

*Celebrating the Battle of the Saintes:
Imperial News in England and Ireland, 1782*

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Preface

I wish to extend my sincere thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Kate Fullagar, and to Dr. Leigh Boucher, both of whom have encouraged me through my return to study at Macquarie University, first as an undergraduate and then through the Masters of Research. I also owe my family a debt of gratitude, in particular my husband, daughter and parents. Your support and confidence in my abilities has enabled me to live up to your expectations, and in the process far exceed my own. Thank you.

This thesis is all my own work and has not been previously submitted for assessment at a tertiary institution.

Signed: 

6 October, 2014

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Introduction

On October 19, 1781 the British Army at Yorktown, Virginia, surrendered to the combined American Continental Army and French troops, in what is traditionally regarded as the closing chapter of the American war.¹ The loss of the North American colonies was a significant blow to Britain, but these thirteen colonies represented only half the colonies of British America in 1776.² The remainder were in the Caribbean. After the loss of the mainland colonies, the imperial powers in the region—Britain, France, Spain and the Netherlands—diverted their attention to the Caribbean, which became the site of a marked escalation of hostilities.

By early 1782, Jamaica, one of Britain's most valuable colonies, was preparing for a Franco-Spanish invasion. Newspapers in Jamaica reported the imposition of martial law on the island in preparation for an attack; and these reports were reprinted in newspapers in England and Ireland. The *Jamaica Gazette* expected "the intended attack on this island...to take place early in April," and that the

¹ In preference to the terms common in American historiography—'War of Independence,' 'American Revolution' or 'Revolutionary War'—this thesis will refer throughout to the 'American war.' This was the terminology most often used in contemporary British newspaper reports and aligns the thesis more closely with British historiography.

² Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), p.xi.

invasion would entail “three debarkations of 10,000 men,” simultaneously at different points on the island, with a reserve of 10,000 more to be kept on board the ships.³ In a letter published in the London newspapers, a planter from Montego Bay, Jamaica, reported that “people in general were under the greatest alarm in consequence of the threatened attack from the enemy.”⁴ Plantation owners in the region also complained about the consequent effect on the price of their sugar. John Mair, who owned a plantation on Dominica, lamented that,

Before the Dutch war broke out our sugars did pretty well, but when we were forced to send it to Ostend it netted little, the taking of St. Kitts and the adjoining islands together with the preparations to attack Jamaica threatened the total annihilation of the British Flag which had in vain under Rodney made several efforts to rear itself.⁵

Mair’s house on his plantation afforded him an uninterrupted view of Les Saintes, a group of small islands in a passage between Dominica and Guadeloupe. From his vantage point, he witnessed the escalation of military activities in the region. In April, he recorded in his private journal,

When that immense Spanish fleet formed a junction with the French the ocean seemed covered with them,

³ “West-India Intelligence, From the Jamaica Gazette, Kingston March 9,” *Dublin Evening Post*, 21 May 1782, p.3.

⁴ “Morning Chronicle, London, May 22, 1782,” *The Morning Chronicle, and London Advertiser*, May 22, 1782, p.3.

⁵ Gwyn Jenkins, ed., *John Mair’s Journals* (Aberystwyth: University College of Wales, Department of History, 1976), p.35.

and the coast of our island particularly exhibited a grand sight.⁶

On 9 April 1782, the British fleet in the Caribbean, headed by Admiral George Brydges Rodney, intercepted a French fleet, led by François-Joseph Paul, comte de Grasse, in Les Saintes. The French fleet was *en route* from Martinique to join troops in St. Domingue for their planned invasion of Jamaica. The two fleets faced each other in Les Saintes, but at too great a distance to engage in battle. On the account of Sir Gilbert Blane, Rodney's surgeon aboard the British flagship, HMS *Formidable*,

A cannonade commenced between the two fleets between nine and ten o'clock of the morning of the 9th, which continued with little intermission till one. As the enemy had the advantage of the wind, they could not be brought to close action; nor would they hazard a general battle...The two following days were employed in attempting by evolutions to gain the wind of the enemy. Our attempts for this purpose were in vain.⁷

According to Blane, a French accident within their fleet on the night of 10 April resulted in the British fleet gaining an advantage. The French *Zélé*, a ship of 74 guns, had run "foul of the *Ville de Paris*...and having her bowsprit thereby carried away, was unable to keep up with the rest of the fleet."⁸ In order to prevent the *Zélé* from falling into British hands, de Grasse was obliged to lose ground. On

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Gilbert Blane, *Account of the Battle between the British and French Fleets in the West Indies, on the Twelfth of April, 1782. In a Letter to Lord Dalrymple, British Minister at the Court of Warsaw, April 22, 1782* (London, 1782), pp.3-4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.4-5.

Blane's account, at daylight on the twelfth of April the British fleet had "the inexpressible satisfaction of finding ourselves to windward of a great part of their line," such that they could "command their distance, so as to bring their antagonist to as close action as they please."⁹ The Battle of the Saintes was about to commence.

⁹ *Ibid.*

The victory at the Saintes has received scant scholarly attention. Aside from biographies of Rodney, and passing references in works of British history, the most sustained scholarship has been undertaken by Stephen Conway, Andrew O'Shaughnessy and Brad Jones, each of whom has examined the Saintes from a different perspective.¹⁰ This thesis takes the Saintes as a case study in the history of imperial news. A comparison of the newspaper coverage of the Saintes and the ensuing celebrations in London, Dublin and Belfast provides an opportunity to consider the impact of imperial news in both the metropole and a second site of empire. Further, the case study permits an examination of the network which passed information from an outpost of empire to England and Ireland. The way that the reporting of the Saintes unfolded in London, Dublin and Belfast provides an insight into how imperial news interacted with local politics, and how this shaped imperial sensibilities.

This thesis engages with scholarship in the fields of press history, new imperial historiography and eighteenth-century Irish studies. In 2007, Michael de Nie and Joe Cleary declared that "Ireland and empire is now one of the most vibrant fields of inquiry in Irish

¹⁰ O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*. Stephen Conway, "A Joy Unknown for Years Past': The American War, Britishness and the Celebration of Rodney's Victory at the Saints," *History* 86 (2001): pp.188-189. Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, "The Other Road to Yorktown: The St. Eustatius Affair and the American Revolution," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 97 (2002): pp.33-59. Brad Jones, "The American Revolution and Popular Loyalism in the British Atlantic World" (Ph.D., Thesis, University of Glasgow, 2006), Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America: British Leadership, the American Revolution, and the Fate of the Empire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013).

studies,” in their introduction to a volume of *Éire-Ireland* devoted to Irish nationalist engagements with empire.¹¹ This volume was part of an effort by Irish studies scholars to address the perceived consignment of “Irish history, in its relations with empire” to a “residual, ill-defined” category, which was often dismissed “with terms such as...ambivalent, complex, exceptional, anomalous.”¹² More recently, de Nie has argued for an even wider focus, to enable explorations of “Irish imperial sensibilities more generally.”¹³ By examining the interaction between the imperial news of the Saintes, and the specifics of local politics in Dublin and Westminster, this thesis contributes to this emerging historiography of Irish imperial sensibilities of the late eighteenth century.

Historians of eighteenth-century Britain have long acknowledged the importance of newspapers,¹⁴ and utilising the newspaper press as a tool for investigating British opinion is well-established.¹⁵ The selection of the individual newspapers for this case study was based upon a combination of information about the reach and popularity of the newspapers and accessibility for research. By the 1780s

¹¹ Michael de Nie and Joe Cleary “Editors’ Introduction,” *Éire-Ireland* 42 (2007): p.5.

¹² Stephen Howe, “Minding the Gaps: New Directions in the Study of Ireland and Empire,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 37 (2009): p.136.

¹³ Michael de Nie, “‘Speed the Mahdi!’ the Irish Press and Empire During the Sudan Conflict of 1883–1885,” *Journal of British Studies* 51 (2012): pp.883–909.

¹⁴ Hannah Barker, “Review of *Benjamin Collins and the Provincial Newspaper Trade in the Eighteenth Century*, by C.Y. Ferdinand,” *English Historical Review* 114 (1999): p.209.

¹⁵ Troy Bickham, *Making Headlines: The American Revolution as Seen Through the British Press* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), p.9.

London and Dublin had a vibrant culture of news consumption, supplied by newspapers competing in increasingly crowded markets.¹⁶ The consensus amongst scholars is that by 1783, London boasted nine daily newspapers and ten bi- or tri-weekly publications;¹⁷ and ten newspapers were being published in Dublin.¹⁸ This case study includes two of the London dailies: the *Morning Chronicle*, and *London Advertiser*¹⁹ and the *Morning Herald*, and *Daily Advertiser*.²⁰ Also included are the *London Chronicle*, which appeared three times per week, and *The London Gazette*, which appeared twice. A London Sunday newspaper is also included: the *British Gazette and Sunday Monitor*.²¹ The *Dublin Evening Post*,²² the *Freeman's Journal*,²³ and the *Belfast News-Letter*²⁴ comprise the Irish section of the case study.

London newspapers enjoyed a wide, almost national circulation, as virtually all London newspapers in the 1780s claimed circulations

¹⁶ James Raven, "The Book Trades," in *Books and Their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England: New Essays*, ed. Isabel Rivers (London: Continuum, 2001), pp.24-26. Brian Inglis, *The Freedom of the Press in Ireland 1784–1841* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1954), pp.21. Padhraig Higgins, *A Nation of Politicians: Gender, Patriotism, and Political Culture in Late Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), pp.28-33.

¹⁷ Jeremy Black, *The English Press in the Eighteenth Century* (Beckenham: Croom Helm Ltd, 1987). Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2011. Kindle edition, p.10 of 226, location 477.

¹⁸ Inglis, *The Freedom of the Press in Ireland*, p.21.

¹⁹ Hereinafter referred to as *The Morning Chronicle*, published Monday to Saturday inclusive.

²⁰ Hereinafter referred to as *The Morning Herald*, published Monday to Friday inclusive.

²¹ Hereinafter referred to as the *Sunday Monitor*.

²² Published daily, Monday to Saturday inclusive.

²³ Published three times per week.

²⁴ Published on Tuesday and Friday.

well beyond the metropolis.²⁵ Readership and circulation figures for eighteenth-century newspapers remain difficult to quantify, but it is accepted that most copies found their way to more than one reader. Therefore circulation numbers—even if they could be accurately ascertained—are not conclusive indicators of a newspaper's reach. It is estimated that London readership may have reached about a quarter of a million by 1782, a third of the population.²⁶ On this basis, a case study which includes the newspaper of record (the *London Gazette*), two widely-circulated dailies, a tri-weekly and a Sunday newspaper, constitutes a substantial survey. A review of the content of these newspapers over the course of the week to ten days following news of the Saintes indicates that many stories were printed and reprinted across the London newspapers with only little variation. It is therefore unlikely that a larger sample would result in further variety in the coverage of the story, or reveal substantial nuances.

In relation to the Irish newspaper press in the 1780s, the *Freeman's Journal* and its chief (commercial) rival, the *Dublin Evening Post*, are regarded as the most influential.²⁷ By 1781, the *Post* claimed a circulation of four thousand, the largest of any newspaper in

²⁵ Bickham, *Making Headlines*, p.12.

²⁶ Uriel Heyd, *Reading Newspapers: press and public in eighteenth-century Britain and America* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2012), p.21.

²⁷ Inglis, *The Freedom of the Press in Ireland*, p.22.

Ireland.²⁸ The *Belfast News-Letter*, although a provincial newspaper, was one of the longest-established, and “most strongly-based newspapers in Ireland.”²⁹

The ease with which newspaper reporting can be utilised as a primary source has increased exponentially with the advent of digitisation. Source selection must, however, take into account more than simply accessibility. This case study incorporates the *Dublin Evening Post*, despite the fact that for 1782, it is not available in digital format. The *Post* has been described as the “titan” of the Dublin press scene, by virtue of its wide circulation;³⁰ to exclude it from this case study would result in an uneven assessment of the impact of the news of the Saintes in Ireland, particularly as the *Post* was the first to break the news there.³¹

In utilising the press as a primary source, it is also important to acknowledge that newspapers were physical objects that were “bought, read and passed around”.³² Keyword searches are useful when utilising digital databases, but this case study has also

²⁸ Inglis, *The Freedom of the Press in Ireland*, p.22. Padraig Higgins, “Bonfires, Illuminations, and Joy: Celebratory Street Politics and Uses of “the Nation” During the Volunteer Movement,” *Éire-Ireland* 42 (2007): p.177.

²⁹ Douglas Simes, “Ireland, 1760–1820s,” in *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760–1820*, ed. Hannah Barker and Simon Burrows (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.119.

³⁰ Simes, “Ireland 1760–1820, p.119.

³¹ “Postscript Extraordinary,” *Dublin Evening Post*, May 21, 1782, p.3.

³² Adrian Bingham, “The Digitization of Newspaper Archives: Opportunities and Challenges for Historians,” *Twentieth Century British History* 21 (2010): p.230.

involved the review of the entire issue of each newspaper, rather than isolated articles. The location of news stories within a newspaper can indicate the story's provenance and significance, and the surrounding news reports provide crucial context. To fully contextualise the news, it is also important to situate the story within the newspaper.

* * *

This thesis will commence by setting the background to the Saintes, in the Caribbean and in London, and will then describe the battle in outline. Chapter Two traces the newspaper coverage of the Saintes and the ensuing celebrations, and provides further political context to assist with the analysis of the interplay between the imperial and local news in England and in Ireland. The final chapter seeks to resolve the apparent paradox which emerged in the reporting and celebrations of the Saintes in Ireland, which enthusiastically celebrated the imperial victory, whilst simultaneously celebrating Dublin's legislative independence from Westminster. In order to fully assess the impact of the imperial news in Ireland, the third chapter includes an assessment of the information networks at play in the transmission of the news, and the mediating role of the press; and finally, places the reporting of the Saintes in the context of the recent historiography of patriotism in eighteenth-century Ireland.

Chapter 1: The Glorious Twelfth of April, or The Battle of the Saintes

The British Caribbean

By the eighteenth century, the Atlantic Ocean was no longer a barrier between the old world and the new. It was a busy thoroughfare, carrying people, goods and information between the imperial centres of Europe and their colonies in the Caribbean and the Americas. By the 1770s, the Caribbean islands had emerged as both an economic powerhouse for the European Empires, and a strategic battleground. Britain, France, the United Provinces, Spain and Denmark all laid claim to Caribbean islands, many of which frequently changed hands. The Caribbean also played a vital role in the American war, as it supplied the bulk of the revolutionaries' military and victual supplies.¹ In his study of the British Caribbean and the American war, Andrew O'Shaughnessy concluded that whilst the American revolutionaries did engage in some trade with British West Indian merchants, they were primarily supplied by the French and later the Dutch Caribbean.²

¹ Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), p.213.

² *Ibid.*, pp.213-214.

When Admiral Rodney assumed command of the British naval squadron in the Leeward Islands in March 1780, his fleet was pre-occupied with fighting a war with France, defending British possessions, and attempting to disrupt supply to American revolutionary interests. In December of that year, Britain also declared war on the United Provinces, primarily because of the support given to the American revolutionaries by St. Eustatius, a tiny but bustling Dutch trading post in the northern Leeward Islands.³ On the same day as Britain declared war, the Admiralty issued orders to Rodney to commence hostilities against the Dutch possessions in the Caribbean. He was instructed to co-operate with Major-General Vaughan, the commander of British land troops in the Caribbean, in “attacking and subduing” any Dutch islands they judged appropriate—and specific mention was made of St. Eustatius.⁴ On 3 February 1781, shortly after receiving the orders, Rodney and Vaughan secured a surrender from the Governor of St. Eustatius without a shot being fired.⁵ Rodney reported to the Admiralty that the “surprise and astonishment of the governor and inhabitants of St. Eustatius is scarce to be conceived.”⁶

What followed, however, was to mire Rodney in controversy for the

³ Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, “The Other Road to Yorktown: The St. Eustatius Affair and the American Revolution,” *Maryland Historical Magazine* 97 (2002): p.33.

⁴ “Copy of His Majesty’s Instructions to Sir George Brydges Rodney. By the Commissioners for Executing the office of Lord High Admiral of Great Britain and Ireland,” in *The Life and Correspondence of the Late Admiral Lord Rodney, Vol.II*, ed. G.B. Mundy (London: John Murray, 1830), pp.6-8.

⁵ Michael J. Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680–1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), p.431.

⁶ Admiral Rodney to Philip Stephens, St. Eustatius, 4 February 1782, in *The Life and Correspondence of the Late Admiral Lord Rodney, Vol II*, p.10.

rest of his life, and—it has been argued—contributed directly to the British defeat at Yorktown.⁷

While Rodney was preoccupied with St. Eustatius, the French admiral, the comte de Grasse, sailed from Brittany for the Caribbean *en route* to Virginia. The Admiralty in London was unconcerned by news of de Grasse's sailing, as Rodney was expected either to intercept the fleet in the Caribbean or to follow it to North America.⁸ Rodney did neither—remaining instead at St. Eustatius. When it became clear that de Grasse had evaded the British in the Caribbean, Rodney ordered his second-in-command, Admiral Sir Samuel Hood, to North America, while he remained behind at St. Eustatius. According to O'Shaughnessy, Rodney's absence from the North American theatre of war deprived the British of their most senior and experienced commander there in the summer of 1781.⁹ The British were defeated in what transpired to be a crucial contest at the battle of the Virginia Capes at the Chesapeake. It was the failure of the British fleet to dislodge de Grasse at the Chesapeake which sealed the fate of Lord Cornwallis' army at Yorktown.¹⁰ Hood later claimed that Rodney would have won this battle, by virtue of his superior skills as a commander, and the

⁷ O'Shaughnessy, "The Other Road to Yorktown," p.34.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid*, pp.49-50.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.49.

numerical superiority his fleet would have brought to the Chesapeake.¹¹ In the event, the battle was commanded by Admiral Sir Thomas Graves, an interim appointee, and instead of Rodney and his fleet participating in the battle, Rodney had diverted at least three ships to escort some of his plunder from St. Eustatius to England.¹²

A Great Convoy of Prizes¹³

After the surrender of St. Eustatius, Rodney and Vaughan remained *in situ* for three months, continued to fly the Dutch flag over the island to trick and trap unsuspecting enemy ships, and set about the plunder of the island and its inhabitants.¹⁴ Their conduct was widely regarded as scandalous. Rodney departed from the norms of Caribbean warfare by declaring all private property within St. Eustatius to be forfeited prize goods, “essentially treating the entire island as if it were one vast captured ship.”¹⁵ The residents of the island suffered; on one account, “every necessary of life” was withheld for almost three weeks “before the retail shops were permitted to be opened.”¹⁶ Admiral Hood predicted that the Commanders would “find it difficult to convince the world that they [had] not proved themselves wickedly rapacious.”¹⁷ Earl Nugent, a supporter of the North government, conceded that the

¹¹ *Ibid*, p.50.

¹² *Ibid*.

¹³ Admiral Rodney to Lady Rodney, St. Eustatius, 23 April 1781, in *The Life and Correspondence of the Late Admiral Lord Rodney, Vol II*, p.98.

¹⁴ O’Shaughnessy, “The Other Road to Yorktown,” pp.37, 49.

¹⁵ Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, p.431.

¹⁶ O’Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, p.217.

¹⁷ Sir Samuel Hood, quoted in O’Shaughnessy, “The Other Road to Yorktown,” p.41.

St. Eustatius affair had made Rodney “extremely unpopular;”¹⁸ and Edmund Burke (who was a political opponent of Nugent and North), referred in private to Rodney as “a perfect fool, a compleat Rascal, and (as many think) a Poltroon into the Bargain.”¹⁹

The Society of West-India Planters and Merchants in London was also outraged. They presented a petition to the King, declaring themselves,

Seriously alarmed at the general Seizure, made by the Commanders of your Majesty’s Sea and Land Forces, of Goods, Merchandise, and Specie, found in the Dutch islands of Saint Eustatius and Saint Martin, on their surrendering, without resistance, and at discretion, to the said Commanders; humbly conceiving, that the inhabitants of places, which submit to the will, and surrender themselves to the discretion, of an invading enemy, immediately upon such Submission, become the Subjects of that Sovereign, or State, to whom the victorious army belongs; and, consequently, by their allegiance, are entitled to Security in their Persons and Property.²⁰

Rodney and Vaughan appointed agents to sell the confiscated goods in the Caribbean, and arranged a convoy to transport other goods back to Britain. In his dispatches to the Admiralty, and his arguments in Parliament later in 1781, Rodney asserted that he had captured the

¹⁸ Quoted in Stephen Conway, “‘A Joy Unknown for Years Past’: The American War, Britishness and the Celebration of Rodney’s Victory at the Saints,” *History* 86 (2001): pp.188-189.

¹⁹ *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed. T.W. Copeland et al, quoted in Conway, “A Joy Unknown for Years Past’,” pp.188-189.

²⁰ *Petition of the West-India Planters and Merchants to the King, On the Subject of the general Seizure of private Property, found in the Dutch Islands of Saint Eustatius and Saint Martin*, 6 April 1781 (London, 1781), p.1.

goods for the King's account.²¹ But his private correspondence demonstrated that he was also cognisant of the percentage of sale proceeds that he would receive as a reward. He wrote from St. Eustatius to his wife that "if my great convoy of prizes arrive safe in England, I shall be happy, as, exclusive of satisfying all debts, something will be left for my dear children."²² The royal grant of prize money was standard practice following a naval capture. Officers and men were rewarded according to rank; Rodney and Vaughan could expect one-sixteenth each of the value of the goods captured at St. Eustatius.²³

The fall-out from the Rodney and Vaughan's conduct at St. Eustatius was widespread. The Society of West India Merchants and Planters printed their Petition for public distribution, satirical cartoons lampooned Rodney and Vaughan as rapacious auctioneer and clerk;²⁴ and in Amsterdam, as many as forty thousand people rioted in protest against the plunder.²⁵ At Westminster, Edmund Burke, the Rockinghamite Member of Parliament for Malton, launched a

²¹ *The Life and Correspondence of the Late Admiral Lord Rodney, Vol II*, pp.9-95. *Parliamentary Register* 1780-1796, Vol.5, pp.90-91. Fifteenth Parliament of Great Britain: second session (27 November 1781–11 July 1782), 4 December 1781. Accessed online: http://gateway.proquest.com.rp.nla.gov.au/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:hcpp&rft_dat=xri:hcpp:rec:pr_1780_1796-000249

²² Admiral Rodney to Lady Rodney, St. Eustatius, 23 April 1781," in *The Life and Correspondence of the Late Admiral Lord Rodney*, Vol II, p.98.

²³ O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, p.223.

²⁴ "The late Auction at St Eustatia," (London: E. Hedges, 11 June 1781.) Source: British Museum, London. Image No. AN77864001 . See Figure 2 herein.

²⁵ O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, p.225.

campaign in May 1781 to investigate the capture of St. Eustatius and its aftermath—a campaign which had the makings of his more famous prosecution of Warren Hastings.²⁶ On 4 December in the House of Commons, during his second call for an investigation, Burke castigated Rodney and Vaughan (who were both also Members of Parliament) for failing to protect the British inhabitants of the island, as well as Britain's new subjects:

Their warehouses were locked up; their books taken from them; their provisions even with-held; and they were compelled to give in an account of all their ready money, plate, jewels, &c ...The next measure was the general proscription of all the inhabitants, by which they were ordered to quit the island; all without exception: the Dutch were banished because they were the king's enemies: ill-fated Americans! Destined to be always the objects on which the English were desirous to heap misfortunes; banished as enemies from St. Eustatius; surrendered without condition at York Town, though friends!²⁷

Rodney was in the Commons as Burke made these allegations, having returned to England in August to see out the Caribbean hurricane season. His son-in-law described this as “the long wished-for opportunity...of vindicating himself from the charges.”²⁸ Rodney rose to his feet and argued that,

when he seized all the property on the island, it was not for his own use; at the time he thought it would all belong to

²⁶ O'Shaughnessy, “The Other Road to Yorktown,” p.45.

²⁷ *Parliamentary Register* 1780–1796, Vol.5, p.85. Fifteenth Parliament of Great Britain: second session (27 November 1781–11 July 1782), 4 December 1781. Accessed online: http://gateway.proquest.com.rp.nla.gov.au/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:hcpp&rft_dat=xri:hcpp:rec:pr_1780_1796-000249

²⁸ Mundy, *The Life and Correspondence of the Late Admiral Lord Rodney, Vol.II.*, p.159.

the King, and that it was his duty to see the most made of it.²⁹

Burke's proposal to investigate the conduct at St. Eustatius was debated, but defeated on the basis that numerous private court cases against Rodney had already been initiated.³⁰ Although Burke may have wished to continue his pursuit of Rodney, events in the Caribbean were to overshadow even the fallout from St. Eustatius.

Rodney returned to the Caribbean shortly after his appearance in Parliament, newly promoted by the North Administration to the position of Vice-Admiral of Great Britain, with command of all of the West Indies. Within four months, the engagement with the French in the Saintes marked an extraordinary turnaround in his public reputation. Instead of pursuing Rodney in Parliament, Burke joined in the acclamations, declaring that "If there were a bald spot on the head of Rodney, he would willingly cover it with laurels."³¹ Six years later, Rodney wrote to Burke, enclosing a pamphlet which he had printed seeking to justify his conduct at St. Eustatius.³² In reply, Burke assured

²⁹ *Parliamentary Register* 1780-1796, Vol.5, pp.90-91. Fifteenth Parliament of Great Britain: second session (27 November 1781–11 July 1782), 4 December 1781. Accessed online: http://gateway.proquest.com.rp.nla.gov.au/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:hc&rft_dat=xri:hc&rec:pr_1780_1796-000249

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ James Prior, *Memoir of the Life and Character of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke with Specimens of his Poetry and Letters and an Estimate of his Genius and Talents, Compared with those of his Great Contemporaries* (London: H & E Sheffield, 1839), p.236.

³² F.P. Lock, "Unpublished Burke Letters, 1783-96," *English Historical Review* 112 (1997): p.123.

Rodney that he could not possibly entertain any personal animosity against him, as he had,

rendered such very splendid and such very substantial service to his Country, which must dispose every man of sentiment and principle to wish him to receive Justice at the very least.³³

³³ Edmund Burke to Lord Rodney, London, 10 July 1787, in George Brydges Rodney, 1st Baron Stoke-Rodney, Papers, 1787, PRO 30/20/21/6 – St. Eustatius, Papers relating to subsequent lawsuits, UK National Archives, London.

The Battle of the Saintes

According to the ship's journal on the *St. Albans* kept by midshipman James Grant, at 5am on the twelfth of April, Admiral Rodney "made the signal for a general Chase," and within four hours, action had commenced.³⁴ Grant's journal records the series of signals issued throughout the day, his deteriorating handwriting illustrating the frenetic pace of battle and the dramatic events he witnessed. After exchanging fire with the French for nearly an hour and a half, Rodney broke through the enemy line.³⁵ Gilbert Blane described how the *Formidable*, with Rodney on board,

...broke the French line, by bursting through it, going within short pistol-shot of the last enemy's ship we passed. This was the decisive act that crowned us with victory; and no sooner had the smoke cleared away, than we perceived the enemy separated, routed, and in flight and one of the ships we had handled so roughly, with every mast and the bowsprit gone by the board, lying on the face of the deep an abandoned and unmanageable hulk.³⁶

Breaking the line constituted a radical departure from the conventions of eighteenth-century naval warfare. By sailing through gaps in the line of French ships, the British ships could use their cannons on both sides, to concentrate fire power and to surround the enemy ships at

³⁴ James Grant, *Journal of H.M.S. St. Albans, kept by midshipman James Francis Grant, 4 December 1780—28 July 1783*, Add MS45124, British Library, London, Folio 47.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Folio 47.

³⁶ Gilbert Blane, *Account of the Battle between the British and French Fleets in the West Indies, on the Twelfth of April, 1782. In a Letter to Lord Dalrymple, British Minister at the Court of Warsaw, April 22, 1782* (London, 1782), p.6.

close range.³⁷ Eighteenth-century sea battles usually proceeded with a “classical symmetry,” the opposing fleets aligned with one another, each ship engaging an opposite ship of approximately equal firepower.³⁸ The innovative tactic attracted controversy within months of the Saintes, due to the publication of a pamphlet attributing the idea of breaking the line not to Rodney, but instead to one of his captains, Sir Charles Douglas.³⁹ Although the question appears to have been settled, controversy amongst military historians continue to simmer.⁴⁰

The battle continued until sunset, with the greatest interval between firing, in some part of other of the fleet, being seven minutes.⁴¹ Midshipman Grant noted that by half past eleven in the morning “many of the Enemy’s Ships greatly Disabled in the Masts and Rigging.”⁴² He also recorded that at half past six in the evening, the *Ville de Paris* struck her colours; and that the *St Albans* “left off engaging at 8. Tacked and joined the Admiral.”⁴³ In Rodney’s words, the engagement ended “after a Battle which lasted with unremitting Fury from Seven in the Morning till Half Past Six in the Evening, when

³⁷ O’Shaughnessy, “The Other Road to Yorktown,” p.53.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.52.

³⁹ Mundy, *The Life and Correspondence of the Late Admiral Lord Rodney, Vol.II*, pp.295-306.

⁴⁰ Christopher J. Valin, *Fortune’s Favorite: Sir Charles Douglas and the Breaking of the Line* (Tucson: Fireship Press LLC, 2009).

⁴¹ Blane, *Account of the Battle*, p.5.

⁴² Grant, *Journal of H.M.S. St. Albans*, Folio 47.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Folio 48.

the setting Sun put an End to the Contest.”⁴⁴ The victory was comprehensive. The British fleet sunk four French ships, captured the fleet’s flagship, the *Ville de Paris*, and took the comte de Grasse prisoner.

Nathaniel Wraxall later recounted the aftermath of the battle, which he based on the account of Lord Cranston, one of the captains of the *Formidable*, Rodney’s flagship. It was Cranston who travelled to London two days after the battle, carrying Rodney’s dispatches to the Admiralty. Wraxall listened to Cranston describe first-hand the “altogether terrible” scene on board the *Ville de Paris*, which he had been sent to take possession of,

Between the foremast and mainmast at every step he took he said he was over his buckles in blood, the carnage having been prodigious...on the quarter-deck, which remained still covered with dead and wounded, only de Grasse himself remained still standing, together with two or three other persons.⁴⁵

Rodney, too, described the horror of the aftermath on the French flagship, in a private letter which was later published in the *London Chronicle*: “The decks of the *Ville de Paris* were so full of dead bodies when our people boarded her, that the scene was the most shocking that imagination can conceive.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ “Formidable, at Sea, April 14, 1782,” *The London Gazette*, May 14-18, 1782, pp.2-3.

⁴⁵ Wraxall, Nathaniel William, *The Historical and the Posthumous Memoirs of Sir Nathaniel William Wraxall 1772–1784* (London: Bickers & Son, 1884), p.322.

⁴⁶ “Postscript. Formidable at Sea, April 15,” *The London Chronicle*, May 18-21, 1782, p.488.

John Mair's private journal affords an equally graphic description of the aftermath of the battle. His plantation on Dominica afforded him an excellent view of Les Saintes. He had watched the final engagement all day from the portico of his house. By eight o'clock in the evening,

...as I was looking at the moving lights a large flame appeared which I immediately knew to be a ship on fire; as this was not above two leagues from shore the glare made the horizon as light as day, and with spy glasses the whole scene of distress on board was distinctly seen, she blew up after burning to the water's edge, and the darkness that succeeded well masked the horrid catastrophe. The awful and sublime sight this day exhibited will ever remain on my mind.⁴⁷

Rodney's first dispatches to the Admiralty reported that the British lost 230 men, with 759 wounded.⁴⁸ The magnitude of the French loss was not quantified, but contemporaneous reports indicate far heavier losses. The *London Chronicle* printed a letter from a private correspondent in Paris,

We have been acquainted that our fleet have met with a great disaster in the West Indies, yet the particulars are kept from the knowledge of the public. By the number of families going into mourning, we well know that the slaughter has been great among the Officers as well as the common men.⁴⁹

Blane recorded that the carnage aboard "the prizes" was dreadful, and that "the damages of the enemy are in every respect greater than ours.

⁴⁷ Gwyn Jenkins, ed., *John Mair's Journals* (Aberystwyth: University College of Wales, Department of History, 1976), p.35.

⁴⁸ "Formidable, at Sea, April 14, 1782," *The London Gazette*, May 14-18, 1782, pp.2-4.

⁴⁹ "London," *The London Chronicle*, May 25-28, 1782, p.509.

By the best accounts that could be obtained, the *Ville de Paris* had near 300 men killed and wounded.”⁵⁰ In fact, the British estimated that “there cannot be less than 14,000 taken, killed, and otherwise hors de combat” as “the ordinary complements of their ships are considerably greater than ours; and the troops, with whom they were crowded at this time, made the slaughter the greater.”⁵¹

The Legacy of Rodney and the Saintes

The Battle of the Saintes has received little academic attention. Military historians have analysed the innovative tactics Rodney and his captains employed during the battle,⁵² but aside from his biographers, few historians have paused long to consider the wider significance of the events of April 1782. David Syrett, the editor of the Navy Records Society’s *Rodney Papers*, concluded that despite Rodney’s towering stature in the navy of the eighteenth century, he and the Saintes were “eclipsed in the imagination of both historians and the public by Nelson.”⁵³ The reason for the obscurity of both Rodney and the Saintes in the historical record is, however, more complicated than simply the emergence of Nelson and Trafalgar in 1805. Both Rodney and the Saintes evade simple characterisation—Rodney was brilliant but

⁵⁰ Blane, *Account of the Battle*, p.8.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.19.

⁵² Most recently: Peter Trew, *Rodney and the Breaking of the Line* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2006); Valin, *Fortune’s Favorite: Sir Charles Douglas and the Breaking of the Line*.

⁵³ David Syrett, “Preface,” in *The Rodney Papers: Selections from the Correspondence of Admiral Lord Rodney, Vol.I 1742–1763*, ed. David Syrett (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate for the Navy Records Society, 2005), p.xi.

divisive, and the battle itself takes on a different character depending upon which side of the Atlantic from which it is viewed.

Rodney was a controversial figure, whose actions at St. Eustatius towards the end of his career tainted his legacy with “an aroma of corruption and personal dissipation.”⁵⁴ As a young man, his rise through the navy had been meteoric; at twenty-four he became one of the youngest captains during the War of the Austrian Succession, being one of very few (if not the only person), to obtain the rank of post captain without first serving as a master and commander.⁵⁵ Such a promotion contravened Admiralty regulations, and meant that in taking command of HMS *Plymouth* in 1743, he overtook scores of senior lieutenants and all the masters and commanders in the navy. Syrett argued that during the ensuing five years, Rodney not only laid “the foundations of a personal fortune with prize money, but would also show that he was a sea officer with considerable skill, who, moreover, was endowed with luck in almost equal measure.”⁵⁶ Outside his naval career, Rodney occupied a succession of seats in Parliament, through a combination of patronage and expending vast amounts of money. He was also a gambler with a reputation for unscrupulous financial dealings. By 1774, he had accumulated such enormous debts—

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.xi.

⁵⁵ Syrett, “Part I: Early Years, 1742–1748,” in *The Rodney Papers: Selections from the Correspondence of Admiral Lord Rodney, Vol.I.*, p.9.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.15.

and having by then no parliamentary immunity—that he fled to Paris to escape his creditors. It was only the generosity of a French nobleman, the Duc de Biron, which enabled him to return to England four years later.⁵⁷

During his stay in Paris, and particularly after hostilities had broken out in North America, Rodney had agitated and appealed for a Royal Navy posting which would take him close to the action, thus entitling him to full military pay—and the possibility of the spoils of battle. As a man known to be in financial difficulty, this was not the first occasion on which he had had such exchanges with the Admiralty. An early biographer, David Hannay, recounted that in 1771 Rodney had been rebuked by Earl Sandwich as the Admiralty suspected that he had been inciting hostilities with Spain in the Caribbean, in order to facilitate the flow of prize money into his own account.⁵⁸ It is this reputation which enabled Syrett to describe Rodney as a man “at loggerheads with everybody and always questing for and squandering money.”⁵⁹ In this context, his conduct at St. Eustatius proved difficult to ignore.

⁵⁷ David Hannay, *Rodney* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1891), pp.82-85.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.76-77.

⁵⁹ Syrett, “Preface,” in *The Rodney Papers: Selections from the Correspondence of Admiral Lord Rodney*, Vol.I. p.xi.

Rodney was unpopular amongst even his political allies once his conduct at St. Eustatius became known.⁶⁰ However when news of his victory at the Saintes spread from the London newspapers to those in regional England and Ireland, the enthusiastic press portrayed Rodney as the noble hero. As Stephen Conway has argued, this enthusiasm possibly had little to do with Rodney personally,⁶¹ but it seems that the reversal in his public reputation spared him from Edmund Burke's proposed investigation. Despite the change in government in March 1782, which moved Burke from the opposition benches to Rockingham's Administration, the political realities of victory at the Saintes prevented him from pursuing Rodney.

This exemplifies the connection Hannah Barker identified between the press, its readers and politics.⁶² Politicians, newspaper editors and readers in the eighteenth century attributed considerable power, and even constitutional importance, to the press. Many believed that the press could act as a public tribunal within which to monitor, judge and criticise the behavior of the country's rulers. Newspaper editors too, identified the newspaper-reading public with the wider political nation,

⁶⁰ Conway, "A Joy Unknown for Years Past," pp.188-189.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.186.

⁶² Hannah Barker, "Introduction," in *Newspapers, Politics, and Public Opinion in Late-Eighteenth Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198207412.003.0003.

and this was reiterated by the highly political contents of eighteenth-century newspapers.⁶³ In this context, Barker defined public opinion as

a body of argument or discussion about (amongst other things) government, but not conducted within the limits of governing institutions nor confined to a governing class.⁶⁴

Public opinion, as reflected in the newspapers, had transformed Rodney from a figure of scorn after St. Eustatius, to a noble commander by May 1782. In the face of this public opinion, Burke could not pursue Rodney, as to do so would be to incur the wrath of the newspaper editors, and the newspaper-reading public.

It is not just the Commander which made Trafalgar the more enduring battle in popular memory. The Battle of the Saintes evades simple characterisation. Although the government, press and public in Britain and around the British world enthusiastically celebrated the victory, it was essentially a victory in a war which had already been lost. Rodney was lauded for winning a battle which lead to the negotiation of honourable peace terms with France in 1783, but this proved to be merely an interlude, not a lasting peace. For American historians, focused on the struggle for the North American colonies' independence from Britain, the battles between Europe's imperial powers in the Caribbean after Yorktown have had little relevance; American historiography has all but ignored the battles waged after Cornwallis's

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

capitulation.⁶⁵ Although Andrew O'Shaughnessy has considered the Saintes within the broader context of the British Atlantic, his work has tended to focus on the strategic and practical impact of Rodney's victory and other British activities in the Caribbean.⁶⁶

Similarly, the Saintes been largely overlooked by historians of Britain. Stephen Conway noted in 2001 that Rodney's victory had received no sustained scholarly attention.⁶⁷ He reviewed the celebrations which followed Rodney's victory as part of his investigation of the ways in which the American conflict stimulated and redefined a popular sense of Britishness, contributing to the historiography of the impact of the American war in Britain.⁶⁸ He argued that the "enthusiastic celebrations of the Saintes...are explicable only when one recognises that Britishness itself was both reconfigured and given a great boost during the American war."⁶⁹

When placed in a transnational, or British Atlantic perspective however, the Battle of the Saintes takes on a different character.

⁶⁵ Brad Jones, "The American Revolution and Popular Loyalism in the British Atlantic World" (Ph.D., Thesis, University of Glasgow, 2006), p.218. Troy Bickham, *Making Headlines: The American Revolution as Seen through the British Press* (deKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), p.158.

⁶⁶ O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, p.xi. O'Shaughnessy, "The Other Road to Yorktown, p.33. O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America: British Leadership, the American Revolution, and the Fate of the Empire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013).

⁶⁷ Conway, "A Joy Unknown for Years Past", p.181.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, pp.180-199.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.181.

American historians have begun to adopt this broader lens, inspired perhaps by the historiographical shift initiated by J.G.A. Pocock's call for a new British history. Pocock advocated for a history which could incorporate the cultures and histories of distant and diverse British communities.⁷⁰ Brad Jones drew upon Pocock's influence in framing his thesis on popular loyalism in the British Atlantic during the American Revolutionary period, which he concluded with a consideration of the Saintes.⁷¹ Jones examined how the war and revolutionary ideology affected the ways in which Britons living throughout the Atlantic world understood and articulated their loyalty to Great Britain.⁷² On his assessment, the victory at the Saintes was "constructed as the defining moment in the American War for Britain's Atlantic world inhabitants," who celebrated the victory as exuberantly as those in mainland Britain.⁷³ Jones's conclusion is predicated upon a conception of the American war as having broadened far beyond the initial conflict between the colonists and Britain, into a global war which involved France, Spain and the United Provinces. As Troy Bickham has observed, this global-war phase—which began with France's entry in 1778—had endured longer than the preceding Anglo-

⁷⁰ J.G.A. Pocock, "British History: A Plea for a New Subject," *New Zealand Historical Journal* 8 (1974): pp.3-21. J.G.A. Pocock, "The New British History in Atlantic Perspective: An Antipodean Commentary," *American Historical Review* 104 (1999): pp.490-500.

⁷¹ Jones, "The American Revolution and Popular Loyalism in the Atlantic World," p.12.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.2.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.217.

American phase.⁷⁴ Bickham argued that it was this ongoing global war which defined British press coverage, and with it many Britons' engagement with the war.⁷⁵ In this context, Yorktown merely resolved one theatre of the war—a theatre which the British government and the wider British public had made subordinate to other theatres for some years.⁷⁶

The Saintes has accordingly been considered from diverse historiographical perspectives: spanning traditional military history, the identity politics of Britain during the American war, and in the context of the British Atlantic. This case study will adopt a different approach, by considering the Saintes and the ensuing celebrations within the framework of new imperial history and British World scholarship—two methodologies which have recently begun to converge.⁷⁷ A comparison of the press coverage in London, Dublin and Belfast of the victory at the Saintes and the ensuing celebrations provides an opportunity to examine not only the impact of imperial news around the empire, but also permits an examination of the network which passed information from the Caribbean to the British Isles. The next chapter of this thesis will trace the way that the story of

⁷⁴ Bickham, *Making Headlines*, p.159.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Laidlaw, Zoë. "Breaking Britannia's Bounds? Law, Settlers, and Space in Britain's Imperial Historiography." *The Historical Journal* 55 (2012): p. 811.

the Saintes unfolded in a selection of newspapers, and will consider the local political context in which the news was published.

Chapter 2: The Saintes in the News

It took five weeks for news of the British victory at the Saintes to reach London. Admiral Rodney drafted his reports to the Admiralty two days after the Battle ended, and dispatched Lord Cranston, a captain from HMS *Formidable*, and Captain Byron, of HMS *Andromache*, to London to deliver the news. They arrived in the early hours of Saturday, 18 May. By eight o'clock that morning, Lady Rodney had received notes from the Admiralty acquainting her with the news of her husband's victory, and two hours later, Captain Byron paid her a visit.¹ One of Rodney's daughters wrote to her father about the events of the day,

In a very little time after, all London was in uproar; the whole town was illuminated that night: we were at the play. When we went in the whole house testified, by their claps and huzzas, the joy they felt at the news, and their love for you; their acclamations lasted for, I am sure, five minutes. You may judge how happy we are.”²

Newspaper reviews also described their reception in Covent Garden at the opening of ‘The Fair American’,

Lady Rodney and her two daughters happened to come into a side-box before the opera began, when the audience, glowing with gratitude for the noble conduct of her gallant husband in the West Indies, (the news of which had arrived by that day) burst out into an involuntary, but general and continued shout of

¹ Miss Rodney to Admiral Rodney, London, 27 May 1782, in *The Life and Correspondence of the Late Admiral Lord Rodney, Vol.II*, ed. G.B. Mundy (London: John Murray, 1830), pp.308-309.

² *Ibid.*, p.309.

applause. The Lady thanked the house for the compliment, with her tears.³

News of the *Saintes* was in the *London Gazette* that evening: Rodney's dispatches to the Admiralty were reproduced in the *Gazette* in full.⁴ As the official journal of record and the newspaper of the Crown, the *Gazette* was the first to publish the official dispatches. Over the coming days, Rodney's dispatches were reprinted verbatim across metropolitan and regional newspapers in England and Ireland. The *Saintes*, and Rodney himself, were newsworthy. Rodney's prominence in the press only a few months earlier made him a familiar figure to readers, thus news that his fleet had salvaged Britain's pride (and his own in the process), garnered attention. News of a British victory had been rare in recent years—reports from America had left the country “exhausted and humiliated.”⁵ Despite Britain's losses, however, war had been good for the press—public reliance on newspapers for information reached its eighteenth-century peak during the American war.⁶ News of the *Saintes* and the ensuing celebrations was therefore reported with (relative) immediacy.

³ “Theatrical Intelligence,” *The British Gazette and Sunday Monitor*, May 19, 1782, p.4. “Theatrical Intelligence,” *The Morning Chronicle, and London Advertiser*, May 20, 1782, p.4.

⁴ “Formidable, at Sea, April 14, 1782,” *The London Gazette*, May 14-18, 1782, pp.2-5.

⁵ Wraxall, Nathaniel William, *The Historical and the Posthumous Memoirs of Sir Nathaniel William Wraxall 1772–1784* (London: Bickers & Son, 1884), p.321.

⁶ Troy Bickham, *Making Headlines: The American Revolution as Seen Through the British Press* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), p.52.

Rodney opened his first post-battle dispatch to the Admiralty with a flourish—"Sir, It has pleased God, out of His Divine Providence, to grant to His Majesty's Arms a most complete Victory over the Fleet of His Enemy."⁷ The grammar amused his detractors in London; Rodney's use of "out" of God's Providence, rather than "in" was a source of comment from "critics and grammarians."⁸ The letter also concluded somewhat awkwardly,

That the British Flag may for ever flourish in every Quarter of the Globe, is the most ardent Wish of him who has the Honor of being, with great Regards, Sir, Your most obedient humble Servant, G.B. Rodney.⁹

Given the practice of printing such dispatches in the *London Gazette* and beyond, Rodney would have been aware that his dispatches were not private missives to the Admiralty, but would be released for public consumption. On the account of the memoirist Nathaniel Wraxall, in person "Rodney...talked perpetually of himself, and was the hero of his own story."¹⁰ The method of distribution of the story of the Saintes—derived from the Admiral's own account—enabled Rodney to cast himself as the hero in the press too.

The initial reporting of the victory at the Saintes in the London, Dublin and Belfast newspapers focused on the battle itself, and comprised little more than reprints of Rodney's official dispatches.

⁷ "Formidable, at Sea, April 14, 1782," *The London Gazette*, May 14-18, 1782, p.2.

⁸ Wraxall, *The Historical and the Posthumous Memoirs*, p.325.

⁹ "Formidable, at Sea, April 14, 1782," *The London Gazette*, May 14-18, 1782, p.3.

The coverage then moved to recounting the public celebrations of the victory around England and Ireland. Within days, however, the tone of the coverage in London and in Ireland diverged, as local news and politics began to infiltrate and influence the story. In London, the news was soon dominated by the recall controversy—it emerged that the Admiralty, at the behest of the newly-installed Rockingham government, had issued an order for Rodney's recall from his Caribbean post before news of the *Saintes* was known. In Ireland, coverage of the *Saintes* was intertwined with news of Dublin's legislative independence from Westminster. The remainder of this chapter will consider in turn the development of the coverage of the *Saintes* in England, and in Ireland. By examining how news of an imperial event evolved differently in the two places, it is possible to more fully appreciate the ebb and flow of contemporary opinion, and to discern the varying impact of the imperial news.¹¹

The London Newspapers

Rodney's dispatches were reproduced from Saturday's *London Gazette* as a postscript in the *Sunday Monitor*, and as the lead stories in the *Morning Chronicle* and the *Morning Herald* on Monday.¹² The *Sunday Monitor* also printed additional intelligence

¹⁰ Wraxall, *The Historical and the Posthumous Memoirs*, p.326.

¹¹ Michael de Nie, "'Speed the Mahdi!' The Irish Press and Empire during the Sudan Conflict 1883–1885," *The Journal of British Studies* 51 (2012): p.886.

¹² "Postscript, From Last Night's Gazette," *The British Gazette and Sunday Monitor*, May 19, 1782, p.4. "From the London Gazette, of Saturday, May 18, 1782," *The Morning*

from Lord Cranston and Captain Byron—including the fact that one of the captured French ships had caught fire by accident and exploded, such that “a considerable number of the people on board her unfortunately perished.”¹³ It is possible this is the fire witnessed by John Mair from his Dominican plantation. This story was reproduced verbatim in the Monday newspapers, without attribution—an example of the scissors-and-paste journalism prevalent during the eighteenth century.¹⁴

Rodney’s letters in Monday’s daily newspapers were immediately followed by dispatches from Britain’s Commander-in-Chief in the East Indies, reporting British military successes against the Dutch at Negapatam and Trincomalee.¹⁵ These reports, which were written in a formal and lengthy style, were also originally printed in the *London Gazette* on May 18, as a supplement. Despite the significance of the Eastern military victories, it is telling that reports from the Caribbean were printed ahead of those from the East Indies in all the newspapers under review. Victory over the French

Chronicle, and London Advertiser, May 20, 1782, pp.1-2. “From the London Gazette. Admiralty Office, May 18, 1782,” *The Morning Herald, and Daily Advertiser*, May 20, 1782, pp.1-2.

¹³ Postscript, N.B., “*The British Gazette and Sunday Monitor*,” May 19, 1782, p.4.

¹⁴ Catherine Feely, “Scissors-and-Paste’ Journalism,” *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism In Great Britain and Ireland* (Gent & London: Academia Press & The British Library (2009), p.561. M.H. Beals, “Musings on a Multimodal Analysis of Scissors-and-Paste Journalism, Part 1,” *MH Beals: Historian of Migration and Media* (blog). <http://mhbeals.com/musings-on-a-multimodal-analysis-of-scissors-and-paste-journalism/>

¹⁵ “Extract of a letter from Vice-Admiral Sir Edward Hughes, to Mr. Stephens, dated on board the *Superb* in Trincomale Bay, the 15th of January, 1782,” *The Morning Chronicle*,

trumped victory over the Dutch for newsworthiness, and perhaps Rodney's succinct and celebratory style was more readable than the dispatches of the Commanders in the East Indies.

Admiral Rodney's subsequent correspondence continued to provide a steady stream of news, supplemented by letters from other officers in his fleet. The *London Chronicle* was the first to print two of Rodney's private letters: the first to his agent, Mr Mailer; and the second, a letter to "a gentleman, a particular friend."¹⁶ This was a brief letter, in which Rodney recounted that "the enemy fought well, and disputed it with such spirit, as if the fate of both nations depended upon the event."¹⁷ Despite the fact that the letter to Mr Mailer also contained little new information, it graced the cover of Thursday's *London Chronicle*, demonstrating the ongoing newsworthiness of the victory. Rodney informed Mr Mailer that the French loss of life "must have been prodigious, as their whole army was on board, consisting of 5500 men," and that "De Grasse is now in my cabin."¹⁸

In the initial stages of the news story then, official government

and *London Advertiser*, May 20, 1782, pp.2-4. "From the Supplement to the above Gazette," *The Morning Herald, and Daily Advertiser*, May 20, 1782, pp.2-3.

¹⁶ "To Mr. Mailer, Formidable, at Sea, April 14, 1782," *The London Chronicle*, May 18-21, 1782, p.489. "Postscript. London. Formidable, at Sea, April 15," *The London Chronicle*, May 18-21, 1782, p.488. According to *The Morning Chronicle*, May 22, 1782, p.2, this letter had arrived on HMS *Andromache*.

¹⁷ "Postscript. London. Formidable, at Sea, April 15," *The London Chronicle*, May 18-21, 1782, p.488.

sources dominated the reporting of the Saintes. The contrast between Rodney's triumphalist dispatches, and their staid counterparts from the East Indies, suggests that Rodney was keenly aware of his audience, and the persuasive power of the press. Clearly unaware of the recent change in government at Westminster from Lord North's Administration to Rockingham's, he wrote to his wife that "I hope the good people of England will now be pleased, and Opposition hide her head."¹⁹ Against the backdrop of the St. Eustatius controversy, and the corollary litigation which had begun to accumulate against him, Rodney succeeded in utilizing the significant naval victory to transform his image in the English (and Irish) newspapers, and put himself beyond the reach of Edmund Burke. In doing so, he had successfully tapped into the tradition of the 'Admiral as hero', which had emerged over the course of the eighteenth century.²⁰ His initial dispatches clearly acknowledged the role of his captains and officers in the victory, but there is no doubt that Rodney was aware of how the newspapers would portray the Saintes and his role as Commander.

¹⁸ "To Mr. Mailer, Formidable, at Sea, April 14, 1782," *The London Chronicle*, p.489.

¹⁹ Admiral Rodney to Lady Rodney, At sea, 20 April 1782, In *The Life and Correspondence of the Late Admiral Lord Rodney, Vol II*, p.263.

²⁰ Kathleen Wilson, "Empire, Trade and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian Britain: The Case of Admiral Vernon," *Past and Present* 121 (1988): pp.74-109. Gerald Jordan and Nicholas Rogers, "Admirals as Heroes: Patriotism and Liberty in Hanoverian England," *Journal of British Studies* 28 (1989): pp.201-224. Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England 1715-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.140-165. Stephen Conway, "A Joy Unknown for

News of the Saintes was celebrated in England with illuminations, bell-ringing and bonfires. Within days of the arrival of Rodney's dispatches, poems, ballads and prints were published celebrating the victory, and Rodney's image appeared on pottery mugs and teapots.²¹ A re-enactment of the Battle was hastily added to the Astley Amphitheatre Riding School's programme, which was performing at Westminster Bridge,²² and the Church of England distributed "A Form of Prayer and Thanksgiving" for the British victory.²³

The celebratory mood sparked by the dispatches from the Caribbean cannot be overstated. Wraxall recalled that "the capital and the country were thrown into a delirium of joy on receiving the intelligence of Rodney's victory over de Grasse."²⁴ The London newspapers reported that spontaneous public celebrations materialised in the capital, as well as elsewhere around England.²⁵ In the House of Commons, Mr Fox, the new Foreign Secretary, praised the victory as "the most brilliant that this country had seen

Years Past': The American War, Britishness and the Celebration of Rodney's Victory at the Saints," *History* 86 (2001): pp.180-199.

²¹ Conway, "A Joy Unknown for Years Past'," pp.180-199.

²² "In addition to the variety of agility..." *The British Gazette and Sunday Monitor*, May 26, 1782, p.4.

²³ *A Form of Prayer and Thanksgiving to Almighty God; to be used At Morning and Evening Service, After the General Thanksgiving* (London, 1782).

²⁴ Wraxall, *The Historical and the Posthumous Memoirs*, pp.319-320.

²⁵ Conway, "A Joy Unknown for Years Past':," pp.180-199.

this century.”²⁶ Not to be outdone, Lord North, the recently deposed Prime Minister, declared that the victory “might be said to be the greatest not only of the present war, but perhaps the greatest ever recorded in the naval annals of this country.”²⁷

The London newspapers in this case study reported illuminations in London, Westminster, Plymouth, Dock, Stonehouse and Tunbridge.²⁸ Illuminations are a little-known aspect of public life in the eighteenth century. Buildings would have been illuminated with lamps and transparencies—lacquered linen decorated with images or inscriptions, made visible with a light from behind.²⁹ There was little light pollution in British towns and cities in the 1780s, rendering the effect of an illumination spectacular.³⁰ On some occasions they were orchestrated, city-wide events with every public building illuminated. The illuminations in London on 18 May must, however, have been spontaneous as there had been no prior warning of the news. Celebrations in the regional centres also were reported

²⁶ “House of Commons, Wednesday, May 22. Thanks to Adm. Rodney,” *The London Chronicle*, May 21-23, 1782, p.494.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.494.

²⁸ “London,” *The Morning Herald, and Daily Advertiser*, May 21, 1782, p.2. “Extract of a letter from Plymouth, May 21,” *The London Chronicle*, May 21-23, 1782, p.504. “Extract of a letter from Plymouth, May 24,” *The Morning Chronicle, and London Advertiser*, May 28, 1782, p.3.

²⁹ Kathryn Kane, “Transparencies for Celebratory Illuminations,” *The Regency Redingote* (blog), 2012.

<http://regencyredingote.wordpress.com/2012/09/07/transparencies-for-celebratory-illuminations/>

³⁰ Lucy Inglis, “A blaze of loyalty’: The illuminations of Georgian London,” *Georgian London* (blog), 2010. <http://georgianlondon.com/post/49247415352/a-blaze-of-loyalty-the-illuminations-of-georg> Kane, “Transparencies for Celebratory Illuminations,” *The Regency Redingote*.

to have occurred on receipt of the news, so these too, would appear to have been spontaneous, although it is possible that there was some official element to these subsequent celebrations.

Reports from regional England in the London newspapers also mentioned bell-ringing and the occasional bonfire. A letter from Plymouth appeared in a number of the London papers, detailing the illuminations which “were the most splendid ever seen on the like occasion,”

At sunset there was a very large bonfire on the parade, and a battery of 8 four-pounders opened, and fired 21 rounds with repeated huzzas between every round. The Swedish, Flemish, and Ostend ships in the Pool, hoisted their colours, illuminated the shrouds and yards with lanthorns, and fired several rounds, with repeated huzzas, in testimony of their joy on this occasion. St. George’s colours were hoisted over the French on a large flag-staff...and the evening concluded with the greatest festivity.³¹

London newspapers were obsessed with political intrigue,³² and it was only a matter of days before the first hint of controversy emerged in the coverage of the Saintes. Two days after the news of the victory broke, the *Morning Herald* printed a letter addressed to

³¹ “Extract of a letter from Plymouth, May 24,” *The Morning Chronicle*, May 28, 1782, p.3.

³² Hannah Barker, “Newspaper Politics in the Capital,” in *Newspapers, Politics, and Public Opinion in Late-Eighteenth Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198207412.003.0003.

the Earl of Sandwich, signed from “An old crippled seaman of 58.”³³ Sandwich had until recently commanded the Royal Navy, but in one of its first actions in government, the Rockingham Administration had removed him from the post and appointed Admiral Keppel as First Lord of the Admiralty.³⁴ The correspondent pleaded with Sandwich not to “let your Admiral be forgotten; though he is superceded in the command of the fleet,”

...in the regards of the mad multitude, though disveiled of employment in that navy, where he has served so long, and so well...his name will be revered by the sincere patriot, the honest citizen, and every individual, who really wishes well to this mutilated, mangled, and ungoverned state.³⁵

This was the first of numerous letters printed in the London newspapers condemning Rodney’s recall, and like many of those letters, the correspondent was remarkably well-informed. The Admiralty had only written to Rodney on 1 May, informing him that he was to be replaced in his command in the West Indies by Vice Admiral Pigot.³⁶ When news of the victory at the Saintes arrived in England, Pigot had just sailed from Plymouth aboard HMS *Jupiter*. Without the victory at the Saintes, the recall would have barely registered as news. Within days, however, this aspect of the story

³³ “For the Morning Herald. To the Earl of Sandwich,” *The Morning Herald, and Daily Advertiser*, May 20, 1782, p.4.

³⁴ N.A.M. Rodger, “Montagu, John, fourth earl of Sandwich (1718–1792),” in *Oxford Dictionary of Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Online ed., accessed October 1 2014: <http://oxforddnb.com/view/article/19026>

³⁵ “For the Morning Herald. To the Earl of Sandwich,” *The Morning Herald, and Daily Advertiser*, May 20, 1782, p.4.

dominated coverage of the Saintes in the London newspapers, highlighting the political nature of Admiralty appointees, and the politics of the moment.

An ally of the ousted North administration, Earl Sandwich supported Rodney in the face of his recall, in both public and in private. In a private letter to Rodney, he wrote,

I need not speak my opinion, or that of the nation, upon the very extraordinary measure of your recall. I believe those who have done it repent most heartily of the measure, but they know not how to retract, as Mr. Pigot had sailed before their express to Plymouth to stop him had reached that port. I have been informed that such an express was sent an hour or two after Lord Cranston arrived with the account of your Victory.³⁷

The tone of the newspaper reports over the ensuing days indicated the strength of feeling amongst London editors. As Hannah Barker has shown, the content of London newspapers of the 1780s was overtly political, and political allegiance was expressed primarily by means of the rudimentary editorial sections, and in letters from correspondents.³⁸ Letters such as the one addressed to Sandwich were not written by newspaper employees, however it is clear that those selected for publication often reinforced the ideological stance

³⁶ Philip Stephens to Admiral Rodney, London, 1 May 1782, in *The Life and Correspondence of the Late Admiral Lord Rodney, Vol. II*, p.326.

³⁷ Earl of Sandwich to Admiral Rodney, Hertford Street, 26 May 1782," in *The Life and Correspondence of the Late Admiral Lord Rodney, Vol. II*, pp.306-308.

³⁸ Barker, "Newspaper Politics in the Capital," in *Newspapers, Politics, and Public Opinion in Late-Eighteenth Century England*.

and party-political allegiances expressed elsewhere in the newspaper.³⁹

The *London Chronicle* printed a lengthy letter from a correspondent using the pseudonym “Cincinnatus.”⁴⁰ It was not unusual to adopt a pseudonym in writing to the press.⁴¹ Pseudonyms often indicated a political sentiment, and the anonymity they provided could protect the author against prosecution if the writing attacked public figures.⁴² Cincinnatus argued that to supersede Rodney would “be a piece of the greatest injustice, and of the utmost ingratitude,” and “a species of tyranny...when he has rendered such eminent services to the State.”⁴³ The pseudonym recalled the Roman Emperor Cincinnatus, who was associated with the values of the noble, selfless citizen soldier.

Both the *Morning Herald* and the *Morning Chronicle* printed strongly-worded editorial commentaries on the matter of Rodney’s recall. The former declared:

The partizans of the new ministry have discovered some decency on the receipt of the late important news; for not one of them has yet presumed to wrest the well

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ “For the London Chronicle. Salva Roma, Salva patria, salvus est Germanicus,” *The London Chronicle*, May 23-25, 1782, p.500.

⁴¹ Padhraig Higgins, *A Nation of Politicians: Gender, Patriotism, and Political Culture in Late Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), p.39.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.39.

⁴³ “For the London Chronicle. Salva Roma, Salva patria, salvus est Germanicus,” *The London Chronicle*, May 23-25, 1782, p.500.

earned laurels, from the OLD ADMINISTRATION, and their SUPERCEDED VETERAN, the gallant RODNEY!⁴⁴

In an equally strident comment, the *Morning Chronicle* indicated its support for Sandwich, Rodney, and (by implication), the parliamentary opposition,

The public ought not, in the present moment of joy and happiness, to forget, that the naval force of England was made superior to that of the French by the Earl of Sandwich, the good effects of which we now feel...The brave Rodney, who had before taken a *Spanish* Admiral, and some of his ships, and has now taken a *French* Admiral, and totally defeated his fleet, was *actually recalled*, and Admiral Pigot, who has not been at sea for many years, appointed in his place.⁴⁵

The *Morning Chronicle* was a stalwart of the London press, edited by William Woodfall. Owing to Woodfall's prodigious memory, the newspaper was the *de facto* newspaper of record when it came to parliamentary reporting. Indeed, both Sandwich and Lady Rodney chose to send copies of the *Morning Chronicle* to Rodney to keep him abreast of parliamentary discussions about his future.⁴⁶ According to Barker, the *Morning Chronicle* may have appeared politically uncommitted, but this was Woodfall's intention, as his stated editorial policy was to apply impartiality in his selection of correspondence for printing.⁴⁷ In this context, the fact that even an

⁴⁴ "London," *The Morning Herald, and Daily Advertiser*, May 21, 1782, p.2.

⁴⁵ "The public ought not..."*The Morning Chronicle, and London Advertiser*, May 23, 1782, p.3.

⁴⁶ Lady Rodney to Admiral Rodney, London, June 1782, in *The Life and Correspondence of the Late Admiral Lord Rodney, Vol. II*, , p.315.

⁴⁷ Barker, "Newspaper Politics in the Capital," in *Newspapers, Politics, and Public Opinion in Late-Eighteenth Century England*.

avowedly impartial editor such as Woodfall, chose to condemn the new government's actions, indicates the strength of feeling amongst the newspaper-reading public about the treatment of Rodney.

Over the following days, however, Woodfall attempted to defuse the political heat from coverage of the aftermath of the Saintes. In his "Answers to Correspondents," later in the week, he referred to the "various articles" he had received which drew comparisons between Rodney and "the conduct of a noble Admiral (high in office)⁴⁸ as "more invidious than useful", and pleaded,

At this moment, let us, in God's name, forget all party disputes and unite in endeavouring to strengthen the acts of government, and by due applause and encouragement of all our officers, promote the good of the service, which necessarily involves in it the good of the nation.⁴⁹

Woodfall concluded his advice to would-be contributors by confirming that no material would be printed "to oblige any persons whatever," which had been previously published in other newspapers.⁵⁰ Presumably some parties were seeking to print their views across a number of newspapers in order to prolong pressure on the Rockingham ministry.

⁴⁸ Presumably Admiral Keppel, the recently-appointed First Lord of the Admiralty.

⁴⁹ "Answers to Correspondents," *The Morning Chronicle, and London Advertiser*, May 24, 1782, p.2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Woodfall may have attempted to avoid overtly partisan commentary in the *Morning Chronicle*, but the reports of proceedings in parliament could not hide the Rockingham Administration's discomfort over the way its recall of Rodney had unravelled. In the House of Commons, parliamentary opponents interrupted Secretary Fox's motion of thanks to Rodney, demanding to know who precisely had advised the recall, and raising the prospect of a motion to address the King, "desiring him to countermand the recall."⁵¹ The House was persuaded that such a motion to the King was both unnecessary and unwise, and the Administration avoided exposing details of the recall.

However the damage had been done. Rodney's success in the Caribbean was embarrassing to the Rockingham Administration and very welcome to its parliamentary opponents.⁵² In an indication of the opposition's aim in applying pressure to Rockingham, Sandwich wrote privately to Rodney that "the Administration will be so pelted in Parliament, and in the papers, for having superseded you, that they will be forced to revoke their measure."⁵³ This comment also hints at the link parliamentarians perceived between newspapers, public opinion and political action.

⁵¹ "Parliamentary Intelligence. House of Commons. Thanks to Sir George Brydges Rodney," *The Morning Chronicle, and London Advertiser*, May 23, 1782, p.2.

⁵² Conway, "A Joy Unknown for Years Past", p.184.

⁵³ Earl of Sandwich to Admiral Rodney, Hertford Street, 26 May 1782, in *The Life and Correspondence of the Late Admiral Lord Rodney, Vol. II.*, p.307.

The recall soon became an object of fun for cartoonists and writers. The *Morning Chronicle* published a two-part skit by “Tom Catt-Call,” which suggested that “the great folks in the West” had recalled Rodney in order to “try him on by a court martial; but can you tell for what, Jack?” No direct reference was made to St. Eustatius, but the skit continued,

Burst my call if they ar’nt going to try his Honour, full of glory, because he did not leave off in the midst of the fray, and let the French fleet try it handsomely the next morning... But there they tell me that every body don’t approve of the great men at the helm for sending any body out to supersede brave Rodney.⁵⁴

Admiral Pigot too, was a figure of fun. A cartoon published in June 1782 entitled “Rodney Invested—or—Admiral Pig on a cruize” depicted Pigot on a boat made of playing cards—a reference to the rumour that he had taken on the Caribbean command in return for his gambling debts to Fox being forgiven. The cartoon reflected just as badly on Fox as it did on Pigot.⁵⁵ It is clear from the tone of newspaper reporting, and parliamentary discussions, that Rockingham’s parliamentary opponents were intent on either reversing the recall, or at the very least, preventing Edmund Burke from pursuing an investigation of Rodney’s conduct at St. Eustatius.

⁵⁴ “Dear Jack, by Tom Catt-Call,” *The Morning Chronicle, and London Advertiser*, May 23, 1782, p.3.

⁵⁵ “Rodney Invested —or—Admiral Pig on a cruise,” 1782. Source: National Portrait

In the event, Rodney, who was in poor health, accepted the recall and returned to England in September 1782. He was awarded an English barony and a pension of £2,000.⁵⁶ By the time Rodney had returned to England, Burke was once again on the outer, as the Rockingham Administration had collapsed following Rockingham's death in July 1782. The political and public capital gained by Rodney by his victory at the Saintes ensured that, whatever his views on St. Eustatius, Burke could not pursue his investigation. Rodney however, spent the remaining decade of his life battling litigation related to St. Eustatius, and attempting to clear his name.⁵⁷

Gallery, London. Catalogue No. NPG D12322. Refer to Figure 3 herein.

⁵⁶ Kenneth Breen, "Rodney, George Bridges, first Baron Rodney (bap.1718, d.1792)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Online ed., accessed October 1, 2014: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23936>

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*



Figure 3: "RODNEY Invested—or—Admiral PIG on a Cruize," London, 1782. Source: National Portrait Gallery, London. Catalogue No. NPGD12322.

Newspapers in Dublin and Belfast

While the story of the Saintes in London descended into political intrigue, the newspapers in Dublin and Belfast intertwined news of the victory with that of Dublin's freedom from Westminster, in the form of the repeal of the *Dependency of Ireland on Great Britain Act 1719*. An apparent paradox emerged from the coverage of the Saintes in the *Dublin Evening Post*, *Freeman's Journal* and the *Belfast News-Letter*—all of which were well-established as patriotic, antigovernment newspapers.⁵⁸ The three papers enthusiastically applauded the imperial victory and the glory it afforded London, whilst simultaneously celebrating Dublin's independence from Westminster. As Stephen Conway has noted, this enthusiasm for British success at the Saintes may seem “odd,” particularly in light of the fact that the Protestant minority had been pulling away from Britain over the course of the American war.⁵⁹ The remainder of this chapter will examine this anomaly in the context of the evolution of the news story, and the final chapter of this thesis will seek to resolve the question.

⁵⁸ Brian Inglis, *The Freedom of the Press in Ireland 1784–1841* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1954), pp.22. Higgins, *A Nation of Politicians*, p.29. Douglas Simes, “Ireland, 1760–1820s,” in *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760–1820*, ed. Hannah Barker and Simon Burrows (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.119.

⁵⁹ Conway, “A Joy Unknown for Years Past’,” p.196.

The *Dublin Evening Post* broke the news of the Saintes in Ireland three days after the news had arrived in London. With “infinite satisfaction” the *Post* announced that,

a most severe contest happened lately off Martinicio between Admiral Rodney and M De Grasse when the French commander was taken in the Ville de Paris of 100 guns...Upwards of 130 men were killed on each side and 700 wounded—on the part of the enemy a most terrible slaughter took place.⁶⁰

Two days later, both the *Post* and the Dublin-based *Freeman’s Journal* printed Rodney’s dispatches in full.⁶¹ The *Belfast News-Letter*, which first reported news of the Saintes on Thursday 24 May, was the only newspaper in the case study which did not reproduce Rodney’s dispatches in full. Instead, the *News-Letter* printed an extract of a letter from “a gentleman in Dublin to his friend in London,” which referred to the *London Gazette*, and explained the victory.⁶² The *News-Letter* reported that “in consequence of the news of Admiral Rodney’s victory...the Belfast Troop, and Belfast artillery paraded, and fired a feu de-joys—and the evening concluded with illuminations, bonfires, &c.”⁶³

⁶⁰ “Postscript Extraordinary,” *The Dublin Evening Post*, May 21, 1782, p.3.

⁶¹ “Formidable, at Sea, April 14, 1782,” *The Dublin Evening Post*, May 23, 1782, p.4.
“Formidable, at Sea, April 14, 1782,” *The Freeman’s Journal*, May, 21-23, 1782, p.2.

⁶² “Extract of a letter from a gentleman in Dublin to his friend in London, dated 21st of May,” *Belfast News-Letter*, May 21-24, 1782, p.2.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

News of the victory at the Saintes was celebrated around Ireland with as much enthusiasm as in England.⁶⁴ In Dublin and Belfast the news was greeted with illuminations, bell-ringing, bonfires and firing of *feux de joie*. As in London, these initial celebrations must have been spontaneous. The Irish newspapers also reported illuminations in Dundalk, Larne, Rathfriland and Philipstown.⁶⁵ A correspondent from Dundalk reported that news “that England has acceded to our demands,” and that the French and the Dutch had been defeated, precipitated the lighting of “the most stupendous bonfire...So resplendent and conspicuous was the blaze, that the very rocks appeared to be on fire.”⁶⁶ It is notable that while the newspapers featured the Saintes more prominently (and ahead of) the news of British military successes in the East Indies—as was the case in the London papers—the Irish almost always mentioned the East Indies along with the Saintes in explaining the reason for celebrating. This contrasts with the coverage in London, which did not usually refer to the East Indies news in explaining the public celebrations. This difference in emphasis may simply reflect the editors’ judgement as to the newsworthiness of the dispatches from the East Indies amongst London readers; but it also underscores the political capital which could be gained from accentuating Rodney’s

⁶⁴ Conway, “A Joy Unknown for Years Past,” p.197.

⁶⁵“Dublin, May 23,” *The Dublin Evening Post*, May 23, 1782, p.3. “Extract of a letter from a gentleman in Dublin to his friend in London, dated 21st of May,” *Belfast News-Letter*, May 21-24, 1782, p.2. “A letter from Dundalk, dated May 23,” *Dublin Evening Post*, May

victory in the context of Westminster. As has been discussed above, the London newspapers were—in the main—willing participants in this political project.

In addition to printing news based on Rodney's private correspondence, as the London newspapers had done, the Irish newspapers detailed the hospitality Rodney extended to de Grasse on board HMS *Formidable*. This marks another point of difference from the London newspapers, which did not dwell upon this aspect of naval chivalry, perhaps preferring to emphasise the sense of Britain having diminished France, rather than drawing attention to Rodney's treatment of de Grasse as an equal. According to the *Dublin Evening Post's* correspondent, two days after the Battle, Rodney and de Grasse dined on roast venison, hams, soups, *pullets a royale* (sic), ducks, fish and hunting puddings.⁶⁷ De Grasse also "drank freely of bottled porter, a liquor which he said he was very fond of, and of which he had several bottles on board the *Ville de Paris* when she was captured."⁶⁸ The English pleasure at defeating the French cannot be underestimated. As Conway has argued, France was the "defining counterpoint that gave meaning to national

25, 1782, p.3. "Belfast," *Belfast News-Letter*, May 24-28, 1782, p.3. "Extract of a letter from Philipstown, King's co. Dated May 28," *Dublin Evening Post*, May 30, 1782, p.1.

⁶⁶ "A letter from Dundalk, dated May 23," *Dublin Evening Post*, May 25, 1782, p.3.

⁶⁷ "Extract of a letter from London, May 31," *Dublin Evening Post*, June 6, 1782, p.3.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

identity.”⁶⁹ The different emphases between the English and Irish coverage suggests that the French aspect of the imperial news was perhaps less newsworthy in Ireland.

One reason for the exuberance of the celebrations (and newspaper reports) was that the newspapers were able to announce news of Ireland’s legislative independence from Westminster within days of the news of the Saintes, and, in some cases, in the same issue of the newspaper. While the English press was preoccupied with the recall, the Irish newspapers were focused on the repeal of the *Dependency of Ireland on Great Britain Act* (“the Act”). Rodney’s recall barely rated a mention in the Irish press. On 17 May (the day before news of the Saintes arrived in England), both Houses of Parliament at Westminster passed a series of key measures, including the repeal of the Act, which ensured that Ireland was no longer automatically bound to abide by Britain’s laws.⁷⁰ The *Freeman’s Journal* combined the “glorious” news of the vote which restored Ireland “to liberty”, with the recent imperial military victories,

The same wind, that wafted on its wings the defeat of the French fleet in the West Indies, attended with a slaughter and carnage hitherto unknown, conveys the happy tidings, of IRELAND’S EMANCIPATION on the other, balanced in the calm wire of STEADINESS and UNANIMITY. English valour has triumphed over French pride, and Irish perseverance has broken

⁶⁹ Conway, “A Joy Unknown for Years Past,” p.192.

⁷⁰ Mark Pack. “Charles James Fox, the Repeal of Poynings’ Law, and the Act of Union 1782-1801,” *Journal of Liberal Democrat History* 33 (2001): pp6-8.

England's stubbornness.⁷¹

Whilst news of legislative independence was reported prominently, references to the imperial military victories in the Caribbean and the East Indies were never far away. For example, the *Dublin Evening Post* printed an extract from a letter from provincial Ireland:

Nothing could exceed the joy demonstrated by the inhabitants of this town upon the arrival of the news of the defeat of the French fleet by the gallant Rodney; the capture of Ceylon...by the ungrateful Dutch; and for that, which Irishmen prize above all, their emancipation from a foreign legislation.⁷²

The tone of the reporting of celebrations in the Irish newspapers was markedly different from the London newspapers. As Padhraig Higgins has elucidated, celebrations and commemorations were central to the ritual life of eighteenth-century Ireland.⁷³ When compared with the reports of the celebrations of the Saintes in the Irish press, the English reports appear almost staid and matter-of-fact. The language employed by the London papers was far less emotive than that in Ireland. In his examination of Protestant public festivities in Ireland in 1779–80, Higgins discussed the way that newspapers constructed meaning from celebrations, and highlighted the increasingly central role of newspapers in constructing and

⁷¹ "Dublin, May 23," *The Freeman's Journal*, May 21–23, 1782, p.4.

⁷² "Extract of a letter from Naas," *The Dublin Evening Post*, May 21, 1782, p.3.

⁷³ Padhraig Higgins, "Bonfires, Illuminations, and Joy: Celebratory Street Politics and Uses of "the Nation" During the Volunteer Movement," *Éire-Ireland* 42(2007): p.175.

interpreting events.⁷⁴ Few sources can illustrate how individual participants in celebrations understood or experienced the festivities, but the style of reporting in the *Dublin Evening Post*, *Freeman's Journal* and *Belfast News-Letter* portray the events of April and the celebrations in May 1782 as emotionally charged and momentous.

Particularly evocative were reports of the burning of effigies of Lord Loughborough, the only dissenting voice in Westminster in the vote on Ireland's legislative independence. According to the *Belfast News-Letter*, the Carrickfergus Volunteers, in a similar fashion to others around Ireland, assembled on parade to celebrate, "then marched thro' the town and its environs" carrying an effigy of Loughborough, "clad in the gown of a Scotch Advocate, a Highlander's bonnet and horse, riding on a Scotch mule."⁷⁵ The effigy was then hung, drawn and quartered, before being cut down and burned.⁷⁶

As noted, most of the coverage of the events of April and May 1782 were combined, suggesting that celebrations of independence and imperial military victories went hand-in-hand. Mathew Carey, the editor of the *Freeman's Journal*, however, was at pains to point out

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.176-177.

⁷⁵ Belfast, " *Belfast News-Letter*, May 24-28, 1782, p.3.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

that the celebrations on Wednesday 22 May in Dublin related *only* to the Saintes, and that the advent of independence necessitated separate celebrations.⁷⁷ He argued that the celebrations of Rodney's victory demonstrated that the Irish were "equally interested with the sister kingdom, whose concerns are now become our own," to celebrate "the fate of their common parent."⁷⁸

Coverage of the celebrations in Ireland was also often combined with news of the movements of the Volunteers, who were beginning to gather in Dublin and Belfast to prepare for the upcoming celebrations of the King's birthday on 4 June. The Volunteer movement had started as a home guard in a country emptied of military presence by the American war.⁷⁹ They were not under the control of the Crown's military commanders, and constituted what was effectively a private militia. With the perceived threat of invasion after France's entry into the war in 1778, the Volunteers became a unifying force for the Protestant community throughout Ireland.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Dublin," *The Freeman's Journal*, May 23-25, 1782, p.4. The editor of the *Freeman's Journal* in 1782 was Mathew Carey: Johanna Archbold & Sylvie Kleinman, "Carey, Mathew (1760-1839)", *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp.339-342.

⁷⁸ Dublin," *The Freeman's Journal*, May 23-25, 1782, p.4.

⁷⁹ Mary Pollard, *Dublin's Trade in Books 1550-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p.22

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.22.

The omnipresence of the Volunteers in the Dublin and Belfast newspapers afforded the reports of Irish celebrations—and the celebrations themselves—a militaristic tone. For example, the *Dublin Evening Post* managed to combine commentary on the illuminations celebrating the military victories in the Caribbean and Ceylon, with a report on the Volunteers,

The armed thousands of our Volunteers poured from the Exchange in numbers, that almost exceeded belief. Each Corps seemed to vie with the other in the strength of their numbers...Nothing could exceed the brilliancy of the spectacles, while the troops lined the walks of the Green, which was heightened to a most amazing degree of splendour, by the general illumination of every house from the ground-story to the roof, of the most elegant and extensive square in Europe. Every thing displayed a perfect blaze of joy.⁸¹

In one sense, the fact that the Volunteers, a predominantly Protestant militia, celebrated an imperial victory, is not unexpected. However, this interpretation overlooks the intricacies of late eighteenth-century Irish patriotism, arguably viewing religious and political differences through a nineteenth-century lens, when nationalism and loyalism had become opposite ends of a spectrum of patriotism. In fact, by 1782, the Volunteers encompassed Protestant men from all social classes, but also many Catholics.⁸² The Volunteers had overcome the localism of their origins, and created a regional and national structure, which enabled them to

⁸¹ "Dublin," *The Dublin Evening Post*, May 23, 1782, p.3.

operate as a powerful political force in their own right.⁸³ In 1781–2, they were involved in the campaign for legislative independence. The fact that a militaristic organisation which supported devolution from Westminster so enthusiastically celebrated an imperial victory requires further analysis. Conway considered the question with reference to Colin Kidd's exposition of Scottish patriotism in the eighteenth century.⁸⁴ Recent scholarship has built upon this, with a specific focus on patriotism in Ireland in the 1780s. Chapter three of this thesis will consider this scholarship in order to explore Irish imperial sensibilities in the period. In turn, this case study aims to contribute to this growing field of Irish studies.

⁸² Higgins, *A Nation of Politicians*, p.129. Vincent Morley, *Irish Opinion and the American Revolution, 1760–1783* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.312.

⁸³ Higgins, *A Nation of Politicians*, p.129.

⁸⁴ Conway, "A Joy Unknown for Years Past", p.182. Colin Kidd, "North Britishness and the Nature of Eighteenth-Century British Patriotisms," *The Historical Journal* 39 (1996): pp.361-382.

Chapter 3: Imperial Sensibilities: The Irish Case

A comparative analysis of newspaper reporting of the Saintes in London and Ireland demonstrates that the impact of imperial news was shaped and oriented by the specifics of local politics, and, in the case of Ireland, their ambivalent relation to the metropole. The initial similarities in the reporting between London and Ireland reflect the network and sources upon which the news was based, but as the story developed, local context and politics increasingly impinged upon the way the news was presented. This chapter will examine the local context, with a focus on Ireland, to draw out the apparent paradox which emerged there in the reporting of the Saintes.

Stephen Conway, in his analysis of the Saintes in the context of the impact of the American war in Britain, argued that the Irish enthusiasm for the victory signified a desire in Ireland (at least amongst the Protestant community) to be not only proudly Irish, but also proudly British.¹ This chapter will suggest a slightly different interpretation. By examining the information networks at play in the transmission of the news of the Saintes, assessing the mediating role of the press, and by drawing upon the recent

¹ Stephen Conway, "‘A Joy Unknown for Years Past’: The American War, Britishness and the Celebration of Rodney’s Victory at the Saints,” *History* 86 (2001): p.197.

historiography of patriotism in eighteenth-century Ireland, this chapter will argue that the paradox is indicative not of a desire to be British *per se*, but rather, a desire to share in ‘English’ liberties² and to be considered an equal partner in the project of empire.

Information Networks

Only recently have scholars of the eighteenth-century press begun to consider in greater depth the routes along which information travelled, and how it was shared around the British empire.³ Simon Potter, Alan Lester and Michael de Nie have all used newspapers to great effect in considering the transfer of information around the British empire; however their work has focused on the nineteenth century, when communication had been transformed by telegraphy.⁴ In her critique of the British World scholarship published during the 1990s, Tamson Pietsch argued that despite the focus of these historians on networks of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century empire, their scholarship had—in the main—

² Colin Kidd, “North Britishness and the Nature of Eighteenth-Century British Patriotisms,” *History* 39 (1996): p.362.

³ This project which will be further enhanced by the methodologies of digital humanities. Tamson Pietsch, “Rethinking the British World,” *Journal of British Studies* 52 (2013): pp.441-463. M.H. Beals, “The Role of the *Sydney Gazette* in the Creation of Australia in the Scottish Public Sphere,” an essay accepted for publication in the forthcoming edited collection *Historical Networks in the Book Trade*, edited by John Hinks & Catherine Feely (2014). <http://dx.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.944593>

⁴ Alan Lester, “British Settler Discourse and the Circuits of Empire,” *History Workshop Journal* 54 (2002): pp.24-48. Simon J. Potter, *News and the British World: The Emergence of an Imperial Press System, 1876-1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Simon J. Potter, “Introduction: empire, propaganda and public opinion,” in *Newspapers and Empire in Ireland and Britain: Reporting the British Empire c.1857–1921*, ed. Simon J. Potter (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), pp.11-22. Michael de Nie, “‘Speed the Mahdi!’ the Irish Press and Empire During the Sudan Conflict of 1883–1885,” *Journal of British Studies* 51 (2012): pp.883–909.

failed to trace the operation of those networks, or to consider the “systems and institutions that created, sustained, and conditioned them.”⁵ In the context of press history, this focus on networks represents a return of sorts to the structural components of print, which originally dominated the field during the twentieth century—albeit the focus then was on the mechanics of production and distribution.⁶

The emerging scholarship which delves into networks complements the histories of the press which engaged with the cultural turn towards the end of the twentieth century. These works changed the focus of press history from what Jeremy Black termed “internalist,”⁷ to readers and the culture which surrounded newspapers. The cultural turn in press history led to investigations of the press’s relationship with politics and with its audience, and the ways in which newspapers “both represented and helped shape ‘public opinion’.”⁸ It has been argued that the cultural turn in press history—away from structural concerns such as sources, distribution statistics and information transmission—has attributed

⁵ Pietsch, “Rethinking the British World,” p.445.

⁶ A. Aspinall, *Politics and the Press c.1780–1850* (London, Home & Van Thal, 1949). Robert Munter, *The History of the Irish Newspapers 1685–1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967). Michael Harris, *London Newspapers in the Age of Walpole: A Study of the Origins of the Modern English Press* (London: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1987). Jeremy Black, *The English Press in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Croom Helm, 1987). Jeremy Black, “The Press and Politics in the Eighteenth Century,” *Media History* 8 (2002): pp.175-182.

⁷ Black, “The Press and Politics in the Eighteenth Century,” p.175.

⁸ Hannah Barker, “Introduction,” in *Newspapers, Politics, and Public Opinion in Late-Eighteenth Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198207412.003.0003.

to print a more passive role, and forced historians of the press to argue for social or political change without any sense of “scale or reach or influence.”⁹ Whilst this argument may overstate the case against cultural history in this context, it is clear that by elucidating the networks at play, it is possible to sharpen the focus on the source, and the influence of the press.

In the case of the Saintes, it is significant that the news which appeared in the English and Irish press had been drafted by the victorious Commander, sent on board a Royal Navy ship to the Admiralty, and then passed within hours to the journal of the Crown for publication. This was not unusual, as government sources were an essential source for foreign news in eighteenth-century newspapers. What this demonstrates, however, is that the state was an integral part of the story: an emissary of the state drafted the reports, transmitted them on board military vessels, and then published them in the *London Gazette*. From there, the reports were reproduced in newspapers across England and Ireland. Each of the *Dublin Evening Post*, *Freeman’s Journal* and *Belfast News-Letter* initially reported receiving the news via the *London Gazette*. In the initial stages of the news of the Saintes then, readers were exposed only to the Admiralty’s agenda—informing the public about

⁹ Reichardt, Alyssa Zuercher, “Taking Print from Print Culture & Leaving the Public Sphere Behind,” *The Junto* (blog), May 23, 2104, <http://earlyamericanists.com/2014/05/23/taking-print-from-print-culture-leaving-the-public-sphere-behind/>

the victory, and highlighting the significance of the role of the officer in charge of the battle. In addition, it seems that Rodney's dispatches were drafted to further his personal and political agenda—to force the Opposition to “hide her head,”¹⁰ put an end to Burke's proposed investigation, and to enhance the political capital of Rodney's political allies of the (former) Rockingham administration.

The Role of the Press

In drawing conclusions about what the newspaper reports on the Saintes can reveal about imperial sensibilities in Ireland, as well as in London, it is important to acknowledge the mediating role of the press. In his study of Irish celebratory street politics in 1779, Padhraig Higgins noted that few sources exist which can illuminate individual participants' perceptions of festivities, but that those contemporaries who did reflect upon these forms of collective action, “leave little doubt that they believed them to be emotionally charged and “historic” moments.”¹¹ A prominent source of reflections on public celebrations was the newspaper press.

¹⁰ Admiral Rodney to Lady Rodney, At sea, 20 April 1782, in *The Life and Correspondence of the Late Admiral Lord Rodney, Vol II*, ed. G.B. Mundy (London: John Murray, 1830), p.263.

¹¹ Padhraig Higgins, “Bonfires, Illuminations, and Joy: Celebratory Street Politics and uses of “the Nation” During the Volunteer Movement,” *Éire-Ireland* 42 (2007): p.176.

Higgins' assertion applies equally to the celebrations of the Saintes. Irish newspaper editors began to employ an emotionally charged tone—once coverage had moved beyond simply reproducing the *London Gazette's* reports. In the context of late eighteenth-century Dublin and Belfast, the celebrations followed a familiar pattern. According to Higgins, the rise of the Volunteer movement in the late 1770s “multiplied opportunities for participating in popular festivities” throughout Ireland.¹² Newspapers routinely reported the wide variety of rituals and public festivities which comprised Ireland's “rich commemorative and celebratory calendar.”¹³ In analysing the reports of these rituals, Higgins drew upon the work of David Waldstreicher, who argued that historians must pay attention to the printed discourse which “surrounded these events and gave them extra-local meaning.”¹⁴ That is, newspaper reports did more than simply describe events—they also “transformed and nationalised scores of local rituals.”¹⁵ Higgins argued that the Irish press in the 1770s and 1780s promoted a highly mediated understanding of the political community and the national interest—by virtue of not only explicit political argument, but more

¹² *Ibid.*, p.176.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.176.

¹⁴ David Waldstreicher, quoted in *Ibid.*, pp.177-178.

¹⁵ David Waldstreicher, quoted in *Ibid.*, p.178.

subtly in the everyday reporting of the spectacular politics of the Volunteers on the street and the parade ground.¹⁶

The contents of the Irish newspapers in this case study certainly contained both explicit political commentary, as well as voluminous reporting on the Volunteers. The columns of the *Dublin Evening Post*, *Freeman's Journal* and *Belfast News-Letter* brimmed with detailed reports of the movements of the Volunteers and lengthy notices of the Volunteer companies' resolutions. As noted in Chapter Two, these Irish newspapers presented a relatively militarised image of the celebrations of the Saintes—in comparison with their London counterparts—as reports of celebrations often highlighted the Volunteers' participation. It is notable too, that in addition to reporting the celebrations in the larger cities, the English and Irish newspapers printed many letters from correspondents around England and Ireland, reporting on the celebrations in provincial centres. The repetition of the ritualistic celebrations enhanced the persuasive power of reports of the celebrations, and emphasized their widespread nature. Whilst these various celebrations may have been spatially separate, the repetitive reports evoked a commonality of purpose and sentiment in England and Ireland respectively.

¹⁶ Padhraig Higgins, *A Nation of Politicians: Gender, Patriotism, and Political Culture in Late Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), p.55.

Higgins' assertions as to the strength of the mediating influence of the press must be balanced against the views of historians of the press who have argued convincingly—in relation to the English newspaper press—that although the newspapers were highly political, they were above all business concerns, which were more dependent upon their appeal to a wide readership base than they were upon political patronage.¹⁷ To quote Troy Bickham, the British press may once have been accepted as “party bugles operated by corrupt editors in search of bribes or satisfying personal vendettas,” but scholars now acknowledge that the eighteenth-century British newspapers were profitable businesses backed by advertising revenues, not party funds.¹⁸ According to Barker, the pressure to maintain extensive distributions ensured that newspapers were highly dependent upon their appeal to readers, rather than political patronage. She concluded that newspaper politics appear to have been shaped less by politicians than by a desire on the part of editors to engage with public opinion.¹⁹ By emphasising the commercial concerns of newspaper editors and proprietors, and by examining the links between newspapers and their readers, Barker thus challenged the existing historiography of the press, and

¹⁷ Barker, “Introduction,” in *Newspapers, Politics, and Public Opinion in Late-Eighteenth Century England*.

¹⁸ Troy Bickham, *Making Headlines: The American Revolution as Seen through the British Press* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), p.9.

¹⁹ Barker, “Introduction,” in *Newspapers, Politics, and Public Opinion in Late-Eighteenth Century England*.

emphasised the role of public opinion in determining newspaper contents.²⁰ The *Morning Chronicle*'s William Woodfall exemplified this in his warning to would-be contributors, that he would not print any material which had already been printed elsewhere "to oblige any persons whatever."²¹ He reserved the right to print only the type of content which would satisfy his avowed editorial policy, and his readers.

The Irish press was considered relatively free of political interference in the early 1780s. Prior to 1784 anybody could publish without special licence, or submission of the manuscript for censorship.²² Although the political persuasions of the Irish newspapers—as with those in London—were almost always crystal-clear, these newspapers too were commercial concerns. They could not have attracted essential advertising revenue unless the editors engaged with public opinion and maintained circulation numbers. On balance, this case study comprises newspapers in London and Ireland which had operated for some time, and with some success. It is therefore accepted that the editors worked hard to balance economic pressures with their political agendas; and at the same

²⁰ Hannah Barker, "Conclusion," in *Newspapers, Politics, and Public Opinion in Late-Eighteenth Century England*.

²¹ Answers to Correspondents," *The Morning Chronicle, and London Advertiser*, May 24, 1782, p.2.

²² Brian Inglis, *The Freedom of the Press in Ireland 1784–1841* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1954), p.15.

time they “sought to shape public opinion while being alive to the currents of popular sentiment.”²³

Taking new imperial history across the Irish Sea

Whilst acknowledging the mediating influence of the information network and of the press itself, this case study has been concerned with assessing the impact of imperial news on the metropole and on a second site of the British empire—Ireland. In so doing, the thesis has been informed by new imperial historiography, and its more recent convergence with the legacy of the British World scholarship of the 1990s. British World scholarship (a critique of which has already been discussed), concerned the story of settler connection across the imperial diaspora, focusing on the “real and imagined commonalities that connected settler communities.”²⁴ New imperial history emerged at around the same time, but focused instead on the impact of empire on Britain, seeking synergies between Britain’s domestic and imperial pasts.²⁵ Kathleen Wilson, one of the early practitioners of new imperial history, described it as

²³ Kenton S. Storey, “‘What Will They Say in England?’ Violence, Anxiety, and the Persistence of Humanitarianism in Vancouver Island and New Zealand, 1853–1862” (Ph.D., thesis, University of Otago, 2011), p.21.

²⁴ Pietsch, “Rethinking the British World,” pp.442–443.

²⁵ Tillman Nechtman, “New Imperial History: A Pedagogical Approach,” *The Middle Ground Journal* 5 (2012), <http://www2.css.edu/app/depts/HIS/historyjournal/index.cfm?name=The-New-Imperial-History:-A-Pedagogical-Approach&cat=4&art=100>

having emerged from “the rather remarkable rediscovery of the importance of the empire in the British past.”²⁶

New imperial history originated in debate over British identity. It emanated from feminist history and postcolonial theory, and has employed the approaches of social, cultural and transnational history. Despite these poststructuralist beginnings, and the original aim of new imperial historians to seek new ways of theorising difference in the imperial context,²⁷ one of the persistent criticisms of the field has been the potential for the focus on metropolitan cultures to lead to little more than a replication of the relations of empire, and in the process displacing the study of the colonised.²⁸ Critics have also bemoaned the more recent predominance of cultural histories in the field, which have demonstrated the widespread production of symbolic goods of empire, but have failed to adequately assess the reception of these cultural forms.²⁹

Recent scholarship has sought to address the respective criticisms of new imperial and British world history, and has been enriched by

²⁶ Kathleen Wilson, “Introduction: histories, empires, modernities,” in *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire 1660–1840*, ed. Kathleen Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.2.

²⁷ Catherine Hall, “Introduction: thinking the postcolonial, thinking the empire,” in *Cultures of Empire, A Reader: Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Catherine Hall (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.16.

²⁸ Zoë Laidlaw, “Breaking Britannia’s Bounds? Law, Settlers, and Space in Britain’s Imperial Historiography,” *The Historical Journal* 55 (2012): p.811.

²⁹ de Nie, “‘Speed the Mahdi!’ The Irish Press and Empire,” p. 885.

the convergence between the two approaches. Catherine Hall and Sonja Rose argued in 2006 that in challenging the traditional focus on centre and periphery relations, scholars have sought to emphasize the importance of connections across empire, the webs and networks which have operated between colonies, and the significance of centres outside the metropole.³⁰ By considering connections not just between metropole and colony, but between colonial sites, and by including non-metropolitan voices, the historiography has resulted in a far more nuanced view of the place of empire in Britain's past, and indeed the place of empire in other imperial sites. As Zoe Laidlaw has noted, recent works influenced by new imperial history

range far beyond dissections of metropolitan society and culture, focusing on interactions between widely separated colonial sites, juxtaposing micro and macro, and questioning the relationship between the remarkable and the everyday.³¹

The inclusion of Ireland in this case study responds to calls by Irish studies scholars to widen the focus in the analysis of Ireland's engagement with the British empire, by taking new imperial history across the Irish Sea.³² Until very recently, the bulk of the historiography on Ireland in the context of empire was consumed by

³⁰ Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose, "Introduction: being at home with the empire," in *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, eds. Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.8.

³¹ Laidlaw, "Breaking Britannia's Bounds?" p.811.

³² de Nie, "'Speed the Mahdi!' The Irish Press and Empire," p. 884.

the question of whether or not Ireland was a colony.³³ The next phase in Irish imperial studies concerned nationalists, and the ways that different strands of nationalism engaged intellectually and politically with empire.³⁴ Michael de Nie, among others, has argued that the next logical step is to broaden the scope and to begin to explore “Irish imperial sensibilities more generally.”³⁵

Irish Imperial Sensibilities

As already noted, the *Freeman's Journal* espoused the view that the celebrations in Dublin on the evening of Wednesday 22 May, 1782, were in response to Rodney's victory at the Saintes.³⁶ The editor asserted that subsequent celebrations would be held once “the last act of the King and Parliament of Great Britain, shall, in an explicit, authentic and irrevocable manner” acknowledge the rights of Ireland.³⁷ Carey described the celebrations of the Saintes as the result of an event:

in which as an obliged people we should esteem ourselves equally interested with the sister kingdom, whose concerns are now become our own, in consequence of the liberal, just and affectionate tie which will *soon unite* both nations in an indissoluble union, not founded on force or necessity, but on the spontaneous goodwill of sisters, equally happy in the fate of their COMMON PARENT.³⁸

³³ Stephen Howe, “Minding the Gaps: New Directions in the Study of Ireland and Empire,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 37 (2009): p.136.

³⁴ Michael de Nie and Joe Cleary, “Editors’ Introduction,” *Éire-Ireland* 42 (2007): p.6.

³⁵ de Nie, “‘Speed the Mahdi!’ The Irish Press and Empire,” p.884.

³⁶ “Dublin,” *The Freeman's Journal*, May 23-25, 1782, p.4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

It is references to “sister kingdom” and “common parent” which suggest an aspiration to be considered as an equal partner in empire. This is the key to unravelling the apparent paradox of the enthusiastic celebration of the Saintes, against a background of ongoing agitation for constitutional independence from Westminster.

The revision over the past decade of the historiography of Irish patriotism and political culture in the eighteenth century helps to explain the stance adopted by the *Freeman's Journal*. In his book on the political nation in Ireland during this period, Padhraig Higgins reviewed the recent historiography of patriotism. He sought to elucidate what exactly eighteenth-century Irish men and women meant when they described themselves as a patriot.³⁹ Somewhat confusingly for the modern reader, ‘patriot’ was a term adopted by proponents of a range of political positions; opponents of the government attempted to monopolise the term, but government supporters also identified themselves as patriots.⁴⁰ By placing patriotism in its eighteenth-century Irish, British and European contexts, scholars have dispatched the notion that Irish patriotism in the period was simply a form of “proto-nationalism,

³⁹ Higgins, *A Nation of Politicians*, pp.19-27.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.20.

part of the story of an unfolding Irish national identity.”⁴¹ Instead, patriotism has come to be associated with what Colin Kidd has described as “the rights of Englishmen.”⁴²

Higgins’ assessment of Irish patriotism in the pre-nationalist era aligns with Kidd’s exposition of patriotism in the Scottish context in the years preceding Scottish Union with England.⁴³ Kidd made only passing reference to Ireland in this work,⁴⁴ but his approach has been instructive for scholars of Irish patriotism, particularly in relation to the late eighteenth century. He argued that patriotism in that period had not yet acquired a predominantly ethnocentric meaning, rather it was “associated with ideals and practices which held universal appeal.”⁴⁵ Kidd described the attachment to notions of liberty and individual rights as elements of the English ideal of self-government, which, in the “British world...came to be equated with winning or preserving the rights of Englishmen.”⁴⁶ Indeed, adherence to an Anglo-British form of patriotism was a common feature of political discourse in the eighteenth-century British Atlantic world.⁴⁷

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.19.

⁴² Kidd, “North Britishness and the Nature of Eighteenth-Century British Patriotism,” p.362.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp.361-382.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.301-381.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.362.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.362.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.361.

In the Irish context, Stephen Small identified patriotism's connection with liberty and the moral and intellectual qualities that fostered it.⁴⁸ Joep Leersen ascribed to this conception of patriotism a combination of social responsibility and "selfless devotion to the common weal," which could incorporate economic and social improvement, and the defence of constitutional rights against oligarchy and arbitrary rule.⁴⁹ In the British tradition, patriotism was often associated with a Whig defence of parliamentary rights against the crown and opposition to arbitrary power, as well as a more general love of one's country.⁵⁰ Leersen noted, however, that over the course of the eighteenth century, patriotism began to lose its Whiggish overtones and became associated with disenchantment with a political system based on vested interest.⁵¹

In relation to Scotland, Kidd noted that "there was, apparently, nothing unpatriotic about replicating English institutions." ⁵² Scholars of patriotism in Ireland have detected a similar desire to share in the freedoms and institutions of self-government as those enjoyed by metropolitan Englishmen (within certain limits). ⁵³ Although it is accepted that a British element "pervaded political

⁴⁸ Stephen Small, quoted in Higgins, *A Nation of Politicians*, p.20.

⁴⁹ J.T. Leersen, quoted in *Ibid.*, p.20.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.19-20.

⁵¹ J.T. Leersen, quoted in *Ibid.*, p.20.

⁵² Kidd, "North Britishness and the Nature of Eighteenth-Century British Patriotism," p.370.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.380.

life” in Ireland, and rendered patriotism in the period anglocentric, Higgins argued (as Kidd had done previously), that patriotism was also prone to exhibiting an anti-English aspect in the face of specific constitutional and economic grievances.⁵⁴ Kidd’s caution that patriotism should not be considered immutable is pertinent. In the Scottish context, he argued that “the forces of attraction and repulsion” along the axis of English and Scottish identification were not constant in the various constitutive elements of national identity, and therefore changed over time.⁵⁵

This marks a significant shift in interpretation. As already noted, earlier scholarship drew very much upon a nationalist (or proto-nationalist) conception of eighteenth-century patriotism.⁵⁶ That is, the behaviour of patriots, or political activists in the eighteenth-century was viewed through the prism of nationalism. As Higgins concluded, Irish patriotism during the 1780s was not necessarily attached to a desire to devolve from Britain, but rather sought, above all, to defend “individual rights and liberty against the arbitrary encroachments of government,” and to promote “the

⁵⁴ Higgins, *A Nation of Politicians*, p.20. Kidd, “North Britishness and the Nature of Eighteenth-Century British Patriotism,” p.361.

⁵⁵ Kidd, “North Britishness and the Nature of Eighteenth-Century British Patriotism,” pp.361-362.

⁵⁶ Inter alia, James Kelly, *Prelude to Union: Anglo-Irish Politics in the 1780s* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1992). Ian McBride, “‘The common name of Irishman’: Protestantism and patriotism in eighteenth-century Ireland,” in *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland, c.1650–c.1850*, ed. Tony Claydon and Ian McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.236-261.

public good.”⁵⁷ Within this frame of reference, it is entirely possible to conceive of public celebration of an imperial victory, as to do so did not detract from the aim of Irish equality with England. In the words the *Freeman’s Journal*, the celebrations denoted happiness in the “fate of their common parent.”⁵⁸

In contrast with the insistence by the *Freeman’s Journal* that the initial illuminations in Dublin were only attributable to Rodney’s victory—the *Dublin Evening Post* did not differentiate between celebrations of the imperial military victories in the West and East Indies, and the advent of legislative independence. Further, the letters from correspondents around Ireland which appeared in the pages of the *Post* and in the *Belfast News-Letter* over the following days, all attributed their celebrations equally to the three events.⁵⁹ Reports in the *Belfast News-Letter* did suggest that the first celebrations by the Carrickfergus Volunteers in Belfast were in response solely to Rodney’s victory, as no mention was made of legislative independence in the report of the celebrations; even though news of the Westminster vote appeared in the same issue of the *News-Letter*. The report of the initial celebrations stated simply that,

⁵⁷ Higgins, *A Nation of Politicians*, p.20.

⁵⁸ “Dublin,” *The Freeman’s Journal*, May 23-25, 1782, p.4.

⁵⁹ “Extract of a Letter from Naas,” *The Dublin Evening Post*, May 23, 1782, p.3. “A Letter from Dundalk,” *The Dublin Evening Post*, May 25, 1782, p.3. “Extract of a Letter from Philipstown, King’s Co.,” *The Dublin Evening Post*, May 30, 1782, p.3 “Belfast,” *The Belfast News-Letter*, May 24-28, 1782, p.3.

in consequence of the news of Admiral Rodney's victory in the West Indies, the Belfast Troop, and Belfast artillery paraded, and fired a feu de-joys—and the evening concluded with illuminations, bonfires, &c.⁶⁰

In the following issue, however, the editor described the celebrations which had occurred over the previous weekend as being on account of “our glorious emancipation from slavery, as also our conquests in the West Indies.”⁶¹

Although the *Freeman's Journal* employed the most florid language of the three Irish newspapers under review, the *Dublin Evening Post* and *Belfast News-Letter* also reported legislative independence with great excitement. On 23 May, the *Post* described the parade of Volunteers in the city to “testify their satisfaction” with the Rockingham government's vote for legislative independence “of this long injured country.”⁶² The report went on to state that Rodney's victory in the West Indies and the capture of Ceylon in the East “gave the most heartfelt pleasure to every Irishman who wishes to live only to share the liberty and share the fate of Britain.”⁶³ In this short phrase, the editor encapsulated what Irish patriots sought from the empire—liberty, and a commonality of purpose. In a more subtle way, the *Post* thus advanced the same opinion as the *Freeman's Journal*.

⁶⁰ “Belfast,” *The Belfast News-Letter*, May 21-24, 1782, p.2.

⁶¹ “Belfast,” *The Belfast News-Letter*, May 24-28, 1782, p.3.

⁶² “Dublin, May 23,” *The Dublin Evening Post*, May 23, 1782, p.3.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

In reporting the vote for legislative independence, the *Belfast News-Letter* described Ireland's "glorious emancipation from slavery,"⁶⁴ and described how "loyal inhabitants" in the provinces demonstrated "their heartfelt pleasure" at "that which every Irishman prizes above all, emancipation from a foreign legislature," together with the military victories in the West and East Indies.⁶⁵ Reports such as these indicate that to celebrate both the imperial news and the advent of legislative independence, was considered an act of loyalty to Ireland—at least by the newspapers under review.

It is important to note that although the issues of the Irish newspapers in this case study did not display explicitly anti-Catholic sentiment, all three reflected Protestant interests.⁶⁶ The degree to which Catholic Ireland embraced the Protestant patriot vision within the context of the empire is a question for a different study, but some examination of Catholic engagement with the newspapers in this case study is necessary. Throughout the eighteenth century, patriotism was intimately intertwined with Protestantism, and religious liberty was an essential element of the notion of liberty at

⁶⁴ "Belfast," *The Belfast News-Letter*, May 24-28, 1782, p.3.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Mary Pollard, *Dublin's Trade in Books 1550–1800: Lyell Lectures, 1986–1987* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p.24. Vincent Morley, *Irish Opinion and the American Revolution, 1760–1783* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.279. Douglas Simes, "Ireland, 1760–1820s," in *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760–1820*, ed. Hannah Barker and Simon Burrows (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.119. Inglis, *The Freedom of the Press in Ireland*, p.22.

the heart of Irish patriotism.⁶⁷ Irish studies scholars have disagreed about the degree of influence to be attributed to religious conflict and division within eighteenth-century Irish society.⁶⁸ This thesis will not detail the arguments advanced, but accepts that religious division was never a marginal issue for either Protestants or Catholics.⁶⁹

The *Dublin Evening Post*, *Freeman's Journal* and *Belfast News-Letter* all devoted considerable column inches to reporting on the Volunteer movement, as it was a central element in the performance of patriotism in the 1780s. Although the Volunteers initially emerged as a Protestant force, by the early 1780s the movement had begun to complicate the strong ties between patriotism and anti-popery. For example, the 1782 Dungannon convention of Volunteers resolved to celebrate the relaxation of penal laws against their "Roman Catholic fellow-subjects", and encouraged the admittance of Catholics to Volunteer units.⁷⁰ Vincent Morley has argued that after Dungannon, middle-class Catholics "increasingly gravitated towards the patriot-inclined milieu of the Volunteers;" joining units in Limerick, Dublin, Newry and elsewhere.⁷¹ Catholic participation in the Volunteers may have remained in the minority, but the

⁶⁷ Higgins, *A Nation of Politicians*, p.24.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.24-25.

⁶⁹ Karen J. Harvey, quoted in *Ibid.*, p.25.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.24-25.

⁷¹ Morley, *Irish Opinion and the American Revolution*, p.312.

overtures of the Volunteers towards the Catholic majority cannot be ignored. By virtue of their involvement in the Volunteers, elite and middling Catholic men could offer support for the goals of patriotism.⁷²

Interactions between Catholics and Protestants have also been identified beyond the Volunteer movement, such that cooperation was no longer inconceivable by the 1780s.⁷³ There is evidence that elite and middling Catholics and Protestants mixed and exchanged ideas “in fashionable venues and societies,”⁷⁴ and that Catholic men enthusiastically participated in tavern and coffeehouse life.⁷⁵ Morley has argued that by about 1780, a crucial change had taken place in the political outlook of the populace.⁷⁶ As a result of the reassessment of attitudes towards Catholics which gradually occurred within Protestant patriot ranks (as evidenced by participation in the Volunteers), and convergence on issues such as Catholic relief, a new solidarity with the patriot opposition and its demands developed among lower-class Catholics.⁷⁷

⁷² Higgins, *A Nation of Politicians*, pp.25-26.

⁷³ Morley, *Irish Opinion and the American Revolution*, p.276.

⁷⁴ Simes, “Ireland, 1760—1820s,” in *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760—1820*, p.117.

⁷⁵ Higgins, *A Nation of Politicians*, p.37.

⁷⁶ Morley, *Irish Opinion and the American Revolution*, p.276.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.276.

My review of the historiography of the eighteenth-century press in Ireland reveals no newspapers printed exclusively for the Catholic majority during the eighteenth century. The absence of Catholic publications does not mean, however, that the newspapers in this case study did not reach Catholic readers. Niall Ó Ciosáin has discounted previous assertions that the ‘Catholic masses’ could not access metropolitan newspapers on account of literacy and/or language barriers.⁷⁸ Whilst noting that in the late eighteenth century, Ireland was “an intensely bilingual and diglossic society,” Ó Ciosáin has argued that during this period Ireland underwent “one of the most rapid and total language shifts in modern European history,” as greater proportions of the population began to utilize English, which was the language of the elite, the law and print.⁷⁹ It is therefore arguable that although newspapers in eighteenth-century Ireland still appealed primarily to English-speaking Protestants,⁸⁰ the culture of print was more inclusive than has often been assumed.⁸¹

This review of the reporting of the *Saintes* demonstrates that in addition to reporting local politics and patriotic activities, imperial information was abundant and prominent in the Irish newspapers.

⁷⁸ Niall Ó Ciosáin, *Print and Popular Culture in Ireland, 1750–1850* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1997), p.6.

⁷⁹ Ó Ciosáin, *Print and Popular Culture in Ireland, 1750–1850*, p.6.

⁸⁰ Simes, “Ireland, 1760–1820s,” in *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760–1820*, p.115.

⁸¹ Higgins, *A Nation of Politicians*, p.30.

As Michael de Nie and Jennifer Regan have both acknowledged in their examinations of popular views of empire in nineteenth-century Ireland, newspapers cannot reveal what people thought, “but they should reveal what kind of information was available to the literate public who did not have imperial knowledge through first-hand accounts.”⁸² By tracing the interaction between news of legislative independence and the victory at the Saintes in a selection of newspapers, it has been possible to uncover a particular strain of patriotism which aligns with the recent historiography of late eighteenth-century Ireland. In May 1782, patriotic editors and correspondents hinted at the possibility of a new equality between Ireland and Britain. Rather than celebrating their inherent Britishness, the newspapers heralded a new commercial and constitutional equality between Ireland and England,⁸³ in which the people of Ireland could share in the rights which flowed from English institutions, as well as share in the fate of the British empire.

⁸² Jennifer M. Regan, “‘We Could Be of Service to Other Suffering People’: Representations of India in the Irish Nationalist Press, c.1857–1887,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 4(2008): pp.62-63.

⁸³ Kelly, *Prelude to Union*, p.ix.

Conclusion

This review of the newspaper coverage of Rodney's victory at the Saintes has provided an insight into a brief period in May 1782, when newspaper readers in London, Dublin and Belfast could read about—and celebrate—a comprehensive victory over Britain's traditional foe, France. The case study has examined the way that news of an imperial victory at the far reaches of empire interacted with local news and politics in the metropole and in Ireland, to create diverse articulations of empire. In tracing the evolution of the story of the Saintes, and the network which carried the story from the Caribbean to the British Isles, this case study has drawn upon the approaches of new imperial history, in combination with the re-invigorated study of information networks, a legacy of the British World project.

The interaction between the imperial news of the Saintes, and that of legislative independence in Ireland, and the machinations of party politics in Westminster, emphasizes the intricate relationship between the press, politics and public opinion in the eighteenth century. In London, the reversal in Rodney's reputation as portrayed in the press had potent political impact, not least for Edmund Burke. Burke's final attempt to initiate an investigation

into Rodney's conduct at St. Eustatius was in February 1782.¹ Three months later, the vehemence with which the recall controversy was reported in the London newspapers rendered any investigation into St. Eustatius a political impossibility, despite Burke's move to the government benches.

In Ireland, the combination of the imperial news with that of the repeal of the *Dependency of Ireland on Great Britain Act 1719*, resulted in complicated public celebrations. Reporting on both events permitted patriotic newspaper editors and correspondents to hint at the possibility of a new equality between Dublin and Westminster. Rather than celebrating their inherent Britishness, the newspapers heralded a new commercial and constitutional equality between Ireland and England,² which it was hoped would grant the people of Ireland access to the "rights of Englishmen."³ In return, Ireland would share in the fate of the empire. In the event, legislative independence was a short-lived affair. The Rockingham Administration which had supported Irish independence came to an end in July 1782, and with it the aspirations of the Irish parliament. Successive British governments endeavoured to mitigate the impact

¹ Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, "The Other Road to Yorktown: The St. Eustatius Affair and the American Revolution," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 97 (2002): pp.44-46.

² James Kelly, *Prelude to Union: Anglo-Irish Politics in the 1780s* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1992), p.ix.

³ Colin Kidd, "North Britishness and the Nature of Eighteenth-Century British Patriotisms," *History* 39 (1996): p.362.

of free trade and legislative independence by concluding a “final adjustment” of Anglo-Irish relations.⁴ This final adjustment entailed tighter control from Westminster, which undermined the gains achieved for Ireland in 1782.⁵

Ireland may have been marked out as anomalous by some scholars of empire, but this case study has borne out the assertions of Michael de Nie, among others, that the study of Ireland can in fact benefit from the methodologies of new imperial history.⁶ The newspaper reporting and the celebration of the Saintes in Dublin and Belfast have shown that Ireland’s engagement with the empire in the early 1780s was more complex than simply a story of “proto-nationalism”.⁷ Although limited in scale, this case study has uncovered a specifically Irish sensibility about empire, which manifested as a desire to participate as an equal partner in the project of empire. The notion of patriotism was central to this articulation of empire. Scholars such as Padhraig Higgins, Vincent Morley and Niall Ó Ciosáin have argued that Irish patriotism was more inclusive than previously accepted, and that it did not

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ *Ibid*.

⁶ Michael de Nie, “‘Speed the Mahdi!’ the Irish Press and Empire During the Sudan Conflict of 1883–1885,” *Journal of British Studies* 51 (2012): p.885. Stephen Howe, “Minding the Gaps: New Directions in the Study of Ireland and Empire,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 37 (2009): p.136. Joe Cleary, “Amongst Empires: A Short History of Ireland and Empire Studies in International Context,” *Éire-Ireland* 42 (2007): pp.11-57.

⁷ Padhraig Higgins, *A Nation of Politicians: Gender, Patriotism, and Political Culture in Late Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), p.19.

necessarily divide neatly along sectarian lines.⁸ On this basis, the imperial sensibilities identified in this case study arguably represent more than simply a Protestant sensibility about empire. This is a question which would benefit from further research, but the conclusions drawn in this thesis align with the recent historiography.

In order to draw conclusions about the impact of the news of the Saintes, this case study incorporated an analysis of the information networks involved in the transmission of the news, and the mediating role these networks assumed. The state was an integral part of the story of the Saintes, which in turn influenced the way the story was reported—at least in the initial stages. By paying close attention to the network, it has also been possible to identify Admiral Rodney's role in the generation of the news. A second mediating influence in the story of the Saintes was the newspaper press in general. The newspapers in this case study all devoted considerable column inches to imperial news, which suggests that imperial news sold newspapers. As commercial enterprises, heavily dependent upon advertising revenue, the newspapers of the eighteenth century required editors to strike a balance between commercial pressures and their own political agendas. The

⁸ Higgins, *A Nation of Politicians*. Vincent Morley, *Irish Opinion and the American Revolution, 1760–1783* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Niall Ó Ciosáin, *Print and Popular Culture in Ireland, 1750–1850* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1997).

mediating role of the press cannot be overlooked, but equally, the fact that successful newspaper editors took heed of popular sentiment in crafting their coverage enables the modern reader to discern the currents of contemporary opinion.

Taken at face value, the vibrant newspaper reporting of the Saintes, and the exuberance of the public celebrations around England and Ireland, constitute an example of the type of popular imperialism which was common in the eighteenth century. It has been possible, however, to write politics into this history of popular imperialism, by means of a detailed investigation of the way the news of the Saintes unfolded. At least for the period under review, empire was an integral element in domestic English and Irish politics and patriotism. Just as the early works of new imperial history teased out English imperial sensibilities, this case study has demonstrated the value of new imperial history doing the same for Ireland. By reviewing the way that one imperial event was reported there, it has been possible to discern a specifically Irish sensibility about empire, and to examine the role of empire in the domestic history of Ireland, in the period before nationalism came to dominate the Anglo-Irish relationship.

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