

A Monument to Charity and Piety? Bryan Blundell and the Liverpool Blue Coat School

Michelle Girvan, PhD Researcher, University of Liverpool

Today, the Grade I listed Bluecoat building operates as a contemporary arts centre; however, it was originally built as a charity school for indigent and orphaned children during a period of vast physical expansion in the eighteenth-century town of Liverpool. The philanthropic venture was led by the town's first joint rector, Revd Robert Styth, and sea captain Bryan Blundell in 1708 and was representative of a wider charity-school movement occurring across the country from the late-seventeenth century.¹ The original building was described as a modest day school for 'the teaching of fifty poor children to read, write and cast accounts', who were also to be 'instructed in the doctrine of the Church of England'.² Yet, Blue Coat's initial premises were quickly deemed inadequate for the burgeoning town and its increasing social problems. As a result, the humble property was replaced by an impressive boarding school in the fashionable architectural style of Queen Anne by 1725.³ While additional extensions to the building allowed for the accommodation of 320 pupils by the close of the century.

In 1861, historian John Hughes described the Liverpool Blue Coat School as a monument to the charity and piety of its founders.⁴ Moreover, James Picton stated that 'the Blue Coat Hospital will ever be identified with the name of Bryan Blundell'.⁵ Indeed, Blundell was not only co-founder and the leading patron of the initial Blue Coat day school but also proved instrumental in the construction of the charity's new boarding facilities from 1716 to 1725.⁶ In addition, he was proudly elected Trustee and Treasurer of Blue Coat for forty-two years, a role he was later succeeded in by his two sons, Richard (1756–60) and Jonathan (1760–96), with the Blundells collectively performing this respectable civic duty for eighty-two years.⁷

¹ M. G. Jones, *The Charity School Movement, A Study of Eighteenth Century Puritanism in Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938).

² Bryan Blundell, Narrative of the Rise and Progress of the Charity School or Blue Coat Hospital ... (c.1751), Liverpool Central Library and Archives (LCLA) 377.BLU/9. The school originally taught forty-two boys and eight girls.

³ Joshua Mollineux, *The North Prospect of the Charity Schoole at Leverpoole*. Engraved by H. Hulsbergh (1718); Dan Cruickshank, *A Guide to the Georgian Buildings of Britain and Ireland* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1985), 161.

⁴ John R. Hughes, 'A Sketch of the Origin and Early History of the Liverpool Blue Coat Hospital', Part I, *Transcriptions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* (May 1859), 173, 186.

⁵ J. A. Picton, *Memorials of Liverpool*. Volume Two, 2nd ed. (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1875), 240.

⁶ In his journal, Blundell disclosed that he constructed the almshouses to the rear of the school building by 1725 at a cost of nearly £600 from profits he acquired via the ship *Providence*. According to Blundell's personal accounts, he donated a total sum of £1135. 9s towards the construction of the new school building (1716–25), which cost £2288. 15s 8d to complete, Journal of Bryan Blundell, 1687–1756, Lancashire Archives (LARO) DDBB8/4; Bryan Blundell, Ledger Accounts of the Charity School in Liverpool, 1714–1755, LCLA 377.BLU/5.

⁷ Blue Coat Hospital and School Minute Book, 1741–1813, LCLA 377. BLU/15/1/1.

Blundell was praised for his generous philanthropy and admirable dedication to the eighteenth-century charity school in the town's earliest topographies and urban histories.⁸ Meanwhile, the commemorative monument displayed in St Nicholas' Church on behalf of Blundell, as well as the portrait commissioned upon his death in 1756, both posthumously celebrated and cemented his legacy to Liverpool's Blue Coat Charity School.⁹ Nevertheless, despite his centrality to the institution's foundation and early history, very little has been explored in connection to Bryan Blundell. The following article, therefore, aims to provide a more thorough insight into the man that helped to shape, maintain and govern Liverpool's eighteenth-century charity school, whilst additionally querying if Blue Coat can, in fact, be accurately described as a monument to Blundell's charity and piety.

Seafaring, Mercantile Business and Commercial Wealth

Bryan Blundell was born in 1674 during a period of Enlightened thought, commercial and consumerist prosperity, and Post-Restoration religio-political tension.¹⁰ He was the second son of William Blundell, a Liverpool mariner, shipowner and trader and, Mary Preeson, the daughter of a respected merchant and property owner.¹¹ Unfortunately, very little is known about Blundell's formative years except that he was apprenticed to sea in 1687 at just twelve years of age.¹² One of his earliest recalled seafaring experiences involved the transportation of soldiers to Londonderry whilst aboard the *Reserve*, likely in support of William of Orange during the Williamite War in Ireland (1689–91). Nevertheless, upon returning to Liverpool, following his first successful voyage, young Blundell received the news that his father had died; a loss which he later shared in common with many of Blue Coat's eighteenth-century pupils owing to Liverpool's increasing dependence upon a seafaring economy.¹³

⁸ See, for instance, William Enfield, *An Essay Towards the History of Liverpool* (London, 1774), 48–51; James Wallace, *A General and Descriptive History of the Ancient and Present State of the Town of Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1796), 158–161; Picton, *Memorials of Liverpool*, 161, 240.

⁹ After Blundell's death in 1756 it is recorded in Blue Coat's quarterly board minute book that 'A picture of Bryan Blundell ... presented by Mr Hamlet Winstanley, with a frame given by Madam Clayton, was ordered by the Trustees to be placed on the east side of the Trustees' room in the said School', 29 March 1756, LCLA 377. BLU/15/1/1. Picton noted Bryan Blundell's memorial found in St Nicholas' Church, Picton, *Memorials of Liverpool*, 60.

¹⁰ See, for example, Lorna Weatherhill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain 1660–1760* (London: Routledge, 1996); Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (London: Penguin, 2001); Walter E. Minchinton, 'The Merchants in England in the Eighteenth Century' in Hugh G. J. Aitken (ed.), *Explorations in Entrepreneurial History* (Cambridge and Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1965), 278–295; J. C. D. Clark 'Church, Parties and Politics' in Jeremy Gregory (ed.) *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Establishment and Empire, 1662–1829*, Volume II (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 289–314.

¹¹ (n.d.) LARO DDBB8/4.

¹² *Ibid.*, 30 November 1687.

¹³ 'The Journal of Bryan Blundell, 1674–1756', trans. H. M. Hignett (1991), iii. On Liverpool's seafaring economy see, for example, Diana E. Ascott, Fiona Lewis and Michael Power, *Liverpool 1660–1750, People, Prosperity and Power* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), 39–47.

The journal kept by Blundell since he was a young boy at sea until his death in 1756 provides a rare insight into the life of an eighteenth-century Liverpool mariner and merchant, while additionally offering a wealth of information about Blundell's character, morals, spirituality and career progression. It spans his early seafaring experiences from 'cabin boy to master'; his successful commercial business and procured wealth; as well as his civic and charitable contribution to the town.¹⁴ His journal particularly exemplifies his shrewd business acumen, opportunism, meticulous record-keeping (which is equally paramount within Blue Coat's accounts) and his impressive navigational skills.¹⁵

Blundell spent twenty-seven years refining his expertise as a master mariner and a record of successful voyages to the Chesapeake, the British West Indian colonies and Archangel in Russia earned him an enviable reputation as one of Liverpool's most requested sea captains.¹⁶ In 1701, for example, Blundell's partners in the ship, the *Lever*, insisted that he captained the vessel.¹⁷ Moreover, he was regularly selected to lead convoys and often completed voyages several weeks ahead of schedule. His journal also demonstrates Blundell's ability to act decisively by 'flying store' and quickly relocating when experiencing difficulty selling produce, such as tobacco.¹⁸ He similarly used his initiative to construct a number of ships including the *Cleveland* (named after his close friend John Cleveland) in Philadelphia or Virginia instead of Liverpool, as it proved much more cost-effective.¹⁹ Finally, and most significantly for this article, his journal confirms that Blundell strategically accessed the indispensable networks which he had nurtured during his career as the entrusted sea captain to many of Liverpool's major merchants, including Sir Thomas Johnson, Richard Gildart, John Cleveland, John Earle, Foster Cunliffe (brother to Blundell's third wife, Mary, 1729–30) and William Clayton in order to secure contributions from the town's 'most respectable inhabitants' for his newest project, the Blue Coat boarding school.²⁰

The ships commanded and often partially freighted by Blundell, such as the *Mulberry* and the *Cleveland*, regularly contained an array of commodities including provisions of beef, butter, cheese, soap and candles collected at Cork or Belfast to be sold predominantly in the Chesapeake region (present-day Virginia and Maryland).²¹ While in the Chesapeake, Blundell would frequent local plantations and auctions in order to purchase several pounds of tobacco, and any secured produce was packed into hogsheads and loaded

¹⁴ Hignett, 'The Journal of Bryan Blundell', iii.

¹⁵ 1714–55, LCLA 377.BLU/5.

¹⁶ 1687–1714, LARO DDBB8/4.

¹⁷ Hignett, 'The Journal of Bryan Blundell', vi.

¹⁸ Hignett demonstrates that whilst in the Chesapeake, Blundell would hire a large shed, which would operate as a store for the purchasing and selling of goods, including tobacco, *Ibid.*, v. See, for example, 5 December 1695; (n.d.) January 1706, LARO DDBB8/4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, (n.d.) March 1707.

²⁰ Blue Coat Hospital and School First Subscription Roll, 1717, LCLA 377.BLU/1/1; 1714–55, LCLA 377.BLU/5; Michael Power, 'Creating a Port: Liverpool 1695–1715', *The Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 149 (2000), 64.

²¹ 1687–1714, LARO DDBB8/4.

onto his ship for the journey across the Atlantic. A mixed cargo of tobacco, sugar, rum, cotton, ginger, brandy, lime juice, herring, yarn, oil, flax and hemp, among other dry goods, would then be returned to Liverpool to be re-exported or sold on the home market. There is also evidence that Blundell transported indentured servants to the Americas during his early seafaring career prior to the admission of Liverpool merchants to the burgeoning African trade from 1698 once the London Royal African Company's official monopoly on the slave trade ended.²² In addition, the tar trade proved a particularly lucrative enterprise for Blundell.²³ During the period 1715 and 1752, H. M. Hignett demonstrates that Blundell imported over 120,000 barrels of tar from North America on approximately 120 vessels, incurring minimal losses.²⁴

The mercantile wealth that Blundell accumulated throughout his commercial career is particularly substantiated in his will, which demonstrates acquired assets and property ownership far exceeding the single dwelling on Preeson's Row bequeathed to him by his grandfather, Thomas Preeson, in 1685.²⁵ In fact, Blundell could boast several acres of land, numerous residential properties in Preeson's Row, Cooper's Row and Chapel Street, as well as two warehouses, a pitch house, half of the shares in a local ropery and numerous ships and stock.²⁶ Nonetheless, not all of his voyages proved profitable owing to the precarious nature of eighteenth-century mercantile trade.²⁷ On several occasions, Blundell reported the failure of commercial investments including the loss of several hundreds of pounds following a voyage to Virginia in 1700, as 'tobacco [was] selling so low'.²⁸ Additionally, despite owning insurance, Blundell incurred financial losses in 1718 following the sinking of the *Cleveland*.²⁹ Most notably, however, Blundell's ship, the *Lever*, and its contents were seized by a French privateer during his fifth voyage in the vessel in 1706.³⁰ Thereafter, he was taken prisoner alongside his crew and transported to a 'nasty, stinking prizon' in St Malo for two months before being released.³¹

²² For instance, three indentured servants are listed as being on board 'ye Mulberry' during a voyage to Pungoteague, Virginia, *Ibid.*, 13 October 1698.

²³ Hignett states that Blundell took over the tar trade in 1715 following the death of his friend, William Clayton, Hignett, 'The Journal of Bryan Blundell', vii.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, vii; (n.d.) LARO DDBB8/4.

²⁵ 9 July 1685, Archdeaonry of Chester Probate Records, Testator: Thomas Preeson, LARO WCW/Supra/C245A/19.

²⁶ 31 January 1756, Archdeaonry of Chester Probate Records, Testator: Bryan Blundell, LARO WCW/Supra/OS1/2.

²⁷ On the risks associated with eighteenth-century mercantile trade see, for example, Sheryllynn Haggerty, *Merely For Money? Business Culture in the British Atlantic 1750–1815* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012); Sheryllynn Haggerty, 'Risk, Networks and Privateering in Liverpool during the Seven Years War, 1756–63', *The International Journal of Maritime History*, 30.1 (February 2018): 30–51; Julian Hoppit, *Risk and Failure in English Business 1700–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Peter Mathias, 'Risk, Credit and Kinship in Early Modern Enterprise', in John J. McCusker and Kenneth Morgan (eds) *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 15–36.

²⁸ 1700, LARO DDBB8/4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, October 1718.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, January 1706.

³¹ *Ibid.*, January 1706.

Blundell and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

Despite little mention in his journal entries, it is crucial to highlight Blundell's involvement in the direct transportation of enslaved African people, in addition to his evident connections to several indirect trades which utilised slave labour, including the harvesting of sugar and tobacco. Research conducted by Lorena Walsh into eighteenth-century Liverpool's connections with slavery in the Chesapeake demonstrates that Blundell was one of seven Liverpool merchants who financed trade in tobacco and naval stores, as well as slaving voyages in the region.³² According to Walsh, Blundell was able to take advantage of the networks he had formed during his early career in the 'colonial produce trades', so that by the 1720s he had successfully established 'regular trade in naval stores in the Lower James Basin and had invested heavily in West Indian slaving'.³³

In 1717, Blundell procured a licence from the East India Company at a cost of £25 in order to send the *Cleveland* to 'Madagaska for slaves'; however, the ship appears to have sunk prior to landing.³⁴ Despite this initial failure, Blundell was seemingly undeterred, as the cross-referencing of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Voyages Database with various personal and local records connects him to an additional five slaving vessels between 1721 and 1761 including: *Martha*, *Jane and Ellen*, *Tarleton*, *Duke of Cumberland* and *Elizabeth*.³⁵ Four out of the five vessels documented were jointly owned, predominantly with close relatives including his sons, William and Richard, his grandson, Samuel Shaw, and his son-in-law, James Crosbie, demonstrating the significance of family networks in eighteenth-century business. Shares in three of these slaving vessels were also held by Blundell's friends and leading Liverpool merchants, Robert Armitage, John Crosbie, Owen Pritchard and Thomas Backhouse.³⁶ The ships connected to Bryan Blundell cumulatively engaged in fifteen slaving voyages, mainly to Bonny (in present-day Nigeria), and were responsible for trafficking 4,719 enslaved Africans to Barbados, Antigua, St Kitts, Nevis and

³² Lorena Walsh, 'Liverpool's Slave Trade to the Colonial Chesapeake: Slaving on the Periphery' in David Richardson, Suzanne Schwarz and Anthony Tibbles (eds) *Liverpool and Transatlantic Slavery* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 103.

³³ *Ibid.*, 106, 104.

³⁴ (n.d.) June 1717, LARO DDBB8/4.

³⁵ Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database. *Slave Voyages*. <<https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database>> [accessed 4 August 2021]. Local historian, Laurence Westgaph, connects Bryan Blundell to a further slaving vessel, the *Sea Flower*, constructed between 1745–48; however, this particular vessel does not appear on the Slave Voyages Database, Laurence Westgaph, 'Introduction', *Reading the Signs*, Historic England, 2014, <<https://historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/research/streetnames-pdf/>> [accessed 11 October 2021].

³⁶ John Crosbie was the brother of Bryan Blundell's son-in-law, James Crosbie. John replaced his brother as a Trustee of Blue Coat in 1755 until his own death in 1791 and subscribed to the school on several occasions. It is also possible to confirm that 'Captain John Crosbie' donated £10. 10s to the charity school in 1747 and £50 in 1752 whilst captain of the slave ships, *Blundell* and *Duke of Cumberland* respectively. Owen Pritchard was similarly a Trustee of the Blue Coat School from 1741 to 1765 and subscribed to the charity from 1728 until 1751. Meanwhile, Thomas Backhouse was a Trustee of the school 1749–50 and gifted a sum of £52. 10s to the worthy cause in 1747.

Jamaica, which formed part of the British West Indies during the period. Each of the slave voyages listed experienced a minimum mortality rate of 13 per cent and an average mortality rate of 16.4 per cent. However, one such slaving voyage pursued by Blundell and his business partners on a ship named *Martha* in 1721, recorded a death rate of 20 per cent, a total of twenty-eight people. Available statistics reveal that the total death count among those forced to board the fifteen slaving voyages — fully or partially funded by Blundell — reached 801 people.

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Voyages Database connects Blundell to an additional twenty-seven slave voyages, which were responsible for the enforced transportation of a further sum of 6,049 enslaved Africans and resulted in the deaths of 1,556 people during the brutal ‘Middle Passage’.³⁷ However, available evidence suggests that the majority, if not all, of these latter voyages were more than likely connected to Bryan Blundell Junior.³⁸ Meanwhile, in recent years, an Intra-American Slave Trade Database was added to *Slave Voyages* in order to highlight the ‘intercolonial’ enforced migration of enslaved Africans within America from the sixteenth- to the nineteenth century.³⁹ This database connects Bryan Blundell to, at least, one further ship named *Jonathan*, which was responsible for embarking forty enslaved Africans in Jamaica, thirty-nine of whom were disembarked at Lower James River (Virginia) in 1733.⁴⁰

Blundell’s sons, Jonathan (76 slave voyages), Bryan Junior (52 slave voyages), Richard and William (25 slave voyages each), as well as at least one grandson, Samuel Shaw (78 slave voyages) were similarly active in the direct transportation of enslaved African people and each subsequently benefitted from its profits.⁴¹ It is clear, then, that the money which Bryan Blundell and his relatives subscribed, gifted and bequeathed to the Blue Coat School was, to some extent, directly linked to the proceeds of trans-Atlantic and intra-American slavery. This is of huge significance given that between the period 1709 to 1796, Bryan Blundell, his four sons, Jonathan, William, Richard and Bryan Junior, and his grandson, Samuel

³⁷ A brief overview of the ‘Triangular Trade’ model is provided in Mary Wills and Madge Dresser, ‘The Transatlantic Slave Economy and England’s Built Environment: A Research Audit’ *Historic England, Research Report Series*, 247–2020 (2020), 8.

³⁸ This conclusion has been reached by cross-referencing entries in Blundell’s journal, which detail the numerous ships he owned or held shares in, and the various assets left to his children in his last will and testament, 1687–1756, LARO DDBB8/4; 31 January 1756, LARO WCW/Supra/OS1/2.

³⁹ Alex Borucki and Greg O’Malley, ‘Introduction’, (2018) Intra-American Slave Trade Database. *Slave Voyages*. <<https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database>> [accessed 9 August 2021].

⁴⁰ The database similarly connects Bryan Blundell to a slaving ship called *Providence* in 1766 via the Intra-American Slave Trade Database; however, this voyage is, once again, more likely connected to Bryan Junior. Intra-American Slave Trade Database. *Slave Voyages*.

⁴¹ The total number of slave voyages provided for Bryan Blundell Junior includes any voyages that I suspect were attributed to Bryan Blundell Senior but were, in fact, pursued by the former, Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database. *Slave Voyages*.

Shaw, cumulatively donated a minimum of £2,992. 5s to the Liverpool Blue Coat School. The Bank of England's Inflation Calculator estimates that this sum would have valued £646,083.59 in 2020.⁴²

Networks of Kith and Kin

Blundell's journal entries, commercial partners and patterns of vessel ownership each demonstrate that he chose to operate business via his most trusted networks of kith and kin. During his early career at sea, Blundell undoubtedly benefitted from the commercial and political networks already established among the Liverpool elite by his grandfather, Thomas Preeson, as well as his uncle, William Preeson (Mayor, 1696–97). In fact, Blundell's first experience as captain was on his uncle's ship, the *Mulberry* (1696–1701).⁴³ In addition, Blundell's journal reveals that his cousins, Thomas Preeson Junior (a plantation owner in Virginia) and Captain Edward Tarleton, were regular sources of assistance, friendship and business, with the latter featuring among Blue Coat's first subscribers alongside his brother, Dr John Tarleton.⁴⁴ Blundell similarly demonstrated a close relationship with his brothers-in-law, William and Ralph, from his first marriage to Samuella Williamson (1696–1704). In 1707, for instance, Blundell diverted from his ship's course to rush to his brother-in-law's side at Potomac (Maryland) upon receiving news of his illness.⁴⁵ Blundell's private papers equally demonstrate that while at sea he often found refuge among trusted convoys of Liverpool, Bristol and London vessels and that passing friendly ships often proved vital conduits of 'nuse'.⁴⁶ Blundell regularly noted familiar faces and vessels hailing from

⁴² Blundell and his sons likely donated a larger sum of money to the Blue Coat School than the figure provided, particularly as the following statement is issued in 1752 in the school's accounts next to 'Blundell & Sons', 'Given pritty large sum of money this year to the school do not continue their subscriptions this year but give handsomely at church collections', LCLA 377.BLU/5. The Blundells did not renew their subscriptions until 1764, so it is assumed that during this period they opted to indirectly donate to the Blue Coat School via the poor box collections held in various Liverpool churches. The Bank of England Inflation Calculator has been used to estimate the modern value of the annual sum of money donated to Blue Coat by Bryan Blundell and his sons during the period 1709–96. Annual gifts, subscriptions and legacies have been valued according to the average inflation of the year each sum was donated. For instance, in 1745, Bryan Blundell Junior gifted £5 5s. to the school, converted to £5.25 in decimal currency and valued at £1,212.87 in 2020. The same sum of money (£5.5s) donated in 1750 was valued at £1,133.73 owing to annual fluctuations in inflation. All donations have then been collated to provide a total estimated value in modern currency, <<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>> [accessed 5 August 2021].

⁴³ Hignett, 'The Journal of Bryan Blundell', iii; December 1696–July 1701, LARO DDBB8/4.

⁴⁴ For instance, Blundell would often stay for periods of up to three months in Virginia with his cousin, Thomas Preeson Junior. There is also evidence which confirms that they jointly owned ships and engaged in the tobacco trade together, *Ibid.*, 1687–1714. Blundell's cousin, Edward Tarleton subscribed to Blue Coat from 1709 to 1717, and Edward's brother, Dr John Tarleton, subscribed in 1709, LCLA 377.BLU/5.

⁴⁵ On this occasion, Blundell does not specify which of the two Williamson brothers was ill, 18 August 1707, LARO DDBB8/4.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 9 July 1702.

Liverpool, who he fondly referred to as his ‘neighbours’, highlighting a contemporary sense of respect and kinship within Liverpool’s seafaring community.⁴⁷

While many social and cultural historians have associated the eighteenth century with the alleged decline of the ‘consanguineal’ family nexus and the subsequent ‘rise of individualism’, Blundell’s actions confirm that akin to his paternal figures, he utilised his achieved wealth, status and reputation to fulfil the obligated ‘contract of family’.⁴⁸ Blundell was a devoted father of fifteen, although experienced the loss of eight of those children during birth, infancy or early childhood.⁴⁹ The contents of his final will and testament reveal that Blundell lent a substantial sum of money to his sons and grandsons during his lifetime, presumably to start their own mercantile businesses, as well as additional finances, assets and properties bequeathed to his male heirs upon his death.⁵⁰ Blundell’s will similarly highlights the generosity and sense of paternal duty directed towards numerous female relatives and extended kin. His granddaughters, Bridgett, Mary, Elinor, Elizabeth and Sarah, each received £200 and shares in numerous properties. Meanwhile, several other female relatives, including sisters, cousins and poor relations, were each gifted varying sums. Most significantly, however, his daughter, Elizabeth Crosbie, inherited a sixth part of his stock in the tar trade, which included a pitch house and its adjacent ground as well as various ships and goods.⁵¹ Elizabeth’s name can be seen listed next to her brothers as a co-owner of the slaving vessel, *Mary*, which took part in at least two voyages to Bonny and the Bight of Biafra (Africa) in 1759–60.⁵² The same ship appears to have been constructed and previously used by Blundell in the tar trade from 1737 until his death in 1756.⁵³ However, the ‘ninety-ton snauw’ was shipwrecked after successfully

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1687–1714.

⁴⁸ Lawrence Stone provides the most influential scholarship on the demise of the ‘consanguineal’ family, Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1977). Alternative theories, which demonstrate the continued significance of the family during the eighteenth century, are provided by, for example, Rosemary Sweet, ‘The Ordering of Family and Gender in the Age of the Enlightenment’ in F. O’Gorman and D. Donald (eds) *Ordering the World in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Publishers Ltd., 2006), 112–140; Richard Grassby, *Kinship and Capitalism: Marriage, Family and Business in the English Speaking World, 1580–1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Naomi Tadmor, ‘Early Modern English Kinship in the Long Run: Reflections on Continuity and Change’, *Continuity and Change*, 25.1 (May 2010): 15–48; Yoram Ben-Porath, ‘The F-Connection: Families, Friends, and Firms and the Organization of Exchange’, *Population and Development Review*, 6.1 (March 1980): 1–30. On the ‘contract of family’ see, for example, Sheryllynne Haggerty, “‘You Promise Well and Perform as Badly’: The Failure of the “Implicit Contract of Family” in the Scottish Atlantic’, *International Journal of Maritime History*, XXIII, 2 (2011), 267–282.

⁴⁹ In his journal, Blundell reflected upon the deaths of various family members and stated, ‘My loss is great...’, 25 August 1745, LARO DDBB8/4.

⁵⁰ 31 January 1756, LARO WCW/Supra/OS1/2.

⁵¹ The property, land and assets bequeathed to Elizabeth were originally left to Blundell’s son-in-law, James Crosbie. However, following James’ death in 1755, Blundell created a codicil to his last will and testament, which instead transferred a sixth part of his stock in the tar trade to his daughter, Elizabeth.

⁵² Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database. *Slave Voyages*.

⁵³ 1754, LARO DDBB8/4.

landing 128 enslaved individuals in Rappahannock (Virginia) and St Kitts during the latter of these two slaving voyages.⁵⁴

Blundell's journal similarly demonstrates his commitment and devotion to family. In particular, Blundell described how his widowed daughter, Hanna Shaw, along with her son, the previously mentioned Samuel Shaw, lived with him for almost thirteen years.⁵⁵ Upon Hanna's sudden death in 1731, Blundell continued to care for his grandson and appears to have treated him as a son.⁵⁶ Another daughter, Mary, similarly 'kept [his] house' for fifteen years.⁵⁷ Further, in addition to the commercial ventures that Blundell frequently pursued with the family group, Blue Coat's accounts ledger (1714–55) reveals that Blundell ushered numerous family members into the beneficial civic position of being a school governor. For instance, when Blue Coat's board of trustees was extended from a total of nine to fifty in 1741, several of Blundell's relatives can be found among the names listed including his son, William; his brother-in-law from his first marriage, William Williamson, as well as his nephew, William Williamson Junior; his brother-in-law and nephew from his third marriage, Foster and Ellis Cunliffe; his cousin Ester's husband, Ralph Peters; and his son William's father-in-law, Richard Houghton. Blundell also had familial links with the Shaws, Tarletons, Townsends, Stathams, Crosbies and Blackburnes, who were each trustees and subscribers to the Liverpool Blue Coat School during the eighteenth century.

Political, Civic and Religious Duty

Blundell's mercantile achievements were complemented with a successful political career. He acted as a member of the Corporation (1721), bailiff (1735) and later alderman of Liverpool, and was one of few men twice elected as Mayor in the town during the eighteenth century (1721 and 1728).⁵⁸ Nevertheless, his time in office was not without its controversies. During his second term as Mayor, Blundell's evident anti-council actions were representative of a series of local protests and populist challenges which, Ascott et al. demonstrate, occurred during the 1720s and 1730s in opposition to the entrenched court-Whig oligarchy.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, Blundell's journal reveals that his involvement in the political disputes may have been predominantly motivated by his deeply felt religious beliefs, as he stated:

⁵⁴ Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database. *Slave Voyages*.

⁵⁵ (n.d), LARO DDBB8/4. Hanna was the only surviving child of five children born to Blundell's first wife, Samuella Williamson.

⁵⁶ In his will, Blundell bequeathed a comparable sum of money and assets to both his grandson, Samuel, and his sons. In contrast, Blundell's other grandchildren, including several males, did not receive as much money and/or property as Samuel, which suggests that Blundell had a closer relationship with him as a result of raising him for many years, LARO WCW/Supra/OS1/2.

⁵⁷ (n.d), LARO DDBB8/4.

⁵⁸ Ascott et al, *Liverpool 1660–1750*, 141.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 178–183.

...[it] is terrible that we should obey men rather than God. And such is the effects of those frequent elections, the whole Nation is being divided by some designing men ... those in the interest of the Court and the Government are for getting great things to themselves their family and friends.⁶⁰

Indeed, Blundell's piety and godly discipline consistently motivated the civic roles he pursued as well as his generous beneficence. In his journal, he frequently praised 'God's assistance' for his acquired commercial riches, as well as for protecting him from illness and injury while at sea.⁶¹ He regularly attended church services, subscribed to various religious texts, including *Discourses on all the Principal Branches of Natural Religion and Social Virtue*, and was an active member of the *Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge* (SPCK).⁶² In addition, Blundell owned several pews in St Peter's, St Nicholas' and St Thomas' Church.⁶³ During his mayoralty, Blundell proactively confronted the town's lack of 'piety and religion' and its 'increase of sin and vice'.⁶⁴ He expanded the number of constables in Liverpool, built a cage, ducking chair and a new pair of stocks to ensure that profanity was properly punished, while simultaneously admonishing the town's inhabitants of their religious and moral obligation.⁶⁵ Yet, Blundell's sense of public duty extended beyond the public office and the political arena. His devotion to charity and, in particular, to the Blue Coat School represented Blundell's most noteworthy act of piety and Christian beneficence. Hignett estimates that Blundell donated a total of £8,000 to various Liverpool charities, including the Infirmary (1749) and, of course, the Blue Coat School, although this figure seems a little generous.⁶⁶ It is, however, possible to confirm that Blundell recorded a total of £2,000 gifted to the Blue Coat School over the course of his lifetime, 'a tenth part of which it pleased God to bless [him] with'.⁶⁷

In both his public and private papers, Blundell frequently substantiated the considerable financial and physical contribution that he made to Blue Coat in acknowledgement of the 'Glory of God'.⁶⁸ Blundell stated that he 'spent a great deal of his time and [took] much pains to promote' the school in addition to 'supervising the buildings and examining the housekeeping and expenses'.⁶⁹ Blundell expressed that during his periods of civic office, he always kept 'the good of the school much at heart' and believed that

⁶⁰ (n.d), LARO DDBB8/4.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 7 November 1690.

⁶² See, for instance, Blundell, 'Rise and Progress', LCLA 377.BLU/9; (n.d), LA DDBB8/4; and Blundell's various correspondence with the SPCK 1719–1755, LCLA 377.72 COR.

⁶³ 31 January 1756, LA WCW/Supra/OS1/2.

⁶⁴ (n.d.), LA DDBB8/4.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*; 4 January 1721; Correspondence with the SPCK, LCLA 377.72 COR.

⁶⁶ Hignett, 'The Journal of Bryan Blundell', i.

⁶⁷ Blundell, 'Rise and Progress', LCLA 377.BLU/9.

⁶⁸ (n.d.), LA DDBB8/4.

⁶⁹ 27 August 1739, Exemplification of the Decree made in the Chancery Court of Lancaster concerning the Government of the Blue Coat School, LCLA 377.BLU/2/1.

he was more serviceable to Blue Coat in a public rather than a private capacity.⁷⁰ Yet, despite his evident enthusiasm and continued support for the charity school since its initial conception in 1708, Blundell was notably absent from Blue Coat's first trustee list, presumably because he was away at sea.⁷¹ It was not until Blundell received news of the death of Robert Styth in 1713 that he decided to remain ashore to undertake full responsibility of the Blue Coat School.

Blundell's journal highlights the empathy and compassion he felt towards the town's increasing number of poor children, who were left to beg in the street for bread and meat.⁷² It was the condition of Liverpool's orphaned, fatherless and destitute street urchins which prompted Blundell to build Blue Coat's new residential building (1716–25), particularly as he became increasingly concerned at the original school's inadequacy to deal with the poverty of the period.⁷³ However, it is possible to argue that Blundell's acts of charity and piety were, at least in part, driven by self-interest. First, it is plausible to suggest that the education and reformation of Blue Coat's pupils benefitted Blundell as the eventual master of several indentured children, although this was likely a fortuitous outcome rather than evidence of any long-term scheming. While apprenticeship data is unavailable for the first half of the eighteenth century, the analysis of the school's post-1740 pupil registers confirms that the Blundells collectively apprenticed a minimum of thirty pupils, predominately to sea, between 1742 and 1792.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, a significant number of additional Blue Coat boys were similarly indentured to Liverpool's major traders, many of whom conducted business with the Blundells. Seafarers were particularly targeted by the SPCK for their immoral and irreligious behaviour, thus the opportunity to apprentice young Blue Coat boys — who had been moulded into 'painful labourers, honest men and good Christians' — to a life at sea on board one of their ships, likely appealed to merchants such as Bryan Blundell, who would theoretically benefit from a more efficient and trustworthy crew.⁷⁵

Indeed, Blundell frequently promoted the utilitarian and religious advantages of the charity school. In 'Rise and Progress', for example, it was stated:

The anxious wish of the Trustees is not only to relieve distress not only to protect feed and cloth[e] the orphan and the fatherless but to supply the community with industrious and well-

⁷⁰ (n.d.), LA DDBB8/4.

⁷¹ 1717, LCLA 377.BLU/1/1.

⁷² (n.d.), LARO DDBB8/4.

⁷³ Blundell, 'Rise and Progress', LCLA 377.BLU/9; 1717, LCLA 377.BLU/1/1.

⁷⁴ While pupil data is unavailable for the years 1709–40, it is likely that the Blundells similarly apprenticed other Blue Coat pupils during this earlier period increasing the overall total, Blue Coat Hospital and School Admission and Dismissal Register, 1743–1846, LCLA 377.BLU/19/1/1; 1741–1813, LCLA 377.BLU/15/1. Two of the thirty pupils apprenticed to the Blundell family during the eighteenth century were girls, Elizabeth Hodgson and Mary Banks, apprenticed as housewives to Mrs Alice Blundell, Jonathan Blundell's wife, in 1776 and 1782 respectively.

⁷⁵ 25 December 1779, LCLA 377.BLU/12.

behaved servants, seamen and artisans to send out into the world young persons qualified to be useful in their several callings and grounded in those sound principles of religion.⁷⁶

A pupil's day was divided between education, religious instruction and manual labour with the specific aim of promoting industry and piety among Liverpool's poor children. In a letter dated 5 September 1723, the SPCK praised Blundell's successful and efficient methods of employing the school children and defraying the expense of maintaining the charity school. As a result, the SPCK wished to make an example of Blundell, stating:

Pray ... me with the particulars of your progress ... if you don't object to it ... it may be printed and recommended to be practiced in other places.⁷⁷

However, the gruelling practice of employing the children to spin cotton and pick oakum for up to half of the school day came under increased scrutiny by the final quarter of the eighteenth century. Hignett states that there is evidence to suggest that several of Blundell's peers believed that he strategically dispatched pupils to sea as indentured servants and claimed that his ships were entirely 'manned by immature children'.⁷⁸ While it has not been possible to verify such claims made against Bryan Blundell, there is definitive evidence that his son, Jonathan Blundell, was similarly accused of abusing his position as school Treasurer and Trustee in 1771 in order to consult '[his] own private lucre and advantage' by employing one-hundred pupils in his jointly-owned stocking manufactory, 'as if the whole business was performed by children'.⁷⁹

Second, despite the challenges posed to Christian Providentialism during the period of Enlightenment, religion remained influential for many eighteenth-century contemporaries, particularly those as pious as Bryan Blundell.⁸⁰ As previously highlighted, he devoutly believed in the Divine Providence of God and man's ability to achieve eternal heavenly rewards by tending to God's work. As a result, Blundell likely expected his philanthropic and charitable contributions to secure him immeasurable wealth in the afterlife.

⁷⁶ William Osborne Bird Allen, *Two Hundred Years, The History of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1698–1898* (London: SPCK, 1898), 168, 456–458; Blundell, 'Rise and Progress', LCLA 377.BLU/9.

⁷⁷ 5 September 1723, LCLA 377.72 COR.

⁷⁸ Hignett, 'The Journal of Bryan Blundell', viii.

⁷⁹ 1 April 1771, LCLA 377.BLU/15/1/1.

⁸⁰ See, for example, J. C. D. Clark, 'Providence, Predestination and Progress: Or, did the Enlightenment Fail?', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 35.4 (Winter, 2003): 559–589; Clark 'Church, Parties and Politics', 289–314; Robert G. Ingram, 'The Church of England, 1714–1783', in Jeremy Gregory (ed.) *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Establishment and Empire, 1662–1829*, Volume II (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 49–68.

Third, his involvement in the Blue Coat School equally offered Blundell worldly rewards. For example, in 1714 Blundell expressed that he would only take full care of the charity school if the Liverpool Corporation agreed to exclude him from any other public duties.⁸¹ In contrast, when he later opted to become active in Liverpool politics, Blundell likely harnessed his affiliation with the charity school to bolster his performance during mayoral campaigns. His position as Blue Coat's Treasurer and Trustee undoubtedly conferred gentlemanly status and respectability to Blundell, which was not only beneficial for political progression but also in accessing the town's most prestigious social and commercial circles. Moreover, as previously stated, available evidence suggests that Blundell used (or abused) his authority at Blue Coat to elect friends and family to the school's exclusive cohort of trustees. This resulted in a dominant mercantile oligarchy, underpinned by family patronage, serving on Blue Coat's governing board, which arguably reflected that of the Liverpool Corporation.⁸² Indeed, several trustees were notably loaned surplus school funds by the board, and Blue Coat's accounts reveal that money was similarly 'put out at interest' to the Liverpool Corporation, the Dock Committee and towards the building of crucial canal infrastructure.⁸³ Significantly, Blundell as well as the majority of other school governors formed the members, proprietors and trustees of each and, therefore, personally benefitted from these investments. There is additional evidence that Blundell was taken to court in 1739 and accused of refusing to:

...account for the monies he has received ... or to discover the balance or fund in his hands or to produce the books of accounts ... or to [illegible] the legal estate of the said hospital ... in proper trustees or to submit to any regulations of the said charity so as to prevent imbezelment...'.⁸⁴

Blundell denied the majority of claims, however, was forced to admit that he had, at the very least, placed several of the school's properties in his own name. It is difficult to establish with any certainty if Blundell was potentially embezzling money from the charity school, but the court appeared satisfied with the accounts he later produced. It was, however, decreed that 'henceforth proper trustees' were to be appointed for the school's future management and that Blue Coat's accounts were to be annually audited.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Blundell wrote retrospectively about his political career, which may impact the accuracy of certain recalled events, (n.d.), LARO DDBB8/4.

⁸² See, for example, Power, *Creating a Port*, 51–71; Michael Power, 'Politics and Progress in Liverpool, 1660–1740', *Northern History*, 35.1 (1999): 119–138.

⁸³ 1714–1755, LCLA 377.BLU/5; Blue Coat Hospital Subscription Ledger 1756–1780, LCLA 377.BLU/17/1/2; Blue Coat Hospital Subscription Ledger 1781–1813, LCLA 377.BLU/17/1/7.

⁸⁴ 27 August 1739, LCLA 377.BLU/2/1.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

Bryan Blundell was a well-respected, successful and wealthy merchant, politician and philanthropist among his eighteenth-century contemporaries. However, as this article has substantiated, John Hughes' description of the Liverpool Blue Coat School as a monument to charity and piety can only offer an incomplete reflection of the complex heritage that Blue Coat's co-founder, chief patron, Treasurer and Trustee, Bryan Blundell, bestowed upon the eighteenth-century school as well as the modern-day inner-city Bluecoat building and Blue Coat School in Wavertree.⁸⁶ It is undeniable that the construction and maintenance of the Blue Coat Charity School was representative of the generous munificence and Christian sentiment, not only of Blundell but also of Liverpool's Georgian middling sort more broadly. Nonetheless, the eighteenth-century Blue Coat School (and subsequently the present-day Grade I listed building) concurrently embodied a multifaceted and often obscure identity of self and familial interest, mercantile wealth, enlightened reform, urban poverty, child labour, social control and colonial legacies. While it is not the intention of this article to suggest that Bryan Blundell and his eighteenth-century contemporaries were incapable of genuine acts of kindness, philanthropy and altruism, it instead highlights the likelihood that a series of multilayered and interconnected eighteenth-century commercial, social, political, cultural and religious factors which shaped the man, motivated Blundell's decision to dedicate his wealth, time and legacy to Liverpool's Blue Coat Charity School.

⁸⁶ Hughes, 'The Liverpool Blue Coat Hospital', 163–186. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Blue Coat School was relocated in Wavertree away from the polluted and overcrowded city-centre. It continues to function as a Liverpool grammar school.

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