

HOMOPHOBIA IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SOUTHAMPTON

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ABSTRACT

During the eighteenth century, Southampton played host to two groups of people with potentially homosexual tendencies; the fashionable macaronies and the military. At a time when sodomy was a capital offence, this combination sometimes caused demonstrations by the local people against groups and individuals suspected of such practices. The evidence indicates that the town's own probable homosexual proclivities, linked to its seafaring population, were overlooked and homophobia was directed towards outsiders only.

THE BACKGROUND

At the beginning of the 1700s Southampton was in a sorry state. In common with the rest of the country it was suffering from the effects of the national state of bankruptcy and legal currency was in short supply (Gaskill 2000, 170–73, 190–96). Aside from the actual physical shortage of legitimate money, at the start of the eighteenth century the town's trade had been steadily eroded with the loss of its import business to London, while the lucrative French wine imports had dwindled away to almost nothing by the 1720s. This, together with the removal of the Newfoundland fisheries to Poole, meant that Southampton was dependent upon petty customs from its coastal trade and the Channel Islands. However, even this was subject to exemptions. The goods of the town's own burgesses and those of towns exempted by charter, were free of duty, meaning that even this source of income for the Corporation was reduced (Patterson 1966, 3–4; 17). In the 1720s Defoe stated that 'the decay of the trade is the real decay of the

town' (Douch 1978, 11) and Southampton had been described ten years previously, as:

'...an outport of the second class, a port of regional rather than national or (on the other hand) merely local significance, dependent for the maintenance of this status on trade with the Channel Islands or Iberia, [trade] in coal and general coastal trade. . .' (Patterson 1966, 4).

The locally well-known Dr John Speed II (1626–1711) grandson of the cartographer, who had settled in Southampton, was equally despondent about the state of the town. Shortly before his death in 1711 he published a piece entitled 'Batt upon Batt' (Davies 1883, ix). In this, he graphically described the decline of the town thus;

'Thy Gates are mouldered, the Portcullis sheweth
Like rotten teeth in an old Woman's Mouth,
Walls, Forts and Towers into their Trenches slide ...
...Thou has been once a Rich and Handsome Towne
But Time hath put a Period to those Days ...'

(SCA BRA 842 Bundle 5/2 Speed papers)

Meanwhile, at a time when the need for efficient monetary management was at its greatest, the Corporation lacked members of a suitable calibre and its affairs were carried out in a cumbersome and dilatory fashion. The Corporation Journal shows the slackness of its dealings; ineffectual efforts to repair the town walls and fortifications, inconsistent management of the town's various charities, poor attendance at meetings with no business completed, nothing recorded at many meetings and futile attempts to inspect the

various Mayors' accounts (SCA SC2/1/9 31 Jan 1701/2; 31 May 1701; 23 March 1701/2). Always quick to plead poverty in attempts to avert any extra expense to themselves, in November 1702 the Corporation begged to be excused the costs of the *oyer and terminer* court scheduled for the following sessions. Apparently it was not successful and the court appears to have been held in the town as usual (SCA SC2/1/9 13 Nov 1702; Aug 1703).

Despite the many financial difficulties regular celebratory events in the annual town calendar were maintained with the usual gusto. Each was marked by the firing of the guns, together with the illumination of the Audit House and a banquet for the Corporation. Such celebrations included the annual election of the Mayor on 29 September, the anniversary of the Restoration of Charles II on 29 May, the current monarch's birthday and accession day, the Duke of Marlborough's victories and a visit by four Indian Chiefs of the Iroquois in 1710 (SCA SC2/1/9 5 Nov 1702; 5 May 1710; Patterson 1966, 21). These were all celebrated with suitable conviviality. In other words, the Corporation displayed all the symptoms of its real malaise, a declining oligarchy desperately trying to maintain appearances to reassure itself that all was well and it was 'business as usual'.

Thus the period of the early 1720s coincided with what was possibly the nadir of the town's economic affairs. Debts had mounted on all sides due to the loans extended to the Corporation by its wealthier members. These individuals may have suffered financial setbacks themselves when the South Sea Company collapsed (Patterson 1966, 26; South 1983, 50 n37; Speed Papers SCA BRA 842 Box 2 Bundle II). At the same time the continued ineffectual actions of town officials did nothing to rectify the situation of the town's falling income. Something was badly needed to revive the town's failing fortunes.

REVIVAL

It was against this background of poverty, decay and neglect that an unexpected resurgence in

the town's affairs began and an upturn in its economy was brought about. The benefits of sea air and sea bathing became an acceptable pastime for genteel folk and this, together with the milder Southampton climate, began to attract visitors to the town. During the 1730s the town increasingly hosted well-to-do visitors and became established as part of the 'season', with sea bathing taking place during the summer.

Evidence for the rapidly developing wealthy visitor trade was demonstrated in 1737, when George Rooke was arrested for stealing a gold snuffbox from a lady visitor staying at the Star. He was convicted and sentenced either to be transported, or 'burnt in the hand' (branded). The judge gave the choice of punishment to the lady victim and she chose the latter punishment for the culprit (SCA TC Box 6/15). The incident supports the view that the town had established itself as a fashionable venue for the wealthy by the end of the 1730s, at the latest. It also makes an interesting social comment about the administration of justice and the role of the victim in that administration; an approach which may have reflected the general attitude towards crime and punishment in the town, and would be demonstrated by future events.

Further evidence for the established nature of the resort is provided by a letter written in 1747/48 to the Admiralty, requesting the removal of sick prisoners of war from the town because,

'... the Towne which is noted for its healthy Situation and now in respect for its salutary Medicinal waters so that People of all Rank and Quality resort hither to receive great benefit thereby to the Emolument and Advantage of the Inhabitants which must be utterly at an End by reason of the Dread and Apprehension of the previous Sickness spreading' (SCA TC Box 4/15/41).

The tone and content of the letter make it clear that the town was already recognised as an established fashionable watering place and that it was also using the local mineral springs as spa waters for the visitors. Taken with the date of the snuffbox theft, it is reasonable to suggest the first visitors had come in the 1720s,

making Southampton's spa status one of the earliest after Bath. This conclusion is supported by Defoe's comment in 1724, that 'the town is large, has many people in it . . .' and continued by indicating that the town could accommodate 'great numbers of people' (Douch 1978, 11).

With the expansion of the season, so the social etiquette at the balls and assemblies developed, in keeping with the accepted niceties and genteel refinements of the visitors. These included almost ritualistic conventions associated with the process of bathing in the sea and/or the drinking of seawater, which were both rigidly overseen by guides from the bathing house establishments. No less restrictive was the etiquette to be observed at the Assembly Balls where the Master of Ceremonies ruled supreme. His role was considered as second only to the Mayor during the proceedings, as it was 'absolutely necessary in all polite assemblies to have some regulations established, without which no order or decorum can be preserved'. He ensured that gentlemen left their swords at the door and refrained from wearing boots on the market days of Tuesdays, Thursdays or Saturdays and that ladies were prevented from wearing coloured gloves at all times. Timekeeping was of the utmost importance for the balls, which were brought to a close at eleven o'clock during the summer and midnight during the winter assemblies. Conventions decreed that times were strictly adhered to, even if it meant curtailing a dance (Douch 1978, 17–19; Davies 1883, 507–11, Vancouver, 428). Over the years the town's increasing importance and reputation as a fashionable resort caused it to be ranked alongside Tunbridge, Brighthelmstone (Brighton), and Margate by the writer George Colman (Langford 1976, 108; Patterson 1966, 53n.4).

As well as the influx of fashionable society members, from the beginning of the century Southampton had played host to various military groups during the ongoing European wars (South 1987, 190–94). By the late 1750s and early 1760s the presence of the military in the town had become an accepted part of life, particularly as several had married local girls

and become part of the community (Patterson 1966, 90). The military influences would remain throughout the century, culminating in the American War of Independence and the French War campaigns. The officers' presence during the 'season' wearing their uniforms not only added to the colour and atmosphere of the social gatherings, but also extended the social scene, as some hosted their own private supper parties.

Therefore, there were gathered within the town two groups, the genteel and fashionable visitors together with the military (including Royal Navy and civilian merchant navy personnel). Neither group was a stranger to homosexual activities within their ranks. The paucity of quarter sessions records for Southampton means that it is not possible to directly search for individuals indicted for sodomy, so evidence must be gleaned from other sources, as demonstrated by the following discussion.

MACARONIES AND MASQUERADES

As the trade of fashionable folk visiting the town expanded, so the more extreme fashions of the capital became increasingly accepted. Indirect evidence for this is shown by the numbers of local tradespeople seeking to emulate the trends from London. Some invested considerable time, effort and money in their attempts to make links with the capital. Thus the local dressmaker S. Short, advertised that she had recently returned from London with the latest spring fashions and 'had informed herself of all that was new and genteel', while James Kunnison had stocked his warehouse on St Michael's Square with all the latest London fabrics (Patterson 1966, 58). As the influence of genteel visitors from London increased however, these local initiatives found themselves in direct competition with a variety of traders from the capital, who followed the visitors down to Southampton and leased shops in the main thoroughfares, advertising their wares in Baker's guide and the *Hampshire Chronicle*. By the mid 1770s there were drapers, dressmakers, hatters, hosiers, mantua-makers

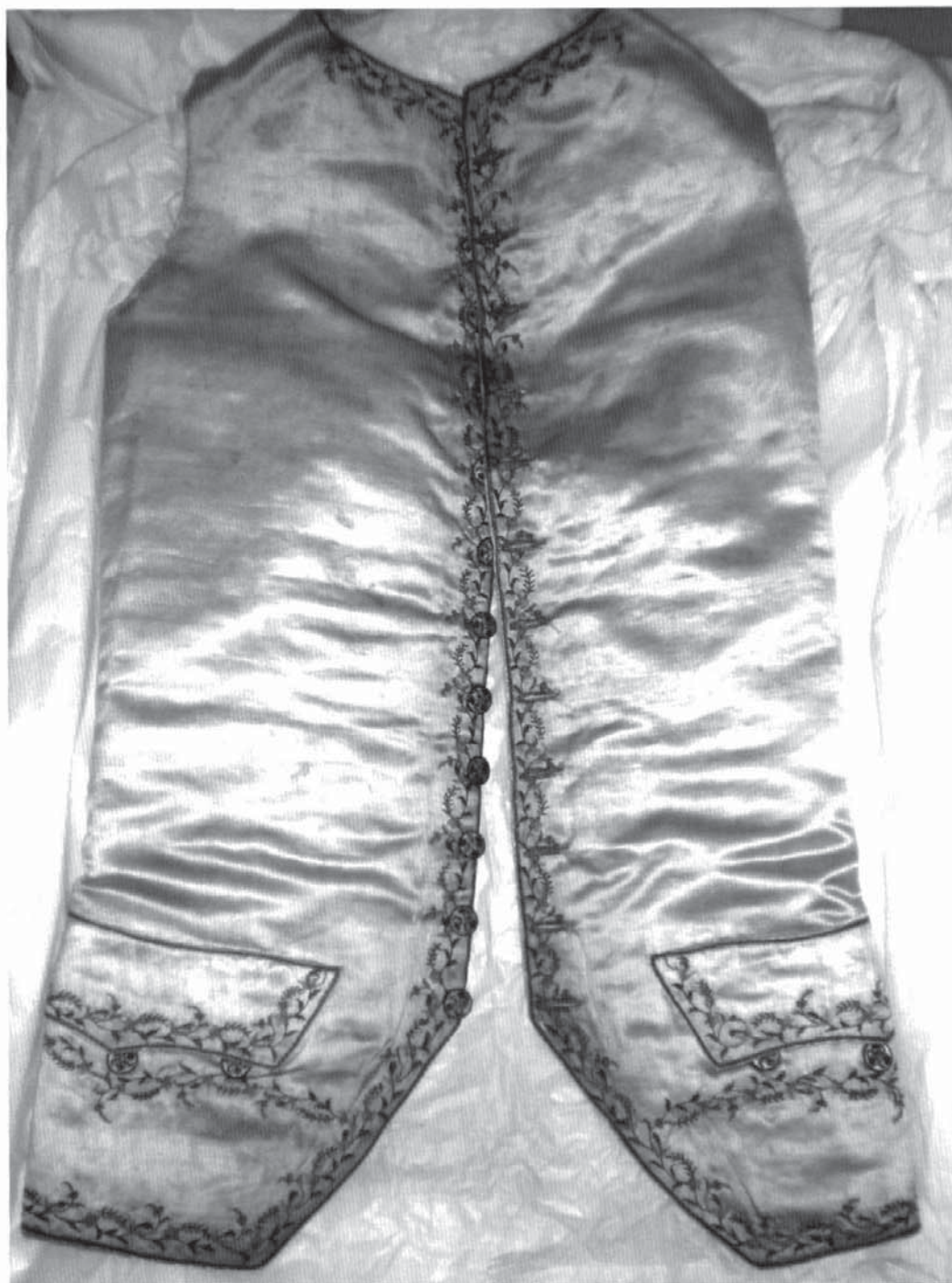


Fig. 1 Cream silk waistcoat, with green embroidery *c.* 1760s (Southampton City Museum 861.1983)

and milliners displaying their London wares along the High Street and French Street (*Guide to Southampton* 1781, 29, 50–51; Patterson 1966, 57–60). Even the seemingly innocuous trade for local tailors and dressmakers of making masquerade costumes was usurped by 'The Original Masquerade Taylor', whose advertisement in the *Hampshire Chronicle* on 24 August 1772, clearly stated his arrival from London 'for the season only' when he would be trading from 14 Broad Lane (John Plenty's establishment). Apparently even costume making was not to be entrusted to the provincials.

But were masquerades really so innocuous? Why should a specialist tailor be required? Perhaps the answers lie with the very extreme Italian fashions which had developed during this period and whose followers were known as 'macaronies'. There is little immediately obvious evidence that the extravagant macaroni fashions from the continent had reached Southampton, although Aubrey (1909, xvi) noted the printing of a whimsical piece 'The Macaroni Shaver' in the *Hampshire Chronicle* which underlined the presence of these fashions in the town. In addition, an account from 1788 for tailor's materials to make two waistcoats indicated that fashion was a male, as well as a female, consideration. The excessive numbers of buttons for each garment corroborates the suggestion that these extremes had reached the town (Hampson 1973, 24–5). Southampton Museum Service holds two waistcoats (c. 1760) and a later striped coat, which clearly show the macaroni influence (Figs 1 & 2).

As well as these pieces of evidence, a poem entitled 'The Oeconomy of Beauty' was published in the *Salisbury Journal* on 2 November 1772. It was a satirical piece about the health giving attributes of sea bathing in Southampton, and was probably intended as a lampoon on Dr Russell's dissertation on seawater and sea bathing entitled 'The Oeconomy of Nature', which extolled the virtues of both drinking and bathing in the sea. 'The Oeconomy of Beauty' related the beauty and charm of Southampton's surrounding countryside, particularly Netley Abbey, before turning to the social scene in the town:

'How oft in bow[e]r or hall, some paragon of
grace we've seen,
Surrounded by a vain, unholy circle
Of pea-green Macaronies, Fribbles, Fops
And lipping Popinjays ... phantastic things
That nature never made ...'

The moral of the poem was the blindness of people to the beauties of nature and the modern obsession with 'manufactured beauties'. The writer also seemed to be referring to the uncertainty of the macaronies' gender preferences, described as 'a vain, unholy circle' made up of effeminate fops (Caulfield c. 1793, under Fribble). Moreover, the author was familiar with the macaroni preference for green as a fashion colour in the 1770s, while the evidence of the striped coat from the 1780s held in the museums' collection, seems to further substantiate this suggestion (McNeil 1999, 440). Pastoureaux (1991, 7–19, 44–5) suggests that until adopted and legitimised in the late eighteenth century, stripes were recognised as a pejorative symbol, denoting those on the outskirts of society such as convicts, jugglers and prostitutes. Use of the stripe signified an individual apart, different from other members of the community and the macaronies may have recognised this connotation in their use of it together with their other decorated and extreme clothing, thus displaying their difference from mainstream society as members of a distinctive subculture (note the ribbed/striped stockings worn in Fig. 5).

In London, the macaronies were the source of much ribald humour and it is feasible that such publications as *The Macaroni Jester* (with its ironical frontispiece ditty) found their way into Southampton society, (Fig. 3).

'Behold a Monster bursting to the view,
Nor Turk, nor Christian, Pagan he, nor Jew:
No Sawney Scot, Welch Taff, or Irish Honey,
But Manhood's Jest! – a London MACARONI'
(Crooke 1773, frontispiece).

The Macaroni Club in London, had been founded by the actor David Garrick together with Messrs Bickerstaffe, Drybutcher and Kenrick (Norton 2005b). The homosexual

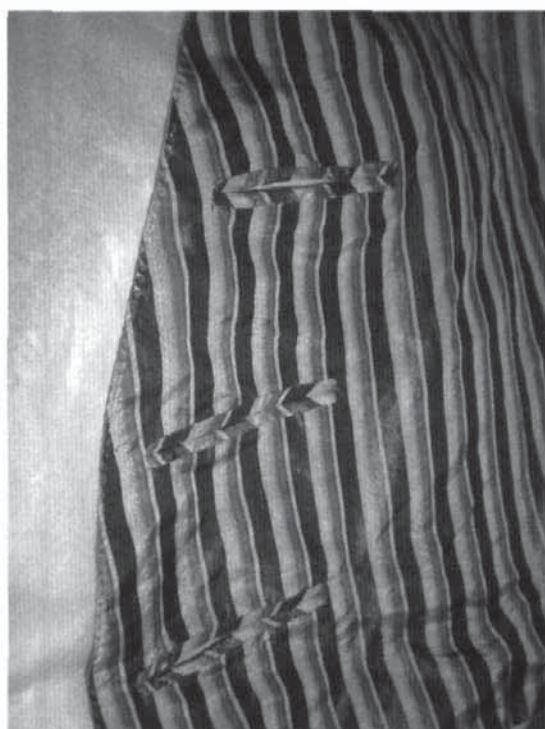


Fig. 2 Part of triple striped silk coat in shades of taupe c. 1780s (Southampton City Museum 212.2001)

poet Thomas Gray, was an associate/friend of Garrick, Bickerstaffe and Charles Dibdin, the Southampton composer, musician and singer. Dibdin was quick to dissociate himself from the group when their sodomitical activities became public (Gillaspie 2004). Linked with the macaronies were the 'Molly Houses', or 'Molly Clubs', where transvestite sodomites from all strata of society, including tradesmen and gentlemen, made and kept assignments with one another (Ward 1745, 265–69). McNeil describes the establishments as 'a cross between a homosexual brothel and a drinking-place' where activities ranged from loud music and wild dancing, to mock marriages between sodomites, which sometimes even included a fantasy pregnancy and birth, using a doll (McNeil 1999, 415–17; Ward 1745, 265–69). The mollies were, unlike the macaronies, directly linked with cross-dressing, transves-

tism and sodomy. Participants regularly posted guards near the clubs to protect their activities from the patrolling watchmen, as sodomy was a capital offence (Smalbroke Sermon 1727).

In his sermon, Smalbroke commended the activities of the Societies for Promoting a Reformation of Manners (morals). These were groups of vigilantes throughout the country, who set themselves up to catch and bring before the courts any person considered guilty of lewd and immoral behaviour, including prostitutes and sodomites. The societies claimed to have prosecuted 94,322 individuals between 1690 and 1727 in and around London alone. It is possible that it was as the result of a similar local group that the following Hampshire trial took place. In 1791 the Easter Quarter Sessions at Winchester (Q9/1/445/23) Calendar of Prisoners records that, 'William Burry/Barry aged 18 – was committed by the Rev. John Penton, having attempted to commit the detestable crime of sodomy on the body of a certain cow, the property of Benjamin Figes, of the parish of Romsey Extra'. The full indictment read:

'The Jurors before our Lord the King upon their Oath present that William Burry otherwise called William Barry late of the Parish of Romsey Extra in the said County of Southampton Laborer not having the fear of God before his Eyes nor regarding the Order of nature but being moved and seduced by the Instigation of the Devil on the thirtieth day of January in the thirty first Year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord George the Third by the Grace of God of Great Britain France and Ireland King Defender of the Faith and so forth with force and with Arms at the parish aforesaid in the county aforesaid in and upon a Certain Cow then and there being feloniously wickedly diabolically and against the Order of Nature did attempt to Commit a Veneral Affair and then and there feloniously diabolically and against the Order of Nature did Attempt to Carnally know the said Cow and then and there feloniously wickedly diabolically and against the Order of Nature did Attempt to Commit and perpetrate the abominable and detestable Crime of Buggery in and upon the said Cow (not to be named amongst Christians) to the great displeasure of Almighty God to the Great Scandal of all human kind against the Form of

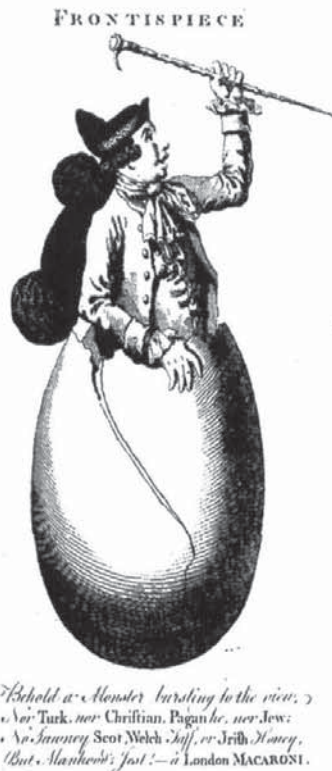


Fig. 3 Frontispiece to *The Macaroni Jester* (Eighteenth Century Collections Online)

the Statute in such Case made and provided and against the Peace of our said Lord the King his Crown and Dignity. Witness William Giddens.'

The lengthy and repetitive indictment is clearly intended to stress a number of significant facts not only to the defendant but to all those hearing and/or reading it. Most heinous is the bestiality of the act, its unnatural nature being a direct insult to the laws of nature and therefore, to God. Such a flagrant insult could only be inspired by the devil; therefore the diabolical aspect of the crime had to be publicly proclaimed. The message is clear; the devil exists and can still lead people astray. Since the case was brought by a clergyman, the Reverend Penton, such a message should not be surpris-

ing. Moreover, it does suggest the possibility of a vigilante group operating in the area. An alternative view of the lengthy indictment can also be taken; that lacking a statement from the injured party i.e. the cow, its length, repetition and reference to the bestial nature of the crime, could be viewed as an attempt to redress this unavoidable omission. Which ever way the charge is viewed significantly it ends with a reference to the crime being an insult to the King and his realm; a reminder that such actions could be regarded as treasonable and potentially capital offences.

Although no direct mention of any societies for the reformation of manners in the town has been found to date, such examples as that cited above, do suggest the presence of aligned group(s) in the area. Similarly the fact that the Contagious Diseases Acts, introduced in 1864 and 1866 (initially intended to stop prostitution and prevent venereal disease in naval ports) were extended to include Southampton in 1869, may be an indication of a long term reputation for immoral behaviour associated with the town and its seafaring communities. Significantly Southampton was the only civilian port where the Acts were implemented. This gave the enforcers of the Acts full powers to stop and examine any unaccompanied and/or single woman for signs of venereal disease (Walkowitz & Walkowitz 1974, 220–21). If a woman was identified as being infected, she was obliged to enter the lock-up hospital situated in the old Pest House, attached to the workhouse. There is an indication that the Pest House was already fulfilling such a role in the eighteenth century. On 7 June 1781 a scandalised Thomas Bernard, the Poor House Visitor at that time, recorded that 'about 1am Sarah Ware escaped out of the House with the assistance of Soldiers who raised a ladder to the Pest House windows' (SCA SC AG/4/1, 7 June 1781; Caulfield 1793, under Lock Hospital). This suggests that the inmates of the Pest House may have been locked in, and that it was already serving as a lock hospital for venereal diseases as it would later do in the nineteenth century. The evidence seems to demonstrate the nineteenth-century authorities' perception



Fig. 4 An all male masquerade with a diabolical musician (Courtesy of the British Museum)

of the town's moral turpitude, and that this was probably a legacy from the previous century.

The fact that the stop and search powers was applied only to women, possibly says more about the Victorian patriarchal society than contemporary knowledge/understanding about the dissemination of venereal disease. Treatises on the dangers of spreading venereal disease via sodomitical practises had been published from the start of the eighteenth century, possibly underlining the presence of homosexual sub-cultures within communities, throughout that period (Marten 1709, 68–9; Astruc 1737, 142). The publication of this information and its detailed nature suggests that the culture was widespread and well known.

It therefore, seems apparent that Southampton was no stranger to various forms of sexual activity and that it is plausible to suggest that during the eighteenth century, with the macaronies in the town there may also have been Molly Houses available for their activities (Ward 1725, 265–9; McNeil 1999, 415–7). These establishments were set up as inns or drinking houses, often in the premises of tradesmen. This however was intended as a

diversion from the main activities of the gatherings, which were generally of a transvestite and homosexual nature, taking the form of dancing and riotous music which continued until the early hours of the morning. A far cry from the strictly regulated assembly balls at the Long Rooms, in the town, which ended so abruptly at eleven o'clock or midnight. Moreover, it is likely that Dr John Speed IV in his piece entitled 'A Curious Account of a Non Descript Species of Negroes', was describing just such a masquerade/transvestite gathering, in his condemnation of all night dancing and erotic music. Taken together with his descriptions of the heavily painted faces and extreme costumes of the 'women' at the assemblies in his 'Temple of Dissipation', there appears to be a certain ambiguity in the potential interpretation of the essay (SCA BRA 842 Bundle 5/10 18). Furthermore he claimed the women paid their gambling debts, run up at the card tables, 'to the winner another way, by putting him into the immediate possession of the Joys of Paradise, *according to their notion of them*' (this author's italics) which seems to be a deliberately ambiguous choice of words indicating the

extreme dissolute nature of the social gatherings. The piece ends by suggesting that the activities may have had diabolical associations and, as already shown, this was a common charge levied against those with divergent sexual orientations (Fig. 4).

More evidence of an established homosexual element to Southampton society was perhaps demonstrated by the poet, Thomas Gray's preference to stay with Mr Vining the coal merchant/hellier/plumber in the High Street, during October 1764 when he wrote to James Brown (Gray 1764). As already noted, tradesmen were often part of the homosexual community, setting up the 'molly houses' under the guise of drinking houses or inns, where assignations could be made and masquerade dances took place. This transvestite and homosexual nature of the molly houses may have accounted for the specialist masquerade tailor, from London. Perhaps this was intended as reassurance to his customers of his absolute discretion, because he was experienced in dealing with the homosexual subculture of the capital. The inference would have been that customers may not have received similar discretion from local dressmakers and tailors.

By the 1760s the association of the masquerade balls and homosexual activity had become firmly rooted in the public mind with the male macaroni obsession for effeminate fashion. Thus, even the well run, popular masquerade balls of the season were subject to various lewd connotations by the local populace (McNeil 1999, 418–23). This appears to have been the situation in Southampton, and various violent disturbances took place either linked to, or because of the masquerade balls.

On September 20 1773, the *Hampshire Chronicle* reported that during a masked ball at the Polygon there had been a disturbance and a large stone had been thrown through a window, just missing the Duke of Gloucester. A week later the newspaper reported another outbreak of violence on the 27 September 1773, when a young man attending a masquerade at the Long Rooms was set upon by the mob and 'tossed like a football for some time'. Almost exactly a year later, another dis-

turbance was reported on 5 September 1774. Again this was prompted by a masked ball, and the riots outside the Long Rooms continued all evening. Attacks on homosexuals were not unusual, and the popular perception of sodomy attached to the cross-dressing and transvestite activities of masked balls, was sufficient excuse for such an outbreak of violence. Therefore, it can be concluded that this was a manifestation of homophobia expressed in Southampton, linked to the masquerade balls held during the season, for the visitors.

The fashionable clientele, however, was not the only source of visitors who demonstrated alternative sexual tendencies. As already noted the town was obliged to accommodate large numbers of military personnel for long periods in the eighteenth century.

MILITARY HOMOSEXUAL INFLUENCES

Homosexuality linked to the military forces was a general concern, not only for the British but other nationalities as well. A local incident, concerning a Dutch naval vessel at Spithead, gives an insight into how seriously the problem was viewed in the Netherlands.

February 1745

About the same time [circa 31 January 1745] a court martial was held on board the *Dutch* admiral's ship at *Spithead* for the trial of the 1st lieutenant of one of their ships, for committing sodomy on the boatswain's son. He was found guilty, and order'd to be ty'd up in a sack, with a large weight fasten'd to it, and flung overboard at high water (which is the usual punishment inflicted by the *Dutch* for crimes of that nature committed at sea) but his life was spared upon intercession of some *English* gentlemen, and his sentence chang'd into a whipping, after which he was stripp'd of his clothes, and set on shore at *Gosport*, in an old jacket and trowsers, to shift for himself.* The admiral immediately dispatch'd to *Holland*, an account of his proceedings to the States General, in order for the confiscating of the delinquent's estate and effects, worth 500l. *per Ann.* sterling.

[*In *Smith's* voyages where we read of an *African* prince who destroy'd a whole city, lest one



Fig. 5 Caricature possibly linked to the Captain Jones affair (Courtesy of the British Museum)

sodomite should escape, to infect the rest of his people] (*Gentleman's Magazine*, Historical Chronicle 15, 106).

The tone of the report is clear about the detestable nature of the crime, the severity of the punishment and the inferred youth of the victim (although no age is given). What is

intriguing is the intervention by two Englishmen, on behalf of the perpetrator. Were they men from a local English ship, or tradesmen come from Gosport to revictual the ship? Were they, as individuals, sympathetic towards the culprit's homosexual activities, or were they merely reflecting a more tolerant attitude towards sodomy developing within the English

population? Since they are described as 'gentlemen' it may be reasonable to assume that they were not associated with any naval vessels as crew, otherwise their descriptions would have been more likely to reflect their rank, in a way similar to the culprit's recorded status. Whether they were reflecting a generally more tolerant, or ambivalent, attitude towards homosexuality in the English population seems unlikely. Although sodomy was still a capital crime at this time, executions were often commuted to periods in the pillory followed by gaol and a heavy fine. A well publicised hour in the pillory however, at the mercy of a righteously outraged mob could result in disabling injury and on occasion, death (Norton 2004, 2005a). It therefore seems likely that the Dutchman's sentence was commuted to a punishment comparable to that of the pillory and its attendant consequences, at the instigation of the Englishmen. It is very unlikely that the Dutchman's sufferings were lessened by the commutation; rather the reverse was probably a more credible outcome.

In contrast to the above report, paedophilic attacks on young girls do not appear to have excited the same feelings of public outrage. These neither had a diabolical association, being of a heterosexual nature, nor attracted capital punishment. A local case illustrates the situation clearly. On 7 June 1788 Mr R.V. Sadleir from Southampton, committed Joseph Vane for having assaulted and raped an eight year old girl, Ann Budden Brown, daughter of John and Ann Budden Brown, at North Stoneham. The child's mother, together with Mr George Waring, surgeon of Southampton, were the witnesses in the case and Vane was sentenced to two years' close confinement (Q9/1/434/12). Snell (2009) recorded that the rape of girls, aged approximately eight years, was the most common sexual crime and that convictions were relatively rare. Although the youth of the victims was considered inappropriate, the actual act of rape against girls did not cause the same outcry as when it was perpetrated against a young boy or youth. It was the charge of sodomy that produced outrage in the public mind. Just such a situation was recorded in the

newspapers when an Army Officer fled to Southampton from London, and successive reports from various newspapers reveal the story of the trial and charge. The initial report came from a letter written to the *General Evening Post*. The man's flight to Southampton may also be indicative of the presence of a military homosexual community in the town, which was known of in the capital. He could therefore, have believed that his activities would pass unnoticed in the town, but he reckoned without the Master of Ceremonies and his strict adherence to polite procedure.

Extract of a Letter from Southampton, July 25
(*General Evening Post* 25–28 July 1772).

The vice that has so lately excited the talk in London, has made its appearance here. It seems as if the military had taken it intirely up. Mr. B[ickerstaffe] celebrated in Mr. K[enric]k's poem, being an officer on half-pay; Mr. Jones [i.e. Capt. Robert Jones], lately capitally convicted at the Old-Bailey, a Captain in the Artillery; and *our hero* at this place also an officer in the army. A report had circulated in a whisper to his discredit, and the Master of the Ceremonies, at the Long Rooms, told him of it, and at the same time hinted that he *must* clear his character, otherwise he could not possibly be continued any longer a member of that company; this was yesterday evening. He left the rooms, and went home, when the constables came to apprehend him. On being acquainted therewith, he endeavoured to escape by the garret window; but the casement being too small, he was taken with his body half out of the window, and committed to the Bridewel in this town. It appears, that he made the attempt on a journeyman shoe-maker, who works with Mr. Day of this place, who, though offered money, manfully refused it, and insisted upon bringing the culprit to condign punishment. This being market-day, an effigy of him, dressed in scarlet, was set on the pillory, with its arms through, and on one side a roll, on the other a pint of beer; this afternoon it was carried about the town, and in the evening is to be burned in triumph. He has been at this place about three months, and is between forty and fifty years of age.

The writer of the letter appears to be trying to distance Southampton from the decadent

practices prevalent in London, inferring that the appearance of homosexuality and unnatural acts were unknown in the town previously. However, as already shown, examples of paedophilia and buggery were recorded in the local area. The correspondent made the connection with the military and the establishment of the Macaroni Club by Bickerstaffe and the others, linked to their homosexual activities (see above). At the same time the Captain Jones trial had excited much public interest and outrage when he was given a Royal Pardon (*General Evening Post* 16–18 July 1772). The Southampton writer provided the first account of the local affair to reach the public domain, and from the report it is apparent that news of the attempted attack on the young man had excited a strong reaction from the crowds in the town, during one of the town's regular market days. The placing of the perpetrator's effigy in the pillory, bearing it around the town and the planned subsequent burning seemed to bode ill for the defendant, if he were to be placed in the pillory. It also may be that part of the reaction was due to the widespread frustration and disgust caused by Jones' pardon. Further newspaper reports reveal how the story ended.

August 1772

By a letter from Southampton we are informed, that one Mr. F—c, an officer in the army, has been apprehended there for an attempt to commit an unnatural crime on a journeyman shoemaker (*The Craftsman; or Say's Weekly Journal*).

17 October 1772

Southampton, Oct. 11. Friday last, at the sessions for the town of Southampton, came on the trial of John Fieldhouse, Esq; an officer in the army, for an attempt to commit a detestable crime on a lad of this town. About twelve o'clock he was brought to the bar, and pleaded, Not Guilty. After a trial of seven hours, the Jury, after withdrawing for a few minutes, brought him in Guilty, and he was sentenced to pay a fine of twenty pounds, and suffer six months imprisonment. It is supposed the Recorder passed this above sentence, instead of the usual one of the pillory, to prevent the

dreadful consequences that were expected to ensue, had that been inflicted on him. Mr. Fieldhouse has been in the army many years, and is now on half-pay; appears to be fifty years of age, or rather more, and wore his own hair tied behind, which was entirely grey. His character is said to have been very good till this affair happened (*The Craftsman; or Say's Weekly Journal*) (Fig. 5).

The Dutch naval affair showed the apparently more tolerant approach of the Englishmen, which could plausibly indicate a more general acceptance of homosexuality within seafaring communities. Similarly the letter reporting Fieldhouse's arrival in the town asked if the crime was general in the army. It was Fieldhouse's presence in the town, which provoked the strong homophobic response by the locals, the violence of which clearly alarmed the Serjeant-at-Law Cranwell Kerby, the Town Recorder, when passing sentence. Significantly he did not commit Fieldhouse to either the pillory, presumably for fear that the army officer would be savagely attacked and perhaps killed, or any official form of physical punishment. Public whipping would have also exposed him to the wrath of the locals – who may have been used to meting out 'just' punishment, as shown by the choice of punishment offered to the lady whose snuffbox was stolen. Kerby had been Recorder for Southampton since 1765 (Davies 1883, 186) so was probably very familiar with the townspeople's attitudes on various issues, including homosexuality.

CONCLUSION

There are sufficient indications to propose the presence of a homosexual subculture in Southampton, during the eighteenth century. Examination of eighteenth-century national newspapers uncovers many reports of sodomy and 'unnatural acts', throughout the country. Despite the lack of direct local evidence from the town, there does not seem to be any reason to consider that Southampton differed from other seafaring areas and therefore, had its own thriving homosexual subculture. This may be partially substantiated by the concerns

about venereal disease in the town, its links to homosexuality and the authorities' attempts to control the disease. As shown these continued from the eighteenth century, through the nineteenth century and ultimately into the twentieth, when it was unequivocally linked to the seamen and the port shipping (Williams *c.* 1960, 48–9).

It has been posited that there were potentially two other communities indulging in homosexual pursuits in the town; the effete macaroni visitors, and the military populations based there. The available evidence seems to indicate that it was these groups of outsiders, together with the more open display of their sexual orientations, which provoked the more serious outbreaks of homophobia within Southampton. Meanwhile the activities of the seafaring community appear to have been more tolerated, or simply took place whilst at sea, therefore causing no reaction in the town.

The eighteenth century was no stranger

to homosexual practices amongst various strata of society and Southampton was no exception. Neither was it exceptional in its apparent acceptance of the practice within its own community. It has been shown however, that evidence of homosexuality amongst outsiders in the town, especially when directed against local inhabitants, did provoke strong homophobic responses from the local population.

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