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The Royal Navy and Intelligence Gathering in the Western Atlantic c.1700-1750

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Abstract

This thesis investigates English, and after 1707, British intelligence gathering and the role of intelligence in operations around the Atlantic Ocean during the first half of the eighteenth century and the years immediately leading up to it. Rather than providing an operational history of this period, it examines naval activity through the lens of intelligence gathering to understand and explain the influence of intelligence exchange, which was crucial to naval operations in the Americas. Attention is drawn to the often-overlooked need for intelligence, which was pivotal to naval operations in Britain's developing empire in the Atlantic, an increasingly important area of economic opportunity for Britain. Intelligence is often present in the literature of naval activity but is rarely examined in depth. This thesis therefore seeks to provide a detailed consideration of the collection, validation, and deployment of intelligence material to fill this lacuna in the historiography.

This thesis also uses a broad array of sources, including governmental and other, civilian sources, and goes beyond what they say about operations, battles, and cruises, and instead examines what they reveal about the frequently overlooked but ever-present process of intelligence gathering. These sources illustrate the range of correspondents in the complex systems of exchange during the eighteenth century, with a cross-section of individuals involved from across society. They have been used in parallel examination with one another to investigate the extent to which systems of intelligence gathering coexisted and drew in actors and correspondents from diverse sources. The range of sources allows the historian to blend both the civilian and the military spheres of intelligence gathering, emphasising the fluidity and flexibility of the exchange during this period.

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Abbreviations

BOT Board of Trade

CSP Calendar of State Papers

NMM National Maritime Museum

TBEA The Bank of England Archive

TNA The National Archives

Introduction

This thesis investigates English, and after 1707, British, intelligence gathering and the role of intelligence in operations around the Atlantic Ocean during the first half of the eighteenth century and the years immediately leading up to it. Instead of focusing on providing an operational history during this period, it examines naval activity through the lens of intelligence gathering, aiming to understand and explain the influence of intelligence exchange, which was crucial to naval operations in the Americas. It draws attention to the often-overlooked constant of the need for intelligence which was pivotal to naval operations in Britain's developing empire in the Atlantic, which was an increasingly important area of economic opportunity for Britain. This period saw the Western Atlantic become a more strategic and important site for naval operations by British administration compared to the seventeenth century, which meant greater regular naval activity, greater interest in developing navigational understanding of the region, and the development and utilisation of sustained methods for gathering intelligence. Intelligence is often present in the literature of naval activity but is rarely examined in depth. This thesis therefore seeks to provide a detailed consideration of the collection, validation, and deployment of intelligence material to fill this space in the historiography. It highlights the importance of information and intelligence gathering to inform the 'who', 'what', 'when', 'where', 'why', and 'how' operations were conducted in the Atlantic during this period.

Modern day central intelligence gathering organisations only took form during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[1] Prior to this, intelligence was collected and disseminated by a range of state and non-state actors both in the British Isles and overseas, and the extent and effectiveness of intelligence gathering could depend greatly on the ability and energy of individuals. Eighteenth-century intelligence gathering consisted of a series of loosely interlocking systems, which became progressively more regular and complex

[1] C. Andrew, *The Secret World: A History of Intelligence* (London: Allen Lane, 2018), 6, 214; M. I. Handel, 'Intelligence and military operations', *Intelligence and National Security*, 5, 2 (1990), 1-95, 5, 85; R. Harding, 'The Use of Intelligence in Royal Navy Amphibious Operations, 1739-1783', in R. C. Balano & C. L. Symonds (eds.), *New Interpretations in Naval History: Selected Papers from the Fourteenth Naval History Symposium, Held at Annapolis, Maryland 23-25 September 1999* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 3-20, 3-4; G. S. Macdonald, 'Black-boxes, flying packets, and espionage: the information trade and Scottish governance, 1689-1691', *Parliaments, Estates and Representation*, 40, 3 (2020), 269-289, 271; G. Rothenburg, 'Military Intelligence Gathering in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century, 1740-1792', in K. Neilson & B. J. C. McKercher (eds.), *Go Spy the Land: Military Intelligence in History* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publications, 1992), 99-113, 111.

throughout the century. Such administration was less systematised in the eighteenth century and without the dedicated intelligence gathering organisations sat at the state's disposal in the present day. Reporting lines were loosely defined, and multiple bodies could act as first recipients of intelligence, allowing intelligence to flow between actors to be directed where it was considered most effective. There were cultivated networks of informants, developed by individuals who were aware of the importance of intelligence to naval operations. Some of these networks were highly personalised and depended on the attention of individual actors, and perhaps did not remain in place after such individuals moved on. Sustained contacts provided state representatives with consistent supplies of intelligence which was then passed around the Atlantic Ocean.

Intelligence is defined as sensitive or strategic information, gathered by actors from across society to further British objectives in times of conflict and uneasy periods of peace with foreign powers vying for control in the Americas. This has been established by studying and blending the primary source material and contemporaries' definitions of intelligence with several scholars' definitions of intelligence.[2] A common aspect of these definitions is the attention to currency, with intelligence being deemed up to date and pertaining to operations in progress or likely to happen in the near future. It had to be available, reliable, and usable, with actors exchanging intelligence material in networks to get it where it was most needed to be effective. Primarily focused on rival nations' strengths and weaknesses, shipping movements, defences, and trading routes, the Royal Navy used intelligence to plan and execute operations both in times of war and peace.

As the mobile military arm of the British empire operating in a dispersed maritime system of island and coastal colonies, the Royal Navy is the principal subject of the following chapters. They discuss its operations against rival nations' naval forces during times of war; as pursuers of pirates during the 'golden age' of the first decades of the eighteenth century; and as navigators and explorers in a growing imperial network. The Navy recruited individuals from all backgrounds who made intelligence gathering possible, as representatives of the state

[2] Handel, 'Intelligence and military operations', 1; Harding, 'Navy Amphibious Operations', 6, 8; S. Hutchinson, 'Intelligence, reason of state and the art of governing risk and opportunity in early modern Europe', *Economy and Society*, 43, 3 (2-14), 370-400, 371; J. Ojala, 'Maritime Information Networks between Northern and Southern Europe during the Eighteenth Century', in G. Nigro (ed.), *Maritime Networks as a Factor in European Integration* (Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2019), 183-194, 187, 190, 191; Rothenburg, 'Military Intelligence Gathering', 102; M. Tieleman, '"No Intrigue is Spared": Anglo-American Intelligence Networks in the Eighteenth Century Dutch Republic', *Itinerario*, 45, 1 (2021), 99-123, 105.

frequently operated independently of governmental oversight and therefore worked on initiative to gather intelligence in loose and decentralised systems.

The Navy was primarily engaged in trade protection and disruption of that of rival nations France and Spain during this period, pushing the establishment of a permanent naval presence before the phase of aggressive and rapid conquest of other nations' Caribbean possessions during the Seven Years' War.[3] From the beginning of the eighteenth century, the government and the Admiralty had regarded the West Indies as a theatre of increasing importance, predicting that it would become the centre of future conflict as the century drew on.[4] It leant on the policy of defensive action in the home waters of the English Channel and aggressive elsewhere, once again based on the protection of trade, the disruption of that of other states to British benefit, and the growth of Britain's maritime power.[5] Britain also sought to establish stations and bases in the West Indies in Jamaica and Antigua, both of which had been established by 1739 and rapidly expanded during the 1740s.[6] Station ships were primarily concerned with the convoying of local merchant shipping during peacetime as their limited numbers earlier in the century restricted their range and preparedness to take on threats to British interests, although their numbers expanded throughout the century and were bolstered by larger fleets during times of war.[7] Particularly important in the case of Jamaica, established bases and facilities offered opportunities to attack Spanish colonies in close proximity to the stations at Port Royal and Port Antonio, with Cuba being just 90 miles north and Cartagena 500

[3] C. Buchet, 'The Royal Navy and the Caribbean, 1689-1763', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 80, 1 (1994), 30-44, 36; D. Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy in the Early Eighteenth Century: Pirates, Merchants and British Imperial Authority in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans* (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2021), 66; S. Williams, 'The Royal Navy and Caribbean Colonial Society during the Eighteenth Century', in J. McAleer & C. Petley, *The Royal Navy and the British Atlantic World, c. 1750-1820* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 27-50, 30-31; S. Satsuma, *Britain and Colonial Maritime War in the Early Eighteenth Century: Silver, Seapower and the Atlantic* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2013), 244, 247, 248.

[4] S. Willis, *The Admiral Benbow: The Life and Times of a Naval Legend* (London: Quercus, 2010), 253, 273, 275; J. D. Grainger, *The British Navy in the Caribbean*, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2021), 100.

[5] D. A. Baugh, *British Naval Administration in the Age of Walpole* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 18-19, 23; D. A. Baugh, 'Great Britain's 'Blue -Water' Policy, 1689-1815', *The International History Review*, 10, 1 (1988), 33-58, 41, 57; Satsuma, *Britain and Colonial Maritime War*, 2-3.

[6] N. A. M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 302; K. Morgan, 'Port location and development in the British Atlantic World in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', in C. Buchet & G. Le Bouëdec (ed.), *The Sea in History- The Early Modern World* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2017), 158-167, 163; J. Black & C. Fury, 'The Development of Sea Power, 1649-1815' in C. A. Fury (ed.), *The Social History of English Seamen, 1650-1815* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2017), 5-32, 25; Williams, 'The Royal Navy and Caribbean Colonial Society', 32.

[7] Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy*, 62.

miles south of Jamaica respectively.[8] Meanwhile, English Harbour at Antigua was situated 60 miles north of Guadeloupe and 180 miles north of Martinique, and served a protective purpose against French privateering, merging with Barbados in 1744 to become the Leeward Islands command when previously it had fallen under the control of the commander-in-chief at Jamaica.[9] By mid-century, these established permanent bases were part of an aim to provide dedicated ships to regions like the Western Atlantic and the setting out of large expeditions from Britain in support of operations.[10] Commanders-in-chief were appointed by the Admiralty as senior officers on station protecting British interests, usually of admiral's rank, although often captains were promoted to the temporary rank of commodore. This granted the powers of an admiral whilst the position and rank remained, as was the case with Charles Wager during the War of Spanish Succession (see Chapter 2).[11] The commander-in-chief was the principal administrator in charge of naval matters, to whom the Admiralty often delegated authority and autonomy in the interpretation of their orders, as well as being connected to the structure of island governance in the case of Jamaica and in communication with colonial governors and colonial assemblies, and as a manager of resources on station.[12] In the pursuit of the objectives in the Western Atlantic laid out above, the commander-in-chief was able to dispatch officers under his command on missions, during both times of war and periods of uneasy peace, for example in the case of Admiral Edward Vernon upon taking command in the Caribbean in 1739 (discussed in Chapter 4), all of which hinged on intelligence gathering. As this thesis shows, the commander-in-chief operating in the Western Atlantic also maintained connections with private citizens, including networks of merchants and mariners spread across the region. This role came with its own demands for consistent supplies of locally gathered intelligence whilst on station. The individuals from whom this local intelligence was collected and their connections with the commander-in -chief, and often colonial governors, are identified in Figure 1. These senior officers were immersed in the gathering of intelligence which fed into their intended objectives in the Western Atlantic in both peace and war.

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[8] Buchet, 'The Royal Navy and the Caribbean, 41; D. Crewe, *Yellow Jack and the Worm: British Naval Administration in the West Indies, 1739-1748* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), 7-8.
[9] Crewe, *Yellow Jack and the Worm*, 8.
[10] Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 303.
[11] N. A. M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London: Harper Collins, 1988), 17, 299.
[12] *Ibid*., 33, 282, 304-5, 309; N. A. M. Rodger, 'Officers and Men of the Navy, 1660-1815' in C. A. Fury (ed.), *The Social History of English Seamen, 1650-1815* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2017), 51-70, 60.

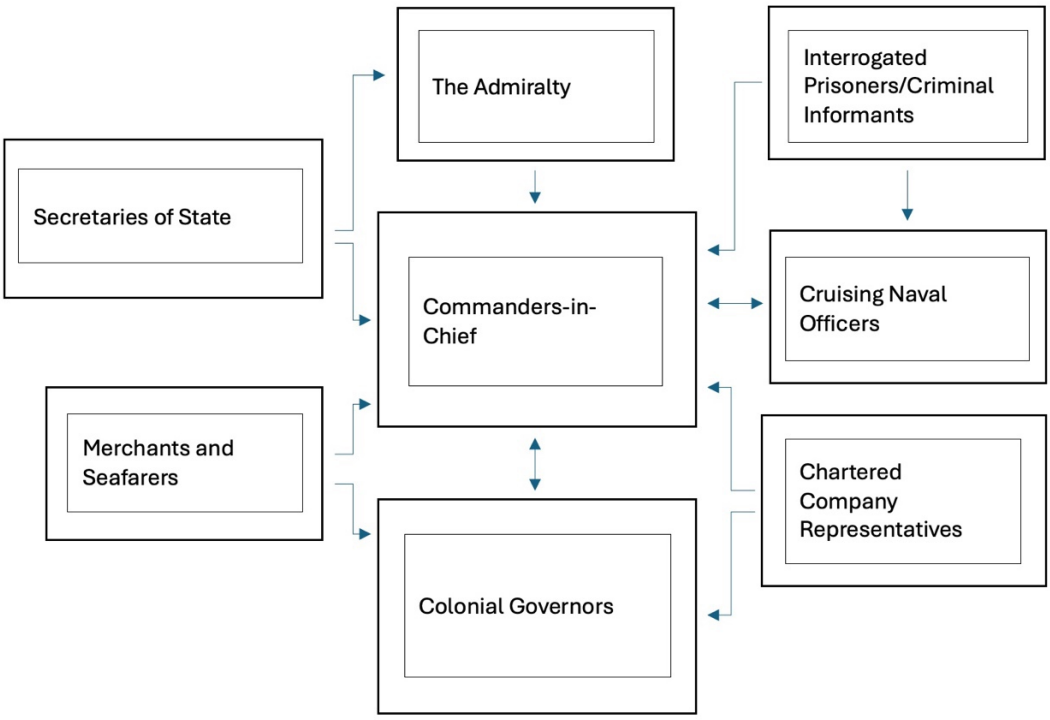

Figure 1 Sources of intelligence available to Commanders-in-Chief on station in Jamaica, c.1700-1750.

Whilst very rarely the commander-in-chief could expect locally relevant material from London with correspondence from Secretaries of State and the Secretary of the Admiralty, the autonomy required of him at such a distance from London as the Western Atlantic demanded he gather his own intelligence material from local connections cultivated himself. Naturally this applied to any commander-in-chief operating at a distance from home, and not only those operating in the Western Atlantic. Colonial governors were pivotal sources of local intelligence for senior naval officers. As recipients of correspondence from merchants and seafarers, as well as representatives of chartered companies such as the South Sea Company, colonial governors like Colonel Thomas Handasyd provided officers such as Commodore Charles Wager with fresh intelligence of French and Spanish naval movements in 1708 (see Chapter 2) to support British attempts to intercept and disrupt rivals. Chartered company representatives did much the same via correspondence with colonial governors, providing details of plans for attacks on British colonial interests. For example, South Carolina's Governor William Bull forwarded fears of invasion plans gathered from South Sea Company factors for the attention of Captain Peter Warren in 1739, discussed in Chapter 4. The same was true in the hunt for pirates, as Captain Chaloner Ogle used intelligence gathered from local informants on the coast of West Africa, in the form of factors of the Royal African Company, to track down the notorious pirate Bartholomew Roberts in 1722, as is discussed in Chapter 3. Merchants and seafarers also naturally provided intelligence to naval officers directly through utilisation of

informants, as illustrated in the example of Captain Ellis Brand in his hunt for notorious pirate Edward ‘Blackbeard’ Teach, which depended on intelligence links with seafarers and merchants cultivated and maintained by Brand, also discussed in Chapter 3. One of the most available and reliable sources of local intelligence for senior naval officers was the dispatch of subordinate naval officers on cruises along coastlines, well-known trade routes, and to look in to rival ports. This is best illustrated by Admiral Edward Vernon, who began his role as commander-in-chief in Jamaica in summer 1739 just before the outbreak of the War of Jenkins’ Ear, examined in Chapter 4. Admiral Vernon maintained a near-constant supply of intelligence through continuous cruising by his officers dispatched in smaller vessels, keeping him abreast of enemy activity in support of his own operations and helping him to formulate wider plans for conflict in the region. Vernon also cultivated one of the most prominent and longer-term examples of intelligence gathering, in the form of ‘Lowther the pirate' (see Chapter 4), a convicted criminal whose knowledge and local intelligence saved him from the gallows and began an unusual rise to prominence as a junior naval officer and imperial informant, as well as another of Vernon’s cruising officers. These are just some of the avenues through which intelligence was gathered by representatives of the state whilst on station in the Western Atlantic, as recognised methods of gathering intelligence which was fresh and therefore of the greatest likelihood to positively support naval operations. These routes also persisted throughout the period, illustrating that they were recognised by officers with shared experience as consistent methods which increased the possibility of results and highlighting the intrinsic link between intelligence gathering and the shaping of operations of the Royal Navy in the Western Atlantic during the early eighteenth century.

Literature Review

The Royal Navy's presence in the Western Atlantic theatre during the eighteenth century has been addressed frequently in the historiography. W. G. Bassett's short-term article examining English naval policy between 1698 and 1703 argues that England saw increased attention to the Caribbean at the end of the seventeenth century as key to competition with France and Spain and increased dominance.[13] Later, but with a similar focus on the Navy's role in the region, Christian Buchet's longer-term survey between 1689 and 1763 posits that the period was one of increased focus of the Navy in the region which met with limited success before the rapid ascendency associated with the Seven Years' War, brought about by improvements in administration, logistics, ship design and attention to health and the prevention of sickness from the 1740s.[14] Impressment and its consequences in the Atlantic World have been examined by Denver Brunsman in the book *The Evil Necessity*, covering the subject between the late seventeenth century and 1815 and its role in the Atlantic World.[15] Shinsuke Satsuma has posited the existence of 'pro-maritime war' policies at the opening of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the War of Spanish Succession, through which it is argued Britain sought to exert influence and gain economic dominance through conducting conflict at sea in the Americas, as well as examining the links between mercantile interests and the execution of the pro-maritime war policy.[16] This work solidifies the connections between the Navy and its preoccupation with trade, through both its protection and disruption, to hinder Britain's enemies France and Spain in the Western Atlantic, in an examination of the interrelations of war at sea and economic concerns in a theatre of increasing importance.

John McAleer and Christer Petley's collection, *The Royal Navy and the British Atlantic World*, discusses the Navy's role in the Atlantic between 1750 and 1820, marked by the contributors' focuses on the growing supremacy of the Navy, its protection of British commerce, and questions of identity in the development of Britain's Atlantic empire.[17] Of greatest significance to the current research is Siân Williams' chapter examining the links between the Royal Navy

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[13] W. G. Bassett, 'Summary of the Julian Corbett Prize Essay, 1932: English naval policy in the Caribbean: 1698-1703', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 11, 32 (1933), 122-125.
[14] Buchet, 'The Royal Navy and the Caribbean', 30-44.
[15] D. Brunsman, *The Evil Necessity: British Naval Impressment in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013).
[16] Satsuma, *Britain and Colonial Maritime War*.
[17] J. McAleer & C. Petley (eds.), *The Royal Navy and the British Atlantic World, c. 1750-1820* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

and colonial society, including protection of British colonial interests such as trade and plantation infrastructure, although much of the chapter focuses on the period after 1750.[18] Sarah Kinkel's *Disciplining the Empire*, ranging from the origins of the rise of the Royal Navy in the seventeenth century to its status in British politics at the close of the American Revolutionary War, discusses the Navy's place within British politics through the periods of growth and ascendancy commonly identified in the literature on the Navy which examines this period.[19] Primarily focused on the Navy's role in the Atlantic in relation to the changing politics of the eighteenth century, Kinkel identifies a transition from a defensive, geographically restrained naval force towards one of greater aggressive action during the second half of the century.[20] Most recently, John Grainger's *The British Navy in the Caribbean* examines the Royal Navy's role in the Western Atlantic over the long term, in a work which serves as a survey from English forays into this theatre under Francis Drake and John Hawkins during the sixteenth century, up to the Navy's almost total withdrawal from the Caribbean in the middle of the twentieth.[21] Most of these works share a common theme of rise and fall, seeking to either retell and re-examine naval operations in this theatre from fresh perspectives and provide more nuanced examinations of the Royal Navy in the Western Atlantic. However, none of these works consider and examine the role of intelligence in the Royal Navy's operations in this theatre of growing importance, which emphasises further the need to investigate intelligence gathering and the significance of this thesis.

Intelligence is frequently mentioned in the literature but rarely considered in any depth, which is especially true of the first half of the eighteenth century. For example, the works of Jane Knight, Michael Duffy, and Richard Harding all address the importance of intelligence specifically, but aside from Harding, none explore intelligence gathering in the period before 1750.[22] Historians' lack of attention to intelligence reflects how contemporaries spoke of it. Contemporaries were aware of intelligence and its importance but made only passing mention. For example, Captain Charles Johnson's *A General History of the Pyrates*, considers the impact of intelligence, but not as the central discussion of his work.[23] Johnson discussed

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[18] Williams, 'The Royal Navy and Caribbean Colonial Society', 27-50.
[19] S. Kinkel, *Disciplining the Empire: Politics, Governance, and the Rise of the British Navy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).
[20] *Ibid*., 212.
[21] Grainger, *The British Navy in the Caribbean*.
[22] J. Knight, 'Nelson's 'Old Lady': Merchant news as a source of intelligence (June to October 1796)', *Journal for Maritime Research*, 7, 1 (2005), 88-109; M. Duffy, 'British Naval Intelligence and Bonaparte's Egyptian Expedition of 1798', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 84, 3 (1998), 278-290; R. Harding, 'The Use of Intelligence in Royal Navy Amphibious Operations', 3-20.
[23] C. Johnson, *A General History of the Pyrates* (London: T. Warner, 1724), 140.

the crew of the *Cassandra*, a pirate vessel cruising along the coast of Africa who were cornered by the Navy in the Caribbean and sought to negotiate a pardon, discussed in Chapter 3. The *General History* makes only passing mention of intelligence, specifically the *Cassandra*'s attempts to prevent intelligence from being gathered by their pursuers. The same is true of Isaac Schomberg's naval history of England and Britain which was written at the turn of the nineteenth century. This text chronicles a narrative that ranges from ancient times up to the Peace of Amiens in 1802, and discusses the exploits of important individuals such as Charles Wager, Edward Vernon, and 'Lowther the pirate', whose gathering and use of intelligence had a direct bearing on operations conducted in the Americas.[24] Schomberg's treatment of intelligence acknowledges its presence and its significance, but without going into depth, perhaps laying the foundations upon which historians have built since.

Even the founders of academic naval history, many of whom had service experience, did not pay much attention to the subject. Alfred Thayer Mahan, a pioneer of naval history as a discipline, did not discuss intelligence in any detail. In his significant book *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, he made only one reference to the difficulties presented in its transmission, and even then only in reference to operations during the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783).[25] While Mahan's focus was on telling a general history of sea power and its effect on history, the omission of the role of intelligence and its collection has perpetuated its neglect in studies which followed. Meanwhile, Julian Corbett's *The English in the Mediterranean* refers to the existence of a system of intelligence which fed reports about French naval movements at Toulon and 'the western ports'.[26] Focused on the operations of the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean, it is a small reference which went undeveloped and largely unreferenced, alongside his other mentions of intelligence transfer to naval officers. The same is true of his book *England in the Seven Years' War*, which referred to intelligence throughout its volumes.[27] This thesis draws on Corbett's awareness and limited discussion of the role of intelligence and applies it to the Atlantic, bringing the role of intelligence into sharper detail and analysis for the neglected first half of the eighteenth century.

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[24] I. Schomberg, *Naval Chronology; or An Historical Summary of Naval & Maritime Events, from the Time of the Romans, to the Treaty of Peace 1802, Vol. I* (London: C. Roworth, Hudson's Court, Strand, 1802), 136, 174, 178, 188-189.
[25] A. T. Mahan, *The influence of sea power upon history, 1660-1783* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1914), 521.
[26] J. S. Corbett, *England in the Mediterranean: a study of the rise and influence of British power within the Straits 1603-1713*, *Vol. 2*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green and Co Ltd., 1904), 218, 243.
[27] J. S. Corbett, *England in the Seven Years' War: A Study in Combined Strategy*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green and Co Ltd., 1907).

Works as influential in the study of the Atlantic as Richard Pares's *War and Trade* make only passing mention of intelligence in the context of the War of Jenkins' Ear (1739-1742), with limited discussion of the interception of letters in Europe which warned the British government of looming conflict.[28] The twentieth-century historiography of intelligence remained sparse until Kenneth Ellis wrote *The Post Office in the Eighteenth Century*, in which he discussed the role of the Post Office in the collection and transmission of intelligence, and explicitly addressed the existence of governmental networks of intelligence gathering, and the connections between Lloyd's Coffee House and state bodies.[29] This study represents a turning point in the historiography, in which the Post Office was one crucial link with governmental offices like the Secretaries of State, and illustrates Ellis's effort to examine systems of intelligence exchange in detail. Writing only three years after Ellis, David Horn's work on the diplomatic service touched lightly on intelligence gathering during the period, arguing that '[d]uring the wars between Britain and France in the middle years of the eighteenth century, spies and intelligence abounded', and highlighting the survival of 'a considerable bulk of secret intelligence'.[30] No evidence or further elaboration was given, perhaps in a function of how little the primary source material had to say; illustrative of the secretive and often unrecorded nature of the subject.

The role of intelligence has been neglected and written out of histories of operations undertaken by the Royal Navy in the Atlantic. Several works following Horn centred on operations undertaken by Admiral Vernon during the War of Jenkins' Ear, in which the authors once again made passing mention of intelligence gathering and its impact on operations in the Caribbean.[31] Charles Nowell makes subtle reference to Vernon's orders from London for what to do in the event of finding intelligence of Spanish fleets ripe for attack, but does not explore any further his methods of collecting and using intelligence.[32] Meanwhile, Jack Ogelsby touches on the role played by 'Lowther the pirate', with a brief reference to his experience on the coast of Spanish America and his place as an informant for operations during Vernon's tenure as commander-in-chief.[33] Neither Nowell or Ogelsby expand on the role of intelligence

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[28] R. Pares, *War and Trade in the West Indies 1739-1763* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1936), 137-138.
[29] K. Ellis, *The Post Office in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Administrative History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 60, 61.
[30] D. B. Horn, *The British Diplomatic Service 1689-1789* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 268, 283.
[31] C. E. Nowell, 'The Defense of Cartagena', *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 42, 4 (1962), 477-501, 483; J. C. M. Ogelsby, 'The British and Panama-1742', *Caribbean Studies*, 3, 2 (1963), 71-79, 73-4, 74-5, 75.
[32] Nowell, 'Defense of Cartagena', 483.
[33] Ogelsby, 'British and Panama', 73-4.

in great detail, although their work evidences the continued awareness of its importance in naval history.

In much the same vein as Horn, Mark Thompson's examination of the offices of Secretaries of State highlighted their importance to the gathering of intelligence. Whilst once again pushing the prevalence of spies in the employ of the government during the period, he also stressed a lack of source material, citing the secrecy of such employment, as well as the government's concentration on a potential Jacobite uprising rather than the collection of intelligence for use in the Americas.[34] Once more, reference to intelligence gathering was limited and far from the focus of the work in which it was addressed, but passing reference shows how it has been a peripheral aspect of the historiography for decades. Studies like Thompson's offer questions about the longevity and continuity of systems of intelligence gathering and exchange. Thompson has offered glimpses of the role of intelligence and its collection at points in time, but it does not provide enough discussion to understand the permanence of these systems and how they evolved over time.

Some historians have sought to examine intelligence in greater detail, although this has often been in the context of land warfare. Jeremy Black posits that British intelligence regarding 'Bourbon naval moves' was highly unreliable and made Britain reactive in their strategy during the eighteenth century, citing intelligence gathering efforts largely dedicated to observations of rival nations' ports.[35] Whilst this was certainly true in some instances, this thesis expands on and explains in greater detail how it was far from the whole story, as officers of the Royal Navy frequently gathered a wealth of local intelligence in the Americas, which assisted in operations against their European rivals. Further discussion by Black examines government intelligence gathering, primarily the interception and deciphering of letters, the development of a state-sanctioned press, and the control of the flow of information.[36] Black is primarily concerned with the implementation of intelligence for the safety of the British Isles from French invasion threats and Jacobite plots, which naturally influenced the sources he used and the cases he looked at. However, there is an important link between this thesis and Black's article in the connections both make regarding intelligence gathering from Europe and its influence on decision making. Whilst this thesis examines intelligence gathering and its uses in naval

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[34] M. A. Thomson, *The Secretaries of State 1681-1782* (New York: A. M. Kelley, 1968), 150-151.
[35] J. Black, 'Anglo-Spanish Naval Relations in the Eighteenth Century', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 77, 3 (1991), 235-258, 251.
[36] J. Black, 'Intelligence and the Emergence of the Information Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain', in K. de Leeuw & J. Bergstra (eds.), *The History of Information Security: A Comprehensive Handbook* (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science Technology, 2007), 369-380.

applications in the West Indies, these applications were reliant on intelligence gathered in Europe to support them. James Alsop, whose discussion of intelligence related to land operations during the War of Spanish Succession, suggests that over-exaggeration of the 'systems' used by individuals like the Duke of Marlborough has led to misunderstandings of eighteenth-century intelligence gathering.[37] Individual successes of intelligence gathering used as case studies throughout this thesis reveal the roles of individuals who represented the state's interests and highlight the complex and established systems which were in fact far from exaggerated. These individuals worked in networks and systems which proved invaluable to intelligence gathering in British naval operations in the Americas during this period.

Robert Kaplan emphasises the historical importance of individual military officers' autonomy during the American Revolutionary War. An officer had to act as 'his own intelligence officer' in the field.[38] Although his discussion centres on land operations, Kaplan's article highlights the universal importance of autonomy and independence for those on station, as reflected in Ian Steele's discussion of Atlantic communications during the eighteenth century and the initiative exercised by colonial governors.[39] As developed further in the chapters which follow, representatives of the state's authority, including naval officers and colonial governors, played a pivotal role in the gathering of intelligence during the first half of the century. Whilst scholarship such as Konstantin Dierk's examination of eighteenth-century letter writing apply the autonomy of state representatives to colonial governors, officers of the Royal Navy and their autonomy are not part of his study.[40] Dierk's discussion is important to the understanding of state representatives' functions in the British Atlantic, and his emphasis on the importance of colonial governors can also be applied to naval officers, as this thesis shows. Ryan Mewett has examined officers' autonomy, although his focus is on the removal of officers from the control of London and their complicity in the contraband trade in the Caribbean during the first half of the eighteenth century.[41] Communication and exchange between naval officers and with colonial governors was vital. These studies underpin the thesis and its discussion, as

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[37] J. D. Alsop, 'British Intelligence for the North Atlantic Theatre of the War of Spanish Succession', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 77, 2 (1991), 113-118, 113.
[38] R. Kaplan, 'The Hidden War: British Intelligence Operations during the American Revolution', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 47, 1 (1990), 115-138, 117.
[39] I. K. Steele, *The English Atlantic 1675-1740: An Exploration of Communication and Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 235; I. K. Steele, 'Moat Theories and the English Atlantic, 1675-1740', *Historical Papers/Communications historiques*, 13, 1 (1978), 18-33, 25.
[40] K. Dierks, *In My Power: Letter Writing and Communications in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 49.
[41] R. E. Mewett, '"It is ticklish meddling with the Navy": The British Navy and the Caribbean contraband trade, c. 1713-1750', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 0, 0 (2023), 1-24, 2, 3, 8, 11.

communication systems and how they operate have defined how intelligence was gathered and exchanged.

The most important of these discussions in recent historiography is Jari Ojala's examination of maritime information networks in Europe during the eighteenth century, and Chapter 1 examines Ojala's theories in a naval context.[42] Ojala's discussion highlights the importance of three factors in the gathering of maritime information: the availability, reliability, and usability of information.[43] The emphasis is of course on maritime information networks regarding trade and commerce. However, as this thesis illustrates throughout, these networks were important sources of intelligence through which the naval and civilian interlinked, and the considerations of the availability, reliability, and usability of intelligence were important to both civilian and naval actors. One objective of this thesis is to apply these concepts to naval intelligence gathering, as the crossover between civilian and military systems underpinned exchange during the period, in addition to examining how its collection fitted into these wider networks.

Two studies which pay greater attention to naval intelligence and its importance to operations are Duffy's examination of intelligence's role during the Navy's pursuit of Napoleon during the 1798 Egyptian expedition and Knight's discussions of intelligence gathering during Nelson's 1796 Mediterranean cruise. Knight highlights the need for locally gathered intelligence acquired from diverse sources, aiming to support operations on stations far removed from central government.[44] Knight's is one of few detailed studies of intelligence gathering in the eighteenth century. This thesis expands on her conclusions regarding the importance of intelligence gathering by Nelson on station in the Mediterranean, applying its focus to the neglected first half of the eighteenth century. Meanwhile, Duffy examines Nelson's pursuit of French forces around the Mediterranean ahead of the expedition to Egypt in 1798. Officers' autonomy is a central tenet of Duffy's article, highlighting the centrality of state representatives, including naval officers, in eighteenth-century intelligence gathering.[45] This study draws on Duffy's discussion, highlighting the similarities between the process of intelligence gathering between the early part of the century and its end, answering the research questions the thesis seeks to address, discussed below. Harding also concentrated on intelligence particularly concerning naval operations, and specifically for the period from the beginning of the War of Jenkins' Ear to the close of the American Revolutionary War. Whilst

[42] Ojala, 'Maritime Information Networks', 183-194.
[43] *Ibid*. 187, 190, 191, 192.
[44] Knight, ''Nelson's old lady', 88-109, 89, 105.
[45] M. Duffy, 'British Naval Intelligence', 278-290, 278.

much of Harding's discussion centres on the Seven Years' War and after, he convincingly argues that intelligence was central to any military operation and especially critical to naval operations.[46] Vernon's gathering of intelligence from his ranging cruisers and the efforts of Governor Edward Trelawny during the War of Jenkins' Ear receive significant attention, as Harding also highlights the importance of local intelligence gathering, although few examples are provided to demonstrate the process or the significance of such gathering.[47]

Other bodies of work such as the literature on military and naval intelligence have the same strengths and weaknesses in relation to intelligence. Even in dedicated chapters like that by Gunther Rothenburg, which draws attention to the wide range of sources of intelligence used, the years before 1750 are neglected in favour of the Wolters of Rotterdam and the Seven Years' War, the American Revolutionary War, and the wars with France of the 1790s and early 1800s.[48] The same is true of Matthijs Tieleman's discussion of the Dutch Republic in relation to their importance to British intelligence gathering, which concentrates on the Wolters of Rotterdam but had limited discussion due to the unrecorded (and likely lost) volumes of correspondence between 1730 and 1762.[49] This illustrates the difficulty presented to the historian of intelligence, whose sources are frequently incomplete or missing altogether. These lost volumes, which present challenges for the earlier decades of the century as well, have prompted the question of a sustained and established system of intelligence gathering. Despite the evidential gaps, it is nevertheless possible to demonstrate the existence of systematic intelligence gathering networks.

Joint-stock companies were significant actors with which the Navy had to cooperate in some parts of the world, and with whom intelligence gathering and exchange formed part of their interplay. Helen Paul suggests that joint-stock companies like the South Sea Company and the Royal African Company provided the Royal Navy with intelligence and other supplies as part of a wider working relationship in exchange for naval protection and support.[50] Chapter 3 discusses the connection between the Navy and joint-stock companies in its examination of Chaloner Ogle's operations against the pirate Bartholomew Roberts in 1722 which hinged on Royal African Company intelligence of Roberts's movements. The relationship between the

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[46] Harding, 'Navy Amphibious Operations', 3, 4.
[47] *Ibid*., 6, 7, 8.
[48] Rothenburg, 'Military Intelligence', 99-113.
[49] Tieleman, '"No Intrigue is Spared"', 102-3
[50] H. J. Paul, 'Joint-Stock Companies as the Sinew of War: The South Sea and Royal African Companies', in R. T. Sanchez (ed.), *War, State and Development. Fiscal-Military States in the Eighteenth Century* (Navarra: Universidad de Navarra, 2007), 277-294, 287.

Navy and joint-stock companies is further expanded and explored in greater detail in Chapter 4 in the example of the South Sea Company as informants for Admiral Edward Vernon. As with much of the literature on intelligence gathering, there is passing mention of such exchange and activity rather than sustained attention as a central subject of the discussion. This thesis therefore expands on Paul's brief discussion to illustrate these systems of support which had a direct bearing on the Royal Navy's pursuit and capture of pirates such as Bartholomew Roberts.

The role of intelligence was just as important in the suppression of Atlantic piracy. David Wilson's examinations of eighteenth-century piracy and the British state's response to it briefly discusses intelligence's place in the Navy's operations, concluding that intelligence was frequently outdated and increased officers' reliance on luck in the hunt for pirates.[51] However, Wilson explicitly considers the role of intelligence gathering, and expands on earlier scholarship such as that of Arne Bialuschewski. Bialuschewski recognised the logistical limitations attached to hunting for pirates during this period, and briefly mentions intelligence as a tradeable commodity, but without much discussion.[52]

Christopher Andrew, who has written on intelligence across time from antiquity to the demands of the twenty-first century, has similarly been forced to simplify the place of intelligence in the eighteenth century as he primarily focused on the fear of Jacobite invasion after the 1714 accession of King George I.[53] Of course, Andrew's long-term survey format for the book makes it impossible to cover the eighteenth century in minute detail, but the serious omission of the West Indies as a notable area of conflict and British attention during the century is one that this thesis will rectify. Although it is extremely general in its approach, Andrew's book is specifically dedicated to intelligence gathering during the same period and serves as important context to discuss the same period in the Americas. Harding's examination of the War of Jenkins' Ear highlights the importance of the Duke of Newcastle and the Board of Trade to the process of intelligence gathering, although Harding's attention centres on the material received from diplomatic channels.[54] Harding's book expands and updates the scholarship on the War of Jenkins' Ear, from the emphasis on logistics and administration in Duncan Crewe's book, which only touched on the place of intelligence gathering as part of the

[51] Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy*, 68.
[52] A. Bialuschewski, 'Between Newfoundland and the Malacca Strait: A Survey of the Golden Age of Piracy, 1695-1725', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 90, 2 (2004), 167-186, 170, 175.
[53] Andrew, *Secret World*, 269.
[54] R. Harding, *The Emergence of Britain's Global Naval Supremacy: The War of 1739-1748* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), 58-59, 59.

naval officers' routine when stationed in the West Indies in the 1730s and 40s, as well as the autonomy of officers on station particularly applied to issues of logistics and supply.[55]

Nicholas Rodger applies the focus on governmental intelligence gathering in his book examining the career of John Montagu, the Earl of Sandwich, and First Lord of the Admiralty during the American Revolutionary War. Rodger concentrated on the bureaucratic side of intelligence, as the Admiralty of the 1770s and 1780s maintained informants in Rotterdam who provided sustained military intelligence to the government.[56] This is a further reflection of the emphasis in the historiography on intelligence gathering during the second half of the eighteenth century, including Daniel Baugh's study of the Seven Years' War.[57] This thesis examines this aspect of intelligence gathering in the earlier half of the century, investigating the links between government departments and those far removed from London. It discusses the flow of intelligence between multiple actors in government and investigates the links between those involved in operations. Although systems of intelligence gathering would have evolved further in the second half of the century, the techniques for gathering intelligence discussed by these scholars studying the second half of the eighteenth century contain insights relevant to this thesis because the system had probably not greatly changed. By applying Rodger's approach to the earlier half of the eighteenth century, it builds on his examination of intelligence gathering by central government and creates a more complete picture of the processes and systems of intelligence gathering which existed during this period. Unlike those above, which concentrate on military intelligence as a core consideration, Baugh's study was primarily designed as a complete history of the war, with isolated mentions of intelligence gathering and its impact on British decision-making during the conflict.[58] Baugh's discussion of the handling and use of intelligence is a secondary consideration, although he acknowledges the role of intelligence in military and naval operations. Baugh is a good example of a common trait of the historiography, as naval histories often acknowledge the significance of intelligence, but do not pursue it in depth.

Limited attention has also been paid to intelligence gathering in the realm of navigation, geography, and other aspects of exploration during the first half of the eighteenth century. Chapter 5 of this thesis serves to expand on the work of scholars such as Paul Moon, whose

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[55] Crewe, *Yellow Jack and the Worm*, 6, 241.
[56] N. A. M. Rodger, *The Insatiable Earl: A Life of John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), 209, 210.
[57] D. A. Baugh, *The Global Seven Years War, 1754-1763* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).
[58] *Ibid*., 150, 184, 415.

article focused on the 'proto-intelligence' phase of exploration of New Zealand during the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Moon uses the case of New Zealand to argue that early exploration focused on 'scientific' data related to 'geography, oceanography, botany, and cartography', rather than 'the nature of peoples and cultures' in such territories.[59] Moon argues that this is foundational to other forms of intelligence gathering and linked to wider imperial activity. This thesis applies these considerations to the British efforts to expand strategic knowledge of the islands and coastlines of the West Indies, establishing the importance of understanding geography to the support of operations during both peace and war. A running theme of the historiography of intelligence is that when literature exists, it is highly specific, but has useful concepts to be expanded upon and relevant applications to other studies of the history of intelligence.

Overall, the historiography of naval intelligence is limited, and especially in the context of the first half of the eighteenth century. Several studies stand out as dedicated discussions of intelligence gathering associated with the Royal Navy during the eighteenth century, but the majority examine the second half of the century and neglect the period between 1700 and 1750. Those that do address the subject are few, often focused on land-based exchanges which make little mention of the Navy and serve as points from which this thesis recentres the focus on intelligence gathering as the central theme. Whilst it expands on several concepts discussed in the scholarship by Harding, Duffy and Knight, the thesis centralises and sustains discussion on the first half of the eighteenth century for the first time. It seeks to address these historiographical lacunae and argues that the role of the Royal Navy in the eighteenth-century Atlantic cannot be understood without examining transatlantic intelligence gathering systems and how they worked to support naval operations.

This review of the literature highlights several questions that are considered throughout this thesis. The allusions which are common in the literature of the subject do not commonly address the period in question, and even when they do, they are often limited in their examination and scrutiny of intelligence gathering. This has prompted the question of: how was intelligence gathered and what effect did it have on operations in the Americas? Previous reference to intelligence has often illustrated historians' having taken it for granted, giving little interrogation of the ways that intelligence was gathered in detail and simply acknowledging its presence. Given that studies have taken the acquisition of intelligence for

[59] P. Moon, 'From Tasman to Cook: the proto-intelligence phase of New Zealand's colonisation', *Journal of Intelligence History*, 18, 2 (2019), 253-268, 254.

granted without considering the constraints upon it, a further question which presents itself is: what were the limitations of intelligence gathering during this period and what were the methods that could be used to mitigate them? The eighteenth-century Atlantic contained a dispersed network of actors gathering, handling and using intelligence to support both commercial and military operations. These actors, both civilian and military, worked within the constraints of contemporary communications, which depended on wind and weather, and varied in reliability. Finally, scholars who examine the role intelligence and its collection had in the eighteenth century often take short term views of the subject, such as Knight's and Duffy's articles. This has prompted this thesis to consider the role of intelligence and intelligence gathering over time and ask the question: to what extent was there a sustained and established system of transatlantic intelligence exchange? In doing so, intelligence gathering during the first half of the eighteenth century is assessed across the whole period, tracking the development of intelligence systems over the longer term. Each of these questions is considered in relation to the methodology and source material and thesis structure sections below, and the chapters which address each question are identified throughout.

Methodology and Source Material

This research is based on material largely held at the National Archives. Much of this material comes from the Admiralty's records, and contains intelligence recorded by diplomats and informants in European towns and cities that had been sent to the offices of the Secretaries of State for the Northern and Southern Departments, before onward dispatch to the Secretary for the Admiralty.[60] Transmission was not always automatic, and incoming information was sometimes sifted to ensure that people received what was relevant and were not overwhelmed with trivial or irrelevant material. Other material from the National Archives has included letters between colonial governors and the Board of Trade, letters from the colonies in the West Indies and North America reporting to the government in London, and more specialised documents containing maps and charts which detailed the push for intelligence to inform operations in the short term.[61] Whilst this intelligence was collected for immediate use, much of it was also collected to plan future operations in a theatre of increasing importance. This thesis also uses older sources differently, such as volumes of *The Calendar of State Papers Colonial*. Going beyond what these volumes say about operations, battles, and cruises to frustrate Britain's maritime rivals, this thesis instead examines what they reveal about the frequently overlooked but ever-present process of intelligence gathering.

These sources illustrate the range of correspondents in the intelligence gathering systems of the eighteenth century, with a cross-section of individuals involved from across society. They have been used in parallel examination with one another to investigate the extent to which systems of intelligence gathering coexisted and drew in actors and correspondents from diverse sources. The range of sources allows the historian to blend the examination of both the civilian and the military spheres of intelligence gathering, emphasising the fluidity and flexibility of the exchange during this period. The thesis examines these correspondents as nodes in networks, as individuals on both sides of the Atlantic exchanged time-sensitive and time-critical material which informed naval operations and policy in the Americas. Vibrant and varied connections allow the examination of not only exchange between London and the colonies, but also between the colonies themselves. Arguing in Chapter 2 that a 'hub-and-

[60] TNA, ADM 1/3930; ADM 1/3931; ADM 1/3932; ADM 1/3933; ADM 1/3934.
[61] For example: TNA, ADM 1/1472; ADM 1/1880; ADM 1/2242; ADM 1/2282; ADM 1/233; ADM 1/2380; ADM 1/3810; ADM 7/833; CO 137/14; CO 137/48; CO 137/5; CO 137/57; CO 137/58; CO 137/59; CO 137/8; CO 28/6; CO 318/3; CO 5/1265; CO 5/292; CO 5/42.

spoke' form of network was insufficient to explain the systems of intelligence exchange, the flexibility and removal from the centre necessitated that the spokes of the wheel, including colonial governors and naval officers, had to go beyond communication and exchange of intelligence with the London 'hub' and that the 'spokes' had to communicate with and support each other if intelligence was to be used effectively.

The largest challenge presented by these sources is their limited coverage of time and fragmentary nature. Volumes of Admiralty records are missing, meaning that surviving volumes of foreign advice discussed above only cover the first two decades of the century and the years 1747 and 1748. Despite their incompleteness these documents offer valuable insights on the role of intelligence and its collection, using the clearly designated material containing intelligence in tandem with sources from elsewhere to help begin recovering a past that is not immediately apparent in the records. Many of the letters in these volumes do link to one another, allowing historians to track the evolving picture of intelligence as it developed, and fragments arrived which were pieced together. Much of the local intelligence gathered by naval officers and colonial governors is similarly preserved in letters returned to the government in London, and once again allows historians to track the development of its author's view on enemy fleet movements, intentions, and status. Once again, however, it is common for these letters to remain unanswered or the outcomes to remain unknown, increasing the need for speculation and conjecture. In some cases, only one side of the correspondence survives. Follow-up letters, sent as was the nature of reportage between far-removed actors, somewhat compensate for this, and much like the foreign advice can provide closure, but it is far from complete. In this regard, the organised administration of British government record keeping is one of its greatest strengths, as the preserved material allows historians to examine in detail the extent and reach of intelligence networks present during the first half of the eighteenth century. However, the record is far from complete, and there is a need for the historian to fill in blanks in the record with conjecture when there is commonly one side of some important exchanges. The fragmentary nature of these sources cannot be ignored, and historians must remain wary.

Thesis Structure

To explore the thesis' central contentions, the first chapter examines the conduits of intelligence gathering which crisscrossed the Atlantic, offering a survey of the whole period under examination and considering the links between government institutions, representatives of the state in both the colonies and in London, and merchant communities. The results were overlapping systems of collection and transfer, as theoretically defined channels of communication were bolstered by gap-filling and flexible exchange between multiple actors seeking to use intelligence effectively in support of naval operations.

Chapter 2 discusses the systems of intelligence gathering in relation to the British state's focus on monitoring the enemy during the War of Spanish Succession. Caught between objectives of disrupting enemy trade and intercepting threats against its own colonies, Britain gathered intelligence from well-established systems. This included the 'foreign advice' system, through which intelligence arrived with the government from port towns and major cities in Europe, which had existed since before war broke out in 1701. Sustained gathering of intelligence in Europe through espionage conducted via diplomatic channels, coupled with the gathering of local intelligence by officers of the Royal Navy collaborating with colonial governors in the Americas, demonstrate the importance of intelligence to the role of the Royal Navy in the region during times of war. It is in this chapter that the extent to which intelligence gathering was established and sustained is explored.

The third chapter examines the period commonly known as the 'golden age of piracy' during the period of fragile peace after the War of Spanish Succession. It looks particularly at the role of intelligence and collaboration between civilians and the Royal Navy in the suppression of piracy. The dispersed and mobile nature of Atlantic piracy prompted naval officers to gather intelligence as a matter of priority, adapting already utilised techniques for gathering intelligence to adversaries beyond allegiance to a specific rival state. With general knowledge of popular pirate haunts augmented by local intelligence, officers sought to nullify the advantages pirates had in their attempts to suppress them. The suppression campaign saw further cooperation between civilian and military institutions, as merchant communities sought support from the government, and specifically the Navy, in the protection of British trade from piracy. With a vested interest in protecting trade from raiders who were difficult to catch, expanding trading interests provided the state with a growing amount of information which was being passed around the Atlantic and developing intelligence gathering further. As was true in everything the Navy did during the eighteenth century, intelligence was at the

heart of the suppression campaign, and without it, operations to stamp out Atlantic piracy and protect growing British trading interests would have proven far more difficult.

Chapter 4 furthers the discussion in the previous two chapters and considers the period of uneasy peace and periodic conflict between the close of the War of Spanish Succession and the end of this period. Officers of the Royal Navy gathering local intelligence continued to cruise and use their mobility for timely intelligence. Sustained examples of local intelligence gathering are limited, as exchanges often went unrecorded, but the chapter examines the importance of informants who fell outside the legal bounds of colonial society such as 'Lowther the pirate', whose usefulness as an informant outweighed past transgressions against the state. Local intelligence was also gathered from the South Sea Company, acting as a further illustration of networks and systems of intelligence transfer between civilian and military institutions. This chapter also highlights the importance of cooperation and collaboration, in an exchange of resources, protection, and intelligence as key considerations in the face of mounting tensions between Britain and Spain. Trade and commercial networks expanded and became more extensive in this period, evidenced by the South Sea Company's role as a source of important intelligence for Admiral Vernon during the War of Jenkins' Ear. The questions of how intelligence was gathered, its effect on operations, and the limitations of intelligence gathering and subsequent attempts to mitigate challenges are discussed in this chapter.

Finally, Chapter 5 examines the role of the Royal Navy as surveyors of the Americas to support increased British economic, territorial, and strategic interest in the region during the first half of the eighteenth century. Central to this chapter is the discussion of this navigational information and intelligence as surveys conducted in the Americas increased understanding of weather patterns, navigational hazards, and other environmental factors beyond human control, whilst marking sites of provision, fresh water, and shelter. This material was also applied to the planning of operations by studying enemy defences and colonial settlements, as the Navy and the government in London looked to future conflict when such data could be most useful. In the case of the Bay of Honduras, British intelligence gathering served as a preparatory step ahead of what was ultimately a short-lived attempt at settlement to expand the empire in the region. The products of these surveys, conducted in the final years of the seventeenth and throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, were sometimes reproduced and sold to the public. They also served as representations of success in British naval operations and proof of cartographic skill. However, the exchange of this information between naval and civilian actors and sources was far from standard procedure, although it did lay the foundations for much better-known cartographical operations later in the century. Chapter 5 therefore provides evidence for consideration of the questions of how intelligence

was gathered, the effects that intelligence had on operations, and the extent to which systems were established and sustained over a longer period of time.

The chapters outline and emphasise the importance of intelligence to naval activity in the first half of the eighteenth century and fill a lacuna in the historiography of intelligence gathering systems during this period. Although the collection, validation, and deployment of intelligence in the early eighteenth century might sometimes seem unsystematic, haphazard, or reliant on luck, the next chapter argues that a system was in fact emerging that was complex and consisted of multiple layers that worked.

Chapter 1 Sustaining the Flow: Transatlantic Conduits of Intelligence and Information Gathering.

Intelligence and information utilisation during the eighteenth century hinged on a complex system of transfer between government institutions. Whilst governments now have clear channels through which intelligence flows, this was not the case during the eighteenth century, and intelligence-handling was similar to most eighteenth-century bureaucracy: confusing and haphazard, but fairly effective.[62] This chapter argues that the mechanisms through which intelligence was transferred were increasingly systematised, as lines of communication blurred, and officials passed intelligence to where it was deemed to be of most use. It was rare that one government department was the sole recipient of correspondence containing intelligence. The Secretary of the Admiralty, the Secretaries of State for the Northern and Southern Departments, and their accompanying offices of staff, were the only designated recipients of intelligence. Letters containing intelligence arrived at their destination independently, and relevant intelligence would be transmitted to other departments to be used most effectively. Firstly, the chapter examines the surviving volumes of 'foreign advices' (extracts of letters written by diplomats gathering intelligence in the courts of Europe), which circulated between governmental institutions and defined policy and the execution of naval operations. It will then explore the relationship between colonial governors, the Secretary of State for the Southern Department, naval officers on station in the Americas, and the Board of Trade. Since channels of intelligence transfer were not officially defined, these transatlantic communication links were flexible and not standardised. Even when mandated, such as correspondence between colonial governors and the Board of Trade, these links were malleable in practice and operated on personal judgement for where intelligence was determined to be most likely to be used effectively. Thirdly, this chapter discusses the inter-institutional transfer of intelligence to fill in gaps in government knowledge to aid naval operations, as government departments such as the Admiralty referred naval officers to the Southern Secretary for intelligence when their own was lacking. This section also observes the growth of Lloyd's Coffee House as a repository for intelligence material, with the state drawing on the private sector to obtain intelligence where its own apparatus failed. The overriding

[62] Black, 'Intelligence and the Emergence of the Information Society', in Leeuw & Bergstra (eds.), *History of Information Security*, 370; Ellis, *Post Office*, 60, 61; C. Wilkinson, *The British Navy and the State in the Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2004), 31.

theme of this chapter is the convoluted and complex nature of eighteenth-century intelligence gathering, with the flexibility of the system providing one of its greatest strengths and allowing the free-flowing transfer of intelligence material to best support the planning and execution of naval operations.

The Secretary for the Admiralty was the recipient of all communications concerning the Navy responsible for forwarding relevant material to the Admiralty Board.[63] The Admiralty Board's business hinged on the reliable transfer of intelligence passed to them, and despite not being the primary formulators of naval policy (the jurisdiction of the monarch and Cabinet), their knowledge of naval matters coupled with intelligence made them important advisors in final decisions concerning operations.

The Secretaries of State for the Northern and Southern Departments, two of the highest-ranking members of the Cabinet and principal communicators with diplomats in Europe, were vital intelligence conduits who passed material between government institutions such as the Secretary for the Admiralty and colonial governors in the American colonies. What quickly becomes apparent is the complexity of these exchanges, as correspondence was rarely limited to between two actors, and more often a mix instead of deliberating and debating individuals seeking to use intelligence gathered to inform naval operations in the Americas. The diagram in Figure 2 illustrates the complexity of this system between governmental institutions, as intelligence arrived in letters at various entry points. Although there were designated points of official contact, these connections were rarely established in practice, and intelligence was frequently sent where it could best influence operations and naval policy.

Many of the connections between these conduits were two-way, as correspondence and intelligence frequently flowed in a back-and-forth exchange. Intelligence transfer yielded the generation of policy and orders and was often accompanied by further intelligence exchange as the cycle repeated. By mid-century, the already complicated system of intelligence gathering had expanded to accommodate the addition of a privately managed centralised repository of commercial and marine intelligence, whose gathering of information for the commercial world was also of use to the state as intelligence material. Lloyd's Coffee House, growing from a meeting place for those with mercantile interests, had become a centre of marine insurance underwriting and a consistent supplier of intelligence to the Admiralty and

[63] Alsop, 'British Intelligence', 117; Baugh, *British Naval Administration*, 81; Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 295-6; F. B. Wickwire, 'Admiralty Secretaries and the British Civil Service', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, 28, 3 (1965), 235-254, 240-1; Wilkinson, *British Navy and the State*, 16.

the Royal Navy. This addition illustrates the complexities, but also the flexibilities, of this system, as Lloyd's slotted into, complemented, and extended the existing, well-established connections.

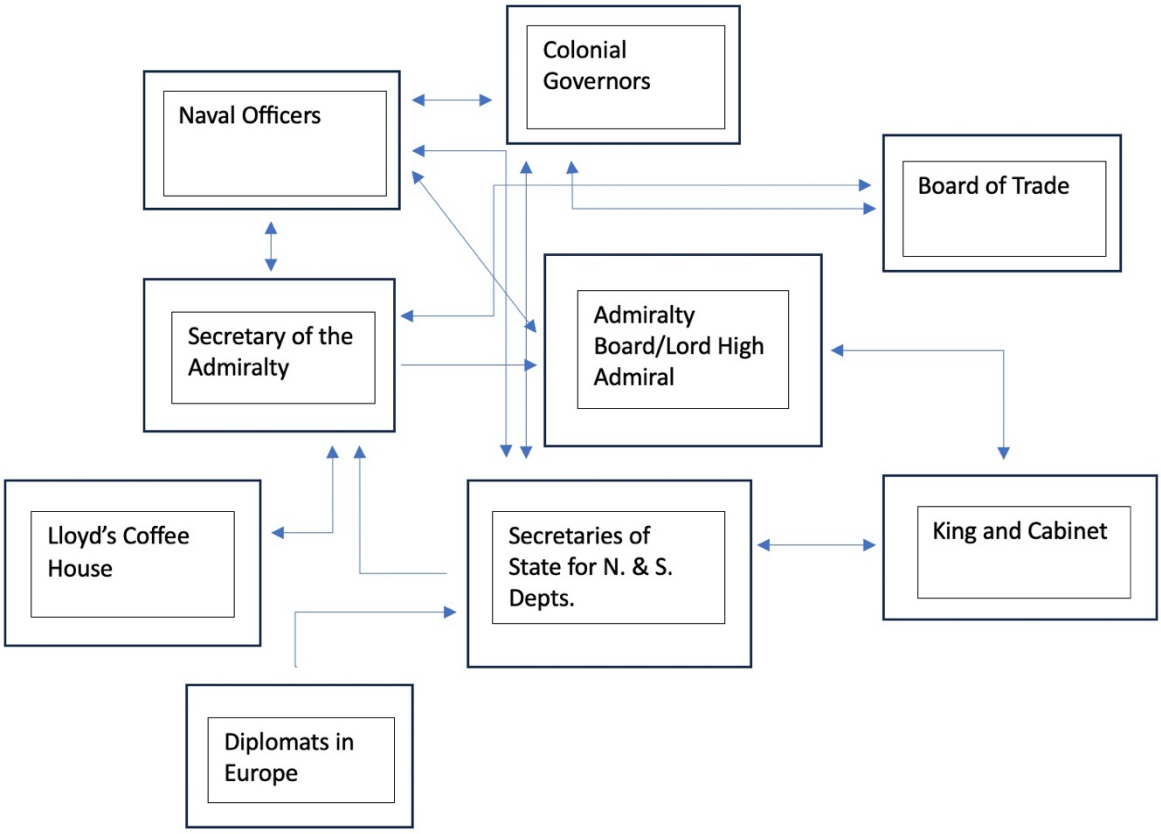

Figure 2 Relationships between conduits of eighteenth-century intelligence gathering c. 1750.

The Secretary for the Admiralty, the Secretaries of State and 'Foreign Advices'

The complex systems of intelligence were connected by correspondence, with letters forming the backbone of intelligence gathering and transfer during the period. While they appear convoluted and haphazard, the decentralisation and multiple reporting lines of eighteenth-century administration systems granted flexibility as well as resilience. If one part of the system was unavailable, there were alternatives. Figure 1 above shows how different offices, most of which were government departments, interacted with each other. Many of these exchanges were two-way, as actors forwarded intelligence they had received to another who was better placed to make use of the contents, which often resulted in the return of orders as well as further intelligence reports. Such two-way exchange created a self-sustaining cycle, whereby the intelligence received influenced governmental direction of operations and the orders that were passed to those executing such orders, such as naval officers and colonial governors. These conduits interlocked in their transfer and handling of intelligence, with the Secretary for the Admiralty placed at the centre of the gathering of naval intelligence. The Secretary received all correspondence which was addressed to the Admiralty, which he read, highlighted for important contents, and passed onward to the Admiralty Board.[64] Much of the intelligence contained in these letters was sent to the Admiralty Secretary by the Secretaries of State for the Northern and Southern Departments. Gathered from diplomats (frequently in a dual capacity as spies it seems) operating in key European cities and towns like Paris, La Rochelle and Madrid, much of the intelligence had already been condensed into extracts by the time it reached the Secretary for the Admiralty.[65] The foreign advices illustrate the interlocking conduits of intelligence and information exchange, as the clerks in the Secretaries of States' offices had already synthesised and condensed the contents of these letters before their onward journey to the Admiralty Secretary.

The Secretaries of State for the Northern and Southern Departments were primarily in charge of diplomatic negotiations with European states, with shared responsibility for domestic

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[64] Alsop, 'British Intelligence', 117; Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 295-296; Wickwire, 'Admiralty Secretaries', 240-241.

[65] TNA, ADM 1/3930 Foreign Advice 5 Oct 1697 to 29 Sept 1705, Naval Intelligence Papers: 1st Series; ADM 1/3931 Foreign Advice 2 Oct 1705 to 31 May 1708, Naval Intelligence Papers: 1st Series; ADM 1/3932, 1 June 1708 to 31 May 1710, Foreign Advice, Naval Intelligence Papers: 1st Series; ADM 1/3933, 1 June 1710 to 31 May 1712, Foreign Advice, Naval intelligence Papers: 1st Series; ADM 1/3934, Foreign Advices 1747-1748, Naval Intelligence Papers: 1st Series.

affairs. Diplomatic affairs were divided between two offices, with the Southern Secretary handling the colonies and southern European states including France, Spain, Portugal and the Italian states. Meanwhile, the Northern Secretary had responsibility for northern Europe, including the Netherlands, the Baltic states, Russia and, after 1714, Hanover. It has been argued that the latter position was more important after the accession of George I in 1714, since it included jurisdiction over the seat of the house of Hanover.[66] This authority over diplomacy made the offices of Secretaries of State, and their clerks, the recipients of vast amounts of correspondence.

By 1702, the staffing of each office was established as comprising 'two Under Secretaries, a First or Chief Clerk, a varying number of other Clerks [the average having increased from five to six by 1750], two Chamber or Office Keepers and a Cleaner or Necessary Woman'.[67] Much of the clerks' time was spent copying letters, which as the following examples illustrate, often contained intelligence material. These clerks were frequently kept in post even after the dismissal of their superior, allowing them to build up a wealth of knowledge and experience, comparative to the Secretary of the Admiralty and the sitting members of the Navy Board. However, if the Secretary of State they served moved from one department to the other, they would frequently move with him, establishing themselves as increasingly permanent.[68]

The Secretaries of State held positions in the Cabinet, alongside the First Lord of the Admiralty, informing the decision-making process. The intelligence was first received at the offices of the Secretaries of State for the Northern and Southern Departments. In the case of foreign advice letters, important intelligence material had already been extracted and marked for the attention of the Admiralty before it was passed on as was procedure. This was the least flexible part of the eighteenth-century intelligence gathering system, as the demanding volume of letters arriving for the attention of the Admiralty Board meant that a dedicated office of a Secretary and his clerks were required solely to handle arriving letters. Figure 3 illustrates how the foreign advice received by the Secretaries of State was passed between government institutions and how multiple sections of government were involved in the circulation of the intelligence they contained. The Lords of the Admiralty recognised 'the impossibility of discussing during their meetings the hundreds of varied matters demanding

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[66] J. A. Henretta, *'Salutary Neglect': Colonial Administration Under the Duke of Newcastle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 3-4n1; Thomson, *Secretaries of State*, 2-3.
[67] J. C. Sainty, *Office-Holders in Modern Britain: Volume 2, Officials of the Secretaries of State 1660-1782*, 1973 (2023). Available online: http://www.british-history.ac.uk/office-holders/vol2/pp1-21. [Accessed 19/06/2023].
[68] *Ibid*.

attention', which pushed them to limit themselves 'primarily to instructions to the Navy Board and its officers, authorisations of promotions, examinations of lieutenants, scrutiny of requests for leave, and discussions of important matters referred to them by other government departments', leaving most other business to the secretary.[69] The complexity of intelligence transfer during this period was complicated further by the Admiralty being only advisors in the formulation of naval policy, which was determined by the King and Cabinet, as the rest of the Admiralty Board served as advisors on the best use of resources in relation to the intelligence they had received.[70] Politicians made (and still make) the overall strategic decisions, often after consulting with and taking advice from the armed forces. This also emphasises the importance of effective members of the Admiralty Board in the influence of policy, such as John Montagu, the Earl of Sandwich, during the second half of the eighteenth century.[71] This illustrates how intelligence transfer was a key component of a larger system of communication and administration. The Secretaries of States needed the Admiralty to see the intelligence they had received from Europe concerning the enemy fleet movements, as the Admiralty was responsible for and knowledgeable of naval resource allocation and fleet distribution. The expertise and knowledge of the Admiralty Board about naval matters made overlap a necessity, as intelligence needed to circulate if the system was to work, and operations were to be planned and executed as a combination of the available intelligence and resources.

[69] Wickwire, 'Admiralty Secretaries', 241.
[70] Wilkinson, *British Navy and the State*, 21; Rodger, *Insatiable Earl*, 22-23.
[71] Rodger, *Insatiable Earl*; N. A. M. Rodger, *Montagu, John, fourth earl of Sandwich (1718-1792), Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2008), 2023. Available online: https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-19026?rskey=9AtFkD&result=6 [Accessed 15/09/2023].

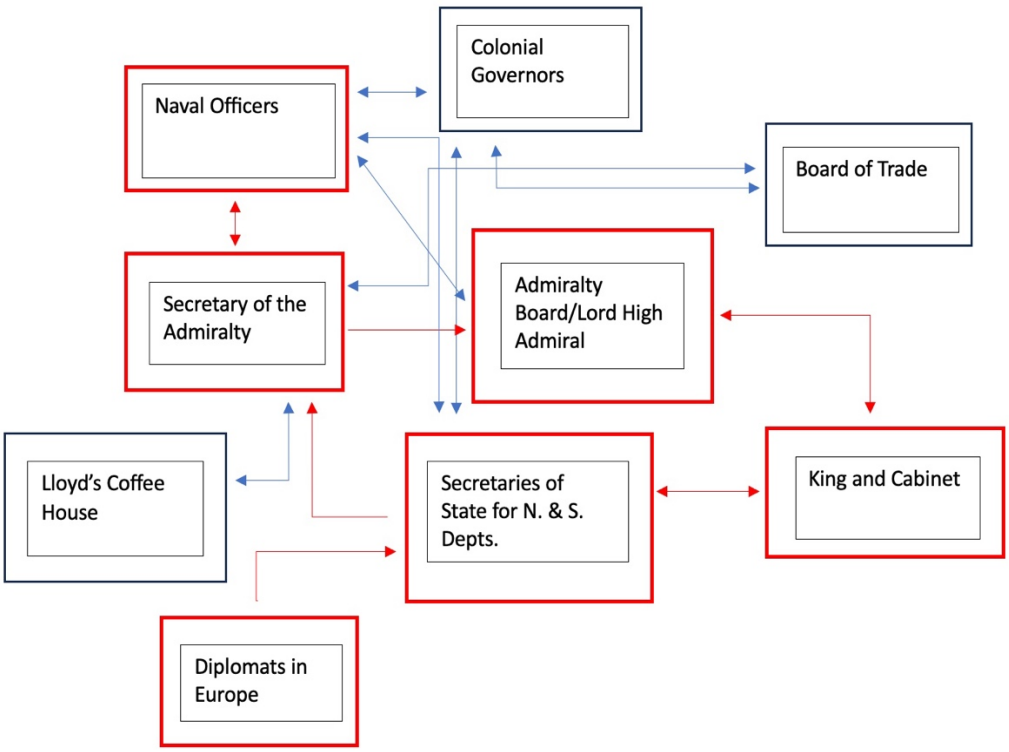

Figure 3 Links between institutions in the use of 'foreign advices' as a source of intelligence c.1701-1750

Flexibility and overlap were vital components of the system. The informally organised avenues of communication allowed the initiative to be taken by individuals like the Secretary for the Admiralty in the transfer of intelligence where it was most useful. The experience of Secretaries such as Josiah Burchett, as well as their status as non-political officials, which allowed them to survive political changes in government, made them the best judges of where such intelligence was required.[72] Like Burchett, the clerks working in the office of the Admiralty Secretary and those working in the offices of the Northern and Southern Secretaries, often stayed in post for long periods of time and acquired considerable experience in their jobs.[73] In line with his duties and responsibility for handling correspondence addressed to the Admiralty, the Secretary forwarded intelligence to officers of the Royal Navy of his own accord, without a need for authorisation from the members of the Board, as shown in Figure 3.

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[72] Baugh, *British Naval Administration*, 83; J. B. Hattendorf, *Burchett, Josiah (c. 1666-1746), Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2008), 2020. Available online: https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-3955?rskey=okRl8e&result=1 [Accessed 10/06/2020]; G. F. James, 'Josiah Burchett, Secretary to the Lords of the Admiralty, 1695-1742', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 23, 4 (1937), 477-498, 487; Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 295-6; Wickwire, 'Admiralty Secretaries', 245, 246, 254.

[73] Sainty, *Office-Holders*; Thomson, *Secretaries of State*, 130.

The case of the English government's sustained surveillance of Admiral François-Louis Rousselet, marquis de Châteaurenault, demonstrates the complexity and informality of the system of intelligence gathering, synthesis and handling as it was at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Châteaurenault was a distinguished naval officer who had fought with distinction during the Nine Years' War (1688-1697), and whose experience brought him back to sea as the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714) began. Multiple government bodies tracked his movements and monitored the threat that he posed to English interests in the West Indies. In a process which began in August 1701, the government had established surveillance on enemy shipping movements, which involved transfer of intelligence between multiple sections of the state's infrastructure. In late August, intelligence from Paris was forwarded by James Vernon, the Secretary of State for the Southern Department, to Josiah Burchett, Secretary for the Admiralty. The letter noted that Châteaurenault had sailed from Brest, 'or at least ought to be according to advices from thence', with Cadiz as his suspected destination, although his course was uncertain.[74] During the eighteenth century, the port of Cadiz acted as the main port of mainland Spain, where fleets assembled for the Americas. This period saw sustained French support of the Spanish Navy, so the informant deduced that Cadiz would be the natural first destination for Châteaurenault before he sailed for the West Indies. This surveillance continued in further foreign advice letters received at the Admiralty from Paris and Brest, as Châteaurenault's course was tracked and his objective understood, determined in mid-November to be the interception of Admiral John Benbow, stationed in the West Indies. The author of the letter was 'still positively assured' of this objective, likely from proximity to sources close to the French government.[75] Benbow was probably targeted as his removal would neutralise the commanding officer and the primary English naval power in the region, and reports of a French fleet of any size would be cause for concern. This concern stemmed from fears of outnumbered English ships alongside a marauding French fleet threatening attacks on English colonies. Whilst the sources of the intelligence are unclear, as many of these extracts are anonymous, it is likely that they were taken from letters that diplomats in the courts of Europe had sent to the Secretary of State for the Southern Department, who then forwarded them to the Secretary for the Admiralty.

Although they had little control over the finer details of strategy, the Admiralty received intelligence from the Secretary of State so that it could be discussed by those with knowledge of the current state of naval resources before the matter was settled in Cabinet. The Southern

[74] TNA, ADM 1/3930, Paris 26 August 1701 NS.
[75] TNA, ADM 1/3930, Paris 29 August 1701 NS; TNA, ADM 1/3930, Paris 17 October 1701.

Secretary's link in this exchange is clear in a letter sent to the Admiralty in mid-December 1701 from James Vernon, who served as both Northern and Southern Secretary under William III, in which Vernon said plainly that 'I send your Lordships the advices I have received concerning the French naval affairs'.[76] These particular extracts had little relevance to the observations of Châteaurenault, but Vernon's cover letter demonstrates the intelligence gathering system of intelligence gathering between government bodies.

In fact, less than a fortnight after Vernon's letter, Admiralty Secretary Josiah Burchett received intelligence concerning French fleet movements, which he marked for forwarding to Admiral John Benbow, who was already on station poised to harass French shipping.[77] This intelligence arrived at the Admiralty in several letters received on different days, and Burchett marked what was necessary to send to Benbow using square brackets. In a letter dated from Paris on 26 December, correspondence from Cadiz detailed Châteaurenault's having 'set sail from [Cadiz] the 21st [November] directing his course for the West Indies' with '28 men of war, 2 frigates, 6 fireships, and several [*en flute*]'.[78] This was suspected to be an invasion force, consisting of both naval vessels and men of war with reduced armament which had been prepared as transport, known as *en flute* vessels. Naturally, this would have alarmed the government and prompted the circulation of this intelligence. The author of the extract believed that Châteaurenault had been delayed by bad weather and was unable to confirm that he had returned to port. However, the extract also contained '[a]dvices from Port Louis of the 15th December NS', which included intelligence that the admiral 'sailed from Belle Isle the 3rd December' in his ship 'the *Hazardous* of 50 guns and 300 men' with another 40-gun ship, four flutes from Brest, a frigate from Rochefort and another flute from Port Louis, with three other vessels from Rochefort which had sailed three weeks prior to meet the fleet at the appointed rendezvous of Martinique.[79] This illustrates the inherent difficulties of gathering intelligence during this period, as observers may have seen incomplete numbers of vessels, and plans could alter in line with logistical considerations and inclement weather.

The fleet under Châteaurenault's command was not something that Burchett could ignore, hence his marking sections of relevant letters for onward dispatch to Benbow. In a few instances, these letters appear contradictory on specifics such as the size of the French fleet,

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[76] TNA, ADM 1/3930, Whitehall 13 December 1701.
[77] TNA, ADM 1/3930, Paris 26 December 1701 NS.; TNA, ADM 1/3930, Advices from Brest 26 Dec 1701; TNA, ADM 1/3930, Advices from Brest of the 10 December NS.; TNA, ADM 1/3930, Advices from Rochefort of the 11 December NS.; TNA, ADM 1/3930, Paris 16 December 1701 NS.
[78] TNA, ADM 1/3930, Paris 26 December 1701 NS.
[79] *Ibid*.

but the fact that it remained a significant force meant that Burchett had to treat it as a priority even when details were unclear. This therefore suggests that Burchett collected all the reports that he had received and arranged them for onward dispatch to Benbow, in the hope that they contained at least some truth and were of some use in preparing the Admiral for intercepting Châteaurenault. In addition to Benbow's squadron having been identified as a possible target, which if neutralised would have given the French temporary control of the Caribbean Sea, the fear of the fleet as an invasion force would have also urged Burchett to act fast to pass on intelligence where it was most needed. Burchett had added a postscript to the end of his letter, which said that '[t]hose parts of this intelligence marked [were sent] to Vice Admiral Benbow by Mr Burchett, [by the] *Martin* Ketch bound to Barbados'; this was also the case with letters received earlier in the month concerning the movements of the French fleet.[80] This illustrates the importance of the secretary, both as an administrator and an intelligence conduit, as the recipient of correspondence on which Admiralty business depended. Since it was the duty of the secretary to read and digest the contents of all correspondence received at the Admiralty, he needed to provide his superiors with the broad strokes and important contents whilst stripping away routine and irrelevant clauses.[81] In summary, the Secretary and his assistants provided both his superiors and naval officers with intelligence material in extracts, which only contained material that they deemed necessary. It also shows the steps in intelligence synthesis between the point of origin and its final destination, as the Secretary for the Admiralty was best placed to extract relevant intelligence for onward dispatch due to his familiarity with England's fleet placement and current resource allocation. Naturally, this had a subjective dimension, as Burchett had to define his own interpretation of what was important. It illustrates how confidence in judgement and trust held by the Secretary's superiors were vitally important in a capacity which could not be objective.

This confirms the Secretary's capacity to seize the initiative, arranging for the dispatch of intelligence without an apparent need for authorisation from his superiors. This reflected the need of the Lords of the Admiralty to defer much of the business of the Board to the Secretary, and trust in the judgements he made on their behalf.[82] However, Burchett's earmarked intelligence for Benbow inadvertently noted a delay between the receipt of the letters containing the intelligence (December 1701), and their eventual dispatch onwards to Benbow

[80] TNA, ADM 1/3930, Paris 26 December 1701 NS.; TNA, ADM 1/3930, Paris 16 December 1701 NS.; TNA, ADM 1/3930, Advices from Brest 26 Dec 1701.
[81] Wickwire, Admiralty Secretaries', 241-2.
[82] *Ibid*. 241.

in the West Indies (March 1702).[83] Burchett had collated intelligence from multiple letters and passed it on as a bulkier collection, presumably so that Benbow received every piece of intelligence the Admiralty had acquired in one and could act accordingly. It is likely that the ketch on which it was eventually sent took time to prepare for the voyage, and may have been further delayed by bad weather, as it would have needed to negotiate the rough winter waters of the English Channel. Steele's warning against ahistorical assumptions that eighteenth-century communications were slow and unreliable is correct, arguing that it was something beyond the concerns of contemporaries, who knew no different, but also understood that communications had improved, and so rarely complained about delays.[84] Whether Burchett's forwarded intelligence arrived at all, Benbow was too late to intercept Châteaurenault, who had successfully sailed to the West Indies to meet and escort the Spanish treasure fleet, the *flota*, across the Atlantic.[85]

It is worth comparing Châteaurenault's objective with the perceived objective suspected by the English government. Given that the French admiral was thought to be sailing for the West Indies in pursuit of Benbow, it is interesting that he instead seemed to sail with the purpose of meeting and escorting the Spanish treasure fleet as a priority for his mission. In multiple scholars' readings, escorting the treasure fleet was Châteaurenault's objective from the start, and Admiral Jean-Baptiste du Casse, whom Benbow would be engaged in drawn-out sea combat with (and ultimately lose his life because of) soon, had arrived to guard the French and distract English interests in the *asiento*, the right to import enslaved Africans into the Spanish Americas.[86] It shows that intelligence gathering was speculative, even if sustained surveillance could be achieved, as the French fleets' objectives were extremely difficult to determine, and in this case, wrongly deduced. This illustrates Horn's claim that received intelligence sometimes 'took so long to reach London that its usefulness was diminished or entirely lost'.[87] Burchett's correspondence with Benbow is an example of this, as intelligence needed to reach Burchett and the Admiralty in London, and then to be forwarded across the Atlantic to Benbow in the West Indies. The intelligence had a limited lifespan, even when Burchett first received it in December 1701, let alone when it was finally sent onward in March 1702. However, this should not diminish the significance of this example, as it clearly shows the process through which intelligence was synthesised, prioritised, and forwarded. Despite

[83] TNA, ADM 1/3930, Paris 26 December 1701 NS.; TNA, ADM 1/3930, Advices from Brest 26 Dec 1701.
[84] Steele, *English Atlantic*, 5.
[85] Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 165.
[86] McLay, 'Combined Operations', 105; Mewett, '"It is ticklish meddling with the Navy", 1-24, 2, 3, 5.
[87] Horn, *British Diplomatic Service*, 265.

communications not working as planned at times, the Secretary for the Admiralty was an integral part of a complex chain of intelligence transfer in support of naval operations during the eighteenth century.

Colonial Governors, the Southern Secretary, and the Board of Trade

Complexity and flexibility underpinned the system's circum-Atlantic connectivity. Since the formation of the Board of Trade in 1696 as an overseer of communications between the colonies and central government, regular contact was maintained with colonial governors. The Board also acted as recipients of reports concerning relations with other nations' colonies, alongside enemy fleets and troop movements.[88] This coupled with two developments in the Board's history which defined its role at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Firstly, Wilson's reading suggests that it was its official establishment in 1696 which allowed it to develop as a repository of colonial information.[89] This thesis agrees that the Board of Trade certainly had become such a repository, but it had done so in tandem with other governmental offices such as the Secretaries of State for the Northern and Southern Departments. Eighteenth-century intelligence and information transfer was far from an organised whole, as correspondence was sent to multiple offices, depending on where it was thought to have the most traction while utilising the flexibility of contemporary systems to pass on messages with haste. The system, whilst whole, was a loosely organised collection of component institutions that had co-evolved in an unplanned and organic manner. The Board of Trade was theoretically the first port of call for colonial governors corresponding with the government in London, but offices like the Secretaries of State offered an alternative route for intelligence to reach the monarch and Cabinet. Secondly, Harding argues that further development saw the Board begin to gather detailed information about economic and social concerns in the colonies from 1721.[90] However, as is discussed below, colonial governors were reporting such information to the Board for at least a decade previously. As representatives of the state in control over individual colonies' development and security, they were the recipients of reports, news, and intelligence from within their sphere of control, including intelligence gathered from naval officers operating on station in its own two-way exchange. This correspondence needed to be returned to London for the attention of the government, closing the communication loop and illustrating the colonial governor's role as a conduit of intelligence and information transfer between the colonies and London; Figure 4 shows how

[88] M. J. Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680-1783* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 138-9; Harding, *Emergence*, 59.
[89] Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy*, 16-17.
[90] Harding, 'Navy Amphibious Operations', 6; Harding, *Emergence*, 59.

colonial governors maintained firm two-way exchanges with naval officers and government in London.

As the example which follows shows, individuals such as du Casse drew the attention of government, whose movements in the Caribbean in support of the Spanish treasure fleet and feared threats to British interests raised concerns. Du Casse became a new priority for Benbow as the English admiral shifted focus from Châteaurenault, who had left the Caribbean to escort the Spanish treasure fleet to Europe.[91] Both Benbow in 1702 and Commodore Charles Wager in 1708 (as the next chapter shows) were motivated by intelligence of du Casse's movements, and made it their priority to intercept du Casse and the fleets he was charged with escorting.[92] The focus on du Casse's movements also illustrates how complex these systems were. Tracking the movements of Admiral du Casse during the War of Spanish Succession illuminates each section of the process of intelligence gathering, utilisation, and transfer, and connects the two sides of the Atlantic in the exchange on which operations were dependent.

In a letter to Southern Secretary Daniel Finch, the Earl of Nottingham, from September 1702, Benbow had received intelligence that du Casse 'is gone to Cartagena and from thence to Porto Bello', sailing after him on 10 August in an attempt to intercept him.[93] The source of Benbow's intelligence remains unclear, but was clearly accurate since the admiral found and engaged the French off the coast of Santa Marta, in present-day Columbia, along the coast from Portobello and Cartagena.[94] In November 1702, acting Governor of Barbados John Farmer wrote to the Board of Trade to inform them of Benbow's engagement with du Casse. Farmer told the Board that 'upon the [nineteenth] instant [i.e. October] here [in Barbados] arrived a small sloop from Curaçao who gave us the following intelligence' that

> Admiral Benbow with nine sail men of war met Monsieur du Casse with his squadron between St Martha and Cartagena where they had a running fight but cannot tell who had the better, though it is judged Admiral Benbow had, the other being observed to make the best of his way from him.[95]

Farmer used this report, taken from an arriving sloop, to pass on a report of Benbow's skirmish and provide the government with a warning of potential threats to English colonies, since the

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[91] McLay, 'Combined Operations', 305.
[92] TNA, CO 318/3, Benbow, *Bredah* 11 September 1702.
[93] *Ibid*.
[94] J. B. Hattendorf, 'Benbow's Last Fight', in N. A. M. Rodger (ed.), *The Naval Miscellany, Volume V* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), 143-206, 143.
[95] TNA, CO 28/6, Farmer to Board of Trade, November 10, 1702.

action had proven indecisive. It is likely that the sloop was a merchant vessel which had observed the drawn-out action between the two fleets or heard second-hand reports that the sloop captain had then circulated. Farmer may have had doubts about the accuracy of the sloop captain's report but thought it reliable enough to send it on to the Board of Trade, but not without suitable qualification. This letter illustrates the limitations and challenges presented by contemporary intelligence gathering, as the sloop captain (whose source is unknown), had speculated that Benbow had edged a close victory over du Casse, which Farmer had repeated in his returns to the Board of Trade. In reality, Benbow's fleet had been rendered ineffective by captains' mutinies and refusal to pursue du Casse, failing to press the advantage and bring the fleet's full firepower to bear.[96] Benbow himself had died from a broken leg caused by a shot sustained during the fight, and two of the captains were executed for cowardice and failure to do their utmost.[97] Farmer's report was ultimately inaccurate, as well as delayed in its transmission to London, with the engagement itself having occurred two months earlier, in mid-August. Farmer's informant made no mention of Benbow's injury and subsequent death, illustrating the challenges presented by such communication systems and the incomplete nature of such transfer. These inaccuracies also support the suggestion that Farmer's informant had not participated in the battle and did not even have contact with the squadron after the fact to gather a report at first hand. Whilst it was inaccurate in its conclusion, Farmer's letter recounting intelligence he had received from a local source demonstrates the role as the conduit that colonial governors like Farmer had in transatlantic communications. It appeared that haste to pass on information deemed to be important, rather than that which had been verified, prompted Farmer to transmit speculative intelligence concerning naval engagements. Whilst there was a delay between the action and the date of Farmer's letter to London, it illustrates Farmer's obligation to inform the government of naval actions in his jurisdiction as soon as he had heard. Since the report was later in arrival at Barbados, it is no wonder that Farmer's letter to London was also some time after the battle. Farmer therefore acted as soon as he had knowledge of the battle, although there was a notable delay between it and the sloop captain's arrival at Barbados. The threat posed by French naval vessels was a point of concern which clearly outweighed the need to

[96] Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 165; Willis, *The Admiral Benbow*, 295; McLay, 'Combined Operations', 305.
[97] Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 165; Willis, *Admiral Benbow*, 295; McLay, 'Combined Operations', 305.

have all the facts, deeming it necessary to raise the alarm regardless of not having a complete account to increase the chances of a successful response.

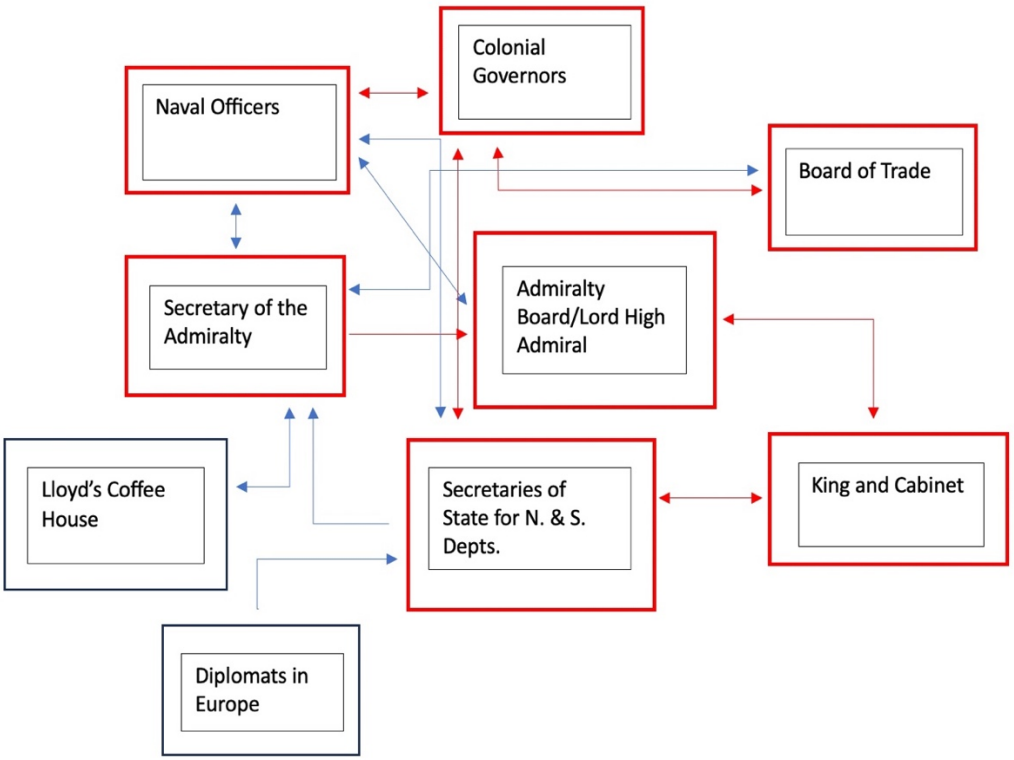

Figure 4 Communications links between colonial governors and London c.1702-1750

Filling in the Gaps: The Admiralty, Naval Officers, The Southern Secretary, and the Growth of Lloyd's Coffee House

The complexities, flexibility and informality of eighteenth-century intelligence gathering came with a distinct advantage. The overlap and interconnected nature of governmental communications meant that those involved in the exchange of intelligence could defer to other organisations to fill in the blanks. This included the growth of Lloyd's Coffee House as a centre for maritime information and intelligence with the regular publishing of *Lloyd's List* from 1734. By the end of the period, Lloyd's had demonstrable links with the Navy and central government, as the lines of intelligence gathering blurred between governmental and commercial channels and the state began tapping into the intelligence resources of the private sector.

Scholars have previously highlighted the importance of the Secretary of State in intelligence gathering, often with specific reference to Thomas Pelham-Holles, the Duke of Newcastle.[98] The significance of the Secretary of State's office is best illustrated through his recognition by his contemporaries, subordinates, and correspondents as a conduit for intelligence transfer. The overlapping systems of intelligence gathering which prevailed during this period meant that sharing was a natural mechanism for the circulation of and acquisition of intelligence where it was needed. As previously discussed, the Secretaries of State for the Northern and Southern Departments were some of the best informed in government, because foreign advice offered a consistent supply of intelligence which informed discussion on naval policy and operations. This was further demonstrated in the office of the Southern Secretary's position as both a possible recipient and middleman for intelligence between naval personnel, naval administration and himself. This is demonstrated by First Lord of the Admiralty Charles Wager's referral to Newcastle for intelligence for Admiral Edward Vernon whilst on station in the West Indies. In a letter from October 1740, Wager told Vernon that 'I believe the Duke of

[98] Hutchinson, 'Intelligence, reason of state and the art of governing risk', 376; Harding, 'Navy Amphibious Operations', 5; Harding, *Emergence*, 58-9; Andrew, *Secret World*, 280-1; S. L. Snyder, *Spencer, Charles, the third earl of Sunderland (1675-1722), Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2006), 2023. Available online: https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-26117 [Accessed 19/06/2023]; Wilkinson, *British Navy and the State*, 21; R. Browning, *Holles, Thomas Pelham-, duke of Newcastle upon Tyne and first duke of Newcastle under Lyme, (1693-1768), Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2011), 2020. Available online: https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-21801?rskey=cD4KpX&result=1 [Accessed 14/12/2020].

Newcastle is very particular in his Letters to you, and the Intelligence he sends you.'[99] In this case, Wager believed that Newcastle's office had access to a vast amount of correspondence from which intelligence to assist Vernon in the West Indies could be gleaned, filling the gaps that Wager and the Admiralty could not. This continued in Wager's note to Vernon from March 1741, in which Wager told Vernon that

> you will receive from the Duke of Newcastle, all the Intelligence that his Majesty has received of the Motion of the Spanish Squadron, so that I need say nothing of that; his Grace will also inform you what you may expect from hence.[100]

This shows Wager's recognition of the limitations of the information and intelligence system with which they worked during the eighteenth century, illustrating Thomson's assertion that the office of the Southern Secretary was a central information and intelligence conduit.[101] Wager readily deferred to an office which received a high volume of letters containing information and intelligence which could support naval operations. The importance of the Secretary of State and the opinion in which the office was held by his contemporaries as an intelligence gathering conduit is clear and is shown in Figure 5. Wager may have felt that lines had been crossed over his own control over intelligence, while simultaneously recognising his own limited intelligence material and, as illustrated by the foreign advice discussed earlier in the chapter, understood the Southern Secretary's proximity to material which could be passed directly to officers like Vernon when necessary.

[99] C. Wager, 'Charles Wager [to Vernon], Admiralty Office, 11 Oct 1740', in E. Vernon (ed.), *Original Letters to an Honest Sailor* (London: R. Thomas, 1744), 26.
[100] C. Wager, 'Wager [to Vernon], Admiralty Office, 18 March [1741]', in Vernon (ed.), *Original Letters*, 36.
[101] Thomson, *Secretaries of State*, 150-1.

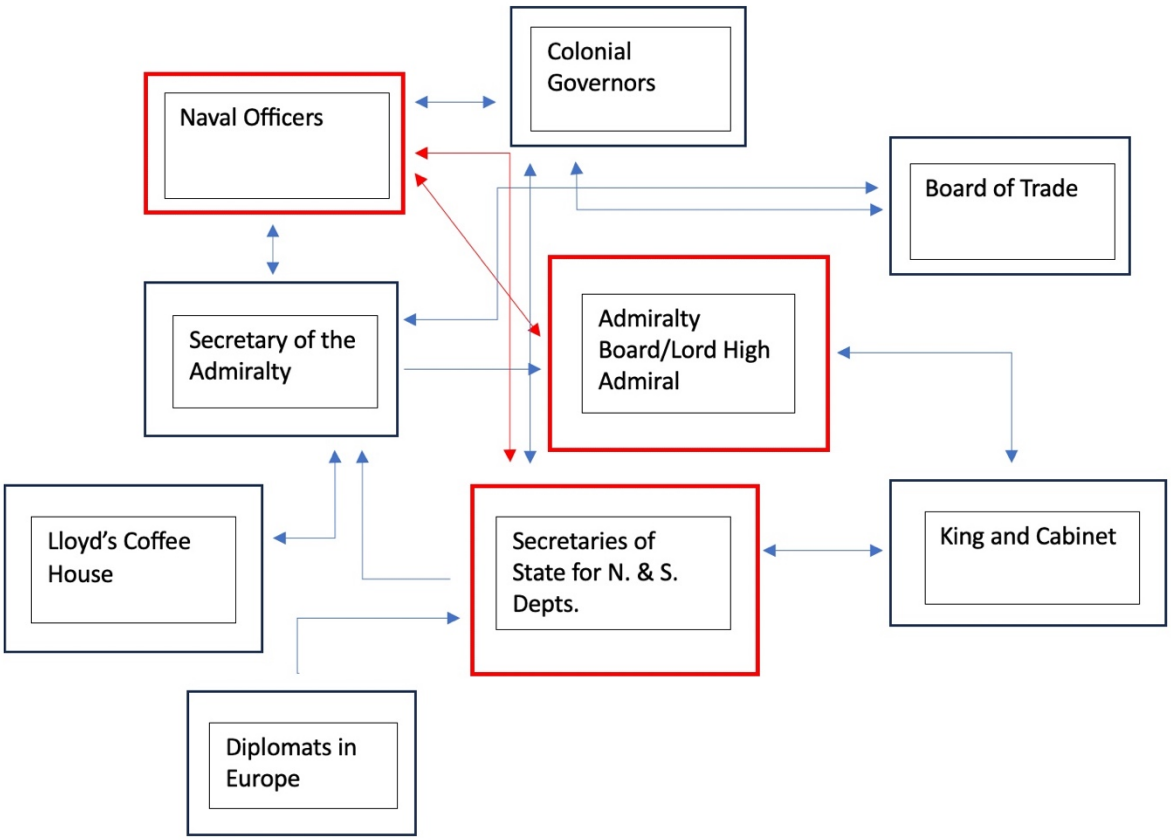

Figure 5 Inter-institutional Communications between the Admiralty, officers of the Royal Navy, and the Secretary for the Southern Department c.1740

This exchange was two-way, as Vernon's further correspondence with Newcastle is demonstrated by the return of intelligence from Vernon's station in Jamaica in December 1740. Vernon informed Newcastle of 'motions and designs of our enemies', which included captured papers containing

> copies of four Spanish letters, two from the Governor of Havana, and two from the Governor of [Santiago][;] three of them directed for his Excellency Mr Larnage, and the fourth to the French governor of Port François; and a copy likewise of the result of a council of the royal officers at the Havana, for conveying their money for paying their garrisons at Puerto Rico and Saint Domingo, and supply of their ships, safely by the assistance of the French and under the protection of the French colours.[102]

Vernon knew that the French were supporting Spanish war logistics and planning efforts and had been since the beginning of the century.[103] Vernon identified a similar partnership for the

[102] TNA, CO 137/48 (ff.68-74), Vernon, *Burford* in Port Royal Harbour, Jamaica, 12 December 1740.
[103] Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 165.

protection of money for the supply of Spanish settlements, which he highlighted as a potential target under the wider British war aim of disrupting Spanish economic systems. This letter shows the role naval officers played in the cyclical intelligence system, informing London of enemy movements and future targets through direct communication with the Secretary of State. This was an extension of Wilkinson's assertion that senior flag officers often communicated directly with the Secretary of State on pressing matters to save time and maintain secrecy, also reflected in Figure 5.[104]

Vernon informed the government of such movements out of concern about French preparations to join the war as an ally of Spain. Although this alliance did not occur until 1742, these movements gave Vernon pause and made him fearful of potential French interference which could outnumber his own naval strength in the West Indies. Vernon had connected this with reports that the French were 'gathering all their forces together, within two days of [Port Royal]', inferring that France was preparing to go to war with Britain as an ally of Spain.[105] The Admiral attempted to predict their movements, declaring that 'I cannot conjecture otherwise, but that their views are against this island', which he had passed on to Trelawny.[106] Vernon informed the government through the Secretary of State, as another illustration of his acting as Wilkinson had posited.[107] The Admiral, who clearly understood the workings of government with regard to the definition of policy, forwarded his intelligence to the Secretary of State to make sure that it arrived at the upper echelons of political power and could be best used to persuade the King and Cabinet to allocate further support in the West Indies. Whilst it appears to have made little difference, as the letter was marked as 'received and read' in April 1741, and had therefore perished in immediate usefulness, it illustrates that Vernon saw direct contact with Newcastle as the fastest route to the heart of British government and the chance to capitalise on intelligence he had gathered.

By mid-century, a range of institutions and individuals were vitally important for intelligence and information gathering, but the growth of coffee house culture brought commercial and mercantile intelligence into government focus through a clearly identifiable route. Figure 6 shows the incorporation of Lloyd's Coffee House into the already complex system of intelligence gathering which has been discussed throughout. The flexibility of the system, and the overlap it demanded to provide intelligence to the government, meant that whilst its

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[104] Wilkinson, *British Navy and the State*, 21.
[105] TNA, CO 137/48 (ff. 68-74), Vernon, *Burford*, 12 December 1740.
[106] *Ibid*.
[107] Wilkinson, *British Navy and the State*, 21.

informality could increase complexity, it also allowed the system to grow organically and increase the avenues for intelligence to travel where it was needed.

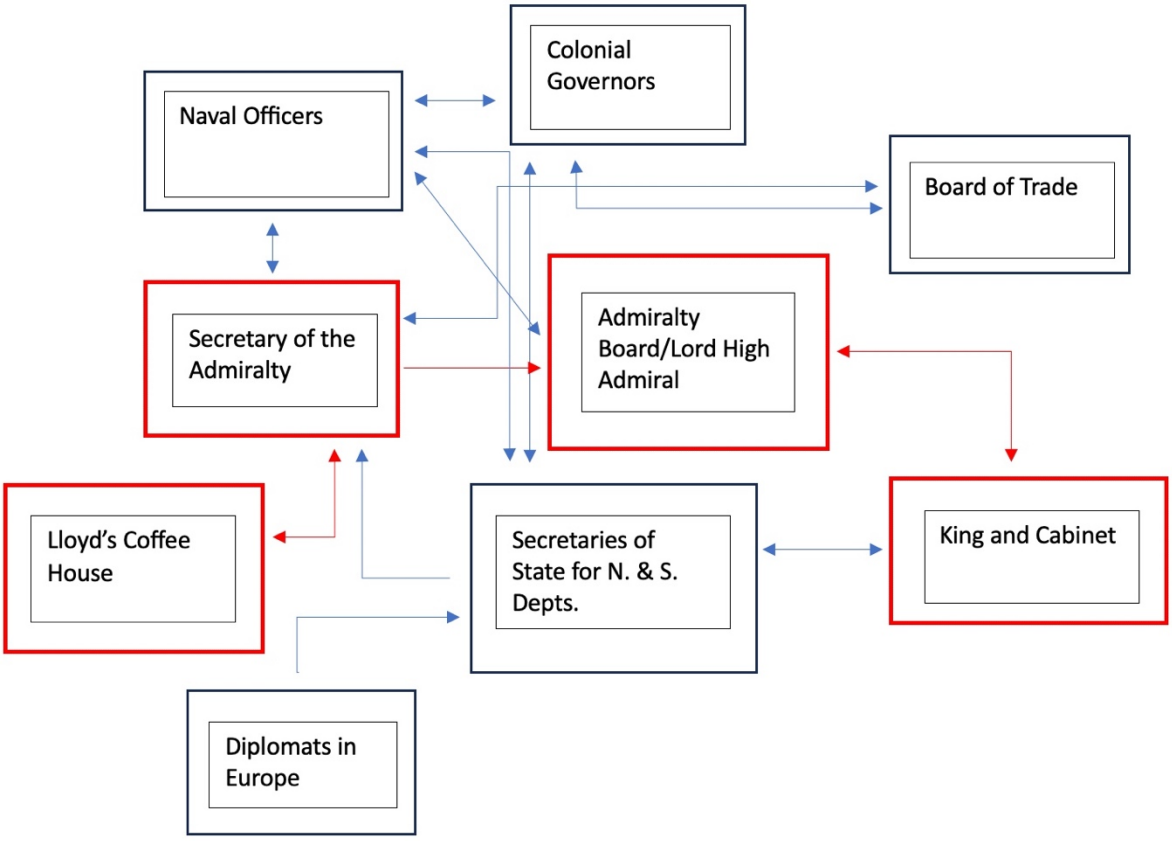

Figure 6 The incorporation of Lloyd's Coffee House into intelligence gathering c. 1747.

Lloyd's Coffee House opened in London in 1686, and by the middle of the eighteenth century had established itself primarily as a centre of exchange and networking for maritime business, and in a secondary capacity as a hub for maritime intelligence and information (with naval applications). However, the Coffee House only appears as a node in the transatlantic naval intelligence system in the final volume of 'foreign advices', which cover letters received at Lloyd's in 1747 and 1748.[108] However, Lloyd's had provided a 'semi-official service' of maritime intelligence since 1734, aided by the Post Office, which often sent gathered intelligence to the Admiralty to support operations.[109] The surviving correspondence from Lloyd's sent to the

[108] TNA, ADM 1/3934, Foreign Advices 1747-1748, Naval Intelligence Papers: 1st Series.
[109] Ellis, *Post Office*, 61; S. E. Maffeo, *Most Secret and Confidential: Intelligence in the Age of Nelson* (London: Chatham Publishing, 2000), 30-1; S. Geissler, 'The Lloyd's List: A Global Intelligence Unit?', in S. Kahlow (ed.), *Transfer between sea and land. Maritime vessels for cultural exchanges in the Early Modern Period* (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2018), 119-130, 120.

Admiralty was forwarded by Richard Baker, the Master of Lloyd's, who inherited it from his aunt in 1738 and held the position until his death in 1748.[110] The correspondence between Baker and the Admiralty often detailed enemy shipping movements, with a view to providing timely maritime intelligence to create opportunities for interception by naval officers whilst lobbying for the protection of Britain's merchant fleet. For example, Baker wrote to Secretary for the Admiralty Thomas Corbett in July 1747, to inform him of the movements of a

> fleet from Martinique of 80 sail under convoy of the *Terrible* and *Espante* of 74 guns and [the] *Aquilon* of 36 [which] were to sail from that island the latter end of May or in June for Europe[.] I have this from Jews who are offering policies on the French ships, [and] I hope Sir Peter Warren will have good luck to meet with them[.][111]

Admiral Warren, who was commanding the Western Squadron operating in the English Channel, the Western Approaches and the North Atlantic, did not intercept the squadron on its return from the West Indies. However, he did capture four ships which had scattered from the larger group following an attack earlier in its voyage by Captain Thomas Fox on 20 June 1747.[112] The ships highlighted by Baker's informants were likely part of Vice Admiral Emmanuel-Auguste de Cahideuc, comte Dubois de la Motte's convoy, of which Captain Thomas Fox intercepted and took 48 of the 160-strong convoy.[113] One source claims that Dubois de la Motte arrived in France with no losses, although the two conflicting conclusions share the same figures for the total size of the convoy involved.[114] The effectiveness of the British Atlantic intelligence network was limited by the technology and logistical considerations of the time, as several scholars posit.[115] As previously detailed by examples throughout this period, if information and intelligence was late in arriving with the Admiralty, dispatching a fleet to intercept a returning enemy convoy would make little difference. The difficulty of

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[110] C. Wright & C. E. Fayle, *A history of Lloyd's from the founding of Lloyd's Coffee House to the present day* (London: Corporation of Lloyd's, 1928), 71-2; Lloyd's, *Corporate History*, 2021. Available online: https://www.lloyds.com/about-lloyds/history/corporate-history [Accessed 3/8/2021]; D. E. W. Gibb, *Lloyd's of London: a study in individualism* (London: Macmillan, 1957), 35.
[111] TNA, ADM 1/3934, [Richard Baker] To Thomas Corbett [from] Lloyd's Coffee House 21 July 1747.
[112] Schomberg, *Naval Chronology*, 239-240; H. W. Richmond, *The Navy in the war of 1739-48, III* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1920), 98.
[113] Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 252; Richmond, *The Navy in the war of 1739-48*, 98.
[114] E. Taillemite, *"CAHIDEUC, EMMANUEL-AUGUSTE DE, Comte DUBOIS DE LA MOTTE," in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 3*, 1974 (2023). Available online: http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/cahideuc_emmanuel_auguste_de_3E.html [Accessed 12/07/2023].
[115] I. K. Steele, 'Time, Communications and Society: The English Atlantic, 1702', *Journal of American Studies*, 8, 1 (1974), 1-21, 21; Steele, 'Moat Theories', 18; Steele, *English Atlantic*, 274; Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy*, 68; C. Kingston, 'Marine Insurance in Britain and America, 1720-1844: A Comparative Institutional Analysis', *The Journal of Economic History*, 67, 2 (2007), 379-409, 382.

finding and intercepting any such fleet was exacerbated by the size of the Atlantic Ocean. This appears to have been the case with de la Motte's convoy which was intercepted by Fox on 20 June off the northern coast of Spain, and Warren having caught the aforementioned stragglers the following day.[116] This suggests that the intelligence provided by Baker's informants was far outdated by the time the master of Lloyd's had sent it on to the Admiralty. However, this should not diminish what Richard Baker sought to achieve, and is illustrative of the aim to provide intelligence for the Navy which could be used to inform placement of British naval forces. Whilst stymied by the technological and logistical limitations of the time, there were clear intentions to act as an intelligence conduit between civilian and naval spheres, and the process by which it was attempted, is evident.

Baker not only detailed the size of the fleet sailing from Martinique, but also his source for his intelligence, identified as Jewish underwriters involved in insuring the vessels in the French fleet and likely based in London as part of the insurance market. Lloyd's had become the centre of marine insurance in London through the sheer number of assembled underwriters using Lloyd's to network, although Lloyd's as a brand for insurance was only officially established in 1769.[117] More generally, London's insurance sector attracted increasing numbers of foreign customers during the eighteenth century due to its flexibility and competitive prices.[118] This was clearly illustrated by these underwriters, whose customer base ignored borders. However, this example begs the question: what was the incentive for these underwriters increasing the risk of capture for ships they were insuring?

An underwriter, or marine insurer, took on risk for vessels and cargoes travelling overseas in exchange for a premium, paid by the buyer, with a return to be paid in the event of an unforeseen loss which had become standard practice by the beginning of the eighteenth century.[119] The title of 'private underwriter' was not a protected profession, but became the primary source of marine insurance in London, into which category the underwriters above fell.[120] This shows a direct link between merchant communities and intelligence gathering, as

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[116] Schomberg, *Naval Chronology*, 239-240.
[117] Kingston, 'Marine Insurance', 385; A. B. Leonard, Introduction: The Nature and Study of Marine Insurance', in A. B. Leonard (ed.), *Marine Insurance: Origins and Institutions, 1300-1850* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 3-24, 3; A. B. Leonard, *London Marine Insurance 1438-1824: Risk, Trade, and the Early Modern State* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2022), 13.
[118] Leonard, *London Marine Insurance*, 12, 26.
[119] Kingston, 'Marine Insurance', 380-1; Leonard, 'Introduction', 4.
[120] M. Barton, 'The Patriotic Fund at Lloyd's, a covenant between the City and the Armed Forces'. PhD thesis (King's College London, June 2021). Available online: https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/studentTheses/the-patriotic-fund-at-lloyds-a-covenant-between-the-city-and-the- [Accessed 12/07/2023], 21-22; Kingston, 'Marine Insurance', 379-380, 405.

individuals with a finger on the pulse of information transfer exchanged intelligence and information to lobby for dedication of resources against the enemy and in defence of Britain's own trading interests. Scholars have commonly highlighted this link, although often from the perspective of shipping news, which the community at Lloyd's found intrinsically linked with their business and therefore in their best interests to remain informed.[121] Shipping news was published in *Lloyd's List* from 1734 onwards, and primarily differed from intelligence in its availability to anyone who subscribed through the coffee house itself. Whilst both intelligence and shipping news discussed movements of shipping, intelligence was available to a very select few, and often with martial concerns in mind. Shipping news was published, although only available to an enclosed community of subscribers at Lloyd's itself, whilst intelligence remained uncirculated.

Baker and the positioning of Lloyd's itself illustrated the complexity of information and intelligence networks which crossed the British Atlantic. As a central actor based at Lloyd's, Baker had attached himself to the governmental intelligence network, providing intelligence material to the Admiralty. It is demonstrative of the overlap between civilian institutions and government-associated networks. As a recipient of commercial intelligence from both sides of the British Atlantic, Lloyd's placed itself at the centre of British intelligence and information transfer, supporting government intelligence gathering as most material flowed from outside the immediate halls of power. Its base in London was situated in the largest trading and shipping centre in the British Isles, to which vessels gravitated and foreign news often arrived alongside where Parliament assembled.[122] The above example illustrates Lloyd's place as a net of sorts, catching letters containing relevant intelligence that could support the Navy's objectives.

The nature of Lloyd's as a recipient of maritime correspondence had the bonus of receiving news of fleet placements and successful operations. This made the informal system of intelligence gathering of the eighteenth century a great boon to the Admiralty which could easily lose contact with its officers on station. Baker sent a letter to Secretary for the Admiralty Thomas Corbett in August 1747, in which he copied two extracts detailing the movements of two naval officers cruising in the region.[123] The Master of Lloyd's informed Corbett of his

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[121] Ellis, *Post Office*, 61; Geissler, 'The Lloyd's List', 120, 125-126; Gibb, *Lloyd's of London*, 8-9, 35; N. Glaisyer, 'Networking: Trade and Exchange in the Eighteenth-Century British Empire', *The Historical Journal*, 47, 2 (2004), 451-476, 474-4; Kingston, 'Marine Insurance', 382, 385-386, 379-380.
[122] L. O'Neill, 'Dealing with Newsmongers: News, Trust, and Letters in the British World, ca. 1670-1730', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, 76, 2 (2013), 215-233, 228; Leonard, *London Marine Insurance*, 29.
[123] TNA, ADM 1/3934, Lloyd's Coffee House the 10 August 1747.

intention to leave London for an extended period, leaving the responsibility to 'advise the Admiralty if anything material shall occur' to his servant Charles Waller.[124] This shows the concerted effort on the part of Lloyd's to keep the Admiralty updated with intelligence and information of British fleet movements. In an extract from Captain Samuel Phillips of the *Swallow* packet dated 18 June 1747, Phillips informed Baker that he had left Barbados six days before, in convoy with Captain James Rentone who had forty merchant ships under his protection which had sailed from England 'for Barbados[,] the Leeward Islands[,] and Jamaica'.[125] Lloyd's was at the centre of routine communications as well as sensitive information gathering, helping central government to track the movements of British shipping and their naval escorts. Just as important as knowledge of enemy shipping, the Admiralty was anxious to know where naval vessels were and remain informed of the success they had had in fulfilling their orders. A second extract, dated the following day, further illustrates its place in routine information concerning naval positions, as Phillips recorded that 'Commodore Lee is now cruising to windward of Martinique with six sail of the line waiting for the French outward bound ships', whilst also detailing Lee's squadron's captures during their cruise and the name of a ship which had reportedly been captured by the French and carried into Martinique.[126] Whilst not overtly sensitive in nature, the forwarded information contained in these extracts allowed the Admiralty to track the movements and condition of Royal Navy vessels, as well as the execution of orders which had been given to officers on station. However, one also would expect Lee to report his own activities, which could point to a quirk of these systems, as Lloyd's may have thought to inform the Admiralty of something they already knew.

Lloyd's and the Admiralty worked in a two-way system of information and intelligence exchange, as is shown in Figure 6. Baker wrote to Corbett in July 1747, with Baker requesting 'the names, tonnage etc of the San Domingo ships taken [by the Royal Navy] so soon as you receive them', whilst also 'comply[ing] with your order in sending you such names of them as may be taken by privateers, but fear the number taken by them will be but few', as there were 'only the three 40-gun ships in the government service' acting as privateers.[127] Baker was alluding to the actions described above when Captain Thomas Fox intercepted the returning French convoy and took 48 of the total 160 ships, whilst Admiral Warren intercepted several

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[124] *Ibid*.
[125] TNA, ADM 1/3934, Extract of a letter from Captain Samuel Phillips of the *Swallow* packet dated Antigua the 18 June 1747.
[126] TNA, ADM 1/3934, Extract of a letter from [Captain Samuel Phillips dated] from Antigua 19 June 1747; TNA, ADM 1/3934, Lloyd's Coffee House the 10 August 1747.
[127] TNA, ADM 1/3934, Lloyd's the 2 July 1747.

stragglers the following day.[128] This illuminates the existence of a system of informational reciprocity between Lloyd's and the Admiralty, as the two relied on each other for maritime reports. Baker added a postscript to his letter, saying that news of captures of enemy shipping such as he referred to 'gives great satisfaction to people in general in this city to find that most of the San Domingo fleet will come round for the River Thames- [and] the very appearance in the river of so many prizes […] must occasion great joy.'[129] This suggests that Lloyd's requests for information regarding captures of enemy shipping were part of a wider public news exchange, as information deemed to be of lessened sensitivity could be used as a propaganda tool and a cause for celebration amongst the population. This was especially true during times of conflict like the wars of the 1740s. Lloyd's was once again demonstrably centrally positioned as a conduit for transatlantic information and intelligence, being perfectly placed to disseminate the information gathered to serve wider public information.

[128] Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 252; Schomberg, *Naval Chronology*, 239-240.
[129] TNA, ADM 1/3934, Lloyd's the 2 July 1747.

Conclusions

Eighteenth-century intelligence gathering was complicated by overlapping systems of collection and transfer. Government institutions received large volumes of correspondence, which often contained intelligence material concerning enemy fleet movements and operations in the Americas. Whilst no one government institution held a monopoly over gathering, handling and using intelligence and information, there were two that possessed centrality, hence making them the least flexible parts of an otherwise flexible system. The Secretary for the Admiralty and his accompanying office of clerks were tasked with reading, summarising, and presenting all correspondence that was deemed to be applicable to the Board of the Admiralty. The Board's advisory position with the monarch and Cabinet helped define policy and operations in line with the intelligence material that they had received. Meanwhile, the Secretaries of State for the Northern and Southern Departments were two of the most senior officials and key members of the Cabinet. Their diplomatic duties with the European states and the American colonies made them and their offices, staffed with clerks and assistants who assisted in handling intelligence material, a second key recipient of intelligence from diplomats in Europe detailing suspected enemy fleet movements and operations. The Secretaries of State and their offices handled, summarised and forwarded intelligence material to the Admiralty, via the Secretary, in a way likened to the procedure of the Admiralty Secretary's handling of intelligence. The Admiralty Board advised on but did not define naval policy, to which intelligence was vital. The Secretaries of State therefore passed such material on to the Admiralty for the discussion of contents by those who best understood fleet placements and logistical considerations. Intelligence was a core requirement of naval operations and underpinned the whole system.

In theory, there were several defined channels through which intelligence was expected to flow. Unlike those discussed above, the expected communication between the Board of Trade and colonial governors was more of a hypothetical connection. While often used, the colonial governors' connection to the Board of Trade was a line of communication in which intelligence transfer grew in tandem with other more established connections such as those previously mentioned. The Board of Trade had limited practical influence on policy and was frequently only able to establish one-sided correspondence with colonial governors, whose letters often read as reports informing them of decisions made and filtering intelligence back to the

government, therefore closing the communication loop.[130] Flexibility was inherent in the system, allowing its actors to send intelligence material where it was deemed to be best used. This was apparent in the duplication of letters containing colonial operations and intelligence material, sent to both the Board of Trade and the Southern Secretary. The Southern Secretary's prominent position on the Cabinet meant that his office was a natural recipient of governors' correspondence which could be used to define naval policy.

The overlap and flexibility of this system also allowed the gaps and deficiencies in government departments' intelligence gathering to be filled by others who were thought to have material. This demonstrates the flexibility of the system, whilst also highlighting the established lines of communication such as the Secretaries of State, whose centrality to the flow of information, seniority in government structures, and influence on operations made them one of the most permanent channels of correspondence in a system built on impermanence. Gap-filling was also accomplished through the growth of Lloyd's Coffee House and the private insurance underwriting that developed there. Merchants, who were already core informants in the system before the growth of *Lloyd's List* in 1734, had manifested a meeting place to which commercial information and marine intelligence gravitated. Passed on by the Master of Lloyd's to the Secretary for the Admiralty, intelligence received at Lloyd's was forwarded with a view to support naval operations, whilst working in a system of two-way exchange. As he provided intelligence to the Admiralty Secretary, Baker also requested details of enemy vessels taken by the Royal Navy. This two-way exchange of intelligence transfer provided details of recent naval operations which could be released to a public eager for news of success. Lloyd's slotted into a system of intelligence gathering that was already complex and well-established by mid-century, but the flexibility of that system posited a strength that allowed it to incorporate new channels of communication easily.

Overall, this chapter has illustrated the complexity and overlap of eighteenth-century intelligence gathering, as government institutions passed correspondence containing intelligence material between themselves to maximise its utility. What had developed was a system of relatively flexible exchange to allow government to remain informed of enemy shipping movements, planned operations and threats to British colonies. The complexity of these exchanges becomes apparent very quickly, as it was rarely the case of correspondence between two actors alone, and instead often a mix of individuals seeking to use intelligence gathered to support naval operations in the Americas. The following chapter examines the use

[130] Mewett, '"It is ticklish meddling with the Navy"', 13.

of intelligence by the Royal Navy during the War of Spanish Succession, as officers gathered intelligence locally to support that drawn from London to monitor enemy fleet movements and disrupt trade.

Chapter 2 Monitoring the enemy in the War of Spanish Succession, 1701-1714: Intelligence and British colonial defence.

The War of Spanish Succession broke out in 1701 following the death of the heirless Charles II of Spain, bequeathing the Spanish throne and its empire to Philip of Anjou, the grandson of Louis XIV of France. Other European powers feared France having effective control over Spain and its empire. Selecting their own candidate, Archduke Charles VI, Austria and the 'Maritime Powers' of Britain and the Netherlands formed a coalition against France.[131] Although much of the conflict focused on the balance of power in Europe, the maritime powers were concerned about French control over Spanish America, as well as limitations placed on Britain's access to economic opportunity in the Spanish empire.[132]

This chapter argues that intelligence gathering and distribution were central in British responses to renewed conflict. It was not piecemeal, or isolated, but collectively underpinned a system of intelligence exchange, in which key offices in London interconnected with correspondents in Europe and to those in the colonies, who had their own intricate networks of informers. The mobility of enemy fleets and the constant threat of assault and invasion of British colonies made monitoring the enemy on both sides of the Atlantic a priority. At best, failure to monitor enemy movements meant missed opportunities to frustrate their commerce and harass their naval vessels. At worst, plans for enemy attacks on British commerce and threats of invasion were missed. Even in cases where intelligence was gathered, it was not a sure-fire prevention method, as the British government was made aware of enemy movements thought to point to threats of invasion of British colonies in 1705, which were not heeded and resulted in attacks on St Kitts and Nevis in spring 1706.

This chapter firstly examines the importance of intelligence gathering systems in tracking enemy fleets in the West Indies. Intelligence from Europe reinforced locally gathered intelligence by individuals on station, such as naval officers, colonial governors, and seafarers

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[112] McLay, 'Combined Operations', 184-5, 304; Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 164-180; C. Rahn Phillips, 'The Galleon *San Jose*, Treasure Ship of the Spanish Indies', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 77, 4 (1991), 355-363, 356; Leonard, *London Marine Insurance*, 17.
[132] McLay, 'Combined Operations', 181, 304; Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 164; Leonard, *London Marine Insurance*, 17; Rahn Phillips, 'The Galleon *San Jose*', 355-6.

cruising in the region. The timelier the intelligence was, the greater its usefulness against mobile enemy fleets whose positions in the region changed quickly.

Secondly, this chapter discusses the War of Spanish Succession in relation to its focus on the *guerre de course* (the 'war on maritime trade'), in which French naval policy altered from fleet actions in favour of a greater focus on commerce raiding by privateers.[133] The French crown loaned naval vessels to private *armateurs* during wartime in exchange for a share of the profits (a fifth) from any prizes taken. After 1709, the Crown stopped insisting on a share to further incentivise civilian interest.[134] This decision reduced the costs of sustaining and manning fleets for the French Crown and provided incentive to civilian vessels to take prizes, and the savings made meant that the Crown did not need to take a cut of prizes to maintain naval operations and could deploy such resources elsewhere. Commerce raiding, which took on several forms depending on if it was conducted by ships belonging to the state (naval vessels) or by privateers, used a similar strategy to catch their prey. This involved the monitoring of high traffic trade routes. Intelligence played a vital role in this aspect of the war, as key chokepoints and areas of high maritime traffic became the target of privateers seeking to attack British shipping, and knowing where privateers operated was paramount for the Royal Navy to protect trade.[135]

Thirdly, the chapter examines British intelligence gathering to monitor threats of invasion against British colonies. Their distance from Britain and a lack of dedicated defensive measures left islands in the Caribbean vulnerable, as demonstrated by the invasions of St Kitts and Nevis in the spring of 1706, despite featuring extensively in British governmental intelligence gathering. Uncertainty about French intentions meant that British responses were delayed, and much of the accumulated intelligence came from French sources after the invasions had already occurred. Limited by technology and speed of exchange, these examples illustrate the often-reactive nature of British operations, to prevent future attacks by allocating new resources rather than by immediately responding. Threats of invasion also spurred colonial governors to manage their own intercolonial intelligence exchanges. Colonial governors informed each other of intelligence concerning threats to Caribbean islands and prompted one

[133] W. R. Meyer, 'English Privateering in the War of Spanish Succession 1702-1713', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 69, 4 (1983), 435-446, 445-6.
[134] J. S. Bromley, *Corsairs and Navies, 1660-1760* (London: Hambleton, 1987), 190, 201.
[135] *Ibid.*, 205.

another to prepare defences in the event of such threats proving true. Colonial preparedness against possible threats depended on consistent intelligence exchange.

Finally, Admiral Jean-Baptiste du Casse was a persistent focus for British naval intelligence gathering, because of his role in escorting the *flota* from Spanish America. His fleet served as a reference point for British intelligence gatherers to monitor du Casse and evaluate the threat that he posed to British colonies and trade. Monitored over the course of three years, du Casse ultimately succeeded in escorting the *flota* to Europe, but British naval operations were heavily influenced by intelligence gathered by naval officers and colonial governors tracking the Admiral. What followed were demonstrations of local intelligence in action, as Commodore Charles Wager and Governor Thomas Handasyd disrupted French and Spanish shipping with support from local intelligence, bolstered by intelligence gathered in Europe.

Tracking Enemy Fleets Around the Atlantic

At the outbreak of the War of Spanish Succession in 1701, Admiral John Benbow had been cruising in the Caribbean Sea as the commander-in-chief of the Royal Navy in the region. This was part of a growing wartime naval presence designed to protect English trade and intercept enemy fleets.[136] He had already undertaken a survey of the Caribbean Sea on a reconnaissance mission under the guise of hunting pirates in 1699 and 1700, discussed in Chapter 5. After reporting his findings to London, Benbow was once again dispatched to the Caribbean as war with France and Spain loomed.[137]

In the Caribbean, Benbow was the senior naval officer and most mobile representative of the state and played a vital role in communications and intelligence gathering in the Americas. The timeliness of information and intelligence was an important consideration with a direct bearing on its application to operations. Distance from the centre made autonomy vital for men like Benbow, as the following chapters demonstrate. To succeed in his mission to protect English interests and frustrate those of France and Spain, Benbow needed intelligence to inform his operations and influence his movements.

Benbow worked closely with the Governor of Jamaica Peter Beckford, to gather local intelligence. Beckford wrote to the Board of Trade in July 1702 to outline the plan he had agreed with Benbow as he 'divided his fleet into three squadrons, which lie to intercept Mr du Casse', to conduct surveillance on the Governor of Cartagena thought to be making the voyage from St Domingue, and 'the victuallers designed for Chateau Renaud's [sic] fleet at the Havana'.[138] Intelligence that the French fleet was destined for Havana was accurate, and although details remain vague, had likely been gathered by officers that Benbow had dispatched on cruising missions. Benbow appeared to make himself and Governor Beckford aware of the movements of the French fleets, doing so by gathering intelligence from squadrons cruising off Hispaniola, Cuba and between Rio de la Hache (modern-day Riohacha, Columbia) and Cartagena.[139] This yielded the capture of a 'very rich ship' destined for France and three ships that were meant to victual Châteaurenault's fleet at Havana.[140] The positions

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[136] Buchet, 'The Royal Navy and the Caribbean', 37; McLay, 'Combined Operations', 304-5.
[137] Grainger, *British Navy in the Caribbean*, 100, 101, 104.
[138] TNA, CO 137/5 (f. 282-4), Beckford to Board of Trade, July 20, 1702.
[139] *Ibid*.
[140] *Ibid*.

of these points of interest are shown in Figure 7. However, the whereabouts of Admiral Jean-Baptiste du Casse himself were unclear, but he was thought to be either in Havana or Vera Cruz. Beckford reported his having received intelligence on the 15 July from a 'Dutch man who had been a prisoner at the Havana for 16 months' before making 'his escape to the Port of Princes, which lies on the south side of Cuba' and once there was 'taken on board one of our sloops'.[141] The informant reported that Châteaurenault had awaited the *flota* at Vera Cruz for 'a great while', which had left his fleet sickly and undermanned.[142] Although Benbow died following injuries sustained in the sea fight against du Casse, this example illustrates how important local intelligence was as the English fleet was able to successfully disrupt rival economic interests and reinforcement efforts. There was a clear partnership between Governor Beckford and Admiral Benbow in the interests of a common goal. Such cooperation was commonplace, with representatives and officials working in systems of exchange, collaborating to gather and use timely intelligence in support of naval operations. The immediacy of this local intelligence supplemented the more strategic decisions based on intelligence passed on by London.

[141] *Ibid.*
[142] *Ibid*.

Figure 7 A map of the Caribbean showing the position of British colonies in relation to French and Spanish possessions.
Source: Wikimedia via Wikipedia, https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Caribbean_map_blank.png (labels added by the candidate, map not to scale).

Tracking fleet movements also involved intelligence gathered in hostile states. Robert Harley, Whig politician and ally of the Secretary of State for the Southern Department, Charles Spencer, the Earl of Sunderland forwarded a letter to the Admiralty in September 1706 with details of French naval preparations at Brest, obtained by a merchant vessel ranging near the French coast.[143] The informant, George Gilbert, a mate aboard a Spanish-captained merchantman, claimed that 'fifteen […] men of war [were] ready in Brest', whilst 'eighteen more were expected in other parts'.[144] Gilbert even identified four of the vessels he saw as those which 'had been taken from the English' in the opening years of the war, suggesting that his vessel had been able to observe the preparations of the French fleet at close quarters.[145] Civilian seafarers were a useful source, able to get in close to observe enemy movements without arousing suspicion from fleets in busy ports. Gilbert's position on a Spanish-captained vessel suggests that his detailed information was gathered from a position free from challenge by the French, who were allied with the Spanish during the War of Spanish Succession. This

[143] TNA, ADM 1/3931, Harley to Whitehall, September 17, 1706; TNA, ADM 1/3931, Examinations of George Gilbert mate of a merchant man September 17, 1706.
[144] TNA, ADM 1/3931, Examinations of George Gilbert.
[145] *Ibid*.

shows the fluidity and permeability of these communication networks, as informants could be gathered from across divisions created by conflict. Foreign service and serving in other nations' merchant fleets was common during the eighteenth century, making it possible that Gilbert was simply continuing service aboard a Spanish vessel in a career which had begun before the war.[146]

Gilbert appeared unsure of the fleet's destination but was informed that the voyage would take two months, although it is unclear as to where he obtained this intelligence.[147] Gilbert had seen the fitting out and initial sailing of a squadron under the command of French captain Claude de Forbin, part of which would go on to capture a convoy of two 70-gun ships of war and 22 merchantmen off Beachy Head in May 1707.[148] In practice, this meant that this was not a transatlantic voyage, instead raiding off the British coast. Forbin's success in the capture of the convoy suggests that the intelligence forwarded by Harley and the Admiralty's immediate efforts to act on it failed to prevent Forbin from achieving his objective of disrupting British trade. Alternatively, the inclusion of the two-month estimation of Forbin's voyage probably misled, distracted the government's attention, and meant that Beachy Head was not considered to be a target. Intelligence had clearly given (as it often does) only a partial picture of the enemy's plans, leaving filling in the blanks to decision-makers, although in this instance unsuccessfully.

In fact, after the attack off Beachy Head, the Admiralty appeared to track the movements of Forbin through correspondence from diplomats in French cities, as well as conducting surveillance on other French naval commanders, appearing to observe but not react with a practical response. In a letter from October 1707, an informant in Brest recounted that squadrons under the command of Jean-Baptiste du Casse, Forbin and René Duguay-Trouin ('du Gue' in the correspondence) had sailed nine days before, with du Casse separating from Forbin and Duguay-Trouin to undertake his voyage to Vera Cruz.[149] After separating from du Casse, Forbin and Duguay-Trouin were then said to have 'met an English fleet going to Lisbon' which was under a convoy of five naval vessels, three of which were taken whilst one was destroyed and the fifth escaped, with all merchant vessels taken.[150] It seems that French operations

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[146] P. Earle, *Sailors: English Merchant Seamen 1650-1775* (London: Methuen, 1998), 200; P. Linebaugh & M. Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 151.
[147] TNA, ADM 1/3931, Examinations of George Gilbert.
[148] Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 176.
[149] TNA, ADM 1/3931, Brest Oct 28th, 1707.
[150] *Ibid.*

against British trade were unimpeded by any naval response by the British government. Perhaps the intelligence provided by Gilbert and the Brest letter from October 1707 was past tense and therefore of little use to the government in the influence of resource dedication, acting instead as reportage and supporting evidence for the devotion of resources in future. These sources of intelligence were therefore useful as evidence for preventative measures to reduce further losses through the examination of enemy deployment patterns and knowledge of key French naval commanders and their fleets. As well as informative of the areas that the French targeted to attack British shipping, the use of this intelligence fed into the development of defensive as opposed to aggressive measures for the protection of British trade.

The intelligence Gilbert had provided and the losses recounted in the letter from Brest may have had a longer-term, yet indirect effect on naval policy, as the continued losses of shipping in 1707 caused 'outcry' in Parliament, resulting in the 1708 Cruisers and Convoys Act. The Act reduced the number of ships under the direct control of the Admiralty to allow the bolstering of defences on specified home stations, reducing those available for escorting convoys to increase the effectiveness of cruising squadrons.[151] Both British and French naval efforts focused on high-traffic areas when locating enemy shipping to increase the probability of interception. This was preferable to spending extended cruising time searching in a vast ocean as suggested by the efforts (discussed below) of naval vessels under Charles Wager and British privateers to prevent French ships preying on British shipping. This section illustrates the importance of locally gathered intelligence, as small networks of representatives of the state and eyewitnesses attempted to predict enemy movements ready to intercept them. It primarily prompted policy changes rather than providing information which aided in the formulation of rapid tactical decisions, changing behaviour and strategy to support future operations. Local intelligence could allow a tactical response to be formulated, while information which passed through London was more likely to be strategic and influential on future operations. It has also shown the consequences of misinterpreted or incorrect intelligence.

[151] Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 177-8.

Tracking Privateers in the *guerre de course.*

Privateering was split into two types. Either merchant ship captains were granted letters of marque which allowed them to attack and capture enemy ships during a voyage in pursuit of their regular trade, or specialist privateers were fitted out with the sole purpose of attacking and capturing enemy shipping. This was part of the shift towards the *guerre de course*, which characterised naval warfare during the eighteenth century.[152] Contemporaries estimate that 3,600 merchantmen were taken by French privateers during the War of Spanish Succession, worth collectively around £8,000,000 sterling according to Meyer.[153] Whilst in Rodger's assessment English trade was 'more buoyant' than during the 1690s and better able to cope with losses, this section argues that privateers remained a consistent concern and a subject of surveillance for naval intelligence gathering.[154]

Naval warfare aligned closely with economic warfare in the eighteenth-century Atlantic, as states sought to protect their own trade and damage that of opponents. The naval administration of Britain was inundated with pleas for protection of trade and economic opportunity. This is illustrated by a letter from Rotterdam, dated September 1705, which advised that '[c]are must be taken that the privateers from St Malo and Brest do not intercept the English merchant fleets expected from Barbados and Jamaica, etc.'[155] Brest's position on the Atlantic coast at the mouth of the English Channel, and St Malo's sheltered position with a commanding view of British shipping further up the English Channel, made them prominent privateering bases which were a sustained threat to British trade during the eighteenth century.[156] The informant notes that '[t]hese privateers wait […] with some men of war at the entrance into the Channel and towards the Irish coasts.'[157]

The Western Squadron, which would become a vital aspect of British naval strategy later in the century, had its foundations in this period. The squadron had been a consideration for the government since at least 1650, as concerns for trade and the move to the *guerre de course* in French strategy reduced the likelihood of French naval actions in favour of greater use of

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[152] Meyer, 'English Privateering', 446; D. J. Starkey, *British Privateering Enterprise in the Eighteenth Century* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1990), 13, 15; Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 177-8; Grainger, *British Navy in the Caribbean*, 85.
[153] Meyer, 'English Privateering', 445-6.
[154] Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 177.
[155] TNA, ADM 1/3930, Extract of a letter from Rotterdam dated September 1705.
[156] P. Crowhurst, *The Defence of British Trade 1689-1815* (Kent: Wm Dawson & Sons, 1977), 15.
[157] TNA, ADM 1/3930, Extract of a letter from Rotterdam.

privateers.[158] The probability of locating enemy shipping was limited by the range that sailors on board vessels in open sea could see. However, this worked both ways, as French privateers remained vulnerable because they had to remain close to well-known and established shipping routes to catch their prey. This increased the chances of their interception by British naval vessels and privateers. While it is unclear if the letter from Brest provided accurate information, it illustrates British attempts to understand privateers' haunts for preying on British trade which could be focused on as cruising spots. Perhaps this is also further evidence of the gradual development of a precursor to the Western Squadron, as Duffy argues it existed in its role as 'linchpin' in British strategy by the latter half of the century.[159] Whilst challenging, it was possible for the Royal Navy to gather intelligence about enemy privateers which led to successful interceptions, but this was exclusively accomplished by those on station. Far removed from the protection of trade from privateers in the Channel and its immediately surrounding waters, colonial governors and officers of the Royal Navy gathered their own intelligence in the Americas. This intelligence gathering was frequently incorporated into the exchange between colonial governors and London, as governors' correspondence was consistently received at the Board of Trade and circulated around the British government (see Chapter 1). Governors' autonomy permitted by distance from the centre often meant they passed on notice of action in relation to gathered intelligence, rather than requests for permission.[160]

Writing to the Board of Trade in December 1708, Thomas Handasyd, Governor of Jamaica, noted that 'two French privateers [had been sighted] upon our coast', with one having 'taken off a man', in Handasyd's assessment 'for [the gathering of] intelligence upon some design the French have to invade us'.[161] While it is possible that the French ships might have been used as a mobile reconnaissance force ahead of a main invasion, it is more likely that there were only privateers, and likely utilised by Handasyd to appeal for greater support and reinforcement against two types of potential threat. The governor considered the presence of these privateers in line with a letter received by Commodore Charles Wager, the highest-ranking

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[158] M. Duffy, 'The establishment of the Western squadron as the linchpin of British Naval strategy', in M. Duffy (ed.), *Parameters of Naval Power: 1650-1850* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1992), 60-81, 62,63.
[159] *Ibid*.
[160] Steele, *English Atlantic*, 235; Steele, 'Moat Theories', 25; Dierks, *In My Power*, 49; Harding, *Emergence*, 59; Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 138-9; Willis, *Admiral Benbow*, 257-8; Alsop, 'British Intelligence', 114-115.
[161] CSP, Vol. 24, 1708-1709, 227: Governor Handasyd to the Council of Trade and Plantations. Dec 4 [1708].

naval officer in the region, which he had discussed with Handasyd, which said 'that the French are fitting out a squadron to make an attempt against this island'.[162] Handasyd reported that Wager had been informed of these privateers and had 'sent out two men of war after them', with one ordered to 'cruize off the French and Spanish coast, and endeavour to get off a man from thence to learn what they are doing, and whether they have any design this way.'[163] Both the French privateers that Handasyd identified and the British naval vessels dispatched by Wager had attempted to use local informants to gather intelligence of their targets' whereabouts, suggesting that it was a common technique on either side of the conflict. Both instances also hint that the acquisition of informants in this manner was not necessarily voluntary, being prepared to interrogate those who stepped into their paths. In this example, Wager was able to put the intelligence which had been gathered by Handasyd into action in the defence of British trading interests, while simultaneously looking for opportunity to gather his own intelligence on the movements and intentions of the enemy. This demonstrates the reportative nature of the governor's correspondence with London, informing them of his uses of the intelligence he had received and subsequent dispatch of Wager to act upon it, rather than requesting advice, guidance, or orders for its use.

In accordance with advice from the Council of Jamaica, Handasyd had laid 'an embargo on all ships and vessels for ten days, until we inform ourselves what preparations the enemy is making', which Handasyd hoped 'will be of no prejudice to the trade' given its short duration.[164] The above letter to the Board of Trade reported Handasyd and the council's actions in response to the intelligence they had received. This was only possible from analysis of intelligence material obtained on station. This example further shows the partnership between officers of the Royal Navy and colonial governors in the gathering and use of intelligence.

Their initiative was successful, as Handasyd informed the Board of Trade in a further letter from April 1709 that enemy ships had been intercepted by British naval vessels and privateers since. Handasyd's actions illustrate the colonial governor's ability to act unilaterally, and express greater fears about the threats posed by privateers rather than any concrete concerns of invasion. Noting the successes of naval officers dispatched in light of Handasyd and Wager's collaboration in December 1708, Handasyd then informed the Board that the 'men of war have

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[162] *Ibid.*
[163] *Ibid*.
[164] *Ibid*.

taken since the last account I gave your [Lordships] a snow and 3 sloops, and one of our privateers has taken a French privateer, one Spanish trading sloop, and retaken an English sloop which they burnt.'[165] The initiative taken by Handasyd and Wager appears to have paid off, with the governor's remarking that '[b]oth our men of war and privateers have lately been very successful, and done considerable damages to the enemy in these parts.'[166]

[165] CSP, Vol. 24, 1708-1709, 451: Governor Handasyd to the Council of Trade and Plantations. April 6 [1709].
[166] *Ibid*.

Invasion Plans and Attacks Against British Colonies

A core concern for the British state during the War of Spanish Succession was the threat posed to colonial possessions, including invasion plans and attacks on islands and colonies which were difficult to support with reinforcements and resources at short notice. A prominent example of this is demonstrated in the lead-up to and the aftermath of the spring 1706 French attacks on St Kitts (referred to as St Christopher's in contemporary documents) and Nevis, which were extensively documented in the intelligence gathered by the British state. St Kitts was an island shared between the British and French until 1713 when the Treaty of Utrecht ceded full control to Britain. A French squadron sailed from Martinique under the command of naval officer Henri-Louis de Chavagnac and landed on St Kitts on 25 February 1706, raiding and plundering the island until de Chavagnac sailed back to Martinique on 2 March with booty estimated to be worth three million livres.[167] On 7 March, Pierre le Moyne d'Ibberville, who was a French soldier, explorer, and founder of Louisiana in New France, arrived at Martinique and took a squadron to rendezvous with de Chavagnac. The assembled squadron landed on Nevis on the 1 April and took 22 ships, after which they advanced into the mountains and forced the island to surrender, taking many of the island's inhabitants as prisoners. Unseasoned and new to the environmental challenges of the Caribbean, d'Ibberville stopped off at Havana on the way to attack Carolina, where he died of yellow fever in July 1706.[168] Similarly to the tracking of enemy fleets, the attacked islands of St Kitts and Nevis were the subject of extensive surveillance by the British state, although resources were not committed to protecting them in time.

The threat of an attack was first mentioned in late November 1705, when a foreign advice extract from Paris cited a letter written by an officer from the Brest fleet who was assigned to join d'Irbeville in a voyage to the West Indies under the command of de Chavagnac. The French achieved surprise and ravaged the islands easily, especially since Admiral William Whetstone had departed and there was therefore no naval presence left on the islands.[169] Written to the officer's friend, the author of the Paris letter recounted that the officer 'says, they have some great design at hand', speculated to be 'designed against some English

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[167] TNA, ADM 1/3931, Extract out of the Paris Gazette, 22 May [1706]; R. S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 136-7.
[168] Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 174.
[169] Grainger, *British Navy in the Caribbean*, 108.

colony', although the Dutch colonies of Surinam and Curaçao were also considered possible targets.[170] The author relayed that this preparing fleet had 'an abundance of provisions of all sorts' as well as 'on board large Chalops so contrived that they are carried in pieces but may be soon put together' and 'which will hold above 100 men each'.[171] This description would have been easily recognisable as an invasion force, with craft designed for amphibious landings and coastal navigation on which could be transported significant numbers of sailors and soldiers. However, uncertainty in determining the fleet's target may have slowed follow-up on such a warning. Possible English targets remained vague, and the alternative targets were both Dutch colonies, which may have convinced those in London that the danger to English colonies was not so urgent. The author of the foreign advice extract provided little detail concerning the letter to which they alluded, apparently having seen it through covert surveillance and without recording its author or recipient beyond their relationship. However, the extract's author was of the firm belief that the intelligence was reliable and important despite its uncertainties, because the source was identified as part of the French fleet, and therefore a threat to the British.

This letter illustrates the frequent uncertainty in the gathering of such intelligence, as the threat of impending invasion or attack was too serious to ignore entirely, but details concerning it could remain incomplete and prevent effective responses. Britain's metropolitan-based intelligence gathering systems were clearly based in part on what was available to be harvested from the French court, and in this case illustrates its often reactive rather than active nature during the War of Spanish Succession. Intelligence was often based on speculation and incomplete leads, affected by the information available to the enemy themselves. In theory, information from sources available to an enemy from the centre of their own knowledge base should be reliable and accurate. Being from the source was more likely to be trustworthy, obtained by diplomats in Europe and sent to the Southern Department and forwarded to the Admiralty. Diplomats, deployed to courts around Europe, were welcomed as official guests to whom monarchs were able to demonstrate their splendour, and so they were hosted with entertainments and invited to high-profile court events like baptisms, coronations and funerals.[172] Such events allowed mingling and exchange with others in court, permitting the diplomat to fulfil their essential function as a reporter to their home government of

[170] TNA, ADM 1/3931, Paris 27 November 1705.
[171] *Ibid*. 'Chalops', or 'shallops' were shallow draft boats used for coastal navigation and amphibious operations.
[172] T. A. Sowerby, 'Diplomats', in E. Griffey (ed.), *Early Modern Court Culture* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2022), 109-122,111.

happenings in their host's court and beyond. These individuals were free to socialise with courtiers, allowing them to create and maintain information networks.[173] The palaces of Europe have been referred to by Raeymaekers as spaces 'teeming with crowds', as '[n]obles, councillors, ladies-in-waiting and servants all crossed paths in the courtyards' and coaches came and went.[174] These spaces, often open to the public and filled with market stalls and gardens, allowed free movement of both goods and information in and out. Meanwhile, Raeymaekers posits that the 'maze of corridors, stairways and antichambers' of the palaces of Europe meant that 'visitors met to talk to each other and exchange bits of news with the courtiers present', under which 'circumstances it was virtually impossible to keep all entrances and passages of the princely residence under surveillance 24 hours a day.'[175] This created an environment in which intelligence from those roaming the palaces and courts of Europe flowed easily as potential spies came and went with intelligence gathered inside.

Uncertainty continued, as a letter from Brest in January 1706 said that the 'squadron under the command of Mr d'Irbeville is departed from Rochelle, [and] it goes on a secret expedition to America.'[176] Clearly, the French withheld information to limit the chances of sensitive intelligence being intercepted, and the author of the extract dispatched to the British government was left in the dark despite their close proximity to French operations. Whilst no competent government would aim to release more information than was needed about where naval forces were sailing, this illustrates that the French managed to prevent a leak of intelligence into British hands which could have supported an operation to intercept d'Ibberville and his fleet. It was common for orders to remain sealed until fleets had already sailed. Indeed, it appears that d'Ibbervile's targets were not revealed to have been St Kitts and Nevis until a letter from Brest dated May 1706 was forwarded to the Admiralty, in which '[i]t is assured, that Mr d'Ibberville has plundered two English plantations[,] St Christopher and Nevis, and that he was going to attack some plantations of the English'.[177]

British intelligence gathering was heavily reliant on what could be gathered from French towns and the French court in Paris, which narrowed the available intelligence and limited the scope of the picture that the British state could create of enemy operations, being unable to pinpoint the objective until it had already happened. The letter from Brest was followed by an extract

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[173] *Ibid*.
[174] D. Raeymaekers, 'Access', in Griffey (ed.), *Early Modern Court Culture*, 125-139, 129.
[175] *Ibid*.
[176] TNA, ADM 1/3931, Extract of a letter from Brest 29 January 1706.
[177] TNA, ADM 1/3931, Brest 13 May 1706.

from Paris dated more than a week later, in which '[t]hey extol very much here the taking of the islands of St Christopher and Nevis by Mr d'Ibberville', with speculation in Paris that the intention was 'to make themselves masters of Jamaica' after resupply at St Domingue.[178] These extracts illustrate the distillation of several sources recorded on the same sheet for easy comparison. British intelligence gathering was influenced by the arrival of the extracts from the courts of Europe at the office of the Southern Secretary and the onward dispatch to the Admiralty, as fragments of disjointed intelligence were pieced together into a more complete picture. These extracts illustrate the analysis and distillation of larger letters discussed in Chapter 1, recorded on a single sheet, of information most worthy of the British government's attention and which formed the core of British naval intelligence gathering in France.

The British government first had detailed news of the attacks on St Kitts and Nevis on 14 May. Secretary of State Charles Hedges forwarded an extract to the Cabinet on 17 May, which Hedges sent with the purpose of requesting that 'you should consider what is proper to be done for strengthening Her Majesty's squadron going to the West Indies, and be ready to give your opinions on what you think may be advisable in this matter on Sunday next.'[179] Hedges' letter illustrates that British intelligence gathering was designed to influence the allocation of naval resources, establishing patterns and providing evidence of French threats to British colonial interests. The extract forwarded by Hedges recounted that '[a]n officer is arrived at [Martinique] belonging to the squadron commanded by Mr d'Ibberville with an account of his having taken the island of St Christopher's', from which were taken 'six thousand negros, five hundred English [prisoners] and several ships', alongside speculation that the squadron would 'make further attempts upon the English plantations and those of the Dutch at Curaçao.'[180] This information, taken from French naval officers' reports, further demonstrates intelligence gathering for future prevention. Uncertainty hindered British predictions of French intentions in the Americas, suggesting that the intelligence of the attacks served instead to initiate a response to prevent further attacks on British interests in the West Indies.

A full account of the attacks on St Kitts and Nevis, from a French perspective, was recorded by a British informant in the French court from the *Paris Gazette* and forwarded to the government in London in late May. It detailed de Chavagnac's voyage's landing on St Kitts on 25 February and the period of looting lasting until 2 March, before returning to Martinique via

[178] TNA, ADM 1/3931, Paris 21 May 1706.
[179] TNA, ADM 1/3931, Hedges, Whitehall 14 May 1706.
[180] TNA, ADM 1/3931, Extract of a letter from Paris 17 May 1706.

Guadeloupe with plunder worth three million livres, or approximately £174,000 in 1706.[181] Interestingly, the *Gazette* made no mention of support from the French already resident on St Kitts.[182] Previously, there had been agreements to pool forces in the event of attacks by the Spanish or indigenous populations with whom the French and English shared the island, with the French settlers occupying either end of the island and the English 'sandwiched in the middle', although tension always remained and the two fought bitterly for decades.[183] With hindsight, it is possible that St Kitts was a target for de Chavagnac based on the existing French presence and long-term conflict between the French and English for control of the whole island. It is more likely, however, that the island was targeted because it was one of the oldest and most developed of Britain's Caribbean possessions, with the largest population of enslaved people. This was the principal plunder to be gained by attacking forces. The other longest-established island colonies were Barbados, Nevis, Antigua, and Montserrat, which had all been established since the first half of the seventeenth century.[184]

The *Gazette* also reported the attack on Nevis, recounting that d'Ibberville arrived at Martinique on 7 March and took a squadron to meet de Chavagnac and landed on Nevis on the 1 April, capturing 22 ships.[185] Pressing the advantage on 4 April and advancing into the mountains, the French brought the island to surrender on the condition that the commander, the soldiers and the island's inhabitants be made prisoners of war, as well as all the island's enslaved people being surrendered to the French.[186] It was estimated by the *Gazette* that more than 7,000 enslaved people were handed over (compared to British estimates of 6,000), with 30 ships prepared 'for war and trading'. The French were confident that the 'two islands will not be able in 10 years to be restored to the condition they were in', whilst the French lost fewer than 50 men killed or wounded.[187] This prediction clearly reveals French aims to capture enslaved Africans and British shipping, hence crippling the island's economy and disrupting its

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[181] TNA, ADM 1/3931, Extract out of the Paris Gazette, 22 May [1706]. The value of the French plunder taken from St Kitts in spring 1706 equates to around (or more than) £18.6 million, calculated by using exchange information for 1706 found in J. J. McCusker, *Money and exchange in Europe and America, 1600-1775: a handbook* (Williamsburg: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 88-92. This was converted using the National Archives, *Currency converter: 1270-2017*, 2023. Available online: https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/#currency-result [Accessed 2/11/2023].
[182] Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 179; Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 23; C. Bridenbaugh & R. Bridenbaugh, *No peace beyond the line: the English in the Caribbean, 1624-1690* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 16.
[183] Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 8, 18, 32; Bridenbaugh & Bridenbaugh, *No peace beyond the line*, 166.
[184] Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 9, 15; Bridenbaugh & Bridenbaugh, *No peace beyond the line*, 20.
[185] TNA, ADM 1/3931, Extract out of the Paris Gazette, 22 May 1706.
[186] *Ibid*.
[187] *Ibid*.

well-established sugar production infrastructure, instead of seeking to seize such lucrative colonies for themselves.[188]

The attacks on St Kitts and Nevis illustrate how the British could, in some cases, only be sure of the destination of an invasion fleet when it was too late. This suggests that the forwarding of the extracts discussed above, as well as the *Paris Gazette* extract, were of greater use as material to account for losses and prepare against future attacks. From a position of limited contact with the islands which had been attacked, Britain was reliant on the capacity to gather information and intelligence from multiple sources. This included information which had been communicated as a victory to wider society within France through the developing medium of printed news. According to foreign advice received in early June, ships containing 'booty' from St Kitts and Nevis were said to have arrived in Brest, whilst three more had arrived at Rochelle with 'confirmation of Mr d'Ibberville's expedition at St Christopher's' and intended voyage to sell the captured slaves to the Spanish a few days later.[189]

During this conflict, threats of invasion prompted governors of British colonies to provide each other with intelligence that had been gathered through their own networks and use their own initiative to pass information on for the defence of other colonies. Intelligence gathering was therefore not simply a case of communications between central government and governors in the colonies, but also an intercolonial system. For example, Bevil Granville, Governor of Barbados, forwarded a letter he had received from Antigua to Thomas Handasyd. Granville passed on 'news of 12 sail sighted on the 6th [April 1706] off Barbados' that were feared to be reinforcements for the French squadron already assembled at Martinique, which could threaten invasion and outnumber British vessels in the region.[190] Primarily concerned for the threat posed to his own island of Barbados and having been '[persuaded] they will make an attempt on this island', Granville forwarded the information in fear that 'it is not unlikely but that they may have an eye afterwards towards you' with a further attack on Jamaica.[191] With the assaults on St Kitts and Nevis having occurred just under a month earlier, and a substantial French fleet in the vicinity, fear of further invasions of English islands was no doubt prominent in the minds of colonial governors. Granville forwarded a copy of a letter he had received from John Yeamans, commander-in-chief of the Army sent to reinforce Nevis, in which Yeamans

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[188] Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 22, 136; Grainger, *British Navy in the Caribbean*, 86.
[189] TNA, ADM 1/3931, Extract of a letter from Brest 9 June 1706; TNA, ADM 1/3931, Extract of a letter from Paris, 11 June 1706.
[190] CSP, Vol. 23, 1706-1708, 246: Governor Sir B. Granville to Governor Handysyd. April 8 [1706].
[191] *Ibid*.

provided Granville with news of Nevis' invasion by the French.[192] The commander-in-chief also outlined his concerns that '[w]e expect to be the next attack'd, and […] very soon', with fears that 'succours from England will come too late'.[193] This was coupled with a request for reinforcement from Barbados to bolster Yeamans' forces, without which he warned that 'we may fall sacrifice with the rest; which may prove of that evil consequence as to encourage France to attempt Barbados itself'.[194] Yeamans played on the fear of a domino effect with the threat of invasion of Barbados itself as the ultimate outcome if the other islands were not defended. This demonstrates the importance of interisland communication networks, as colonial representatives took their collective information and defence into their own hands. The chain of correspondence further illustrates the autonomy colonial governors were granted, the centrality of intercolonial intelligence sharing, and the importance of practical support for one another in the interests of colonial defence.

Granville also dispatched a copy of Yeamans' letter to the Board of Trade the day before he forwarded the intelligence to Handasyd in Jamaica. Granville stressed the 'danger of the Leeward Islands, and the nearness of it to us', highlighting local fears that Antigua was next to be attacked after Nevis.[195] As discussed in Chapter 1, governors like Granville wrote to the Board with a reportative tone, outlining the colony's plans to counteract their lack of manpower with greater defensive measures like 'intrenchments and redoubts'.[196] Granville clearly recognised that combatting invasion attempts in his jurisdiction was largely down to him, and so he had to make use of defences beyond pure manpower to better his chances. Whilst the governor appeared resolute in his own will to defend his island, his letter can be seen as a plea for reinforcements from central government.

From Jamaica, Handasyd informed the Board of Trade of his own 'preparations to receive [the enemy]', claiming to be 'putting everything in as good a posture of defence as it's possible' ready to 'give them a very warm Reception'.[197] This illustrates the inter-colonial use of local intelligence in action. Handasyd did not have time for reinforcement to aid the defence of the island, obliging him to make do with what he had and reinforce himself as well as possible.

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[192] CSP, Vol. 23, 1706-1708, 245 i: J. Yeamans to Governor Sir B. Granville. March 25, 1706.
[193] *Ibid*.
[194] *Ibid*.
[195] CSP, Vol. 23, 1706-1708, 245: Governor Sir B. Granville to the Council of Trade and Plantations. April 7 [1706].
[196] *Ibid*.
[197] CSP, Vol. 23, 1706-1708, 319: Governor Handasyd to the Council of Trade and Plantations. May 12 [1706].

Handasyd is vague on what resources he had available, although he could no doubt count on a local presence of the Royal Navy with the only naval dockyard in the region being at Port Royal, and it is likely that he had mobilised the island's militia and population to build defences on the island should the French attempt a landing.[198] Once again, the letter that he sent to the Board of Trade noting these preparations read more as a report, with the governor recognising the limitations of his communication with central government and the need for self-reliance. Handasyd also informed the Board that he had 'advice that there are 12 sail of French men of war at Carthagene [Cartagena]', although he was unsure 'whether they are come to fetch away the Spanish fflota, or get fforces from the Spaniards to come against Jamaica'.[199] Handasyd was alluding to a fleet commanded by Admiral Jean-Baptiste du Casse, whose purpose of protecting the Spanish *flota* is discussed in the following section. In fact, no attempt was made against Jamaica, but the attacks on St Kitts and Nevis had prompted colonial governors like Handasyd to increase their preparedness, and this example shows the direct consequences of the intercolonial intelligence system and the exchange between proxies representing the state on station in the West Indies.

The attacks on the two islands in 1706 clearly had a profound effect on colonial preparedness, as demonstrated further by Benjamin Bennett, Governor of Bermuda. In a letter from late April 1706, Bennett wrote to William Popple, the secretary to the Board of Trade, with news of the arrival of a ship from Antigua with letters detailing the attacks on St Kitts and Nevis and his fears of Antigua being the next target.[200] Bennett then noted that

> [b]y the vessel that carries this to Virginia I have sent letters to the Governors throughout the Continent, that they may know the danger of letting vessels go to the Southward. I expect a visit from the enemy upon their return homeward from the Havana in Aug or Sept, for they must cross this latitude, but I shall be prepared for them, and will [do] what I can to defend this place.[201]

Bennett demonstrates the extent of intercolonial communications. In dispatching information derived from the Caribbean, Bennett's warning to other colonial officials that was spread across the Americas shows the importance of colonial governors, who received, processed, and forwarded intelligence with little oversight from London. This is evidence of communications not only between the hub and spokes of the wheel, but of the spokes' need to use the flexibility of Atlantic communications to exchange and provide support amongst

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[198] Bromley, *Corsairs and Navies*, 27.
[199] CSP, 23, 245: Handasyd to Council of Trade. May 12 [1706].
[200] CSP, Vol. 23, 1706-1708, 284: Lt Governor Bennett to Mr Popple. April 22 [1706]. CSP, 23.
[201] *Ibid*.

themselves as well. Intelligence which moved in this manner was likely to be timelier than anything that crossed the Atlantic multiple times. As in the chain discussed above, Bennett appeared to recognise the vulnerability of the island colonies spread across the Caribbean, and by extension saw the importance of rapid transfer of intelligence as vital in warning Britain's American colonies of threats. Whilst Governor Bennett was at a disadvantage as an apparent target of opportunity for French raiders, since vessels sailing from the Caribbean always passed Bermuda, it also allowed the governor to predict when they could expect an attack, prepare in advance, and warn North American colonies of arriving forces. Once again, the autonomy of the colonial governor, and the importance of local intelligence to that autonomy, demonstrate the power of the networks through which colonial interests were maintained and protected.

Tracking du Casse

During the War of Spanish Succession, French Admiral Jean-Baptiste du Casse's ships were a serious threat in the Caribbean. He was tasked with meeting and escorting the Spanish treasure fleet, the *flota*, which shipped the silver and gold mined in Spain's American empire to Europe, but there were concerns that his objectives could shift and instead turn to attacking British trade and colonies. From the beginning of the war in 1701, Spain reluctantly relied on protection of the *flota* by the French Navy, because of the weakness and diminished size of their own naval fleet.[202] French naval preparations and movements became an important means of tracking the progress of the treasure fleet, which although a consistent draw for British naval officers interested in the prizes, was not a priority for the Admiralty. The *flota*, which drew significant naval support from French vessels, was a convenient monitoring tool to gauge du Casse's movements, and the threat his fleet posed to commerce and British interests in the Atlantic.

Intelligence first arrived at the Admiralty in October 1705 indicating that du Casse had been called to Madrid to plan the escort of the Spanish treasure fleet from the Americas.[203] This fleet carried Spanish treasure, taxes, and trading profits, totalling a value of between 12 and 14 million pesos (between approximately £2.5 million and £2.9 million) that had accumulated in the ports of Spanish America as hostilities since 1701 had delayed it being shipped to Europe.[204] Focus on tracking du Casse's and his convoy's movements served as a method of predicting the best opportunities to intercept them when the fleet arrived in the West Indies. Indeed, a letter from the Jamaican Governor Handasyd to the Admiralty from March 1706/7 noted the arrival of a fleet in January, believed by the captain of a packet boat to be French and 'by advice of the Spaniards [is] commanded by Mr du Casse.'[205] This is an example of

[202] Bromley, *Corsairs and Navies*, 21; Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 165; Grainger, *British Navy in the Caribbean*, 104-105.
[203] TNA, ADM 1/3931, Extract of another letter from Paris of 2 Oct [1705]; TNA, ADM 1/3931, Tucker to Burchett, 4 Oct 1705.
[204] Rahn Phillips, 'The Galleon *San Jose*', 356. The 2017 equivalents are around £268 million and £313 million. The value of Spanish treasure awaiting shipping in 1705 was calculated by using exchange information for 1705 found in McCusker, *Money and exchange*, 100-102. This was then converted using the National Archives *Currency converter.* Available online: https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/#currency-result [Accessed 2/11/2023].
[205] TNA, ADM 1/3931, Extract of a letter from Brigadier Handasyd 8 March 1706/7.

Handasyd's own efforts to gather intelligence locally to augment intelligence which had come from London.

These systems of intelligence gathering at first glance appear unconnected and disjointed, illustrating the challenges apparent in discerning du Casse's intentions in the West Indies with any degree of certainty. An extract from St Malo, dated December 1707, reported that du Casse would escort the convoy 'to France or Spain', without further specifics beyond the news that '[t]here is a small fleet bound for Mexico at Cadiz with 4 of the King's ships', on which both French and Spanish merchants had loaded trading goods.[206] This second part appears to be the only information concerning du Casse's objective, and offered no specifics to the British government. This highlights challenges with the British system of intelligence gathering's reliance on these reports of foreign advice, as their frequent vagueness limited their impact on tracking enemy shipping movements. Handasyd also demonstrated similar uncertainty in discerning enemy shipping movements. In a letter to the Board of Trade in December 1707, the governor said that he had knowledge 'of M. du Cass[e]'s being arrived in the West Indies, but at what part […] I cannot at present learn', with conflicting reports as 'some say he is not come from Martinique', whilst 'others say he is at the Havana, but my opinion is he is at Port Lewis [Hispaniola], and if so, he is within 18 hours' sail of us'.[207] The inherent challenges apparent in systems of intelligence gathering are made clear, as conflicting reports from local eyewitnesses created a need for informed conjecture. The governor initially appeared concerned that this was an invasion fleet, having '[u]pon receiving this intelligence […] dispatched a sloop to give Mr Wager advice of it', with Wager deeming the fleet too large for him to engage with his available ships.[208] Wager, who was the senior officer on station in Port Royal, then forwarded the intelligence via naval vessels to warn British traders at Portobello. He also apparently gathered intelligence that the *flota* was projected to sail from Cartagena to Portobello as soon as du Casse ordered it, although Handasyd believed this to be delayed by the late arrival of the treasure from Lima.[209] The economic motivations behind this intelligence gathering system are clear here, as the concern for the security of British trade and the disruption of that of rivals was a central objective during the war in the Caribbean. Handasyd seemed confident of the Admiral's intentions, asserting that 'M. du Cass[e]'s whole business is for the Galleons, without any design to make an attempt against this place', although what he

[206] TNA, ADM 1/3931, Extract of a letter from St Malo, 12 Dec 1707.
[207] CSP, Vol. 23, 1706-1708, 1250: Governor Handasyd to the Council of Trade and Plantations. Dec 30 [1707].
[208] *Ibid*.
[209] *Ibid*.

had based such surety on remains unclear.[210] Clearly, the process of intelligence gathering was continuous and challenging, as incomplete information had to be pieced together over time, often through conjecture and deduction.[211] New fragments of information would continue to arrive, which served to confirm or contradict previous hypotheses. This pushed Handasyd and his colleagues to constantly update their ideas about du Casse's movements and intentions. In this case, Handasyd focused on du Casse's attention to the *flota* rather than readying for an attack on Jamaica. His relief about the apparent safety of Jamaica is clear. For the British, tracking the *flota* was a way to assess the threat posed by du Casse cruising in the region, based on his association with the treasure fleet and how seriously they took the orders to escort it to Europe.

An unidentified informant in Cartagena in February 1708 reported 'intelligence that the galleons sailed from thence on the 28th January for Portobello' as a convoy of nine ships, and were to wait for two months to collect treasure from Portobello before returning to Cartagena to collect 'twenty million pieces of eight belonging to the General and Admiral and some other merchants'.[212] Du Casse was then said to be planning to meet them there with his fleet, ready to convoy them to Havana to resupply before travelling on to Spain.[213]

The author of this letter claims to have been a prisoner, although it is unclear as to whom they were a prisoner of, precisely where, and for what reason. However, this report further demonstrates the difficulties that arose from tracking enemy shipping, as the predictions made by Handasyd were far from concrete. Indeed, the *flota* was not a cohesive, organised, and regular voyage, which meant that tracking and intercepting it was particularly difficult. The informant at Cartagena noted that the 'Spaniards told me that there [were] four [vessels from Vera Cruz that] went home about Christmas last', with three remaining to sail, which were expected to do so later in the year.[214] The informant claimed that this was based on a strategy that postulated that smaller groups of vessels, or even single ships, were safer from being targeted by commerce raiders and ships of the Royal Navy than large fleets.

Handasyd updated the Board of Trade in a letter in mid-February 1708 on du Casse's whereabouts 'with nine men of war and one large merchant ship', which sailed from Port Louis to Havana to load the assembled treasure, and was estimated to take between three and four

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[210] *Ibid*.
[211] Grainger, *British Navy in the Caribbean*, 98.
[212] TNA, ADM 1/3932, Being on the coast of Cartagena the 2 Feb 1708.
[213] *Ibid*.
[214] *Ibid*.

months.[215] He recounted that '[s]even galleons […,] several privateers and other vessels' were convoyed by a French man of war from Cartagena to Portobello in January, with the remaining nine 'they say will not be in a condition to sail [until] the next year'.[216] How he had been informed of this is unclear, and it appears to conflict with the intelligence gathered by the anonymous informant discussed above in relation to the dates of sailing and the specifics of the ships in the convoy. The process of gathering intelligence was primarily focused on broad strokes, as Handasyd and others enacting the state's objectives could not afford to wait for a complete picture before acting and forwarding intelligence, otherwise the effectiveness of the intelligence and their resulting actions in light of it would be diminished. This is the first piece of correspondence which details a practical British response to the intelligence which had been gathered, as the governor informed the Board of Trade that 'Mr Wager has been out and is now going again with all the force he can make to endeavour to prevent the galleons going from Portobello to the Havana', reinforced with 130 men provided by Handasyd from the island's militia.[217] This shows the limited responses available to British government in response to enemy shipping movements. As suggested above, using naval vessels as cruisers was the most likely to yield results in the pursuit of the *flota*.

Handasyd returned intelligence to the government in duplicated letters in March 1708, sending one to the Admiralty and one to the Board of Trade that said that 'du Casse with his squadron is at the Havana, and has been there a considerable time[.] Seven galleons and as many Spanish merchant ships sailed from Cartagena to Portobello seven weeks ago.'[218] The letter to the Admiralty illustrates that the formatting of the intelligence was just as important as its content, which was entitled 'Extract of a letter from Brigadier Handasyde [sic] dated 31st March 1708'. The original letter was clearly longer than this version, and no doubt contained more routine correspondence. Someone had evidently read the original letter and condensed it into a clearer outline of its intelligence content for easier referral to the government and is an illustration of how correspondence was filtered before being passed on. The letter was likely to have been condensed by either the office of the Southern Secretary or the Admiralty Secretary, demonstrating the process by which intelligence was identified and singled out for relevance. Handasyd and Commodore Charles Wager had acted on this intelligence under their

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[215] CSP, Vol. 23, 1706-1708, 1339: Governor Handasyd to the Council of Trade and Plantations. Feb 14 [1708].
[216] *Ibid*.
[217] *Ibid*.
[218] TNA, ADM 1/3931, Extract of a letter from Brigadier Handasyd dated 31 March 1708; CSP, Vol. 23, 1706-1708, 1423: Governor Handasyd to the Council of Trade and Plantations. March 31 [1708].

own initiative, as the governor said that 'Mr Wager is out with all his squadron except the *Portland*' and 'has on board him all the force I can spare him, which is 170 men of my regiment'. The governor and Wager shared mutual hope that Wager

> can lie without being discovered in the passage between Portobello and the Havana [where] I hope he will give a very good account of the galleons, it being almost impossible for them to have assistance from the French squadron, they are so far to leeward and the currents set too strong against them.[219]

Handasyd reported that Wager had already acted on what had been discovered, setting off to lie in wait for the Franco-Spanish convoy with Handasyd's support, using the weather systems of the West Indies to his advantage to attempt an intercept. In this case, Wager had determined that the conditions of the wind and currents meant that French support would not reach the convoy he had targeted, allowing him to condition his own operation and constrain those of the enemy if they attempted to relieve the assembled shipping.

Handasyd's concurrent letter to the Board of Trade, which contained largely the same content as that which arrived in extract at the Admiralty, shows how Handasyd fulfilled his obligation to inform the government about du Casse's movements, as well as those of the *flota* sailing between treasure ports.[220] Given the pattern followed by the *flota* in its voyage between the West Indies and Europe, Handasyd was keen to inform the Board of du Casse's waiting at Havana as a signal to prepare a naval response, as Havana was considered the final stop before making the return voyage to Europe. Handasyd and Wager had already deployed a locally organised response as the men most able to act.[221] Clearly, the possibility of causing disruption to the *flota* depended on highly localised knowledge of the movements of enemy shipping and moments of weakness. Simultaneously, Wager capitalised on his knowledge of the region's geography, exploiting the prevailing winds and the French fleet's position to leeward of the passage, which prevented them from helping, as contemporary shipping was limited in its ability to sail upwind.

Handasyd's letter received a response from both the Secretary of State for the Southern Department, Charles Spencer, the Earl of Sunderland, and the Board of Trade.[222] As discussed in Chapter 1, the Board received correspondence from governors as a primary recipient of

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[219] TNA, ADM 1/3931, Extract from Handasyd dated 31 March 1708.
[220] CSP, 23, 1423: Handasyd to the Council of Trade. March 31 [1708].
[221] *Ibid*.
[222] CSP, Vol. 23, 1706-1708, 1547: C. Spencer to Governor Handasyd. June 16 [1708]; CSP, Vol. 23, 1706-1708, 1577: Council of Trade and Plantations to Governor Handasyd. June 25 [1708].

colonial communications, before being forwarded to Sunderland, whose position on the Cabinet reinforced the need to keep him in the loop and help define operations and naval policy. This demonstrates the relationships discussed in Chapter 1, as the Southern Secretary was anxious to respond directly to Handasyd and bypass the official channel of communication between colonial governors and the Board of Trade. In his response to Handasyd's letter 'of March 31', Sunderland 'thank[ed] [Handasyd] for the accounts you give of [Mr] du Casse's squadron', as well as commending the governor on 'supplying Capt. Wager with what men you [could] spare, and I heartily wish he may have the success you encourage us to hope for.'[223] Sunderland acknowledged and approved of Handasyd and Wager's actions, commending them for their initiative. The Board of Trade echoed this praise, saying that Handasyd had 'done well in supplying Commodore Wager with men, in […] his cruising for the galleons, of which we are in hopes to hear a good account from the Commodore's diligence and zeal in H.M. service'.[224] The Board's response also demonstrates the importance of the Royal Navy in protecting British economic interests. They were 'glad to hear [Wager] gives such satisfaction to the merchants and Traders of Jamaica, and particularly that the trade to the Spanish coast goes on so successfully.'[225] This linked the protection of British trading interests with monitoring du Casse, highlighting further the need for intelligence that was available, reliable and usable in the Caribbean.[226]

Around the time that Handasyd returned his reports of Wager's cruise in pursuit of the galleons aiming to meet du Casse, he had received intelligence of du Casse's base at Havana from a man called John Bernard, who claimed to have recently escaped the port. What exactly Bernard had escaped remains unclear, although it is possible that he was either a prisoner of war, detained in the city's fortifications, or more likely he was a British merchant who had fled the city from fear of anti-British sentiment exacerbated by the War of Spanish Succession. It is worth noting that at least two of Handasyd's informants were identified as prisoners, suggesting that the governor saw such individuals as keepers of knowledge from the inside of enemy colonies. Either way, Bernard had arrived in Jamaica and provided Handasyd with detailed observations of du Casse's fleet and its readying to escort the Spanish treasure back to Europe. Bernard's intelligence, first passed to Handasyd, was sent to the government

[223] CSP, 23, 1547: Spencer to Handasyd. June 16 [1708].
[224] CSP, 23, 1577: Council of Trade to Handasyd. June 25 [1708].
[225] *Ibid*.
[226] Ojala, 'Maritime Information Networks', 183-194.

simultaneously for the attention of Southern Secretary Charles Spencer, the Earl of Sunderland, and the Board of Trade.[227]

Bernard had told Handasyd that there were 'in that harbour thirty five sail of merchant ships, and five men of war', which were 'all French vessels with money on board, and one galleon that has been there these two years'.[228] Bernard had informed Handasyd that 'they expect three men of war from La Vera Cruz […] to convoy the [flotilla]' to Europe, reporting that 'the sailors are very sickly, and that Mr du Casse had been nine days indisposed when he [Bernard] came away'.[229] Handasyd saw it as part of his general duty to inform London of developments in the colonies, although this officially meant that he was to correspond with the Board of Trade.[230] By writing and sending a duplicate of his letter to the Board to the office of the Secretary of State, the governor was simultaneously fulfilling his duties in the passing on of intelligence, whilst also pushing it to the highest authority possible to get noticed. Whilst Handasyd did what he could to act on the intelligence immediately after receiving it, forwarding it to the government in London additionally served to influence the future allocation of resources by detailing enemy shipping movements, reveal the parameters of the Franco-Spanish alliance, and help justify the governor's own actions.

Bernard's observations demonstrate the direct support that the French Navy provided to the Spanish treasure fleet during the early eighteenth century. What Bernard saw was an example of Spanish treasure ships assembled and convoyed by French naval vessels, a practice which had begun in 1701 after reluctant Spanish acceptance based on their limited naval capabilities.[231] Sunderland's forwarding of Handasyd's intelligence to the Admiralty suggests that whilst the decision on how to act upon such information was the territory of the Cabinet, they sought advice from the Admiralty to determine how best to act on that intelligence based on available naval resources.

However, an accompanying letter to Bernard's intelligence, dated the following day, detailed that Handasyd and Wager's initiative in dispatching the naval officer's fleet had paid off, as Handasyd said that 'Captain [Abraham] [Tudor] of Her Majesty's Ship *Dolphin* is just now

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[227] TNA, ADM 1/3932, Extract of a letter from Colonel Handasyd, Governor of Jamaica to the Earl of Sunderland, Jamaica June 17, 1708; CSP, Vol. 23, 1706-1708, 1551: Governor Handasyd to the Council of Trade and Plantations. June 17 [1708].
[228] TNA, ADM 1/3932, Handasyd to Sunderland June 17, 1708.
[229] *Ibid*.
[230] Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy*, 16-17; Harding, *Emergence*, 59; Steele, *English Atlantic*, 231; Thomson, *Secretaries of State*, 45.
[231] Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 165.

arrived from the Spanish coast'.[232] Tudor reported that Wager was refitting a galleon he had taken as a prize ahead of returning to Jamaica, in addition to his ship.[233] Tudor was recounting what became known as 'Wager's Action', in which Wager successfully intercepted Spanish treasure ships loaded with South American silver that had assembled at Portobello on 8 June 1708, whilst du Casse left Havana uninterrupted in July with the silver-laden vessels from Mexico.[234] Wager destroyed the Spanish Admiral's ship, the *San Jose* (from which only 11 men survived from a crew of around 650), capturing one galleon and destroying another, with the plunder he took valued at around £50,000, and his share making him a very rich man upon his return to Britain.[235] This is a clear demonstration of intelligence gathering playing an active role in eighteenth-century naval operations, and illustrates the interplay between the state's representatives as conduits for information and intelligence transfer. Although Bernard's intelligence arrived too late to be of immediate use to Wager, the existing cooperation between himself and Handasyd led to a successful capture as they acted on and used intelligence that they gathered themselves, only informing the Board of Trade of their actions after the event. Wager's cruising near Portobello demonstrates a knowledge of shipping patterns which proved useful in determining where the treasure fleet was likely to be, narrowed down to a window of time (seemingly which could last months) in which it would be possible to attack the galleons and disrupt British rivals' trade. However, this also raises an issue of opportunity cost, as Wager's interception of the ships on the coast may have prevented him from going after du Casse and missing out on the larger prize. Indeed, Rahn Phillips says that the action was just as much a disaster for Britain as it was for Spain, as the Spanish flagship, the *San Jose*, was reportedly laden with between 75 and 105 million *reales* worth of gold and silver, when the original objective had been to capture the *San Jose* and its companions, not destroy them.[236] Handasyd himself returned a report of the action complaining of the mutinous behaviour of several captains who contributed to the less than desired outcome, after which they were court-martialled and relieved of their commands.[237]

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[232] TNA, ADM 1/3932, Extract of a letter from Colonel Handasyd, Governor of Jamaica to the Earl of Sunderland [June 18, 1708].
[233] D. Syrett & R. L. DiNardo (eds.), *The Commissioned Sea Officers of the Royal Navy 1660-1815: Occasional Publications of the Navy Records Society Vol. 1* (London: Scolar Press, 1994), 446; TNA, ADM 1/3932, Handasyd to Sunderland [June 18, 1708].
[234] Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 174; Rahn Phillips, 'Galleon *San Jose*', 357.
[235] E. Cruickshanks, *Wager, Sir Charles (c. 1666-1743), of Kilmenath, nr. West Looe, Cornw. and Parson's Green, London*, 2023. Available online: http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1715-1754/member/wager-sir-charles-1666-1743 [Accessed 6/7/2023]; Rahn Phillips, 'Galleon *San Jose*', 357; C. Headlam, 'Preface'. CSP, 23, vii-viii.
[236] Rahn Phillips, 'Galleon *San Jose*', 357-8.
[237] CSP, Vol. 24, 1708-1709, 56: Governor Handasyd to the Council of Trade and Plantations. July 20 [1708]; Rahn Phillips, 'Galleon *San Jose*', 357.

Rahn Phillips regards this as evidence of British disappointment with the action, although this chapter argues that Handasyd saw its outcome more positively, pressing that the action could frighten du Casse and draw him out with the assembled fleet to be intercepted.

Handasyd appeared confident that this would occur, offering the Earl of Sunderland his 'opinion [that] Mr du Casse, when he hears this news, will not stay any longer, but make the best of his way to France'.[238] Once again acting on his own initiative, Handasyd said that 'I shall endeavour all I can to prevent those vessels coming out of Cartagena [that seek to join du Casse], […] and am sending all our privateers to cruise off that port and the Havana.'[239] Handasyd had already made up his mind about what to do, and he wrote to the Board of Trade, saying that he believed that the ships waiting at Cartagena were likely to be delayed in meeting du Casse on account of the destruction of the *San Jose* and the organisers of the fleet, including the Admiral.[240] This was evidence of Handasyd's own consideration of the intelligence he had, evaluating the available material in the face of a changing situation.

This correspondence is further evidence of Steele's assertion that letters between colonial governors and the government in London (and particularly the Board of Trade) were 'not really correspondence at all', and often read more as reports.[241] Handasyd also illustrated Steele's conclusion that governors 'seldom asked for advice', which he marked as an indication that 'they did not wait for a reply before taking action', instead 'reporting, explaining, defending [and] justifying' alongside 'petitioning, but they were not usually asking questions'.[242] They worked, in their own way, as informants, updating the government with intelligence they had gathered in the hopes that such transfer would garner support. Handasyd certainly saw himself as autonomous from the government in London on issues of colonial security, supporting naval operations in his jurisdiction, and the gathering and handling of intelligence and information. Handasyd, like all colonial governors, was accountable to London for his actions, and expected to keep his superiors informed of what was going on. However, like all officials who sat at a distance from England, Handasyd had a good deal of freedom to act as he saw fit. London expected him to account for his actions but was unable to exercise control over them. Governors were appointed through the Board of Trade, and confidence in them to

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[238] TNA, ADM 1/3932, Handasyd to Sunderland [June 18, 1708].
[239] *Ibid*.
[240] CSP, 24, 56: Handasyd to the Council of Trade. July 20 [1708]; Rahn Phillips, 'The Galleon *San Jose*', 357-358.
[241] Steele, *English Atlantic*, 235.
[242] *Ibid*.

act with the best interests of the empire was paramount.[243] The colonial governor therefore was central to the transatlantic communications of the eighteenth century as a semi-autonomous conduit. Tasked with keeping central government informed and using intelligence gathered to support naval operations, whilst also remaining accountable for their actions as representatives acting under London's authority, colonial governors' relationships with London were reminiscent of that between central government and officers of the Royal Navy.

Sustained tracking of du Casse's progress escorting the *flota* illustrates that intelligence came from both the Caribbean and from a range of cities in Europe, demonstrating the state's recognition of the importance of intelligence gathered from multiple sources in an attempt to fill in blanks. The frequency with which foreign advice was received from the continent by the Secretaries of State, and in turn the haste with which it was passed on to the Admiralty, implies its perceived reliability. While intelligence took time to reach its destination, the apparent faith with which it was received by the government suggests that they trusted their informants. They therefore recognised the challenges inherent in the system concerning the time it took for such intelligence to reach its destination and cast a net wide enough to gather it from multiple locales. This is clearly demonstrated by the Admiralty's receipt of letters dated a day apart from Cadiz and Paris in March 1708. The letter from Paris said that '[t]here [is] no news from Mr du Casse, nor the galleons which, it is said[,] he is to bring […] into Brest or Rochelle.'[244] In comparison, the letter from Cadiz recounted that

> [y]esterday arrived a French ship in 42 days from the Havana, dispatched thence by Mr du Casse who was there with seven French men of war, and had sent to Cartagena and Vera Cruz ordering galleons and *flota* to go to the Havana, and join him. [245]

Perhaps this arrival from Havana was a small naval vessel, or a merchant ship dispatched with mails and sent to inform the French government of du Casse's progress and the delays with the preparation of the treasure to be loaded onto the ships to be escorted by the French Navy. This illustrates how localised intelligence gathering could be, and the British state's mitigation of that challenge. By having informants in multiple cities, the Secretary of State for the Southern Department and, by extension, the Secretary for the Admiralty, had access to different perspectives and could cast a wide net of intelligence gathering. Cadiz was a port city in which both French and Spanish shipping was arriving, which naturally made it a place of

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[243] Henretta, *'Salutary Neglect'*, 215.
[244] TNA, ADM 1/3931, Extract of a letter from Paris dated 12 March 1708 N.S.
[245] TNA, ADM 1/3931, Cadiz 1/11 March 1708.

knowledge exchange and the recipient of news and intelligence before Paris, depending on how smooth the voyage was. This illustrates how the British government's net functioned, as contacts in multiple cities mitigated dark spots and gaps in intelligence gathering and helped steadily build more complete visions of enemy movements.

The British government continued to track du Casse's movements through the following months. In duplicated letters from May 1708 to Admiralty Secretary Josiah Burchett and Secretary to the Board of Trade William Popple, Surveyor of the Navy Edmund Dummer recounted that the unnamed 'Captain [of the *Frankland*] wrote from Ireland [near Kinsale, between 16 and 21 May] of his discovering eleven ships of war in latitude 35 which he supposes to be French commanded by du Casse', as well as being 'informed from my correspondent at Jamaica dated 30 March last, that the galleons will stay at Portobello four months in expectation of a convoy'.[246] This shows once again the power of local informants such as the captain of the *Frankland*, as well as the importance of the packet service, which Dummer is credited with inventing, as the service which would form the foundation of future imperial mail communication systems.[247] This illustrates the usefulness of merchant ships and their crews as sources of intelligence, in a similar fashion to the intelligence gathered from George Gilbert, discussed above. Whilst they were clearly often chance meetings with enemy ships which were reported to the government in London, they highlight the mobility of seafarers and their ability to observe enemy shipping movements without arousing suspicion. Observations by seafaring individuals naturally were not without their limitations and obstructed viewpoints, and whilst they may have often kept their distance from potentially hostile warships, they would frequently have been able at least to identify a fleet's nationality and approximate size.

Dummer's system experienced heavy losses during the War of Spanish Succession, and he was left bankrupt as a result. However, it shows the developing communications infrastructure on which the empire increasingly came to depend, as well as the British state's focus on remaining informed of enemy shipping movements. Dummer's letters to Burchett and Popple also indicated that 'the *flota* from Vera Cruz are arrived at the Havana and [are] almost ready to sail

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[246] TNA, ADM 1/3931, Dummer to Burchett, 26 May 1708; CSP, Vol. 23, 1706-1708, 1501: Mr Dummer to Mr Popple. May 26 [1708].
[247] C. Fox, 'The Ingenious Mr Dummer: Rationalising the Royal Navy in Late Seventeenth-Century England', *Electronic British Library Journal*, 2007, 10 (2007), 1-58, 57; P. MacDougall, *Dummer, Edmund (bap. 1651, d. 1713), Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2008), 2023. Available online: https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-60947?rskey=CBbpL5&result=1 [Accessed 07/10/2023].

for Europe under convoy of Mr du Casse.'[248] Once more, the focus returned to du Casse and the *flota*, whilst also demonstrating further challenges in the system of intelligence gathering during the eighteenth century.

Dummer appeared to leave the interpretation of intelligence he had gathered to the Board of Trade and the Admiralty, having apparently received conflicting reports of du Casse's position in the Atlantic. A later report received from Brest in June 1708 suggested that Vice Admiral René Duguay-Trouin had arrived in the port, fitting out a fleet of seven ships to meet du Casse on his return.[249] Conversely, a report from the end of the same month claimed to have received correspondence from du Casse complaining of heavy losses and many sick aboard his fleet, asking for 'provisions and assistance' to help him 'convoy the galleons to Cadiz' as the 'most he can do'.[250] This failed to reveal du Casse's actual position any further and was not known until a month later, although it did provide vital clues to du Casse's intentions or capacity to fulfil them. Handasyd informed the Board of Trade that 'I cannot learn from any hand whether he is yet sailed with the *flota* and other ships', only able to predict that it would not be much longer, whilst also predicting that the 'Spanish ships at Cartagena' were unlikely 'to join Monsieur du Casse or stir from thence [until they received] further orders from Old Spain' after significant Spanish losses.[251] The British state was focused on the threat posed by Admiral du Casse and his squadron, and interest in the *flota* as a target stemmed from du Casse's association as its escort. It suggests that the British government remained hopeful that du Casse would escort the *flota*, as his attachment to the treasure fleet would reduce the risk of a roaming fleet threatening British trade and colonial possessions.

In August, Governor Handasyd wrote a letter to the Board of Trade, having been 'informed that [Monsieur] du Casse sailed from the Havana [on] July 4 or 5, with the *flota* and merchant ships richly laden under convoy of 9 men of war, which are but indifferently manned, consisting in all of 50 sail'.[252] Where the governor had managed to acquire this information is unclear, but Handasyd appeared to be confident of the accuracy as to the make-up of du Casse's convoy. Details of the fleet were possibly gathered by Wager, having observed the *flota*'s preparations in Havana as a direct consequence of the delays and weakened condition of du Casse's ships. However, it could also have been from a civilian informant based in

[248] TNA, ADM 1/3931, Dummer to Burchett, 26 May 1708.
[249] TNA, ADM 1/3932, Brest 17 June 1708.
[250] TNA, ADM 1/3932, Brest 29 June 1708.
[251] CSP, 24, 56: Handasyd to the Council of Trade. July 20 [1708].
[252] CSP, Vol. 24, 1708-1709, 68: Governor Handasyd to the Council of Trade and Plantations. Aug 2 [1708].

Havana. Handasyd expressed his hopes that the fleet would be intercepted before it reached its destination, although he seemed unable to confirm where the *flota* was to be escorted.[253]

In early August, Joseph Addison, Under-Secretary to Sunderland, forwarded an extract of a letter to Burchett 'in my Lord Sunderland's absence' from Charles Chaplin, who was likely a merchant or commercial agent based in Jamaica. Chaplin had written a letter to Edward Brown who was, according to the letter sent from Addison to Burchett, a London-based merchant, dated June 1708.[254] According to Chaplin, '[b]y the last account that we had from the Havana, the new Spain fleet were arrived there, and it is thought Mr du Casse is by this time gone with them under his convoy for Europe'.[255] Once again, the specifics of du Casse's convoy, as well as dates of departure had been disregarded, and the broader news was the main concern deemed worth sending on to London. Perhaps the primary motive for these two men of commerce was assessing how much of a risk du Casse posed to their shipping. At its heart, it was a commercial judgement, but was based on information which was of interest to the state, which Brown seems to have realised as he passed the contents of Chaplin's letter to Addison. This echoes the role that Lloyd's Coffee House played by mid-century (discussed in Chapter 1), as commercial information could also have a strategic application. Chaplin also pointed out that the 'said fleet is very rich, and by the most moderate computation not worth less than eighty million pieces of eight', and that 'Mr du Casse has had a great sickness and mortality in his squadron, and consequently goes home very weak'.[256] Chaplin appears to have been well informed, with information potentially gathered from frequenting taverns and alehouses found along the waterfront. This example supports Goodall's conclusion that waterfront drinking houses and taverns were places of knowledge exchange, where all kinds of maritime, mercantile, and commercial intelligence was exchanged over drink by people from many backgrounds.[257] It is also possible that Chaplin had informants in Havana, given his reference to 'the last account' he had received from the city, implying the existence of merchant networks which fed into this system. Chaplin's motivations for informing Brown and the onward passage of this intelligence were therefore based on Chaplin's assessment that 'if it pleases God [that]

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[253] *Ibid*.
[254] TNA, ADM 1/3932, Addison to Burchett, 10 August 1708; TNA, ADM 1/3932, Extract of a letter from Charles Chaplin Esq dated at Jamaica 17 June 1708 to Mr Edward Brown of London, Merchant.
[255] TNA, ADM 1/3932, Chaplin to Brown, Jamaica 17 June 1708.
[256] *Ibid.*
[257] J. L. H. Goodall, 'Tippling houses, rum shops and taverns: how alcohol fuelled informal commercial networks and knowledge exchange in the West Indies', *Journal for Maritime Research*, 18, 2 (2016), 97-121, 98, 99, 109.

any squadron of ours [should] meet with them, it is to be hoped they may be taken with a great deal of ease.'[258]

The final intelligence received by the British regarding du Casse's voyage demonstrates the clearest intention against du Casse and the *flota*. Thomas Hopkins, Under-Secretary to Henry Boyle, who was the Secretary of State for the Northern Department, forwarded intelligence of du Casse's arrival off the coast of France in August 1708 to Burchett at the Admiralty. Writing on behalf of Boyle, Hopkins was

> direct[ed] to acquaint [Burchett] that […] Her Majesty desires the Prince [George, Lord High Admiral] will consider of the advice of Mr du Casse's being arrived […] and His Royal Highness will be pleased to let Her Majesty have his opinion what is proper to be done in such a conjecture and whether any attempt can be made upon [them] with probability of success.[259]

Intentions were clear, as the government now deemed du Casse to be in close enough proximity to consider dispatching an intercepting British naval fleet with a higher chance of success. As discussed earlier in the chapter, sending fleets into open waters to hunt for enemy shipping was inefficient, and the British preferred to send vessels to coastal areas or commonly used routes, much like hunting privateers. This request for Admiralty advice from the Cabinet shows the process of receiving, processing, and using intelligence in action during this period, illustrating the departmentalisation of the system for administering naval affairs as argued by Wilkinson.[260] It is not clear where Boyle and Hopkins had received the intelligence from, but it probably originated from an informant in the port where du Casse arrived from the Americas, or at least from a ship which had seen him and his squadron. In fact, a letter from Paris in early September suggests the synthesis of multiple sources of intelligence to firmly establish du Casse's whereabouts. In the letter, '[it is] confirmed from Bayonne by letters of last month that Mr du Casse is arrived at [name missing] du passage with his squadron from New Spain [and has] brought with him 8 Spanish ships of the [*flota*]'.[261] Clearly, the government had received reports during the previous weeks and had confirmed du Casse's whereabouts by combining reports from multiple sources. However, there are once again clear limitations of the system, as the author of the above letter was unable to confirm the value of the *flota*'s cargo. The author entertained rumour and hearsay, as he recounted that '[s]ome say that all these ships have 20 million […] pieces of eight on board, besides the goods [which they] will unlade where

[258] TNA, ADM 1/3932, Chaplin to Brown, Jamaica 17 June 1708.
[259] TNA, ADM 1/3932, Hopkins to Burchett, 31 August 1708.
[260] Wilkinson, *British Navy and the State*, 19, 20, 21, 27, 30
[261] TNA, ADM 1/3932, Paris 7 September 1708.

they are as soon as the [King] of Spain has regulated the Indulto [duty put on the import of enslaved people].'[262]

Clearly, the availability, reliability, and perceived usability of intelligence increased as the sources they were taken from were located closer to the centres of trade and exchange and seats of government, although consistency was not guaranteed. Being in centres of exchange increased the sheer volume of available information, and proximity to government meant that individuals flocked in the hopes that good quality intelligence could garner them with reward. In the case of du Casse during the nearly three-year voyage to meet and escort the *flota* from Spanish America to Europe between autumn 1705 and summer 1708, it proved that British efforts to utilise intelligence to track the Admiral and intercept him and the convoy if necessary were dedicated and organised. However, the limitations of intelligence gathering and how it could be passed between those most well-placed to use it stunted their results. Contrary to the letter from 7 September, correspondence arrived in Paris ten days later, confirming that du Casse had arrived in Brest with the eight ships he had escorted from the West Indies.[263] The limitations of communications and technology available made a British naval response to intelligence of the impending arrival of the treasure fleet difficult to organise in time. Whilst correspondence demonstrates that it was the British state's intention to dispatch a fleet and allocate resources to attempt to intercept the convoy and its weakened escort, it was not a given of British strategic planning and allocation during the War of Spanish Succession to make it a reality. It was clearly an objective for the Royal Navy and a focus of the British state, especially evident in the sustained surveillance of du Casse and the *flota* on both sides of the Atlantic, although it proved beyond the capabilities of the state's resources at the time. It shows the formation of systems which grew in sophistication over the century, based on solid and consistent gathering of intelligence from multiple sources which was constrained by the limitations of technology and logistics. Intelligence could only move across water at the speed of the fastest ship and went nowhere if the wind was unfavourable.

A letter Handasyd sent to the Board of Trade in May 1709 illustrates the importance of broad strokes and action in the face of uncertainty about accuracy in intelligence gathering. The letter reported that a sloop captured by HMS *Roebuck* between Cuba and Cartagena had correspondence aboard 'that give advice of a French squadron being arrived, or was every day expected at Cartagena and directions were therein sent to prepare their effects to ship on

[262] *Ibid*.
[263] TNA, ADM 1/3932, Extract of a letter from Paris of the 17 September N.S. 1708.

board them'.[264] However, Handasyd added that 'the truth of it, I must confess I much question, the Spaniards and French giving out false reports.'[265] The governor illuminates a key challenge of intelligence gathering, as it was always a possibility that material obtained from enemy vessels could in fact be counter intelligence designed to mislead and misdirect. Handasyd clearly felt compelled to inform the Board of these findings, however he was careful to consider the possibility that such intelligence was designed to reduce British chances of intercepting enemy ships and distract them from what movements were happening in truth. Naturally, this was a way for the French and Spanish to gain an advantage, misinforming their opponents and sending them on incorrect leads. At the very least, they sowed doubt and uncertainty that such leads could be trusted at all, as demonstrated by Handasyd's own questions towards the validity of intelligence that a French fleet had arrived at Cartagena.

The tracking of Admiral du Casse illustrates and emphasises the network of intelligence gathering and transfer which Governor Thomas Handasyd had cultivated. Using his long-term cooperation with officers of the Royal Navy like Charles Wager, as well as civilian informants such as John Bernard, the governor sought to build as complete a picture of du Casse's intentions as possible. Blending the efforts of various local informants and Wager's squadron, who doubled as the executors of operations influenced by such intelligence, British representatives tracked du Casse from Cartagena to Havana and disrupted his objective of assembling and escorting the *flota*. Handasyd sat at the centre of an intelligence gathering network that traversed the Caribbean.

[264] TNA, CO 137/8 (f. 235-6), Handasyd to Board of Trade, 25 May 1709.
[265] *Ibid*.

Conclusions

Monitoring enemy shipping was a core focus of the British state and the Royal Navy during the War of Spanish Succession, both for the opportunities it presented to disrupt enemy trade, as well as its usefulness in intercepting threats to British colonies and trade. British objectives were focused on the economic opportunities the Americas presented to the rival European nations seeking to forge empires in the region. British intelligence during the War of Spanish Succession was gathered through systems which appeared to have been well-established before the outbreak of war itself. The government in London was already gathering information concerning enemy fleet preparations from across Europe prior to the outbreak of war, and officers on station procured local intelligence, often in tandem with cooperation from colonial government. The importance of the foreign advice system was clear, acting as a steady stream of intelligence gathered in Europe regarding enemy movements that influenced operations and strategy in the Americas, but it was locally gathered intelligence which proved most vital. Timely intelligence put into action by those on station increased the chances of accuracy and successful interception of enemy fleets and commerce raiders. The importance of intelligence to naval operations was well recognised, but the systems through which intelligence was gathered had limits. Technology limited the speed with which officers could use intelligence on station, and the disjointed nature of correspondence meant that letters were often not collated to actively inform officers of developments received in London. These difficulties pushed the government to act defensively, which meant greater focus on the provision of resources to prevent further losses to British interests in future, as an after-effect of attacks by enemy forces. By comparison, officers of the Royal Navy took a more aggressive approach in the use of intelligence, frequently gathering intelligence on station which had a greater usability and probability of leading to direct contact with enemy shipping. As the examples used above demonstrate, these representatives of the state had greater chances of successfully intercepting their targets when using locally gathered intelligence. However, technology once again limited the successes of these operations, demonstrating that efficiency and effectiveness in theory did not always translate into practice. The next chapter discusses the use of intelligence in the defence of Britain's empire from threats to the status quo as British authorities sought to suppress Atlantic piracy.

Chapter 3 "That coast is infested by Pirates, to the great prejudice of the trade": Atlantic Piracy, its Suppression and British Imperial Intelligence

As important as intelligence was in times of war, this chapter shows that its function in peace time was also vital. Piracy was regarded across the world's oceans as a crime of 'Heinousness or Wickedness' which needed 'no Aggravation, it being evident to the Reason of all Men'.[266] For this reason, pirates hunted, convicted and executed by British government were labelled *hostis humani generis*, or 'enemies of all mankind', 'with whom neither Faith nor Oath is to be kept', and for whom the punishment was death, often even without trial.[267] In the 1718 trial of Stede Bonnet and his accomplices, piracy was labelled as 'the worst sort of Robbery, both in its Nature and its Effects, since it disturbs the Commerce and Friendship betwixt different Nations, and if left unpunished, involves them in War and Blood.'[268] Colonial governors, such as Robert Johnson of South Carolina, feared piracy as the potential architect of ruin for the Atlantic economy if left unchecked. This made pirates the targets of both the Royal Navy, and privately funded expeditions led by colonial officials in the Americas attempting to suppress them. The duty of officers of the Royal Navy was to pursue and capture any pirates that refused to comply with the recent offers of pardon.[269] The Royal Navy was responsible for some of the most famous examples of successful pirate hunting, which was directly influenced by the gathering and use of intelligence. Intelligence fuelled the Royal Navy as plans changed dynamically dependent on the intelligence gathered. At its core, the Royal Navy's intelligence gathering relied upon knowledge of high-traffic areas of trade that pirates preyed on, augmented by locally gathered specific intelligence which prompted action by naval officers seeking to intercept them.

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[266] B. J. Cowse, *The Tryals of Stede Bonnet, and other Pirates* (London: Rose and Crown, 1719), 3.
[267] Cowse, *Tryals of Stede Bonnet*, 3; M. Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World 1700-1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); M. Rediker, '"Under the Banner of King Death": The Social World of Anglo-American Pirates, 1716 to 1726', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 38, 2 (1981), 203-227; Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy*.
[268] Cowse, *Tryals of Stede* Bonnet, 10.
[269] TNA, CO 5/1265 (ff. 245-247), Robert Johnson to Board of Trade, 18 June 1718; Wilson, *Suppressing* Piracy, 3; George I, '1717, September 5. [For Suppressing Pirates in West Indies]', in C. S. Brigham (ed.), *British proclamations relating to America, 1603-1783* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1911), 176-177; George I, '1718, December 21. [For Suppressing Pirates in West Indies]', in C. S. Brigham (ed.), *British royal proclamations relating to America, 1603-1783* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1911), 178-180.

Atlantic piracy has previously been viewed as easily suppressed by swift, consistent, and effective naval operations, as the apparent disorganisation and status of pirates as dispersed raiders on maritime trade made them easy to suppress and eliminate. However, this has been challenged since and the obstacles of such campaigns have been highlighted by multiple scholars.[270] These campaigns were triggered by fears that pirates would form an ever-larger threat if they were able to gather and form a 'commonwealth' if left unchecked.[271] Officers of the Royal Navy were reliant on intelligence to hunt for pirates in the Atlantic, but the dispersal of pirates across an ocean made them harder to track. Historians have tended to overlook the role of intelligence in pirate hunting, illustrated by recent works examining the Navy's hunt for Blackbeard in 1719. Wilson argues that the treatment of examples such as Blackbeard and Stede Bonnet give little consideration to how anti-piracy operations were organised, instead being viewed as a 'turning point in a unified imperial project to curtail piracy in the British Atlantic'.[272] This chapter agrees with this and seeks to expand on this approach, as intelligence gathering is an essential part of operational organisation and planning. Whilst Wilson detailed the Navy's information gathering to track Blackbeard to Ocracoke Island, this chapter explicitly highlights the importance of that intelligence to the resulting capture and death of a pirate who had terrorised the coast of North America.[273] Wilson highlighted this connection more so than Goodall, whose narrative overlooked the place of intelligence and its role in decision-making during these operations.[274] The defeat of Blackbeard is one of the clearest examples of the use of intelligence in direct support of operations by the Royal Navy against Atlantic piracy, brought back into focus in this chapter.

This chapter argues that intelligence gathering was integral to the campaign to suppress piracy during the eighteenth century, and intelligence gathering mattered in peace as well as in war time. Elusive and mobile raiders spread out across the Atlantic, threatening British trade and pushing officers of the Royal Navy to gather intelligence as a matter of priority. Combining a mixture of general knowledge of pirates' movements and probable haunts, local intelligence gathered at such points, and good fortune, naval officers were able to combat the natural

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[270] Rediker, *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 257, 259, 281, 285; Bialuschewski, 'Between Newfoundland and the Malacca Strait', 175; P. Earle, *The Pirate Wars* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2006), 184-5; M. G. Hanna, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570-1740* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 371-2; C. Land, 'Flying the black flag: Revolt, revolution and the social organization of piracy in the 'golden age'', *Management & Organizational History*, 2, 2 (2007), 169-192, 184; Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy*, 3, 68, 168, 216-7.
[271] Rediker, *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 281, 285.
[272] Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy*, 114.
[273] *Ibid*., 132-3.
[274] Goodall, *Pirates of the Chesapeake Bay*, 60-65.

advantages pirates had over their attempts to suppress them. The chapter develops the literature on piracy by recentring the discussion on how the Royal Navy knew where to find and intercept pirate vessels, in addition to highlighting the centrality of intelligence gathering to naval operations. It explores the role of intelligence gathering as an adaptive and evolving necessity by assessing the Navy's actions against piracy on the eastern coast of North America, in the Caribbean and on the West African coast.

Piracy, Fears for British Trade, and the Development of Naval Intelligence

Robert Johnson, Governor of South Carolina, had not been in post for long when Edward Teach (sometimes Thach), better known as 'Blackbeard', was raiding along the coast of North America and in the Caribbean in May 1718. Threats to colonial trade along the Carolina coast were consistent concerns for Johnson. The 'unspeakable calamity' of piracy which threatened 'this poor province' pushed Johnson to 'inform your lordships [at the Board of Trade] of it in order that his Majesty may know it and be induced to afford us the assistance of a frigate or two to cruise hereabouts' as the residents were 'continually alarmed and our ships taken to the utter ruin of our trade'.[275] Although Johnson had only arrived in South Carolina approximately nine months before Blackbeard's blockade, the province had fallen prey to the pirates in two separate attacks since his arrival.[276] Johnson reported that losses were heavy, as the pirates had 'lain off our bar taking and plundering all ships that either go out or come in to this port'.[277] He calculated that the losses from the previous two weeks included the town's pilot boat and eight or nine other vessels, alongside 'several of the best inhabitants of this place'.[278] Johnson's cries for help were part of larger calls for naval resource allocation, spearheaded by merchants fearing damage to their trade, and marked a move towards larger state involvement in the suppression of Atlantic piracy.[279] Before 1719, attempts to limit piracy and capture those responsible were privately organised and funded in South Carolina. In Wilson's analysis, this was due to Britain's reluctance to allocate dedicated naval resources to a privately-owned colony.[280] It was through the governor's report and later appeals by assembled merchants of Charles Town, which made London take notice of the wider damage to trade in the British Atlantic, including the allocation of naval vessels to cruise in protection of trade.[281] In line with the greater dedication of naval vessels to the cause, naval intelligence gathering grew in importance and adapted to aid in the suppression of Atlantic piracy.

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[275] TNA, CO 5/1265, Johnson to BOT, June 18, 1718.
[276] Goodall, *Pirates of the Chesapeake Bay*, 60-1.
[277] TNA, CO 5/1265, Johnson to BOT, June 18, 1718.
[278] *Ibid*.
[279] TNA, ADM 3/31, Admiralty: Minutes. Board's Minutes, Friday 6 February 1719; Grainger, *British Navy in the Caribbean*, 118-9; Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy*, 130-1; TNA, CO 5/292 (ff. 57), Minutes of Council, Lords Proprietors: 19 December 1718.
[280] Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy*, 130-1.
[281] TNA, ADM 3/31, Minutes: Friday 6 February 1719; TNA, ADM 3/31, Admiralty: Minutes. Board's Minutes, Thursday 12 February 1719; J. J. Navin, *The Grim Years: Settling South Carolina, 1670-1720* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2020), 140.

King Charles II granted proprietary rights, to the land of the Province of Carolina in 1663 to eight men, in recognition of their support for his restoration. This allowed them to administer the province with powers normally granted to the monarch, and profit from the trade built in the region. These men were: Edward Hyde, first Earl of Clarendon; George Monck, first Duke of Albermale; William Craven, first Earl of Craven; John Berkeley, first Baron Berkeley of Stratton; Anthony Ashley-Cooper, first Earl of Shaftesbury; Sir George Carteret; Sir William Berkeley; and Sir John Colleton.[282] As the colony developed, proprietary rights were beneficial to the Crown as the expense of its upkeep was paid by the individuals and the risks of colonisation (such as attacks from indigenous populations, rival forces and development problems) were held with them.[283] In December 1719, settlers of South Carolina rejected proprietary rule, removing Robert Johnson as governor and replacing him with James Moore Jr. as a provisional governor until the king appointed a royal governor the following year.[284] However, it was not until 1729 that the Province of Carolina, which had split into two separate colonies in 1712, was sold by the majority of the proprietors to the Crown and became royal colonies.[285] Originally, piracy had helped fund the colony of South Carolina as it developed, as the locals traded with them and the authorities turned a blind eye in favour of the recouping of the proprietors' investments.[286] However, piracy soon became a hindrance rather than a benefit, as pirates began to prey on the colony and its inhabitants as the rice trade in particular grew in size and value.[287]

The British government had already issued two periods of amnesty pardoning anyone practising piracy if they turned themselves in, firstly in September 1717 (with a deadline of 5 September 1718), and again in July 1718 (with a deadline of 1 July 1719).[288] In the days following their first announcement, the *London Gazette* published the calls for amnesty, which were widely distributed. However, Johnson was adamant that it had been a pointless measure, saying that he did not 'perceive [that] His Majesty's gracious proclamation of pardon works any good effect upon them'.[289] The governor complained that while many took advantage of

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[282] Lords Proprietors of Carolina, *A Declaration and Proposals of the Lord Proprietor of Carolina, Aug. 25-Sept. 4, 1663, The Avalon Project*, 2008. Available online: https://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/nc02.asp [Accessed 07/12/2023]; Navin, *The Grim Years*, 48.
[283] Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 150; P. C. Hoffer, *The Brave New World: A History of Early America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), 323; Navin, *The Grim Years*, 47.
[284] Navin, *The Grim Years*, 141.
[285] Hoffer, *Brave New World*, 323; Navin, *The Grim Years*, 141.
[286] Navin, *The Grim Years*, 88; Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 150.
[287] Navin, *The Grim Years*, 88, 139.
[288] George I, '1717, September 5', in Brigham (ed.), *British proclamations*, 176-177; George I, '1718, December 21', in Brigham (ed.), *British proclamations*, 178-180.
[289] TNA, CO 5/1265, Johnson to BOT, June 18, 1718.

the offer of amnesty, many others refused, and several who had taken the pardon were believed to have returned to piracy shortly after, including Blackbeard.[290] Johnson acknowledged that there had been a naval vessel at New Providence, the largest island in the Bahamas, stationed for the general defence of the east coast of the American colonies, although this was a massive task for one ship to accomplish alone. Johnson mistook this vessel as a dedicated cruising man of war, when in fact it was a ship carrying the news of the pardon out to New Providence, where the greatest concentration of pirates was located. He was referring to Captain Vincent Pearse, who had sailed from New York in HMS *Phoenix* in February 1718 to give notice of the general pardon to the pirates at New Providence, arriving in late February and setting about making lists of pirates who had agreed to take the pardon and those who had rejected it.[291] After compiling the list and losing three of his own men who joined the pirates, Pearse sailed back to New York via Virginia, arriving in New York in late May 1718. After leaving New Providence, Pearse encountered a French ship called the *John and Elizabeth* which had been taken by pirates in October 1717 and had since been used for raiding, being filled with goods taken from the Dutch.[292] Pearse took his duty as a naval officer seriously, intercepting pirate vessels which continued raiding in violation of the terms of the pardon.[293] This demonstrates the point Johnson made that the Navy was outnumbered, as Pearse had been tasked with ranging between New York and New Providence as both messenger and pirate hunter, delivering the pardon to the pirates in the Bahamas before returning to his station in New York soon after. While he did intercept those violating the pardon's terms, Pearse's priority had not been to enforce its contents, delivering it to New Providence and implementing its terms if the opportunity presented itself in line with Pearse's capabilities. His actions as a hunter on the coast were therefore the precursor of what was to come as efforts to suppress piracy from the state grew, although his efforts were not evidence of a dedicated anti-piracy presence by the Navy in the region.

Johnson appealed that he had been 'credibly informed' that more ships had been 'fitted out a pirating', believing there to be twenty now raiding in the region.[294] Johnson said that 'unless ships be sent to cruise upon them, […] all the trade of these American parts will be stopped, for hardly a ship goes to sea but falls into their hands.'[295] The governor viewed piracy as a

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[290] *Ibid*.
[291] TNA, ADM 1/2282, Vincent Pearse to Admiralty, 3 June 1718.
[292] *Ibid*.
[293] George I, '1717, September 5', in Brigham (ed.), *British proclamations*, 176-177; George I, '1718, December 21', in Brigham (ed.), *British proclamations*, 178-180.
[294] TNA, CO 5/1265, Johnson to BOT, June 18, 1718.
[295] *Ibid*.

growing threat to trade in the Americas, fearing that increasing numbers of pirates in the region would damage trade. Not long after Captain Pearse delivered notice of the pardon, pirates began to disperse from New Providence as Woodes Rogers arrived and took over as governor in July 1718. Pirates who refused to accept the terms of the pardon, such as Edward England, fled in search of new commerce raiding targets around the Atlantic. England was Captain of the pirate crew which captured James Macrae and the East India Company ship the *Cassandra* and is discussed in detail later. Johnson experienced the fallout of the dispersal, as Woodes Rogers' crackdown pushed pirates like Blackbeard to roam in search of new prey.[296] Rogers instigated an ultimatum whereby the pirates settled in the Bahamas could follow the terms of the amnesty or be destroyed, with many choosing to flee in search of new targets away from such authority. Rediker suggests that the dispersal scattered pirates across the Atlantic extending to 'unpeopled inlets of the Carolinas', Africa, and the 'small, unsettled cays and shallow waters' of the Caribbean which were difficult for naval vessels to navigate, establishing bases 'near major trade routes [and] as distant as possible from the powers of the state.'[297] Naval officers therefore had to adapt their general knowledge of piracy hotspots to guide their interception of vessels and crews.

It appears that Johnson's requests paid off in the longer term. Josiah Burchett, Secretary of the Admiralty, wrote to William Popple, Secretary to the Board of Trade, detailing the Lords of the Admiralty's intention to 'send a frigate thither as soon as possible.'[298] This, as well as further appeals made by the merchants of South Carolina in the months immediately before, demonstrate the reversibility of the government's reluctance to provide naval support to a private colony. Merchants' petitions were read at a meeting of the Admiralty Board in February 1719, where the merchants of London and 'others trading to Carolina' stressed that the 'coast is infested by Pirates, to the great prejudice of the trade', in the hope that a naval vessel would be sent rapidly to guard the waters around the Carolinas.[299] It was resolved the following week at a meeting of the Board that the colony would be provided with a sixth rate.[300]

Other attempts to curb Atlantic piracy were frequently privately funded and organised, which were designed as compensations for the lack of dedicated naval protection for colonies

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[296] Rediker, *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 257.
[297] Rediker, *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 257; Rediker, '"Under the Banner of King Death"', 205.
[298] TNA, CO 5/1265, Burchett to Popple, 20 April 1719.
[299] TNA, ADM 3/31, Minutes: 6 February 1719.
[300] TNA, ADM 3/31, Minutes: 6 February 1719; TNA, ADM 3/31, Minutes: 12 February 1719.

deemed to be privately managed. Before its receipt of dedicated naval protection, South Carolina was such a colony. Wilson argues that pressure by London mercantile interests rather than colonial governments prompted increased naval support, and petitions from these merchants in 1719 resulted in South Carolina being the only proprietary colony to have a permanently stationed naval vessel allocated to its defence.[301]

In another letter to the Board of Trade from October 1718, Johnson recounted attacks by the pirate Charles Vane. As the threats and expectations of attacks grew, applications were made to the governor 'to fit out a force to go and attack them'.[302] Despite challenges brought about by 'want of men and money', two sloops were hired and placed under the command of Captain Masters and Captain Hall (not naval officers) respectively, with approximately 130 men dispatched between them.[303] The expedition was placed under Colonel William Rhett's leadership, a colonel in the South Carolinian militia. They went in pursuit of Vane, sailing south from the Carolinas, although they were '[un]able to meet with, or gain intelligence of him', pushing Rhett to steer north and away from Carolina for Cape Fear River, where he found Major Stede Bonnet and two prizes he had taken whilst raiding in the waters around New England.[304] Rhett and his sloops may have attempted to gather intelligence by ranging along the east coast in search of local informants but were unsuccessful, and the altered course for Cape Fear perhaps stemmed from general knowledge of popular haunts and regions of calm for pirates to rest and refit. The interception of Bonnet in the Cape Fear River was coincidental but helped to offset the failure to find Charles Vane. Bonnet's case is an exemplar of how pirates' operations were predictable enough that educated guesses based on general knowledge of their behaviours could sometimes prove adequate in locating them.

After a long fight, Bonnet's vessels surrendered and were taken back to South Carolina for trial. Johnson highlighted the 'considerable expense' that had been incurred from the expedition but considered it necessary to 'very much irritate the pirates who infest this coast in great numbers'.[305] Rhett's chance encounter with Bonnet further illustrates the application of intelligence gathering to suppressing piracy. It was successful by chance as the original target was lost entirely, and Rhett could easily have returned to his superiors empty-handed, but knowledge of patterns and rest areas led to the capture of another pirate. However, this

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[301] Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy*, 130-1.
[302] TNA, CO 5/1265, Council of South Carolina to Board of Trade, October 21, 1718.
[303] *Ibid*.
[304] *Ibid*.
[305] *Ibid*.

was not enough in many cases, as the following examples illustrate. Naval officers' methods of intelligence gathering adapted later in the decade, as they built upon background knowledge with locally sourced intelligence, demonstrating a deeper understanding of intelligence's role in suppressing piracy. Johnson stressed the importance of anti-piracy expeditions and appeared to illustrate that private attempts to organise and dispatch them were beneficial, but not enough of a disruption and deterrent. As a result, he ended his letter to the Board of Trade with concern about 'the great danger our trade and colony are in from them', and stressed the belief that '[i]n procuring a [naval] vessel it will be of the greatest service to the trade not only of this colony, but all these parts'.[306] The perception of naval power as a deterrent for piracy was supported in Johnson's letter by the confidence that such dedicated resources would benefit trade along the coast.

Naval officers were also reliant on chance in their pursuits of pirates, using general knowledge of trade routes and choke points for intercepting pirates based on the probability of sightings.[307] By concentrating on these areas, more would be achieved than by cruising around the open ocean, as officers might be fortunate enough to encounter a pirate directly, or be able to pick up intelligence from passing ships. Background knowledge may have helped point the naval officer to an area suspected of piratical activity, but locating pirates once there also required specific intelligence to capitalise on it most effectively.

[306] TNA, CO 5/1265, South Carolina to BOT, October 21, 1718.
[307] Bialuschewski, 'Between Newfoundland and the Malacca Strait', 175.

Captain Ellis Brand and the Hunt for Blackbeard

Officers of the Royal Navy used local informants to track and intercept pirates, demonstrated by Captain Ellis Brand's pursuit and interception of Blackbeard and his crew, reported to the Admiralty in a letter from February 1719.[308] Pressures on Virginian trade prompted the lieutenant governor Alexander Spotswood to push for support against pirates raiding along the coast. Brand, commanding the 40-gun ship HMS *Pearl*, and Captain George Gordon, commanding the 24-gun HMS *Lyme*, had orders from the Admiralty to 'correspond and act in concert against the pirates' on Virginia's coast.[309] Summoned to a meeting with Spotswood in October 1718, the captains agreed to support the governor's operation. Spotswood outlined his concerns to Brand and Gordon, which

> occasioned my forming a Design in concert [with] the [Captains] of his [Majesty's] Ships on this Station to prevent a danger [which] so nearly [threatened] the Trade of this Colony. To the Execution whereof I furnished at my own Charge two Sloops, Pilots, and the two Captains, Men from the Ships under their Command, it being impracticable for larger [Vessels] than Sloops to go into the [Inlets] of that Country.[310]

33 men from the *Pearl* and 24 from the *Lyme* were provided by the two captains and placed under the overall command of Captain Brand and Lieutenant Robert Maynard.[311] They were distributed between Spotswood's hired sloops to navigate shallower waters and set sail on Monday 17 November 1718. Spotswood and Johnson were operating with the same goal as they sought out the same pirate. Whilst Johnson and the government of South Carolina had taken the appeal approach, calling for support from London, Spotswood instead opted for the more common approach as posited by Wilson: proactive, privately-organised dispatch of ships by colonial government to root out and bring pirates to justice, which was in this case conducted in partnership with naval officers Brand and Gordon.[312] The Carolinian and Virginian approaches against Blackbeard were conducted separately and independently of each other, and took very different tacks. While both responded to the threat posed by Blackbeard, they

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[308] TNA, ADM 1/1472, Brand to Burchett, February 6, 1718/19.
[309] TNA, ADM 8/14, The present Disposal of all His Majesties Ships and Vessels in Sea Pay, issued by the Admiralty Office, 1 May 1718, as quoted in D. Cordingly, *Spanish Gold: Captain Woodes Rogers and the True Story of the Pirates of the Caribbean* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 210-11
[310] A. Spotswood, 'Oct. ye 22nd, 1718', in R. A. Brock (ed.), *The official letters of Alexander Spotswood, Lieutenant-Governor of the colony of Virginia, 1710-1722, now first printed from the manuscript in the collections of the Virginia Historical Society* (Richmond, VA: Virginia Historical Society, 1882), 305-306.
[311] Cordingly, *Spanish Gold*, 210-11.
[312] Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy*, 3, 134-5.

did so without collaborating, further disputing the notion that state anti-piracy campaigns were coordinated.

Merchants in Virginia had called for better protection of the trade in the region and pushed the lieutenant governor to take the matter into his own hands. As the quote above suggests, Spotswood's concerns centred on his own jurisdiction of Virginia, and not further into the neighbouring Carolinas. Brand was flexible in his mission, as the mobility of his quarry demanded freedom of movement for a pursuit. Whilst Spotswood did not limit how far his hired vessels could range in search of Blackbeard, he did not appear to consider how far Thach had travelled after raiding near Virginia. Brand's gathered information directed him beyond Spotswood's jurisdiction and into Carolinian waters, which led to Blackbeard's death. Brand's knowledge of the pirate's movements, coupled with the intelligence he had gathered himself, allowed him to act with autonomy beyond Spotswood's limited focus on the consequences of Blackbeard's activities to Virginian trade. No doubt Spotswood envisioned that Brand would be deployed specifically to the waters around Virginia, but Blackbeard's capture would not have been possible had this limitation been enforced. Inadvertently and accidentally, Brand managed to achieve both Spotswood's and Johnson's objective of suppressing Blackbeard with a direct use of intelligence, but not in collaboration between the colonies.

Like many historians' works on piracy and its suppression, Cordingly's account of the hunt for Blackbeard does not elaborate on how colonial government and naval officers knew where to find the pirate.[313] By focusing attention on the demand for intelligence in naval operations against Atlantic piracy, greater consideration is paid as to how the Navy accomplished its goals in relation to the challenges of communications and technology of the period.

Captain Brand began recruiting local informants in the waters off the east coast among seafarers who had reliable knowledge from recent sightings of Blackbeard. It speaks to the trust granted to officers on station to inform themselves in the best way they could about the whereabouts and status of pirates and their vessels, examples of which permeate the discussion as a vital aspect of many officers' orders when cruising on station.[314] However, this also applied to any officer on detached service, who needed to be trusted to inform himself and act effectively based on intelligence he gathered.

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[313] Cordingly, *Spanish Gold*, 209-215.
[314] TNA, ADM 2/50, Burchett to Harris, 6 June 1722; TNA, ADM 2/50, Burchett to Elford, 25 September 1722; TNA, ADM 2/50, Burchett to Brown and Brand, 6 June 1722.

Brand's actions gathering local intelligence led directly to the successful tracking, capture, and death of Blackbeard at the hands of Brand's second-in-command, Lieutenant Robert Maynard. Whilst Brand and his subordinates were searching for Blackbeard, the pardon and promise of amnesty was in effect, and news circulated that Blackbeard had married and settled in North Carolina after taking the pardon.[315] Brand says that 'so soon as I received this advice[,] I employed a man that was going into North Carolina to inform himself of how the fellow lived', requesting that he report back to him on Blackbeard's movements and activity in the colony.[316] The only identifying factor for the informant recruited by Brand is that they were *en route* to North Carolina, suggesting that he was the captain of a merchant vessel or other seafarer. Much like the 'foreign advices' discussed in Chapter 2, Brand's informants remain anonymous. By omitting personal details, Brand reduced the potential risk of reprisal against the informant if correspondence fell into the wrong hands. Rediker stresses revenge as a driving force behind pirates' attacks on the coast of North America in particular, which made it difficult for the colonial courts to gather evidence to bring to trial out of fears of reprisals against local populations if evidence provided led to an accused pirate being condemned.[317] The same could have applied to intelligence gathering in the pursuit of pirates, such as that gathered by Captain Brand in his hunt for Blackbeard. Brand needed to consult the individuals tasked with observing Blackbeard's movements, and it is likely that he met with them personally to obtain up-to-date information. In addition to protecting their identities for their own safety, Brand may well have considered it unnecessary to inform the Admiralty of their names, as their information would have been of no use to them.

Brand recounted laying the groundwork for his longer-term informant in North Carolina in June 1719, when he received intelligence in mid-July 'that Thach was in [North Carolina] and gave out [that] he was fitting out to go to St Thomas'.[318] Brand received this intelligence from routine surveillance of Blackbeard, who at the time was only under Brand's suspicions and had not conclusively returned to piracy. Brand took the initiative and acted with autonomy, gathering intelligence from North Carolina which allowed him to assess the situation with fresh information. He had to be sure that Blackbeard had broken the terms of the pardon and returned to piracy before a pursuit could begin.

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[315] Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy*, 132-3; Bialuschewski, 'Between Newfoundland and the Malacca Strait', 176; Cordingly, *Spanish Gold*, 209.
[316] TNA, ADM 1/1472, Brand to Burchett, February 6, 1718/19.
[317] Rediker, *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 277.
[318] TNA, ADM 1/1472, Brand to Burchett, February 6, 1718/19.

Interestingly, Brand wrote that in August 1719 he 'employed a second person going into North Carolina, to make particular enquiry after the pirate'.[319] His intentions may have been to cast a wider net to stay better informed about Blackbeard's whereabouts and activities and build intelligence networks which could persist over the longer term and cover a wider geographical area. Officers like Brand looked to mitigate the challenges of being spread out thinly, as Wilson argues that Brand's duties would have likely extended to a wider role as a protective force along the North American coast and not simply the frequently exaggerated role bestowed upon naval officers as 'pirate hunter' during this period.[320] Brand wrote that he was

> bound out to sea with some ships in the middle of October [when] the second person employed being returned from North Carolina [and from whom] I had certain information that Thach had been at sea and was come into that place again and had brought in with him a ship[.][321]

Absorbed in his wider duties cruising as a protective force in the region, it was vital that Brand recruited multiple informants to support his aims, especially given that he was the highest-ranking naval officer involved in the hunt for Blackbeard and the operation hinged on his activities being properly informed. His regular cruising of the coast allowed him to establish eyes on Blackbeard's location, awaiting evidence of Blackbeard's return to piracy.

Brand maintained reliance on locally sourced informants from amongst the population, largely consisting of sailors and merchants operating in areas in which pirates were known to operate. Brand's recruitment of multiple informants demonstrates the universal nature of Ojala's principles for information and intelligence transfer and application.[322] The intelligence gathered from individuals he had recruited was deemed reliable by Brand and was demonstrably accurate given that he was able to catch, engage and kill Blackbeard on 22 November. It was also usable, as the captain and his attached vessels were able to track Blackbeard to a predicted rendezvous off Ocracoake island near North Carolina, even arriving early

> within three miles of town[,] and [after which, Brand] desired Colonel Moore to go in and learn if Thach was there, he soon returned to let me know he was not yet come up but expected every minute[.] I parted from Colonel Moore and went

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[319] *Ibid*.
[320] Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy*, xi, 2, 3, 74; TNA, ADM 1/1472, Brand to Burchett, February 6, 1718/19.
[321] TNA, ADM 1/1472, Brand to Burchett, February 6, 1718/19.
[322] Ojala, 'Maritime Information Networks', 183-194.

> to the [Governor] and applied myself to him and let him know I was come in quest of Thach.[323]

The elusiveness of Atlantic pirates was accentuated by the size of the area they operated in, and the many small cays and dispersed islands within which they could evade naval officers in frequently much larger vessels.[324] Wilson points out that much was stacked against officers of the Royal Navy in the hunt for pirates, including often outdated intelligence, weakened squadrons frequently outnumbered against their quarry, and a reliance on luck by officers who were especially committed to the suppression of piracy in a particular region.[325] However, Brand illustrates that this was recognised by officers who sought to mitigate these challenges and work with what was available out of necessity. His example stands as evidence of how tangible intelligence gathering had a demonstrable impact on the Royal Navy's protection of British trade. Combining Brand's recruitment drive for accurate intelligence from local informants, the recruitment of colonial militia forces and small vessels provided by Governor Spotswood, as well as luck, portray Brand as a committed and successful pirate hunter. Wilson's assessment is much closer to the truth than that posited by Bialuschewski. The latter regards the cornering and death of Blackbeard as 'a turning point in the history of piracy in the New World' as the pirates were now '[w]ithout a safe base' after the dispersal from the Bahamas, and were raiding in the 'face of growing pressure from naval forces', which meant that the 'rovers lost their momentum.'[326] In reality, the challenges to naval patrols remained, and the dispersed nature of Atlantic piracy made its eradication far from easy. Blackbeard was clearly a high-profile case wielded by government to demonstrate their triumph in the war against piracy, as an example of a notorious maritime criminal who was successfully intercepted and punished for his crimes against British trade in the Atlantic. Brand had relied on knowledge of pirates' previous movements, which then informed the operations intended to intercept them. With an understanding of the infamous pirate's activities, Brand was able to gather local intelligence which led to Blackbeard's death.

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[323] TNA, ADM 1/1472, Brand to Burchett, February 6, 1718/19.
[324] J. L. Anderson, 'Piracy and World History: An Economic Perspective on Maritime Predation', in C. R. Pennell (ed.), *Bandits at Sea: A Pirate Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 82-106, 84; Bialuschewski, 'Between Newfoundland and the Malacca Strait', 175; Land, 'Flying the black flag', 184; Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy*, 62.
[325] Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy*, 68.
[326] Bialuschewski, 'Between Newfoundland and the Malacca Strait', 176.

Chaloner Ogle, Local Intelligence, and the Hunt for Bartholomew Roberts

Importantly, Brand's pursuit of Blackbeard was not an isolated case. Intelligence gathered by Captain Chaloner Ogle directly led to the interception and death of one of the most prolific pirates of the 'golden age': Bartholomew Roberts. Both Rediker and Wilson emphasise the significance of Roberts' death and the capture of his crew in March 1722 to the suppression campaign.[327] However, they also note that the greater effort for suppression came from pressure applied on government by merchant associations with interests in the slave trade, not directly from the British government.[328] Ogle's successful operation intercepting one of the most notorious Atlantic pirates was in fact part of a wider cruise for pirates on the West African coast, which came at the behest of the slaving lobby. Merchants were fearful that their trading interests, including transatlantic shipping and slave factories along the African coast, were at risk from pirates' attacks. Also at stake was the supply of commodities which underpinned the African trade, including gold and ivory, as well as manufactured goods such as iron bars, cloth, jewellery, and weapons, which were exchanged for enslaved people.[329] Valuable goods like these were desirable to pirates. In ship captain and slave trader William Snelgrave's account of being captured by pirates whilst trading on the coast in 1719, the priority merchandise taken from his seized vessel were 'liquor and necessaries'.[330] These could be readily sold on as commodities and were also vital to the day-to-day running of the pirates' vessels, sustaining them in further raiding.[331]

The Admiralty had dispatched orders to Ogle to 'cruis[e] on the coast of Africa, to protect the trade, and Company's settlements from the pirates'.[332] Once he had arrived on the coast in March 1721, Ogle met with an agent of the Royal African Company, who confirmed that the coastline in proximity to the River Gambia had been 'a base of pirates ever since the latter end

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[327] M. Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (London: Verso, 2012), 137; Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy*, 145, 173.
[328] Rediker, *Villains of All Nations*, 137; Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy*, 145, 173.
[329] W. Snelgrave, *A new account of some parts of Guinea, and the slave-trade: containing, I. The history of the late conquest of the kingdom of Whidaw by the king of Dahomè ... II. The manner how the Negroes become slaves ... III. A relation of the author's being taken by pirates, and the many dangers he underwent* (London: The Crown in Ludgate Street, 1734), 223; H. Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The History of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1440-1870* (London: Picador, 1997), 321, 323; T. Green, *A Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to the Age of Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 2020), 90-1, 108-9, 117-8.
[330] Snelgrave, *A new account of some parts of Guinea*, 233.
[331] *Ibid*.
[332] TNA, ADM 1/2242, Ogle to Admiralty, 6 December 1720.

of the year 1719', as pirates fleeing the Bahamas sought new prey in the Atlantic.[333] This illustrates the cooperation and symbiotic relationship between the Navy and the Royal African Company which Paul posits was vital to both organisations, as the Company provided intelligence to Ogle to help him track down the threats to the Company's interests on the coast.[334]

By August 1721, Ogle had cruised down to Cape Coast Castle in modern Ghana, where he 'was informed' of two pirate vessels which had sailed 'past this place' and intercepted a Royal African Company ship called the *Onslow*.[335] The ship was renamed the *Royal Fortune* and taken as a replacement for a leaky vessel, before sailing further south and believed to be heading either across the Atlantic to Brazil, or out to the East Indies.[336] This highlights the ease with which leads could go cold, as all possibilities of the pirates movements had to be considered, risking leaving Ogle unable to pursue his quarry. Without yet knowing the pirate's identity, Ogle had learned of Robert's movements along the coast from an unidentified informant. It is probable that this intelligence was gathered from either a Royal African Company agent stationed at Cape Coast Castle or from a passing merchant ship calling to trade there, where Ogle called for resupply and local intelligence and had been since 31 August.[337] The informant did not know the pirates' identities, only that they were raiders and not ships of a rival nation's Navy. The above speculation that Roberts had left the African coast for Brazil or the East Indies proved to be unfounded, as Roberts was later found and killed on the West African coast.[338] Ogle considered his presence to be a deterrent for piracy on the coast, being confident that he had seemingly warded the pirates away from the trade that he had been dispatched to protect. However, in the winter of 1721, Ogle noted that he had spoken with the Governor of Cape Coast Castle who had 'received advice' that pirates had attacked shipping nearby, and had not left the African coast to continue raiding.[339] After leaving orders for Captain Hardman in HMS *Weymouth* to cruise nearby until late March 1722, Ogle left to sail on the coast of Whydah (now Ouidah).[340] When he arrived at his destination, Ogle was 'informed that two pirate [ships], one of 40 and another of 24 guns[,] commanded by one [Roberts] [had been] there and had sailed about 36 hours before', leaving behind vessels which had been taken,

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[333] TNA, ADM 1/2242, Ogle to Admiralty, 5/15/25? April 1721.
[334] Paul, 'Joint-Stock Companies', 287.
[335] TNA, ADM 1/2242, Ogle to Admiralty, 20 September 1721.
[336] *Ibid*.
[337] *Ibid*.
[338] *Ibid*.
[339] TNA, ADM 1/2242, Ogle to Admiralty, c. March 1722.
[340] *Ibid*.

stripped of their value and burned.[341] The port at Whydah was where the majority of enslaved persons were trafficked to the Americas during the period, making it a useful centre on which Ogle could rely for fresh intelligence of the pirates from vessels passing through the port and in the waters nearby.[342]

Using his own judgement and the intelligence he had gathered, Ogle predicted that the pirates would sail to the Bight of Benin to refit and clean their vessels ahead of further cruising, where the water was deep enough to support the draft of his own ship, HMS *Swallow*, which was armed with 54 guns.[343] Condensed in his summary letter to the Admiralty from March or April 1722, Ogle wrote that he found and engaged Roberts' assembled pirate ships in February 1722 off Cape Lopez, near Gabon.[344] Roberts was killed in the engagement and 168 of the total 243 of his associates captured were tried between 29 March and 19 April 1722. In all, 77 were acquitted, 52 were hanged, twenty sentenced to seven years' service in Royal African Company mines on the Coast, seventeen transferred to be imprisoned in London, two given a stay of execution with further consideration, and 75 who were listed only as 'black men', were sold into slavery without a trial.[345]

Roberts and his crew are one of the most famous examples of the 'golden age of piracy', and were believed to have taken more than 400 vessels between 1719 and 1722.[346] Roberts' and Blackbeard's well-documented activities are the main reason that the naval campaign against piracy has been exaggerated in its reach.[347] In the case of Bartholomew Roberts, the campaign's success hinged on intelligence gathering efforts by officers on station like Ogle. However, unlike Brand's hunt for Blackbeard, finding Roberts was not Ogle's primary objective, charged instead with the general protection of British slaving interests on the coast, ranging along it accordingly to deter and intercept pirates. Also distinct from intelligence regarding Blackbeard, the intelligence of pirates in the vicinity of British trade on the African coast was unable to identify Roberts specifically. However, Ogle knew that the probability of encountering pirates on the coast was high as it was another extremely high-traffic region with high-value trade, increasing the likelihood of pirate activity. Leads and general intelligence

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[341] *Ibid*.
[342] Green, *A Fistful of Shells*, 287.
[343] J. J. College (ed.), *Ships of the Royal Navy: The Complete Record of all Fighting Ships of the Royal Navy from the Fifteenth Century to the Present* (London: Greenhill Books, 2003), 314.
[344] TNA, ADM 1/2242, Ogle to Admiralty, c. March 1722.
[345] Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy*, 145; TNA, ADM 1/2242, Ogle to Admiralty, 26 July 1722; Bialuschewski, 'Between Newfoundland and the Malacca Strait', 178.
[346] Rediker, *Villains of All Nations*, 33.
[347] *Ibid*.

were vital, and despite only formally identifying Roberts as the captain of one of the vessels he was pursuing shortly before their final encounter, Ogle illustrates the significance of intelligence in naval operations against piracy, even when sources were difficult to collect. Roberts' death at the hands of the Navy has long been used as an example to illustrate naval power in the suppression campaign against the 'golden age of piracy' in the eighteenth century, but the active role of intelligence and information gathering has rarely been highlighted.[348] It was commonly in collaboration with merchants, in this case those trading in enslaved people on the African coast, that officers of the Royal Navy joined the campaign as state-sanctioned pirate hunters, gathering intelligence from agents to act with a greater understanding of how to achieve it.

[348] Rediker, '"Under the Banner of King Death"', 203-227; Rediker, *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*; Anderson, 'Piracy and World History', 82-106; A. Pérotin-Dumon, 'The Pirate and the Emperor: Power and the Law on the Seas, 1450-1850', in C. R. Pennell (ed.), *Bandits at Sea: A Pirate Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 25-54; Hanna, *Pirate Nests*; D. J. Starkey, 'Pirates and Markets', in C. R. Pennell (ed.), *Bandits at Sea: A Pirate Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 107-124; Goodall, *Pirates of the Chesapeake*, 60-3; Cordingly, *Spanish Gold*, 209-215.

General Knowledge and Playing Probability in the Suppression of Piracy

Commodore Barrows Harris, commander-in-chief at Jamaica in 1722, demonstrates that 'very fortunate accident[s]' did happen, providing an account from Captain Bartholomew Candler in HMS *Launceston* who was cruising 'off of the southwest end of Hispaniola for protection of our trade against the pirates', to Governor of Jamaica Nicholas Lawes.[349] Candler 'luckily met with a notorious Spanish pirate commanded by an Italian' and his crew which 'consisted of fifty eight, chiefly mulattoes and Spaniards of Puerto Rico.'[350] Identifying popular areas of anchorage to locate pirates clearly worked on measures of probability that they would rest there. Candler was especially fortunate to intercept the pirates by chance, although that is not to say that local intelligence gleaned from further cruising had he not encountered them coincidentally would have not led to their eventual capture. When officers were not so fortunate, general information of pirates' popular haunts and sailing patterns could be augmented with locally gathered intelligence, as well as background knowledge of high traffic areas.

Unlike the hunt for Blackbeard by Ellis Brand and Robert Maynard, Harris's dispatch of Candler to the coast of the island of Hispaniola, split between French St Domingue and Spanish Santo Domingo, was based on common knowledge that there was a high probability of encountering pirates along the island's coastline. Candler's example illustrates that the Navy's more general knowledge of pirates' areas of refit and the points of traffic used to intercept trade adapted to counter the dispersal from the Bahamas after 1718. The captain's good fortune was informed by the Navy's understanding of pirates' movements; recognising patterns and tracking of pirates' movements after 1718 gave officers a better awareness of where to cruise for pirate vessels.

However, Candler's example also highlights the problems of terminology used by these officers and colonial governors for these threats to British trading interests. As Hanna points out, the language used to refer to pirates such as 'privateers', 'corsairs' and 'private men-of-war', meant that definitions were loose and easy to manipulate.[351] The vessel Candler captured was a Spanish *guarda costa*. From a British perspective, Spanish attacks on British shipping were no different to piracy, and were in violation of trading rights agreed at the close

[349] TNA, CO 137/14, Nicholas Lawes to Board of Trade, 18 May 1722.
[350] *Ibid*.
[351] Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 10, 15, 358-9.

of the War of Spanish Succession on based on accusations of British smuggling.[352] As peace returned to the Americas with the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, Spain ceded the *asiento* to Britain, which granted trading rights to import a defined number of enslaved Africans to the Americas. The Spanish in America began to seize shipping on charges of smuggling and abuse of the trading terms levelled against British merchants, as well as seizing those sailing anywhere other than standard trading routes that they suspected of smuggling for any reason.[353]

Terminology and legality was subjective, as Starkey suggests, as the balance of power at sea reflected how law was perceived, rather than the implementation of an 'impartial interpretation of natural justice.'[354] In other words, the targets of British anti-piracy were whoever they deemed them to be within limits, as demonstrated by Britain's refusal to recognise the captured vessel as a *guarda costa* and instead regarding them as purely piratical threats to British trading interests. Lawes wrote that the commander and crew of the captured vessel were brought to trial, where

> the commander pretended [that] he had a commission from the Alcalde [Mayor] of Puerto Rico to be a [guarda costa][,] but it having been plainly proved that he had taken two English vessels who were going on their lawful occasions and no ways near to or within sight of any part of Hispaniola, the judges found them all guilty of piracy except seven.[355]

The British government clearly regarded them simply as pirates who had acted beyond their jurisdiction or criminalised them to justify their capture. Lawes was confident that 'the example ha[d] been made of those rogues [and] will deter others in these parts', and most importantly 'the Spanish Guard de Coast [*guarda costas*] from committing such notorious piracies as they have lately been guilty of.'[356] The potential for such captures to act as a deterrent of further 'piracy' outweighed the risk of fallout that came from British seizure of vessels protected by Spanish legal documentation.

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[352] Crewe, *Yellow Jack and the Worm*, 2; Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 410-11; Harding, *Emergence*, 6; Pares, *War and Trade*, 18, 22.
[353] Pares, *War and Trade*, 22; V. G. Sorsby, 'British Trade with Spanish America Under the Asiento 1713-1740'. PhD Thesis (University of London, November 1975). Available online: https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1349550/1/473433.pdf [Accessed 08/09/2021], 68; Bialuschewski, 'Between Newfoundland and the Malacca Strait', 173-4; Crewe, *Yellow Jack and the Worm*, 2; Harding, *Emergence*, 6; Mewett, '"It is ticklish meddling with the Navy", 1-24, 2, 3, 5.
[354] Starkey, 'Pirates and Markets', 107.
[355] TNA, CO 137/14, Lawes to BOT, 18 May 1722.
[356] *Ibid*.

In a later example, Commodore Harris wrote to the Admiralty in June 1723, saying that he had ordered HMS *Adventure* to escort the trade out to open water from Jamaica, before cruising on the Hispaniola coast for eight weeks to 'gain intelligence of any pirates' which were operating in the region.[357] For Harris, the limits of background knowledge and good fortune in the hunt for pirates increased the need for specific intelligence gathered on the coast of Hispaniola, which he regarded as sufficiently important to warrant sole occupation of a valuable warship for two months of cruising. It shows the importance of cruising to intelligence gathering, viewed as a potential by-product of keeping ships and their crews active and mobile rather than sitting in harbour at Port Royal. However, Harris also acknowledged that there had been 'little or no damage done for some time in these parts by pirates', instead highlighting the threat posed by 'some Spaniards that call themselves *guarda costas*', who he condemned as having 'illegally taken […] his Majesty's trading subjects believe shall use them as pirates.'[358] Clearly, Harris viewed the Spanish seizures of British trade with equal disdain to the opportunistic pirates who had preyed on shipping for the decade prior. He made no distinction between them, and saw the *guarda costas* as pirates themselves, which he and those under his command pursued and seized in retaliation. Wilson makes a similar reading in his discussion of the rising tensions, as priorities shifted in the wake of increasingly frequent seizures by Spanish ships.[359] However, he also points out that the legal commissions granted by Spanish authorities made it extremely difficult to convict crews of piratical behaviour, and in peacetime, such as in the 1720s, it was almost impossible to move against them.[360] This shows that the distinction made between pirates and *guarda costas* was unimportant to officers like Harris in their mission to protect British trading interests, with attacks on trade deemed inexcusable and in violation of British trading rights within the Spanish empire.

[357] TNA, ADM 1/1880, Harris to Burchett, 16 June 1723.
[358] *Ibid*.
[359] Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy*, 231.
[360] *Ibid*.

Officers on Station and the Receding of Atlantic Piracy

The successes of Brand and Ogle highlighted the importance of intelligence to the suppression of Atlantic piracy, and the years immediately following the death of Bartholomew Roberts illustrate that intelligence gathering had developed a recognised priority for officers on station. Returning to the tenure of Commodore Barrows Harris, the influence of intelligence was constant, although the success granted by such gathered intelligence was far from guaranteed. Harris reported the results of cruises conducted by naval officers around the Caribbean. In a letter from March 1723, Harris reported the return of HMS *Mermaid*, under Captain Joseph Lawes, who had 'had advice of a French pirate sloop chasing one of the South Sea snows into Cartagena', which he 'proceeded directly in search of'.[361] Lawes arrived in Cartagena several days later, although the French pirate was not there.[362] The threat to a South Sea Company ship prompted Lawes into action, and upon finding the pirate vessel gone, changed course to cruise close to Cartagena in search of the pirate vessel itself or news of it from other vessels sailing nearby. As discussed throughout this thesis, Cartagena was a consistent target for observation and attention by the Royal Navy, as a vital Spanish trading centre during the period and a destination for South Sea Company ships under the terms of the *asiento*.

Harris continued the practice of applying general knowledge of shipping patterns to the process of suppression, as foundational for the gathering of local intelligence. In a copy of orders Harris sent to Captain Digby Dent, Dent was instructed to sail 'without loss of time […] with his Majesty's ship [*Launceston*] under your command and cruise from [Jamaica] to the eastward on the south side [of] Hispaniola as far as Santa Cruz [St Croix]', with the view to 'look into Samana Bay' if opportunity allowed.[363] He ordered that if he was successful and 'gain[ed] intelligence of any pirates being amongst those islands, or thereabouts, you are to use your utmost endeavours to take or destroy them'.[364] Harris' orders to Dent may have been based on knowledge of the approximate locations of pirate hideaways and refuge areas, as a starting point on which Dent could gather local intelligence and begin the hunt for pirates. However, he may also have been assigned an area to search as part of a standard sweep for pirate activity, such as officers were ordered to do so by Burchett and the Admiralty.[365]

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[361] TNA, ADM 1/1880, Harris to Burchett, 23 March 1722/3.
[362] *Ibid*.
[363] TNA, ADM 1/1880, Harris to Burchett [copied to Dent], 23 March 1723.
[364] *Ibid*.
[365] TNA, ADM 2/50, Burchett to Brown at Barbados and Brand at the Leeward Islands, 6 June 1722; TNA, ADM 2/50, Burchett to Harris, 6 June 1722; TNA, ADM 2/50, Burchett to Elford, 25 September 1722.

Admiralty orders to officers stationed in the West Indies also provided leads and intelligence, as demonstrated by Burchett's letter to Harris from June 1722. The letter relayed 'an account' that 'since the pirates have been driven from the island of [New] Providence' by Woodes Rogers' operations to disperse them, they had begun to 'resort' on St Croix and 'near Puerto Rico and Samana Bay, at the north east end of Hispaniola', which is said to have resulted in several losses to both French and British shipping.[366] Whilst providing Harris with recent pirate sightings, as well as older and more general background knowledge rather than specific intelligence, the Admiralty ordered Harris to 'use your best endeavours, by all opportunities, to gain intelligence of the said pirates, that so you may be the better able [to] most effectually […] put in execution these orders to you'.[367] Burchett's letter illustrates the Admiralty's recognition that intelligence gathering was a constant and vital part of the officer's role on station, and an essential resource if orders were to be executed. However, their actual intelligence provision capabilities were naturally limited, as any information that they dispatched would be months old by the time it reached their intended recipient.

Under Harris's command, Ellis Brand remained an active officer in the Caribbean after Blackbeard's death. His correspondence with the Admiralty demonstrates that intelligence gathering in the hunt for pirates had its limitations. In a letter from Antigua in July 1723, Brand acknowledged the receipt of letters from April and May which contained extracts concerning the pirates that roamed the area. He also expressed concern that material dated from June 1722 about the 'rendezvous of the pirates on Santa Cruz and Samana Bay never came'.[368] Meanwhile, he noted that intelligence had prompted him to go 'twice cruising that way' but to no avail, as 'when I came amongst those I could [in] no ways get information from the inhabitants in those parts any ways find that there had been any pirates thereabouts at the time it had been represented to [us].'[369] Acknowledging that he had 'not been so fortunate as to meet with any of those pirates', Brand said that 'his Majesty's ship under my command has been constantly employed in cruising after them', and he assured the Admiralty that 'I shall continue whenever I get any information where they are to use my utmost endeavours to find them out and destroy them.'[370] This illustrates that there were limitations to relying on

[366] TNA, ADM 2/50, Burchett to Harris, 6 June 1722.
[367] *Ibid*.
[368] TNA, ADM 1/1472, Brand to Burchett, 16 July 1723.
[369] *Ibid*.
[370] *Ibid*.

probability in the search for pirates, and further shows that the assessment of the suppression campaign as swift and easy was unfounded.

Brand recounted his limited success in 'breaking up […] part of the pirate crew which remained out on board of a brigantine [and] had been carried into Curaçao', which he appeared to have intercepted on a separate cruise to that in which he ranged near the Virgin Islands. This reveals something of the scale of the geography over which officers like Brand ranged in pursuit of pirates, as two points positioned as far away from one another in the Caribbean as possible (see Figure 8). Brand also acknowledged that he had 'spoke[n] with several ships' but had 'not been able to get any account [and] nor can I hear that any of them have seen or heard of any pirate vessel in these parts lately'.[371] It appears that Brand had hit a dead end in the hunt for vessels suspected of piracy after limited success in capturing pirates in the region. This example shows that even experienced officers were limited by the resources available to them, and competence could be frustrated by an inability to gather intelligence. In his hunt for Blackbeard, Brand had found local informants and the intelligence they possessed to be extremely reliable, resulting in his success. This was not reflected during his later service, as individuals in the local area appeared to possess little knowledge of the movements of the pirates he was hunting. Brand, although a seasoned and experienced naval officer and hunter of pirates, was reliant on a system of intelligence gathering that if garnered with little reliable and current local intelligence could not be compensated with experience nor will.

[371] *Ibid*.

Figure 8 A map showing the island of Curacao and the Virgin Islands
Source: Wikimedia via Wikipedia, https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Caribbean_map_blank.png (labels added by the candidate, map not to scale).

Commodore Harris used knowledge gathered over time, as well as predictions of shipping patterns based on his longer-term knowledge. For example, in a letter to Governor of the Bank of England and wealthy slave owner Humphry Morice in September 1724, Captain William Royle recounted orders he received from Harris when 'a vessel', presumably a merchant ship affiliated with Britain, was taken by a 'pirate ship and sloop' off the coast of Jamaica in August.[372] Harris ordered Royle 'and [his ship] the *Spence* to go to Honduras Bay [s]upposing they [the pirates] might take and destroy his Majesty's Subjects trading there as they have done the year before.'[373] Harris's fears for British trading interests around Honduras Bay were clearly based on the rhetoric of *hostis humani generis* which had permeated the discourse on piracy from at least as far back as the trial of Stede Bonnet in 1719, as well as actual losses to pirates which had occurred in recent memory. Primarily, the Honduras coast was a high-traffic area for transport of Spanish silver and gold coming from Central America, in addition to the British timber trade of logwood, which was mostly used as a dye for textiles and leather. This period boasted a peak demand for logwood in line with the expansion of the British woollen

[372] TBEA, M542, Royle to Morice, 20 September 1724.
[373] *Ibid*.

industry, and the supply from Honduras Bay was enough to fulfil both British demand and a significant logwood reexport trade to Europe.[374] This lucrative trade had been a target for piracy and the coast of Honduras a hiding spot for buccaneers and pirates since the seventeenth century, and British control of it pushed governments to provide resources to protect it.[375] Britain and Spain were at peace during Royle's cruise, and so whilst also protecting their own high-value logwood trade from piracy, they were also unintentionally deterring attacks on Spanish treasure fleets from a common enemy.

Rather than basing orders on informed intelligence that the pirates had sailed from Jamaica for the Bay, Harris predicted that their sailing patterns would mirror those of the previous year, coinciding with British merchant vessels' adherence to winds and currents. The Navy had developed general knowledge of coastal areas of resupply alongside sailing patterns over the previous decade, which Land asserts only happened during Woodes Rogers' era when tracking became easier after Rogers ousted pirates from the Bahamas.[376] However, the example of Harris demonstrates that this was far from the case, as intelligence was integral to the establishment of an accurate and up-to-date report of pirates' locations, whilst Harris based the search for pirates at this point on general knowledge of common haunts and previous sightings.

Sailing from Jamaica in late August 1724, strong winds caused the *Spence* and Royle's ship, HMS *Diamond*, to be separated, with Royle sailing for the rendezvous at 'Rattan Island […], where I heard that the Pirates had passed this way', although 'the *Spence* was still missing'.[377] Sailing further along the coast, Royle 'met a boat […] who informed me that Eight Sail of English Ships' had been captured by pirates in Honduras Bay three days before, with the pirates still anchored there.[378] Seeing his opportunity as he drew closer to the Bay, Royle 'put men and officers aboard two Merchant vessels in Company' to cut off the pirates' escape, 'but coming to a difficult part of the entrance the Wind took us short'.[379] The geography of the Bay continued to frustrate the *Diamond*'s attempts to engage the pirate ship, the *Delight*, which was able to elude capture and 'bore away for another Channel'.[380] Royle's cruise was clearly

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[374] M. A. Camille & R. Espejo-Saavedra, 'Historical Geography of the Belizean Logwood Trade', *Yearbook (Conference of Latin American Geographers)*, 22 (1996), 77-85.
[375] Grainger, *British Navy in the Caribbean*, 117-8.
[376] Land, 'Flying the black flag', 184.
[377] TBEA, M542, Royle to Morice, 20 September 1724.
[378] *Ibid*.
[379] *Ibid*.
[380] *Ibid*.

unsuccessful in its objective to capture the pirates, but it illustrates the process by which officers of the Royal Navy continued to gather intelligence locally and attempt to protect British trading interests. Working from rumour, prediction and established knowledge gathered from cruising around the Caribbean previously, Royle used the lead that Honduras Bay was a refuge point for pirates to begin his search. Bolstering that gamble with local intelligence gathered at his rendezvous at Rattan Island, he found the pirates where Harris had predicted, only failing to engage successfully due to geographical factors. In this example, it was not a lack of intelligence which failed Royle in suppressing pirates in the Atlantic, as the intelligence they possessed brought them within touching distance of their target. It was instead factors beyond human control that denied him success, such as the weather, the currents and the uncertain waters of Honduras Bay which had yet to be charted properly. Chapter 5 elaborates on the British effort to chart Rattan Island and Honduras Bay in the decades following Royle's cruising in the Caribbean.

The Admiralty also encouraged cooperation between officers in the pursuit of their orders, as shown in Burchett's letter to Captain Elford in preparation for the latter's voyage to the West Indies in September 1722. Elford was ordered to 'hold a constant correspondence with [the] commanders [of HMS *Hector* (stationed at the Leeward Islands), and HMS *Winchelsea* (stationed at St Lucia)], as we have directed them to do with you' to better reinforce each other in the event of encountering any pirates that 'should be lurking about those islands'.[381] The sightings of the pirates which had been passed to Harris in June, were also repeated to Elford, alongside the order to use 'all possible means' to gather intelligence himself whilst cruising for the general protection of Barbados and following up on the leads he had been provided by Burchett, 'for the more effectual execution of these […] instructions'.[382] This further suggests that the Admiralty took the importance of intelligence to successful operations very seriously, disseminating general information which provided leads on which officers of the Royal Navy could gather locally sourced intelligence for the pursuit and interception of pirates.

[381] TNA, ADM 2/50, Burchett to Elford, 25 September 1722.
[382] *Ibid*.

Joseph Lawes and the *Cassandra* Pirates

British naval intelligence gathering in the suppression of piracy based on leads and probability also produced anomalous examples like the *Cassandra*, which was a vessel spotted in the Gulf of Darien (Panama) by the Royal Navy in 1723. Harris informed the Admiralty in June 1723 that Captain Joseph Lawes had located a 'large pirate ship named the *Cassandra*, said to have forty guns' and believed to have been taken from the East India Company, which had 'got into a lagoon near Calladonia [i.e. 'New Caledonia' (Darien)] so advantageously that he could not come to attack them by himself'.[383] Built in 1719, the *Cassandra* was recorded as a 26-gun ship which was sent on its first voyage to Bombay in 1720, setting sail from Portsmouth in March 1720 under the command of Captain James Macrae.[384] The vessel was attacked in August 1720 on the island of Johanna in the Indian Ocean, northwest of Madagascar, by Edward England and his crew, a contemporary of Charles Vane who had refused to accept the pardons of 1717-1718. Thirteen crew members were killed and 24, including Captain James Macrae, were wounded, with the survivors fleeing and leaving the ship (and its cargo worth £75,000) to England and his crew.[385] Macrae later returned to confront England and the pirates and ask for mercy, and was given a damaged ship in which he could leave with his 43 surviving crew.[386] The ship arrived in Bombay seven weeks later, with Macrae being rewarded for his bravery and eventually serving as governor of Madras between 1725 and 1730.[387] Edward England was later replaced as captain of the *Cassandra* by John Taylor and marooned after the crew saw his mercy towards Macrae as a sign of weakness. He died in poverty in Madagascar.[388] The crew of the *Cassandra* then sailed for the western coast of Africa, where they raided shipping for some time. In fact, the *Cassandra* is an example of how pirates themselves recognised the

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[383] TNA, ADM 1/1880, Harris to Burchett, 16 June 1723.
[384] Three Decks, *British Merchant east indiaman 'Cassandra' (1719)*, 2022. Available online: https://threedecks.org/index.php?display_type=show_ship&id=29166 [Accessed 14/11/2022]
[385] Three Decks, *James Macrae*, 2022. Available online: https://threedecks.org/index.php?display_type=show_crewman&id=37310 [Accessed 15/11/2022]; V. Syrett, *The dangers of working for the East India Company*, 2020. Available online: https://www.rmg.co.uk/stories/blog/library-archive/shipwreck-sickness-pirates-dangers-working-east-india-company [Accessed 14/11/2022]; T. Seccombe & I. B. Watson, *Macrae, James (c. 1677-1744), Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 2008. Available online: https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-17740?rskey=SLptyW&result=1 [Accessed 15/11/2022]; Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates*, 121.
[386] J. H. Thomas, 'Merchants and Maritime Marauders: The East India Company and the Problem of Piracy in the Eighteenth Century', *The Great Circle*, 36, 1 (2014), 83-107, 96-7; Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates*, 121-2.
[387] Thomas, 'Merchants and Maritime Marauders', 96-7; Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates*, 121-2.
[388] Thomas, 'Merchants and Maritime Marauders' 96-7; Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates*, 124.

importance of intelligence to the Royal Navy, actively evading and trying to prevent attempts to gather intelligence about their movements. According to Johnson, the crew of the *Cassandra* chose their base near Delagoa Bay, on the east coast of Africa, because they believed that it was 'a place of security', as the men of war pursuing them 'could not possibly get intelligence of them', given the region's limited land correspondence and limited coastal trade.[389]

The *Cassandra*'s arrival in the Caribbean quickly made it a focus for officers under Harris's command, as he ordered HMS *Launceston*, which had been damaged by bad weather while cruising on the south coast of Hispaniola, to reinforce Lawes in the *Mermaid* in an attempt to 'take or destroy the aforesaid pirate'.[390] Lawes' letter was the outcome of further general cruising orders which had been transmitted by the Admiralty during the previous year, as Captain Harris had highlighted losses to the Royal African Company from pirates during the transatlantic voyage, as well as positing the theory that the new pirate rendezvous was on St Croix. These losses pushed for greater allocation of resources to the coast of Africa, and compelled the Admiralty to order that vessels 'employed at Jamaica, Barbados, and the Leeward Islands' must do their utmost to destroy pirates that were to be found careening and refitting at St Croix 'or at any other island or place thereabouts'.[391] Once again attached to the preservation of economic interests, the Admiralty stressed that Harris was to be reminded that it was 'much for the advantage of the trade if the merchant ships employed where any of his Majesty's ships are stationed, do give their commanders frequent accounts of the pirates, as may come to their knowledge.'[392] According to the *General History of the Pyrates*, Lawes stumbled upon the *Cassandra* by chance as he escorted a convoy of merchant shipping 'on the [Spanish] Main'.[393] Once again, a naval vessel had cruised along a popular route, and found a target for the suppression campaign through probability.

What sets this example apart is the Navy's dealings with the pirates themselves. Lawes informed the Governor of Jamaica Henry Bentick, Duke of Portland, that he had received 'advice' that the Spanish had sent a 'sloop with a general pardon […] if they will come into

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[389] Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates*, 138.
[390] TNA, ADM 1/1880, Harris to Burchett, 16 June 1723; TNA, ADM 1/1880, Harris to Burchett, 5 July 1723.
[391] TNA, ADM 3/34, Board of Admiralty Minutes: Tuesday 5 June 1722.
[392] *Ibid*.
[393] Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates*, 139.

their port', which he passed on to Commodore Harris who informed the Admiralty.[394] The pirates had also petitioned for clemency in a letter that Lawes forwarded to Portland, having himself reiterated that the *Cassandra* was in an area that he believed would be difficult to attack without a greater naval force. Lawes said that he had met with John Taylor (signed Richard Taylor in the pirates' own petition and William in Lawes' letter), inviting him aboard the *Mermaid* to negotiate the pirates' surrender.[395] In his letter addressing the pirates directly, Lawes acknowledged the petition that he had received and passed on to the Duke of Portland, highlighting his belief that clemency and safe passage to Jamaica could be secured, citing the precedent set by the offers of amnesty of 1717-1718.[396] The pirates' petition requested that Portland pardon them for their crimes and in exchange, they would 'render ourselves again serviceable to our king and country', while they 'do not in any [ways] pretend to extenuate the crimes we have committed'.[397] Interestingly, the *Cassandra* crew laid their entrance into piracy at the feet of their 'misfortune to fall into the hands of those that came from the island of Providence and partly forced and decided to associate ourselves with them'.[398] This was an example of a crew who were able to claim that they had been effectively 'impressed' into piracy against their will, and sought clemency. The *General History* confirms this, as the crew of the *Cassandra* were said to be part of a larger band of pirates which had separated after a bout of raids in the Indian Ocean and along the African coast, with the *Cassandra* crew comprising of individuals who no longer wished to remain pirates.[399]

Lawes' correspondence with the *Cassandra*'s crew suggests an alternative approach used by naval officers to suppress piracy, through negotiation. The crew of the *Cassandra* highlighted their 'having got ourselves clear of [the Providence pirates] and by God's mercy are arrived here and [had] committed no acts of piracy for this year last past', as further evidence of their will to reform in exchange for Portland's pardon.[400] This example suggests parallels to 'Lowther the pirate', criminal turned informant, discussed in the following chapter. Interest in these pirates may have been linked to the recruitment of informants from formerly criminal backgrounds for their unique knowledge of other pirates. Naturally there was also a stake for

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[394] TNA, CO 137/14, Joseph Lawes to Duke of Portland, 24 April 1723; TNA, ADM 1/1880, Harris to Burchett, 5 July 1723.
[395] TNA, CO 137/14, Lawes to Portland, 24 April 1723; Thomas, 'Merchants and Maritime Marauders', 96-7.
[396] TNA, CO 137/14, Joseph Lawes to the *Cassandra* pirates, 16 April 1723.
[397] TNA, CO 137/14, Petition of the pirates from on board the *Cassandra* at Harbour of Pines near Caledonia, 10 April 1723.
[398] *Ibid*.
[399] Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates*, 139.
[400] TNA, CO 137/14, Petition of the pirates, 10 April 1723.

the East India Company, who no doubt would have wanted their ship returned to them. Lawes claimed that he had been hindered by the marine geography and was unable to engage the *Cassandra* with his deeper drafted vessel, but informed Portland that if the duke believed it to be a good strategy to encourage the pirates to turn themselves in, then he would wait there and maintain communication for 'five or six weeks'.[401] Lawes noted that there was 'not one Spaniard amongst them', which suggests that Lawes had identified the crew of the *Cassandra* as worth the attention of the British government. However, Spain had taken a similar interest, offering a pardon to individuals who did not have Spanish heritage, as discussed below. The crew of the *Cassandra* were clearly deemed useful for both powers during the period of uneasy peace after the end of the War of the Quadruple Alliance in 1720. Rediker argues that the motivation behind the 1718 pardon extended to pirates by the British was an attempt to recruit pirates as privateers ahead of future conflict after the War of Spanish Succession.[402] Although not explicitly stated, Lawes' attempts to negotiate with the *Cassandra* pirates were therefore probably based on their usefulness as experienced seafarers in future conflict; a motivation likely shared by the Spanish. Alternatively, in the case of British interest in negotiation, the vessel was more likely to be recovered intact if a non-violent solution could be reached and the pirates returned to the fold peacefully, with the vessel belonging to the East India Company.

However, Lawes failed to secure their surrender. Portland seemed surprised that Lawes had failed to engage the *Cassandra* when he first sighted them, condemning Lawes' attempts to negotiate their surrender in exchange for amnesty for past offences.[403] The *General History* placed the onus for Lawes' reluctance to engage the *Cassandra* on his concern for the safety of the merchant ships which he was in convoy with, given his consultations with the masters of those ships when the *Cassandra* was first encountered.[404] This calls into question Lawes' own account that the shallow waters in which the *Cassandra* had anchored frustrated his attempts to engage the pirates himself, but furthers the importance of negotiation as a method of bringing them in. In a letter to Lawes in May 1723, Portland said that he had received both petitions for clemency which the pirates of the *Cassandra* had written to him but had chosen to ignore them and leave the fate of the *Cassandra* to Lawes and the orders he had received from his commanding officer.[405] Portland appeared to be more concerned about the future of

[401] TNA, CO 137/14, Lawes to Portland, 24 April 1723.
[402] Rediker, *Villains of All Nations*, 137.
[403] TNA, CO 137/14, Duke of Portland to Board of Trade, 4 March 1723/4.
[404] Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates*, 139.
[405] TNA, CO 137/14, Duke of Portland to Joseph Lawes, 24 May 1723.

the ship itself. Writing to the Governor of Panama after the *Cassandra* had been received in Portobello and her crew given their pardon, the duke reminded him that the ship had belonged to the East India Company before it was taken by the pirates.[406]

After the crew had accepted the Spanish pardon, John Taylor enlisted in the Spanish Navy, and was later believed to have joined the Panamanian coast guard and was rumoured to have attacked British logwood trade in the Bay of Honduras.[407] Meanwhile, the *Cassandra* was incorporated as a fifth-rate into the Spanish fleet and the crew were said to have dispersed around the Caribbean.[408] Portland requested restitution for the *Cassandra*, but appeared uninterested in the return of the pirates themselves. The Governor of Panama responded to Portland's request via 'Mr Bartholomew Stewart, factor for the Royal Asiento Company [the South Sea Company] of Great Britain in this kingdom', refusing to comply with the duke's request, having 'already received and taken under the protection of his Catholic Majesty the ship *Cassandra* and her crew'.[409] Again, it is unclear why the governor was so keen to extend a pardon on behalf of the Spanish empire to these pirates, whom Lawes' earlier letter to Portland had already identified as Britons. Perhaps the Spanish governor believed that information they had about other pirates was highly valuable, seeing the offer of a pardon as a powerful bargaining chip with informants whose criminal status made them even more important in the suppression of other criminal activity.

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[406] TNA, CO 137/14 (ff. 320-1), Duke of Portland to Governor Dadillo, c. October 1723; Thomas, 'Merchants and Maritime Marauders', 96-7.
[407] Thomas, 'Merchants and Maritime Marauders', 97, n74; Snelgrave, *A new account of some parts of Guinea,* 272; Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates*, 140.
[408] *Ibid.*
[409] TNA, CO 137/14, Governor Dadillo to Duke of Portland, 5 October 1723.

Conclusions

Intelligence gathering was vital to the suppression of piracy during the eighteenth century. The threat that Atlantic piracy posed to British trade increased merchant pressure on government for greater action against pirates. Naval officers deployed to the Caribbean, North America and the western coast of Africa made the gathering of intelligence a priority for their successful cruises against pirates, using background knowledge of common pirate haunts and areas of high traffic, blended with specific local intelligence, to increase the probability of interception. Knowledge of where pirates had operated in the past became part of the body of general knowledge, which was drawn upon by those hunting pirates and reinforced by local intelligence which maintained links with fresh information and increased the likelihood of capture. Examples such as Blackbeard and Bartholomew Roberts illustrate the sustained efforts by individual officers of the Royal Navy to track pirates with local intelligence over a period of months, resulting in the successful interception and resulting in the deaths of both pirate captains. Intelligence gathering was a constant for officers of the Royal Navy, and the suppression of piracy was dependent on information gathering and transfer, as officers frequently relied on playing the probabilities to intercept vessels suspected of piracy. This chapter has centred operations against pirates on the role of intelligence, arguing that without even general knowledge of pirates' movements, particularly in the wake of the dispersal from the Bahamas in 1718, the Navy would have relied entirely on good fortune and blind luck to intercept pirate vessels. Whilst naval officers did much of the heavy lifting in the suppression of Atlantic piracy, the example of Stede Bonnet, captured by Colonel William Rhett after his failure to find his original target, Charles Vane, shows that private actors were also involved, and their methods were the same.

Even the case of the *Cassandra* pirates linked intelligence, trade, and imperial interests. These men, having taken an East India Company vessel and gone raiding before seeking amnesty in exchange for a return to legitimate employment, were sought by representatives of both the British and Spanish as important informants and experts on piracy. They are a remarkable example of not only the offer of pardon being extended, but also a break from the norm when considering the established official attitude to piracy which prevailed in the previous decade. Whilst not explicit, the unique information that these pirates knew coupled with their experience ranging in waters on both sides of the Atlantic, were likely to have been viewed as a vital advantage to whoever could offer pardon (and have it accepted) first. Accepting the offer of Spanish pardon, the *Cassandra* and her crew sailed to Portobello and were employed

in the Spanish Navy, again suggesting that their skills and knowledge was important to the imperial rivalry in the Americas.

Intelligence was at the core of the suppression campaign, just as it was at the centre of all naval operations during the eighteenth century. Overall, those who had gathered good intelligence were best placed to protect British trade, on which the growing empire in the Atlantic was based. The next chapter discusses the monitoring of the enemy in conflicts which followed up to the middle of the century, in another assessment of British naval intelligence gathering during times of conflict in the Americas.

Chapter 4 Monitoring the enemy 1739-1742: intelligence in the War of Jenkins' Ear

Monitoring the enemy remained pivotal to the Royal Navy's mission to protect British interests in the Americas and disrupt those of the after the close of the War of Spanish Succession. The Navy continued to rely on local intelligence and emphasised the importance of officials working as part of intelligence exchange networks. This chapter begins with a discussion of the backbone of the commander-in-chief's intelligence gathering during the period: subordinate officers' cruising for the purposes of gathering intelligence. Once they had arrived on station with orders from government, naval officers exercised autonomy as officials far removed from government oversight, to which locally sourced intelligence was pivotal.[410] This chapter re-examines this period of conflict from the often neglected perspective of information and intelligence transfer, as a vital aspect of British success which has been overlooked in much of the literature.[411] It expands on works which discuss intelligence gathering in the centuries surrounding the eighteenth, and the focus of historians who do write on the subject of the eighteenth century whose work has primarily discussed intelligence gathering after 1750.[412]

The importance of officials as gatherers of intelligence is examined in three different forms in this chapter. Firstly, this chapter examines the role of factors of the South Sea Company, who were resident in the cosmopolitan ports of the West Indies and the Caribbean coast of central and South America. The nature of their work with multinational trade brought them into contact with sources that the Royal Navy could utilise. Company factors and naval officers had a shared interest in the accuracy of intelligence and the successful protection of British interests, which fed into the symbiotic relationship between the two institutions. The Navy's

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[410] P. Woodfine, 'Ideas of naval power and the conflict with Spain, 1737-1742', in J. Black & P. Woodfine (eds.), *The British Navy and the Use of Naval Power in the Eighteenth Century* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1988), 71-90, 78; Mewett, '"It is ticklish meddling with the Navy", 2.

[411] For example: Harding, *Emergence*; Crewe, *Yellow Jack and the Worm*; Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*; J. H. Elliot, *Empires of the Atlantic world: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (London: Yale University Press, 2008); Ogelsby, 'British and Panama'; Pares, *War and Trade*.

[412] C. A. Bayley, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Duffy, 'British Naval Intelligence'; S. Haggerty, 'A Link in the Chain: Trade and the Transhipment of Knowledge in the Late Eighteenth Century', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 14, 1 (2002), 157-172; Handel, 'Intelligence and military operations'; Kaplan, 'The Hidden War'; Knight, 'Nelson's 'old lady''; P. Raban, 'War and Trade in the Mid-Eighteenth Century', *Societe Guernesiaise Report and Transactions* (1986), 131-163; Rodger, *Insatiable Earl*; Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*; Rothenburg, 'Military Intelligence'; Wilkinson, *British Navy and the State*.

reliance on South Sea Company intelligence informed their operations against rival nations in return for protecting Company interests in this period. Officers of the Royal Navy recognised how important intelligence gathering was regarding the execution of their orders on station, the detail of which has been neglected in previous scholarship. Secondly, subordinate naval officers were detached from the commander-in-chief and dispatched with cruising orders, often specifically to gather intelligence. Thirdly, the challenges of studying local informants are discussed, as correspondence between officers of the Navy and London rarely includes details of their informants or their identities. Such exchanges often occurred off the books and entirely in verbal conversation. This made individual cases such as Lieutenant George Lowther, former pirate turned informant and naval officer, even more important. Recruited for his local knowledge of enemy colonial defences, geography and shipping movements, Lowther is an unusually well-documented example, which demonstrates how the Navy kept itself informed.

Intelligence remained a primary concern for the Royal Navy in both peace and wartime. Officers made the gathering and use of intelligence a priority, to understand enemy shipping patterns and naval fleet movements, whilst also being alert to rumours of invasion plans. Much as it had been earlier in the century, intelligence was essential fuel for British naval strategy, influencing the allocation of resources and manpower in line with predicted movements of rivals in the dispersed British Atlantic empire. The gathering of intelligence locally had evolved as the Navy adapted to its role in the Atlantic. There was a push to greater reliance on local intelligence as the Navy had hunted pirates in the decades preceding, and self-reliance for officers on station meant a greater leaning on intelligence gathered for themselves. While the recognition of intelligence's importance had been in place since the beginning of the century, the War of Jenkins' Ear saw the more systematic use of naval officers as intelligence gatherers on station, and the better documentation of sustained gathering and utilisation of that which had been collected.

Economic Interests and the South Sea Company

As residents of colonial ports, particularly in the Caribbean, South Sea Company factors were well placed to observe enemy shipping, naval fleets and troop preparations. Such intelligence was then passed on to colonial governments or directly to officers of the Royal Navy to inform operations in the region. The power of these factors' placements and their information reached further around the Americas, as intelligence played into fears for colonial security on the coast of North America. William Bull, Governor of South Carolina, wrote to Captain Peter Warren in September 1739 expressing anxiety about an expected Spanish seaborne invasion, although his fears remained unrealised.[413] Bull requested that Warren take information and intelligence provided '[b]y several late circumstances and depositions, particularly by Capt. Fennell and Mr. Dodd from Havana and of Capt. Tisdale from Bilboa [all representatives of the South Sea Company], copies of which you have herewith'.[414] Bull said that

> I have the greatest reason to believe that, though the Spaniards for some reason suspended the invasion of this province and Georgia (which was intended the summer before last, and actually then ready to be carried into execution, according to an account which I then sent to the Duke of Newcastle) yet that same design still subsists, that the preparation of boats, &c., then made are still in being in great order and readiness; and that they are only waiting for the first favourable juncture to invade us.[415]

Bull's suspicions of a Spanish invasion attempt were based on the information gathered from the three company agents, whose positions in Spanish ports granted them access to the free exchange of information in cosmopolitan trading centres. Rumours of invasion plans and threats to British colonial interests were simply a by-product of their business in foreign ports. Commercial informants like South Sea Company factors, with economic interests in the region and knowledge of key Spanish ports, provided colonial governors and other high-ranking officials with the acquired intelligence. Subsequently passed on to the Royal Navy, this information clearly affected priorities and influenced operations. It illustrates the blended information networks which formed within British imperial society in the Americas, as men like Bull sought to secure their territory from foreign invasion with knowledge from rival ports and

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[413] W. Bull, 'Governor William Bull to Warren, Charleston, SC, 13 September 1739', in J. Gwyn (ed.), *The Royal Navy and North America: The Warren Papers, 1736-1752: Publications of the Navy Records Society* (London: Scolar Press), 13-15.
[414] *Ibid*. 14.
[415] *Ibid*.

of fleet patterns to discern such threats and prepare against them. Bull accompanied the intelligence to Warren with a revealing postscript, which reads:

> P.S. Since writing the above, Capt. Fennell and Mr. Dodd have declined making their depositions in [written] form, apprehending that their private interests might suffer thereby, as their duty to the South Sea Company's service will call them to Havana. But they informed me by word of mouth that the vessels which were to be employed in the late invasion now lie hauled up at Havana and secured from the weather with an intent, as was currently reported there, to put them to the same use, upon the first account they shall have of a rupture with the crown of Great Britain.[416]

Fennell and Dodd were reluctant to leave a written statement of their intelligence and therefore a traceable record which could be intercepted. These men were clearly concerned with written records containing their status as informants and feared the information they supplied could be copied and reproduced. The commercial importance of the South Sea Company and the interests they held in ports like Havana, as well as Fennell and Dodd's fears for personal security, trumped the urgency of the information and intelligence the factors held. Despite this, Bull still recorded their intelligence at the end of his letter to Warren. Perhaps Bull hoped that forwarding this intelligence to Warren, a naval officer, lowered the risk of interception and would therefore preserve the safety of these informants, although this could not be guaranteed. Fennell and Dodd illustrate the importance of multicultural populations in ports like Havana as centres for information from multiple groups of different backgrounds. Bull's correspondence with Warren predated the beginning of the War of Jenkins' Ear by just over a month, and British commercial operations and factors' safety in ports such as Havana had not been disrupted by open conflict yet, although it was feared. With war on the horizon, a permanent Spanish fleet, the *Armada de Barlovento*, remained primed at Havana for the first signs of open warfare with Britain.[417]

This illustrates the connections made by Paul between the South Sea Company and the Royal Navy in the sharing of scarce resources, of which information was key, in a working relationship that 'treated them more like partners in a joint endeavour, and as if they were part of the state apparatus' which developed the British Atlantic empire.[418] This was similarly reflected in Stern's argument that chartered companies were frequently responsible for acting as the state, helping administer colonies and play a role in their development as a

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[416] *Ibid*. 15.
[417] J. R. McNeil, *Atlantic Empires of France and Spain: Louisburg and Havana, 1700-1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 76-7.
[418] Paul, 'Joint-Stock Companies', 278, 287.

simultaneously public and private body.[419] Fennell and Dodd's intelligence demonstrates the importance of exchange between civilian and naval institutions, as well as the place of private and commercial interests in the flow of such information. The two agents appeared to be frightened for their safety if their status as informants was uncovered. By making their statement to Bull 'by word of mouth', it is likely that the company agents could retain their status as informants and reduce the risk of a leak.

Admiral Vernon similarly sent reports of South Sea Company factors' information gathered by a lieutenant on station near Cartagena. Vernon hoped to 'send [Charles Wager] a copy of Lieutenant Broderick's information to me of what he had observed, and what intelligence he had gathered from the Factors'.[420] The factors' knowledge of the region made them pivotal to the Royal Navy's understanding of Spanish shipping movements. The company factors, who Vernon said had been returned from time as prisoners at Cartagena, reported that 'all the treasure is removed out of Cartagena which they computed at about twelve hundred thousand pounds sterling, they having been in daily expectation of being [attacked] by me.'[421] This solidifies the importance of the South Sea Company's factors as both mobile individuals within the Caribbean able to gather intelligence from cosmopolitan communities, as well as their value to Britain's enemies. Whilst the full circumstances are unclear, Spanish Admiral Blas de Lezo y Olaverrieta had imprisoned these factors, likely ransoming them after Vernon wrote to him on their behalf. After war broke out, these factors were perhaps seen as spies for the British embedded through their employment in Cartagena. Their imprisonment illustrates the value they had as informants in ports controlled by a rival nation, to be imprisoned and ransomed back to Britain, and providing Vernon with further intelligence about the port of Cartagena. Vernon also said that the reports they returned 'confirm my former account that orders were gone for removing the treasure from Panama to Quito, and say it was actually shipped off from Panama for Guayaquil in May last, and from thence to be sent to Quito.'[422] Vernon was evidently aware of the importance of information, as well as the need to confirm and verify reports. The fact that the treasure was being shipped west rather than east was also

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[419] P. Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6, 9, 11.
[420] Vernon, 'Vernon to Sir Charles Wager, (PHB/sa, ff. 8-19), *Burford*, at Port Royal, July 19, 1740]', in B. McL. Ranft (ed.), *The Vernon Papers: Publications of the Navy Records Society* (London: Navy Records Society, 1958), 114.
[421] *Ibid.*
[422] *Ibid*.

likely considered, as Vernon will have assessed that it was not worth his effort and resources to pursue the treasure as it took the Pacific rather than the Atlantic route.

The system of information transfer between the South Sea Company and the Navy was two-way, as the Company was anxious to be informed of movements of naval ships in the Caribbean which suited their interests. The South Sea Company's correspondence with the Admiralty commonly involved requests regarding fleet positions and arrival times for naval vessels in Company trading areas. For example, in a letter to Josiah Burchett from March 1731, secretary to the South Sea Company, W. Smith, said that

> [t]he court of directors of the South Sea Company having heard that the Right Hon[ourable] the Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty are dispatching one of His Majesty's Ships to Rear Admiral Stewart at Jamaica, desire the favour of you to acquaint me for their information, how soon you think she may be ready to sail.[423]

It is unclear how the South Sea Company and its directors had heard of the Admiralty's planned dispatch of a naval vessel to Jamaica, but it shows the importance of information and intelligence transfer not only in the interests of the Royal Navy, but also for the South Sea Company to gain protection for their ships to and in the West Indies by the state. It is worth noting that this was a period of uneasy peace, illustrating the need for support from the Royal Navy against the *guarda costas* which roamed the Caribbean Sea.

The Company also provided its own shipping movements, lobbying for support and commitment of resources by the Admiralty for the defence of their interests. This was particularly prominent during the period of the *asiento* and the years of peace between the end of the War of Spanish Succession and the outbreak of the War of Jenkins' Ear, as the tensions between Britain and Spain over trading rights in the Spanish empire were often heated, including allegations of French and British smuggling in the region. The reluctant cession of the *asiento* to Britain at the close of the War of Spanish Succession, granting the import of a designated quota of enslaved Africans by the newly formed South Sea Company into the Spanish empire, pushed the Spanish crown to issue permissions to private ships to act as *guarda costas*. These coast guards patrolled the waters of the Caribbean in search of vessels accused of smuggling and were granted powers to search and seize those they believed to be guilty.[424]

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[423] TNA, ADM 1/3810, W. Smith to Burchett, 1 March 1731.
[424] Mewett, '"It is ticklish meddling with the Navy", 6.

These years of peace were plagued with stories of abuse of these powers which pushed greater calls for protection of Britain's trade. This prompted the Company to use the Navy as a protective force for their returning vessels which contained bullion and luxuries gained from trading in Spanish America. In March 1723, the Company's factors, as well as factors of the Royal African Company and merchants of Jamaica, petitioned Captain Robert Harris and his ship HMS *Falkland* to protect their ships which were preparing to make the crossing back to Britain. With 'ships, goods and money to a very considerable value ready to send for Britain', Harris 'ordered Captain [Nicholas] Eaton to stay twenty days and take the trade under his care as was desired.'[425] Intelligence clearly influenced the allocation of resources in peace as much as war, as fears of attacks on British shipping and trading interests remained. The movements of this convoy would have been guarded by Harris and his fellow officers, to minimise the risk of interception by Spanish vessels hoping to search and seize them.

The above was an early example in a pattern which continued throughout this period, as perceived threats to trading interests coincided with planned sailing dates of convoys. In a letter to the Admiralty from August 1725, Company sub-governor Sir John Eyles informed the Admiralty that the Company had 'lately dispatched their annual ship, the *Prince Frederick* to the port of Vera Cruz, with a cargo amounting to about £300,000' under the terms of the *asiento*.[426] Citing fear that 'these seas are infested with pirates' and patrolled 'in a manner equally dangerous with ships, which under the pretence of being *guarda costas*, take and plunder almost any ships they meet with', Eyles requested that the Admiralty would deploy 'one or more of His Majesty's Ships on the Jamaica station' as greater protections for their vessels and their cargoes.[427] The South Sea Company relied on the Royal Navy for protection for its commercial interests and used the information networks which crisscrossed the Atlantic to apply for enhanced protections for such interests. This was particularly relevant during this period of tension, as the Company's trade was a frequent target for the *guarda costas* and therefore requiring of protection from the Royal Navy.

In March 1726, Company secretary D. Wescomb passed on information received by the directors that 'the Company's ship *Royal George* in her homeward bound voyage from the Spanish West Indies has been condemned at Antigua as not in a condition to proceed home', with the loaded treasure 'intended to be put on board His Majesty's Ship [*Kinsale*], which was

[425] TNA, ADM 1/3810, Harris to Admiralty, *Falkland* at Kingston Jamaica 1 March 1722/3.
[426] TNA, ADM 1/3810, To the Rt Hon the Lords Commissioners for executing the office of Lord High Admiral of Great Britain [27 August 1725].
[427] TNA, ADM 1/3810, To the Rt Hon the Lords Commissioners 27 August 1725.

appointed her convoy.'[428] *Kinsale* was a frigate of substantially weaker armament than the 100-gun *Royal George*, and the Company's directors evidently doubted that she was strong enough to convey the treasure safely across the Atlantic at a time of rising tensions between Britain and Spain. Wescomb therefore requested that the Admiralty 'order one of His Majesty's Ships [to] Antigua, to join the *Kinsale*, and accompany her the remainder of the voyage', with the *Kinsale* due to sail at the end of the following month.[429] Not only was the Navy directly supporting the South Sea Company by shipping the contents of the *Royal George* in the *Kinsale*, a naval vessel, but the request had been made for further naval support timed with the *Kinsale*'s scheduled sailing date at the end of April 1726. This shows the symbiotic relationship between the South Sea Company and the Royal Navy as well as the importance of intelligence in preserving and supporting the Company's interests. As a chartered company with connections to the British state itself, originally set up to alleviate and manage war debt, the Company's protection and the successful shipping of the wealth it had gathered in the Americas back to Britain was a focus shared by the Royal Navy, furthering the development of Britain's share of the economic opportunities available in the West Indies.

Communication connections between the South Sea Company and the Royal Navy also demonstrate the Navy's link to the defence of British imperial interests. Naval officers on station used Company factors as informants based on their knowledge of trade routes and economic activity in the region, as well as sources of information gathered as a by-product of business around the West Indies. This is best illustrated by the information chain formed between Admiral Vernon and his subordinate officers cruising for intelligence in the Caribbean. In September 1739 Vernon ordered Captain Herbert to

> use your best diligence for procuring the most experienced pilot you can meet with [at Barbados], for the Course of Caracas, and to endeavour to inform yourself as particularly as you can from the agent of the South Sea Company there or others that may have frequented it, what are the usual times for the ships loading there, and what are the ports they frequent, and what fortifications they have for the security of their respective ports, and in general, get the best information you can of all particulars relating to the course of the Spanish Trade.[430]

Vernon sent this letter to Herbert a month before the outbreak of war, when Vernon was preparing for the coming conflict, making it imperative to be informed about the region.

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[428] TNA, ADM 1/3810, To the Rt Hon the Lords Commissioners for executing the office of Lord High Admiral of Great Britain [9 March 1726].
[429] *Ibid*.
[430] Vernon, 'Order to Captain Herbert, September 2, 1739', in Ranft (ed.), *The Vernon Papers*, 23-4.

Gathering intelligence about likely areas of conflict was standard practice, as an extension of the Navy's role in gathering information about geography, topography, and navigation, which is discussed in Chapter 5. Vernon's advice to Herbert shows the immediate intelligence gathering which the Navy was able to conduct in preparation for open conflict. The South Sea Company's factors based at Caracas had deep knowledge of the functions of regional maritime trade routes, as well as the sailing patterns of Spanish ships due to their proximity to Spain's treasure ports such as Cartagena. Vernon was anxious to develop his own knowledge of the region, and the South Sea Company's traders' observations of the Spanish empire in the years leading up to the period of rising tensions and eventual war meant that they had developed an understanding of the trading systems which flowed around the West Indies and back to Europe. Trading interests were both targets for the Royal Navy's war objectives against the Spanish in the conflict that followed, as well as a focus for imperial defensive measures preserving British trade.

Vernon's plan paid off, demonstrated by his letter from October 1739 which ordered Waterhouse 'together with his Majesty's ship the *Strafford*' to Caracas, with '[t]he best intelligence I could procure of the course of the Spanish trade on that coast and what fortifications they have' delivered with the orders in the letter.[431] Vernon's prediction that the South Sea Company's representatives on the coast were locally knowledgeable had proven accurate, as the Admiral informed Waterhouse that 'Capt. Herbert has procured one who was mate to a South Sea Company's ship trading on that coast to serve you for a pilot as far as his knowledge extends, in which he seems positive as to knowing the land'.[432] Intelligence clearly flowed between naval officers as they shared resources to remain collectively informed of the situation on station.

The Company shared goals with the Navy, as the Company's interests and the economic benefit their preservation brought to Britain's developing Atlantic empire was a mutual focus and something which the Navy was sworn to protect. The British Atlantic empire was an economic system to which the South Sea Company was pivotal, not only through the wealth it created and transported but also as a source of intelligence gathered to protect those interests. The Royal Navy was both the protector and collaborator in a system of symbiotic exchange, as naval officers needed the knowledge that Company agents possessed to further the interests of the Company and the wider British state, just as much as the Company and the

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[431] Vernon, 'Order to Waterhouse, October 2, 1739', in Ranft (ed.), *The Vernon Papers*, 24-5.
[432] *Ibid.*

British state needed the Royal Navy to protect the British empire in the Atlantic as it developed during the tension and conflict of the 1730s and 1740s.

Captain Herbert's intelligence gathering mission also yielded knowledge of the placement of Spanish trade on the south coast of the Caribbean Sea. Vernon directed Waterhouse to Herbert's 'paper intelligence [in which you will] see that all their trade on that coast is limited between La Guayra and Porto Cavallo', with the order to attack any Spanish ships he encountered.[433] The apparent confidence and precision with which Vernon set out the boundaries of Spanish trading settlements on that coast demonstrates both the importance of the South Sea Company's employees as informants for the Royal Navy, as well as the trust with which Vernon regarded the intelligence he had received. Herbert's intelligence predated the outbreak of war, showing the commander-in-chief's continuous dedication to remaining informed on station.

[433] *Ibid*.

Officers' Cruises for Intelligence

Admiral Edward Vernon's tenure as commander in chief on the Jamaica station took place against the backdrop of the War of Jenkins' Ear. The war itself was the culmination of long-standing disputes between Britain and Spain for commercial control of the western Atlantic, dating back to the settlements reached at the end of the War of Spanish Succession in the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht.[434] This background of long-term grievance was the environment in which the legend of Captain Jenkins' ear developed. Captain Robert Jenkins was a British merchant trading in the Caribbean when he was allegedly intercepted by a Spanish *guarda costa* who proceeded to beat him and cut off his ear. According to myth, Jenkins then appeared in Parliament eight years later brandishing the ear pickled in a jar and demanding that the British government retaliate.[435] Whilst this was almost certainly a myth, Jenkins was very likely to have been abused by the Spanish vessel, and the story would serve the cause well as part of British justifications for going to war in October 1739.[436]

The wealth of surviving correspondence from Vernon and the officers he commanded during the war makes this an excellent case to examine the power of intelligence as a vital factor in British imperial development during the first half of the eighteenth century.

Admiral Edward Vernon demonstrated extensive use of one of the most available and reliable sources of intelligence for commanders-in-chief: subordinate naval officers dispatched on cruising orders along coastlines and through points of high maritime traffic in the Americas. As discussed in the previous chapter, knowledge of high-traffic areas increased the probability of gathering intelligence and of intercepting enemy vessels. Vernon sent vessels with orders to gather all possible intelligence of enemy movements in a selected port or on a stretch of coastline where rival nations' vessels and fortifications were present.[437] The cruising order gave the officer autonomy to decide how best to gather intelligence and report back to Vernon. Beyond the instruction to range in a specified area, officers were frequently left to their own devices and expected to act on those orders on initiative. The challenges of

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[434] Crewe, *Yellow Jack and the Worm*, 1; Harding, *Emergence*, 6; Mewett, '"It is ticklish meddling with the Navy", 5, 6.
[435] Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 235.
[436] Woodfine, 'Ideas of naval power', 71-90; Mewett, '"It is ticklish meddling with the Navy", 6.
[437] Frequent examples can be found in: TNA, ADM 1/233, Letters from Senior Officers, Jamaica: including Admirals Vernon, Ogle and Davers, 1740-1746; Ranft (ed.), *Vernon Papers*.

communication systems of the period demanded delegation, as operating in a dispersed colonial environment made autonomy a necessity.

Vernon began to rely on the mobility of his junior officers in smaller vessels to cruise for intelligence, gathering intelligence to define and redefine his strategy. After war had broken out, Vernon ordered Captain Edward Stapleton in November 1739 to 'make the best of your way to Cartagena and to look in on the back of the town' for the Spanish *flota* which he expected to be assembling for return to Spain, and to 'make your best observations whether they may have been joined by any other ships of war since you were there last'.[438] Cartagena was known to be the centre of the Spanish *flota* system in the Americas, as the port from which galleons loaded with precious metals from Spanish mines began their voyage to Europe via Havana, Cuba. Vernon's order to Stapleton illustrates the link between common knowledge and intelligence, implying that Stapleton had previously observed the fleet at Cartagena, although when these observations took place and exactly what Stapleton saw is unclear. Despite this, Vernon deemed him as best placed to observe and compare the size of the fleet gathered there by the second cruise. Vernon clearly strove to deploy his limited resources, utilising consistent informants who could provide intelligence on Spanish shipping and other viable targets for the execution of Britain's wartime objectives. The targeting of the *flota* was an extension of British aims to balance losses made to British shipping in Europe. It was perceived as one method of further enfeebling Spanish commerce as well as strengthening Britain's own and establishing colonies to guarantee British 'control of the Caribbean trade.'[439] These war aims were inherently economically driven as a method of recouping losses made to the Spanish *guarda costas* in the period of tension since the end of the Spanish Succession War. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, the pursuit of the *flota* remained opportunistic.

Vernon's orders to Stapleton also demonstrate the in-built flexibility in such cruising orders for intelligence gathering. Vernon said that in the event that the *flota* had not been joined by Spanish naval vessels in preparations for the return to Spain, Stapleton was to 'continue cruising in such stations off that harbour as you shall judge most advisable, according to the course of the winds and currents at that time, for your intercepting and taking all Spanish ships and vessels that you shall meet with or be able to come up with'.[440] Vernon clearly trusted his detached officer to act with autonomy and initiative off Cartagena. Vernon clearly recognised

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[438] E. Vernon, 'Order to Capt Stapelton of the Sheerness [*Burford*, at Sea, November 6, 1739]', in Ranft (ed.), *Vernon Papers*, 30-31.
[439] Woodfine, 'Ideas of naval power', 71, 74-5.
[440] Vernon, 'Order to Stapleton', 30-31.

the limitations of contact between himself and his officers cruising away from his immediate control. In a broader sense, it also shows the difficulties of command and control in an era of slow and uncertain communications. Vernon had to allow the officers under his command to use discretion regarding execution of orders (including gathering intelligence), in the same way that the Admiralty had allowed him in his service as commander-in-chief in Jamaica.

Naval officers also gathered intelligence captured as a by-product of prize-taking. In a letter to Secretary of the Admiralty Josiah Burchett (and for the attention of the Duke of Newcastle and Sir Charles Wager) from December 1740, Vernon recounted the 'many material intelligences, that have happily fallen in my way by the prizes brought in by my cruisers'.[441] Vernon provided digests of what each prize granted him regarding the movements of French and Spanish shipping, including 'the first advice of the *Marquis d'Antin* being arrived at Port Louis with the Brest Squadron, and twelve hundred men raised in Martinique; which were to be followed by six hundred more'.[442] This was taken from intelligence gathered by Captain William Knight, cruising near Port Louis, who intercepted a Spanish sloop as it departed from the island.[443] Vernon had taken this opportunity to inform London of the ship's arrival, filling in gaps in the Admiralty's own gathering of such shipping movements. Vernon was informed of the *Marquis d'Antin*'s arrival in the West Indies upon Knight's return to Port Royal, Jamaica on 26 November. This intelligence highlighted the cruising method in action, as an important and reliable method of delegated intelligence gathering at the commander-in-chief's disposal. Officers would cruise coasts to improve their understanding of local geography, defences, and enemy movements, providing consistent intelligence from mobile informants. Vernon detailed further intelligence received on 5 December, as the

> *Princess Louisa* brought me the intelligence of the Toulon squadron's arrival at Port Louis, commanded by Mr de la Rochelard. The French collecting all their forces just to windward of us, makes me conjecture, their views are against this island, particularly, as they daily expect orders for a war against Britain.[444]

This invasion never came. The French only later joined the conflict on the Spanish side once major naval operations had ceased with the return of Vernon's fleet to Britain in 1742, the escalation of the War of Austrian Succession and the greater focus on the European theatre of conflict. Nevertheless, Vernon's inclusion of the French fleet's arrival shows the surveillance

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[441] TNA, ADM 1/233, 12 December 1740, Vernon to Burchett.
[442] *Ibid*.
[443] Syrett & DiNardo (eds.), *Commissioned Sea Officers*, 261; TNA, ADM 1/233, 12 December 1740, Vernon to Burchett.
[444] TNA, ADM 1/233, 12 December 1740, Vernon to Burchett.

conducted by British naval officers in the area, through which Vernon gathered locally sourced intelligence about the movement of enemy shipping and naval forces. Captain Knight's earlier report indicates Vernon's application of intelligence received from his cruising officers, predicting that French forces gathering at Port Louis were evidence of a plan to invade Jamaica. Whilst such fear was never realised, French vessels remained a constant consideration as support for the *flota*, so whether they were actual threats to colonial security was always in question.

Material gathered from cruising was often collected as a by-product of prize taking. Ships were captured, their crews questioned (perhaps forcefully), and papers seized before the information was relayed back to Vernon. This was just as important as Knight argues it would prove to be during Nelson's cruise in the Mediterranean over half a century later.[445] This intelligence was considered reliable because it had been stolen from rivals directly and therefore was likely to be accurate. Simultaneously, it is evident that the absence of papers which could be taken would not preserve the crew of a vessel from being the subject of a naval officer's search for intelligence. For example, Vernon informed the Duke of Newcastle that in late November 1740, Captain Knight of HMS *Torrington* 'brought […] [to Jamaica] a Spanish sloop he had taken the day she came out of Port Louis, but [the captain] had thrown his letters overboard, if he had any, which he would not confess'.[446] Keeping sensitive papers (including the mail) in weighted bags was standard security practice of the day, allowing the ship's crew to throw anything that should not fall into enemy hands overboard if capture became inevitable. Vernon touched on the challenge that this presented, as papers on board which could provide intelligence could easily be destroyed before they were seized by naval officers, which adds to the challenge presented to historians using incomplete records. However, it also shows the range of sources utilised by naval officers in such cases, as Vernon proposed a solution through his intention to

> send you the Master home, who is a Genoese, and speaks English, that your grace may examine him yourself, for he is an artful canary bird, and says he resided eight years at Gibraltar. By him, however, I learnt the first advice of the Brest squadron under the *Marquis d'Antin*, being arrived at Port Louis, and was greatly surprised to learn [that] they had been there even all the time I was last cruising off their coast, and had watered amongst their settlements, without the least intimation of it from anyone.[447]

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[445] Knight, 'Nelson's 'old lady', 89.
[446] TNA, CO 137/48, Vernon to Newcastle, 12 December 1740.
[447] *Ibid*.

This is clear evidence of interrogation as a method of extracting intelligence from those intercepted by the Navy during cruising missions. This letter was sent to the Duke of Newcastle, as a digest of the intelligence that Vernon also sent to Burchett at the Admiralty, which was also designed for Newcastle's attention. Once again, Vernon had sent multiple letters containing similar contents, to reduce the likelihood of its complete loss if it was mishandled. Vernon, in sending the Master of the Spanish vessel to London, was clearly confident that the Master's intelligence concerning the *Marquis d'Antin* was only the start. By sending him to London, Vernon considered the longer-term usefulness of this man as an informant for government intelligence gathering in support of naval operations.

Prize-taking could prove especially lucrative as officers kept shares of ships sold through capture, meaning that the incentive to take enemy vessels for financial gain was coupled with potentially vital intelligence retrieved from papers on board or crews under interrogation. There was a coincidence of public and private interest in this regard, which also applied to privateers. Finally, intelligence gathered in this manner helped define the commander-in-chief's operational strategy, as well as informing future cruising orders by identifying high-traffic regions to target to disrupt enemy vessels. On the same day that the *Princess Louisa* returned with intelligence of the Toulon fleet, Vernon recounted the arrival of

> Captain [James] Rentone returned from his cruise off Cartagena, where he saw all the Spanish fleet, and met advice of the Marquis de las Torres and his squadron, being prepar[ed] to sail for the Havana, and Don Blas to continue with all his ships (but the *Europa*, Don Benedito Spinola, who was to go with Torres) for the defence of Cartagena.[448]

Cartagena remained a focus of British attention and appears to have shared significance as a port city with Philadelphia in the lead-up to the American Revolution. [449] Cartagena was important to the Royal Navy as a port from which Spain's precious metals were dispatched across the Atlantic, as well as a stationing port for the South Sea Company. This cemented it not only as a centre of trade and therefore information, facilitated by cosmopolitan populations mixing, gossiping and trading, but also of significance for its military and naval resources. As illustrated by multiple orders between Vernon and his subordinates dispatched on cruises near the port, observations of Cartagena gave the commander-in-chief clues to the strength of naval forces against him. Established as a trading centre and base for Spanish naval

[448] TNA, ADM 1/233, Vernon to Burchett, 12 December 1740.
[449] P. A. Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

forces in the Caribbean, observing the port by cruising naval officers evolved into a tool for gathering intelligence of Spanish movements.

This focus on Cartagena remained until Vernon left his post as commander-in-chief in the West Indies. Collating the intelligence gathered from cruises by subordinate officers in June 1742, Vernon informed Thomas Corbett, Secretary to the Admiralty after Burchett retired earlier that year, of the coming and going of Spanish shipping associated with the port. Relaying intelligence taken '[b]y Captain Stevens of the *Ludlow Castle* lately returned from Cartagena' from a 'Spanish sloop he took coming in for Boca Chica', Vernon informed the Admiralty that 'Don Rodrigo de Torres[…] was said to be at the Havana with his squadron when they came from Santiago with a loading of tobacco and sugar' earlier in the month.[450] The Royal Navy was attentive to the networks created by the commerce which stemmed from Cartagena, highlighting the ports which connected the Spanish Caribbean to Europe. Vernon reported that the French squadron feared to be at Port Louis had not arrived as of the most recent intelligence he had from April of the same year, 'since which all my cruisers going to windward have been prevented by the lee current and returned shattered into port, by the fiery breezes.'[451] Cruises for intelligence were weather and current dependant, and the autonomy granted to officers of the Royal Navy could be taken from them by elements beyond their control.

Just as during the War of Spanish Succession, officers of the Royal Navy also tracked the movements of individuals to establish shipping patterns and enemy fleet movements during the wars of the 1740s. Vernon recognised the significance of de Torres' fleet. In August 1742, Vernon sent intelligence he had received to Corbett which contained 'the list of the 12 ships of the line' which Torres 'had with him at the Havana on the 15th of June' as well as two others which had joined him from another squadron.[452] Torres' presence clearly caught the attention of Vernon and his subordinates, as a significant force against British vessels in the region. What began as concentration on a port like Cartagena expanded into a focus on tracking individuals whose movements posed a threat to British interests. Indeed, Vernon's intelligence transfer to the Admiralty highlighted his concerns that 'they have [as] full [and] as strong a squadron in those seas as we have and they cannot be in so bad condition as ours having had very little wear and [tear].'[453] Vernon appeared to suggest that the Admiralty should bolster British

[450] TNA, ADM 1/233, Vernon to Thomas Corbett 30 June 1742.
[451] *Ibid*.
[452] TNA, ADM 1/233, Vernon to Corbett, 3 August 1742.
[453] *Ibid*.

forces in line with the intelligence he had forwarded, although he was not explicit in his request. Vernon clearly saw Torres' squadron as a threat in the Caribbean, tracking the Spaniard's movements for patterns and further details of strength to assess the risk if he were to consider engaging him. Vernon was also naturally fixated on discerning Torres' objectives if he were to escort the *flota*. Much like the British state's focus on the movements of Admiral du Casse on his voyage to meet and escort the *flota* during the War of Spanish Succession, individual fleets deemed to be targets for British naval operations stemmed from intelligence gathered in information centres like Cartagena.

Captain James Rentone, previously dispatched by Vernon in the *Triumph* sloop to take news of the British capture of Portobello in spring 1740, returned to the Caribbean with orders to support Vernon, and arrived from London in English Harbour, Antigua in September 1740.[454] Rentone was dispatched to Cartagena, and upon his return to Vernon in Port Royal in early December, passed intelligence of enemy shipping movements, including that which 'seems to confirm the former intelligence, that the Marquis de Torres is certainly intended to be moving off speedily for the Havana, with such part of the treasure as they have yet been able to collect'.[455] Vernon reproduced this in a letter to the Duke of Newcastle. Alongside copies of the captain's journal was a copy of a letter from the Captain of the *Don Carlos*, who had recently escorted Pedro de Castro out to his new post as Viceroy of New Spain.[456]

Rentone had seemingly intercepted a letter from the *Don Carlos*, 'which seem[ed] to confirm the former intelligence, that the Marquis de Torres is certainly intended to be moving off speedily for the Havana' from Cartagena with the *flota*.[457] Opportunistic interception of Spanish vessels led to the gathering of human intelligence from prisoners, as well as the interception of captured correspondence. Vernon provided both the Duke of Newcastle and Burchett with details of the sources his officers had found whilst cruising in duplicated letters. For example, Vernon recounted his receipt of intelligence from a captured French sloop sailing in Spanish service, a captured Spanish sloop and from Captain Rentone after cruising on the coast of Cartagena.[458] He probably duplicated this intelligence to once again reduce the risk of it being lost in its return to London, and also replicated the intelligence he had received from

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[454] TNA, ADM 1/2380, Rentone to Burchett, *Experiment* at Antigua[,] September 3, 1740.
[455] TNA, CO 137/48 (ff. 68-74), Vernon to Newcastle, *Burford* in Port Royal Harbour, Jamaica, 12 December 1740.
[456] *Ibid*.
[457] *Ibid*.
[458] TNA, ADM 1/233, Vernon to Burchett, 12 December 1740; TNA, CO 137/48 (ff. 68-74), Vernon to Newcastle, 12 December 1740.

Captain Stapleton aboard the *Princess Louisa* after he returned from his cruise off Cape Tiburon (St Domingue). Echoing the 'arrival of the Toulon squadron with Mr de Rochelard at Port Louis', he repeated his suspicions that the French were massing there with plans to invade Jamaica in both letters, noting to Newcastle that he had passed this intelligence to Governor Trelawny for discussion in the Jamaican assembly.[459] Intelligence transfer between officers of the Navy and central government was flexible, as intelligence was passed along multiple routes with varying levels of detail dependent on recipient. Vernon may have predicted that intelligence might not be shared between government bodies, pushing him to write to each individually to better guarantee the transfer of intelligence to those who needed to remain informed. Alternatively, Vernon may have written a backup addressed to two departments in case one letter was intercepted or lost.

Vernon noted his reliance on smaller vessels for intelligence gathering, informing Burchett that 'I will continue to keep [cruisers] out in all convenient stations, and have my whole squadron in condition for service' as far as possible.[460] Officers' cruising was an important conduit through which intelligence could be gathered and used to inform naval strategy in theatre. Maffeo's suggestion that 'deployed (detached) ship captains and fleet commanders were their own intelligence officers' by the late eighteenth century was in fact a much earlier development in the infrastructure of intelligence gathering, as evidenced by Vernon's delegation of such gathering duties to his subordinate officers.[461] Vernon's correspondence with both the officers in his squadron and representatives of central government evidences a continuous network of correspondence and intelligence transfer predating the period examined by Maffeo, and demonstrating Vernon's clear understanding of the importance of intelligence and its channels of communication.

Naturally, cruises did not always result in a positive collection of intelligence material. In correspondence from late April and early May 1742, Vernon recounted the return of 'Captain Forrest, whom I had sent with my tender and boats to watch Passo Cavallos and to view the entrance into the Matunilla' on 15 March.[462] Forrest met with limited success in his attempts to gather intelligence from these two cities in Columbia,

> having […] rowed three leagues up the Matunilla, but could only come up with an old black woman, from whom they could get no other intelligence than, that was

[459] TNA, CO 137/48 (ff. 68-74), Vernon to Newcastle, 12 December 1740
[460] *Ibid*.
[461] Maffeo, *Most Secret and Confidential*, 121.
[462] TNA, ADM 1/233, Vernon to Corbett 27 April/1 May 1742.

> the way the boats passed for [Mompos], and he brought with him four canoes, that might have been of service in the expedition.[463]

Cruises like Forrest's were inconsistent in their levels of success in intelligence gathering, with his findings limited to establishing the patterns of shipping in the area under observation. This informant, labelled by Vernon only as an 'old black woman', simultaneously demonstrates the range of backgrounds from which informants were drawn, whilst also illustrating that the usefulness of intelligence which was available varied. In this case, Forrest had likely hoped that he would find multiple individuals who would prove useful. He instead interrogated the only person he could find, and came up with nothing useful, in an occupational hazard of such methods of gathering intelligence. There were no guarantees, as was evident in all parts of these systems on which the Navy relied for intelligence. The flexibility of the connections applied to the transfer to the government as well as at the point of collection on station. Vernon's correspondence with central government also shows the limits of these informational networks, as Vernon suggested that Admiralty Secretary Josiah Burchett should 'refer their Lordships [of the Admiralty] to [Sir Charles Wager] for particulars' of the intelligence he had forwarded, as 'I have wrote at large, and sent copies of all intercepted letters' to him.[464] Vernon's decision to forward much of what had been gathered directly to Wager, as the First Lord of the Admiralty, illustrates Vernon's understanding of the realities of the systems in which he operated. Clearly, there were demands on naval officers to forward their gathered intelligence to officials in London, even if these channels were defined theoretically and often did not function quite so in practice, as discussed in Chapter 1.

[463] *Ibid*.
[464] TNA, CO 137/48, Vernon to Newcastle, 12 December 1740.

‘Lowther the pirate’: from Convicted Criminal to Imperial Informant

‘Lowther the pirate’ was a convicted pirate, found by naval officers cruising in the Caribbean Sea. Determined to have intelligence which was vital to Vernon’s operations in the region, Lowther was granted a pardon and later a commission in the Royal Navy. Lowther’s exact identity is difficult to determine, given that his name (and criminal past) was shared with a pirate featured in *A General History of the Pyrates*, who took his own life on the island of Blanco, off the coast of Panama, in 1723 to avoid facing trial for piracy.[465] Ranft makes no connection between the two men, simply labelling Vernon’s informant as ‘an ex-pirate’ and advisor on the attack on Spanish Panama in 1741.[466] Meanwhile, Chapman speculates that the two men were one and the same, accepting the common name as evidence enough without consideration of the disparity between the years of the former Lowther’s death and the appearance of Vernon’s informant.[467] It was probably coincidence that the men had the same name, and could not have been the same person unless the former Lowther had not taken his own life in 1723. Lowther’s pardon was confirmed in the minutes of a meeting of the Lords Justice, in which the recommendation was made to King George II that it be granted.[468] The Lords Justice present at the meeting and the government officials (who later made sure that Lowther’s commission as lieutenant was confirmed) clearly recognised his value as an informant and contributor to intelligence gathering in the West Indies, and were willing to withhold punishment for his (apparently undocumented) piratical behaviour in the Americas. The level of documentation which survives regarding Lowther’s recruitment and employment with the Navy as an informant is remarkable, providing unique insight into the process of intelligence gathering with the cultivation of local informants. Despite being granted a pardon for his past crimes and being commissioned lieutenant, Lowther does not appear in the recorded list of commissioned sea officers.[469] As a flag officer on station, Vernon was able to promote and commission those around him without waiting for the confirmation to have been processed by the Admiralty before they could undertake their role. Another example of this is Captain James Rentone, who later applied for and received confirmation upon his return to

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[465] Johnson, *History of the Pyrates*, 347-365.
[466] Ranft (ed.), *The Vernon Papers*, 18-19.
[467] C. S. Chapman, *Disaster on the Spanish Main: The Tragic British-American Expedition to the West Indies during the War of Jenkins’ Ear* (Sterling: Potomac Books, 2021), 95-6.
[468] TNA, SP 36/51/229 (ff. 87), Folio 229. Minutes of a meeting of the Lords Justices and others concerning the pardon for Lowther the pirate; military matters; the riots at Newcastle; Cathcart’s expedition, etc.
[469] i.e. Syrett & DiNardo (eds.), *Commissioned Sea Officers*, 284.

London with Vernon's dispatches detailing the capture of Portobello.[470] Such conditions for promotion were also recorded in the contemporary edition of the *Regulations and Instructions Relating to His Majesty's Service at Sea*, provided the commander-in-chief did not appoint an individual in the English Channel, which fell under the jurisdiction of the Admiralty itself.[471]

Vernon sent a letter to the Admiralty in April 1740 requesting a pardon for Lowther, whose local knowledge had manifested in 'a draught of the coast from Portobello to Chagres, and the mouth of the river, and shoal before it, which was found from their observations to be very exact,' deemed by Vernon to be sufficient to deserve a pardon, later confirmed by the King.[472] This knowledge and sketch of the coast (copies of which do not survive) was present during and instrumental to the successful British attack and capture of Portobello in November 1739, ahead of reopening the town to British trade.[473] Lowther's information charting this small section of the Spanish-controlled southern coast of the Caribbean Sea provided Vernon with a vital insight into how best to approach the tasks of disrupting Spanish commerce and aiding British access to those markets. It is likely that Lowther was a resident, trader, and Company associate in Portobello before war broke out, a status which made him extremely attractive to British forces in this pivotal theatre of conflict. His usefulness as an informant probably saved him from the gallows as he was a convicted pirate, an offence that was usually punishable by death. His involvement in joint operations on the Caribbean coast of South America, discussed below, was based specifically on his knowledge of the geography, capabilities, and defences of Spanish imperial possessions in the region, gathered first-hand from his time on that coast.

Vernon concluded that 'I find him capable of doing greater services to his Majesty, and know him to be a good seaman and gallant man, having formerly sailed with me in several ships'.[474] The details of Lowther's past, as well as his previous service with Vernon are uncertain, but the Admiral's intention is well-defined: to demonstrate the importance of this man as a local

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[470] TNA, ADM 1/2380, Rentone to Burchett, Deptford June 10, 1740; Vernon, 'Order to Captain Rentone of the *Triumph*, Snow, Prize, December 22, 1739', in Ranft (ed.), *The Vernon Papers*, 47-48; Syrett & DiNardo (eds.), *Commissioned Sea Officers*, 375.
[471] Privy Council of Great Britain, *Regulations and Instructions Relating to His Majesty's Service at Sea* (London: n.p., 1740), 14.
[472] Vernon, 'Vernon to Wager, *Strafford*, April 5, 1740', in Ranft (ed.), *The Vernon Papers*, 81-2; TNA, SP 36/51/229 (ff. 87), Folio 229. Minutes of a meeting of the Lords Justices.
[473] R. Harding, 'Edward Vernon, 1684-1757', in P. Le Fevre & R. Harding (eds.), *Precursors of Nelson: British Admirals of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Chatham Publishing, 2000), 151-175, 168; R. Harding, *Vernon, Edward (1684–1757), Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2008), 2020. Available online: https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-28237?rskey=5Kkg8n&result=3 [Accessed 18/09/2020]; Vernon, 'Vernon to Wager, *Strafford*, April 5, 1740', in Ranft (ed.), *The Vernon Papers*, 81-2.
[474] *Ibid*.

informant, regardless of his criminal past, and thereby encourage his future employment. In Lowther's case, his crimes were outweighed by his usefulness in charting the coast of Spanish Panama. Vernon and his subordinates were clearly willing to use any source of information, even if it involved dealing with convicted criminals. This example highlights the importance of intelligence to successful British naval operations in the region, illustrated in Vernon and his subordinates' pragmatism in using a convicted pirate as an informant. It marks a stark contrast with British state policy on piracy of the 1710s and 1720s: a time when pirates were not informants for the state, but were hunted in European efforts to suppress Atlantic piracy and its perpetrators as *hostis humani generis* ('enemies of all mankind') with the threat of the death penalty, which remained in living memory.[475] The death penalty remained in place as the punishment for piracy, but had decreased in frequency after the suppression of piracy in the previous decade. Lowther's employment by the Navy was a striking contrast to Captain Ellis Brand and Lieutenant Robert Maynard's hunt for and execution of Blackbeard in 1718, discussed in the previous chapter, although, Lowther may have been considered only a very minor pirate and therefore not treated as harshly as Blackbeard. Officers like Vernon needed to be flexible on the margins of empire, with looser adherence to previous condemnation of piracy to facilitate intelligence gathering from these knowledgeable sources who had previously operated outside the law. As is discussed below, Lowther possessed unconventional importance as a convicted criminal turned informant, whose local knowledge and skill as a pilot led to reward and status as a longer-term informer and naval officer.

After the initial successes of Vernon's campaign in the Caribbean capturing Portobello, British operations soon met with mixed success. Firstly, an attack on Cartagena in March 1740 was plagued by a lack of land troops and poor anchorage, suggesting a combination of poor logistical organisation and inaccurate hydrographic information.[476] However, Lowther's sketch did not chart the coast as far as Cartagena, apparently beyond Lowther's sphere of knowledge. It was a lack of British preparedness, disagreements amongst commanders and outbreaks of disease which led to failure at Cartagena, and not a deficiency in the intelligence given to Vernon.[477] However, the comparative ease with which Vernon's squadron successfully besieged, captured, and destroyed the fortifications at Chagres in March 1740 before it was

[475] Cowse, *Tryals of Stede Bonnet,* 3; Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy*, 3-4; Rediker, '"Under the Banner of King Death"', 203-227; Rediker, *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 269, 275.
[476] Harding, 'Edward Vernon', 168.
[477] J. de Zulueta, 'Health and Military Factors in Vernon's Failure at Cartagena', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 78, 2 (1992), 127-141.

opened to British merchants suggests that Lowther's chart did have some degree of accuracy.[478]

Later in the British campaign, now-Lieutenant George Lowther developed his knowledge into a number of 'schemes' for attacking Spanish colonial settlements, including plans for joint operations between the Royal Navy and the British Army against Spanish Panama and Santiago de Cuba. He was also frequently dispatched on small vessel operations as a direct result of his local knowledge, tasked with surveying enemy settlements and defences during the planning of assaults by Vernon and Lieutenant General Thomas Wentworth's combined forces, as well as acting as pilot for other vessels in waters unfamiliar to them.[479]

This involvement directly influenced the West Indies campaign whilst Vernon was Commander-in-Chief, advocating for Lowther's pardon, commission as a lieutenant and pay as a pilot.[480] Vernon cited Lowther's support of operations led by Lieutenant General Wentworth as justification for his request for Lowther's confirmation and pay as a lieutenant by the Admiralty, as he requested an Order in Council (if so required), to ensure Lowther was paid adequately in line with his 'experience, judgement and resolution, and [a] hearty goodwill, to serve His Majesty faithfully and diligently.'[481] Vernon's mention of an Order in Council suggests that Vernon understood that Lowther was not necessarily eligible for commission as lieutenant, in line with the regulations for officers' service at sea.[482] For example, Lowther is unlikely to have taken and passed the formal examination for promotion (conducted at the Navy Office), and will not have had the required documents detailing six years of sea time, two of which were required to have been spent as a midshipman.[483] Vernon's grounds for securing Lowther's promotion therefore rested on his practical importance to naval operations and his continued usefulness as an informant, which Vernon played into when he made the request. Whilst Lowther had no documented experience with the Navy, his time sailing in the Caribbean and knowledge gathered during his time as a pilot was the basis for Vernon's argument. This details how Vernon cultivated a longer-term informant, to be retained for extended operations and rewarded for his contribution. Following this, Lowther continued to advise Vernon with his

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[478] Harding, 'Edward Vernon', 168.
[479] TNA, ADM 1/233, Vernon Letter to Thomas Corbett, 10 February 1741; TNA, ADM 1/233, Vernon to Corbett, 3 August 1742; TNA, ADM 1/233, Copy of an order from Vice Admiral Vernon to Mr George Hinde his majesty's storekeeper at Kingston [23 June 1742].
[480] TNA, ADM 1/233, Vernon to Hinde 23 June 1742.
[481] TNA, ADM 1/233, Vernon to Corbett, 27 April 1742.
[482] Privy Council, *Regulations and Instructions*, 14-15.
[483] *Ibid*.

knowledge of the region's geography, Spanish settlements and fortifications, and likely stayed in the Caribbean to advise Admiral Sir Chaloner Ogle after Vernon departed from command of the West Indies in October 1742.[484]

After he was commissioned lieutenant, Lowther served as the fifth lieutenant aboard the *Boyne*, Vernon's flagship, in the last year of his command in the West Indies.[485] Vernon clearly wished to keep his informant close, and so promotion and payment in accordance with a naval officer's rank would have rewarded him for the intelligence he provided and incentivised his continued loyalty and intelligence gathering efforts. It demonstrates the need for, and successful acquisition of consistently available, reliable and usable intelligence to support naval operations in the West Indies.[486] Lowther's rise from convicted criminal to informant and naval office is a remarkable example of local intelligence gathering which directly informed the Navy's operations, which was similar in process to Brand's and Ogle's method of intelligence gathering in the hunt for Blackbeard, discussed in the previous chapter.

J. Morris, presumed to be an Army officer serving with Wentworth and Vernon's combined West Indies expedition, recounted a plan for an expedition to attack and capture Spanish settlements in Panama, which were based 'upon the proposals and intelligence of Mr Lowther (lately an inhabitant of Portobello, having obtained His Majesty's pardon etc)'.[487] Morris's account explicitly linked Lowther and the influence of his intelligence on the execution of British operations. By the time of Morris's account, Lieutenant Lowther had produced detailed proposals for attacks on Spanish Panama and Santiago de Cuba, based on his knowledge of defences, geography and manpower in both towns.[488] Not only was his intelligence now connected directly to British operations, but his status as lieutenant in the Royal Navy now gave legitimacy to what he knew, as a trustworthy and competent representative of the British Empire, acting in its interests and in its employ.

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[484] TNA, CO 5/42, A Scheme Proposed by Lieutenant George Lowther for Taking St. Jago by Sea; TNA, CO 5/42, Lieutenant George Lowther's Scheme for Taking St. Jago De Cuba; TNA, CO 137/57 (ff. 169-174), 1 August 1742; TNA, ADM 1/233, Vernon to Corbett, 27 April 1742; TNA, ADM 1/233, Vernon to Corbett, 3 October 1742; Syrett & DiNardo (eds.), *Commissioned Sea Officers*, 337.
[485] TNA, ADM 36/381 (ff. 31, 75, 120, 173), Admiralty: Royal Navy Ships' Musters (Series I). Ship: Boyne, 01 June 1741 – 30 November 1742.
[486] Ojala, 'Maritime Information Networks', 183-194.
[487] TNA, CO 137/57 (ff. 169-174), 1 August 1742.
[488] TNA, CO 5/42, A Scheme Proposed by Lieutenant George Lowther for Taking St. Jago by Sea; TNA, CO 5/42, Lieutenant George Lowther's Scheme for Taking St. Jago De Cuba; TNA, CO 137/57 (ff. 145-6), Copy of Lt Lowther's Scheme in Governor Trelawny's [letter] of April 25, 1742.

Vernon also recorded officer assignments in lists submitted to the Admiralty such as in January 1741, when Vernon released Lowther from assignment aboard his flagship, '[t]o be ready to attend such detached services, for the Army, or otherwise as there shall be occasion for from his experience, and knowledge in those parts.'[489] Lowther clearly remained important in the prosecution of British naval and combined military operations during the War of Jenkins' Ear whilst Vernon was commander-in-chief. Vernon obviously trusted in Lowther, both in the latter's already acquired knowledge and his abilities to acquire new intelligence if needed, in the expectation that the Lieutenant would act independently and of his own initiative, delivering on his orders to survey Spanish coastal defences. Lowther was also a further example of Vernon's reliance on subordinate officers dispatched on cruising and detached independent service for the purposes of intelligence gathering, as discussed above in Vernon's letter to George Hinde.

However, Vernon and the leadership of British forces in the West Indies did not blindly trust intelligence shared nor act purely on information that Lowther provided. The 1741 expedition against Cartagena, devised by Lowther, occurred but was unsuccessful due to bad weather, logistical problems, and outbreaks of disease. This gave Vernon pause when the combined British forces were camped at Cumberland Harbour (Guantánamo Bay). The postscript of the proposed attack on Santiago de Cuba said that the 'above scheme was given to Admiral Vernon off the Navasa [an island south of Cuba], about the middle of last July by Lt. George Lowther […] of His Majesty's Navy, and never communicated to the General [Thomas Wentworth] or the Council of War.'[490] Vernon dismissed the expedition as wasteful and costly, perhaps as a direct result of the failure of the Cartagena expedition and the price it exerted on the British combined forces, in line with the layout of the city as recounted by Lowther.[491] In his plan for attacking Santiago, Lowther described an amphibious assault in which 'the land forces might be landed at the great Aguaderos, which is 4 leagues to the Moor Castle, [where] there [are] 2 small batteries that defend the said landing place, but one 70 gun ship would soon lay it in ruins'.[492] Lowther was confident that the operation would be successful, and even

[489] TNA, ADM 1/233, A List of Officers Appointed, and removed, by Edward Vernon Esq Vice Admiral of the Blue, and Commander in Chief of His Majesty's Ships and Vessels in the West Indies, between the 26 December 1741 and the 25 March 1742.
[490] TNA, CO 5/42, A Scheme Proposed by Lieutenant George Lowther; TNA, CO 5/42, Lieutenant George Lowther's Scheme.
[491] TNA, CO 5/42, A Scheme Proposed by Lieutenant George Lowther; TNA, CO 5/42, Lieutenant George Lowther's Scheme.
[492] TNA, CO 5/42, Lieutenant George Lowther's Scheme.

used his local knowledge to provide an alternative plan in the event that the council of war vetoed the original. The alternative he proposed was a landing on

> the western part of the harbour's mouth[, which] is as high as the eastern, and has no fortification on it, and is really so nigh the Moor Castle that with a small arm you might shoot any man in the Moor Castle, that should offer to load or fire a gun.[493]

These plans demonstrate Lowther's knowledge of the defences around the landing area, and his confidence in its success extended to offering to lead the landing personally with 300 men under his command.

The march however, which was to be undertaken by the Army and supported by the Navy from Cumberland Harbour, was 'effectively sabotaged' by Vernon out of concern for the surviving forces, according to Rodger.[494] Vernon's attachment to Lowther's abilities as an informant and his acquired regional knowledge was an intrinsic part of the commander-in-chief's tenure in the West Indies. However, it also shows Vernon's measured attitude to command in tempering the eagerness of his informant, who saw the proposal as a certain victory, when weighed against the risk to the assembled forces at Cumberland Harbour. Since Vernon never presented Lowther's proposal to General Wentworth or the council of war for the proposed expedition, Vernon clearly evaluated the details of the defences at Santiago and dismissed Lowther's plan for a combined attack as too risky for the weakened British forces.

Vernon used his local informant's knowledge and status to inform his strategic planning, weighing up the strength of Spanish defences against the capabilities of the joint forces at his disposal. The failure of the Cartagena operation and consistent problems with disease and supply hindered Vernon's plans, and it seems that Lowther's zealous claims that such an expedition would be a sure success were ignored in favour of caution. In other words, factors beyond Vernon's control were measured against what could be controlled. This shows that Vernon took Lowther's intelligence seriously, whilst still questioning and evaluating it against his own assessment of the situation and making the final decision as the commander-in-chief responsible. This illustrates the importance of experienced senior officers examining and evaluating the intelligence they received, to conduct successful operations and minimise and manage risk.

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[493] *Ibid.*
[494] Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 238.

‘Lowther the pirate’ remains a remarkable yet rare occurrence of a documented locally acquired source of intelligence, since many exchanges like that between Lowther and Vernon would have occurred verbally and not been recorded. Records that did exist were often scant on personal detail, and it was difficult to track consistently utilised informants across campaigns. This makes Lowther even more remarkable as a well-documented associate of the Royal Navy. This section has focused on the conventional system of intelligence gathering operated through naval officers’ cruising on station. Intelligence was gathered consistently and regularly through engagement with civilians, such as merchants and seafarers of rival nations. Lowther was an example of a successful cruise for intelligence, as he was engaged on the Spanish American coast and brought to Vernon’s attention. Vernon wrote to the Admiralty requesting a pardon for Lowther, making it impossible to keep him and their exchanges out of the written record. Lowther had already assisted British operations against Portobello and Chagres. As the representatives of the Crown, and therefore most able to dole out reward (or punishment) according to the accuracy of information provided, the Navy’s reliance on local information illustrates the existence of a system of informational currency; a resource to be bought, sold, and bartered in exchange for commodities deemed most attractive to the informant. In Lowther’s case, this proved to be a pardon from past crimes and increased status through a commission in the Royal Navy. Lowther is a clear example of a named informant, with a well-documented, albeit short, career providing intelligence to the Royal Navy during the eighteenth century.

Naval Intelligence Gathering in London

As Chapter 2 showed, the Admiralty applied its intelligence gathering efforts to the allocation of state military and naval resources during the War of Spanish Succession. The same was true of the War of Austrian Succession, as the Admiralty took on an active approach to naval support in the wake of reports of enemy fleet movements. By 1744, France had joined Spain in the Anglo-Spanish conflict in the Atlantic on the side of Spain, and the struggle over trading rights and protections had been absorbed into the dynastic concerns of the War of Austrian Succession, which had broken out in 1740.[495] British policy had become largely defensive after the departure of Vernon from the West Indies in 1742, as illustrated by concerns raised by the Admiralty for the defence of the economically important fishery in Newfoundland, which also acted as a prominent nursery for seamen for the Navy. In April 1745, the Admiralty passed on intelligence to Commodore Peter Warren, who was sailing north with orders to attack Louisburg with ships gathered from those normally protecting Carolina. The Admiralty told Warren that a French squadron had sailed from Brest in mid-March, which they believed was destined for Cape Breton.[496] As a direct consequence of this intelligence, and demonstrating its importance to the allocation of naval resources, the Admiralty had 'determined to send immediately out to you his Majesty's ships [*Sunderland, Princess Mary* and *Chester*] in order to enable you to act with vigour against the enemy and to carry on such operations against them as shall be for the service and advantage of the nation.'[497] Discussed earlier in this chapter, Warren had already been involved in the protection of the North American coastal colonies, protecting the Carolinas and Georgia coasts. As the senior officer on station in the Americas closest to Cape Breton, an island off the coast of Nova Scotia, Warren was tasked with extending his area of operation to include that of the northernmost American colonies. Indeed, this allocation suggests that the orders and the accompanying resources granted to officers such as Warren were to be used in line with demand of the situation at hand. In the same letter, the Admiralty said that

> [w]hen any further operations against the enemy by land this summer shall be over, and nothing remains to be done but the general guard and defence of his Majesty's colonies and settlements, and infesting the enemy in their shipping at sea (that they shall not have superior strength of ships in war in your parts) you

[495] Crewe, *Yellow Jack and the Worm*, 4-5; Harding, *Emergence*, 6.
[496] Admiralty Board, 'Admiralty Board to Warren, 4/4/1745', in Gwyn (ed.), *Warren Papers*, 75-6.
[497] *Ibid*.

> are to send the *Princess Mary* and *Hector* to protect the Newfoundland fishery, according as you are already directed.[498]

Primarily, Warren was to secure the northern colonies against the predicted arrival of the French fleet from Brest, with the allocation of further naval resources from London to support it. As a secondary objective, the Admiralty ordered the onward use of the reinforcements for Warren's squadron to protect the fishery at Newfoundland. The Newfoundland fishery was seasonal, with a permanent population of 3,000 in 1720 (and 10,000 by 1780), governed by a naval squadron commanded by a commodore sent each summer.[499] Fishing seasons and approximate sailing times of fishing fleets were a base of mariners' knowledge, which the commander-in-chief would have made it his business to be informed of. The Admiralty had taken the initiative to react to the perceived threat posed by a predicted French fleet from Europe. British metropolitan government attempted to mitigate the challenges of intelligence transfer which have been discussed throughout, such as the assignment of resources in line with future demand. This was pre-emptive allocation of vessels with a longer-term intention, as the ships which were to be dispatched could range more easily between strategic priorities in line with the seasonal considerations which were beyond their control, and bolster defences much more rapidly than was possible if the Admiralty was expected to allocate resources in case-by-case circumstances. It was a squadron deployed in addition to the standard squadron, in a direct response to French movements. Economically focused in its allotment, this naval reinforcement was split between protection of British interests in Newfoundland and along the coast of North America.

However, the Admiralty also recognised its limitations in the provision of intelligence material to officers on station. As was the case for any commander operating at a distance during the eighteenth century, Vernon needed to act with autonomy. Those who could not be trusted to do so effectively were not appointed to positions of command. In the month before the outbreak of war with Spain, First Lord of the Admiralty Charles Wager recognised the importance of granting such autonomy on the commander-in-chief, saying that 'I am not able to give you any advice, [since] you are upon the spot, and well acquainted everywhere', in the confidence that 'I don't doubt but you will do all that can be done for the honour of the King

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[498] *Ibid*.

[499] J. Bannister, *The Rule of the Admirals: Law, Custom, and Naval Government in Newfoundland, 1699-1832* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 4, 8; J. Morrow, *Naval Government of Newfoundland in the French Wars: 1793-1815* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), 13.

and the interest of this nation'.[500] Wager, whose experience in the Caribbean during the War of Spanish Succession in the role as an autonomous official was discussed in Chapter 2, clearly acknowledged that the most accurate survey of the situation on station came from those actually there. It was therefore ingrained into the officers' mission to act independently, following loose instructions from London. However, there was still advice given. As has been discussed previously, the process of intelligence gathering relied on information about areas of high traffic which could support gathering. Wager's experience of the Caribbean had highlighted to him the importance of Cartagena as a trading port as well as an assembly point for naval vessels; a similarly prominent focus for Vernon and his squadron during the War of Jenkins' Ear, as discussed earlier in the chapter.

Wager ordered Vernon to 'be perfectly informed of the state and strength of Cartagena, and the situation of ships there, if they are not gone, so that you will be able to judge whether it be practicable to attempt to burn them there'.[501] Given the dates of letters between Vernon and Stapleton and Wager and Vernon, it is possible that Vernon acted immediately on the instructions sent to him by Wager, ordering Stapleton to observe Cartagena in November 1739 as a centre of Spanish naval strength in addition to the *flota*. Again, Wager's knowledge of the West Indies from his own service there over three decades before had served him in relaying the well-known patterns of Spanish shipping. Wager, even from his position as First Lord, far removed from the West Indies, understood the ongoing significance of Cartagena and this clearly influenced his orders to Vernon. However, the First Lord's orders illustrate his recognition of Vernon's autonomy, as the status of Spanish shipping needed up to date intelligence, which could best be gathered on the spot. Wager simply reiterated his general knowledge of the region and the areas of high traffic which were applicable to Vernon's mission to disrupt Spanish trade and expand British interests, suggesting that '[i]f you can catch them at Portobello, that bay, I think, is open, but then nothing can be done but burning their ships', which he said 'may stop the treasure some time from coming to Spain'.[502] Wager advised Vernon with chokepoints and areas of high traffic, where intelligence could be gathered, but left the specifics of Vernon's planning to him as he gathered his own knowledge of the current status of Cartagena, with the help of cruising officers. The autonomous official gathering intelligence locally was a vital aspect of intelligence gathering, clearly entrenched

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[500] C. Wager, 'Charles Wager to Vernon, Admiralty Office, Oct 7 1739', in Vernon (ed.), *Original Letters*, 3-5.
[501] *Ibid.*
[502] *Ibid.*

within standard procedure for officers of the Royal Navy. Experience gathered by Wager during service in the West Indies pushed him to encourage the same in officers like Vernon operating in the same theatre.

Vernon clearly followed the advice he was given by Wager, reporting that '[t]he four ships they have in Cartagena (their sixty-gun ships being as big as our seventy) are not inferior in force to the five I hope to be able to carry with me, and have more men belonging to them'.[503] Vernon assured himself and the Admiralty that the importance of Cartagena was unchanged as a meeting port for Spanish imperial shipping, especially illustrated in Vernon having heard that 'the two ships they had at [Vera Cruz] […] are got up to the Havana, so there are four ships now there', which he said was likely to fluctuate rapidly as 'some […] have orders to come to Cartagena'.[504] Clearly, much of the Royal Navy's handling of intelligence stemmed from following patterns in enemy shipping routes and ports which saw high traffic, gathering intelligence by observing regions commonly known to be areas of activity which gave clues to enemy preparations and defences. Such understanding was pivotal to Vernon's mission, which the Admiral appeared to repeat to Wager to 'distress them in every way I shall find myself capable of', which he based on his hoped success that he would intercept the rival vessels as they made their voyage to Cartagena from Havana.[505] The fixed points of shared knowledge imposed a level of systematised procedure to the gathering of intelligence, which was then coupled with operational flexibility for those on station to gather usable local intelligence on specific fleet formations and enemy strength. The government retained a loose grip on the orders for gathering intelligence, with the recognition that it was best left to officers on station to act with autonomy to gather accurate intelligence to best succeed in their mission.

Wager illustrated London's attention paid to the Americas as an economic centre, writing 'observations' of the local trade and navigation in 1738. Wager addressed the prevalence of smuggling in the Caribbean, admitting that both French and British vessels were involved in exchange between Barbados and St Lucia with French ships from Martinique, as well as 'a small smuggling trade to the coast of Caracas on the Spanish continent.'[506] The intention behind these observations and to whom they were intended, is unclear, but they were likely designed to identify the points of trade that would need protection in the event of conflict, as

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[503] Vernon, 'Vernon to Sir Charles Wager (Copy-PHB/3b), Port Royal, Jamaica, January 18-31, 1739/40', in Ranft (ed.), *The Vernon Papers*, 57-8.
[504] *Ibid*.
[505] Vernon, 'Vernon to Wager, January 18-31, 1739/40', in Ranft (ed.), *The Vernon Papers*, 57-8.
[506] TNA, SP 42/81, Observations on the Trade and Navigation in America received from Sir Charles Wager November 8, 1738.

well as details of points to attack to disrupt the trade of Britain's rivals. These observations further demonstrate the link between common knowledge and freely available information and the gathering of intelligence. Wager detailed the proximity of Martinique, and other islands which comprise the Leeward Islands, to Barbados, '[t]o the westward, or to leeward […] about 30 or 40 leagues'.[507] He highlighted how the closeness of these islands, some under French control and others under British jurisdiction, necessitated common routes of navigation in line with the prevailing winds and currents, which further facilitated the smuggling trade by both British and French ships. This knowledge, no doubt commonly exchanged and known to seafarers across the region, had a knock-on effect as Wager identified that these navigational routes were universal. Wager said that

> The Spanish men of war and [the] galleons bound to Cartagena and Portobello generally sail by the [Leeward] Islands, or Trinidad which may be called one of them, the nearer to the Spanish continent, and so go down along their own coast to Cartagena. The *flota* and men of war bound to Havana, or Vera Cruz, generally go on the north side of Puerto Rico and Hispaniola, and go through between Cuba and Jamaica, to those ports.[508]

Patterns of shipping were analysed to aid intelligence gathering by the Royal Navy. Knowledge of shipping routes was common, dictated by the reliance on wind and currents to make marine travel possible.[509] However, this commonly held knowledge meant that men like Wager, as well as officers on station, could gather sensitive intelligence regarding sailing dates of enemy naval vessels and in this case, the Spanish treasure fleet, to intercept them. Intelligence gathering relied on commonly acquired information, as a foundation upon which could be built the Navy's understanding of enemy fleets and strategies during times of war. The process of gathering and transferring information and intelligence was pre-emptive and constant. With rising tensions between Spain and Britain at this time, Wager was no doubt preparing for war which was becoming more and more likely as time passed.

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[507] *Ibid*.
[508] *Ibid.*
[509] G. Bankoff, 'Aeolian Empires: The Influence of Winds and Currents on European Maritime Expansion in the Days of Sail', *Environment and History*, 23, 1 (2017), 163-196.

Conclusions

Intelligence gathering between the end of the War of Spanish Succession and the end of the War of Austrian Succession draws similarities to intelligence gathering during the war which opened the century. The use of locally sourced intelligence from informants in the region of operation, gathered by officers of the Royal Navy, continued to be a vital method. The backbone of this system was the use of cruising naval officers tasked with observing enemy shipping, capturing such vessels and gathering informants in the maritime world. Information gathered by trade, exploration, exchange and as a by-product of officers' cruising was then developed into intelligence, assisting the commander-in-chief with the devising of strategy in the Americas. Cartagena was identified as a key focus for the Royal Navy as a gathering point for the *flota* and Spanish naval forces besides Havana. This intelligence was then returned to London, and in the case of Admiral Vernon, this process was used to criticise the Admiralty's failures to provide intelligence of outward enemy fleets bound to the Caribbean. The examples in this chapter illustrate that the bulk of Vernon's intelligence gathered locally was obtained by officers cruising in the Caribbean and North American waters. Vernon provides the clearest and most sustained example of an autonomous official delegating with efficiency and utilising locally gathered intelligence in the West Indies.

Local informants were vital to British naval intelligence gathering during this period, but the study of such informants and the intelligence they provided to naval officers comes with challenges of physical evidence, with many exchanges occurring with scant recorded detail or off the books entirely. This was consistent for the entire period, making recorded examples even more valuable. The most thoroughly recorded of these examples is 'Lowther the pirate', documented from his assistance of Vernon's early operations in the War of Jenkins' Ear, and through his promotion to naval officer, advisor and informant to Vernon and his expedition. Lowther's influence on British naval operations was clear, providing advice on the attacks on Portobello, Spanish Panama and the Chagres River. However, this was not an absolute, as the commander-in-chief vetoed operations against Santiago de Cuba based on depleted resources, sickness amongst British forces, and the failure of the earlier attack on Spanish Panama. Clearly, intelligence was utilised to inform operations, and was applied to considerations beyond the commander's control to determine if operations were feasible.

British naval resource allocation hinged on intelligence gathering and transfer, and after Vernon's return to Britain in 1742, Britain was on the defence. Rather than attacking enemy

fleets and settlements in the Americas, the Navy was protecting British trade and preserving its interests, to which intelligence gathering and transfer remained vital.

All of this gathering hinged on officers' autonomy from metropolitan interference. Dictated by service far removed from the state's immediate influence, officers of the Royal Navy were granted flexibility in the interpretation of orders and instructions, many of which focused on the gathering and utilisation of intelligence material to further their objectives.

Finally, the South Sea Company and British economic interests influenced the gathering, synthesis, and use of intelligence in the Americas. The Company and its factors, stationed in ports around the Caribbean, were used by colonial authorities like Governor William Bull and naval officers like Vernon as informants based on their local knowledge. Gathered as a by-product of living and working in cosmopolitan trading ports, where trade brought information and intelligence, the Company pressed for greater support in return for intelligence about enemy shipping and naval movements. The Royal Navy shared resources with the Company in a symbiotic relationship of naval protection for Company shipping, particularly in the wake of the War of Spanish Succession, the granting of the *asiento* to Britain in 1713, and the rise of the *guarda costas* as a threat to the British economic interest.

Overall, the Navy was heavily reliant on locally gathered intelligence in the period between the end of the Spanish Succession War in 1713 and the close of the War of Austrian Succession in 1748. Locally gathered intelligence supported British naval operations and provided more timely intelligence of enemy shipping and naval movements, a constant objective for the Royal Navy in a period of high tension between Britain and Spain. To a similar degree to the previous conflict, the autonomous official and the importance of local intelligence were clear as a basis for naval intelligence gathering during the 1740s.

Chapter 5 Getting the lie of the land (and sea): navigation, geography, and charting the western Atlantic

During the eighteenth century, the importance of the Americas to British economic, territorial, and strategic interests increased activity by the Royal Navy. This chapter examines the Navy's role in surveying and exploration during the first half of the century and the years leading into it, to which historians have given less attention than later periods.[510] The central theme of this chapter is the use of navigational information to inform operations undertaken by the Navy and improve safety for sailing in the Americas as the region gained significance to British objectives. Systems of navigational intelligence gathering were established and complex as well as those discussed earlier. The Navy's surveys, preserved in maps and reports, were returned to government in London, and were a key part of operational planning. They are evidence of an established system of navigational intelligence gathering, as officers recorded navigational data and mapped enemy colonies, as a recognised part of the Navy's role during the first half of the eighteenth century. There was a distinct although unsystematised link between the military and the civilian circles of intelligence gathering, which sometimes operated in a two-way exchange as navigational intelligence passed from the Navy into civilian knowledge, and vice versa. As discussed throughout this thesis, intelligence was assembled from a wider gathering of information. Intelligence was distinguished from information by its sensitivity, as material gathered was often kept in low circulation. This information was often circulated in addition to common navigational knowledge, to increase understanding of navigation to improve the safety of navigation and mitigate environmental problems beyond human control. Meanwhile, navigational intelligence had a much smaller circulation. The Royal Navy consistently gathered intelligence to survey the Caribbean, examining enemy defences and settlements, which they regarded as sensitive. Intelligence was also of shorter-term relevance, as fortifications could change with an altering strategic landscape. Both navigational information and intelligence were central to operational planning, with the Navy consistently looking ahead in a region of persistent conflict.

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[510] R. Drayton, 'Knowledge and Empire', in P. J. Marshall et al. (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume II: The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 231-253, 244-5, 246, 249; Grainger, *British Navy in the Caribbean*; Moon, 'From Tasman to Cook', 253-268, 255, 259, 261; S. A. Royle, 'Islands, Voyaging and Empires in the Age of Sail', in D. Hamilton & J. McAleer (eds.), *Islands and the British Empire in the Age of Sail* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 18-34, 27.

The generation and analysis of this intelligence is examined through several case studies. Firstly, the chapter discusses Admiral John Benbow's 1698 voyage to the West Indies, examining the findings of Robert Thompson, master and pilot aboard Benbow's flagship HMS *Gloucester*. Benbow's voyage saw the early charting of vital settlements which drew English attention during the century, such as Cartagena, Portobello, and Hispaniola. Charting involved plotting and mapping soundings, and locations of resupply, as well as instructions for avoiding hazards; all of which increased common navigational knowledge of the region. Thompson's work has been overshadowed by Benbow's last fight and his contribution overlooked. This chapter brings Thompson back into focus, as a vital conduit in the gathering of navigational intelligence in the early eighteenth century. Secondly, the pioneering navigation manual, *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book* is then examined, regarding the Royal Navy's influence on its contents, and *The Pilot*'s impact on naval intelligence gathering during this period. Thirdly, this chapter examines two maps designed by naval officers. Lieutenant Philip Durrell used Captain James Rentone's account of the 1739 attack on Portobello (see Chapter 4) to create a detailed map of Portobello and a visual account of Vernon's victory.[511] Contemporaneously, Archibald Bontein, an engineer serving with Admiral Charles Knowles in his 1747 cruise of the Caribbean, designed a map of Fort St Louis on the south coast of St Domingue, which was captured in March 1748.[512] Both are examples of intelligence recorded and stored to support future operations. In the case of Durrell's map, intelligence as propaganda exemplifies the transformation of previously sensitive intelligence into public information, made available through commercial maps to boost the reputation of the Royal Navy during this period. In comparison, Bontein's map was circulated in a smaller rotation as a reference for government on future operations and was not a publicly available source at the time.

This section also discusses two further maps charting Rattan Island in the Bay of Honduras. William Cunningham, an Army engineer, created sketches and maps which methodically charted Port Royal Harbour, demonstrating another active mission to gather navigational intelligence in support of British colonial interests during this period. Lieutenant Henry Barnsley conducted a second survey independently of Cunningham, which encompassed the whole island's coastline and a similarly methodically charted and detailed map of Port Royal Harbour. The biggest distinction between the two maps was their circulation. Cunningham's

[511] NMM, PAH7663, This plan of the harbour, town, and forts of Porto Bello (taken by Edward Vernon, esqr. vice admiral of the Blue on the 22d of November 1739 with six men of war only), 1740.
[512] TNA, CO 137/59, An Exact Plan of Fort St. Louis, on the South side of the Island of Hispaniola, as it was when taken by Admiral Knowles, the 8th March 1747/8, 1748.

was seemingly kept within a small circulation between colonial and metropolitan government, whilst Barnsley's map was designed for public circulation and sold in London as a decorative piece. In other words, the former was an example of navigational intelligence designed for consumption by officials, and the latter was an example of navigational information, intended to be disseminated to the public as part of an ever-growing bank of common knowledge. There was no official mechanism for transferring knowledge gathered through navigational surveys and naval intelligence into publicly available maps and navigation manuals, but it did happen. This was often through the initiative of individuals motivated by financial gain or prestige through visual proof of one's involvement in operations.

These maps also served another purpose: to visually represent British success in military operations, the superiority of its Navy, and British cartographic skills. Nevertheless, the transfer of naval intelligence to civilian consciousness was comparatively limited, and sensitive intelligence was largely kept within limited circulation due to imperfect knowledge exchange and security. Whilst civilian-produced information sources such as *The English Pilot* were likely influenced by naval intelligence, it was far from standard procedure and never guaranteed. Despite this, the foundations were laid for much more ambitious and better-known cartographical operations later in the century. Navigational intelligence gathering was part of the established systems which crisscrossed the Atlantic during this period and slotted into the expectations applied to officers of the Royal Navy to keep the government informed, gathering intelligence locally in support of operations in both the immediate and in the future.

Robert Thompson's Collecsion of Memorandom & Remarks on a Voiyage to the West Endias, 1698-1700

The seventeenth century saw England fully engage in the rivalry for territory and influence in the Americas, in which other states had been involved for over a century. This rivalry centred on the struggle for economic and territorial expansion, as competition over trading opportunities intensified. The 'new world' had been divided between the most powerful nations in Catholic Europe: Spain and Portugal, by Pope Alexander VI in the Treaties of Tordesillas (1494) and Sargossa (1529). These treaties granted Spanish monarchs exclusive rights to the land west of the Cape Verde Islands and east of the Maluku Islands in the Indonesian archipelago, simultaneously claiming jurisdiction over their waters. Meanwhile, Portugal had claim to land east of the Cape Verde Islands and west of the Maluku Islands, in addition to Brazil.[513] The Spanish developed an extensive silver mining industry in Central and South America, which provided finance for Spain's empire well into the eighteenth century. Expanding their respective empires in the Americas and establishing themselves by the turn of the eighteenth century, England and France focused on muscling in on these lucrative opportunities by raiding Spanish shipping, establishing and maintaining their own trade in the region, and through the British exploitation of the *asiento* once it was ceded by Spain in 1713.[514]

It is this component of the Spanish imperial economic system towards which the Royal Navy's attention was directed during the late seventeenth and into the early eighteenth centuries. Vice Admiral John Benbow had been dispatched on an intelligence gathering mission (coupled to a lesser degree with a hunt for pirates) in 1698-99. Recognising the importance of this mission, he ordered the Master of his flagship HMS *Gloucester*, Robert Thompson, to record the findings and proceedings of the expedition in addition to the usual Master's log.[515] Conducted during a time of peace after the conclusion of the Nine Years' War (1688-1697),

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[513] Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy*, 4; Grainger, *British Navy in the Caribbean*, 124.
[514] P. W. Mapp, *The Elusive West and the Contest for Empire, 1713-1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 18; Bassett, 'English naval policy in the Caribbean', 122-123; Buchet, 'The Royal Navy and the Caribbean', 37; Willis, *Admiral Benbow*, 253; Crewe, *Yellow Jack and the Worm*, 1; Grainger, *British Navy in the Caribbean*, 113; P. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (London: Unwin Hyman Limited, 1988), 105; Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 234.
[515] TNA, ADM 7/833, A Collecsion of Memorandom & Remarks on a Voiyage to the West Endias On Bord of his Majesties Shipp Gloucester Under Command of Rear Admirall Benbow by Robert Thompson[,] Master of ye Said Shipp Anno Domni 1699; Willis, *Admiral Benbow*, 262.

Benbow's expedition to the West Indies charted the colonies and trading centres of England's rival Spain with particular accuracy; most notably Portobello and Cartagena (Figure 9 and Figure 10). Both were pivotal locations for the Spanish American trade, including the treasure fleets which regularly shipped precious metals back to Spain.[516] The ports are precisely drawn in diagrams which detail soundings in their respective harbours. Knowledge of the Spanish settlements on the Caribbean-facing Central and South American coasts was invaluable to England at this time, particularly as England's possessions in the Caribbean were not yet the economic powerhouses that they would become during the eighteenth century. The Spanish treasure fleets and the ports of Portobello and Cartagena were consistent targets for English naval attention to expand their economic control in the region and inflict damage to Spanish interests should war break out. In his notes, Thompson described Cartagena's defences, and how '[o]n the larboard side [stands] a small castle of 12 guns upon a point […] by the water side[,] but on the starboard side is no fortification'.[517] This document and the description of Cartagena and its harbour, including detailed soundings and coastal sketches (see Figure 9), demonstrate Thompson's effort to understand Spanish defences and the region's geography both ahead of potential conflict, and to muscle in on local commerce and opportunities for plunder. However, as Willis suggests, this was by no means a part of standard procedure for naval vessels on cruises like Benbow's to record their findings, instead usually settling for the standard master's log.[518] As a result, there was no formalised procedure for storing and circulating Thompson's intelligence notes amongst naval personnel, despite its significance for the specific information it contained and locale it detailed.

[516] TNA, ADM 7/833, A Collecsion of Memorandom.
[517] *Ibid*.
[518] Willis, *Admiral Benbow*, 262.

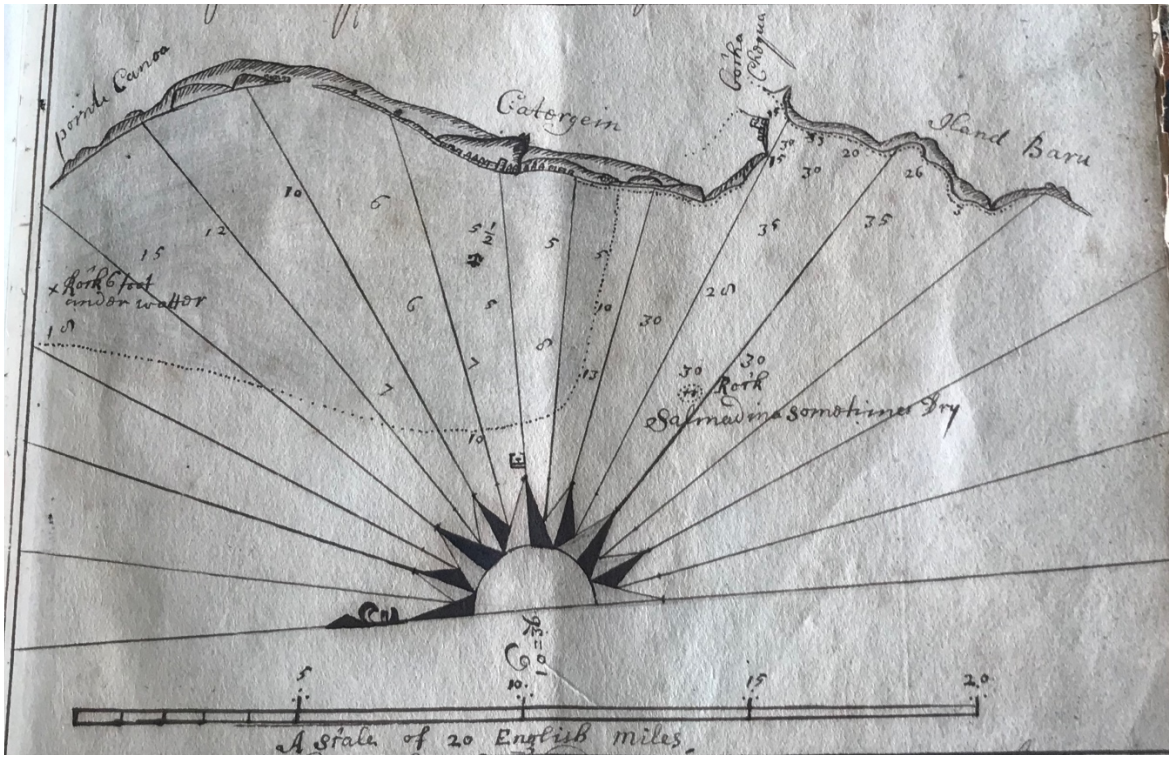

Figure 9 'A draft of the coast of [Cartegena] from Point Canoa to the Island Baru with the depths of water and rocks', 1700.
Source: R. Thompson, Collecsion of Memorandom (1700), TNA, ADM 7/833, Admiralty: Miscellanea, 5.

Some of the information on ports such as Cartagena and Portobello had a limited lifespan and became outdated as their defences were altered and improved. The Anglo-Spanish rivalry in the Americas and frequent bouts of Anglo-French conflict that were interspersed with periods of tension throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, made it necessary to remain up to date about coastal defences in the region. This changing strategic landscape influenced how useful this information was in the long term, although certain aspects of Thompson's descriptions would have retained their value. The soundings of harbours, details of where to obtain fresh water and supplies, and places of refuge from inclement weather, would have all remained relevant information for expeditions such as those under Vernon's command of the Jamaica station during the War of Jenkins' Ear (see Chapter 4). It is unclear whether Vernon was given access to Thompson's data, but the latter's sketch and accompanying soundings (see Figure 10) would have proven useful during the planning of Vernon's attack on Portobello in November 1739. Intelligence ranged in its timeliness from that which was useful in the short term such as individual enemy positions, to that which perished over time like details of fortifications, and through to that which was invaluable indefinitely such as knowledge of weather systems and water depths. This illustrates a natural by-product of expeditions like Benbow's, as the common knowledge underpinning some intelligence gathering was built upon and updated to keep the wider community of seafarers informed.

Figure 10 'A draft of the coast of Portobello with the depth of water and rocks thereabout', 1700. Source: Thompson, Collecsion of Memorandom, 7.

It is possible that the voyage conducted by Benbow and Thompson and recorded in this manual was designed with the intention that it be circulated amongst officers of the Royal Navy. Later in his notes, Thompson demonstrated that it was just as important to understand navigation around England's own colonies, as shown by his inclusion of directions into Port Royal harbour. Jamaica's strategic position in the Caribbean had made it important to the development of an English empire soon after its capture from the Spanish in 1655, first

through privateering and then from a growing plantation economy.[519] Therefore, reliable navigational instructions into Jamaica's harbours like Port Royal were vital for the safety of shipping arriving at and leaving the island. Thompson provided advice on entering the harbour, saying for example that

> coming [near] Plumb Point you will have 12 and 14 fathoms water so steer along by this low land in 14/15 and 16 fathoms towards Port Royal leaving all the keys or islands on the larboard side [until] you come abreast of Port Royal fort [then?] you may keep [close] alongst it in 7 and 8 fathoms or else keep ¼ of a mile from it[.] [F]or 1 cable length from the point is a small [shoal] of 3 fathoms where on we were aground[.][520]

This implies that Benbow and Thompson's findings were always intended to be shared, even in limited circulation, specifically for officers operating in an increasingly contested area during the eighteenth century. Navigational knowledge was a seafarer's defence against navigational hazards and could reduce the need to find reliable pilots if it was recorded and available, demonstrating that Thompson's contribution made navigation fundamentally safer for both military and commercial shipping. Earlier attempts, such as by the Royal Society during the late 1660s, to explore islands like Jamaica and record their flora and fauna, were examinations in the wake of the island's acquisition from the Spanish in 1655.[521] The two surveys were conducted for different purposes, as that by the Royal Society was to inform the English about their newly colony, whilst Thompson focused on how to defend it and navigate safely around the hazards of its harbour. Thompson wished not only to thoroughly document the geography of rival settlements and provide guides on their navigation, but also detail the geography and hydrography of British settlements, of which Jamaica was one of the most (if not the most) important in the British western Atlantic. This shares parallels with Moon's 'proto-intelligence' argument, as the two surveys conducted illustrate the need for a groundwork of understanding to be laid before greater strategic considerations could be made.[522] This intelligence was still sensitive and designed to have limited circulation, to prevent rival nations from being able to navigate and threaten Jamaica while its defences were developed. This was intelligence gathering for colonial development and was just as important as intelligence

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[519] N. Zahedieh, ''Trade, Plunder, and Economic Development in Early English Jamaica, 1655-89', *The Economic History Review*, 39, 2 (1986), 205-222; N. Zahedieh, 'A Frugal, Prudential and Hopeful Trade'. Privateering in Jamaica, 1655-89', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 18, 2 (1990), 145-168, 147; Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 149.
[520] TNA, ADM 7/833, A Collecsion of Memorandom.
[521] D. Buisseret, 'Discovery by Committee: The Investigations of the Royal Society in the 1660s', *Terrae Incognitae*, 53, 3 (2021), 247-254, 250.
[522] Moon, 'From Tasman to Cook', 254.

gathered to support operations against rival nations' colonies. It was of greater defensive value, unlike many other examples used throughout this thesis, demonstrating that intelligence as a form of defence was just as important during the period.

Benbow's primary objective in his intelligence gathering mission was to survey the geography, navigation, colonial settlements, and defences of England's rivals. One particularly important example of this was the survey that Thompson recorded of the east end of Hispaniola, which he said contained a harbour 'where the pirates formerly resorted and careened their ships [and] it is said to be a harbour for any ships in coming out of the [Caribbean] sea'.[523] This demonstrates that the secondary objective of Benbow's voyage was at the forefront of Thompson's mind: hunting and intercepting pirates who had been active in the Caribbean (see Chapter 3). This suggests that they used the last known location of these pirates as both a reference for where they were last seen and as evidence of the harbour's suitability as a point of refuge and resupply for English shipping. Hispaniola was a frequent focus for naval anti-piracy operations, which suggests that Thompson's knowledge of popular pirate rest areas on the coast of Hispaniola were reused in the 1720s. Intelligence gathering was not only conducted against rival states, but also non-state actors who threatened commercial interests, like the Atlantic pirates of the early eighteenth century. The inclusion of a site which Thompson says was 'formerly' a favoured stopping place for pirates suggests that the goal was to bring the net in close around the commerce raiders if they should try and return to refit, again utilising their general knowledge to increase the probability of interception in a vast area. See for example the instructions from Josiah Burchett to Commodore Barrows Harris to cruise off the coast of Hispaniola for pirates in 1722, discussed in Chapter 3. He also included more recent intelligence about piracy, alongside advice on areas for refuge, recovery, and resupply. Sources of water were finite and may have necessitated reusing ones already identified, making it reasonable to suggest that Thompson had the possibility of its use by the pirates in mind. Simultaneously, they may have had thoughts of provisioning commercial shipping there in mind as well, as a wider application of this navigational knowledge. Thompson wrote that they 'anchored in 17 fathoms [near] the south part of Cape Churchill', where 'we laid [in] several rivers of fresh water being in small bays where the pirates doth commonly resort to victual their ships with fresh cattle and hogs being there wild', also on Hispaniola.[524] It seems that Benbow and Thompson had gathered enough local intelligence to track the areas of activity for local commerce raiders to a more current location, whilst

[523] TNA, ADM 7/833 (ff. 14), A Collecsion of Memorandom.
[524] TNA, ADM 7/833 (ff. 17), A Collecsion of Memorandom.

simultaneously identifying more areas of resupply which could support naval operations. Finding supplies of fresh and clean water was an issue for all shipping, and a good and reliable source was just as useful to the Navy as it would prove to pirates. Once again, Thompson took measures to mitigate the difficulties of navigation and maritime travel. He did this by recording suitable (and recommended) places to refit and recover from the strains of such travel, which was also applicable to a growing knowledge base available to English seafarers. Thompson and Benbow recorded these areas of resupply and refuge not only to catch pirates and resupply themselves, but also to gather knowledge of places around the region where rival nations could also resupply themselves and escape pursuit by the Royal Navy.

Willis highlights the significance of Benbow's voyage and Thompson's detailed log, arguing that Benbow's 'whole purpose there was *because* the Royal Navy had no detailed knowledge of those waters. Surveying the Caribbean was a lengthy, ongoing, and multi-layered process, and by the 1690s a very important part of the exploration of the Caribbean was still incomplete.'[525] Broad navigational outlines were known, but details were still lacking. Benbow and his crew were expanding on these navigational outlines when the expedition began, following in the footsteps of and providing details of locations like Cartagena and Darien which had been visited by seafarers such as William Dampier and Lionel Wafer in the closing decades of the seventeenth century, whose accounts had been published and experienced popularity.[526] Benbow and his superiors could not have predicted that war would break out two years later. Nevertheless, the preparation for future conflict served as a motivator for the Admiral's intelligence gathering mission. As Willis says, 'a period of peace encouraged the government to use the power and reach of the Navy to assist in expeditions that had the national interest at heart'.[527] As preparation for future conflict, accurate surveys were imperative, and Benbow's voyage and the intelligence Thompson recorded from it had a functional, strategic purpose in

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[525] Willis, *Admiral Benbow*, 274-5.
[526] W. Dampier, *A new voyage round the world. Describing particularly, the isthmus of America, several coasts and islands in the West Indies, the Isles of Cape Verd, the Passage by Terra del Fuego, the South Sea Coasts of Chili, Peru, and Mexico; the Isle of Guam one of the Ladrones, Mindanao, and other Philippine and East India Islands near Cambodia, China, Formosa, [Luconia], Celebes, &c. New Holland, Sumatra, Nicobar Isles; the Cape of Good Hope, and Santa Hellena. their soil, rivers, harbours, plants, Fruits, Animals, and Inhabitants. their Customs, Religion, Government, Trade, &c. Vol.I. By Captain William Dampier. Illustrated with particular maps and draughts* (London: The Crown in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1703); L. Wafer, *A new voyage and description of the isthmus of America. Giving an account of the author's abode there, The Form and Make of the Country, the Coasts, Hills, Rivers, &c. Woods, Soil, Weather, &c. Trees, Fruit, Beasts, Birds, Fish, &c. The Indian Inhabitants, their Features, Complexion, &c. their Manners, Customs, Employments, Marriages, Feasts, Hunting, Computation, Language, &c. With Remarkable Occurrences in the South-Sea and elsewhere. By Lionel Wafer. Illustrated with several Copper-Plates* (London: The Crown in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1704).
[527] Willis, *Admiral Benbow*, 255-6.

preparing Britain for potential war in a region of increasing economic importance. This was its own reflection of action by the Navy in the 'national interest', expanding knowledge to gain a better understanding of the West Indies.

The influence of Thompson's completed logbook on the West Indies voyage of 1699 is partially demonstrable in the years immediately after Benbow's death, although it also highlights the limitations of the Admiralty's information and intelligence gathering infrastructure and the spread of knowledge amongst officers of the Royal Navy. In a letter to the Lord High Admiral Prince George, Duke of Cumberland, Captain Richard Jennings, a resident of Bermuda and likely a merchant captain expressed that

> [h]ad Admiral Benbow but have lived, he knowing all those ports, I don't doubt but by this time he would have made the French in those parts very miserable, for he was both an Admiral and a very good pilot, that no man could tell him anything of the West Indies better than he knew himself[.][528]

Jennings' letter demonstrates his belief in Benbow's capacity to have gathered more intelligence had his career continued. Benbow's (and, as an overlooked contributor, Thompson's) knowledge of the Caribbean Sea, its islands and the placement and strength of rival nations' settlements and defences was unmatched, and the Admiral and his knowledge would have been an asset when war broke out. As Jennings was probably a civilian captain, he was likely unaware of what had been circulated from Thompson's manual (and probably did not know of its existence at all) and may have been led to believe that the Admiral's knowledge had died with him. Most of this knowledge seems to have come from experience (hence the deployment of officers who had served on station before), advice from those familiar with the region, and commercial navigation manuals such as *The English Pilot*, discussed in the next section.

Jennings appeared convinced that Benbow's knowledge was lost entirely, especially given the secrecy under which the voyage of 1699 was conducted, with the suppression of piracy being publicised as the reason for the expedition.[529] This was probably not the case, however, as the expedition was able to report the condition of Jamaica's defences, its vulnerability to enemy attack, and the difficulties of raising manpower for defence on its return to London, already

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[528] CSP, Vol. 23, 1706-1708, 984: Captain Richard Jennings to the Lord High Admiral. June 13 [1707].
[529] Bassett, 'English naval policy in the Caribbean', 122; Willis, *Admiral Benbow*, 254; Grainger, *British Navy in the Caribbean*, 100.

demonstrating its immediate impact.[530] Thompson's notes included a description and advice for navigating the approach into Port Royal, taking the impact of the 1692 earthquake into consideration. Thompson described 'a large white [split] on the land caused by the earthquake[,] the cliff being broke[n]', a landmark which if kept by the sailor on a 'N[orth] E[ast] ½ E[ast]' bearing 'will carry you clear to the Eastward of all the keys'.[531] Thompson and Benbow aimed both to chart British colonies and pursue operations against rival nations. Thompson's instructions for navigation in Port Royal harbour in the wake of the earthquake demonstrate Mulcahy's assertion that colonists were forced to 'temper their expectations and acknowledge their vulnerability to larger forces.'[532] Mulcahy's assessment of the earthquake posits that it was seen both as a product of divine judgement and as a disaster with more earthly causes, to which the settlers' frequent exposure was enough to encourage alterations in town planning.[533] This was reflected in Thompson's notes, as he seemed receptive to adapting to the changes in landscape that the earthquake had caused, recognising the local populations' vulnerability to natural hazards and a changing environment. One aspect of the recovery after such a disaster was mitigating the changes to geography, namely through updated surveys such as Thompson's serving to adapt navigational information and improve safety. Similarly, Thompson recorded 'tornadoes' in the Gulf of Darien, although inconsistent terminology of the period means that Thompson's designation may also refer to the threat of hurricanes, which can spawn their own tornadoes within the hurricane's weather system.[534] Once again, Thompson recognised the importance of updated meteorological information in a region of high importance. Whilst this had historically been the realm of the Spanish empire, the Gulf had become a greater focus for England aimed at the treasure fleet which began its return to Spain along the coast in the hopes of intercepting or tapping into the markets which operated there whilst improving seafarers' safety. Benbow's voyage and Thompson's observations of the weather systems in this region were further examples of attempts to add to a store of local knowledge, with potentially both commercial and military benefits.

Certain aspects of the intelligence gathered by Benbow and Thompson remained unchanged and retained their relevance. The shape and appearance of coastlines, positions of landmarks,

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[530] CSP, Vol. 19, 1701, 4: Rear-Admiral Benbow to the Council of Trade and Plantations. January 2 [1701]; Willis, *Admiral Benbow*, 273-4.
[531] TNA, ADM 7/833, A Collecsion of Memorandom.
[532] M. Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean, 1624-1783* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), 11, 31.
[533] M. Mulcahy, 'The Port Royal Earthquake and the World of Wonders in Seventeenth-Century Jamaica', *Early American Studies*, 6, 2 (2008), 391-421, 421.
[534] M. Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society*, 13.

and the soundings charting depths in harbours were largely beyond manipulation, although natural disasters and shifting sand banks were obvious exceptions, and Thompson's notes on such information could be consistently relied upon for later generations of naval officers. For example, the geography of Portobello and the depth of its harbour and surrounding waters were unlikely to have changed, and were no doubt built upon in the near-four decades between Thompson's fact-finding expedition and the publishing of *The English Pilot* and Vernon's attack on Portobello. Similarly in the case of Cartagena, Spanish settlements and defences had remained largely unchanged in the time since Thompson's survey in peacetime.[535] However, this was far from a certainty for Admiral Vernon during his operations during the War of Jenkins' Ear, which made it vital that he consulted local informants, such as 'Lowther the pirate' (see Chapter 4). Vernon was able to supplement the common knowledge preserved in documents like *The English Pilot* and Thompson's surveys with local intelligence gathered on the spot.

Portobello was a well-documented point of attack and a key trading centre in the Spanish Caribbean, to which the Navy had attached importance since at least Benbow's voyage. The navigational information gathered meant less demand for the gathering of harbour depths and other information which was unchanged in almost four decades. The following section discusses the possible impact of Benbow's fact-finding mission and Thompson's recorded observations on the English/British understanding of Caribbean waters and geography, as recorded in publicly available volumes of navigational and geographical knowledge such as *The English Pilot.*

[535] Nowell, 'Defense of Cartagena', 490-491.

The English Pilot: The Fourth Book and Naval Navigational Intelligence Gathering

Before *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book*, first published in 1689, there was no wholly English sea atlas which focused on the waters of the Americas, making it a pioneer for future editions and a forerunner for similar works published after the mid-eighteenth century.[536] The first two volumes were published in 1671 and 1672 by John Seller, a maker of compasses and nautical instruments, before being taken over by John Thornton and business partners William Fisher, Richard Mount and Thomas Page who published a volume charting the Mediterranean in 1677, *The Fourth Book* in 1689, and the third (in 1703) and fifth (confusingly, in 1701) books, which charted the Orient and Africa respectively.[537] Previously, English mariners had been reliant on charts created by Dutch cartographers, including charts of the English coastline itself.[538] Unlike other European countries, Britain lacked a centralised geographical information system, which encouraged private providers to begin publishing accounts, maps and charts, which began with *The English Pilot*.[539] *The Fourth Book* had the longest lifespan, remaining in print up to the end of the eighteenth century.[540] This section examines *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book* in its position as a compilation of English and British knowledge of the coastlines of the Americas, which the Royal Navy contributed to improve and update future editions between 1700 and 1750.

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[536] C. Verner, *A Carto-biographical Study of The English Pilot The Fourth Book* (Virginia: Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 1960); C. Verner, 'Introduction', in C. Verner (ed.), *The English Pilot, the fourth book with an introduction by Prof. Coolie Verner* (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1967), i-xi; Buisseret, *The mapmakers' quest*, 107-9; C. Verner, 'John Seller and the Chart Trade in Seventeenth-Century England', in N. J. W. Thrower (ed.), *The Compleat Plattmaker: Essays on Chart, Map, and Globe Making in England in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1978), 127-157, 150.

[537] S. Fisher, *Thornton, John (bap. 1641, d. 1708), Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), 2023. Available online: https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-50901?rskey=MU876b&result=2 [Accessed 12/01/2023]; Verner, *Carto-biographical Study of the English Pilot*, 9.

[538] Verner, *Carto-biographical Study of the English Pilot*, 5-6; J. D. Black, 'Mapping the English Colonies in North America: The Beginnings', in N. J. W. Thrower (ed.), *The Compleat Plattmaker: Essays on Chart, Map, and Globe Making in England in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1978), 101-125, 102; Verner, 'John Seller and the Chart Trade in Seventeenth-Century England', in N. J. W. Thrower (ed.), *The Compleat Plattmaker*, 127.

[539] K. Parker, 'Ship, the Map, the Chart, and the Book', *XVII-XVIII*, 78, (2021). Available online: https://journals.openedition.org/1718/6939#quotation [Accessed 14/11/2022].

[540] Verner, *A Carto-biographical Study of The English Pilot*; C. Verner, 'Introduction', in C. Verner (ed.), *The English Pilot*, i-xi; Verner, 'John Seller and the Chart Trade', in Thrower (ed.), *The Compleat Plattmaker*, 128, 132.

As Verner points out, there is little variation between the text of earlier and later versions of the book, with the core content being established in versions published between 1706 and 1721.[541] However, the beginning of the eighteenth century was a significant period of expansion and exploration of the waters of the Americas, and there is evidence that officers of the Royal Navy contributed intelligence gathered during cruises to aid in the development of descriptions in *The English Pilot*. For example, the first edition of the *Pilot* contains a description of the Virgin Islands, which remarked on its being '[g]ood shelter in bad weather […] for many hundred sail of ships.'[542] This could imply that the Virgin Islands were identified as a viable option for anchoring and assembling both military and commercial fleets or convoys, as well as providing assurance for civilian captains that they had somewhere to shelter in case of a storm. Tropical storms were frequent, and the threat of hurricanes influenced colonial societies' adaptations to survive, including shipping which was key to trade and expansion in the region.[543] This is reflected in the inclusion of this refuge point in *The English Pilot*, demonstrating the necessity of such safe havens to mitigate the effects of storms, which was invaluable in the hurricane season and provided shelter from season to season. *The English Pilot* illustrates efforts to expand knowledge of such areas, and this chapter expands on Mulcahy's assertion of the importance of St Johns Harbour in Antigua, applying this to *The English Pilot* in its objective of developing knowledge of areas of refuge and safety on uncertain seas.[544] *The English Pilot* provided clear advice for safe havens from the weather, which was an unpredictable and unavoidable consideration for seafarers.

These considerations remained unchanged in future editions. A significant addition to the information regarding the Virgin Islands was made in the 1706 edition, in which is recorded the presence of the Danish colony of St Thomas, as well as a brief description of its defences: 'on the west side of the harbour, there [were] two white forts, and one on the east side.'[545] Benbow's expedition also observed the Virgin Islands, detailing the course from Crab Island to St Thomas, as well as 'the best way to know the harbour [of St Thomas] by [its] 2 white towers upon the high land of St Thomas', as well as a 'round hill' which formed 'the west [part] of the harbour' and which had a 'watchhouse over the castle […] and a square tower of 8 guns on a

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[541] Verner, 'Introduction', in C. Verner (ed.), *The English Pilot*, viii; Verner, 'John Seller and the Chart Trade', in Thrower (ed.), *The Compleat Plattmaker*, 156.
[542] J. Thornton & W. Fisher, *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book describing the West Indies Navigation from Hudson's Bay to the River Amazones* (London: Postern Row on Tower Hill, 1689), 11.
[543] Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society*, 11, 72, 89-90.
[544] *Ibid*., 89-90.
[545] J. Thornton & R. Mount, *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book describing the West Indies Navigation from Hudson's Bay to the River Amazones* (London: Postern Row on Tower Hill, 1706), 30.

hill to the eastward'.[546] This suggests that there was a crossover between the intelligence gathered by Benbow and the content which was added to the 1706 version of *The English Pilot*. Observations of rival colonies' defences and the viability of gathering a large fleet in waters nearby may have influenced naval contributions to navigational knowledge, demonstrated by the similarities between Thompson's description and that provided in *The English Pilot*. During this period, the Admiralty was on alert to maintain operational knowledge of the Atlantic, in line with shifting attention to the Americas as the centre of Spanish and French imperial wealth and a key theatre of conflict after the outbreak of the War of Spanish Succession.[547] However, it is more likely that the towers were considered by both Thompson and the author of *The English Pilot* to be conspicuous landmarks which helped any captain to easily identify his location as further development of common knowledge.

The material recorded by Thompson was probably not directly transferred to later versions of *The English Pilot*. This is evident in the case of Cartagena, which English government had previously identified as an important port in the Spanish-American economy and remained so for much of the eighteenth century. The 1689 version of *The English Pilot* outlines the enclosed nature of Cartagena as a 'great deep bay', as well as its having 'two forts […] called Forto Granada, and […] Forto de Indea' on its 'middlemost island' and a castle on '[t]he westernmost island […] called Isla Cares'.[548] These descriptions were identical in later versions, with an accompanying diagram of the port's layout and soundings (see Figure 11). However, Thompson's findings from his West Indies cruise of 1699 and 1700 described Cartagena's defences very differently to *The English Pilot*. His account detailed that '[o]n the larboard side' stood 'a small castle of 12 guns', whilst 'on the starboard side is no fortification[,] but the point with thick bushes where men may lodge with small arms in the middle of this narrow is 15 fathoms depth'.[549] Thompson appeared more focused on the individual capabilities of the defences he detailed in his notes, including the number of guns and points from which an assaulting force could be ambushed. By the 1740s, defences were back to a larger strength, with the same number of forts as detailed in *The English Pilot*.[550] This illustrates both the differences and crossover between the two documents, as *The English Pilot* sought to use the information gathered to inform navigation, whilst Thompson's observations had a more martial application. Benbow's fact-finding mission occurred during a time of peace between

[546] TNA, ADM 7/833 (ff. 19), A Collecsion of Memorandom.
[547] Willis, *Admiral Benbow*, 253-4.
[548] Thornton & Fisher, *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book*, 21.
[549] TNA, ADM 7/833 (ff. 6), A Collecsion of Memorandom.
[550] Thornton & Fisher, *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book*, 21; Nowell, 'Defense of Cartagena', 490-1.

Spain and England, allowing the ships to get close enough to see the defences guarding Cartagena's harbour and the city within. However, the parallels between the two may have been a coincidence and the information and intelligence gathered by Benbow and Thompson may not have crossed over to the authors of *The English Pilot*, like may have happened with the two white forts noticed at St Thomas. This could therefore be evidence of the limited capacity for organised information transfer between military and civilian sectors, and possibly of the protection of sensitive intelligence which the Navy chose to keep concealed in the event of conflict.

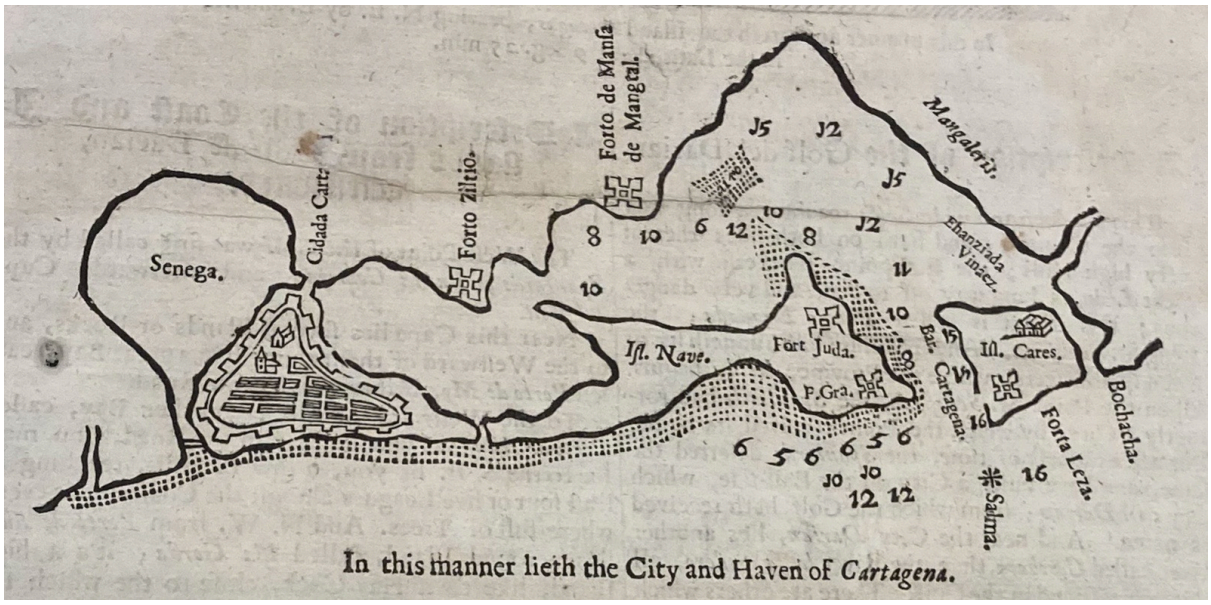

Figure 11 Diagram of Cartagena, labelled 'In this manner lieth the City and Haven of Cartagena', 1689
Source: Thornton and Fisher, *The English Pilot The Fourth Book*, 21.

The first version of *The English Pilot* identified Portobello as a suitable place of water and firewood resupply, as well as a place of 'good anchor ground […] and room enough for a whole fleet of ships to ride in', which was repeated in all versions up to 1750.[551] The 1706 edition expanded the description of Portobello, the coastline nearby and the 'Island Bastementos' with an anchoring point of eighteen fathoms, how to navigate along the coastline with further

[551] Thornton & Fisher, *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book* (1689), 23-4; J. Thornton & R. Mount, *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book describing the West Indies Navigation from Hudson's Bay to the River Amazones* (London: Postern Row on Tower Hill, 1706), 61-2; J. Thornton, R. Mount, W. Mount & T. Page, *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book describing the West Indies Navigation from Hudson's Bay to the River Amazones* (London: Postern Row on Tower Hill, 1716), 60; J. Thornton, T. Page & W. Mount, *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book describing the West Indies Navigation from Hudson's Bay to the River Amazones* (London: The Postern on Tower Hill, 1729), 60; W. Mount, J. Mount & J. Page, *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book describing the West Indies Navigation from Hudson's Bay to the River Amazones* (London: Tower Hill, 1749), 60.

detailed depths; all details also reflected in the 1749 edition.[552] This information may have originated in the findings gathered by Benbow and Thompson, given that the expedition was undertaken to better understand the coastal geography and hydrography of the Americas. It was not only a quest to evaluate European rivals, but also a way to simply understand the probable future locales of conflict between the powers of Europe and gain appreciation of navigational hazards in a region which was already bustling with commercial shipping. Thompson similarly remarked that the 'river to the southward of Portobello is very good fresh water and a very good place to cut firewood in', which was useful information to civilian and military shipping alike.[553] Portobello had been founded by the Spanish in 1597, selected for its deep natural harbour, and was well established as a pivotal port in the Spanish silver trade. Naturally, *The English Pilot* had common knowledge of Portobello derived from over a century of earlier seafarers' travel to the port. Versions of *The English Pilot* published from 1706 onwards include expanded descriptions of the coastline nearby, including Bastimentos Island and its coastline, which sat between Portobello and the former treasure assembly port of Nombre de Dios.[554] Part of this description labelled the nearby 'road of Agrota' as 'large enough to contain 8 or 9 sail of ships'.[555] This was later used as an anchoring place for Admiral Francis Hosier in his 1726 cruise to intercept the Spanish treasure fleet, although disease killed many of the sailors and the expedition failed. Hosier's use of the area for anchorage suggests the transfer of information between military and civilian spheres, although in this instance it was from a civilian origin. By comparison, Thompson only identified Bastimentos Island, drawing a sketch of the island's position in relation to Portobello and Nombre de Dios (see Figure 12). This suggests that Thompson's work was not universally transferred to civilian sources and that Benbow's surveying voyage was not designed as a comprehensive examination. Thompson's notes and sketches only detail the coast around Bastimentos and not the waters between it and the mainland, suggesting that Thompson did not investigate the area between Nombre de Dios and Portobello. Hosier's knowledge of its potential as a place of refuge suggests either that this information contained in the 1706 edition of *The English Pilot* had passed to the Navy in an example of the exchange which occurred in both directions, or

[552] Thornton & Mount, *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book* (1706), 61-2; Mount et al., *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book*, 60.
[553] TNA, ADM 7/833 (ff. 7), A Collecsion of Memorandom.
[554] Thornton & Mount, *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book* (1706), 61-2; J. Thornton et al., *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book* (1716), 60; Thornton et al., *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book* (1729), 60; W. Mount et al., *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book* (1749), 60.
[555] Thornton & Mount, *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book* (1706), 61-2.

perhaps that Hosier had simply read *The English Pilot*, exemplifying naval officers' need to obtain their own sailing guides from a lack of Admiralty provision of such charts.

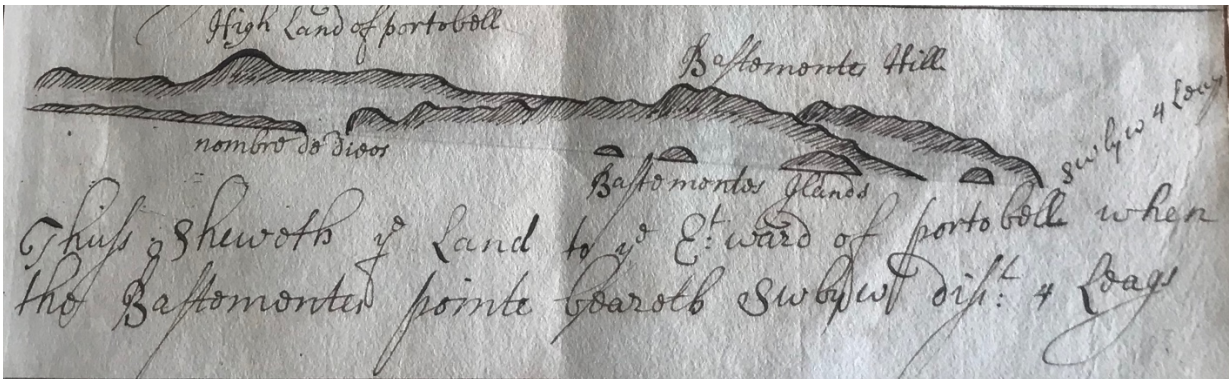

Figure 12 A sketch of Bastimentos Island as viewed from a ship, labelled 'Thus showeth the land to the Eastward of Portobello when the Bastementos point bears SW by W distance 4 leagues'.
Source: Thompson, Collecsion of Memorandum, 6.

However, a precedent was clearly set, as demonstrated by the descriptions of other ports and settlements discussed above that make direct reference to the defences at each. It suggests that Thompson's observations had at least a passing effect on the future of navigational knowledge of the West Indies, with descriptions of the coastline near Portobello passing from the Navy to a civilian publication like *The English Pilot*. These descriptions would be considered far from sensitive intelligence but were vital updates to knowledge which could support British navigation in the region.

Portobello is a particularly important example in the development of navigational knowledge, illustrated by the attention it drew throughout the period. The successful attack by Admiral Edward Vernon in 1739 created the opportunity to significantly update the description of Portobello as recorded in *The English Pilot*'s 1749 printing, which appears to have not happened and the description of Portobello in that version was the same as those in previous iterations.[556] The attack, capture and reopening of Portobello in November 1739 is well documented, and served as a prominent display of British naval power and a powerful tool of propaganda during the War of Jenkins' Ear.

After returning to Britain to report the successful capture of Portobello, Captain James Rentone provided a description and a drawing which was reproduced by Lieutenant Philip

[556] W. Mount et al., *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book* (1749), 60.

Durrell, another naval officer (see Figure 13).[557] This map was detailed with locations of forts and other defences, the layout of the town, and sandbanks which could both aid and hinder ships in the harbour. The information gathered both before and after the attack, could be relied upon to develop British knowledge of the Americas and support future operations. This map was likely made for public consumption, as part of the wider British capitalisation on the victory at Portobello as a show of naval strength. Whilst the map itself is mostly utilitarian in its design with a scale, labels, and detailed illustrations of the harbour's sandbanks, several features of the reproduction are of a propagandist nature. Firstly, the map's title, recorded in a cartouche on the left-hand side, highlights the success of the operation to take the town 'With Six Men of War only'.[558] This is an overt boast by the map maker and the Navy itself, highlighting the Navy's perception of its own resourcefulness in attacking a well-defended major Spanish American trading point. This explains why Rentone's map was made into something which was designed for public circulation, to demonstrate naval power in a format that could be easily distributed and displayed. Secondly, the map is as much a dramatic visual account of the attack, as it is a functional map. It not only includes the geographical features discussed above, but also includes relative positions of Vernon's (small) fleet; complete with billowing clouds of smoke to illustrate gunfire as Vernon's fleet engaged the Iron Castle at the mouth of the harbour and blockaded the Spanish ships anchored near the town itself.

[557] NMM, PAH7663, This plan of the harbour, town, and forts of Porto Bello, 1740.
[558] *Ibid*.

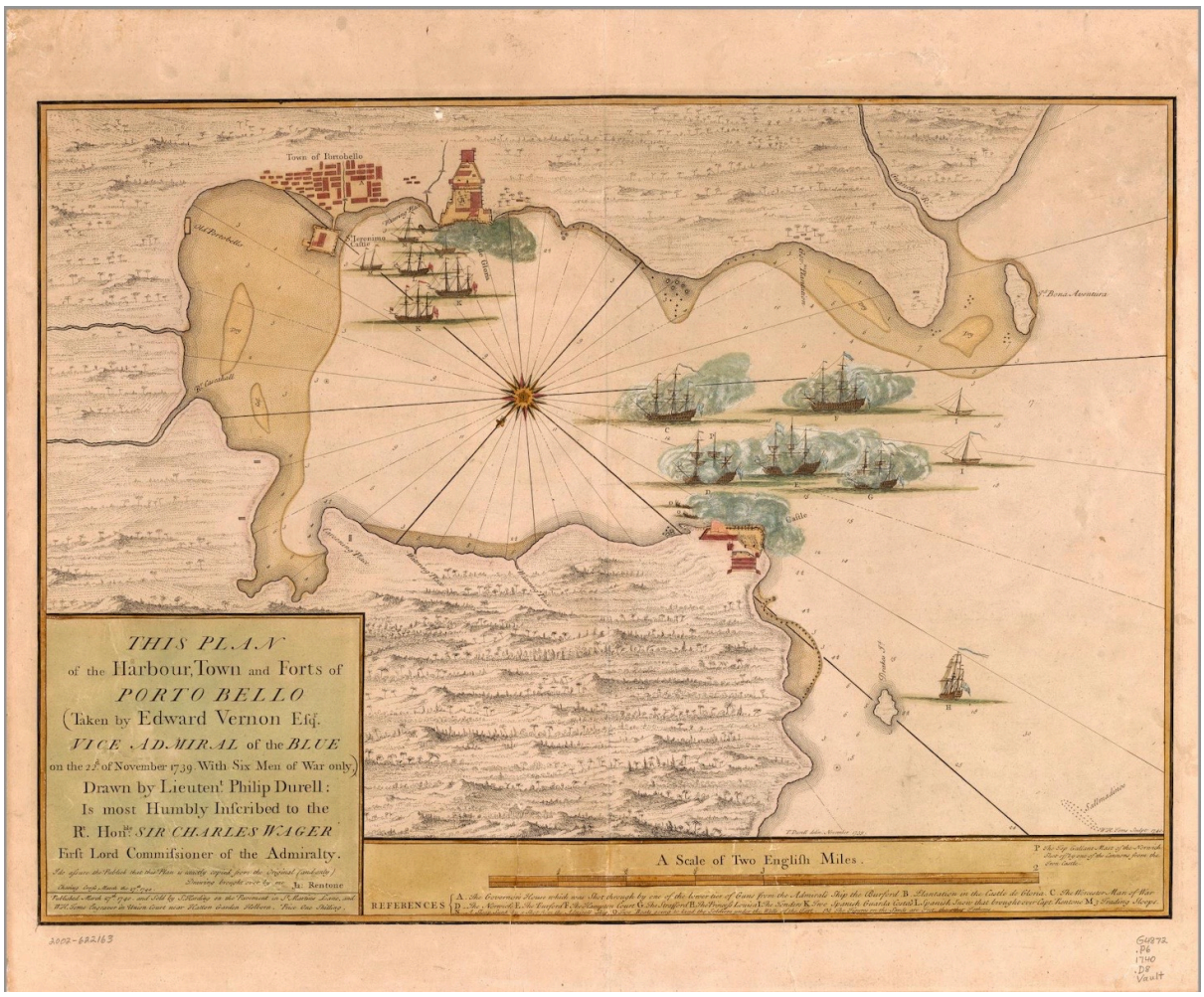

Figure 13 P. Durrell & J. Rentone, 'This plan of the harbour, town, and forts of Porto Bello (taken by Edward Vernon, esqr. vice admiral of the Blue on the 22d of November 1739 with six men of war only)', 1740.
Source: Durrell & Rentone, G4872 .P6 1740 .D8 Vault, Library of Congress.

The transfer of navigational intelligence and information between military sources and the publicly available chart trade was not a standard procedure. *The English Pilot* clearly did not employ Thompson's sketched chart of Portobello in its 1706 printing. The same was true of the 1749 printing, in which the description of Portobello was not accompanied by a detailed map such as the one produced by Lieutenant Durrell with Captain Rentone's intelligence. Some informal transfer did happen, as illustrated above by the examples of developing and expanding descriptions of Cartagena and the Danish colony of St Thomas. However, the transfer may have been affected by perceived audiences and whether such information was of use to a civilian seafarer. This intelligence was not passed between these two spheres as standard procedure, but filtered through in fragments and was added to later versions. As Verner suggests, *The English Pilot* was the first English sea atlas which charted and described American waters, but it also turned navigational information and intelligence into a marketable commodity which the creators were uninterested in updating with newer charts

and changing geographical knowledge.[559] The same was true of intelligence, which could be bought and sold, possibly to commercial publishers, although presumably dependent on sensitivity. Verner highlighted that *The English Pilot* was created by cartographers who had acquired their plates through purchases and inheritance, publishing the same charts for decades up to the end of the eighteenth century. This creates the impression that *The English Pilot* was updated and revised only as material arrived with the creators without great exertion. Without competitors, and therefore with an effective monopoly, *The English Pilot*'s publishers were complacent about updating it, as to do so would incur an avoidable expense in a market crying out for publicly available navigation manuals. Small changes could be made to fix imperfections in printing plates, but the expense of large updates and new plates often encouraged the persistence of older geographical ideas.[560]

The English Pilot also contained details which persisted through versions of *The Fourth Book*. In the first 1689 printing, the island of St Juan de Ulúa off the coast of Veracruz, Mexico, was highlighted as the 'place the Spanish plate fleet uses to lie, and bring their loading from all parts, til the month of March; and from thence they then sail for the Havana, where they always make up their fleet to depart for Spain.'[561] This same description remained in the 1749 version. Similarly, the 1689 printing described the 'St Andreo and Cattalin Islands' as 'islands the French use to lie with their private men of war, and plague the Spaniards to leeward, especially those of Portobello, and Nombre de Dios', duplicated in printings at least as late as 1749.[562] The inclusion of these islands suggests an attempt to warn English (and later British) seafarers of the threat from French privateers to shipping in the region. Whilst it focused on the harassment of Spanish ships, primarily at Portobello and Nombre de Dios, it was also undoubtedly included as a warning that French privateers could prey on English ships as well. Additionally, it may have been included to support Britain's own privateering efforts in wartime, as the *guerre de course* created a burgeoning attention to attacking the shipping of rival nations as an objective for British vessels.[563] The inclusion of St Juan de Ulúa as 'the place the Spanish plate fleet uses to lie' illustrates that *The English Pilot* was designed as a

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[559] Verner, *A Carto-biographical Study of The English Pilot*, vii, 79, 81; Verner, 'Introduction', in Verner (ed.), *The English Pilot*, v, x; Verner, 'John Seller and the Chart Trade' in Thrower (ed.), *The Compleat Plattmaker*, 156.
[560] K. Parker, 'Pepys Island as a Pacific stepping stone: the struggle to capture islands on early modern maps', *British Society for the History of Science*, 51, 4 (2018), 659-677, 664-665.
[561] Thornton & Fisher, *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book* (1689), 30.
[562] Thornton & Fisher, *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book* (1689), 26; W. Mount et al., *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book* (1749), 63.
[563] Grainger, *British Navy in the Caribbean*, 85.

navigational guide for all mariners. Except as an anecdote or detail to interest the civilian reader, there is no need for them to know the patterns of the Spanish galleons, suggesting that its inclusion was intended to inform the Royal Navy's awareness of the Spanish treasure fleet's movements, which was a key consideration during times of war. Perhaps it was a throwaway observation, or an indication of a recommendation that if it was considered a good place to assemble the *flota*, it was also good for the anchoring of regular merchant shipping.

Also worth considering is the material contained in the 1706 printing of *The English Pilot*, which was updated from sources beyond Robert Thompson. The 1689 printing contains a description of St Domingo, the main port of the Spanish part of Hispaniola. It highlighted its easily accessible port and favourable loading conditions, as well as its defences in the form of 'a castle' and a 'church, or cloister, called Nostra Signoria de Bosario', and is accompanied by an illustration mapping out the harbour and these defensive structures.[564] These details were few in the first printing of *The English Pilot*, but had been expanded on in the 1706 and subsequent versions. Also included in these later printings were directions for sailing into St Domingo harbour, which provided greater detail of the defences and specifics outlined in 1689. As well as the instruction to use the castle as a landmark to guide a mariner's entry into the harbour, the 1706 and later versions outlined that

> [t]he fortifications of this place are as follows. Upon the first point, on your starboard, going in on the green point, there is hid[den] among some trees a small fort of 6 guns, and over against it, on the east side is a church or cloister, called Nostra Signoria de Bosaria, and a fort of 12 guns with a green parade; on the same side half a mile to the eastward, stands a fortification of 20 guns, and within that, about two tier of about 14 guns each, then you come to the castle with a flat steeple, in which is 20 guns, 14 of them brass, and within that a round tower of ten guns, which is the landing place. Towards the sea is no manner of defence.[565]

This description was probably designed as a navigational aid for shipping entering and leaving the port of St Domingo. Military interest in the port stemmed from its position as a significant dispatch point for privateers, as well as its capital status for the Spanish side of the island of Hispaniola, for which it drew the attention of any naval officers in the region. This is evidence of knowledge transfer between the Navy and civilian sectors, as the inclusion of the above description provided universal assistance through navigational landmarks. Landmarks aided

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[564] Thornton & Fisher, *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book* (1689), 37-8.
[565] Thornton & Fisher, *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book* (1689), 37-8; Thornton & Mount, *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book* (1706), 38-40; Thornton et al., *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book* (1716), 39-40; Thornton et al., *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book* (1729), 39-40; Mount et al., *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book* (1749), 39-40.

sailing directions in relation to the depth of the harbour, lessening the risk of damage from underwater hazards. However, the details of these defences go beyond the general, and suggest that unidentified mariners were able to examine the number of guns and hidden areas which could be used as concealed ambush points, details which needed a careful and perhaps clandestine examination to gather. Alternatively, these details may have been obtained from an informant, but their identity is impossible to know. There is more detail included in this description than would be required for a navigational aid in which the forts were simply labelled as landmarks. An understanding of St Domingo was key to English naval action, given that the War of Spanish Succession was raging in the Caribbean at this time. Once again, this implies that *The English Pilot* had a universal target audience as a guide for civilian seafarers as well as naval officers who were not provided with charts and guides by the Admiralty and thus had to source their own.[566] It illustrates the cycle of navigational intelligence gathering and use, as *The English Pilot* was updated as intelligence became available to its creators. This is not to say that this process was constant, and the specific sources of this intelligence remain difficult to establish, but the details of St Domingo's defensive structures imply the involvement of military sources in their identification. The following section examines the involvement of military and naval officers in the further gathering of navigational and geographical intelligence, utilising the examples of the 1742 development of Rattan Island, off the coast of Honduras, and the 1748 survey of Fort St Louis, Hispaniola after the successful attack by Admiral Charles Knowles.

[566] Verner, *A Carto-biographical Study of The English Pilot*, 4.

Military and Naval Maps of the Caribbean

This section discusses the place of maps, which were primarily designed by naval and military officers, in the development of British knowledge and its effects on operations. It examines how knowledge gathered on the spot by officers of the Royal Navy was translated into maps and charts with differing levels of circulation. Also discussed is the Navy's use of maps for future planning, as gathered knowledge could contribute to British understanding of rival fortifications' architecture, layout, and armaments. Developing an understanding of the enemy's building techniques and the layout of infrastructure meant that Britain had a reference point on which to base future operations when attacking and capturing enemy fortifications.

Early surveys of Rattan Island are scrutinised as the island's importance to British objectives in the West Indies grew. Rattan Island (now Roatan Island) is the largest island in the Bay of Honduras and had been contested by Spain and England since early in the colonial period, often used as a resting place for seafarers and a refuge for pirates. By the early 1740s, plans had been formed to garrison the island and establish more permanent British settlement, partially to support the logwood trade on the coast of central America, as well as providing a convenient base from which to strike Spanish shipping arriving and departing from central America.[567] This plan was enacted after initial surveys conducted in 1742 (discussed below), after which an Army officer named John Caulfeild was appointed governor and commander-in-chief of Rattan Island until the island was abandoned on 30 November 1749 due to problems of supplying the garrison with adequate food and water.[568]

The map created by Lieutenant Philip Durrell using Captain Rentone's intelligence and recollection of the attack on Portobello also illustrates a trend reflected in subsequent maps produced by military and naval sources. These maps were often reproduced after their immediate usefulness had passed. As illustrated by the Portobello example, this was sometimes used as propaganda highlighting the strength of the Navy and retelling the heroic feats of its sailors. However, these maps also contain detailed navigational information. They charted coastlines, sandbanks, defences, and depths methodically. For example, only two

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[567] Camille & Espejo-Saavedra, 'Historical Geography of the Belizean Logwood Trade', 80; A. Cormack, 'John Caulfeild, Governor and Commander-In-Chief of Rattan', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, 95, 383 (2017), 197-206, 201-2; Grainger, *British Navy in the Caribbean*, 142

[568] Cormack, 'John Caulfeild', 204.

years after the creation and circulation of the Portobello map, British attention had been drawn to the Bay of Honduras, and more specifically the island of Rattan. This was reflected in a 'true copy by Isaac Pearson' of a map composed by engineer William Cunningham, which was passed on in a letter from Governor Trelawny of Jamaica to the Duke of Newcastle.[569] The map contained a rough draft of the coastline, relative positions of watering spots, and areas identified for settlement, reflecting the concerted effort of Britain to expand its influence in the Bay of Honduras. The rough draft (see Figure 14) includes an annotation pinpointing the initial landing place of HMS *Litchfield*, which had escorted Caulfeild from Jamaica and arrived on the island on 23 August 1742.[570] This suggests that the survey conducted by Cunningham was done as a direct response to the arrival of the new governor, to prepare the island for a permanent garrison. Cunningham's rough sketch (and the subsequent refined map created the year after) is an example of what Moon termed 'proto-intelligence', with a focus on the physical or 'scientific' attributes like 'geography, oceanography, botany and cartography, rather than details about the nature of peoples and cultures in the territories under consideration.'[571] This was the foundation on which the settlement of a region could begin, as demonstrated by the British conclusion that Rattan was suitable for colonisation and as a military base. Moon argues that this 'proto-intelligence' was part of a prioritisation of discovery over the possible short-term political or commercial engagements that these exploratory surveys invited, as in the case of early surveys of New Zealand.[572] However, certainly in the case of Rattan Island in the 1740s, these considerations were intertwined. Whilst surveys were conducted to better understand the island's coasts and geography, the island's potential as a military and commercial base were already central to the reasons for such surveys to gather better navigational information.

[569] TNA, CO 137/57, Plan of Portroyal Harbour, Rattan, 1743; TNA, CO 137/57, Governor Edward Trelawny to Duke of Newcastle, 10 December 1743.
[570] TNA, CO 137/57, A Plan of Portroyal Harbour in the Island of Ratan 1742, 1742; The London Evening Post, 'Business', *The London Evening Post.* London. May 3, 1743-May 5, 1743. Available online: link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2000645657/BBCN?u=unihull&sid=bookmark-BBCN, [Accessed 17/05/2023]; Cormack, 'John Caulfeild', 201-2.
[571] Moon, 'From Tasman to Cook', 254.
[572] *Ibid*.

Figure 14 W. Cunningham, 'A Plan of Portroyal Harbour in the Island of Ratan 1742', 1742
Source: Cunningham, TNA, CO 137/57, Colonial Office and predecessors: Jamaica, Original Correspondence. Correspondence, Original - Board of Trade.

The powers of Europe vied for control of the lucrative trade in logwood, used in the production of dye, and Rattan's position in the Bay of Honduras made it important to a British foothold in

the trade.[573] The map and its accompanying letters demonstrate a concerted effort to gather intelligence in support of further development of the island and its opportunities. Cunningham produced a refined map that plotted systematic soundings of the crescent-shaped Port Royal Harbour (see Figure 15). Soundings radiate outwards from Port Royal Island, where England had already established Fort George in the mid-seventeenth century. Cunningham was methodical in the gathering of such sounding information, charting variation in depth all the way into the shoreline of the harbour itself. It illustrates planning ahead of approval by central government. Knowledge of the depths in the harbour allowed Cunningham to establish the maximum draught of ships that could enter and anchor within the harbour for Caulfeild and Governor Trelawny (and by extension the Duke of Newcastle). *The London Evening Post* published an extract of a letter from the governor, likely forwarded to *The Post* by William Caulfeild, the brother of Governor John Caulfeild.[574] The letter describes Port Royal Harbour as 'one of the finest harbours in the world, capacious enough to hold 500 Sail of Ships, where they may always ride safe', calling it 'strongly fortified by nature.'[575] Concern for the safety of shipping is once again demonstrated, as Caulfeild saw the potential of the harbour as a refuge from storms and bad weather, and perhaps also as a convoy rendezvous. Whilst Caulfeild may have exaggerated the size of the fleet it could hold, his intention is clear: illustrate the potential of the harbour as a base for military operations in the region and strengthen Britain's foothold in the trade networks which crossed from central America. This highlights the purpose of publishing the letter in a prominent city newspaper, to act as a tool to encourage support for the venture. It also highlights the distinction between information and intelligence, as little effort was made to conceal British intentions in an area primarily controlled by Spanish interests. Whilst Rattan was the subject of British military ambition and harassment of rival shipping, it was primarily part of the efforts to expand economic opportunity and develop a foothold in the trade in the region. The establishment of camps in the previous year may have reduced concerns for the settlement's safety, and the fact that Britain and Spain were already at war may have been a factor in lessening the need for secrecy of British intentions in a contested region.

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[573] Sorsby, 'British Trade with Spanish America', 179; Camille & Espejo-Saavedra, 'Historical Geography of the Belizean Logwood Trade', 77, 80; Grainger, *British Navy in the Caribbean*, 117-118, 142.
[574] London Evening Post, 'Business', *The London Evening Post*.
[575] *Ibid*.

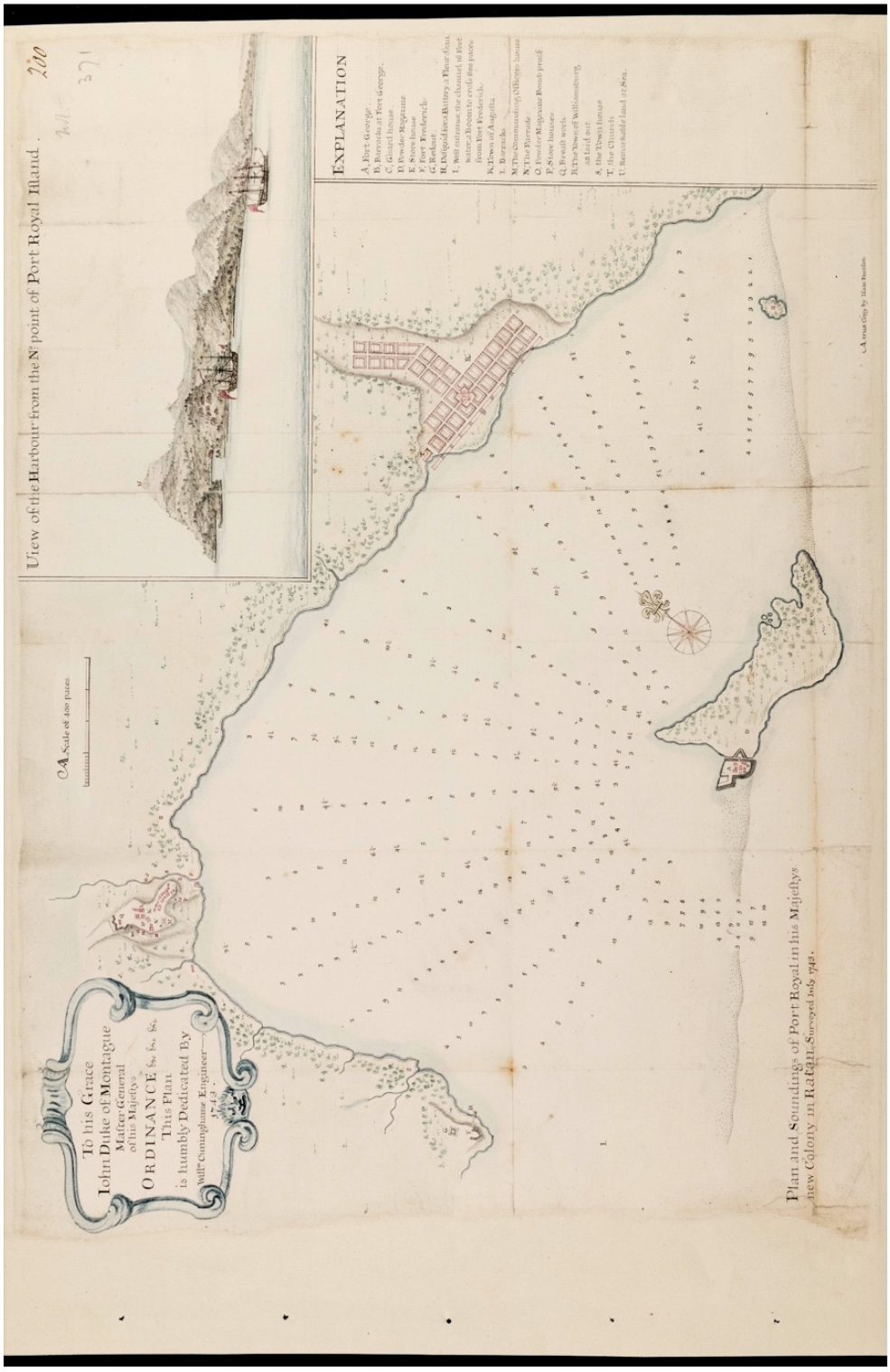

Figure 15 W. Cunningham, 'Plan and Soundings of Port Royal in his Majesty's new Colony in Rattan. Surveyed July 1743.', 1743.
Source: Cunningham, TNA, CO 137/57, Colonial Office and predecessors: Jamaica, Original Correspondence. Correspondence, Original - Board of Trade.

This correlates with Trelawny's letters proposing developments for the island's use as a base for the Royal Navy. Trelawny highlighted the island's proximity to Spanish Central America, pointing out that

> our ships that may be engaged off Cartagena or Portobello, may not be able to reach Jamaica and might be glad of a Leeward port to refit in; and as this island is a little to leeward of the Havana, it might be a good place for our ships that should cruise between that port and Cape Antonio (a good station to intercept the treasure from Vera Cruz) to resort to upon occasion.[576]

Britain was still at war with Spain in 1743, as the War of Jenkins' Ear had been absorbed into the War of Austrian Succession. Rattan provided a potential venue for a base from which naval vessels could attack the Spanish treasure fleet. This was also a strategic consideration for future operations against the Spanish empire in the Caribbean basin, with the perceived advantage of a base in the path of trade routes from these key ports with vessels already on station. It was thought that the base would assist in both the interception of Spanish trade and in developing the British logwood trade on the coast of Honduras due to its proximity, without the need for vessels making the voyage from Jamaica.[577] Trelawny also highlighted the island's place in the production and supply of logwood, which he said amounted to 'no less cut, than 20 to 25 thousand tons, annually.'[578] He claimed that Dutch merchants shipped most of the logwood to the Netherlands, making them the target of harassment by Spanish privateers. He therefore made the case for 'some form of government' and 'a man of war or two cruising there' to regulate and better defend British trading interests in the region.[579] Cunningham's map, combined with Trelawny's comments, provide an insight into the Royal Navy and British government's use of intelligence gathering for planned expansion. By charting Port Royal Harbour, Cunningham provided detailed intelligence of the potential uses for the island as a base of operations in future naval expeditions.

Cunningham's Rattan map shows methodical investigations by British engineers into the usefulness of a port like Port Royal in supporting and advancing British trading opportunities, and in disrupting those of its rivals. Labelled as an important staging area from which to disrupt the Spanish treasure fleet as it departed from Vera Cruz, Rattan was proposed as a potential base for the Royal Navy in the region, which put them close to these targets. The labels, detailed soundings, layouts of towns and suggestions for new settlement show the methodical attention to detail to support the development of the port. Much like Benbow and Thompson's expedition of 1699, the Rattan map illustrates the results of a fact-finding mission designed to encourage future British colonial expansion. The island's strategic position in

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[576] TNA, CO 137/57, Trelawny to Newcastle, 10 December 1743.
[577] London Evening Post, 'Business', *The London Evening Post*.
[578] TNA, CO 137/57, Trelawny to Newcastle, 10 December 1743.
[579] *Ibid*.

proximity to the Spanish empire, coupled with the existing logwood trade in which Britain had a stake, made it an attractive prospect for development. Detailed and accurate surveys like that made by Cunningham were therefore pivotal to the future of this expansion project. The combination of individuals involved in the exchange, from naval officers, engineers, a colonial governor, and a Secretary of State, also show the moving parts of the process of eighteenth-century intelligence gathering and exchange, as British government sought to alter the boundaries between what was known and what was unknown. Trelawny was clearly keen to employ the technical expertise of an engineer like Cunningham who served with the Army, was based in Jamaica, and assigned to Rattan. Trelawny referred the Duke of Newcastle to the engineer's findings and specialist skills.[580] It was a clear, concerted effort to conduct a mission to gather navigational information in an area of developing importance which had been previously unsurveyed by British sources. Development was already underway between Cunningham's initial rough survey in 1742 (Figure 14) and the refined plan in Figure 15, with noticeable growth in infrastructure and detail present on the updated map. Conspicuously absent from the refined plan is the apparent line of rocks across the mouth of the harbour, which suggests either an oversight in the final version or speculation and conjecture by the creator of the rough survey. Perhaps Cunningham's initial survey was designed with caution in mind, to properly judge the potential hazards for shipping navigating the harbour. Subsequent, more methodical surveying found that these rocks were either less hazardous than first thought, or possibly even non-existent.

Interestingly, there was a second survey conducted simultaneously with that by William Cunningham. Naval officer Lieutenant Henry Barnsley drew a map of the whole island which included a smaller diagram of Port Royal Harbour (see Figure 16). This map was also published in 1743, and according to Cormack, bears striking similarities to a map depicted in a portrait of John Caulfeild, which was commissioned upon his return from the governorship in Rattan.[581] Whilst Barnsley's map is primarily a larger survey of the entire island, it also includes a diagram of Port Royal Harbour in the bottom right corner, complete with its own methodically plotted soundings.[582] Much like Cunningham's map, Barnsley demonstrates competence in the gathering of navigational information, mapping the depths of the harbour with a view to its uses as a refuge for British shipping and labelling areas which would support settlement. It also

[580] TNA, CO 137/57, Trelawny to Newcastle, 10 December 1743; TNA, CO 137/57, Cunningham to Trelawny, December 1743.
[581] Cormack, 'John Caulfeild', 205.
[582] NMM, G245:19/1, A Draught of the Island Rattan, in the Bay of Honduras, in Latitude 16 22 North by Lieutenant Henry Barnsley 1742. 1742.

suggests that there was little communication between those tasked with surveying the harbour, and that these surveys were conducted independently of each other and therefore detailed with significant overlap. Perhaps this is an illustration of points made throughout this thesis of the limitations of eighteenth-century intelligence gathering, as multiple actors working towards the same goal were not coordinated or in communication with one another. Whilst the surveys were likely to have been conducted with no communication and cooperation between Cunningham and Barnsley, the similarities in their findings show the high standard to which they conducted information-gathering. Barnsley's map also includes a description of the island and its merits as a base for British settlement in the region. He extols the plentiful food supplies on the island with a wide range of animals to hunt and his assessment that the soil was fertile. Also noted was the supply of timber, which Barnsley highlighted as valuable to merchants' demands for masts and yards in the event of damage to ships in the region.[583] Barnsley's map was more decorative and eye-catching than Cunningham's, and was perhaps intended as propaganda or an advertisement for the island project. Rattan's position in the Bay of Honduras and its connections to the trade routes of the region perhaps reveal Barnsley's purpose as encouraging settlement in the interests of furthering economic opportunity. The fact that the description provided on the map primarily targets the support the island could supply further evidence that it was designed primarily for advertisement over functionality.

[583] *Ibid.*

Figure 16 H. Barnsley, A Draught of the Island Rattan, in the Bay of Honduras, in Latitude 16 22 North By Lieutenant Henry Barnsley 1742, 1742.
Source: NMM, G245:19/1, A Draught of the Island Rattan. 1742.

Both the description on Barnsley's map and Caulfeild's letter to his brother push the good health of the island, describing and complimenting the available food supplies as well as the

suitability of the harbour on the island's south side as being large and safe from bad weather.[584] Once again, concerns for safety for shipping were central to the process of navigational information gathering. Mulcahy's assertion of the continuous concern in the colonial mindset about the dangers of storms is demonstrated here.[585] Much like Caulfeild's letter published in *The London Post*, Barnsley's map was circulated freely, sold as a 'coloured' version for 2s 6d or a 'plain' version for 1s 6d, and was in Cormack's assessment focused almost entirely on the shape of the coast and soundings of the harbours.[586] However, this conclusion downplays the effort and technical skill incorporated in Barnsley's map. Although primarily designed as a promotional and decorative piece, it still illustrates the efforts to inform British colonial expansion and development. The open sale of this map shows further use of information as a promotion of achievement to a public audience, like that expressed in Durrell's map of Portobello. Barnsley went on to design another chart in 1750, this time plotting the coast of New England, which was printed and sold by William and Isaac Mount and Thomas Page, who were the contemporary owners of the rights to *The English Pilot*.[587] Barnsley clearly enjoyed a role as a maritime surveyor, contributing to the growing bank of navigational knowledge available to sailors in Britain. His affiliation with Thomas Page and the Mounts demonstrates the transfer of knowledge between military and civilian spheres, as alluded to above, even if it remained inconsistent.

Britain's aims to grow its trade in this region made the search for safe harbours a priority for the settlers of Rattan, with the size of Port Royal Harbour and its perceived capacity serving as a major pull factor for pushing the island's settlement. Barnsley's map and Caulfeild's letter also illustrate the continuous question of supply and support of a healthy population. Both deemed Rattan to be an island which could support settlement and support a population healthy, to encourage backing for the venture. However, the growing military population on the island outstripped its capacity to support them, and it was evacuated in 1749.[588] This might suggest that Caulfeild and Barnsley were exaggerating its benefits. Whilst unsuccessful in establishing a lasting British presence on Rattan Island, the surveys conducted by Cunningham

[584] London Evening Post, 'Business', *The London Evening Post*; NMM, G245:19/1, A Draught of the Island Rattan.
[585] Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society*, 11, 31.
[586] Cormack, 'John Caulfeild', 205.
[587] See: NMM, G246:2/4(1), A new and correct chart of the sea coast from Cape Codd to Casco Bay lately survey'd by Capt Henry Barnsley, c. 1750. Available online: https://www.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/rmgc-object-557607 [Accessed 19/5/2023].
[588] Cormack, 'John Caulfeild', 203, 204.

and Barnsley demonstrate the attempt to plan and execute British ambitions to expand economic and strategic opportunities.

This forward thinking is also demonstrated by Admiral Charles Knowles's map of Fort St Louis, Hispaniola, which was sent to the Duke of Newcastle after Knowles's successful attack and capture of the fort in March 1748. Knowles had had training in engineering and served under Admiral Vernon during the latter's command in the West Indies in an engineering capacity, as well as in a naval officer's role. By 1748, Knowles had served briefly as Governor of Louisburg (1743-1745) before returning to sea as Admiral of the White, serving once more in the Caribbean. His appointment suggests that the Admiralty sought to develop senior officers' expertise in particular geographical areas, or to at least assign officers where they had previous experience. The same was true of Edward Vernon, whose earlier service in the West Indies under the command of Charles Wager made him a first choice when war loomed in 1739 (see Chapter 4).[589] Local experience drawn from previous cruises gave commanders knowledge of wind patterns, shipping routes, areas of tension and choke points, which allowed them to judge more accurately the quality and reliability of the intelligence they gathered. Knowles arrived at Jamaica in February 1748, and immediately began formulating plans to harass the Spanish with support from Governor of Jamaica Edward Trelawny, intending to attack Santiago de Cuba before the winds were judged unfavourable.[590] Disrupted by the weather and keen to maintain their aim to take the fight to the enemy, they agreed instead on an attack on Fort Louis on the southern side of French Hispaniola, which began on 8 March, in an attack on Spain's French ally.[591]

Knowles claimed that he 'gave the necessary orders and made a disposition [a line of battle] for the attack (agreeable to the best information I could gain and my own remembrance of the place)', although the source of his intelligence is unclear.[592] Captain James Rentone was also present (and was killed during the attack), and his own service under Vernon probably assisted Knowles' planning based on information and intelligence that Rentone had gathered from cruises almost a decade earlier.[593] According to Knowles, the Admiral and his ships attacked at 1 pm, close into the walls of the fort where battle continued for approximately three hours. The Governor of the fort surrendered, and Knowles sent an Army officer ashore to accept the

[589] Nowell, 'Defense of Cartagena', 482.
[590] TNA, CO 137/58, Charles Knowles to Duke of Newcastle, 13 March 1747/8.
[591] Grainger, *British Navy in the Caribbean*, 148-9.
[592] TNA, CO 137/58, Knowles to Newcastle, 13 March 1747/8.
[593] *Ibid*.

surrender of the fort and take possession of it with a body of troops. Knowles recounted the strength of its emplaced defences, stating that they 'had mounted in the fort 78 guns chiefly 42, 36, and 28 pounders, and 5 mortars' and were well supplied.[594] He also remarked on the guns and their carriages' new condition, commenting that 'indeed everything was in good order as ever I saw in a fortress in my life: so that I cannot help thinking but we have had an easy conquest of it.'[595] Whilst vague on the details of his own intelligence gathering ahead of the attack on the fort, Knowles provided details of its strength, probably to boost his own prestige having successfully assaulted such defences. It may have served a second purpose as a written survey of the fort's strengths and an example of retrospective intelligence gathering which could support future operations in details of what to expect from such an assault. After the capture of Fort Louis, Knowles resolved to dismantle the fort and 'make all dispatch I can to blow it up', clearly uninterested in devoting the resources to man the fort himself or attempt to maintain it.[596] This reflects the earlier example of the November 1739 attack on Portobello, when Vernon was uninterested in allocating resources, or unable to spare ships and men to hold the port, instead opting to destroy the fortifications before reopening trade to British merchants, discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Conversely, Knowles and Trelawny saw the taking of Fort Louis as a means to an end, leapfrogging from the success there to a successful attack on Santiago, which they had hoped to use as a bargaining chip when peace talks began.[597] The map of Fort Louis, designed by engineer Archibald Bontein (see Figure 17) and enclosed with Knowles's letter, is therefore a record of observations following the attack, rather than a pre-emptive survey for the attack itself.[598] Knowles's intelligence was likely incomplete during the attack on the fort itself, even if he had coupled intelligence with his own memories of the fort's layout. The map designed by Bontein, which Knowles endorsed and was therefore likely designed as a record of Knowles' success, was created with similar intentions to Durrell and Rentone's map: as a form of propaganda to demonstrate British success and a retrospective survey for government records. Even though the fort it resembled was destroyed, the map could be used as a frame of reference for future naval assaults on French forts.

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[594] *Ibid*.
[595] *Ibid*.
[596] *Ibid*.
[597] *Ibid*.
[598] TNA, CO 137/59, An Exact Plan of Fort St. Louis, on the South side of the Island of Hispaniola, as it was taken by Admiral Knowles, 8 March 1747/8.

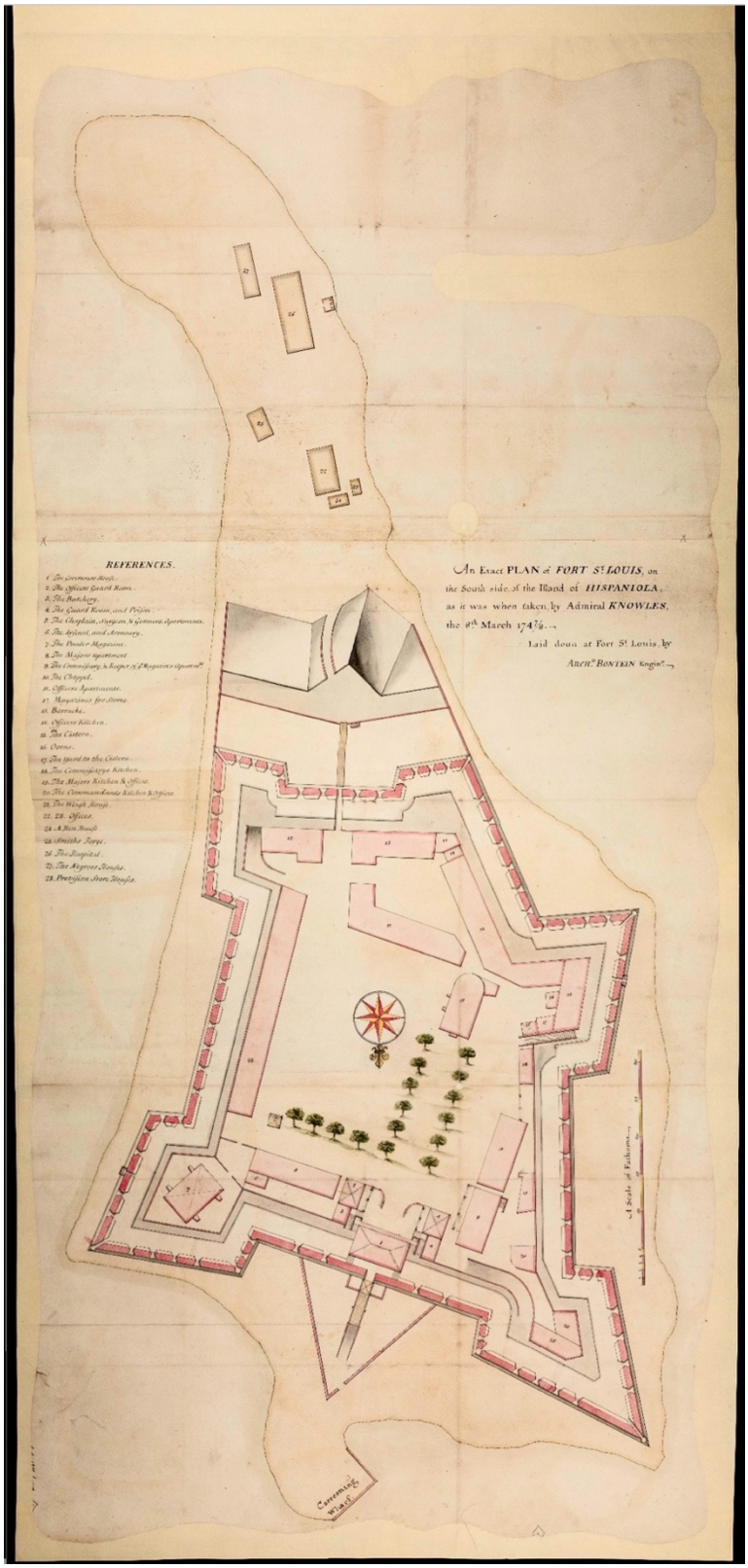

Figure 17 A. Bontein, 'An Exact Plan of Fort St. Louis, on the South side of the Island of Hispaniola, as it was when taken by Admiral Knowles, the 8th March 1747/8', 1748.
Source: Bontein, TNA, CO 137/59, Colonial Office and predecessors: Jamaica, Original Correspondence. Correspondence, Original - Board of Trade.

Both the Portobello and Fort St Louis maps show that the Royal Navy and British government wished to use them to inform future operations. Not only did they want to gather information and intelligence in the short term, but these maps also stretched their usefulness over the longer term. As well as serving as a record of successful operations by the Royal Navy in times of conflict, these maps illustrate that Britain had an interest in learning about rival defences ahead of future operations. Much like the map of Portobello, Bontein's map is highly detailed, with positions of facilities clearly drawn and numbered. The walls of the fort are also boldly outlined, complete with crenelations, and even the trees in the main courtyard are included and realistically coloured.[599] Since the attack had already happened, the immediate usefulness of the map had passed, and the direct purpose of this map forwarded to the Duke of Newcastle appears to be intended as a record of what Knowles observed after the fort was captured. However, the attention to detail that Bontein applied to the map, drawn as the fort was dismantled and destroyed, suggests that the British were interested in learning and applying how rival nations constructed and laid out their defences. By understanding the enemy's planning, building techniques and the layout of infrastructure, Britain had a reference point on which to base future operations when attacking and capturing enemy fortifications.

[599] TNA, CO 137/59, An Exact Plan of Fort St. Louis, 8 March 1747/8.

Conclusions

The Royal Navy was intrinsically linked to exploration, navigation, and strategic surveys of the Americas during the first half of the eighteenth century. Particularly in the case of exploration and navigation, the scholarship has previously centred on the voyages of James Cook after the end of the Seven Years' War, and historians have neglected the examination of earlier decades of the century. John Benbow's mission was just one example of the Royal Navy's peacetime role as navigators, explorers, and cartographers. Primarily designed as a survey of a region of growing strategic and economic importance, it is possible that the record of this voyage influenced the contents of volumes available to the public, such as *The English Pilot*, the first sea atlas of English origin, and a pioneer of publicly available navigational information. Navigational intelligence was constantly evolving, changing, and losing relevance in the unstable political environment of the Atlantic world. This applied to sensitive information such as defences, fortifications, and garrisons, which could change with the tides of war. Meanwhile, navigational information such as soundings, locations of fresh water, resupply and shelter from hazards whilst navigating, much remained unchanged and consistently useful. In instances where this was not the case, such as Jamaica in the wake of the hurricane of 1694, surveys were conducted to re-evaluate and mitigate for such changes. They were a foundation on which officers of the Royal Navy could base future operations and the opportunity to gather local intelligence, such as enemy fortifications and troop movements. These forays into navigational intelligence gathering were therefore pivotal to future operations as the building blocks for later exploratory missions. The central theme of this chapter is information and intelligence as a tool of planning, as the Royal Navy consistently gathered intelligence which was recorded to inform future operations in Caribbean waters. Durrell and Rentone's map of Portobello, Bontein's plan of Fort St Louis on Hispaniola, and Cunningham and Barnsley's charts of Rattan Island all demonstrate the Navy's attempts to provide visual information for future operations. The maps of Portobello and Fort St Louis and their illustrations were based on intelligence gathered ahead of offensive (and successful) naval operations. The maps were therefore created retrospectively, as a visual distillation of what had contributed to success. They stand as examples of preparation for the future, as documented surveys of possible future military targets. In the case of Knowles's map of Fort St Louis, the chart was a survey of an example of French military engineering, that he had ordered dismantled after its capture. It therefore no longer held immediate use for the Navy, but it did provide the government and future operations with a diagram of typical French defensive structures; this helped inform attacks in future conflict. These maps also served as propaganda, boasting the British success

in military operations, the superiority of its Navy, and the quality of British cartography. Cunningham's rough sketch and refined map of Rattan methodically charted the island, demonstrating another active mission to gather navigational intelligence in support of British colonial interests during this period. British naval intelligence gathering was a constant, but the transfer of that intelligence to civilian consciousness was comparatively limited. The intelligence gathered, often of a sensitive nature, was also largely kept within limited circulation purely due to imperfect knowledge exchange and concerns for confidentiality. *The English Pilot* remained mostly unchanged once the core contents had been established by 1721, which shows that whilst parts were likely influenced by intelligence and surveys conducted by the Royal Navy, it was far from standard procedure. It was, however, the forerunner of the more documented period of naval exploration in the wake of the Seven Years' War.

Conclusion

This thesis demonstrates the critical role of intelligence gathering in naval operations in the opening decades of the eighteenth century. In doing so, it has addressed a lacuna in the historiography which has focused on the second half of the century. Rather than simply retelling an operational history of the Royal Navy during this period, it has provided an original viewpoint by examining how the Navy knew what it knew, and how that influenced operational strategy and the allocation of resources.

Scholarly understanding of the Royal Navy in the Western Atlantic has been developed in this study of intelligence gathering which also identifies and explains the systems through which intelligence was collected and exchanged. Intelligence gathering is pivotal to any examination of the role the Royal Navy played in the Western Atlantic, and this research, as the first to systematically explain and examine the systems through which intelligence was gathered and exchanged in support of naval operations, connects the private and mercantile with the governmental in a greater examination of the way information and intelligence shaped the eighteenth century. The Navy in the Western Atlantic has been a feature of the historiography for decades, and has been examined from the perspective of operations, logistics and supply, administration, and the politics of the Navy's role in the region. For example, there was a shift from the work of Bassett, whose focus centred on operations in a theatre of developing importance, to Buchet's analysis around six decades later which served to examine why the Navy was unable to achieve its objectives of conquest in the Caribbean before the Seven Years' War. This centred on logistical changes, administrative developments, ship design, and matters of health. By focusing on intelligence, this thesis has built upon this work to consider a constant and vital commodity which underpinned operations and shaped the role the Navy played in the Western Atlantic, as intelligence gathering influenced and shaped operations in a theatre of growing importance. Works like the collection by Petley and McAleer have expanded the discussion of the Navy's role in the Atlantic World but have focused on the second half of the century, examining the Navy and identity, its rising supremacy, and its protection of commerce. This thesis has developed work such as that by Williams found in this collection to examine the interplay between the Royal Navy and colonial society during the first half of the eighteenth century, and specifically regarding the gathering and exchange of intelligence as a vital part of the Navy's objectives supporting and protecting those colonial societies. Recent work such as Grainger has returned to an operational view of British

attention to the Western Atlantic, in something of a retreat from the more cognate discussions of history and this subject and period in particular.

These chapters have thrown light on aspects of naval operations and planning in a region of growing importance which had been neglected by previous studies, through the consideration of the constant need for intelligence to support operations, and the examination of a period of war and uneasy peace in which the supremacy many historians tout had its foundations. It serves to highlight both the neglected theme of intelligence gathering and its universal importance to operations in the Western Atlantic, as well as the overlooked first half of the eighteenth century, to examine the foundations of Britain's naval supremacy which developed after 1750, to which the gathering and exchange of intelligence in systems of growing complexity and sophistication was key. This work has illustrated how the regional and local intelligence gathering apparatus used by central colonial representatives in the form of commanders-in-chief and colonial governors helped to shape naval operations and their outcomes. As an essential resource in the Royal Navy's role in the Western Atlantic during the first half of the eighteenth century, this thesis has contributed to scholars' understanding of communications and information networks in the Atlantic world; Britain's developing empire in an increasingly important theatre of conflict and economic activity; the dynamics and competitions between rival nations in their objectives to expand trade and economic opportunity; and its responses to threats to those opportunities such as piracy. For example, discussions of the Navy's role in the suppression of piracy have often taken for granted the role played by intelligence. Wilson's work contains the clearest attention to intelligence's role in tracking pirates, but this thesis has made this objective the centre of discussion and expanded it to highlight its distinct effect on operations against pirates such as Blackbeard and Bartholomew Roberts. This work as a whole has the potential to support further research in these cognate areas of history, as intelligence and information gathering and exchange was fundamental to the British Western Atlantic.

Intelligence gathering is an activity in which every state engages and is vital to both policymaking and military operations in times of both war and peace. The English, and then, British states were no exception. The Atlantic was growing in significance for English and British trading interests and as a centre for rivalry between European powers in periods of alternating conflict and uneasy peace, as the Americas became an increasingly important theatre. Officers of the Royal Navy were employed in the gathering and use of local intelligence to support their operations in the region, and aided by intelligence gathered in Europe which was augmented by the sustained collection of foreign advice gathered from cities and port towns in France and Spain. Systems of government-gathered intelligence

defined and influenced the distribution of resources. However, this intelligence had a lifespan which limited its usability in operations on the other side of the Atlantic. Rather than providing another operational history using often-used sources, the thesis has shown for the first time how some of these interlocking networks worked, and how intelligence was fed into and passed around within them.

The systems of intelligence gathering and exchange outlined in Chapter 1 have underlined the significance of intelligence to naval operations and the influence it had on the definition of policy and resource allocation during times of war. The systems and networks which existed were multi-faceted and multi-layered. They encapsulated civilian and military, public and private, governmental and unofficial, and were flexible enough to allow intelligence to flow where it could be used. The later addition of Lloyd's Coffee House is evidence of this, as a repository of intelligence gathering and exchange which slotted into a system of growing complexity. There were a series of loosely interlocked systems which connected London with the Americas in the form of a transatlantic arrangement which increased in regularity and complexity as the century progressed. A range of actors in the British Isles and overseas collected and disseminated intelligence, with varying degrees of effectiveness dependent on individual energy and ability. Networks were cultivated by individuals who were aware of the significance played by intelligence and consistent supply meant that intelligence was passed around the Atlantic Ocean.

The examination of intelligence gathering during the War of Spanish Succession in Chapter 2 and the War of Jenkins' Ear in Chapter 4 has emphasised an increased reliance by officers on station to source their own intelligence. Officers like Admiral Edward Vernon demonstrated the significance of timely intelligence through sustained efforts to cruise the Caribbean in its collection, and in its application to operations during the first half of the eighteenth century. Vernon's endeavours highlight the limitations of intelligence gathering during this period and demonstrates methods that could be used to mitigate these limitations. His efforts had a direct influence on all aspects of the Navy's work in the region, pressing on the deployment of resources and influencing officers' decision-making in operations. Also worth noting is the connection between actors, as historians' examinations of transatlantic communications between government in Britain and the colonies have not gone far enough. The system was more complex than a relatively straightforward 'hub-and-spoke' model providing intelligence for the centre of government in London. Instead, it supported a detailed and multi-layered web of connections, in which officers of the Royal Navy and colonial governors, and their informants, provided material through a series of key nodal points in London and major colonial ports. The systems of the eighteenth century were loosely organised and defined, but

their flexibility was a key strength as officials and naval officers exchanged intelligence to support each other in operations, having been granted autonomy and independence by virtue of their distance from London. The discussion of these links demonstrates that there was a sustained and established system of transatlantic intelligence exchange.

Intelligence gathering was just as vital during times of peace. Spanish *guarda costas* seized British shipping on both legitimate and falsified grounds of exploitation of the *asiento*, pirates raided trade of all nations, while British vessels conducted contraband trade and smuggling in Spanish America. Pirates, who preyed on shipping in the growing Atlantic economy, and Spanish *guarda costas*, labelled under the same term by the British through misused terminology and legal definitions, became the focus of a campaign of suppression. The suppression of Atlantic piracy was not a swiftly and easily achieved objective, as pirates evaded private and state-supported operations against them. However, intelligence gathering directly led to the interception and capture of several high-profile pirates like Blackbeard, Bartholomew Roberts, and Stede Bonnet, as Chapter 3 showed. Historians should take care to avoid exaggerating the success of the suppression campaign and generalising based on these high-profile examples, although they do serve as a demonstration of the importance of intelligence to the protection of British trade and the tracking of pirates.

Peacetime also granted opportunities for exploration, surveying areas of the Americas which had been largely unmapped by England and Britain. Chapter 5 assessed the role of officers like Admiral John Benbow and his ship's master, Robert Thompson, who were engaged in expanding navigational knowledge and mapping out the West Indies in preparation for future conflict, under the guise of a hunt for pirates. Meanwhile, growing interest in the region pushed the development of publicly available navigational knowledge in volumes such as *The English Pilot: The Fourth Book*, on which operations conducted by the Royal Navy influenced versions printed during the period between 1689 and 1750. Improved navigational knowledge enhanced safety at sea for both civil and military interests. Intelligence was a vital resource in everything the Navy did during this period, and this thesis has re-examined episodes of conflict and tension through its role and the process of its collection.

These chapters have illustrated that there was a system of interlocking, yet flexibly defined, connections between actors from many backgrounds, as intelligence gathering and exchange influenced and defined operations in the western Atlantic. Each chapter has shown the links between the military and civilians as intelligence overlapped and informants and actors mixed to support operations. Timeliness of intelligence was a common factor and a consideration in everything the Navy did. This stimulated the development of established systems of

communication and exchange and saw the growth of locally gathered intelligence as a primary focus for officers of the Royal Navy during times of both peace and war.

Conflicts which defined the period, alongside key tasks for the Royal Navy, such as the expansion of navigational intelligence and the suppression of Atlantic piracy, have been re-examined and the connections and systems which were used to inform them brought into sharp focus. This research has made use of source material which has been examined by multiple scholars and has been important in previous naval histories and histories of the development of the British empire during the period between 1689 and 1750. However, this thesis has examined their contents to discuss the connections and systems which were already established during the period to illustrate the role of intelligence gathering, the networks through which it was conducted, and its influence on operations.

This thesis has focused on the Western Atlantic, in an examination of intelligence gathering between the Americas and Britain to provide a detailed discussion of a vital resource which was integral to operations undertaken by the Royal Navy. It addresses the space in the literature before 1750, as historians have previously focused on the role of intelligence during the Seven Years' War and onwards. It has pulled together the military and civilian gathering of intelligence and laid bare the connections between them in a greater understanding of intelligence as a constant consideration during the period. It is fresh in its approach as it recentres discussion on the operations of the period from a perspective of communications, exchange, and intelligence gathering to help scholars better understand how the Navy conducted its operations and executed its orders in line with what it knew and how it knew it.

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