

opened the door to this rich source of research, but more is required to bring Napoleon's American prisoners of war to life.

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**Morriss, Roger, ed. *Samuel Bentham, Inspector General of Naval Works, 1796–1807, Letters and Papers*. Navy Records Society, vol. 172
Boydell & Brewer, 2025**

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This is the 172nd volume in the Navy Records Society's publication of papers, journals, and letters ranging across British naval history from the 1500s to the 1970s. Each volume has added insight and allowed for wider access to the archival material. This volume, edited by Roger Morriss, covers the key records of Samuel Bentham's experience as the Inspector General of the Naval Works, civil architect, and engineer. This is a continuation of Morriss's exploration of Bentham's life and influence on naval dockyard development in the book, *Science, Utility and Maritime Power: Samuel Bentham in Russia, 1779–91* (Routledge, 2016).

This collection is divided into eight sections, each focused on a particular topic or set of documents, and introduced and contextualized by Morriss. Bentham's Russian experience is discussed in the general introduction as it relates to his work for the British Admiralty. On his return from Russia (1791), Bentham developed new machinery which could be applied to dockyards. In 1794, the inventions brought interest from the Admiralty, leading to his redevelopment of Portsmouth Dockyard, which is covered in section one. His renovation created a larger basin, more docks and longer jetties to facilitate ships moving in and out of the docks. It would increase efficiency and capacity in ship repair. His proposal for this work led to his appointment to the position of Inspector General of Naval Works, which is the subject of the second section. An ambitious project to reform all the dockyards was developed, but immediately faced push-back from the Navy Board, whose members felt threatened by Bentham's ideas and independence from their control. Ultimately, he was restricted to implementing changes only to Sheerness Dockyard. Section three focuses on Bentham's desire to use contemporary chemistry, but his failure to work cooperatively with the chemist limited that area of exploration. The seven experimental vessels he constructed between 1795 and 1797 are the topic of section four, and his promotion of non-recoil

guns aboard ship is dealt with in section six. Both sections reveal Bentham's willingness to break with tradition and work with methods he saw in his earlier work abroad. The non-recoil guns were accepted within his time in the navy's service, but the experimental vessels met with so much disdain from critics that their positive aspects were very slow to gain traction.

Administration reform and the reaction against the Inspector General form sections five and seven, respectively. Bentham believed in central control and oversight, with singular responsibility residing in the person in charge. The Navy Board practiced a group responsibility approach, making the adoption of new practices, technology, or even thinking antithetical to the board's existence. The clash between these two opposite arrangements runs throughout the entire volume.

Samuel Bentham created the idea of the panopticon. As a physical structure, it placed the overseer for each department in a physically central location from which they could easily observe the activity within their authority. He proposed a panopticon architecture for the Sheerness shipyard. He had previously constructed a panopticon for the School and Arts and Manufactures at Ochta, St. Petersburg, Russia.

The panopticon was a physical manifestation of Bentham's beliefs that one person held overriding responsibility for an activity, and had to observe the workers closely to ensure they carried out their assignments exactly as ordered, and in a timely manner. This started with Bentham, as Inspector General, over the heads of each yard who in turn were to observe the individuals in charge of each department (wood mill, metal mill, rope walk, etc.), who in turn watched from a central vantage point over their workers. The concept of this central point of scrutiny and responsibility trickled down in Bentham's thinking to the pay level of each workman, depending on their skill or craftsmen level. This variance in rate of pay underscored their responsibility to do the task correctly. His focus on personal responsibility for work efficiency, quality, and reimbursement matched to skill and task was in utter opposition to the traditional approach. Bentham advanced the ideas of surveillance, individual accountability, and what today would be recognized as best practices. But change comes slowly, and is often resisted with ignorant zeal.

Morriss touches on Bentham's experience as civil architect and engineer, 1807 to 1812. The period saw the continuation of two themes seen during his time as Inspector General. First was the ongoing struggle with the Navy Board commissioners, and second, his insatiable drive to bring innovation and centralized control into the operation of naval dockyards. By 1812, Samuel Bentham had become *persona non grata* within the Admiralty and Navy Board. Former associates had to sidestep their relationship with him in order

to stay employed. Section eight includes Bentham's statement of service, a remarkable review of his career and ideas.

Samuel Bentham was an innovative genius, with most of his ideas working their way, if not immediately, eventually into the dockyard organization, shipbuilding, and armament. He had the ability to surround himself with people who could fill gaps in his knowledge and skill, and develop and implement his schemes. He did, however, have little patience for those with whom he disagreed, or those he thought did not have the talent for the task. The force with which he projected his innovations created a wave of objections that limited or delayed implementation. Bentham's expertise could win over those with a desire for change but were uncertain what that should look like, and make enemies of those for whom change was a challenge. Mary Sophia, his wife, is addressed in Morriss's introduction and appears in the documents as promoter of her husband, a sounding board for his ideas, and defender of his reputation.

This volume is for researchers exploring the dockyard structure of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the reforms of the period. Those interested in Samuel Bentham's legacy will find this a requisite read. It is also a study in the resistance to innovation, a timeless issue. Roger Morriss's collection and introduction to these Samuel Bentham documents is a significant contribution to the Navy Records Society's ongoing effort to make archival material more accessible and spur research into naval history.

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Morton, Suzanne. *Contested Catch: Lobster, Localism, and Canada's Atlantic Coast*

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Suzanne Morton's *Contested Catch* aspires to create a greater awareness of industrial capitalism in the Atlantic region that is more than the passive result of external forces leading to underdevelopment. The history of the lobster fishery highlights local factors, the considerations they forced on the state, and the state's response. This is more than an environmental history, unless one considers that the environment also includes social, political, and economic forces. Given that this is the first general history of the lobster fishery in