CHAPTER 5 : BEEF, LIBERTY AND THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

THE BEEF-STEAK CLUB.

When Henry Fielding first set his poem *"The Roast beef of old England"* to a catchy well-known air,[1] and the bass singer Richard Leveridge popularised it and added more verses, they somehow caught the mood of the times. This song became an immediate 'hit', and stayed popular for the rest of the century. It was sung on patriotic occasions at feasts and festivals, and was one of the favourite songs at the theatre. But singers and actors did not just sing the praises of British beef in public: they also founded clubs devoted to celebrating it, and the accompanying glories of being British, being beer-drinkers (rather than wine-drinkers), and above all being decidedly not French![2] The first of these seems to have been set up by a group of actors, writers and other notables at the Bumper Tavern in Covent Garden run by the well-known actor and mimic Dick Estcourt. Estcourt kept a written record of all the company's proceedings, bon mots and jokes, and in return was allowed to wear the club badge, a small golden grid-iron, around his neck on a green ribbon. Richard Steele writes about its meetings in several essays for *The Spectator*.[3] A later version of the club, which also chose the grid-iron for its insignia, was named the *Sublime Society of Beefsteaks*. This dates from about 1735 and there are differing tales regarding its origins. Its founding members were John Rich, George Lambert and William Hogarth.

John Rich, the owner and manager of Covent Garden Theatre, which he had built out of the profits he had made with John Gay's "The Beggar's Opera", was an immensely important theatrical figure of the day, and was later to become Beard's father-in-law. But in 1735 Beard was only a minor star in the Covent Garden firmament with one season as Handel's tenor behind him. George Lambert was Rich's senior scene painter at Covent Garden as well as a landscape artist in his own right. He and Hogarth were good friends who, in this same year, managed to arrange for a copyright bill to be passed which protected the authorship of original prints – an important achievement that much improved the standing of British artists.

William Hogarth himself moved easily in theatrical circles and had already painted several theatrical scenes, including one from "The Beggar's Opera" (1728-9) in which Rich is portrayed watching the scene between 'Macheath' and his rival ladies 'Polly' and 'Lucy' from the side of the stage. Hogarth's satirical narrative cycles "The Rake's Progress" and "The Harlot's Progress" reveal a theatrical flair for arranging his subjects, as though the viewer is watching scenes from a play.[4] Later he was to publicly demonstrate the patriotism which had led to his interest in the idea of a Beefsteak club with the great, mature paintings "The March to Finchley, 1745" and "O The Roast Beef of Old England ('The Gate of Calais')" of 1748.[5]

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[1] 'The Queen's Old Courtier' in 'The Grub-Street Opera' of 1731. See: Edgar V. Roberts, 'Henry Fielding and Richard Leveridge: Authorship of the "Roast Beef of Old England", Huntingdon Library Quarterly, 27, no.2, February 1964, pp. 175-81

[2] There are many printed ballads in the *Madden collection* of Cambridge University Library which reveal the extent of this repertoire; and many of their titles state 'as sung by Mr Beard': e.g. 'A new Song in praise of Old English Roast Beef'; 'The Beer-drinking Britons'; 'Hearts of Oak'; 'Britons' Guardian Angel'.

[3] Robert J. Allen, 'The Clubs of Augustan London', Harvard Studies in English Vol. VII, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1933, pp.136-40; & Ben Rogers, 'Beef and Liberty', Chatto & Windus, London 2003, p. 79-80

[4] William Vaughan, 'British Painting The Golden Age', Thames & Hudson, London 1999, pp. 26-32

[5] see Matthew Craske, 'William Hogarth', Tate Publishing, London 2000

These three are credited with the origins of the *Sublime Society of Beefsteaks* when one of them, (stories vary as to whether it was Rich or Lambert), not having time for a regular dinner, "contented himself with a beef steak broiled upon the fire in the painting room".[6] An issue of *The Connoisseur*[7] sets the scene vividly when it describes: "the most ingenious artists in the kingdom [who] meet every Saturday in a noble room at the top of Covent-Garden theatre, and never suffer any dish except Beef-steaks to appear".[8]

Membership was restricted to twenty-four, and the initial list shown in Walter Arnold's detailed account of the club[9] includes leading actors, painters and musicians of the day. It was a closely-knit community of workers in the Covent Garden area who shared much in common, including the need for a good meal between the Saturday morning rehearsals and visit to the Treasury to collect the week's wages, and the six o'clock start of the evening's entertainment. Meetings were always on Saturdays during Beard's lifetime, and remained at the Covent Garden Theatre until it burnt down in 1808. The rules of the society state

"*that Beef steaks shall be the only meat for dinner, and the broiling begin at two of the clock on each day of the meeting, and the table-cloth be removed at half-an-hour after three*".[10]

New members between 1736 and 1743 included the musician and composer William Defesch, the actor Theophilus Cibber, and the artist Francis Hayman. John Beard joined John Rich's Covent Garden company in the autumn of 1743, and was elected a Society member on December 24th.

Election to the *Sublime Society of Beefsteaks* was open to anyone who could muster the correct number of votes from existing members when a vacancy in the statutory number of 24 occurred. The candidate was also required to have attended at least three previous meetings as a guest. As an immensely 'clubbable' person Beard is likely to have been to several meetings during the weeks immediately prior to his election. Indeed he was scarcely out of the theatre at all. Between November 25th and December 24th he performed there on fifteen nights. On the day before his election, Friday December 23rd, he made his first appearance in this new venue as 'Macheath' opposite the 'Polly Peachum' of his lifelong friend Kitty Clive.

Beard remained a member of the Society for all of his life. In fact, he came to embody the spirit and ethos of it during his long tenure. It was fortunate that he took over as manager of Covent Garden Theatre on the death of John Rich in 1761 as he was able to maintain the regularity of the meetings in their usual venue at the top of the backstage area. Several writers attest to his charm and good nature during this period. It was a time when it was run with affection and courtesy by his good friends and relatives. Thomas Davies writes of the club, "with the jolly president John Beard" as "one of the most respectable assemblies of jovial and agreeable companions in this metropolis".[11] Beard was the President in many different years; but certainly held that position in 1784, when the decision was taken to expand the number of members to 25, in order to admit the 22-year-old HRH the Prince of Wales (later King George IV).[12] Almost certainly it was during this period that its satirical customs and quirky laws became entrenched. Tobias Smollett attended as a guest, and wrote in his 1762 novel

[6] Edwards, 'Anecdotes of Painters', 1808
[7] *The Connoisseur*, issue no. 29[sometimes quoted as 19], June 6th, 1754
[8] Robert J. Allen, ibid, p.144
[9] Walter Arnold, 'The Life and Death of the Sublime Society of Beefsteaks', London 1871
[10] Arnold, ibid.
[11] Thomas Davies, 'Dramatic Miscellanies' vol. 3, 1784, p.167
[12] John Timbs, 'Clubs and club life in London', London 1873, p.120-1

"*Sir Launcelot Greaves*" of the club's "genial board", where "delicate rumps irresistibly attract the stranger's eye, and, while they seem to cry 'come cut me – come cut me', constrain, by wondrous sympathy, each mouth to overflow. Where the obliging and humorous Jemmy B[encraf]t [*Beard's brother-in-law*], the gentle Billy H[avar]d[13], [*his very close friend*] replete with human kindness, and the generous Johnny B[ear]d, respected and beloved by all the world, attend as priests and ministers of mirth, good cheer, and jollity, and assist with culinary art the raw, unpractised, awkward guest."[14]

Beard was undoubtedly sought out as a member because one of their number, referred to in the rules as *The Bishop*, had to sing the Grace and the Anthem. This, and the singing of stirring ballads, (some of them especially written for the society's sole use) must have frequently fallen to his lot. The rules were an irreverent and humorous parody of Masonry (which was beginning to take hold in London, and to which many of the members also belonged).[15] The 24 members regarded themselves as a Brotherhood and wore a distinctive blue coat and buff waistcoat, with brass buttons impressed with the gridiron and the motto "*Beef and Liberty*". It was as though these artisans, painters, actors, musicians and writers needed a club in the same way that the medieval world had needed the Lord of Misrule: - to let down their collective hair and replace an ordered society with a temporary world in which all could be equals, and classes could be reversed.

Apart from *The Bishop* there was *The President of the Day, The Vice President, The Recorder* and *The Boots*. These roles were taken in rotation and were a mixed blessing. *The President* had the honour of presiding over the meeting, but also provided the beef at his expense. He had to observe all the ancient forms and customs of the society, and give the customary toasts in strict accordance with the society's specific list. But he had no powers, and was, in fact, closely watched by the other members to see if he made any slight mistakes of protocol, through ignorance or forgetfulness. A certain amount of 'parlour game' mentality crept into all of this, as there were moments when he had to remember to put on one or other of the hats – a Beefeater's hat and a tricorn with a plume – which hung from the back of his chair. Apparently he had to sing 'The Song of the Day' whether he had a voice or not: which renders the duties of the role even more akin to our modern idea of "charades".

The Vice President was the oldest member present and, according to Arnold, "had to carry out the President's directions without responsibility" – whatever that means!

The Recorder had another role that seems to have come out of the world of the parlour game: he had to rebuke everybody for offences, real or imaginary, and 'record' the witticisms, bon mots and banter that the meeting produced. The archive having been burned in the 1808 fire, we only have a few examples left: such as the time when Garrick was late for a performance at Drury Lane, and on being reprimanded by another of the Patentees that he should "consider the stake you and I have in this house" he answered "True, but I was thinking of my steak in the other house!"[16]

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[13] Arnold and others have misread this name as 'Howard'. However, it is clear from the papers that the author has consulted in the Folger Shakespeare Library ('Jeu d'esprit' N.a.2) that 'H…d' is the actor & playwright William Havard (1710-1778) and therefore the person who was elected to the society on December 28th 1745, and not William Howard, musician d. 1785.

[14] Tobias Smollett, 'Sir Launcelot Greaves', London 1762, chapter 4

[15] Bencraft was a prominent Mason. His benefit on 10th April 1741 was for the entertainment of the Ancient and Honourable Society of Free and Accepted Masons. Beard was referred to as 'Brother Beard' on May 15th 1739, when he sang "On, on my dear Brethren" at Drury Lane for the same group of Masons.

[16] John Timbs, 'Clubs and club life in London', London 1873, p.115

The Recorder also had to 'induct' new members. This was a farcical ceremony that always caused great mirth. The newly elected member was brought in blindfolded, accompanied by the *Bishop* wearing his robes and mitre (old stage props) and bearing a book containing the rules of the society on which he had to swear an oath of loyalty "*to support the dignity and welfare of the society, and behave as a worthy member*". All the other members were decked out in whatever stage costumes were at hand, one with a sword of state, others as halberdiers accompanying the *Bishop,* in a parody of the Coronation service. The 'charge' was then delivered by the *Recorder*. This was by turns serious and lighthearted, but made the point that the brotherhood encouraged a perfect equality between members; but that such an equality should never degenerate into undue familiarity. At the moment after the oath-taking when the new recruit had to kiss the book, a bone of beef was surreptitiously substituted. Practical jokes like this were encouraged, and outrageous toasts were the order of the day.

Quite what the noble members made of this – for there were several from the time of the Earl of Sandwich (elected 1761) onwards – can only be guessed at. When HRH the Prince of Wales sought membership in 1785 he must have been well aware of this dangerous egalitarianism. Whether or not he equated it with the ideals of the French Revolution, which was brewing at this time, or the American War of Independence which had ended with the Treaty of Versailles two years previously, or simply dismissed it as the playful rules of a gentleman's club, is not known. But he embraced it warmly when the rules were changed and membership was increased to 25 in order to circumvent the problem that no vacancy for him existed. He was soon joined as a member by HRH the Duke of York (elected 1790) and other brothers and relatives. After Beard's death in 1791 membership of the society became ever more sought-after by members of the aristocracy, wishing to witness royalty in their cups and at play.

There is one extant record of a speech made by the *Recorder*. Although the society's entire archives were destroyed in the 1808 fire (along with a fine wine-cellar) the Folger Shakespeare Library contains William Havard's scrapbook which he entitled 'Jeu d'esprit'. It contains many letters, poems and writings that illuminate his friendship with John Beard. In his letters he addresses him as 'Brother' – which led some to believe that they were actually related.[17] But Havard had married the actress Elizabeth Kilby in May 1745. So the affectionate term must stem from their joint membership of the 'Free and Accepted Masons' or the 'Sublime Society of Beefsteaks'.

His manuscript contains this sketch for a speech made at the admission of T…. F…. Esq:[18]

"It has been my good fortune to be appointed to acquaint you that you have this day been unanimously elected a Member of our Society. A Society, as remarkable for the excellency of its Constitution, the Purity of its Manners, and the Sociality of its Members, as for the Sublimity of its situation [a joke about its position at the top of the building]. *No member, here, sells his Conscience: no Brother lies in wait for the Fortune of his Friend. – But I will not exalt ourselves by affecting to make comparisons. As to your behaviour here, Sir: - Give me leave to acquaint you, that a Disposition to please and be pleased is the sole Requisite to constitute our mutual Happiness: upon this Green-swerd the wheels of Conviviality will roll pleasantly and without a Rubb".*[19]

[17] "Beard's sister, in turn, married William Havard, who for twenty-two years was the wheelhorse of the profession at Drury Lane". 'The London Stage', Part 4, ed. G. W. Stone, Carbondale Illinois, 1962, p. xci
[18] Theodosius Forrest (January 22nd 1763). Arnold, ibid. p.xix
[19] Folger Shakespeare Library 'Jeu d'esprit' N.a.2

T… F… was Theodosius Forrest who later wrote 'The Song of the Day' for the society's regular use. This replaced 'The Roast Beef of Old England', with words by Henry Fielding and Richard Leveridge, which had been sung at every previous meeting. It probably continued to be sung for a long time after, as it so embodies the patriotic fervour underlying the spirit of the times, and was firmly in John Beard's repertoire. Later Beard may have introduced the 'New Song in praise of Old English Roast Beef sung by Mr Beard', a copy of which is to be found in the Madden Collection.[20]

insert copy of the ballad 'A New Song in praise of Old English Roast Beef'

Horace Walpole's comments on Handel hiring "all the singers of *Roast Beef* from between the acts at both theatres"[21] for his *Samson* cast (in which Beard sang the title role) is evidence that he must have been famous for singing it, as well as such other rousing patriotic songs as 'To arms' and 'Britons strike home' for which there is documentary evidence on the playbills of 1743-5. The bass singer Richard Leveridge himself was on the Covent Garden roster at this time, and Beard and he duetted between the acts in unnamed patriotic songs during the spring of 1744, when, beside the worries of Britain's involvement in the War of Austrian Succession (1740-8) there were the growing fears of a Jacobite invasion as well.

Extracts from the texts reveal the xenophobic content of both songs:

The roast beef of Old England

When mighty roast beef was the Englishman's food,
It ennobled our hearts, and enriched our blood,
Our soldiers were brave, our courtiers were good;
Oh the roast beef of England
And old England's roast beef!

Then, Britons, from all nice dainties refrain,
Which effeminate Italy, France and Spain;
And mighty roast beef shall command on the main;
Oh the roast beef of England
And old England's roast beef!

The Song of the Day

No more shall Fame expand her wings
To sounds of heroes, states and kings;
A nobler flight the Goddess takes,
To praise our British Beef in steaks,
A joyful theme for Britons free,
Happy in Beef and Liberty.

Throughout the realms where despots reign,
What tracks of glory now remain?
Their people, slaves of power and pride,
Fat Beef and Freedom are denied!
What realm, what state can happy be,
Wanting our Beef and Liberty?[22]

[20] C.U. Library
[21] Letter to Horace Mann, 24th February 1743: Deutsch, p. 560
[22] Ben Rogers, 'Beef and Liberty', Chatto & Windus, London 2003, pp. 77-8, & 82

The last official of the society that needs to be described is *The Boots*. This important position also harks back to medieval traditions, such as the 'Boy-Bishop', where roles were temporarily reversed. *The Boots* was always the newest member. He had to arrive early, collect the wine from the cellar and decant it, and bring the steaks individually from the griddle to the diners. No one was exempted from this duty – not even royalty when it was their turn. Indeed some, such as the Duke of Sussex – George III's 6th son - who held the post in 1808-9, seemed to enjoy the role. A practical joke played regularly by the company was to demand that *Boots* should decant another bottle just as he was about to eat his own long-awaited steak.

Another writer who saw Beard at the club was the young James Boswell, whose great mentor Dr. Johnson became a member on March 4th 1780. In his *London Journal* Boswell writes of going there on Saturday 27th November 1762 with Lord Eglinton.

"He carried me to Covent Garden in a coach and bid me wait in the Bedford Coffee House till he sent for me."

Members were entitled to take one guest to the meetings on payment of 10 shillings and sixpence to the Treasurer. So it appears that Boswell was Lord Eglinton's guest for the afternoon; but that he was not allowed to enter until some formality or other had been undertaken. If he was Eglinton's second guest the delay could be more easily explained, since the rules for this were even more complicated: "if he brought a second [guest] he had to borrow a name; in default of obtaining it, the visitor was doomed to retire".[23] Boswell must have observed the niceties of admission, since:

"...In a few minutes the famous Mr Beard of Covent Garden Theatre came for me and carried me up a great many steps to a handsome room above the theatre, in which met the Beefsteak Club, a society which has subsisted these thirty years. The room where it met was once burnt. The Gridiron (in Scotch, '*brander*') was almost consumed, but a thin image of it remained entire. That they have fixed in the stucco in the roof. The president sits in a chair under a canopy, above which you have in gold letters, *Beef and Liberty*. We were entertained by the Club. Lord Sandwich was in the chair, a jolly, hearty, lively man. It was very mixed society: Lord Eglinton, Mr Beard, Colonel West of the Guards, Mr Havard the actor, Mr Churchill the poet, Mr Wilkes the author *of The North Briton*, and many more. We had nothing to eat but beefsteaks, and had wine and punch in plenty and freedom. We had a number of songs."[24]

Boswell was present at an interesting time. With Wilkes and Lord Sandwich both dining on the same day the air must have been electric. Having been involved in the notorious orgies of the Hell-Fire Club at Medmenham Abbey both were now at daggers drawn. Wilkes had just published his obscene *Essay on Woman*, and Lord Sandwich was about to take a leading role in the condemnation of the *Essay* in the House of Lords. Horace Walpole, a notorious gossip but an obviously well-informed one, wrote to Sir Horace Mann:

"… the wicked even affirm, that very lately, at a club with Mr Wilkes, held at the top of the playhouse in Drury Lane [*recte* Covent Garden], Lord Sandwich talked so prophanely that he drove two harlequins out of company".[25]

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[23] Arnold, ibid. p.4
[24] James Boswell, London Journal, ed. F.A. Pottle, Heinemann 1950, p.56-7
[25] The Letters of Horace Walpole, ed. Mrs Paget Toynbee, Oxford, 1903-5, v, p. 395

A little later he wrote to George Montagu:

"He [Lord Sandwich] has impeached Wilkes for a blasphemous poem [the Essay on Woman], and has been expelled for blasphemy himself by the Beef-steak Club at Covent Garden".[26]

Beard seemed to have been running a tight ship, and expelled the member for breaking the tenth law of the society, which states that "*every member who shall be found guilty of any crime or misdemeanour in this Society, and shall neglect or refuse to submit to the penalty or censure by him incurred, and duly voted and ordered by the majority … shall stand expelled this Society."*[27] In a twist that would have been appreciated by Beard more than most, since he regularly spoke the line in his character of 'Macheath',[28] Lord Sandwich earned the unflattering soubriquet of 'Jemmy Twitcher' – (the character in the *Beggar's Opera* who 'impeaches' 'Macheath') – for the way in which he turned on his erstwhile friend Wilkes and impeached him. Hogarth drew an unflattering portrait of Wilkes in May 1763 that was soon on sale as an etching.[29] All of this was brewing on the day in November 1762 that the ingenuous 22 year-old Boswell met them.

The gridiron referred to by Boswell, was reputedly the original one used by John Rich in 1735. It had always been given an honourable place amidst their somewhat facetious regalia and was represented on their uniform buttons. It is clear from Boswell's account that it had already suffered in one fire before the awful conflagration that destroyed the whole theatre in 1808. However it had a habit of surviving, and was extracted from the ashes a second time to remain the most significant feature of the rebuilt meeting room.

[insert a Photo of the Gridiron, e.g. the one on p. 81 of Ben Rogers 'Beef and Liberty']

One of the further 'parlour games' that this assembly of theatrically minded members played, towards the end of their meetings, was one that got right under Beard's skin and took him over. It was the requirement to hold a conversation for as long as possible using only quotations from plays, ballad operas, pantomimes etc. Beard was obviously qualified to do well in this; and, indeed, it is possible that it influenced his everyday thought process. For, in the few letters of his which are still extant, the same ease for slipping into quotation is frequently on display. This letter was written to Miss Hull (daughter of his friend the actor Thomas Hull) from his villa in Hampton eighteen years after his retirement from the stage:

> Dear Miss Hull, Rose Hill, 18th Aug. 1785
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> "What horrid silence thus invades our ears?" as the King of Brentford says.[30]
> Well as I love dumb things, the taciturnity of your pen begins to be alarmingly painful… Let me say with Prior, or somebody prior to him, faith, I don't know who –
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> 'Let them censure, what care I?
> The herd of critics I defie…'
>
> and there's an end of the matter."

[26] Ibid. p.396
[27] Walter Arnold, The Life and Death of the Sublime Society of Beefsteaks, London 1871 p. xvi
[28] Scene XIV, Macheath: "That Jemmy Twitcher should 'peach me, I own, surprised me".
[29] 'Engravings by Hogarth', ed. Sean Shesgreen, New York 1973, plate 98
[30] A role in an untraced play of the time, based on *Le Roi d'Yvetor*, (later translated by Thackeray as "The King of Brentford")

This custom was still prevalent in the Club in the year 1799 when Thomas Dibdin became a member. In his 'Reminiscences'[31] he describes the parlour-game in more detail:

"I had not been long attached to Covent Garden Theatre before I was elected member of the Covent Garden Beef-Steak Club… It was a most agreeable society, consisting of the principal actors, and every dramatic author, connected with Covent Garden Theatre, as well as several eminent commercial and legal characters… Mr Emery, who was introduced to this joyous assembly the same day with myself, and who was reckoned a very diffident man, was at first much annoyed by these quotations, which, to produce greater effect, were to be given as instantaneously as possible… When, on the first day, it came to Emery's turn to make a quotation he declared that (although an actor) he never could extemporaneously think of an apt extract from a play, nor had he ever made one on any subject. On being pressed, however, without any apparent consciousness of its just applicability to himself, he said: "Indeed, indeed, sirs! But this troubles me."

Beard spent most days of the week – apart from Sunday – at the theatre, either rehearsing or performing. On performance days he was often in the main show and the afterpiece. It is clear that he liked his comrades and spent much spare time in their company. Being a member of the Beefsteak Club added to the time he was away from home. How did this go down with his wife Henrietta?

As an aristocratic lady whose marriage had put her into a kind of purdah amongst her own kind, it seems that she transferred much of her social ambition to her husband once the Waldegrave family had abandoned her. Beard's repeated applications for Court positions for which he was not the obvious candidate ('Serjeant Trumpeter' in 1753 and 'King's Waiter' in 1757) may have stemmed from her desire to regain a more visible rank in society. As a prelude she would have supported his membership of any society that brought him into contact with people of rank and consequence. There were aristocrats in the Beefsteak club from the very beginning, even if they only came as guests. The tale is recounted that the Earl of Peterborough was present on the occasion in 1735 when John Rich grilled his first steak.[32] His enthusiasm for this informal manner of dining in the upstairs painting room encouraged the formation of the society, to which he brought groups of his titled friends.[33] The records in Arnold's history of the society do not show that many of these were initially elected as members[34]; but the records may be incomplete as a result of the many fires that ravaged the theatre in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Apart from the obvious advantages of rubbing shoulders with the gentry, Henrietta would probably have seen how membership would also assist Beard in his career. The timing of his election in December 1743, just a few weeks after he had transferred from Drury Lane to Covent Garden, reveals that he was already getting on well with his new employer. John Rich was an astute man of the theatre and could see that he had got hold of a popular and versatile performer. He put him to work on plays and afterpieces before introducing him at Christmas in the role for which he had been particularly sought out. We can see from the confident portrait of Beard in Macheath's famous red coat by Thomas Hudson (dated by experts to this precise period)[35] that he knew now that, after seven years of hard labour, he had really made his mark on London's theatrical world.

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[31] Thomas Dibdin, 'Reminiscences of Thomas Dibdin', London, 1827, pp. 254-5

[32] John Timbs, 'Clubs and club life in London', London 1873, pp.111-2

[33] Sir William Saunderson was one of the original 24 members

[34] Walter Arnold, The Life and Death of the Sublime Society of Beefsteaks, London 1871

[35] "Hudson's striking portrait of the singer and actor John Beard in his red coat trimmed with gold has been dated stylistically by Ellen Miles to about 1743; this was the year when Beard appeared in the first London performance of *Messiah*". Handel: a celebration of his Life and Times, National Portrait Gallery, London, 1985

Henrietta would not have been discomfited by the times of the meetings either. Two o'clock on a Saturday afternoon merely bridged the gap between morning rehearsal and evening performance. On days when Beard had no evening's singing to worry about he could stay longer, and drink more heavily of the port and porter which flowed freely after the tablecloth had been removed. One such Saturday was soon to arrive – within two years of his election - which would transform British musical life for ever, and set the whole nation singing along with Beard in his patriotic songs.

PATRIOTIC SONGS

The songs that delighted the *Sublime Society of Beef-Steaks* were the same songs that roused patriotic fervour in the theatre audience. There are many accounts of the audience in the gallery growing restive during some instrumental interlude or high-flown art-song, and calling for the *Roast Beef of Old England* and suchlike popular ballads instead. Silas Neville, in his diary entry for June 9th 1767 - at the very end of Beard's period as Covent Garden Manager - writes:

"Half past 4 went into the Pit at Covent Garden Theatre; after being shut up for the season [it] was opened tonight as a high favour to [Edward] Shuter [1728-76] for whose benefit "The Busybody" with "Love a la Mode", a farce never published, was played… Before it began the Gods, having called for the music to play *Roast Beef*, would not suffer the play to begin till their request was complied with. They pelted Davies and Hull, who appeared first, with orange skins, crying 'Off! Off!'…"[36]

Oliver Goldsmith writes that the lower classes "would find more satisfaction in the *Roast Beef of Old England* than in the finest closes [cadences] of an eunuch [male castrato]".[37] When the management felt that it was prudent to tap into the public's loyalty to the House of Hanover they arranged for the last portion of Handel's Coronation Anthem '*Zadok the Priest*' to be performed. This was published in 1743[38] and was therefore suddenly and fortuitously available. The text to the relevant section is:

God save the King, long live the King, may the King live for ever. Alleluia, Amen

and it became an unofficial National Anthem at a time when there was no such thing anywhere yet in Europe. But, requiring a choir of skilled voices and an orchestra with trumpets, this piece was not always easy to mount at short notice. Other patriotic ballads had to be found to serve the same purpose.

Therefore the singers found themselves scouring their repertoire of Masques and Oratorios for suitable material, while the house-composers in turn knocked up appropriate trifles. At Drury Lane the chief vocalist was now Thomas Lowe. He had sung in the first performance, at Cliveden in 1740, of Arne's "Masque of Alfred". Throughout 1745 he performed Arne's extracted chorus "Britons never will be slaves" (known to us as '*Rule Britannia'*) on most nights. Arne was house composer at Drury Lane, so it is not surprising to find this piece

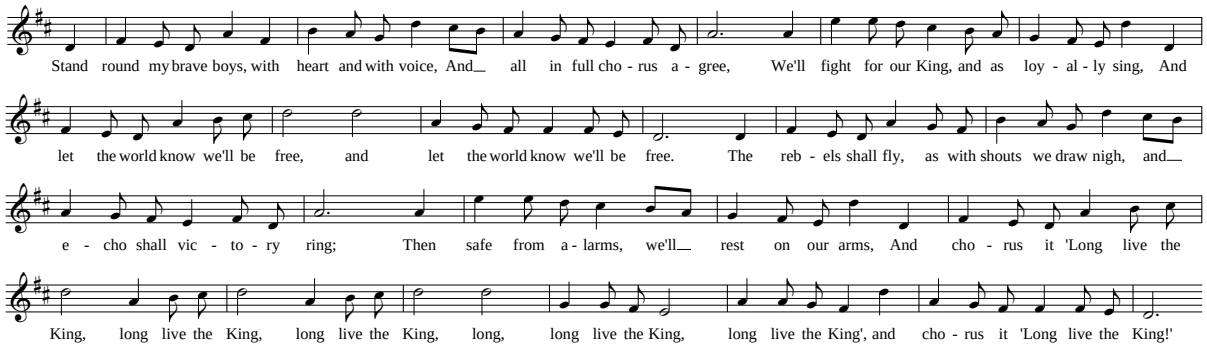
[36] Tuesday June 9th 1767, The Diary of Sylas Neville 1767-88, ed. B. Cozens-Hardy, London 1950
[37] Oliver Goldsmith, 'The Bee' Number VIII, November 24th, 1759
[38] see: G.F. Handel, 'Four Coronation Anthems', ed. C. Bartlett, Oxford 1988, 'Preface'

failing to appear on Covent Garden playbills. Beard was not able to sing this rousing song until he was back on the books at Drury Lane (1748-59) three years later.[39] It is likely that, sung with his strong, manly and heroic tones, the piece might well have become popular enough to have taken on the identity of the real National Anthem. But the first recorded occasion on when he sang it, February 23rd 1751, was long after the Jacobite threat had subsided. Thomas Lowe's milder and more mellifluous performance in 1745 wasn't strong enough to establish it as a serious contender for an important national role. But Handel may have looked on and felt that Arne's tune was sufficiently strong to eclipse any of his martial arias; thus deciding to throw a pot-boiler of his own into the ring.

This was a setting of words by John Lockman '*Stand round, my brave boys*' and was snapped up by Drury Lane. Lowe stepped in front of the curtain to perform it on 14th November in the presence of those volunteering for military service.

Stand round my brave boys, with heart and with voice,
And all in full chorus agree,
We'll fight for our King, and as loyally sing,
And let the world know we'll be free.

The rebels shall fly, as with shouts we draw nigh,
And echo shall victory ring:
Then safe from alarms, we'll rest on our arms,
And chorus it – Long live the King. *etc*



W. Barclay Squire who researched this little-known piece while Curator of the Music in the Library at Buckingham Palace wrote:

"Whether all this stir of patriotism roused Handel, or whether he received a commission from the theatre, it is impossible to say; but on November 14 the *General Advertiser* announced that at Drury Lane that evening there would be sung, at the end of the play of *'The Relapse'*, a Chorus Song set by Mr Handel for the Gentlemen Volunteers of the City of London."[40]

The song was advertised for sale the next day, November 15th: "*New Musick. This day is published A Song made for the Gentlemen Volunteers of the City of London, and sung by Mr Lowe, at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane. Set to Musick by Mr Handel*."

[39] The Madden Ballad Collection contains 'Rule Britannia' with the variant title 'Britons [sic] Guardian Angel sung by Mr Beard at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane'
[40] Arthur M. Friedlander, 'Two Patriotic Songs by Handel', Musical Times, May 1st 1925, pp. 416-9

Thus Drury Lane had strong patriotic music, while Covent Garden was forced to resurrect old favourites from a previous time of conflict.

Many years earlier in 1739, during the War of Jenkins's Ear, Beard had found great success with several songs celebrating Admiral Vernon's capture of Porto Bello. During the months of October and November of that year, when Londoners were aware of the hostilities but ignorant of the outcome, Beard sang "To Arms" and "Britons strike home" on most nights. These were two arias from Purcell's incidental music to the play "Bonduca, or The British Heroine"(1695), and their texts were suitably martial and aggressive:

> The oracle for War declares
> Success upon our Hearts and Spears.
>
> Britons strike home, revenge your Country's wrong:
> Strike and record yourselves in Druid songs.

On March 15th 1740 London learned of the successful action at Porto Bello. The theatre was quick to respond, and on 25th Beard sang 'Nel Pugnar' and 'A Song in the character of a Captain of an English Man-of-War upon the taking of Porto Bello':[41]

> Spain no longer shall assume Boys,
> The true Ocean as their own;
> For at last the time is come Boys,
> We've their Topsails lower'd down:
> Tho' in politics contesting,
> Round to Round they veer about,
> All their shifts and manifesting,
> We will with our Broadsides rout. etc

This was something new. Appearing in costume in the interval between the acts he became noted for his little scenes "in character". According to the requirements of the moment, he was happy to don the costume of a common soldier or sailor, or a Captain or Admiral to rouse the audience's spirits. He did it in the theatre, at the Pleasure Gardens, and at private parties in the taverns. Such 'acts' transferred, in time, to the Music Hall. But in the mid-eighteenth century these did not yet exist; and the 'straight' singer of Handel's fine oratorios was just as able to sing florid arias in the guise of the biblical military hero 'Judas Maccabaeus' as to turn his vocal prowess to a ballad in the character of the contemporary hero 'Jack Tar'.

Because of Beard's success at popularising these pieces of propaganda it was possible to read, in the St James Magazine,[42]

"...let but *Britons strike home*, or *God save the King*, be sounded in the ears of five thousand brave Englishmen, with a Protestant prince at the head of 'em, and they'll drive every monsieur into the sea, and make 'em food for mackrel".[43]

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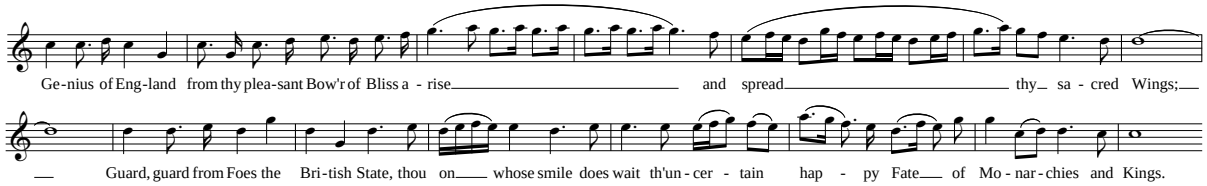
[41] A copy of this is in the Madden Collection, University Library, Cambridge, and is illustrated on page 56
[42] The St James Magazine, 1762
[43] quoted in: Terence M. Freeman, 'Dramatic Representations of British Soldiers and Sailors on the London Stage', 1660-1800, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston/Queenstown/Lampeter

The “English Captain’s Song” stayed popular through March and April 1740, but at the end of the season (which was usually in mid-May) it fell out of Beard’s repertoire.

But in the dark days of 1745, when Bonnie Prince Charlie was expected to arrive in London at any moment[44], Beard dusted off the patriotic songs of 1739-40. To these he added new ‘occasional’ ballads by the Covent Garden house-composer John Frederick Lampe (composer of the ballad opera *The Dragon of Wantley*). These were not even as successful as Handel’s, and quickly faded from view. One of them was called “The English Hero’s welcome home”, which was rather optimistic as there had been no battle between the forces by January 8th 1746, when it first appears on playbills! The Duke of Cumberland was still pursuing the rebels northwards to Scotland at this time; and a skirmish at Clifton, near Penrith, had been inconclusive. More to Beard’s taste was a fine aria with trumpet obbligato from incidental music by Purcell: ‘Genius of England’ (from ‘Don Quixote’). This found a more regular place in his repertoire, beginning with performances throughout October 1745, and remaining there until the end of the season. The text, written originally in 1694 by Thomas Durfey, could not have been better chosen, and may well have helped military recruitment in these troubled times:

Genius of England
From thy pleasant Bow’r of Bliss
Arise and spread thy sacred Wings;
Guard from foes the British state,
Thou on whose smile does wait
Th’uncertain happy Fate
Of Monarchies and Kings.
Then follow brave Boys to the Wars;
The Laurel you know is the prize:
Who brings home the noblest Scars
Looks finest in Celia’s Eyes.
Then shake off the slothful ease,
Let Glory inspire your hearts;
Remember a Soldier in War and in Peace
Is the noblest of all other Arts.



But what was wanted was something as grand as the extract from Handel’s Coronation Anthem, but which could still be performed by as small a group as were employed by the theatres for the interval music. It was Thomas Arne who would achieve lasting glory by discovering and arranging the melody, and John Beard who created history by singing it onstage on Saturday 28th September 1745.

[44] Horace Walpole, writing to Sir Horace Mann, British Envoy in Florence, on 27th September after the battle of Prestonpans, voiced the dread that all Londoners were feeling: “Prince Charles has called a Parliament in Scotland for the 7th of October; ours does not meet till the 17th, so that even in the show of liberty and laws they are beforehand with us… I have so trained myself to expect this ruin, that I see it approach without any emotion”. Scholes, ibid. p. 5-6

GOD BLESS OUR NOBLE KING

Arne was a Catholic – as was John Beard's wife Henrietta – and their personal feelings about the Jacobite invasion must have been very mixed at this time. Beard must have been particularly alarmed as Henrietta had Jacobite blood running through her veins. She was King James II's great-granddaughter by the illegitimate line passing down from his mistress Arabella Churchill. The Young Pretender was almost her age, and was the King's grandson by his second wife Mary of Modena. Thus Henrietta and Bonny Prince Charlie were cousins – though one suspects that she kept this quite quiet at such a delicate moment in time. If it was well-known that Beard was married to *a)* a catholic, and *b)* a relative of the Pretender, then it was very astute of him to make a public show of his loyalty to the House of Hanover by singing hymns for their safety.

Arne played a very clever game. Asked by Drury Lane to produce a ballad in support of the House of Hanover (which his stirring aria 'Rule Britannia' failed to do) he made use of an old catholic anthem tune.[45] This was recognised by some at a very early stage. When Benjamin Victor wrote to the absent Garrick to tell him of the amazing musical innovation in the London theatres he reported that the new loyal words were sung to 'an old anthem tune', and that the song consisted of 'the very words, and music, of an old Anthem that was sung at St. James's Chapel, for King James the Second, when the Prince of Orange was landed, to deliver us from popery and slavery.'[46]

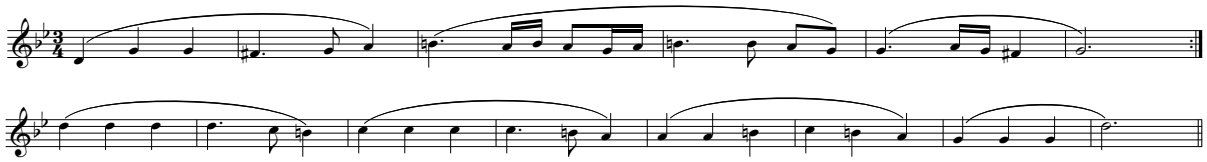
This is also confirmed by Charles Burney in a letter to Sir Joseph Banks of 29th July 1806[47] – which also contains the interesting details of the first performers' names:

'Old Mrs Arne, the mother of Dr. Arne and Mrs Cibber, a bigoted Roman Catholic, assured me at the time, 1746, that God save the King was written and sung for King James, in 1688, when the Prince of Orange was hovering over the coast; she said she had heard it sung, not only at the Playhouse but in the street. Her son, Mr. Arne, composer to Drury Lane Theatre, at the desire of Mr. Fleetwood, the Patentee, harmonised this loyal song for the stage, and he made a trio of it for Mrs Cibber *[his sister*], Beard, and Reinhold, with instrumental accompaniments without knowing the author of the words or original melody, and it continued to be sung and called for a full year after the suppression of the rebellion.'

As a little digression it is worth noting that the origins of the tune have not been definitively traced by most of the musicologists who have written on the subject.[48] Written in a 'Galliard' style with two distinct halves composed of unequal length - three phrases followed by four phrases - it has a distinctive musical shape. Although there are several 17th century pieces that have been discovered to resemble it closely, and that have musical phrases in common, none make an absolutely perfect fit. There are real similarities with a *Minuet* by Purcell (1696), an Old Song '*Franklin is fled away*', the carol '*Remember O thou man*' (set in the minor key), and a keyboard piece by the organist John Bull (1562-1628). Frustratingly, the manuscript of

[45] see Percy A. Scholes, 'God save the Queen', Oxford University Press, London, 1954 pp. 9-13 for a description of the version of the song given in *Thesaurus Musicus*, and published c.1744 (i.e. before its performance at Drury Lane). This appears to be the source for Arne's actual arrangement.
[46] Percy A. Scholes, 'God save the Queen', Oxford University Press, London, 1954, pp. 49-50
[47] W. H. Cummings, 'God save the King', Novello, London 1902, pp. 35-6
[48] including W.H. Cummings, op.cit.

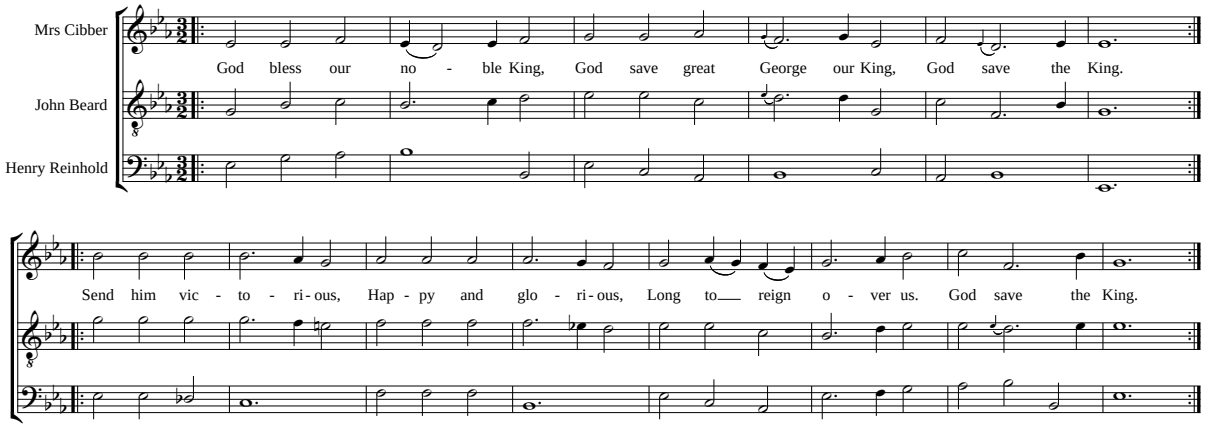
the last piece in this list has disappeared, and it is only known from a copy made by Sir George Smart (1776-1867) in the nineteenth century. But it is the only version of the tune to have the unequal shape of three phrases followed by four.



Percy Scholes makes a convincing case for this being the inspiration behind the old Anthem sung in King James II's time.[49] There is a convincing argument that it was performed even earlier for James I in 1607 at the Merchant Taylor Hall, and that the words to Dr Bull's tune were by Ben Jonson, beginning: "God save great James our King".[50] *The Times* newspaper of Wednesday January 30th 1822 carried this report:

"Mr Clark, of the King's Chapel, has, in a work recently published, traced back from the records and books of the Merchant Tailors' Company, that this song was composed and sung on the escape of King James I from the [Gun] Powder Plot, and sung in their Hall by the gentlemen and children of his Majesty's Chapel Royal, on the day when King James dined there, when a grand solemn entertainment, to celebrate the event of the King's escape from the Gunpowder Plot, was given; and it is supposed that the Church Service was performed previous to the entertainment, as the Dean and Sub-Dean were present, and an organ was erected in the Hall upon the occasion, which was on the 16th July, 1607. Dr. John Bull was first Professor of Music to Gresham College in 1596, and was chosen organist to James I in 1607, and played before the King at the above entertainment. It appears by the Merchant Tailors' records, that the Master of the Company conferred with Ben Jonson, who was then Poet Laureate, to write some verses for an anthem, which he accordingly did, beginning with 'God save great James our King,' and Dr. John Bull set them to music, which is the same so universally admired now George is substituted."

Arne's manuscript is interesting for many reasons. It shows what words were sung when it was first performed in 1745, and in what key the music was played. This has traditionally been G major, which is the key of the first publication. But in September of that year he wrote it out in E flat major. The reason was doubtless because his sister – the fine actress who had also been the first singer of Handel's aria 'He was despised' – was a contralto. Beard's tenor part in this trio version is very comfortably written for his range, from low F to high G:



[49] Percy A. Scholes, 'God save the Queen', Oxford University Press, London, 1954, pp. 97-101
[50] Andrew Ashbee, 'Records of English Court Music', Snodland, c. 1986

The text published in 1745,[51] though largely based on that penned initially by Ben Jonson in 1607, is actually derived from the version published in 1744 in the *Thesaurus Musicus*. Nobody ever claimed authorship of the lyrics. The *Thesaurus Musicus* version has the usual verse 2 words "O Lord our God arise / Scatter his enemies" etc. The *Gentleman's Magazine* added a new verse in its 1745 publication which is still sung today: "Thy choicest gifts in store / On him be pleased to pour...etc." Arne must have been quietly pleased to have foisted on an unsuspecting Protestant nation a tune heavy with Catholic resonance. Even John Beard may have been able to go home to his wife Henrietta and enjoy the subtle joke with her.

The actual autograph manuscript of the song is in the British Library.[52] Verse 1 (seen above) reads:

God bless our noble King,
God save great George our King,
God save the King.
Send him victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God save the King.

There is a final mystery to unravel. John Beard was contracted to Covent Garden Theatre between 1743-8. Eye-witness records all show him as singing in the first performance of the anthem at Drury Lane on Saturday 28th September 1745. Why?

The answer, although based on speculation, could be as follows. The tenor singer employed at Drury Lane after Beard's removal to Covent Garden was Thomas Lowe, whom we have seen having success with 'Rule Britannia' and Handel's new ballad. He was not a quick learner. Burney described him as having "the finest tenor voice I ever heard in my life", but who "for want of diligence and cultivation could never be safely trusted with anything better than a ballad, which he constantly learned by his ear".[53] In contrast, Beard "… knew as much of music as was necessary to sing a single part at sight, and with a voice that was more powerful than sweet, he became the most useful and favourite singer of his time…"[54]

Lowe was obviously not the man to be entrusted with a harmony part at short notice. Arne knew Beard well; they had worked together at Drury Lane during the 1730s. He now had to prepare something stirring in a hurry, to counter the news of Sir John Cope's defeat at the Battle of Prestonpans, which had just reached London. The Drury Lane management needed to reassure their clientele, many of whom were planning to move out of the capital, with music that was upbeat and patriotic. So Arne cannily took the catholic tune that he had found in the recently published *Thesaurus Musicus* and quickly made a 3-part ballad of it. He probably imagined it would be another occasional piece like all of the others – here today and gone tomorrow. It was a Saturday and he needed good performers. He knew where to find a reliable tenor. One can imagine Beard in the painting room at Covent Garden finishing his customary steak with the other members of the *Sublime Society of Beefsteaks*; being called

[51] Authorship was claimed on behalf of his father, Henry Carey (author of "Sally in our alley") by George Saville Carey in 1795 on very slender grounds, that have since been discredited. W. H. Cummings, ibid. p.45-
[52] Add. MS. 29,466
[53] Charles Burney, 'A General History of Music', London 1935, p.1010
[54] 'Memoirs of Dr. Charles Burney', University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln & London 1988, p.131

outside to address this emergency; learning the new music as he went across the road to his previous home-turf; and finally striding onstage with his colleagues Susanna Cibber and Henry Theodore Reinhold to sing another of Arne's arrangements – little realising what this particular one would lead to.

Its success was so complete that it was in print next day, and being talked about far and wide. Magazines like the *Gentleman's Magazine* were quick to print it, in a show of loyalty, adding new verses of their own. Covent Garden Theatre needed to get onto the bandwagon as well. Their own star singer had been involved in the first performance, after all.

Benjamin Victor's letter to Garrick, which is dated 10th October, i.e. a mere twelve days after the first performance, reveals that the custom did indeed spread to both theatres:

"The stage at both houses is the most *pious*, as well as the most *loyal* place in the three kingdoms. Twenty men appear at the end of every play: and one, stepping forward from the rest, with uplifted hands and eyes, begins singing, to an old anthem tune".[55]

The idea of copyright was still in its infancy at this time; but there was an understanding between the theatres that they didn't poach each other's product until a season, or a set number of performances, had passed. No such qualms can have attached to Arne's arrangement of this new loyal song. Obviously the fact that it was only an arrangement - not an original composition - made a significant difference.[56] Charles Burney clarifies matters in his letter of 1806:

"I, then a pupil of Mr Arne, was desired by some of the Covent Garden singers with whom I was acquainted, and who knew that I was a bit of a composer, to set parts to the old tune for the *new house*, as it was then called, which I did utterly ignorant who wrote the words or put them to music."[57]

Beard was likely to be the instigator of this arrangement. As a frequent performer of Arne's music (he had recently been singing in performances of his '*Comus*') and as a colleague of both Arne's wife and sister, he would have been a regular visitor at their household. Here he would have met the teenaged Burney, who had recently arrived from Chester as Arne's apprentice. Initial performances at Covent Garden were not advertised in the press, for the reasons outlined above. But during the course of the autumn there appear references to Beard singing "*the new occasional song*"; and on December 26th the management plucked up the courage to advertise: "*at the end of the play "God save the King"*.

It was not clear at this stage that this song was destined to eclipse all the other professions of loyalty being sung onstage. New ones still kept arriving, in tandem with the progress of the fortunes of war. New verses were also added to the existing anthem, whose warmongering lyric was a response to the immediacy of the threat. Without a knowledge of the origins of the National Anthem, lines like "Confound their Politicks, Frustrate their knavish tricks" must

[55] Percy A. Scholes, God save the Queen, Oxford University Press, London, 1954, p. 7
[56] According to Scholes (ibid. p.13) the latest date of publication for *Thesaurus Musicus* must be 1744, since it was advertised for sale in the *Daily Advertiser* on 16th November 1744. Therefore the publication of "God save our Lord the King" predates the first recorded performance at Drury Lane by nine months.
[57] Quoted in W. H. Cummings, 'God save the King', Novello, London 1902, p. 36

seem quite baffling. Understandably this verse is usually omitted in modern performance! But early in 1746, the London public heard verses like this:

O grant that Cumberland
May, by his mighty hand,
Victory bring;
May he sedition hush,
And like a torrent rush,
Rebellious hearts to crush,
God save the King.

After the Battle of Culloden, on April 16th 1746, one could predict that the happy news would be reflected on the daily playbills. While Handel was contemplating a large-scale celebration, with an oratorio on an appropriate theme, *('Judas Maccabaeus*' in which the heroic leader in the title role would be sung by John Beard) the Covent Garden management was offering its public, from April 25th onwards, "an Occasional Song on the defeat of the Rebels, by Beard". This must have been the Handel song 'From scourging Rebellion' or 'A Song on the Victory obtained over the Rebels by His Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland' that Walsh published a month later on 26th May.

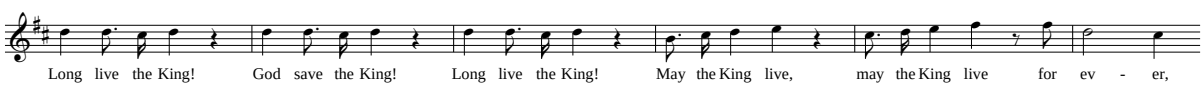
For some time afterwards there was a certain amount of confusion as to which song was being referred to by the title "*God save the King*". This had earlier been applied to the extract from Handel's Coronation Anthem "Zadok the Priest". Now there was an alternative song, much easier for unison singing, with the same title. Gradually the Handel became known as the 'old' version. As late as 1770 it is apparent from the correspondence of the Sharp family – keen amateur music-makers – that these terms were still being employed. One day in 1770 they were making music in their sailing-barge on the river Thames when they encountered King George III and Queen Charlotte, also on an outing by the river.

"They were seated on a bench under a large tree. As soon as we came opposite to them there happened luckily half a bar's rest, in which time the performers pulled off their hats, and went on in time till the watermen had let down the anker and made us fast. The first piece was *God save the King* (to another tune)." [presumably the Arne version]

Later, after the royal party had enjoyed an *al fresco* concert and suffered the interruption of a shower of rain,

"we struck up *God save the King* in the old tune [presumably the Handel], and the number of people on the water joined us, and the Hurraugh was noble, and after each time His Majesty moved his hat."

The Sharp family musicians were judicious in the order of their programme. The Arne version of *God save the King* is not exactly jolly, and doesn't encourage an audience to join in with hurrahs. But the lively Handel version that concluded their impromptu concert, with its repeated exclamations of



would have allowed the King time to doff his hat and acknowledge the acclamation each time.

THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

It may appear strange that the British public chose Arne's solemn, catholic, melody as their expression of national solidarity. The text says nothing about being proud to be British – as the jollier *Roast Beef* and *Rule Britannia* type of song had.[58] In fact, reflecting the occasion for which it was first penned, it is little more than a prayer for the safety of the royal family. The impact that this solemnity had on the super-charged feelings of the nation in the perilous days of 1745-6 can be gathered from an eye-witness to the early performances of the original vocal trio version, in which Mrs Cibber sang the melody-line. Lady Lucy Meyrick, discussing the actresses that she had admired in her youth, regarded Mrs Cibber as 'unrivalled' - in comparison to the other leading ladies of the day - in one particular aspect:

"this was in singing *God save the King* in chorus on the stage. She said it was a perfect hymn as *she* sang it; and indeed so it ought always to be, and so we trust it is felt by him for whom with such true British loyalty it is offered up".[59]

After Drury Lane and Covent Garden had established the custom of performing the piece at the end of their evening's entertainments it was not long before the custom was spreading through the kingdom. The Theatre in Goodman's Fields adopted the practice by October 2nd 1746; and the provincial theatres were soon to follow. Even the chimes of clocks were altered to ring out the new tune. At St Margaret's Church, Westminster, right beside the seat of Government, the bells which had previously rung out the tune of John Beard's popular 'hit' "*Britons, strike home*" since March 1740 were now updated, as we learn from their minute-book:

> *1748. 15th October. The churchwardens are authorised to cause the repair of the chimes, they to be set to the tune of that Loyal Song called 'God save the King'.*

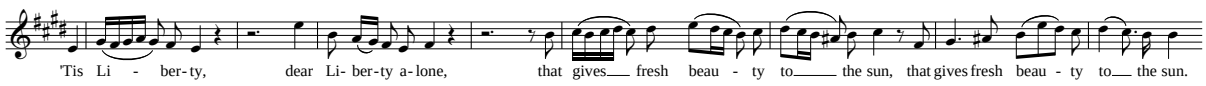
The music was also hawked through the streets by ballad-sellers, as can be seen in William Hogarth's famous painting 'The March to Finchley, 1745' that celebrates the volunteer militia sent out to defend London against the Jacobite rebels. In the centre of the picture a guardsman walks along beside a ballad-seller, whose copy of the new national anthem is hanging from her basket. It was called for in the theatre even when there was no pressing military threat, as this poem[60] - showing the theatre from the performer's point of view - reveals:

> The coach below, the clock gone five,
> Now to the theatre we drive:
> Peeping the curtain's eyelet through,
> Behold the house in dreadful view!
> Observe how close the critics sit,
> And not one bonnet in the pit.
> With horror hear the galleries ring,
> Nosy! Black Joke, *God save the King*![61]

[58] Burney's view was that "Rule Britannia" was "the most pleasing air to English words which our national music could boast." 'Memoirs of Dr. Charles Burney', ibid. p.41
[59] Laetitia Hawkins, 'Memoirs, Anecdotes, Facts and Opinions', vol. 1, 1824
[60] Robert Lloyd, 'To George Colman Esq: a familiar Epistle, 1761' quoted in Scholes, ibid. p. 30
[61] 'Black Joke' was a popular tune of the day, and 'Nosy' was the theatre musician Giacomo Cervetto

George Anne Bellamy recounts an occasion when the new national anthem interrupted a play. In her unreliable memoirs, written long after the event and usually full of inaccuracies, she tells how the news of the victory at Culloden arrived during a performance of *Macbeth,* whilst the King was in the audience. "They stopped the play … and ordering all the singers to unwitch themselves, directed them to sing 'God save great George our King'.[62]

Other popular ballads emerged during this protracted War.[63] Handel had success in 1748 with two arias from 'Judas Maccabaeus' – 'Tis liberty' and 'Come ever smiling Liberty' – both of which looked likely to challenge the supremacy of *God save the King* in the audience's affection. They were called for continuously at this time. Now it was the leading ladies, Mrs Storer and Mrs Faulkner, who added lustre to their reputations with the nightly performances.[64]



William Boyce wrote "Heart of Oak" with David Garrick at the time of the Seven Years War (1756-63). This was a huge success at the time, both as a solo number for the male singers, and in the context of its position within Garrick's pantomime "Harlequin's Invasion" (1759):

> Come, cheer up, my lads, 'tis to glory we steer,
> To add something more to this wonderful year,
> To honor we call you, as free men, not slaves,
> For who are so free as the sons of the waves?
> Heart of oak are our ships, Heart of oak are our men:
> We always are ready. Steady, boys, steady.
> We'll fight and we'll conquer again and again.

This recalls the spirit of the songs Beard sang at the time of Admiral Vernon's battle at Porto Bello (which took place in November 1739 but was not reported in London until early in the new year). Some twenty years after that naval action Beard was still dressing up as a sailor and doing his patriotic 'act' once again. On the 28th November 1760 the 45-year old was creating the role of another sturdy sailor: this time it was 'Thomas', in Covent Garden's new ballad opera "Thomas and Sally". By the 23rd April 1761 the playbills featured an additional puff, that he would sing 'by desire, *Heart of Oak*'.

Dibdin would write other stirring nautical songs, to rouse the nation during the French and Napoleonic wars. But the national anthem had taken root. It was often the earliest music that a child would hear. Henry Angelo recounts that:

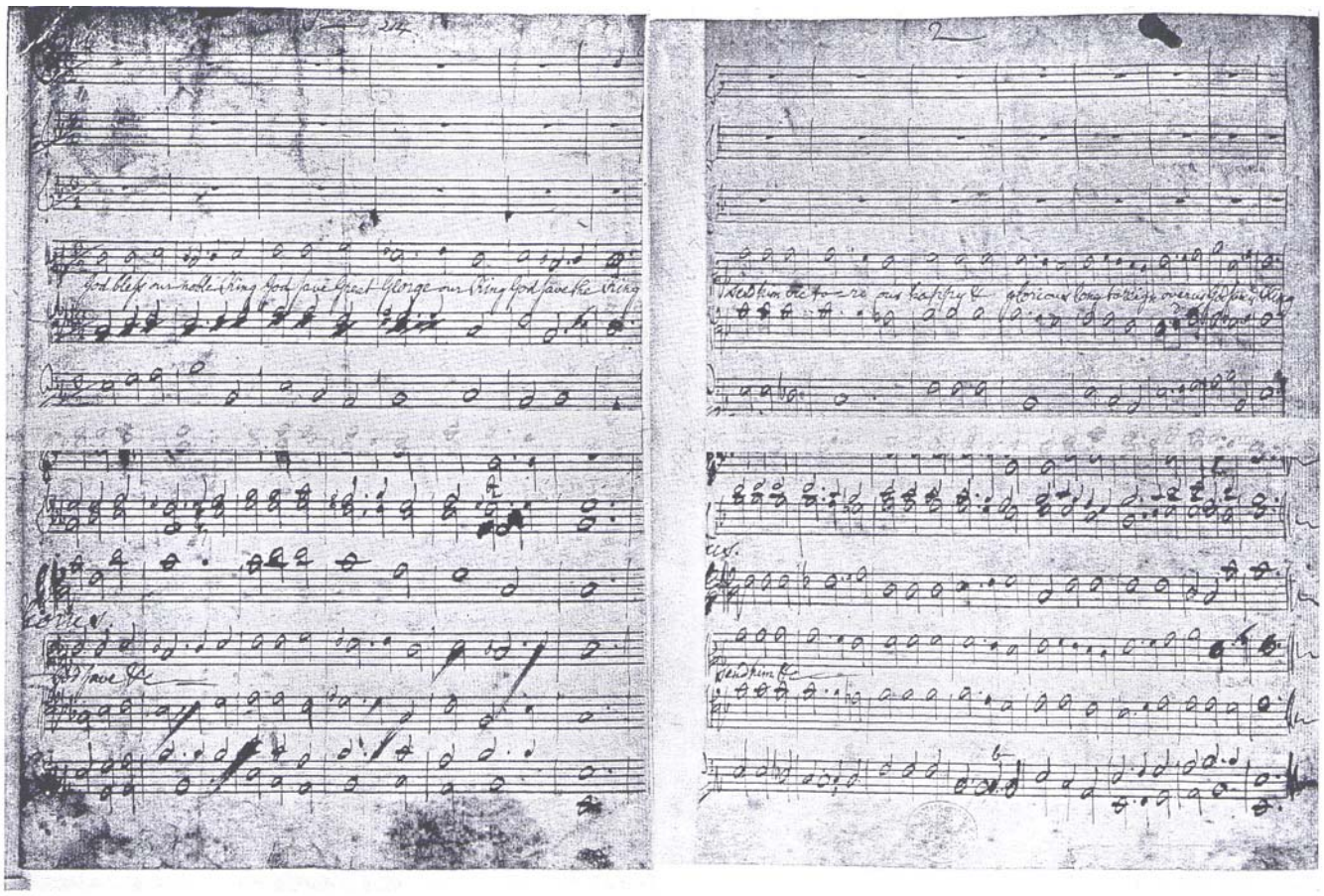
"When not four years old … my nurse took me to St. James's church, when, in the psalms, hearing everyone about me singing, I thought I must join in the chorus, and began to bawl out

[62] George Ann Bellamy, 'An Apology', vol. 3, p.88
[63] The War of the Austrian Succession lasted from 1740-8. The Jacobite uprising was only one element in it. The death of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI in October 1740 sparked off a crisis that led to Spain, Prussia & France all trying to acquire territory at Austria's expense. Peace was negotiated at Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748.
[64] Winton Dean, 'Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques', O.U.P. London, 1959, p. 473

as loud as I could *God save the King*, the only song I knew. The whole congregation were convulsed with laughter..." [65]

And so the music and words stuck fast. Ordinary people could remember both easily, and felt moved to be able to participate in something that was as loyal as it was solemn. Arne had always worried that Handel's music would eclipse his. Dr Burney reported that he felt like Marsyas challenging the Sun-God Apollo to a music contest in the old Greek legend. For him Handel, the immigrant German and friend of the Royal Family, was a "tyrant and usurper against whom he frequently rebelled; but with as little effect as Marsyas against Apollo".[66] But in this one respect Arne's music triumphed over Handel's. His version of *God save the King* became the nation's favourite.

Arne's original manuscript of the National Anthem



ARNE'S OWN MANUSCRIPT SCORE FOR THE FIRST RECORDED PERFORMANCE

[65] Henry Angelo, 'Reminiscences', vol. 2, 1828, p. 368
[66] Charles Burney, 'A General History of Music', London 1935, pp.1010-1