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``The 'Poor Decayed Seamen' of Greenwich Hospital, 1705-1763

The Royal Hospital for Seamen at Greenwich, commonly known as Greenwich Hospital, is an institution both famous and oddly obscure. The broad outlines of its history are well documented and the architectural history of its iconic buildings, which now form the centrepiece of the World Heritage Site of Greenwich, has been studied in detail, as has the development of naval hospital provision more generally in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[1] However, the functioning of the institution in its early years has received relatively modest scholarly attention, and the lives of its pensioners almost as little. They appear in stereotyped form in countless cartoons, lithographs and prints from the eighteenth century onward, but little is known about who they actually were, what they had done before entering the Hospital, or how they fared when they got there. This is somewhat surprising, because the Hospital's comprehensive admissions and administrative records allow an unusually detailed insight into the life and career of the eighteenth-century seafarer. Despite numerous recent attempts to demystify him, notably by Nicholas Rodger, Marcus Rediker, Peter Earle, David Cordingly, Tim Clayton and, for the end of the eighteenth century, Roy and Leslie Adkins,[2] 'Jack Tar' remains a rather amorphous collective worker. Moreover, most research has focused upon the working lives of seafarers, and very little on the end of their careers and what they did after leaving the sea. This paper, based upon a full database of the 8,112 admissions to the Hospital prior to the end of 1763, including 3,316 admitted after 1749 for whom full biographical data is available,[3] is an attempt to redress the balance a little, add some statistical weight to many hitherto rather

[1] P. Newell, *Greenwich Hospital: A Royal Foundation 1692-1983* (Greenwich, 1984); P. van der Merwe, *A Refuge For All: Greenwich Hospital, 1694-1994* (London, 1994); C. Lloyd, *Greenwich: Palace, Hospital, College* (London, 1960); J. Bold, *Greenwich: An Architectural History of the Royal Hospital for Seamen and the Queen's House* (London, 2000); K. Harland, *The Establishment of the First Hospitals in the Royal Navy, 1650-1745* (Unpub. PhD Thesis, University of Exeter, 2003); J. Ehrman, *The Navy in the War of Wiliam III, 1689-1697* (Cambridge, 1953); K. Brown, *Poxed and Scurvied: The Story of Health and Sickness at Sea* (Barnsley, 2011).

[2] N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London, 1986); M. Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World 1700-1750* (Cambridge, 1987); P. Earle, *Sailors: English Merchant Seamen 1650-1775* (London, 2007); D. Cordingly, *Billy Ruffian: The Bellerophon and the Downfall of Napoleon* (London, 2003); T. Clayton, *Tars: The Men Who Made Britain Rule the Waves* (London, 2007); R. and L. Adkins, *Jack Tar: Life in Nelson's Navy* (London, 2008).

[3] This database was compiled from the Hospital's Rough and General Entry Books, in UK National Archives (hereafter TNA), ADM 73/36-7 and 51-2. It will be placed online in due course. For brevity's sake individual pensioners referred to in the text will be referred to by name, admission number and date of entry, and the database as 'Poor Decayed Seamen Database.' The format of the Rough Entry Books changes in 1749, and thereafter full data – origin, last residence, age, marital status, number of children, trade brought up to, length of naval service and last ship – is available. Prior to this only name, number and dates of entry and discharge are given.

impressionistic judgements made about the men who manned the 'wooden walls,' and to shed some light upon their later lives and the functioning of the institution in which some of them ended their days.

Entry

Greenwich Hospital was founded by King William III in 1694, and admitted the first pensioners to its part-completed buildings in 1705. The Royal Warrant stated that it was intended:

> For the reliefe and support of Seamen serving on board the Shipps and Vessells belonging to the Navy Royall who by reason of Age, Wounds or other disabilities shall be uncapable of further Service at Sea and be unable to maintain themselves.[4]

In fact, these conditions were frequently relaxed. Men with little or no naval service were admitted from the beginning, such as William Keech, who had been involved in taking up ships for the transport service but had not served in the Navy himself, and William Tucker, admitted in 1707, who had only commanded merchant vessels.[5] This was formalised by an order in 1733 stating that merchant seamen would be admitted if they could produce documentation proving service at sea 'in the manner as they do of those who have served in the King's Service.'[6] In an age before written crew lists were required and service records routinely kept it must have been difficult for such men to prove their entitlement to entry, which is perhaps partly why the perception persisted that the 6d per month deduction from merchant seamen's wages funded an institution from which they would see no benefit.[7] Some men were also admitted who had worked in the Royal Dockyards but had never been to sea.[8] All of these were exceptions, however, and in the main the Hospital stuck to its remit of taking in men with prior naval service.

The means of selecting and admitting eligible pensioners changed over time. Two years after the Hospital was founded a registry of seamen was founded, with the aim of 'furnishing and supplying of his Majesty's Royal Navy with a competent number of able Seamen and

[4] Quoted in Bold, *Greenwich*, p.95.
[5] TNA, ADM 80/74, Papers Relating to the Management of the Hospital, list of pensioners admitted 1705-23 with no naval service, undated but certainly dates from early 1720s; William Keech (1095), 4 Apr 1718; William Tucker (373), 4 Mar 1707.
[6] TNA, ADM 66/28, Directors to Josiah Burchett, 2 Feb 1733.
[7] Earle, *Sailors*, p.35.
[8] TNA, ADM 67/10, General Court Minutes, 26 Jul 1748.

Marines.'[9] Initially the intention was to admit only men who had registered under this Act, but this was abandoned in 1703, seven years before the unpopular and widely-evaded registry was scrapped altogether. Admission thereafter was at the discretion of the Admiralty.[10] By the late eighteenth century applicants were examined quarterly, after presenting themselves at the Admiralty for a check on their eligibility ten days beforehand, but it is not clear when this system was introduced.[11] At times the Hospital advertised for entrants, as it did in February 1763, attracting several erstwhile members of the crew of the *Dragon*, which had just paid off.[12] At other times men could solicit entrance, perhaps with the encouragement and assistance of a patron.[13] Regardless of the means by which he had secured a place, once a vacancy became available a man was required to present himself at Greenwich, where he was interviewed again and his particulars entered into the Entry Books. This occasionally gave rise to minor practical difficulties, the lack of information for John Sweet in 1755 being explained by a note that he was 'a foreigner, deaf, cannot read nor write, therefore cannot answer any questions.'[14] Sweet was admitted nevertheless, and joined the rest of the men awaiting their Hospital uniforms and assignment to a cabin.

In most cases it is impossible to determine where men had been immediately prior to entry. The Entry Books record few discharged directly from ships, but it certainly did happen and several instances can be determined where several men from a particular ship were admitted on one day, which might indicate direct discharge. For example, three men who gave their last ship as the *Royal Sovereign* entered on 30 September 1757. However, it appears that the majority of prospective pensioners were living ashore by the time they applied for entry.

In its early years the Hospital could house only small numbers of pensioners and, with the exception of 1705, when the first were admitted, admissions ran at a rate of less than fifty per year. However, as Table One shows, entries started to rise quickly from the 1730s.

[9] Quoted in BPP 1860 XXX, Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into Greenwich Hospital, p.7.
[10] BPP 1860 XXX, Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into Greenwich Hospital, p.9; C. Lloyd, *The British Seaman* (London, 1968), pp/106-7.
[11] Bold, *Greenwich*, p.270.
[12] Clayton, *Tars*, p.295.
[13] M. Lewis, *A Social History of the Navy 1793-1815* (London, 1960), p.415.
[14] John Sweet (6081), 31 Jan 1755.

Table One
Entries to Greenwich Hospital in selected Years, 1705-1763

Year	Number of Entrants
1705	120
1710	38
1715	50
1720	39
1725	45
1730	98
1735	94
1740	176
1745	118
1750	107
1755	195
1760	215
1763	515

Source: *Poor Decayed Seamen* database.

There were in fact substantial spikes in admissions between these years, driven partly by the state of the Hospital's finances, which until the award of a £10,000 annual Parliamentary grant in 1728 were precarious, and partly by demand for its services.[15] There were 324 in 1728, when the grant allowed for a sharp increase in accommodation and 230 in 1748, when thousands of men were demobilised at the end of the War of Austrian Succession, something Table One shows was repeated on a larger scale at the end of the Seven Years War in 1763.[16] Table Two confirms the rapid rise in numbers from the 1730s.

[15] Newell, *Greenwich Hospital*, pp.68-70.
[16] D.J. Starkey, 'War and the Market for Seafarers in Britain, 1736-1792,' in L.R. Fischer and H.W. Nordvik (eds), *Shipping and Trade, 1750-1950: Essays in International Maritime Economic History* (Pontefract, 1990), pp.25-42.

Table Two

Number of Greenwich Pensioners in Selected Years, 1705-1770

Year	Number of Cases
1705	100
1706	200
1709	350
1728	450
1738	1000
1751	1300
1755	1550
1763	1720
1770	2000

Source: BPP 1860 XXX, Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into Greenwich Hospital, p.10.

Note: these figures are estimates.

By 1815 more than 2,700 men resided at Greenwich. Moreover, in 1763 the Hospital's scope was widened to include the payment of 'out pensions' to eligible non-residents, of which around 30,000 men were in receipt by 1820.[17]

Ages and Origins

In the early nineteenth century, when living and working conditions at sea had not changed greatly in half a century, seamen's careers usually ended before the age of fifty.[18] It is therefore not surprising to find that the average pensioner entered the Hospital at the age of fifty-six. However, as Table Three shows, there was considerable variation.

[17] Newell, *Greenwich Hospital*, pp.84, 123-4.

[18] J. Press, 'The Collapse of a Contributory Pension Scheme: The Merchant Seamen's Fund, 1747-1851,' in *Journal of Transport History* V (1979), p.91.

Table Three

Ages of Admission of Greenwich Pensioners, 1749-1763

Age	Number
Under 20	14
20-29	167
30-39	211
40-49	370
50-59	997
60-69	1019
70-79	261
80-89	17
90+	7

Source: *Poor Decayed Seamen* database.

Much as the Hospital might have been seen as a refuge for old men, in fact it also contained a large number of younger ones, many of them invalided out of the Navy after suffering disabling injuries. Indeed, 115 of the 181 pensioners admitted below the age of thirty are recorded as injured: forty-two had lost limbs, seven had been blinded and there were many other miscellaneous injuries. Fourteen-year-old Michael Kenn was admitted in 1749, having been injured 'by a fall in the gryne.' He lived only another eighteen months, dying at the Hospital in July 1751.[19] The youngest pensioner of all, John McKerty, was aged just twelve when he was admitted in 1750. He was suffering from 'dropsy,' an edema which probably contributed to his death two years later.[20] At the other end of the scale were the 285 men admitted over the age of seventy. Few men remained at sea so late in life, and it is likely that most of these had lived ashore for some time before applying for entry. Oldest of all was Edward Moor, who had been born in Deptford and lived there before entering the Hospital after thirty years' naval service. He was ninety-nine years old, and died at the hospital three years later.[21]

Moor was one of the twenty-one per cent of entrants who were widowers. Indeed, many men probably decided to seek admission to the Hospital after the death of their wives. However, twenty-three per cent of men were bachelors, rather above the average for the population of Britain as a whole, where in 1751 less than ten per cent of the cohort aged

[19] Michael Kenn (4979), 1 Dec 1749.
[20] JohnMcKerty (5071), 29 Sep 1750.
[21] Edward Moor (6752), 4 Apr 1758.

between forty and forty-four were unmarried.[22] Unsurprisingly there was a strong concentration of bachelors among the younger pensioners, with sixty-nine per cent of those aged under thirty being unmarried. Conversely, fifty-five per cent of all entrants had living wives. In the nineteenth century it was noted that seamen tended to marry later in life, and at much the same time gave up deep-sea seafaring and either moved into coastal shipping or came ashore altogether, and the evidence from Greenwich Hospital suggests this was the case in the eighteenth century as well.[23] With marriage went children, but it appears that seamen had slightly fewer than the average. The Gross Reproduction Rate – the average number of children born to a couple – was around 2.3-2.4 in the first half of the eighteenth century, whereas among Greenwich pensioners the average number of children was 2.16.[24] It may be that in some cases men gave only the numbers of living or dependent children and therefore this figure is a slight underestimate. Overall, though, the evidence from Greenwich Hospital does tend to confirm that seamen married less often than the average and often later in life.

The Greenwich Hospital records also confirm and add statistical weight to two other common generalisations about seamen: they were highly mobile, and the growing manning requirements of the Navy were met by increasing recruitment from poorer and remoter parts of the country, especially Scotland and Ireland. Table Four, detailing places of birth and last residence, illustrates the point.

[22] E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871: A Reconstruction* (London, 1981), p.260, quoted in M. Daunton, *Progress and Poverty: An Economic and Social History of Britain, 1700-1850* (Oxford, 1995), p.395.
[23] Earle, *Sailors*, p.48.
[24] Daunton, *Progress and Poverty*, p.393; The method of recording children in the Entry Books varied over time. At some points boys and girls are distinguished, at others not. The average figures were 1.47 boys, 1.49 girls and 2.77 unstated. The figure given in the text is the mean of these.

Table Four

Places of Birth and Last Residence of Greenwich Pensioners, 1749-1763

	Born	Last resided
England - Channel Islands	12	4
England - East	146	44
England - East Midlands	39	9
England - London	983	2533
England - North East	99	25
England - North West	61	17
England - South East	303	184
England - South West	265	77
England - West Midlands	24	3
England - Yorkshire and Humber	94	17
Ireland - unspecified	373	10
Ireland - Connaught	1	0
Ireland - Leinster	42	7
Ireland - Munster	11	12
Ireland - Ulster	3	2
Isle of Man	9	0
Overseas - Africa	4	0
Overseas - Americas	23	4
Overseas - Asia	0	0
Overseas - Australasia	0	0
Overseas - Europe	49	8
Scotland - unspecified	335	8
Scotland - Central	15	6
Scotland - North East	8	1
Scotland - North West	2	1
Scotland - South East	6	6
Scotland South West	10	7
Shetland and Orkney Islands	5	2
Wales – unspecified	43	10
Wales - North	6	1
Wales - South	16	2
	3003	3002

Source: *Poor Decayed Seamen* database.

In all, sixty-eight percent of pensioners had been born in England, fourteen in Ireland, thirteen in Scotland, two in Wales and three overseas. Half a century later, in 1805, a survey of the crew of the 74-gun *Bellerophon* revealed that forty-nine per cent of her crew were

English, twenty-four Irish, twelve Scottish and seven Welsh, with eight per cent born overseas. There is no reason to think the *Bellerophon* was untypical, and these figures thus serve to illustrate the Navy's increasing dependence upon recruits from the 'Celtic Fringe' and overseas as the eighteenth century wore on.[25]

Recruitment from within England is generally held to have been concentrated in London and the maritime counties.[26] This again is borne out by the Greenwich Hospital records, with the caveat that in many cases only a county is given, making it hard to distinguish between those born on the coast and migrants from inland. Almost exactly a third of pensioners for whom a birthplace is given had been born in London, whilst the coastal counties of southern and eastern England provided many of the others. Of the 265 men from the south-west almost all were from Devon and Cornwall, especially the ports of Plymouth, Falmouth, Exeter, Bristol and to a lesser extent Weymouth in Dorset, whilst almost all of those from east Anglia had been born in Norfolk, Suffolk or Essex. There were rather fewer men from northern England in the Hospital, with the north east providing only 3.3 per cent of pensioners, almost all from County Durham and the Newcastle area. Of the seventy-six foreigners, forty-nine were Europeans, with Sweden supplying nine pensioners and the German states twelve, for example, whilst of those born further afield twenty-three were from the American colonies, mainly in New England.

Table Four also illustrates the strong pull that London exerted on the maritime labour market, for in no other area of the country had more pensioners last lived than had been born. A third of pensioners had been born in the city but no fewer than eighty-four per cent gave it as their last place of residence. Predictably, among these 2,533 men there were concentrations in the maritime suburbs, especially those east of the centre along both banks of the Thames. Wapping – the largest, with 253 men giving it as their last address – Greenwich, Southwark, Deptford, Shadwell, Westminster and Rotherhithe between them accounted for 943 men between them, or 37 per cent, and there were also clusters of men in Bermondsey, Ratcliffe, Limehouse, Borough, Smithfield, Spitalfields and Whitechapel. As the magistrate and social reformer Sir John Fielding remarked, such areas were:

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[25] Starkey, 'War and the Market for Seafarers,' pp.30-4; N.A.M. Rodger, '"A little navy of your own making." Admiral Boscawen and the Cornish Connection in the Royal Navy,' in M. Duffy (ed.), *Parameters of British Naval Power 1650-1850* (Exeter, 1992), p.85.
[26] Earle, *Sailors*, p.19.

> Chiefly inhabited by sailors, [where] a man would be apt to suspect himself in another country. Their manner of living, speaking, acting, dressing and behaving, are so very peculiar to themselves.[27]

All of these figures underestimate the true numbers living in those areas, however, since many pensioners' previous domicile is noted only as 'London,' or at an address it has not been possible to trace. It is possible that Londoners were more willing to enter the Hospital than seamen from elsewhere, since it would entail less disruption to family and social support networks, but even so, these figures serve to underline the strong pull that London exerted on the maritime labour market of the day.

London was not the only port to experience in-migration, however, both from other coastal areas and from inland. All of the major naval bases had this effect. Sixty men entered the Hospital from Portsmouth and Gosport, thirty-seven from Plymouth and its developing suburb of Dock (now Devonport), and thirty-nine from Chatham. Of these last only seven had been born within the town: three of the remainder were from elsewhere in Kent, six were London-born, and there were two apiece from Scotland, Wales, Ireland and Great Yarmouth. Similarly, only seven of the Portsmouth residents had been born there, with the remainder coming from all over the British Isles and one apiece from France and the American Colonies. There was also considerable migration between and to the major commercial ports. Ten pensioners entered the Hospital who had last lived in Great Yarmouth, for example. Six of them were from the town, one from elsewhere in Norfolk, and one apiece from Ipswich, Harwich and Newcastle. This suggests some mobility among sailors engaged in the coastal trades of eastern England, an impression reinforced by the fact that of the four men who had last lived in Whitby, three had been born in London, as had three of the five who came to the Hospital from Newcastle. The coal trade no doubt explains some of these movements. Meanwhile, an indication of how ports could draw men from inland comes from the two Hull residents, one of whom had been born in York and the other in Nottinghamshire.

Wherever they hailed from, most seamen were drawn from and remained in the lower ranks of society. Archaeological investigation of the Hospital burial ground has shown the prevalence of deficiency diseases: ten per cent showed signs of rickets, whilst a third had

[27] Quoted in Earle, *Sailors*, p.4.

traces of iron deficiency anaemia in early life, both of these figures being rather higher than those found amongst other predominantly working class bone assemblages.[28]

Careers Ashore and at Sea

The Royal Navy had always contained a proportion of men who had left occupations ashore for a variety of reasons. Some joined for a more mobile and adventurous life than was open to them ashore and some joined out of patriotism. Many, though, were driven to sea by economic necessity. [29] Robert Hay was working as a weaver in the summer of 1803, 'at which time trade was exceedingly depressed and work nowhere to be found.'[30] The Navy, perpetually short of men in wartime, was an obvious alternative. Similarly, although the Navy was generally very reluctant to take in criminals, those imprisoned for debt were a different matter, and the Navy received 487 men from debtors' prisons during the wars of 1739-48.[31]

Doubtless economic imperatives sent to sea many of the Greenwich pensioners who had been brought up to occupations with no obvious maritime connection. From the clothing trades there were five hatters, seven clothiers, thirty-six tailors, forty-one shoemakers and 108 weavers. Of the latter, forty-three were from London, mainly from the area around Spitalfields that was noted for its silk weaving industry. During the eighteenth century this business, vulnerable to competition from imports, underwent sharp economic fluctuations.[32] This, coupled with the fact that it was close to the maritime suburbs of east London, probably accounts for the large number of former weavers among Greenwich pensioners. Aside from the clothing trades, pensioners had left a wide variety of occupations to go to sea. Some were from food-producing industries, including eighteen butchers and fourteen bakers. Seventeen had been barbers. Twenty-two were listed as farmers or husbandmen, along with twelve gardeners. Several men came from the metalworking trades, including twenty-one smiths, three blacksmiths and two brass founders. Some had been skilled craftsmen, among them three cabinet makers, two wheelwrights and a silversmith. There was also one former apothecary. Although it is not possible to tell, some doubtless served in these occupations for long periods of time,

[28] C. Boston, A. Witkin, A. Boyle and D.R.P. Wilkinson, *Safe Moor'd in Greenwich Tier: A study of the skeletons of Royal Navy sailors and marines excavated at the Royal Hospital Greenwich* (Oxford, 2008), pp.55-6.
[29] C.P. Kindleberger, *Mariners and Markets* (New York, 1992), pp.1-18.
[30] R. Hay, *Landsman Hay: The Memoirs of Robert Hay* (repr. Barnsley, 2010), p.39.
[31] Rodger, *The Wooden World*, pp.158-9.
[32] M. Dorothy George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1966 edn.), p.180.

whereas others may well not have completed their apprenticeships. Nevertheless, they attest to how men from all walks of life were drawn into the Royal Navy.

Many pensioners had started life in occupations with some maritime connection. There were, for example, seventy-eight shipwrights. Less clear-cut are the cases of the eighteen sawyers, some of whom had no doubt worked in shipyards, although others may have sawn timber for completely different purposes. It is similarly difficult to be precise about those listed as carpenters. At times the clerks who compiled the entry books drew a distinction between house carpenters – of whom they noted four – and others, but this may well not have been done consistently. Fifty-four men are just noted as 'carpenter,' of whom a proportion probably worked in shipbuilding. There were also five 'ship carpenters,' almost certainly implying a seagoing role.

Much as the Greenwich pensioners may have been diverse in their original occupations, however, the overwhelming majority had been brought up to seafaring, or to related trades that 'used the sea' and therefore made them vulnerable to the press.[33] Accordingly, no fewer than 1,629 men were described as having been brought up as seamen or merchant seamen. There were also 134 watermen, sixty-three fishermen, mainly from the Barking area and the lower reaches of the Thames; twelve lightermen and two bargemen. There were also two pilots, one of whom, seventy-three-year-old Emanuel Jago, was a Dane by birth, albeit with thirty years' naval service to his name.[34] There were also those who gave positions in a ship's crew as their trades, although in some cases these are unlikely to have been the first positions they occupied aboard ship. 'Able seaman' is noted for 229 men, quartermaster for fifty-three, quarter gunner for twenty-five, midshipman for twenty, sailmaker for nineteen. Gunner yeomen and gunner's mates accounted for a further twenty-one entries. In all, 74 per cent of Greenwich pensioners had been bred to the sea.

Most seamen in the eighteenth century went to sea as teenagers or younger, as the truncated careers of younger Greenwich pensioners go to illustrate. Of the eleven pensioners aged eighteen or under, one had spent a year at sea, one two years and the remainder between three and five, with the exception of Michael Kenn, aged fourteen, who

[33] N. Rogers, *The Press Gang: Naval impressment and its opponents in Georgian Britain* (London, 2007), p.8.
[34] Emanuel Jago (5543), 9 Jul 1752.

had already been in the Navy six years by the time his fall terminated his career.[35] At the other end of the scale is John Worley, depicted as the face of winter in the ceiling of the Painted Hall. Worley had reputedly been at sea for seventy years by the time he entered the Hospital in 1705 which, given that he was born in 1624, suggests he had gone to sea aged about ten.[36] Nor is it possible to determine which pensioners had served apprenticeships at sea, for although from 1704 it was compulsory for merchant ships of fifty tons and above to carry apprentices, there was no requirement for seamen of any grade to have served an apprenticeship.[37] The law was not universally observed, and where it was many apprenticeships represented little more than unpaid 'introductions to the lower ranks of seafaring.'[38] It is likely that veterans of such apprenticeships were much more strongly represented among Greenwich pensioners than those whose families could have afforded the premiums required for more prestigious apprenticeships, who would have been unlikely to need the charity of Greenwich Hospital in their old age.

The eighteenth-century seafaring labour force was considerably less specialised than it was later to become, and no hard and fast distinction existed between merchant seamen and naval ratings. Although there certainly were men who spent their entire careers in one or other branch, many moved between them, sometimes interspersed with spells of fishing and perhaps service on privateers.[39] The average Greenwich pensioner had spent nineteen years and nine months in the Navy, far from a full working life. There was, however, great variety in men's service times, as Table Five shows.

[35] Michael Kenn (4979), 1 Dec 1749.
[36] John Worley (45), 2 Feb 1705; see also http://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/14575.html, accessed 16 Sep 2012.
[37] V.C. Burton, 'Apprenticeship Regulation and Maritime Labour in the Nineteenth-Century British Merchant Marine,' in *International Journal of Maritime History* 1 (1989), p.30.
[38] R.W. Davis, *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London, 1962), p.118.
[39] Starkey, 'War and the Market,' pp.25-42; Earle, *Sailors*, pp.194-5; Rodger, *Wooden World*, p.113.

Table Five

Duration of Greenwich Pensioners' Naval Service

Naval Service	Number of Pensioners	Percentage
Less than 1 year	25	0.8
1-5 years	428	13.7
6-10 years	536	17.2
11-15 years	476	15.2
16-20 years	465	14.9
21-25 years	289	9.3
26-30 years	308	9.9
31-35 years	143	4.6
36-40 years	234	7.5
41-45 years	83	2.7
46-50 years	96	3.1
51-55 years	23	0.7
More than 55 years	18	0.6

Source: *Poor Decayed Seamen* database

There were men in the Hospital who had spent the whole of their long careers in naval service. The longest known before 1763 were Jonas Hill, Lodowick McCallister and Richard Cook, all of whom entered the Hospital aged ninety-three or ninety-four, with eighty years' service behind them.[40] On the other hand, for some pensioners naval service had been a brief interlude only, terminated by desertion, discharge, paying off or, in some cases, injury. Seventy-eight men declared less than two years' naval service, of whom twenty-nine were injured. Among them was fifty-four-year-old Tobias Rossiter, who had only served ten months, but in that time had been wounded in the mouth and lost his lower lip,[41] whilst William Thomas, aged twenty-one, entered the Hospital after only a year's service, having lost the use of his right side.[42]

Warships' companies were overwhelmingly composed of young men, with able seamen typically in their early twenties, although petty officers were often older and warrant and commissioned officers still more so.[43] The merchant service may well have employed a slightly older workforce on the average, and the tendency noted in the nineteenth century for coastal vessels to employ older men than deep-sea shipping was probably equally true in

[40] Jonas Hill (5581), 28 Oct 1752; Lodowick McCallister (7006), 13 Apr 1759; Richard Cook (6253), 11 Dec 1755.
[41] Tobias Rossiter (5838), 15 Mar 1754.
[42] William Thomas (7605), 2 Sept 1762.
[43] Rodger, *Wooden World*, pp.114-5 and Appendix VII.

the eighteenth.[44] Even so, for many men there must have been a space of several years between leaving the sea and entering the Hospital. We know little about how they filled that time, but it seems clear enough that many had slipped into, or returned to, poverty. As early as 1707 the directors noted that the clothes of newly admitted men were 'full of bugs and will infect the house,' and ordered that they should be burned or buried in future.[45] Petitions of men for readmission routinely stressed the 'miserable and starving' condition to which they had been reduced.[46]

Fundamentally, the options for aged and disabled seamen ashore were few and usually unattractive. Few common seamen saved much for their old age, or even had the ability to do so.[47] Although there were occupations for which men who had retired from the sea were well fitted, such as ship-watching and rigging, these were poorly paid, insecure and available only to those physically able to do them. For the remainder, the options boiled down to the same as the rest of the aged working class: family, charity or the Poor Law. Families usually did feel under some obligation to care for their elderly, and no doubt many former seamen were able to depend upon them.[48] However, this was of little use to a man who had no family, in which category seamen were overrepresented. Private charity was patchy in its provision, perhaps especially in port towns where the influx of population tended to strain resources.[49] There were seamen's charities providing accommodation for former seamen in even relatively small ports, such as the Whitby Seamen's Hospital, established in 1676,[50] but they could never cater for more than a minority of the former seamen in need of relief. Seamen's benevolent and self-help societies also proliferated in some ports, there being twenty-eight in Hull alone by the 1790s,[51] but suffered from the same difficulty. Meanwhile, although the Poor Law was not uniformly mean, and the elderly tended to be regarded as more deserving than other applicants for relief, it was far from unknown for Vestries to refuse assistance.[52] Moreover, the value of out-pensions was declining, and after Knatchbull's Act of 1723 relief increasingly became conditional upon entry to the

[44] Rodger, *Wooden World*, p.78.
[45] TNA, ADM 67/3, General Court and Directors' Minutes, 2 Sept 1707.
[46] See for example TNA, ADM 65/81, Petition of Joseph Suffolk, undated.
[47] Earle, *Sailors*, p.64.
[48] S. Ottaway, *The Decline of Life: Old Age in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 2004), p.7.
[49] P.A. Fideler, *Social Welfare in Pre-Industrial England* (London, 2006), p.156.
[50] R. Barker, *The Rise of an Early Modern Shipping Industry: Whitby's Golden Fleet, 1600-1750* (Woodbridge, 2011), pp.148-50.
[51] G. Jackson, *Hull in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Economic and Social History* (Oxford, 1972), p.281.
[52] Ottaway, *Decline of Life*, p.176.

workhouse. In any case, the Settlement Laws meant that many were not eligible for relief in their places of residence, something which may well have affected seafarers more than the average, given how mobile they were. Some parishes did provide relief for natives living outside their boundaries, but probably not many.[53] For the former seaman who had no family upon which he could depend, then, Greenwich Hospital was probably a better option for relief than the alternatives.

Entry to the Hospital did mean having to leave families behind, but pensioners were able to keep in touch with the friends and relatives, and many did so. Several men took leave to visit them, sometimes just for a night or two in the case of those with family in London.[54] Others took extended leave to visit family living far away, such as John Nesbitt, who was 'seized with a Fever' whilst visiting his family in Berwick upon Tweed in 1757, marked as a deserter whilst he was convalescing and forced to petition for re-entry, in which he succeeded.[55] There is little mention of the reverse happening – men being visited by associates – but undoubtedly it happened, and was probably too common to be worthy of much comment. Some moved their families to Greenwich so as to keep in close contact. Men also took leave for reasons other than family connections. Richard Bickerton took four days' leave in order to assist in moving a timber barge downriver to Sheerness,[56] whilst Samuel Glass was allowed to travel to Bristol to attend the General Election.[57] Some men even discharged themselves altogether to attend to various forms of business, among them Samuel Greene, who left the Hospital after a year's residence in July 1757, 'about some particular business I had to Settle in the Cuntry [sic],' and petitioned successfully for re-entry when it was concluded.[58] Greenwich Hospital was certainly not a closed community, although it is likely that for some it was a rather isolating existence.

'Poor and Necessitous Sufferers'[59]

Seafaring was an extraordinarily dangerous profession. Of 3,391 entrants to the Hospital between 1749 and 1763, 891 are recorded as injured, or just over a quarter. Moreover, the case of the Greenwich pensioners serves to highlight how, even in the Navy in wartime, the

[53] Ottaway, *Decline of Life*, pp.10-1; 183-8.
[54] See for example ADM 65/81, petition of Robert Winter, 5 Jul 1759.
[55] TNA, ADM 65/81, Petition of John Nesbitt, 21 Apr 1758; John Nesbitt (5230), 22 Mar 1751.
[56] TNA, ADM 65/81, Petition of Richard Bickerton, 3 Mar 1760.
[57] TNA, ADM 65/81, Petition of Samuel Glass, undated.
[58] TNA, ADM 65/81. Petition of Samuel Greene, 19 Jun 1758; Samuel Greene (6358), 2 Jul 1756, (6876), 30 Jul 1758.
[59] TNA, ADM 66/28, Petition of Directors to Parliament, 10 Apr 1711.

routine hazards of the sea were a far greater threat to life and limb than the violence of the enemy. Only a few Greenwich pensioners' records show definite evidence of battle injuries, among them Thomas Meazant, who had been shot through both ankles, and Timothy Mackay who had lost his right arm 'by a Cannon Ball in taking the October Fleet.'[60] A few of the skeletons excavated in the Hospital burial ground also showed evidence of violence, including one man with apparent cutlass wounds to his skull.[61] However, accidents accounted for a far greater proportion of injuries than fighting. Falls from the rigging were commonplace and, where not fatal, often caused multiple injuries. William Hayden was admitted to the Hospital in February 1751 with a broken thigh after a fall,[62] whilst George Miller had both thighs and one arm broken.[63] Crush injuries, sustained in the course of moving heavy objects around ships, or from guns recoiling over carelessly placed feet, almost certainly account for a proportion of the damaged limbs. Blows to the head were also common, probably explaining some of the seven pensioners with fractured skulls. Table Six shows the numbers of pensioners noted with injuries to various parts of the body.

[60] Thomas Meazant (5123), 23 Feb 1751; Timothy Mackay (6753), 4 Apr 1758; see also ADM 65/81, Petition of Timothy Mackay, 29 Oct 1760/
[61] Boston *et al*, *Safe Moor'd in Greenwich Tier*, pp.40-1.
[62] William Hayden (5133), 23 Feb 1751.
[63] George Miller (5692), 4 May 1753.

Table Six

Injuries Sustained by Greenwich Pensioners

Nature of Injury	Number of Cases
Head/skull	56
Collarbone	6
Neck/throat	9
Face	5
Breast	14
Ribs	25
Loins	9
Side	56
Belly	6
Back	27
Hip	5
Groin/genitals	4
Foot	20
Leg	216
Knee	23
Thigh	54
Shoulder	24
Arm	138
Hand	123

Source: *Poor Decayed Seamen* database

Table Six serves to highlight the preponderance of wounds to arms and legs, but also illustrates the range of injuries that seamen could acquire during their working lives. However, all of the figures are underestimates, probably by a sizeable margin, for the Hospital usually only recorded serious injuries, and not minor injuries or old wounds that had healed. No nasal fractures are noted in the records, and yet 61.8 per cent of male skeletons excavated in the Hospital burial ground had broken noses. Some of these were probably accounted for by the inter-personal violence and pugilism that were common aboard ship, which may also account for some of the 2.9 per cent who had broken fingers. Including such minor cases, no fewer than 85 per cent of male skeletons in the Hospital burial ground had at least one fracture. [64]

Through illness or recent injury, some men required medical attention beyond the Hospital's capabilities. The need for an infirmary was recognised at an early stage, and by the 1740s a ward had been given over to this purpose, but although plans were advanced several times

[64] Boston *et al*, *Safe Moor'd in Greenwich Tier*, pp.41-2.

construction of a dedicated Infirmary did not begin until the 1760s.[65] Before then, those in need of medical attention beyond the Hospital's capabilities were despatched to London hospitals, especially St Bartholomew's. Thus in September 1706 were John Rodes and William Cant sent for amputations. Both survived: Cant remained in the Hospital until his death in 1710, whilst Cant deserted in 1708.[66] Others were not so fortunate, for infections and gangrene were common amongst recent amputees. A month after despatching Rodes and Cant to St Bartholomew's, the directors wrote to St Thomas's Hospital requesting that John Organ be admitted, because his 'condition is such that there is a necessity for both the stumps of his Leggs to be cut off.'[67] Organ died in St Thomas's nineteen days later.[68] Aside from injuries sustained in accidents and complications arising wherefrom, many pensioners were worn out by the sheer rigour of the job. Hernias were common, 221 pensioners noted as being ruptured, and the archaeological record also indicates higher than average prevalence of degenerative joint diseases and osteoarthritis.[69] Miscellaneous other occupational health problems are also evident. Thomas Bullock, admitted in March 1751, had 'strain'd ankles,' whilst Samuel Abbott, petitioning for re-entry after a period back at sea, complained of severe rheumatism as well as bad eyesight.[70] Others, however, are conspicuously absent: there is little mention of deafness, for example, even though it must have been common amongst those who had spent years in close proximity to gunfire.

On diseases the Hospital records are strangely silent. No entries prior to 1763 mention the scurvy that at that stage was still a threat on long cruises, the tuberculosis and smallpox that were major killers on land, or the tropical diseases that killed many men on deployments overseas. Nor is there any mention of the venereal disease that seamen were renowned for catching and a charge for whose treatment was docked from their pay.[71] However, the archaeological evidence suggests a higher than average prevalence of tuberculosis amongst the pensioners, whilst twelve per cent of skeletons showed some signs of scurvy.[72] Nor do the Hospital's records say much about general ageing and the infirmities and diseases that came with it. A few scattered cases, however, seem to suggest that some of the pensioners

[65] Bold, *Greenwich*, pp.207-8.
[66] William Cant (52), 9 Feb 1705; John Rodes, sometimes rendered as Roads (34), 29 Jan 1705; TNA, ADM 66/28, Directors to St Bartholomew's Hospital, 7 Sept 1706.
[67] TNA, ADM 66/28, Directors to St Thomas's Hospital, 10 Oct 1706.
[68] John Organ (251), 9 Aug 1706.
[69] Boston *ert al*, *Safe Moor'd in Greenwich Tier*, pp.52-4.
[70] Thomas Bullock (5157), 8 Mar 1751; Samuel Abbott (5358), 19 Jun 1751; TNA, ADM 65/81, petition of Samuel Abbott, 25 Aug 1756.
[71] D. Pope, *Life in Nelson's Navy* (London, 1981), p.138.
[72] Boston *et al*, *Safe Moor'd in Greenwich Tier*, pp.51-7.

were in very poor health indeed. John Simpson, who had been purser of a warship, was described in 1736 as 'very weak and infirm, and unable to eat the establish'd provisions of the Hospital.' He was allowed money in lieu, presumably to buy food he could cope with.[73] Some pensioners developed cancer. Whilst a supposed cure for hernias (which turned out to be worthless) was being discussed in early 1755, it emerged that one of the trial patients, Thomas Wright, had 'large Tumours in several parts of his Body, and the directors apprehend, that what was taken for a Rupture is nothing more than one of the like tumours.'[74] Wright died fifteen months later.[75] Several pensioners were given leave to go to Bath and take the waters for the sake of their health, such as James Gerrard, who was 'afflicted with the Palsie.' He first went to Bath in March 1721, was given a further two months leave to remain there as he was receiving 'much benefit' from it, and was sent again the following year.[76] Clearly, then, some of the pensioners were in poor physical condition. On the other hand, not all were infirm by any means. Many left the Hospital for various reasons, some did occasional work in the river, and some were well enough to be plausibly accused of plying a regular trade as watermen.[77]

Less obvious was the poor mental health of some pensioners. The onset of senile dementia may account for some of the apparent cases of madness, but others had certainly suffered psychological damage of the kind hinted at by Jeremiah Raven, who was expelled from the Hospital in October 1756 after suffering periodic 'fitts' of insanity, during which he became violent and disruptive. He attributed his illness to a fire in the spirit room of the *Dragon*, in which one of his messmates had burned to death.[78] The Hospital had 'no convenience for lunaticks'[79] and, as with those requiring major operations, they were despatched to other institutions. Francis Charlton was first noted by the directors as being 'delirious and very much out of order in his head' in October 1707.[80] He was confined in the Hospital for a month before being despatched to Bethlem Hospital for the insane. His stay there was short and he returned to Greenwich, but only a few weeks later the directors wrote again:

> In pursuance of a minute made by the Directors for Greenwich Hospll I am to acquaint you that Francis Charlton a poor pentioner in the said hospll being a

[73] John Simpson (2258), 12 Apr 1731; TNA, ADM 67/9, Directors' Minutes, 22 Sept 1736.
[74] TNA, ADM 67/20, Directors' Minutes, 25 Jan 1755.
[75] Thomas Wright (4245), 7 Mar 1745.
[76] TNA, ADM 67/6, Directors' Minutes, 25 Mar, 27 May, 22 Jul 1721; 17 Mar, 7 Jul 1722.
[77] TNA, ADM 67/19, Directors' Minutes, 24 Jul 1745.
[78] Jeremiah Raven (5636), 15 Mar 1753; TNA, ADM 65/81, petition of Jeremiah Raven, undated.
[79] TNA, ADM 66/28, Directors to the Governors of Bethlem Hospital, 11 Jul 1730.
[80] Francis Charlton (174), 8 January 1706; TNA, ADM 66/28, Sir John Vanbrugh to the Governors of Bethlem Hospital, 31 October 1707.

> lunatic, and having been so many years was admitted into Bedlam in order to his cure. He appeared well and as such Dr Sison discharged him, and the Hospll received him. But he had not been at liberty above three Weeks before his indisposition return'd; so that he hath beat several persons, abus'd the officers of the house, and threatened to kill others. This being the Case and it being impossible to confine him in our Hospitall, it is desired you will let him be taken into your House and used as those persons who are lodged there as incurable. He is as great an object of charity as any you have with you, he hath no Relations nor thing to support him; he hath served at sea, and many years was Master of the Queen's Barge, 'til he grew mad, and his madnesse made him incapable and ruined him.[81]

Bethlem initially refused to take him a second time, but then relented. Charlton lived until 1715 and is not recorded as having died at Bethlem, so it is possible that he recovered and returned to Greenwich.[82] He was not alone in being deemed mad, or in being despatched to an asylum. Nine men are recorded as having died in Bethlem, which does not include those, like Charlton, who were sent there on a temporary basis. Nor was Bethlem the only insane asylum used: Robert Johnson was discharged from there as incurable in 1759 and, the Hospital not wanting him back, was sent to a private asylum in Hoxton 'till there shall be a vacancy in the apartments design'd for Incurables in Bethlehem.'[83] Gilbert Blane, Physician to the Fleet in 1779-83, believed that seamen were at greater risk of madness than other people, estimating that the rate of lunacy amongst sailors was seven times that in the general population.[84] Whether or not this was true, the case of the Greenwich pensioners certainly seems to show that a proportion of former ratings had suffered psychological damage with which the Hospital was ill-equipped to deal. This may also account for some of the seven suicides among pensioners prior to 1763.

Hospital Life and Discipline

The mean duration of a pensioner's stay in the Hospital was eight years and two months, but as Table Seven suggests, there was great variation.

Table Seven

[81] TNA, ADM 66/28, Sir John Vanbrugh to the Governors of Bethlem Hospital, 25 Mar 1708.
[82] TNA, ADM 67/3, Directors' Minutes, 25 Mar, 1 Apr, 29 Apr 1708.
[83] Robert Johnson (6212), 14 Oct 1755; TNA, ADM 67/20, Directors' Minutes, 26 May 1759.
[84] Lewis, *A Social History of the Navy*, pp.396-7.

Duration of Greenwich Pensioners' Residence at the Hospital

Duration	Number of Cases	Percentage
Less than 1 year	1,146	14.2
1-4 years	2,408	29.9
5-9 years	1,914	23.7
10-19 years	1,894	23.5
20-29 years	569	7.1
30-39 years	104	1.3
40 years and over	26	0.3

Source: *Poor Decayed Seamen* database

The longest-staying resident was George Anderson, who was admitted in 1748 and remained until his death fifty-six years later, in 1804.[85] At the other end of the scale there were several who stayed only a few days. Five died within a day of admission, whilst twelve were discharged at their own request within a month, having perhaps concluded that life in the Hospital was not for them. They were not alone in coming to that conclusion.

Greenwich Hospital cared for men used to leading a regimented life, and in their dotage they continued to do so, albeit unwillingly in some cases. From the start pensioners worse a uniform, and the Hospital was organised in divisions, each of which was overseen by a lieutenant, aided by senior pensioners with the ranks of boatswain and boatswain's mate. These were then subdivided into wards, in which each pensioner had his own cabin. They were also divided into messes of four men who ate together.[86] The food, provided on a scale modelled on that of Chelsea Hospital,[87] was plentiful, but there were persistent complaints over its quality. Several contractors were sacked for providing poor-quality provisions,[88] whilst two pensioners created a 'mutinous disturbance' over the food in 1732. They were expelled, but the directors tacitly conceded that they had a point when they agreed to examine the situation and take comments from pensioners.[89]

Pensioners were mustered by the boatswains at 7am, and lights were to be out by 9pm. Daily attendance at Chapel was expected, one disruptive pensioner being expelled partly for

[85] George Anderson (4638), 5 Mar 1748.
[86] Newell, *Greenwich Hospital*, pp.81-2.
[87] TNA, ADM 67/3, General Court and Directors' Minutes, 5 Oct 1704.
[88] For example, Lancelot Skinner's contract for providing cheese was terminated in December 1717 after complaints dating back five years over the quality of his supplies. See TNA, ADM 66/28, Sir John Vanbrugh to Lancelot Skinner, 24 Mar 1712, 30 Dec 1717.
[89] TNA, ADM 67/8. Directors' Minutes, 29 Mar 1732.

pretending to be a Quaker to evade attendance,[90] and pensioners were expected to perform various tasks around the Hospital. Some also took on more permanent positions, such as Boatswain, sculleryman, cook's mate, messenger and porter, the latter being charged with winding the clock, minding the gates, serving surplus food to the poor and showing visitors around the Painted Hall.[91] There was a rough hierarchy among these positions, judging from the promotion of the messenger to succeed a deceased porter, after which the butler moved up into the messenger's place.[92] Pensioners received some remuneration for these tasks, in addition to the standard Hospital pocket money of two shillings per week, whilst boatswains and their mates were entitled to gold braid on their uniforms.[93]

Despite the tasks they were expected to perform, pensioners did have substantial leisure time and were at liberty to leave the Hospital. Several seem to have spent time on and around the Thames, and many ventured into London and back to their old haunts, whilst others went into nearby Greenwich, where as early as 1706 the directors were demanding the suppression of some of the alehouses for 'debauching the Pentrs … from their duty, and encouraging them in drunkenness.'[94] Old age no doubt mellowed some of the pensioners, but 'Jack Tar' was justly renowned for liking his drink, and alcohol lay at the heart of many of the disciplinary problems the hospital suffered. The directors complained in 1741 that:

> Amongst the number of Men sent down by Warrant from the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, many of them are incorrigible Sotts, and so ungovernable that they behave like Madmen, and indeed are so for the time they are under that Disorder, admitting of no Rest or Peace in the Wards where they are put.[95]

On this occasion the directors instructed their surveyor to fit up a cell 'with Conveniences for Confining such Ungovernable People.' This was an extreme measure, tried only after all existing punishments had failed. Among these were confinement to the Hospital, fines, stoppage of liquor and humiliation, in the form of having to turn the uniform coat inside out

[90] Walter Fitzwilliams (134), 31 Dec 1705; TNA, ADM 67/3, Directors' Minutes, 12 Dec 1706.
[91] Bold, *Greenwich*, p.154.
[92] TNA, ADM 66/28, Directors to Josiah Burchett, 5 Jun 1718.
[93] C. Lloyd and J.L.S. Coulter, *Medicine and the Navy 1200-1900, vol. III: 1714-1815* (Edinburgh, 1961), p.202.
[94] TNA, ADM 66/28, Sir John Vanbrugh to the Justices of the Peace of the Division of Greenwich, 7 Dec 1706.
[95] TNA, ADM 67/18, Directors' Minutes, 23 Jan 1741.

to expose its yellow lining.[96] This was much resented by pensioners, and at least one man was expelled for refusing to do it.[97]

Expulsion was the ultimate sanction, but it was used with caution. Whilst considering the problem of the 'incorrigible sotts,' the directors remarked that they had expelled another pensioner two weeks previously. With nowhere to go, he had died near the gates two days later, after which they had felt obliged to pay for his funeral.[98] Nevertheless, despite the risk of adverse publicity from being seen to send men to their deaths, expulsions and discharges at the directors' orders – which amounted to the same thing – were common. There were 190 expulsions prior to 1763, and at least fifteen of the 591 discharges were at the directors' orders. The reasons ranged from getting married, which pensioners were not permitted to do and for which three were expelled,[99] to criminal offences committed outside the Hospital.[100] Expulsion was a harsh sanction, often leaving erstwhile pensioners with nowhere to go. Many were too old or infirm to return to sea or to find alternative employment. Robert Burnside, expelled for refusing to help roll the gravel in the courtyards, stated in his petition for re-entry that, 'I have Offered my Self to the Press Gang and the Regulaten [regulating] Capt wont have me because I am too Old.'[101] Many had no family to whom they could turn, whilst those who sought assistance from the former parishes often found the authorities there treated entry to the Hospital as forfeiture of their right to relief.[102] The fact that expulsions remained so common despite the risks of absolute destitution for errant pensioners and ill publicity for the directors is perhaps an index of how serious the Hospital's disciplinary problems could be.

Discharge and Desertion

Far more common than pensioners expelled from the Hospital were those who left of their own volition. Altogether, 507 men are noted as having deserted and 591 having been discharged, although these figures are approximate, and there was some crossover between the two. A high proportion were young pensioners (thirty-one per cent of whom were

[96] Newell, *Greenwich Hospital*, pp.31, 82; Bold, *Greenwich*, p.130.
[97] James Brock (5989), 20 Jun 1754; TNA, ADM 65/81, petition of James Brock, 7 Mar 1763.
[98] Thomas Simpson (3472), 12 Apr 1740; TNA, ADM 67/18, Directors' Minutes, 23 Jan 1741.
[99] Eustace Thomas (3331), 18 May 1739; James Servier (3715), 17 Oct 1741; William Daniel (6000), 28 Aug 1754.
[100] John Wardley (1078), 10 Jan 1718; William Young (1205), 28 Mar 1720; John Cooper (3910), 5 Mar 1743; Jeremiah Dykes (4802), 24 Nov 1748.
[101] Robert Burnside (7110), 7 Dec 1759; TNA, ADM 65/81, petition of Robert Burnside, undated.
[102] TNA, ADM 67/18, Directors' Minutes, 23 Jan 1741.

discharged and seventeen per cent deserted, as opposed to seven and six per cent respectively for all pensioners), perhaps concluding that a rather idle life spent mainly in the company of the elderly and infirm was not for them. Many pensioners' petitions for readmission mention a desire to remain 'useful' as a reason for leaving, and seventy-five were discharged back to sea. Hugh Menderson was aged twenty-two when he was admitted in 1756 with an injured leg: four years later he was discharged at his request to go as cook of the *Boneta*.[103] Those who discharged themselves to return to the Navy were always looked upon favourably if they petitioned for readmission, and in 1755 the Admiralty notified the Hospital's directors of:

> their directions to you to Readmit into the Royal Hospital at Greenwich, all such pensioners who voluntarily went to serve on board His Majesty's Ships, or may hereafter obtain your leave so to do, provided they shall appear to be rendered unfit for further service, and are discharged accordingly.[104]

Among such men was Henry Strivens, who was discharged from the Hospital in 1758 after two years in residence. He served in the *Santa Maria* transport for a few months before concluding that, 'having receiv'd great Damage … and being Advanced in Years, incapable of doing anything towards a Subsistence' he needed to apply for readmission, which he did, supported by a certificate from his captain attesting his diligence and sobriety. He re-entered the Hospital a month later.[105]

The need to support a family, or a plan to live with one, was another reason for men to leave, although several subsequently sought to return. Patrick Collins went to New York at the invitation of his brother, only to find upon his arrival that the brother had died, leaving him with no alternative but to return to England and petition for readmission, whilst Charles Cleeve went to live with his daughter in Ipswich.[106] He had failed to get the proper permission to leave the Hospital and was thus marked as a deserter. Indeed, many apparent desertions were in fact men who had not obtained leave through the proper channels, or had overstayed it. Provided they could produce a plausible reason for doing so, such men had a good chance of readmission. William White petitioned for re-entry in 1759, stating:

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[103] Hugh Menderson (6352), 23 Jun 1756.
[104] TNA, ADM 65/81, Admiralty to Lieutenant Governor and Council, 16 Nov 1758.
[105] Henry Strivens (6402), 6 Aug 1756; TNA, ADM 65/81, petition of Henry Strivens, 16 Nov 1758.
[106] Charles Cleeve (5903), 2 May 1754; TNA, ADM 65/81, petition of Charles Cleeve, undated; Patrick Collins (7090), 3 Oct 1759; TNA, ADM 65/81, petition of Patrick Collins, undated.

> That yr Petitioner having obtain'd Leave of absence from the Governors of the Royal Hospital at Greenwich to go to Scotland to transact some particular Business, and before the Expiration of the Time limited took Shipping in Scotland in order to return to the said Hospital within the Time appointed, had the misfortune to fall in with a French Privateer, wch took us & our Vessell into France, where I have been a Prisoner a considerable Time, and was thereby consequently prevented from returning according to me Intentions for which I find I am prick'd Run.[107]

White was readmitted, as were other pensioners who claimed to have fallen ill whilst on leave and been marked as deserters when they did not return on time. Those who had been expelled had little chance of readmission, however, and nor did most of those who deliberately absconded, such as Robert Baxter, who sent word via another pensioner that 'he'd be damn'd before he return to the Hospital.'[108] In the early years the Hospital made attempts to retrieve deserters, the directors ordering the steward to attempt to get a Justice's warrant to arrest the errant Thomas Bloomfield in 1706, for example,[109] but later this was given up and they were not pursued unless they had taken goods or Hospital clothes, in which case they were sometimes prosecuted for theft if they could be found.[110]

Conclusion

The case of Greenwich Hospital serves to deepen our knowledge of the eighteenth-century seafarer, confirming and extending several previously largely unquantified judgements about him. He hailed from a poor background, frequently from the maritime counties of England and Wales, from poorer and remoter parts of the kingdom such as Scotland and Ireland, and especially from the growing port city of London, the linchpin of the British maritime economy. He often went to sea at a very young age, although during his career he would have worked alongside men who had begun life in a variety of careers and gone to sea later for a variety of reasons. Although he may have spent his entire working life in the Royal Navy, this was relatively unusual, and he was more likely to alternate periods of naval service with work in merchant shipping, and in some instances the fisheries and privateering. During his working life he was highly mobile, but would tend to gravitate towards the major ports, and especially London. He was at considerable risk of injury and disablement throughout hid working life, and when his career ended, because he was more likely than the average to be unmarried and childless, he was probably also more likely than

[107] William White (6515), 3 Apr 1757; TNA, ADM 65/81, petition of William White, 2 Jan 1759.
[108] Robert Baxter (2798), 29 Jan 1735.
[109] TNA, ADM 67/3, Directors' Minutes, 23 May 1706.
[110] Edmund Johnson (4737), 15 Sep 1748; TNA, ADM 65/81, petition of Edmund Johnson, undated.

most to end up dependent upon institutions for support. Among these institutions, and by far the largest and most prominent, was Greenwich Hospital. A project of considerable political, symbolic and philanthropic importance, and unquantifiable but certain strategic significance, the Hospital provided a home for thousands of former seamen, mainly but not exclusively former naval personnel, during the first half-century of its existence. Some were evidently content to remain there for the rest of their lives: others, especially younger men, could find it confining and sought to try their luck in the outside world, especially by returning to sea. Nevertheless, for the minority of seamen who were fortunate or artful enough to gain admission to the Hospital, it was almost certainly better than the alternatives.