

## Valentine Joyce - Naval Mutineer of 1797

The lower-deck mutinies of 1797 have been much commented on, both at the time and subsequently. Copies of one modern account, *The Great Mutiny* by James Dugan, can easily be found in second-hand bookshops. As told by this author, this is a stirring tale of mass insurrections by the men of the home fleets, wound up not only by poor pay, food, conditions and cruelty of (some) officers, but also through incitement by at least some with darker aims. Politically these were apparently dangerous days - with Irish traitors in nefarious league with Continental enemies of Great Britain. Referring to the bibliography, as well as noting all the standard works previously published, there is, at first sight anyway, an impressive list of original naval documents at the Public Records Office, Kew (now part of The National Archives).

As unequivocally stated by Mr. Dugan, the 'leading spirit was a quartermaster's mate of *Royal George*, Valentine Joyce, who had served a sentence for sedition, lost his tobacco shop in Belfast as a result, and had recently come aboard in the quota'.<sup>1</sup> Even on first reading, I was doubtful of this. For a landsman to have made quartermaster's mate in such a short period of time (the various Quota Acts having been passed in 1795 and 1796) would have meant spectacular promotion. Even if most past published works had also maintained a similar line on this individual's background, one stood out in contradiction. Written in the 1930s, within *The Floating Republic* was analysis of the leading characters as experienced seamen and Valentine Joyce was specifically mentioned in this way. In fact, this work goes further. Not only does it pour cold water on rampant political objectives by the mutineers, Joyce himself is stated as having been born in Jersey and apparently having family in Portsmouth.<sup>2</sup> A relatively recent doctoral thesis, *Mutiny in the Public Eye* by David London, clearly shows these mutinies to have been industrial relations disputes, primarily in relation to naval pay that had not been improved in over 140 years.<sup>3</sup> In this Joyce's background and naval career are outlined, from information supplied by Ann Coates and this is identical to that in a published modern entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, the information given in these two accounts is not particularly accurate either.

The following is not intended to be a complete biography of this most interesting character. It is merely an introduction. With all the surviving official records now open to public scrutiny, further research *may* yield links between the (known) individual delegates that may lead to a better understanding of *how* the mutiny formed and other issues.

Valentine Joyce was born in Elizabeth Castle, Jersey and baptised there on 13<sup>th</sup> August 1769. His father, also named Valentine Joyce, was then a corporal in Captain Thomas Northey's company of the 41<sup>st</sup> Regiment of Foot (Invalids) and stationed there. His mother was named as Elizabeth Lamb. (I understand that it was then customary to show mothers' maiden names on such records in this era.) Interestingly, William Lamb was noted as one of three godparents. There was a sergeant of this same name in Captain Henry Lee's company of this same regiment, also stationed in Jersey.<sup>5</sup>

With re-organisation, these two companies mustered in Portsmouth in August 1770, joining the other eight. Valentine Joyce senior was reduced to private in May 1774 and transferred company the following year to remain in Portsmouth. In March 1776 he shifted once again, being taken on initially as a 'casual' in Captain Joshua Crump's company. By this time William Lamb was one of the sergeants in this company (until his death in June 1782). With the complex formal peace treaties at Versailles being concluded (ending the American War of Independence), it would appear that Valentine Joyce senior became a

victim of what would now be called 'the peace dividend'. Along with two thirds of the privates of his company, he was discharged in June 1783.<sup>6</sup>

Between April 1772 and September 1795 another eleven children were baptised to Valentine and Elizabeth Joyce. The family would appear to have been non-conformists of some kind. Eight of these ceremonies were carried out at Portsmouth's High Street Presbyterian or Unitarian Church, with the other three at the St. Thomas a Becket's, Portsmouth, which was Baptist.<sup>7</sup>

The High Street church's baptismal records not only show witnesses including other members of the Lamb family, possibly indicating that they came from Portsmouth, but also other pertinent information. The entries for May 1787 and February 1789 state that Valentine Joyce senior was by that time 'an out pensioner of Chelsea Hospital and pauper'.<sup>8</sup> It *may* be that he was later returned to service during the Revolutionary Wars. There is an intelligence report during the Spithead Mutiny, made by the high level government 'spy' Aaron Graham, stating that the mutineer's father was thought 'to belong to the Invalid Corps in the garrison' of Portsmouth.<sup>9</sup> Having said that, I have found absolutely no evidence of Joyce senior in any of the independent companies of invalids at Portsmouth between 1793 and 1800: although I did find the surname Lamb cropping up again. (The 41<sup>st</sup> had been reconstituted as a regular line regiment in 1787).<sup>10</sup> So, this snippet of intelligence may have been erroneous.

Another report, this time made by the naval delegate Valentine Joyce to a Portsmouth newspaper on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1797 (but not published until well after the mutiny, apparently 'miflaid'), gives information not seen elsewhere. Clearly incensed at the rumours circulating as to his background, he maintained not only that he was a professional mariner, but also that he had served in His Majesty's Navy for 'seventeen years'.<sup>11</sup> It would then seem that he had first gone to sea in a man-o-war at the age of eleven, or twelve.

His first proven presence in the Royal Navy was on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1788 when he joined the fifth-rate, 36-gun frigate *Perseverance*, at Portsmouth and was rated able seaman. From her pay and muster books it would seem that he had gone through a receiving ship shortly before. (No records for this port's receiving ships for this year survive and he does not show up in the muster books of the then seven guardships<sup>12</sup>.) It then being peacetime there are two main possibilities. It may have been that he had recently been paid off from another man-o-war and had spent some time at home before 'rejoining'. Or, the 1797 statement to the press *may* have included some exaggeration in relation to his time in the king's service and he had been on merchantmen: possibly from 1783 onwards. His age on going on the books of *Perseverance* was stated as 23, but this was not correct.<sup>13</sup>

Anyway, under the command of Commander Isaac Smith, in February 1789 and in company with four sloops, *Crown*, *Phoenix*, *Atlanta* and *Ariel*, she sailed for the East Indies. There she remained through an interesting political period in competition with the French in India, until early 1793.<sup>14</sup> Contrary to the order of battle abroad at the beginning of the Revolutionary Wars, as stated in William Clowes' standard multi-volume history of the Royal Navy, *Perseverance* had already begun her transit home from Bombay on 19<sup>th</sup> January 1793. Having called at Saint Helena, in mid April she convoyed a number of East Indiamen back to the United Kingdom. These were the *Rockingham*, *Thetis*, *Walpole*, *Middlesex*, *Dublin*, *Airly Castle*, *Lord Macartney*, *Duke of Montrose*, *Sir Edward Hughes* and *Nottingham*. While the Indiamen continued on up the English Channel, *Perseverance* anchored on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> June at Spithead. On 25<sup>th</sup> July all petty officers and seamen were turned over to another vessel though, as part of her complement. This was on the order of Admiral Sir Peter Parker, Commander-in-Chief Portsmouth.<sup>15</sup>

The second-rate, 98-gun, ship-of-the-line *Boyne* had also arrived back at Portsmouth in early June. With Captain William Albany Otway in command, she had previously sailed from Hamoaze (Plymouth) in February as part of the escort for eighteen merchantmen (nine

being East Indiamen) to the Spanish Canaries (Spain not then being a British enemy). On her way back she had encountered the French 20-gun privateer *Guidelon* and prevailed, bringing her back as a prize.<sup>16</sup> But, Valentine Joyce and the others late of *Perseverance* were not to get their chance of death, glory or prize money onboard *Boyne*. By the time they joined her she was in the dockyard, lashed alongside a hulk. They were a mere work party and in all likelihood little interest was taken in them, as in Joyce's case no age on entry was recorded. Still, he was not to remain in this thankless duty for long.<sup>17</sup>

Per a 'Lords' order' a draft of fifty men was required for the first-rate, 100-gun, ship-of-the-line *Royal George*, under the command of Captain Edward Pakenham. Mostly able seamen, Val was one of these. Appearing on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1793 he was then rated quartermaster's mate - an 'inferior' petty officer. His age of entry on pay and muster books is shown as 25.<sup>18</sup> If correct, then this may reflect his date of birth, rather than date of baptism (and does not quite tally with his age as claimed in his letter to the press).

The *Royal George* was part of the Channel Fleet that in war was committed to maintaining 'command of the sea' not only in the English Channel, but also the south-western approaches. Depending on wind and weather, this required significant periods off the French Atlantic coast and further out to sea. When not possible though, long periods were also spent back in the English Channel, in Tor Bay or even as far away as Spithead, sheltering.<sup>19</sup>

The *Royal George* was involved in Admiral Lord 'Black Dick' Howe's Glorious First of June 1794, with Captain Pakenham in command; and in Lord Bridport's fleet action off the Isle of Groix on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1795, under Captain William Domett. In the latter engagement the *Royal George* was the Admiral's flagship. (Lord Bridport had been Howe's relief as Commander-in-Chief Channel Fleet.) The ship's musters show that Val was onboard for both these battles and he was also lent on a few occasions. Deeper study of operational records *may* shed light on these short periods elsewhere.<sup>20</sup>

Much has been written of Valentine Joyce's diplomatic and skilful leadership during the Spithead Mutiny of spring 1797, so I need not devote any space here, although Dr. London's account has proved that this had little 'revolutionary' fervour and was in reality, a labour dispute. Per their word, the higher authorities of the Royal Navy apparently sought no revenge and Val continued in his rate and ship for another year. He is recorded as having been discharged to the naval hospital at Haslar (on marshy ground across the river from Portsmouth) on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1798. The *Royal George* was then at sea 'off Ushant' and there is no mention of him leaving in either the captain's or master's logs.<sup>21</sup> But then, that is hardly surprising considering the details noted in sea officers' logs on ships of this size.

At this point he disappeared in naval records. He is not recorded in Haslar's muster books of patients (or even in the establishment's pay list of staff as suggested by a knowledgeable friend).<sup>22</sup> As Val's family was known to have been resident in Portsmouth since at least the early 1770s and since Haslar had such a bad name among 'Jack', it *may* be that he went home instead. That then would have presented a problem. Unless he was careful, at best he would have been regarded as a 'rambler' and at worst as having 'run' (deserted). If he did not go to Haslar, then somehow he managed to extricate himself.

His date of appearance (that is the day that he was on this ship's books for both pay and victuals) on the diminutive, Infernal class, bomb vessel *Vesuvius* was 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1798. But, both the entries in this vessel's pay books and muster lists are a complete mess and cannot be relied on. Most of the entries show that he was rated as a quartermaster on coming on board, but the first muster states that he was rated able seaman previous to 23<sup>rd</sup> June.<sup>23</sup> The captain's log for 22<sup>nd</sup> June contains an intriguing entry, '... Received 2 men from the Hospital' and Haslar's muster has an entry that almost confirms this. On the 21<sup>st</sup> two landsmen that had been suffering from scurvy were discharged to the very same bomb vessel.<sup>24</sup> However, neither appears on the bomb ship's musters, or pay books. So, it would

seem that they were rejected. But, this was a period of change onboard. The individual with the ship's book number immediately prior to Val was Commander Robert Lewis Fitzgerald, the new captain that had only come onboard on June 20<sup>th</sup>. Holding the ship's book number following Val was Lieutenant Alexander Lightness, who appeared on July 1<sup>st</sup>. As for Valentine Joyce himself, he is shown as 'late Royal William late Royal George'. Perhaps he presented himself onboard the guardship *Royal William* (flying the flag of the C-in-C Portsmouth, Admiral Sir Peter Parker), even if he is not shown on her musters or pay books and he was directed to join *Vesuvius* immediately.<sup>25</sup>

No matter the means for getting onboard, once there he improved his status rapidly and substantially. There was a second interesting entry in the captain's log for 22<sup>nd</sup> June that required *Vesuvius* to transfer a petty officer to the guardship. This, therefore, may explain Val's rating of quartermaster on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. But, he was only in this rate for a week (she was then at anchor at Spithead), before being re-rated as a midshipman.<sup>26</sup> This was also a petty officer rate, but one that was regarded as *far* superior and required to be held by candidates seeking to be commissioned.

*Vesuvius* had previously been patrolling in the English Channel off Cape Havre and she returned there on sailing on 10<sup>th</sup> August. After September anchored at Spithead and St. Helens, she was re-deployed and October was spent in transit to Gibraltar. Until July 1799, when she returned to Spithead, *Vesuvius* operated in the Western Mediterranean, the Straits of Gibraltar and out on the Atlantic coast at least as far as Lisbon. On 27<sup>th</sup> January 1799 Val was made the bomb vessel's master's mate, which was another superior petty officer rate. But, this was only temporarily, being re-rated midshipman on 14<sup>th</sup> February. This can be explained as follows. While in Lisbon harbour on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1798 Commander Fitzgerald was instructed to take command of a French prize *Tonnant* (a third rate man-o-war taken at the Nile). Receiving men variously, within a few days five others from *Vesuvius* had been turned over to *Tonnant*, including her master's mate, Thomas Duncan. Lieutenant George Miller was transferred to *Vesuvius* commanding in an acting capacity. Subsequently, Commander William Moore joined her at sea, by cutter on 24<sup>th</sup> January 1799: with his commission as captain being read onboard three days later. A man rated master's mate then joined the bomb vessel on 14<sup>th</sup> February, 'Per Order Earl St. Vincent' (Admiral John Jervis, C-in-C Mediterranean).<sup>27</sup>

On her return to the U.K., she remained at anchor at Spithead until early November. Entries do not quite match, but on the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup>, during 'stormy gales' *Vesuvius* was paid off and the ship's company was discharged into the *Royal William*, on the orders of the port admiral.<sup>28</sup>

Unfortunately for Midshipman Joyce, on 5<sup>th</sup> November he became one of a draft of four immediately turned over to the eighteen-gun sloop *Brazen*. She had been the French privateer *L'Invincible General Buonaparte* until taken as a British prize in April 1799 by the fifth-rate *Boadicea*.<sup>29</sup> Under Commander James Hanson, while on patrol in the Eastern English Channel 'for the protection of the Trade and annoyance of the Enemy', she was lost in the early hours of 26<sup>th</sup> January 1800, on Ave Rocks, near Newhaven, Sussex. During a gale, she was smashed to pieces below cliffs. Most sources maintain all but one of her company were lost in this terrible accident. At least one contemporaneous press account (reported variously) states that others escaped though. The day before *Brazen* had taken a prize and seven men had been put onboard to take her into Portsmouth. Valentine Joyce was not among these eight men surviving.<sup>30</sup>

Val is shown in the relevant pay book on joining *Vesuvius* in 1798 as already having an annual allotment. This would seem to indicate that he made this out in 1795 while on the *Royal George*, but due to missing ledgers the details are now lost. Although allotments were primarily aimed at supporting wives, and/or mariners' children, mothers could also receive

these. So, this in itself proves nothing and in the one obituary found, no dependants were mentioned. Similarly, no will was unearthed.<sup>31</sup>

In the surviving 1798 allotment books there was an ordinary seaman on the *Royal George* by the of name Thomas Joyce though. His entry states that he had been born in Portsmouth and his mother's name was Elizabeth. The battleship's muster books would seem to indicate that he originally joined her on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1797, as a volunteer 3<sup>rd</sup> class. (The pay books being sloppily kept do not positively confirm this.) All this is consistent with the baptism entry for a son to Valentine (senior) and Elizabeth Joyce, named Thomas. So, it certainly looks as if the young volunteer joined his older brother on the *Royal George*.<sup>32</sup> This too is interesting inasmuch as it is known that youngsters on merchantmen often served on vessels that older family members were on (certainly by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century). But, this is the only occasion that I have seen a good indication of this sometimes happening on men-o-war as well.

There are also other areas where hypothesis can be brought into play. One of these relates to education. In order for Val to operate in the manner that he did during the mutiny it is obvious that he was not only confident in his negotiations with senior naval officers, but that he must have been literate to at least a comparatively good level. This argument can be further advanced when one takes into consideration his later ratings as master's mate and especially midshipman where an understanding of mathematics would have been required. Knowing something of his lowly background, it *may* be that he received schooling through one of the non-conformist churches. (The modern John Pounds Unitarian Church is on the site of the High Street Presbyterian or Unitarian Church, Portsmouth. Interestingly, John Pounds had been personally highly active in educating the poor, although too late to have taught the young Valentine.<sup>33</sup>)

Again, one could speculate as to how far Valentine Joyce could have progressed within the Royal Navy had he not been killed prematurely in 1800. Entry and promotion in this service was complex, *far* more so than is often stated. Individual cases can be *very* interesting, such as of one man pressed in 1808 as an able seaman that had taken over as acting master of a gun-brig in 1815,<sup>34</sup> but these cannot be regarded as reliable models. Case studies of larger numbers, as in one of volunteer landsmen on three frigates between 1795 and 1811,<sup>35</sup> again give interesting insights, but cannot be regarded as uniform. In turn, this is similar in the promotion of commissioned officers. As has recently been well put in a published academic paper by Charles Consolvo, there has been a tendency towards concentrating on *particularly* successful officers, thereby giving a skewed perception of the general prospects of those commissioned during these wars. This excellent study of those receiving their lieutenantcies in 1790 shows a very mixed picture.<sup>36</sup>

Taking all this into consideration two projections for Val's career might be made. As a man, he was obviously more than capable, as his sophisticated performance during the mutiny has shown. But, on as large a man-o-war as the *Royal George* it would appear that he was not in a position to better his lot. Indeed, post mutiny he remained in the rate of quartermaster's mate until he was discharged to sick quarters a year later. Once on the little bomb vessel *Vesuvius* he rapidly made midshipman though. This might merely have been because there was a need for a senior petty officer's billet to be filled and he was the only suitable candidate. Or, alternatively, he could have gained his midshipman's rate by impressing the newly joined commander within a short time. Nevertheless, he retained the rate on being transferred to the sloop *Brazen*. It *may* have been that he was content to remain as a petty officer, it simply cannot be determined from the evidence. But, assuming that by the late 1790s he was working towards a lieutenantcy, even having passed professionally, a commission would not *necessarily* have followed. All the same, it would not have been unlikely to gain an active commission in the years of the much-expanded navy in the early

1800s. Without interest (as patronage was then known); a recognised success in battle; or luck for that matter, it could have been difficult for him to get promotion to commander though (other than on the retired list post 1815). Yet higher rank could again have been technically possible, but in light of the European nations not resorting to further armed conflict for almost a century after the Napoleonic Wars, this cannot be regarded as particularly likely in this case.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I wish to express gratitude to the following individuals that were kind enough to discuss points, encourage me and suggest further avenues of research. Alphabetically, they are:-

Mary Billot, Elizabeth Hore, Prof. Richard Harding, Prof. Andrew Lambert, Brian Lavery, Dr. Peter Le Fevre; Bruno Pappardo, Prof. N.A.M. Rodger and William Spencer.

One individual stands out however. He is John Hailey. Apart from encouraging me to take this further through his continued interest, John very kindly checked the St. Helier parish records for me when on holiday on Jersey. For this I warmly thank him.

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<sup>31</sup> TNA: PRO ADM 48/46; and ADM 48/47

<sup>32</sup> TNA: PRO ADM 36/11704; ADM 36/12218; ADM 35/1460; and SoG: CHU2/1A/7 12<sup>th</sup> December 1784

<sup>33</sup> [http://www.johnpounds.org.uk/john\\_pounds.html](http://www.johnpounds.org.uk/john_pounds.html)

<sup>34</sup> Len Barnett: 'Two Master Mariners in the Family - A Work in Progress' in *The Family and Local History Handbook* (Nether Poppleton, York: Robert Blatchford Publishing Ltd., 8<sup>th</sup> Edition)

<sup>35</sup> 'Volunteer Landsmen Recruits to the Royal Navy 1795-1811: The Case of Three Thames-built Frigates' in *"Shipbuilding on the Thames and Thames-Built Ships" Proceedings of a Second Symposium, held on 15 February 2003 at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich* (West Wickham: Dr. J.R. Owen, 2004)

<sup>36</sup> Charles Consolvo: 'The Prospects and Promotion of British Naval Officers 1793-1815' in *The Mariner's Mirror* May 2005