

The Cruising Voyages of William Dampier, Woodes Rogers and George Shelvocke and their Impact.

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ABSTRACT

The thesis proposes that the cruising voyages of Dampier, Woodes Rogers and Shelvocke were not, as David J Starkey suggests, 'an anachronistic activity' of minor historical significance, but were of considerable contemporary importance and provided a model of British maritime endeavour that was to be widely disseminated and through literature had an enduring impact on the public imagination. They were more successful in terms of financial return and more impressive as maritime achievements than has previously been recognised.

The voyages are placed in the historical context of South Sea exploration and plunder beginning with Drake's 1578 circumnavigation and ending with Anson's 1740 expedition. The purposes, origins, costs and rewards of each voyage are investigated using HCA, Chancery and East India Company records (a number of which are cited for the first time), contemporary newspapers, manuscript and printed first-hand narratives. Such records confirm how each voyage embodied - in its attention to detailed plans, reliance on written agreements, constitutions and governing councils - British commercial values. A full account of the range and scale of commercial investment involved supports the argument that the voyages were of considerable contemporary interest and significance. Contemporary responses to the printed accounts are recorded and there is analysis of how they link to new and rapidly evolving literary forms.

The total financial rewards of the three voyages were considerable – amounting, at a conservative estimate, to more than £240,000 (£17.65 million in today's money). They were not repeated partly because the risks appeared to outweigh the potential rewards, but largely because efforts to take a share of South American wealth began to focus on a state solution involving a large naval force. Nevertheless the voyages and the narratives that followed provided an important contribution to the debate – central to British foreign policy during the first half of the eighteenth century – over how to exploit the 'inexhaustible fountain of gold' that was Spanish South America. They influenced trade and economic policy through their impact on the South Sea Company and naval strategy by providing models for Anson's expedition.

They were also, through their published narratives, instrumental in the development of a new literary form (the novel) and the genesis of an enduring literary genre (maritime fiction). They had a wide and long-lasting influence on English literature, its forms and styles. *Robinson Crusoe* (and therefore the whole novel form), *Gulliver's Travels* and maritime literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have their origins in the books of Dampier, Rogers, and Shelvocke.

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