

At this point the memoirs come to an abrupt end.

It is, perhaps, worth noting that some of his stories can be substantiated. I cannot pretend to have verified many of his claims – that would require studying the geography of Peru and the history of the Spanish-American revolt, as well as tracking down records of all of the whaling ships Choyce claimed to have sailed in – but the most obvious points I have checked quickly and in all cases they corroborate Choyce. The war between England and Spain which resulted in his capture early in 1797, the outbreak of war with France again in 1803, Lord Cochrane's court-martial and his later re-appearance as commander of the patriots' navy in the South American revolt against Spain, and the date of Duperrey's stay at Concepcion – in all these cases the dates and facts in Choyce's narrative are correct. In the last case, Choyce's date is within a day or two of when Duperrey records that his ship anchored in the Bay of Concepcion.

A glance at a map showing the harbour of Lorient proves beyond a doubt that Choyce knew his territory when he described his escape from the French Navy. The arm of the harbour down which the two men paddled is separated from the sea by an extremely narrow strip of land across which they dragged their small boat to the open sea, thus escaping the notice of the French frigates guarding the harbour entrance.

And the most romantic adventure of all, his being picked up by the *HMS Theseus*, outside Lorient, has been recorded. As mentioned in the introductory paragraph, a letter from the Public Record Office, dated 18 November 1937, gave the following information:

‘There seems to be no reference to Phillip Watts or his companion in this muster book. In the next volume, however, (Ad. 37/1189), a “Gilbert Watts” appears who with a companion, James Choyce, is described as joining the *Theseus* off Lorient from a French prison on June 29th, 1808. James Choyce is described as A.B., aged 30, born in Chelsea. The Captain's Log of the *Theseus* for June 29th reads as follows: “Fired several guns at some armed boats. Sent the boats manned and armed to cut off fishing boats. At 8 the boats returned.”’

The impressions left with the reader of the memoirs, besides astonishment that he survived all his adventures, are the leniency and freedom in the Peruvian jails and the relatively kind treatment received at the hands of the Spaniards, in comparison with that of the French during the Napoleonic Wars; his descriptions of sailors' behaviour; his determination to return to England despite his treatment by Englishmen and despite offers to work in Peru and to serve on board a Spanish ship; and, of course, the descriptions of the peoples, manners, and customs of these far-away places as early as the 1800s. Altogether, a fascinating memoir.

Dorothy Reid