

FROM HAMPSHIRE MERCHANT TO LORD OF THE MANOR: THE RISE OF AARON MOODY

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ABSTRACT

This paper follows the business activities of Aaron Moody, 1749–1829, born Whiteparish, Wiltshire, and inhabitant of, successively, Romsey, Southampton and Portchester. Corn factoring was his core activity but he also traded in a range of other food-stuffs, in timber and horses. A succession of contracts with the Navy's Victualling Yard at Portsmouth are investigated as are his forays into food processing, notably his partnership with the industrial pioneer Christopher Potter, the first of the 'cheap bakers'. His association with political radicals under the banner of free trade brought him into conflict with Southampton Corporation, but his radicalism later appears much tempered by the events of the French revolution. Despite a bankruptcy, his activities as a merchant finally prospered, allowing him to lease two very substantial farms in Portchester in the 1790s; and profiting from agricultural price rises during the French Wars, he was able to buy the mansion, manor and estate of Kingsdon in Somerset. His progression fits a classic English pattern of landed proprietorship being favoured over mercantile empire-building.

Aaron Moody, eldest son of Aaron and Jane Blunt, was christened in Whiteparish, Wiltshire on 4 May 1749. Whiteparish was within the prosperous wheat and sheep belt stretching from Salisbury across into Hampshire. Arthur Young found it 'generally inclosed and well cultivated' in 1769 with a four or five year rotation (Young 1769, 203). The family was from prosperous yeoman stock, settled in Downton, Landford and Whiteparish parishes from early in the seventeenth century at least. His great grandfather Robert (1642/3–1725) had diversified into malting, a produce which was in the forefront of the development of private marketing (Everitt 1990, 97). A Robert Moody, possibly

the grandson of this Robert and uncle of Aaron, still had malting interests in Downton in 1784, as did the Wellsteads, who were twice-over in-laws of the family (WSA: 490/299 Surrender of burgages 1784). Robert's son Charles Moody (1676/7–1747/8), designated in his will 'of Broxmore farm' in Whiteparish, accumulated sufficient lands (Barford Liveing and Rowhill in Bramshaw; Whitehouse, Earldom Lodge and Smallgaines in Whiteparish; and Collins in Landford) to generously endow six sons (WSA: P2/M/1065). The fourth of these sons, Aaron senior (1717–64) inherited some Whiteparish lands, but he also established himself as a timber merchant. Aaron senior married Jane Blunt (?–1754) of Alderholt, across the Wiltshire border into Dorset. The Blunts were themselves a prosperous yeoman family. Aaron and Jane had five children, Jane (1747–1825), Aaron junior (1749–1829), William (1750–c1797), Mary (1752–76) and Rachel (1753–?), all baptised in Whiteparish. Their mother died in 1754 when Aaron junior was five years old, and his father ten years later. In his will, Aaron senior left Aaron his copyhold land in Hampshire in the manor of Cadnam and Windsor known as Coles, plus £100 to be paid on his 21st birthday (WSA: P2/M/1157). Aaron's brother William was bequeathed the lands in Whiteparish, plus £50; provision was also made for their three sisters (£250 each plus a third share each in the residue of the estate). The Cadnam and Winsor Manor Court Book 1756–1819 recorded Aaron junior's admittance to these twelve acres of land at the age of 16 at a yearly rent of 3/–, and his surrender of them to Thomas Conley of Romsey in 1771 (HRO: Copy/745/21 – TD524/F2 pages 40, 76, 77).

There is no further record known of Aaron junior until he was in his late twenties. Given

the family precedents, it was not surprising to find him established as a merchant, apparently prospering. In the will of Aaron's mother's unmarried sister, Rachael Blunt, of Alderholt, dated 1777 and proved 1786, she described him as a corn factor of Romsey in the County of Southampton. She bequeathed him ten pounds, whereas his siblings, Jane Moyle and Rachel Moody each received £100, as did (collectively) the children of his other sister, Mary Rose (deceased), wife of John. William, Aaron's younger brother, was named executor and received the residue of her estate (NA: Prob 11/1143). It is possible that Aaron had received gifts from her during her lifetime, and there could be various explanations as to why she preferred his younger brother as executor. The following year, March 17, 1778 Aaron Moody, cornchandler, Romsey received a summary conviction and five pound fine at the quarter sessions for killing game in James Lockhart's Melchett Park, an extra-parochial territory adjoining Whiteparish. So one possibility is that Rachael Blunt had doubts about his sense of responsibility (WSA: Quarter Session summary convictions, transcript by Janet Hall). Moody was still in Romsey in 1780 when he was described as a maltster and dealer in corn in a Rex Fire Insurance Policy Register, with an insured value of £1950 registered in 1779 and a second policy for £150 in 1780 (policy nos 34546 and 76858 www.londonlives.org).

Corn factors were one of the new breed of private marketers and middlemen whose star was in the ascendancy, and whose operations differed in key respects from those of the traditional agricultural market. They concluded their deals outside the framework of the borough markets, often in public houses, hence paid no tolls (an issue on which Moody was later to be embroiled with Southampton Corporation). Likewise, they dealt in samples, from which entire crops could be purchased; to this end, corn exchanges were beginning to be built, as in London in 1750, where the market was dominated by a handful of powerful factors (Brown, Richard, 301). Furthermore, factors had begun to buy up in bulk crops that were not yet harvested, or not even planted, in other words a futures market. Laissez-faire advocates argued that such high-

risk activities helped to provide capital for both agricultural and industrial improvement and also encouraged the development of a national market, allowing growing to be concentrated in those areas where the conditions were most favourable to the crop. Contemporaries did not always see corn factors in such a positive light, however; they were the target of starving protestors after bad harvests, accused of maintaining artificially high prices through their monopolistic powers, though Government protectionism for the landed classes through the Corn Laws was probably as important a factor. The legislation governing forestalling and regrating had been repealed between 1767 and 1772, by which time it was already in many respects a dead letter. None the less, local authorities jumped into action when faced by angry crowds burning and looting merchants' warehouses and causing mayhem in the markets, as in Norwich in 1766. Forestallers, regrators and engrossers were threatened with the pillory, imprisonment and forfeiture of goods; but the leaders of the hungry rioters in Norwich were publicly hanged (Randall & Charlesworth 1996, 125–6). Free trade after 1772 extended only to the internal market, not to exports and imports. Exports were virtually banned between 1757 and 1773 and in that year the government passed an act 'forbidding export except when wheat prices fell below 44s a quarter' (Thirsk 1957, 460). The act stayed in force till 1791. A bounty of 5s was paid for each quarter exported. Imports were subject to quotas: foreign corn was prohibited if the internal market price fell below 48s per quarter (the figure was raised to 54s in 1791). Under the post 1791 arrangement, a duty of 2/6d was payable if the price was not less than 50s and not more than 54s, but if the price fell below 50s, the duty was increased to a prohibitive 24s 3d (Barker, n.d.). Import quotas led to shortages and helped to keep prices high, whilst rapid population growth, industrialisation and prolonged warfare, with the American War of Independence soon followed by the French revolutionary wars, accentuated shortages and also provided a growing market for provisioning the armed forces.

Aaron Moody married Ann Dixon (baptised 1 August 1761 Winchester St Swithin) by license,

at the age of 29, on 1 October 1778 in Romsey Parish Church. Aaron had developed a distinctive signature (an underlining with ornate curlicues) which immediately identified him. His bride, aged 17, was an orphan. Thomas Dixon, her father, owner, under mortgage, of the White Horse Inn, Romsey (a coaching inn still going strong), had died in 1771, leaving the inn outright to his wife Mary. He also left his wife all his personal goods subject to charges for the maintenance and education of his daughter and a bequest to the latter of £100 on her marriage or attainment of the age of 21 (HRO: 1772/A39). Mary Dixon (she was Ann's step-mother, not mother), died intestate four years later in 1775 (HRO: 1775AD/22). It is not known what happened to the White Horse Inn at this point. Ann's own mother, Sarah Fussell (c1739–67) was probably sister of the Peter Fussell who was organist of Winchester Cathedral and a minor composer. Two of his daughters (Ann's cousins), Ann Coldham Fussell (born 7 July 1759) and Hannah Fussell (born 9 September 1761) were witnesses at Ann's wedding to Aaron Moody. All three had confident signatures. There was a third witness, Charles Sibly, a Romsey gentleman about whom nothing else has been traced. The couple had one child, Aaron, christened at Romsey 5 January 1780. Ann Moody was buried two weeks later, on 19 January. So ended, at the age of 19, a short life. The bishop's transcript register recorded an unnamed infant death the next day, possibly Aaron. At any rate it seemed that he died before 1792, when Aaron's first son by his second marriage was baptised Charles Aaron.

The early 1780s were a time of diversification for Moody. He had moved to Southampton, and Pelham (1963, 21) traced malting and brewing contracts with the navy's Victualling Board. Moody was operating as a corn merchant from a wharf and grain store at Chapel Mills, Elm Street on the river Itchen just outside Southampton (also known as American Wharf), and a tenement on the same site was assigned around this time to 'Miller and Moody of the Town and County of Southampton, brewers' (SAS: D/MH 9/4). Whether this Moody the brewer was Aaron or another was not established; there was at least one other candidate,

Samuel Moody, brewer, who made interest payments to the Town Council in 1773 (SAS: TC Box 3/4/6 and 7).

Moody was almost immediately involved in a much more ambitious foray into food processing on the same Chapel Mills wharf, in partnership with Christopher Potter. The site, which in 1777 included mill, coalyard, dwelling house, garden and stables, had been granted in that year on a 14 year lease by William Drake, gentleman of the parish of St Mary's, Southampton to a miller named James Rowsell (SAS: D/MH 9/4) for a yearly rent of £66. This lease had been assigned to Moody and Potter at an unspecified date for the residue of the 14 years. Potter, the foremost of a new breed of industrial baker, planned to build a steam flour mill and bakehouse there. This was a time when marketing had become more complex, particularly within the grain trade: 'mealmen and flourmen entered the processing side of the trade, becoming mill owners and millers; farmers moved into milling and malting; home baking began to decline with the emergence of professional bakers' (Brown 1991, 301).

The purpose behind the steam mill and bakehouse was to provision biscuits for the Royal Navy, concentrating the whole process from corn factoring to finished product on one site. The American War of Independence was still in full swing. Victualling had previously been the prerogative of royal purveyors, but had rapidly opened up to private factors and merchants (Everitt 1990, 71). The Victualling Board organised the provisioning of ships' crews which numbered more than 100,000 men by Nelson's time, and there were big profits to be made. In the words of Knight (2006, 8): 'The system of eighteenth-century victualling was characterised by the disbursement of millions of pounds of government money by private and non-governmental actors, who acted as much in their own interests as the state's'. Given the scale of the provisioning the Navy, factors and merchants were encouraged 'to think in terms not of hundreds, but of thousands of quarters of corn... (Everitt 1990, 71). Thinking big and taking risks was part and parcel of the character of Christopher Potter (c1751–1817) 'the first of the cheap bakers' (*Observer* 16 July 1797, 3). Potter was about the

same age as Moody, born c.1751 probably in Bethnal Green (Alger & Gordon, 2004). After experimenting with the cultivation of dyes, his attention turned to victualling. With the patronage of the prime-minister Lord North, who described him in 1778 as 'a gentleman of business and of very fair character in the City... a good friend to Government upon all occasions' (HoP, *Commons, 1754–90*, 3.309, quoted in Alger & Gordon, 2004) Potter became one of the principal contractors during the American War of Independence, with a monopoly contract for the supply of ships' biscuits.

It is within this context that the innovative Chapel Mills complex was built, and it would seem that Potter was the driving force behind the steam mill (Pelham 1963, 31). Steam milling was cutting-edge technology. The first known example of a Newcomen steam engine adapted for the rotary motion required for flour milling dated from 1779, when it was installed in a Birmingham flour mill owned by James Pickard (Tann, Jennifer, 2004). Other engineers were working on improvements, including James Watt, later responsible with his partner Matthew Boulton for the ill-fated Albion Mill in London. In 1781, the year Moody and Potter's mill opened, the Victualling Board was considering building its own steam mill, but its misgivings about the risks of breakdown and the high running costs gave it reason to pause (Pelham 1963, 22–3 quoting NA: ADM 111/85 and 111/87 July 30). Potter, though he himself had misgivings, leaped into the breach, thanks in part to his 'eccentric and speculative' nature (as noted in his obituary) and in part to the gamble of achieving a quasi-monopolistic relationship with the Board. The latter was probably only too relieved to see another taking on the risk on its behalf (Pelham 1963, 28). Potter launched his plan before the Board in March 1781 (NA: ADM 111/85; Pelham 1963, 25), and, with extraordinary speed by today's standards, the mill was operational in July 1781. The original 1781 mill and bakery building (still standing though extended and modified) was of brick, three storeys high, as was the grain store, with two gabled hoists and attics (Southampton City Council 2008, 60). James Watt described

Chapel Steam Mill as having ten ovens which each discharged 16 times per day and 16 times per night, three hundredweight of bread per batch (Pelham 1963, 25 quoting Watt's Calculation and Blotting Book No 2, 29). The mill was thus working 24 hours per day, delivering to Portsmouth alone six tons of biscuit per day during the second half of 1781 (Pelham 1963, 29 quoting NA: ADM 122/167). For his part, Moody must have been dealing in colossal quantities of corn.

Between 1781 and 1783, the Moody Potter partnership seemed to have prospered, and Potter, from his Westminster base, was taking advantage of his new industrial milling and baking processes (possibly in London as well as Southampton) to open a chain of shops selling 'the best white bread at a penny the quartern [four pound] loaf' (Burnett 1962, 99–100). According to one opponent the best price for raw flour from March 1781 to June 1783 returned to the Lord Mayor was an average of 41s 8d and a halfpenny per sack 'and consequently the price of bread on the average during the same period, was 7 and a quarter pence *per quartern loaf*' (Atkinson 1785–2, 20). If that was the case, Potter had undercut the price by a factor of seven. The artisan baker was under threat.

The same opponent suggested that Potter was also cutting corners on the victualling contract, though Christopher Atkinson, the critic concerned, had his own axe to grind. One of the first corn dealers in Europe, he had, before Potter's ascendancy, served as the 'general Cornfactor' to the Victualling Board, supplying malt, wheat, pease, flour and oatmeal on a commission basis, but following accusations of fraud, was tried and convicted of perjury in 1783. Atkinson cited the evidence of 'Henry Emery, master miller, at the King's Mills, Rotherhithe, where wheat was ground for biscuit for the supply of the Navy, as well as Portsmouth as elsewhere, who informed them, that the wheat supplied by Mr Potter was frequently cold, rough and light, and considerably inferior to that supplied before Mr Potter's time by Mr Christopher Atkinson...' (Atkinson 1785–1, 210). There may have been some truth in these allegations: Potter was penalised by the Board for

delivering under-weight and sub-standard (Pelham 1963, 24 quoting NA: ADM 111/87 11 July and 16 July), but so were many others, including Moody in later years.

In 1783 Moody was hit by a double calamity. Firstly a ship, possibly one he owned, was shipwrecked off the coast of Kent whilst carrying a cargo of his beans destined for the Victualling Board. Moody gave details in a letter to Messrs Francis Cobb and Co, Margate, written from Southampton on March 8th, 1783. Francis Cobb (1727–1802) founded one of the earliest provincial banks, but doubled up as a salvage expert (as well as brewer, shipping agent, Chandler, coal merchant, insurance agent and ship owner (www.banking-history.co.uk/cobbs)). Moody wrote:

I have this morning reced your letter of the 5th Inst: with the melancholy tidings of the sloop Endeavour James Burton. The loss of lives is indeed by much the most to be lamented and it is with real concern I perceive that not one on Board was saved. On my own account I am sorry to acquaint you that the cargo is mine & not insured (EKAC: UI453/B5/4/909).

Moody reported that he was arranging for his brother William to come down from London to inspect the cargo; meantime Cobb was engaged in trying to dry it, and Aaron was organising a ship to come and take it off. He wrote again to Cobb on 26 March: William's inspection of the beans had revealed that some were less damaged than others; he was still trying to find a ship, and asked Cobb to go easy on the charges considering his heavy losses. The bill presented by Cobb to Denman Berry of the London Victualling Office actually amounted to £78 12s 6d. A letter dated 10 April from Aaron's brother William informed Cobb that Aaron's sloop *The John and Elizabeth*, registered at Southampton, would be leaving London the following morning to collect the beans. This was the first unequivocal evidence that Aaron had shipping interests; his brother William too appears to have been a ship owner, though he was altogether a more shadowy figure. The only possible record found of his activities was a report in the *Times* 30 May 1785, 3 of the arrival of William Moody's *Friend-*

ship from Amsterdam at the Custom House, London on May 28 1785, but there was another William Moody, mariner, operating in London at the time.

The misfortune of the shipwreck was compounded barely a month later by the bankruptcy of Christopher Potter. His 'failure', wrote Moody to Cobb on 10 May 1783, carried in its train the ruin of himself, his brother William and of Mr Berry of the Victualling Office. The commission of bankruptcy had been issued against Potter on 17 April and his property assigned to his creditors on 2 May. 'The *Bakers* of the cities of London and Westminster have thrown by their *sackcloth*, and now sport the garb of triumph, in consequence of their great opposer's complete, though unexpected overthrow' (Pelham 1963, 30). It was claimed at the time that his bankruptcy stemmed in part from the 'ruinous expenses' he had incurred as candidate in a Colchester parliamentary election (Oldfield 1816, 452–6). Potter had been the defeated candidate in Cambridge in the 1780 election; in 1781 in Colchester he actually won but 'on petition was unseated for corrupt practices' (Alger & Gordon, 2004). It was also the case that Potter was operating on a narrow profit margin at Southampton (NA: ADM 111/85 19 Mar; Pelham 1963, 24).

Potter's immediate concern in the wake of his bankruptcy was to offload his remaining stocks of biscuits onto the Victualling Board as he quitted the contract. Christopher Atkinson, whose partiality against Potter has already been mentioned reported the evidence of Potter's employee James Noakes (Atkinson 1785–1, 212):

The Board was applied to, to take the stock in hand, and an inspector was sent down to see the same. The bread lay in two lofts. Mr Potter ordered a stage to be made in the middle of each loft, and built round, and covered with bags of bread. The inspector came to see the same, who was informed that there were 6000 bags; which appearance it had, when (by the casks and planks being in the middle) there were not more than 3000 bags. Afterwards, Mr Potter had all his mixed meal made up into bread, to make up the quantity 6000 bags; and the same was sent into the King's Storehouses. This mixed meal was some of it very bad. I helped to place the casks as above,

and to fill the bags with the bread that was afterwards made, and shipped the same. At the time the inspector came, the windows were ordered to be darkened, and the holes between.

In Aaron Moody's letter to Cobb of 10 May 1783, he expressed the hope that he himself would avoid bankruptcy. He reported that a meeting of his creditors had been held in London and they had agreed to an assignment of his estate and effects rather than a statute of bankruptcy; in return they would grant him a discharge from his debts. By this means he reckoned the creditors would get a dividend of from 12s to 13s in the pound. Six trustees were appointed, three in London and three in Hampshire. The London names were Sam Smith junior, banker, of Samuel Smith & Co, 12 Aldermanbury, City of London, William Havard Esq of Mansion House Street, City of London, merchant and Sam Farmer Esq. of Worship Street, Moorfields, merchant (SAS: D/MH 9/4; www.merchantnetworks.com). Those from Hampshire were John Moody of Winchester, Jos Bernard of Southampton and Mr James Sharp of Romsey. John Moody of Winchester has not been satisfactorily identified; Aaron had a cousin John, but eight years younger than himself. Joseph Bernard, styled a gentleman, was a member of a prominent Southampton dissenting merchant family (the Above Bar evangelical church they frequented is still on the same site today), one of four brothers who led the Independent Party supporting the American cause in the War of Independence (Bradley 1986, 164–6). Moody at the time might therefore have had radical political sympathies, and he was soon to be involved on the side of the Bernards in a battle for free trade with Southampton Corporation. A James Sharp of Romsey was agent for the Phoenix Company fire office in 1802 (*Hampshire Telegraph & Portsmouth Gazette* 29 March 1802) and was described as a freeholder or landholder in 1809 (*Cobbett's Weekly Political Register* 15 April 1809).

Whatever the merits of this rescue plan, it appears to have foundered, for in July 1783, the *London Gazette* announced the following bankruptcies (*Monthly Chronicle* July 1783, 82):

Aaron Moody of Southampton and Christopher Potter, late of Parliament Square, merchants and partners

Aaron Moody of Southampton, in Hants, merchant

William Moody of Copthall Buildings London, merchant

The bill of sale (reproduced in Pelham 1963, 20) for the auction of the effects of Moody and Potter 24–26 September 1783 included the contents of Aaron's dwelling house in the High Street, Southampton, as well as wheat, coal, tools and horses. Timber lots at Romsey and a 'new plate for a malt-kiln' linked Aaron to the business activities of his father and great-grandfather respectively. On 10 October 1783 Smith, Havard and Farmer, the assignees of Moody and Potter, as mentioned in Moody's letter to Cobb, assigned the lease of the mill, coal yard, house and premises in St Mary's, Southampton to William Fox, yeoman of Southampton (SAS: D/MH 9/4). Overall, however, the process of the bankruptcy commissions seemed to have been slow. A meeting of creditors for declaration of dividend for the Moody/Potter partnership was called on 13 November 1787 (*Times* 12 Nov 1787, 2) and for Moody himself on Wednesday 20 February 1788 (*Times* 19 February 1788, 3). Potter's creditors were finally paid only 2/6d in the pound (Oldfield 1816, 453); no figures were traced for the other bankrupts. Nothing was discovered of further relationship between Moody and Potter and the latter's extraordinary exploits as pottery manufacturer in France feted by Napoleon cannot detain us here. Suffice it here to record his obituary in the *Morning Chronicle* of 8 December 1817: 'His researches in mechanical and chemical science, if not profound, rendered the common powers of both prompt and useful for various purposes....[but] He was too eccentric and speculative to hoard a fortune....' Moody, quicker to learn from burnt fingers, was to be much more successful in hoarding a fortune.

Despite his bankruptcy, Moody continued his occupation of the Chapel wharf and the steam mill premises until 1792. He not only appears to have been able to disentangle his and Potter's more extensive investment in the

site (Pelham 1963, 32) but also to persuade his creditors to leave him some means to continue trading. There appears to have been little interruption in his activities, for from 1783/4 he was embroiled, together with a number of other merchants, in a long-running dispute with Southampton Corporation over borough petty customs. These merchants were operating from private quays outside the confines of the borough, and, in the name of free trade, challenged the Corporation's right to charge wharfage and petty customs on their imports and to restrict landings to the corporation's public quays (SAS: CJMB 12 Nov 1784). Amongst the leaders of the revolt were Joseph Bernard, of the Bernard family encountered above (*Hants Chronicle* 22 Mar 1784), and the 'radical bookseller and librarian' turned merchant Thomas Baker (Patterson 1966, 73). Moody was a key player in that his Chapel wharf could be used for landing other merchants' cargoes. The revolt was co-ordinated at a public meeting in the Star Inn, Southampton held on 24 March 1784. Legal action and threats of action were raised by the Corporation against various merchants between 1784 and 1791, with Aaron Moody himself targeted three times in the Corporation's minute books (SAS: CJMB 24 July 1784, 7 Dec 1784 and 30 January 1788). He had several times refused payment of mayor's dues and 'obstructed corporation officers in taking the same on divers cargoes of corn landed there [Chapel wharf]'. 'The Spirit of Discord and Delusion is gone forth, and operates with the worst Effects on the Minds of Men, who, instead of a conscientious submission to established laws and customs, vainly seek for advantages by opposition to all Order and Authority' bemoaned the Corporation (SAS: CJMB 13 Oct 1788). The court, however, did not agree, and on the key point – the liability of a private quay to pay dues – found in Moody's favour (Patterson 1966, 74–5), striking a serious blow against the traditional borough privileges.

Moody's unabated activity is also demonstrated by a surviving draft of a contract of 1787 with William Burn, master of the brig *The Willing Mind*. Burn was to take the ship from Southampton to Sunderland for fitting out, and thence to Dantzic, Elbing or Pillau

on Prussia's Baltic coast to take on a cargo of wheat for Southampton. Moody would pay £3 3s. per last (=10 quarters or 80 bushels) and Burn was to pay half the port charges in the Baltic (SAS: D/PM Box 1/47/2). A ship called *The Willing Mind* was wrecked off Formby nine years later (*Times* 3 February 1796, 3).

Moody also continued to procure contracts with the Victualling Yard at Portsmouth. In 1792 he was fined ten pounds for delivering wheat lighter than the stipulated 59 lb per bushel. The wheat, he claimed in his defense 'was put into his Majesty's Mill in my absence and without trial being made of the weight'. He had subsequently made up the weight and 'humbly hope the Penalty will be remitted'. The Yard superintendent William Cooper was not persuaded: 'I conceive the Person who was to deliver it ought to have been made acquainted with the conditions of the Contract.' (NA: ADM 224/ 71 8 October 1792). The following April Moody was again in trouble, this time for failure to deliver to contract 633 bags of biscuit. He had managed only 352 bags and that 'under every disadvantage of bad workmen and even such as have robbed me to a very material degree'. Moody painted his scene of woe: 'in the present very critical situation of Money matters, every little disappointment in getting returns is most seriously felt' (NA: ADM 224/ 71 23 April 1793). Just a few months later, there was a third dispute, again on the question of weight. Six hundred quarters of American wheat weighing just 56 and a half lb per bushel was offered. It was, said Moody 'perfectly sweet and good' and he offered to make up the weight with an extra amount. However, William Cooper responded: 'we are of opinion that from its being very thin, inferior in quality to what has usually been received...and not weighing more than 56 and a half lb per bushell, it is therefore unfit for his Majesty's service.' (NA: ADM 224/ 71 15 August 1793).

In 1788, seven years after the death of his wife, Moody had remarried by licence to Catherine Harper. She was described as spinster of the parish of St James, Westminster and Aaron as widower, St Mary's parish, Southampton (marriage licence allegations – faculty office 1701–1850). The license was dated 3 December and the wedding took place at St James, West-

minster the same day. Catherine Harper was the daughter of 'Mr Harper Esq' and was born c 1751 (thus about 37 when she married, well past the normal age for a first marriage at the time; Aaron was 39). In 1778 she was operating a millinery business in St James Street, Westminster, with two partners, Caelia Fry and Mary Cushen (who was one of the witnesses to her partner's marriage to Moody). The business was insured for £1000 in a Sun fire insurance policy taken out in 1778 (policy no 435621 www.londonlives.org). Nothing was discovered about the other marriage witness, John Arthur Smith. A businesswoman such as Catherine was relatively unusual for the time; this was perhaps a marriage of equals.

Aaron and Catherine's first child, Catherine, was born nine months after the marriage and christened 19 September 1789 at St Mary's Southampton. She died at the age of 12 and was buried on 12 January 1802. A notice of her death appeared in the *Portsmouth Telegraph* of Monday 11 January. A son, Charles Aaron, was christened 13 June 1792. Two subsequent children, William (christened 19 June 1794) and Ann (christened September 1795) were baptised at Portchester, whence the family had moved, probably in 1793. For in that year Moody took a 21 year lease on the farm of Moralls or Portchester Marsh at £180 for the first two years and £220 thereafter (HRO: 4M/53/78/19). His landlord was Robert Thistlethwayte, who had bought half the manor of Morralls in 1775 and the other half subsequently (Page 1908, 151–61). The Thistlethwaytes had had Whiteparish connections, so were perhaps known to Moody.

Moralls was a substantial farm and Moody one of a new breed of tenant farmers, operating on large farms of enclosed land outside the traditional manorial system. In the lease reference was made to 90 acres as constituting but a part of the total arable and there was also 'Down-ground, meadow, pasture and marsh land' where Moody was to keep 'his full stock of sheep'. The land valuation for Moralls was £74 between 1800 and 1807, with an annual land tax charge of £14.16s. Before or in 1800, Moody had taken a second lease of land in Portchester parish, from Lord Powerscourt, an Irish aristocrat, with an even higher valuation of £85 and

an annual tax of £17 4s; and also a small parcel of land, leased from William Strong Esq. of Lincoln's Inn, at land tax valuation of £3 and annual charge of 12s (HRO: Q22/1/1/443). In total Moody was farming land taxed at £32 12s, nearly one third of Portchester parish (tax charged £110 13s 4d). Portchester parish extended to 1,380 acres, so he was probably cultivating around 400. Although Aaron had come from yeoman stock, it is uncertain what hands-on experience of farming he had had. As noted above, he had held the twelve acres of copyhold land in Hampshire which he had inherited from his father from 1764 to 1771 only, surrendering them in his early-twenties.

Experienced or not, Moody had chosen a propitious moment to direct some of his energies into farming. The woolen industry was thriving because of the need for uniforms in the war in Europe, and this same war made for food scarcity, a problem compounded by bad harvests:

After the bad harvest of 1795 the price of wheat rose to above 100s., the highest since the late sixteenth century. Food riots forced the government to pass scarcity laws and to pay bounties on imported grain, including rye. In the towns there was popular outcry against forestallers, engrossers and regrators... The crisis of 1799–1801 was even more severe: there were demands for peace, the extension of government controls and an increase in enclosure, as well as rioting against corn dealers. Prices continued high until 1801, when in March the average was 154s. 2d. Relief came not from government policy but from the moderately abundant harvests of 1801, 1802 and 1803 (Briggs 1957, 460).

It is not known whether Moody was on the receiving end of any popular action against corn dealers between 1795 (when there were food riots in Portsmouth) and 1801. During the food riots of 1800–01, regular and volunteer troops were used to guard grain stocks and disperse rioters, but unrest reached such a point that both militia and volunteer infantry mutinied, and heavy reliance on volunteer cavalry, recruited from the higher ranks of society, became necessary (Royle 2000, 179). Moody played his part, perhaps for the first time on the side of the establishment, serving

in the newly established Bere Forest Rangers Cavalry Volunteers, as a lieutenant (appointed 18 October 1798) and then as a captain (25 September 1800). (*Portsmouth Telegraph* Monday 9 June 1800 and Monday 6 October 1800; *List of Officers* 1799; 1800).

Was it coincidental that he was twice the target of sheep stealers? In 1800 he offered a five guinea reward for information about the slaughter of a 'fat wether sheep, the Skin, Head and Entrails left in the field' (*Portsmouth Telegraph* 10 March 1800). He was targeted again in 1802, this time offering a ten guinea reward (*Hampshire Telegraph & Portsmouth Gazette* 20 Dec 1802). As the Dorset folksong put it (Rule 1997, 231):

Then I'll ride all around in another man's ground
And I'll take a fat sheep for my own
On I'll end his life by the aid of my knife
And then I will carry him home.

It will be remembered that 25 years earlier Moody had been convicted for poaching game near Whiteparish. It was very likely that any such delinquent tendencies, together with his possible political radicalism, had been severely tempered by the events in revolutionary France, as was the case with so many of the pre-1789 radicals. By a neat parallel of fate, Moody was much later to cross the path of a radical who spoke publicly in defence of poaching. Henry Hunt, himself a Wiltshire farmer, and orator at the Peterloo massacre in 1819, was serving a two and a half years sentence in Ilchester gaol for his part in the demonstration when he published his memoirs in 1820. Moody was by then a justice of the peace (sworn 1806 – NA:C 202/194/8), a deputy lieutenant and a major landowner nearby in Kingsdon, Somerset, and, as visiting magistrate to the gaol, ordered many improvements to Hunt's situation. Hunt was duly grateful to this 'worthy and considerate visiting magistrate' (Hunt 1820).

After 1792, Moody had continued to trade in corn in addition to his farming activities. In December 1796 he addressed a memorial to the Lords of the Committee of Trade and Plantations concerning a consignment of 90 lasts of 'the best high mixed Polish wheat' part of which he had bought from Messrs Avison

& Co of Elbing. Owing to contrary winds and bad weather, the shipload, ready for sea on 1 September, did not reach Harwich until 26 October, nearly four weeks after the ending of the government bounty on wheat. Moody, chancing his arm not for the first time as has been seen, petitioned for his bounty by dispensation (NA: PC1/36/104 Dec 13 1796). Up to the end of the eighteenth century at least, Moody was still involved in trading other commodities. In 1800 he contributed £30 to a project to bring herring by sea from Scotland, as one of those 'desirous of becoming Subscribers and having a supply for their Town and Neighbourhood' (*Portsmouth Telegraph* 29 December 1800). He had also diversified in a completely new direction as far as can be established. His lease on Moralls mentioned that he was 'the Contractor with Government for the Horses used in and about the Dock Yard of Portsmouth belonging to Government' and permitted him during the first fifteen years of the lease to take off hay and straw for these horses, to be substituted with dung, compost or manure put back into the farm. Horses were in great demand in the Yard. Quite apart from the normal work of carrying provisions, they were much used for working the chain pumps that evacuated the great stone dock (later known as No 5 dock) and a dry and wet dock complex connected to it (www.portsmouth-dockyard.org.uk). Steam power was soon to supersede the horses for pumping, following the appointment of General Bentham to the post of Inspector General in 1795.

Moody's brother William died circa 1800. The brothers appear to have been close: they had collaborated in business and had been bankrupted together, and each had a child with the other's name. At his death, William was farming at Alderholt, Dorset, his mother's home. In his will of 1797, Aaron was made one of the executors and the estate sold in 1801 to John Ford of Bath (SSAS: D3272/2/2/1/1-7 – copy at DHC)

In 1801 Moody entered the ranks of the landed gentry. He bought the estate and manor of Kingsdon in Somerset, including most of the village of Kingsdon, from Henry, Lord Arundell (Vivian-Neal 1959, 66; sale particulars 16 January 1802 SARS: DD/X/KN) for

the sum of 20,000 guineas at a public auction held at Garaways Coffee House in London (NA: C13/56/41). The property was described in 1784 as 'comprising sixteen hundred acres of land, and requisite buildings, let on lives, many of them very old; and the manor of Kingsdon with the quit-rents, fines, reliefs, heriots, profits and rights, extending over near two thousand acres, in a fine sporting country, well stocked with game; the improved yearly value upwards of eleven hundred pounds; and the right of patronage to the rectory, worth one hundred and ninety pounds per annum'. It was the fourth time the Arundells had put the property on the market in just over thirty years; their failure to sell possibly a result of what Moody apparently considered the antiquated estate management and indifferent condition of the farm houses and cottages (Vivian-Neal 1959, 66). It is not possible to say how much of the purchase price was funded by his farming activities and how much from his corn dealing and other business activities. The profitability of farming at that juncture was evident from land-rental inflation. The ten year lease of Morralls negotiated in 1811 by John Moyle (these appear to have been unrelated Moyles, Portchester merchants, not connected with Moody's brother-in-law in Alderholt) was for £600 pounds per annum, almost a trebling of the £220 per annum of Moody's lease in 1793 (HRO: 4M53/96/18-19 Moyle). Moody also showed excellent judgment (or luck) in making the move from farmer to landowner at this time. Being a farmer was highly profitable; being a landlord even more so, with rocketing land rent and the security of knowing that when the crash came (as it did for many farmers at the end of the Napoleonic wars) your estates were intact, even considerably enhanced if, like Moody, you had in the meantime taken advantage of parliamentary enclosure to garner tracts of commons and buy up the lands of small proprietors without the resources to fence their new enclosed plots.

After the purchase of Kingsdon, there was a progressive run-down of his activities in Hampshire. A notice in the *Hampshire Telegraph and Portsmouth Gazette* of 18 October 1802 advertised an auction of draught horses, teams employed in his Majesty's Dock Yard, to be viewed at 'Mr Moody's stables, Newtown'.

In 1804 he was no longer an officer with the Bere Forest Cavalry (*List of Officers* 1804), and in 1805 Robert Thistlethwayte was recorded as occupier as well as owner of Moralls (HRO: Q22/1/1/443 (1805)). Moody's lease, still with eight years to run, appears to have been renegotiated in 1806, and Moody was once again recorded as occupier in 1806 and 1807. From 1808 the Thistlethwayte lands were occupied by Moyle and Moody had also vacated the lands leased from Lord Powerscourt and William Strong.

The history of Moody's thirty years as lord of the manor of Kingsdon is too big a task to be attempted here except in resumé. He appears to have been an impatient and perhaps ruthless moderniser, enlarging the property by the purchase of various other parcels of land in Kingsdon and Somerton in 1802 (SARS: DD/CH/126/3) and making preparations for enclosure. Considerable litigation ensued in the Court of Chancery (Moody plaintiff against Lord and Lady Arundell, Baron Clifford of Chudleigh, William Sheldon, Nicholas Twite Selby and Henry Robinson in 1804, 1805, 1806 and 1809 NA: C13/57/10; C13/479/77; C13/56/41; C13/501/13; C13/105/24) over Moody's claim that he had been misled as to the Kingsdon manorial customs at the time of sale. The conflict revolved around widowhood rights on copyhold land granted in 1757 to Richard Horsey for three lives, for which Moody claimed compensation of £1,500 from Lord Arundell. Arundell accepted arbitration and even 'submitted himself to be examined on oath derogatory to the honor [sic] and dignity of a peer of the United Kingdom', Enclosure was obtained in 1810 (enclosure awards SARS: CR43; CR94). New estates were also bought in Glastonbury and King's Sedgmoor, and much of Kingsdon was converted to grassland (Dunning 1974). He was an assiduous magistrate. His career as a merchant was perhaps over, but he may have been a director of the West of England Insurance Company in 1807 (*Trewman's Exeter Flying Post* 19 November 1807).

Moody died on the 17 February 1829 and was buried in a vault in the parish church of Kingsdon a week later. His wife Catherine had predeceased him by five years (4 September

1824). Both his sons had attended Winchester School and Oxbridge (Foster 1891, 972; Boase 1921, 252; *Alumni* 1999). The elder, Charles Aaron, 1792–1867, inherited Kingsdon and proceeded to rearrange the village and roads, and to knock down the old manor house, dating from the early seventeenth century, and rebuild it in modern taste, a taste considered ‘austere’ by the 1860s when new owners rebuilt it yet again (Vivian-Neal 1959, 66, 67). He was later to become an undistinguished conservative MP for West Somersetshire. His other son William, 1794–1867, an intellectually brilliant barrister, inherited the Glastonbury and King’s Sedgmoor properties. Aaron’s daughter Ann, described by Hosking as ‘a deeply religious woman’ (1999, 34), ‘cared much for her family but did not show tenderness to them. Her dress was plain without jewellery’. She married in 1828 at Laverton, Somerset Thomas Paynter, who unexpectedly inherited the Boskenna estate in Cornwall the same day. Kingsdon was sold by Charles Aaron in 1864 and both of Aaron’s sons died without issue in 1867 (*Pall Mall Gazette* Monday 23 December 1867; *Law Times* Oct 26 1867), with the family inheritance passing to the Paynter family (Hosking 1999, 42).

CONCLUSION

Aaron Moody was a classic representative of his age. From pugnacious private merchant of the kind ‘impatient of human institutions’ (Everitt 1990, 112), entrepreneur and poacher, he, like most others of his class, frightened by the bloodshed and egalitarianism of the French revolution, transmuted into a stout defender of the established order. He was likewise typical

of his age in the boldness and adventure of his risk-taking and his enthusiasm for trading commodities, any commodities that came his way – corn, malt, timber, beans, beer, herring, biscuit, horses and probably others of which no record was found. Moody’s course demonstrates the extent to which commerce was a hazardous occupation, both physically, with the death of shipwrecked sailors, as well as financially. Bankruptcy was an ever-present spectre, and recklessness, it seems, a prerequisite of the entrepreneur, willing to speculate on a Chapel Mills project and to send cargoes out to sea uninsured. But there were clear boundaries to Moody’s radicalism: he was a free trader when it came to smashing borough privileges, but perhaps a mercantilist when it came to exploiting corn-law bounties. The call of the laissez-faireists and urban dwellers, repeal of the Corn Laws, probably had no appeal. He collaborated with dissenters, but seemed to have remained firmly anchored in the established church. He had a brush with the vision of industrial production, but retreated into foodstuff marketing, financially a sound decision. His caution and conservatism made of him a perfect model of the Adam Smith entrepreneur. Smith of course was far more conservative than his subsequent reputation has given him credit for. Like Moody, he saw land ownership as of fundamental value and mercantile activity as a means to acquiring it. He would doubtless have approved of Moody had he known of him, in a way he would not have approved of or understood Christopher Potter or Howard Hunt, in their different ways both far more radical men, the one the harbinger of an industrial world, the other of political democracy.

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EKAC	East Kent Archives Centre
HRO	Hampshire Record Office
NA	National Archives, Kew
SARS	Somerset Archive and Record Service
SAS	Southampton Archives Services

SSAS	Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service
WSA	Wiltshire & Swindon Archives

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