

THE ACADIAN EXILES IN ENGLAND

1756 - 1763

By DOROTHY VINTER

THE fate of the twelve hundred Acadians deported from N. S. to Virginia in 1755 "without any funds for their maintenance"¹ has, I believe never been fully investigated. In the following year they were shipped to England, but unfortunately official references to them for the next seven years are rather scrappy and intertwined with those of ordinary prisoners-of-war. The following short notes have mainly been derived from entries in the Minutes of the Admiralty Commissioners (Sick and Hurt Board) in the Public Record Office, Chancery Lane, London, from those of the Medical Department of the same Board, and from a local Bristol newspaper.

From these sources it is clear that the Acadians were sent to England in four shiploads of approximately three hundred each, and were landed at Liverpool, Portsmouth, Falmouth and Bristol.² The "Virginian Packet" landed the Bristol contingent on June 26th, 1756 "a great part of whom were women and children."³ The Portsmouth group of 296 landed there from the ship "Bobby" (Goodrich Boust, Master) on June 23rd; the snow — "Fanny Bovey" — with 220 on board arrived at Falmouth on June 22nd. The latter were only given 5d. a day instead of the official 6d. plus lodging money and for this bit of sharp practice the agent was reprimanded.⁴ On June 30th 243 neutrals were landed at Liverpool.⁴

I will take the Bristol group first since there is much more information about it in the Admiralty papers than about the other three.

The Government of Virginia had agreed with the Master of the "Virginian Packet" that the cost of a passage to Bristol should be £5., including food up to the day of arrival.⁵ (Six of the Acadians worked their passage and were paid £2. each).⁶ After being towed up the winding River Avon into the very heart of the city, the ship remained alongside Bristol Quay for three nights and days until lodgings could be found for the

1. Collections of the Nova Scotia Histor. Soc. Vol. XXII (1933).
2. Adm/E.16/June, 1756.
3. Felix Farley's Bristol Journal, June 26th, 1756.
4. Adm/E.16/June, 1756.
5. Adm/F.14/Nov. 29th, 1756.
6. Ibid.

unhappy exiled peasants.⁷ This proved a difficult problem for their arrival had been almost unexpected. Although the Admiralty had sent Mr. Louis Guigner, one of the two Commissioners of the Sick and Hurt Board, to Bristol to make what provision he could for them,⁸ the ship arrived only two days later. As neutrals, they were not allowed to be treated as ordinary prisoners or to be confined strictly in existing prisons.⁹ They had therefore to stay on board until lodgings of a different kind could be found.

Guigner first tried to billet them in private houses in the village of Knowle, about a mile and a half outside the city. This proved impossible. He only offered 6d. a week for their lodging and "there was a very strong aversion among all the inhabitants to take these poor wretches in." Another difficulty was that "being deemed His Majesty's subjects," should they be quartered in Bristol, they might thereby gain a settlement and become a burden upon the Overseers of the Poor in the parish to which they were sent. Guigner had to convince the Mayor, Henry Dampier, that this could not happen because they would be maintained at Government expense. The Mayor capitulated so Guigner, having failed in his search for private lodgings, obtained the Admiralty's consent to rent "several large warehouses built round an airy and spacious court in Guinea Street (a back street at the extreme end of the town)."

He found that most of the neutrals had brought their own beds and bedding with them, so he hurriedly ordered some loads of straw for the mattresses and some iron bars for the fireplaces. With this scanty preparation he had to be content; there was no time for more. The exiles' sea-chests were landed and sent on ahead by waggon from the ship to the warehouses. (Some were missing and believed lost but arrived later). The three hundred newcomers were then mustered on deck, and marched under guard to Guinea Street "without any hindrance, some few Constables attending to keep the Mob in order, which was very numerous."¹⁰

Before his return to London, Guigner issued two simple instructions. They were always to be indoors by eight o'clock every evening and "were not to be found drunken," otherwise punishment would follow. "They promised to behave well, as I find they did in their passage," (i.e. across the Atlantic).

7. Felix Farley's Bristol Journal,
June 26th, 1756.

8. Adm/F/13/June 23rd., 1756.

9. *ibid.* July 7th., 1756.

10. *ibid.* June 26th., 1756.

He provided them with three days' pay, i.e. 6d. a day for adults and 3d. for each child under seven years old. Their ordinary food such as meat, bread, cheese, butter, peas and beer, was issued to them free, ¹¹ as well as firewood, and for these rations they were on the same footing as military and naval prisoners-of-war. For anything extra, as well as for their clothing, they were supposed to pay from the Government's scanty allowance.

After their first week in Bristol, the Acadians "appeared pleased with their situation."¹² They were on shore and under shelter at last, with some of their own possessions around them.

But several of them already seemed ailing and a house adjoining the "Ketch" tavern at Knowle was hastily converted into a make-shift hospital. Guigner inspected it, said he "found it very sweet and clean and the people thoroughly satisfied with their treatment."¹³ It was equipped with hospital "cradles," i.e. wooden bedsteads with a box attached to the head of each to hold dressings and medicines. Guigner ordered that the "cradles" should be well spaced out, that the mattresses should be filled with extra straw and were "to weigh upwards of 21 lbs. each." He had arranged that Dr. Davies, the Admiralty surgeon for the sick British seamen in Bristol Port, was to be in charge of all the sick Acadians. Guigner himself thought that most of these were suffering only from sickness and colds brought on by the sea-voyage, and that Dr. Davies' prescribed diet of broth and water-gruel, good nursing and wholesome air "will soon recover them completely."¹⁴

On June 30th Guigner, his work in Bristol done, returned to London and the local Admiralty agent, Anthony Swymmer, was left in charge, with Dr. Davies to deal with all medical problems.

Alas for Guigner's optimism and official complacency! Only three days after his departure there were between sixty and seventy people ill, one child lay dead and an old woman was dying.¹⁵ A week later Swymmer reported the first case of smallpox which was quickly moved to the hospital already provided. Another case occurred on July 14th, two more on the following day and seven more on July 19th, one of whom was not expected to recover.¹⁶

The relations of the smallpox patients immediately sacrificed their own beds and mattresses, and asked that they might

11. Adm/99/38 Med.Dept. Minutes, Dec., 1762.

12. Adm/E.16 June, 1756.

13. *ibid.*

14. *ibid.*

15. Adm/Med.Dept. 99/30 July 2nd., 1756.

16. *ibid.*

have the whole of the Government agents allowance for food so that they might buy necessaries for the sick and dying. This plan received Admiralty approval.¹⁷

On July 28th a house in Spring Gardens near Guinea Street was rented to take an additional ten patients and two nurses, but even this proved insufficient. By August 7th the disease was spreading so rapidly that instead of the difficulty and expense of obtaining yet a third house, the surgeon and the agent "finding nothing will stop the contagion" were obliged to clear out one of the warehouses for the reception of further smallpoxes cases. The Admiralty gave reluctant consent but ordered that the patients "must be kept as far distant from the well as the nature of the place will admit."¹⁸

It is fairly evident that the exiles must have brought the infection with them or possibly have contracted it on board ship. The Liverpool group also had a large number of smallpox cases, for by August 16th sixty had recovered, five had died and more deaths were expected. They had been ill since June 30th with "fever and scurvy" and some had seemed likely to die even then. They were very short of clothing but when some was asked for from the Admiralty, the reply was:—

"No cloaths are to be provided but 10/— allowed for funerals."¹⁹

Smallpox spread with terrifying rapidity, and by August 9th the Admiralty had received news from the Sick and Hurt Commissioners that among the four groups of neutrals in England there were now 200 ill.²⁰ The surgeons attending them were of the opinion that "it will take its progress through the greater part, if not all of them." It is clear they expected about 800-1000 cases but fortunately the number proved much smaller. The necessary medicines were ordered, nurses were employed and the surgeons were promised "an extra allowance for their trouble."

By this time news of the "Sick neutrals" had reached France and a letter complaining of "the sickly and unhappy condition of the neutrals" had been sent to Charles Fox, the Secretary of State. He forwarded its contents to the Admiralty with instructions "That if anything can be added to what has already been done for their relief, that you cause it to be set about immediately, sparing no expense that may contribute to their recovery and well-being."²¹

17. *ibid.*

18. *ibid.* August 7th.

19. *ibid.* June 30th.

20. Adm/F.13/Aug. 9th., 1756.

21. Adm/E.17/Sept. 15th., 1756.

To discover the true state of affairs and whether the complaints from France were justified, the Admiralty sent their chief surgeon, Dr. Maxwell, to Bristol to investigate. He accused both Swymmer and Davies of disgraceful neglect. To a charge of filthy conditions in the warehouses the former replied that "he had let the neutrals out to air themselves and had borrowed tubbs for them to wash their linen, at which they were very satisfied and pleased."²² Davies was threatened with dismissal for neglecting his medical duties and for not forwarding proper returns of the number of women and children for whom he was responsible.²³ He set about his defence and quoted a letter from the Revd. Dr. Josiah Tucker, the Vicar of St. Stephens. This evidence stated that Lady Exerkine (possibly Erskine but I have not been able to trace either of the names) and other ladies had attended the women every day "in order to receive the information to be communicated to women." Dr. Tucker continued that "several physicians and surgeons had been consulted and had agreed that nothing could be done by way of physic while so many lay wallowing in the same place, infecting each other with their mutual stench and effluvia."²⁴

In spite of the Dean's support, Davies was later deprived of his post and was replaced by Dr. Fuchs²⁵ who also had charge of the prisoners-of-war in the newly built prison at Knowle.

For Dr. Davies' misdoings there may be at least the excuse of overwork. The terrifying rapidity with which the disease spread during his first two months of office and the lack of proper hospital provision was enough to daunt the most experienced physician. He was young, yet had to care for patients in many scattered places; smallpox cases in Guinea Street and at the "Ketch," scurvy in the garden-house in Spring Gardens, other patients, probably military prisoners, in Temple Street and at the "Gun and Gunner" and a bad outbreak of fever, possibly typhoid,²⁷ in Knowle Prison where by November 1756 there were seven hundred French and Spanish prisoners-of-war. Too much was demanded of him; his failure was apparent but his task an almost impossible one.

By October the neutrals had nearly all recovered. They were "tolerably well" except the last fifteen smallpox patients, one of these a baby who had been put out to nurse.²⁸ All had

22. Adm.99/32/Sept. 1st., 1756.

23. Adm.99/33/Dec. 3rd., 1756.

24. Adm.99/32/Sept., 1756.

25. Adm.99/34/Dec., 1756.

26. Adm.99/33/Nov., 1756.

27. *ibid.*

28. Adm.99/32/Sept., 1756.

however begun to suffer badly from cold. Many were in need of clothing and for them Guigner made this spirited appeal: —

“Many neutral French now in England are become destitute of shoes and stockings, and some of them of other clothing. They are liable to suffer much by the severity of the weather and the healths of many of them are endangered. Wherefore we would humbly propose to their Lordships, as well as from a principle of saving to the Crown (as the care of them while sick is attended with great expense) as out of humanity to those poor people, whether it may not be very proper to purchase and distribute among them such shoes, stockings etc. as they may stand in absolute need of.”²⁹

Five months later, Guigner made another appeal, both for an additional 3d. a day and for still more clothing, “their little stock of money being expended and the few cloaths they brought with them being worn out. As their situation does not admit of their working, we humbly recommend them to Their Lordships as real objects of compassion.”³⁰

It was not only on the medical side that trouble arose. Anthony Swymmer, the agent, had also a heavy burden of responsibility as great as that of Dr. Davies. Swymmer’s first problem was to find prison-space for the naval prisoners-of-war; next, to provide enough food for both these and for the “neutrals” out of his Government allowance. Costs were rising rapidly and there was great scarcity and distress. Early in January 1757 when wheat was 3/2d. a bushel, there were hunger riots, with frantic mobs searching the Somersetshire mills for flour,³¹ whilst the Welsh and Wiltshire colliers also rose in revolt owing to hunger.³² In Bristol a month or two earlier, rich citizens were buying wheat and rice “selling it to the advantage of the poor” or giving it away in charity.³³

In spite of these conditions, 2d. a week had been deducted by the Admiralty from Swymmer’s allowance for the prisoners’ food, which also included that for the “neutrals.” Driven to dishonesty, Swymmer began either to send in no returns at all or else to forward false claims, making no deduction for any prisoners or neutrals who had died or escaped. In January 1757 his accounts were challenged.³⁴ He defended himself by trying to blame his clerk’s work, then maintained that his clerk, turnkey

29. Adm.F/14/Nov. 14th., 1756.

30. Adm.F/15/April 13th., 1757.

31. Felix Farley’s Bristol Journal.
Jan., 1757.

32. *ibid.* Nov., 1756.

33. *ibid.* May 28th., 1757.

34. Adm.99/34 (Med. Dept.) Jan., 1757.

and steward were all ill, but it was not long before the truth was discovered.³⁵

He had also invented a fictitious contractor for the purchase of butter and cheese. In reality this was Mr. Smith, the publican of the "Ketch" at Knowle who had, one feels, probably been doing well for himself by providing a hospital with two wards at the inn.³⁶

The Admiralty, finding that Swymmer "had entirely neglected his duty," discharged him and replaced him by Henry Dampier.³⁷ The latter only held the post of agent for a year for in April 1758 he too was "found guilty of the greatest mismanagement," and was deprived of his office. Until the end of the war in 1763, Edward d'Ans seems to have done much better.³⁸

For the rest of the war years the four small groups of Acadians remained in England, being allowed the same parole limits as the foreign officers who were prisoners-of-war. One Acadian escaped from Bristol and was recaptured. As a punishment he was put with the naval prisoners, and a plan was made to "remove the Neutrals to one of the towns upon the Severn where a proper guard can be kept over them,"³⁹ but this was never carried into effect.

In April 1761 two Acadians in Southampton, Allain le Blanc and Joseph Babin, asked permission to come to Bristol to visit their relations. This was refused "as they might make the worst use of such indulgences, especially as being neither considered nor treated as prisoners of war, they enjoy more privileges than other prisoners."⁴⁰ The group to which these two belonged had originally been landed at Portsmouth⁴¹ and was first quartered at the nearby village of Forton near Gosport in "a very bad barn where there is hardly a chimney and no water to be had." A letter of protest signed amongst others by Simon, Francois and Joseph Granger, Baptiste and Olivier Daire and Jean Terriost, was sent to the Admiralty and this, having described the barn, continued: —

"There are a great number of sick persons and also young people of both sexes all together in a lodging where there is neither separation nor distinction of rooms."⁴²

35. Adm 99/35/Feb. 1757.

36. Adm.99/30/July, 1756 and Adm.99/32/Sept., 1756.

37. Adm.E/20/April, 1757.

38. Adm.E/24/April, 1758.

39. Adm.E/21/Sept. 6th., 1757.

40. Adm.F/21/April 3rd., 1761.

41. Adm.E/16/June 23rd., 1756.

42. Ibid. July 7th., 1756.

As a result of this letter, it seems that the group was sent to Southampton and there lodged on two floors in the "Great Tower" which had been offered by Prince Isenberg, the Commander of the Hessian Regiment, who no longer needed it as a powder magazine.⁴³ There is, I believe, no further mention of this group until July 1758 when they asked to be allowed to do some paid outside work, the repair of the turnpike road leading to Winchester. To this the Admiralty consented, "provided the people of the country will permit it."⁴⁴ There are no further details of this group until November 1762, when their numbers were found to be reduced to 220 (88 men, 80 women, 29 boys, 23 girls).⁴⁵

The Falmouth contingent of 220⁴⁶ arrived on June 22nd 1756 on board the snow "Fanny Bovey" and were taken to makeshift quarters, a large barn at a farm called Upper Kergilliac, near Penrhyn. The building had been used "in the last war" (i.e. War of the Austrian Succession 1740 - 1748) and was rented again for the same purpose. The neutrals were still there in October 1756, declaring themselves "well situated except that they wanted barrs to their chimneys and requested that a priest should attend them." They expressed themselves as very willing to work but "nothing relating to the employing of such people had come before the Board."⁴⁸ When M. de la Rochette, the French Ambassador's secret agent, visited them in December 1762, they were no longer in the barn but lodging in middle-class houses ("maisons bourgeoises"). The younger ones among them had been apprenticed to various unspecified trades and had adopted English ways. They had lost some of their feelings of allegiance to France and for this reason de la Rochette feared lest they should betray him. "The pay of 6d. a day had been stopped," or so the Frenchman stated, and "those without a trade lived by borrowing, the widows and orphans begged."⁴⁹ This may be the exact truth, but there is no letter of protest or any reference to special hardship at Penrhyn in the Admiralty papers.

Since 1758 and the discharge of the two agents for dishonesty and mismanagement, things had evidently gone more smoothly in Bristol. The Acadians there were still in the large warehouses

43. Ibid July 7th, 1956.

44. Adm.E/24/July 20th., 1758.

45. Adm.F/23/Nov., 1762.

46. E/16/June, 1756.

47. Adm.F/13/June & Sept., 1756.

48. Adm.99/32/Oct. 4th., 1756.

49. Canadian Archives Vol. 11, (1905).
Page 150.

round the courtyard in Guinea Street. The men had been allowed to do some outside work but an accident had occurred so that for a time it was forbidden, to be resumed however in May 1761.⁵⁰ Meanwhile the women had started a small linen-weaving industry in one of the warehouses and here they manufactured "coarse sheeting, which was very serviceable."⁵¹ By the time they sailed for France they had overcome the prejudice shown on their arrival seven years before: "During their abode here by their industry and civil deportment they have gained the esteem of all."⁵²

In November 1762 an "Abstract of French Neutrals" was asked for from all four towns and forwarded by M. Guigner, the Admiralty Commissioner, as follows:

<i>Port</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>
Southampton;	88	80	29	23	220
Liverpool	95	76	19	25	215
Bristol	56	67	14	15	152
Falmouth	61	69	13	11	154 ⁵³

If these figures are correct, the deathrate must have been extremely high. The numbers as given in English papers on their arrival had been: — Southampton 296, (of Liverpool I can find no record) Bristol 300, Falmouth 220. De la Rochette's figures do not tally with these. He gives: — Southampton originally 340, was reduced to 219, Liverpool originally 336 had become 224, Bristol's 300 had become 184, and the Falmouth group, originally 220 had gone down to 159.⁵⁴

For the following March 1763 an interesting list from Bristol has been preserved. It shows: —

<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>			<i>Under 12</i>	<i>Under 12</i>
<i>over 20</i>	<i>over 20</i>	<i>20 - 12</i>		<i>born</i>	<i>born</i>
		<i>M.</i>	<i>F.</i>	<i>elsewhere</i>	<i>in England</i>
		<i>M.</i>	<i>F.</i>	<i>M.</i>	<i>F.</i>
37	42	20	23	7	19
				2	10
				<i>Total 160.</i> ⁵⁵	

When asked where they wished to go at the end of hostilities. the Bristol group took the lead and replied that they wished to return to Nova Scotia, to have their possessions restored and indemnities paid for their losses, and to be allowed the free exercise of their religion. If these demands were granted they promised in return to bind themselves by an oath of fidelity and neutrality not to bear arms against any warlike nation whatsoever. Lastly

50. Adm.E/32/May 19th., 1761.

51. Felix Farley's Bristol Journal, May 21st., 1756.

52. *ibid.*

53. Adm.F/23/Nov., 1762.

they suggested: "If we could be exempted from having any fort built among our habitations, we should look upon that as an essential point of happiness."⁵⁶ (The original was, of course, in French but the above is taken from the contemporary translation provided for the Admiralty).

The reply continued: — "These, Gentlemen, are our true sentiments. We ardently desire they may be espoused by your Authority; in default we beg that time may be given us to choose our lot elsewhere."

The three other groups all desired to be on the same footing as Bristol,⁵⁷ but later all four changed their minds owing to the influence of M. de la Rochette who had been sent secretly by the Duc de Nivernois to visit them and to outline a subsidized scheme for their emigration to France. The promise of free food and tobacco for three months, gifts of animals and farm implements, and 50 years' exemption from taxes proved too great a temptation. They resolved to accept and to be subjects of France, but the whole scheme subsequently ended in disaster.⁵⁸

In May 1763 occurs, I believe, the last English entry about the Acadians. "Today the neutrals or Canadians, brought here soon after the beginning of the war, were sent in waggons to Shirehampton to be shipped for home. They sailed first to Southampton on the frigate "La Dorothée" and landed at St. Malo, their numbers now being 175."⁵⁹ (Shirehampton was a small port at the mouth of the Avon from which the larger ships sailed to avoid the winding course of the river downstream from Bristol).

Two months earlier there appear to have been 184 Acadians in Bristol and I am unable to account for the missing 9. They may have married Englishmen, or had not summoned enough courage to face life in yet another unknown country. It is possible that they stayed with a view to returning later to Nova Scotia.

Whether there are any families of Acadian ancestry in England I cannot tell you. Southampton, Bristol and Cornish Archives, with many church registers, have yielded few clues as yet. But having been lucky enough to come across some hitherto unrecorded facts, who knows? Perhaps one day other evidence may come to light.

54. Memoire from the Duc de Nivernois.
March, 1763.

55. Adm.F/24/March 2nd., 1763.

56. *ibid.* Jan. 4th., 1763.

57. *ibid.*

58. Canadian Archives Vol. 11, P. 150.

59. Felix Farley's Bristol Journal,
May 21st., 1763.