Pressgangs, conscripts and professionals: recruiting the Royal Navy from the age of sail to the present day

This Conference explored the recruitment and retention processes of the Royal Navy from the age of sail to the modern day, and showcased the latest social and cultural histories of naval personnel.

Press Gangs, Conscripts and Professionals Conference Report

Last week Heather and I were delighted to be able to attend the Pressgangs, Conscripts and Professionals conference at the National Museu...

Port Towns

The @NMRNP conference on Recruitment in the Royal Navy will get underway this morning. Keep you eyes out for RTs #NMRNPConf

Welcome | Royal Naval Museum at Portsmouth Historic Dockyard

Homepage for the Royal Naval Museum at Portsmouth Historic Dockyard, dedicated to preserving and displaying the historical heritage of th...

Simon Smith

All ready for day one #NMRNPconf @NMRNP. I'll try and tweet throughout the day so keep an eye out.

Lorna M. Campbell

Today I'll be tweeting form the @NMRNP Pressgangs, Conscripts & Professionals conference, hashtag is #NMRNPconf. Please retweet tag.
Good to see some familiar faces from @PortPTUC here! #NMRNPconf

Delegates arriving for #NMRNPconf twitter.com/LornaMCampbell/…

The conference was organised and introduced by Duncan Redford.
Duncan Redford introducing the Pressgangs, Conscripts & Professionals conference #NMRNPconf
twitter.com/LornaMCampbell/...

Simon Smith
SMGSmith

First paper from R Blake on evangelicalism and Jack Tar #NMRNPconf

Richard Blake’s book Evangelicals in the Royal Navy is published by Boydell & Brewer.

Evangelicals in the Royal Navy, 1775-1815 (Richard Blake) 9781843833598 - Boydell & Brewer
The Evangelical Admiral Gambier, notorious for distributing tracts to his fleet in a theatre of war, is commonly seen as a misfit in a fi...

Lorna M. Campbell

Richard Blake speaking about Converting Wild Jack Tar into Iconic Bluejacket - "rum helped morale more than discipline" #NMRNPconf
Lorna M. Campbell

Blake - Lack of shore leave was the cause of a minor mutiny as late as 1859 #NMRNPconf

5 YEARS AGO

Paul Hollins

@LornaMCampbell and post first world war too ! (pre national strike)

5 YEARS AGO

Scott Wilson

@LornaMCampbell it nearly caused one in 2010 on a ship my brother in law was serving on...

5 YEARS AGO

Lorna M. Campbell

Sailors liked carousing & loose women & disliked morality. This what made him formidable. Taming Jack Tar would emasculate him! #NMRNPconf

5 YEARS AGO

Isaac Land

@LornaMCampbell Don't abolish grog ration either... cocoa ration would leave sailors too unmanly to fight. Unsure if marshmallows involved

5 YEARS AGO

Lorna M. Campbell

Blake - chaplains sometimes became the seamen's welfare officer #NMRNPconf

5 YEARS AGO

Lorna M. Campbell

Blake - The arctic expeditions tested out radical notions of piety & new ways of maintaining discipline #NMRNPconf

5 YEARS AGO
Blake - dockside evangelists were more successful than pious Admirals like Gambier
#NMRNPconf

Blake - For long, the Admiralty held themselves aloof from morality. Increasing incidents of "diseases of immorality" changed that #NMRNPconf

Next up David Sheppard on The Men Of The Victorian Navy in 1881 #NMRNPconf

Data management - 1881 Census and the RN paper by D Sheppard #NMRNPconf

@louisemoon30 right up my street - was it just their backgrounds etc? Anything about family / community, ties to land????

Sheppard's research based on the 1881 British census & list of 226 HM Ships in commission #NMRNPconf

Sheppard 58,000 sailors & marines were serving in 1881 #NMRNPconf
Sheppard - Age of men on active & static ships #NMRNPconf
pic.twitter.com/jTfuX9wACv

Sheppard - Less than 2% of ordinary seamen were married. #NMRNPconf
Sheppard Counties were men of all ranks were born #NMRNPconf twitter.com/LornaMCampbell/...

J D Davies

V interesting paper at start of recruitment conference- David Sheppard database of RN personnel drawn from 1881 census.

Lorna M. Campbell

Next speaker James Davey on Balladry, naval recruitment & the language of patriotism in the 18th century #NMRNPconf

James Davey

Academic profile Curator of Naval History Biography Before joining the museum in 2009, I completed a BA at King’s College London and an M...

Lorna M. Campbell

Davey talking about Dibdin now. Attention @IsaacLand2! #NMRNPconf
Pressgangs, conscripts and professionals: recruiting the Royal Navy from the age of sail to the present day

11/05/2018

Lorna M. Campbell

Davey - according to Dibdin, a sailor should brave the world & not flinch #NMRNPconf

@PortPTUC - 5 YEARS AGO

Simon Smith

Singing for the nation - James Davey's v interesting paper on sailor ballads #NMRNPconf

@PortPTUC - 5 YEARS AGO

Lorna M. Campbell

Davey - Ballads used patriotic tropes to encourage volunteers. Those who refused to sign up were labelled cowards #NMRNPconf

5 YEARS AGO

Lorna M. Campbell

Davey - Ballads created a binary view of the patriotic man and the fearful coward. They also offered the temptation of prize money #NMRNPconf

5 YEARS AGO

Lorna M. Campbell

Davey - Balladeers who wrote positively about the navy such as Dibdin were employed by the government #NMRNPconf

@PortPTUC - 5 YEARS AGO

Lorna M. Campbell

Davey - there is a pronounced linguistic similarity between ballads and recruiting posters #NMRNPconf

@PortPTUC - 5 YEARS AGO

Port Towns

@LornaMCampbell Early 19thC propaganda

5 YEARS AGO
Jennifer Daley talking now about use of uniform & clothing as a recruiting tool & mechanism of cohesion. #NMRNPconf

Daley - uniform promoted the idea of cleanliness & hygiene. #NMRNPconf

Daley - clothing & clean linen played a pivotal role in controlling infection #NMRNPconf

Daley - customised Sailor uniform became a representation of sailors' independent spirit, in contrast to their military peers #NMRNPconf

Daley - marine society used its own brand of sailor uniform as a recruiting tool & created a new identity for incoming landsmen #NMRNPconf

@PortPTUC @LornaMCampbell this sounds v interesting especially the crossing of it over the coastal borderland area!

Apparently submariners are notorious for their corruption of uniform! #NMRNPconf
Virginia Preston

Great morning, now for Manning the C18 Navy & the myth of the press gang #NMRNPconf

@PortPTUC · 5 YEARS AGO

Lorna M. Campbell

Claire Phelan now talking about British impressment of American seamen #NMRNPconf

@PortPTUC · 5 YEARS AGO

Lorna M. Campbell

Phelan giving examples of arrogant attitudes on both sides of the Atlantic #NMRNPconf

@PortPTUC · 5 YEARS AGO

Lorna M. Campbell

Phelan - Americans believed Britain would act with total disregard for other nations #NMRNPconf

@PortPTUC · 5 YEARS AGO

Virginia Preston

American masters complained British officers ‘wield Jove’s thunder when impressing our men’ #NMRNPconf

5 YEARS AGO

Lorna M. Campbell

Phelan quoting some lovely examples of inflammatory language from both sides of the pond! #NMRNPconf

@PortPTUC · 5 YEARS AGO

Lorna M. Campbell

Phelan - Britain accused Americans of wilful duplicity in the matter of protections #NMRNPconf

@PortPTUC · 5 YEARS AGO
Phelan - One woman selling protections made a giant crib so she could state she’d known the man since he was in the cradle #NMRNPconf

Phelan - we’ll never know the exact number of British seamen serving in the US navy, but figure was as high as 60% on some ships #NMRNPconf

Phelan - It was often down to frequently illiterate women to campaign for the release of their impressed men #NMRNPconf

@LornaMCampbell Nice, fits in with that great piece by Margaret Hunt about women in England lobbying for husbands' pay.

@LornaMCampbell Yeah they just SAID "I'm just going to the pub, love" and never came back.

Jeremiah Dancy talking about the myth of the Pressgang now #NMRNPconf
Dancy: press gang key image of Royal Navy for many - but lack of statistical evidence on manning #NMRNPconf

Dancy constructed a database to study British naval recruiting during Napoleonic war #NMRNPconf

Dancy's research shows that only 16% of men were pressed & over 70% were volunteers #NMRNPconf

@LornaMCampbell So how do deserters fit in ? Claim bounty for enlisting, jump ship later. Or enlist several times under false name?

Dancy - many recruits were highly skilled men who were no strangers to the sea & had experience from coastal vessels #NMRNPconf
Dancy - the quota act resulted in an increase of inexperienced landsmen, but landsmen never outnumbered seamen #NMRNPconf

Motivation for volunteering complex. Patriotism, adventure & opportunity were powerful motivators. As were tobacco, food & rum #NMRNPconf

@LornaMCampbell In US Civil War, Confederacy had patriotic volunteer army AND massive desertion problems, as war went on

Dancy - Prospects of recruitment & betterment also motivated volunteers #NMRNPconf

Recruitment drives with posters, speeches & bands playing patriotic songs - ties into Davey's ballad work #NMRNPconf

Dancy talking about Cochrane's famous recruiting poster. Similar ones were used by other captains #NMRNPconf

Press gangs redressed imbalance of skill - 84% skilled (AB or Ord) vs 58% of volunteers #NMRNPconf
Lorna M. Campbell

Dancy - Only anecdotal evidence has been presented for large scale impressment of landsmen. #NMRNPconf

Joshua Newton now talking about naval recruitment from the slave trade & West African forts #NMRNPconf

Newton - Life of a common soldiers at slave forts was tough & short. Conditions for petty officers were marginally better #NMRNPconf

Newton - Service in the navy could be a springboard to a merchant career in Africa #NMRNPconf

Newton - Royal naval patrols relied on local African hired labour on shore #NMRNPconf

Newton- Clarkson claimed that far from being the nursery of the navy, was actually the sailors’ graveyard #NMRNPconf

Abolitionists made the point that slave trade not only did not provide skilled seamen, it killed those trained elsewhere #NMRNPconf
Pressgangs, conscripts and professionals: recruiting the Royal Navy from the age of sail to the present day

Lorna M. Campbell

Mike Farquharson-Roberts talking about The Specialists: Internal Recruiting in the RN #NMRNConf

pic.twitter.com/gq6Ef83BNF

LornaMCampbell/status/375999156453912576/photo/1

Lorna M. Campbell

Farquharson-Roberts - Specialists evolved by a process of accretion & chance #NMRNConf

Lorna M. Campbell

Farquharson-Roberts - Civil servants could only understand the aspirations & needs of junior officers at second hand #NMRNConf

Lorna M. Campbell

Farquharson-Roberts There was no shortage of volunteers for pilots but the RN struggled to recruit officers to become observers #NMRNConf

Thanks to attendees tweeting live from our Press Gangs, Conscripts & Professionals conference. To follow what they're saying see #NMRNPconf

Looking forward to the keynote later. Great tweets from @LornaMCampbell to follow whilst in navy library next door! #NMRNPconf

Anthony Balfour talking about "Hostilities Only" officers during WW2 #NMRNPconf

Balfour All men aged between 18 & 39 were required to register for conscription #NMRNPconf

Balfour - Psychologists were introduced to training establishments in 1934 to help select officer candidates #NMRNPconf

Excellent talks this afternoon at #NMRNPConf. Need to tweak bits of my own talk tomorrow after Sheppard and Dancy papers, though.
Philip Grove talking about Officer Recruit Training & Education #NMRNPconf
dc.twiiter.com/EnElmFJtI

Lorna M. Campbell
@LornaMCampbell  · 5 YEARS AGO

Grove - Dartmouth has been threatened with closure since 1960 but is still going #NMRNPconf

Lorna M. Campbell
@LornaMCampbell  · 5 YEARS AGO

Grove - since the end if the cold war we have seen knee jerk education with a large case of the emperors new clothes #NMRNPconf

Lorna M. Campbell
@LornaMCampbell  · 5 YEARS AGO

Grove - Everything the royal naval college does is underpinned by doctrine & theory #NMRNPconf

Lorna M. Campbell
@LornaMCampbell  · 5 YEARS AGO
Virginia Preston

Grove: RN officer education - have been allowed to include more 'heritage' - Nelson is back! #NMRNPconf

@PortPTUC · 5 YEARS AGO

Lorna M. Campbell

Grove - The regional profile of young officers is interesting - lots from the Celtic Fringe & coastal regions, few from cities #NMRNPconf

5 YEARS AGO

Virginia Preston

Grove: current recruits may not have deep knowledge but know how to find things out - Internet generation #NMRNPconf

5 YEARS AGO

Virginia Preston

Grove: No long-term planning but Dartmouth has survived & will continue to do so & produce excellent product #NMRNPconf

@PortPTUC · 5 YEARS AGO

Virginia Preston

Grove: diffs in recruits now vs 80s & 90s - now expect to be deployed #NMRNPconf

5 YEARS AGO

Virginia Preston

Duncan: Navy draws very strong distinction between training and education - not v interested in content of education #NMRNPconf

5 YEARS AGO

Virginia Preston

RNVSR fascinating - introduced v fast, lots signed up - but no actual obligation to serve in RN in wartime #NMRNPconf

5 YEARS AGO
Eagerly awaiting Brian Lavery's keynote #NMRNPconf
pic.twitter.com/0fK8aUHU4N

Brian Lavery
Brian Lavery - author of books on maritime history. He appeared in Time Team and Timewatch & acted as consultant on documentaries such as...

Ending day one of the conference - Brian Lavery taking to the podium for his keynote @NMRNP #NMRNPconf

@SMGSmith looking forward to hearing more about this keynote - keep us posted @PortPTUC

Lavery kicking off his keynote with Chaucer's shipman #NMRNPconf
Lavery ‘Bred to the sea’ #NMRNPconf
pic.twitter.com/q6wJC61CmonaMCampbell/status/376030668268253184/photo/1

Simon Smith
@SMGSmith
Lavery: Sailors - a separate breed. Like Crocodile Dundee, a fish out of water on land...
#NMRNPconf

5 YEARS AGO

Lorna M. Campbell
@LornamCampbell
Lavery - Manning the navy became a particularly acute problem during the long wars with France #NMRNPconf

5 YEARS AGO

Virginia Preston
@virginia875
Lavery: Naval manning something that controlled naval policy - Anson's voyage - deaths from scurvy, Chelsea pensioners as Marines #NMRNPconf

5 YEARS AGO
Lavery - The army regarded the Marines as being soldiers who didn't have to march!
#NMRNPconf

Lavery: Anson’s experiences informed policy eg Marines should be properly trained
#NMRNPconf

Lavery - Anson was a great reformer but had less success reforming naval manning
#NMRNPconf

Anson’s attempts at reform and creating a naval reserve. Blocked by parliament! Extend pressgang instead and include Scotland! #NMRNPconf

Anson introduced the press to Scotland but it didn’t really work. In Clydeside they beat them up, in Edinburgh they sued them. #NMRNPconf

Lavery: Byng’s problems came down to poor manning #NMRNPconf

Even impressed sailors were professional at sea - mess deck culture of good seamanship #NMRNPconf
Uniformity or Uniform? Interesting debate today over what is uniform. Slops or officially designated from 1857? #NMRNPconf

Lavery - Engineer artificers brought trade union consciousness to the navy #NMRNPconf

Lavery: Fisher - ideal seaman would be a cross between a Stoker and a Gunner. #NMRNPconf

Lavery: 1914 RN think they'll beat the Germans easily, partly because Germans are conscript navy, not like British Boys #NMRNPconf

Excellent keynote from Brian Lavery. (Running out of battery here tho!) #NMRNPconf
Drinks on the Victory #NMRNPconf
pic.twitter.com/ewGO1jicSU

Lorna M. Campbell
@LornaMCampbell · 5 years ago

Victory

Simon Smith
SMGSmith

Just gearing up for Day 2 of conf @NMRNP. Looking forward to @LornaMCampbell and Heather’s paper later on today. #NMRNPconf

Lorna M. Campbell
@SMGSmith @NMRNP Hope we can live up to your expectations! #NMRNPconf

5 years ago
Conference dinner aboard HMS Victory last night #NMRNPconf twitter.com/LornaMCampbell/…

@LORNAMCAMPBELL · 5 YEARS AGO

1st paper - V Preston & O Walton: To go to sea was everything for a poor boy. Joining RN C19 #NMRNPconf

@louisemoon30 · 5 YEARS AGO

Preston has analysed records from 23 ships and over 4,000 sailors #NMRNPconf

5 YEARS AGO

Walton - By the end of the 19th century seamen made up less than half of the navy #NMRNPconf

5 YEARS AGO
Preston - lots of evidence of men moving from ship to ship, about 15% #NMRNPconf
twitter.com/LornaMCampbell/...

Preston - place of origin of English sailors in the sample #NMRNPconf
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Preston - non English sailors by country of birth #NMRNPconf twitter.com/LornaMCampbell/

Walton - Stokers were not all low skilled shovelers those grading coal & maintaining furnace temp were more highly skilled #NMRNPconf

Not that this is relevant to anything, but I do think "artificers" is a lovely word! #NMRNPconf

Sad to have to dash off after our paper - my mum's 70th today and have to get to Norfolk for celebration! #NMRNPconf
Next up @quintonjournals talking about naval recruitment in Wales "Britains heros or England's slaves" #NMRNPconf
pic.twitter.com/i6kr52fyga

David's book *Britannia's Dragon: A Naval History of Wales* is published by The History Press.

This is the first book ever written about Wales' part in naval history. Based on extensive research, it tells a compelling story that spa...

Lorna M. Campbell
@LornaMCampbell

@quintonjournals kicking off with some truly awful puns :} #NMRNPconf

Stereotype view - Welsh sailors pressganged by alien English imperialists. How accurate? #NMRNPconf

Davies - The majority were volunteers, not pressed into service. Similar to English recruitment. #NMRNPconf

@quintonjournals Brutality of the press & resistance to it is very much part of the Welsh folk memory. #NMRNPconf

@quintonjournals maintaining that the Welsh are obsessed with genealogy. #NMRNPconf

Following the establishment of Plymouth, Welsh recruitment to the navy increased. #NMRNPconf

Establishment of Plymouth made recruiting Welsh into the navy much easier. Matter of geography. #NMRNPconf

@louisemoon30 was this supported with stats? Just interested whether there is data behind it or from other sources saying it was?

@quintonjournals There was a particular regard for the navy in Wales in latter half of 18th century. #NMRNPconf
Welsh pride in RN by late 18th C. Creation of naval monuments and memorials #NMRNConf

Welsh fairs were fertile grounds for recruiting. Common for Welsh pressed men to be unable to speak English #NMRNConf

Several founders of the Eisteddfodau had been Royal Naval chaplains & clerks #NMRNConf

Big hurrah for the Fishguard invasion! Definitely my favourite French invasion :D #NMRNConf

Proportionally more Welsh served at Trafalgar than Scots & Irish, if you include marines, more than English too #NMRNConf

Use of Welsh was banned in the army until 1815 #NMRNConf

Andrea Ellner paper on Wrens: it wasn't all about the hat. Roles conceived as "womens' jobs" #NMRNConf
Ellner - Dame Katherine Furse, founder of the Wrens, was an eminent scholar of fungi!

Ellner - Laughton Matthews regarded the ideal Wren to be a woman of character.

Popularity of Wrens meant no real need for conscription during SWW

Ellner - No qualifications required for the Wrens but two letters of recommendation were needed. All recruits joined as ratings.

Ellner Wrens recruitment driven by educated middle class women, but recruited women had wide range of social backgrounds

An eye-opening experience for middle class girls who joined up
RN expected 1,500 applicants for the Wrens in 1939. They got 15,000 #NMRNPconf

Ellner- Wrens recruitment was very successful. The image of the service & role of uniform was very important #NMRNPconf

Ellner- The importance of the uniform & the tricorn hat to Wrens recruitment can't be underestimated. #NMRNPconf

Appeal of the uniform? Blue was "more becoming" than khaki. Better rep than the ATS #NMRNPconf
In 1778, the future William IV joined the Royal Navy as a midshipman. That same year, John Perkins, who was probably born a slave, took c...
Navy and Nation, 1688 to the Present
(https://prezi.com/a5c_ppaqagzb/) By

RN was a career; taking the lieutenants’ exam was an investment #NMRNPconf

Wilson - Officers came from lower down the social scale than previously suggest by Lewis #NMRNPconf

@SMGSmith going to ask the question again - is thus based on stat's??

Welcome to @LornaMCampbell and Heather Noel-Smith's paper on Merchant adventurers #NMRNPconf
Merchant Adventurers: Alex McVicar and John McKerlie of the Indefatigable

Paper to be presented at the Press Gangs, Conscripts and Professionals Conference, at the National Museum of the Royal Navy, Portsmouth, ...

Simon Smith
@SMGSmith
5 YEARS AGO

McVicar - a disappointed midshipman? Problems of career progression #NMRNPconf

Simon Smith
@SMGSmith
5 YEARS AGO

Short-term promotion of officeres allowed skilled officers to be shared with other ships in squadron who lacked them #NMRNPconf

Simon Smith
@SMGSmith
5 YEARS AGO

Crewing prize vessels - balance demands of own ships with who was trusted to take the prize home. Chance to prove themselves! #NMRNPconf
Final paper from Prof Don Bittner US Marine Core Command & Staff College #NMRNPconf

Bittner referring to the importance of film in shaping the reality and perception if the navy e.g. The Caine Mutiny #NMRNPconf

Bittner - With the Royal Marine Officer Corps it's a case of once in never out. #NMRNPconf
Bittner - Major General Sir David Mercer, Adjutant General Royal Marines 1916 -1920 #NMRNPconf
pic.twitter.com/3npv3Z5uGB
LornaMCampbell/status/376358244496998400/photo/1

Lorna M. Campbell
Sir John Boscawen Savage was courtmartialed at age 60 following a duel resulting from him bringing his dog Bingo into the mess #NMRNPconf

Port Towns
Enjoyed the tweets from the @NMRNP conference this weekend. To catch up on debates on the history Royal Navy recruitment check #NMRNPConf

Lorna M. Campbell
Duncan Redford now closing conference. Many thanks for a really great conference. Impeccably well organised & excellent papers! #NMRNPconf

Post conference blog post by J. David Davies aka @quintonjournals
Gentlemen and Tarpaulins

When we think of the great movies of the sailing navy, we think of the likes of Gregory Peck stiffening his upper lip to notable effect i...