



Figure 1. Rowlandson's image can be read as a sailor returning to his sweetheart, showing the money he earned to provide for them; it can also be read as a sailor returned to shore, exchanging money for this woman's company (and more). This image highlights the blurred line between a sailor's sweetheart or wife and a sex worker, one that created challenges for women's respectability. Thomas Rowlandson, *The Sailor's Return*, 1799, hand-colored etching. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1959, 59.533.614

Bread and Sympathy: British Sailors' Wives' Survival Strategies, 1793–1815

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Abstract

Understood as necessary for national interests and deserving of sympathy, the challenges British sailors' wives faced emerged from their unique role as both nationally important and socially suspect—something particularly magnified as Britain spent over twenty years at war with France. In the absence of many written records, it becomes necessary to examine these women from the outside in. This article uses court and parish records combined with newspaper and admiralty accounts to trace the lives of sailors' wives, demonstrating the multilayered survival strategies they deployed to navigate their communities. By examining sailors' wives' lives not just in London, but also in Plymouth, Swansea, Newcastle upon Tyne, and Edinburgh, this article reveals their common experiences, despite geographic differences. This research finds women in these ports experienced price fluctuations in staple goods, as demonstrated by price indexes compiled here and more dramatically by accounts of bread riots. The cost of living juxtaposed with the amount of money sailor husbands sent home shows the financial challenges sailors' wives faced, providing a much-needed addition to the discipline. Community networks emerged out of shared labors and organizing to protect men from impressment, including press riots. Such findings indicate a sense of collective protection that persisted among the laboring poor in these seaside communities. Taken together, they reveal something of women's challenges, labors, restrictions, and support systems—in short, their everyday lives.

Keywords

British history, gender history, women's history, cost of living, everyday life, riots, impressment, military families

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Introduction

In June 1793, Ann Cave spoke in her own defense at the Old Bailey, a criminal court in London. Accused of theft, she spoke of her three children, her husband at sea, and of “work being short.”¹ Seeking materials to make an apron for her neighbor, Cave testified she went and bought some muslin, although the shopkeeper claimed she stole it. While the court found Cave guilty and sentenced her to be transported, the want that Cave described, the financial hardship, and the circumstances that could have led her to steal, were not unusual for British sailors’ wives in the period of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1793–1815).

Sailors’ wives often found ways to make ends meet while dealing with inconsistent incomes and fluctuating prices, confronting many of the same problems as other women of the lower orders.² Yet, sailors’ wives faced a distinct brand of hardship. Understood as necessary for national interests and deserving of sympathy, their challenges emerged from their unique role as both nationally important and socially suspect—something particularly magnified as Britain spent over twenty years at war with France. Contrasting the cost of living and the amount of money husbands sent home offers a much-needed addition to the discipline. These incomes and costs, combined with the social and cultural mores of the time, shaped the everyday lives of sailors’ wives during this era. To understand their lives in the absence of many written records, such as letters or diaries that might otherwise help clarify, it becomes necessary to examine these women from the outside in. In exploring their everyday lives, this article considers the gender, legal, and social dynamics women of their era faced, before taking a closer look at their economic circumstances.

“Sailor’s wife” is a slippery category of analysis. Many of the wives and families identified for this study were found in the Admiralty records. Other sources referenced women with husbands on naval ships or impressed into service, clearly classing them as wives of husbands serving in the navy. Murkier expressions referencing a “husband at sea” make it harder to know definitively whether naval or merchant service is indicated. The number of men mustered (138,204 by 1812), the liability of merchant seamen to naval recruitment, and the experiences seamen themselves described, moving between merchant and naval service over the course of the war, meant that wives referencing husbands at sea might mean naval service one year and merchant the next.³ All kinds of women with husbands at sea shared in many of the experiences described below, including anxieties about impressment, suggesting their inclusion in these broader networks women forged in maritime communities is warranted.⁴

By exploring sailors’ wives’ lives not just in London, but also in Plymouth, Swansea, Newcastle upon Tyne, and Edinburgh, this article reveals their common experiences, despite geographic differences. This research finds women in these ports experienced price fluctuations in staple goods, as demonstrated by price indexes compiled here. Community networks emerged out of shared labors—women in these communities organized to protect affordable prices for goods, including through bread riots, and to protect men from impressment, including with press riots. These findings indicate a sense of collective protection that persisted among the laboring poor in these seaside communities. Taken together, they reveal something of women’s challenges, labors, restrictions, and support systems—in short, their everyday lives. Using court and parish records combined with newspaper and admiralty accounts, this arti-

cle traces the lives of sailors' wives, demonstrating the multilayered survival strategies they deployed to navigate their communities. In so doing, it adds to the growing body of research that examines the experiences of military families during wartime.⁵

Scholars like Patricia Y. C. E. Lin and Jennine Hurl-Eamon reframed sailors' wives. Hurl-Eamon's work focused on military wives' professions, using Old Bailey court records to determine this information and situate it within their "makeshift economy." Lin's research placed sailors' wives' emerging status as "deserving poor" within the nation's growing military and imperial needs.⁶ Sailors' wives' depiction as dependent in public discourse undercut their own financial contributions. By exploring their access to remittances and the work that allowed them some degree of financial control and self-sufficiency, their scholarship raised the importance of different incomes in sailors' wives' everyday lives. By considering the basic cost of living alongside remittances sent to sailors' wives, this work adds an important component to women's financial realities and details their economic circumstances.

While money alone did not shape these women's destinies, knowing whether they would be able to pay their rent certainly shaped their decision-making processes, knowing whether they would need to borrow off a friend, sell some secondhand clothes, or find some other way to get by. This article offers a body of data to show the financial strain these families experienced, bringing quantitative data to bear on previously qualitative discussions. Then, this study extends out, considering how these women lived in their communities, emphasizing the experiences of those families of landmen, ordinary seamen, and able seamen who often left few records behind. Community experiences inform the broader context of their lives in the absence of other records. This work also brings

London lives—so robustly represented in the historiography—into conversation with those in other bustling ports in Britain. Wales and Scotland are often underrepresented in discussions of the British navy, but ports like Swansea and Edinburgh sent men into service, leaving families behind.⁷ By capturing more about regional diversity, a clearer image of the shared experiences of British sailors' families emerges, rather than asking London or Southern England to represent the diverse whole.

Background

In eighteenth-century Britain, men and women coexisted within a system that designated their complementary gender roles; each spouse owed specific kinds of labor to the other.⁸ These obligations and responsibilities shifted when men went off to war, but contemporary language often publicly assumed that men maintained their authority, even in their absence. Some women found means of resistance within seeming compliance.⁹ Others relished their ability to fulfill their gender roles through their efforts at being a "good" wife and mother, married to a "good" husband and father.¹⁰ In so doing, they might clash with the government to protect their family.

By the late eighteenth century, wives' financial dependence and their right to maintenance—or financial support—from husbands was long established.¹¹ Lack of financial support and references to physical violence went hand in hand in discussions of husbands' cruelty.¹² Not providing for their spouses could also place men at risk of being categorized as "rogues," a label that connoted their exclusion from society. The Recruiting Act of 1779 said that men who deserted their families could be impressed and their money for signing on given straight to their parish, which then passed it on to the rogue's family.¹³ Thus, failure to support their families meant that the state

could find a way to make them fulfill their social role by forcing them into naval service. Where the state failed to intervene, women could also turn to their neighbors for support.

While men had formal collective power through their exclusive fraternal, often job-related, networks, women held informal collective power in their own community-based networks.¹⁴ Examining the navy’s records of remittances sent home helps establish, in some instances, exactly where sailors’ wives lived. This hints at the kinds of networks and economic opportunities that might exist for neighboring sailors’ wives. By examining women in these communities, traces of the kinds of work they conducted emerge, as will be discussed below.

Women’s work was often framed as lower paying and domestic in nature, though the women discussed in this article frequently took on the role of primary or equal earners within their marriages. They might engage in both “family” and “capitalistic industry” creating goods for market or working for a wage.¹⁵ Family industry might include children’s labors in the household’s finances. Sailors’ families in the Admiralty records consulted tended to have few to no children—those in the records with children tended to have one to two, with only the rare family growing to include three to six children.¹⁶ Sources consulted for this study rarely reference earnings from children’s labor, instead emphasizing the youth and dependence of children. Elizabeth Harvey in her Old Bailey trial said of herself, “I have three small children to provide for, my husband is at sea.”¹⁷ The costs explored below imagine the needs of a small family dependent on women’s earnings. Public acknowledgment of their vital earnings remained rare.¹⁸ The sailors’ wives discussed here had little recourse to formal organizations to protect their work or wages. In the face of dramatically changing prices affecting their cost of living, women organized to protect their access to food.¹⁹

Historians have long noted the fluctuation of prices in this period, particularly during the initial

decade of the war. Dearth affected most of society, from agricultural laborers to the emerging body of industrial workers.²⁰ In particular, many workers viewed the dramatic increase in costs as a violation of their right to purchase bread at affordable prices.²¹ Local magistrates set bread prices based on the cost of grain in the market and bakers’ need to make a profit. The local newspaper then published these prices, helping create the data that informs this article. These accounts show both the fluctuating prices during wartime and the social unrest that followed.

The Cost of Living

Drawing on the works of contemporary examiners of the cost of living, Frederick Eden and David Davies, as well as the records of overseers of the poor in London, Plymouth, Swansea, Newcastle upon Tyne, and Edinburgh, the following section examines the costs of goods women purchased for their households. Davies compiled his records with an eye toward relieving financial hardships for the working poor. While certainly not an exhaustive list—no records consistently cover the entire period of the war in the same level of detail—taken as a whole, these sources suggest the kinds of economic realities sailors’ wives faced.

Item	Cost (per week) ²²
Bread and flour	3s. 2d.
Yeast and salt	3d.
Bacon and other meat	1s. 4d.
Tea, sugar, and butter	1s.
Thread, soap, starch, and blue	4 ¹ / ₂ d.
Candles	2 ¹ / ₂ d.
Fuel	3d.
Total	6s. 7d.

The list above demonstrates the average weekly cost of goods in the late 1780s and early 1790s, in budgets Davies compiled with the assistance of local leaders. While these records do not specify how much of each item could be purchased at



Figure 2. This image encapsulates the romantic image of a sailor's love on land, captured in the moment of his departure, as though her life pauses in his absence—an image that elides the hard work entailed in being the one left on shore. William S. Leney, after Emma Crew, *The Sailor's Wife*, active 1783, colored stipple engraving. Yale Center for British Art, B1978.43.216

these prices, based on those families examined, one assumes that the amounts were close to subsistence levels. These budgets show the lower, earlier prices that sailors’ wives encountered when purchasing provisions for their families. Factoring in the cost of rent and clothing, which likely featured in monthly but not weekly budgets, in addition to the goods listed above, the cost of living was approximately eight shillings and one penny per week.²³

According to Davies’s calculations, the average male laborer earned about eight shillings per week, which would just cover those weekly costs.²⁴ By contrast, seamen in the same period made between four shillings and nine pence and six shillings, depending on their rating.²⁵ For those afloat, the free food, medical care, and relative shelter men received on board somewhat offset this deficiency in pay.²⁶ While men afloat enjoyed their ship’s biscuits, their wives needed to make do with the half-pay allotted, making ends meet until their husbands returned and could draw down their payment in arrears. In her husband’s absence, a woman needed to survive on the pay of about four to five pence per day, or between two shillings and four pence and two shillings and eleven pence per week to defray expenses.²⁷ Assuming that men consumed half of a family’s provisions

while at home—truer in terms of bread than candles or fuel—this brings a small family’s minimum weekly expenses to three shillings and three and a half pence per week. Factoring in rent and clothing raises weekly costs to about four shillings and a halfpenny.²⁸ Thus, even assuming women found goods at the lowest possible costs available, they maintained a deficit of between thirteen and a half and nineteen and a half pence per week.

Price of Bread

Although the cost of goods in relation to sailors’ remittances is revealing in itself, the price of bread carries a special significance. Bread formed the staple foodstuff for many families in Britain in this period, and sailors’ families were no exception.²⁹ While scholars have discussed the high costs of bread in England, they have not attempted a detailed breakdown of precise prices that also considers wages.³⁰ Such a consideration is worthwhile because it demonstrates the degree to which the price of bread could determine a family’s financial fortunes and fiscal survival.

The price of bread changed significantly during wartime. Concerns over these prices were printed in newspapers from London to Edinburgh.³¹ As Table 2 shows, drawing on data calculated in *Cob-*

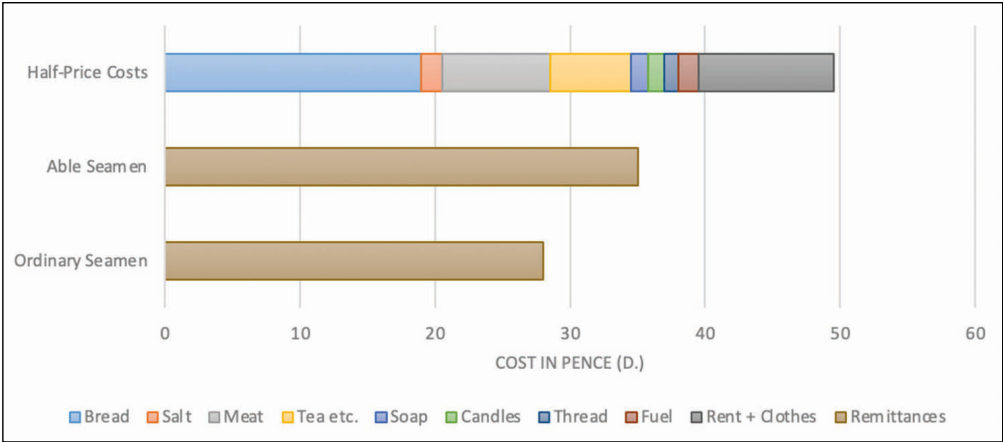


Table 1. Minimum Weekly Costs and Weekly Remittances

bett's Weekly, the average price of bread in London shifted dramatically over the initial years of the war.³² From 1797 to 1801, the price of a quartern loaf (that consumed by a small family in one to two days) more than doubled, from eight to eighteen and a half pence. In 1799 alone, in Edinburgh prices nearly doubled from April to December, and in London prices rose by roughly 75 percent.³³

Despite these changing expenses, wages sent home stayed the same. Even after ordinary and able seamen received a raise in 1797—their first in over a century—they tended not to change the wages sent to their families, though they might share their enlistment bounties before leaving.³⁴ Several possibilities explain this trend. The several steps and forms in triplicate required to alter their remittances may have discouraged them. They may have accepted the little money sent home, wanting to save the difference for themselves or for their families upon their return. They may have believed their wives capable enough at “making shift” that the addition of a few extra pence per month would do little to improve their circumstances. Yet, as Table 3 illustrates, their remittances hardly covered the weekly cost of bread.³⁵ This table assumes that families purchased about four quartern loaves, or less than half what Frederick Eden, in 1795, esti-

mated a small family of four required for sustenance. Only recently enlisted able seamen could hope to cover more than the cost of bread in 1799. Without women’s wages, a family could easily spend their entire budget on bread alone.³⁶

Making Shift

Women typically did not earn as much as men at the turn of the century. The budgets submitted to Davies assumed that wives earned about a shilling a week through their own “family industry.”³⁷ While the industrial revolution created more manufacturing opportunities, one of its well-documented consequences was to limit the putting-out industry that often provided additional incomes to women. Furthermore, women who entered into factory work could expect to be paid less than men on principle.³⁸ While recent research into military families in London has shown that a subset of women found work as pub owners and other somewhat financially stable ventures, many women had to rely on more typical professions to make do.³⁹ In addition to work in textiles or in domestic service, women also took advantage of opportunities to pawn items or do odd jobs. Parish records show women receiving money for caring for their sick neighbors or cleaning or repairing items when the

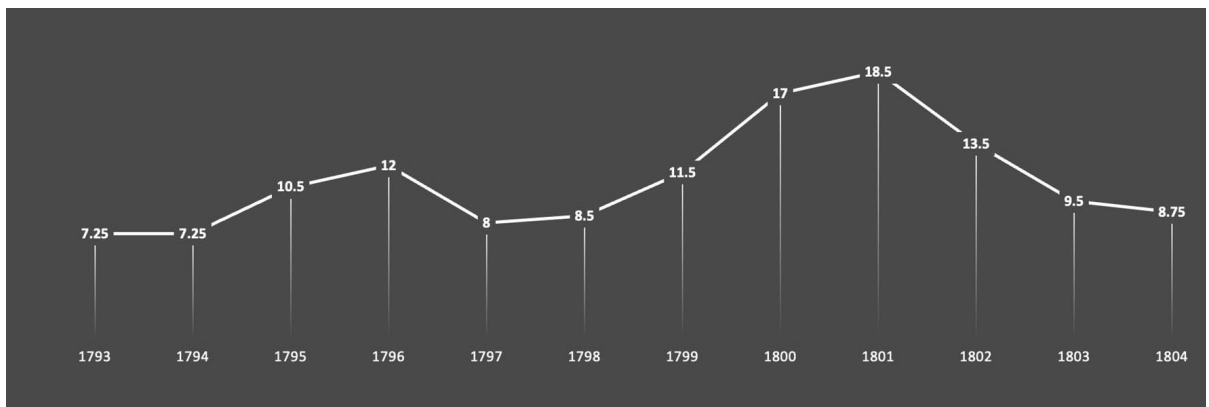


Table 2. Average Price of Bread in London (in pence)

need arose.⁴⁰ If they had the space, they might rent out a room in their home to a lodger, although this presented a social risk as well as a financial boon.

Knowing where sailors’ wives lived helps establish a clearer sense of the economic opportunities open to them. Combining this information with the wage and price information above also provides a reasonable estimate for the income that sailors’ wives needed to earn. As Table 1 shows, the wives of ordinary seamen needed to make roughly the same amount per week as their husbands to remain financially afloat in the early 1790s. Yet, as Table 3 demonstrates, they also needed to find ways to cope financially with changing prices that meant that their husbands’ wages barely covered the cost of bread, if at all. The industriousness of many of these women is beyond doubt and, combined with community support, often allowed them to provide for their families.

By comparing sailors’ wives living on Rosemary Lane in London to sailors’ wives in other British ports, common experiences and geographical distinctions emerge. Sailors’ wives lived shoulder to shoulder in Rosemary Lane, a stretch of street in the Minories, located in the shadow of the Tower of London.⁴¹ By the time the French Revolutionary War began, their neighborhood had long been associated with the lower orders, particularly sailors coming in off nearby docks.⁴² Few observers

would mistake their neighborhood for a quiet one. A strong secondhand clothing trade, or “rag fair,” operated in Rosemary Lane.⁴³ Walking along the street, women would see the nearby victualing office, and know that Trinity House was not far away.⁴⁴ These buildings provided resources for women—Trinity House offered support for its members’ families. Sailors in their traditional clothing—trousers, a blue jacket, perhaps a kerchief tied round their neck—would remind these women of the sea lives of their husbands, and, in a way, of themselves. This shifting population in the area provided not only reminders of the military and economic needs of the nation. They were part of the everyday lives of sailors’ wives.

Many sailors’ wives on Rosemary Lane had small families to raise. The largest belonged to the Croneens and the Barkers. Eleanor Croneen, wife of ordinary seaman Jeremiah, had one boy and two girls to look after when her husband enlisted in 1796. He served for five years until he ran off in 1801.⁴⁵ Richard Barker, an armorer, and his wife, Margaret, likewise had three children, a boy and two girls, and lived on the same street. Richard enlisted in 1795 and served until his death in 1797.⁴⁶ Most women had one or two children to care for, as well as themselves. Joanna and Peter Hook had a daughter. Richard and Mary Ann Goodfellow had a son.⁴⁷ All of these families lived along the same

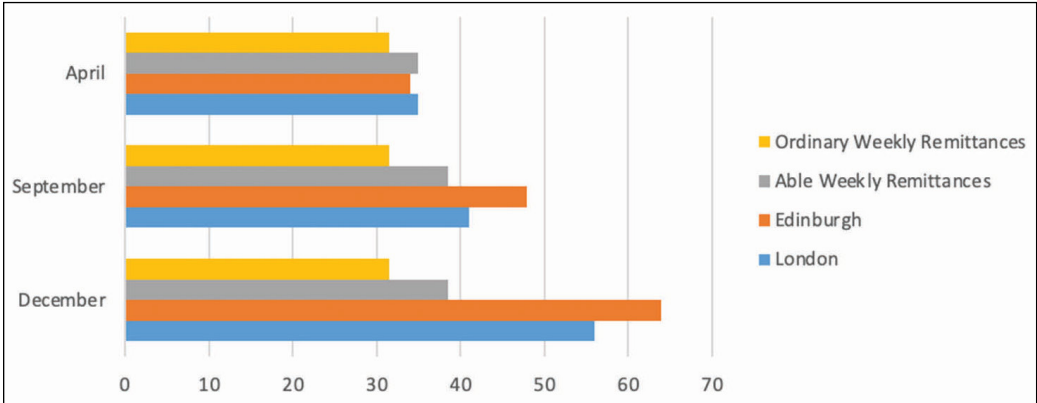


Table 3. Remittances at the pre-1797 rate and the Minimum Weekly Cost of Bread (1799)

street, sharing many of the same struggles and triumphs. Their worries—about money, about the well-being of their husbands, their children, and themselves—were common worries.

Most women in the area received somewhere between nine shillings and four pence to ten shillings and sixpence per month from their husbands, although two received fourteen shillings per month. That worked out to between four and five pence per day. As Table 4 suggests, sometimes the remittances sent home could buy three quarter loaves in London—less than the minimum amount for a small family like those found on Rosemary Lane. However, in other years, such as 1799 to 1802, those wages fell short. Meanwhile, the average price in 1799—when an able seaman's remittances would have just barely covered costs—rose and fell, meaning that although it appears that an able seaman's wife could make ends meet, at least in terms of buying bread, she had moments of surplus and want during the year.

Across Britain, the cost of bread proved challenging for sailors' families, but the women of Rosemary Lane also had to contend with issues specific to their location. Women might pay anywhere from one to three shillings per week to lodge in a room in someone's home in London. Seaman's wife Mary McCarthy stated she paid one shilling per week when she made her appearance at the Old Bailey. Ann Dawson, whose husband was at sea, in bearing witness against Hannah Clarke, said she charged Clarke three shillings per week to lodge with her.⁴⁸ Rent in London could range from 52 to 154 shillings, or two pounds and twelve shillings to seven pounds and fourteen shillings, per year. This contrasts starkly with the more typical rent of just over one pound per year found in places like Swansea or Plymouth.⁴⁹ Of course, since some sailors' wives rented out rooms in their homes as Ann Dawson did, these inflated housing costs could also help offset their own expenses.

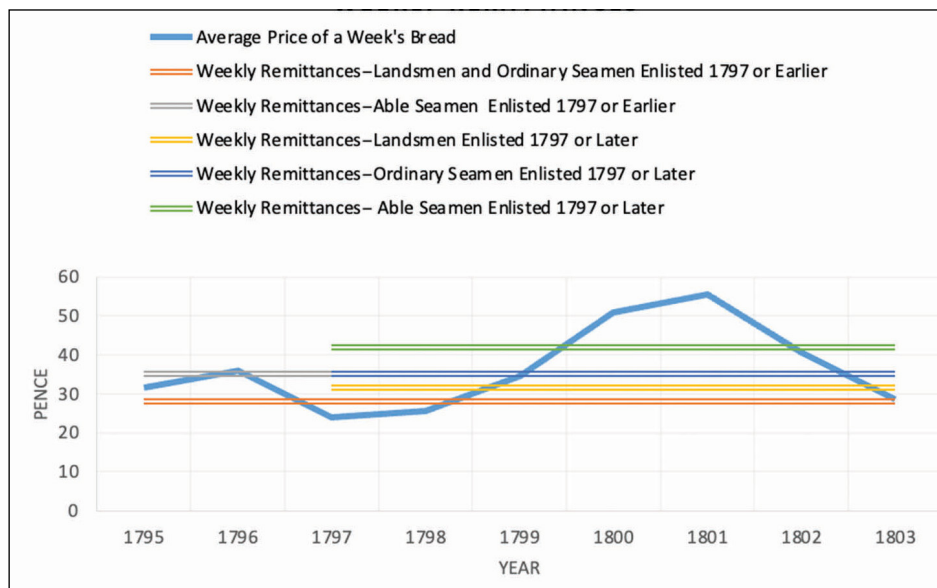


Table 4. Cost of Three Quartern Loaves in London and a Seaman's Weekly Remittances

Note on Table 4: Admiralty records show remittances set up before or during 1797 (before the raise) continuing at the same rate until as late as 1803. Those enlisting after the raise in 1797 took effect sent more money home—landsmen sent four and a half pence, ordinary seamen sent five pence, and able seamen sent sixpence per day.



Figure 3. These pitchers once again highlight the narrow way that women's lives enter the popular story of sailors—upon their departure and return—and the romanticized nature of their depictions in cultural materials. The twinned images of departure and return offer the comforting bookends of a more complicated experience. China pitchers. Left: "Sailors Farewell," after 1796, Mystic Seaport Museum, 1981.86.2; right: "The Sailor's Return," Mystic Seaport Museum, 1970.323

In searching for survival in the volatile economy without wanting to rely on the support of parish out-relief,⁵⁰ women turned instead to their wits and neighbors.⁵¹ Proximity to and familiarity with sea life also helped women supplement their incomes, sometimes with trades not open to women in smaller or inland towns. Women might work as crimps or assist press-gangs in carrying out their duties.⁵² Few documents survive that record their work and the financial remuneration they received. However, scraps of paper recovered in the London Metropolitan Archive note details provided by informants, hoping to be rewarded for their troubles. Women could supplement their income by informing on sailors. Even in earlier periods, informants could earn upward of three guineas for information on seamen, particularly those hiding from the press-gang.⁵³ Some, like Ann Oakly, named multiple men.⁵⁴ Others, like

Elizabeth Johnson, simply reported one man.⁵⁵ They could also convince spouses to enlist, and at times were able to receive part of their bounties for themselves. One court record described a sailor entering the navy "through" his wife, suggesting women played a role in their husbands' naval work.⁵⁶

London offered further employment opportunities for women, ranging from the respectable and low paying to the disreputable and profitable. Court testimony and newspaper accounts hint at the range of professions available along Rosemary Lane. Susannah Jellison left only a small whisper of the work she did with her husband in this exchange at the Old Bailey: "Q. What is your husband's name? - A. John Jellison; we live in Angel-alley, Bishopsgate-street; my husband was brought up to the sea; we deal in second-hand cloaths, in Rosemary-lane."⁵⁷ Similar traces remain for Deb-

orah Sheene, who said of herself, "I have got a young child six months old, and a husband and two brothers at sea." The court asked her neighbor what Sheene did for money, to which she replied: "She has got a husband at sea, but she does any handy work that a woman can do, she quilts petticoats, and she has been nursing sick people."⁵⁸ Other sailors' wives might put out "slop work," or hastily and cheaply made clothing.⁵⁹ Living near the docks provided a ready market of people eager to buy and sell goods, particularly clothes. Thus, like their counterparts in other ports, sailors' wives in Rosemary Lane took advantage of nearby, local trades in determining how to make their money.

Local industry and trade provided job opportunities for sailors' wives across Britain. The Newcastle Overseers of the Poor recorded the occupation of one sailor's wife as working in earthenware. Women in Edinburgh and Leith might work at sugar refining or carding wool. Women in Swansea may have taken part in the emerging pottery trade, being developed "on Mr. Wedgwood's plan."⁶⁰ Connections to naval activity also created opportunities that might not exist in more rural areas. In Leith, one local observer remarked on the trade connected to that port: "The extensive shipping in the port of Leith makes a very great demand for cordage and sail-cloth for the manufacture of which there are several extensive works . . . The spinners, weavers, flax-dressers, and rope-makers, employed in this branch, may amount to seven hundred persons of both sexes."⁶¹ Although their wages remain unknown, clearly their incomes helped women provide for their families and worked, in some part, to cover the financial gap between their husbands' remittances and the money required for survival.

Some women might rent out their rooms to lodgers, taking on a social risk for financial reward, as neighbors might imagine illicit affairs or worse. Simply getting by was not enough to appear virtuous; women had to navigate social norms to maintain their reputation, needing to appear as

both industrious and virtuous, even while shouldering the economic burden of war.⁶² Even renting a room in an establishment that also housed sailors could harm one's reputation. When two houses collapsed in Rosemary Lane, the newspaper published that the proprietors, two older women, rented "to a great number of women of the town, of the very lowest class . . . There were [also] a number of Lascars, and other foreign sailors, in the house."⁶³ Perhaps some of these women were in relationships with the sailors who visited them in their tenement home, while others relied on the cycling of men into and out of London to earn money through sex work, as the article implies.⁶⁴ If unlucky enough to have an impressed husband unable to set up their remittances, they would have additional financial incentives to engage in such work.⁶⁵ Although frowned upon and risking punishment, sex workers also earned more than their peers pursuing more reputable professions. One such woman earned for her mistress, a madame, two shillings and sixpence per "visitor" received.⁶⁶ Even if she saw only half that for her wages, this would put her ahead of an entire week's earnings for some female laborers.⁶⁷ Industries and markets emergent in port towns helped these women supplement their incomes, but they also survived by demanding their right to fair prices.

Organizing: Bread and Press-Gang Riots

Given the financial straits experienced by sailors' wives, and by other families in their community, it can come as no surprise that women regularly led and participated in bread riots. In many riot actions, the central goal was not disorder—despite its interpretation as such by local officials—but rather, the correcting of prices. Women took over stalls and sold goods, especially bread, at what they determined to be the true, fairer cost. These riots demonstrate the injustice felt at the high price of goods, and the ability of women and men to organize within their neighborhoods, pursuing a



Figure 4. Images within this trope of lovers separated by press-gangs emphasize the cruelty of the press-gang in tearing husbands and fathers away from their families. Other images show women joining in the fray to protect the men of their community against forced recruitment; images like these speak to the hostility with which the press-gang was regarded. *The Press-Gang, or, Cruel Separation*, 1795, color mezzotint plate. Brown University Library, GB-NH1795mf-1

common goal that would ameliorate, if only for a day, a shared burden within their community.⁶⁸ Limited accounts suggest how people came to organize. While word of mouth sometimes acted as the central mode of coordination, in the swelling port of Plymouth, posting flyers helped organize protests. Organizers circulated similar flyers in London and Swansea, with statements like “Cheap Bread, and a Good Trade” or the more confrontational “unless you seek our Good we Seek your own Destruction” spurring people to action.⁶⁹ These flyers worked.

The women of Rosemary Lane shared the economic concerns of their counterparts in other port towns. As noted above, they had to grapple with the constantly shifting price of bread. An 1800 riot began with the posting of flyers. One read: “BREAD WILL BE SIXPENCE THE QUARTERN, If the People will assemble at the Corn Market on Monday.”⁷⁰ At a moment when bread cost closer to seventeen pence for a quatern loaf, this offered a highly tempting invitation.⁷¹ Predictably, a crowd of people gathered in the market; after a stern talking-to by the Lord Mayor they dispersed—but not for long. Hundreds took over the streets of East London, attacking the homes and shops of cheesemongers, butchers, and bakers. Law enforcement—in this instance, mostly militiamen—failed to capture many of the participants, making it difficult to know who, precisely, participated. However, given the dense population of sailors’ wives in the area and the size of the crowd, it seems reasonable to conclude that some likely participated. They, like their counterparts in other British ports, organized and acted collectively to find a way to afford feeding themselves and their families.

Records of bread riots in Swansea in 1793 and 1801 suggest that, like their counterparts in other port towns, sailors’ wives contended with fluctuating prices.⁷² John Bird observed an 1801 Swansea bread riot while visiting to collect taxes. Women controlled the events of the day, ensuring no theft

occurred, using noise and the sheer force of their presence as weapons rather than physical violence. Bird described the women who led the riot as “poor Women with two Common Girls of the Town at their head assembled . . . One or two of the Ringleaders were taken into Custody and delivered to some of the Swansea Independent Volunteers. But as the Females were of the Cyprian Corps [sex workers] the Independents suffered them to escape.”⁷³ Just like renting to a male lodger, participating in bread riots might come at a reputational risk, though Bird and his colleague felt secure enough despite this riot to continue collecting taxes. Officials called in the local militia to protect property against those who would demand it at a fairer price.

A bread riot in Plymouth began on a Monday morning, with handbills posted in the markets, which the mayor ordered the constables to remove. Despite their efforts, a crowd made up largely of women arrived at the market and began negotiating prices. This “mob” dropped the price of potatoes from seventeen to one shilling per gallon and butter from one shilling and ten pence to one shilling per pound. More women gathered. Faced with such a crowd, farmers reduced the price of wheat; butchers reduced the price of meat. Women maintained control—the news reported, “The populace behaved with great temper. A fellow, in the height of the business, attempted to carry off a bag of potatoes, but the women soon brought him back, and made him restore it to the farmer, and then turned the fellow out of the market.”⁷⁴ Like the earlier riot in Swansea, and a similar riot in Edinburgh in 1801, the initial effort focused on the goods and prices, not violence. Though court description used words like “riotously” to describe their behavior, actors seemed to focus on order, organization, goods, and prices, not the spontaneous disorder that the term “riot” might call to mind. From Swansea to Edinburgh, networks of people, often led by women, posted bills and negotiated prices. These coordi-

nated actions to improve prices were conducted in response to the challenging conditions their communities faced, an important element of peoples' everyday lives. Sailors' wives participated in forms of unrest, particularly when it came to demanding fair treatment for seagoing men.

Press-gang riots refer to the collective action of town residents against a press-gang. This press-gang, the colloquial term for members of the Impress Service, sought able-bodied men for the navy, resorting to force when they did not find enough volunteers. While bread riots appear organized, press-gang riots often occurred spontaneously, as residents responded to the changing level of determination, desperation, and cruelty of the local press-gang. Riots against press-gangs represented several kinds of grievances.⁷⁵ Outside observers frequently commented on the broader sense of injustice and argued, typically in an English context, that Englishness was associated with liberty, not tyranny. Forcibly kidnapping freeborn Englishmen and sending them into the navy, regardless of state necessity or the man's experience at sea, denied them their traditional rights.⁷⁶ Another, somewhat more visceral, argument noted that kidnapping men broke up families.⁷⁷ Women and men fought for family cohesion. Sailors' wives in press-gang riots also combatted the loss of income caused by impressment, as sailors in the navy historically received lower and irregular wages compared to merchant sailors. Thus, justice, liberty, family, and financial survival all factored into press-gang riot participation.

Living in a port town, sailors' wives and their networks of support were aware of the persistent threat that press-gangs presented to family life and financial stability. Those living along Rosemary Lane keenly felt the presence of the press-gang in their everyday lives. Multiple times a year, the Admiralty sent the Impress Service to work at Tower Hill, along the Thames, or in London more generally.⁷⁸ The press-gang could take a husband

away before he arranged the paperwork to send remittances home. Press-gangs could also disrupt local business. Mrs. Harvey's bar in East Smithfield, about a block away from Rosemary Lane, experienced this firsthand in 1805. One press-gang member, "not very punctilious in his regards for the tenderness of the sex, struck her a very unmerciful blow with his brawny fist . . . and in . . . his violence, pulled down a shelf in the bar, upon which was sustained a five gallon cask of *Hodge's high flavoured cordial gin*, which being precipitated upon the exterior of the Prosecutrix's head," rendered her unconscious.⁷⁹ Press-gang violence could touch anyone connected to the sea, even if they merely served sailors their gin. For those sailors' wives fortunate enough to run a business like a bar, the press-gang proved a threat in many forms.

Women in Rosemary Lane, because of these fears, and with a certain degree of sympathy for sailors, might offer to hide them from the press-gang. Doing so carried the risk of the press-gang's wrath, as described above. Yet, they might also face the wrath of their neighbors for colluding with the press-gang. As a result, when an officer of the press-gang sought refuge from an angry mob near Rosemary Lane in 1801, the proprietors could offer him no sanctuary. When the "riot" ended, as many as fifty-three sailors ended up enlisting at nearby Tower Hill, volunteering and likely setting up their remittances as needed rather than being forced into the navy.⁸⁰ Women and men defended their community against forced naval service throughout Britain.

Press riots frequently occurred in Newcastle and its environs. A riot in Howdon dock, in the greater Newcastle area, illustrates both common and exceptional elements of a press-gang riot:

Monday night, one sailor was impressed, and while the gang was dragging him away, a crowd of women and children assembled, and among the rest the sailor's wife, who by making a hideous outcry, procured the atten-

tion of the carpenters in the dock adjoining, who immediately sallied out with weapons of attack in order to liberate the prisoner. An affray ensued, and the sailor, during the scuffle, contrived to slip away . . . On the night following . . . the North and South Shields gangs . . . in all about 46, armed with pistols, cutlasses, swords, &c. arrived in the poor defenceless village of Howdon . . . Most of the people being in bed, the press-gangs, without order or ceremony, broke open doors and windows, and forced themselves into the most private chambers of the houses they attacked. The shrieks of the women, and the horrid oaths of the sailors on this disgraceful service, were beyond expression dreadful, about thirty men and boys, consisting of carpenters, apprentices, ropers, masons, blacksmiths, tailors, shoemakers, &c. were all dragged indiscriminately into their boats . . . every soul of them who were thus wantonly dragged from their beds, and lodged all night in the hold of a tender, were sent home the next day, as not coming under the description of men liable to be impressed.⁸¹

Clearly, the correspondent wished to convey shock at the acts of the press-gang. Yet, certain elements of this story are unsurprising. The impressed man's wife joining the fight against his capture and receiving help from other women, represented common elements of press-gang riots. Another press-gang in the same area was "driven out." Captain Adam Mackenzie complained that "The seamen all fled, but we [the press-gang] were attacked by large Mobs, principally Women, who by throwing things hurt some of the Officers, and rescued several men."⁸² While the release of all impressed parties added an unexpected twist to this account, the notion of retaliation, or of the press in hot pursuit of anyone to impress, appeared in accounts of riots in other ports as well as in the Newcastle area. Few records detailed precisely who participated in riots, save for those who ended up

in front of the magistrates, but women's participation in these riots makes it likely that even when the gender makeup of the crowd went unmentioned, women, including sailors' wives, were part of the crowd.⁸³

These women easily could have enough frustration, anger, or pragmatic calculation to imagine that the risks of rioting were worth the reward of protecting their own and their neighbors' husbands against impressment. Ann Reburn and Elizabeth Johnston, of South Shields, accepted the risk involved in taking part in a press riot and faced the consequences, as they appeared at the Quarter Sessions and pled guilty. While the women claimed contrition, Sir John Eden, sitting as chair of the sessions, reminded them that the impress service was "at all times unpleasant to those directing and employed in it."⁸⁴ Though he emphasized the important work of the press-gang, he also understood that the work they conducted offended. As such, he released the women, cautioning them to maintain good behavior going forward. Their risk paid off.

Communities united to pursue their common interests. They fought against the power of the impress service to disrupt their lives, and they demanded, as loudly and vociferously as possible, that bakers, butchers, cheesemongers, and the like all sold their goods at fair prices that their community could afford. In doing so, they demanded relief from some of the most challenging aspects of their everyday lives. The records mainly account for those more violent encounters between angry communities and the Impress Service attempting to operate among them. These records, taken together, suggest that sailors' wives were among those women prepared to organize and to riot for what they needed—a fair price for goods and their spouse protected from forced naval service. Women fought tooth and nail to keep their community's men out of the navy unless they desired it, while taking advantage of the financial oppor-

tunities that living in a port town during wartime provided.

This article has explored elements of the everyday lives of sailors' wives. Like most other women of the lower orders, they worked, they struggled to make ends meet, they looked out for members of their community. Like other women of the lower orders, little record remains, if any, of their innermost selves, their personal thoughts and feelings. There are no documents that express, firsthand, their views on raising children alone, of providing for them financially because their husband could not. No records remain to reflect the odd sensations they must have felt at seeing their husbands' work publicly praised while their work of maintaining economic and familial survival went largely ignored.

Sailors' wives were set apart. Their husbands' occupation created strange parameters for their lives. Associations with sailors and lodgers made it easy for some to suggest they were really sex workers or unfaithful. Their husbands fought at sea, sometimes for years at a time, and despite regular remittances, their families were vulnerable in a way that a weaver or blacksmith's family was not, exposed to the emotional and financial disruption a press-gang could cause. Ultimately, sailors' wives were members of their communities—some welcome, others not, all forming informal networks, from the secondhand clothing trade to the fellow sailor's wife who would testify to her good reputation in court to the neighbor who would stand alongside her to help provide food and financial security for their families. Their efforts, from regular and irregular work to collective action, maintained their families when wages sent home could barely pay for bread.

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Endnotes

- 1 Trial of Ann Cave (t17930626-24), June 1793, *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online, 1674-1913 (OBP)*, accessed December 6, 2024, <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/record/t17930626-24>.
- 2 This article uses "lower orders" to differentiate these women from the self-styled women of the working class emerging in the early nineteenth century. While these women knew their status, they often did not say "working class," nor did other members of their community.
- 3 N. A. M. Rodger, *Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815* (London: Penguin, 2006), 638-39. James Richardson complained of being impressed and forced to send his wife less money than he did as a merchant sailor. "Autobiography of James Richardson, merchant and naval seaman, 1843," Caird Library and Archive, National Maritime Museum, BGR/45.
- 4 For clarity, where remittances are discussed, women whose husbands were clearly on merchant ships are excluded from this study as their financial circumstances differed.
- 5 For parallels with sailors' families in New England, see Ruth Wallis Herndon, "The Domestic Cost of Seafaring: Town Leaders and Seamen's Families in Eighteenth-Century Rhode Island," in *Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World*, ed. Margaret S. Creighton and Lisa Norling (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 55-69; Lisa Norling, *Captain Ahab Had a Wife: New England Women and the Whalefishery, 1720-1870* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 117-64; and Elaine Crane, *Ebb Tide in New England: Women, Seaports, and Social Change, 1630-1800* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 98-138.
- 6 Patricia Y. C. E. Lin, "Caring for the Nation's Families: British Soldiers' and Sailors' Families and the State, 1793-1815," in *Soldiers, Citizens and Civilians: Experiences and Perceptions of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic*

Wars, 1790–1820, ed. Alan Forrest et al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 99–117; and “Citizenship, Military Families, and the Creation of a New Definition of ‘Deserving Poor’ in Britain, 1793–1815,” *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 7, no. 1 (2000): 5–46; Jennine Hurl-Eamon, “The Fiction of Female Dependence and the Makeshift Economy of Soldiers, Sailors, and their Wives in Eighteenth-Century London,” *Labor History* 49, no. 4 (November 2008): 481–501.

7 Sara Caputo, “Scotland, Scottishness, British Integration and the Royal Navy, 1793–1815,” *Scottish Historical Review* 97, no. 1 (April 2018): 86.

8 On marriage as a complementary partnership, see Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe 1500–1800* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 144–76. On the gender divisions of labor, see Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 11–88; Jeffrey D. Glasco, “The Seaman Feels Him-self a Man,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 66 (Fall 2004): 40–56.

9 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xiv.

10 Goodness here means compliance with social expectations by women and men. Clark describes marriages both happy and unhappy; those women described as unhappy seem to be so in part because men were not fulfilling their social (and legal) obligations of providing for their wives. Clark, *Struggle for the Breeches*, 64–67.

11 Margaret R. Hunt, “Wives and Marital ‘Rights’ in the Court of the Exchequer in the Early Eighteenth Century,” in *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural and Social History of Early Modern London*, ed. Paul Griffiths and Mark S. R. Jenner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 116–17.

12 Clark, *Struggle for the Breeches*, 64–67.

13 Parliament later repealed elements of this law, but connections between criminality, family responsibility, and naval recruitment demonstrate both the intervention of the state into family life and the navy’s need for able-bodied men. Margaret Hunt argues that state interventions in earlier eras helped ally women and the state. Margaret R. Hunt, “Women and the Fiscal-Imperial State in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries,” in *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840*, ed. Kathleen Wilson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 34; see also Leon Radzinowicz, “Impressment into the Army and the Navy—A Rough and Ready Instrument of Preventive Police and Criminal Justice,” in *Crime and Culture: Essays in Honor of Thorsten Sellin*, ed. Marvin E. Wolfgang (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1968), 287–314.

14 See Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Ellen Ross, “Fierce Questions and Taunts: Married Life in Working-Class London, 1870–1914,” *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 575–602.

15 Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (1919; repr., New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1968), 6–7, 118, 145, 148–49.

16 Jane Humphries calculated the “mean number of children” of fathers who worked at sea as 4.91—it may be that men engaged in maritime occupations with greater opportunities to be at home had larger families or may reflect the different stages of life for fathers captured in the Admiralty Records versus the autobiographical works that made up Humphries’s core data set. Possibly, expanding the geographical scope would bring the numbers closer to Humphries’s. Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 56.

17 This framing parallels the pattern of describing dependent children found in dockyard workers petitions analyzed by Gill; Harvey portrays herself as sympathetic and industrious while offering a plausible description of her circumstances. Trial of Elizabeth Harvey (t18090920-130), September 1809, *OBP*, accessed December 6, 2024, <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/>

record/t18090920-130; Ellen Gill, *Naval Families, War and Duty in Britain, 1740–1820* (Suffolk, UK: Boydell, 2016), 208–9.

18 Heidi Hartmann, “The Historical Roots of Occupational Segregation-Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex,” *Signs* 1, no. 3 (Spring 1976): 138, 146; Barbara A. Hanawalt, “Peasant Women’s Contribution to the Home Economy in Late Medieval England,” in *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 12.

19 On wages in this period, see Joanna Innes, “Regulating Wages in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth-Century England: Arguments in Context,” in *Regulating the British Economy, 1660–1850*, ed. Perry Gauci (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 195–216.

20 Ian Gazely and Nicola Verdon, “The First Poverty Line? Davies’ and Eden’s Investigation of Rural Poverty in the Late 18th-Century England,” *Explorations in Economic History* 51 (January 2014): 94–108; Elizabeth W. Gilboy, “The Cost of Living and Real Wages in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Review of Economics and Statistics* 18, no. 3 (August 1936): 134–43; Peter Jones, “Swing, Speenhamland and Rural Social Relations: The ‘Moral Economy’ of the English Crowd in the Nineteenth Century,” *Social History* 32, no. 3 (August 2007): 271–90.

21 E. P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), 185–258.

22 Costs were calculated based on the amounts provided for smaller families in David Davies’s work establishing representative budgets for laboring agricultural workers, since most families found in the remittance records had zero to two children. David Davies, *The Case of Labourers in Husbandry Stated and Considered* (Bath: R. Cruttwell, 1795), 65, 137–41, 144–45, 176.

23 Rent frequency and prices varied. Welsh mariner Richard Batton leased land for ten pounds and ten shillings, leaving it to his wife, Mary, and her son, Richard David, in the event of his death. Mariner’s lease, D/D SB 16/37, West Glamorgan Archive Service (Swansea, UK). For more on the difficulty in affording clothing, see Vivienne Richmond, *Clothing the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 52–71.

24 The topic of laborers’ wages rightly raises the question of the Speenhamland Plan, an economic approach taken on by local parishes, often in Southern England, to offset the low wages of agricultural or rural laborers and the rising cost of goods by providing additional relief. The application of such an approach in places like Newcastle can be hard to discern, as the Overseers’ accounts simply mark monthly relief for the “Established Poor,” “Temporary Poor,” and “Militiamen’s Families,” tracked by last name. While the relief noted in 1796 for Taylor (two shillings a month) may have gone to Jane Taylor, wife of Peter Taylor, and their five children, other Taylors lived in town. Where women might access that kind of regular aid, they likely still needed to make shift to provide for their families. Bread riots in this era likewise suggest efforts at relief were not felt by communities to go far enough. Newcastle Upon Tyne Overseers Accounts Book, MF352, Tyne & Wear Archives (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK); Penelope J. Corfield, *The Georgians: The Deeds and Misdeeds of 18th-Century Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022), 210.

25 Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 624; Register of Allotments, 1795–1805, ADM 27/2, The National Archives (TNA) (London, UK).

26 This might prove especially true for husbands and wives at sea together, as Rodger describes in *Command of the Ocean*, 505–6; see also N. A. M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 60.

27 Register of Allotments, 1795–1805, ADM 27/2.

28 Davies, *The Case of Labourers*, 65, 137–76.

29 Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd,” 189–92.

30 Scholarly conversations about the cost of living date well into the previous century. The Gilboy-Boody Index of the Cost of Living in London, by Groups, perhaps comes closest to this discussion of cost by showing how prices of certain kinds of goods—clothing, fuel, cereals—fluctuated while generally trending up over the eighteenth century. However, given the unique nature of sailors' lives and work, it is difficult to compare the cost of living between different professional groups without caveats. Gilboy, "The Cost of Living," 134–43.

31 Finding consistent points of comparison for prices outside of London proved a difficult task. As such, the comparisons over time or within a given year are relatively limited, to allow for consistent points of comparison.

32 "Price of the Quartern Loaf," *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, July 3, 1811, British Newspaper Archive (BNA).

33 "London," *Oxford Journal*, April 20, 1799; "London Markets," *Oxford Journal*, September 7, 1799; "Quartern Loaf in London," *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, October 3, 1799; "London," *Oxford Journal*, December 21, 1799; "Assize of Bread," *Caledonian Mercury*, April 11, 1799; "Assize of Bread," *Caledonian Mercury*, September 28, 1799; "Assize of Bread," *Caledonian Mercury*, October 5, 1799; "December 25," *Caledonian Mercury*, December 28, 1799, British Newspapers Online.

34 This is based on the relative lack of change seen throughout the record of sailors' remittances sent home, where over years of service remittances tend to remain the same, though those enlisting after the mutinies sent home a half penny to one penny more per day than their peers of the same rank. When men earned promotions, they sometimes changed the amount sent home. Bounties could range from two to twenty pounds, though typically about half (or less) would be shared with wives or mothers. Allotment Registers, ADM 27/2, TNA; Certificates for Payment of Bounty Money, Misc MSS/96/6 1795, LMA.

35 Table 3 splits the difference between what men who enlisted before and after 1797 would send home: ordinary seamen sent from twenty-eight to thirty-five pence while able seamen sent from thirty-five to forty-two pence per week, and the records in 1799 show remittances at both amounts.

36 Frederick Morton Eden, *The State of the Poor; Or, An History of the Labouring Classes in England, from the Conquest to the Present Period, in which are Particularly Considered, Their Domestic Economy, with Respect to Diet, Dress, Fuel, and Habitation . . .* (London: J. Davis, 1797), appendix, lxxxvii.

37 These numbers could be smaller, averaging out at sixpence per week for particularly industrious women also in charge of raising four children under six. Davies, *The Case of Labourers*, 10, 84.

38 Maxine Berg, "What Difference did Women's Work Make to the Industrial Revolution?" *History Workshop Journal* 35, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 22–44; Hartmann, "Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex," 165–66; Sonya O. Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

39 Hurl-Eamon, "The Fiction of Female Dependence," 481–501.

40 See, for instance, "Account of Cloathing and other things laid out for Relieving the Poor for one year from Easter 1805 to Easter 1806—by Robt. Taylor," Wembury Parish Records, 125/22, West Devon and Plymouth Archives (WDPa) (Plymouth, UK); St. Giles Camberwell Churchwardens and Overseers Accounts 1778 to 1790, P73/GIS/061, London Metropolitan Archives (LMA).

41 Rosemary Lane was near where Royal Mint Street is today.

42 The West India and London Docks were built in the early 1800s—for an image from this era, see Samuel Owen, *West India Docks*, copper-plate engraving, 1811, National Maritime Museum, accessed December 6, 2024, <https://www.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/rmgc-object-105593>.

43 Janice Turner, "'Ill-Favoured sluts'—The Disorderly Women of Rosemary Lane and Rag Fair," *London Journal* 38, no. 2 (July 2013): 95–109. For Edinburgh's "rag fair," see Elizabeth C. Sanderson, "Nearly New: The Second-hand Clothing

Trade in Eighteenth-Century Edinburgh," *Costume* 31, no. 1 (1997): 38–48.

44 Trinity House operated essentially as a guild for those who made their living at sea, from long-distance traders to local keel-men. They offered support for sailors in need and provided for sailors' widows when the widow was deserving, and finances made it possible. During wartime, when sailors involved in trade became prisoners of war, their wives appealed to Trinity House for support. Anon., *General Map of London*, 1786, LMA; J. Russell, *General Map of London*, 1806, LMA.

45 Register of Allotments, ADM 27/2, TNA.

46 Register of Allotments, ADM 27/2, TNA.

47 Register of Allotments, ADM 27/2, TNA.

48 Research assistant Kate Gehl helped compile data on rent from the *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*: Trial of Mary McCarthy (t17940115-43), January 1794, OBP, accessed December 6, 2024, <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/record/t17940115-43>; Trial of Hannah Clarke (t17980523-49), May 1798, OBP, accessed December 6, 2024, <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/record/t17980523-49>.

49 Records from Wembury, near Plymouth, noted when the rent was paid for poor families, and similar records for Swansea listed the value of rents more generally. An Account of Clothing &c. for the Poor of Wembury for the year from Easter 1798 to Easter 1799 by Robert Anthony Junr, Wembury Parish Records, 125/22 WDPa. Swansea Borough Records 1775–1816, BS Corp B7, West Glamorgan Archive Service (Swansea, UK).

50 The parish took charge of poor relief and other state functions. It acted as the administrative unit within towns, sometimes covering much of a town—as in Swansea's St. Mary Parish—or a small fraction of a city—as in the parishes of London. Out-relief included cash for those who needed it and was an alternative to putting people in the workhouse.

51 Margaret Lincoln, *Naval Wives & Mistresses, 1750–1815* (London: National Maritime Museum, 2007), 148.

52 Crimps helped recruit men for the military and the East India Company. Crimps often acted outside of the law, tricking or ensnaring men into service, rather than encouraging them to volunteer willingly. Lincoln, *Naval Wives & Mistresses*, 150–51.

53 Francis Hill to Gentlemen, July 31, 1779. Information against seamen, July–September 1779, L/RV/23b, LMA.

54 Note, August 5, 1779. Information against seamen, L/RV/23b, LMA.

55 Unfortunately, the records provide little information as to what motivated these women, simply noting their names and some details on where eligible seamen could be found. Note, July 23, no year, L/RV/23b, LMA.

56 Trial of Elizabeth Griffiths (t17931030-46), October 1793, OBP, accessed December 6, 2024, <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/record/t17931030-46>.

57 Trial of John Jonqua, Richard Gale (t18030216-28), February 1803, OBP, accessed December 6, 2024, <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/record/t18030216-28>.

58 Trial of Deborah Sheene (t17950218-25), February 1795, OBP, accessed December 6, 2024, <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/record/t17950218-25>.

59 This phrase appears in testimony in 1793, although the *Oxford English Dictionary* first records its meaning—"the making of slop-garments" or "work cheaply and imperfectly done"—in 1849. *Oxford English Dictionary*, "slop-work," accessed December 6, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1043055314>. Trial of Joseph Cross (t17931030-41), October 1793, OBP, accessed December 6, 2024, <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/record/t17931030-41>.

60 Minutes, Newcastle Overseers of the Poor, 183/86, Tyne and Wear Archive Service (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK); *The New Picture of Edinburgh* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, & Brown, 1823), 193. A.116.f.13 National Library of Scotland (Edinburgh, UK); Benjamin Heath Malkin, Esq., *The*

Scenery, Antiquities and Biography, of South Wales, From Materials Collected during Two Excursions in the Year 1803. Embellished with Views Drawn on the Sport and Engraved by Laporte and a Map of the Country (London: T. Longman and O. Rees, 1804), 587.

61 *The New Picture of Edinburgh* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, & Brown, 1823), 192–93. A.116.f.13 NLS.

62 Hunt, “Women and the Fiscal-Imperial State,” 29–47; Pamela Sharpe, “Gender at Sea: Women and the East India Company in Seventeenth-Century London,” in *Women, Work and Wages in England, 1600–1850*, ed. Penelope Lane, Neil Raven and K. D. M. Snell (New York: Boydell, 2004), 47–67.

63 “Shocking Accident,” *Hampshire Chronicle*, April 14, 1806, BNA.

64 Women outside of London engaged in similar pursuits, with Edward Hoxland noting in Plymouth, “it is commonplace when the country is in conflict and, in Dock, prostitutes walk the streets shamelessly and unabashed.” Edward Hoxland, “Plymouth Dock,” in *The Plymouth Dock Guide, or an Authentic Account of the Rise and Progress of that Town* (1794), 73.

65 Women might also turn to theft, although records suggest that single women were more likely to fleece sailors than married women, unless the married woman was working with another man, possibly her husband, who was not a sailor. For instance, see the Trial of Thomas Jackson, Sarah Rumbold (t18041205-69), December 1804, OBP, accessed December 6, 2024, <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/record/t18041205-69>.

66 From an account of a “bagnio” in Drury Lane, “Middlesex Sessions,” *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser*, September 20, 1809, BNA. Over a shilling per customer was similar to prices in Judith Walkowitz’s “We are not beasts of the field” that explored a later period, hinting that women in this earlier era whose customers included sailors rather than wealthier visitors to Covent Garden earned perhaps half that amount.

67 Some sailors’ wives may have acted as managers of similar establishments, as references to running “lodging houses” suggest.

68 Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd,” 189–92.

69 “The Riots,” *Bristol Mirror*, March 11, 1815, BNA. David J. V. Jones, *Before Rebecca: Popular Protests in Wales, 1793–1835* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), 228–30.

70 “Riots,” *Hampshire Chronicle*, September 22, 1800, BNA.

71 Prices would reach nineteen and a half pence in December of that year. “London,” *Kentish Weekly Post or Canterbury Journal*, December 19, 1800, BNA.

72 Jones, *Before Rebecca*, 20, 26.

73 John Bird, *The Diaries of John Bird of Cardiff Clerk to the First Marquess of Bute 1790–1803*, ed. Hilary M. Thomas (Cardiff: South Wales Record Society and Glamorgan Archive Service, 1987), 131–32.

74 “Plymouth,” *Hampshire Chronicle*, April 6, 1801, BNA.

75 For more on press-gang riots and affrays, see Nicholas Rogers, *The Press Gang: Naval Impressment and Its Opponents in Georgian Britain* (London: Continuum, 2007).

76 James Gillray’s etching *The Liberty of the Subject* (1779) reinforced these arguments, as did written works. For more, see Amelia Rauser, “Death or Liberty: British Political Prints and the Struggle for Symbols in the American Revolution,” *Oxford Art Journal* 21, no. 2 (1998): 167–68; Daniel Ennis, *Enter the Press-Gang: Naval Impressment in Eighteenth-Century British Literature* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002).

77 These arguments often ignored the centuries-long legal tradition supporting impressment. For more, see Kevin Costello, “Habeas Corpus and Military and Naval Impressment, 1756–1816,” *Journal of Legal History* 29, no. 2 (2008): 215–25; Radzinowicz, “Impressment into the Army and the Navy”; Peter King, “War as a Judicial Resource. Press Gangs and Prosecution Rates, 1740–1830,” in *Law, Crime and English Society, 1660–1830*, ed. Norma Landau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 97–116.

78 Sometimes Admiralty orders specified an area, like Tower Hill, but more often named a place, writing “Plymouth.” Entry book of orders appointing officers to cutters, tenders, Sea Fencibles, signal stations, Impress Service and other shore appointments, ADM 11/14, ADM 11/15, TNA.

79 “Middlesex Session, Clerkenwell,” *Evening Mail*, December 6, 1805, BNA.

80 No title, *Morning Chronicle*, August 13, 1801, 3, BNA.

81 “Violent Outrage of the Press Gangs,” *Staffordshire Advertiser*, August 3, 1805, BNA.

82 Captain Adam Mackenzie to the Admiralty, April 20, 1803, quoted in Norman McCord, “The Impress Service in North-East England during the Napoleonic War,” in *Pressgangs and Privateers: Aspects of the Maritime History of N.E. England, 1760–1815*, ed. Tony Barrow (Tyne and Wear, UK: Bewick, 1993), 25.

83 Women joined in riots throughout Scotland; in Aberdeenshire fishermen’s wives and daughters participated readily. Other press riots occurred at Castle Douglas in 1815, and in Dundee and Perth in 1795. In Plymouth, England, a crowd of 2,000 turned on a press-gang, inspiring a hasty retreat. “Precognition against Jean Still, Alexander Stephen, Christian Noble, Hugh Gauld, Andrew Noble, Alexander Noble, Elspeth Watt, Margaret Low, Ann Short, George Murison, Mary Thain, Margaret Noble, Barbara Taylor, Alexander Noble for the crime of mobbing and rioting,” Crown Office Precognitions, 1813, AD14/13/88, “Precognition into riot between recruiting party and inhabitants of Castle Douglas,” Crown Office Precognitions, 1815, AD14/15/112; Archibald Cuninghame to Major Cuninghame, September 15, 1795, Papers of the Cuninghame Family of Thourtown, GD21/637/15, TNA; “Agriculture,” *The Cambrian*, June 6, 1807, Welsh Newspapers Online, National Library of Wales.

84 “Wednesday’s and Thursday’s Posts,” *Exeter Flying Post*, October 27, 1803, BNA.