heroes of the early eighteenth century are an understudied topic. Even less well understood is how naval heroes before Nelson influenced (and perhaps reflected) culture and society. It might be instructive to apply this thesis's approach to the celebration of one of Vernon's naval contemporaries, Commodore George Anson, who undertook a four-year circumnavigation of the globe in 1740-44. Departing Britain with eight ships and 1,854 men, Anson weathered Cape Horn, survived several outbreaks of scurvy, visited China, and captured an Acapulco Galleon laden with Spanish treasure. On 15 June 1744, Anson arrived at Spithead in the *Centurion*, his only remaining ship, with a crew of just 188. They brought with them more than a million pieces-of-eight and nearly 2,500 pounds of silver. The treasure was paraded through the streets of London, and Anson and the so-called *Centurions* became instant heroes. Whereas Vernon's brash nature helped his political allies but eventually sank his own political career, Anson was much cannier about parlaying his undisputed naval experience and leadership skill into the much coveted position of First Lord of the Admiralty. As First Lord, his influence on the development of the Royal Navy through the later eighteenth century was profound.

Though Glyndwyr Williams has brought Anson's story to life for a new generation of historical enthusiasts in *Prize of All the Oceans*,<sup>1</sup> Anson's impact on his own time needs to be further explored, especially beyond his contributions to naval administration. By examining the rhetoric and culture surrounding his popularity and that of the *Centurions*, a study based on this thesis's methods might yield further insight into the culture and character of Britain during this period.

This study has also gathered important evidence that concerns about British male effeminacy and cowardice were debated with intensity in the early eighteenth century, in contrast to the assertions (or assumptions) of many historians who discuss these issues post-1756.<sup>2</sup> Further work on the culture of this period should be undertaken to corroborate this insight. Future projects might seek to more fully explain the root causes of such concerns, and whether they were the same as those that bothered many Britons who decried the effeminacy, emasculation, and cowardice of men later in the century. Though consideration of feminine ideals is outside the scope of this study, this could also be explored using similar sources employing a gender theory perspective for the early-to-mid-eighteenth century.

Ultimately, this study helps us overcome some of the limitations of the Whig narrative by demonstrating how British publics responded to, celebrated, and fixed meanings on a national hero whose achievements alone did not justify his celebrity. In effect, when politicians, poets and private citizens effusively praised Vernon's character and values, they engaged in the creation of a national ideal made in their own image. Admiral Vernon's Caribbean gains may have been reversed, but his impact on Britain's national identity endures.

---

<sup>1</sup>Glyndwyr Williams, *The Prize of All the Oceans: The Triumph and Tragedy of Anson's Voyage Round the World*, (London: HarperCollins, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Please see the historiographical overview presented in the Introduction and Chapter 2.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

#### Published Texts

Amhurst, Nicholas ["Caled D'anvers"]. *An argument against excises, in several essays, lately published in the craftsman, and now collected together. By Caleb D'anvers of Gray's-Inn, Esq*, London, 1733. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CB3326189018.

Arnold, Edmund. *National humiliation the best attonement for national sins. A sermon Preached in the Parish Church of Mortlake, in the County of Surrey, On Wednesday, January 9th, 1739. Being the Day set a-part by Authority for a Publick Fast. By Edmund Arnold, L. L. B. Curate of the said Parish, and Fellow of New-College in Oxford*. London, 1739 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3323153039.

Baston, Thomas *Observations on trade, and a publick spirit. and a Publick Spirit. Shewing, I. That all trade ought to be in common, and the Danger of Monopolies. II. That the Abuse of it, by Publick Companies, was the Origin of Stock-Jobbing. III. Of the Deceits arising from the Encouragement of Projectors, Lotteries, and other Cheats. IV. Of the general Benefit of Trade. V. Of the Selling of Places, Corruptions in Elections of Members, in the Law, in the Commission of the Peace, and Select Vestries. VI. The advantages of a publick spirit, and wherein it consists. Written by Thomas Baston, Esq*, London, 1732. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3305351510.

"Britannicus." "The sly subscription: on the Norfolk monarch, &c. To which is added, the Briton's speech to Sir Politick." London, 1733, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3305172103.

Argyll, John Campbell, Duke of. *The D[uke] of Ar[gy]le's letter to the Right Honourable Sir [Robert Walpole], upon the present intended expeditions*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3305240816.

Bellamy, Daniel. *The Perjur'd Devotee; or, the Force of Love*, in *The dramatic pieces, and other miscellaneous works in prose and verse, of D. Bellamy, formerly of St. John's College, Oxford*. London, 1739. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3310219255.

*Britain's mistakes in the commencement and conduct of the present war. By a merchant and citizen of London*. London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3305975515).

Carey, Henry. *The honest Yorkshire-man: A ballad-farce*. London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, CB3326462663.

“Characteristicks: a dialogue.” London, 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3311548163.

*A Companion to the Theatre: Or, a Key to the Play. Containing the Stories of the Most Celebrated Dramatick Pieces. The Plan, Character, and Design of each Performance is Exhibited and Explain'd; with Remarks on Each Representation.* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3311747118.

*The crisis: or, the Briton's Advocate.* London, 1733. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3305150237.

Egmont, Viscount Perceval, First Earl of. *Diary.* London: Historical Manuscripts Commission, 1920. Vol. 1-3.

*England's triumph: or, Spanish cowardice expos'd. Being a compleat history of the many signal victories gain'd by the Royal Navy and merchant ships of Great Britain, for the term of four hundred years past, over the insulting and haughty Spaniards. Wherein is particularly related A true and genuine Account of all the Expeditions, Voyages, Adventures, &c. of all the British Admirals from the Time above-mention'd, whose Successes have already filled all Europe with Amazement. By Capt. Charles Jenkins, Who has too sensibly felt the Effects of Spanish Tyranny.* London, 1738. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3301880069.

Fielding, Henry. *Joseph Andrews; with Shamela and related writings.* Homer Goldberg, ed. New York: Norton, 1987.

Forman, Charles. “A letter to the Right Honourable Sir Robert Walpole, concerning the election of a King of Poland, the claim of King Stanislaus, the views of the House of Austria, and the interest of Great-Britain. By Charles Forman, Esq,” London, 1733. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3305552950.

“The Freeholder,” in *Vernon's glory. Containing Fifteen New Songs, occasion'd by the Taking of Porto-Bello and Fort Chagre.* London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3315651016.

Gay, John. *The Beggar's Opera* in *The Beggar's Opera and Other Eighteenth Century Plays.* David M. Lindsay, ed. London: Dent, 1993.

J.G. *The consequences of His Majesty's journey to Hanover, at this critical juncture. Considered in a letter from a Member of Parliament in town, to a noble duke in the country: to which is added, the D-ke of A---le's speech upon the state of the nation: with the reply to it, by Lord \*\*\*\*\*.* London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3305346358.

Glover, Richard. "Admiral Hosier's Ghost." London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3313538096.

"The Gossips-Toast," in *Vernon's glory. Containing Fifteen New Songs, occasion'd by the Taking of Porto-Bello and Fort Chagre*. London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3315651016.

*The good patriot's security in the time of publick distress. A sermon from Isaiah xxxiii C. 15 and 16 V. preached on the 12th of Novem. 1740. Before A Society of Gentlemen, Met to Celebrate the birth of Admiral Vernon. And Published at their Request*. London, 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3323004412.

"He has kep't his word. A poem. To perpetuate the memory of ... Porto Bello. Written by a gentleman on board that fleet." London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3314200869.

Hogarth, William. *Canvassing for Votes*. Oil on canvas. 1755. Sir John Soane's Museum, London, UK.

Johnson, Samuel. *A dictionary of the English language: in which the words are deduced from their originals, and illustrated in their different significations by examples from the best writers. To which are prefixed, a history of the language, and an English grammar*. By Samuel Johnson, A.M. In two volumes. The second edition. London, 1755-56. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW111952888.

Johnson, Samuel "London" in *Samuel Johnson: The Major Works*. Donald Greene, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 2-8.

Jones, Henry. "On Taking Porto Bello by Storm. Inscrib'd to the Vernon Club in Drogheda." 189-191, in "Poems on Several Occasions. By Henry Jones." London, 1749. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3313800284.

Jones, Lewis. "Io! Triumphe! A poem upon Admiral Vernon. By an Undergraduate of Jesus-College, Oxford." London, 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3314478130.

Leslie, Charles. *A new history of Jamaica, from the earliest accounts, to the taking of Porto Bello by Vice-Admiral Vernon. In thirteen letters from a gentleman to his friend. ... With two maps, ...* London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3302609815.

*The livery-Man: or, plain thoughts on publick affairs. In which the present situation of things, some late writings concerning the liberty of the press, the general disposition of the*

*people, the insults offered to the city of London, and the true nature and infallible characteristicks of publick spirit, in contradistinction to that of a faction, are consider'd and explain'd. Addressed to the lovers of truth and liberty.* London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3305703462.

Knowles, Sir Charles. "An account of the expedition to Carthagen, with explanatory notes and observations." London, 1743. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3300211787.

*The Life of Admiral Vernon. By an impartial hand,* London, 1758. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3302698137.

"List of British merchant ships, taken or plundered by the Spaniards," London, 1738, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CB3327197203.

Marvell Jr., Andrew. "Satirical and panegyric instructions to Mr. William Hogarth, painter, on Admiral Vernon's taking Porto Bello with six ships of war only." London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3317324197.

"Merchant and citizen of London." "A supplement to Britain's mistakes in the commencement and conduct of the present war. Wherein the late glorious success of Admiral Vernon at Porto Bello is particularly considered." London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, (CW3306105438).

"The Modern Englishman. A Satire, by A.P., Esq." London, 1739. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CB3326781703.

Montagu, Elizabeth Robinson. *The Letters of Mrs. E. Montagu, With Some of the Letters of Her Correspondence, vol. 1 and 2.* London, England: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1809.

Morris, J.C. *Puerto Bello [Map]*. 1740. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, G245:19/33

"A new ballad on the taking of Porto-Bello, By Admiral Vernon." London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3315388455.

*Observations arising from the declaration of war against Spain, with considerations relating to the future management of it on the part of Great-Britain; and the Consistency of the M-y, and their Advocates. In a letter to - By the author of The letters to Sir G- C-, and The conduct of the livery, &c.* London, 1739. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3304939228.

“Officer present at the expedition to Carthagenæ.” “The conduct of Admiral Vernon examin'd and vindicated: to which is added, two exact lists... By an officer present at that expedition.” Dublin, 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3305055536.

“On the Taking of Chagre,” in *Vernon's glory. Containing Fifteen New Songs, occasion'd by the Taking of Porto-Bello and Fort Chagre*. London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3315651016.

*A Perspective view of ye Harbour, Castles & Town of Porto Bello... Vice Admiral Vernon... took the same on 22nd of November 1739... (with key)*. London, 21 April 1740. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, PAH7665.

Peterson, Joseph. *The raree show: or, the fox trap't. An opera. Written by Joseph Peterson, comedian. The second edition, with alterations*. London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3312923507.

Ranft, Bryan, ed., *The Vernon Papers*. London: Navy Records Society, 1958.

*Reasons for a war against Spain. In a letter from a merchant of London trading to America, to a Member of the House of Commons. With a plan of operations*. London, 1737. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3306696178.

“Release from Lawrence Washington, 17 June 1752.” *The Papers of George Washington: Digital Edition*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2008.  
<<http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/default.xqy?keys=GEWN-print-02-01-02-0022>>.

*The remarkable life of Uriel Acosta, an eminent freethinker; With his reasons for rejecting all Revealed Religion. To which is added, Mr. Limborch's defence of Christianity, in answer to Acosta's objections: with an introduction; containing, memoirs of Mr. Limborch's life, and an Account of his Writings*, London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3320674721.

Scott, Thomas. “England's danger and duty, represented in a copy of verses on the present rebellion in Scotland. Inscribed to the Honourable Edward Vernon, Esq; Admiral of the White.” London, 1745. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3306828259.

Shantoon, Frederick and George Forester. *Spanish Insolence chastized or a View of the Town Port & Forts of Porto Bello a----- by 6 of his Majesties Ships of War under the Command of Vice Admiral Vernon on ye 21 November 1739*. 3 May 1740. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, PAF4571.

“Sir Bluestring’s Expostulation with Admiral *Vernon*, for taking *Porto Bello*,” in *Vernon’s glory. Containing Fifteen New Songs, occasion’d by the Taking of Porto-Bello and Fort Chagre*. London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3315651016.

Smollett, Tobias. *The Adventures of Roderick Random*. O.M. Brack Jr., ed. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012.

Somerset, Frances Thynne Seymour, Duchess of. *Correspondence Between Frances, Countess of Hartford (afterwards Duchess of Somerset) and Henrietta Louisa, Countess of Pomfret, Between the Years 1738 and 1741*. Vol. 3. Bingley, W., ed. London, England: I. Gold for Richard Phillips, 1806.

Spiltimber, George. “The statesman: A poem. Humbly inscrib’d to the Right Honourable Sir Robert Walpole. By a gentleman of Gray’s-Inn.” London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale, CW3315405192.

*A supplement to Britain’s mistakes in the commencement and conduct of the present war. Wherein the late glorious success of Admiral Vernon at Porto Bello is particularly considered. By a merchant and citizen of London*. London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3306105438.

Thomson, James. “Alfred: a masque. Represented before Their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales, at Cliffden, on the first of August, 1740.” London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3311745479.

“The Three politicians: or, a dialogue in verse between a patriot, a courtier, and their friend. Concluding with an exhortation to Admiral Vernon.” London, 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CB3327668489.

“The true English-Boys song, to Vernon’s glory. Occasioned by the birth-day of that brave admiral. To be sung round the bonfires of London and Westminster. To the tune of, come let us prepare, &c,” London, 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3305153044.

“To Admiral VERNON,” in *Vernon’s glory. Containing Fifteen New Songs, occasion’d by the Taking of Porto-Bello and Fort Chagre*. London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3315651016.

Vernon, Vice-Admiral Edward. *Adm. V---n’s opinion upon the present state of the British Navy: in a letter to a Certain Board. To which is Annex’d By way of Illustration, his Letter to the Secretary of the same Board*. London, 1744. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale, CW3308003242.

*The genuine speech of the truly honourable Adm[ira]l V[erno]n, to the sea-officers, at a council of war, just before the attack of C[artagen]a. As communicated by a person of honour then present, in a letter to his friend*. London, 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3303818523.

*A second genuine speech, deliver'd by Adm[ira]l V[erno]n, on board the Carolina, to the officers of the navy, immediately after the salley from Fort St. Lazara.* London, 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3310320390.

*Some seasonable advice from an honest sailor, to whom it might have concerned, for the service of the C--and c-y.* London, 1746. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale CW3310320411.

*Vernon's glory. Containing Fifteen New Songs, occasion'd by the Taking of Porto-Bello and Fort Chagre.* London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3315651016.

“Vernon’s Glory,” in *Vernon's glory. Containing Fifteen New Songs, occasion'd by the Taking of Porto-Bello and Fort Chagre.* London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3315651016.

Walpole, Horace. *The Letters of Horace Walpol*3. 4<sup>th</sup> ed., vol. 1 and 2, *Eighteenth Century: Electronic Edition*.

Whitehead, Paul. “Manners. A Satire. By Mr. Whitehead.” London, 1739. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3317261816.

#### Parliamentary Debates

*Cobbett's Parliamentary history of England.* Volume 8. London, 1809-1820. *Making of the Modern World*, Gale, U3607836584.

*A Collection of the Parliamentary Debates in England from the Year 1668 to the present Time.* vol. XV, XVI. London: John Torbuck, 1741.

*The Parliamentary History of England from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803.* Vol. X, XI. London: Hansard, 1811.

Stock, Leo Francis, ed., *Proceedings and Debates of the British Parliaments respecting North America.* Vol. V. Washington, D.C.: The Carnegie Institution of Washington.

#### Periodicals

Amhurst, Nicholas. *The Craftsman*, vol. 8, London, 1731. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CB3328374573.

*Country Journal or The Craftsman*, Saturday, January 18, 1729; Issue 133. *Burney Collection*, Gale, Z2000132501.

Fielding, Henry. *The champion: containing a series of papers, humourous, moral, political, and critical. To each of which is added, A proper Index to the Times...* Vol. 2. London, 1741. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3310895042.

*London Evening Post*, Issues 554, 1610, 1820, 1825, 1851. 1925, 1930, 1931, 1936, 1939, 2021, *Burney Collection*, Gale.

*London Gazette*, London, 11 March 1740- 15 March 1740, Iss. 7892. *Burney Collection*, Z2000724435.

*The London Magazine and Monthly Chronologer*. London, 1736-1746. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3306875084.

*Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, vol. 10. (April), London, 1740. *Internet Library of Early Journals*, <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/ilej/>.

*Norwich Gazette*. 14 November 1741- 21 November 1741. Iss. 1833. *Burney Collection*, Z2000987927.

*Universal Spectator and Weekly Journal*. London, Saturday 8 March 1740. Iss. 596. *Burney Collection*, Z2001497848.

## Objects

*Bowl*. Stoneware. 1740. National Maritime Museum. Greenwich, London, AAA4355.

*Bowl [with inscription "The British Glory Rev: v:d. By Admiral Vernon. He took Porto Bello with six ships only Nov: ye: 22 1739"]*. Stoneware. 1740. Metropolitan Museum of Art. New York, 34.165.60.

*Bowl [with inscription "The British Glory Rev: v:d. By Admiral Vernon. He took Porto Bello with six ships only Nov: ye: 22 1739"]*. Stoneware. 1740. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 34.165.60.

*Button Commemorating Admiral Vernon*. Copper alloy. 1740-1742. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, MEC0892.

*Button Commemorating Admiral Vernon*. Copper alloy. 1740-1742. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, MEC0893.

Chassereau, F. *Fan*. Paper and ivory. 1740. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, OBJ0421.

- Cunst, Jasper. *Freedom Box*. Gold. 1740. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London. PLT0187.
- Fan [Battle of the Nile]*. Paper and wood. 1798. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, OBJ0422.
- Fan [Trafalgar]*. Paper and wood. 1806. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, OBJ0424.
- Flower, Joseph (maker), Richard Frank (producer), Redcliff Back pottery (manufacturer). *Dish*. Earthenware. 1740. Victoria & Albert Museum, London, C.426-1915.
- Medal commemorating Admiral Edward Vernon and the capture of Porto Bello, 1739*. Copper alloy. After 1739. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, MEC1031.
- Medal commemorating Admiral Vernon and Sir Robert Walpole*. Copper alloy. After 1739. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, MEC0899.
- Medal commemorating Vernon's attack on Cartagena, 1741*. Brass. 1741. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, MEC1078.
- Medal commemorating Vernon's attack on Cartagena, 1741*. Silver. 1741. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, MEC1041.
- Mug*. Stoneware. 1740. Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 414:942-1885.
- Plate [Porto Bello]*. Earthenware. 1740. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, AAA4353.
- Teapot [with inscription "PORTO BELLO TAKEN" and "BY AD[MIRAL] VERNON FORT CHAGRE" on the reverse]*. Stoneware. 1740. Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 414:984/&A-1885

### Secondary Sources

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Verso, 2006.
- Berg, Maxine. *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth Century Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Black, Jeremy, ed., *Britain in the Age of Walpole*. London: MacMillan Publishers Ltd, 1984.

Black, Jeremy. *George II: Puppet of the Politicians?* Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2007.

*A Subject for Taste: Culture in Eighteenth-Century England.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Brewer, John. *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Brunstrom, Conrad. "‘Be Male and Female Still’: An ABC of Hyperbolic Masculinity in the Eighteenth Century," in Chris Mounsey, ed. *Presenting Gender: Changing Sex in Early-Modern Culture.* Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2001.

Butterfield, Herbert. *The Whig Interpretation of History.* London: Bell, 1931.

Colley, Linda. *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Conway, Stephen. *War, state, and society in mid-eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Cox, Oliver J.W. "Frederick, Prince of Wales, and the First Performance of ‘Rule, Britannia!’" *The Historical Journal.* Vol. 56, iss. 4, December 2013: 931-954.

Cubitt, Geoffrey and Allen Warren, ed. *Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives.* Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000.

Czennia, Baerbel ed. *Celebrity: The Idiom of the Modern Era.* New York: AMS Press, Inc., 2013.

Davey, James. "The Naval Hero and British National Identity 1707-1750," in Duncan Redford, ed., *Maritime History and Identity: The Sea and Culture in the Modern World.* London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014.

Dudink, Stefan; Karen Hagemann; John Tosh, ed. *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History.* New York: Palgrave, 2004.

Dupont, Jr., Ronald J. *Vernon 200--A Bicentennial History of the Township of Vernon, New Jersey: 1792-1992.* The Friends of the Dorothy E. Henry Library, McAfee, NJ, 1992.

Felsentein, Frank. "Unravelling Ann Mills: Some Notes on Gender Construction and Naval Heroism." *Eighteenth Century Fiction.* Vol. 19, no.1, art. 24, 2006.

Folkenflik, Robert, ed. *The English Hero, 1660-1800.* Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1982.

- Gerrard, Christine. *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole: Politics, Poetry, and National Myth, 1725-1742*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.
- Guyatt, Mary. "The Wedgwood Slave Medallion: Values in Eighteenth-century Design." *Journal of Design History*. vol. 13, no. 2, 2000: 83-105.
- Harding, Richard. "Edward Vernon, 1684-1757," In Peter Lefevre, Richard Harding, ed., *Precursors of Nelson: British Admirals of the Eighteenth Century*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2000.
- Harris, Bob. "'American Idols': Empire, War and the Middling Ranks in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain." *Past & Present*. No. 150, Feb. 1996: 111-141.
- Politics and the Nation: Britain in the Mid-Eighteenth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Hartmann, Cyril Hughes. *The Angry Admiral: The later career of Edward Vernon, Admiral of the White*. London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1953.
- Heriot, Angus. *The Castrati in Opera*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1956.
- Hill, Brian. *The Early Parties and Politics in Britain, 1688-1832*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.
- Sir Robert Walpole: 'Sole and Prime Minister.'* London: Hamish Hamilton, 1989.
- Hook, Holger. *Empires of the Imagination: Politics, War, and the Arts in the British World, 1750-1850*. London: Profile Books Ltd., 2010.
- Hunt, Margaret R. *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- Johnson, James William. "England, 1660-1800: An Age without a Hero?" in Robert Folkenflik, ed., *The English Hero, 1660-1800*. West Brunswick, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1982.
- Jordan, Gerald and Nicholas Rogers. "Admirals as Heroes: Patriotism and Liberty in Hanoverian England." *Journal of British Studies*. Vol. 28, no. 3, July 1989: 201-224.
- Kidd, Colin. *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

- Langford, Paul. *Englishness Identified: Manners and Character, 1650-1850*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- The Excise Crisis: Society and Politics in the Age of Walpole*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.
- A polite and commercial people: England 1727-1783*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Le Fevre, Peter and Richard Harding, ed. *Precursors of Nelson: British Admirals of the Eighteenth Century*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2000.
- Lincoln, Margarette. *Representing the Royal Navy: British Sea Power, 1750-1815*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003.
- McKendrick, Neil, John Brewer and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982.
- McNairn, Alan. *Behold the Hero: General Wolfe and the Arts in the Eighteenth Century*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999.
- Moore, Stephen. "'A Nation of Harlequins'? Politics and Masculinity in Mid-Eighteenth-Century England." *Journal of British Studies*. Vol. 49, No. 3, July 2010: 514-539.
- Mounsey, Chris, ed. *Presenting Gender: Changing Sex in Early-Modern Culture*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2001.
- Moseley, Barbara. "About Vernon." *Town of Vernon*, <http://www.vernonvt.org/index.php/about-vernon>.
- Myrone, Martin. *Bodybuilding: reforming masculinities in British art 1750-1810*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005.
- Newman, Gerald. *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987.
- Pares, Richard. *War and trade in the West Indies, 1739-1763*. London: Frank Cass & Co Ltd, 1963
- Pearce, Edward. *The Great Man: Sir Robert Walpole: Scoundrel, Genius, and Britain's First Prime Minister*. London: Random House, 2007.
- Peterson, Joseph. *The raree show: or, the fox trap't. An opera. Written by Joseph Peterson*,

comedian. *The second edition, with alterations*. London, 1740. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, CW3312923507.

Pugh, Gordon. *Naval Ceramics*. Bath, UK: Lonsdale & Bartholomew, Ltd., 1971.

Richmond, H.W. *The navy in the war of 1739-48*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920. Vol. 1.

Rodger, N.A.M. *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815*. London: Penguin, 2006.  
*The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1986.

Rogers, Nicholas. "Brave Wolfe: the making of a hero," in Kathleen Wilson, ed. *A New Imperial History*, 2004.

Romani, Robert. *National Character and Public Spirit in Britain and France, 1750-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Rose, Mary Beth. *Gender and Heroism in Early Modern English Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

Scott, Joan Wallach. *Gender and the Politics of History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

Shepard, Alexandra. "From Anxious Patriarchs to Refined Gentlemen? Manhood in Britain, circa 1500-1700." *Journal of British Studies*. Vol. 44, 2005: 281-295.

*The Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Speck, W.A. *Stability and Strife: England, 1714-1760*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977.

Thompson, Andrew C. *George II: King and Elector*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

Tosh, John. "Hegemonic masculinity and the history of gender," in Stefan Dudink; Karen Hagemann; John Tosh, ed. *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*. New York: Palgrave, 2004.

Wahrman, Dror. *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-century England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

- Wanko, Cheryl. "Celebrity Studies in the Long Eighteenth Century: An Interdisciplinary Overview." *Literature Compass*. Vol. 8 no. 3, 2011: 351-362.
- Wathen, Bruce. *Sir Francis Drake: The Construction of a Hero*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewster, 2009.
- Williams, Glyndwyr. *The Death of Captain Cook: A Hero Made and Unmade*. London: Profile Books Ltd., 2008.
- The Prize of All the Oceans: The Triumph and Tragedy of Anson's Voyage Round the World*. London: HarperCollins, 1999.
- Wilson, Kathleen, ed. *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Wilson, Kathleen. *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- "Empire, Trade and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian Britain: The Case of Admiral Vernon." *Past & Present*. No. 121, Nov., 1988: 74-109.
- Woodfine, Philip. *Britannia's Glories: The Walpole Ministry and the 1739 War with Spain*. London: Woodbridge, 1998.
- "Ideas of naval power and the conflict with Spain, 1737-1742," in Jeremy Black; Philip Woodfine, ed. *The British Navy and the Use of Naval Power in the Eighteenth Century*. Atlantic Highlands, NY: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1989.