

Conference Abstracts & Biographies

3D – Maritime History

Chair: Chris Ware, University of Greenwich

Dead men DO tell tales: Letters from ship to shore 1793-1815

Ian Robertson, University of Greenwich, UK

Abstract:

The link formed between the sea, society and community is extended to wherever the senders and recipients of letters are. This paper will show how the ship to shore correspondence of a broad range of seafaring individuals reflects their thoughts and feelings. It will, effectively, de-anonymise 'Jack Tar' in his various guises.

Caches of correspondence have identified a spread of individual letter writers: a Midshipman, a Quarter Gunner, a Captain of a Naval Victualler brig and a Royal Marine. The significance of the letters chosen is threefold. Firstly, there is the importance of them in the way in which they create identity and a sense of self. Secondly they are historical documents but in a social and cultural context not necessarily directly linked to 'historical events'. Finally, they are important because of the forming and maintaining of the links between the communities both ashore and afloat.

There are four stories here. The journey from being a twelve year old midshipman to his preparations for his lieutenants' exam; the frustrations of the captain of a victualler separated from his wife and what I shall call 'A Tale of Two Greatcoats' covering the letters of a sergeant of marines and a Quarter Gunner.

Keywords: Letters Seamen 1793-1815 Postal Service Royal Navy Marines Midshipmen Victuallers

Biography:

Ian Robertson is a PhD student at the University of Greenwich having gained an MA in Maritime History at the Greenwich Maritime Institute. His love of maritime history has stemmed largely from his career at sea with his research interests being focused mainly on the period 1793-1815. He has had a varied and many faceted working life having been a steward in the merchant navy, a professional musician, a Social Worker, an independent expert witness in child protection, had responsibility for assessing the impact of child care training programmes in Romania for the International Red Cross, a lecturer and freelance trainer.

He sees his present role as a researcher as 'looking for answers to questions that no one has asked before'.

The Baltic Trade in the Age of Conflicts: Commerce Strategies for Avoiding Losses in the 18th century

Pavel Demchenko, The National Research University Higher School of Economics, Russia

Abstract:

The sea always differs from the terrain strongly. Humans had to adapt to the naval space not only by inventing new types of transport, but also new strategies of managing resources on the sea. The paper is dedicated to strategies used by skippers and merchants involved in the Baltic trade. Being one of the most active trade routes, the Baltic trade was in the center of outrage and market changes in the 18th century. Most of the European powers had some interests in the Baltic trade somehow. However, the confrontation of interested parties always produced problems for commerce. There might be the outrage of naval forces, changes in market conditions and permanent lack of knowledge among economic actors.

How did the economic actors deal with it? How could they overwhelm adverse circumstances and abate risks? How could they manage their nets over naval space in broad perspective? This paper tries to find out the working model of economic actors's informational exchange and its impact on the economy. Basing on the Sound Toll Registers, other local port statistics and periodical papers I reconstruct the mechanism of information exchange for the Baltic region. Several cases complement my model with certain examples of how economic actors operated within network not restricted by national or terrestrial borders made by themselves.

While economic actors were twisting their nets, states drove the policy of expropriating the sea. These two strategies were different but they adapted toward one another. Therefore, I also show the points of coincidence of these strategies over time. It allows us to understand the whole entanglement of managing and governing the naval space in the 18th century what remains pertinent.

Keywords: maritime trade, 18th century, the Baltic Sea, information exchange, skippers

Biography:

2017 - PhD in history, Department of History of Higher School of Economics

2015-2017 M.A. in history, Department of History of European University at Saint-Petersburg.

2011-2015 B.A. in history, Historical faculty of Saint-Petersburg State University.

"The ocean floor is the cemetery of British bones" - narratives in the aftermath of the Titanic disaster

Richard Coltman, University of Greenwich, UK

Abstract:

The sinking of the Titanic on her maiden voyage from Southampton to New York in April 1912 is perhaps the most famous shipwreck in the world. Although much has been written on the subject, we can learn about society's response to this maritime catastrophe by looking at the immediate aftermath of the sinking.

On 21 April, the first Sunday following the Titanic disaster, church services included expressions of sympathy for the victims and prayers for the survivors. During these services the Titanic disaster provided a timely subject for sermons and addresses, where church leaders of different denominations sought to explain the disaster to their congregations. These took place while news of the disaster was still evolving; the Titanic's survivors had landed in New York three days earlier and the bodies of the first victims would be recovered the same day.

Newspapers continued to report the story of the Titanic disaster, defining a narrative of the disaster and drawing lessons that would instil in readers ideals of righteous and virtuous behaviour. Narratives of the disaster touched on personal qualities of bravery, heroism and self-sacrifice; negative traits of greed, cowardice and folly; and our relationship with nature and the sea.

This paper examines newspaper reports in Australia, Britain and the United States, and identifies how society's leaders sought to explain the disaster. This paper explores the universal messages identified across the world that sought to rationalise society's responses and understanding of the Titanic disaster in its immediate aftermath.

Keywords: shipwreck, memorial, Titanic, mourning, society

Biography:

Richard Coltman has been a part-time research (MPhil/PhD) student at the University of Greenwich since November 2015. Richard graduated from the University of Leeds at the College of Ripon & York St John in 1999 with a BA (Hons) in Heritage Studies, after completing his final dissertation focussing on the physical memorials to the Titanic disaster. Richard's current research builds on his interest in the Titanic over the last thirty years, and his 1999 dissertation, looking at society's commemoration and memorialisation of the Titanic disaster. In his spare time Richard maintains the website www.titanicmemorials.co.uk, which records many of the Titanic memorials he has visited.