2017-11-06

Devonport  Building a Purposed Community: Who lived in Plymouth Dock?

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http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/10176

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The inhabitants of Plymouth Dock were mainly those working in or for the Royal Navy together with their families and the businesses supplying them, living alongside retired and invalided-out seamen of all ranks. By 1733, in its third decade of existence, the new town had over 3,000 residents with new buildings—commercial properties and dwelling houses—springing up almost daily. By 1780 the population had swelled to 10-12,000 equalling that of Plymouth and by the 1820s it had increased tenfold to 34,000 overtaking Plymouth by a third.

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A well-off community?
The job of Master Caulker, in the gift of the Admiralty, carried a salary of 150 guineas per annum. Similar or higher paid roles included Clerk to the Ropeyard, Master Ropemaker and Porter to the Dockyard as shown in this Table of Salaries for Plymouth Dock in 1780 from the Parliamentary Register. Caulkers plugged gaps in wooden ships with oakum mixing it with tar to make them watertight. Who picked over and supplied the oakum?

On 8 March 1749, Paul Michael was convicted and sentenced to transportation to the Caribbean and Americas for theft of a silver hanger (to hand a sword from) and cane from William Taylor, a jeweller and silver smith of Plymouth Dock. Other local jewellers included James Dunsford and George Banks underlining Devonport’s early wealth.

At the start of the 1800s, businesses based in Plymouth Dock included a number of local banks: Glencross, Hodge and Norman (1804) later the Naval and Commercial Bank; Messrs Shiells and Johns; also Messrs Husband and Sons.

The former Goude’s Hotel, renamed the Royal Devonport Hotel in 1824, and the King’s Arms Hotel were owned by Mrs. Goude, in the late 1820s she erected an Assembly Room for balls and concerts at the back of the Kings Arms Hotel.

HMS Achilles capturing a French ship in 1758. Back in Plymouth Dock, after the crew had been paid, local traders were invited on board to sell their wares. The crew were also given 2 days liberty to go onshore and enjoy themselves – adding to the profits of many Landlords in Plymouth Dock!!