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**Carrie Irene Elizabeth Long**

**‘Yours Humbly, Sincerely, and Obediently’? The Social Agency of Lone Women’s  
Petitions c.1789-1850**

Abstract

This thesis studies the personal petitions of lone women across three archival collections - the Home Office, the Admiralty, and the Poor Law authorities. It compares the experiences and survival strategies of the wives of convicts and the deserted wives and widows of mariners, across class lines and throughout Britain in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Petitions are used to gain insights into the lives of lone women, in their own words, at several challenging points of their lifecycle, from young motherhood to elderly widowhood. This thesis shows that lone women often shared a belief in their entitlement to relief from the state following the loss of their breadwinner through naval service or criminal transportation and that they applied for pensions, parochial relief, clemency, and free passage. This discussion highlights that lone women’s reliance on discretionary welfare meant they were able to exert their agency and influence institutional decisions through their negotiations and appeals to authorities. This is achieved by categorising and comparing their petitioning strategies, including emotional and linguistic appeals, bargaining, knowledge sharing, and networking.

This research is structured around the experiences of lone women and the responses of multiple state authorities. The first two chapters examine the wives of convicts and naval widows to compare their socio-economic experiences following the loss of a breadwinner, assessing their petitioning practices and treatment by authorities, alongside the challenges faced in terms of class and social expectations. The third and fourth chapters further develop understandings of lone women’s survival strategies in reference to long-term familial support and the pressures from the moral policing of the wider community and institutions. Collectively, by assessing the negotiations between lone women and authorities, this research addresses wider themes of class, age, motherhood, respectability, and stigma, developing scholarly understanding of how clerks and officials shaped welfare decisions.

‘Yours Humbly, Sincerely, and Obediently’?

The Social Agency of Lone Women’s  
Petitions c.1789-1850

Carrie Irene Elizabeth Long

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of Durham University for the degree of  
Doctor in Philosophy

Department of History, Durham University  
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## Introduction

'I fear these repeated appeals may be deemed troublesome, but [to] whom can I apply if not to those on whom I have a just claim'.<sup>1</sup>

Catherine Lamburn was the widow of a middle-class officer, a convict, and a pauper. She petitioned thirty-four times over twenty-eight-years, from 1819-1847, for a pension, a job, and a range of other monetary relief from the Admiralty. Lamburn typifies a lone woman. This thesis analyses the experiences of lone women whose lifecycle had been disrupted by the loss of a male breadwinner due to policies of the state. This meant she survived alone for long periods but was ultimately without financial provision and, as a result, held the state accountable as a replacement protector and provider.

Lamburn, like many others, faced a challenging existence as claims to monetary relief and the grant of pensions were not a guaranteed right. Naval widows' pensions were highly desirable and competitive and, in the case of Lamburn, could be lost due to factors outside of her control, such as her husband having died in debt. Furthermore, she struggled in the face of institutional rule changes regarding remarriage. However, Lamburn did not let such administrative obstacles deter her in petitioning efforts for her 'just claim'.<sup>2</sup> Her claims to financial support were rooted in her identity as a lone woman. As a widow and mother of a son who died in the navy, she had a patriotic claim and strong entitlement for her reproductive and nurturing labour. Women in the eighteenth and nineteenth century faced unequal economic opportunities to replace the earnings of a male breadwinner and were also subject to additional cultural pressures regarding their respectability, making them vulnerable to poverty and crime.<sup>3</sup> The loss of Lamburn's male

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<sup>1</sup> TNA, ADM 7/615, Catherine Lamburn, 1821-1847.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Jane Humphries, 'Female-headed households in early industrial Britain: the vanguard of the proletariat?', *Labour History Review*, 63.1 (1998), 34; Bridget Hill, *Women Alone: Spinners in England, 1660-1850* (New Haven, 2001), 2; Emma Griffin, *Bread Winner: an intimate history of the Victorian economy* (New Haven, 2020), 173.



breadwinners caused her social fortunes to decline and, in 1834, Lamburn was incarcerated for six months in Marshalsea debtor's prison. As a convict she continued to petition, writing to King William IV for redress to intervene on her behalf with the Admiralty for a pension and the arrears of her late husband's pay to which she viewed herself as entitled. Once free and without a pension, Lamburn found poverty a constant threat. In 1839, she wrote to the Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty that she was 'upwards of sixty years of age' and was 'actually starving – hourly expecting to be driven into the streets'.<sup>4</sup> Relief from the Poor Law authorities had been transformed through the introduction of the New Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834. It introduced widespread adoption of workhouses to relieve the able-bodied poor, a system which acted as a stigmatising deterrent rather than a safety net.<sup>5</sup> Retirement was not an option for the poor and, by 1843, Lamburn had asked the Admiralty for a job as a servant although she stated that her request was evidence of her 'most gloomy prospects' for a person so 'honourably connected'.<sup>6</sup> Altering and alternating her demands in each petition, she also utilised her networks by drawing on support from admirals as well as collaborating in her petition-writing efforts with her local curate. Lamburn constantly attempted to negotiate with the Admiralty and petitioned as each new Lord Commissioner took their post.

A petition, which is a written, deferential, formalised, but personal request to an established authority, can at first appear as a defeatist account of a subject trapped by difficult circumstances.<sup>7</sup> However, petitions were a long-established right which allowed unfranchised women with an opportunity for agency over their circumstances through their 'demands [for] favour; or the redressing of an injustice'.<sup>8</sup> Although there was no guarantee of success, they

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<sup>4</sup> TNA, ADM 7/615, Catherine Lamburn, 1821-1847.

<sup>5</sup> Griffin, *Bread Winner*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Susannah Ottoway, *The Decline of Life: Old Age in Eighteenth-century England* (Cambridge, 2008) 8; TNA, ADM 7/615, Catherine Lamburn, 1821-1847.

<sup>7</sup> Lex Heerma van Voss, (eds.) *Petitions in Social History*, (Cambridge, 2002), 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

allowed women to enter a 'privileged communicative space' in which humble subject and state meet to negotiate.<sup>9</sup> Lamburn, although unsuccessful in appeals for a pension, did have some success in her negotiations with the Admiralty, as she referenced being given temporary private charity from naval officials, her numerous petitions were never ignored, and her case underwent several investigations.

Petitions in the eighteenth and nineteenth century were a key literary genre of self-expression and something all women could participate in regardless of their literacy or wealth. As sources, they offer the opportunity to further enrich understandings of the experiences and perceived entitlements of lone women, in their own words, prior to the existence of a welfare state.

Personal petitions are important in identifying and comparing survival strategies, patronage networks, negotiation tactics, and tracking evolving linguistic strategies. They also provide insight into institutional values and administrative practices through assessment of their responses to the substantial number of petitions by lone women. Lamburn was just one example of hundreds of thousands of lone women who used petitions to negotiate relief and support from state institutions. Her case, however, demonstrates that the social categories of maritime widow, pauper, and convict could overlap. It also invites questions of how lone women targeted multiple institutions for support and in what ways they could negotiate for assistance in response to social and economic fluctuations throughout their lifecycle.

This thesis, for the first time, traces and examines the personal petitions of lone women across three state archives – the Home Office, the Admiralty, and the Poor Law authorities – and across the period 1789-1850. It defines lone women as limited to the wives of convicts and the deserted wives and widows of mariners. These lone women have been selected for three key reasons: their

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<sup>9</sup> Ken Lunn and Ann Day, 'Deference and Defiance: The Changing Nature of Petitioning in British Naval Dockyards', *International Review of Social History*, 46 (2001), 132.

representation as an important but often partially explored category in the eighteenth and nineteenth century; their practical and cultural similarities of surviving alone for long periods whilst their husbands were away at sea; and, crucially, their shared petitioning practices directed to the same authorities across multiple state institutions.

### **Contextualising Lone Women**

Across the period 1789-1850, the number of lone women and their visibility grew in prominence due to the introduction of extensive criminal transportation overseas and significant periods of naval warfare, alongside disadvantageous changes to the Poor Law which brought them to the attention of authorities. The emphasis on criminal transportation to Australia, for periods of seven to fourteen years as well as life sentences, broke traditional family units and left dependants indefinitely without support. Approximately 153,000 men were banished for often trifling offences, but many more dependants would have been left behind.<sup>10</sup> Concurrently, the British Navy was one of the largest maritime powers in the world, drawing on substantial numbers of men, either voluntarily or forcibly through impressment, keeping them at sea for years at a time.<sup>11</sup> These pressures of separation were exacerbated by wider social changes, such as the New Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which, as Sidney and Beatrice Webb identified more than a century ago, was silent ‘with regard to the really baffling problems, presented by the widow, the deserted wife, the wife of the absentee soldier or sailor’.<sup>12</sup> However, since the Webbs’ observation, historians have yet to give significant attention to comparing the experiences of these lone women left behind on shore.

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<sup>10</sup> Marjory Harper and Stephen Constantine, *Migration and Empire* (Oxford, 2010), 44. Clare Anderson and Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, ‘Convict Labour and the Western Empires, 1415 -1954’, in Robert Aldrich and Kirsten McKenzie, *The Routledge History of Western Empires*, (Oxon, 2014), 112. Anderson and Hamish record an additional 3,000 convicts transported from Britain to Port Phillip in 1846 -1850, 9,000 to Bermuda between 1824 – 1863 and 9,000 sent to Gibraltar between 1842 and 1875.

<sup>11</sup> N.A.M Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815* (London, 2004), 500; 582.

<sup>12</sup> Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *English Poor Law Policy*, (London, 1910), 6.

Petitions will be used to address this oversight and highlight the importance of making such comparisons. The social agency of these women is evident through petitions: even if they were not immediately successful, lone women often made numerous applications expressing their feelings of entitlement for support and would not accept the circumstances of being without a breadwinner as their own responsibility. Indeed, the fact that they lost their husband to the state-run institutions of the navy or criminal transportation gave them more authority to argue that the state was responsible as their lone status was not of their own making. Petitioners were united in their use of the language of gendered ideals to confer moral responsibility onto the authorities for their support. Through comparative exploration of lone women, including poor to elite petitioners, it will highlight how factors such as class affected how these women were treated. However, it will also consider whether universal linguistic strategies concerning motherhood, patriotism, and emotion could also appeal to authorities to make discretionary decisions in their favour, regardless of their social category.

### **Shared Experiences**

There are several similarities and shared experiences between the wives of convicts and the deserted wives and widows of mariners. In practical socio-economic terms, they faced similar financial challenges of surviving alone for long periods, often at a young age with families to support. Female paupers whose husbands were absent overseas could provoke the ire of parochial authorities for having the potential to add to the burden of rate payers, leading to removal attempts or unfavourable treatment in their efforts to access relief.<sup>13</sup> Widowhood did not automatically grant women with special status or pensions and it was a struggle for many to survive solely on their own earnings, making them vulnerable to poverty and crime.

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<sup>13</sup> TNA, MH12/2223, 10306, W. G. L. Clerk to the East Stonehouse Poor Law Board to Captain W. A. B. Hamilton, RN, Secretary to the Admiralty, Whitehall, 2 April 1849; TNA, MH 12/5250, 727A, Internal memorandum by F. Funckle, Relieving Officer and Assistant Overseer, Medway Union, 24 Jan. 1840.

A further commonality between the wives of convicts and the wives and widows of mariners is evidenced through material culture. Ballads and love tokens, received as keepsakes from their absent husbands, show shared sentiments regarding the experience of separation, loss, and remembrance.<sup>14</sup> For example, both sailors and convicts used similar motifs of engraved ships on their love tokens and used the same phrases of ‘when this you see remember me’.<sup>15</sup> Ballads provided comparable perspectives on the emotions of wives left behind: ‘The Convict’s Child’ focused on the ‘The widow’d mother sobb’d alone’ and the ‘Lamentation of the Sailors and Soldiers Wives for the loss of their Husbands’ acknowledged the ‘Many wives they’ve left behind them/Full of grief in every town’.<sup>16</sup> Collectively, these women faced similar challenges and experiences, but they also had the opportunity of gaining social agency through petitions.

State institutions were foremost focused on controlling male convicts, sailors, and paupers; however, the women and dependants who were left behind did not remain passive. In all three cases, lone women pursued an essential survival response to petition and negotiate with state authorities for relief and aid to compensate for the inevitable consequences of state policies. Politicians of both parties in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century pursued legislation and institutional reform to make relief, pensions, and support more standardised and to limit personal favour. However, through comparative assessment of institutional practices, this thesis will demonstrate how the role of official discretion remained a uniting factor across time and the collections. The following chapters argue that the prevalence of exceptions and varying

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<sup>14</sup> Claire Tindal, Ainslie Greiner, and David Hallam, ‘Harnessing the Powers of Elemental Analysis to Determine the Manufacture and use of Convict Love Tokens – A Case Study’, *Bulletin of the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material*, 36.1 (2015), 45; Lincoln, *Naval Wives and Mistresses, 1750-1815* (London, 2007), 137.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid; Timothy Millet and Peter Lane, ‘Known convict love tokens’, in Timothy Millett and Peter Lane (eds.), *Convict Love Tokens: The Leaden Hearts the Convicts Left Behind* (Kent Town, 1998), 100.

<sup>16</sup> *The Convict’s Child*. Broadside Ballad (London, 1838-1859). Broadside Ballads Online, Bodleian Library, Oxford: Edition Bod1159, Round V351; *Lamentation of the sailors and soldiers wives for the loss of their husbands*. Broadside Ballad (London, 1807-1810). Broadside Ballads Online, Bodleian Library, Oxford: Edition Bod15392, Round V1188.

interpretation of rules provided lone women with agency over their circumstances through appeals to these discretionary powers.

Personal petitions will be used in this thesis to uncover lone women's survival strategies, identify networks, and categorise their negotiating tactics for relief and support with multiple state institutions. It will assess what factors affected the success of petitioners through close attention to internal discussions and marginalia on petitions. These outcomes, both successful and unsuccessful, will be used to provide a new comparative perspective on the opportunities and obstacles that the wives of convicts and the deserted wives and widows of mariners experienced. As well as exploring the accounts of lone women, critical attention will also be given to contemporary perceptions of their social status as lone women across class lines, from the perspectives of supporters and critical informers who wrote to institutions regarding their deservingness for relief. Together this research will connect disparate historiography on convicts, paupers, and mariners to highlight the importance of petitions, and enhance knowledge of institutional welfare practices and the experiences of women left behind on shore.

To contextualise lone women and petitioning, this introduction will reflect on existing historiography and methodological approaches. Firstly, it will explore current scholarship on recovering histories of women alone in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, highlighting how this wider research has informed this study's research questions. Secondly, individual historiographies on convicts and mariners will be reviewed in detail to explain how petitions can advance these specialist fields and provide new perspectives by reading across archival and subject boundaries. Thirdly, it will include a methodological discussion regarding how petitions are defined and used, alongside analytical approaches to petitions in relation to themes of gender and the history of emotions. This thesis also draws on archival theory and will explain how and

why the multiple archive collections have been used and selected. Lastly, it will provide an overview of the four chapters that comprise this thesis.

### **Women's History Historiography**

Within women's history there exist distinct but connected bodies of scholarship which focus on recovering the experiences of women on their own in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Elite, middling, and working-class lone women have separately been subject to class-based studies. This thesis will bring together these approaches, methods, and historical debates, strengthening the value of this research whilst developing a broader understanding of the experiences of lone women across the social spectrum.

The experience and agency of women on their own has been most readily recovered by historians who have focused on elite and middling women where archival traces of their lives in personal correspondence are often most extensive. This work has helped to reconsider women's roles within patronage, to uncover their public involvement in charitable causes, and to reassess the importance of matriarchs to the familial economy.

Elaine Chalus' research on political elite women in the eighteenth-century persuasively challenges understanding of politics and patronage as an exclusively male stronghold. Chalus' focus on the personal, familial, and social aspects of politics has reintegrated the experiences of women, finding that in practice women were accepted 'from political confidant through to political partner'.<sup>17</sup> Elite women, she finds, did not challenge the status quo but worked within it to further wider familial interests and, as such, identifies that social status and connection were often more important than gender for their agency. Patronage thrived in grey areas between

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<sup>17</sup> Elaine Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life c.1754-1790* (Oxford, 2005), 13.

public and private life, such as dining rooms and ballrooms, making these women particularly well suited to participate within a system that worked ‘primarily through personal contact, connexion, and persuasion’.<sup>18</sup> Women, like men, also took up their pens to request patronage and achieve familial advancement. Chalus’ research on the personal appeals to the Duke of Newcastle, First Lord of the Treasury, finds women accounted for ten per cent of the petitioners. This convincing assessment of women’s appeals for patronage has helped highlight a method to uncover agency and demonstrates the influence women held, even when possessing limited political rights and less visible public profiles.

Kathryn Gleadle’s *Borderline Citizens* complements Chalus’ findings in her assessment of middling and elite women’s engagement with British politics in the nineteenth century, providing further evidence of women’s agency beyond the expected domestic sphere. Philanthropy, Gleadle argues, conferred elite women with status and ‘cultivated highly politicized identities within their communities’.<sup>19</sup> Like Chalus, she emphasises that, for elite women, status and economic standing, rather than gender, were key to their influence within a paternalist society. Gleadle argues that women could have significant influence in what she terms the ‘parochial realm’ identified as ‘the world of neighbourhood, workplace, or acquaintance networks’.<sup>20</sup> She identifies, for example, that several female philanthropists ‘played a critical role in liaising with boards of guardians to influence the implementation of the [Poor Law Amendment] Act’, thereby adopting the role of activist for pauper women and children.<sup>21</sup> Her research draws on a wide range sources including memoirs, pamphlets, letters, poems, and biographies. Her approach is innovative in its attention to how women ‘felt’ as well as their strategies for political engagement and highlights the contradictions in ‘hegemonic gender codes’ and the ‘diversity and dynamism of women’s

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>19</sup> Kathryn Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender and Political Culture in Britain, 1815-1867* (Oxford, 2009), 141.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 140.



activities “on the ground”<sup>22</sup>. This work has further challenged the idea of women being confined to the domestic sphere and demonstrates that women did have public and active roles within the community. However, Gleadle is tempered in her analysis of women’s opportunities and success. She finds women continued to be vulnerable to change, highlights that collective action could cause controversy, and reveals that memorialisation of women’s civic participation was often hidden or overlooked by an emphasis on gendered and familial ideals.

To further uncover women’s public participation and agency in the community, increasing attention has been given to the role of women as matriarchs and business owners. Peter Collinge’s assessment of women business owners in the mid-eighteenth to nineteenth century counters traditional narratives of women eking out a marginal existence and giving up their businesses when their sons became of age, instead finding that many women operated businesses, servicing parishes as well as the public, for many years and even left them for their daughters to inherit.<sup>23</sup> This agency of women in business has been further corroborated by assessments by Stana Nenadic, Christina De Bellaigue, and Andrew Popp, on the role of women as matriarchs guiding the socio-economic interests of the wider ‘familial project’.<sup>24</sup> Nenadic argues that women have previously been overlooked by business historians who focused on economic growth.<sup>25</sup> However, by viewing women from the perspective of family income strategies, more nuanced findings of women’s economic contributions emerge. Nenadic convincingly argues that the business strategies of women were shaped by societal expectations rather than market economy which meant their focus was not on expansion but stable income.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Collinge, ‘Women, business and the Old Poor Law’, in Peter Collinge and Louise Falcini (ed.) *Providing for the Poor: The Old Poor Law, 1750 – 1834* (London, 2022), 107-132.

<sup>24</sup> Stana Nenadic, ‘The Social Shaping of Business Behaviour in the Nineteenth-Century Women’s Garment Trades’, *Journal of Social History*, 31.3 (1998), 625-645; Christina De Bellaigue, ‘Great Expectations? Childhood, Family, and Middle-Class Social Mobility in Nineteenth-Century England’, *The Journal of Social History Society*, 16.1 (2019), 3; Andrew Popp, “‘But to cover her shame’: Respectability, social mobility, and the middling sort in early nineteenth-century England”, *Cultural and Social History*, 18.4 (2021), 13.

<sup>25</sup> Nenadic, ‘The Social Shaping of Business Behaviour’, 627-628.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 627.

Her research into the Scottish textile industry also points to the close employment and long-term socio-economic relationships between lone female family members into adulthood. De Bellaigue and Popp have similarly identified female business matriarchs and close familial relationships in their studies of middling merchant and industrial families, although they have also revealingly highlighted the importance of character and women's particular vulnerability to reputational damage.<sup>27</sup> This focus on middling women's independence in business has been important in highlighting agency and recovering women's place within the eighteenth and nineteenth-century economy. However, most importantly, this scholarship highlights that it is essential to contextualise women's business efforts within the societal expectations of the period to fully understand the experiences, role of community relationships, and the vulnerabilities of women on their own.

As well as exploring elite and middling women, historians, such as Jane Humphries, Emma Griffin, and Bridget Hill, have taken a demographic and social approach to uncover the experiences of working-class and poor lone women. Jane Humphries in her research has identified that female-headed families were a common occurrence, finding that during the industrial revolution 'nine per cent of all households with children were headed by women'.<sup>28</sup> Humphries' assessment of working-class autobiographies and extensive financial data relating to household budgets has demonstrated that lone women had fewer financial opportunities, experienced poverty, and relied on the early contributions of their young children to bolster the family economy. This focus on women within the industrial revolution has challenged Whig narratives on the social progress of industrialisation, instead highlighting that it was a period that witnessed increased poverty for lone women. Humphries persuasively argues that lone women were not a 'parasitic sub-culture', instead demonstrating that society benefitted from their

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<sup>27</sup> De Bellaigue, 'Great Expectations?', 33; Popp, 'But to cover her shame', 8.

<sup>28</sup> Humphries, 'Female-headed households', 33.

existence as they provided adult and female labour and facilitated wider migration by providing lodgings.<sup>29</sup> Whilst trapped in a poverty cycle, lone women also culturally shaped the nuclear families of the working class as the ‘threat of falling to their level encouraged patterns of behaviour’ to achieve respectability.<sup>30</sup>

Emma Griffin’s *Bread Winner* has furthered Humphries’ findings, arguing that women did not directly benefit from the industrial revolution. Griffin’s research draws on working-class familial autobiographies to explore how wealth travelled through society and considers the implications of the concept of the ‘breadwinner wage’ defined as ‘substantial enough for a man to keep his wife and young children out of the labour market altogether’.<sup>31</sup> Griffin finds that the breadwinner wage was an aspiration rather than a reality for many working families, and, for lone women, this concept did not apply to them as they could not independently achieve a wage equivalent to a man. Women were instead reliant on marrying a male wage earner for their financial survival. Griffin’s assessment of lone women finds that those who lost a breadwinner needed a replacement to survive through remarriage or through use of their children, although there was no guarantee they would be reliable providers.<sup>32</sup> Deserted women, she finds, were most vulnerable as they could not remarry, and the poor law acted as a ‘last resort rather than a safety net’.<sup>33</sup>

Bridget Hill’s *Women Alone* focuses on spinsters in England and further explores lone women’s experiences in relation to local Poor Law authorities and community response to their status. Hill identifies that widows and spinsters were common recipients of parish relief as well as

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>31</sup> Griffin, *Bread Winner*, 4.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 7.

inmates of workhouses and bridewells.<sup>34</sup> She argues that there was hostility to lone women regarding their liability to become chargeable to parish ratepayers and, consequently, were subject to close surveillance. Hill, like Humphries and Griffin, finds that lone women's migrating and makeshift work practices were essential to their survival. However, Hill also identifies that these practices had the potential to undermine women's survival as such strategies were against perceived gendered norms which could bring lone women's respectability into question.<sup>35</sup>

Collectively, Humphries, Griffin, and Hill point to lone women as a common social category and as a group which contributed to the economy but were often trapped in a cycle of poverty. Their research has also highlighted the contradictions of the ideal of a male breadwinner and the reality that many women needed to work but were unable to access the same employment opportunities. As a result, this created cultural and institutional conflict in society over poverty, welfare, and respectability.

An essential contribution to understanding the experiences of lone women has been the scholarly assessment of pauper letters requesting relief under the old and new poor law. The old poor law, which existed from 1601-1834, created a legal obligation for parishes to provide relief to the impotent poor, including widows, orphans and the sick.<sup>36</sup> The able-bodied poor were to be found employment or supported from the rates if wages were insufficient or employment could not be sourced. Those who refused to work were liable to punishment. Relief under the old poor law was administered at a parish level and was discretionary in style.<sup>37</sup> Under this system, Samantha Williams has identified that elderly widows in the eighteenth century were considered particularly deserving of parochial relief as they were perceived as 'not the architects

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<sup>34</sup> Hill, *Women Alone*, 2.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 101.

<sup>36</sup> Samantha Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle under the English Poor Law, 1760-1834* (Suffolk, 2013), 2.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Jones and Steven King (eds.), *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute under the English Poor Laws* (Cambridge, 2015), 3.

of their own situation' and therefore were entitled to the assistance that a patriarchal society was meant to provide.<sup>38</sup> Joanne Bailey and Alannah Tomkins have also argued that there was less stigma for pauper women to request and receive relief as this was in keeping with gendered ideals of women being dependent, whereas respectable masculinity required independent industry.<sup>39</sup> However, findings by Peter Jones differ as he argues that relief was not simply granted to widows as there was an expectation that they should first help themselves by compromising their living arrangements or seeking paid work.<sup>40</sup> Jones also finds that parish decision-making was affected by 'moral paternalism' as officials considered behavioural indiscretions when deciding whom to relieve.<sup>41</sup> Steven King's research on pauper letters argues that the poor were aware of the need to make their requests appealing to authorities and took great care to frame their requests in ways which drew upon 'shared rhetorical fictions'.<sup>42</sup> King has identified and categorised linguistic strategies used in pauper letters, such as 'anchoring' appeals to custom, promoting their good character, appealing to human dignity or its absence, and detailing more emotive expressions of the pauper self.<sup>43</sup> His research devotes one chapter to how gender shaped pauper writing and finds that women were able to 'manipulat[e] a primarily male discourse aimed at men in power' and could 'tie together universal rhetorical models, emotional appeals, and firm parochial obligation much more consciously than was the case with fathers and husbands'.<sup>44</sup> Collectively, historians of the old poor law have made a convincing case for the value of pauper letters as particularly valuable sources for revealing history from below and assessing social and cultural attitudes towards the poor.

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<sup>38</sup> Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle*, 111.

<sup>39</sup> Joanne Bailey, "'Think Wot a Mother Must Feel?': Parenting in English Pauper Letters c.1760-1834', *Family and Community History*, 13.1 (2010), 9; Alannah Tomkins, 'Men's pauper letters', Alys Levene, Steven King, Alannah Tomkins, Thomas Nutt, Peter King, Deborah Symonds and Lisa Zunshine (eds.) *Narratives of the Poor in Eighteenth-Century England Vol. 1* (Abingdon, 2006), 213.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Jones, 'Widows, Work and Wantonness: Pauper Letters and the Boundaries of Entitlement Under the Old Poor Law', in Jones and King (eds.) *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute*, 149.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 152; 166.

<sup>42</sup> Steven King, *Writing the lives of the English Poor 1750s-1830s* (London, 2019), 143.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 183-185.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 291; 304.

Historians of the new poor law have also successfully utilised pauper letters and have, through assessment of The New Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, been able to interrogate the experiences of women more critically. Overall, the act was a ‘fundamental break from the more intimate and largely parochial administration of welfare’ as the introduction of a Central Authority (Poor Law Commission) was intended to bring more uniformity to practice.<sup>45</sup> The new poor law was intended to be a deterrent to the poor and, as such, monetary out-relief was only to be granted in exceptional cases; relief was instead to be provided to the able-bodied poor through admission to the workhouse, a stigmatising experience that limited independence and often subjected paupers to harsh treatment.<sup>46</sup> Pat Thane and Sonja Rose argue convincingly that the new poor law was shaped by gendered expectations and that officials took it for granted that a male breadwinner would universally support a wife and dependants.<sup>47</sup> In this way, the common-law principle of ‘*coverture*’ which viewed women’s legal status as a dependant of her husband extended into relief practices.<sup>48</sup> These ideals were largely incompatible with the reality of ‘industrial low pay and recurrent unemployment, and early or sudden death’ of the breadwinner.<sup>49</sup> The difficult financial position of lone women, particularly widows and the deserted, was also not taken into consideration within this new policy.

Marjorie Levine-Clark has furthered this analysis through assessment of the inherent tensions and contradictions in how poor law officials implemented the new poor law regarding women. Officials, she argues, were caught between competing ideals: on the one hand, women were understood to be physically weaker, suited to domestic work to preserve their health for

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<sup>45</sup> Steven King, Paul Carter, Natalie Carter, Peter Jones and Carol Beardmore, (eds.) *In Their Own Write: Contesting the New Poor Law, 1834-1900* (London, 2022), 3-4.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>47</sup> Pat Thane, ‘Women and the Poor Law in Victorian and Edwardian England’, *History Workshop*, 6 (1978), 30.

<sup>48</sup> Sonya Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth Century England* (London, 1992), 51.

<sup>49</sup> Thane, ‘Women and the Poor Law’, 30; Rose, *Limited Livelihoods*, 54.

motherhood, and largely dependent upon men to provide for them.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, women as paupers could also be categorised as able-bodied workers and thus not entitled to special treatment in the form of out-relief.<sup>51</sup> Levine-Clark's assessment of petitions for parochial relief finds that some women could still negotiate exceptional out-relief, arguing that appeals to old age and 'illness was central to women's petitions for aid'.<sup>52</sup> This was a strategy, she asserts, that enabled women to not be judged as able-bodied and instead be considered worthy of out-relief because they were no longer able to support themselves'.<sup>53</sup> Pamela Sharpe's assessment of widows' survival strategies suggests that the social perception of women as a particularly deserving category of paupers was declining.<sup>54</sup> She argues that, by the mid-nineteenth century, relief towards women had become more exclusive than inclusive and, for younger widows, there was a growing need for them to justify their claims.<sup>55</sup> King et al.'s *In Their Own Write*, which assesses pauper letters, adds authority to findings that women paupers continued to try to negotiate through letters despite the changes in relief policies introduced under the new poor law.<sup>56</sup> Their findings draw upon a broader range of female pauper applicants, including deserted women and pauper inmates, suggesting collectively that women continued to make use of rhetorical strategies of dependence and deference of the past but also expressed 'a newer sense of right defined by regulation or law'.<sup>57</sup> Collectively, this scholarship on women and the new poor law has insightfully raised questions over the evolution of ideals around welfare and deservingness, particularly how women were defined over time and the extent of continuity in practices of discretion and negotiation for types of relief.

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<sup>50</sup> Marjorie Levine-Clark, 'Engendering Relief: Women, Ablebodiedness, and the New Poor Law in Early Victorian England', *Journal of Women's History*, 11.4 (2000), 108.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 116-117.

<sup>54</sup> Pamela Sharpe, 'Survival strategies and stories: poor widows and widowers in early industrial England', in Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner (eds.) *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (London, 1999), 235-236.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> King, et al., *In Their Own Write*, 188-211.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 197.

Another method historians have used to access the experiences of women from below has been to utilise the petitions they submitted to charitable and state institutions at points of crisis. Tanya Evans's *Unfortunate Objects*' explores the personal petitions of unmarried mothers who wished to give up their illegitimate children to The Foundling Hospital. Evans uses these sources to further understand the circumstances of lone mothers in the eighteenth century and, as a result, finds parallels with pauper letters, such as their use of rhetoric relating to economic need and distress.<sup>58</sup> Her research identifies a shift between the eighteenth and nineteenth century regarding cultural expectations of women's sexuality. Petitions that appealed to seduction narratives and sexual passivity became the most appealing to authorities. However, through use of personal petitions, Evans reveals a more complex picture of women being affected by a lifecycle of socio-economic misfortunes.<sup>59</sup> Petitions which are directed to an established authority offer the opportunity to assess not only the emotions and experiences of the petitioner but also to uncover what could gain sympathy and a positive response from institutions, providing insights into contemporary cultural understandings of gender and welfare.

Similar assessments have also been applied to the petitions of criminal women to the Home Office. Robert Shoemaker, in his assessment of pardon petitions, finds that gender was a significant factor in the sentencing of criminals. Shoemaker finds that women were treated more leniently than men as they were more likely to be imprisoned or given a free pardon than sentenced to death.<sup>60</sup> He argues this was due to cultural considerations in which judges saw women as 'more vulnerable, and more susceptible to economic difficulties owing to lower pay and the burden of providing for children, so [were] less culpable than men'.<sup>61</sup> This perspective,

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<sup>58</sup> "Unfortunate Objects": London's Unmarried Mothers in the Eighteenth Century', *Gender and History*, 17.1 (2005), 130.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 133.

<sup>60</sup> Robert Shoemaker, 'Sparing the Noose: Death sentence and the pardoning of Old Bailey Convicts, 1763-1868', in Katie Barclay and Amy Milka (eds.), *Cultural Histories of Law, Media and Emotion* (New York, 2023), 249.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 250.



Shoemaker argues, was reinforced by the women themselves who he finds were ‘almost twice as likely to mention “distress” as their male counterparts’ in their petitions for mercy.<sup>62</sup> Kim Price takes this research further by exploring the clemency appeals of female criminals imprisoned in Britain, but sentenced to transportation. His research focuses on three case studies, assessing how appeals to the Home Office evolved within individual cases and explores social attitudes to mental and physical health.<sup>63</sup> Research on petitions submitted to institutions at points of crisis clearly raise important questions regarding whether petitioners shaped their appeals to attract different audiences or whether some appeals of distress were universal.

A limitation of the scholarship on women alone in the eighteenth and nineteenth century is that assessments are often treated in isolation, confined to a particular group, class, or record series. This thesis aims to contribute to this scholarship and provide comparative analysis across archival collections and social groups by focusing on *lone women*, a definition which applies specifically to the wives of transported convicts and the deserted wives and widows of mariners. This thesis will use personal petitions to explore many questions raised by existing scholarship and apply it to lone women, exploring the roles of non-industrial matriarchs, considering whether gendered patronage was possible in naval as well as political circles, and establishing the significance of social status and connections to lone women’s self-agency. It will also assess whether the appeals of the wives of convicts were similar or different to naval widows, questioning how important it was for them to gain the support of local officials, what obstacles lone women faced, and whether they were equally felt across all social classes.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Kim Price, ‘Time to Write: Convict Petitions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century’, *Family and Community History*, 22.1(2019), 22-39.

## Historiography Connecting Wives of Convicts and Mariners

Some historians have previously hinted at the links between the wives of convicts and mariners; however, there has not been any developed study which has fully compared them. Ginger Frost's research on nineteenth-century cohabitation practices, for example, finds that sailors' wives and those deserted by their husband's transportation were similarly vulnerable to adulterous cohabitation as a survival strategy.<sup>64</sup> However, she does not consider broader comparisons between the groups. Margarett Lincoln's research on naval wives and mistresses in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century provides a more detailed analysis of survival strategies as she devotes a chapter of her book to 'labouring and criminal classes', highlighting the vulnerabilities of the wives of common seamen to prostitution and crime.<sup>65</sup> Lincoln states that access to experiences of labouring classes of naval women is difficult to uncover. Her research relies on newspapers, local records, and Old Bailey trial accounts, but finds 'most of the information about domestic relationships of seamen at this end of the social scale comes from instances when they or their womenfolk broke the law and were arrested, or when one partner actually brought charges against the other'.<sup>66</sup> Whilst Lincoln's research is valuable in exploring the general social conditions of poor naval women, her categorisation and source base cannot offer a balanced picture of ordinary wives and widows of mariners throughout their lifecycle. Were there other employment opportunities; was it possible for a lone woman to achieve social mobility; or were criminal taint and rough survival practices socially-defining? Historian Jennine Hurl-Eamon identifies that rough practices, such as pawning, were often a temporary survival strategy as part of a makeshift economy for poor sailors' wives but could occasionally lead to convictions for theft.<sup>67</sup> Middling wives and widows were also vulnerable to getting into debt in

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<sup>64</sup> Ginger Frost, *Living in Sin: Cohabiting as husband and wife in nineteenth-century England* (Manchester, 2008), 110-111.

<sup>65</sup> Lincoln, *Naval Wives and Mistresses*, 135-172.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 136.

<sup>67</sup> Jennine Hurl-Eamon, 'The fiction of female dependence and the makeshift economy of soldiers, sailors, and their wives in eighteenth-century London', *Labor History*, 49.4 (2008), 485.

their efforts to keep up appearances and maintain their independence by spending on credit. However, they risked liquidating their assets or facing debtors' prison if they were not able to quickly secure allotments of their husband's wages, pension payments, or relief. Margot Finn's research on character and debt finds a broad shift in attitudes towards debtors, suggesting their circumstances were understood as misfortune rather than misbehaviour.<sup>68</sup> Petitions for pensions and relief present the opportunity to further test these historiographical debates, questioning how women's makeshift economies were perceived by authorities and communities and what implications they might have for accessing relief in the long-term.

Other scholarly contributions to the understanding of lone women have been made by historians who have focused on microhistories which overlap the categories of sailors, convicts, and paupers. Melanie Ward's microstudy of David Moore, a seaman by trade, traces his life as a convict in Australia and his return to Ireland. This study reveals that Moore was able to bargain his seafaring skills with authorities, both in person and through petitions with Irish parochial and government authorities, to achieve a reunion with his wife and gain a free passage for his family to Australia.<sup>69</sup> Helen Rogers' research on Christian charity and prisoners in nineteenth century Great Yarmouth suggests that naval wives were also adept at networking to gain charitable support. Her research focuses on the intervention of philanthropist and prison visitor, Sarah Martin, who helped the poor wives of seamen negotiate with authorities, including magistrates and parochial officials, to avoid the workhouse and gain relief and employment.<sup>70</sup> These individual cases suggest fluidity in social status and the importance of networking and personal petitioning. The relationship between having a maritime background and the likelihood of success in networking and bargaining requires more extensive comparison of individual

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<sup>68</sup> Margot Finn, *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740-1914* (Cambridge, 2003), 104.

<sup>69</sup> Melanie Ward, 'A Tale of Transportation', *Clogher Record*, 22.1 (2015), 43-56.

<sup>70</sup> Helen Rogers, 'Kindness, and Reciprocity: Liberated Prisoners and Christian Charity in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *Journal of Social History*, 47.3 (2014), 730.

experiences and strategies. Petitions, of which there are hundreds of thousands available and rich in personal detail, offer the opportunity to further uncover the connections between the categories of convicts, mariners, and paupers to explore similarities and differences in how they could bargain their skills and utilise patronage in their negotiations with authorities.

Comparing the petitions of lone women to multiple authorities offers the opportunity to test how authorities viewed them, if there were similarities in the types of survival strategies and linguistic modes of appeal they used, and what, if any, factors affected the types of response they received from authorities. The opening example of petitioner Catherine Lamburn has shown how women could petition and experience their lives in all three categories; however, the historiography of naval, convict, and pauper histories have, until now, largely been treated in isolation. As will be seen throughout this thesis and outlined below there is much to be gained in each field by looking beyond subject and archival boundaries.

### **Naval Women**

Scholarship on the wives and widows of mariners has developed significantly since N. A. M. Rodger argued that, to fully understand the social history of the navy, there is a need to explore the experiences of the 'female half of the naval community as a whole; not the minority of women who went to sea, but the wives and mothers who stayed home'.<sup>71</sup> The navy encouraged strong familial links which were primarily supported through marriage within the maritime community. Melanie Holihead has identified that a sailor's daughter was, by the mid-nineteenth century, four times as likely to marry a 'sailor groom' than a civilian groom.<sup>72</sup> The proximity of living near dockyards added to a sense of community, but the navy actively reinforced these spatial links by requiring wives and widows to attend revenue offices in person to collect

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<sup>71</sup> N. A. M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815*, (London, 2004), 407.

<sup>72</sup> Melanie Holihead, 'Cut adrift or towed astern: sailors' wives in mid-nineteenth century Portsea Island considered in perspective', *Journal for Maritime Research*, 17.2 (2015), 158.

allotments of pay or confirm their eligibility to receive pensions. A by-product of this system, Patricia Lin argues, was ‘the creation of physical communities of seaman’s wives, mothers and children. These communities were not only formed by women and children whose men were serving on the same ship, but also by those related to men serving on many other of His Majesty’s ships’.<sup>73</sup> These networks kept women informed with news of their husbands and sons, but also policy changes, and the successes and failures of other women’s interactions with naval officials.

Within this specialist historiography, naval wives and widows have often been analysed as separate groups made distinct by class and location. As previously referenced, Lincoln’s pioneering work on *Naval Wives and Mistresses*, for example, divides her assessment of women by social class exploring ‘the aristocracy and the gentry’, ‘the middling sort’, and ‘the labouring and criminal classes’.<sup>74</sup> Other historians, such as Elaine Chalus, Jennine Hurl-Eamon, Melanie Holihead, and Patricia Lin, have produced detailed micro-studies focusing on the archive material of one couple, such as Thomas and Elizabeth Fremantle, or exploring the financial economies of these women in specific geographic locations such as London or Portsea, often with comparative reference to the experiences of military wives.<sup>75</sup> These works all provide valuable insights into how women, often on the margins of history, survived. Their methodological decisions to focus on class or location is in part reflective of the influence of where surviving evidence can be found and how the archive is constructed, both factors which

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<sup>73</sup> Patricia Y.C.E. Lin, ‘Caring for the Nation’s Families: British Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Families and the State, 1793-1815’, in A. Forrest, K Hagemann, J. Rendall, (eds.) *Soldiers, Citizens and Civilians: War, Culture and Society, 1750 -1850* (London, 2009), 104.

<sup>74</sup> Margarette Lincoln, *Naval Wives and Mistresses, 1750-1815*, (London, 2007).

<sup>75</sup> Elaine Chalus, “‘My dearest Tussy’: coping with separation during the Napoleonic Wars (the Fremantle papers, 1800-1814)”, in James Davey and Quintin Colville, (eds.) *A New Naval History* (Manchester, 2019), 47-69; Jennine Hurl-Eamon, ‘The fiction of female dependence’, 481-501; Melanie Holihead, ‘Cut adrift or towed astern: sailors’, 155-168; Patricia Y.C.E. Lin, ‘Caring for the Nation’s Families’, 99-117.

often make it challenging to uncover the lives of ordinary seamen's wives and widows in the same level of detail as an admiral's wife or widow.

However, a petition is a type of document which all naval women had to produce to apply for a widow's pension regardless of their class or location. Petitions are used to investigate the significance of social divisions, such as class, and question whether appeals to patriotism could overcome such barriers, through analysing whether treatment varied by the Admiralty. Petitions are of value whether they are successful or not as they can capture a wide range of personal details, including employment practices, familial relationships, personal networks, and whether they interacted with parochial or criminal authorities. A comparison of petitions offers the opportunity to uncover how lone women financially survived following the loss of their breadwinner, by assessing how families restructured themselves and establishing whether familial and community support was equally available.

Petitions directed to the Admiralty also enhance understandings of pauper histories. Perceptions of parochial authorities towards the wives and widows of sailors are often viewed negatively, if explored from the perspective of local Poor Law Unions' complaints to the Central Authority. They wrote of the financial burden to rate payers and these sentiments are also reflected further in popular ballads regarding naval women which popularly recount, 'If they ask relief, the parish grumble'.<sup>76</sup> However, naval records will demonstrate that local parochial officials could be allies to lone women in their negotiations with other authorities for relief. Internal marginalia by the Admiralty, as will be seen in chapter four, also reveals its own perceptions and judgments on the

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<sup>76</sup> TNA, MH12/2223, 10306, W. G. L. Clerk to the East Stonehouse Poor Law Board to Captain W. A. B. Hamilton, RN, Secretary to the Admiralty, Whitehall, 2 April 1849; *Lamentation of the sailors and soldiers wives for the loss of their husbands*. Broadside Ballad (London, 1807-1810). Broadside Ballads Online, Bodleian Library, Oxford: Edition Bod15392, Round V1188.

trustworthiness and authority of other state institutions, providing greater insights into how Poor Law authorities responded to the poor and other state officials.

Within naval scholarship, less is understood regarding the survival of deserted wives and widows who were unsuccessful in their applications for pensions. Unsuccessful petitioners who reappealed for exceptions and those who came under investigation for fraud, bigamy, or misbehaviour by the Court of Assistants of the Admiralty will be discussed in greater detail throughout the chapters, providing another perspective to explore criminal and maritime history. The value of exploring institutional involvement in criminal proceedings to access the experiences of women has already been established in the assessment of criminals' petitions to the Bank of England.<sup>77</sup> Women convicted for fraud also petitioned the Bank of England for financial support prior to their transportation, providing details of their social and economic circumstances.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, the Admiralty had its own legal departments and encouraged informers against those engaged in activities that were criminal or at odds with the policy of naval charity. An assessment of these cases and investigations pursued by the Admiralty will provide new insights into both naval and wider criminal scholarship.

### **Wives of Convicts**

Scholarship related to convict transportation to Australia, whilst extensive, focuses primarily on the experiences of convicts overseas, and few have considered the long-lasting effects transportation had on the significant numbers of family and friends left behind.<sup>79</sup> Helen Rogers,

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<sup>77</sup> Randall McGowen, 'Managing the Gallows: The Bank of England and the Death Penalty, 1797-1821', *Law and History Review*, 25.2 (2007), 269-271; Carol Liston and Katherine M. Reynolds, 'Crime Pays: Women transported for forged bank notes' *Journal of Royal Australian Historical Society*, 104.1 (2018), 83-101

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 90-91.

<sup>79</sup> Ian Duffield and James Bradley, *Representing Convicts: New Perspectives on Convict Forced Labour Migration* (London, 1997); Lucy Frost and Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, *Chain Letters: Narrating Convict Lives* (Victoria, 2001); Stephen Nicholas, *Convict Workers: Reinterpreting Australia's Past* (Cambridge, 1988). Kirsty Reid, *Gender, Crime and Empire: Convicts, Settlers and the state in early colonial Australia* (Manchester, 2007); Clare Anderson, *Convicts: A Global History* (Cambridge, 2022).

Rebecca Kippen and Janet McCalman, and Lucy Frost have, through their research on convict families and nominal record linkage methodology, revealed that orphaned children of transported convicts were more vulnerable to crime as a survival strategy.<sup>80</sup> However, the experiences and strategies of families headed by lone women who did not resort to crime remain limited.

Portia Robinson, in her research on female transportees, gives greater consideration to the socio-economic conditions in Britain, but her work nonetheless shows that much remains to be understood about the experiences and institutional support available to those left behind.

Robinson's research has focused on the origins of a cultural 'convict taint' which depicted convicts as 'vile', 'depraved' and 'immoral', and was a stigma which she claimed extended to free women who joined their convict husbands in Australia.<sup>81</sup> She argues that 'vast misunderstanding' between perception and reality of convicts and their relations was due to contemporaries and scholars overlooking the social and economic conditions in Britain. Her research emphasises the extreme poverty of 'everyday standards of "homes" for the lower orders' described as 'only the most basic of shelter, overrun with vermin, with rats, lice and bedbugs' and points to a lack of 'provision to relieve the distresses of men, women, and children', particularly single women away from their parish of settlement.<sup>82</sup> This assessment, however, appears overstated as not all convicts were vagrants and paupers could appeal to parishes for temporary relief or assistance to return to their original place of settlement.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, even after the introduction of the

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<sup>80</sup> Helen Rogers, "'A Very Fair Statement of His Past Life': Transported Convicts, Former Lives and Previous Offences' *Open Library of Humanities*, 1.1 (2015), 1-35; Rebecca Kippen and Janet McCalman, 'Parental loss in young convicts transported to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania), 1841-1853, *The History of the Family*, 23.4 (2018), 656-678; Lucy Frost, "'Wished to Get out to Our Mother": Convict Transportation as Family Experience', Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers, 2006.

<sup>81</sup> Portia Robinson, *The Women of Botany Bay: a reinterpretation of the role of women in the origins of Australian society* (Sydney, 1988) 3; 12.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 19; 20.

<sup>83</sup> Tim Hitchcock 'Vagrancy, poor relief and the parish', in Peter Collinge and Louise Falcini, *Providing for the Poor: The Old Poor Law, 1750-1834* (London, 2022), 88; K. D. M. Snell, 'Belonging and Community: understandings of "home" and "friends" among the English poor, 1750-1850', *Economic History Review*, 65.1 (2012), 11.



New Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which aimed to limit out-relief, Poor Law authorities still had an obligation to assist those in extreme distress to prevent death.<sup>84</sup> Historians Steve King et al. and David Englander have, through exploration of pauper letters and petitions, also demonstrated that the poor did have agency and could be active, holding authorities to account if they were refused relief by writing to the Central Authorities and were willing to act as whistle-blowers on poor treatment and conditions in workhouses.<sup>85</sup>

Despite Robinson's claims of dire economic conditions and the extension of stigma to the wives of convicts, she does acknowledge that the loss of a husband through convict transportation did not immediately lead to a life of crime to survive. Instead, she found only 'a very small number of convict women did claim to have a husband already transported' compared to the 'greater number of free and unconvicted women who pleaded to be reunited with their transported husbands'.<sup>86</sup> Further insights into how single women managed the experience of 'poverty, destitution and deprivation consequent of unemployment and irregular work' is outside the focus of Robinson's project.<sup>87</sup> Whilst a reassessment of the convict taint is important in challenging stereotypes and understanding the socio-economic conditions that contributed to crime, there remains a need for a reassessment of the wider conditions experienced by the free women and children left behind and their interactions with state welfare.

Perry McIntyre has gone further in her research to develop understanding of the experience of convict relations through an important assessment of the assisted emigration scheme to reunite wives of convicts in Australia. McIntyre's focus is confined to the wives of Irish convicts and, like Robinson, only one chapter is devoted to female experience at home after their separation.

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<sup>84</sup> Thane, 'Women and the Poor Law', 35.

<sup>85</sup> King, et. al., *In Their Own Write*, 19; David Englander, 'From the Abyss: Pauper Petitions and Correspondence in Victorian London', *The London Journal*, 25.1 (2000), 78.

<sup>86</sup> Robinson, *The Women of Botany Bay*, 19.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

McIntyre explains that, in Ireland, formal poor relief was limited, and argues that Irish wives could not rely on the assistance of the parish, instead being reliant on the support of community and friends.<sup>88</sup> Emigration, McIntyre promotes, was seen as a common survival strategy against poverty. Her research uses petitions written by free wives left behind and transported convicts for reunion, providing important insights into the social and economic conditions of poverty and survival, particularly pre-famine.<sup>89</sup> McIntyre's close assessment of legislative scheme changes, however, places more emphasis on the responsibility of male convicts to initiate the reunion scheme application and gives limited consideration to the strategies of women petitioning from home.<sup>90</sup>

Collectively, Robinson and McIntyre's research demonstrates that much is still unknown and raises many questions about the survival strategies of the wives of convicts. A wider reassessment of British convicts through use of the Central Poor Law records will help to understand the relationships and the scope women had to negotiate with the Poor Law authorities, excluding Ireland. McIntyre draws her research from the 'Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers' at the National Archives of Ireland, Dublin.<sup>91</sup> However, the archival collection PC1 held at The National Archives, London, which contains petitions from the wives of convicts, including Irish petitioners, directed to the Home Secretary in London offers the opportunity to further McIntyre's research.<sup>92</sup> A comparative assessment will help to reveal more information on survival strategies and female bargaining, and deepen current understanding of institutional practices of the Home Office to establish the scope for discretion.

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<sup>88</sup> Perry McIntyre, *Free passage: the reunion of Irish convicts and their families in Australia, 1788-1852*, (Dublin, 2010), 127.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 122.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 127.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 121.

<sup>92</sup> TNA, PC 1/67-92, 'In-Letters relating to convicts and prisons', 1819-1844.

Historians of convict transportation have tended to separate imperial and domestic social histories, focusing on a top-down policy rather than the push factors from below.<sup>93</sup> However, comparatively, scholars of pauper emigration have challenged ideas of shovelling out paupers, instead highlighting agency of the poor rather than the coercion of authorities.<sup>94</sup> Wider analysis of the wives of convicts, in the context of welfare and emigration practices in Britain, will provide a more nuanced social and gendered perspective to the imperial policy of assisted reunion emigration. This thesis will also contribute to understanding the experiences of women left behind by using personal petitions to question scholarly debates concerning the stigma attached to the wives of convicts. Through comparison with lone naval women, it will investigate what support was available to them, which authorities they appealed to, as well as how they were defined and treated by authorities.

### **Methodology and Definitions**

This research is built around the personal petitions of lone women identified across three main state archive collections during the period 1789-1850. For the purpose of this thesis, a personal petition is defined as a written request submitted to an established authority for favour or the redress of an injustice. This is in keeping with Lex Heerma van Voss's definition.<sup>95</sup> Within the records of the Home Office, Poor Law authorities, and Admiralty, the appearance of petitions varied. Some petitions were traditional with a manuscript page layout with the title of the humble petitioner and the authority it was addressing. Often written in the third person, the petition summarised the circumstances of an individual and then made a request and was signed either with their name or mark if they could not write themselves. Personal petitions were distinct from

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<sup>93</sup> McIntyre, *Free passage*; Caitlin Adams, 'Thinking the empire poor: plebeian petitions for clemency in Britain and New South Wales', *History Australia*, 19.3 (2022), 440-441.

<sup>94</sup> Robin Haines, 'Indigent Misfits or Shrewd Operators? Government-assisted Emigrants from the United Kingdom to Australia, 1831-1860', *Population Studies*, Vol 48, no. 2 (1994), 246-247; Gary Howells, 'On Account of their Disreputable Characters': Parish-Assisted Emigration from Rural England, 1834-1860', *History*, 88.4 (2003), 587-588.

<sup>95</sup> Lex Heerma van Voss (eds.), *Petitions in Social History* (Cambridge, 2002), 1-2.

political subscriptional petitions which attracted thousands of signatures on specific issues; nonetheless, there could be a collaborative and multi-authored element in the way personal petitions were written.<sup>96</sup> Petitioners sometimes sought advice on how to draft petitions and final copies could also include accompanying signatures by members of the community and local officials in an effort to give weight to the authority of a personal petition. Other petitions were less elaborately crafted. Paupers and wives of convicts often used smaller letter style paper or even scrap materials and, whilst retaining the title of a petitioner, the structure of their writing merged the style of a petition with the style of a familiar letter and were often written in the first person. Forms called petitions were also introduced by the Home Office and Admiralty which applicants filled out, but individuals sometimes chose to attach additional handwritten personal petitions.

This thesis takes a broad view of what constitutes a petition, focusing on the practical act of petitioning and its content, rather than making narrow stylistic distinctions. This thesis therefore does not adhere to the sharp distinctions made by Peter Jones and Steven King in their discussion of the evolution of paupers' use of the petition to the familiar letter. A key difference identified by Jones and King is their claim that

a petition could be described as a “closed question” (a request that requires a one of two straightforward outcomes, yes or no, the granting of a favour or dismissal), the familiar letter opens up a dialogue within which there is considerable room for negotiation and at the beginning of which no particular outcome is assured.<sup>97</sup>

However, research into the petitions of lone women across the series has shown that negotiation was possible through petitions. As will be demonstrated throughout this thesis, women used petitions in long-term negotiations with authorities as, even when they were not initially

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<sup>96</sup> Richard Huzzey and Henry Miller, ‘The Politics of Petitioning: Parliament, Government, and Subscriptional Cultures in the United Kingdom, 1780-1918’, *History*, 106.370 (2021), 8.

<sup>97</sup> Peter Jones and Steven King ‘From Petition to Pauper Letter: The Development of an Epistolary Form’ in Peter Jones and Steve King (eds.), *Obligation, Entitlement and Dispute under English Poor Laws* (Cambridge, 2015), 72.

successful, they often became serial petition writers altering their linguistic style and arguments over time to create a dialogue with authorities and appeal for discretionary exceptions. Others sent multiple copies of the same petition to different audiences to try to gain patronage or wrote directly to higher authorities within the institution they targeted in an attempt to place additional pressure on authorities to negotiate.

Moreover, formulaic petitions were also used as a respectful way to initiate correspondence, but once a response was received, a petitioner could then lend themselves to familiar letter exchange with authorities. A key purpose of this research is to uncover the experiences and personal networks of lone women and, as such, letters cannot be excluded due to stylistic difference.

Letters were also used by petitioners who often enclosed familial letters received from overseas as evidence in their petitions to aid their negotiations and appeal to authorities. In addition, some petitioners could also actively merge the style of a petition and familial letter within one document by switching between the third and first person and quoting extracts of letters or familial advice. This was likely a strategy to imply friendship and shorten the emotional distance between the petitioner and recipient to make the petitioning request more appealing.

Familiar letters involve a style of writing which is viewed as being most commonly used by elite correspondents. However, familiar letters by elite writers for patronage and relief have many similarities with the act of petitioning. Donna Andrew's research on begging letters sent to Lady Spencer in the eighteenth century reveals that she received many similar appeals from distressed women and naval relatives who presented 'themselves as needy but worthy objects of assistance, reduced to their present circumstances by occurrences which they could not foresee or control'.<sup>98</sup> Andrew suggests there is a distinction between petitions, which are limited in 'full-blown appeals

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<sup>98</sup> Donna T. Andrew, 'Noblesse Oblige: Female Charity in an Age of Sentiment', in John Brewer and Susan Staves (eds.) *Early Modern Conception of Property* (New York, 1995), 278.

to sentiment', and letters, which are 'crafted by educated men and women whose need had shaped and honed their eloquence'.<sup>99</sup> However, this thesis disagrees with this distinction and, as will be seen, emotional appeals were an important strategy used by lone women within their petitions. Petitioning requests were also utilised by elite women and, as identified earlier by Chalus, were an important way women engaged in patronage.<sup>100</sup> An assessment of the linguistic and emotional strategies utilised by naval widows of different statuses in their appeals for support instead presents a more necessary comparison than stylistic differences of a petition and letter to fully establish how important class and connections were for success. Chapter three will explore this in greater detail, assessing the strategies of naval widows who petitioned individual admirals for support as well as the Admiralty.

### **Agency**

The thesis uses personal petitions to uncover the social agency of lone women. The term 'agency' can be a problematic concept if not defined, as Walter Johnson and Megan Webber have argued.<sup>101</sup> Agency can often be conflated in scholarship with humanity and treated only as a way for scholars to acknowledge protest. However, petitions, in whatever form or context, did not openly question the established power structure, but do aim to negotiate small changes in relief and support.<sup>102</sup> Historians Alannah Tomkins and Andy Wood have argued for the continued usefulness of the term agency in writing about this history from below. Tomkins, through use of pauper letters from the eighteenth and nineteenth century has highlighted that the poor, whilst practically constrained by officialdom, were not forced to write to authorities but chose to take limited personal control over their circumstances, using their letter writing to

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 279.

<sup>100</sup> Chalus, *Elite Women*, 113.

<sup>101</sup> Walter Johnson, 'On Agency', *Journal of Social History*, 37.1 (2003), 114; Megan Clare Webber, 'Troubling agency: agency and charity in early nineteenth-century London', *Historical Research*, 91.251 (2018), 121.

<sup>102</sup> Voss, *Petitions*, 2.

ensure ongoing support or to ‘secur[e] relief in an acceptable format’.<sup>103</sup> Wood in his assessment of popular agency in the seventeenth century has argued that agency is useful but must be framed within the unequal power structures, particularly class difference which impacted identity as the ‘experience of subordination impaired workers’ senses of themselves, and could thereby undermine collective agency’.<sup>104</sup> This thesis draws on Johnson’s and Webber’s perspectives that agency should not be conflated with protest. However, actions of writing, networking for support, gathering knowledge and employing thoughtful linguistic narratives to culturally connect with authorities should be understood as agency. Although these actions did not guarantee success, they demonstrated a proactive effort to negotiate and improve their circumstances from within an unequal gender and class system rather than accept their fate. To assess the different ways lone women from different social classes exerted personal agency and its limits, this thesis will focus on the authorship of petitions, using them to uncover evidence of support networks, categorise their linguistic strategies, and critically compare responses to similar requests for pensions, relief and reunions or clemency.

### **Authorship and Networks**

Petitions are valuable in accessing the voices of a diverse group of lone women, but the act of petitioning can also be valuable for gaining insights into personal networks and understanding women’s positions within their communities. Amanda Jane Whiting in her research on women and petitioning in the seventeenth century has argued that ‘women’s agency should be sought in the act, the social and political transaction, of petitioning, which includes, but is not reducible to and rather exceeds, the text of the petition’.<sup>105</sup> Developing this perspective further in relation to

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<sup>103</sup> Alannah Tomkins, ‘I mak Bould to Wrigt’: First-Person Narratives in the History of Poverty in England, c1750-1900, *History Compass*, 9.5 (2011), 366.

<sup>104</sup> Andy Wood, ‘Subordination and the Limits of Popular Agency in a Yorkshire Valley c.1596- 1615, *Past and Present*, 193 (2006), 44.

<sup>105</sup> Amanda Whiting, *Women and Petitioning in the Seventeenth-century English Revolution: Deference, Difference, and Dissent*, (Turnhout, 2015), 26-27.

petitions of lone women in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, attention has been given to choices around authorship and its implications for agency. The deferential and supplicatory style of appeals has been observed as particularly suited to women over men, but for delicate matters regarding sexual propriety which could subject women to harsh moral judgements, as will be discussed in chapter four, some literate women chose to allow male patrons to write their petitions for them.<sup>106</sup> Literacy rates did affect some women's ability to write their own petitions. Most were able to do so, although skill and spelling varied, but those who could not were made vulnerable by having to share their personal details with a scribe. As will be discussed in chapter four, scribes could turn informers which raises important questions as to whether petitioning agency was equally available to all.

As well as considering whether women chose to write their own petitions, it will consider who women referenced and collaborated with in the crafting of their petitions. Arlette Farge, who explores women's writing in eighteenth-century French judicial records, argues that the sources can be used to show that women were at the forefront of their neighbourhood networks.<sup>107</sup> Similar attention will be given to petitions through analysing what community knowledge they referenced in their petitions and which members of the community and local officials lone women asked to provide supporting signatures and character testimony.

### **Linguistic Strategies and Emotional Appeals**

Petitioners were aware that, to increase their chances of success, they needed to craft their petitions to appeal to the shared values of their audience. Culturally, petitions were part of a long established 'conduit of exchange', in which the petitioner gave deference and 'dependence for

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<sup>106</sup> Andrew, 'Noblesse Oblige', 290.

<sup>107</sup> Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, (New Haven, 2013), 36.



obligation of service of care, of need for succour'.<sup>108</sup> Petitioners recounted their circumstances and needs in emotional and appealing ways, but also employed flattery towards their audience, highlighting their virtues, humanity, or sensibility. As such, they are valuable documents for understanding which shared sentiments were considered appealing through assessing how petitioners presented themselves, the values they promoted, and how they framed their arguments.

Petitions were performative and not casual requests as they often represented a lifeline for women. They are emotional documents, whether genuine or theatrical, but the type of emotions expressed could affect their reception. King and Joanne Bailey argue that pauper mothers used emotive language of 'distress' when writing for poor relief, appealing to cultural sensibility and was an effective way to appeal for relief.<sup>109</sup> However, not all expressions of emotion were well received. Natalie Zemon Davis and Alannah Tomkins have identified limits of emotion available to female criminals and paupers, finding that expressions of anger were not acceptable in negotiations with authorities.<sup>110</sup> Assessment of the impact of emotive language will be further assessed through success rates and marginalia on petitions. Kathryn Burns has argued that, in uncovering agency from below, it is best to see the archive not as a window or mirror to the past but instead view it as a chess board, as she states 'document making was like chess: full of gambits, scripted moves, and countermoves'.<sup>111</sup> Taking this perspective, petitions can be viewed as a form of calculated negotiation which can usefully highlight anomalies and provide insights into what could and could not be said and by whom. An assessment of clerical comments in the margins of petitions alongside internal discussions will also be used to gauge whether institutions reciprocated emotionally to petitions received.

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<sup>108</sup> R.A Houston, *Peasant Petitions: Social Relations and Economic Life on Landed Estates, 1600-1850* (Hampshire, 2014), 24.

<sup>109</sup> King, *Writing the lives*, 299; Bailey, 'Think Wot a Mother Must Feel', 13.

<sup>110</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth Century France* (Stanford, 1987), 81; Tomkins, 'Men's pauper letters', 208.

<sup>111</sup> Kathryn Burns, *Into the Archive: Writing and Power in Colonial Peru* (London, 2010), 124.

## **Archival Power**

This thesis has adopted the perspective that archives should be treated as a subject as well as a source. Kirsty Reid and Fiona Paisley have persuasively argued that archival collections are constructed, meaning that, far from simple collection agencies, they were created for particular purposes that extended beyond the running of institutions into surveillance and often created the very subjects they claimed to report.<sup>112</sup> Furthering this argument, Ann Stoler, on her research on colonial Dutch archives in the nineteenth century, has insightfully questioned how it is possible for historians to quickly and confidently read ‘against the grain’ of archival documents without first reading ‘along the archival grain’ to understand the significance and context of where these documents are placed within collections.<sup>113</sup> A methodology which approaches archival activity as ‘more extractive than ethnographic’, she argues, is a significant shortcoming that reveals only a narrow perspective and ‘bypasses the power in production of the archive itself’.<sup>114</sup> Within the archival collections of the Home Office, Admiralty, and Poor Law authorities, the cataloguing of petitions is complicated and diverse, as there was no state archive or uniform system of recording. Registers, digests, and subject indexes provide essential insights into each institution’s purpose for recording and storing petitions, highlighting issues of concern and change over time. Most importantly, by using these sources to replicate how clerks recorded the petitions, the thesis reveals how lone women were treated, by whom, and how great an importance their correspondence was judged through assessment of their position in the construction of the archives.

Lone women were united in their petitioning practices, but to recover them across different state archives, registers, digests, and indexes are essential. As Stoler states, in regard to Dutch state

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<sup>112</sup> Kirsty Reid and Fiona Paisley, *Sources and Methods in Histories of Colonialism: Approaching the Imperial Archive* (Abingdon, 2017), 2.

<sup>113</sup> Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, 2009), 101.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

archives, ‘an interest in European paupers ... gets you nowhere, unless you know how they mattered, to whom, when, and why they did so’.<sup>115</sup> This is similarly true of lone women and indexes help answer those questions. Lone women’s petitions that were sent to the Poor Law Authority were entered into MH 15, a register which thematically recorded cases under different subject headings and were provided with a reference number which related to the original correspondence stored in the extensive MH 12 series. The names of petitioners were given sporadically and often phrases such as a ‘woman whose husband has been transported’ or reference ‘to wives and families of seamen’ would be all that was written under subject headings. Lone women could appear in several categories that included ‘bastardy’, ‘desertion of families’, ‘emigration’, ‘maintenance of families’, ‘mariners’, ‘migration’, ‘orphans’, ‘punishment of paupers’, ‘prisoners’, ‘relief to families of convicts’, ‘relief generally’, ‘relief in individual cases’, ‘relief in-door’, ‘relief out-door’, ‘relief in special cases’, ‘relief to widows’, ‘sailors’, ‘sea service’, ‘wages’, and ‘workhouse’. MH 15 does not represent the total sum of all recorded petitions, as the main register of incoming correspondence was destroyed in the Second World War.<sup>116</sup> MH 15 was likely used to record precedents as the new poor law was being implemented and is important in demonstrating that lone women were important to authorities across multiple thematic categories.<sup>117</sup>

Within the Admiralty records, attention has been given to the original organisational and cataloguing practices, noting where clerks have left traces of evidence of class prejudices in their recording practices. ADM 12 is the main subject index used to identify correspondence held in ADM 1 which relates to Admiralty business and letters received. The organisation of ADM 12 was categorised under subject themes; however, correspondence could also be organised by the rank of the author, the first letter of the surname of author, the location from where the letter

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>116</sup> King, et al., *In Their Own Write*, 42.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 43.

was sent or naval station. Lone women's petitions in ADM 12 might make a one-line appearance within the subject index on pages such as 'Pensions to the widows and parents of officers' which recorded application cases that could be used as precedents and also logged changes in legislation. The indexes contain small summaries of information, regarding the name of the individual petitioners, their request, the outcome (although this is not always given), and the reference to find the original petition. It is clear from the indexes that close attention was given to rank and class-based titles in the ways the lone women petitioners' names were recorded to reflect whether they were a 'lady' or not.

The ADM series is subject to some structural inequality in the way they were recorded, which makes identifying a history from below challenging. Not all pension petitions were recorded in the ADM 12 index and some petitions could also be stored in miscellaneous boxes organised by year with no further description or accompanying index. The petitions and letters of ordinary sailors and families within the series, although preserved, are mostly treated as ephemeral by being recorded as promiscuous otherwise known as miscellaneous boxes and are not catalogued to an item level. The difficulty of searching for records of ordinary sailors is not a modern problem, but rather was a recognised issue at the time. Annotations on a petition requesting the Admiralty provide a certificate of service to enable a naval widow to obtain a pension, illustrate this in their reply that finding such records would 'occasion much trouble' and 'unless it is indispensably necessary' to they 'cannot be put to the inconvenience of examining every Muster book'.<sup>118</sup> However, the investigative practices should not be underestimated when they were pursuing cases of widows who were perceived to act against the interests of naval charity. ADM 6 contains more detailed investigative cases which were overseen by the Court of Assistants who would present their findings to the Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty for their decision. All

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<sup>118</sup> TNA, ADM 1/4068, Mary Bird, 1830.

the records in this series are organised by year and are not catalogued, but there is overlap in select cases between the subject index and ADM 6. This series contains a greater diversity of applicants, including petitioners who wrote to the Admiralty for arrears of their mothers' pensions, in which they provide valuable insights into socio-economic conditions as they provide detailed accounts of their familial and economic survival strategies.

The approach by the Admiralty differs significantly from the Home Office, where the main purpose of criminal records was to find individuals and their outcomes easily. The Home Office petition series does not have a subject index; instead, petitions are arranged alphabetically by surname and year. Petitions are recorded in HO 47, HO 17, HO 18 and the outcome of prisoners' sentencing is recorded in HO 19. Although comparatively it is the most complete system surviving largely in its original form, it was subject to changes of administrative practice which has meant insights into institutional perspectives vary in detail. The HO 47 series is rich in detail as it includes the annotated reviews of petitions by magistrates, but it only covers the period 1782-1830. However, petitions stored in HO 17 and HO 18 which received criminal petitions up to the 1860s were often responded to with brief and shorthand annotations in the margins to record outcomes. Nonetheless, the personal petitions related to criminals are valuable in understanding wider social history. They often include an array of additional documentation, including personal familial letters from overseas, community petitions with supporting signatures and letters of recommendation from noted persons.

It is important to note that the entirety of the material received in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century does not survive. Subject to later culling by archivists, the preservation of documents such as petitions and letters of *ordinary* subjects vary greatly. Petitions featured as complete separate collections in the Home Office records and the Poor Law Authority records are preserved as they were received by being bound within books, but consequently are wedged

between a diverse range of topics, prints and authors. However, in the Admiralty records, which used multiple cataloguing practices, some petitions have been lost leaving only traces of their redacted existence behind.

This thesis has adopted Stoler's approach to consider the original construction of each state archive and has replicated the clerks' use of original registers and indexes to identify the petitions of lone women. In doing so, it has focused on the power relations observable within the organisational practices. As a result, it has been possible to critically consider the social importance of women by being sensitive to where they have been recorded in the collections and assessment of internal marginalia on petitions has been used to identify the factors that shaped decision-making. For example, the MH 12 series was created as a record to help with advice between the Central Poor Law Authority and local Poor Law Unions to aid the implementation of the new poor law on a wide range of topics. As discussed, the status of lone women was not taken into consideration under the new legislation and thus created a grey area around relief. Focusing on the subheadings used for the wives of convicts has provided insights into how they were categorised and the discretionary ways they were treated across different Poor Law Unions. Also, as will be discussed further in chapter one, the indexes allow insights into the agency of wives of convicts by providing evidence of investigations they initiated by petitioning the Central Poor Law Authority regarding their disputes with local unions.

## **Sources**

### **Admiralty**

The collection practices of this thesis reflect the fact that the construction of the different state archives' recording practices varied significantly and, even within collections, had multiple subdivisions. Since the survival rate and recording practices are not consistent, a dataset of petitions across the period 1789-1850 will be supplemented with qualitative evidence from non-

indexed collections. The latter have been used to supplement and compare with the petitions identified in the indexes, digests, and registers.

For the Admiralty records, a dataset has been created using subject index ADM 12, using the entries and references recorded under the pension subject heading relating to ‘widows and parents of officers’ and ‘to the children of officers’ to access their petitions stored in ADM 1. The indexes were sampled every five years between 1794 and 1849, accounting for a total of 480 index entries. Of this sample 123 cases were selected for detailed analysis and were qualitatively chosen to give a cross section of the applicants’ rank, class, and outcomes to evaluate continuity and change in decision-making. The individual petitions were used to assess linguistic strategies of widows and will provide the core basis of material used in chapter two. The range of dates captures both the high points of naval activity during the Napoleonic Wars as well as longer peacetime periods. Naval widows had to justify their appeal for a pension by promoting the patriotic activities of their husbands, and men who died in active duty were compensated to the highest levels. A comparison of women over time will be useful to assess how they responded to the need to be more creative in peacetime regarding how they shaped their husbands’ naval careers. It is important to note that the original correspondence in ADM 1 relating to the entries in ADM 12 for the period 1844-1849 does not survive in the archival record; however, summaries from the original index, which often include outcomes, allow insights into overall trends, the introduction of new rules, and the setting of precedents. Reference to the petitions of lone women could be identified in other categories of the subject index, such as ‘Foreign Yards’; however, as this thesis focuses on the survival strategies of lone women in Britain, widows’ pensions have been its focus, and other categories are considered outside of the scope of this study.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> TNA, ADM 12/299, Digest and Indexes, ‘Officers. Appointments, salaries and allowances’, 1834.

To complement these findings, ADM 7/615 and the complete collection of ADM 6 will be used to provide further insights into institutional decision-making through assessment of the investigative cases relating to widows' pensions. From ADM 7/615 I have consulted two large cases. The first pertains to rule changes in pension eligibility between 1831-1840 which contains the petitions of eleven widows and internal correspondence which amount to seventy-seven pages. The second relates to a serial petitioner and contains 32 petitions covering 122 pages. ADM 6 represents a sub-branch of naval administration known as the 'Courts of Assistants of Widows Charity'.<sup>120</sup> It covers the period 1808-1830 and includes 655 cases within 18 boxes. The number of individual petitions is higher than the figure stated; however, this thesis has counted the documents in the way they were originally organised as cases. For example, the series holds multiple grouped applications for the arrears of maternal pensions from relatives which were collectively decided upon. ADM 6 covered a wide array of issues, including disputes over pension allowance; evidence requirements for pensions; changes in remarriage rules; maternal pension arrears applications; criminal cases relating to fraud and bigamy; and informer cases which subjected petitioners to extensive character trials. From this series, 302 records were analysed in closer detail. Petitions from ADM 6 will be used across the chapters but will be of particular importance in chapter one, where the 25 bigamy cases are used to compare the survival strategies of the deserted wives of mariners with the wives of convicts. Chapter four will also draw significantly upon this material to assess 42 informer cases against lone women, paying particular attention to how women counter-petitioned against the loss of their pensions and what financial details they provided that many widows omitted in their original applications for pensions found in ADM 1.

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<sup>120</sup> TNA, ADM 12/224, Digest, 72-104, 1824.



### Widows' Pension eligibility

ADM 6 is an important series to highlight discussions and rule changes regarding increases in pay and eligibility of Commissioned and Warrant officers and specific rules for their widows.

Widows' pensions were paid through money received from parliamentary grants and from a deduction of three pence in the pound from officers' wages. Those eligible for a pension included the widows of 'a Flag Officer of his Majesty's Fleet', 'a superannuated Rear Admiral', 'a Captain of three years standing', 'a Captain, under three years standing', 'commander', 'superannuated commander', 'lieutenant', 'master', 'surgeon', 'purser', 'boatswain', 'gunner', 'carpenter', 'second master of a yacht, or master of a naval vessel warranted by the navy board'.<sup>121</sup> Across the period 1789-1850, the eligibility of occupations altered. In 1825 the widows of a 'chaplain', 'inspector of Hospitals', 'physician of a hospital or Fleet', and 'assistant surgeon' were added to the list of occupations eligible for a pension.<sup>122</sup> However, after June 1830, widows of warrant officers including widows of boatswains, gunners, carpenters, and masters of the Naval Vessels warranted by the Navy Board were excluded from receiving a pension.<sup>123</sup> In addition, after 1830 widows of officers were required to have 'been on the list of commission or warrant officers ten complete years'.<sup>124</sup> The only exception to this length of service rule was if the husband had been 'killed in action'.<sup>125</sup> The value of a widow's pension, detailed in Table 1, did not increase with inflation and changed relatively little over the period post-1813. However, additional pension funds might be sought by widows from the Lloyd's Patriotic Fund and Compassionate Fund for themselves and their children.

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<sup>121</sup> TNA, ADM 6/363, Minutes of the Court, 27 Feb. 1812.

<sup>122</sup> TNA, ADM 6/402, Widows' Pensions: Rules and Orders. Sign Manual, 6<sup>th</sup> May 1825.

<sup>123</sup> TNA, ADM 7/615, Widows' Pensions: Rules and Orders. 30<sup>th</sup> June 1830.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

In addition to eligibility of occupation, widows' pensions were subject to other rules and requirements. These included restrictions on age, income, and marital status. Widows were disqualified from a pension if they married officers over 65 years of age or if their personal income was double the value of the pension.<sup>126</sup> A widow was only eligible for a pension if she had been married a year. Changes authorised by the Prince Regent in 1818 altered some of these rules by allowing pensions to widows who had been married less than a year and in 1819 allowed remarriage, however in both cases widows were subject to investigation. Rules that required widows to forfeit a pension due to remarriage were reintroduced in 1830 and restrictions on personal income were removed in 1836.<sup>127</sup>

Rule changes regarding pay and eligibility were also introduced which were triggered by investigations of widows in receipt of pensions. New regulations instigated by John W. Croker in 1813 attempted to reform inequality in the pensions granted under the ordinary and estimate pension systems. An ordinary pension was defined as a 'pension from the widows' charity of a fixed amount and demandable as a matter of right whenever the widows' income does not exceed double the amount of the pension'.<sup>128</sup> An 'extraordinary pension' is defined as a 'pension granted in peculiar cases and borne on the estimate of the Navy and voted accordingly by Parliament at public expense'.<sup>129</sup> Croker identified that some widows of Admirals, depending on their income, were able to claim dual pensions leading to inequality. As a result, the pension rates were increased and all widows were to be granted the same value of a pension, apart from those widows whose husbands had died 'in actual service by wounds or accident' but widows were to

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<sup>126</sup> TNA, ADM 6/386, Meeting of the Court of Assistants, 14 Jul. 1813; ADM 6/402, Widows' Pensions: Rules and Orders. Sign Manual, 6<sup>th</sup> May 1825.

<sup>127</sup> TNA, ADM 7/615, Widows' Pensions: Rules and Orders. 30<sup>th</sup> June 1830; TNA, 'Royal Navy Officers' pension' research guide. <<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/royal-navy-officers-pensions/>> (Accessed 8/2/2024).

<sup>128</sup> TNA, ADM 6/386, Meeting of the Court of Assistants, 14 Jul. 1813.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

be limited to one pension.<sup>130</sup> Whilst striving for equality and fairness in their management of pension payments, Croker also pressed for increased powers to make a widow's pension discretionary and based on behaviour, rather than a right.<sup>131</sup> A new regulation in 1819 was introduced which required that widows 'shall appear to be proper and deserving objects of the public bounty'.<sup>132</sup> This decision was influenced by informers who morally policed widows and wrote to the Admiralty to request that widows found to be undeserving would be denied pensions. A more detailed discussion of this rule change is explored further in chapter 4.

Eligibility for a pension was also expanded beyond the traditional remit of widows, allowing in certain exceptional cases for pensions to be granted to mothers in 1819 and sisters from 1824, provided the women were in need and the son or brother left no widow to claim it.<sup>133</sup>

Changes in eligibility criteria were communicated through 'sign manuals', otherwise known as 'Widows' Pensions: Rules and Orders' or 'The Queen's regulations' and were also reprinted in Navy Lists.<sup>134</sup> Changes to the rules were also communicated through the press. Widows were advised they could obtain copies of the new regulations at the Admiralty Office or Dockyards and could make their claim in writing to the Secretary of the Admiralty, J.W Croker.<sup>135</sup> Proximity, literacy, or friends to share this information was vital. It required great initiative by women to both monitor their eligibility and access their entitlements in a timely manner. Petitioning for a pension initiated a wider application process. Widows needed to complete a declaration form which had to be signed by a flag officer or captain and minister of the parish and provide their

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> AMD 6/387, Jane Naiby, 1814.

<sup>132</sup> Admiralty-Office, 'Widows Pensions', *London Gazette*, Vol. 1, 15 Jan. 1819, 108.

<sup>133</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5237, 'Memorial from the Right Honourable The Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty' to the King in council, 20<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1824.

<sup>134</sup> TNA, ADM 6/402, Widows' Pensions: Rules and Orders. Sign Manual, 6<sup>th</sup> May 1825; TNA, ADM 7/615, Widows' Pensions: Rules and Orders. 30<sup>th</sup> June 1830; *The Queen's Regulations for the Government of Her Majesty's Naval Service; Admiralty Instructions for the Government of Her Majesty's Naval Service* (London, 1844).

<sup>135</sup> Admiralty Office, 16 Jan. 1819. Widows' Pensions, *The Times*, 18. Jan 1819, 2; Admiralty Office, 10 Apr 1818. Widows' Pensions, *The London Gazette*, 2 May 1818, 787.

marital certificates. Once granted a pension, widows had to supply an affidavit four times a year to confirm their status and that they were not in receipt of another pension from the government.

Widows' Pension Rates, Table 1.

Occupational Rank	1805 Pension rates (Per annum)	1813 Pension rates (Per annum)	1825 Pension rates (Per annum)	1830 Pension rates (Per annum)	1844 Pension rates (Per annum)
The Widow of a Flag Officer of His Majesty's Fleet	£80	£120	£120	£120	£120
The Widow of Superannuated Rear Admiral	£80	£100	£100	£100	N/A
The Widow of a Captain of three Years of Standing	£80	£90	£90	£90	£90
The Widow of a Captain of under three Years of Standing	£70	£80	£80	£80	£80
The Widow of a Captain (retired under Order in Council, 10 Aug, 1840)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	£75
The Widow of a Commander	£60	£70	£70	£70	£70
The Widow of Superannuated Commander	£45	£60	£60	£60	£60 to those retired under Order in Council of 1816 & £50 to those retired under Order in Council of 1830.
The Widow of a Lieutenant	£40	£50	£50	£50	£50

The Widow of a Master	£40	£40	£40	£40	£50
The Widow of a Chaplain	N/A	£40	£40	£40	£40
The Widow of an Inspector of Hospitals	N/A	N/A	£70	N/A	£50
Secretaries to Commanders-in-Chief	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	£50
Deputy Medical Inspectors of Hospitals and Fleets	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	£50
The Widow of a Physician of a Hospital, or of the Fleet	N/A	N/A	£60	£60	N/A
The Widow of a Surgeon	£40	£40	£40	£40	£40
The Widow of an Assistant Surgeon	N/A	N/A	£36	£36	£36
The Widow of a Purser	£30	£30	£30	£40	£40
Secretaries to Junior Flag Officers and Commodores	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	£40
Naval Instructors	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	£40
The Widow of a Boatswain	£25	£25	£25	Not entitled after June 1830.	N/A
The Widow of a Gunner	£25	£25	£25	Not entitled after June 1830.	N/A
The Widow of a Carpenter	£25	£25	£25	Not entitled after June 1830.	N/A
The Widow of a Second Master of a Yacht, or Master of a Naval Vessel warranted by the Navy Board	£25	£25	£25	Not entitled after June 1830.	N/A

The Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty were not the only officials whom naval lone women targeted with petitions; many chose to also write to the monarch and admirals to solicit patronage to aid their appeals. Petitioners, particularly those who were finding it difficult to negotiate with the Admiralty, often sought the intervention of the monarch. King William IV, affectionately known as the 'Sailors Friend' for having served in the navy prior to his royal ascension, received many such petitions.<sup>136</sup> These 'Palace Petitions', held in ADM 1/4068-4070, is an Admiralty series which collected the redirected petitions from the king's private secretary, Sir Herbert Taylor, between 1830-1836. Within this series, all the petitions contain similar covering letters conveying their transfer for the attention of the Admiralty. However, they are useful in comparing how petitioners wrote to different authorities and offer the opportunity for comparison with criminal petitioners who also targeted monarchs for clemency.

The personal correspondence of admirals and naval officers held at Royal Museums Greenwich, Caird Archive and Library has been used to provide context for the experiences of lone women and their petitioning practices. Admiral John Markham was in receipt of 46 personal petitions from wives and mothers of Admiralty officials to request his patronage, jobs, and support. Petitions to Admiral Markham, as will be seen in chapter two, reveal that petitioners could replicate large sections of petitions word for word that were also submitted to the Admiralty. Personal petitions in private correspondence also highlight networks, patronage, and informal support which helped sustain lone women's petitioning efforts.

### **Poor Law Authorities**

To access information regarding lone women, the MH 15 subject indexes have been used to locate petitions and correspondence within the vast scale of the MH 12 series. The indexes, produced annually and spanning 1836-1850, have been read in their entirety for references to

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<sup>136</sup> TNA, ADM 1/4068, Mary Stevenson, 1831.

lone women across multiple subject headings, resulting in a dataset of 239 records. However, 32 of the records in the index did not survive, so the details within the index have been relied upon in these cases. As with Admiralty and Home Office records, the petitions of lone women are analysed for their content relating to survival strategies and linguistic strategies of appeal.

A challenge of a comparative project is selecting record series covering identical time periods. The MH 12 series covers 1836-1850 as it relates to the introduction of the New Poor Law Amendment Act introduced in 1834. This thesis has chosen to focus on central state records to allow a comparison with the administrative practices of the Admiralty and Home Office. However, the old poor law records are not kept centrally but rather held in regional record archives and, as such, are outside the scope of this study. However, to mitigate this limitation, published anthologies of pauper letters and petitions have been utilised to compare and supplement this research. Petitions identified within the Home Office and Admiralty records also provide insights into the relationships between the Poor Law authorities and lone women prior to 1834.

### **Home Office**

The Home Office convict petition records are used to access the experiences of the wives of transported convicts, focusing on their petitions for reunion and clemency for their husbands. HO 47, HO 17, and parts of HO18 have been indexed to item level, which has allowed key word searches for reunion and maritime terms to identify convicts with naval relations. I have identified and analysed 14 petitions from this series relating to convict wives' requests for a free passage or clemency for their husband, including a serial petitioner who campaigned over twenty years and is discussed in chapter one. Women facing criminal transportation themselves is outside of the scope of this study as its main purpose is to compare the free women left behind. However, reference to criminal activities of lone women in relation to Admiralty regarding

pension fraud will be explored in the ADM collections to further understand the social stigma of crime as perceived by different authorities.

The series PC 1, which details personal petitions from the wives of transported convicts to the Home Secretary, will be used to uncover the women's survival strategies and networks and will be compared to similar petitions found in the MH 12 series. PC 1 covers the period 1819-1844, but has been sampled across the years 1819, 1826, 1836, and 1844 to capture how petitioners adapted to key changes to eligibility and how the responses differed between Home Secretaries. This series included a variety of familial requests to the Home Secretary. For example, petitions to inquire whether a convict relative was dead or alive; requests for children to accompany a convicted parent; requests for clemency by convicts; and requests for a free passage either by male convicts asking if their wives could accompany them during their transportation or by wives asking to join their husbands after their transportation. Chapter one draws on 113 of these petitions which specifically relate to requests by, or in support of, wives of convicts for a free passage to join their husband written from the UK, and requests by the wives of convicts for clemency for their convict husband to stay or return in Britain.

Archival collections, despite their volume, do not represent a 'sum of all texts' and are as much about knowledge production as recording information and, as Michel Foucault argues, they provide insights into the "rules of practice" shaping what could and could not be said.<sup>137</sup> Whilst the Home Office records leave comparatively less detail of their decision-making, an assessment of success rates regarding reunion will be used to trace exceptions and to identify the hidden transcript of appeal that could influence a Home Secretary to use their discretion.

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<sup>137</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, as cited in Ann Stoler, 'Colonial archives and the arts of governance', *Archival Science*, 2.1-2, (2002), 96.



Table 2

Chapter	Record Collections
1. Wives of Transported Convicts	<p><u>Admiralty:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ADM 6: papers of cases referred to the Court of Assistants, 1808-1830.</li> </ul> <p><u>Poor Law:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MH 12: sources identified in the MH 15 index. 1836- 1850. Themes taken from index: bastardry, desertion of families, emigration, workhouse, relief in special cases, emigration, relief to widows, relief to families of convicts, relief generally, relief in individual cases, relief out-door, punishment of paupers, prisoners, relief in-door.</li> </ul> <p><u>Home Office:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HO 17: criminal petitions, 1819-1849.</li> <li>• HO 18: criminal petitions, 1839-1863.</li> <li>• PC 1 Sample years: 1819, 1826, 1836, 1844.</li> </ul>
2. Naval Widows	<p><u>Admiralty:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ADM 1: sources identified in ADM 12 indexes on pensions. Sample years: 1794, 1799, 1800, 1804, 1814, 1819, 1824, 1829, 1834, 1839, 1844, 1849.</li> <li>• ADM 6.</li> <li>• ADM 7/615: Widows' Pensions, 1821-1847.</li> <li>• ADM 1/4068: Palace Petitions, 1830-1831.</li> <li>• MRK/104: Admiral John Markham personal papers, 1800-1810.</li> </ul> <p><u>Poor Law:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MH 12 &amp; MH 15. Themes taken from index: mariners, sea service, sailors, desertion of families, maintenance of families, paupers generally miscellaneous, relief in individual cases, relief in special cases, relief- recovery of.</li> </ul>
3. Familial Petitioning	<p><u>Admiralty:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ADM 6</li> <li>• ADM 1 &amp; ADM 12 (Same dataset as chapter 2).</li> <li>• MRK/104.</li> <li>• GRT/23: Samuel Grant, purser, personal papers, 1788-1802.</li> <li>• CLS/48: Admiral Richard Collinson personal papers, 1819-1854.</li> <li>•</li> </ul> <p><u>Poor Law:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MH 12 &amp; 15 (Same dataset as chapter 2).</li> </ul>
4. Moral Policing and Community Informers	<p><u>Admiralty:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ADM 6</li> <li>• ADM 1 &amp; ADM 12 (Same dataset as chapters 2-3)</li> <li>• ADM 7/615</li> <li>• COD/21: Admiral Edward Codrington papers, 1834-1838.</li> </ul> <p><u>Poor Law:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MH 12 – sample taken from MH 15 index. 1836- 1850. Themes taken from index: bastardry, desertion of families, emigration, workhouse, relief in special cases, emigration, relief to widows, relief to families of convicts, relief generally, relief in individual cases, relief out-door, punishment of paupers, prisoners, relief in-door.</li> </ul> <p><u>Home Office:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HO 17</li> </ul>

## **Chapter Outline**

This thesis argues for the recognition of a distinct social category, that of lone women. Within this category, it focuses on the deserted wives and widows of mariners and the wives of transported convicts. It reveals that lone women, although possessing limited rights, exerted agency through their use of petitions, demanding the relief they saw themselves as entitled to as wives and mothers. They crafted emotional linguistic arguments, gathered knowledge, and built networks to help them negotiate with a range of authorities. These insights arise from researching these women's personal petitions across the archives of three vast and varied state institutions - the Admiralty, the Home Office, and the Poor Law authorities. These findings challenge arguments regarding the codification and standardisation of welfare and bureaucracy in the first half of the nineteenth century, instead demonstrating the continuation of discretion and the significance of ideas of deservingness as an enduring factor in how charitable relief was managed.

This study reveals how lone women were defined and treated by different authorities. The precarity of their financial existence without a male breadwinner meant that the women often petitioned more than one institution during their lifecycle. The four chapters compare the survival strategies available to lone women, including those judged rough and those judged respectable. This research uncovers the moral policing of lone women by communities and institutionally condoned investigative practices through an analysis of informing letters and the counter-petitions women submitted to institutions.

The first chapter focuses on the wives of convicts transported to Australia who were left behind in Britain. It engages with historiographical debates regarding out-relief to women under the New Poor Law Amendment Act. Identified by contemporaries as a special category for relief, this assessment of their treatment has demonstrated a continuation of the role of discretion and

challenged arguments that exceptional monetary relief for able-bodied women was only available to old and infirm widows. It posits that wives of convicts exerted agency through their petitions by utilising their lone status as a loophole to negotiate relief with parochial authorities. Petitions to the Home Office reveal that wives of convicts were at an advantage as they could reverse their lone status through the assisted emigration scheme or use it to bargain with parochial authorities.

The second chapter analyses the pension petitions of naval widows. Drawing on Admiralty indexes, it compares the appeals of all ranks of widows to demonstrate that maritime women were united in their belief that their own contributions as wives and mothers entitled them to support. It uses close reading of their petitions to identify linguistic strategies, networks of support and considers how knowledge was used to present their husband's wider service contributions and make appeals for their own suffering and patriotism. Analysis of responses to petitions reveals that class and Admiralty clerks' discretion affected widows' success and treatment, although exceptions existed for widows whose husbands died in action.

The third chapter further explores the lives of lone women in naval communities, focusing on long-term survival and the impact on families. Studying familial petitions identifies generational financial dependence and knowledge-sharing that existed between mothers and daughters into adulthood. The chapter also argues that sons acted as replacement breadwinners for their mothers and siblings and promotes the importance of elite mothers' patronage for their sons. The claim of motherhood was a universal strategy open to all petitioning mothers; however, this chapter analyses how other factors intersect with this by exploring how class, poverty, age, and personal presentation affected their success.

The final chapter looks at the role of the community in relation to lone women. It utilises informer letters to reveal the societal expectations of lone women regarding their behaviour and

sexual propriety, institutional values, and investigative practices. It provides further evidence of how class prejudice affected support but demonstrates that, even for those genteel petitioners who were often treated with greater leniency, women were expected to remain lone and dependent to be deserving. Collectively, by assessing the negotiations between lone women and authorities, this research addresses wider themes of class, age, motherhood, respectability, and stigma, developing scholarly understanding of how clerks and officials shaped welfare decisions.

## **Chapter 1: Wives of Transported Convicts**

This chapter focuses on the wives of transported convicts who were left behind in Britain. It engages with historiographical debates regarding out-relief to women under the Poor Law Amendment Act (PLAA). Identified by contemporaries as a special category for relief, this assessment of their treatment by authorities will demonstrate a continuation of the role of discretion and challenge arguments that exceptional monetary relief for able-bodied women was only available to old and infirm widows. This chapter posits that the wives of convicts exerted agency through their petitions by utilising their lone status as a loophole to negotiate relief with parochial authorities under the new poor law. To further contextualise the experience and survival strategies available to the wives of convicts this chapter will compare them with the deserted wives of mariners. It will explore how they were perceived and treated by authorities, assess their ability to negotiate relief on their own terms through close attention to linguistic strategies and actions, questioning whether a criminal taint affected or limited their access to support. Petitions by the wives of convicts to the Home Office, as well as the Poor Law authorities, will be used to demonstrate how they utilised the unique opportunity to reverse their lone status through assisted emigration or use it as a bargaining strategy with parochial authorities.

### **Defining Wives of Convicts and the New Poor Law**

Women were the main recipients of relief, despite the PLAA's attempt to shift financial responsibility for them onto their husband and father.<sup>1</sup> After 1834, all able-bodied paupers were meant to be relieved in the workhouse; however, there remained discretion for out-relief in the form of money or relief in kind, such as food or clothing, for the deserving poor which included

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<sup>1</sup> Thane, 'Women and the Poor Law', 30.

the 'sick, aged, children, and the mad'.<sup>2</sup> Lone women, including single mothers, widows and deserted mothers who did not have the support of a male breadwinner, also had a claim upon the poor law administrators to help them if they were destitute; however, the type of relief given was open to interpretation and out-relief was usually reserved for exceptional and deserving cases.<sup>3</sup> The use of discretion, which the new poor law was meant to erase, continued in the treatment of lone women which meant that inequality occurred and the type of relief granted varied across unions. As a category of lone women, the wives of convicts posed additional challenges for poor law officials as they did not fit easily into the more generally well-received category of widow as their husbands were banished not dead, nor were they to be categorised undesirably as an unwed single mother.<sup>4</sup> The wives and dependants of convicts presented a legal and financial conundrum for parish authorities. Rose argues '[t]he 1834 act extended the principle of *couverture*, that women were the wards of their husbands, to the dispensation of relief to poor women'.<sup>5</sup> Thus, a married woman was not considered by the Poor Law Commissioners as liable for financial costs incurred from relief during her husband's lifetime.<sup>6</sup> If a husband deserted, he was expected to repay expenses to the parish for their support; however, this legal system did not take banishment into account. The possibility of reunion in Britain was remote as transportation sentences ranged from seven years to life. After 1823, it was largely impossible, as few received free pardons and convicts who completed their overseas sentence were given conditional pardons upon them settling anywhere in the world apart from Britain.<sup>7</sup> Within popular culture, the finality of marital separation through convict transportation was acknowledged, as illustrated in popular ballads such as 'The Convict's Child'.<sup>8</sup> This ballad depicts

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>4</sup> Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle*, 111.

<sup>5</sup> Rose, *Limited Livelihoods*, 53.

<sup>6</sup> TNA, MH12/8618, 1767, Poor Law Commissioners [hereafter PLC] to Samuel Caley, clerk to the Wayland Union, 20 Feb. 1844.

<sup>7</sup> K.S. Inglis, *The Australian Colonists: An exploration of social history, 1788 -1870* (Melbourne, 1974), 9.

<sup>8</sup> *The Convict's Child*. Broadside Ballad (London, 1838-1859). Broadside Ballads Online, Bodleian Library, Oxford: Edition Bod1159, Round V351.

a convicted man joining a ship and giving up his responsibility as a husband and father: 'Tis done; the fatal struggle's o'er', which transforms his wife on shore into a 'widow-mother'.<sup>9</sup>

Although criminal transportation affected a relatively small proportion of the population, the social devastation caused by this policy of banishment was exacerbated when considering the wives and dependants left behind. Criminal transportation, Roger argues, had 'catastrophic effects' on the family economy as it took away essential 'work and family ties [that] were sources of stability'.<sup>10</sup> In her research on convicts in Great Yarmouth in the 1830s and 1840s, Roger identified, through record linkage that analysed criminal records prior to and after conviction, that fifty percent of convicts were missing a parent and, particularly, the loss of a father could create a cycle of criminality.<sup>11</sup> Thus, in a wider perspective, parishes faced long-term burdens with no direct means of reclaiming expended relief from banished husbands, with a high possibility that these situation could reoccur further affecting entire families.

The complexity and ongoing negotiations of how to define and treat the wives of convicts are a prominent feature in the poor law index records.<sup>12</sup> The subject index, which thematically recorded brief descriptions of the letters submitted to the Poor Law Commissioners, includes 239 cases relating to lone women between 1836-1850.<sup>13</sup> Of these, 80 relate specifically to the wives and dependants of convicts, although the actual figure may be higher, as later records for relief referred to individual names without any further context, but, due to the large number of entries, it was not possible to test all these cases. These indexes allow insights into how local Poor Law authorities across England and Wales communicated with the Central Authority in London, helping to clarify legal rights and protocols. These records were intended to act as a

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Rogers, 'A Very Fair Statement of His Past Life', 34.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> TNA, MH15/1-15, Subject Indexes of Correspondence, 1836 -1850.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

precedent guide; however, it appears that the individual circumstances of deserted wives of convicts were a constant concern throughout the period, illustrating that approaches of how to respond to their relief request varied greatly. Equally, the existence of so many cases referred to the Central Authority indicates the agency of wives of convicts in negotiating the relief they wanted, namely out-relief outside of the workhouse. These women, in some cases, also directly applied to the Central Authority themselves for intervention in their cases when in conflict with their local parish guardians.<sup>14</sup> Prior to the passing of the new poor law in 1834, paupers could appeal to a magistrate to contest their treatment but, as this was no longer allowed, this petition represents an example of continued agency as paupers found new means of holding local authorities to account.<sup>15</sup> Poor law union enquiries to the Central Authority focused on clarity regarding how to treat wives of convicts and whether they should be seen as deserving despite their husband's criminal circumstances. They varied widely in their descriptions of lone women, ranging from sympathetic portrayals akin to a deserving widow to negative depictions of them as a 'heavy charge' similar to vagrants.<sup>16</sup> The personal agency of women to assert the type of relief they wanted was essential as a means of shaping negotiations with the parish and to take control of their ambiguous lone identities.

As discussed in the historiography on the poor laws and gender, there were many tensions and contradictions in how poor law officials implemented the new poor law regarding lone women. Officials were torn between competing ideals of women as weak and in need of protection versus defining them as able-bodied workers.<sup>17</sup> Levine-Clark's assessment of petitions for parochial relief argues that old age and 'illness w[ere] central to women's petitions for aid' to

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<sup>14</sup> TNA, MH 12/6843, 13283, Petition of Mary Clarke to the PLC 11 Nov. 1842.

<sup>15</sup> Natalie Carter and Steven King, "I think we ought not to acknowledge them [paupers] as that encourages them to write": The administrative state, power and the Victorian pauper', *Social History*, 46.2 (2021), 124.

<sup>16</sup> TNA, MH 12/9549, 2537, John Wall, clerk to the guardians of Worksop Union to the PLC, 3 March 1838; TNA, MH 12/11796, 8365, Isaac Last, clerk to the guardians of Cosford Union, to the PLC, 13 Jul. 1840.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*



achieve exceptional out-relief.<sup>18</sup> However, petitions from wives of convicts differ from these findings. They reveal a more complex picture of how lone women negotiated and expressed their deservingness and entitlement for out-relief, pointing to the need to expand our understandings of negotiation strategies available to lone women beyond illness and age.

Like petitioning widows identified by Levine-Clarke, the wives of convicts were not alone by personal choice. However, they were often at a different stage in their lifecycle as the majority were of prime childbearing age and often emphasised their young families in their petitions. Wives of convicts were also at an added disadvantage as they could not remarry. Their strategies were more wide-ranging; as will be seen, they used their able-bodiedness as workers and young mothers to bargain with authorities to extract the relief they wanted. They focused on their respectability (although often at the expense of other lone women) and drew on networks of supporters. They were not confined to assistance from the Poor Law authorities alone and could seek support by petitioning other institutions such as the Home Office to help them reverse their lone woman status through clemency or assisted emigration. Historians have noted the treatment of lone women as being uncertain and inconsistent, but this ambiguity could also point to the existence of opportunities for the wives of convicts to gain exceptional treatment.<sup>19</sup> This is confirmed by the fact that their cases were often categorised in subject indexes as ‘relief in special cases’ or ‘individual cases’ which allowed for discretion to be utilised.<sup>20</sup> This chapter argues that by focusing on wives of convicts, it is possible to see a greater range of agency available to lone women in their attempts to negotiate with authorities, to shape or at least influence how they were treated and where they lived, further highlighting the gendered limitations of the implementation of the new poor law.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 116-117.

<sup>19</sup> Thane, ‘Women and the Poor Law’, 42; Levine-Clark, ‘Engendering Relief’, 123.

<sup>20</sup> TNA, MH15/2 (1837); MH15/4 (1839); MH15/5 (1840); MH15/6 (1841); MH15/7 (1842); MH15/9 (1844); MH15/10 (1845); MH15/11 (1846).

## Negotiating Relief and Resisting the Workhouse

Lone women strongly resisted the workhouse as a form of relief, viewing it as an unpleasant, arduous, and stigmatising experience. Upon entering the workhouse, women had to give up their personal freedom and identity as '[i]nmates had to wear uniforms; their meals were rigidly scheduled and purposefully unappealing; and they spent their days at chores the workhouse master assigned to them'.<sup>21</sup> Wives of convicts often refused the workhouse and Mrs Bine, for example, bartered instead for some 'small trifle' of out-relief, and was reported to have said to her parish guardian that she would 'rather starve and see her family do so also, than go into the house'.<sup>22</sup> Other petitioners were equally adamant, illustrated by the case of an unnamed wife of a convict who was found by the parochial officials of Liskeard Union to be 'in a deplorable state of wretchedness hav[ing] no possible honest means of preventing themselves from starving [she] the mother positively refused to come into the workhouse'.<sup>23</sup> The loss of a male breadwinner could have life-threatening consequences for wives of convicts, potentially leading to them to crime or death without support. The emotive claim that they would rather starve than receive help in the workhouse can also be understood as a linguistic strategy to hold Poor Law officials to account. The threat of starvation was a powerful claim as Poor Law officials could not ignore their request as they were obligated to prevent starvation and death.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, a lone woman, without a male protector, held an important bargaining tool as her appeal could play upon gendered norms whereby women were seen to be weak, dependent, and requiring compassion.<sup>25</sup> In this case, the petitioner needed a replacement breadwinner that only the parish could provide. In the case of Mrs Bine, she was successful, being granted money and '3 gallons

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<sup>21</sup> Levine-Clark, 'Engendering Relief', 120.

<sup>22</sup> TNA, MH 12/13079, 1452, Letter by Mrs Bine to the Board of Guardians, 6 Feb. 1842; TNA, MH 12/13079, 1126, Samuel Pix, Guardian and churchwarden of the Rye Union to the PLC, 1 Feb. 1842.

<sup>23</sup> TNA, MH 12/1430, 2235, Peter Glubb, clerk to the Liskeard Union, to the PLC, 29 Feb. 1840.

<sup>24</sup> King, *Writing the lives*, 220; Pat Thane, 'Women and the Poor Law', 35.

<sup>25</sup> King, *Writing the lives*, 294.

of flour'.<sup>26</sup> In the second case, the unnamed wife of a convict was not forced to enter the workhouse and her young children were given relief. The opportunity to refuse entry was an important victory for lone women who, prior to being deserted, had limited agency and would have to follow their husbands into the workhouse if they had chosen to enter.<sup>27</sup>

Lone women also refused the workhouse for the sake of their respectability and viewed this form of relief as an unjust punishment for merely being alone and in need. Levine-Clark argues that '[e]ntrance into a workhouse ... compromised respectability by associating a person with the undeserving poor – vagrants, prostitutes, criminals, and those who chose not to work'.<sup>28</sup> This stigma was reflected by two advocates of a wife of a convict who argued that to send a widowed mother and children who had committed no crime to the workhouse 'would be as bad as to transport them'.<sup>29</sup> The extent to which a criminal taint was thought to extend to the wives of convicts by the community and poor law officials had much to do with the level of support and perceptions of the woman's character. This is illustrated by the case of Hannah Button, the wife of a convict with seven children, whose out-relief was stopped due to 'their relationship to a convict' and was instead offered the workhouse.<sup>30</sup> Mrs Button's case represents a clash of Poor Law ideology and the reality of individual suffering which encouraged local parochial supporters to come to her aid. A petition submitted on her behalf and signed by a parish churchwarden, two overseers, a clerk, and five other named men, recounts that although her first application for out-relief was 'recommended and seconded by the guardian', the Board refused.<sup>31</sup> To justify their claims for Mrs Button's deservingness, she was described as having been 'born a good character'

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<sup>26</sup> TNA, MH 12/13079, 1452, Henry Edwards Caine, clerk to the Rye Union, to the PLC, 8 Feb. 1842.

<sup>27</sup> Thane, 'Women and the Poor Law', 31.

<sup>28</sup> Levine-Clark, 'Engendering Relief', 109.

<sup>29</sup> TNA, MH 12/98, 1461, Letter by Joseph Osborn and Benjamin Bennett regarding Mary Gayden to the PLC, 7 Feb. 1844.

<sup>30</sup> TNA, MH12/11735, Petition by J. N. Grigg, clerk to the Blything Union, regarding Hannah Button to the PLC, 2 May 1840.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

and had made the socially expected effort to attempt to maintain herself as they note she ‘has found no difficulty in obtaining employment even when out of the House’.<sup>32</sup> Work, as will be further explored in this chapter, was an important strategy to demonstrate deservingness. The parishioners asked for an exception to be made not solely on the grounds of her material needs, but more so due to her emotional suffering, arguing that the Board’s refusal of such ‘trifling assistance’ was ‘unmerciful to the pauper and offensive to themselves’.<sup>33</sup> The double offence referred to here suggests the local officials were appealing to a ‘shared moral universe’, which had roots in a long-established sense of obligation to the poor, who in their deference to officials and landowners provided them with legitimacy, creating a reciprocal agreement and a customary right to ask for relief.<sup>34</sup> In arguing against this ‘injustice’, the parishioners used a legal and moral language that is highly sympathetic and strongly refutes an acceptance of a criminal taint, stating that ‘the alternative left to this poor unfortunate [whose] only crime is her misfortune, is the confinement of the house during the term of her husband’s banishment – or the extreme misery without’.<sup>35</sup> Their description highlights that within the local community relation to a criminal was not a factor which made her undeserving of relief. As a result, her youngest children were provided out-relief and she avoided the workhouse, thus allowing her to successfully retain both her independence and her children.

### **Survival: Work and Motherhood**

Deserted by their husbands’ transportation or imprisonment, the most pressing concern for the wives of convicts was their financial survival. Women did not have the same earning potential as men and were, by the 1830s and 1840s, increasingly encouraged by reformers to keep to the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid; Jones, ‘Widows, Work and Wantonness’, 149.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Houston, *Peasant Petitions*, 28; Tim Hitchcock, Peter King, and Pamela Sharpe (eds.), *Chronicling Poverty: The voices and strategies of the English poor, 1640-1840* (Basingstoke, 1997), 11; King, *Writing the lives*, 209.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

remit of domestic tasks believed to be more suited to them.<sup>36</sup> Margaret Ward, for example, whose husband was transported, laid bare to poor law officials the harsh reality of life without a breadwinner and the limits of her earning power. A mother of three daughters aged between eight and fourteen, she was also a serial petitioner for relief. After her short-term relief ended, the Droitwich Union clerk recounted that she ‘had to struggle with great difficulties in procuring a very scanty subsistence, that she can seldom procure more than one day’s washing in the week and that the earnings of her three children average no more than 2/3 per week’.<sup>37</sup> Mrs Ward’s emphasis on her struggle and difficult work conditions, along with her children contributing to the family economy, can be seen as a strategy to elicit sympathy from the union officials for two key reasons. Firstly, she could not be accused under the regulations of the new poor law that the cause of poverty lay with her refusal to work and was ‘the fault of the destitute’, as she had sought some employment in a culturally-preferred occupation available to women.<sup>38</sup> Poor law guardians were aware of the challenges and had more generally acknowledged that the amount that lone women could earn from washing and shirt-making was ‘so trifling a remuneration as to render it impossible therewith to maintain themselves’.<sup>39</sup> Secondly, growing fears about respectability and vulnerabilities of women as workers who were ‘caught in an economy in which their sexuality could be marketable’ may have made the union officials feel the need to provide patriarchal protection.<sup>40</sup> As Sharpe has identified in a study on widows, parochial relief provided protection for the recipient but also gave the officials control and, in this case, relief can be seen as enabling them with the opportunity for surveillance of Mrs Ward’s daughters.<sup>41</sup> Mrs Ward’s appeal was successful as she was given temporary out-relief, a notable victory as her children were above the age of nurture and thus not directly entitled to relief. Limited to a maximum of

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<sup>36</sup> Levine-Clark, ‘Engendering Relief’, 111; Rose, *Limited Livelihoods*, 57.

<sup>37</sup> TNA, MH 12/13932, 6281, Thomas Richards, clerk to Droitwich Union to the PLC, 11 May 1843.

<sup>38</sup> Rose, *Limited Livelihoods*, 52-53.

<sup>39</sup> TNA, MH12/12104, 817, B. Drew, clerk to guardians of Bermondsey parish, to PLC, 3 Jan. 1849.

<sup>40</sup> Anna Clark, *Struggle for the breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (London, 1997), 28.

<sup>41</sup> Sharpe, ‘Survival Strategies and Stories’, 229.

three months, the temporary nature of support suggests how women had to constantly renegotiate and that authorities wished to retain close surveillance of their survival strategies.

### **Work Opportunities and Networks: A Comparative View**

In their requests to the Poor Law authorities for further assistance, wives of convicts described their employment relating to washing and domestic tasks. However, a comparison with naval wives who had been criminally deserted by their bigamous husbands provides a unique insight into options available to other lone women.<sup>42</sup> In their accounts to the Admiralty regarding their lone survival, naval wives named their occupations as silk weaver, publican, servant, nursemaid, housekeeper to a reverend, whilst others relied on a wealthy female friend or a sister in business, and, in one case of an older petitioner, entering the workhouse.<sup>43</sup> This list represents a vast array of occupations outside of washing and domestic tasks, but it can be inferred that the wives of convicts' limited employment options may have been due to social stigma, of having known connections with a convict or having been in the workhouse. This is supported by Levine-Clark's finding 'that prospective servants also had to match respectability and character requirements for domestic service. In many cases, one workhouse stay was enough to damage irreparably a woman's character'.<sup>44</sup> Family and friendship ties were perhaps weaker for the wives of convicts than for naval wives. In their petitions to the Home Office, they included emotional appeals regarding the impact of their husband's transportation on their support networks and social mobility. One petitioner wrote how she was 'deprived of every Friend in the Country', whilst another made specific reference to being deprived of male friendship, pointing to its grave financial implications, writing that she had 'three daughters who are without any male relation

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<sup>42</sup> TNA, ADM 6/385–402, 1808-1830. Within this series twenty-five cases related to bigamy.

<sup>43</sup> TNA, ADM 6, 385, Martha Veasy, 1811; ADM 6/386, Lydia Ramsay, 1812; ADM 6/397, Harriet Magnes, 1823; ADM 6/399, Elizabeth Lawson, 1825; Arabella Bryant Lucas, 1821; ADM 6/392, Alice Hutton, 1819; ADM 6/387, Ann Cockburn, 1814; ADM 6/389, Mary Fry, 1817.

<sup>44</sup> Levine-Clark, 'Engendering Relief', 121.

and have without any means of procuring a livelihood'.<sup>45</sup> Friendship in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did not refer merely to personal acquaintances but were usually people 'who could open up avenues to assistance, who were frequently in a stronger position than their supplicants' and who could help 'by influencing those in power'.<sup>46</sup> However, friendship was considered to be intimately tied to a person's character so this could limit association, as "friends" would not wish to countenance dishonourable or questionably dependent behaviour, as it might discredit their standing'.<sup>47</sup> However, wives of convicts' general omission of reference to friends and relatives in pauper letters could also be seen as tactical. Keith Snell, in his analysis of pauper friendship in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, argues that the poor were selective about when they would 'allude to the existence of friends as support networks' as this raised the prospect that these people might be made to contribute towards their maintenance and thus undermine a case for relief or support.<sup>48</sup> It is important to note that not all wives of convicts were reliant on the Poor Law authorities, and some for only short periods and, as will be seen, there were other survival strategies available to them, both rough and respectable, to keep them from poor relief.

However, for those that struggled and experienced acute crisis after their husband was transported, a significant factor which limited work and independent survival options was childcare. Dependent young children and the loss of a breadwinner affected naval wives too. The similarity of desperation and struggle is illustrated in the case of one lone naval woman who, following the death of her bigamist husband, found herself without the expected support of his pension, leading her to appeal to the Admiralty that 'myself and six children are in a state of starvation and must be under the necessity of troubling the parish for support or die of want'.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> TNA, PC1/84, Elizabeth Edmonds, June 1836; TNA, PC1/92, Mary Gildea, Nov. 1844.

<sup>46</sup> Snell, 'Belonging and community', 4.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Snell, 'Belonging and community', 20.

<sup>49</sup> TNA, ADM 6/392, John Hutton and wives, 1819.

The appeal of motherhood was an issue which could transcend status and was an important bargaining tool for lone women in their arguments for their entitlement to financial relief. The challenges of motherhood for legitimate naval widows will be further explored in chapters two and three.

Appeals to motherhood and the challenges of poverty were strategies utilised by wives of convicts to highlight their deservingness for relief and provided a legitimate reason why their work abilities were affected.<sup>50</sup> However, lone women still needed to be careful in how they presented themselves and framed their expectations for relief, as being a mother was not sufficient grounds for out-relief alone. Whiting, in her research on gender and petitioning in the seventeenth century, has argued that petitioning was particularly well suited to women, fitting with cultural expectations of women as helpless, distressed and in need of protection.<sup>51</sup> Whiting finds that women used this dependent language, emphasising gender based necessity in their appeals to male authorities, as a practical strategy that allowed them an important voice of their own.<sup>52</sup> In their appeals to motherhood, the lone women studied in this chapter can be seen as continuing to use emotive and gendered language of necessity. Elizabeth Edmonds, whose husband was transported, leaving her with a child between two and three years of age, uses similarly dependent language, writing that she found it ‘utterly out of her power’ to work due to the difficulty of providing childcare, leaving her ‘thrown upon the world without a protector’.<sup>53</sup> Steve King, in his assessment of poor supplicants, has argued that female ‘writers were skilled in taking restrictive masculine discourse and linguistic register and using them subtly but

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<sup>50</sup> King, *Writing the lives*, 302.

<sup>51</sup> Whiting, *Women and Petitioning*, 26.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> TNA, PC1/84, Elizabeth Edmonds, June 1836.



concertedly for their own purposes'.<sup>54</sup> A lack of 'power' and 'protector', thus, should be seen as calculated word choices for a patriarchal audience Edmonds was trying to appeal to.<sup>55</sup>

Through comparative analysis it appears that passivity and deference were preferred among officials, as more assertive claims, whilst not ignored, were not always well-received. The case of Catherine Nash is illustrative of a lone woman's sense of entitlement to out-relief as a mother and explores the difficulties of negotiating with a discretionary system. Mrs Nash, in her appeal for out-relief, wrote that her little earnings of '1s p[e]r day' from washing were greatly reduced by having 'to pay a person to manage the children each day of my absence'.<sup>56</sup> The inclusion of this detail can be seen as an attempt to fulfil the expected prerequisite to relief negotiations by displaying an attempt to survive independently, before acknowledging they were unable to do so.<sup>57</sup> Mrs Nash's error, in comparison to other wives of convicts, was that she assumed relief before it was officially granted. She explained that 'in the expectation of receiving some assistance from the Relieving officer' she had bought food on credit which she had over a few weeks 'exhausted', leaving her and her children 'destitute' with '2s per week to pay for house rent'.<sup>58</sup> The relieving officer refused to provide out-relief and, in response, Mrs Nash sent a duplicate letter to the Central Authority in London, revealing how draft letters were kept and redeployed as needed, asking for intervention in her case. A reply was given by the Basford Union guardians that she was offered relief in the workhouse which she refused. Mrs Nash's perceived sense of entitlement to her right to out-relief is further explained through her inclusion of the legitimacy of her children and their young ages. She writes to both authorities: 'I am 37 years of age have three legitimate children, viz. Elizabeth 7 years of age, Anne 2 years & 9

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<sup>54</sup> King, *Writing the lives*, 291-2.

<sup>55</sup> TNA, PC1/84, Elizabeth Edmonds, June 1836.

<sup>56</sup> TNA, MH 12/9235, 10242, Catherine Nash to the PLC, 14 Jul. 1845.

<sup>57</sup> Bailey, 'Think Wot a Mother Must Feel', 9.

<sup>58</sup> TNA, MH 12/9235, 10242, Catherine Nash to the PLC, 14 Jul. 1845.

months, George 1 year & 9 months'.<sup>59</sup> Children of convicts or deserted wives, under the age of seven, technically were entitled to out-relief and were not to be separated from their mothers.<sup>60</sup>

There are no further records regarding Mrs Nash, so it is not possible to know what happened in her negotiations. However, other wives of convicts were able to use their status as young, deserted mothers to exploit this poor law loophole, as by accepting relief only on behalf of their children, who were legally entitled, and not for themselves, they did not have to enter the workhouse and gained some monetary relief.<sup>61</sup>

### **Deserving vs. Undeserving Lone Women**

The treatment of lone women seeking relief and assistance from the Poor Law authorities - but also the Admiralty and Home Office - often depended on their marital status and legitimacy of their children, but alongside this, the perceived respectability and quality of her character was vitally important. However, as Pat Thane notes, among poor law officials there was 'no such consensus about what constituted respectability'.<sup>62</sup> Petitions, therefore, are valuable in illuminating what supplicants understood deservingness to be through assessment of how they portrayed themselves and referred to other women. Through analysis of institutional responses, it is also possible to understand what shaped the Poor Law authorities' decision-making, and how this varied in comparison with other institutions.

The need for petitioners to prove their deservingness and good moral character in a competitive relief system often placed limits on female solidarity. Lone women aligned their use of language with that of the officials and, in doing so, made calculated comparisons at the expense of other

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> A comparative case: TNA, MH 12/6843, 13788, PLC to Robert Button clerk to the Bethnal Green Union, 31 Nov. 1842.

<sup>61</sup> TNA MH 12/6398, 7047, PLC to Thomas Tewkes clerk to the guardians of Barrow-upon-Soar Union, 22 June 1840; TNA, MH 12/12043, 6090, PLC to J. Sparke clerk to the guardians of Thorpe Union, Bury St. Edmonds, 1841; TNA, MH 12/6843, 13788, PLC to Robert Button clerk to the Bethnal Green Union, 31 Nov. 1842.

<sup>62</sup> Thane, 'Women and the Poor Law', 41.

women, particularly regarding their marital status and the legitimacy of their children, to highlight their own deservingness against the perceived moral failings of others. For example, Ann Meagher, in her petition to the Home Office, pointed to the legitimacy of her young children to demonstrate her deservingness. Mrs Meagher, who ultimately wanted to be reunited with her convicted husband, wrote that she was in a distressed state with ‘7 small and helpless Children’ dependent on her and that she could provide a marriage certificate to support their legitimacy.<sup>63</sup> That Mrs Meagher thought it was important to emphasise this, suggests it was a strategy to appeal to institutional ideals that judged women with legitimate children as deserving of leniency, whereas unmarried mothers who could not support themselves were deemed only fit for relief into the workhouse ‘to be left in no doubt of their shameful condition’.<sup>64</sup>

Moral and sexual policing in the guise of promoting their own deserving status as mothers also occurred in the petitions of naval wives, deserted by bigamous husbands, who appealed to the Admiralty. This is demonstrated in the case of Mrs Martha Talbot who focused her argument on the failings of the other claimant as much as her own positive attributes. In her petition, she wrote emotively that she had ‘three helpless infants in a state of the deepest poverty’, and whilst she stated that she had no knowledge of her husband having a prior wife, she was nonetheless keen to discredit her rival as a ‘woman of notorious ill fame’.<sup>65</sup> In nineteenth-century defamation cases, Anna Clark has identified that both men and women used sexual insults regarding a woman’s reputation, in which they ‘dr[ew] upon the moral vocabulary of the dominant class to carry out their own vendettas’ and assert their moral authority.<sup>66</sup> Mrs Martha Talbot can be seen to use similar strategies as she concludes her appeal with a further damning postscript in her

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<sup>63</sup> TNA, PC1/74, Anne Meagher, Feb. 1826.

<sup>64</sup> Thane, ‘Women and the Poor Law’, 32; Rose, *Limited Livelihoods*, 54.

<sup>65</sup> TNA, ADM 6/388, Thomas Talbot and wives, 1815 (Emphasis in the original).

<sup>66</sup> Clark, *Struggle for the breeches*, 54.

letter that ‘the said prostitute had asserted in the event of her success to take my bed from under me of which mention here made is proof of her wicked disposition’.<sup>67</sup>

The Admiralty denied a pension to Mary Talbot, the woman claiming to be a first wife of Thomas and accused of being a sex worker by Martha. This decision was made on grounds that Mary had not provided sufficient evidence of her and husband’s identity. Although she supplied a marital certificate and evidence by two former mates now working a factory, the Admiralty judged the latter to ‘appear’ not to be ‘signed by any respectable people’.<sup>68</sup> This verdict suggests that character defamation was extremely damaging, and that officials used their moral judgment in their discretionary decision-making. Martha succeeded at the expense of Mary.

### **Undeserving Behaviour**

Poor law officials also treated reports of undeserving behaviour by lone women in receipt of relief severely. Relief, even once granted, was not entirely free for a woman to use as she pleased and could be revoked for undesirable behaviour. A type of undesirable behaviour reviled by the authorities was women, particularly mothers, drinking alcohol and discovery of this was actively punished by authorities. Dorota Dias-Lewandowska and Pam Lock have argued that drinking was considered a ‘threat to public order and production’ but was considered particularly problematic among women as they were expected to be the ‘upholders of moral decency in family and community and the source of the next generation’.<sup>69</sup> Despite these social fears and negative implications for respectability, Clark finds that it was common for women to drink and recounts the findings of the 1834 ‘The Parliamentary Select Committee on Drunkenness’.<sup>70</sup> This committee ‘hired investigators to watch the comings and goings of customers in fourteen

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Dorota Dias-Lewandowska and Pam Lock, ‘Women, Home, and Alcohol: Constructed Facades and Social Norms in Nineteenth-Century Polish and British Representations of Female Drinking Practices’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 28.2 (2023), 2.

<sup>70</sup> Clark, *Struggle for the breeches*, 29.

London pubs for a week ... [and] found that men never made up more than 66 percent of the customers, averaging just over 50 percent'.<sup>71</sup> Whilst it was difficult to police women's behaviour generally, the personal affairs of lone women were subject to even greater intervention by parish officials. Reports of alcoholism were treated harshly by poor law unions and the Central Authority. They did not see cases of lone women's addiction as coping strategies due to desertion, rather as evidence of their being a 'cruel' and 'unnatural mother'.<sup>72</sup> Authorities use of discretion to deprive as well as award relief is illustrated in the case of an unnamed wife of a convict, described as an able-bodied woman with five small children, four under the age of seven, who was uncovered as being an alcoholic. Bishop Stortford Union's internal correspondence notes that she was originally given out-relief instead of the workhouse as an exception, but this was stopped when the guardians were informed that she was 'addicted to drinking and neglected her children, which on enquiry proved to be true'.<sup>73</sup> Consequently, she was given an order to enter the workhouse, although she refused either to enter or allow her children to do so. The guardians requested advice from the Poor Law Commissioners to understand whether they had a legal right to punish her under the Vagrant Act for her neglect and misuse of relief and even suggested removing her children from her.<sup>74</sup> However, due to her status as the wife of a convict, the guardians were advised that whilst they 'have full power to refuse the relief altogether unless in the W[orkhouse] ... the woman is not liable to punishment for refusing to allow the children to come into the house'.<sup>75</sup> This case demonstrates the desire to morally punish women but also highlights the legal limits authorities had over the wives of convicts.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> TNA, MH12/4539, 17122, PLC draft response notes to a letter by John Taylor, clerk to Bishop Stortford Union, 9 June 1848.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. (Emphasis in the original).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

The Bishop Stortford Union was not unique in rescinding financial support to alcoholic mothers. The Admiralty in 1821 also chose to ‘strike’ a widow, Sarah Campbell, from the pension list upon discovery, thanks to an informer’s tip off, that she ‘is said to be a complete drunkard spending the purchase of liquor every sixpence she can get, either by fair or dishonest means’.<sup>76</sup> In addition, the Admiralty investigator stated that, since her widowhood, she had cohabited with a man, with whom she had twins who had since died, and was pregnant again whilst remaining an alcoholic, willing to sell gifts of food for drink.<sup>77</sup> This description conjured images of William Hogarth’s ‘Gin Lane’, which depicts a child falling from the lap of its intoxicated and impoverished mother, centred among the chaos of violence, death, and disorder that alcohol caused.<sup>78</sup> Although printed in 1751, the link between alcohol and moral failings of motherhood left a legacy, with gin becoming known in colloquial terms as ‘mother’s ruin’.<sup>79</sup> Women were aware that their behaviour would be judged harshly by the authorities and could have the potential to threaten their financial support. Indeed, the case notes reveals that Mrs Campbell attempted to hide her behaviour from the authorities in public and did this by two main strategies: mobility and appearance. To retain anonymity and escape those she defrauded, by often not paying rent, she moved frequently to different locations to draw her pension. Also, she is recorded as borrowing shawls, bonnets, and shoes to ‘appear decent on attending the pay table’.<sup>80</sup> Adopting clothing to appear respectable is corroborated in Thane’s findings that ‘[c]leanliness and good character were inextricably linked in the minds of Poor Law and charity administrators’.<sup>81</sup> Much like Mrs Campbell’s borrowing of clothes, Thane found similar strategies among pauper women, including a ‘old lady in Dorset ... who always kept a white apron behind the door to put on when gentlefolk came’.<sup>82</sup> However, in the case of Mrs Campbell, she later

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<sup>76</sup> TNA, ADM 6/396, Sarah Campbell, 1821.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> William Hogarth, *Gin Lane*. Etching and Engraving on Paper (London, 1751). Museum Number: Tate T01799.

<sup>79</sup> Jan Waterson, *Women and Alcohol in Social Context: Mother’s Ruin Revisited* (Basingstoke, 2000), 3.

<sup>80</sup> TNA, ADM 6/396, Sarah Campbell, 1821.

<sup>81</sup> Thane, ‘Women and the Poor Law’, 42.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

pawned or stole the borrowed items which meant that her attempts to go unnoticed by the authorities were ultimately unsuccessful; those she defrauded caught up with her and brought her to the attention of the authorities. The role of the community and institutions working together to police the behaviour of lone women will be further explored in chapter four.

### **Gate Keeping**

Poor Law authorities and officers of charitable institutions often took it upon themselves to act as gate keepers to ensure relief was not granted to those that they deemed unworthy. In addition to policing women's drinking and childcare practices, attention was also given to lone women's private relationships. Evidence of informal relationships with men was a significant bar to petitioners accessing relief. This is evident in the 1837 case of Mrs Cann, whose husband was transported for life leaving her with five young children, but who was denied out-relief because the Chelmsford guardians judged that 'the woman's character' was 'very indifferent'.<sup>83</sup> No further clarification of her behaviour was given as to what made her 'indifferent', although the guardians report that after a 'short time' she had left the workhouse and her children behind and 'went to live in adultery'.<sup>84</sup> It is inferred, therefore, that her extra-marital relations were what caused the refusal by the authorities. Mrs Cann's husband was transported for life which meant that there was no chance of reunion in Britain and thus it is an understandable strategy that she would look for a replacement breadwinner, especially if the parish denied her financial assistance to raise her family independently.<sup>85</sup> The common adoption of such a strategy is illustrated by another wife of a convict, whose husband was also transported for life, who remarried as she considered 'her former marriage dissolved by the transportation of her husband'.<sup>86</sup> The Chelmsford guardians who were financially responsible for Mrs Cann's children, brought her before a magistrate to be

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<sup>83</sup> TNA, MH 12/3396, 9278, Robert Bartlett, clerk to guardians of the Chelmsford Union, to the PLC, 2 Nov. 1837.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> For more on deserted lone women finding replacement breadwinners as a survival strategy see: Griffin, *Bread Winner*, 140; Frost, *Living in Sin*, 130.

<sup>86</sup> TNA, MH 12/2733, 6437, Philip Mules, clerk to guardians of Howton Union, to the PLC, 23. Sep 1837.

convicted for the crime of abandoning her children. However, their prosecution failed thanks to an institutional clash between the expectations of the guardians and the justice's sympathy for the reality of the wives of convicts without a breadwinner. It was reported by the Chelmsford guardians that 'the magistrate after hearing the evidence came to the conclusion that the facts of the case did not justify them in proceeding to commit and punish this woman'.<sup>87</sup> Magistrates sentenced many men to transportation, knowing the implications for the families left behind about which many male convicts wrote in their pleas for clemency.<sup>88</sup> It is significant, therefore, that they might extend leniency to the women left behind, if not their husbands, although this was much to the disapproval of the selected Poor Law authorities who had to bear the financial burden.

Poor law guardians were not alone in their active attempts to gate keep relief in their local jurisdiction as naval port commissioners acted similarly against lone women deemed of 'bad character'.<sup>89</sup> The case of Jane Bennett in 1824 provides an example of how relief could be denied on grounds of character even if the woman was entitled to apply for it. Mrs Bennett was a widow whose claim to her husband's naval pension was entangled in a bigamy case. Married in 1803 to William Bennett, a boatswain, she was subsequently deserted by her husband who married another woman named Martha in 1813 who he lived with until his death in 1822. The marital certificates proved Jane to be the legitimate wife and Martha lost her £25 per annum pension. However, Jane was not granted the pension as she was judged 'as not a deserving object'.<sup>90</sup> Martha, in her petition to keep her pension, had attacked the character of Jane, writing that she 'lived a loose profligate life in Portsmouth with any man who would take up with her and that she did not even consider herself to be his wife' and accused her of marrying someone

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<sup>87</sup> TNA, MH 12/3396, 9278, Robert Bartlett, clerk to the guardians of Chelmsford Union, to the PLC, 2 Nov. 1837.

<sup>88</sup> TNA, PC 1/67, John Clark, 1819; PC1/84, Thomas Hasker, 1836.

<sup>89</sup> TNA, ADM 6/398, William Bennett and wives, 1824.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.



else.<sup>91</sup> Jane was found to have remarried, but this was in 1824 after her husband's death. The reports of Jane's behaviour influenced Sir George Grey, the Portsmouth commissioner, who resorted to devious means to prevent her accessing her pension. Jane learnt from the commissioner's clerk that 'Mr Croker had put across against my name' and was further informed by the clerk that 'Sir George Grey had burnt my papers after he signed them'.<sup>92</sup> The Admiralty requested that Sir George explain his actions and he justified his refusal to support her application was due to her perceived failings as a wife, for having not lived with her husband for many years and noted that he found it 'extraordinary' that she would have waited two years after her husband's death to apply for a pension, suggesting she was an opportunist.<sup>93</sup> The influence of Martha's accusation – although not named – appears to have had a significant impact as he stated that it was 'conveyed' to him that Jane was 'a person of very irregular habits' and stated overall that his opinion that she was not 'fit' for the 'benefit of the charity' had not changed.<sup>94</sup> The Admiralty deferred to the report of Commissioner Grey and neither widow was granted a pension. The Admiralty had greater autonomy than Poor Law authorities to control who received relief, but the desire to control women's sexual behaviour remained the same.

### **Deserting Mothers**

Motherhood, as we have seen, remained an essential way for a lone woman to demonstrate her respectability for out-relief as an able-bodied woman on the basis that she was legitimately restricted by her childcare obligations. However, some mothers who were refused relief utilised the workhouse as a form of childcare, often as a final resort after negotiations for relief broke down. Leaving children at the workhouse alone was a serious point of contention for the Poor Law authorities who vehemently policed such actions by going to the expense of bringing

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

deserting mothers before magistrates. Hugh Cunningham has argued that children constituted a large proportion of recipients relieved under the poor law and that by the early nineteenth century ‘195,000 children of paupers were being permanently relieved by parishes’ in England and Wales.<sup>95</sup> This suggests why financially-conscious parishes wished to deter more children being added to their care. The wives of convicts sometimes resorted to calculated strategies to leave their children and escape being detained themselves in the workhouse. This is demonstrated through the evasive tactics of Elizabeth Nash who was 43 years of age when her husband was transported for 10 years leaving her with four children ranging between 4 and 13 years of age. The Billericay guardians accused Mrs Nash of cohabiting with another man since her husband’s transportation, ordering her to enter the workhouse rather than receive out-relief. On arrival with her children to the workhouse, Mrs Nash was reported to have ‘said she had a bundle of clothes at an adjoining house which she was about to bring’; however, this was a ruse used to enable her to leave her children and flee.<sup>96</sup> For women who could not support their families alone, the workhouse represented an opportunity to safeguard their children.

It is difficult to access the emotions women felt towards abandoning their children, although, in keeping with findings of why women left infants at the Foundling Hospital, the cause was often that women could not afford to keep them.<sup>97</sup> Indeed, women taken before the magistrate by the Poor Law authorities were recorded as responding that they could not afford to look after their children.<sup>98</sup> Mrs Nash was also brought before a magistrate, but she was not punished or forced to contribute to the care of her children, a decision the guardians were ‘dissatisfied’ with.<sup>99</sup> The likelihood of a husband’s return was rare and thus co-habiting with another man was a strategy

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<sup>95</sup> Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (London, 2020), 91.

<sup>96</sup> TNA, MH 12/3348, 9558, James Penfold, clerk to the guardians of Billericay Union, to the PLC, 31 Oct. 1838.

<sup>97</sup> Tanya Evans, *Unfortunate Objects: Lone Mothers in Eighteenth-Century London* (Basingstoke, 2005), 130-131; Cunningham, *Children*, 100.

<sup>98</sup> TNA, MH 12/13932, 445, Thomas Richards, clerk to the guardians of Droitwich Union, to the PLC, 12 Jan. 1843.

<sup>99</sup> TNA, MH 12/3348, 9558, James Penfold, clerk to the guardians of Billericay Union, to the PLC, 31 Oct. 1839.

that could offer women a second chance in life and provide greater financial security than remaining on their own, especially given that long-term relief was not guaranteed. The decision to give up children was also utilised by some female convicts, such as Mary Easterbrook, who, sentenced to transportation herself, requested that her three-year-old son be left behind with his father who was a biscuit baker for the Navy in Deptford.<sup>100</sup> It is possible that some women considered it easier to be independent of dependants for their own survival and, indeed once in Australia, many married men and women bigamously remarried, starting new lives and families.<sup>101</sup>

However, for many of wives of convicts, they saw the placement of their children in the workhouse as a temporary strategy, in-keeping with those of other poor families who utilised the workhouse as a 'short-term resource to tide them over the emergencies that were a routine feature of their lives'.<sup>102</sup> The temporary nature of this strategy is further evidenced by the fact that mothers did maintain contact with the children they placed in the workhouse and attempted to recover them.<sup>103</sup> However, this strategy came with risks as some lone women found it difficult to recover their children if they could not prove that they could provide for them.<sup>104</sup>

The unique status of the wives of convicts, as neither widows or unmarried women, offered them an element of protection and limited their prosecution by the Poor Law authorities for not being able to sustain their family without their husbands, differentiating them from other women. Their unique status is demonstrated in the 1840 comparative case of Mary Wright and Mary Smith, who, despite similar circumstances, experienced different treatment. Mrs Wright

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<sup>100</sup> TNA, PC1/67, Mary Easterbrook, Oct. 1819.

<sup>101</sup> Perry McIntyre, 'The Desire for a Wife: Convict Family Reunion and Remarriage in Colonial New South Wales', *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, 15 (2013), 213.

<sup>102</sup> Englander, 'From the Abyss', 77.

<sup>103</sup> TNA, MH 12/6843, 13283, Petition of Mary Clarke to the PLC, 11 Nov. 1842.

<sup>104</sup> TNA, MH 12/437, 7850, Buckingham Union guardians to the PLC, 13 Aug. 1841.

and Mrs Smith, both had two children, one of which was illegitimate, and both mothers left their children alone in the workhouse. The parish in this case was keen to convict both women under the Vagrancy Act for failing to support their children and placing the financial burden on the parish. The distinction between these women was that Mary Wright was a widow, while Mary Smith was the wife of a transported convict. For the wives of transported criminals, the Poor Law authorities continued to view their husbands as financially responsible, regardless of their physical separation. The Poor Law Commissioners found that the wife of a transported convict ‘cannot be treated as a widow, and that as relief to her children is not relief to her she cannot be proceeded against’ and ‘do not see how she can be compelled to contribute’.<sup>105</sup> By contrast, Mary Wright was a widow and therefore considered liable under the Vagrancy Act for ‘neglecting to maintain her legitimate child as part of her family’.<sup>106</sup> In 1844, the Poor Law Commissioners to the Wayland Union’s made a similar distinction regarding the liability of a wife of a convict for punishment for also leaving her children in the workhouse. The commissioners made explicit reference to the legal uncertainty surrounding the wives of convicts, stating that ‘the point is by no means free from doubt they have had the subject under their consideration, on more than one occasion’ but again stated that ‘in the present state of the law, a married woman is not liable, during her husband's lifetime, to any legal proceeding for neglecting to maintain her children’.<sup>107</sup> Thus, aware of it being a grey area, they judged that they ‘certainly could not, whilst the doubt exists recommend justices to convict a married woman, under the vagrant act’.<sup>108</sup> The legal loophole for wives of convicts over the financial responsibility for their children did put them at an advantage over other lone women. However, this was a strategy which was often a last resort as it could limit their options for future negotiation for relief by souring their relationship with the parish.

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<sup>105</sup> TNA, MH 12/11796, 8365, PLC to Isaac Last, clerk to the guardians of Cosford Union, to the, 16 Jul. 1840.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> TNA, MH12/8618, 1767, PLC to Samuel Caley, clerk to the guardians of Wayland Union, 20 Feb. 1844.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

The late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries experienced a change in attitudes regarding the importance of motherhood which was increasingly perceived as the ‘ultimate yardstick of deservingness’ for a woman.<sup>109</sup> Emerging ideas around childhood and the need to save children also meant that authorities were taking a more active role and interest in private family matters.<sup>110</sup> Authorities viewed child abandoning practices as particularly undeserving behaviour. However, in families where the parents were involved in crime, some authorities viewed the separation of parents from their children as the best solution to prevent the possibility that their children would replicate their criminal behaviour. For example, in 1840, a vicar from the Wallingford Union wrote to the parish guardians regarding Elizabeth Bessell, the wife of a man transported for sheep stealing, and her three children aged two, eight, and ten. The vicar argued that Mrs Bessell’s ‘course of life and whole conduct is such as to furnish the very worst example to her children, who to all appearances seem likely to follow the steps of their father’.<sup>111</sup>

Thus, he proposed that an order should be given for Mrs Bessell’s children to be sent to the workhouse without her on grounds that, from a ‘moral point of view’, the conditions in which she raised her children were ‘so deplorable’.<sup>112</sup> The Admiralty also took an active interest in the care of children whose widowed mothers they were supporting. Margaret Tuckey, for example, in 1821, lost her generous widow’s pension of £120 per annum for not supporting her sons, who she placed in the care of John S. for board and education.<sup>113</sup> Each of her children was granted £25 per annum by the Admiralty in addition to her pension but, as she would not pay John S. for their care, she was subsequently informed upon. In consequence, the Admiralty judged her as

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<sup>109</sup> King, *Writing the lives*, 301.

<sup>110</sup> Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England, 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity and Generation* (Oxford, 2012), 5; Cunningham, *Children*, 111.

<sup>111</sup> TNA, MH 12/298, 3890, J. Clittenbuck, Vicar of Long Wittenham, to the guardians of the Wallingford Union, 27 Mar. 1840.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> TNA, ADM 6/395, Margaret Tuckey, 1821. (Surname of John S. not decipherable).

not being a 'proper person' to receive a pension and instead ordered that each of her children be granted an additional £5 and ordered that the solicitor 'take measures for placing the guardianship of the children in other hands on the grounds of her having abandoned them and misapplied the pension'.<sup>114</sup>

The Poor Law authorities and Admiralty, in providing relief and pensions, assumed the role of breadwinner which gave the authorities a sense of entitlement to police lone women's behaviour and use of the funds. However, the wives of convicts could navigate this by petitioning more than one institution for assistance, which was particularly important if their relationship with their local Poor Law authorities broke down. The wives of convicts also had the option to petition the Home Office to try to reverse their lone woman status through requesting clemency for their husbands or assisted emigration for themselves.

### **Mobile Lone Women and the Appeal of Emigration**

Emigration in the nineteenth century was an increasingly viewed by the poor as a strategy to escape difficult circumstances in Britain, regarding unemployment and poor living conditions.<sup>115</sup> Hope for a better life and more opportunities resulted in four million people emigrating from England alone.<sup>116</sup> Families and single men were identified as desirable emigrants by colonial governments, however many married men also deserted their wives and families to pursue new lives on their own overseas.<sup>117</sup> Gary Howell and Robin Haines have asserted the agency of emigrants, arguing it was not a case of the poor being 'shovelled out' but rather an active choice by mostly able-bodied men who took full advantage of assisted emigration schemes available

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Gary Howells, "'For I was tired of England Sir': English pauper emigrant strategies, 1834 -60", *Social History*, 23.2 (1998), 185.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 178.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 187-188; John Tosh, 'From the "cape of despair" to the Cape of Good Hope: letters of the emigrant poor in early nineteenth-century England', *Social History*, 42.4 (2017), 493-495; Olive Anderson, 'Emigration and marriage break-up in mid-Victorian England', *Economic History Review*, 1(1997), 104.

under the new poor law.<sup>118</sup> However, the agency and experiences of female emigrants, particularly lone women, have not been fully explored. Lone women, especially those from maritime communities, were also mobile in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Within Britain, lone women frequently moved home in search of cheaper accommodation and companionship to such an extent that one naval husband wrote to his wife that he found it difficult to keep track of her many addresses whilst away at sea.<sup>119</sup> Also, lone women whose naval husbands' allotted pay was not sufficient to support them found themselves at risk of being forcibly removed to different marital settlements rather than where they had chosen to live themselves.<sup>120</sup> Pushed to be mobile by necessity, lone women were also pulled to emigration to better their chances and escape their own difficult circumstances. This is illustrated by the case of Mary Miles. Mrs Miles was a widow of a purser, but for much of her marriage had lived separately with her child in America. Mrs Miles learnt the news of her husband's death in a letter from her mother in England, although it took six months to reach her in Indiana and she could not afford to return to England until three years later.<sup>121</sup> To access a pension, widows had to claim it within a year of the death of their husband, and thus, to justify the delay in applying and why she was not living with her husband, Mrs Miles gave an emotive account of what had motivated her to emigrate. Her husband, she claimed, was 'a man of very extravagant and dissipated habits', prone to gambling and drinking which meant that he did not support her and their child, who he subjected to 'unkind and cruel treatment'.<sup>122</sup> His behaviour towards her, Mrs Miles claimed, 'inspire[d] her with the utmost terror and sometimes proceeded to acts of violence which endangered her life'.<sup>123</sup> These claims were supported by a servant, Ann Clarke,

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<sup>118</sup> Haines, 'Indigent Misfits or Shrewd Operators?', 246-247; Howells, 'On Account of their Disreputable Characters', 587-588.

<sup>119</sup> TNA, ADM 6/385, Mary Orrack, 1827.

<sup>120</sup> TNA, MH12/2219, 12980, Richard Rudd, clerk to the guardians of the Stonehouse Union, to the PLC, 1 Nov. 1842.

<sup>121</sup> TNA, ADM 6/397, Mary Miles, 1823.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

who provided a statement regarding the three months she had lived with the couple, confirming his terrorising treatment, including Mr Miles, whilst intoxicated, taking their baby from a distressed Mary several times throughout the night.<sup>124</sup> Mrs Miles left her husband and stayed instead with her mother and then her sister, but, unable to feel safe as her husband tracked her down and ‘threatened to send a constable and take her away’, she stated that she emigrated out of the reach of her husband, taking an opportunity to go to America in a ‘respectable capacity’ until it was safe to return.<sup>125</sup> A chilling case of domestic abuse and escape, Mrs Miles was not alone in using emigration to flee unfavourable marital circumstances. Mrs West, for example, similarly chose to take a service job abroad as a ‘servant in the family of a commissary general’ in Barbados due to ‘ill treatment’ by her husband.<sup>126</sup> Bigamously remarrying, she left her second husband after ‘unkind’ treatment and returned to England to claim a widow’s pension.<sup>127</sup> These cases demonstrate that it was not only men who were willing to desert spouses for better opportunities overseas.

For the wives of convicts, assisted emigration presented a chance to escape challenging financial circumstances in Britain and join husbands that they did not want to be parted from. Separated by the sentence of transportation rather than active marital desertion, they made it clear that their lone status was not of their choosing. Convict wives, in their petitions to the Home Office, claimed to have lived together ‘most affectionately’, with one woman complaining of the loss of ‘her only comfort and protection through life,’ whilst another petitioner who wrote in support of a convict’s wife observed that she was transformed into ‘a poor unhappy creature since their separation’.<sup>128</sup> Emigration was voluntary, and women were not bound to go to Australia if they

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> TNA, ADM 6/397, Elizabeth West, 1823.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> TNA, PC 1/74, Hannah Perrings, Jan 1826; PC1/74, Esther Deardow, May 1826; TNA, PC 1/74, Jane Cook, Jan 1826.



did not want to, even if their husbands expressed a wish for them to join them.<sup>129</sup> However, for those keen to take control of their circumstances, assisted schemes through the Home Office and the new poor law meant that emigration was a more accessible survival strategy for the wives of convicts than it was for maritime wives who often needed to find service positions to allow them to emigrate. The self-determination and agency of the wives of convicts should not be underestimated; despite claims of distress at home, convict wives were willing to travel ‘regardless of what peril she may undergo’ and promoted their willingness to ‘share his sorrows in a Strange Land’.<sup>130</sup>

The appeal of emigrating to join their convicted husbands was twofold: firstly, husbands sometimes wrote back positively to their wives of better living conditions in Australia and, secondly, for those in dispute with the parish over relief, the conditions of the workhouse in Britain were a significant deterrent which meant any alternative was seen as a better option. Despite the distance, literacy levels and relative poverty, communication with convict husbands was not impossible. Positive news of life in Australia could be learnt in prison prior to transportation and several petitioners refer to receiving letters from overseas, some even attaching their husbands’ letters to their petitions.<sup>131</sup> Convict, Thomas Davis, in a letter to his wife, Anne, sent from New South Wales, illustrates how such communication could encourage women to apply to reunite as an opportunity to better their lives. In his letter he writes:

you will find it a far comfortable situation than what you at present are in – you will find your mind comeposed and happy with me and your children ... – you will find everything Comefortable and agreeable heare is all sorts of fruit all you can mention and likewise graine – Every Mals Child is Entitled to a grant of Sixty Acres of Land when

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<sup>129</sup> TNA, PC1/74, Mary Holland and Charlotte Jenkins, Jan 1826.

<sup>130</sup> TNA, PC 1/74, Sarah Williamson, May 1826; TNA, PC1/67, Mrs Norman, Jan 1819.

<sup>131</sup> TNA, MH12 /8600, 1476, Walsingham Union’s copy of letter from convict William Wells to his wife, Elizabeth Wells, regarding news of opportunities in Australia prior to Transportation, 28 Dec. 1849.

they comes to the age of Sixteen ... rely on my word my d[ea]r that you will never want.<sup>132</sup>

His enthusiasm about conditions in Australia was intended to entice his wife to join him.

However, this imagined homemaking and a chance to perform the role of husband and provider through letters, was a form of communication commonly used in naval marriages.<sup>133</sup> Letters from sailors to their wives similarly expressed desires for their wives to live in 'comfort' and proposed different ventures they could partake in together from wine selling to farming.<sup>134</sup> Thus, in this wider context, these letters suggest that emigration to Australia was a way to recover their aspirations for a future together.

A positive account of Australia by convict husbands made the hardships faced by lone women in Britain seem more severe and encouraged women to use emigration as a bargaining tool with the parish. Mary Clark, for example, used the prospect of reunion with her husband in Van Diemen's Land as a strategy to help make a case to avoid the workhouse and negotiate relief. A serial candidate for relief, Mrs Clark wrote to the Poor Law Commissioners, giving an emotive account of the 'grief and sorrow' at her separation from her husband and a damning account of her family's ill treatment by the Bethnal Green guardians.<sup>135</sup> In contrast to the prospect of abundance in Australia, Mrs Clark wrote that her children 'fret and pine' in the workhouse and complain 'for want of food'.<sup>136</sup> Upon removing her children from the workhouse, Mrs Clark stated that their suffering increased as she wrote that 'the Best clothing [was taken] from the children and left them their Old Clothes to cover them' which were 'scanty', having no shoes

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<sup>132</sup> TNA, PC1/74, Anne Davis, July 1826. (Original spelling).

<sup>133</sup> Ellen Gill, *Naval families, war and duty in Britain, 1740-1820*, (Suffolk, 2016), 26.

<sup>134</sup> TNA, ADM 6/385, Mary Orrack, 1811; Royal Museums Greenwich [hereafter RMG], WIL/1/20-31, Commander William Wilkinson, 1809; RMG, GRT/23, Samuel Grant, Purser, 1788-1802.

<sup>135</sup> TNA, MH 12/6843, 13283, Petition of Mary Clarke to the PLC, 11 Nov. 1842.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

and only ‘Two Old Blankets’.<sup>137</sup> This emotive appeal of neglect can be seen as a strategy to create sympathy for Mrs Clark and encourage the Poor Law Commissioners to hold the local guardians to account. Peter Jones argues that the concept of nakedness was ‘a powerful element in rhetorical armoury available to paupers’ as it was closely related to ideas of decency that the parish had a humanitarian responsibility to uphold.<sup>138</sup> Thus, ‘their appeal confers not only an economic, but also a *moral* responsibility to restore them to a state of “decency”’.<sup>139</sup> To add to the power of her moral appeal, Mrs Clark claims that she would be ‘happy’ if she could look after her family independently – an expected prerequisite for relief – whilst acknowledging that she could not do so at the time of writing due to her ‘distressed state’.<sup>140</sup> The use of ‘distress’ was a common phrase in petitions, a useful shorthand that was expressive of inadequate circumstances, a deserving nature and a right to subsistence.<sup>141</sup> King has argued for the need to be critical when decoding language that appears to conform to gendered norms, as behind the ‘rhetorics of dependence, friendlessness, struggle, and honesty ... a different rendering would find that pride, resistance to more forceful parochial action, such as workhouse confinement, and an attempt to keep or restore a reputation were woven into a very subtle communication’.<sup>142</sup> These characteristics of pride and resilience are also evident in Mrs Clark’s petition, rejecting relief in the workhouse. Her proposal of joining her husband overseas also demonstrates her agency and willingness to look for alternatives. In general, some poor law unions did consider emigration as a possible strategy to resolve the long-term ‘heavy burden’ of wives of convicts and bluntly stated they are ‘desirous of getting rid of’ them.<sup>143</sup> The potential to use poor rates for assisted

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Peter Jones, “‘I cannot keep my place without being deascent’”: Pauper Letters, Parish Clothing and Pragmatism in the South of England, 1750-1830’, *Rural History*, 20.1 (2009), 36, 41.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>140</sup> TNA, MH 12/6843, 13283, Petition of Mary Clarke to the PLC, 11 Nov. 1842.

<sup>141</sup> Bailey, ‘Think Wot a Mother Must Feel’, 16.

<sup>142</sup> King, *Writing the lives*, 294.

<sup>143</sup> TNA, MH 12/9549, 2537, Worksop Union to the PLC, 3 March 1838.

emigration became more appealing as an expensive investment to resolve the long-term problem of assisting wives of convicts.<sup>144</sup>

### **Petitions for Assisted Reunion**

Assisted reunion, in the form of a free passage, which reunited wives with their convicted husbands in Australia, was organised between the Home Office and the colonial governors of Australia between 1789-1852. This was introduced to encourage the population of the colony and was a discretionary 'indulgence' towards convicts and their families for good behaviour; however, it was not a uniform scheme and subject to changes and pauses under different Home Secretaries.<sup>145</sup> In the early years of transportation, the emigration of wives of convicts was discretionary: six wives accompanied their husbands on the second fleet and others who subsequently followed their transported husbands were selected on an individual basis.<sup>146</sup> However, the number of poor wives sent to Australia placed pressure on the fledgling colony which led colonial officials to alter the reunion policy, allowing only convicts who could guarantee their ability to support their wives and children to be accepted.<sup>147</sup> These conditions became more restrictive under the leadership of Sir Robert Peel as Home Secretary from 1822-1830, as the ad hoc selection process under his predecessor, Lord Sidmouth, changed dramatically through the introduction of standardised printed forms. By 1826, the system of reunions was, in theory, meant to be driven by the convict who would apply in Australia and, if recommended, would have his application sent to Britain where his wife and family would be contacted. The printed form was clear in removing responsibility from the wife to the husband as it stated:

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<sup>144</sup> Howells also finds that parishes considered emigration of a deserted wife as investment to cut long-term costs of supporting the family, see 'On Account of their Disreputable Characters', 588.

<sup>145</sup> McIntyre, *Free passage*, 13.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

no Person shall be allowed to join Relatives, who may be Convicts there, unless a Recommendation and Certificate has been transmitted by the Governor of New South Wales to this Country, that the Convict so applying has conducted himself with propriety, and is able to support his Family on their Arrival in the Colony.<sup>148</sup>

Although it appears that authorities removed agency from the wives of convicts, by defining them by their husband's breadwinning status in a manner similar to the Poor Law Amendment Act, women's personal petitioning efforts could negotiate discretionary exceptions. McIntyre, in her research on Irish convict reunion, has argued that perceptions of 'systems' from the convict system to the poor law as a government system, has 'assumed a power of the state and its influence over lives of the convicts that is sometimes overemphasised in practice'.<sup>149</sup> Whilst rules existed, she argues, 'the rules were open to interpretation by convict applicants, the various authorities and the families "at home"'.<sup>150</sup> Research into the petitions for reunion held in London further McIntyre's findings on the possibility of discretionary exceptions. This is evident in a petition on behalf of Mary O'Connor, by a magistrate named Tollet, who applied for an exception and more information regarding the reunion policy, even though he was 'aware of the regulations adopted in England as to the wives of convicts from which Mr P[eel] never deviates'.<sup>151</sup> In this correspondence, Home Secretary, Robert Peel, revealed that an exception to the rule already existed in 1826 which related to a convict's wife providing 'very useful information against a gang with whom her husband was concerned, which rendered it unsafe for her to remain at home and compliance with her Petition to accompany her husband was granted'.<sup>152</sup> This, therefore, confirms that negotiation for exceptions was possible.

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<sup>148</sup> TNA, PC1/74, July 1826.

<sup>149</sup> McIntyre, *Free passage*, xx.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> TNA, PC1/74, Joanna Taylor, May 1826.

<sup>152</sup> TNA, PC1/74, Mary O'Connor, July 1826.

The policy changes and restrictions regarding assisted reunion are useful to understand how petitioners adapted their strategies and provide insights into what exceptions continued to be made. Caitlin Adams, in her research on clemency petitioning written from both Britain and Australia, has argued that pardons were requested for ‘mercy’s sake alone’, and did not have to be ‘earned by any notable merit or good works’.<sup>153</sup> Adams claims that clemency petitions were ‘distinctive’ from other genres of petitioning, including parochial and naval dockyard petitioning which were founded on ‘desert, rights or obligation’.<sup>154</sup> However, this distinction is overstated. Petitioning was a discretionary process across all institutions, as expectations of relief, a pension, or indeed clemency were not guaranteed rights, and all had to be bargained for and justified to achieve the satisfaction of the petitioner. In focusing on petitions for clemency as ‘a mechanism of empire by which the British state sought to develop the colony’, Adams’ research has overlooked the significance and agency of familial petitioning in Britain.<sup>155</sup> The wives of convicts in Britain who petitioned for reunion through emigration or campaigned for their husband’s clemency to return home did have to make convincing and practical cases for themselves and their husbands. Lone women, as will be seen, actively petitioned over sustained periods, including periods when they were not officially allowed to emigrate through the Home Office. Petitioners were also adept in evolving their strategies, utilising emotional language of appeal, bargaining with their skills, using their knowledge for exceptions, and networking. The common inclusion of parochial support in applications to the Home Office also attests to the similarity and merging of the petitioning genres across institutions. Kim Price, who has explored cases of female convicts petitioning for clemency, has similarly found that petitioners’ arguments evolved, with success arising from proving their deservingness through good behaviour and providing supporting statements from prison chaplains.<sup>156</sup> Petitions granted for clemency and emigration

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<sup>153</sup> Caitlin Adams, ‘Thinking the empire poor’, 440-441.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*, 442.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, 438.

<sup>156</sup> Kim Price, ‘Time to write’, 28.

were not random, and it required a sustained campaign and significant effort in acquiring knowledge and connections to support their request.

### **Skills Bargaining and Supporters**

Although reunion was meant to be dependent on a convict husband's ability to support his family, wives in Britain could also bargain for exceptions based on their own skills as able-bodied workers. Mrs Louisa Stedman, for example, was a notably successful petitioner whose proactive choice of work as a prison matron proved a strong negotiation strategy to reunite herself and son with her husband in Australia. Mrs Stedman impressed two prison inspectors with her 'experienced and trustworthy' behaviour who consequently petitioned on her behalf to gain her a free passage.<sup>157</sup> Mrs Stedman's petition clearly sets out the terms of her negotiation, stating that she was 'willing to undertake the duties of that Office during the Voyage, without salary, on condition that she and her son (a boy of eleven years of age) are provided with a free passage, and victualled'.<sup>158</sup> Although she offered to work without payment, a free passage for her son and her specific request for victualling, was a remarkable expense to achieve as it would take several years to raise such a sum rather than a few months' labour. Mrs Stedman was able to avoid the need to rely on the parish to support her remaining emigration costs for the three- to four-month voyage by securing these from the Home Office.

However, this was not a strategy open to all. Other petitioners also claimed they were earning a living by their needle or 'country work' and promised they could support themselves in Australia but were unfortunately unsuccessful.<sup>159</sup> Mrs Nisbett, for example, self-described as 'well qualified' to go as 'your humble petitioner can earn her maintenance', expressed great frustration at her rejection as she had provided a personal character reference which confirmed that she was

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<sup>157</sup> TNA, PC 1/92, Louisa Stedman, April 1844.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> TNA, PC1/74, Bridget Nooran, March 1826.

‘able to earn her Support in every quarter of the Globe Sewing Washing & Cooking – and many other qualifications’ and questioned the Home Secretary directly: ‘What must I do now to convince you that I am capable to earn my own livelihood’.<sup>160</sup> The outgoing letter to Mrs Nisbett no longer survives, but a clerk annotated the outcome as ‘answered twice before, nil’, indicating she was unsuccessful.<sup>161</sup> Although driven by affection as a ‘loyal spouse’, promises of financial independence were not always sufficient to ensure success. Mrs Stedman, by contrast, was successful as she had as tangible proof of her work in a desirable role and was supported by officials. Petitioners, therefore, required a multiple-strategy approach of emphasising their own efforts and demonstrating support from respectable and notable members of the community to add to their appeal.

The importance of support from officials is demonstrated in the case of Mrs Chambers. Mrs Chambers’ husband was transported for sheep stealing, but she was identified as a worthy cause by the Vicar of Goudhurst who knew her ‘before her marriage, as the Superintendent of our Sunday Girls’ School, in which office she conducted herself very much to the satisfaction of myself & Parishioners’.<sup>162</sup> Her useful occupation as a teacher and deservingness approved by the vicar was an important strength in Mrs Chambers’ negotiations. In addition to the impassioned plea of the vicar relating her ‘poignant distress’, her application included an accompanying letter from her lawyer which outlined in detail how to petition successfully and reinforced the importance of supporters. In the attached letter, the solicitor writes:

if the clergyman who forwards it [the petition] will address a letter to him at the same time urging him to give it attention it will have great weight with the Secretary of State for the

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<sup>160</sup> TNA, PC1/84, Ann Nisbett, April 1836.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>162</sup> TNA, HO17/53/238, Charles Chambers, 1828-1838.



Home Department. Your number of signatures are quite sufficient...the sooner now your petition goes in the better.<sup>163</sup>

This advice proved profitable to Mrs Chambers, whose petition included eighteen signatures of support and was accompanied by two supporting letters. She was granted free passage for herself and her son. However, what is notable about this case is that after receiving a free passage, Mrs Chambers petitioned again with ‘most grateful thanks’, but pushed to make a further request to mitigate her husband’s sentence so ‘that he may enjoy all the privileges that can be allowed to any individual situate as her Husband is’.<sup>164</sup> Mrs Chambers justified this request due to her husband’s recommendation in Australia, but, more importantly, because she had the support of the widow of the prosecutor, Mrs Hosmer. Mrs Hosmer’s petition expressed ‘pleasure’ in recommending the characters of Mrs Chambers and her husband. The widow vouched for the latter after learning of his experience through correspondence with his employer in Australia.<sup>165</sup> Mrs Hosmer also noted that her husband was also in support of the couple prior to his death, suggesting that within the community there was a limit to criminal taint and, importantly, that banishment did not end communication between Britain and Australia. Significantly, Mrs Hosmer’s petition was noted as being ‘annexed’ to Mrs Chamber’s petition, showing an active collaboration between the women, despite the former’s husband causing the misfortune of the latter.

### **Working Together**

Petitioners adapted to restrictions of the reunion policy’s eligibility requirements by working more closely together as a team to target influential supporters in Britain. An example of such teamwork is the petition by Thomas Hasker and his wife, who framed their request through

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

emotive and gendered language. Although the petition was written by Hasker from prison, it is noted in the postscript that his wife was ‘the bearer of this letter’ to Lady John Russell, illustrating that they worked together and, by planning a hand-delivered presentation, ensured their petition was not to be overlooked.<sup>166</sup> In their petition, Hasker writes that it is ‘not the punishment that awaits me, although severe and painful that gives me trouble’, rather it is the fact that his wife will be ‘unprotected and unprovided for’.<sup>167</sup> A lack of provision and protection was repeated more than once to emphasise how his banishment would leave her ‘bereft of protection’<sup>168</sup>. This use of distressed language in reference to his wife can be seen as a strategy to further legitimise their request. Whiting argues that, similarly in the seventeenth century, men harnessed the gendered language of ‘necessity’ and ‘made women’s suffering emblematic of their own plight’ to further their own cause.<sup>169</sup> Petitioning Lady Russell, the wife of Home Secretary, Lord John Russell, was a calculated strategy to try to gain influence and support as elite women also acted as important brokers in patronage.<sup>170</sup> In Hasker’s petition, he writes that he was ‘advised to solicit your consideration as your benevolence and humanity is well known to the distressed and afflicted’, suggesting that targeting Lady Russell was a strategy utilised by other petitioners.<sup>171</sup> However, not all elite women who were petitioned for support encouraged the letters of criminal applicants. Lady Louisa Conolly, for example, wrote that she was inundated with petitions,

the most distressing of all are the poor wretches condemned to death ... I quite dread the sight of a petition and have suffered so much from those I took in, that ... I have been obliged to make the servants enquire the nature of every petition before they bring them to me.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> TNA, PC1/84, Thomas Hasker, Jan. 1836.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Whiting, *Women and Petitioning*, 28.

<sup>170</sup> Chalus, *Elite Women*, 136.

<sup>171</sup> TNA, PC1/84, Thomas Hasker, Jan. 1836.

<sup>172</sup> Correspondence of Emily, Duchess of Leinster, ed. Fitzgerald, 262, cited in Chalus, *Elite Women*, 139.

Nonetheless, applying for intervention and patronage was an important way that petitioners could attempt to stand out among many similar applicants.

The language used in Hasker's petition regarding the benevolence and humanity of Lady Russell was common flattery, but it does demonstrate a petitioner's awareness of the cultural importance of sensibility to incite their reader to exhibit mercy by assisting them in their efforts to reunite. This form of persuasion was given added emphasis by the emotional and religious conclusion of the petition which stated, 'may the almighty God reward you for the trouble you have taken on behalf of the unfortunate Prisoners and their broken hearted wives and families'.<sup>173</sup> It can be inferred that Hasker's use of emotive and religious language was carefully selected to have the most personal impact. Indeed, the fact that the petition exists within the Home Office series suggests that the Haskers were successful in getting their petition acknowledged and read by the Home Secretary. Unfortunately, the outcome of the Haskers' appeal is unknown. However, evidence from another case does suggest that emotional appeals could entice patrons to help petitioners campaign for an exception.

The power and appeal of emotive writing is illustrated in the case of the Slaters in 1819. Mr Birch, who wrote from St James' Palace on more than one occasion regarding Catherine Slater, appealed for an exception. In his letter, he wrote of not knowing whether reports had arrived from Botany Bay 'to induce Lord Sidmouth to comply with her anxious desire to join her Husband', but argued that, regardless of the need for approval of self-sufficiency introduced two years earlier, an exception should be made.<sup>174</sup> Notably, the only justification given for such a request was that he was moved by the emotion expressed by the couple as he stated, 'perhaps in this particular case (in reference to Slaters Letter) and where so much proper feeling is shewn on

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> TNA, PC1/67, Mr Birch to Mr Capper on behalf of Catherine Slater, March 1819.

both sides, a deviation from the strict official rule may be permitted'.<sup>175</sup> Barbara Rosenwein and Christiani Riccardo have argued that, as well as social communities, there are 'emotional communities' that tie people together through a recognition of shared values as being either 'valuable or harmful'.<sup>176</sup> Thus, whether affection expressed was genuine or not, the 'performance' of such emotions could nevertheless have an impact on the audience as they were expected to react in keeping with these values, which fortunately, in the Slaters' case, was to spark proactive assistance.<sup>177</sup> Similarly, Ellen Gill, in her assessment of naval petitioners, notes a correlation between social and emotional communities that affected the way petitioners 'consciously constructed' their petitions to appeal to 'gentlemen's sympathy and interest'.<sup>178</sup>

Although the success of emotional appeals is difficult to quantify, the importance of petitioning and attracting the correct support in Britain was acknowledged by convicts overseas. In a letter sent home in 1826, Thomas Lynch made clear the importance of family petitioning in Britain, stating, 'What a hapyness it would be to be if I Could See you all once moor but I feer I niver shall as the goverment hear is so Muthch altered and Little Liberty given unless you have Friends in England To Petition for you to Lord Sydmouth [sic]'.<sup>179</sup> The importance of wives petitioning and their networking efforts in Britain is further emphasised by letters of instructions shared by convict husbands from Australia, who were very specific as to how their wives could achieve their reunion plans and to whom they should apply. This is demonstrated in Thomas Davis' letter to his 'dear wife' who he advises, 'you must get a pettion drawn up and get S[i]g[natures] Manly & Sir Robert Peel & sir Frances Lawley and any other Gentlemen as you get to signe it ... and if they approve of the Petition thy will send you and the children to me free of Expence

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>176</sup> Barbara Rosenwein and Riccardo Cristiani, *What is the History of Emotions?* (Cambridge, 2018), 39.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>178</sup> Gill, *Naval families*, 205.

<sup>179</sup> TNA, PC1/74, Thomas Lynch, Mar. 1826.

[sic]'.<sup>180</sup> Thus, despite changes in rules regarding reunion placing emphasis on male convicts, the importance of women petitioning at home should not be overlooked as it remained a collaborative process.

### **Knowledge and Agency**

The sense of agency and determination of the wives of convicts in Britain to seek out assistance from officials, including magistrates and Poor Law authorities, is made clear in the covering letters attached to their petitions. A vicar, for example, noted the proactive nature of the wives of convicts, recounting that he had been stopped on his journey by a woman who 'called me in yesterday as I passed her cottage to enquire about her husband'.<sup>181</sup> Elsewhere, a magistrate recalled the physical directness of another petitioner, stating that 'the enclosed papers were put into my hands by a very poor woman whose Husband was transported'.<sup>182</sup>

In networking for support, wives of convicts were adept at using wider knowledge of other petitioners to claim precedents and were attuned to news of ship departures, so they could make direct and clear appeals as to what they wanted to achieve. Knowledge arguably emboldened petitioners to make requests and this is particularly evident in the way that they referenced precedents. Mrs Hannah Yardley's knowledge of other reunion cases, informed by a letter in 1819 from her husband in Australia, encouraged her to enquire about accessing further indulgences other than a free passage, as she wrote to be directed to the 'necessary information' as she was 'told, that not only the means of conveyance, but also some other allowances are made in such cases'.<sup>183</sup> More than one petitioner also directly named other successful women who were granted a free passage. Mrs Bridget Jennings' petition, dated 1826, at a time when it was more difficult to secure a free passage under Robert Peel as Home Secretary, implored his

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<sup>180</sup> TNA, PC1/74, Ann Davis, Jul. 1826.

<sup>181</sup> TNA, HO17/46/27, John Barnes, 1830-1842.

<sup>182</sup> TNA, PC 1/74, Bridget Jennings, Jul. 1826.

<sup>183</sup> TNA, PC 1/67, Hannah Yardley, Dec 1819.

‘kind Benevolence’ for a free passage with the forceful facts that she was aware that ‘you have already obtain[ed] leave for Fanaugher wife to go to her husband’.<sup>184</sup> Arlette Farge, who explores the status of women in French judicial archives, identifies such local knowledge as empowering for women who are excluded from ‘the fixed structures of recognised trades’.<sup>185</sup> For the wives of convicts, the utilisation of local community knowledge could be a powerful strategy. This is apparent in the petition of Mary O’Connor, written on her behalf by local magistrate, Tollet, which provides an insight into how women could often have more awareness of local legal cases and could ‘force’ men of importance to do their bidding based on the information they provided.<sup>186</sup> Tollet wrote that her request for a free passage was ‘unusual’, but supports that she was self-assured of the legitimacy of her request by furnishing the petition with the claim that ‘she said it has been made and granted to persons in the same neighbourhood (the potteries) from the pressing entreaties of the poor woman I have been reluctantly forced to trouble you’.<sup>187</sup> The powerful influence of Mary O’Connor is notably reinforced by Tollet’s personal admission that it is ‘with great regret that I trouble you’, pointing out that it was the first occasion that he had made an intervention ‘after practicing as a magistrate for 30 years’.<sup>188</sup> Although Mrs O’Connor did not write her own petition, nonetheless her identification as an exceptional case in Tollet’s career does suggest that women could express agency through the relationships they built.

The knowledge networks of petitioners are also apparent in their subtle yet direct requests to the authorities for free passages which illustrate their initiative in finding out news of imminent ship departures and, in the petitioners’ eyes, removed the possible obstacle of communication delays, leaving permission as the only action the government needed to take. Petitioners wrote of their

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<sup>184</sup> TNA, PC 1/74, Bridget Jennings, July 1826.

<sup>185</sup> Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, 36.

<sup>186</sup> TNA, PC1/74, Mary O’Connor, 1826.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

awareness of when and where ships were departing and even identified what type of ship they wished to be sent in. Mrs Dolan, for example, requested to join her husband not on a convict ship, but on a free emigrant ship and wrote to be allowed to join the ‘ship that is to sail from Cork with the next passengers of Emigrants that is to Embark for Sydney – and by so doing will for ever pray – by giving directions how she is to act’.<sup>189</sup> The deferential end to the sentence of waiting in prayer softened the tone of the request, but the use of humble language does not hide her awareness of how the system worked and a willingness to push for specific requests.

### **Petitioning the Monarch**

Wives of convicts petitioned the monarch, as well as the Home Secretary, as a strategy to appeal for exceptions. The monarch did have a history of involvement in pardons, as all capital cases in London were reviewed ‘by the king and his ministers, in the so-called “hanging cabinet”’ until 1837.<sup>190</sup> In addition, different members of the Royal Family were known to intervene in institutional processes, such as the granting of Royal Naval widows’ pensions by expanding exceptions for eligible widows.<sup>191</sup> Thus, given this background of intervention and support for lone women, there were expectations that appeals to the monarch could be successful. Wives of convicts who gained knowledge of the monarch’s birthday or movement around the country attempted to capitalise on special occasions as an opportunity to increase the likelihood of gaining an exception. Several petitioners wrote regarding their awareness of royal proclamations as added justification of them meeting the requirements for clemency or a free passage. The case of Ann Smith illustrates such opportunism. Her first attempt at petitioning had not yet received a response in September 1819; when she petitioned again the following month to attempt to raise the profile of her petition, she stated how she was aware that as ‘his Royal Highness is now

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<sup>189</sup> TNA, PC1/84, Mary Dolan, Sep 1836.

<sup>190</sup> Shoemaker, ‘Sparing the Noose’, 238.

<sup>191</sup> TNA, ADM 6/391, 1818.

again arrived in Town I humbly & most earnestly Pray that your lordship will from Motive of humanity take into your most gracious consideration'.<sup>192</sup> Similarly in 1840, Rebecca Meekhams, another serial petitioner, hoped her petition would gain more weight by invoking reference to the birth of the Prince of Wales. In her petition, she used the occasion to forcefully state her deservingness and how her husband's character was good and thus met the requirements for an exception to be made. Mrs Meekhams further reinforced her request by pointing out that she had 'precur[ed] in the public papers - that Her Most gracious Majesty has been pleased to signify her will that a commutation of sentence should be granted to convicts of good character'.<sup>193</sup> These petitions illustrate that despite limits of literacy, demonstrated by many petitioners signing their name with a 'X' mark, they were nonetheless able to actively engage in sourcing national news that affected them.<sup>194</sup> It is not known whether these petitions were read by the monarch as they were redirected to the Home Office; however, they remain important in demonstrating the wives of convicts' attempts at agency and confirm that their appeals, although redirected, were not ignored.

### **Female Networks and Moral Policing**

As a strategy, some convict wives, although not related, chose to petition together, suggesting that similar circumstances could unite them within their communities. Although this was a practical tactic to draw upon each other for help, the fact that they were of similar social standing, rather than supported by an official patron, was less appealing to authorities.

Government-assisted reunions were an 'indulgence' for the deserving and thus judgment on their character was a constant if highly prejudicial factor, that often required the intervention of powerful religious or respected members of society to provide assurances in addition to their

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<sup>192</sup> TNA, PC1/67, Ann Smith, Sep 1819.

<sup>193</sup> TNA, HO17/19/12, William Meekhams, 1836-40.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.



own petition.<sup>195</sup> This is evident in the case of serial petitioners, Mrs Holland and Mrs Jenkins, who both resided in the same workhouse and merged their families together when petitioning. Mrs Jenkins was noted on 6 January 1826 as having ‘still decline[d]’ the offer to join her husband; however, Mrs Holland, who was desirous of going, offered herself as ‘willing to take charge of Jenkins’ children on the passage’.<sup>196</sup> The offer to care for the children of another woman can be perceived as a bargaining tool to lessen the taboo of Mrs Holland having borne female twins to another man after her husband’s transportation and whom she wished to take with her alongside her legitimate children. For Mrs Jenkins, her repeated refusal suggests that she was expressing agency over her own life decisions and, although it is not possible to know her views on being parted from her children, a life without dependants could make it easier to survive independently. Negotiations over childcare and a reliance on other women in the community was not unusual, as another petitioner, Bridget Bryan, also alluded to relying on friends to help take care of her children. Her petition recounted her desire to take with her two of her children aged six and seven years, but for her two younger children ‘her friends would take care of [them] for some time’ in the hope they would eventually ‘be able to make an establishment for them all’.<sup>197</sup> However, Mrs Bryan’s community-aided strategy was rejected. Instead, she was redirected to a printed form that informed her that she could not apply to join her husband until he could prove able to support his family on arrival, demonstrating an unfortunate limit to her agency. In the case of Mrs Holland, her community childcare strategies were also refused. Notably, the Home Office clerk’s rare annotation directly on this petition leaves a small indication of the moral policing factored into making their decisions as an ‘X’ in pencil was annotated next to the admission that she had two further children ‘by another man’.<sup>198</sup> This intervention in the text implies that this was a decisive factor in judging her undeserving of a free passage, regardless of

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<sup>195</sup> McIntyre, *Free passage*, 13.

<sup>196</sup> TNA, PC1/74, Mary Holland and Charlotte Jenkins, Jan 1826.

<sup>197</sup> TNA, PC1/74, Bridget Bryan, May 1826.

<sup>198</sup> TNA, PC1/74, Mary Holland and Charlotte Jenkins, Jan 1826.

the assurance that her daughters would become an ‘acquisition to the colony’ rather than a ‘burden for many years’ to the parish.<sup>199</sup>

Mrs Holland and Mrs Jenkins, however, did not end their petitioning efforts but rather changed their strategy. In their next petition only a month later, it is striking to see a shift in language which adopts a more passive tone and includes the support of several figures of the local authority in their petition. Mrs Holland and Mrs Jenkins wrote that their husbands had been recommended six years previously as eligible for their wives to join them but that ‘your Petitioners at that time wrought upon by ignorant and designing people declined going’.<sup>200</sup> However, after meeting their husbands’ employer in England, they both claimed to change their minds and were now ‘satisfied that their Husbands are still desirous of receiving them’ and wished to join them.<sup>201</sup> From the list of the children included in the subsequent petition, it appears that Mrs Holland lost one of her illegitimate twin daughters, but it is significant that this petition made no direct mention of the distinctions of her children’s birth right. Instead, the stronger focus was on their eligibility and support, as their petition was forwarded with a letter signed by six Justices of the Peace. Added to the bottom of the women’s petition were the statement and signatures of their husbands’ employer from Australia, who wrote, ‘I have always found them industrious men, and diligent, faithful servants; and that they have very ample means of maintaining their families if sent out to them’.<sup>202</sup> Two churchwardens and two overseers signed the statement, adding that ‘their families are a heavy and increasing burden to this Parish and that we are perfectly ready to fit them out for the voyage with clothing’.<sup>203</sup> The contrast between their petitions, which were dated only a month apart, are striking: the bargaining strategies of the women now appear absent as their narrative is overtaken by their more

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

powerful patrons who offered more tangible proof of their eligibility and means to survive the voyage. This petition insightfully suggests that female expressions of agency had to be carefully made and claims that they were vulnerable and helpless might in some circumstances better achieve their aims.

In analysing parish support directed to the Home Office, rather than internal correspondence, it is possible to detect a significant shift in language which was noticeably more positive towards the wives of convicts. Transforming their internal criticism of the women being a burden to the parish, they instead focused on their assets to the empire. Notably, some women could even overcome significant taboos that would have previously meant they would be considered undeserving. This is illustrated by Anne Brooks who, after her husband's transportation, had remarried his brother and had two children by him, although he soon after died, leaving her a widow and dependent on the parish out-relief of a shilling a week.<sup>204</sup> A letter from her first husband asking her to join him was actively supported by the parish who promoted Anne as young, 'active and healthy – and of good character notwithstanding her having married the brother'.<sup>205</sup> Melanie Ward, in her assessment of a Irish convict reunion, similarly finds that parish ministers were willing to report that a wife of a convict had 'good character' and correct conduct even though on 'one occasion, has acted improperly, she has had a child since her husband left'.<sup>206</sup> Thus, in the eyes of poor law officials, whilst the illegitimacy of children was not forgotten, it may not have been a significant barrier for support where the wife of a convict could prove their deservingness in other ways.

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<sup>204</sup> TNA, PC1/84, Anne Brooks, Feb. 1836.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>206</sup> Ward, 'A Tale of Transportation', 51.

## Targeting the Parish

Government-assisted reunions were paused temporarily in 1842, which meant that assisted emigration under the new poor law became of greater importance to the wives of convicts. Notably, shifts in this strategy could have their origins in knowledge from convicts in Australia, who, instead of instructing their wives to write to the Home Secretary, wrote to them to share their letters with Poor Law authorities. James Pearman in 1844, for example, provided advice to his wife regarding their family, writing,

if they can make interest with the parish officers to send them out in an Emigrant ship that they may inform the officers that I will either employ the whole of them or I will make provision for them, so that if they will send them out they will be no more troublesome to any parish or them.<sup>207</sup>

Notably, in his letter, he advises that he has not written to the parish, but relies on his wife to do so, writing ‘I think you had all of you better to go the officers and see them and state that you are all willing to come out to me if they will assist you to a passage’, although he does state ‘you can show this letter to the parish officers if you think proper - ... may God almighty prosper you all in your last application to the parish for assistance to emigrate to this colony’.<sup>208</sup>

Request for reunion through means of the parish was common, as paupers who deserted their wives by emigrating to America used their distance as a strategy to apply for parish assistance for their wives to be sent out to them. This parish did not like being extorted by claims that “you have to maintain [her] for years – and the children after grown up may be a burden on the parish, God only knows” if they refused.<sup>209</sup> Poor law regulations ‘prohibited the emigration of wives and children seeking reunion with husbands on the grounds that such desertions should

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<sup>207</sup> TNA, PC1/92, James Pearman Feb. 1844.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> George Fewins to the Overseers of Cheriton Bishop, Devon, Jan 1851 in C. Erickson (ed.), *Emigration from Europe 1815-1914: Selected Documents* (London, 1976), 129, cited in Gary Howells, ‘For I was tired of England Sir’, 188.

not be encouraged'.<sup>210</sup> It is thus significant that, despite similar strategies, some wives of convicts were assisted in their emigration.

The wives of convicts used similar language to both the Poor Law authorities and the Home Office to promote themselves as having the potential to be industrious and 'useful members of society in a foreign land'.<sup>211</sup> King argues that 'the rhetoric of powerlessness and dependence upon the male parish were appropriated and juxtaposed with the potential of her own industry, which might in other circumstances have generated an independent existence' was a powerful strategy which could 'carry moral authority ... and even a touch of heroism'.<sup>212</sup> This shared language that petitioners were attempting to draw upon did, in some cases, effectively encourage the Poor Law authorities to support their cause. This is illustrated by the fact that poor law officials would even provide assistance to wives of convicts who were 'no longer a pauper' and would emphasise the self-sufficiency of others, such as Anne Stevens, whose family was noted as being all 'carpenters by trade, and perfectly able to maintain the said petitioner in the colony ... the children of the said petitioners are all, except one, capable of their own maintenance'.<sup>213</sup> The support of those who were not destitute is in keeping with Howells' findings that assisted emigration was 'part of an older tradition of paternalistic help for the "deserving poor"'.<sup>214</sup> Emotional appeals and personal relationships remained important in encouraging the Poor Law authorities to act on behalf of the wives of convicts. This is further illustrated in the case of Maria Stammers, where no argument of her being a burden or asset to the colony was given, but instead the churchwardens focused on her wellbeing, writing, "I may volunteer to say it would be

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<sup>210</sup> Gary Howells, 'Emigration and the New Poor Law: The Norfolk Emigration Fever of 1836, *Rural History*, 11.2 (2000), 149.

<sup>211</sup> TNA, PC1/74, Sarah Williamson, May. 1826.

<sup>212</sup> King, *Writing the lives*, 297-8.

<sup>213</sup> TNA, HO17/64/135, Anne Stevens, 1837.

<sup>214</sup> Howells, 'On account', 587.

doing that which apparently would afford a great happiness to her - who seem much to lament the loss of her husband'.<sup>215</sup>

Overall, although the assisted reunions altered over time, exceptions were more frequent than the scholarship has suggested. Despite a suspension of the government-assisted reunions in 1842, a prison matron was able to exchange her services to secure a free passage in 1844.<sup>216</sup> Petitioners were not always successful initially and often made serial attempts over several years which meant they could find success when government-assisted reunions reopened in 1847. Notably, however, when utilising both the Home Office and poor law archival collection, it is possible to detect that the government did keep some aspects of the reunion policy alive through outsourcing, although this was not popularly advertised. This is demonstrated in the internal correspondence of the Poor Law Commissioners who wrote to the Wongford Union to inform them 'that Her Majesty's Govt. do not object in certain cases to send out the wives and families of transported convicts to join their Husbands, and that communications on the subject may be made to Mrs Chisholm'.<sup>217</sup> Mrs Chisholm was a private philanthropist who helped to reunite wives of convicts through assisted emigration and her work was promoted by Charles Dickens' *Household Words*.<sup>218</sup> Many avenues, therefore, were open to petitioners who were flexible and responsive to change and selective in their choice of both language and supporters.

### **Petitioning for Clemency**

This chapter has explored snapshots of different petitioners and their strategies. However, in turning to one case study of a successful petitioner, Lydia Travwicks, on behalf of her

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<sup>215</sup> TNA, PC1/74, S. W. Eldred on behalf of Maria Stammers, July 1826.

<sup>216</sup> TNA, PC 1/92, Louisa Stedman, April 1844.

<sup>217</sup> TNA, MH 12/12065, 15567, PLC to P. W. Clarke, clerk to the Guardians of the Wongford Union, Beccles, 7 Aug. 1847.

<sup>218</sup> Julie M Barst, 'Pushing the Envelope: Caroline Chisholm, Colonial Australia, and the transformative power of postal networks, *Prose Studies*, 33.3 (2016), 211.

transported husband, John, it is possible to analyse in detail how petitioners altered their strategies over a twenty-year period. John, who had previously served in the navy, was convicted for ‘stealing a case containing stationary’.<sup>219</sup> He claimed innocence but was found guilty and sentenced to transportation for life. John’s personal petition for mercy at the time of his sentencing in 1829 was rejected despite reference to his prior patriotic service in the navy, alongside his personal appeals for the distressed state of his ‘wife and three Infant Offspring who are in a wretched and deplorable situation’, and twenty-five signatures in support of his appeal.<sup>220</sup> His wife, Lydia, did not give up hope of their reunion and serially petitioned the Home Office to greater success. Although there was no specific guide to petitioning provided by the Home Office, the existence of a printed form which included a petition check list attached to internal correspondence relating to another petitioner, suggests that there were expected criteria that the Home Office looked for. These were ‘family and friends’ names and residences’; what ‘his prospects [were] if liberated’; if he had petitioned before and, if so, to whom and whether reference has been made to the ‘minister of the parish or district’.<sup>221</sup>

Lydia’s first petition, and the second in favour of John in 1847, attempted to redress the unspoken expectations regarding his prospects if liberated and provided insights into his familial relations. In her petition, she reiterated that John was ‘totally innocent of the charge’ and was able to produce a supporting letter by his previous employer who stated, ‘I never had any reason to suspect him ... I shall not object to again employ him if eligible’, which was supported by a further six signatures.<sup>222</sup> This evidence was an important appeal which met the criterion of providing practical evidence from his employer to guarantee that he would be able to find employment and not be a burden on his theoretical return. Also included in her petition was an

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<sup>219</sup> TNA, HO17/113/17, John Travvicks, 1829-1849.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> TNA, HO 18/266/7, Henry Foot, 1849.

<sup>222</sup> TNA, HO17/113/17, John Travvicks, 1829-1849.

emotive letter written by John recounting his experience in Australia where he had had a ‘hard struggle to obtain a [l]iving’.<sup>223</sup> However, the majority of John’s letter focuses on his concerns for Lydia’s troubles in Britain of which he acknowledges ‘you have so many of your own’ and praises her parental care for acting as ‘both father and mother to our dear Children’.<sup>224</sup> This letter, shared with the Home Office, signalled Lydia’s deservingness as a mother. Although originally unsuccessful when petitioning for himself, John’s letter demonstrates a shift in approach as utilising the gendered language of distress minimised his own suffering and instead highlighted the more emotionally appealing deservingness of his wife for fulfilling both gendered roles in his absence. His letter, written in a desperate tone, also transmits crucial policy information to Lydia as it informs her that he will likely receive a conditional pardon, but that ‘it will be of little use to me’ as he would not be allowed to return to Britain ‘althoug my hart i[s] there [sic]’.<sup>225</sup> Although this was tragic news, it nevertheless gave Lydia an opportunity to make a specific appeal for a full free pardon to the Home Office. That John was granted a pardon at all having previously been given a life sentence suggested there was hope for further negotiation and this is perhaps indicative of why there was a nineteen-year delay between the first and second petition. Notably, John writes to his wife to assure her of his faithfulness as he states he is ‘happy to heare that those foolish suspicions were removed from your mind’ and signs off his letter ‘your ever Affectionate Husband till Death [sic]’.<sup>226</sup> This promise of fidelity, despite the impossibility of reunion, was significant as many convicts sentenced for life remarried in Australia and accusations of bigamy could be a significant barrier to reunion.<sup>227</sup> It is suggestive that the petition’s practical assurances and emotional appeal did have an impact on the reader as the clerk annotated an ‘enquiry as to his character and conduct in N. S. Wales’ was to be carried out, illustrating that the petition was not immediately dismissed.

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> McIntyre, ‘The Desire for a Wife’, 213.



A year later, Lydia presented a third petition to the Home Secretary. Building on the last appeal, it applied directly for a free pardon on the grounds that his conduct in the colony has been good; the prosecutor was dead; the prisoner would be provided with employment if allowed to return home, and that Travwicks maintained his innocence.<sup>228</sup> This petition, in the style of a traditional official document, was signed by eight people in support of Lydia who they declared to be ‘an industrious, well conducted woman & believing the truth of her statements’.<sup>229</sup> Local clerks and fishmongers signed the petition, suggesting Lydia did have a community network to draw upon and highlighted her meeting another check list criterion of providing references of support. Along with this more traditional formulaic petition that was likely produced by a scribe, Lydia sent her own more emotive and personal petition in the style of a letter written in her own hand. Emphasising her grief and virtuous maternal skills, she writes that one of her children had died and, although at the time of her husband’s conviction she ‘did not know how to get them a bit of bread’, none of her children had fallen into crime or were to be considered a burden, as she writes that they have ‘a comfortable living and are eating the Bread of honesty’.<sup>230</sup> Although Lydia did try to provide more information of her husband’s innocence on the night of his arrest, rather than being critical of this perceived injustice, the majority of her petition focused on personal and emotive appeals of their grief as she writes:

Take to your consideration the very many years that he has been gone and the grief we have Suffered no Tongue can tell if it should please you to soften our intense grief by letting him come Home once more to His disconsolate family it will make up for all the Sorrows We have had. I cannot give you more satisfaction that if I know he was guilty I would not ask so great a favour.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> TNA, HO17/113/17, John Travwicks, 1829-1849.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> TNA, HO17/113/17, John Travwicks, 1829-1849.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

Whiting, who explores the relationship between the genre of petitions and the gender of authors, argues that women's choice of language should not be read as 'evidence of spontaneity and passionate sentiments' but rather 'can be better regarded as evidence of some women's adroit deployment of the elements of a shared (but not equally available) cultural practice to achieve carefully planned ends'.<sup>232</sup> Lydia's carefully planned end was to attract as much support for her cause as possible and align her language with officials in ways which would have an impact. Similarly, in his assessment of clemency petitions, Price found that officials in support of convicts utilised comparable language regarding a female convict also being "very anxious to earn her bread by honest industry".<sup>233</sup> Rogers, in her assessment of prisoners and philanthropic exchange, also identified the importance to officials that criminals demonstrate their industry and 'never tolerated the "excuse" that want justified crime'.<sup>234</sup> Thus, Lydia focusing on her own legitimate efforts to raise a family can be understood as more powerful than her husband's initial appeals.

Although the petition for John's free pardon was given nil as an outcome in 1848, a free passage for Lydia was offered as an alternative. The Home Office's offer of a free passage suggests that the emotive appeal of her struggle and grief was an effective strategy.<sup>235</sup> However, Lydia responded by refusing this offer and instead requested her free passage could be exchanged for her husband's freedom to return home. In her letter to the Home Secretary, she wrote that '[I] am truly thankful to you fore your Kindness' but 'it will be Be Enough for me if you will Be Pleased to Let him come home'.<sup>236</sup> Although she wrote that she was 'sorry to be so troublesome',

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<sup>232</sup> Whiting, *Women and Petitioning*, 22.

<sup>233</sup> Price, 'Time to Write', 28.

<sup>234</sup> Helen Rogers, 'Kindness and Reciprocity: Liberated Prisoners and Christian Charity in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *Journal of Social History*, 47.3 (2014), 725.

<sup>235</sup> King, *Writing the lives*, 203.

<sup>236</sup> TNA, HO17/113/17, John Travwicks, 1829-1849.

Lydia was financially prepared to bargain as she referred to her having ‘twenty pounds in the savings Bank’ and asked how much a passage would be for her husband.<sup>237</sup> This was a highly presumptuous request as the conditions of his pardon had not altered.

In her fourth petition in June 1848, Lydia reiterated her request for an exception to be made to allow her husband to return to Britain. This petition demonstrates her effective networking tactics to gain high-profile supporters for her cause and meet the further requirement on the petitioning check list that referenced the need for parish or district minister support. In Lydia’s petition, she provides a more detailed emotional justification as to why she declined her free passage, stating that she would be ‘Heartly glad to embrace’ the offer ‘if My Children where Young that I could lead them’, but as her husband had been transported for twenty years, they were now adults and it would cause ‘a very great Grief to My Children to go anywhere I should never expect to see them anymore’.<sup>238</sup> Motherhood and deservingness, as has been discussed, was an important strategy of appeal for women and Lydia further reinforces her commitment to her children by relaying yet more suffering, as she states she has ‘a Daughter and two children entirely depending on me Her Husband was killed He fell off the Adelaide Wharf’.<sup>239</sup> The site of her son-in-law’s death suggests that Lydia and her family remained within the maritime community of her husband’s prior occupation. Significantly, her declaration of her daughter’s reliance demonstrated that, within naval families, women often relied on each other for support and, as the likelihood of male absence was higher in maritime communities, it can be inferred that this gave them an advantage as lone women who were used to independence and having stronger matriarchal networks of support. Lydia was a strong matriarchal figure and her petition suggests that she was also a forceful character within the community who could draw admiration. This is supported by a minister, Reverend J. Briney, who wrote on the same piece of

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

paper as Lydia that he had been requested ‘by Mrs Travwicks to add a line to her letter’, thus highlighting her agency and control over the petitioning process.<sup>240</sup> Highly supportive of Lydia, he described her as a ‘upright, sober and industrious & praise-worthy person’.<sup>241</sup> Significantly, Reverend Briney, as well as having religious authority, was well-connected, noting that he was ‘personally known to Mr Hawes, of the Colonial Office’.<sup>242</sup> These connections helped to further advance Lydia’s case for an exception to be made. His argument was twofold: emotional and practical. Firstly, he argued that ‘at the age of the wife (55) with her children & grand children about her, her going to N. S. Wales (especially after a separation from her husband of 20 years) is what none interested for her cared advise’.<sup>243</sup> This illustrates a shared concern for Lydia’s children, but also expresses that a more personal relationship had been established, demonstrated by Reverend Briney’s concerns for Lydia’s future where she would not have a support network other than her long-estranged husband. Secondly, he asked if, given the circumstances and length of time, that John might ‘now receive a full pardon without detriment to the law’ and enquired whether the free passage offered to Lydia could ‘by any possibility, be given to the husband’.<sup>244</sup> Intervening in government policy, which after 1847 was actively pursuing assisted female emigration to Australia, he argued that Lydia would not be a desirable candidate for emigration, stating that ‘[t]he age of both husband and wife is now such as to take them out of the class whose emigration it is important to encourage’.<sup>245</sup> The Reverend Briney, therefore, reversed the traditional argument of convict wives being a burden to the parish and an asset to the Empire.

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<sup>240</sup> TNA, HO17/113/17, John Travwicks, 1829-1849.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid. (Emphasis in the original document).

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid; McIntyre, ‘Free passage’, 54.

Within the same month as Lydia and the Reverend Briney's petition, a letter sent from the Governor of New South Wales relating to John's conduct as requested a year earlier, was received by the Home Office which confirmed that John had been granted a conditional pardon. Although his police report recorded that he had received additional punishment in Australia of fifty lashes on two occasions, once in 1832 for absenting himself and the second in 1838 for insolence, these were the only refractions committed during the duration of his time in Australia.<sup>246</sup> His police report was still considered 'by no means unfavourable' and John was described as 'a quiet inoffensive man' who 'had conducted himself with propriety'.<sup>247</sup> Attached to this report was a petition by John's previous employer in Australia who had returned to England and further emphasised the 'deserving' nature of his character, arguing that he would not be a threat to society if he returned, having 'served me faithfully and with good conduct to others'.<sup>248</sup> However, most notably, this letter highlights Lydia's agency stating his knowledge that she has sent money out to John for his passage home and that he wished to 'join in Lydia Travwicks humble petition that a free pardon may be granted to him'.<sup>249</sup> The fact that he identified the petition as Lydia's and not John's highlights how significant she was as a driving force to network, appeal and attract support. In Lydia's final petition dated 15 September 1849, she addressed the final requirement of summarising 'to whom' the petitioner had appealed. In her petition to the Secretary of State, she recounts a record of her correspondence, and annexes a further recommendation by an Edward Kirby, reiterating how 'all the officers in the Colony' are supportive of a recommendation and that in Britain 'Mr Gray a master lighterman will take him again into his employ'.<sup>250</sup> In response to this final petition, a free pardon was granted on 26 September 1849.

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<sup>246</sup> TNA, HO17/113/17, John Travwicks, 1829-1849.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

Lydia's petitioning strategies effectively met all the requirements but, combined with her emotionally charged petitioning strategies, meant that she was able to achieve more than many petitioners by exchanging a free passage for herself to gain a full pardon, enabling her husband's freedom to return to Britain. This was a significant feat as convicts transported to Australia were legally prohibited to return after 1823.<sup>251</sup> Tickets of leave, pardons on the condition that they never returned to Britain, were granted to most convicts. The significance of her success is made evident through contrast with the failure of others. The daughter of George Wilson, convicted in 1836 but granted a pardon in 1861 after a series of petitions, requested that her father might also be given a free passage home but was firmly rejected. Her petition was annotated, 'No – I should think not – he is not pardoned on the ground of innocence'.<sup>252</sup> Petitioning requests and emotional appeals therefore had to be carefully expressed and not all could guarantee an exception.

### **Conclusion**

It was a significant advantage for wives of convicts to appeal to more than one institution which allowed them to forge links between different authorities and manipulate wider power structures, depending on to whom they targeted their petitions. Comparing the treatment and outcomes of petitions to the Poor Law authorities and the Home Office shows similar application of discretion despite attempts to make the administrative practices in both these institutions more uniform. The discretionary treatment of wives of convicts as special cases for relief granted outside of the workhouse further points to the failure of the New Poor Law Amendment Act to limit out-relief to the old and ill as the only exceptions for lone women.

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<sup>251</sup> Inglis, *The Australian Colonists*, 9.

<sup>252</sup> TNA, HO17/130/134, George Wilson, 1861.

A convict's wife's success depended on her unrepachable character, evidence of industriousness or potential for it, and the support of officials, all essential for appealing to their audience of both the Home Office and Poor Law authorities. In their petitions, wives of convicts had to strike a delicate balance between dependent behaviour of gaining support and crafting their narratives as truly deserving, whilst also exerting agency in a competitive relief environment. Stigma of a criminal taint has not been identified as a significant obstacle to the wives of convicts for relief although, through comparison with the deserted wives of mariners, it has shown their agency could be more significantly affected by institutional moral policing.

At face value, petitions of distress following a husband's transportation appear to make the women passive victims. However, this critical reading of their strategies has demonstrated that such language gave them the legitimacy to speak and appeal to a shared emotional community to help them achieve an exception. Endurance and adaptability were vital as, for many women, petitioning was a strategy that they would have to utilise throughout their life with no guarantee their first petition would succeed, but nevertheless there were no definite limits on their future success.

## Chapter 2: Naval Widows

The chapter focuses on naval widows who, as lone women, held a different social position to the wives of convicts. A husband's service was, in theory, meant to offer them long-term protection and security in the form of a widow's pension, although this did not always prevent them from becoming either a pauper or a convict. A pension was not automatically granted as a right had to be applied for within a year of their husband's death. It came with many caveats to ensure success and, even once granted, widows had to reaffirm their eligibility regularly.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, naval widows had more bargaining power, through appeals to familial maritime patriotism, to access relief following the loss of a male breadwinner than their civilian counterparts. The accepted culture of petitioning opened an important space for women to interact with the Admiralty and its agents to exercise agency for themselves and their family. Within the practice surrounding widows' petitions, women had scope to negotiate for a variety of support including: an increase in their pensions, additional aid from different charitable branches of the Admiralty, relief and education support for their children, and requests for work and patronage for not only themselves but also their sons.

Petitions for widows' pensions are used to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and survival strategies of this maritime group of lone women. Provision for the wives and dependants of mariners was generous in comparison to those of the military and considerably more than poor relief.<sup>2</sup> For all naval widows the receipt of a widow's pension could be life defining. Although the money could not take away the emotional pain of loss, it did have a radical effect on the lives of those left behind. At the highest level of compensation received,

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<sup>1</sup> Erika Behrisch 'Widows' Men: The Admiralty Board, Precedent, and Pensions for the Widows of the Lost Franklin Expedition', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 47.1 (2019), 32.

<sup>2</sup> Holihead, 'Cut adrift or towed astern', 164-165.



Patricia Lin finds that widows might maintain their status among the middle classes and, even at a lower level, the recipient ‘could enjoy security as members of the upper echelons of the working class’.<sup>3</sup> In 1812 the Admiralty supported 1887 widows and spent £12,399.3.4 which by 1829 had significantly increased to support 3396 widows and spending £37,007.13.4.<sup>4</sup> However, this funding was not sufficient to accommodate all widows’ requests and the rules dictating eligibility for a pension were under constant review. This altered the fortunes of individual dependents as the Admiralty added and excluded different mariner occupations throughout the period.<sup>5</sup> Admiralty records include entries from widows of a variety of different social classes, from the wives of dockyard workers to wives of high-ranking officers and these records offer insights into how different women presented their circumstances and the various responses they achieved. How this group of lone women survived on their own during widowhood is not fully understood, especially the widows of non-elite officers.

Petitions will be used to investigate the significance of such divisions, such as class, through analysing similarities and differences in appeals and whether treatment varied by the Admiralty. All widows’ petitions, including those found to be ineligible or unsuccessful, are useful sources to provide insights into the expectations maritime lone women had of the Admiralty and what forms of relief and support they turned to when they were without a breadwinner. This chapter draws on the petitions directed to the Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty, the Court of Assistants of the Widows’ Charity, and to members of the royal family to assess variations in negotiation and treatment of maritime widows and how this affected their agency. Additionally, a collection of letters and petitions written by women addressed to admirals regarding pensions are

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<sup>3</sup> Lin, ‘Caring for the Nation’s Families’, 107.

<sup>4</sup> TNA, ADM 6/386, 1812; TNA, ADM 6/402, 1829.

<sup>5</sup> Between 1830 and 1864 widows of warrant officers lost their entitlement to a widows’ pension. This change applied to widows of warrant officers appointed in 1830 or afterwards, and not to the widows of men killed in service TNA, ‘Royal Navy Officers’ pension’ research guide. <<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/royal-navy-officers-pensions/>> (Accessed 10/4/2023).

also used to further contextualise knowledge exchange and the role of patronage of naval officials outside the central administration. Taken together, this source material will be used to understand what shaped the Admiralty's decision-making and use of discretion. It will also uncover what expectations lone women had of the Admiralty and what linguistic strategies they used to hold them to account. Petitions from naval widows of all ranks will be compared with particular attention paid to the presentation of their own identities and strategies of appeal regarding the shared experience of loss, patriotism, and motherhood. This chapter concludes that while class was a significant factor in success, it was possible for petitioners to appeal for exceptions which relied on the knowledge and writing skills of the petitioner to relay their husband's death and sacrifices for the navy in an emotive and appealing way.

### **Widows' Pension Rules and the Role of Discretion**

A pension system established since 1732 under the 'Charity for payment of pensions to widows of sea officers' had, by the nineteenth century, extensive rules on eligibility.<sup>6</sup> Attempts were made across the period 1789-1850 to make the pension application system more uniform rather than discretionary. Nevertheless, the possibility for negotiation remained a constant feature. This is evident in the vague statement that recipients must 'appear to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to be proper and deserving Objects', enabling the Admiralty to use its discretion to make positive exceptions, but equally rescind its charity if it judged recipients of its welfare did not meet expected moral standards.<sup>7</sup> This will be more fully explored in chapter four.

The ultimate autonomy that the Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty, and Admiralty clerks that reported to them, retained is demonstrated by their longstanding unwillingness to disclose

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<sup>6</sup> TNA, 'Royal Navy Officers' pensions' research guide, <<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/royal-navy-officers-pensions/>>, (Accessed 8/12/2020).

<sup>7</sup> *The Queen's Regulations for the Government of Her Majesty's Naval Service; Admiralty Instructions for the Government of Her Majesty's Naval Service* (London, 1844), 110.

explicit details of their decision-making processes. The lack of transparency is made evident in query by Commissioner Roberts' request in 1839 to provide 'information as to rules by which the Board are guided in deciding on applications for pensions from Widows of officers'.<sup>8</sup> A response was recorded that a 'decision depends on the circumstances of the case'.<sup>9</sup> However, even in individual cases, the Admiralty was quick to dismiss enquires if the appeal was not made directly by the widow. This is illustrated in the case of Mrs Kent in 1819. A letter was sent on her behalf by an agent to the Admiralty which listed a range of hypothetical questions hoping to discover all the potential outcomes for Mrs Kent's pension request. The questions included: what would happen if she was to remarry; whether she could receive payments quarterly; if her pension could be increased on grounds of insufficiency; and questioning whether any arrears would be paid to her executor in the event of her death.<sup>10</sup> The clerk replied with finality that 'Mrs Kent can herself apply for such information as she may require'.<sup>11</sup> The clerk's refusal may have been an attempt to protect Mrs Kent from her agent as unfortunately some women were financially exploited and defrauded by their executors.<sup>12</sup> It is significant that at the same time when women were viewed increasingly as helpless dependents reliant on male support, that the Lord Commissioners pushed widows to act as lone individuals, suggesting the Admiralty viewed itself as having the authority of a substitute breadwinner. A preference for direct communication with the widow made the relationship of appeal more personal, but also meant widows had to have good writing skills or the ability to access a scribe. This system also put significant pressure on women to appear to act independently and appeal in the correct way without explicit instructions of how best to do so. However, evidence of petitioners' linguistic strategies,

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<sup>8</sup> TNA, ADM 12/360, Digest 72-86, 'Pensions to the Widows & Parents of Officers', 'Coms. Roberts', 1839.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> TNA, ADM 1/3352, Agnes Dickson Kent, 1819.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Examples of executor fraud are recorded in the index such as, Lady Mends, who reported in her petition that her financial agent had taken £20,000 of her husband's fortune and left her only £50. TNA, ADM1/5237, 1824.

references to wider knowledge, and use of networks will demonstrate that women negotiated this system with a personal outlook and position in society that was far from lone.

### **Shared Expectations of a Pension**

The wives and dependants of sailors often spent long periods alone, but did so with the expectations of support, which as a wife included allotted pay and prize money, if her husband allowed, and as a widow a pension and charitable support for their children. The expectation of the Admiralty's help and protection should anything happen to the man in service was reinforced in Admiralty recruitment advertisements published in newspapers, confirming high pay, sick leave, hospital care and support for their dependants.<sup>13</sup> The personal letters of naval husbands and wives, suggest that such advertised promises were taken seriously by naval couples.

Commander William Wilkinson, for example was candid with his wife on how much he disliked life at sea and their separation, but nonetheless was compelled to stay due to the hope of a pension, writing:

only think my dear how much better our prospects are than thousands - we shall be provided for in our old age, others are obliged to work tho attended with ill health and scarcely able to earn their bread.<sup>14</sup>

A similar expectation and sense of entitlement is evident in the petition of widow Mary Stevenson. Mrs Stevenson addressed her petition to King William IV in an attempt to entreat his 'paternal compassion for a helpless widow' to overrule the decision of the Admiralty which rejected her on grounds of her husband's age being above the limit of regulations.<sup>15</sup> Her petition wrote in the style of a familial letter emotively quoting 'the almost dying admonition of her late Husband' that:

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<sup>13</sup> 'Royal Navy', *The Pilot*, Monday 26 November 1838.

<sup>14</sup> RMG, WIL/1/31, Letter from Commander William Wilkinson to his wife, 7 Apr. 1809.

<sup>15</sup> TNA, ADM 1/4068, Palace Petitions, Mary Stevenson, 1831.

If you should meet with any unforeseen obstacles in obtaining your Pension as you are destitute of powerful friends – fail not Petition our noble and Gracious King. I have sailed many and many a time in the same Fleet with him – I know his Heart – He is the Sailors Friend [sic].<sup>16</sup>

This insight into the conversations and advice between husband and wife – whether factually accurate or a rhetorical strategy on her part – is significant as it demonstrates Mrs Stevenson entered widowhood with a strong sense of entitlement and armed with knowledge of how to direct her appeals. Invoking the memory of her husband and his friendship with the monarch was a considered tactic to frame her expectation in a way that was difficult to refuse. However, the fact a conversation regarding ‘obstacles’ was even necessary demonstrates the petitioning process was not straightforward, and wives could be left in a vulnerable position. The emotional intimacy of sharing this account was a strategy used by Mrs Stevenson to invoke claims of friendship. As previously discussed in chapter one, friendship in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century did not exclusively refer to equal peers, but instead ‘friends’ ‘were often those who could open up avenues to assistance, who were frequently in a stronger position than their supplicants’ and were called on as a powerful person to help them.<sup>17</sup> By presuming on her husband’s acquaintance as giving him a deeper insight into the monarch’s ‘heart’, her petition suggests an attempt at replicating a more personal familial letter which was ‘inspired by friendship and a desire to shorten emotional distance in pursuit of sensibility and sociability’ which had come ‘to resemble routine letters between those bound by kinship or business’.<sup>18</sup> Mrs Stevenson’s embodiment of her husband’s voice was a strategy that allowed her agency to contradict the naval officials by implying an intimacy and greater knowledge of a reciprocal agreement, achieved through service, directly with William IV. A husband and wife shared a life

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Snell, ‘Belonging and community’, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Houston, *Peasant Petitions*, 28.

in the navy, both making sacrifices in regard to his length of service overseas and her nursing of him while on shore. This petition shows that the couple perceived this service as more than an occupation and by invoking the monarch as the 'Sailors Friend', attempted to hold the King to account. Unfortunately, this did not guarantee success and Mrs Stevenson was informed that her petition 'could not be complied with'.<sup>19</sup> This petition is catalogued under 'Palace petitions' and, while there is a covering letter confirming it was passed from Sir Herbert Taylor, the King's Secretary, to Mr Barrow, the Second Secretary to the Admiralty, it is unknown whether this petition personally reached William IV. The transference between secretaries meant the decision was returned to the discretion of the Admiralty. Nonetheless, by directing her petition to the monarch it enabled her to contest the initial decision of the Admiralty and further explain that she had done all that was required of her in the first application and was unaware of the regulations. To reinforce her deservingness she added that she had 'sustained the character and reputation' as wife and mother, although admitted that the couple lived together with their child for seven years before the marriage was officially finalised.<sup>20</sup> Isaac Land in his assessment of patriotic sailor petitioners has similarly found that 'in the case of state provision, the rhetorical conventions of the petition offered an effective way to keep an exact, unforgiving account of an entire society's failed promises'.<sup>21</sup> Thus, despite the unsuccessful outcome of this petition, it remains important to provide insights into how naval widows portrayed themselves and their relationships with their husbands and the agency they had to interact with authorities. The sentiments of expectation of assistance beyond mere charity was a common trope in widows' petitions and is further reflected in the negotiations of those applying for a pension and demanding financial increases.

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<sup>19</sup> TNA, ADM 1/4068, Mary Stevenson, 1831.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Isaac Land, 'Patriotic Complaints: Sailors Performing Petition in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain', in Kirsty Reid and Fiona Paisley (eds.), *Critical Perspectives on Colonialism: Writing the Empire from Below* (London, 2013), 104.

### Financial Negotiation and Class Barriers

Understanding what constituted a successful petition, what would gain notice and what could act as a catalyst to change the rules is difficult to decipher. However, as Arlette Farage has argued, within the archive's complexity it is useful to recognise that 'its contradictory readings lead the reader to a place where systems of reciprocal compensation play out, where ambiguous attitudes are determined, where the functioning of the confrontation between masculine and feminine can be untangled'.<sup>22</sup> Negotiation over the amount of pension received was a constant request in the index records and one that reveals some of the internal attitudes of the naval officials in their decision-making, particularly how class and status were a key factor in altering women's fortunes and affecting the level of sympathy and interest.

As well as a shared expectation for assistance, lone women in maritime communities adopted similar linguistic strategies to their husbands to justify their requests for financial negotiation over pay. This is particularly evident when collective petitions of dockyard workers and naval widows are compared. Male dockyard workers signed collective petitions that attempted to appeal to patriarchal values by focusing their personal suffering on the difficulties in maintaining their families. In 1801, a clerk who acted as spokesman for the Plymouth dockyard complained that, with a wife and eight children, he found 'great difficulty with so small an income, to keep up the respectable appearance, so necessary to the discipline of his Majesty's Dockyard'.<sup>23</sup> A similar concern was reiterated in 1835 by the dockyard workers at Devonport, who argued that the classification system which dictated the hierarchy of naval pay rates and concessions 'became quite inadequate for sober and industrious men to provide for themselves and their families the common necessities of life' and thus were 'rendered disheartened and their persons degraded'.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Farage, *Allure of the Archives*, 39.

<sup>23</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5126, Petition of Joseph Ligger, 'Clerks of the Survey of His Majesty's Dockyard at Plymouth', 19 March 1801.

<sup>24</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5136, Petition of the workmen of His Majesty's Dockyard at Devonport', 1835.

Dockyard widows replicated this petitioning style in protesting similar injustices towards their financial and social standing. This is demonstrated in a collective petition of 55 widows of warrant officers resident in Deptford, Greenwich and Woolwich in 1812. Their petition is remarkable for having united several different yards and occupations, which included the spouses of boatswains, gunners and carpenters.<sup>25</sup> Much like the men these women justified their requests in blunt and practical socio-economic terms that the 'extreme high price of all the necessaries of life' meant their £25 pension was not sufficient to support their large families.<sup>26</sup>

Negotiating financial relief was a strategy also used by pauper widows. Mrs Elizabeth Durban, a 67-year-old widow, petitioned the Poor Law Commissioners to request their intervention with the relieving officer who would 'not allow her more than one shilling a week which she finds it impossible to do with'.<sup>27</sup> However, Mrs Durban's appeal was redirected to her union where she was informed that as she received a shilling a week out-relief and had her lodging provided for by keeping a person's house that if she still did not find this sufficient she 'should have an order of admission to the union workhouse'.<sup>28</sup> The offer of a workhouse meant a further decline in standards and negotiations for higher pay ended unfavourably. However, for naval dockyard widows, they were able to frame their negotiations not just in relation to their insufficient support but also through knowledge of other types of charitable support available and their comparative position relative to other women supported by the Admiralty. Asking for acknowledgment of their 'distressing' and 'unpleasant circumstances', they justified their deservingness by highlighting that they had no claim on the Compassionate Fund or on any other institution.<sup>29</sup> Although in receipt of £25 per annum, they were, like their husbands 'led to

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<sup>25</sup> This collective strategy was later replicated by 44 widows of warrants officers, including masters, surgeons and pursers who united to request higher rates of pension in 1815. See, TNA, ADM 6/388.

<sup>26</sup> TNA, ADM 6/386, 'The Petition of 55 Widows of warrant officers' resident in Deptford, Greenwich and Woolwich and places adjacent thereunto', 1812.

<sup>27</sup> TNA, MH12/5021, 4073, Elizabeth Durban to the PLC, 1841.

<sup>28</sup> TNA, MH12/5021, 4073, Elham Union board of guardians to PLC, 1841.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.



think that their small Pensions are not in an adequate Proportion with other classes of widows' and were sensitive to changes in regulations which separated them from groups such as pursers from receiving 'other Bounties' which are 'closed to our solicitations and distress'.<sup>30</sup> Thus, keenly aware of the limits on their social mobility and enforced frugality, shared circumstance could unite widows to collectively challenge the Admiralty.

### **Class Restrictions and Exceptions**

Although there was power in numbers, class and the type of service performed within the navy could be a significant inhibiting factor that prevented the success of a widow's petition, no matter how well organised or presented. Private internal prejudices are made evident in the handwritten response by the Courts of Assistants of Widows' Charity to the collective petition of 55 widows of dockyard workers discussed. A highly prohibitive social structure regarding both class and finances was made evident, as it recounts:

I really think that there can be no chance of success – for certainly £25 per annum, is more in proportion to the widow of a Boatswain, than £40 to a Lieutenants widow, £60 to a Commander or £80 to a post Captain or Admirals Widow who are from connections & habits of Life in the station of "Gentlewomen" – and altho' an increase to all classes of widows pensions might be very reasonable in these times yet I fear that there could be but little hope, as it would not only add to the expenditure of the charity so heavily, but subject the Country to a like increase for the Army officers widows, whose pensions are at the same rates.<sup>31</sup>

Widows whose husbands had spent their careers working in dockyards and civilian professions faced the greatest difficulties of all classes of naval widows as their eligibility was further eroded throughout the period. In 1824, new pension legislation was introduced which stated 'no person employed in other civic departments of the navy will give to his widow any claim to a pension

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> TNA, ADM 6/386, 'The Petition of 55 Widows of Warrant Officers', 1812.

unless under special circumstances' and, by 1830, wives of warrant officers lost their entitlement to a widow's pension.<sup>32</sup> The exceptional circumstance which could overrule any restrictions on eligibility were hinged upon whether their husband had died in active duty. Ken Lunn and Ann Day, in their assessment of Admiralty petitions from male dockyard workers, have identified that their 'disgruntlement [was] not simply with their financial situation, but also with what is seen as the state's refusal to recognize the nature of their service and their loyalty to the British nation'.<sup>33</sup> Widows of these men felt similar frustrations when appealing for their service to be viewed under special circumstances. Betsy Wilmott, for example, who was a widow of a boatswain of Chatham Yard, petitioned for a pension as 'she states he was killed while in performance of his duty'.<sup>34</sup> Although her husband did not die at sea, Mrs Wilmott was fortunately granted a pension and 'under peculiar circumstances to have 5£ extra'.<sup>35</sup> However, such benevolence was not granted to all as was discovered by Sarah Rose, whose husband, a modeller from the same yard, died in a dockyard accident. The Navy Yard where he worked transmitted Mrs Rose's petition and 'strongly recommend[ed] a favourable consideration as his death is attributed to his anxiety & exertion to finish the work in which he was employed'.<sup>36</sup> However, her attempt to promote her husband in similar patriotic terms as mariners who died overseas, was not appreciated by the Lord Commissioners. A distinction of what type of death was considered worthy of a pension was made clear, as the decision was underlined that no pension could be granted 'unless the Husband was killed while in the actual discharge of his duty'.<sup>37</sup> It was the peculiar and extreme cases of suffering that would alter the attitudes of the Lord Commissioners, demonstrated by their response to the peculiar case of Mrs Butcher. Her husband was reported to have died of

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<sup>32</sup> TNA, ADM 12/224, Digest (72-104), 1824; TNA, 'Royal Naval officers' pensions guide, <<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/royal-navy-officers-pensions/>> (accessed, 28 Jan. 2021).

<sup>33</sup> Lunn and Day, 'Deference and Defiance', 138.

<sup>34</sup> TNA, ADM 12/360, Digest 72-86, 1839.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> TNA, ADM 12/ 263, Digest 63-81, 1829.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

‘cholera superinduced by a shock to his nervous system received from finding a cask of human remains on board’ a ship.<sup>38</sup> It was found that his occupation as a riffer meant that he was not entitled to a pension, however an exception was made to grant her a gratuity of £15.

Widows in their petitions often displayed self-awareness of how their class and keeping up appearances were important issues to be carefully articulated in their negotiations with the Admiralty. Ann Guscote, the widow of a victualler and private merchant, for example, tried to overcome class prejudice and appeal to the sensibilities of the Admiralty through a detailed tale of her husband’s sacrifices and misfortunes. In her petition, she recollects that her husband’s career started as a midshipman in 1757 to becoming an agent victualler and store-keeper at Nore and Sheerness in 1778, which he had held five years until the end of the war and was then discharged with a £100 lump sum which amounted to one year’s salary. After this period of employment he had since faced unemployment, failure in business and imprisonment for his debts prior to his death.<sup>39</sup> This petitioning tale appears more suited to a relief request to the Poor Law authorities, but Mrs Guscote presents her fortunes as being connected with the welfare failings of the Admiralty, by promoting her husband’s patriotism and loyalty, writing how he had ‘been bred in your Majesty’s sea service’ and had lost a leg at 17.<sup>40</sup> Disabled and without a secure role, Mrs Guscote writes that her husband had struggled for employment. However, she contrasts this ill fortune by highlighting how the family was both deserving but also class conscious and modest, informing the reader that her husband had been offered a knighthood, but that he ‘would not allow to be named, knowing that a large and helpless family, and no fortune, could not uphold that honour with becoming dignity’.<sup>41</sup> Within the navy, social mobility came with great personal cost: uniforms, for example, had to be purchased and adorned privately

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<sup>38</sup> TNA, ADM 12/511, Mrs Butcher, 1849.

<sup>39</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5208, Ann Guscote, 1809.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

and this could include embellishments of large quantities of gold lace.<sup>42</sup> Keeping up appearances appropriate for social standing was an important concern in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and echoed petitioning strategies of men. Within other naval petitions it was a frequent concern that poor wages meant that men could not maintain appropriate appearances and thus lamented they were ‘utterly out of their power with their present means to preserve themselves from embarrassments or to retain that decent appearance which their situation requires’ and ‘must unavoidably be involved in debt to the great injury of their character and ultimate loss of their situations’.<sup>43</sup> Others were reported to have quit their roles out of ‘embarrassment’.<sup>44</sup> Peter Jones, in his assessment of pauper letters, identifies that writers who focused on decency and not being able to clothe and look after their family were keen to advertise that a lack of decency was not their fault and their own attention to the issue was a strategy to confer ‘not only an economic, but also *moral* responsibility’ to help restore them.<sup>45</sup> Mrs Guscote, therefore, can be seen as tactically replicating this male discourse to create sympathy for her husband’s failings and her own current situation.

Independence was a highly valued and desirable masculine trait during this period and while Mr Guscote had attempted to act on his own, his independent venture in private vessel trading failed due to a shipwreck which led to his imprisonment and the subsequent suffering of the petitioner and her six children from ‘hunger and want of every necessary of life’.<sup>46</sup> Despite these sufferings and setbacks, Mrs Gustcote recounts her husband’s constant industriousness and service, writing that he ‘invented’ a plan for watering ships which carried water in ‘Tanks and pump’t thro’ hose into the ships store casks as they lay in the Hold, to the great saving of lives

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<sup>42</sup> Amy Miller, ‘Clothes make the Man: Naval Uniform and Masculinity in the Early Nineteenth Century’, *Journal for Maritime Research*, 17.2 (2015), 147-154.

<sup>43</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5131; for similar cases, also see: TNA, ADM 1/5126.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Jones, ‘I cannot keep my place without being deascent’, 35.

<sup>46</sup> Matthew McCormack, *The Independent Man: Citizenship and Gender Politics in Georgian England* (Manchester, 2005); TNA, ADM 1/5208, Ann Guscote. 1809.

and desertion of men coming ashore'.<sup>47</sup> However, Mrs Guscote wrote that her husband's lack of social connections to help him protect his enterprise meant that, despite approval by captains in Portsmouth, a change in policy by the Commissioners led to the violation of his business and 'total ruin'.<sup>48</sup> Mrs Guscote laments that she is left with only 'female children' as her son died slowly after being crippled, an emotive appeal which attempted to play into patriarchal expectations that women were solely dependent on the male members of the family and calls on Christian duty and humanity to prevent them from starving again.<sup>49</sup> The financial struggles of Mrs Guscote is in keeping with Lincoln's findings that 'the position of naval wives worsened the lower they were down the social scale'.<sup>50</sup> However, such accounts of personal suffering were not sufficient to attract the support of the Admiralty and it can be inferred that Mr Guscote's long periods of unemployment and disagreements within the Victualling Commissioners were not appealing arguments. Mrs Guscote's outsider status is reinforced by their final impersonal note that there is 'no precedent for granting relief to this person', their choice to refer to her as a 'person' rather than widow suggests attempts to emphasise her difference to other widows, who in the index were carefully recorded by their titles and names, and thus place her case firmly outside of the welfare remit of the Admiralty.<sup>51</sup>

However, naval officials were not hard hearted to all appeals of emotional and physical suffering, particularly in regard to widows of officers. New rules introduced in 1830 which limited the eligibility of officers' widows was met with a sympathetic response for the 'poor Ladies who are suffering'.<sup>52</sup> Under this new policy, it was decreed that the widows of officers 'shall only be entitled to the Pensions of their respective classes, in the event of their husbands having served

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid; On expectations of male independence: Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycles*, chp. 4; Joanne Bailey, 'Think Wot a Mother Must Feel', 5-19 and McCormack, *The Independent Man*.

<sup>49</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5208, Ann Guscote, 1809 (underlining in original); King, *Writing the Lives*, 297.

<sup>50</sup> Lincoln, *Naval Wives and Mistresses*, 16.

<sup>51</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5208, Ann Guscote, 1809.

<sup>52</sup> TNA, ADM 7/615, Case 70 'Widow's pensions refused', 1831-40.

on full pay ten completed full years, except the husband be killed in action, or lose his life in the execution of the service'.<sup>53</sup> Ten years of service was required to be completed in their respected rank prior to death, regardless of their full employment history. Consequently, this excluded many widows who missed the opportunity by a matter of months, such as Mrs Wiley, who was refused due to her husband narrowly missing the service threshold by six months, having been on the list for nine and a half years.<sup>54</sup> This rigid timeframe did not take the men's overall service into consideration and this meant widows, such as Mrs Eleanor Newnham, whose husband had previously served 'upward of 20 years as Clerk', but only '3 years & 2 months on the list of pursers' was also not deemed eligible.<sup>55</sup> An internal investigation carried out in 1840 identified thirteen unsuccessful petitioners who had been disenfranchised by the new rules. The clerks' sympathy for the suffering of the widows was made evident by their efforts to establish their financial circumstances and whether they had children to care for; the majority of their situations were summarised as being 'left without an income' and 'totally unprovided for'.<sup>56</sup> Newspapers advised women whose husbands had run businesses or had been skilled artisans 'to take pains to understand their husband's business so that, if he died, they might continue with it for their own support', but for the wives of naval officers this was not a career they could continue independent of their husbands.<sup>57</sup> The First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord de Grey, had shown mercy towards one of the rejected widows by 'compassionately' appointing her as matron at Haslar Hospital, which was a sought after role for petitioners with no other options for support.<sup>58</sup> However, Mr Hay, a clerk for the Admiralty, lamented that their efforts were not enough as demonstrated by the unfortunate situation of the widowed matron. Mr Hay writes

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Lincoln, *Naval Wives and Mistresses*, 95.

<sup>58</sup> TNA, ADM 7/615, Case 70 'Widow's pensions refused', 1831-40; RMG 104/4/4/22, Henrietta Maria Moriarty wrote Admiral Markham in 1809 to request to be appointed as matron at 'the Royal Naval Asylum', but her request was rejected on grounds it was not within his authority.

that her ‘case is the more distressing from what has since happened’ recounting that she had been ‘compelled to relinquish [the role] last year from the effects of ill health’ and, having not held the position long enough, was not entitled to an allowance and that her ‘very deplorable state of health’ meant she was ‘without the means of obtaining a livelihood’.<sup>59</sup> Mr Hay, a naval official, argued for a case to be made to the Treasury and a petition was drafted by the Admiralty to Queen Victoria to request the rules be repealed, on grounds that:

[it] has affected very injuriously the interests of several Ladies, who have been thereby deprived of the pension, to which they would otherwise be entitled, and have in consequence been left in circumstances of great distress, on the other hand the saving that has accrued to the public has been very inconsiderable.<sup>60</sup>

The Admiralty’s appeal was unsuccessful as the requirement to have served ten years in their respective class remained in place when regulations were updated in 1844.<sup>61</sup> However, within their own remit of approval exceptions in other matters could be made. This is illustrated in the Admiralty’s willingness to dispense with some evidence requirements in exceptional cases. Baroness Gardner, for example, was initially prevented from receiving her pension as she could not provide a marriage certificate as she had married in Jamaica. Her appeals for an exception, were rooted in her perceived self-importance as she stated ‘Lord Gardner and myself being so well known in the navy for many years ... would be proof sufficient of the legality of the marriage’.<sup>62</sup> As a result, the certificate requirement for Baroness Gardner was ‘dispensed with’.<sup>63</sup> This highlights that the Admiralty clerks were able to use greater discretion in individual rather than collective cases to interpret and implement the rules.

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<sup>59</sup> TNA, ADM 7/615, Case 70 ‘Widow’s pensions refused’, 1831-40.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> ‘The Queen’s Regulations for the Government of Her Majesty’s Naval Service’, 1844.

<[https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=TZteAAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=TZteAAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)> (Accessed via Google books, 7 Feb 2021); Behrisch, ‘Widows’ Men’, 37.

<sup>62</sup> TNA, ADM 6/392, Susan Hyde, Baroness Gardner, 1819.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

## **Privilege and Perceived Entitlement to a Widow's Pension**

Lone women in maritime communities, particularly among the officer classes, expected their financial and social standing should be secure in widowhood as well as marriage. It is clear from the petitioning sample that many women expected that their standards of living would continue, if not improve, and that the Admiralty would assume the role of the stable provider in their lives. Among upper- and middle-class widows, a petition for a pension was, therefore, not a request for charity but instead a request for what they saw as their rightful entitlement. Similar to the collective petition of widows of dockyard workers who were protesting against lower incomes, the wives of captains and those of higher commissioned ranks would also try to negotiate pension fund allocations that they viewed as inadequate. This is illustrated by the successful petition of Judith Harvey, who was not destitute but lamented that ‘a very considerable part of her income having ceased at her Husband’s death’ and was thus ‘in circumstances inadequate to the maintenance of herself and the necessary expense of ... educating her Infant children’.<sup>64</sup> Mrs Harvey received a favourable pension of £100 a year. However, she was not unique in confronting the Admiralty over financial circumstances and expectations. From the sample of petitions selected across the index covering 1789-1850, each sampled interval included entries related to requests for additional or increased funding which amounted to 7% of all requests.<sup>65</sup> Naval pension rules for widows placed financial embargoes on women receiving pensions up until 1836, despite their husband’s service and payment into the pension fund, and would only grant them if they were left with modest incomes.<sup>66</sup> In the 1834 pension index, eight women were recorded as being rejected from receiving a pension as they were found to be already in possession of other incomes ranging from £320 to £1,100 a year.<sup>67</sup> An income of £180 was

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<sup>64</sup> TNA, ADM 1/517, Judith Harvey, 1794.

<sup>65</sup> This percentage is based on 35 requests for additional funds identified out of a sample of the petition index which amounted to 480 entries in total.

<sup>66</sup> Lincoln, *Naval Wives and Mistresses*, 44; The National Archives Royal Navy officers’ pensions guide (<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/royal-navy-officers-pensions/> - accessed 20 Jan. 2021).

<sup>67</sup> TNA, ADM 12/300, Digest 61-81, 1834.



stated to be the precedent threshold for the maximum amount of private wealth eligible to be granted a pension. Despite their comparative fortunes, these widows did express their contempt from being excluded and wrote back to the Navy Board in complaint. The petition of Mrs Mauclark is illustrative of this: despite being in possession of £365 a year, she used her executor to counter her pension rejection on the grounds of ineligibility by asking for the return of the amount stopped from her husband's pay, demonstrating a strong sense of financial entitlement.<sup>68</sup>

Other strategies utilised by widows to press for what they claimed as entitlements included demonstrating their knowledge of policy change and their awareness of the success of other widowed petitioners. Mrs Kent, for example, who had, since 1807, received a pension of £60 per annum for herself and £10 for her child, petitioned in 1819 to say that the funds were no longer 'sufficient maintenance' due to her ill health which obliged her to borrow from a friend.<sup>69</sup> To add to her justification, the request – which was written on her behalf by an agent – stated an awareness of wider policy change and pension increases that should be taken into consideration. She wrote that 'we understand that an increase ... has taken place since the grant ... from 40 to 50 £ a Capt[ain]s W[idow] – so that her pension is now only 10 £ additional for the loss of her husband in battle, to what it otherwise now have been'.<sup>70</sup> Mrs Kent and her agent, therefore, viewed the success of others with competitive jealousy as the narrowing of the financial gap between widows who did not lose their husbands in battle was portrayed as an affront to Mrs Kent and an added cause for her deservingness to receive a pension increase. Similar tactics of widows using their knowledge of policy change and thinly veiled accusatory nationalism is also illustrated in a petition by Penelope-Ann Lambe. Mrs Lambe was motivated to write for an increase in her pension due to her knowledge of the 'addition lately made to the pension of

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> TNA, ADM 1/3352, Agnes Dickson Kent, 1819.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

widows of commanders in the navy who lost their lives in the service'.<sup>71</sup> Her appeal was emotive, asking to be looked upon with 'mercy ... of a brave officer's indigent widow whose only support from relatives is lost in the war' but makes the sharper practical point that 'had [her husband's] life been spared [it] would have been a great help to herself & fatherless child also the necessity of the time makes a small fortune very small'.<sup>72</sup> In both these cases it is clear that the widows felt themselves deserving and entitled to support for their patriotic sacrifices of losing a husband and breadwinner in the service of the navy.

Widowhood at an early age dramatically altered fortunes by locking widows into a static income and limiting the possibility of social mobility which was expected to be achieved in the course of a husband's lifetime. The financial hardship of a long widowhood on a fixed pension which did not increase with inflation or changes to the rules was bitterly described as a 'slender pittance of a pension' by Susannah Naple.<sup>73</sup> Widowed for 33 years from a 'man of worth', Mrs Naple recounts that her life has been 'bowed down under many sorrows' including her ill health which at the time of writing meant she was under 'surgical advice' for 'the most alarming complaint' and having lost her only son to consumption, a lieutenant in the navy for 13 years, causing her to further lose the 'little annual assistance'.<sup>74</sup> The lengthy widowhood had put her at the disadvantage of 'having out lived all my friends', and she highlighted the importance of this loss by bringing to the reader's attention that they were influential people in society who had previously championed her, listing them as 'the late amiable Lady Chatham [and] Lady Floratia Saymore', as well as a 'true friend in late worthy [sic] Sir William Elliot who ... strongly advocated my case'.<sup>75</sup> However, in her petition she refers to seeking advice and assistance from Captain Elliot and recounts her distress at 'finding many Pursers widows in receipt of 40 per

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<sup>71</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5232, Penelope-Ann Lambe, 1819.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> TNA, ADM 1/4967, Susannah Naple, 1834.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

annum [she] having only 30 which I shall but a short time enjoying’, illustrating that her networks remained sufficient to keep her abreast of news and changes.<sup>76</sup> Employing great flattery in her request to receive an additional £10, she writes that if she was granted this ‘act of humanity’ she ‘shall have cause to laud & bless your Lordship’, but also bargains that ‘should your Lordship object to this my ardent request in pittty [sic] may I hope some little boon be afforded that may tend to eleviate [sic] the woes of a suffering deep distress’.<sup>77</sup> The status of being a naval widow can be seen to have offered more opportunities for attempted bargaining with institutions to gain more support than what would have been available from the Poor Law authorities.

Utilising connections, knowledge and a willingness to negotiate in her appeals for assistance was a strategy also evident in the strong case put forward by Elizabeth Curgenvén. Her husband had died in a ‘fatal accident’ before he officially took up his promotion which put her eligibility for a higher rate of pension in doubt.<sup>78</sup> In her written negotiations to be granted what she viewed as the correct rate of pension, she built a strong case detailing extensive research and networking as she accounted for her husband’s eighteen years of service, providing a detailed account of his employment history, attaching fourteen testimonial letters of recommendation to her petition as evidence of his ‘good conduct and meticulous character’.<sup>79</sup> Mrs Curgenvén also attached an emotively written letter by the last captain her husband served under which explained the cause of his death as drowning due to the lower deck being swamped in a storm and although ‘every assistance was given, and the body picked up in about five minutes I regret to say all appearance of life was extinct’.<sup>80</sup> A further personal comment was added to his report that as well as a being a ‘most valuable person’ it was noted that he ‘had a large family who has sustained an irreparable

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> TNA, ADM 1/4664, Elizabeth Curgenvén, 1829.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

loss'.<sup>81</sup> These intimate and emotive details of his last moments add to the anguish expressed by Mrs Curgenven who writes 'this Melancholy and distressing bereavement, your Lordships Petitioner (herself in a very delicate state of health) is left with Five young children ... totally destitute of the means of support'.<sup>82</sup> Promoting his character and her distress, she appealed for the technicalities of the rules to be over looked:

confiding in the justice of the your Lordship, trusts, that she will not be made to suffer the consequences of her Husband's promotion being thus deferred; by withholding from her the provision, to which she would otherwise, have been entitled .... should she however be disappointed in this expectation, she earnestly applied to your Lordship on behalf of her five Destitute children; ... at least afford to them some provision out of the Compassionate Fund; until arrived at an age to procure it for themselves.<sup>83</sup>

Despite the forceful petitioning efforts, the four women discussed who appealed for additional funds met with limited to no success. The outcome of Mrs Mauclark's appeal for her husband's pension contributions to be returned was recorded as 'cannot comply' and, in the case of Penelope-Ann Lambe and Susannah Naple, the former was informed that she could not receive two pension rates while the latter was told the new regulation increases could not be applied retrospectively, as to do so would set an expensive precedent.<sup>84</sup> Regardless of the women's lack of success, an understanding of their strategies remains useful to highlight how commonplace a mindset of entitlement was among naval widows and demonstrates their resourcefulness to gain knowledge and interpret the Admiralty's own policy to fit their own ends.

Their failures, as will be seen, also offer insight into the inherent prejudices within the system when contrasted with exceptions which deviated from the norm. Evidence of officials'

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> TNA, ADM 12/300, Digest 61-81, 1834; ADM 1/5232, Penelope-Ann Lambe, 1819; ADM 1/4967, Susannah Naple, 1834.

discretionary decision-making suggests some petitioners' presentation of their financial and emotional suffering could successfully overcome restrictions and gain them exceptional additional support from other branches within the Admiralty. The case of Mrs Curgenvén demonstrates this. Her petition was at first unsuccessful as the Lord Commissioner wrote that they 'are not authorised to afford her any relief and that children are not entitled to the Compassionate Fund'.<sup>85</sup> However, what is significant is that while they again 'concede [that it is] not in their power to afford her any relief', they do allow for a glimmer of hope by noting that 'the gratuity will be paid on her application to the Navy Board'.<sup>86</sup> As well as the Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty, there were sub-branches within the naval administration for relief and appeal that widows could apply for, such as the Compassionate Fund, Greenwich Hospital School and the Courts of Assistants of the Widows' Charity. These institutional bodies, particularly the Courts of Assistants, had more autonomy and discretion but with this also came high exacting standards and a hidden transcript of expectations for the widows, such as Mrs Curgenvén, to meet.

### **Loss, Distress and Work**

The petitioning system was very unequal among widows, but they shared the common experience of loss and trying to articulate their situations in ways that were most appealing to the sympathy of the naval officials. Chalus, in her assessment of naval wives, found that those who were successful at living their lives apart from their husbands were more practical than emotional, arguing that those who 'coped most effectively ... took problem solving rather than emotional approaches to their husbands' absences'.<sup>87</sup> However, once a wife became a widow, all responsibility for survival rested with them and how they presented their husband's memory and

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<sup>85</sup> TNA, ADM 1/4664, Elizabeth Curgenvén, 1829.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid; The Navy Board, although subordinate to the Admiralty, 'was by far the larger, older and administratively the more important of the two, and always preserved a large measure of independence'. For more details see, TNA, ADM 1, 1 – 8364 reference guide, 1989.

<sup>87</sup> Chalus, 'My dearest Tussy', 47-8.

service. In this stage of life, petitioners who could unite emotive appeals with practical and tangible evidence of suffering through promotion of their patriotism and motherhood could achieve greater success. This strategy presented the opportunity to achieve exceptions and, to an extent, negate class-based preferences and, in the long-term, alter regulations.

In the petitions surveyed, the widows might refer to themselves in indigent or in distressed circumstances but this was subjective to their own self-perception and definitions of wealth. It is notable that within petitioning requests few refer to any personal employment, although from other records it is evident that the majority would have had to supplement their income through taking on casual roles such as 'laundress' and even the wives of officers could substitute their earnings 'by keeping a shop – by teaching Drawing, Music, etc'.<sup>88</sup> Jennine Hurl-Eamon has argued that the absence of references to employment when petitioning for charity was an indication of 'wealth more than poverty', as by contrast this was not common among soldiers' wives 'who always associated themselves with some sort of trade'.<sup>89</sup> The omission of employment can also be seen as a strategy, as by stressing complete dependence it appealed to a cultural patriarchal belief system in which dependence was seen as an appealing quality for women.<sup>90</sup> Refraining from providing insights into their means of survival also allowed them greater liberty to more sharply engage with the interests of the Admiralty by tailoring their appeals towards their patriotism and motherhood in service of the navy. This, in turn, was more likely to secure them a moral reciprocal agreement than general appeals for mercy and employment support which was better directed to the local Poor Law authorities. As Lisa Norling has argued, the labour of women, although not quantifiable economically was essential to the naval community as a whole. The long absences of men at sea 'assumed the willingness

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<sup>88</sup> Hurl-Eamon, 'The Fiction of Female Dependence', 486; Lincoln, *Naval Wives and Mistresses*, 95; In petitions where a naval widow is contesting the loss of her pension, discussed in chapter four, widows often share more details on their financial situation and work practices.

<sup>89</sup> Hurl-Eamon, 'The Fiction of Female Dependence', 488.

<sup>90</sup> Gill, *Naval Families*, 209.

and ability of those left on shore to do whatever was necessary: to care for the young, the sick, the old; to oversee property, manage budgets, maintain households, and integrate the networks of kinship and neighbourhood ties through which the larger community survived'.<sup>91</sup> Petitioning manuals, such as *The Accomplish'd Letter-writer*, advised military wives to emphasise their domestic support alongside their husband's service and in their example petition includes the statement: 'Her own life has been spent in discharging her domestic duties, and her husband's in venturing his life in defence of your Majesty's person and government'.<sup>92</sup> This petitioning style was replicated by naval wives, as Lunn and Day have, through their assessment of female dockyard workers, found that their approach was gendered, with their concerns focused on 'their roles predominantly as mothers and their domestic responsibilities rather than their role as workers'.<sup>93</sup> For naval widows, their unquantifiable domestic and childrearing labour was an important rhetorical device to emphasise their deservingness and to hold the Admiralty to account.

### **Work and Sacrifice as a Maritime Wife**

A sailor's career shaped the life of his wife through the expectation that she would assume the wider social role of being her husband's promoter, a mother to his children and often a nurse on his return. In Chalus' assessment of the Fremantle papers which detail the relationship between Elizabeth and Thomas Fremantle during their separation throughout the Napoleonic wars, the extent of hidden work expected by naval wives is made evident. Utilising her diaries and their correspondence, she finds that Elizabeth's life, while lived separately, was constantly tied to her husband as she 'publicised her husband's exploits and reminded the people who mattered of his existence' as it was 'far too easy for a naval officer to be forgotten while he was away at sea,

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<sup>91</sup> Lisa Norling, 'Ahab's Wife: Women and the American Whaling Industry, 1820-1870', in Margaret S. Creighton and Lisa Norling, (eds.) *Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World, 1700-1920* (London, 1996), 79.

<sup>92</sup> *The accomplish'd letter-writer: or the young gentlemen and ladies' polite guide to an epistolary correspondence in business, friendship, love ... 'several Petitions, from Persons in low of middling States of Life, to those in higher Stations'*, (Newcastle, 1787), 175.

<sup>93</sup> Lunn and Day, 'Deference and Defiance', 143.

especially if he could not count upon his praises sung in his admiral's despatches'.<sup>94</sup> As well as being relied upon to promote her husband's interest, she also had to shape the education of their children and ensure the enhancement of wider family's social mobility by socialising in the correct circles and 'constructing a public image of the family as polite, cultured and worthy of advancement'.<sup>95</sup> While few petitions in this sample leave such rich records for a single relationship as the Fremantle letters and diaries, women who petitioned for pensions would have experienced similar social conditions and expectations, although on a sliding scale, and their commitment to their husband's careers will be seen in their detailed patriotic appeals. Widows' petitions that negotiated for higher pensions or any charity that would be deemed eligible for themselves and their children, was as a strategy that enabled them to hold the Admiralty to account for their efforts which underpinned the successful social function of the naval community. Naval wives transgressed gendered spheres by taking on a more independent role in running the household and managing the family. This 'structurally enabled the men's absences, which in turn made possible the industry's extension into more distant seas'.<sup>96</sup> This was a lifestyle which meant that after the death of their husbands, naval widows expected and felt deserving of the Admiralty's financial acknowledgment of their efforts and would thus utilise petitions as powerful rhetoric to call on the Admiralty's moral obligation.

### **Patriotic Appeals**

A naval widow's use of patriotic language to recount her husband's heroic service was an important strategy to stand out as a deserving candidate. Widows, while subtly masking any criticism for their loss, nevertheless were quick to point out the financial responsibility of the Lord Commissioners 'to which alone she can now look for support'.<sup>97</sup> Such petitions provided

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<sup>94</sup> Chalus, 'My dearest Tussy' 62, 57.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>96</sup> Norling, 'Ahab's Wife', 91.

<sup>97</sup> TNA, ADM 7/615, Case 70, Grace Bates, 1835.



highly detailed accounts of their husbands' service and detailed knowledge of the circumstances of their deaths which they would not have been physically present to witness. These accounts required considerable effort, researching and networking to correctly and appealingly give a final review of their husband's service and character upon which their own fate hinged. Mrs Grace Bates' petition is demonstrative of the research and networking labour required. In her petition, she recounts the date and circumstance of her husband's death writing that she 'lately received mournful intelligence' that he 'fell a victim on the 23<sup>rd</sup> Ult., to fever contracted on the Coast of Africa, while engaged in active duties'.<sup>98</sup> The reference to his 'active duties' stresses the importance of his death being understood not as a passive weakness of his body, as illness was rarely accepted as a cause of death which entitled a widow to a pension. In her petition, she also displays an awareness of the pension rules, pre-emptively acknowledging that she had not been married for the required minimum of a year to be eligible to receive a pension. However, she countered this requirement by emphasising that she was 'wanting only eleven days'.<sup>99</sup>

Despite their short marriage, Mrs Bates had mastered the employment history of her husband in great detail. She recounted his experience in the navy over twenty-years, identifying 'eight of which he was in active employment on Foreign Stations' and including reference to his fourteen years as midshipman and involvement in the 'Battle of the Algiers' before serving 'nearly four years as Lieutenant', when his life was 'suddenly cut off at the early age of thirty-four'.<sup>100</sup> This knowledge of the record of his employment history prior to their marriage served to emphasise his heroism and her patriotism. Experience in 'foreign stations' hinted he was a 'seasoned' and experienced officer used to different dangerous climates making his death due to fever at this stage in his life more exceptional.<sup>101</sup> Mrs Bates added legitimacy to her account by pointing to her

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London, 1986), 99.

social connections who could support her case, writing she could ‘confidently refer to every officer with whom he served’.<sup>102</sup> To support her claims of being well-connected she quoted a letter from Rear Admiral Sir F. L. Maitland that was also attached to her petition separately.<sup>103</sup> In her petition she quotes:

everyone who had the pleasure of being known to him must deplore the calamity, both in a public, and private view, as he was a most amiable young man, as well as a most promising officer.<sup>104</sup>

For institutional bodies that remained influenced by a discretionary culture, patronage and support from high-ranking officials remained an important but unspoken requirement. Catherine Beck argues, patronage ‘was an inherently personal system of trust, reciprocity and obligation in which the reputation acted as a kind of currency’.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, a ‘person’s merit was rooted as much in their connections as their individual ability’.<sup>106</sup> Thus, with the inclusion of such a positive account by Rear Admiral Maitland, Mrs Bates’ confidence and self-assurance in her belief that she had produced a petition which would meet the Lord Commissioners’ expectations is made evident in her final address that:

Your Lordships Petitioner feeling assured, that all these circumstances will receive your Lordships kind and favourable attention ...[toward] a deserving object of the Public Bounty, and graciously afford some alleviation of her bitter sufferings, and distress.<sup>107</sup>

Comparative petitioning research in the long eighteenth century regarding the Chelsea Hospital for pensions for disabled and injured soldiers reveals a similar system in which a pension was

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<sup>102</sup> TNA, ADM 7/615, Case 70, Grace Bates, 1835.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Catherine Beck, ‘Patronage and Insanity: Tolerance, Reputation and Mental Disorder in the British Navy 1740-1820’, *Historical Research* 94.263 (2021), 2.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> TNA, ADM 7/615, Case 70, Grace Bates, 1835.

considered a ‘gift of the state and not a legal entitlement’.<sup>108</sup> Caroline Louise Nielsen identified that for soldiers ‘[a]t an individual level, the award depended on, in rough order of importance: the level of recommendations from persons of “Quality” given on the applicant’s behalf; their length of service; the status of their former regiment; their personal social status before and during their life in the army; and finally the specifics of their disability’.<sup>109</sup> A comparison of these expectations with the content of Mrs Bates’ petition reveals that she did meet many of the requirements although these were similarly not explicitly ‘enshrined in the instructions’.<sup>110</sup> Naval officials were certainly moved by her petition as evidenced by the clerk’s marginalia which sympathetically questioned ‘what can be done for this poor widow[?]’.<sup>111</sup> Unfortunately, due to changes in legislation in 1830s relating to widows’ pensions, Mrs Bates was refused. Legislation was highlighted which pointed to her being ineligible on grounds of her having not been married a year and that her husband had not served on the list of commission for ten complete years, the only exception being if ‘the Husband be killed in action, or lose his life in the execution of the Service’.<sup>112</sup> Mrs Bates was included among the women identified as unjustly suffering and her case forwarded to the Treasury; unfortunately, the final outcome of her case is unknown. However, what remains significant in this case is that it highlights the definition of what was considered death ‘in action’ was the most contentious legislative point in a widow’s pension negotiations.

### **Writing an Appealing Death Narrative**

Dying heroically and recounting in detail how the sailors’ bodies were pushed to extremes in dedicated active duty was an important linguistic strategy in widows’ petitions. Culturally, in the

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<sup>108</sup> Caroline Louise Nielsen, ‘Disability, Fraud and Medical Experience at Royal Hospital of Chelsea in the Long Eighteenth Century’, in Kevin Linch and Matthew McCormack (eds.), *Britain’s Soldiers: Rethinking War and Society, 1715-1815* (Liverpool, 2014), 193.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 190.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> TNA, ADM 7/615, Case 70, Grace Bates, 1835.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was great pride and admiration for soldiers and sailors who endured physical suffering in war for the greater good. This was demonstrated in romantic depictions of military scenes in art, prints and poetry; 'they enabled the material consequences of war, the grotesque business of death and wounding, to be comprehended under the sign of the beautiful'.<sup>113</sup> The military and navy operated a culture in which injury and disability were not a bar to future service if a man was strong enough to hold a weapon standing or sail.<sup>114</sup> Officers could retire due to ill health on half pay, but this 'provided the bare minimum to live on' while alive and excluded their wives from a pension upon death, and was an economic consideration that caused many 'officers to keep working although chronically ill'.<sup>115</sup> Death was expected to not have come easily to a sailor and a history of poor health unrelated to injury before his death would be held against him rather than in his favour when deciding on a widow's pension. For example, in the case of Mrs Penelope-Ann Lambe, investigations were carried out to understand the state of her husband's health before they married as a factor in deciding her pension. It was found that:

This Lady was married to him in 1799 when he is stated to have been in perfect health, but a few months after their marriage he began to suffer in the head from the effect of a concussion which he received in Battle, & finally became paralytic & childish from its effects & dead before the expiration of a year: The blow he received was stated to be the cause of his Death.<sup>116</sup>

Mrs Lambe received a £60 per annum pension from the civil list at the time of his death in 1799 which was then transferred in 1811 to an estimate pension. However, it took further petitioning efforts until 1819 for his death to be recognised as having been caused by active service and for her rate of pension to be reflected in line with this.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Philip Shaw, *Suffering and Sentiment in Romantic Military Art* (London, 2016), 88.

<sup>114</sup> Nielsen 'Disability, Fraud and Medical Experience', 196.

<sup>115</sup> Lincoln, *Naval Wives and Mistresses*, 99; TNA, ADM 1/3353, Mary Howdell was refused pension as her husband died on half pay.

<sup>116</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5232, Penelope Ann Lambe, 1819.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

The importance of being explicit about their husband's death and injuries is demonstrated by the petition of Mrs Caroline Woolridge, who ensured there could be no question of her husband's heroism, suffering, and cause of death being related entirely to active service. Mrs Woolridge's husband had been given a £200 pension and 'a chain & medal granted by His Majesty "to remain as a token of Honour to him & his posterity"' for severe injuries received under his command of the *Mediator* in 1809.<sup>118</sup> Upon his death in 1814, his widow requested a pension to be granted to her and their dependants, so that their children could be supported and 'taught to imitate their Father's conduct'.<sup>119</sup> In her petition, she described her husband's injuries from active combat in visceral detail, writing that he was:

blown up and forced overboard by an unexpected explosion of Congreve's Rockets by which he was most severely burnt, scorched and bruised, became totally blind of the left eye & the sight of other much injured, he also lost the hearing on the left ear & further suffered the loss of seven teeth & was so much injured in his constitution as perfectly to unfit him for further active service.<sup>120</sup>

To add legitimacy to her account, Mrs Woolridge included a supporting statement by a doctor, John Ayrton Paris, a 'Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians', and surgeon, Thomas Giddy, confirming her husband's impaired state of health.<sup>121</sup> Both medical professionals wrote that having 'anxiously observed the gradual declension of his health ... fe[lt] no hesitation in declaring it as my decided opinion that his death was occasioned by the very severe shock which his constitution received from the explosion of the *Mediator*'.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5221, Caroline Woolridge, 1814.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

The intimate detailed knowledge of her husband's physical suffering relating even to the number of teeth he had lost was due to the fact she would have been a close witness, as it had taken five years for him to fully succumb to his injuries 'in which he ha[d] never enjoyed the blessing of general health'.<sup>123</sup> This account was likely a strategy to elicit sympathy for her husband and herself, but it was also a petitioning style indicative of wider disabled pension appeals. In the case of injured servicemen who appealed to Chelsea Hospital, they had to undergo an examination process that was both physical and personal. An eighteenth-century contemporary described the process whereby they 'made them strip to the Skin, the better to judge their Inability; after such a strict Enquiry, we could not in Humanity refuse to admit them'.<sup>124</sup> Nevertheless, they were also required to be 'publicly questioned by the commissioners as to the particulars of ... service, age, settlement and disability'.<sup>125</sup> Thus, it appears that Mrs Woolridge's petition which also recounted his service history, recognition by admirals, parliament and the monarch alongside her husband's detailed personal bodily injuries was replicating this intrusive examination process in her petition. Fortunately, such an invasive account of his health and heroism brought Mrs Woolridge success. The Lord Commissioners agreed that his death was attributed to the shock of his injuries and granted his widow a pension equal to those killed in immediate action, generously providing her with £120 per annum and £25 per annum to each of her children. This pension exceeded the precedent referred to in their discussions of this case in which a Mrs Hose was referred to as receiving only £100 per annum for her husband 'having been blown up at Toulon in 1793 & who fell sick & died at Malta', but was not considered as having died directly from his injuries and therefore in action.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> 'Debates in last Sessions of Parliament', *Gentleman's Magazine*, 2.22 (October, 1732), p.987, cited in Nielsen, 'Disability, Fraud and Medical Experience', 195.

<sup>126</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5221, Caroline Woolridge, 1814.

For some widows, they would never again see the body of their husband who had fallen at sea or overseas. Nevertheless, physical absence at their time of death did not prevent them from recounting their husband's demise in emotive and authoritative detail. Naval wives, in comparison to their civilian counterparts, were a uniquely well-connected social group. Alone for long periods, 'they looked to other wives for solace, friendship and understanding', and it was through these relationships that they could often access personal and direct news of their husband's fate, integrating them into wider male friendships and further cementing their connections on shore.<sup>127</sup> As well as female friendships, naval wives and widows also had their own relationships with their husbands' shipmates and patrons who they 'relied on for information and support from naval officers'.<sup>128</sup>

Intelligence networks meant that a widow could account for the final moments of her husband's life in gripping detail, and in a way that may have also allowed an acceptable cathartic outlet for her grief. The case of Mrs Sarah Skying shows how meticulous knowledge and emotion could be a persuasive combination for petitioning success. In her petition, she displays a detailed knowledge of her husband's employment activities and directly reminds the Lord Commissioners that he was appointed by them, for the purpose of surveying the Western Coast of Africa, to emphasise their accountability.<sup>129</sup> In shockingly graphic detail for a second-hand account of her husband's death she recounts his death, writing that:

That, on the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Dec: last, having landed at Cape Roxo ... with various instruments for making the necessary observations the party were attacked by the natives, & without any previous provocation her late husband was wantonly murdered by a thrust of a spear & his body mutilated by seventy four wounds in a manner too revolting for description.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Gill, *Naval Families*, 45; Helen Doe, 'Those They Left Behind: Navy Wives and Widows during the French Wars', *Trafalgar Chronicle*, (2015), 10.

<sup>128</sup> Gill, *Naval Families*, 45.

<sup>129</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5243, Sarah Skying, 1834.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

This near eye-witness account is shocking given that Mrs Skying was writing from London. Her emphasis on the brutality of his death, specific to his number of wounds but also alluding to the fact that she was in possession of knowledge of great horrors inverts gender expectations. Women on shore were supposed to be delicate and kept away from the horrors of war and imperial expansion, and so this inclusion of these violent details in her petition was likely intended to shock and gain sympathy. Women at home were not shielded from the horrors at sea as husbands sometimes confided their experience in graphic detail. Samuel Whitehead, for example, described to his wife his work in intercepting slave ships and the terrible conditions and disease enslaved Africans endured, which would ultimately kill him, writing that they included:

Men, women & children & nearly starved to death we had one hundred and forty on board our ship and such miserable objects would have frightened you to have seen them all naked entirely the smallpox raged among them and they died three & four a day.<sup>131</sup>

Thus, widows could have an intimate knowledge of the experiences of their husbands and a reiteration of their violent and traumatic suffering can be seen as a way widows to appeal for additional sympathy for their loss.

Moreover, as well as through letter exchange Lincoln has observed, in terms of material culture, women did not shy away from violence finding that, although women ‘were perceived to be the softer sex’, some ‘chose to wear tokens of battle, including the depiction of violent scenes such as the sinking warships’.<sup>132</sup> Although women had little means of public communication, they could nevertheless comment on the navy through their ballads, poetry and letter writing.<sup>133</sup> For middling wives of naval officers, they could also make a statement through their purchasing of

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<sup>131</sup> TNA, ADM 6/390, Mary Whitehead, 1818.

<sup>132</sup> Margarette Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy: British Sea Power, 1750-1815* (Aldershot, 2007), 142.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.



commemorative decorative objects for the home and themselves to revere and display loyalty to the navy and its causes.<sup>134</sup> However, as well as supporting the navy, they could also undermine it. Thus, it can be inferred that it was not in the Lord Commissioners' interest to ignore such a gruesome death, as while it was expected that news of his death would spread, so too could accounts of the treatment of his widow and children.

Mrs Skying further enhanced her petition by appealing for herself and family's distress in practical terms. The sudden death of her husband had caused great financial distress for Mrs Skying and her wider family, as she writes that due to 'this mysterious dispensation of providence, [she] is left with two very young children, as well as with her aged parents under her roof, all of whom are entirely depending on her for support'.<sup>135</sup> The finances of naval families was often widely connected, for example, evidenced by financial allotment records showing recipients extended beyond wives and dependants.<sup>136</sup> Allotment was an optional system that allowed a sailor's dependants to claim monthly remittances from his wages, most commonly received by wives but the records show sailors also naming their parents, siblings, aunts and cousins as eligible.<sup>137</sup> The loss of a husband had a rippling financial impact that meant grief was inseparable from their material circumstances and future security for many. Julie-Marie Strange in her assessment of grief among the working-class has argued that '[g]rief encompassed the loss of a specific individual, it effected changes in the mourner's identity and role, and it represented lost opportunities'.<sup>138</sup> The feeling of 'lost opportunities' was made explicit in Mrs Skying's discussion of her financial situation. It was expected that her husband's career would advance through his voyage as his finances were far from secure on his departure. Mrs Skying writes that

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5243, Sarah Skying, 1834.

<sup>136</sup> Lin, 'Caring for the Nation's Families', 106.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Julie-Marie Strange, "'She Cried a Very Little': Death, Grief and Mourning in Working-Class Culture, c.1880-1914", *Social History*, 27.2 (2002), 150.

having previously been on half pay he had ‘no private property, he unavoidably incurred a heavy debt in order to equip himself in a suitable manner for such an important ~~man~~ service’.<sup>139</sup> This account of his debts shows him to be victim of the pressure to keep up appearances already discussed. It is significant that Mrs Skying edited her petition to change the sentiment to focus not on his personal importance as an individual, striking the word ‘man’ in favour of his ‘service’ to emphasise his patriotism and to deflect individual blame. In support of her husband’s financial management, she writes that ‘satisfactory arrangements’ had been made for the liquidation of his debts ‘but owing to his premature death, a large sum still remains which your Majesty’s Petitioners, though wholly left as she is without the means, still feels herself bound in honour to pay’.<sup>140</sup> Duty and dependence were two admirable qualities that tapped into social expectations of women and acted as a strategy to hold the Admiralty to account.

Petitioners could find agency in the practicalities related to their grief and negotiations of their widowhood with naval officials. Strange has argued that grief was often ‘managed’ as ‘individuals developed strategies for confronting death and grief which allowed them to fulfil pragmatic responsibilities, but which also provided scope for reflection, sorrow and anger in isolated moments and spaces’.<sup>141</sup> This dual expression of emotion and practical use of knowledge is illustrated at the end of Mrs Skying’s petition:

That as her husband was massacred while in the actual execution of his duty in a manner which perhaps has scarcely a parallel in the annals of the British Navy, your Majesty’s petitioner in the agony of her feelings, indulges in the hope that your Majesty will be graciously pleased owing to the peculiarities of this case, to take her present & future condition into your Majesty’s beneficent consideration.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5243, Sarah Skying, 1834.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Strange, ‘She Cried a Very Little’, 150.

<sup>142</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5243, Sarah Skying, 1834.

The use of emotive language of his ‘massacre’ and her ‘agony’ is a striking expression of anger and loss. However, her reference to it being unparalleled case in active duty shows her awareness of the rules relating to exceptions to which she was actively appealing.<sup>143</sup> Mrs Skying was granted a £90 per annum pension, under the policy rules granted to those ‘if drowned or [succumbed to] other violent death in an immediate active duty’.<sup>144</sup> Surprisingly, Mrs Skying was not deemed eligible for the £120 pension for commanders killed in action. Nevertheless, the agency of Mrs Skying regarding her financial situation did not end with her first petition. In a subsequent petition less than a month later she reiterated her case for herself and specifically her two children who were not granted support in her first request. She demonstrated her awareness quoting that under the ‘b Act: Sec: 4 Cap: 5 of the “Regulations established by the King in Council for His Majesty’s Service at Sea” under the clause of “officers slain in His Majesty’s service’ herself and children were both entitled to support.<sup>145</sup> The outcome was successful, demonstrating that with specific knowledge of policy it was possible for widows to negotiate for the full financial reward they felt they were entitled to.

Heroism, exceptionalism, and tales of the suffering of orphans was a successful strategy employed by several other petitioners. Mrs Coombe, for example, whose husband ‘lost his life by cannon shot’ similarly emphasised his heroic actions evidenced by his early promotion to Lieutenant two years before the normally stipulated regulations.<sup>146</sup> His death in active duty against enemy vessels and the distressed state of his widow gained the sympathy of the Lord Commissioners who granted her not the recommended rate of £70 per annum for a commander’s widow, but instead the higher pension rate of £120 per annum and £30 per annum

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5208, Mary Coombe, 1809.

for her son.<sup>147</sup> Thus, writing powerful and detailed accounts of a husband's death was an important factor which affected the success of a naval widow's pension appeal.

### **Defining Types of Death and Petitions for Exceptions**

However, not all widows could provide such detailed accounts of heroism in active duty. A similar number of widows lost their husbands due to short-term diseases or long-term effects of injury. From the sample of pension petitions collected from ADM 12, sixteen out of seventy applications specifically referred to their husbands dying in action of which nine were successful, six unsuccessful and one remaining case is unknown. These unsuccessful women were refused due to rules limiting mothers and sisters receiving a pension of a son or brother, although new rules introduced in 1824 did allow some exceptions in lieu of a widow, which will be discussed further in chapter three.<sup>148</sup> By comparison, fifteen petitioners referred to their husbands' deaths as having not directly occurred in action but nevertheless attributed their death to injury or illness caused by their service. The success rates for this group of widows were bleak, with only two successfully granted their request, eleven denied, and the other two untraceable. In the remaining sample, six petitions did not specify a particular cause of death and, in the final thirty-three cases, the cause of death did not form part of their case.

Widows who purposefully identified that while their husbands did not die in action, as defined by the Admiralty as being killed in battle, drowning 'or other violent death in an immediate act of duty' nevertheless utilised similar patriotic appeals.<sup>149</sup> These women argued that their husband's death was equivalent to dying in action because their husband's health had suffered in the long-

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5237, 'Memorial from the Right Honourable The Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty' to the King in council, 20 Nov. 1824. This memorial outlines rules which specified that a mother of an officer killed in action could be entitled to a pension provided there was not a widow or child, that she was in distressed circumstances and not in receipt of any other public allowance. Sisters of officers were not eligible to any allowance except under very extraordinary circumstances.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

term or that their lives were prematurely taken by diseases from dangerous environments. Within this group of petitioners, it is notable that their patriotism is tinged with an accusatory tone that also makes more explicit their own personal suffering alongside their ailing husbands. This is evident in the case of serial petitioner, Mrs Mary Howdell, who wrote a counter letter against the rejection of her pension request, refused due to her husband having died while in receipt of half pay.<sup>150</sup> In her petition in 1819, she outlines that her husband had served in the navy for thirty years until his death in 1792 and had left her widowed with one daughter. Her delay in petitioning was due to her awareness of rules changes in pension grants, writing that ‘your memorialist having been informed that His Royal Highness the Prince Regent has lately been most graciously pleased to direct that the widows of officers in the navy shall receive pensions during their lives’.<sup>151</sup> Mrs Howdell’s appeal did not focus on her and her daughter’s present needs as was the norm for many widows, as such an approach would not be favourable given the significant gap between his death and her time of writing which would require Mrs Howdell to disclose how she had survived without their support for so many years. Instead, she highlighted her own patriotic sacrifices in the course of her marriage, writing that she should be considered as being ‘a proper subject to extend His Royal Highnesses benevolence to ... [as] she was the greater part of her coverture (12 years) a nurse to her deceased husband whose health and constitution were impaired by the service’.<sup>152</sup> The pressure of nursing was a common fate and difficult task, as alluded to by a similar account in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* in 1806 which reported on the death of William Robinson, a master and commander, who returned home after 25 years’ service in broken health finding that all ‘the aids of medicine, seconded by the unremitting attention of an affectionate mother and sisters, could not save his life’.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> TNA, ADM 1/3352, Mary Howdell, 1819.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Lincoln, *Naval Wives and Mistresses*, 100; *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 76 (1806), 1076.

Mrs Howdell's petition was rejected on grounds that her husband, a captain in the Plymouth division, had been on half pay prior to his death which made her ineligible for a pension. Strikingly, Mrs Howdell wrote an impassioned response to explain that it was ill health that had caused him to retire on half pay. A line of communication having been opened by the initial petition and the Admiralty's response to her, Mrs Howdell's second written response shifted into the form of a personal begging letter. Donna Andrew finds similar tactics in her assessment of 'begging letters' sent to Lady Spencer between 1750 and 1814.<sup>154</sup> Andrew argues begging letters were tales of 'virtuous victims, down but not yet out' and were directed to late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century aristocrats and those of similar standing from supplicants across the social spectrum.<sup>155</sup> In crafting her petition and letter, Mrs Howdell's use of a scribe is made evident by the contrast in handwriting between her signature and the main text. According to R.A. Houston, who assesses manorial petitioning strategies, the use of a scribe was neither a disadvantage nor an immediate suggestion of illiteracy, but was merely comparative to the modern parallel of employing lawyers to draft contracts or letters of importance.<sup>156</sup> Petition and letter '[w]riters followed conventional forms, but tailored content to individual material and familial circumstances and to the specific moral standpoint a supplicant wanted to adopt'.<sup>157</sup> In the case of Mrs Howdell, the moral standpoint of appeal was her husband's patriotism which was to the detriment of his health and her own infirmity as an aged widow.

Mrs Howdell, unable to alter the fact that she was under regulations ineligible for a pension, attempted to convince the Lord Commissioners against their 'objections' by explaining the events that led him to be placed on the half pay list. In deflecting blame from her husband, she argues that he was willing to serve, but by the time he was called upon he was too ill to do so,

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<sup>154</sup> Andrew, 'Noblesse Oblige', 278.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 278.

<sup>156</sup> Houston, *Peasant Petitions*, 83.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 78.

quoting a surgeon who certified ‘that he was restricted to his bed, and could not leave it but at the imminent peril of his life’.<sup>158</sup> Adding to a sense of desperate drama, Mrs Howdell accused a commander of intimidating him into joining his regiment regardless of his health by ‘threatening if he did not, he would hold a Court Martial and break him’, leaving him no choice but to retire on half pay.<sup>159</sup> She writes:

to a mind weakened by long illness and without the hope of being able to vindicate himself against any proceeding which would have sullied his honour, or without the most distant chance of being able to repair to head-quarters to justify himself he hesitated what measures to adopt - when he thought that by retiring on half pay he might be able to pass the few days allotted to him on earth free from the dread of unjust prosecution or malignant accusations .... [he] retired upon half pay which he enjoyed but a few months.<sup>160</sup>

In recounting her husband’s case in her letter, in ways that her husband was prevented from doing so both physically and verbally honour-bound, she displayed a particular type of agency permissible by her gender. Donna Andrew argues ‘women were the natural agents of appeal ... [as] they had less “honor” to lose, because their role was thought to allow all efforts, no matter how demeaning, to protect and preserve their families, could make such pleas with fewer mitigating reasons than could men’.<sup>161</sup> Mrs Howdell’s reference to how limited her husband’s final days were before his death which she attributed to stressful threats of breaking him and the fragility of his mind all emotively appeal for sympathy and deflect blame from her husband’s actions and preserves him from damaging claims of desertion. Her letter attempts to shift emphasis from his unfavourable retirement and requests that the Lord Commissioners remember his longer service.

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<sup>158</sup> TNA, ADM 1/3352, Mary Howdell, 1819.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Andrew, ‘Noblesse Oblige’, 290.

Mirroring the fate of her husband, she referred to her own infirmity and her expectation that ‘in all human probability the term of my life will be but short’.<sup>162</sup> Mrs Howdell notably refers to surviving twenty-six years as a widow without ‘the least gratuity of my late husband’s servitude’ and now at the age of seventy one hoped that ‘a small sum’ [would be granted] ... which will greatly lessen the difficulties of their memorialists for the remanent of her days’.<sup>163</sup> Unfortunately, Mrs Howdell’s hopes for fewer difficulties in her final days were not met and the rules pertaining to the fact she was not entitled to a pension under regulations were reiterated. It can be inferred that her survival for many years without assistance of the Admiralty, although not in the comfort she desired, and the fact she was no longer a young widow with infant children to support, meant her appeal, although professionally and emotively constructed, was not a strong enough for the Commissioners to make an exception or redirect her to another branch of aid such as the Compassionate Fund.

### **Appeals to Patriotic Lone Motherhood**

Other petitioners, particularly those who had lost husbands in their ‘prime of life’ due to disease, attempted strategies of appeal to highlight the impact of the loss to a young wife and mother was the same, if not worse, than if their husband had been violently slain in action.<sup>164</sup>

Culturally, images and stories of the fates of distressed military widows ‘captured public imagination’ during and beyond the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars.<sup>165</sup> Joseph Wright’s *The Dead Soldier* (1789), for example, emotively portrayed ‘the image of a grieving widow clutching the wrist of her dead soldier husband, as she nurses her newly-orphaned child’.<sup>166</sup> Notably, despite being called ‘*The Dead Soldier*’, the cause of death is unknown as the slumped male body

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<sup>162</sup> TNA, ADM 1/3352, Mary Howdell, 1819.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5198, Henrietta Maria Moriarty, 1804. Several petitioners refer to losing their husbands in their ‘prime of life’ or ‘prematurely’ to emphasise their distress, see TNA ADM 1/5219, Peggy Eshelley, 1814; ADM 1/5220, Lady Charlotte Douglas, 1814.

<sup>165</sup> Shaw, *Suffering and Sentiment*, 80.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.



does not show any signs of violent injury or blood. Instead the widow holding his limp hand and her child in the other is the focus of this distressing scene. This painting was reprinted more than the candlelight paintings of the 1760s, or the celebrated storm and fireworks paintings of later years and was still in production as late as 1829.<sup>167</sup> The cultural popularity of such scenes with artists and writers provided widows with the opportunity to evoke similar imagery as a strategy to appeal for a personal charitable response.

Mrs Moriarty, widow of a lieutenant, makes her suffering clear in her distressed and dependent appeals to the Lord Commissioners. Her husband, she writes, was ‘so injured by the Yellow Fever that he died in the prime of Life’.<sup>168</sup> Like the image of the widow in *The Dead Soldier*, her main claim to assistance was that his fate had left her alone with ‘four helpless children, the eldest not six years old, and the youngest only four months, in the greatest Indigence’.<sup>169</sup> Mrs Moriarty was already in receipt of the ‘usual pension’ granted to widows.<sup>170</sup> Her petition requested additional funds, on grounds of her distress but also her husband’s twenty-nine years of service. Although his cause of death was fever not violence, she attempted to redefine perceptions of his long-term demise by structuring the first part of her petition with focus on his patriotic and dangerous service. In her petition she lists which roles and battles he ‘had the honour of serving’, highlighting his success against French enemies in the 1780 and 1790s, previous wounds and his actions to prevent a mutiny.<sup>171</sup> Despite this patriotic account, the Lord Commissioners could not be enticed to provide extra charity and responded to state ‘it has not been usual to recommend additional pensions to the widows of officers who have not been slain in fight or died of that ... [and] see no grounds for doing it in the present instance’.<sup>172</sup> Although

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5198, Henrietta Maria Moriarty, 1804.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

Mrs Moriarty was not successful on this occasion, she reemployed her petitioning strategy three years later in 1807, writing to Admiral Markham. In her subsequent petition she copied the same patriotic statements of her husband's actions and her distress as she formerly submitted to the Admiralty and wrote that she hoped that after the 'above recital' she would not be deemed presumptuous for requesting his assistance.<sup>173</sup> In her letter she appealed to her loose connections with Markham, stating she was 'not totally unknown to you' as her 'near relation Mr D'Oyly, applied to you, at the time of Colonel Moriarty's death, to obtain an increase to my pension'.<sup>174</sup> It can be inferred that neither previous request was successful, as she felt the need to further negotiate for more financial support, but this time requested that she be put forward for the role of 'Matron to the Royal Naval Asylum'.<sup>175</sup> This appointment she wrote would 'greatly contribute to my happiness, if the very humble abilities which I possess can prove instrumental in forwarding the wishes, of the Patrons & Governors, of that Noble Institution, by promoting Religion, Industry, and Cleanliness'.<sup>176</sup> Linda Colley has argued that for all classes and sexes patriotic sentiments were often a 'highly rational response and a creative one as well' which enabled them to demand a 'much broader access to citizenship'.<sup>177</sup> Mrs Moriarty's selfless and patriotic appeals allowed her the opportunity to make a very direct appeal for public employment that would enable her to act outside of her domestic sphere and gain prestigious responsibility and independence for herself. Her bold and direct request was softened with her reference to a patron as she assured Markham, 'I would not take the liberty of soliciting your favour, if I had not the permission of General Morelay, Commandant of His Majesty's Royal Marine Force, to refer to him for my integrity and abilities'.<sup>178</sup> Her reference to the support of General Morelay was a tactic which reinforced the respectability of her request and created a level of

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<sup>173</sup> RMG, MRK 104/4/4/22, Henrietta Maria Moriarty, 1809.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London, 2008), 5.

<sup>178</sup> RMG, MRK 104/4/4/22, Henrietta Maria Moriarty, 1809.

accountability by involving a patron in her application, making it more difficult to be refused. However, the response to her request was ambiguously rejected. Although she was not successfully appointed Markham instructed that she be '[a]cquaint[ed] ... that this appointment & this situation does not rest with the Admiralty'.<sup>179</sup> It is questionable whether she would have found whose power it was to grant this request and perform her 'recital' again, but her duplication of her petition suggests that her strategy of recounting her husband's sacrifice and her distress would still provide an effective opening for future negotiations.<sup>180</sup>

### **Motherhood and Genteel Poverty**

Lady Douglas, whose husband she argued also lost his life 'prematurely', petitioned similarly on grounds of patriotism and paternalism for an exception to be made, negotiating not to allow her extra funds but rather have her husband's £443 pension be transferred to her and her children.<sup>181</sup> Her husband, General Sir John Douglas, had died of 'effects of climate and a complaint contracted in the deserts of Egypt at the premature age of fifty one years'.<sup>182</sup> Her petition emotively described her 'lamented loss of the best of Husbands and Fathers' with the very material loss that 'she was suddenly deprived of every means of Existence, his pay and the pension his Majesty's gracious consideration bestowed upon him'.<sup>183</sup> Lady Douglas appealed to paternalism and reinforced her gendered dependence, writing: 'I approach his Royal Highness the Prince Regent in Council as the natural Protector of the destitute Family of an officer who devoted thirty nine years of approved service in the cause of his revered sovereign and this country'.<sup>184</sup> However, the construction of her pension and her patriotic claims were not

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> TNA, ADM 1/ 5220, Lady Charlotte Douglas, 1814.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

presented in a timid and humble style, but rather as a strong and proud case as she supported her petition with thirty-three pages of supporting evidence.

These documents, she argued ‘demonstrate my late husband [was] not only distinguished in life ... but also, honoured and respected when consigned to the Earth, they speak for his Widow and Children’.<sup>185</sup> The need for such supporting evidence to confirm Lady Douglas’ account was in part required because her request hinged upon a direct promise from the monarch of which she had no written proof. Lady Douglas copied an extract of a letter dated in 1800 from His Royal Highness Prince Vizier of Egypt recommending his command to the monarch which resulted in her husband being granted a pension worth £443 while living ‘from the Day that Bonaparte [was] repulsed from the walls of St. Jean D’Acre’.<sup>186</sup> Significantly, she argues that the pension was to be extended to her:

added to that liberal and gracious Act, the benign Assurance, that as I was the Daughter of one of his eldest, and most approved Dragoon officers, that if the sickness he laboured under terminated fatally, he would continue the support to myself.<sup>187</sup>

Lady Douglas’ reference to the patriotic service of her father reinforced her deservingness as a daughter of a naval officer as well as a wife and mother. Gill has argued that ‘[f]or the majority of naval women, their primary loyalty and duty was to their family, and their patriotism came in the form of resignation in the face of personal hardship’.<sup>188</sup> However, strikingly, in the case of Lady Douglas she did not follow this rhetoric and made it clear she was not going to give up a life of comfort easily. She reinforced her claim with confrontational flattery of the monarch’s intentions and reference to the Admiralty’s obligation to her own class expectations, as she writes she was:

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Gill, *Naval Families*, 146-7.

Assured and confident in His Majesty's Intention who never would have rewarded Services, and have given the Comforts of Life to withdraw them, and under the privation doubly severe, I with great Reluctance, and with the most real Humility and Necessity, beg leave to lay my peculiar and trying situation connecting with it my Rank in life of a General Officers widow.<sup>189</sup>

The anguish of her loss of financial comforts and implications for her rank as an officer's widow alludes to the particular isolating difficulties of genteel poverty. Andrew has argued that '[f]or genteel people, the prime requisite, both psychological and economic, was keeping up appearances' as to fail to do so could bring creditors calling and seizing their remaining possessions.<sup>190</sup> To appeal privately to the monarch and naval Lord Commissioners was an essential lifeline. To validate her claims and social importance, her selected documents highlighted her husband's previous patronage and notability. As with other forms of personal charity requests, investigation was to be expected.<sup>191</sup> Attached to the petition first was a letter confirming his grant of a pension confirming its validity, but this notably did not include a reference to its extension to his widow. A key to success in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century was still heavily linked to patronage and "being known" or knowable'.<sup>192</sup> It is unsurprising then that the second attachment was a statement of her husband's services submitted by Sir Sidney Smith, recommending him for promotion in 1803. Notably, the letter does reference being previously overlooked by the first Lord of the Admiralty Lord Spencer, suggesting his social standing was unstable. However, correspondence copied from exchanges with Royal Marine Barracks arranging his public funeral and eulogy suggested his public importance was without question by the time of his death. An extract from *The Times* reporting on his funeral further remarked on his popularity, observing that 'the concourse of spectators

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<sup>189</sup> TNA, ADM 1/ 5220, Lady Charlotte Douglas, 1814.

<sup>190</sup> Andrew, 'Noblesse Oblige', 291.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid, 292.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid, 293.

was immense ... [n]ot withstanding the unfavourable state of the weather'.<sup>193</sup> Finally, letters written by Douglas in English and French during active duty in Egypt 1799-1800 were included, confirming his patriotic action and subsequent letters of approval relating to his promotion and an extract of a letter between a Sir Keith to Sir Sidney recommending him.

Despite the extensive evidence, the Lord Commissioners refused Lady Douglas' request, although internal correspondence in the marginalia did suggest this was not an easy decision to come to. The first clerk noted that a lieutenant colonel's widow was granted £60 per annum but this was crossly dismissed as 'no precedent nor like one'.<sup>194</sup> The former clerk replied: 'I am aware of this sir, nor is there any precedent recommending the continuance of a pension granted' and redirected the second clerk to a report which no longer survives.<sup>195</sup> Ultimately, their Lordships could not recommend compliance, as hearsay of a monarch's promises were hard to validate when no precedents were available. While the documents did speak for her husband, Lady Douglas did not have a personal letter from a patron recommending her case solely on her behalf which may have contributed to her rejection, as well as her confident tone which did not fit the common self-sacrificing and dependent petitioning style.

The suffering of genteel ladies and the physical long-term hardships undergone by their deceased husbands were emotively appealing. However, in cases where a widow's husband did not die in action and where she was in receipt of other funds, widows often found these appeals could fall short. Andrew, in her assessment of contemporary begging letters sent to Lady Spencer, has argued that for a letter to be truly understood it 'is necessary not only to know what the writer intended, but what the recipient understood it to intend, and how that reader

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<sup>193</sup> TNA, ADM 1/ 5220, Lady Charlotte Douglas, 1814.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

responded to the intention'.<sup>196</sup> Understanding the strategies employed by widows and the limits of the Lord Commissioner's generosity is useful in revealing how the delicate balance of obligations to reward patriotism and perform paternalism were negotiated. This is demonstrated in the case of Lady Mends, widow of Sir Robert Mends, a commodore and commander in chief of the west coast of Africa. The recipient's understanding of the intention of Lady Mends' petition was clear that she was negotiating for financial relief from the Admiralty after her fortune of £20,000 was stolen by her financial agent leaving her with £50 and debts.<sup>197</sup> However, her intention is only made evident at the final pages of her petition. Notably, to gain sympathy for her case, she constructed a petition in a way which focused foremost on her husband's physical sufferings throughout the course of his career in graphic detail and then, finally her own financial situation was explained but couched selflessly in the needs of her children over herself.

Lady Mends submitted her petition in 1824 but recounted that her husband's suffering began in 1770s. In 1779, starting his career as a midshipman she states that he lost his arm and 'suffered most severely, it having been so much shattered as to be obliged to be twice amputated'.<sup>198</sup> Promoted to lieutenant for the period 1790 to 1796, he was 'again severely wounded by the bursting of a gun from which he suffered very considerably'.<sup>199</sup> He was promoted again to the rank of post captain and during this active service after capturing a French frigate off the coast of Spain 'received a wound in the head which for a time deprived him of his senses'.<sup>200</sup> As a result, in 1814, he received a pension of £300 a year and also received recognition by the Spanish government in the form of 'the order of Charles the Third' which His Majesty granted him permission to wear as well as giving him his own knighthood.<sup>201</sup> Despite such impressive career

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<sup>196</sup> Andrew, 'Noblesse Oblige', 278.

<sup>197</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5237, Lady Elizabeth Mends, 1824.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

achievements, he returned to active service in 1821 providing ‘ardent efforts for the abolition of the slave trade’ and surveyed the west coast of Africa which with the threat of attack from the Ashanti caused ‘great anxiety and fatigue’.<sup>202</sup> His ultimate death was not physically violent, but described by Lady Mends as painful and unrelenting:

from great anxiety of mind and constant exposure to a bursting sun in the performance of his duty, was first seized with the cholera morbus, as after suffering from that complaint for two days, a fit of apoplexy put a period to his existence on the 4th of September last, after he served his country near half a century, during which period he suffered from many other wounds besides those specifically named.<sup>203</sup>

The reasoning for Lady Mends’ extensive discussion of her husband’s wounds can be inferred as two-fold. Firstly, in practical terms it was to highlight her eligibility for an exception for additional support from the Lord Commissioners, as their discretionary influence was reserved for cases in which a man’s death was attributed to active duty or where his injuries could be proved related to this. Secondly, it was a culturally significant tactic which worked successfully to boost the image of other naval figures, such as Lord Horatio Nelson. Although Nelson’s public image was brought into question by his public affair with Emma Hamilton, a letter printed in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* by Nelson’s father demonstrated that a similar extensive account of physical sacrifice and injuries could plead his case against any other shortcomings, writing:

His country seems sensible of his services; but should he ever meet with ingratitude his scars will plead his case: for at the siege of Bastia he lost an eye; at Tenerife an arm; on the memorable 14 of February, he received a severe blow on his body, which he still feels; and now a wound in his head.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, v.62, pt.2, 1806, 628.

<<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015027527491&seq=56&q1=nelson>> (Accessed via HathiTrust, 22 April 2021).



Indeed, Barbara Korte in her long-term assessment of popular memory regarding Nelson, identified that for Victorian audiences his physical sufferings were paramount in the way he was remembered, promoted in part to detract from his relations with Emma Hamilton, and argued in consequence that 'his fragility [meant] Nelson's last great effort was all the more heroic, and almost an act of martyrdom for his native land'.<sup>205</sup>

Lady Mends similarly described her husband's own martyrdom for his country as a way to deflect blame from his ill-judged financial management. Writing that as well as having the 'misfortune' to lose a 'most affectionate and attached husband', Lady Mends also lost her fortune. A 'trustee of her marriage settlement ... having abused the implicit confidence placed in him by her Husband, the whole of her Fortune consisting of £10,000, as well as about £10,000 of her husband's, which had been placed in his hands with a view to the benefits of her family had been totally and irrevocably lost'.<sup>206</sup> Her husband's pension ceased on his death also and she found she was 'forlorn and destitute'.<sup>207</sup> Although she was in receipt of a widow's pension and each of her six children were granted £10 per annum from the Compassionate Fund, she was 'sorry to say she feels herself wholly incapable of supporting her Family on the sums the Admiralty have been pleased to grant'.<sup>208</sup> Her justification for increased funds centred around her children, writing that if 'her two eldest sons ... [were to] continue in the navy will require an allowance of forty to fifty pounds a year each in addition to their pay as midshipman until they may be made lieutenant' and that £10 was not sufficient to educate her youngest son who was deaf.<sup>209</sup> Lady Mend's selfless appeal was in keeping with gendered expressions of patriotism identified by Linda Colley who argues that women had to 'present themselves as working for

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<sup>205</sup> Barbara Korte, 'Naval Heroism in the Mid-Victorian Family Magazine', in Quintin Colville and James Davey (eds.), *A New Naval History*, (Manchester, 2019), 181.

<sup>206</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5237, Lady Elizabeth Mends, 1824.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

others in a self-denying and morally superior fashion’, but by ‘proclaiming their reputed vulnerability and moral superiority – and men’s duty to respect both – [it] provided them with a means to legitimise their intervention in public affairs and a means, as well, of protecting themselves’.<sup>210</sup>

The Lord Commissioners’ response to Lady Mends’ intentions was to compare her case to precedents of support previously given. Annotations reveal three other cases were discussed in which it was found that Lord Mends had received the most generous pension in his lifetime and that the most that was offered to two or three children was £25 per annum, therefore their six children in receipt of £10 each was still in excess of this grant. Ellen Gill in her assessment of personal petitions has argued that ‘[d]espite the familial, often personal nature of petitions, the Navy Board would not become involved in matters which they deemed private’.<sup>211</sup> In this case, it is clear there were definite limits to the Admiralty’s intervention, they had provided comparatively generously towards the Mends family and could not assist with correcting their private misfortunes of being victims of fraud. A similar calculated response was also given to Mrs Peggy Eschelly, the widow of a surgeon with six children. Equally, she promoted the patriotism of her husband and even tried to link him with the popular notability of Nelson whose name ‘was particular potent in th[e] years after ‘Trafalgar’, stating her husband served with him for seven years and it was he who amputated his arm in ‘Tenerife’.<sup>212</sup> Although her husband did not die in active violent duty, she argued he was affected by his care for a number of French prisoners which was ‘most fatiguing and hazardous’, and attributed this to ‘his premature Death having fallen victim to fever in the full vigour and prime of his life’.<sup>213</sup> Nevertheless, Mrs Eschelly was unsuccessful. The Lord Commissioners wrote they could not recommend

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<sup>210</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons*, 280-281.

<sup>211</sup> Gill, *Naval Families*, 170.

<sup>212</sup> Doe, ‘Those They Left Behind’, 3; TNA, ADM 1/5219, Peggy Eschelly, 1814.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*

compliance, noting ‘Mrs Eschelly has in addition to the usual pension of £40 per annum an allowance of £5 for each of her six children from the compassionate fund’ and there was no reason for granting further funds.<sup>214</sup> Thus, there were limits to the generosity of the Admiralty towards genteel suffering.

### **Patriotism, Patronage, and Exceptions**

Although the Lord Commissioners did not reject all appeals of widows whose husbands died from ill health rather than action, Mrs Haliburton stands out as an exceptional successful case. Mrs Haliburton was the widow of a surgeon at Halifax Hospital, who served for 26 years although in the final four months of his life was required to retire due to ‘the declining state of his health’.<sup>215</sup> Mrs Haliburton’s petition was a tale of loyalty, patriotism and long-term financial sacrifice which she appealed upon the commissioners to remedy and reward in her final years.

Writing in 1809, she noted that she and her husband had proven their devoted allegiance in promoting the British ‘loyal course’ when living and serving overseas in Rhode Island during the American War of independence.<sup>216</sup> Mrs Haliburton writes the couple had both faced great financial sacrifices for their loyalty, writing:

he sacrificed all that can be held dear and at the eminent hazard of his life, the distress of his Family, and the loss of his professional Situation, together with Three Thousand five hundred Pounds in Bonds, Notes & besides a property in buildings in the Town of Newport part of which he had received with your Petitioner in marriage.<sup>217</sup>

Although, Haliburton’s services were recognised at the time by Sir Henry Clinton, who provided ‘Five Hundred Guineas as a temporary relief to the necessities of his Family’ and was appointed

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> TNA, ADM 1/4692, Susannah Haliburton, 1809.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

as ‘Surgeon of the Naval Hospital at Halifax at a salary of Twenty Shillings Sterling per day’.<sup>218</sup> This was a generous amounting to £30 month and was higher than the average pay scale for surgeons in this period which varied between £15 8s -£25 4s per month.<sup>219</sup> Nonetheless, his fortune did not last as Mrs Haliburton writes his salary was later ‘reduced to Two Hundred Pounds per annum nor was it restored to its former amount’ which she argued was accountable for her current distressed state, estimating there had been a ‘deficiency of which amounting to more than One Thousand four Hundred Pounds ... [which] could not fail in a material degree to effect the interest of his Family’.<sup>220</sup> Accusatory nationalism, especially around financial payment, as has been seen was not always a winning strategy for petitions, however, Haliburton’s petition was tempered in tone by her appeals to their patriotism, loyalty and her old age. Enclosures attached to her petition by those who had served alongside Haliburton reinforced that they were not driven by greed, as his notable reference by the H.R.H. Duke of Clarence attests:

[having] both known & frequently heard of his declining to attend cases of private medical practice, that would have brought him a very handsome remuneration from the apprehension of its interfering with the professional duties – as it is therefore wholly to his loyalty to his Sovereign, and to the conscientious discharge of his duty, that Dr Haliburton died in indigent circumstances after a service of 50 years.<sup>221</sup>

This selfless account of his service can be inferred as more appealing than petitioners whose dire financial situation was caused by personal mismanagement or fraud. Indeed, claims of excessive generosity has been identified by Andrew as a particularly useful strategy for men to explain their poverty in sentimental terms of having ‘too generous conception of mankind’.<sup>222</sup> However, Mrs Haliburton’s petition equally appealed as a tale of ‘aristocracy-on-the-rocks’ and “‘gentility” fallen

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 626.

<sup>220</sup> TNA, ADM 1/4692, Susannah Haliburton, 1809.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Andrew, ‘Noblesse Oblige’, 290.

on hard times' which could relate to manners and behaviour as well as birth.<sup>223</sup> These factors combined it was argued 'was irresistible and may be said to constitute 'influential poverty'.<sup>224</sup>

Mrs Haliburton does not make reference to having any children nor if she has any family to support her. Instead, in appealing for a pension for herself she self-deprecatingly and humbly wrote that as she was 'at the advanced Age of 63 years' meant was 'not likely to be long a Bother to the State'.<sup>225</sup> However, it is clear from her knowledge of naval policy changes and connections with illustrious and respectable royalty and members of the navy, she was fully imbedded in elite naval circles. Her petition reinforced her eligibility for a pension by quoting her awareness of their own policy writing:

His Majesty's order in the council of the 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1805 – it is directed in cases of special service, and even otherwise – 'That the Widows of Physicians and surgeons shall be allowed such pension as the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty shall think proper to grant'.<sup>226</sup>

A significant asset to her petition was her ability to enclose five letters of support for her case by notable supporters including, H.R.H. Duke of Clarence, H.R.H. Duke of Kent, The Hon. Admiral Digby, Sir Andrew Hammond and Sir Rupert George. Unlike Lady Douglas who relied solely on copies of correspondence relating to her husband written at the time of his active duty, Mrs Haliburton had connections to get updated reflections on his character and service which promoted 'superior medical and surgical knowledge'.<sup>227</sup> Importantly, these recommendations were not restricted to her husband as Edward, H.R.H. Duke of Clarence, who 'under my hand and seal at Kensington Palace' directly recommended as a widow 'peculiarly deserving of their

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> J. M. Bourne, *Patronage and Society in Nineteenth-Century England* (London, 1986), cited in *Ibid*, 290.

<sup>225</sup> TNA, ADM 1/4692, Susannah Haliburton, 1809.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

favourable consideration'.<sup>228</sup> Ultimately, this combination of patriotism, humble tone, connections and knowledge worked in Mrs Haliburton's favour as she was granted £80 per annum.

### **Conclusion**

All petitioners regardless of their class or success were united in the view that their status as a naval widow meant they expected assistance for their often-hidden work which they provided on shore in raising a family and caring for their husband. Their applications for this relief were a lifetime's gathering of knowledge and networking.

While the naval pension system placed pressure on women to act independently, it was rare that any woman would act entirely alone. Although a petition might be personally written and signed, its content reveals widespread networking and research. This is evident in widows' references to their awareness of policy change and to their knowledge of specific rules of entitlement as well as precedents through their shared observations of the outcomes of other applicants. Widows' references to advice from naval officers either written into their petitions or through their inclusion as accompanying letters provide further evidence for the collaborative nature of petitioning. These relationships were essential as they enabled widows to provide a full account of their husband's service even before their marriage enabling them to corroborate their patriotic appeals and confirm their own deservingness.

This close assessment of the pension indexes, which recorded applications from across the social spectrum, further reinforces the existence of class-based distinctions. Petitions reveal further the starkly different treatment and language used by naval clerks when interacting with petitioners of different social rank. Petitioners whose husbands were below the position of an officer often

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

received one-line answers of ‘cannot comply’ or ‘nothing can be done’ and there is less evidence of further investigation to possible precedents and with limited words of regret.<sup>229</sup> The fifty-five dockyard workers’ widows who collectively petitioned were taken note of but dismissed as not being ‘gentlewomen’.<sup>230</sup> By contrast, legislation changes unfavourable to officers’ widows brought words of sympathy for the ‘poor Ladies who are suffering’ and attempted to negotiate with the Treasury.<sup>231</sup> The widows of officers tended to receive more comments on whether their case had precedents or not and could even be redirected to other forms of charity.

However, despite these class-based challenges a comparison of widows across the social spectrum does reveal that the circumstances of how their husbands died could be a great equaliser among petitioning widows. If their husband died in action it allowed them to apply to the discretion of the Lord Commissioners regardless of class or rank. In cases where the cause of death was not in action but where the petitioner appealed for an exception, all petitioners faced the challenge of how to present their husband’s wider service contributions and make appeals for their own suffering and patriotism. Middle and upper-class widows had an advantage in their access to patronage and while some distressed accounts of ‘aristocracy-on-the-rocks’ were appealing this was no guarantee of success as if a petitioner was too expectant or if their financial circumstances were due to private mismanagement this could act against them.<sup>232</sup> Thus, while widows were not always treated equally there is merit in analysing widows’ cases collectively to understand the extent and different forms of discretion employed by the Lord Commissioners and naval clerks.

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<sup>229</sup> TNA ADM 1/5208, Ann Guscote, 1809; ADM 1/5030, Jane Stewart, 1824.

<sup>230</sup> TNA, ADM 6/386, ‘The Petition of 55 Widows of warrant officers’, 1812.

<sup>231</sup> TNA, ADM 7/615, Case 70 ‘Widow’s pensions refused’, 1831-1840.

<sup>232</sup> Andrew, ‘Noblesse Oblige’, 290.

This chapter has focused on how widows' petitions can reveal agency and negotiation styles across a wide range of social classes. However, the material here represents just a small fraction of overall widow petitions for pensions of which there are hundreds of thousands. Petitions by the widows of ordinary sailors and warrant officers, are less visible in the index due to issues of eligibility which changed over time. However, a widow's pension was not the only means of support that could be applied for. To further our understanding of the practical survival strategies of maritime lone women it is necessary to contextualise these examples against other petitioning strategies. The following chapter will build on the above discussion by exploring how women's appeals on behalf of their children can reveal greater insights into practical familial survival strategies often omitted in initial petitions for a widow's pension.



### Chapter 3: Familial Petitioning

This chapter explores maternal and familial petitions for pensions and relief to reveal new insights into the long-term financial survival strategies of naval families. It will also highlight the important role of mothers as matriarchs to guide and support the interests of their children and will demonstrate how close familial bonds provided families with opportunities to successfully adapt to the loss of a breadwinner. The chapter will explore how the expectations, appeals, and strategies of mothers altered depending on the gender of their children to tease out different power dynamics and assess how this affected their survival as lone women. Therefore, it focuses on three key relationships for lone women – those between mothers and daughters, mothers and sons, and brothers and sisters. It will also evaluate whether strategies and modes of appeal differed between social classes and whether their opportunities for support were also shaped by this, or if exceptions were possible.

Additionally, it will develop the growing scholarship highlighted in the historiography which focuses on uncovering the role of women and the family to provide a fuller understanding of the wider economy and experience in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. This chapter supports De Bellaigue's findings that economic histories which focus on the traditional male breadwinner and the rise of the individual 'play down internal power dynamics and gendered hierarchies within families, and tend to deny agency to those involved, particularly under-recognising women's ability to influence decisions about family life'.<sup>1</sup> It will explore petitions from across the social spectrum to deepen understandings of the familial and financial relationships of those without a traditional breadwinner in maritime communities and assess the role of the Admiralty in shaping wider familial relationships through its extension of charity to

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<sup>1</sup> De Bellaigue, 'Great Expectations?', 30.

children and siblings. It will also provide insights into how naval charity shaped society by encouraging matriarchal influence and cultivating strong familial interdependence.

The appeal of motherhood gained important cultural prominence from the eighteenth to mid nineteenth century. Joanne Bailey has argued that a powerful “cult of maternity” existed which ‘essentialised the maternal role, raised the value of motherhood and made mothers central to their children’s welfare’.<sup>2</sup> Petitioners also played heavily upon this emotional strategy and actively promoted their motherhood. However, the generosity of charitable institutions towards lone women and their children varied, which affected their ability to adapt and maintain their social status. The wives of convicts, as discussed in chapter one, drew upon this maternal rhetoric to negotiate relief with the Poor Law authorities, although they often struggled to keep their family together if their children were above the age of nurture and could be sent to the workhouse. By contrast, naval mothers were at an advantage in their negotiations with the Admiralty as more extensive charity was available and, as Ellen Gill notes, they were more readily recognised as the ‘direct producers of future sailors’, thus possessing a ‘particular and specific importance to the nation’.<sup>3</sup> The Admiralty made comparatively generous provision, in theory, for the dependants of deceased sailors through the Compassionate Fund and Greenwich Hospital School. The former was unique in providing financial support for children into adulthood rather than short-term emergency relief. The Admiralty’s charity went a step further than the Poor Law or Home Office in attempting to compensate the financial loss of a male breadwinner and its charitable system and methods of appeal had broad implications for the wider family. However, as with naval widows’ pensions, not all applicants were successful, and discretion played a significant factor in decision-making. Nonetheless, such provision gave naval lone women an additional opportunity

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<sup>2</sup> Claudia Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England* (London, 2007), 47, cited in Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England, 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity and Generation* (Oxford, 2012), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Gill, *Naval Families*, 50.

to petition a uniquely receptive audience for relief, whether for themselves as mothers or for their children.

It is possible to uncover the agency of naval mothers who petitioned for relief, education, and jobs for their children to shape their careers and prospects. The relationships between mothers and daughters, as will be seen, were strongly intertwined, often living, working, and petitioning together. Mothers shared with their daughters their knowledge and experience of previous interactions with naval officials and assisted them practically through the sharing of pensions, regardless of Admiralty approval. Sons often took on a specific role as a replacement breadwinner, supporting their mothers and sisters, proving essential to how the family recovered financially. Familial petitions also helped to shape the Admiralty's charitable policy by extending the grant of naval pensions to mothers from 1819 in cases where their sons had not left a widow or children, and the mother was in distressed circumstances.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, in 1824, sisters who were deemed exceptionally deserving were also made eligible to receive a pension.<sup>5</sup> Thus, familial and financial links, particularly in relation to women, were further reinforced by the Admiralty and utilised by lone women at multiple points in their lifecycle.

Within existing scholarship, the influence and agency of maritime matriarchs through child-raising and networking efforts have been overlooked. Gill, for example, has argued for the importance of fathers in providing patronage to aid their sons' careers and instructing them from afar through letter writing.<sup>6</sup> However, she is less generous in her analysis of the influence of mothers. Gill relies on the written correspondence of both commanders and fathers, reiterating male sentiments that women were often perceived as overly 'anxious', in need of careful

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<sup>4</sup> TNA, ADM 12/194, Digest 62-104, 'Pensions to widows and parents of officers', 1819.

<sup>5</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5237, Memorial on pension policy, 1824.

<sup>6</sup> Ellen Gill, "'Children of the service': paternalism, patronage and friendship in the Georgian navy', *Journal for Maritime Research*, 15.2 (2013), 149-156.

reassurance, and occasionally chastised that they should not exaggerate their sons' merits.<sup>7</sup> Her research on selected elite families does not include the letters written by mothers nor does she fully explore the intent with which mothers wrote to naval officials. However, gendered rhetoric in letter writing requires more critical analysis. Whiting, in her analysis of gender and petitioning in the seventeenth-century, argues for the importance of not accepting language at face value, finding that 'women represented themselves as the "weaker vessel" precisely to enable their own public speech'.<sup>8</sup> The action of writing had specific intent as women petitioners 'were not merely expressing themselves in a minor literary genre ... they were engaging with a vigorous and effective discourse of power'.<sup>9</sup> Chalus' work on eighteenth-century elite women and patronage further reinforces the argument that the impact of women's writing should not be underestimated. Her work has identified, in the context of the political elite, that patronage was a family affair in which women successfully participated through their appeals for themselves and family.<sup>10</sup> This chapter applies Chalus' findings to naval communities in the nineteenth century to show a continuation of such practices outside of the political elite. Naval mothers took up their pens to advance the interests of their children and for their own survival to hold the Admiralty to account for its advertised promises to provide for dependants left behind.

### **Familial Naval Charity**

The Admiralty had several branches of naval charity created to support families, but the administration of it was bound in discretion. In 1809, Parliament legislated for a Compassionate Fund for the relief of orphans and dependants of naval officers killed in action. From the outset, the management of this fund was at the discretion of the naval authorities as the 'bill [was] to enable the board of the Admiralty to select such objects as were properly entitled to aid from the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 151-52.

<sup>8</sup> Whiting, *Women and Petitioning*, 26.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>10</sup> Chalus, *Elite Women*, 127.

compassionate fund: to allow them such sums as they should think fit'.<sup>11</sup> The Greenwich Hospital School, whose origins dated from 1694, was, by the nineteenth century, an institution open to the children of ordinary sailors as well as officers, providing them with board and education, although a two-tier class system of an upper and lower school existed.<sup>12</sup> The school accommodated 700 boys and 200 girls and, similarly to other forms of charity, required petitions for entry, and the selection process, while having a published list of priority applicants, was equally discretionary.<sup>13</sup> The opportunity exists for future scholarship to compare the findings of this chapter, based on familial petitioning strategies for pension, to the related phenomenon of petitions for support at a naval institution. The applications to the Greenwich Hospital School are outside the scope of this thesis which will instead focus on petitions for pension allowances to dependants to explore how family finances were interconnected. The petitions of ordinary sailors' dependants will be explored through poor law and maternal pension material to demonstrate that widows' pensions were often shared in ways not expected by the Admiralty and provide a comparative context for the treatment of petitioners of differing wealth and status.

The Compassionate Fund, which provided monetary grants, was a desirable form of relief allowing recipients more freedom in how they chose to spend the money and keep their family together. Eligibility varied over time. For example, in 1829, an orphaned child of an assistant surgeon was rejected on grounds that her father's rank did not make her eligible; however, by 1849, the daughter of a surgeon was granted an allowance of £10 once she had outlined the services of her relatives.<sup>14</sup> From a sample of the pension index entries for 'pensions to the children of officers', spanning between 1794 and 1849 and assessed at five-year intervals, 35% of

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<sup>11</sup> Widows Of Navy Officers' Pension Bill, House of Lords Debates, 28 Feb. 1809, vol 12, col 1136.

<sup>12</sup> H. D. Turner, *The Cradle of The Navy: The Story of the Royal Hospital School at Greenwich and at Holbrook, 1694-1988* (York, 1990), 43.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> TNA, ADM 12/263 (1829); ADM 12/511 (1849).

applications were successfully granted with amounts ranging between £10 and £50 per child.<sup>15</sup> The amounts granted were significant and could help a widowed mother, such as Caroline Woodridge to ‘better support and educate’ her children without drawing on her own pension.<sup>16</sup> A comparable naval family, the Grants, whose father was a purser in the navy, spent £20 per annum sending his daughter to a respectable school.<sup>17</sup> On average, the most common amount granted to children was £25 per annum, allowing them an education and additional funds for clothing and other consumer goods.

The Compassionate Fund was not limited to school years, but supported boys until eighteen and girls until they were either twenty-one or married.<sup>18</sup> An exception to this rule was whether they were ‘afflicted with any infirmity’ which could entitle them to longer relief.<sup>19</sup> For all claimants, it was stated that ‘a distinct condition’ was that ‘allowances are only to be given in cases of real distress’.<sup>20</sup> However, the condition that the cases must be in ‘real distress’ was a subjective assessment, as the recipients were all offspring of commissioned and warrant officers and would likely have been in a better financial position than the widows and children of ordinary sailors. Internal marginalia in the index suggests that ‘distress’ did not necessarily correlate to financial distress as, in 1839, when a list was requested for the ‘statement of [the] amount of income to which the claimants are to declare’, a handwritten response replied to state that ‘no rule exists on the subject each case must be submitted for their Lordships decision’.<sup>21</sup> As each case was treated individually and only limited annotations of outcomes exist, it is difficult to uncover the decision-

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<sup>15</sup> TNA, ADM 12/63 (1794); ADM 12/83 (1799); ADM 12/111 (1804); ADM 12/139 (1809); ADM 12/168 (1814); ADM 12/194 (1819); ADM 12/224 (1824); ADM 12/263 (1829); ADM 12/300 (1834); ADM 12/360 (1839); ADM 12/431 (1844); ADM 12/511 (1849). Collectively 49 applications were made, 17 were successful, 22 rejected and 10 unknown outcomes. It is important to note that the index does not capture all applications.

<sup>16</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5221, Caroline Woolridge, 1814.

<sup>17</sup> RMG, GRT/23, Julia Grant to her father Samuel Grant, Purser, 1. Jan. 1802.

<sup>18</sup> J. Allen and C. Haultain, ‘Compassionate Allowances’, in *The New Navy List, compiled by C. Haultain, K. H. Commander, Royal Navy* (London, 1844), 340.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> TNA, ADM 12/360 (1839).

making process of the Lord Commissioners. However, through assessment of applications and personal petitions, it is possible to gain insights into what petitioners considered most likely to appeal positively.

Petitioners and their supporters mirrored the positive language of officials to promote themselves as exceptional cases deserving of support. For example, Mary Rhodes, a purser's widow who lost her husband on his return to England in a private vessel, was identified as 'a real object of charity' by an official at Milford Yard after being described as 'really destitute and in the worst kind of way – that of keeping up a Genteel appearance with five small children'.<sup>22</sup> Her father had also written to the Admiralty eight months earlier from Deptford Yard on behalf of his daughter who he described as being 'left with five small children the eldest not more than seven years old'.<sup>23</sup> Her circumstances of being a young single mother, the decline in her social mobility while trying to keep up appearances, and her connections with local yards worked in Mary Rhodes' favour. The Milford Yard official wrote to the Admiralty for instructions to expedite the pension application process, writing:

Pray what is to be done about the compassionate Fund – the widow here spoken of is a real object of charity. Should I have some blank forms for widows – as clerk of the check here – if so how am I to procure them?<sup>24</sup>

It is notable that her genteel suffering and social decline was identified as what made her a 'real' object of distress.<sup>25</sup> Perceptions among petitioners regarding poverty were subjective, but so too were institutional discernments of what constituted distress. By comparison, Elizabeth Adcock, a pauper whose husband was a soldier stationed in America, petitioned the Poor Law Commissioners for relief after her husband did not return as promised to meet her in Newcastle.

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<sup>22</sup> TNA, ADM 6/386, Mary Rhodes, 1812.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. (Emphasis in original).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

After spending three months in the workhouse with her two children in her husband's parish of Donnington, Lincolnshire, her father paid for her to return to him in Newcastle where she resided for three years. Applying again for local poor law relief to return to her husband's place of residence, Gateshead Union refused to fund more than half her journey. In correspondence between the Poor Law Commissioners and Gateshead Union officials, the latter undertook a detailed investigation into the family finances to justify that Mrs Adcock was not deserving of support. They argued that, as she resided with her family, she was not in need of support as her father 'has a pension of 1/10 per day [and] her brother earns 4/ per week – and she earned last week 3/ making the aggregate income of the family 19/10 for the past week'.<sup>26</sup> Mrs Adcock makes no reference to her family's support in her original petition, therefore it was the inference of the local guardians that her remaining male relatives would support her in the absence of her husband. Overall, they argued that 'they do not consider that she had claim upon them for any assistance there being no destitution and [her] living with her father'.<sup>27</sup> It is significant in both cases that Mrs Rhodes and Mrs Adcock had some familial support and young children, yet their deservingness and distress in the eyes of the authorities varied significantly. Although motherhood was acknowledged as a universal experience, the right relief was not guaranteed. For maritime mothers, the networks they cultivated to help support their appeals and the careful way they justified their existing support and survival strategies as lone women, as will be seen, were important factors in their success.

### **Financial Expectations of Elite Mothers and Daughters**

Mothers petitioning for pensions for their daughters feature significantly in the index, accounting for 43 requests compared to 4 for sons, revealing that the fortunes of mothers and daughters

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<sup>26</sup> TNA, ADM 12/3068, 113a/1842, William Rowntree, clerk to Gateshead Union, to the PLC, 31 May 1842. (Emphasis in original).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.



were closely connected.<sup>28</sup> Maritime mothers, particularly from the upper classes, expected that, while they were living, their daughters would be provided for, not by sharing their own pensions, but through the Admiralty separately granting allowances to ensure future stability. Mary Balderston, for example, questioned that without the Admiralty's additional help for her daughters 'what a tender Mother's affection can spare of her Widows Pension of Forty Pounds a year, which is now their only remaining source of subsistence'.<sup>29</sup> This was an expectation also shared by daughters, particularly those of middling status. Although a charitable system was in place through the Compassionate Fund, there remained a grey area for mothers to network privately and utilise their patronage to request pensions for their daughters when petitioning for themselves as widows, regardless of the cause of death of their husbands. Widowed mothers, as will be seen, took advantage of differing charitable policy rules within the Admiralty, appealing emotionally to the highest powers, including royalty, for the security of their daughters, utilising patronage in an attempt to secure finances for their future.

Frances Prideaux, formerly the widow of Captain Courtney, who petitioned in 1804, five years prior to the establishment of the Compassionate Fund, illustrates that the financial relationships between mothers and daughters were considered an extension of each other. Mrs Prideaux's petition also highlights the importance of networks and patronage in gaining exceptions for her daughters. She appealed for a pension for her children, Frances and Mary Courtney, following the death of her second husband, whose mismanagement of his will through inadequate witnesses meant that they were left without inheritance.<sup>30</sup> Her petitioning letter, although specific to her circumstances, was in keeping with the formula utilised by political elite women for patronage in the eighteenth century, as identified by Chalus. These women, Chalus argues, believed they were 'owed patronage on personal and familial grounds' and made cases for

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<sup>28</sup> Sample created using ADM 12 index across, 1794-1849 taken at five-year intervals.

<sup>29</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5208, Mary Balderston, 1809.

<sup>30</sup> TNA, ADM 1/4979, Widow of Captain Courtney, 1804.

themselves and their children using a combination of factors ‘including rank, lineage, honour, loyalty, and service’.<sup>31</sup> These strategies were also used by naval widows such as Mrs Prideaux, and her letter mirrors the similar structure identified by Chalus of ‘opening with a brief apology for troubling the reader, followed by a passage setting out the writer’s parentage and any pre-existing connexions with socially or politically important people (especially the reader)’.<sup>32</sup> Mrs Prideaux, after her standard rhetorical apologies to the reader, reminds her intended recipient, Viscount Melville, the recently-appointed First Lord of the Admiralty, of their prior acquaintance and his previous knowledge of her requests by further reminding him of an ‘old subject which you were so kind to interest yourself much about two or three years ago – It is my Lord to grant my late pension to my two daughters Frances & Mary Courtney, as it is now in your power’.<sup>33</sup> Calling upon his friendship and advertising her knowledge of his recent rise to a position of influence, she supported her claims by similarly name-dropping many of her social connections. These included ‘Lord Keith’ described as a ‘kind friend’ who advised her to write, alongside providing detailed reference to her friendship with the ‘kind heart[ed]’ Miss Stuart Wortley, which more importantly pointed to the support of her ‘considerable Father Mr Stuart Wortley [who] will back my application to your Lordship’.<sup>34</sup> Chalus has argued that the patronage system was ‘eminently suited to women, especially women of the political elite’ as it ‘worked primarily through personal contact, connexion, and persuasion’.<sup>35</sup> Mrs Prideaux’s list of social connections with influential statesmen and elite women certainly suggested she was as adept as other political elite women in appealing for their family interests. Mrs Prideaux further supported her claims to the Admiralty through reference to her first husband’s patriotic service, promoting him as having ‘distinguished himself to the last’.<sup>36</sup> The outcome of her daughters receiving a pension is

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<sup>31</sup> Chalus, *Elite Women*, 106.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 116.

<sup>33</sup> TNA, ADM 1/4979, Widow of Captain Courtney, 1804.

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

<sup>35</sup> Chalus, *Elite Women*, 111-112.

<sup>36</sup> TNA, ADM 1/4979, Widow of Captain Courtney, 1804.

unknown; however, she did receive the promising response of being invited to present a ‘memorial to the King in Council for the continuance of her pension’.<sup>37</sup>

Early nineteenth-century monarchs received naval petitions directly at various courts four times a year when they sat in council with the Lords Commissioners and were often generous in their support of selected widows and dependants. Outside of the official Admiralty petitioning process, naval widows could also receive direct pensions from the royal family. Sally Kelly, widow of a vice admiral, for example, received a favourable gift from the Prince Regent in 1811 of a lifetime pension worth £100 for herself and daughter including any future dependants.<sup>38</sup> The shared pension was processed by the Treasury and, although granted as a ‘compliment for the long services of Admiral Kelly’, did not prevent her from also expecting a pension direct from the Admiralty.<sup>39</sup> In political petitions in the same period, Huzzey and Miller have identified that petitioners, such as London shipwrights left destitute after the American Revolutionary War, addressed the monarch alongside other parliamentary institutions as a dual strategy to encourage an active response.<sup>40</sup> However, for personal petitioning, this dual strategy to obtain funds from different institutions led to financial disagreements between the Admiralty and Treasury. Mrs Kelly’s right to a dual naval pension was queried by the Admiralty as it was understood that ‘no widow can be reputed a proper object who has a pension from any other sources, of greater amount than the sum allowed from the charity’.<sup>41</sup> The terms of the pension granted by the Prince Regent was that it would be equally shared between Mrs Kelly and her daughter and, fortunately, the naval commissioner’s deliberation ‘on the construction of the words of the grant’ were read favourably and considered under £80 thus allowing her the additional naval pension.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> TNA, ADM 6/386, Sally Kelly, 1812.

<sup>39</sup> TNA, ADM 6/388, Sally Kelly, 1815.

<sup>40</sup> Huzzey and Miller, ‘The Politics of Petitioning’, 236.

<sup>41</sup> TNA, ADM 6/386, Sally Kelly, 1812.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

However, this was not the final verdict on her case, which was considered again in 1815 when pension rates were increased. The Admiralty was once again in disagreement with the Treasury over the dual pensions ‘which is to charge the public £120 per annum more than is at present paid’.<sup>43</sup> Forced to choose between different institutional support, a disgruntled Mrs Kelly provided insight into her financial relationship with her daughter, informing the Admiralty that, as her daughter did not receive a pension from them, she ‘made over to her my share of the voluntary gift of His Royal Highness’.<sup>44</sup> Her letter ended with the curt statement that ‘I assure you Gentlemen had my income, not been a most limited one, I should never have given you this trouble’.<sup>45</sup> Although the widow of a vice-admiral and in receipt of one of the highest pensions, nonetheless her expectations for the support of herself and daughter remained high. In life, her husband provided for the family, not just through his salary but through prize money, which was where admirals ‘could really make their fortunes’.<sup>46</sup>

Prize money was a reward to the crews for the value of captured enemy vessels, colloquially known as a ‘golden harvest’ and was a significant enticement to face dangers at sea.<sup>47</sup> In the period in which Admiral Kelly served, ‘between 1803 and 1810 the ships of the Navy on home stations were taking about £1 million a year in prizes’ of which a commander was entitled to eighth of each of his ships’ prizes.<sup>48</sup> Thus, Admiral Kelly had the potential to amass a fortune into the tens of thousands, although he would have significant expenses which came with his rank.<sup>49</sup> As a widow, Mrs Kelly would not be in receipt of such a large income again. However,

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> TNA, ADM 6/388, Sally Kelly, 1815.

<sup>46</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 523.

<sup>47</sup> Brain Southam, *Jane Austen and the Navy* (London, 2000), 121.

<sup>48</sup> Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 522.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 524. Rodger finds that with rank came additional expenses, as ‘admirals had to feed and entertain their staff and numerous official visitors’. Admiral Keith, for example, from 1799-1801 spent £8,000 annually on entertainment which was four times his pay.

she did receive a favourable response from the Treasury which stated that the gift from the Prince Regent was ‘not intended to deprive her of any other pension or allowance to which she would have been entitled’ and informed the Admiralty that they would create a warrant for the Prince Regent to cancel the pension and apply it only to her daughter.<sup>50</sup> For widows and their daughters, financial support was discretionary and aided by connections and status, but it was also subject to institutional interpretation to which not all women were effectively able to appeal.

### **Financial Reliance of Middling Daughters on Mothers**

Whether or not mothers and daughters received separate pensions, the reality, especially among the middling classes, was that daughters were often financially reliant on sharing their mothers’ pensions. However, the Admiralty rarely viewed this sharing of pensions positively and, unlike elite petitioners with royal connections, adult daughters’ appeals for support were difficult to negotiate. This difficulty is demonstrated, in 1814, by serial petitioners Lettice and Anne Bevians, daughters of a lieutenant. The Bevians daughters petitioned the Prince Regent for a pension, writing that, despite their father’s sixty years of service, he was not able to prepare his family financially and his ‘premature death [of drowning] of course subjected them to inevitable distress’.<sup>51</sup> The Bevians daughters appealed that, unlike others, they were not able to share in their mother’s pension, stating, ‘as their widow mother has no other sources of support but that of the usual limited pension ... your poor Petitioners could derive little or no benefit from their aged Parent’.<sup>52</sup> Their sense of entitlement suggests a common expectation for adult daughters to be financially dependent on their mothers in the long-term. Jane Humphries, in her assessment of employment opportunities for girls in the nineteenth-century, confirmed that they had ‘less education’, ‘narrower job opportunities’, and that their ‘vulnerability to sexual predation [in the

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<sup>50</sup> TNA, ADM 6/386, Sally Kelly, 1812.

<sup>51</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5220, Lettice and Anne Bevians, 1814.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

workplace] ... constrained their independence and limited how they lived their lives'.<sup>53</sup>

Consequently, girls' relationships with their mothers were often close as their first and most formative roles were often to work alongside them in the home. Through this experience, Humphries, in her assessment of female memoirs, argues that girls learned survival tactics at home through observing their mothers 'negotiate support from ... sometimes begrudging breadwinners, stretch resources to cover needs, seize opportunities to augment resources'.<sup>54</sup> In the Bevians daughter's petitioning letter, there was a similar sense of shared sufferings alongside their mother and their limited opportunities are evident in appeals to the Prince Regent to recognise that they:

have struggled hard against the rude tide of adversity ... and which for the long period of 12 years must clearly prove that they have not presumed to press their case while a ray of hope remained and until they have been reduced to the greatest extremity.<sup>55</sup>

In submitting their petition to the Prince Regent, they employed flattery that they had 'repeatedly heard of your Royal Highness's humanity and natural inclination'.<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately, unlike other petitioners, they were not able to present their missive personally and, while the covering letter states it had been read by the Prince Regent in Council, their request would be referred to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty for their opinion. Notably, despite their claims of waiting twelve years, a naval clerk responded that the 'case of these ladies has been stated and refused twice now on the compassionate list' and 'there is no instance of a pension being granted to the daughters of Lieutenants'.<sup>57</sup> Whether these two previous applications were made by the mother or her daughters is unclear, but it is evident that the campaigns of both to seize any further financial opportunities was a long-term occupation.

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<sup>53</sup> Jane Humphries, 'Girls and their families in an era of economic change', *Continuity and Change*, 35 (2020), 312.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5220, Lettice and Anne Bevians, 1814.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

The Bevians daughters were not unique in their appeals and reliance on their mother as the petitions of the orphaned Payzant daughters attest. Mary and Susannah Payzant petitioned Viscount Melville in 1819 for a continuation of their allowance from the Compassionate Fund after the loss of their widowed mother. Their father, ‘a second lieutenant of the marines’, had died in action, and they had since his death been reliant on sharing their mother’s pension. They recounted that they ‘had the Compassionate During their mothers life But at her Decease they would not grant it us as it was not separated on us saying we had no Right to it and there was new Rules’.<sup>58</sup> To elicit sympathy for their case, the Payzant daughters emotively appealed to their age and vulnerability, writing that ‘they are now advanced in years and their sight fails them they have it not in their power to provide for themselves’.<sup>59</sup> Ottaway has argued that in the eighteenth century the concept of retirement, especially for the poor, did not exist and there was an expectation that individuals were to save for their ‘evening days’ and in cases of no savings ‘the elderly were supposed to work up to and, as much as possible, through their lasts years of debility’.<sup>60</sup> Gill, too, has identified that naval ‘widows, particularly elderly widows, were ... seen as a burden and were often subject to criticism and ridicule’ and ‘old age was not a guaranteed road to support from the Board’.<sup>61</sup> In the cases of aged spinster daughters, such as the Payzants, judgment received from the War Office under Lord Palmerston remained firm. The War Office repeated that the Payzant daughters were not eligible, noting that the allowance of £12 a year was ‘specially granted to the widow’ and that ‘allowances are not under any circumstances given to the relatives of marine officers’.<sup>62</sup> The Royal Marines, treated as a separate branch of the Royal Navy, disadvantaged the Payzant daughters as they were outside the influence of the Admiralty.

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<sup>58</sup> TNA, ADM 1/3352, Mary and Susannah Payzant, 1819.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ottaway, *The Decline of Life*, 9.

<sup>61</sup> Gill, *Naval Families*, 212.

<sup>62</sup> TNA, ADM 1/4342, Mary and Susannah Payzant, 1819.

Nevertheless, their appeals to the Admiralty demonstrate that shared financial survival, whether authorised or not, was a common strategy for lone women and their daughters.

Other naval daughters resorted to the extreme of identity fraud to prevent themselves being cut off from the Admiralty's charity, although they did so at great risk of criminal prosecution.

Frances Ward, for example, in 1814, was uncovered as having illegally impersonated her deceased mother for two years to draw her pension and was sentenced to trial by the Admiralty.

In her petition for clemency, she implored mercy as a mother herself, writing that she had a 'young family' of '4 children and a sick husband her youngest child at the breast is now in Gaol with her [and her] other child a girl has an impediment in her speech which renders her a pitiable object of Humanity'.<sup>63</sup> Admitting to her crime, she promised that 'no poverty or distress of any

kind shall tempt her to infringe the Laws again'.<sup>64</sup> Financial identity fraud was a serious offence and, in a comparative case, a man who assumed the identity of a deceased sailor to claim his prize money received a death sentence.<sup>65</sup> Shoemaker, in his assessment of death sentences and pardoning of capital crimes, has argued that gender was a significant factor in penal outcomes.

Men, Shoemaker finds, 'were more likely to be executed while, in comparison, women were more likely to be imprisoned or given a free pardon'.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, he acknowledges the difficulty in explaining definitively that gender was the reason for leniency 'because gender was so fundamental an aspect of judicial practice that it was, paradoxically, never mentioned in justification of mercy or pardons'.<sup>67</sup> However, in the case of Mrs Ward, internal correspondence from the Admiralty agent does reveal that her status as a mother shaped the chairman's decision-making. Charles Bicknell, Admiralty agent, reported that Mrs Ward was impressed with the

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<sup>63</sup> TNA, ADM 6, Frances Ward, 1814.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, t18030420-39, Trial of William Boulton, April 1803. ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), accessed 28 April 2023).

<sup>66</sup> Shoemaker, 'Sparing the Noose', 249.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 250.



seriousness of her crime and was ‘in Hysterical fits’ at her trial.<sup>68</sup> In response, the chairman took ‘into consideration her distressed situation, the circumstances of her having four children, one infant in arms, and her being in a state of pregnancy, adjudged her, in addition to the imprisonment she had already suffered, to be further confined for the space of 14 days only’.<sup>69</sup> The appeals to motherhood can be seen to have saved her life.

### **Collective Appeals to Motherhood**

Mothers and daughters could also come to each other’s aid through petitions when in conflict with the Admiralty. Adult daughters utilised their close personal and financial relationships as a strategy to make their petitions more appealing by elaborating on the pressures and deservingness of motherhood from an intergenerational perspective. For example, Mrs Elizabeth Carter-Dormer sought the support of her mother after her initial petition for a widow’s pension was rejected due to new eligibility rules in 1830, as her husband had only served seven out of the required ten years in his post as an officer. However, Mrs Carter-Dormer’s mother, who was also a widow, intervened to have her case reconsidered. The content of her petition was personal and, while she confirmed her daughter’s sufferings by quoting extracts of her original petition, she also explained how they were adding pressure to her own circumstances, writing that her daughter ‘must naturally look up to me for her future support, and [I] have had myself to contend with a large family of eleven children four of which are entirely unprovided for at the time, [which] will make it bear very heavy on my means’.<sup>70</sup>

This account of their interconnected sufferings, her daughter’s natural reliance upon her, and her inability to help due to her own large family utilises two maternal linguistic strategies to

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<sup>68</sup> TNA, ADM 6, Frances Ward, 1814.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> TNA, ADM 7/615, Elizabeth Carter-Dormer, 1836.

emphasise the deservingness of their situation. Firstly, the widowed matriarch emphasised her stretched but otherwise good management of her large family. While she underlined that four of her children were directly dependent to illustrate the strain on her resources and justify the financial limitations of supporting her daughter, it is notable that she does not use the language of distress or claim a complete lack of provisions to support her family. Instead of a distressed dependence, she presents herself in keeping with what Bailey has termed a 'prudent mother'.<sup>71</sup> This was a persona adopted by genteel middling women whose maternal skills were expressed through focusing upon their 'good management in catering for the needs of a family' which included 'good domestic management, sound financial acumen centred on thrift and economy, and industriousness'.<sup>72</sup> The widowed mother's knowledge of how much she can financially bear and her daughter's 'natural' reaction to look to her for advice implies a sound knowledge of her family's financial management.<sup>73</sup> Quoting her daughter's letter directly also demonstrates the closeness of their relationship. For Mrs Carter-Dormer, a reiteration of her case by her mother can be seen to support the reputation of her good character which was considered in the nineteenth century as a 'key lubricant for business and qualities which were valued as a public good'.<sup>74</sup> Presenting such an image of a prudent mother and distressed daughter sought to create a sense of guilt on behalf of the Admiralty for not assisting two deserving widows. King et al. in their assessment of female pauper letters identify that women utilised rhetoric regarding their family care, claims to humanity, and the kindness of the reader to create the 'sense that male respondents should feel guilty about the circumstances that writers described' and claim this as being particularly 'palpable, even if no female writer actually asserts it'.<sup>75</sup> This strategy received a positive response from an unnamed clerk who wrote in the margins that Mrs Carter-Dormer

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<sup>71</sup> Bailey, *Parenting in England*, 68.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> TNA, ADM 7/615, Elizabeth Carter-Dormer, 1836.

<sup>74</sup> De Bellaigue, 'Great Expectations?', 33.

<sup>75</sup> Steve King et al., *In Their Own Write*, 211.

made a 'fair case' and reiterated the intergenerational reliance, demonstrating that stretched familial financial support was a factor in decision-making.<sup>76</sup>

Mothers, too, relied on their daughters to assist in their petitioning efforts. Elizabeth Whitaker, for example, utilised the support of her daughter to appeal her pension rejection in 1819. Mrs Whitaker, formerly widow O'Hara, was rejected on grounds of attempting to commit pension fraud as she applied for a pension after she remarried. Similarly to Elizabeth Carter-Dormer, her petition was caught in a moment of significant rule changes. In 1819, the Prince Regent made an announcement which was reproduced by the Admiralty Office's advertisement in the *London Gazette*, informing widows of commissioned and warrant officers that they could 'without restriction' receive a pension 'notwithstanding they now are, or may have been remarried'.<sup>77</sup> Mrs Whitaker applied for a pension for the second time in response to this advertisement, but she found that her earlier petition requesting the arrears for her 16-month period of widowhood before she remarried in 1807 was held against her. Mrs Whitaker had reported that she first applied for a pension on the advice of her new husband to claim the arrears for the short period of her widowhood before remarriage. Griffin has identified that remarriage was often an appealing survival strategy, as it 'offered the promise of long-term stability for both mothers and children', but it was a decision fraught with risk as 'a sizable minority of men did not provide adequately for their families'.<sup>78</sup> The pressures to remarry are apparent in Mrs Whitaker's account of her widowhood as she wrote in her petition that 'during the time I was Capt. O'Hara's widow my fate is indeed a very hard one reduced to depend entirely on the charity of my friends or I must die with want'.<sup>79</sup> Notably, however, despite the reference to friends, no mention of her daughter is made in her first petition. However, the crucial financial support of her daughter is

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<sup>76</sup> TNA, ADM 7/615, Elizabeth Carter-Dormer, 1836.

<sup>77</sup> *London Gazette*, 'Widows' Pensions', January 15, 1819. This announcement was also reprinted in the *Hampshire Chronicle* four times: 8 February, 15 February, 22 February and 1 March 1819.

<sup>78</sup> Griffin, *Bread Winner*, 142.

<sup>79</sup> TNA, ADM 6/393, Elizabeth Whitaker, 1819.

made clear in the latter's petition in favour of her mother. Unlike the mother of Mrs Elizabeth Carter-Dormer, she is not presented as a prudent woman. Rather, her daughter emphasises her mother's dependence and vulnerability to be led astray by men, both her new husband and the naval clerk she interacted with.

Unable to alter the opinion of the Admiralty herself, Mrs Whitaker allowed her daughter to appeal her case. Her daughter, Mrs M. J. Holland, petitioned the First Secretary of the Lords of the Admiralty on behalf of her mother, but also utilised rhetorical strategies of distress to present herself as the victim in need of assistance. Employing a standard opening of flattery for the secretary's 'well known character for Humanity', she used gendered norms of vulnerability and dependence in appealing for assistance for the 'unfortunate dilemma I am placed in through my mother's conduct occasioned by her total ignorance of business'.<sup>80</sup> She promoted the rank of her father whose pension her mother is attempting to claim, describing him as one of the oldest captains and highlights her mother's susceptibility to the influence of other men. Firstly, she deflected blame from her mother by stating that it was her new husband who advised her to claim the arrears of the pension. Secondly, the confusion over fraud is blamed on Mr Pierce of the widows' pension office. Both daughter and mother recount that Mrs Whitaker admitted to being remarried, although they argued that Mrs Whitaker was justified in wanting the arrears. However, their account of her interaction with the pension office shows there was a fine discretionary line between right and charity, which is highlighted in her quick turn of fortunes in her interactions with Mr Pierce:

at the instigation of Mr Pierce [Mrs Whitaker] went home and returned with the certificate of her second marriage which she presented to Mr Pierce who then told her she had taken a false oath and all he could do for her was to take no notice of the

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

circumstances if she made no further application for the pension as nothing would induce the Board to believe but that it was her intention to defraud the charity.<sup>81</sup>

Although Mrs Whitaker was technically eligible to receive the pension of her first husband under the new rules, the accusations of fraud tarnished her record. Her exclusion from receiving a pension had significant financial consequences for her daughter, as she makes clear in her petition, writing that ‘she is entirely dependent on me and all I possess is £55 per annum which I am compelled to allow her to prevent her starving and hurt my own abilities/or a maintenance for myself.’<sup>82</sup> Her daughter’s annual income amounted to the same as a year’s wages of skilled tradesman, and while difficult to share these funds and maintain appearances of gentlewomen, the emotive reference to starvation can be viewed as an exaggerated linguistic strategy to elicit sympathy for their case.<sup>83</sup> King’s assessment of pauper letters identifies that the language of suffering, particularly when used to describe others such as a parent or child, was a useful rhetorical strategy for accessing parochial relief, for ‘the suffering of the author was a dread to behold, but the suffering of others would make an ordinary person weep’.<sup>84</sup> In such situations when an individual risked starvation, the ‘parish was invariably called to stand in friendship with the family concerned in order to prevent a grave injustice that could tip honest people over into dishonest means’.<sup>85</sup> Unfortunately for Mrs Whitaker, the clerks judged her guilty of her actions of dishonesty. The seriousness of the accusation was acknowledged by her daughter who recognised that was a ‘sin’ and a ‘serious charge’ to attempt to defraud the charity.<sup>86</sup> However, Mrs Holland strongly denied any wrongdoing by her mother and, to try to add weight to her

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> A. L. Bowley, *Wages in the United Kingdom in the 19th Century* (Cambridge, 1990), 63; Anon, *A New System of Practical Domestic Economy* (London, 1823), Appendix. This book include an estimate for a family of two parents and three children with a £55 per annum income, which is described as a low but one that still be respectable and allow some small saving, although was limited to necessity rather than luxury goods; A later manual by J. H. Walsh, *A Manual of Domestic Economy* (London, 1857) described the minimum income of a respectable middle-class family by 1857 as £100 per annum, however this was based on a family of four with two parents and two children.

<sup>84</sup> King, *Writing the lives*, 191.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> TNA, ADM 6/393, Elizabeth Whitaker, 1819.

character, she referenced notable friends and family in her petition to reinforce their patriotic loyalty in an attempt to gain a favourable outcome. She wrote:

As niece to the late general Charles O'Hara and daughter to his brother I should conceive an application to Lord St. Vincent who was the particular friend of both might do some good as he has already interested himself in my behalf – but my application to his Lordship I should think quite unnecessary would you sir, interest yourself in laying before the board a favourable state of the facts ...<sup>87</sup>

The 'interchangeability of claims and family members', was a common petitioning strategy as 'patronage was understood to benefit families as a whole'.<sup>88</sup> However, it appears that Mrs Holland's personal connection with Lord St. Vincent was a weak friendship, as although she threatens to apply directly, she chose to submit her petition to Mr Croker the First Secretary to the Lord Commissioners.<sup>89</sup> However, marginalia on her petition refers to Mr Clifton, a lesser clerk of second class ranking, suggesting she failed to have the influence to act as broker of the patronage she referred to.<sup>90</sup> The case of Mrs Whitaker was put forward for reassessment but with the damning annotation of 'yes but it does not alter the case'.<sup>91</sup> In cases where any attempt was expressed of greed or fraud, even if not intended, petitioners often found it impossible to overcome this stigma even if they were eligible under new rules, as a caveat of the Prince Regent's announcement was that they 'shall appear to be proper and deserving objects of the public bounty'.<sup>92</sup> Thus, moral judgement featured heavily in how clerks utilised their discretion to interpret and apply the rules.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Chalus, *Elite Women*, 127.

<sup>89</sup> T. C. Hansard, (ed.), *The Royal Kalendar: and court and city register for England, Scotland, Ireland, and the Colonies for the year 1819* (London, 1819), 143.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> TNA, ADM 6/393, Elizabeth Whitaker, 1819.

<sup>92</sup> *London Gazette*, 'Widows' Pensions', 15 January 1819.

## Familial Strategies of Survival and Appeal

### Living together

The close relationships between mothers and daughters, particularly those who presented a positive image of themselves living and surviving interdependently, could use these circumstances as an effective strategy to present themselves as deserving of charity and attract additional supporters to enhance their applications. Mary Margaret Dean, for example, returned to live with her mother for a period of three years after her husband, a boatswain, had ‘without cause or provocation absented himself, and ceased all communication with her nearly Four Years’.<sup>93</sup> Abandoned with a child, she wrote that up until his disappearance he has ‘always behaved an affectionate Husband, and the kindest of fathers’.<sup>94</sup> Lincoln has identified that maritime couples often endured long periods without communication and thus delays in applications for pensions were quite common as ‘when the ships were thought to have been lost ... some officers’ wives waited a considerable time, hoping for better news, before applying for a pension from the Charity’.<sup>95</sup> Mrs Dean was a victim to such communication perils, as she writes from her residence in Plymouth, that it was by chance that she learnt of his death as she would not know ‘had it not been for a Friend’s information from Sheerness’.<sup>96</sup> Her account of this situation was given added authority by including a supporting statement and signature of the parish minister, John Hawker. Poor law officials were often aggrieved at the pressures sailors placed on the community in deserting their wives and families without support, and the Poor Law Board gave them sanction to act against sailor husbands who attempted to use the workhouse as lodgings for their wives.<sup>97</sup> To have the minister support her statement to counter presumptions that it was not a case of desertion and marital breakdown, and confirm that she

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<sup>93</sup> TNA, ADM 6/386, Mary Margaret Dean, 1812.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Lincoln, *Naval Wives and Mistresses*, 128.

<sup>96</sup> TNA, ADM 6/386, Mary Margaret Dean, 1812.

<sup>97</sup> TNA, MH 12/2574, 12953, Poor Law Board to Bidwell Browning, clerk to the St Thomas Union, Exeter, 8 Apr. 1850.

had found support with her family in the intervening time helped to create the image of a ‘fit object of ... charity’ that she claimed to be.<sup>98</sup> To be eligible to receive a naval widow’s pension women were required to apply for a pension within a year of their husband’s death, unless there was a mitigating reason to justify their delay in application. The support of the parish to give weight to her testimony can be seen to have aided her case as she was successfully placed on the pension list.

In a similar case, six years later in 1818, the widow Johanna Tench who also lived with her mother and was delayed in applying for her pension used the interventions of the parish minister to promote her as a deserving object. Unlike Mrs Dean, the delay in Mrs Tench’s application by two years was not due to her lack of knowledge of when her husband died, but rather that she was not aware that she was eligible to apply until otherwise informed by a friend. A letter was written on Mrs Tench’s behalf by her parish minister to plead her case ‘further in her favour’.<sup>99</sup> In his letter requesting for an exception to be made, it is notable that it is her personal industry and familial relationships which he identified as making her worthy recipient, writing:

I can recommend her as a distressed & deserving object; being left with one child, & living with an aged mother, whom she partly supports. To do this, & maintain herself & child, she has had nothing, exclusive of her own industry, but some wages & prize money which were due to her late husband.<sup>100</sup>

This summary of circumstances, of being left with a child and mother to support, was likely appealing to the parish minister as although she was ‘distressed’ he does not refer to her as destitute and reliant on the parish.<sup>101</sup> The relationship of partially supporting her mother can also be seen as a desirable moral behaviour. Ottaway has argued that in the eighteenth century both

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> TNA, ADM 6/386, Johanna Tench, 1818.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.



poor families and the poor law viewed children as ‘morally obligated’ to support their elderly parents and this was reinforced by ‘biblical texts, conduct manuals, works of literature, and moralizing treatises [that] all spoke of the more tangible requirements of filial piety as well as the need to respect one’s parents’.<sup>102</sup> In the case of Mrs Dean and Mrs Tench, who both survived by their own industry for several years on their own, their activity was well received by the parish officials who supported their petitions and it was also survival strategy that was positively approved by the Admiralty clerks. Although there were restrictions on private income, officials did appreciate ‘any signs of self-help’ and reported that they ‘had no doubt that the income resulting from a widow’s labour should not be taken into account or disable her from receiving a pension’.<sup>103</sup> The outcome for Mrs Tench was that the ‘standing regulations to be abided by’.<sup>104</sup> As there was no mention of an outright rejection and by comparing cases in the one to two years prior and post Mrs Tench application, the regulations appear to refer to her being granted the pension but that her late application due to ‘ignorance’ was not exceptional enough circumstances, unlike delayed knowledge of death, to allow her the backdated years of her pension.<sup>105</sup> While Mrs Tench successfully gained support, knowledge of naval rules to share within families allowed others better to win the charity of the Admiralty – as we shall see in the next section.

### **Knowledgeable, Experienced, and Active Petitioners**

For daughters, the exchange of past knowledge and learned experience from their mothers could also be vitally important to their prospects, as well as sharing resources. Daughters were influenced by their experiences of living with their mothers, whether this was as a child within a naval family or returning as a bereaved adult. As a result of this experience, some women were

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<sup>102</sup> Ottaway, *The Decline of Life*, 7.

<sup>103</sup> Lincoln, *Naval Wives and Mistresses*, 129.

<sup>104</sup> TNA, ADM 6/386, Johanna Tench, 1818; comparative sources: TNA, ADM 6/389, Mrs Finland, 1816; TNA, ADM 6/393, Mrs Elizabeth Barrell, 1819.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

able to utilise this knowledge and difficult experiences to their advantage as an effective negotiating strategy with the Admiralty to right perceived wrongs and past sufferings, even if it took years to achieve. Focusing on the cases of widows Mary Fortier and Sarah Bailey will demonstrate how their knowledge of rule changes, their presentation of prior traumas experienced alongside their mothers, and their personal initiative helped to make their claims exceptionally successful.

Mary Fortier, a serial petitioner of over four years, was initially rejected from receiving her pension on grounds that her husband had not paid into the widows' pension fund during his final post. The 'Charity for the payment of Pensions to the Widows of Sea Officers' required officers to pay '3d in the pound from officers' wages' to enable all widows to a pension 'regardless of how or when th[eir husbands] had died, as long as they were in service at the time'.<sup>106</sup> Mary Fortier's husband was a naval surgeon who died while serving prisoners of war in Jamaica, he only held the post from July 1803 to September 1804, and despite formerly contributing to the widows' pension fund in this last post the funds were not deducted from his salary and thus voided all of his former contributions. Mrs Fortier described this situation in 1808 as a mistake and 'trifling omission' on part of the naval administrators rather than as an action by her husband.<sup>107</sup> However, this was far from trifling but rather a serious obstacle to her accessing her pension, as evidenced by other widows who had been permanently rejected for the same issue.<sup>108</sup> Mrs Fortier, despite her trivialising words, clearly understood the true gravity of the matter as she wrote that it was not enough to try to resolve the issue remotely, as despite her 'repeated efforts' by letter overseas 'found my presence in England was absolutely necessary to the attainment of it'.<sup>109</sup> Independently sailing back to England with her children, her petition in

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<sup>106</sup> Lincoln, *Naval Wives and Mistresses*, 44.

<sup>107</sup> TNA, ADM 6/385, Mary Fortier, 1808.

<sup>108</sup> TNA, ADM 6/393, widows rejected for their husband's lack of contribution: Widow of John Bart; Widow of George Jacques; Mary Monetary, 1819; TNA, ADM 6/397, Elizabeth Mason, 1823.

<sup>109</sup> TNA, ADM 6/385, Mary Fortier, 1807.

1808 details that they had survived for just over four years since her husband's death, undergoing 'extreme difficulties' despite her 'unavailing efforts' and was now 'induced by Necessity - for the death of her Husband she is deprived of the means of supporting herself & family'.<sup>110</sup> Although her means of survival are not made clear, it can be inferred that she did not fall into abject poverty during this time when she was without a male breadwinner. However, the pain of falling below the standards she was used to was made plain as she wrote that having been 'born to brighter prospects and unaccustomed to Hardships she feels them with greater severity'.<sup>111</sup> De Bellaigue has identified that among the industrial middle-classes, although they 'did not have great expectations of joining the ranks of the aristocratic elite', decline was considered similarly jarring as their 'principal objective was to shore up the position of their children in order to insure against downward mobility'.<sup>112</sup> To elicit sympathy for her declining circumstances and try to gain an exception for the missing contributions, Mrs Fortier used the emotional strategies of recounting her own experiences of being an orphan and reminding the Admiralty of the unfortunate treatment her mother received when, in similar circumstances, her father had died.

Mrs Fortier, although a widow and mother herself, identified herself in her petition as the 'orphan daughter of an old and respectable officer who died while serving his country as Captain' in the East Indies.<sup>113</sup> Her father died in service, but was not instantly slain in action, a distinction that was a significant factor in granting a pension as discussed in chapter two. Negotiations with the Admiralty over this clearly made an impact on her experience as a child as she recounts in detail the negotiations her mother undertook, the way that his death needed to be framed, and what additional support was required to prove this. Mrs Fortier recounts, that her father's 'services were of that nature as to induce the Commander-in-Chief to write home requesting that

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<sup>110</sup> TNA, ADM 6/385, Mary Fortier, 1808 (emphasis in original).

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> De Bellaigue, 'Great Expectations?', 41.

<sup>113</sup> TNA, ADM 6/385, Mary Fortier, 1808.

his widow and family might be considered the same as if Captain McCoy had actually been slain in fight his death having been solely occasioned by the fatigue he sustained during the siege Negapatam' leading him to die upon returning to his ship.<sup>114</sup> Despite this support, her mother's fate was at the mercy of the whims of institutional officials and unfortunately was badly affected by inopportune administrative change, as she explains:

a change of administration however took place unfortunately for your memorialists mother as it was a means of preventing her from obtaining the additional pension intended for her although so nearly completed as only to require his Majesties signature to the papers!<sup>115</sup>

As already experienced by her mother, Mrs Fortier was aware how her appeals were not only dependent on her arguments for her eligibility but also relied on a personal appeal to entice the Lord Commissioners to use their influence and discretion. Her dual appeal 'as the daughter of an officer of rank – and the Widow of a respectable one without other means of supporting his offspring' as well as flattery to request 'your Lordships humane intercession on her behalf', was a strategy used to gain sympathy, but also to express entitlement.<sup>116</sup> The suffering endured in losing her father and husband, along with the missed opportunity for her mother, can be seen as an attempt to display her loyalty and patience, qualities which were positively valued by her naval contemporaries.<sup>117</sup> Gill in her assessment of petitioners has also identified similar strategies whereby women 'appeal[ed] to the paternalism of the gentleman Commissioners, playing the double hand of a helpless orphan and a helpless woman'.<sup>118</sup> This strategy did receive a positive response as Mrs Fortier's petition was accepted by naval clerk, Mr Clifton, to be presented to the Lord Commissioners for their decision.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Gill, *Naval Families*, 31. Gill in her assessment of naval letters of Philip Broke regarding his wife, outlined that his expectations were his wife and daughters not to sacrifice themselves for their nation but to act as 'kind', 'patient' and 'affectionate' to display their patriotic support.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 211.

However, for Mrs Fortier, the several months' delay in hearing her case at the next meeting in July 1809 after she had submitted her appeal in September 1808, was not sufficient and she reappealed in patriotic and emotional terms for immediate action. Mrs Fortier made the bold decision to bypass the naval clerks she had been corresponding with, and directed her letter to the highest source and most powerful recipient, the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Mulgrave.<sup>119</sup> In her letter, she flattered him to justify her actions, writing that '[p]ublic testimony of your Lordships superior excellence in supporting the cause of Widows emboldens me'.<sup>120</sup> As well as recounting her case, she wrote of her frustration at the long drawn out process and sustained effort of applying to access a pension. Mrs Fortier pointed out that the further delays extended her sufferings, causing it to be 'nearly five years that impelled by strong necessity, I have been struggling to obtain a Pension which I conceive myself to have been justly entitled to from the period of my widowhood!'.<sup>121</sup> An angry tone was rarely received positively, as in the eighteenth and nineteenth century this was typically gendered as a male response.<sup>122</sup> Gentlewomen were expected to behave with 'self-control and "rational behaviour"' for fear it 'betrayed their social class and upbringing' and made them appear less feminine for violating social norms.<sup>123</sup> However, Mrs Fortier counteracted her frustration with an emotive request for the Lord Commissioner to imagine her position as a woman, a strategy that was in keeping with gendered expectations of women's sensibility of feeling and dependence, writing:

Were it possible that the anguish of a Widows Heart when bereft of the means of supporting her offspring could be but felt for a single day by those who have the power to decide on my claim ... They would agree with me in thinking that under heaven there

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<sup>119</sup> J. Stockdale (ed.), *The Royal Kalendar: and court and city register for England, Scotland, Ireland, and the Colonies for the year 1808* (London, 1808), 174.

<sup>120</sup> TNA, ADM 6/385, Mary Fortier, 1808.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ute Frevert, *Emotions in History: Lost and Found* (Budapest, 2011), 97.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

is not a case of distress which calls so loud for the immediate exercise of compassion and prompt attention.<sup>124</sup>

Bailey, in her assessment of parenting using English pauper letters in the eighteenth century, has identified that the rhetoric of “feeling” carried a heavy freight of meaning for readers ... when used in conjunction with the family’ as the culture of sensibility placed special emphasis on ‘the tender family and the concept of benevolence’.<sup>125</sup> Mrs Fortier can be seen to have used similar strategies to appeal to the Lord Commissioner. In promoting the ‘anguish of her heart’ for her children and sharing her emotional distress by asking the reader to imagine himself helpless for a day, her strategy attempts to emotionally influence Lord Mulgrave by reinforcing his ‘power’ to alter her situation and live up to expectations of his own benevolence by reciprocating her demonstration of sensibility by granting her request. This strategy was a success as her request for her pension was granted five months early in February 1809. This allowed her to receive her pension backdated to her first date of application in 1807.<sup>126</sup> However, this was granted with the caveat that she was to repay the arrears of the pension contribution amounting to £3.0.4. This was not an inconsiderable sum for a woman without income for four years; however, as with other middling women at times of crisis, selling their belongings was one way to regain capital. In a letter of a purser’s daughter to her father, she recounts buying within her community ‘a bed bolster and pillows at Mrs Lewhelins sale and gave £7.11.8 for them which she was forced to borrow she is gone so very poor now’.<sup>127</sup> Mrs Fortier, who returned to England from Jamaica, may have similarly liquidated her assets to enable her survival for so long without a pension. Four years of tireless campaigning and likely frugal financial management had bought her long-term security.

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<sup>124</sup> TNA, ADM 6/385, Mary Fortier, 1808; Bailey, ‘Think Wot a Mother Must Feel’, 13.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> TNA, ADM 6/385, Mary Fortier, 1809.

<sup>127</sup> RMG, GRT/23, Julia Grant to her father Samuel Grant, Purser, 10 Aug. 1801.

The case of Sarah Bayly was another successful petitioner able to achieve a pension several years after the death of her husband. She took advantage of rules changes to reclaim a pension and lifestyle she saw as rightfully hers. Bayly, who was the widow of a carpenter on a hospital ship, was pregnant with a daughter when her husband died in 1794 and because she had not yet been married a year she was not eligible for a pension. The change of rules in 1819 instigated by the Prince Regent allowed widows to receive a pension without restriction. Aware of his change Sarah Bayly, now remarried and fifty-five years of age, petitioned to receive the pension from which she was denied twenty-five years earlier. Notably, in requesting her pension she wrote of her experience as if they were the present, rather than referencing her current needs, writing that her first husband's death,

Left your humble petitioner in a helpless state with an infant daughter then unborn & with no asylum but that of a widowed Mother in consequence of which I suffered many privations at time of life when we were looking forward to better days.<sup>128</sup>

Focusing on her sufferings as a young mother and the pressures on her own widowed mother was a strategy to elicit greater sympathy than focusing on her present circumstances, which could be considered as more appropriately directed to the local parish. Bayly was successful in her appeal upon providing evidence that her husband was in good health prior to his death from disease on active duty in the West Indies. However, she was not able to provide proof of his death as she had discarded the letter from a fellow gunner informing her of her husband's death as she 'could not bear to read its melancholy contents'.<sup>129</sup> Nevertheless, her ability like Mrs Fortier to recount past trauma and suffering in their petitions experienced with their mothers either as children or bereaved adults did aid their appeals for retrospective charity from the navy.

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<sup>128</sup> TNA, ADM 6, Sarah Bayly, 1819.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

### **Class and Family Relationships**

Insight into the practical hardships and experiences endured by widowed mothers and daughters as they attempted to adapt to the loss of a breadwinner is often difficult to uncover beyond rhetorical phrases of distress employed by all women across the social spectrum. In the petitions of middling and elite women, the vagueness regarding their personal finances is likely a tactic to prevent the disclosure in detail of any alternative forms of income which would suggest they were not in need. For the wives of ordinary seamen, Lincoln has argued that it is particularly difficult to access the personal ‘experiences of sailors’ women living in poverty on the fringes of society’, finding that the lower classes left so few records of their own that our understandings mostly come from ‘newspapers accounts, local records and Old Bailey trial records’ written about them.<sup>130</sup> Newspapers and court records recounted salacious stories of prostitution and crime; however, requests to the navy board for short-term relief in the form of arrears of parental pensions and pay does provide another avenue to explore first-hand accounts of maritime women’s experience. These sources provide insights into families at times of crisis – but before poor women turned to crime as a survival strategy – and can provide an understanding of how poor naval dependants were functioning as fragmented families.

Anne McLee’s petition for the arrears of her mother’s pension, as the last surviving adult daughter of a gunner, provides an illustrative example of the types of practical hardships experienced by widows and their families. It also demonstrates the centrality of the matriarch in keeping the family together and shaping how the family adapted to loss. In her petition, McLee’s own marital status is not mentioned, but her long-lasting entrenchment in the maritime community is made clear from her reference of receiving advice to apply for the arrears by ‘several naval friends’ and her detailed account of seeking instruction from the dockyard pay

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<sup>130</sup> Lincoln, *Naval Wives and Mistresses*, 135.



office.<sup>131</sup> Requests for pension arrears to cover funeral costs were relatively commonplace and the Admiralty usually granted amounts less than £20; however, it was not a quick process as the dependant had to petition alongside providing a death certificate and evidence from the clergyman who had officiated at the burial.<sup>132</sup> McLee, in her attempt to hasten access to funds and present herself as deserving of charity, ended her petitioning letter with detailed insights into her family structure, losses, and adaptations throughout her life. McLee identified her mother as the main component who kept their family together, writing that,

I feel it to be my duty to acquaint you when my father died, my mother was left with four children my two Brothers lost their lives in the service many years ago, my sister died a widow eleven years since leaving six orphans five of whom were girls we took them to reside with us although my mother's income was small and the little property her last husband left her was to return to his own family after her death.<sup>133</sup>

Gill concludes that 'ordinary people believed that a narrative of familial, particularly female, dependence was valued by their social superiors'.<sup>134</sup> This account by McLee appears to reflect such a strategy. Her mother's loss of two sons can be read as a patriotic appeal, but it also alludes to the fact that their deaths would have created a significant economic loss to the family income, as will be seen in the case of other petitioners later in the chapter. Furthermore, the adoption of her orphaned granddaughters, suggests that expansion of the family had financial implications of likely increased dependency as employment opportunities for girls were more limited than for boys.<sup>135</sup> The additional loss of familial funds following the death of her mother's husband further emphasised their struggle and lack of patriarchal protection.

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<sup>131</sup> TNA, ADM 6/402, Anne McLee, 1828.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Gill, *Naval Families*, 221.

<sup>135</sup> Humphries, 'Girls and their families', 311-343.

Single parent families headed by women, either widowed or deserted, were relatively common in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. Households headed by single parents represented twenty per cent of the population and lone mother households considerably outnumbered those of lone fathers.<sup>136</sup> The loss of a male breadwinner presented significant challenges as women struggled to earn wages equivalent to men, despite equal efficiency.<sup>137</sup> However, the bonds of familial relations did benefit from the influence of lone women as matriarchs as historians have identified that families which lost a father by death or desertion did have more chance of staying together than if a mother died when the children were young.<sup>138</sup> A family's survival from two generations of loss points to the strength of mother-daughter relations.

McLee's self-proclaimed 'duty' to remember and recount her past demonstrates that her identity and the shape of her life were deeply influenced by her family. In their assessments of nineteenth-century working-class autobiographic writing, Alannah Tomkins and Bailey, have identified the death of parent had a significant impact on an offspring's long-term identity, often more so than their own experiences of being a parent.<sup>139</sup> Recounting parental experiences was a way to explain their personal circumstances and could also be used to aid their own character when writing to institutions as their remembrance 'reflected the glory of whatever admirable qualities were available onto the writer, according to social rank and level of wealth, from shaping British history to being industrious and honest'.<sup>140</sup> In the case of McLee, it was the latter, as demonstrated by her account of the efforts in raising her nieces and resulting financial situation. She claimed an equal part in her mother's struggle, writing that despite the financial challenges, 'still we made a struggle to bring them up in that way that at her death they might be

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<sup>136</sup> Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, 2010), 64-67.

<sup>137</sup> Griffin, *Bread Winner*, 182.

<sup>138</sup> Humphries, *Childhood*, 81.

<sup>139</sup> Alannah Tomkins, 'Poor Law Institutions through Working-Class Eyes: Autobiography, Emotion, and Family Context, 1834-1914', *Journal of British Studies*, 60 (April 2021), 289; Bailey, *Parenting*, 238-244.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.* 143.

able to provide for themselves and a merciful God has blessed our endeavours and I trust with industry they will get on in life'.<sup>141</sup>

Her reference to their 'struggle' and her Christian belief was a rhetorical strategy commonly utilised to highlight deservingness for charitable relief. King has identified similar linguistic strategies in pauper letters to the parish, finding 'a story of struggle was a necessary and accepted basis – even if fictive – for a positive decision'.<sup>142</sup> However, by merging her struggle with her mother's child-raising, she was also appealing to popular ideas of deserving motherhood outlined in advice manuals such as Louisa Hoare's *Friendly Advice on the Management and Education of Children: addressed to parents of the middle and labouring classes of society*, printed in 1824, four years prior to her petition.<sup>143</sup> The advice manual instructed that when

conscientious parents have to struggle with poverty and distress, they claim in a peculiar manner our sympathy and consideration. A mother, for example who is obliged to assist in providing bread for her family, numerous offspring growing up around her, her health perhaps often weak, cannot possibly bestow upon her children that care and time and watchfulness which she knows they require.<sup>144</sup>

The tale of the McLee family certainly fits within this narrative and their success in raising the children with 'industry' to guarantee they will 'get on in life', suggest that they were a family worthy of relief.<sup>145</sup>

McLee contrasted her industrious past with her present financial uncertainty, writing 'I am less able from my years to provide for myself but trusting as I do for support from above, I am perfectly resigned to the will of heaven'.<sup>146</sup> Although trusting in divine providence, she is

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<sup>141</sup> TNA, ADM 6 /402, Anne McLee, 1828.

<sup>142</sup> King, *Writing the lives*, 203.

<sup>143</sup> Bailey, *Parenting*, 43.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> TNA, ADM 6 /402, Anne McLee, 1828.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

practical about the resources available to her in requesting the arrears of her mother's pension to defray funeral expenses. McLee stated she has few disposable assets, writing 'I need hardly allude to the effects of my later mother if sold they would not amount to 15 [value indistinguishable] as the principal part of our household furniture was my late sisters and of course we consider that as her children's'.<sup>147</sup> Her reference to familial assets and inheritance bequests suggests there was some similarity between poorer and elite households in matriarchal management of female property, allowing women to decide to whom to leave their personal property.<sup>148</sup> For McLee, explaining her financial situation and lack of inheritance, despite helping raise her nieces, can be seen as a strategy which was similarly used in early modern church court deponents during questioning of applicants' worth. Deponents gained the support of the church according to Bailey by 'admitting they were worth little' and "'offset[ing] the language of poverty with a counterclaim to honesty", which [was] associated with industry and efforts to avoid dependence'.<sup>149</sup> The combined strategies of emphasising her past struggles in helping raise her wider family and financial distress despite her industry, proved successful for McLee as she was granted the remains of her mother's pension which amounted to £2.1.5 (497 pence). The arrears offered McLee a short financial respite but not long-term security. Nonetheless, the significance of such a sum was not inconsiderable as an unskilled woman could only earn between 7-15 pence per day.<sup>150</sup>

However, not all maritime mothers and daughters had good relationships, and, in some cases, they could hinder as well as help in accessing relief. Catherine Hurley, whose pension in 1821 was under question due to her missing second marriage certificate, found that her 'general

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Joanne Begiato, 'A "master-mistress": revisiting the history of eighteenth-century wives', *Women's History Review*, (2022), 7; Amanda Vickery, 'Women and the world of goods', in John Brewer and Roy Porter (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London, 1993), 294.

<sup>149</sup> Bailey, *Parenting*, 133-134.

<sup>150</sup> Jane Humphries and Jacob Weisdorf, 'The Wages of Women in England', *Journal of Economic History*, 75.2 (2015), 432.

character' was also under investigation 'to judge whether she is a proper object to be continued on the pension list'.<sup>151</sup> As well as providing the certificate of her second marriage in 1820 to regain access to her pension, Mrs Hurley also had to provide certificates to confirm her good character. A list of seven 'inhabitant householders', including two women, signed a letter confirming she was the widow of her first husband 'Jeremiah Hurley late a Gunner in the Royal Navy for many years' and that they 'believed her to be a well-disposed deserving woman, and do recommend her to the Lords Commissioners of the navy'.<sup>152</sup> Notably, no familial relations aided her support, instead a positive character witness statement stemmed from an account of her poor relations with her daughter, as it was reported that she spent time in Portsmouth Gaol 'for a breach of the peace upon the complaint of her daughter'.<sup>153</sup> No further details of the disagreement are provided, but given that she remarried in 1820 and that her case includes a letter from one of her nearby neighbours attesting that 'she stands much in need' in 1821, suggests that her second marriage did not provide great security and could have undermined relations with her daughter.<sup>154</sup> The gaolkeeper did present a positive report of Catherine Hurley, highlighting that she was not arrested 'for felony or any other misdemeanour and that while she remained in prison she conducted herself orderly and properly and appeared to me to be a very civil well behaved woman'.<sup>155</sup> The distinction of her crime as a private matter rather than a financial felony fortunately worked in Mrs Hurley's favour. Her general report of good behaviour and rule-abiding in providing the second marriage certificate allowed her to be returned to the pension list. This decision appears in keeping with Gill's findings that 'despite the familial, often personal nature of petitions, the Navy Board would not become involved in matters which they deemed private'.<sup>156</sup> Nonetheless, she endured three months suspension

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<sup>151</sup> TNA, ADM 6/395, Catherine Hurley, 1821.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Gill, *Naval Families*, 221.

without financial support and letters from neighbours recounting her ‘extreme distress’ as a ‘poor widow’, suggests that familial breakdown could undermine a widow’s survival.<sup>157</sup>

### **The Parish and the Navy**

Source material from Poor Law authorities regarding the wives and widows of sailors also provides further insights into the experience of lone women. Poor Law officials often wrote to the Admiralty on behalf of their parishioners for relief in the form of allotted pay and pensions, and it can be inferred that it was in their best interest to present their female supplicants as deserving cases. Success would relieve individual Poor Law Unions financially as being their only form of support. However, within correspondence between parishes and the Admiralty, it is also possible to read a parish’s own internal concerns relating to their perceptions of familial relations, the public position of lone women, and class.

In 1834, the parish of Hubberstone took an active role in trying to compel a Greenwich pensioner to support his wife and daughters.<sup>158</sup> Letters between the vestry ministers and the local magistrate, Anthony Innys Stokes, reveal that James Owen had been impressed into the navy and, after being hurt on board the ship *Caesar*, was allowed a pension. The case letter from the parish to the magistrate states that at first his pension was withheld, and he worked as a labourer in the dockyards at Milford Haven, but after a few years was discharged from Pembroke Yard on a pension of £10 per year. In 1831, he applied for his pension to be renewed and was sent to Greenwich Hospital where he ‘went supposing he was only to be examined previous to the pension being granted him, but he has there remained ever since’.<sup>159</sup> His wife and daughters who lived separately were supported by his pension until October 1833, when correspondence from the dockyard and Owen informed his wife that the allowance could no longer be paid. This case

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<sup>157</sup> TNA, ADM 6/395, Catherine Hurley, 1821.

<sup>158</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5040, Martha Owens, 1834.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

occurred during the same year as the introduction of new poor law in 1834 which reformed governmental relief, in which accessing support from the parish was to be a last resort with the intention of deterring individuals by making relief only accessible through entry into the workhouse rather than the traditional form of monetary out-relief. It is unsurprising, given the context, that the local vestry replied harshly to Owen's refusal to support his family, writing to the magistrate to use his influence to: 'induce them [the navy] to make some arrangement by which James Owen who seems to have ample means may be made support his wretched Family instead of throwing them on this Parish'.<sup>160</sup>

Despite a harsh characterisation of Martha Owen and her daughters as a 'wretched family', the case notes written for the magistrate and forwarded to the Admiralty on their circumstances does reveal some sympathy and fears regarding their lone existence.<sup>161</sup> The letter describes her as

subject to frequent alarming fits and is consequently obliged to keep one of her children constantly at home to take care of her she has other daughters, young Girls, who are frequently out of Place – she is in very distressed circumstances being disappointed in receiving the Last quarters pension and is in considerable arrears for rent of her cottage at Coombe.<sup>162</sup>

A mother in ill health and unable to give her children proper care is a similar appeal to the deserving distressed parents described in Louisa Hoare's *Friendly Advice on the Management and Education of Children*.<sup>163</sup> However, unlike the industrious McLee family, debt and crime loom as a parochial fear for the Owen women. The debts for their cottage rent were a significant financial burden and the reference to her 'young girls', who were 'frequently out of place' suggest a moral

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Bailey, *Parenting*, 43.

panic regarding their character and reputation.<sup>164</sup> Lincoln has argued that young girls who left their families found themselves particularly vulnerable in society and often ended up in prostitution, as ‘contemporaries saw a connection between prostitution and commerce, suggesting that women who sold goods would be prepared to sell themselves, and many male customers seem to have regarded shop assistants as fair game’.<sup>165</sup> The pressures on female members of poor families following the loss of male breadwinner support have also been identified by Kippen and McCalman who argue that the practical consequences of losing the support of a parent was worse for daughters than sons.<sup>166</sup> Their analysis of the personal records of convicts transported to Tasmania, Australia, identified that a significant proportion of those criminally transported had similar family backgrounds of having lost a parent and that for female convicts in particular the limited earning opportunities for women meant they faced a precarious adolescence and were more ‘vulnerable to crime as a survival strategy’.<sup>167</sup> However, despite the parish’s fears and threats, the outcome of naval support was unsuccessful as the Admiralty responded that they had no authority to compel Owen to support this family. His wife and children, therefore, were at the mercy of the parish.

A more successful example of parochial intervention was the case of Lavinia Atkinson, an ‘orphan daughter’ of a lieutenant and identified as an ‘object of real distress’.<sup>168</sup> Lavinia Atkinson was a resident of the Tynemouth workhouse in 1815, having recently lost her widowed mother, and did not submit her own application. Instead, her petitioning letter to the Admiralty was submitted by the parish clerk, R. G. Akens and supported by two church wardens, a minister, and included a postscript by Captain Caulfield. Nonetheless, despite the second-hand authorship of the petition, the voice of Atkinson is present in the parish’s account of her request for the

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<sup>164</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5040, Matha Owens, 1834.

<sup>165</sup> Lincoln, *Naval Wives and Mistresses*, 135.

<sup>166</sup> Kippen and McCalman, ‘Parental Loss’, 656-678.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> TNA, ADM 6/388, Lavinia Atkinson, 1815.



arrears of her mother's pension. The letter recounts that 'she states that at the time of her mother's decease the [pension] quarter wanted one fortnight of being due and in her present indigence it will afford her the most seasonable relief'.<sup>169</sup> The reference to timings of missing out on sharing in her mother's pension allowance by two weeks and the reference to 'seasonable' relief suggests that Atkinson was trying to promote herself to the parish as only needing temporary relief, a short-term strategy that has been identified in a comparative corpus assessment of female-authored pauper letters as a common request that was in keeping with the appeals of other 'younger women [who] hoped to become independent again if given a little help in the present, preferably outside the workhouse'.<sup>170</sup> However, additional documentation to the petition suggests that her supporters thought she may need more than seasonable help. The parish clerk also 'applied [to] the secretary of the navy office for some little aid from the Naval charitable fund' and wrote deferentially to John W. Croker that he 'hope[d] your honour will not think me impertinent or intrusive in submitting it to your inspection and soliciting your patronage'.<sup>171</sup> These additional enquiries in 1815 occurred under the old poor law, a period in which there was less pressure for women to only be given relief inside the workhouse. However, while there was more sympathy expressed for Lavinia Atkinson as an 'unfortunate object' than the Owen women as a 'wretched family', this distinction was arguably due to their attitudes towards the absence of the male breadwinner rather than the women themselves.<sup>172</sup> In the period 1760-1834, Williams has identified that women were more likely to receive relief than men and that, particularly for orphans who had lost both parents, the child often continued to receive regular relief if a widowed parent had previously received support.<sup>173</sup> Relief to women such as Atkinson, who had lost the protection of her family through death and not any form of spousal desertion, was similarly considered as deserving of sympathy and relief. By contrast, Bailey has

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> King et al., *In Their Own Write*, 191.

<sup>171</sup> TNA, ADM 6/388, Lavinia Atkinson, 1815.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid; TNA, ADM 1/5040, Matha Owens, 1834.

<sup>173</sup> Williams, *Poverty, Gender and Life-Cycle*, 104.

identified that even before the new poor law, ‘letters written by those administering relief demonstrate that the most reviled men were those who explicitly rejected the role of providing for their family, rather than those who failed in its fulfilment’.<sup>174</sup> These long-standing attitudes suggest there was a cultural precedent for the harsh account given of the Owen family. A comparison of the cases also points to a collective class-based sympathy for Ms Atkinson’s fall in social status as the orphan of a lieutenant. She was successfully granted the outstanding £6.13.4 of her mother’s pension.

### **Mothers and Sons**

Widows’ concerns for their daughters did not undermine their attachment to their sons, but sons played a very different role within the family dynamic. A tactic for a single mother’s survival was to replace their husband with another breadwinner and older sons were particularly important in helping the family to remain intact.<sup>175</sup> Culturally, too, there was an expectation that sons would fill the void left by their fathers. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have identified in contemporary literature that a son was ‘charged with protecting his sister’s name for “remember son – thou art her father now” and with supporting his mother’s “falling years”’.<sup>176</sup>

Through exploration of petitions written by mothers and sons, many adult sons in the navy did subscribe to this expectation and were of essential support to their mothers and sisters. Mary Balderston’s petition in 1809 provides an example of how a son could be essential and sometimes considered even more important than a husband to the prosperity and protection of a family. Mrs Balderston was a widow having previously lost her husband, a lieutenant, and two of her sons, a midshipman and first lieutenant, who both died from wounds. In addition to this

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<sup>174</sup> Bailey, ‘Think Wot a Mother Must Feel’, 8.

<sup>175</sup> Griffin, *Bread winner*, 140; Humphries, ‘Girls and their families’, 335.

<sup>176</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London, 2018), 334.

tragedy, she identifies the loss of ‘her only remaining son and sole consolation’, John Basset Balderston, a commander, as emotionally and financially devastating.<sup>177</sup> Her son she describes was the ‘chief support’ of his two sisters Mary and Delia Balderston, to whom he gave ‘liberal education’ and were by his death ‘left almost Destitute, having no other Property or expectation of any excepting the small effects he was posses’d of at his Death made trifling from his Liberality to them, for a series of years’.<sup>178</sup>

Middle-class and elite families often considered education to be a matter of great importance and thus her reference to her son’s support of his sisters can be read as a significant contribution to the security of their futures. Gill has argued that accomplishments of ‘reading, writing and basic arithmetic along with other “ornamental accomplishments” including dancing, drawing and French ... were seen to be essential for young girls, because as mothers they would go on to teach them to their own children’.<sup>179</sup> However, regardless of their future married status, education was of value because it provided women with ‘one of the main resources’ for financial security as ‘the learning they acquired was one of their few saleable skills’.<sup>180</sup> Despite the skills acquired by her daughters, Mrs Balderston’s despair at their loss of fortune and lack of property suggests anxiety about their social decline. For a genteel woman who took up a position as governess, although she ‘did not lose her respectability, she sacrificed any claim she might have had to gentility, simply by the virtue of taking paid employment’.<sup>181</sup> Social mobility was considered a familial project in the nineteenth century and the concern for her daughters’ loss is in keeping with the findings of De Bellaigue that a parental ‘chief objective was to guard against social decline’.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5208, Mary Balderston, 1809.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Gill, *Naval Families*, 209.

<sup>180</sup> Leonore Davidoff, *Thicker than Water: Siblings and their Relations, 1780-1920* (Oxford, 2011), 149.

<sup>181</sup> Pat Rodgers, ‘The Cambridge edition of the works of Jane Austen’ (Cambridge, 2006), cited in Robert D. Hume, ‘Money in Jane Austen’, *The Review of English Studies*, 64.264 (2013), 298.

<sup>182</sup> De Bellaigue, ‘Great Expectations?’, 29.

Further details of the Balderston family's financial dynamics and their anxieties over status were provided by the family agent who supported the memorial of Mrs Balderston and added that:

The father died very much embarrassed, and immediately on his decease his son ... allowed his mother 30£ per Annum out of his Pay as Lieutenant, to enable her to educate his sisters, which allowance I continued to pay her quarterly ... besides many presents, and every assistance afforded them to the extent of his ability, as a dutiful son and affectionate brother.<sup>183</sup>

This account illustrates that, as a son, not only did Balderston immediately fill the void of his breadwinner father, but he also surpassed him by providing generous allowances and additional gifts. However, despite his generosity in life, his unexpected death by an 'assassin' meant he was not able to provide a significant inheritance and the support of the Admiralty was required to compensate this.<sup>184</sup> Fortunately, for the Balderstons, the Lord Commissioners responded generously to their petition. The loss of the widow's 'sole consolation' of her son, how his sisters were deprived by his loss, and the circumstances of John Basset Balderston's death and 'meritorious' service, were identified as the key factors in their recommendation to the monarch that widow Balderston's pension be increased from £40 to £140 and that each of her daughters be given £25 until they married.<sup>185</sup> This significant increase in Mrs Balderston's pension, while not diminishing the pain of her loss, did dramatically alter her family's fortunes, as Robert D. Hume has identified that, in the same period, the top 10% of affluent families in England had an income of £150 per annum.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5208, Mary Balderston, 1809.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Robert D. Hume, 'Money in Jane Austen', 298.

The Balderston family was not unique in relying on sons as replacement breadwinners for support. In 1824, Ann Worsley provided a further example of the importance of shared income within naval families. Ann had lost all four of her sons to naval and military service: ‘one of them fell in boarding an enemy vessel, two of fever on service abroad in the active discharge of their duty, the fourth of disease contracted with his regiment in the peninsula’.<sup>187</sup> Similarly to the Balderstons, Mrs Worsley and her three unmarried daughters were financially dependent on her sons. Her petition for a pension was emotive in describing ‘the irreparable loss I have sustained by being so prematurely deprived of my four sons in the service of their country’.<sup>188</sup> In 1819, Lord Palmerston approved the grant of pensions to mothers of officers but confined this to ‘cases in which an officer has fallen in action in the execution of some act of military duty ... [and] has left a mother in distressed circumstances and has not left any widow or legitimate children’.<sup>189</sup> Mrs Worsley’s petition can be read as a direct appeal to this policy. Her petition emphasised that she met the criteria by acknowledging that none of her sons married and had ‘not left any family to have been a burden to the public’ and further demonstrated her awareness of her eligibility by referring to other successful cases, writing she hoped the Commissioners would ‘grant us that assistance which they have in their kindness extended to the relatives of officers similarly situated with ourselves’.<sup>190</sup>

In addition, her petition had the threefold strategy of promoting her age, her health, and her dependent daughters as factors in meeting the criterion of ‘distressed circumstances’.<sup>191</sup> Mrs Worsley wrote:

my advanced old age, my delicate state of health, my destitute and distressed situation and that of my three daughters ... I am now much more solicitous about them [than] myself as

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<sup>187</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5085, Ann Worsley, 1824.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> TNA, ADM 12/94, 1819.

<sup>190</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5085, Ann Worsley, 1824.

<sup>191</sup> TNA, ADM 12/94, 1819.

my days are very speedily approaching to a close and it is perhaps to me of all other misfortunes which I have experienced during a long life the most distressing the idea of quitting this world leaving these three young women totally unprovided for.<sup>192</sup>

Her emotive petition appealed to patriarchal values to assist dependent women and again demonstrates that lone mothers felt their experience was closely tied with their daughters. Although this petitioning strategy was likely constructed to elicit more sympathy and portray Mrs Worsley as a selfless mother, comparative research suggests familial dependence was common between elderly parents and their children. Thomas Sokoll, in his assessment of pauper letters, finds that aged poor women in receipt of relief often lived with their children, which contradicted census material that identified them as lone recipients.<sup>193</sup> Indeed, informal sharing of resources is also supported by Ottaway who finds that ‘although children felt an obligation to help their aged parents, assistance was most likely to flow down rather than up through the generations’.<sup>194</sup> To add greater sympathy for her cause, Mrs Worsley provided further details about the relationships with her daughters, informing the Commissioners that one of her daughters was disabled by a childhood accident and was unable ‘to move from chair to chair without assistance which your memorialists from her advanced age, and declining state of health is not now able to afford her’.<sup>195</sup> The intersection of age and sickness in seventeenth-century Lancashire has been identified by Jonathan Healey as one of the causes of ‘endemic poverty’ which could devastate the household economy, reducing a person’s ability to work and adding financial pressures in the need for employing outside carers to maintain acceptable living standards.<sup>196</sup> As a strategy, the inclusion of such detail appears another pointed attempt to gain

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Thomas Sokoll, ‘Old Age in Poverty: The Record of Essex Pauper Letters, 1780-1834’ in Tim Hitchcock, Peter King and Pamela Sharpe (eds.), *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840* (London, 1997), 138.

<sup>194</sup> Ottaway, *The Decline of Life*, 11.

<sup>195</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5085, Ann Worsley, 1824.

<sup>196</sup> Jonathan Healey, *The First Century of Welfare: Poverty and Poor Relief in Lancashire, 1620-1730* (Woodbridge, 2014), 182.

support from the Admiralty as pensions were sometimes provided under the Compassionate Fund to adult daughters in cases of disability or sickness.<sup>197</sup> Unfortunately, despite Mrs Worsley's well-crafted efforts to appeal to the rules on maternal pensions, her application was rejected. The thought process behind this rejection is unclear, but it is possibly due to three factors: definition of causes of death, class, and deferral of Admiralty responsibility to the parish. Although Mrs Worsley stated that her sons died 'in the active discharge of their profession', they did not die in military action, an important distinction which has already been discussed in chapter two.<sup>198</sup> Internal decision-making suggests that rank was a factor as, when asked for a precedent, the clerk replied that 'there is no precedent hitherto a pension to the mother of a lieutenant'.<sup>199</sup> Although Mrs Balderston was successful in 1809, her son was a commander and had died in action. Finally, the narrative of distress appears more in keeping with petitioners' requests for parochial relief. Comparable petitions from aged widows, Anne Stewart in 1824 and Mary Beard Sholl in 1829, who wrote similar tales of hardship for themselves and their dependent children following the loss of their lieutenant sons were also rejected.<sup>200</sup> Support for mothers by the Admiralty, therefore, was discretionary and the distressed circumstances of age and dependence were not a guarantee.

As well as petitioning for themselves as mothers, lone women could also petition the Admiralty during their sons' lives in an attempt to aid and shape their sons' naval careers. Attaining success in the navy required three key components: 'family, friendship and patronage'.<sup>201</sup> Appointment through patronage and nepotism were commonplace in the eighteenth century and Gill has

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<sup>197</sup> See TNA, ADM 1/4396, Miss Buchan, 1834. Miss Buchan was placed on the compassionate list as her leg was amputated at 15 and she is unable to work independently; ADM 12/360 (1839) The subject pension index refers to Emma Bradley and Sarah Clarke as child recipients whose place on the compassionate list has been extended due to ill health.

<sup>198</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5085, Ann Worsley, 1824.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5030, Mrs Stewart, 1824; ADM 1/5031, Mary Beard Sholl, 1829.

<sup>201</sup> Gill, 'Children of the service', 161.

argued that the '[t]he paternalistic, familial model of naval organisation continued throughout the first half of the nineteenth century'.<sup>202</sup> The influence of fathers to further their sons' careers and advise them through correspondence on how to conduct themselves has been recognised by scholars.<sup>203</sup> By contrast, mothers' relationships with their sons have been described more emotionally with focus on their fears and 'reluctan[ce] to let boys go to sea, fearing for [the] safety of their child and the hardships he would endure'.<sup>204</sup> However, as previously discussed, the advancement of a family was considered a wider 'familial project' and thus the influence of mothers acting independently on behalf of their sons to cultivate those three key components should not be overlooked.<sup>205</sup>

To aid their sons' careers, mothers were effective at networking with admirals and other naval officials of importance to influence official decision-making within the Admiralty. Although social class did offer some mothers more opportunity than others, the agency of such women remains important to explore. Admiral Markham was an individual targeted by several naval mothers as one lever in the cog of a delicate system of appointments utilised to exert influence on their wider networking. Lady Collier's letter to Markham in 1807 provides insight into the networking strategies a mother used in trying to secure a promotion for her son. Firstly, the letter exists because she was not able to 'obtain a few minutes conversation with [Markham]' and thus comfortable in the knowledge of being previously 'indulged' was 'encouraged to express on paper – what I wished to have asked in person'.<sup>206</sup> Chalus has argued that the patronage system was suited to women because of the way in which it operated in grey areas in public and private life from drawing rooms to institutions.<sup>207</sup> Lady Collier's reference to her actions of actively

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<sup>202</sup> Gill, *Naval Families*, 91.

<sup>203</sup> Gill, 'Children of the service', 154.

<sup>204</sup> Gill, *Naval Families*, 89.

<sup>205</sup> De Bellaigue, 'Great Expectations?', 29.

<sup>206</sup> RMG, MRK/104/4/54, Lady Collier to Admiral John Markham, 1807.

<sup>207</sup> Chalus, *Elite Women*, 111-112.



seeking private conversations with Markham, although unsuccessful on this occasion, nevertheless shows that, for women, patronage could also be achieved by personal connection. Secondly, Lady Collier's letter reveals her thorough preparations to undertake her networking, as she did not rely on emotive and patriotic appeals alone but rather made specific requests and produced accompanying evidence to support her claims. This is demonstrated through her reference to having previously had an interview with Mr Granville and in requesting his assistance:

left with him a slight memorandum of my son's services, I produced some letters from his immortal friend Lord Nelson; Lord St Vincent; ... & warm memorandums from Sir Alexander Cochrane (in a letter of his in my possession) the whole of which Mr Granville; admitted were the most honourable testimonials.<sup>208</sup>

Her reference to the personal correspondence with noted admirals demonstrates that Lady Collier's family was well-connected in naval circles. However, despite these connections, her son's lack of promotion caused her distress, writing 'I feel as a mother most poignant that disappointments & neglect' of her son.<sup>209</sup> Chalus has argued that to make effective requests, knowledge was essential as 'women had to know what patronage was available, what they could ask for, and to whom they should address their requests ... and who could be depended upon to lend support or act as a broker'.<sup>210</sup> Despite her disappointments, Lady Collier's letter suggests she was knowledgeable of how the Admiralty operated. Frustrated that the 'death vacancy' of being made captain was for 'ten months unconfirmed at the Admiralty – where the form only was necessary and not favour', she nonetheless knew that favour from Markham as broker with Mr Granville and Sir Alexander Cochrane could have the effect of putting her plans into action and 'establish my son in the class he ought to stand in'.<sup>211</sup> Unfortunately, the outcome of her letter is

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<sup>208</sup> RMG, MRK/104/4/54, Lady Collier to Admiral John Markham, 1807.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Chalus, *Elite Women*, 114.

<sup>211</sup> RMG, MRK/104/4/54, Lady Collier to Admiral John Markham, 1807.

unknown. However, a similar case by Mrs Crozier to Markham regarding her son's wish to serve in the marines, demonstrates that Markham did act as a broker on behalf of some petitioning mothers. Mrs Crozier writes in 1803 that her 'agent begs me no longer to delay writing to you', following a letter written to Lord St Vincent to help promote her son.<sup>212</sup> Both cases are important in demonstrating that mothers could be as active as fathers in networking for their sons.

Petitioning and supplicatory letters have been considered as particularly suited to women and the nineteenth-century culture of sensibility encouraged gentlemen to be more receptive to the appeals of dependent women.<sup>213</sup> A supporting letter from a mother was to the advantage of their sons in their early careers as they 'may have lacked the necessary connexions and self-confidence to plead their own cases effectively'.<sup>214</sup> Lady Collier was bold in her praise of her son, describing him as a 'gallant' officer and stating, 'I most solemnly would not appeal for [him] if my son was not most prominently deserving'.<sup>215</sup> Gill, in her assessment of the familial correspondence of young seamen with their families and naval officers, has identified that mothers were included in correspondence from naval commanders regarding their sons, suggesting that the letter-writing of Lady Collier was common practice. Gill, however, notes some subtle criticism from commanders to mothers being overzealous in praise of their sons, noting Commander Codrington's 'gentle warning' to Lady Arden not to overestimate her sons achievements which suggest that she was not alone in 'inflating and exaggerating her son's merits'.<sup>216</sup> However, in agreement with the assessment of Chalus, 'women would not have submitted as many requests as they did, or phrased them as commandingly, if they had not stood a chance of achieving their

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<sup>212</sup> RMG, MRK, 104/1/84, Mrs Crozier to Admiral John Markham, 1803.

<sup>213</sup> Whiting, *Women and Petitioning*, 26; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London, 1992), 281.

<sup>214</sup> Chalus, *Elite Women*, 132.

<sup>215</sup> RMG, MRK/104/4/54, Lady Collier to Admiral John Markham, 1807.

<sup>216</sup> Gill, 'Children of the service', 156-157.

goals'.<sup>217</sup> Indeed, some petitioning mothers, such as Rebecca Brett, were successful in achieving their aims down to the inclusion of specific details. Mrs Brett wrote to Admiral Markham in 1802 to ask that he use his 'influence on the present occasion that my son may be appointed to some ship, I dare not presume to point out any, but if it could be to a frigate I should be the more obliged'.<sup>218</sup> A frigate would be more likely to be involved in the taking of prizes and thus was a potentially more lucrative posting. Her request was successful and acknowledged by letter expressing her 'highest sense of gratitude'.<sup>219</sup> Mrs Brett's petitioning efforts suggest that some naval mothers had a good knowledge of naval opportunities and could, like fathers, have influence to shape their sons' experience and careers. A mother's praise was not confined to their achieving appointments, as they would also ensure that their sons would be remembered at home through publishing extracts of their letters in local newspapers to highlight their achievements.<sup>220</sup>

Mothers, in certain circumstances, may even be seen to have more advantage than fathers in their correspondence with naval patrons. The expected emotional distress of mothers meant that it was more acceptable for them to make certain requests, such as interventions for their sons' safety. For example, Lady Peshell wrote to Admiral Markham in 1803 to request his influence on directing where her son would be sent. Stating her preferences directly, she wrote that:

I have not the least objection to his going to any part of Europe, that you may think proper to direct – but the climates of the east and west indies have proved so fatal to my family, few advantages would tempt me to risqué my son there [sic].<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Chalus, *Elite Women*, 121.

<sup>218</sup> RMG, MRK 104/4/2, Mrs Brett to Admiral John Markham, 1802.

<sup>219</sup> RMG, MRK 104/4/3, Mrs Brett to Admiral John Markham, 1802.

<sup>220</sup> RMG, CLS/48/1/1, Letter from Emily Collinson to her son, Lieutenant Richard Collinson, 31 March 1841.

<sup>221</sup> RMG, MRK/104/4/42, Lady Peshell to Admiral John Markham, 1803.

Written during the Napoleonic Wars, her attempt to influence naval deployment can be considered as a significant request for personal favour. However, reference to her emotions did allow Lady Peshell some justification in addressing Markham, writing:

I am sure the feelings of your own mind will pardon these statements when I say ... [my son] I fear will be the last of my children left me, & the only one of an old family, for my eldest son I have accompanied to this place as a last hope & god only can say how things may turn out with him. I will not give you the trouble of acknowledging this letter sir convinced that anything you are pleased to do will be for the best.<sup>222</sup>

Her fears for the continuing loss of her children and her active accompanying of her remaining son demonstrates her agency in taking practical as well as written steps to campaign for him. Although she does not request a response, her trust in his independent action suggests this may have been a strategy which allowed Markham more discretion without having to write direct promises. Mothers petitioned on behalf of their sons throughout their lives, from requesting their first appointments and promotions, to charity for themselves as dependants after they had ‘fallen in Defence of their country and in supporting the honour of the British Flag’.<sup>223</sup> Mothers took such an active interest for the safety of their sons due to their own affection, but also for their own wider family interests due to social mobility being a familial project.

### **Sisters and Brothers**

The relationship between sisters and brothers in maritime communities was close, both emotionally and financially. As already demonstrated in maternal petitioning, daughters were often considered an extension of a mother’s identity and were expected to benefit from the breadwinning activities of their male family members. Petitioning by brothers regarding their sisters is suggestive that this wider family obligation was continued even after their parents had

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> TNA, ADM 1/4211, Elizabeth Martin, 1809.

died. William Ellis's petition on 'behalf of his four orphan sisters' in 1834 supports the claim of brothers assuming the position of protector after familial bereavement.<sup>224</sup> Ellis petitioned following the slow death of his father, a purser in the navy, who was struck by an illness which had caused the 'total loss of his limbs ... his loss and disappointment pressed so heavily on his afflicted mind as to deprive him both of the power of reason and of speech'.<sup>225</sup> Ellis reveals the pressure that was experienced by his sisters, 'already bereaved of a fond mother's care, and thrown upon the mercy of the world', which included the added responsibility of the long-term care of a sister who was disabled from birth.<sup>226</sup> Although 'almost penniless', Ellis's financial contribution to his family is made clear in his efforts to fill the role of his father in his selfless actions and reference to:

[the] exertions made by himself to prevent the service from suffering in any way during his late fathers indisposition that at a considerable expense your memorialist attended at Portsmouth upwards of five weeks in order to make up his Fathers accounts.<sup>227</sup>

This action was a significant use of agency to support the future of their family, as dying in debt often precluded the dependants from receiving any financial support from the Admiralty.<sup>228</sup> Ellis further supported his petition with character statements which promoted his father's 'high character' and service in the navy since 1797.<sup>229</sup> Reputation and character was a family affair, the actions of one affecting the others as 'respectability, status, family, and business' all operated together.<sup>230</sup> Ellis's actions of settling his father's accounts emphasised the family loyalty to the Admiralty, a strategy which was appealing to officials. He was able to gain the favourable support of Captain Elliot who transmitted his petition and promoted his case, adding that Ellis 'would be an acquisition to the service as a clerk, being of the proper age & talents having since his father's

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<sup>224</sup> TNA, ADM 1/4571, William Ellis, 1834.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> TNA, ADM 1/615, Catherine Lamburn, 1821-1847.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Popp, 'But to cover her shame', 4.

death been employed in making out the pursers account'.<sup>231</sup> Fortunately, Ellis's petition was successful and each of the family was granted £10.

However, not all brothers were as successful as Ellis at supporting their siblings. Some struggled under the strain of supporting their sisters and wider families. Humphries has argued that 'the ideology of the male breadwinner, able and willing to support a family, ran ahead of the reality'.<sup>232</sup> This was due to several different factors including 'low wages; irregularity of work or unemployment; large families; and the death, incapacity or desertion of the chief earner'.<sup>233</sup> These findings explain a petition to the Admiralty by the four orphaned Stow daughters in 1809. The Stow daughters were all unmarried and wrote that they had been reliant on their brothers following the death of their father, but that they were now unable to provide for them. In their petition, they wrote that they had:

depended (now nearly thirty years) entirely on two of their brothers for support but that their elder brother having a young family of eight children to maintain & their youngest brother having fallen into decayed circumstances are no longer enabled to contribute as they heretofore done to the support of your Petitioners who are consequently reduced to great distress.<sup>234</sup>

Middle-class brothers, according to Davidoff and Hall, felt long-lasting obligations to their sisters and acted as 'trustees and business advisers for their sisters and sisters sought refuge in the home of brothers when widowed (or abandoned), even if several brothers had to club together to make up an income'.<sup>235</sup> The reference to thirty years of support suggests their brothers had even played an active role while their father was alive and suggests these brothers acted collaboratively in the support of their sisters. This bond, however, was placed under pressure when brothers married

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<sup>231</sup> TNA, ADM 1/4571, Captain Eliot on behalf of William Ellis and sisters, 1834.

<sup>232</sup> Humphries, 'Girls and their families', 316.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5018, Sophia, Anne, Catherine, and Sarah Stow, 1809.

<sup>235</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 349.

and had families of their own. To support their application of need following this loss of support, the Stow sisters displayed their knowledge of specific precedents writing that they were:

encouraged to hope for [relief] as they are informed that a provision of a similar nature has been granted, as far back as the year 1805, in favour of two unmarried daughters of the late Joshua Thomas esq. who succeeded to the office of your Petitioners father at his decease.<sup>236</sup>

Their petitioning letter received the response that they could direct a memorial to the King in Council and noted ‘that if it should be referred to their Lordships, they will not be able to recommend any relief to be afforded to you, unless a very strong case of necessity be fully authenticated’.<sup>237</sup> This response, while not a rejection, suggests that their initial petitioning strategy, of highlighting that they were without the support of a breadwinner, was not sufficient on its own for charitable relief to be granted. A more emotive appeal, character references, support from the community or local authorities are a few strategies which could potentially enhance their petition. However, their knowledge of precedents nevertheless was an important strategy as it gave them the opportunity to petition again.

A petitioner who the Admiralty identified as making a particularly strong case of appeal was Charlotte Hawkey. In 1824, the Admiralty’s rules on pensions to family members extended to sisters but only in ‘very extraordinary circumstances’.<sup>238</sup> Miss Hawkey, a spinster and orphan who had lost four of her brothers in the navy, was selected by the Admiralty as fitting this criterion. In the same year, Mrs Worsley, whose case has already been discussed, had lost three sons in the navy but was not chosen as an exceptional case.<sup>239</sup> The preference towards Miss Hawkey was

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<sup>236</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5018, Sophia, Anne, Catherine, and Sarah Stow, 1809.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5237, Memorial on pension policy, 1824.

<sup>239</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5085, Ann Worsley, 1824.

likely due to her petitioning strategies and how she relayed the patriotic circumstances of their deaths.

Like other sisters who petitioned the Admiralty on behalf of their brothers' services, Miss Hawkey outlined her emotional as well as financial distress at their loss, writing she was 'wholly dependent on her two brothers Lieutenant John and Joseph Hawkey for the means of subsistence'.<sup>240</sup> In contrast to Mrs Worsley, her brothers were all officers with the rank of lieutenant or captain and all had died in action. The majority of Miss Hawkey's petition recounted the service of each of her brothers, the first brother, John Hawkey, dying in 'arduous service' in the Congo where he distinguished himself by 'gallant and excellent conduct'.<sup>241</sup> Prior to this, he had been a prisoner of war in France for eleven years and was 'for his previous meritorious conduct ... promoted from the rank of midshipman to that of Lieutenant, a fact as your petitioner is informed of unusual occurrence'.<sup>242</sup> To add to her first brother's exceptional status, she recounts the loss of her publicly-celebrated second brother, Joseph Hawkey, also a lieutenant, who was 'killed in a suspenseful attack on a Russian flotilla'.<sup>243</sup> His actions received the 'most honourable testimony' from his commanding officer but also gained public notoriety as she references a 'public account of his gallant enterprise, in the London Gazette'.<sup>244</sup> Her other two brothers, a captain and a lieutenant, also had died abroad and of wounds while in service to the navy. The knowledge of the specifics of her brothers' careers was an important way to demonstrate her deservingness for belonging to such a brave and self-sacrificing family. Such detailed knowledge was common among middling families, particularly when they married later which meant that 'brothers and sisters could continue their shared life as young adults ... [d]uring this period they had lived through family crises and were often implicated in each other's

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<sup>240</sup> TNA, ADM 1/4737, Charlotte Hawkey, 1824.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.



courtship and career adventures'.<sup>245</sup> In the case of Miss Hawkey, close attention to her brothers' career adventures was important in death as well as life in her appeals to the Admiralty.

Regarding Miss Hawkey's own circumstances, she writes that her 'mother has long since deceased' and that due to the loss of her brothers is 'left entirely destitute of the means of support'.<sup>246</sup> Brothers, as has already been discussed, did play an important role in supporting their sisters and mothers and, for some relationships, the sibling bond was on par with husband and wife.<sup>247</sup> As both of her brothers had not married or had any other dependants, Miss Hawkey was able to receive a pension as a sister. As a lone woman, without the support of her mother, her appeal to her orphanhood can be seen as an additional strategy to appeal to the sympathy of the Commissioners. Her emotional loss and dependence certainly attracted the support of other officials, as her petition was supported by the Mayor of Cornwall which added importance to her appeal. Overall, her combined strategies of expressing her brothers' patriotism, providing detailed evidence of their service and deaths, support from local officials and statement of her distress with flattery to the Lord Commissioner's 'goodness' were strategies which distinguished her and her loss as a deserving exception.<sup>248</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The opportunity to appeal to the Admiralty for a pension as a dependant allowed many women and families agency over their circumstances. For more elite and middling-class petitioners who had lost husbands or sons of officer rank, applying for pensions for themselves and their daughters and jobs for their sons offered them a chance to avoid social decline and continue in the near standard of living experienced during their husband's or father's life. For poorer

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<sup>245</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 349.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid. 351.

<sup>248</sup> TNA, ADM 1/4737, Charlotte Hawkey, 1824.

petitioners of ordinary seamen, petitioning offered them a chance to support themselves without resorting to poor relief particularly post-1834 when such relief became explicitly linked to notions of moral failings.

It is clear from the assessment of petitions that strong family relations were essential to lone women's long-term survival. This is evident in how lone mothers portrayed their emotional and practical relationships with their children, by gender, in their petitions. Ann Guscote, for example, in her petition underlined that she had 'daughters' to support who were unprovided for, a strategy which highlighted dual female dependence in a society which required a male breadwinner's support.<sup>249</sup> Daughters were often portrayed as an extension of a mother's identity and their shared interdependence is demonstrated through references to them living, working, and petitioning together. In cases where there were strong mother-daughter relationships, petitioners could profit from their mother's knowledge, experience, and could benefit from a safe harbour by living together in times of need. This mother-daughter support and dual industry did meet the approval of authorities such as the parish, which consequently benefited them by gaining local support for their petitions in negotiating relief with the Admiralty. In petitions for their sons, the collaborative nature of family finances is further revealed. Although this support was not always possible in all families, the replacement of the paternal breadwinner by a son did make a significant difference to familial survival and acted against social decline, as evidenced by many mothers writing to the Admiralty that they relied on allowances from their sons for themselves and their daughters.

However, while many lone women appealed emotively to a 'cult of maternity' and provided details of their dependence and vulnerability in old age, these claims alone did not necessarily

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<sup>249</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5208, Ann Guscote, 1809.

guarantee support.<sup>250</sup> To achieve success as a mother or a sister also required multiple petitioning strategies: networking, knowledgeability, patronage, character reference, and support from influential individuals. This, combined with emotive appeal, was important as petitions needed to be appealing enough to be treated as an exception. Class and rank, too, were important distinguishing factors in the success of petitioners, affecting how families were treated, alongside their eligibility.

Overall, in exploring naval families headed by matriarchs, this chapter has demonstrated that familial relations were vital in providing additional opportunities for institutional support, allowing mothers to provide, both formally and informally, for their children and to benefit the social mobility of the wider family.

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<sup>250</sup> Bailey, *Parenting in England*, 5.

#### **Chapter 4: Moral Policing and Community Informers**

This chapter builds on the research of previous chapters on lone women's petitions for relief, and their familial survival strategies, to focus on the role of neighbourhoods. Lone women in the late eighteenth to nineteenth century were subject to close surveillance by their communities and the authorities. Relief granted to women by institutions remained dependent on their meeting that institution's expectations and rules throughout their lives. This chapter assesses how local communities acted as informal agents to monitor morally the recipients of relief and how this affected lone women's negotiations with authorities. Thus, lone women faced not only economic challenges due to the mere fact that they were alone, but faced continuing surveillance to determine whether they remained deserving of support and sympathy.

Naval widows and the wives of convicts were particularly targeted, the bounds of their privacy frequently tested, and their respectability under constant review. Naval widows, in particular, lived under significant scrutiny as the Admiralty required them to produce affidavits annually. They also had to travel to receive their pensions where their dress and deportment would be observed by officials, and those who relied on agents would have to be open and trusting with their personal affairs.<sup>1</sup> For the wives of convicts, changes under the new poor law placed an emphasis on providing relief in the workhouse and thus restricted out-relief for the able-bodied. Although the notion of deservingness was supposed to be curtailed, it continued at local levels and the behaviour and reputation of wives of convicts was often considered in decision-making on relief. Both groups of women were vulnerable to informants within the community casting aspersions on their character and behaviour as they attempted to create lives of their own and could easily lose the institutional support intended to replace their lost breadwinner as a result.

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<sup>1</sup> Lincoln, *Naval Wives and Mistresses*, 44-45; TNA, ADM 6/ 395, Sarah Campbell, 1821. Mrs Campbell was reported to have borrowed clothing and shoes to ensure she would receive her pension without question.

The perceived respectability of women was often tied with their sexual propriety and relationship status. As discussed in earlier chapters, it was difficult for many lone women to survive financially without a male breadwinner. For most of the period 1789-1850, the Admiralty did not allow widows to remarry and claim a pension, which undermined women's capacity for survival and physical comfort by denying them a chance to remarry without financial detriment. However, the intervention of the Prince Regent in 1819 allowed widows to claim a pension even if they remarried, but this was reversed in 1830.<sup>2</sup> These rule changes regarding remarriage meant that many secret marriages and informal relationships prior to this rule change came to the Admiralty's attention upon renewed applications during this eleven-year period. Otherwise, authorities learned about lone women's personal relationships from informers who wrote with information to undermine a pension claim. Throughout the period, accusations of cohabitation were common in informing letters submitted to the Admiralty.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, poor lone women also found themselves to be victims of informer allegations regarding extra-marital relations which could prevent them being granted relief.<sup>4</sup> For the wives of convicts, they faced a different prospect of being legally unable to remarry as their husbands were banished, not dead.

This chapter will draw on informer cases against widows which were brought to the Admiralty's attention, along with disputes with the parish regarding the wives of convicts. It uses the ADM 6 series which covers investigations by the Court of Assistants across the period 1808 to 1830. This series covers a wide range of case material relative to grants to widows and is rich in detail, revealing how the Admiralty kept track of spending, responded prior to and post interventions

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<sup>2</sup> Admiralty-Office, 'Widows Pensions', *London Gazette*, Vol. 1, 15 Jan 1819, 108; TNA, ADM 7/615, 'Widows' Pensions. Rules and orders for granting pension to the widows of commission and warrant officer of the Royal Navy', 30 June 1830, Article X.

<sup>3</sup> Twenty-five cases have been identified relating to cohabiting or extra marital relations submitted by informers to the Admiralty taken from ADM 6 series and ADM 1 sample.

<sup>4</sup> TNA, MH 12/5413, 1153, Letter from Randel and Samuel Hubbert to Mr Muggeriagio, Poor Law agent, Manchester, 1836.

by the Prince Regent in widows' pension policies, identified crime, and defined what it considered as appropriate evidence when widows could not produce standard certificates due to their global travels with their husbands. It also includes extensive personal accounts within petitions on a range of issues written by widows, family members, and the community, in which they provide insights into their living standards, distress, and behaviour. From this wealth of information, this chapter will focus foremost on informer cases. The widows in these cases were all successful in their initial application for a pension but had it temporarily or permanently stopped through accusations made against them from the community which triggered extensive investigations of their character and past conduct. Lone women themselves had to challenge these accusations and appeals could span several years. In addition to these cases, source material from ADM 1 and ADM 12, which extends to 1844, will also be used to demonstrate that, even within indexes, moral judgements were recorded and informed the Admiralty's decision-making. The MH 12 series will also be used to compare the experiences with the wives of convicts. However, there is overlap between the records collections, as petitioners used the support of other officials, such as local parish officials, in their counterclaims. Notably, the Admiralty also used the knowledge of other institutions, including local Poor Law authorities and magistrates. Using these cross-institutional sources permits examination of the role of the community, considering how and to what extent informers succeeded in undermining claimants. Together, this evidence reveals institutional understandings and decision-making regarding deservingness and how this was affected by gendered and class prejudice.

### **Neighbourhoods and Informing Culture**

Domestic historians focusing on gender, neighbourhoods and welfare have, from the early modern period through to the twentieth century, identified that neighbours often proved crucial in informally policing behaviour and respectability. As Andy Wood has observed, '[n]eighbourhood sustained stories about one's place in the moral and social order of the locality'

made a good reputation ‘key to their place in the community’.<sup>5</sup> But, as Ellen Ross noted in her study of the early twentieth century, neighbours watched for better and for worse, as ‘knowledgeable and eager spectators for displays of respectability, or lapses from it’.<sup>6</sup> Such knowledge could be recalled years after the events to support or damage an individual’s claim to welfare or legal dispute. Studies by Holihead and Davidoff have shown that the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also had conditions that were ideal for neighbourhood watching, despite significant periods of mass migration forming new local communities. Many people experienced close living quarters, and lone women often had to share accommodation with other women in similar circumstances or take in lodgers.<sup>7</sup> Work as a landlady or by taking in washing meant there was little separation of home and work, thus limiting personal privacy.<sup>8</sup> A good reputation and being known within the neighbourhood were important for credit, especially for naval wives and widows who would often have to wait months before receiving payment. Equally, local union officials took an interest in personal activities, especially of lone women, assessing the pressure they could place on ratepayers by their potential to become chargeable.<sup>9</sup>

Lone women had the potential to be costly to the community as applicants for long-term parochial relief and so could easily become a key target of neighbourhood surveillance. In late-eighteenth century Preston, Lancashire, the parish actively tried to drive lone women away by warning the population ‘twice a year against taking in and harbouring “single women pregnant or not, who do not belong to the township”’.<sup>10</sup> These practices continued into the nineteenth

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<sup>5</sup> Andy Wood, *Faith, Hope and Charity: English Neighbourhoods, 1500-1640* (Cambridge, 2020), 81-2.

<sup>6</sup> Ellen Ross, “‘Not the Sort that Would Sit on the Doorstep’: Respectability in Pre-World War I London neighbourhoods’, *International Labor and Working Class History*, 27 (1985), 42.

<sup>7</sup> Holihead, ‘Cut adrift or towed astern’, 156; Leonore Davidoff, ‘The separation of home and work? Landladies and lodgers in nineteenth and twentieth century England’, in Sandra Burman (ed.) *Fit Work for Women* (London, 1979), 64.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 65.

<sup>9</sup> TNA, MH12/2223, 10306, W. G. L. Clerk to the East Stonehouse Poor Law Board to Captain W. A. B. Hamilton, RN, Secretary to the Admiralty, Whitehall, 2 April 1849. The clerk wrote to the Admiralty to address their grievances of taking on the ‘burden’ of supporting women while men were away at sea and who would not allot money until three months after the start of their voyage.

<sup>10</sup> Hill, *Women Alone*, 104.

century, illustrated by the Medway Union's internal discussions among guardians for removal of families of mariners who were not financially maintained.<sup>11</sup> The authorities closely monitored even the widows of officers. To access their pensions, women had to meet the requirement that their marital and financial circumstances had not changed, and they had to make an affidavit as proof annually.<sup>12</sup> For a woman unfortunate enough to be deserted by her husband through criminal transportation, her whole life and personal status was up for constant discussion by authorities. Poor law authorities, as discussed in chapter one, debated how to treat deserted wives of convicts in terms of relief, questioning whether they could be considered a widow despite their husbands being banished, not dead, and whether they could be legally punished for their circumstances.

The nineteenth century marked a significant point of change in Britain regarding the understanding and application of welfare. Widespread administrative reforms in government intended that relief become more standardised.<sup>13</sup> However, population increase and migration meant that at the same time there was a greater reliance on letters, petitions, and reports rather than in-person appeals, which meant there remained much discretion as to how information and rules were interpreted. Lone women, due to their financial position within a patriarchal society that privileged a male breadwinner, were the most likely to receive aid and were thus caught up in a culture of surveillance and increased investigative practices. Charitable institutions used petitions to screen eligibility, but in selecting recipients, charities, in some cases, also investigated personal lives and reputations.<sup>14</sup> Institutions such as the Admiralty did this by employing private

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<sup>11</sup> TNA, MH 12/5250, 727A, Internal memorandum by F. Funcke, Relieving Officer and Assistant Overseer, Medway Union, 24 Jan. 1840.

<sup>12</sup> Lincoln, *Naval Wives and Mistresses*, 44.

<sup>13</sup> Steve King, et al., *In Their Own Write*, 4; Philip Harling, *The Waning of 'Old Corruption': The Politics of Economical Reform in Britain, 1779-1846* (Oxford, 1996), 20-22.

<sup>14</sup> In the Royal Navy, the courts of assistants had their own legal team and agents who would be deployed to comment on the character of pension recipients. More widely, private charities and individuals, such as Lady Spencer, who received multiple petitions for financial assistance in the period 1750 - 1814, also investigated all applicants, specifically references from those who could validate their claims. See: Donna Andrews, 'Noblesse



investigators, but such inquiries could also be triggered by local community knowledge, through informers. The outcomes could significantly affect whether an applicant retained their pension and could result in discretionary rewards for the informers. In a parochial context, neighbours and friends could aid but also undermine charitable applications through using their own personal knowledge to sway local poor law officials. For example, in Kirby Lonsdale, John Haley wrote to the parish officer, Stephen Garnett, on behalf of the Nelson family, detailing their hardship and deservingness and thus acted as a conduit for their relief.<sup>15</sup> This positive relationship spanned 1814 to 1831; however, by 1829 his own moral judgments shaped his personal interventions, as he wrote to Garnett that the family's widowed sister-in-law, 'keeps a Verry Disorderly House ... and her Children is Verrey Idle and Naught'(sic).<sup>16</sup> He took it upon himself to advise that she should not be given relief, as she was soon likely to ask, and instead suggested she go to the 'Workhouse [where] She may Grow Better with Care'.<sup>17</sup> Within naval communities, information regarding the behaviour of lone women could be reported on from great distances, spanning nations not just counties. The Lord Commissioners received information about the widows they supported from Ireland and Scotland, as well as from naval ports, and, in response, the Admiralty used their own agents to investigate cases in intense detail across the United Kingdom.<sup>18</sup>

Those informing against lone women were part of a broader culture of civil surveillance encouraged by the state. Informers emerged from a wide range of people within society, from professionals and small groups to individuals, despite it being unpopular among local

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oblige: Female Charity in the age of sentiment', in J. Brewer and S. Staves (eds.), *Early Modern Conceptions of Poverty* (London, 1995), 292.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Jones and Stephen King, *Navigating the Old English Poor Law: The Kirby Lonsdale Letters, 1809-1836* (Oxford, 2020), 29.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> TNA, ADM 6/385-402, 1808-1830.

populations.<sup>19</sup> Criminal reward policies dating from 1692 set precedents for community informers by offering financial incentives of £40-£100 to apprehend criminals, such as highway robbers and housebreakers, and bring them to prosecution.<sup>20</sup> This reward system was introduced in response to the many crimes that remained unprosecuted and was, according to Mary Clayton and Robert Shoemaker, significant in that it was an incentive that encouraged ‘*anyone*’ in society to inform, not just ‘*victims and witnesses*’.<sup>21</sup> Rewards were divided and awarded automatically following successful conviction. Although informers were unlikely to make a living from the practice, Clayton and Shoemaker find that, ‘even one to two rewards would have provided significant financial benefits for most people at the time’.<sup>22</sup> This informing policy resulted in a significant increase in the number of executions for crimes eligible for rewards but ceased in 1818, as rewards were thought by the state to encourage ‘perjury and led juries to be disinclined to convict’.<sup>23</sup> Socially, criminal informing was unpopular and those who benefited through convictions were criticised as having received ‘blood money’.<sup>24</sup>

However, rewards were not limited to information supporting convictions for violent personal crime. Smaller rewards were periodically introduced, such as the Gin Act of 1736, which gave £5 rewards for providing information against those who sold gin or distilled spirits without a licence.<sup>25</sup> In those cases, Jessica Warner and Frank Ivis found that those who took part in providing information were often motivated by insecure employment, drawn from professions such as rope-makers, carpenters and sailors who could easily converse in dockyards while being close to public houses.<sup>26</sup> However, those who used informing to supplement their income did so

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<sup>19</sup> Hill, *Women Alone*, 123.

<sup>20</sup> Mary Clayton and Robert Shoemaker, ‘Blood money and the bloody code: the impact of financial reward on criminal justice in eighteenth-century England’, *Continuity and Change*, 37 (2022), 98.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* (Emphasis in original).

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

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>25</sup> Jessica Warner and Frank Ivis, ‘Informers and Their Social Networks in Eighteenth-Century London: A Comparison of Two Communities’, *Social Science History*, 25.4 (2001), 564.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 566.

with considerable social risk as ‘once an individual becomes known as an informer, his or her reputation [was] beyond rehabilitation’.<sup>27</sup> Similar risks to informers continued into the mid-nineteenth century as one self-described ‘public informer’ and ex-sailor, James Benwell, wrote of in his 1832 petition to the Home Office following his arrest for conspiracy.<sup>28</sup> Benwell pleaded with the Home Secretary that he had been medically discharged with only a temporary pension and having a wife and four children to support, he necessarily turned informer against ‘publicans, stage coachmasters and others to recover penalties incurred by offence under various statutes of parliament’.<sup>29</sup> The main information provided against publicans concerned their ‘harbouring of disorderly prostitutes and other bad persons in their houses’ which could reach rewards of up to £100 in fines.<sup>30</sup> His actions, however, put him at risk as he wrote, ‘his life has been endangered in 30 instances when he has either been immersed in water, his clothes torn off his person, wounded and ill-used by the populace’.<sup>31</sup> Providing information against businesses came with significant risks of retribution; however, other informers could act more discreetly against more vulnerable individuals for monetary gain.

Less-widely advertised and notorious than these state campaigns, charities also encouraged information against those not adhering to their rules. They appealed through newspapers and could even anonymously name and shame the undeserving in the press.<sup>32</sup> The Admiralty, in rare cases, also utilised the press to advertise large rewards, such as a £200 reward for a runaway clerk accused of forgery.<sup>33</sup> However, information against lone women, as will be seen, was often submitted at the instigation of the informer rather than at the request of the Admiralty. This wider culture of informing prompted informants to act on speculation that they could secure a

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 564.

<sup>28</sup> TNA, HO 17/41/95, James Benwell, 1832.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> *The Morning Advertiser*, 31 October 1826; *Leicester Chronicle*, 5 November 1836.

<sup>33</sup> *The Morning Chronicle*, 20 January 1812.

share of the money saved from payments denied to naval widows. As early as 1754, the Court of Assistants agreed that ‘50 per cent upon the money saved in the year’ of a widow’s pension was to be given to informers and ‘alike reward promised in future instances’.<sup>34</sup> Lone women, therefore, were vulnerable to being targeted for financial as well as moral reasons by their communities.

### **Reward**

Policing of social morality was often underpinned by economic need, enticing informers with the chance of reward and playing on the jealousy of those perceived as receiving more than their just share. Reward was a powerful, if not always reliable, incentive for individuals to inform against their neighbours to authorities, as evidenced by the case of one informer, Mrs Ann Patton. In 1817, Mrs Patton, a naval widow, wrote to the Admiralty from Raphoe, Ireland, with information condemning a fellow widow, Mrs Jane McClure, for continuing to draw her widow’s pension whilst being remarried which was against the Admiralty’s rules.<sup>35</sup> The value of the reward for the information in this case, based on the pension granted, was £20. However, Mrs Patton had her own ideas regarding the value of her information and attempted to bargain with the Admiralty for the value of the reward. In her first letter, her details were vague and Mrs Patton withheld information, writing that ‘there is a lady here who has made herself rich under his majesty’ in reference to her undisclosed remarriage and refers to an unnamed witness to her claims, offering to ‘transmit their names and places of abode ... which I would expect some recompense’.<sup>36</sup> Upon supplying the names and addresses of those who could confirm the second marriage, she wrote that to obtain the information cost her ‘much trouble and expense’ and thus requested that she could ‘for the good I have done ask the liberty of drawing on London for fifty

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<sup>34</sup> TNA, ADM 6/389, Ann Patton, 1817.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid; ADM 6/393, Ann Patton, 1819; Lincoln, *Naval Wives and Mistresses*, 45.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

pounds and if you are so kind as to double it the blessing of the widow which I am will come upon you'.<sup>37</sup>

To justify such a substantial reward, her argument was twofold. First that she was saving the Admiralty considerable expense as she described Mrs McClure as a 'young woman and might have enjoyed it [the pension] forty years but for me'.<sup>38</sup> Mrs Patton noted in her letter that Mrs McClure was originally a surgeon's widow, the same occupation as Patton's son, and that Mrs McClure's second husband was now dead and thus it can be inferred again without support. It appears that even if similar naval occupations could forge communities of women bound by their shared experience, as argued by Lin, these communities nonetheless did not guarantee friendship or sympathy for the plight of other lone women.<sup>39</sup> Mrs Patton's second line of reasoning was far more sympathetic to her own poor situation and distinguished herself from Mrs McClure through an account of her own independent struggle and sacrifice. To reinforce her deservingness for a reward, she emphasised her old age and poverty, the latter due to her investment in her son's career as an assistant surgeon. She wrote that, 'I brought myself to poverty to put him where he is at present being six years in His Majesty's service and I have no interest to forward his promotion'.<sup>40</sup> Her account of selfless patriotism was likely to highlight her virtue, but perhaps also shield her son from her actions and ensure that she would receive the monetary reward. However, the Admiralty was not influenced by her arguments and agreed on the value of £20 only. Even this was dependent on receiving further information from the Mayor of Londonderry regarding Mrs McClure.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Lin, 'Caring for the Nation's Families', 104-105.

<sup>40</sup> TNA, ADM 6/389, Ann Patton, 1817.

The Admiralty contacted Mrs McClure in consequence of Mrs Patton's information, but she managed to avoid questioning through the letter-writing intervention of a friend who claimed, 'she laid in bed dangerously ill'.<sup>41</sup> Subsequently, she absconded from the area, preventing a full investigation of the accusation. Mrs Patton, dismayed that Mrs McClure 'fled from this place with several hundred of his Majesty's money in her pocket', wrote again to the Admiralty for her reward; however, her authoritative tone notably changed to that of fear.<sup>42</sup> Like professional informer, James Benwell, Mrs Patton revealed that her actions had put her in significant danger and the need for secrecy was paramount. Her letter in August 1817, following Mrs McClure's departure, reminded the Admiralty of her 'crav[ing for] some little reward for what I have done as I am afraid I will suffer from her friends'.<sup>43</sup> But by June 1818, Mrs Patton, still not recompensed, begged for a reward in the 'the most secret manner as I am desolate and unprotected and surrounded with people who would murder me were it known'.<sup>44</sup> Wood has argued for an earlier period that those 'who denounced their neighbours could, in some circumstances, be seen as upholding the proper standards of the authorities. Yet, in other contexts, they could be seen as troublesome barrators and gossips, disrupting the easy-flowing life of the ideal community, and so be subject to neighbourly sanctions'.<sup>45</sup> Mrs Patton's desperation and fear becomes apparent in her offer to 'accept anything you may think proper as I am in distress' and request to 'please to send it in the most secret manner as I am afraid of my life being a widow desolate and unprotected'.<sup>46</sup>

These fears, particularly her concern for the lack of protection, implies that her actions likely had isolated her within the community and she would feel their sanctions if she was identified. From

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> TNA, ADM 6/393, Ann Patton, 1819.

<sup>45</sup> Wood, *Faith, Hope and Charity*, 181.

<sup>46</sup> TNA, ADM 6/393, Ann Patton, 1819.

analysis of the clerk's marginalia in this case, it appears that the obstacle to Mrs Patton's reward is that the Admiralty never received a response from the Mayor of Londonderry.<sup>47</sup> However, when Mrs McClure wrote to the Admiralty in 1819 to request reinstatement of her pension following rule changes, she referenced receiving a letter from the 'Mayor of L Derry' in 1817. This admission, read alongside the lack of response from the Mayor of Londonderry to the Admiralty and Mrs Patton's subtle references to Mrs McClure's 'favour of the Gentleman here' in her first informing letter, suggests the younger widow did enjoy protection from supporters within the community. Overall, Mrs Patton's informing actions had a lasting impact, as Mrs McClure was unable to regain her pension. There is no evidence whether Mrs Patton finally received a reward, and thus this case highlights an informer's risks, especially if the accused had a supportive network.

However, other informers against naval widows did successfully collect rewards for their information. William Scott, who was not affiliated to the navy, was a 'cabinet maker and upholsterer' in Dublin who informed against Sarah Charlton, a surgeon's widow in 1819. Like Mrs McClure, Charlton had remarried while continuing to claim her widow's pension.<sup>48</sup> Scott had been present at her second marriage and for his evidence was generously rewarded, being 'paid a moiety of the pension for the year 1800, which he was the means of saving to the Charity as well as the charge he had incurred for postage'.<sup>49</sup> Mrs Charlton and her new husband faced legal proceedings for claiming the pension fraudulently. However, nineteen years later when the rules against remarriage changed, Mrs Charlton reapplied for her widow's pension and notably used Scott as a witness to her second marriage to support her claim. Her use of his testimony for support suggests that some informers maintained their secrecy from their victims as the agents

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> TNA, ADM 6/393, Sarah Charlton, 1819.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

of their personal ruin. However, despite the passage of nineteen years, clerks found Scott's original proof of her deception and thus denied reinstating her pension.<sup>50</sup>

In the parishes administering the poor law, informers collaborated with parochial authorities morally to police marital relations too. However, the targets would most often be male deserters who left women alone and made them and their children chargeable to ratepayers. As with the Admiralty, however, official rewards were discretionary and acquiring information was often a difficult endeavour. This is illustrated by one disgruntled informer, Harry Hyatt, who wrote in a letter to the Poor Law Board in 1849 that the local guardians had not paid him the £10 reward promised for informing and apprehending a man named William Glenister, who had deserted his wife and large family. Glenister had absconded from the Amersham Union in Buckinghamshire but was recognised by Hyatt in Brighton. His information led to Glenister's arrest and sentence to three months in Aylesbury Gaol. Hyatt was paid expenses but told a reward would be disallowed by the parish accounts. In his appeal to the Poor Law Board, Hyatt, like Mrs Patton, expressed entitlement to a reward for his effort and knowledge, arguing:

I feel myself – fully entitled to the reward and having had a great deal of trouble about the matter ... I beg further to state that had it not been for my exertions the parish officers would never have succeeded in apprehending him as he was going here in another name and living with a woman to whom it is believed he had been married.<sup>51</sup>

Hyatt met disappointment in his appeal as the Board replied that the parish officers did not have 'any legal power to offer a reward' and thus could not interfere.<sup>52</sup> However, in the same year, the Poor Law Board received another enquiry regarding rewards for the apprehension of men who deserted their families from the local guardians of St Saviour's Union, Surrey, and the Board in this instance approved discretion in paying a reward, writing that:

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> TNA, MH 12/384, 26250, Harry Hyatt to the PLC, 4 Sep. 1849.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.



The question turns upon the proper construction of § 59 of the 7 & 8 Vic. C101. Which enables the G[uar]d[ia]ns, to pay ‘the reasonable costs of apprehension and prosecution of person who desert their families’, and the B[oa]rd think that the words ‘costs of apprehension’ would include any reasonable sum paid as a reward offered for the taking and securing the offender.<sup>53</sup>

The above cases reveal that, unlike government rewards for capital criminals, payment to informers was neither guaranteed nor ‘automatic’.<sup>54</sup> Parish informers, while carrying out similar efforts to find, apprehend and bring an individual to prosecution, had to petition for their right to access a reward. Informing to the parish and Admiralty could be time consuming. Finding evidence was often expensive and created risks to the informer’s own security, and ultimately rewards from institutions were not always guaranteed. Despite this, many letters of accusations continued, making it important to consider the wider motivations which would encourage individuals or groups to actively try to undermine the financial survival of lone women and what behaviours that they, the informers, found threatening or unacceptable within their communities. Based on the informing sources, these motivations can be grouped into three main categories: moral outrage of the neighbourhood, personal revenge, and financial disagreements, although in some cases all three themes overlap.

### **Moral Outrage and Neighbourhood Policing**

Among the informing letters submitted to the Admiralty, rewards appear not to be the stated motivation as only one informer explicitly requested a reward. Instead, the majority of informing letters focused on punishing the behaviour of individuals who defied social norms.<sup>55</sup> Bridget Hill and Mark Jackson have argued that ‘singleness’ was regarded with hostility, not just by

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<sup>53</sup> TNA, MH 12/12641, 25103, Poor Law Board to James Blake, Clerk to the Guardians of Saint Saviour Union, 27 Aug. 1849.

<sup>54</sup> Clayton and Shoemaker, ‘Blood money’, 103.

<sup>55</sup> TNA, ADM 6/393, Ann Patton, 1819.

authorities such as the Poor Law authorities, but ‘by other women, who regarded the behaviour of single women as somehow threatening’.<sup>56</sup> They found that ‘[t]hose women who conformed to the allotted role felt increased security in confronting those who deviated from it’.<sup>57</sup> These fears and confrontations also apply to lone widows as well as spinsters, as shown by several informing letters submitted by other women policing widows’ propriety and expressing their moral outrage to a power higher than the neighbourhood.

In their letters to the Admiralty, informers often mirrored official language to reinforce their legitimacy in casting aspersions, actively utilising a shared language of moral policing to achieve their own personal campaigns. Sara Hobbs, for example, wrote against Eliza Foord receiving a widow’s pension, declaring that ‘she is not a fit object for your charity’.<sup>58</sup> This phrase can be read as an intentional choice to hold the Admiralty to account to only support ‘proper and deserving objects’ as they advertised.<sup>59</sup> Eliza Foord was the widow of a carpenter, who died of cholera in Haslar Hospital in 1833, and she was in receipt of £25 per annum pension. During their marriage, as wife of a warrant officer, Mrs Foord would have likely been from the upper-working to low-middling class, depending on the generosity of her husband to allot his pay. In this social position, there was often a tension between respectability and necessary ‘rougher’ survival tactics.<sup>60</sup> Respectability and keeping up appearances, Ellen Ross argues, were often focused on women as a reflection of their entire household which was important for bargaining with outsiders for goods, credit or charity.<sup>61</sup> The judgement of respectability was intimately personal and invasive, as women were to ‘*embod[y]*’ respectability or the lack of it, in their dress, public conduct, language, housekeeping, childrearing methods, spending habits, and, of course, sexual

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<sup>56</sup> Mark Jackson, ‘New-Born Child Murder’ (Manchester, 1996), in Hill, *Women Alone*, 115.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> TNA, ADM 1/4755, Eliza Foord, 1834

<sup>59</sup> TNA, ADM 7/615, ‘Widows’ Pensions: Rules and orders’ 30 June 1830.

<sup>60</sup> Ross, ‘Not the sort’, 39.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

behaviour'.<sup>62</sup> Sarah Hobbs' informing letter acted as an exposé of Mrs Foord's reported lack of respectability, providing a long history of her failings as a wife, rough behaviour and criminal past:

the woman have abandoned her husband eighteen year time after time she pawned and sold his cloths brought him twice into a Goal for her Debts she Contracted for Drink was put into a work house by him and allowed maintenance by him Broke from work house Rob'd her Lodging got 7 months imprisonment in Portsmouth goal from that time being Living in adultery in London where her husband Received an account of her Committing a felony an understood she was transported and was sent to Botany Bay but such as it apers she was imprisoned for one or two years this woman are now applying for the Bounty (sic).<sup>63</sup>

The focus of Mrs Hobbs' accusations was on the Foords' failed marriage, which featured separations, abandonment to the workhouse, and extra marital relationships for which she held Eliza accountable. This letter written to male Admiralty officials was intended to appeal to a patriarchal audience in favour of traditional authority by husbands and obedience of wives. It nevertheless suggests a shared misogyny by Mrs Hobbs, who shows no sympathy for Mrs Foord's forced entry into the workhouse, a place that was socially feared and considered stigmatising. Mrs Foord's breaking free from the workhouse suggests she viewed it as an act of confinement rather than support from her husband. This case also reveals that Mrs Hobbs had been watching and gathering information about Mrs Foord over a sustained period that enabled her to list a multitude of moral failings to damage her character. For accused lone women, it was often a shock when their past deeds and experiences were recalled and held against them.

In regard to accusations of Mrs Foord 'living in adultery', Frost has identified that many wives living alone, whether by separation or desertion, were forced to cohabit with a new breadwinner

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>63</sup> TNA, ADM 1/4755, Eliza Foord, 1834.

as a ‘rational choice’ and an act of financial necessity.<sup>64</sup> Neighbours from working-class communities, in response to adulterous cohabiting, could be ambivalent about these relationships ‘[s]ince the divide between respectable and rough was seldom clean’, although this was not always the guaranteed response.<sup>65</sup> Frost finds that relations between neighbours were complex, and that for some ‘[s]elf-consciously respectable families might also be censorious, no matter how poor’.<sup>66</sup> A concern for respectability was even more prevalent in middling and artisan classes and a naval pension would help raise Mrs Foord to this rank. Although no information survives regarding Mrs Hobbs’ class, her informing letter written with imperfect prose suggests she was of similar status to Mrs Foord and, coming from Portsea, possibly had her own connections to the navy. She did, however, likely know what would arouse the fears of her upper-middling readership, the Lord Commissioners. Frost argues that contemporary observers feared that an ‘uncontrolled lower class with sexual freedom’ also implied that ‘that those who could live happily “in sin” were also idle, drunken, and criminal’.<sup>67</sup> Mrs Hobbs, in her informing letter, ensured to make these connections.

Mrs Hobbs had a familiar knowledge of Mrs Foord’s financial practices, including the pawning of her husband’s clothes and committing theft. Pawning was a common ‘rough’ survival strategy for working class women to make their finances stretch and was often viewed as “borrowing” rather than stealing.<sup>68</sup> Women pawned household items and clothing with the intention of recovering the items rather than committing theft by permanently selling them: however, for items borrowed from lodgings, this was fraught with risk of being interpreted as theft.<sup>69</sup>

Drinking, particularly for women, was a social taboo and implied prostitution rather than

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<sup>64</sup> TNA, ADM 1/4755, Eliza Foord, 1834; Frost, *Living in Sin*, 130, 110.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 134.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 116.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 125.

<sup>68</sup> Ellen Ross, ‘Survival Networks: Women’s Neighbourhood Sharing in London before World War I’, *History Workshop*, 15 (1983), 7; Hurl-Eamon, ‘The fiction of female dependence’, 485.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*.

respectability.<sup>70</sup> Despite social judgment against women drinking, popular ballads such as *The Merry Wives of Wapping*, described women ‘drowning their sorrows at being “forc’d to Lye alone” in “brisk reviving brandy”, while their husbands were away at sea’.<sup>71</sup> Accusations of intemperance, Jennine Hurl-Eamon finds, could significantly discredit women in the eyes of the authorities, particularly during criminal trials.<sup>72</sup> Mrs Hobbs concludes her letter with reference to Mrs Foord’s criminal past and her discovery that she had not been criminally transported, but rather served a two-year sentence. Although punished for her crime, it appears that the community retained a long memory of such criminal taint.

This damning account of Mrs Foord’s character contrasts with the evidence supplied from the local superintendent, who contextualises her circumstances and shifts criticism onto her husband. Although he did not deny Mrs Foord’s criminal activity of ‘stealing a bolster’, he argued that ‘she was driven to this from the ill conduct of her husband who is reported to have been a worthless vagabond during his lifetime she paid several sums for him which he would not pay’.<sup>73</sup> It can be inferred that this theft might have been an attempt at temporarily pawning goods for short-term funds. Attached to his report were numerous credit receipts for boots, shoes and other goods bought by Mr Foord amounting to £100 and included sums paid by Mrs Foord, suggesting she did not attempt widespread defrauding of their creditors. Overall, the superintendent displays a greater sympathy for the rough survival tactics of Mrs Foord, who found that she had been ‘severely punished’ for her crime and ‘otherwise she bears a most excellent character’.<sup>74</sup> The loss of her pension had forced Mrs Foord back into the workhouse. Unfortunately, the Lord Commissioners disregarded this evidence and would not alter their

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<sup>70</sup> David W. Gutzke, ‘Gender, Class, and Public Drinking in Britain During the First World War’, *Histoire social/Social History*, 27.54 (1994), 369; Dias-Lewandowska and Lock, ‘Women, Home, and Alcohol’, 2.

<sup>71</sup> Jennine Hurl-Eamon, ‘Insights into Plebeian Marriage: Soldiers, Sailors, and their Wives in the Old Bailey Proceeding’, *London Journal*, 30.1 (2005), 28.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> TNA, ADM 1/4755, Eliza Foord, 1834

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

decision that she was ‘not a fit nor deserving person’ for the ‘indulgence’ of a pension.<sup>75</sup> The circumstances of Mrs Foord’s crime and her time served could not remove her criminal taint and she continued to be defined by her past.

The case of Mrs Elizabeth Cochran also involves the community in the private affairs of a widow acting against social norms regarding sexual propriety. A relatively wealthy widow, she was in receipt of £40 per annum and owned a tavern in Edinburgh. Mrs Cochran was informed upon by her neighbours George and Margaret Tasker, in 1817, for her illicit sexual relations during her widowhood and subsequently drawing on a pension after remarrying. Mrs Cochran’s first husband had died in 1807 in France as a prisoner of war. Although the original informing letter against Mrs Cochran does not survive, a statement does that transmitted the Taskers’ evidence against her that expressed their moral outrage and highlighted the interconnectedness of neighbour relations. The Taskers had only known Mrs Cochran a relatively short period of ‘twelve to fifteen months’ but were well-connected through friendship with her daughter, who was a governess to the family of George Tasker’s employer.<sup>76</sup> This close friendship allowed access to the personal life of Mrs Cochran who was one evening surprised by Mrs Tasker and her own daughter returning after a trip from the theatre. Due to the late hour, her daughter intended to sleep at her mother’s house for the evening and, upon arrival, Mrs Tasker ‘to her surprise found she Mrs Cochran had retired with Alexander Boswell to her bed chamber’.<sup>77</sup> In response, Mrs Tasker states that she:

remonstrated the next day with Mrs Cochran on the impropriety of such conduct and threatened that if she did not forbid Boswell her house or marry him she would drop her acquaintance. Mrs Cochran made light of it saying she was much attached to the young man & at first said she would not think of marrying but afterwards in consequence of

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> TNA, ADM 6/389, Elizabeth Cochran, 1817.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

Mrs Tasker's repeating her threats Mrs Cochran altered her mind & gave Tasker & wife money to purchase the licence and some favours for friends.<sup>78</sup>

This statement reveals Mrs Tasker's moral outrage at Mrs Cochran's 'impropriety', but also of the power she had over the latter as she directed her to abstinence or marriage, otherwise she would 'drop her acquaintance'.<sup>79</sup> The multiple reference to 'threats' suggests that Mrs Cochran would not only lose the Taskers' friendship but that she could face ostracism in the community, with implied consequence to her social and financial status. Indeed, the providing of money for gifts for friends and allowing them to acquire the license suggests an attempt at social appeasement for Mrs Cochran's personal actions. This statement also reveals that, until coerced by the Taskers, Mrs Cochran was reluctant to marry. Remarriage was unpopular for some widows, especially those with property, as it meant a loss of independence and, for naval widows before 1819, it meant forfeiting their pension.<sup>80</sup> Frost argues that, although it was less common than for men, some women preferred casual relations outside of marriage which gave them sexual and economic freedom, with the advantage that they could leave if a partner 'misbehaved'.<sup>81</sup> Mrs Cochran's reaction suggests she preferred this more informal relationship.

After forcing the nuptials through their 'threats', the Taskers acted against Mrs Cochran for continuing to draw her pension, supplying evidence for the case against her in Scotland from their new residence in London.<sup>82</sup> They stated that they did not know at the time that she had a pension from the government. However, they knew that she was a tavern owner in Edinburgh and their renewed assistance in attempting to help police her behaviour, suggests that as well as their grievance against her sexual independence against the status quo, they may have felt

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Frost, *Living in Sin*, 128.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

jealousy towards her financial independence. Similarly, in newspapers, distinctions were drawn between lone women who ‘abuse[d]’ charity and those who were ‘a case of real charity’ made clear by their means.<sup>83</sup> In the *Leicester Chronicle*, an informer wrote against a woman who drew ‘the regular receipt of the payments accruing from “a hospital place,” although she possessed a considerable sum of money, in addition to her wages’.<sup>84</sup> This was contrasted on the same page with a subscription request for a dependent widow who recently lost her husband in an accident and was left with ten children ‘some quite helpless’, urging readers that a ‘stronger claim upon their and the public benevolence has seldom, if ever, been known’.<sup>85</sup> Although each of these cases has unique circumstances, they nonetheless reflect the tension and debate within communities over when it is legitimate for women to be provided aid to replace a breadwinner, where this aid should be received from, and how generous it should be.

Resentment might also be expressed by Poor Law authorities when lone women seemed to be enjoying informal relationships to replace a breadwinner. Wives of convicts who had been deserted by their husbands by criminal transportation to Australia were a particular target for surveillance. Local union officials vilified women who drew on parish funds while cohabiting with other men. Many wrote to the Poor Law Commissioners for advice to prosecute the women or terminate their support. Under the new poor law, relief was meant to be given to the able-bodied in the workhouse, but there remained some discretion for out-relief, such as for women with children under the age of nurture. Through analysis of petitions from the wives of convicts, it is evident that union decision-making on types of relief still utilised significant discretion regarding women’s behaviour. As discussed in chapter one, lone women preferred monetary out-relief as it allowed them to retain some independence. However, the local authorities were quick to deny this if the woman did not remain alone. A woman referred to as

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<sup>83</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 5 November 1836.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*



‘A. B.’, in the Battle Union parish, Sussex, whose husband was transported, illustrates this. The woman, described as an ‘able-bodied’ mother, left her children in the workhouse and went to live with another man in an adjoining parish.<sup>86</sup> Brought before a magistrate for child abandonment, her response was recorded as stating that ‘she sent the children into the Workhouse after maintaining them as long as she was able’.<sup>87</sup> Lone women faced significant financial challenges to earn money equivalent to a male breadwinner, or even find childcare to enable them to work. As a survival strategy, some mothers did place their children in the workhouse so that poor law officials would provide care that they themselves could not afford. The official response was not sympathetic to this difficult circumstance and, instead of changing their relief provision, they attempted to prosecute. This decision for A. B. was focused on her work avoidance which they viewed as unjust given their provision for her children, as they wrote:

The Man she cohabits with is a labouring man, and while living with him she earns nothing – The Guardians do not think it right to allow Out-relief to the woman for her children while living with and cohabiting with another man – If she was in the Workhouse she would by her work there be doing work which would be beneficial to the Union.<sup>88</sup>

However, the union officials were at a loss to prosecute women such as A. B.; as long as relief was requested for her children and not herself, legally this was considered as relief given on her husband’s behalf for his family, thus making her not liable for any financial payments.

Nonetheless, this case demonstrated that the union officials, like the Taskers, felt that they were entitled to reproach a lone woman for her conduct and took it upon themselves to dictate how she should live, with whom, and what type of work was appropriate.

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<sup>86</sup> TNA, MH 12/12748, Nathaniel P. Kell to the PLC, Dec. 1842.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

Mrs Cochran also faced prosecution for her actions of drawing a pension while having a relationship with another man. However, she was acquitted due to incorrectly drawn papers, difficulties in prosecuting her for fraud and imposition under civil law, and the unwillingness of the informer to come forward publicly. Due to the expense of organising legal proceedings in Edinburgh, the Admiralty dropped the case and Mrs Cochran was released on bail. However, she lost her pension which left her 'in extreme want' having long run out of her money.<sup>89</sup> Mrs Cochran petitioned for a reinstatement of her pension after the legal case was dropped, but the clerks responded that the case was 'not given up on account of want of evidence' and the Taskers' statement was crucial to this decision.<sup>90</sup>

Informers also brought affairs and illegitimate children to the Admiralty's attention by recounting dramatic scandals in the neighbourhood. The case of Mrs Honor Thompson, accused of 'criminal intercourse' with her husband's brother, provides an illustrative case of the enduring importance of neighbourhood gossip in defining an individual's reputation.<sup>91</sup> The informant in this case was Joseph Thompson, the cousin to Mrs Thompson's late husband, who applied to the Admiralty with the ultimate goal of gaining their investigative intervention to 'invalidate Mrs Honor Thompson's marriage, and thereby to bastardize her children, who will, if they be legitimate, be entitled to a considerable sum of Money under the will of a Colonel Dewar, the half-brother of the mother's side of the two Lieutenant Thompson'.<sup>92</sup> To encourage an Admiralty investigation, the informant made two accusations. Firstly, that Mrs Thompson's marriage, whether unknowingly or not, was bigamous, as he had abandoned his first wife, an actress, after his family judged her 'a woman of low description'.<sup>93</sup> The second accusation alleged that Mrs Thompson had an affair with her brother-in-law, with whom she was living and that

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> TNA, ADM 6/402, Honor Thompson, 1828.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

their child had been born more than a year after her husband died. He wrote that this fact was publicly known after Mrs Thompson's sister-in-law had made a scene to expose her in the street, writing that she made a 'great noise about her brother cohabiting with her brother's wife, and said the child was his & the neighbours became acquainted with the circumstances, and he [the brother-in-law] was under the necessity of taking lodging for himself at a place a small distance off and visit her in the evenings to avoid the scoff of the neighbours'.<sup>94</sup> Creating a scene in the street was an active attempt to damage Mrs Thompson's reputation. There was always a ready audience as much of women's social activity took place on the doorstep, while door-to-door tradesmen bore witness to and shared news in male gossip exchanges.<sup>95</sup> The strength of these accusations was aided by the fact that the informer was able to provide witnesses within the community to confirm his statement, including Mrs Thompson's nurse.

The testimony in the Thompson case affirms that neighbours had long memories when it came to scandal. In July 1828, Mrs Elizabeth Henderson, who was nurse to Mrs Thompson after she gave birth to her last child in 1818, provided a statement to the Admiralty of her experience during the month she lived with her. In her recollections, she wrote that Mrs Thompson was in 'deep mourning as a widow' and that her '5 or 6 children at home with her ... were all in deep black'.<sup>96</sup> Although 'represent[ing] herself as the widow of Lieutenant Thompson' she states she did not say when or where her husband had died but overall was 'a very ladylike woman and conducted herself with the greatest propriety'.<sup>97</sup> Notably, Mrs Henderson's focus on Mrs Thompson's clothes confirms the importance of the rituals of mourning and the wearing of black clothing as an act of 'conspicuous consumption' to determine respectability.<sup>98</sup> Julie-Marie

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ross, 'Survival Networks', 10; Amanda Vickey, 'An Englishman's Home is His Castle? Thresholds, Boundaries and Privacies in the Eighteenth-Century London House', *Past & Present*, 199 (2008), 154.

<sup>96</sup> TNA, ADM 6/402, Honor Thompson, 1828.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Strange, 'She Cried a Very Little', 156.

Strange similarly finds that, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the wearing of black mourning dress whether borrowed, dyed, or new, was important among the working class.<sup>99</sup> Strange argues that ‘those who wore light or coloured clothes during bereavement invited speculations as to the gravity of their grief’.<sup>100</sup> Mrs Henderson’s doubt regarding Mrs Thompson’s character arose, not through her personal actions, but through her interaction with a neighbourhood outsider, Mrs Thompson’s sister-in-law. Mrs Henderson described the sister-in-law as a ‘very low vulgar woman’ who called at the house to ask if Mrs Thompson was sick and to confirm her pregnancy.<sup>101</sup> Mrs Henderson said that the woman said she had ‘no wish to see her’ but wanted it known that Mrs Thompson ‘was a very bad woman and that there was every reason to believe that the child was by lieutenant Joseph Thompson who was also her brother’.<sup>102</sup> Although her statement confirms the informer’s accusations, Mrs Henderson’s recorded reaction to the information suggest doubt in the validity of the gossip as she had no prior ‘suspicion’.<sup>103</sup> She states that:

Lieutenant Joseph Thompson lived in the House at the same time but did not appear to take any charge or authority that he used to go into the rooms to see Mrs Thompson during her confinement and when she got about he used to dine and take his meals with her and appeared to be very attentive to her.<sup>104</sup>

From Mrs Henderson’s statement, her judgment focuses foremost on the appearance of power relations, particularly whether Joseph Thompson was trying to fill the void left by her husband. Her observation that Joseph Thompson did not appear to be the head of the household, not ‘tak[ing] any charge or authority’, suggests he presented the correct appearance of a lodger. However, as Leonore Davidoff has noted, within lodger and landlady relations there was often a

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 157.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

blurring of respectability and sexual relations could be implied: ‘There was, after all, a deeply rooted expectation that any man living with a woman would provide support, as a husband did, in return for services; the position of housekeeper very easily ran into common-law wife’.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, some cohabiting couples were able to fool others into believing they were married by acting as man and wife, even going by the same name, although not legally married.<sup>106</sup> In the Thompson case, familial affection and lodging was problematically blurred. It was controversial to marry the sibling of a deceased spouse and was later made illegal in 1835.<sup>107</sup> However, the account of Mrs Henderson’s conversation with Mrs Thompson confirms the possibility of marriage was discussed, but the ‘risk of her losing her pension’ acted as the main impediment, rather than any legal or social objection to the union.<sup>108</sup> Mrs Henderson’s statement does not express a moral judgment on the possibility of their marriage, but notes that she never saw her more than once and ‘had no conversation’ with her after employment, suggesting her parting was not particularly amicable or at least did not result in a friendship.<sup>109</sup> Her statement ended with an admission that she once heard Mrs Thompson say ‘she believed her husband had been married before he married her’, creating added suspicion regarding the legitimacy of her marital status, further supporting the informer’s claims.<sup>110</sup>

Mrs Henderson was not the only member of the community to comment on Mrs Thompson. Judgement from the wider neighbourhood was also evidenced in the additional testimony taken by the Admiralty clerks who interviewed the doctor who attended Mrs Thompson and, more informally, his wife. These statements reveal tension and differing perspectives regarding who was willing to help the authorities, what information was deemed as acceptably public or private

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<sup>105</sup> Davidoff, ‘The separation of home and work?’, 76.

<sup>106</sup> Frost, *Living in Sin*, 142.

<sup>107</sup> Martha Bailey, ‘The Marriage of Law of Jane Austen’s World’, *Jane Austen Society of North America*, 36.1 (2015).

<sup>108</sup> TNA, ADM 6/402, Honor Thompson, 1828.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

and who had the moral authority to judge. The doctor, Mr Rowan, who delivered Mrs Thompson's child, was not receptive to the Admiralty's enquiries and tried to avoid providing information by several strategies. The first was denial, where he 'pretends' that he could not remember which Mrs Thompson he had attended as it had been ten years and he treated multiple patients by that surname.<sup>111</sup> Secondly, he refused to consult his books, objecting because of his 'conscientious principles'.<sup>112</sup> The naval officials wrote in the case notes that they felt that he had conversed with either 'Mrs Thompson or some of her friends on the subject' and was therefore actively withholding information.<sup>113</sup> Rowan's firm refusal to provide information was in part driven by him being recently fooled into giving access to his records to the informer, Thompson, who claimed 'an arrangement was about to be made for the liquidation of Mrs Thompson's debts and that it was necessary to be satisfied that she was the housekeeper in East Street'.<sup>114</sup> Aware of Thompson's accusations against her, he stated that 'had he known as much at the time as he has since learnt he certainly would not have permitted an inspection of his books'.<sup>115</sup> Finally, in this recorded statement he expressed his own moral judgement on the investigative activities of the Admiralty, arguing that 'he thought it was carrying severity too far to deprive the woman of her pension for having had the misfortune to have a child'.<sup>116</sup> Although Mr Rowan expressed sympathy for Mrs Thompson and does not provide proof which could be used against her, his description of her 'misfortune to have a child' likely did cast doubt on its legitimacy.<sup>117</sup>

Despite Mr Rowan's threefold argument against providing the naval investigators with information, his wife did not hold the same views, as 'in her husband's absence' she told the

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

naval investigators that ‘she knew Mrs Honor Thompson personally and that Mr Rowan attended her in her confinement and delivered her of a child’.<sup>118</sup> She helped confirm that the birth took place in the summer of 1818 and said she ‘recollects the circumstances and the time perfectly well because she was near her own confinement at the time and the nurse quitted Mrs Thompson to nurse her’.<sup>119</sup> Notably, she referenced the importance of neighbourhood gossip, adding that ‘she had repeatedly heard from the nurse and from other persons in the neighbourhood that Mrs Thompson was living with her husband’s brother and that it was generally believed to be his child’.<sup>120</sup> Farge has argued, in the context of women’s voices in comparable French judicial archival records, that women ‘were the spirit of their neighbourhoods, passing rumours and news along a network of local personalities whose haunts and habits were always well known to them’.<sup>121</sup> While these networks could be empowering and advantageous in some circumstances in terms of temporary support, women that found themselves alienated from the group encountered risks through gossip. Ross found that in early twentieth century London neighbourhoods, “‘gossip’ was the main conduit’ of information for women and an aid to their survival in times of need.”<sup>122</sup> However, similarly she identified that ‘those who remained aloof from neighbourhood sociability, usually to demonstrate their superior “respectability”, were also cut off from the safety it could provide’.<sup>123</sup> In the case of Mrs Thompson, while she had some male supporters, the accounts of women and neighbourhood gossip could be estimated as equal in importance to male evidence in the eyes of the officials.

As well as spreading gossip, neighbourhoods could act against scandalous relationships. This is illustrated in the informing case against Mary Ann Williams who lost her pension for ‘living in a

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, 36.

<sup>122</sup> Ross, ‘Not the Sort’, 51.

<sup>123</sup> Ross, ‘Survival Networks’, 19.

state of profligacy with a Mr Manning a married man'.<sup>124</sup> A widow of a lieutenant, Mrs Williams, in 1819, eloped with the married surgeon who attended her husband prior to his death. An informing letter, signed anonymously, brought her situation to the Admiralty's attention and an investigation was launched. The author was identified as Mr William Cornish, hairdresser, connected to the lieutenant's family.<sup>125</sup> He critically accused Mrs Williams of having 'seduced [Mr Manning] from a business his wife and 4 young children', leaving only 'a few weeks' after her husband's decease.<sup>126</sup> By contrast, the informant was sympathetic to Mrs Manning, who he described as a 'poor woman' who made 'every exertion' to 'reclaim her husband' but was unsuccessful.<sup>127</sup> Instead, he wrote that Mr Manning 'is now living with this abandoned woman, who goes by his name she has an income of 125£ per annum arising from 1250£ bank stock ... and I believe receives the pension from the charity'.<sup>128</sup> Similarly to other informing cases such as Mrs Cochran previously discussed, moral indignation was often met with increased outrage that the lone woman was wealthy, as illustrated by the added underlining and specificity of her income in the letter. Informers targeted wealth, whether private business or fortune, as an added reason to justify why they should lose their pension. The informer, Mr Cornish, was interviewed by the naval investigator, Charles Bickwell, providing further information regarding Mrs Williams and Mr Manning. He stated that they were cohabiting in Scarborough, but had been arrested by the landlord of the Bell Inn for debt and, being discovered unmarried, consequently were imprisoned for several months until Mr Manning 'sent to his wife for money to release him from prison'.<sup>129</sup> Upon his release, he returned to London and informed his wife, Mrs Manning, that he had married Mrs Williams; however, his illegal and cruel actions did not go unnoticed by the neighbourhood. Mr Cornish recounts that:

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<sup>124</sup> TN, ADM 6/396, Mary Ann Williams, 1822.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. (emphasis in original).

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. (emphasis in original).

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.



Upon that occasion the rabble of the neighbourhood knowing in what manner he had behaved to his wife and children assailed him with stones and dirt and it was with difficulty he escaped their vengeance.<sup>130</sup>

This public retribution, seemingly more fitting of a baser time than the age of sensibility, demonstrates that neighbours were closely involved in each other's personal lives and would take physical action on behalf of members of the community who they felt were wronged.

Mr Manning criticised this one-sided narrative in a bizarre letter of response to the Admiralty. His letter, dated 1822, following the loss of Mrs Williams' pension, criticised the Admiralty's investigative practices, questioning why 'the voice of the accused was not to be heard' and instead relied on the testimony of a 'common prostitute tutoring a young family in the horrors of vice and rearing them (upon another's property) in a common brothel of her own making'.<sup>131</sup> Although at the end of his letter Mr Manning asks to be informed of the names of the persons providing information, his accusations of prostitution can be read as an attack on his own legitimate wife who was later questioned by the Admiralty regarding this. Mrs Williams, by contrast, he described with positive enthusiasm, claiming that 'there is not amongst the list of Pension'd widows ... a more amicable woman a more strictly moral religious and virtuous one not a more upright honest and benevolent one'.<sup>132</sup> To add sympathy for her case, he wrote that losing her pension meant that she 'is liable to be incarcerated in a jail for life for want of the means which is that unjustly wrung from her' and added that her health was poor which 'precluded her from the enjoyment of one hour throughout the day free from pain'.<sup>133</sup> Mr Manning, as her lover and the doctor who cared for her, stated 'it is alone on me the charge of

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

profligacy (& of which I can clear myself in the mind of every reasonable man)<sup>134</sup>. As proof, he provided a marriage certificate in which he described himself as a ‘widower’.<sup>135</sup> However, his evidence did not appear a reasonable justification as his statement was false given his first wife was alive, and that Mrs Williams had income other than her pension to survive upon.

The statement of Mrs Manning further undermined the characters of her husband and Mrs Williams by providing insight into the motivations of her husband and offering to swear an oath. She claimed to be well acquainted with Mrs Williams and that, after the Lieutenant died, ‘formed reason to believe an improper connexion subsisted between her husband & Mrs Williams’, after confronting the latter and accusing her with ‘warm language’ to quit the house.<sup>136</sup> As a consequence, her husband ‘beat her severely’ and soon after abandoned her. The couple was discovered two years later and, following imprisonment, contacted Mrs Manning who acted as power of attorney to sell their property to release them both from prison. In corroboration of the informing letter, she states that her husband told her he had remarried, but she attributes his actions to his ‘expectation of getting the property’ of Mrs Williams who was unwell and already supporting her husband with £100 per annum.<sup>137</sup> Mrs Manning stated that she supported herself as a midwife and denied raising her children in a ‘common brothel’, pointing out that she remained in their family home and none of the lodgers had changed since her husband’s departure.<sup>138</sup> That Mrs Manning was even questioned regarding this accusation further highlights the importance of sexual reputation for women as key to their credibility and having the potential to silence their voices if found to be acting outside of expected norms. Regarding Mrs Williams, no positive statements were provided by any other sources, and it was reported that, although well-connected by birth as daughter of an Earl, she had been disowned by her family as

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

well as her in-laws who would not give a positive statement on her behalf. The Admiralty therefore took it upon themselves to make a final judgement on this case.

The collective abhorrence to the affair that left Mrs Manning an abandoned victim was clear, but the correspondence also reveals shared outrage regarding Mrs Williams's wealth. A widow having wealth to live against the norm to support her married lover was repeated in neighbourhood informer testimony and, for the Admiralty, providing a pension to aid this behaviour was also viewed as against their charitable values. This sort of personal investigation and intervention can be seen as creating an early precedent and standards which extended into the twentieth century. The 1871 report of the Royal Commissioners of the Patriotic Fund made clear that 'no help would be given to any widow "if by profligate behaviour she dishonours the memory of her husband"'.<sup>139</sup> Similar expectations were held during the First World War in the administration of separation and pension allowances to wives of soldiers and sailors. Susan Pedersen argues that '[b]oth the charities and the state took their role as surrogate for the husbands seriously, replacing them as the breadwinners while also making benefits contingent on the temperance, diligence, and chastity of their wives'.<sup>140</sup> Women were supported not for themselves but in relation to the services of men and, as such, the Ministry of Pensions argued that a 'woman by her infidelity has forfeited her right to be supported by her husband'.<sup>141</sup> Across time, pensions were understood as a reward for their husbands' service, and thus women were expected to remain lone and chaste, the pension acting as their replacement breadwinner. Mrs Williams fell foul of these expectations and was struck from the list for failing to adhere to moral expectations. Although this case had uniquely scandalous circumstances, she would not be the

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<sup>139</sup> Janis Lomas, "'Delicate Duties': issues of class and respectability in government policy towards the wives and widows of British soldiers in the era of the Great War", *Women's History Review*, 9.1 (2000), 124.

<sup>140</sup> Susan Pedersen, 'Gender, Welfare and Citizenship in Britain during the Great War', *American Historical Review*, 95.4 (Oct. 1990), 996.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, 999.

first or last woman to have her sexual and personal circumstances investigated and judged by male charitable officials.

### **Personal Revenge**

Pensions were essential to lone women but, as their financial support hinged upon their constant moral character, it made them vulnerable to personal aspersions, whether true or false.

‘[V]engeful and malicious motives’ were identified by the Admiralty as some of the driving factors for the informing letters they received against women, particularly when written against their sexual propriety.<sup>142</sup> Ross has argued that ‘sexual propriety was the cornerstone for female reputation, suffusing most of a woman’s existence’ and that ‘her respectability was under perpetual suspicion’.<sup>143</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, she argues, prostitution ‘became a sharply delineated category of womanhood rather than a stage through which many young women passed before marriage’ and there was greater emphasis on ‘sorting out “good” from “bad” women’.<sup>144</sup> However, petitions reveal earlier attempts to draw these distinctions. The case of Anna Maria Bowstreet in 1818 provides an example, when in this case the accuser claiming to be William Johnston, church warden, wrote to the Admiralty that she was ‘a very bad dangerous woman’.<sup>145</sup> He accused her of fraudulently claiming a pension while remarried ‘to a man that was not wordey [sic] of anything’ and stated that ‘she says that she will draw her pension as he lives in spite of any of us’.<sup>146</sup> Upon investigation by the Admiralty, it was found that the informer was not a church warden, but an anonymous imposter. Mrs Bowstreet had remarried but did so in 1819 when the regulations on remarriage changed, enabling her to keep her pension. However, this case remains important in demonstrating that women’s private lives were constantly open for investigation by their neighbours and the authorities. The fact that the informer disapproved

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<sup>142</sup> TNA, ADM 6/396, Ann Duffy, 1822.

<sup>143</sup> Ross, ‘Not the Sort’, 49.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 49-50.

<sup>145</sup> TNA, ADM 6/393, Anna Maria Bowstreet, 1818.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

of her marriage choice and felt she was taking money to which she was not entitled illustrates that deservingness was judged at a local as well as institutional level.

As well as impersonating officials, informers exacted personal revenge by making up false claims against naval widows. Jane Anderson, for example, lost her pension in 1821 following four dishonest informing letters submitted to the Admiralty by her ex-lover, John Alison. He accused Mrs Anderson of committing identity fraud by impersonating a deceased naval widow, as well as being an ‘infamous woman in the city’, committing financial crimes and spending time in Bridewell for theft.<sup>147</sup> In his letters, he reveals that he actively checked that Mrs Anderson had been cut off from her pension by directly asking local naval agents to confirm that she had not received further payments, complaining again to the Admiralty in writing regarding her receiving ‘some prize tickets by which she obtains credit’.<sup>148</sup> Mrs Anderson contested the loss of her pension and a two-year reassessment of the case found that the accusations of Alison were false and written ‘out of malice’ and as he was ‘evidently a low dissipated character ... very little reliance can be placed on any statement coming from him’.<sup>149</sup> Mrs Anderson’s identity was confirmed, although it was uncovered that she and Alison had previously cohabited. However, Mrs Anderson refused to marry ‘for fear of losing her pension’ and ‘that it was upon occasion of her leaving him, and giving up her connection with him (finding him as she says a bad and low character) that he out of revenge sent up the information to the secretary to the admiralty’.<sup>150</sup> Her admission of choosing not to marry and engaging in an informal relationship that she was able to leave can each be seen as survival strategies for lone women who were reliant on their pension. However, this was not in keeping with the Admiralty’s definition of respectability, calling her deservingness into question even though she was eligible to receive a pension.

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<sup>147</sup> TNA, ADM 6/395, Jane Anderson, 1821; ADM 6/396, Jane Anderson, 1822.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

Although the report by the investigator on Mrs Anderson's case was sympathetic to the extent that 'Alison has been in a great measure the cause of her misfortunes', the Admiralty was judgmental of Mrs Anderson's open acknowledgement of her informal relationship and treated her harshly as a result.<sup>151</sup> The promises of Mrs Anderson to 'conduct herself with all propriety' in future and her counter petition with community testimonials regarding her character were not found to be convincing.<sup>152</sup> The investigator wrote that:

the testimonials ... have only a kind of negative evidence to give in her favour – that is they state that so far as they know they have never heard anything against her character and have believed her to be a sober decent and industrious woman but many of them I find have no great cause of knowledge as to her private character and most of them have interfered from thinking her an injured woman.<sup>153</sup>

The six individuals who signed her petition were tradespeople from Mrs Anderson's neighbourhood and they included a draper, a cabinetmaker, and a clerk. The investigator's dismissal of these supporters as not being truly able to reveal her 'private character' and deeming their support as 'negative' evidence demonstrates that the Admiralty officials were discerning regarding who they felt could give them accurate information.<sup>154</sup> The purpose of their investigation, therefore, was not to accept accounts of superficial respectability but to unearth personal insights into her moral character. One of the supporters interviewed by the investigator subsequently wrote to the Admiralty to criticise their decision-making practices, writing that to 'deprive her of her living without any more proof would never I am convinced pass before a Court of Justice in either England or Wales'.<sup>155</sup> Indeed, other petitioners also criticised the power of the Admiralty to remove pensions or pay from those deemed undeserving or of poor

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid. emphasis in original.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

character. For example, in 1838, a letter was submitted to Admiral Edward Codrington requesting his intervention regarding the experience of a Lieutenant Edward Bryant who was struck from the half-pay list for accusations of debt. The supplicant wrote frustratedly of ‘the caprice of the Admiralty, who can, without a legal trial, and of their own volition, reduce an officer from a state of comparative comfort to abject poverty’ and questioned ‘why such tremendous power was placed in the hand of a Board not celebrated for their knowledge of the law?’.<sup>156</sup> Mrs Anderson also expressed criticism and threatened that if she could not ‘find justice through you I must be driven to the necessity of laying down the whole of my case to His Royal Highness the Duke of Clarence’.<sup>157</sup> The Duke of Clarence had served in the navy and as a member of the royal family he had influence over the Lord Commissioners; the prospect of his intervention was a strategy intended to apply pressure on the Admiralty to get the decision Mrs Anderson wanted. However, Mrs Anderson seemed unaware of the root cause of her dismissal from the pension list as not a ‘proper character’ as she asked for the ‘name or names of those person or person (who dared to represent my character to the Court)’, so that ‘I might take the proper steps of bringing them to punishment which they well deserve for interfering with any poor widow’.<sup>158</sup> The evidence against her came from Alison and, although his claims were mostly disproved, it is clear she was not self-aware as to how damning her open admission of cohabiting with Alison was. It is unknown whether Mrs Anderson took this action of informing the Duke of Clarence. Nonetheless, the Admiralty was, as others criticised, a law unto itself and defending access to funds which were discretionary rather than a right meant she had no legal recourse. Alison and Mrs Anderson were found to be both ‘very low dissipated characters’ and her pension was not restored.

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<sup>156</sup> RMG, COD/21/4, Edward Bryant, 1838.

<sup>157</sup> TNA, ADM 6/396, Jane Anderson, 1822.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

## Financial Disagreements

Financial disagreements were another motivating factor for informers to attempt to undermine the security of lone women through attacks on their character, particularly their sexual propriety. An allegation of being a sex-worker was the most extreme, and often unfounded, accusation, so much so that informers' attacks on these grounds can be seen as akin to a witch trial. Wood argues that, in the seventeenth century, witchcraft accusations 'drew upon a wider sense that the witch was an enemy of the neighbourhood and that his or her activities formed the antithesis of Christian, communal living' and, as a consequence, 'accusations of witchcraft could spring up in the course of everyday conflict, imploding within a community's life'.<sup>159</sup> The case of Susanna Stocks in 1823, although accused of 'prostitution' rather than witchcraft, similarly represents how a conflict within a community could lead to inflammatory allegations causing a public character trial.<sup>160</sup> Mrs Stocks was a widow of a boatswain in receipt of £25 per annum and was a successful 'bumboat' woman who supplied ships' crews with necessaries.<sup>161</sup> Animosity towards her arose due to her 'preference to many other persons at Gosport and Portsmouth' which prevented their equal access on ships due to Mrs Stocks 'being more respected than them by the navy in general'.<sup>162</sup> Consequently, her monopolising of the market meant she was threatened on several occasions by other bumboat workers 'to do her out of her pension' and they attempted to extort money from her.<sup>163</sup> Mrs Stocks believed that it was a recent disagreement with a man named Simons, who she entrusted with a commissioned sword for an officer to take on board to allow him 'to do some business' but, upon being denied entry onto the ship, he refused to return it unless Mrs Stocks 'paid him one pound & all his expenses'.<sup>164</sup> Mrs Stocks refused to pay him what she felt was an 'unjust' charge and used the influence of the Mayor of Portsmouth to

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<sup>159</sup> Wood, *Faith, Hope and Charity*, 191-192.

<sup>160</sup> TNA, ADM 6/397, Susanna Stocks, 1823.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*



retrieve the sword and, as a result, she believed ‘Simons would say and do anything to be revenged as he hath often since threatened her to get her pension stop’d’.<sup>165</sup> Thus, accusing her of being a sex-worker was a strategy to ruin her reputation and deprive her of both pension and employment. The informers’ accusations were intended to ‘oblige her to quit the port’ to ultimately remove Mrs Stocks as a financial obstacle to their own success.<sup>166</sup>

The informing letter against Mrs Stocks was signed by seven men and one woman from Gosport, Portsmouth, and Portsea. Uniting across different ports demonstrates significant organisation and reflects the geographical reach of Mrs Stocks’ servicing activities for the navy, but also the scale of animosity she aroused. The informants’ letter, however, does not reference financial disagreements but instead is an attack on Mrs Stocks who they describe as ‘unworthy of receiving an income’ due to her ‘conduct which is that of Prostitution as she is now living and cohabiting with a man named David Duckett who has himself a wife and large family absolutely living and receiving parochial relief at Chatham’.<sup>167</sup> The “[c]oming between man and wife” was a serious wrong, and the social stigma had long-lived effects’, but the added claim that it had forced Duckett’s family into poor relief while he ‘is enjoying himself on the income and gains of Susanna Stocks’ added further injury to their living against respectable patriarchal norms.<sup>168</sup> The informers also claimed that she styled herself as ‘Mrs Duckett’, implying bigamy, and wrote that to ‘attempt to set forth the baseness and vileness of this woman’s conduct would fill a volume suffice it therefore only to state that she is living in a state of adultery contrary to the articles and regulations of the honourable institution’.<sup>169</sup> However, by not going into detail of her other faults, they played upon the reader’s imagination of the types of people living in ports which

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Frost, *Living in Sin*, 98.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

were characterised by ‘public houses, brothels, and low entertainment’.<sup>170</sup> Indeed, one contemporary sailor described it as ‘a world of sordid pleasure, unlimited vice, and lashings of booze, but a dangerous place too’.<sup>171</sup> The low respectability of women inhabiting these ports are further undermined by popular cultural representations, such as ‘Portsmouth Poll’ caricatures, and these often included erotic depictions of sex-workers and brothels posing as lodging houses.<sup>172</sup> When the Admiralty investigators interviewed the informants, they brought such images to life describing Mrs Stocks as a ‘common prostitute’ and ‘loose woman with many men’, providing examples of witnessing her ‘sitting by the side [of Duckett] partly undressed and some part of her dress was lying on the bed’.<sup>173</sup> Two of the informers declared - without recognition of their own hypocrisy - that they had been ‘connected’ to her as a sex-worker and one of them, James Poor, a mariner, accused Mrs Stocks of giving him a venereal disease.<sup>174</sup> Six of the informers claimed that they had seen Mrs Stocks in bed with Mr Duckett. However, other informers, such as Simons who had a financial disagreement with Mrs Stocks, would only agree to make an affidavit that Mrs Stocks and Duckett lived together but would not say that he had seen them in bed together. Mrs Stocks’ case, therefore, became a battle over reputation and the investigators were charged with trying to distinguish who was worthy of belief.

Wood has argued that ‘[w]itchcraft accusations often succeeded or failed on the basis of the alleged witch’s reputation and the depth of their connection within the neighbourhood’.<sup>175</sup> In

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<sup>170</sup> Brad Beaven, ‘From Jolly Sailor to Proletarian Jack: The Remaking of Sailortown and the Merchant Seafarer in Victorian London’, in Brad Beaven, Karl Bell and Robert James (eds.), *Port Town and Urban Cultures: International Histories of the Waterfront, c.1700-2000* (London, 2016) 160.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> Margarette Lincoln, ‘Emma Hamilton, war, and the depiction of femininity in the late eighteenth century’, *Journal for Maritime Research*, 17.2 (2015), 142; Other examples of caricatures and prints include: Thomas Rowlandson, *Accommodation or Lodging to let at Portsmouth!!*. Hand Coloured Etching (30 June 1808). Museum Number: The Metropolitan Museum of Art: 59.533.1107; George Shephard, after Henry William Bunbury. *Sweet Poll of Plymouth*. Hand Coloured Print (London, 10 June 1790). Museum Number: RMG, PAD4734; Carrington Bowles, *Men of War, bound for the Port of Pleasure*. Hand Coloured Print (25 April, 1791). Museum Number: RMG, PAF4036.

<sup>173</sup> TNA, ADM 6/397, Susanna Stocks, 1823.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> Wood, *Faith, Hope and Charity*, 197.

naval character investigations, neighbourhood support also played an important part. Mrs Stocks presented a petition supported by thirty-six signatures, including men and women, to attest she was a 'decent, respectable, and well-behaved woman, and not a woman of loose character and immoral habits'.<sup>176</sup> In addition, Mrs Stocks hired a solicitor to help her collect official testimony in her favour, including Mr Duckett (her lodger and business partner), her mother, neighbours, a gentleman, four tradespeople and two constables. These statements refuted claims of the impropriety of Mrs Stocks with Mr Duckett in their home. In his statement, Duckett denied 'ever having visited said Susanna Stocks as a prostitute ... nor hath he ever cohabited or lived with her as man and wife'.<sup>177</sup> He also stated that, although he was separated from his wife and children, they were still financially supported by him. Mrs Stocks' mother further tried to disprove claims of her daughter and Duckett being seen in bed together, by explaining that she shared a bed with her daughter and that Duckett always remained in his own room. A neighbour, William Frederick Webber, also provided evidence against claims of impropriety in the bedroom, stating that he had visited Duckett on one occasion when he was unwell in bed and that Mrs Stocks had entered the room, 'respecting the accounts which he was then making out for them, but he never at any other period seen them in a bedroom together although he hath been at the same house a great number of times'.<sup>178</sup> Others testified to her not being known as a 'common prostitute', claiming that she is 'much respected by the officers and seamen' in the navy and that she was found to be 'honest in the extreme, [and] punctual in all her dealings and in business transactions'.<sup>179</sup> As well as offering support, the testimonials also provided negative reports on the informers to disprove much of the credibility of her accusers. The informer, Rebecca Crowley, was said to have 'been repeatedly taken before the magistrate' and is considered 'not worthy of belief' by a gentleman, and the constable added that he had witnessed 'the violence of

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<sup>176</sup> TNA, ADM 6/397, Susanna Stocks, 1823.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

her disposition' and 'hath frequently seen her strike sailors who have displeased her'.<sup>180</sup> William Lipscomb, constable of Portsmouth, stated that the same Eli Mills who accused Mrs Stocks of being a sex-worker was, ironically, living with a woman who was not his wife and described him as a person of 'loose character' and stated he 'would not believe the said Eli Mills even upon his oath'.<sup>181</sup> The constable of Portsmouth, Richard Madgwick, also pointed out Eli Mills' history of violence and intimidation, having 18 months ago been charged with 'robbing and ill-using a seaman in the middle of the night'.<sup>182</sup> Peter Gregory, a sailmaker and member of the Friendly Society of Tradesmen at Gosport, provided evidence which revealed that the claims of James Poor catching venereal disease was untrue. Poor, a member of the club, had claimed an allowance for the treatment of dropsy and had made an affidavit at the time confirming it was not venereal disease and had a surgeon support this. However, when the club president learned of his accusations against Mrs Stocks, Poor admitted that it was not true and that he was 'half drunk' and had been 'persuaded' to do so by Mrs Crowley.<sup>183</sup>

In addition to these supporting statements, Mrs Stocks had high-profile support from Admiral Sir George Campbell, who recommended her as a bumboat woman. She was also able to gain the intervention of George Cockburn through having an interview with his brother, in which she petitioned emotively that she was trying to 'support herself and an aged sick mother'.<sup>184</sup> Mrs Stocks travelled to London to be available for interview, a proactive strategy given that not being able to state a case in person was a common critique of other petitioners who complained that they were not given an opportunity to refute the claims before being struck off the pension list. Thus, Mrs Stocks had tried all the strategies possible to redeem her character. However, her efforts were not considered enough to change the decision of Admiralty. Their decision is

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

revealing of class attitudes and suspicion regarding rough survival tactics which were judged harshly when respectability was brought into question. The main form of evidence against Mrs Stocks was an intercepted letter sent from her to her friend, Mrs Holland, which she signed S. Duckett, despite claiming previously that she had only used her own name. The report by naval investigator, Mr Greetham, questioned the reliability of her testimony, writing that if 'she has sworn falsely in once instance it is a matter of consideration what reliance can be placed on the other parts of her affidavit'.<sup>185</sup> In regard to the other supporting statements produced by Mrs Stocks' solicitor, it was noted that only Mrs Stocks had made an oath on the validity of her statement and Duckett notably had not. The investigator highlighted this omission further by adding that it was important to point this out because in their experience they

kn[ew] that some persons in her class of life will sometimes make statements which they would not swear to and in a similar case to the present party with whom the widow was stated to have cohabited positively denied having been at any time criminally connected but upon our asking him whether he would swear to that fact, he declined saying that he would not take a false oath on any account.<sup>186</sup>

The blurring of cases with other 'persons in her class of life' demonstrates the inbuilt prejudice of the investigators.<sup>187</sup> The investigative reports were created on behalf of the First and Second Secretaries to the Board of the Admiralty, John Croker and John Barrow, before being presented to the Lords Commissioners for their decision. Although it is difficult to talk definitively of a standardised Admiralty response, when petitions could pass through the hands of several clerks, the employment process within the Admiralty and a great period of continuity from 1809 to 1845 under the leadership of Croker and Barrow suggests that clerks were often of similar backgrounds and work ethics.<sup>188</sup> Indeed, unsuccessful serial petitioner Catherine Lamburn, who

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Charles Ian Hamilton, *The making of the modern Admiralty: British naval policy making, 1805-1927* (Cambridge, 2011), 107.

was rejected from the pension list but reapplied following every new appointment of Lord Commissioners, commented frustratedly that she could not ‘alter the determination of your predecessors; that is, in other words, that the injustices done me through the influence of Sir John Barrow shall remain unaddressed’.<sup>189</sup> Croker and Barrow had a strong working and personal relationship, illustrated by Barrow writing to Croker in 1828 that ‘You and I have stood it out a great many years ... almost without a breeze’.<sup>190</sup> Their good relations extended to their children who married, making their bond even closer. Croker had, until 1827, sole control over the employment of clerks, and after that retained a great level of influence.<sup>191</sup> In his appointments, respectability and youth were his key criteria when selecting new clerks, the latter so that he could mould them. Writing to Lord Exmouth in 1824 on a clerkship vacancy, Croker impressed upon him that ‘as the place soon becomes one of great trust & confidence & is one of character & ultimate emolument - I look to have a young gentleman in it’.<sup>192</sup> Those appointed were drawn from family as well as friends, but they nevertheless ‘expected the highest standards from them of efficiency as well as gentlemanly behaviour’ and would continue ‘to monitor them, threatening to cut off all relations in the future, and even to take away their posts, if they displeased him’.<sup>193</sup> Croker had a legal background and was an MP, making him an important representative for the navy, also taking an active interest in controlling the public image of the navy in the press.<sup>194</sup> Although the administration of naval widows’ pensions was not the most important aspect of Barrow and Croker’s roles, it nonetheless did come within their remit and can clearly be seen as an extension of their wider practices. The reliance on investigators who were used for each region demonstrates similarly selective employment, and these court-like trials with a focus on character evidence and respectability can also be seen as an extension of practices held within the

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<sup>189</sup> TNA, ADM 7/615, Catherine Lamburn, 1846.

<sup>190</sup> Hamilton, *The making of the modern Admiralty*, 107.

<sup>191</sup> Charles Ian Hamilton, ‘John Wilson Croker: Patronage and Clientage at the Admiralty, 1809-1857’, *The Historical Journal*, 43.1 (2000), 56.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid*, 58.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

<sup>194</sup> Hamilton, *The making of the modern Admiralty*, 97-103.

Admiralty. Charles Ian Hamilton argues that the importance of gentlemanly behaviour had become ‘something of a fixation with Croker’ to the extent that he was willing to dismiss a ‘very good’ clerk for falling foul of regulations regarding debt.<sup>195</sup> Thus, when reading opinions of investigators who were extremely critical of language, questioning whether the phrase not ‘visited as a prostitute’ used by Mrs Stocks and Duckett meant they were really denying all sexual allegations, suggests that they were part of this wider culture of critical respectability monitoring.<sup>196</sup>

However, other institutional bodies expressed fears regarding lodgers and cohabiting practices, not just the Admiralty. Vicky Holmes, through exploring nineteenth-century coroner’s reports, has similarly identified that middling officials were similarly judgemental of working-class lodging practices, especially regarding the privacy of bedrooms. Contemporaries declared that the ‘[l]odger’s presence in the bedroom was “beyond the bounds of decency and morality”’ and the seriousness of such judgement is illustrated in a case, where a young woman found to be sharing a bedroom as a lodger was warned by the inspector to ‘seek suitable lodging before her character was “injure[d]”’.<sup>197</sup> In Mrs Stocks’ case claims of her sharing a bed reflected very badly on her respectability. In her supporting statement, Mrs Stocks’ friend Mrs Holland, admitted that ‘Duckett & Stocks, & informant slept together in one bed at Plymouth’, but that this was ‘occasioned by their being at Plymouth on business & not being able to procure any other lodgings’.<sup>198</sup> Melanie Holihead’s investigation of naval women in Portsea found that room sharing was utilised as cost cutting measure by many women who ‘they often shared part of a house or even a room’.<sup>199</sup> Thus, as with survival practices such as pawning, the temporary

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<sup>195</sup> Hamilton, ‘John Wilson Croker’, 58.

<sup>196</sup> TNA, ADM 6/397, Susanna Stocks, 1823.

<sup>197</sup> Vicky Holmes, ‘Pulling back the covers: uncovering bed in the Victorian working-class home’, in Joseph Harley, Vicky Holmes and Laika Nevalainen (eds.), *The Working Class at Home, 1790-1940* (Cham, 2022), 82.

<sup>198</sup> TNA, ADM 6/397, Susanna Stocks, 1823.

<sup>199</sup> Holihead, ‘Cut adrift or towed astern’, 165.

sharing of a room admitted by Mrs Holland provides insight into another rough survival tactic which officials judged improper.

Mrs Stocks was unsuccessful and not restored to the pension list. This case demonstrates the power that informers held in making sexual allegations to achieve revenge in financial disagreements. Although Mrs Stocks refuted the allegation of her being sex-worker and gained the support of the community as well as admirals, her credibility was damaged in the eyes of the Admiralty. Mr Greetham held against her the evidence of her signing a letter S. Duckett. Mrs Stocks' rough survival practices met with suspicion of impropriety as evidenced by the investigator's critical assessment of whether Duckett's phrase not 'visited as a prostitute' had a hidden meaning.<sup>200</sup> For the Admiralty, there could be no grey areas regarding moral propriety. Mrs Stock's respectability remained in question by the investigator's report and, tinged with class prejudice, she was not shown mercy.

### **Agents, Rules, and Vulnerabilities**

Informer cases have shown that women were vulnerable to accusations within the community and privacy over their personal affairs was difficult to maintain. However, women who relied on agents were also vulnerable to abuse and changes in Admiralty rules provide insights into this external threat. Rules regarding remarriage changed in 1819 due to the intervention of the Prince Regent, who allowed widows to reclaim a pension even if they remarried.<sup>201</sup> As discussed in chapters one and three, the possibility of financial survival without a breadwinner was very difficult and to remain single could mean a lonely existence for women who often lost their husbands at a young age. A consequence of this rule change was that, among the widows applying to reinstate their pensions, several women were found out to have remarried and

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<sup>200</sup> TNA, ADM 6/397, Susanna Stocks, 1823.

<sup>201</sup> Admiralty-Office, 'Widows Pensions', *London Gazette*, Vol. 1, 15 Jan. 1819, 108.



continued illegally to draw their pension. Justification for why these women had done so ranged from financial desperation, bad second unions, and desertion.<sup>202</sup>

In the case of Ann Ashby, the pressures of an unreliable second marriage and the influence of an agent led to her attempt to deceive the Admiralty, as she was told ‘there was hundreds that were lawfully married and liv’d with men that rec’d it [a widows’ pension] and nobody the wiser’.<sup>203</sup> Mrs Ashby, remarried in 1806 to William Rose, met rejection in 1812 when she attempted to reclaim her widow’s pension under her first husband’s name. In 1819, she applied again under the new rules and provided a long personal history explaining her circumstances and actions which led her to be influenced by an agent who she described as a ‘villain’ who ‘dupp’d and robb’d’ her and ‘never recover’d a farthing’ for her, hoping through her honesty that the Admiralty would take pity on her fall in social status.<sup>204</sup> She begins by explaining that during her second marriage, ‘heavy losses’ financially drove her husband to ‘drinking which made bad worse, and the end was, he deserted me, leaving me destitute and distressed’.<sup>205</sup> While deserted, she claimed to have received a report that her husband had a prior wife which led her to believe that her marriage was illegal, knowledge ‘which almost drove [her] distracted’.<sup>206</sup> To support herself, Mrs Ashby/Rose was advised to employ an agent to help her recover property in Ireland belonging to her first husband. Consequently, she ‘parted with ... clothes and everything I could to make up a sum of money which he [the agent] said she must have to begin to act’, but even after this the agent pushed for more money and told her she must try to reinstate her pension.<sup>207</sup> She described how her ‘heart sunk’ at the thought of the deception, but stated that the agent ‘laughed’ at her and argued that as her second marriage was likely unlawful, ‘it could only be

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<sup>202</sup> TNA, ADM 6/393, ‘Widows who had improperly received the pension after their remarriage’, 1819.

<sup>203</sup> TNA, ADM 6/392, Ann Ashby/Rose, 1819.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

call'd living with another man therefore [she] must only own it as such, or I need not say anything about it'.<sup>208</sup> Mrs Ashby/Rose signed a statement which the agent 'dictated' and was subsequently rejected. She described this as an action which 'remained a thorn in my flesh ever since' as the agent had claimed he could do no more for her and, in trusting him, had isolated herself socially as she said that she 'dar'd not reveal to my friends' what she had done.<sup>209</sup> Admiralty clerks considered cohabitation as a significant moral impediment to access a pension, as evidenced by the similar outcomes of other cases discussed. Although the agent claimed to be aware that many naval widows did remarry or cohabit, he was not so adept at deceiving the Admiralty and provided Mrs Ashby with poor advice on how to present her circumstances. After being rejected for a pension, Mrs Ashby/Rose supported herself with 'a little washing' and later, to her 'great joy', her second husband returned from sea and confirmed that she was his only wife.<sup>210</sup> Promoting the legality of her second union and his 'reform'd' and 'industrious' character, to emphasise their renewed deservingness, she stated that they were still struggling financially due to his unemployment and hoped that she could receive a pension to once again 'live decently with my husband for the remainder of my days'.<sup>211</sup> Unsurprisingly, the Admiralty were not moved by her admission of scheming to defraud the charity and rejected her petition. The Admiralty would not approve pensions to anyone who had remarried and continued to claim a pension before the rules changed and would check second marriage certificates against the last pension payment to ensure there was no prior fraud. Some agents, as well as providing damaging advice to desperate women, also deceived widows by claiming their pensions for themselves without their knowledge. The Admiralty's stringent process of checking last pension payments revealed that in two cases, those of Sarah Atkinson/Frost and Harriet Ann Charters/Bourne, an agent deceived the women whose pensions he had drawn without their knowledge.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> TNA, ADM 6/392, Sarah Atkinson/Frost, 1819; ADM 6/392, Harriet Ann Charters/Bourne, 1819.

Fortunately, in these cases, the pensions were reinstated, although only after the women had provided evidence and swore an official oath before the magistrate. In the case of Mrs Charters/Bourne, whose agent had taken her pension and ‘soon became a bankrupt’, she even offered to have the amount deducted from her pension so long as she could receive it.<sup>213</sup> Pensions remained vitally important even upon remarriage since women often had large families to support and their second husbands could not always be relied upon as breadwinners.

Fears regarding the loss of financial security through giving up a pension and the risk of an unreliable second marriage were significant factors in how naval widows decided to live their lives. The Admiralty’s restrictions on remarriage had a long legacy and, in the case of Susannah Grice, her past behaviour was used against her, by both an agent and the Admiralty. Mrs Grice was brought to the Admiralty’s attention in 1822 by a serial informer, Robert Thornell, who accused her of ‘fraudulent and profligate conduct’ including being imprisoned for debt, selling trafficked silk goods, some of which she placed in pawnshops, and having an adulterous relationship with Thomas Lawrence, a customs officer, with whom she was witnessed together in bed.<sup>214</sup> As with the case of Susannah Stocks, the informer was motivated by a personal financial disagreement. Thornell was a captain’s clerk and ‘when unemployed ha[d] been engaged in writing letters and petitions’; Mrs Grice, who was unable to sign her own name, was one of his customers. A disagreement arose between them regarding payment, with Mrs Grice stating that he had asked for the large sum of £9 and Thornell counter-claimed that he had asked for £5 for his services, and even tried unsuccessfully to intercept Mrs Grice’s letter at the Post Office to access the money he knew she was expecting, fearing he would not receive the amount of payment he wanted.<sup>215</sup> The Admiralty’s investigation into the character and behaviour of Thornell found that he was a ‘person who cannot altogether be relied on’ as he had a history of

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> TNA, ADM 6/397, Susannah Grice, 1824.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

targeting naval widows and was an unscrupulous petition writer.<sup>216</sup> Concurrently with his attack on Mrs Grice, he also wrote a letter against Mrs Meads in which ‘he framed the charges for the complaint and afterwards endeavoured to clear Mrs Meads of the same’.<sup>217</sup> He also offered his services to Mrs Stocks, the informed-upon bumboat woman previously discussed, claiming to be able to restore her to the pension list if she paid him £10.<sup>218</sup> His accusations against all three women, especially regarding their cohabitation with men, was particularly vindictive given that Thornell himself was discovered to have remarried bigamously and had adulterous affairs, admitting to the Admiralty investigators that ‘he kept [a] woman, that she is married and her name is Tolbell or Turnbell and lives in Guernsey and her husband is the mate of a vessel’.<sup>219</sup> Joseph Booker, a local tavern owner, who prevented Thornell seducing his own daughter, reported that Thornell’s legitimate wife would not compel her husband to maintain her as ‘she did not know what to do with such a rascal, that the wage she has received from him was such that she should not trouble him anymore’.<sup>220</sup> Thus, Thornell was far from morally superior to cast aspersions. His actions can be judged to have been motivated by revenge and a willingness to turn his pen to those who would pay him without consideration of the consequences for the lives he was destroying.

Mrs Grice was interviewed by the Admiralty investigators regarding Thornell’s claims against her and made the self-damning admission of having previously cohabited with Thomas Lawrence. In defence of her actions, she initially explained that she chose not to marry Lawrence ‘for the purpose of retaining her pension for she would have lost the same by marriage’ and because ‘she

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> TNA, ADM 6/397, Susanna Stocks, 1823, in her petition she refers to Thornell as ‘Thornhill’, but this is likely a misspelling and is the same person. In TNA, AMD 6/399, in the Admiralty’s case notes on Mrs Meads who was informed on by Robert Thornell, Mrs Grice and Mrs Stocks are also named as being informed on by the same person.

<sup>219</sup> TNA, ADM 6/397, Susannah Grice, 1824.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

learnt from Lawrence's children that he was a bad character'.<sup>221</sup> This justification adds weight to assumptions that, among wealthier widows, temporary relationships were often preferred, to preserve their financial independence and allow them the flexibility to leave a relationship if they wanted to.<sup>222</sup> For the Admiralty, her admission of cohabiting, even temporarily three to four years previously with Lawrence, and even in view of subsequent changes in marital rules, was still given as the principal reason why her name was removed from the pension list for the 'impropriety of her moral conduct'.<sup>223</sup> Following the loss of her pension, Mrs Grice petitioned the Admiralty with the support of her parish who wrote petitions on her behalf. Their petitioning letters stated that the Admiralty investigators misinterpreted Mrs Grice, arguing that by saying she lived with Thomas Lawrence, she did not mean cohabited, but rather that he lived with her as her lodger and stated that, in general, the 'charges made against her have been very much exaggerated by a person of bad character'.<sup>224</sup> The threat of the male lodger and the assumptions that sexual relations commonly occurred in these relationships was a significant social fear at the time among middle-class contemporaries, who viewed this type of living arrangement as both 'immoral' and an 'evil' among the working-class.<sup>225</sup> The parish's argument that the Admiralty had given in to these judgemental assumptions about a widow and a male lodger is revealing, not so much of these fears but of the tensions between the Admiralty and parish regarding financial responsibility for naval widows.

The internal case notes made clear the Admiralty's concern that the parish was attempting to encourage undiscerning support for all naval widows as a means of relieving the parish of the financial burden. The loss of Mrs Grice's pension meant she became chargeable to the parish and, in 1822, a petitioning letter was sent to the Admiralty from the Portsmouth Poorhouse,

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Frost, *Living in Sin*, 128.

<sup>223</sup> TNA, ADM 6/397, Susannah Grice, 1824.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Davidoff, 'The separation of home and work?', 71.

writing emotively that, although they ‘knew nothing particularly favourable of her character’, Mrs Grice was in ‘extreme distress and requires constant attendance, consequent upon her afflicted case from cancer, having had already one breast cut off, the remaining one strongly recommended to her for amputation’ and also had a daughter to support.<sup>226</sup> The Admiralty investigators in their internal reports were attuned to the needs of the parish and wrote sheepishly that ‘it may however perhaps not be proper to state that the Parish officers have an object in recovering her pension, as in the first letter they admit that since the loss of her pension she has become chargeable to the parish’.<sup>227</sup> Subsequent parish petitions in 1824 try to justify their better knowledge of Mrs Grice, writing ‘we beg to assure you that we would not trouble you with this solicitation if we were not persuaded that the poor afflicted woman’s case is worth reconsideration’.<sup>228</sup> This petition was signed by a vicar, four churchwardens and three overseers. However, the Admiralty interviewed those who signed and found their knowledge of Mrs Grice remained lacking, reporting that one of the parties

knew nothing of Mrs Grice, except from his brother parish officer and it appears probable to us that the petition has been got up by one of the officers and signed by the others at his suggestion as we observe all the petitioners sign in their capacity of officers of the parish – the clergyman is at present on the continent or we would have made inquiries of him on the subject.<sup>229</sup>

This interrogation of the parish officers may appear particularly harsh treatment given the poor health of Mrs Grice; however, the Admiralty experienced other cases of deception and parish officers giving support without knowledge of the person they were advocating. An example is the case of Mrs Simpson, in 1820, who was struck off the pension list for charges of ‘profligacy,

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<sup>226</sup> TNA, ADM 6/397, Susannah Grice, 1824.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

being a common swindler & strumpet' by an informer.<sup>230</sup> Her counter petition, with signatures from the parish and householders of Portsea, claimed that she was 'a woman of fair character', although an investigation by the Admiralty found her to be 'a woman of profligate and debauched habits', as Mrs Simpson was found to have cohabited with several men on board ships as a 'common woman' and had so 'turbulent a disposition, that people are reluctant to speak of her, least on its becoming known, they may be subject themselves to her violent abuse'.<sup>231</sup> The curate, Mr Cumyns, and the churchwarden, Mr Pearce, admitted to the naval investigators that they 'neither had the smallest knowledge of this woman when they signed the certificate' which the investigators noted was 'not to be expected in so large a parish, with so mixed a set of inhabitants'.<sup>232</sup> The churchwardens said they were encouraged to sign the document by the clerk to the vestry, Mr John Macknell Poulden, but the naval investigator, Mr Greetham, knew the clerk through prior experience as being 'for many years totally unworthy of being relied on, [noting] that he was dismissed from the commissioner's office, on a conviction of sedition of the worst description' and thus dismissed the other names who signed the petition as likely 'persons of low consideration'.<sup>233</sup> Cases such as this encouraged the Admiralty to believe that their investigative practice and clerks operated to higher standards and thus the value of parish testimony should not be taken at face value. In Mrs Grice's case, the intervention of the parish and the account of her poor health did not elicit much sympathy from the Admiralty, although she did attract support from others. Notably, Lady Grey, wife of Commissioner Sir George Grey of Portsmouth Dockyard, wrote to the Admiralty to say that she 'considers it a hard case that whatever her conduct may have been it should be now visited upon her by taking away her pension as she has a child to maintain & is wholly incapable of maintaining herself'.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> TNA, ADM 6/394, Kitty Simpson, 1820.

<sup>231</sup> TNA, ADM 6/395, Kitty Simpson, 1821.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> TNA, ADM 6/397, Susannah Grice, 1824.

In addition to the support of the parish and Lady Grey, Mrs Grice tried to redeem her character by providing testimonial evidence from both male and female lodgers she had previously lived with, as well as sharing letters from her female friend regarding her reputation as a bumboat woman. In her interview with the Admiralty, she admitted to being briefly imprisoned for debt and claiming the benefits of the Insolvency Act but denied charges of selling trafficked goods. Mrs Grice also supplied an affidavit denying a relationship with Thomas Lawrence although 'said that there has been something of a correspondence between them some years ago'.<sup>235</sup> However, this testimony was not convincing to Admiralty investigators who retained their insistence of the validity of her first admission of cohabiting. Mr Greetham reported that there could be no doubt regarding the relationship between Mrs Grice and Lawrence as

in questioning Mrs Grice on the subject we used the word 'cohabit' and other terms which we considered could not be mistaken as applying to her committing fornication with Lawrence and we certainly clearly understood her to mean that she been connected in a criminal way with Lawrence, for it was upon our reasoning on the impropriety of her living with Lawrence that she gave the excuse that she should have forfeited her pension by marrying him ... [and thus] considered totally unnecessary on her part if she had intended to say at the time that Lawrence was merely her lodger.<sup>236</sup>

It was also noted that she did not provide an affidavit during the first investigation and that it was odd that she referred to her and Lawrence having had 'correspondence' given that she was unable to sign her own name.<sup>237</sup> The investigators' confidence in there being no confusion over Mrs Grice's cohabitation is reflective of their wider aggressive interviewing practices in which they attempted to shame women into making confessions. For example, in the comparative case of Mrs Meads, also accused of cohabiting with a man, it was stated that despite her initial denials '[u]pon one of us speaking to her on the impropriety of her conduct in living with Andrews,

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.



particularly having a daughter residing in the house with her, she said that she was very sorry for it and it should not happen again'.<sup>238</sup> These types of exchanges and language of criminality demonstrates a class clash in understandings of respectability and rough survival strategies. Ross identified that, in the twentieth century, middle-class ideas regarding female respectability were closely 'bound up with sexual morality', but in 'working-class neighbourhoods, including many of the "better" ones, sexual standards, although becoming more rigid, were still considerably less so than those of the bourgeoisie'.<sup>239</sup> This is also true of the nineteenth century, as demonstrated in Mrs Grice's final petition. This petition appealing to get her pension reinstated was, surprisingly, written under the direction of her accuser, Thornell. Acknowledging that his 'derogatory' comments occurred due to a disagreement over debts, he petitioned that the charges of adultery should be dropped as, 'even if true', they occurred before the change in laws against remarriage.<sup>240</sup> However, the Admiralty did not comment on arguments that restrictive rules on remarriage encouraged cohabitation, although the investigators did conclude that they did not consider her a 'common prostitute'.<sup>241</sup> Mrs Grice and Mrs Meads' pensions were not restored and, in 1830, the Admiralty reversed the allowance of remarriage, once again limiting women's options for independence and affection in their widowhood. However, as acknowledged by an agent, many women did cohabit and remarry secretly before the rules changed, and thus it can be assumed that some women likely chose to do this again. Informers were crucial in bringing these women to the Admiralty's attention, although in some cases the community would keep quiet to prevent widows becoming a burden on their parish community.<sup>242</sup> The women who did become targets of informers were frequently, although not exclusively, women working in enterprises such as public houses, lodgings and bumboating, all occupations which blurred the public and private spheres and, through selling goods, implied that they were also open to selling

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<sup>238</sup> TNA, ADM 6/399, Elizabeth Meads, 1825.

<sup>239</sup> Ross, 'Not the Sort', 46.

<sup>240</sup> TNA, ADM 6/397, Susannah Grice, 1824.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> TNA, ADM 6/394, Mary Jenkins, 1820.

themselves. In these businesses, it was difficult to keep their lives private, a necessity for genteel status, and thus they were made more vulnerable to agents and vengeful members of the community.<sup>243</sup> However, the Admiralty inspectors' judgement reflected class prejudices and preconceptions, as the next section will consider as regards discretionary decision-making about widows with illegitimate children.

### **Moral Policing and Exceptions**

Illegitimate children and single mothers were treated harshly by Poor Law authorities who viewed them 'as unwelcome and undeserving burdens on the system of parochial relief'.<sup>244</sup> The responsibility for illegitimate children was placed unfairly on the reputation of the mother, and in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, tales of fallen women were open for discussion in popular literature and among many authorities from the parish to charities such as the Foundling Hospital.<sup>245</sup> The Admiralty also made judgements on such cases, although the board did not have full discretionary powers to do so until 1819. A comparative assessment of how widows with illegitimate children were treated allows insights into change over time, and the role of discretion and class distinctions.

The case of serial petitioner, Jane Naiby, reveals how the Admiralty clerks' influence evolved over time and used changes in the rules to give themselves more discretionary powers. Mrs Naiby, a widow of a lieutenant, had been informed on for having two illegitimate children since the death of her husband and having abandoned them in the workhouse.<sup>246</sup> A warrant of bastardry that she gave in her parish named Matthew Noseworthy as the father and was given as evidence to support the informer's claim. As previously discussed in chapter one, the placement

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<sup>243</sup> Davidoff, 'The separation of home and work?', 70.

<sup>244</sup> Michael Macdonald, *Mystical Bedlam* (1981), in Hill, *Women Alone*, 103.

<sup>245</sup> Tanya Evans, "'Unfortunate Objects': London's Unmarried Mothers in the Eighteenth Century", *Gender and History*, 17.1 (2005), 127-153; Kate Gibson, *Illegitimacy, family and stigma in England, 1660-1834* (Oxford, 2022).

<sup>246</sup> TNA, ADM 6/387, Jane Naiby, 1814.

of children in the workhouse when the mother was unable to support them acted as a survival strategy used by lone women. However, in the eyes of the authorities, such makeshift strategies might be judged as abandonment and neglect which went against middle-class expectations of parental affection.<sup>247</sup> The informer further claimed that Mrs Naiby had committed ‘various instances of swindling who by great cunning and art eludes being brought to justice’.<sup>248</sup> No specifics are provided, but again this type of accusation suggests that the primary motivation of the informer was a personal disagreement that encouraged him to attack Mrs Naiby on an aspect of her life that he knew she would be punished for. To add further inflammatory emphasis to his appeal, he highlighted that

What makes the woman’s conduct still more profligate is that her pension is [£]40 Lieutenants pension, [£]35 kings bounty [£]25 from patriotic fund her husband being killed in action gives her [£]90 per annum which from the rank of her husband she ought to be made sensitive of her infamous transactions and I do most humbly hope that the court will make a proper example of her.<sup>249</sup>

Women having wealth and not adhering to moral expectations were, as previously discussed, considered particularly abhorrent and a sign of social disorder that could not be supported. The Admiralty wished not only to make an example of Mrs Naiby, but her case encouraged them to appeal for more powers in deciding who was eligible for a pension. John Croker, first secretary to the Admiralty, wrote to ask the ‘law officers for the crown’ whether the court has the power to deprive ‘depraved’ women from the pension list.<sup>250</sup> However, the attorney and solicitor general replied that

It appears to us that the present regulations are framed the only requisites for a claim upon this fund are that the party be a widow of an officer and indigent circumstances. It is not required that any certificate or proof shall be given of good character, or of sober

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<sup>247</sup> Gibson, *Illegitimacy*, 61.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>250</sup> AMD 6/387, Jane Naiby, 1814.

life and conversation, and we are of [the] opinion that the court of assistants have not any discretionary power to order the pension to cease in consequence of any subsequent irregularity or misconduct.<sup>251</sup>

To overcome this obstacle, the Admiralty applied to the Prince Regent and obtained an order in council to revoke the former grant of £25.<sup>252</sup> As the Admiralty could not police widows' morality in general, such restrictions did allow women, such as Grace Henderson, a pension in 1816 despite her 'abandoned course of life'.<sup>253</sup> Henderson was described by naval investigator, Charles Bickwell, as a

woman of very bad character, and when residing at Plymouth cohabited with a seaman named William Jones ... by whom she also has a child, as well as by another seaman names Davis, who was killed on board the *Macedonian* .... And she has been heard to declare, that she never would marry, least she should thereby lose her pension.<sup>254</sup>

However, the change of rules for widows' pensions in 1819 simultaneously placed new conditions that they 'shall appear to be proper and deserving objects of the public bounty'.<sup>255</sup> Mrs Naiby petitioned in response to this broadening of widow applications, hoping to restore the £25 that was previously taken from her. In her petition, she criticised the 'malicious representations of some evil minded person' and focused on her patriotism and active contributions to the navy, writing that she was on board the *Minotaur* with her husband during the battle of the Nile where he died in action and that she afterward helped the surgeon dress the wounded.<sup>256</sup> Her petition was unsuccessful, but not only did she not receive the increase requested, she was struck off the list entirely on grounds of 'bad character', having had illegitimate children in 1813.<sup>257</sup> Thus, the Admiralty was finally able to punish her perceived

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> TNA, ADM 6/393, Jane Naiby, 1819.

<sup>253</sup> TNA, ADM 6/389, Grace Henderson, 1816.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Admiralty-Office, 'Widows Pensions', *London Gazette*, Vol. 1, 15 Jan. 1819, 108.

<sup>256</sup> TNA, ADM 6/393, Jane Naiby, 1819.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

‘depraved’ behaviour.<sup>258</sup> Upon receiving their decision, she petitioned again, writing emotively that she was the mother of four children who relied on her and at

near 50 years of age, she is left totally destitute of any provision or maintenance miserable and wretched situation your petitioner is in, may be more easily felt than here described, struggling hard under severe want and from repeated sickness and inabilities is obliged to dispose of all her little effects to fill up the cup of misery and seek an asylum in the workhouse.<sup>259</sup>

Her petition received popular support from the community as it was signed by twenty-four people, including surgeons, churchwardens, and shop owners. R. J. Nelson, a signatory to her petition, added evidence that her informer had a history of ‘being practiced in villainous information’ and that Mrs Naiby was a victim of revenge as he had ‘acted as her agent till she felt compelled to dismiss him in consequence of his fraudulent conduct’.<sup>260</sup> The investigator’s report by Mr Shields, unlike that of Mrs Henderson, was positive regarding Mrs Naiby finding that ‘her indiscretion does not amount to that “of an abandoned character” and I feel pleasure in adding that her conduct improved with her declining years’.<sup>261</sup> Mrs Naiby’s four legitimate children were reported by Mr Shields to be at school or living with her brother-in-law, but her twin illegitimate children had died. The Admiralty, however, did not show sympathy for her case and decided that ‘the circumstance of her having had illegitimate children not living ... the court cannot think her a proper object of charity’.<sup>262</sup>

The Admiralty, despite its harsh treatment of Mrs Naiby for having illegitimate children, did allow some exceptions to their unwritten rules of moral expectations.<sup>263</sup> Kate Gibson has argued that, by the nineteenth century, ‘attitudes towards illegitimacy diverged according to class:

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<sup>258</sup> TNA, ADM 6/387, Jane Naiby, 1814.

<sup>259</sup> TNA, ADM 6/393, Jane Naiby, 1819.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> TNA, ADM 6/387, Jane Naiby, 1814.

middling and elite illegitimate individuals were seen sympathetically, but older associations of illegitimacy with sin and disorder continued to taint perceptions of the poor'.<sup>264</sup> This argument is given further weight when considering how differently the case of Sarah Ann Wales in 1828 was treated by the Admiralty. Mrs Wales had four illegitimate children and had only been married to her husband six days prior to his unexpected decease by apoplexy.<sup>265</sup> Unlike Mrs Naiby, she was not informed upon but pre-empted an investigation by giving a detailed account of her case written by a third party, Mr M. Pegler. Mrs Wales did not abandon her illegitimate children but raised them herself, appearing to all who knew her to be a married woman; this perhaps was an essential distinction of deserving behaviour as, from the eighteenth century, 'new ideals of parenthood, with emotional tenderness and physical demonstrations of affection were prized amongst mothers and fathers'.<sup>266</sup>

The narrative of how Mrs Wales was 'seduced' by Captain Wales - while living for the first time away from her family in the countryside as a companion to her aunt in Bath - is fitting with other popular literary novels and broadsides warning against seduction and pre-marital sex.<sup>267</sup> Mrs Wales did not write her own petition, but her decision to rely on a male agent can be seen as an effective strategy in her case as there was power in her silence, appearing a passive victim. Mr Pegler stated that Mrs Wales 'had not been highly educated, but accustomed to active industry on a farm [but] ... that, with the exception of free writing, she processes every accomplishment that might be judged suitable to that station in life which her husband conferred on her by marriage'.<sup>268</sup> Other widows who wrote their own petitions which were less polished and more honest in their rough survival strategies were often treated harshly and deemed undeserving. The importance of writing well is given further credence in a petitioning letter in defence of

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<sup>264</sup> Gibson, *Illegitimacy*, 24.

<sup>265</sup> TNA, ADM 6/402, Sarah Ann Wales, 1828.

<sup>266</sup> Gibson, *Illegitimacy*, 5.

<sup>267</sup> TNA, ADM 6/402, Sarah Ann Wales, 1828; Gibson, *Illegitimacy*, 50.

<sup>268</sup> TNA, ADM 6/402, Sarah Ann Wales, 1828.

unsuccessful supplicant, Edward Bryant. The supporter wrote to Admiral Codrington for his intervention with the Admiralty writing that Bryant had joined the navy at thirteen and his limited education meant that it was

evident that he did not know what he was about when he wrote his replies, and the improper expressions which he used must have escaped from him without reflecting on their evil tendency ... the means of employing counsel were not within his reach and he became the victim as much of his poverty as his want of judgement.<sup>269</sup>

Thus, like the widows' cases, they were often victims of want of advice and support when faced with Admiralty investigators. Indeed, '[p]oor families were not more promiscuous, just more visible. Elite and middling parents had the resources to hide or falsify their children's illegitimacy'.<sup>270</sup>

While Mrs Wales did not try to hide her illegitimate children from the Admiralty, she was able to present her narrative in a way which was the most socially acceptable. Tanya Evans argues that in the Foundling Hospital applications there was an expectation that deserving petitioners would present themselves as passive victims of male seduction.<sup>271</sup> Gibson has also identified more widely that narratives of infidelity could also portray tragic tales of 'parents [being] largely depicted as pursuing emotionally legitimate and monogamous relationships, engaging in extra-marital sex only because they were prevented from marrying by their own mercenary parents. Illegitimacy was, therefore, used to highlight the tragic consequences of mercenary matches and the importance of conjugal love'.<sup>272</sup> In Mrs Wales' case, both these narratives were combined. Mrs Wales was said to be 'seduced' by her husband who promised to marry her but, unknown to her, already had a wife living who was described as having a 'bad character'.<sup>273</sup> In addition to

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<sup>269</sup> RMG, COD/21/4, A letter regarding Edward Bryant to Admiral Sir Edward Codrington, no date, 1838. (Note: name of author is not legible).

<sup>270</sup> Gibson, *Illegitimacy*, 12.

<sup>271</sup> Tanya Evans, "Unfortunate Objects", 128.

<sup>272</sup> Gibson, *Illegitimacy*, 50.

<sup>273</sup> TNA, ADM 6/402, Sarah Ann Wales, 1828.

these circumstances was the added impediment that his wealthy aunt objected to his marriage to a woman without property.

Notably, Mr Pegler framed his defence of Mr Wales to a male audience, appealing to the court that his late marriage, which took place after his first wife and aunt were deceased, were motivated by a desire not to offend his ‘brother officers’.<sup>274</sup> The Wales’ intended to leave London and move to Portsmouth where he ‘felt himself bound to introduce his wife and children to Lady Borlase Warren, and to his best friend, her daughter’.<sup>275</sup> Mr Wales’ concern for duty to his own wife ‘who well deserved his affections’ were also given as a final reason for the marriage. Mrs Wales was promoted as a good wife and mother, originating from a good family of landowners and tradesmen. It was stated that positive references could be provided by her neighbours, but it appears that Mrs Wales was not forced to endure a character trial experienced by other petitioners, nor did she appeal to the local parish. A few supporting letters from commanding officers were provided, testifying to her being a ‘most domesticated, prudent & affectionate wife & mother’ along with their confirmation that they had no knowledge that they were unmarried.<sup>276</sup> The reason for Mrs Wales’ different treatment can likely be attributed to the influence of a patron, as Mr Pegler’s letter was written at the request of the Hon. Mrs Vernon Warren, a member of elite naval and political circles. The covering letter to the petition was addressed to ‘Sir George’, likely Sir George Cockburn, who was one of the Lord Commissioners, thus bypassing the Admiralty clerks. This letter appeals directly to Cockburn’s humanity, appealing to him as a ‘brother officer’ and asking for additional sympathy for Mrs Wales who was six months pregnant and to a ‘high degree excited by the fear of being refused’.<sup>277</sup> Cockburn had a reputation for generosity towards naval widows, even granting them small sums from his

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.



own purse.<sup>278</sup> Finally, Mr Pegler also appealed to him on grounds of professional acquaintance, 'having personally known [him] as a visitor at Mess. Coutts for eight & twenty years'.<sup>279</sup> The reference to Coutts, a private bank, suggests that if not intended as a veiled threat was certainly to remind Cockburn that they belonged to similar circles. This case received a limited investigation and remarkably little to no internal discussion, with 'place her on the list' being the main annotation.<sup>280</sup>

However, Mrs Wales' case is not a complete anomaly, as a case in 1829 demonstrates a similar use of discretion. Mrs Carrington had two children out of wedlock and also relied on a third party, in the form of her brother-in-law, to send an enquiring petition on her behalf for advice from the Admiralty. In his letter, he writes to 'beg most respectfully & earnestly to implore the favour of your private opinion & friendly advice, in her peculiarly, delicate and unfortunate situation'.<sup>281</sup> The reason for the delay in marriage was given, similarly to Mrs Wales, as due to an issue of familial consent. Mrs Carrington was described positively as a mother and it was declared that 'a more prudent, virtuous & affectionate wife never existed' and emphasised that she was 'sincerely beloved by her late husband'.<sup>282</sup> The importance of promoting love and affection enabled Mrs Carrington to differentiate herself from the imagined non-deserving poor supplicants who abandoned their children in workhouses and had multiple partners. In response, John Barrow replied that he 'can give none on the subject', although the index records an entry for Mrs Carrington receiving the usual pension.<sup>283</sup> The lack of detailed notes on these cases obscures what made their circumstances of having illegitimate children different. These women's ability to look after their children and their promotion as good mothers who did not abandon

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<sup>278</sup> RMG, COD/21/4, Sir George Cockburn to Mrs Amy Maria Dobson, 6 September 1837.

<sup>279</sup> TNA, ADM 6/402, Sarah Ann Wales, 1828.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> TNA, ADM 1/3345, Mrs Caroline Carrington, 1829.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> TNA, ADM 12/263, Lieutenant T. W. Spear to John Barrow regarding Mrs Caroline Carrington, 1829.

their children to the workhouse must have played an important role in their redemption. Both Mrs Wales and Mrs Carrington also lived within the norms of a married couple rather than as women who had relationships with new partners in their widowhood. Lastly, in both cases, they pre-empted scandal by going to the Admiralty directly rather than being informed upon which enabled them to tell their story and present their circumstances more favourably.

### **Conclusion**

Naval widows and the wives of convicts received invasive attention from the authorities and from the communities in which they lived. Women in receipt of a pension or out-relief were never truly independent but were constantly under surveillance. They were often in distress and their past actions could be held against them years later.

The Admiralty, through its investigative practices, was aware that some of the information they received was submitted out of revenge, yet informers were not discouraged. Informers remained an important way for the Admiralty to direct its investigations and it therefore took all accusations seriously. A private and discretionary charity, the Admiralty pension system was nonetheless part of a broader public policing of lone women. In assessing how informers wrote to the Admiralty against perceived *undeserving* women, this chapter reveals a common theme of moral outrage regarding sexual propriety, especially if the woman was wealthy and from an officer class background. That this particularly alarmed the Admiralty meant that vengeful informers often targeted women's respectability and private lives to punish them for personal and financial disagreements, regardless of whether there was any truth to the accusations. Women, to be seen as deserving, were expected to remain lone and chaste to receive financial support in lieu of their lost breadwinner and extra-marital relationships in widowhood were judged harshly.

As well as insights into the internal decision-making of the Admiralty, these informing petition cases are crucial in widening our understanding of widows' survival practices. Petition applications for pensions, discussed in chapter two, have already demonstrated that widows often actively omitted details of employment and generally referred to their distressed circumstances. However, through these cases which explore the lives of women after they received their pensions, it is possible to see that these women were engaged in a wide range of enterprises including running shops, public houses, lodgings and bumboating. Their economic enterprises were nonetheless vulnerable when their pensions were stopped and their characters destroyed by informer accusations. However, they also reveal agency and determination as several women refused to accept the loss of their pension and counter-petitioned with their own supporters, even employing lawyers to assist them. These sources, therefore, are valuable in demonstrating their personal networks and friendships, business reputations, and relationships with the parish. A petitioner's efforts to recover their pension were affected by one important factor outside of their control and that was class prejudice. The moral expectations of women and their respectability were high and, for women of the working-class, their rough survival tactics clashed with middle-class expectations with many of the former class struck off the list. There were exceptions to the rules: middling women who adhered to the expected roles of faithful wives and mothers were shown leniency and discretion even if their children were not legitimate, demonstrating how the Admiralty had a dual system with separate rules for the genteel.

## Conclusion

This thesis has critically assessed the personal petitions of lone women across three archival collections - the Home Office, the Admiralty, and the Poor Law authorities. It has demonstrated the value of petitions as evidence to compare the experiences and survival strategies of the wives of convicts and the deserted wives and widows of mariners, across class lines and throughout Britain in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Personal petitions have been used to gain access to multiple snapshots of the lives of lone women, in their own words, at several challenging points of their lifecycle, from young motherhood to elderly widowhood. This assessment has shown that lone women, regardless of the state authority to which they appealed, often shared a belief in their entitlement to relief from the state following the loss of their breadwinner through naval service or criminal transportation. Lone women's reliance on discretionary welfare meant they were able to exert their agency and influence institutional decisions through their negotiations and appeals to authorities for pensions, parochial relief, clemency, and free passages.

Through identifying and comparing the petitions of lone women across subject and archival boundaries, this thesis has developed our understanding of lone women and demonstrated that welfare needs to be explored across institutions and at several phases in the lifecycle to understand how social mobility fluctuated for vulnerable and marginal individuals. The research has shown that women could occupy different social categories. Their status as naval widows, paupers, and convicts could overlap, meaning that an individual could interact with multiple institutions of the state as their personal fortunes fluctuated. This approach has helped to address the challenge identified by Lincoln that it is difficult to capture the lives of ordinary

women other than through newspapers and Old Bailey trial records; instead, petitions have enabled a recovery of women's voices and personal agency.<sup>1</sup>

This research is structured around the experiences of lone women and the responses of multiple state authorities. The first two chapters examined the wives of convicts and naval widows to compare their socio-economic experiences following the loss of a breadwinner, assessing their petitioning practices and treatment by authorities, as well as challenges faced in terms of class and social expectations. The third and fourth chapters further developed understandings of lone women's survival strategies in reference to long-term familial support and pressures from the moral policing of the wider community and institutions.

This research's core contributions to the scholarship on lone women and institutional welfare in the eighteenth and nineteenth century are three-fold. Firstly, the research has categorised personal petitioning strategies which has enabled an assessment of lone women's agency. Applying these findings to the wider context of the historiography of women alone has developed our understanding of the role of matriarchs of non-industrial families and their uses of makeshift economies. This approach has also facilitated a comparison of the strategies of lone women to further assess the significance of class, identify how patronage efforts were utilised beyond political elites, and has uncovered how institutional and community-held ideals of deservingness shaped the language of petitions and allowed institutional discretion to continue.

Secondly, a comparison across three state archives has shown that combining perspectives provides a deeper understanding of relationships between lone women and authorities which can also enhance our knowledge of specialist naval, pauper, or convict history. This has identified

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<sup>1</sup> Lincoln, *Naval Wives and Mistresses*, 135.

that state authorities did not exist in isolation and were often interconnected and that parochial officials involved themselves on behalf of lone women as allies when petitioning the Home Office or Admiralty. The Admiralty sought advice from poor law officials as part of their investigative cases. These records have also allowed a comparison of informer practices used across institutions which has provided insights into the wider activities of criminal prosecution for fraud and desertion.

Lastly, the concept of lone women and the methodology informed by the construction of three state archives and the use of indexes and marginalia has provided a keystone in our comprehension of institutional practices and the ability of disenfranchised women to negotiate. This approach is of value to wider research on state institutions and lone women. As will be discussed, it can provide a springboard for further research into other charitable branches of the Admiralty and facilitate a more extensive assessment of criminal records in relation to the Admiralty and Poor Law.

### **Petitioning Strategies**

Lone women's petitioning strategies have been categorised as linguistic and emotional strategies of appeal; bargaining skills; knowledge sharing; and networking and appealing to multiple authorities.

Petitions have been compared to assess whether survival strategies and opportunities for appeal were equally available to the wives of convicts and deserted wives and widows of mariners. Petitioners had differing levels of wealth and perceptions of poverty, but these lone women similarly used the language of distress to encapsulate financial and emotional grief. This thesis has uncovered that many naval widows actively concealed their actual resources, or the extent of them, behind language intended to elicit sympathy from middling audiences. Similarities in the

language used between poor law and Admiralty officials regarding what constituted a ‘real object of charity’ reinforce findings by Andrew that narratives of ‘aristocracy-on-the-rocks’ were appealing and there existed a class-based sympathy for a fall in status.<sup>2</sup> A higher class status did allow some petitioners an advantage in accessing relief, making them stand out as deserving and gaining the sympathy of officials for being ‘really destitute in the worst kind of way – that of keeping up a genteel appearance with five small children’.<sup>3</sup> The importance of class status in shaping officials’ responses is evident from how clerks wrote about women. Clerks used class signifiers such as ‘lady’ and sympathetically wrote of the suffering of officers’ wives. This contrasted with the lack of trust investigators had in a working-class bumboat woman, evidenced by their negative and generalised comments on ‘persons in her class of life’.<sup>4</sup>

Class status also implied access to patronage, which was another important way petitioners could distinguish themselves by giving their petitions added authority through attaching supporting statements or covering letters from noted officials or elite members of society. Some elite women could use their status to apply pressure on clerks to dispense with protocol and grant their petition. However, there were limits to the benefits of class status. Petitioners could not rely on name dropping alone and proof of patronage was required through attaching supporting statements or signatures to their petitions. Also, in cases where a pension was in dispute due to accusations of sexual impropriety, their class status could be held severely against them. Indeed, for women who had illegitimate children it was best not to personally petition and instead allow male relatives or officials to appeal for them.

The range of applicants across all social classes highlights the value of a pension as a long-term survival strategy. For elite widows, a pension would not entirely replace the earnings of a

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<sup>2</sup> TNA, ADM 6/386, Mary Rhodes, 1812; Andrew, ‘Noblesse oblige’, 290.

<sup>3</sup> TNA, ADM 6/386, Mary Rhodes, 1812.

<sup>4</sup> TNA, ADM 6/397, Susanna Stocks, 1823.

husband, but it could provide secure income of up to £120 per annum which would maintain a good standard of living, with separate funds often granted to their children through the Compassionate Fund. A widows' pension was particularly important as property was often passed to male heirs or could be mismanaged by agents, so inheritance could not be relied on alone. For middling to working-class women a pension was vital in allowing them to retain their middling status or enable them to join the upper echelons of the working class.<sup>5</sup> It is likely that some women would still need to supplement their income, but a pension would mean there would be less financial pressure to do so. It has been widely acknowledged by historians and Poor Law officials that respectable work opportunities were limited for women and that they were unable to replace a male breadwinner's earnings on their own.<sup>6</sup>

Although pensions did not increase with inflation the importance of a lifetime's support should not be underestimated, particularly as widows aged. The petitions of older unsuccessful applicants demonstrate the importance of a pension. They wrote to the Admiralty in desperation for support explaining that they had outlived their friends, their health and capability of working was failing, and consequently they were facing increased poverty and feared being thrown onto the streets.<sup>7</sup> Through comparison this thesis has identified that not all linguistic strategies were equally appealing to authorities. Emotive appeals regarding old age, for example, did not carry as much weight with the Admiralty as they did with Poor Law authorities who were legally obligated to prevent starvation and destitution. However, for most petitioners poor relief and the possibility of being sent to the workhouse was considered a last resort.

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<sup>5</sup> Lin, 'Caring for the Nation's Families', 107.

<sup>6</sup> Humphries, 'Female-headed households', 34; Hill, *Women Alone*, 2; Emma Griffin, *Bread Winner*, 182; TNA, MH12/12104, 817, B. Drew, clerk to guardians of Bermondsey parish, to PLC, 3 Jan. 1849.

<sup>7</sup> TNA, ADM 7/615, Catherine Lamburn, 1821-1847.



This thesis has shown that petitioners could appeal multiple times and redeploy their petitions as a ‘recital’ to other authorities to increase their chances of success.<sup>8</sup> Petitioners could also attempt to overcome administrative rules or class-based prejudices by appealing for exceptions based on their universal appeals to motherhood, portraying emotive female dependence crafted to the sensibilities of patriarchal authorities, and promote their patriotism through recounting their familial sacrifices. Petitions gave lone women agency over their circumstances through the act of appeal. However, whilst petitions provide useful insights into their experiences they also need to be read as a performative document. To be successful, lone women had to adhere to gendered norms which would appeal to a male middle-class audience and as such women often told similar narratives in which they portrayed themselves to the authorities as vulnerable, dependent and in need of compassion, which at face value can seem to diminish their agency. Nonetheless, the importance of lone women’s petitions should not be underestimated. Whiting, in the context of the seventeenth century finds that women were selective in their choice of language, writing that women ‘presented themselves as the “weaker vessel” precisely to enable their own public speech’.<sup>9</sup> This thesis has expanded this observation to petitioners of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, identifying similarly that their language requires critical reading to demonstrate that women were able to use these gendered norms and replicate language of authorities regarding deservingness for their own ends in accessing relief.

Petitions are valuable documents to provide insights into how linguistic strategies changed over time and how lone women adapted to new requirements for accessing relief. Petitions in the late eighteenth century tended to be a more formal recital of a widow’s husband’s services and a request for a pension which was limited in personal description of her life beyond reference to her distress. However, by the nineteenth century petitions were becoming rich in detail regarding

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<sup>8</sup> TNA, ADM 1/5198, Henrietta Maria Moriarty, 1804; RMG, MRK 104/4/4/22, Henrietta Maria Moriarty, 1809.

<sup>9</sup> Whiting, *Women and Petitioning*, 26.

the virtues and values of their husbands' patriotic service, providing more personal insights into lone women's contributions to society as respectable wives and mothers, and were increasingly emotive in their appeals to authorities. This was due to petitioners responding to shifts in cultural values, gendered ideals, and policy changes. After the Napoleonic wars, the Royal Navy was not engaged in active warfare and therefore widows had to be more creative in how they patriotically framed their husband's service as fewer men died in action. As discussed in chapter two, naval widows could argue for exceptions regardless of their status based on the type of death suffered by their husband. Many men died due to disease caused by the tropical climates that they were posted to. However, such deaths were not considered as death in action and their widows increasingly had to argue that they should be interpreted as such, by highlighting their husband's prior good health or providing details of a cumulation of previous injuries that were heroically sustained. In addition, naval widows also promoted their own suffering and patriotic duties through the nursing of their husbands and their status as solo caregivers for their children. That lone women increasingly wrote about their own contributions to the navy reflects the significance of rule changes in 1819 in which the Admiralty changed access to a pension as a right and instead added the caveat that widows must 'appear to be proper and deserving objects of the public bounty'.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, the wives of convicts also placed increased emphasis on their roles as mothers when appealing to Poor Law authorities for relief. The challenges of childcare appealed to a growing 'cult of maternity' in this period and was a strategy which enabled women to emphasise their deservingness and overcome the changes in policy under the PLAA, which increasingly tried to judge all petitioners for relief as workers.<sup>11</sup> This strategy was particularly useful to the wives of convicts when negotiating with their local Poor Law Union as by applying for relief for their

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<sup>10</sup> AMD 6/387, Jane Naiby, 1814; Admiralty-Office, 'Widows Pensions', *London Gazette*, Vol. 1, 15 Jan. 1819, 108.

<sup>11</sup> Bailey, *Parenting in England*, 5.

children and not themselves they could avoid entering the workhouse. This was a unique loophole available to the wives of convicts as the PLAA did not take into consideration the banishment of men criminally transported and thus their wives could not be deemed as liable for support in the same way as widows or single mothers. Convict wives, in their petitions to the Poor Law authorities and Home Office, also increasingly expressed their emotional suffering caused by their unwanted spousal separation. Although this did not guarantee success, it could garner supporters for long-term petitioning campaigns for reunions. Emotion was an important tool for petitioners; however, there were limits for its use as the emotions of anger and frustration, similarly identified by Davis and Tomkins, were not well received.<sup>12</sup> Marginalia on Admiralty records confirms that officials were more likely to reciprocate sympathetically towards the 'poor Ladies who are suffering' when women's distress and vulnerability were emphasised, encouraging the authority to act as replacement protector.<sup>13</sup> Whilst petitioners felt entitled to relief and sometimes frustrated in their negotiations with authorities it was important that they were careful in the tone of their petitions, as being too aggressive or accusatory could affect their chances of being granted discretionary relief and instead they could be deemed as undeserving or not a proper object of charity.

Another key strategy utilised by lone women was to bargain their skills and promote their industry to gain exceptions and create opportunities for themselves. This study has found that, as well as class connections, practical skills could enable women to act as self-agents in their negotiations for exceptions and additional support. For example, a wife of a convict made herself indispensable through her experience as a prison matron to achieve a free passage and naval widows also promoted their caregiving skills to appeal for the respectable and desirable roles as matrons in naval hospitals. Although bargaining was an important strategy for success,

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<sup>12</sup> Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives*, 81; Tomkins, 'Men's pauper letters', 208.

<sup>13</sup> TNA, ADM 7/615, Case 70 'Widow's pensions refused', 1831-1840.

not all lone women were able to exhibit their agency in this way. The majority of petitioners relied on a multiple strategy approach of crafting linguistically appealing and emotive appeals, networking for patronage and importantly gathering knowledge of rule changes and advice on how best to petition.

Through comparing the responses of differing state institutions, this thesis has challenged arguments regarding the codification and standardisation of welfare and bureaucracy in the nineteenth century, instead demonstrating the reformulation of discretion and the significance of ideas of deservingness as an enduring factor in the administration of charitable relief. Authorities had the right to reward, but also police and punish lone women who applied for pensions or relief. Close attention to internal correspondence and the annotations on petitions have provided insights into what contemporaries considered deserving and non-deserving behaviour and how this affected institutional decision-making. Nenadic, De Bellaigue, and Popp have argued convincingly how women's economic ambitions were restricted by societal expectations, making them more vulnerable to reputational damage.<sup>14</sup> However, the above discussion has taken their observation further by exploring the impact of informers against lone women, demonstrating that pensions and relief were dependent on social perceptions of deservingness and, consequently, that women were subject to constant surveillance of their behaviour and lone status.<sup>15</sup> Lone women's independence and personal choices regarding remarriage or cohabitation were limited if they wished to receive relief. Their agency in negotiating relief did come with a personal cost, which was most significant for working-class and middling women who were less able to afford privacy due to their living arrangements and working practices, and thus subject to closer public observation.

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<sup>14</sup> Nenadic, 'The Social Shaping of Business Behaviour', 627, De Bellaigue, 'Great Expectations?', 33; Popp, 'But to cover her shame', 8.

<sup>15</sup> A legacy of these expectations continues today, as the British government announced in May 2023 that it would 'establish a scheme to cover those who forfeited their pension by remarrying or cohabiting before the rules changed in 2015'. See: 'War Widows' Pensions' research briefing, House of Commons Library 16 June 2023.

Knowledge gathering and sharing was an essential strategy for lone women, allowing them to act on behalf of their family at a distance and take advantage of institutional rule changes.

Knowledge could be gained through familial correspondence, word of mouth, and through the press. King has argued that, in regard to the old poor law, women and the elderly had a keen appreciation of the law, especially regarding illegitimacy cases and welfare entitlements once they were unable to work.<sup>16</sup> This research has extended these findings to the wives of convicts who also developed legal knowledge and sought out evidence of precedents they could use to their advantage in negotiations with authorities as added justification of their request to a free passage. The wives of convicts also crafted their appeals for clemency through reference to wider knowledge of exceptional events, such as specific royal celebrations that offered criminal reprieves.

Knowledge sharing was also an important feature in naval communities. Research on the importance of familial advice and patronage regarding sons has been well established.<sup>17</sup> However, this research has identified the importance of long-term maternal bonds for naval daughters who benefitted from the experience and knowledge of their mothers into adulthood. This has been demonstrated in their shared petitioning practices, alongside their references to practical support, to highlight their deservingness of working and supporting one another. Knowledge of how to access naval charity could also be used illicitly, from the fraudulent impersonation of a deceased mother to the informal sharing of pensions. Overall, these actions and the sharing of knowledge reinforce how naval families, like industrial middling families, were financially interconnected as part of a shared familial project.

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<sup>16</sup> King, *Writing the Lives*, 213.

<sup>17</sup> Gill, 'Children of the service', 154.

An important strategy of lone women was their ability to network with a wide range of officials and to use their support as additional leverage in their negotiations with multiple authorities. Chalus has identified how naval wives at home were utilised to campaign and share news of the activities of their male relatives to boost their careers.<sup>18</sup> As seen in chapter two, research into the private papers of Admiral John Markham as a recipient of petitions has further reinforced the importance of women as advocates, even at a middling level, to influence appointments to the navy through their personal appeals to gain employment for their sons.

As well as petitioning elite patrons, lone women frequently sought the support of multiple authorities to assist in their negotiations and give their appeals greater importance through officials' support or interest in their case. Poor law officials, although sometimes hostile to the burden lone women could place on parish poor rates, were more receptive in helping them appeal to the Admiralty or Home Office for support in the form of a pension or free passage. Naval widows and the wives of convicts also petitioned the monarch for support. Although this had limited success as they were usually redirected to the Home Office or Admiralty, petitioners did succeed in getting their cases re-examined and this likely offered some satisfaction of being acknowledged in their attempts to hold authorities to account. The wives of convicts replicated this strategy by directing their petitions to the Central Poor Law Authority to complain of their poor treatment by local poor law unions. The Central Poor Law Authority was not able to intervene in individual cases, but the prevalence of appeals did have an impact, as identified by King et al.<sup>19</sup> This research has highlighted that petitioners' agency to challenge institutions at a higher level was not confined to pauper letters and instead was commonly utilised by lone women in general. Uncovering networks and survival strategies, even in unsuccessful cases, has

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<sup>18</sup> Chalus, 'My dearest Tussy', 47-69.

<sup>19</sup> King et al., *In Their Own Write*, 106-130.

been important to understand how lone women survived and the factors affecting their chances of success.

### **Institutional Practices**

An assessment of lone women and a critical reading of subject indexes across the three state institutional archives has confirmed the similar use of discretion by all authorities. These authorities were also interconnected as a lone woman's failure to access support could mean that she would interact with multiple agencies of the state as her social mobility fluctuated. A comparison of institutional practices has revealed that clerks and commissioners held their own internal judgements on different institutions who aided lone women. The Admiralty made all their decisions centrally, although it did rely on the intelligence of nominated regional agents to carry out investigative reports. Admiralty pension applications required supporting evidence of an affidavit from a magistrate and for petitioners to provide a marriage certificate. However, in cases where the validity of a petitioner was brought into question, it is apparent that the Admiralty was suspicious of evidence by parochial officials and magistrates in densely populated areas and often wrote to the officials to confirm their supporting statements. By contrast, for the Home Office and poor law officials, the support of a magistrate had important and unquestionable weight. The Poor Law authorities made decisions at a local union level as the Central Authority was restricted in intervening in local cases, although correspondence for guidance on interpreting the new poor law was frequent. The MH subject indexes which record this correspondence confirm discretionary variation in responses to and the treatment of lone women across poor law unions. Overall, for all these institutions and despite attempts to become more uniform, individual relationships and appeals to clerks, investigators, and local poor law officials still had significant importance in how a petition was judged initially.

### **Future Avenues for Research**

The methodology developed in this thesis has created a framework which has the potential to be fruitfully applied to other collections and institutions, particularly those related to naval charity. Due to the scale of the Admiralty collections held at The National Archives and the comparative nature of this project, the assessment of lone women's petitions was limited to those appealing for pensions. However, other branches of naval charity, including the Compassionate Fund and Greenwich Hospital School, also attracted hundreds of thousands of personal petitions. An assessment of the application petitions for these charities could further develop understandings of how naval charity shaped familial experiences on shore, provide further insights into patronage networks, and allow comparative assessment of the Admiralty's decision-making principles.

Petitions could also offer new perspectives on the relationship between convict, naval, and gender history through an assessment of female convicts from maritime communities. This thesis has focused on the wives of convicts, rather than female convicts, to assess comparatively how the former responded to their lone status, similar to naval widows and deserted wives. However, naval women convicts' personal petitions to the Home Office could add a further dimension to the experiences of lone women, offering the opportunity to assess the similarities and differences in petitioning strategies and consider how appeals to naval connections were perceived outside the Admiralty. This approach could also be applied to regional archives holding local records on the poor laws and private papers relating to officials, such as magistrates, admirals, and MPs, who were also recipients of petitions. Considering petitions from a local or regional perspective may also provide further insights into networks that petitioners interacted with and that are mentioned in their petitions to the Central Authority.



## **Lone women**

Whilst the scope for future research on lone women is rich, this thesis has made significant contributions to the knowledge of women alone and welfare administration in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Its major contribution is the recognition of lone women as a social category, uncovering their petitioning strategies and demonstrating that discretion within the various state authorities united them. In assessing the numerous petitions of lone women, this research has addressed wider themes of class, age, motherhood, respectability, and stigma, developing our understanding of which factors informed the decision-making of clerks and officials regarding relief and welfare. It has also offered new insights into how lone women were received in their communities, highlighting the significance of an informing culture as an obstacle to their agency. To overcome these social obstacles, lone women expressed ingenuity through their petitioning. They achieved this through crafting appealing and tailored linguistic strategies, bargaining their skills, using their knowledge of precedents to hold authorities to account, and taking advantage of their ability to negotiate with multiple authorities to leverage power and take control over their lone status. The assessment of familial and support networks available to lone women has demonstrated that whilst petitioning independently, they were not alone.

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ADM 6/386, Papers of cases referred to the Court of Assistants of the Charity for decision, 1812-1813.

ADM 6/387, Papers of cases referred to the Court of Assistants of the Charity for decision, 1814.

ADM 6/388, Papers of cases referred to the Court of Assistants of the Charity for decision, 1815.

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ADM 12/431, Admiralty Digest and Index. Digest 72-81, 1844.

ADM 12/511, Admiralty Digest and Index. Digest 72-86, 1849.

### **ADM 1**

ADM 1: Admiralty, and Ministry of Defence, Navy Department: Correspondence and Papers, 1794 -1849.

ADM 1/4068, Letters from Palace: The King's Private Secretary, 1830-1831.

### **ADM 7**

ADM 7/615, Admiralty Miscellanea. Catherine Lamburn (5), 1821-1847.

ADM 7/615, Admiralty Miscellanea. Widows' Pensions (70), 1831-140.

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#### **MH 15**

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MH15/2, Local Government Board and predecessors: Subject Indexes of Correspondence, 1837.

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MH15/4, Local Government Board and predecessors: Subject Indexes of Correspondence, 1839.

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MH15/8, Local Government Board and predecessors: Subject Indexes of Correspondence, 1843.

MH15/9, Local Government Board and predecessors: Subject Indexes of Correspondence, 1844.

MH15/10, Local Government Board and predecessors: Subject Indexes of Correspondence, 1845.

MH15/11, Local Government Board and predecessors: Subject Indexes of Correspondence, 1846.

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## **MH 12**

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