

From Cintra to Salamanca: Shifting Popular Perceptions of the War in the Iberian Peninsular, 1808-1812¹

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ABSTRACT

Scholarly attention on how the British public thought about the Peninsular War is limited. This piece examines contemporary letters, caricatures and newspapers to determine whether the public was influenced by the media's presentation of the conflict, or vice versa. It is argued that the Peninsular War was a peripheral concern for the public, which was easily eclipsed by political crises or scandals at home. Furthermore, an undertone of patriotism can be identified throughout the Peninsular War. The British public engaged with an ideal of the war, in which British honour was maintained, and ultimately personified, by Wellington and his army.

'The papers, [...] have exercised a most baneful influence, and to have quite envenomed the public mind. It is too much, to hear the victory of Talavera called into question by the "Times".'² George Jackson's comment may suggest that popular British perceptions of the Peninsular War were solely dictated by the newspapers. However, a more detailed analysis of popular attitudes reveals a more nuanced picture, in which public perceptions both influenced, and were influenced by, media genres.

The impact of events in the Iberian Peninsula on the attitudes of the British public has received remarkably little focused attention in the historiography. Muir's *Britain and the Defeat of Napoleon* demonstrates the way in which the uncertain political situation in Britain was affected by events in the Peninsula.³ Nonetheless, Muir's focus on high politics forces him to make a more limited assessment of the lower echelons of British society. The work of Dorothy M. George and Diana Donald on caricatures,

¹ I would like to thank Karen Robson, Chris Woolgar, David Brown, Emma Clery, Charles Esdaile and Rory Muir for their advice and encouragement, and Rosie White for her tireless support.

² G. Jackson, *The Diaries and Letters of Sir George Jackson*, (ed.) Lady Jackson (London: Richard Bentley, 1872). Diary, 13 September 1808.

³ R. Muir, *Britain and the Defeat of Napoleon* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 217-218.

and Aspinall on newspaper reports, all demonstrate that Ignacio Paz's recent suggestion that considerations of popular opinion are 'impossible' is inaccurate, as both source genres enjoyed widespread circulation and, particularly in the case of caricatures, transcended social boundaries.⁴ However, George, Donald and Aspinall all cover large timescales in their work, and a considerable amount of time has elapsed since their publications. A fresh analysis of both the newspaper reports and the caricatures relating to the Peninsular War would therefore be revealing. This article therefore seeks to address a serious gap in scholarly understanding on the interrelation between British military operations in the Iberian Peninsula and the attitudes of the British public to the struggle.

In seeking to establish the thoughts of civilians, contemporary letters and diaries are an obvious starting point. However, whilst these may suggest that a particular sentiment was commonplace, for an assessment of a broad section of society to be made with any certainty, a wide-ranging source base is required. Articles published in contemporary newspapers have also been examined to identify both what the public consumed, and what the newspaper proprietors wished to tell the public. The *Nineteenth-Century British Library Newspapers* online archive has improved access to a wide range of newspapers, creating a new body of source material. Both the local and national newspapers have been studied in order to make a more thorough assessment of popular opinion. Whilst many of the London-based daily publications were influenced by the political leanings of the newspaper's owners and editor, the regional newspapers were, it will be argued, more inclined to report dispassionately on events. The regional newspapers also allude to interesting undercurrents of patriotism amongst the wider population and provide intriguing evidence to suggest that efforts were made to sustain public interest in the Peninsular War during times when news was scarce, or victories were not forthcoming.

Caricatures from the period will also be examined and in particular the online collections of the Victoria & Albert Museum and the British Museum. It is important to highlight that it is misleading to assume that caricatures were purely the preserve of upper-class men. Although the most elaborate caricatures, etched on copper plates, and intricately coloured by hand, were extremely costly, the emergence of a wholesale caricature business, established by Thomas Tegg in 1807, ensured that large quantities of caricatures were available at the significantly lower price of 1 shilling each.⁵ Caricatures were also visible in public places, with the preserved

⁴ D. M. George, *Hogarth to Cruikshank: Social Change in Graphic Satire* (London: Allen Lane, 1967); D. Donald, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III* (London: Yale University Press, 1996); A. Aspinall, *Politics and the Press, 1780-1850* (London: Home and Van Thal Ltd, 1949); I. Paz, 'British Popular Opinion of the Peninsular War: 1808-1814' www.napoleon-series.org/research/society/c_BritishPopularOpinion.html. [accessed 14/11/2013], para 9 of 81.

⁵ Donald, *The Age of Caricature*, pp. 4-5.

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caricature wall at Calke Abbey, Derbyshire demonstrating how public venues displayed these prints.⁶ Donald has shown that caricature advertising was particularly targeted at billiard rooms, whilst James Gillray's *Very Slippery Weather* depicts a crowd gazing in rapt attention at the window of Mrs Humphrey's caricature shop, in which the latest prints are displayed.⁷ It is noteworthy that Gillray depicted individuals from all classes in the crowd, which contradicts the remarks of Johann Christian Hüttner, made in *London und Paris* in 1806, that Mrs Humphrey's premises was visited exclusively by those of 'high rank [...] and intelligence'.⁸ Cheaper woodcut prints could be viewed in Pubs and Coffee Houses, and Gillray's *A Barber shop in Assize Time* indicates that satirical prints decorated the walls of barber shops.⁹ Engravings show that the latest satires could be perused in brothels and privies.¹⁰ This demonstrates that caricatures were a form of topical, recreational amusement, which anyone with an interest in current affairs engaged with.

When considering the public response, efforts will be made to ascertain the opinions of the middle and, wherever possible, lower classes. However, the focus upon caricatures and newspapers, means that the opinions of the former can be identified with a greater degree of certainty than those of the latter.

It is important to retain a sense of perspective in terms of how representative the views identified were of the entirety of the British public. The lack of opinion polls for this period makes it difficult to be certain if the majority viewpoint that emerges from considering a wide variety of sources is an accurate reflection of how the public felt. The issue is complicated by the fact that newspapers were expensive and could only be consumed by the literate, although consulting caricatures can ameliorate this. Furthermore, analysing the broadside ballads held within the John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera is inconclusive, as the vast majority of focused upon common themes of love, crime and death, whilst comments on contemporary politics are limited.¹¹

Nonetheless, these limitations will not prevent a detailed consideration of an under-researched, yet vital issue for understanding allied success in the Peninsular War. It will be argued that interest to the Peninsular War was closely linked to whether the public felt that the nation's honour was being upheld in the conflict. The pride in

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4; J. Gillray, *Very Slippery Weather* in *The Satirical Etchings of James Gillray*, (ed.) D. Hill (New York: Dover Publications, 1976).

⁸ Donald, *The Age of Caricature*, p. 4.

⁹ P. Anderson, *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture 1790 – 1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 35; James Gillray, *A Barber Shop in Assize Time* (9 January 1811) in Hill (ed), *Satirical Etchings*, p. 94.

¹⁰ Donald, *The Age of Caricature*, p. 19.

¹¹ Anderson, *The Printed Image*, pp. 21-22.

success which resulted from this brought with it greater interest. For the public, events in the Peninsula were often deemed to be of curiosity and interest, but generally were peripheral to events closer to home. While Esdaile has made compelling arguments that the Peninsular War enjoyed a cult following, reference to newspaper reports and caricatures will show that this was overridden by scandals in high society.¹² It will also be demonstrated that the attitudes of the public and the army had a profound impact on one another, with individuals in the army expressing considerable concern about the way in which their efforts were being perceived by the public.

When British troops set sail for the Iberian Peninsula in July 1808 at the start of the Peninsular War, they left behind them a nation in a state of fever-pitch excitement. News of the widespread uprisings by Spanish and Portuguese civilians against the occupying French forces had been greeted with delight on its arrival in June.¹³ As the fleet sailed from Cork, the Cruikshank brothers were creating their latest caricature, which celebrated the popular uprising in Spain, and noted with approval that the British government was offering material and financial assistance to the rebels.¹⁴ *The Morning Post* was representative of the public mood in remarking that 'a finer body of troops never left this country, nor considering [...] the auspicious circumstances of the present time, did ever an army inspire more confident hopes of a successful issue.'¹⁵

It is therefore unsurprising that the news of Wellesley's victory at Vimeiro was greeted with jubilation by the British public. The continued interest in events in the Peninsula had been capitalised on by James Gillray in the caricature *Spanish Patriots attacking the French Banditti*.¹⁶ The manner in which the British contribution to the uprisings in Spain and Portugal is depicted makes this print worthy of detailed analysis. Whilst the majority of this battle scene is occupied with the efforts of the Spaniards in fighting the French, it is interesting that the cannon is being loaded with 'British gunpowder'. The implication of this is that Britain's funding of the Spanish cause will cause the French severe damage. However, more revealing is the solitary British soldier, the only person in this scene in the act of killing. This figure is even more remarkable for the fact that he is stepping over a decapitated soldier, stands on a broken standard bearing the words 'Invincible Legion', and is killing two French

¹² C. Esdaile, 'British Military Intervention in Spain, 1808-1814', public lecture, University of Madrid, November 2008.

¹³ R. Muir, *Wellington: The Path to Victory 1769-1814* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 230.

¹⁴ British Museum [BM], Museum Number 186808087656, Isaac Cruikshank and George Cruikshank, *The Noble Spaniards: or Britannia assisting the cause of freedom all over the world*, 30 July 1808.

¹⁵ *The Morning Post*, 14 July 1808.

¹⁶ BM, Museum Number 185109011261, J. Gillray, *Spanish Patriots Attacking the French Banditti – Loyal Britons Lending a Lift*, 15 August 1808.

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soldiers simultaneously with a single thrust of his bayonet. The actions of the British soldier are indicative of a sense of national superiority, suggesting that one British infantryman equates to two elite French soldiers, and simultaneously alluding to the professionalism of the British troops. However, *Spanish Patriots* was created before news of Vimeiro reached England, and is therefore a statement of expectation and confident belief in the superiority of the British infantryman over his French counterpart.

Unsurprisingly, news of Wellesley's victory resulted in a number of newspaper articles. The *Morning Post* was typical in praising Wellesley for enduring all the privations with his troops, placing himself 'in the hottest part of the action' and claiming that he was 'cheered by the whole line, after the action'.¹⁷ The exultant mood was also captured in a caricature by Charles William *The Last Harvest or British Threshers making French Crops*, in which British soldiers drive fleeing French troops into the sea whilst, in the foreground, Wellesley cuts Junot's pigtails. These actions are unremarkable for a print commemorating a British victory, but the background of the picture shows a number of French soldiers being decapitated by cannonballs, which effectively underlines the image's implicit message of British military dominance over the French. When this is considered alongside the undertone of British superiority identified in *Spanish Patriots*, a definite and consistent underlying sentiment of patriotism is easily identifiable, an attitude which frequently re-emerged in subsequent caricatures on the Peninsular War.

Wellesley's victory at Vimeiro was swiftly followed by the Convention of Cintra, by which Junot's troops were evacuated from Portugal to be repatriated to France by the Royal Navy, complete with their baggage and plunder. In light of the overwhelming confidence that Vimeiro inspired in the continued success of operations in that theatre, the widespread public disgust with the generals who signed the Convention of Cintra is understandable.

Although initial reactions of the British newspapers to Cintra were universally condemnatory, subsequent articles clearly demonstrate the extent to which the content of the London-based dailies was influenced by the political orientation of the owner and editor. Aspinall identified three main categories amongst the British newspapers: those with 'ministerial' leanings; those associated with the Opposition; and those that were independent of either the Tories or the Whigs.¹⁸ This was also true of British newspaper's commentary on the Peninsular War, although it is more accurate to say that the newspaper in the third category were predominantly regional publications. The *Morning Chronicle* sought to discredit Wellesley in an article

¹⁷ *Morning Post*, 8 September 1808.

¹⁸ Aspinall, *Politics and the Press*, p. 201.

which claimed that his reputation was based solely upon the Battle of Assaye, and that 'those who have the best means of knowing' considered Wellesley to have stumbled into battle at Vimeiro.¹⁹ However, the *Morning Chronicle's* efforts backfired when, the following day, the *Morning Post* launched a vehement attack of the *Morning Chronicle's* claims, accusing the publication of lying, seeking to solely place the blame for the Convention of Cintra on 'the hero of Vimeiro', and pointing out that the opposition newspaper would not identify the source of their information.²⁰

It is clear that this exchange was politically motivated, as the *Morning Chronicle* had a lengthy, albeit inconsistent, association with the Whigs, whilst the *Morning Post's* pro-government stance is clear from its continuously optimistic outlook on the Peninsular War.²¹ As Muir highlights, Wellesley enjoyed close links with the Portland ministry, and he was therefore a natural target for the *Morning Chronicle's* acrimony.²²

A report in the *Caledonian Mercury*, an Edinburgh based publication, adds credence to the system for categorising differing newspapers' leanings outlined above. Whilst the *Morning Chronicle* and *Morning Post* were engaged in the squabbling referenced above, *Caledonian Mercury* printed a letter which related how officers who had served under Wellesley in August had presented him with a piece of plate worth 1,000 guineas 'as a testimony of that sincere esteem and respect' which he had inspired.²³ The balanced tone of this extract is noteworthy, although it also demonstrates that Wellesley's success in the Peninsular in August 1808 shielded him from criticism during the ensuing controversy over Cintra, and ensured that he retained the confidence of the public in his ability as a commander.

George Cruikshank's caricature *Whitlock the Second or Another Tarnish for British Valor* joined the outcry by drawing all three generals in prone positions before Junot, presenting him with the terms of the Convention.²⁴ A Portuguese soldier looks on, remarking with disgust: 'Why I thought you came as my friends to protect us & drive out these Thieves [sic], but it seems you intend to protect them with their stolen goods - is this British Honor is this British Valor?' It is interesting that, of all the three members of the British delegation, Wellesley is depicted in a less abject pose, perhaps suggesting that whilst he was implicated in the controversy, and therefore worthy of criticism, his actions for much of the campaign had demonstrated that he was a greater defender of British honour than his superiors. As Muir highlights,

¹⁹ *The Morning Chronicle*, 14 October 1808.

²⁰ *Morning Post*, 15 October 1808.

²¹ Aspinall, *Politics and the Press*, p. 69.

²² Muir, *Wellington*, p. 294.

²³ *Caledonian Mercury*, 13 October 1808.

²⁴ BM, Museum Number 18521217390, G. Cruikshank, *Whitlock the Second or Another Tarnish for British Valor*, 29 September 1808.

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Vimeiro and Cintra placed Wellesley in an uncertain position between hero and villain.²⁵ It is also striking that the caricature expressed its criticism of the Convention in terms of the discredit that it would bring to international perceptions of British honour, not in terms of any strategic damage to the Spanish and Portuguese cause. This focus on the manner in which Cintra undermined the supposed virtues of the nation also provides indirect support for the notion that an underlying patriotism can be identified in the caricatures relating to the Peninsular War.

Equally intriguing, particularly in terms of understanding changes in popular attitudes towards Wellesley, is Charles Williams's caricature *A Portugal Catch for three Voices*, which was published in October 1808. This caricature emerged a matter of weeks after *Whitlock the second*, yet makes no reference to Wellesley, laying the blame solely on Dalrymple: 'T'was You Sir-Hew – T'was Hew. That let the French Escape'.²⁶ This adds further support to the suggestion that Wellesley's success in securing two victories for the British served to partially shield him from criticism, as he had already demonstrated that he was both able and willing to inflict defeat upon the French.

It may appear bold to suggest that these caricatures are so revealing of popular opinion, however it must be remembered that caricatures were a form of popular entertainment. As caricatures were visual, they transcended class and could be enjoyed by the illiterate. Caricaturists were therefore encouraged to produce prints that appealed to the widest possible audience in order to ensure that the business was lucrative, and were pushed towards depicting the majority viewpoint. Despite contacting archives and academics, it has proven impossible to establish the number of print runs for specific caricature. However, by analysing the recurrent themes in the prints, it is still possible to establish popular contemporary attitudes with some certainty. Irrespective of this, it is indisputable that the Convention was a major contributor to the shattering of public belief in the potential of the Peninsula as a viable theatre of war.

The public reaction to the Battle of Corunna and the subsequent evacuation was surprisingly muted, possibly reflecting public exhaustion and disillusionment following Cintra and the devastating success of Napoleon's offensive in November 1808.²⁷ For those newspapers that supported the government, criticism of the campaign would mean implicitly criticising the government for their strategy in the Peninsula, whilst Moore's association with the Opposition meant that the Whig orientated publications were equally disinclined to target the dead general.²⁸ Furthermore, given

²⁵ Muir, *Wellington*, p. 282.

²⁶ BM, Museum Number 186808087699, C. Williams, *A Portugal Catch for Three Voices*, October 1808.

²⁷ C. Esdaile, *The Peninsular War: A New History* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 156.

²⁸ C. Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 353.

that Moore had died in battle, to have criticised him would have been in bad taste. This sombre mood was not visible in political circles though, as the Whigs seized the opportunity to attack the government for its conduct of the war, a fact which demonstrates the divide between popular opinion and the attitude of the ruling classes.²⁹

The public's attitude to the Peninsular War remained subdued throughout 1809, despite news of Wellington's successes. The high levels of interest in the Peninsular War evaporated in the wake of the Corunna campaign, and Muir emphasises the impact that the dishevelled state of the returning troops had on the public, who were suddenly confronted with the shocking realities of the privations that the troops had faced.³⁰ However, this shock did not necessarily equate to pity. John Cooke, an officer himself, recounted how a visibly ill officer was completely ignored by pedestrians as he struggled to make his way through the streets of an unnamed port, and was only assisted by a sympathetic sailor.³¹

This waning interest also reflected in the caricatures of the period. It was not unusual for satirical prints to focus upon scandals in high society, however this insular tendency was particularly apparent in 1809-10. The retreat to Corunna, evacuation of the British forces from Spain, Wellesley's victories at Oporto and Talavera, and his subsequent retreat back to Portugal were completely overshadowed in the caricatures by the scandal surrounding the Duke of York and Mary Anne Clarke. The suggestion that Clarke used her position as the Commander-in-Chief's mistress in order to secure commissions for the highest bidder was the subject of 120 prints, dwarfing the three prints which made passing references to events in the Peninsula.³²

The underlying, albeit peripheral, interest in the British army's campaign in the Peninsular is alluded to by Charles Williams's satirical print *English Curiosity or a Short Answer for John Bull*.³³ This caricature criticises the ministry for failing to adequately celebrate the news of Wellesley's victory at Talavera, as John Bull chastises Castlereagh and Canning: 'I have never heard any of your crackers [tower guns] for the Victorys [sic] in Spain'. This print appears to have enjoyed widespread popularity, as it is an 1811 re-issue of the 1809 original, and is a cheaper black and white version, indicating that this was sufficiently popular to be disseminated amongst a larger, less affluent audience.

²⁹ Esdaile, *The Peninsular War*, p. 156-7.

³⁰ Muir, *Britain and the Defeat of Napoleon*, pp. 80-81.

³¹ J. Cooke, *A True Soldier Gentleman: The Memoirs of Lieutenant John Cooke 1791-1813*, E. Hathaway (ed.), (Swanage: Shinglepicker, 2000), p. 48.

³² M. Wynn Jones, *George Cruikshank: His Life and London* (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 3; George, *English Caricature*, p. 123.

³³ BM, Museum Number: I86808087819, C. Williams, *English Curiosity or A Short Answer for John Bull*, 1809.

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Potentially even more revealing in terms of a growing public appreciation of Wellington's abilities is *Munchausen's Return with the Grand Expedition*.³⁴ Whilst the print is unremarkable in ridiculing the leaders of the Walcheren expedition, it is astonishing to find that the depicted soldier laments that 'we wanted an Abercrombie! A Moore! A Wellesley with us!' This speaks volumes about popular attitudes towards both Moore and Wellesley, as they clearly retained the status of military heroes amongst the public.

Undoubtedly the most intriguing print from 1809 is Thomas Rowlandson's *The Rising Sun or A View of the Continent*, which was published in August. In this cartoon, the sun which rises in the background is labelled Spain and Portugal, representing the only real threat to the peaceful scene which Napoleon has created for himself in Europe.³⁵ The optimism is particularly evident in a poem underneath the print which includes the lines: 'Thus Spain, the source of patriotic worth, (A Rising-Sun of Freedom to the Earth)'. *Rising Sun* is particularly useful in terms of ascertaining popular opinion due to its less elaborate style. Although it is an etching on copper plate, rather than a cruder woodcut engraving, the caricature is less sophisticated than many of its contemporaries. This may be attributable to a cheaper method of production, in order to reduce the price of prints. This argument is given greater validity by the fact that the print was created by Rowlandson, who enjoyed a lengthy and lucrative association with the wholesale caricature vendor Thomas Tegg.³⁶ Furthermore, the inclusion of a poem beneath the image indicates that this print was bridging the divide between broadside ballad and satirical cartoon, a fact which also suggests that it would have appealed to a wider audience. *Rising's Sun's* sub-text can therefore be considered to be a good indicator of popular attitudes towards the Peninsular War in the aftermath of the Battle of Talavera. When considered alongside the messages of the other caricatures produced in 1809, it is clear that whilst the public's reaction to events in the Peninsula may have been overshadowed by the more salacious scandals, the popular attitude was still one of optimism and pride at the success of Wellington's army.

Whilst the glimpses that the caricatures provide into the public's perceptions of the Peninsular War are suggestive of an underlying optimism, and a faith in Wellington's abilities as a general, the attitudes of the newspapers were more varied. The *Morning Chronicle* was schizophrenic in its attitude towards Wellington, occasionally choosing to profess confidence in his ability as a general. However, Michael Roberts suggests

³⁴ BM, Museum Number: 186808087896, Anon, *Munchausen's Return with the Grand Expedition*, September 1809.

³⁵ BM, Museum Number: 186808087849, T. Rowlandson, *The Rising Sun or A View of the Continent*, August 1809.

³⁶ Donald, *The Age of Caricature*, pp. 4-5.

that this was only done in order to contrast Wellington's ability with the ineptitude of the Tory ministry.³⁷

The inconsistency, injustice and malice of the *Morning Chronicle's* remarks on Wellington are demonstrated by its claims on 10 October 1809 that officers were writing home claiming that Wellington had thought only of rapidity of movement, had ignored the issues of supplies, and had allowed himself to be forced into fighting at Talavera.³⁸ Such comments are fabrications. Wellington's concern for supply, frugality with his men's lives, and his lack of interest in accumulating personal glory is well documented.³⁹ However, the extract's reference to officers' letters does point to the emergence of 'croaking' in the British army. Croaking, the practice of disaffected officers writing home with the express intentions of criticizing the way in which Wellington was conducting the campaign, became increasingly prevalent between 1809 and 1811.⁴⁰ By August 1810, the issue had so significant that Wellington was obliged to issue a General Order requesting that officers: 'for the sake of their own reputations, avoid giving opinions upon which they have no knowledge to enable them to form any'.⁴¹

The attitudes of some British officers were actually a significant major cause of the public's despondency at this time, as a series of pessimistic letters which officers had sent home to their families appeared in the regional newspapers. The *Caledonian Mercury* and the *Bury and Norwich Post*, provide some examples of this, printing letters which encouraged the addressee to disregard claims that the Spanish were energetic in the defence of their country, or spoke at length about the army's poor health.⁴² The *Bury and Norwich Post* later proved to be a vocal supporter of Britain's commitments in the Peninsula, a fact which points to how the representations of the Peninsular War in the press shifted over time in tandem with popular opinion.⁴³ Furthermore, the regional newspapers were equally disposed to print letters that lavished praise on Wellington, as the *Hull Packet* demonstrated in December.⁴⁴ This supports the suggestion that the local newspapers were inclined to be more

³⁷ M. Roberts, *The Whig Party, 1807-1812* (London: Macmillan, 1939), p. 134.

³⁸ *The Morning Chronicle*, 10 October 1809.

³⁹ G. Davies, *Wellington and his Army* (Oxford: Blackwell and Mott, 1954), p.16; E. Longford, *Wellington*, 3rd ed. (London: Abacus, 1992), p. 179.

⁴⁰ Z. White, "'Old Nosey' and 'the Scum of the Earth': Assessing the Relationship between Arthur Wellesley and his troops in the Iberian Peninsula, 1808-1814", *Mars and Clio*, No. 38 (December 2013), pp. 79-96 (p. 87).

⁴¹ University of Southampton, Hartley Library, Wellington Papers 9/1/2/4. General Orders, 10 August 1810.

⁴² *Caledonian Mercury*, 30 October 1809; *Bury and Norwich Post*, 6 December 1809.

⁴³ *Bury and Norwich Post*, 14 July 1813; 29 December 1813.

⁴⁴ *Hull Packet*, 12 December 1809.

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dispassionate in their reporting on events in the Peninsular, and therefore bolsters their value in ascertaining popular opinion.

The question of whether the press influenced, or was influenced by, the public is a difficult one. However, everything that appeared in the newspapers, other than Wellington's dispatches via the *London Gazette Extraordinary*, did so either because the editor of the publication thought that their audience would agree with the views expressed, or because the editor was being influenced by the owner of the newspaper. As a result, it is feasible that any widespread shifts in attitude that appeared in the newspapers were the result of business demands compelling the editors to alter their articles in order to stay in line with popular opinion.

Throughout much of 1810, the *Morning Post* and the *Morning Chronicle* maintained their politically motivated attitudes towards the Peninsular War. Between August and October 1810, the *Morning Post* printed letters from readers expressing a patriotic confidence in the British army's ability to inflict defeats upon their French enemies, and cause Napoleon considerable anguish, or attacked those who criticised Wellington for his strategic decisions.⁴⁵ The pro-government newspaper's upbeat tone continued in November, when it produced an article remarking that: 'Lord Wellington has been heard to say that if he could have the choice of any ground to contend with a French Army upon, it should be Torres Vedras – *where he now is!*'⁴⁶

The *Morning Chronicle* was less supportive of Wellington and the government's commitments in the Peninsula, as a series of articles from January 1811 demonstrate.⁴⁷ However, it is also interesting to note that an element of doubt began to appear in the newspapers columns. As the war progressed, and as Wellington's strategic retreat to Torres Vedras was vindicated in early 1811, the criticisms of the Opposition began to lose the limited credence that they had with both the public and parliament.⁴⁸

These shifts in attitude appear to have increased with Massena's retreat in March 1811, an alteration in popular perception which was exemplified by the *Morning Chronicle*'s decision to publish a poem by William Fitzgerald entitled *Wellington's Triumph and Portugal Relieved*.⁴⁹ The poet was clearly a man of significance, as the *Morning Post* also published the poem.⁵⁰ However the example is pertinent for two

⁴⁵ *Morning Post*, 4 August 1810, 13 October 1810.

⁴⁶ *Morning Post*, 15 November 1810, (Newspaper's emphasis).

⁴⁷ *The Morning Chronicle*, 11 January 1811, 25 January 1811.

⁴⁸ M. Roberts, *The Whig Party*, (1939), p. 169-170; C. Emsley, *British Society and the French Wars 1793 – 1815* (London: Macmillan Press, 1979) p. 150.

⁴⁹ *The Morning Chronicle*, 13 April 1811.

⁵⁰ *Morning Post*, 13 April 1811.

reasons. First, that the *Morning Chronicle* should have published a poem which praised Wellington marks a major shift in the newspapers attitudes towards the Peninsular War, particularly given the close associations that the publication had with the Whigs during this period. It is impossible to imagine a similar situation having occurred twelve months earlier, irrespective of the author's credentials. Second, it is clear that there was recognition that the events in the Iberian Peninsula were something to be celebrated, and that Wellington a man to portray as a hero.

Furthermore, *Wellington's Triumph* was not an isolated incident, as letters from the remainder of the year demonstrate. Particularly interesting is a letter written to the *Morning Chronicle's* editor which clearly perceived Britain's commitments in the Peninsula as vital to maintaining hope of overthrowing Napoleon, remarking that Europe was not lost as long as 'we hold Napoleon by the throat in Spain and Portugal'.⁵¹ The anonymity of letters to newspaper editors makes it difficult to be certain whether this view corresponds with a particular aspect of popular opinion. However, once again, the fact that it was published in the *Morning Chronicle* suggests that support for the war had become sufficiently widespread to compel the editor to take a view that was more representative of popular opinion in order to maintain sales.

The attitudes of the regional newspapers appear to have been more balanced during this period, a tendency which is consistent with the tone identified above. However, there is also an indication that in addition to publishing articles that supported the war, regional papers sought to sustain interest in the Peninsular War during times when news was scarce, and also foster a sense of pride in the British army serving under Wellington. The *Hampshire Telegraph* published reports on reinforcements being sent out to the Peninsula, or on the likelihood of a battle being fought.⁵² Similarly the *Hull Packet* published a confident letter 'from Lisbon' describing Wellington's position at Torres Vedras as 'almost impregnable'.⁵³ The *Hull Packet* also echoed the national papers' growing exasperation with those who blindly criticised Wellington, whilst extolling the prowess of the French, publishing a letter expressing such irritation in May 1811.⁵⁴

Nonetheless, political motivations were still obvious amongst some of the regional publications, as the *Liverpool Mercury* demonstrates. The *Liverpool Mercury* was a new publication in 1811, with a definite anti-government agenda. This anti-government stance was clear from the grim satisfaction with which the newspaper reported on

⁵¹ *The Morning Chronicle*, 2 September 1811.

⁵² *Hampshire Telegraph*, 17 September 1810, 28 January 1811.

⁵³ *Hull Packet*, 27 November 1810.

⁵⁴ *Hull Packet*, 14 May 1811.

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Wellington's lack of progress in the latter part of 1811.⁵⁵ Although the newspaper claimed to hold Wellington in high esteem, it is impossible to ignore the glee with which it remarked that his latest dispatches had 'depressed the tones of the Ministerial prints, which professed their confidence that Lord Wellington had some great purpose in hand.'⁵⁶ It is interesting that such a fiercely anti-government publication felt compelled to veil its criticisms. This coincides with the shift in the *Morning Chronicle's* attitude and therefore provides further support for the suggestion that confidence in Wellington amongst the British public was gradually increasing during this period.

However, the statistics for the number of caricatures produced in 1810 serve as a reminder of the extent to which the Peninsular War was considered to be peripheral factor in everyday life. In 1810, just one print made reference to the war, giving a clear indication that the high levels of public interest which had been apparent in 1808 were not re-emerging. George highlights that only 59 prints from 1810 have survived in the British Museum collection, although a further five reside in the Victoria & Albert Museum.⁵⁷ Irrespective of the small number of surviving prints, the fact that just one cartoon refers to the Peninsular War indicates the dearth of popular demand for caricatures on this topic. If popular interest in the war had been higher, caricaturists would have produced a large number of prints to capitalise on this.

Nonetheless, an analysis of the surviving material is still revealing. *Hogarth's Roast Beef Realised* was published in November 1810, and its triumphalism contrasts with disappointment of 1810 campaign. A group of emaciated French soldiers are depicted 'cap in hand' before a group of strong, well nourished, British soldiers, who are about to butcher a slaughtered bull. The ballad which is printed underneath includes the lines: 'Now nimbly the French with their Keen Scenting Nose, To beg for a Slice to the British Lines goes, Who nobly divided the ox with their Foes,'⁵⁸ The image is clearly one that ridicules the plight of the French, although there is also an implicit sense of national pride in the fact that the British soldiers are all immaculately presented, whilst the French are dirty, bedraggled.

In 1811, the number of surviving satirical prints is just 45.⁵⁹ However, the Peninsular War received, proportionately, a far higher level of attention from caricaturists, with four prints devoted to events in the Iberian Peninsula. The satirical prints from this

⁵⁵ See, for example, *Liverpool Mercury*, 20 November 1811.

⁵⁶ *Liverpool Mercury*, 12 July 1811.

⁵⁷ D. M. George, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires Present in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*, (London: HMSO, 1948), VIII, p. xxxii. Subsequently George, *Catalogue*.

⁵⁸ BM, Museum No.: 186808087962, S. W. Forees, *Hogarth's Roast Beef Realised*, 28 November 1810.

⁵⁹ George, *Catalogue*, p. xxvi.

year indicate different levels of engagement. *English Manners and French Prudence or French Dragoons Brought to a Check by a Belvoir Leap*) was published in November 1811, and like *Hogarth's Beef*, sought to ridicule the French. The print is based on a real event as English Hussar Lord Charles Manners escaped from pursuing French cavalymen when his thoroughbred horse leapt over a stream which the French horses could not jump over.⁶⁰ This is such an obscure event that it suggests that fairly detailed knowledge about events in the Peninsula was widespread. Furthermore, the print design is more basic than some of its contemporaries, indicating that it was produced by cheaper methods, and was therefore targeted at those with less disposable income. The fact that it was published by both Mrs Humphreys and Tegg also supports this. The print also exudes a sense of pride in the British army, with the elegant officer equipped with thoroughbred horse, being contrasted favourably with vulgar looking Frenchmen, on poorer quality horses.

Sketch for a Prime Minister or How to Purchase a Peace was published in the journal *The Satirist* in February 1811, and was therefore primarily intended for those with an appreciation not only of who the people in the caricature were, but also why they were significant.⁶¹ This is in contrast to many of the prints from this period, where the person or object at centre of the picture is very obvious. In this caricature Lord and Lady Holland, the latter shrouding Napoleon in her cloak and carrying a paper entitled 'Lord Wellington's recall' attempt to enter the 'Treasury', which is defended by Perceval armed with a blunderbuss. The implication of this print is that Wellington's recall would be disastrous for Britain's interests, a view which the journal consistently expressed throughout the Peninsular War.⁶² This notion arguably reconciles the 'cult following' that Esdaile has identified with the concept that interest in the conflict was a more limited. Although popular opinion may generally have considered Britain's intervention in Spain and Portugal to be beneficial, this would not necessarily have equated to the fever-pitch interest. *The Imperial Nursery or News from the Army* depicted Napoleon recoiling in horror as a courtier presents him with 'Dispatches Massena 10000 slain ran away all'.⁶³ *The Satirist's* message is clearly that Britain's commitments in the Peninsular were causing Napoleon distress, a perception which is consistent with the sub-text of *Sketch for a Prime Minister* identified above. Similarly, *The Satirist* issued scathing rebukes in December 1810 to the 'patriotic scribblers' who suggested that Wellington's returns after the Battle of Busacco were fabricated, and in January 1811 the periodical lambasted those at the

⁶⁰ BM, Museum No.: 186808087988, T. Rowlandson, *English Manners and French Prudence or French Dragoons Brought to a Check by a Belvoir Leap*, 25 November 1811.

⁶¹ BM, Museum Number: 1868080812618, S. De Wilde, *Sketch for a Prime Minister or How to Purchase a Peace*, 1 February 1811.

⁶² *The Satirist*, October 1810, September 1811, October 1812.

⁶³ BM, Museum No.: 1868080812625, Anonymous, *The Imperial Nursery, or News from the Army*, 1 May 1811.

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Morning Chronicle who were 'fabricating the most deplorable account of impending disaster.'⁶⁴ The consistency over a period of months means that we can therefore be fairly certain that this was the opinion of *The Satirist's* target audience at this time. As this is a cheaper black and white print, not a more elaborate, hand painted version, it is likely to have been issued in multiple formats due to its popularity.

Furthermore, an examination of *British Cookery or 'Out of the Frying Pan into the Fire'* indicates that this view was not limited to *The Satirist*. Wellington stands in the 'Grand Kitchen of Europe' holding a frying pan inscribed Portugal, from which Frenchmen leap into the fire which is entitled 'Spain'. General Graham kneels, plying bellows labelled 'British bravery', whilst Napoleon is literally in 'a stew'.⁶⁵ This print clearly seeks to suggest that events in the Peninsula were beginning to have an effect on the global stage.

The testimony of those serving in the Peninsula gives an indication of the value which they placed on the knowledge that their endeavours were receiving the support and approval of those back home in Britain. Army surgeon Charles Boutflower serves as a typical example by remarking that the 'English papers to the 12th instant inform us that the good people are highly delighted with the battle of Albuera'.⁶⁶ It is comments like this that give a true sense of the ability of the newspapers to affect the morale of the troops. The fact that their conduct had received the approval of the public back home was a source of considerable pride, at least for the British officers, a fact which becomes increasingly apparent when considering some of the correspondence from 1812.

The disillusionment which a number of soldiers expressed over what they considered to be lack of zeal from the Spanish alludes to the public perception of the Peninsular War.⁶⁷ Prior to their deployment in the Peninsula the literate of the British army only had access to the same channels of information as the rest of the public, and were therefore influenced by the representation of news. Gavin Daly suggests that the British public retained a romanticised perception of the Peninsular War, closely associated with notions of widespread Spanish and Portuguese zeal, a finding which Paz's work also supports.⁶⁸ This romanticism undoubtedly had its origins in the

⁶⁴ *The Satirist*, December 1810, pp. 578-579; January 1811,

⁶⁵ BM, Museum No: 1868080812624, S. De Wilde, *British Cookery or Out of the Frying Pan into the Fire*, 1 May 1811.

⁶⁶ C. Boutflower, *The Journal of an Army Surgeon During the Peninsular War* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 1997), p. 102. Diary, 28 June 1811.

⁶⁷ G. Simmons, *A British Rifleman* (ed.) Lt-Col Willoughby Verner (London: Greenhill Books, 1986), p. 51. Simmons to his father, 22 February 1810; Boutflower, p. 87. Diary, 22 April 1811.

⁶⁸ G. Daly, *The British Soldier in the Peninsular War: Encounters with Spain and Portugal, 1808 – 1814* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 20-21; Paz, 'British Popular Opinion of the Peninsular War: 1808-1814', para 2 of 81.

widespread public excitement of 1808. It is interesting that representations in the newspapers did not sufficiently match reality. Artillery Officer Thomas Dyneley expressed disillusionment with other aspects of the newspapers' coverage of the Peninsular War, assuring his mother that accounts of the health of the army were completely inaccurate, as sickness was rife.⁶⁹ This raises the question of the extent to which the public sought to engage in an ideal of war when thinking about the Peninsular War, although it is not possible to devote sufficient attention to this here.

The conclusion of the Peninsular War's 1812 campaign can be said to have disappointed dreams to almost the same degree as that of 1808.⁷⁰ The first eight months of the 1812 campaign were a period of inexorable success for Wellington's army, as they captured the fortresses of Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz in January and April respectively, routed a French army at Salamanca in July, and liberated Madrid in August. After this, the longest period of success which the Allies had known during the Peninsular War, many had expected the British Army to be spending the winter of 1812-13 on the banks of the Ebro.⁷¹ The sense of anti-climax was understandable.

Despite this, the confidence of the British public, and their engagement with news arriving from the Peninsula, soared during 1812. The most noteworthy material from the newspapers in 1812 comes from the months associated with the arrival of the news of the Battle of Salamanca, and its aftermath. The *Royal Cornwall Gazette* was typical of the regional newspapers for the detail with which it reported on the public celebrations at the news of Wellington's victory.⁷² However, the *Liverpool Mercury* continued to demonstrate its perpetual pessimism by suggesting, in the middle of August 1812, that reports of the victory at Salamanca were based on fabricated rumours, although once again it is striking that the newspaper professed to have confidence in Wellington and 'the brave men under his command'.⁷³ It appears that despite misgivings about government policy, the editor of the *Liverpool Mercury* still felt it necessary to express a basic patriotic sentiment and feign confidence in Britain's Peninsular Army.

In the national newspapers, sceptics of the Peninsular War shifted from criticising Wellington to attacking the government for not supporting him enough once news of Salamanca demonstrated that the British army was thriving in the Peninsula. The *Morning Chronicle* was particularly symptomatic of this phenomenon, when, in October 1812, it printed letters querying whether Wellington could have been

⁶⁹ T. Dyneley, *Letters Written by Lieutenant-General Thomas Dyneley While on Active service*, (ed.) F. A. Whinyates (London: Ken Trotman, 1984), p. 13. Dyneley to his mother, 26 September 1811.

⁷⁰ C. Knight, *Passages from a Working Life*, 2 vols (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1864), I, pp. 141-142.

⁷¹ Boutflower, p. 159. Diary, 15 September 1812; Knight, *Passages from a Working Life*, vol. I, pp. 141-142.

⁷² *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, 29 August 1812.

⁷³ *Liverpool Mercury*, 14 August 1812.

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invading France that year if the force sent to Walcheren had been redeployed in the Peninsula instead.⁷⁴ As Roberts highlights, such efforts at 'point-scoring' did little to endear the opposition to popular opinion.⁷⁵

However, those who criticised the government's handling of the war were not necessarily sceptics of the Peninsular War's value. Charles Knight confessed to levelling similar accusations at the government in his own newspaper, based in Windsor, although it is clear from the language that he uses when commenting on news from the Peninsula, that he supported the war.⁷⁶ Knight's testimony was potentially influenced by hindsight, as it comes from a memoir, his comments are nonetheless pertinent, as he openly confesses to having entertained 'conflicting opinions' about the Peninsular War.⁷⁷ This points to one of the issues surrounding this study, as it appears that even those living through the period reconciled their conflicting attitudes towards the war. Irrespective of sporadic uncertainties however, popular attitudes to the Peninsular War were becoming increasingly favourable.

The increase in the number satirical prints referring to the Peninsular War in 1812 demonstrates the extent to which levels of public interest in the Peninsular War were closely related to whether the news from the Peninsula gave cause for celebration. *National Pursuits*, a caricature published in April 1812 by Charles Williams is particularly instructive here.⁷⁸ The print depicts a cross roads, from which can be found the paths to 'Glory' 'Pleasure' 'Ruin' and 'Peace'. On the road to 'Glory' three officers gallop wielding sabres inscribed respectively 'Ciudad Rodrigo', 'Barrossa', and 'Merida', all of which were British victories which had occurred within the last year. This caricature serves as the perfect metaphor for the argument which has been made that whilst the Peninsular War was the subject of peripheral interest, primarily for the manner in which it proved to be a source of glory, it was subsumed and often overshadowed by more pressing political crises or scandals.

The liberation of Madrid appealed to William's imagination, and he issued two caricatures in September 1812 which are incredibly revealing about popular attitudes to the Peninsular War. See *the Conquering Hero Comes* depicted Wellington riding into Madrid to the joy and adulation of the city's inhabitants.⁷⁹ This is the only print to have acknowledged the contributions of the Spanish to the Peninsular War since 1808, although it is clear that the primary intention was to ridicule the French, as

⁷⁴ *The Morning Chronicle*, 30 October 1812.

⁷⁵ Roberts, *The Whig Party*, p. 151.

⁷⁶ Knight, *Passages from a Working Life*, vol. I, (1864), pp. 139, 141-142.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁷⁸ BM, Museum Number: 186808088005, C. Williams, *National Pursuits*, 1 April 1812.

⁷⁹ BM, Museum Number: 19480214783, C. Williams, *See the Conquering Hero Comes, Sound your Trumpet, Beat your Drum*, 14 September 1812.

they are shown being chased away by women armed with brooms. This clearly denigrates the fighting prowess of the French, and the parallels with *British Threshers* and *Hogarth's Beef Realised* are obvious.

More revealing in terms of popular attitudes to Wellington at this time is *King Joey Taking Leave of his Capital*, Williams's second print from September 1812, in which Wellington gallops into Madrid chasing Joseph Bonaparte, King of Spain, before him. Wellington proclaims: 'Thus shall the hand of Wellington arrest all sacrilegious, upstart, Tyrannic Monarchs, and restore to the injured their rights and Lawfull Sovereign!'⁸⁰ The rhetoric is significant, as it indicates how the public perceived the struggle in the Peninsula, given the influence of business demands on caricature production. Such consistency in the representations of war indicate the extent to which representations of Joseph's evacuation from the capital were closely linked to romanticised depictions of Wellington as the upholder of Britain's honour and commitment to overthrowing Napoleon.

A passing comment made by Judge-Advocate Larpent in his journal about a satirical print from England which he saw in the Peninsular is also noteworthy. It is clear from Larpent's description that this is a print in the style of *Hogarth's Beef*, but it is impossible to base any substantial argument on this remark, as no other references to caricatures in the Peninsula have been found.⁸¹ It nonetheless points to two elements which affect the arguments made in this piece. The first is the material that once existed, but has not survived the passage of time, as strenuous efforts have failed to locate this print. The second relates to what examples such as this would potentially reveal about the interplay between public and military opinion. It is natural to wonder how the troops responded to the caricatures, how frequently images such as this reached the Peninsula, and how they were consumed.

Also of interest, is *The Effects of the Arrival of French Eagles in England*, published in *The Satirist* on 1 October 1812, which was one of a number of prints from the Peninsular War which indicates how the public celebrated the news of Wellington's victories.⁸² The explosion of joy in the aftermath of Salamanca, is effectively captured by the depictions of London's illuminations and cheering crowds which greeted the news of Salamanca.⁸³ However, to one side, a group of men, representing the four nations of the United Kingdom toast the 'everlasting glory' of 'Wellington and his brave fellows'. It is difficult to determine whether the reference to the four nations of the Union

⁸⁰ BM, Museum Number: 186808088022, C. Williams, *King Joey Taking Leave of his Capital*, i.e. *Madrid Relieved from Robbers*, September 1812.

⁸¹ G. Larpent, *The Private Journal of Judge Advocate Larpent*, 3rd ed (London: Richard Bentley, 1854), p. 23.

⁸² BM, Museum Number: 1868080812679, W. Brooke, *The Effects of the Arrival of the French Eagles in England*, 1 October 1812.

⁸³ R. Muir, *Salamanca: 1812* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 232-233.

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was representative of the popular mood in all four countries. The implication is that the nation was united in support for the Peninsular War, but it is nonetheless intriguing that *The Satirist* felt the need to highlight this.

This is not to suggest that patriotic support for the war needed to be impressed upon the public however. An example of this from the higher echelons of 'popular' opinion is the response to Anna Barbauld's poem *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, in which Barbauld had suggested that the British Empire was destined to collapse due to the pressures of funding the war against Napoleon.⁸⁴ Barbauld was condemned by *Quarterly Review* for the lack of patriotism displayed in her work, although Emma Clery has shown that there were political motivations to these attacks.⁸⁵ Nonetheless, the fact that critics expressed their censures in such terms is interesting, and coincides with the underlying patriotism which was visible in caricatures throughout the war.

A number of letters written by soldiers in 1812 reinforce the notion that the British public's perceptions of the war were a source of interest and concern for the officers serving in the Peninsula. George Hennell, who was sufficiently zealous to travel to the Peninsula at his own expense to volunteer, was delighted that his letters received approval from his friends and family: 'to have the good wishes of wise and good people is exceedingly gratifying, but to have their good opinion is sterling worth'.⁸⁶ John Freemantle, an officer in the Coldstream Guards, likewise remarked that 'it is very gratifying for us to see that [...] at last the good people in England do seem to give due credit to the exertions'.⁸⁷ The sentiments visible in these comments can also be identified in a comment by Captain William Bragge of the 3rd Dragoons reflecting on the Burgos retreat: 'I regret excessively having been obliged to have to recourse to this measure, which has disappointed the expectations of England', a sentiment which was echoed by Boutflower.⁸⁸

Dyneley's letters also provide an interesting aside to his sister, whom he seeks to reassure her about a concern she had: 'You ask me why his lordship [Wellington] wrote so dolorous a dispatch. Because, I suppose, it was evident to him and to every drummer in the army that we were in a most perilous situation, and he wish to

⁸⁴ A. Barbauld, *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/barbauld/1811/1811.html> [accessed 9/8/2014], Lines 1 to 6.

⁸⁵ *Quarterly Review*, 7 (June 1812), p. 309; E. Clery, 'The Peninsular Campaign and Cultural Propaganda: The Case of *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*', 5th Wellington Congress, University of Southampton, 5–7 April 2013.

⁸⁶ Hennell, p. 27. Hennell to his brother, 5 August 1812.

⁸⁷ Freemantle, p. 124. Freemantle to his uncle, 13 September 1812.

⁸⁸ W. Bragge, *Peninsular Portrait: The Letters of Captain William Bragge Third (King's Own) Dragoons*, ed. by S. A.C. Cassels (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 82. Bragge to his father, 26 November 1812; Boutflower, pp. 167-168. Diary, 6 November 1812.

prepare your minds for the worst'.⁸⁹ The idea that Wellington had written a dispatch for the benefit of popular opinion is fanciful, as concern for public morale would never have caused him to alter his comments when writing in an official capacity.⁹⁰ Nonetheless, this example, and the others which precede it, provide an interesting indication of the interplay between the thoughts of the public and the army, and provide fleeting glimpses as to how those with loved ones serving in the Peninsula responded to the news that came home.

In conclusion, it is clear that whilst enthusiasm for the war was widespread, it was also more peripheral than has often been recognised. The scarcity of references in the caricatures to the Peninsular War has highlighted that interest in the war was not consistently high. It is revealing that social scandals could eclipse the struggle against Napoleon. Periods of high interest were generally associated with key events, such as the liberation of Madrid or the Convention of Cintra. Nonetheless, with the exception of the caricatures referring to Cintra, the British satirical prints were overwhelmingly positive in their representations of the Peninsular War. As business demands ensured that caricatures were targeted at a broad cross section of society and popular opinion, and analysis of the prints reveals consistent undertones of patriotism and satisfaction with the conduct of the British Army in the Peninsula, it can be concluded that a level of widespread support for the war permeated all levels of society.

Representations in the newspapers were more varied, and in the case of the London-based dailies, were influenced by the political leanings of the owner and editor. At a local level, newspaper reports shifted in synchronicity with public opinion, albeit with occasional exceptions based on political agendas. Above all, the letters sent to editors of the regional newspapers by the public reveal the extent to which, as the conflict progressed, criticism of the war was increasingly considered to be unpatriotic and unwarranted. Overall, it emerges that the British public were generally content with the war, albeit with politically-orientated exceptions. Wellington's ability to secure successive victories both on campaign and in battle resulted in increasing confidence in him, with a corresponding rise in efforts to present him as a British hero, defending the cause of liberty, and demonstrating Britain's martial prowess.

⁸⁹ Dyneley, p. 61. Dyneley to his sister, 20 December 1812.

⁹⁰ C. M. Woolgar, 'Writing the Despatch: Wellington and official communication', in *Wellington Studies II*, (ed.) C. M. Woolgar (Southampton: Hartley Institute, 1999), pp. 3-4.