Who ran the British Admiralty’s Hydrographic Office between 1808 and 1829?

Adrian James Webb

ABSTRACT

The question of ‘Who ran the British Admiralty’s Hydrographic Office between 1808 and 1829’ cannot simply be answered by choosing the most likely candidate, i.e. the Hydrographer, as the answer as it was a case of shifting boundaries. The period in question saw a great deal of change and innovation but this was not possible, or even creditable, by or to one person. The influence the Admiralty Board had over key strategic measures and the freedom the Hydrographer had to introduce his own ideas is examined in this paper. During this period there were different degrees of management of the Hydrographic Office. From 1808 to 1823 Captain Thomas Hurd R.N. (c.1747-1823) took firm control over the running of the office, but after his death the consistency and experience he brought was temporarily lost. When his successor, Captain William Edward Parry R.N. (1790-1855), eventually took up his post there was a much greater level of interest over hydrographic matters being shown by members of the Admiralty Board. This situation remained unchanged whilst Parry was away on his Arctic voyages but on his return he found a quite remarkable change in affairs, thanks to the appointment of the Duke of Clarence as Lord High Admiral.

DALRYMPLE’S LEGACY

When Captain Hurd accepted the office of Hydrographer to the Admiralty in 1808 he inherited a position which over the previous 12 years had been held by one man, Alexander Dalrymple (1737-1808). Those formative years (from 1795) of that new function of the Admiralty were not without controversy and numerous run-ins with the Admiralty Board, who effectively acted as a board of directors. But hindsight

Figure 1: Left: Captain Thomas Hurd, by an unknown artist (ref: photograph in the UKHO archive, original location not known). Right: Captain William Edward Parry (ref: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/2/22/WilliamEdwardParry.jpg).
And a comparative approach to the history of the administration of the office up until Captain Parry’s resignation in 1829, allows the problems faced to be placed into context. Needless to say Dalrymple was not alone in facing many difficulties, which could be taken out of perspective, as there were many achievements during the terms of the first three Hydrographers and not all problems.

The personnel within the Admiralty Board who were responsible for the direction of the Hydrographic Office between 1808 and 1829 were dominated, when it came to longevity in office, by three individuals: Robert Dundas, 2nd Viscount Melville (1771-1851), who served as First Lord from 1812 until 1830; John Wilson Croker (1780-1857), who served from 1809 until 1830 as First Secretary, and Sir John Barrow (1764-1848), who served as Second Secretary from 1807 until 1845. Because of the continuity which this gave to the direction of the Hydrographic Office, it is fair to state that those three men had more influence than any others but it is Croker who is mostly associated with control of the Office and he is the main focus of this paper. Out of the three it was Croker in particular who appears to have had more direct involvement, as out of the 1020 letters entered in the Hydrographers’ out-letter books from 1815-1829 some 49 are addressed personally to him, which compares with 16 to Barrow and three to Melville.

A non-hydrographic historiographical measure of the importance of the work the Board undertook involving the Hydrographic Office can be seen in the biography of Sir George Cockburn, the autobiography of Barrow and a volume on the Croker papers. In these three works there is no mention of their involvement with any direct governance of the office, or any issues that had any obvious influence on chart production or supply. Only Barrow mentions hydrography in passing and that was only due to his involvement with Croker in the appointment of Captain Francis Beaufort as Hydrographer. Considering at the time Barrow wrote his autobiography

Figure 2: The Admiralty Boardroom in the 1808 where the governance of the Hydrographic Office was determined. Note the map or chart hanging on the wall over the fireplace and the globe, showing how important geographical knowledge was to Admiralty policy and strategy (ref: Ackerman, Microcosm of London).
Hydrographic Office contingencies in 1821 (when they were voted at the highest level) and the salaries of six members of staff, pales into significance compared to the £6,400,000 for the naval estimate for that year.\textsuperscript{11} However, before thinking the office was totally insignificant, to this small sum must be added the cost of manning and fitting vessels to collect the data the Admiralty needed and the cost of vessels lost because they were using charts that were not fit for purpose.

THE FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY

The dominance of those officers, especially ‘the big three’ of Melville, Croker and Barrow, compared to the other members of the Board, usually made up of up to seven commissioners until 1822 when it was reduced to five,\textsuperscript{12} can be explained by briefly examining their background. As First Lord, Melville, who was the longest serving First Lord of all time,\textsuperscript{13} followed two men who had held relatively short service over the direction of the Hydrographic Office; Lord Mulgrave and Charles Yorke. Mulgrave had notably removed Dalrymple, who (according to Barrow) was ‘an impracticable and obstinate man, and very difficult to be diverted from any plan or project he had conceived’, who had ‘exhibited so many symptoms of decayed faculties, joined to an irritable habit, as to lessen the value of those services for which he had previously been so highly respected’,\textsuperscript{14} thus summing up his physical and mental state but succinctly showing the position he had risen to. His removal from the position of Hydrographer, was much to the reluctance of the Admiralty Board and distain of numerous members of the Royal Society,\textsuperscript{15} especially to be replaced by one who was not a fellow, or ever would be, of that society. But the writing had been on the wall since at least July 1806, when Earl St Vincent wrote to Viscount Howick deploring the state of the Hydrographic Office, being in a ‘shameful disorder, and has been so for many years, although the expense is very heavy’\textsuperscript{16}. Clearly Dalrymple had not been performing to the expectations of some of the gentry (at least) associated with the navy and the First Lord was the man who held enough power to remove him.

Such was the power of the First Lord over the direction of the office, but unfortunately for Mulgrave historians have overlooked this act of great vision and he should have some credit at least for removing what had become an obstacle to speedy improvements in the Admiralty’s hydrographic capability. Melville’s role was to convey government policy to the Admiralty Board, especially concerning matters of strategy, expenditure and patronage\textsuperscript{17} and according to his biographer was a ‘diligent administrator ably balancing the pressures on him, he was regarded by the Navy as a thoroughly reliable representative of its interests, and by his political colleagues as a man who could be ruthless when necessary’.\textsuperscript{18} However, his specific form of governance in relation to the Hydrographic Office appears in writing to have been only small, as from 1815 to 1829 he is mentioned specifically in only nine out-letters.\textsuperscript{19} This may be more of a reflection of the way in which Hurd was familiar with the Board members, whereas the Parry years were far more fluent with no one person in the Hydrographic Office having direct dealings with one Board member over the whole period.

As so few letters by Hurd were specifically addressed to Melville, this indicates he was carefully choosing his moments when to go straight to the top. This shows a great deal of tact and diplomacy by Hurd, as the three letters from 1815 which were addressed to Melville all contained important matters relating to the promotion of surveying specialists. Although the Hydrographer appears not to have had any quota for promotions, he knew how to use the system to advance specialist officers, such as the promotions for Lieutenant William Henry Smyth, Commander Martin White and Midshipman Henry Mangles Denham, who all became distinguished surveyors.
For Melville to grant promotions to officers within such a small specialism, at a time when the number of ships of the line had been reduced to 44 when he wanted over one hundred, shows his support for hydrography despite his ‘constant struggle . . . to find every possible economy.’

Although other members of the Board were keen to offer promotions, Melville also had the final say when it came to other more important matters relating to the direction of the office and often on even more trivial matters. In 1822 he decided that the chart produced in the Hydrographic Office of Plymouth Sound could not be issued to ships before it had been ‘submitted to the inspection of professional judges’. This was not a trivial matter and was due to the issue of the precise position of the breakwater (being built under Joseph Whidbey’s superintendence) being positioned correctly on the chart. The reason for his involvement was due to conflicting reports as to the breakwater’s precise position (see Figure 4).

On a more trivial nature, Hurd had to remind the commander of the Admiralty Yacht that it was ‘Lord Melville’s particular desire that you will immediately forward to this office the Channel Atlas’ in order for it to be updated. But these are just a few of the many occasions during which Melville undoubtedly had a hand in matters which involved the Hydrographic Office brought before the Admiralty Board.

As first lord it was his duty on the 19 October 1823 to offer Parry, after the latter’s return from the Arctic, the position of Hydrographer, which Parry wrote to his brother was undertaken in a ‘very handsome manner’. However, as it had been some seven months since the demise of Hurd, and possibly longer since he was last in the Hydrographic Office, the delay by the Board in making an appointment is questionable.

It was not a case of Parry being the only man who was considered for the post, as Captain Francis Beaufort wrote to the Board in May stating his wish to be Hydrographer, only to be told by the Board that they had no immediate intention of filling the post. Despite this snub by the Board, and having to wait six years, Beaufort became Hydrographer after Parry left in 1829. Another officer was alleged to have been offered the post at this time, but Captain Peter Heywood declined the position, possibly because of his encounter with Croker’s dislike for the employment of additional naval officers in the Hydrographic Office. Despite Friendly thinking it was Croker’s decision not to fill the post, it appears Melville was in no hurry to make such an appointment and even went as far as keeping the position open for Parry whilst he was away on
another expedition. Only the First Lord could hold such power and this was why Lieutenant Alexander Becher R.N. was retained in the Hydrographic Office, despite Croker’s attempts to reduce the number of naval staff. Similarly, when Parry’s successor was being chosen, it was Melville who held the strings and asked the Second Secretary to choose between the two candidates.  

**FIRST SECRETARY OF THE ADMIRALTY, JOHN WILSON CROKER**

Although Melville clearly had the greatest influence, it was Croker who appears most in the correspondence with the Hydrographer, but it is impossible to establish just how much influence one person had within the Board on the Hydrographic Office alone. One writer thought Melville, as leader of the Scottish peers, was more interested in politics than running the Admiralty, therefore leaving Croker in charge of the day-to-day administration. Coupled with the fact that Melville was absent from the Admiralty for long periods from the summer to autumn, either at Melville Castle, or yachting on the Solent, that was certainly an opportunity for Croker to wield extra influence. A contemporary statement, which was undoubtedly true to a certain extent at least, was that Croker referred to himself as ‘only a servant of the Board’, although one of his fellow commissioners thought that it was quite the opposite. What is difficult to establish is when the Hydrographer wrote to Croker, was he only going to receive a reply reflecting Croker’s own views and opinion, or did Croker discuss the matter with his fellow Board members and then write the reply, signing his name as if the decision was his own and not a collective one? Either way the decision he made would have been influenced in some part by the views and policies of the Board, which in turn were driven by political and operational demands. Thus the minutes and
correspondence emanating from Croker led to strong allegations by writers such as Ritchie of Croker’s almost subversive approach towards his management of the Hydrographic Office. These allegations need to be explained.

Croker was a man who clearly worked on two different levels. To those of the more affluent and influential world he was involved in he sought to gain opportunities for his own advancement and procurement.33 To this circle he sought to endear himself and ‘… was not vindictive’34 according to one writer. Undoubtedly true and although a succinct summary of his better qualities, his attitude and approach to what he saw as his subordinates was very different.35 But there was a good reason for this. He was driven by the political need, even more so after the peace of 1815, to obtain full value for money. Everyone in the Admiralty felt the effects of this, not just the Hydrographic Office, especially as the numbers of men employed in the Navy dropped from 145,000 in 1812 to 90,000 in 1815 then to 19,000 in 1817.36 Although his ‘manner was often overbearing and harsh’37 he dealt with a phenomenal amount of work and naturally the pressure of office would leave little time for the niceties and formalities some people expected.

Historians of the Hydrographic Office have portrayed Croker in a very unfavourable light, mainly due to two sources; the comments by Parry and the dealings Croker had with the Walker family, in particular the chief draughtsman John Walker. A pencilled note, most likely written by one of the Walker family, in the margin against a minute from the Duke of Clarence,38 states the original minute

‘was in Croker’s hand writing – what a leak for him to swallow. It condemned all his mischievous [sic] doings’.39

This suggests the governance by Clarence was against the plans of Croker, but it is an isolated example, although it is worth noting how the minute was signed by Walker and Becher.40 More tangible is the letter John Dyer wrote to John Walker in 1823 in which the Chief Clerk stated ‘It having been some time in contemplation to reduce the present establishment of the Hydrographical department it is Mr Croker’s direction that you inform W. Brown and J. Anderson that their services will be no longer necessary, . . .’.41

Both of these pieces of evidence, which are still in the Hydrographic Office archive, could have been used in Richards’ historical notes he put together in the 1860s.42 After Richard’s memoir was published, the unfavourable image of Croker and his dealings with some issues relating to hydrography comes to light.

In the 1880s Dawson wrote of Croker’s governance of the office that he ‘. . . was using his energy and strong will not altogether in favour of the department . . .’43 and how he thought he was an enemy of the department. Dawson hypothesized that Croker looked upon the office as

‘. . . an institution of highly-skilled map makers, who, encouraged by a few enthusiastic naval officers, were likely to make work for work (not without profit’s sake). It has been said that he imposed upon the traditionally credulity of the naval members of the Board, using the oft repeated arguments so dear to the naval mind – that they had managed to navigate ships and conduct operations without such scientific charts in their day; why, therefore, should not the navy of the period, and posterity, do the same?’.44

Dawson then goes on to state how the sheer vitality of the office saved it, which is something he does not qualify with any facts or figures. If this was the case it must have been Beaufort who saved it as Parry resigned whilst Croker continued in office. This theme brought into print by Dawson continued in the 1920s by Gould in his unpublished ‘History of [the] British Hydrographic Office’45 and by Edgell in the 1940s by stating how Croker’s ‘. . . eminence in
learned society did not extend to any benevolence towards hydrography’.\textsuperscript{46} Also in the 1960s when Ritchie stated how in 1823 after Hurd’s death the office was ‘left . . . to the mercy of . . . Croker’\textsuperscript{47} and whilst Parry was away on his voyages Croker ‘did his utmost to reduce the status and value of the work the Office was doing’.\textsuperscript{48} Ritchie also states how during this same period the indefatigable John Walker ‘battled as well as he could against the efforts of Croker to reduce the establishment of the office’,\textsuperscript{49} being a theme mentioned by Edgell in 1947.\textsuperscript{50} When Captain W.H. Smyth was ordered out of the Hydrographic Office by Croker (taking all his charts with him), Ritchie called it an ‘apparent high-handed action’,\textsuperscript{51} but later stated how Croker’s dislike of naval officers preparing their fair charts in the Office and his request for weekly progress reports drove both Peter Heywood and Smyth out of the office.\textsuperscript{52} Although whether the Board required them to leave, or whether they decided to resign because of the alleged conditions they had to work in, is far from clear. Day was also of a similar opinion about Croker and how he ‘was concerned to limit the autonomy of the department’.\textsuperscript{53} Day quotes how Croker wrote to Walker in 1823 to inform him that ‘it was merely a branch of this office’,\textsuperscript{54} which apparently dismissive was entirely correct on Croker’s part. As the Hydrographer had little directorial autonomy and as the office was still in its development, even the most trivial of matters had to be approved by the Board who had the final say on any matters of importance.

There were a great many things in Croker’s favour. Dawson states how Croker ‘... doubtless had his duty to do, or what he regarded as his duty, in a financial way, viz., to keep down the expenses of the Admiralty as well as of the navy generally’.\textsuperscript{55} Similarly in the 1920s Gould wrote how ‘Croker was an energetic and ambitious man and we can feel increasingly his hot breath on the back of Hurd’s neck’,\textsuperscript{56} which does not mean to say he had it in for the Hydrographic Office, merely he was keen to see business conducted efficiently and cost effectively. Similarly his energy was not solely devoted to reducing the Hydrographic Office, more his enthusiasm for the task in hand and the amount of work he got through, including opening all the post to the Admiralty Board himself.\textsuperscript{57}

Croker’s approach in governing the Hydrographic Office was direct and to the point, with many things which he should be credited for. It must be remembered that Croker was neither a mariner nor cartographer and subsequently his affinity with the promotion of either fields is less than obvious. He was interested in balancing the books and signed five documents (concerning

![Figure 5](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/55/Barrow3.jpg)

manning and chart supply which the Hydrographer would have done if he had been in post),
between 1823-5 which were later entered in to the Hydrographic Office letter book, suggesting his
involvement of evidence of Croker’s support for Hurd.

When Hurd’s accounting was brought into question in 1812 because of the procedures which
were followed, and not for any financial irregularity, it was Croker who agreed to pass the
accounts without any condemnation of Hurd.58 Also Croker and Barrow appear to have covered
for Hurd during 1823 when he was not only absent because of ill health, but due to the failure of
the Admiralty Board to find a suitable replacement for him. The accounting incident was an ideal
opportunity for Croker to have acted against Hurd but he did not take it, nor did he refer to it at a
later date to use against him.

Croker appears to have been driven by a desire to be transparent when it came to public
accountability, especially his dealings with the appointment of staff. In April 1823 (to Croker’s
credit), Lieutenant A.B. Becher was appointed to catalogue the documents in the Hydrographic
Office, which were found ‘in promiscuous heaps . . . and filthy with dust’.59 When Parry was
absent from the office in 1826 fitting out for his next voyage, it was Croker who signed the
minute appointing Becher to be his stand-in, although he pointed out that Becher was to have no
additional salary for undertaking the additional duties.60 This shows clearly how those
twoappointments portray his progressive nature rather than holding any personal vendetta against
the Hydrographic Office. It could be stated that when Charles Yorke ordered that no Frenchman
could work ‘in’ the Admiralty, Croker could have extended this to working ‘for’ the Admiralty,
thus preventing a French national working for the British Hydrographer in 1812.61 But this was
not the case and the Hydrographer was still permitted to use this valuable resource at an extra cost
to the Admiralty.

SECOND SECRETARY OF THE ADMIRALTY, SIR JOHN BARROW

The only member of the Admiralty Board to see continuous service between 1808 and 1829 was
Sir John Barrow. In many ways Barrow and Croker could not have been more different, as
Barrow’s interests were far more in line with Hydrographic activities, such as exploration,
science, geography, whereas as Croker was a political beast, but the two were great friends as well
as Fellows of the Royal Society. Barrow served several terms on the council of the Royal Society
and as its vice-president, but was better known as one of the founders of the Royal Geographical
Society in 1830, which organisation he later served as president. He owed his allegiance to Lord
Melville who appointed him to the Board in 1804 and was ‘convinced that Britain’s security and
future wealth depended on control of the world’s sea lanes both for trade and for defence’.62 To
obtain this ‘control’ for defence meant high quality geographical knowledge and data being made
available to its defenders, therefore navigational charts were key to his strategic thinking. It was
this type of thinking which raised the importance of the work undertaken in the Hydrographic
Office in the eyes of the Board, especially those members (or member) that were less than
supportive.

His direct involvement in Hydrographic Office administration was two-fold. Firstly, his
connections with other like-minded men brought in geographical data for the Hydrographer’s use
and secondly, his position allowed him to influence the Board to use government sponsored
voyages for the pursuit of geographical interests.63 In 1819 William Allsopp wrote to Barrow in
his capacity as Secretary to the Admiralty, after Barrow suggested how information on Allsopp’s
South American commercial voyages would be of use to the Admiralty.64 Ironically his
indifference towards one provider of information, the exiled Spanish Hydrographer Don Felipe
Bauzá, did not deter the Spaniard from providing the Admiralty with a wealth of hydrographic
information. This was despite Bauzá writing of Barrow as being ‘. . . not frank and not at all
forthcoming’, being more ‘. . . eager for glory and full of envy . . .’ but more worryingly when it

Symposium on “Shifting Boundaries”: Cartography of the 19th and 20th Centuries. ICA Commission on the History of Cartography
came to the Hydrographic Office ‘Mr Barrow is a man who neither understands nor cares for it.’ 65

Being eager for glory and envious were two criticisms also made by T.C. Croker 66 of Barrow, which is not surprising as both Barrow and Parry had similar interests and got on so well being like-minded.

His governance of voyages of discovery and data gathering was far greater than the day-to-day administration of hydrographic matters. He had his own agenda for the purpose and manning of those voyages of discovery, which in turn unwittingly influenced the course of the Hydrographic Office in a detrimental way. This chain of events started in 1817 and involved the exploration of the Arctic, when Barrow recommended Parry to Lord Melville for the expedition to search for a north-west passage. Had Barrow not taken an instant delight in Parry when they met, 67 the future of the Hydrographic Office may have been very different, as it was Barrow’s patronage and support of Parry that continually took him away from that Office. Not only was he taken away but his three appointments were only temporary ones, leaving the office without a permanent leader and on occasions without any noticeable direction. Further evidence of Barrow’s closeness to Parry occurred just prior to Parry’s voyage of 1824, when the former told him ‘Do not think of quitting this situation, for, although it is true that you are to receive no salary for it, as soon as your ship is commissioned, still it is your sheet-anchor; keep hold of the Admiralty while you can – you do not know to what it may hereafter lead’. 68 Such loyalty from the Board would have helped Parry’s own career, but not necessarily benefited the governance of the Hydrographic Office.

WILLIAM, DUKE OF CLARENCE, LORD HIGH ADMIRAL

Croker was an administrator and it is not always clear that he fully understood the implications of supplying the fleet with accurate charts, especially when you consider the number of charts wanting from those produced by the Hydrographic Office and the missed opportunities for their production. By 1827 Croker had been in office for nearly two decades and his influence was particularly powerful and widely felt, however in that year a major turning point in the governance of the Hydrographic Office occurred when Clarence became lord high admiral at the invitation of the incoming prime minister, George Canning. 69 This was good news for the Hydrographic Office as the Duke had served under John Knight, a hydrographic surveyor in the West Indies, became a competent naval officer who by 1827 had a not inconsiderable knowledge of governance and naval affairs. 70 To support him in his new role an advisory council, rather than the traditionally named ‘Admiralty Board’ was formed, although both were ‘boards’ in the naval sense consisting of men of experience in naval matters. Backed by this group of men, who brought a variety of experience to the task in hand, Clarence introduced some extremely well thought through schemes but others were questionable. 71 But what was the effect on the Hydrographic Office?

Clarence acted quickly and after less than two months he ordered (and it happened) the employment of six extra draughtsmen. 72 This raised the number from four to ten and was due to the backlog of work in the office, which still had not published material which had been in the Admiralty for 25 years or more. 73 As a direct result of this the number of new charts published rose from at least 21 in 1817 to at least 108 in 1827, being the highest year of output between 1808 and 1829. In the following year at least 93 new charts were published 74 and this had the knock-on effect for chart revenues which jumped from £233 in 1827 to £383 two years later. 75 Other decisions he made were both significant and well informed, which can only be viewed as progressive measures: the appointment of an additional agent for the sale of Admiralty charts in September 1827 76 (only to terminate the arrangement eleven months later); 77 in January 1828 he ordered Ordnance Survey data for use whilst Bullock was surveying the River Thames 78 and encouraged closer collaboration with the Danish Hydrographic Office; 79 in February ordered complimentary charts to be sent to the British Museum to make up their set of Hydrographic
Office charts and employed two additional officers (and a third in June) to compile sailing directions; in March ordered an officer to submit data in order for charts to be completed as well as ordering numerous routine matters to be undertaken that were no different to those confirmed by previous Board members.

Figure 6: (Left) The Duke of Clarence, Lord High Admiral (ref: Briggs, Naval Administrations). Note the wine glass and the decanter by his side, symbols of his renowned hospitality. (Right) Design of the Royal initials, which Parry was involved with, at the Admiralty Board’s suggestion in 1828 (ref: UKHO, LP1857 L197).

The advisory council under Clarence also got involved with matters relating to manning, asking Parry in April 1828 for a ‘a complete and accurate list of the names of all officers at present serving in ships employed on the surveying service’. They also took an interest in scientific instruments being supplied to survey vessels, when they not only considered the costs but also whether the ships were sufficiently equipped. In the same month they ordered a complete copy of the recent surveys of the coasts of Africa and Madagascar by Captain Owen (published at the Hydrographic Office) to be sent to France; although this was not the first occurrence of Anglo-French relations, this was an important step forward in international co-operation. The spirit of internationalism continued in July, but on this occasion it was with Sweden. Charles Tottie had presented two volumes of charts by Admiral Klint to the Lord High Admiral and The Council ordered Parry to send a letter of thanks along with some complementary charts, which had by this time become the accepted way of doing things. The Council also encouraged new ideas and were particularly keen on the experimental use of water-proof chart paper in July 1828. Although a good idea, in practice it proved to be ineffective but it was not resolved until the January of the following year, despite several attempts at solving the problem of its suitability. When it came to matters connected with hydrographic administration they were not always so easily won over, for example when the issue of extra pay being incorrectly claimed by a surveyor was brought before them they left the officer in no uncertain terms exactly how they felt.

The implications of many of those decisions had very long lasting effects. Although Hurd had made some international connections, for the Admiralty the increased involvement with foreign hydrographers or hydrographic offices in Denmark, France and Sweden opened up the possibility of even wider participation in the international field. The Board clearly saw the advantages of the free exchange of navigational information, which benefited both nations involved in the mutual supply of data. The Board’s employment of officers who were dedicated to the production of sailing directions, meant they could focus on the publication of volumes, which eventually would become a worldwide series. Although this was many years away, these initial steps were crucial to moving from ad hoc production schedule to a standard planned publication series.
During those halcyon days when the Lord High Admiral was in charge at the Admiralty, Parry wrote of the Admiralty that

‘It is now, in short, fit for a gentleman and an officer to hold, which was by no means the case, when a certain person whose name begins with a C, was allowed to govern the Admiralty from top to bottom. This is all over now, and, under the Duke’s government, everybody minds their own business’. 96

It is also possible that in 1827 Parry was also referring to Croker, rather than Cockburn, when he wrote about the high popularity of the Duke of Clarence ‘with certain exceptions’ – Croker being one of the exceptions. 91 Clearly showing that the Parry family had little time for Croker’s interference and his style of management was to Parry’s mind detrimental. But it was not just Croker who was open to criticism as an Admiralty clerk, Thomas Crofton Croker (1798-1854), who owed his position to John Wilson Croker, 92 wrote very unfavourably of Parry in April 1828, indicating a possible rift between the Houses of Parry and Croker. He referred to Parry as ‘the very reverse of a manlike openhearted sailor’ and how the ‘Northern expeditions’, i.e. to the Arctic, would before long be shown ‘in their true light of most gross humbug’. 93

The onward and progressive measures for hydrography could not last forever, and the last involvement the Advisory Council had with Parry was the termination of the chart agency at Bristol in August 1828. 94 The departure of William, Duke of Clarence from office 95 was according to his biographer ‘a sad episode for the navy because some at least of William’s reforms were much needed’. Citing the commissioning of its first steam vessel, and his concerns at the state of naval gunnery, 96 as his major successes, it should be added that his achievement in the advancement of the Hydrographic Service as a whole was equally important. Thought to be a cuckoo in the nest, 97 to have been detrimental to Admiralty administration, 98 and his appointment a disastrous one, 99 his influence on the Hydrographic Office was far from that. The latter were on a par with great advancements under Hurd, from which the office was on a firm footing for further expansion. Although to Greville, Clarence ‘distinguished himself by making ridiculous speeches, by a morbid official activity’, 100 the effect on British and to some extent, world hydrography has been underestimated. In the short term Parry wrote how Clarence’s influence within the Admiralty was one of

‘….. immense improvement which had taken place in it since his administration of affairs’, and by doing so had transformed it into something ‘fit for a gentleman and officer . . . ‘. 101

Conversely after Clarence’s departure Parry found the Admiralty

‘in a remarkably quiescent state, as if nothing had happened, just as people live under a volcano just after an eruption. In fact, the old régime seems to have succeeded so quietly and smoothly, that the change is now no longer a matter of conversation or remark’. 102

This is backed up by Briggs, whose contemporary thought was that ‘Lord Melville’s retrograde proclivities were only too well known, and therefore nothing in the shape of reforms or improvement could reasonably be expected during his tenure of office; expectation was not disappointed’. 103 Those two accounts reflect the way in which Admiralty business was undertaken, whereby the vast majority of ‘ideas’ had to be suggested to the Board, rather than original ideas being generated by the Board; with Melville’s lack of technical knowledge of the Navy and his political commitments, it is easy to see why he was thought of in this light by contemporaries. 104 But little did either Parry or Briggs know of the impending monumental changes (for the better) which were on the horizon, in the shape of Sir James Graham, Sir Thomas Masterman Hardy and for hydrography, Captain Francis Beaufort.
CONCLUSION

The advantages of having a virtually continuous core of ‘directors’ of the Hydrographic Office between 1808 and 1829 eventually paid dividends for its expansion, but development and innovation was slow, often compromised by existing parameters, or by later decisions which reduced its capabilities. The Board oversaw the transition from Dalrymple’s departure, the extensive post-war reductions and then through the most difficult of times – the Parry years. Those were truly years of shifting boundaries where the rules of engagement were constantly changing through precedents being set and new regulations being introduced. Far from letting the office decline, or even cease to exist, either of which might have occurred as the Board could have left the chart production business to private enterprise, the Office eventually expanded. Not only did the Board introduce the expansion, with some suggestions from the Lord High Admiral and its Hydrographer, but it laid the foundations for vast increases in chart production. Had they thought earlier of expanding the resources in the Hydrographic Office, before being asked to do so, the fleet would have been able to use a much higher number of Admiralty produced charts containing good quality accurate data. This was a serious short-coming and one which had its origins in Dalrymple’s time, thus the finger of blame cannot be entirely pointed at Croker for this, but it is certainly with the Board who did not provide enough resources.

Croker’s relationship with Hurd compared to that with Parry, was not particularly different, showing no apparent favouritism for either man. But it is worth noting that Croker’s plan to ‘reduce the . . . establishment of the Hydrographic Department’ did not come to light until after Hurd’s death, during the interregnum between Hydrographers. His bottom line when dealing with the business matters of the governance of the Hydrographic Office was consistent, fair, at times cautious but never zealous in seeking opportunities for cutting the service for any personal gain. How much his alleged determination to curb the growing Hydrographic Office was curtailed by his fellow board members when debating important matters relating to finance, manning and expansion may never be known. What is known is that he was outnumbered by naval officers who knew all too well the value of accurate charts and Sir John Barrow, whose thirst for geographical information was unabated. But putting this into perspective, Barrow and Croker were known to have worked well together and the Board contained a good balance of administrators, naval officers, politicians, governors and civilians who acted quickly in returning their verdicts and on the whole fairly when dealing with issues which confronted them in the Board Room concerning cartography.

ENDNOTES

1 The date of his appointment was 28 May 1808 (J.C. Sainty, Office-holders in modern Britain, IV, Admiralty officials 1660-1870 (London, 1975)).


Adrian Webb: Who ran the British Admiralty’s Hydrographic Office between 1808 and 1829?


5 There were many other Board members, notably Sir George Cockburn (1772-1853) and Sir Edward Owen (1771-1849), who were also involved with Hydrographic Office administration but they are outside of the scope of this paper.

6 United Kingdom Hydrographic Office (UKHO), LB1 and 2, ‘out’ letter books, passim.

7 Morriss, Cockburn, passim.

8 Sir J. Barrow, An auto-biographical memoir of Sir John Barrow, Bart., late of the Admiralty, including reflections, observations and reminiscences at home and abroad, from early life to advanced age (London, 1847); F. Fleming, Barrow’s boys (London, 1998).


10 Sir J. Barrow, An auto-biographical memoir of Sir John Barrow, Bart., late of the Admiralty, including reflections, observations and reminiscences at home and abroad, from early life to advanced age (London, 1847), 394.


14 Sir J. Barrow, Sketches of the Royal Society and Royal Society Club (London, 1849), 138-9. This quote is based on Barrow’s own dealings with Dalrymple. In Dalrymple’s defence he did not mention in his Case of Alexander Dalrymple, late Hydrographer to the Admiralty (London, 1808) the withholding of information from the Board and its Chart Committee as the reason of his being offered a pension.


19 UKHO, LB1 and 2, passim.

20 Fry, ‘Dundas, Robert Saunders’, ODNB.

21 Cameron, ‘Barrow, Sir John’, ODNB.

22 Morriss, Cockburn, 177.

23 UKHO, LB1 f.483, Hurd to Whidbey, 25 April 1822.

24 Ibid, f.485, Hurd to Allen, 26 April 1822. The Channel Atlas was published by the Admiralty in 1811.

25 The original letter was in private hands and is quoted in Ritchie, Admiralty chart, 175. A transcript of this letter is in the Ritchie Papers at the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office.

Symposium on “Shifting Boundaries”: Cartography of the 19th and 20th Centuries. ICA Commission on the History of Cartography
UKHO, LB1 f.523 is the last letter signed by Hurd and is dated 27 December 1822.


28 Ibid, 244.

29 Ibid, 229.


31 Parry, *Parry of the Arctic*, 124.

32 Ritchie is known to have used the telegraph from Portsmouth to relay decisions using his own private code, see C.I. Hamilton, ‘Expanding naval powers: Admiralty private secretaries and private offices, 1800-1945’, *War in History* 10 (2003), 126; Day, *Hydrographic Service*, 13.

33 For an account of Croker’s connections and patronage see Hamilton, ‘John Wilson Croker’, 49-77.

34 Thomas, ‘Croker, John Wilson’, *ODNB*.


37 UKHO, MLP 77.

38 UKHO, MLP 5/3iv, draft minute of 1828; Ibid, MB1, Board minute of 1825. It is also worth noting how this minute under Clarence’s rule was only a revision of one that had been drawn up by Croker in 1825.

39 UKHO, MLP 2/1, Dyer to Walker, 7 July 1823.


43 UKHO, MLP4.

44 Edgell, *Charting the seas in peace and war the story of the Hydrographic Department of the Admiralty over a hundred and fifty years 12th August 1795 to 12th August 1945* (London, 1947), 8.


46 Ibid, 176.


Symposium on “Shifting Boundaries”: Cartography of the 19th and 20th Centuries. ICA Commission on the History of Cartography

Ibid, 177.


UKHO, MLP2, Croker to Walker, 7 July 1823; Day, *Hydrographic Service*, 35.


UKHO, MLP4 p.8; Lt-Cdr. R.T. Gould prepared a typescript ‘History of British Hydrographic Office’, which although unpublished was used heavily by Day in his *Hydrographic Service*, from which this quote was taken. Gould only managed two chapters before realising the task was too great and he gave it up. Despite encouragement from the Hydrographer, Gould never returned to the project (J. Betts, *Time restored. The Harrison timekeepers and R.T. Gould the man who knew (almost) everything* (Oxford, 2006), 70).


TNA, ADM1/3458, Hurd to Croker, 21 April 1812; ibid, Kite to Croker, 22 April 1812.

UKHO, MLP107, Becher’s memoirs, 1869. This was misquoted in Ritchie, *Admiralty chart*, 176-7.

UKHO, MB1 f.91, Croker to Dyer, 30 November 1826.

TNA, ADM1/3458, Hurd to Yorke, 13 February 1812.


Examples of the first case can be seen in those letters which have either survived in the Hydrographic Office archive, or have been through the hands of the Hydrographic Office staff at some point but ended up elsewhere.

Allsopp included information in his letter of the commercial opportunities, the accuracy of the navigational charts (by Malaspina published by Faden), descriptions of the aboriginal peoples, agriculture, livestock, timber, building materials and the consideration of establishing an English settlement. The matter was also referred to the Board of Trade but as it was of ephemeral use to hydrography as Hurd did not follow the matter any further (UKHO, LP1857 A159, Allsopp to Barrow, 10 July 1819). There is no out-letter relating to this matter in Hurd’s letter book (UKHO, LB1).


National Maritime Museum, MSS78/038.a, T.C. Croker to un-named recipient, 3 April 1828.


UKHO, Ritchie Papers, letter from Parry to his brother dated 5 January 1824, abstracted by Ann Parry in a letter to Ritchie, 12 August 1963.


Symposium on “Shifting Boundaries”: Cartography of the 19th and 20th Centuries. ICA Commission on the History of Cartography
Adrian Webb: Who ran the British Admiralty’s Hydrographic Office between 1808 and 1829?

71 Morris, *Cockburn*, passim.


73 Hurd’s survey of Bermuda is a prime example of this as it was completed in 1802 (UKHO, A124).

74 These figures are based on the inventory of Admiralty Charts held at the UKHO. The term ‘at least’ is used because no complete record of charts produced has survived and many charts were withdrawn before the numbering system was introduced in 1839.

75 UKHO, MLP98.

76 Ibid, LB2, f.84, Becher to King and Son, 26 September 1827.

77 Ibid, LB2, f.183, Parry to King and Son, 22 August 1828.

78 Ibid, LB2, f.94, Parry to Colby, 28 January 1828.

79 Ibid, LB2, ff.95-7, Parry to the Danish Hydrographer, 26 January 1828.

80 Ibid, LB2, f.110, Parry to Ellis, 16 February 1828.

81 Ibid, LB2, f.111, Parry to Roe and Dessiou, 27 February 1828, ibid, f.149, Parry to Symonds, 12 June 1828.

82 Ibid, LB2, f.113, Parry to Fitzmaurice, 4 March 1828.

83 Ibid, LB2, f.127, Parry to the Navy Board, 19 April 1828.

84 Ibid, LB2, ff.132-4, Parry to White, Hewett and Jones, 22 April 1828.

85 Ibid, LB2, f.129, Parry to Rossell, 19 April 1828.

86 Ibid, LB2, f.162, Parry to Tottie, 4 July 1828.

87 Ibid, LB2, f.163, Parry to Stackhouse, 9 July 1828.

88 Ibid, MB1, f.221, Board minute January 1829.

89 Ibid, LB2, f.169, Parry to Frazer, 29 July 1828.

90 Parry, *Parry of the Arctic*, 127.

91 Ibid, 120. Parry’s cousin thought Croker was ‘singularly entertaining and disagreeable’ (Ibid, 124).


93 NMM, MSS78/038.a, T.C. Croker to unnamed recipient, 3 April 1828.

94 UKHO, LB2, f.183, Parry to King and Son, 22 August 1828.


Symposium on “Shifting Boundaries”: Cartography of the 19th and 20th Centuries. ICA Commission on the History of Cartography
BIOGRAPHY

Adrian Webb joined the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office (UKHO) in 1988 and has worked in many areas of cartography, including archives, compilation, digitisation, and project management. He has a BTEC in Surveying and Cartography and an MA in Naval History from the University of Exeter. Worked in the UKHO Archive with the Admiralty Library Collection and The National Archive of Marine Cartography. Published several works on aspects of Somerset’s economic and social history. Currently preparing a volume of letters and papers relating to the administration of the Hydrographic Office prior to 1830, which was one of the most interesting times of development and change in the history of the Office, for publication by the Navy Records Society; during that period the Hydrographic Office laid the foundations to becoming one of the leading chart producing organisations in the World. Convener of the Historical Military Mapping Group (HMMG) of the British Cartographic Society in 2007, which publishes a newsletter, organises seminars and is looking into the publication of materials relating to the history of military mapping. Elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London and of the British Cartographic Society. Other interests include the navigation of the Bristol Channel and the administration of Taunton Castle, from Tudor times to the present.