

Pompey as the nickname for Portsmouth

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Throughout the twentieth century, *Pompey* has been used as a nickname¹ for the city of Portsmouth in Hampshire. It is sometimes said to be, more restrictedly, a nickname for the naval base there, and it is certainly used for Portsmouth Football Club. There are many theories of its origin, some with a veneer of plausibility, others feeble, and still others probably never meant to be taken seriously. Not one of them comes near being convincing. They are conveniently presented on a number of local web-sites, from which I have borrowed as freely as they have borrowed from each other and from miscellaneous printed sources.² Let us start by reviewing them all.

¹ The term *nickname* is not theoretically satisfactory, but it will serve here since no theoretical issue is addressed in this article. It is often used indiscriminately to label derived forms (often pet-names, like *Joe*), informal alternative names with some descriptive lexical content (like *Fats* used of a genuinely fat person), and otherwise-motivated alternative names (like the sometimes baffling traditional names given to Englishmen with particular surnames, like *Dusty* Miller or *Tug* Wilson). We shall be dealing with the third type here.

² See for instance the particularly comprehensive <uk.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20060917160335AA8A6UC> (accessed 29 January 2009), which brings together most of the explanations that have been commonly considered. Note the following comment on the current state of opinion <www.articlesbase.com/soccer-articles/portsmouth-fc-pompey-strive-for-another-fa-cup-575610.html>, accessed 11 February 2009): ‘No one is quite certain when Portsmouth [Football Club] became known by its nickname “Pompey”. It came about within a few decades of its founding. Fans debate the time “Pompey” became synonymous with “Portsmouth” almost as hotly as the origin of the name. The nickname seems to have dubious roots. It has become, in fact, something of an urban legend. What’s very certain is that no one really is quite certain where “Pompey” came from. Theories abound by the hundreds and many hold to their own preferred theory religiously. It seems to be agreed upon by fans and historians alike that the name is of naval origin. Not much consensus has been reached beyond this. Sometimes

The current ‘theories’

The first group consists of stories that name-researchers will immediately recognize as clutching at straws. Place-names arising out of incidents are extremely rare in England, but several of these efforts are incident-narratives. It is a thankless task trying to kick stories like this into the long grass; they refuse to die, and just keep their heads above the undergrowth. Any new theory proposed in this article will surely be presented somewhere as an honest bedfellow of the rejected ones. It might seem a waste of space to give a solemn refutation of every doubtful detail of the bad ideas. But they have some amusement value, and I have offered some criticisms below (in {curly} brackets) in the hope of encouraging any non-specialists reading this to reject them.

Apart from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, in the material introducing its entry for *Pompey*,³ no source has suggested that we could be dealing with an obscure application of the name of the famous Roman general Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus, rival of Julius Caesar, assassinated in Egypt in 48 BCE. But, indirectly, that may be the case, and, whatever the true origin, the English form of the general’s name has influenced the present form of the place-name.

Here are the current ‘theories’:

- Portsmouth has been a port since Roman times, and there are standing ruins of that period at nearby Portchester. When the port started to be developed, some local nicknamed it *Pompey*, because s/he was somehow reminded of the ruins of Pompeii, which had been re-discovered in 1748 and excavated from 1755. {Portsmouth, not Portchester, is called *Pompey*, and it is called *Pompey*, not *Pompeii*!

these things are best left undebated, at least between those who wish to remain cordial.’ I hope what follows will not bring further strife to Portsmouth.

³ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd edn, edited by J. Simpson (Oxford, 2000–) [hereafter *OED3*], s.v. *Pompey n.*

There is no evidence that *Pompeii* has ever been pronounced in the relevant way.⁴}

- The pomp and ceremony of the Royal Navy at Portsmouth led to the adoption of *Pompey* as a nickname. {There is no evidence that a word of suitable shape (i.e. **pompy*) has ever existed, but a directly-created nickname of the same form is possible. There is a parallel in English-language place-nicknaming, i.e. a name of the form [word for a characteristic + suffix]: [*Auld*] *Reekie* ‘smoky’ for Edinburgh. But no hard supporting evidence is available.}
- Volunteer firemen known as *pompier*s exercised on Southsea Common in the eighteenth century; or sailors were on occasion required to do less dignified duties as firemen by this title. {A decent fire engine was deployed in London in 1725 by Richard Newsham, manned by *firemen*, and this word had existed to describe their less well-equipped predecessors since 1714. Why would the French word have been used here? There is no evidence of its use by English writers till the end of the nineteenth century, and then only either in relation to fires in mainland Europe or to the technical term *pompier ladder*, a ladder with hooks at the top of its stiles.}
- The well-known naval temperance campaigner Dame Agnes Weston (1840–1918) was giving a lecture on the Roman Empire in the course of which she mentioned the murder of Pompey the Great. A drunken sailor woke up from his stupor and shouted out, ‘Poor old Pompey!’; the name then stuck and moved into common usage. {This sounds like a projection back in time of the fact that supporters’ chants in use at Southampton and Bournemouth Football Clubs include a line ‘Poor old Pompey’ in denigration of their southern rivals (to the tune of ‘London Bridge is falling down’, where ‘My fair lady’ belongs).}

⁴ Pompeii is, of course, ultimately named from the *nomen* or *gentilicium* of the general’s family, bearing the full name *Colonia Cornelia Veneria Pompeianorum* from about 80 BCE.

- *Pompey* is a drunkard's slurred pronunciation of *Portsmouth Point*, the name of an area well provided with taverns. {Portsmouth Point was technically outside Portsmouth proper, though a regular point of (dis)embarkation. One drunken pronunciation in the tavern district is unlikely to have been a memorable event; this one is not even a convincing drunken pronunciation.⁵}

They all lack a credible account of exactly how the name became attached to the city.

The 'explanations' in the next group have slightly more surface plausibility in that their inventors have provided some harder supposedly factual content to latch on to:

- *Pompey* comes from *Bombay*. Bombay was part of the dowry of Catherine of Braganza to Charles II. Portuguese sailors thought Bombay resembled Portsmouth and called Portsmouth by the name said to be the source of *Bombay*, Portuguese *bom bahia* 'good bay', which was anglicized as *Pompey*. {*Bombay* is a europeanization, probably via Hindi *Bambai*, of its local Marathi name, which is now coming into general use in the West, *Mumbai*. It is implausible that this was taken as Portuguese *bom bahia* (a) because Portuguese for 'good bay' is *boa bahia* (modern *baía*), and (b) because Bombay was first known to the Portuguese as *Benamajambu* or *Tena-Maiambu* (1516)⁶, then as *Mombaim* (1563) and later (late sixteenth century in the works of Gaspar Correia,⁷ and still) as *Bombaim*; the last of these could, however, be construed as 'good little bay', by folk-etym-

⁵ Compare the evidence presented in D. B. Pisoni and C. S. Martin, 'Effects of alcohol on the acoustic-phonetic properties of speech: perceptual and acoustic analyses', *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research* (1989), 13.4, 577–87; K. Johnson, D. B. Pisoni, and R. H. Bernacki, 'Do voice recordings reveal whether a person is intoxicated?', *Phonetica* (1990), 47, 215–237; and everyday experience.

⁶ J. P. Machado, *Dicionário onomástico Etimológico da Língua Portuguesa*, 2nd edn, (Lisbon, 2003), s.v. Bombaim.

⁷ G. Correia, *Lendas da Índia*, edited by M. Lopes de Almeida (Porto, 1975).

ology.⁸ But whatever its origin, and whether via Portuguese or Hindi, it was anglicized as *Bombay*, not *Pompey*! Fully-voiced Portuguese /b/ is unlikely to have been rendered by English voiceless aspirated /p/, and the required shift of stress to the first syllable remains unexplained. }

- In 1781, a group of Portsmouth-based sailors scaled the column near Alexandria, Egypt, dating from Diocletian's time but known since the Middle Ages as *Pompey's Pillar*.⁹ Hence they became known as the *Pompey Boys*. {Maybe they did this, but it was apparently a common tourist prank by the early nineteenth century, and sources conflict about exactly how heroic the ascent was. Compare the following extract from the *Ancient Egypt Magazine*:

During the first half of the nineteenth century CE, it developed into a popular, even fashionable activity to scale to the top of the pillar which, naturally, would have given one a breathtaking panoramic view of the entire surrounding area. These adventuresome high climbs, by people who must have had a head for heights, actually grew into full-blown social outings for well-to-do European travellers, who packed picnics to take along. It was, furthermore, rather novel to receive a letter from a friend or a loved one with a P.S., proudly mentioning that it had been penned while perched atop Pompey's Pillar.¹⁰

with this more unequivocally heroic piece from the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry for George Meredith:

⁸ The century-old reflections by Gerson da Cunha in *The Origin of Bombay* (Bombay and London, 1872), pp. 43–4, about the dates on which various spellings were first recorded, should have been enough to kill the simpler versions of the story of Portuguese origin.

⁹ i.e. incorrectly named after the general because of the coincidence that Pompey had died in Egypt.

¹⁰ P. F. Houlihan, “‘Pompey's Pillar’ in Alexandria”, *Ancient Egypt Magazine* (2003), 4.1 [19], <<http://www.ancientegyptmagazine.com/pillar19.htm>>, accessed 5th February 2009.

At Alexandria in 1803 he made a daring ascent of Pompey's Pillar, a granite column 180 feet (55m) high, to fasten the Union Jack in place of a French cap-of-liberty placed there by Napoleon's forces.¹¹

It is not clear what Jack Tar might have been doing in Egypt in 1781, since the Fleet was busy in the Americas and then at the Second Battle of Ushant in the English Channel. This date is found only in material dealing with the origin of the name *Pompey*. The story sounds as though it is based on a chance association, and no hard evidence exists for its truth, even if one is prepared to move the date (e.g. to that of the Battle of the Nile, 1798). }

- The *Pompée* (named after the general) was a 74-gun French warship which fled to England at the Siege of Toulon in 1793 and was enrolled as a third rate ship of the line in the English fleet at Portsmouth, where she later became a prison hulk before being broken up in 1817. (This vessel may or may not have been involved in the Spithead mutiny of 1797.) {This is true. How her name could have become attached to the port is a matter of conjecture; she was not the only trophy or hulk at Portsmouth. At least the French spelling encourages the modern English pronunciation when read in English. There is an obsolete Yorkshire term *pompey* for 'prison' or 'house of correction',¹² which presumably derives from the name of the prison ship, but by what route is unknown. It is not impossible that an incarcerated sailor might have spoken of being 'in Pompey', where the name of the ship was generalized to mean 'prison' and later taken as referring to the town, but there is no evidence supporting this. }
- Officers entering Portsmouth harbour used to enter in the ship's log *Pom. P.* for Portsmouth Point. Navigational charts are also said to

¹¹ D. Hodgson, 'Meredith, George (1777–1856)', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, 16 vols (Melbourne, 1967), II, 224–226 (p. 224); also available in the Online Edition (2006): <<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A020192b.htm>>.

¹² A. Easter, *A Glossary of the Dialect of Almondbury and Huddersfield*, edited by T. Lees, English Dialect Society, 39 (London, 1883), p. 103.

have used this abbreviation. {This has a vague but hardly compelling plausibility, and I have never seen any evidence for its truth.}

All of these ideas suffer from the uncomfortable fact that there is no record of *Pompey* as a name for Portsmouth before 1899:

1899 *Evening News* 9 Dec. 3/6 Wilkie, amid tremendous cheering from the Pompey lads, won the toss, and played with the wind in their favour.¹³

All of them except the last in each group therefore require the name to have existed underground for some time, a hundred years or even more in some cases. If it really had existed earlier, one might have expected to find it recorded in Grose's *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, which includes other place-nicknames, for example, *Pompkinshire* for Boston, Massachusetts.¹⁴ Another uncomfortable truth is that this first known reference is to the football club, not the city or dockyard, and so are other early ones; the first reference to the affecting anthem called the 'Pompey Chimes' dates from the club handbook of 1900–1.¹⁵

Pompey as a given-name

There is plenty of evidence that *Pompey* was used as a name for two categories of living chattel: dogs in England and slaves in the USA. In 1752, Francis Coventry published *The History of Pompey the Little: or, the life and adventures of a lap-dog*, where there is an obvious allusion to the name and title of honour of the Roman general. This canine Pompey was followed by the one featuring in a children's story by 'Prince George of England', namely *The History of Solomon Serious, and his dog Pompey: containing many pleasing particulars of Solomon's life*,

¹³ *OED3* s.v. Pompey, n. 3.

¹⁴ F. Grose (1785) *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*. (London, 1785; repr. 1980), s.v. Pompkin.

¹⁵ 'Play up Pompey! Just one more goal! Make tracks! What ho! Hallo! Hallo!' Fans will want me to point out that the present-day chant consists of a simplified version of these words. The handbook of 1900–1 is mentioned on several websites, but I have not seen a copy myself.

his rapid progress in learning, his wonderful discoveries with the microscope, and attainment of a large fortune: also some curious instances of sagacity and gratitude in his favourite dog with Pompey's death, monument and inscription, published in 1797. More succinctly titled is C. B. Poultney's *My Dog Pompey* of as late as 1931. The name had been known much earlier:

1709 'B[arnaby] SLUSH' *Navy Royal* 24 There are..a sort of Tame Inhabitants in our Island, the Cæsars, the Pompeys, and Jowlers I mean, who can..give Chace for a whole Day after a Flying Enemy.¹⁶

and before that the sixteenth-century Dutch rebel against the Spanish, William the Silent, is known to have had a dog called *Pompey*.¹⁷ The use of the name for dogs seems to have given rise to the expression 'Paws off, Pompey', a generalized humorous command not to touch, which is mentioned in *OED3* under *paw*, n.¹, 2.c, and was still known to Stella Gibbons in *Cold Comfort Farm*.¹⁸

As for slaves, the use of Pompey is consistent with the use of other classical-period names bestowed, at least in some instances, in a presumably satirical way, such as Caesar, Cassius, Scipio Africanus, (Uncle) Remus, and the like.¹⁹ It became one of the most widely used

¹⁶ *OED3* s.v. Pompey n. 1.

¹⁷ See for example P. Maggitti, *Pugs* (Hauppauge NY, 2000), p. 5; countless other writings retail this story.

¹⁸ S. Gibbons, *Cold Comfort Farm* (London, 1932; repr. 1938), p. 211. Metrically and alliteration-wise, this expression is identical to the first line of the 'Pompey Chimes'.

¹⁹ A literary antecedent for such a usage would be the name of the barman and pimp Pompey Bum in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (introduced in Act 2, Scene 1). He is probably not directly relevant to the present topic, but offers a chance for reflection on the comic potential of the name. It 'begin[s] pompously, end[s] basely' (W. Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, edited by B. Gibbons (Cambridge, 2006), p. 87). Escalus' rejoinder to Pompey's self-introduction, 'Troth, and your bum is the greatest thing about you', II.1.207, obviously plays on the hidden *cognomen* of the general, *Magnus*. There is a no doubt also a play here on Early Modern English *pompion* 'pumpkin'. See the account of this name by M. J. Levith, *What's in Shakespeare's Names*. (Hamden CT, 1978), pp. 80–1. I am grateful to Grant W. Smith for discussion of such Shakespeareana.

stereotypical names for a slave, and then more generally a black person, in early American culture.²⁰ In Alex Haley's *Roots*, the drummer Boteng Bediako recounts that he was given the name *Pompey* on arrival in America.²¹

Among the earliest and best known cases is that of the literary figure Pompey Smash, associated with Davy Crockett, in song at least, in the 1830s. Pompey was at odds with Crockett; he sings:

*That tarnal critter Crockett, he never say his prayers,
He kill all de wild Cats, de Coons and de bears,
And den he go to Washington to make de laws,
And dere he find de Congress men sucking deir paws.*

There is much other evidence for Pompey in song and in blackface stage plays, illustrated in image 1 and collected in a footnote.²² He turns up

²⁰ Its stereotypical status can be judged from this extract: 'The part of Ebenezer Green can be played as a darkey, in which case he will assume coon dialect and his name will be POMPEY JOHNSON. It can also be rendered in German dialect, and the character can be called HENNY DINKELHEIMER' (*The Witmark Amateur Minstrel Guide and Burnt Cork Encyclopedia*, rev. edn, edited by F. Dumont (New York, 1905): Available online at <http://www.archive.org/stream/witmark_amateur_mi00dumorich/witmarkamateurmi00dumorich_djvu.txt>, accessed 9 February 2009). A source of a very different type, conveying the same impression, is William Cowper's poem 'Sweet meat has sour sauce: or, the slave trader in the dumps' (written 1788; published posthumously), in which the former slaver calls: 'Come buy off my stock, for I must no more / Carry Caesars and Pompeys to Sugar-cane shore' (*The Complete Poetical Works of William Cowper*, edited by H. S. Milford (London, 1905), pp. 374–5). This classical-naming phenomenon seems to be especially American. It is interesting that there is hardly any evidence for the use of such names for slaves in Barbados during the whole slavery era (see the material in J. S. Handler and J. Jacoby, 'Slave names and naming in Barbados, 1650–1830', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 53.4 (1996), 685–728).

²¹ A. Haley, *Roots* (New York, 1976), p. 302.

²² Songs referring to Pompey are many. They include: 'Pompey is dead and laid in his grave', 'Pompey ran away', and 'Pompey Smash and Davy Crockett'. The last is in, for example, *Texas Folk Songs*, 2nd edn, edited by W. A. Owens (Dallas TX, 1976), p.130, and was much collected; the verse in the main text is from the earliest known (1834) version. The second verse, in a version collected by G. E. Hastings

late as Pompsmasher in a song sung by James Clifton Ferrell collected in Memphis, TN, in 1963.²³

in Fayetteville, Arkansas, before 1938 (see *Ozark Folksongs*, edited by Vance Randolph (Columbia MO, 1946–50; repr. St Louis MO, [1980?]), III, 167), goes:

*Says he, Pompey Smash, just follow your Uncle Davy,
An' he'll soon show you how to grin a coon crazy.
We hadn't gone far till Davy thought he seen a squirrel
A-settin' on a pine-knot eatin' sheep sorrel.
Then I begin to laugh an' he began to grin,
Says he, Pompey Smash, let me brace against your heel!*

This, and other versions of the same song, are based on 'Pompey Smash,' an 'old minstrel tune' of at least as early as 1834, printed in *The Negro Singer's Own Book* (Philadelphia, 1846) and *Lloyd's Ethiopian Song Book* (London, 1847). The song is apparently often still performed as 'Davy Crockett'. It was well enough known for Daniel Decatur Emmett to produce a parody, 'Pompey O Smash', by 1844 (D. D. Emmett, *Old Dan Emmett's Original Banjo Melodies, Never Before Published [etc]* (Boston MA, 1944). The final line of this, 'Debble take de hindmost! sez Pompey O Smash', might be seen as a suitable watchword for people involved in competitive activities, a point of possible relevance below. A set of lyrics for 'Pompey O. Smash' were printed in *S.S. Stewart's Banjo and Guitar Journal*, 7.4 (1890), 3 (<<https://urresearch.rochester.edu/retrieve/6076/Stewarts+1890Oct-Nov.pdf>>, accessed 29 January 2009). Another early reference is in Emmett's blackface play (1850s), *The Barber Shop in an Uproar*, which features Pompey Smash (see also B. Holmberg and G. D. Schneider, 'Daniel Decatur Emmett's Stump Sermons: genuine Afro-American culture, language and rhetoric in the Negro minstrel show', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 19.4 (1986), 27–38; S. Freeland, 'Kinking the stereotype: barbers and hairstyles as signifiers of authentic American racial performance' (unpublished MA dissertation, Florida State University, 2005), p. 2, available online at <http://etd.lib.fsu.edu/theses/available/etd-02282005-195606/unrestricted/Freeland_thesis.pdf>, accessed 6 February 2009). Joel Chandler Harris refers to Pompey Smash in the preface to *Uncle Remus*: 'The dialect, it will be observed, is wholly different from that of the Hon. Pompey Smash and his literary descendants, and different also from the intolerable misrepresentations of the minstrel stage, but it is at least phonetically genuine' (*Uncle Remus, His Songs and His Sayings: the Folklore of the Old Plantation* (New York, 1881 [actually 1880]).

²³ See the site of the John Quincy Wolf collection of Ozark folksongs: <<http://www.lyon.edu/wolfcollection/songs/songs.html>>, accessed 12 February 2009.

POMPEY SMASH.



As I seen the folks now that I think is disarming,
I'll tell you where I come from, and where I got my larner;
I'm bot from old Virginia, where you find all the great men;
I'm Pompey Smash one of the principal statesmen.
On *de* side de sun,
I'm second best to none

And by 'he gosh I weigh, without my head, half a ton.

I'll tell you about a fight now I had with Davy Crocket,
That's half Cow, half Horse, and half Sky Rocket.
I met him one day, as he go out a gassing;
I ask him where he going, and he say he going a cooning.

Den I say, Davy, how you going to hunt without one?
Then I ask him where he gun,
And he say he got none;

O, says he, Pompey Smash, just come along with Davy,
I'll very soon show you how to grin a coon crazy.
I follow right arter him, till Davy see'd a squirrel
Setting on a nice knot, eating sheep sorrel.

Den he stand right still,
And he gin for me to feel;
O, says he, Pompey Smash, let me brace agin your heel.

Den I stretch out my heel, and I brace up de sinner,
Den Davy gin to grin hard for his diner,
But de critter did not move, nor did not seem to mind him,
But still kept a eatin, and never lock'd behind him.

At last Davy said,
He really must be dead,
For he said he see the lark fly all a-out his head.

Then we both started up, the truth to discover,
And may de Deity meet old Pompey Smash's siber,
If it wasn't an old lark, about as big as a squirrel?
Says I, Carnal Davy, does you call dis a squirrel?
Says he, you brack calf,
You better not laff,

Or else I'll pin your ears lock, and bite you in a half.

I throw down my gun, and I drop my ammunition,
Says I, Carnal Davy, I cool your ambition,
He back'd both his ears, and he jact'd like a steamer;
Says he, Pompey Smash, I'm a Tennessee screamer.

Then we both lock'd horn,
And I think my breath gone,
I was never hugg'd so close since de day I was burn.

We fought a half lay, and then greed to stop it,
For I was lark'y lock'd it, and so was Davy Crocket.
When we lock'd for our hands, gosh, we found 'em both miss-

ing,
For he ain't bit off mine, and I had swallow'd his'n.
Then we both did gree
For to let the other be,
For I was rather hard for him, and so was he for me.

1116 Sold wholesale and retail by J. G. Hunt, at Song Depot and Book stand, South side City Wharf.

Image 1: From The Library of Congress: American Memory web-site,
<<http://memory.loc.gov>>, accessed 12 February 2009.
[Boston, MA, no date; the printer J.G. Hunt was trading in 1836]

Pompey Smash goes on to give his name to a mining community in Maryland (recorded from about 1848), later prettified as *Vale Summit*; there is documentary evidence of persons born there while it carried its earlier name,²⁴ and it is commemorated in Pompey Smash Road within the limits of the present city of Frostburg, MD.

An authentic later instance of a well-known man bearing this given name was Pompey Factor (1849–1928), a black Seminole who served as a United States Army Indian Scout and received America’s highest military decoration, the Medal of Honor, in the Indian Wars of the later nineteenth century.²⁵

Pompey and Portsmouth

Readers may well be wondering precisely what Pompey in song and on stage across the Atlantic has to do with Portsmouth, Hampshire. Preliminary grounds for suspecting a connection can be established. Stan Hugill claims that “[t]he influence of the “nigger minstrel” on shantying is plainly emphasized by Doerflinger,²⁶ who points out that the Sailors of the Sail would naturally frequent the “melodeons” and “concert saloons” of both America and England, where they would hear many nigger minstrel ditties suitable for use at capstan and halyard—the ditties of Pompey Smash, Gumbo Chaff, and Liza Lee, all noted nigger minstrels [*sic*; I have not yet found an actual person bearing the (stage-) name *Pompey Smash*, RC].²⁷ He continues by noting that white seamen picked up these novel songs in cotton ports (e.g. Mobile, AL), taking

²⁴ For instance: LeGeer, Mary Catherine, b. Pompey Smash, bp. Aug. 1875, dau. Jacob & Frances LeGeer, William Richard, b. Pompey Smash 12 Sept.; bp. 3 Nov. 1867, son of Jacob & Frances. Births & Baptismals of St. John’s Episcopal Church in Frostburg, Maryland, 1866–1892, Allegany County; <<http://files.usgwarchives.org/md/allegany/church/stjohne-births.txt>>, accessed 6 February 2009. The place is commemorated in H. L. Scott, *Glorious Old Pompey Smash* (Cumberland, 1991).

²⁵ Conveniently in Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pompey_Factor>, accessed 9 February 2009.

²⁶ W. M. Doerflinger, *Shantymen and Shantyboys: Songs of the Sailor and Lumberman* (New York, 1951).

²⁷ S. Hugill, *Shanties from the Seven Seas: Shipboard Work-Songs and Songs used as Work-Songs from the Great Days of Sail* (London, 1961), p. 14.

cotton stowing jobs alongside black workers to avoid the Atlantic passage in winter before returning to home ports such as Liverpool when the weather improved.²⁸ He also notes the employment at this period of West Indian seamen and cooks on British naval and merchant ships.²⁹ Whilst it is conjectural, we can therefore establish a plausible context and a plausible channel for the transmission of awareness of the name from American to British ports. Rudyard Kipling provides indirect evidence for the interest of sailors in this kind of music at the right period; in ‘The Bonds of Discipline’, a story in *Traffics and Discoveries*, the fictional narrator says of the men of the fictional HMS *Archimandrite*:

There wasn't a ship, I don't care in what fleet, could come near the *Archimandrites* when we give our mind to a thing. We held the cruiser big-gun records, the sailing-cutter (fancy-rig) championship, an' the challenge-cup row round the fleet. **We 'ad the best nigger-minstrels, the best football an' cricket teams, an' the best squee-jee band of anything that ever pushed in front of a brace o' screws.**³⁰

(my emphasis, RC)

The adjacent mention of minstrels and football comes close to completing the connections needed for our account. We noted above that the first mentions of Pompey have to do with the football club. It was founded in 1899 out of the ruins of the previous highly successful Portsmouth club, Royal Artillery (Portsmouth) FC (existed 1895–9), which collapsed after being embroiled in a scandal about its players' supposedly amateur status.³¹ Royal Artillery was, as its name indicates, a club consisting largely of military personnel, involved in ammunition storage and supply for the Senior Service; they were the original Gunn-ers, a nickname since appropriated by [Woolwich] Arsenal. According to club historian Kevin Smith, Royal Artillery were the first team to be known as *Pompey* and their supporters were responsible for the

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³⁰ R. Kipling, *Traffics and Discoveries* (London, 1904; repr. Charleston SC, 2007), p. 44.

³¹ Football Club History Database, <www.fchd.btinternet.co.uk>, accessed 9 February 2009.

‘Pompey Chimes’.³² This gives us an almost complete set of links: *Pompey* as a stereotypical nickname used in popular songs in the southern USA—moonlighting English sailors in the southern USA learning these minstrel songs—such sailors returning to British ports armed with knowledge of minstrelsy—Portsmouth as a naval port—an associated army regiment founding a successful football team in Portsmouth in the mid-1890s—the name *Pompey* being associated with this team and its successor. Whilst we have a plausible context and a channel, we still lack a precise motivation for the application of the name in Portsmouth.

It seems possible, but not beyond dispute, that the nickname originated with the football club, though it was soon used in purely naval contexts. We again find some suggestive evidence in the words of Kipling—a man on the lookout for naval novelties if ever there was one—writing in part 1 of ‘Their Lawful Occasions’, another story in *Traffics and Discoveries*: ‘We are the *Gnome*, now in the Fleet Reserve at Pompey—Portsmouth, I should say’.³³ There is more than one way of reading this, but Kipling’s wording suggests to me that he is aware of using a name which might not be understood by his readers, and which might therefore be of recent origin: perhaps a new piece of slang his knowledge of which he is self-consciously showing off. If that is right, it is consistent with what we have seen so far. Other naval mentions follow: ‘1916 “TAFFRAIL” *Pincher Martin* iii. 40 The *Belligerent* was a

³² K. Smith, *Glory Gunners: the History of Royal Artillery (Portsmouth) F.C.* (Bognor Regis, 1999). Not relevant to the main theme, but an interesting issue nevertheless, is the use of the words ‘Play up!’ in the ‘Chimes’. In its sporting application, this was a recently-coined expression in the late 1890s. *OED3* attributes the first usage to Sir Henry Newbolt in the famous poem ‘*Vitaī lampada*’ (1897), which begins ‘There’s a breathless hush in the close tonight’, and contains the refrain ‘Play up! play up! and play the game!’ This does indeed place the expression in a sporting context (cricket [at Clifton College, Bristol]; it had previously been used in music), but it is not the first sporting usage. An earlier one can be found on a card produced by Baines of Bradford as a supporters’ memento for the short-lived Sunderland Albion FC in 1888–9 (available at <<http://bridgemanartondemand.com>>, accessed 30 January 2009).

³³ R. Kipling, *Traffics and Discoveries* (London, 1904; repr. Charleston SC, 2007), p. 90.

“Pompey” ship,³⁴ and the name became firmly attached to the naval base and then the city, which is the present situation.

Conclusion

No completely watertight conclusion is possible, but it seems plausible that the nickname of Portsmouth originated in the name of a character in songs current in the southern USA in the later nineteenth century and was brought to Portsmouth by sailors, some of whom may have been involved with playing for or supporting the Royal Artillery Football Club. Somehow, the name became attached to the club, perhaps casually through its musical use in the ‘Pompey Chimes’, a chant originating as an accompaniment to the chimes of the Portsmouth Guildhall clock, and perhaps in some measure encouraged by the slight resemblance of *Pompey* to *Portsmouth*. The nickname for the club has since extended its range to become a nickname for the naval base and the city. This account provides a context and channel of transmission at a time suitable for the emergence of the name in the decades before 1900, though the precise reasons for its attachment to the football club, and/or its use in the ‘Chimes’, remain a matter for speculation.

³⁴ *OED3* s.v. Pompey *n.* 3.