Slum Priests as missionaries of Empire in a British Naval Port Town, Portsmouth c.1850-1900

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The conditions and welfare of Britain's urban poor in the nineteenth century has consistently attracted historians' attention with discussion on the philanthropic efforts in the East End of London dominating historiography. However, the maritime historian Alston Kennerley recently noted that there are few histories of seamen's missions and those that exist were written by practising pastors. Kennerley rightly observes that these histories are not "tempered sufficiently by discussions of the wider historical social context" and "awkward negative issues" such as the self-interest of the clergy themselves.[1]

Indeed, it is these "awkward and negative issues" that will be explored in this article through examining Father Dolling's slum naval missionary in

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Portsmouth during the late nineteenth century. Dolling was one of a number of slum priests who, through their unorthodox engagement with the poor, courted controversy with both the Anglican Church and the civic authorities. Dolling's establishment of a sailor's mission in which both he and the sailors resided, dangerously contravened Victorian moral boundaries and raised questions about the Priest's ambiguous sexuality.[2] In creating a religious mission set within a homo-societal environment, Dolling was following in the footsteps of London Slum Priests and the wider civilizing programmes in the British Empire.[3] Portsmouth was Britain's premier naval port and its Royal Navy was the standard bearer of Empire, yet according to missionaries, large sections of its populous were no more "civilised" than those in "Darkest Africa".[4]

First, the article will review how historians have focused on London's slum priest phenomenon and how maritime urban missions evolved during the nineteenth century. Focusing on sailor missions in Portsmouth, this article will then explore the clergy's philanthropic motivations and the clergy's rather uneasy relationship with the town's civic elite. Finally, we shall investigate the sailors' response to philanthropic initiatives in the late nineteenth century. The article will argue that religious missionaries undoubtedly took their cue from their colleagues in London and the wider Empire. Like their missionary counterparts in the outposts of the British Empire, sailor missionaries fashioned an alternative environment that allowed them to delve into the seamier side of urban life. Gaining approval for its religious objectives, the missions afforded philanthropists the opportunity for excitement and forge relationships with sailors who were deemed on the margins of respectability.

However, unlike the East End of London and the outposts of the British Empire, naval towns traditionally had strong civic cultures that aligned the town with the power and prestige of Britain's imperial navy. Thus Dolling's behaviour produced a backlash from the town's civic elite who began to question the cleric's own moral framework. In exploring Dolling's mission, the case study professes a wider relevance in arguing that historians should not only explore the motivations of slum priests but also the powerful civic cultures and elites who were keen to preserve the Victorian social and moral order.

Recently, historians have made significant strides in mapping how the East End became part of the imperial project through assessing how journalists, priests and researchers projected imperial metaphors on to the peoples and conditions they witnessed in London.[5] Moreover, historians have also begun to question their attraction to "slumming" and speculated that they may well have been drawn to an underworld that subverted Victorian moral codes. W.T. Stead, the moral campaigner against child prostitution and the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, reported his journey into London sin in the style of a "Gothic Fairytale". In "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon", Stead seemingly uncovered the black market for young virgins and demonstrated how easy it was to procure a girl by actually purchasing a child for £5. As Walkowitz has pointed out, Stead "seems to have gone over the edge in his attempts to authenticate and document criminal vice". Stead, who attempted to live the role as a sexual libertine and explorer, explained that "I had been visiting brothels and drinking champagne and smoking" in order that his research and experience be genuine.[6] Even after his conviction for child abduction resulting from the "Tribute of Modern Babylon" story, Stead continued to explore the city and associate himself with street walkers and vice.[7]

However, it was the university and religious settlements in London that institutionalised the exploration of the East End and helped create the phenomenon of the slum priest. In these institutions, university men could live among the poor and help evangelise the district. Indeed, such settlements were viewed as beacons of light amidst the heathen population and would prove a useful experience for those intent on missionary work in the empire. In addition, Seth Koven has argued that these institutions also tested "heterodox conceptions of masculinity and male sexuality".[8] During the 1880s, the East End was subjected to a number of settlements; the High Anglican Oxford House, Toynbee Hall and the Oxford House Movement run by Anglo-Catholic slum priests.[9]

The homosocial aspect of settlement life clearly attracted university men who desired to escape middle-class moral conventions and bond with fellow male missionaries and even the "rough" lads from the East End. Some volunteers, such as the homosexual socialist C.R. Ashbee, saw the

settlement movement as an opportunity to explore their sexual desires with working-class boys. According to Ashbee's diary, the time he spent with "his boys" at Toynbee Hall moved beyond the class room where they shared "love time". While no evidence of sexual scandal surfaced, it was clear that Ashbee pushed the boundaries of what was acceptable in Toynbee Hall and left after clashing with its founder Cannon Samuel Barnett. Ashbee accused Barnett of being a "eunuch in spirit and heart" and for being unwilling to lead or be led by the boys.[10] Ashbee was not alone in his fondness for Cockney boys. Residents of Oxford House such as Hugh Legge would refer to them as "my boys" and would admire their roughness, coarseness and physical strength.[11]

Likewise, the slum priests in the Oxford House Movement such as Father Robert Dolling and Father Osborne Jay would mix freely with the boys, establishing gymnasiums and attending music halls and even inviting "rough" boys into their own homes. The university settlement men, then, were attracted to the moral freedoms that appeared to operate in an enclosed netherworld far removed from polite society. The settlements exposed men to a life of service and sin. Just as colonial missionaries were tempted by the exotic natives and customs of the indigenous peoples so too were their domestic equivalents. As we shall see, the Oxford Movement not only provided ideal preparation for civilisers of the empire, they also proved an excellent training ground for slum priests keen to disseminate their imperial missionary zeal to the slums of the provincial towns.

Merchant and Naval Sailor Missions during the Nineteenth Century

The undoubted increase in poverty and distress in British cities during the first half of the nineteenth century triggered an acceleration in the establishment of philanthropic institutions geared towards helping families in distress. As part of this upsurge in private philanthropy, specialist philanthropic institutions were formed in ports with the aim of providing welfare for the merchant sailor. In the key merchant ports such as London, Liverpool and Hull, philanthropists sought to provide an alternative to the exploitative lodging houses that sailors were compelled to reside in.[12] Indeed, when the sailor stepped ashore with his extensive earnings he was

perceived an easy prey for the crimps, prostitutes, publicans and lodging houses keepers.[13] Moreover, philanthropists were particularly worried about the merchant seaman's transient lifestyle since it was considered that unstable occupational patterns and unsafe working conditions would draw the sailor into temptation and moral and physical ruin.[14]

Philanthropic initiatives for naval sailors were slower to emerge, since the British Navy's introduction of continuous service in 1853 provided naval sailors with more stability than their merchant counterparts.[15] However, the growing importance of the Royal Navy in protecting the British Empire ensured that the welfare of naval sailors could not be left to chance and from the late-nineteenth century sailors in naval ports such as Portsmouth and Plymouth saw a number of sailor rests and missions open in their midst.[16] During an era when many contemporaries feared that the Empire was at risk from rising imperial powers, the navy required a strong, fit and healthy sailor.[17]

Indeed, some philanthropists consciously moved their missions from merchant ports to naval towns as they believed it would be for the greater national good. For example, Winchester College switched their missionary work from supporting London-based dock labourers to fostering, moral and physical well-being among Portsmouth's naval sailors. The town's unique role in maintaining the British Empire was cited as a key reason for relocating the mission.

> Portsmouth, with its Soldiers and Sailors and Dockmen, claims an interest far beyond its own immediate surroundings. It appeals to all England, and its moral and religious welfare affects the interests of the whole Kingdom … [here] religion was in such a desperate state.[18]

As we shall see later, the Winchester Mission almost entirely focused on naval sailors, rather than Portsmouth's soldiers or dockmen. There were a number of reasons for why sailors were targeted, rather than soldiers or ancillary workers to the navy. Naval sailors were deemed to be vulnerable to the array of temptations ashore as, unlike soldiers, there were no barracks, or in the case of dockmen, no families to return to. Indeed, it was feared that naval sailors were often at the mercy of the notorious boarding house keepers.[19] Moreover, the spatial demarcation of sailors and dockyard work-

ers was particularly acute in naval port towns. Whereas dockyard workers tended to reside in fairly stable traditional working-class neighbourhoods, naval sailors could be found in the streets commonly referred to as sailortown which invariably was located towards the water's edge.[20]

Sailortowns were the districts of merchant and naval ports where sailors visited, often lived and were entertained. It was a distinct area characterised by its public houses, brothels and low entertainment that employed significant numbers of working people. Stan Hugill, a former sailor, noted that "Sailortown was a world in, but not of, that of the landsman. It was a world of sordid pleasure, unlimited vice, and lashings of booze, but a dangerous place too".[21] Contemporaries saw sailortown as a fusion of urban and maritime traditions and, courtesy of the transient nature of the sailor, a place of continual cultural exchange. Certainly, the many accounts of sailortown describe in their own way a generic "Otherness" of the district.[22] Sailortowns, then, meant that sailors, their low entertainment and vice were highly visible ashore and provoked concerns about the fitness of these Royal Naval sailors to serve the British Empire.

This "Otherness" that sailortown exuded also ensured that sailors and sailortown were attractive subjects to civilise as, for philanthropists like Dolling, the district had acquired an exoticness akin to the outer-reaches of the British Empire. As we shall see, Dolling created his mission in the style of an outpost of empire, complete with his "watchtower" from which he recorded his engagement with sailors in a narrative that drew heavily from the imperial travelogues and adventures that were fashionable at the time.[23] Perhaps, above all, it was the sailor himself who was the fascination for the maritime missionary. Reverend G. H. Mitchell, a London missionary declared that sailortown was "the flotsam and jetsam of the seven seas, the 'mecca' towards which Jack sails and for whose delights he hankers, after the long and tedious spell at sea".[24]

In sailing across the Empire, both merchant and naval sailors were in contact with differing cultures and brought back to British ports exotic foods, spices, drinks and animals. There was also an anxiety that, through their trans-national life-styles, sailors would import heathen cultures into English sailortowns. For example, missionaries in naval Plymouth were convinced that "witchcraft" was practiced in late nineteenth century Devonport, while the clergy of early twentieth century London blamed

the merchant sailors for importing "black magic" rituals into Limehouse.[25] Sailors, then, stood apart from others in the urban environment due to their transient nature and their perceived vulnerability to the vices of sailortown at home and abroad. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that sailors became increasingly the subject of philanthropic efforts as the nineteenth century unfolded.

Portsmouth and the Royal Navy: the "Gateway to Empire"

By the late nineteenth century, Portsmouth comprised three interlocking communities. The middle-class enclave of Southsea, with its large villas and high-class shops made for a stark contrast to Portsea, an area that surrounded the dockyard and suffered severe social and economic deprivation. While casual dockyard workers often resided in Portsea, the skilled artisans, such as shipwrights, began settling in the new and expanding northern Kingston district of the town.[26] The expansion of the dockyard had largely been responsible for Portsmouth's population growth which had increased from 72 096 in 1851 to 188 123 in 1911.[27] By 1901, the dockyard employed almost 8 000 workers, representing 53 percent of all male industrial workers in Portsmouth.[28]

Not only was a large proportion of the population dependant on the navy, but the town's physical environment was unmistakably stamped with a military character. By the mid-1870s, the dockyard occupied over 300 acres of the west side of Portsmouth, while the 1901 census recorded that over 7 000 men were stationed in army barracks or navy ships in the harbour.[29] The main thoroughfares through Portsea were, as E.S. Washington noted, "full night and day of men in naval uniform", while "many large barracks with parade grounds were constant reminders of the naval and military presence in the town".[30]

Aside from the overwhelming military presence in Portsmouth, the town shared many characteristics with London's East End. Like London, contemporaries perceived that Portsmouth possessed a special connection with the empire and, as with the Capital, it also brought some unwelcome repercussions. One commentator noted that, from its connection to the navy, Portsmouth's

Portsmouth is situated on the south coast of England and this image depicts the view of Portsmouth harbour in the 1890s. Portsmouth's sailortown during this period straddled the water's edge known as the "Hard" or the "Devil's Acre". Source: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA. http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print

> relationship to the life of the Empire is of an unrivalled description, and the fact that so many of its adult male population are, in one sense or another, servants of the State, and are not under private employment, seemed to direct special attention to its crying needs on the part of the National Church.[31]

Furthermore, the absence of an indigenous philanthropic leadership in the East End, was replicated in Portsmouth as the state's dominance as an employer meant that there were few wealthy industrialists to take-up a philanthropic cause. Consequently, just as London's West End looked

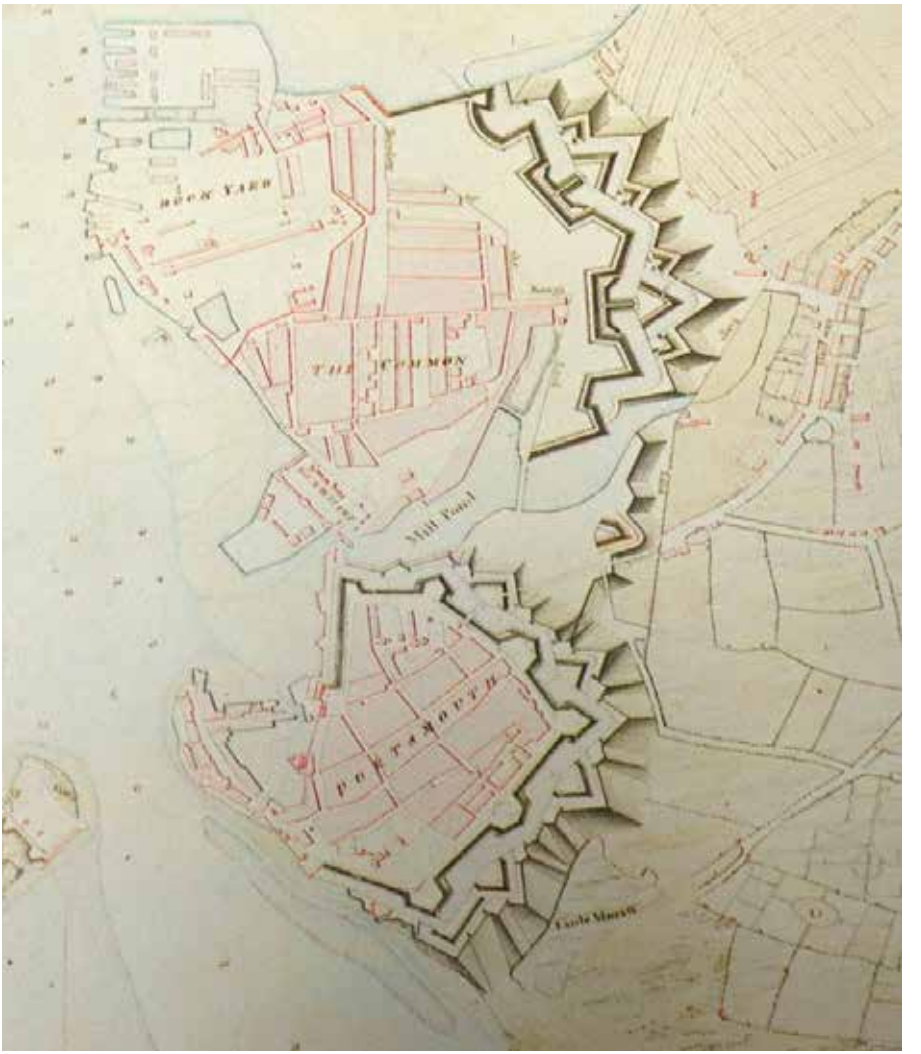
upon the East with some trepidation and fear, the middle-class residents of Southesa became increasingly concerned with Portsea which had become notorious for its "sailortown district".

In the nineteenth century, Portsea was a fortified section of the urban coast cut adrift from the civic hub of the town, increasing its sense of "Otherness". It was here that naval sailors and locals lived, worked and socialised beyond the reach and influence of the centres of civic leadership that were based in the heart of Portsmouth. By the 1890s, Portsea had become known as "The Devil's Acre", as its high density of public houses and brothels, cultivated the view that the district had descended into moral deprivation.[32] Indeed, Ellice Hopkins, writing in 1883, made a gloomy assessment of the extent to which philanthropy could stem the licentious behaviour in Portsmouth.

> The numbers of soldiers and sailors passing through that garrison and seaport were so overwhelming, the local peculiarities were so great, the drinking interest was so strong, that anything started in Portsmouth would fail.[33]

The sailor would come ashore to Portsea "flush with cash" and carry sums of between £30 to £100 to spend on their sailortown nights.[34] With a dense sailor population, poor-quality housing, inadequate sanitation and a labyrinth of courts that lay behind the main thoroughfares, Portsea became the focus for religious missionaries who undoubtedly took their cue from their counterparts in London and the wider empire.

Reverend Reginald Shutte's work in Portsea was heavily influenced by the civilising missionaries of the British Empire.[35] After completing a degree in Cambridge and being ordained a priest in 1854, Shutte established the "Mission of the Good Shepherd" in Portsea to save fallen women in 1866.[36] Shutte was a flamboyant ritualist and was not afraid to court either religious controversy or publicity for his cause.[37] Indeed, Shutte's pamphlets spoke directly to his middle-class readership in sensational terms that would both intrigue and appal them. An imperial theme ran through Shutte's texts as he placed himself as both daring explorer and saviour of the empire's reputation. Shutte first demanded from his readers as to whether they "know Portsea" or "walked up and down the leading streets"



In the early part of the nineteenth century, Portsea was defended by battlements that circled sailortown and the dockyard on the water front. The battlements separated sailortown from Portsmouth's civic and religious centres. Source: http://porttowns.port.ac.uk/mapping-waterfront/

near the dockyard. Writing at the time of the Contagious Diseases Acts in the 1860s, Shutte amplified the view that it was the prostitute, not the sailor, who was the curse of sailortown. He described the women in bestial terms and depicted their public displays of immorality as bringing disgrace to the main thoroughfares of Portsea.

> Bloated, draggled women in dirty print frocks, who lounge along in twos or threes without bonnet or shawl, and who in broad daylight make your flesh creep with their loathsome words and gestures. These are some of the companions of our soldiers and sailors, in whose society they spend their hours of leisure. They are just now sunning themselves on the Hard or Queen Street, and are waiting to pick up the latest gossip about the Channel Fleet, or drink a dram with a friend. Their name is legion, and, as you look into their faces, each one seems fouler than the last.[38]

Shutte, then, described these prostitutes in Portsea in bestial terms and depicted their public displays of immorality as bringing disgrace to the main thoroughfares of Portsea. Moreover, their presence also had repercussions for the empire since according to Shutte, they drew the armed forces into their depravity. The brothels of Portsea, according to Shutte, had become "infamous from the Baltic to Japan".[39] Shutte then took on the role of urban explorer to venture into the "rookeries" that his readers would have feared to tread:

> All I can say, is that if you have penetrated into the dens of lust and violence which are closely packed within the slice of brick and mortar that lies between St George's Square and Queen Street, your heart will have been sickened, and you will be giddy with sights and sounds which your brain refuses to forget…our work is to deal with the poorest and most depraved of the classes that haunt these lanes and alleys.[40]

There can be little doubt that Shutte's mission was fuelled by a sense of imperial exploration as he invited African imperial missionaries to speak to his congregation to mark the official opening of his new chapel buildings.[41] Indeed, the African explorers were in popular demand in Portsea since a similar chapel in the area also invited the group which included the Bishop of Maritzburg in South Africa and Commander Cameron, an

African explorer. After the Bishop had outlined some of the "heathen" superstitions and immoral practices, Cameron urged his audience to support the quest of civilising inferior populations since "these people [Africans] might go forward without seeing a church or clergy-man, and it was highly important, therefore, that the English people should, by every measure in their power, seek to develop their Christian missions". It could not have escaped the Portsea missionaries in the audience that they too were charged with a similar task in the empire's chief naval port.[42]

Shutte died in 1892 and while he undoubtedly saw his mission as a civilising one, he did not live among the poor. Portsmouth's first slum priest was the flamboyant and controversial cleric, Father Robert Dolling.[43] Inspired by the University settlements in the East End, Winchester College (the elite public school) established St Agatha's Mission in Portsea which was led by Father Dolling from 1885.[44] The School had originally established a Mission in 1868 in St Peters Docks in the East End of London. It was led by Rev. R. Linklater who focused his work on supporting poor dock labourers' families and establishing church schools in the district. However, as we have seen, the increasing concerns over the fate of the empire, encouraged Winchester to focus their efforts on civilising the most important naval town in Britain. Dolling was apprenticed in missionary work in the East End and recognised in Portsea a similar urban and immoral decay that he had witnessed in Stepney. However, for Dolling the significance of empire was even greater in Portsea due to its naval strategic importance and saw the symbols of navy and empire inscribed into his new environment. He noted that "the streets are, most of them, very narrow and quaint, named after great admirals and sea-battles, with old world, red-tiled roofs, and interiors almost like cabins of ships".[45]

Turning his attention to the inhabitants, Dolling remembered "sailors everywhere, sometimes fighting, sometimes courting" and "slatternly women creeping out of some little public house." However, like his African missionary counterparts, it was important to describe in some detail the shocking heathen customs of the natives to both appal the reader and illustrate how the mission eventually brought light and civilisation to a dark and corrupted area. Dolling recounted that on his first Sunday afternoon stroll through the district he witnessed a scene he termed the "Landport Dance".

> Two girls, their only clothing a pair of sailors' trousers each, and two sailor lads, their only clothing the girls' petticoats, were dancing a kind of breakdown up and down the street, all the neighbours looked on amused but unastonished, until one couple, the worse for drink toppled over. I stepped forward to help them up, but my endeavour was evidently looked upon from a hostile point of view, for the parish voice was translated into a shower of stones…[46]

In another passage, Dolling complained the poor lighting in Portsea courts and the abundance of slaughter houses in the area had helped foster a savage population. Indeed, he likened Portsea's conditions to those of the East End and warned of the terrible dangers (meaning the Whitechapel murders) that might call upon Portsmouth if nothing was done.[47] He claimed that among the Portsea boys "it is no uncommon thing to find one who eats raw meat and drinks blood". These descriptions of the native with their mysterious semi-naked dances, primitive rituals and implicit references to cannibalism glamorised Dolling's mission and drew readers into an unknown underworld which paralleled contemporary African expeditions. It was perhaps no accident that reviewers of the book and biographers of Dolling consistently cited the "Landport dance" incident as it firmly set Dolling in the role of intrepid imperial slum priest.[48]

He was successful cultivating this image since one biographer likened him to an imperial adventurer, reclaiming his heathen brethren street by street. Reverend Charles Osborne marvelled at his

> wonderful record, and not one word of it is an exaggeration. It is wonderful as a witness to that spirit of statesmanship which enabled Dolling like a capable general to grasp position after position. Truly from his watch-tower in that extraordinary 'parsonage' he was like an ecclesiastical Cecil Rhodes, planning ever fresh developments.[49]

Osborne's description of the mission as a "watch-tower" was quite revealing since, like their counterparts in the Empire, the missionary's role was not only to convert the heathen brethren but also keep surveillance on a disorderly and uncivilised population. Dolling was a Liberal imperi-

alist, firmly supporting the Boer Wars in the 1890s.[50] Indeed, his work in London and Portsmouth had led him to believe the city had become a centre of vice and decay that was undermining the English stock. In London, Dolling singled out the Jews for their overly competitive nature, a view shared by his biographer who believed them to be the "greatest rack-renters" among the "swarms of aliens" that inhabited London.[51]

For Dolling, an imperial war "with its defeats, was a great corrective to national indulgence", and Portsea provided the ideal base to contribute to a national rejuvenation. Situating the mission in the heart of Portsmouth, Dolling's chief objective was to "save" young boys from the town's "sinks of iniquity" and prepare them for a life in the services.[52] These boys were sent for training on the hulk HMS *Northampton* from 1894.[53] Osborne noted that "it was impossible to realise that many of these smart, well-set-up young fellows had once been underfed and neglected lads whom Dolling had got hold of in former years and pulled up out of the social abyss".[54] He praised those sailors who left his mission and "went forth to shed their blood in order that the English flag might continue to proudly fly".[55]

Alternatively, for those boys unsuitable for naval training, Dolling encouraged emigration and spent over £1000 of parish funds on the project. However, the greatest financial outlay was Dolling's Parsonage that cost over £4000 and designed to allow an informal relationship to develop between the missionaries and those seeking help.[56] Reverend Charles Osborne's astute view that Dolling had taken on many of the characteristics of an imperial missionary can extend to the way in which Dolling conducted himself among sailors. John Tosh has noted that among men emigrating to serve the British Empire, there was less pressure on them to marry which gave them a freedom from conforming to Victorian domesticity. He argues that the Empire's "ports, trading posts, mining settlements, and bush farms offered a comparatively undiluted homosocial environment".[57] Dolling had replicated an imperial homosocietal setting in Portsmouth and, to the outside world, he portrayed his bachelor lifestyle as a self-sacrifice to a greater cause. However, in the building of his controversial parsonage, Dolling was not only aware of the significant Victorian codes of morality he was crossing, he, in fact, revelled in their contravention.

Dolling's St Agatha's parsonage seems to have been modelled on his friend's mission in Shoreditch. Reverend Osborne Jay horrified contempo-

raries by sleeping in the Shoreditch Mission building, which was complete with a homeless shelter, gymnasium and boxing club.[58] Dolling's parsonage possessed a gymnasium, over 20 beds for his guests, a room for the visiting Winchester College boys and a room for himself. Living in such close quarters to both the working-class youths and the young Winchester College missionaries, Dolling and Jay rode roughshod over carefully constructed social boundaries and protocols of Victorian society. Indeed, Dolling recalled that he would often invite visiting Winchester boys to his room to talk. In addition, Dolling undoubtedly forged a close relationship with the boys he trained. Osborne observed that "Dolling's sailor-boys abounded all over the globe, their photographs lined in part, the walls of the parsonage, and whenever they had leave and were in England, some of them were sure to be staying in the house".[59] Dolling wrote that "all over the world at this moment there are my dear boys, who look to this place [the parsonage] as their home, from whence all the love they have ever known has reached them".[60]

However, Dolling's informal relationship with "his boys" did raise questions over his conduct since he would invite the "slummiest" boys into his room and would often accompany boys to low music halls.[61] Unlike, earlier Missionaries like Shutte or his predecessor Linklater, Dolling focused on the boys and their physical and moral development, rather than the welfare of sailor-wives or families. For example, Dolling talked of sailors as "strong, vigorous men, well groomed, fairly well fed with all to make them bodily strong, their passions powerful, think of them living separately altogether from womenfolk and centred in sinks of iniquity as Portsmouth".[62]

This focus on the male body was a narrative that Dolling would have been familiar with since it was dominant discourse to emerge from East End's Missionary movements such as the Oxford House Movement (which Dolling had been part of) and Toynbee Hall.[63] Dolling had created an intensely masculine environment which offered little for women. Indeed, Dolling acknowledged that his great weakness was his failure to attract women to his gymnasium, card and bagatelle games concluding that "girls" games are so uninteresting, and you cannot make legitimate excuses for wholesome noise…".[64] Clearly, Dolling was not overly worried that his mission was driven by a masculine muscular Christian ethos.

His biographers consistently noted both his feminine and masculine qualities. One described Dolling as possessing "the sympathy and tenderness of the women with the strength and courage of the man"; he was "not so much non-sexual as bi-sexual".[65] Likewise, Osborne noted Dolling's dual persona since he exhibited a "masculine strength" with a "feminine" character.[66] Like his missionary counterparts in the outposts of the British Empire, Dolling fashioned a homosocial society that he felt at ease in. Gaining approval for its religious objectives, the mission afforded Dolling the opportunity for excitement and forge relationships that were on the margins of respectability. Portsea's squalor and its militarised environs attracted Dolling since, as Osborne observed, "excitement did not weary him, it stimulated his efforts; and Portsmouth, whatever its faults, is not dull". Indeed, Osborne went on to portray a vivid image of Portsmouth in the 1890s.

> The dashes of colour afforded by the uniforms of the soldiers and sailors who fill the streets; the constant music of the bands as the troops swing past from route-marching; the summer concourse of all sorts of odd people to the sea-front (just like the individuals who fill up so many of John Leech's drawings in the best days of *Punch*); the briny atmosphere, as it were, that pervades the whole place – suited him thoroughly. Dolling, would have died of ennui amid suburban villas. Landport, even when he employed his most lurid colours in the painting of it, was far more congenial to his mind as a place to live in than any region of prim decorum could ever have been.[67]

Osborne's insights into the seamy side of Portsmouth may explain why Dolling was one of many missionaries drawn to the town. However, Dolling's description of Portsmouth as the "sink of iniquity" in which unmarried young sailors sought drink and prostitution and where sailor's wives were drawn into vice when their husbands were at sea, was forcefully challenged by councillors, the press and residents of Portsea. In 1894, Leon Emanuel, the Mayor of Portsmouth, complained that a "serious stigma had been cast on the borough of Portsmouth" and he criticised Dolling for living "not five minutes" in Portsmouth and making "wicked" allegations "without a shadow of foundation in fact". In one speech defending Portsmouth's good name, the Mayor made a clear reference to Dolling's ambiguous sexuality to a "knowing" audience. On Dolling's claim that sailors' morality would improve through marriage, the Mayor said:

> Now there was an old saying that people who lived in glass houses should not throw stones, and he would ask the rev. gentleman why he did not set the example and marry. (Loud laughter and cheers). It was all very well to preach, but practice was a great deal better than precept.[68]

In response to Dolling's claims, the Mayor announced that one night he and a Police Inspector had visited and surveyed fifty pubs in Portsea and found 460 men and women drinking respectably. The Mayor concluded that he had "been born and bred in the ancient borough of Portsmouth, and he was proud beyond measure to stand there that evening as one of its sons".[69] Significantly, the Mayor was supported by residents in Portsea. A letter from a sailor's wife published in the local paper praised the Mayor's defence of the area in which she lived and standing by "the much abused publican and sailors' wives".[70]

Sailor Responses to Missionary Work

Dolling's attempt to "civilise" Portsea's sailors undoubtedly unsettled Portsmouth's urban elites who were concerned that the town would suffer the stigma of becoming known as unruly slum. What is less well known,

however, is how the sailors responded to Dolling's missionary work. Clearly, very few sailors left diaries and those that did wrote about the places they visited rather than about life in their home port.[71] However, we can discern glimpses of their motivations, behaviour and response to missionary work from often unpublished missionary records. To read the official memoirs and accounts of missionary work, one would assume that their philanthropic initiatives were resounding successes. A favourite device employed by philanthropists was to describe how through a piecemeal process the heathen district in which they entered was gradually becoming religiously colonised. This narrative often illustrated the success of the mission by employing the stories of individuals who had transformed their lives through a conversion to Christianity. For example, when Dolling began his Portsea mission he noted that:

> Boys stole, because stealing seemed to them the only method of living; men were drunken because their stomachs were empty, and the public-house was the only cheerful place of entertainment, the only home of good fellowship and kindliness; girls sinned, because their mothers sinned before them.[72]

However, throughout his account of his ten years in a Portsmouth slum, Dolling consistently cited individual success stories of sailors who "have turned out splendidly". On one occasion he remembered a sailor who had been in prison for 18 months and how "day by day, we could notice the giving up of the slouch, the desire for a clean collar, for a bath, for rational talk, for intellectual books to read".[73] Dolling's most outwardly successful enterprise was undoubtedly his gymnasium which attracted the "roughest" type of man. As part of his parsonage investment, Dolling purchased a disused Baptist Chapel for £3000 and converted it into a gymnasium complete with a "gallery all around" and "two dead ministers buried in the middle".[74] Dolling, at first, employed instructors to train the men and discovered that attempts to impose strict behavioural and moral codes resulted in patrons taking matters into their own hands. He noted that:

> All sorts and kinds of men have tried to manage that gymnasium, with varying success, the clergy, the lay-readers, Oxford men, officers in the Army and Navy. They have suffered all sorts of contumely and wrong. I have seen them skilfully lassoed, arms and legs bound, and lashed to the gymnasium ladder, or a noose run under their armpits, and hauled up to the ceiling. I have seen them spread-eagled upon the vaulting-horse, with a dance of savage Indians whooping round them. I have seen all the mattresses ripped up and picked to pieces, then strewn over the floor. I have seen the bagatelle-tables used as points of vantage, from which opposing forces sprang at each other. I have seen men playing upon the piano with their feet, and I have known, when no other mischief was possible, the fierce joy of tearing away the front of the piano, and strewing the broken hammers artistically on the floor.[75]

Eventually, Dolling himself, took charge and relaxed the rules of engagement, abandoning any notion of instruction be it physical or moral. One Winchester College student who was visiting the mission remembered seeing Dolling in the gymnasium amidst "a racket made by half a hundred disrespectable ragamuffins who were all in the main good gymnasts". Dolling sat at his desk "quietly working amid the noise addressing a few words to each as they come in withal keeping order".[76] Indeed, it seemed he allowed the men to police themselves. Dolling invited one notorious gang known as the "forty thieves", who were the "terror of the neighbourhood", to use the gymnasium and to keep "perfect order". The "forty thieves" gang was led by "Nobby", a stoker, who told Dolling that the gymnasium "was the only fitting club-room for his mates."[77] Indeed, Osborne noted that the gymnasium was "surprisingly free from either officialism or pietism".[78]

Dolling's relationship with notorious street gangs and the apparent absence of religious instruction, raised eyebrows in the Church and the mission's sponsor, Winchester College. Questions were raised as to whether Dolling's expensive investment in the gymnasium had paid back in ecclesiastical terms through the conversion of the "roughest type of men" to the church. Dolling was open enough in his official account to admit that "I do not believe that in that sense it paid" but had instead created physically and morally stronger individuals, albeit in a more secular sense. In private he did despair that "alas! religion does not yet progress amongst them" and that "direct religious teaching has little influence".[79] Undoubtedly, Dolling

had created a very successful gymnasium that attracted over 70 men per night. However, the men were clearly using the gymnasium on their own terms, since the evenings were free from religious or moral instruction and policed by notorious gang leaders. The absence of religious instruction raised wider concerns in the church that Dolling was indulging the roughest sailors by hosting and legitimising their immoral leisure practices.[80]

Conclusion

The recent historiography of philanthropy in Britain has shown that imperial contexts underpinned the East End Missions of the nineteenth century.[81] This article has shown that a missionary imperialist approach to the poor was also adopted by clerics more widely. Portsmouth's naval and imperial importance invited direct comparison to London, not least since slum priests like Dolling were "apprenticed" in the East End before embarking on missionary work in Portsea. However, ports provided their own distinctive attractions to slum priests since sailortown exhibited a maritime-urban "Otherness", which was far removed from conventional urban living.[82]

It was also teeming with young, unattached and transitory males, much more so than conventional provincial towns. The Portsmouth missionaries who attempted to colonise sailortown were often driven by both religious and personal motivations. Missionaries framed their forays into sailortown as imperial adventures since it made good copy for campaigning pamphlets that raised funds for their cause. Indeed, just as the imperial explorers could civilise the heathen native, Portsmouth missionaries described how they could transform a spendthrift and morally corrupt seafarer to an exemplary citizen who could secure the empire's future. Stories of individual sailors who had turned away from sailortown to purse a more godly existence adorned the pages of missionary publications.

In reality, those sailors who experienced a moral and religious conversion were firmly in the minority. Dolling's experiment with the gymnasium had taught him that to succeed in attracting men, the patrons would require a degree of autonomy in the running of the club. While the ab-

sence of religious instruction raised concerns in the Church, Dolling went along with a more liberal regime as the gymnasium fulfilled his more personal needs. There can be little doubt that missionaries like Dolling enjoyed and thrived in the male-exclusive societies which they had created. These missions afforded Dolling the opportunity to associate with those on the margins of respectability. Under no other circumstances could Dolling have led this homo-societal life without transgressing careful Victorian moral codes on gender and sexuality. For a Victorian cleric, it was a damaging predilection that was fully exploited by the civic elites, many of them businessmen, who feared that their trade would suffer if Portsmouth became known as a "sink of inequity". Thus while Dolling was busy drawing a moral map of Portsmouth's "Devil's Acre", his opponents were equally questioning his own ethical and moral standards.

Sammanfattning

Portsmouth var Storbritanniens främsta örlogshamn och Royal Navy imperiets fanbärare, men enligt missionärer i staden var stora delar av befolkningen inte mer "civiliserade" än de som bodde i "mörkaste Afrika". Denna artikel beskriver kortfattat hur sjömansmissioner utvecklades i handels- och örlogshamnar för att sedan utröna prästerskapets motiv för etableringen av sådana missioner i Portsmouth under slutet av 1800-talet. Artikeln fokuserar på hur en inflytelserik präst, Fader Dolling, skapade kontroverser med den civila eliten genom hans oortodoxa förbindelser med sjömännen. Dollings etablering av en sjömansmission, där både han själv och sjömännen bodde, stred mot victorianska moraluppfattningar och väckte frågor om hans tvetydiga sexualitet. Precis som andra missioner i det brittiska imperiets utkanter, skapade dessa sjömansmissioner en alternativ miljö som också tillät deltagarna att utforska stadslivets mer dunkla sidor. Genom acceptansen för de religiösa målsättningarna, kunde dessa missioner ge filantroper en möjlighet till spänning och till relationer med sjömän som ansågs vara på gränsen för det respektabla. Genom studier av Dollings mission, hävdas att fallstudien har en vidare betydelse och att historiker inte bara ska utforska slumprästernas motiv, utan också de inflytelserika medborgerliga kulturer och eliter som var angelägna att bevara den Victorianska sociala och moraliska ordningen.

Notes

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[2] S. Koven, *Slumming. Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Nigel Scotland, *Squires in the Slums. Settlements and Missions in Late Victorian London*, (London: IB Tauris, 2007), p. 256.
[3] A. Mayne, *The Imagined Slum: Newspaper Representations in three Cities, 1870-1914* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993); M. Valverde, "The dialect of the familiar and unfamiliar: 'The jungle' in early slum travel writing", *Sociology*, 30, 3 (August 1996).
[4] R.R. Dolling, *Ten Years in a Portsmouth Slum* (London: S.C. Brown, Langham & Co, 1896, 1903 edn), p. 18
[5] J. Marriott, *The Other Empire. Metropolis, India and Progress in the Colonial Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); Koven, *Slumming*; Nigel Scotland, *Squires in the Slums. Settlements and Missions in Late Victorian London* (London: IB Tauris, 2007).
[6] J. R. Walkowitz, *The City of Dreadful Delight*: *Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London* (London: Virago Press, 1982), p.113.
[7] Quoted in Walkowitz, *The City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 113.
[8] Koven, *Slumming*, p. 229.
[9] Koven, *Slumming*, pp. 229, 255.
[10] Koven, *Slumming*, pp. 265-266.
[11] Koven, *Slumming*, p. 265.
[12] D. Williams, "Mid-Victorian attitudes to seamen and maritime reform: The Society for Improving Merchant Seamen, 1867", *International Journal of Maritime History*, 3, 1 (1991), pp. 101-126.
[13] E. Koren, "Between responsibility and temptation; Norwegian seamen and welfare ashore 1918-1939", in R. Gorski and B. Söderqvist (eds.) *The Parallel Worlds of the Seafarer: Ashore, Afloat and Abroad* (Gothenburg: Maritime Museum & Aquarium: Northern Sea Network, 2011), pp. 97-118.
[14] A. Kennerley, "British merchant seafarers and their homes, 1895-1970", *International Journal of Maritime History*, 24, 1 (2012), pp. 115-146.
[15] C. Lloyd, *The British Seaman, 1200-1860: A Social Survey* (London: Collins, 1968), p. 274.
[16] L. Moon, "'Sailorhoods': Sailortown and Sailors in the Port of Portsmouth, c. 1850-1900" (University of Portsmouth, unpublished PhD, 2015), p. 221.
[17] M. Conley, "You don't make a torpedo gunner out of a drunkard: Agnes Weston, temperance and the British Navy", *Northern Mariner*, 9, 1, (1999), pp. 1-4.
[18] Winchester College Archive, D2/58 Envelope J of George Ridding's papers and labelled by Laura Ridding 'St Landport, Winchester College Mission 1878-1905', 79, 'Landport Mission Portsmouth.
[19] Moon, "'Sailorhoods': Sailortown and Sailors", p. 225.
[20] M. Bassett, "The Royal Dockyard Worker in Edwardian England: Culture, Leisure and Empire" (unpublished PhD, University of Portsmouth, 2014), ch 3.

[21] S. Hugill, *Sailortown*, (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1967), xviii; For analysis of sailortown in Portsmouth and Plymouth see B. Beaven, "The resilience of sailortown culture in English naval ports, c. 1820–1900", *Urban History*, Vol. 43, No.1, February 2016. For London's sailortown see C. Fox Smith, *Sailor Town Days* (London: Methuen & Co, 1923), p. 27.
[22] Fox Smith, *Sailor Town Days*, p. 27.
[23] Dolling, *Ten Years in a Portsmouth Slum*, p. 18.
[24] B. Beaven, "The resilience of sailortown", p. 17; G.H. Mitchell, *Down in Limehouse* (London: Stanley Martin & Co., 1925), pp. 19-20.
[25] Mitchell, *Down in Limehouse*, p. 23. Mitchell claimed that "nightly séances were held, and the spirits to incarnate the coloured devotees of the black art".
[26] V. Fulda, "Space, Civic Pride, Citizenship and Identity in 1890s Portsmouth", (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Portsmouth, 2006), p. 1, 33.
[27] B. Beaven, *Visions of Empire: Patriotism, Popular Culture and the City, 1870-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 13.
[28] R. C. Riley, *The Industries of Portsmouth in the 19th Century* (Portsmouth: Portsmouth Papers, 1976), p. 9.
[29] R. Riley, *Portsmouth: Ships, Dockyard and Town* (Stroud: Tempus, 2002), p. 41.
[30] E.S. Washington, *Local Battles in Fact and Fiction: The Portsmouth Election of 1895* (Portsmouth: Portsmouth City Council, 1985), p. 6.
[31] C.E. Osborne, *The Life of Father Dolling* (London: Edward Arnold, 1903), p. 58.
[32] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 24 February 1894. This term was first used in this context by Charles Dickens when he explored the slums of London see *Household Words*, 31 August 1850.
[33] E. Hopkins, "Our soldiers and sailors at home", *Good Words*, Dec 24, 1883, p. 170.
[34] Hopkins, "Our soldiers and sailors at home", p. 170.
[35] Similarly, the journalist James Greenwood explored London in the same fashion during this period see J. Greenwood, *The Seven Curses of London* (London: Stanley Rivers and Co., 1869).
[36] For a more detailed analysis of Portsmouth "outcasts" see R. Denyer, "The Bitter Cry of Outcast Portsmouth: Poverty and Crime 1860-1900" (University of Portsmouth, BA dissertation, 2004).
[37] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 15 October 1892.
[38] Portsmouth City Record Office (hereafter PCRO), 11A/J/5, R.N. Shutte, "Mission of the Good Shepherd, Portsea", 1870, p. 1.
[39] PCRO, Shutte, "Mission of the Good Shepherd", p. 2.
[40] PCRO, Shutte, "Mission of the Good Shepherd", pp. 2-3.
[41] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 13 December 1876.
[42] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 13 December 1876.
[43] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 15 October 1892.
[44] Osborne, *The Life of Father Dolling*, p. 55.
[45] Dolling, *Ten Years in a Portsmouth Slum*, p. 18.
[46] Dolling, *Ten Years in a Portsmouth Slum*, p. 18.
[47] Osborne, *The Life of Father Dolling*, p. 126.
[48] For example, *Leeds Mercury*, 8 July 1896; *London Quarterly Review* 27 January 1896; *The Speaker* 22 August 1896; J. Clayton, *Father Dolling. A Memoir* (London: Wells, Gardner, Darton & Co, 1902), p. 23.

[49] Osborne, *The Life of Father Dolling*, p. 85.
[50] Clayton, *Father Dolling*, p. 56.
[51] Osborne, *The Life of Father Dolling*, p. 244.
[52] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 24 February 1894. The "sinks of iniquity" quote and description of Portsmouth's slum in his book, caused outrage among Portsmouth's urban elite who feared that it would damage the town's national representation.
[53] Dolling, *Ten Years in a Portsmouth Slum*, p. 112.
[54] Osborne, *The Life of Father Dolling*, p. 89.
[55] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 3 March 1894.
[56] Dolling, *Ten Years in a Portsmouth Slum*, p. 185.
[57] J. Tosh, "Masculinites in an industrializing society, 1800-1914", *Journal of British Studies*, 44, 2, April 2005, p. 340
[58] S. Koven, *Slumming*, p. 256.
[59] Osborne, *The Life of Father Dolling*, p. 89.
[60] Quoted in Clayton, *Father Dolling*, p. 42.
[61] Koven, *Slumming*, p. 256; Clayton, *Father Dolling*, p. 42.
[62] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 24 February 1894.
[63] Koven, *Slumming*, pp. 230-231.
[64] Winchester College Archive, D2/58 Envelope J of George Ridding's papers and labelled by Laura Ridding "St Landport, Winchester College Mission 1878-1905", 87, *Annual Report of St Agatha's Mission, 1889*.
[65] Clayton, *Father Dolling*, p. 134.
[66] Osborne, *The Life of Father Dolling*, p. 178.
[67] Osborne, *The Life of Father Dolling*, p. 67.
[68] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 24 February 1894.
[69] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 24 February 1894.
[70] *Portsmouth News*, 24 February 1894.
[71] The National Museum of the Royal Navy, UK holds over 200 sailor diaries and they tend to replicate this pattern of writing.
[72] Dolling, *Ten Years in a Portsmouth Slum*, pp. 17-18.
[73] Dolling, *Ten Years in a Portsmouth Slum*, p. 81.
[74] Dolling, *Ten Years in a Portsmouth Slum*, p. 27.
[75] Dolling, *Ten Years in a Portsmouth Slum*, p. 29.
[76] Winchester College Archive, G14/151, "Letter from Francis Lucas at Wich Col to his mother 10 Dec 1894."
[77] Dolling, *Ten Years in a Portsmouth Slum*, p. 33.
[78] Osborne, *The Life of Father Dolling*, p. 67, 90.
[79] Winchester School Archive, St Agatha, Landport 1887 report, 84, "The gymnasium".
[80] Osborne, *The Life of Father Dolling*, p. 92.
[81] F. Driver, *Geography Militant. Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[82] Beaven, "The resilience of sailortown".