

Sons of the American Revolution Visiting Professorship

Report specially prepared for the Sons of the American Revolution

May 2017

Introduction – the Georgian Papers Programme

Thanks to support from the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR), Professor Andrew O'Shaughnessy has been able to bring a new perspective to the study of texts uncovered by the Georgian Papers Programme (GPP).

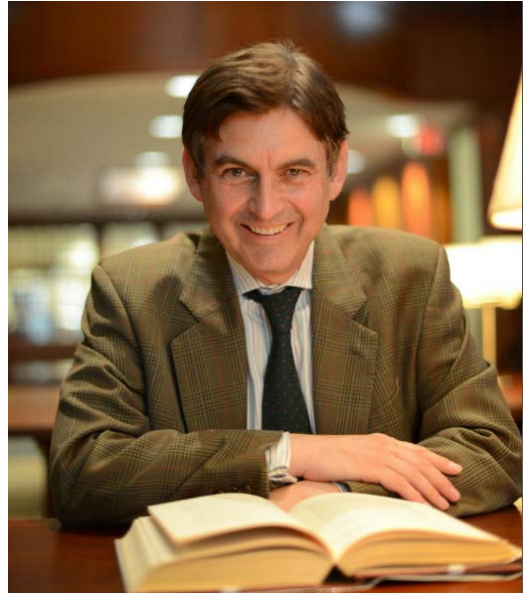
Launched on 1 April 2015 by Her Majesty the Queen, the GPP is an ambitious five-year project to transform access to the extensive collection of Georgian papers, held in the Royal Archives and Royal Library at Windsor Castle. The GPP is a partnership between King's College London, the Royal Archives and the Royal Library.

Providing free digital access to the Georgian papers has enabled historians and the public to deepen their understanding of Georgian Britain, its monarchy and its role in the world from 1714–1837. To date, 37,500 pages have been scanned and 854 new catalogue records have been created including the essays of George III and Queen Charlotte's private papers, providing a rich introduction to the range of subjects covered by the papers and an insight into the daily life of the court.

Through your generous giving, King's College London has been able to establish the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) Visiting Professorship. Thank you for your support, we hope that you enjoy the following report from Professor O'Shaughnessy on his time in this role.

Progress report from SAR Visiting Professor Andrew O'Shaughnessy

The objective of my research project was twofold. Firstly, it aimed to explain the significance of the archives of George III and the Georgian Programme for our understanding of the American Revolution. Secondly, it examined the personal role of George III in the formulation of strategy in the Revolutionary War.



Why are George III's archives significant for understanding the American Revolution?

The papers of George III are fundamental to interpreting the British side of the American Revolution. The King was a critical figure because he enjoyed considerable power under the constitutional system of the 18th century. The monarch was still actively involved in politics, selecting both the Prime Minister and members of the Cabinet. The King also had much influence over the independent country gentry who made up the majority of members of the House of Commons. This was augmented by the patronage of individuals known as placemen and direct control of some constituencies.

The correspondence of George III was edited and published in 1927-28 as a series of six volumes covering the period of the American Revolution by Sir John Fortescue, who was the royal librarian at Windsor Castle. His later papers were edited and published in five volumes by A Aspinall between 1963 and 1971. The majority of historians therefore did not use the original archive because of the availability of the published letters and the difficulty of obtaining permission to obtain access to the papers at Windsor Castle.

However, the archive is important for historians since it contains a significant volume of information that has not been published. Furthermore, it is always necessary to consult original documents since they may reveal much more with alterations and deletions. It is also possible to identify documents in which George III meticulously listed military information, including details of the French fleet. There were additionally several categories of unpublished papers, important for our knowledge of the American Revolution.

Highlights from the archives

Letters not included in the papers published by Sir John Fortescue:

Fortescue omitted some letters that are in the archive but not in the published volumes. Andrew Beaumont at Hertford College, Oxford, has been examining the correspondence of

George III to Lord North for a biography of Lord North. He has certainly found that some of these letters were not included in the printed correspondence. My own investigation was for the correspondence of the actual war years in which the military intelligence and reports of spies were for some reason not included in the published papers by Fortescue. These included the letters of Aristarchus, who reported directly to George III. It may indeed have been the pen name of more than one individual while his reports were clearly based on many sources, especially in Britain and France. There is a book of reports from Brest in France about the activities of the French navy in the late 1770s – ‘George III Secret Intelligence 1779-1782’, which is handwritten and contained in Box 4121-4448. The naval intelligence ultimately failed the British in the months prior to Yorktown. This period is covered in the reports.

There is additionally a memoir by William Knox – former agent to the colony of Georgia and deputy secretary of state for America under Lord George Germain – entitled ‘Anecdotes and Characters of the late Administration 1782’. It is a wonderful source on the personalities of Lord North’s government and the debacle at the Battle of Saratoga.

The letters of Admiral Sir Samuel Hood:

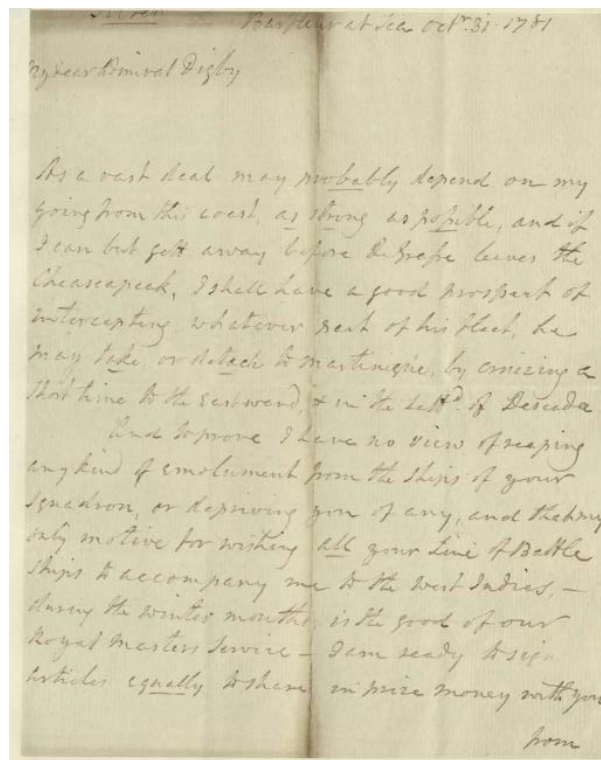
Admiral Sir Samuel Hood was second in command at arguably the most important naval battle of the 18th century, which is known as the Battle of the Chesapeake Capes off Virginia. It was lost by the British and proved decisive in the fate of Lord Cornwallis in Yorktown. Hood wrote regularly to one of the King’s courtiers and officeholders, General J Budé. These documents are unique and have not been examined by the various biographers of Hood. They are not part of those of his papers published by the Naval Records Society. They include important accounts of naval affairs and of the Battle of the Chesapeake Capes.

The correspondence of William, Duke of Clarence:

Prince William was the third son of George III, who assigned him to the navy at the age of 13 in 1778. He was witness to several major naval engagements, and later served under Admiral Sir Samuel Hood. His correspondence includes accounts of British-occupied New York, naval battles and the war in the Caribbean.

George III private papers (undated):

There are miscellaneous volumes of letters that were not included in the papers



Letter from Admiral Sir Samuel Hood to General Jacob Budé, 3 November 1781.
Source: gpp.royalcollection.org.uk.

published by Fortescue. These included personal matters relating to his family, but also include his drafts requesting German mercenaries to the various princes in Brunswick, the Landsgrave of Hesse and Hesse Cassel. There is also correspondence with the admirals, often relating to Prince William.

Maps, engravings and plans:

The maps are not formally part of the digital project of the Georgian Programme, however it was possible to consult them while working at Windsor Castle. They are not for the most part known to historians even though copies have long been available on microfilm at the Library of Congress. They include plans of battles, including one for the Battle of Bunker Hill and the siege of Charleston and are only just in the process of being indexed. They represent possibly the richest trove of unpolished materials for military historians.

What was George III's role in the strategy of the American Revolution?

My second objective was to attempt to evaluate the role of George III in the strategy of the Revolutionary War. It was apparent to me that some of his language was repeated by Lord George Germain, the Minister most responsible for the war in America. He certainly had a role in the continuance of the war by refusing to countenance the appointment of a ministry committed to peace with America. Indeed, he became a driving force of the war in 1778 in the absence of leadership by Lord North. He threatened even to abdicate rather than permit a government that would not continue the war. He personally wrote to and negotiated the contracts for mercenaries with the princes of various states in Germany.

The research project hoped to find additional correspondence with those members of the government most responsible for the war. The outcome was indecisive. There were no letters that had not been published to Germain and the Earl of Sandwich. However, it is very likely that they were regularly meeting in person with the King, but unfortunately we do not have a source that lists his meetings. It was significant, though, that he copied, in his own hand, many of the military documents that he consulted, including lists of the ships in the respective fleets and the logistics of the British army in Boston in 1775.

A rewarding time at King's: final thoughts

This was a personally very rewarding experience. I was very warmly hosted by members of the History and War Studies Department at King's. I would like to express particular gratitude to Dr Angel-Luke O'Donnell, Patricia Methven and Dr Joanna Newman. It was impressive that many faculty members from King's attended my lecture in the Great Hall on 13 February 2017. It was also attended by members of the Royal Household including the Librarian, Archivist and the director of the Queen's Public Relations.

Dr O'Donnell additionally invited me to present a more specialist paper to the American History Seminar at the Institute of Historical Research at the University of London. I also gave lectures at St Paul's Girls School, Eton and Bedford Schools. I was interviewed by BBC Two for their documentary about the programme entitled *George III – The Genius of*

the Mad King. It was invaluable to actually live at Windsor and become better acquainted with the castle, since George III used it as one of his favourite palaces during the American Revolution. However, it was only as a result of visiting that I discovered that he lived in a house behind the castle, not in Windsor Castle.

The Men Who Lost America – Lecture by Professor O’Shaughnessy

On 13 February Professor O’Shaughnessy delivered a lecture in the Great Hall at King’s College London. The lecture was jointly hosted by the Sir Michael Howard Centre for the History of War and the Georgian Papers Programme, and made possible by funds from the Sons of the American Revolution.

The loss of America was a stunning and unexpected defeat for the powerful British Empire. Common wisdom has held that incompetent military commanders and political leaders must have been to blame, but Professor O’Shaughnessy questions this view. By weaving together the personal stories of ten prominent men who directed the British dimension of the war, this lecture dispelled the incompetence myth and uncovered the real reasons that rebellious colonials were able to achieve their surprising victory.

The lecture was attended by 150 academics representing prestigious global institutions including the University of Glasgow, University of Western Australia, School of Advanced Studies (University of London), University of Oxford and New York University.



Professor Alan James (left) and Professor Andrew O’Shaughnessy (right) at *The Men Who Lost America* lecture.

George III – The Genius of the Mad King

This BBC Two documentary shed light on the essays, scientific notes and letters written by George III are now available to view and examine on a new global online portal thanks to work by researchers at King's, the Royal Archives, and Royal Collection Trust, as part of the Georgian Papers Programme. The documentary featured several King’s academics including Professor O’Shaughnessy and had 2.03 million viewers.

Dr Joanna Newman, Vice Principal (International) and the university's project lead said: 'We are only just starting to explore this amazing resource and the opportunity for reinterpretation and scrutiny of many aspects of 18th and early 19th century life, political, social and economic, as well as seeing George III through more informed perspectives'.

This was also reported by Times, Guardian, Daily Mail, Daily Express, Times Higher Education, BBC News Online, BBC Radio 4 Today, Washington Post and NBC. The show was also featured on King's Spotlight and had nearly 1,000 page views putting it in the top 10 most popular posts on the site.

theguardian *The Washington Post* **THE**  **TIMES**

Thank you

The generous donation made by The Sons of the American Revolution has enabled Professor O'Shaughnessy to access key documents that have added further evidence to his research. Further to this, the donation also helped us to provide a platform for Professor O'Shaughnessy to share his findings with other leading academics through a successful lecture and involvement in a well received documentary. Thank you for your support.