



# prize papers project

**Portal Launch  
22 February 2022  
Facts & Figures**

The following pages provide brief explanations of terms, phenomena, and institutions related to the Prize Papers Project.

Find high-resolution photos, videos, logos, flyers, quotes, and source examples here: <https://www.prizepapers.de/the-project/press>

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## THE PROJECT

### The Prize Papers Project

The aim of the German-UK Prize Papers Project is the complete digitization and sorting of the Prize Papers including the preservation of the collection's material, the initial and in-depth cataloguing, the creation of research-oriented metadata and finally the presentation of the digital copies and the metadata in an open access research database. The portal development reflects our continuous engagement with current discussions in the field of Digital Humanities. We also pursue various research projects, and we cooperate with numerous international researchers and research institutions working on the Prize Papers and in project-related areas.

The Prize Papers Project is part of the Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Germany. It is based at the Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg, Germany, and The National Archives, UK. The project co-operates closely with the German Historical Institute London (GHIL), as well as the VZG (the headquarters of the Common Library Network) in Göttingen, who provide their IT expertise.

As of 2018, the Prize Papers Project has been part of the Academies Programme of the Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities. Thus, it is funded by the German state and the federal state of Lower Saxony, with a prospective funding period from 2018 to 2037.

<https://adw-goe.de/forschung/forschungsprojekte-akademienprogramm/prize-papers-erschliessung-digitalisierung-praesentation>

### The Prize Papers Collection

The Prize Papers comprise the initial process and exhibits of the Prize Court of the High Court of Admiralty for ships captured at sea, and brought into English, Irish, Channel Islands and Portuguese ports, in the fourteen naval wars between 1652 and 1815. The Prize Court was reconstituted for each war, and so was in existence for the First, Second and Third Anglo-Dutch Wars (1652-4, 1665-7 and 1672-4), the Nine Years War (1688-97), the War of the Spanish Succession and the War of the Quadruple Alliance (1701-14 and 1717-20, treated as one war by the court), the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-8), the Seven Years War (1756-63), the War of American Independence shading into the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1775-83, 1780-4), the French Revolutionary War (1793-1801), the Napoleonic War including the War of 1812 (1803-1814, 1812-5) and the War of 1815. Geographically, the collection includes Europe, the Americas, Asia, Africa, and Australia.

<https://www.prizepapers.de/the-project/the-prize-papers-collection>

## Key Figures

- 165 years (1652–1817)
- 35,000 captured ships
- 4088 boxes
- 82 document types
- 160,000 undelivered letters
- 71 printed volumes
- 19 languages
- 5 continents
- 3.5 million digital copies in 2037

## Privateering and Prize-Taking

The Prize Papers are a result of an early modern warfare practice which witnessed its heyday in the context of 17th and 18th century European colonial expansion. During wartime, hostile European powers would capture their enemies' ships all over the world, dealing severe blows to their military, political and economic force.

Capturing, or prize-taking, was not a lawless act of piracy – on the contrary: Laws, which were respected by all the parties involved, dictated precisely how a capture had to unfold, and under which circumstances it would be legal or illegal. Only a ship that could be proven to belong to an enemy party, or to support that enemy party's war effort, could be legally captured. The final ruling on the legality or illegality of a capture had to be made in court. For the seafarers setting out to take prizes, this meant that they had to adhere and swear to a strict legal procedure, which included making sure that every last scrap of paper travelling on board the captured ship was confiscated as evidence for the ensuing court process.

The practice of prize-taking resulted in a vast, extraordinary and partly accidental archive of the early modern world, contains documents from more than 35,000 captured ships, held in around 4088 boxes and 71 printed volumes. The Prize Papers Collection includes at least 160,000 undelivered letters intercepted on their way across the seas, many of which remain unopened to this day. These are accompanied by books and papers on all manner of legal, commercial, maritime, colonial and administrative matters, often embellished with notes and doodles. Documents in at least 19 different languages have been identified so far, and more languages are likely to be discovered as the project progresses. Alongside this written material is a variety of small miscellaneous artefacts, including jewelry, textiles, playing cards and keys.

This collection of time-capsules has preserved the voices of men, women and children from a multitude of societies and cultures. Each item reveals how peoples' lives were caught in the global entanglements of the early modern world. Their frozen dramas provide matchless insights into 165-years of colonial development, spanning three centuries.

## THE TEAM

### The International Prize Papers Team

The members of the international Prize Papers team are based in Oldenburg, London and Göttingen. The Oldenburg team led by Professor Dagmar Freist includes six researchers in various academic posts and ten student assistants. A senior archivist and two records specialists are sorting and cataloguing the collection at The National Archives (TNA) in London led by Dr Amanda Bevan. In addition, two TNA conservators are ensuring that all items in the archive are preserved in the best possible condition. The Göttingen team, two IT experts from the head office of the Common Library Network (VZG) provide their IT expertise and are responsible for the technical implementation of the portal. As an academic partner, the German Historical Institute London (GHIL) helps with the organization of international conferences and employs the project's two photographers.

#### **Oldenburg**

Prof. Dr Dagmar Freist: Project Director

Christina Beckers: Digital Humanities and Project Management

Dr Lucas Haasis: Research Coordinator and PR

Dr Jessica Cronshagen: Schools and Museums Liaison

Frank Marquardt: Research Associate

Lisa Magnin: Research Associate

Daniel Fleisch: Research Associate

#### **London**

Dr Amanda Bevan: Head of Legal Records, Head of the London Prize Papers Team

Dr Randolph Cock: Prize Papers Record Specialist

Dr Oliver Finnegan: Prize Papers Record Specialist

Dr Jess Nelson: Interim Head of Collections Expertise and Engagement

Sarah Noble: Senior Conservation Manager for Mass Digitisation and Large Scale Projects

Camilla Camus-Doughan: Project Conservator, Digitisation and Large Scale Projects

Maria Cardamone: Imaging Operator

Mustapha Ousellam: Imaging Operator

#### **Göttingen**

Frank Dührkohp, IT

Timo Schleier, IT

Tobias Helms, IT

## The Cooperation Partners



### The National Archives, UK (TNA)

The National Archives in London are a non-ministerial department, and the official archive and publisher for the UK Government, and for England and Wales. They are the guardians of over 1,000 years of iconic national documents. They are expert advisers in information and records management and are a cultural, academic and heritage institution. The National Archives (TNA) fulfil a leadership role for the archive sector and work to secure the future of physical and digital records.

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/our-role>



### The Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg

The Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg was founded in 1973, making it one of Germany's young universities. Its goal is to find answers to the major challenges society faces in the 21st century – through interdisciplinary, cutting edge research.

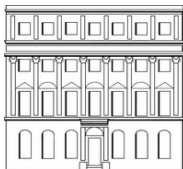
<https://uol.de/en/outline>



### VZG Göttingen

The Gemeinsamer Bibliotheksverbund (GBV) is the common library network of the seven German federal states Bremen, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Lower Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Schleswig-Holstein, Thuringia and the Foundation of Prussian Cultural Heritage. The GBV head office (VZG) is situated in Göttingen.

[https://www.gbv.de/Verbundzentrale/ueber\\_die\\_VZG/index](https://www.gbv.de/Verbundzentrale/ueber_die_VZG/index)



### GHIL London

The German Historical Institute London (GHIL) is dedicated to the promotion of historical research in the United Kingdom and Germany. It focuses on the comparative history of Britain and Germany, the global and colonial history of the British Empire and Commonwealth, and the history of British-German relations and transfers.

German  
Historical  
Institute  
London

<https://www.ghil.ac.uk/home/mission-statement>

## THE FUNDING BODY

The Prize Papers project is funded within The Academies Programme of the Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities and assigned to the Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Göttingen.

### The Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities

The Academy is a learned society rich in tradition and a non-university research institution. Crossing national and disciplinary boundaries, it unites around 400 Ordinary and Corresponding Members.

In these fast-paced times, the Göttingen Academy runs scientific long-term projects of international significance. In the area of basic research into the humanities the Göttingen Academy is the biggest non-university institution in Lower Saxony. It also promotes the use of computer technologies in the humanities and pushes for free online access to scientific publications.

The Göttingen Academy organizes and participates in numerous events aimed at the public at large. On these occasions, it either promotes a dialogue on questions of wider social importance or offers deeper insights into particular areas of knowledge.

<https://adw-goe.de/startseite/>

### The Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities

The Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities unites eight German academies in Berlin, Düsseldorf, Göttingen, Hamburg, Heidelberg, Leipzig, Mainz and Munich. The academies bring together more than 2000 scientists and scholars of national and international distinction, across a range of researchers. Together they work to promote interdisciplinary exchange, to guarantee scholarly and scientific excellence and to support early career researchers.

The Union coordinates the Academies Programme. It supports communication between the academies, undertakes press and publicity work, organises events on current themes in research and contributes to scientifically grounded consultations for civil society and the political process. Once a year it invites the public to the Academies' Day to learn about the research conducted by the academies. In addition, the Union represents its member academies both at home and abroad and sends representatives to umbrella organisations of academies in Europe and around the world.

<https://www.akademienunion.de/>



## The Academies Programme

The Academies Programme is a joint initiative by the eight German Academies of Sciences and Humanities under the aegis of the Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities, as well as the Leopoldina, the German National Academy of Sciences.

The joint research programme of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities has the goal of studying, preserving and communicating global cultural heritage. It is Germany's largest research programme in the social sciences and humanities and is the only one of its kind in the world. Through their long-term basic research, the academies make an indispensable contribution to the documentation of our cultural memory and thereby also to the formation of both national and transnational cultural identities.

Since 1979/80 the Academies Programme has been funded jointly by the German Federal Government and Federal States. The Prize Papers Project is funded by the German state and the federal state of Lower Saxony in Germany. Within the Academies Programme, around 900 staff are working on around 130 projects in over 190 research units. Through their editions, dictionaries and text corpora, the academies create central stores of knowledge for the future, which are available – increasingly also in digital form – for use by researchers and the public.

<https://www.akademienunion.de/en/research/the-academies-programme>

## THE LAUNCH

### The Portal

The Beta-Version of the Portal is now online. The first collection presented are 55 fully digitized Case Books of the HCA 45 collection: volumes of printed court papers documenting appeals brought before the Appeal Court from the High Court of Admiralty in London and the Vice-Admiralty Courts in the British colonies between 1793 and 1815.

The digital records and the metadata available on the portal are created in the context of close collaboration between Oldenburg, London and Göttingen. The documents are recorded, sorted, catalogued and preserved by the team at The National Archives and then digitized by the project photographers there (GHIL). The images and information are sent on a daily basis to the Oldenburg team, which collects basic information and more in-depth metadata and continually identifies new document types. The data model was developed together with IT experts at the VZG, who are also responsible for the technical implementation of the portal.

### Online First: HCA 45 High Court of Appeals for Prizes: Case Books

The TNA series HCA 45 contains bound volumes of printed appeals presented to the Lords Commissioners of Prize Appeals by litigants, with judgments written in. Those for 1793 to 1815 are presented here, to allow in-depth exploration of maritime trade, communications and warfare across the globe.

The litigants provided their own narratives of voyages and captures and the text of depositions and judgments from the earlier court cases. The appendices print (in full English transcript) the ship's papers, cargo lists, accounts and letters, used to prove the nationality of ship or goods. The prize courts appealed from could be the High Court of Admiralty in London, or one of the many British Vice-Admiralty Courts in the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, the Northwest Atlantic or in Africa and India.

Appeals by enemies were not possible, although British captors disputed their own shares of the spoils of war, from both neutrals and enemies. Only neutrals could hope for restoration, and so 60% were about United States ships (neutral until the War of 1812) and 30% about ships from Denmark, Sweden, and Germany. Numerous appeals concern slave trading-ships. Some are for trade to and from India, China and the East; more are for trade along the coasts of Europe, or the west Atlantic coast, or between the Caribbean coasts and islands – all linking people across the world.

The HCA 45 collection particularly shows prize-taking as an essential part of warfare. The printed appeals provide information about the myriad of small-scale actions undertaken by the Royal Navy, as well as more formal actions. The British captors named in appeals are twice as likely to be Royal Navy ships rather than privateers and range from the smallest tenders to naval squadrons. Privateers however were very active in the Caribbean, with by far the most appeals against privateers coming from the Caribbean Vice-Admiralty Courts, snapping up trade along the American seaboard and to and from the islands. The archival cataloguing and pagination of this collection HCA 45 was carried out with additional support of the William Nelson Cromwell Foundation: <https://cromwellfoundation.org>

## Quotes

### **Prof. Dr. Margaret Hunt**

Uppsala University, Sweden

*"The printed appeals that make up HCA 45 are easy to read, engaging, and the most accessible of the Prize Papers. As such they are the perfect class with which to launch the new Portal. They will be appreciated by scholars, students and the general public alike."*

### **Dr. Nick Radburn**

Lancaster University, UK

Co-Editor of the Slave Voyages Project

*"Accessible and packed with new information, the printed appeals in HCA 45 are the perfect entry point to the Prize Papers - a project that will be transformational for the study of Atlantic history."*

### **Dr. Bertie Mandelblatt**

The John Carter Brown Library, Brown University

Providence, Rhode Island, USA

*"The Prize Papers Portal makes available to scholars crucial primary documents that had previously been difficult to access. These papers are incredible snapshots of the worlds of European and transatlantic trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and can be used to investigate all kinds of questions from many fields: not only economic, maritime, political and legal history but also social and cultural history. Moreover, the filters and metadata provided by the portal allows for new and very useful kinds of searches."*

## Present Search Options for HCA 45

HCA 45 can be accessed in different ways. In general, it is possible to read through each case book online or to download it. Altogether, you will find 57.000 pages from 55 Case Books to browse through. It is also possible to search by subject and keyword and, additionally, you can refine your search by using various techniques to narrow or broaden your search results. In this beta version of the portal you will be able to:

- search for ships which were captured
- search for ships which were captors
- search for a specific capture
- search for a specific court case
- search by date, time and place
- search for documents related to a specific court case
- search for ships and court cases by the captains/masters of the involved ships

Furthermore, it is already possible to limit the range of your search results within ships or court cases even more by adding further criteria, such as loadings or nationalities, to your search. The information will be gradually completed.

## The Next Steps

In addition to the Case Books, the Prize Papers collection at The National Archives includes thousands of trial records and pieces of evidence presented during the proceedings before the High Court of Admiralty, in series HCA 30 and HCA 32, including some 160,000 undelivered letters, as well as logbooks, ship's papers and bills, poems and drawings, fabrics, coins, jewellery and other objects seized from the captured ships. The collection comprises documents in at least 19 languages identified so far – from French, Dutch, to Armenian or Basque – and covers a geographic space that spans Europe, the Americas, Asia and Australia.

This collection of time-capsules has preserved the voices of men, women and children from a multitude of societies and cultures. Each item reveals how peoples' lives were caught in the global entanglements of the early modern world. Their frozen dramas provide matchless insights into 165-years of colonial development, spanning three centuries.

Later this year, selected archive materials from the collections HCA 30 and HCA 32 from times of the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-48) will additionally appear on the portal. This is our 2nd module. These sample materials – such as the contents of a business archive or a collection of materials from certain ships – will serve to illustrate the diversity of the collection.

The digitisation in the Prize Papers Project started with the War of the Austrian Succession, where the papers have been newly catalogued by TNA in 2018-2021. Currently, sorting and cataloguing is taking place on the Anglo-Spanish War, 1st Anglo-Dutch War, 2nd Anglo-Dutch War, 3rd Anglo-Dutch War and the Nine Years War.

By the end of 2023 the entire part of the collection that originated during the War of the Austrian Succession, taken from 1,600 captured ships, is to be published on the Portal. The other modules will follow – one war after another – so that when the project ends in 2037 the portal will contain an estimated 3.5 million digital copies, along with the metadata.

### Research Opportunities HCA 30 and HCA 32

Studies in the areas of Maritime History, Maritime and Trade Law, Military History, Natural History, History of the Slave Trade and Plantation-based Economies, History of Medicine, History of the Family, History of Communication, History of Consumption, History of Migration and Legal History, History of the Body, Missionary History, Historical Climate Research, Economic History, History of Science, Colonial History and Postcolonial Studies.

### Languages in HCA 30/32

Dutch, French, English, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Italian, Danish, Swedish, Russian, Basque, Yiddish, Ladino, Latin, Hebrew, Arabic, Persian and Armenian

### Selection of Document Types in HCA 30/32

Account Books, Affidavits, Examinations, Claims, Bills of Exchange, Bills of Health, Bills of Lading, Dictionaries, Journals, Letters of Marque, Letters, Logbooks, Muster Rolls, Petitions, Receipts, Ship's Passes.