

BRITISH RECORDS RELATING TO AMERICA IN MICROFORM

General Editor: W E Minchinton

Documents relating to
THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION
1775–1783

in the
NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM
GREENWICH

Introduction
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1 PROVENANCE

The National Maritime Museum at Greenwich was established by Act of Parliament in 1934 and was opened in 1937. This was largely due to the work of the Society for Nautical Research, which, from its foundation in 1910, had worked to bring a national museum into existence. In 1927 there was an opportunity to purchase the MacPherson Collection of paintings, prints and drawings, which was done by a Board of Trustees through the generosity of Sir James Caird (1864–1954). From that time the Museum has been collecting artefacts and documents relating to the sea by gift, purchase or permanent loan.

Today, the manuscript holdings occupy over nine thousand feet of shelving. In 1962 the Museum was recognised by the Lord Chancellor as an official repository under the Public Records Act of 1958, confirming the holding of over nine thousand volumes of Admiralty records from before the war. Apart from these administrative records, there are a large number of records of shipping companies and institutions and single volumes and documents collected by the Museum. However, probably the most important sections are the personal papers of naval and merchant officers, from which the 25 documents or sets of documents reproduced on this microfilm are largely drawn. A proportion of them are official, such as sailing orders or instructions, but they are mostly private or semi-official. All the logs and journals included here were kept for personal use and usually differ considerably from those sent into the Admiralty at the end of a commission.

The 25 documents or sets of documents are necessarily a selection from the large number in the Museum which relate to the American Revolution. They were chosen with a view to their bearing on operations in North American and West Indian waters. Thus records of higher strategy and naval administration, as well as those relating to the European and Indian theatres, have been excluded. The division between North America and the West Indies is not complete because ships frequently moved between stations, especially during the hurricane season in the West Indies. In addition, there are frequent references to periods when ships were escorting convoys across the Atlantic.

The documents came to the Museum between 1930 and 1958. All were purchased except six items (documents 3, 4, 8, 12, 17, 24) which were presented. No documents deposited on loan have been reproduced. There is only one collection in this category of importance, that of Samuel, Viscount Hood, deposited in 1950. His papers contain letter and order books and a group of one hundred letters from Sir George Rodney, 1781 to 1782.

2 THE NAVAL WAR IN THE NORTH AMERICAN AND WEST INDIES THEATRES

Naval warfare in the western Atlantic and the Caribbean during the American War of Independence can be divided broadly into two periods. Before the French entry into the war early in 1778 the main British effort was put into convoying vital supplies to the British army and supporting the armies of Howe and Clinton in New England and the middle colonies. The British were opposed in a spirited manner by a young American navy on both sides of the Atlantic. These efforts severely stretched the British who were reluctant to mobilise their navy and lacked the ships most suited to a privateering war. In 1778 the French and then the Spanish and the Dutch entered the war, intent on avenging the defeat of the Seven Years War. This they intended to do by winning back colonial possessions. Immediately the centre of interest switched to the West Indies. From being the scene of smuggling goods and armaments with which the colonists carried on the struggle, it became an area of vital importance in which the naval war would be won or lost.

The skirmishes and battles between 1778 and 1782 did indeed prove this to be so. The great set-piece battle at the Saints saved the British from disastrous peace terms, while the French superiority at sea at the Chesapeake, which brought about the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown, was caused by decisions and events in the West Indies. This phase of the war illustrates the essential relationship between North American and West Indies waters. Ships interchanged frequently between the two stations. The advent of the hurricane season in the second part of the year meant that a large part of the West Indies was left without warships. A few were sent home with a convoy but most went to the North American Station and so the centre of hostilities immediately changed.

The British Navy became involved in the rebellion at a very early date. The inspired dash by Montgomery and Arnold in 1775 to grab Canada was only repulsed by a skilful defence by Carleton. The siege was lifted when the ice allowed a British ship up the St Lawrence (documents 1, 2). There followed a campaign which was fought on Lake Champlain in 1777; its outcome contributed to the British surrender at Saratoga, the defeat which transformed a colonial revolt into a world war (document 2).

The other feature of the early years of the war was the impact of American privateers which led to the early decision to convoy British transports across the Atlantic. After the French entry, convoys became even more of a necessity. Gathering ships took time and their protection used escorts which

the British could ill afford. Material reproduced here shows the time, skill and effort expended on convoying (documents 10, 11, 15, 17, 18, 19, 25).

Although the British were taken aback by the strength and suddenness of rebellion in the first year, they gradually re-established control in North American waters. Driven out of everywhere but Boston, they established themselves later at New York (document 3). Under the Howe brothers, there were some critical months when the rebellion could have been crushed. However, the moment passed and the peace terms offered by the North government in 1778 were rejected (document 8). The Navy built up its strength and its command of the coast (documents 4, 7, 12, 20). After the departure of the Howes, there was an energetic period when Sir George Collier made great inroads into New England shipping (documents 5, 6).

In the West Indies command of the sea was quickly lost after the French entered the war, largely through strategic and political indecision in Britain. Superiority was established by D'Estaing who captured Dominica, St Vincent and Grenada. Spanish entry put a further strain on British resources. Only after the relief of Charlestown was there an end to the succession of reverses (documents 9, 10, 12, 14).

Rodney's arrival in the West Indies in April 1780 began the next phase of the war. After a long series of inconclusive manoeuvres off Martinique with Guichen, nothing more was settled until the fleets dispersed before the hurricane season. One of these, at an unusually late date, took its toll of both navies in the same year (document 14). Rodney was reinforced by Hood in October of this year and the breach with Holland enabled Rodney to capture St Eustatius (documents 14, 16) and it was Rodney's delay here that enabled De Grasse to establish a superiority over Graves and Hood at the Battle of the Chesapeake (documents 9, 10, 24).

The surrender at Yorktown left the West Indies wide open for French attack. De Grasse's main objective was Jamaica. Hood outwitted him with inferior forces at St Kitts and finally Rodney's victory at the Saints in April 1782 saved Jamaica (documents 16, 18, 20, 21, 23). The decisiveness of this victory went a long way to restoring British balance in the peace of Paris.

3 CONTENTS OF THE FILM

This section contains a list of the items filmed giving the Museum's class mark and brief details of provenance. Notes on the careers of individual officers are given at the end of the first entry in which they are mentioned.

REEL 1

I Documents relating to the naval war in North America

- X 1 'Journal of the most remarkable occurrences in the Province of Quebec, from the appearance of the Rebels in September 1775 until their retreat on the sixth of May 1776'

Museum's single volume collection: JOD/66. Acquired in 1958.

X A detailed, day-by-day account of the siege of Quebec by an anonymous defender under Carleton, containing some sharp political comment and a detailed report on each day's weather. The importance of shipping in this siege is emphasised with many details of the part played until the relief by the *Surprise*.

? X Frames 1-89

- 2 Memorial of Lieutenant John Starke: 'The case of Lieutenant John Starke of His Majesty's Navy, together with a short sketch of the operations of the War in Canada, in which he was employed, during the years 1775, 1776 and 1777'

Museum's single volume collection: BGR/9. Acquired in 1949.

Starke was second lieutenant of the *Lizard* and was appointed to the armed schooner *Maria* in May 1776. The *Maria* was taken to pieces and transported to Lake Champlain.

Lieutenant John Starke, d 1790: lieutenant 1776. Served for rest of war in home waters. See Carson I A Ritchie, 'Lieutenant Starke at the Siege of Quebec', *Notes and Queries*, CCIV (1959) 385-7.

Frames 90-109

- 3 Captain Benjamin Caldwell: Log of the *Emerald*, 6 December 1775 to 28 February 1777

Caldwell Papers: CAL/103. Presented in 1938.

In the early part of 1776 the *Emerald* escorted a convoy from England to New York, arriving in June in time for the capture from American forces. After further action in the North River, the *Emerald* left for the Chesapeake in February 1777.

Admiral Sir Benjamin Caldwell, 1737–1830: lieutenant 1760, commander 1762, captain 1765. Served mostly in North America and West Indies during American War except in 1780 when he escorted the East India convoy home.

Frames 110–240

- 4 Captain Benjamin Caldwell: Orders, Signals and Instructions to *Emerald*, 12 July 1776 to 12 April 1778

ms. 69/056
Caldwell Papers: ~~CAL/122~~. Presented in 1938.

Routine orders from Howe, including Order of Battle, Order of Retreat, Signals, Distinguishing Pennants, Order of Sailing, Rendezvous, etc.

Frames 241–412

- 5 'A journal of the war in America by Sir George Collier'

CAL/122
Museum's single volume collection: ~~JOB/9~~. Acquired in 1931.

A short personal journal in Collier's own hand of the operations off New England and Nova Scotia. He carried out a number of operations against settlements and colonial shipping and was particularly successful in frustrating an attack from New England against the loyalists on the Penobscot River.

Vice-Admiral Sir George Collier, 1738–1795: lieutenant 1754, commander 1761, captain 1762. Sent to North America in *Rainbow* 1776, captain of the *Hancock* 1777. Between the recall of the Rear-Admiral Gambier (February 1779) and the arrival of Marriot Arbuthnot (July 1779) was Commander-in-Chief in North America. Returned to England, November 1779. Served afterwards in the Channel and at Gibraltar.

Frames 413–435

- 6 'A detail of some particular services performed in America during the years 1776, 1777, 1778 and 1779, by Commodore Sir George Collier, Commander-in-Chief on the American Station, compiled from journals and original papers by G J Rainier'

Museum's single volume collection: HIS/7. Acquired in 1931.

The volume, presumably written by Rainier, has corrections in Collier's hand. This manuscript forms the basis of the 'Biographical memoir of Sir George Collier, Knt, vice-admiral of the blue', *Naval Chronicle*, XXXII (1814) 265–96, 353–400, and the note in *Naval Chronicle*, XXXIII (1815) 114. See Dean R Mayhew, 'The Bagaduce blunder', *Mariner's Mirror*, LXI (1975) 27–30.

Frames 436–520

REEL 2

- 7 Captain the Hon. William Cornwallis: Orders and letters received in *Isis*, 12 January to 8 December 1777

Cornwallis Papers: COR/2. Acquired in 1932.

Isis, a 50 gun ship, was on the North American Station for the early part of the war. These documents consist of Standing Orders, Sailing Instructions, etc, from Howe and other commanders.

Admiral the Hon. Sir William Cornwallis, 1744–1819: lieutenant 1761, commander 1762, captain 1765. Served almost continuously in North American and West Indies waters 1777 to 1783.

Frames 1–60

- 8 Lieutenant Thomas Lewis: Notes and journals relating to the Carlisle Peace Commission of 1778

Lewis Papers: LEW/3. Presented in 1955.

Letters, drafts of letters, fragments of a journal and notes made when Secretary to Lord Carlisle.

Captain Thomas Lewis, 1742–1795: lieutenant 1761. Secretary to Lord Carlisle on Peace Commission 1778. Commander 1782, captain the same year.

Frames 61–123

- 9 Rear-Admiral Thomas Graves: Letters and Orders, 1777 to 1782

Graves Papers: GRV/108. Acquired in 1931.

A selection of orders received and issued by Graves when Commander-in-Chief flying his flag in the *London*. Included here is a long letter from Rodney of 1 July 1782.

Admiral Thomas, 1st Baron Graves, 1725–1802: lieutenant 1743, commander 1754, captain 1755. In American War in North America and West Indies until 1778. Returned home in 1779, promoted to Rear-Admiral, served as Second-in-Command of Channel Fleet. Went to America as Commander-in-Chief 1780. Commanded British Fleet in the action off Chesapeake 1781. Returned home 1782.

Frames 124–145

- 10 Rear-Admiral Thomas Graves: Journal, 7 September 1779 to 16 December 1781

Graves Papers: GRV/120. Acquired in 1931.

This personal journal covers the time when the ship was being fitted out at Spithead and then her voyage to Long Island, down to the West Indies and back to Sandy Hook. It contains an account of the Battle of Chesapeake Bay which is fuller than the official Admiralty log printed in the Graves papers (see Select bibliography, Section 4).

Frames 146–307

- 11 Prince William Henry (midshipman): Log of the *Prince George* and *Warwick*, 25 September 1781 to 6 December 1782

Museum's single volume collection: LOG/N/B/8. Acquired in 1931.

Prince William Henry joined the *Prince George* at Spithead and arrived off Sandy Hook on 25 September 1781. It includes a map of the bar of Sandy Hook drawn by Samuel Hemmans, Master Attendant at New York. The Prince later transferred to the *Warwick*, under Captain George Elphinstone (later Admiral, for his career, see item 12).

Prince William Henry, later William IV, 1765–1837: entered navy May 1779, went to Gibraltar and then to North America.

Frames 308–418

- 12 Captain the Hon. George Elphinstone: Orders and letters received and drafts of letters sent when in command of the *Perseus*, 1776 to July 1780

Keith Papers: KEI/2/2. Presented in 1930.

This collection consists of loose papers containing orders and intelligence concerning the operations from Florida to New York. In November 1777 the *Perseus* was at Charlestown, when he has correspondence with Robert Fanshawe in the *Carysfort*. By April of the next year he was at New York, when there are several letters from and drafts of letters sent to Governor Tryon. By July 1778 the *Perseus* was off East Florida. In February 1779 the ship was ordered to New York and there are many letters from Marriot Arbuthnot in early 1780, from Sir Henry Clinton (February) and Tryon (April) concerning the siege of Charlestown. Elphinstone was put in special charge of co-operating with the army.

Admiral George Keith Elphinstone, 1st Viscount Keith, 1746–1823: lieutenant 1770, commander 1772, captain 1775. He was in North American waters 1775 to 1782.

Frames 419–647

REEL 3

- 12 continued

Frames 1–495

- 13 'Volume containing extracts about important actions in which His Majesty's Ship *America* took part on the North American Station, with sketches of ships and lines of battle, by Daniel Woodhouse, seaman'

Museum's single volume collection: JOD/40. Acquired in 1939.

This includes, in great detail, an account of the Battle of the Chesapeake.

Frames 496–517

II Documents relating to the naval war in the West Indies

- 14 Captain John Houlton: Nineteen letters to James Frampton, of Moreton, near Blandford, Dorset, February 1780 to November 1781

Museum's single document collection: AGC/31. Acquired in 1938.

These nineteen letters, although personal, were primarily written to convey news. Houlton was captain of the *Montagu* and there are letters from Madeira, St Lucia, Martinique and Dominica on the subjects of the 1780 hurricane and constantly of his own and his mens' sickness. After the capture of St Eustatius he had to give up his command because of scurvy. He came back to England in the *Triumph*, arriving at Cork in September 1781. He also had prize money difficulties.

Rear-Admiral John Houlton, d 1791: lieutenant 1756, commander 1759, captain 1761. At Relief of Gibraltar 1779 and in the West Indies from 1780.

Frames 518–576

- 15 Captain Benjamin Caldwell: List of the ships in a convoy from Jamaica to England, March to June 1779, under the escort of the *Emerald* and the *Hornet*

Caldwell Papers: CAL/104. Acquired in 1938.

There are full details of the ships in the convoy, with size, cargoes and a remarks column, with comments on station keeping.

See David Syrett, 'The organisation of British trade convoys during the American War, 1775–1783', *Mariner's Mirror*, LXII (1976) 169–81.

Frames 577–588

- 16 Rear-Admiral Sir Samuel Hood: Letters to Henry Shales, 12 February 1781 to 12 April 1782

Hood Collection: HOO/101. Acquired in 1939.

A small series of letters after successes in the West Indies, beginning with a letter after the capture of St Eustatius. There is an account of his action with the Comte de Grasse and a copy of a letter from Rodney to Hood congratulating him for his part in the Saints.

Admiral Samuel, 1st Viscount Hood, 1724–1816: lieutenant 1746, commander 1753, captain 1756. Resident Commissioner at Portsmouth Dockyard 1778–80. Rear-Admiral 1780. Went to West Indies 1780 and North America 1781. Took part in Chesapeake, commanded at St Kitts and was second-in-command at the Saints.

Frames 589–609

- 17 Captain Peter Rainier: Log of the *Ostrich*, England to the West Indies, 24 January 1778 to 24 June 1778

Rainier Collection: RAI/1. Presented in 1948.

This personal log begins with the ship in the Downs, from which it goes to Spithead to join the *Active* and the *Boreas* to escort a convoy to Jamaica. Details of the organisation of the convoy are included. They arrive at Port Royal in April, after which the *Ostrich* sloop is ordered to cruise off Jamaica.

Admiral Peter Rainier, c 1741–1808: lieutenant 1768, commander 1777, captain 1778. Appointed to command the *Ostrich* in the West Indies 1778–9. Finished service in American war in the East Indies.

Frames 610–687

- 18 Captain Benjamin Caldwell: Log of the *Agamemnon*, 12 January 1782 to 8 September 1782

Caldwell Papers: CAL/107. Acquired in 1938.

The *Agamemnon* went to the West Indies late in the war, escorting a convoy and arriving just in time to reinforce Rodney at the Saints. She then went up the North American coast, arriving in Staten Island in September.

Frames 688–785

REEL 4

- 19 Captain Benjamin Caldwell: Log of the *Agamemnon*, 9 September 1782 to 10 June 1783

Caldwell Papers: CAL/202. Acquired in 1938.

Caldwell sailed from Sandy Hook under Admiral Pigot with a convoy back to the West Indies. Having arrived at Carlisle Bay, Barbados, he was ordered to cruise off Dominica and St Lucia. He was finally ordered home, arriving at St Helens in June 1783.

Frames 1–70

- 20 Captain Benjamin Caldwell: Out-letter book, 4 May 1776 to 17 June 1783, *Emerald* and *Agamemnon*

Caldwell Papers: CAL/110. Acquired in 1938.

This volume, kept by a secretary, contains the copies of letters sent by Caldwell during service in North American waters while in the *Emerald*, until the ship was paid off at Chatham in June 1779, and then his command of the *Agamemnon*, starting in July 1781. It covers the period of the Saints and the closing months of the war in the West Indies before his return home in June 1783.

Frames 71–128

- 21 Midshipman William Spry: Three letters written while serving on the *Formidable* and *Licorne*, 14 April 1782 to 4 February 1783

Museum's single document collection: AGC/14/8. Acquired in 1937.

These letters were written to his parents and convey news in a vigorous style. The first letter contains an account of the Battle of the Saints.

Frames 129–137

- 22 Admiral Thomas Graves: Journal, 17 December 1781 to 3 October 1782

Graves Papers: GRV/113. Acquired in 1931.

Until May 1782 Graves stayed at Jamaica in the *London*. On 8 May he set out from Port Royal in the *Ramillies*, working up the North

American coast and thence home to England. In mid-September the squadron, with its convoy, met a storm which wrecked the convoy and caused Graves to abandon his ship on 22 September and transfer to the *Bell* merchantman. The journal continued in the *Bell* until 3 October. Graves reached Cork safely on 10 October. This journal was one of the few papers that Graves was able to save in the wreck.

See K Breen, 'The foundering of HMS Ramillies', *Mariner's Mirror*, LVI (1970) 187–97.

Frames 138–198

23 Captain William Cornwallis: Description of Battle of the Saints

Cornwallis Collection: COR/2. Acquired in 1932.

Detailed account by Cornwallis when in command of the *Canada*.

Frames 199–212

24 Captain Charles Saxton: 'Journal of the several interviews with the French Fleet at Tobago, Chesapeake and St Kitts', 30 May 1781 to 15 January 1782

Grey Collection: GRE/6. Presented in 1945.

Captain Sir Charles Saxton, 1732–1808: lieutenant 1753, captain 1762. Commissioned *Invincible* in the Channel 1779. Went out to West Indies under Hood 1780.

Frames 213–225

25 Prince William Henry: Log of the *Barfleur*, 10 December 1782 to 27 June 1783

Museum's single volume collection: LOG/N/B/9. Acquired in 1931.

The *Barfleur* cruised in the West Indies before starting home with a convoy early in 1783. The log contains particular detail on sailing positions and signals.

Frames 226–382

4 SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

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