

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In the church at Upper Largo in Fife, where he lies buried in the family vault, there is a handsome wall tablet dedicated to the memory of Admiral Sir Philip Charles Henderson Calderwood Durham. Placed there in 1849 on the initiative of his great-nephew and residual legatee, [James] Wolfe Murray of Cringletie (whose brother Alexander, known to the family as Alick, was the putative author of Durham's naval memoirs published three years previously),¹ it notes that Durham's 'activity, gallantry, judgement and zeal were excelled by none in his profession and his numerous captures and successes were acknowledged by many public testimonials' and that as a flag-officer he commanded in the Leeward Islands and at Portsmouth. It omits, however, both his survival, in 1782, of the capsizing of the *Royal George*, the worst naval disaster in British home waters since the sinking of the *Mary Rose* at virtually the same spot 237 years earlier, and his captaincy of a ship of the line at Trafalgar, where he took two prizes – pivotal events of his career. And Wolfe Murray's unfortunate choice of words – that Durham spent his later years 'generously spending an ample fortune' – gives the impression that the admiral was a careless spendthrift rather than a man of prudence who liberally gave to individuals and causes that he deemed worthy, but was otherwise cannily restrained in his personal expenditure.

The third of the four sons of James Durham (1732–1808), the genial and gregarious laird of Largo, the equally genial and gregarious Philip Charles Durham (his other names were adopted in maturity), was born in 1763 at Largo House, his family's Adam-designed mansion overlooking the Firth of Forth, presumably a few days before his baptism on 29 July (though that is the birthdate given on the church tablet). Descended on both sides from diverse prominent figures in Scotland's history, the most incongruous being a grim Covenanting theologian admired by Cromwell, he counted many luminaries of the legal profession among

¹Alexander Murray, *Memoir Of The Naval Life And Services Of Admiral Sir Philip C.H.C. Durham G.C.B.* (London, 1846). Wolfe and Alick were children of Durham's niece Isabella Strange, who in 1807 married James Wolfe Murray of Cringletie (1759–1836), a Scottish Lord of Session.

his blood relatives both living and deceased. Not least of these was his mother Anne Calderwood's cousin Thomas Erskine, a former midshipman who, having subsequently read for the English Bar, served from 1806 to 1807 as Lord Chancellor and was the first Baron Erskine. Also among his mother's kin were several nautical eighteenth-century Dalrymples, notably Alexander Dalrymple, initial hydrographer to the Admiralty. Charles Middleton, Lord Barham, had a family link with Durham's father, whose collateral forebear, Grizel Durham, had married Barham's great-uncle, the first Earl of Middleton.

His good nature and affable manner tempered by an acerbic wit, and by a proneness to impatience and obstinacy, Admiral Sir Philip Durham was one of the most colourful characters of his naval generation. His father was described by a friend, the Earl of Haddington, as 'full of invention in his conversation' and when he could not sleep 'he invented stories to divert folks'. Readers of this Society's published memoirs by two of Philip Durham's naval contemporaries may recall that Durham was well known, even to George III, as a teller of tall tales (the king said of any story of dubious authenticity, 'That's a Durham!'); it seems, therefore, that the trait was inherited.¹

Durham enjoyed a charmed life on both sea and land. As I point out in my biography of him,² he was, with justification, widely considered to be one of the luckiest officers in the Georgian Navy. His naval career's milestones were: Lieutenant, 26 December 1782; Commander, 12 November 1790; Captain, 24 June 1793; Rear-Admiral of the Blue, 31 July 1810; Rear-Admiral of the White, 12 August 1812; Rear-Admiral of the Red, 4 June 1814; KCB, 1815; Vice-Admiral of the Blue, 12 August 1819, Vice-Admiral of the White, 19 July 1821; Vice-Admiral of the Red, 27 May 1825; Admiral of the Blue, 22 July 1830; GCB, 1 December 1830; Admiral of the White, 10 January 1837; Admiral of the Red, 23 November 1841.

His career's highlights, in addition to his presence at Trafalgar, included making the first conquest of the tricolour flag in 1793 and the

¹National Register of Archives of Scotland (NRAS) MS 3215, Durham of Largo Papers, Bundle 72, Appendix, vol. 1, p. 151; Sir Thomas Byam Martin, *Letters and Papers . . . , 1733–1854*, ed. R. Vesey Hamilton, vol. 1 (NRS vol. 12, 1903), pp. 29–30; Sir William Henry Dillon, *A Narrative of My Professional Adventures*, ed. M. Lewis, vol. 2 (NRS vol. 93, 1956), p. 435. See also *Notes & Queries*, 23 September 1882, p. 243. Sincere thanks are due to Durham's collateral descendant Mrs Althea Dundas-Bekker for making available to me the Dundas of Arniston and Durham of Largo papers, in her possession at Arniston House.

²Hilary, L. Rubinstein, *Trafalgar Captain: Durham of the Defiance* (Stroud, Glos., 2005).

last in 1815. On 3 June 1815, aboard his flagship the *Venerable* in Gros Inlet Bay, St Lucia, while waiting as Commander-in-Chief of the Leeward Isles station to attack the Bonapartist Guadeloupe garrison, he dictated the following synopsis of his career:¹

Midshipman, *Trident*, July 1777

On the coast of America and the West Indies.

In Lord Howe's action with the French fleet off Rhode Island, and many other services in boats on the coast of America.

Midshipman, *Edgar*, 1780

In the action under Lord Rodney with the Spanish fleet off Cape St Vincent in 1780.

For six months employed in gun boats during the siege of Gibraltar.

Lieutenant, *Victory*, July 1781

Appointed Acting Lieutenant and Signal Officer to Admiral Kempenfelt in the *Victory*. Was with the Admiral in that gallant action in which he beat off Guichen.

Was Acting Lieutenant on board the *Royal George* when she upset at Spithead, and was fortunately saved.

Acting Lieutenant in the *Union*, and again in action with Lord Howe off the Straits of Gibraltar.

Was commissioned as Lieutenant December 1782. In the Peace served in the *Unicorn*. Then three years in the *Salisbury* flagship, Admiral Elliot.

Lieutenant of the *Barfleur* in the Spanish Armament 1790 and made a commander into the *Daphne*.

Commander *Daphne* 12 November 1790

Sailed for the West Indies with despatches of the peace. Served in the *Cygnets*. Then commissioned for the *Spitfire* 12 February 1793 and sailed on the first day of the Republican War. Had many skirmishes, and was particularly fortunate in the taking of privateers and protecting the commerce, until June, when I was presented with the first piece of plate that the City of London had given during the War, and made Post-Captain into the *Hind*.

¹National Archives of Scotland (NAS), GD172/637, Henderson of Fordel Papers, 'A Statement of the Services of Sir Charles P. Durham KCB Rear Admiral of the Red and Commander in Chief of the Leeward Islands'. Durham used the name Charles at that juncture to humour his wife, as explained later in this volume.

Post-Captain *Hind* 28 guns October 1793

Cruising in the Channel on the 6th of January 1794 was engaged with five French frigates for several hours, in which I had many men killed and wounded, and the ship very much cut up – saved by two line of battle ships coming in sight.

Employed with the convoys to Cadiz and Gibraltar, and in consequence of my attention to a large convoy, on my return to England in 1794 I was appointed to the command of the *Anson* of 48 guns [*sic*; she was pierced for 44], which ship I commanded for six years, during which time I was engaged in several actions, particularly in Lord Bridport's off L'Orient [i.e. Lorient] at the taking of three ships of the line, and Sir John Warren's off Tory Island, where I was the cause of the capture of one line of battle ship and four frigates, and the destruction of the French expedition to Ireland, by keeping constant sight of the squadron for twenty-two days from the time of their sailing from Brest until I called Sir John Warren to my assistance.

I assisted in the capture of several frigates, corvettes and privateers – and have actually taken and destroyed myself whilst I commanded the *Anson* the undermentioned ships, viz

La Loire of 48 guns [*sic*; she too was pierced for 44]; after a very severe single action off Ireland

La Flore (late *Flora*) of 36 guns, off Cordova

La Calliope of 32 guns, off the Penmarcks

La Daphne mounting 30 guns, off Isle Ré (late HM ship *Daphne*)

and twelve privateers, mounting from eight to eighteen guns each – and was present at the capture of one hundred and twenty seven merchant ships and vessels.

Post-Captain *Endymion* February 1801

Served in the South Seas, brought home convoy from St Helena. Captured the *Furie* privateer of 14 guns. *Endymion* paid off in consequence of the Peace, April 1802.

Post-Captain *Windsor Castle* March 1803

At Portsmouth and appointed to the *Defiance* May 1803.

Post-Captain *Defiance* May 1803

Discovered the Combined Fleet in the SW when Sir Robert Calder was steering to the NE having passed them – gave Sir Robert information, led him to them, and captured two sail of the line off Ferrol.

In the Battle of Trafalgar, had seventeen men killed, myself and fifty-one wounded, the ship disabled and sent home. Left the *Defiance* in January 1806 and appointed to the *Renown* the same day.

Post-Captain *Renown* January 1806

Served on the coast of France, and in the Mediterranean; promoted to the rank of commodore with a broad pendant and appointed to

command the third division of Lord Collingwood's fleet – returned to England February 1810 and the *Renown* paid off in April. In July 1810 promoted to the rank of Rear-Admiral.

Rear-Admiral *Hannibal* February 1811

Hoisted my flag in the *Hannibal* in the Baltic Fleet; appointed to the command of the squadron off Texel; then to the command of a squadron at St Helens with my flag in the *Venerable*, and went in pursuit of a French squadron which had escaped from L'Orient.¹ Returned to Cawsand Bay and appointed to the Channel Fleet, and to the command of a squadron in Basque Road [*sic*]; my flag in the *Bulwark*.

Rear-Admiral

Appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Leeward Islands, in the West Indies; my flag in the *Venerable*.

On my passage out captured a French brig and two French frigates now HM ships *Dunira* and *Palma*.²

Remarks

During a service of thirty-eight years, I have scarcely been on half pay, but in constant employment, in which period I have been honoured with the thanks of the House of Commons three times – and repeatedly received the marked approbation of the Admiralty.

Durham's record of prize-taking was extremely impressive, and correspondingly lucrative. His cool courage when the disabled *Anson* was fired upon by five French frigates off Tory Island in 1798 and his capture of one of them a few days later won him the hand, after a whirlwind courtship, of Lady Charlotte Matilda Bruce (1777–1816), whose mother the Dowager Countess of Elgin was governess to Princess Charlotte, and brought him valued contacts at Court. It also made him brother-in-law to the earl who brought to Britain the Parthenon Marbles. By the close of the Napoleonic Wars Durham was, to quote a female admirer requoted by one of his friends, his future father-in-law Sir John Henderson of Fordel, 'an officer of distinction covered with honours'.

Naturally, the coming of peace heralded lean times for naval officers of all ranks as far as employment was concerned,³ and it would be twenty years before Durham drew full pay again. But, as explained in Part VII, the wars had made him a wealthy man, and after them, as the result of

¹The usual British rendition of Lorient at the time.

²He had renamed the *Alcmène* after Lord Melville's Perthshire estate and the *Iphigénie* after the island off which she and her consort had first been sighted; but after the frigates were taken into the Royal Navy they were renamed *Immortalité* and *Gloire* respectively.

³See Michael Lewis, *The Navy in Transition, 1814–1864* (London, 1965).

a fortuitous second marriage in 1817 (when he added Henderson to his name), he reinvented himself as an entrepreneurial Lowland laird and businessman.

His father – known as the greatest improver of agriculture in Fife after the Earl of Balcarres – overspent on such improvements, and his estate became encumbered by debt. It was undoubtedly the latter fact, combined with his status as his parents' third son, due to inherit neither his father's patrimony (as would the eldest son) nor his mother's (as would the second), that kindled Durham's mercenary instinct, and his marked aversion to extravagance. His brothers (two army officers, and a lawyer who died heartbreakingly young) all attended the Royal High School in Edinburgh; there is nothing in its incomplete extant records to indicate that he did too, but it is probable. Certainly, like his capable and feisty maternal grandmother Margaret Calderwood (née Steuart; 1715–74)¹ – who with her sister the future Countess of Buchan studied mathematics under a famous academic in Edinburgh and went on to administer her lawyer husband's landed estate at Polton, near Lasswade, much to its advantage – he had a head for figures and for business that would do for his second wife's Fordel estate what his grandmother had done for Polton. His father's estate at Largo had been owned by the great Scottish admiral Sir Andrew Wood, whose conquest with two ships in 1489 of an English force of five in the Firth of Forth was legendary. That event had occurred near the coastal home of the Anstruther family, after two members of which – his father's uncles – Durham was named. There were tangible reminders of Wood in the grounds of the Durham family's seat. The fishing village of Lower Largo, a downhill stroll away from Largo House, was the birthplace in 1676 of marooned mariner Alexander Selcraig or Selkirk, immortalised by Defoe as Robinson Crusoe. Given these maritime connections and influences, combined with his practical bent, it is not unlikely that Durham had been intended for a naval career from an early age.

The fascinating, although in many ways unsatisfactory, brief memoir of Durham's naval services published in 1846, the year after his death, under the name of his great-nephew Alick Murray was almost certainly mainly the work of the admiral himself. Despite its posthumous publication it contains an unedited reference to him as being still alive, and internal evidence suggests that he wrote it during or soon after his three-year

¹She is known for the *Letters and Journals of Mrs. Calderwood of Polton*, ed. A. Fergusson, (Edinburgh, 1884), consisting of letters she wrote when abroad to Durham's mother. But she also wrote an unpublished romance, *The Adventures of Fanny Roberts*.

stint as Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth (see Part VII). He made at least part of it available to Sir Harris Nicolas when the latter was compiling *The Dispatches and Letters of Lord Nelson* (London, 1844–46), and he is named in Nicolas's acknowledgments. As a lieutenant in the 18th Royal Irish Fusiliers, Alick had seen service in the Far East, and early in 1843 he stayed with Sir Philip and Lady Durham at Polton and Fordel while putting the finishing touches to his *Doings in China . . . From the recapture of Chusan in 1841, to the Peace of Nankin in 1842* (London, 1843). It was presumably at that time that he agreed to complete his great-uncle's memoir following the latter's decease – a not very onerous job, by the look of things, but one which ensured that he received £5,000 in Durham's will, and other perks. The memoir sheds no light on how Durham came to be in the Navy, or how he felt when he first joined, and, infuriatingly, there is next to nothing in it about Trafalgar.

Durham's father's sickly younger brother Robert, who died in 1752 before his career could begin, had passed from the Royal Naval Academy in Portsmouth. But although it produced a number of distinguished naval personalities, the Academy's theoretical approach was not generally appreciated by serving officers, and when Durham joined the service at Deal in the summer of 1777 it was as an ordinary seaman (not midshipman as his memoir asserts) aboard the 64-gun *Trident* commanded by a fellow-Scot, Captain John Elliot.¹ Entered on her books on 31 May, Durham went aboard a few weeks later. Also finding his sea legs on her was the future Admiral Sir Graham Moore,² a Glaswegian then aged thirteen and destined like Durham to be one of the Navy's most esteemed young frigate captains. Both feature in *The Star Captains: Frigate Command in the Napoleonic Wars* (London, 2001) by Tom Wareham, who is Moore's biographer (*Frigate Commander*, London, 2004).

In the *Trident*, under Elliot and, subsequently rated midshipman under the martinet-like Captain Anthony Molloy,³ Durham saw service on the North American Station and the West Indies, obtaining his discharge and returning home in 1779 as a passenger on the sloop *Snake* (14), then joining the 74-gun *Edgar* under Elliot's command. En route to the relief of Gibraltar with the rest of Rodney's fleet, she took part in

¹John Elliot (1732–1808), uncle of the first Earl of Minto; Lt, 1756; Capt, 1757; Governor and C-in-C, Newfoundland, 1786–89; RA, 1787; VA, 1790; Adm. 1795.

²Sir Graham Moore (1764–1843); Lt, 1782; Cdr, 1790; Capt, 1794; RA, 1812; KCB, 1815; VA, 1819; GCB, 1836; Adm, 1841.

³Anthony James Pye Molloy (c.1754–1814); Lt, 1768; Cdr, 1776; Capt, 1778; court-martialled and dismissed, 1795, over his conduct when in command of the *Caesar* at the Glorious First of June (1794).

Rodney's moonlight defeat of the Spanish admiral Juan de Langara off Cape St Vincent in 1780. The following year Durham joined the *Victory*, and afterwards the *Royal George*, as explained in Part I, which covers the earliest phase of his naval career for which documents are available. The other key facts in his long and eventful career are indicated in the introductions to the various Parts, as relevant.

It is clear that, following his mother's example, Durham destroyed all papers of a personal nature. Disappointingly, I failed to find letters to his family relating to the *Royal George* tragedy, Calder's action, and Trafalgar. The papers in this volume are from various collections in several repositories, and were used by me when researching my biography of Durham, a work which was originally substantially longer than its published size, partly owing to a detailed examination of his activities after 1815. Apart from his ongoing and successful 'second career' as a landed proprietor with extensive coal-mining interests, these comprised periods as a Conservative MP (Queenborough, 1830; Devizes, 1834–36) and as Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth (1836–39). It is rather touching to note, incidentally, that he named coal pits on his estate after ships that he had commanded. For, while extraordinarily successful in matters of commerce, he remained a seaman to his core. He was also, from the autumn of 1830, Equerry to the Duke of Cambridge. The major source for the post-1815 phase of his life (described more fully in the introduction to Part VII) is the extensive Henderson of Fordel collection (GD172) at the National Archives of Scotland in Edinburgh. Correspondence between his second wife Anne and her circle affords intimate glimpses into his activities and disposition; it seems likely that he would have discovered and destroyed such letters had he outlived Anne for long enough rather than dying only two months after her sudden death. The Henderson of Fordel collection also contains the bulk of the naval papers reproduced in this volume, but there are fragments of his naval correspondence elsewhere in Scotland, and I have drawn on them all for the biography and for the present work.

Although he was not one of the great fleet commanders and is virtually forgotten today, Durham's reputation as one of Britain's naval luminaries, clinched by his status as a Trafalgar captain, long outlived him. This must have been due in part to the existence of his memoir, in a favourable review of which Edinburgh publisher James Hogg declared in 1846:

Admiral Sir Philip Durham will be ever remembered as one of the most conspicuous actors in the last great war in which our country was involved. All the qualities necessary for success in the profession he had adopted seem to have met in his person. Kind, generous, and open-hearted, he was the very *beau ideal* of the British sailor . . .

It was in the Channel Fleet that Philip Durham came to the Admiralty's attention as one of the Royal Navy's ablest young commanders, and it was in that fleet that much of his career as a post-captain was spent. In July 1781, like several other protégés of Captain John Elliot glad to come into a flag-officer's orbit given what that could mean for promotion, he was transferred from Elliot's *Edgar* into the *Victory*, flagship of Rear-Admiral Kempenfelt,¹ formerly captain of the fleet and now a divisional commander under Vice-Admiral Darby,² whose flag flew in the *Britannia*. Kempenfelt was still refining the numerical signal code upon which he had been working for a number of years, and chose the sharp-minded Durham to be his signal officer, in the role of acting lieutenant. Durham was present at Kempenfelt's heroic rout off Ushant, on 12 December 1781, of the Comte de Guichen's Caribbean-bound transports, with the audacious capture of many despite de Guichen's vastly superior strength. He continued as Kempenfelt's signal officer following Darby's replacement as commander-in-chief of the Channel Fleet by Admiral Lord Howe,³ who in April 1782 raised his flag aboard the *Victory*. Kempenfelt – now the fleet's third in command, under Howe and Barrington⁴ – raised his on board the *Royal George*, mounting 108 guns, with Martin Waghorn⁵ (written Waghorne in the documents below) as his flag-captain. When imminently due with the rest of the fleet to sail to the relief of Gibraltar, the *Royal George* sank at Spithead on the morning of 29 August while undergoing a 'parliament heel'⁶ so that a faulty starboard pipe leading to the cistern in her orlop could be replaced, provisions for the already well-stocked ship being simultaneously unloaded from a lighter that lay alongside.

Having examined the course and causes of this famous disaster in a recently completed but not yet published work, I will confine remarks here to the situation only in relation to Durham, who from 8am was officer of the watch. Nobody voiced concern regarding the extent of the heel, which seemed no steeper than when she was previously heeled, and

¹Richard Kempenfelt (1715–82); Lt, 1741; Cdr, 1756; Capt, 1757; RA, 1780.

²George Darby (c.1720–90); Lt, 1742; Capt, 1747; RA, 1778; VA, 1779.

³Richard Howe, Earl Howe (1726–99); Lt, 1745; Capt, 1746; RA, 1770; VA, 1776; Adm, 1782; created earl April 1782; AoF, 1796; KG, 1797.

⁴Samuel Barrington (1729–1800); Lt, 1745; Cdr, 1746; Capt, 1747; RA, 1778; VA, 1779; Adm, 1787.

⁵Martin Waghorn (1734–87); Lt, 1762; Cdr, 1781; Capt, 1782.

⁶An expedient method of raising a ship's bottom sufficiently out of the water for scrubbing or routine repair, rather than docking her; it was effected by running guns and shot over to one side in order to expose the side to be treated. For the possible origin of the term, see *The Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea*, ed. Peter Kemp (Oxford, 1976), p. 632.

though at length the worried carpenter, Thomas Williams, told Waghorn of nearly three feet of water in her hold, it proved too late to right her. Durham survived in common with Waghorn and most of the men on deck. The rear-admiral, two lieutenants, and twelve midshipmen were among the numerous casualties, naval and civilian, the ship having up to 1,200 persons on board that day.

Two basic versions exist regarding Durham's immediate actions when it was clear the ship was sinking. The first is in a very rare brief pamphlet printed in January 1837 at Portsmouth, where he was then Commander-in-Chief. Internal evidence and other factors strongly suggest that he was the author, and that the work was intended for distribution among family and friends. According to this narrative:

He had just time to throw off his coat, and scramble to the side, from which, as the ship sunk, he was soon washed away, and left floating about amongst men and hammocks, and various other things from the wreck.

A drowning marine caught him by the waistcoat, and held him fast, so that he was several times drawn under water. It was in vain to reason with the poor man; he therefore clung with his legs around a hammock, and unbuttoning his waistcoat got it over his shoulders, and thus freed himself from the unfortunate marine, who immediately disappeared. He then got to some of the top-mast rigging . . .

The second version, echoing an article that had appeared some years earlier, was written or dictated by Durham in January 1842, to correct the erroneous assertion in a public account of the wreck that he had been in a boat returning from shore when the ship foundered. This version differs from that of 1837 in one essential respect: he sprang overboard as she sank. It also contains subtle differences and embellishments:

She was evidently going over, and I heard [Acting] Lieutenant Richardson¹ from the poop exclaim, 'It is all over, but I must try and save this coat.' It was the first day he had put on his lieutenant's uniform, and he immediately jumped overboard with his coat under his arm. Following his example, I pulled off my coat and leapt over, but being a bad swimmer I soon got hold of a large hammock which had floated off the deck.

At that moment I was twice carried down by a marine, whom I shook off, by tearing loose my waistcoat, by which the marine clung.

¹William Richardson (d. 1806); Lt, 27 Nov 1782; Cdr, 1798.

I then, by throwing my arms about, fortunately got hold of a spar, and was carried into the wake of the ship, when I got hold of the signal halyards, (a singular coincidence as I was signal officer) attached to the mizzen top-mast head. I continued to swim by them until one of the seamen swam up and said, ‘give me hold of these halyards and I’ll tow you up.’ This he did, and I sat on the mast-head for above an hour, the boats being busied in picking up others who were in more imminent danger.¹

As soon as the ship capsized, cannon near the entrance to Portsmouth Harbour fired distress signals. Boats were launched from the shore and from neighbouring vessels to pick up survivors, and amid a sea thick with rescue craft Durham, from his vantage point, ‘now observed the captain hanging to the weather mizzen top-sail yard-arm, supported by a seaman, and I desired the first boat that came towards me to save him first, which was done’. Another boat rescued Durham, as well as the half-drowned carpenter, who soon expired.

A list of 331 survivors [1] hurriedly drawn up for Lord Howe, who sent the Admiralty news of the disaster by the noon coach from Portsmouth (about two and a half hours after the event), mentioned by name only commissioned and warrant officers. It muddled the rankings of some of the lieutenants and in error described Acting Lieutenant Durham as the sixth. Some of those named, including Lieutenant Viguers,² master Searle, boatswain Talbot and gunner Harrison, had definitely not been aboard when the vessel sunk. And it seems that Lieutenants Hollingbery³ and Stevens,⁴ along with several ‘survivor’ midshipmen, were ashore too. In Hollingbery’s case this is most ironic, since owing to a misleading passage in survivor James Ingram’s account,⁵ too trustingly followed by twentieth-century author Roy Johnson,⁶ he is widely but erroneously

¹*A Narrative of the Loss of HMS Royal George, of 108 guns* (Portsmouth, 1837); [Julian Slight], *A Narrative of the Loss of the Royal George, Bound in the Wood of the Wreck* (Portsmouth, 1844). Other contemporary accounts of the disaster include *A Description of the Royal George, with the particulars relative to her sinking* (Portsmouth, 1782); Henry Slight, *True Stories of HM Ship Royal George from 1745 to 1841* (Ryde, 1841).

²Jeremiah Viguers (d. 1806), from a Devonian family, and c.1800 rejoined as a principal the family’s firm of London woollen drapers; naval career milestones elusive.

³Monins Hollingbery (1754–1828); Lt, 1777; superannuated Cdr, 1810.

⁴Either John Stevens (d. 1814), Lt, 1759; or John Stevens, Lt, 1779; superannuated Cdr, 1816.

⁵James Ingram, ‘The Loss of the Royal George’, *Penny Magazine*, 3 May 1834, pp. 174–6.

⁶R. F. Johnson, *The Royal George*, London, 1971, pp. 126, 171.

assumed today to have been the officer who haughtily rejected carpenter Williams's warnings that the ship was sinking. The lieutenant in question, wrote Ingram,

was, if I remember right, the third lieutenant; he had not joined us long; his name I do not recollect; he was a good sized man between thirty and forty years of age. The men called him 'Jib-and-Fore-sail-Jack,' for if he had the watch in the night, he would be always bothering the men to alter the sails, and it was 'up jib' and 'down jib,' and 'up fore-sail' and 'down fore-sail' every minute. However, the men considered him more of a troublesome officer than a good one, and from a habit he had of moving his fingers about, when walking the quarterdeck, the men said he was an organ player from London; but I have no reason to know that that was the case.

Ingram added that 'if the lieutenant of the watch had given the order to right ship a couple of minutes earlier, when the carpenter first spoke to him, nothing amiss would have happened – as three or four men at each tackle of the starboard guns would very soon have boused the guns all out, and have righted the ship'. Durham has also been mistaken for the lieutenant Ingram mentioned, naturally enough since he was officer of the watch. Dr Nicholas Tracy opens Durham's entry in *Who's Who in Nelson's Navy* thus: '[He] should have borne the responsibility for the sinking of the *Royal George* at Spithead, but escaped punishment.'¹ In an article entitled 'The Loss of the *Royal George* 1782',² Captain Scarritt Adams USN was perhaps the first commentator to blame Durham for the tragedy, prompting Roy Johnson in his account of the disaster to observe that Adams 'owes the shade of Durham an apology'.³ But, as I point out in my new account of the disaster, Durham's recollection that the first lieutenant, George Saunders,⁴ was the man who rebuffed the carpenter was equally mistaken.

The court-martial on the *Royal George*'s survivors 'for enquiring into the Causes and Circumstances of the loss' of the ship took place aboard the *Warspite*, the guardship in Portsmouth Harbour, on 7 September. Vice-Admiral Barrington presided. Other members of the court

¹N. Tracy, *Who's Who in Nelson's Navy* (London, 2006), p. 131.

²S. Adams, 'The Loss of the *Royal George* 1782', *History Today*, vol. 9, 1954, pp. 837–40.

³Johnson, *The Royal George*, pp. 81–2, 125–26.

⁴Sometimes spelled Sanders (1751–82); Lt, 1775.

were Vice-Admirals Evans¹ and Milbanke,² Rear-Admirals Hood³ and Hughes,⁴ Commodores Hotham⁵ and Leveson Gower,⁶ and Captains Allen,⁷ Dalrymple,⁸ Moutray,⁹ Faulknor,¹⁰ Jervis¹¹ and Duncan.¹²

The extract below from the court-martial transcript that gives Durham's testimony [2] illustrates the cursory nature of most of the questioning, with a notable lack of probing follow-ups to answers. The court's verdict was that the ship 'was not over-heeled [and] that the captain, officers and ship's company used every exertion to right the ship, as soon as the alarm was given of her settling'. Instead, 'from the short space of time between the alarm being given and the sinking of the ship, that some material part of her frame gave way, which can only be accounted for by the general state of the decay of her timbers'. Consequently, 'The Court doth therefore adjudge that the captain, officers and ship's company be acquitted of all blame on account of the loss of the said ship, and they are hereby acquitted of all blame of the loss of her accordingly'.

As seen in [3], Durham was on 10 September 1782 authorised by Howe to act in place of an indisposed lieutenant on the 90-gun *Union*, commanded by Captain John Dalrymple, a relative of Durham's mother, though Durham does not volunteer that fact in his memoir. On 11 September that ship, with the rest of Howe's fleet, set sail from Spithead for the relief of Gibraltar, and on 20 October took part in the indecisive action off Cape Spartel, when Durham assisted Dalrymple with the

¹John Evans (d. 1794); Lt, 1740; Cdr, 1746; Capt, 1748; RA, 1779; VA, 1780; Adm, 1793.

²Mark Milbanke (1724–1805); Lt, 1744; Cdr, 1746; Capt, 1748; RA, 1779; VA, 1780; Adm, 1793.

³Sir Alexander Hood, Viscount Bridport (1726–1814); Lt, 1746; Cdr, 1756; Capt., 1756; RA, 1780; VA, 1787; created Baron Bridport (Irish peerage), 1794; created Viscount Bridport (English peerage), 1796; Adm, 1805.

⁴Sir Richard Hughes, 2nd Bt. (1729–1812); Lt, 1745; Cdr, 1756; Capt, 1756; RA, 1780; VA, 1790; Adm, 1795.

⁵William Hotham (1736–1813); Lt, 1755; Cdr, 1756; Capt, 1757; RA, 1787; VA, 1790; created Lord Hotham (Irish peerage); Adm, 1799.

⁶John Leveson Gower (1740–92); Lt, 1758; Cdr, 1759; Capt, 1760; RA, 1787.

⁷John Carter Allen (d. 1800); Lt, 1745; Cdr, 1757; Capt, 1758; RA, 1780; VA, 1793; Adm, 1795.

⁸John Dalrymple (d. 1798); Lt., 1745; Cdr, 1757; Capt, 1758; RA, 1787; VA, 1783; Adm, 1798.

⁹John Moutray (d. 1785); Lt, 1744; Cdr, 1757; Capt, 1758.

¹⁰Jonathan Faulknor (d. 1795); Lt, 1753; Cdr, 1758; Capt, 1759; RA, 1787; VA, 1793; Adm, 1795.

¹¹Sir John Jervis, Earl St Vincent (1735–1823); Lt, 1755; Cdr, 1759; Capt, 1760; KB, 1782; RA, 1787; VA, 1793; Adm, 1795; created Earl St Vincent 1797; First Lord of the Admiralty, 1801–4; GCB, 1815; AoF, 1821.

¹²Adam Duncan (1731–1804); Lt, 1755; Cdr, 1759; Capt, 1761; RA, 1787; VA, 1793; Adm, 1795; created peer, 1797.

signals. In December, the *Union* was sent to join the squadron of the Commander-in-Chief, West Indies, Admiral Pigot,¹ and the day after Christmas Durham was made a lieutenant. In March 1783, he joined the *Raisnable*, commanded by Captain Lord Hervey,² as fourth lieutenant. As indicated by [4] and [5], there was a mutiny aboard her in June when, having arrived at Spithead, she was ordered to Chatham to be paid off. The crew, wanting to put into Portsmouth instead, defied Hervey and his lieutenants, appointed their own 'officers', and ceased attempting to summon a pilot to guide them into harbour only when Hervey threatened them with death. Durham always assumed that the instigators of the mutiny were traders from shore, who wished the ship to be paid off locally for obvious reasons; however, the mutiny may have been linked to a general mood among seamen of bitterness over pay and conditions.³ After several days' stalemate Hervey and his officers overpowered the leading mutineers, and the ship proceeded to Chatham. Following the courtmartial that took place there, four ringleaders were hanged and four flogged.

In October 1783, Durham was appointed a lieutenant on a frigate, lying at Plymouth and bound for the Barbary Coast, but ill-health – his memoir does not specify the ailment that landed him in hospital – prevented him from sailing in her. The following year, seeing no immediate employment prospects owing to peace, he left for Paris (where he had expatriate Jacobite relatives) with a midshipman friend from Fife, Peter Halkett.⁴ On the advice of contacts at the Scotch College in Paris, he lodged for about a year in an academic environment at Bourges in the Loire Valley, immersing himself in French, and afterwards made acquaintances among the French nobility; by the time he returned to Britain in 1786, he was fluent in the language. He then became third lieutenant on the 50-gun *Salisbury*, carrying the pennant of his original patron, Commodore John Elliot, who was going out to Newfoundland to be Governor and naval Commander-in-Chief, spending each June to October for the ensuing three years there. In September 1786, when the *Salisbury* was joined at anchor in St John's Bay for three weeks by the 28-gun *Pegasus*, the latter's captain, that ebullient carouser Prince William Henry (later William IV), made Durham, the entertaining

¹Hugh Pigot (1722–92); Lt, 1742; Capt, 1746; RA, 1775; VA, 1776; Adm, 1782.

²Lord John Augustus Hervey (1757–96), son of the 4th Earl of Bristol; Capt, 1780.

³See *Scots Magazine*, vol. 46, 1784, pp. 181–3.

⁴Sir Peter Halkett (1765–1839); Lt, 1789; Cdr, 1793; Capt, 1794; RA, 1812; VA, 1821; knighted 1837.

yarn-spinner, his boon companion. Future First Lord of the Admiralty Charles Yorke wrote from Hampshire to his brother Philip (later third Earl of Hardwicke), on 8 October 1786:

[Y]esterday . . . we were most agreeably surprised with a letter from Joseph¹ dated at St John's September 13th, which indeed brought little other intelligence than an account of his health and of his being extremely well satisfied with his situation . . . I must not however omit that he mentions the arrival of Prince William in the *Pegasus* 4 days before he wrote. He was sent in a boat to assist in getting the frigate thro' the narrows, and during the execution of that piece of service remained on board His Highness's ship 24 hours, who it seems was civil, and took great notice of him. He says that the ship was in excellent order, that the officers gave the prince a very high character and that the men seemed fond of him. He adds from his own observation that the prince seemed to him very sensible, but talked a great deal, and that altogether he was much of a gentleman; but what surprised me a little is that Durham is at present his bosom friend, a person for whom Joseph entertains no very great respect, and indeed from the opportunity I had of observing him when I was last at Portsmouth he struck me as not at all deficient in modest assurance, but not a little so in sense and information. Joseph was to dine with the prince the day after he wrote. I presume his being sent to assist &c might be intended as a mark of distinction and as a way of introducing him; he does not seem to consider it in that light himself, so perhaps it might be only in the course of duty. He does not say whether the prince recollected him as having seen him in America, during the war.²

While Durham was in Newfoundland his mother suffered the loss of her brother Lieutenant-Colonel William Calderwood (1745–87), and accordingly succeeded him in possession of their parental estate of Polton, south of Edinburgh, which she entailed for inheritance by her second son, Tom. She and her husband now became formally known as Mr and Mrs Calderwood Durham. In January 1788, they arrived in London for an extended stay, since James Calderwood Durham was pressing an ultimately unsuccessful claim before the House of Lords to an abeyant

¹Sir Joseph Sydney Yorke (1768–1831), their other brother, then a midshipman on the *Salisbury*; Lt, 1789; Cdr, 1790; Capt, 1793; knighted 1805; RA, 1810; VA, 1814; KCB, 1815; Adm, 1830.

²British Library, BM Added MS 39352, Hardwicke Papers. In later years both Charles and Joseph Yorke seem to have reversed their low opinion of Durham.

Scottish barony, that of Rutherford. During their time there, Lieutenant Durham arrived from Newfoundland, and he duly returned with them to Largo, where he soon got a girl pregnant. With mother and child to support, he felt the need for employment keenly and went to London to lobby for a ship. In this Part are a number of letters [7–20] of this period (1789–90) from him and his parents to and about the powerful Scottish politician Henry Dundas¹ (who had a townhouse next to James Calderwood Durham's in Edinburgh's St George's Square), Lord Chatham, and other influential figures, regarding his prospects for promotion and his worries about his future. These letters are of human and professional interest, showing the anxieties of an ambitious young officer who felt frustrated in his career path; they also illuminate the realities of naval placement and patronage at the time. Kempenfelt's death had deprived him of the patronage of a flag-officer who held him in high regard, and who might have helped him to obtain, sooner rather than later, his step up to commander's rank, or, as it was then termed, that of 'master and commander'. His chance of employment came in 1790 with the Nootka Sound Incident and the consequent 'Spanish Armament';² it was against that backdrop that the letters of 1790 were written.

Durham's delight at being shipboard once again is palpable, as is his enthusiasm for naval life, despite being supplanted as first lieutenant of John Elliott's flagship *Barfleur* (98) by the admiral's less experienced nephew, William Elliot,³ who was junior to Durham in the Navy List – and relegation to second lieutenant. Papers relating to a feud between the *Barfleur*'s lieutenants and her purser John Delafons [21–25] shed light on a purser's function and status, although the extent of Durham's involvement in the dispute is unknown. Durham had, in any case, other matters on his mind, knowing that, with Elliot's help, he was about to be made master and commander. He achieved this step on 12 November 1790, and to his obvious delight [26, 27] was given temporary command of the *Daphne* (20), in order to take her to the West Indies. At Barbados he was given despatches by Admiral Cornish⁴ to take to Jamaica, where in January 1791, as arranged, he relinquished the *Daphne* to the newly

¹Henry Dundas (1742–1811), MP for Midlothian; Home Secretary (1791–94); Home Secretary (1794–1801); Treasurer of the Admiralty (1782–1800); created Viscount Melville and Baron Dunira in 1802.

²See my *Trafalgar Captain*, pp. 24–5.

³William Elliot (d. 1792); Lt, 1787; Cdr, 1790.

⁴Samuel Cornish, formerly Pitchford (d. 1816); Lt, 1740; Capt, 1761; RA, 1790; VA, 1794; Adm, 1795; nephew of Admiral Sir Samuel Cornish Bt (c.1715–70).

posted Captain Gardner¹ and took command of the sloop *Cygnets* (18). On 6 December, Durham's mother wrote of her 'great happiness' over her son's promotion and voyage to the West Indies, adding 'disappointment and idleness has a worse effect on his health than climate' and noting that his 'warm hearted attachment to all those he has ever been obliged to gains him friends wherever he goes'.² That same month the *Cygnets* arrived home with despatches describing the progress of a slave revolt in French-held San Domingo (now Haiti), and was paid off.

¹Alan Hyde Gardner (d. 1815); Cdr, 1788; Capt, 1790; RA, 1808; VA, 1813; KCB, 1815.

²NRAS 3215, Durham of Largo Papers, Bundle 72, Appendix, vol. 1, p. 141. Mrs Durham's original letter does not exist there; the quoted phrases appear in a précis of it by her granddaughter Lillias's husband, Robert Dundas of Arniston.