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Thomas Watson Cornforth Vasey

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## ABSTRACT

### The Emergence of Examinations for British Shipmasters and Mates, 1830 - 1850

Thomas Watson Cornforth Vasey

This thesis is a study of the attempts made during the second quarter of the nineteenth century to establish licensing examinations for ships' officers in the British mercantile marine. The focus is upon analysing the various forces which obtained to determine the pattern and progress of the examination debate. This involved a thorough sifting and evaluation of evidence in support of the view that the emergence of a national system of compulsory examinations for British shipmasters and mates was a more complex process than has been hitherto argued.

It considers in detail the events between 1830 - 1850 when increasing demands were made upon government to attend to the problem of British shipwrecks, a problem which was shown to be related to the incompetence of ships' officers. The thesis shows that the demands to establish standards of professional competency for shipmasters were rooted in precedents of examinations in the Royal Navy, the East India Company, foreign mercantile fleets, professional occupations ashore and in the universities. It analyses the constraints on government action such as the widespread dislike of state interference in private affairs, the intransigent opposition of many shipping interests, the chaotic and restrictive nature of shipping legislation and the lack of a clearly defined government agency competent to supervise effectively a system of shipmaster examinations.

The study demonstrates that the emergence of compulsory examinations for masters and mates coincided with the establishment of the Board of Trade as the executive department of government responsible for shipping affairs. Consequently, the Board's activities on the examination front are delineated and analysed. Also charted is the rise and fall of the General Shipowners' Society, the core of opposition to examination reform. Additionally, shipmaster examination reform is related to contemporary developments in the field of professional examinations.

THE EMERGENCE OF EXAMINATIONS FOR BRITISH  
SHIPMASTERS AND MATES, 1830-1850

Thomas Watson Cornforth Vasey, M.Ed.  
(Graduate Society)

A thesis presented to the School of Education  
of the University of Durham for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy, January 1980

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17 MAY 1984

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The place of publication is London unless otherwise stated

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- S.C. (1843)        First Report from the Select Committee appointed to inquire into the Shipwreck of British Vessels, and the means of preserving the Lives and Property of Shipwrecked Persons, and to whom the Reports of 1836 and 1839, and the several Petitions on the subject were referred; 1843 (549) IX

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           (Wisconsin Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1955)

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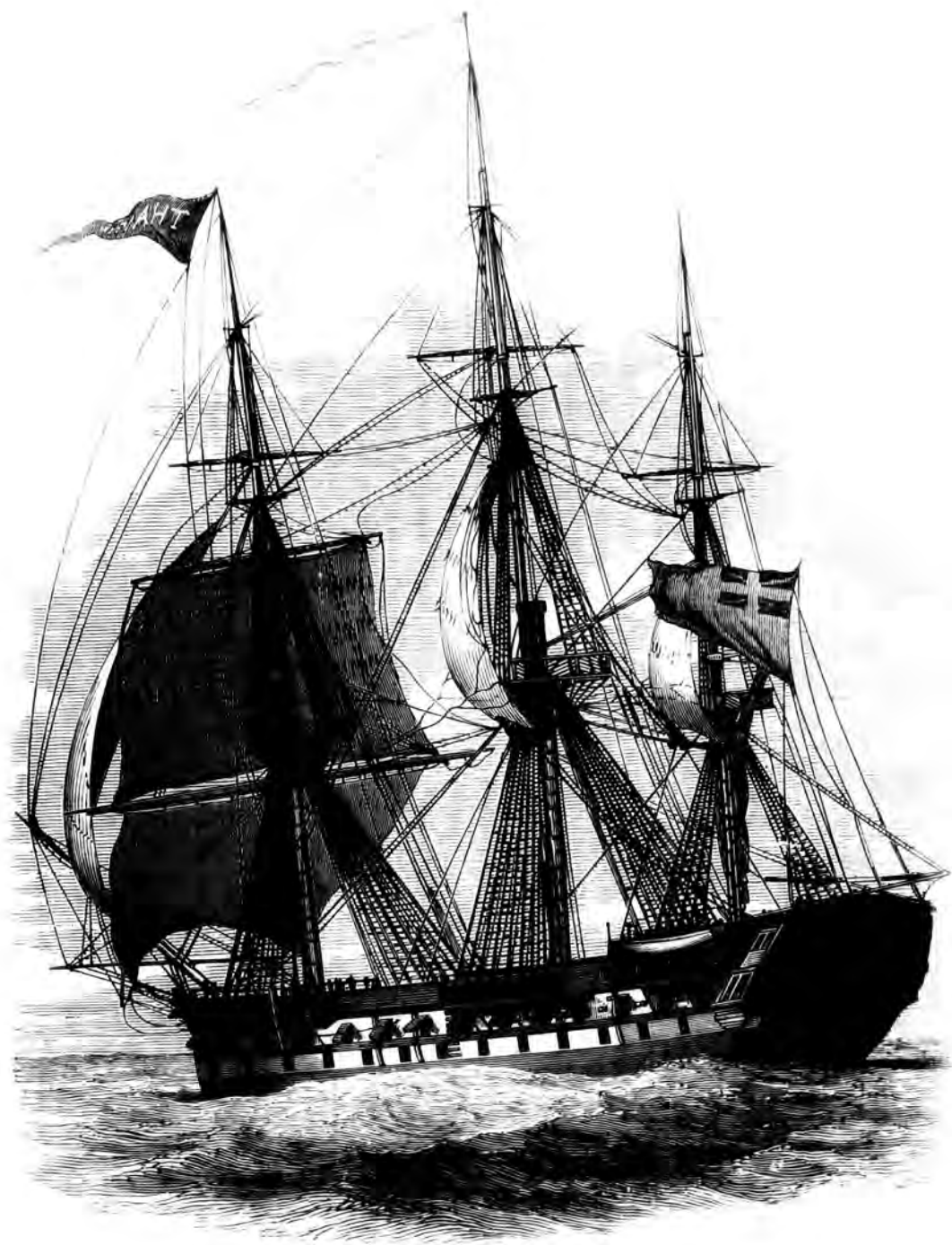
Finally, I wish to thank my wife for her forbearance and support throughout the period of this research.

PLATE I

The 'Thames'

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East Indiaman, 1424 tons  
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Acknowledgements to the National Maritime Museum, London



## INTRODUCTION

Examinations played an important role in nineteenth-century social and administrative reform. The pre-eminent contribution to examination reform made by the universities has been extensively documented.<sup>1</sup> Less well-known are those influences outside the universities which made their own distinctive contributions to the Victorian examinations debate. A case in point was the testing of professional competence as a means of obtaining 'securities for special fitness' for admission to certain vocations.<sup>2</sup> It is clear, however, that the movements for reform both within and outside the universities were not mutually exclusive; indeed, interpenetration was almost inevitable. Many of the men who held the most prestigious public appointments were themselves the products of public schools, universities and competitive examinations. Proposals which sought to establish a national system of examinations had to undergo the scrutiny and meet the approbation of such men. Among Presidents of the Board of Trade, Labouchere took a first in classics at Oxford, Gladstone a double first; among Vice-Presidents of the Board, Milner-Gibson was thirty-sixth wrangler. Shaw-Lefevre, a Joint-Secretary to the Board, was a senior wrangler and fellow of Trinity College.<sup>3</sup>

This thesis is about an examination reform movement between 1830 and 1850. More specifically, it is a study of the attempts made to establish minimum standards of professional competency for ships'

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1. John P.C. Roach, Public Examinations in England 1850-1900 (1971); 'Victorian Universities and the National Intelligentsia', Victorian Studies 1959, III, pp.131-150 ; Robert J. Montgomery, Examinations : An account of their evolution as administrative devices in England (1965), esp. pp.1-16; 242-248.
  2. Sir Alexander M. Carr-Saunders and Paul A. Wilson, The Professions (1964), p.311 ; the phrase is attributed to Edwin Chadwick, see Papers relating to the Reorganisation of the Civil Service, P.P. 1854/5, XX, p.186.
  3. For biographical details of Presidents, Vice-Presidents and Chief Permanent Officers of the Board of Trade between 1830-1850, see Dramatis Personae, App. I, pp. 318-320; App. II; p.321; and App.III, p. 322.



officers in the British mercantile marine by means of a licensing examination. Most studies of the genesis of shipmaster examinations have tended to discuss the subject from the point of view of shipping and administrative reform per se. Invariably, such commentaries fail to recognize fully the involved and subtle nature of the examination reform process.

This study considers the emergence of examinations for masters and mates primarily in relation to pressure group activity and the British political system, set against contemporary developments in the testing of professional competence. The focus is upon defining and analysing those forces whose influence and interplay affected the course and nature of the examination debate and shaped the context in which the issue of shipmaster certification was finally resolved. It suggests that the emergence of a national system of compulsory examinations for British shipmasters and mates was a more complex process than has been hitherto argued.<sup>4</sup>

From this perspective the questions that must be asked revolve around the roles of the main protagonists and the interchanges between them. The study examines the conduct, motives and strategies of the principals within and external to the shipmaster competency debate. Such a focus precludes a detailed analysis being made of all the issues involved in the debate but these issues are not ignored. In some instances they are used to provide a backcloth against which the strategies of the various participants can be seen; on other occasions they help to establish a frame of reference for assessing the tactics deployed by the interested parties.

For example, the opposition of shipping interests to the introduction of examinations must be seen in its historical

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4. Lindsay, Prouty; Wilde; Robert G. Newey, 'Government Intervention in the British Merchant Service in the Nineteenth Century' (Exeter Univ. M.A. thesis, 1970); Clifford Jeans, 'A Critical Study of the Education and Training of Masters and Mates in British Merchant Ships' (Brunel Univ. M.Tech. thesis, 1970).

perspective as well as in relation to contemporaneous governmental policies, both economic and commercial. The role of the General Shipowners' Society - leader of British shipping interests in the 1830s and early 1840s - is crucial in this respect. An attempt has been made to trace its origins and its determined efforts to establish itself as the sole and legitimate agency through which to channel shipping affairs and to assess its effectiveness as a sectional pressure group.

On the other hand, in considering the activities of the proponents of examinations for British masters and mates it has seemed more appropriate to examine the motives which underpinned their reforming zeal. Why, for example, did they regard examinations as the most suitable instrument for measuring professional competence? What sources gave them their ideas and what inspirations fired their ideals? Were their motives humanitarian or was their solicitude less than altruistic? Were some, in fact, motivated more by a desire to enhance the status of the nautical profession than by a genuine concern for their fellow men?

Government strategy on the shipmaster competency issue prompts three main questions. First, was its apparent reluctance to intervene positively in the debate consistent with government policy vis-a-vis social and administrative reform and state intervention? Secondly, how valid is it to suggest that the Government's stance on the issue was influenced, in part at least, by the lack of a clearly defined government department competent to administer and control a national system of examinations? Thirdly, did the Government finally intervene in the issue to rescue the shipping industry or to safeguard the nation's economic and political interests?

Some writers who have chronicled the events described in this thesis have tended to the view that shipping interests, and in particular the shipowners, brought about the introduction of compulsory shipmaster examinations by their unwillingness to put their own house in order.<sup>5</sup> While this study acknowledges that the obduracy of shipping

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5. Wilde, p.181 : Lindsay, III, pp. 28, 42.

interests influenced government policy on the certification issue, it will show that government strategy was determined by other factors. It demonstrates for example, that the Government consistently refused to intervene until the time was politically propitious for positive action.

It would be futile to attempt to isolate the precise moment when the issue of shipmaster competency and the demand for certification entered the arena of public debate. The mobilization, not only of public sympathy but also of the support and approval of government, was a gradual process accomplished over a number of years. The accumulating evidence suggested that the many shipping disasters which occurred were not by any means inevitable. Among the proposals for reducing the losses of lives and vessels were improvements in the construction, insurance and manning of ships, in addition to the vital question of the competency of shipmasters and mates<sup>6</sup>.

This study, covering two decades from 1830 onwards, begins by identifying some of the causes of the unrest and apprehension pervading the British shipping industry. The Government's explicit commitment to free trade, and its increasing intervention in the industry, generated alarm and despondency among shipping interests. Shipowners complained that the decline in their fortunes stemmed directly from the Government's imprudent and partial trading policy. It was against this background that the General Shipowners' Society came into existence.

The escalating loss of life and property at sea gave rise to demands for government to attend to the problem of British shipwrecks. While the scale of shipping loss was such as to agitate the minds of seafarers and their dependents it evoked little response from outside the industry. But although the response was limited, it was persistent. Growing pressure for shipping reform, including the

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6. See S.C. (1836), pp.viii, ix.

introduction of shipmaster examinations, led to the establishment of the 1836 Select Committee on Shipwrecks. Chairman of the Committee was James Silk Buckingham, leader of the maritime reformers and of the pro-examination lobby.<sup>7</sup> The Government declined to adopt the Committee's recommendations for the professionalization of the British mercantile marine. Buckingham introduced a private members Bill which embodied most of the Committee's proposals but it was soundly defeated.<sup>8</sup>

Local attempts to introduce examining procedures and regulations for shipmasters were restricted in scope and impact. But the issue of shipmaster examinations was not dead. Glasgow shipping interests, led by Capt. Robert Fitzroy, R.N., launched a determined and concerted campaign to elicit government support for the introduction of obligatory examinations for ships' officers. A Bill for the compulsory examination and certification of British shipmasters was sponsored and introduced by Fitzroy.<sup>9</sup> The plans of the Glasgow group were thwarted, however, by the setting up of the 1843 Select Committee on Shipwrecks and by Fitzroy's appointment to the Governorship of New Zealand. Fitzroy's Bill was shelved. Significantly, the Select Committee re-affirmed the need to examine into the proficiency of ships' officers and recommended that the examinations be carried out by local agencies.<sup>10</sup>

Collusion between a number of government departments, notably the Admiralty, the Board of Trade and the Foreign Office paved the way for the introduction of a voluntary scheme of examinations for masters and mates. The Board of Trade was entrusted with the supervision and control of the system; the views of the General Shipowners' Society were

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7. See Ralph E. Turner, James Silk Buckingham 1786-1855. A social biography (1934), pp.287-293.

8. Hansard 1837, XXXVIII, 1225.

9. Hansard 1842, LXV, 764. For details of the Bill, see Public Bills 1842, 6 Vict., III, 28 July 1842, pp.1-17.

10. S.C. (1843), p.iv.

not canvassed.<sup>11</sup> In essence, the voluntary programme was a pilot scheme to test the practicality of and response to shipmaster examinations. It also placated the pro-examination lobby.

More importantly, the background events surrounding the emergence of the voluntary scheme indicated that the leadership of the shipmaster examination campaign had shifted. A Foreign Office inquiry to British consuls about the general competency of British shipmasters underpinned and stimulated further action on the examination front.<sup>12</sup> The inquiry - the Murray Circular - has been described as the private initiative of James Murray, a junior clerk at the Foreign Office.<sup>13</sup> This study suggests that Murray may have been more of an instrument than an instigator of policy.

The Board of Trade's growing commitment to the cause of shipmaster examinations is traced and considered in the context of its developing role in shipping per se. It was the Board of Trade which pressed home the attack on the Navigation Laws in 1849 and introduced the 1850 Mercantile Marine Bill with its proposals for centralizing the administration of mercantile affairs and for the introduction of compulsory shipmaster examinations. Shipping interests compelled the Board to modify certain provisions relating to the control and operation of the examination system. Responsibility was divided between central and local, between public and private agencies; a classic Victorian compromise.<sup>14</sup>

The conclusion relates the shipmaster examination reform experience to contemporary developments in the field of professional

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11. London Gazette, 19 Aug. 1845, No. 20498, pp.2502-2505.
  12. Papers relating to the Commercial Marine of Great Britain, P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt.I, p.153.
  13. Wilde, p.158; Sir Hubert L. Smith, The Board of Trade (1928), p.102.
  14. Cf. Lubenow, p.180.

examinations and locates it within the context of nineteenth-century social and administrative reform.

One of the main attractions, and chief difficulties, in studying nineteenth century socio-political history lies in the abundance of written and printed records. The task becomes analogous to the dilemma confronting the artist before a blank canvas - what to leave out assumes almost as much importance as what to put in. The brief discussion of source material, like the thesis itself, must necessarily ignore, or appear to ignore, large areas of available sources. Sometimes, of course, the problem of what to leave out is solved for the researcher by the fact of records having been destroyed and fascination quickly turns to frustration. In the main, it is often possible to obtain at least some of the missing information by a diligent search elsewhere; occasionally there is no alternative but to enter the dangerous realm of conjecture.

The main sources used in this thesis include the Board of Trade papers at the Public Record Office, Parliamentary papers, the minute books and annual reports of the General Shipowners' Society and the minute books of the London Trinity House.

Four main classes of Board of Trade records were used :  
B.T.1 - in-letters to the Board; B.T.3 - copies of out-letters from the Board; B.T.4 - registers of letters sent to the Board and B.T.5 - minutes of Board meetings. The in-letters derive from a variety of sources and embrace a wide range of topics. They offer a useful insight into some of the problems surrounding the examination issue as perceived by shipping interests and government departments. Although the series is generally unclassified and, from 1845 in particular, greatly depleted, the foci of all letters sent to the Board can be drawn from the B.T.4 registers. Some of the missing information has been located in the records of other agencies.<sup>15</sup> In addition,

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15. E.g. Lloyd's Register of British and Foreign Shipping; Trinity Houses at Dundee, Hull, Leith, London and Newcastle.

The Times, the Shields Gazette, the Shipping Gazette and the Nautical Magazine occasionally published extracts from letters sent to the Board. The speeches in Parliament of the shipping lobby also serve to supplement the evidence available, as do the printed records of the evidence presented to Select Committees of both Houses.<sup>16</sup> The availability of Board of Trade interdepartmental memoranda is limited; the usual practice was to write appropriate comments on the covers of the files themselves. But as Roberts wryly observes:

'One frank confession of a frustrated administrator can illuminate more administrative history than a long formal report'.<sup>17</sup>

The out-letters of the Board of Trade are particularly valuable. Whilst many of them serve merely to affirm overt government policy on a number of issues, others are more illuminating. Some, for example, shed light on the range of problems encountered by local agencies in their attempts to establish a viable examining programme. Given that the Board was required frequently to advise on such matters, the out-letters reveal some of the doubts and tensions raised by the shipmaster examination issue within the Board itself. As such they not only provide insight into the nature and mechanics of the decision-making process but also into the stances adopted by a succession of Presidents towards the shipping interest generally and shipmaster examinations in particular.

The Board's business was conducted at twice-weekly meetings, attended by the President and Vice-President. Against a description of the correspondence received for discussion the President recorded the Board's decision. Where no action was to be taken, he wrote 'read'. These descriptions and minutes were copied into bound minute

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16. The shipping interest was a recognized Parliamentary group. Its chief spokesmen in the Commons were George F. Young, Alderman Thompson and Aaron Chapman, see Brown, p.175.

17. Roberts, p.340.

books which cover the period 1784 to 1839. From July 1839 onwards only rough drafts exist. The minutes tend to be somewhat impersonal and limited. Their main value is in confirming relevant dates and official decisions. Clearly, as Parris has pointed out, the President and Vice-President were so much involved in the activities of the Board that 'its decisions were in a real sense, their decisions'.<sup>18</sup>

Parliamentary papers constitute a basic documentary source. The Reports of the Select Committees of 1836 and 1843, appointed to inquire into the causes of British shipwrecks, for example, provide information about the aspirations and fears of the main factions in the examination debate. Parliamentary debates not only serve to expose the bitter rivalry which characterized the examination campaign but, in conjunction with Parliamentary journals, help to chart the progress of various Bills through the Parliamentary process. The numerous reports and returns called for by Select Committees and by the House illustrate vividly Victorian thoroughness and obsession with detail.

The minute books and annual reports of the General Shipowners' Society, at the London offices of the London General Shipowners' Society, enable some assessment to be made of the Society's response to the changes taking place within the shipping industry. Like most institutional records, however, they tend to be somewhat biased and myopic; internal tensions and conflicts are hidden from the outside world. The destruction of all letter-books and account-books makes it difficult to ascertain the nature and extent of the Society's membership. What becomes apparent is that the Society was essentially the London General Shipowners' Society masquerading under a different name.<sup>19</sup>

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18. Henry Parris, Government and the Railways in Nineteenth-Century Britain (1965), p.209.

19. For Chairmen of the General Shipowners' Society 1832/3 - 1851/2, see App. IV, p.323.

The records of the London Trinity House, as in other Trinity Houses, are comprehensive, detailed and readily accessible. Minute-books, letter-books, account-books and journals provide a treasury of invaluable references about the organization and general affairs of the House. The minute-books furnish much evidence about the problems encountered by the Board of Trade in its attempts to establish and develop a voluntary programme of shipmaster examinations. They also provide information about the role of the London Trinity House vis-a-vis the examination of naval personnel.

Extensive searching at the Glasgow and Clyde Shipowners' Association, the Strathclyde Port Authority, the Mitchell Library in Glasgow and the Strathclyde Regional Archives revealed no trace of the minute-books of the Glasgow Shipowners' Society. The main sources of information about the Society's activities were contemporary pamphlets, newspaper cuttings and correspondence found in the files of other agencies. The minute-books of the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce, housed in their Glasgow offices, are complete and fully indexed and make explicit reference to the campaigning efforts of the Glasgow Shipowners' Society. A search for the records of the Liverpool Shipowners' Society proved somewhat futile. No material relating to the Society's inception, development or participation in the examination debate was found at the Merseyside Port Authority, the Mersey County Museums and the Liverpool Record Office. The Society's activities have been traced through its dealings with the Board of Trade, the General Shipowners' Society and the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce. There is also a dearth of information relating to shipping societies of North-East England, especially in the ports of Sunderland, South Shields and Newcastle. Searches of the Tyne-Wear Archives and the records of local libraries and museums produced little of consequence. Again, relevant details have been gleaned from the files of other agencies and from the columns of contemporary newspapers, periodicals and directories.

Although the main focus of this thesis is directed towards the emergence of examinations for mercantile officers, it seemed apposite to consider developments in the general area of professional examinations. A scrutiny of Parliamentary papers generated valuable information about the testing of competence in the Indian and Home

Civil Service, the Royal Navy, the Army and in the legal, medical and teaching professions. Additionally, the papers provide evidence on which to base some opinions as to the nature of the social, economic and political context of the shipmaster examination debate.

The influence of examining practices obtaining in the Royal Navy and formerly in the East India Company on the shipmaster examination campaign was considerable. The records of both are extensive and detailed. Information relating to the development of examining procedures in the Royal Navy is available at the Admiralty Library, the Royal Naval Academy and the National Maritime Museum. The India Office Library, London, is the repository for the maritime records of the East India Company. There are ships' journals, log-books, letter-books, etc., as well as innumerable references to the qualifications and experience demanded of candidates.

Although the private papers of eminent Victorians were examined, comparatively little relevant information was found. Among the collections researched were the Bentham, Gladstone, Peel and Ripon Papers at the British Library, the Russell Papers at the Public Record Office, the Shaw-Lefevre Papers at the Palace of Westminster and the Dalhousie Papers at the Scottish Record Office. It was a matter of regret that the private papers of Poulett Thomson and Henry Labouchere were unavailable, especially in view of the latter's significant role in the examination debate.

It would be unwise to suggest that contemporary newspapers and periodic journals swayed public opinion or had any marked effect on government policy; nonetheless their value to the historian is considerable. Much use has been made in this study of the informed and compassionate campaign of The Times in following the debate on shipmaster examinations and mercantile reform. The vigorous support of the examination scheme by the Nautical Magazine has also been taken account of, as have the contributions of such journals as the Shipping Gazette, Lloyd's Register, the Economist, the Edinburgh Review, the Quarterly Review and the Westminster Review.

Books which have been used in the writing and researching of this study are listed in the bibliography. Two volumes, one contemporaneous with the events described, the other modern, have proved especially helpful. William S. Lindsay's History of Merchant Shipping and Ancient

Commerce (1874-6) is almost unique in that the author could write authoritatively on so many issues - he had been seaman, shipowner and member of Parliament. His compassion for the sufferings of seamen is real and understandable. David Roberts's The Victorian Origins of the British State (1960) is a model of balance, economy and wisdom. It exposes clearly the inadequacy of early nineteenth-century legislative machinery to resolve the many social and economic problems deriving from a society undergoing rapid and traumatic change and shows how government attempts to translate such pressures into political action were shaped by the conflicting views of the reformers and the defenders of the status quo.

CHAPTER I

Examinations and the Shipping Interest : a question of perception

Changes in the nature of commerce during the first half of the nineteenth century were reflected in and instigated by dominant trends in government policy towards industry and trade. In a rapidly industrializing society, growing demands were made upon government to act and legislate in the public and national interest. While the general principle of laissez faire continued to underpin the social and economic policies of government it was consistently defeated in practice.<sup>1</sup>

On the social front some of the intense humanitarian feeling previously generated by the horrors of negro slavery, rural pauperism, factory conditions and public health was increasingly directed towards improving the abominable conditions endured by passengers and seamen on British merchant ships. The regulation of the North Atlantic emigrant trade was a case in point.<sup>2</sup> Pressures for government intervention in the shipping industry came from other quarters and for other reasons. A rapidly expanding economy required that wider markets for manufactured goods had to be secured.<sup>3</sup> Commercial interests, anxious to exploit new technologies, urged government to facilitate the growth of industrial capitalism and trade. Ironically, some of the most aggressive free traders were officials at the Board

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1. Prouty, p.1.

2. For a detailed study of the problem, see Oliver MacDonagh, A Pattern of Government Growth 1800-1860. The Passenger Acts and their Enforcement (1961) ; also Wilde, pp 47-93.

3. Sydney G. Checkland, The Rise of Industrial Society in England 1815-1885 (1964), p.15.

of Trade.<sup>4</sup> Such economic liberalism was not endorsed by shipowning interests. The corollary of a free commerce was a free carrying trade.

To many British shipowners the proposals appeared to undermine the base upon which their prosperity had been founded. Concerned that their interests should not suffer they took collective action to consolidate their position. The emergence of the General Shipowners' Society reflected their attempt to mobilize the shipping community and safeguard its interests. What is of particular significance here is that shipowners generally perceived disadvantages in government moves to open and expand trade. This perception of disadvantage had a crucial effect on the way the Society came to interpret the interests of shipping, an interpretation which was to influence the nature and course of the subsequent shipmaster examination debate.

Thus, to appreciate the debate from the standpoint of the shipowners, it is necessary to locate it within the wider context of shipping. It seems apposite to proceed in two stages: first, to relate the shift in government commercial policy to the contemporary structure, organization and state of British shipping and to suggest why British shipowners might have been hostile to the change; secondly, by examining the motives and strategies of shipowners as a group to reach some conclusions about their probable stance on the examination issue. What evidence is there, for example, to show that the Society perceived itself as the legitimate agency for shipping affairs and to what extent was it conceived and developed as a sectional pressure group?

British shipping was a protected interest. For more than two hundred years the industry had sheltered under the protective umbrella

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4. Peter Mathias, The First Industrial Nation. An economic history of Britain 1700-1914 (1969), p.294.

of the Navigation Laws<sup>5</sup>. In essence, the Laws were designed to create and maintain a powerful British mercantile fleet and to prevent any other nation from acquiring too large a share of world trade<sup>6</sup>. To this end regulations were introduced to compel British merchants to use British ships for the carriage of their goods and stringent import controls were imposed on the ships of other nations. These restrictions led eventually to widespread retaliation by European powers and the United States<sup>7</sup>. Not until Huskisson introduced the 1823 Reciprocity of Duties Act was there any positive relaxation of the regulations.

When William Huskisson became President of the Board of Trade in 1823 he sought to translate and meet the new demands for free commercial intercourse between nations through two main channels: commercial relations and fiscal policy. The first emphasized the need for a more open, more flexible system of trading between Britain and other nations; the second, the removal or reduction of tariff duties<sup>8</sup>. The result was the introduction of the Reciprocity of Duties Act of 1823 which empowered the King in Council to extend to all countries willing to accept the principle of reciprocity, equality of

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5. Lindsay, III, p.54.

6. Hansard 1826, XV, 1145; speech of William Huskisson introducing debate on the Navigation Laws and the State of the Shipping Interest. See also First Report from the Select Committee appointed to inquire into the operation and policy of the Navigation Laws, P.P. 1847, X, p.60, Q.612; John MacGregor, Joint Secretary to the Board of Trade : William Smart, Economic Annals of the Nineteenth Century (1917), II, p.101.

7. First Report from the Lords' Select Committee appointed to inquire into the policy and operation of the Navigation Laws, P.P. 1847/8, XX, Pt. II, pp. 440,441,446, QQ.4722,4725,4773; Stafford Northcote, Legal Assistant to the Board of Trade. For a useful summary of the origin and subsequent modification of the Navigation Laws, see Northcote's evidence, pp.440-466, QQ.4716-4980.

8. Brown, pp. 2/3.

duties and drawbacks on imported goods. The legislation was extended two years later to allow foreign fleets to trade with the British colonies, provided that these nations had colonies themselves and were prepared to make reciprocal concessions to British shipping. In practice, these measures, although ostensibly substantial, were limited in that they only affected nations with large mercantile fleets.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, they were enough to provoke an immediate and hostile reaction from British shipowners.

Shipowner opposition to free trade was directed by the Committee of Shipowners in London. The passing of the 1823 Reciprocity of Duties Act, for example, prompted the Committee to petition the Board of Trade pointing out the ramifications of such a policy. It claimed that many branches of the British carrying trade were struggling for existence and warned that it was impossible for British shipping to compete successfully for trade against foreign fleets without the aid of preferential duties.<sup>10</sup> But it was not only the carrying trade which was fighting for survival. For several years the Committee itself had been struggling to remain solvent. By 1825 subscriptions had declined to such an extent that the organization was virtually defunct.<sup>11</sup>

To British shipowners free trade meant foreign competition for trade and unfair competition at that. Their complaints had some substance. To be eligible for protection under the Laws a vessel had to be British-built, British-owned and navigated by a British master. Furthermore, it was required that three-quarters of the crew should be British subjects. While these regulations safeguarded the supply and employment of British seamen and ships they also meant that British shipowners were debarred from finding their officers and men in the cheapest markets.

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9. Ibid., p.2.

10. Report of the London Committee of Shipowners, 11 Dec. 1823, p.6.

11. Leonard Harris, London General Shipowners' Society, 1811-1961 (1962), pp. 16/17.

Under a protective system of trading British shipowners might have been prepared to accept the restrictions but with the advent of free trade they found them less tolerable. The regulations put British shipowners at a disadvantage in relation to their competitors who were able to build, man and provision their vessels as they pleased.<sup>12</sup> This perception of disadvantage in terms of the financial burdens imposed by the Laws encouraged several owners to offset them by rigid economies in their operating and repair costs.<sup>13</sup> The Laws also worked to the detriment of British shipping in a more insidious way. Lindsay has pointed out that under the protection of the Laws, British shipowners found it

'less necessary to exert themselves to contend with the foreigner as keenly as, under other circumstances, they would surely have done.'<sup>14</sup>

Other factors adversely influencing the competitive position of British shipping included the regulations imposed by the classification societies, the method of tonnage measurement, marine insurance and the inadequacy of the provision made for the education and training of ships' officers.

The system of ship classification induced owners to have little regard for the permanency of their vessels. All new vessels, however, constructed, were registered in the first-class category for a specified period, usually between six and twelve years. Relegation to a lower category automatically reduced their value.<sup>15</sup> Purchasers of these older vessels, by virtue of their lower capital investment, were able to compete advantageously against the owners of newer ships

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12. S.C. (1833), p.412, Q.6881; John Astle, shipowner : p.446 Q.7383; Robert Anderson, shipowner : Rep., p.v.
  13. Hansard 1837, XXXVII, 174/5; James Buckingham : S.C. (1843), p.350, Q.5532; John Gladstone, shipowner : Papers relating to the Commercial Marine of Great Britain, P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt.I, p.167; Consul at Gottenburgh.
  14. Lindsay, III, p.28; for similar comment, see Third Report from the Select Committee on the Navigation Laws, P.P. 1847, X, p.266, Q.3153; Robert V. Swaine, merchant at Hamburg.
  15. For origin and development of the registry system, see Annals of Lloyd's Register (1884), pp.1-64; S.C. (1836), pp.156-179, QQ.2566-2827; Nathaniel Symonds, Secretary to Lloyd's Register of British and Foreign Shipping.

thereby depressing freight charges and profits. To contend with such competition owners sought other means of maintaining their profits. In many instances this took the form of excessive loading and the insecure storage of cargo.<sup>16</sup>

Ship design and performance were influenced by the method of tonnage measurement. The duties and taxes levied upon a vessel were based on its tonnage, the measurement of which was related to the ship's length and breadth - its depth being totally disregarded. In consequence ships were built to 'carry much and measure little', design criteria not conducive to safe and efficient sailing performance.<sup>17</sup>

The system of marine insurance did little to cause shipowners to attend to the safe operation of their vessels. Though negligent owners were liable to increased premiums, they were able to recover the greater part of any losses incurred by shipwreck or accident. Since marine insurance transferred the burden of shipping loss from the shipowner, the merchant and the manufacturer to the consumer, shipping interests were virtually in a no-loss situation.<sup>18</sup> But there were other, and more substantial, grounds for doubting the efficacy of British shipping.

Unlike maritime practice in other countries Britain had no code of laws regulating the conduct and competency of its officers. There was, however, a somewhat tenuous correlation between the deployment of incompetent officers and the nature of the shipowning enterprise. Most of the chartered shipping companies paid a great deal of attention to the selection and training of their officers. Foremost

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16. S.C. (1836), Rep., p.v. The Report welcomed the formation of a new association, established 1834, entitled 'Lloyd's Register Society for British and Foreign Shipping.' p.vii.
17. S.C. (1836), p.82, QQ.1206-1216; Robert Brindley, naval architect and shipping surveyor : Rep., p.vi.
18. S.C. (1836), p.20, QQ.263/4; James Ballingall, shipping manager and surveyor : p.67, Q.1002; Lieut. James Forrest, R.N. : Rep., p.vii: Hansard 1837, XXXVII, 171/2; James Buckingham.

among such companies was the East India Company.<sup>19</sup> Its officers wore distinctive uniforms and carried swords. When the commander of an Indiaman landed at any of the Company's settlements, he was greeted with a thirteen gun salute.<sup>20</sup>

The Company enjoyed a reputation for reliable, efficient and disciplined service.<sup>21</sup> In a letter to the Board of Trade in October 1849, James Melvill, Secretary to the Company, explained the bases of such esteem:

'The Commanders and Officers were men of education and respectability, brought up from youth in the Service, they were subjected to a strict examination before a competent Committee previously to them obtaining the rank of 4th Mate; and their promotion from grade to grade was dependent upon their previous servitude, good conduct and ascertained qualifications ... '.

Midshipmen not engaged in shipboard duties were expected to attend classes in navigational theory each morning under the auspices of the commander or other officers.<sup>23</sup> Each midshipman was required to keep a daily journal which had to be made available for inspection at the end of every voyage. Promotion to mate was by examination, entry being contingent upon the satisfying of criteria relating to age, experience and navigational competence.<sup>24</sup> All examinations were

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19. See Rudolph Robert, Chartered Companies and their role in the development of overseas trade (1969), esp. pp.65-93; R.J. Cornwall-Jones, The British Merchant Service (1898), pp.64-76.
  20. Evan Cotton and Charles Fawcett (ed.), East Indiamen. The East India Company's Maritime Service (1949), p.21.
  21. Cornwall-Jones, Merchant Service, p.75; Edwin C. Millington, Seamen in the Making (1935), pp.90/1.
  22. I.O.R. Mar. 1849, Home Misc., XLIV, 3428; see also evidence of George Coleman, S.C. (1836), p.48, Q.702.
  23. B.T. 1/475, 2951.
  24. See rejection of James Falconer for position of 4th Mate, I.O.R. Mar. 1810-33, 644, p.6. For details of the Company's regulations relating to the appointment of commanders and officers to its own ships, see App. V, pp. 324/5.

internal; those for 4th mate were carried out by the Company's master attendant and his assistant in the presence of the clerk to the Committee of Shipping; examinations for stations above 4th mate were conducted by three or more members of the Committee.<sup>25</sup>

The loss of a company ship was followed by a searching inquiry in order to determine the cause, blame, and redress. On 3 February 1822 one of the Company's ships, 'Thames', was stranded off Eastbourne. The ensuing inquiry found the Commander and the Chief and Second Mates guilty of negligence. They were ordered to be 'severely censured and admonished'; they were also demoted. In the case of the Commander the appointment to any future command was made dependent upon a satisfactory re-examination and report.<sup>26</sup> The maritime service of the Company was a corps d' elite and many regarded it as being superior to the Royal Navy.<sup>27</sup>

In the Royal Navy, the practice of examining formally into the professional competency of ships' officers began in the seventeenth century with the institution of the lieutenant's qualifying examination.<sup>28</sup> This was an internally-based test with senior naval staff as examiners. Subsequent progress along the commissioned rank - commander, captain, admiral - depended upon seniority, patronage and job availability.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, the examination for ship's master was entrusted to the Brethren of the London Trinity House, an autonomous pilotage authority established by Royal Charter in 1514.<sup>30</sup>

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25. I.O.R. Mar. 1787, 644, ff. 9,9b. See reference to Company's examinations, Hansard 1837, XXXVII, 173.
26. I.O.R. Mar. 1822, 644. For illustration of the Thames, see Plate I, frontispiece.
27. Cotton and Fawcett, East Indiamen, p.22.
28. Millington, Seamen in the Making, p.11; S.C. (1843), p.32, Q.379; Capt. James Dalzell.
29. Michael Lewis, The Navy in Transition : a social history 1814-1864 (1965), pp.72-95.
30. For origin and early history of the London Trinity House, see Joseph Cotton, Memoir on the Origin and Incorporation of the Trinity House of Deptford Strond (1818).

The master of a naval ship was its navigating officer, not its captain. Although a warranted-officer he was accorded the rank of lieutenant, 'junior to all lieutenants but taking precedence of Surgeons'.<sup>31</sup> Cotton recorded that the duty of examining masters in the Royal Navy was a voluntary and gratuitous service having evolved after the incorporation of the House.<sup>32</sup> Evidence obtains to suggest that the House was examining masters in the Royal Navy in the seventeenth century.<sup>33</sup> The House jealously guarded its authoritative position in navigational matters. When, for example, an Order in Council in 1805 stipulated that a naval representative should be present at the examination of masters or second masters, the House refused to continue its examining function. Such a regulation, it claimed, was 'derogatory to the honour and character' of the examining committee. The Order in Council was rescinded.<sup>34</sup>

All candidates had to provide proof of service and sobriety prior to the examination. The examination lasted between one and two hours and covered practical seamanship, pilotage and navigation. Successful candidates were awarded certificates endorsed by the Deputy-Master and four Elder Brethren of the House.<sup>35</sup> In subsequent years the examining role of the House vis-a-vis naval officers declined as the Admiralty's educational initiatives and policies came to fruition.<sup>36</sup>

The attention paid by the East India Company and the Royal Navy to the proficiency of their officers was in marked contrast to

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31. Lewis, The Navy in Transition, p.138.

32. Cotton, Memoir, p.51.

33. Thomas Golding, The Trinity House from Within (1929), p.82.

34. Hilary, P. Mead, Trinity House (1947), pp.88/9.

35. Ibid., p.90.

36. For an analysis of the Admiralty's attempts to resolve the problem of naval training in the nineteenth century, see Francis E. Sullivan, 'The Origin and Development of Education in the Royal Navy, 1702-1902' (Reading Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1975). See also instructions to London Trinity House relating to examinations, TH.Ct.Min. 1849, pp. 198/9.

practices obtaining in other areas of shipping.<sup>37</sup> To some extent this was to be expected given the range and diversity of British shipping enterprises. Few owners, or companies, would be able to afford to build or charter ships of the tonnage deployed by the East India Company. As the following table indicates, the overwhelming majority of ships in the United Kingdom were 300 tons and under; ships above 1200 tons would, with few exceptions, belong to, or be chartered by, the East India Company.<sup>38</sup>

TABLE I

U.K. Shipping, 1830 : size and structure

<u>Tonnage Range</u>	<u>Number of Ships</u>
50 tons and under	6,542
50 - 100	5,212
100 - 200	3,942
200 - 300	1,948
300 - 400	969
400 - 500	329
500 - 800	110
800 - 1000	15
1200 and above	43
Total	<u>19,110</u>

Source: Annals of Lloyd's Register (1884), p.55.

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37. Richard Green of Blackwall also enjoyed a high reputation for well built ships and 'highly trained master mariners', see Young, Early Victorian England, I, p.29. The Captain of a Blackwall frigate was considered to have reached the 'topmost pinnacle of his profession', Basil Lubbock, The Blackwall Frigates (1922), p.111. See also Economist, 3 June 1848, No.249, p.626.
38. Edward Blackmore, The British Mercantile Marine: A Short Historical Review (1897), p.133.

Although there was a tendency for the shipping industry to stratify into three mutually exclusive trading categories - coastal, Baltic and foreign-going - as the century progressed, many of the smaller shipping operators simply plied for trade where it was available.<sup>39</sup> Some shipowners lacked the expertise necessary to recruit competent officers, others were indifferent. The emergence of the trader-cum-shipowner exacerbated the problem of incompetent manning; ownership was sought primarily as a means of acquiring prestige within the local community.<sup>40</sup> Such shipping enterprises were frequently seen to be the source of much shipping distress. Life and property, it was claimed, were often entrusted to men without integrity or ability.<sup>41</sup>

In general, aspiring masters began their careers before the mast and served an apprenticeship of five to seven years.<sup>42</sup> Many of them went to sea at the age of twelve and in consequence had few opportunities to widen their education. The problem of their education and training was aggravated by the poverty of educational opportunities ashore. In any case, the very nature of the seafarer's life prevent him from taking advantage of the few opportunities existing.<sup>43</sup> Voyages commonly lasted for months on end, sometimes for years. Furthermore, some shipowners were suspicious of educated masters. Lindsay recounted the case of one shipowner telling him

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39. Papers relating to the Commercial Marine of Great Britain, P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt.I, p.169; Consul at Hammerfest (Norway).
40. S.C. (1836), p.22, Q.297; Henry Woodroffe, Secretary to the Seamen's Society at South Shields : S.C. (1843), p.35, Q.424; Capt. James Dalzell.
41. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt.I, p.224; Consul at Havana.
42. S.C. (1836), p.23, Q.314; Woodroffe : P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.200; Consul at Brest.
43. Lindsay, III, p.541 : S.C. (1836), p.215, Q.3357; Capt. Edward Brenton, R.N. : Lubbock claims that a 'Geordie captain had no education, frequently he could neither read nor write', see Young, Early Victorian England, I, p.388.

'that he never would have a "scholar" in command of any of his vessels, because education taught him how to make up false accounts and the art of cheating;... '44

Given the absence of any statutory regulations imposing minimum standards of competency and the indifference of many shipowners to the calibre of their officers, it might be surmised that few seafarers would be either able or willing to undertake programmes of nautical instruction. Those who chose to do so often turned to the private teachers of navigation to be found in many sea-port towns, or to the charitable mathematical and navigational schools.<sup>45</sup>

Notwithstanding such manifest deficiencies, the British Mercantile fleet in the second quarter of the nineteenth century was the largest in the world, as indicated by the following table.

TABLE II

Ships and Tonnage of the Commercial Marines  
of Europe and the United States, 1845/6

Country	Number of Ships	Total Tonnage
Great Britain	33,152	3,047,418
United States		2,158,602
France	13,835	589,517
Norway and Sweden	5,450	471,772
Holland	1,195	376,084
Prussia	835	222,094
Two Sicilies	9,174	213,198
Austria	6,199	208,551
Turkey	2,220	182,000
Sardinia	3,502	167,360
Denmark	3,036	153,408
Greece	3,069	147,558

Source: The Times, 10 Mar. 1845, p.6, col. 2; abridged from tonnage statistics from Austrian Lloyd's and Hunts (American) Merchants' Magazine.

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44. Lindsay, III, p.51.

45. Alston Kennerley, 'The Education of the Merchant Seaman in the Nineteenth Century' (Exeter Univ. M.A. thesis, 1978), pp.14/15. For a general survey of contemporary nautical literature available to seafarers, see pp. 162-174. For details of curriculum and organisation of Greenwich Navigational School, see S.C. (1843), p.241, QQ.3727-3735; Edward Riddle, headmaster.

But the statistics portray only part of the shipping scenario. The British mercantile fleet might have been the largest in the world; it was doubtful whether it was the most efficient. It was estimated that the total annual loss of property from foundering and shipwreck amounted to nearly £3,000,000, with an accompanying loss of life of almost 1000 passengers and crew.<sup>46</sup> Only a mercantile fleet so large could sustain such losses.<sup>47</sup>

Thus there are several grounds for supposing that British shipowners would be hostile towards the Government's new policy on commerce and trade. They would, for example, resent the increased competition for trade generated by the reciprocity treaties, especially in view of the restrictions imposed upon British shipowners in relation to the building and manning of their vessels. British shipping was patently ill-equipped in financial, organizational and operational terms to compete successfully for trade on the open market. It is difficult to imagine that the industry itself was unaware of the fact. In addition, there was the question of government intervention. Government could not afford to neglect an industry so vital to the nation's prosperity and defence. But government intervention in private industry was opposed to the general sentiments of the period. It was certainly against the sentiments of the shipping industry with its entrepreneurial and protected background. In short, government policy appeared to threaten the shipping status quo and was, therefore, likely to be strongly resisted by British shipping interests.

No matter how heterogeneous its composition, any group confronted with a threat to its survival tends to close ranks and take some degree of concerted action. So it was with the shipowners. On 10 April 1828 a meeting of London shipowners was

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46. S.C. (1836), p.iv.

47. Prouty, p.30.

convened to discuss the possibility of reviving the Committee of Shipowners in London or of creating a new society. It was agreed that their common interests would best be served by a general association of shipowners. Some shipowners, however, demanded an assurance that the new society, were it to be formed, would last. To this end, the Provisional Committee appointed to draw up a code of regulations was also instructed to find out

'how far reliance may be placed on such general concurrence and pecuniary support, as could alone render any association efficient ... and afford a reasonable expectation of securing its permanency'. 48

Thus, from the very outset the necessity of an adequately funded, nationally representative power base was recognized and its establishment actively promoted.

Shipowners concern about the ramifications of the Government's stance on mercantile affairs found expression in numerous petitions to the Board of Trade.<sup>49</sup> But the shipping interest was not alone in considering itself the victim of Huskisson's economic policies.<sup>50</sup> There were protests and complaints across a spectrum of industrial and commercial interests and over and above this general discontent was a growing agitation for Parliamentary reform. In the midst of such widespread unrest the Board of Trade consistently refused to concede the priority of any one interest. Sometimes, in fact, it did little more than acknowledge receipt of a complaint whilst at

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48. SS. Min. 1828, III, p.1.

49. B.T. 4/6 - 12.305a (London), 12.353 (Outports), 12.999 (Northern England), 13.493 (Sunderland), 13.503 (Liverpool), 13.536 (Glasgow). For focus and tenor of complaints lodged by shipping interests, see details of interview granted by the Board of Trade to a deputation on 23 Feb. 1830; B.T. 5/39, pp. 77-85.

50. Smart suggests that in 1829 alone, 180 distress petitions were presented to Parliament, Smart, Economic Annals, II, quoted by Brown, p.3/4. See also 'State of the Nation' debates Hansard 1830, XXIII, 391-430, 548-613, 624-673, 789-827.

other times it seemed disinclined even to do that. When George Lyall, Chairman of the moribund Committee of Shipowners in London, wrote to the Board in August 1828 seeking relief from some of the duties burdening the shipping industry, the Board did not reply to his letter until June of the following year.<sup>51</sup> Lyall was informed that the advantages which might accrue from a repeal of shipping duties could not justify 'so great a sacrifice of the Public Revenue'.<sup>52</sup>

Admittedly the Board was inundated with representations from shipping interests but it was also true, as the minute books indicate, that cases were sometimes dealt with en bloc.<sup>53</sup> It is worth noting that the shipping interest, as a protected interest, was the natural foe of the radical free traders within the Board of Trade. Unlike many other government departments, the officials of the Board of Trade were usually self-made men.<sup>54</sup> To many of them patronage and privilege were anathema and protection, an abhorrent anachronism. They were guided, if not governed, by the principles of Huskisson and inspired by the philosophies of Bentham and Ricardo.<sup>55</sup>

In their dealings with the Board of Trade and with Parliament, shipowners were often their own worst enemy. Their persistent claims for special attention and their tendency to become involved in related but peripheral issues alienated official and public opinion alike. George Richardson Porter, Joint-Secretary to the

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51. B.T. 4/6, 12-305a.

52. B.T. 5/38, p.206.

53. B.T. 5/38, pp. 217-219.

54. For biography of Poulett Thomson, President of the Board of Trade 1834-9, see G. Poulett Scrope, Memoir of the Life of the Right Hon. Charles Lord Sydenham (1843).

55. Brown, pp. 17/18. For a perceptive analysis of the free-trade sentiments pervading the Board of Trade, see Brown, pp.20-33.

Board, alleged that since 1815 no other class of persons with the possible exception of the landowners, had made 'such loud and continued complaints of distress' than British shipowners.<sup>56</sup>

A petition from the shipowners of Hull in 1830, for example, not only begged Parliament to rescue the shipping interest from the 'deepest and most deplorable distress' but questioned the efficacy of reciprocity treaties and the validity of shipping returns.<sup>57</sup>

The Board's President, John Charles Herries, refuting suggestions that the introduction of reciprocity had led to a decline in British tonnage, advised shipping interests that ministers were inclined to pay more attention to those parts of a petition focusing directly on shipping matters than those referring to foreign policy.<sup>58</sup>

The Times dismissed the claim of the shipowners that they were a special case:

'The cry has been, as is in everybody's recollection, that the shipping interest of England was suffering a rapid decay, and that such disastrous effect had been produced by Mr. Huskisson's measures for a reciprocal abolition of port and other charges on foreign shipping between England and other states. The first of the above assertions was proved on this occasion (as on former ones) to be a falsehood. The second of them, which pretends to mix the argumentative character with the affirmative, turns out to be a sheer fallacy'.<sup>59</sup>

Meanwhile, the Provisional Committee appointed to canvass support for a general association of shipowners found considerable

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56. George R. Porter, The Progress of the Nation (1836), Chapter IX, Sect. III, p.164. See also Alexander Brady, William Huskisson and Liberal Reform (1928), pp.138-141.

57. Hansard 1830, XXIII, 1215-1221; see critical response from The Times, 5 Apr. 1830, p.2, cols. 1/2. For other shipowner distress petitions to Parliament in March and April, see C.J. 1830, LXXXV, pp.139/40 (Maryport), p.140 (Whitby), p.178 (Scarborough), p.236 (Sunderland), p.265 (North Shields, Blyth, Hartley, South Shields), pp.383/4 (London).

58. Hansard 1830, XXIII, 1230.

59. The Times, 10 Apr. 1830, p.2, col. 6.

interest being shown in the plan. Several shipowner societies pledged financial support; the societies at North and South Shields, Sunderland, Hull, Glasgow, Bristol and Cork covenanted a total annual income of £350.<sup>60</sup> Surprisingly, given the background to the appeal, London shipowners displayed little enthusiasm for the venture, a reaction attributed by the Provisional Committee to the emergence of certain 'suspicions and jealousies' about the new organization.<sup>61</sup> Confronted by this disunity the Committee decided to defer further action until a more opportune moment. The proposal in the Whig Budget of 1831 to modify the duties on foreign and colonial timber was the catalyst for action.

In the House, Alderman Thompson, a leading member of the shipping lobby claimed that the proposal would wipe out the shipping interest.<sup>62</sup> Poulett Thomson, Vice-President of the Board of Trade dismissed such charges as exaggerated and inequitable. No section of the community, he argued, was entitled to have their interests considered exclusive to all others. He also pointed out that the shipping interest would gain much benefit from the Budget proposal to reduce the coal duty.<sup>63</sup> Alderman Thompson was not placated. Four days later, on 18 February 1831, he returned to the attack while occupying the chair at a specially convened meeting of shipping interests. Any increase in the duty on Canadian timber, he alleged, would be disastrous to the nation's shipping and colonial interests.<sup>64</sup> George F. Young, M.P., a vociferous and influential London shipowner, observed that while the reciprocity system was sound in principle, its success depended upon the

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60. SS. Min. 1831, III, p.10.

61. Ibid.

62. Hansard 1830/1, II, 494.

63. Ibid., 496-498.

64. The Times, 19 Feb. 1831, p.6, col.2.

absolute commitment of all parties.<sup>65</sup> The shipowners, the colonial timber interests and the Tory opposition combined forces to defeat the Government on the issue by forty-three votes.<sup>66</sup>

The shipowners alone had not secured victory in the timber debate - the Government had contributed to its own defeat by attempting to introduce radical measures at an inopportune time - but the success acted as a spur. In April 1831 the General Shipping and Colonial Committee, a group working on behalf of the shipping interests, decided to convene a general meeting of shipowners for 8 June 1831. The Provisional Committee was asked to submit a report to the meeting.

At the general meeting, re-arranged for 9 June 1831, Aaron Chapman, a London merchant, made it clear that the new society had a positive role to play in mercantile affairs:

'In every question connected with the shipping interest, it must be advisable that Government should have a body to whose sense and opinions at large they might refer.'<sup>67</sup>

The Provisional Committee's proposals for the organization and management of the new society were endorsed by the meeting. All affairs would be controlled by a central committee in London; this committee would consist of twelve members to be elected annually and include representatives from the outports. An annual subscription of £50 would entitle a port to one representative, £100 would permit two nominations while £200 would admit a maximum of three members to the central committee.<sup>68</sup>

The Committee's recommendations having been adopted, steps were taken to secure the co-operation of the outports, a prerequisite to

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65. Ibid., col.3.

66. Brown, p.49.

67. The Times, 10 June 1831, p.1, col.5.

68. For details of the Society's membership regulations, see App. VI, pp.326/7.

the formal establishment of the new society. An extended Provisional Committee was set up to pursue the matter. Letters canvassing support were despatched to the outports and to brokers, tradesmen and others connected with shipping. The letters pointed out that, although firm pledges of support had now been obtained from the London shipowners, the Committee could not proceed with its arrangements until the full level of support was known.<sup>69</sup>

On 16 October 1831 the Committee met to assess the response. Letters had been sent to sixty-four outports but only twenty-eight replies were received. Six of the outports were willing to subscribe a total annual amount of £227.2s.0d. Seven others expressed themselves favourable to the association but declined to subscribe, apart from a few individuals concerned with the trade who offered a total sum of £26.1s.0d. Fifteen were either indifferent or hostile to the proposal. Of the London shipping interests five hundred and thirty-six individuals had been approached : ninety-six promised to subscribe a total of £782.17s.0d. to the permanent fund and a further £256.4s.0d. by annual subscription; thirty-six were very favourable to the society's aims, some promising to become members; seventy-seven were favourable but not inclined to subscribe at that time; twenty-seven were against the formation of the society; three hundred and one did not reply.<sup>70</sup>

Satisfied by the extent of the promised financial support the Provisional Committee finalized details for the setting up of the new organization. At a general meeting of the subscribers on 13 December 1831 the General Shipowners' Society was formally established.<sup>71</sup>

Having endorsed the Committee's report, the general meeting turned its attention to the numerous resolutions drawn up for its consideration. George F. Young moved that, since every effort to

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69. SS. Min. 1831, III, pp. 19/20.

70. Ibid., p.23.

71. Ibid., p.37.

obtain protection and relief from the Legislature had proved abortive, an address should be sent to the Crown.<sup>72</sup> This prompted The Times to point out that the profits of all trades had declined in recent years. The newspaper warned that Parliament would never attempt to appease the shipping interest by creating a monopoly in its favour, observing sceptically that 'Toryism and monopoly are convertible terms.'<sup>73</sup>

During its first year, although primarily concerned with the maintenance of protection, the Society became increasingly involved in a wide range of activities. It investigated problems associated with pilotage, tonnage returns and ships' registry and was consulted by the Admiralty, Customs and Board of Trade on a variety of issues.<sup>74</sup>

Attempts made to win the Society's support or guidance for the promotion of nautical inventions and projects invariably failed. The Society considered that such matters were no part of its brief.<sup>75</sup> On the other hand, it showed considerable tenacity and resolution in pursuing matters thought to have a bearing on the general welfare of the shipping industry. The question of surgeon qualifications on board certain vessels provides an apt illustration of its influence and energy.

A cholera epidemic had led to increased demands for state intervention in the shipping industry to eradicate or at least improve the intolerable state of sanitation aboard many emigrant ships. On 28 March 1832 an Order in Council re-imposed those clauses of the 1803 Passenger Act which stipulated that every ship carrying more than fifty passengers to North America or the United States should have a qualified surgeon aboard. The surgeon should have

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72. Ibid., pp.41/2.

73. The Times, 15 Dec. 1831, p.5, cols. 1/2.

74. SS.Min. 1832, III, pp.79,82,87,92,118,120.

75. Ibid., pp. 72,80,87,103,118.

'passed his examination at Surgeon's Hall in London, or at the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh or Dublin, or before the Medical Faculty of the University of Glasgow.' 76

Shipowners engaged in the emigrant trade were quick to point out the difficulties inherent in the regulation. There was a marked scarcity of qualified surgeons willing to expose themselves to the twin hazards of an Atlantic crossing and a fully-laden emigrant vessel.<sup>77</sup> If each ship had to wait in port until a surgeon could be obtained, then sailing schedules would be disrupted and profits reduced. In April 1832 the Society drew the attention of the Board of Trade to the dilemma confronting shipowners and requested that the regulation relating to surgeons' qualifications be appropriately amended.<sup>78</sup> The Board replied that it was prepared to consider the matter but it required the Chairman of the Society to state his case in person or in a written submission indicating what grade of qualification he had in mind to substitute in the existing regulation.<sup>79</sup> The Society's Chairman, George Palmer, had an interview with Lord Auckland, President of the Board of Trade and the regulation was considerably modified.<sup>80</sup> The Society had not only won a concession from the Board but it had reinforced its claim to be the authoritative spokesman for the nation's shipowners. It was a situation that the Society seemed determined to exploit. Almost immediately, the Society recommended that surgeon eligibility should be extended to include those who had completed a bona fide apprenticeship to a practising apothecary.<sup>81</sup> The Board of Trade agreed. In a further letter to the Board the Society expressed the hope that when the cholera epidemic in the Metropolis had finally subsided, the remaining regulations would also be removed. Once again the Board gave way.<sup>82</sup>

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76. Ibid., p.80.

77. MacDonagh, Pattern of Government Growth, p.63.

78. SS. Min. 1832, III, p.80. See also B.T.4/7,242,251.

79. B.T.3/23, p.255.

80. SS. Min. 1832, III, p.84.

81. Ibid.

82. B.T. 3/23, p.262.

It was true that the question of surgeon qualifications was little more than a minor skirmish but the Society had shown that when the occasion demanded, it could prove both persistent and effective. In due course, however, this very quality of persistence was to become a bigoted obstinacy injurious to the Society and to the industry it was professing to represent.

Increasingly, the General Shipowners' Society recognised that its policy of political non-alignment was detrimental to its own interests often placing it on the periphery, rather than in the centre of affairs. Sensitive to the irony of its position, it attempted to restore its authority taking advantage of the Reform Bill of 1832. Under the Bill several of the maritime boroughs were given the franchise.<sup>83</sup> The Society saw a means of strengthening its influence in the shipping lobby without actually surrendering its political neutrality. Although its circulated address was explicitly designed to secure a stronger shipping lobby in the House, the Society emphasized that the document was politically impartial and sought only to maintain the 'interests of British Maritime Commerce'.<sup>84</sup>

The circular reiterated the need to safeguard and advance the cause of British shipping and advised the outports that their own prosperity was bound up with the general prosperity of marine affairs. The lack of suitable Parliamentary representation for the shipping interest was noted as a deficiency which had allowed 'continuous exposure to speculative experiment'.<sup>85</sup> Printed copies of the Society's address were circulated in London and distributed in the outports of England, Scotland and Ireland. The electors were urged to remember that it was in their power to realize for the shipping lobby 'a weight that must command respect and secure attention'.<sup>86</sup>

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83. Chris Cook and Brendan Keith, British Historical Facts 1830-1900 (1975), pp. 110/111.

84. SS. Rep. 1832, p.7.

85. SS. Min. 1832, III, p.130.

86. SS. Min. 1832, III, p.132. Supportive replies came from North and South Shields, Plymouth, Cowes, Hull, Portsmouth, Lancaster, Rye, Falmouth, Liverpool, Edinburgh and Glasgow. see, p.137.

The 1832 general election provided the Whigs with a substantial majority; it also strengthened the shipping lobby. Aaron Chapman, one of the Society's staunchest supporters was elected Conservative member for Whitby and Tynemouth.

Free trade again came under attack at the Society's general meeting in January 1833 when its First Annual Report was adopted. In a highly emotional speech the Society's Chairman, George Palmer, spoke of the depression obtaining among the shipowning community and warned members that the continuance of the Government's free-trade policy would lead to the destruction of their interests.<sup>87</sup> George F. Young endorsed Palmer's remarks and stressed the necessity of affording protection to British shipping.<sup>88</sup>

Although the Society's Report was similarly pessimistic about the consequences of the Government's commercial policy it seemed confident as to its own future. The grounds for such optimism stemmed in part from a number of successful negotiations it had undertaken on behalf of the shipping interest. Such developments led the Society to predict that an impartial consideration of its activities would not only justify its continued existence but

'induce such an extension of support  
as may hereafter enlarge the sphere  
of its utility, and secure its stability  
on the firm basis of general confidence'.<sup>89</sup>

Another development was that George F. Young was elected Chairman of the Society.

The pattern of activity of any pressure group is governed not just by the aims and resources of the group and the target to be attacked but also by the character of its leadership. With the ebullient Young at the helm, the Society did not change course but its activities were charged with a new dynamism. One of his first

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87. The Times, 24 Jan. 1833, p.3, col.6.

88. Ibid.

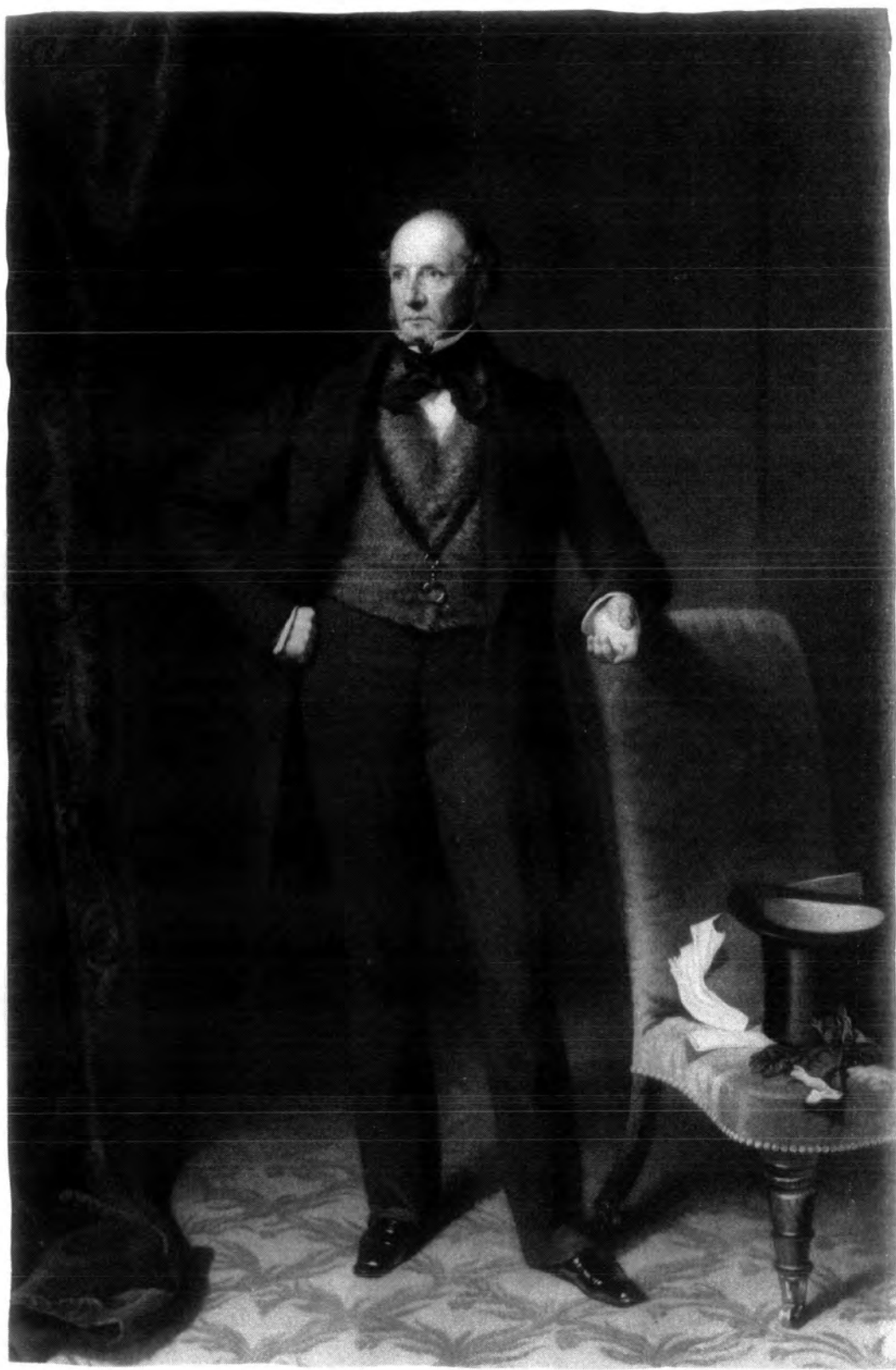
89. SS. Rep. 1832, p.1.

PLATE II

George Frederick Young, M.P.

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Acknowledgements to the National Maritime Museum, London



moves as Chairman was to press for a Select Committee to inquire into the state of British shipping. Letters were sent to the outports outlining the proposal and asking that their views on the subject be forwarded as a matter of urgency. The outports responded promptly and a sub-committee was formed to collate their reports.<sup>90</sup>

The necessity of urgent action was sharply emphasized when Lord Althorp's motion for the setting up of a Committee of Inquiry into the state of Agriculture, Trade and Manufactures was extended, unexpectedly, to embrace shipping. Althorp was only too well aware of the dismay his move would cause in the shipping industry; he suggested that if shipping interests found that insufficient attention was paid to their case there was nothing to prevent 'another Committee being appointed to inquire particularly into shipping affairs'.<sup>91</sup>

The Chancellor's attempts at conciliation did nothing to appease George F. Young who affirmed that as far as the shipping interest was concerned, the proposed inquiry was far from satisfactory.<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless Althorp's motion prevailed and a Committee was appointed to

'inquire into the present state of the  
Trade, Manufactures, and Shipping, of  
the United Kingdom, ... ' 93

The Society was forced to revise its strategy. It decided to petition the House of Commons on behalf of the shipowners of London and to ask the outports to submit details of their distress.<sup>94</sup> Among the numerous returns from the outports the contribution from Tynemouth received special attention. Henry Richmond, a local shipowner, had enclosed tables and statistics to confirm the distressed state of British shipping and to identify the underlying causes. Impressed by his evidence, the Society told him that were he to

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90. SS. Min. 1833, III, p.192.

91. Hansard 1833, XVII, 958.

92. Ibid., 959.

93. Ibid.

94. SS. Min. 1833, III, p.195.

publish the information, it would undertake to circulate it among the shipowners of London. After the tables had been printed and distributed, the Shipowners' Society of North Shields wrote to the General Shipowners' Society on 13 December 1934 and complained about the cost involved. They asked that they might receive recompense in the form of relief of two years' subscriptions. The General Shipowners' Society agreed to the request.<sup>95</sup>

Although the Society had expressed reservations about the objectives of the Select Committee of the House it could not complain about the inquiry itself. The Select Committee made a point of asking the Society for a list of persons competent and willing to present evidence. The Society circularized several of the outports and asked that the names of 'one or two intelligent individuals' of suitable experience be submitted either to their Parliamentary representative or direct to the Society.<sup>96</sup> When the Select Committee came to conduct its inquiry, nine days were devoted exclusively to the subject of shipping and twenty-five witnesses from the nation's outports gave evidence.

Though opinions sometimes varied as to the nature and extent of the shipping depression the majority of shipowner witnesses affirmed that it was severe and debilitating.<sup>97</sup> One witness, however, who had previously spoken of the 'very depressed' state of the shipping industry, conceded that the main cause of the diminishing value in shipping property lay in the unwillingness of capitalists to invest in shipping. They thought it unlikely to yield an adequate return.<sup>98</sup> One shipowner admitted that although shipping profits had been unsatisfactory, in recent times, he had managed to make a 5% return on his investments during the past year.<sup>99</sup> Predictably, many

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95. SS. Min. 1834, III, p.359.

96. Ibid., 202.

97. S.C. (1833), p.346, Q.5841; John Nickols, shipowner/broker; p.416, Q.6946, John Spence shipowner; p.434, Q.7251; William Richmond, shipowner: Cf. p.501, QQ.8132-8134, Thomas Hedley, shipowner.

98. S.C. (1833), p.341, Q.5764; William Woolcombe, shipbroker.

99. S.C. (1833), p.398, Q.6587; Henry Tanner.

owners blamed the distress on the changes in the navigation and commercial regulations. One owner blamed the decline entirely on a system

'which throws us into a competition with the ships of foreign nations that we are utterly unable to sustain, inasmuch as our wages and expenditure of every kind is double that which they are liable to ...' 100

The measures suggested by the shipowners for ensuring economic survival revolved around the need to remove restrictions or to extend protection to offset the restrictions. It was pointed out by one shipowner, however, that it would be difficult to deal with the situation by legislation because the complexion of the country's commercial policy had changed so much. Because of the reciprocity treaties there could be no return to the kind of protection the shipping industry had previously enjoyed. He suggested that some relief from distress might be obtained by excusing British ships from tonnage duty when entering foreign ports and by an extension of the bonding system.<sup>101</sup>

The shipping interest continued to lay evidence before the Select Committee to support their contention that their industry was in the throes of a major depression. Numerous statements showing the initial cost, current value and potential earnings of a variety of vessels were made available to the Committee; all of them purporting to show the marked decline in shipping profitability.<sup>102</sup> Great play was made of the advantages enjoyed by foreign fleets.

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100. S.C. (1833), p.434, Q.7253; Richmond: for similar complaints, see p.385, Q.6410; John Powles, shipowner : p.545, Q8985/6. Robert Roxby, shipowner.

101. S.C. (1833), p.466, QQ. 7588-7596; Edward Gibson, shipowner/shipbuilder.

102. S.C. (1833), p.347, QQ.5850-5854; Nickols : pp.396-398, QQ.6578-6587; Tanner; pp.429-433, QQ.7217-7234; Richmond : pp.451/2, QQ.7434-7454; Robert Anderson, shipowner : pp.487/8, QQ.7947-7952; John Shelley, shipowner. Cf. pp. 504/5, QQ.8204-8214; Hedley.

Many witnesses presented comparative analyses of the costs incurred in the building, equipping and navigating of British and foreign vessels.<sup>103</sup> Robert Roxby, for example, contrasted the expenses incurred and profits made by two ships, one British the other Prussian, on a three month voyage from Memel to Cork carrying identical cargoes, each ship being similarly insured. Roxby estimated that the profit on the voyage for the British shipowner was about one-sixth of the profit realized by the Prussian owner.<sup>104</sup>

There was undoubted gloom and despondency within the shipping industry and yet many shipowners continued to invest large amounts of capital. The shipowners argued that investment in shipping could not necessarily be taken as an indication that the capital was profitably invested. Although maritime commerce depended on continuing capital investment, the shipowner knew that some of his investments would never yield a profit. Often he had to face the prospect of long term losses. Investment was not a sign of present or imminent prosperity.<sup>105</sup>

Although a number of witnesses alluded to the large number of vessels for sale, it would seem that shipping was suffering not so much from a lack of employment as a lack of adequate returns. The reported increased tonnage of some ports seemed to conflict with the notion of a 'ruinous interminable depression' and invalidated the contention that shipping was unprofitable.<sup>106</sup> The increased tonnage of a port such as Sunderland was shown to be the result of an expanding export trade in coal.<sup>107</sup> The slight increase in tonnage at South Shields was accounted for by the failure to dispose

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103. S.C. (1833), p.364, QQ.6198 ; Robert Barry, shipowner - former shipbuilder : p.399, QQ.6611-6613; Tanner : p.546, QQ.8998-9000; Thomas Forrest, shipowner.

104. For breakdown of estimated accounts for the voyage, see App. VII, p. 328.

105. S.C. (1833), p.476, Q.7788; Thomas Young.

106. SS. Rep. 1833, p.5.

107. S.C. (1833), p.405, QQ. 6721/2; Tanner.

of vessels. The output from the building yards at South Shields had diminished considerably.<sup>108</sup>

When the Select Committee finally closed its hearings the General Shipowners' Society took stock of the situation. The Select Committee hearings had supplied the Society with the platform and the opportunities for which it had so long striven. Thus, there was an air of self-satisfaction about its Annual Report of 1833:

'never were opinions more triumphantly vindicated; never were assertions more unanswerably established, than are the opinions and assertions which have been from time to time advanced on the part of the recognised organs for conveying the sentiments of British Shipowners, by the concurrent spirit and bearing of the evidence. Many of those important questions which have been most vehemently contested, must now be considered as finally set at rest'.<sup>109</sup>

The Report also stressed the Society's increasing involvement in a wide range of activities of vital concern to the shipping interest; a commitment, it claimed, beyond the compass of individual effort.

The Society had engaged in many activities calculated to defend and expand the British shipping industry and yet had never formulated a precise definition of 'the shipping interest', even although that interest was its very raison d'etre. However, by its refusal to pursue certain proposals put forward by its own members, it did indicate what it did not consider to be shipping interests. It defended this policy by claiming that matters of secondary concern

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108. S.C. (1833), pp. 478/9, QQ.7815-7825; Young : See also increase at Newcastle, pp. 437/8, QQ.7294-7299; Richmond.

109. SS. Rep. 1833, p.5. For a critical appraisal of the Society's report, see Economist, 27 July 1844, No. 48, p.1034.

must always be subordinated to the central interests of the shipping community. Its singleminded determination betrayed its anxiety to establish itself as an effective Parliamentary lobby and to win recognition as the only official mouthpiece of the shipping interest. Perhaps such a narrow focus was essential to an organization with limited resources. The Society's ambitions required that it make its appeal to the country's highest authorities; thus it was more prudent to concentrate its limited fire power on selected targets rather than waste ammunition on random sniping. Its immediate targets were the duties resulting from a foreign policy dictated by the shift towards free trade. Since this was a national policy affecting the prosperity of shipowners in general, it was obviously more vital than those issues which touched upon a minority of the Society's members. A further indication of the Society's determination to become a significant force in shipping affairs was its practice of sending copies of its Annual Report to the Board of Trade and the Foreign Office.

While reminding government departments of its aims and presence, the Society also had to persuade its own members that it was their official spokesman. It had to begin by stamping its authority on its membership, resolutely suppressing sectional differences within the Society. The Society's claim to speak on behalf of the nation's shipowning communities does not always bear very close scrutiny. For example, the list of outport subscriptions suggests that its support nationally was far from being complete.

What then did the General Shipowners' Society mean when it spoke of promoting the welfare of the British shipping interest? A study of the Society's activities leads to the conclusion that representing the shipping interest implied the tenacious pursuit of any course of action likely to maintain or increase profitability for the shipowner. It might be argued that this conclusion is self-evident; a society of shipowners would obviously have as its first concern the welfare of its members. Nevertheless, the Society consistently claimed to be acting for the general good of British shipping. However, it is this over-riding concern with profitability

which must be borne in mind when considering matters relating to shipping during this period.

Profitability, of course, was a relative rather than an absolute matter, as the evidence laid before the 1833 Select Committee confirmed. Many shipowners admitted that shipping continued to be a profitable enterprise, even though for some owners profits were substantially reduced. It was also true that shipping, like many commercial enterprises of the time, was in the middle of a depression, although not as severe as some owners claimed. The rather melodramatic phrase, 'ruinous and distressed state', was exactly the kind of hyperbole frequently employed to draw attention to an injustice, real or imagined. There was little doubt too that many shipowners honestly believed that other capital investors were more favourably placed than themselves to benefit from the effects of government policy. The Society, however, was careful to avoid concerning itself only with the economic aspects of shipping discontent, deliberately and overtly engaging itself in issues of a more general and national character. All of its activities were bound up with the task of consolidating its authority as the only legitimate channel for handling all shipping affairs. In short, it was functioning as a clearly defined sectional pressure group.

This inextricable association between the shipowners and profitability, together with the shipowners' grumble that they were the Cinderellas of capitalism, permits an understanding of the Society's reluctance to become involved in the myriad of other problems of the industry. In particular, it makes it easier to anticipate the probable response of the General Shipowners' Society to any proposals which might be put forward for examining the competency of masters and mates in the merchant marine. It would be fair to suggest that such a proposition would be greeted with disfavour unless accompanied by a fair guarantee of increased profits. Bearing in mind the limited educational attainments of many shipowners, it would also be reasonable to propose that they would be

more amenable to the idea of practical rather than theoretical tests of proficiency. Finally, in view of the shipowners' reluctance to accept interference in the industry, it seems valid to surmise that the source of any such proposals would be subject to the most searching scrutiny.

The conflict between the shipping interest and the Government had arisen out of the Government's decision to expand trade by reducing protection. It seems reasonable to suppose that government would be unwilling to exacerbate matters by a direct intervention in the shipmaster competency debate. The Government dare not act. Equally, it could not act. The British merchant marine was administered by nine government departments but no one department had absolute authority for the direction and supervision of mercantile policy.<sup>110</sup> Until it was possible to constitute such authority, there could be no effective system of shipmaster examinations. But if the Government could not risk further antagonizing the shipping interest, neither could it afford to ignore it. The shipping community contributed in large measure to the nation's prosperity and was instrumental in helping to safeguard it from foreign aggression. In the latter context, it is worth noting that the mercantile marine provided many recruits, voluntary and otherwise, for the Royal Navy.<sup>111</sup> Government was unwilling to intervene and yet there were precedents for intervention. In line with its commitment to secure public safety and welfare it had imposed certain regulations in the passenger trade. The question of safety, in all its aspects, and in particular the safety of emigrant vessels, was a vital element in the shipmaster competency debate.

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110. Papers relating to the Commercial Marine of Great Britain, P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.154; letter from James Murray to Viscount Canning. But in practice two departments, the Admiralty and the Board of Trade, were primarily concerned with the administration of mercantile affairs, see Report from the Select Committee on Miscellaneous Expenditure, P.P. 1847/8, XVIII, Pt. I, p.429, Q.5626; Henry Labouchere, President of the Board of Trade.

111. 5 & 6 Will. IV, c.19. For discussion of the relationships obtaining between the two services, see Christopher Lloyd, The British Seaman 1200-1860 : a social survey (1968), pp.124-149.

It would seem, however, that in spite of the compelling arguments for state interference, the Government would have to wait, or would choose to wait, until the political climate was more favourable. Government was under pressure from a variety of separate but frequently inter-related forces:

'Parliamentary reform, free trade, and dissent provided the main "cores" to early Victorian pressure group activity, the amount of overspill in men and ideology was substantial'.<sup>112</sup>

In addition, the central agencies of British government were not only small by continental standards but were patently ill-equipped to handle the 'massive social, economic, and demographic changes' emerging to threaten the stability and political security of the country. As Roberts suggests, the central system of administration did little except to 'administer justice, collect taxes and defend the realm'. To many of the population government appeared to be large, extravagant, interfering and all-powerful. And yet, despite its judicial and administrative authority, central government displayed a marked reluctance to intervene to improve the lot of its citizens or to supervise those agencies prepared to do so.

Thus, progress in the shipmaster debate would have to be achieved in the main by consensus and not by coercion. Timing would be a critical factor. Time would allow the shipowners to set their own house in order and perhaps obviate the need for intervention. If this strategy failed, then time would allow government itself to complete its programme of liberating trade from the shackles of protection and centralizing its own administrative

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112. Patricia Hollis (ed.), Pressure from Without in Early Victorian England (1974), p.12.

113. Lubenow, p.15.

114. Roberts, p.13.

machinery. The realities of the situation demanded action but they also dictated caution. Caution, therefore, would become the hallmark of the Government's approach to the whole issue of shipmaster examinations.

At this juncture it would seem that the prospect of an agreed settlement between the Government and shipping interests on the free trade issue was remote. To many shipowners the future of British shipping must have appeared bleak and confused. Normal trade was difficult to secure, freight rates were declining, and ships depreciating in value. Experimental developments in steam propulsion added to the uncertainty. Under these circumstances it could be anticipated that the preference of many shipowners would be to retrench and defend the status quo. What is less disputable is that the tensions generated by the issues of free trade and of shipwreck would not be easily defused.

## CHAPTER II

### Shipwreck, Shipmaster Competency and Examinations : an emerging response

By 1836 the issue of British shipwrecks was giving rise to some concern at the national level, a concern exemplified by the appointment on 14 June 1836 of a Select Committee to

'inquire into the Causes of the increased Number of Shipwrecks, with a view to ascertain whether such improvements might not be made in the Construction, Equipment and Navigation of Merchant Vessels, as would greatly diminish the annual Loss of Life and Property at Sea,...'<sup>1</sup>

Although the issues of shipmaster competency and examinations were not mentioned in the Committee's terms of reference, the focus on navigational expertise suggested that such questions would be considered.

Scant attention had been paid to the subject of shipmaster competency by the 1833 Select Committee on Manufactures, Commerce and Shipping.<sup>2</sup> The implicit inclusion of such matters in 1836 reflected the successful efforts of a number of individuals and groups in the years between to secure legislative support for measures aimed at reducing the high level of British shipwrecks. Canvassing for reform was isolated and spasmodic. The participants in the shipwreck and competency debate were in the main embryonic pressure groups lacking the necessary organization, unity and support to harness effectively the ideological and emotional energies generated by the prevailing shipping losses. Only later did more clearly identifiable interests and lobbies emerge.

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1. S.C. (1836), p.iii.

2. S.C. (1833).

The evidence presented to the 1833 Select Committee on the competency of British shipmasters was limited but revealing. One shipowner witness claimed that British shipmasters were superior to all others in the art of navigation despite having 'retrograded in emolument and conduct'. He pointed out, however, that although French officers in the Northern States were subjected to a rigorous examination into their qualifications and navigational skills and were better 'theoretical navigators', they were 'not so practical seamen'.<sup>3</sup> Another witness acknowledged the greater sobriety of foreign shipmasters but asserted that English captains were superior in the handling, discharging and navigation of their vessels.<sup>4</sup> Observations of this nature suggest that some shipowners might tend to translate professional competency primarily in terms of practically based seamanship skills and disciplined behaviour. Shipowner perceptions of shipmaster competency related to and were influenced by the nature of their trade. The navigational skills required for a foreign-going command would generally be of a higher order than those demanded in the coastal trade. In terms of seamanship skills, however, the positions could be reversed. Coasting was more dangerous than long open-sea voyages. It was land that frequently posed the greatest threat to ships - tides, adverse winds and storms drove them upon it.

Despite such assurances as to the proficiency of British shipmasters, the increasing loss of life and property at sea stimulated demands from a number of sources for an effective method of assessing their competency for office.

The Nautical Magazine led the way. Since its inception in

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3. S.C. (1833), p.410, QQ.6845/6; John Astle.

4. S.C. (1833), p.507, QQ.8262-8265; Thomas Hedley, shipowner : see also p.226, QQ. 3611/2 ; Robert Gray, merchant/shipowner. For regulations governing the appointment of masters in the French Commercial Marine, see App. VIII, pp. 329/331.

1832 the Magazine had published a monthly register of shipwreck statistics and had repeatedly drawn attention to the inefficiency of British shipping. The loss of the 'Hibernia' in 1833, when 153 passengers and crew lost their lives, provided the platform for an attack upon the general incompetency of British shipmasters. Noting that a consular despatch had attributed the loss to a 'culpable negligence' on the part of the ship's officers, the Magazine urged merchant captains to exercise care and vigilance to prevent a recurrence. 'Surely', it argued,

'our shipmasters don't need an act of parliament, in order to oblige them to take care of themselves and their ships?'<sup>6</sup>

Shipmaster incompetency was brought to public attention by Captain Hyland at the annual dinner of the Royal Humane Society on 16 April 1834. A great number of masters and mates, he claimed, were

'entirely ignorant of the use of a sextant or chronometer, and many of them in their station, ... are nearly equally ignorant of seamanship'.<sup>7</sup>

Publication of his remarks in the Nautical Magazine led one subscriber to suggest that whilst British shipmasters were generally second to none in practical seamanship an 'unaccountable indifference pervades the mind of the navigator as to the safety of his crew'. Another contributor recommended that a board of control over shipping affairs should be established to ensure the seaworthiness of ships

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5. In the introduction to its first edition the Magazine emphasized that the safety of seamen would be its prime concern, see N.M. 1832, I, p.1. The Magazine reported that 404 British merchant vessels had been wrecked during 1832, see N.M. 1832, I, p.558.
  6. N.M. 1833, II, p.557. For other editorial comments and letters relating to the competency of British shipmasters, between 1833 and 1836, see N.M. 1834, III, p.448; N.M. 1835, IV, pp. 375/6, 586, 782; N.M. 1836, V, pp. 213/4, 414, 571, 745.
  7. N.M. 1834, III, p.310.

and the competency of masters and mates. One correspondent observed that whatever commendation might be accorded Captain Hyland for his humane and just remarks he would receive little praise from the shipping interest.<sup>8</sup>

The General Shipowners' Society had already been drawn into the shipmaster competency debate. Its minute book of 14 January 1834 acknowledged the receipt of letters

'from Mr. George Coleman dated 26th December and 13th January on the propriety of having captains and officers in the merchant service examined on a similar principle to that adopted in the Navy and East India Company's service prior to their appointment'.<sup>9</sup>

Coleman proposed that a marine board be set up under the control of the Admiralty to prepare and implement a carefully structured system of examinations for British merchant officers.<sup>10</sup> The Society set up a sub-committee to consider the proposals. Coleman was subsequently informed that although the Society recognized the importance of his plan, it did not 'perceive any satisfactory means of carrying it into practical effect'.<sup>11</sup> Such a stance was perhaps predictable. Given the Society's manifest distrust of intervention and its determination to be the sole arbiter on shipping matters, it was unlikely that moves to delegate control of a national system of shipmaster examinations to a government department would receive its support. But the Society

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8. Ibid., pp.407, 310. For other attempts to alert public opinion as to the plight of British seafarers, see Christopher Biden, Naval Discipline. Subordination contrasted with insubordination &c. (1830) ; Charles Lorimer, Letters to a young Master Mariner on some subjects connected with his calling (1834).
9. SS. Min. 1833, III, p.284.
10. Coleman was formerly an officer in the East India Company's service but was now an established teacher of navigation and nautical astronomy, see S.C. (1836), p.44, Q.656.
11. SS. Min. 1834, III, p.311; for further information about the correspondence on the subject between the Society and Coleman, see S.C. (1836), pp.55/6, QQ.774-779.

was not permitted to dismiss the matter. Renewed pressures came from a more authoritative source, Mr. James Buchanan, H.M. Consul at New York.

In November 1833 Buchanan wrote to the Society focusing upon the need for the certification and classification of ships' officers and explicitly linking shipping loss with inadequate and incompetent manning. He also urged that the supply of spirits be discontinued on board merchant ships asserting that vessels commanded by sober masters and mates 'rarely occasion any trouble as to their men'.<sup>12</sup> The Society acknowledged receipt of his letter the following February.<sup>13</sup> Buchanan had to wait several months to learn of the peremptory dismissal of his suggestions but unwilling to adopt a passive stance on the issue, addressed his concern elsewhere. In June 1834 he warned the Foreign Office about the apparent indifference of British shipping interests to the prevalence of shipwreck at Quebec and pointed out that unless measures were taken to regulate British shipping, American vessels would soon dominate the passenger trade. More specifically, he suggested that British shipowners should lead the way 'by employing competent persons'. To reinforce his argument he enclosed a cutting from a New York newspaper which attributed the majority of British shipwrecks to the appointment of incompetent commanders. The Foreign Office immediately sought the comments of the Board of Trade.<sup>14</sup> The Board's reply on 15 August 1834 suggested that it was not in the power of the Government, or of the Legislature to afford a remedy but that it should be left to the 'private interests of individuals'.<sup>15</sup>

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12. B.T. 1/306, 2393 ; Buchanan forwarded a copy of the letter to the Foreign Office who sent a copy to the Board of Trade.

13. Ibid.

14. B.T. 5/42, p.194.

15. B.T. 3/25, p.269.

In July 1834 Buchanan again wrote to the General Shipowners' Society reiterating the necessity for decisive action. American shipowners, he warned, were 'fully aware of the importance of the Passenger Trade'.<sup>16</sup> He also reiterated his view that the low state of British shipping was attributable not only to the condition of the vessels but to the 'manner in which they are conducted'.<sup>17</sup> The Society did not reply. In a further despatch to the Foreign Office on 1 August 1834 Buchanan stressed the need for the introduction of prompt and efficient measures to safeguard British shipping interests in the passenger trade and to elevate the character and professional standing of the mercantile marine. He again exposed the reluctance of British shipowners to become involved in the promotion of such issues and predicted that

'unless the strong arm of H.M. Government interposes to oblige the shipowners to adopt salutary regulations so as to secure the service of a more efficient class of Masters of Vessels, in vain will a classification of the vessels restore the character of our ships trading to this continent'.<sup>18</sup>

The Foreign Office wrote to the Board of Trade on 24 September 1834 enclosing copies of Buchanan's despatches.<sup>19</sup> The Board would not be drawn on the issue; action on the subject was 'reserved'.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, however, evidence accrues to suggest that the Board was exploring ways of securing a greater commitment on the part of British shipowners to the safe and efficient operation of their vessels. Written in pencil on the cover of the same minute document

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16. B.T. 1/306, 2499.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid. He also suggested that while the interests of the shipowners were kept 'constantly forward by men in Trade', the interests of the Empire afford them little anxiety.

19. B.T. 5/42, p.231.

20. Ibid.

was the comment:

'this seems a case in which the want of competition with foreign ships is much felt. Considering that it is more a question of security to life than of commercial profit, it might be held out to the Shipowners that American vessels will be allowed to carry our emigrants to Canada, unless given proof that British vessels will perform their duty better than they have done'.<sup>21</sup>

Clearly, the Board could not continue to disregard the concern displayed by such a powerful department of state as to the conditions obtaining on many British ships. Equally clearly, given the sensitive nature of the relationship between government and the shipping interest and the advisory nature of its own role within the fragmented administrative framework of mercantile affairs, the Board had little room for manoeuvre.

On 25 November 1834 Buchanan wrote to the General Shipowners' Society urging them to adopt some system of examining and classifying masters and mates relative to their competency for command. He was informed on 10 February 1835 that although the subject of his former communications to the Society had never been forgotten, the additional information now provided would 'forthwith come under their special consideration'.<sup>22</sup> Although the Society's explicit response to Buchanan's exhortations was not recorded in the Society's minute book it can be deduced from Buchanan's further letter to the Society on 9 April 1835.<sup>23</sup> The letter drew attention to the Society's admission that many of the evils affecting British shipping stemmed

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21. Ibid. See also B.T. 1/306, 2499.

22. SS. Min. 1835, III, p.381/2.

23. SS. Min. 1835, III, p.404.

from shipmaster incompetency and of its determination to follow the matter up. To the possible chagrin of the Society Buchanan published his letter in The Times. Buchanan recommended that courts, supported by the Legislature, should be appointed in each of the major ports to examine and classify masters, to evolve a fee structure for the examinations and to investigate all ship losses. In the latter context, all ships' officers involved in such an inquiry would be disallowed from taking up a command until cleared by the court. Each court would be comprised of retired shipmasters, shipowners or merchants approved by the Shipowners' Society and the Committee of Lloyds, and to have a president appointed by the Crown.<sup>24</sup> Similar sentiments and demands were being expressed in other areas, albeit in a somewhat less strident fashion.

Public opinion on the shipwreck issue was divided and confused. The general public blamed the shipowner for purchasing imperfectly built ships and being careless of their loss because of the protection afforded by marine insurance and accused the underwriter of dubious practices relating to the survey and insurance of ships. Shipmasters were denounced as being ignorant, careless and intemperate.<sup>25</sup> Although such allegations were principally confined to articles and correspondence in contemporary newspapers and journals, they found increasing expression between 1833 and 1836, in the form of Parliamentary petitions.<sup>26</sup>

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24. The Times, 3 June 1835, p.7, col. 3. For further details of Buchanan's campaigning efforts, see F.O. 5/294, 171 (1835); F.O. 5/302, 3, 44, 45, 71, 127 (1835); F.O. 5/308, 18, 59, 137 (1836).
25. Blackmore, British Mercantile Marine, p.58 ; Prouty, p.36.
26. The Times published shipwreck statistics and was not averse to demanding an investigation into the condition and loss of merchant vessels, see The Times, 10 Dec. 1835, p.2, col. 2, relating to the loss of the convict ship 'Neva'. The Edinburgh Review argued that all commanders and officers should undergo an examination into their professional competency before appointment to office, see Edinburgh Review (hereafter Ed.R.), 1834/5, LX, pp. 350 - 352.

However, although eighteen petitions were presented to Parliament in 1833 on the subject of British shipping, no explicit reference was made either to the problem of shipwreck or shipmaster competency. In general, the petitions were of a complaining and negative character; eleven of the petitions derived directly from shipowning interests pointing out the disastrous consequences government policies were having upon the shipping interest; one was a plea from the inhabitants of Harrington that an inquiry should be made into the distress of British shipowners; and one petition stemmed from the mariners of Newcastle and pleaded for a 'want of employment'.<sup>27</sup> The remaining petitions adopted a more positive and constructive line. The 'Officers and Sailors of the Commercial Navy of the Kingdom', for example, urged the House to consider whether 'some well digested, printed and generally circulated, code of laws for Merchant Shipping' should be established; the other petition, from 'Friends of the British Sea Service', urged Parliament to establish some general maritime code of laws for the regulation of the mercantile marine.<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, succeeding years witnessed a shift in the nature and focus of Parliamentary petitions from within and outside the shipping industry. Petitions presented on behalf of the seafaring community tended to place particular emphasis upon the need to ascertain the competency of masters and mates. In 1834 and in 1835, the seamen of South Shields drew attention to the lack of any inquiry made into the circumstances of ship loss and advocated the establishment of a nautical committee to inquire into the construction and provisioning of merchant vessels - and to examine

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27. C.J. 1833, LXXXVIII, p. 189 (Liverpool), p.363 (Fife), p.394 (Scarborough), p.404 (Borrowstones), p.412 (Grangemouth), p.412 (Kingston-upon-Hull), p.427 (Berwick-upon-Tweed), p.437 (Dartmouth), p.437 (Montrose), p.442 (Dundee), p.442 (Whitby), p.484 (Alloa), p.670 (London), p.717 (Newcastle); p.378 (Harrington); p.232 (Newcastle).

28. Ibid., pp. 555, 490.

into the 'abilities and conduct of the commanders and officers'.<sup>29</sup> The masters, mates and seamen of London, however, were more concerned to ensure that ships were adequately constructed and equipped and petitioned the House to

'pass an Act to prevent  
Merchant Vessels being sent  
to sea in an unfit state'.<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, petitions from the general public seemed content to express concern about the extent of shipping losses, leaving the remedy in the hands of government.<sup>31</sup> The citizens of Kirkcaldy, however, proposed that an Act should be passed requiring all new ships, prior to registration to be certified by government inspectors as to their 'proper construction, strength and sufficiency'.<sup>32</sup> Not surprisingly, given the nature of the emigrant trade, the majority of shipwreck petitions emanated from Scottish ports. Indeed, it was the agitation directed towards alleviating the sufferings endured by passengers and crew aboard emigrant vessels which forced government to intervene directly into the situation.<sup>33</sup>

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29. C.J. 1834, LXXXIX, p.129 ; C.J. 1835, XC, p.339.  
Other petitions presented in 1834 emphasized the need for the appointment of surveyors to superintend and report upon the construction of merchant ships, see C.J. 1834, LXXXIX, p.216 (Kirkcaldy), p.548 (Edinburgh).
30. C.J. 1835, XC, p.583.
31. Ibid., p.469 (Cupar), p.548 (Canongate near Edinburgh).  
Both petitions focused upon the loss of life and property peculiar to the emigrant trade.
32. Ibid., p.366. A petition from James Ballingall and the inhabitants of Leslie urged that an inquiry be made into the construction of merchant vessels and that an Act be passed enforcing improvements to be made conducive to the saving of life and public property, C.J. 1835, XC, p.492.
33. MacDonagh, Pattern of Government Growth, p.84; Kathleen A. Walpole, 'the Humanitarian Movement of the Early Nineteenth Century to Remedy Abuses on Emigrant Vessels to America', Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 1931, XIV, pp.197-224.

On 19 March 1835, Gladstone, Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, sought leave to bring in a Bill to repeal existing regulations relating to the carriage of passengers to the Continent and Islands of North America. On the grounds that the measure did not introduce any new principle but merely modified the provisions already obtaining he hoped that it would be unopposed, especially as 'humanity and good feeling' demanded legislative action on the subject.<sup>34</sup>

Observing that in 1831 emigration to 'the Canadas and the Islands' was 51,000 and that it embraced many of the poorest in the community, Gladstone urged that some attention should be afforded to their comforts. The conditions aboard many emigrant vessels were appalling. It was claimed by the inspecting physician at the port of Quebec that the

'harbour-master's boatmen had no difficulty, at the distance of a gun-shot, either when the wind was favourable or in a dead calm, in distinguishing by the odour alone a crowded emigrant ship'.<sup>35</sup>

It would seem that the persistent appeals and continued pressure for government intervention and confirmation of shipwreck statistics had been noted at the Board of Trade. During the course of the debate on emigrant vessels, Baring, the Board's President, while reaffirming the Board's reluctance to interfere in such matters, conceded that instances could arise where intervention might be necessary. Noting the recent shipwreck of seventeen emigrant vessels in which seven hundred persons had lost their lives, Baring urged the House to intercede on behalf of those who were so helpless. Such tragedies, he claimed, were the result of improvidence and mismanagement.<sup>36</sup> Such remarks clearly widened the parameters of the

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34. Hansard 1835, XXVI, 1235.

35. Report of the Earl of Durham on the Affairs of British North America, P.P. 1839, XVII, p.87.

36. Hansard 1835, XXVI, 1238.

emigrant issue to embrace the related problem of shipwreck. Baring supported his allegations by referring to the 1834 report of the chief emigrant agent at Quebec, Mr. A.C. Buchanan, son of H.M. Consul at New York. This report drew particular attention to the increasing loss of life and property in the emigrant trade and intimated that many of the losses stemmed from the intemperate conduct of mercantile personnel.<sup>37</sup>

On the 18th February 1835 a deputation from the General Shipowners' Society arrived at the Board of Trade ostensibly to discuss issues arising from the exclusion of British shipping from the northern ports of Spain.<sup>38</sup> At the meeting Baring took the opportunity to raise the matter of the pending Passenger Bill and expressed the hope that the Committee of the Shipowners' Society would assist in the completion of a measure so urgently required on both political and humanitarian grounds. He was informed that the Society had already responded to a request from Mr. Stanley, late Secretary for the Colonies, to convey to the Colonial Office 'the opinion of the Trade' on the proposed amendments to the Passenger Bill.<sup>39</sup>

It would seem that the Society was well on the way to its goal, that of being accepted as the only legitimate organization to represent shipowner opinion. In an attempt to consolidate its position the Society asked for an opportunity to read the draft of the amended Passenger Bill prior to its introduction in Parliament. Although the Colonial Office did not grant this particular request it had further discussions with the Society, as well as with the North American Colonial Association, about the proposed measures. After the Passenger Bill had been enacted in Parliament and had passed into law the Society reported that the new Act embodied, to

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37. MacDonagh, Pattern of Government Growth, p.84.

38. SS. Min. 1835, III, p.388. See also B.T. 5/42, p.348.

39. SS. Rep. 1834, p.6.

a considerable degree, their joint recommendations. Although careful to emphasize its humanitarianism and concern for the nation's welfare, the Society often conspicuously failed to disguise its underlying sentiments. Its Annual Report of 1835 expressed a hope that the Bill

'... will be found, in practice, to provide for the comfort of the poor Emigrant, without materially interfering with the interests of Shipping and Navigation'. 40

The campaign for government intervention into the shipwreck debate was boosted by a trenchant article in the Edinburgh Review in which the question of shipmaster competency came in for special attention. The Review took the line that if it was right for government to introduce pilotage regulations then it was equally proper for government to concern itself with other shipping matters where its 'judicious interference would be productive of even more advantage'. It maintained that the drift of government policy had allowed practices detrimental to British shipping to develop. In the light of improvements made in astronomical and navigational science, in the construction of chronometers and the accuracy of charts and in the erection of lighthouses and beacons, the Review queried the causes underlying the continuing high levels of shipwrecks. It conceded that certain losses were inevitable given the size and nature of the British mercantile fleet but discounted the possibility that such a hypothesis could account for the eight hundred ships lost in 1833. 'Three-fourths' of all shipwrecks,

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40. SS. Rep. 1835, p.4. The amended Bill passed into law (5 & 6 Will. IV, c.53) and imposed more stringent regulations as to the seaworthiness and provisioning of passenger vessels and related the number of passengers to the ship's tonnage and deck space. It also prohibited the carriage of liquor as part of a ship's cargo.

it argued, were

'ascribable to entirely different causes : - to the vicious customs and regulations under which the business of sea-insurance is conducted, the defective construction of ships resulting therefrom, and the incompetence of masters'.<sup>41</sup>

Observing that the Royal Navy and the East India Company obliged their officers to undergo examinations to determine their competence for office, the Review exhorted the Government to implement a similar process of certification for officers in the mercantile marine. The masters and mates of 'ordinary merchant ships', it asserted, were not subject to any specific training or regular examination and their selection and assessment left solely to the discretion of individual shipowners. In its attack on the 'ignorance and incapacity' of British shipmasters the Review suggested that nearly half the losses at sea' were attributable to their incompetency and carelessness.<sup>42</sup> Even if only a third of shipwreck losses could be so apportioned the Review pointed out that in 1833 alone shipmaster incompetency had been responsible for the loss of 266 vessels. Under these circumstances the Review asserted that such evidence was not only sufficient to justify the intervention of government but, more importantly, 'to make such interference a positive duty'.<sup>43</sup> Somewhat prophetically the Review advocated the establishment of Boards, in London and the other great sea-ports to supervise the mandatory examination and certification of masters of ships above a stipulated tonnage.<sup>44</sup>

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41. Ed.R. 1834/5, LX, p.340.

42. Ibid., p.351.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid., p.352; the author of the article was J.R. McCulloch, a Ricardian disciple and an influential economic adviser to the Whig Ministry, see McVey Napier Papers, Add. MSS. 34616, ff. 402,482. The Nautical Magazine printed an extract from the article and hoped that the 'Government will speedily take up this most important subject', see N.M. 1835, IV, pp.375/6.

Other agencies intensified the pressure for reform. The Royal Humane Society and the Royal National Institution for the Preservation of Life from Shipwreck made impassioned pleas for action from a humanitarian perspective. The insurance and classification societies made their point by publishing the grim statistics of shipwreck. In short, despite the official laissez faire sentiments of the day, government intervention was increasingly seen as being imperative and inescapable - but not by the shipping interest.

The shift in emphasis which the agitation for shipping reform had taken, focusing primarily on the safety and well-being of passengers and seamen, placed the General Shipowners' Society in a dilemma. Because of the depressing numbers of lives lost at sea, highlighted by the shipwreck statistics of emigrant vessels, the issue was not simply one of inefficiency but of basic humanity. The delicacy of the Society's position can be best appreciated by a recapitulation of the many positive recommendations for action.

Editorial and subscriber response in the Nautical Magazine and petitions to Parliament had frequently advocated the examination and certification of ships' officers as a means of curtailing shipping losses. The publication in The Times of the Society's reply to Consul Buchanan confirmed the Society's knowledge of the nature and extent of British shipwrecks and, importantly, linked the shipwreck problem with shipmaster incompetency. Comments in the Edinburgh Review had drawn attention to the existing examining practices of the Royal Navy and those previously followed by the East India Company. This meant that although the Society might claim that such practices would be difficult to implement in the mercantile marine, it could not argue that examinations were not viable per se.

The Society's response was non-committal. It acknowledged that the subject of shipmaster qualifications and certification had been repeatedly brought to its notice but claimed that the issue was surrounded by so many difficulties that it was 'unprepared to offer

any suggestions likely to lead to practical measures'<sup>45</sup> The reluctance of the Society to become embroiled in the shipmaster competency debate was to some extent predictable. Since its inception the Society had implicitly defined the interests of British shipping primarily in terms of the need to protect and maintain profits. The financial consequences of shipwreck were mitigated by marine insurance; the main concern of the Society was to maintain the status quo and to resist any extension of the free-trade system. This stance brought the Society into direct conflict with the officials at the Board of Trade.

When, for example, on 5 June 1834, the Society's Chairman, George F. Young, introduced a motion to repeal the Reciprocity of Duties Act, the ensuing debate was characterized by vehement personal attacks on both sides. Young claimed that the present Board lacked the intellect and integrity of the Huskisson Administration and had

'grasped at the mantle of the prophet,  
expecting to imbibe also his inspiration,  
but they had obtained only a worthless  
covering'.<sup>46</sup>

Young's general premise was that because of its lack of influence the shipping interest had been singularly harshly treated under the Government's economic and commercial policy. Government, he argued, should either legislate to protect shipping interests or remove all burdens to which they were liable.<sup>47</sup> Refuting Young's allegation and rejecting his recommendation, Poulett Thomson, President of the Board, referred to Young's propensity for introducing topics into a debate which had little relevance to the subject under discussion and suggested that

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45. SS. Rep. 1835, p.4.

46. Hansard 1834, XXIV, 187.

47. Ibid., 206.

'the hon. Gentleman had probably wandered into extraneous matter to conceal his want of accurate knowledge'.<sup>48</sup>

He dismissed Young's case for legislative action, making the point that any attempt to impose differential dues on foreign shipping would invite retaliatory action. Protective legislation outside the country's jurisdiction would not only be impossible but absurd.<sup>49</sup> Whilst he was prepared to accept that considerable distress existed within the shipping interest, he believed he could 'assign other causes for it than the passing of this Act'. He reminded the House that it had been the shipping interest who had opposed the relief offered to them on the timber issue.<sup>50</sup>

Not surprisingly, the change in the government at the close of 1834 was applauded by the shipping interest. At the annual general meeting of the General Shipowners' Society on 20 January 1835 a special point was made of explicitly welcoming the change and with it, the appointment of Alexander Baring as President of the Board of trade.<sup>51</sup> The Society's satisfaction was to be short-lived. On 8 April 1835 the Conservative Government was dissolved, Poulett Thomson returned to head the Board of Trade under the new Whig Ministry.<sup>52</sup>

The strained relationships obtaining between the Board and the shipping interest were again exacerbated by the question of the timber duties. Deacon Hume, Joint-Secretary to the Board, giving evidence to the 1835 Select Committee on Timber Duties referred to the shipping interest as those parties

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48. Ibid., 211.

49. Ibid., 216.

50. Ibid., 224.

51. The Times, 21 Jan. 1835, p.2, col.6.

52. Harold J. Hanham (ed.), Charles R. Dod, Electoral Facts 1832-1853 Impartially Stated (1972), p.207.

'who think it is desirable to neutralize all facilities of trade, and as nearly as they can, to turn commerce into a handy-cap race'.<sup>53</sup>

The Society claimed subsequently that the Select Committee had been unfairly constituted against shipping interests; George Young accused the Committee's Chairman, Poulett Thomson, of improper and impartial leadership.<sup>54</sup>

While the mutual antipathy between the Board of Trade and the General Shipowners' Society should not be exaggerated, there can be little doubt that it undermined the Society's hopes of gaining access to the decision-making processes within government. From a pressure group perspective it was clearly important for the Society to be in a position to influence shipping policy at the formulation stage. Such hopes seemed increasingly remote. The Society's indifferent stance on the shipmaster certification issue could, for example, jeopardize its claims to be consulted on the subject if the Government were subsequently to endorse the need for some form of licensing qualification for ships' officers in the British mercantile marine. And there was at least one campaigner determined to press government for such an endorsement - James Silk Buckingham, M.P.

Buckingham's zeal for mercantile reform reflected a personal and working knowledge of the conditions under which many British seafarers laboured. First as a seaman, then as a merchant captain he had seen at first-hand their exploitation and victimization.<sup>55</sup> His commitment to ameliorate the lot of the seamen led him to challenge the principle of impressment and, subsequently, to expose to a still mainly apathetic public, the scale and horror of shipwreck.

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53. Report from the Select Committee appointed to take into account the Duties on Timber. P.P. 1835, XIX, p.12,Q.29

54. SS. Rep. 1835, pp. 1/2.

55. Ralph E. Turner, James Silk Buckingham 1786-1855 pp.60-2; see also James Silk Buckingham, Autobiography of James Silk Buckingham (1855), I, p.329.

Between 1833 and 1835 he had conducted a powerful and persistent Parliamentary crusade against the manning of naval ships by impressment. As an ex-seafarer, he was aware of the need for an adequate and continuing supply of seamen for both the merchant and naval services but deprecated the iniquitous recruiting methods deployed. More specifically, he sought to provide education and protection for seamen engaged in the British mercantile marine and thereby ensure that no 'raw recruits or unskilled hands' would receive their initial training in a ship of war.<sup>56</sup> Such a humanitarian and liberal approach to impressment reflected Buckingham's conviction that forcible recruitment to the naval service could only be abolished by making the service socially and financially attractive. To this end he proposed the setting up of a classified registry of British seamen, compiled on the basis of age, experience and availability for naval service. The register would assure the Royal Navy of access to a body of men able and willing to enlist. It would, in effect, provide a naval reserve.

On 15 August 1833, Buckingham made a long and impassioned attack on impressment. He told the House that many seamen deserted ship and sought refuge in foreign fleets rather than be exposed to the vicissitudes and barbarism of the press-gang. Such defections, he pointed out, depleted the manpower resources of the Royal Navy and led to an inevitable deterioration in the quality, experience and disposition of naval and mercantile personnel.<sup>57</sup>

Sir James Graham, First Lord of the Admiralty, was not unsympathetic to the spirit of Buckingham's proposals but opposed them on the grounds that they would erode the Crown's prerogative.<sup>58</sup> Lest his opposition be construed as support for impressment, Graham urged the House to consider measures for modifying the prevailing system of naval recruitment. He would not, however, unreservedly

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56. Hansard 1833, XX, 662.

57. Ibid., 636-676.

58. Ibid., 677.

condemn past practices of naval enlistment. As a member of the Government such reluctance was predictable. Nevertheless he promised to consider the issue during the Parliamentary recess.<sup>59</sup>

In the light of this setback and hoping to gain wider support, Buckingham amended his original motion. He deleted explicit mention of the evils of impressment and instead asked the House to instigate an inquiry into the feasibility of naval manning in time of war without resort to forcible recruitment. The motion was narrowly defeated, 59 votes to 54.<sup>60</sup> Buckingham was undaunted. The narrow margin of defeat only encouraged him to renew his attack on impressment. On 4 March 1834 he proposed to the House that a Select Committee be appointed to inquire into the issue.<sup>61</sup> The motion received such widespread support that the Government was left with little choice but to intervene.

Responding on its behalf Graham sought leave to introduce a Bill amending the Laws concerning merchant seamen.<sup>62</sup> The Bill included the provision of a seamen's register and, indeed, largely embodied Buckingham's earlier proposals - with one notable exception. Reluctant to relinquish complete control of impressment the Government attempted instead to hold such powers in reserve. Buckingham refused to compromise on so vital an issue and pressed his motion to a decision. It was defeated 218 votes to 130, but it was only a defeat in kind.<sup>63</sup> The increasing demand for government to promote the interests of British seamen found expression in two Bills, one to establish a general register of seamen, the other to encourage voluntary enlistment in the Royal Navy.<sup>64</sup>

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59. Ibid., 680.

60. Ibid., 694.

61. Hansard 1834, XXI, 1063.

62. Ibid., 1088.

63. Ibid., 1112.

64. Graham introduced both Bills on 17 Mar. 1835, see Hansard 1835, XXVI, 1120-1126.

Although Buckingham tacitly accepted the non-interventionist stance of government in trading and commercial matters he was also persuaded that other and related issues demanded legislative attention. In the debate on impressment, for example, he argued that the safety of ships was a fit and proper subject for government concern and proposed that

'some of the valuable officers of his Majesty's navy now on half pay on shore, could not be more advantageously employed than as maritime surveyors at the out-ports to see that no merchant vessel left the harbour in an unsound state ...'.<sup>65</sup>

Such comments suggest that while Parliamentary response to shipwreck agitation had been muted, the support of a tenacious and vigorous campaigner had been secured.

During the early months of 1836 an increasing number of the petitions presented to Parliament on the subject of British shipwrecks focused upon the need to ascertain the proficiency of ships' officers prior to their appointment to office. On 17 February 1836, for example, a petition from the masters, mates and seamen of Kirkcaldy focused upon the need for the introduction of examinations

'similar to the practice for officers of the Royal Navy, and formerly for officers of the East India Company's naval service, for pilots and for many professions ashore'.<sup>66</sup>

A petition from the masters, mates and seamen of Dundee, presented by James Buckingham, recommended that an examination should be made into the qualifications of masters and mates 'hereafter to be

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65. Hansard 1833, XX, 663.

66. Reports on Public Petitions 1836, App. 46, p.27. See also C.J. 1836, XCI, p.45.

appointed and that they should be licensed for such offices accordingly.<sup>67</sup> In addition, both petitions stressed the need for an investigation to be made into the causes of every shipwreck and appropriate redress exacted.

Petitions from the general public on the shipwreck issue were similarly concerned about the general incapacity of ships and shipmasters. The heritors, burgesses and inhabitants of Falkland blamed the increasing loss of life and property at sea upon the

'insufficient manner in which this class of vessels are originally built; a system caused by the present mode of marine insurance, which is regulated not by the condition of the ship, but by its age; and by the unskilfulness of the masters and officers,...'.<sup>68</sup>

Interestingly, the petition from the shipowners, merchants and manufacturers of Aberdeen stressed the need for government to appoint officials to examine into the construction and equipment of merchant vessels but failed to broach the subject of shipmaster competency.<sup>69</sup>

It would be misleading to suggest that Parliament was inundated with shipwreck petitions between 1833 and 1836 but the fact remains that those that were presented reflected the increasing concern of interests - public, business and professional - about the mounting toll of life and property. Three demands predominated: first, that measures should be taken to control and certify the condition of ships; secondly, that a formal inquiry be instituted to ascertain the cause of every ship loss and, thirdly, that masters

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67. C.J. 1836, XCI, p.191. For other petitions from mercantile personnel, see Ibid., p.224 (Newcastle), p.228 (Leith), p.268 (South Shields), p.315 (North and South Shields and Newcastle).

68. Reports on Public Petitions 1836, App. 1444, pp.671/2. For a similar petition from the heritors, burgesses and inhabitants of Kirkcaldy and Dysart, see Ibid., App.177, p.91.

69. C.J. 1836, XCI, p.356.

and mates should be examined and licensed for office.

Shrewdly gauging the tide of concern and goodwill towards mercantile reform, Buckingham successfully moved that a Select Committee be set up to investigate the problem of shipwreck.<sup>70</sup> James Silk Buckingham was appointed Chairman of the Committee.

Buckingham's involvement in the question of examining masters and mates was thus an indirect one. An investigation into shipwrecks, at this juncture, could hardly avoid considerations of shipmaster competency, and of examinations, as a possible solution to the problem. Although the inspiration for his campaign was primarily humanitarian the general protest was really four-pronged: humanitarian, political, economic and moral.

The humanitarians were responding in an enlightened way to the harshness of life at sea. The political attack was an attempt to erode the advantaged position of the traditionally-protected shipping interest. From an economic standpoint, the pressure for reform came from the alarming realization that British merchant shipping was surrendering its supremacy to foreign merchant fleets. Finally, the moral indignation, as exemplified in the correspondence of Consul Buchanan and his son, was directed against the widespread intemperance aboard many British merchant ships, with all its dire consequences.

In each area of protest there was a degree of overlap. Buckingham was a Radical and a humanitarian but he was also a politician; thus he fully appreciated the necessity for an efficient and profitable marine. His zeal for reform, genuine though it was, lacked the evangelical fervour and single-mindedness of a man like Lord Ashley (later Lord Shaftesbury). Consul Buchanan was not only concerned about the effects of universal drunkenness but he was also anxious about the political and commercial consequences of an inefficient mercantile marine. The seafarers themselves, in

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70. 14 June 1836, see Votes and Proceedings of the House of Commons, XCI, No. 78, p.1219.

advocating examinations for masters and mates, might have foreseen not only the benefits of increased safety and conditions aboard ships but also the economic advantages which would accrue to themselves from an enhanced professional status. Teachers of navigation such as George Coleman cannot have been unmindful of the potential personal gain in any national examining procedure.

Notwithstanding the zeal and determination with which Buchanan, Buckingham and others pressed for shipping reform it is arguable whether their efforts alone would have won enough support for an official inquiry into shipwrecks. The agitation for reform came from a number of sources but it lacked co-ordination and direction. The demands for change carried little political weight. There was no public outcry about the high level of shipwrecks such as might have persuaded government to intervene directly into the issue. In any case, the social problems ashore were equally grim. The fact was that, in the context of the age, the hazards and conditions to which passengers and seamen were exposed were not exceptional. A government confronted with rural and urban poverty, overcrowded towns and cities, bad sanitation, bestial prisons and lunatic asylums, intolerable conditions in factories and mines, disease, drunkenness and crime, all on a vast and unprecedented scale, was unlikely to pay particular attention to the question of shipwrecks.<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless the proponents of reform had secured the appointment of a Select Committee of inquiry into the causes of shipwreck; an appointment which clearly threatened the status quo in British shipping. Although the Committee's appointment required the formal approval of government, such support did not commit government to implement its recommendations. However, there are reasons to suppose that the Government would have welcomed an investigation into the causes of shipping loss.

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71. For a recent study of the problems, policies and achievements of some of the social reformers of this period, see John Roach, Social Reform in England 1780-1880 (1978), esp. pp.89-150.

The problems facing government in the 1830's were mainly the consequences of the agrarian and industrial changes of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>72</sup> Government was not responsible for creating the enormous social problems which stemmed from the resulting changes in the size, distribution and economic functions of the population but the lack of appropriate government machinery to translate political intention into reality exacerbated the situation.<sup>73</sup> The process of making the historic transition from oligarchic rule to legislating democracy was not yet complete and there were few political thinkers who

'had a comprehensive theory of government and fewer a systematic awareness of the problems of public administration'.<sup>74</sup>

If, as many believed, the answer lay in greater centralization there were many more who found that remedy to be obnoxious. Even Bentham had entertained grave misgivings about central government in his earlier writings although his Constitutional Code - published fully in 1841, nine years after his death - proposed a comprehensive and detailed plan of centralization.<sup>75</sup> The reforms taking place in the poor law, factory legislation, public health and prisons and in other areas were in response to individual situations rather than the results of a coherent national policy.<sup>76</sup> The debate on shipwreck came into this category but government lacked the administrative machinery to deal effectively with the problem of marine reform; it also lacked information about the nature and extent of the problem.

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72. Oliver MacDonagh, Early Victorian Government 1830-1870 (1977), p.1.

73. Roach, Social Reform, p.97. See also Brown, pp.4/5.

74. Roberts, p.28. But see Prouty, pp.87/8.

75. Ibid., p.29.

76. Lubenow, pp.185/6. See also MacDonagh, Pattern of Government Growth, pp. 346/7. Cf. Parris, Government and the Railways, p.207.

Under these circumstances it could be anticipated that the Government would readily assent to the introduction of measures explicitly designed to expose some of the problems besetting the mercantile marine. An inquiry into shipwrecks could provide evidence to enable government evaluate the allegations made about the declining status and competitiveness of British shipping. It is also reasonable to assume that the Government would not have been averse to moves which might increase public awareness of the need for action and reform in the shipping industry, especially should it be forced to intervene directly into the issue. Finally, an investigation into shipwrecks could alert the shipping interest to the damaging economic and political consequences of its indifferent stance on the shipwreck and shipmaster examination issues and cause it to adopt a more positive and constructive position on the subject.

In summation, the events of the years 1833-36 were of considerable significance for the developing debate about competence and accountability in merchant shipping. While the proponents of shipping reform had not dramatically influenced contemporary opinion on the question of shipmaster competency and examinations, they had caused public and official opinion to translate shipping loss in terms other than that of ship construction. In its early stages the agitation for reform had lacked cohesion and organization but the dissent had alerted the shipping interest to the threat of opposition. Previously, the prime concern of the shipping interest had been to maintain the protection traditionally afforded by the Navigation Laws. The registers and minute books of the Board testified the extent to which shipping interests monitored developments on the economic and commercial front.<sup>77</sup> However, the pressure for reform from within and outside the shipping industry led shipowners to

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77. See B.T. 4/8, 1482, 1523, 1580, 1638, 2817, 2836, 2912; B.T. 5/42 pp. 257, 348; B.T. 5/43, pp. 105, 117.

review their collective attitudes and to revise their strategies. This in turn brought about the polarization and unification of opposing interests. Thus the real importance of the reforming campaigns of 1833-36 lay in their contribution to the formation of organized pressure groups which radically influenced the conduct and control of shipping affairs.

### CHAPTER III

#### The Examination Campaign and the Political Process : an exercise in containment

The 1836 Select Committee of Inquiry and the Parliamentary Bill to which it gave birth were landmarks in the movement to introduce examinations for British shipmasters and mates.<sup>1</sup> It was at this stage in the examination debate that Parliament and the shipping interest first displayed explicit concern for the arguments and demands which were subsequently to pervade the whole issue. Marshalled and directed by Buckingham, the protagonists for shipping reform sought frequently to translate the problem of shipwreck in terms of shipmaster incompetency. Significantly, they often advocated recourse to some form of examination as a means whereby shipmaster proficiency could be ascertained. Although opinions differed within the examination lobby as to the nature of the incompetency, little doubt obtained that the setting up of an examining process to determine competency demanded the intervention of the Legislature. The deliberations of the Select Committee indicate that the enthusiasm for such innovative proposals was not shared by all parties.

The debates surrounding the introduction and progress of Buckingham's Bill in Parliament are revealing on several counts. First, they serve to confirm the nature of the shipping interest's stance on the examination issue. Secondly, they allow some evaluation to be made of the Government's attitude towards legislative intervention in the shipping industry generally and in the examination debate in particular. Thirdly, they clarify the main areas of conflict between the main protagonists and, finally, they

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1. S.C. (1836).

illustrate how political interests can operate to contain innovation and change.

The Report of the Select Committee was issued on 15 August 1836.<sup>2</sup> Briefed to inquire into the increasing number of shipwrecks, it made recommendations for improving the construction, equipment and navigation of merchant vessels. Since so extensive a reference clearly encompasses many issues not directly concerned with shipmaster examinations, it is unnecessary to consider the full deliberations of the Committee.

It is, however, necessary to take account of the statistics on shipwrecks presented to and reported by the Committee. Drawing evidence from the records of Lloyds over two periods, shown each of three years, it was calculated that over the first period, 1816-1818, a total of 1114 vessels were recorded as being wrecked or stranded and a further 89 vessels missing or lost. The corresponding figures for the second period 1833-1835, were 1573 and 129. The table overleaf gives a more detailed breakdown of the losses, both in property and life.

The Committee conjectured that a realistic figure reflecting the extent of loss of life would not be less than one thousand persons annually, as not all shipwrecks were recorded at Lloyds.<sup>3</sup> In monetary terms it was estimated that the financial burden occasioned by shipwreck each year was £2,836,666.<sup>4</sup>

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2. C.J. 1836, XCI, p.810.

3. S.C. (1836), p.iv.

4. S.C. (1836), p.iii.

TABLE III

Extent of Loss of Property and Lives at Sea, 1816-1818 and 1833-1835

Number of Vessels Stranded or Wrecked.									
1816	.	.	.	343	1833	.	.	.	595
1817	.	.	.	362	1834	.	.	.	454
1818	.	.	.	<u>409</u>	1835	.	.	.	<u>524</u>
				<u>1,114</u>					<u>1,573</u>
Number of Vessels Missing or Lost.									
1816	.	.	.	19	1833	.	.	.	56
1817	.	.	.	40	1834	.	.	.	43
1818	.	.	.	<u>30</u>	1835	.	.	.	<u>30</u>
				<u>89</u>					<u>129</u>
Number of Vessels in each Year, of which the entire Crews were Drowned.									
1816	.	.	.	15	1833	.	.	.	38
1817	.	.	.	19	1834	.	.	.	24
1818	.	.	.	<u>15</u>	1835	.	.	.	<u>19</u>
				<u>49</u>					<u>81</u>
Number of Persons Drowned in each Year by Ships named.									
1816	.	.	.	945	1833	.	.	.	572
1817	.	.	.	499	1834	.	.	.	578
1818	.	.	.	<u>256</u>	1835	.	.	.	<u>564</u>
				<u>1,700</u>					<u>1,714</u>

Source : S.C. (1836), pp. iii, iv.

Although the shipwreck returns were criticized on the grounds of inaccuracy and interpretation they indicated an increasing and disturbing trend. In order to compare losses of ships and life at different periods of time it is not only necessary to know the actual amounts of loss during the respective periods but also the proportions of the total amount of property and life at risk these losses represent. This latter requirement demands data relating to the number and size of ships afloat, knowledge of how these ships were manned and the length and nature of their voyages.

Reservations about the validity of such data tended to cloud its significance but, by drawing attention to the scale of the shipwreck problem, it confirmed the need for positive and immediate action.<sup>5</sup>

The Committee conducted its analysis within ten main areas: the defective construction of ships; the inadequacy of ships' equipment; the imperfect state of repair of many vessels; the improper or excessive loading of cargo; the inappropriateness of ship design; the incompetency of masters and officers; the drunkenness of officers and men; the operation of marine insurance; the want of harbours of refuge; and the imperfection of charts.<sup>6</sup>

Of these areas only the category dealing with the incompetency of masters and officers is of prime importance to the examination debate. What is of particular interest is the apparent change of opinion since the 1833 Select Committee. At that time the assumption which prevailed was that masters and mates in the British merchant service were generally competent to perform their duties.<sup>7</sup> The shift in opinion suggests that the agitation for mercantile reform between 1833 - 1836 may have had a more subtle influence upon the attitudes of the public and committed interests than was immediately apparent.

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5. For criticism of shipwreck statistics, see Lindsay, III, pp.464-466 ; Henry Jeula, 'A Few Statistics relating to Shipping Casualties', Journal of the Statistical Society 1864, XXVII, p.222.

6. S.C. (1836), p.v.

7. See p. 47.

Although a variety of witnesses were examined by the 1836 Committee on the shipmaster competency issue, a consensus of opinion quickly emerged to suggest that many masters and mates in the British mercantile marine were patently incompetent for office.<sup>8</sup> Reference was frequently made to the extreme youth and inexperience of those appointed to a command. In one instance the master was a lad of fourteen years; in another, a former porter with minimal sea experience.<sup>9</sup> A case was quoted of a master of one ship who had been

'in a butcher shop only a few months back;  
neither the mate nor he can make out a  
common day's work in navigation'.<sup>10</sup>

In these circumstances it was not surprising that ships went astray. One witness told of how the assistance of a pilot had been sought by one captain to help determine whether the land he was 'standing to' was Seaham or Hartlepool.<sup>11</sup>

There was some confusion as to the nature of the alleged incompetency. Some witnesses attributed it to a lack of navigational expertise.<sup>12</sup> There were those who believed it reflected a want of proficiency both in seamanship and navigation.<sup>13</sup> But few

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8. S.C. (1836), p.63, Q.930; Lieut. Robert Wall : p.201, Q.3169; John Marshall, agent of the Emigration Committee : p.262, Q.3946; George Charlton, retired merchant captain : p.276, App. 4; extract of a letter from a passenger complaining to the Admiralty about the incompetency of a shipmaster.
  9. S.C. (1836), p.47, QQ.687-9; George Coleman, formerly an officer with the East India Company but now a teacher of navigation: p.68, Q.1031; Lieut. James Forrest, R.N.
  10. S.C. (1836), p.24, Q.336; Henry Woodroffe, Secretary to the Seamen's Society at South Shields.
  11. S.C. (1836), p.22, Q.304; Woodroffe.
  12. S.C. (1836), p.47, Q.681; Coleman : p.68, Q.1028; Forrest: p.111, Q.1725; Capt. James Couch, navy captain.
  13. S.C. (1836), p.212, Q.3315; Capt. Edward Brenton, R.N.: p.262, Q.3946; George Charlton, retired master mariner.

witnesses were unclear as to the consequences stemming from the incompetency. Many argued that shipmaster incompetency was a direct and frequent cause of shipwreck; several denounced it as being the chief cause of shipping loss.<sup>14</sup>

Not all witnesses were so critical. John Anderson, for example, one of the few witnesses drawn from the shipping interest, refuted suggestions that shipmaster incompetency had led directly to the loss of many ships. He conceded that some masters were more skilled than others but assured the Committee that although all British captains might not fully understand the principles of navigation, most of them would be competent to get home safely again if blown off course.<sup>15</sup>

The issues of shipmaster competency and examinations figured prominently in the Committee's deliberations. The frequency with which they did so bore witness not only to their relevance to the shipwreck debate but to the somewhat partial chairmanship on the part of Buckingham. Not only did he lead witnesses to consider such subjects but on occasions explicitly introduced them. The following examples serve to illustrate the point:

'Then seeing that in cases where examination takes place the result is increased safety to the vessels, and in cases where no such examination takes place losses are very frequent; would you recommend that a legislative enactment should be made, rendering the examination of officers and commanders compulsory previously to vessels sailing from the port?' 16

'Have you had an opportunity, experimentally and practically, to witness incompetency on the part of officers in command of ships, or do you know cases of losses clearly attributable to that cause?'<sup>17</sup>

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14. S.C. (1836), p.11, Q.111; Ballingall: p.99, Q.1570; Lorimer: pp.206/7, QQ.3234/5; Charles Purnell, dockmaster - p.68, Q.1026; Forrest: p.212, Q.3314; Brenton.
15. S.C. (1836), p.115, Q.1807
16. S.C. (1836), p.48, Q.705; Coleman.
17. S.C. (1836), p.63, Q.931; Wall.

' ... would it not be a wise regulation to have masters and mates examined previous to their being appointed to their stations?'<sup>18</sup>

'Do you think it desirable that officers and mates should undergo an examination by some board previous to their appointment?'<sup>19</sup>

The majority of witnesses responded positively to such prompting and readily supported the need for the introduction of some examining procedure to ensure that masters and mates were qualified for office. As Captain Edward Brenton, R.N., pointed out,

' ... you do not let a man practise as an apothecary without proof of his skill, and yet a man is suffered to go to sea in a ship without a proof that he put his ship about or work a common day's work'.<sup>20</sup>

Officer support for an examining and certification process tended to be argued in terms of their professional interest. One witness suggested that officers would feel 'great gratification' in proving themselves proficient in their chosen profession by the securing of 'authorized certificates'.<sup>21</sup> Another thought that captains and officers would undergo an examination because it would afford them protection against the employment of unqualified personnel.<sup>22</sup>

Some witnesses were more circumspect. Anderson raised doubts as to the validity of an examining process to ascertain shipmaster competency. Many captains in the coasting trade, he argued, were excellent seamen but because of their defective education would have 'great difficulty in giving reasons for their practice'.<sup>23</sup>

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18. S.C. (1836), p.115, Q.1801; Anderson

19. S.C. (1836), p.262, Q.3947; Charlton

20. S.C. (1836), p.215, Q.3360.

21. S.C. (1836), p.48, Q.707; Coleman

22. S.C. (1836), p.69, Q.1062; Forrest

23. S.C. (1836), p.115, Q.1802.

Arthur Willis, a Lloyds underwriter, suggested that many officers might be reluctant to submit themselves to the ordeal of an examination when their characters were known to be honourable and their fitness to command accepted.<sup>24</sup> Notwithstanding these reservations witness support for shipmaster examinations was enthusiastic and constructive.

Most of the proposals canvassed were concerned more with organizational matters than with content. The suggestions which won the greatest support were those which sought to establish a central examining board in London assisted by local boards at each of the principal outports.<sup>25</sup> George Coleman proposed the appointment of a central marine board in London to be responsible for the control of examinations both in navigation and seamanship and submitted a detailed paper in support.<sup>26</sup> James Ballingall contended that it was practical and desirable to have an examining board authorized to award licenses of competency, the retention of which being contingent upon satisfactory conduct and competency. He also suggested that the examinations be conducted along lines similar to those adopted in the Royal Navy, or at the Trinity House.<sup>27</sup> Such proposals reflected Ballingall's previous experience - he had served as an officer in both the mercantile and royal navies and had passed the examination for navigation master. Charles Lorimer, an insurance adjuster, saw the establishment of examining boards at the various outports as a means of improving the class of master mariners.<sup>28</sup> Prompted by Buckingham he accepted that the examinations should be made compulsory under law but questioned whether the setting up of a centralized system to prescribe rules for the

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24. S.C. (1836), p.230, Q.3615.

25. S.C. (1836), p.63, Q.938; Wall : p.93, QQ.1451-1460; Lorimer : p.230, Q.3607; Willis.

26. For details of his scheme, see App. IX ,pp. 332-336.

27. S.C. (1836), p.15, Q.184.

28. S.C. (1836), p.93, QQ.1450/1.

examination might not lead to a set form thereby enabling candidates to pass it by rote.<sup>29</sup>

Other witnesses, however, queried the viability of such proposals. Anderson, who had previously expressed personal doubts about the acceptability of the proposed examining system, confirmed that shipowners and others connected with shipping were not in favour of a board having the authority to examine ships' officers.<sup>30</sup> Similar misgivings were expressed by Willis. In his attempts to persuade Willis of the efficacy of examinations Buckingham alluded to the fact that surgeons had to pass an examination before being allowed to practise. Although Willis agreed that there could be little objection to the establishment of a board of examining officers he also noted that it would constitute a form of interference in that it could restrict shipowners choice as to the appointment of ships' officers. Consequently, he doubted whether shipowners would support such a measure and advised the Committee that there would be a 'strong feeling in their minds against it'.<sup>31</sup> Some of these doubts were shared by certain members of the Select Committee.

In general, Buckingham's partisan handling of witnesses on the examination issue did not evoke similar tactics from members of the shipping interest on the Committee. Indeed, they appeared genuinely concerned to establish the extent and nature of the shipmaster competency problem and to explore means - including examinations - of ameliorating it. They did not, however, endorse proposals for the establishment of compulsory centrally controlled examinations. Young took an aggressive and critical line, revealed in his questioning of certain witnesses:

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29. S.C. (1836), p.93, Q.1460.

30. S.C. (1836), p.116, QQ. 1827/8.

31. S.C. (1836), p.231, Q.3625.

'Would it not be attended with enormous difficulty and inconvenience to require men to come from all parts of the country to the metropolis to undergo that examination?'.<sup>32</sup>

'Therefore, raising the standard of quality among them generally, would have the natural effect of raising the remuneration they receive for their services?'.<sup>33</sup>

'Do not you think that such regulation might be carried into effect practically in such ships as you have described, without that inconvenience to commerce which might result from the general application of it?'.<sup>34</sup>

'Do you not think that there would be some liability to jobbing if much patronage were placed in the hands of Government, of lucrative appointments in all the seaports?'.<sup>35</sup>

To dispel accusations that shipowners had been guilty of procrastination in dealing with shipping losses and dilatory over the matter of shipmaster competency, Young manoeuvred Coleman into an admission that shipowner sentiment was well disposed to examinations. This Young achieved by referring to Coleman's correspondence with the General Shipowners' Society in 1834.<sup>36</sup> Young

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32. S.C. (1836), p.53, Q.760; to Coleman who had suggested the establishment of a central marine board in London.
33. S.C. (1836), p.94, Q.1475; to Lorimer who had earlier advocated the compulsory examination of ships' officers under the aegis of a central board in London.
34. S.C. (1836), p.128, Q.2057; to Anderson who had suggested that in the case of ships carrying passengers regulations for the examination of their masters and mates might be introduced.
35. S.C. (1836), p.146, Q.2366; to Thomas Adams, Secretary to the South Shields Coal Trade Mutual Insurance Association, who had endorsed the formation of a government appointed examining board.
36. S.C. (1836), pp. 54/55, QQ.773-779.

was well acquainted with the correspondence. At the time he had been Deputy Chairman of the Society and a member of the special committee established to consider Coleman's plan.<sup>37</sup>

Young also initiated discussion on the related issue of marine apprenticeship, a tack which allowed him to question the expediency of the examination proposals. He reminded the Committee that in the coastal trade it was customary for boys to go to sea between the ages of twelve and fifteen to make them good practical sailors. 'Would it not follow', he argued, that if such boys

'had to undergo an examination previous to their taking the station of mates, and subsequently of masters, that from the want of education in early life they would be excluded from those stations for which their practical knowledge best qualifies them?'<sup>38</sup>

Other witnesses endorsed Young's concern as to the lack of educational opportunities for boys prior to their apprenticeship.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, Coleman seemed oblivious to the paucity of such provision. Detailing the contents of an examination designed to assess competency in nautical astronomy, he argued that a good navigator should be able to demonstrate his theoretical prowess in six hours. Aware that cadets at the Royal Naval College were given seven hours to complete the examination paper he thought it reasonable to allow mercantile officers a period of eight hours, working from 8.00 a.m. until 4.00 p.m.<sup>40</sup>

In focusing attention upon the lack of educational provision for boys prior to their apprenticeship, Young had identified an inherent constraint to the emergence of the professional shipmaster. Proposals like Coleman's were generally untenable. In emulating

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37. SS. Min. 1834, III, pp.284/5, 382.

38. S.C. (1836), p.116, Q.1835.

39. S.C. (1836), p.116, QQ.1818-1823; Anderson : p.215, Q.3357; Brenton. Anderson agreed that there was a need to elevate the condition of masters and mates and made reference to the free school associated with the Newcastle Trinity House.

40. S.C. (1836), App. I, p.271.

the practice of the Royal Navy, Coleman was ignoring the educational abyss separating the various marine bodies. Examinations, in time, might play their part in helping to bridge the gulf; the short term demanded a more basic solution.

Aaron Chapman continued the oblique attack on the examining procedure by stressing the advantages of apprenticeship to 'keep in succession a good breed of sailors'. Assured by Woodroffe that the masters and mates at South Shields were of a lower calibre than those of 30 or 40 years earlier, he urged the adoption of some form of apprenticeship system. In the past, he pointed out, a sailor was apprenticed to sea service; it then became a point of honour with him to complete his apprenticeship so that he could then produce indentures to certify his status as a qualified seaman. The practice had fallen into disuse. Chapman pressed Woodroffe to agree that if regular apprenticeships were served and proof called for, ships would be better manned and officered than at present.<sup>41</sup> Chapman's proposal was approved by his colleague, Young, who said that no person should be appointed to the position of master until he had gained experience 'in a subordinate place'.<sup>42</sup> This was a direct reference to the old system of indentured apprenticeships.<sup>43</sup>

It would be easy to assume that the shipowners' eagerness to reinstate the former system of indentured apprenticeships revealed only blatant self-interest. Certainly, the apprenticeship system would have ensured for them a continuing supply of able seamen and would also have eased the financial burden which would almost inevitably accompany improved standards in education. Higher educational qualifications would lead to demands for higher wages, thus increasing costs and reducing profit levels. Quite conceivably,

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41. S.C. (1836), p.23, Q.319.

42. S.C. (1836), p.149, Q.2434.

43. The Government had imposed a compulsory system of apprentice in 1835 (5 & 6, Will. IV, c.19). Shipowners had opposed the compulsory nature of the measure.

however, the shipowners may have seen a re-introduction of the old system as a genuinely practical solution to the problem of escalating losses at sea.

Apart from a recognition of the need for basic instruction in reading and writing and Coleman's scheme for examinations in nautical astronomy, there were few suggestions about the most appropriate kind of education and training for officers in the merchant service. The types of question posed by the shipping members of the Select Committee suggested that they were more favourably disposed to practical than theoretical education.

Two other issues directly relevant to this study, raised by the Select Committee, were shipmaster accountability and foreign competition. Many witnesses believed that the lack of any public investigation into ship loss had contributed to the declining standards of responsibility and duty amongst British masters and mates. Almost without exception, witnesses stressed the need for the formation of a board of inquiry to investigate every shipwreck or stranding. The board would be authorized to suspend certificates or licences of commanding officers until they were adjudged innocent of blame.<sup>44</sup> Lieut. Forrest, R.N., thought that such courts of inquiry would act as a 'restraint on masters and mates and make them more careful'.<sup>45</sup> To some degree, the practice had already been in operation in Newcastle and South Shields through the agency of the local insurance societies. The Committee was informed, however, that although in Newcastle every master of a lost vessel was brought up before a board of inquiry to discover the cause of the loss, no action had ever been taken against a master found guilty.<sup>46</sup> At South Shields the regulations seemed to be more rigorously enforced; during the previous six years no fewer than seven masters had been either discharged or suspended for incompetency.<sup>47</sup>

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44. S.C. (1836), p.16, Q.193-195; Ballingall : p.33, Q.512; Woodroffe: p.64, QQ.952/3; Wall.

45. S.C. (1836), p.70, Q.1076.

46. S.C. (1836), p.115, QQ.1797/8; Anderson.

47. S.C. (1836), p.142, QQ.2263/4; Adams. See notice overleaf confirming this practice.

PLATE III

Notice of the Suspension of a Shipmaster

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Acknowledgements to the South Tyneside Central Library

*Coal Trade Association,  
South Shields, February 10th, 1842.*

*Sir,*

*I have the Committee's directions to inform you, that after a careful examination of the circumstances attending two strandings of the Brig JOHN, of North Shields, on her last passage from London to Shields in ballast, they have found it necessary to order the Master, William Beautyman of Cullercoats, to be suspended from holding command of any Ship insured in this Association, for twelve Months from the date hereof.*

*Satisfactory testimonials of character and conduct will be required at the end of the said time, in order to enable him to be re-instated in the privilege of going Master.*

*I remain Sir,*

*Your very obedient Servant,*

*THOS. ADAMS, Sec.*

The demand for courts of inquiry was not an attempt to supplant the demand for examinations or apprenticeships but simply the vocal expression of a widespread belief that masters and mates should be held accountable for losses caused by their incompetence. Since these appeals invariably emanated from naval and merchant officers they were probably symptomatic of a desire to safeguard and enhance the professional status of all officers, whether naval or mercantile.

Although less attention was paid to the question of foreign competition, the evidence which accrued was depressing. Ballingall claimed that the masters and mates of Baltic nations were invariably sober and appeared 'more competent to perform their duties.'<sup>48</sup> Other witnesses tended to focus upon the growing strength and improved efficiency of American shipping. Willis ascribed the lower ratio of shipwrecks of American ships to the

'superiority of their construction, outfit,  
and the superiority of the seamen and  
officers'.<sup>49</sup>

John Pym, a shipping agent at Liverpool, agreed with Buckingham that American shipowners selected men of a 'higher class' in character and instruction.<sup>50</sup> Lorimer pointed out that the prevailing sentiment in favour of American ships was on the increase and that they were held in 'high estimation'.<sup>51</sup> The Committee could not ignore the ramifications of such developments.

In its Report the Select Committee blamed many of the inadequacies of the merchant service on the absence of an absolute authority in charge of shipping policy. The Committee recommended

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48. S.C. (1836), p.15, Q.179.

49. S.C. (1836), p.233, Q.3667; see also p.209, Q.3256; Charles Purnell, dockmaster at Liverpool.

50. S.C. (1836), p.228, Q.3565.

51. S.C. (1836), p.96, Q.1508.

as ' a matter of the first importance' the establishment of a Mercantile Marine Board in London.<sup>52</sup> This Board would be empowered to direct, superintend and regulate all shipping affairs, including the classification, construction and equipping of ships; to examine officers for competency; to establish nautical schools; to institute courts of inquiry into all cases of shipwreck; to set up a registry office for seamen and to act as arbiter in disputes among owners, officers and crew. Particular emphasis was to be given to the attainment of prescribed qualifications in seamanship and navigation by officers prior to their being appointed to the command of vessels of different classes and for different voyages. The Committee went on to recommend the appointment of examiners in seamanship, navigation and astronomy; such examiners would supervise the public examinations of all candidates aspiring to marine command or office. Further, these examiners would have the authority to defer all who should prove deficient in the 'requisite degree of knowledge for the class to which the candidate might aspire'.<sup>53</sup> Attention was also drawn to the competitiveness of American ships and to the alleged supremacy of their commanders - in seamanship and navigation - over their British counterparts.<sup>54</sup>

The Committee concluded its report with a reiteration of the need to persuade the Legislature to pay heed to the depressed state of British shipping, its vessels as well as its manpower, in order that it might take steps

'best calculated to elevate and improve the general character of the British Mercantile Marine ... to make its officers the most distinguished for their competency and skill ... '.<sup>55</sup>

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52. S.C. (1836), p.viii.

53. S.C. (1836), p.viii, ix.

54. S.C. (1836), p.xi.

55. Ibid.

The Times gave full coverage to the Committee's Report and recommendations.<sup>56</sup> In a subsequent article the newspaper focused upon the increased number of disasters to merchant shipping and, drawing support from the evidence presented to the Committee, suggested that the principal causes of shipwreck were the 'unseaworthiness of vessels and the ignorance of persons that command them'.<sup>57</sup> The Nautical Magazine endorsed the Committee's recommendations and claimed that the Report was one of the 'most important documents ever yet offered to the attention of the British Legislature' and suggested that its implementation would ensure that the British mercantile marine would no longer remain in such a deplorable condition.<sup>58</sup> But the Government failed to respond. Tenacious to the end, Buckingham sought leave to bring in a private members Bill.

Until this stage in the examination debate the proponents for examination reform must have believed that they had made considerable progress in their bid to establish a system of obligatory examinations for masters and mates. A Select Committee had endorsed their proposals for reform. But, as they now realized, government support for the appointment of a Committee carried with it no concomitant obligation to act upon the Committee's recommendations. At the same time, however, the issue remained finely poised. Given that Buckingham intended to press the measure through the instrument of a private member's Bill, the proponents for reform had some justification for qualified optimism.

On the other hand, from the perspective of the shipping interest, the Committee's recommendations must have been a source of

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56. The Times, 15 Nov. 1836, p.7, col.3.

57. Ibid., 15 Dec. 1836, p.7, col.3.

58. N.M. 1836, V, pp. 599/600.

much concern. The Government's refusal to promote the Bill would only partly allay its fears. Buckingham's determination to pursue the matter gave substance to their concern. It was a development for which the shipping interest was partly responsible. During the course of the campaign for shipping reform the shipping interest, through the General Shipowners' Society, had consistently miscalculated the mood and resolution of the examination lobby. The Society had produced few witnesses to plead its case before the Select Committee. Its minute book over the relevant period reveals no explicit attempt to mobilize opinion or gather evidence in its favour. Perhaps the shipping interest expected too much of the Society; maybe the Society asked too much from its members on the Select Committee. Whatever the reason, it was a serious error of judgement. These considerations suggest that the progress of Buckingham's Bill would receive the Society's close and undivided attention.

The Committee's recommendations clearly placed the Government in a dilemma. Government would be reluctant to intervene directly in shipping affairs on the scale envisaged by the Committee.<sup>59</sup> At the same time, however, government could not easily ignore evidence pointing to the growing threat posed to British shipping by foreign fleets. The Select Committee had estimated that whereas British shipping had been increasing at an annual rate of  $1\frac{1}{2}\%$ , the corresponding figure for American shipping was  $12\frac{3}{4}\%$ .<sup>60</sup> Government would also have noted other evidence indicating that American ships were being increasingly preferred to British vessels because of their reliable and efficient management. What does seem clear is that Buckingham's Bill seemed destined for an eventful passage.

On 9 March 1837 Buckingham sought leave to introduce his Bill for the formation of a Marine Board and the better regulation of

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59. B.T. 5/42, pp. 194, 231; see also B.T. 3/25, p.269.

60. S.C. (1836), p.xi.

British merchant shipping.<sup>61</sup> His plea was both powerful and passionate. He made little attempt to disguise his contempt for what he saw as the deliberate procrastination of the shipowners. In his opening remarks he contrasted their anxiety in protecting their own interests with their callous indifference to the safety and welfare of others.<sup>62</sup>

Buckingham then drew the attention of the House to the amount of legislation, regulating, as opposed to promoting, shipping affairs. Seeing the 'false protection and prohibitory system' as a reward to the shipping interest for Britain's maritime supremacy, he argued that such favoured protection ought to have led to attempts to reduce shipping losses by ensuring that vessels were efficiently constructed, equipped and managed. On land, he said, there was legislation to govern every aspect of transport, even down to such precise details as the breadth of wheels; yet the problem of shipwreck remained ignored and unresolved. But the deficiencies in the building, equipping and managing of ships, he claimed, were a direct consequence of an even more fundamental cause of shipwreck - the system of marine insurance. He denounced the huge profits made by underwriters, merchants, manufacturers and shipowners at the expense of the nation.<sup>63</sup>

Buckingham then directed attention to the question of shipmaster incompetency, citing it as the second major cause of shipwrecks. He referred to the practice of the Royal Navy and the East India Company to assess officer competency by examination:

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61. Hansard 1837, XXXVII, 164.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid., 166-173.

'In the navy, an examination takes place of every midshipman who is to pass as a lieutenant, and of every master, on whom the principal responsibility of the navigation rests, before he is appointed to a ship. In the East-India Company's service also, the sworn officers, to the number of four in each of their vessels, were strictly examined in navigation and seamanship ...'.<sup>64</sup>

Additionally, he drew attention to similar practices obtaining in foreign merchant fleets, observing that with the

'French, the Dutch, the Danes, the Swedes, and even with the Russians, a rigid examination takes place into the qualifications of persons about to be appointed to the command of merchant vessels ...'.<sup>65</sup>

In consequence their ships were more competently managed and their losses fewer. This approach allowed Buckingham to alert the House to two points; first, that losses could be reduced by efficient management, and secondly, that British merchant shipping was in grave danger of surrendering its supremacy to foreign fleets. Was it too much to ask of British shipowners, he queried, that they support examinations for shipmaster competency when they were entrusted with millions of pounds worth of property and many thousands of lives?<sup>66</sup>

In his catalogue of accusations he was prepared to concede only one mitigating factor to the shipowners; that the artificially high costs of materials required to build and equip British ships

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64. Ibid., 173.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid., 174.

forced shipowners to make stringent economies in order to compete with foreign fleets.<sup>67</sup> It was imperative, he argued, that some system of accountability for the intolerable losses at sea be found and found speedily.

Buckingham had dwelt at length upon the iniquities and inequities of marine insurance. His diatribe against those who profited so handsomely and immorally from so pernicious a system made no concession to any group or individual. The members of the House, therefore, must have been astonished when he announced that his Parliamentary Bill included no provisions for reform of the marine insurance system. It was a remarkable volte-face. More surprises were in store. Having indicated that marine insurance reforms were not included in his Bill, Buckingham then proceeded to elaborate his proposals for reforming marine insurance.<sup>68</sup> His controversial treatment of the subject was to have serious repercussions.

Leaving the contentious issue of marine insurance, he described his scheme for a Marine Board in the port of London which would be

'charged with the especial duty of superintending the general state and condition of the whole of the mercantile marine of the kingdom and promoting by every means in its power whatever can tend to improve it'.<sup>69</sup>

This Board would be invested with the authority to supervise the examination of ships' officers, as well as having specific powers over the vessels themselves. It would also be delegated to enforce a system of appropriate maritime legislation.

Buckingham's humanitarianism manifested itself with his reference to the establishment of Marine Hospitals for the old and

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67. Ibid., 174/5.

68. Ibid., 177.

69. Ibid., 178.

infirm, and Marine Asylums for the use, 'in a state of comfort and sobriety', of every merchant seaman in port. He justified these proposals by a lengthy recital of the wholesale exploitation of seamen ashore, easy prey for the unscrupulous because of their drunkenness and demoralized state. These Hospitals and Asylums would come under the wing of the Marine Board. He brought his long speech to an end with a reiteration of the unendurable losses of human life and public and private property caused by shipwreck. He then sought leave to bring in his Bill.<sup>70</sup>

The responses to his proposed measures were varied. Joseph Hume made it quite clear that he was generally opposed to the intervention of the Legislature in commercial matters but admitted that the extent of the evils described compelled him to support the Bill. He felt obliged to endorse a means of removing the anomaly whereby 500 men could perish at sea without any subsequent inquiry being held to determine the cause of the tragedy.<sup>71</sup>

The longest and most deliberate response came from Poulett Thomson, President of the Board of Trade. He stated that he would not oppose the introduction of the Bill but felt bound to offer some criticisms. They mainly related to the impracticability of implementing many of the recommendations. He suggested that the

'Bill would enter into a great variety of subjects, and would attempt to legislate upon details which he did not believe susceptible of legislation'.<sup>72</sup>

He also claimed that the supremacy of Britain's mercantile marine could be attributed to the lack of 'meddling' by the Legislature and dismissed the necessity for any intervention in the matter of marine insurance. His view was that the Marine Board's powers should be

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70. Ibid., 182.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid.

limited to assessing the soundness of ships putting to sea and to investigating shipwrecks. He also objected to the Board being given licence to concern itself with ship construction because this would restrain innovation and improvement in their design. These several reservations excepted, he assured the House that he would support the Bill and present no obstacle to its introduction.<sup>73</sup>

George F. Young's response to Buckingham's speech was a mixture of muted complaint and cautious approval. He pointed out that the Select Committee's recommendations were not unanimous. Many members did not vote on a number of the resolutions, thereby avoiding a division. On several occasions he himself had abstained from voting. Young suggested that

'the hon. Member for Sheffield seemed, by his Bill to endeavour to carry out his own preconceived opinions!'.<sup>74</sup>

Young concurred with Poulett Thomson in opposing all suggestion of government interference in ship construction and marine insurance but supported Buckingham on two vital issues, shipmaster competency and accountability. He felt that

'it was most inconsistent and improper, that men who were entrusted with such important interests as the command of merchant ships should not be required to give some proof of competency'

and, in addition

'if, through any circumstances, a ship was lost, the commander of such ship at the time ought not to be allowed to resume his station until, by an inquiry before a competent tribunal, he should have been exonerated from all blame'.<sup>75</sup>

Though he supported the concept of competency he made no reference whatever to the idea of a Marine Board which might ensure such

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73. Ibid., 185.

74. Ibid.,

75. Ibid., 186.

competency.

Similar remarks were made by several other members of the shipping interest. George Robinson, for example, promised to support measures explicitly aimed at humanitarian reforms but warned that if the House exceeded its brief it would incur the risk of doing a 'great deal of mischief'. He was prepared to lend support to measures for inquiring into cases of shipwreck and even, though to a lesser extent, for assessing shipmaster competency but was adamantly opposed to the intervention of the legislature in such matters as ship construction and marine insurance.<sup>76</sup> Aaron Chapman impressed on the House the need for caution and

'of not permitting themselves to be carried into precipitate legislation by the personal attachment of hon. Members to Quixotic views'.<sup>77</sup>

Henry Warburton drew out a point which seemed implicit in the views of the Board of Trade and the shipowners, that the formation of a licensing board for masters of merchant vessels

'might be tantamount to the formation of a sort of corporation of masters, whose exertions, corresponding with their own interests, would be directed to the limitation of the list of masters to the smallest possible number'.<sup>78</sup>

If examinations to determine competency were introduced then such matters as restricting entry to the profession, with consequent demands for greater remuneration, might also be insisted on.

The response to Buckingham's speech brought into focus two contentious issues, marine insurance and the almost obsessive amount of detail contained in the Bill. To many members, marine insurance

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76. Ibid., 187/8.

77. Ibid., 189.

78. Ibid.

had no place in any Parliamentary debate. Buckingham had aroused their animosity with his exhaustive expose of the system's injustices. It was vain for him to plead at the end of the debate that it was not his intention to deal with the subject. He had not only alienated the sympathies of many members but he had diverted attention from more important clauses in his Bill. Although given leave to introduce his Bill he had damaged his case.

Buckingham's minute attention to detail caused further opposition to his Bill, even among those who supported the sentiments contained in his proposals. Warburton, for instance, expressed the hope that

'the hon. Gentleman would make his Bill comprehend only the broad and leading points of the question, and leave all minor points to the good sense of the individuals engaged in maritime commerce'.<sup>79</sup>

Similarly, Lord Sandon felt that he could support the Bill 'if not shackled with too many regulations'.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, one such regulation led to the peremptory withdrawal of the Bill on its second reading thereby incurring a delay of nearly two months.<sup>81</sup>

The subjects of marine insurance and the Bill's excessive concern with detail loomed even larger when the Bill had its second reading on 7 June 1837.<sup>82</sup> Since the Bill's first introduction into the House, opposition to it had hardened. On 29 March 1837 the Committee of the Society of Merchants wrote to the Board of Trade expressing disapproval of two specific clauses: Clause 14

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79. Ibid., 190.

80. Ibid.

81. See Roebuck's point of order, Ibid., 1124.

82. Hansard 1837, XXXVIII, 1222.

which sought to empower a Marine Court to inquire into and to adjudicate legally and bindingly in disputes between merchants, shipowners and undermasters; and Clause 18 which would permit such a Marine Court to levy a sum equal to 5% of the amount involved in the dispute. Such unwarrantable intrusion prompted the Committee

'to express a hope that so much of the measure referred to will not receive the sanction or support of H.M. government'. 83

The Board of Trade's reply made it abundantly clear that opposition to the Bill was steadily increasing:

'It is the intention of Mr. Thomson to express his opposition in the House to the clauses which are the particular subjects of your letter ... '. 84

The General Shipowners' Society also made its position clear. The Society's Annual Report for 1836 affirmed that the Bill would be strenuously resisted but that 'unbiased and attentive consideration' would be given to any system which would have the practical effect of

'insuring proper qualifications in those to whom the responsible charge of life and property is entrusted'. 85

Confronted by the combined might of the Board of Trade and the shipping interest the Bill moved to its second reading and to a changed and hostile climate. Indeed, Poulett Thomson questioned the wisdom of allowing the Bill a second reading since it

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83. B.T. 1/329, 5221.

84. B.T. 3/27, p.16.

85. SS. Rep. 1836, p.3.

was

'so faulty in its details, that in his opinion, and he believed in the opinion of the House, it would be impossible ever to carry it into a law'.<sup>86</sup>

He reminded the House that when Buckingham had first introduced his Bill he had been counselled to reduce its excessive detail. Buckingham had chosen to ignore the warnings. This Bill

'went into a series of details of the most extraordinary nature, and which were calculated to destroy the whole mercantile law of this country, and to establish in its place a new and arbitrary power'.<sup>87</sup>

He singled out the proposed Marine Board for particular criticism. If such a Board were to be constituted in the manner proposed, it would have a power exceeding even that of the Legislature; moreover, in setting up and enforcing a code of maritime practice, it would set aside the courts of law themselves.

Poulett Thomson's sceptical remarks about the Bill's defects were readily endorsed by Young and Chapman. Young declared that the Bill was a 'legislative monstrosity'.<sup>88</sup> Chapman warned the House not to be

'led away by fanciful speculations which were wholly at variance with experience'.<sup>89</sup>

Nevertheless, certain sections of the Bill were given qualified support. Poulett Thomson agreed that it was necessary to inquire into the causes of so many shipwrecks and that

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86. Hansard 1837, XXXVIII, 1222.

87. Ibid.

88. Ibid., 1224.

89. Ibid.

'some examination ought to take place into the qualification of masters in the merchant service'.<sup>90</sup>

He thought, however, that compulsion was wrong as it constituted an 'unjust interference with the rights of the shipping interest'. He announced his intention to insert a clause in the Pilotage Bill which would place the examination of masters, as far as pilotage was concerned, under the control of Trinity House. It might then be

'a matter of consideration whether they would extend the examination further, and whether a full voluntary examination should not take place before the body'.<sup>91</sup>

Further condemnation of the Bill came from Henry Labouchere, Vice-President of the Board of Trade. He approved of the Bill's objective but disputed its principle, seeing it as a 'vexatious interference with the shipping interest'.<sup>92</sup> Approval for its second reading, he believed, would spread alarm among the shipping interest and should the Bill become law it would

'inflict a great blow upon that interest and at the same time be highly injurious to the seamen themselves'.<sup>93</sup>

It was a more subdued Buckingham who took the floor as he struggled to salvage his Bill. He assured the House that in view of the objections raised, he was willing to allow his Bill to be referred to Committee so that the offending sections could be modified. His pleas were in vain. The House divided on the motion that the Bill receive a second reading. The defeat was as

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90. Ibid., 1223.

91. Ibid.

92. Ibid., 1224.

93. Ibid., 1224/5.

predictable as it was decisive. 176 members voted against the second reading, only 28 voted in favour. Of the 18 members of the 1836 Select Committee, 12 took part in the division. 5 were in favour, 4 against. Buckingham, Young and Ingram served as tellers.<sup>94</sup>

Several commentators have suggested that Buckingham's Bill was defeated by the shipowners.<sup>95</sup> A scrutiny of the Select Committee's proceedings and the Bill's progress in Parliament suggests that such an assessment is altogether too facile. Certainly, the shipowners played an important role during the course of the debate. The Bill's final defeat cannot, however, be attributed to the activities and machinations of a single agency, no matter how influential. The intervention of the Board of Trade, for example, was a critical factor in the ultimate rejection of the Bill. Its antagonistic attitude to several of the Bill's proposals was crystallized in the criticisms of Poulett Thomson and Henry Labouchere. Again, one can hardly discount the effect on the House of Buckingham's highly personalized campaign as a possible cause of his Bill's final agonies on the floor of the House. Many members found his diagnoses too extreme and his remedies too drastic. Buckingham, the crusading idealist, was probably blinded by the sheer intensity of his personal vision of a maritime Utopia.

Without question the inquiry had publicized the deplorable state of the mercantile marine and, by drawing attention to the deficiencies of shipmasters, it had also ensured that the agitation for shipmaster qualifications would go on increasing each year. When Prouty suggests, however, that the procedural problems inherent in organizing a system of examinations were the responsibility of the Board of Trade and that the Board's responsibility extended to

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94. Ibid., 1225.

95. Prouty, p.65; Millington, Seamen in the Making, pp.17/18; Wilde, p.103.

PLATE IV

James Silk Buckingham, M.P.

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resolving the conflicting opinions of the shipowners, he appears to have misconstrued the Board's interest and position in the context of maritime reform.<sup>96</sup> The contributions of Poulett Thomson and Henry Labouchere to the general debate were hardly the dispassionate interventions of a neutral arbitrating agency. The Board was but a single factor in a complex interplay of power politics. Different groups and individuals with divergent aims and priorities were engaged in a bitter rivalry to make explicit their hopes and ambitions for a reformed mercantile marine. Each sought to protect and, if possible, to reinforce its own interests, status and influence within the constantly shifting emphases of the drama. There can be little doubt that the campaign for shipmaster examination had been effectively contained by the political process.

The defeat of Buckingham's Bill at its second reading did not mean that the successful containing strategies of the shipping interest and the Government had rung the death knell of the campaign for shipmaster examinations. The evidence presented to the 1836 Select Committee had identified many of the problems for which practical solutions had to be found before any examining procedure could be successfully inaugurated. In general, the problems revolved around the nature, validity and control of the proposed examinations. Should examinations be voluntary or compulsory? Should they be based on practical or theoretical knowledge? Were examinations really a valid means of determining competency? If a system were introduced who would be responsible for administering it? It is worth recalling too that both the shipping interest and the Board of Trade expressed support for examinations - on condition that they were voluntary. Other issues that had to be fully resolved were the poverty of educational opportunities which would have significant consequences if written examinations were introduced and the effect of examinations upon the status and remuneration of masters and mates.

One of the more fascinating aspects of Buckingham's Bill in

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96. Prouty, p.65.



its fateful journey through the House was the shift in tactics employed by Buckingham himself. He had initiated his campaign in the House, perhaps rather altruistically, by stressing the humanitarian consequences of shipping disaster. Gradually, as the debate had progressed and the mood of the House had visibly changed, he had swung his spotlight away from humanitarian issues and directed it towards the material implications of shipwreck, highlighting the needs and demands of national and private investment in shipping. It was cruelly ironic that his campaign to prevent, or at least reduce the numbers of, shipwrecks and strandings should itself have been wrecked and its author politically stranded.

Considering the magnitude of the defeat and the nature of the man, it was inevitable that Buckingham should see the rejection of his Bill in personal rather than political terms.<sup>97</sup> He was rarely to concern himself again with the issue of mercantile reform. The issue itself, however, did not die with Buckingham's hopes. Three weeks after the defeat of the Bill there took place the annual general meeting of the General Shipowners' Society. Young, as Chairman, was moved to remark upon the improving prospects for the shipping community. Nevertheless, he warned his audience to guard against complacency lest it lead to a

'supineness or an overweening confidence. They ought not to diminish their guardianship of those most important interests'.<sup>98</sup>

Justifying his opposition to Buckingham's Bill he impressed on the Society that he had been left with no alternative but to oppose the second reading because the Bill had been such a 'mass of

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97. It was suggested that Buckingham had made a 'well-intended but a clumsy effort' to remedy the problems of British shipping and that his Bill was 'very properly rejected, in consequence of its many imperfections and unnecessary incumbrances', see Shipping Gazette, 18 May 1838, p.3, col.1.

98. The Times, 22 Mar. 1837, p.6, col.1.

crudities and of such an inexplicable composition'. He trusted that no attempts would be made to urge the Government to sanction it.

Chapman agreed with Young on the need to oppose the Bill but observed that

'... there were some parts of it which certainly should have his support, and those were the clauses by which masters of vessels would be obliged to give proper tests of qualification before they would be intrusted with the command of vessels'.<sup>99</sup>

Such a comment reinforces the view that the conflict-consensus controversy among shipping interests on the issue of shipmaster examinations was in the process of being gradually and positively resolved. Other parties were not prepared to wait. The defeat of Buckingham's Bill signalled the revival of the shipmaster examination campaign.

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99. Ibid. The Annual Report confirmed the Society's active opposition to a Bill 'wholly incompatible with the Maritime Law of the country' and, more importantly, one which 'involved the objectionable principle of legislative interference with individual rights', SS. Rep. 1837, p.1.

## CHAPTER IV

### A Regional Thrust to a National System

When he opposed the second reading of the 1837 Merchant Shipping Bill, the President of the Board of Trade, Poulett Thomson, strongly criticized the proposal to introduce compulsory examinations for British shipmasters. Such a development, he complained, would be an 'unjust interference' with the shipping interest.<sup>1</sup> His opinion was endorsed by the General Shipowners' Society. Its Annual Report for 1837 referred to the Bill's 'objectionable principle of legislative interference with individual rights' and stated unequivocally the Society's opposition to it.<sup>2</sup>

On 28 July 1842 a Bill was introduced in Parliament which sought to require and regulate the examination of masters and mates in the British merchant service.<sup>3</sup> The appearance of this Bill did not reflect any change of opinion by either the Board of Trade or the General Shipowners' Society. It marked the culmination of a vigorous and determined campaign by a regional pressure group - the Glasgow shipping interest - to secure legislative support for the implementation of a system of obligatory examinations for ships' officers employed in the British mercantile marine. The campaign evoked interest and concern among a number of parties. If at the national level progress on the examination issue was minimal, this was not the case at the regional level. The regional campaign shaped the context in which the examination debate was subsequently located.

In Sunderland the problem of determining the proficiency of

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1. Hansard 1837, XXXVIII, 1223; Labouchere, Vice-President of the Board thought the principle of the Bill to be a 'vexatious interference with the shipping interest of the country, to which he was most decidedly opposed', Ibid., 1224.
  2. SS. Rep. 1837, p.4.
  3. Hansard 1842, LXV, 764.

merchant captains was of vital concern to the local shipping insurance clubs. Established to provide financial protection and remuneration for shipowners on a mutual insurance basis, the clubs shared an understandable desire to ensure the competent management of ships.<sup>4</sup>

The insurance of a ship was covered by the imposition of an initial premium levied on all club members. This charge was governed by the condition and class of the vessel concerned, the length and nature of its voyage and the likely overall risk incurred. In the event of claims being drawn upon the policy in excess of the subscribed capital, a further call was made upon club members. Given their dual interests club members were clearly concerned to reduce the incidence of shipwreck. The Sunderland insurance clubs translated their anxiety into positive action; a local marine board was established to examine the competency of ships' officers. From the outset an element of compulsion was built into the examining system. Underwriters were requested to insert a clause in their policies declaring that masters must be certificated by the marine board.<sup>5</sup>

The Sunderland Marine Board was established on 5 August 1837 under the chairmanship of George Booth, a local shipowner. Examinations, covering aspects of seamanship and navigation, would be carried out by nautical men elected annually by the insurance clubs. Three categories of award would be made reflecting the experience, expertise and nature of the anticipated command. To defray the costs of the scheme fees would be imposed on all candidates; £3.0.0. for masters in the foreign-going trade and £2.0.0. for coastal commands.<sup>6</sup> The Board envisaged that

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4. For a summary of contemporary marine insurance organisations in north east England, see George B. Hodgson, The Borough of South Shields (1903), pp.299-306.
  5. N.M. 1837, VI, p.689. It would seem that the Sunderland clubs successfully enforced this rule, see S.C. (1839), p.26, QQ. 367,370; Alderman Thompson.
  6. S.C. (1843), p.43, QQ.611/2; John Brunton, shipwright surveyor, Sunderland.

'all young men of respectability and character will avail themselves of the earliest opportunity of passing their examination, and obtaining a certificate ...'.<sup>7</sup>

Strong support for the examination board came from the Sunderland Herald. The paper euphorically commended the establishment of shipmaster examinations as a channel whereby a rising generation of seamen would

'apply their time more fully to the acquisition of useful knowledge, a rivalry will be commenced in scholarship, the interesting and indispensably useful science of navigation in all its branches will be pursued with avidity.'<sup>8</sup>

On a more cautionary note the Herald urged that careful consideration should be given to the composition of the examining board so that its duties might be carried out with 'uncompromising impartiality'.

The Board was soon in operation. By November 1837 it had examined 'upwards of 20 young men' in the second and third class categories.<sup>9</sup> Its First Annual Report claimed that the Board had stimulated much interest in navigation and seamanship in the town, exemplified by the well-attended classes at local nautical schools. Men, previously indifferent to possible advancement aboard ship had been inspired by the success and promotion of their contemporaries, to address 'themselves studiously to improvement'.<sup>10</sup>

Publication of the Report brought a mixed response. The Nautical Magazine supported the scheme and lamented that 'other great ports did not follow the example of Sunderland'.<sup>11</sup> The 1837 Annual Report of the Sunderland Shipowners' Society, a subscribing member of the General Shipowners' Society, made no reference to the

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7. N.M. 1837, VI, p.689.

8. Sunderland Herald, 9 Sept. 1837, p.2, col.5.

9. Ibid., 25 Nov. 1837, p.2, col.5.

10. N.M. 1838, VII, p.625.

11. Ibid., p.626. For supportive correspondence on the need to examine and license shipmasters for office, see Ibid., pp. 152-157, 399-402, 736.

formation or endeavours of the Marine Board.<sup>12</sup> If silent disdain was the official attitude of the Sunderland Shipowners' Society to the Board it was not a stance which satisfied all Sunderland shipowners. One of them chose to make his hostility public. His letter to the Shipping Gazette denounced the examining scheme as useless and invalid:

'They receive fees, but no account is rendered of their amount; they are an irresponsible body. A teacher of navigation is a member, and he enjoys the great privilege of examining his own pupils'.<sup>13</sup>

He also recommended that the constitution of the Board and the structure of the examining procedure be completely altered; members of the Marine Board should be elected annually by the local Shipowners' Society; fixed salaries should be paid and an account rendered of all fees; and only nautical men should be appointed 'and those not superannuated'. Such criticism did not deter others from following the example and initiative of the Sunderland insurance associations.

On 3 October 1837 the South Shields Nautical Insurance Association circulated a list of resolutions relating to the formation and control of a Marine Board 'similar to that lately established in Sunderland'.<sup>14</sup> The proposed Board was to consist of not fewer than twelve persons: nine to be retired, experienced seamen; two to be landsmen competent to examine on matters relating to Charter Parties and Bills of Lading; and one person qualified to examine on Plane Trigonometry, Navigation and Nautical Astronomy. Examinations were to be conducted once or twice a week as required. There were three categories of certificate: first class, for the coasting trade only, in which the candidates would be examined as to age, service, good

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12. Report of the Committee of the Sunderland Shipowners' Society, 4 Dec. 1837.

13. Shipping Gazette, 10 Feb. 1838, p.3, col.4. The letter was also published in the Nautical Magazine, see N.M. 1837, VI, pp.162/3.

14. Circular from the Sun Insurance Association dated 20 Oct. 1837, see Local Collection, South Shields Public Library. See also App. X, pp. 337-339.

conduct, knowledge of the coast and its dangers, and practical seamanship; second class, for the coasting and foreign trades, in which candidates would be examined as in the first class but also in plane navigation, the nature and use of sea charts, and charter parties and bills of lading; third (and highest) class, in which candidates would be examined as in the second class but in addition would require a thorough knowledge of navigation in all its branches by lunars and chronometers. The circular also specified other regulations relating to the organization, fees, certificates of exemption and selection of Board members. It also urged the insurance clubs to ensure that every man who had not previously served as master should produce a certificate of qualification from the Marine Board before assuming command of any insured vessel. Furthermore, it instructed the clubs to 'refuse employment as a Master to those failing to comply',<sup>15</sup>

The South Shields Marine Board held its first examination on 19 August 1838; forty-six certificates were awarded during its first year.<sup>16</sup> By 18 November 1842 the Board was able to report that since its inception it had awarded one hundred and fifty three certificates, an achievement with which it was eminently satisfied:

'the Nautical Schools have been better attended; a gradual and marked Improvement is apparent in the Candidates who present themselves for Examination ... an Incitement is given to young seamen to make themselves better acquainted with the Coast ... These are the practical Results, and the moral Influence which it exercises cannot of course be ascertained, but it is certain the Effect has been acknowledged by many'.<sup>17</sup>

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15. Ibid. See also Hodgson, Borough of South Shields, pp.305/6. The clubs were unable to enforce this regulation, see S.C. (1843), p.121, Q.1921; Robert Anderson. It would seem that in Aberdeen a similar system was tried but with limited success, see S S.Min. 1841, IV, pp.215/6.
16. Hodgson, Borough of South Shields, p.306.
17. Gateshead Observer, (hereafter G.O.), 3 Dec. 1842, p.1, col.1. Cf. with Strakers allegation that the Board did not award certificates, see S.C. (1843), p.159, QQ.2417/8.

The apparent success of the examining system adopted by the Marine Boards at South Shields and Sunderland neither assuaged the hostility of the local Shipowner Societies nor engendered support among the insurance associations themselves for changing the status of the examinations. At the General Meeting of the South Shields Insurance Associations on 18 November 1842, for example, whilst full support was expressed for the continuation of the local Marine Board as a 'voluntary' examining agency, vociferous opposition was accorded to the notion of compulsory examining boards 'lately brought into Parliament' by Captain Fitzroy.<sup>18</sup> Under no circumstances would government interference be tolerated in what was essentially a shipping affair. Captain Robert Fitzroy, R.N., in fact, was the spokesman and leader of a campaign to secure legislative support for the introduction of compulsory examinations for ships' officers, a campaign initiated and sustained by Glasgow shipping interests.

To some extent the overwhelming defeat of Buckingham's Bill had overshadowed the fact that means to determine shipmaster competency had enjoyed considerable support in Scotland. One group, the Association of Underwriters in Glasgow, had argued in 1833 that a 'wholesale check upon the incompetency and neglect of shipmasters' would help to reduce the increasing and widespread shipping losses. The Association recommended that masters and mates should be licensed for employment under the aegis of a competent board.<sup>19</sup> To gain wider support for its proposals the Association formed a Joint Committee composed of representatives from the Merchant House, the Chamber of Commerce and the East and West India Association in Glasgow. Information about the structure and organization of nautical examinations abroad was obtained from Lloyd's Registry of Shipping and from similar agencies abroad.<sup>20</sup> In April 1837 the Joint Committee drew

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18. Newcastle Journal, 3 Dec. 1842, p.3, col.4. Cf. with the supportive stance taken by Sunderland shipowners on the issue of compulsory examinations for masters and mates, see G.O. 26 Feb. 1842, p.2, col.5.

19. Glasgow Herald, 13 Nov. 1840, p.1, col.5.

20. This information was incorporated in subsequent petitions to the Board of Trade pressing the case for legislative support for a national system of shipmaster examinations, see B.T.1/381, 101; B.T. 1/382, 153.

the attention of the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce to the Merchant Shipping Bill then before Parliament. Despite being 'very objectionable' in some particulars, the Committee believed that the Bill deserved support since it was

'most desirable that something should be done particularly with regard to the proper qualifications of the masters and officers of merchant vessels'.<sup>21</sup>

The Chamber of Commerce agreed that the measure should be supported and immediately deputed a committee to meet and co-operate with the Joint Committee.<sup>22</sup>

Other groups in Scotland expressed a similar concern.

On 30 January 1837 the General Meeting of the Company of Merchants in Edinburgh resolved that the Company should unite with other public agencies to secure a legislative enactment to improve the character of the mercantile marine and to ensure that British ships were placed under the 'guidance of properly qualified officers'.<sup>23</sup> The efforts of the Glasgow Joint Committee were pre-empted by the appointment and subsequent hearings of the 1836 Select Committee on Shipwrecks and by the ensuing introduction of Buckingham's Bill in Parliament. When it became apparent, however, that the Government was not going to act on the examination issue, the Glasgow interest renewed their agitation for reform.

The nautical press was also concerned about the consistently falling standards of competency in the merchant marine.<sup>24</sup> Public concern about the mismanagement of merchant vessels and of the need to prevent the shipwreck of merchant vessels was echoed in numerous petitions to Parliament.<sup>25</sup> The issue of shipmaster competency was

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21. Glasgow Chamber of Commerce Minute Book (hereafter GC. Min) 1837, p.24.

22. Ibid.

23. N.M. 1837, VI, p.199.

24. Shipping Gazette, 2 Apr. 1838, p.3, col.2; 4 May 1838, p.2, col.6; N.M. 1839, VIII, p.747.

25. C.J. 1837, XCII, pp.55,253,410,445; C.J. 1837/8, XCIII, pp.191/2, 203,232,370,461,509/10,818.

also raised during the hearings of the 1839 Select Committee of Inquiry into the loss of timber ships.<sup>26</sup>

Asked to suggest a remedy to reduce shipping losses, one witness spoke of the need to secure competent masters, 'men who have undergone an examination in navigation'.<sup>27</sup> Alderman Thompson affirmed that in Sunderland masters and mates were obliged to undertake an examination to determine their competency and to obtain a certificate from the local Marine Board before being appointed to the command of a ship.<sup>28</sup> Another witness linked shipping losses with the drunkenness of masters and mates and urged that the most rigorous powers of the law should be invoked to ensure and maintain the character of such officers. He recommended the establishment of a 'Trinity Board of veteran sea commanders' to examine the competency of all commanding officers.<sup>29</sup>

On 20 January 1840 the Glasgow Joint Committee convened a meeting to consider the problem of shipmaster competency and the degree to which the Government should be involved in the matter. The question of a marine board for assessing the qualifications of masters and mates was also discussed. It was decided to ascertain the strength of feeling on the subject and to this end the outports and other interested parties were circularized. This decision led to the Glasgow Joint Committee establishing contact with the General Shipowners' Society and the Board of Trade. The regional thrust had begun.

The General Shipowners' Society convened a meeting of its Central Committee on 18 February 1840 to consider the matter. It was

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26. Report from the Select Committee on Shipwrecks of Timber Ships, 1839, (333), IX (hereafter S.C.(1839) )
27. S.C. (1839), p.26, Q.364; Alexander Becher, lieutenant/editor of the Nautical Magazine; see also p.16, Q.162; Peter Courtenay, Lloyds nautical surveyor.
28. S.C. (1839), p.26, QQ.367,370.
29. S.C. (1839), App.2, p.97; George Smith, Secretary to the British and Foreign Soldiers' and Sailors' Friendly Society.

unable to offer any positive comment or guidance. Claiming that there was considerable doubt about the propriety of legislative interference in a matter like shipmaster qualifications, it would only pledge itself to

'give any specific measures that may be suggested for that purpose, its most attentive and impartial consideration'.<sup>30</sup>

In its petition to the Board of Trade, the Glasgow Joint Committee indicated that its exhaustive inquiries into the subject of examinations had shown that continental practice permitted no man to serve as a master or a mate without having passed a rigorous examination and received an appropriate certificate. The petition also drew attention to the widespread 'strong feeling of the necessity of some legislative enactment' on which to build an effective examining system. The Committee declared its willingness to draw up the heads of a bill for submission to Parliament but stressed the need for it to be introduced as a government measure.<sup>31</sup> The Committee expressed a willingness to consult with the Board on the principle and the details of the measure and promised to modify any particulars to accommodate the needs and demands of other groups. The Board of Trade refused to be drawn. On 24 February 1840 it replied that

'highly as they prize the exertions of the Glasgow Association and other public bodies for the improvement of the character of British Seamen, their Lordships are not prepared to sanction a measure so general in its application as the one proposed in this memorial. Their Lordships indeed see very great if not insuperable difficulties in framing any measure of the kind with a fair prospect of success, and under such circumstances they are not disposed to take up the question at present'.<sup>32</sup>

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30. SS. Min. 1840, IV, p.92.

31. B.T. 1/359, 9147.

32. B.T. 3/29, p.254.

It was going to take something more than an official wet blanket to extinguish the reforming ardour of the Glasgow interest. Its resolution had been made apparent in its approaches to the General Shipowners' Society and the Board of Trade. Nor was its determination simply a manifestation of Scottish obstinacy; it was tempered with political sensitivity and awareness, as was revealed in the tenor of its petition to the Board of Trade. From a regional organization of relative insignificance, the Glasgow interest was rapidly developing into a powerful pressure group of national standing. Admittedly, it had failed in its bid to secure the support of the General Shipowners' Society and the Board of Trade but it was not without support in other quarters.

On 13 March 1840 the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce fully endorsed the Joint Committee's efforts to establish regulations for 'fixing and ascertaining the qualifications' of merchant marine officers and set up a committee to promote these aims.<sup>33</sup> On 11 November of the same year a public meeting of merchants, shipowners, underwriters and others concerned with shipping affairs, was convened by the Lord Provost of Glasgow to consider the

'propriety of having Boards established under the charge and direction of Government for the examination of the masters and mates of ships or of devising such other measures as may be considered likely to avert that sacrifice of human life and property which too frequently occurs from ignorance of navigation and unskilful seamanship'.<sup>34</sup>

One speaker was convinced that the proposed measures would be acceptable to all underwriters and shipowners since they were 'well aware that one half of the captains and mates of merchant vessels did not understand navigation'. He moved a series of resolutions urging

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33. G.C. Min. 1840, p.194.

34. Glasgow Herald, 13 Nov. 1840, p.1, col.5; meeting also reported in Glasgow Argus, 12 Nov. 1840, p.2, col.5.

that a Bill be laid before Parliament obliging masters and mates to be examined and licensed for office.<sup>35</sup>

A proposal to form a management committee for the purpose of expediting the matter immediately ran into opposition from the members of the Joint Committee who were present. They argued that it would be unwise to diffuse the energy of the central campaign by creating a second movement for reform. Instead, they moved an amendment proposing the establishment of boards for the examination and licensing of officers and in order that the matter might be more fully investigated, they suggested that the membership of the Joint Committee might be increased. The amendment was approved.<sup>36</sup>

One outcome of the meeting was the clarification of the Joint Committee's attitude to the precise constitution and function of the proposed examining agencies. Serious doubts had been expressed about the role of the Legislature in any examining procedure. The Committee made it clear that the examining boards would consist of shipmasters and other competent persons. It was at pains to stress that it had never entertained the idea of government-controlled examining boards.

The assurance of freedom from government intervention undoubtedly helped to win sympathy and support for the Joint Committee's campaign. Public and private interests alike subscribed to the Committee's contingency fund. On 23 November 1840 the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce was informed that several insurance companies and other interested agencies had agreed to contribute to the running expenses of the extended Joint Committee.<sup>37</sup> On 29 January 1841 the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce resolved that the sum of £50.0.0. be placed at the disposal of the Joint Committee in order to promote the campaign for establishing shipmaster and pilot qualifications.<sup>38</sup>

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35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. GC. Min. 1840, p.212.

38. GC. Min. 1841, p.225.

Groups outside Scotland were also attracted to work in concert with the Glasgow interest. The Liverpool Mercury reported on 20 February 1841 that shipowners, merchants and underwriters in Liverpool had met to consider the issue of shipmaster qualifications with the

'deputation from Glasgow who are proceeding to London to promote a Bill for the formation of a Board for the examination of shipmasters and mates'. 39

The Liverpool shipping interest agreed with the Glasgow group on the need for compulsion and a committee was appointed to work in harness with the Glasgow deputation.

On 2 March 1841 the deputation met the Central Committee of the General Shipowners' Society to discover their views on the introduction of a legislative enactment for testing the qualifications of masters and mates in the merchant service.<sup>40</sup> Pending further discussion, the Society adjourned the meeting. On 5 March 1841 the Society's Central Committee met privately to formulate its reply. Opinion was divided. One resolution stressed the vital contribution made by the traditional and still-prevailing system of officer selection to British commerce. Another resolution declared that the intervention of the Legislature in the issue of shipmaster examinations constituted an 'unexpedient interference' with the management of private property. On balance, the Committee agreed that a resolution recommending the establishment of 'voluntary local Boards' might be of some benefit in resolving the problem of shipmaster competency. Despite its tentative nature even this resolution failed to please certain members of the Committee. George F. Young for example, accepted that the competent and impartial examination of

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39. Liverpool Mercury, 26 Feb. 1841, p.6, col.4.

40. SS.Min. 1841, IV, p.157.

ships' officers would be beneficial but only if the regulations could be implemented with minimal interference with the rights of property. Young moved that the resolution should record the Committee's opposition to the formation of boards of examination by legislative enactment but should confirm the Committee's readiness to support measures 'affecting the object by voluntary associations of shipowners'.<sup>41</sup> The amendment was defeated by five votes to three and the agreed resolutions were forwarded to the Glasgow deputation.

The deputation acknowledged the Society's reluctance to participate in any scheme involving government support or control and it expressed an 'anxious desire' to join with the Society in drawing up plans for a voluntary examining procedure. The deputation then requested a meeting with the Society in order to discuss 'one uniform and efficient system' of nationwide examinations.<sup>42</sup>

On 9 March the two sides met again. Stalemate was virtually guaranteed by the deputation's insistence on legislative support and the Society's steadfast refusal to countenance such a move. The Society defended its reluctance to initiate discussion on the examination issue on the grounds that it had never been asked to do so by any of its members. Waiting to receive a push might be regarded as a curious conception of leadership. The Society did, however, affirm its willingness to consider any reasonable proposition based upon a voluntary principle. Recognizing the futility of pursuing so inconsequential a dialogue, the deputation withdrew but warned that it was determined to 'prosecute the matter'.<sup>43</sup>

The representations of the Glasgow interest were referred to in the Society's Annual Report for 1840, presented on 18 June 1841. Polite regret was expressed about the necessity of having to be at odds with so distinguished a body on such an important issue;

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41. Ibid., pp.158/9.

42. Ibid., p.161.

43. Ibid., p.162.

whereupon the important issue was summarily dismissed. On the question of improving the mercantile marine, the Society promised that,

'to whatever specific measure may be brought forward for the attainment of the object, they will devote their best and impartial consideration'.<sup>44</sup>

To the Glasgow group this must have sounded more like a pious platitude than a genuine pledge.

Having failed with the General Shipowners' Society the Glasgow deputation turned its attention to the Board of Trade. The Board's President, Henry Labouchere, assured his Glasgow audience that he was impressed by the 'utility and importance of the scheme' but asked for more information and more time to consider it.<sup>45</sup> The deputation readily complied with his request. In the meantime, Lord Melbourne's Whig Government lost the 1841 general election to the Conservatives under Peel and with the change in the Government came other changes too, including changes within the Board of Trade. Lord Ripon became President of the Board, William Gladstone his Vice-President.<sup>46</sup> On 6 December 1841 Fitzroy wrote to Gladstone on the subject of shipmaster examinations but was advised to allow the subject to mature before bringing it before the Board of Trade.<sup>47</sup> Far from being discouraged by these reversals, the Glasgow group was spurred to a renewed assault on the shipping status quo. They

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44. SS. Rep. 1840, p.2.

45. G.O., 26 Feb. 1842, p.2, col.5.

46. Cook and Keith, British Historical Facts, p.9.

47. Add. MSS. 44552, ff. 16b,17. This volume is one of six (44552-7) registers of letters received by Gladstone while at the Board of Trade. Each letter is arranged alphabetically and a short abstract of each is given together with its reply. Add. MSS. 44552, for example records other correspondence between Gladstone and Fitzroy and appeals to Gladstone from the Provost of Glasgow (ff.10b,11) and Sir James Duke (ff.12b,13), for government action on the shipmaster examination issue.

chose as their leader and spokesman Capt. Robert Fitzroy, R.N., M.P. for Durham City.

Of aristocratic stock - his father was the second son of the Duke of Grafton, his mother the eldest daughter of the first Marquis of Londonderry - Robert Fitzroy was born in 1805, the year of Trafalgar. He went from Harrow to the Royal Naval College, Portsmouth in February 1818, completing the three year course in one year, eight months and receiving the first College medal.<sup>48</sup> After serving aboard a number of ships he returned to England in 1825 where he passed his examination in seamanship with 'marked approbation'. Nor did his examination successes end there:

'In a later examination at the Naval College, he was first on the list of twenty-six. Every question was correctly worked by him, and many of them by two or three different methods. Promotion was immediately awarded by the Admiralty, in consequence of this examination and of the first College medal'.<sup>49</sup>

Today the 'Beagle' is more usually associated with Charles Darwin than with its commander, Robert Fitzroy, but his contemporaries fully appreciated Fitzroy's superb achievement as hydrographer of the South American coast. His charts were comprehensive and meticulous and the five year survey of the 'Beagle' was described shortly after his untimely death as 'one of the most complete in the world's records'.<sup>50</sup> Fitzroy was certainly a master mariner but he was also a humanitarian, always mindful of the needs of the men placed under his command.<sup>51</sup>

It is worth noting that Sir Robert Peel valued Fitzroy's opinion highly enough to seek his advice about the career of his son, William. Sir George Cockburn, a Lord of the Admiralty, had recommended that William return to England for a new posting.

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48. Harold E.L. Mellersh, Fitzroy of the Beagle (1968), pp.22-24.

49. 'Admiral Fitzroy', Good Words 1866, VII, p.407.

50. Ibid., p.408.

51. Ibid., p.407.

PLATE V

Capt. Robert Fitzroy, R.N.

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Fitzroy disagreed with this view and stressed the importance of the young man mixing with good officers and masters:

'Were he to come to England in two months an eligible ship might not be accessible - and, for the sake of a particular station he might be tempted to join a ship on board of which he might find a low tone of society and morals as well as laxity in discipline ...

... Sir George looks with the eye of a Lord of the Admiralty - used to distribute officers on a large scale, rather than with the anxious eye of a parent who will weigh every advantage or disadvantage in the balance'. 52

There were flaws in Fitzroy's temperament - he could be moody and irascible and he eventually took his own life - but he was ideally qualified to lead a campaign to introduce minimum standards of competency and conduct for merchant marine officers.

The objective of the Glasgow interest was to have a Bill laid before the House of Commons proposing an appropriate and effective system of examinations. To this end the campaign was carried forward using two main strategies, direct action and consultation. The first depended on the mobilization of shipping opinion at the various outports, as well as the distribution of circulars to other potential sources of support; the second strategy sought to win support by consultation and debate. All those with an interest in the proposed measures were encouraged to petition the Board of Trade. At the same time, the Glasgow interest attempted to attract to its cause men of influence and power.

One such man of consequence was Alexander Wardrop, the Deputy Chairman of the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce. On 3 February 1842 Wardrop told the Chamber that he had been invited to join a deputation bound for England to promote the introduction of a Bill in Parliament which had as its aim the inauguration of an examination scheme for merchant officers. Wardrop asked the Chamber to approve

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52. Peel Papers, Add. MSS. 40428, f.33.

his inclusion in the delegation. The Chamber agreed to his request and empowered him to act on their behalf in negotiations with the Government or any other group.<sup>53</sup>

The draft Bill, sponsored by Captain Fitzroy, sought to oblige every man aspiring to the post of master or mate on any British ship trading overseas, or on ships above 60 tons burden engaged in the coasting trade, to be qualified under the provision of the Bill. Each man would be required to produce satisfactory proof of good conduct, integrity and sobriety and to pass examinations in seamanship, navigation and general professional knowledge. Boards of Examination, under the supervision and control of the Corporation of Trinity House, Deptford Strond, London, would be established in London, Liverpool, Bristol, Newcastle, Hull, Dublin, Leith and Glasgow. The selection of examiners was to be entrusted to the shipowners of the named ports but each appointment would be subject to the ratification of Trinity House and the examiners themselves would be required to undergo a rigorous examination before acceptance. There would be a Principal Examiner, based in London and appointed by Trinity House. It would be his responsibility to oversee the examining procedures and to scrutinize the results from each Board so that he might 'check any irregularities which he may observe'. All examiners would be salaried and their remuneration would be on a sliding scale related to their local status. Salaries and other expenses would be recouped from examination fees. The fees would range from £2.0.0. - £5.0.0. for masters and from 10s. - £2.0.0d. for mates. All fees, fines and forfeitures would be held in a General Examination Fund under the exclusive control of Trinity House. Deficiencies in the Fund would be covered by a special Parliamentary grant or by Trinity House itself. Exemptions from the

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53. GC. Min. 1842, p.296.

provisions of the Bill would be granted to any master or mate who had held his post for not less than six months from the date of the passing of the Act.<sup>54</sup>

The immediate reaction of the General Shipowners' Society was to send copies of the draft Bill to each member of its Central Committee and to convene a special meeting to consider the measure. At the meeting on 8 February 1842 the Committee decided to canvass the views of its members before committing itself to any action on the issue. Circulars were sent to the various outports advising them of the 'serious and important' proposals contained in the Bill and inviting their comments. The Society did offer some kind of a lead inasmuch as the circulars drew attention to those sections of its Annual Reports for 1840 and 1841 which stated the Society's attitude to the concept of intervention by government in the examination issue: in brief this consisted of unequivocal opposition to any form of government interference and guarded approval of voluntary examinations under the control of competent local committees.<sup>55</sup>

By seeking to invest so much authority in Trinity House, Fitzroy attracted the censure and hostility of shipowners and generated some apprehension amongst those committed to its general principle. Even the Glasgow interest had reservations about the prominence of the role proposed for Trinity House under the terms of Fitzroy's Bill. When the Glasgow representatives, Wardrop and MacDowell, attended a meeting of the Newcastle and Gateshead Shipowners' Society on 22 February 1842 for the purpose of discussing the Bill, it was

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54. G.O., 19 Feb. 1842, p.1, col.2.

55. SS. Min. 1842, IV, p.210/11.

observed that they

'did not appear to advocate Captain Fitzroy's Bill, but their object was to obtain the assent of the shipowners of Newcastle to the principle of a compulsory legislative enactment, for testing the qualifications of candidates for the office of master and mate'.<sup>56</sup>

John Anderson, Secretary to the Shipowners' Society at South Shields, claimed that the Bill was an 'improper interference' with the management of private property.<sup>57</sup> Wardrop took a contrary view. It was his opinion that the Bill would allow shipowners the 'most perfect freedom of choice' in selecting their officers from a body of men of 'recognised and established qualification'.<sup>58</sup> MacDowall reminded the meeting that there was widespread support for the introduction of compulsory examinations and said that the Board of Trade had been presented with many memorials and petitions on the subject.

MacDowall was right. The Board of Trade had received numerous representations, an indication that the vigorous campaign mounted by the Glasgow interest was gaining momentum. Invariably, the petitions laid great stress upon the demonstrable deficiencies of shipmasters:

'it has long been a subject of regret and dissatisfaction ... that there does not exist any law operating as a prevention to the appointment of ignorant, uneducated, incompetent and often most dishonourable men, to the command of vessels'.<sup>59</sup>

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56. G.O., 26 Feb. 1842, p.2, col.4. Wardrop subsequently admitted that certain members of the Glasgow shipping interest objected to some of its details, especially the power entrusted to the Trinity House, see S.C. (1843), p.395, Q.6219.
57. Ibid., p.2, col.5.
58. The deputation inspired the Sunderland shipowners to set up a committee to promote the establishment of examining boards under an Act of Parliament, see G.O., 26 Feb. 1842, p.2, col.5.
59. B.T. 1/382, 198; Merchants and shipowners, Belfast.

'considering the appalling extent of losses by sea, in lives and property, much of which it is to be feared arises from incompetency of those in command of vessels, good policy and humanity alike call out for some remedial measures'. 60

'the indisputable fact that many such disasters are attributable to the incompetency of those placed in charge of merchant vessels'.61

'from what they have personally seen, many persons get the command of vessels long before they have attained a sufficient knowledge of Seamanship, Navigation and Nautical Astronomy'.62

'... a very great proportion of the disasters which occur at sea in the mercantile marine, is occasioned by those having charge of ships not being sufficiently experienced and properly qualified for such charge'.63

Similar memorials were received from shipping interests in Dundee, Glasgow, Montrose, Leith, Liverpool, Dumbarton, Sterling, Aberdeen and Newcastle.<sup>64</sup> Many of the representations referred to continental examining practices and recommended the adoption of similar procedures by government examining boards.<sup>65</sup> The Board of Trade issued what had become almost a standard reply, stating that the 'subject was under consideration'.<sup>66</sup>

On 8 March 1842 a deputation from the Glasgow interest, including Fitzroy himself, conferred again with the Central Committee of the General Shipowners' Society. On this occasion the deputation was in more aggressive mood. MacDowell demanded to know why the

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60. B.T.1/382, 213; Merchants and shipowners, Arbroath.  
61. B.T.1/384, 366; Shipmasters Association, Liverpool.  
62. B.T.1/381, 66; Masters and seamen, Dundee.  
63. B.T.1/382, 175; Magistrates and Town Council, Dundee.  
64. B.T.1/381, 34, 101, 110; B.T.1/382, 153-185, 161-162, 164, 197; B.T.1/384, 416, 446.  
65. See especially memorials from Glasgow (B.T.1/381, 101), Leith (B.T.1/382, 153) and Liverpool (B.T.1/382, 162).  
66. B.T.3/30, pp. 400, 407, 409, 431, 461.

Society had consistently rejected all measures for reform which incorporated legislative support. Public opinion, he asserted, was clearly in favour of shipmaster examinations. The concept of voluntary boards, as suggested by the Shipowners' Society, was acceptable in theory but had proved impracticable in use. The deputation had been told on its visit to South Shields that the Marine Board was almost extinct and that the shipowners at Sunderland had conceded that to make shipmaster examinations generally beneficial they should be made compulsory by an Act of Parliament. The deputation also pointed out that shipowners in the port of Aberdeen had sent a memorial to the Board of Trade in favour of a legislative enactment, 'voluntary Boards not having succeeded'.<sup>67</sup>

MacDowall dismissed the objection raised by the Society in their resolution of 5 March 1841 that a legislative enactment might interfere with the management of private property and urged it to reconsider its position on the issue. He acknowledged the Society's concern about the dominant role entrusted to Trinity House in the proposed measures and agreed that alternative means of control ought to be considered. To clarify and expedite the situation MacDowall tabled discussion documents in which two possible modes of control were outlined, one through the Trinity House, the other by the Board of Trade.<sup>68</sup>

The Society refused to commit itself without first consulting the outports. To a certain extent the Society's hesitancy was the result of the uneven response of the outports to the Society's circular. The proposed Bill had the support of Aberdeen, Newcastle, North Shields and Plymouth but it was opposed by Scarborough and South Shields.<sup>69</sup> When the Society discovered that the Glasgow

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67. SS. Min. 1841, IV, pp.215/6. Cf. Report of the Shields Marine Board for 1842 told of an increasing number of candidates and was self-funding, see G.O., 3 Dec. 1842, p.1, col. 1; also memorial from Aberdeen which pointed out that the voluntary board had been in operation only for a short time, see B.T.1/384, 416.

68. SS. Min. 1841, IV, pp. 216-218.

69. Ibid., p.221.

deputation had arranged a meeting with the Board of Trade at 3.00 p.m. on 10 March, only two days hence, it hastily revised its plans, agreeing to meet again with the deputation at 1.00 p.m. on 10 March, two hours before the Glasgow group's meeting with the Board of Trade. In the event, the meeting did not take place.

On the following day, 9 March, the Society's Central Committee convened to prepare the text of its reply but in spite of exhaustive discussion, no agreement could be reached and therefore no statement issued. The only thing to emerge from the meeting was a letter to the Glasgow delegation announcing the impasse. The Central Committee expressed its willingness to confer with the delegation after its meeting with the Board of Trade.<sup>70</sup> The Glasgow group did not reply.

As arranged, the Glasgow deputation met with the President and Vice-President of the Board of Trade and discussed the Bill's proposals. Both Lord Ripon and Gladstone were apparently impressed by the volume of support for the Bill but requested 'a more full statement in writing' about the necessity and probable effect of the measure before they would commit themselves to a definitive statement on the issue.<sup>71</sup>

The Board of Trade had been willing to participate in the promotion of a voluntary examination system but now that there was a significant shift of opinion in favour of compulsion the Board's enthusiasm markedly waned. The Board was aware of the weight of opinion in favour of government intervention but the Board was equally aware that the seesaw of opinion was weighted in this instance by the mass of shipping views in the north of the country. In short, the figures did not reflect a national consensus of opinion. The Board's doubts about the real support the Glasgow

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70. Ibid., pp. 222/3.

71. The Times, 14 Mar. 1842, p.3, col.4.

group enjoyed were confirmed by subsequent petitions.

In March 1842 the shipowners of Megavissey wrote to the Board expressing their alarm at the pending Parliamentary Bill with its threat of compulsory examinations. The Megavissey group implored the Board to intercede to prevent such an 'obnoxious measure' from passing into law.<sup>72</sup> Obviously misinterpreting the petition, the Board acknowledged the communication 'in favour' of compulsory examinations.<sup>73</sup> The reply from Megavissey sped back swift as an arrow, and just as pointed. The shipowners indignantly pointed out that they were

'not in favour, - but most decidedly against the contemplated measure for the compulsory examination of masters and mates ...'.<sup>74</sup>

Opposition to the Bill also came from the near neighbours of the Glasgow group, the Chamber of Commerce and Manufacturers of Greenock. They complained that the appointment of a Board of surveillance to oversee the conduct and capacity of masters and mates would be detrimental to the shipping interest and injurious to the 'present and future interests' of seafarers.<sup>75</sup> The Board of Trade informed the petitioners that it was unaware of any such Bill before Parliament and assured them that 'none has proceeded from this Department'.<sup>76</sup> This was a remarkable statement from the Board of Trade in view of its recent discussions with Fitzroy and the Glasgow deputation. It seemed to indicate that the Board regarded its conference of 10 March 1842 more in the nature of a peace negotiation rather than as a discussion of battle strategy. There was a further indication of the Board's intentions, or lack of them, when Fitzroy himself wrote to the Board on 20 May 1842 and enclosed a copy of his draft Bill.<sup>77</sup> The Board asked Fitzroy whether the draft reflected

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72. B.T.1/385, 581.  
73. B.T.3/30, p.503.  
74. B.T.1/386, 707.  
75. B.T.1/390, 1030.  
76. B.T.3/30, p.570.  
77. B.T.1/391, 1159.

the sentiments of the deputation who had an interview with Lord Ripon several weeks ago.<sup>78</sup> It would seem that the Board was reluctant to take any action which did not enjoy the support of shipping interests, especially the concurrence of the General Shipowners' Society.

At this point, however, the Society was unable to demonstrate that its policies reflected a consensus of shipping opinion. During its early years the Society had paid particular attention to establishing rapport and cohesion between the parent body and its widespread heterogeneous membership. This not only enabled it to promote policies consistent with the particular needs of the shipping interest but also facilitated a rapid mobilization of shipowner opinion and support. More recently, however, the Society had tended to neglect its outport membership, demonstrated, to some extent, by its failure to canvass their views prior to the inquiries of the 1836 Select Committee. The weakening of the Society's financial resources may necessarily have restricted communication between sectors of its membership. This, together with the failure of the Society to give positive direction on the question of examinations led to the situation in which segments of the Society's membership held alternative positions to that expressed in the formal statements of the organization. Thus, when forced to participate more fully in the matter by the approaches of the Glasgow deputation, the Society was indeed unable to confirm the views of its constituents, and when it did attempt to canvass them, was surprised by their variety. During a mission to gain increased support and subscriptions from the outports, the Society's secretary, William Oviatt, noted the increasing interest and concern shown in the qualification and certification of ships' officers.<sup>79</sup> Although Oviatt reported that the response to his mission was generally

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78. B.T.3/30, p.651. Fitzroy confirmed that the draft Bill had been endorsed by the deputation, see B.T.1/391, 1196.

79. SS. Min, 1841, IV, p.151; for details of Oviatt's report, see pp. 137-151.

favourable, it would appear that the outports could no longer be relied upon to abandon any divergent objectives in favour of the general interest of the Society.

When, therefore, the Society circularized the outports to ascertain their response to Fitzroy's draft Bill, the diversity of the replies placed the Society in a somewhat weak and uncertain position. In consequence, the Society would only promise its members that it would give its

'best and impartial consideration to it, whenever, and by whomsoever, it may be brought before Parliament'.<sup>80</sup>

The Society did not have long to wait. On 28 July 1842 Capt. Robert Fitzroy, R.N., introduced his Bill.<sup>81</sup>

Fitzroy began by making an impassioned appeal for some provision to be made for determining the proficiency of masters and mates in the Merchant Service. Vividly contrasting the ever-increasing tonnage of the British Mercantile Marine - 'upwards of 20,000 vessels of upwards of fifty tons burden' - with the woeful lack of any system of shipmaster examinations, he claimed that there were

'too many instances in which the indignation of Englishmen was roused at the conduct of those who were entrusted with the command of vessels'.<sup>82</sup>

He referred to the recommendations of the 1836 Select Committee on Shipwrecks and challenged the prevailing assumption that only shipowners and masters should have a say about the competency of commanders. Fitzroy reminded the House that passengers and the country generally were also interested in the proficiency of shipmasters.<sup>83</sup> Fitzroy had not forgotten the proposals in the earlier draft Bill

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80. SS. Rep. 1841/2, p.8.

81. Hansard 1842, LXV, 764.

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid., 765.

which had sought to vest much authority in the Trinity House, proposals which had only succeeded in antagonizing the shipowners. Aware that it was a potentially explosive issue he hastened to defuse it. He told members that Trinity House would not be wholly divested of its authority but that its authority would be substantially reduced and the whole system supervised by the Board of Trade. Fitzroy then informed the House that it was not his intention to press his Bill forward for immediate attention and action. He had introduced it at this time so that copies of it might be printed and circulated during the recess to allow time for members to consider and frame any objections 'that might be urged against it'.<sup>84</sup> It was a prudent, conciliatory approach and it produced a sympathetic, if hesitant response.

Aaron Chapman, one of the leaders of the Parliamentary shipping lobby, was prepared to second the motion but declined to pledge his support for its every detail.<sup>85</sup> Gladstone, Vice-President of the Board of Trade, took a similar line of qualified approval when he agreed that there was a strong desire for some such measure but warned that

'there were great differences of opinion among shipowners as to the details of such a measure, all of which would require grave consideration, before Parliament could proceed to legislate'.<sup>86</sup>

Gladstone explained to the House that his conviction that the matter was 'not ripe for legislation' should not be construed as meaning that he did not support Fitzroy's action in merely introducing the Bill. In allowing time for shipmasters and mates to examine the Bill's proposals, suggestions could be received from all parties concerned which would enable the House to proceed with the issue next session hopeful of 'effecting something beneficial'.<sup>87</sup>

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84. Ibid., 766.

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid., 766/7.

87. Ibid., 767.

From the outset Fitzroy's attempt to introduce his Bill in Parliament had been constrained by the demands of the political situation. He had been compelled to take a less aggressive line than he might have wished. To a certain extent, conciliation was part of the strategy of the Glasgow group. Until it encountered the obduracy of the General Shipowners' Society, it had shown at least a degree of willingness to modify its proposals, as well as to consider any alternative measures. Nevertheless, Fitzroy's decision to permit time for reflection, although a common Parliamentary procedure, was not one he would have taken lightly. On the other hand, bearing in mind the might of the shipping interest and the attitude of the Government, it is more than probable that he was left with little alternative in the matter.

In bringing his measure before Parliament, Fitzroy was faced with a dilemma: whether to try and speed his Bill through the House or to pursue his objective with less emphasis on haste and more on consultation and political compromise. That he was conscious of the shipping interest's antipathy to his Bill was readily apparent from his opening remarks. He could hardly ignore the powerful protectionist lobby within Parliament itself, a faction unlikely to be kindly disposed to any measure seeking to encourage government interference in commercial affairs. At the same time, Fitzroy could not discount the possible adverse effect of a prolonged debate on the final outcome of his Bill; apart from anything else, it would allow the shipping interest time to mobilize opposition to it. In weighing the alternatives, Fitzroy realized that to try and force the Bill through the House without opportunity for reflection and discussion, would probably alienate political opinion on all sides. It would also signal the defeat of the campaign for shipmaster examinations. In the short term, Fitzroy's tactics were successful because they secured the introduction of his Bill in Parliament with a minimum of opposition. In the long term, his measure did not enjoy the same success. As Fitzroy himself had feared, the extended national debate permitted the opponents of the Bill to muster their forces and consolidate their opposition.

The General Shipowners' Society made haste to forward copies of the draft Bill to all its correspondents, requesting that replies should reflect their opinions on the Bill's 'principle and details'.<sup>88</sup> The replies seemed to indicate that there was increasing opposition to the idea of compulsory examinations. Although the shipowner societies at Aberdeen, North Shields and Hartlepool were prepared to accept the general principle of compulsion, if not the details of the Bill, the societies at South Shields, Swansea, Sunderland and Hull were adamantly opposed to both the principle and the details.<sup>89</sup> Even The Times was moved to record its 'great and determined opposition' to Captain Fitzroy's proposals.<sup>90</sup>

On 16 February 1843, George Palmer, a founder member and first Chairman of the General Shipowners' Society moved that a Select Committee be established to inquire into the disturbingly high numbers of British shipwrecks. It was a move which had the 'concurrence of the Right Hon. Baronet at the head of Her Majesty's government', Sir Robert Peel.<sup>91</sup> The political implications of the manoeuvre were not lost on Fitzroy. That he was subsequently elected to serve on the Committee did little to disabuse him of the idea that the Committee's terms of reference would include the issue of shipmaster competency, thus effectively delaying the introduction of his Bill. On 24 February 1843 he asked Gladstone, as Vice-President of the Board of Trade, whether it was the intention of the Government to introduce any measure 'respecting the examination of masters and mates' in the merchant service. Gladstone replied that government action on the matter would be determined by the findings of the Select Committee now in session.<sup>92</sup> For Fitzroy, the

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88. SS. Min. 1842, IV, p.268.

89. Ibid., p.276; the Committee of Merchant Adventures at Bristol registered their total disapproval of the Bill, see p.278.

90. The Times, 24 Jan. 1843, p.5, col.5.

91. Hansard 1843, LXVI, 702.

92. Ibid., 1277.

findings of the Select Committee very soon became academic because he was appointed Governor of New Zealand. In the summer of that same year he sailed from England with his wife to take up his new post.<sup>93</sup>

Probably few men in the country were as well fitted for the position of New Zealand Governor as Robert Fitzroy. He came from the correct social background and belonged to the proper profession. Moreover, his tenure of command aboard the 'Beagle' had shown him to be resourceful, industrious and courageous, certainly not the kind of man to refuse a difficult challenge. He was also interested in colonial affairs, knew something of New Zealand and had even offered evidence on the country to a committee of the House of Lords.<sup>94</sup> Lord Stanley must have felt that in making the appointment he was selecting the most obvious candidate for the job. Nonetheless, there remain lingering doubts about the timing of the appointment. Was it coincidence or collusion? Captain Hobson, Fitzroy's predecessor and, incidentally, New Zealand's first Governor, died at his post in 1842 and yet Fitzroy was not appointed until the following year.<sup>95</sup> That the leader of a powerful, national campaign should be transferred to the opposite side of the world at such a moment was a remarkable coincidence.

It would be extravagant to claim that the insurance clubs of Sunderland and South Shields gave a lead and a direction to the movement advocating shipmaster qualifications but it would be unjust to deny that in the context of their time, their efforts in the field showed initiative and vision. In establishing Boards of Examiners to license aspiring masters and mates, they were able to make a contribution to the examination debate. Admittedly, they operated only at local level but the exercise had the effect of highlighting

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93. 'Admiral Fitzroy', Good Words 1866, VII, p.410.

94. Mellersh, Fitzroy of the Beagle, p.197.

95. Ibid.

many of the problems likely to be encountered in any national examination procedure. The fact, too, that the experiments in the north east of England enjoyed only a limited success and a brief life helped to emphasize the necessity of a centralized authority, preferably that of the Legislature. Nor was the north east contribution to the development of nautical examinations diminished by reason of its not having been inspired by wholly altruistic motives.

The activities at Sunderland and South Shields were localized and never intended to be anything else. From the outset, however, the Glasgow campaign, although regional in origin, deliberately aimed at securing the attention of the Government and the success of the campaign placed government in a dilemma. In the first place, the Government had to reconcile its increasing commitment to the extension of free trade with the possibility of being compelled to intervene in the examination debate. In the second place, the Government could not afford to ignore the unease and hostility which the regional campaign had succeeded in generating, even though it was unsure about the extent of the unrest. Numerous representations had been made to Parliament and to the Board of Trade urging the necessity of government intervention in the shipmaster debate but even these remonstrations and demonstrations had not been sufficient to persuade the Legislature to act. To a certain extent, the Government's reluctance could be traced to the disunity within the ranks of the shipowners themselves. Had the Government been convinced that the majority of shipowners were in favour of change, it probably would have taken some positive action. As it was, the Board of Trade's repeated attempts to obtain concrete and consistent evidence about the exact levels of support for the proposed reforms had met with only qualified success. Nor had the Board's task been rendered easier by the change from Whig to Tory Government. If it was difficult to gain an accurate assessment of national opinion, it was not easy to form any precise conclusions about feeling in the reconstituted House of Commons. The Board of Trade was also mindful of the fact that it did not enjoy the absolute trust of the new Tory Government which had accused it, with justification, of not having acted with the proper anonymity and impartiality during the Whig regime. Thus, the Board was determined to act, and to be seen to

act, as a neutral arbiter in the examination debate; hence its persistence in attempting to build up a comprehensive picture of national opinion. Finally, the lack of a centralized authority within government for controlling any system of examinations must have placed constraints on government action in the matter.

The course followed by the General Shipowners' Society in the examination debate was erratic and often contrary. Although given to regular statements of approval for measures designed to promote proper qualifications for masters and mates, it seemed to be resolutely opposed to every suggestion for examining the proficiency of shipmasters. Increasingly, it had alienated itself from its membership. Thus, when it decided to communicate with the outports on the subject of Fitzroy's Bill, its decision was dictated only in part by the strength of the campaign for reform. The independent line being pursued by many of the outports was just as crucial a factor. The Society, in fact, saw not simply a threat to the shipping interest at large but also a very real threat to its own authority.

From its inception the Society had endeavoured to establish itself as the only legitimate representative of the nation's shipping interest. During one of its early meetings Aaron Chapman had emphasized the need for the Society to play a positive role in the determination of mercantile legislation. In every question involving the shipping interest, he had told the members,

'Government should have a body to whose sense and opinions at large they might refer'.<sup>96</sup>

Seven years later, in 1838, the Society was expressing its deep regret at an apparent departure

'from that course of frank and considerate communication in matters affecting the shipping interest'.<sup>97</sup>

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96. The Times, 10 June 1831, p.1, col.5.

97. B.T. 1/346, 7326.

This was no more than an exaggerated claim for a consultative procedure and it did little to endear the Society to the officials of the Board of Trade.<sup>98</sup> The Society declared that in the formulation of all mercantile legislation its views must be taken into account. It was a declaration which it continued to make with an almost monotonous regularity. The consequence of so relentlessly pursuing this policy was the neglect of the particular interests of the Society's own members. This inevitably led to discontent which found greatest expression in the regions. The Society's failure to maintain harmony and the Glasgow group's ability to make capital out of dissent were, in fact, symptoms of the same condition. Thus, it was predictable to a degree that the Society should view with alarm the progress of the campaign for shipmaster examinations, so effectively organized by the Glasgow interest.

If the General Shipowners' Society was anxious about the threat to its authority, indeed to its very existence, it was also apprehensive about the possibility of government interference in the shipping industry. The very basis of Fitzroy's Bill was compulsion engineered by government intervention and as such it was anathema to the Society. But the Society's determined opposition was not motivated only by fear and dislike of government interference. It was suggested earlier in this study that, from the Society's standpoint, promoting the interests of British shipping meant simply the single-minded pursuit of profitability. Unless it could be amply demonstrated that the proposed Bill offered a fair guarantee of increased profits for the shipowner, then the General Shipowners' Society would remain intractably hostile to compulsory shipmaster examinations.

The regional campaign was not destined to succeed in its ultimate objective of placing compulsory shipmaster examinations on

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98. Deacon Hume, Joint Assistant Secretary to the Board of Trade, informed the Society that its comments were 'wholly uncalled for', see Brown, p.176.

the statute book but it was successful in convincing the Government of the need to inaugurate a formal debate on the issue from which might evolve a compromise solution. Fitzroy's departure for New Zealand, whether calculated or coincidental, had the effect of defusing the situation. The ensuing hiatus allowed time for reflection and discussion on both sides. It is in this light that the Government's willingness to institute a Select Committee of Inquiry must be viewed. The tactics of the Government were perhaps more crucial to the development of the examination debate than the overt aggression of the shipping interest, and in particular of the General Shipowners' Society.

In short, government support for an inquiry into British shipwrecks was a cautious but realistic response to a seemingly irreconcilable situation. Caution and realism, however, are not synonymous with an abdication of responsibility. The inquiry did not resolve the conflict between the main protagonists on the examination issue but it significantly influenced government strategy on the subject.

CHAPTER V

Conflict, Consensus and Compromise : the 1843 Select Committee on  
Shipwreck and the case for Shipmaster Examinations.

The Select Committee appointed to inquire into the causes of British shipwrecks and into the means of preserving the lives and property of shipwrecked persons published its First Report on 10 August 1843<sup>1</sup>. Among the many questions considered relevant to the investigation were the character of ships, the competency of ships' officers, the availability of good pilots, harbours of refuge, lighthouses and beacons and the use of charts and compasses. It is the evidence relating to the competency of masters and mates which is the prime concern of this study.

In its Report the Committee drew attention to the conflicting nature of the evidence presented on the competency issue:

'Opinions have been advanced, and the example of foreign nations cited, in favour of the establishment of Boards for the examination of Masters and Mates; whilst, on the other hand, most of the leading Shipowners appear to be decidedly hostile to the enforcement of examination by Act of Parliament, ...'.<sup>2</sup>

The statement highlights the main focus of dispute between the various interests on the subject of shipmaster examinations. It does not indicate the confused and contradictory character of opinion on the subject of shipmaster competency and examinations.

From its inception, the Select Committee attracted the close attention of shipping interests. George Palmer had successfully

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1. C.J. 1843, XCVIII, p.557.
  2. S.C. (1843), p.iv.

moved the establishment of the inquiry on 16 February 1843.<sup>3</sup> Two weeks later on 1 March he attempted to enlarge the Committee's membership from the customary fifteen to twenty-three to afford more adequate representation to the shipping community.<sup>4</sup> Hedworth Lambton, the member for Durham North, argued that the composition of the Committee ought to be governed more by the importance of the subject than by rule. He stressed the comprehensive mandate given to the Committee and reminded the House that it had to inquire into the

'bill of the hon. Member for the city of Durham, which peculiarly affected the interests of the shipping interest all over the kingdom'.<sup>5</sup>

Another member pointed out that to give representation to all towns connected with shipping the membership of the Committee would be 'enlarged ad infinitum'.<sup>6</sup> On a division the motion for the increase was narrowly defeated, ninety votes to eighty-five.<sup>7</sup>

Fitzroy's earlier suspicions about the setting up of the Committee, reinforced by Lambton's comments, were shared by the General Shipowners' Society but for other reasons. Although the Society was prepared to recognize Palmer's loyalty and service to the shipping interest, it demanded some reassurance as to the 'specific object he had in view' when he had moved the Committee's appointment. The Society was inherently distrustful of such committees and declared that in many instances they simply offered a

'convenient means for placing on record any description of opinion however remotely bearing on the subject of inquiry; and the opinions thus recorded, however visionary, are so frequently rendered the basis of attempts at practical legislation deeply affecting important interests ...'.<sup>8</sup>

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3. Hansard 1843, LXVI, 702. See also C.J. 1843, XCVIII, p.69.
  4. Hansard 1843, LXVII, 116.
  5. Ibid., 116/7.
  6. Ibid., 117.
  7. Ibid.
  8. SS. Min. 1843, IV, p.6.

Palmer readily agreed to discuss the matter with a deputation from the Society despite being somewhat perturbed by this need to confirm his allegiance to the shipping interest. He subsequently informed the Society that he had been 'actuated purely by motives of humanity'.<sup>9</sup> Palmer's explanation failed to dispel the Society's anxieties. On 7 April 1843 its Chairman and Deputy-Chairman were specifically enjoined to maintain the most vigilant watch over the Committee's proceedings and to 'take such steps as they may deem advisable ...'. In addition, efforts were made to canvass the support of parliamentary members supportive of shipping interests. Letters were also sent to Aaron Chapman and George Lyall, who, as members of the Select Committee, were in a position to influence its proceedings.<sup>10</sup>

The Select Committee consisted of nine Conservative members, four of whom - Palmer, Lyall, Chapman and Hodgson Hinde - were spokesmen for the shipping interest. There were three official members: William Gladstone, Vice-President of the Board of Trade, Capt. William Gordon, R.N., a Lord of the Admiralty and Henry Baring, a Lord of the Treasury. The other Conservative members were Sir Howard Douglas and Capt. Robert Fitzroy, R.N.

The Liberals contributed a wealth of naval expertise to the Committee in the persons of Sir Charles Napier, Admiral James W.D. Dundas and Capt. James Plumridge, R.N. Also on the Liberal side were George Duncan, a former Dundee merchant and an enthusiastic supporter of steam navigation, Edward Rice, a former banker and High Sheriff of Kent and David Ross, a free trader.<sup>11</sup> When Fitzroy was appointed Governor of New Zealand in April 1843, his place was filled by Capt. Richard Pechell, R.N., the Liberal member for Brighton.<sup>12</sup> The change was of some significance. On one hand

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9. Ibid., p.281.

10. Ibid., p.285.

11. Biographical information relating to the members of the Select Committee has been drawn from the D.N.B.; Hanham, Electoral Facts 1832-1853; Michael Stenton (ed.), Who's Who of British Members of Parliament, 1832-1885 (1976), I.

12. C.J. 1843, XCVIII, p.249.

Fitzroy, the leader of the campaign for examination reform was prevented from taking up his position on the Committee; on the other, Pechell proved to be antagonistic towards the whole concept of Fitzroy's Bill.<sup>13</sup> There is no manifest reason to suppose, however, that Pechell's appointment was any more than an ironic twist of fate.

The Committee heard evidence on twenty-three occasions. As can be seen from the table below, the attendance of Committee members, apart from the Government representatives, was at a high level throughout the inquiry.

TABLE IV

1843 Select Committee on Shipwrecks : attendance of Members

Name of Committee Member	Number of Hearings																							Total No. of Attendances.
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	
Palmer	x									x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	14
Chapman	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	18
Hinde	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x				x	x	x	x	17
Lyall	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	20
Baring		x																						1
Gladstone			x	x	x					x							x		x	x				7
Gordon			x	x	x	x			x								x						x	7
Douglas	x	x	x		x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		x	x		x	x		16
Pechell			x	x	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x	17
Napier	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		x	19
Dundas	x		x	x	x	x	x	x				x	x	x	x					x	x	x	x	15
Plumridge	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	23
Duncan	x	x	x		x	x		x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	17
Rice		x	x	x	x		x	x			x		x	x	x	x			x	x	x		x	15
Ross	x	x	x	x		x		x								x		x	x	x			x	11
Members Present at each hearing	10	8	13	9	12	9	8	10	7	9	8	9	10	10	9	8	9	6	12	11	11	7	12	

Source: S.C. (1843), pp.1,15,30,43,59,82,95,115,133,149,166,182,194, 218,240,260,282,312,328,349,363,387,400

13. For evidence of his critical stance on Fitzroy's Bill, see his questioning of leading members of the shipping interest, S.C.(1843), p.70,QQ.1115-7; Joseph Somes : p.160 QQ.2424-7; Joseph Straker ; p.168, QQ.2579/80; George Kendal : p.203, QQ.3084/5; Anthony Ridley. Pechell had also been appointed a replacement member on the 1836 Select Committee on Shipwrecks but failed to attend any of its hearings.

With Palmer as Chairman of the Committee, the shipping interest was in a position to play an influential role in the proceedings; the chair was taken by a member of the interest on seventeen occasions. On average, nine Committee members were present at each hearing of which four were explicitly supportive of shipping interests.

The evidence presented to the Select Committee on the issue of shipmaster competency can be classified in terms of three debates:

- (i) whether or not the incompetency of ships' officers was a major cause of shipwreck?
- (ii) to what extent could competency be improved by the introduction of some form of examining process?
- (iii) by what means should the examining process be controlled if instituted?

The need to establish some sort of correlation between shipmaster incompetency and shipwreck was of direct concern to those interests pressing for the introduction of examinations for British shipmasters and mates. Unless claims that action was required to improve the general proficiency of merchant officers could be substantiated, progress on the examination front would be severely curtailed. The significance of the competency debate was not lost upon shipping interests.

A majority of shipowner witnesses expressed satisfaction as to the standards of skill and conduct prevailing among ships officers. Robert Anderson, for example, Secretary to the Shipowners' Society at South Shields, declared that not only were masters and mates better educated than they had previously been but that they were also 'better acquainted with navigation and nautical astronomy'.<sup>14</sup> Johnson Hicks, a master and shipowner in the coasting trade admitted, however, that very few captains in that particular trade understood navigation.<sup>15</sup> A more critical stance was taken by John Gladstone, father of

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14. S.C. (1843), p.124, Q.1969.

15. S.C. (1843), p.107, Q.1695.

W.E. Gladstone and a senior member of the shipping interest in Liverpool. He was unaware of any improvement in the scientific attainments of masters in the merchant service and claimed that masters in the North of England were frequently replaced when trading was extended beyond coastal limits.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, he instanced several cases of shipping loss attributable directly to the incapacity of commanders. Joseph Somes, one of the country's largest shipowners and a prominent member of the General Shipowners' Society refuted suggestions that shipwreck arose either from the insufficiency of ships or the incompetency of masters.<sup>17</sup> He conceded subsequently that although British shipmasters were generally competent for office there were cases where ships were entrusted to men unfitted for command. But it was unreasonable, he argued, to expect all 28,960 masters on the 28,960 ships in the British merchant service to be highly qualified.<sup>18</sup> Anthony Ridley, Chairman of the General Shipowners' Society said shipwreck was inevitable; George Kendall, Chairman of the Liverpool Shipowners Association suggested that shipping losses could be due to 'bad weather'.<sup>19</sup> Responses from other witnesses were less vague.

Capt. Robert Fitzroy, R.N., called as a witness, claimed that the principal cause of British shipwrecks was the neglect, incompetency and mismanagement of commanders.<sup>20</sup> Capt. John Washington, R.N., suggested that shipmaster incompetency derived from a lack of navigational skill and an ignorance of basic seamanship.<sup>21</sup> Capt. Alexander Becher, R.N., asserted that over the previous six months

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16. S.C. (1843), p.350, Q.5529. He had assisted Fitzroy in drawing up his Bill, see p.352, Q.5544.
17. S.C. (1843), p.60, QQ.877,879.
18. S.C. (1843), p.67, QQ.1052/3.
19. S.C. (1843), p.196, Q.3002; p.166, Q.2542.
20. S.C. (1843), p.1, Q.1.
21. S.C. (1843), pp.95/6, Q.1484.

the incompetency of shipmasters had been responsible in part for two hundred shipwrecks.<sup>22</sup> A particularly damning indictment came from the Admiralty. Asked by the Select Committee to advise as to the likely causes of shipwreck on the coast of France the Lord Commissioners assigned the losses to

'inattention to the reckoning, stupidity about the lights, running in thick weather, neglecting to allow for tides, bad compasses, and above all laziness in not heaving the lead...'.<sup>23</sup>

Capt. Joseph Taylor, R.N., took a more magnanimous line and argued that a great deal of knowledge and experience was to be found among the masters of merchant vessels.<sup>24</sup>

Evidence drawn from the commercial and professional community ashore was more contradictory. Capt. James Dalzell, agent to the underwriters in Glasgow claimed that

'80 ships out of a 100 get on shore either from the ignorance, carelessness, or stupidity of the masters'.<sup>25</sup>

Alexander Wardrop, manager of a mercantile insurance company and a prominent member of the Glasgow shipping interest produced statistics, shown in the following table, purporting to link shipping loss to shipmaster incompetency.<sup>26</sup> While such evidence is clearly of limited value given the somewhat vague nature of the listed causes of ship - loss, it indicates that shipmaster incompetency and mismanagement was to some extent a contributory factor.

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22. S.C. (1843), p.116, Q.1847.

23. S.C. (1843), App. 6, p.53.

24. S.C. (1843), p.148, Q.2280.

25. S.C. (1843), p.30, Q.340.

26. S.C. (1843), p.387, Q.6120.

TABLE V

Extent and Cause of the Shipping Losses sustained by a Provincial Marine Insurance Company over a period of Three Years, the ships being primarily Foreign-going

No.	Causes of Loss	Ships	Tons	Lives Lost
1	Abandoned	17	6,396	13
2	Not heard of	5	1,065	127
3	Out of course or reckoning	6	2,324	36
4	Fog and current	5	1,932	-
5	Want of lead and lookout	5	2,552	1
6	Mistake of lights and bearings	4	2,915	90
7	Drunkenness	3	1,441	-
8	Burned	4	1,565	18
9	Condemned and yet sailing	3	741	-
10	Unsatisfactory	8	3,424	2
11	Doubtful and highly suspicious	3	1,124	-
12	Evident perils of the sea	36	10,597	247
	Total	99	36,076	534

Source: S.C. (1843), App. 13, p.79.

In contrast, Capt. Joseph Haythorn, a former commander in the East India Company's service, disclaimed any knowledge of shipping loss stemming from an ignorance of navigation on the part of merchant captains.<sup>27</sup> Capt. William Cole, a Lloyd's agent, preferred to attribute shipping loss to the imprudence rather than to the incompetency of commanders; John Brunton, shipwright surveyor to the port of Sunderland, argued that more ships were lost by the incompetency of masters than by the insufficiency of vessels.<sup>28</sup>

27. S.C. (1843), p.180, Q.2766.

28. S.C. (1843), p.109, Q.1743; p.45, Q.660.

On the question of whether a causal relationship obtained between shipwreck and shipmaster competency opinion was divided across and within the various interest groups. Nevertheless, a consensus emerged to suggest that shipmaster incompetency was a direct and frequent source of shipping loss. There was, however, some disagreement as to the causes of such mismanagement. The issue of shipmaster examinations highlighted this discord.

Doubts were raised by several shipowners as to the reliance and validity of the examining format outlined in Fitzroy's Bill. To some extent such concern was perhaps inevitable given the propensity of many shipowners to perceive the needs of shipmasters primarily in terms of practical skills and character development. In short, there was a tendency for shipowners to evaluate examinations on criteria different from those envisaged by their proponents. Some, for example, questioned whether the proposed examinations would provide valid information as to a man's seamanship skill, sobriety or moral conduct. Pressed by Gladstone he admitted that he was unable to identify a positive objection to the principle of examining officers for command but argued that examinations would do little good.<sup>29</sup> Ridley stressed that shipowners were obliged to go to great lengths to secure sober and reputable men for command and doubted the ability of examinations to remedy the problem of drunkenness among mercantile personnel. He did not disapprove of the idea of examining masters but was unaware of any benefits likely to be derived from them. Paradoxically, he went on to suggest that at minor ports where the availability of ships' officers was restricted, the selection of shipmasters might be facilitated by some form of examining process, voluntarily established.<sup>30</sup> Kendall conceded that examinations could have a beneficial moral effect but affirmed the need to 'have it done with little expense'.<sup>31</sup> A more constructive and positive response came

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29. S.C. (1843), p.63, QQ.949-955.

30. S.C. (1843), p.197, Q.3014; p.199, Q.3033.

31. S.C. (1843), p.170, Q.2616.

from other shipowners. Joseph Straker argued that it was impossible to judge a master's competency on the basis of a single test. In his view it was necessary to have access to information relating to the previous experience, service and character of each candidate.<sup>32</sup>

Nathaniel Domett confirmed that he had always examined his masters as to their navigational expertise. Anderson outlined the examining procedures obtaining in Sunderland and South Shields under the aegis of the local insurance clubs.<sup>33</sup>

The doubts raised by some of the shipowning interests on the examination issue were not shared by the majority of witnesses. There was a widespread belief that the introduction of shipmaster examinations would lead to a reduction in shipwrecks, afford protection to underwriters and shipowners alike and give a general impulse to the moral and educational development of masters and mates.<sup>34</sup> Capt. Edward Chappell, R.N., told the Committee that the Royal Mail Company had sought to contain shipping losses by obliging all their masters and mates to submit to an examination to determine their competency for office. The results, declared Chappell, had convinced him 'beyond all doubt of the propriety of such examinations.'<sup>35</sup> It was his opinion that all serving officers in the mercantile marine should be tested for their general proficiency and a clear distinction drawn between the examinations for master and mate. Capt. Becher, R.N., also expressed strong support for shipmaster examination, urging that mates should also be subject to an examination, though of a lower standard than that for masters.<sup>36</sup> Capt. Dalzell agreed that every master, except those engaged in the coasting trade, should be examined on seamanship and navigation and that coasting masters subsequently transferred to the foreign-going trade should be examined before taking command.<sup>37</sup>

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32. S.C. (1843), p.158, Q.2395.

33. S.C. (1843), p.254, QQ.3936/7; p.121, Q.1920.

34. S.C. (1843), p.322, QQ.5144/5; Capt. Adderley Sleigh: p.45, Q.667; Brunton : p.63, QQ.949/50; Somes.

35. S.C. (1843), p.48, Q.697. For details of the examination syllabus, see App. XI , p. 340.

36. S.C. (1843), p.115, QQ.1833, 1839.

37. S.C. (1843), p.32, Q.378.

Professional officers were not just concerned about the explicit professional requirements of command. There was an echo of the shipowners' sentiments from Lieut. James Forrest, R.N., when he said that examinations were desirable

'not so much from incompetency with regard to professional knowledge as with regard to character. I would not consider any examination sufficient which merely related to professional abilities...'.<sup>38</sup>

Brunton believed that the universal adoption of an examining procedure would elevate the morals of the men just as much as it would raise the general level of proficiency in the merchant service; John Gladstone, foreshadowing the concern of his son for the moral welfare of certain members of the opposite sex, thought that Fitzroy's proposals for examining masters and mates would raise the character of 'that class of individuals'.<sup>39</sup>

Little attempt, however, was made by either of the main factions in the examination debate to explore alternative means of improving the proficiency of ships' officers. The possibility of an improved system of marine apprenticeship, for instance, received scant attention even though a cogent case for such a system had been introduced to the 1836 Shipwreck Committee on behalf of shipping interests.<sup>40</sup> It would seem that during the intervening period, the combined effects of foreign competition and depressed shipping markets had modified shipowning opinion on the subject.<sup>41</sup> Several shipowners questioned the need to carry the required quota of apprentices in an attempt to reduce operating costs. As Anderson pointed out, whereas 'half-men' employed in foreign fleets were completely discharged at the end of each voyage, British shipowners were obliged to give continuous attention to the welfare and occupation of their apprentices.<sup>42</sup> Many shipowners flouted the law relating to the carrying

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38. S.C. (1843), p.24, Q.251.

39. S.C. (1843), p.43, Q.599; p.46, Q.675; p.350, Q.5532.

40. S.C. (1836), p.23, QQ.310, 314, 319.

41. SS. Rep. 1841/2, p.1.

42. S.C. (1843), p.129, Q.2082.

of apprentices.<sup>43</sup>

Although ships' officers had been in the vanguard of those advocating an improvement in seamanship standards few were inclined to introduce or endorse the case for the initial training of seafarers. Capt. Barber, however, argued that apprentices were the seeds of the profession and suggested that each captain should teach his apprentices the rudiments of navigation.<sup>44</sup> Generally, officers appeared to be more concerned about improving the proficiency of men holding a command than about the training of apprentices. In any case, since so many masters were themselves so patently incompetent it would be tantamount to asking the blind to lead the blind. Marine apprenticeship did not become a crucial element in the examination debate because it was not in the interests of the major factions to promote it.

The widespread concern about the need to improve the character and moral well-being of ships' officers suggested that the proponents of shipmaster examinations had cause for optimism. In essence, the problem was to reconcile differences of emphasis. The shipping interest, even though many of its members cautiously endorsed the need for a form of examining procedure, chose to see examinations as only second in priority to the main task of securing for the merchant service men of temperate habit and good character. Understandably, while recognizing the necessity of attracting and retaining men of undoubted sobriety and sound character, professional officers held that the first requirement demanded of any man appointed to a command must be professional competence - a competence determined through the instrument of some examining procedure. At this point the differences between the two points of view were not irreconcilable. The debate about the organization and control of the examinations, however, highlighted the existence of other, more critical objections, to the introduction of shipmaster examinations.

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43. S.C. (1843), p.216, Q.3265; Capt. Barber.

44. S.C. (1843), p.216, Q.3267.

The control debate revolved around three main issues: first, whether examinations should be conducted by independent local examining boards or by a central board in London; secondly, the constitution of the boards themselves; thirdly, whether or not the examinations should be compulsory.

Several shipowners argued that if an examining system had to be introduced then it ought to be conducted by those best fitted for the task, namely, the shipowners themselves. Anderson pointed out that most northern shipowners had spent time at sea and were thus perfectly competent to judge the proficiency of their own masters and mates.<sup>45</sup> Some criticized and questioned the validity of any examination set by a board of examiners, implying that the arrangement would lend itself to cramming.<sup>46</sup>

Straker was both contrary and complacent. He argued against the introduction of any examination because little advantage would be gained; at the same time he expressed satisfaction with the board of examiners at Shields 'which we ourselves compose'.<sup>47</sup> It was apparent that he was not so much opposed to the principle of examinations as the possibility of outside control. Asked by Chapman if he would insure at a lower premium if his masters were licensed by a board, Straker admitted that he would consider such a proposal only if the board 'was in my own port'.<sup>48</sup> At the same time he was still prepared to recommend the establishment in other sea-ports of examining boards similar to the one at South Shields.

Whatever else the examining board at South Shields engaged in, it certainly did not over-burden itself with administrative chores. When cross-examined by Gladstone, Straker had to confess that his board kept no minutes, made no records and awarded no certificates.<sup>49</sup>

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45. S.C. (1843), p.122, Q.1933.

46. S.C. (1843), p.67, QQ.1056-1059.

47. S.C. (1843), p.157, Q.2376; p.158, Q.2390.

48. S.C. (1843), p.159, Q.2413.

49. S.C. (1843), p.159, QQ.2417/8. Cf. Claim of the South Shields Marine Board in 1842 to have awarded 153 Certificates since its inception, see G.O. 3 Dec. 1842, p.1, col.1.

In the light of such information, it was not surprising that Gladstone wished to know more about Straker's hostility to examinations.

Gladstone: 'Taking the question of mercantile examination as a whole, do you not think that an examination of this kind would afford a better test of seamanship than now exists?'

Straker: 'I do not think that seamanship is the thing wanted. Most men have sufficient seamanship'.

Gladstone: 'What do you want besides seamanship?'

Straker: 'Sobriety and moral conduct'.

Gladstone: 'Might not moral conduct, sobriety, and steadiness be included in the certificate as a matter of fact?'

Straker: 'It might; but I am afraid the Board could not come at it'.

Gladstone: 'You think the Board could not come at it so well as the private owner of a vessel?'

Straker: 'I think not'.

Gladstone: 'Do you think there would be any interference with freedom of competition among the officers of merchant ships?'

Straker: 'I think there would; and I think the expense attending it would be an objection'. 50

Similar sentiments were expressed by other shipowners. Ridley wondered how a board could possibly act in the best interests of the owner; 'the owner has his pocket at stake' and would therefore be at pains to select the most reliable men.<sup>51</sup> Kendall declared emphatically that 'where my money is, I will pay more attention than any Committee'. He did concede that if the Board were a local one 'perhaps there might be some benefit derived from it'.<sup>52</sup>

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50. S.C. (1843), p.159, QQ.2404-2408.

51. S.C. (1843), p.197, Q.3015.

52. S.C. (1843), p.168, Q.2583; p.166, Q.2545.

Opinions on the subject of examination control were sought outside the shipping interest. John Mitchell, an Edinburgh merchant, thought that the Boards should be elected only by shipowners and shipmasters.<sup>53</sup> Capt. Taylor, R.N., was satisfied that examinations could safely be left in the hands of shipowners.<sup>54</sup> Other witnesses were alarmed by such proposals. Capt. Dalzell doubted the ability of many shipowners to undertake the responsible role of examiners. Pressed by Chapman on this point he persisted in his belief that only impartial bodies should be entrusted with so important a function.<sup>55</sup> John Gladstone supported this view, claiming that in 'nine cases out of ten' shipowners would be incompetent for such a task.<sup>56</sup>

Support for local examining boards at the outports was widespread but doubts were expressed about the availability of qualified men to operate them. Capt. Chappell, R.N., raised the question of remuneration and suspected that local examiners would be unwilling to officiate without payment.<sup>57</sup> Capt. Becher, R.N., thought that unpaid staff could be recruited but was realistic enough to suggest that they might not attend regularly.<sup>58</sup> Although agreeing that a stranger would be 'more likely to be exempt from favouritism', Edward Riddle, headmaster of Greenwich navigation school, preferred the idea of a local rather than a central examining board.<sup>59</sup> Capt. Washington, R.N., wanted local boards to be assisted by an experienced naval man, an Elder Brother of Trinity House.<sup>60</sup> Capt. Sparshott, R.N., was of the opinion that the examining board should be staffed by experienced naval and merchant officers.<sup>61</sup> Lieut. Forrest, R.N., suggested that local examining boards should be governed by Trinity

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53. S.C. (1843), p.16, Q.143.  
54. S.C. (1843), p.148, Q.2281  
55. S.C. (1843), p.31, Q.355; p.35, Q.424.  
56. S.C. (1843), p.353, Q.5555.  
57. S.C. (1843), p.48, Q.704.  
58. S.C. (1843), p.116, QQ.1850/1.  
59. S.C. (1843), p.243, Q.3773.  
60. S.C. (1843), p.98, QQ. 1530-1532.  
61. S.C. (1843), p.226, Q.3436.

House.<sup>62</sup> Capt. Barber favoured a board composed of old commanders in the merchant service and chaired by 'a Government man'.<sup>63</sup>

Fears of partiality and even of nepotism led a number of witnesses to support the idea of a central board in London. Capt. Sparshott, R.N., articulated their fears:

'if you take masters or captains of vessels belonging to the ports, they will all have relations, or connexions, or friends; and they may the more readily be disposed to pass over any little imperfections'.<sup>64</sup>

Capt. Denham, R.N., advised that any master or mate seeking employment should be required to 'come up to a Central Board; certainly not local'. Local boards should only be allowed if 'derived from a central authority'.<sup>65</sup> Capt. Dalzell thought that local boards could never function efficiently

'without the authority of a head Board at London; a Board to whom there could be an appeal from any others'.<sup>66</sup>

In general, evidence presented to the Committee had been of a contradictory but non-polarized nature. The situation changed when the question of compulsory examinations was broached. Anderson, for example, rejected emphatically the idea of compulsory examinations. The experiment at South Shields had demonstrated that it would be

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62. S.C. (1843), p.29, Q.336.

63. S.C. (1843), p.216, Q.3262.

64. S.C. (1843), p.227, Q.3452.

65. S.C. (1843), p.93, Q.1463; p.94, Q.1469.

66. S.C. (1843), p.35, Q.415.

impossible to make the system obligatory.<sup>67</sup> Some was very much opposed to such an 'arbitrary power'.<sup>68</sup> Kendall spoke of the almost universal antipathy to government interference in Liverpool and that the principal shipowners in that port had moved a resolution to that effect.<sup>69</sup> John Gladstone, however, was persuaded that the examinations should be made obligatory and that the compulsion constituted a fair interference into the interests of shipowners and their officers.<sup>70</sup>

Witnesses outside the shipping interest generally endorsed the compulsory principle. Riddle stressed the need to make the examinations 'absolutely imperative'; Wardrop asserted that the merchants and shipowners at Glasgow were in favour of the measures proposed by Fitzroy's Bill.<sup>71</sup> Thomas Sands, Chairman of the Liverpool Dock Company, queried Kendall's remark as to the opposition of Liverpool shipowners to government involvement. It was his opinion that there was general approval in Liverpool for the compulsory examination of masters and mates.<sup>72</sup> John Powell, a member of Lloyds' Coffee-house, agreed that the examinations should be obligatory but acknowledged that many shipowners were hostile to such a measure.<sup>73</sup> Capt. Barber thought that it would be advisable to make the examinations compulsory but recognized that there could be some difficulties.<sup>74</sup> Capt. Sparshott, R.N., recommended that the examinations should be compulsory and be incumbent on all masters and mates.<sup>75</sup> Lieut. Forrest R.N., argued the case for government intervention on a wider basis:

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67. S.C. (1843), p.121, Q.1922.

68. S.C. (1843), p.69, Q.1103.

69. S.C. (1843), p.166, Q.2549.

70. S.C. (1843), p.350, QQ.5533/4.

71. S.C. (1843), p.243, Q.3764; p.395, Q.6219.

72. S.C. (1843), p.396, Q.6235.

73. S.C. (1843), p.317, Q.5043; p.318, Q.5064.

74. S.C. (1843), p.211, Q.3187.

75. S.C. (1843), p.229, QQ.3501/2.

'... there is a necessity for a code of maritime laws to be established for the internal government of ships, with regard to the discipline and number of the crew ... the survey of ships, loss at sea; and in fact to embrace everything connected with mercantile shipping'.<sup>76</sup>

Those who were in opposition to the idea of government intervention were finding it increasingly difficult to justify their hostility, especially in view of the growing ascendancy of foreign shipping. Many witnesses doubted the ability of British shipping to compete on the open market with foreign fleets, although there was not complete agreement about the reasons. In general, those outside the shipping interest blamed the incompetence of masters whereas the shipping interest itself was content to place the blame on government policies.

Speaking for those outside the shipping interest, Capt. Fitzroy, R.N., offered damning testimony. Because of the inferior qualifications of British masters engaged in the foreign trade, some merchant houses were choosing to send their cargoes 'in foreign bottoms in preference to our ships'.<sup>77</sup> The practice, he went on, was an indication of the many advantages enjoyed by foreign vessels over British vessels: better care was taken of foreign ships; more attention was paid to the storage and carriage of cargoes; and business transactions were carried out with greater efficiency. He rejected the idea that foreign shipowners were able to offer cheaper rates because of the lower operating costs of their ships. Foreign seamen, he admitted, might receive lower wages but that was offset by foreign ships carrying larger crews.<sup>78</sup> Wardrop was equally critical:

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76. S.C. (1843), pp.25/26, Q.263.

77. S.C. (1843), p.1/2, Q.1.

78. S.C. (1843), p.5, QQ.32-36.

'...English vessels and captains are going fast out of repute, and Swedes, Austrians and Danes, taking their place; also Hamburgese, whose captains are in general much more intelligent, better behaved, and better educated, ...'.<sup>79</sup>

Gladstone was disturbed by these allegations. He questioned Somes on the subject:

Gladstone: 'Thirty years ago would you say that though the state of British navigation is now superior to what it was then, there was a great comparative superiority in the navigation of British over foreign?'

Somes: 'Certainly'.

Gladstone: 'Do you think that superiority continues?'

Somes: 'No'.

Gladstone: 'As far as the skill of foreign shipmasters is concerned, they are nearer than they were formerly?'

Somes: 'Yes, they have had more practice'.

Gladstone: 'Would you say that the masters of those ships who compete with us are as well and better conducted than ours, and as well or better educated?'

Somes: 'I think the foreign masters are as well conducted, but not superior'.

Gladstone: 'Neither in point of skill nor of moral conduct superior?'

Somes: 'No; I think they are quite equal to ours, but not superior, certainly'.<sup>80</sup>

That one of the most dogmatic and most powerful members of the shipping interest should have acknowledged the rapidly advancing skills and steadfast conduct of foreign masters, was of vital

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79. S.C. (1843), p.390, Q.6146.

80. S.C. (1843), p.60, QQ.884-888.

significance. It was more significant still that his admission should have been made to William Gladstone, Vice-President of the Board of Trade.

The improvement in the skills of continental masters and mates was explained by John Mitchell. He was a representative to the Select Committee from the port of Leith and had a reputation as a man 'conversant with the system of examination practised in other countries'.<sup>81</sup> His evidence to the Committee was thorough, detailed and authoritative. Mitchell said that it was standard continental practice to require all masters and mates to satisfy an examining board about their competence for command. His experience led him to assert that

'... in those countries where the captains and mates are examined, the captains are very excellent men; sober and attentive to their duties, and evidently well educated; possessing much superior education to what we generally find in our own country'.<sup>82</sup>

Mitchell enthused about the Prussian system of examination. Mates in Prussia had to be at least twenty years of age and to have spent five years at sea before being allowed to sit the licensing examination. Licences were of two grades: the senior grade permitted mates to navigate anywhere in the world; the lower grade imposed limitations on the size of ship and the areas of navigation. Masters' certificates were divided into three categories, each clearly defining the range and nature of command. The examinations themselves were held in the various sea-ports, the examiners representing the interests of shipowners, ship-builders and shipmasters. Mitchell warned that before such procedures could be adopted in this country,

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81. S.C. (1843), p.15, letter to Committee from Leith shipping interests introducing Mitchell.

82. S.C. (1843), p.16, Q.145.

'academies must be established, and it would take several years before the mates or masters would come under the curriculum of examination, because I do not think it could possibly be at once made an act of legislation to compel mates and masters to be examined upon tactics and new theories which they have had no opportunity of acquiring in many sea-port towns'.<sup>83</sup>

Somes was not the only shipowner prepared to acknowledge the growing threat from foreign shipping. Straker affirmed that the decrease in British trade in the Baltic had coincided with a proportionate increase in the number of foreign ships engaged in that trade.<sup>84</sup> Anderson argued that British vessels were being driven out of the Baltic trade because of the reciprocity system. He claimed that foreign owners paid lower wages and their ships carried fewer seamen.<sup>85</sup> Somes declared that he knew of American ships which carried '20 per cent less seamen than we have'.<sup>86</sup> It was a remark that led Gladstone to observe that they must either be 'better men or better governed'.<sup>87</sup>

The Select Committee was aware of the strength of shipping opinion on the question of obligatory legislation. At the same time the Committee could not easily ignore the arguments raised in support of the compulsory principle. Caught between conflicting currents of opinion the Committee's draft report omitted any reference to the need for establishing a compulsory system of examinations for masters and mates. On a motion by Admiral Dundas the draft report was amended by a vote of six to five, to recommend the passing of a legislative enactment

'obliging in future all masters and mates in the merchant service to be examined by competent persons'.<sup>88</sup>

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83. S.C. (1843), p.17, Q.149.  
84. S.C. (1843), p.163, QQ.2490-2492.  
85. S.C. (1843), p.125, Q.1998-2005.  
86. S.C. (1843), p.61, Q.903.  
87. S.C. (1843), p.61, Q.905.  
88. S.C. (1843), p.xi.

Capt. Gordon, the Admiralty's representative, voted against the motion. Gladstone and Baring were absent. The Committee's published Report urged that on the grounds of promoting science and preventing loss of life and property government should establish

'local Boards for the purpose of examining into the ability, conduct, and character of all who wish to qualify as Masters and Mates in the merchant service'.<sup>89</sup>

Deadlocked situations are more often resolved by compromise than by a total surrender of one side to the other's point of view. The Committee's recommendations on the examination issue was a case in point. The advocates of compulsory shipmaster examination had secured authoritative support for their cause; the shipping interest had ensured that the control of the system was entrusted to local agencies. On balance, however, there can be little doubt that the pro-examination lobby had won the day. The findings of the Select Committee marked a significant breakthrough in the campaign to establish a national system of compulsory examinations.

Without wishing to decry the achievements of Fitzroy and his supporters in securing the tacit support of the Select Committee to their campaign it is pertinent to ask whether or not their endeavours stemmed from wholly altruistic motives. Whilst there can be little doubt that the prevailing high levels of shipwreck could often be justifiably attributed to the incompetence of ships' officers, it is less clear why they should focus upon examinations as the principle means of ascertaining and improving shipmaster competency. To some extent it could be reasonably argued that in many instances their position on the issue merely reflected a desire to sustain practices with which they were conversant and had themselves been subject to. It is therefore not surprising to observe that witnesses drawn from the Royal Navy or from the service of the East India Company proved to be among the strongest advocates of the examining system. Taking

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89. S.C. (1843), p.iv.

this argument a stage further it might be argued that their activities could also have been generated by a desire to enhance the professional status of the British sea-going officer.

Professional status cannot be gained overnight, it is invariably a lengthy process during which certain criteria are established. Among the established professions a common core of acceptable criteria can be identified. First, that the profession itself should have a monopolizable theoretical knowledge base and have an area of knowledge and skill not available to others.<sup>90</sup> Translating this requirement in terms of the activities of the proponents of examinations one can recognize parallel strategies in their emphasis upon the need to attend to the more theoretical aspects of a ship's command, the complex nature of which demanded a high level of initial training and education. Another aspect relevant to this particular argument is that as a group they were invariably in favour of using the examinations as a sort of screening device, a channel through which aspiring shipmasters would be obliged to pass as a pre-requisite to obtaining a licence to practice. Similarly, proposals seeking to spell out and classify the certificates on the basis of theoretical knowledge and skills could be conceived as a further attempt by an embryo profession to enhance its status by the establishment of a closely defined hierarchical and technical base.

A second and related criterion seemingly implicit in the professionalization of an occupation, is that careful attention should be paid to the qualifications and previous training of entrants. Surprisingly, in view of the extensive nature of the evidence on the examination issue, there appeared to be little interest shown in providing facilities whereby potential sea-going officers could obtain the relevant education and training necessary to satisfy the demands

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90. Terence J. Johnson, Professions and Power (1972), p.23.

See also Harold L. Wilensky, 'The Professionalization of Everyone', American Journal of Sociology (1964), LXX, pp.137-158; William J. Reader, Professional Men. The rise of the professional classes in nineteenth-century England (1966), pp.59-72; Carr-Saunders and Wilson, The Professions, pp.365-381.

of the examination. It could be argued that until agreement was reached between the principal protagonists as to what constituted the primary needs of masters and mates it would have been a futile exercise to consider problems of curriculum design and the provision of appropriate back-up resources. Even so, it might have been expected that, given the general paucity of educational provision, and of nautical education in particular, the question of primary education would have been of general interest.

The limited attention given to the issue tended to be drawn primarily from the evidence of shipmasters and naval personnel. Capt. Wheatley, R.N., was satisfied that the defective state of the British mercantile marine was the result of employing men 'not sufficiently educated' and supported the idea of having local schools established in the different sea-ports for the education of sea-farers.<sup>91</sup> The educational attainments of many masters, particularly those engaged in the coasting trade, were abysmally low. Riddle, referring to the efforts of Trinity House and the navigational school at Greenwich to elevate the standard of nautical education, observed that many coasting masters could not even write and claimed that

'if you take three-fourths of the masters  
and examine the logs, nobody could  
understand them'.<sup>92</sup>

Evidence as to attainments of coasting masters came from within the industry. Hicks suggested that coasting men would be reluctant to present themselves for examination 'because they are not very good scholars'.<sup>93</sup> Other testimony sought to dismiss shipowner allegations that men could be crammed to satisfy the requirements of the proposed examinations.<sup>94</sup> Confirming the availability of a sufficient number of

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91. S.C. (1843), p.258, QQ.4003, 4010.

92. S.C. (1843), p.242, Q.3756; for useful discussion of seafarer literacy in the nineteenth century, see Kennerley, 'Education of the Merchant Seamen', pp.178-183.

93. S.C. (1843), p.107, Q.1701.

94. Some had suggested earlier that 'all might be learnt in 48 hours by reading Hamilton Moore to pass the examination', p.67, Q.1056.

nautical teachers in the various sea-ports to instruct and prepare men for examination, Capt. Becher, R.N., emphasized that by instruction he did not allude to

'that sort of instruction which would give what some consider a fitness for examination in 48 hours'.<sup>95</sup>

When concern was expressed as to low standards of educational achievement prevailing among merchant personnel, it tended to stem primarily from commanders in the merchant and naval services.

Finally, it is of particular interest to consider the stance of the nautical group on the criteria of accountability. It would be wrong to imply that the need for some public authority to investigate the causes of each shipping loss was recognized by them alone. Indeed, almost without exception, witnesses representing a variety of interests, stressed the need for an authoritative inquiry to be set up whenever a merchant vessel was lost. What is of particular significance, however, is that as a group, the nautical faction was overwhelmingly in favour of extending the inquiry into ship loss to specifically consider the conduct of their commanding officers. Both Capt. Chappell, R.N., and Capt. Sparshott, R.N., drew support from practices obtaining in the naval service for their proposals that an investigation should be carried out into the conduct of every captain who had lost his ship.<sup>96</sup> Others sought to locate the investigative function within those agencies set up to examine and certificate ships' officers. In the opinion of Capt. Denham, R.N., F.R.S., there were

'no persons more fitted to inquire into the competency of masters and mates, than those who have to inquire into the losses of vessels;...'.<sup>97</sup>

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95. S.C. (1843), p.116, Q.1845.

96. S.C. (1843), p.50, Q.726; pp. 229/30, QQ.3508-3514.

97. S.C. (1843), p.95, Q.1478.

There were others who viewed such a development as an opportunity to influence directly the behaviour of commanding officers. Capt. Becher, R.N., observed that if the cause of the loss

'be noted in the certificate of examination;  
I think this would have a good effect on  
the captains of merchantmen'.<sup>98</sup>

To some extent, therefore, moves to render masters and mates accountable for their action in the event of ship loss to the authority empowered to licence them for command could be seen as an attempt to exercise a stricter control over their professional conduct.

Before turning away from the issue of professionalism, it is perhaps appropriate to note that pressures to move an occupation towards professional status can come either from within the occupational group itself or derive from external sources. This is especially so in areas where there is a feeling that individuals and property have to be protected from the unprofessional conduct of the practitioner. The lack of any public investigative authority had not prevented individual shipowners, shipping companies or insurance societies from instituting their own enquiries and seeking to impose penalties on incompetent and negligent commanders. At North and South Shields, for example, the nautical insurance clubs were in a position to suspend a master or declare him 'unfit to command a ship at all'.<sup>99</sup>

Shipowner evidence on the examination issue was uncertain and contradictory. As the inquiry proceeded it became increasingly apparent that many shipowners were not opposed to shipmaster examinations either in principle or practice. Despite a tendency to adopt an intransigent posture on many issues they were not averse to modifying their position in certain instances. For example, although a concerted attack was made upon the limitations of examinations it

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98. S.C. (1843), p.121, Q.1913.

99. S.C. (1843), p.158, Q.2386.

later transpired that several of the shipowners subjected their officers to some form of examination before appointment. Similarly, when the Committee considered the propriety of establishing examining boards in the various sea-port towns members of the shipping interest sought to discount the need for such bodies on the grounds that they themselves were perfectly competent to examine candidates and were prepared to do so. The conclusion to be drawn from their evidence is that shipowner opposition was primarily directed towards the control rather than the functional aspects of shipmaster examinations. Such an interpretation is consistent with the view that at the heart of shipowner criticism lay fears that the introduction of a national system of shipmaster examinations could facilitate the intervention of government into shipping affairs. Almost imperceptibly the discussion had shifted from a disagreement over whether examinations should occur at all to one concerning the structure and control of examinations. The significance of the shift might not have been lost upon the official members of the Select Committee.

In terms of the sparse attendance of its representatives on the Committee it might appear that the inquiry was regarded by government as being of limited political consequence. At the same time, however, there can be little doubt that Gladstone, as Vice-President of the Board of Trade, was becoming increasingly embroiled in the growing amount of executive business assigned to that department.<sup>100</sup> It is of particular interest to note that his attendance on the Select Committee coincided with the appearance of both Straker and Somes, two of the most dominant members of the shipping interest and to whom he subjected a close and persistent examination. From the nature of his inquiries, it would seem that he was primarily concerned to ascertain the bases of the shipping interest's

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100. For example, the period 1840-1844 witnessed the emergence and development of the Railway Department of the Board of Trade, see Parris, Government and the Railways, esp. pp.28-60.

opposition to the promulgation of a system of shipmaster examinations; to gain information as to the logistical and administrative problems implicit in their implementation; and, in the light of the alleged supremacy of foreign shipmasters, to assess the potential benefits likely to stem from the implementation of such a system. The tenor of the evidence on the latter issue suggested that government policy on the examination issue was more likely to be influenced by the wider implications of shipmaster incompetency than by an explicit concern for the internal problems of the industry itself. That the doubtful calibre of British shipmasters could undermine the country's trading position on world markets was a threat that could not be ignored.

But Government would move only when it was politically expedient to do so. That it did not yet think the moment was propitious can be drawn from the refusal of the Board of Trade to align itself with either of the main interests in the debate.

The Times wrote a postscript to the deliberations of the 1843 Select Committee. Observing very pointedly that the recommendations of the 1836 Select Committee on Shipwreck had been virtually ignored by the Legislature, The Times said of the 1843 Inquiry:

'the examination of masters and mates was violently resisted by the shipowners. The committee, still adhering to the doctrine of its predecessor upon the necessity of an examination for the officers of the mercantile marine, came, very unwisely in our opinion, to a kind of compromise'.<sup>101</sup>

And so, while the compromise continued, the Government patiently bided its time and the campaigners for reform planned afresh. Indeed, plans for a further assault on the status quo were already under way.

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<sup>101</sup>. The Times, 4 Mar. 1850, p.4, col.4.

## CHAPTER VI

### The Murray Circular : a case of covert government intervention?

On 1 July 1843 James Murray, a clerk at the Foreign Office, circulated a private letter among a number of British consuls requesting information as to the character, competency and conduct of British shipmasters. In 1845 a national programme of voluntary examinations for masters and mates in the British merchant service was established under the aegis of the Board of Trade. This overt acceptance by government of the need to attend to the proficiency of ships' officers was a significant breakthrough for the proponents of shipmaster examinations. It was also of some significance for the Board of Trade. The decision to entrust the supervision of the examinations to the Board implicitly established it as the agency of government responsible for the administration of mercantile affairs. In addition, the political machinations surrounding the decision directly challenged the legitimacy of the General Ship-owners' Society's adopted role as the authoritative leader of British shipowning interests. Such developments threatened the status quo in British shipping. Several factors combined to determine government policy on the issue of shipmaster examinations. The Murray Circular was one of them.

At the time of the Circular inquiry Murray was one of twenty-one clerks in the Foreign Office. Above him in rank were six senior clerks, one chief clerk, two under-secretaries and one Principal Secretary of State.<sup>1</sup> His position in the Office was such as to make him conversant with a number of consuls and with the

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1. British Imperial Callender, 1843, p.153.

shipping trade.<sup>2</sup> The Circular was directed to consuls of his acquaintance and left them in no doubt as to the objectives of the inquiry:

'I am anxious to obtain any information which your long experience may enable you to supply me with respecting the character and conduct of British shipmasters and seamen, and I shall be exceedingly obliged to you for any communication upon this subject.

I am particularly desirous of gaining information in regard to instances which have come under your observation, of the incompetency of British shipmasters to manage their vessels and their crews, whether arising from deficiency of knowledge of practical navigation and seamanship, or from moral character, particularly want of sobriety; also, to the different conduct of crews, according as they are commanded by good or incompetent masters; showing, therefore, the advantage, as regards preserving the character of British seamen, of their being commanded by a class of persons who should combine with skill in their profession, a knowledge of the means of properly maintaining authority on board their ships.

My object is to show the necessity for authoritative steps on the part of Her Majesty's Government to remedy what appears to be an evil detrimental to, and seriously affecting the character of, our Commercial Marine, and therefore advantageous to foreign rivals, whose merchant-vessels are said to be exceedingly well manned and navigated'.<sup>3</sup>

Consuls endorsed Murray's assertion that the character of British shipping had been influenced adversely by the professional and moral deficiencies of British shipmasters. The Consul at Ancona spoke of the necessity for a 'great reform' to restore the status of British shipping; the Consul at Riga focused upon the 'deplorable

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2. Papers relating to the Commercial Marine of Great Britain,  
P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.153.
  3. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.156.

condition' of the British mercantile marine and the need to improve the quality of ships' officers.<sup>4</sup> Vice-Consul Hertslet at Memel claimed that the 'bad character' attached to British shipping stemmed in part from the 'heedless conduct' of officers and seamen.<sup>5</sup>

The Consul at Brest produced evidence purporting to show that shipmaster incompetency was a prime cause of shipwreck; Consul Crowe at Hammerfest, Norway, affirmed that in several instances of ship loss the cause had been traced to the ignorance of the master.<sup>6</sup> Consuls stationed in Brazil warned that the incompetency of British shipmasters had prejudiced British interests in the carrying trade. The Consul at Paraiba noted that the ships of Sweden, Denmark, Sardinia, Hamburgh and Austria were preferred to British ships because of the greater care taken by their masters in the handling of cargo.<sup>7</sup> Consul Porter at Bahia suggested that even British merchants sought, when practicable, to transport goods in foreign vessels solely on account of the attention given to their reception, stowage and delivery.<sup>8</sup>

Little doubt obtained that many masters and mates in the British merchant service were patently unfitted for office.<sup>9</sup> Ships' officers engaged in the coasting and collier trades were subjected to especially severe and savage condemnation:

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4. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt.I, pp.235 : 160.
  5. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt.I, p184 ; see also pp.163(Russia); 205 (France); 261 (United States).
  6. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt.I, pp.204:169 ; see also pp.165(Sweden); 197 (France); 229(Portugal).
  7. P.P.1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, pp. 289/90
  8. P.P.1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.285; see also pp.163(Russia); 188 (Hamburgh); 280 (Brazil).
  9. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, pp.159(Russia) ; 213 (Spain); 261 (United States); 273 (Mexico).

'... they are the most ignorant, illiterate, and brutal set to be met with, in command of vessels belonging to a civilized nation ...'.<sup>10</sup>

'... hardly one in ten of the masters can write or spell his native language correctly. An examination of a few old log-books would give you an idea of the horrible ignorance of most of the mates'.<sup>11</sup>

'... commanders are illiterate, incapable of exercising any control over their crews, and at most only able to conduct their vessels between the two opposite shores; ...'.<sup>12</sup>

'As to their knowledge of navigation and general instruction, there is a great deficiency, - I mean the majority of those trading to this port (colliers); not one in twenty knows anything of the theory of navigation ...'.<sup>13</sup>

The problem of shipmaster incompetency did not pervade the entire spectrum of British shipping. Several tributes were paid to the professional competence and character of commanders engaged in the Far East trade. In his general attack on British shipmasters Consul Cowper at Pernambuco specifically excluded the 'superior class of persons' in command of the large ships trading to the East Indies and Australia.<sup>14</sup>

There was, however, little unanimity among consuls as to what constituted professional competence. Some defined it in terms of nautical proficiency; differentiating between the skills of seamanship and navigation; others extended the concept to include management and commercial expertise.<sup>15</sup> One consul observed that British shipmasters were excellent sailors but were quite ignorant

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10. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.169, Hammerfest, Norway.

11. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.184, Memel, Prussia.

12. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.191, Rotterdam.

13. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.198, Havre.

14. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, pp.286/287; see also pp. 197 (France); 273 (Mexico); 280 (Brazil).

15. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, pp. 160 (Russia); 221 (Spain); 247 (Greece); 188 (Hamburg); 205 (France); 289 (Brazil).

PLATE VI

An Early Nineteenth-Century Collier

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Acknowledgements to the National Maritime Museum, London



of the science of navigation.<sup>16</sup> Another attributed the 'glaring incompetency' of British masters to a want of sobriety and a deficiency of practical navigation and seamanship.<sup>17</sup> Several consuls pointed out that in ships commanded by professionally competent and sober masters, order and discipline prevailed.<sup>18</sup> The Consul at Hamburgh claimed that many masters were unaware of the economic and commercial implications of their decisions, a professional incapacity which meant that voyages were not always conducted in the shortest and 'least expensive way'.<sup>19</sup>

Seeking to explain the causes of such widespread incompetency consuls focused primarily upon the intemperate habits of mercantile personnel and the inadequate provision made for their education and training. To reinforce their arguments they cited practices operating in foreign fleets. Consul Hesketh at Rio de Janeiro told of his 'unwearied trouble and much anxiety' because of the drunken habits of British shipmasters; Consul McTavish at Baltimore claimed that the incompetency of British masters arose 'chiefly from inebriety'.<sup>20</sup> Another consul observed that although American captains were not better seamen than their British counterparts, they were 'less addicted to intoxication'.<sup>21</sup>

Frequent reference was made to the want of primary education. Consul Perrier at Brest explained the nature of the problem:

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16. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.200, France.
  17. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.289 Paraiba, Brazil; see also pp.187 (Hamburgh); 258 (Morocco); 261 (United States).
  18. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, pp.164 (Sweden); 170 (Norway); 197 (France); 213 (Spain); 289 (Brazil).
  19. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.187.
  20. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, pp. 279; 262.
  21. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.220; see also pp.195 (Belgium); 224 (Spain); 249 (Turkey); 279 (Brazil).

'The masters of English coasters and colliers are generally put on board as cabin boys, at ten or twelve years of age. They rise gradually from foremast men to mates and masters, their education being almost entirely practical. The little knowledge of navigation they acquire is by spelling Hamilton Moore on board, and by snatches (if the term may be used) of schooling during the short intervals between their voyages. Very few of them can write grammatically'.<sup>22</sup>

The Consul at Danzig argued that 'Boys ought not to be bound' without having attended school to acquire the rudiments of education; Consul Hodges at Hamburg thought that all shipmasters should be able to read, write, calculate and understand the basic principles of navigation.<sup>23</sup> Consul Curry at Ostend believed that the competitive strength of foreign commercial marines derived from the attention paid to the instruction and examination of their officers. He pointed out that in Belgium two schools had been established at public expense to educate young people destined for a career in the merchant service.<sup>24</sup> Other consuls drew attention to the superior education and training enjoyed by American and Continental shipmasters.<sup>25</sup>

Many consuls agreed that government should intervene to regulate mercantile affairs. The Consul at Naples welcomed the enactment of any measure which would improve the masters of British vessels.<sup>26</sup> Consul Cowper at Pernambuco refuted the suggestion that government intervention would constitute an unjust interference with the rights of private property.<sup>27</sup> He made the point that if shipmasters were to be directly responsible for the lives and safety of passengers and crew, it was the

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22. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.200; see also pp. 178 (Denmark); 208 (France); 273 (Mexico).

23. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, pp. 182; 188.

24. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.195.

25. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, pp.160 (Russia); 221 (Spain); 238 (Naples); 275 (Hayti).

26. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.237.

27. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.285.

'absolute duty of the Government, to insist that they shall be protected, by the official approval of the capacity of the candidates for these commands'.<sup>28</sup>

The majority of consuls felt that such approval should be contingent upon the passing of an appropriate examination. The Consul at Bordeaux lamented the absence of any statutory regulation exacting certain qualifications from British shipmasters and observed that in France the

'laws are very strict as regards the qualifications of master-mariners, and no man can obtain the command of a vessel without having previously undergone a very severe examination'.<sup>29</sup>

His colleagues at Havre thought that much life and property would be saved if persons were examined and licensed before being appointed to a command.<sup>30</sup> The Consul at Vera Cruz noted that in France, Spain, Italy, the Hanseatic Towns, Germany, Sweden and Denmark the command of even a coasting vessel was restricted to certificated personnel.<sup>31</sup>

Vice-Consul Booker at Cronstadt endorsed and explained the Prussian system of shipmaster certification. Prior to sitting the mates' examination all candidates were required to attend school for one year. Certificates were classified into three grades according to the level of navigational proficiency attained by the successful applicants. Each grade of certificate defined explicitly the range of voyage to which it related: third class, to the East Sea and the Coast of Norway; second class, to the 'Lands End of England'; first class, world wide. Entry to the masters' examination was restricted to mates in the first and second class

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28. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.286; see also pp. 157 (Russia); 178 (Denmark); 251 (Turkey); 261 (United States); 273 (Mexico).

29. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.206.

30. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.198.

31. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.273.

categories who had completed three years in those capacities.<sup>32</sup>

The Consul at Santa Cruz was supportive but circumspect. He doubted the efficacy of Fitzroy's Bill and questioned whether examinations alone would be sufficient to raise the general proficiency of British shipmasters. Any improvement, he contended, would be contingent upon the active involvement and support of shipowners and that

'the exercise of their caution and prudence will be of more avail in providing skilful officers than the provisions of Acts of Parliament'.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, he conceded that a board of examiners, formed under the auspices of government would have a beneficial influence. He suggested that Fitzroy's Bill might be strongly opposed and that government might find 'impulsion more effectual than compulsion'.

The Vice-Consul at Elsinore reiterated the objections made by several British shipmasters against the patronage exercised by shipowners in the selection of commanders. Such shipmasters, he claimed, recounted with satisfaction

'the hard-fought battle of their own examination at the Marine Board of the home-port;...'.<sup>34</sup>

Such examinations provided no control over 'private interests' in the appointment of ships' officers. He believed, however, that the introduction of a government controlled shipmaster examination system would be of general benefit.

Several consuls commented upon the indifference shown by many shipowners to the character and attainments of their shipmasters. It was suggested by one consul that the sole aim of shipowners engaged in the Baltic trade was to

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32. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.159, Cf. pp.170-175 (Norway).

33. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.219.

34. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.178.

'officer and man their ships at the cheapest rate. The only qualifications they deem necessary in a shipmaster are, that insurance can be obtained upon a vessel placed under his command, - and the lowest possible rate of remuneration for his services'.<sup>35</sup>

To meet the threat from foreign vessels a number of shipowners had imposed stringent economies in the manning of their ships. The Consul at Gottenburgh attributed the low standards of manning and proficiency in the British mercantile marine to competition and low wages 'in the maddest excess'.<sup>36</sup> Consul Crowe at Hammerfest dismissed shipowner claims that the preference given to foreign vessels stemmed directly from the relaxation of the Navigation Laws. He explained the preference in terms of the close attention given to the training of foreign masters and alleged that the 'British Marine have been left to themselves'.<sup>37</sup>

There can be little doubt that the Circular, in translating the alleged problems of British shipping solely in terms of shipmaster incompetency, influenced the character and parameters of the response. Another factor influencing the nature of the consular responses was that consuls were frequently exposed to the more unacceptable face of shipboard life. As the Vice-Consul at Elsinore pointed out,

'They have to record the accidents which happen to vessels on their voyage ; to listen to the complaints of, and to settle the disputes between, the individuals on board. What more natural than they should be impressed with an unfavourable opinion of that very interest by which they are so often called upon to witness trouble, disorder and imperfection?'.<sup>38</sup>

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35. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.160 Russia; see also pp.224 (Spain); 280,285 (Brazil).
36. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.167; see also pp.224 (Spain); 250 (Turkey); 261 (United States); 281/2 (Brazil).
37. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.169.
38. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.177.

Despite these considerations, as the table below indicates, many consuls were persuaded that the problem of shipmaster competency was grave enough to warrant alarm and to demand action.

TABLE VI

Analysis of Consular Responses to the Murray Circular

Total Number of returns 55

Consular comments and recommendations	Level of Support.
British masters and mates were often incompetent for office	50
i) because of inadequate navigational and seamanship skills	13
ii) because of their illiterate and intemperate behaviour	31
iii) not specified	6
Competent shipmasters maintain authority and discipline	16
Superiority of foreign shipmasters	20
Need for government intervention and action	25
Masters and mates to be examined and licensed for office	21

On 1 January 1844 Murray forwarded the consular correspondence and the conclusions he had drawn from it to Viscount Canning, Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office.<sup>39</sup> He requested that the papers be laid before the Foreign Secretary, Lord Aberdeen. Murray argued that the evidence from the consuls established a prima facie case for government to intervene and halt the decline in British merchant shipping. He concluded that:

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39. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, pp.153-155.

1. the character of British shipping had declined whereas that of foreign shipping had improved;
2. there was insufficient control exercised over British masters and seamen, at home and abroad, compared with the high degree of control maintained over foreign ships;
3. there was no regular system of education for the British merchant service unlike foreign practice;
4. the sort of education available when training men for the higher grades in the merchant service was inadequate to safeguard the best interests of merchants;
5. there was no means by which merchants could accurately ascertain the character and proficiency of shipmasters or crew and that merchants depended upon insurance for the protection of their property;
6. the marine insurance system was detrimental both to the interests of the merchant service and the general public.

Murray urged the Government to end the fragmented responsibility in the administration of mercantile affairs and stressed the desirability of 'a Board or Department of Commercial Marine'. He observed that

'The Committee of the Privy Council for Trade appears to be the office to which the mercantile community naturally look in regard to everything relating to trade, whether on shore or at sea, and it is to the head of that department that the commercial public would probably always be inclined to look for protection and information'. 40

Murray concluded his letter by suggesting that if his proposals for a Board to be set up at once were thought premature, 'a Commission might be formed to take the subject into consideration'.

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40. Ibid., p.154.

It is difficult to locate the source of Murray's inspiration. The fact that the tone and style of his letter suggested that it was private initiative reflecting a personal concern about the state of British shipping does not preclude the existence of other, less explicit, motives. There are reasons, and hypothetical evidence, to support the contention that Murray acted as an instrument as well as an instigator. It could be argued, for example, that the 'Murray Circular' was simply a departmental response to a request for information relating to the competency of British shipmasters. Such a request could well have emanated from the Board of Trade.

Between 1843 and 1845 the involvement of the Board of Trade in the issue of shipmaster examinations became increasingly exploratory and directive. On 18 January 1843, for example, when the Admiralty wrote to the Board questioning the viability of introducing measures to test the qualifications of commanders in the mercantile marine, the response was immediate and supportive.<sup>41</sup> The Admiralty was advised that although the matter was already under consideration any guidance it could offer on the subject would be valued. The Board proposed that a conference with Sir George Cockburn, or with some other officer, might be arranged to discuss the matter.<sup>42</sup> The Admiralty deferred action on the issue.<sup>43</sup> On 1 March 1843 shipowners at Sunderland petitioned the Board to withhold its support for measures seeking to examine into the qualifications of masters and mates.<sup>44</sup> They were informed that the Board was anxious to receive the opinions of shipowners and other parties connected with the mercantile marine on this issue and that it would consider all evidence relating to the case before 'determining what course they may ultimately pursue'.<sup>45</sup> Under these circumstances a canvass of consular

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41. B.T.4/15,91; see also letter from Thomas Bevis to Admiralty reporting loss of steam boat, B.T.1/402,91.

42. ADM. 1/5537; 23 Jan. 1843.

43. Ibid.

44. B.T.4/15,350; see similar request from South Shields shipowners, B.T.4/15,354.

45. B.T.5/51,350.

opinion on the professional competency of British shipmasters might provide authoritative evidence on which to base a decision.

On 27 November 1843 Commander John Gladstone, R.N., M.P., a member of the pro-examination lobby reminded Canning of his promise to give information to the 1843 Select Committee on Shipwrecks about the examining procedures adopted in France, Prussia and Russia for the certification of masters and mates and of the corresponding shipwreck statistics for these nations. Gladstone suggested that in the light of the Select Committee's recommendations on the examination issue, information on continental practices 'may have a considerable influence should such a measure be introduced'.<sup>46</sup> Canning had forgotten both Gladstone's request and his own promise. On 5 December 1843 Canning wrote to Bidwell, a Senior Clerk in the Foreign Office, informing him of Gladstone's letter. He explained that he had forgotten about Gladstone's request, then added:

'I doubt whether Murray has any information answering to the returns for which Mr. Gladstone asks ... it would be better (in the case of Russia and Prussia certainly) to call for it from the Consuls rather than Ministers ... No time should be lost in sending the instructions'.<sup>47</sup>

In spite of Canning's doubts about Murray having the desired information, it was Murray who was most closely involved in the ensuing transactions. The Consul at Danzig wrote to him on 26 February 1844 enclosing particulars about the Prussian merchant fleet, indicating the figures for shipwreck losses between 1841 and 1843.<sup>48</sup> A return from the Consul at Hamburgh in December 1843 indicated that Murray had written to him on 11 December 1843 requesting information about the education, training and examination of officers in the mercantile marine of Hamburgh.<sup>49</sup>

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46. F.O. 83/97; 27 Nov. 1843.

47. Ibid., 5 Dec. 1843.

48. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p. 183.

49. F.O. 83/97; 18 Dec. 1843.

On the other hand, it is also possible that Murray was acting in collusion with the pro-examination lobby. The focus of his reforming zeal - shipmaster competency - had been the subject of a long campaign within and outside Whitehall. Consular reports had frequently borne witness to the general incapacity of British shipmasters to manage their vessels and had spelled out the consequences of such incompetency. Attention of the public and Parliament had been drawn to the issue of shipmaster competency by Fitzroy and his Bill to introduce compulsory examinations for British shipmasters and mates.

Significantly, the despatch of the Circular coincided with the sittings of the 1843 Select Committee on Shipwrecks, which was itself directly concerned with the problem of shipmaster competency. It was this inquiry which had pre-empted further consideration of Fitzroy's Bill. In addition, Murray was personally acquainted with Fitzroy. On 26 June 1843 Murray wrote to Fitzroy:

'My Dear Fitzroy,

Will you oblige me by the name of the Master, R.N., who sailed with you in the 'Beagle' and who made the passage you spoke of, to and from Sidney'.<sup>50</sup>

The master in question, Mr. Edward Main Chaffers, had sailed in a merchant ship, the 'Tory', from England to Wellington, New Zealand, not Sydney, Australia, in 93 days and had made the return journey in 91 days. Normally, the voyage in either direction took anything up to six months. The feat had obviously impressed Murray - even if he did forget the captain's name and proper destination. He did not make use of the information immediately but incorporated it in his letter to Canning on 1 January 1844 as proof of the benefits of engaging intelligent, well-trained men as masters of merchant vessels.<sup>51</sup> The letter also introduced the issue of

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50. F.O. 83/97; 26 June 1843.

51. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt. I, p.155.

shipmaster examinations. To illustrate the need for the centralization of mercantile affairs Murray drew attention to the recommendations of the 1843 Select Committee on Shipwrecks relating to the examination of shipmasters. He pointed out that should the recommendation be implemented without regard to other interests and issues the Committee's aims might be only partially realized.<sup>52</sup>

Murray's involvement with Fitzroy might also explain why the Circular focused almost exclusively upon the subject of shipmaster competency. The question of shipmaster proficiency was clearly germane to any inquiry into the status and efficiency of the mercantile marine. But it was not the only one. A strong case could be made for examining into the regulations controlling the construction, manning and victualling of ships; for investigating the conditions of service imposed upon mercantile personnel; and for assessing the influence of marine insurance. Murray was clearly determined to highlight the need for government to attend to the professional training of British shipmasters. Evidence was drawn from practices abroad. Murray intimated that foreign ships were now in a position to compete effectively with British ships for trade because of the skilled navigational attainments of their commanders.

Whatever the underlying motives, the Circular was an event of some significance for administrative and examination reform in British shipping. The inquiry came from the Foreign Office, a powerful department of state primarily political in character. Its involvement in the issue of shipmaster competency politicized the examination debate and implicitly eroded the shipping interest's position on the issue. The Circular was instrumental in harnessing the quasi-official support of British consuls for authoritative measures to be taken to improve the status of British shipping and British shipmasters. This evidence was subsequently

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52. Ibid., p.154.

used to press the case for the centralization of mercantile affairs, an argument which widened the parameters of the shipmaster examination debate. The consular returns, and Murray's evaluation of them, provided both the trigger and the ammunition for a sustained attack on the shipping status quo.

On 25 January 1844 Canning wrote to the Treasury enclosing details of Murray's enquiry and subsequent recommendations. His letter pointed out that although Lord Aberdeen, the Foreign Secretary, supported the establishment of a Board or Department of Commercial Marine, he had requested that the views of other departments be canvassed.<sup>53</sup> The Treasury sent copies of the Murray documents and Lord Aberdeen's request to the Admiralty and the Colonial Office on 9 February 1844, to the Board of Trade on 10 February 1844 and to Trinity House, London on 12 February 1844.<sup>54</sup> The replies were forwarded to the Board of Trade.<sup>55</sup>

The Admiralty's reply to the Treasury on 20 February 1844 expressed concern that the Government would attempt to legislate on issues additional to that of shipmaster examinations. In these circumstances it would be inclined to support Murray's alternative proposal, that of appointing a Committee under the Board of Trade to explore the situation. The Admiralty was opposed to proposals that would increase the financial burdens of British shipowners who were already subject to higher operating costs than their foreign competitors. Measures which obliged shipowners to improve manning levels and conditions of service might be construed as being a 'very oppressive interference' in shipping affairs. It also questioned the need for legislative action on the examination issue and suggested that the problem of shipmaster competency might be solved by 'encouraging masters to undergo voluntary Examinations'

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53. F.O. 83/97; 25 Jan. 1844.

54. B.T. 1/424, 313; B.T. 1/423, 235; B.T. 1/424, 371.

55. B.T. 5/52, 313, 419, 371.

and by the imposition of fines should they be found drunk on duty. The Admiralty warned that it would be

'impossible for any Commission or Committee to secure for the command of Colliers and the inferior Description of Traders, most complained of by the Consuls, men of equal respectability and capacity as those commanding the larger, distant, and regular Traders'.<sup>56</sup>

The Admiralty's reply did not disclose that Sir George Cockburn, the First Lord, was in favour of placing the Board of Commercial Marine under the control of the Board of Trade, or that action on the examination front was already under way.<sup>57</sup>

The Colonial Office refused to be drawn on the issue. It informed the Treasury on 4 March 1844 that Lord Stanley, the Colonial Secretary, would express an opinion on the subject when 'Murray's proposal' was embodied in a Bill. Nevertheless, it recommended that were the scheme adopted it should be initially confined to the United Kingdom.<sup>58</sup>

A more enthusiastic and positive response came from the London Trinity House. The Treasury letter and accompanying correspondence was considered by its By-Board on 13 February 1844 and by the Warden's Committee the following week.<sup>59</sup> The Committee endorsed the need to attend to the seamanship and navigational skills of British shipmasters but questioned the necessity of requiring masters to prove their proficiency in the selling of cargoes or transacting business.<sup>60</sup> The General Court approved the Committee's recommendations and relayed them to the Treasury on 2 March 1844.<sup>61</sup>

The Board of Trade formally considered the Treasury's request on 13 February 1844 but did not reply - the minute was endorsed

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56. B.T. 1/427, 625.

57. ADM. 12/430, 64a; 9 Feb. 1844.

58. B.T. 1/425, 419.

59. T.H. By-Min. 1844, p.29; TH.Wd.Min. 1844. XVI, pp.119 / 20.

60. TH. Wd.Min. 1844, XVI, p.120.

61. TH. By-Min. 1844, p.46; see also B.T. 5/52, p.157.

'consideration postponed'.<sup>62</sup> The truth was that the Board had already acted. On 12 February 1844 the Board had asked the Admiralty whether it was prepared to adopt any of the recommendations of the 1843 Select Committee on Shipwrecks apart from the issue of shipmaster examinations. The Admiralty was advised that the Board intended to 'hold a separate communication' on that subject.<sup>63</sup> Evidence accrues to suggest that the Board and the Admiralty had agreed to pursue the issue of shipmaster examinations in tandem.

On 23 February 1844 the Board sought the assistance of Lloyd's Register to promote the Select Committee's proposals relating to the examination of ships' officers. The Register was assured that the Board was fully sensible of the need to secure the support of shipowners and that there was no intention at present to press for compulsory examinations. It was also informed that 'in concert with the Lords of the Admiralty' consideration had been given to the introduction of a voluntary scheme of examination. Successful candidates would be divided into three separate classes:

'... a very moderate amount of knowledge should qualify for the 3rd Class, - a somewhat greater amount for the 2nd, - and a still higher degree for the 1st, and that opportunity should be given for those in the First Class to show still further proficiency, which should entitle them to be designated as 1st Class extra ...'.<sup>64</sup>

The Board hoped that Lloyd's would indicate by an appropriate sign in its Annual Register, the names of the successful candidates together with the class of certificate obtained and their current appointment.

The General Committee of the Register considered the Board's request on 29 February 1844 and resolved to 'afford every facility' in the publication of such information.<sup>65</sup> The Register agreed to a

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62. B.T. 5/52, p.101.

63. ADM.1/5537; 12 Feb. 1844.

64. Lloyd's Register of British and Foreign Shipping, London General Committee Minute Book, pp.223-224.

65. B.T. 1/424, 319.

further request from the Board to add or delete the 'signs' when occasion demanded.<sup>66</sup>

On 14 March 1844 the Board asked the Admiralty to prepare a plan for the establishment of an adequate number of boards in London and at the outports to examine masters and mates wishing to 'establish their ability to command Merchant Ships'. The Board suggested that the plan should have regard to the classification of certificates and to the relevance of the examination syllabuses. Attention was also to be paid to the conditions under which certificates might be withdrawn. Copies of the Board's correspondence with Lloyd's Register on the subject were forwarded to the Admiralty.<sup>67</sup>

The plan was ready within a week, a response which implied that the issue had been the subject of previous discussions by the Admiralty and the Board of Trade. Reflecting its terms of reference the plan spelled out the conditions under which certificates would be awarded and annulled. No attempt was made to explain how the system of examinations would be organized, controlled or monitored. The plan was primarily concerned with the specification of examination syllabuses.<sup>68</sup>

There would be two categories of certificate, masters and mates; each category would be divided into three classes. All candidates would be required to produce proof of age, sobriety, character and conduct; to be able to write a legible hand; and to understand the first five rules of arithmetic. Entry to the master's examination required candidates to have reached the age of twenty-one; for the mates examination candidates had to be at least nineteen years old. Surprisingly, no reference or requirement was made relating to the previous experience of candidates.

Since it was envisaged that the examination for masters and mates would be of a similar form and content, differing only on

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66. B.T. 4/16, 397.

67. ADM. 12/430, 64a; 14 Mar. 1844.

68. For draft of plan, see App. XII, pp. 341/342.

points of detail, syllabuses for only three classes were outlined. Although it was clear that the examinations were designed to assess navigational competency attention was also paid to general seamanship. Candidates for the first class certificate, for example, were required to fulfil the examination requirements for the second and third class certificates; to demonstrate their knowledge of plane trigonometry, nautical astronomy, compass deviation and mercantile book-keeping; and to satisfy the examiners about their ability to cope with extremes of weather and sea. Candidates in either first class category who displayed higher attainments would be entitled to have their certificate endorsed class 1st extra.

If a certificated master should be found drunk on duty or if a vessel should be damaged while under the command of a certificated master it would be incumbent upon the examining board who had certified the master to investigate the matter. The examining board would be empowered to cancel the certificate of any master found negligent and to instruct Lloyd's Register accordingly.

On 22 March 1844 the Admiralty forwarded the plan to the Trinity House in London and asked whether the House would undertake the examination of masters and mates in London. The Admiralty suggested that they might wish to draw upon the services of a Professor of Navigation and Astronomy in implementing the scheme. The House was also requested to indicate the extent to which similar examining boards might be provided at the outports by agencies under its direct control. It was advised that the examination fees - £2.0.0. for each master, £1.0.0. for each mate - would enable the examination scheme to be 'nearly if not wholly' self-financing.<sup>69</sup> Trinity House agreed to support the scheme and to use the services of the Sub-Commissioners of Pilotage for examinations outside London. Each agency would be assisted by a Professor as in the port of London.<sup>70</sup>

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69. TH. By-Min. 1844, pp.62/3.

70. ADM. 12/430, 64a; 27 Mar. 1844.

Although encouraged by the response from the London Trinity House the Admiralty recognized the need to increase the number and widen the spread of examining agencies. To this end letters canvassing support for the voluntary scheme were sent to public dignitaries at the larger outports. In general, the scheme was favourably received. On 17 April, 1844 the Lord Provost of Glasgow brought the Admiralty's letter to the notice of the Glasgow Pilotage Board where it was enthusiastically endorsed. The Board believed that the measure would ensure 'greater skill and efficiency' in the masters and mates of the mercantile marine and agreed to appoint a

'suitable number of persons competent to examine the parties who may apply for examination and to judge of their qualifications, with the view of their obtaining a license from the Board'.<sup>72</sup>

They also tacitly accepted the need to draw upon the assistance of the Professor of Astronomy and Mathematics at the University of Glasgow 'in so far as consistent with the discharge of the duties of these gentlemen in the University'.

On the other hand, the Provost of Greenock declined to take a positive and official stance on the subject until he had submitted the proposed plan to the local Chamber of Commerce and to 'some of our most experienced shipowners and masters. The shipping interests in Greenock were less than enthusiastic about the examination scheme and claimed that

'while it subjects a particular class of the community to an unusual and somewhat inquisitorial scrutiny of their normal character and educational attainments, and while it authorizes the publication of such scrutiny in a work of very extensive circulation does not appear calculated to produce except in a slight degree those countervailing advantages which the advocates of the plan seem to anticipate ...'.<sup>73</sup>

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72. Clyde Port Authority Records, T-CN. 30/1, Minute Book of Clyde Pilot Board 1826-1856, 17 Apr. 1844, pp.99/100.

73. Ibid., 10 May 1844, pp. 101-105.

Nevertheless, despite their doubts as to the efficacy of such a scheme they recognised that the Government was disposed to sanction the plan and agreed to implement and support the proposals.

Meanwhile, pressure for government to attend to the manifest deficiencies of British shipmasters and mates came from the general and nautical press. The Times contrasted the improvements made in nautical science with the prevalence of shipwreck and suggested that the scale of shipping distress reflected the incompetency of British commanders and the indifference shown by many shipowners to the seaworthiness of their vessels.<sup>74</sup> Commenting on the published First Report of the 1843 Select Committee on Shipwrecks, the Economist claimed that the improper construction of many British merchant vessels was a prime cause of shipwreck. But it also recognised that other adverse influences obtained. It alleged that one 'fertile cause' of British shipwrecks was the 'gross ignorance and incapacity on the part of masters and mates'. Although reluctant to invite the excessive interference of government in the issue it conceded the need for the introduction of a 'public and authorized certificate' to confirm that a shipmaster was 'not perfectly illiterate, ignorant, dissolute, and unprincipled'.<sup>75</sup> The Nautical Magazine argued that British shipwrecks stemmed primarily from 'bad ships - badly commanded, - badly manned, - and badly found'.<sup>76</sup> In the opinion of the Shipping Gazette the prejudice shown against British vessels in Rio de Janeiro stemmed from the general incapacity of British masters and crews. The Gateshead Observer affirmed the Gazette's diagnosis of the problem and questioned whether South American merchants could be blamed for preferring to send their goods by inferior vessels when aware that 'more qualified commanders' were in charge.<sup>77</sup>

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74. The Times, 26 July 1843, p.5, cols. 1/2.

75. Economist, 20 Apr. 1844, No. 34, pp. 700/1.

76. N.M. 1843, XII, p.196. For supportive contributor comment on the issue, see Ibid., pp.230, 260, 274/5, 391/2; N.M. 1844, XIII, pp.97/8, 261-70, 334-345. But for contrasting view, see pp. 83-86.

77. G.O., 10 Dec.1843, p.2, col.5. See also N.M. 1843, XII, p.44

Publication of the 1843 Select Committee's First Report stimulated action in other quarters. On 2 December 1843, the Provost of Glasgow informed the Board of Trade that although Glasgow shipping interests generally approved the Select Committee's recommendations on the prevention of shipwreck, they were anxious that the funding of examining boards and navigation schools should be met by government.<sup>78</sup> In January 1844 the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce and the East India Association of Glasgow petitioned the Board to give immediate effect to the Committee's proposals relating to the compulsory examination and certification of ship's officers.<sup>79</sup> They were informed that the Board was collecting information prior to arriving at a decision.<sup>80</sup> On 25 March 1844 a deputation from the Glasgow Joint Committee, including representatives from Liverpool shipping interests, attended the Board of Trade to press the case for the compulsory examination of masters and mates. They were informed by Gladstone, President of the Board, that the Government was

'inclined to deal with the subject; and hoped that they might be able to introduce a bill in the course of the present session'.<sup>81</sup>

On 29 March 1844 the Liverpool Registry of Shipping wrote to the Board expressing its willingness to indicate in its Registry Book masters and mates who had passed the examination. It pointed out that the publication of such information would be incomplete unless given in both the 'London and Liverpool Books'.<sup>82</sup> The Board readily accepted the offer.<sup>83</sup> Gladstone's comments led one petitioner to the Board to claim that such an innovation would not

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78. B.T.1/420, 2043.

79. B.T.1/422, 128; 145.

80. B.T.5/52, 128; 145.

81. The Times, 28 Mar. 1844, p.5, col.5.

82. B.T.1/427, 550.

83. B.T.5/50, 550.

only encourage the qualified shipmaster but afford him protection from the 'encroachment of his less qualified competitor'. Other petitions to the Board and also to Parliament, adverted to the need to guard against the appointment of incompetent ships' officers and to examine into their proficiency.<sup>85</sup>

It would seem that the General Shipowners' Society had overlooked the publication of Gladstone's remarks. In any event it made no manifest response. The Society did notice the publicity given to the Admiralty's attempts to progress the voluntary scheme of examinations. At its meeting on 14 May 1844 attention was drawn to

'the Plan issued by the Board of the Admiralty to the Elder Brethren of the Trinity, for the proposed examination of "Qualification for Masters and Mates of Merchant Ships" which had appeared in the Shipping Gazette of the 20th April'.<sup>86</sup>

When the Society sought further information on the issue from the Admiralty they were informed that consultations were already in progress and that the Admiralty would come to a 'definite arrangement with the Board of Trade' when all the replies had been collected.<sup>87</sup> The Society's opinion was not canvassed.

On 25 May 1844 the Admiralty sent a copy of its examination scheme to the Board of Trade together with the supportive responses made to it by the various Trinity Boards - the views of the Hull Trinity House were forwarded to the Board on 30 May 1844.<sup>88</sup> The Admiralty's report was clearly acceptable to the Board; the minute was endorsed,

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85. B.T. 1/420, 2145; B.T. 1/427, 626; 645:  
C.J. 1844, XCIX, p.213.

86. SS. Min. 1844, IV, p.327.

87. ADM. 1,5337; 15 May 1844. The Admiralty replied 24 May 1844, see SS. Min. 1844, IV, p.334.

88. B.T. 4/16,888; 905.

'Inform Admiralty that My Lords will cause the necessary Clauses to be prepared for introduction into the Merchant Seamen's Bill'.<sup>89</sup>

The General Shipowners' Society's exclusion from the preliminary discussions on the voluntary scheme of examinations was to some extent predictable. Since its inception the Society had consistently adopted a negative and peripheral stance on the shipmaster examination issue. From the Society's point of view the issue was subordinate to the central concern of shipping, that of profitability and in consequence, the Society had failed to become positively involved in the question. Its Annual Report for 1844 made no reference to the 1843 Select Committee on Shipwrecks but noted that a scheme for examining shipmasters was under government consideration. The Society promised that it would 'carefully watch its progress'.<sup>90</sup> The Report focused primarily upon the ravages of the prevailing economic depression and claimed that the previous year had witnessed an unprecedented decline in the fortunes of shipping interests.<sup>91</sup> Steps to ameliorate the depressed condition of British shipping had already been taken.

In April 1844 George Lyall, the member for the City of London and a member of the General Shipowners' Society, gave notice of a motion to establish a Select Committee to enquire into the condition of the Commercial Marine with a view to extending the 'beneficial employment of British shipping'.<sup>92</sup> The General Shipowners' Society endorsed Lyall's initiative and informed him that it would afford 'any assistance in its power' to further the objectives of the enquiry.<sup>93</sup>

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89. B.T. 5/52, p.376; 4 June 1844.

90. SS. Rep. 1843/4, p.4.

91. Ibid., pp.1, 2, 6, 7, 8.

92. SS. Min. 1844, IV, p.325.

93. Ibid.

The Government had no wish to alienate the shipping industry. The appointment of the Select Committee could serve to defuse a sensitive situation by allowing the shipping interest to air its grievances and publicize its misfortunes. Gladstone was careful to point out, however, that the Committee's appointment did not presage any change in government policy towards trade.<sup>94</sup>

The General Shipowners' Society acted with a speed born of desperation. Letters were rushed off to the outports alerting them to the inquiry and urging them to prepare evidence to aid the shipowners' cause. The Society's Central Committee drew up a 'list of leading questions' for the guidance of the Select Committee's Chairman. The Society's Chairman and his Deputy were authorized to present evidence and it was agreed that the proceedings of the Select Committee would be carefully monitored.<sup>95</sup>

As Gladstone had anticipated the Select Committee hearings were used by the shipping interest as a means of launching a series of vitriolic attacks on government policies. Witness after witness complained about the depressed and unprofitable state of British shipping.<sup>96</sup> The blame was laid squarely at the door of government: ships had depreciated in value; freight rates had sunk abysmally low; and British shipping had been unfairly exposed to foreign competition with its lower capital and operating costs.<sup>97</sup> Although other causes were also blamed for the dramatic decline in shipping fortunes - the falling off in the emigration trade, the need to carry apprentices and the growth of steam navigation - government policy was seen as the main offender.<sup>98</sup>

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94. Hansard 1844, LXXV, 274/275. Gladstone's comments were recorded in the Society's Annual Report, see SS. Rep. 1843/4, p.6.

95. SS. Min. 1844, IV, p.332.

96. S.C. (1844), p.1, Q.4; Young : p.21, QQ. 255,258; Somes : p.93, Q.1366; Smales : p.115, QQ.1679/1680; Tanner : p.129. QQ.1921-1923; Anderson : p.201, Q.3175; Hall.

97. S.C. (1844), p.54, QQ.740-743; Young : p.29, QQ. 388/389; Somes: p.81, QQ.1119-1123; Wilcox.

98. S.C. (1844), p.19, QQ.220/221; Young : p.60, Q.833; Chapman : p.16, QQ.194-196; Young : pp.7/8, QQ.86-88; Young: p.186, QQ.2873-2877; Straker.

The limited evidence offered on the subject of shipmaster examinations had a familiar ring about it. Somes, who had testified before the 1843 Select Committee, was satisfied that British commanders were generally good sailors and navigators.<sup>99</sup> Chapman, another leading shipowner, agreed that many 'unqualified parties' were appointed to command but strenuously opposed compulsory examinations.<sup>100</sup> On the other hand, Smith, a shipowner and Master of the Trinity House at Leith, declared that the shipowners in his home port were in favour of examinations.<sup>101</sup> If Somes and Chapman were biased witnesses so also was Smith. Leith Trinity House had already committed itself to the examination scheme. The evidence of Wilcox, a managing director of the Peninsular & Oriental Steam Company, reflected the laissez faire stance of many shipowners. He concurred with the view that foreign shipping was often preferred to British shipping because of the superior appointment of its masters. Pressed by Ross on the subject - Ross had been a member of the 1843 Select Committee - Wilcox said that he did not believe that foreign masters were better educated than their English counterparts, simply that they were 'superior in address, which goes a long way with foreigners'.<sup>102</sup> He did not explain how superiority in address contributed to the competent handling of a ship. Nor would he concede that a man who had been rigorously examined was more acceptable than a man who had not been examined at all. He asserted that shipowners, not committees, were the best arbiters of competency. If there happened to be a few deficient shipmasters in the British merchant service, they represented the exception rather than the rule. Ross finally asked Wilcox if he had ever taken the trouble to read the evidence presented to the 1843 Select

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99. S.C. (1844), p.40, Q.616. He had earlier agreed that ships' officers had improved in qualification, see p.40, Q.612.

100. S.C. (1844), p.109, QQ.1597/8.

101. S.C. (1844), p.151, Q.2317.

102. S.C. (1844), p.83, QQ.1152/3.

Committee. Wilcox confessed that he had not read any of it.<sup>103</sup>

Evidence presented to the Select Committee made it clear that the shipping interest remained intractably opposed to any form of government intervention. There can be little doubt that relationships between the Society and Government were somewhat strained. The Society's exclusion from the discussions on the voluntary examination scheme would not have helped matters. The Merchant Seamen's Amendment Bill did nothing to heal the breach or reassure the Society as to its political future.

The 1835 Merchant Seamen's Act had two main objectives: to reinforce existing legislation relating to the welfare and protection of British seamen and to establish a general register of merchant seamen.<sup>104</sup> Responsibility for the administration and regulation of the Act lay with the Admiralty. The first Registrar-General of Seamen was Lieut. J.H. Brown, R.N.

The Act had encountered opposition from its inception. The General Shipowners' Society argued that the Act contained measures which were objectionable in principle and imposed wholly unsupportable penalties.<sup>105</sup> At a later date the Society claimed that the Bill had produced 'extensive evils' in undermining the authority of shipmasters; had inflicted injustice on shipowners; and had demoralized the seamen themselves.<sup>106</sup> Others claimed that the absence of any statutory legislation for administering shipboard duties gave the master an 'unbounden authority' over his crew, often leading to grave injustice and brutal inhumanity.<sup>107</sup> The Foreign Office, the Admiralty, the Board of Customs and the Board of Trade all received petitions describing the difficulties of implementing the Act. The

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103. S.C. (1844), p.85, Q.1192.

104. 5 & 6 Will. IV, c.19.

105. SS. Min. 1842/3, pp. 4/5.

106. SS. Min. 1843, IV, p.286; 7 June, 1843.

107. See Consular Reports, P.P. 1847/8; LIX, Pt. I; The Times, 26 Dec. 1845, p.6, col.3; N.M. 1842, XI, pp.276-281.

obstructive conduct of many shipmasters was especially deplored.<sup>108</sup>

On 13 November 1843 Brown, the Registrar-General of Seamen, requested British consuls to forward to the Secretary of the Admiralty, the Hon. Sidney Herbert, any information they had about British shipmasters contravening the 1835 Act.<sup>109</sup> Brown's circular, like Murray's asked leading questions and invited adverse criticisms. The consuls were just as eager to comply with Brown's request as they had been to concur with Murray's. They overwhelmingly stressed the need for the introduction of amendments to the 1835 Act. No attempt was made to elicit the opinion of the General Shipowners' Society.

On 9 July 1844 the Society's Chairman, George F. Young, was informed by the Admiralty that a Bill to amend the 1835 Act had already been introduced in Parliament.<sup>110</sup> The Society sought unsuccessfully to get a postponement of the Bill, arguing that it required careful scrutiny. It then attempted to modify some of the Bill's provisions, again without success.<sup>111</sup> In the House, one member called the Bill 'an attempt to navigate ships by Act of Parliament - and an improper interference between masters and men'.<sup>112</sup> The Secretary of the Admiralty claimed, nonetheless, that he had received many intimations of support from shipowners; furthermore, out of three alterations suggested by them, two were included in the Bill.<sup>113</sup> Sir John Graham, the architect of the 1835 Act, not only confirmed this claim but suggested that shipowners generally were in favour of the new measures.<sup>114</sup>

The Amendment Bill did not, however, broach the subject of

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108. ADM. 1/5543, 22 June 1844.

109. ADM. 1/5543, 13 Nov. 1844.

110. SS. Rep. 1843/4, p.4.

111. SS. Min. 1844, IV, pp.338-341, 343-347.

112. Hansard 1844, LXXVI, 1510.

113. Ibid.

114. Ibid., 1510/11.

shipmaster examinations. It would seem that the Board of Trade had changed tack on the issue, notwithstanding its promise to the Admiralty on 4 June 1844 to introduce examination clauses into the Bill. There were valid logistical and political grounds to support the change. The Admiralty scheme was essentially an outline plan. Curricula and organizational details still had to be explored and finalized. In addition, no explicit decision had been made as to which agency of government should be made responsible for the examination scheme. Under these circumstances the Board could well have been reluctant to link the scheme with an Admiralty Bill. In short, it was not expedient to introduce the issue of shipmaster examinations either at this point or in this way. The Admiralty was less inhibited.

On 9 August 1844, during a brief debate on the Merchant Seamen's Amendment Bill, the Secretary of the Admiralty, Sidney Herbert, was asked whether government intended to introduce measures for the examination of masters and mates. He informed the House that

'it was intended by the Admiralty to institute such a Board immediately, and not take up any merchant ship for the Queen's service that was not commanded by a master or mate who had been examined'.<sup>115</sup>

Notwithstanding Herbert's comments as to the immediacy of the Admiralty's intentions on the examination issue it was the Board of Trade which made the first move.

On 8 November 1844 the Board informed the London Trinity House that it had 'resumed the consideration' of the voluntary scheme of examinations and sought its advice on 'several important matters of detail' relating to the scheme's implementation.<sup>116</sup> Issues raised by the Board included the extension of the examining system; examination time-tables; the determination, collection and

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115. Hansard 1844, LXXVI, 1996.

116. B.T. 3/33, pp. 15-20.

disbursement of examination fees; the awarding and invalidation of certificates; and the clarification of disciplinary procedures. The House was also asked to draft a notice containing particulars of the scheme which might be published in the London Gazette.

The Warden's Committee of the House discussed the problems raised by the Board at some length.<sup>117</sup> On 7 January 1845 it submitted its recommendations - one of which was that the Board should act as a court of appeal to officers contesting the withdrawal of their certificates.<sup>118</sup> The Board's response was positive and immediate, written alongside the minute was the instruction, 'Mr. Lefevre to prepare draft of necessary regulations'.<sup>119</sup> On 21 January 1845 the Warden's Committee approved the regulations

'for the examination of Masters and Mates as printed at the Government Confidential Press, sent to this House by Mr. Lefevre, Secretary to the Board of Trade ...'.<sup>120</sup>

The urgency with which the Board pursued the issue did not solely derive from a concern to establish itself as the agency responsible for the control examination scheme. Pressure for firm action on the examination issue and for the rationalization of mercantile affairs came from outside and within the confines of government. In several instances the pressure implicitly reinforced the Board's dominant position in the shipping arena.

When, for example, Glasgow Merchants asked the Admiralty on 9 September 1844 when the law for the examination of masters and mates would be brought into force, they were informed that the matter was under the control of the Board of Trade.<sup>121</sup> On 20 November 1844 they directed a similar enquiry to the Board of Trade and were

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117. TH. Wd. Min. 1844, pp. 324, 328; TH. Wd. Min. 1845, p.361.

118. B.T. 4/17, 52.

119. B.T. 5/53, p.25.

120. TH. Wd. Min. 1845, XVI, p.371.

121. ADM. 12/430, 64a, 16 Sept. 1844.

advised that arrangements were in 'a forward state'.<sup>122</sup> A further request for information was made by the Glasgow shipping interests on 24 March 1845. They were informed by the Board that the regulations were under consideration and would shortly be promulgated.<sup>123</sup>

Increasingly The Times used its columns to impress on its readers the desperate need for marine reform. In August 1844 it called attention to the lack of any means of guaranteeing the proficiency of masters and mates. It urged the setting up of examination boards to test their 'experience as seamen and scientific knowledge as navigators'.<sup>124</sup> In support of its views, it recounted the case of a master charged at Durham Assizes with the wilful destruction of his ship. The man had a scanty knowledge of navigation, knew little about writing and addition and absolutely 'nothing of subtraction, multiplication, or division'. The Westminster Review took a similar line when it declared that a large proportion of supposedly inevitable marine disasters were directly attributable to the 'sheer default of the shipowners and his servants'.<sup>125</sup> The Economist referred to the evidence on ship mismanagement presented to the 1843 Select Committee and claimed that the remedy lay in raising the standard of education among seafarers. It also stressed the need of voluntary examinations as a way of reassuring innocent and ignorant travellers, such as those in emigrant and transport ships and claimed that

'right principle and humanity equally require a security that those entrusted with the care of so many lives should give some security and evidence as to their being able and willing to take care of them properly'.<sup>126</sup>

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122. B.T. 3/33, p.40, Cf Opposition of Bristol Merchants to examination scheme, B.T. 4/16, 1789.

123. B.T. 4/17, 619; B.T. 3/33, p.159.

124. The Times, 22 Aug. 1844, p.3, col.6.

125. Westminster Review 1844, XLII, p.60.

126. Economist, 9 Nov. 1844, No. 63, p.1396.

The correspondence columns in the Nautical Magazine testified to the growing concern among seafarers themselves about the incompetence of British shipmasters. Many saw an examining programme as the only practicable solution.<sup>127</sup>

On 7 January 1845 the British Vice-Consul at Copenhagen warned the Board of Trade that the 'very great ignorance' of British shipmasters engaged in the Baltic trade was detrimental to their own and employers' interests.<sup>128</sup> On an equally serious note the Foreign Office transmitted to the Board a copy of a despatch from the Consul at Stockholm calling attention to the increasing employment of British capital in foreign shipping. The Foreign Office requested that further attention should be paid to its letter in January 1844 relating to the

'Board of Commercial Marine and to the establishment of a Department for the special superintendance of this matter'.<sup>129</sup>

The Board's response to this directive was the subject of a 'special minute' but as in the case of other 'separate and special' correspondence between government departments details have not been retained.<sup>130</sup> What is known, however, is that the Board of Trade proceeded to press ahead with the voluntary scheme.

In July 1845 draft copies of the examination regulations were circulated among the various examining boards.<sup>131</sup> The next month, on 9 August, the London Gazette reported that from 1 November 1845 voluntary examinations for masters and mates in the British merchant service would come into effect.<sup>132</sup>

The examining programme would operate under the wing of the Board of Trade but the responsibility for operating the examinations

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127. N.M. 1844, XIII, pp.606-608.

128. B.T. 1/441, 41.

129. B.T. 4/17, 770.

130. B.T. 5/53, p. 337; B.T. 5/55, p.152.

131. TH. Ct. Min. 1845, p.506;

132. London Gazette, 19 Aug. 1845, No. 20498, p.2502.

themselves would be invested in the Corporations of the Trinity Houses in London, Hull, Newcastle and Leith, the sub-Commissioners of Pilotage at Beaumaris, Gloucester, Milford, Plymouth, Portsmouth and Great Yarmouth, the Boards for licensing Pilots at Glasgow and Liverpool and the Ballast Board of Dublin. These same authorities would also award certificates to successful candidates. Other ports were to be added to the list when possessed of a competent examining authority.<sup>133</sup>

Entry regulations and examination content followed the general pattern set out in the Admiralty plan. There were a few additions and amendments however. Candidates for each category of examination were now required to have completed a minimum period of service at sea but no reference was made to the capacity in which it should be served. Although the examining boards would still enjoy the right to withdraw the certificate of any officer found negligent, appeals could be made to the Board of Trade whose decision would be final. The Board would compile a registry in London of all certificates awarded and withdrawn. Periodically, such information would be published in the London Gazette and made available to Lloyd's Register. Examination fees - £2.0.0. for masters, £1.0.0. for mates - would be used to remunerate examiners and to defray running costs. Half the fee would be paid prior to the candidate sitting the examination, the other half before the certificate was awarded. In the case of failure, the candidate would forfeit the half of the fee already paid. Each board would be financially accountable to the Board of Trade.

It would be wrong to suppose that because of its voluntary nature the boards involved in the examining scheme had a freedom much greater than that envisaged by Fitzroy's Bill. Fitzroy had laid down strict criteria as to the qualifications and experience

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133. Ibid., p.2505.

PLATE VII

Publication of Successful Candidates  
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under the Voluntary Examination Scheme  
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Acknowledgements to the London Gazette

1850

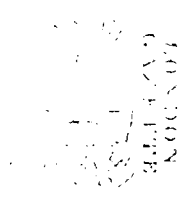
DATE.	Name of Party who has received the Certificate.	Class of Certificate.	Age of Party	Place and Date of Birth.	Present or last previous Service.	No. of Register Ticket.	Name of Board.
1850.							
June 22	Peter Campbell	Second	—	Greenock, 1821	"Hydaspes," of Liverpool, 591 tons, as Mate	187005	Board of miners, Liverpool
June 24	George Bilton Lee*	Second	—	Heworth, Durham, 1826	"John Cooper," of London, 639 tons, as Mate	388801	Trinity I London
June 25	John Shand	Second	—	Aberdeen, 1823	"Eliza Ann," of Glasgow, 736 tons, as Mate	101553	Board of miners, Glasgow
June 27	John S. Byrne	First	—	Dublin, 1819	"Ariel," of 284 tons, as Master	266690	Board of miners, Glasgow
June 28	Andrew Nicoll	First	—	Dundee, 1803	"Andromeda," of Dundee, 315 tons, as Master	—	Board of miners, Dundee
June 28	James Nash Marshall	First	—	Horsleydown, London, 1817	"Promise," of South Shields, 263 tons, as Master	—	Trinity II Newcastle
June 29	Robert Briggs	Second	—	Lancaster, 1826	"Burrell," of Lancaster, 402 tons, as Mate	40748	Board of miners, Liverpool

The Certificate granted to Richard Corney, on the 23rd April, by the Liverpool Board, has been withdrawn.

MATES.

DATE.	Name of Party who has received the Certificate.	Class of Certificate.	Age of Party	Place and Date of Birth.	Present or last previous Service.	No. of Register Ticket.	Name of Board.
1850.							
June 3	Thomas Hybert	Second	—	Pontypool, 1831	"Dalhousie," of London, 759 tons, as Mate	327926	Trinity II London
June 4	Wm. Henry Kemp	Third	—	Exeter, 1818	"Bombay," of Liverpool, 400 tons, as Mate	274071	Trinity I London
June 5	Thomas Cobby Good	Second	—	Brighton, 1822	"Hydaspes," of Liverpool, 595 tons, as Mate	258943	Board of miners, Liverpool
June 6	David Grant	Second	—	Stepney, 1831	"Berthamport," of Hull, 653 tons, as Mate	176529	Trinity I London
June 6	Richard Thomas Edwards†	Second	—	Halesowen, Salop, 1827	"Enxine," of London, 1100 tons, as Quartermaster	—	Trinity I London

\* The Register Ticket, George Lee.



of examiners and had required that they be subject to an examination by the Principal Examiner appointed by the London Trinity House. He had, however, entrusted their initial selection to the shipowners of the district.<sup>134</sup> The new regulations required that for the third class examination at least two examiners be shipmasters experienced in overseas trade and that for all other examinations they would be

'assisted by a scientific person, competently acquainted with the theory of Navigation and Nautical Astronomy'.<sup>135</sup>

Under the voluntary system the examining boards would be free from the surveillance and control of the London Trinity House but would be required to assure the Board of Trade as to their competency to undertake the examining duty. Other differences between the two schemes were marginal, being essentially ones of detail and emphasis rather than of a structural or organizational nature. But neither scheme made any attempt to cater for the instruction of candidates. In short, Fitzroy's plan for the compulsory examination of British masters and chief mates provided the base upon which the voluntary scheme was established.

The Times had described the recommendations of the 1843 Select Committee as 'a kind of compromise'.<sup>136</sup> By the same token, the Order in Council establishing the first programme of shipmaster examinations could be described as a kind of victory. If it was an occasion for modified celebration, then it was also a time for sober reflection. A voluntary examination scheme had been proposed as far back as 1837 by Charles Poulett Thomson, President of the Board of Trade, during the debate on the second reading of Buckingham's ill-starred Bill.<sup>137</sup> The intervening years had been

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134. Public Bills 1842, 6 Vict., III, 28 July 1842, pp.4/5.

135. London Gazette, 19 Aug. 1845, No. 20498, p.2505.

136. The Times, 4 Mar. 1850, p.4, col.4.

137. Hansard 1837, XXXVIII, 1223.

characterized by the frustrated idealism of the reformers, the circumspect deliberations of government and the continuing obstinacy of the shipping interest, particularly of its official mouthpiece, the General Shipowners' Society.

At first the intransigence of the shipowners had been partly inspired by resentment of possible intervention by government in their affairs but much more by a belief in the strength of their position nationally and internationally. Britain had emerged from the Napoleonic Wars as the unchallenged leader of the world's mercantile nations. But while many British shipowners were content to sit back and ignore everything but profits, continental and American shipowners concentrated on increasing efficiency by the construction of better, safer ships and by engaging properly qualified officers to command these ships. Some shipowners recognized the threat from overseas, many more refused to do so. Reform might have been in the air but the shipping interest chose to maintain the status quo. In doing so it lost political ground. The failure of the Admiralty and the Board of Trade to involve the General Shipowners' Society in the discussions on the voluntary examining scheme highlighted the Society's waning influence and prestige. The decline in the political fortunes of the General Shipowners' Society was paralleled by the growing involvement of the general public and government in the movement to establish shipmaster examinations.

It was suggested earlier in this study that the Government would only be persuaded to intervene in the examination debate when it was satisfied that its intervention could be justified on the grounds of humanitarianism and practical economics. In truth, the Government was merely temporizing. The humanitarian justification for intervention had existed for many years. Nor was the economic argument straightforward, being coloured by the Government's ever-present anxiety not to offend the shipping interest. The situation was changing fast, however. The 1843 Select Committee's report had created a reasonable basis for government intervention. The nautical and national press played a part by educating the public to the necessity of firm government action.

It was perhaps no more than coincidence that the idea of voluntary examinations for masters and mates should first have been

proposed by a President of the Board of Trade. Chance, however, played very little part in the Board's subsequent involvement in the examination issue. Capt. Robert Fitzroy, R.N., had discussed the issue of shipmaster examinations and the establishment of local examining boards with the Board before he introduced his Bill in Parliament.<sup>138</sup> As Vice-President of the Board and a member of the 1843 Select Committee on Shipwrecks, Gladstone had been especially attentive to the evidence about the competency of foreign fleets and shipmaster examinations. It was the Board of Trade, too, which initiated the crucial discussions with the Admiralty about shipmaster examinations; which gained the approval and support of Lloyd's Register of Shipping; which persuaded the Admiralty to prepare an appropriate examining system; which finalized the examination arrangements with Trinity House; and which finally secured the formal endorsement of the scheme by means of an Order in Council. The programme had been established without any manifest consultation with shipping interests or with the General Shipowners' Society. The exclusion of the shipping interest from discussions reflected the increasing politicization of the examination debate. It also emphasized what the Economist had called the General Shipowners' Society's 'increasing disunity' with the nation's general body of merchants and shipowners among whom the

'more enlightened principles of commerce,  
tested and supported by the most searching  
inquiry into the experience of the past,  
are now rapidly making way'.<sup>139</sup>

Changes in government policy rarely emerge overnight. They are invariably the result of private discussion and public debate, of subtle persuasions and powerful representations, as well as

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138. Prouty, p.66.

139. Economist, 10 Aug. 1844, No.50, p.1081.

countless other influences. The complexities of political manoeuvrings are never easy to analyse and sometimes the veil of official secrecy makes them impossible to trace. What is occasionally discernible in retrospect, however, is an event of apparent contemporary insignificance which sets in motion a whole chain of events, ultimately leading to a major government decision. The Murray Circular was such an event.

The Murray correspondence was made public in 1848. It was used by Henry Labouchere, President of the Board of Trade, to argue the case for rationalizing the organization and control of British shipping. In short, it was held back until the time was politically propitious for it to be revealed. It would seem that it was not by accident that the Board finally emerged as the Government department responsible for mercantile affairs. Such developments had clear implications for the shipmaster examination debate.

## CHAPTER VII

### Steering with the Tide

Although the growth of shipping legislation in the two decades up to 1850 had been rapid, the pattern had been confused. Given that nine separate government departments had been involved in the passing of forty-eight statutes relating directly to British shipping during the period, some administrative muddle was perhaps inevitable.<sup>1</sup> It was time for the rationalization and consolidation of mercantile affairs. Until the administration of British shipping was centralized little progress could be made towards the introduction of compulsory shipmaster examinations. Administrative reform was contingent upon the repeal of the Navigation Laws but their abolition would expose British shipping to unrestricted competition with foreign fleets. The stringent qualifications of British masters and mates which the situation demanded could only be achieved by a properly constituted and strictly controlled programme of compulsory examinations. The issues were intertwined and inter-dependent. Reorientation and reconciliation would not be easily won.

During the planning and implementation of the voluntary examination scheme the Board of Trade had sought to place the examinations under the supervision of the Trinity Houses. There were good reasons for entrusting the pilotage authorities with this responsibility. First, they were impartial agencies. Secondly, they had considerable experience in conducting examinations, especially the testing of pilots. In addition, Hull Trinity House examined officers in the

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1. Prouty, p.87.

mercantile marine and the London Trinity House examined masters and second masters in the Royal Navy.<sup>2</sup> Thirdly, the network of pilotage agencies provided a ready-made framework in which to locate and control a national scheme of examinations. The London Trinity House had direct control of the pilotage branch boards at Beaumaris, Gloucester, Milford, Plymouth, Portsmouth and Great Yarmouth; had close links with the Trinity Houses at Dundee, Hull, Leith and Newcastle; and shared common interests with the Commissioners of Pilotage at Glasgow and Liverpool, as well as with the Dublin Ballast Boards. Clearly, the London Trinity House was ideally placed to direct the voluntary scheme under the aegis of the Board of Trade. Its authoritative position and expertise in the field of nautical examinations had been tacitly acknowledged by the Admiralty and the Board of Trade during the planning stages of the voluntary shipmaster examination programme.

Evidence of the pre-eminent position of the London Trinity House in the voluntary scheme soon emerged. On 12 September 1845 the Board of Trade wrote to the House enclosing copies of the examination regulations relating to the voluntary scheme. In addition, the Board took the opportunity to thank the House for the support it had already given to the examination programme and requested it to forward any suggestions regarding points not specifically catered for in the regulations.<sup>3</sup> It was not until 30 September 1845 that the other examining boards were supplied with their copies of the regulations and the covering letters emphasized the dominant role to be played by the London Trinity House.<sup>4</sup>

Trinity House, London, carefully scrutinized the recommendations

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2. Hull Trinity House were authorized by Charter in 1581 'to examine and license mariners to take charge of vessels sailing the seas', see Arthur Storey, Trinity House of Kingston upon Hull (1967), p.40.

3. B.T. 3/33, pp.263/4.

4. B.T. 3/33, p.276.

and arrangements made by the various branch boards. When, for example, the Sub-Commissioners of Pilotage at Portsmouth recommended as an examiner a Mr. Yule, a former commander of H.M.'s flagship at Portsmouth, the House was not fully satisfied with Yule's qualifications. Yule was obliged to make a personal visit to the London Trinity House and subsequently accepted responsibility for examining candidates for third class certificates only.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the appointment of a local navigation teacher at Milford was approved without demur.<sup>6</sup> Beaumaris advised against setting up a board of examiners at that port. When Trinity House, London, relayed the information to the Board of Trade and recommended that Beaumaris should be deleted from the list of examining ports the Board of Trade accepted the recommendation without question.<sup>7</sup>

At the London Trinity House the voluntary examinations were conducted by the examining committee appointed to ascertain the proficiency of naval and pilotage candidates. The committee was to be aided by a scientific examiner who was to refrain, 'either directly or indirectly' from teaching navigation to prospective applicants.<sup>8</sup> Since the position of scientific examiner to the London Trinity House was a coveted post, the House was able to select from a number of suitable candidates.<sup>9</sup>

The Board of Trade had appointed examining boards in a limited number of ports but it had left the way open for other ports to join the scheme, provided they could supply competent personnel to conduct the examinations.<sup>10</sup> There was a meagre response from ports outside

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5. TH. Wd. Min. 1845, XVII, pp.123, 126, 128.

6. Ibid., p.123.

7. Ibid., pp.129/30.

8. TH. Ct. Min. 1845, pp.136/7; TH.Wd.Min. 1845, XVII, p.125.

9. TH. Ct. Min. 1845, pp.137, 241, 242; TH. Wd. Min. 1845, XVII, p.127.

10. London Gazette, 19 Aug. 1845, No. 20498, p.2505. See also P.P. 1847, LX, p.357.

the scheme, only Sunderland, South Shields and Dundee seeking inclusion. Dundee's request was granted immediately but since the approach had come from Dundee Trinity House, a refusal was hardly likely.<sup>11</sup> Sunderland's application, from the local shipowners, recommended that the examining authority should be vested either in the Shipowners' Society or in the Commissioners of Pilotage. The Secretary of the Sunderland Shipowners' Society was told that his communication would be given 'early consideration'.<sup>12</sup> The Board of Trade commended the South Shields Marine Board for its private examination scheme but pointed out that its inclusion in the voluntary programme was dependent upon the approval of the Newcastle Trinity House.<sup>13</sup> The applications from Sunderland and South Shields were passed by the Board of Trade to Newcastle Trinity House along with a letter which suggested that if it were deemed proper to set up a separate board at Sunderland, then it would be preferable that the examining function be discharged by the Pilotage Commissioners - 'and not the Shipowners' Society'.<sup>14</sup>

Newcastle Trinity House agreed that a separate board should be established at Sunderland, with its members drawn from the Sub-Commissioners of Pilotage.<sup>15</sup> The decision to exclude the Shipowners' Society at local level was an echo of the decision to exclude the General Shipowners' Society from the preliminary discussions leading up to the voluntary scheme. South Shields's request received the wholehearted approval of Newcastle Trinity House which referred to the 'essential services to the Shipping Interest' already rendered by the South Shields Marine Board.<sup>16</sup> On 16 October 1845, nearly two

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11. B.T.4/17, 1707; B.T.3/33, pp.270/1.

12. B.T.4/17, 1463; B.T.3/33, p.294.

13. B.T.4/17, 1485; B.T.3/33, p.294.

14. B.T.3/33, pp.294/5.

15. Newcastle Trinity House, Letter Book 1845-1848, pp.193/4.

16. Ibid.

months after Sunderland's application had been presented, the Board of Trade sent the Sunderland Shipowners' Society copies of the examination regulations and asked that they be brought to the attention of the Commissioners of Pilotage. A further supply of the regulations was promised if the Commissioners were 'disposed to give their assistance'.<sup>17</sup> The Pilotage Commissioners somewhat peremptorily informed the Board of Trade that they intended to consult with the shipping interest of Sunderland before 'taking upon themselves the duties of an examining board'.<sup>18</sup> It was clear that the local shipowners held the real authority in the port of Sunderland. The Board of Trade did not reply.

Despite the fact that the Marine Board at South Shields had earned commendation from the Board of Trade and from Trinity House, Newcastle for its initiative and services on the examining front, its application was carefully assessed. It was asked to supply the Board of Trade with copies of its constitution, the names and occupations of Board members and an account of the experience of the examiners. It was also asked to state in writing its intention to examine and award certificates under the voluntary scheme.<sup>19</sup> Even when its application had been approved, the Marine Board was reminded that its right to examine could be withdrawn at any time.<sup>20</sup> The Marine Board was undeterred. On 18 November 1845 it confirmed its willingness to participate in the voluntary scheme.<sup>21</sup>

Inevitably, there were anomalies and omissions in the planning and implementation of the voluntary programme. For example, Bristol was a major port and yet it had no examining board. But Bristol had no recognized pilotage authority. To remedy the situation the Board of Trade sought the co-operation of the Bristol Society of Merchants.<sup>22</sup>

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17. B.T.3/33, p.288.

18. B.T.4/17, 2240; 6 Nov. 1845.

19. B.T.3/33, p.289. The Marine Board forwarded the relevant documents on 20 Oct. 1845, see B.T.4/17, 1924.

20. B.T.3/33, p.303.

21. B.T.4/17, 2360; B.T.3/33, p.347.

22. The Admiralty had earlier sought unsuccessfully the co-operation of the Society of Merchants at Bristol in the promotion of the voluntary scheme in 1844, see B.T.4/16, 1789.

Its efforts were in vain.<sup>23</sup>

Although the Board of Trade had been the driving force behind the implementation of the voluntary examination scheme, once the scheme was in operation it seemed content, at least initially, to adopt a somewhat avuncular stance. It wanted to be kept informed about examination successes but expressed little manifest interest in the number of failures or why certain examining boards made no returns. It would seem that the Board used the voluntary scheme simply as a sounding board for testing opinion on examinations per se. If the voluntary scheme proved a signal success, that success could be used to justify an even broader scheme of examinations and the idea of compulsion might seem less contentious. If the voluntary scheme failed, the failure could be used to justify compulsion. The Board of Trade, and thus the Government, had little to lose and much to gain from the introduction of the voluntary examination system.

Periodically, the Board of Trade circularized the examining boards to clarify or amend the existing regulations. On 5 January 1846, for example, the boards at Dundee, London and South Shields were informed that suggestions had been made in certain quarters that to enable successful candidates to be more readily identified

'an endorsement, or note should be made on each Certificate, stating the age and place of birth of the Master and Mate, the tonnage and port of the Vessel, if any, in which he shall be serving at the date of the Certificate or in which he shall have last served previous to that date and the number of his Register Ticket, if any'.<sup>24</sup>

In January 1847, when the voluntary scheme had been in operation for over one year, the Board asked for a progress report from each

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23. B.T.3/33, p.293; B.T.4/18, 314.

24. B.T.3/33, p.349.

of the boards. The circular alluded to the 'considerable number' of persons taking the opportunity to acquire nautical knowledge and expressed the hope that the voluntary system would soon be regarded nationally as providing an 'adequate supply of well educated' mercantile officers. The reality of the situation, as indicated by the following table and related figure, was that the response to the scheme had been limited.

TABLE VII

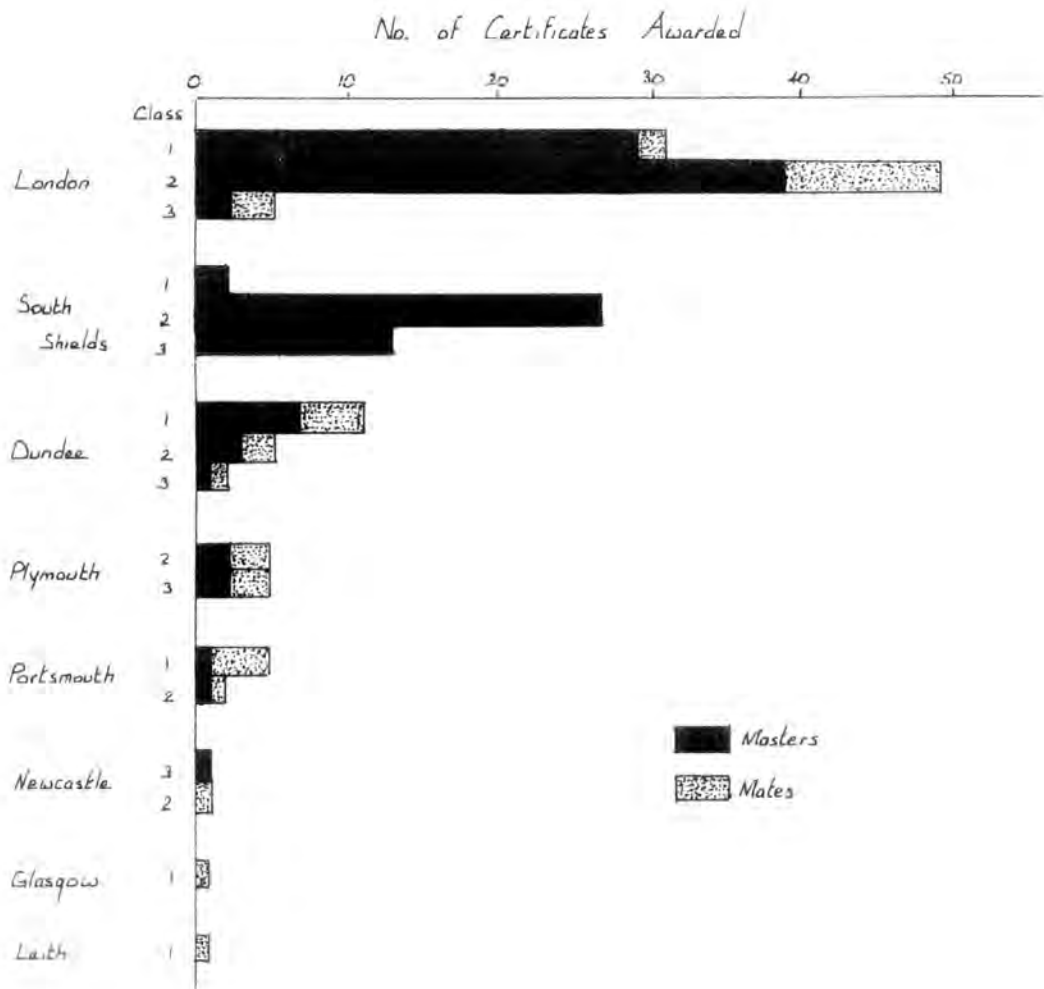
Certificates of Competency awarded 1845/6 : number, class and awarding authority

Examining Board	Masters				Mates				Total Number awarded by each Board
	Class			Total	Class			Total	
	1	2	3		1	2	3		
London	29	39	2	70	2	10	3	15	85
South Shields	2	27	13	42	0	0	0	0	42
Dundee	7	3	1	11	4	2	1	7	18
Plymouth	0	2	2	4	0	3	3	6	10
Portsmouth	1	1	0	2	4	1	0	5	7
Newcastle	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	2
Glasgow	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Leith	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
	40	72	19	131	11	17	7	35	166
	131				35				

Source : B.T. 6/218; P.P. 1847, LX, pp. 361-366;  
The Mercantile Navy List, July, 1850, pp.20-25.

FIGURE I

Certificates of Competency awarded 1845/6 :  
number, class and awarding authority



Source : B.T. 6/218 ; P.P. 1847, LX, pp.361-366;  
The Mercantile Navy List, July, 1850,  
pp. 20-25.

Of the thirteen designated examining boards only eight were operational. Glasgow could boast but a single success, Newcastle only two. At the same time, however, the Newcastle Trinity House informed the Board of Trade that they highly approved of the arrangements made for the voluntary examination of masters and mates and were glad to find that so many had come forward for examination.<sup>26</sup> The Secretary to the Liverpool Board of Examiners pointed out that as the Board did not commence operation until November 1846, their experience was as yet

'too limited to pronounce a decided opinion on the system of examinations but that they continued to be impressed with its favourable tendency'.<sup>27</sup>

It would seem, however, that the voluntary examination scheme had excited limited interest among British seafarers. The total number of certificates awarded throughout the country was 166, the majority of which were masters' certificates of the second class. But if the Board of Trade and some of the examining agencies were not prepared to make a realistic appraisal of the situation, there were others who were.

Since its inception, the Nautical Magazine had sought to improve the proficiency and status of ships' officers in the British mercantile marine and was a strong advocate of shipmaster examinations. It had greeted the introduction of the voluntary examination scheme with much enthusiasm. In January 1846, for example, it urged British shipmasters to present themselves for examination and become the 'regenerators of their own profession'.<sup>28</sup> By March 1846, however, it was forced to concede that in a country with a merchant fleet of

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26. Newcastle Trinity House, Letter Book 1845-1848, p.188. See also B.T.4/19, 638.

27. B.T.4/19, 456. On 11 Oct. 1845 at a meeting of the Liverpool Commissioners of Pilotage a Board of Examination was established to implement the voluntary scheme, see Mersey Docks Harbour Board, Pilotage Meeting and Minute Book, 1766-1857.

28. N.M. 1846, XV. p.52.

some 30,000 ships of 3,000,000 gross tons the number of certificates awarded - twenty-six masters and eight mates - bore a 'very small proportion to the number required'.<sup>29</sup> In July 1846, with the total of certificates still below one hundred, it described the response as 'not very cheering' and intimated that it might be necessary to introduce a measure of compulsion to secure the employment of qualified masters and mates.<sup>30</sup> As the year progressed the Magazine's tone became increasingly despairing. In December 1846 it declared that unless the system received some stimulation little hope could be entertained of its ultimate success.<sup>31</sup>

In assessing the initial response to the voluntary programme it would be wrong to dismiss the scheme as an abject failure. Some of the examining boards were sailing in strange waters. It was notable that South Shields, which had previous experience of examining masters and mates, elicited better than average support.<sup>32</sup> Several factors obtained to restrict the response made by ships' officers to the voluntary examination scheme. Probably the most significant factor was the voluntary nature of the scheme. The majority of British masters must have felt that they had nothing to gain by presenting themselves for examination - and a great deal to lose if they sat and failed. Few of the smaller shipowning enterprises would be inclined to persuade their officers to undergo an examination into their professional competency, especially those engaged in the coastal and Baltic trades. In addition, the very nature of a seafarer's employment automatically removed many potential applicants from the examination scene. Another factor possibly inhibiting men from appearing before a board of examiners was their lack of a formal education. Simply to write a legible hand and to

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29. Ibid., p.153.

30. Ibid., pp.369/70.

31. Ibid., p.663. For other editorial comment on the scheme, see pp.487/8, 604/5.

32. A Board for the examination of ships' officers had been established at South Shields since 1838, see p.108 and App. X , pp. 337/339.

understand the first five rules of arithmetic were accomplishments beyond the scope of many seamen.<sup>33</sup>

It would seem that the London Trinity House also shared the view that the voluntary programme needed some stimulation. On 9 February 1847 it suggested to the Board of Trade that the scheme might benefit if the Government, when contracting for the hire of vessels, were to require that the

'Commanders and Mates of such hired vessels should have certificates of qualification from this House and further as may be practicable of all sea-going vessels carrying passengers...' 34

The letter was read at a Board of Trade meeting on 26 February 1847 and a note was appended to the minute: 'consideration to be resumed'.<sup>35</sup> On 23 March 1847 the Admiralty introduced a new regulation giving preference to certificated masters when making appointments to transport commands.<sup>36</sup> Clearly, the involvement of the Board of Trade in mercantile matters was much closer than its overt stance suggested. Significantly, it appeared to be increasingly concerned about the operational aspects of the voluntary scheme.

On 21 May 1847 the Board asked the examining boards to submit returns showing the numbers of candidates who had been refused certificates since the inauguration of the scheme.<sup>37</sup> Trinity House,

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33. Such educational deficiencies were not confined solely to seafarers. Bishop has emphasized that in the second quarter of the nineteenth century in 'no quarter was the need more pressing than in education...', see Anthony S. Bishop, The Rise of a Central Authority for English Education (1971), p.9. But see also Edwin G. West, Education and the Industrial Revolution (1975) esp. pp. 8-20.

34. TH.Wd.Min. 1847, XVIII, p.55. For similar suggestion, see N.M. 1847, XV, p.148.

35. B.T. 4/19, 396.

36. The Mercantile Navy List, Jan. 1850, p.v.

37. B.T.3/36, p.171.

London, replied that no certificates had been refused but three candidates had failed to complete the examination.<sup>38</sup> Trinity House, Dundee, reported that two candidates had been refused certificates because of their failure to reach a required standard.<sup>39</sup> Newcastle reported three refusals; one lacked moral character, the other two were insufficiently acquainted with the coasts of England and Scotland.<sup>40</sup> At Newcastle, too, there were a number of instances of candidates seeking first class certificates but receiving only second class Certificates.<sup>41</sup> Newcastle's strictness may have accounted for some of the relative success of its Tyneside neighbour, South Shields. If the candidates at Newcastle were perhaps victims of an over zealous board, there were cases of real moral turpitude.

On 29 July 1847 the Secretary to the Sailors Home in Wells Street, London, reported an instance of attempted bribery as an inducement to impersonation. A man called Haines was offered £5.0.0d. if he would sit the examination under an assumed name and thus gain a certificate under false pretences. Haines refused and reported the incident.<sup>42</sup> The ruse failed but the incident was sufficient to cause the Board of Trade to inform the various examining authorities on the 6 August 1847 about the possibility of such abuses. The Yarmouth Board suggested that the applicant's description should be endorsed on all subsequent certificates awarded; Newcastle Trinity House affirmed that every person wishing to be examined at Newcastle had to produce certificates of his age, indentures and experience from previous employers.<sup>43</sup> The London Trinity House pointed

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38. TH.By-Min. 1847, p.336.

39. B.T.4/19, 1765.

40. Newcastle Trinity House, Examination Book, 7 Feb. 1846,  
8 Mar. 1847, 23 Mar. 1847.

41. Ibid., 26 July 1847; 10 Aug. 1847. See also illustration  
overleaf.

42. B.T.4/19, 2199.

43. B.T.4/19, 2280 : B.T.4/19, 2279; Newcastle Trinity House,  
Letter Book 1845-1848, p.259.

PLATE VIII

An Extract from the Examination's Book,

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Newcastle Trinity House  
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Family House, Newcastle

Jan 7 - 28<sup>th</sup> 1848.

A Board was held this Day to examine Geo. Lockwick  
of St. Shields, 46 years of age upon Examination he was  
not found perfectly qualified. Qualifications were required for  
a 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Master for which he applied, he was therefore not  
granted a Certificate until he makes himself perfect.

Nicholas Ferguson Harvey (applicant for a 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Master's  
Certificate) of Newcastle aged 26 years, D<sup>o</sup> of Register  
Sept 40, 329, is holder of the Therapeutic 419 Dons.  
Upon Examination he was found competent in the art  
Navigation and Seamanship and was therefore granted  
a 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Master's Certificate according to his application.

Charles Williamson of Newcastle aged 26 years  
D<sup>o</sup> of Register Sept 16, 1835, is holder of the Port  
Regulation of 2<sup>nd</sup> Class of 261 Dons - upon Examination  
he was not found quite competent and was therefore  
not granted a 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Master's Certificate for the present.

Wm. B. McKinnon  
John Brown

J. A. Patterson  
Chas. Thompson  
P. Thos. Agle  
William Taylor

out that whilst they had not considered themselves authorized to institute a 'very rigid scrutiny' into establishing the identity of examination candidates, they had given consideration to the testimonials and documents provided by them.<sup>44</sup> Increasingly, the Board took a more positive, and constructive role in the scheme's operation. On 7 December 1847, for example, it sought more detailed information from the examining boards relating to the numbers of examination candidates and to the pass rate. It also intimated that in future, financial accounts regarding the collection and disbursement of examination fees should be forwarded half-yearly.<sup>45</sup>

By the close of 1848 the voluntary examination scheme had been in operation for three years and was, as the following table indicates, beginning to gather momentum

TABLE VIII

Certificates of Competency issued 1845-1848 : numbers and class

Year	Masters					Mates				Combined Total
	Extra	1	2	3	Total	1	2	3	Total	
1845-6	0	40	72	19	131	11	17	7	35	166
1846-7	24	73	166	31	294	7	21	11	39	333
1847-8	3	76	446	120	645	14	39	42	95	740
	27	189	684	170	1070	42	77	60	169	1239

Source : B.T.6/218. ; P.P. 1847, LX, pp.361-366; P.P. 1850, LIII, pp.349/50; The Mercantile Navy List, July 1850, pp. 20-60.

In the first year a total of 166 certificates had been awarded; this figure was more than doubled in the second year. In the third year 740 certificates were awarded. Over the first three years of the scheme a total of 1,239 certificates had been presented; 1070 masters certificates, 169 mates. In percentage terms, the number of first class masters certificates issued had declined, the number of second and third class masters certificates had increased. The number of first class extra certificates issued was small and erratic. The

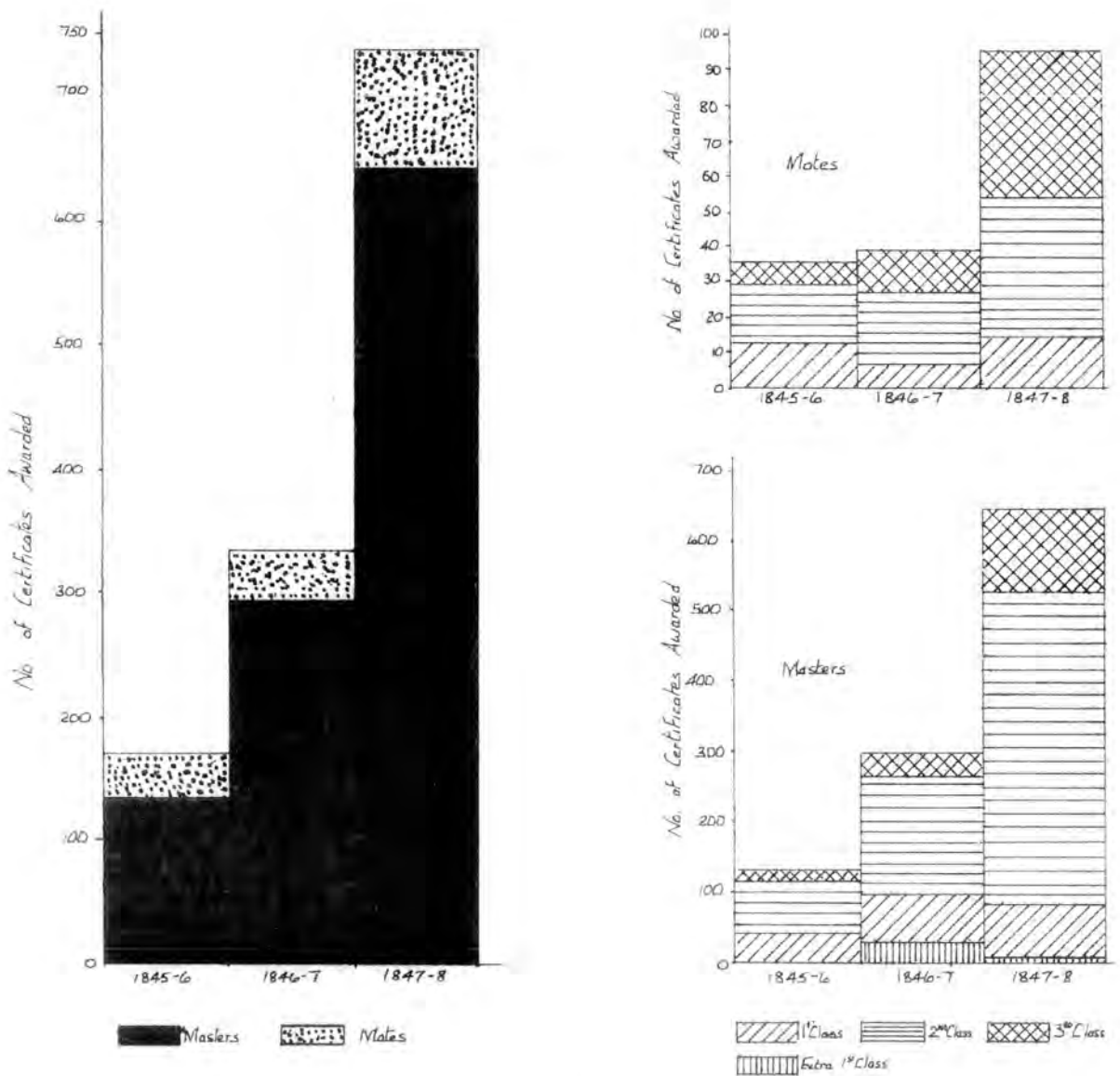
44. B.T.4/19, 2314; TH. By-Min. 1847, p.384.

45. TH. By-Min. 1847, pp.485/6.

percentage of first class mates certificates issued had declined; the second class remained fairly constant; and the third class increased appreciably.

FIGURE II

Certificates of Competency issued 1845-1848 : patterns of development



Source : B.T. 6/218. : P.P. 1847, LX, pp.361-366; P.P. 1850, LIII, pp. 349/50; The Mercantile Navy List, July 1850, pp.20-60.

The responses made by the respective examining boards, as shown in the table and figure overleaf were varied and somewhat controversial.

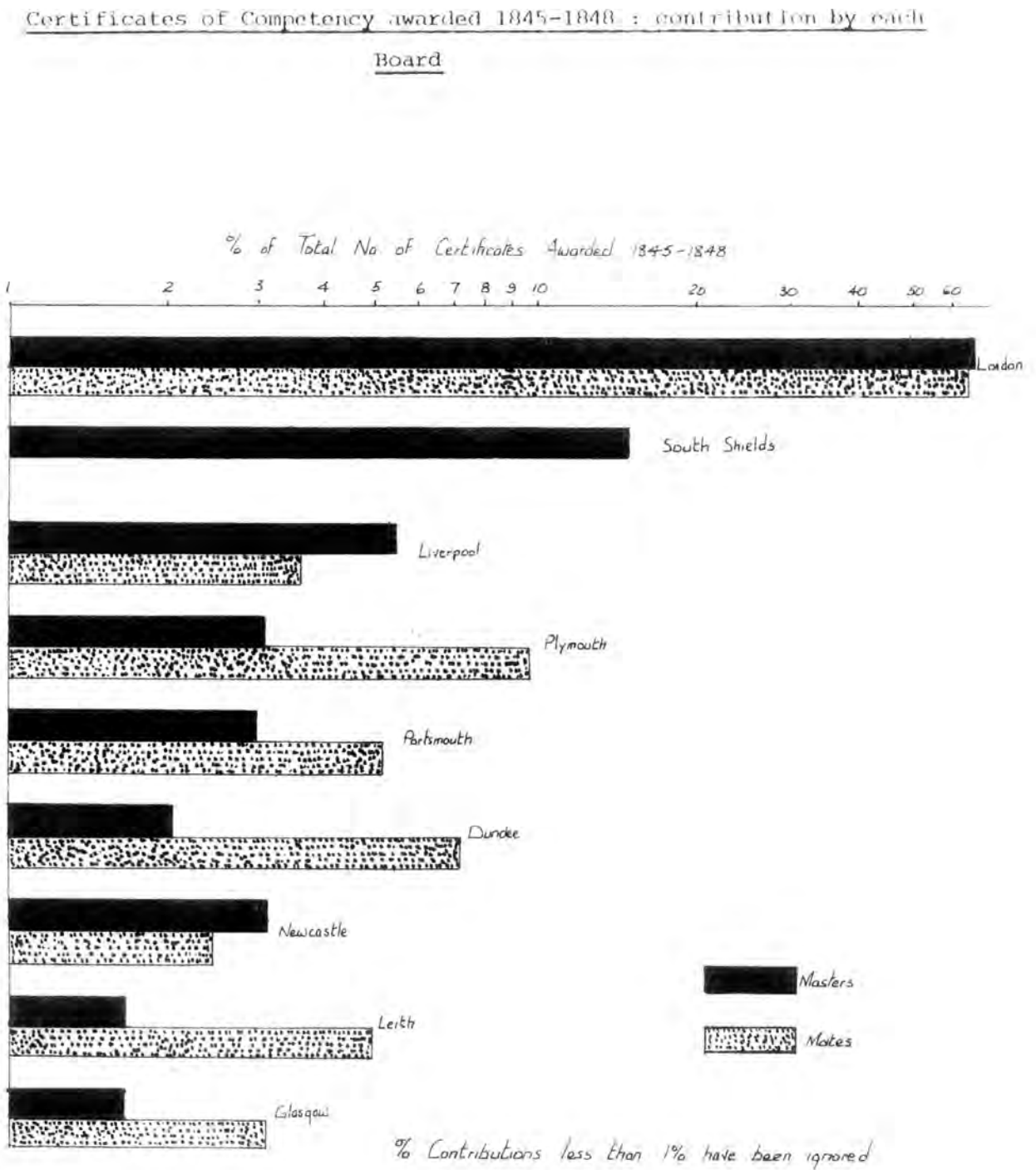
TABLE IX

Certificates of Competency awarded 1845-1848 : numbers, class and awarding authority

Examining Board	Year	MASTERS					MATES				Total Cert. Awarded
		Class				Total Mast's	Class			Total Mates	
		X	1	2	3		1	2	3		
London	1845-6		29	39	2	70	2	10	3	15	85
	1846-7	1	25	102	10	138	0	12	8	20	158
	1847-8		19	373	96	488	0	33	38	71	559
		1	73	514	108	696	2	55	49	106	802
South Shields	1845-6		2	27	13	42	0	0	0	0	42
	1846-7		2	41	18	61	0	0	0	0	61
	1847-8		3	35	15	53	1	0	0	1	54
		-	7	103	46	156	1	-	-	1	157
Liverpool	1845-6		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1846-7	18	19	1	0	38	2	1	0	3	41
	1847-8	1	17	0	0	18	3	0	0	3	21
		19	36	1	0	56	5	1	-	6	62
Plymouth	1845-6		0	2	2	4	0	3	3	6	10
	1846-7		0	3	2	5	2	2	2	6	11
	1847-8	2	5	13	4	24	0	2	2	4	28
		2	5	18	8	33	2	7	7	16	49
Portsmouth	1845-6		1	1	0	2	4	1	0	5	7
	1846-7	1	12	8	0	21	0	3	0	3	24
	1847-8		4	2	0	6	1	0	0	1	7
		1	17	11	-	29	5	4	-	9	38
Dundee	1845-6		7	3	1	11	4	2	1	7	18
	1846-7		4	1	0	5	1	1	1	3	8
	1847-8		1	7	0	8	0	2	0	2	10
		-	12	11	1	24	5	5	2	12	36
Newcastle	1845-6		0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	2
	1846-7		3	9	0	12	0	2	0	2	14
	1847-8		6	10	3	19	1	0	0	1	20
		-	9	19	4	32	1	3	0	4	36
Leith	1845-6		0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
	1846-7	4	4	0	0	8	1	0	0	1	9
	1847-8		7	2	0	9	6	0	0	6	15
		4	11	2	-	17	8	-	-	8	25
Glasgow	1845-6		1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
	1846-7		2	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	3
	1847-8		10	3	0	13	2	2	0	4	17
		-	13	3	0	16	3	2	-	5	21
Yarmouth	1845-6		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1846-7		2	1	1	4	0	0	0	0	4
	1847-8		4	1	1	6	0	0	1	1	7
		-	6	2	2	10	-	-	1	1	11
Hull	1845-6		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1846-7		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1847-8		0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	2
		-	-	-	1	1	-	-	1	1	2
		27	189	684	170	1070	32	77	60	169	1239

Source : B.T. 6/218. ; P.P. 1847, LX, pp.361-366; P.P. 1850, LIII, pp. 349/50; The Mercantile Navy List, July 1850, pp.20-60.

FIGURE III



Source : B.T. 6/218. P.P. 1847, LX, pp. 361-366; P.P. 1850, LIII, pp. 349/50 ; The Mercantile Navy List, July 1850, pp.20-60.

A scrutiny of the respective contributions made by the various examining boards suggests that different standards and criteria were being used to assess the proficiency of candidates. For example, although London Trinity House awarded 696 masters' certificates during the first three years of the voluntary scheme - 65% of the national total - only 11% were placed in the first class category and of these only one was a first class extra certificate. In contrast, the examining board at Liverpool joined the scheme a year later and in its first year of operation awarded 38 masters certificates, of which 37 were in the first class category and, more astonishing still, 18 of the certificates were first class extra. Liverpool's remarkable success raised a number of sceptical eyebrows. The Nautical Magazine observed rather drily that none of the 'talented masters who have been examined at the Trinity House, London', had succeeded in gaining a first class extra certificate during the equivalent period. Only at Liverpool, 'notwithstanding the tardiness hitherto observable at that port', could one find officers 'possessing such high claims to distinction'. The Magazine was careful to add that it was not impugning the integrity or doubting the competency of the Liverpool examiners but expressed the hope that they had acted with 'strict justice and impartiality'.<sup>46</sup> The Board of Trade took no explicit action against Liverpool but it was notable that in the following year Liverpool awarded only one first class extra certificate. There were other boards - at Leith, Dundee, Yarmouth and Portsmouth, for instance - which also awarded a relatively high number of first class certificates, sometimes more than half the totals. The London Trinity House apart, the Board at South Shields made the largest and most consistent contribution to the voluntary programme but awarded only one mates certificate in the three years of operation.

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46. N.M. 1847, XVI, p.148.

Suggestions that some of the examining agencies lacked expertise and credibility had some substance.<sup>47</sup> The Trinity House, London, employed Elder Brethren and a fully qualified scientific examiner but at Yarmouth the Board consisted mainly of shipowners. At Dundee, too, local shipowners formed the majority of examining board members, although the board did include a shipmaster and a marine examiner. The shipowners at South Shields were assisted by an industrialist but contrived to get along without a scientific examiner.<sup>48</sup> With no central authority to determine and direct policy, any uniformity of purpose and action in the voluntary scheme could only be fortuitous. The appearance of such an authority was anything but fortuitous. The decision in 1845 to establish a national programme of voluntary shipmaster examiners was the occasion, not the cause, of the emergence of the Board of Trade as the legitimate agency of government for directing the affairs of the mercantile marine. The cause, or causes, for there were several, lay in a variety of social, economic and political factors. In its original capacity as an advisory committee of the Privy Council, the Board of Trade possessed few real responsibilities and, in fact, it surrendered one of the more important of these, control of the colonies, to the Colonial Office early in the century. But if it had, so to speak, lost an Empire, the Board of Trade succeeded in finding a succession of roles. Throughout the 1840's the Board of Trade continued to increase its administrative responsibilities. An Act of Parliament in 1845 gave it authority to check crimping by granting licences to those who signed on crews for merchant ships.<sup>49</sup> It received further powers the following year when it was authorized to inquire into accidents involving steam ships and to appoint surveyors for passenger ships.<sup>50</sup>

47. N.M. 1847, XVI, p.71; N.M. 1848, XVII, pp.33,560,589-595. See also Edward Blackmore, 'The Wants of our Navigating Officers', Shipmaster Society Papers, 16 Dec. 1892, p.11.

48. P.P. 1850, LIII, pp.349/50.

49. 8 & 9 Vict. c.116.

50. 9 & 10 Vict. c.100.

The Board was thus gaining not only fresh powers but also invaluable administrative experience. Henry Labouchere, President of the Board of Trade, commented on the Board's expanding role when he gave evidence to the Select Committee on Miscellaneous Expenditure on 6 June 1848:

'When I first knew the office it was almost purely a consulting department; it had hardly any executive duties whatever to discharge. It was consulted by the Colonial Office, by the Treasury, and by the Foreign Office; .... but Parliament has gradually thrown upon the Board of Trade a great variety of executive duties'.<sup>51</sup>

The Committee also questioned Labouchere about the progress of the voluntary examination scheme. Labouchere assured it that the scheme was 'working in a satisfactory manner'. When asked whether compulsory examinations might not be a more satisfactory answer to the problems facing the mercantile marine, he accepted that there would be 'great advantage in such a system' but believed that it would be opposed by the merchant service. As the voluntary scheme was 'working so well' he was reluctant to interfere with its operation - 'at least for the present'.<sup>52</sup>

Members of the Sunderland shipping interest were fully aware of Labouchere's reluctance to disturb the voluntary system. Nevertheless, they refused to concede defeat in their attempts to establish an authorized examining board in the town. In October 1848 the Committee of the Sunderland Mutual Insurance Association wrote to the Registrar-General of Seamen seeking permission to form an examining board under the auspices of the voluntary system. The Registrar-General passed the application to the Board of Trade.<sup>53</sup>

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51. Report from the Committee on Miscellaneous Expenditure, P.P. 1847/8, XVIII, Pt.I, pp.425/6 , Q.5599.

52. Ibid., pp.429/30, Q.5627/8.

53. B.T.4/20, 2793.

After further correspondence between the Registrar-General, the Board of Trade and the Mutual Insurance Association of Sunderland, the matter was referred by the Board of Trade to Trinity House, London.<sup>54</sup> The Board also informed the Sunderland group that their application was 'under consideration'.<sup>55</sup> In the meanwhile, the Sunderland Herald was hailing the setting up of a marine board almost as a fait accompli.<sup>56</sup>

On 5 December 1848 the London Trinity House advised the Board of Trade that it would be impracticable to increase the number of examining Boards and pointed out that while Sunderland was an important port, there were already examining Boards at Newcastle and South Shields. It suggested that the approval of the Sunderland application might give rise to a spate of similar requests which would lead to an 'inconvenient extension of the scheme'. The House also took exception to the proposed composition of the Sunderland examining board - 'five gentlemen to be elected annually by the Ship Owners of the Port'.<sup>57</sup> The Board of Trade informed the Sunderland Mutual Insurance on 13 December 1848 that it was not prepared to 'add to the number of Boards already constituted'.<sup>58</sup>

The Mutual Insurance Association was unwilling to accept the decision and wrote again to the Board of Trade on 3 January 1849.<sup>59</sup> The Board again sought the opinion of London Trinity House.<sup>60</sup> Trinity House dismissed Sunderland's contention that rivalry and jealousies between Newcastle and South Shields and the port of Sunderland operated to the detriment of Sunderland. Nevertheless, after offering some

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54. B.T.3/37, p.186. See also B.T.4/20, 2843,3171, 3699.

55. B.T.3/37, p.185.

56. Sunderland Herald, 10 Nov. 1848, p.4, col.6.

57. TH. Ct. Min. 1848, pp.93/4.

58. B.T.3/37, p.204.

59. B.T.4/21, 44.

60. B.T.3/37, p.246.

adverse comments on the examination syllabus proposed by the aspiring Sunderland board, Trinity House assured the Board of Trade that the Elder Brethren would not put any impediment in the way if the Board saw fit to admit Sunderland to the voluntary scheme - but, significantly, reminded the Board of the manner in which the Sunderland examining board would be elected.<sup>61</sup> The Board of Trade immediately wrote to the Sunderland Mutual Insurance Association praising the shipowners of the town for their wisdom in seeking to reject unsuitable candidates for positions of command in the merchant service. The Board expressed its reluctance about dampening such commendable enthusiasm but pointed out the futility of pressing the matter at this point:

'the whole system of Examination is now under the consideration of their Lordships, no new Board of Examiners will be appointed at any of the outports for the present'.<sup>62</sup>

The case of the Sunderland application brings into sharp focus the reliance placed by the Board of Trade on the advice and opinions of the Elder Brethren of the Trinity House, London. The Board's eagerness to seek and to act on recommendations from Trinity House suggested that the Board was acutely aware of its lack of professional expertise in such matters. The correspondence on the issue also revealed the deep suspicion held by Trinity House and by the Board of Trade of locally-appointed boards of examiners. What remains uncertain, however, are the real reasons for Sunderland's rejection. A previous application in 1846 had also met with an unfavourable response.<sup>63</sup> The geographical argument is unconvincing. Newcastle and South Shields both lie on the River Tyne, Sunderland on the River Wear; in addition, South Shields is slightly nearer to Newcastle than Sunderland. It would have been logical, therefore, to have made Sunderland an examining authority and to have asked that

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61. TH. By-Min. 1849, pp.194-196. See also B.T.4/21, 164.

62. B.T.3/37, p.271.

63. See pp.206/7.

the candidates from South Shields should present themselves either at Sunderland or Newcastle. It was curious too that Sunderland's application of October 1848 was not dismissed immediately. Was there a prejudice against Sunderland or did the Board of Trade simply not wish to betray its intentions too soon?

When the Sunderland Herald printed its optimistic editorial about Sunderland's application to be made an examining port, the newspaper suggested that the publicity given to their names and attainments of successful candidates in Lloyd's Register would secure a 'respectable position' for them in the mercantile marine.<sup>64</sup> The incentive of publicity was a prominent theme in an unsigned memorandum to John Shaw-Lefevre, Joint Secretary at the Board of Trade. The memorandum also suggested that the voluntary scheme would benefit if the various examining boards were brought 'under the immediate superintendent and efficient control of the Board of Trade' because the merchant marine did not turn naturally to the Admiralty for leadership.<sup>65</sup>

It would seem that the issue of centralization was generating much activity within the Board of Trade. Labouchere had informed the Select Committee on Miscellaneous Expenditure in 1848 that he was intending to establish a mercantile department in the Board of Trade and that he had lately introduced a Bill to that effect.<sup>66</sup> Sir Denis Le Marchant, the other Secretary to the Board discussed the issue in considerable detail in a lengthy inter-departmental memorandum to Labouchere in June 1849. He diagnosed the ills of the mercantile marine and prescribed remedies for its recovery. Included in his memorandum was an endorsement of the idea of a board of marine as proposed by James Murray in his circular of 1843.<sup>67</sup> Centralization

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64. Sunderland Herald, 10 Nov. 1848, p.4, col.6.

65. House of Lords Record Office, Shaw-Lefevre Papers; Board of Trade, Memorandum on the Examination of Masters and Mates in the Merchant Service, dated 17 Feb. 1848.

66. P.P. 1847/8, XVIII, Pt. I, pp.428/9. Q.5619.

67. Peter G. Parkhurst, Ships of Peace. A record of some of the problems which came before the Board of Trade in connection with the British Mercantile Marine from early days to the year 1885 (1962), pp.154-166.

was and would continue to be a politically sensitive area but the expanding role of government had persuaded some men at least that only centralized control administered by highly trained professionals could meet the needs of the situation.

One of the government departments most concerned to improve the condition of the merchant marine was the Foreign Office. The introduction of the voluntary system of shipmaster examinations in 1845 failed to stifle Foreign Office criticism.<sup>68</sup> The attention of the Board of Trade was drawn not just to the continuing inefficiencies of British shipmasters but also to increasing capital investment by British interests in foreign shipping. Lord Canning in a letter on 18 April 1845, reminded the Board about previous suggestions put forward for a Board of Commercial Marine under the superintendence of the Board of Trade.<sup>69</sup> The Board of Trade minute book recorded that a 'separate minute' had been drawn up on the issue.<sup>70</sup> On 23 February 1846 the Foreign Office again focused the Board's attention upon the Murray Papers.<sup>71</sup> Other despatches from the Foreign Office continued to focus upon the improper conduct of British shipmasters and urged the Board to attend to the problem.<sup>72</sup> On 16 March 1846 the Board informed the Foreign Office that it had 'no authority in this matter'.<sup>73</sup> In the House, on 11 May 1847, Milner Gibson, Vice-President of the Board of Trade disclaimed any knowledge of government intentions to introduce a Bill for the compulsory examination of shipmasters.<sup>74</sup> But developments were imminent.

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68. B.T. 1/441, 41.

69. B.T.4/17/770.

70. B.T.5/53, p.337.

71. B.T.4/18, 420.

72. B.T.4/18, 528, 569.

73. B.T.5/55, p.200.

74. Hansard 1847, XCII, 689.

On 17 May 1847 the Board of Trade informed the Foreign Office that with reference to the papers provided by Murray on 1 January 1844, it intended to establish a Commission to inquire into

'certain matters relating to the Commercial Marine, (that is to say) more especially into the state and prospects of the Merchant Seamen's Fund ...'.<sup>75</sup>

Lord Palmerston, the Foreign Secretary, immediately directed John Bidwell, James Murray's immediate superior, to circularize British consuls, enclosing copies of the Board of Trade's letter as well as copies of Murray's 1843 memorandum to Lord Canning. Besides being asked to contribute information likely to be useful to the proposed Commission, consuls were also requested to

'furnish, in a distinct paper, such additional information relative to the general subject of the Commercial Marine as may be suggested to by a perusal of that letter (Murray's letter)'.<sup>76</sup>

Little had changed in the interval between Murray's original circular and Bidwell's letter. Accounts of incompetence and indiscipline, drunkenness and dirt, brutality and ignorance, occupied most of the despatches. Consul Green at Athens took English crews to task for their deplorable lack of hygiene, observing that 'the dirtiest of the crew' was 'generally selected for the cook'.<sup>77</sup> Consul Plaw at Danzig described British seamen as 'a trouble to the Police' and 'a disgrace to their country'.<sup>78</sup> The 'distinctive attributes' of British masters, according to the Consul at Ancona, were 'inebriety, tyranny, and too frequent incompetency'.<sup>79</sup> Consul-General Cumberbatch at Constantinople was only one of many consuls

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75. Papers relating to the Commercial Marine of Great Britain, P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt.II, p.296.

76. Ibid.

77. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt.II, p.511. He also claimed that the character of British shipping had declined and recommended that more attention should be paid to the education and apprenticeship of British seafarers, see pp.510/11.

78. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt.II, p.355.

79. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt.II, p.490.

who cited drunkenness as a major source of evil aboard British ships. He described a stretch of shore along the Bosphorous which had been facetiously dubbed 'the English Bank' because of the regularity with which English masters grounded their vessels there.<sup>80</sup> Many consuls blamed lack of education and training for the abysmal professional and moral standards of British masters and mates, contrasting them with the exemplary behaviour and high professionalism of foreign crews.<sup>81</sup> The reply from Consul Crowe at Christiana ran to several pages and included elaborate accounts and detailed tables of marine affairs in Norway and Sweden, in addition to his own thoughtful observations on the state of the British commercial marine. Crowe believed that it was 'the duty of the Government to take the initiative' by introducing legislation to remove the abuses. This should include the establishment of a Commercial Marine Board and the introduction of compulsory shipmaster examinations.<sup>82</sup> Crowe even went so far as to propose that all who aspired to command within the British commercial marine should be compelled to receive confirmation in the Church of England. Such a comment would have delighted Gladstone but would hardly have found favour with the nonconformists.

When all of the consular returns had been received James Murray was given the task of summarizing the contents. Murray's memorandum, issued on 22 November 1847, was concise and competent. Noting that the consuls found the state of British shipping 'discreditable to this country', Murray deplored the fact that insufficient effort had been made 'to remedy the existing evils'. He laid the blame

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80. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt.II, p.519. For similar comments relating to the drunkenness of British officers and crews, see p.348 (Elsinore), p.443 (Alicante), pp.465/6 (Lisbon), p.431 (Bahia).

81. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt.II, p.299 (Cronstadt), p.407 (Nantes), p.500 (Trieste), pp.539/40 (Philadelphia), pp.579/80.

82. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt.II, pp.332-336. For other consuls advocating the introduction of compulsory shipmaster examinations, see pp.355/6 (Memel), p.398 (Havre), p.463 (Porto Rico), p.524 (Dardanelles), p.556 (Vera Cruz).

squarely at the door of shipowners and ship-charterers. Vessels were allowed to put to sea, he claimed,

'commanded, and navigated, in a manner which injures British interests, and reflects discredit upon the National intelligence'.<sup>83</sup>

Only three consuls out of the sixty-five canvassed reported any improvement in the state of British shipping. Murray challenged a system which could permit shipowners to endanger lives by placing incompetent men in charge of their ships and placed seafarers at the mercy of 'illiterate and drunken captains'. He scathingly denounced British shipowners who, he claimed, sheltering behind the Navigation Laws, ensured themselves of continuous employment but simultaneously encouraged the growth of foreign fleets. The whole mass of evidence, he believed, pointed to the necessity of a central authority with absolute responsibility for administering the affairs of the mercantile marine. It was also time to deal with the repeal of the Navigation Laws, changes which demanded 'the formation of a Department of Commercial Marine'. After touching briefly on tonnage dues, lights, freight rates and shipwreck inquiries, all of them subjects requiring centralized control, Murray concluded by expressing the hope that 'sufficient ground has been shown for urging the formation of such a department'.<sup>84</sup>

The guns had been primed and loaded. It only remained for someone to fire them. On 15 February 1848 Henry Labouchere, armed with the 1843 and 1847 consular reports as well as with Murray's memorandum, told the House of Commons that the Government must act to remove the evils described in the reports.<sup>85</sup> He knew, however, that it was not the time to press for action. The shipowners were unhappy

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83. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt.II, p.293.

84. Ibid., pp.293-295.

85. Hansard 1848, XCVI, 671/2.

enough about the impending battle over the repeal of the Navigation Laws. Labouchere was wise enough not to risk antagonizing them further at this point.

The 1840s had witnessed a steady decline in the financial and political fortunes of the General Shipowners' Society. On the financial front subscriptions had fallen to such an extent that the Society had to sell investment stock to pay outstanding debts.<sup>86</sup> The gravity of the situation called for immediate and drastic action. Committee members were urged to make individual approaches to potential members, the Society canvassed the London dock companies for financial support and resolved to make a renewed application to the outports 'as early as may be deemed expedient'. An early casualty of the financial struggle was the Society's new secretary - his salary was reduced from £200 to £120 per annum.<sup>87</sup> To some extent the decline in its fortunes was perhaps inevitable. It was, in essence, a London-based shipowners' society. The emergence of powerful local and regional shipowner societies - particularly in Liverpool and Glasgow - drained the Society of financial and political support.<sup>88</sup> Despite the fragile and declining nature of its membership, the Society steadfastly opposed government attempts to abrogate the Navigation Laws.<sup>89</sup> By 1846, however, it was clear that the Government planned to abandon its traditional protection for British commerce which, by inference, presaged the end of the Navigation Laws.<sup>90</sup>

On 13 October 1846 the Society's attention was drawn to the efforts being made by various agencies to secure a repeal of the

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86. SS. Min. 1846, IV, pp.489-491.

87. SS. Min. 1847, V, p.23.

88. The Liverpool Shipowners' Association, for example, played an increasing and leading role in shipping affairs and implicitly challenged the Society's credibility as the authoritative representative of shipping interests, see SS. Min. 1844, IV, p.321 ; SS. Min. 1845, IV, pp.427/8, 460.

89. SS. Rep. 1844/5, pp.2/3; SS. Rep. 1845/6, p.2,6,7,8.

90. Harris, London General Shipowners' Society, p.27.

Navigation Laws. Particular reference was made to a memorial from the Manchester Chamber of Commerce praying for a 'revision or total abandonment of the Navigation Laws'.<sup>91</sup> The Society resolved that prompt and energetic measures should be taken to alert the British public as to the 'ruinous consequences' both national and private that would stem from 'rash or precipitate legislation thereon'. In addition, representations would be made to government expressing the Society's anxiety and opposition to such a development and that the outports be informed about the 'subversion of the Navigation Laws'.<sup>92</sup> On 21 December 1847 the Society's Chairman and Deputy-Chairman were granted an interview by the Earl of Clarendon, President of the Board of Trade, on the subject of the Navigation Laws. The President reassured the deputation that the Government

'had no intention of agitating the question of an alteration in the Navigation Laws and hoped it would not be brought forward in Parliament'.<sup>93</sup>

He also stressed that his sentiments should be kept private.

There was a grim irony in the fact that a catastrophic terrestrial event should have partly precipitated a crucial piece of maritime legislation. The failure of the Irish potato crop in 1845-46 led to famine in Ireland and caused the price of grain to rise dramatically almost overnight. Peel was thus forced to choose between facilitating the free flow of grain by abrogating the Corn Laws or allowing the Irish nation to starve. In effect, he was forced to decide between almost certain political suicide and near-genocide. The repeal of the Corn Laws broke the monopoly of the agricultural landlords but it also

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91. SS. Min. 1846, IV, p.535. For example, The Times published a memorial from the Manchester Chamber of Commerce seeking a 'revision or total abandonment of the Navigation Laws', The Times, 9 Oct. 1846, p. 6 , col. 1.

92. Ibid., p.36. On 14 Dec. 1846 the Society called the Board of Trade's attention to the necessity of maintaining the principle of the Navigation Laws, see B.T.4/18, 2311.

93. SS. Min. 1847, V, p.5.

broke the back of the Conservative Government. Peel had little option but to resign.<sup>94</sup>

Lord John Russell, the new Prime Minister, declared that he did 'not propose in any respect to alter the existing Navigation Laws'.<sup>95</sup> It was a statement which further reassured the shipping interest. The public utterance served to emphasize the private promise. On 9 February, 1847, however, John Ricardo, an ardent free trader, moved for a Select Committee to be appointed to 'inquire into the operation and policy of the Navigation Laws'; the motion was carried 155 votes to 61.<sup>96</sup> The Select Committee was appointed on 16 February 1847.<sup>97</sup> Labouchere, President of the Board of Trade, supported the motion, Milner-Gibson, his Vice-President, was appointed Chairman of the Select Committee. The General Shipowners' Society secured a further interview with Lord Clarendon on the subject of the Navigation Laws and were again assured that government did not intend to alter the existing regulations.<sup>98</sup>

Although the prime focus of the Committee's inquiries was the efficacy of the Navigation Laws, much attention was paid to the competency of British shipmasters. Witnesses across a broad front paid tribute to the educational attainments and professional expertise of ships' officers engaged in the distant foreign trade but deprecated the conduct and standing of officers employed in coastal and Baltic Trades.<sup>99</sup> Significantly, many witnesses - including shipowners - endorsed the need for the introduction of some examining procedure to ascertain and improve the proficiency of British masters and mates. In several instances reference was made to examining

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94. Lindsay, III, p.80.

95. Hansard 1846, LXXXVII, 1326. Lindsay suggests that Russell 'had not studied the question sufficiently, see Lindsay, III, p.82.

96. Hansard 1847, LXXXIX, 1007; 1058.

97. C.J. 1847, CII, pp. 115/116.

98. Lindsay, III, p.166.

99. Fourth Report from the Select Committee on Navigation Laws; together with the Minutes of Evidence, P.P. 1847, X, p.424, Q.4938; Capt. G. Briggs, an American captain: p.453, Q.5310; Young, shipowner : p.560, Q.6407; Cummings, an insurance broker/underwriter.

practices obtained in foreign mercantile fleets and to the benefits which had subsequently accrued.

William Tottie, a Vice-consul of the Swedish and Norwegian Governments, affirmed that ships' officers in the Swedish and Norwegian mercantile fleets were obliged to pass a strict examination to secure a license to command a vessel. Tottie believed that one consequence of this requirement was that merchants preferred to send their goods on Swedish and Norwegian ships.<sup>100</sup> Robert Swaine, a British merchant based in Hamburg, agreed that foreign shipmasters were superior to their British rivals and confirmed that merchants in Hamburg also preferred to obtain foreign vessels for the carriage of their goods. Swaine thought that a repeal of the Navigation Laws would benefit British shipowners but urged that action should be taken to improve the competitive position of British shipping.<sup>101</sup> He was an advocate of compulsory shipmaster examinations and produced a paper on the subject prepared by the Head of the Hamburg School of Navigation.<sup>102</sup> William Cumming, an insurance broker and underwriter, conceded that in general foreign ships were better commanded than British ships but was persuaded that the introduction of examinations for British officers would bring about an improvement in their professional standing.<sup>103</sup> Similar sentiments were expressed by William Janson, another insurance broker. While he was in favour of shipmaster examinations Janson was opposed to any system of compulsory certification.<sup>104</sup> Charles Graham, Secretary to Lloyds Register of British and Foreign Shipping, argued that the examinations should be made compulsory, the pathetic response made to the existing programme of voluntary examinations had exposed the futility of promulgating

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100. First Report ..., P.P. 1847, X, p.173, QQ.1959-61 : Second Report ..., P.P. 1847, X, pp.192/3, QQ.2129-2137.

101. Third Report ..., P.P. 1847, X, p.266, QQ.3147-3151, 3154.

102. See App. XIII ,pp. 343/345.

103. Fourth Report ..., P.P. 1847, X, p.560, QQ.6407, 6404.

104. Fourth Report ..., P.P. 1847, X, p.569, QQ.6512-6514.

a non-obligatory system. Despite the obduracy of certain shipowners on the issue of compulsory examinations he suggested that they would surrender to reason 'in the end'.<sup>105</sup>

The evidence of Duncan Dunbar, Chairman of the General Shipowners' Society suggested that British shipowners had already surrendered on the examination issue. Dunbar believed that ships' officers should be examined into their professional competency and agreed that the examinations should be made compulsory by legislative enactment. He did hope, however, that the arrangements could be made 'without throwing any responsibility upon the shipowner' in relation to his insurance. On the subject of commercial policy Dunbar claimed that the abolition of the Navigation Laws would devalue his own property by 30% and have disastrous effects upon the future employment of all persons involved in the shipping industry.<sup>106</sup> George F. Young adopted a similar line. The Laws, he suggested, had facilitated the growth of British shipping and any relaxation in their requirements would debilitate British shipbuilding. On the question of shipmaster proficiency he affirmed his support for the introduction of examinations for shipmasters, providing they could be arranged.

'so that you have competent examiners and a system of examination that will not discourage men who may be perfectly competent navigators, but not the fittest men to take their seats before a Board of examination'.<sup>107</sup>

John Lockett, Chairman of the Liverpool Shipowners Association, also believed that the introduction of examinations for British masters

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105. Third Report ..., P.P. 1847, X, p.290, QQ.3394-3396, p.292, QQ.3424-3427.

106. Fourth Report ..., P.P. 1847, X, p.376, QQ.4207/8, p.379, Q.4233.

107. Fourth Report ..., P.P. 1847, X, p.453, Q.5316. See also pp.439/40, QQ.5217; pp.452/3, QQ.5307/8.

and mates would enhance the character of the mercantile marine but expressed his opposition to the 'passing of an Act of Parliament' to compel officers to be examined.<sup>108</sup>

On the wider issue of commercial policy, George Porter, Director of the Statistical Department of the Board of Trade and a committed free trader, denied that the nation or the shipping interest derived benefit from the Navigation Laws. No benefit, he argued, could derive from any system of restrictive practices; to benefit a country trade must expand, yet all the Navigation Laws achieved were the placing of obstacles in the way of commerce. Free Trade was the only reasonable course for the nation to pursue. The Continent looked to Great Britain for a lead. If she adopted this principle of free trade the rest of Europe would follow her example 'sooner or later'.<sup>109</sup>

The Select Committee held its final session on 17 July 1847. The reason given for its abrupt termination was that Parliament was about to be prorogued. The shipowners complained that the Committee had deliberately halted the proceedings to prevent the case for the protectionist lobby from being fully presented. The complaint was a reasonable one. Twenty-four witnesses had been called on behalf of the free traders while only nine had appeared for the protectionists. Duncan Dunbar claimed that the Committee had been

'Chosen by the Government, who placed at its head one of their own members, a determined and uncompromising partizan, it comprised a decided majority of individuals pledged to the view of the Government, or devoted to the wildest doctrines of Free Trade, and declared opponents of the Laws into which the Committee was appointed to inquire'.<sup>110</sup>

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108. Fifth Report ..., P.P. 1847, X, p.645, Q.7419. See also supportive stance adopted by William Phillips, another shipowner, towards the introduction of examinations for masters and mates, p.603, Q.6808.

109. Fifth Report ..., P.P. 1847, X, pp.660/1, QQ.7603-7606; p.676, QQ.7715-7716.

110. SS. Rep. 1847/8, pp.2/3.

When the new Parliament opened on 18 November 1847 the Queen's Speech made it clear that the Navigation Laws would come under close scrutiny during the following months. More specifically, it questioned whether any change could be adopted which would promote commercial and colonial interests without detriment to the nation's maritime strength.<sup>111</sup> It would seem, however, that the Government's concern was not so much whether but when such a change would be adopted. An article which appeared in the Washington Union, a journal which purported to reflect United States Government policy, revealed that communications had taken place between Lord Palmerston, Labouchere and a United States Minister, Mr. Bancroft, on the question of the repeal of the British Navigation Laws. The Washington Union confidently predicted that 'Parliament will at once act favourably on the Bill'.<sup>112</sup> Evidence for such an assertion was drawn from a letter from Palmerston to Bancroft which indicated that it was the Government's intention to introduce measures to facilitate commercial intercourse on a 'most liberal and comprehensive basis'.<sup>113</sup> The letter was dated 17 November 1847, the day before the Queen's Speech. The protectionists had been often attacked but they had not expected to be stabbed in the back.

The shipowners believed that their interests would never be properly served by a House of Commons so weighted in favour of free trade. Accordingly, they sought help in the House of Lords. On 25 February 1848 Lord Hardwicke, bitterly accusing the Government of dissimulation and deception, successfully moved the appointment of a Select Committee of the Upper House to inquire into the Navigation Laws.<sup>114</sup> With the appointment of the House of Lords Select Committee,

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111. Hansard 1847, XCV, 14.

112. Hansard 1847/8, XCVI, 1315. Labouchere informed the House on 15 May 1848 that he had been involved in the discussions, see Hansard 1847/8, XCVIII, 1008.

113. Correspondence with the Minister from the United States respecting the Navigation Laws, P.P. 1847/8, LIX, p.33.

114. Hansard 1847/8, XCVI, 1313-1329, 1332.

the shipowners felt that they had wrested the initiative from the Government and the free traders. It was an advantage they were determined not to squander. There was optimism in their camp, fostered by the belief that a Committee of the Lords would be favourably disposed to the protectionist principle.<sup>115</sup>

On balance, the evidence presented to the Lords' Committee suggested that the majority of witnesses were opposed to any change in the existing system. British shipowners claimed that a repeal of the Laws would be to the detriment of the British shipping and ship-building interests and be directly beneficial to American interests.<sup>116</sup> A consensus of opinion among merchants indicated that, contrary to the arguments of the free-traders, the Laws were not productive of injury or inconvenience to British trade.<sup>117</sup>

On the question of the professional competency of British shipmasters concern was expressed about the lack of a qualifying examination to license officers for command. Money Wigram, a London shipowner, claimed that the consular reports on the conduct of British shipmasters in the European trades were 'too authentic to leave any doubt' as to the need to attend to the problem. He believed that a considerable improvement in the conduct of such masters might be secured if they were examined as to their proficiency and were required to submit a report of their sobriety and good conduct to an examining board at the completion of each voyage.<sup>118</sup>

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115. Lindsay, III, pp.170/1.

116. Second Report from the Lords' Select Committee appointed to inquire into the policy and operation of the Navigation Laws, P.P. 1847/8, XX, Pt.II, p.513, Q.5500; Anderson : p.533, Q.5771; Tindall : p.587, QQ.6257/8; Wigram. Third Report ..., P.P. 1847/8, XX, Pt.II, p.738, Q.7774; Dunbar: pp.817/8, Q.8298; pp.823/4, Q.8337; Young.

117. First Report ..., P.P. 1847/8, XX, Pt. II, p.53, Q.510; Bosanquet, : p.68, Q.738; Davidson, Second Report ..., P.P. 1847/8, XX, Pt.II, pp.408/9, Q.4562; Aylwin: pp.690/1, QQ.7384/5; J.Mitchell.

118. Second Report ..., P.P. 1847/8, XX, Pt.II, p.574/5, QQ.6098, 6106. For other adverse comments about the competency of British shipmasters, see p.630, Q.6673; T.Mitchell, M.P.: p.650, Q.6930; Hall, merchant: p.691, Q.7388; J.Mitchell, merchant/shipowner.

Christian Allhusen, a shipowner and merchant, believed that the introduction of a law to compel British captains to undergo an examination into their professional competency would be of unquestionable value.<sup>119</sup> In short, a growing swell of informed opinion within and outside the shipping industry favoured the introduction of some form of examining procedure to ascertain and improve the professional competency of ships' officers in the British mercantile marine. At the same time, however, witnesses acknowledged the outstanding character, educational attainments and professional expertise of shipmasters engaged in the distant foreign-going trade.<sup>120</sup>

As to the maintenance of the shipping status quo the die was already cast. British shipowners had been caught up in the great nineteenth-century tide of reform which saw government move from oligarchy to legislative democracy and political power shift from the ancient landowning class to the new middle class with its wealth and new social consciousness. There were changes in the shipping industry itself as new technologies superseded the old and as steam navigation gradually began to take some of the wind out of the sails of sailing ships.<sup>121</sup> Thus, although the shipowners claimed that they had established their case to the Lord's Committee a changing society could no longer accept an anachronism such as the Navigation Laws.<sup>122</sup> Their case was doomed to defeat.

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119. Second Report ..., P.P. 1847/8, XX, Pt.II, p.645, Q.6860.

120. First Report ..., P.P. 1847/8, XX, Pt.II, p.76, Q.788; Geddes, planter: p.102, Q.1067; Hankey, an estate owner in the West Indies. Second Report ..., p.629, Q.6666; T.Mitchell, M.P.

121. Between 1830 and 1848 the total steam tonnage of the British Empire increased from 33,444 tons to 161,171 tons, see P.P. 1849 (in 1129), LII, p.169.

122. SS. Rep. 1847/8, pp.3-5. The Report recorded that during the Navigation Law debate only 12 petitions, containing 2,425 signatures, were presented in favour of a repeal of the Laws, 198 petitions with 62,230 signatures sought to maintain the Laws.

When the debate moved to the floor of the House of Commons, John Herries, a former Chancellor of the Exchequer and a past President of the Board of Trade, led the protectionist attack. In his opinion the Navigation Laws had been weakened by Huskisson and were about to be destroyed by Cobden, Bright, Ricardo and Milner Gibson.<sup>123</sup> The ensuing debate attracted the most eloquent and persuasive orators from both sides of the House, among them Gladstone, Lord George Bentinck, Richard Cobden and Disraeli.<sup>124</sup> On 9 June 1848, after five nights of intensive discussion, Herries' amendment, that it was essential to maintain the existing Navigation Laws, was defeated by 294 votes to 177.<sup>125</sup> The way was cleared for the introduction of the Navigation Bill.

The new Parliament assembled on 2 February 1849. Less than two weeks later, on 14 February 1849, Labouchere moved his resolution:

'That it is expedient to remove the restrictions which prevent the free carriage of goods by sea to and from the United Kingdom and the British Possessions abroad; and to amend the Laws regulating the Coasting Trade of the United Kingdom, subject, nevertheless, to such control by Her Majesty in Council as may be necessary; and also to amend the Laws for the Registration of Ships and Seamen'.<sup>126</sup>

The Bill was given its formal first reading on 16 February 1849 with the second reading scheduled for 9 March 1849. In the interval between the two readings the General Shipowners' Society held its annual general meeting during which the shipowners reviewed their reverses and revised their strategies. Duncan Dunbar, the Society's Chairman, described the Bill as one of the most unjust and inconsistent measures ever brought before a British Parliament.<sup>127</sup> He urged the

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123. Lindsay, III, p.192. See also Hansard 1847/8, XCIX, 9-26.

124. Hansard 1847/8, XCIX, 251-273, 573-603, 613-620, 620-631.

125. Ibid., 670.

126. Hansard 1849, CII, 741.

127. SS. Rep. 1847/8, p.6.

nation's shipowners to submerge their differences and to unite in a concerted effort to have the Bill withdrawn.<sup>128</sup>

The final battle to decide the fate of the Navigation Laws was concerned with something more fundamental than the title of the Bill indicated. It was a struggle between the guardians of ancient traditions and hereditary privilege, and the advocates of progress. The protectionists believed that they were fighting to save nothing less than the naval power and commercial wealth of the nation, the free traders were battling to rid the country of what they saw as the last bastion of protection. The importance of the debate was reflected in the way the chamber was packed to capacity, with hundreds more thronging outside, as members gathered on 9 March 1849 to debate the second reading of the Navigation Bill.<sup>129</sup>

Herries began by requesting a six months' postponement. After a debate and an adjournment until 12 March 1849, his motion was defeated by 266 votes to 210.<sup>130</sup> The relatively narrow margin of defeat seemed to vindicate Herries' tactics and gave the protectionists renewed hope. On 23 March 1849, as the House was preparing to discuss the Bill in Committee, Labouchere suddenly announced that he was withdrawing those clauses which would have admitted foreign vessels to a share of the coasting trade.<sup>131</sup> It was a major concession in the circumstances. One month later, on 23 April 1849, the motion was put forward that the Bill be read a third time. Yet again Herries asked for a six months' postponement, referring to the communications between Palmerston and Bancroft and warning the Government that if it persisted in its folly, it would become the subject of

'universal indignation at home, and the laughing stock of all the enemies and rivals of Great Britain abroad'.<sup>132</sup>

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128. Ibid., pp.8/9.

129. Lindsay, III, pp.230/1.

130. Hansard 1849, CIII, 464; 625.

131. Ibid., 1196-1198.

132. Hansard 1849, CIV, 632.

The measure was defended by Sir James Graham and attacked by Thomas Baring.<sup>133</sup> Lord John Russell, the Prime Minister, wound up the debate for the Government. He suggested that in spite of the extravagant claims made for them, the Navigation Laws had never afforded much advantage to the nation and that their abolition would result in 'a general increase in the commerce of this country and of the world'.<sup>134</sup>

Exercising his prerogative of making the final speech, Disraeli reminded the House that Sir James Graham had likened the Navigation Bill to a capital on top of a column which had taken a long time to erect. But surely, riposted Disraeli, it was hardly worth placing an expensive capital on top of a column which lacked both symmetry and beauty. Sir James Graham had told this House that it must decide between reaction and progress. 'But progress where?' mocked Disraeli. 'Progress to Paradise, or progress to the devil?'.<sup>135</sup> Disraeli may have won the hour but he was unable to secure the final victory. Herrie's motion was defeated by 275 votes to 214 and the Bill was given its third reading.<sup>136</sup> Passing to the House of Lords it received its first reading on 24 April 1849 and its second reading on 7 May 1849. The major surprise in the Upper House came from Lord Brougham who had supported every free trade measure in the past but who now made a complete volte face. In a lively, witty speech he accused Porter, Statistical Director of the Board of Trade, of having engaged in 'the cooking of the returns' and he accused the cook of concocting a poisonous dish for which he did not know the antidote. Lord Brougham declared his intention of resisting 'the further progress of the Bill'.<sup>137</sup> Neither Lord Brougham nor indeed any of his colleagues could resist the progress of the Bill at this stage. There was a desperate intervention by the General Shipowners' Society

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133. Ibid., 658-674; 676-682.

134. Ibid., 686; see also 682-685, 687-690.

135. Ibid., 698; see also 690-697.

136. Ibid., 702.

137. Ibid., 1357; see also 1328-1356.

who sought to have the commencement of the Bill's proposals postponed until 1 January 1851 but the amendment to that effect, moved on 24 May 1849 by Lord Ellenborough, was defeated.<sup>138</sup> In the debate on the third reading, Lord Ellenborough, recognizing the inevitability of the enactment but still opposed to it, urged the Government to

'introduce a measure rendering it necessary that all masters and mates of vessels should be subjected to examination before they were entrusted with their commands.'<sup>139</sup>

The House of Lords passed the Bill on 12 June 1849.<sup>140</sup> The shipowners frantically prepared a petition begging the Queen to withhold her approval but their efforts were in vain.<sup>141</sup> The Royal Assent was granted on 26 June 1849.<sup>142</sup> The Navigation Laws had served as a lee shore behind which generations of British shipowners had sheltered for some two hundred years. With the repeal of the Laws the shipowners were exposed to the freshening winds of free trade.

On 12 July 1849, two weeks after the passing of the Navigation Act, Labouchere outlined the Government's proposals for the reform of the merchant marine. The measures included the establishment of a central authority to control maritime affairs and the introduction of compulsory shipmaster examinations. Labouchere told the members that the recess would allow them time and opportunity to consider his proposals.<sup>143</sup> His words were the warning shots across the bows of the shipping interest. The battle would be joined in earnest in the next session.

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138. Hansard 1849, CV, 883.

139. Hansard 1849, CVI, 12.

140. Ibid., 48.

141. SS. Min. 1849, V, 71.

142. C.J. 1849, CIV, p.426.

143. Hansard 1849, CVII, 212-236.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Compulsory Shipmaster Examinations : vision and reality

With the passing of the 1849 Navigation Bill the shipmaster examination campaign entered its final phase. On 12 July 1849, Henry Labouchere gave notice to the House of two measures he intended to introduce relating to the British mercantile marine. The first sought to reform the operation and control of lighthouses and pilotage; the second, 'to improve the condition of Masters, Mates and Seamen in the Merchant Service'<sup>1</sup>. The latter measure included proposals for the centralization of mercantile affairs and for the introduction of compulsory examinations for masters and mates which were embodied in a Bill published in July 1849<sup>2</sup>. Opposition to the Bill compelled Labouchere to beat a strategic retreat from centralization<sup>3</sup>. The Bill was subsequently amended and then replaced by one which tacitly acknowledged the concept of local involvement and control in British shipping<sup>4</sup>.

On 14 August 1850 the Mercantile Marine (No. 2) Bill received the Royal Assent<sup>5</sup>. The Act confirmed the Board of Trade's responsibility for the general superintendence of mercantile affairs, a principal function of which was the introduction and supervision of a compulsory system of shipmaster examinations. Although the Act constituted a victory for the examination lobby, it was a qualified one. Responsibility for the examination and certification of ships' officers was delegated to local marine boards, agencies which were

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1. Hansard 1849, CVII, 212-236.
  2. Public Bills 1849, 12 & 13 Vict., IV, 27 July 1849.
  3. Prouty, p.82.
  4. Public Bills, 1850, 13 Vict., IV, 19 Apr. 1850, p.6.
  5. C.J. 1850, CV, p.669.

subsequently the core of localism in the shipping industry throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

Arguing the case for Parliament to attend to the deficiencies of the mercantile marine Labouchere emphasized the low character and qualification of ships' officers and the general lack of discipline aboard many vessels. He drew the attention of the House to the evidence contained in the consular reports on the subject which had suggested that much of the blame for the imperfect discipline of crews derived from the want of qualifications of British shipmasters. Figures from the Registrar General of Merchant Seamen, he claimed, indicated that 14,000 sailors had deserted from British merchant vessels in one year alone. The appalling conditions aboard such vessels resulted not only in disease but often in death.<sup>7</sup>

Labouchere came to the crux of his speech. He reminded the House that there was no department of government holding any absolute authority for the affairs of the mercantile marine. It was, therefore, his intention to vest the authority and the responsibility for marine affairs in the Board of Trade. To achieve the objectives he had in view,

'it would be necessary to create or derive from the Board of Trade a department - not a board - but a Department of Mercantile Marine'.<sup>8</sup>

The words were an uncanny echo of James Murray's recommendations to Canning in his letter of 1843.<sup>9</sup>

Having broached the subject of the proposed new department, Labouchere outlined one of its primary functions, the superintendence

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6. Newey, 'Government Intervention in the Merchant Service', p.31.

7. Hansard 1849, CVII, 221/2, 225. For a vivid description of living conditions for crew members aboard a contemporary merchant vessel, see Lindsay, II, pp.497/8.

8. Ibid., 227.

9. P.P. 1847/8, LIX, Pt.I, pp.154/5.

of qualifications for masters and mates. He believed that the existing voluntary examinations were not

'sufficiently strict, or that they were working in that uniform and satisfactory manner which was desirable'.<sup>10</sup>

He therefore proposed that in future the examinations would be obligatory and be conducted under the aegis of the Board of Trade. The system would be made prospective; to make them otherwise would be 'unjust and inexpedient'. Masters and mates already in service would be able to obtain a certificate from the new Department of Mercantile Marine without submitting to an examination. Moral or professional misconduct would lead to the withdrawal of certificates. Labouchere suggested that merchant captains who gained first-class certificates might be permitted to 'wear some badge of distinction'. This suggestion had, in fact, been included in Sir Denis Le Marchant's detailed memorandum to Labouchere on 26 June 1849.<sup>11</sup>

Gladstone agreed that improving the character and condition of the merchant marine depended upon improving the character of its masters and mates. He compared the disorderly and disorganized ship to the disorderly and disorganized school; the former was the fault of the incompetent shipmaster, the second the fault of the incompetent schoolmaster. He approved of compulsory examinations for masters and mates but objected to Labouchere's plan for dealing with the deficiencies of the merchant service. It would, he believed, place the profession of seaman and shipmaster in a 'kind of pupilage'.<sup>12</sup> The significance of Labouchere's projected measures was recognized and explicitly acknowledged by the national and nautical press.

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10. Hansard 1849, CVII, 228.

11. Parkhurst, Ships of Peace, p.162. See also recommendation of the 1836 Select Committee on Shipwrecks that officers might be authorized to wear a uniform 'sufficiently marked for the purpose of distinguishing the persons wearing it as passed officers of the Merchant Service', S.C. (1836), p.ix. In the East India Company each grade of officer wore an 'established and distinctive uniform, see I.O.R. Min. 1849, Home Misc., XLIV, 3428; letter to B.O.T. 29 Oct. 1849.

12. Hansard 1849, CVII, 241.

On 13 July 1849, The Times launched what was destined to become a passionate and sustained campaign in support of Labouchere's proposals. It spoke of the 'systematic drunkenness, the characteristic brutality, and the gross ignorance' which degraded the merchant service and urged the Legislature to ensure the 'due qualification of masters'.<sup>13</sup> Three days later it stridently affirmed the need for compulsory examinations:

'There was ... but one opinion as to the point on which the whole reform would be found to turn, viz., the subjecting masters and mates to an examination as to professional competency'.<sup>14</sup>

The Times was quick to nail its colours to the mast of marine reform. The Economist refused to hoist any flag until given the opportunity to ascertain the details of 'this novel plan' for improving the character of our mercantile marine.<sup>15</sup> The Nautical Magazine published the entire text of Labouchere's speech on the subject and emphasized the 'great importance' of his proposals.<sup>16</sup>

The Bill was published on 27 July 1849 and contained one hundred sections, eighteen of which related directly to the extended role of the Board of Trade and shipmaster examinations.<sup>17</sup> It proposed that the Board of Trade be responsible for enforcing the provisions of the Act and of 'all other Acts relating to the British Mercantile Marine'. It empowered the Board to issue regulations: to secure 'proper Qualifications in Masters and Mates'; to improve the character and conditions of seamen; to promote health, order and

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13. The Times, 13 July 1849, p.5, cols. 1/2.

14. Ibid., 16 July 1849, p.4, col.3. See letter supportive of Labouchere's Bill, p.3, col.5.

15. Economist, 14 July 1849, No.307, p.769. Nevertheless, it consistently focused upon the need for British shipowners to employ competent officers, see 22 Dec. 1849, No.330, p.1415; 12 Jan. 1850, No.333, p.36.

16. N.M. 1849, XVIII, pp.420-431.

17. Public Bills 1849, 12 & 13 Vict., IV, 27 July 1849.

discipline aboard ships; and to ensure that owners, masters, mates and crews fulfilled their respective duties and obligations.<sup>18</sup>

The Board would have complete control of the examinations. It would fix the times and places at which the examinations would be held, determine examination syllabuses and set out the conditions under which candidates would be examined and certified. Certificates, both for masters and mates, would be divided into three classes according to the candidate's 'Skill, Merit, Conduct and general Qualifications'. Exemption from the proposed examinations would be granted to persons already masters and mates in the merchant service and to those who had attained the position of

'Lieutenant, Master, Passed Mate, or Second Master,  
or any higher Rank in the Naval Service of Her  
Majesty or of the East India Company ...'.<sup>19</sup>

Such officers would be granted 'Certificates of Service' and be entitled to sail as a master or mate of a merchant vessel. No foreign-going merchant vessels or any coasting ships above a certain tonnage would be permitted to sail unless their masters and mates had obtained valid and appropriate certificates. The Bill made no reference as to the currency of the certificates already awarded under the voluntary scheme. This omission was spotted and questioned by the Liverpool Board of Examiners.<sup>20</sup> It was informed by the Board of Trade that the certificates granted under the present arrangements would be 'recognised in the proposed Merchant Service Act'.<sup>21</sup>

Criticism of the Merchant Service Bill was limited but predictable. Objections were raised by shipping interests against further government intervention in mercantile affairs and doubts were expressed about the necessity and validity of compulsory ship-

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18. Ibid., p.4.

19. Ibid., p.6.

20. B.T. 1/476, 16.

21. B.T. 3/39, p.282.

master examinations.<sup>22</sup> The General Shipowners' Society maintained an uncharacteristic silence. It made no reference to the Bill during its committee meeting of 17 July 1849.<sup>23</sup> Support for the Bill tended to derive primarily from officers in the mercantile and naval service.<sup>24</sup>

Although opposition to his measures was somewhat muted, it did not prevent Labouchere from seeking advice and support from other quarters. On 10 September 1849 the Board of Trade wrote to the East India Company on the subject of shipboard discipline. The Board having noted the 'excellent state of discipline' previously enforced in the Company requested that they might be provided with a copy of the regulations and instructions under which such a satisfactory result was obtained.<sup>25</sup> The Company's reply, on 29 October 1849, emphasized the close attention paid to the selection, training and examination of all officers employed in the Company's Maritime Service. Officers were subjected to a strict examination, their subsequent promotion was dependent upon 'previous servitude, good conduct and ascertained qualifications'. The whole service was subject to stringent supervision and control similar to that obtaining in the Royal Navy.<sup>26</sup>

When the House re-assembled the following February it was to discover that Labouchere had changed the structure and content of his proposals. The revised measures took the form of three separate Bills:

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22. B.T. 1/476, 643; B.T.4/22, 2992, 3522.

23. SS. Min. 1849, V, p.76.

24. B.T. 1/476, 302; B.T.4/22, 2113, 2849.

25. B.T. 3/39, p.168.

26. I.O.R. Mar. 1849, Home Misc., XCIV, No. 3438.

1. '... a Bill for improving the Condition of Masters, Mates and Seamen, and maintaining discipline in the Merchant Service'.
2. '... a Bill for regulating the Merchant Seamen's Fund'.
3. '... a Bill for the Regulation of the Admeasurement of the Tonnage and Burthen of the Merchant Shipping'.<sup>27</sup>

Labouchere was quick to point out that the first of his three measures was based 'essentially and fundamentally' upon the principles of his original Merchant Service Bill but took account of communications which had been sent to him.<sup>28</sup> The establishment of a 'department of the mercantile marine' as part of the Board of Trade, responsible to the nation and to Parliament for the general superintendence of shipping affairs was, he believed, essential to his plan to codify mercantile legislation. At present, the Admiralty and the Board of Trade shared the responsibilities for overseeing the affairs of the merchant service. The Board of Trade, he admitted, lacked the necessary professional expertise. The new department would, therefore, employ two captains from the merchant service to assist the President of the Board of Trade in the discharge of his duties.<sup>29</sup>

On the question of shipmaster examinations, Labouchere stressed the need for caution and discretion. If new provisions were introduced too precipitately, or if the examinations were too stringently controlled or too rigorous in content, then a great deal of hardship and inconvenience might result. He promised members that, if established, the new department would act responsibly, discreetly and without haste. Although the prospective nature of the certification process remained unchanged, changes would be

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27. Hansard 1850, CVIII, 685; 697; 699.

28. Ibid., 667.

29. Ibid., 668/9.

introduced in the nature and classification of awards. The Board would retain complete control of the examinations - including the nomination of examiners - and would establish examinations not only for masters and mates but for such officers who wished to obtain 'other and higher certificates'. The new Bill extended the classification system. Certificates of competency for the masters and mates of coasting ships would be distinguished from those awarded to officers aboard foreign-going vessels. Labouchere argued that the examinations would have a great moral tendency to elevate the position and raise the character of British sailors. He drew support from practices obtaining in foreign fleets. In the Baltic, where the mercantile marine was on a 'most admirable footing' arrangements were made for the obligatory examination of masters and mates - 'examinations which were strictly enforced and found to work well'.<sup>30</sup>

If Labouchere had no wish further to antagonize the shipowners, neither did he intend to capitulate on so important an issue as compulsory examinations. He appealed to the House

'to insist upon a system of examination of masters and mates being introduced; cautiously, if they pleased, but still introduced; because, by doing so, he believed they would promote that kind of knowledge which was of the deepest interest to the mercantile navy - they would elevate both captains and mates in the scale of their profession, arm them with proper power over their crews, and confer many important benefits upon all concerned in the navigation of the seas'.<sup>31</sup>

Responding on behalf of Liverpool shipping interests, Cardwell claimed that Labouchere's proposals would make masters and mates 'the mere creatures of the Board of Trade'. Masters would not be able to put to sea unless they had passed an examination, with examiners appointed by the Board of Trade; if a master offended

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30. Hansard 1850, CVIII, 670.

31. Ibid., 671.

against Board of Trade regulations, his certificate would be withdrawn by the Board of Trade.<sup>32</sup> Labouchere explained that the alleged offence would have to be proved by an independent tribunal. But, rejoined Cardwell, the Board of Trade would reserve the right to decide whether there was a charge to answer in the first place. Cardwell told the House that the abolition of the Navigation Laws had caused considerable disquiet in his constituency and that the present proposals would do nothing to allay shipowner concern. He had little confidence in the Bill and hoped that sufficient time might be allowed to consider it more carefully.<sup>33</sup> Labouchere assured Cardwell that ample time would be given for full consideration and discussion of the Bill before its second reading and was given leave to bring in his Bill.

The Times again rallied to Labouchere's support and argued that in the face of such irrefutable evidence as to the need for improving the class and condition of the mercantile marine, government should act to remedy the situation.<sup>34</sup> Shipping interests did not endorse such views.

At the headquarters of the General Shipowners' Society the publication of Labouchere's proposals stimulated the Society's Central Committee into action. Each committee member was issued with a copy of the Bill and a sub-committee formed to examine its provisions. It was also agreed that the sub-committee's report should be the subject of a specially convened meeting.<sup>35</sup> Other shipping interests, however, had already acted. A deputation from the Liverpool Shipowners' Association informed the Society that it had been unable to persuade the President of the Board of Trade to withdraw the Mercantile Marine Bill despite having had several

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32. Ibid., 680.

33. Ibid., 681.

34. The Times, 12 Feb. 1850, p.5, cols. 2/3.

35. SS. Min. 1850, V, p.85.

interviews with him on the subject. The deputation suggested that it might be generally advantageous if the Society and the Association could join forces to get the Bill amended.<sup>36</sup> The Society declined to commit itself to any firm statement of intent but agreed to meet on 'an early day' to discuss the measure. Its reply concealed its real intentions and aspirations.

The following day the Society decided to write to Labouchere regarding his proposed measures and to convene a special meeting for 22 February 1850 'to determine the course to be adopted on the Mercantile Marine Bill'. No mention was made of the other two Bills. The Society's correspondents at the principal outports were asked to forward their sentiments on the Bill.<sup>37</sup> With George F. Young in the chair, the special meeting stressed the need for caution in introducing legislation for improving the conduct and character of officers and men in the mercantile marine; argued that British ship-owners be released from interference, unnecessary burdens and restrictions to enable them compete with foreign fleets; appealed for a comprehensive review to be made of all maritime legislation before further legislation was enacted; and criticized Labouchere's Bill as imposing 'additional and harassing requirements, enforced by pecuniary penalties'. The meeting also recommended that a letter be sent to the Board of Trade urging the withdrawal of the Bill and requesting that an impartial inquiry be set up to consider the whole question of maritime regulation.<sup>38</sup> The Board merely acknowledged receipt of the Society's communication on the issue.<sup>39</sup> Other complaints about the Bill evoked a similar curt response.

The Liverpool Shipowners' Association wrote to the Board on 1 March 1850 enclosing a detailed list of objections to Labouchere's

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36. Ibid., p.87.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid., pp.88/89. See also B.T. 4/23, 639.

39. B.T. 3/39, p.347.

Bill. Strong criticism was made of the enhanced and unconstitutional powers of the Board. Exception was also taken to the 'unnecessary restriction' imposed in the selection and hiring of officers which, it argued, diminished the authority of shipowners. The Association also attacked Labouchere's intention to appoint two professional officers to provide the Board with the necessary expertise in its handling of mercantile affairs. Was it wise, they questioned, to place under the control of two individuals, who might act on caprice or without consultation, what was 'perhaps the most important interest in the empire?'. The proposed examinations would confer no benefit on the merchant service. No experienced shipowner, they suggested, would engage a man simply because he held a certificate. Shipowners looked for qualities rather than qualifications, qualities like integrity, sobriety, industry, firmness and temper, 'with a competent practical knowledge of his duties'.<sup>40</sup> The Association was informed by the Board that the matter would be given due attention.<sup>41</sup>

Although neither so detailed nor so comprehensive as the memorandum from the Liverpool Shipowners, many other petitions were handed in to the Board of Trade, all criticizing Labouchere's Bill and demanding its withdrawal. Among the groups who registered their disapproval were the Chambers of Commerce at Limerick and Hull, the shipowners at Belfast, Yarmouth and Brixham, the Steam Shipowners' Association, the Dundee shipping interest, the shipowners and shipmasters of Montrose, and the merchants and shipowners of Greenock.<sup>42</sup>

The Board of Trade defended itself against the mounting criticism by explaining that the measures had been introduced only after the most searching investigations and that the matter was one which demanded firm, prompt action. Nonetheless, the Board indicated its willingness to consider reasonable, constructive suggestions for

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40. B.T. 1/477, 643.

41. B.T. 3/39, p.371.

42. B.T. 4/23, 637; 667; 650; 723; 839; 870; 638; 668; 669.

amending Labouchere's proposals. In a letter to the Yarmouth Shipowners' Association, for example, the Board wrote that although Labouchere's sense of duty would not permit him to withdraw his Bill, he was ready to discuss proposals for its modification.<sup>43</sup> Labouchere also acceded to a request from the General Shipowners' Society for a personal interview on the Bill's proposals on 5 March 1850. At the meeting the Society pointed out that a strong feeling against his measure existed throughout the country. Response to its own circular on the subject indicated that Belfast, Bristol, Brixham, Dundee, Exeter, Glasgow, Greenock, Hull, Limerick, Liverpool, North and South Shields, Montrose, Scarborough, Sunderland and Swansea opposed the Bill.<sup>44</sup> Labouchere refused to budge on the issue. He also rejected the Society's alternative proposal that an inquiry be set to consider the consolidation and simplification of maritime regulations.<sup>45</sup>

The Liverpool Chamber of Commerce adopted a more positive and constructive line. Its memorial to the Board expressed support for the general aims of Labouchere's Bill but suggested that they might be made acceptable to shipowners by inserting a clause

'granting to Liverpool and other large seaports the power of electing a local board for carrying out the details of the bill - such as the appointment of examiners, shipping masters, &c'.<sup>46</sup>

The Board of Trade could retain the right of veto as a means of controlling appointments. The more objectionable clauses in the Bill could be left for later consideration and in this way, the Chamber suggested, the 'universal feeling of hostility to the spirit of centralization which characterizes the bill' might be reduced.

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43. B.T. 3/39, p.366.

44. SS. Min. 1850, V, p.90.

45. Ibid., pp.91/2.

46. The Times, 11 Mar. 1850, p.5, col.5.

In his reply Labouchere commended the Liverpool Chamber for the 'fair and temperate tone' of its memorial and added that he was pleased to learn that they had common objectives - the safeguarding of lives and property against gross incompetence. But Labouchere's reply also made it very clear that he had no intention of abandoning a course of action which he believed to be based on sound principle. He affirmed that he was against interfering in private commerce but the securing of national standards in shipmaster examinations demanded a degree of centralized control. If exemption from the system were granted to Liverpool, then it could not reasonably be withheld from less important seaports. A department of government, subject to Parliament and public opinion, was the best guarantor of impartiality and efficiency.<sup>47</sup>

In consistently refusing to withdraw his measure and in his willingness to listen to constructive suggestions, Labouchere had given the impression of a man of principle, steadfast yet reasonable, an experienced professional who knew exactly where he was going. It was curious, therefore, that he inexplicably deferred the second reading of his Mercantile Marine Bill and refused to reveal the reason for the delay.<sup>48</sup> His tactics did little to ease the minds of the shipowners, already exasperated by his refusal to meet their demands. Finally, on 21 March 1850, Labouchere admitted to the House that he had been engaged in making certain amendments to his Bill but, under the rules of the House, he could not reveal what they were before the second reading. Pressed by Cardwell, Labouchere said that he had been in touch with Cardwell's Liverpool constituents, as well as with merchants in Glasgow, London and other places. He had given them an indication of the nature of the changes and thus, when the time came for the Bill to be discussed, the shipping members would know what they were. He told members that the alterations did

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47. B.T. 3/39, pp.356-360.

48. The second reading was deferred on 2, 9, 16, 18 Mar. 1850, see C.J. 1850, CV, pp.111, 127, 148, 157.

not affect the underlying principle of his measure.<sup>49</sup>

Defeated in its attempts to maintain the Navigation Laws, frustrated in its efforts to have the Mercantile Marine Bill withdrawn, worried about its manifestly declining leadership role, the General Shipowners' Society decided to hold a public meeting

'to adopt measures for inducing the postponement of the bills affecting the British mercantile marine, recently introduced into Parliament by the Right Hon. the President of the Board of Trade ...'.<sup>50</sup>

A postponement, it argued, would allow a 'full and impartial inquiry' to be made into the nation's maritime commerce. With the support of the Steam Shipowners' Association and the Light Dues Association, the public meeting took place on 17 April 1850 at the London Tavern in Bishopsgate Street. Joseph Hume, the Radical reformer, occupied the chair.

Opening the meeting, Hume described Labouchere's measures as 'crude and objectionable' and complained that justice had never been done to the country's mercantile marine and that the unnecessary interference of the Government in its affairs had impeded its development.<sup>51</sup> Other shipowners were equally critical. Aitken, a Liverpool shipowner, denounced the Government's proposals as a paltry, puerile, trashy piece of legislation; Phillips, a London shipowner, claimed that the shipping interest was interfered with to such an extent that its enterprise was impeded and its business 'trammelled in such a way as no other nation experienced'.<sup>52</sup> Henderson, a Glasgow shipowner, adopted a more conciliatory stance towards Labouchere's Bill and suggested that most of the measures were aimed at improving the lot of British seamen. Such sentiments led George F. Young to suggest that Henderson had not read the Bills

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49. Hansard 1850, CIX, 1208.

50. The Times, 18 Apr. 1850, p.3, col.4; See also SS.Min. 1850, V, pp.91/2.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid., cols. 4,6.

since the majority of clauses related solely to shipowners. Switching his attack, Young condemned the libellous nature of the consular accusations against British shipmasters. If such charges were true, he argued,

'where then was the justice of compelling the British shipowner to intrust his ship to the care of those very men who had been thus stamped as incompetent?'.<sup>53</sup>

The meeting appointed and authorized a committee to petition Parliament requesting that the present Bills be withdrawn and a comprehensive and important inquiry into mercantile affairs be instituted.

In the face of such extensive and intransigent opposition, Labouchere was forced to revise his strategy. On 20 April 1850 he withdrew the Bills and substituted one single Bill in their place - the Mercantile Marine (No.2) Bill.<sup>54</sup> Although Labouchere claimed later the essential principles of his earlier proposals remained intact, the new Bill introduced a significant innovation - the involvement of local agencies in the examining and certification process. The Board of Trade would undertake the general superintendence of maritime matters and have complete control of the compulsory system of shipmaster examinations but it would now

'appoint local Boards of Examiners to conduct the same at ... London, Liverpool, Newcastle, Bristol, Plymouth, Glasgow, Dundee, Dublin and Belfast'.<sup>55</sup>

Other changes proposed were less notable and tended to exemplify a more flexible and open approach by the Board to its reforming aspirations. For example, on the question of the classification of awards, the Bill merely proposed that the Board 'may distinguish'

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53. Ibid., col.5.

54. C.J. 1850, CV, p.243.

55. Public Bills 1850, IV, 13 Vict., 19 Apr. 1850, p.6.

PLATE IX

Henry Labouchere, M.P.

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between certificates of competency according to different trades and voyages and into classes relating to the skill, merit, conduct and general qualifications of candidates. Again, however, no reference was made to the position of ships' officers who had already obtained certificates of competency under the voluntary programme of examinations. And again the Liverpool Board of Examiners queried the lack of information in the issue.<sup>56</sup> They were informed by the Board of Trade that alterations would be made in the Bill in Committee to cover such a contingency.<sup>57</sup> The Board was aware of the need and extent of the issue. On 6 May 1850, the same day as the Liverpool inquiry, the Board had presented a Return to Parliament under a House of Commons Order showing the response to and the operational details of the voluntary scheme.<sup>58</sup> The Order had been secured by Alexander Hastie, the Member for Glasgow, on 12 March 1850.<sup>59</sup> The Return indicated that a total of 2384 certificates of competency had been awarded since the scheme's inception, 2057 masters' certificates, 327 mates.<sup>60</sup>

On 20 June 1850 when Labouchere finally introduced the Bill's second reading he reminded the House of his determination to adhere to the essential principles of his Bill and to give every consideration to suggestions made by shipping interests as to the best mode of carrying such principles into effect.<sup>61</sup> It would seem that the exhortations of the shipping interest, and others, had not been in

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56. B.T. 4/23, 1560.

57. B.T. 3/39, p.475. The Bill was subsequently amended to empower the Board of Trade to award certificates of competency to officers who had obtained certificates under the voluntary regulations, see Public Bills 1850, IV, 13 & 14, Vict., 20 June 1850, p.8.

58. P.P. 1850, LIII, pp.349/50. For details of circular, see B.T. 3/39, p.390.

59. C.J. 1850, CV, p.136.

60. For detailed breakdown of the Return, see App.XIV, p.346.

61. Hansard 1850, CXII, 109. The second reading had been deferred on 26 Apr, 4, 11, 18 May; 3 June; see C.J. 1850, CV, pp. 284, 307, 327, 358, 392.

vain. Their impact upon the Bill's proposals can best be assessed by considering the agitation preceding and surrounding its emergence.

On 25 April 1850 the Magistrates and Council of Glasgow protested to the Board against the 'spirit of centralization' and the obstructive tendency of Parliamentary measures relating to mercantile affairs. They suggested the objectives of the Bill would be best accomplished by the enactment of a series of rules and regulations to be carried into effect and enforced by

'properly constituted local authorities, bound, if considered necessary, to report their proceedings periodically to the Board of Trade ...'.<sup>62</sup>

Such an arrangement, it was argued, would identify shipping interests with proposed legislative measures, without which the efforts of the Government would be in vain. They were informed by the Board that their observations would receive 'Mr. Labouchere's attentive consideration'.<sup>63</sup>

The day following the introduction of the Mercantile Marine (No.2) Bill, Labouchere granted an interview to two prominent members of the Glasgow shipping interest: one of them was Mr. A. Henderson, who had been rebuffed by George F. Young at the public meeting of shipowners; the other was Mr. J. Gilmour, one of the largest ship-owners in the country.<sup>64</sup> Subsequently, a series of letters ensued between the Board of Trade and the Glasgow Shipowners' Association in which the Glasgow group expressed its eagerness to promote Labouchere's measure and offered some constructive criticisms. Among other suggestions they advocated a more positive and dynamic role for the local marine boards.<sup>65</sup> On 1 May 1850 the Association was

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62. B.T. 1/477, 1367.

63. B.T. 3/39, p.456.

64. B.T. 3/39, p.446.

65. B.T. 4/23, 1358; B.T.4/23, 1455, 1467; B.T. 1/477, 1767 (in 1367).

informed that Mr. Labouchere was glad to receive suggestions relating to his Bill and was anxious that every facility should be given to shipowners to enable them compete successfully against foreign rivals.<sup>66</sup>

The Association responded by enclosing further suggestions as to the extended role of local agencies in shipping affairs.<sup>67</sup> They were told that Mr. Labouchere was considering their valuable proposals 'with a view to their adoption in the Bill'.<sup>68</sup> Nor was it a paper promise. On 7 May 1850 Labouchere sent the Glasgow Shipowners' Association a comprehensive list of his own proposals, many of them coinciding with the wishes of the Glasgow interest.<sup>69</sup> The following month Labouchere told the Glasgow group that he would 'endeavour whenever it is practicable' to accede to their wishes.<sup>70</sup>

But the Glasgow shipping interest was not the only group concerned about the Government's centralizing proposals. On 10 May 1850 the Board reassured the Marine Board at South Shields that the Bill had been drawn up to ensure that the whole merchant service would not come under the jurisdiction of a London-based central examining board but that control would be vested in local examiners appointed by the Board of Trade.<sup>71</sup>

In his capacity as Permanent Secretary to the Board of Trade, Sir Denis Le Marchant would have been aware of the responses made by interested groups to the Government's proposals for marine legislation. He was not averse to shaping them. In May 1850 he sent a copy of Labouchere's correspondence with the Glasgow shipping interests to T.B. Horsfall, President of the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce.<sup>72</sup> In his reply of 23 May 1850 Horsfall pointed out that

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66. B.T. 3/39, p.455.

67. B.T. 4/23, 1467.

68. B.T. 3/39, p.460.

69. B.T. 3/39, p.463.

70. B.T. 3/40, pp. 5, 29.

71. B.T. 4/23, 1594; B.T. 3/39, p.474. For similar query from the Pilot Board at Glasgow, see B.T. 4/23, 612.

72. B.T. 1/477, 1367; B.T. 3/39, p.456.

while the Liverpool Shipowners' Association was 'bound to the London meeting', he had managed to persuade the Association to convene a general meeting to review its attitude to the Bill. Horsfall told Le Marchant that he had reason to believe that certain committee members of the Liverpool Shipowners' Association would 'not be sorry' should the Association align itself with the views of the Chamber of Commerce. Horsfall fully endorsed the opinions and suggestions of the Glasgow Shipowners' Association. Concluding his letter, Horsfall announced that he intended to be present at the general meeting of the Liverpool Shipowners' Association and promised to forward a full account of the proceedings.<sup>73</sup> Although the Board of Trade was at pains to establish amicable relations with the groups from Liverpool and Glasgow it tended to ignore the shipping interest on its own doorstep, the General Shipowners' Society.

The General Shipowners' Society seemed unaware of the correspondence between the Board of Trade and the Liverpool and Glasgow shipping interests, or that Labouchere was prepared to modify certain of his measures. Thus, at the very time when Le Marchant and Horsfall were corresponding, the General Shipowners' Society's Central Committee was resolving not to assent to the appointment of a tribunal for the general superintendence and enforcement of mercantile affairs. Copies of the resolution were sent to the outports which were asked 'for immediate communication of the sentiments thereon'.<sup>74</sup> At the next meeting of the Society's Committee on 11 June 1850, the Secretary confirmed that the Society's resolution had been approved by Dundee, Scarborough, North Shields, South Shields, Hull, Belfast, Plymouth, Yarmouth, Brixham, Bristol, Greenock, Montrose and Liverpool.<sup>75</sup> Glasgow's wish to see Labouchere's Bill have its

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73. B.T. 1/477, 1367.

74. SS. Min. 1850, V, p.95.

75. Ibid., p.96.

second reading was duly noted. Sunderland was also reported to be in favour of the measure. When all the replies from the outports had been collected the Society clarified its position; the Bill's second reading would be opposed and attempts made to induce legislation which would relieve British shipping from the 'burdens and restrictions' to which it was exposed.<sup>76</sup>

Shortly before the Bill's second reading the Society got wind of the proposed alterations to Labouchere's Bill and sent a letter to the Board of Trade seeking the Bill's postponement in order that the shipping communities throughout the country might have the opportunity to study the amendments.<sup>77</sup> The Board replied the next day, 19 June 1850, the day before the second reading. The Society was informed that the proposed amendments did not affect the principle of the Bill and that no material changes were envisaged, 'except in the machinery for carrying the principle into effect'. Nevertheless, the Board promised to provide the Society with full details of the amendments 'to allow time for any alteration at the appropriate time'. The Board hoped that the Society would not press for a further postponement of the Bill, especially as it appeared to enjoy the general support of shipping interests throughout the country.<sup>78</sup> And so with each of the rival factions believing, or professing to believe, that it enjoyed the support of the majority of the nation's shipping communities, the Mercantile Marine (No. 2) Bill was laid before the House on 20 June 1850.<sup>79</sup>

In his opening speech, Labouchere assured the members that in spite of the alterations, his Bill remained unchanged in principle and that it had 'the warm and zealous support of the great body of

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76. Ibid., pp.96, 97.

77. B.T. 4/23, 2046. They were warned by the Liverpool Shipowners' Association, Hansard 1850, CXII, 118.  
A similar request for the Bill's postponement came from the Committee appointed by the London meeting of the ship-owners, B.T. 4/23, 2044.

78. B.T. 3/40, p.27.

79. C.J. 1850, CV, p.452.

the shipping interest'. In the event, the Bill generated not merely warmth but considerable heat. Labouchere spoke of the encouragement he had received from both the Chamber of Commerce and the Shipowners' Association of Liverpool.<sup>80</sup> He told the House that he could cite further evidence of approval for his proposals but was sure he had said enough to persuade members that they too should support his Bill. He reminded them of its three great principles: the system of compulsory examinations, the checking of crimpage, and, finally, the improvement of discipline and prevention of desertion. The main objections to his previous measures had been directed against excessive centralization, especially against the degree of power which would have been vested in the Board of Trade. He confessed that he himself

'had no abstract reverence for a system of centralisation upon that or upon any other subject; on the contrary, he was anxious to avoid it as much as possible; and still less was he anxious for the patronage which the Bill would vest in the Board of Trade'.<sup>81</sup>

With this in mind, it was his intention to establish local marine boards in all ports having more than 30,000 tons of shipping registered in the foreign-going trade. Each board would have twelve members, six of whom would be elected by those shipowners of the port possessing 500 tons of foreign-going shipping.

Each shipowner would be limited to a specified number of votes. Four of the resident shipowners of each port would be nominated by the Board of Trade, together with the Mayor or Provost and the Stipendiary Magistrate. The local boards would handle business and regulate appointments previously handled by the Board of Trade.

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80. Hansard 1850, CXII, 109. The Liverpool Shipowners' Association withdrew their opposition to the Bill's second reading on 17 June 1850, B.T. 4/23, 2047.

81. Ibid., 111.

The local boards would share with the Board of Trade the right to appoint examiners but the Board of Trade would reserve the responsibility of determining the examination plan and of using its own officers to assist at examinations. Although the local boards would be able to nominate shipping officers, such officers could not draw salaries without the prior sanction of the Board of Trade. Masters thought to be guilty of dereliction of duty would be investigated by both the local boards and the Board of Trade. Since the coasting trade would be exempt from the regulations, no coasting master would be required to pass an examination before being appointed to a coasting command.<sup>82</sup> The distinction between the certificates would be removed: only one class of certificate would be awarded. Shipping interests had persuaded him that

'sufficient confidence would not be felt by the sailors in a captain with a second-class certificate ...'.<sup>83</sup>

Nevertheless, the discretion to award higher certificates to outstanding captains would be retained, such masters being subject to an additional examination. Labouchere told the members that he hoped that they would dismiss all party loyalties when the time came to vote on the measure. He felt certain that his Bill 'would receive the cordial assent and concurrence of the immense majority of the shipping interest'.

Joseph Hume was not in any mood to give a cordial assent to the proposal. He reminded the House of the public meeting the previous April and of Labouchere's promise of the previous year, that of introducing a Bill, 'full and comprehensive, and affording relief to the shipping interest'. A Bill had been presented during this present year and it had been the business of the public meeting to discuss

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82. Ibid., 111-113. Labouchere claimed, had been reluctantly compelled to make this concession in the light of the 'almost unanimous feeling in the coasting trade against such a step', B.T. 3/40, p.74.

83. Ibid., 113.

that same Bill. The House would be astonished to learn that on the very day of the public meeting Labouchere had published a letter announcing his intention to alter nineteen of the Bill's clauses. Hume affirmed that he had read the clauses 'and they made such an alteration that it was quite impossible to proceed with that Bill'. Mr. Labouchere had obviously arrived at the same conclusion because he had withdrawn the Bill and calmly substituted another, the one now lying before the House. The Right Hon. Gentleman had informed the House that both the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce and the Liverpool Shipowners' Association approved of his Bill. The Liverpool Shipowners' Association did not, in fact, approve of the Bill. Labouchere intervened to say that he had been informed that the Chairman and Secretary of the Association had assented to the measure. Hume returned to the attack, drawing attention to the thirteen new clauses in the revised proposals. Their content was such that the changes should have been printed and distributed to members in the accepted manner. In these circumstances, he felt justified in demanding an adjournment.<sup>84</sup>

Hume's motion was opposed by Admiral Bowles who argued that the reform of the merchant marine was so urgent a matter as to demand no further delay.<sup>85</sup> John Herries, a former President of the Board of Trade, opposed the Bill on grounds of procedure. He conceded that Labouchere had communicated with Liverpool, Glasgow and Sunderland but questioned whether he had contacted the Committee of Shipowners in London 'representing as they did, the shipowners of the United Kingdom?'. Herries said that he was not questioning Labouchere's good intentions but his unconstitutional conduct.<sup>86</sup> Labouchere refuted the allegation. If he had perhaps communicated more with some parties than with others, it was simply because some parties had shown a greater willingness to

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84. Ibid., 114/115.

85. Ibid., 115.

86. Ibid., 116.

discuss the matter than others. At all times he had acted with fairness and that when

'Mr. G.F. Young went to the Board of Trade at the head of the assailants of this measure, he had received him with the same courtesy and kindness as any other gentleman'.<sup>87</sup>

Edward Cardwell said that he would not now oppose the Bill since it 'limited and defined' the powers of the Board of Trade.<sup>88</sup> A number of members complained that they had not been given enough time to consider the amendments, others thought that there had already been too many delays. Gladstone suggested that the House appeared to be in accord on only one point, that it was 'losing its time'. He proposed that since Joseph Hume seemed to be holding the power, he should exercise it with clemency.<sup>89</sup> Hume agreed not to divide the House and withdrew his motion for adjournment. The Bill was given its second reading and passed into committee.<sup>90</sup>

So yet again a kind of compromise had emerged. The Bill had not been enacted but Labouchere had secured a victory. In doing so, however, he had been forced to modify a principle, that of centralization, even if it was a principle for which he professed to hold no great admiration. The shipping interest could not have been wholly discouraged by the turn of events. Local marine boards would almost certainly become the tools of powerful local shipowners. There was certainly little despondency within the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce. Its members believed that they had won, or had substantially contributed to, a notable victory. It was a victory they were determined to build on. On 29 June 1850, Horsfall, President of the

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87. Ibid., 118.

88. Ibid., 119.

89. Ibid., 121.

90. C.J. 1850, CV, p.452. Committee deferred 4 July 1850, p.489.

Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, reminded Cardwell that whereas the Chamber of Commerce had cordially assented to the Bill's second reading, the Shipowners' Association had reserved the right to move 'amendments in the Committee'. Horsfall proposed that certain 'little amendments' might be introduced at the committee stage. He recommended, for example, that the votes of local shipowners should be reduced from ten to six, 'it being considered 10 votes will give too great a power to the largest shipowners'.<sup>91</sup> Other groups, and individuals, made it clear that the Bill was susceptible to further improvement and that such alterations would be introduced at a later stage.<sup>92</sup>

The Liverpool Shipowners' Association inundated the Board with suggestions designed to improve the Bill, primarily in relation to the constitution and powers of the local marine boards.<sup>93</sup> Labouchere conceded the importance and desirability of many of the Association's suggestions but refused to amend the Bill any further.<sup>94</sup> It would seem that the Association had modified its stance on the examination issue. On 13 July 1850 the Association wrote to the Board of Trade recommending that the local marine boards should make a regular and full report of all examinations conducted under their aegis to the Board of Trade. Such a practice, it suggested, would allow the Board to monitor the progress of the scheme and be a

'check upon applicants refused once, going at another time to another Board of a more easy character and getting favourably reported'.<sup>95</sup>

The spirit of enthusiasm pervading the shipping interests in Liverpool on the Mercantile Marine Bill and towards shipmaster examinations did not extend to the Metropolis. Within the ranks of the General Shipowners' Society there was an air of despondency and

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91. B.T. 1/478, 2173. His suggestion was not implemented, see Public Bills 1850, 13 & 14 Vict., IV, 25 July 1850, p.5.
92. B.T. 4/23, 2043, 2122; B.T. 1/478, 2192; B.T.1/479, 2537.
93. B.T. 4/23, 2147, 2275, 2330.
94. B.T. 3/40, p.55, 77.
95. B.T. 1/478, 2275. The practice obtained under the voluntary examination scheme, see illustration overleaf : B.T.1/476,16.

PLATE X

A Return of Masters and Mates  
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awarded Certificates of Competency by  
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the Liverpool Board of Examiners  
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A list of persons and their families who have applied and been granted the benefit of Exemption, of Woodford and District of Woodford

Woodford

No. of Application	Date of Application	No. of Order	Date of Order	Name	What Application Applied for	Granted or Refused	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class
162	Jan 27		1849	James Mayfair Best.	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	Not Granted		
163	" 29			Joseph Mulheusch.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Not Granted		
164	July 2	155	July 10	James Boyer	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Granted		2 <sup>nd</sup> Class
165	" 9	157	" 30	John Cheyan	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Do		2 <sup>nd</sup> Class
166	" 11	158	" 20	John Buchanan	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	Do	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	
167	" 14			John Cunningham	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	Not Granted		
168	Jan 25	158	" 17	Thomas Taylor	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	Granted	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	
169	July 21	160	Aug 3	David Wilson	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Do		2 <sup>nd</sup> Class
170	" 19	159	July 27	Robert Spencer	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Do		2 <sup>nd</sup> Class
171	" 25	165	Aug 21	John Killman	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	Do	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	
172	" 24	162	" 10	Samuel Flood	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Do		2 <sup>nd</sup> Class
173	" 30	169	Sept 25	William Daly	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	Do	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	
174	Aug 3	161	Aug 8	John Hargrave Bowman	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Do		2 <sup>nd</sup> Class
175	" 6	163	" 14	Charles Hewitt	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	Do	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	
176	" 6	164	" 14	William Kelly	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	Do	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	
177	Sept 4			James Philip Dewey	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Not Granted		
178	" 7	167	Sept 27	Joseph Gibson	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Granted		2 <sup>nd</sup> Class
179	" 9	166	" 21	Joseph Brown	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Do		2 <sup>nd</sup> Class
180	" 17	151	1849 6	Alexander Hall	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	Do	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	
181	" 14	168	Sept 21	Charles Gardner	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	Do	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	
183	" 24	164	1849 13	Edward Hall	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Do		2 <sup>nd</sup> Class
184	Sept 1	155	" 13	Robert Ogles	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Do		2 <sup>nd</sup> Class
185	" 1	152	" 6	Charles Semonds	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	Do	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	
186	1 <sup>st</sup> 2			Alexander Kellan Merchant	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Not Granted		
187	" 18			Duncan McMillan	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Not Granted		
188	" 15	156	1849 19	James King	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	Granted	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	
189	" 18	157	" 26	John Stewart	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	Do	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	
190	" 12	165	" 19	Philip Bennett	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	Do	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	
192	" 23	161	" 17	Edward Schenker Barber	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	Do	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	
193	" 26	159	" 9	Thomas Deane	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	Do	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	
194	" 26	158	Oct 28	Richard Trammack	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Do	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	
196	Jan 3	160	Jan 9	Joseph Cury	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	Do	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	
197	" 17	162	" 25	William Highkings	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Do		2 <sup>nd</sup> Class
198	" 22	163	" 27	Thomas Edward Branch	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Do		2 <sup>nd</sup> Class
199	" 3			Isaac Dixon	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Not Granted		
200	Dec 3			John Brynes	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Not Granted		
201	" 4			Dougald Buchanan	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	Not Granted		
202	" 3	168	Dec 28	William Grant	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	Granted	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	
203	" 5			John Mc Donald	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Not Granted		
204	" 6	166	Dec 2	James Grant	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	Granted	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	
206	" 7	169	" 28	Edward Bell	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	Do	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	
207	" 17	167	" 21	Thomas Bennett	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Do		2 <sup>nd</sup> Class
25	Jan 25	150	1849 6	Washington Lewis	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	Granted	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	
				Grated				
182	Sept 27	9	Oct 30	George Green	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Granted		2 <sup>nd</sup> Class
191	Oct 31	11	Nov 17	William Henry Kettle	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	Do	1 <sup>st</sup> Class	
195	" 31	10	Nov 19	Alexander Macallen Sackinger	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Do		2 <sup>nd</sup> Class
205	Dec 6	12	Dec 18	Thomas Killman	2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	Do		2 <sup>nd</sup> Class

Henry John Secretary

defeat. On 9 July 1850 the Central Committee concluded that in the light of the Government's determination to press the measure through Parliament and from the course pursued by shipowners in certain outports, further opposition 'appears to be hopeless'.<sup>96</sup> The Committee agreed to defer action until the Bill came to the House of Lords.

While the General Shipowners' Society was preparing its admission of defeat, the Mercantile Marine Bill was ready to go into Committee. But opinion on the Bill remained divided despite Labouchere's attempts to placate the shipping interest. On 8 July 1850, Moffat, the Member for Dartmouth moved that the House go into Committee in three months time so as to give all interests the opportunity of discussing the measure in full. He believed that the measure was 'exceedingly prejudicial and exceedingly unpopular' and complained of the unfair treatment meted out to the shipping interest on the issues of light-dues, pilotage, naval manning and the registry of seamen. He also made the point that while shipping interests accepted the need for improving the theoretical knowledge of ships' officers they

'doubted the efficacy of the machinery by which that was proposed to be accomplished, and they were of opinion that, before passing a compulsory measure, public schools of instruction in nautical science should be established, as in Prussia, Holland, France and other countries where a compulsory examination existed'.<sup>97</sup>

In challenging the necessity for the Bill, Moffat took the opportunity to attack the 'one-sided information' provided by British consuls on the subject, observing that except in the case of the low class of coaster, consuls spoke highly of British captains and mates.<sup>98</sup>

Sir William Clay, the wealthy, influential and philanthropic Member for Tower Hamlets, admitted a large proportion of London shipowners opposed the measure but doubted whether it was as unpopular as

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96. SS. Min. 1850, V, p.97.

97. Hansard 1850, CXII, 1067.

98. Ibid.

it was often made out to be. The Bill would benefit the shipowners and the nation. He defended the consuls against the 'calumnies and ridicule' which had been heaped upon them in the previous session and praised them for their sense of judgment. In his view, the crucial question before the House was whether the conduct of ships' officers in the British mercantile marine 'befitted the character' of the world's leading commercial country and

'whether it was such that millions of property and hundreds of thousands of lives might be annually trusted with it'.<sup>99</sup>

Clearly, he argued, it was not. On the other hand, James Clay, the Member for Hull, could not share his namesake's enthusiasm for the Bill. Why, he asked, had the coasting trade been exempted? No one could deny that its captains required less improvement, or that its sailors needed less protection than those of other trades.<sup>100</sup> Clay's contention that the matter ought to be referred to a Select Committee was endorsed by Lord J. Manners who also wondered how Labouchere had arrived at his arbitrary figures. Why select ports with 30,000 tons? Why choose shipowners with 500 tons? Only a Select Committee could properly decide such issues.<sup>101</sup>

Labouchere denied that his Bill was as unpopular as many members suggested and claimed that the great ports of Liverpool, Glasgow and Bristol were almost unanimous in their approval of it. He told the House that he could name others too - but he was careful not to. He did, however, name 'the greatest shipowner in the world', Mr. Gilmour of Glasgow, who possessed more than 36,000 tons of shipping. Mr. Gilmour had initially opposed the Bill but was now one of its most fervent supporters. Labouchere claimed that if the House had to wait for a Bill which enjoyed universal support, then it would wait until doomsday. He defended the compulsory system of examinations and reminded members of the benefits such a scheme conferred upon the

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99. Ibid., 1069.

100. Ibid., 1070.

101. Ibid., 1071.

maritime service of the East India Company.<sup>102</sup> He urged members to approve the Bill in the present session. John Herries replied that he had no wish to halt the Bill's progress but felt that nothing could be lost by referring it to a Select Committee and expressed regret that so little account had been taken of London, 'the greatest shipping interest in the country'.<sup>103</sup> Edward Cardwell believed it was the duty of members representing shipping interests to ensure that the Bill was passed in the present session. Moffat withdrew his motion and the Bill went into Committee.<sup>104</sup>

In Committee the Bill was subject to close scrutiny and amendment; on points of detail and definition rather than on structure. On 29 July 1850 it passed its third reading.<sup>105</sup> The Times took account of the event on 2 August 1850:

'After much discussion, and many alterations made to meet the objections of those deeply interested in the matter, the Mercantile Marine Bill has passed the House of Commons, and is now submitted to the judgment of the other branch of the Legislature'.<sup>106</sup>

The Times admitted that the section of the Bill most likely to cause concern was the provision requiring masters and mates to be certificated. The question would be asked, why cannot shipowners be left to look after the welfare of their servants since the owners would suffer most if they engaged incompetent men? The answer was that the new regulations would operate to elevate the moral and intellectual character of marine officers in a uniform way, with no imputation of unfairness. But it was not simply a question of protecting property,

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102. Ibid., 1075; see letter detailing procedures in the East India Company's Maritime Service, I.O.R. Mar. 1849, Home Misc., XLIV, No. 3428.

103. Ibid., 1078.

104. C.J. 1850, CV, pp.499, 506.

105. Hansard 1850, CXII, 1372-5, 1423-6, 1444-53; CXIII, 11-13, 80-86, 211-221, 453/4.

106. The Times, 2 Aug. 1850, p.4, col.3.

it was a matter of safeguarding human lives.<sup>107</sup>

The Bill passed through the Lords without undue difficulty. Lord Colchester approved of the Bill but regretted that the qualifications for masters and mates was a provision which embraced only foreign-going vessels.<sup>108</sup> The Bill was referred to a Select Committee of the Lords where it underwent some minor alterations.<sup>109</sup> The Lords gave the Bill its third reading on 10 August 1850.<sup>110</sup> Four days later there appeared a petition from the President, Vice-President and Directors of the Hull Chamber of Commerce begging that the measure be withdrawn.<sup>111</sup> It was a forlorn hope. The Mercantile Marine Bill received the Royal Assent on 14th August 1850.<sup>112</sup> That part of the Bill relating to the extended powers of the Board of Trade and to the establishment and powers of local marine boards - including the introduction of examinations for masters and mates - would come into effect immediately. The remainder of the regulations would take effect from 1 January 1851.

Labouchere immediately set about establishing the administrative machinery necessary to enable the Board of Trade fulfil its executive obligations from 1 January 1851. The new Marine Department - known initially as the Naval Department - was formed under the charge of Thomas H. Farrer who was given the rank of Assistant-Secretary. Two Professional Officers, Capt. F.W. Beechey, R.N., and Capt. W.H. Walker, were appointed to assist and advise him. These three officers constituted the 'Naval Board' and dealt with business of the department generally without recourse to the President of the Board of Trade.<sup>113</sup>

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107. Ibid., col.4.

108. Hansard 1850, CXIII, 698.

109. Journals of the House of Lords (hereafter L.J.) 1850, LXXXII, pp.463/4.

110. Ibid., p.468.

111. Ibid., p.473.

112. Hansard 1850, CXIII, 1068.

113. Parkhurst, Ships of Peace, p.170.

The following months saw frenzied activity at the new department. Letters were despatched to the public examining bodies established under the 1845 Order in Council informing them of the impending changes. On 16 October 1850 Farrer wrote to the London Trinity House pointing out that a new system of examination would shortly be introduced under the recent Mercantile Marine Act and that in consequence

'no further examination under the present voluntary System shall take place after the 25th inst:-'.<sup>114</sup>

A subsequent letter from Farrer, ten days later, thanked the London Trinity House and its Branch Boards for the services they had rendered in the examination of masters and mates.<sup>115</sup> In addition, the Department had to resolve the numerous problems raised by the new system. It was inundated with queries relating to the constitution, election and duties of the local marine boards and of the administrative resources to support and fund the examination programme.<sup>116</sup> Regulations and instructions covering the content, conduct and operation of the examinations had to be drawn up and sent to the newly elected boards.

Under a notice circulated by the Naval Department of the Board of Trade on 19 December 1850, no foreign-going vessel would, after 1 January 1850, be

'permitted to clear out from any Custom-house in the United Kingdom without the masters and mates respectively being in possession of Certificates, either of service or of competency'.<sup>117</sup>

The notice set out the times at which the examinations would commence at the various ports and outlined the qualifications and experience required for the award of certificates for Masters, First Mates, Only Mates and Second Mates. It detailed the examination syllabus for an

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114. TH. By-Min. 1850, p.738. The Admiralty had transferred the examination in navigation for Masters and Second Masters in the Royal Navy from the House to the Royal Naval College, see TH. Ct. Min. pp.198/9, 209.

115. Ibid., p.748.

116. B.T. 4/23, 2795, 2916, 2952, 2971, 3032, 3045, 3101, 3129.

117. Notice of Examinations of Masters and Mates, 1850, Naval Department, Board of Trade, 19 December 1850, p.3.

Extra Master's Certificate for persons 'desirous of obtaining the command of ships and steamers of the first class'.<sup>118</sup>

Because of their different structures and grading it is difficult to compare the examination syllabuses of the voluntary and compulsory schemes. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that the new qualifications - particularly in their navigational requirements - were at a lower standard than that previously obtaining under the voluntary regulations. Indeed, the notice introducing the regulations admitted that

'as the examinations of Masters and Mates are now for the first time, made compulsory, the qualifications have been kept as low as possible ...'.<sup>119</sup>

The notice warned, however, that the Board of Trade would raise the standard 'in the course of time', when the general attainments of ships' officers would render it possible 'without inconvenience'.

There were many who regarded the introduction of the new examinations as a retrograde step for nautical education generally and for the professionalization of British shipmasters in particular.<sup>120</sup> The impact of the examinations upon the subsequent pattern and progress of education and training in the British mercantile marine is outside the parameters of this study.

In the course of piloting home his measures for the centralization of shipping affairs and for the compulsory examination of British shipmasters and mates, Labouchere had been obliged to accommodate the claims and demands of shipping interests. The Times emphasized this point in a leader article on 9 July 1850 deprecating the

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118. Ibid., p.6. For details of the notice, see App. XV, pp. 347-351.

119. Ibid., p.7. For a useful analysis of the respective syllabuses, see Kennerly, 'Education of the Merchant Seamen', pp.53-6.

120. Blackmore, The British Mercantile Marine, pp. 182-187; Mercantile Marine Magazine 1870, pp.138-145; Kennerly, 'Education of the Merchant Seamen', p.188.

continued hostility of shipowners to Labouchere's proposals. It reminded readers that many of the powers originally given to the Board of Trade had been transferred to local boards to be elected by shipowners. Such a shift had transpired because it

'appeared on the whole more advisable to admit these changes in the method of working out the measure than to struggle against an organized hostility at so advanced a period of the session'.<sup>121</sup>

The extent to which Labouchere was prepared to compromise on many issues was remarkable. For example, the Merchant Service Bill published in July 1849 proposed that the Board of Trade be empowered to secure the proper qualification of masters and mates, institute compulsory shipmaster examinations to that effect, nominate the examiners and have complete control of the examination system.<sup>122</sup> By July 1850, it was clear that such centralizing aspirations could not be realized. The structure and content of the Mercantile Marine (No. 2) Bill finally approved by Parliament bore testimony to the shipping interests extensive and vehement campaign against the original proposals. It also reflected Labouchere's determination to press his measures through - however mutilated. The Bill confirmed that compulsory examinations would be instituted but also that the Board of Trade would be responsible only for the determination of a 'general plan for the Conduct thereof'. The provision and regulation of the examinations themselves would be entrusted to local marine boards established in all ports of a specified minimum level of registered tonnage.<sup>123</sup> They would, however, be expected to 'adhere to general plan' and be subject to the Board of Trade's general superintendence. The local boards would be able to initiate investigations into complaints of moral and professional misconduct

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121. The Times, 9 July 1850, p.5, col.1.

122. Public Bills 1849, 12 & 13 Vict., IV, 27 July 1849, p.4.

123. Public Bills 1850, 13 & 14 Vict., IV, 25 July 1850, p.4.

made against certificated officers but the Board of Trade alone could formally suspend or cancel a certificate of competency. Notwithstanding the regulation appertaining to registered tonnage, the Board of Trade would be empowered to appoint 'other Local Marine Boards' as occasion demanded.<sup>124</sup>

The regulations and requirements relating to the classification and nature of the examinations themselves were subject to frequent modification. Labouchere's original intention was that certificates of competency would be awarded to both masters and mates, each category being divided into three classes. The examination regulations would apply to all officer personnel irrespective of trading route.<sup>125</sup> Subsequent amendments to the Bill sought to classify the certificates into two further categories - coastal and foreign-going.<sup>126</sup> The Mercantile Marine (No.2) Bill brought other changes in its wake. Coastal and foreign-going vessels remained subject to the examination regulations but the certification process was less rigidly defined; the Board of Trade might distinguish between certificates of competency in terms of trading demands and the competence of the applicants.<sup>127</sup> In its final approved form the Bill exempted the coastal trade from the examination requirements. It also specified that the Board of Trade would provide each successful candidate, - as reported by the local examiners, - with a certificate to the effect that he was competent to act as a master or mate.<sup>128</sup> The classification system had been radically modified and simplified.

It would be easy to overstate the concession granted to the coastal trade, although it was clear that its exemption was not readily endorsed by Labouchere. In a letter to the Glasgow Shipowners' Association on 15 July 1850 the Board of Trade indicated that it would have been more satisfactory to Labouchere if the examinations had been

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124. Ibid.

125. Public Bills 1849, 12 & 13 Vict., IV, 27 July 1849, pp.6, 8.  
The regulations would apply only to coastal vessels of a specified minimum tonnage.

126. Public Bills 1850, 13 Vict., IV., 15 Feb. 1850, p.7.

127. Ibid., 19 Apr. 1850, p.6.

128. Ibid., 13 & 14 Vict., IV, 25 July 1850, p.11.

made to apply to coasting as well as foreign-going vessels. But, the letter pointed out,

'the almost unanimous feeling in the coasting trade against such a step at present and the difficulty of making new and stringent regulations at once universal induced him to abandon that part of his measure for the present'.<sup>129</sup>

On the other hand, the fact that the coasting trade had been exempted from the provision of the 1849 Navigation Act and was therefore a protected trade, would clearly serve to allay Labouchere's concern. The coastal trade was safeguarded - for the present.<sup>130</sup>

It would be wrong to interpret Labouchere's apparent readiness to give way on many issues as a sign of personal or political ineptitude. His response to the pressure group activities of shipping interests and his attitude towards mercantile legislation must be seen in the context of the whole strategic situation in which the debate was located. Labouchere was determined to place British shipping on an efficient and effective operational footing. The Mercantile Marine (No.2) Bill was not designed to solve the problem alone but to provide a base upon which to build a revitalized and strengthened mercantile marine. In essence, the Bill was an attempt to end the fragmented administration of shipping affairs and to secure an improvement in the proficiency and performance of British shipmasters and mates by obliging them to undergo a compulsory examination into their competency for command. Such innovative proposals demanded careful and sensitive handling. Any outright and total opposition to the Bill on the part of the shipping industry would have damaged Labouchere's hopes for its early implementation and implicitly sabotage his long-term aspirations for the development of the industry. Since he was not prepared to see such aspiration founder, he was constrained to heed representations made to him by

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129. B.T.3/40, p.74.

130. The coastal trade was opened in 1854; 17 & 18 Vict., c.5.

groups inimical to his cause - and to cultivate their attention and support when apposite. In short, Labouchere had little room to manoeuvre.

In his attempts to press ahead with his reforming measures Labouchere was supported and sustained by the campaigning efforts of The Times. It was The Times who endorsed Labouchere's own view of his Bill that it was

'rather in the nature of a series of necessary police regulations than an attempt to interfere with traders in the management of their own affairs'.<sup>131</sup>

and later conceded that while centralization was mischievous, it was less mischievous for practices for which 'there appears no other cure'.<sup>132</sup> It lambasted George F. Young for his stance and assertions against the Bill and contemptuously described him as the 'Pangloss of the shipping interest'.<sup>133</sup> The nautical press took a supportive but less aggressive line. The Nautical Magazine pointedly observed that it had been long apparent that it was the Government's intention to introduce compulsory examinations. The nature of the questions directed to witnesses during the hearings of the Select Committees on the Navigation Laws, it claimed, had offered a fair indication of future government policy on the matter. The Government had earlier betrayed its hand with its insistence on employing only qualified masters to command its transport ships. Such developments should have persuaded shipowners and shipmasters 'to fall into the system'.<sup>134</sup>

Predictably, the Economist adopted a more circumspect stance. On 7 September 1850 it reported the imprisonment of a captain and the transportation of a mate for 'culpable neglect' and admitted that

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131. The Times, 11 Mar. 1850, p.5, col.3.

132. Ibid., 9 Apr. 1850, p.5, col.2.

133. Ibid., 18 Apr. 1850, p.4, col.5; The newspaper's campaigning efforts led one shipowner to suggest that its articles had the 'smack and stamp of official logic', see p.3, col.6.

134. N.M. 1850, XIX, p.234.

'latterly the skill and activity of our captains and seamen have not always kept pace with those of the Americans...'.<sup>135</sup>

But it also observed that foreign rivals did not submit their marines to state regulation and claimed that the British mercantile marine was not so 'miserably mismanaged' as frequently made out, or that it would be improved 'by parliamentary legislation'. It argued the punishment meted out to the captain and mate would not only surprise ships' officers in the merchant service but would alert them to the extent of their responsibilities and duties.<sup>136</sup>

The encouragement and support given to Labouchere by the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce undoubtedly eased the passage of the Bill through the House. The Chamber was also instrumental in persuading the Liverpool Shipowners' Association to revise its attitude to the measure. On 3 February 1851 the Chamber published its First Annual Report, the Mercantile Marine Bill was given particular mention. The Report outlined the crucial role played by the Chamber in securing important modifications in the Bill's structure and contents. It also mentioned that in the selection of four shipowners, by the Government, for the local marine board, three out of the four were members of the Chamber.<sup>137</sup> It would seem that the Chamber's contribution to the emergence of the Bill had not gone unrewarded.

If the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce's endeavours had a happy outcome, much less felicitous was the exit of the 'Pangloss' of the shipping community, George F. Young. On 8 September 1850 The Times announced that it would, in future, ignore the ridiculous debates generated by Young in his attempts to defend the shipping interest. It categorically refused to be drawn into discussions which served no other purpose than to give 'currency to the nonsense of the Ship-

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135. Economist, 7 Sept. 1850, No.367, p.985.

136. Ibid.

137. Liverpool Chamber of Commerce Annual Report 1851, pp.16/17.

owners' Protection Society', and bade Young a hearty, but pathetic, farewell.<sup>138</sup>

And thus the Mercantile Marine Act secured a place in the story of mid-nineteenth-century social and administrative reform, and shipmaster examinations became a part of that great examination movement, the repercussions of which are felt to this day. But, as Sir Winston Churchill once remarked in a somewhat different context, it was not the end. It was not even the beginning of the end. But it was, perhaps, the end of the beginning.<sup>139</sup>

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138. The Times, 8 Sept. 1851, p.4, cols. 4/5.

139. Speech relating to the Battle of Egypt made at the Lord Mayor's Day luncheon at the London Mansion House, 10 Nov. 1942, The Times, 11 Nov. 1942, p.8, col.4.

## CHAPTER IX

### CONCLUSION

Reforming legislation tends to come into force when government has been persuaded to act in the interests of those whom the reformers represent. Pressure for government action may be directed towards the administration or through elected members. Pamphlets, petitions, public meetings, the press and influential patronage can play a vital role by stimulating and sustaining interest in an issue. But it is the task of the reformers to provide sufficient hard evidence to underpin their case and to marshall effectively the agitation generated in its support. The campaign against slavery was not only an example of social amelioration deriving from religious motives but was, as Roach suggests,

'the first such movement which systematically made use of publicity and constitutional agitation to achieve its ends'.<sup>1</sup>

The beliefs of the nineteenth-century social reformers came from three main schools of thought : the Evangelicals, the political economists and the Utilitarians. Humanitarianism did not emanate only from these sources:

'its intellectual tributaries were many, ranging from the logical reflections of Scottish moral philosophers to the generous sentiments of the Lake Poets, from broad church sensibility to the piety of the Quakers'.<sup>2</sup>

But the springs which fed these tributaries ran deeper still. The eighteenth century had witnessed a revitalization of religion, in particular of nonconformist religion. Thanks to the vision, industry

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1. Roach, Social Reform, p.36. For a study of the campaign from a pressure group perspective, see Howard Temperley, 'Anti-slavery', in Patricia Hollis (ed), Pressure from Without, pp.27-51.
  2. Roberts, p.27.

and example of Wesley, Methodism had spread through the land like a heath fire, burning most fiercely in the working class north. The Sunday School Movement, too, with its inauspicious beginnings in Gloucester, enjoyed a phenomenal success after the founding in 1785 of the Sunday School Society which had the double blessing of the established and the nonconformist churches.<sup>3</sup> The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, the S.P.C.K., founded in 1698, flourished throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth and, like Methodism and the Sunday School Society, had a temporal as well as a religious basis.<sup>4</sup> Religious philanthropy also directed the activities of the Evangelicals whose most famous disciples were Wilberforce and Shaftesbury.

That spirit of inquiry which first prompted man to examine the relationship between himself and the natural world also prompted him to question the relationship between man and man. One far-reaching consequence of this inquiry was the emergence of the science of political economy. Like the Evangelicals, the political economists wanted to see a more equitable society but they were motivated by different ideals. Whereas the Evangelicals were Christian philanthropists, the political economists were social analysts. In fact, the political economists themselves, although pursuing the same general goal, followed different paths to reach it.<sup>5</sup> But whatever the ideological differences of the various reformers and pressure groups, the results they finally achieved were markedly similar. Perhaps one reason for this was that proposals for reform were ultimately subject to the scrutiny of Parliament and the Legislature.

Pressure groups can be divided into two broad categories; sectional and promotional. Sectional pressure groups seek to advance

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3. Thomas Kelly, A History of Adult Education in Great Britain (1962), p.75.

4. Ibid., p.65.

5. Roach, Social Reform, pp.53-59.

the interests of a particular section of society - usually organized on the basis of a common economic or vocational interest - and to provide them with a variety of services. This type of group devotes much of its time attempting to influence the decisions of administrative departments of state. The promotional pressure group is not usually formed on the basis of a shared economic or vocational interest. Indeed, its members may be drawn from wholly dissimilar backgrounds ; even their political ideologies may be diametrically opposed. What such a group does share is a dedication to a particular, very often a humanitarian, cause<sup>6</sup>. The General Shipowners' Society was a sectional pressure group, while Buckingham's campaign to improve the condition of British shipping was primarily a promotional pressure group activity.

Buckingham did not belong to any specific ideological group but he knew Bentham and was a friend of the Utilitarians<sup>7</sup>. His humanitarian zeal had been fired by exposure to the harsh conditions aboard ship as an apprentice, and later, as a ship's officer. But he was not alone in advocating shipping reform. The shipping industry embraced a spectrum of trades and interests many of whom sought frequently to redress real or imagined grievances. Year after year the Government was involved in some aspect of shipping legislation. Since they usually dealt with one specific subject such measures rarely encountered serious opposition in the House<sup>8</sup>. What made Buckingham's campaign so markedly different was the fact that it concerned the whole shipping industry. The Report of the 1836 Select Committee on Shipwrecks presented a detailed and uncompromising account of the causes of the many ills afflicting British shipping and proposed wide-ranging innovative remedies. These

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6. Robert McKensie, 'Parties, Pressure Groups and the British Political Process', in Richard Kimber and J.J.Richardson (ed.), Pressure Groups in Britain : a reader (1974), pp.281/2.
  7. Bentham Papers, Add. MSS. 33546, ff. 349, 364, 424, 449. See also Turner, James Silk Buckingham, pp.223/4.
  8. Prouty, p.39.

included the formation of a London-based marine board to superintend maritime affairs and the introduction of shipmaster examinations. In essence, the Report was a blueprint for the professionalization of the British merchant service.<sup>9</sup> It failed to induce government action.

Undeterred, Buckingham introduced a private member's Bill incorporating the Committee's main proposals, including those relating to shipmaster examinations. The prospect of government intervention generated concern across a broad front. Poulett Thomson, President of the Board of Trade, thought that the proposed Marine Board would have greater powers than the Legislature; his Vice-President, Labouchere, described the measure as a 'vexatious interference with the shipping interest'.<sup>10</sup> George F. Young, Chairman of the General Shipowners' Society, denounced the Bill as a 'legislative monstrosity'.<sup>11</sup> The House threw the Bill out. Prouty's comment that it 'was easily defeated by the shipowners', fails to take account of the political climate and Buckingham's idiosyncratic behaviour.<sup>12</sup> The Bill failed mainly because it was a case of too much too soon.

It would be wrong, however, to dismiss Buckingham's attempt to professionalize the merchant service as a complete failure. One of the principal functions of a promotional pressure group is to focus attention upon a particular cause or grievance. Buckingham's campaign not only diagnosed many of the problems besetting British shipping but spelled out their extent and ramifications. Although the spirit of the period was not ripe for reform, such disclosures meant that the issues could not continue to be overlooked.<sup>13</sup>

The spirit of the age was still not ripe for reform in 1843 when

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9. Wilde, p.103.

10. Hansard 1837, XXXVIII, 1222/3; 1224.

11. Ibid., 1224.

12. Prouty, p.65. Wilde also attributes the defeat of Buckingham's Bill to the shipping interest, see p.136.

13. Roberts, p.89.

Fitzroy and the Glasgow shipping interest attempted to introduce compulsory examinations under a centralized authority. With Fitzroy's departure for New Zealand his Bill was dropped. The Select Committee appointed that same year recommended that the examining powers should be vested in local boards, not in central government. The Times described it as 'a kind of compromise'<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Fitzroy and the Glasgow group, like Buckingham before them, had succeeded in keeping the issue in the forefront of public and official consciousness. The campaigns of the 'thirties and the 'forties had the same general objectives but their motives were different, the first being the actions of a promotional pressure group, the second representing the activities of a sectional pressure group.

Indications that the climate of political opinion was beginning to change could be seen in the events surrounding the Murray Circular and the introduction of the voluntary examination scheme. The shipping interest had been excluded from the discussions on the design and operation of the examination programme. Moreover, the scheme had been introduced under an Order in Council, a procedure which effectively by-passed Parliament and avoided a confrontation with the shipping lobby. The stage was thus set for the final bitter struggles, the repeal of the Navigation Laws and the introduction of the 1850 Mercantile Marine Act.

At the outset of the study questions were raised about the conduct and motives of the main protagonists in the shipmaster examination debate. Why did the advocates of shipping reform advocate the use of examinations as the means of solving the problem of shipmaster competency? What was the source of their reforming zeal? Why did the shipping interest oppose the introduction of compulsory examinations and to what extent was it able to circumscribe the issue?

The case for examinations was based primarily on precedent and accepted practice, at home and abroad. Throughout the debate

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14. The Times, 4 Mar. 1850, p.4, col.4.

frequent reference was made to the examining procedures carried out in the Royal Navy, the East India Company and the more progressive shipping companies. Attention was also drawn to the benefits of the system; ships were efficiently managed, crews were well disciplined and shipwreck was minimal. The argument for compulsory examinations was reinforced when evidence emerged indicating that the growing supremacy of foreign fleets was attributable to the continental practice of obliging shipmasters to undergo stringent professional examinations. In addition, many of the men involved in the decision-making process at government and executive level had been exposed to examining procedures at public school and university.<sup>15</sup>

As to the motives of the examination proponents it would seem that there was an overlap of interests and concerns. Naval and mercantile officers probably viewed the distress of the merchant service and the question of improved professional status as interdependent issues. The introduction of compulsory examinations could serve a dual function. It would affirm, protect and enhance the professional status of ships' officers per se and, by ensuring that the ships were competently navigated, reduce the loss of life and property at sea. Fitzroy, for example, a professional naval officer, expressed the need for qualified officers and disciplined crews, but also concern for the welfare of ordinary seamen. Like so many men of his time, Fitzroy had strong, almost rigid, religious convictions.<sup>16</sup> The source of Buckingham's reforming zeal was primarily humanitarian. But he was also a politician and would recognize the need for an efficient British mercantile marine.

It was not surprising that licensing examinations should be seen as a means of enhancing the professional status and respectability of ships' officers. The pursuit of respectability was a major preoccupation of the professional world. Status and respectability

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15. See App. I, pp. 318/320; App. II, p. 321; and App. III, p. 322.

16. Mellersh, Fitzroy of the Beagle, pp. 177/8.

were often equated with professional expertise. Interestingly, examinations were accepted as the legitimate instruments for assessing professional competence. Such developments had not escaped the notice of seafarers. When, for example, the masters, mates and seamen of Kirkcaldy petitioned Parliament about the high level of shipwrecks they urged that examinations be introduced to ascertain the competency of ships' officers similar to the practices obtaining in 'many professions ashore'.<sup>17</sup> Respectability made a regular appearance in the hearings of Select Committees:

Admiral Dundas: 'What is your opinion of the general talent and character of the captains and mates employed in the British merchant service?'

Duncan Dunbar: 'I think they are a very respectable body of men'.<sup>18</sup>

Sir Henry Halford, on being asked to explain why candidates for the Royal College of Physicians had to disenfranchise themselves from a college of surgeons or company of apothecaries:

'Because we think it would diminish somewhat the high respectability of men of education, who stand on the same ground as members of the English Universities'.<sup>19</sup>

The latter comment not only highlighted the hierarchical structure of the medical profession but epitomized the bitterness of the relationships obtaining between the different branches.

At the outset of the nineteenth century a strict caste system prevailed in the medical profession, with the physicians holding the premier position and showing no signs of relinquishing it. Below the physicians in the medical pecking order were the 'three inferior grades of surgeons, apothecaries and even druggists'.<sup>20</sup> The Royal

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17. See p.66.

18. Fourth Report from the Select Committee on Navigation Laws, P.P. 1847, X, p.379, Q.4232.

19. Report from the Select Committee on Medical Education (hereafter S.C. (1834)), P.P. 1834, XIII, Pt. I, pp.21/2, Q.239.

20. S.C. (1834), P.P. 1834, XIII, Pt. I, p.24, Q.283; Halford.

Society of Physicians received its Royal Charter in 1518 and jealously guarded its prestige and privilege. The surgeons could hardly boast of so felicitous a pedigree. Until an Act of Parliament dissolved the partnership in 1745, the surgeons had been united with the barbers in a rather undistinguished marriage of convenience, their union being known as the Barber-Surgeons Company.<sup>21</sup> But whereas the eighteenth century saw so many physicians languishing in a state of professional inertia, the same period witnessed a dramatic rise to eminence of many surgeons. This was the age of such men as John Hunter who 'was advancing the prestige of surgery by applying scientific method to it'.<sup>22</sup> Teaching methods also underwent a marked improvement and the courses of instruction for surgeons were subject to continual modification and the examinations to frequent revision.<sup>23</sup>

The apothecaries, although ranking below the surgeons in the medical hierarchy, were examined and licensed by the Royal College of Surgeons. Many apothecaries took a second qualification and were known as surgeon-apothecaries. The Radical reformer, Joseph Hume, was apprenticed to a master surgeon-apothecary at the age of thirteen.<sup>24</sup> In spite of their efforts at self-improvement, however, the surgeon-apothecaries remained in the eyes of polite and medical society, merely apothecaries. They were not respectable. With their status despised by the physicians and their profession invaded by the druggists and chemists, many apothecaries

'became profoundly impressed with the need for doing away with the unqualified and for raising the attainments of the qualified'.<sup>25</sup>

To this end a Bill and a petition were drawn up and presented to

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21. Carr-Saunders and Wilson, The Professions, p.75

22. Reader, Professional Men, p.33.

23. For a useful survey of the development of surgeon examinations, see Sir V. Zachary Cope, The Royal College of Surgeons. A history etc. (1959), pp.133-145.

24. Reader, Professional Men, p.33.

25. Carr-Saunders and Wilson, The Professions, p.77.

Parliament in November 1814. The Bill was passed on 5 July 1815 and received the Royal Assent one week later.<sup>27</sup>

The Apothecaries Act in 1815 empowered the Society of Apothecaries to hold examinations and grant licences to practice; chemists, druggists and those already in practice were exempted from the Act's provisions.<sup>28</sup>

One of the most interesting aspects of the scheme was the use of written questions in examinations, to be answered in writing. The examinations reflected a concern and need for professional relevance, for apprenticeship, attendance at lectures, and hospital-experience, all of which seem routine enough requirements by twentieth-century standards but were remarkable in their day.<sup>29</sup> Despite frequent and bitter rivalry within the profession medical reform continued unabated. Select Committees were appointed in 1834 and 1847 and a succession of Bills introduced in Parliament until the passing of the 1858 Medical Act.<sup>30</sup> Like so much contemporary reforming legislation, the Medical Act was a compromise solution but it unified the medical profession.<sup>31</sup>

Increasing professional competence was also the objective of those who sought reform in the legal field. The aims of the revised Law Society in 1835 were that of

'promoting professional improvement and facilitating acquisition of professional knowledge'.<sup>32</sup>

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26. C.J. 1814/5, LXX, p.28.

27. Ibid., pp.462, 475.

28. Carr-Saunders and Wilson, The Professions, p.78.

29. Ibid., p.79. Halford, President of the Royal Physicians, admitted that 'the character of that branch of the profession has been amazingly raised' since the 1815 Act, see P.P. 1834, XIII, Pt. I, p.20, Q.219.

30. Ibid., p.83.

31. Reader, Professional Men, p.67/8.

32. Carr-Saunders and Wilson, The Professions, p.47.

Consistent with the desire to facilitate the acquisition of professional knowledge, a series of lectures was inaugurated in 1833 and in 1836 the judges of the common law courts were persuaded to agree to the introduction of compulsory written examinations in common law. This examination affected only those who wished to be admitted as attorneys but a similar procedure was introduced the following year to embrace the solicitors. The examinations were consolidated in 1853.<sup>33</sup>

Not surprisingly, the objectives of newly-formed professional bodies were remarkably similar to those of the long-established professions. When, for example, the Institute of Civil Engineers was incorporated in 1828 its Charter stated that the organization had been formed to promote the acquisition of that special knowledge 'which constitutes the profession of a Civil Engineer'; the declared aims of the Institute of British Architects, formed in 1834 and receiving its Royal Charter three years later were to facilitate and extend architectural knowledge and related sciences and for 'establishing an uniformity and respectability of practice in the profession'.<sup>34</sup> As Wootton has pointed out, the new professional bodies devoted much attention to status and qualifications.<sup>35</sup>

Although examinations were to captivate the imagination of mid-Victorian England, the road was strewn with the wreckage of the proposals of enlightened reformers. When Samuel Whitbread, the brewer and M.P., introduced his Parochial Schools Bill in 1807 it was too far ahead of its time, even though its proposals were relatively modest.<sup>36</sup> Nor did the crusading Henry Brougham fare any better in 1816, 1820 or 1838 when he pressed for government intervention in education.<sup>37</sup> John Roebuck's Prussian-inspired scheme of

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33. Ibid.

34. Ibid., pp. 155, 178. The Civil Engineers established compulsory entrance examinations in 1897; the Architects in 1882, pp.158/9; 180.

35. Graham Wootton, Pressure Groups in Britain 1720-1970 (1975), p.57.

36. Montgomery, Examinations, p.33.

37. Roach, Social Reform, pp.75-77.

of 1833 advocated

'district, rate-supported schools, inspected by the central government and offering non-denominational religious instruction'.<sup>38</sup>

but foundered on the rock of Established Church opposition. Nevertheless, it eased the way for the first Parliamentary grant to elementary education. The grant had the effect of stimulating discussion and polarizing opinion on the question of educational provision. The Radicals and Liberals favoured a wholly democratic state system of education; the church groups, in particular the Anglicans, insisted that the education of the people was the province of the Church and that state interference was not only unnecessary but decidedly harmful.<sup>39</sup>

An Order in Council of 10 April 1839 established a Committee of the Privy Council to

'superintend the application of any sums voted by Parliament for the purpose of promoting public education'.<sup>40</sup>

The first Secretary of the Committee was James Kay, soon to be married and thereafter known as James Kay-Shuttleworth. Kay, a physician, hailed from a Lancashire non-conformist background and had attended neither a public school nor Oxbridge. He had, in fact, studied at Edinburgh University on a scholarship.<sup>41</sup> He possessed ability, was conscientious to a degree, was compassionate, highly moral and wholly uncompromising in his views on social evils.<sup>42</sup> Under Kay, the Committee recommended a Training School for teachers, grants to schools other than those of the National Society and the British and Foreign School Society and the central inspection of all

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38. Roberts, p.55; See also Bruce A. Gillham, 'Examinations and Teacher Involvement' (Hull Univ. M.Ed. thesis, 1974), pp.3/4.

39. Ibid., pp.56-58.

40. Montgomery, Examinations, p.33.

41. Roberts, p.148.

42. Frank Smith, The Life and Work of Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth (1974), pp.24/5.

grant-aided schools. Inevitably, in view of the vehemence of the opposition, this was a compromise; moreover, it was a compromise which became a near-capitulation when Church opposition compelled the abandonment of the proposal for the Training School.<sup>43</sup>

The Church's opposition took a constructive form when a band of Established Churchmen, the Mathison-Acland group - Gladstone and Lord Ashley were members of the group - consulted and co-operated with the National Society in an attempt to translate their beliefs on Church-inspired education for the middle classes into reality. Out of their deliberations emerged a system of middle schools and training colleges. The former failed to fulfil the objectives of their originators, partly because of the latent hostility of the Non-conformists who distrusted a scheme so obviously Anglican in inspiration. There was a steady proliferation of the training colleges, however, and as they increased in number so they accordingly came to depend more and more upon state aid 'which created, under the Minutes of 1846, a new social group of trained teachers'.<sup>44</sup> One of the most striking features of the training colleges was their use of organized examinations. Indeed, as Roach points out, their example was taken by the advocates of Civil Service reform as adequate proof that the simultaneous examination of a large number of candidates was a feasible proposition:

'the training college examinations were the first common test in England set on a general syllabus and taken in a number of separate places'.<sup>45</sup>

One of the most ancient and honourable professions was soldiering; 'Warfare, like government, had founded many a family fortune'.<sup>46</sup> Since it was considered a fit occupation for a

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43. Ibid., 81-84.

44. Roach, Public Examinations, pp. 45, 46, 49.

45. Ibid., p.50.

46. Reader, Professional Men, p.8.

gentleman many sons of the gentry chose it as a career. Army commissions were invariably purchased and often looked upon 'as an investment in a life annuity at rather a poor rate of interest'.<sup>47</sup> Any gain was in social status, not in remuneration. Both Woolwich and Sandhurst used examinations from an early date but the conditions of entry at Sandhurst were never as strict as those at Woolwich. Sandhurst supplied officers for the line regiments, Woolwich trained artillery and engineer officers. Established in 1741, the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst used a form of passing-out examination as early as 1765.<sup>48</sup> The Academy at Woolwich was established in 1806 and cadets were eligible to receive the Master-General's nomination after reaching the age of ten. At fourteen they were examined in the Arsenal by masters of the lower Academies but falling standards forced the introduction of new entrance regulations in 1813. The age of entry was raised to fourteen-sixteen. In 1835 an attempt was made to attract more candidates; the age of entry was raised to fifteen-seventeen years and geography, history and drawing were added to the syllabus. Classics, which had been dropped in 1813 was restored. Declining standards at Sandhurst led to the introduction in 1849 of an elementary qualifying examination. Candidates had to submit to a passing-out examination, conducted publicly, in which they were required to pass in six subjects.<sup>49</sup> After 1850 the speed of change accelerated. In that year, on 14 May, it was required that candidates for a commission and for promotion should undergo an examination into their knowledge and attainment.<sup>50</sup>

If the regulation hinted at a lack of professional expertise, the Crimean War brutally confirmed it. It was no longer enough for an Army officer to demonstrate on the battlefield those qualities usually seen in the hunting field, namely, courage, physical toughness, a determination to stand up for one's rights, a touchy sense of

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47. Ibid.

48. Thomas J.A. Smith, 'Some Aspects of Examinations, 1800-1858' (Southampton Univ. M.A. thesis, 1957), Pt.II, p.18.

49. Instructions issued by the Commander-in-Chief respecting Examinations to be required on the Admission or Promotion of Officers in the Army, see P.P. 1849, XXXII, p.109; P.P. 1850, XXXV, pp.101-103.

50. Smith, 'Aspects of Examinations', Pt.II, p.23.

honour and the ability to ride a spirited horse.<sup>51</sup>

The other Armed Service, the Royal Navy, had been traditionally a bastion of patronage. Although nominally abolished by an Order in Council in 1794, the system under which officer candidates went to sea under the patronage of ships' officers persisted into the nineteenth century. The minimum age at which boys might begin training was thirteen - eleven in the case of sons of naval officers - but the rule was often breached. A further six years had to pass before candidates could be considered for a lieutenancy.<sup>52</sup> Nor was this promotion automatic even in the eighteenth century since practical examinations had to be passed. This examination was frequently as chancy affair, depending as it did upon the whims and idiosyncrasies of the three examining Captains. Such examinations, however,

'were not specific applications of a systematically defined universal code, constituted and regulated by the central authorities'.<sup>53</sup>

Successful candidates had to wait until appointed to a ship before entitled to officer rank. Previous to such an appointment, which often hinged upon patronage, he was simply a 'Passed midshipman'. Following his first appointment the young lieutenant might advance to the position of commander and to the coveted rank of post Captain.

With the cessation of hostilities in the Napoleonic Wars, however, there occurred a massive demobilization of officer personnel. They returned to a society whose traditional structures of interest and political patronage were beginning to crumble. The emerging middle classes, with their powerful commercial and manufacturing bases, were beginning to agitate for a more equitable share of political power. Of those officers remaining in service, only those

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51. Reader, Professional Men, p.74.

52. The qualifying examination for a lieutenancy was instituted in 1677, see Millington, Seaman in the Making, p.11.

53. Christopher Dandeker, 'Patronage and bureaucratic control - The case of the naval officer in English society 1780-1850', British Journal of Sociology 1978, XXIX, p.305. For a more detailed account of the problem, see Christopher Dandeker, 'A Study of Bureaucratisation : Navy, State and Society 1780-1916' (Leicester Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1977).

with the most favourable connections enjoyed any prospect of promotion and by the 1830's and 1840's the situation was grim indeed. Senescent and incompetent men blocked all the routes to promotion and no matter how young or competent he might be, a Captain stood little chance of gaining his flag (as an Admiral).<sup>54</sup> There was an even more perilous consequence of this in terms of national security. Most senior naval officers had not been to sea in twenty years - since 1815, the end of the Napoleonic Wars - and thus they had been unable to practise seamanship, gunnery and other nautical skills, nor could they impart their knowledge to junior officers. Some minor skirmishes with foreign powers, notably the French, exposed the inefficiency and general unpreparedness of the Royal Navy. The Admiralty was left with little option but to intervene to control recruitment and promotion. The Naval College, which had been struggling for some years, was closed, and naval schoolmasters placed on board the larger ships. Despite the scheme's inadequacies, it did achieve a measure of uniformity in naval education.<sup>55</sup> Progress had also been made on the examination front. In a return to the House of Commons in 1839 the Admiralty was in a position to detail the qualifications and experience required for all appointments to the rank of cadet, midshipman and lieutenant - and the respective examination syllabuses.<sup>56</sup>

The reforms in the two Armed Services were gradual processes, introduced over many years in response to a variety of internal and external pressures. The reform of the Civil Service, on the other hand, was a deliberate attempt to use competitive examinations to accomplish a specific objective, namely the abolition of patronage.

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54. Lewis, The Navy in Transition, pp.72-95; Young, Victorian England, p.323.

55. For discussion of the Admiralty's educational policy 1800-1840, see Sullivan, 'The Origin and Development of Education in the Royal Navy, 1702-1902', pp.82-108.

56. Return showing what Examinations or Tests of Qualification are required on Admission into, or on Promotion of Officers in the Navy and Marines, P.P. 1849, XXXII, pp.241-243.

But if it was an attack on patronage, it was not an attack on the upper class. Gladstone, for example, recommended open competition as a means of reinforcing and extending 'the ties between the higher classes and the possession of administrative power'. He believed that the nation's aristocracy were 'superior, in natural gifts, on the average, to the mass'.<sup>57</sup> The men who were most closely concerned with the application of competitive examinations to public life were a very small coterie of politicians, government officials and academics who had been exposed to

'the strenuous academic competition, among a minority of brilliant undergraduates, which had been coming into fashion at Oxford and Cambridge since the beginning of the century'.<sup>58</sup>

The precedent for the home Civil Service examinations was supplied by the success of the examination system in the Indian Civil Service. The idea of competition had been proposed in 1813 by Lord Grenville and twenty years later an Act of Parliament had decreed that four candidates were to be nominated for each vacancy in the Indian Civil Service and that the candidates would be required to compete in an examination. In the event, however, the directors of the company failed to put the scheme into practice.<sup>59</sup> Entry to and promotion within the East India Company's Service was, however, by examination. In 1853 the India Act was passed which required all men entering the Indian Civil Service, whether in the capacity of soldiers or civilians, to be tested by examination.<sup>60</sup> In that same year Sir Stafford Northcote

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57. Roach, Public Examinations, p.193 : Roach acknowledges quotation from E. Hughes, 'Civil Service Reform, 1853-5', Public Administration, XXXII, pp.28/9.

58. Reader, Professional Men, p.86.

59. Roach, Public Examinations, p.24.

60. Return showing any Subjects of Examination to which Candidates for Cadetships in the East India Company's Service are subjected before entering the Service, or on Promotion therein, P.P. 1851, XLI, pp.195/6.

and Sir Charles Trevelyan, Macaulay's brother-in-law, reported at Gladstone's request, on the organization of the permanent Civil Service.<sup>61</sup> The Northcote-Trevelyan Report was presented to Parliament in 1854 and the next year an Order in Council set up the Civil Service Commission.<sup>62</sup> Another Order in Council in 1870 extended the principle of competitive examination to include entry to virtually every branch of the Civil Service.<sup>63</sup> A notable exception was the Foreign Office. By 1875 the revolution, if such it can be called, was complete. The old Tory world of privilege, patronage, purchase, nepotism and interest was effectively at an end. Whatever their failings, examinations as instruments to determine the fitness of candidates for professional or public life, or as tools of social engineering had come to stay.

Even a cursory study of the reforms in professional examinations in the nineteenth century reveals a considerable diversity in the way reforms were achieved. The apothecaries, for example, were able to set their own house in order, refusing to be intimidated or deterred by the very real pressures from the ancient medical corporations. The Apothecaries Act of 1815 was mainly the consequence of pressure from within, a desire on the part of the apothecaries and the apothecary-surgeons to improve their professional and social standing. But later in the century it was also the apothecaries who agitated for greater changes in the medical profession generally, leading to the Medical Act of 1858, and here the apothecaries could be said to be exerting pressure from without. Patricia Hollis defines pressure from without as constituting

'those more or less radical and mainly middle class pressure groups, pursuing specified goals and working for legislative change by putting pressure on parliament and on government; possessing a sophisticated organization over a defined period of time; and invoking a moral language, by claiming to speak for the People, the Nation or the Country'.<sup>64</sup>

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61. Roach, Public Examinations, pp.22/23. See also Montgomery, Examinations, p.21.

62. Montgomery, Examinations, p.24.

63. Reader, Professional Men, p.96.

64. Hollis, Pressure from Without, p.vii.1.

If the apothecaries of pre-1815 could not quite be accommodated within this definition, the apothecaries, or general practitioners as they came to be called, of the middle of the century could lay claim to be so included. Humanitarianism played a part in the agitations of the apothecaries inasmuch as the danger to the health of the community at large from the activities of unqualified practitioners was an important issue.

It would be less easy to attribute any religious motives to the reforms in the Royal Navy and the Army, although the prodigal waste of human life in the Crimea certainly touched the religious conscience of the nation and helped to accelerate change. In the main, however, naval and army reforms came about very gradually and were in response to the break-down of patronage and ancient interests, the changing nature of warfare at sea and on land, the changing balance of power among sovereign states, and the advance of technology. The demand for new standards of professional efficiency to meet outside threats was more instrumental in securing reforms in the Armed Forces than religious or political ideologies. Religion, however, played a crucial role in educational reforms, both in promoting reforms and in opposing reforms. If they had their faults, men like Kay-Shuttleworth, Shaftesbury and Gladstone, as well as a legion of others, were motivated by the highest Christian ideals. Education was not only a means of enlarging men's minds and expanding their opportunities, but it was seen as a powerful moral force as well. The abolition of interest and patronage was a major reason for the reforms in the Civil Service but only because patronage was seen to lead to gross, even dangerous inefficiency, as the Crimean experience had proved.

The first notable demands for reform in the merchant marine occurred during the 'thirties when the Buckingham-led campaign revealed the true state of the merchant service. It was a classical instance of pressure from without, even to the first customary step of external pressure groups, seeking direct Parliamentary power, persuading from within. Buckingham himself was the persuader from within. Morality also played an important part in the shipmaster debate. Almost every consul complained of drunkenness, brutality and debauchery aboard British merchant vessels. If the language of those seeking reforms was sometimes extreme, it was the accepted

currency of the times:

'taxes on windows became a tax on light, taxes on newspapers a tax on knowledge, taxes on soap a tax on cleanliness; the Corn Laws were a bread tax, church rates a tax on religion. Whatever was morally wrong could not of course be politically right'.<sup>65</sup>

The escalating losses at sea were certainly morally wrong but it is unlikely that even the most inflexible protectionist would have described them as politically right.

Why, then, did shipping interests oppose the introduction of compulsory shipmaster examinations, particularly when they were designed to improve the efficiency of the merchant service? There were several reasons, some logistical, some economic but probably the most powerful reasons were historical. Although the ancien regime of Toryism was principally agrarian, the term could be extended, as MacDonagh suggests, to include all who wished to maintain the constitutional status quo such as lawyers, churchmen and 'certain of the older trade interests such as sugar and shipping'.<sup>66</sup>

Traditional Toryism derived its power from aristocratic privilege and political patronage; its beliefs and customs were rooted deep in centuries of tradition. Aristocratic, paternalistic government was regarded not merely as the best system of government but, because it was believed to be naturally ordained, the only reasonable system of government. Government interference, except in the interests of the nation's safety, was seen as a threat to the very structure of traditional society. Toryism was characterized by a system of

'remarkably weak central control, remarkably autonomous local bodies, and remarkably small units of local government'.<sup>67</sup>

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65. Ibid., p.7.

66. MacDonagh, Early Victorian Government, p.12.

67. Ibid.

Accordingly, the notion of an external, centralized administrative authority as embodied, for example, in Fitzroy's proposals for the compulsory examination of ships' officers was quite unacceptable to shipping interests generally. Evidence presented to the 1843 Select Committee on Shipwrecks made it clear that although many shipowners recognized the need for some test to ascertain the professional competency of ships' officers they were opposed to examinations being imposed and controlled from without. The opposition of shipping interests to the 1850 Mercantile Marine Bill was such as to modify crucially proposals relating to the control and operation of the compulsory examination system. The Tory tradition of 'remarkably autonomous local bodies' was perpetuated in local marine boards.

It was not only the Tories and shipping interests who disliked state interference. Labouchere himself, a Whig, declared that he had no abstract reverence for centralization.<sup>68</sup> He simply had to bow to the demands of political and economic necessity. Many other political opponents had no fondness for intervention by the State. Mill owners, cotton manufacturers, iron founders, bankers, all revelling in their wealth and recently-acquired political power, joined with the social scientists in subscribing to the view that

'there was a natural harmony of economic interests, that interference by the state with the free play of these interests was injurious, and that consequently (with the relatively minor exception of what patently belonged to the category of public undertakings) a condition of uncluttered enterprise and unfettered competition should be immediately established'.<sup>69</sup>

There were many shipping societies throughout the country but the most prominent was the General Shipowners' Society. Although it did not function exclusively on the basis of economic self-interest, its prime concern was to maintain the status quo - and

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68. Hansard 1850, CXII, 111.

69. MacDonagh, Early Victorian Government, p.15.

shipping profits. To this end it sought to establish itself as the authoritative voice of British shipowners and the 'body to whose sense and opinions at large' the Government might refer.<sup>70</sup> It was, in fact, a clearly defined sectional pressure group. There is little evidence, however, to suggest that its aims were ever realized. It is true that it was consulted by government departments and by its members on a variety of shipping issues. But it is also true that in the latter stages of the examination debate during the 'forties, it was blatantly disregarded by government and shipowners alike. In essence, the Society was a London-based shipping organization with somewhat tenuous links with a limited number of shipping societies at the outports. The growth of shipowner organizations in the regions was paralleled by a rapid decline in the Society's financial and political resources. One of the Society's more prominent members, George F. Young, became the object of scorn and ridicule by his peers and was mercilessly lampooned by The Times. To suggest, as Wilde does, that an 'organisation such as the Shipowners' Society' might have made some efforts 'to police' the industry and 'to insist' that competent masters and mates be appointed, is to misjudge the whole purpose of the Society's activities.<sup>71</sup> Given the size, structure and heterogeneous nature of British shipping it would also seem to overstate the extent of the Society's support.

It is all too easy to stress the obstructive side of the General Shipowners' Society but its contribution to the cause of shipping, especially during the 'thirties, should not be forgotten. Nor did George F. Young spend all his days gratuitously opposing the Legislature. In 1839, for example, he strongly attacked the practice of carrying timber on the decks of ships and argued that

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70. The Times, 10 June 1831, p.1, col.5.

71. Wilde, p.104.

government should interfere in the interests of humanity.<sup>72</sup> Young's objections to compulsory examinations were rooted in the fear of centralized government with its implications of interference with the right of a shipowner to manage his own private affairs. Other contemporary reforms produced their quota of violent opposition. Such thinking men as Toulmin Smith, Oastler, Newdegate, Disraeli and Urquhart frequently resorted to extremes of language in their denunciation of measures like the new poor law, public health, and factory improvements.<sup>73</sup> And even Young in his wildest flights of fancy never attained the state of near-paranoia of the ultra-Tory Colonel Sibthorp in his diatribes against the railways.<sup>74</sup> All these outbursts seem to have been inspired by an irrational fear of state intervention and government growth. The latter was invariably equated with corruption and economic extravagance.<sup>75</sup>

There can be little doubt that the progress of the examination debate was constrained by the shipping interest's intransigent stance on the issue. In February 1848 Labouchere told the House that no compulsory system of shipmaster examinations had been introduced by Parliament because of shipping opposition.<sup>76</sup> Later that year, before the Select Committee on Miscellaneous Expenditure, he agreed that great advantages would be derived from a compulsory system but pointed out that the merchant service were reluctant to be subjected to it.<sup>77</sup> But it would be easy to overstate the extent to which shipping interests influenced government strategy on the certification issue. There were many shipping interests who not

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72. Report from the Select Committee on the Shipwreck of Timber Ships, P.P. 1839, IX, p.287, Q.944.

73. Lubenow, p.184.

74. Ibid., p.133.

75. MacDonagh, Early Victorian Government, pp.17/8. Given this background, it is not altogether surprising that the emergence of a central authority for English education was a 'slow, tortuous, makeshift, muddled, unplanned, disjointed and ignoble process', see Bishop, Rise of a Central Authority, p.276; George M. Young, Portrait of an Age : Victorian England (1977), p.66.

76. Hansard 1848, XCVI, 671/2.

77. Report of the Select Committee on Miscellaneous Expenditure, P.P. 1847/8, XVIII, Pt. I, pp.429, Q.5627.

only recognized the need for some form of licensing examination for ships' officers but were prepared to campaign vigorously for its introduction. Gladstone alluded to this conflict of opinion within the industry during the debate on Fitzroy's Bill. He accepted that there was a strong desire for such a measure but suggested that the time was 'not ripe for legislation'.<sup>78</sup> Wilde argues that the shipping interest significantly constrained government action on the examination issue and claims that it was mainly because of its opposition that government could do no more than to institute voluntary examinations. She also suggests that shipowners brought regulation upon themselves by their own lack of concern.<sup>79</sup> Such arguments fail to acknowledge fully the strategic situation in which the examination campaign was located and discounts the crucial role played by government departments, particularly the Board of Trade, in the developing debate about shipmaster competency and certification.

As to the attitude of government itself, three questions were sent in the introduction to this study. First, to what extent was the Government's apparent reluctance to interfere in the debate consistent with general government policy towards state intervention and towards nineteenth century administrative reform? Secondly, was the lack of an appropriate government department a reason for the Government's apparent procrastination, and, thirdly, did the Government finally intervene to rescue the industry or to save the nation?

State interference was anathema to almost every interest, justified only when safety and the national interest were concerned. Even the most vigorous campaigners disliked state intervention as a principle. It was opposed in nearly every case of reform, not just in the shipping debate. Only when the nation's commercial and

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78. Hansard 1842, LXV, 767. See also Gladstone Papers, Add.MSS.44552 ff.16b, 17; Gladstone wrote to Fitzroy suggesting that he should allow the shipmaster examination scheme to mature before bringing it forward.

79. Wilde, pp. 149, 163, 181.

economic welfare was threatened, was persuaded to act. Free trade was bound up with the idea of individual enterprise and government intervention had little place in private and personal commercial endeavours. The 'natural harmony of economic interests' which embraced every commercial interest, would be injured by state interference. There were many men in Parliament who subscribed to this view. Clearly, state intervention would require the tacit support of a consensus of opinion within and outside the industry. But information about the nature and extent of the shipmaster competency problem was sparse. Evidence on the subject had to be collected and assessed, a process which ruled out any precipitate action on the issue. The 'forties were not the most propitious period for government intervention in the shipping industry. Centralization, one of the main planks in the Government's planned structure for marine reform, was still a thorny problem. Protection, as embodied in Corn Laws and the Navigation Laws remained to inhibit direct and positive action. In addition, Parliamentary time was increasingly taken up with railway legislation, a matter directly involving the Board of Trade, thus effectively preventing it from dealing with the other great transport industry, the mercantile marine.

Was the absence of an appropriate government department a significant issue? Undoubtedly it was. There was an increasing awareness of the need for professionalism in every walk of life.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, the role of government was expanding as it moved away from the ancient oligarchical structure. The Board of Trade was increasing its responsibilities as it made the transition from a Committee of the Privy Council to a full executive government department. Within such a changing climate, the Government would recognize that the superintending of such a large and important industry as the merchant

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80. Sir Ernest L. Woodward, The Age of Reform, 1815-1870 (1938), pp. 15/16; Asa Briggs, The Age of Improvement (1959), pp. 332/3.

marine, required a separate, professionally-orientated department.

Free trade, meant unfettered competition for trade but the Navigation Laws imposed restrictions on both trade and conditions of employment. The abolition of the Navigation Laws was, therefore, an extension of the logic of free trade. Thus the liberation of trade demanded regulations to open trade. It also imposed demands upon government to ensure that British shipping was fully equipped to compete for trade on the open market. Indeed, it was the threat from foreign fleets which resulted in the relatively early appearance of examinations in the merchant marine. The voluntary scheme was introduced in 1845, well ahead of the great national examination impetus. Compulsory shipmaster examinations were called for, the Register-General of Seamen pointed out, not only to meet the need that those in charge of life and property should possess appropriate qualifications,

'but in order the better to enable Masters of British vessels to compete with foreigners for freights in the markets of the world, by the production of satisfactory creditentials as to their competency'.<sup>81</sup>

Whatever the humanitarian reasons, whatever the moral character of many seafarers, the economic factor must have weighed very heavily in the minds of those men whose business it was to make the ultimate decisions. The survival of the island nation depended upon a thriving mercantile marine. But it did not always follow that action was taken even when the necessity for particular reforms was recognized:

'Public health was a burning issue in the 'forties, yet the environment of towns did not really improve until the 'seventies and 'eighties. The plea for a system of public education had been made in the 'thirties yet no effective Education Act was passed until 1870'.<sup>82</sup>

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81. The Mercantile Navy List, Jan. 1850, p.vi.

82. Roach, Social Reform, p.96.

Dicey's laissez-faire interpretation of nineteenth-century central government growth has long since been laid to rest but, as Lubenow observes, its ghost remains remarkably lively.<sup>83</sup> The controversy concerning the proper interpretation of nineteenth-century social and administrative development continues unabated. Roberts argues that the growth of the early Victorian welfare state was not the consequence of an intellectual climate created by the Benthamites but was instead the result of specific measures, uninformed by theory, drawn up to meet specific grievances.<sup>84</sup> This view accords with Prouty's description of the development of the Board of Trade in its transition from an advisory committee of the Privy Council into an administrative department of state:

'The problems were new, the solutions various. Expedients were tried with varying success. The prejudice against the central government, against any legislative panacea, against any doctrinaire solution was too strong for any abrupt and thorough reform. It had to be done bit by bit'.<sup>85</sup>

It was exactly this kind of incrementalist approach to government growth to which Toulmin Smith was objecting when he wrote:

'we are losing sight daily, more and more, of principles and are allowing ourselves to be made the dupes of presumptuous empiricism'.<sup>86</sup>

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83. Lubenow, p.9. For a useful analysis of some critical and controversial interpretations of nineteenth-century administrative growth, see Valerie Cromwell, 'Interpretations of Nineteenth-Century Administration : An Analysis', Victorian Studies 1966, IX, pp.245-255.
84. David Roberts, 'Jeremy Bentham and the Victorian Administrative State', Victorian Studies 1959, II, p.210.
85. Prouty, p.102.
86. Lubenow, p.27; from Joshua Toulmin Smith, Government by Commissions Illegal and Pernicious. The Nature and Effects of All Commissions of Inquiry and other Crown Appointed Commissions, the Constitutional Principles of Taxation; and the Rights, Duties and Importance of Local Self-Government (1849), p.367.

MacDonagh contends that Benthamism exerted no influence upon the general climate of opinion or even upon the overwhelming majority of public servants. 'In general', he goes on,

'nothing is more mistaken than a "blanket" prima facie assumption that "useful", "rational", or centralizing changes in the nineteenth century were Benthamic in origin'.<sup>87</sup>

On the other hand, Parris and Hart argue that Bentham and Benthamism had a positive and traceable effect upon nineteenth-century social and administrative reforms. Hart suggests that to take a contrary view belittles the role of men and ideas and she roundly chastises those who subscribe to the notion of historical process and unseen and unseeing forces. Using a similar technique to Roberts, that of analysing specific acts of legislation, she seeks to show how Benthamism contributed to administrative growth.<sup>88</sup> Roberts, however, does not dismiss Bentham quite so summarily as Hart asserts. Even if he refuses to concede the omnipresence of Benthamism in every reform, he does at least acknowledge

'the foresight, the clarity, and the logic with which he expressed those truths which other forces, far stronger than his own ideas, would bring to pass. He saw more comprehensively than his contemporaries the necessity of an expanded administrative state'.<sup>89</sup>

Roberts proposed that Bentham's failure lay in taking the maxim of the greatest good for the greatest number, a notion which was not apparently his own, and making it

'a formula too neat, too simplified, too all embracing to serve as an explanation of the complexities and passions of human nature'.<sup>90</sup>

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87. Oliver MacDonagh, 'The Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Government: A Reappraisal', Historical Journal 1958, I, p.65. See also Oliver MacDonagh 'The Challenge to Dicey' in Valerie Cromwell (ed.), Revolution or Evolution: British Government in the Nineteenth Century (1977), pp.31-43.
88. Jenifer Hart, 'Nineteenth-Century Social Reform: a Tory Interpretation of History', Past and Present (1958), XXXI, pp.39-61.
89. Roberts, 'Jeremy Bentham', Victorian Studies 1959, II, p.207.
90. Ibid., p.208.

Roberts is on shakier ground, however, when he suggests that few politicians and government servants were influenced by Bentham.<sup>91</sup> This is sheer conjecture and it is just as tenable to accept the opposite view, a point made by Parris when he takes MacDonagh to task:

'If it is wrong to assume that men were influenced by Bentham's ideas, it is equally wrong to assume, as Dr. MacDonagh does, that they were not'.<sup>92</sup>

Hart, in claiming so all-pervasive an influence for Benthamism and in declaring that those who disagree are guilty of belittling men and ideas, seems herself to be guilty of diminishing the individuality of men. Her view takes too little account of the astonishing variety and complexity of early Victorian opinion. On many similar kinds of social and political issues, politicians of every persuasion consistently voted inconsistently but saw no apparent inconsistency in doing so. Joseph Hume, for example, would not consider his support for railway legislation and his opposition to the Corn Laws as ideological contradictions.<sup>93</sup> Hume also sided with the shipowners, among them George F. Young, in denouncing the 1850 Mercantile Marine Bill.<sup>94</sup> Lord Brougham favoured national education but opposed the repeal of the Navigation Laws.<sup>95</sup> The Times opposed government growth in the form of the new poor law but supported it in the form of the Public Health Act.<sup>96</sup> In such a tangle of conflict,

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91. Ibid., p.207; also see William Aydelotte, 'The Conservative and Radical Interpretations of Early Victorian Social Legislation', Victorian Studies 1967, XI, p.227.

92. Henry Parris, 'The Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Government : A Reappraisal Reappraised', Historical Journal 1960, III, p.28.

93. Lubenow, p.129 Cf. Hollis, Pressure from Without, p.24 ; William L. Burn, The Age of Equipoise (1964), p.134.

94. Hansard 1850, CXII, 114.

95. Roberts, 'Jeremy Bentham', Victorian Studies 1959, II, p.197.

96. Lubenow, p.24.

contradiction and compromise as then existed, it would not have been easy for the ordered symmetry of Benthamism to survive intact. What does seem easier is to discount a powerful Benthamite influence in marine reform if for no other reason than his Constitutional Code 'specifically exempted merchant shipping from the regulations of the Ministry of Interior'.<sup>97</sup> It was true that Bentham assisted in Poulett Thomson's election in 1828 but Poulett Thomson's policies revealed little trace of Benthamism.<sup>98</sup> Nor was Henry Labouchere a Benthamite.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, Bentham would hardly have approved of the rather uncertain course which Labouchere pursued, or was compelled to pursue, in his drive towards reforming the merchant marine. Even as late as 1848 Labouchere could not be certain that the new Department would be located in the Board of Trade; Russell favoured the Admiralty. Labouchere pointed out that such a move would generate discontent and jealousy among the shipping interest.<sup>100</sup> Sir Denis Le Marchant's inter-departmental memorandum to Labouchere in 1849 acknowledges no debt to political theory.<sup>101</sup> It was simply the response of a disciplined professional mind to the problems besetting the industry he represented. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of such permanent officials as Sir Denis Le Marchant and Sir John Shaw-Lefevre in the story of nineteenth-century social and administrative reform.

Lubenow explains the social administrative changes which occurred in the middle years of the nineteenth century somewhat differently. He proposes that two conflicting views were at work simultaneously, one historical, the other incrementalist. The first perspective,

'with its reverence for traditional institutions and practices, was congenitally unable to adapt, with any ease at least, to novel political and social structures'.<sup>102</sup>

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97. Roberts, 'Jeremy Bentham', Victorian Studies 1959, II, pp.205/6.

98. Prouty, p.105.

99. Roberts, 'Jeremy Bentham', Victorian Studies 1959, II, p.205.

100. Russell Papers, P.R.O. 30/22/7A, ff.1/2.

101. Parkhurst, Ships of Peace, pp.154-166.

102. Lubenow, p.186.

The second perspective, the incrementalist view, emphasized the necessity of cautious piecemeal modification in existing institutional arrangements. But, as Parris points out, however slowly the current seemed at times to be moving towards increasing state intervention, its direction was never in doubt.<sup>103</sup> It would appear that the reform of the British mercantile marine is best accommodated within Lubenow's theory of social and administrative change. The formation of the Marine Department of the Board of Trade, like its railway counterpart some ten years earlier, in 1840, was not simply an isolated occurrence but part of a pattern of expanding state intervention. Even as late as 1850, however, the reverence for traditional institutions and practices was apparent, asserting itself in the shipowners' insistence on local marine boards.

Did shipmaster examinations fulfil the expectations of their promoters? Several writers imply that the voluntary scheme was a dismal failure.<sup>104</sup> This study takes a contrary view. The voluntary scheme was not an ad hoc measure the parameters of which were determined by shipping interests. It was a pilot examining scheme introduced to highlight the problems involved in examining candidates located in different centres on a general syllabus. Many issues emerged to demand the attention of the Board of Trade. The Board was called upon to act as auditor, arbitrator, and, to a certain extent, innovator. It introduced regulations to combat the emergence of an increasing number of forged certificates and also authorized inquiries to be made into the alleged misconduct of certificated masters and mates. In April 1849, for example, following several instances of false testimonials coming to light,

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103. Parris, Government and the Railways, p.207.

104. Alfred G. Course. The Merchant Navy, A social history (1963), p.211 : Clifford Jeans, 'The First Statutory Qualifications for Seafarers', Journal of Transport History 1973, VI, p.254; J.H. Quick, 'The History of Masters' and Mates' Examinations', Journal of the Honourable Company of Master Mariners 1955, VI, p.61.

the Board circularized the examining boards directing that all certificates of service should be verified by the Registrar-General of Seamen.<sup>105</sup> All the examining boards complied except those at Liverpool and South Shields. They were reminded about the directive in June 1849 and informed that six cases of impersonation had recently been detected.<sup>106</sup> Both boards acquiesced. On detecting one of the forgeries the Deputy-Master of the London Trinity House sought the Board's advice as to the procedure to be followed. He was advised that it was 'highly desirable that the offender should be prosecuted'.<sup>107</sup> In consequence, one of the miscreants, a Mr. Francis Toshack was convicted in May 1850.<sup>108</sup> The Board took a firm line on instances of misconduct on the part of licensed officers, on professional and on moral grounds. In several instances certificates were withdrawn, notices of the withdrawals were published in the London Gazette, Lloyd's Register of Shipping and the Society of Shipping at Liverpool.<sup>109</sup> Suggestions that the Board of Trade adopted a passive role during the operation of the voluntary scheme would seem untenable.<sup>110</sup>

The voluntary scheme evoked a limited response. There was little incentive for candidates to come forward; they had little to gain and perhaps everything to lose. Even had they been willing to submit to examination on principle, the lack of an elementary education made it difficult for them to do so. Despite these drawbacks more than three thousand certificates were awarded which, as Blackmore suggests, proved that there were

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105. B.T. 3/37, p.368.

106. B.T. 3/39, p.47.

107. TH. By-Min. 1849, p.307.

108. B.T. 4/23, 1619.

109. B.T. 3/39, pp.456, 476, 485; B.T. 3/40, p.19.

110. Wilde, for example, claims that the Board of Trade, apart from implementing the 1845 Order in Council, 'made no other efforts to interfere in or supervise the examinations', see Wilde, p.165. For similar assertions, see Blackmore, The British Mercantile Marine, p.71; Smith, The Board of Trade, p.104.

'some masters and mates in the Mercantile Marine who were sufficiently well educated to pass from their quarter-decks to the examination room, and successfully obtain a certificate of competency, with little or no assistance from special teaching'.<sup>111</sup>

As to the overall results of the voluntary scheme it would seem, as the table and figures overleaf indicates, that the response was one of steady growth, accelerating between 1847-8 when the Admiralty's order restricting the command of government-hired ships came into operation.<sup>112</sup> During the final year of the scheme, however, the total number of certificates awarded tended to flatten out; a decline in masters' certificates being offset by an increase in mates. The decrease in masters' certificates coincided with an appreciable percentage drop in the certificates awarded by the London Trinity House. Although there is no evidence to suggest that the majority of London officers were certificated, it is worth remembering that the London Trinity House had awarded almost 60% of the total number of certificates awarded under the voluntary scheme.<sup>113</sup> The increase in the number of mates' certificates over the final year might be partly explained in terms of a growing awareness among less able seafarers of the need to become certificated before the introduction of a compulsory system of examinations. The figure also highlights the disparity between the number of certificates awarded in the three main categories. The award of 'extra' certificates remained at a low level, apart from the controversial period marking the entry of the Liverpool examining board into the examining system. It would also seem that the growing involvement of shipping interests in the examination debate had stimulated an increasing number of candidates to come forward for examination at

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111. Blackmore, The British Mercantile Marine, p.182.

112. The Mercantile Navy List, Jan. 1850, p.v.

113. See Fig. V, p. 313.

TABLE X

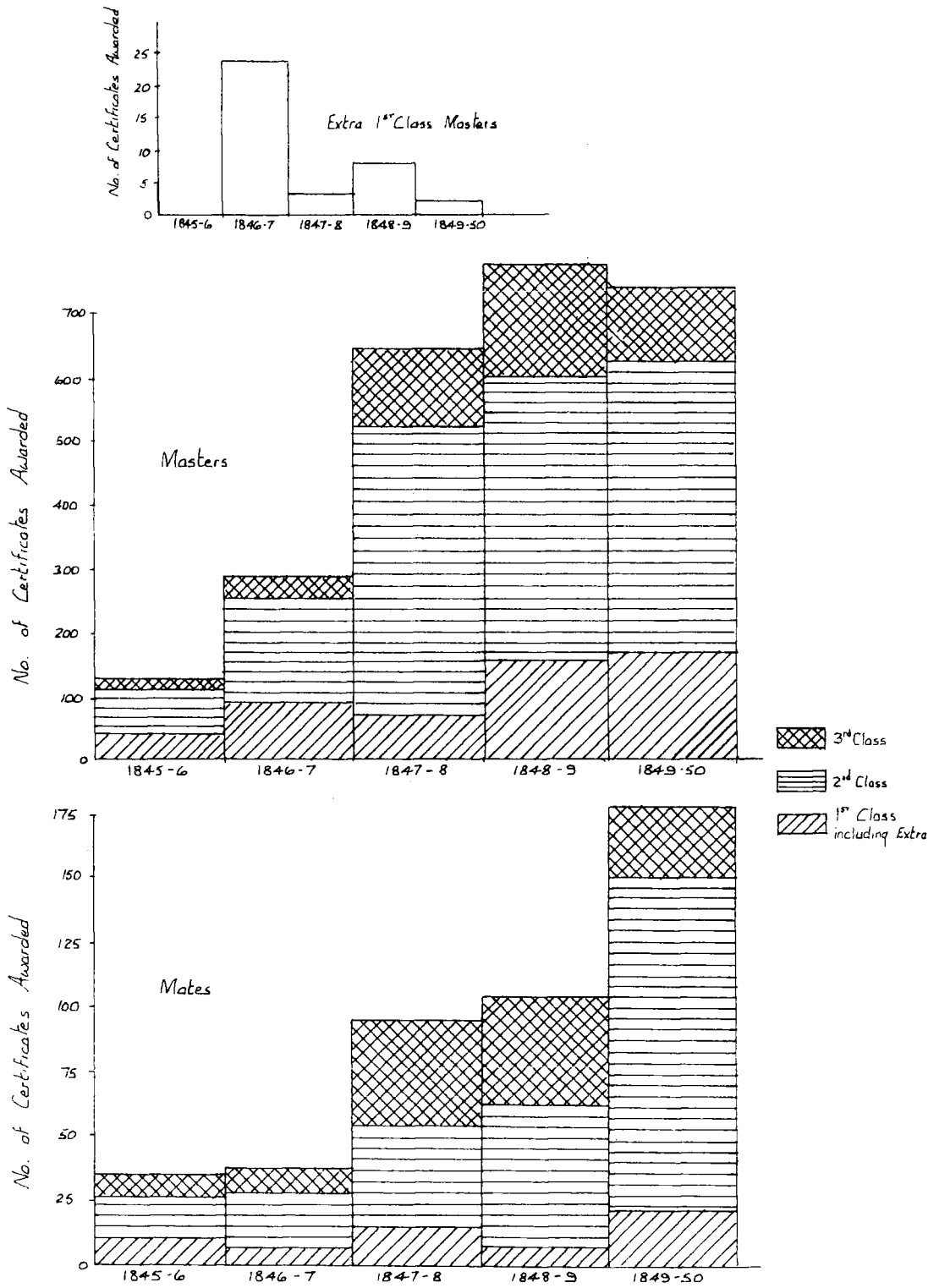
Total number of Certificates of Competency awarded 1845-1850:  
numbers, class and awarding authority

Examining Board	MASTERS					MATES				Total no. of cert. awarded by each board
	X	1	2	3	T	1	2	3	T	
London	2	111	1037	323	1473	4	175	117	296	1769
Dundee	2	40	49	5	96	9	17	2	28	124
Hull	-	8	29	6	43	0	1	2	3	46
Newcastle	3	30	61	9	103	3	5	0	8	111
Leith	4	36	22	0	62	11	7	1	19	81
Gloucester	-	2	3	0	5	1	5	0	6	11
Great Yarmouth	-	15	19	6	40	2	2	2	6	46
Milford	-	1	1	0	2	0	4	0	4	6
Plymouth	3	13	39	17	72	2	15	11	28	100
Portsmouth	1	22	12	1	36	5	5	0	10	46
Glasgow	2	75	45	0	122	9	10	0	19	141
Liverpool	20	129	101	1	251	12	16	0	28	279
South Shields	-	21	178	87	286	1	1	0	2	288
	37	503	1596	455	2591	59	263	135	457	3048

Source: B.T. 6/218,219 ; B.T. 143/1, The Mercantile Navy List, July 1850, pp. 20-107.

FIGURE IV

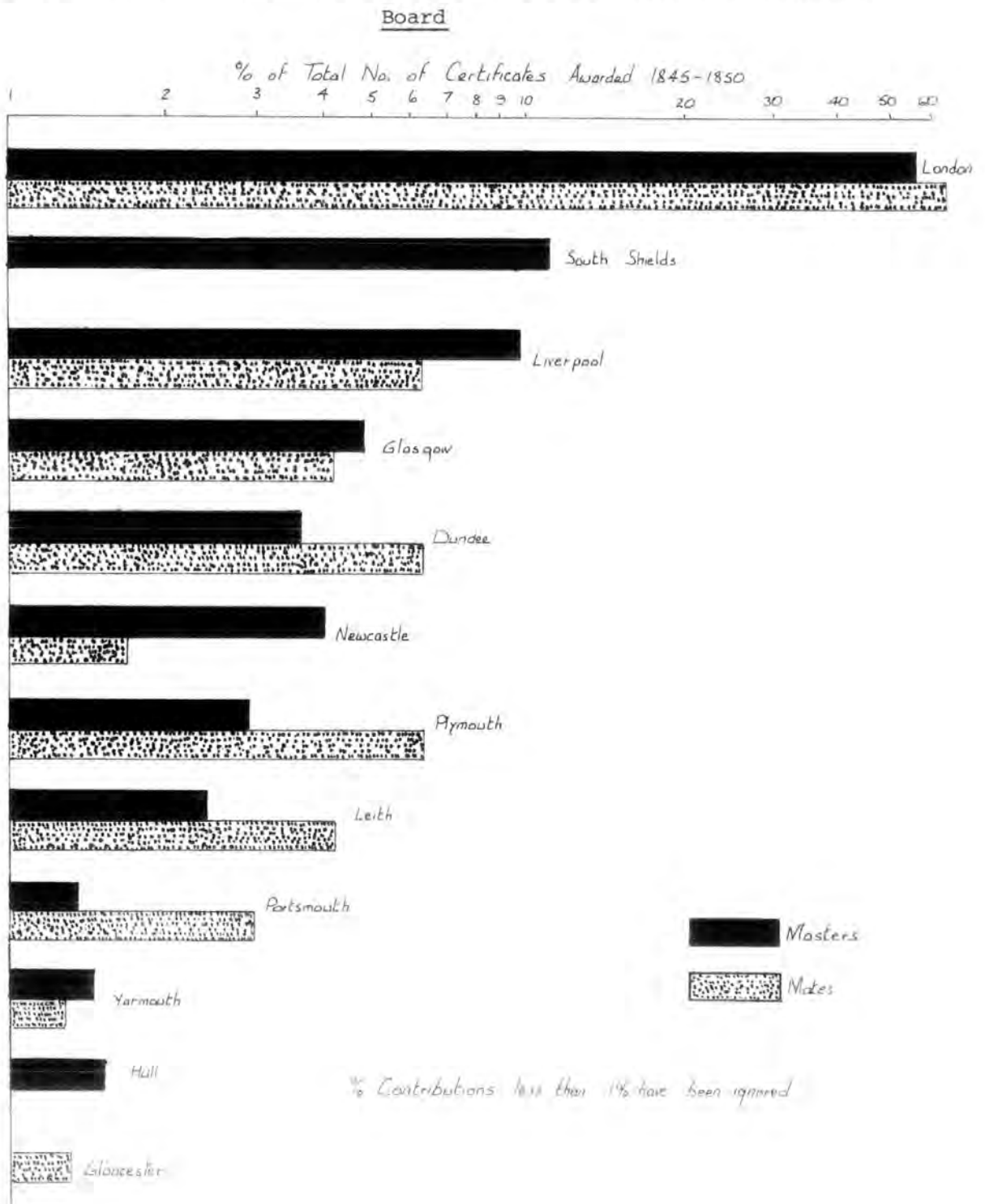
Certificates of Competency awarded 1845-1850 : patterns of development



Source: B.T. 6/218,219, B.T. 143/1. The Mercantile Navy List, July, 1850, pp. 20-107.

FIGURE V

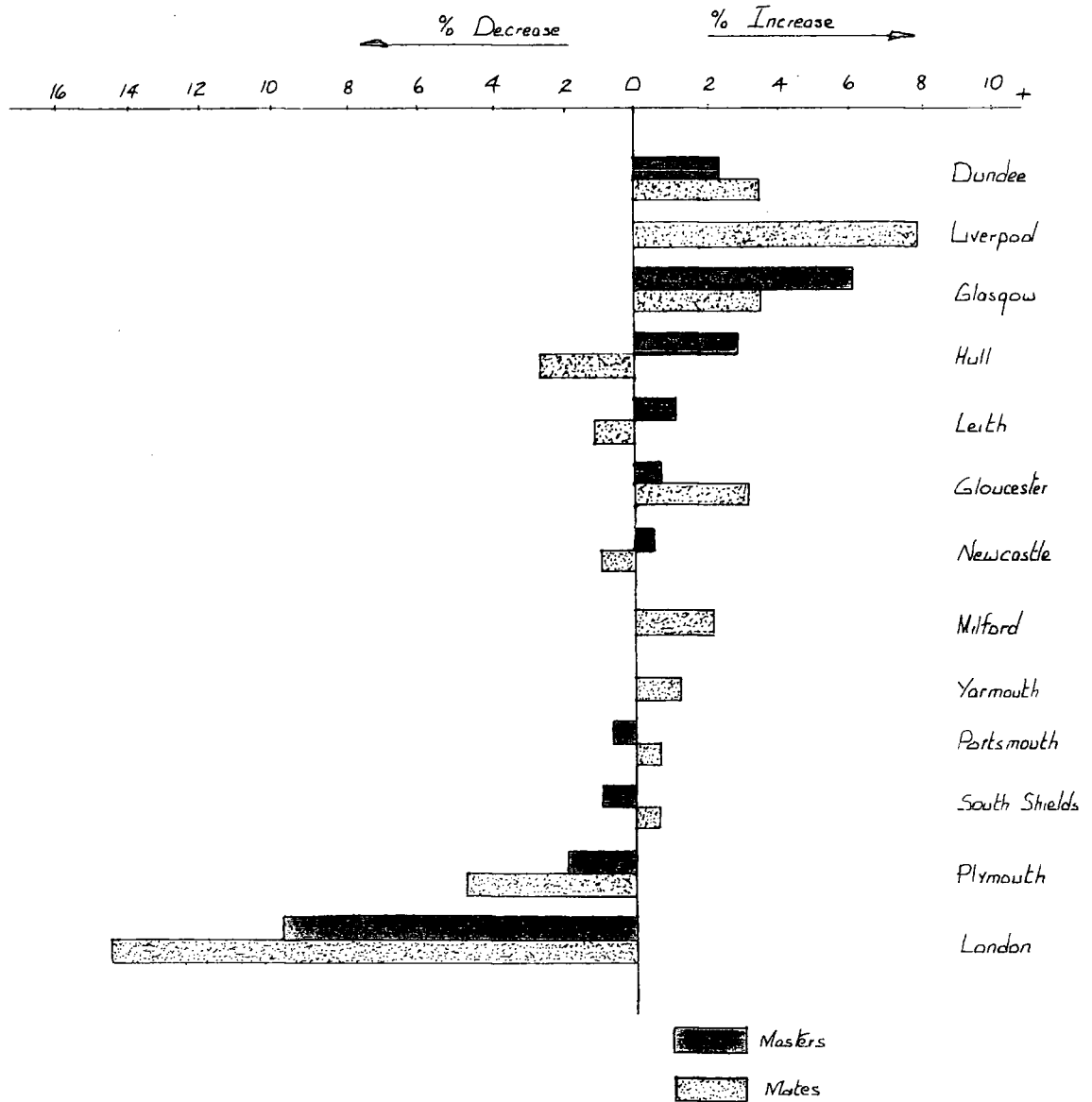
Certificates of Competency awarded 1845-1850 : contribution by each



Source: B.T. 6/219, 219 ; B.T. 143/1. The Mercantile Navy List, July, 1850, pp. 20-107.

FIGURE VI

Change in percentage distribution of Certificates of Competency  
awarded between 1849 and 1850



Source: B.T. 6/218,219 ; B.T. 143/1. The Mercantile Navy List,  
July, 1850, pp. 20-107.

those ports.<sup>114</sup> Before turning away from the issue of voluntary examinations it seems important to stress that the introduction of the scheme served at least two other purposes; it placated the vociferous supporters of compulsory examinations and provided time and information for government to draw up proposals for the introduction of a more formalized, and compulsory, system of ship-master examinations.

The introduction of compulsory examinations in 1850 had little immediate effect. Standards in the compulsory scheme were deliberately set lower than in the voluntary scheme. The Board of Trade explained that as the examinations were now compulsory the qualifications had been set 'as low as possible'. It warned, however, that it was the

'intention of the Board of Trade to raise the standard in the course of time, whenever ... the general attainments of officers in the merchant service shall render it possible to do so without inconvenience'.<sup>115</sup>

The Board urged officers in the Mercantile Marine to 'educate themselves'.<sup>116</sup> Not surprisingly, this hopeful exhortation produced little effect. There was some improvement in the examining system when, in 1872, the Senior Examiner in London was given the task of setting all the written papers and sending them, along with the relevant answers, to the various examining boards.<sup>117</sup> And on a happier note still, there was a notable decrease in the numbers of lives lost at sea, although whether this was entirely due to the efficacy of examinations is debatable.<sup>118</sup> What is clear is that

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114. See Fig. VI p. 314.

115. Notice of Examinations of Masters and Mates established in pursuance of the Mercantile Marine Act, 19 Dec. 1850, p.7.

116. Ibid.

117. Quick, 'Masters' and Mates' Examinations', Journal of the Hon.Co. of Master Mariners 1973, VI, p.63.

118. See Henry Jeula, 'A Few Statistics relating to Shipping Casualties' Journal of the Statistical Society 1964, XXVII, p.232.

the introduction of compulsory examinations under the aegis of the Board of Trade not only failed to stimulate the provision of nautical education, but, in the context of professionalism, usurped two crucial functions of a potential professional association - control of the education, training and licensing of prospective members and of their admission to the profession.<sup>119</sup> Even today there is no requirement for ships' officers to attend a formal course of training in an educational establishment prior to examination, apart from statutory regulations relating to basic sea survival, first aid at sea, radar observation etc. Despite the introduction of sophisticated navigational aids, safety at sea remains a seemingly intractable problem. The topic figured prominently at the second West European conference on marine technology held in London in May 1977. The Times report on the conference at which, predictably, the problem of shipboard competency was raised, noted that while the vast majority of accidents was attributable to some extent to human error, there was a 'surprising lack of standards relating crew qualifications and training'.<sup>120</sup> In May 1979 the Naval Architect reported the continued high level of marine casualties and emphasized the need for some 'serious soul searching' among those responsible for safety at sea.<sup>121</sup> Such comments have a familiar ring.

Examination reform is rarely an easy or a coherent development. Many elements are involved in the process. Factors influencing the progress of the shipmaster examination debate included government policy in relation to trade, pressure group behaviour, the weight of public opinion and the historical precedent of examinations. The

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119. Kennerley, 'Education of the Merchant Seaman', p.188;  
Mercantile Marine Magazine 1870, XVII, pp.138-145.

120. The Times, 27 May 1977, p.23, col.4.

121. Journal of the Royal Institution of Naval Architects 1979,  
No. 3, p.49.

emergence of examinations for British masters and mates was a complex and subtle process. The decisions made were shaped by history and tradition, conditioned by religious, moral and political ideologies and modified to accommodate the demands of particular interests. In other words, this study is testimony to the validity of multiple causation in educational decision-making and a warning against the temptation to view the process of examination reform as an implicitly rational and ingenuous process.

## APPENDIX I

### Dramatis Personae

These brief biographical notes have been compiled primarily from entries in the D.N.B., Who's Who of British Members of Parliament Vol.I, the records of the General Shipowners' Society and of the London Trinity House.

James Silk Buckingham, 1786-1855. Traveller, author, politician and social reformer. Seafaring experience as seaman and shipmaster, Journalist in India but was expelled for attacking the Government. M.P. (Whig) for Sheffield 1832-1837.

Aaron Chapman, 1771-1850. Seaman, shipmaster and merchant. An Elder Brother of the London Trinity House; an East India Proprietor, a Director of the London Docks and the Hudson Bay Companies. A founder and prominent member of the General Shipowners' Society. M.P. (Tory) for Whitby, 1832-1847.

Edward Cardwell, Viscount Cardwell, 1813-1886. Educated at Winchester and Balliol College, Oxford; B.A. 1835. M.P. (Tory/Whig) for Clitheroe, 1842-1847; for Liverpool, 1847-52; for Oxford City, 1852. President of the Board of Trade 1852-1855, Created Viscount Cardwell, 1874.

Earl of Dalhousie, see Sir James Andrew Brown Ramsay.

Robert Fitzroy, 1805-1865. Vice-Admiral, hydrographer and meteorologist. Commanded the Beagle during Darwin's expeditions. M.P. (Tory) for Durham City 1841-1843. Governor of New Zealand 1843, F.R.S. 1843. Head of Meteorological Dept. of Board of Trade 1854. Committed suicide 1865.

Thomas Milner Gibson, 1806-1884. Educated at Charterhouse and Trinity College, Cambridge, B.A., thirty-six wrangler 1830. M.P. (Tory) for Ipswich, 1837-1839 but resigned on change of views. M.P. (Whig) for Manchester, 1841-1857. Vice-President of the Board of Trade, 1846-1848. President of the Board of Trade, 1859-1866.

Earl of Granville, see Leveson-Gower.

John Charles Herries, 1778-1855. Educated at University of Leipsig. M.P. (Tory and protectionist) for Harwich 1823-1841; for Stamford 1847-1853. Secretary to the Treasury 1823-1827; Chancellor of the Exchequer 1827-1828; Master of the Mint 1828-1830; President of the Board of Trade 1830; Secretary at War 1834-1835; President of the Board of Control 1852.

Henry Labouchere, 1st Baron Taunton, 1798-1869. Educated at Christ Church, Oxford; 1st class in classics 1820, M.A. 1828. M.P. (Whig) for St. Michaels, 1826-1830, for Taunton, 1830-1859. Lord of the Admiralty, 1832-1834; Vice-President of the Board of Trade, 1835-1839; President of the Board of Trade, 1839-1841 and from 1847-1852. An Elder Brother of the London Trinity House. Created Baron Taunton 1859.

Sir Denis Le Marchant, 1795-1874. Educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge. Called to Bar 1823. M.P. (Whig) for Worcester, 1846-1847. Joint-Assistant Secretary to the Board of Trade, 1836-1841; Joint-Secretary to the Board of Trade, 1848-1850. Chief Clerk to the House of Commons, 1850-1871. Created Baronet, 1841.

Granville George Leveson-Gower, 2nd Earl Granville, 1815-1891  
Educated at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford; B.A. 1839. M.P. (Whig) for Morpeth, 1836-1841; for Lichfield, 1841. Vice-President of the Board of Trade, 1848-1852. Later Foreign Secretary and Leader of the Whig and Liberal peers in the House of Lords.

George Lyall, 1784-1853. Merchant and shipowner. Chairman of the London General Shipowners' Society 1823/5. Chairman of the Hon. East India Company, a Director of the London Docks and Chairman of the Indemnity Assurance Company. M.P. (Tory) for the City of London 1833-1835, and from 1841-1847.

James Murray, 1806-1878. Clerk in Navy Pay Office 1823, entered Foreign Office 1826. Thanked by H.M. Government for services in connection with the Mercantile Marine Act in 1846. Senior Clerkship 1851; Assistant Under-Secretary of State Foreign Affairs 1858 - 1839. C.B. 1869. F.R.G.S.

George Palmer, 1772-1853. Commander in East India Company 1788-1799. East India merchant and shipowner. Chairman of the General Shipowners' Society 1832. Prominent member of the National Lifeboat Institution 1826-1853. M.P. (Tory) for Essex South 1836-1847.

George Richardson Porter, 1792-1852. Statistician; failed in business as a sugar-broker and devoted himself to economics and statistics. Supervised the establishment of the Statistical Department of the Board of Trade 1834. Joint-Secretary to the Board of Trade 1847-1852.

Sir James Andrew Brown Ramsay, 10th Earl and 1st Marquis of Dalhousie, 1812-1860. Educated at Harrow and Christ Church, Oxford; B.A., 1833. M.P. (Tory) for Haddingshire, 1837-1838. Vice-President of the Board of Trade, 1843-1845; President of the Board of Trade 1845-1846. Governor-General of India, 1847.

Sir John George Shaw-Lefevre, 1797-1879. Educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge; senior wrangler, 1818; fellow 1819. Called to Bar 1825. On Commission which founded Colony of Australia 1834; Commissioner for carrying into effect new Poor-Law Amendment Act 1834; Vice-Chancellor of London University 1842-1862; Joint-Assistant Secretary to the Board of Trade 1841-1848. On Ecclesiastical Commission 1847; Deputy-Clerk of the Parliaments 1848 and Clerk 1855-1875. Served on inquiry into Indian Civil Service 1851; Civil Service Commissioner 1855. F.R.S., 1820; K.C.B., 1857; D.C.L. Oxford, 1858.

Joseph Somes, 1790-1845. Seaman, shipmaster and shipowner. Was the architect of his own fortune being the most extensive shipowner in London. Liberal patron of charitable institutions and a Governor of the New Zealand Company. M.P. (Tory) for Dartmouth 1844-1845. Was unsuccessful in his attempts to be elected to the Elder Brethren of the London Trinity House.

Lord Sydenham, see Charles Poulett Thomson.

Lord Taunton, see Henry Labouchere.

Alderman William Thompson, 1793-1854. An iron-master and shipowner. M.P. (Tory) for Callington, 1820-1826; for London, 1826-1832; for Sunderland, 1833-1841. Chairman of the Committee at Lloyd's but resigned when subscribers expressed dissatisfaction with his having joined the Sunderland Shipowners Mutual Assurance Association.

Charles Poulett Thomson, 1st Baron Sydenham, 1799-1841. M.P. (Whig) for Dover 1826-1832; for Manchester 1832-1839. Vice-President of the Board of Trade and Treasurer of the Navy 1830-1834; President of Board of Trade 1834; 1835-1839. Governor-General of Canada 1839. Created Baron Sydenham 1840.

George Frederick Young, 1791-1870. Shipowner and shipbuilder; elder son of Vice-Admiral William Young. Seven times Chairman of the General Shipowners' Society between 1833-1851. M.P. (Protectionist) for Tynemouth 1831-1838; for Scarborough 1851-1852.

APPENDIX II

Presidents and Vice-Presidents of the Board of Trade,  
1823-1852

Date Appointed	President	Vice President
Jan. 1823	William Huskisson	Charles Grant
Sept. 1827	Charles Grant later Lord Glenelg	John Wilmot Horton
June 1828	William Vesey Fitzgerald later Lord Fitzgerald	Thomas Frankland Lewis later Sir T.F. Lewis
Feb. 1830	John Charles Herries	Thomas Peregrine Courtenay
Nov. 1830	Lord Auckland	Charles Poulett Thomson
June 1834	Charles Poulett Thomson	
Dec. 1834	Alexander Baring later Lord Ashburton	Viscount Lowther
Apr. 1835	Charles Poulett Thomson later Lord Sydenham	Henry Labouchere
Aug. 1839	Henry Labouchere	Richard Lalor Shiel June 1841, Fox Maule later Lord Panmure
Sept. 1841	Lord Ripon	William Ewart Gladstone
May 1843	William Ewart Gladstone	Lord Dalhousie
Feb. 1845	Lord Dalhousie	Sir George Clerk
July 1846	Lord Clarendon	Thomas Milner-Gibson
July 1847	Henry Labouchere later Lord Taunton	Thomas Milner-Gibson May 1848, Lord Granville Feb. 1852, Lord Stanley of Alderney
Feb. 1852	Joseph Warner Henley	Lord Colchester
Dec. 1852	Edward Cardwell later Lord Cardwell	Lord Stanley of Alderney

APPENDIX III

Chief Permanent Officers of the Board of Trade

1825 - 1865

Appointment

From	To	Name	Title
July 1825 - Feb. 1836		Thomas Lack	Assistant Secretary July 1829, Joint Assistant Secretary
July 1829 - Jan. 1840		James Deacon Hume	Joint Assistant Secretary
Feb. 1836 - June 1841		Sir Denis Le Marchant	Joint Assistant Secretary
May 1848 - Oct. 1850		Sir Denis Le Marchant	Joint Secretary
Jan 1840 - Aug. 1847		John MacGregor	Joint Secretary
June 1841 - May 1848		Sir John George Shaw- Lefevre	Joint Secretary
Aug. 1847 - Sept. 1852		George Richardson Porter	Joint Secretary
Oct. 1850 - Sept. 1865		James Booth	Joint Secretary

Source: Sir Hubert L. Smith, The Board of Trade (1928), p.278.

APPENDIX IV

Chairmen of the General Shipowners' Society, 1833-1852

1832/3	George Palmer
1833/4	George Frederick Young
1834/5	Octavius Wigram
1835/6	William Tindall
1836/7	George Frederick Young
1837/8	John Chapman
1838/9	Henry Blanchard
1839/40	George Frederick Young
1840/1	Henry Buckle
1841/2	Robert Barry
1842/3	Anthony Ridley
1843/4	George Frederick Young
1844/5	Joseph B. Chapman
1845/6	George Frederick Young
1846/7	Duncan Dunbar
1847/8	Duncan Dunbar
1848/9	Duncan Dunbar
1849/50	George Frederick Young
1850/1	George Frederick Young
1851/2	William Tindall

Source: SS. Min. & SS. Rep., 1833-1852.

APPENDIX V

Extract from the Regulations for the Appointment of  
Commanders and Officers to the East India Company's  
Own Ships, 18 Mar. 1818

23. That the Master of a regular Extra Ship, on his entrance into the Company's own service as Chief Mate, be not above forty years of age.
24. That a Chief Mate of the Freight service, upon his entrance into the Company's own service, be not above thirty-five years of age; nor a Second Mate above thirty years of age, a Third Mate above twenty-six, a Fourth above twenty-three, and Fifth and Sixth Mates not above twenty-one.
25. That in all selections of Commanders and Officers from the Freight service, good character and conduct be indispensable qualifications.
26. That on occasion of selecting any Commander or Officers from the Freight service, reference be had by the recommending Committee to an account abstracted from the records of this House, of the character and conduct of each of the candidates.
27. That for the better answering the purpose of the preceding resolution, and for the guidance of the recommending Committee in future, a distinct record of the conduct of each individual Commander and Officer in the Company's service be kept, and that the same do also include the Company's own Commanders and Officers.
28. That any Commander introduced from the Freight service to command one of the Company's own ships, be not allowed to continue as Commander in the Company's own service more than three voyages.
29. That any Officer who shall be promoted in the Company's own service to the command of one of their own ships, be not allowed to continue a Commander in that service more than five voyages. In the case of Captains Patterson and Adams, their five voyages to commence from the season 1817.
30. That the recommendation of the Commanders and First and Second Mates of the Company's own ships be in the Committee of Correspondence.
31. That the recommendation to the appointment of Officers to the Company's own ships, under the rank of second Mate, be with the Committee of Shipping.

32. That the number of Midshipmen be,

For ships under 800 tons . . . . . 4) amended, see Resolution  
800 tons and under 1000 tons . 6) of Court  
1000 tons and upwards . . . . . 7) 27 Aug. 1828.

33. That no appointment of supernumerary Midshipman, or of succession to the office of Midshipman, or of any person to act as a Midshipman, beyond those abovementioned, be allowed.

34. That the first appointment of Midshipman to the Company's own ships be by the Members of the Court in succession, according to seniority, so that every Member of the Court may have one nomination before any Member shall have a second; and that no Midshipman to be appointed shall be less than thirteen years of age, or more than eighteen years of age, unless he has been at sea, in which case, for every year he has been at sea the age of admission may be extended, as far as to his twentieth year.

35. That the complement of the Midshipmen assigned to any ship be appointed a fortnight before the period fixed for the ship to be afloat, otherwise such to be immediately filled up by the Member of the Court next in rotation.

36. That appointments for the Company's own ships of Medical men, not actually in their own service, be recommended, of persons properly qualified, by the Members of the Committee of Shipping for the time being, in rotation, beginning with the Chairs and proceeding according to seniority.

37. That all appointments of Surgeons in the Company's own ships be made from the class of Assistant Surgeons in those ships, according to seniority; and the vacancies of Assistant Surgeons be filled up as before provided for.

38. That the Medical appointments be made at the same time that the Commanders and Officers of the Company's own ships are nominated.

39. That the appointments of Pursers be given to the Commanders of the Company's own ships, respectively, subject to the approbation of the Committee of Shipping.

Source: I.O.R. Mar. 1/30/648.

APPENDIX VI

General Shipowners' Society :

membership regulations

All Ship Owners or other persons interested in British Shipping, subscribing Fifty Guineas, or upwards, in one sum, to be Members of the Society for Life; those subscribing Five Guineas, or upwards, in one sum, together with not less than One Guinea annually, and those subscribing One Guinea, or upwards, annually, to be Members so long as their Annual Subscriptions shall continue to be paid.

The Members to be entitled to vote at all ballots, according to the following scale, viz.

Members for life; those subscribing Twenty-five Guineas, or upwards, in one sum, together with Five Guineas, or upwards, annually; and those subscribing Ten Guineas or upwards, annually, to have  
. . . . . Three Votes.

Members subscribing Fifteen Guineas, or upwards, in one sum, together with Three Guineas, or upwards, annually; and those subscribing Five Guineas, or upwards, annually, to have  
. . . . . Two Votes.

Members subscribing Five Guineas, or upwards, in one sum, together with One Guinea, or upwards, annually; and those subscribing One Guinea, or upwards, annually, to have . . . . . One Vote.

The Ship Owners of the Out-Ports to be invited to co-operate with the Society, by the formation of District Associations, to be governed by their own rules.

An annual contribution of £50 from any such Association, to entitle the Port from which it is received to the annual appointment of a respectable individual, usually resident in London, as a Member of the General Committee; an annual subscription of £100 to entitle to two; and of £200 to three Members; but in no case to any greater number. Any smaller annual contribution than £50, from any Association, to constitute the Association, from which it is received, a part of the General Society, and entitle it to enter into correspondence with the General Committee. All such Associations, whether having elected any Individual as a Member of the General Committee or not, to be recommended to make such communications as from time to time may be found advisable to promote the general objects and advantage of the British Shipping Interest.

The affairs of the Society to be managed by a Committee in London, consisting of twelve Members, to be chosen by ballot at a General Meeting of the Society, to be annually convened in London for that special purpose, and of the Individuals elected at such Out-Ports as may be entitled to the privilege under the preceding regulation. Such four of the said twelve Members, as shall have least frequently attended during the first year, to go out at the expiration thereof, and to be replaced by an equal number by ballot, as above; the same course to be pursued at the expiration of the second year, with respect to such four of the original Members as shall have least frequently attended in that year; and in all subsequent years,

one-third of the said number to go out annually by rotation, and not to be eligible for re-election for twelve months. In the event of any vacancy occurring in the Committee, by resignation or casualty, the individual standing next in number of votes, on the balloting list of the last previous election, to become a Member of the Committee for the remaining period of the time during which the party occasioning the vacancy would have continued therein.

The Chairman or Deputy Chairman of any Association subscribing to the Funds of this Society or any Member thereof who may be specially deputed to attend in London upon any occasion before the Parliament, or other important occasion, to be Honorary Members of the General Committee during the period that they shall remain in London.

The Committee to nominate by ballot, at the first meeting after their appointment, a Chairman and Deputy Chairman from their own body, for one year; the latter to become Chairman for the following year; and the Committee for the second, and each succeeding year, to nominate by ballot at the first meeting after their appointment, a Deputy Chairman, who shall succeed in rotation to the chair. The Committee to appoint a Secretary and such other Assistants as may be requisite for conducting the business of the Society. Five Members to be a quorum, except at the Meetings for the appointment of Chairman or Deputy Chairman, at which the attendance of not less than one-half of the Members of the Committee to be indispensable.

The Funds to be under the control and management of the Committee, who are annually to lay before a General Meeting of the Members a detailed Statement of the receipts and expenditure of the Society, together with a Report of their proceedings during the preceding year.

Source: SS. Rep. 1833.

APPENDIX VII

A comparative statement of operational profitability between a British and a Prussian ship engaged on a three month voyage from Memel to Cork carrying identical cargoes, each ship being similarly insured

	British Ship		Prussian Ship	
	£.	s. d.	£.	s. d.
To Provisions, 12 men for 3 months	83.	14. 0.	41.	17. 0.
Stores, expenses loading cargo and pilotage	46.	12. 6.	46.	12. 6.
Charges on ship at Elsineur	6.	13. 6.	6.	13. 6.
Pilotage in and out of Cork Harbour	6.	6. 0.	6.	6. 0.
Brokers account at Cork, clearing at Custom-House, paying lights and other charges	20.	0. 0.	20.	0. 0.
Master's expenses at Cork	7.	15. 6.	7.	15. 6.
		171. 1. 6.		129. 4. 6.
Wages:				
To Master's wages for three months	27.	0. 0.	15.	0. 0.
Mates - ditto -	13.	10. 0.	5.	5. 0.
Carpenter's - ditto -	13.	10. 0.	4.	10. 0.
Cook's - ditto -	8.	12. 6.	3.	15. 0.
Seamen's (6) - ditto -	45.	0. 0.	18.	18. 0.
Boy's (2) - ditto -	7.	10. 0.	3.	0. 0.
		115. 2. 6.		50. 8. 0.
To insurance on ship per voyage @ 3½%, and policy.	40.	10. 0.	40.	10. 0.
Insurance on cargo	7.	10. 0.	7.	10. 0.
Brokers commission	8.	10. 0.	8.	10. 0.
Three months interest on £1000, at 5%	12.	10. 0.	12.	10. 0.
		69. 0. 0.		69. 0. 0.
		£355. 4. 0.		£248.12. 6.
By freight on 360 loads of timber at 21s.		378. 0. 0.		378. 0. 0.
Balance and Profit		£22.16. 0.		£129. 7. 6.

## APPENDIX VIII

### Regulations obtaining in the French mercantile marine relating to the appointment of Shipmasters

No one shall command a Foreign-going ship or shall be master of a coasting vessel, before he is twenty-four years old; nor before he has been five years at sea (of which two at least shall have been served in vessels of the state), nor until he has been examined in the theory and practice of navigation.

He shall not be exempt from the condition required of having served in a vessel of the state, unless besides the five years of sea-time specified, he shall have undergone detention of more than two years in an enemy's prison, or shall have been declared unfit for the Royal Navy.

Candidates for examination must forward their names to the Secretary of the Chief Naval officer at their ports, and be provided with the following papers, viz.:- Certificate of birth, time of servitude, of good conduct from the Mayor, countersigned by the commissioner of their department, certificates from the captains of vessels in which they have served of their fitness and good conduct. These papers must be inspected and signed by the Commissioner of Maritime Inscription in the ports to which the above vessels may have returned.

They must specify besides in what Navigation school, or by what Professor they have been educated; and also the district of inscription where they wish to matriculate.

The examination for Captains of Foreign-going ships in seamanship will include, the rigging a ship, manoeuvring ships and boats, and gunnery; that in the theory of navigation will consist of arithmetic, elementary geometry, plain and spherical trigonometry, navigation, the use of instruments and working observations.

For the masters of coasters the examination in seamanship will consist of rigging and manoeuvring ships and boats, the knowledge of soundings and depth of water, the bearings of headlands and the positions of dangers, the currents and tides within the limits assigned to coasters on the shores of the Atlantic or those of the Mediterranean; that in navigation will include the use of the compass and chart, the use of nautical instruments and keeping a reckoning.

The examinations will be public. The candidates who shall have passed through the above examinations shall be duly declared qualified to receive their appointments as captains of ships or masters of coasters.

No one will be allowed to take command of a merchant vessel who has not been admitted to the general examination in conformity with the present ordinance.

The law of the 22nd April, 1832, concerning the whale fishery, art. 5, sec. 4, declares that, -

French mariners following the Whale fishery, desirous of being examined for the appointments of captains of foreign-going ships shall be exempt from serving one year in vessels of the state, on having made at least three voyages in that employment.

The minister of marine being referred to, respecting the application of this clause, has decided 15th Nov. 1838,

That mariners who have been five years at sea, which include three voyages in whalers, shall have permission to stay on shore, from the chiefs of their districts, the year following their return home, to undergo their examination for Captains of foreign-going ships. The chiefs will ascertain whether these persons are assiduous in their study of navigation, and those who are found defective or shall be rejected either in seamanship or navigation, shall be immediately sent to sea.

The examinations of candidates for the Captains of foreign-going ships and masters of coasting vessels will commence on the 1st of March, 1844, in the ports of the Northern coast, and on the 1st April in those of the southern ports. The former consist of St. Malo, Brest, L'Orient, Nantes, Cherbourg, Havre, Dunkerque; the southern ports are Toulon, Marseille, Cette, Bayonne and Rochfort. Examiners for the Northern ports are M.M. de Pannajon (Capitaine de fregate on half-pay) for seamanship; for navigation M.Fournier. Examiners for the Southern ports, M. Baudin (Capitaine de corvette on half-pay) for seamanship, and M. Lehuen for navigation.

Previous to the commencement of the examination, candidates must send their names to the Secretary of the chiefs of Administration or chiefs (de service) of the ports, and must take care to provide themselves with their certificates of berth and servitude.

To be second captain of a merchant ship a candidate must be twenty-one years of age, and have served four years at sea.

To embark as an officer a candidate must be eighteen years old, and have served eighteen months at sea, - Statute of 1st January, 1786, arts 43 and 44.

The law of the 21st of June, 1836, concerning masters of coasting vessels says, ;

Art 1. - Masters of coasting vessels as well as captains of foreign-going ships are eligible to the command of ships employed in the cod fishery, either at Newfoundland and the isles of St. Pierre and Miquelon, or on the coast of Iceland.

To the mercantile marine there has been recently added a body formed and paid by the State, for their benefit, called Professors of Hydrography. Schools for this science are established in the principal commercial ports where the necessary instruction may be received to pass examination for captains and masters. There are four classes of professors; the places of the fourth class, which must be passed before the others are given at the meeting.

No one can attend the meeting for examination who is not twenty-two years old at least, and who has not complied with the established law.

The government will give notice of the meeting, and the time it will take place, which will be always at Paris.

Candidates admitted to the meeting are examined in, 1st. Arithmetic; 2nd Geometry; 3rd, Plane and Spherical Trigonometry; 4th, Navigation, including the use of nautical instruments and working observations; 5th, Algebra and its application to geometry; 6th, the elements of the differential and integral calculus; 7th, Statics. In one of these sciences questions will likewise be given, to be answered in writing.

Source: N.M. 1844, XIII, pp.93-95.

APPENDIX IX

SUGGESTIONS for constituting a Marine Board, by Mr. George Coleman

1. A Marine Board should be formed under the direction of the Admiralty, consisting of one of the lords and five or six gentlemen of talent conversant with nautical affairs; a board thus constituted would no doubt carry great weight and respect with it in the minds of all nautical men.
2. By the said marine board should be framed all necessary regulations respecting the duty of each respective examiner in London as well as the out-ports, as suggested in article 11.
3. The marine board should be provided with rooms and offices in London, (say for instance,) either in the Trinity House, Somerset House, the late shipping and pay offices (which are now empty) in the East India House, or some other spacious building, for the use of the marine board, the examiners, as well as the candidates for certificates.
4. Certain days should be appointed for examination, say Monday, Wednesday and Friday, for navigation and nautical astronomy, with Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday for seamanship and rigging, as well as the dangers belonging to the principal ports in the East and West Indies, particularly the port bound to, Etc. The intermediate days would be employed by each respective examiner in entering the names of those who had obtained certificates, in a book kept for the purpose, and ruled according to the form respectfully suggested in article 8.
5. The navigation certificate should be first obtained, then produced for the inspection of the examiners in seamanship and rigging, to satisfy them that the person producing the same is a proper candidate for their department.
6. Every candidate should pay £2. 2s. for his certificate in navigation and nautical astronomy, (a small sum for useful knowledge always in his possession,) consequently no captain or officer would have to be examined more than once on this subject, unless he has been on shore seven years, in that case he should be examined again, for which he should pay £1. 1s.
7. Candidates for examination in seamanship and rigging, etc., should be charged according to their rank. Those who obtain a certificate as a qualified man to command a ship, should pay £2. 2s. for the same; having thereby proved himself fully competent to take the command; of course no further examination would be required of him, unless a man in command of a collier, Baltic trader, West Indiaman or some other short trader wished to be in charge of a ship to China or any of the presidencies of India, then in fact he should subject himself to another examination, such only as regards the dangers of the Eastern seas and straits; if found competent, on obtaining his certificate, he should pay £1. 1s. Each officer, of every rank, should be charged £1. 1s. for his certificate, until he proved himself qualified to command a ship and then he should pay £2. 2s.

Note:- It will be perceived by the above scale of fees, that the greatest demand made on the captain's purse would be four guineas only, a sum comparatively nothing, when contrasted with the enormous fees paid by all other professional men; the officers would pay the same sum as captains, but at different times as they obtain

promotion, consequently with such moderate fees seamen would have no reason to complain.

8. It is respectfully suggested that certificates given should be emblazoned with either the King's Arms, the Admiralty Anchor, or some other appropriate insignia, to show to the world it was a legal document; the form of each certificate being somewhat similar to the following plan:-

Number of Certificate	Date	Candidate's Name	Age	Rank	Ship's Name	Tons	Owner's Name	Where con-sign-ed	Subject of Examination	Examiners Signature

9. Previously to the delivery of these authentic and valuable documents, an exact copy of the same should be entered in books ruled as the plan shown in the last article, and kept for that purpose. This being strictly enjoined on each examiner, the marine board would have in their possession a clear proof, not only how the system worked, but the precise amount of fees received.

10. Should application be made for a second certificate in case the original ones were lost by fire, wreck or any other unavoidable accident, then other certificates should be granted, free of any charge whatever; but should a captain or officer lose one or both of his certificates, it would be but just to grant others, paying, at the same time (say 10s. each) for his carelessness and neglect, in not taking care of such important and valuable documents. A considerable sum would be collected annually by this regulation; but no examiner would be justified in giving a second certificate when such was applied for, without being empowered to do so by an order from the marine board.

11. In consequence of the number of men to be examined, it would be necessary to institute certain examining ports, say for instance:-

In England - - - London, Liverpool, Bristol and Hull.  
 Scotland - - - Edinburgh and Glasgow.  
 Ireland - - - Dublin and Cork.

London and Liverpool being the principal ports, to them three examiners in seaman-ship and rigging would be required, whereas only two to the other out-ports; would be sufficient; but in navigation and nautical astronomy only one examiner would be requisite at each port, because 50, 60 or more persons might be examined at one and the same time, upon precisely the same principle as that adopted at the Royal Naval College, at Portsmouth.

12. No officer should be examined a second time in seamanship, etc., provided he filled the same station either on board his own or any other ship; for having once proved himself qualified for that particular station, he must be capable of filling it again. This may, and no doubt would, be the case with many officers; it is therefore recommended that an officer, after performing a voyage, should only be examined when he obtained promotion, for instance, from third to second, or from second to chief mate.

13. All the out-port examiners should send a monthly statement of all persons examined by them for the information of the marine board; that a duplicate of each certificate given may be in possession of the board, thereby any member could report within one month what had been received or done, if called upon unexpectedly.

14. The officers exempted from the ordeal of an examination should be all commanders, lieutenants, masters and passed midshipmen, belonging to the Royal Navy; as well as all captains and sworn officers that formerly belonged to the Honourable Company's service. These having passed necessary examinations, in accordance with the rules and regulations of their respective services, should be exempt, but certainly none else; therefore it is most respectfully suggested that the proposed system of examination should be as follows, viz.

Vessels from 100 to 300 tons burthen	captain & 1 officer,)	should be examined
" 300 to 600 tons "	captain & 2 officers)	first in navigation
" 600 to 900 tons "	captain & 3 officer )	and then in seaman-
" 900 tons & upwards "	captain & 4 officers)	ship and rigging.

15. Those captains and officers claiming exemptions from examination should produce satisfactory certificates, showing their ground of exemption; those belonging to the Royal Navy from the Secretary of the Admiralty; and those that formerly belonged to the East India Company's late maritime service from the East India House; these certificates should be filed and fresh ones granted according to the plan suggested in article 8, then copies into a book, and recorded to the marine board as "exempted certificates."

16. Ship-owners should be made amenable by law for the examination of all captains and officers in their employ, that were not exempt; if heavy penalties were instituted, say, the owner £200, captain £100 and officer £50 for every evasion of the law on this subject, such penalties would certainly prevent any attempt to avoid escaping this wise and judicious regulation.

17. Every captain, previous to his sailing, should appear before the marine board and state on affirmation that he had obtained his own certificates and had seen those of his officers; for the satisfaction of the marine board he should produce a correct list of all the nautical books, charts, chronometers, sextants, quadrants, etc. that were in his possession for navigating the ship under his command. And if it were deemed that the captain was not sufficiently provided with every requisite necessary for the voyage, according to the opinion of the marine board, on the captain's declaration that he could not afford to purchase the deficiency, then the marine board should insist on the ship-owners doing so, for the general good of all concerned in the ship.

18. The marine board should be empowered to demand sight of any ship's log, when they had occasion for it, also to examine any captain, with the officers of his ship, in case of loss or getting her on shore; this law would be an act of justice to the underwriters, and no doubt would be a great protection to the vast amount of property they insure, by making men more careful of the lives and property entrusted to their care, than is the case at present; therefore such a clause would be a considerable advantage to shipping interest in various ways; the marine board, investigating such subjects might prevent much litigation; for the board being constituted of nautical men, their decision in nautical matters would carry greater weight and respect with it than the opinion of a jury who are, generally speaking, ignorant of the subject they have to decide upon.

19. Excellent examiners on these subjects might be found from among the captains and commanders belonging to the Royal Navy; also from among captains and officers of the late Honourable Company's service, the major part of whom were men possessing considerable abilities and acquirements in every branch of their profession.

20. The marine board should be empowered to fix the number of officers and men to each ship according to tonnage, also their equipment, as regards quantity as well as quality, of every thing that was requisite for the intended voyage; this would prevent the complaints so frequently made at the present time on these subjects.

21. It is respectfully suggested that the system of examination on nautical astronomy should consist of the following practicable problems:

To find the bearing and distance between two places, by middle latitude, mercator's, and also, by parallel sailings.

To find the time of high water at any place, on any given day.

To find the latitude by the meridian altitude of the sun, moon, stars and planets.

To find the latitude by an altitude of the polar star both above and below the pole.

To find the latitude by double altitudes.

To find the variation of the compass, by amplitude and azimuth.

To find the longitude by lunar observations, between  $\odot$  and  $(,)$  and  $*$ , also  $)$  and planet.

To find the longitude of any place by chronometer.

To find the daily rate of a chronometer.

To work a day's work from noon to noon, introducing a current occasionally.

22. A good and expert navigator would work questions on the subjects above stated in six hours readily; at the Royal Naval College seven hours are given, consequently by saying eight hours on the appointed days (from eight a.m. to four p.m.) would be ample time to complete them in.

23. By a rough statement, from the returns made of shipping four years since, (and ample allowance being made for those claiming grounds of exemption,) it is estimated, upon the moderate fees respectfully suggested in articles 6 and 7, that the first two years will produce £842,410 being no less than £421,205 annually.

24. If a return of shipping were demanded and classed according to tonnage as shown in article 14, the annual receipts of the first two years might be very correctly ascertained.

James S. Buckingham, Esq. M.P.  
Chairman of the Shipwreck Committee,  
etc. etc. etc.

George Coleman,  
157, Leadenhall Street,  
9th July 1836.

N.B. As this suggestion for constituting a marine board is not intended to interfere with the General Shipowners' Society, on the Committee at Lloyd's, but to co-operate with both for the general good of shipping interest, probably the marine board could not be better constituted, than by its being formed of four gentlemen belonging to the General Shipowners' Society, and two of Lloyd's Committee, in addition to one of the Lords of the Admiralty.

Source: S.C. 1836, App. 1, pp.269-271.

APPENDIX X

Resolutions passed by a Sub-Committee, deputed by the  
Committees of the South Shields Mutual Insurance Association,  
concerning the establishment of a Marine Board, 1837

1. That the Marine Board intended to be established in this Borough shall consist of not less than twelve persons, who are to be resident within the limits thereof.
2. That of the said twelve Members appointed to form this Board, nine are to be experienced Seamen, who have been at least seven years Masters in the Coasting and Foreign Trades, and do not now go to sea; and two Landsmen competent to examine on matters relating to Charter Parties, Bills of Lading, &c.; and one person qualified to examine on Plane Trigonometry, Navigation, and Nautical Astronomy.
3. The Members of this Board shall be elected annually, at General Meetings of the Members of the South Shields Mutual Insurances, called especially for that purpose.
4. The Mode of Election at such General Meetings to be by each of those present delivering a written list to Scrutineers, appointed for that purpose, of the names of such persons as he deems most proper to fill the situation of Examiners or Members of the Board.
5. The Board to sit once or twice a week, according as required, for the purpose of examining Seamen wishing to qualify for Masters of Ships, and, on approval, for granting Certificates agreeably to their capabilities, as follows: viz.-

FIRST CLASS.

For the Coasting Trade only. To be examined as to age, servitude, and good conduct - their knowledge of the Coast, its dangers, and whatever relates to practical Seamanship in general.

SECOND CLASS.

For the Coasting and Foreign Trades, including the Baltic, Archangel, North America, and the Mediterranean. To be examined the same as the First Class; and, in addition thereto, as to their knowledge of plain Navigation, and the nature and use of Sea Charts; also respecting the nature of Charter Parties, Bills of Lading, &c.

THIRD AND HIGHEST CLASS.

Course of Examination to be the same as the Second Class; and moreover they must shew a competent knowledge of Navigation in all its branches by Lunars and Chronometers.

6. That six Members in attendance at any Meeting regularly convened by the Secretary, shall be deemed sufficient for the purposes herein required.
7. Previous to any applicant being declared to be rejected, a majority of the Board then sitting must concur in opinion as to his unfitness.
8. Applicants on passing their Examination for the First Class to pay one guinea; Second Class, two guineas; and Third Class, three guineas, on receiving their Certificates, in order to defray the expenses of the Establishment.
9. Masters of Ships, who have been actually acting as such before the establishment of this Board, shall be required to attend the said Board within twelve months, and be furnished with Certificates, on proving their previous good conduct and experience from the Trades they have been employed in as Masters, without being subject to any other Examination. Certificates granted in this case to be charged five shillings each, and to be different from those given to new applicants on regular Examination; but such of the Masters as prefer going through a regular Examination before the Board, to be entitled to the same kind of Certificate on approval.
10. The several Insurances of South Shields to be requested to call General Meetings of their Members as early as possible, and propose to those assembled at such Meetings the following Resolutions for approval and insertion in the Rules: viz.-

That a Board for the Examination of Masters be established at South Shields - to be called the "Marine Board" - which shall consist of twelve Members, to be chosen annually by the Members of the Mutual Insurances, and every person not having been previously Master of a vessel, to produce a Certificate of qualification from the said Board before taking the command of any vessel insured therein; and the Members of the Insurance not to employ such persons as Masters of their respective Ships without such Certificate.

That persons at present actually acting as Masters be required to apply to the Board, within twelve months, for Certificates, and shall merely be examined as to their experience in command of a vessel, and in what Trades employed; and exhibit proofs of their good conduct during the same.

11. That on the above Resolutions receiving the sanction of the General Meetings aforesaid, they are then to proceed to the Election of Members to form the said Board, in the manner set forth in the 4th Resolution, so that the same may be established and brought into active operation as early as circumstances will permit.

APPENDIX XI

Competencies required from officers of the Royal Mail Steam Packet  
Company for appointment and promotion

Rating	Requirements
4th Officer	To find the latitude by meridian altitude. To work dead reckoning. To find time of high water. To know the use of the quadrant, and how to adjust it. To be able to use the lead, hand, reef, and steer.
3rd Officer	In addition to the above: To take and work double altitudes. To find the latitude by sun, moon, or a star. To know all the lights on both sides of the English Channel, say from Scilly and Brest to Southampton and Guernsey To work the chronometer. To know log line and glass. To know how to handle a steamer under all circumstances. To know the use of the charts.
2nd Officer	In addition to the above: To find the variation of the compass by amplitude or azimuth. To have a knowledge of trigonometry.
1st Officer	In addition to the above: To have a thorough knowledge of all branches of navigation and seamanship, also of the lights, soundings, dangers, and pilotage in general, of the English Channel.
Commander	In addition to the above: To have some knowledge of the navigation of the different places embraced in the scope of the Company's operations abroad. To be acquainted with the nature of Bills of Lading, Bills of Health, and other ship's papers.

APPENDIX XII

Copy of a letter from the Admiralty to Trinity House, London, 22 March 1844, relating to the examination of Masters and Mates in the British mercantile marine

No person should be examined as a Master under 21 years of age, nor as a Mate under 19 years.

All should produce Certificates of Sobriety, of general good character, and good conduct, and particular care is to be taken by the examiners, to satisfy themselves as to the habitual sobriety of the party previous to granting him a Certificate of fitness, to take charge, and command of a ship of any description.

All should be able to write a legible hand and should understand the five first Rules of Arithmetic.

All should be examined as to their knowledge of seamanship, of rigging vessels, stowing holds and in addition to which, those to be admitted into the lowest class, or "Class 3" should be able to correct the courses steered by compass for variation, see-way etc - to work what is termed a day's work - to prick off the Vessels place on a chart, either by the calculated latitude and longitude or by the bearings of the land by compass - they should show that they understand the use of the Quadrant or Sextant, and can observe the Sun's meridian altitude and therefrom determine the latitude, and they should be able to work the tides by the Age of the Moon, from the known time of High Water at full and change.

To receive "2nd Class" Certificates they should in addition to all the foregoing qualifications be able to ascertain the latitude by double Altitudes of the Sun and by Meridian Altitudes of the Moon, or of those bright Planets or Stars, the places of which are given in the Nautical Almanac - they should understand the care and management of Chronometers, and the mode of working out and ascertaining the longitude therefrom - and they should be able to ascertain the variation of the compass by the Azimuth of the Sun as well as by the Amplitude.

Those to receive a 1st Class Certificate, should in addition to all the foregoing qualifications, undergo a more strict examination as to their proficiency in Navigation, and also in Seamanship under the many difficult circumstances and trying situations to which vessels may be exposed, such as having to erect a rig Jury Masts when suddenly requisite, or forming rafts in case of being stranded and in such other cases as call for a higher order of resources.

They should have a competent acquaintance with plane Trigonometry, a general knowledge of Nautical Astronomy, including the determination of the latitude by reduction to the Meridian as well as by double altitude of the Sun and of the longitude by Lunar observations.

They must also be acquainted with the mode of ascertaining and applying the deviation of the compass, which is of so much importance in iron built Vessels and also in Vessels laden with iron.

Also they should be practically acquainted with the mode of comparing two or more Chronometers and of rating them by equal Altitudes. They should understand the construction of Mercator Charts so as to be able to correct any errors they may discover in those they possess; as well as to insert with precision any new shoals or islands which they may discover; - and they ought to be well versed in the principle of great circle sailing and of the mode of laying down the required course in the Chart.

They should also possess a knowledge of Mercantile Book-Keeping, at least in Single Entry.

In the event of any Candidate proving himself to have still higher attainments than the foregoing, it should be noted in his Certificate and should entitle him to have "Class 1st Extra" thereon and against his name on Lloyds List.

The examination for Mates should be the same as that for Masters in proof of their abilities to succeed to the command of ships, in the event of accidents to the Master and these certificates should be similarly numbered 1, or 1 Extra or 2nd or 3rd Class, as the case may be.

It is to be understood that in the event of it becoming known that accidents such as foundering has befallen a ship having a passed Master the Board of Examiners who granted his Certificate will be authorized and required to call such Master again before them, and examine into the circumstances of the accident, after which they should be at liberty to annul the former Certificate given by them to such master if sufficient blame shall in their opinion attach to the said Master as to call for such proceeding, and in that case they the Examiners, should lose no time in acquainting the Committee at Lloyds thereof, in order that the said Master may no longer appear on their Shipping List as a passed Master, but if no such blame attaches to him they should give him a fresh Certificate to that affect.

Should any charge be advanced of a passed Master of a ship having been drunk at sea, while in charge and command of a ship the Board of Examiners that granted his Certificate should likewise be authorized and required to call such Master before them and to act in all respects regarding the Charge as directed in the foregoing Paragraph.

And in the event of a passed Master refusing or neglecting to appear before a Board of Examiners when summoned as proposed above the Board of Examiners should be authorized and required to cancel the former certificate given to such Master and to make communication to the Committee at Lloyds accordingly.

(signed) J. Barrow

The Elder Brethren of Trinity.

APPENDIX XIII

Copy of a paper by the Head of the Hamburg  
Navigation School on the examination of Masters and Mates

It is desirable that the masters and mates in the merchant service should not only be experienced seamen, well skilled in manoeuvring and the stowage of their ships, but also thoroughly versed in the theory of navigation, which cannot be obtained without a sufficient foundation of mathematical and astronomical knowledge. It is moreover expected that they shall be acquainted with the language of the port they are bound to, and be able to correspond with their owners. The first point, however, which (for a sailing vessel at least) may be considered as the sine qua non, renders it necessary (hitherto) that the apprentices shall begin their career from their 16th year, and not be from that time deprived of the advantage of a literary education and even of a civilized conversation. This forms an almost insurmountable obstacle to the attainment of the other qualifications, unless their masters and mates are possessed of them, and undertake the meritorious task of superintending the education of the apprentices; but the greater part of skippers are neither fit nor inclined to do so. It is therefore recommended to establish schools for young mariners in different ports of England, to which they should be compelled to resort after every return from sea, in lieu of being kept to do menial offices for their masters, as cleaning boots and shoes for his family, attending the kitchen, and serving as errand boys for not always the most moral purposes. Their own interest should induce merchants and shipowners to support by voluntary contributions such schools, for which also part of the premium of the indentures could be deposited. Mathematics, navigation, and geography should form the principal subjects of instruction. It may be here sufficient to remark that after laying a good mathematical foundation, without which nothing perfect can be expected, little more is left to be done. The necessity of frequent repetitions of his studies cannot be too earnestly impressed upon a young sea officer, nor can the superficial preparation for the passing of his examen be too severely reprehended. By the more interested than laudable endeavours of scientific tradesmen to lay mechanical rules down for the art of navigation, ignorant men can without knowing what they do, go through the routine of part of their profession. But as no rule can be given that is without exception, the ship and the lives of the crew, which no underwriter can repay, are left to the protection of Providence when the master is put to his wits' ends. Gales that never blew and sunk rocks that do not exist are then made answerable for his want of skill, wherein he is further indulged by the improvement of chronometers, that, however useful in other hands, are as apt to mislead ignorant masters. Thus it has become the fate of a most honourable profession to be monopolized by uncultivated men, and to sink from the high degree of estimation in which it was held when considered as inseparable from astronomical knowledge, into a state of disrepute; so that many a captain who

feels himself unqualified to mix with respectable company, and upon whose hands leisure time hangs heavy, either sinks still lower, or becomes dissatisfied with a mode of living that would afford to persons of previous education a most desirable opportunity of improving their minds, and gaining in distant parts of the world that information which is in vain wished for by many an intelligent man who cannot leave his native home. The numerous melancholy accidents that have only lately occurred at sea, the frequent losses of lives of passengers and unfortunate emigrants to another world than what they shipped for, must at last open the eyes of the owners, and silence the silly phrases, as "our captains" (who by the way can only work their dead reckoning, as it is significantly called) "are competent men," or "our ships have fared well enough so long." For, setting aside that masters could make much shorter voyages if they placed that confidence in their profession which theory only can give, the second part proves untrue, and the non-survivors cannot reveal the nautical blunders by which many a ship has been lost. It becomes therefore also, in a philanthropic view, a duty of Government to inspect the competency of the masters of merchant vessels, which can only be done by an examination. But the object of this examination should not be frustrated by the mercenary officiousness of professed preparers, who undertake the drilling of uneducated mates, so as to enable them in a month or two to answer a list of questions and work a set of examples that had been given on previous occasions. This is an imposition which is, however, easily remedied by demanding at the examination the theoretical demonstrations of the problems which, for very good reasons, the teacher could not instil into his pupil, who is perhaps also not liberally endowed by nature. Besides, the former generally neglect to teach the latter how to make those observations which he is called upon to "work," as it is not improperly styled, not to mention the scarcity of opportunities of observing lunar distances within so short a period. Hence follows the necessity of schools at different ports, to which all young mariners should be admitted after each return from sea, so as to allow practical experience and theoretical knowledge to go hand in hand. This affords them an opportunity to make at sea application of and to reflect on that which they have learned at home, and to find out their deficiencies on certain points whereof they can after their return to school demand explanation, and work there the observations which they have made on board. Captains who encourage their apprentices in making observations, and cause them to work them, should be recommended for so doing; besides which, their benevolent attention rewards itself by the progresses which their pupils make, who thereby can become valuable assistants to them. Owners who add to the inventory of the ship an octant or a sextant, would by so doing only promote their own interest. The objection of some masters against the examining of old experienced sailors by persons who have never been at sea, and cannot sufficiently judge of the practicability of methods on shipboard, however well founded on theory, and questioning them in matters that are of no use to a seaman, would be avoided by a forbearing discretion on the side of the examiner, who will not require a great discernment to see through his man; beside which there can be no want of theoretically-informed seamen to act as examiners. There might, however, another objection be made: young men who have had the advantage of a good education, and have only at an advanced age "bore away" for a sea life, in fact land-lubbers, are likely to obtain, in

theoretical respects at least, the best certificates. This would, however, be remedied by admitting no seaman to an examination as mate without a certificate of sufficient servitude, and no one to an examination as master without a certificate of having served as mate. When these regulations have been in force for some time, mates and captains will find that they are only in favour of their own interest, as persons without the necessary qualifications are thereby excluded from competition with them. It can, finally, not fail, that under such auspices the mariner's profession will rise in estimation by the officers themselves who do credit to their station.

Hamburgh, 6 April 1847.

(signed)

C. Rumker.

Source: P.P. 1847, X, pp.267/8.

APPENDIX XIV

Abstract from a Return to an Order of the House of Commons, dated 13 March 1850 regarding the number and classes of certificates of competency awarded since the inception of the voluntary scheme of examinations for Masters and Mates & etc.

Examining Board	Masters				Mates				Total Passed at each Port
	Class			Total	Class			Total	
	1	2	3		1	2	3		
London	97	856	255	1208	3	111	95	209	1417
South Shields	13	147	71	231	1	-	-	1	232
Liverpool	125	63	-	188	10	4	-	14	202
Dundee	28	38	3	69	9	14	2	25	94
Plymouth	14	35	15	64	2	12	11	25	89
Newcastle	22	49	9	80	2	5	-	7	87
Glasgow	43	25	-	68	3	6	1	10	78
Leith	41	17	-	58	11	6	-	17	75
Portsmouth	21	13	1	35	5	6	2	13	48
Hull	7	17	4	28	-	-	1	1	29
Yarmouth	13	11	3	27	1	-	1	2	29
Milford	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	2
Gloucester	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	2
	424	1272	361	2057	47	167	113	327	2384

Source: P.P. 1850, LIII, pp.349/50.

APPENDIX XV

Notice of Examinations of Masters and Mates,  
established in pursuance of The Mercantile  
Act, 1850

After the first day of January, 1851, no \*foreign-going vessel will be permitted to clear out from any Custom-house in the United Kingdom without the masters and mates respectively being in possession of Certificates, either of service or of competency.

The Certificate of Service entitles an officer, who has already served as either master or mate, to go in those capacities again, and may be had by application to the Registrar-General of Seamen, Custom House, London, on the transmission of the necessary certificates and testimonials.

Certificates of Competency will be granted by the Board of Trade to all mates and masters who have passed examinations, whether under the old or the present regulations, and also to all Officers who have passed Lieutenants', Masters', and Second Masters' examinations, in the Royal Navy and East India Company's service, unless special reasons to the contrary exist; and any person desirous of exchanging a passing Certificate - obtained under the former Boards of Examiners - for a Competency Certificate, should send it to the Registrar-General, as before mentioned, with a request to that effect, and state the Port to which he wishes it to be sent, where it will be delivered to him by the Collector of Customs.

All other Officers, entering for the first time upon their duties, whether as mate or master, will be required to undergo an examination before one of the Local Marine Boards before they can act in either of those capacities.

For the convenience of such persons, Examiners have been appointed under the Local Marine Boards, and arrangements have been made for holding the Examinations at the undermentioned Ports upon the days specified against them; and these days are so arranged for general convenience, that a candidate wishing to proceed to sea, and missing the day at his own Port, may proceed to another Port where an Examination is coming forward. The Days for commencing the Examinations at the various Ports are as follow:-

\* By a Foreign-going vessel is meant one which is bound to some place out of the United Kingdom, beyond the limits included between the river Elbe and Brest.

PLACES	DAYS
Aberdeen . . .	Fridays and Saturdays in first week in each month.
Belfast . . .	1st and 3rd Tuesday in each month.
Bristol . . .	1st Tuesday in each month.
Cork . . . .	4th Monday in each month.
Dublin . . . .	1st and 3rd Thursday in each month.
Dundee . . . .	Saturday in each week.
Glasgow* . . .	1st and 3rd Thursday in each month.
Hull . . . . .	2nd Tuesday in each month.
Leith . . . .	2nd Tuesday in each month.
Liverpool* . .	2nd and 4th Tuesday in each month.
London* . . .	Tuesday and Wednesday in Navigation; Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, in Seamanship.
Newcastle* . .	1st day of each month.
Shields* . . .	10th day of each month.
Sunderland* . .	20th day of each month.
Plymouth . . .	3rd Wednesday in each month.

The Examinations required for qualification for the several ranks undermentioned, are as follow:-

A SECOND MATE must be seventeen years of age, and must have been four years at sea.

In Navigation. - He must write a legible hand, and understand the five first rules of arithmetic. He must be able to correct the courses steered for variation and lee-way, and find the difference of latitude and departure therefrom; be able to correct the sun's declination for longitude, and find his latitude by meridian altitude of the sun; and work such other easy problems of a like nature, as may be put to him. He must understand the use of the quadrant, and be able to observe with it, and read off the arc.

In Seamanship. - He must give satisfactory answers as to the rigging and unrigging of Ships, stowing of holds, &c.; must understand the measurement of the log-line, glass, and lead-line; be conversant with the rule of the road, as regards both steamers and sailing-vessels, and the lights carried by them.

AN ONLY MATE must be eighteen years of age, and have been four years at sea.

In Navigation. - In addition to the qualification required for a Second Mate, an only Mate must be able to find the place of his vessel at sea by the observed altitude of the sun, comprising the latitude by meridian altitude. He must work a day's work complete, including the bearings and distance of the port he is bound to. He must be able to observe and calculate the amplitude of the sun, and deduce the variation of the compass therefrom. He must know how to lay off the place of the ship on the chart, both by bearings of known objects, and by latitude and longitude. He must be able to use a sextant and

\* At these places only Extra Examinations are held.

determine its error, and adjust it.

In Seamanship. - In addition to what is required by a Second Mate, he must know how to moor and unmoor, and to keep a clear anchor; to carry out an anchor; to stow a hold, and make the requisite entries in the ship's log.

A FIRST MATE must be nineteen years of age, and have served five years at sea, of which one year must have been as either Second or only Mate, or as both.\*

In Navigation. - He must be able to calculate the time of high-water, from the known time at full and change; to observe azimuths and compute the variation; to compare chronometers and keep their rates, and find the longitude by them from an observation by the sun; to work the latitude by single altitude of the sun off the meridian; and be able to use and adjust the sextant by the sun.

In Seamanship. - In addition to the qualification required for an only Mate, a more extensive knowledge of seamanship will be required, as to shifting large spars and sails, managing a ship in stormy weather, taking in and making sail, shifting yards and masts, &c., and getting cargo in and out; and especially heavy spars and weights, anchors, &c.; casting ship on a lee-shore; and to secure the masts in the event of accident to the bowsprit.

A MASTER must be twenty-one years of age, and have been six years at sea, of which one year must have been as First or only Mate, and one year as Second Mate; or two years as First and only Mate.\*

In addition to the qualification for a First Mate, he will be enquired of as to the nature of the attraction of the ship's iron upon the compass, and as to the method of determining it. He must possess a sufficient knowledge of what he is required to do by law; as to entry, and discharge and the management of his crew; as to penalties and entries to be made in the official log. He will be questioned as to his knowledge of invoices, charter party, Lloyd's agent, and as to the nature of bottomry.

He must be acquainted with the leading lights of the channel he has been accustomed to navigate, or which he is going to use.

AN EXTRA MASTER'S EXAMINATION is intended for such persons as are desirous of obtaining command of ships and steamers of the first class.

In Navigation. - As such vessels frequently make long voyages to the East Indies, and the Pacific, &c., the candidates will be required to work a lunar observation by both sun and star, to determine the latitude by the moon and star, and also by double altitude of the sun.

He must understand how to observe and apply the deviation of the compass; and to deduce the set and rate of the current from the D.R. and observation. He will be required to explain the nature of great

\* Service in a superior capacity is in all cases to be equivalent to service in an inferior capacity.

circle sailing, and know how to apply practically that knowledge, but he will not be required to go into the calculations. He must be acquainted with the law of storms, so far as to know how he may probably best escape those storms common to the East and West Indies, and known as hurricanes.

In Seamanship. - The extra examination will consist of an enquiry into the competency of the party to heave a ship down, in case of accident befalling her abroad; of getting lower masts and other heavy weights in and out; how to construct rafts, and as to his resources for the preservation of the ship's crew in the event of wreck, and in such like operations as the examiner may consider necessary.

The candidates will be allowed to work out the various problems according to the method and the tables they have been accustomed to use, and will be allowed five hours to perform the work; at the expiration of which, if they have not finished, they will be declared to have failed.

It will be seen that at certain of the above-mentioned ports, First Class Examinations will be held; and at these alone can be procured extra certificates of competency.

Applicants for examination are required to give their names to the Shipping Master, or to the Local Marine Board at the place where they intend to be examined, on or before the day of examination, and to conform to the regulations in this respect which may be laid down by the Local Marine Board, and if this be not done, a delay will be occasioned.

The examinations will commence early in the forenoon on the days before-mentioned, and be continued from day to day until all the candidates whose names appeared upon the Shipping Master's list on the day of examination are examined.

Testimonials of character, sobriety, and trustworthiness will be required of all applicants, and without which no person will be examined; and as testimonials may have to be forwarded to the office of the Registrar General of seamen in London for verification, before any Certificates can be granted, it is desirable that candidates should lodge them as early as possible. Upon application to the Shipping Master, candidates will be supplied with a Form, which they will be required to fill up and lodge with their testimonials in the hands of the Examiners.

The fee for examination must be paid to the Shipping Master or the officer appointed pro tem. by the Local Board to receive it. If a candidate fail in his examination, half the fee he has paid will be returned to him by the Shipping Master on his producing a document which will be given him by the Examiner.

The following are the fees to be paid by applicants for examination:-

	£.	s.	d.
Second Mate . . . . .	1	0	0
First and only Mate, if previously possessing an inferior certificate . . . . .	0	10	0
If not . . . . .	1	0	0
Master, whether Extra or Ordinary . . . . .	2	0	0

Any one who already possesses a Master's first-class Certificate granted by one of the former Boards of Examiners, or an Ordinary Master's Certificate of competency granted under the present Examiners, may pass an Extra Examination, and receive an Extra Certificate in exchange for his former one, without payment of any fee. But if he fails in his first Examination, he must pay half a Master's fee on his coming a second time; and the same sum for every subsequent attempt.

If the applicant passes, he will receive a document from the Examiner which will entitle him to receive his Certificate of Competency from the Shipping Master at the port to which he has directed it to be forwarded. If his testimonials have been sent to the Registrar to be verified, they will be returned with his Certificate.

As the examinations of Masters and Mates are now, for the first time, made compulsory, the qualifications have been kept as low as possible; but it must be distinctly understood that it is the intention of the Board of Trade to raise the standard in the course of time, whenever, as will no doubt be the case, the general attainments of officers in the merchant service shall render it possible to do so without inconvenience; and officers are strongly urged to employ their leisure hours, when in port, to the acquirement of the knowledge necessary to enable them to pass their examinations; and Masters will do well to permit apprentices and junior officers to attend schools of instruction, and to afford them as much time for this purpose as possible.

F. W. BEECHEY,  
W. H. WALKER.

T. H. FARRER,  
Secretary.

Naval Department, Board of Trade,  
December 19th, 1850.

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	(602-I-III)	XIII-III	<u>Pt. III, Society of Apothecaries.</u>
		II	<u>Index.</u>
1835	(242)	XVIII	<u>Maritime Officers, East India Co. Sel.Cttee. Rep. mins. of ev.</u>
1835	(465)	VII	<u>Education in England and Wales. Sel.Cttee. Rep., mins. of ev., etc.</u>
1836	(254)	XLV	<u>Number of Children employed under 14 years; of those receiving the Benefit of Education Clauses; and Rules and Regulations of Inspectors. Return.</u>
1836	(439)	XXXVIII	<u>Mates and midshipmen serving who have passed examination for lieutenants or captains &amp;c., promoted since 1825. Return.</u>
1836	(513)	XXXVIII	<u>Number of Merchant Seamen, 1835; Number Registered to 1836, under 5 &amp; 6 Will. IV, c.19; Number of Apprentices, 1835; also Number which, under 4 Geo. IV, should have belonged to the Service; also, Number whose Indentures have been Registered subsequent to 5 &amp; 6 Will. IV, to the present time. Return.</u>
1836	(567)	XVII	<u>Causes of Shipwrecks. Sel.Cttee. Rep., mins. of ev., etc.</u>
1836	(in 567)	XVII	<u>Ships' Registers cancelled or given up on account of Loss or Destruction of ships. Return.</u>

1837	(336)	VI	<u>Maritime Officers, East India Co., Sel.Cttee.Rep.</u>
1837/8	(165)	XXXVII	<u>Names of Mates in H.M.Navy, 1 Jan. 1838, the date of their examination for lieutenant, and ship in which they are serving; names of midshipmen, date of entry into the service &amp;c; also names of volunteers of the first class at the same period &amp;c. Return.</u>
1837/8	(589)	VII	<u>Education of the Poorer Classes in England and Wales. Sel. Cttee. Rep., mins.of ev., etc.</u>
1839	(42)	XLII	<u>Educational Provisions of the Factories Act. Factory Inspectors. Reps,</u>
1839	(284)	XLI	<u>Sums voted by Parliament for Public Education. Cttee. Rep.</u>
1839	(333)	IX	<u>Shipwrecks of Timber Ships. Sel. Cttee. Rep., mins.of ev., etc,</u>
1840	(384)	XI	<u>Health of Towns. Sel.Cttee. Rep. mins. of ev., etc,</u>
1841	(182)	VI	<u>Emigration. Islands and Highlands of Scotland. Sel.Cttee. 1st Rep.</u>
	(333)		<u>2nd Rep., mins.of ev., etc.</u>
1843	(166)	LII	<u>Number of Transports and Packets which have founded or not been heard of since 1816, with their Names and Tonnage. Return.</u>
1843	(549)	IX	<u>Shipwrecks. Sel. Cttee. 1st Rep., mins. of ev., etc.</u>
	(581)	IX	<u>Shipwrecks. 2nd Rep., mins. of ev., etc.</u>
1844	(545)	VIII	<u>Extending the Employment of British Shipping. Sel.Cttee.Rep., mins.of ev.</u>
1845	(HL.112)	XIX	<u>Parochial Schoolmasters. Sel.Cttee. HL, Rep., mins. of ev.</u>

1846	(686)	X	<u>Legal Education.Sel.Cttee.Rep., mins. of ev., etc.</u>
1847	(in 115)	LX	<u>Return showing, from each year 1816-1845 inclusive, the Number and Tonnage of Vessels entered Inwards and cleared Outwards at each of the Twelve principal Ports of the U.K.</u>
1847	(313)	LX	<u>Abstract from the Register-general of Shipping, showing the Number of Boys Apprenticed, and the Periods of their Apprenticeships.</u>
1847	(232)	X	<u>Navigation Laws.Sel.Cttee. 1st Rep., mins. of ev.</u>
	(246)	X	<u>2nd Rep., mins. of ev.</u>
	(392)	X	<u>3rd Rep., mins. of ev., etc.</u>
	(556)	X	<u>4th Rep., mins. of ev.</u>
	(678)	X	<u>5th Rep., mins. of ev., etc (Reprint of 1st-4th Reprs.: 1847/8(7) XX)</u>
1847	(526)	LX	<u>Instructions given to the Boards appointed in the several Seaports of the U.K., for the examination of Masters and Mates of Merchant Ships and Vessels; and of the Certificates of Qualification granted to Candidates who pass the regulated Examinations; List of the Number to whom such Certificates have been granted, and the Vessels in which they now serve.</u>
1847/8	(340)	XX	<u>Navigation Laws. Sel.Cttee.HL.</u>
		Pt.II	<u>1st Rep., mins. of ev.</u>
	(431)		<u>2nd Rep., mins. of ev.</u>
	(754)		<u>3rd Rep., mins. of ev., etc.</u>
1847/8	(in 754)	XX	<u>Comparative Statement of the Progressive Increase in the registered Mercantile Tonnage of the U.K. and the United States of America, in each year, 1791 to 1848, inclusive.</u>
		Pt.II	
1847/8	(913)	LIX	<u>Papers relating to the Commercial Marine of Great Britain.</u>

- 1850 (49) LIII Method of Measuring Ships for Tonnage. Cttee. Rep.
- 1850 (319) LIII Masters and Mates in the Merchant Service who have voluntarily passed an Examination, and obtained Certificates of Qualification under the Regulations issued by the Board of Trade, stating the Numbers of each Class, the Port, Amount of Fees, and expense to the Public; also Names and Professions of Examinators. Return.
- 1850 (in 460) LII Return of British Shipping built and registered since 1815.
- 1851 (196) LII Return of the registered Steam Vessels of the U.K. on 1 Jan. 1851; distinguishing Vessels built of Iron, and also having Screw Propellers, with Port of Registry, Owners, Dimensions and Tonnage.
- 1851 (688) LII Return from Lloyd's Book of all Collisions, Accidents, and Wrecks of Vessels, distinguishing the Sailing from Steam Vessels, specifying nature of each Collision, &c., Tonnage of each Vessel and the Number of Lives Lost in each year, 1847-1850.
- 1852 (376) XLIX Number and Tonnage of Vessels built and registered in the Ports of the British Empire in each year 1815-1852; Number and Tonnage of Vessels, and Number of Men and Boys employed in navigating the same, from 1814 to 1851; Amount of Tonnage employed in the Foreign Trade and in the Coasting Trade of the U.K., from 1815 to 1851 &c. Return.
- 1867 (266) LXIII Copies of Memoranda etc. recently addressed to the Board of Trade concerning Disasters at Sea and their Prevention.

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| 1867 | (C.18865) | LXIII | <u>Qualifications for Certificates of Competency of Masters and Mates in the Merchant Service at the institution of Compulsory Examinations in 1850, and at the present time. Copies of examination papers in use. Return.</u> |
| 1876 | (C.1398)  | LXVI  | <u>Report to the President of the Board of Trade on recent Legislation concerning Merchant Ships and Seamen.</u>   |

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Lloyd's Register of British and Foreign Shipping

London Gazette

Mercantile Marine Magazine

Mercantile Navy List

Nautical Magazine

Quarterly Review

Shields Gazette

Shipmasters' Society Papers, London

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