

Selection and Early Career Education of Executive Officers in the Royal Navy
c1902-1939

Submitted by Elinor Frances Romans, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for
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Signature.....

This thesis is dedicated to the teachers who inspired me and, in the true sense of the word, educated me. I'd like to name you all but it would be a very long list. Without you this thesis would have been unthinkable.

This thesis is dedicated to the colleagues, friends, phriends, DMers and DMRPers without whom it would have unendurable

This thesis is dedicated to my supervisor, Nicholas Rodger, without whom it would have been implausible.

Above all though it is dedicated to my family, without whom it would have been impossible.

Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the selection and early career education of executive branch officers in the Royal Navy c1902-1939. The thesis attempts to place naval selection and educational policy in context by demonstrating how it was affected by changing naval requirements, external political interference and contemporary educational reform. It also explores the impact of the First World War and the Invergordon mutiny upon officer education.

The thesis discusses the selection of potential executive officers, exploring what methods were used, why they were used and how they were developed over time. It discusses the increasing openness of the officer corps of the Royal Navy to boys of talent, irrespective of their background; and shows that this trend was driven by political demand, fuelled by the increasing number of well educated lower middle class boys, and welcomed by many in the Royal Navy.

The thesis demonstrates that the Fisher-Selborne Scheme of officer education combined existing naval practice with recent educational developments to produce a unique and innovatory educational system. It shows how many of the assumptions on which the scheme was founded were subsequently proven to be wrong, and demonstrates its gradual dismantling through the inter-war years.

The thesis considers the development of the Special Entry scheme, initially in response to a shortage of junior officers but later as a means of broadening entry to the officer corps. It contrasts the fortunes of the two schemes in the inter-war period, in which the educational side of the Special Entry scheme was largely unaltered.

Overall the thesis seeks to place the development of the Royal Navy's systems for the selection and early career education of executive officers in context by exploring how and why they were developed and their response to the changing fortunes and shape of the Royal Navy.

Contents

Title page	– p.1
Dedication	– p.2
Abstract	– p.3
Contents page	– p.4
List of tables	– p.5
Abbreviations and terminology used herein	p.6
Dramatis Personae	– p.9
Royal Navy officer entry schemes 1902-1939	– p.12
Introduction	– p.13
Chapter One – Officer Selection	p.75
Chapter Two – The Royal Naval Colleges Dartmouth and Osborne	p.139
Chapter Three – The Special Entry	p.201
Chapter Four – Cadet Sea Training	p.227
Chapter Five – The Education of Midshipmen	p.253
Conclusion	– p.297
Appendix I – List of committees concerned with the selection and early career education of Royal Navy officers 1902-1939	p.307
Appendix II – HM Ships employed in cadet training 1907-1939	p.309
Bibliography	– p.312

List of Tables

- Table 1 – Percentage of candidates or selected candidates from various backgrounds 1903-1929; p.106
- Table 2 – Independent schools producing ten or more Special Entry cadets between June 1925 and November 1929 and military professions of these cadet's fathers; p.108
- Table 3 – Annual cost to parents of selected public schools 1933; p.111
- Table 4 – Executive officers entered per year 1930-1939; p.113
- Table 5 – Comparison of interview and examination performance of Dartmouth candidates March and July 1939; p.122
- Table 6 – Highest and lowest marks of successful candidates for Special Entry cadetships, selected years 1928-1936; p.125
- Table 7 – Marks obtained by candidates taking particular places in Civil Service examinations 1934-1936; p.125
- Table 8 – Candidates for Special Entry Cadetships who passed the examination but failed the interview 1938-1940; p.128
- Table 9 – Comparison of promotion rates to commander of Fisher-Selborne and Special Entry officers promoted to midshipman between 1923-1927; p.216
- Table 10 – Zones from which lieutenant-commanders were selected for promotion to commander during the years 1934-1937; p.218
- Table 11 – Candidates per advertised vacancy 1928-1930; p.221

Abbreviations and terminology employed herein.

DTSD – Director of Training and staff duties, a naval officer (generally a captain) employed within the Admiralty and largely responsible for the administration of officer education. He was expected to comment on all questions of officer education and suggest answers to problems, but was rarely required to sit on committees and did not have an active role in formatting syllabi. The role was created as part of the reorganisation of the Admiralty in 1917.

Director of Education/Advisor on Education – Civilian employed within the Admiralty and responsible for providing advice on non-professional education.
Director of Education 1903-1917 Sir James Alfred Ewing
Acting Director of Education 1917-1919 Cyril Ashford
Admiralty Advisor on Education 1919-1936 Alexander McMullen

HMC – The Headmaster's Conference, the organisation which represented the interests of independent boy's secondary schools in the period. The HMC investigated and campaigned on behalf of its members and spoke to the Navy on their behalf.

KRs and AIs – King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions, the rules governing all aspects of naval life from sunset ceremonies to magazine safety. Procedures for the instruction and examination of all personnel were laid down in KRs and AIs. Amendments to KRs and AIs were, from 1909 onwards, published in Admiralty Weekly Orders; in 1914 these were supplemented by Admiralty Monthly Orders. From 1921 a system of Admiralty Fleet Orders (AFOs) and Confidential Admiralty Fleet Orders (CAFOS) was introduced.

Term system – Between 1903 and 1937 each entry to Osborne or Dartmouth was referred to as a term. The college year was divided into three terms along the same lines as a normal school thus there were three entries of cadets every year – in January, May and September. Throughout their time at the colleges, cadets spent most of their time with their term-mates with whom they shared

lessons, sports, dormitories, and free time. Contact with cadets in other terms was strictly limited and the terms competed with each other at sports. In 1937 the term system was replaced by a house system similar to that in most public schools. Houses contained cadets of all ages who were allowed to mix freely and took part in sports and social activities together although they continued to share lessons and dormitories only with cadets of the same entry.

Term log/ line book – The collective diary kept by the members of a term during their time in the college. It recorded daily events and the achievements the term or its members. Logs and line books were enlivened by drawings, cartoons, poetry and jokes which showcased the creative talents of cadets and demonstrated their feelings about the college.

Midshipman's journal – All midshipmen were required to keep a journal which recorded their lives and work and the activities of their ships. The keeping of a journal was designed to ensure midshipmen took an interest in their work. The contents often include essays about various aspects of naval warfare or the places visited by the ship. Midshipmen were required to illustrate their journals with hand-drawn charts and technical drawings, many included photographs or paintings of the places they visited. Journals were frequently inspected by the officers in charge of the training of midshipmen, and midshipmen could not be promoted unless their journal was up to standard.

Gunroom – The living space for midshipmen in a ship in which they ate, worked and studied. The gunroom was ruled by a sub-lieutenant. The term 'gunroom' was also used to describe the recreational space set aside for each term at the naval colleges.

Snottie's Nurse – From 1912 onwards the officer in charge of the midshipmen in a ship. The snottie's nurse was responsible for ensuring the adequate progress of midshipmen in their studies and was nominally responsible for disciplining them although he normally gave the sub-lieutenant of the gunroom a free hand.

Abbreviations for archives:

TNA – The National Archives

CCA – Churchill College Archives

BRNC – Archives of Britannia Royal Naval College Dartmouth

RNM – Archives of the Royal Naval Museum

IWM – Archives of the Imperial War Museum

NMM- Archives of the National Maritime Museum

Dramatis Personae

Admiral of the Fleet John Arbuthnot 'Jacky' Fisher 1st Baron Fisher (1841-1920)

- As Second (1902) and then First (1905 to 1910) Sea Lord, Fisher presided over the reform of the Royal Navy including the introduction of new ships, the revision of fleet disposition and an attempt to completely change the way in which Royal Navy officers were educated and employed. Fisher's reforms form the heart of this thesis. Fisher served again as First Sea Lord in 1914-1915, clashing with Winston Churchill who had previously been his ally in implementing manning reforms.

William Palmer, 2nd Earl of Selborne (1859-1942) – First Lord of the Admiralty from 1900 to 1905. Selborne supported Fisher in his reforming efforts, facilitating the integration of the engineering and executive corps of naval officers.

Sir Winston Churchill (1874-1965) - As First Lord of the Admiralty from 1911-1915, Churchill was a strong advocate of the democratisation of the officer corps. He served again in the role from 1939-1940 and again advocated the democratisation of the officer corps. After becoming Prime Minister in 1940 Churchill retained a keen interest in the Navy.

Albert Alexander, 1st Earl Alexander of Hillsborough (1885-1965) – Alexander twice served as First Lord of the Admiralty, from 1929-1931, and from 1940-1946, the first Labour Party member to hold the post. He was an enthusiastic advocate of the democratisation of the officer corps.

Permanent Secretary to the Board of Admiralty (hereafter referred to by the abbreviated form in daily use 'Secretary of the Admiralty') - The senior civil servant at the Admiralty and the man to whom most communications concerned with officer education and selection were addressed. He was himself a member of the Board of Admiralty and could have a considerable role in policy making.

Holders:

1874-1907 Sir Evan MacGregor

1907-1911 Sir Charles Thomas

1911-1917 Sir William Graham Greene

1917-1936 Sir Oswyn Murray

1936-1940 Sir Richard Carter

Admiral Sir Archibald Douglas (1842-1913) – As Commander in Chief Portsmouth (1904-1907) Douglas presided over a series of committees concerned with the practical implementation of the Fisher-Selborne Scheme for the education and employment of naval officers.

Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond (1871-1946) – A highly capable naval officer and historian, Richmond none the less succeeded in making himself very unpopular within the service. He was the first officer to hold the post of Director of Training and Staff Duties in 1918, subsequently becoming the Captain of the Royal Naval College Greenwich. Richmond finally left the Royal Navy in 1931 and became a distinguished historian, holding the post of Vere-Harmsworth Professor of Naval History at Cambridge University from 1934-1936. Richmond was one of the founders of the *Naval Review* and wrote extensively on officer education.

Sir James Alfred Ewing (1855-1935) – Ewing is sometimes referred to as 'Alfred' rather than 'James'. A distinguished physicist and engineer, Ewing was given the newly created role of Director of Education in 1903. Between 1914 and 1917 his considerable academic talents were exercised as the Head of Room 40, the Admiralty's cryptanalysis organisation which also employed various civilian staff from Osborne and Dartmouth Naval Colleges. In 1917 Ewing left the Admiralty for Edinburgh University and his naval work came to an end.

Alexander McMullen – McMullen's association with the Royal Navy began with teaching science at Dartmouth, before serving at sea in the First World War. (His performance at Jutland was sufficiently impressive to see him recommended for early promotion). From 1919-1936 he served as Admiralty Advisor on Education.

The Royal Naval College Osborne - Founded in 1903, Osborne occupied a proportion of the Royal Estate at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight. It housed Fisher-Selborne Scheme cadets for the first two years of their education. Plagued by poor health, and with the buildings in poor condition, Osborne was closed in 1921. Officers serving at Osborne were appointed to HMS *Racer*, the slop acting as tender to the college.

The Royal Naval College Dartmouth - Home to the cadet training ship *Britannia* from 1863 onwards, the construction of the College began in 1898 with the foundation stone being laid in 1902. The College opened in 1905 and housed Fisher-Selborne cadets in their final two years ashore. The establishment was known as HMS *Britannia* until 1908, HMS *Espiegle* until 1910, and HMS *Pomone* until 1922 when the name of HMS *Britannia* was restored.

Sir Cyril Ashford (1867-1951) - Formerly Head of Science at Harrow, Ashford was appointed Headmaster of Osborne when it opened in 1903. When the first batch of Fisher-Selborne scheme cadets moved to Dartmouth in 1905 Ashford went with them, remaining as the headmaster there until his retirement in 1927. Ashford's retirement was marked by his being knighted.

Charles Godfrey (1873-1924) - Formerly Head of Mathematics at Winchester, Godfrey succeeded Ashford at Osborne and remained as the headmaster there until the closure of the college in 1921. Godfrey was a noted pioneer of modern mathematical education.

Eric Kempson (1878-1948) - Taught at Dartmouth before the First World War, saw war service in the Royal Engineers (winning the Military Cross) and subsequently became Head of Science at Rugby. Kempson succeeded Ashford, becoming the headmaster of Dartmouth in 1927, he retired in 1940.

Royal Navy officer entry schemes 1902-1939

Fisher-Selborne scheme - First cadets entered in 1903. Took boys at the age of thirteen and put them through four years of education at Osborne and Dartmouth, normally followed by eight months in a cadet training cruiser and two years four months as a midshipman. Sometimes referred to as the Selborne-Fisher, Fisher, or Selborne scheme.

Special Entry - First cadets entered in 1913. Took boys at the age of seventeen and put them through a year or eighteen months of education in a dedicated training ship before sending them to sea as midshipmen.

Warrant officers - The rank of warrant officer was reached by ratings after men years of service, typically men were in their thirties when they reached it. From 1903 onwards a limited number of warrant officers were commissioned. Because they were so old when first commissioned they had no hope of rising to the highest ranks of the Royal Navy

Mate - Introduced in 1912, the Mate Scheme allowed ratings the chance to gain a commission at a relatively young age and so compete for promotion to the highest ranks of the service. From 1931 onwards the men in the scheme were called 'upper-yardmen', and the rank of mate was replaced by sub-lieutenant.

Introduction

Given the acres of print devoted to the careers of the Royal Navy's officers, it is perhaps surprising that so little should be devoted to their selection and early career education.¹ This is particularly so as the distinguished record of the Royal Navy in both peace and war has only been achieved through the skills and efforts of its personnel, in particular its officers. Given the dependence of Britain on the Royal Navy the selection and education of officers has been a critical factor in the maintenance of naval and, by extension, national strength. Officer selection and educational policies have been driven by a wide variety of internal and external factors, and so illustrate both the priorities of the Royal Navy and its relationship with the state.

Whilst the selection and education of Royal Navy officers is generally deserving of greater attention from historians, the period from 1902 to 1939 is of particular interest because it saw an almost complete cycle of educational development. The Fisher-Selborne scheme of 1902 put in place an educational system based around science and engineering. By 1939, much of this system had been dismantled in favour of a more traditional approach centred on seamanship and leadership. At the same time, officer selection became increasingly meritocratic, the officer corps being opened gradually to men from less wealthy backgrounds.

Any examination of officer selection and education must be pursued from a clear starting point. The subject is too extensive to be fully examined within the scope of a PhD thesis and so limitations must be imposed. In the first place, it is necessary to define the terms 'selection' and 'education'. For the purposes of this thesis, I shall define selection as the process by which boys were chosen to enter the naval officer education system.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers several relevant definitions for education, thus: *'the process of 'bringing up' (young persons); the manner in which a person has been 'brought up'; with reference to social station, kind of manners and habits acquired, calling or employment prepared for, etc'* and *'the systematic instruction, schooling or training given to the young in preparation for the work of life; by extension, similar instruction or training obtained in adult*

¹ For example Law's naval bibliography of the Second World War lists three hundred and five books about the wartime Royal Navy of which only nine are devoted to training. Derek G Law, *The Royal Navy in World War Two: An Annotated Bibliography* (London: Greenhill, c1988)

age. Also, the whole course of scholastic instruction which a person has received'; finally 'culture or development of powers, formation of character, as contrasted with the imparting of mere knowledge or skill'.²

All these definitions may be applied to some aspect of the education of naval officers between 1902 and 1939. Naval officers pursued a course of academic and professional learning and were immersed in seagoing life and naval culture including history, uniforms, customs, and prescribed behaviors. The system was designed to shape their attitudes and behavior; to be a naval officer was not merely a job, or even a profession, it was to be a cell of a great living organism. The Royal Navy made some distinction between education and training – in 1902, education was defined as the development of character and seagoing instinct and training as the mastering of knowledge.³ Training was thus, in some ways, subordinate to education – the knowledge and skills gained through training contributed to the development of an officer who was master of his men and his environment. As the Royal Navy did not confine itself merely to imparting knowledge it seems reasonable to refer to the officer development process as education.

The education of naval officers in the period from 1902 to 1939 was characterised by the enormous number of widely varying and constantly changing instructional schemes and courses – themselves dictated by an even wider variety of concerns and developments. As space is limited I have chosen to concentrate on the early career education of executive branch officers.

By early career education I mean that received by officers between joining the Royal Navy and qualifying as an acting sub-lieutenant at the age of twenty-one. I am therefore concerned with the studies of cadets and midshipmen. Cadets started either a four year course at Osborne or Dartmouth naval colleges aged thirteen; or, at the age of seventeen, the one year or eighteen month Special Entry training course aboard a training ship. Some boys entered from nautical training colleges as Direct Entries, either joining a Dartmouth term part-way through its time at the colleges or training alongside the Special Entry. For most of the period in question both groups subsequently

² 'Education' in Oxford English Dictionary Online <<http://www.oed.com>> [Accessed 20 January 2012]

³ The National Archives (TNA) Papers of Records of the Admiralty, Naval Forces, Royal Marines, Coastguard, and related bodies (ADM) 7/941 'New Scheme of Training Officers and Men 1903', 'Scheme for Entry, Training and Employment of Officers, Men and Boys for the Royal Navy', extract from Board minutes No.1045, 21 November 1902 p.1

served for eight months or so aboard a seagoing training cruiser. On completion of their cadet training young executive officers served as midshipmen aboard operational warships of the fleet for two years and four months before taking examinations that, if passed, earned them the rank of acting sub-lieutenant.

Their subsequent education, with which I am not concerned, consisted of sub-lieutenants courses which at various times included up to a year of general naval studies at Greenwich Naval College, and subsequent shorter courses in gunnery, torpedo, signals and navigation held at naval establishments in the Portsmouth area. Only after he had passed these courses was an officer's commission confirmed. Following a further period at sea, many executive officers went on to qualify as specialists in gunnery, torpedo, navigation, signals, submarines or aviation and could expect to be employed in their specialisation until at least the rank of lieutenant-commander. As their careers progressed officers undertook more courses and examinations – these being designed to qualify them for more complicated work in their specialisation, or for destroyer command, or as staff officers, or to prepare them for senior rank.

The education officers received after commissioning was vital in shaping their careers and had a critical role in determining the future of the Royal Navy – including its tactical and strategic development, the ships and weapons it used and its fortunes in battle. It is an area deserving of several theses and to attempt to condense it into one, itself concentrating on early career education, would do it a great injustice and present a grossly unbalanced account. Consequently I have chosen to neglect the education officers received after being ranked acting sub-lieutenant; except where investigations or changes of policy impacted upon the education of cadets or midshipmen.

I have also opted to largely exclude those executive officers who began their careers as ratings. Most of the ratings who achieved commissioned rank did so via the rank of warrant officer. Generally they were not commissioned until the age of thirty or older, and had little hope of promotion beyond lieutenant-commander. Consequently their selection and education was completely different from that of other executive officers. A small number of ratings became officers at a young age via the Mate Scheme. Although their training was generally completely separated from that of other executive officers they have a case for inclusion here – not least as pressure to expand their numbers was a significant factor in officer selection policy. However I have

again opted to largely ignore them, preferring to concentrate on the experiences of the vast majority of officers – those who entered the Royal Navy as cadets. The small numbers of mates, combined with the great differences between their educational experiences and those of other executive officers, means that they naturally fall largely outside this narrative.

Finally, I have chosen to concern myself almost exclusively with officers of the executive branch. This branch was the largest and most powerful within the Royal Navy. Aside from commanding ships executive officers were also responsible for navigation, communications, damage control, and the maintenance and use of all weapons and many auxiliary systems. They also dominated the lives of ratings – being largely responsible for discipline, the welfare of personnel, and the domestic tasks of ship maintenance which occupied much of the working week. Consequently they dominated the higher ranks of the Royal Navy, exercising control over its development, deployment and preparation for war; only they could rise to the head of the service.

Between 1905 and 1921 the executive and engineering branches were, to some extent, integrated as explored below. However, even in this period very few commands were given to engineer officers, and the executive officers continued to dominate the service. Only those officers fulfilling executive functions can truly be described as professional naval officers. In 1957 the American sociologist Samuel Huntington published *The Soldier and the State* in which he provided a definition of the professional military officer.⁴ His work provides a convenient starting point for any consideration of the history of the Royal Navy officer corps in the 1903-1939 period. Samuel Huntington, drawing on the work of preeminent social scientist Harold Lasswell, identified various factors as important in shaping the profession of military officership.⁵

Samuel Huntington explained that to be considered a profession an occupation must combine specific expertise, clearly defined responsibilities, and a sense of corporateness.⁶ The second of these is, within the context of this thesis, easily dealt with – the professional officers of a national military force are responsible for the security of the nation; if they do not act in the interests of the nation's security they have failed in their professional duty. This responsibility to

⁴ Samuel P Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957; repr.d 1987)

⁵ Harold D Laswell, 'The Garrison State', *American Journal of Sociology*, 48 (1941), pp.455-468

⁶ Huntington, *Soldier State*, p.8

the state differentiates military officers from mercenaries who owe no allegiance but instead sell their skills to the highest bidder.⁷

The specific expertise of the military officers to which Samuel Huntington referred, and to which he attached Harold Laswell's terminology, is 'the management of violence'.⁸ This separates officers from the enlisted personnel whose function it is to actually apply violence — they are tradesmen rather than professionals, applying current skills to current problems. In contrast officership, although incorporating manual skills, requires a far wider breadth of knowledge and an understanding of history and society. It is the ability to manage violence, rather than to merely inflict it, which separates the officer from the enlisted man; and the enhanced ability to do so that distinguishes the good officer from the mediocre.⁹

This definition of officership, equally applicable to sea, land, and air forces, specifically excludes those officers whose primary function is not combat. Military doctors, engineers, and communications specialists are auxiliaries — supporting the professional military officers in the same way that nurses support doctors.¹⁰ The only true professional military officers are those responsible for 'the management of violence'. This thesis is primarily concerned with the way in the Royal Navy taught young officers the principles of the management of violence. In a naval context this encompasses not only the pure combat elements of tactics, strategy and the employment of weapons, but also navigation, seamanship, leadership and other qualities essential in producing an effective naval force — including the general secondary education needed as a basis for professional studies.

Samuel Huntington devoted little attention to the Royal Navy of the early twentieth century but had he done so he would have seen many of his ideas about the characteristics of military professionalism played out. The director, promoter, and lead actor in this piece was John 'Jackie' Fisher, Second Sea Lord from 1902 to 1903 and First Sea Lord from 1904 to 1910 and again from 1914 to 1915. Fisher recognised what later became the essentials of Samuel Huntington's thesis and sought to address them for the benefit of his service.

⁷ *ibid*, p.9

⁸ *ibid*, p.11; Laswell, 'Garrison State', pp.455-468 (p.455)

⁹ Huntington, *Soldier State*, pp.11-13 and p.18

¹⁰ *ibid*, p.11

The Fisher Reforms

At the turn of the twentieth century the officer corps of the Royal Navy was divided into two distinct groups. On one hand, the so called military branch – the officers who navigated and fought the ship, generally known as executive officers. On the other, the civil – encompassing all the auxiliary trades such as engineering, medicine and logistics. This division was in some ways logical as it separated those officers who were responsible for ‘the management of violence’, to say nothing of the navigation and general safety of the ship, from those who were not.

However it ignored the fact that responsibility for the propulsion of the ship – and a ship that could not move under its own power was, besides being extremely vulnerable to the enemy and the elements, of little military value – had passed away from the military branch. Once the Royal Navy had begun to employ engines in its ships it had also employed specialists to operate them; these specialists evolved into a corps of engineering officers, their role being confined to operating and maintaining the ship’s engines and associated plant.¹¹

Despite their importance the engineer officers did not have the same status as the military. Trained separately, they wore a different uniform without the curl in the sleeve lace that symbolised the power of their colleagues. Engineers could not rise to the highest ranks of the service because they were not eligible to command ships and fleets. Despite the importance of their work they had little power over the men of their departments – discipline, especially punishment, was in the hands of the military branch. Fully aware of their value, the engineers had long campaigned for better conditions. In this they were supported by many civilian advocates in particular Members of Parliament (MPs).¹²

Research and development was increasingly entrusted to experts ashore, many of them civilians, rather than being undertaken by naval officers

¹¹ For the history of the engineering branch, and engineer officers in particular, see Geoffrey Penn, *HMS Thunderer: The Story of the Royal Naval Engineering College Keyham and Manadon* (Emsworth: Kenneth Mason, 1984) and Oliver C Walton, 'Officers or Engineers? The Integration and Status of Engineers in the Royal Navy, 1847-60', *Historical Research*, 77 (2004), pp.178-201

¹² Hansard, House of Commons (HC) Debates (Deb) (all 4th Series) 1 March 1901 cc.1459-1508; HC Deb 18 March 1901 cc.317-337; HC Deb 22 March 1901 cc.930-975; HC Deb 21 February 1902 c.732 and cc787-840; HC Deb 25 February 1902 cc.1048-1081; HC Deb 10 June 1902 c.236; HC Deb 8 August 1902 c.1154

themselves. The Navy struggled to reconcile these developments; executive officers specialising in gunnery or torpedo were taught a strange mixture of skills and knowledge; instead of merely directing the use of their weapons, they were taught the minutiae of their construction and maintenance, but little about the best strategies and tactics for their use. One officer later complained that the Long Course for gunnery officers would have been more useful if it had been decided whether the students were being trained as gunnery officers, gun manufacturers, ordnance artificers, gunners, gunner's mates or seamen gunners.¹³ The only thing that did not seem to be included in the curriculum was how to get the guns to actually hit their target.¹⁴

Fisher had built his career on scientific knowledge and engineering skill. He had achieved promotion and fame through his mastery of technology, firstly gunnery and then torpedoes and electronics. Fisher had played an important role in introducing torpedoes to the Royal Navy, superintending the first purchases made, and establishing the torpedo branch and its headquarters HMS *Vernon*.¹⁵ He had long been concerned about the division between the military and engineering officers and, in particular, young military officer's lack of knowledge and experience in science and engineering. As early as 1873 the then Second Sea Lord, Vice-Admiral Sir Walter Tarleton, had come away from a lecture given by Fisher convinced that 'mechanical training will in the near future be essential for all officers'.¹⁶

Fisher's plans for the service were driven by a ruthless obsession with military effectiveness and efficiency combined with the enthusiasms of a small child in a sweet shop. He oversaw the construction of the Dreadnought type battleships and the creation of the Royal Navy's submarine force; his enthusiasms for battle cruisers and fleet submarines proved rather less successful. Although he redistributed the fleet to meet the threat from Germany he also resisted the development of an effective staff organisation and

¹³ Kenneth G Dewar, *The Navy from Within* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1939) p.117. Ordnance artificers were the skilled ratings responsible for gun maintenance; gunners, gunner's mates and seamen gunners were specialist qualifications held by seamen ratings – the men who loaded and fired the guns.

¹⁴ *ibid* p.62 Dewar rose to high rank in the Royal Navy but frequently criticised the service.

¹⁵ For details of Fisher's career see Reginald H Bacon, *The Life of Lord Fisher of Kilverstone*, 2 vols (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1929); Ruddock F Mackay, *Fisher of Kilverstone* (Oxford: Clarendon press, c1973); Jan Morris, *Fisher's Face* (London: Viking, 1995)

¹⁶ Extract from Tarleton's Diary 3 October 1872 *Fear God and Dread Nought – The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone*, ed. by Arthur J Marder, 3 vols (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953-59), I (1953), p.65

ruthlessly crushed all opponents. To man his new ships he proposed to create a well trained, mechanically literate and extremely flexible force of personnel.

Fisher thought that naval manpower was used inefficiently, with peacetime and wartime requirements being at odds with each other. In 1901 he suggested that too little use was made of unskilled labour; he proposed that ships should carry large numbers of soldiers to do the unskilled work and provide landing parties.¹⁷ The prospect of carrying soldiers aboard ship was particularly attractive as Fisher was concerned about the large number of naval personnel serving ashore, and frequently dying, as members of naval brigades. He highlighted the recent loss of HMS *Sybil* which he attributed to her captain being employed ashore. Fisher did not demand the best British regiments for the task – he suggested using black or Chinese troops.¹⁸

Fisher had a very negative view of the professional sea soldiers already carried aboard HM ships – the Royal Marines. Fisher complained that Royal Marine officers were ‘absolutely useless’, because they were incapable of carrying out any shipboard task and, having been ‘brought up upon military lines’, were impossible to educate. Writing in May 1902, Fisher favoured getting rid of them (and presumably marines) describing them as ‘relics of the Armada’.¹⁹

Fisher wanted to create a force of efficient naval officers and ratings who could be used in a variety of capacities as required. He favoured creating a small cadre of specialist officers and ratings to carry out the most difficult technical tasks, and training the remainder to do a variety of less skilled work. Thus junior ratings would be employable as seaman or stokers, perhaps forming part of the engine room compliment on a daily basis but serving a gun should battle be joined.²⁰ Officers would be capable of taking charge on the bridge or in the engine room and employed for watch-keeping as required. Initially he planned to retain the separate engineering and executive branches, but with the potential for their ultimate integration – for officers to become largely inter-changeable.

¹⁷ Letter from the Second Sea Lord (Admiral Sir John A Fisher) to the First Lord (William Palmer, 2nd Earl Selborne) 5 January 1901, *ibid*, p.176

¹⁸ Fisher’s letter to Selborne 16 May 1901, *ibid*, pp.191-193

¹⁹ Fisher’s letter to Selborne 19 May 1902, *ibid*, p.241

²⁰ *The Papers of Admiral Sir John Fisher*, ed. by Peter Kemp, 2 vols, (London: Navy Records Society, 1960-1964), II (1964), pp.118-122

Engine Room Artificers (ERAs) had been introduced to the Navy in 1868 but had joined as fully trained men aged 21-35 and had been promoted to Chief Petty Officer (CPO) soon after joining. Fisher introduced a new group – artificer apprentices who joined the Navy at the age of fifteen having passed a competitive examination administered by the Civil Service. The standard required for entry was higher than for other rating branches, and the training period far longer. Artificers did a four year apprenticeship ashore, whereas all other ratings went to sea within three years of joining. Their value to the service was reflected in their high pay, segregated accommodation, and high status – they could expect to become CPOs by the age of twenty-three. The way in which artificers were developed and treated reflected their important place in Fisher’s plans. The technical abilities of the artificers, and their ability to work unsupervised, freed officers from most of the heaviest and dirtiest engineering work, making employment as an engineering officer a more gentlemanly prospect.

Fisher’s plans relied on the premise that naval technology was constantly improving and, although it was becoming more complex, it was also becoming more reliable. This suggested that in the future engineering officers might not be needed, especially as the artificers became more adept. This argument proved to be completely unsound and even in 1903 there was strong evidence that the increasing variety and complexity of naval equipment meant that no person could master the maintenance and use of more than a small portion of it.

Specialist engineer officers had been abolished by the United States Navy in 1899 – replaced with a system in which officers had a thorough all-round education and could be employed as engineers on one commission and deck officers on the next. This system had proved reasonably successful, although this success probably owed something to the fact that engineer and executive midshipmen had trained together at Annapolis since 1874 and had studied the same curriculum since 1882.²¹ Thus there already existed officers with a shared background and common professional knowledge, and the cadre of skilled technical ratings needed to compensate for the officers’ lack of expertise.

²¹ TNA ADM 7/941, ‘New Scheme of Training Officers and Men 1903’, un-dated report of the Royal Naval attaché in the United States, Captain Troubridge on ‘The Engineer Question in the United States Navy’ forming an appendix to ‘The Training of Officers, Men and Boys in the Royal Navy’.

Fisher with the support of the First Lord of the Admiralty, William Palmer the Second Earl of Selborne, produced an entirely new system for the entry, training, and employment of officers – the Fisher-Selborne scheme, published on Christmas Day 1902. The scheme provided for cadets to enter the Royal Navy at the age of twelve and spend four years pursuing a science and engineering based curriculum ashore, after which they would go to sea for around three years to learn the practical skills of the naval officer. Only as sub-lieutenants would they choose between the executive and engineering branches – thus the two branches would be staffed by men from similar backgrounds who had been educated together. The engineers were to move from the civil to military status, thus enhancing their right to command and discipline their men.²²

It was the possibility of creating a united officer corps that ensured the support of Selborne. Shortly after becoming First Lord, Selborne visited Fisher (who was then Commander in Chief (hereafter C-in-C) Mediterranean) and was quickly converted to his way of thinking. Thereafter he actively backed Fisher's manning reforms, indeed he insisted on Fisher being made Second Sea Lord despite his seniority (the job normally went to a vice-admiral), cunning, and divisiveness.²³ Fisher later wrote that Selborne accepted his proposals for the officer corps 'without the alteration of a comma' and 'benevolently spared me from the Admiralty to become C-in-C Portsmouth to see that scheme carried out'.²⁴ So important was Selborne's influence that the scheme for officer education and employment came to carry his name as well as Fisher's.

Selborne was no unthinking disciple; there were strong reasons for him to support Fisher. He was acutely concerned about the demands of the engineers for greater status and linked this to rising social discontent elsewhere. He feared that if the engineers were not given better prospects they would be vulnerable to outside influence and that this would lead to pressure for

²² TNA ADM 7/941 'New Scheme of Training Officers and Men 1903', 'Memorandum Dealing with the Entry, Training and Employment of Officers of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines' presented to Parliament by The First Lord (William Palmer, 2nd Earl Selborne) 16 December 1902

²³ Selborne's letter to the First Sea Lord (Admiral Lord Walter T Kerr) 16 December 1901 and Kerr's reply of 17 December 1901 in D George Boyce ed., *The Crisis of British Power: The Imperial and Naval Papers of the Second Earl of Selborne 1895-1910* (London: The Historians Press, 1990) pp.136-139

²⁴ John A Fisher, *Memories* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1919) p.245

parliament to intervene in the Navy's business.²⁵ He was shrewd enough to recognise that Fisher's ideas offered the prospect of a more efficient, economical and effective fleet – a prospect particularly enticing as Selborne feared the loss of British naval pre-eminence and with it the loss of national strength and prestige.²⁶

As parliamentary pressure increased the First Sea Lord, Admiral Lord Walter Kerr, was gradually converted to Selborne's viewpoint, noting that 'the time has arrived when this mischievous spirit can no longer be disregarded'. Although he noted the objections of Admiral Lambton, whom he considered to represent many other officers, Kerr gave his acquiescence to the Fisher-Selborne scheme.²⁷

The parliamentary pressure that so concerned Selborne and Kerr arose largely from the debates on the 1902-1903 naval estimates. On this occasion the status and, in particular, disciplinary powers of engineer officers had been criticised by MPs including Mr Platt-Higgins the member for Salford, Mr Allan, member for Gateshead, Colonel Ropner, member for Stockton, and Mr Duke, member for Plymouth.²⁸ The previous year Platt-Higgins had been among a group of fifty MPs who had tackled Selborne on the issue.

The Fisher-Selborne scheme was widely and viciously attacked – the charge against it being led by those opposed to any prospect of inter-changeability, strongly supported by both those against changing the curriculum and opponents of the thirteen year old entry. Amongst the most negative responses to the scheme was that published in *Brassey's Naval Annual* for 1903. Admiral Sir Richard Vesey Hamilton was deeply critical of the scheme, which he viewed as the work of engineer agitators. Hamilton felt the scheme would not conquer social divides, nor make the fleet more efficient, nor produce another Nelson. He noted that naval officers were already expected to be seamen, soldiers and diplomats and said it was too much to expect them to be engineers as well. He was critical of the scheme of education, being a firm believer that naval officers were made at sea and that classroom studies could not be satisfactorily conducted aboard a warship. Finally Hamilton believed that the prestige of officers would be damaged if they were dependent on

²⁵ Selborne's letter to Kerr 2 May 1901, Selborne's Memorandum for the Board of Admiralty 'Position of Naval Engineers' 25 February 1902, Boyce, *British Power*, pp.139-140

²⁶ Editorial comment by Boyce, *ibid*, pp.5-6

²⁷ Kerr's letter to Selborne 21 May 1902, *ibid*, pp.121-123

²⁸ Hansard HC Deb (4th series) 25 February 1902 cc.1053-1070

engineering ratings and thought that this would have a negative effect on naval morale.

Hamilton accused the Admiralty of manufacturing favourable publicity for the scheme. He noted that a very detailed announcement had been made on Christmas Day, yet two days later *The Times* had published a detailed and favourable assessment. Hamilton suggested that this assessment had been supplied by the scheme's backers.²⁹

This reaction was echoed in a House of Lords question session on 8 May 1903, during which Selborne was forced to defend the scheme against attacks by the Earl of Glasgow and Lord Spencer. The Earl was a former president of the Institute of Naval Architects and a man well acquainted with naval engineers yet he was against the scheme. He described it as 'the most unfortunate proposal that has ever been made with respect to the Navy' although he did acknowledge its widespread support.

Like Hamilton he viewed the scheme as the work of engineer agitators, albeit civilians rather than those in the Navy. He cited a deputation of engineers who had waylaid the First Lord on 16 July 1901 and was of the view that the scheme benefitted them rather than the Navy. Whilst the Earl agreed that boys should enter the service aged thirteen, he thought specialist engineers essential and feared that the power and prestige of the officer corps would be undermined. Finally the Earl doubted that the cadets, even if keen and intelligent, could cope with the curriculum. Small wonder that he talked of 'careers flung into the melting pot with a spirit of cheerful optimism'.³⁰

Lord Spencer did not see any need to change officer training – the existing system had, after all, produced the greatest navy in the world. Whilst accepting the thirteen year old entry, and the proposed curriculum, he was against any suggestion of inter-changeability and was frustrated that entry could not be more open, although he appreciated the financial constraints.³¹

These reactions illustrate the depth and nature of most of the criticisms of the Fisher-Selborne scheme, as well as the suspicion with which Admiral Fisher was viewed and the animosity he attracted. That such scathing criticism by a senior officer should be published in a respected journal is indicative of the

²⁹ Richard Vesey Hamilton, 'The New Admiralty Education Scheme', in *Brassey's Naval Annual*, ed. by TA Brassey (Portsmouth: J Griffin & co, 1903), pp.208-230

³⁰ Hansard House of Lords (HL) Deb (4th Series) 8 May 1903 cc.155-167

³¹ Hansard HL Deb (4th Series) 8 May 1903 cc.168-174

strength of reaction to the Fisher-Selborne scheme whilst the questions asked in the Lords demonstrate the variety of objections raised.

Cadet curriculum aside, the Fisher-Selborne scheme was largely an adaptation of the existing arrangements for officer education. Since the 1850s officers had undergone an initial spell of training in a static ship followed by a period at sea as a midshipman. More recent plans allowed for cadet training ashore (construction of Dartmouth Naval College had begun in 1898) followed by six months in the training cruiser, midshipman time in the fleet and finally the examinations for sub-lieutenant. The Fisher-Selborne scheme dramatically altered the balance of the training system, doubling the length of the initial shore course from two to four years but with no increase in the three years served as a midshipman. Thus it was clear that the naval officers of the future were to be engineers as much as, or more than, they were seamen. Moreover the introduction of an engineering based curriculum was not merely a reflection of the changing needs of the service but rather it indicated a revolution in the officer corps and the prospect of completely inter-changeable deck and engineering officers.

The introduction of the Fisher-Selborne scheme in 1903 paved the way for inter-changeability. Fisher's system required the majority of officers to hold specialist qualifications and to be appointed to ships in these roles but to be employed aboard as needed. Thus a torpedo specialist, although in charge of the torpedo department and employed in it at action stations, might be required to keep watch in the engine room under normal steaming conditions. An immediate start was made in integrating the two groups, the engineers dropped their existing rank titles in favour of a modified version of the executive; chief inspectors of machinery became engineer rear-admirals, engineers became engineer sub-lieutenants. In September the first cadets began a two year course at the new naval college at Osborne, to be followed by two years at Dartmouth before going to sea.

As First Sea Lord in 1905 Fisher was able to introduce a system of genuine, if limited, inter-changeability – the exact details being worked out by a committee headed by Admiral Sir Archibald Douglas. The Douglas Committee declared that, whilst the cadets at Osborne were very keen on engineering, there was little prospect of them volunteering for the engineering branch if it meant they could not rise to the highest ranks of the service and command

ships and fleets. It also felt that there was a social gap between the executive and engineering branches. However both of these problems could be remedied by integrating the engineers into the military branch; all officers could be trained by the Fisher-Selborne scheme and those that wished to specialise as engineers could do so at the age of twenty-two. Provided they held bridge watch-keeping certificates, engineers could revert to upper deck duties on promotion to commander and thus become eligible for command and promotion to the highest ranks.³²

On 30 November 1905 the Cawdor Memorandum was published, setting out the future of the reformed military branch. It announced that there was no need for a separate engineering branch and that henceforth engineering would become an executive specialisation.³³ Having been integrated into the military branch, the engineers gained the rights and privileges previously denied them – promotion to the highest ranks, full command over their subordinates, the right to sit on courts martial and the curl in the sleeve lace that signified the right to command. Whereas the United States Navy had opted for a highly flexible officer corps with limited specialist knowledge, the Royal Navy chose a system in which each man was an expert in his specialist field – sacrificing flexibility in assignments in favour of having officers who were not totally reliant on the technical skills and knowledge of their ratings. Thus true inter-changeability was not achieved.

The question naturally arose of what to do with the existing engineer officers; the older members of the branch lacked the experience of upper deck duties needed to take full advantage of the new system but their engineering knowledge and experience made their retention essential. In February 1907 the Douglas Committee produced a second report dealing with these questions. The committee thought that the existing engineers lacked the skills needed to command ships. The officers produced through the Fisher-Selborne scheme would have these skills and it was important that they were not placed in a position far superior to the older engineers. It was recommended that the old

³² TNA ADM 116/863 'Report of the Committee on the Extension of the New Scheme of Training for Officers of the Navy and the Provision of Warrant Officers for Engine Room Duties' (Douglas Committee), 18 August 1905, pp.54-66 in TNA ADM 116/863 'Reports of Departmental Committees Appointed to Consider Certain Questions Concerning the Extension of the New Scheme of Training for Officers of the Navy &c' 5 May 1906

³³ TNA ADM 116/863 'A Statement of Admiralty Policy', presented to both Houses of Parliament by the First Lord (Fredrick Campbell, 3rd Earl Cawdor) 30 November 1905, p.13

engineers should keep their existing titles – engineering lieutenant rather than the new lieutenant (E) which reflected that their high level of technical expertise and lack of executive skills and experience. They should wear the executive uniform – complete with curl in the lace – but retain the purple stripes they currently wore between the gold stripes of rank. They should given command of, and disciplinary powers over, all the men working in their department regardless of whether the men were engineer ratings or not. The senior engineer officer of a ship should report directly to her first lieutenant, or, if senior to him, directly to her captain.³⁴

The last engineer cadets entered Keyham College in 1905; it closed when they finished their course in 1910. In July 1913 it reopened, commanded for the first time by an engineer captain, charged with delivering the one year engineering specialisation course for Fisher-Selborne scheme officers.³⁵ For several years the engineering branch existed in a kind of limbo – entry to it had been cut off but it had not yet been integrated into the military branch. Only in January 1915, with Fisher back at the Admiralty and again able to harness the energies of a sympathetic First Lord – on this occasion Winston Churchill – were the engineers absorbed into the executive branch and finally able to adopt their new uniforms. Even then they retained their separate ranks and had no prospect of commanding ships or fleets; full integration into the executive branch was reserved for the officers produced by the Fisher-Selborne scheme.³⁶

The Royal Marines were also included in the Fisher-Selborne scheme, the expectation being that marine officers would take an active role in the running of their ships, available for watch-keeping and other duties when not busy with the marine detachment. The 1907 plans paved the way for their integration into the military branch.³⁷ These aims were never achieved; the Royal Marines continued to enter and train their own officers and these officers continued to be employed solely within their own service.

³⁴ TNA ADM 116/862 'Report of the Committee Considering Engineer Officers and Royal Marine Officers' (Douglas Committee), part I, February 1907, quotes pp.4-5 para.11 and para.12; recommendations pp.6-9 paras.17-27

³⁵ Penn, *Thunderer*, pp.61-63

³⁶ Penn, *Thunderer*, p.69; a copy of the Order in Council formalising these changes is contained in TNA ADM 116/862

³⁷ TNA ADM 116/996 'Report of the Committee Considering Engineer Officers and Royal Marine Officers' (Douglas Committee) part II, 27 February 1907

The integration of the Royal Marines was doomed to failure because the skills needed to command a large force of marines were not those needed to command a ship or a fleet. Even had it been possible to train men as both platoon commanders and watch keepers it would not have been possible to integrate the higher ranks of the two services. There was also a desire to maintain the distinctive character of the Royal Marines which was, in itself, a reflection of the distinctive identity of naval officers. The distinctive identity of naval officers, and of executive officers in particular, must be understood if the officer selection and education systems are to be placed in context.

Royal Navy Officer Identities

Entering officers at the age of twelve, as demanded by the Fisher-Selborne scheme, meant that they could be thoroughly educated – not only in engineering, science and seamanship, but also in the spirit, customs and traditions of the Royal Navy. They would be social and professional equals, presenting a united front to the outside world – a Nelsonian band of brothers. Thus would be achieved what Samuel Huntington called ‘corporateness’. He pointed out that this feeling of corporateness was the result of shared background, and professional lives that dominated personal. He noted that the professional world of the military officer firmly excludes those who are not qualified to enter it.

Among Fisher’s motives was a desire to unite the officer corps and to remove the existing social divide between the engineering and executive branches. Fisher aimed to remove these problems by recruiting all officers at the same age and through the same system. Thus shared knowledge, combined with shared formative experiences, would produce officers with a shared mentality and strong personal bonds. The published plans for the scheme referred to a desire to ‘consolidate into a harmonious whole the fighting officers of the Navy’.³⁸

This ‘harmonious whole’ would have the shared outlook and skills that Samuel Huntington demanded to achieve corporateness. In such a society the engineering specialist would be treated with the same respect as the gunnery or

³⁸ TNA ADM 7/941 ‘Memorandum Dealing with the Entry, Training and Employment of Officers of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines’ presented to both Houses of Parliament by Selborne 16 December 1902

torpedo specialist. Whilst raising the social status of engineering was highly desirable there was a definite risk that the engineers produced under the old system would be in an even worse position than before – increasingly outnumbered by men with whom they had little in common and who were not reliant on their technical expertise. They might therefore find themselves even more firmly excluded from the professional circle.

Samuel Huntington's three part definition of a profession is a simplification of a longer list of qualities, which have also been highlighted by other sociologists and historians such as Teitler, Carr-Saunders and Wilson, and Perkin.³⁹ All these authors agree that a profession exists where a group of practitioners monopolise a specific type of expertise which requires a high level of education to achieve and which benefits, and is sold to, wider society. The group of practitioners organises itself into a professional body that regulates entry to the profession and negotiates with society on its behalf. In the nineteenth century the development of many professions was characterised by the development of bodies which aimed to closely define and control entry to the profession and to raise its status.

The Royal Navy did not entirely fit the normal patterns of development. The standards for entry had been laid out with the introduction in 1677 of an examination – the passing of which entitled a man to be commissioned as a lieutenant. In Samuel Huntington's view this examination alone did not make the officers of the Royal Navy professionals because advancement within the service depended largely on patronage rather exclusively on professional skill.⁴⁰

In the nineteenth century the Royal Navy, like many other developing professions, placed increasing emphasis on uniform educational standards. Historically most future officers had entered directly into the ships of the fleet as the protégées of particular officers and had received whatever education was available in their ships, with the result that those being commissioned varied enormously in age, education and practical experience. From 1859 onwards all executive officers began their careers aboard HMS *Britannia* and went through the same course of pre-commissioning education and training. Further uniformity was imposed by the introduction of a single opportunity for entry –

³⁹ Harold J Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1989; rev.d 2002), p.xxi-xxiv; Huntington, *Soldier State*, pp. 8-10; Alexander M Carr-Saunders and Paul A Wilson, *The Professions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933) pp.1-4; Gerke Teitler, *The Genesis of the Professional Officers' Corps* (London: Sage, c1977) pp.6-7

⁴⁰ Huntington, *Soldier State*, p.43

which required candidates to pass an official set of examinations and meet the approval of interviewers appointed by the Admiralty.

The military officers of the Royal Navy never formed a professional body – there was little need for them to do so. The state valued their services and was prepared to pay for them, indeed often there was a great deal of public and political desire to strengthen the Navy. Entry to the officer corps was tightly controlled by the Admiralty, and outsiders kept from the service by the walls of the dockyards and of the ships themselves. Aboard ship officers enjoyed the trappings of high status – they lived apart from the crew in more opulent conditions, did little manual work, and were attended by servants. The public held the Navy in high regard and the high status of the officers was reflected in their close links to the crown; members of the Royal family launched and sponsored ships, Queen Victoria dressed her sons in sailor suits and sent several of them into the service. The expertise, exclusivity, and the status of the executive officers ensured the rewards other developing professions craved.

Such professional naval officer organisations as did exist were essentially learned societies – devoted to the transfer and development of professional knowledge, rather than campaigning for better conditions or more recognition or tighter restrictions as to who was commissioned. In 1872 an attempt was made to found a ‘Junior Naval Officers Professional Association’ with the aim of allowing lieutenants to pool their knowledge and debate the future of the service. This organisation foundered within two years; Goldrick suggests this was because membership was limited to lieutenants, a restriction he describes as ‘artificial – and unworkable’.⁴¹

The Naval Society, founded in 1912, and its publication *The Naval Review*, was rather more successful. *The Naval Review* was intended to be the principal forum of a corresponding society, devoted to the non-technical aspects of the naval profession, and designed to encourage officers to think and write. Contributions were anonymous which encouraged free discussion unhindered by rank and personal sensibilities. Early issues considered problems of strategy, tactics, naval education, discipline, and varying aspects of daily naval life including boats, gunnery, and readiness for war – in other words most

⁴¹ James Goldrick, ‘The Irresistible Force and the Immovable Object: The Naval Review, the Young Turks, and the Royal Navy, 1911-1931’, in *Mahan is not Enough: The Proceedings of a Conference on the Works of Sir Julian Corbett and Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond*, ed. by James Goldrick and John B Hattendorf (Newport RI: Naval War College Press, 1993), pp.83-102 (p.88)

aspects of the work of the professional naval officer. The *Naval Review* was widely read, and many different officers contributed to it, but it was habitually viewed with suspicion by the naval authorities and did not have much influence on the service in general.⁴²

Within the Royal Navy of the early twentieth century ideas of officerly attributes were habitually discussed in terms of 'officer-like qualities' – a concept which was never defined but was well understood within the service. Officer-like qualities encompassed a wide range of attributes which together made the complete officer – a man who enjoyed the complete trust of superiors and subordinates in all circumstances of peace and war. Such a man needed to be brave, determined, honourable, loyal, alert, intelligent, fair minded, physically fit, courteous, honourable, inspirational, and a skilled seaman and sea-fighter. Beyond these attributes he must also be devoted to the Royal Navy and enjoy living and working at sea. Thus equipped he would be able to handle any situation he found himself in, be it entertaining royalty, nursing a ship through a storm, fighting a battle, or spending weeks at a time on eventless patrol.

The concept of officer-like qualities, if not the terminology, had appeared by the mid eighteenth century. As the Royal Navy's officers had begun to carve out a distinct identity, symbolised by their wearing uniforms and being held to certain professional standards, so ideas about how they should behave began to appear. The officer was expected to be a seaman, a gentleman and a leader – the last quality partly arising from the first two. Behaviour such as duelling, drunkenness, quarrelling in public, and socialising with ratings became increasingly unacceptable. Seamanship, bravery, and gentlemanly manners were prized, and there was increasing emphasis on education.⁴³ In 1747 a pamphlet, probably written by Admiral Vernon, was published stating: 'It is certainly necessary that a sea officer should have good natural courage: but it is equally just that he should have a good share of sense, be perfect master of his business, and have some taste for honour'.⁴⁴

These ideas found concrete form in the Articles of War first published in 1661, revised in 1749, and frequently read out to the company of every ship thereafter. They were primarily a response to fears that naval officers were

⁴² James Goldrick, 'Appendix C : Author List for The Naval Review 1913-1930', in *Mahan is not Enough*, ed. by Goldrick and Hattendorf, pp.341-342

⁴³ Nicholas AM Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London: Collins, 1986; repr.d. London: Fontana, 1988) pp.260-262

⁴⁴ Rodger, *The Wooden World*, p.261

treacherous or cowardly, and many of the clauses reflect these fears – mutiny, aiding the enemy, embezzling prizes, and cowardice in action were all punishable.⁴⁵ The articles also outlined a code of behaviour for all naval personnel, forbidding sodomy, theft, and ‘profane Oaths, Cursings, Execrations, Drunkenness, Uncleaness, or other scandalous Actions, in derogation of God's Honour, and Corruption of Good Manners’. Higher standards were expected of officers who were additionally barred from ‘behaving in a scandalous, infamous, cruel, oppressive or fraudulent Manner, unbecoming the Character of an Officer’.⁴⁶

Officer-like qualities fell naturally into two categories. On one hand, professional skills and knowledge, be it of sail handling, the inner workings of fifteen inch guns, or grand strategy. On the other hand personal qualities including not only attributes such as courage and determination but also the manners, appearance and behaviour of a gentleman. It was the question of personal attributes that caused most difficulty in the reform of the officer corps and of naval education.

The military officers of the late nineteenth century Royal Navy were drawn from the wealthier sections of society. The combination of stiff entrance examinations and the cost of launching a boy into an officer’s career served to exclude the poor. The need to secure a nomination before even attempting the entrance examinations served to exclude those who lacked connections at the highest levels of the Navy, society or government. The result was a military officer corps comprised of men from the upper and upper middle classes.⁴⁷

Whilst the engineers had, since their introduction into the service in 1837, been bound by the articles of war the engineering officer corps had developed along different lines from the executive – the Royal Navy initially relied on recruiting trained engineers from the open labour market. These men were from a different background – they were more likely to be from northern or urban areas and less likely to come from naval families, Walton wrote that ‘socially and culturally their roots were in the labour aristocracy’ and that once in the

⁴⁵ Nicholas AM Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain: Volume II 1649-1815* (London: Allen Lane, 2004) pp.59-60 and p.326

⁴⁶ ‘An Act for Amending, Explaining and Reducing into one Act of Parliament, the Laws Relating to the Government of His Majesty’s Ships, Vessels and Forces by Sea’, 22 Georgii II c.33

⁴⁷ Mary Jones ‘The Making of the Royal Navy Officer Corps 1860-1914’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 1999), pp.18-22

service they continued to identify with other well paid highly skilled technicians rather than with military officers.⁴⁸

The Royal Navy's early attempts at training its own engineers brought in boys who were mostly the sons of sailors or dockyard workers. The entry was gradually revised; from 1876 onwards candidates were required to pass the Civil Service examinations, a move described by Penn as 'a determined attempt to convert the engineer into a true officer by recruiting him from the officer rather than the mechanic class'.⁴⁹ At the same time training began to move out of the dockyards and into separate facilities so that the young officers were segregated from the workmen and their development could be more closely controlled. The main public school games cricket and rugby were encouraged, as were the more naval pulling (rowing) and sailing.⁵⁰

There remained a considerable divide between the engineering and military officers, the former being employed on work that far more closely resembled that of their ratings (their working clothes also more closely resembled those of their men, especially when dirty). Fisher's schemes aimed to overcome the differences between the engineer and executive officers through giving them many of the same skills and similar employment and through filling both branches with boys from the same backgrounds.

Thus he would achieve his 'harmonious whole' or, to use Samuel Huntington's terminology, 'corporateness'. This shared identity inevitably depended on all officers being drawn from the wealthiest part of society, because only the wealthy could afford to support a boy through his early career training – cadets were not paid by the state (instead their parents paid several hundred pounds for their education) and midshipmen and sub-lieutenants relied on parental support.

It is inevitable that issues of social class intrude upon any discussion of the composition and attitudes of the Royal Navy officer corps in the 1903-1939. Social class is a highly complex and controversial issue with authors offering a variety of models for British society in the period.⁵¹ British society was moderately turbulent, the fluctuating economy, world war, and political pressure

⁴⁸ Walton, 'Officers or Engineers', p.183

⁴⁹ Penn, *Thunderer*, p.19

⁵⁰ Penn, *Thunderer*, p.26

⁵¹ David Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, c1998) contains the most thorough explanation of these varying models and the ideologies underpinning them pp.3-12

combining to ensure that whilst some sections of the population gained considerably in wealth and power others suffered dramatic losses. This in turn created friction between different groups and consequent political responses.

The Navy was relatively autonomous – its men lived distantly from the rest of the population in a society with its own rules and divisions. However naval personnel did not constitute their own social class, nor even two separate classes (officers and ratings). Instead the service was subject to the same pressures as the rest of the nation in particular it was affected by the increasing political power and education of the lower middle and upper working classes. So far as this thesis is concerned the issue of the varying class backgrounds manifests itself in various ways.

Educationally, the Royal Naval Colleges Osborne and Dartmouth were an offshoot of the civilian system of private education. They were largely staffed by men who would otherwise have taught in the private secondary system and they took their pupils from the private primary system. They were thus institutions of the upper and upper middle classes; and in this way they reflected the officer corps of the Royal Navy as a whole.

More critically class issues affected the selection of officers. During this period the vast majority of naval officers were recruited from the upper and upper middle classes. That is to say their parents were part of the 11.6% of the population that received 47.5% of nation's income.⁵² Comparative wealth aside the upper, and most especially middle, classes are difficult to define but they did have certain shared characteristics. These characteristics mostly took the form of prescribed behaviour or desires – people who considered themselves middle class were generally salary earners in white collar occupations. Wherever possible they aimed to employ servants, to have their children privately educated and, above all, to separate themselves from the working classes by living in different areas, dressing in different clothing and pursuing different hobbies.⁵³

⁵² Perkin, *Professional Society*, p.30 (quotation of figures compiled by LG Chiozza Money in 1906); Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society* (London; Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975) pp.11-13 quotes 13% of the population in control of 92% of the nation's capital.

⁵³ Perkin, *Professional Society*, pp.78-83; Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998; paperback edn. 2000), pp.44-49; Alan A Jackson, *The Middle Classes, 1900-1950* (Nairn: David St John Thomas, c1991), pp.11-13 and pp.153-156

This desire for separation stemmed partly from a fear of the working classes. The inequities of wealth meant that the rich were undoubtedly bigger, healthier, and better educated than the poor. The poor were widely perceived to be stupid, feckless, irresponsible or immoral – in contrast to the middle and upper classes who had, through industry and morality, built an empire.⁵⁴ In the late nineteenth century there was a widespread fear that Britain was in danger of entering a chronic decline, or even collapsing, as a result of her ill-educated, physically weak and immoral population. These fears played a critical role in the ‘national efficiency’ movement which highlighted causes as widespread as the poor organisation of the Army, the lack of facilities for scientific education, and the possibility of selectively breeding from the human population.⁵⁵ In the aftermath of the First World War fear of the working class was largely founded in the fear of a communist revolution.

This widespread dislike and distrust of the working classes was unfortunate given the questions that arose about the future of the Royal Navy officer corps in the 1903-1939 period. An officer corps drawn from the wealthiest sections of society was becoming increasingly unacceptable to politicians and the general public. Politicians, whilst they had no control over the education of young officers, did manage to exercise some control over selection. The 1903-1939 period, and in particular the 1919-1939 period, was characterised by political attempts to force the Royal Navy to enter officers from a wider range of backgrounds.

Today this would probably be called ‘widening access’ and in fact many of the issues it encompassed are familiar modern media fare. Within the service a variety of terminology was used. The terms of reference for the Bennett Committee, for example, referred to the need for officers ‘from all classes of the community’.⁵⁶ Other documents desired a more ‘democratic’ officer corps.⁵⁷ A paper written by the First Sea Lord in 1931 referred to the process of opening

⁵⁴ Perkin, *Professional Society*, pp.53-61; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, pp.98-105; Cannadine, *Class*, p.135

⁵⁵ David R Oldroyd, *Darwinian Impacts: An Introduction to the Darwinian Revolution* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1980) p.216, Geoffrey R Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought 1899-1914* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971)

⁵⁶ TNA ADM 116/2791, CW.9333/30 Extract from Board Minutes No.2742, 29 July 1930

⁵⁷ For examples see TNA ADM 1/8402/422, CW.8998/14 Letter from the First Lord (Winston Churchill) to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Sir Edwin Montagu) 6 July 1914 in which Churchill explicitly links democratic government to an officer corps open to talent and TNA ADM 1/8567/249 Comment by Second Sea Lord 25 November 1919 describes the Riccardo Committee’s proposals as ‘not democratic at all’.

the officer corps to men from a wider variety of social classes as 'democratisation' and it is this word that I shall use to describe the process.⁵⁸ This term has been adopted concurrently by Christopher Bell.⁵⁹

Advocates of democratisation wished to open entry to the officer corps of the Royal Navy to boys from a wider variety of backgrounds rather than continuing to confine it to the sons of the upper and upper middle classes. Democratisation carried the implication that, given equal opportunity at the start of their careers, officers from all backgrounds were equally capable of rising to the top of the service.

Although some campaigners for democratisation aspired only to enter the sons of poorer professionals others favoured opening the selection process to any boy of sufficient talent, regardless of background and family income. There was no suggestion that reduced officer-like qualities should be accepted as the price for a more diverse officer corps, only that many boys capable of meeting the existing standards were not being given a chance. Although politically led, democratisation was underpinned by the massive growth in state secondary education that enabled many boys from working and lower middle class backgrounds to achieve the academic standards required of potential officers. The pro-democratisation forces acting on the officer corps of the Navy reflected wider desires for equality.⁶⁰

Democratisation threatened to undermine the shared identity of the officer corps that Fisher had been so determined to nurture. A democratic officer corps could not promote itself as an upper class institution and could not dictate its member's choices of hobbies, clothing, or spouses. The relationship of the officer corps and the lower-deck was also bound to be altered. Naval discipline rested to some extent on the deference ratings paid to officers whilst the gulf in pay and living conditions reflected that between the rich and poor ashore.⁶¹

⁵⁸ TNA ADM 116/2791, CW.9333/1930 Memorandum by the First Sea Lord (Admiral Sir Charles E Madden) for the Board of Admiralty 7 May 1930

⁵⁹ Christopher Bell, 'King's English', pp.695-716

⁶⁰ George DH Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1948) details the policies of the Labour Party and its success, or otherwise, in elections between 1914 and 1939. See also Susan Kingsley Kent, *Aftershocks: Politics and Trauma in Britain, 1918-1931* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); John Benson, *The Working Class in Britain, 1850-1939* (London: Longman, 1989), pp.152-164

⁶¹ The role of social class in naval discipline is discussed in Christopher McKee, *Sober Men and True: Sailor Lives in the Royal Navy 1900-1945* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2002) pp.47-49

The democratisation of the service made the corporateness of the officer corps even more important, and this was largely produced through naval education. Through its schemes of selection and education, the Royal Navy aimed to produce young officers who were leaders, gentlemen, and had the required professional skills. It required an officer corps of men who were loyal to the service and to each other – requiring the personalities of young officers to be developed in a particular way. Mary Jones has suggested that the Navy in fact pursued a divided curriculum. The ‘visible’ concentrating on professional knowledge and skills (i.e. specific expertise) actively taught. And the ‘invisible’ – in which attitudes and behaviours (i.e. a sense of corporateness) were learnt through immersion in a carefully calculated naval atmosphere.⁶²

This thesis is largely concerned with the way in which officers were developed through this divided curriculum. It details the visible curriculum for cadets and midshipmen and explores the invisible – how young officers were shaped by their environment, the personnel around them, and the history of the service. It also explores how democratisation was pursued and the impact it had on officer education.

A substantial complication in any attempt to analyse officer education is the fragmented way in which it was administered and controlled. No one individual or office was responsible. The First Lord of the Admiralty (hereafter First Lord) was responsible for the selection of cadets, but the process by which they were selected was the responsibility of the Second Sea Lord.

As the head of naval personnel, the Second Sea Lord was nominally responsible for officer education but on a day to day basis he had little involvement, leaving most educational decisions to his subordinates. The development of the cadet curriculum was left almost entirely to the staff of Dartmouth and Osborne; for administrative purposes the colleges came under the command of their local C-in-C (Plymouth and Portsmouth respectively).

The education of midshipmen was largely in the hands of the Director of Training and Staff Duties (hereafter DTSD), a naval officer working in the Admiralty building. The Training and Staff Duties Division was created as part of the reorganisation of the naval staff in 1917, so placing officer education firmly under naval control with civilians employed as advisors rather than policy makers. Thus James Ewing, who served as Director of Education from 1903-

⁶² Jones, *Officer Corps*, p.1 and p.84

1918, was succeeded by Alexander McMullen who was titled Advisor on Education.

Changes in selection or educational policy generally resulted from the work of specially appointed committees, normally comprised of a mixture of naval officers and civilian experts. However, policy could also be heavily influenced by senior officers serving in the fleet or in the specialist departments of the Admiralty. Aside from complicating the work of the historian this divided responsibility resulted in conflict and confusion, the effects of which on selection and education will be demonstrated by this thesis.

Most prominent amongst the DTSDs of the period is Herbert Richmond, who rose to the rank of Admiral before leaving the Royal Navy to become Vere-Harmsworth Professor of Naval History at Cambridge University. Richmond's extensive writings on naval education, combined with biographies by Marder and Hunt, make his one of the loudest voices heard by the historian.⁶³ Volume must not however be confused with influence – and Richmond's was limited. Consequently, his main place in this narrative is as a dissenting voice, repeatedly challenging established naval policy to little effect.

Young officers were taught by naval personnel of all ranks, especially during the seagoing part of their education. Ratings provided mostly informal education in seamanship and taught young officers about the men they would be expected to lead. Some officers were employed for instructional duties; others, whilst they did little if any actual teaching, exercised a powerful influence over their charges.

Whilst most officer education was undertaken by Royal Navy personnel, civilian teachers also played a vital role. School subjects such as English, French, and history were taught to cadets at Osborne and Dartmouth by civilians. Mathematics, navigation, and engineering were taught by a mixture of civilian and naval staff. The two colleges had headmasters, who reported directly to the captain, and led large civilian teaching staffs who enjoyed considerable freedom in selecting teaching methods and producing curricula.

⁶³ Richmond was a prolific contributor to the *Naval Review* and author of several articles in other publications. He wrote several books addressing officer selection and training: *National Policy and Naval Strength and Other Essays* (London: Longman's, 1928); *Naval Warfare* (London: E.Benn, 1930) and *Naval Training* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933). See also Arthur J Marder, *Portrait of an Admiral: The Life and Papers of Sir Herbert Richmond* (London: J Cape, 1952) and Barry D Hunt, *Sailor Scholar: Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond 1871-1946* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1982)

The Royal Navy did not provide formal leadership teaching – instead relying on young officers absorbing useful techniques from a variety of exemplars. The most important, and central, figures were adult naval officers but naval ratings and the civilian teaching staff at the naval colleges also played an important role, as did the inspirational exploits of the great naval officers of the past.

Changes in the naval education system, and to some extent the democratisation debate, were frequently driven by changes in the employment of the officer corps, in particular efforts at inter-changeability. It is therefore necessary to establish a clear chronology of the major relevant events of the period. This chronology is the foundation of the in-depth studies to be found in the later chapters, although in itself it presents only a narrow view of the problems facing the Royal Navy.

Chronology and Background

Actually implementing Fisher's scheme proved difficult, so much so that in 1912 the Custance Committee was set up to iron out the numerous difficulties. This committee, whilst leaving the scheme essentially untouched, considerably altered the selection and education of officers. The following year an additional system of officer selection and development, the Special Entry scheme, was added to meet the demands of the ever expanding fleet. These boys, most of them privately educated, entered at the age of seventeen. They generally had a year of preliminary cadet training, concentrating on professional subjects rather than academics, before going to sea as cadets then midshipmen in the same way as the Fisher-Selborne scheme officers. The first of these cadets had been in the Navy for less than a year when war broke out in August 1914.

The strains of the First World War ultimately destroyed Fisher's scheme. On the outbreak of war in 1914 Dartmouth was emptied – every cadet was sent to sea. The decision to mobilise the Dartmouth cadets in the event of war was probably taken in July 1911. On the 27th of that month the Admiralty contacted the Treasury to discuss the required financial arrangements. Some cadets would remain in the colleges; whilst the parents of those at sea would not be expected to pay fees, they would be required to pay the £50 annual allowance which covered personal expenses. This decision meant that cadets would be

placed on a similar footing to midshipmen serving in the fleet – expected to play an active officer-like role but not treated as adults. Whilst they could, at their captain's discretion, be promoted early to midshipman they could not receive early promotion to sub-lieutenant.⁶⁴ Clearly it was anticipated that any war would be brief enough not to seriously interfere with the education of cadets.

The proposals aroused little alarm. Treasury officials decided not to interfere, believing the cadets would have a useful role to play.⁶⁵ There was no media outcry and the parents of the cadets were not informed. Cadets from both Osborne and Dartmouth took part in the test mobilisation of July 1914; shortly afterwards lists were published at Dartmouth attaching each cadet to a specific ship should war break out.⁶⁶ Even so, Dartmouth cadets were incredulous when the order to mobilise arrived on the afternoon of 1 August.⁶⁷

The cadets were quickly in action; 23 were dead by 16 November.⁶⁸ Public outcry inevitably followed but the cadets, and most of their parents, were content. One mother, writing the introduction to her son's diaries published in 1916 explained: 'It seemed to me that if my son was too young to be exposed to such danger, the principle must apply equally to the son of my cook, or my butcher, or my gardener, whose boys were no less precious to them than mine was to me'.⁶⁹

In writing these words the mother reaffirmed that in the Royal Navy danger was shared quite equally amongst all ranks of society. This may well have reflected her own desire for all to play their fair part in the war and pride that her son was doing so. However it may also have been designed to positively influence the reader's opinion of the war and of the Royal Navy, given that the book was published in 1916 it is likely that some thought was given to its potential impact on public opinion. Even so when judged against other items published during the war, such as the letters by the mothers of other cadets

⁶⁴ TNA Treasury papers (T) 1/11399, File 5383/1912, Letter CW.10025 from the Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir Charles Thomas) to the Permanent Secretary of the Treasury (Sir Robert Chalmers) 27 July 1911

⁶⁵ TNA T 1/11399, Treasury letter 14566/11 from Chalmers to Thomas 31 July 1911

⁶⁶ Wolston BCW Forester, *From Dartmouth to the Dardanelles: A Midshipman's Log*, ed. by Elsbeth Forester (London; W.Heinemann, 1916) p.13; Eric W Bush, *Bless our Ship* (London: Allen & Unwin 1958) pp.19-21

⁶⁷ Forester, *Dartmouth to the Dardanelles*, p.22

⁶⁸ Hansard HC Deb (5th series) 16 November 1914 c.183, an additional eight cadets from the training cruisers were killed at Coronel.

⁶⁹ Forester, *Dartmouth to the Dardanelles*, p.viii

discussed below, it seems likely that the introduction reflected her true feelings.⁷⁰

The Times published a negative letter from one mother but she criticised the lack of swimming instruction at Osborne rather than the decision to send the cadets to sea.⁷¹ The decision was criticised in Parliament but the complainant did not claim to speak on behalf of his constituents. Mr Joynson-Hicks repeatedly asked what purpose sending the cadets to sea served and how many had been killed. He was told that although the cadets had suffered disproportionately (by February 1915, 41 out of 423 had died) they were doing the full work of midshipmen.⁷²

Joynson-Hicks' views were published in a letter in the *Morning Post*, in which he asked Churchill to return the cadets to Dartmouth, arguing that they were of little practical value aboard ship, were being exposed to sights far beyond their years, and that the long term future would be best served by returning them to Dartmouth. A number of replies were published, all of them favouring the cadets remaining at sea. One was from a cadet's mother who wrote that: 'Should the Admiralty see fit to remove our sons from the danger zone the relief would be immeasurable. Nevertheless, for my own part, if my son can best serve England at this juncture by giving his life for her, I would not lift one finger to bring him home. If any act or word of mine should interfere with or take from him his grandest privilege I could never look him in the face again'.⁷³

In fact the cadets had swiftly proved their value at sea. Most joined ships of the Reserve Fleet and found themselves doing the work of midshipmen, often including important roles in gunnery control. Their extreme youth was a matter of embarrassment to some; one captain sentenced his cadets to bouts of jumping off the capstan in a fruitless attempt to break their voices.⁷⁴ Otherwise little concession was made – cadets were bullied by their seniors in the gunroom and, when in harbour, were expected to study as they would have in

⁷⁰ G DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London: Longman, 1996) p.175, p.184 and p.196 argues that there was very little official British propaganda at this stage of the war and that most of the patriotic material published was a true, and uncensored, reflection of the patriotic sentiments of the author.

⁷¹ 'A Mother of a Cadet', 'No Swimming at Osborne', *The Times*, 23 February 1916, p.9

⁷² Hansard HC Deb (4th series) 16 November 1914 cc.182-184; Hansard HC Deb (4th series) 19 November 1914 c.538; Hansard HC Deb (4th series) 8 February 1915 cc.228-229

⁷³ These letters quoted: Bush, *Bless our Ship*, pp.35-37

⁷⁴ Max Arthur *The True Glory - The Royal Navy 1914-39* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996; paperback edn.1997) p.25; Recollections of Midshipman Frank Layard HMS *Indomitable*.

peacetime despite their tiredness. The value of the cadets was frequently recognised by early promotion to midshipman; those in *Hogue* were so rated on 2 August 1914, while the survivors of *Cressy* and *Aboukir* were promoted on 22 September.⁷⁵ The first term of Special Entries, four of whom fought at the Falklands aboard HMS *Inflexible*, had to wait until December.⁷⁶

So successful were these cadets that others followed them to sea early. By 1916, instead of spending six terms at each college, cadets spent only four at Osborne and five at Dartmouth. The entries of September 1916 and January 1917 spent only three terms at Osborne.⁷⁷ The naval authorities showed no inclination to bow to the concerns of those who felt that the cadets were too young to go to sea in wartime. In March 1917 a committee chaired by Lord Selborne proposed meeting the increased demand for officers by entering large numbers of Special Entry cadets on temporary commissions but this was to avoid the post-war navy being afflicted with huge numbers of half-educated officers.⁷⁸ The proposals were rejected, it was felt that the necessary Special Entry cadets could not be entered and trained quickly enough to meet the projected demand for officers in 1920.

Had the war not occurred the Fisher-Selborne and Special Entry schemes would probably have continued to develop gradually. Instead, a series of reforms were made to meet wartime demands, completely disrupting the gradual development of the training schemes. On the other hand fighting a major naval war for the first time in a hundred years focussed naval minds on what aspects of officer development should be emphasised. Wartime experience seemed to justify the demands of those who thought officers needed more training in the arts of naval warfare.⁷⁹

Several modifications to the education of midshipmen were made during the First World War. They were made with aim of producing effective officers

⁷⁵ Hansard HC Deb (4th series) 25 November 1914 cc.1088-1089; Mr Joynson-Hicks raised the matter with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty, Dr Macnamara, who replied that measures would be taken to ensure that older officers maintained their seniority over younger.

⁷⁶ John H Beattie, *The Churchill Scheme: The Royal Navy Special Entry Cadet Scheme 1913-1955* (Unknown: The author, 2011) p.25

⁷⁷ Michael Partridge, *The Royal Naval College Osborne: A History 1903-1921* (Stroud: Sutton in association with the Royal Naval Museum, 1999), pp.6-7

⁷⁸ TNA ADM 1/8520/98 Report of Lord Selborne's Committee, 23 July 1917, pp.2-5

⁷⁹ In particular, lack of initiative was judged to be a factor in the failure to inflict serious losses upon the German fleet in the battles of Dogger Bank and Jutland. The issue is thoroughly explored in Andrew Gordon, *The Rules of the Game: Jutland and British Naval Command* (London: John Murray, 1996; paperback edn. 2005), for examples see p.394 and p.399. See also Edward F Gueritz, 'Nelson's Blood: Attitudes and Actions of the Royal Navy 1939-45' *Journal of Contemporary History* 16 (1981) pp. 487-499 (pp.487-488)

more quickly but had wider reaching effects. After a year of war it was readily apparent that the training scheme for midshipmen could not be implemented under wartime conditions. It required attendance at several hours of lectures daily, completion of an extensive academic syllabus, and thorough practical training in navigation; at the same time midshipmen were supposed to take an active role in the work of their ship and devote a third of their time to engineering.

In 1915 a committee was formed to investigate the training of midshipmen in the Grand Fleet. The committee took the view that 'the main and principal object of the training afloat must be to produce competent deck officers', because deck work, rather than engineering, was the main occupation of military officers. The committee suggested that midshipmen should devote an eighth of their time to engineering rather than a third, unless they wished to specialise in engineering.⁸⁰

The separation of the engineering specialist midshipmen from the rest was reinforced by the suggestion that other midshipmen assigned to engineering instruction should only work in the engine room in harbour. At sea they should be employed exclusively on deck duties, including manning the armament. The suggestions of the committee were adopted; and so by separating the engineering specialists from the rest the Navy divided its midshipmen into two groups, which would not be inter-changeable as officers.⁸¹ Although the change was intended as a temporary response to wartime conditions it marked the beginning of the end of inter-changeability. That such a change was made with little opposition demonstrates that many in the Royal Navy had never been won over by inter-changeability and were happy to abandon it.

In 1916 it was decided that engineer officers (who were in short supply) should devote their time to engineering duties. They were not required to do any work on deck, but nor were they entitled command ships other than submarines. Midshipmen specialising in engineering were appointed to ships as

⁸⁰ TNA ADM 116/1478 Report of the Committee 'on the Engineering Training of Midshipmen in the Fleet During War' (Duff Committee) 13 November 1915; Enclosure in the report of the Committee to 'Consider and Report as to the Immediate Steps Which Should be Taken in Conjunction with the Course of Instruction and Examination of Junior Officers for the Rank of Lieutenant on the Termination of the War' (Lowry Committee) 28 June 1916; p.33 para.4, pp.33-37 para.6-12

⁸¹ The Duff committee's recommendations were promulgated as Admiralty War order (AWO) 2158 on 10 December 1915

supernumeraries for engineering instruction, and were not required to work on deck.⁸² The shortage of engineers at this time owed more to the premature ending of the old style engineer entry than to a lack of enthusiasm amongst the products of the Fisher-Selborne scheme.⁸³

The Goodenough Committee, which submitted its report in February 1918, was charged with considering the post-war education of those whose studies had been disrupted. This committee was of the opinion that the reduction in time devoted to engineering was not, in any way, a departure from inter-changeability.⁸⁴ On the other hand the wartime products of Dartmouth were not technically minded and their short time at the colleges, combined with the demands wartime active service made upon them, had not allowed them to become competent engineers.⁸⁵ The committee suggested that, although common entry and cadet training should continue, midshipmen should choose whether or not to specialise in engineering after six months at sea. Those who chose to become engineers should follow a separate curriculum from the rest.⁸⁶

This suggestion attracted some dissenting views from those who commented upon the committee's report. Charles Godfrey, the Headmaster of Osborne, urged patience – he pointed out that only two terms had reached the point of specialisation before war broke out and that sufficient of them had volunteered for engineering.⁸⁷ On the other hand Herbert Richmond, commenting in his capacity as DTSD, urged the abandonment of inter-changeability. He suggested that young officers resented having to devote their time to engineering and thought that in any case they would do better to devote their time to other affairs such as damage control and navigation given how few ships had been lost due to engineering as opposed to other failures.⁸⁸

Perhaps the views of the Goodenough Committee were a factor in the appointment of the McKenna Committee in 1918. This committee was charged

⁸² TNA ADM 116/1707, AWO 3618/1916 promulgated 29 December 1916, and AWO 1228/1916 promulgated 30 March 1917

⁸³ TNA ADM 1/25722 'Fourth Interim Report of the Committee on Officer Structure and Training' (Mansergh Committee), 23 December 1954, p.2 para.7

⁸⁴ TNA ADM 116/1734 'Report of the Committee on the Training of Midshipmen' (Goodenough Committee), 26 February 1918 p.6 para.13

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p.4 para.9

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, pp.7-8 para.18-21

⁸⁷ TNA ADM 116/1734 'Memorandum on the Future of the Osborne and Dartmouth Scheme', prepared for the Board of Admiralty in response to the Goodenough Committee Report, February 1918 p.1 para.3

⁸⁸ TNA ADM 116/1734, CW.11136 DTSD's (Admiral Sir Herbert W Richmond) 'Remarks on the Goodenough Committee Report', prepared for the Board of Admiralty, 26 April 1918; Memorandum on the Report of the McKenna Committee 26 August 1918

with investigating the success of the Fisher-Selborne scheme in providing specialist engineers and whether the future lay in inter-changeability or a separate corps of engineers.⁸⁹ The committee members were Jellicoe (who, as C-in-C of the Grand Fleet, had presided over the separation of the engineering midshipmen from the rest), the MP Reginald McKenna (who had been First Lord from 1908-1911) and Engineer Vice-Admiral Sir George Goodwin.

The committee reported a shortage of volunteers to specialise; 25% were needed but only 17% volunteered (this was not an entirely reliable guide to enthusiasm for engineering amongst young officers because the war had considerably disrupted things and consequently reduced the number of volunteers).⁹⁰ Offering early command of a submarine as an inducement to volunteer had been unsuccessful. Even so the committee felt that the Fisher-Selborne scheme could produce adequate numbers of engineers, and noted that those who had chosen to specialise in engineering rarely reverted to deck duties.⁹¹

The McKenna Committee proposed a partial separation of the engineering and executive officer corps. It suggested a dual scheme whereby officers could specialise in engineering either as sub-lieutenants (with no right to revert to deck duties), or as lieutenants with a year of watch-keeping experience (in which case they could revert after seven and a half to nine years). Only those officers who chose to revert to deck duties would qualify to command ships and potentially rise to the top of the service.⁹²

The difficulty of this scheme was that it would encourage officers in a position to revert to deck duties to do so in order to improve their career prospects. It was therefore suggested that a separate portion of the *Navy List* should be formed for engineer officers of commander and higher ranks; and that these officers should compete amongst themselves for promotion and employment. The committee agreed with this suggestion; and the revised scheme came into force in December 1918.⁹³

⁸⁹ TNA ADM 116/1709 Report of the Committee 'to Consider the Position as Regards Engineering Officers' (McKenna Committee), August 1918 p.1 para.1

⁹⁰ *ibid*, p.1 para.3

⁹¹ *ibid*, p.2 para.6

⁹² *ibid*, p.6 para.11

⁹³ TNA ADM 116/1709 'Report of the Committee appointed by Board Minute No.403 to Consider the Promotion & c of (E) Officers' 19 October 1918. The orders were promulgated as AWO 4047 on 24 December 1918

The end of the war was an excellent opportunity to consider the long-term future of the officer corps and not to have done so would, under the prevailing circumstances, have constituted dereliction of duty. The strategic, financial, and technological landscapes had all been radically and irrevocably altered. The Royal Navy of the 1920s would have to be smaller, cheaper, and make better use of technology – its officers would have to change with it.

Furthermore war had demonstrated that some aspects of the Fisher-Selborne scheme were unworkable. The average young officer was simply incapable of learning all that was required of him, especially under wartime conditions. At the same time the war had accelerated technological development, filling ships with an increasingly wide variety of increasingly sophisticated equipment. This equipment demanded ever more specialist knowledge and so inter-changeability became progressively more unworkable.

The greatest change to the Royal Navy officer corps in the early post-war period was the abandonment of inter-changeability and with it the operational end of the Fisher-Selborne scheme. The educational side of the scheme continued in a modified form and the end of inter-changeability enabled many important reforms to be made, supporting the effort to produce an officer corps of thinkers rather than technicians.

The end of inter-changeability was not universally welcomed, on the contrary it was referred to as 'the great betrayal' by naval engineers and their lobbyists. A typical exponent of this view was Louis Le Bailly, himself an engineer officer, who later wrote: 'A reactionary Admiralty, worried at the Navy's poor showing in World War One, lumped the blame on Fisher and abolished the whole arrangement'.⁹⁴ In reality the abandonment of inter-changeability was a long drawn out process driven as much by the officers of the fleet, including some engineers, as by the Admiralty.

In April 1920 the Admiralty decided that midshipmen who had spent a year at sea should be allowed to volunteer for engineering duties. Those who did would take the engineering examination with a view to earning accelerated promotion. Those who did not would take the examination but would not gain any seniority if they did well.⁹⁵ The result was rather predictable, in August 1920 deep resentment was reported amongst midshipmen not specialising in

⁹⁴ Louis Le Bailly, *The Man Around the Engine: Life Below the Waterline* (Emsworth: Kenneth Mason, 1997) p30

⁹⁵ TNA ADM 116/1904, AFO 1188/20 published 17 April 1920

engineering who thought they were wasting their time – a suggestion borne out by their tendency to fail the exam.⁹⁶

Pressure was rising for the engineering and executive branches to be separated – a view endorsed by a committee set up in October 1919 to consider the future of electrical engineering in the fleet. So great was the volume and complexity of the fleet's electrical equipment that there was a growing need for specialist officers to oversee it. The work was currently in the hands of the torpedo branch but many torpedo officers lacked both the time and specialist knowledge to be effective. Reporting in December 1919 the Field/Waistell Committee declared that it would be best to have a separate non-executive engineering branch with no prospects of command – in short that inter-changeability should be abandoned.⁹⁷

With rising evidence in favour of separating deck and engineering officers, the Admiralty did so via AFO 2157/20 of 17 July 1920. The AFO (Admiralty Fleet Order) not only separated the two branches, it also revoked the right of engineers to command ships and shore bases and removed the possibility of their reverting to deck duties. By way of compensation engineers were paid more than executive officers and prospects of promotion within the engineering branch were better than in the executive branch although there were few jobs of flag rank. Engineers also retained the executive curl in the gold lace on their sleeves and their membership of the military branch which meant they could discipline the ratings of their department and sit on courts martial.⁹⁸

Whilst these changes angered many engineers only five out of the twenty-three holding command posts did not agree to lose them and join the new engineering branch.⁹⁹ However there continued to be a shortage of volunteers to enter the engineering branch. In July 1921 the Tudor Committee reported that since October 1919 only 44 out of 783 eligible midshipmen had volunteered for engineering, 51 were needed every year. It was suggested that volunteers

⁹⁶ TNA ADM 116/1904 Submission L.P/4 from the Engineer Captain Reserve Fleet (Engineer Captain Frederick W Marshall) to the Board of Admiralty, 8 August 1920

⁹⁷ TNA ADM 116/1900, CW.15655/20 Majority report of the committee appointed to consider 'the best method of ensuring the efficiency and development of under water weapons 'high power' installations, 'low power' installations, W/T and signalling appliances, and the desirability for re-allocation of the duties of specialist officers and men', (Field/Waistell Committee) August 1920 pp.1-2 para.2-3; minority report of the Field/Waistell Committee pp.1-2 para.1-3. Whereas the majority report suggested a separate electrical engineering branch, the minority proposed that engineer officers be divided between electrical and mechanical specialities.

⁹⁸ TNA ADM 116/2098, Training 1295/20 and CW.13055/20, these files do not suggest Beatty was unduly influential.

⁹⁹ Hansard HC Deb (5th series) 9 December 1925 c.430

should be recruited in their final term at Dartmouth (or as soon as possible after commencing Special Entry training) and should begin their engineering training at the end of their time in the training cruiser.¹⁰⁰ In May 1922 the first midshipmen commenced a four year engineering training course at Keyham; their education was entirely separated from that of executive midshipmen, and the institution of the course a clear sign that the engineering branch saw its future as a corps of engineers rather than as a corps of seamen.

The changes did not satisfy the desires of many executive officers. In 1924 DTSD, Captain Hugh Tweedie, circulated a paper around the Admiralty complaining that the engineers were now not sufficiently distinguishable from the executive officers and that this created confusion and, more importantly, suggested that the engineers had as much responsibility as the executive officers. He complained that the executive officers were in danger of becoming the 'slaves' of the engineers whose demands for equality 'appear to be based on a mistaken assumption that a sailor's profession is not a profession at all'.¹⁰¹

Tweedie thought the professional responsibilities of the executive officers went well beyond seamanship, navigation and fighting. It was they, and they alone, who were the guardians of the spirit and traditions of the service. He wrote that 'it is of the greatest importance that if the Navy is to uphold its traditions and to maintain a rigid discipline ensuring a measure of content and general pride of service that the officers comprising the line of command who are alone responsible must first of all be seamen'.¹⁰²

Tweedie's remarks illustrate the failure of Fisher's reforms to promote a positive view of engineering amongst executive officers. Tweedie did not regard engineering or the mastery of technology as part of the executive officer's essential professional knowledge, and he did not regard anyone who was not a seaman as a professional naval officer. In Samuel Huntington's terms, the engineers did not have the specialist knowledge that characterised the professional naval officer and thus had been rejected from the professional circle – the corporateness of the professional officer corps did not extend to

¹⁰⁰ TNA ADM 116/2098, CW.2588/22 'Report of the Committee on the Future Training of Officers for the Executive and Engineering Duties of the Naval Service' (Tudor Committee) 29 July 1921 pp.7-9, para.5-9

¹⁰¹ ADM 1/8658/67 'Remarks on the Second Sea Lord's and Secretary's memos', circular paper by DTSD (Captain Hugh J Tweedie) on the future of the engineering and executive branches, presented to Board of Admiralty 8 September 1924 (para.11)

¹⁰² *ibid*, para.5

them. It is impossible to say how far Tweedie's views were typical but subsequent events suggest that they were a fair summary of how many executive officers defined their profession.

Published the following year, AFO 3241/25 deprived engineers of all military command and placed them on a separate section of the *Navy List* from executive branch officers. Whilst engineers did not lose their military status and therefore continued to command and discipline the men working in their departments, command in any other situation now devolved to the senior executive branch representative present. Not only did this mean that an executive officer had to take charge of damage control and other engineering related tasks, it also meant that if all the executive officers in a ship were killed command would pass to the senior seaman warrant officer and not to the senior engineering officer. To make matters worse, the AFO specified that the distinguishing cloth the engineers wore as part of their rank insignia should be a brighter shade of purple.

These changes were considered betrayal by the engineers, a point made clear by one MP who told the house 'The promise was made to them that they should remain in the military branch'.¹⁰³ Another MP alleged that the engineers had received the executive uniform (with a curl in the lace and no distinguishing stripes) as a reward for their war services.¹⁰⁴ His comments were inaccurate, these changes had been announced before the war even if their implementation had been delayed, but they reflected the proud wartime record of the engineer officers whose loyalty and skill was beyond doubt. Given the symbolic importance attached to uniform, the brighter purple distinguishing cloth inevitably became a symbol of the engineer's second class status.

Whilst the abandonment of inter-changeability crushed the hopes of some officers and weakened the authority of the engineers, it strengthened the fleet by allowing officers to concentrate on their primary duties. It was not driven by a desire to reduce the status of engineers compared to executive officers but by operational requirements. In abandoning inter-changeability the Royal Navy finally acknowledged the fallacy of Fisher's argument that an officer could become a complete master of his profession. For all their lost prospects and powers, the engineers did gain higher pay and improved prospects of

¹⁰³ Hansard HC Deb (5th series) 22 March 1926 c.910

¹⁰⁴ Hansard HC Deb (5th series) 22 March 1926 c.917

promotion. However their loss of command, and the defacing of their uniforms, was enough for many engineers to consider themselves betrayed. Thus was the 'great betrayal' of naval folklore born.

The re-separation of the executive and engineering branches enabled the officers of each to concentrate on their own particular duties. It also created space for the reform of the early career education of executive officers to emphasise seamanship and leadership. The curriculum at Dartmouth was rebalanced, the engineering content was greatly reduced, and more of an emphasis placed on English, history, and foreign languages. The curriculum for midshipman was gradually reformed to emphasise seamanship and leadership over technical knowledge.

The end of the war meant a reduced need for officers and thus a reduced number of cadets and midshipmen. Many young officers were forced to leave the service. Osborne, beset by problems of ill health and badly constructed accommodation, closed in 1921. Thereafter Fisher-Selborne cadets undertook the whole of their shore course at Dartmouth. The Special Entry, who had done their early training ashore during the war, resumed ship based training; only in 1939 were they moved ashore for good.

In the years after the war, the Royal Navy came under increasing pressure to democratise the officer corps. In 1919 the Anderson and Ricardo committees recommended a widening of the entry to include the best and brightest boy seamen and civilians from lower middle class backgrounds. Little was done until a Labour government came to power in 1929. In 1931 the Admiralty was forced to set up the Bennett Committee to discuss the entry of officers. The 1930s saw a gradual and limited democratisation of the officer corps – achieved largely through the Special Entry.

In October 1931 a naval mutiny at Invergordon forced the problems of officer education to the fore again. A series of educational reforms followed, emphasising leadership and seamanship. Once the dust of Invergordon settled, officer selection and education entered a period of relative stability. From 1936 onwards this was aided by naval rearmament which made the government more willing to spend money on officer education and the Navy a more attractive career.

Perhaps the prospect of war also served to draw attention to the inadequacies of naval education. In 1937 the James Committee was formed to

consider the education of officers of all ranks in tactics and strategy. In 1938 the Watson Committee gave further consideration to the training of young officers. By 1939 the Fisher-Selborne scheme had been largely abandoned. Although Dartmouth was still teaching a four year course based on science and mathematics, engineering was now a small part of the cadet's education. Furthermore the vast majority of the officers produced by the college served in the executive branch, their professional development and prospects entirely separate from those of engineering officers.

Having outlined the history of the officer corps of the Royal Navy in this period it is also necessary to examine the nation that the Royal Navy served and the society, and in particular the educational system, from which it drew its officers. It is necessary to consider the economic, political and social history of Britain.

Historians have traditionally considered the early part of the twentieth century a period of British decline. They point to the failure of British industry in relation to nations such as America and Germany and to periods of economic depression.¹⁰⁵ Certainly the British economy did struggle, first losing the lead in high-tech industries and subsequently suffering a decline in traditional industries such as shipbuilding and textiles.¹⁰⁶ However there was a significant recovery in the 1930s which saw growth in modern industries such as aircraft and car production.¹⁰⁷

It has also been suggested that British prestige and naval power declined significantly during the period.¹⁰⁸ In some ways this allegation is justified, Britain was not able to retain the pre-eminent position it held early in the century. Even in the years before the First World War British naval superiority had been

¹⁰⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: An Economic History of Britain since 1750* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1968) pp.145-149; Aaron Friedburg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988; repr.d Oxford: Princeton University Press 2010) p.124; Harold Perkin, *Professional Society*, p.222

¹⁰⁶ Paul Kennedy, *The Decline and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Allen Lane, 1976; repub.d London: Penguin, 2001), p.268; Keith Robbins, *The Eclipse of a Great Power: Modern Britain, 1870-1992* (London: Longman, 1983; 2nd edn London: Longman, 1994) pp.142-147; Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War: War, Peace and Social Change 1900-1967* (London: Bodley Head, 1968), p.142

¹⁰⁷ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p.107; Perkin, *Professional Society*, p.223

¹⁰⁸ Corelli Barnett, *Engage the Enemy More Closely: The Royal Navy in the Second World War* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991) p.7 and pp.20-24

eroded through the ability of other nations to build modern ships in large numbers.¹⁰⁹

The Royal Navy emerged from the war as the most modern and powerful naval force in the world despite failing to achieve a decisive victory over the German fleet during the war and struggling to protect British trade.¹¹⁰ Lacking credible opposition, and constrained by treaty restrictions and national finances, it shrank greatly in the post-war years. However Britain continued to build large numbers of new warships well into the 1920s so that obsolescence and the loss of construction capacity did not become a problem until the 1930s.¹¹¹

The defining event of the period was the First World War. The war itself was enormously expensive in both human and monetary terms and its consequences were far-reaching. It was widely felt that the war had destroyed the best of Britain's men and seriously dislocated society.¹¹² The post-war years saw high unemployment and a feeling of betrayal amongst ex-servicemen.¹¹³ Desire to avoid a future conflict of the same scale and horror boosted support for a wide variety of political movements and bolstered support for the League of Nations.¹¹⁴ Public sentiment in Britain favoured disarmament and making peace rather than war.¹¹⁵

The net result was dramatic cutbacks in military strength and spending, governed by the 'Ten Year Rule' which assumed that no major conflict would take place with the next ten years. Government policy coincided with public sentiment which had drifted away from a 'pleasure culture of war' to one of pacifist sentiment and a rejection of military service.¹¹⁶ This was reflected in a

¹⁰⁹ Kennedy, *Decline and Fall*, pp.208-229

¹¹⁰ John Ferris, 'It is our Business in the Navy to Command the Seas': The Last Decade of British Maritime Supremacy, 1919-1929' 1934', in *Far Flung Lines: Essays on Imperial Defence in Honour of Donald Mackenzie Schurman* ed. by Greg Kennedy and Keith Neilson, (London: Frank Cass, 1997) pp.124-170 (p.125)

¹¹¹ Kennedy, *Decline and Fall*, p.87; Daniel Baugh, 'Confusion and Constraints: The Navy and British Defence Planning 1913-1939' in *Naval Power in the Twentieth Century* ed. by Nicholas Rodger (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996) pp.120-133 (p.130); Ferris, 'It is our Business', pp.128-143; Jon Sumida, 'The Best Laid Plans': The Development of British Battle-fleet Tactics, 1919-1942' *International History Review* 14 (1992) pp.681-700 (p.684)

¹¹² Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Bodley Head, 1990) p.31; Perkin, *Professional Society*, pp.224-226

¹¹³ John Lewis-Stempel, *Six Weeks: The Short and Gallant Life of the British Officer in the First World War* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2010; Paperback edn. London: Orion, 2011) p.309; Kingsley Kent, *Aftershocks*, p.30

¹¹⁴ Kingsley Kent, *Aftershocks*, pp.6-8 and p.59; Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon, 2005) p.17

¹¹⁵ Kennedy, *Decline and Fall*, p.272

¹¹⁶ Todman, *Myth and Memory*, p.135; Quotation from Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850-2000* (London: Reaktion, 2000) p.9

decline in membership of military organisations such as the OTC.¹¹⁷ Only in the mid 1930s, amidst the rising threat of various extreme regimes abroad, did public and political sentiment shift towards military expansion. In the last years of the 1930s Britain commenced a major rearmament programme and the general public became increasingly resigned to the prospect of war.¹¹⁸

The inter-war period was one of short-lived and unstable governments with six general elections between 1918 and 1931.¹¹⁹ Stability was thereafter achieved through the development of a coalition 'National Government' which, in various guises, held power until the outbreak of the Second World War. The fragility of these governments was such as to restrict their policy making options.¹²⁰ Britain's inter-war politicians have been criticised by historians who point to mass unemployment, the faltering economy and the failure of appeasement. More recently opinion has moderated, recognising that these problems were nigh on insoluble.¹²¹

The growth of enfranchisement to embrace all adults also contributed to the changing political landscape. The 1918 Representation of the People Act gave the vote to all men aged twenty-one or over and women aged thirty or over, in 1928 parity was granted to women. Despite the uncertainty and instability Britain was never really threatened by either communist or fascist revolution.¹²² Such a revolution was widely and continuously feared and this contributed to the growth of class-based politics in the 1920s and to the restriction of various civil liberties in the 1930s.¹²³

¹¹⁷ See Sonja Levson, 'Constructing Elite Identities: University Students, Military Masculinity and the Consequences of the Great War in Britain and Germany' *Past & Present* 198 (2008) pp.147-183

¹¹⁸ Kennedy, *Decline and Fall*, p.293; Barnett, *Engage the Enemy*, pp.31-36; David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century* (London: Longman, 1991; 2nd edn. Harlow: Longman, 2000) p.113

¹¹⁹ Robbins, *Eclipse*, pp.132-135

¹²⁰ Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p.124; Charles Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars, 1918-1940* (London: Meuthen, 1955) p.413, argues that there was, in any case, a national desire for safe and non-controversial policies.

¹²¹ For the traditional view-point see Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, p.144. More recent opinion can be found in Andy Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930s: The Deceptive Decade* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) pp.21-22 and Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p.108.

¹²² David Lewis, *Illusions of Grandeur: Mosley, Fascism and British Society, 1931-81* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987) p.147; Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars* p.473; DeGroot, *Blighly*, p.171

¹²³ Lewis, *Illusions of Grandeur*, pp.148-156; Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars* p.577; John Stevenson, *British Society 1914-1945* (London: Allen Lane, 1984) p.246; David Cannadine, *Class* p.132; Kingsley Kent, *Aftershocks*, p.123; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, pp.54-60. Political uniforms and militia forces were banned, political rallies and meetings severely limited and efforts made to curtail threatening or violent behaviour by political campaigners.

There is no clear class-based narrative of early twentieth century British history; after due consideration David Cannadine concluded that ‘the only master narrative left is that there is no master narrative whatsoever’.¹²⁴ The population could not be clearly divided into upper, middle and working classes — many people could not be definitively said to belong to one or the other and there was some scope to move between them. Class-based conflict was limited with the main political parties attracting support from across the social spectrum.¹²⁵

In so far as the fortunes of the British population can be considered on a class by class basis it must be admitted that the main losers of the period were the upper class. From the 1870s onwards they had suffered from falling agricultural rents, a disaster for the landed classes whom derived the bulk of their income from agriculture.¹²⁶ The extension of the franchise in 1884 and 1918 undermined their political power and this weakness was demonstrated by the introduction of death duties in 1894 and by the passing of the ‘People’s Budget’ in 1909.¹²⁷ Many estates were broken up and sold to meet the demands of the exchequer and those who avoided selling were often obliged to dramatically reduce their expenses.¹²⁸ To make matters worse the upper class sustained the highest proportion of losses in the First World War.¹²⁹

The working class in contrast generally improved its position. Although plagued by unemployment, slum living and poor health the poor benefitted from improved education, increased political power and, in some cases, better housing and diet.¹³⁰ Skilled and well paid working class people were increasingly able to copy the lifestyles of the middle class through amusements

¹²⁴ Cannadine, *Class*, p.12

¹²⁵ Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars* p.153; Cannadine, *Class*, p.115; Benson, *Working Class* p.153; Arthur Marwick, *Class: Image and Reality in Britain, France and the USA since 1930* (London: Collins, 1980) p.13, Stevenson, *British Society*, p.346

¹²⁶ Stevenson, *British Society*, p.334; Perkin, *Professional Society*, p.252

¹²⁷ David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven CT; London: Yale University Press, 1990) pp.27-46; Perkin, *Professional Society*, pp.40-42

¹²⁸ Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, p.203; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, pp.19-21; Perkin, *Professional Society*, p.254

¹²⁹ Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, p.62; Lewis-Stempel, *Six Weeks*, p.25; Hynes, *A War Imagined*, p.317

¹³⁰ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p.112; Marwick, *Total War*, p.178; Perkin, *Professional Society*, pp.273-285; Kyle Laybourn, *Britain on the Breadline: A Social and Political History of Britain Between the Wars* (Stroud: Sutton, 1998) pp.138-142; George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002) pp.89-95

such as cycling and cinema attendance.¹³¹ There was an increased sense of working class identity characterised by rising trade union membership.¹³²

The fortunes of the middle classes were more mixed. For those at the top wealth and education provided an opportunity to move into the elite. Although men educated at top public schools continued to hold the vast majority of positions of power and influence, they themselves were increasingly likely to be of middle class origin – the sons or grandsons of businessmen or industrialists.¹³³

Other members of the middle classes fared less well. Those at the bottom, the clerks and small shop keepers, were at the mercy of economic fluctuations and struggled to retain their distinctive identity in the face of their upwardly mobile working class neighbours.¹³⁴ They were unable to join the wealthier sections of the middle class who, aided by improvements in transport and a boom in housing construction, were increasingly moving to new suburbs from which the poor and undesirable were deliberately excluded.¹³⁵

The upward mobility achieved by many in the working and middle classes owed much to the evolution of British education both private and state. One of the difficulties faced by the Royal Navy in selecting and educating naval officers was the lack of a national system of education. Schools varied enormously in scope and quality and provision varied dramatically between different areas. The education a child received was dependent on the wealth and attitude of its parents. The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw great upheaval in the way that British children of all social classes were educated. Here we shall concern ourselves with the changes in the education of boys in England and Wales.

In the early nineteenth century two religious societies were founded which together provided educational opportunities for most working class

¹³¹ Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, p.202; Benson, *Working Class*, p.146

¹³² Cannadine, *Class*, p.111 and p.131; Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930s*, p.92; Benson, *Working Class*, p.152

¹³³ Cannadine, *Class*, p.179; Arthur Marwick, *Image and Reality* pp.176-179; Stevenson, *British Society*, p.346-351; Perkin, *Professional Society*, pp.260-265. Inter-war Prime Ministers Baldwin, Bonar-Law and Chamberlain were all from middle class backgrounds.

¹³⁴ Jackson, *Middle Classes*, pp.24-30; Marwick, *Image and Reality*, p.62; Marwick, *Total War*, p.229; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p.53

¹³⁵ Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, p.228; Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930s*, p.98; Jackson, *Middle Classes*, p.15; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p.74

children in England.¹³⁶ A series of parliamentary acts concerning factories, workshops and mines created a minimum age for employment in these industries and required children to be allowed to attend school on a part-time basis, often with factory owners providing educational facilities.¹³⁷

Many of the resultant schools were very poor. Some of the religious schools prioritised godliness and good behaviour over literacy, relying on teenage monitors teaching from religious primers.¹³⁸ Factory schools principally gave children a respite from their dangerous and exhausting work rather than an education.¹³⁹ However the average quality gradually improved and many of the religious schools were well-supported by parents.¹⁴⁰

There was also an extensive network of private schools charging a shilling a week or less. The scope and quality of these schools varied enormously according to local demand. They operated at every time of day and night and, whilst some taught nothing but reading, others offered curricula including history and geography – fees were dependent on the material taught. Attendance was patchy with children only going to school when familial finances allowed and work was not available.¹⁴¹

Only in 1870 was any attempt made to establish a national system of education in England and Wales. The Elementary Education Act set up local 'School Boards' which were to ensure that every child aged between five and thirteen had access to education. They could either pay for children to attend existing establishments or set up new schools for which no fees would be charged. They were able to make local byelaws compelling school attendance. In 1880 attendance became compulsory and in 1891 elementary schools were barred from charging fees.

¹³⁶ JM Goldstom, 'The Content of Education and the Socialisation of the Working Class Child 1830-1860', in *Popular Education and Socialization in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Phillip McCann (London: Meuthen, c1977; 2nd edn. London: Routledge, 2007), pp.93-110 (p.93); WB Stephens, *Education in Britain, 1750-1914* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998) p.6. They were the 'British and Foreign Schools Society' and the 'National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principals of the Established Church'.

¹³⁷ Harold Silver, 'Ideology and the Factory Child, Attitudes to Half-Time Education', in *Popular Education and Socialization* ed. by McCann, pp.141-166 (pp.141-142)

¹³⁸ Goldstom, 'Content of Education', pp.98-102; SG Checkland, *British Public Policy, 1776-1939: An Economic, Social, and Political Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) p.102

¹³⁹ Silver, 'Ideology and the Factory Child', p.141

¹⁴⁰ Stephens, *Education*, pp.16-17

¹⁴¹ Phil Gardner, *The Lost Elementary Schools of Victorian England: The People's Education* (London: Croom Helm, c1984) pp.17-29 and p.46

The act was the product of sustained pressure to improve educational opportunities for the poor and there were a number of motivations behind it. The desire to remove children from dangerous working environments was undiminished; as was the desire to condition the poor to a life of hard work, obedience and law-abiding behaviour. However it was also realised that existing educational provision could not meet the ever expanding demand for skilled workers such as engineers and clerks.¹⁴²

The establishment of a state system of schooling did not put an end to the existing schools. The new 'Board Schools' were primarily built in places where provision had been lacking. It was some years before private elementary schools were effectively stamped out. Meanwhile the number of schools provided by religious organisations actually increased owing to the willingness of the government to fund their construction and parents to send their children to them.¹⁴³

In addition to paying for the construction of schools the state also paid an annual fee for each child known as a grant. Grant money was paid for children reaching an acceptable standard in the 'Three R's' – reading, writing and arithmetic. Additional grant could be earned by success in other subjects which encouraged schools to teach their eldest pupils subjects such as history, geography, science and modern languages. In larger towns and cities this provision gradually became consolidated into 'higher grade' schools which took their pupils from surrounding elementary schools. There was no legal basis for these schools to exist but the authorities turned a blind eye recognising that they met local needs.¹⁴⁴ Only in 1895 did the Bryce Committee recommend the setting up of separate state secondary schools.¹⁴⁵

At the other end of the scale were the great public schools at which the sons of the wealthy and powerful were educated. The core group of public

¹⁴² AS Bishop, *The Rise of a Central Authority for English Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971) pp.272-276; Stephens, *Education*, p.78

¹⁴³ Myrtle EA Boulton, Stanley J Curtis, *A Short History of Educational Ideas* ([First edn]; 2nd edn. London: University Tutorial Press, 1956) p.521

¹⁴⁴ Nanette Whitbread, 'The Early Twentieth Century Secondary Curriculum Debate in England' *History of Education* 13 (1984) pp.221-333 (p.224); M Sanderson, *The Missing Stratum: Technical School Education in England 1900s to 1990s* (London: Athlone Press, 1994) p.18; Brian Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement 1870-1920* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1965) pp.176-185

¹⁴⁵ Howard C Barnard, *A Short History of English Education from 1760-1944* (London: University of London Press, 1947) p.239

schools were defined by their inclusion in the Clarendon Report of 1864.¹⁴⁶ The subsequent Public Schools Act of 1868 established boards of governors for these schools, freeing them from their ancient statutes and allowing their governors and headmasters almost complete control over curricula, fees and all aspects of school life.

This freedom separated the Clarendon Schools from the great bulk of endowed schools, which were instead subject to the Endowed Schools Act of 1869. Whereas the Clarendon schools were wealthy institutions, generally drawing their pupils from across the nation, the endowed schools were typically poorer local institutions. Often the endowment also had to bear the cost of providing alms for the elderly or feeding and clothing the pupils of the school.¹⁴⁷ Many of these schools were several hundred years old and most taught a curriculum based around classical languages.

Under the terms of the 1869 act a group of three commissioners was appointed to review and reformulate school endowments. The aim was to divide the schools into three grades each catering for a distinctive type of boy. Third grade schools were to take pupils aged up to fourteen, second grade up to the age of sixteen and first grade up to the age of 19. Whereas elementary Latin would be the most advanced subject in the third grade schools, the second grade would teach Latin and modern languages, and first grade would give their pupils the Greek and Latin necessary for university entry. Whilst third grade schools were intended to draw their pupils from the skilled working class, first grade schools were to draw theirs from the landed classes and wealthy businessmen. Undesirable pupils would be barred through high fees although a limited number of children might benefit from scholarships.¹⁴⁸

Many of the smaller and poorer third grade schools ultimately ended up within the state system. At the other end of the scale schools such as Repton and Sherborne were able to climb into the ranks of public schools after

¹⁴⁶ The schools included were Eton, Harrow, Rugby, Winchester, Westminster, St Pauls, Charterhouse, Shrewsbury and Merchant Taylors.

¹⁴⁷ David I Allsobrook, *Schools for the Shires: The Reform of Middle-Class Education in Mid-Victorian England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, c1986) pp.3-6; John Roach, *Secondary Education in England 1870-1902: Public Activity and Private Enterprise* (London: Routledge, 1991) p.37

¹⁴⁸ G McCulloch 'Education and the Middle Classes: The Case of the English Grammar Schools, 1868-1944' *History of Education* 35 (2006) pp.689-704 (p.690); TW Bamford, *The Rise of the Public School: A Study of Boys Public Boarding Schools in England and Wales from 1837 to the Present Day* (London: Nelson, 1967) pp.170-172

shedding the poor scholars for whose benefit they had originally been founded.¹⁴⁹

The middle and later years of the nineteenth century also witnessed the foundation and growth of an enormous number and variety of schools owned by companies and individuals. They varied from small establishments catering for parents who did not wish to send their children to the local elementary schools to grand establishments such as Cheltenham and Marlborough which were able to establish themselves as public schools.¹⁵⁰

The enormous growth in the public school sector was in response to a variety of stimuli. Entry into elite professions increasingly required a good level of education and schools were needed to supply this.¹⁵¹ More importantly the schools provided 'character training centres for the new middle classes'.¹⁵² They were designed to ensure that their pupils imbued the right values, learnt the correct behaviours and made contacts that would help them in later life. A prosperous businessman or industrialist could raise the status of his family by sending his son to school alongside the sons of the traditional elite.¹⁵³ Their prestige was so great that other schools copied them – instituting classics based curricula, houses and competitive sport.¹⁵⁴

The reforms within the educational system prompted headmasters to organise themselves into bodies through which they were able to represent their collective interests. The first was the Headmaster's Conference (HMC) founded in 1870 and catering for elite establishments.¹⁵⁵ In 1890 the Incorporated Association of Headmasters was founded to cater for the lesser private schools. Schools were not allowed to belong to both bodies until 1904.¹⁵⁶

¹⁴⁹ Simon, *Labour Movement*, p.99; Bamford, *Public Schools*, p.194; Roach, *Secondary Education*, p.33

¹⁵⁰ Simon, *Labour Movement*, p.102

¹⁵¹ J Gathorne-Hardy, *The Public School Phenomenon, 597-1977* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1977) p.69 and pp.163-164; JM Bourne, *Patronage and Society in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986) p.23

¹⁵² CB Otley, 'Militarism and Militarization in the Public Schools, 1900-1972' *The British Journal of Sociology* 29 (1978) pp.321-339 (p.321)

¹⁵³ Arthur Marwick, *Image and Reality*, p.24; K Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys Story Paper in Britain: A Cultural History, 1855-1940* (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2003) pp.127-128; John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (London: Yale University Press, 1999) p.117; Rupert Wilkinson, *The Prefects: British Leadership and the Public School Tradition: A Comparative Study in the Making of Rulers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964) pp.4-24

¹⁵⁴ Gathorne-Hardy, *Public School Phenomenon*, p.226

¹⁵⁵ DP Leinster-Mackay, *The Educational World of Edward Thring: A Centenary Study* (London: Falmer, 1987) p.101; Simon, *Labour Movement*, p.104

¹⁵⁶ Roach, *Secondary Education*, p.123

Membership of the HMC was one feature that helped to identify a public school, not least as prospective members had to go before a committee which considered the reputation of the school and the standing of its headmaster. Other identifying features of a public school were success in sending pupils to university or to Sandhurst and participation in sporting contests and other events against the Clarendon schools. Thus although the HMC had about 100 members in 1900 only 64 of them could really be considered public schools.¹⁵⁷

The early years of the twentieth century saw considerable expansion of state secondary education. The 1902 Education Act enabled the 'Local Education Authorities', which succeeded schools boards, to build fee paying secondary schools. From 1907 onwards these schools were required to provide a free education to 25% of their intake.¹⁵⁸ Provision was further expanded by the 1918 Education Act so that, whereas in 1913 1 in 40 elementary school pupils had progressed to secondary education, 1 in 13 did so in 1929.¹⁵⁹

1918 also saw the introduction of the School Certificate which provided a means for all children to prove their educational attainment. The introduction of this national qualification removed the public schools' monopoly in providing an education perceived as suitable for professions such as Royal Navy officer; by passing it anybody could prove they were intellectually suited to the career of their choice.

In the inter-war period pressure for the extension of high quality secondary education came mainly from the Labour Party which, from 1922 onwards, was committed to a policy of 'secondary education for all'. In contrast, and more mindful of national finances, the Conservative Party favoured concentrating resources on those most likely to benefit from them. The Conservative commissioned Hadow Report, *The Education of the Adolescent* – published in 1927 – became the key influence on inter-war state secondary education.

The report found that no less than nine different systems of state education for children up to the age of fourteen were in use in England and

¹⁵⁷ Thomas C Worsley, *Barbarians and Philistines, Democracy and the Public Schools* (London: Robert Hale, [1940]) p.19; George MacDonald Fraser, *The World of the Public School* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977) pp.2-3; JR de S Honey, 'Tom Brown's Universe: The Nature and Limits of the Victorian Public Schools Community', in *The Victorian Public School: Studies in the Development of an Educational Institutional Symposium*, ed. by Brian Simon and Ian C Bradley (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), pp.19-33 (pp.27-29)

¹⁵⁸ Simon, *Labour Movement*, pp.21-23

¹⁵⁹ Robbins, *Eclipse*, p.152

Wales. The quality and type of secondary provision was particularly variable. Some schools seemed to offer children very little whilst others were obsessed with examination results or with the teaching of particular subjects.¹⁶⁰

The report recommended that the schooling of children aged between eleven and fifteen should be entirely separated from that of younger children. Secondary schools should be divided into three types – higher elementary schools taking children from one elementary school, central schools taking children from all the elementary schools in the area, and grammar schools selecting the brightest children in the area. Higher elementary and central schools were intended to provide a semi-vocational education, especially to children in their last two years. Grammar schools were to concentrate on academic subjects, preparing children for the School Certificate and university entrance examinations.¹⁶¹

Many grammar schools subsequently achieved academic standards on a par with, or ahead of, some public schools. Middle class parents increasingly saw them as offering a cheap alternative to private education and their children increasingly dominated them. Middle class enrolment increased despite parental wariness of the working class children who attended the grammar schools, and the effect they would have on the manners and accents of their own children.¹⁶² Doubts later arose about the academic emphasis in grammar schools, and in 1936 the House of Commons passed a motion stating that grammar school pupils were overburdened with homework and that other areas of their development were being stunted as a result.¹⁶³

The Hadow Report hastened the demise of the technical schools. These schools typically took their pupils from poorer backgrounds than the grammar schools. They taught science, engineering and mathematics to a high standard as well as practical skills. Many tried to copy the public schools by teaching

¹⁶⁰ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p.209; 'Report of the Consultative Committee on the Education of the Adolescent' (Hadow Report), 1927, Chapter 2: 'The Facts of the Present Situation' pp.36-39 re-produced online by Derek Gillard at <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/hadow1926/2600.html> [Accessed 1 February 2012]

¹⁶¹ D Lawton, *Education and Labour Party Ideologies, 1900-2001 and Beyond* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004) pp.26-30; Hadow Committee Report, Chapter 11: 'Summary of Principal Conclusions and Recommendations' pp.172-174 re-produced online by Derek Gillard at <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/hadow1926/2611.html> [Accessed 1 February 2012]

¹⁶² Jackson, *Middle Classes*, pp.174-188; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, pp.241-243; Perkin, *Professional Society*, p.239

¹⁶³ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p.216

foreign languages, promoting the arts and sport, and sending pupils on trips aboard. Their ambitions were frequently reined in by local councils which, wishing them to confine their efforts to preparing pupils to enter the workplace, barred them from offering the School Certificate.¹⁶⁴ Technical schools, combining technical instruction with a broad education, would have been an excellent source of Special Entry cadets had the Royal Navy been willing to take the boys and the state willing to support the schools.

State provision was increasingly enhanced by scholarships to private schools. Private schools could adopt 'direct-grant' status under which, in exchange for making up to 25% of their places available to children holding local authority scholarships, they received funding directly from government sources. These schools remained entirely independent and achieved some of the best academic results in the country.¹⁶⁵

Direct-grant status must have been attractive to the naval authorities, potentially offering enhanced funding for Dartmouth and a more democratic officer corps (with scholarship entry limited to those who had satisfied the naval interviewers). Although there was never any attempt to secure direct-grant status for the college, the possibility of local authority scholarships for boys who could not otherwise afford to become officers, first raised in 1910, was raised again in 1918 and 1931.¹⁶⁶

The net result of all this educational change was to create a large body of working and lower middle class boys who, in educational terms, were equal or superior to the richest pupils of the best public schools. By passing the School Certificate they proved themselves equally clever. They had absorbed the behaviours and values taught in public schools either through attending them on scholarships or through schools which mimicked them as closely as possible. These boys ultimately demanded entry to professions hitherto closed to them, including officer entry to the Royal Navy.

The final element to be considered before launching into a detailed consideration of officer selection and education is the extent and nature of the

¹⁶⁴ Sanderson, *Missing Stratum*, pp.37-58 and pp.81-85

¹⁶⁵ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p.237

¹⁶⁶ Hansard HC Deb (5th series) 9 June 1910 c.903. By the Anderson Committee in 1918 (TNA ADM 1/8551/41 'Report of the Committee Appointed to Consider the Effect of the Cost of Training Upon the Supply of Candidates for Naval Cadetships' (Anderson Committee) February 1919 p.8) and the Bennett Committee in 1931 (TNA ADM 116/2791 'Report of the Committee to Consider the Present Systems of Cadet Entry' (Bennett Committee) 29 June 1931 p.8)

existing historiography, and the availability of primary source material. The existing historiography can broadly be divided as follows: items directly concerned with naval education and selection, items dealing with the wider history (and in particular the social history) of the Royal Navy at this time, histories of civilian education, and more general social and political histories of Britain. There is inevitably considerable overlap between many of these studies, for instance those addressing the role of education in determining social class.

The history of the Royal Navy in the early part of the twentieth century remains patchy and quite fragmented. Matters of strategy, logistics, and social history have been pursued by a wide variety of authors – their methods and approach varying considerably. To some extent there is a separation between the history of the wartime and peacetime navies, with the volume of works on the former dwarfing that on the latter. Whilst numerous historians have addressed the preparation of the Navy for war and matters of peacetime strategy and development, certain aspects are still ignored.¹⁶⁷ Rüger claims that the relationships of navies to their nations have been neglected;¹⁶⁸ he is quite right to do so, but he himself ignores a key interface between navies and the general public – recruitment.

Whilst the relationship of the Royal Navy and parliament has been more thoroughly explored than the Royal Navy's relationship with the general public, such exploration has concentrated on matters of strategy and construction policy, whilst ignoring parliamentary interference in the social makeup of the Navy. The history of the role of government in naval manpower issues in this period is distinctly sparse; cuts to the strength of the service are well documented, if not thoroughly understood, and there is some literature on democratisation but very little else.

The inter-war period dominates this thesis and here the most useful starting point remains Roskill's two part *Naval Policy Between the Wars* which suffers from its reliance on a limited range of sources, a degree of factual inaccuracy, and the bias resultant from an officer writing about a service of

¹⁶⁷ The state of naval history is discussed in *Doing Naval History: Essays Towards Improvement*, ed. by John B Hattendorf (Newport RI: Naval War College, 1995). The most notable effort to draw the divergent threads together is that of Rodger; see *The Command of the Ocean* and *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain: Volume I 660-1649* (London: Harper Collins, 1997).

¹⁶⁸ Jan Rüger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) pp.209-210

which he was himself part. It does however cover a great deal of ground so far as naval tactics and strategy and relations between the Navy and the government are concerned.¹⁶⁹

Traditionally scholarship on the inter-war Royal Navy is based around ideas of stagnation and decline postulated by authors such as Barnett.¹⁷⁰ Such works place the Royal Navy as a symbol of the decline in British power both military and industrial. The service is presented as tactically sterile, often poorly led, and the victim of massive cuts which left it a shadow of its former self. More recently authors such as Grove, Nicholas Lambert, Bell, Ferris, and Greg Kennedy have challenged these assertions – arguing that the Royal Navy was, in fact, in relative terms as strong or stronger than it had been in any time in the past hundred years, an innovator in both tactics and weapons, and largely led by men of competence and dedication. These authors individually cover less ground than Roskill and their scholarship is all the sounder for this.¹⁷¹

The social history of the Royal Navy in the 1903-1939 period had, until recently, attracted less attention than other areas. Several works have been produced by former naval officers – they offer a wealth of anecdotal detail about many aspects of naval life but little by way of serious analysis. Wells offers a wide ranging view of naval life, but his work suffers from a lack of detail. The same may be said of Owen's *Plain Yarns From the Fleet*, although this author packs a wealth of anecdotal detail (much of it autobiographical) into a comparatively short book. Both authors write affectionately of the naval ratings with whom they worked but their accounts are ill-balanced and somewhat rose-tinted. Their accounts of the lives and work of naval officers were doubtless influenced by their own experiences in the service.¹⁷²

Those academic studies that do exist are concerned largely with specific aspects of the lives of ratings. Carew offers a detailed account of all facets of

¹⁶⁹ Stephen W Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars Volume I: The Period of Anglo-American Antagonism 1919-29* (London: Collins, 1968); Stephen W Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars Volume II: The Period of Reluctant Rearmament 1930-39* (London: Collins, 1976)

¹⁷⁰ Corelli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power* (London: Eyre Meuthen, 1972)

¹⁷¹ Eric J Grove, *The Royal Navy Since 1815: A New Short History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Nicholas A Lambert, *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution* (Columbia SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999); Christopher M Bell, *The Royal Navy, Sea Power and Strategy Between the Wars* (London 2000); John R Ferris, *The Evolution of British Strategic Policy 1919-1926* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988); *Military Education: Past, Present, Future*, ed. by Greg Kennedy, Keith Neilson, (Westport CT: Praeger, 2002)

¹⁷² John Wells, *The Royal Navy- An Illustrated Social History 1870-1982* (Stroud: Sutton in association with the Royal Naval Museum, 1994); Charles Owen, *Plain Yarns From the Fleet* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1997)

lower-deck politics, although this focus inevitably produces an overly negative account structured around lower-deck grievances.¹⁷³ McKee's *Sober Men and True*, is a study of the origins, careers and lives of naval ratings, largely as viewed by the men themselves, whilst it covers a wide variety of ground it is largely superficial.¹⁷⁴

Those interested in the lives and careers of officers have little to go on. Wells and Owen offer some useful insights based on personal experience, but little detailed information. Howard-Bailey's promisingly titled *Social Change in the Royal Navy* is in fact a biography of Admiral Sir Frank Twiss but does offer a wide ranging account of naval life.¹⁷⁵ Recently Lavery has given considerable attention to the experiences of officers in the Second World War but his books (*Churchill's Navy, Hostilities Only, In Which They Served*) suffer from continued reliance on the same few sources and are not particularly useful to those studying the peacetime Royal Navy. Even so, Lavery's work is a valuable addition to the social history of the twentieth century Royal Navy.¹⁷⁶

More recently historians have begun to apply methods and approaches from other aspects of social history to the Royal Navy, rather than treating it as something separate from normal society.¹⁷⁷ In this they have been hampered, to some extent, by the tendency of previous generations of naval historians to gather evidence only from the sailors themselves and not from their families or the communities in which they lived. To some extent their work intertwines with that on contemporary British culture, and in particular that concerned with middle and upper class masculinity.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ Anthony Carew, *The Lower-Deck of the Royal Navy: 1900-1939: The Invergordon Mutiny in Perspective* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981)

¹⁷⁴ McKee, *Sober Men*

¹⁷⁵ Chris Howard-Bailey, *Social Change in the Royal Navy 1924-70: The Life and Times of Admiral Sir Frank Twiss* (Stroud: Sutton in association with the Royal Naval Museum, 1996)

¹⁷⁶ Brian Lavery, *Churchill's Navy: The Ships, Men and Organisation, 1939-1945* (London: Conway, 2006); *Hostilities Only - Training the Wartime Royal Navy* (London: Conway, 2004); *In Which They Served: The Royal Navy Officer Experience in the Second World War* (London: Conway, 2008)

¹⁷⁷ Laura EL Rowe, 'At the Sign of the Foul Anchor: Discipline and Morale in the Royal Navy During the First World War' (Unpublished PhD thesis, King's College London 2009); Glyn Pryor, *Citizen Sailors: The Royal Navy in the Second World War* (London: Viking, 2011); Quentin Colville, 'Corporate Domesticity and Idealised Masculinity: Royal Navy Officers and their Shipboard Homes', in ed by. Karen H Adler, Carrie Hamilton, *Homes and Homecomings: Gendered Histories of Domesticity and Return* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); Quentin Colville, 'The Role of the Interior in Constructing Notions of Class and Status: A Case Study of Britannia Royal Naval College Dartmouth 1905-1960', in *Interior Design and Identity* ed. by Susie McKellar, Penny Sparke, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2004) pp.114-132

¹⁷⁸ RH MacDonald, 'Reproducing the Middle-Class Boy: From Purity to Patriotism in the Boys' Magazines, 1892-1914' *Journal of Contemporary History* 24 (1989) pp.519-539; JA Mangan,

Naval education has been discussed in a variety of ways. The historian considering the education of the Royal Navy in the second half of the nineteenth century is fortunate indeed, for he has access to the works of Jones, Dickinson and Gordon who between them offer a more or less complete account of military branch education.¹⁷⁹ Jones provides detailed information on officer selection, as well as a thorough picture of the curriculum and her account is generally well balanced. Dickinson gives far more space to official discussions and examines the resultant policy in great detail, but tends to neglect the practical impact of these policies.

Gordon, whilst not overly concerned with official policy, offers a wide-ranging discussion of the factors affecting the later career education of officers, the place of this education in the development of individual careers and the consequent impact on the Navy. Gordon's work is partly an extension of the enquiries into the intellectual history of the service made, among others, by Marder and Schurman. These authors focused on the development of staff organisation within the Royal Navy and how far officers were encouraged to study history rather than science and to learn to think and write rather than design, maintain and use weapons.¹⁸⁰ Davison's *The Challenges of Command* promises to add to Gordon's picture of the doctrinal development of Royal Navy in the first years of the twentieth century.¹⁸¹

So far as the actual process of early career education is concerned, a variety of texts discuss the 1903-1939 period. Most of them take much the

Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Tony Money, *Manly and Muscular Diversions: Public Schools and the Nineteenth-Century Sporting Revival* (London: Duckworth, 1997)

¹⁷⁹ Jones, *Officer Corps*; Harry W Dickinson, *Educating the Royal Navy: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Education for Officers* (London: Routledge, 2007); Gordon, *Rules of the Game*

¹⁸⁰ Thomas Gregori and Oriol Pi-Sunyer, 'Technology, 'Traditionalism', and Military Establishments' *Technology and Culture* 7 (1966) pp. 402-407; Paul Haggie, 'The Royal Navy and War Planning in the Fisher Era' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 8 (1973) pp.113-131; Robin Higham, *Armed Forces in Peacetime: Britain 1918-1940: A Case Study* (London: G.T.Foulis, 1963); Robin Higham, *The Military Intellectuals in Britain 1918-38* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1966); Arthur J Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era, 1904-1919* 5 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1961-1970); Donald M Schurman, *The Education of a Navy: The Development of British Naval Strategic Thought, 1867-1914* (London: Cassell, 1965); Ronald Spector, *Professors of War: The Naval War College and the Development of the Naval Profession* (Newport RI: Naval War College Press, 1977); Jon T Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command: The Classic Works of Alfred Thayer Mahan Reconsidered* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Institute Press, 1997); Martin Van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1985)

¹⁸¹ Robert L Davison, *The Challenges of Command: The Royal Navy's Executive Branch Officers, 1880-1919* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2011)

same pattern – a chronological history focusing on Osborne and Dartmouth as naval institution. A wealth of detail is supplied but little information on the education provided or as to how the colleges were organised.

The notable exception to this is Partridge's *The Royal Naval College Osborne* which, whilst dominated by the experiences of cadets, offers a balanced picture of the college as both a school and as a naval establishment and examines the circumstances of its creation and closure. Partridge also examined the background and selection of cadets, adding further value to his work (this subject being largely ignored, otherwise only Jones provides an analysis of officer selection in this period and hers is more wide ranging than Partridge's). Whilst praising the teaching and facilities at the college, he makes little attempt to judge its success in producing officers. This is understandable given that, after leaving Osborne, cadets spent two years at Dartmouth before going to sea and over two years as midshipmen before commissioning; thus Osborne had a limited role in officer development. More seriously, Partridge makes no attempt to examine the educational origins of the Fisher-Selborne scheme or the philosophy of the college's academic staff.¹⁸²

This neglect of the cadet curriculum is a repeated flaw in naval historians' evaluation of officer education; all the more so given the prominence and importance of many of the educators involved and the pioneering curriculum they pursued. The daily lives and work of academic staff are generally neglected, although Pack's *Britannia at Dartmouth* is something of an exception.¹⁸³ Pack's lively and detailed account of life at the college between the world wars is given weight by his own service as a term officer. However personal experience has produced a rather positive bias and an account of limited outlook, making little attempt to link the college to the rest of the Navy. Even so, *Britannia at Dartmouth* is of great value to the historian as a window into college life. Much the same can be said of Hughes' *The Royal Naval College Dartmouth*, an earlier work produced by a master at the college and similar in style and content to Pack's work.¹⁸⁴

More recent work on Dartmouth by professional historians has tended to be more balanced than Pack's, notwithstanding the strong links of many of the

¹⁸² Partridge, *Osborne*

¹⁸³ SWC Pack, *Britannia at Dartmouth: The Story of HMS Britannia and the Britannia Royal Naval College* (London; Alvin Redman, 1966)

¹⁸⁴ EA Hughes, *The Royal Naval College Dartmouth* (London: Winchester Publications, 1950)

authors to the college. However, these histories tend to be somewhat formulaic, relying on the same sources to tell the same story to the same audience — primarily former students of the Colleges. Two good books of this type are available to the historian, those by Davies & Grove and Harrold & Porter, respectively produced to mark the seventy-fifth and hundredth anniversaries of the opening of Dartmouth Naval College. Haskins has produced a similar volume for Osborne.¹⁸⁵ These volumes all provide a useful insight into daily life of the colleges, and some information about their origins and development, but rather neglect the development and operation of their academic systems. Penn's history of HMS *Thunderer*, whilst again focusing on an institution of naval education, also provides a useful study of the history of engineer officer education in the Royal Navy.¹⁸⁶

A final flaw is a tendency to neglect the relationship of the colleges to the rest of the Navy. The lives of young officers in the fleet remain a generally neglected area — there is no serious academic study of the lives of midshipmen or seagoing cadets. Authors such as Pears combined fact with a degree of fiction.¹⁸⁷ Walker's study *Young Gentlemen* is not a particularly reliable guide to the history of the midshipman, but its chapters on the life of modern (1938) midshipmen are invaluable.¹⁸⁸ A more scholarly approach was adopted by Penn and Lewis making their work most useful.¹⁸⁹

There is, as yet, no series of novels providing such a complete picture of the early twentieth century as the adventures of Hornblower or Ramage provide for those interested in earlier periods. However, officer education is a reasonably popular subject for those novels that do exist, especially when written by naval officers. Probably the most famous is *The Gunroom* by Charles Morgan which was published in 1919. *The Sub*, published in 1917, offers a detailed, realistic, account of early career education in the early years of the

¹⁸⁵ Evan L Davies, Eric J Grove, *Dartmouth, Seventy-Five Years in Pictures* (Portsmouth: Gieves & Hawkes, 1980); Jane Harrold, Richard Porter, *Britannia Royal Naval College 1905-2005: A Century of Officer Training at Dartmouth* (Dartmouth: Richard Webb, 2005); G Haskins, *The School That Jack Built: The Royal Naval College, Osborne, 1903-1921* (Fleet: Hargate, 1999)

¹⁸⁶ Penn, *Thunderer*

¹⁸⁷ Randolph Pears, *Young Sea Dogs; Some Adventures of Midshipmen of the Fleet* (London: Putnam, 1966)

¹⁸⁸ Charles F Walker, *Young Gentlemen: The Story of Midshipmen from the XVIIIth Century to the Present Day* (London: Longman's, Green and Co, 1938)

¹⁸⁹ Geoffrey Penn, *Snotty: The Story of the Midshipman* (London: Hollis & Carter, [1957]); Michael A Lewis, *England's Sea-Officers: The Story of the Naval Profession* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1939)

Fisher-Selborne scheme although it is not the autobiography it claims to be – the author, Henry Taprell Dorling, having entered the Royal Navy in 1897.¹⁹⁰

Some officers chose to wait until later in life before transforming their experiences into fictional form. Gilbert Hackforth-Jones wrote prolifically and imaginatively, but the early chapters of *The Greatest Fool*, dealing with life at Osborne, doubtless owe much to personal experience. Although they appeared in print thirty-four years after the author entered the college, they are entirely in keeping with non-fictitious accounts of college life. *The Cradle of Neptune* was published in 1951, three years after *The Greatest Fool*, and considered life at Dartmouth in the mid thirties.¹⁹¹ Again it appears to be based on the experiences of the author (John Lodwick) and, like *The Greatest Fool*, is notable for the rather negative portrayal of the college and the disaffection of its cadet characters.

In contrast to the paucity of novels, there is a wealth of autobiographical material on the early twentieth century Royal Navy, albeit disproportionately the work of executive officers who enjoyed successful careers. The limitations of these sources are well documented; the problems of selective, limited, or false memory, the desire to present the subject in a certain light and the possibility of being written to an agenda. However psychological research, such as that conducted by Schacter, suggests that people best remember their late adolescence and that memories of events which stretched over long periods are substantially accurate.¹⁹²

Therefore the sections of autobiographies that deal with naval training are likely to be amongst the most accurate – especially as many authors are willing to discuss their youth with more freedom and honesty than their later career, youthful mistakes being less significant and more easily forgiven. On the other hand if the writers did not enjoy their experiences this is likely to be reflected in their accounts of life as a cadet and midshipman. Alternatively, officers who went on to successful careers may feel obliged to present the training they received in as positive a light as possible.

¹⁹⁰ C Morgan, *The Gunroom* (London: A.&C. Black, 1919; 2nd edn. London: Chatto & Windus, 1968); 'Taffrail', *The Sub: The Autobiography of David Munro Sub-Lieutenant RN* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1917)

¹⁹¹ Gilbert Hackforth-Jones, *The Greatest Fool* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1948; paperback edn. 1955); John Lodwick, *The Cradle of Neptune* (London: Heinemann, 1951)

¹⁹² Daniel L Schacter, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind and the Past* (New York: Basic, 1996)

Amongst the most useful autobiographies of inter-war officers are those produced by Courtney Anderson, Louis Le Bailly, Bob Whinney and Phillip Seymour. All discuss their early career education in considerable detail and reflect upon its impact upon their careers.¹⁹³ All of these officers enjoyed some success, Seymour chose to retire early at the age of thirty-four and Whinney retired as a commander but Le Bailly and Anderson reached flag rank. Given their success it is likely that all were inclined to write favourably about their formative naval experiences. Le Bailly's autobiography should be treated with extra caution, as he was and remained a staunch supporter of the engineer cause and is bitterly critical of the Royal Navy's treatment of its engineer officers.

It is not only naval historians who have failed to provide a full account of the Royal Naval colleges Osborne and Dartmouth. Despite there being some interest in the career of Charles Godfrey, and a great deal in the evolution of scientific education, this has not translated into a wealth of writing on the naval colleges. No consideration has been given to the education young officers received at sea. The net result is that the early career education of naval officers remains on the periphery of the educational history of Britain in the early twentieth century.

The most useful work on Godfrey's career has been done by Price and Howson.¹⁹⁴ Whilst the college curriculum was not widely copied, it greatly influenced teaching methods elsewhere and yet this influence has gone largely unremarked and uninvestigated. The careers of James Ewing and Cyril Ashford have been neglected – something of an omission given the impact of their naval work and the interest in Ewing's work as a crypto-analyst to say nothing of his great achievements in physics and engineering. The only biographer of a

¹⁹³ Courtney C Anderson, *Seagulls in my Belfry: The Very Personal Story of a Naval Career* (Edinburgh: Pentland, 1997); Louis Le Bailly, *The Man Around the Engine: Life Below The Waterline* (Emsworth: Kenneth Mason, 1990); Bob Whinney, *The U-Boat Peril: A Fight for Survival* (London: Blandford, 1986; repub.d London: Cassell, 1998); Phillip Seymour, *Where the Hell is Africa? Memoirs of a Junior Naval Officer in the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: Pentland, 1995)

¹⁹⁴ Michael H Price, 'The Perry Movement in School Mathematics' in *The Development of the Secondary Curriculum*, ed. by Michael H Price (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp.103-155; Geoffrey Howson, *A History of Mathematics Education in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Other works on curricular development in the period include Edward J Power, *Main Currents in the History of Education* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962); E Jenkins, 'Science for Professionals: Scientific Method and Secondary Education', in *Development of the Secondary Curriculum*, ed. by Michael J Price, pp.156-181

science educator to take a great interest in the colleges was Nye in her study of naval-officer-turned-physicist Patrick Blackett.¹⁹⁵

The educational systems at the colleges had their foundations in nineteenth century developments in education, most especially in the development of the public schools. As most naval officers in the early twentieth centuries either attended public schools, or probably would have done so had they not joined the Royal Navy at the age of thirteen, an understanding of these institutions is essential and reference to authors such as Wakeford and Krumpe is required.¹⁹⁶

The democratisation of the officer corps has also been neglected. The nature of the executive officer corps in the earliest part of the twentieth century is well understood, and authors such as Gordon and Jones have gone some way to explaining why it was so. However attempts at democratisation made in the inter-war period have generally been viewed as grudging gestures made by a reluctant Admiralty although there is some acknowledgement of the difficulties the service faced. Most recently, Bell has argued that the inter-war period was 'two decades of cautious and reluctant experimentation' in democratisation.¹⁹⁷ Studies of class mobility in the period have ignored the problem altogether.¹⁹⁸

There is a great deal of primary evidence available to the historian of the early twentieth century Royal Navy. The historian of naval education and democratisation is particularly well served with official documentation and contemporary publications, but suffers from a comparative lack of accounts by those actually involved.

One useful group of sources is the various editions of *How to Become a Naval Officer*. This was a semi-official recruiting document produced by the naval tailors Gieves. It laid the advantages of a naval career and included a wealth of detail on how to get into the Navy, the nature of officer education, and the structure of officer careers. Whereas numerous versions were produced for

¹⁹⁵ Mary J Nye, *Blackett: Physics, War and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2004)

¹⁹⁶ John Wakeford, *The Cloistered Elite: A Sociological Analysis of the English Public Boarding School* (London: Macmillan 1969); Elizabeth C Krumpe, *The Educational Ideas of the Clarendon Headmasters from 1860-1914* (London: Garland, 1987)

¹⁹⁷ Christopher M Bell, 'King's English', pp.695-716 (p.697); see also Partridge, *Osborne*, pp.10-

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¹⁹⁸ For example those by Perkin and McKibbin.

the Fisher-Selborne scheme, there was only one version for the Special Entry which was published in 1927.¹⁹⁹

There is an enormous amount of naval paperwork on the subject, most of it accessible (the glaring omission being personnel records). Historians may peruse the evidence gathered and the reports made by numerous committees into naval education and officer selection which are held by the National Archives. These papers are enriched by official and unofficial comment illustrating a variety of viewpoints (if not in such forthright terms as the authors may have desired). However, I have found the value of this material to be hindered by the tendency of discussions to be spread across several files, often in completely different series of documents, occasionally in a more or less random order.

The National Archives also house the papers of the Board of Education which often assisted the Admiralty in formulating policy and carried out inspections of the naval colleges. These papers are present in limited numbers, something of a disappointment given that those filing them took care to collect the material on each subject together and generally presented it in a logical order. Fragmentary evidence also comes from Treasury papers; generated when the Admiralty applied for funding for some scheme or another, these papers reveal little detail of the naval schemes but are a useful guide to the practical difficulties in implementing them!

Hansard is also a useful source on official policy via the Royal Navy's position being relayed to the Houses of Parliament. Hansard clearly displays the opinions of politicians on naval matters and also offers a glimpse of their constituent's views. Occasionally, it offers an insight into policy making absent from the Admiralty files in the National Archives. It is also a useful source of statistics many of which do not appear in naval documents. Political and public opinion can also be found in newspapers and other periodicals although they were not greatly concerned with the subject and one must be aware of editorial bias as well as inaccurate reporting.

¹⁹⁹ Eric W Bush, *How to Become a Naval Officer (Special Entry)* (London: Gieves, Matthews & Seagrove Ltd., 1927); Gieves, *How to Become a Naval Officer and Life at the Royal Naval Colleges at Osborne and Dartmouth* ([London]: Gieves, Matthews & Seagrove Ltd., 1907); Gieves, *How to Become a Naval Officer and Life at the Royal Naval College Dartmouth* (London: Gieves, Matthews & Seagrove Ltd., 1923); Gieves, *How to Become a Naval Officer and Life at the Royal Naval College Dartmouth* (London: Gieves, Matthews & Seagrove Ltd., 1924). Hereafter the various editions of the Fisher-Selborne scheme version are identified by their year of publication.

Objective opinions of naval officers themselves are rather harder to come by. Although substantial archives of personal documents are available, few contain letters or diaries addressing personal experiences of selection or education. Doubtless many such useful documents have been destroyed or are out of reach of the historian, lost and forgotten in attics or garden sheds. This is unfortunate given the great value of such documents in revealing private thoughts soon after the events to which they refer as well as the daily lives and concerns of their authors. The loss may not, however, be so great as imagined given that many of those letters and diaries that are available are devoted to sports results, examination marks, or accounts of places visited.

Some officers, or their families, left substantial collections of personal documents to various archives. The principal disadvantage of these collections is that material may have been removed before they were made publically available. Against this personal collections contain a wide variety of material – often a cadet career can be glimpsed through the eyes of the boy (and, to a limited extent, his parents) and through the eyes of a long-retired officer. Unfortunately, as with other first hand accounts, almost all the surviving material comes from men who completed their training and gained their commissions – the voices of those who failed, either as candidates or as young officers, are virtually absent.

Although many personal documents have evidently been lost substantial numbers of midshipmen's journals survive. Midshipmen were required to make daily entries in these diaries, recording the work of the ship and the nature of their instruction. Because the journals were regularly examined by senior officers, they tend to be quite impersonal and unemotional; as such they are of limited value in discerning the feelings and opinions of their authors. However I have found them to be an excellent source of information on daily life, including education, and the occasional comment betrays the true emotions of the writer. Throughout the period they were written and illustrated in much the same style; they can make monotonous reading but it is easy to pick out unusual elements in the experiences of individuals.

The Naval Review, a journal produced by naval officers to be read by naval officers, is another useful source. It was published four times a year throughout the inter-war period and consequently offers a large mass of source material. Articles were published anonymously in order to avoid censorship and

encourage the free circulation of ideas. However *The Naval Review* tended to be most attractive to the more radical officers in the Navy and so it cannot be taken as indicative of unanimous, or even majority, opinion on the part of the officer corps. Furthermore, it did not have complete freedom of publication and so certain viewpoints may have been repressed. For these reasons, it is most useful when considered in conjunction with other source material.

A final source of information and one that I have largely neglected is the officers themselves. A diminishing band of inter-war officers survive and they may offer much to the historian. I have neglected them owing to the difficulties in gathering testimony and the problems of memory associated with old age and the recollection of long distant events. This omission is regrettable, but I hope to have gathered sufficient information from other sources to compensate for any loss. Some physical reminders remain of their lives as young men; most of Osborne is long gone but Dartmouth is still training naval officers and, in some respects, seems little changed.

Given the source material available, it seems reasonable to attempt as full a consideration of the selection and early career education of executive branch officers as is possible within the confines of a one hundred thousand word thesis. I will consider the selection of cadets, both the methods used and the type of boys recruited. I will examine each stage of early career education in detail, considering their purpose and evolution. I will discuss the relationship between the naval and civilian education systems. I will aim to provide a thorough overview of how the Royal Navy developed its executive officers in the 1902-1939 period.

Chapter One – Officer Selection

The selection of potential officers was of critical importance to the Royal Navy in the 1903-1939 period. The success of the Navy rested largely upon its officers and it was therefore essential to choose the right men and boys. The problems of selection were great because few of the candidates were obviously entirely suited to being a naval officer – the Navy was generally picking from unproven youngsters with little, if any, nautical experience. There was also some debate as to how selection should best be accomplished. Furthermore the Royal Navy did not have an entirely free choice as to who was selected; in contrast to officer education, officer selection was subjected to numerous attempts at political interference.

In the period from 1903-1939, the Royal Navy was concerned with recruiting five separate groups of officers. The first were men with professional qualifications such as doctors. The second was those raised via the rank of warrant officer after many years of service. Both groups are outside the scope of this thesis. Instead I will concentrate on the twelve and thirteen year olds being recruited for the Fisher-Selborne scheme, the seventeen and eighteen year olds being recruited for the Special Entry and – to a lesser extent, on the men being promoted from the lower-deck via the Mate scheme who were in their twenties.

In selecting potential officers, the Royal Navy faced two problems. The first was that of identifying suitable candidates amongst those who applied. The second, and thornier, was that of who should be allowed to apply. Democratisation, the opening of entry to the officer corps to men who been denied access owing to their poverty or low social rank, was a key issue throughout the 1903-1939 period. The progress of democratisation was influenced on one hand by the willingness of the Navy to change, and the ability of politicians to make it, and on the other by supply and demand. The latter, hitherto largely overlooked by historians, was of critical importance – there could only be democratisation once there was a suitable supply of candidates and demand for more naval officers.

The democratisation of an officer corps, and the implementation of promotion by merit without social considerations, is viewed by some writers as an essential part of the professionalisation of a military force. Jacques Van

Doorn argues that the development of genuinely professional military forces requires the democratisation of the officer entry.¹ Morris Janowitz identifies the democratic entry and promotion of officers as one of the five defining characteristics of the modern professional military force.²

These authors were American and were concerned predominantly with American experiences. Fewer authors have discussed the social origins of British officers. The only detailed study of the formation of the professional officer corps of the Royal Navy is that by Gerke Teitler.³ He argues that professionalisation had occurred by the end of the eighteenth century. A corps of specialist naval officers had grown up in response to the construction of specialist warships.⁴ The specialist ships required specialist handling and tactics and thus a corps of specialist seamen.⁵ Gerke Teitler suggests that the upper class identity of the officer corps played an important role in enabling professionalisation to take place. The ability to dispense patronage gave captains a financial and social boost which sea service alone could not supply.⁶ The gradual exclusion of the poor and uneducated fostered a collective sense of identity amongst the officer corps.⁷

The officer corps of the RAF was also founded on a shared sense of upper class identity. Formed in 1918 it prided itself on a modern image and a disregard for military tradition.⁸ RAF officer recruitment brochures emphasised character over social background.⁹ However those interviewing candidates were most inclined to spot desirable characteristics in boys from the public schools.¹⁰ Furthermore the rumbustious social life for which the RAF was famous, and through which it built esprit de corps, was largely an adaptation of common public school behaviour.¹¹

¹ Jacques Van Doorn, *The Soldier and Social Change* (Beverly Hills CA: Sage, 1975) p.36

² Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1960) pp.8-12

³ A good analysis of the social backgrounds of naval officers in the 1960s is available Oscar Grusky, 'Career Patterns and Characteristics of British Naval Officers' *The British Journal of Sociology* 26 (March 1975) pp.35-51. The recently published Davison, *Challenges of Command* also contains relevant material.

⁴ Teitler, *Professional Officers*, p.62 and p.73

⁵ *ibid*, p.75

⁶ *ibid*, p.121

⁷ *ibid*, p.132

⁸ Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) pp.14-15

⁹ *ibid*, p.15

¹⁰ *ibid*, p.48

¹¹ *ibid*, p.34

The situation of the British Army was somewhat different given the separation between the different regiments which placed a greater or lesser importance on the backgrounds of their officers. In the years before the First World War, Army officers were more or less professionals. The British Army was the servant of the state and its officers had the skills of professional army officers and a distinctive identity. The purchase of commissions had been abolished in 1881.

However officers could not live on their pay alone and required a private income. Regiments took only the cadets they wanted from Sandhurst and family background was at least as important as professional skills.¹² Officers who lacked the required social graces were ostracised by their fellows. The major social pursuits of officers were those of the upper classes, and in particular the aristocracy, with a strong emphasis on equestrian pursuits.¹³

During the First World War the Army expanded enormously. Initially the expanded requirement for officers was met by commissioning huge numbers of public school products. Many of them had gained military experience through the OTC but the main attraction was the qualities of leadership, endurance, bravery and determination they were assumed to have learnt at school.¹⁴ The death rate amongst officers was so high that officer recruitment had to be expanded, initially to boys from minor public and grammar schools but ultimately to men who had only elementary educations but had proven their military worth.¹⁵

Even so, many regiments attempted to retain pre-war standards of officer behaviour, so that miners and fishermen dined in the grandest style possible in military billets and learnt to talk in as much of a public school fashion as they could manage.¹⁶ Thus it was clear that the professional identity of army officers was inextricably linked to upper class values, manners and interests. Little happened to change this identity in the inter-war period, the 'temporary

¹² Keith Simpson, 'The Officers', in *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War*, ed. by Ian Beckett and Keith Simpson (Manchester: Manchester University Press c1985), pp.63-98 (p.67)

¹³ Gary Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the era of the First World War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000) p.2

¹⁴ David French, *Raising Churchill's Army: The British Army and the War Against Germany, 1919-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p.50; Simpson, 'The Officers', p.65; Anthony Clayton, *The British Officer: Leading the British Army From 1660 to the Present* (Harlow: Longman, 2006) p.101

¹⁵ Simpson, 'The Officers', p.82; Lewis-Stempel, *Six Weeks*, pp.59-61

¹⁶ Simpson, 'The Officers', pp.84-88; Lewis-Stempel, *Six Weeks*, p.93 and p.135

gentlemen' returned to civilian life and a new generation of officers was recruited from the public schools.¹⁷

Overall it is clear that the officer corps of the British armed forces were professionalised before they were democratised. The selection of officers from a limited part of the population gave them a collective identity which provided a foundation for their shared military identity. Familial wealth enabled officers to withstand long periods of unpaid training or military unemployment. The high costs of officership also served to exclude the poor and so distanced the officers from the ranks.

In selecting potential officers, the Royal Navy was looking for embryonic officer-like qualities. Thus the selection process needed to investigate traits such as bravery, determination, leadership skills, initiative, honesty and integrity, a keen and genuine interest in the service, intelligence – in particular the ability to master the officer training syllabus – common sense, self-confidence, physical fitness, and a pleasant personality. There was also the thorny issue of whether or not the candidate was a gentleman.

These qualities were easier to identify in some candidates than in others. The Fisher-Selborne scheme was particularly problematic as there was no guarantee that a boy who was suitable at the age of twelve would still be suitable when he was twenty-one. Conversely a slow developing boy might appear unsuitable at twelve but be an excellent candidate a few years later. Special Entry candidates were easier to analyse – their adult personalities were closer to being fully formed and they had been given some opportunity to prove themselves in and out of the classroom. Ratings were older still; but their experiences in the service might have led to certain qualities being repressed or over-emphasised.

Throughout the period the question of democratisation was divided in two – promotion from the lower-deck and the widening of the cadet entry; I have chosen to concentrate on the latter. The two means of democratisation attracted different supporters and were generally considered separately by the naval authorities.

Whereas demand for the widening of the cadet entry came primarily from outside the service, the demand for promotion from the lower-deck came mostly

¹⁷ Jeremy Crang, *The British Army and the People's War 1939-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, c2000) p.21; Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, p.30

from the ratings themselves. From the mid nineteenth century onwards naval ratings began to combine into societies which existed primarily to provide death benefits for the widows and children of their members (only the families of men killed in action were supported by the state). These organisations had a subsidiary role of campaigning for improved conditions, which the men themselves were barred from doing.

From 1898 onwards the interests of ratings were increasingly represented by Lionel Yexley, a retired petty officer, who published *The Bluejacket* and later *The Fleet* which campaigned for improvements in conditions. At the same time the political muscle of the lower-deck began to be exercised, men using their votes in support of candidates who promised to campaign on their behalf.¹⁸

The reform movement enjoyed the support of Fisher and Churchill. In the years leading up to the First World War improvements were made in victualling, the cost to men of maintaining their uniforms reduced, pay raised, and punishments modified. Two avenues of promotion were opened up: in 1903 from chief warrant officer to lieutenant, and in 1912 from able seaman to mate (the equivalent of sub-lieutenant).¹⁹

Because it had been achieved through the efforts of agitators such as Yexley, promotion from the lower-deck was inextricably linked with the other demands made by reformers. In the years following the First World War this became something of a handicap – the increasing links between the friendly societies and trade unions made the Admiralty suspicious of them and their demands. Ratings who called for reform were dismissed from the Navy, access to the civilian political process was restricted, and an official system of airing grievances introduced.²⁰

The association of lower-deck promotion with lower-deck revolt went beyond the means through which it might be achieved. If widespread promotions were to be introduced the social structure of the service would be challenged. There had gradually developed a great division between the officers and ratings, extending beyond duties and responsibilities into what men wore, where they lived and what they were paid. The superior status of some ratings was recognised by their leading a more officer like existence – a uniform which

¹⁸ Carew, *Lower-Deck*, pp.1-16

¹⁹ Carew, *Lower-Deck*, pp.17-61, Wells, *Royal Navy*, pp.84-89

²⁰ Carew, *Lower-Deck*, pp.100-142, Wells, *Royal Navy*, pp.129-130

resembled that of an officer, enhanced living facilities, and relief from menial tasks.

Relations between the different ranks were generally harmonious, and if nothing else people knew their position in the hierarchy – this harmony and stability would have been undermined by the mass movement of men from the mess deck to the wardroom. Officers promoted from the ranks were said to have come ‘through the hawsehole’ which implied that they had come aboard in the same manner as rats and mud.²¹ In contrast, the democratisation of the cadet entry primarily threatened only the cohesion of the officer corps. Regardless of their background cadets began their careers as prospective officers and were afforded the appropriate chattels and moulded in the appropriate fashion.

One of the promises made by Fisher was that his new scheme of entering and training officers would mean a complete change in the way potential officers were selected. In the course of the nineteenth century a system had developed whereby nominated candidates were entered into the Royal Navy after passing an interview and academic and medical examinations. It was entirely unremarkable that naval cadets should be selected in this way. Nomination was the preferred way of filling all Civil Service vacancies and the introduction of the Civil Service entrance examinations in the later part of the nineteenth century legitimised rather than destroyed the existing system.²²

The hurdles facing the potential officer grew during the nineteenth century. The power of captains to enter whom they pleased was gradually eroded to the point of disappearance. In 1837, a minimum age of twelve was set (in 1849 an upper limit of fourteen was imposed), candidates were also required to be healthy and ‘able to write English from dictation and acquainted with the first four rules of arithmetic, reduction and the Rule of Three’. Standards continued to vary – mid-century tales tell of potential cadets facing a variety of tests included drinking sherry, jumping over chairs, writing out the Lords Prayer and knowing the capital of Madagascar.²³

²¹ The hawsehole is the opening in the bow of the ship through which the anchor cables pass. Henry Capper, instrumental in achieving commissioning opportunities for warrant officers, called his autobiography *Aft Through the Hawsehole*.

²² Bourne, *Patronage and Society*, p.23

²³ Whilst these tales are of dubious authenticity they have been widely quoted by historians including Jones, *Officer Corps*, p.70 and Dickinson, *Educating*, p.64.

In 1855 a number of changes were made which served to regularise the entry process. Candidates were now to be fourteen or fifteen years old. Apart from English and mathematics they were also examined in geography and foreign languages, and interviewed to assess their suitability.²⁴ In 1869 the rules were changed again. There were now two nominated candidates for each place and a competitive examination with the top half of the candidates gaining admission. The new entrance examination included Latin, French, and a third foreign language.²⁵ The imposition of these examinations, along with the introduction of cadet fees of £70 per annum, served to exclude all but the richest from the officer corps of the Royal Navy.

The entry of engineering cadets was an entirely separate business, the first scheme for doing so being published in 1837. In 1863 it was decided that candidates needed to be fifteen years old and should sit examinations covering English, geography, French, and various branches of mathematics including geometry, arithmetic, algebra, and quadratic equations. The so called 'Engineer Students', were not actually in the Navy; they worked in the dockyards, were educated by the dockyard schools, wore no uniform and, outside working hours, lived as civilians.

There was a shortage of candidates and the life of a naval engineer was particularly unattractive to the upper classes with their disdain for manual work. The position of the naval engineer was, therefore, significantly improved by the introduction of the artificer rating in 1868 – the provision of such skilled men relieved the engineering officers of much of the dirty work of their department. Even so in 1875 the Cooper-Key Committee noted that the majority of engineering officers were the sons of seamen, marines, or dockyard workmen.

As the future of naval engineering officers most certainly lay in the wardroom it was considered desirable to attract boys from the higher social classes and to educate them separately from their future subordinates. In 1876 it was decided that candidates, aged fifteen or sixteen, would take the Civil Service examinations available at various centres around the country. This not only widened the geographical background of the candidates, but made the profession appear respectable – the higher grades of the Civil Service were entirely socially acceptable occupations, and the examinations were already

²⁴ Dickinson, *Educating*, p.64

²⁵ *ibid*, p.104

used to select Army officer cadets. In the same year training moved aboard the battleship *Marlborough*, and the following year students were put into naval uniform. These measures moved their position closer to that of the cadets in *Britannia*, although they were still clearly differentiated by their doing a great deal of manual work.²⁶ This difference, along with the lower status of engineers within the service, meant that the higher echelons of society remained reluctant to enter their sons into the branch.

Fisher himself wished to secure the best boys for the service, regardless of class or parental wealth, he wrote: 'do not exclude for poverty alone, either at the outset or afterwards. Let every fit boy have a chance'.²⁷ This desire owed little to democratic sentiment and much to a desire to improve the efficiency of the service, Fisher later wrote that entry to the officer corps of the Royal Navy was limited to 1/40th of the population and what it needed was the brains of the other 39/40ths.²⁸

He also wished for the officer corps to be comprised of men of similar outlook, sympathetic to each other and able to live harmoniously. This he hoped to achieve by recruiting all officers from the same class, which in turn meant doing away with the existing relatively democratic engineer entry.²⁹ This plan had the support of both the Prince of Wales and Lord Selborne.³⁰ Selborne was particularly concerned by the demands of the engineers for improved status, and feared their entering into an alliance with the trade unions.³¹ Thus although Fisher's own views were essentially democratic he thought it more important that the Navy's officers should be in harmony with one another and he was, in any case, obliged to rely on the support of men who had no wish to see the officer corps democratised. There was thus a need to create systems for cadet entry that considered background as well as mental and physical fitness.

²⁶ Penn, *Thunderer*, pp.11-54

²⁷ CCA FISR 3/6 The Papers of 1st Lord Fisher of Kilverstone, Memorandum 'State Education in the Navy', un-dated, pp.1-3

²⁸ Letter from the First Sea Lord (Admiral Sir John A Fisher) to the First Lord (Winston Churchill) 5 March 1912, *Fear God and Dread Nought – The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone*, ed. by Arthur J Marder, 3 vols (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953-59), II (1956), pp.435-440 (p.437)

²⁹ Editorial comment by Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought – The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone*, ed. by Arthur J Marder, 3 vols (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953-59), I (1953), p.245

³⁰ Letter from the Prince of Wales to Fisher 18 November 1902, *ibid*, pp.266-267

³¹ Letter from Selborne to the First Sea Lord (Admiral Sir Walter T Kerr) 2 May 1901, Boyce, *British Power*, pp.119-20; Selborne's memorandum for the Board of Admiralty 'Position of Naval Engineers' 25 February 1902, *ibid*, pp.139-141

Entry of Fisher-Selborne and Special Entry Cadets

Under the terms of the Fisher-Selborne scheme candidates, aged twelve, were faced by three hurdles – a competitive interview followed by a qualifying examination and medical testing. An application could be made on behalf of any boy but he could not be interviewed without a nomination from the First Lord – who thus screened all applicants for social acceptability. No attempt was made to disguise this; the families of suitable applicants received a letter informing them that the First Lord had selected them for a nomination. An element of naval patronage was retained, with Admiralty Board members, flag officers, and captains all having the right to recommend candidates.³²

It is clear that although the Fisher-Selborne scheme was intended to widen entry to the naval officer corps, (by opening it to boys who would not previously have been able to secure nominations), it was not an attempt to democratise it. The cost of supporting a boy as cadet and midshipman meant that entry was limited to the wealthier members of society. Nominated candidates were to be interviewed by a board comprised of senior naval officers and educational experts, which at least helped to ensure that candidates were selected on their merits as gentlemen and potential leaders rather than through influence as had previously been the case.

In fact the interview was a late addition to the scheme. It had been intended that selection would be entirely in the hands of the First Lord with his power in the matter being balanced by his being directly responsible to parliament and thus the nation.³³ Under parliamentary pressure, Selborne appointed a committee of Fisher, Commander Hyde-Parker of HMS *Britannia*, Cyril Ashford the Headmaster of Osborne Naval College and his own assistant private secretary (Vincent Baddeley) to discuss the entry process. They opted to interview all those who appeared suitable and found that, despite their generally differing views, they were able to quickly reach a consensus on each candidate.³⁴ The selection committee was thus judged a success and remained in place; throughout the life of the scheme potential cadets were selected by an interview panel composed of naval officers, civilian education experts (normally public school headmasters), and Admiralty civil servants.

³² Gieves, *Naval Officer* (1907), p.9

³³ Hansard HL Deb (4th series) 8 May 1903 c.187

³⁴ Hansard HL Deb (4th series) 6 July 1903 cc.1357-1358

This is not to say that the interviewers had an easy task – in fact their work was extremely difficult, the true character and intelligence of twelve year olds being hard to discern. Courtney Anderson later unearthed a note written by an early committee member. This man felt that the role of the committee was to ascertain whether the boy was a) a gentleman, b) a sharp and intelligent one, c) if he is observant and enthusiastic, d) if enthusiastic and keen about the Navy and patriotic, e) if fond of manly sports, f) what his relatives and ancestors have been. On second thoughts, f had been crossed out, the interviewer perhaps feeling that to be invited for interview meant that one was a gentleman and that the profession of a father was not always proof of his class – engineers, paymasters, and clergy being drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds.³⁵

Ultimately the committee member decided that questions on eating habits and the appropriateness of serving certain sauces with various foods were a good test of gentlemanly qualities. This suggests that he thought it important that the boys selected for the scheme should be socially compatible with the officers already in the service.

The interviewers were aided by a form completed by the candidate's headmaster. The original form had twelve questions and enquired about the progress and potential capabilities of the boy and his conduct. Headmasters were to report on the boy's suitability, his skill in foreign languages and practical mechanics, and his keenness in work and play. The Admiralty also wished to know if the boy had influence over his peers and if so what kind, if he was physically strong and active, if he was 'frank truthful and obedient' and 'have you detected in him any offence against morals'. Finally, the headmaster was asked if the boy had received extra or special tuition in preparation for his naval candidature. In 1912 the form was slightly modified with headmasters being asked to compare candidates with those from their school on that or any previous occasion.³⁶

The minimum age for entry into Osborne had originally been set at twelve and a half. In 1906 it was raised to twelve years and nine or ten months, and in 1913 it was raised again to thirteen years and four to eight months. This brought the colleges into line with the normal age for boys go to public school

³⁵ Anderson, *Seagulls*, p.198

³⁶ TNA ADM 116/1288 Vol 1 First Report of the Committee 'Appointed to Enquire into the Training of Cadets, Midshipmen and Junior Officers of his Majesty's fleet and Cognate Subjects' (Custance Committee) 18 May 1912, enclosures 6 and 6a, pp.64-65

and so suited the prep schools better. Prep school headmasters were able to give a more accurate opinion of older boys who had more influence in the school than their younger fellows and were more likely to have occupied a position of responsibility.

The candidates who did best in the interview would enter the Royal Navy provided they passed the qualifying examination and medical tests. To make the examination qualifying rather than competitive served two purposes. Firstly it favoured boys who, although less academic, were perceived to be good leaders or who had other desirable qualities. Secondly, it was hoped to dramatically reduce 'cramming', the process by which candidates suffered an intensive spell of study in preparation for examinations. Cramming was detested (Fisher was a particularly strong opponent) for it exhausted and soured boys, many of whom took a long time to recover. It was among the most disliked aspects of the previous system of entry.³⁷ The new scheme appears to have been successful in this respect as no boys from crammers were among the initial candidates. This may be due to the earlier age of entry – potential candidates had not yet been sent to crammers. Alternatively one may accept Jones' explanation, that certain schools may have conducted a hasty rebranding exercise.³⁸

The subjects included in the examinations balanced the normal curricula of contemporary prep schools against the specific demands of the naval curriculum. They were English, history and geography (with special reference to the British Empire), arithmetic and algebra, geometry, Latin, and French or German. There was no attempt to make the examination suitable for boys who had been educated by the state, and this made the undemocratic nature of the scheme plainly obvious.

Jones provides data on candidates from 1860-1880, 1903 and 1905. In the early period, 28.5% of candidates had fathers in the Army, 20.5% in the Church, 15.1% in the Royal Navy, 13.5% of independent means, 7.1% in commerce and 0.9% had fathers who were engineers.³⁹ By 1903 these figures had radically altered: 25.6% were in commerce, 16.7% in the Army, 14.4% of independent means, 10% in the Royal Navy, 7.8% in the Church and 5.6% engineers. The 1905 figures are not dissimilar to those for 1903 – commerce

³⁷ Partridge, *Osborne*, p.52; Fisher, *Memories*, p.123

³⁸ Jones, *Officer Corps*, p.37

³⁹ *ibid*, p.47

24.7%, Army 16.2%, Navy 14.3%, independent 10.4, engineers 5.3 and Church 3.9%.⁴⁰

This suggests that the Royal Navy had succeeded in attracting the desired type of boy. All the fathers' professions offered some claim to gentlemanly status; although income and prestige varied considerably there were no sons of manual workers, servants or shop assistants. The interview process appears to have been fair to candidates from all backgrounds. Jones provides figures which show that the proportion of those appointed cadet from each background in 1905 was generally more or less equal to the proportion of candidates. The occupation groups with a difference over 2% are Army (16.2% of applicants but 27.8% of cadets), Civil Service (3.9% of candidates, 11.1% of cadets), commerce (24.7% of candidates, 11.1% of cadets), and legal (7.8% of candidates, 5.6% of cadets).⁴¹

For the Special Entry scheme, introduced in 1913, a revised system was adopted. The naval authorities opted to make the Special Entry selection process more or less the opposite of that for the Fisher-Selborne scheme. It consisted of competitive examinations followed by a qualifying interview, with a view to eliminating weak candidates as early as possible and securing those most likely to meet the academic demands of the service.

The Admiralty opted to make use of the Civil Service examinations already used by the Army to select officer cadets.⁴² This decision had several great advantages. Firstly, the Navy was spared the difficulty and expense of constructing and maintaining a suitable system of testing. Secondly the Civil Service examinations could be taken at centres all over the country. This, combined with the relative lack of special preparation needed, promised to make the Special Entry attractive to both boys and their schools; especially as candidates needed only to take the examinations once to be considered by both services.⁴³ In particular, it offered the prospect of tapping into the so called 'Army sides' of many public schools.

⁴⁰ *ibid*, pp.60-61

⁴¹ *ibid*, p.63

⁴² TNA ADM 1/8342 Letter from Secretary of the Civil Service Commission (David Main) to Ewing 23 January 1913, Ewing had visited the Civil Service Commission on the previous day to discuss the proposal, the origins of which are unclear.

⁴³ TNA ADM 1/8342 'Regulations for Naval Cadets (Special Entry)' minutes of meeting held at the Admiralty 8 March 1913

From the mid nineteenth century onwards, most public schools divided their pupils between a classical side, focussed on Greek and Latin, and a modern side focussed on English and history.⁴⁴ Following the introduction of the Civil Service examinations for army officer cadetships in 1870 some schools, most prominently Cheltenham and Wellington, developed specialist Army sides focussed on preparing candidates for these examinations and requiring them to participate in the Officer Training Corps (OTC).⁴⁵ Candidates with this educational and military background were clearly desirable, as were those from the science and engineering sides at schools such as Clifton and Oundle.

The cost to parents of supporting a Special Entry cadet through his training was lower than that for a Fisher-Selborne scheme cadet but the scheme was not intended to democratise the officer corps – the vast majority were expected to be recruited from fee paying schools. In any case few parents could afford to support their sons beyond the age of eighteen. Far from seeing the scheme as an opportunity to widen the social base of the officer corps the Royal Navy was anxious to secure the products of famous public schools.⁴⁶

The 58 candidates for the first Special Entry in 1913 were drawn from much the same background as those applying for Osborne; 17 fathers had commercial backgrounds, 6 were in the Army and 2 in the Royal Navy (they were a vice-admiral and a rear-admiral), 5 were involved in the law and 7 employed by the government in a wide variety of roles. The remaining 20 candidates included the sons of 5 doctors, 3 clergymen and 2 university professors. Although thirty to forty of the candidates were from well known schools (or at any rate schools the interviewers considered to be well known), none came from Eton, Harrow, Winchester or Rugby which were considered the top schools by the Admiralty.⁴⁷

The Civil Service examination for Special Entry candidates carried a maximum mark of 16200 allocated as follows – English 2000, history and geography 2000, French, German, or Latin 2000, elementary mathematics 2000, intermediate mathematics 2000 (candidates must score 600 to gain

⁴⁴ Bamford, *Public Schools*, pp.87-92; Krumpke, *Clarendon Headmasters*, pp.91-123

⁴⁵ Otley, *Militarism and Militarization*, pp.329-330

⁴⁶ TNA ADM 116/6354 contains reports from the first two interview boards both of which comment on the number of candidates from top public schools showing the matter was clearly of importance. (Report of the first interview committee 7 May 1913; report of second interview committee un-dated)

⁴⁷ TNA ADM 116/6354 Report of the first interview committee 7 May 1913

entrance), optional higher mathematics 2000, physics and chemistry 2000, optional English paper 2000. Holders of Certificate A, an examination taken by OTC members which was designed as a test of military proficiency and leadership ability, received 200 bonus marks. The minimum acceptable total mark was 5600 although, as the examination was competitive, it was hoped that those who were successful would score far higher.⁴⁸

By 1924 the system of selection for the Special Entry had been changed. The exact timing of these changes is unknown and it is unclear what prompted them although the School Certificate may have been a factor – the new rules required candidates to have passed the certificate or an equivalent qualification. Candidates were now marked out of 1750 and the interview mark was included within this. The examination was divided into two parts. All subjects in Part I were compulsory – they were English worth 150 marks, general knowledge also worth 150, interview and record worth 400 and a modern language or British history since 1714 worth 100. Part II was comprised of optional subjects. There were compulsory papers in lower mathematics and physics and chemistry, both worth 300 marks – to secure entry candidates had to achieve a certain mark but were not told what it was. They then chose a further paper also worth 300 marks from a choice of French, German, Latin, Greek, higher mathematics, modern history and biology.

Candidates could not take history in both parts I and II or take the same language twice. Part I offered a wider range of modern languages than Part II, in addition to French or German, candidates could opt to be examined in Italian, Spanish, Russian, Arabic or Urdu.⁴⁹ Finally papers in freehand or geometric drawing could be taken, both being worth 50 marks. No science subject could be taken unless a candidate could prove they were competent in a laboratory environment (such confirmation being sought from their school, unless the reputation of the school was such that competency could be assumed). Points could be deducted for poor handwriting, or where a candidate's knowledge of a subject was deemed superficial – a measure designed to defeat cramming.

The examinations taken by Special Entry candidates had changed in a variety of ways. The range of subjects available increased noticeably, reflecting

⁴⁸ TNA CSC 5/63 'Special Entry of Naval Cadets' pamphlet attached to Admiralty Letter CE from the Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir William Graham Greene) to the Secretary of the Civil Service Commission 10 March 1913

⁴⁹ The inclusion of Urdu reflected the fact that some who passed the examinations would be serving in Indian Army regiments.

not only the increasingly diverse curricula of public schools but also the willingness of the Royal Navy to accept a wider variety of candidates – its acceptance that supply officers did not require expertise in science and engineering, and its growing desire for skilled communicators and potential staff officers. The increasing separation of the engineering and executive branches also made this change more palatable. The backgrounds of those becoming naval officers was also beginning to change as the campaign for democratisation gathered force.

Democratisation

The appointment of Winston Churchill as First Lord in 1912 turned out to be a major boon for pro democratisation campaigners. Churchill was heavily influenced by Fisher and Yexley. Yexley was particularly critical of the lack of opportunities for talented young ratings to gain commissions and, with Fisher's help, succeeded in converting Churchill to his cause. The result was the Mate scheme introduced in 1912, giving men under twenty-six the chance to gain commissions.

It had numerous faults – the ex-ratings were given the rank of mate rather than sub-lieutenant, thus differentiating them from ex-cadets, and marking them as inferior; and because they did not become lieutenants before they were twenty-eight they had no hope of promotion above commander. Men were unlikely to be selected unless they were both unmarried and teetotal. Potential candidates received little encouragement or assistance. Carew describes the scheme as 'deliberately sabotaged'; certainly more could have been achieved in the short term given the increasing demand for officers and the prevalence of experienced ratings.⁵⁰

The democratisation of the Royal Navy's officer corps did not become a prominent issue until well into the inter-war period, but by the end of the First World War various fee reduction schemes had been put in place – slightly widening the entry and enabling young officers whose families had become impoverished to remain in the service. Although there were those who advocated a greater degree of democratisation, their efforts were thwarted by

⁵⁰ Carew, *Lower-Deck*, pp.47-53 (p.52); Hansard HC Deb (5th series) 18 March 1912 cc.1569-1750; Hansard HC Deb (5th series) 7 April 1913 c.826

the Treasury and by those who felt that the Royal Navy was not responsible for the finances of its officers.

By 1911 most parents were paying fees of £75 a year for their sons to attend Osborne or Dartmouth. Reduced fees of £40 per year were available only to the sons of naval officers, army officers, and Admiralty civil servants – approximately 5% of the current cadet body benefited from this concession. Imposing fees at this level meant that officer entry to the Royal Navy was effectively closed to civilian parents with an income under £600 per year. This limitation was of sufficiently widespread concern for the matter to have been raised in Parliament but, although sympathetic, the Admiralty was powerless to act. The Admiralty wished to extend the reduced fees to all candidates, but with a maximum of 10% of the cadet body in receipt of such a concession, the additional cost of doing this was estimated at £1085 a year.⁵¹

The Treasury refused to extend the reduced fees, arguing that, as the quantity and quality of the cadets already serving was sufficient, fee reductions were unnecessary.⁵² Instead, it argued that £75 was too little and a fee of £84-100 would be more realistic given the high running costs of the colleges and quality of their teaching staff.⁵³ It seems that the Treasury was concerned not with the democratisation of the officer corps but with the extent to which the state was subsidising the education of the sons of the wealthy.

Had the Treasury acquiesced, the Admiralty scheme would probably have been of little impact – only 27% of those eligible held reduced fee places, suggesting that their parents could afford the £75 a year fees.⁵⁴ It is unclear how well publicised the fee reductions were although they are mentioned in the 1907 edition of *How to Become a Naval Officer*.⁵⁵ Widening access to the reduced fees would not have brought in many boys from poorer backgrounds as even fees of £40 would have limited entry to boys from moderately wealthy families given the need for expensive uniforms, the payment of a personal allowance, and the requirement to support the boy until the age of twenty-one.

⁵¹ TNA T 1/11326, Treasury File 17734 Admiralty letter CE from the Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir Charles Thomas) to the Secretary of the Treasury (Sir Robert Chalmers) 22 September 1911

⁵² TNA T 1/11326, Treasury letter 17743/11 from Chalmers to Thomas 5 October 1911

⁵³ TNA T 1/11326, Treasury internal discussion, comments of 'RAC' (presumably Chalmers) 25 September 1911 and illegible author 3 October 1911

⁵⁴ TNA T 1/11326 Letter from Thomas to Chalmers 22 September 1911

⁵⁵ Gieves, *Naval Officer* (1907), pp.14-15

The number of cadets taking up reduced fee places did not increase. For example amongst the 61 new entries of January 1914 only 15 were paying the reduced rate. Over the history of the scheme of reduced fees, only 7% of those eligible had benefited.⁵⁶ By 1913 the size of each term had increased but the number of candidates had not; in April it was reported there were 200 candidates for 75 places, and that the main factor in limiting candidate numbers was felt to be the cost of a cadet's education.⁵⁷ To address the shortage of candidates the Admiralty proposed to lower the standard fee to £50 a year. The Treasury refused to allow this concession but did agree to extend the £40 a year fees to all poor cadets, irrespective of their parentage.⁵⁸

Relief was granted to parents solely on financial grounds. The poorest cadets in each term received the greatest fee reductions, irrespective of their place in the term or promise as an officer. This was a remarkably egalitarian system, most public schools gave the largest scholarship to the highest placed candidate – irrespective of his familial income. However the new system still did nothing to benefit boys from working, or lower middle, class families for whom the expense remained far too great.

Once a boy had joined the Royal Navy financial concessions might be made to allow him to remain should the circumstances of his family change unexpectedly. There were sound economic reasons for this – in 1914 it was calculated that the education of a cadet cost his parents £560 and the country £500. Once he reached the rank of midshipman it was cheaper to continue his education at no cost to his parents than it was to replace him.⁵⁹ In July 1914 the Treasury was forced to concede that, in exceptional and unforeseen circumstances, it would meet the full cost of a young officer's education.⁶⁰

This decision owed something to political considerations. Winston Churchill, wrote to a Treasury minister reminding him that the pressure to democratise the officer corps of the Royal Navy would not be alleviated by ending the careers of midshipmen whose families could no longer support them.

⁵⁶ TNA T 1/11948, Treasury File 2049, Admiralty letter CE.11331 from the Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir William Graham Greene) to the joint Secretary of the Treasury (Sir John Bradbury) 28 January 1914.

⁵⁷ TNA T 1/11948, Treasury File 8510, Admiralty letter CE.12584 from Graham Greene to Bradbury 22 April 1913

⁵⁸ TNA T 1/11948, Treasury File 17894, Treasury letter 17894/13 from the joint Secretary of the Treasury (Sir Thomas Heath) to Graham Greene 25 September 1913

⁵⁹ TNA ADM 1/8402/422, CW.8998/14 Memorandum prepared for the First Lord 22 May 1914

⁶⁰ *ibid*, Letter from the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, (Sir Edwin Montagu) to the First Lord (Winston Churchill) 17 July 1914.

Churchill provided a driving force for democratisation, noting that: ‘Democratic England still preserves even at a heavy financial loss, the poverty bar’. This situation compared unfavourably with Germany where the Kaiser’s Fund supported the sons of state servants.⁶¹

Despite this concession there was no question that boys whose families had no hope of paying their fees would be allowed to enter Osborne.⁶² This policy already applied to commissioned officers who had fallen into debt. At no stage of his career, once expected to support himself, would a Royal Navy officer receive financial assistance from the state.⁶³

The fees and allowances paid by cadet parents were clearly understood to be supporting their sons in their careers as students, rather than as naval officers. When the Dartmouth cadets were sent to sea in 1914 their parents were no longer charged fees – their sons were doing the work of midshipmen in the fleet and were treated as such. In July 1917 the importance of cadets serving in the wartime fleet was further recognised when the requirement for parents to provide a £50 annual allowance for their sons was waived.⁶⁴

By 1916 fees at the cadet colleges had increased to £110 a year and action was clearly necessary to alleviate financial distress amongst current and future cadets, especially as many families had been impoverished by the death of the main earner. The Army already had a scheme for supporting the sons of deceased officers and the introduction of such a scheme in the Royal Navy was supported by the Treasury. The result was the introduction of King’s Cadetships, scholarships covering the cost of cadet uniforms, fees and allowances – a total of £648 of the estimated £700 cost of supporting a cadet. A maximum of 100 cadets could hold Kings’ Cadetships, which could be allocated at any time in a cadet’s career.⁶⁵ Although limited to officers’ sons whose fathers had been killed or disabled on active service, the King’s Cadetships did provide for a small number of boys from impoverished families to become naval officers.

⁶¹ *ibid*, Letter from Churchill to Montagu 6 July 1914

⁶² *ibid*, Letter from Montagu to Churchill 17 July 1914

⁶³ *ibid*, Letter from Montagu to Churchill 17 July 1914

⁶⁴ Hansard HC Deb (5th series) 11 July 1917 c.1887

⁶⁵ TNA T 1/11948, Treasury File 16062, Admiralty letter CE.45124/16 from the Private Secretary to the First Lord (Sir Vincent Baddeley) to the joint Secretary of the Treasury (Sir Thomas Heath) 17 June 1916; Treasury letter 16062/16 from Heath to Baddeley 3 July 1916.

The Admiralty's fight for financial support for cadets illustrates a number of issues that recurred throughout the inter-war period. The cost of supporting a young officer was beyond most parents and so many capable boys had no hope of becoming naval officers. Whilst the Admiralty appears to have been willing to accept cadets from a wider variety of backgrounds any attempt to do so was thwarted by the Treasury, which felt that cadet education was already costing the country too much. Where relief was available, it was generally confined to the sons of military officers, clearly indicating the desirability of officer recruits from military backgrounds as well as the Royal Navy's determination to look after its own.

The fast expanding wartime fleet required enormous numbers of officers, the vast majority of whom were recruited through existing sources and given permanent commissions. Osborne terms had typically entered with 70-80 cadets but in 1914 this increased to over 100, peaking at 122 in January 1915.⁶⁶ By the end of the war 371 seamen ratings and 161 ERAs had become lieutenants.⁶⁷ In 1917 a second annual entry of Special Entries was introduced.

In the 1920s the fleet shrank, first in response to peace and then in response to international treaty and Treasury parsimony. Consequently the period was characterised by mass redundancies of officers. A 1919 report declared a surplus of 95 captains, 189 commanders, 283 lieutenant-commanders and lieutenants, and 1000 officers of more junior rank. In April 1920, 407 officers of varying rank were voluntarily discharged. In 1925 around 200 lieutenants resigned while a further 350 were selected to leave, followed in 1926 and 1929 by reductions in the number of lieutenant-commanders.⁶⁸

The reduced strength of the officer corps meant that far fewer new officers were needed, consequently recruitment through all channels was dramatically scaled back. This in turn retarded the progress of democratisation – not only was there no need to exploit new sources of officers, there was also a desire to retain the loyalty of the existing sources so as to ensure a continuing supply of good quality material.

In spite of the myriad difficulties (not least impoverishment) facing navy and nation, the prospect of democratising the officer corps arose in 1918. That it

⁶⁶ Partridge, *Osborne*, p.22

⁶⁷ Carew, *Lower-Deck*, p.52

⁶⁸ Roskill, *Naval Policy I*, pp.124-125. At least seven cadets axed from Dartmouth subsequently re-entered the Royal Navy via the Special Entry, Beattie, *Churchill Scheme*, p.38

did was not entirely surprising given the prospects for change that peace seemed to offer. The war had created a climate in which the stranglehold of the traditional elite over positions of power could be questioned and in which some concession to the masses might be made in the interests of deterring communism.⁶⁹ In 1919 the Admiralty received reports from two separate committees appointed to consider the possibilities for democratisation – the Anderson Committee to investigate the fees paid by cadets' parents, and the Ricardo Committee to consider promotion from the lower-deck.

The Anderson Committee was headed by Sir Alan Anderson, a civil servant, and contained representatives of all three services. The committee was appointed in September 1918 and was tasked with investigating whether the costs of supporting a cadet deterred many suitable candidates and, if so, with suggesting affordable steps to alleviate the situation.

The committee decided that suitable candidates were coming forward in large enough numbers – Osborne attracted on average 2.2 candidates for every place, far greater than Woolwich and Sandhurst which averaged only 1.6, despite giving candidates a window of one year to apply in comparison to Osborne's four months. Although an increase in candidates was desirable, a large increase in numbers would necessitate the entrance examinations being held before the interview and cramming would inevitably occur. The examinations favoured boys who had attended more expensive prep schools and this, together with the high cost of supporting a cadet, ruled out boys from poorer middle class families – a fact deplored by the committee, which considered such boys to 'compare very favourably in all respects' to those from richer families.⁷⁰

The Osborne entry could be democratised relatively simply and cheaply by altering the examinations to make them fairer, and ensuring that families were aware of the reduced fee places on offer. Clearly the committee did not intend that the Osborne entry should be totally democratised; their suggested measures were designed only to admit poorer members of the middle classes. In contrast the committee advocated the Special Entry as a means of genuinely

⁶⁹ Robb, *British Culture*, pp.68-87

⁷⁰ TNA ADM 1/8551/41 Anderson Committee Report pp.3-5 (p.4)

democratising the officer corps, noting that it: 'seems to be the opportunity for giving a chance to native ability at present excluded from the Navy'.⁷¹

The committee felt that ex-elementary school boys would be able to compete on equal terms with their public school counterparts at the age of seventeen, having been to grammar schools or attended public schools on scholarships. However their parents would be unable to afford to support them as cadets and, in many cases, they could not even afford to keep them in school until they were old enough to take the entrance examinations. The only solution was to institute a system of scholarships to support boys from the age of sixteen until they became sub-lieutenants. This proposal found no favour with the naval authorities, presumably owing to the cost and the difficulties in arranging for boys to be educated for eighteen months before entering the Navy.⁷²

In June 1919, largely as a result of parliamentary pressure, the Admiralty appointed a committee headed by Vice-Admiral Sir Arthur Ricardo to consider the possibility of boy seamen becoming officers. The committee submitted its report in November, with its members unanimously agreeing that very few boy seamen were suitable for promotion to officer. Those who were suitable should be identified during their initial shore training and should not go to sea with the rest of their class as living on the mess deck would be fatal to the development of officer-like qualities. Instead those who passed an interview and educational examination (the latter at a lower standard than that for Special Entry candidates) should be sent to the Special Entry training ship for two and a half years before passing out as midshipmen; thereafter they should follow the same path as the Special Entry and be expected to achieve the same standards.⁷³

The report was passed around various Admiralty departments for comment and the readers were generally of one mind. They agreed that the boys selected must not serve as ratings, that to be commissioned they must meet the same standards as other officers, and that those who failed as cadets should be allowed to leave the service.⁷⁴ Ultimately the Ricardo scheme was

⁷¹ *ibid*, p.6

⁷² *ibid*, pp.7-8

⁷³ TNA ADM 1/8567/249 Report of the committee appointed to 'Consider and Report Upon the Training of Boys, Boy Artificers and Young Seamen for Commissions in HM Navy' (Ricardo Committee) 7 November 1919 pp.1-3, para.1-3

⁷⁴ TNA ADM 1/8567/249 'Summary of Committee and Departmental Remarks' prepared by the Head of the CW Branch (JA Phillips) for the Board of Admiralty 3 December 1919, those asked

rejected as unworkable as the annual entry of boy seamen to the training cruiser was impractical and alternatives such as a separate training establishment too expensive. Whatever the nature of the scheme, the small number of officers produced would not justify the cost of at least £300 per boy. Furthermore the scheme was not genuinely democratic, it would not help boys already serving, and few boys of high ability were going to join the Navy for a very limited chance of achieving commissioned rank.⁷⁵

The impact of these two committees was very limited. No change was made to the entrance examinations, and numerous letters to the Treasury failed to win any further concessions on fees. Their lordships were informed that King's Cadetships and the existing system of discounting went: 'as far as public sentiment can reasonably demand'.⁷⁶ Many within the Treasury were still of the opinion that the fees at Dartmouth were so low as to constitute public subsidy of private education. An internal memorandum noted that Dartmouth was 'far cheaper than any normal middle class education'.⁷⁷

The minimum age for ratings to enter the Mate scheme was lowered from twenty-four to twenty-one, improving the career prospects of those who graduated from it.⁷⁸ More importantly, the Special Entry gradually became a mechanism for the democratisation of the officer corps – in direct contrast with the original enthusiasm of the Royal Navy for recruiting boys from the top public schools.

The reform of the Direct Entry system in 1924 reflected this change. The Direct Entry had its origins in 1903 and provided a chance for boys at nautical training establishments to become naval officers. The original scheme had placed these boys in the fourth term at Osborne but the revised system trained them alongside the Special Entry. Some of these boys came from the *Conway* and *Worcester* but the majority came from Pangbourne Nautical College.⁷⁹

to comment included the Advisor on Education, (Alexander McMullen); DTSD, (Captain Walter M Ellerton) and Phillips himself.

⁷⁵ TNA ADM 1/8567/249 Extract from Board Minutes No.1148, 11 February 1920

⁷⁶ TNA T 1/12509, Treasury File 12320/19, Treasury letter 40582/19 from the Secretary of the Treasury (Sir George Barstow) to the Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir Oswyn Murray) 7 October 1919

⁷⁷ TNA T 1/12509, Treasury File 12320/19 Internal discussion document June 1920

⁷⁸ TNA ADM 1/8567/249 Extract from Board Minutes No.1148, 11 February 1920

⁷⁹ Beattie, *Churchill Scheme*, p.52; Founded in 1917 Pangbourne subsequently became the biggest supplier of officers to the combined Special, Direct and Paymaster entries (see Beattie, *Churchill Scheme*, Appendix 6). The *Conway* had made considerable efforts in support of the Direct Entry, in 1903 engineering workshops were constructed and a special class established

Aligning the Direct Entry with the Special Entry meant that more attention could be given to these cadets and also reduced the cost to their parents of entering them into the Navy. In 1933 an additional entry was introduced, bringing boys from *Worcester* and *Conway* into the sixth term at Dartmouth; this too was an equalising measure as Pangbourne had come to dominate the revised entry.⁸⁰

Any desire for democratisation was not reflected in *How to Become a Naval Officer*. The 1927 Special Entry edition referred to ‘public school cadets’, and noted that smaller schools were most prone to exaggerating the achievements of their candidates. A list of sample interview questions included: ‘which do you consider to be England’s best public school’, and ‘name any famous men educated at your school’. If the interviewers were unfamiliar with a candidate’s school, they might gauge its status through asking who it played at games.⁸¹ The cadets continued to be colloquially known as ‘pubs’ – reflecting their perceived origins.

The 1924 Dartmouth version was more subtle – reminding readers that the Navy was officered by gentlemen, and listing social activities such as shooting. It also stated that for an officer to change ship was ‘as if his quarters had been moved to another wing of the family mansion’.⁸² Neither publication gave any encouragement to candidates from poorer backgrounds.

The increased growth and parliamentary strength of the Labour Party had the potential to force democratisation on the Navy. The party was reconstituted in 1918, and in the same year committed itself to a statement of policy *Labour and the New Social Order* which took as its first resolution a commitment to ‘the gradual building up of a new social order based [...] [on] healthy equality, the widest possible participation in power, both economic and political’.⁸³ In 1928 this was replaced by *Labour and the Nation*, a more generalised statement committing the party to promoting education and opportunity.⁸⁴

The Labour government elected in 1929 planned to dramatically change the recruitment and education of Royal Navy officers, giving those who had

for boys hoping to get into Osborne; John Masefield *The Conway* (London: William Heinemann, 1933; rev.d. 1953) pp.92-93.

⁸⁰ Beattie, *Churchill Scheme*, p.59

⁸¹ Bush, *How to Become a Naval Officer*, pp.91-93

⁸² Gieves, *Naval Officer* (1924), p.8

⁸³ Cole, *Labour Party*, p.65

⁸⁴ *ibid* p.206

benefitted from the improvements to state education a chance of entering the service. The new First Lord, Albert Alexander, told the Commons that 'I want those who go through the national system of education, as apart from private and public school education, to have an equal opportunity of entering that Service'.⁸⁵ On 11 July 1930 the Board of Admiralty discussed Alexander's proposal that at least 50% of officers should be Special Entry, and that bursaries should be made available to enable less well off boys to become cadets. Two objections were raised – the cost would be enormous, and there was concern that democratising entry would lead to a decline in the quality of candidates.⁸⁶

Alexander was concerned about the lack of opportunities for state school boys to become naval officers. He believed they were disadvantaged by the interview system because they lacked the manners and polish of public school boys, and at a disadvantage in the examinations owing to their comparatively weak Latin and French. He was firmly convinced that some secondary school boys were entirely suited to being naval officers. Alexander was also concerned about the high cost of Dartmouth, especially as there was some evidence that Special Entry officers were better than those produced by the college.⁸⁷

Admiral Sir Charles Madden, the First Sea Lord, was dubious but not hostile. He reminded his colleagues that naval officers were obtained at reasonable cost to their country and that there was no lack of volunteers. Royal Navy officers enjoyed the confidence of their men who, as a result, were well behaved and lightly disciplined. Because the officers lived in close confines and tended to be from similar backgrounds the existing ex-rating officers struggled socially. They also struggled professionally as ratings did not respect them. Madden was concerned that to extract fees from the parents of some boys whilst providing bursaries for others was unfair, and would cause considerable upset in the fleet. Finally the Army recruited the vast majority of its officers from the pool the Special Entry was drawn from, and it struggled to find sufficient good quality candidates. On the other hand a small number of secondary school boys, around 5-7% of each entry, could be absorbed into the officer corps. This

⁸⁵ Hansard HC Deb (5th series) 17 March 1930 c.1861

⁸⁶ TNA ADM 116/2791 Extract from Board Minutes No.2728, 11 July 1930

⁸⁷ TNA ADM 116/2791, CW.9333/1930 Memorandum by First Lord (Albert Alexander) for the Board of Admiralty 25 March 1930

was, in Madden's view, preferable to extending promotion from the lower-deck.⁸⁸

The Second Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Michael Hodges, did not offer Alexander a great deal of encouragement. Although he would not object to the field of entry being widened if the current standards were maintained, he felt the current system of entry and training at Dartmouth worked well. Schools did not encourage pupils to become Special Entry officers, many of those who joined aged seventeen had wanted to join aged thirteen. Meddling with the Special Entry was especially undesirable as a shortfall of these officers could not be addressed. Hodges too was concerned about the quality of potential candidates from the lower classes.⁸⁹

The Board decided to appoint two committees. One was to concern itself with the prospect of promoting more ratings to officer status. The other was to consider the prospect of democratising the officer entry. It was headed by the MP Sir Ernest Bennett and the other members were Admiral Sir Osmond de B Brock, Rear-Admiral Sir Reginald Plunkett-Erle-Drax (hereafter Drax), Sir Edmond Phipps, and Mr Francis Dale, Headmaster of the City of London School. They were charged:

'To consider whether the present system of entry of naval cadets and naval cadets Special Entry are such as to give candidates of the requisite standards from all types of schools and belonging to all classes of the community a fair opportunity of being considered on their merits for entry as cadet, and if not, to report what changes are recommended in order to extend the field of selection, subject to the requirements of the naval service'.⁹⁰

The committee interviewed a variety of witnesses before preparing its report, which was submitted on 29 June 1931. Various themes emerge from the committee's work: democratisation of the officer entry, the selection process, the relative merits of Dartmouth and the Special Entry, and the number, nature, and suitability of existing candidates.

Most of the witnesses examined by the committee were in favour of some degree of democratisation. Mr Orme, Headmaster of Reigate Grammar

⁸⁸ TNA ADM 116/2791, CW.9333/30 Memorandum by the First Sea Lord (Admiral Sir Charles E Madden) for the Board of Admiralty 7 May 1930

⁸⁹ *ibid*, Memorandum by the Second Sea Lord (Admiral Sir Michael H Hodges) for the Board of Admiralty 6 May 1930

⁹⁰ *ibid*, Extract from Board Minutes No.2742, 29 July 1930

School, explained that the parents of his boys could not afford to enter their boys except as paymaster cadets. Although they aspired to public schools, and would doubtless like their sons to become executive officers, this was impossible for them. Whilst he thought his own boys were suited to becoming naval officers he doubted that those from state schools would be sufficiently responsible.⁹¹

Three representatives of the state education system were consulted. Dr Woosnam was the Headmaster of Howard Gardens School in Cardiff. He thought that working class boys would only enter the Navy if they were confident of job security. He considered his sixth formers responsible, disciplined and serious minded boys who were good leaders.⁹² Mr Tresader, Headmaster of Devonport High School, thought the ex-elementary school boys amongst his students worked harder than those who had gone to private schools. He claimed that humble homes could produce responsible boys, strongly supported by their parents. His school had produced twelve paymaster, three engineering, and one executive midshipmen since 1918; he was confident that he could provide five good candidates every year.⁹³ Mr Williams, Director of Education for Cardiff, thought that secondary school boys were capable of becoming naval officers if given the chance. However their parents expected them to become self supporting soon after leaving school.⁹⁴

Naval opinion was positive. Most of those consulted believed that, whilst complete democratisation was both impractical and unwise, a limited number of working class boys could be integrated into the officer corps. Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond, who had long campaigned for reform of officer entry, was in favour of democratisation. He believed that secondary school boys were perfectly capable of fitting in amongst public schools boys and of achieving the required standards.⁹⁵

Rear-Admiral Sir Edward Astley-Rushton did not doubt the cleverness of lower class boys, but he did question their social suitability. He thought them less morally sound than boys from the upper classes and commented 'you

⁹¹ TNA ADM 116/2799 Evidence gathered by the 'Committee on the Recruitment of Officers' (Bennett Committee) Evidence of Mr FS Orme pp.1-2

⁹² *ibid*, Evidence of Dr L Woosnam pp.1-4

⁹³ *ibid*, Evidence of Mr A Tresader pp.29-39

⁹⁴ *ibid*, Evidence of Mr H Williams pp.7-8

⁹⁵ *ibid*, Evidence of Admiral Sir HW Richmond p.5

cannot make a brotherhood of people with different ethical standards'.⁹⁶ Astley-Rushton's comments in this respect are the most negative by any witness.

Three former Dartmouth cadets now at Greenwich were consulted. They thought that working class boys could be integrated into the officer corps if they spent four years at Dartmouth. On the other hand most young officers had private allowances from their parents, and would struggle without them, meaning that poorer boys would struggle socially once they left Dartmouth.⁹⁷

Two Dartmouth Captains were consulted, Captain Sidney Meyrick and Rear-Admiral Sir Martin Dunbar-Nasmith. Both said they did not know the personal circumstances of the cadets under their command. Although virtually all the existing Dartmouth cadets had been to prep school Meyrick believed a small number of secondary school boys could be successfully absorbed.⁹⁸ Dunbar-Nasmith thought it was rather strange that national servants should have to pay to learn their profession. However he believed the lower-deck would be hostile to the widening of the officer entry, and he doubted ratings would want their sons to become officers. He thought that working class boys could be integrated into the officer corps but that their career prospects might be damaged by marrying working class women, who would be uncomfortable in the social circles frequented by naval officers.⁹⁹

Eric Kempson, the Headmaster of Dartmouth, considered that although in theory open to all, officer entry was in reality limited to boys from wealthy families. He thought that the entrance examinations favoured prep school boys; secondary school boys would not know enough Latin. The examinations were based on the curricula of prep schools so little change could be made, although perhaps French could be offered as an alternative to Latin.¹⁰⁰

Alexander McMullen, the Admiralty Education Advisor, did not think that merely removing fees would widen the variety of applicants. He thought that the Navy would have to offer scholarships and strengthen its links with state schools. However he did think suitable candidates could be found in the state sector – Devonport High School, for example, had produced many paymasters.

⁹⁶ *ibid*, Evidence of Rear-Admiral Sir EA Astley-Rushton p.8

⁹⁷ *ibid*, Evidence of Sub-Lieutenants JL Rathbone, DS Johnston, PWF Stubbs pp.1-2

⁹⁸ *ibid*, Evidence of Captain SJ Meyrick p.2, p.6; evidence of Rear-Admiral Sir ME Dunbar-Nasmith p.1

⁹⁹ *ibid*, Evidence of Rear-Admiral Sir ME Dunbar-Nasmith pp.3-17

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*, Evidence of Mr EWE Kempson pp.3-4 and p.12

If nothing else, the Navy should broaden the officer entry to include the sons of professionals who could not afford a public school education.¹⁰¹

Commander Peter Berthon had been on the staff of the Royal Naval Engineering College Keyham for three years. His midshipmen varied considerably in social class although the majority were from the south of Britain. Class was no barrier to success although the former artificer apprentices from HMS *Fisgard* tended to be quiet and lack initiative. Whilst the boys from the better public schools tended to be better leaders they did not tend to be the hardest working or the cleverest. He favoured recruiting more sons of servicemen.¹⁰²

Captain Moore of HMS *Erebus* reported that Special Entry cadets were drawn from an increasingly wide range of schools. Many warrant officers sons had been successfully integrated, and he thought former boy seamen could be, although working class boys with no naval background would struggle.¹⁰³ Captain Hamilton, also representing *Erebus*, agreed that boy seaman could be made into officers. He noted that many warrant officers' sons had become capable paymasters.¹⁰⁴

Overall witnesses favoured some form of democratisation. All apart from Astley-Rushton thought that a limited number of boys from lower class backgrounds could be successfully integrated into Dartmouth and subsequently the officer corps. However they disagreed over who was suitable. Everyone thought the sons of poorer professionals could be integrated, but opinion differed as to the suitability of working class boys.

Irrespective of their class the Royal Navy was determined to secure the best possible candidates. Witnesses were therefore questioned about the various aspects of the selection process. The committee was particularly interested in the interview process but was also concerned about the academic examinations, in particular whether candidates were cramming for them.

Mr Fletcher, the Headmaster of Charterhouse, had previously served as an interviewer of Dartmouth candidates and could suggest no improvements to the process.¹⁰⁵ He offered no comment on whether or not candidates had been crammed. The state school representatives had the most negative views of the

¹⁰¹ *ibid*, Evidence of Mr AP McMullen pp.2-6, p.15 and p.18

¹⁰² *ibid*, Evidence of Commander PD Berthon pp.1-9

¹⁰³ *ibid*, Evidence of Captain Moore pp.5-9

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*, Evidence of Captain Hamilton pp.2-4 and p.8

¹⁰⁵ *ibid*, Evidence of Mr F Fletcher p.13

current system. Dr Woosnam thought the fact that the examination centres were mainly in public schools would put off poorer boys. He doubted his pupils would do well in the interview – although the equal of public school boys in other respects, they could not compete on manners.¹⁰⁶ Mr Williams said that state schools were not accustomed to preparing thirteen year olds for examinations.¹⁰⁷

Another civilian who had sat on an interview board, this time for Special Entry candidates, was the civil servant Roderick Meiklejohn. He thought the interview was essential as Royal Navy officers were Britain's representatives abroad. Interviewers most prized tact and alertness although it was also important for the candidate's appearance to be acceptable (it is unclear whether this referred to his clothing and manners or his skin colour).¹⁰⁸ Clever boys generally passed, although the interviewers were not looking for great intelligence. Candidates from state schools often performed very well. Interviewers were heavily reliant on headmaster's reports; those written by the headmasters of major public schools being most reliable.¹⁰⁹

Naval opinion overwhelmingly favoured retaining the interview. The sub-lieutenants thought the interviewers were fair, and were confident that state school boys would be judged on their own merits.¹¹⁰ Astley-Rushton's response to the prospect of the interview being removed was forthright – 'god forbid'. He admitted that interviewing thirteen year olds was not an exact science however it did enable the Navy to 'reject the absolute wasters and select the fliers'.¹¹¹ Meyrick was similarly blunt 'one does not take a gardener without interviewing him'.¹¹²

The naval witnesses were universally opposed to cramming, but divided as to whether it took place. Kempson said that around half the cadets had been crammed in order to pass the entry examinations but that most remained lively and interested.¹¹³ Vincent Baddeley thought that many Special Entry candidates were crammed to remedy their deficiencies in mathematics although public

¹⁰⁶ *ibid*, Evidence of Dr L Woosnam p.1 and p.3

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*, Evidence of Mr H Williams p.3

¹⁰⁸ The Royal Navy had a policy of not recruiting their officers from amongst ethnic minorities. This policy is explored in more detail on pp.130-131

¹⁰⁹ TNA ADM 116/2799 Evidence of Sir RS Meiklejohn pp.1-7

¹¹⁰ *ibid*, Evidence of Sub-Lieutenants JL Rathbone, DS Johnston, PWF Stubbs p.4

¹¹¹ *ibid*, Evidence of Rear-Admiral Sir EA Astley-Rushton p.12

¹¹² *ibid*, Evidence of Captain SJ Meyrick p.15

¹¹³ *ibid*, Evidence of Mr EWE Kempson p.5

schools did not arrange special classes as they did for Army candidates.¹¹⁴ Dunbar-Nasmith said that crammed boys had been a rarity at Dartmouth during his time as captain.¹¹⁵ McMullen reported that the Board of Admiralty was firmly opposed to competitive entrance examinations and, by extension, to cramming.¹¹⁶

The Royal Navy was not getting enough officer candidates and a variety of explanations were offered. Moore suggested that the considerable variation in the number of Special Entry cadetships offered on different occasions hampered the scheme, as did the limited number of executive cadetships on offer.¹¹⁷ Astley-Rushton thought continual defence cuts had made boys uncertain of their prospects in the service, especially as they feared that naval training would not fit them for a change of career.¹¹⁸

McMullen thought anti-war sentiment was strong throughout Britain and that parents did not wish their sons to enter the armed services. Schools had never been happy to lose their best boys to the Navy and were now even less enthusiastic.¹¹⁹ Orme thought that independent schools were reluctant to lose their best boys at a younger age than normal.¹²⁰ Fletcher disliked pupils leaving before the age of seventeen, feeling they lost two-thirds of the value of being at a public school.¹²¹ Dale said that he encouraged pupils to stay until they were at least seventeen, preferably eighteen.¹²²

The committee also prepared a list of the schools and father's occupations of the 546 successful Special Entry candidates from the examinations held between June 1925 and November 1929.¹²³ The list suffers from various weaknesses, including duplicate entries and typing errors, which the historian must attempt to overcome. Its value as a source is negated by it only including the successful candidates. It suffers other problems common to all candidate lists. Some of the descriptions are quite vague – engineers, for example could vary greatly in income and social status. It is possible that some of those attending independent schools had won scholarships or had their fees

¹¹⁴ *ibid*, Evidence of Sir VW Baddeley p.6

¹¹⁵ *ibid*, Evidence of Rear-Admiral Sir ME Dunbar-Nasmith p.4

¹¹⁶ *ibid*, Evidence of Mr AP McMullen p.16

¹¹⁷ *ibid*, Evidence of Captain Moore p.4 and p.6

¹¹⁸ *ibid*, Evidence of Rear-Admiral Sir EA Astley-Rushton pp.1-2 and p.4

¹¹⁹ *ibid*, Evidence of Mr AP McMullen pp.1-2 and p.13

¹²⁰ *ibid*, Evidence of Mr FS Orme p.10

¹²¹ *ibid*, Evidence of Mr F Fletcher p.6

¹²² *ibid*, Evidence of Mr F Fletcher p.7

¹²³ TNA ADM 116/2791 Bennett Committee Report, Appendix B

paid by relatives or godparents. Some fathers, although in relatively low paying posts, may have other incomes not mentioned.

Of these cadets 94 had fathers in the Royal Navy – of which 74 were officers, 10 warrant officers and 7 ratings (all petty officers or chief petty officers). There was 1 chaplain, 1 father listed as ‘RN retired’, and 1 lieutenant in the Royal Naval Reserve for whom no other profession was listed – almost certainly a merchant navy officer. The largest group of officers (including warrant officers) came from the executive branch and comprised 40 men; there were also 3 shipwrights, 5 medical officers, 5 paymasters and 31 engineers. Those who were, or had begun their careers as, ratings were generally amongst the most skilled and best educated men of the lower-deck such as artificers, although there was also a master at arms.

From this it can be seen that the sons of naval personnel were keen to become Royal Navy officers via the Special Entry scheme and that they were successful in their efforts. However, there were only 5 sons of Royal Marines, which even allowing for the small size of the corps must be seen as disappointing. Of these, 3 were officer’s sons, 1 a warrant officer’s son, and for the other there is no rank listed.

The second largest group was those whose fathers were engaged in business, numbering 93. The Royal Navy was an attractive option for the sons of men in commerce – perhaps because naval officers were undoubted gentlemen, and to become one would set the seal on the upward mobility of one’s family.

The next largest group was rather smaller, the 54 sons of army personnel. There were 49 officers from the British Army, 5 of whom are listed as generals and 1 as a doctor. There were the sons of 3 Indian Army officers, 1 retired United States Army officer and 1 warrant officer (a master artificer). It is unclear whether army personnel, of similar wealth and social status to the naval ratings whose sons became cadets, were unaware of the opportunities available or if they considered cadetships out of reach either financially or socially.

The table below compares the cadets in the Bennett sample to earlier entries; the Bennett Committee made no such comparison. Lists of candidates are available for the first Fisher-Selborne entry in 1903, for a subsequent entry in November 1905 and for the first Special Entry in 1913. Comparisons to the

Bennett data must be made with caution given that the earlier three lists are of all candidates rather than just those that were successful and that they concerned far fewer boys. However the proportion of boys from various backgrounds can be compared.

Table 1 – Percentage of candidates or selected candidates from various backgrounds 1903-1929.¹²⁴

Profession	1903 (193 Candidates)	1905 (167 Candidates)	1913 (57 Candidates)	1925-1929 (546 Cadets)
Naval Officer	8.3	14.3	5.3	17.2
Royal Marines Officer	0.6	0	0	0.7
Army Officer	16.7	16.2	8.8	9.7
Gentleman/ Independent Income	14.4	10.4	5.3	3.5
Business	25.6	24.7	29.8	17
Law	6.7	7.8	8.8	3.5
Medicine	6.7	7.5	8.8	7
Church	7.8	3.9	5.3	4.9
Engineering and Science	5.6	5.2	1.8	10.1

It is immediately apparent that cadet entry to the Royal Navy consistently attracted the sons of military officers – they made up more than a quarter of the candidates in 1903 and 1905 (27.5% and 30.6% respectively) and 25% of those selected for the Special Entry between 1925 and 1929.

¹²⁴ Derived from TNA ADM 116/2791 Bennett Committee Report, Appendix B; TNA ADM 116/6354 List of candidates for the first Special Entry un-dated; Partridge, *Osborne*, pp.38-19; Jones, *Officer Corps*, p.61

This suggests that military officers viewed a naval cadetship as offering their sons good career prospects, although this supposition is somewhat undermined by the lack of sons of Royal Marines officers from all the samples and the lack of RAF officer's sons amongst the Special Entry candidates. The high proportion of Special Entry cadets from military backgrounds suggests that the scheme increasingly enjoyed the confidence of military families – boys from military backgrounds had made up only 14.1% of the first pool of applicants.

Overall the data suggests that naval officers came from much the same backgrounds in the late 1920s as they had before the First World War. The armed services and businessmen still fathered the majority. The most dramatic changes were the decline in businessmen and legal professional's sons, and the rise in engineers' sons. Officer recruitment still overwhelmingly favoured the sons of the upper classes, in particular the upper middle class.

The lower proportion of fathers engaged in business was perhaps because of the failing state of the economy but more likely businessmen's sons were more interested in other careers. The high proportion of Special Entry cadets from engineering backgrounds may be misleading – the majority of Royal Navy engineering officers entered via the Special Entry and these boys may have been more interested in being engineers than in being naval officers.

The successful Special Entry candidates attended 195 different schools, of which I have identified 56 as state funded and 112 as independent (although many of them received government grants in some form). Not only did the independent schools dramatically outnumber the state, they individually supplied more cadets. Devonport High School, praised by McMullen for its pro naval stance, was comfortably the most successful state school supplying 8 cadets; the next most successful, Reading School, managed only 5. In contrast 12 independent schools each supplied at least 10 cadets:

Table 2 – Independent schools producing ten or more Special Entry cadets between June 1925 and November 1929 and military professions of these cadet’s fathers. Derived from TNA ADM 116/2791.¹²⁵

School name	Total cadets	Royal Navy	Royal Marines	Army Officers	Admiralty/Dockyard
Portsmouth Grammar	18	11	0	0	1
Cheltenham	17	2	0	7	0
Eton	15	0	0	6	0
Plymouth College	14	6	0	0	2
Bedford	13	2	0	0	1
Christ’s Hospital	13	2	0	1	0
Blundell’s	12	3	0	1	1
Marlborough	12	2	0	1	0
Oundle	12	5	0	1	0
Clifton	10	0	1	4	0
Imperial Service College	10	3	1	3	0
Rugby	10	0	0	0	0

¹²⁵ TNA ADM 116/2791 Bennett Committee Report, Appendix B

It will be seen that two of these schools were situated in naval home ports and that the majority of the cadets they supplied (17 out of 32) had fathers in the Navy. Many of the other schools supplied large numbers of cadets from military backgrounds. The large number of Blundell's boys is particularly interesting as the school was Dartmouth's main sporting rival – suggesting that Blundell's students had a positive view of the college and had been impressed by their contact with the Royal Navy (which although limited was greater than that of pupils at other schools).

The Royal Navy had hoped to draw Special Entry cadets from top public schools and to some extent it did so with Marlborough, Bedford and Cheltenham all well represented. However the most famous schools of all did not produce as many officers as the Royal Navy would have liked. True Eton supplied 15 cadets and Rugby 10 but Harrow only 7 and Winchester 5. The other Clarendon schools were similarly under-represented. The lack of boys from the very top schools was perhaps because the pupils of these schools generally had the connections and financial backing to pursue any career they chose.

The data collected by the committee gave no indication of when particular cadets had entered the service. Consequently, it is impossible to tell if there was an increasing trend towards democratisation in the period from 1925-1929. Nor is any data provided about the unsuccessful candidates. The cadets selected at this time were a more democratic group than those from earlier samples, but this was achieved largely through entering the sons of lower paid civil servants and naval ratings – the very groups most favoured by pro-democratisation campaigners within the service.

The other committee set up at this time was the Larken Committee which was charged with investigating promotion from the lower-deck. The committee reported that few ratings were aware of the opportunities open to them and that the examinations for mate were too hard, especially given the lack of tuition. The title of mate carried a considerable stigma, and ex-rating officers struggled socially – the committee suggested they receive a first appointment to the Mediterranean to maximise their chance of finding a suitable wife.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ TNA ADM 116/3058 Report of the committee to 'Examine the System of Promotion from the Lower-Deck Through the Rank of Mate' (Larken Committee) 24 February 1930, awareness p.6 para.28; stigma pp.6-7 para.32; examinations pp.10-12 para.45-48; marriage pp.22-23 para.95

Some action was taken to meet these concerns. Greater efforts were made to encourage suitable boy seamen to aim for a commission. Educational opportunities for candidates were improved. The system was modified to improve a man's chances of succeeding and commission him at a younger age.¹²⁷ There was a real desire to improve the prospects of the best and brightest ratings in the Navy and these measures did constitute a genuine improvement. Little could be done whilst demand for officers remained so limited but by the late 1930s things were starting to improve.¹²⁸

The detested title of mate was abandoned in favour of sub-lieutenant in 1932; candidates were referred to as 'upper-yardmen' who in the days of sail had been the smartest and bravest of the seamen. Adopting this title served to reinforce the superiority of the officer candidates to the rest of the lower-deck and suggested officer-like qualities of courage and seamanship skill. It also provided candidates with a link to the heritage of the service, albeit one which did not provided them with an explicitly officer identity.

In 1933 the Admiralty attempted to reduce the fees paid by the parents of Dartmouth cadets. The proposed reduction was prompted partly by demands for democratisation (including the recommendations of the Bennett Committee), but mainly by the shortage of candidates and the reduced fees being charged by other schools. Dartmouth fees were set at £150 a year (although the parents of 30% of the cadets paid less, some as little as £40), but thirty-four public schools were charging under £100.¹²⁹ The annual cost of running the college had been reduced by £32,000 and the Navy was hoping to pass some of these savings on to parents.¹³⁰

The Finance Committee of the Admiralty considered the current fees to be reasonable, in line with good schools and the cost of launching a boy into another career. A rising number of serviceman's sons were entering Dartmouth

¹²⁷ TNA ADM 116/3058 Extract from Board Minutes No.2822, 7 May 1931; AFO 2473 of 16 October 1931; AFO 2472 of 16 October 1931; AFO 2793 of 27 November 1931; the varying reforms were consolidated by AFO 2595 of 29 November 1934

¹²⁸ TNA ADM 116/4734, B.185 'Executive Officers - Sources of Entry, With Proposals for Scholarships to Dartmouth'; Memorandum for the Board of Admiralty 3 January 1941, Appendix C

¹²⁹ TNA ADM 1/8767/102, CW Minute 831/1933 Prepared by Head of CW (Philip E Marrack) for the Board of Admiralty 24 January 1933.

¹³⁰ *ibid*, Minute by Marrack unknown day February 1933

– suggesting that the shortage of candidates was caused by concerns about career prospects, rather than the cost.¹³¹

A note from the First Lord's private office supported this argument. It stated that pre-war Dartmouth entries had attracted around 150 candidates, early 1920s entries about 100, and recent entries around 70. The note considered disarmament to be the main cause of the candidate shortage; the axing of so many officers had created a feeling that the Royal Navy could not guarantee a full career. However the inflexibility of the system for allocating reduced fees meant that the income of the families receiving the reductions varied considerably from term to term, which was off-putting to poorer families as well as being unfair. The First Lord wanted more control over the allocation of reduced fee places and a kit purchase allowance for the poorest cadets.¹³²

Further investigation revealed that the very cheap public schools were small and had many day boys. Dartmouth was charging similar fees to the schools it hoped to compete with. The Board of Education supplied the following data:

Table 3 – Annual cost to parents of selected public schools in 1933.
Reproduced from TNA ADM 1/8767/102.¹³³

School	Annual boarding fees (£)	Annual fees for tuition (£)	Total (£)
Charterhouse	87	63	150
Westminster	84	60	144
Clifton	100	50-60	150-160
Cheltenham	Not given	Not given	150-160

Ultimately, the Admiralty decided that normal fees could not be reduced below £150. However the Treasury was asked to remove the fee of 8s a term for bedding, to give an allowance of £40 to purchase the kit of the poorest

¹³¹ *ibid*, Minute by unknown author 23 February 1933

¹³² TNA ADM 1/8767/102, CW.831/33 Note by EA Seal for the First Lord 15 February 1933

¹³³ TNA ADM 1/8767/102 Paper by JH James 16 February 1933, data supplied by Mr Bosworth-Smith of the Board of Education. Bosworth-Smith suggested that the schools shown in the table were of the same type as Dartmouth.

cadets, and to give control of fee reductions to the Admiralty.¹³⁴ The Treasury agreed to most of these requests. Bedding charges were removed and kit allowances granted. The Admiralty was given control over the reduced fees and the kit grants, but the lowest fees of £40 were now limited to King's Cadets except in exceptional circumstances.¹³⁵

This episode was significant for several reasons. Firstly it demonstrates that the Navy was, by this time, committed to allowing boys from relatively poor families to become naval officers. Secondly it shows that ambitions for Dartmouth had not changed, it was still intended to compete with top public schools. Thirdly it demonstrates the control the Treasury was able to exert over officer selection. By refusing to give the Admiralty full control of cadet fees it ensured they remained at a level which excluded the poor but did not unduly subsidise the wealthy. Significantly, control of discounted fees was ceded only once it was proved that the normal cost to parents of Dartmouth was similar to that of sending a boy to a well regarded public school.

The expansion of the fleet from 1935 onwards meant that large numbers of officers were required. In 1936 it was decided to transfer up to three-hundred Reserve officers to full time Royal Navy service, to retain officers approaching retirement, and to recall some of those who had retired.¹³⁶ In 1939 Volunteer Reserve officers were offered three year full time appointments, and a scheme was put in place to promote young warrant officers to commissioned status.¹³⁷ There was a dramatically increased demand for junior officers, and this finally created an opportunity for large-scale democratisation.

The increased demand for officers was met through increasing the numbers entered through all three commissioning sources. By far the greatest increase was in the number of Special Entries because this scheme could be expanded quickly and simply and produced officers relatively quickly. Although

¹³⁴ TNA ADM 1/8767/102, CW 831/33, Letter CW.831/1933 from the Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir Vincent Baddeley) to Treasury Secretary (SH Wright) 12 April 1933

¹³⁵ TNA ADM 1/8767/102, Treasury Letter E 27350/4 from Wright to Baddeley 18 May 1933

¹³⁶ TNA ADM 116/4968, Memorandum B.81 'Fleet Expansion - Position as Regards Officers' prepared by the Second Sea Lord (Admiral Sir Charles J Little) for the Board of Admiralty 23 February 1939

¹³⁷ TNA ADM 116/4968 Extract from Board Minutes No.3622, 24 February 1939

Dartmouth was still seen as the best chance of securing top quality candidates, numbers increased less dramatically owing to the long training time.¹³⁸

The picture for lower-deck promotion via the Mate scheme was more complicated, efforts at expanding it were hampered by the low numbers of ratings recruited in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and by the rising demand for senior ratings. Consequently, the mid 1930s were the low point for advancement, only 3 men being promoted in 1935. Numbers improved as the demand for officers and supply of candidates increased.¹³⁹

As the table below demonstrates, the expansion of the officer corps was characterised by increasing emphasis on the Special Entry as opposed to Dartmouth; as the Special Entry was the more democratic of the two, some progress in democratisation was inevitable. This progress cannot be accurately measured owing to the lack of available data. Naval ratings continued to comprise a very small proportion of those becoming executive officers.

Table 4 – Executive officers entered per year, 1930-1939. Derived from TNA ADM 116/4734.¹⁴⁰

(cadets entering Dartmouth and Special Entry, ratings promoted to sub-lieutenant via the Mate scheme).

Year	Dartmouth	% of total	Special Entry	% of total	Lower-Deck	% of total
1930	112	86	12	9	6	5
1931	97	80	12	10	12	10
1932	100	78	20	16	8	6
1933	104	77	25	16	6	4
1934	100	75	29	22	5	4
1935	124	78	32	20	3	2
1936	135	64	72	34	4	2
1937	145	56	100	39	13	5
1938	130	53	100	41	17	7
1939	129	51	100	39	24	9

¹³⁸ TNA ADM 116/4734, B.185 'Executive Officers - Sources of Entry, With Proposals for Scholarships to Dartmouth'; Memorandum for the Board of Admiralty 3 January 1941, Appendix B

¹³⁹ *ibid*, Appendix C

¹⁴⁰ *ibid*, Appendices B and C

Numerous difficulties were experienced in increasing promotion from the lower-deck, most of them outlined in a series of reports compiled in 1937. Respondents reported that the examinations were too difficult, study facilities too few, and that men were discouraged by the cost of living in the wardroom and the fact that candidates could not be married. It was reported that whilst boy seamen were ambitious, once settled into the fleet as able seamen these ambitions disappeared. Candidates who persisted received little encouragement from their messmates or their officers, rumours abounded of high failure rates and unfair interviewers.¹⁴¹

These complaints were much the same as had been voiced in 1931, indeed many had surfaced in 1912. Little action was taken to resolve them, possibly the will did not exist, certainly there were enormous practical difficulties to be overcome – in particular providing the appropriate environment and support for the development of promising young ratings.

A further factor also intervened – the serious and increasing shortage of senior ratings. From 1935 onwards the recruitment of ratings was gradually increased to meet demand, but this did nothing to ease the increasing shortage of experienced or senior ratings.¹⁴² By May 1939 the Admiralty was forced to reduce the qualifications required for promotion to leading seaman owing to a severe shortage of candidates.¹⁴³ The promotion roster at Portsmouth was practically empty and there was a lack of candidates at both Devonport and Chatham; this when over a thousand additional leading seamen would be required in the following financial year.¹⁴⁴

The problem was not likely to be eased in the near future – the Department of Personnel Services estimated that there would be no substantial increase in the number of men with at least three years service as able seamen (the minimum required for promotion to leading seaman) until 1941.¹⁴⁵ Under these circumstances the best and brightest ratings, especially those with

¹⁴¹ TNA ADM 1/9082 'Promotion From the Lower-Deck, Reports From the Fleet' 1937; reports were collected from boys training establishments, technical training establishments and the various fleets and commands.

¹⁴² TNA ADM 1/10930, N.3872/1939, Memorandum for Naval Branch 12 May 1939;

¹⁴³ TNA ADM 1/10930, AFO 1909/1939, Promulgated 13 July 1939

¹⁴⁴ TNA ADM 1/10930, N.3872/1939, Memorandum for DPS 11 May 1939

¹⁴⁵ *ibid*, Memorandum for Naval Branch 12 May 1939

several years of experience, were desperately needed on the lower-deck; junior officers could be produced from scratch more quickly than senior ratings.

The shortage of candidates for promotion illustrates the fact that naval preparations for a future war could not be limited to the construction of new ships. Manning these ships posed also posed considerable difficulties – arguably greater than those involved in ship construction – because the required men had to be entered and trained before the new ships were commissioned.

Under these circumstances it is hardly surprising that ratings continued to make up a very small proportion of those becoming officers. There was in fact a substantial increase in the number of men promoted; the 24 men promoted in 1939 represented a four-fold increase on the 6 promoted in 1933 and a six-fold increase on the 4 promoted in 1936. This increase in numbers represented a genuine improvement in the commissioning prospects of ratings, even as they continued to constitute less than 10% of those becoming officers.

The problems caused by First World War policies were the guiding force behind new wartime manning policies developed during the inter-war period. The Royal Navy needed a system that would deliver sufficient personnel of all ranks for wartime without requiring excessive redundancies or massive education programmes in the subsequent peace. There was no question of Dartmouth cadets being sent to sea early but they were to be left ashore to complete their education, not because of their youth.¹⁴⁶ Other youth entries continued in their peacetime form – sixteen year old boy seamen and Royal Marine buglers continued to serve at sea in wartime.

The extra officers needed by the wartime fleet were, in the main, to be chosen from amongst the volunteers recruited for temporary, wartime only, service. They were identified during their training as ratings and sent for officer training after they had gained practical experience. Typically, they became officers within a year of joining the Royal Navy – following ten weeks of basic training, three months of sea time as ratings, and twenty weeks of officer

¹⁴⁶ TNA ADM 116/4968, B.81 'Fleet Expansion', the entry of cadets is discussed p.2; TNA ADM 1/9778 CW.13960/38 Note by Head of CW (Philip Marrack) 22 March 1939 para.1a; note by illegible author for the First Sea Lord (Admiral Sir Dudley PR Pound) 17 August 1939; CAFO 2608/39 promulgated 14 September 1939 stated that the entry of cadets and the substantive promotion of regular officers would continue in their peacetime form; shortfalls would be met by recruiting temporary volunteers and granting temporary promotions.

training.¹⁴⁷ Under this system service as a rating was the proving ground for potential officers – a complete reversal of the normal policy of removing potential officers from the mess decks as soon as possible. Despite these changes commissioning opportunities for regular ratings remained very limited.

The Volunteer Reserve, into which wartime officers were entered, had initially served ashore during the First World War because Churchill did not believe it would be of any use at sea; many of its members fought ashore throughout the war.¹⁴⁸ In the Second it was entrusted with sea service, even to the extent of being given command (initially in trawlers and other small vessels, later in corvettes, frigates, destroyers, and submarines). The wartime Royal Navy was extremely successful – the hastily trained wartime recruits performing well in the most arduous conditions. This success was only possible because all but the smallest ships had a backbone of experienced, fully trained, regular personnel. All this lay in the future, in the mean time the entry of Fisher-Selborne and Special Entry cadets continued and both schemes struggled to attract sufficient candidates.

Fisher-Selborne Scheme Selection in the 1930s

The extra places at Dartmouth were increasingly taken up by the sons of naval officers. The increased willingness of naval officers to send their sons to Dartmouth appears to have been due to the fee concessions available and increased confidence in the prospects of a naval career. It attracted adverse opinion: Mr Parker, MP for Romford, complained in March 1937 that the 31% of Dartmouth cadets were officers' sons and that the college was becoming a dumping ground for naval offspring with no other prospects. Parker believed this was damaging the Navy – making reference to 'educational inbreeding'.¹⁴⁹ Parker's comments had no effect; in May 1938, 155 of the 496 cadets at Dartmouth (31.25%) were the sons of officers in the Royal Navy or Royal Marines.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Lavery, *They Served*, contains a good account of wartime officer training pp.150-183.

¹⁴⁸ Stephen Howarth, *The Royal Navy's Reserves in War & Peace 1903-2003* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2003) p.40; Lavery, *They Served*, p.17

¹⁴⁹ Hansard HC Deb (5th series) 11 January 1937 c.1437

¹⁵⁰ TNA Records created or inherited by the Department of Education and Science, and of related bodies (ED) 109/824 'Report of Inspection of Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, Devon. Held on 31st May, 1st, 2nd and 3rd June 1938' p.3

There is nothing to suggest that the interviewers were actively encouraged to favour boys from service backgrounds. But they would have been well aware that many families had a tradition of naval service, and in some cases would have served with relatives of the boys they were interviewing. Furthermore the Admiralty's efforts to expand the provision of King's Cadetships, and the 1925 suggestion by DTSD Captain Hugh Tweedie that the sons of naval officers should automatically pass the selection interview,¹⁵¹ suggest that a substantial number of senior officers did favour recruiting boys from naval backgrounds. There were solid grounds for doing so, these boys might have been brought up to love and revere the Navy and would certainly be familiar with the realities of naval life – in particular the long periods spent away from home. Their decision to join the service was more informed than that of other candidates and they could be expected to adjust to naval life more quickly.

Perhaps the large number of officer's sons entering Dartmouth was symptomatic of difficulties in recruiting sufficient good quality cadets from other backgrounds. Official files offer some evidence of serious difficulties in Dartmouth recruiting in the late 1930s. The first concerns surfaced in 1936, and were an important factor in the subsequent adoption of the house system. The Second Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Martin Dunbar-Nasmith, wrote to the Captain of the College, Rear-Admiral Reginald Holt, stating that there was 'very considerable concern' at the shortage of candidates. Dartmouth was attracting around two candidates for every place, the Admiralty wanted three.¹⁵²

Holt replied that the parents of potential cadets generally preferred the Special Entry. He cited the later age of entry (enabling boys to attend their father's old public school and then make an informed choice about their career), the possibility of being forced into engineering, and opposition from prep school headmasters (they were wary of the interview and thought the curriculum only suitable for the Navy) as the key reasons for this.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ TNA ADM 116/2462, M.02256/25 'Economy in the Education of Officers and Men: Paper B' by DTSD (Captain Hugh J Tweedie) August 1925 p.2; it must be noted that Tweedie thought the interviewers should reject only the totally unsuitable (around 5%) leaving the remainder to sit a competitive examination for entry.

¹⁵² TNA ADM 1/8832, CW.11270/1936 'Letter to the Commanding Officer on the Subject', 31 July 1936 Attachment A of the Second Sea Lord's (Admiral Sir Martin E Dunbar-Nasmith) memorandum for the Board presented 5 November 1936

¹⁵³ *ibid*, 'Remarks on the Shortage of Candidates for the Royal Naval College Dartmouth, and the Possibility of Introducing the House System' attachment to letter of 3 October 1936 para.1.

Supporting remarks by the Headmaster, Eric Kempson, suggested that the lower cost of the Special Entry was attractive to parents. He accused the Admiralty of failing to defend Dartmouth against attacks made in the press. He thought that prep school headmasters should be invited to hold their annual conference at the college so that their views might be changed.

Kempson also offered remarks on the quality of entrants to the college. The marks obtained in the entrance examinations were not being kept secret. Obligated to take candidates who had scored poorly in the examinations, the reputation of the college suffered. Cadets who had done badly in the entrance examinations openly referred to themselves as 'charity cases'. On the other hand, the boys entering Dartmouth were almost all far cleverer than those entering Sandhurst.¹⁵⁴

Dartmouth was far from alone in struggling to attract sufficient candidates. The late 1930s were a difficult period for the public school sector, with many schools struggling against a lack of pupils and rising costs. There was sufficient alarm to prompt a series of investigations by the HMC in the 1936-1940 period. At a meeting held at the Board of Education on 24 October 1938 the problem was laid out in detail. After the First World War there had been a boom in independent schooling and many new schools had opened, demand had now fallen and schools were struggling to find enough pupils to survive. Many headmasters had taken to recruiting in prep schools – this was so widespread that close relations with prep schools were now a factor in the appointment of public school headmasters.¹⁵⁵

No action was taken following this meeting, despite the emergence of some alarming facts during an earlier meeting of the HMC. Pupil numbers had dropped from 1931 onwards; this decline looked set to continue, in 1925 a reduction in elementary school pupil numbers of around 800,000 over the next ten years had been predicted. This did not necessarily translate to a

Attached to Holt's letter to Dunbar-Nasmith 3 October 1936. Attachment B of Dunbar-Nasmith's memorandum for the Board presented 5 November 1936

¹⁵⁴ *ibid*, 'Remarks by the Headmaster, RN College Dartmouth', attached to Holt's letter to Dunbar-Nasmith 3 October 1936. Attachment B of Dunbar-Nasmith's memorandum for the Board presented 5 November 1936

¹⁵⁵ TNA ED 136/129 Report of meeting held at the Board of Education 24 October 1938

proportionate decline in public school entrants, but it was clear that public school enrolment was unlikely to rise in the near future.¹⁵⁶

Surprisingly the HMC largely ignored the obvious cause of the decline in public school enrolment – the economic depression of the 1930s, which had destroyed the fortunes of many families meaning that they could no longer afford private schooling.¹⁵⁷ There is no evidence of the number of families that were affected but the evidence gathered by the HMC suggests that financial struggles may have been a significant factor in declining enrolment. A survey conducted in 1940 found that the schools struggling most were those charging middling fees. The most expensive schools attracted the richest parents and their prestige meant that parents were willing to make sacrifices in other areas in order to pay the fees. The cheapest schools had undoubtedly gained pupils who would previously have been sent to a more expensive establishment.¹⁵⁸

The struggles of the public schools in the late 1930s are interesting for several reasons. In the first place, there was undoubtedly a decline in the number of boys available to attend any public school, a fact overlooked by the Royal Navy when debating the decline in applications for Dartmouth. The increasing tendency of prep schools to direct their pupils to particular public schools may have been greatly detrimental to naval recruitment. Similarly, the willingness of headmasters to target individual parents in an effort to snare their sons gave their schools an advantage over Dartmouth which could not recruit pupils in the same way. It must be born in mind however that Dartmouth was not merely a public school, but the gateway to a naval career with its own particular attractions and drawbacks, and therefore unique problems of pupil recruitment.

Secondly, the public schools were increasingly democratic institutions. Although the top schools remained the exclusive preserve of the rich (except perhaps for a few scholarship boys) those at the bottom of the pecking order were increasingly turning to public funding and were therefore contributing to the rise in poorer but well educated boys seeking entry to the Royal Navy.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ TNA ED 136/129 Report of HMC committee enclosed in letter from the Headmaster of Winchester College (Spencer Leeson) to the Permanent Secretary of the Board of Education (Sir Maurice Holmes) 12 June 1938

¹⁵⁷ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p.239; Jackson, *Middle Classes*, p.28

¹⁵⁸ TNA ED 136/129 'Report of the Committee of Three appointed by the Conference on December 22nd, 1939, upon the future of the Public Schools' 9 March 1940 p.5

¹⁵⁹ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p.242; Jackson, *Middle Classes*, pp.174-178

These boys had a particularly strong claim – they had received the academic, social and moral education of a public school boy and lacked only his financial backing. The success of the elementary school boys sent to these schools reinforced the argument that they could succeed at Dartmouth if given the chance.

The Royal Navy took no immediate action to meet concerns about the quality of those entering and leaving Dartmouth, or even to investigate how far these concerns were justified. Instead the naval authorities replaced terms with houses and, in 1940, adopted the Common Entrance examinations in an effort to make the college more attractive to parents. No systematic investigation into the results achieved by cadets was undertaken until 1944.¹⁶⁰

Two sets of examination results for Dartmouth candidates are available – those from March and July 1939. Dartmouth candidates were interviewed before being examined and those receiving low interview marks did not take the examination. Dartmouth candidates received interview grades, ranging from A1 to C3, rather than marks. B2 was generally the minimum grade from which candidates would progress to the examinations.

In July 1939, 98 candidates were interviewed, 64 progressed to the examinations and 43 were ultimately accepted.¹⁶¹ The interview grades were as follows A1 6 candidates, A2+ 8 candidates, A2- 8 candidates, B1+ 6 candidates, B1 7 candidates, B1- 7 candidates, B2+ 9 candidates, B2 13 candidates, B2- 8 candidates, B3+ 4 candidates, B3 5 candidates, B3- 2 candidates, C1 6 candidates, C2 3 candidates and C3 1 candidate. On this evidence, although the pool of candidates was not large, it was of good quality with 22 of the 64 who progressed securing A grades of some kind.

A total of 600 examination marks were available to Dartmouth candidates and the minimum needed to secure entry was normally 310 although candidates scoring above 290 might be taken. The marks were allocated as follows: English 100, history 50, geography 50, French dictation 70, French oral 30, arithmetic 75, algebra 50, geometry 75 and Latin 100.¹⁶² This mark scheme reflects the priorities of both prep schools and the Royal Navy. 200 marks were available for mathematics of various forms, reflecting the course at Dartmouth,

¹⁶⁰ See TNA ADM 1/16609

¹⁶¹ TNA ADM 116/6354 List of candidates and interview grades, un-dated

¹⁶² *ibid*, 'Report on the Examination for Naval Cadetships held on 1st and 2nd March 1939', signed JD Hurd Private Secretary to the First Lord 13 March 1939

but 100 were available for Latin – a key subject in prep schools. The 100 marks available for English reflected both its important place in the naval curriculum, and the increasing emphasis the Royal Navy placed on communication skills.

A total of 124 candidates took part in the examinations in March and July 1939, 73 scored at least 310. In the two exams concerned, 11 candidates scored under 310 but over 290. The lowest scoring entrant from the March examinations had a mark of 302, while in July a score of 291 secured admission. Mark distribution for the two examinations combined is as follows:

500-600 marks 2 candidates

450-499 marks 4 candidates

400-449 marks 8 candidates

350-399 marks 34 candidates

300-349 marks 32 candidates

250-299 marks 19 candidates

200-249 marks 15 candidates

150-199 marks 5 candidates

100-149 marks 5 candidates

Under 100 marks 0 candidates.¹⁶³

High marks were rare, of the 124 candidates only 2 scored above 500 and the best of these scored only 511; further, of those scoring under 500 the best score was 465. This suggests that the Dartmouth examinations were hard, possibly too hard. Had the examinations been slightly easier, more candidates would have scored high marks, and there might have been more separation of the bulk of candidates who scored between 300 and 400. Easier examinations would, however, also have raised the marks of those who scored 250-299 marks and such candidates might have struggled at Dartmouth if, as can reasonably be assumed, the minimum score of 290 had been arrived at as the result of years of experience. As the following table shows, interview marks were not always a good guide to examination marks:

¹⁶³ *ibid*, Lists of candidates and interview grades, the lists themselves are not dated but it is clear which examination they refer to.

Table 5 – Comparison of interview and examination performance of Dartmouth candidates March and July 1939. Derived from TNA ADM 116/6354.¹⁶⁴

Grade	Number of candidates	Highest mark	Lowest mark	Average mark	Number admitted
A1	11	412	243	359	10
A2+	11	511	295	355	11
A2	12	465	255	366	11
A2-	18	458	185	331	15
B1+	16	504	136	312	9
B1	9	455	219	344	7
B1-	10	384	143	313	6
B2+	14	368	129	287	9
B2	23	407	126	255	6

As the table shows, candidates with high interview grades were more likely to secure a pass mark in the entry examinations. Of the 52 candidates given A¹⁶⁵ grades in the interview 47 secured admission; while of 37 with B2¹⁶⁶ grades only 15 were admitted and the average mark was too low to secure admission.

Although the average marks for candidates graded A2 and B1 are higher than might be expected, both averages benefit from the lack of very low scoring candidates. Whilst there are clear patterns, candidates of each grade scored a wide variety of marks. Overall, analysis of the results from the examinations of Dartmouth candidates held in March and July 1939 supports the view of the Royal Navy that interviews were a good way to assess a potential officer. Most of those who gained high interview grades also did well in the examinations and very few candidates with high interview grades failed to secure a pass mark.

The lists of successful candidates from these examinations are dominated by the sons of military personnel, and in particular naval officers. Of the 89 candidates, 32 had fathers in the armed services, whilst another was the

¹⁶⁴ *ibid*, List of candidates and interview grades, the lists themselves are not dated but it is clear which examination they refer to.

¹⁶⁵ Those graded A1 A2+, A2 or A2-

¹⁶⁶ Those graded B2+ and B2

son of a former RAF chaplain. 18 had fathers in the Royal Navy (20%), 10 in the Army (11%), 2 in the RAF, and 1 each in the Royal Marines and Royal Fleet Auxiliary.¹⁶⁷ The naval officers ranged in rank from lieutenant to rear-admiral and 3 were paymasters although none were engineers.

Of the other candidates, 24 had fathers involved in the commercial world, 6 in law, 3 employed by the government (all of them holding high level positions),¹⁶⁸ 6 in agriculture and 9 engineers, a further 9 candidates cannot be placed into any of these groups. There were also 2 doctors and 4 clergymen.

Aside from the vast growth in the number of officer's sons, perhaps prompted by the increased confidence arising from rearmament, the background of those selected for Dartmouth was much as it had been in 1903. The large number of officer's sons suggests that the college was more affordable than it had once been, but it clearly remained the domain of wealthy families from the upper and upper middle classes. The makeup of the cadet body did not reflect the increasing keenness of the Royal Navy to recruit boys from state schools, largely because the Special Entry remained the preferred route to democratisation.

Special Entry Selection in the late 1930s

In 1937 a note by the Head of the CW Branch called attention to the high academic standards and increasingly public school-like atmosphere of many state schools. He was a civilian but nobody challenged his assertion that: 'The Navy would lose little or nothing by obtaining an increasing number of Special Entry cadets from secondary schools'.¹⁶⁹

Whilst nobody in the Admiralty objected to increasing the number of secondary school entrants, they were still limited in number and were not universally appreciated. After a visit to HMS *Erebus*, Captain Harold Burroughs of HMS *Excellent* wrote a letter to C-in-C Portsmouth, Admiral the Earl of Cork

¹⁶⁷ The Royal Fleet Auxiliary was part of the Merchant Navy rather than the Royal Navy and its officers were socially on a par with Merchant Navy officers, below Royal Navy officers. However, because it worked so closely with the Royal Navy, its inclusion here is justified.

¹⁶⁸ Namely Member of Parliament, manager of the Hong Kong telegraphy service, and Colonial Secretary to Trinidad and Tobago. These men probably had substantial private wealth and certainly had high social status.

¹⁶⁹ TNA ADM 1/9056 Note by Head of CW (Philip Marrack) un-dated, attached to EWE Kempson's 'Headmaster's Conference: Memorandum of Discussion on Special Entry' 28 February 1934

and Orrery, in which he stated that eight of the sixty-eight cadets aboard *Erebus* had pronounced regional accents . In Burroughs' opinion these cadets would not be respected by ratings and as such were unsuited to becoming officers.¹⁷⁰ His letter was unofficially forwarded to the Second Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Martin Dunbar-Nasmith, – Cork and Orrery commenting that whilst such accents were undesirable they were remediable, and did not make a boy unsuited to being an officer.¹⁷¹ Dunbar-Nasmith apparently shared his views for he took no action on the letter. Whilst Burroughs' letter offers strong evidence of class bias amongst some officers there is no evidence it was typical of naval opinion.

The source of candidates was less important than their quality, and in 1936 this was a matter of concern. The Air Ministry had decided to alter the marks available for the RAF officer entry interview from a maximum of 250 to 300.¹⁷² This proposal did not directly affect the Navy, which marked candidates out of 400 and was not bound by joint service policy, but it did result in substantial Admiralty discussions – not least as the proposed move would have resulted in a pass range for naval candidates of 260 and for the other services 250, these ranges were close enough to consider forming a joint policy.¹⁷³

The CW Branch had noticed that while candidates had historically averaged around 650 to 1050 marks out of 1750 available for the combined academic testing and interview, they were now averaging 850 to 1150.¹⁷⁴ This substantial increase clearly had to be investigated – were the standards of the examiners slipping or was the quality of the candidates rising? If this was the case, was the standard rising across the board or was there a new group of very good candidates? Two tables were produced, detailing the highest and lowest marks of successful candidates and the marks of candidates taking various places.

¹⁷⁰ TNA ADM 116/3989 *Excellent* letter No.0500 from the officer commanding HMS *Excellent* (Captain Harrold M Burroughs) to the C-in-C Portsmouth (Admiral the Earl of Cork and Orrery) 10 November 1937

¹⁷¹ TNA ADM 116/3989 Letter from Cork and Orrery to the Second Sea Lord (Admiral Sir Martin E Dunbar-Nasmith) 17 November 1937

¹⁷² TNA ADM 178/210, CW.11862/36 Note by Marrack 11 December 1936

¹⁷³ *ibid*

¹⁷⁴ *ibid*

Table 6 – Highest and lowest marks of successful candidates for Special Entry cadetships, selected years 1928-1936. Reproduced from TNA ADM 178/210.¹⁷⁵

Date	Highest Mark	Lowest Mark
November 1928	1273	700
June 1931	1311	723
November 1933	1212	718
June 1935	1270	688
June 1936	1267	650

Table 7 – Marks obtained by candidates taking particular places in Civil Service examinations 1934-1936. Reproduced from TNA ADM 178/210.¹⁷⁶

Date	1 st place	11 th place	21 st place	31 st place	41 st place
November 1934	1236	1071	1019	967	902
June 1935	1306	1111	1013	994	972
November 1935	1234	1099	1022	984	941
June 1936	1269	1096	1046	1023	999
November 1936	1305	1158	1103	1064	1055

The first of these tables demonstrates that the highest scoring candidates were still at around the same level marks. However, the marks obtained by the lowest

¹⁷⁵ *ibid*, Tables included in Marrack's note

¹⁷⁶ *ibid*, Tables included in Marrack's note

scoring entrants were steadily falling. This suggests that although the standard of the better candidates was much as it had been, they were in short supply and so the Royal Navy was increasingly obliged to take those with poor marks. Confusingly, the evidence from this table does not support the statement that average mark was increasing.

However the table includes only the best and worst marks and ignores those in between. This suggests that whilst the highest scoring candidates were of the same standard and the lowest scoring candidates slightly worse, those in between had improved. This suggestion is borne out by the second table, which includes the marks of all those taking the examinations, rather than being limited to those wishing to enter the Royal Navy or Royal Marines.

In this table the marks obtained by the first placed candidates show no particular pattern. The highest mark was obtained in the second examination, and thereafter the standard fell again although the first examination was still the second lowest score. The candidates finishing eleventh seem to have improved slightly, the earliest exam seeing the poorest score of the five. However, unless November 1936 was the start of a new leap in standards, the improvement was small, only around twenty marks. The candidates finishing twenty-first were initially of very similar standard, the twenty-first placed candidates in the first three examinations were separated by only nine marks. Thereafter the standard appears to have improved, most noticeably in the November 1936 examination.

Only among those in lower positions was there a marked improvement. The first examination saw the weakest score of those in thirty-first and forty-first places and the standard thereafter improved noticeably. Overall, there is no clear proof that the quality of candidates was improving. Whilst the examination scores of those placing first to forty-first were improving, this improvement was uneven and unreliable. However, the November 1936 examinations did see scores considerably better than those in the two examinations beforehand. In general candidates in the first exam recorded the worst scores.

Clearly scores in the Civil Service examinations taken by candidates for Special Entry cadetships in the Royal Navy did improve in the mid 1930s. However, this improvement was uneven, suggesting that it was not the result of improved educational standards or of schools directing their best boys towards the armed services. Rather it suggests that as rearmament began so public confidence in the armed services as a career rose and they were able to attract

better quality candidates – especially as they were now offering more vacancies. Alternatively, continuing economic hardship may have reduced the career options of many boys – some would then be encouraged to join the Royal Navy, a profession that could be entered relatively cheaply and at the early age of seventeen.

These results also suggest that high scores among candidates in the Civil Service examinations were rare and that the best candidates taken by the Royal Navy were amongst the best overall. However they also show that the lowest scoring candidates taken by the Royal Navy had quite poor results, with many scoring under 50%. That the Royal Navy accepted candidates with comparatively low scores, suggests that the examinations were harder than they need have been. This suggestion is supported by a 1939 claim that cramming was almost universal among Special Entry candidates and that at least 69% had attended specialist coaching establishments.¹⁷⁷

In considering the selection system as a whole it is important to compare interview and examination marks. This comparison is vital given the emphasis placed by the Royal Navy on the interview stage of the selection process. Given that the Special Entry examinations preceded the interviews it was not uncommon for candidates who had scored very highly in the examinations to be rejected.

¹⁷⁷ TNA ADM 1/20540, CW.17645/38 Remarks of DED (Captain Arthur E Hall) on interview marks obtained by Special Entry cadets 30 May 1939

Table 8 – Candidates for Special Entry Cadetships who passed the examination but failed the interview 1938-1940. Reproduced from TNA ADM 1/20540.¹⁷⁸

Date	Number of candidates	Interview failures	Would have entered if had not failed interview.
3.40	375	7	0
11.39	475	30	1
6.39	350	43	4
3.39	220	10	1
11.38	307	33	4
6.38	Not given	19	3

This table shows that the number of Special Entry candidates who passed the examination only to be denied entry to the Royal Navy by their interview scores was low, only 13 out of 143 failures in 6 examinations. None the less, this represents the loss of 13 very intelligent boys to the Royal Navy. The results were released to the public making it readily apparent that the Royal Navy was rejecting some of the very clever boys it claimed to be keen to recruit.

Evidence suggests that the Special Entries interviews of the late 1930s may not have provided an accurate picture of the candidates, and that class bias played a significant role in these failings. Few interviewers passed on detailed comments to the Admiralty, only a list of interview grades and some reasoning behind them. One exception was Admiral Sir Frederic Dreyer who was on the interview board for Special Entry candidates in February and March 1939.¹⁷⁹ Dreyer was well qualified for his appointment – not only had he risen to high rank in the Royal Navy but he also had three serving sons and both his daughters had married naval officers.

Dreyer reported that of the 200 candidates only 6 had failed, the remainder having received marks between 50 and 380; 50 being a very low

¹⁷⁸ TNA ADM 1/20540, CW.34977/40 Table enclosed in remarks by Marrack 3 May 1940

¹⁷⁹ TNA ADM 1/20540, CW.17645/38 'Remarks on the Cadets Special Entry Interviews for the Royal Navy and Royal Indian Navy held in February and March 1939' by Admiral Sir Frederic C Dreyer 15 March 1939

pass and 400 the maximum attainable mark. Unsurprisingly, Dreyer recorded that 'The general impression was that they were fine young fellows'. Around 40% of the candidates appeared to come from the better public schools, these proving easier to assess than the remainder. Dreyer was an enthusiastic supporter of the candidates from poorer backgrounds. He did not agree that ratings would refuse to be led by those who were not gentlemen by birth; not only did he believe the suggestion 'scandalous', he also thought that, were they to hear it, naval ratings would conclude that the interviewers were not themselves gentlemen! In any case, these candidates should not be rejected by a navy that would promote their rating brother to officer status.

Dreyer had a further complaint, alleging that some lower class candidates had been given higher marks than they might otherwise have received because they had expressed a preference for engineering. This, Dreyer believed, was the executive branch looking after its own – attempting to retain its own exclusiveness whilst reducing that of the engineering branch.

Aside from these controversial remarks Dreyer suggested several refinements. In his opinion boys who had not reached public school leaving age were inferior to those who had – he proposed raising the age limit and limiting candidates to one attempt at securing entry. He suggested that as the representatives of the engineering and paymaster branches and the Royal Indian Navy were not concerned with all the candidates they should not question any of them.

Dreyer's views are those of a man who had vast experience of his service, and was intensely loyal to it, yet was not afraid to criticise. However his opinions were not necessarily shared by the majority of his colleagues. Dreyer's career had not been without its controversies and he was not particularly popular; the First Lord Alfred Duff-Cooper described him as 'universally disliked and distrusted'.¹⁸⁰

Dreyer's view of lower class candidates was very positive yet his views of the engineering branch appear strangely mixed. On one hand he complained that lower class candidates were being pushed towards the engineering branch, suggesting a conspiracy to ensure the continuing low status of this branch. On the other he did not feel that an engineering officer could fairly question all

¹⁸⁰ CCA DUFC 2/12 The Papers of Alfred Duff Cooper (1st Viscount Norwich), paper summarising the characters of senior Royal Navy officers un-dated 1937

candidates and this suggests he considered engineer officers poor judges of character and, by extension, officer-like qualities.

On occasion the conduct of the interviewers was questioned, particularly in the late 1930s when more candidates emerged from state schools and the lower social classes. There had been isolated complaints on previous occasions, but from 1938 onwards a series of complaints thrust the Special Entry into the public eye.

In January a complaint was received from Lieutenant Colonel RM Raynsford on behalf of his son, who had been rejected by the Royal Navy after the November 1937 interviews.¹⁸¹ Raynsford complained that the naval officers among the interviewers were too old, and suggested the interview board should include a psychologist and a headmaster. He felt that too little attention had been paid to the school record of his son (who had attended Repton) or his passing of Certificate A, in which he had finished first of fifty candidates. Further, his son had been asked questions which required only monosyllabic answers and did not allow him to do himself justice. Additionally his son had been criticised for stating his brother's job in the Royal Navy rather than his rank, and most of the general knowledge questions he had been asked were irrelevant.¹⁸²

The CW branch said that it took great care to appoint naval officers of appropriate experience and that a psychologist would be unhelpful. It did concede that a headmaster would be a useful addition, but felt it would be impossible to find anyone with no connection to any of the candidates. Internal correspondence confirmed the suitability of the interviewers. None the less, more care would have to be taken to keep the identity of the interviewers secret (numerous enquiries were received from potential string pullers) and it was vital that those appointed be of sufficiently high standing that, if recognised, their appointment would be beyond criticism.¹⁸³

Here matters rested until July when a complaint was received from the father of AEC Griffith, a candidate rejected by the Royal Marines. He complained that having gone to the expense of sending his son to famous prep and public schools the boy 'in work and games must have had a standard far

¹⁸¹ TNA ADM 178/210, CW.333/38 'Interview and Record Naval Cadetships Examination', unaddressed letter 6 January 1938

¹⁸² He was a lieutenant but Raynsford described him as 'the first lieutenant of a destroyer'.

¹⁸³ TNA ADM 178/210, CW.333/38 Comments for Marrack 14 January 1938 and 10 February 1938

above the ordinary candidate'. His demands for an explanation of his son's rejection were refused, although the Admiralty assured him there was no slur on the boy's intelligence.¹⁸⁴

These candidates came from typical backgrounds – they were from wealthy families and had been educated at expensive schools. Their complaints might therefore be seen as a product of increasing democratisation, although in neither case did the complainant suggest that their boy had been rejected in favour of somebody from a poorer background in order to pacify politicians or public opinion (although this suggestion is not far from the surface).

Both these candidates can be perceived as being the unlucky, if justifiable, victims of interviewers who – although fair – were faced with a multitude of suitable candidates. By contrast the November 1938 interviews appear to have gone badly wrong. The first complaint arrived soon after the results were announced and came from the godfather of PG Hurford-Jones, denied entry to the Royal Marines.¹⁸⁵ The complaint was not unreasonable – on his previous attempt the boy had scored 300 out of 400 for the interview but on this occasion he had failed to secure a passing mark.

The situation would have been prevented had the November interviewers known Hurford-Jones' earlier mark. Hurford-Jones had not failed on the second occasion because of his performance, but because he had been judged to be of Negroid appearance; when questioned the chairman of the interview board explained that 'from his appearance he is unsuitable to be a naval officer'.¹⁸⁶ This was not something that the Admiralty wished to raise with the boy's family. Fortunately Hurford-Jones had done badly enough in the academic tests to put himself out of contention, and so the matter did not become public, and the need to explain the interview mark did not arise.

Entry to the officer corps of the Royal Navy was limited to white men. Within the service it was believed that ratings would not willingly serve under an ethnic minority officer.¹⁸⁷ The Royal Navy was probably no more racist than the rest of British society at the time, although it did offer racial exclusivity as an

¹⁸⁴ TNA ADM 178/210, CW.91919/38 Letter from Mr ES Clifton-Griffith to the Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir Richard Carter) 24 June 1938, draft reply un-dated July 1938

¹⁸⁵ TNA ADM 178/210, CW.16227/38 Letter from Sir Kenneth Harper to Carter 16 November 1938

¹⁸⁶ *ibid*, Sir Matthew Best to JH Peck 22 November 1938

¹⁸⁷ TNA ADM 178/299, CW.41694/2 Comment by Marrack 30 July 1943

inducement to join; *How to Become a Naval Officer* promised that 'your messmates will all be white men'.¹⁸⁸

The interviewers were not only biased against candidates who did not appear to be of the desired ethnicity. Engineer Commander PF Griffiths wrote to complain about the treatment of his son who, like Hurford-Jones, had made a second appearance before the interviewers.¹⁸⁹ On his first attempt the boy had scored 250 interview marks but failed the educational examinations; on his second his exam marks had risen but his interview mark fell to 80. This fall was mysterious given that the boy was praised by the military side at Cheltenham where he was a member of the upper sixth form, a prefect, and a sergeant in the OTC. In this case the Admiralty could only conclude that the interview committee had been biased against the boy.¹⁹⁰

After eight more complaints the Admiralty ruefully concluded that 'evidence is accumulating that the November interview committee did not handle their job too skilfully'.¹⁹¹ The preferred solution was that interviewers should sit on multiple boards to introduce some consistency and it was agreed that a headmaster would be a useful addition to the board. To this end correspondence was opened with the HMC via Claude Elliott, the Headmaster of Eton, who suggested that a university don or retired headmaster might provide an acceptable solution.¹⁹²

By now however the attention of Their Lordships had been distracted by a case than had become embarrassingly public. The case of GWM Morgan had been raised in parliament by his MP, James Griffith, and the Admiralty had to move to fight the fire. Morgan had finished 18th in the academic examinations, beating 79 successful applicants, but received a failing mark of 40 for the interview. This, Griffith suggested, was a clear case of class bias. Morgan was captain of the school rugby team, a member of the cricket team, and clearly the leader of the boys in his school. Unfortunately for Morgan, the school in question was the decidedly obscure Amman Valley County School in Llanelli.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ Bush, *How to Become a Naval Officer*, p.3. For a more general discussion of racist attitudes in Britain in the inter-war period see Colin Holmes, *John Bull's Island* (London: Sheridan House, 1988) especially pp.144-159

¹⁸⁹ TNA ADM 178/210, CW.317/1939 Letter from Engineer Commander PF Griffiths to Carter 4 January 1939

¹⁹⁰ *ibid*, Internal discussions of 6-31 January 1939

¹⁹¹ TNA ADM 178/210, CW.2327/39 Comment by Carter 16 February 1939

¹⁹² *ibid*, Letter from the Headmaster of Eton College (Claude Elliott) to Carter 22 June 1939

¹⁹³ Hansard HC Deb (5th series) 15 February 1939 cc.1710-1712

Griffith complained that Morgan's interview had lasted for only five minutes. He had been asked about his reading of the work of WH Davies but felt that the interviewers knew nothing about Davies or Welsh culture. Apart from being Welsh, Morgan felt he had been discriminated against because his school was co-educational. Griffith complained that only six of the successful candidates had not come from well-known public schools and was firmly of the opinion that the interviewers were biased in their favour. Griffith was followed by the MP for Brigg, who alleged that his constituent had been denied entry because his father drove a bus.¹⁹⁴

These allegations were met by Mr Shakespeare, Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty. He reminded the House that the Royal Navy had an important diplomatic role for which not all boys were suitable. He explained that boys from smaller, less known, schools were much harder to judge than those whose schools were larger or better known. These schools were an unknown quantity and the judgement of their headmasters not always reliable. Of the 75 HMC member schools attended by successful applicants, 20 were grant aided and so the successful candidates came from a less exclusive background than might be assumed at first sight. Finally, the questions Morgan had been asked were, like those asked to all candidates, designed to draw him out of himself and help him to talk to the interviewers.¹⁹⁵

Following this embarrassment the Admiralty and the Civil Service worked to avoid a repeat. It was generally agreed that whilst the Special Entry interviews would benefit from the introduction of a headmaster, continuity was more important. Therefore either the senior civil servant or the flag officer, if not both, must serve on consecutive boards. Whilst the autonomy of the interviewers was important, the Admiralty decided it had a right to demand explanations of surprising verdicts and was keen to make available the marks achieved by candidates on previous attempts.¹⁹⁶

Action was slow in coming – after the November 1939 interviews three candidates who had failed were admitted to the Royal Navy on the personal insistence of Winston Churchill, now First Lord. These candidates had finished fifth, eighth, and seventeenth in the examinations but had been rejected. One

¹⁹⁴ Hansard HC Deb (5th series) 15 February 1939 c.1714

¹⁹⁵ Hansard HC Deb (5th series) 15 February 1939 c.1712

¹⁹⁶ TNA ADM 178/210 'Memorandum of a Meeting Held in the Parliamentary Secretary's Room Admiralty, on the afternoon of February 17th', 17 February 1939

was the son of a chief petty officer, another the son of a merchant navy engineer, and the third had a slight cockney accent. Churchill concluded they had been rejected for no good reason but as a result of class bias 'wholly contrary to the principles approved by parliament'.¹⁹⁷

Clearly many Special Entry candidates felt that they had been rejected unfairly. They criticised the interviewers who they felt had questioned them unreasonably, paid them little attention, or discriminated against them. They were sufficiently angry to mobilise the support of their fathers, guardians and MPs in support of their cases. Several came to public notice to the considerable embarrassment of the Admiralty. In many cases their complaints were justified. The November 1938 interviews appear to have gone badly wrong, with the interviewers demonstrating poor judgement and bias.

The Admiralty was certainly willing to tackle the issues raised by these complaints. Efforts were made to improve the composition of the interview boards and great emphasis was placed on the appointment of the best possible interviewers. That complaints were received from candidates from a variety of schools and backgrounds suggests that even a perfectly composed and entirely unbiased interview board would have attracted some level of complaint. Overall, whilst the Special Entry interviewers of the late 1930s may not have treated all candidates fairly, there is no evidence of any bias on the part of the Admiralty or the Royal Navy as a whole. This argument is borne out by the experiences of candidates from the period.

Candidate Experiences

The March 1939 Dartmouth examinations provide an interesting opportunity to compare a candidate's perceptions to his performance. Philip Seymour's autobiography includes a detailed description of his experiences at the interview. Seymour, whose father was in the Colonial Service, had been born in Ceylon and had lived in Fiji before being sent to prep school in England aged eight. His father had no firm ambition for his son but, hoping he would become a classical scholar, entered him for Winchester and sent him to a prep school

¹⁹⁷ TNA ADM 1/20540, CW.34977/40 Letter from the First Lord (Winston Churchill) to the Second Sea Lord (Admiral Sir Charles J Little) 7 April 1940

specialising in this area. Seymour however determined on joining the Royal Navy and his parents acquiesced.

Seymour suffered from the same interview nerves as other candidates but with several complicating factors. The Admiralty building where the interview was held was a completely alien environment; so too was London itself to the self described 'boy from the South Pacific'. Seymour's prep school might have given him some preparation for the sights of London, but as nobody in its sixty year history had ever asked to take the naval examinations it was unable to help him with practical preparation.¹⁹⁸

Unsurprisingly Seymour felt that his interview started badly. The questions ranged from the reasonable – 'Why do you want to join the Royal Navy?' to the more bizarre, such as being asked to outline a plan for finding a cricket ball lost in a field of long grass. He was he felt saved by the questions on the First World War. By outlining most of the Royal Navy's major exploits in the conflict he did at least convince the interviewers of his interest in the Navy. He played an accidental trump card when he mentioned the exploits of HM ships *Broke* and *Swift*. The reaction of the interviewers to this was 'astonishing. The entire committee let out a guffaw, the chairman slapped his side and roared with laughter'.¹⁹⁹ It transpired that the civilian clothed chairman of the interview board was Admiral Sir Edward Evans – better known as Evans of the *Broke*, and the commander of the destroyers in this action.

Seymour concluded that 'my board decided this candidate was not as dim-witted as he appeared. Clearly, he had taken the trouble to find out who would be in charge of his interview panel. He had looked up his story and had an ace to play'.²⁰⁰ In reality this was not the case. Not only were the identities of the board unknown to Seymour they were also supposed to be secret. Further, Seymour's A1 grading suggests that his performance generally impressed the board.²⁰¹

This is evidence of a gap between the perceptions of a candidate and those of the interview board. Writing in early 1990s Seymour's recollections may not have been entirely accurate, but none the less here is a candidate who felt that his interview performance was generally poor and yet received the

¹⁹⁸ Seymour, *Africa*, p.6

¹⁹⁹ Seymour, *Africa*, p.7

²⁰⁰ Seymour, *Africa*, p.8

²⁰¹ TNA ADM 116/6354 Note from the Oxford and Cambridge Examinations Board 'Naval Cadetships Examination March 1939: List of Candidates in Order of Total Marks' un-dated

highest possible grade. Unfortunately no official notes on Seymour's interview have survived, only the note of his grade on the list of examination results.

In 1938 Robert Clarkson felt that another war with Germany was inevitable and decided to join the Royal Navy rather than go to university where his studies would likely be interrupted. Facing the Civil Service examinations in March 1939 he was 'given a refresher course in mathematics and told that the history and English ought to be a pushover'. The history examination did go well, but Clarkson was later to discover he had finished sixth from bottom in English, which he had planned to study at Oxford – illustrating the gap between the functional role of the language in the armed services and the more literary bent pursued by most educational institutions.

Many of the interview questions he remembers concerned his school career. Although his school was four hundred years old he suspected that the interviewers were not familiar with it; he was closely questioned as to the fixture list and prowess of the cricket and rugby teams of which he was part. Clarkson was also asked what he thought his role in the Royal Navy would be – he was a candidate for paymaster so perhaps the role of the executive officer was thought to be clearer.²⁰²

One candidate who failed the interview did record his experiences in his autobiography. RB Crosley did not enter the Royal Navy in 1937 but joined the Fleet Air Arm in 1940, and made his career there rather than return to his peacetime profession the police force. Seeking advice about the interviews Crosley was informed that candidates were examined by around twenty admirals, and that it was essential to arrive with a taxi number memorised – even if one had not travelled by taxi; an acquaintance claimed he had only passed after noticing the collar of one of the interviewers was undone.

Initially Crosley's interview went well. He was questioned on his hobby of sailing and on being a member of his school cricket team. Ultimately however he failed by thirteen marks which he suspected was as a result of perceived communist tendencies. Despite this slight Crosley does not suggest that the interviewers were unfair or that the process itself was wrong.²⁰³

The experiences of Seymour, Clarkson and Crosley would have been recognised by any candidate for a naval cadetship from the 1903-1939 period.

²⁰² Robert Clarkson, *Headlong Into the Sea* (Edinburgh: Pentland, 1995) pp.1-4; Clarkson attended the Crypt School in Gloucester

²⁰³ RM Crosley, *They Gave Me a Seafire* (Shrewsbury: Airlife, 1986) pp.19-20

The stability of the selection process was a tribute to those who had originally developed it. Although far from perfect, it served to identify the boys who became the officers that led the Royal Navy to victory in the Second World War. This continuity was in contrast to the change in the type of boy thought suitable.

Throughout this period the main practical officer selection concern of the Royal Navy was to find enough suitable candidates. However from a historical view point the over-arching theme is democratisation, the gradual process of which was helping to shape the future of the officer corps of the Royal Navy. Whereas changes to officer education and training were driven almost entirely by naval concerns, democratisation was driven largely by politicians, in particular Churchill and Alexander.

During this period a measure of genuine democratisation occurred. Commissioning prospects for ratings were improved, a system of reduced fees was introduced, and the democratic possibilities of the Special Entry exploited. It is true that the impact of these measures was very limited but it is a gross injustice to accuse the Royal Navy of actively opposing democratisation. Despite vocal protestations to the contrary, by the Labour Party and others, there was genuine enthusiasm for democratisation within the officer corps. While it is true that many officers wished to retain the exclusivity of the officer corps; others were in favour of change. Their efforts to produce it were generally frustrated by changing naval manpower requirements and Treasury parsimony rather than their colleagues.

Although it generated a great deal of hot air and paperwork, in practical terms, democratisation was a lesser concern to the Royal Navy than maintaining an adequate supply of suitable candidates. Throughout the inter-war period the Royal Navy struggled to secure the boys it needed – potential candidates were put off by the disapproval of schoolmasters, the high cost of entry, opposition to war, and the prospect of being axed from the service. Their parents were alarmed by these factors and also by the strenuous lifestyle of cadets and the narrowness of a Dartmouth education.

The factor that is easiest to overlook is the changing manpower demands of the Royal Navy, the impact of which is mentioned above. The shrinking Royal Navy of the 1920s simply did not need extra officers promoted from the lower-deck, even if it could have afforded to train them. Conversely, the Royal Navy of the late 1930s was in desperate need of both trained ratings and junior officers

– the latter could be produced in less time and so democratisation was sacrificed to meet operational requirements.

Increased manpower requirements also helped to make the Special Entry more attractive than Dartmouth to the naval authorities; it offered a shorter training period and a lower cost per officer. The Special Entry also became the chosen means of democratising the officer entry and perhaps more boys from working and lower middle class backgrounds should have become Special Entry cadets in the late 1930s. However to have recruited these boys in large numbers would have required modified selection and educational schemes, which were neither practical nor advisable when the Navy was already in a state of flux and might have discouraged candidates from the existing sources. By adhering to its existing practice the Royal Navy ensured the continuation of an already successful system.

Chapter Two – The Royal Naval Colleges Dartmouth and Osborne

Most naval officers of the 1903-1939 period began their careers at the Royal Naval Colleges Osborne and Dartmouth. These institutions, central to the officer education process, operated in a unique dual role as both public schools and naval establishments. They provided cadets not only with an academic education, designed to be the equal of that provided by a top public school, but also with a thorough indoctrination into the ways of the Royal Navy.

Numerous aspects of the college experience were designed to develop officer-like qualities. The entire experience was calculated to produce devotion to the Royal Navy. The academic curriculum was tailored to the demands of the naval profession. There was an emphasis on self-discipline, obedience and physical and mental hardening. However cadets had little opportunity to develop a sense of responsibility, learned little about seamanship, and had very few leadership opportunities.

Of the two only Osborne was the direct product of the Fisher-Selborne scheme. Construction of Dartmouth Naval College had begun in 1898, the college replaced the existing ship based facilities, providing better living conditions and improved educational facilities. Cadet training had taken place at Dartmouth since 1863 in which year HMS *Britannia* had first anchored in the River Dart. In 1864 *Britannia* was joined by HMS *Hindustan*; and in 1869 *Prince of Wales* took over both *Britannia*'s name and duties. Thereafter training took place aboard the two ships, the establishment being known as *Britannia* or, more informally, 'the ship'.

Dartmouth had many advantages as a location for officer training. The town itself was relatively small and isolated, meaning that the cadets could be raised away from disease and shore side temptation. The sheltered waters of the Dart were ideal for pulling and sailing, cadets could also venture out into the open sea. There were some disadvantages, including a lack of flat, well drained, land for playing fields and being away from any major naval base. A railway was under construction, opening in 1864 and providing a direct link to London. In 1877 Britannia Halt was built to serve the ship. Later a through

service to London was introduced, cutting the journey from Paddington to Dartmouth to under six hours.¹

Certainly Dartmouth was far superior to Portsmouth and Portland which had previously been used for cadet training. Portsmouth, although a great naval base, offered far too much by way of temptation and a great risk of disease. Portland was unpleasantly isolated and suffered from poor weather. So great were the advantages of Dartmouth that the decision was made to build the new naval college there rather than move to another location; Gosport, Hayling Island, Devonport, Weymouth and Milford Haven were among the alternatives considered.² When the first Fisher-Selborne scheme cadets arrived at Dartmouth in 1905 a clear effort was made to separate them from the cadets still serving in *Britannia* and the scheme that had produced them.

Only one term of cadets moved from the ships into the newly opened college; where they were out-numbered by, and carefully segregated from, those who had joined via the Fisher-Selborne scheme. The remainder were sent to Bermuda to complete their training. Many of the staff, both naval and civilian, were replaced. The name *Britannia* was retained until 1908 when the college was re-designated as HMS *Espiegle* – a clear effort to break with the past. None the less, many at the college retained a love of the ship which remained in the Dart until 1916. Her departure did not result in the end of her traditions; for example ‘ship’ remained the rallying cry for college sports teams.

The Fisher-Selborne scheme required a course lasting four years rather than its predecessor’s two; consequently extra accommodation for cadets was needed. Rather than greatly enlarging Dartmouth it was decided to provide separate facilities for cadets in the first two years of the course. It was suggested that these cadets be housed aboard ships; the three-deck screw ship *Marlborough* and the 1875 built barque rigged battleship *Superb* were earmarked for the task. The use of these vessels would have been somewhat

¹ Vic Mitchell, Keith Smith, *Branch Line to Kingswear* (Midhurst: Middleton Press, 1998). The *Great Western Railway Public Timetable* for November 1875 offered the 0900 departure from Paddington which got passengers to Dartmouth at 1655 and the 1145 arriving at 1746. In 1929 you could leave Paddington at 0900 and arrive at Dartmouth at 1440, or take an express train which left at 1100 and arrived at 1540pm *Great Western Railway Public Time Books 1929* pp.63-64. (Timetables in author’s father’s collection)

² Davies, Grove, *Royal Naval College Dartmouth*, p.9

ironic given Fisher's enthusiasm for modernity and, unsurprisingly, on his insistence it was decided to build a junior college ashore instead.³

The decision was made to construct the junior college at Osborne on the Isle of Wight, King Edward VII having no use for his mother's favourite residence. Victoria's house went untouched; the new naval college took shape in the outbuildings and grounds. The site offered various advantages – whilst secluded it was reasonably accessible, and was close to the naval base at Portsmouth. This was especially advantageous as Fisher left the Admiralty to become C-in-C Portsmouth and was able to keep a close eye on his creation.⁴ Otherwise, Osborne was not particularly well suited to naval training – facilities for boat work were few and poor, and the climate was not seen to be particularly healthy.

The two colleges contrasted greatly in construction, and this reflected the differing circumstances of their creation. Osborne was hastily constructed to meet an urgent need for new facilities; many of the buildings, including all of the cadet dormitories, were constructed of uralite, a compressed felt-like material which was attached to wooden frames in two layers with asbestos insulation in between. The projected life span of these structures is unclear. Although the Admiralty strenuously denied that they were temporary, it admitted they were not expected to last a hundred years.⁵

Dartmouth on the other hand was a deliberate statement of British naval mastery and tradition. The college sat on a hill above the town of Dartmouth, its presence both dominating and protective of the town and its merchant shipping. The college was of grand construction, the architect Aston Webb had previously designed the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Birmingham Law Courts. Webb was one of the most respected architects in Britain and the obvious choice for a prestigious public building.⁶

The design also reflected the values and aspirations of the inhabitants. The college was of similar appearance to the great country houses of the late nineteenth century, such as Kinmel, Bryanston and Ditton Place. The domestic

³ ADM 7/941 'New Scheme of Training Officers and Men 1903' Admiralty Board Minute No.1045 'Scheme for Entry Training and Employment of Officers, Men and Boys for the Royal Navy' 21 November 1902 p.11; Letter from Fisher to his son Cecil Fisher 5 August 1903, Marder, *Fear God I*, pp.276-277

⁴ Fisher's letter to James Thursfield 17 May 1903, Marder, *Fear God I*, pp.273-274

⁵ Partridge, *Osborne*, p.30

⁶ Harrold, Porter, *Royal Naval College*, p.43

tone of the architecture promoted feelings of family and fellowship and thus loyalty to the service. At the same time, its grandeur reflected the social aspirations of the Royal Navy's officers and reinforced their upper class status, providing them with the grand family home most of them lacked. The college was also architecturally similar to many contemporary public schools which helped reinforce its status as an educational establishment. In the words of Quintin Colville, it 'allowed naval officers to consolidate and internalise a further, and vital, component of middle and upper class status'.⁷

The way in which the colleges were promoted reflected the aspirations of their owner rather than the facts of their appearance. Successive issues of *How to Become a Naval Officer* emphasised the beauty and grandeur of the colleges as part of their efforts to attract boys from middle and upper class backgrounds. Needless to say these opinions were not universally shared. When the designs for Dartmouth were released in 1900 *Truth* magazine informed its readers that the building 'appears to be a combination of a workhouse and a stable'.⁸ This decidedly unflattering description was, unsurprisingly, very different from that later applied by *How to Become a Naval Officer* which discusses the 'magnificence' of the 'truly beautiful' college. Perhaps the author was aware of *Truth's* remarks for he also stated that 'Dartmouth College is that rare product of modern architecture on the grand scale, in that on first sighting the building, the visitor feels instinctively that it is neither - one- a lunatic asylum, two- a prison, or three- the house of a profiteer'.⁹

Osborne generally did not attract such favourable comment. *How to Become a Naval Officer* was favourable enough, describing the surroundings of the college as 'truly Arcadian' and the bungalow style of the buildings as 'picturesquely beautiful'.¹⁰ Presenting the college as a desirable rural residence likened it to a country house, reinforcing its upper class status. It conveniently ignored the nature of the buildings, whilst at the same time suggesting Osborne was a suitably inspiring setting for naval training and a healthy environment for young boys. Those who actually experienced the college were less favourable,

⁷ Colville, 'Dartmouth', p.118

⁸ Quoted in Partridge, *Osborne*, p.2

⁹ Gieves, *Naval Officer* (1923), p.17

¹⁰ Gieves, *Naval Officer* (1916), pp.29-30; Gieves, *Naval Officer* (1907), pp.24-25

in later years former cadets ungenerously referred to 'cardboard huts' and 'chicken brooders'.¹¹

During the First World War Dartmouth was considerably expanded. Osborne on the other hand began to fall into disrepair and disrepute. The uralite buildings were fast falling apart and the college was also dogged by poor health. The end of the war, and with it the decline in cadet numbers, offered the possibility of training all cadets in one place. The decision was taken to close Osborne and the last cadets left the college in May 1921. Thereafter Fisher-Selborne scheme cadets did all their training at Dartmouth; those in their first six terms being referred to as the junior college and those in the upper five terms as the senior college. The junior and senior colleges had separate mess rooms and sporting competitions, and only senior college terms acted as the guard for divisions (the guard was required to carry rifles which were too large and heavy for most junior cadets to handle properly), there were also some variations in the daily routine to allow the younger cadets more rest.

The colleges were foremost naval establishments — they carried the names of ships, flew the white ensign and had large naval staffs. At the head stood the captain, who normally was a captain although he might be a rear-admiral. As in a ship he had a second in command, who was a commander, and a ships company of officers and ratings. This extended to the employment of marine sentries rather than civilian watchmen, and naval pensioners who variously worked as servants and gave instruction in engineering.

The college captains were always well respected officers; many had distinguished themselves in one or more areas. Hugh Evan-Thomas was a personal friend of the King and Martin Dunbar-Nasmith a Victoria Cross winner. All the captains of Dartmouth subsequently served as flag officers: Rosslyn Wemyss, the first Captain of Osborne, became First Sea Lord.¹² They enjoyed considerable freedom, and although nominally a subordinate of their local C-in-C, (Plymouth for Dartmouth and Portsmouth for Osborne), they often corresponded directly with the Second Sea Lord.

Day to day control of the cadets was largely in the hands of the term officers who were normally lieutenants. When the Fisher-Selborne scheme was

¹¹ Partridge, *Osborne*, pp.93-95 and p.157

¹² Evan-Thomas' relationship with King George V is discussed extensively in Gordon, *Rules of the Game*; Joseph Callo, Alastair Wilson *Who's Who in Naval History* (London: Routledge, 2004) pp.224-225 and p.302

introduced each term had one engineer and one executive term officer, this was later abandoned in favour of a single executive officer. The term officer had a range of responsibilities, variously acting as teacher, surrogate father, disciplinarian and naval exemplar.¹³ He was assisted by a petty officer, who responsible for keeping the cadets and their belongings clean and tidy and providing friendly guidance.¹⁴ The naval hierarchy was completed by the cadet captains who were similar to public school prefects.

The colleges had large civilian academic staffs, although naval officers were supplied to teach navigation and mathematics. The headmaster of each college reported directly to the captain and oversaw his own staff of masters.¹⁵ The civilian educational staff was given considerable freedom in developing and teaching the academic curricula of the colleges. This freedom stemmed from an early decision to place the educational side of the Fisher-Selborne scheme in the hands of James Ewing. A distinguished scientist and engineer, previously professor of engineering at Cambridge University, Ewing was given the newly created role 'Director of Education' and employed at the Admiralty.¹⁶

Ewing was assisted by two groundbreaking educators Cyril Ashford and Charles Godfrey; the former was Headmaster of Osborne from its opening in 1903 before moving to Dartmouth when it opened in 1905, he was succeeded at Osborne by Godfrey. These three men, together with their assistants and successors, created a unique and noteworthy system of education.

Educational Origins and Curriculum Development at the Naval Colleges

This system had its roots in the perceived failure of nineteenth century public schools to produce men who knew anything about science, mathematics and engineering. Such men were essential to maintain the industrial pre-eminence of Britain which was considered to be under threat, particularly from Germany and the USA. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, there was a variety of vocal and influential lobbyists for scientific education, some of them individuals but others acting in groups such as the British Association for the Advancement of Science.

¹³ BRNC College General Orders 1914, Chapter 37

¹⁴ *ibid*, Chapter 122

¹⁵ *ibid*, Chapter 33

¹⁶ Pack, *Britannia*, p.145; Hughes, *Dartmouth*, pp.26-27

The influential individuals included eminent astrophysicist Sir Norman Lockyer, founder of the journal *Nature*. Lockyer argued that scientific education was essential to maintaining British pre-eminence. For instance, in 1901 he wrote 'our intellectual resources are not sufficiently superior to those of other nations to enable us to retain our position by brains alone'.¹⁷ To maintain superiority he believed that 'the scientific spirit must be applied in England as elsewhere'.¹⁸ Lockyer quoted a letter written by the chemist Sir Henry Roscoe which put the case even more firmly 'upon education, the basis of industry and commerce, the greatness of our country depends'.¹⁹

The views espoused by Lockyer, Roscoe, and their friends had some basis in fact; Britain had fallen behind the USA and Germany in developing the most advanced science and technology.²⁰ However they also owed much to the movement known as Social Darwinism. Darwin was not the originator of this movement, but his ideas on evolution became the rallying point for a variety of disparate groups; Oldroyd suggests that Social Darwinists variously subscribed to 'conservatism, militarism, racism, rejection of social welfare, eugenics, laissez faire and unfettered capitalism'.²¹ Some Social Darwinists argued that nations and races were locked in a perpetual struggle which Britain would lose unless her citizens were healthier, fitter, better educated, morally sounder, and braver than the rest.

Searle argues that both the scientific education lobby and the Social Darwinists were part of the wide-ranging national efficiency movement; a loose organisation of disparate interests united by a feeling that Britain's international pre-eminence was in danger of being lost. Searle traces the origins of the movement to the 1870s but states that it became most prominent and influential after the Boer War which was seen as clear evidence of general national weakness. The panic arising from British failure in the Boer War helped ensure enthusiasm for the Fisher-Selborne scheme along with a variety of other reforms; amongst which Searle lists the establishment of a national physics

¹⁷ Norman Lockyer, 'Education in the New Century' in *Education and National Progress, Essays and Addresses, 1870-1905*, ed. by Norman Lockyer (London: Macmillan and co, 1906), pp.118-130 (p.122)

¹⁸ *ibid*, p.126

¹⁹ This letter is quoted *ibid*, p.122

²⁰ For example see Kennedy, *Decline and Fall*, pp.187-190 and Robbins, *Eclipse*, pp.142-147. This view has been challenged by authors such as: Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, pp.11-14 and Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930s*, p.67

²¹ Oldroyd, *Darwinian Impacts*, p.212

laboratory, the expansion of secondary and higher education, Haldane's Army reforms, and the establishment of the Committee of Imperial Defence.²²

Under the stimulus of the national efficiency movement British scientific education had improved dramatically during the later nineteenth century. The first polytechnic opened at Finsbury Park in 1883 and spawned many imitators, elsewhere mechanical institutes, evening colleges, and other organisations offering classes to working men flourished. University science departments expanded and developed improved facilities. The teaching of science and mathematics in public schools improved dramatically under a variety of influences. In addition to pressure from parents seeking improved educational standards, Oxford and Cambridge Universities complained about the standard of entering undergraduates. Finally, the introduction of competitive entrance examinations for the Civil Service and the Army forced schools to raise their standards.²³ Money was available for improvements to be made, grants from the Department of Science and Art being available to build laboratories and buy equipment.²⁴

These changes occurred gradually and were faster in some schools than others. One of the first schools to emphasise science was Clifton College, founded in 1862. The school's early headmasters were a stream of men set on reforming scientific education and by 1877 the school had its first laboratory and boys studied the subject for ten hours a week. The science and mathematics masters employed by the school in its early days included John Perry and James Wilson, major forces in revolutionizing the teaching of mathematics.²⁵

It is unsurprising that a new school such as Clifton should adopt science as a major subject. There was after all no great school tradition in the classics and the parents may have favoured a more practical, modern, education. Rather more surprising is the revolution in the teaching of mathematics which occurred at Winchester College, a far older school (founded in 1382), with a great tradition of classical scholarship. However it was in this confident and wealthy institution that the future Headmaster of Osborne, Charles Godfrey, revolutionized mathematics teaching between 1899 and 1904.

²² Searle, *National Efficiency*, pp.2-9, pp.34-40 and p.205

²³ Howson, *Mathematics Education*, pp.127-138; Price, 'Perry Movement', pp.103-155; Barnard, *English Education*, pp.207-209

²⁴ Jenkins, 'Science for Professionals', pp.156-181

²⁵ Price, 'Perry Movement', p.104, Howson, *Mathematics Education*, p.138

Godfrey, a disciple of Perry, believed that mathematics education for most boys should be of a practical and simple nature. He attempted to link the mathematical theory he taught to its practical utilities and abandoned many traditional methods such as Euclid, previously the standard textbook of geometry in British public schools. The practical nature of Godfrey's course extended to the use of laboratories, in which mathematics could be applied to simple scientific problems. Godfrey's ideas for teaching mathematics to boys of secondary school age were fully implemented at Osborne, of which he said proudly 'all the main functions of differentiation and integration are exemplified without using any function more abstruse than x^n '.²⁶ In short Godfrey had created a system of teaching practical mathematics, designed for functional use by engineers and scientists.

Godfrey and Ashford represented opposing viewpoints on scientific education. Godfrey represented the methods pioneered at Clifton, which emphasised accuracy, discipline, concentration and factual recall; while Harrow, where Ashford had been Head of Science, favoured a method in which scientific facts and laws were derived from known facts and observed results.²⁷ Although the Clifton approach was probably more attractive to the Royal Navy, not least as it offered physics as a disciplinary substitute for Latin, the naval colleges appear to have adhered more to Harrovian methods.

Still another system developed at Oundle under the guidance of Frederick Sanderson headmaster from 1892 to 1922. At Oundle boys were given basic instruction in science and engineering and then more or less left alone to work on the projects of their choice. The well equipped laboratories and workshops were always open, with only the most dangerous chemicals locked up. Most of the work was done in groups and there was an emphasis on communal achievement. Many projects focussed on real world problems such as casting replacement parts for farm machinery or investigating the best ways of growing wheat.²⁸ Needless to say there was no suggestion that the happy hedonism of Oundle had a place in naval education.

²⁶ Price, 'Perry Movement', p.140

²⁷ AW Barton, 'The Teaching of Physics in Schools' *Reports on Progress in Physics*, 5 (1938), pp.422-445 (p.425)

²⁸ Herbert G Wells, *The Story of a Great Schoolmaster: Being a Plain Account of the Life and Ideas of Sanderson of Oundle* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1924); C Freebairn, *Sanderson of Oundle* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1923); Raymond Flower, *Oundle and the English Public School* (London: Stacey, 1989)

The syllabus adopted by the two naval colleges was highly innovative. A great deal of time was devoted to engineering; at Osborne fifteen out of the thirty-eight periods each week.²⁹ The engineering syllabus was not confined to the study of naval machinery, instead a wide ranging course was designed with a view to providing a more general educational experience. Engineering was expected to demonstrate the principles learnt in science and mathematics, as well as to educate cadets in patience and the arts of tool use.³⁰

The wide range of craft skills taught ensured that cadets became capable handymen, competent to undertake a wide variety of simple maintenance tasks, and confident in taking on other practical problems. This was a useful precursor to a career in a highly mechanised service, not unlike the education earlier generations of officers had received in the maintenance and handling of ropes and sails, and thus the academic curriculum played a role in the development of officer-like qualities.

Mathematics and science were also prominent in the curriculum, occupying nine and a half and five and a half periods respectively at Osborne.³¹ Like engineering they were studied not only for their utilitarian value but also as a means of encouraging cadets to think. This was an educational system in which, rather than relying on proofs and rules, cadets were taught a variety of practical skills and could choose which to apply to any problem. They did not waste time on hypothetical problems but instead applied their knowledge to real world situations, especially those they could expect to encounter as naval officers. This alternative approach was summed up by TW Mercer who wrote that: 'An appalling amount of time used to be spent on [...] ingenious puzzles about cows engaging in contests with uniformly growing grass'.³²

The innovative mathematical curriculum was not anticipated; indeed the proposals for the Fisher-Selborne Scheme indicated that cadets would study Euclid.³³ When questioned in the House of Commons in March 1903 the Secretary to the Admiralty, Arnold-Foster, explained that the exact nature of the curriculum was being discussed by experts and that consequently the syllabus

²⁹ TNA ADM 268/39 Director of Naval Education's Annual Report for 1906 p.24

³⁰ TNA ADM 268/39 Director of Naval Education's Annual Reports for 1903-1913 demonstrate the progressive development of the college curriculum.

³¹ *ibid*, Director of Naval Education's Annual Report for 1906 p.24

³² TNA ED 12/305 Loose Enclosure: TW Mercer, 'Board of Education Special Reports on Educational Subjects. Series: The Teaching of Mathematics in the United Kingdom. No 17- Maths at Osborne and Dartmouth' p.9; Mercer was Head of Mathematics at Dartmouth.

³³ TNA ADM 7/941 Admiralty Board Minute No.1045, 21 November 1902 p.12

would not be revealed for some time.³⁴ Ashford later stated that the objectives of the course were always very clear and, although given considerable freedom, his staff was closely observed by the demanding naval authorities.³⁵ Although the teaching at Osborne and Dartmouth has attracted little attention from educational historians, it is held to have been both innovative and of high quality.³⁶

Attempts by the teaching staff of the colleges to create a liberal curriculum, in which cadets were taught to think and experiment, were often thwarted by the naval authorities who emphasised utilitarian, professional learning. This clash of values was largely the result of the attempt at the foundation of the colleges to combine the two schools of thought. The plans of the civilian staff were effectively thwarted by their limited power to oppose the naval, and by the appointment of a largely naval staff to teach the civilian designed engineering course. The engineering part of the syllabus was quickly hijacked and used to create competent technicians rather than as a means for understanding scientific principles as cadets devoted their time to studying naval equipment and developing craft skills.³⁷

Doubtless many engineers serving at the Colleges thought the interests of their profession were best served by introducing cadets to the delights of practical naval engineering. In spite of repeated naval interference, the educational authorities did succeed in retaining the spirit of the original curriculum if not the letter. The masters also retained their pioneering spirit and reputation for innovation and quality; in 1932 it was suggested that the college should produce a series of physics textbooks.³⁸

³⁴ Hansard HC Deb (4th series) 2 March 1903 c.1105

³⁵ Cyril Ashford, 'The Education of Naval Cadets', in *The Schools of England: A Study in Renaissance*, ed. by John Dover-Wilson (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1928) pp.301-310

³⁶ Nye, *Blackett*, p.18; G Sloan, 'One of Fisher's Specials - The Education of a Navy', in *Patrick Blackett: Sailor, Scientist, and Socialist*, ed. by Peter Hore (London: F.Cass, 2003) pp.35-59 (p.50)

³⁷ The curriculum can be glimpsed through Stephen King-Hall's diary; *Sea Saga* ed. by L King-Hall (London: Victor Gollancz, 1935) pp.339-340. Evidence collated by Michael Partridge suggests that the engineering curriculum was largely devoted to knowledge of naval machinery and developing practical skills to an unnecessarily high level; Partridge, *Osborne*, pp.71-73. Adrian Holloway thought that the engineering instruction in the late 1930s served no practical purpose; Adrian Holloway, *From Dartmouth to War: A Midshipman's Journal* (London: Buckland, 1993) p.20. The reports of schools inspectors suggest that although the original aims of the curriculum remained intact, the curriculum emphasised knowledge of naval machinery - see TNA ED 109/821 'Report of Inspection of the Royal Naval College Dartmouth, Devonshire, Held on the 25th, 26th, 27th and 28th April 1926' p.12 and ED 109/823 'Report of Inspection of Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, Devonshire. Held on 14th, 15th, 16th and 17th June 1932' p.18

³⁸ ED 109/823 Schools Inspection of Dartmouth 1932 p.16

Despite the provision of large numbers of quality teachers many cadets still failed to meet the required standards and were discharged as a result. Parents were warned a term in advance if their son was failing; a policy designed to ensure that failing cadets were pressured by their parents to maximise their efforts, at the same time allowing for provisional planning of their education elsewhere.

The Annual Report of the Director of Naval Education for 1913 noted that between September 1903 and December 1913, 2239 cadets had entered Osborne and 50 had joined Dartmouth from various training ships, principally the *Conway*; 999 were still cadets, 1086 were now midshipmen and 204 had been withdrawn.³⁹ In January 1913 a total of 914 cadets had been in training at the two colleges, over the course of the year 53 had been withdrawn; 24 for insufficient academic progress, 26 for medical reasons, 1 for misconduct and 2 at their parent's request.⁴⁰ In the same year, 3 cadets had died and 67 had been put down a term.⁴¹ That 67 cadets were put down a term but only 24 discharged for academic reasons suggests that putting cadets down a term was a successful measure, enabling them to reach satisfactory academic standards. Most of the cadets discharged were in the bottom terms at Osborne, withdrawals amongst the higher terms and at Dartmouth were comparatively rare, suggesting that many boys initially struggled to adapt to naval life.

These problems may have been eased as the staff of the college grew more adept at integrating new arrivals. The Custance Committee found that whereas originally 10% of entries had been discharged as unsuitable for various reasons, by 1912 this had been reduced to 3-4%.⁴² The early high drop out rate had been ensured by so called 'weeding committees' which had examined the records of cadets at the end of their first year at Osborne and discharged those failing to meet requirements.⁴³ Once the weeding committees had been abolished, drop out rates had stabilised at around 3-4%.

In the early 1920s the curriculum was partly dismantled in response to changing circumstances. With common training and inter-changeability being abandoned, there was no need for executive officers to have an extensive

³⁹ TNA ADM 268/39 Report of the Director of Naval Education 1913 p.1

⁴⁰ *ibid*, p.2

⁴¹ *ibid*, p.3

⁴² TNA ADM 116/1288 Vol 1 Third Report of the Custance Committee, 13 September 1912, p.37 para.29-30

⁴³ Hughes, *Dartmouth*, p.48

engineering education. Since most Dartmouth cadets were expected to become executive officers, it made sense to reduce the engineering content of the course. At the same time, the Navy was anxious to increase the emphasis on English, foreign languages and history. What might have been a simple, if painful, adjustment became rather complicated as curriculum reform became a battle ground between naval and civilian educators. The situation was not helped by the Navy partially abandoning its commitment to innovative and high quality education.

One clear sign of changing naval policy regarding the education and employment of the officer corps came with the appointment of Alexander McMullen as Admiralty Education Advisor in 1919. Although McMullen was Ewing's successor, he did not receive Ewing's title Director of Naval Education. This reflected the control the newly created DTSD exercised over naval education – and thus the reduced power of the civilian head of naval education. It also symbolised the scaling back of the Royal Navy's educational aspirations. The appointment of Ewing in 1903 had signalled the intent of the Royal Navy to provide a revolutionary, engineering focussed, system of education. Replacing the eminent engineer with the former Dartmouth Head of Science demonstrated that the Royal Navy was now anxious to forego educational innovation in favour of consolidation, economy, and tradition.

McMullen's appointment had much to recommend it beyond economy. He had been Head of Science at Dartmouth from its opening until the outbreak of war and had then served at sea – an attractive combination which also gave him invaluable experience of working with ratings, the education of whom was also part of the Admiralty Education Advisor's responsibilities.

McMullen took the role up on 20 March 1919. His brief was to give 'sound and responsible advice on the question of education' and his responsibilities extended to all Royal Navy and Royal Marine personnel, as well as the civilian workers educated in dockyard schools.⁴⁴ The work was important and McMullen's role was potentially vital. But he was hamstrung by being a civilian employed as an advisor and therefore lacking any real power over naval policy.

⁴⁴ TNA ADM 1/8616/217, CE.6976/19 Letter From the Secretary of the Admiralty (Oswyn Murray) to McMullen informing him of his appointment, enclosed memorandum 'Instructions for the Advisor on Education' 11 March 1919

McMullen's lack of influence became apparent when the issue of reforming the college curriculum arose in the early 1920s. Engineering had originally been intended to provide the cadets at the naval colleges with a general education – it would teach them not only practical skills but also patience and precision and give them a deeper understanding of the science and mathematics learnt in the classroom. Instead cadets spent most of their workshop time learning the practical work of the naval engineer in preparation for their future careers. With the requirement to produce naval engineers removed, the way seemed clear for the educational authorities to re-appropriate the engineering curriculum and re-impose their original aims and ideals.

The educators were thwarted and the time allocated to engineering instruction was reduced from 1270 to 470 hours, a maximum of 371 of which were spent in the workshops. This allowed more time to be devoted to English, French, and history – undoubtedly benefitting the general education of the cadets.⁴⁵ That the time was not reallocated to science and mathematics is evidence of a change in naval thinking – an increased emphasis on the ability of officers to solve tactical rather than mechanical problems and to effectively communicate their solutions.

As First Sea Lord from 1919 to 1927 David Beatty utilised the talents of a number of senior officers who favoured radical changes to naval education.⁴⁶ Beatty's fleet tactics had emphasised the need for initiative on the part of ship commanders, which was more likely if they clearly understood the aims of their commanding officer.⁴⁷ Beatty also realised that the shrinking Royal Navy was increasingly reliant on its dominion partners and so a shared doctrinal and tactical base was needed.⁴⁸

Beatty was bolstered by Herbert Richmond who loyally supported him whilst serving as DTSD in 1918, much to the distress of the then First Sea Lord Rosslyn Wemyss.⁴⁹ A Richmond article in the May 1919 *Naval Review* commented that the Royal Navy was an organisation 'in which peculiar danger

⁴⁵ TNA ED 109/821 Schools Inspection of Dartmouth 1926 p.3 and p.12

⁴⁶ Kenneth Dewar served in the plans division at the Admiralty, Roger Bellairs as Beatty's Naval Assistant, and Drax as the Director of the Staff College. All had been among the founders of *The Naval Review* and had been brought to the Admiralty, albeit on sufferance, by Beatty's predecessor Rosslyn Wemyss see: Hunt, *Richmond*, p.90

⁴⁷ Gordon, *Rules of the Game*, pp.55-56, pp.382-383 and pp.527-528

⁴⁸ Bryan Ranft, 'Admiral Earl David Beatty (1919-1927)', in *The First Sea Lords: From Fisher to Mountbatten*, ed. by Malcolm Murfett (London: Praeger, 1995) pp.127-140 (p.131)

⁴⁹ Hunt, *Richmond*, p.90

is run of stifling initiative, both of thought and action'.⁵⁰ It is true that Richmond was a man of extreme views, which *The Naval Review* tended to reflect, but there is clear evidence that many serving Royal Navy officers had similar concerns.

In early 1918 Admiral Sturdee invited Grand Fleet officers, whether or not they served in his own 4th Battle Squadron, to submit essays on 'what is considered the best education and training for developing in a naval officer, character, initiative, power of rapid decision and ability to command in peace or war?'.⁵¹ Significantly, Sturdee chose to concentrate on personal qualities rather than professional skills and made no mention of technical ability.

Unfortunately there is no evidence of how many essays were submitted, or what they suggested, let alone what Sturdee did with them. However that the question was asked demonstrates interest in the subject amongst serving officers, as well as a willingness to question the existing structures and procedures for officer training and education.

One of the most pressing educational questions was what to do with those officers whose education had been seriously disrupted by the First World War. The decision was made to send these officers to Cambridge University where they were able to study a variety of subjects rather than being put through the Navy's science and mathematics based course at Greenwich. The origins of this decision are unclear, Arthur Marder suggests that Richmond was responsible, although there is no evidence to support this and the scheme did not meet with Richmond's full approval.⁵²

The Navy attempted to make this scheme permanent, telling the Treasury that it was necessary to counteract officer's 'tendency to lack the imagination, versatility, breadth of vision and independence of thought which a wider field of training would serve to develop'. Naval officers were also hamstrung by their 'deficiency in power of expression and general literary

⁵⁰ Captain HW Richmond, 'On Thought and Discussion' *The Naval Review* 7 (1919) pp.190-197 (p.190)

⁵¹ CCA DRAX 1/22 contains a copy of the announcement of the contest. DRAX 1/22 and DRAX 1/23 contain Drax's correspondence with Richmond on the need for improved education of officers.

⁵² Stephen Roskill, 'The Navy at Cambridge 1919-23' *Mariner's Mirror* 49 (1963) pp.178-193 (p.178); CCA ROSK 8/7 Letter from Captain EH Longsdon to Roskill 10 August 1963 suggests McMullen as originator of the scheme but this seems unlikely given that it pre-dated his appointment as Advisor on Education. Ewing is a strong possibility given his previous links to the University and his 1917 paper suggesting post-war educational schemes (TNA ADM 116/1478, CW.22161 Minute by AJ Parish on behalf of Alfred Ewing 11 October 1917)

ability'.⁵³ These failings were satisfactorily addressed by the Cambridge course and within the Admiralty, there was some feeling that all sub-lieutenants should continue to be sent to the university.⁵⁴

Ultimately it was proposed that 25% of sub-lieutenants should attend the university for a year and that they should be selected on the basis of their ability at English and history.⁵⁵ This demonstrated an aspiration, alas thwarted by Treasury parsimony, to produce an elite corps of officers who were not scientists but were skilled in tactical and strategic thought and communication – officers who would excel in staff work rather than in technical roles.⁵⁶

Richmond also attempted to reform the higher education of officers. The War Staff was extensively and effectively reorganised.⁵⁷ Richmond then became Director of the Senior Officer's War course, Beatty gave him a free hand in developing it and he was able to act in concert with Drax who was Director of the Naval Staff College.⁵⁸ Richmond reduced the number of lectures and placed more emphasis on reading, writing and the study of history rather than technology. His impact was limited, not least because most of his staff and students fell foul of redundancy, but he moved on to the creation of the Imperial Staff College.⁵⁹

Officers were given greater freedom to contribute to publications such as *The Naval Review*.⁶⁰ Attendance at the Imperial Staff College was increasingly essential for promotion to the highest ranks of the service.⁶¹ Technical courses for officers were shortened by removing unnecessary mathematics and

⁵³ TNA T 161/94, CW.36572/19 Letter from Secretary of Admiralty (Sir Vincent Baddeley) to the Secretary of the Treasury (Sir George Barstow) 10 March 1920 para.4

⁵⁴ TNA ADM 1/8591/119, CW.36572/19 Remarks of DTSD 13 January 1920

⁵⁵ *ibid*, Proposals contained in remarks of First Sea Lord 2 February 1920 adopted 11 February 1920 at a meeting of the Board, extract from board minutes no.1149

⁵⁶ James Goldrick, 'Admiral Sir Rosslyn Wemyss (1917-1919)', in *The First Sea Lords*, ed. by Murfett pp.113-126 (p.119)

⁵⁷ Barry Hunt, 'Richmond and the Education of the Royal Navy', in *Mahan is not Enough*, ed. by James and Hattendorf pp.65-83 (p.70); Hunt, *Richmond*, p.85

⁵⁸ *ibid*, p.73

⁵⁹ *ibid*, p.74; Higham, *Military Intellectuals*, p.32. The appointment of Geoffrey Callender as Head of History at Greenwich was also unfortunate given that his approach was best suited to thirteen year olds, see 'Discussion of the Papers Written by Professor Donald M. Schurman, Dr Barry Hunt, and Commander James Goldrick', in *Mahan is not Enough*, ed. by Goldrick and Hattendorf, pp.103-116 (pp.104-107); Hunt, *Richmond*, p.128

⁶⁰ Goldrick, 'Irresistible Force', pp.97-100

⁶¹ Hunt, *Richmond*, p.75

science.⁶² The impact of all these reforms was limited but they represented genuine progress in moving officer education away from the purely technical.⁶³

Whilst the academic staff of Dartmouth may have appreciated the improved balance of the curriculum; they did not appreciate the determination of the naval personnel who remained within the engineering department to continue teaching naval engineering, presumably hoping to foster enthusiasm for the subject or at least produce officers who would understand the difficulties faced by their engineering staff. The 1926 inspection of Dartmouth revealed that the naval lobby had emerged victorious – the course being described as professionally useful (at any rate to the operator or maintainer of machinery rather than the designer) but unlikely to develop the intellect.⁶⁴

Conflict over the engineering curriculum reached critical point late in 1925 – the exact causes are unclear but it is obvious that some on the naval side had come to resent the influence of Cyril Ashford; so much that they sought assistance from the C-in-C Plymouth, Admiral Sir Richard Phillimore, who brought the matter to the attention of Their Lordships. McMullen reported to the Board of Admiralty that the recently revised engineering curriculum sat well beside the science courses offered by the college; both the engineer commander (who remained responsible for teaching) and the headmaster were happy with progress. McMullen could see no basis for the complaints made by the naval staff about Ashford's influence. But he was mindful of the potential for damaged relations and remarked that care must be taken to avoid Admiral Phillimore appearing to be against the civilian staff of the college.⁶⁵

How powerful Ashford actually was is a matter of debate – especially in light of the school inspectors' report. McMullen himself complained that the engineering curriculum was still based around marine engineering. This, McMullen stated, was because Ashford lacked the power rather than the will to make further reforms. McMullen emphasised the importance of the headmaster's independence, for only by being fully independent could he ensure the highest possible educational standards.⁶⁶

⁶² See TNA ADM 116/2571 and TNA ADM 116/2455

⁶³ Higham, *Military Intellectuals*, p.51

⁶⁴ *ibid*, p.13

⁶⁵ TNA ADM 1/8704/172, CW.1360/26 Remarks of the Admiralty Advisor on Education (Alexander McMullen) on the responsibilities of the Captain and Headmaster of the Royal Naval College Dartmouth 15 December 1925

⁶⁶ TNA ADM 1/8704/172, CW.7360/26 Remarks of McMullen on the importance of the headmaster's independence 28 September 1926

McMullen was, at the time, engaged in debating various academic matters with the naval authorities. It is clear that he saw himself as the spokesman for the civilian members of the naval educational establishment and was determined to act in the best educational interests of the cadets, rather than in accordance with prevailing naval opinion. McMullen complained that naval opinion was 'a fickle jade in educational matters' and perceived that he himself acted as 'flywheel to the fluctuations of the training division'. He also complained about the lack of resources the Navy devoted to education, noting that the cost of naval education had increased 30% since 1913 but that the budget had not been increased to match; and this at a time when both the state and the Army had tripled their educational expenditure.⁶⁷

These episodes illustrate several points. Firstly the naval authorities were anxious to retain as good a relationship as possible with the civilian staff at Dartmouth. Secondly the power of the civilian staff was strengthened by their long tenure at the college, and by the freedom given to the headmaster to run his side of the establishment, and by his reporting directly to the captain. Thirdly, whilst the importance of the independence of the civilian masters was recognised, there was a determination that the college should be dominated by the Navy. Finally it is clear that the early 1920s were a time of curriculum upheaval at Dartmouth, the masters remaining true to the educational origins of the Fisher-Selborne scheme in the face of naval pressure. It is probably not a coincidence that the conflict reached its height at the time when the Royal Navy's engineer officers were being stripped of their rights and privileges. The masters enjoyed the support of McMullen who seems to have been largely responsible for the maintenance of peaceful relations between the naval and educational authorities.

Despite the reforms that followed the abandonment of inter-changeability the college curriculum remained rather narrow. Although there was more time for history, English and French, other subjects such as art, music and drama as well as classical languages were totally absent. In 1914 parents had been told that 'the aim of the course as a whole is to provide as far as may be possible a liberal education', however 'the claims of the technical subjects are so strong

⁶⁷ TNA ADM 116/2462, M.02256/25 McMullen's comments on Paper B by DTSD (Captain Hugh J Tweedie) which proposed cutting the Dartmouth Course to nine terms, removing naval instructors from ships and reducing the mathematical content of numerous training courses, 22 October 1925; Paper B by Tweedie August 1925.

that the curriculum inevitably leans towards the side of mathematics and science and their applications'.⁶⁸ In 1924 the situation was much the same, whilst the cadet 'should be made as cultured as possible' professional subjects inevitable predominated.⁶⁹ Whilst *How to Become a Naval Officer* did not give many details of the curriculum, it did give a list of studies which made clear the educational bias of the college.⁷⁰

Masters and naval officers were aware of the gaps in the education of the cadets and went to considerable effort to fill them. Extra-curricular activities involving the arts were both common and popular. The college authorities were keen supporters of such activities, providing space and some facilities. Visiting speakers were entertained by the captain or the headmaster; and, on some occasions, the college was opened for visitors to view the artistic efforts of the cadets. Art clubs were organised and there were competitions for both art and photography. Each term kept a log (sometimes known as a line book), a kind of collective diary, recording the key events of each day and showcasing the creative talents of the term's members – logs featured poems, photographs, drawings and jokes.

Theatrical productions were a popular activity and included a variety of plays as well as musicals. Musically inclined cadets could join college choirs and some terms had bands, although these do not seem to have been organised on a college wide basis.⁷¹ A limited amount of musical tuition was available but few cadets took advantage and the standards achieved were not high. One cultural event is well recorded, the performance of a translated Greek play *Iphigenia in Aulis* in 1932. Recorded in the Blake Term Log, this play illustrates the sophistication of some extra-curricular activities (the props, costumes and performance were agreed to have been of a very high standard), the level of interest in the classics and the theatre amongst cadets, and the support of the authorities for their efforts.⁷² Visiting school inspectors saw the play as evidence of a strong, and successful, effort to provide a balanced curriculum noting that 'the course of study is far from being purely vocational'.⁷³

⁶⁸ James A Ewing, *The Entry and Training of Naval Officers* (London: Admiralty, 1914) pp.21-22

⁶⁹ Gieves, *Naval Officer* (1923), p.16

⁷⁰ *ibid*, p.51

⁷¹ RNM 1989.394 Records the activities of the Blake Term band including its amalgamation with that of Hawke Term (the Blake's immediate juniors) in May 1931.

⁷² *ibid*, Entry of 16 June 1932

⁷³ ED 109/823 Schools Inspection of the Royal Naval College Dartmouth 1932 p.4

Most public schools offered a wide-variety of extra-curricular activities with a varying degree of supervision. Official clubs operated under the leadership of masters who aimed to educate boys in matters such as music and art. Otherwise masters and boys might work together, for instance in repairing an old car. Many activities were pursued by boys with little supervision – building small boats was quite a popular activity to which many boys devoted their free time over several years, doing most of the work themselves but relying on masters for advice and occasional assistance.⁷⁴

At Dartmouth this type of unsupervised activity appears to have been rare – most extra-curricular activities were led and supervised by masters. Dartmouth offered a variety of voluntary subjects, cadets were obliged to pursue at least one for most of their time at the college. These subjects consisted mainly of lectures from masters but there was some scope for practical participation. Subjects included music, Spanish, astronomy, heraldry, and a course on medieval siege-warfare enlivened by the teacher's collection of working models. The instruction seems to have been of high quality as these lectures were repeatedly praised by the school inspectors.⁷⁵ More active participation was required by a variety of clubs – including model-boating, dinghy sailing and gliding. Unsurprisingly there was a place for engineering and science, with voluntary attendance at the Sandquay workshops being a favoured wet weather activity. In 1928 cars powered by signal rockets were built and raced before a number of explosions saw the project abandoned.⁷⁶

One long standing Dartmouth institution, more in keeping with the public schools of the early nineteenth century than the twentieth, was that of the senior college visiting farms. On Sunday afternoons groups of senior cadets visited a variety of households in order to eat a large tea. Originally local farms had been visited and the term 'farms' was retained although the cadets graced an increasing variety of households – including council houses in Dartmouth. The teas had to be paid for and, although a farm could be bequeathed or abandoned, it was seen as unacceptable to force out the current visitors by

⁷⁴ Barrington JW Hill, *Eton Medley* (London: Winchester Publications, 1948) contains a detailed description of the activities available at the school; extra-curricular activities in general are discussed pp.187-198; Mangan, *Athleticism*, p.23

⁷⁵ ED 109/823 Schools Inspection of Dartmouth 1932 p.5; ED 109/824 'Report of Inspection of Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, Devon' Held on 31st May, 1st, 2nd and 3rd June 1938' pp.21-22; ED 109/821 Schools Inspection of Dartmouth 1926 p.4

⁷⁶ Pack, *Britannia*, pp.229-230

offering more money. Farm visits allowed cadets, who were not normally allowed to leave the college, a degree of freedom and relaxation they otherwise lacked.

When Cyril Ashford retired in 1927 he was replaced by Eric Kempson who had been a member of staff at Dartmouth before the First World War. Kempson had then served in the Royal Engineers, winning the Military Cross, and had subsequently become senior science master at Rugby. Ashford's years of devoted service were rewarded with a well deserved knighthood. Kempson's appointment reaffirmed the educational principles of Dartmouth. He was a scientist and had been present in the early days of the Fisher-Selborne scheme and so was familiar with the educational ideas behind the curriculum. His wartime service ensured the respect of the naval staff and provided him with useful experience. However his post-war experience at Rugby meant that he brought fresh ideas to the college and was able to view it more objectively than a long standing staff member might have.

The Royal Navy was determined to appoint Kempson; having identified him as the best candidate, the Board of Admiralty sought an increased salary of £1800 per annum – more than any grammar school and also in excess of some well regarded public schools.⁷⁷ The Treasury acquiesced duly recognising the importance of the Dartmouth headmaster in producing the best possible officers for the fleet.⁷⁸

Kempson may well have been responsible for the alpha scheme, introduced at Dartmouth in 1928. The scheme was a product of long standing concerns about the suitability of the academic curriculum. Academic standards were enforced more rigorously in the naval colleges than in most public schools, and for cadets the price of failure was more likely to be dismissal. Consequently the efforts of the academic staff were largely concentrated on ensuring the weakest cadets passed out of Dartmouth successfully. The 1926 inspection of Dartmouth had noted a lack of provision for the brightest cadets – a situation the Navy determined to remedy.⁷⁹ By examination of the eighth term and passing-out examinations, schools inspectors were asked to report on the academic standards at the college.

⁷⁷ TNA T 213/382, Admiralty Letter CE/2568/27 from the Deputy Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir Charles Walker) to the Secretary of the Treasury (Sir Warren Fisher) 12 May 1927

⁷⁸ TNA T 213/382, Treasury Letter E.17149 from RR Scott on behalf of the Secretary of the Treasury to the Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir Oswyn Murray) 14 June 1927

⁷⁹ TNA ED 109/821 Schools Inspection of Dartmouth 1926 p.14

The inspectors were generally impressed by the standards obtained by the cadets. They reported that the weakest cadets were well ahead of the weakest boys in public schools. The passing out examination was far more difficult than the School Certificate – a mark of 33% being equivalent to a School Certificate pass. All 101 cadets who had taken the passing out examination in the period reviewed would have passed the School Certificate; all but 18 cadets had scored at least 50% in all the non-science subjects. True the cadets were seventeen, slightly older than the boys taking the School Certificate, but at least a fifth of them were agreed to have reached a good sixth form standard. Having examined the marks of the eighth termers, the inspectors reported that a substantial number would have been promoted to the lower sixth form.⁸⁰

This in itself justified the existence of some kind of sixth form at the college. However the inspectors also reported that, despite the selection process and the college curriculum, cadets – like public schoolboys – were not equally good at all subjects. Although the top 4 eighth termers were in the top 5 for maths, science, history, French and English, the rest of the top 10 in each subject were no higher than 16th overall.⁸¹ This study formed the basis of the alpha scheme which enabled cadets to undertake extended studies in mathematics, science, history, English or French.

The alpha scheme was the closest approach to a sixth form at Dartmouth and was introduced in September 1928 – the inspectors having submitted their report in April. The cadets involved were selected by a committee; selection was based on marks and reports made by masters and term officers. In the summer of 1932 there were 35 alphas out of the 130 cadets in their last three terms. Alpha class cadets normally had to be good at three subjects out of maths, science, history, English and French but might be selected if exceptionally good at two. They benefited from an altered curriculum which allowed them time for independent study and to reduce their studies in science, history, English or French to subsidiary level. They did not take the normal academic pass-out papers but special ones – alongside the professional subjects of engineering, seamanship and navigation. If they passed the alpha

⁸⁰ TNA ED 109/822 'Report of an Investigation into the Passing Out Examination for Cadets at the Royal Naval College Dartmouth, Held on 12th and 13th April, 1928' pp.3-4, para.2-4

⁸¹ *ibid*, pp.4-5, para.3-4

papers they were given a first class pass-out grade.⁸² The alpha scheme was recorded by the 1932 inspection of the college as a positive development which encouraged thinking, time-management and self-education – thereby benefitting the cadets, the college and the Navy.⁸³

That the alpha scheme was not introduced until 1928, and was then limited to academic studies rather than conferring full sixth form style privileges, illustrates the differences between Dartmouth and the public schools of the day. Most sixth formers enjoyed considerable levels of freedom and power, often accompanied by special items of uniform.⁸⁴ Alpha class cadets did not have these benefits. Although they might be envied, if not admired, by their term-mates they were not expected or empowered to influence them. Other than a reduced class schedule and more freedom in their studies the alphas had no special privileges.⁸⁵

The alpha scheme seems to have arisen entirely as a result of evidence that the college curriculum did not stretch the brightest cadets enough. However by allowing cadets to specialise in non-science subjects it also fitted in with the Royal Navy's post-war educational policies. Like the revised Dartmouth curriculum, the alpha scheme sacrificed the development of potential scientists and engineers in order to produce better communicators and staff officers. The alpha scheme also allowed specialisation in mathematics and engineering, enabling cadets talented in these subjects to develop their skills and interests. Separating the alpha cadets from the rest also reduced the pressure on less able cadets and allowed them more time to develop. The increasing variation in the curriculum was at odds with the general emphasis on the college on all cadets learning the values and behaviours demanded by the Navy.

Naval Culture, Indoctrination, Discipline and Control

The lives of all cadets were dominated by the Royal Navy rather than by their civilian teachers, this was reflected in every aspect of their existence including

⁸² TNA ED 109/823 Schools Inspection of Dartmouth 1932 p.5

⁸³ *ibid*, p.6

⁸⁴ Wilkinson, *Prefects*, p.39; Wakeford, *Cloistered Elite*, p.111 and p.120

⁸⁵ BRNC College general orders 1934 does not contain a special section relating to alpha class cadets whereas the privileges and responsibilities of cadet captains are laid down in considerable detail. The various documents discuss the transition to houses suggest that, aside from in their academic studies, the alphas were treated the same as any other senior cadets, see TNA ADM 1/8832 and BRNC File on the introduction of the house system.

their surroundings, behaviour and activities. Mary Jones suggests that cadets actually followed two curricula – a visible one in which they attended lessons in school type subjects; and an invisible one in which they absorbed the culture and traditions of the service and learnt to behave as young naval officers rather than schoolboys.⁸⁶

Jones' argument is borne out by examination of the role that history played in the lives of cadets. The subject was taught by civilians as a normal school subject, but the course was heavily based around the history of the Royal Navy and related subjects such as war and diplomacy. The importance of the subject was recognised in 1922 when various officials discussed how it should be taught at Dartmouth and Greenwich. Richmond, President of Greenwich Naval College, was a great advocate of history, describing it as: 'The true means of learning what war is and how it is conducted, and of determining the principles of war and impressing them upon officer's minds'. In his view, it was through studying history that officers learnt how to study war, and to look beyond the work of their own ship to that of the Navy as a whole.⁸⁷

Although McMullen and DTSD Captain Hugh Tweedie agreed that history was important, they were divided as to why. Tweedie saw it as a means of looking beyond tactics and so studying wider strategic, social and political issues.⁸⁸ McMullen however considered this 'nothing less than the prostitution of history' and thought the subject should be studied for its own sake.⁸⁹ This would encourage officers to study in their free time and to develop their abilities to think and write.

A small committee was appointed to consider the matter; it agreed with Tweedie – history was a tool, a precursor to the study of war and to the staff course. Thus the history course at Dartmouth should be a precursor to that at Greenwich. The latter should be as wide as possible and cover a period from the Tudors to the present. It was to be used to illustrate the principles of war, and those who excelled should be recommended for staff duties.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Jones, *Officer Corps*, pp.83-84

⁸⁷ TNA ADM 1/8687/174, CW.582/22 Letter from the President of Greenwich Naval College (Rear-Admiral Herbert W Richmond) to the Admiralty Advisor on Education (Alexander McMullen) 6 January 1923

⁸⁸ *ibid*, Comments of DTSD (Captain Hugh J Tweedie) on the teaching of history 24 September 1923

⁸⁹ *ibid*, Comments of McMullen on the teaching of history at Greenwich 20 December 1923

⁹⁰ TNA ADM 1/8687/174, CW.2008/25 'Report of the Committee to Consider the Question of Instruction in Naval History' 26 February 1925. Committee members included Commander WS

This policy was never successfully implemented. Roskill later told a friend 'I don't think it was at all well taught' although he did praise the efforts of Michael Lewis at Greenwich.⁹¹ Although the school inspectors who visited Dartmouth in the inter-war period praised the history teachers, they thought the curriculum overcrowded and too biased towards the naval side.⁹²

Aside from the syllabus the choice of textbook must also be questioned. The main history textbook was *Sea Kings of Britain* by Geoffrey Callender who was a master at Osborne before moving to Greenwich and subsequently to the fledgling National Maritime Museum.⁹³ *Sea Kings* took the form of three volumes, the first of which was published in 1907, detailing the lives of Britain's great admirals. Aside from conveying historical facts, Callender tried to inspire his young readers with tales of the achievements of these officers, the good qualities of whom were highlighted at length. Of Anson he wrote: 'Heroism, pluck, endurance, perseverance, seem but soiled labels for the virtues that Anson carried. In the blackest depths of adversity he never for one moment abandoned the hope of accomplishing his purpose. So motherly was his compassion that he felt the death of every man as a personal loss; but he turned to the survivors and infused new courage into them by the intense reality of his faith'.⁹⁴

Callender's eulogies were not entirely appreciated by the cadets, one of who later recalled having to: 'wade painstakingly through sycophantic appraisals of various British admirals. Their battles were splendid victories attributable to infallible skill and courage, the only exception being the unfortunate Byng and he must have been included to show all the others in a relatively glorious light'.⁹⁵

This lack of enthusiasm was contrary to the expectations of the committee on the teaching of history which had argued that the emphasis on

Chalmers who was employed in the Training and Staff Duties Division and the historian Geoffrey Callender. Chalmers later became a writer producing biographies of David Beatty, Max Horton and Bertram Ramsay.

⁹¹ CCA GDFR 7/11 The Papers of Captain Godfrey Alexander French; letters from Stephen Roskill to Godfrey French 30 June 1980 and 28 February 1980

⁹² TNA ED 109/821 Schools Inspection of Dartmouth 1926, p.7; TNA ED 109/823 Schools Inspection of Dartmouth 1932, pp.11-12; TNA ED 109/824 Schools Inspection of Dartmouth 1938, p.13

⁹³ Hugh Murphy, Derek J Oddy, *The Mirror of the Seas: A Centenary History of the Society for Nautical Research* (London: Society for Nautical Research, 2010) pp.215-216

⁹⁴ Geoffrey AR Callender, *Sea Kings of Britain: Volume II Albemarle to Hawke* (London: Longman's Green & Co, 1909) p.174

⁹⁵ Owen, *Plain Yarns*, p.38

biographical studies of great naval officers was essential for 'bringing prominently forward, [...], the more romantic side of naval life, which is the aspect that appeals most naturally to boys of the Dartmouth age'. This romanticism should be capitalised on – 'glamour [...] should invest a cadet's first reading of naval history'.⁹⁶

The emphasis on the great admirals of the past was not confined to the classroom; instead they were part of daily life at the college. Each term (and later house) of cadets carried the name of a famous British admiral and was thus provided with a direct link to naval heritage. These admirals were St Vincent, Drake, Blake, Hawke, Greynville, Exmouth, Anson, Benbow, Duncan, Rodney and Hood. The term names were a new innovation, *Britannia* terms had been defined by seniority as 'news', 'threes', 'sixers' and 'niners'. Although cadets did not study 'their' admiral in any particular detail, he was still intended to be an inspiration, and quite often was. One former cadet described Drake as the 'patron saint' of his term.⁹⁷

One name was conspicuously absent – Nelson. This greatest of heroes had not merely a term but instead something of a cult devoted to him. Osborne had Nelson Hall; enhanced with a picture of the great hero, underneath which was written in enormous letters 'There is nothing the Navy cannot do'. Osborne cadets were sent to visit Nelson's flagship HMS *Victory* and attended Trafalgar Day church services aboard her. Dartmouth cadets had to make do with half holidays to mark his victories, the raising of his famous England expects signal every Trafalgar Day, and a variety of Nelsonian portraits and artefacts. The veneration of Nelson did not always have the desired results; one cadet was heard to remark 'No! Not another picture of the death of the immortal Nelson!'⁹⁸

Physical reminders of the Royal Navy's illustrious past lay all over the colleges which were littered with naval relics, including weapons, paintings, and uniforms – in stark contrast to the bareness of the cadet accommodation. Many of these items were donated or paid for by naval officers, serving or retired, and anxious to ensure their veneration of the service was continued.⁹⁹ Cadets were probably more appreciative of the half holidays granted on the anniversaries of famous Royal Navy victories.

⁹⁶ TNA ADM 1/8687/174, CW.2008/25 'Report of the Committee to Consider the Question of Instruction in Naval History' 26 February 1925 para.12-13

⁹⁷ Hackforth-Jones, *Greatest Fool*, p.18

⁹⁸ Seymour, *Africa*, p.3

⁹⁹ Colville, 'Dartmouth', p.119

Even the fabric of Dartmouth had a message to offer. For the most part this message was delivered subtly, decorative motifs of the Tudor rose, the cypher of Edward VII, and the naval and English crowns (frequently intertwined) appeared around the building; emphasising the links between navy, nation and monarchy. This symbolism was particularly potent in the Senior Gunroom, which was decorated with the dates of famous Royal Navy victories along with paintings of the actions and the victorious naval officers, and on the quarterdeck.¹⁰⁰

The quarterdeck was hallowed ground on any Royal Navy ship. Historically the area from which command was exercised it had gradually become the shipboard centre of ceremonial activities and the space from which access to the ship was controlled. Personnel entering the quarterdeck area were required to salute.¹⁰¹ The quarterdeck of the college, two stories high and decorated with the motifs described above, occupied a central space and was used to assemble the cadets en-masse. It was a secular space devoted to the Navy but it, rather than the chapel, lay at the heart of the college.¹⁰²

The exterior of the college was deliberately calculated to inspire cadets. The college faced out over the town and River Dart and towards the sea. Inscribed on the façade were the words of Charles II 'It is on the Navy, under the good providence of God, that our wealth, prosperity and peace depend'.

Living links to the past were also provided. The Captain of Osborne from 1909 to 1913 was Horace Hood, the latest in a long line of distinguished naval officers whom subsequently gave their name to the battle cruiser *Hood*. In the 1930s Dartmouth enjoyed the services of English master Guy Pocock, a direct descendant of Admiral Sir George Pocock, whose impressive naval career had culminated in the capture of Havana in 1762.¹⁰³ Inevitably the colleges acquired cadets and term officers from famous naval families, hearing their family names provided a daily link with the Navy of the past.

The history of the Royal Navy with which cadets were presented was carefully managed, with disaster and defeat generally absent. This was in no

¹⁰⁰ Colville, 'Dartmouth', p.121

¹⁰¹ *The Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea* ed. by Peter Kemp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976; repub.d London: Granada, 1979) p.679

¹⁰² Colville, 'Dartmouth', p.121. The relative importance of the quarterdeck and chapel was previously noted by Andrew Lambert.

¹⁰³ Obituary of Tom Pocock (son of Guy), *Daily Telegraph* 10 May 2007 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1551073/Tom-Pocock.html> [recovered 9 December 2011]

way unique – perceptions of the history of the Royal Navy were carefully managed both inside and outside the service. The drill shed at HMS *Ganges* housed a range of naval artefacts for the inspiration of boy seamen, who were members of divisions named after famous admirals. The public image of the service was managed through events such as Navy Days, the selection of ship names, and media manipulation.¹⁰⁴

This careful use of history extended to the way in which the First World War was commemorated at Dartmouth. Many British war memorials celebrated masculinity, soldiers being portrayed as men in their prime. Images of the dead and maimed were often excluded; although relatives of the latter could take comfort from memorials such as the cenotaph which were of a more tomblike appearance.¹⁰⁵ Armistice Day increasingly became a day of solemn remembrance offering little space for veterans to renew, let alone celebrate, their comradeship.¹⁰⁶ These trends were reflected in the way that the war was absorbed into Dartmouth's existing system rather than set aside for special attention.

The many successes of the wartime Royal Navy were a new chapter in the history of the service and the college celebrated them as such. The naval heroes of the war took their place in the Royal Navy's pantheon – new battles were added to the list commemorated in the senior gunroom and new relics found their resting places in the college. Many decorated officers served at the college in the years after the war, providing cadets with naval heroes to model themselves upon.

The Royal Navy war memorials constructed in Plymouth, Chatham and Portsmouth were topped with images of sailing ships, placing the sacrifices of the First World War as a continuation of the traditions of the service. Perhaps therefore it is unsurprising that Dartmouth, already filled with the history of the service, opted for a small memorial shrine rather than a more substantial construction.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Rüger, *Naval Game*, pp.24-27, pp.73-82 and pp.165-182

¹⁰⁵ Gabriel Koureas, *Memory, Masculinity, and National Identity in British Visual Culture, 1914-1930: A Study of "Unconquerable Manhood"* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) p.5, p.79 and pp.28-33; Richard Van Emden, *The Quick and the Dead: Fallen Soldiers and Their Families in the Great War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011) pp.260-262

¹⁰⁶ Todman, *Myth and Memory*, p.55 and p.58; Koureas, *British Visual Culture*, p.33; Van Emden, *Quick and the Dead*, pp.270-271

¹⁰⁷ Howard, Porter, *Royal Naval College*, pp.38-39

There was little space for the war in the college curriculum. The history course was not altered to include it, and there was no great effort to teach cadets how it had been fought. German was dropped from the curriculum, removing any opportunity young officers might have had of making a comparison of the accounts of the war produced by the two sides.¹⁰⁸ This lack of focus reflected wider ambiguity surrounding the war, most boys knew something of its horrors and their distaste was reflected in a dramatic decline in OTC membership.¹⁰⁹ Casting the war as part of Britain's naval heritage rather than an international cataclysm discouraged such distaste amongst cadets.

The use of history to both control and inspire cadets was typical of the naval aspects of the colleges. Control, in various forms, was a key aspect of the cadet experience. The college differed greatly from the average public school in that cadets were subject to enormous supervision and had very little personal freedom. Control was exercised by masters, naval officers, cadet captains and by the cadets themselves.

The frenetic pace of life at the colleges was key to ensuring that cadets remained within the boundaries set for them. The early days of the colleges were characterised by ceaseless activity, in part because of the enormous range of activities that were packed into them. On the recommendations of the Custance Committee of 1912 and the Osborne Committee of 1917 some effort was made to relax the daily routine.¹¹⁰ The regime at the colleges was generally softened, with more sleep being allowed and use of the cold plunge baths restricted. These changes had a noticeable impact on the colleges, in particular upon Osborne. Hughes admitted that, with hindsight, 'cadets were hustled too much' until 'common sense crept in'.¹¹¹ On the other hand, Stephen King-Hall considered that Osborne cadets were 'looked after frightfully carefully

¹⁰⁸ TNA ED 109/823 Schools Inspection of Dartmouth 1932 p.12; TNA ED 109/824 Schools Inspection of Dartmouth 1938 p.12 and p.16. On both occasions inspectors called for the history course to be extended into the twentieth century. TNA ED 109/821 Schools Inspection of Dartmouth 1926 p.3, on this occasion the inspectors criticised the decision to drop German from the curriculum (it was restored in the late 1930s). Cadets were frequently lectured by visiting speakers and the war was amongst the subjects covered, officers and masters may have discussed their wartime experiences with cadets.

¹⁰⁹ Todman, *Myth and Memory*, pp.23-25; John Stevenson, *British Society*, pp.245-246

¹¹⁰ TNA ADM 1/8520/98 Report of the Committee to 'Enquire Into Certain Questions Concerning the Royal Naval College Osborne' (May Committee) June 1917 pp.9-10 para.25-27; TNA ADM 116/1288 Vol I Third Report of the Custance Committee, p.32 para.13

¹¹¹ Hughes, *Dartmouth*, p.50

nowadays'. As he was revisiting Osborne less than three years after passing out of the college his remarks should not perhaps be taken too seriously.¹¹²

However cadets of the inter-war period later recalled a tiring, strictly scheduled existence. Frank Twiss remarked that life at Dartmouth was 'very regulated and disciplined' and that 'it was always a tremendous rush'. Consequently 'there was very little time to think about very much except actually getting through the day'.¹¹³ This is supported by Edward Ashmore who recorded 'almost ceaseless activity' and that 'we hardly ever walked'.¹¹⁴

This was not the situation at any public school where, normally, boys had a reasonable amount of freedom and the day proceeded in a fairly relaxed manner. Certainly public school boys were not routinely required to run from one class to the next, let alone to do it as a group, as was normal at Dartmouth and Osborne. Public schools also lacked the punishment meted out to any term judged to be 'slack' – inefficient, lazy, untidy or ill-disciplined. Such terms would be subject to 'slack-parties' or 'strafes' – these would involve a series of rapid changes of uniform, runs to distant parts of the college, beatings for minor misdemeanours, and even less freedom than normal.

The brisk routine at the college ensured that there were few opportunities for cadets to make trouble. It also suggested an atmosphere of urgency and efficiency reflective of that to be found in the fleet. There was certainly some value in cadets becoming accustomed to a lack of free time and rest, constant difficulties in wartime. The desire to prepare cadets for life at sea was also expressed in conditions at the colleges. The furnishing of the colleges was generally utilitarian and this too was a deliberate device, designed to accustom cadets to a life of relative hardship.

The colleges were never intended to be luxurious, in 1905 the Osborne and Dartmouth Committee was informed that 'it is of great importance that young naval officers be brought up in habits of frugality and simplicity, and that nothing should be done during their college career to render their future life afloat irksome and distasteful' – sound reasoning, although the Spartan conditions at the colleges must also have been attractive financially.¹¹⁵ Cadets

¹¹² Stephen King-Hall diary entry of 17 May 1910, *Sea Saga*, p.345

¹¹³ Howard-Bailey, *Social History*, pp.8-9

¹¹⁴ Edward Ashmore, ed. by Eric J Grove, *The Battle and the Breeze: The Naval Reminiscences of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Edward Ashmore* (Stroud: Sutton, 1997) p.8

¹¹⁵ TNA ADM 268/38 'Report of the Osborne and Dartmouth Committee' (Fawkes Committee) May 1905 pp.3-4 para.5; Admiralty Letter N-1778/05 giving instructions to the committee from

lived in dormitories, bedded down in alphabetical order, a term typically occupied two. Each term had a gunroom which functioned as a common room, as well as studies for working outside school hours, central dining facilities catered for all cadets.

These basic facilities, combined with the lack of privacy and stringent regime, reinforced the strict discipline of the college and the control exercised over every aspect of cadet's lives. This control was further reinforced by the lack of personal freedom and great emphasis on conformity. The personal possessions of cadets were strictly limited and liable to be inspected, they were not allowed to decorate their accommodation, and wore uniform at all times. Regimentation extended to toothbrushes being stored in a certain way and windows opened to a prescribed degree.

The cadets themselves emphasised conformity, seniority was measured through the length of one's lanyard and the wearing of outgrown clothes, and conformity was also a theme of jokes and cartoons produced by cadets.¹¹⁶ There was also the matter of 'guff', for which cadets could be beaten by cadet captains. Guff was a failure to abide by the unwritten rules that defined conventional cadet behaviour; or, as described by Courtney Anderson, 'Mortal Sin'.¹¹⁷

This control was accepted by cadets because it emphasised their collective and, by extension, their naval identity. When a new term joined the service it was membership of the Royal Navy that first drew its members together. Courtney Anderson describes how, on the night of their arrival, his term: 'had new values and expressions. We were mentally and physically exhausted and yet exalted too. We were suddenly no longer children. We were in the Navy now'. Immediately the cadet's individual identities were consumed by that of the Royal Navy, and while the prospect was frightening it also held infinite promise — 'all life ahead was our chosen adventure'.¹¹⁸

This collective identity, established through wearing a naval uniform, using naval slang, and behaving in a certain way was reinforced throughout a cadet's college career. Naval tradition and spirit was imbued in cadets so that it provided idealism and a manner in which to act, along with a shared identity

the Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir Evan MacGregor) on behalf of Their Lordships 14 February 1905

¹¹⁶ Colville, 'Dartmouth', pp.122-125

¹¹⁷ Anderson, *Seagulls*, p. 9

¹¹⁸ *ibid*, p.10

with something of a family spirit about it. Jones suggests that pride in being part of the Royal Navy kept cadets at Dartmouth who might otherwise have left because of bullying or academic difficulties. They might have been amongst the weakest in their term, but they were still part of an elite.¹¹⁹ She emphasises the role of Dartmouth's invisible curriculum in developing cadets and so shaping the identities of naval officers.¹²⁰ Colville argues that this identity was shaped through the whole college environment rather than merely through dressing and behaving in a certain way.¹²¹

The naval identity, and adherence to the proud history of the Royal Navy, established by the naval colleges stayed with cadets throughout their lives; and it also had an important role in shaping the mentality of the rest of the service. In particular, it was a factor in the ability of Fisher-Selborne scheme cadets and midshipmen to influence Special Entries when serving with them at sea. The shorter training period of the Special Entries, carried out in a functional shipboard environment, did not allow them to be imbued with the same behavioural norms and ideals. Therefore, as described by the captain of HMS *Valiant*, 'the Dartmouth boys provide the solid and essential core of custom, tradition and system round which the public school boys exist'.¹²²

On a more formal level, and via the rules of the college, control was exercised by masters, cadet captains and term officers. The relative status of these groups was reflected through the authority they each exercised, as explored below. The general orders issued for Dartmouth in 1914 made clear the behaviour expected of all members of the college community.

The cadets themselves were expected to behave obediently and as gentlemen. When on duty they were required to be silent and orderly, and to proceed around the college at the double. Skylarking, or messing around, was not permitted in the dormitories or in the mess – which cadets were not to enter unless properly dressed and with clean hands and tidy hair. Gentlemanly conduct extended to the prohibition of familiarity with servants or the ships company; and of selling or bartering clothes, watches and jewellery. As cadets

¹¹⁹ Jones, *Officer Corps*, p.103

¹²⁰ *ibid*, p.84

¹²¹ Colville, 'Dartmouth', p.130

¹²² BRNC Captain Wodehouse's investigation into the quality of the cadets produced by the College, reply from the commanding officer HMS *Valiant* (Captain Wellwood GC Maxwell) to Captain Wodehouse 7 December 1932

were gentlemen, and therefore trusted to behave as such, they were not subject to surveillance when outside the college.

Staff members had varying punishment powers, with executive officers being able to award harsher punishments than engineer officers or masters. Term officers could punish all minor offences in an appropriate manner and did not need to refer to higher authority unless the punishment lasted for more than an hour. Masters could give minor punishments but were otherwise to refer miscreants to the commander. More serious punishments could be awarded by the commander or the captain. Extra school work could be given by the headmaster. Whilst lists of duties were provided for all members of the naval hierarchy, the civilian side of the establishment was left to its own devices.¹²³

A revised set of orders was issued in 1934 which largely copied its predecessor. To the existing rules about the deportment, cleanliness and general behaviour of cadets were added further restrictions banning buying, writing to, or writing for, any journal or periodical without permission. The status of the masters was raised by passing cadets being required to salute them as they would officers; this reinforced the authority of the masters, and emphasised the importance of their work.¹²⁴ The most noticeable change was in the formalisation of the powers given to the cadet captains.

Cadet captains pre-dated term officers, having been introduced to *Britannia* in the earliest days of her life as a training ship. They were responsible for keeping order and maintaining discipline and were supposed to report any misdemeanours committed by the cadets in their charge. In reality however, the maintenance of discipline had generally been left to the Royal Marines who acted as cadet corporals.¹²⁵ By 1890 the position had been modified, like the prefects in public schools, the cadet captains were increasingly regulated and their role more closely defined. The position of the cadet captains also differed from that of normal prefects in that they were likely to be closer in age to their charges.

An article written by *Britannia*'s captain listed their responsibilities as protecting and guiding new cadets, maintaining discipline and acting as intermediaries between cadets and officers. So great was their influence over

¹²³ BRNC College general orders 1914. Order relating to cadets in Chapter 1 Article 7, authority to give various punishments Chapter 32 Article 1

¹²⁴ BRNC College general orders 1934 Chapter 2

¹²⁵ Pack, *Britannia*, p.27 and p.53

the other cadets that 'the tone depends very much on them'.¹²⁶ An 1898 article described them as an 'admirable institution' and discussed their privileges and the special insignia worn on their sleeves.¹²⁷

Little changed in the early years of the colleges. In 1914 the Dartmouth general orders required cadet captains to maintain order and prevent bullying. They were told that 'to a large extent, the discipline, comfort, and well-being of the college is in their hands, and that the great freedom from restrictions which is enjoyed by all cadets, is only possible if the cadet captains do their duty in an efficient manner'.¹²⁸ Each term had two captains, selected from among the senior terms of the college.

From the cadet captains were selected two chief cadet captains who were 'to do their utmost to uphold the discipline of the college and to see that the cadet captains do their duties properly'. The chief cadet captain of the day was responsible for saying grace before meals and maintaining discipline during them. Otherwise his duties were similar to that of an officer acting as officer of the day aboard a Royal Navy ship; he was to attend the parade of defaulters, making sure the relevant cadets were present, and attend the commander during evening rounds.¹²⁹

The cadet captains were expressly required to maintain order when officers and masters were not present. This not only gave them scope for bullying their fellows, but also ensured that the remainder of the cadets were rarely required to organise or take responsibility for themselves, let alone anyone else. In 1932 the Captain of the College, Captain Norman Wodehouse, wrote to a variety of officers in the fleet asking them for their opinions of the products of the college. Almost without exception, these officers reported the cadets to lack self-discipline and the required sense of responsibility. Amongst the respondents were the captains of *Valiant* and *Resolution*. The Captain of *Valiant* suggested these failings arose from the 'exceptionally sheltered life' lived by cadets, who had neither responsibilities nor duties. The reply from *Resolution* suggested they were 'too much chased and herded and nursed'.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ FGD Bedford, 'Life on Board the *Britannia*', *Boys Own Paper*, c1890, pp.572-693 (p.606)

¹²⁷ Leyland Fisher, 'The Story of the *Britannias* in War and Peace', *Army and Navy Illustrated*, February 1898, pp.182-204 (p.198)

¹²⁸ BRNC College general orders 1914 Chapter 20, Article 18

¹²⁹ *ibid*, Chapter 20, Articles 5-8 (article 5)

¹³⁰ BRNC Captain Wodehouse's investigation into the quality of the cadets produced by the College, letters to Wodehouse from the commanding officer HMS *Valiant* (Captain Wellwood)

Given the lack of responsibility given to cadets, it is hardly surprising that cadet captains seem to have been frequently chosen as a result of their sporting prowess – the playing fields gave them their only opportunity to stand out as leaders. The Blake Term Log for 1929-1932 records that the first four term members picked to be cadet captains include the cadet highlighted as best at soccer, the first to play for the first rugby XV, and another with a generally distinguished sporting record.¹³¹

The cadet captains themselves enjoyed a variety of privileges and powers, most of them unregulated. The college regulations quoted above did not regulate the punishments given by cadet captains, nor give other cadets any right of appeal against them. These punishments were typically canings, administered at night; with no officers present there was little restriction on how hard victims could be beaten. It was not announced in advance who would be beaten and potential victims waited in painful suspense.

Furthermore, comparison of a record of official punishments and anecdotal evidence from cadets suggest that cadets received the vast majority of their beatings from cadet captains rather than through official channels. Unsurprisingly, cadet captains seem to have had great influence over the cadets in their charge, but this influence rested largely on their ability to punish rather than inspire. Jock Gardiner noted that cadet captains had more influence than term officers. Douglas Dickens recalled the punishments inflicted by cadet captains in more detail than the work of his term officers.¹³² The importance of the cadet captains was reflected by the prominence given to them in official college publications.

The Blue Book listed every cadet in the college and made their relative status very clear. The terms were listed by order of seniority, and the cadets within them listed in order of merit; except for the cadet captains who appeared first in their terms and with their names in capital letters (chief cadet captains had their names in bold). An alphabetical list of all cadets was included; again the cadet captains were marked out. A list of cadet captains was also included

GC Maxwell) 7 December 1932; and the commanding officer HMS *Resolution* (Captain Charles E Turle) 13 June 1933

¹³¹ RNM 1989.394 Blake Term Log entry of 21 December 1931

¹³² Adrian Holloway, email to author 2 February 2011; BRNC Daily Record of Offences Committed by Cadets at the RNC Dartmouth 1925-1926; BRNC Jock Gardiner, unpublished memoir, *Naval Cradle: The Story of the Greynville Term 1919-1923*; Douglas Dickens, 'A Life on The Ocean Wave', *The Lady Magazine*, 5 July 2005, p.32; RNM 1989.394 Blake Term Log 1929-1932; BRNC Drake Term Line Book; 1929-1932; BRNC Blake Term Log 1925-1929

in *Britannia Magazine*, Dartmouth's missive to the outside world. The 1908 summer issue included the first full page group photograph to appear in the publication – of the cadet captains. The following term a photograph of the first rugby XV appeared, but it was not until 1910 that photographs of entire terms appeared.¹³³

The 1934 college regulations suggest that Wodehouse had decided to make the position of the cadet captains closer to that of public school prefects; perhaps in response to the criticisms he had received from the fleet, perhaps as part of the College's general drift towards being more public school-like. The revised regulations reduced the power of the cadet captains but also gave them more of the privileges they would have had as public school prefects. Their responsibilities remained much the same, maintaining order in messes and gunrooms and when no adult was present. In return for these duties they were given extra freedom to leave the college, could employ junior cadets as fags to clean their shoes and tidy their possessions, and could eat tea in their cabins – which junior cadets could be ordered to prepare. However all beatings were to take place after breakfast or dinner and must be reported to the recipient's term officer. The recipient had to be given advance notice of the punishment and could appeal to his term officer if he felt it unfair. Cadet captains could also award up to four days of 'slack party' the recipient of which was given extra work and similar harassments.¹³⁴

These changes meant that cadet captains finally had lesser powers of punishment than masters and were firmly subordinated to term officers. Their lack of disciplinary powers was one of the disadvantages faced by masters at the colleges, which were otherwise reasonably attractive employers. Unlike many public schools the naval colleges did not particularly struggle for pupils or finance, thus granting masters security of tenure (although there was constant pressure from the Treasury to reduce the number of staff). Wages and working conditions were broadly similar. However masters could not achieve the normal goal of becoming a housemaster. To become a housemaster was viewed as a prize for many reasons. It carried less responsibility than being headmaster but still offered a man great power over the members of his house and great influence over their development. Housemasters could build a lasting reputation

¹³³ BRNC *Britannia Magazine* Summer 1920 p.286

¹³⁴ BRNC College general orders 1934 Chapter 1

and earned enough money to support a family. At Dartmouth, where terms and later houses were led by naval officers, there was no place for civilian housemasters.

Tutor sets, led by masters, contained boys from a number of terms; one of few opportunities for cadets of different ages to mix. They met weekly and had little practical function beyond giving each cadet a master to take some interest in his academic progress. This should have given cadets advocates or help when they were struggling or faced undue criticism but in fact tutors and tutor sets seem to have made little impression.¹³⁵

Otherwise many masters followed public school practice by taking an interest in their pupils outside working hours. They aided term officers in organising and refereeing sporting fixtures and organised many voluntary activities such as plays, lectures and clubs for hobbies. This was particularly valuable as the masters probably had a wider range of interests than the term officers, and certainly had more opportunity to develop them. The devotion to duty of the masters at the colleges was, by most measures, impressive and all the more so in the light of the conditions under which they operated.

The masters occupied an awkward position. Their disciplinary powers were quite limited and they did not have as much influence over their pupils as they might in another school. This was compensated for by the good working conditions and security of tenure. Certainly the masters appear to have been happy enough, long careers at the college were common. Although he did not provide any evidence, Pack wrote that at least a quarter of the Dartmouth teaching staff of 1921 were still at the college in 1941.¹³⁶ Stability in the master's common room ensured the smooth operation of the college and also gave the masters more influence than they might otherwise have had.

Although the term officers did not have enormous influence over naval policy, and did not exercise control to the same extent as the cadet captains, they were still expected to be the most important people in the lives of their cadets. They had been introduced in 1895 to counter the perceived failure of *Britannia's* officers to take any interest in the cadets (the duty officers were rumoured to relieve each other on Paddington station). They were not an

¹³⁵ Partridge, *Osborne*, pp.62-63

¹³⁶ Pack, *Britannia*, p.209

enormous success; one *Britannia* cadet later complained that he had never heard a term officer lecture his cadets on any subject other than games.¹³⁷

The term officers were retained in the new colleges and given an impressive variety of responsibilities. They were responsible for practically every aspect of their cadet's performance including sports, discipline, academics, and general behaviour. They taught seamanship and boat work to their cadets. They were thus required to act as father figures, teachers, and exemplify officer like qualities and behaviours. The 1922 Stanley Committee noted that 'in particular, it is his duty to impart to the cadets of his Term the customs and traditions of the service, and to endeavour to mould their characters and personalities so that they may ultimately become efficient officers, fitted in every respect to take their place in the naval service'.¹³⁸

Under the Fisher-Selborne scheme each term had two officers, one from the executive branch and the other an engineer. This was designed to ensure that cadets were equally enthusiastic and well informed about both areas, and it also signified the new found parity of the two branches.

The Stanley Committee stated that although the term officer system generally worked well it had several drawbacks. The reduction in term strength meant that term officers were now under-employed. They tended to obsess about games which tended to produce games obsessed cadets. They were devoting too much attention to individual cadets resulting in the cadets being too well looked after and thus irresponsible. The proposed solution was to make each term officer responsible for two terms instead of one; with around forty to forty-five cadets in each term this would make the individual term officers responsible for about as many cadets as they had been in the period of naval expansion before and during the First World War.¹³⁹

In spite of the term officer's vital role in cadet development the Admiralty accepted this recommendation. Economy measures also spelt the end of the engineer officer term lieutenants, who had in any case tended to disappear to seagoing appointments during the war. This change of policy was doubtless lamented by the engineering branch but was in many ways a practical step. The administration of the college was simplified by there being one officer in charge

¹³⁷ Hughes, *Dartmouth*, p.12

¹³⁸ TNA ADM 116/2362 Report of committee to 'Enquire into the Present Cost of Training Cadets at Dartmouth College' (Stanley Committee), 28 January 1922, p.12 para.43

¹³⁹ *ibid*, Stanley Committee Report p.12 para.41

of each term while the decline of inter-changeability, and consequent loss of interest in engineering at Dartmouth, meant that the engineering officers were increasingly redundant.

Whilst relations between officer and cadets might not have been as close as they had been, the reduction in staffing did not mean a reduction in supervision. On the contrary, in 1936 the Captain of the College, Captain Reginald Holt, wrote to the Second Sea Lord that 'the cadets are under more or less constant supervision and do not have to think for themselves'. This was largely the work of term officers and had a positive effect on both the cadets and their parents who felt that their sons were unusually well looked after.¹⁴⁰ Captain Holt apparently did not believe that being in the habit of not thinking for themselves would hamper the subsequent careers of these officers.

As these two letters suggest, the relationship of a cadet to his term officer was a critical fact in his development and, as such, the matter is worthy of further consideration. In his study of Osborne, Michael Partridge examined the relationships of cadets with their term officers. He wrote that 'those who thought most highly of their officers were those whose general memories of their time at Osborne were most favourable'.¹⁴¹ Partridge suggests that the experience of cadets during the First World War when masters served as term officers was quite different from that of those who had naval officers as their term lieutenants; the masters generally being kinder and more understanding although less naval minded.¹⁴²

A picture of good and bad term officers and their effects on cadets can be drawn from the autobiographies of Louis Le Bailly and Courtney Anderson. In general Anderson appears to have enjoyed Dartmouth rather more, and his recollections of his term officers are far more favourable than those of Le Bailly. Le Bailly suggests that the term officers were driven by a desire to boost their own careers, frustration at separation from their wives (who were not allowed to live within fifty miles of the college), and naval traditions of driving leadership.¹⁴³ Whilst there is undoubtedly some truth in these claims, regard should be given

¹⁴⁰ TNA ADM 1/8832, CW.11270/1936 Letter from the Captain of the College (Captain Reginald V Holt) to the Second Sea Lord (Admiral Sir Martin E Dunbar-Nasmith) 3 October 1936. Attachment B of the Dunbar-Nasmith's memorandum for the Board presented 5 November 1936

¹⁴¹ Partridge, *Osborne*, p.121

¹⁴² Partridge, *Osborne*, pp.122-123

¹⁴³ Le Bailly, *Around the Engine*, p.14

to Le Bailly's dislike of Dartmouth and later transfer into the engineering branch, along with his disdain for the executive branch which he perceived as elitist and less professional.

Anderson recorded that after their first encounter with their term officer 'Poop' Edwards, 'every new Exmouth felt he had a substitute father in this strange and frightening place'.¹⁴⁴ This impression proved correct for when the Exmouths entered the senior college in their sixth term and gained a new term officer Anderson noted that 'the obvious kindness and sympathy of the man had been our shield in our early terms'.¹⁴⁵ However under their new term officer St John Cronyn 'Exmouth Term took a great leap upwards in performance and morale. He made us really good and we knew how good we were'. Cronyn's methods were almost the opposite of those of Edwards – he demanded the highest possible standards and punished defaulters severely (although he limited beatings to those who had 'really asked for it').¹⁴⁶

Anderson's experiences, even if recalled through rose-tinted lenses, demonstrate the effect of good term officers. Under the sympathetic leadership of Edwards the term established themselves in the college and came to feel at home in the Royal Navy. Under Cronyn the emphasis was on performance, self-confidence and self-discipline – officer-like qualities.

There is little evidence of what the term officers themselves thought about their work and the cadets entrusted to them. One of the best pieces of evidence is the diary kept by Exmouth term officer, Lieutenant-Commander Louis Hamilton at the start of 1920. Hamilton's diary is especially valuable because it sheds light on the collective psyche of the college at a time when there was great upheaval in the Navy and the near certainty that many of those at the college would be forced out of the service.

Before the start of the college term in January, Hamilton had visited Captain Bertram Thesiger and discussed a mutual friend's prospects of leaving the service. Thesiger, he recorded, was 'all for it if he could get a job outside, but of course that is the difficulty'.¹⁴⁷ Reductions in the strength of the service unquestionably weighed heavily on the college. In early March, Hamilton was told his own term was to be reduced from 106 to 65 with the survivors to be

¹⁴⁴ Anderson, *Seagulls*, p.8

¹⁴⁵ *ibid*, p.16

¹⁴⁶ *ibid*, p.17

¹⁴⁷ NMM HTN/210 Diary of Lieutenant-Commander LHK Hamilton, entry of 13 January 1920

selected on the basis of their officer-like qualities, a definition of which was provided by the captain of the college.¹⁴⁸

Some of the cadets must have been delighted to leave; Hamilton recorded discontented cadets who had only joined the Royal Navy in the hope of getting to take part in the war and had no wish to be part of a peacetime force. These feelings were heightened by the fact that, with the war over, cadets were being treated more like schoolboys and less like young men; this was particularly galling to those affected by the general 'unrest and craving for pleasure' of wider society. Morale was undermined by poor quality staff members, recruited out of wartime necessity, so much so that 'the fashion of criticising the capabilities of the officers has been fairly general'.¹⁴⁹

Hamilton was perturbed by this undercurrent of discontent but he made no concession to it. He appears to have been a sporting obsessive – he kept a diary for only two months but in that time he went walking four times, riding twice, and hunting ten times. He was regularly involved with the sporting activities of his term and was clearly of the view that cadets benefitted from exercise. Early in the term he took some of them running 'just to keep the boys on the move'.¹⁵⁰

Later entries rage about the inadequacies of the term rugby team, the poor performances of which evidently enraged Hamilton who 'gave a short discourse on the putrid exhibition of rigger this afternoon'.¹⁵¹ It was not for lack of practise – twelve days later, and with only twenty-five members of the term fit, Hamilton enlisted two masters and two Drake term cadets so that a game might take place.¹⁵² This was one of a number of occasions on which Hamilton himself played, especially relishing the prospect of officers versus cadets matches as 'the latter look on us all as cripples'.¹⁵³ This view must have been reinforced when Hamilton was off duty for four days after spraining his ankle in a game.

Hamilton himself had flourished as a cadet athlete, representing the college at rugby. However the extensive games programme that he enforced

¹⁴⁸ *ibid*, 4 March 1920 unfortunately the diary ends on the following day and does not give any further details.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid*, 26 January 1920

¹⁵⁰ *ibid*, 19 January 1920

¹⁵¹ *ibid*, 29 January 1920

¹⁵² *ibid*, 10 February 1920

¹⁵³ *ibid*, 12 February 1920

was not driven by visions of glory, or by an obsession with physical fitness. Rather it was the cornerstone of his policy of driving cadets hard to prepare them for later life.¹⁵⁴ Others ascribed the sporting success of his term to his allowing them the freedom to organise their own sporting activities, suggesting that Hamilton's diary may have exaggerated the exhortations given.¹⁵⁵

Hamilton was undoubtedly a man accustomed to success. His cadet career had been highly successful, culminating in his becoming chief cadet captain. He had won the DSO in the First World War.¹⁵⁶ Perhaps he was not the most obvious choice for nurturing the weaker cadets of Exmouth term; but he was a suitably brave and dashing role model. His spell as a term officer did him no harm, he became the first ex-Osborne cadet to reach flag rank and retired as an Admiral having been Chief Naval Advisor to the Australian government, effectively the Australian First Sea Lord.¹⁵⁷

All the authority figures at the colleges had something in common – they were men. Women were deliberately excluded from positions of authority. Those employed as nurses were able to demonstrate feminine qualities of care and compassion but were directed by naval surgeons who decided what treatment sick cadets should receive. Those employed as domestic servants had little contact with cadets, who in any case were not allowed to speak to them.

This reflected the situation in most public schools, there being a widely held view that manliness could only be learnt in an environment from which women were excluded.¹⁵⁸ In a public school the housemaster's wife might take a caring interest in his charges; at Dartmouth and Osborne terms were supplied with petty officers who dispensed advice, ensured cadets were properly dressed before going on parade, and generally acted as guides and guardians. Cadets were thus provided with a role model who, although compassionate and caring, was indisputably masculine. The removal of women from a cadet's normal

¹⁵⁴ *ibid*, 26 January 1920

¹⁵⁵ BRNC *Britannia Magazine* Michaelmas 1920 p.1

¹⁵⁶ BRNC *Britannia Magazine* Michaelmas 1906 p.1176 and p.1232, BRNC *Britannia Magazine* Easter 1920 p.1

¹⁵⁷ Charles Mosley, ed. *Burke's Peerage, Baronetage & Knightage, 107th edition*, 3 vols (Wilmington, DE: Burke's Peerage (Genealogical Books) Ltd, 2003), I, p.329 online at <http://thepeerage.com/p8347.htm#i83464>, [accessed 1 February 2012]; Beattie, *Churchill Scheme*, p.83

¹⁵⁸ Tosh, *Man's Place*, p.119

environment removed an obstacle to the development of the manly attributes required as officer-like qualities.

Given the variety of authority figures at the colleges, there was inevitably considerable variation in the punishments awarded to erring cadets. There was also a need to ensure that punishments were appropriate, given the colleges' dual identities as naval establishments and public schools, and the cadet's dual identities as school boys and young naval officers.

The 1914 Dartmouth regulations laid out seven different punishments. The most minor, and the only one that masters could award, was fifteen minutes extra drill on one day. Commanders could award an hour of extra drill for four days. Punishments involving extra drill were designed as a response to misbehaviour, especially in the classroom. Other punishments included forfeiture of a half holiday and confinement to the college grounds – responses to more serious offences such as leaving the college without permission or insubordination. The final option was forfeiture of pocket money (cadets were not paid but instead received one shilling a week in pocket money paid for by their parents) – largely to pay for damage to naval property.

These punishments reflected the naval nature of the college. Cadets could not be given lines or assigned manual work as they might be in a public school. Extra drill was a punishment entirely military in nature and was used in other naval training establishments. The regulations did not lay down any scale for giving extra work which was the provenance of the headmaster; nor, as discussed above, did they give any guidance to cadet captains. They also did not cover expulsion and certain other punishments which only the captain himself could award.¹⁵⁹

The majority of the punishments recorded in a sample list of offences for May 1925 were of a minor nature, and given for offences that might occur in any public school. Eight cadets were punished for breaking fixtures or fittings, all of them with a small fine, which varied according to the item involved – breaking a pane of glass carried a fine of 9d, the destruction of a gunroom light fitting one of 2s. Twenty-six cadets received minor punishments for various misbehaviours, varying from two days of thirty minutes extra drill for talking, to

¹⁵⁹ BRNC College General Orders 1914, Chapter 32

the loss of two half holidays for undefined misbehaviour. One cadet was cautioned – he had been caught ‘interfering’ with junior cadets.¹⁶⁰

The only cadet punished for a serious offence was Cadet Johnson, top of the tenth term and only months away from passing out, who was punished for making a grossly impertinent remark to a master. His punishment, of unlisted duration, was designed to cause him maximum inconvenience and to emphasise his subordinate status. Johnson was required to report to the main office every thirty minutes outside working hours and to go to bed early.¹⁶¹ This punishment did not have the desired result. Far from falling into line with the behaviour expected of cadets he and three others stole a master’s car – for which they each received twelve cuts of the cane. Johnson was removed from the college at the end of the term, his naval career at an end.¹⁶²

Johnson’s motivations are not recorded, but it may be that he found serious misbehaviour to be his only way of escaping from the college. Amongst the complaints received by Wodehouse in 1932 was a remark, from a recent cadet, that ‘Once in Dartmouth College, it is extraordinarily difficult and expensive to get out’.¹⁶³ These difficulties had not been resolved by 1939; Captain Frederick Dalrymple- Hamilton recorded asking Admiral Barrow to remove his son after the boy had committed a string of offences culminating in running away from the college.¹⁶⁴

There were many reasons why, despite the exhausting regime, strict discipline, and hard classes, the drop-out rate from the naval colleges remained reasonably low at around 3-4%. Jones, as noted above, suggested that cadets were reluctant to surrender their elite identity.¹⁶⁵ Cadets who enjoyed being part of the Navy had no hope of finding the same atmosphere and opportunities elsewhere. Cadets who disliked the Navy may well have wished to leave the college, which after all led automatically to a naval career, but were prevented from doing so largely through pressure on their parents.

¹⁶⁰ BRNC, Daily Record of Offences Committed by Cadets at the RNC Dartmouth 1925-1926, entries for May 1925

¹⁶¹ *ibid*, entry for 1 May 1925

¹⁶² *ibid*, entry for 28 July 1925; Johnson is not listed in the College List for the following term.

¹⁶³ BRNC, Captain Wodehouse’s investigation into the quality of the cadets produced by the College, un-dated remarks of Cadet JK Lyon, HMS *Nelson*

¹⁶⁴ BRNC, Diary of Captain Frederick HG Dalrymple-Hamilton, entry of 6 July 1939. Cadet Barrow had previously received a dozen cuts of the cane after being caught with a local girl, the caning is described; Holloway, *Dartmouth to War*, p.20.

¹⁶⁵ Jones, *Officer Corps*, p.103

Cadets remained the responsibility of their parents or guardians rather than the state. If their cadet chose to leave they were obliged to pay the naval authorities an extra payment for every term he had completed – thus repaying the money the state had spent on him. In 1924 this extra payment was £40 per term passed.¹⁶⁶ Given that the normal college fees were £50 a term, and that many parents were paying a reduced rate, it can be seen that that withdrawing a cadet nearly doubled the cost of his naval education. There was also the cost and effort of getting him into another school, providing him with a new school uniform, and launching him into another career. Failure might also leave a boy feeling humiliated, especially at being found unfit to defend King and Country. The humiliation, and parental recriminations, might be even greater if the boy came from a naval family or had joined because his parents wanted him to.¹⁶⁷

Under these circumstances parents had no incentive to withdraw their sons or to allow them to leave the colleges. On the contrary they were the natural allies of the naval authorities who were naturally anxious to retain the services of their future officers. If his parents would not allow him to leave, the cadet could escape only through continually failing examinations, or through behaving so badly that his parents would be asked to withdraw him. This method of departure had one advantage – cadets who left at the request of the naval authorities did not incur the additional payments.

The difficulties associated with leaving the college, along with the young age of entry, ensured that there was a wider range of personalities and interests amongst the cadets than there would otherwise have been. This variation, which could have produced a corresponding range of interests and specialist talents in the officer corps, was stifled by the lack of freedom cadets had to associate with each other and, in particular, by the term system.

The unusual conditions at the colleges arose partly from the fact that cadets of different ages were separated from each other as terms, rather than being mixed up in houses as they would have been in a public school. The term system was the natural product of the Navy entering multiple batches of cadets each year; it meant that cadets of the same seniority were always together, greatly simplifying college administration.

¹⁶⁶ Gieves, *Naval Officer* (1924), p.32

¹⁶⁷ No cadet dismissed from the colleges has left an account of his feelings. Concern about parental reactions can be found in Hughes, *Dartmouth*, pp.48-49 where the author discusses anxious communications received from the parents of struggling cadets.

The major disadvantage of the term system was the isolation it produced. Living, working, and playing with members of their own term, cadets had no opportunity to mix with those in others. This natural isolation was compounded by the efforts of the college authorities to ensure that cadets did not mix outside their own terms. There were very few opportunities to interact, even brothers required permission to speak to each other. This separation was designed to prevent the older cadets from interfering with the younger and thus to preclude bullying, fagging and sexual assault.¹⁶⁸

There was even segregation within terms. Cadets slept in, and were often seated or lined up in, alphabetical order; thus they developed the closest relationships with those closest to them in the alphabet. Terms were split between two or more dormitories; cadets knew term-mates in their own dormitory far better than the others, with whom they frequently competed in games and other activities.¹⁶⁹ The life of a cadet who was an outcast in his own term, or was habitually bullied by his term-mates, must have been very unpleasant.

The isolation of terms interfered with one of the stated objectives of the Fisher-Selborne scheme – to create a corps of officers with a shared background and lifelong friendships. It also meant that cadets who were not cadet captains had very few leadership opportunities. One later complained that ‘for four years we milled about as a herd, supremely and smugly proud of ourselves and hopelessly unaware of our own defects’.¹⁷⁰ Finally, it tended to produce officers who were inward looking and cliquish.

The lives of cadets were greatly changed by the adoption of houses in place of terms in 1937. The possibility of introducing the house system had

¹⁶⁸ *Britannia* had had an unfortunate, though arguably exaggerated, reputation for bullying for which see Pack, *Britannia*, p.50. The college regulations explicitly ordered cadet captains to ensure that younger cadets were not being bullied or harassed by their seniors, see BRNC College general orders 1914 Chapter 20, Article 14. Various documents suggest that the Navy feared younger cadets being sexually assaulted. For examples see TNA ADM 116/2799 Evidence of Captain SJ Meyrick p.9 and TNA ADM 116/2362 Letter from the Captain of the College, (Captain Martin E Dunbar-Nasmith) to the Commander in Chief Plymouth, (Vice-Admiral Sir Rudolph W Bentinck) 23 August 1928. The moral safeguarding of cadets was a considerable concern when the change from terms to houses was made in 1938 see TNA ADM 1/8832, CW.11270/1936 Letter from Captain of the College (Rear-Admiral Reginald V Holt) to the Second Sea Lord, (Admiral Sir Martin E Dunbar-Nasmith) 3 October 1936. Attachment B of Dunbar-Nasmith’s memorandum for the Board presented 5 November 1936; ‘Organisation of Cadets into Terms or Other Groups’ Cyril Ashford unknown date 1920. Attachment F of Dunbar-Nasmith’s memorandum for the Board presented 5 November 1936.

¹⁶⁹ BRNC Gardiner, p.10; Seymour, *Africa*, p.23; Seymour’s account demonstrates how the traditions of the term system lingered on into the house system.

¹⁷⁰ BRNC Gardiner, p.11

been mooted as early as 1920,¹⁷¹ but it was not until 1936 that it was seriously investigated. The term system was a legacy from the *Britannia* and it persisted partly because of tradition and partly because it was seen as successful. Although inward looking, the terms tended to be closely bonded and welded to their ideals. Largely invulnerable to external malevolent influence, they benefitted from a close relationship with their term officer. The strict segregation of terms, whilst limiting leadership opportunities, did mean there was very little bullying of younger boys by the elder although the potential existed for very nasty bullying within a term.

In 1936 the Captain of the College, Rear-Admiral Reginald Holt, argued that the term system encouraged self-discipline, limited the spread of disease, and safeguarded the morals of the younger cadets.¹⁷² Holt presented this as an advantage, but to many officers continual supervision was amongst the worst features of the term system. They believed it stifled initiative, forced cadets into a mould, and prevented them from developing as leaders.

Advocates of the house system, including Drax and McMullen, pointed out that it would not be used by almost every public school were it unsuccessful.¹⁷³ They argued that the house system would give older cadets more opportunity to practise leadership without any great increase in immorality or bullying – thus linking it to the drive for initiative that was reforming officer education. Whilst there would be more chances for disease to spread, public schools were generally healthy places and there was no reason to suppose Dartmouth would be otherwise. Sporting contests between houses would be more even than those between terms and this would improve morale. House traditions could be built up, and this would ease the lot of new officers at the college who currently found it very hard to earn the trust of an established term.

The move from terms to houses involved a conscious effort to make the college more like a public school. Captain Frederick Dalrymple-Hamilton, who replaced Holt at the end of 1936, noted in his diary 'I have been told to make it

¹⁷¹ TNA ADM 1/8832, CW.11270/1936 'Organisation of Cadets into Terms or Other Groups' Cyril Ashford unknown date 1920. Attachment F of the Second Sea Lord's (Admiral Sir Martin E Dunbar-Nasmith) memorandum for the Board presented 5 November 1936

¹⁷² *ibid*, Letter from Captain of the College (Rear-Admiral Reginald V Holt) to Dunbar-Nasmith 3 October 1936 Attachment B of Dunbar-Nasmith's memorandum for the Board presented 5 November 1936

¹⁷³ *ibid*, 'Notes on Dartmouth College by the C-in-C Plymouth' (Admiral Sir Reginald Drax) 18 August 1936. Attachment D of Dunbar-Nasmith's memorandum for the Board 5 November 1936; 'Remarks by the Advisor on Education' (Alexander McMullen) 21 September 1936. Attachment E of Dunbar-Nasmith's memorandum for the Board 5 November 1936

into a public school'.¹⁷⁴ The aim was to give cadets more of the responsibility, freedom, and variety of friendships they would have had in a public school and, at the same time, to make the college more attractive to parents and prep school headmasters. Those involved in drawing up the plans visited a variety of prominent public schools including Sherborne, Marlborough, Radley, Wellington and Winchester.¹⁷⁵

Under the scheme drawn up in late 1936 there were five main houses – Blake, Grenville (the spelling modernised from the previous Greynville), St Vincent, Exmouth, and Rodney. Cadets in their first two terms were in Drake house, a measure devised to maintain some of the old traditions and closeness of the term system.¹⁷⁶ House officers were in much the same position as term officers, although they were now responsible for the condition of their house's accommodation as well as the lives of its cadets.¹⁷⁷

A complete change of policy encouraged senior cadets to take an active interest in their juniors, and it was hoped that bad behaviour would continue to be discouraged by peer pressure rather than the fear of punishment.¹⁷⁸ Houses followed public school practice in having a senior room, but the senior cadets lost many existing privileges. Cadets in their last term gained cabins, they were very small spaces and shared by three cadets but they gave their occupants privacy and freedom unknown to their juniors.¹⁷⁹

The house system was introduced on a trial basis in the summer term of 1937. The official report submitted by Dalrymple-Hamilton suggested that most of its problems and successes were as predicted – demonstrating the thoroughness with which the issue had been considered. He reported that, in general, the cadets were now both happier and livelier. However the younger cadet captains were struggling to exert authority over older cadets – a situation not helped by senior cadets resenting their loss of privileges and refusing to rise to the occasion. This in turn had resulted in worse behaviour amongst the younger cadets and the house officers being over-worked. On the other hand,

¹⁷⁴ BRNC Diary of Captain Dalrymple-Hamilton, entry of 5 March 1937

¹⁷⁵ *ibid*, entries of 16 and 17 March 1937

¹⁷⁶ TNA ADM 1/8832, CW.12527/1936 Letter No.871/A from Captain of the College (Captain Frederick HG Dalrymple-Hamilton) to Drax 17 December 1936, enclosure 'Orders for the House System'

¹⁷⁷ *ibid*, Appendix to the enclosure no.1

¹⁷⁸ *ibid*, Appendix to the enclosure no.3

¹⁷⁹ Holloway, *Dartmouth to War*, p.38

games matches were now more evenly and keenly contested, and senior cadets had begun to coach their younger housemates.¹⁸⁰

His satisfaction was not shared by the rest of the college, both the masters and the senior college cadets were disgruntled by the changes. The masters had legitimate cause for complaint – standards of order and discipline had slipped, and their pastoral role within the college had not been properly redefined. The headmaster complained that whereas formerly ‘order kept itself’ there was now indiscipline. He still supported the changes, recognising that ‘the prestige of seniority has gone, it will have to be replaced by the prestige of character’.¹⁸¹

Dalrymple-Hamilton recognised the difficulties and opted to address both the masters and the senior college cadets to encourage them to support the changes. He told the masters that the house system was proving to be a success – ‘the spirit of initiative engendered is what is being asked for in the fleet’ but recognised their difficulties, telling them that the decline in discipline had been inevitable, and that they should do more to punish transgressors and encourage self discipline.¹⁸² He showed less sympathy to the senior college cadets, and instead urged them to behave responsibly and to help the cadet captains. Those who had been helpful and responsible he thanked for their efforts.¹⁸³

His remarks seem to have had a positive impact. By the end of the following term the novelty of the changes had worn off and they had won almost unanimous approval.¹⁸⁴ Having gained experience, senior cadets and housemasters alike were performing better while the younger cadets had settled down. House spirit had risen, the cadets were happier, and games matches were ever more keenly contested. Several problems remained – the senior cadets did not have time for the additional responsibilities taken by public school boys in their position (who were in any case older). Cadet Captains were

¹⁸⁰ TNA ADM 1/8832, CW.7725/37 Dartmouth letter No.1254/150 ‘Report on Working of the House System at the Royal Naval College Dartmouth’ submitted by Dalrymple-Hamilton to Drax 13 July 1937.

¹⁸¹ BRNC File on the introduction of the house system, letter from the Headmaster (Mr Eric WE Kempson) to Dalrymple-Hamilton 14 July 1937

¹⁸² *ibid*, Dalrymple-Hamilton’s remarks to masters 16 July 1937

¹⁸³ *ibid*, Dalrymple-Hamilton remarks to senior cadets 15 July 1937

¹⁸⁴ TNA ADM 1/8832, CW.157/1938, Dartmouth Letter No.1455/150 ‘Further Report on the Working of the House System at the Royal Naval College Dartmouth’ submitted by Dalrymple-Hamilton to Drax 15 December 1937. The principle dissenters were senior cadets and many of the older masters.

still chosen in a quota from each term, resulting in good candidates losing out while poorer cadets were promoted. Whilst academic standards had generally been unaffected, the lack of supervision of younger cadets was resulting in cheating at prep, (which would be better undertaken in supervised groups).

In spite of these difficulties the house system had proven so successful that no suggestion was made for it to be discontinued, it remained in place until the last Fisher-Selborne scheme cadets passed out of the college in 1953. The removal of the term system resulted in a loss of adult supervision, some reduction in discipline, a generally more relaxed atmosphere, and less insularity amongst cadets. That standard public school practice should be successfully adopted demonstrates the similarity of Dartmouth to public schools, as well as the similarity of cadets to public schoolboys.

This positive impact is illustrated by the autobiography of Phillip Seymour which discusses his friendships with cadets from other terms and important lessons of leadership and man-management learnt at the college. The change in the atmosphere of the college can be evidenced by a single quote: 'qualities instilled in us were Honour and Respect for Tradition – but not at the expense of innovation or initiative nor even a sense of humour'.¹⁸⁵ Whilst the college had never lacked a sense of humour, respect for naval tradition and one's superiors had very much been instilled at the cost of lost initiative. The house system was not a panacea for all the college's ills. One cadet subsequently recalled having little contact with cadets outside his own house and stated that bullying took place within his house.¹⁸⁶

The available evidence suggests that, teething problems aside, the introduction of the house system at Dartmouth was entirely successful. It improved the lives of cadets at the college by relaxing the restrictions placed upon them, allowed them to broaden their horizons, and it also sent them to sea as more capable young officers with increased leadership experience.

Given the great emphasis on loyalty to the Navy and the effort to control cadets through secular means, it is perhaps unsurprising that religion played a relatively limited role in the life of the colleges. Whereas the physical health of cadets was a constant concern of the naval authorities, the question of spiritual health arose only once. On this occasion the naval authorities engaged in a

¹⁸⁵ Seymour, *Africa*, p.21

¹⁸⁶ ex inf. Lieutenant-Commander Ian A Rodger (Blake House, 1936-40)

prolonged conflict with the local Catholic authorities regarding provision for Roman Catholic cadets.¹⁸⁷

The Royal Navy was an overtly Christian organisation – religious attendance was more or less compulsory and special provision was made for Catholics and non-conformists. Morning divisions included prayers and church attendance was compulsory on Sundays while some official encouragement was given to religious organisations that targeted sailors. At Dartmouth classes in scripture were included in the curriculum. Terms were normally confirmed together – a process which reaffirmed their group identity but may not have aided their spiritual development.

The religious instruction provided at the colleges was designed to promote certain Christian ideals. The Michaelmas 1927 issue of *Britannia Magazine* carried a transcription of Ashford's address to the passing out term in which he told the cadets why they had been given so much religious instruction. He told them that religion was an important part of life at all public schools – and part and parcel of being a gentleman. Only through devotion could men reach the moral standards desired by Christ. He advised them to watch and pray, and that a good leader was guided by his faith in his treatment of his subordinates.¹⁸⁸ *Britannia Magazine* made clear the emphasis placed on Christianity at Dartmouth, it always contained a report on religious activities at the college.

This functional approach to religion was reinforced by the circumstances under which cadets worshipped and received religious instruction. The hectic routine of the colleges was not conducive to deep thought and religious contemplation. Cadets were given time to pray before going to bed – but given the limited amount of time available it is unlikely that much deep thought was involved. A former Osborne cadet recalled: 'Then suddenly the orders came 'say your prayers'. One fell to ones knees and rattled off a prayer or two'.¹⁸⁹ For some, prayers offered a head start at undressing: 'while he was kneeling down there he was fiddling with his tie all the time and loosening the knot [...] so that the moment the gong went for the finish of prayers after ninety seconds off it came over his head'.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ See TNA ADM 1/8643/165

¹⁸⁸ BRNC *Britannia Magazine* Michaelmas 1927 pp.5-6

¹⁸⁹ Partridge, *Osborne*, p.97

¹⁹⁰ *ibid*, p.98

Nor was the atmosphere of the colleges calculated to inspire religious devotion – the loyalties of cadets were directed towards the Navy and arrangements made this clear. At Dartmouth the chapel, magnificent in itself, was tucked away at the end of a corridor whilst the quarterdeck stood at the centre of the college. Osborne did not have a chapel, cadets attended services in Nelson Hall – a general purpose space devoted to a naval hero. The interior of these spaces reflected the profession of those who worshipped within and the links to naval heritage that pervaded the colleges. On leaving Dartmouth in 1928, Captain Martin Dunbar-Nasmith gifted a model of the first *Britannia* to the chapel; the model was suspended from the ceiling, thus placing the Royal Navy and its traditions at the centre of the College's religious space.

Sport too was pursued as a route to becoming a better naval officer rather than for its own sake. This approach owed much to the way in which sports had developed in British public schools during the nineteenth century. Organised games offered a variety of positive effects. They could be used to occupy large numbers of boys for long periods of time, provided a release for frustrations and high spirits, and taught teamwork, self-sacrifice, and self-discipline. In this way they could be an excellent tool for crushing individualism and vices such as gambling, laziness, alcoholism and masturbation, or other threats to discipline. Finally, games were a vehicle for self-improvement, producing a healthy mind and a healthy body ready to serve God and nation.

It has been argued that the growth in games was largely the result of the popularity of the concept of 'muscular Christianity'. For muscular Christians to be physically fit was to glorify God's work and to equip oneself to spread his word throughout the world. The importance of muscular Christianity has been over-emphasised for a number of reasons. Mainly it seems to be the product of over-emphasising the influence of Thomas Arnold, portrayed by his early biographers Hughes and Stanley as a great advocate of muscular Christianity.¹⁹¹ Arnold was unquestionably a devout Christian, but he rarely referred to games in his sermons and did not take an active role in them or their promotion.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1857); Arthur P Stanley, *The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold* (London: 1844). Terence Copley, *Black Tom: Arnold of Rugby, The Man and the Myth* (London: Continuum, 2002) examines Stanley's influence pp.254-258.

¹⁹² Mangan, *Athleticism*, p.16

Edward Thring, who as Headmaster of Uppingham transformed it from small local institution to great public school, is also cited as a key advocate of muscular Christianity. Thring certainly advocated both Christianity and sport — however he used sport as a tool for school unity, encouraging the masters to play alongside the boys. He actually resisted the growth and worship of school sport because it detracted from his aim of giving all boys an equal chance to thrive.¹⁹³

The pro-games movement was partly driven by a fear of vice, particularly that connected to sexuality. This fear appears to have been widespread, even among those with more practical concerns about the future of young Britons. James Wilson, Headmaster of Clifton School, was a major force in modernising the teaching of mathematics. Yet, in 1881 he declared ‘There is amply sufficient ground for alarm that the nation may be on the eve of an age of voluptuousness and reckless immorality’.¹⁹⁴ Among Thring’s greatest concerns was the ‘large percentage of temptation, criminality and idleness in great schools’.¹⁹⁵

Although sport was seen to be morally beneficial its institution was largely a result of practical concerns. Schools had few staff therefore it was essential to have activities which engaged large numbers of boys under minimal supervision, and for this sport was ideal. This view was crystallised by Thring who wrote that ‘each boy being fully occupied is thus preserved from innumerable evils’.¹⁹⁶

At Harrow the development of organised games followed the formation of the Harrow Philathletic society in 1853. The society was started by thirty members of the fifth and sixth forms and one of its stated aims was to improve order in the school. The society collected subscriptions, organised house matches and campaigned for the building of a gymnasium, ultimately it ‘organised, coerced and flattered the bulk of the school into a complicated system of regimented games playing’.¹⁹⁷ Whilst the Philathletic Society members may have been concerned about Empire, Christianity, or

¹⁹³ Leinster-Mackay, *Edward Thring*, p.2 and p.59

¹⁹⁴ David Winner, *Those Feet: An Intimate History of English Football* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005; paperback edn, 2006) p.15

¹⁹⁵ Edward Thring, *Uppingham School, the Statement of the Rev Edward Thring, Headmaster, Respecting the Organisation of the School* ([Uppingham]: [The Author], 1870) p.3

¹⁹⁶ *ibid*, p.9

¹⁹⁷ Mangan, *Athleticism*, p.29

masturbation, it is clear that they were mostly concerned with their own position and power within the school.

Many of these attributes were attractive to the naval authorities. Extending the strict control of cadets to their hours of leisure was an entirely logical step. Laziness, immorality, and criminality were undesirable characteristics in young naval officers; physical fitness, determination, and teamwork were desirable. Sport was also one of the few areas in which officers and ratings participated at as equals – as such it was excellent for building morale – indeed sporting success was seen as a sure sign of a happy ship.

Hardly surprising then, that sport was an important part of life at the naval colleges. They offered a wider variety of sports than most public schools, with rugby, soccer, hockey, tennis, cricket, rowing, sailing, athletics, squash, gymnastics, swimming and beagling available. Few public schools offered sailing, let alone included it in the curriculum, but otherwise the sports on offer were fairly typical. Rugby, as in most public schools, was the dominant winter game but it was felt important that cadets should play and understand soccer – the game preferred by ratings.¹⁹⁸

Cadets made a daily report on their activities known as a log – some activities counted as a whole log, others as only half a log meaning that more than one had to be undertaken in the course of the afternoon. Log activities generally involved sport but getting a haircut or taking a music lesson were also acceptable. It was expected that cadets would make an honest report on their activities – liars were severely punished.

Hardly surprising then that, according to *How to Become a Naval Officer*, the sporting facilities at Dartmouth ‘challenge comparison with any school in the world’¹⁹⁹ This was an exaggeration – the college had insufficient pitch space resulting in cadets travelling to off-site pitches owned by the college, and all the pitches were liable to be closed due to water-logging in the winter. Although Dartmouth had an excellent outdoor (and later indoor) swimming pool, Osborne had no swimming pool at all. However, the quality of the coaching was impressive – rugby initially being in the hands of former Welsh international HGW Hughes-Games, succeeded by former Ireland player Mark Sugden, who was in charge between 1931 and 1964. The sporting record of Dartmouth was

¹⁹⁸ As Captain of the College in the late 1920s Martin Dunbar-Nasmith made soccer the main spring sport for this reason; Pack, *Britannia*, p.212

¹⁹⁹ Gieves, *Naval Officer* (1923), p.18

impressive, especially given the relative youth and high turnover of its senior teams. The college produced eleven international rugby players – ten representing England and one Ireland.²⁰⁰

The Blake Term Log for 1929-1932 provides a useful picture of how sport was viewed by cadets. Being a contemporary record, produced by a variety of cadets, it can be considered fairly representative of cadet opinion. The log records the term's own sporting results and those of the college. Particular athletic achievements by term members are marked out and are clearly a source of pride for the entire term, so too are the sporting achievements of the term – which included victory in the senior college athletics championships and providing all the finalists in the college tennis championships. A poem salutes the leaders of the term in each sport.²⁰¹

In the early days of the Fisher-Selborne scheme particular emphasis was placed on the participation of all members of the college community. This was partly a hangover from *Britannia*, which had traditionally fielded teams of the best men available – be they cadets, officers or masters – and partly a desire to emphasise the democratic nature of service sport. It was also part of a conscious effort to build team spirit – Ashford played in the earliest hockey fixtures.²⁰² Fielding teams of this nature, rather than purely composed of cadets, improved chances of victory and so helped to develop winning traditions.

However this inclusive spirit did not extend to the ship's company and college servants; the 1907 Dartmouth sports day featured one set of events for these employees and another for officers and masters.²⁰³ The exclusion of these men emphasised that college sport was not a purely athletic endeavour but was also part of the gentlemanly lifestyle of the naval officer. In later years there were soccer fixtures between cadets and ratings, and ratings were included in college teams competing against adults rather than other schools.

In the inter-war years the colleges placed more of an emphasis on participation by all cadets. *Britannia Magazine* was careful to report on all inter-term fixtures, even those at third team level. It also reported on the 90% boxing, introduced in 1920 this event excluded the 10% of cadets most skilled in boxing

²⁰⁰ Pack, *Britannia*, p.177

²⁰¹ RNM 1989.394 Blake Term Log, entry of 29 May 1930

²⁰² BRNC *Osborne Magazine* Michaelmas 1903 p.11

²⁰³ BRNC *Britannia Magazine* Easter 1907 p.1272

and so produced a competition in which any cadet had some hope of victory. Participation secured a point for the cadet's term, regardless of how soundly he was defeated. One of the major disadvantages of the term system was that sporting events, especially rugby and soccer matches, tended to be very uneven contests.

Although intramural sports were a key aspect of college life, there was also an emphasis on competing against outsiders and the choice of opposition reflected the public school-like nature of the colleges. Dartmouth cadets played public schools such as Sherborne, Blundell's and Taunton. These schools, although well respected, were not amongst the foremost in the country. They were also all in the South West; Dartmouth's commitment to sports did not extend to sending teams long distances to play. Pangbourne Nautical College was only added to the schedule in 1938; the *Conway*, (anchored in the Mersey), and the *Worcester* (in the Thames) did not feature at all. The opportunity for cadets to meet their peers in the merchant navy did not outweigh the cost and difficulties associated with travelling between the two. Nor was there any suggestion that cadets should play their social inferiors.

Finding appropriate opposition for Osborne was a constant difficulty. The cadets were too old to play against the first teams of prep schools, and far too young to play against the first teams of public schools. There was no question of them playing against state secondary schools. The result was a great emphasis on competition between terms and tutor sets, and a succession of sporting contests against Winchester's junior sides.²⁰⁴

The colleges competed mostly in rugby and cricket, and to a lesser extent in hockey, soccer, swimming, athletics and tennis. There was relatively little emphasis on the more professionally useful sports of pulling and sailing. Competitive sailing races between terms were not reported on by *Britannia Magazine* until 1908, in which year they seem to have been a new development.²⁰⁵ Colours were not awarded to the most proficient performers until 1912, long after their institution for other sports. No trophy was provided for the term that enjoyed most success on the water until 1913.

The Drake Term Line Book for 1929-1932 also demonstrates where these sports fell in the college pecking order. It shows that during the summer,

²⁰⁴ BRNC *Osborne Magazine*, various issues, especially Michaelmas 1904 p.13

²⁰⁵ BRNC *Britannia Magazine* Summer 1908 p.94

the best time of the year for pulling and sailing, these sports came a very poor second to cricket. The log noted that the term was not very good at pulling on account of the time dedicated to cricket. On another day it declared that 'the two teams sailed as they do not get much chance otherwise'.²⁰⁶ The Drakes were not the only cadets who struggled on the water. Some of Wodehouse's respondents reported poor standards of boat handling amongst cadets who had recently passed out of the college.²⁰⁷

Poor standards of boat handling were just one sign of the college's failure to teach seamanship well. The neglect of the subject is rather surprising, it was after all a key aspect of the executive officer's professional expertise, and one of the things that separated him from other officers. It was also one of the few subjects in the curriculum that provided cadets with a constant reminder of their future profession. The academic demands of the colleges meant that little time was available for seamanship – only one or two hours a week were devoted to the subject.²⁰⁸ Under these circumstances it was essential for the subject to be taught well if good results were to be achieved.

Unfortunately the training was left in the hands of term officers, petty officers, and various retired ratings – none of whom was trained to teach. The poor quality of the seamanship training was criticised by many of Wodehouse's respondents who placed most of the blame on the instructors, describing them as old and poor at teaching.²⁰⁹

It is unclear why the teaching of seamanship at the colleges was so poor. The subject did not fit in with Fisher's agenda of modernity and science but it was still useful professional knowledge. In a way, the lack of seamanship training at the colleges was symbolic of the way in which knowledge and duties required of the professional naval officer had changed. Neither the students nor the teachers seem to have been particularly unenthusiastic. The problem probably stemmed from the lack of emphasis on the subject at this stage of the officer's education. With three years of sea training lying ahead, which for most

²⁰⁶ BRNC Drake Term Line Book, entries of 19 May 1929 and 31 May 1929

²⁰⁷ BRNC Captain Wodehouse's investigation into the quality of the cadets produced by the College, reply from the officer commanding HMS *Resolution* (Captain Charles E Turle) 13 June 1933

²⁰⁸ TNA ADM 268/39 Director of Naval Education's annual reports 1906-1913

²⁰⁹ BRNC Wodehouse's investigation into the quality of the cadets produced by the College, responses from the officer commanding HMS *Valiant* (Captain Wellwood GC Maxwell) 7 December 1932, *Resolution* 13 June 1933, un-dated comments of Cadets GE Pouldon and JK Lyon HMS *Nelson*

Dartmouth cadets started with eight months in a dedicated training cruiser, seamanship cannot have been a very pressing concern – especially given the great demands college life made of cadets.

Nor did the college place much emphasis on military behaviour beyond that normally expected in the Navy. No effort was made to teach anything about the practicalities of land warfare. New cadets joined the college a day before the remainder and were immediately taught enough drill to take part in the daily parades. Older cadets periodically practised drill, especially when it was their turn to form the guard for Sunday divisions. In 1926 the gardens at the front of the college were dug up and replaced by an expanded parade ground. It is unclear why this was done but there does not seem to have been a greatly increased emphasis on parades and ceremonials. The change did however offer reduced maintenance costs and more room in which to hold divisions – although the terms were far smaller than those of the pre-war period; there were now eleven of them rather than six.

Rifle shooting was also part of a new cadet's introduction to the Royal Navy. The Drake Term Line Book for 1929-1933 records that cadets were sent onto the rifle range two days after joining the college and that the shooting competition was the first intra-mural event they took part in.²¹⁰ Thereafter they spent little time on the range, and seemed to have viewed shooting as a recreational activity rather than a professional accomplishment.

The lack of military emphasis reflected the fact that the colleges were schools as well as naval establishments. This side of their nature should also be explored and the obvious point of comparison is with the public schools which were responsible for producing most of Britain's leaders including the bulk of her military officers.

The Naval Colleges as Public Schools

Superficially the naval colleges had much in common with the public schools – they recruited from the same pools of teachers and potential pupils, and were members of the HMC. Official committees compared the colleges to high

²¹⁰ BRNC Drake Term Line Book 1929-1932, entries of 18 January 1929 and 28 January 1929

ranking public schools such as Cheltenham, Westminster and St Pauls.²¹¹

Sports and many other college recreational activities were similar to those found in public schools.

The colleges also shaped their students in much the same way as the average public school, the crucial difference being that the schools did not prepare all their pupils for service to the same employer. Although the degree of segregation achieved by the term system was probably unique, it should not be thought that the average public school allowed its students to mix freely. Frank Fletcher recommended that Dartmouth adopt the house system but, in his autobiography, admitted that it frequently produced 'extreme tribal separation'.²¹² Shrewsbury pupils were forbidden from being seen in public with members of other houses.²¹³

Nor did the public schools allow their pupils freedom in behaviour, dress or association. They demanded that individual identities were subordinated to that of the school; this subordination was marked by unique slang, customs and uniforms. New boys were expected to learn these things quickly – some schools such as Winchester and Eton required them to take a test in school knowledge within a few weeks of starting. These unique specifications of dress and behaviour were part of a socialisation process that aimed to produce pupils whose behaviour throughout their future lives was governed by the lessons of their schools. Wilkinson noted that public schools, even if established quite recently, 'formed group loyalty by making the individual value himself only as part of the group and as part of an historical continuum'.²¹⁴

The public schools of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries increasingly existed to produce a certain type of boy – the type most useful to the empire. Such boys should eschew personal profit in favour of entering an occupation where they could do public good. They were expected to be brave, loyal, gentlemanly, and physically tough. The ideals of the public school became increasingly associated with manliness, and thus the public schools

²¹¹ For example see ADM 268/38 Report of the Osborne and Dartmouth Committee May 1905 p.5, the committee visited Haileybury, Clifton, Winchester and three prep schools; and TNA ADM 1/8767/102 Paper by JH James 16 February 1933, which compared the fees charged by Dartmouth to those of Charterhouse, Cheltenham, Westminster and Clifton.

²¹² Frank Fletcher, *After Many Days: A Schoolmaster's Memories* (London: R.Hale, 1937) p.15; TNA ADM 116/2799 Evidence of Mr F Fletcher p.15

²¹³ Alisdare Hickson, *The Poisoned Bowl: Sex, Repression, and the Public School System* (London: Constable, 1995) p.23

²¹⁴ Wilkinson, *Prefects*, p.42

rejected femininity – there was an emphasis on toughening sports, a lack of material comfort and an almost complete absence of female role models. Women were present only as nurses, domestic staff or the dutiful wives of masters. Boys had few opportunities to interact with local girls and rarely saw their families during term time.²¹⁵

Such ideas were expressed in the fiction written for boys in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. British boys of all classes were encouraged to be honest, brave and determined, to be good Christians, to play fairly, and to do their best for country and empire. The heroes of many stories were public school boys or men who had been to public schools.²¹⁶ In 1954 Alec Waugh wrote a new forward to his 1917 book *The Loom of Youth* in which he noted that ‘the public school system was venerated as a pillar of the British Empire and out of that veneration had grown the myth of the ideal public school boy’.²¹⁷ It was Waugh’s exposure of this myth of idealised and perfected youth that gained his book its tempestuous reception. The boys of the fictitious Fernhurst are variously games obsessed, selfish, and stupid. Their loyalties are to their house rather than their school, let alone their country.

To ensure that they behaved in the prescribed manner boys were subject to surveillance by teachers, housemasters, prefects and each other. Most lived in large dormitories, there was little space for personal belongings, and little scope for privacy or self-expression. At Wellington the dormitories radiated out from a central hub ensuring that comings and goings could be constantly and effectively monitored – a variation on Bentham’s panopticon prison design in which a central guard tower gave the illusion of constant surveillance even if unoccupied.²¹⁸

Wakeford argued that, much like a prison, the public school constituted a ‘total institution’. The term, coined by American sociologist Erving Goffman, described an institution in which large numbers of people were contained for long periods of time, having little contact with outside society. The occupants of such an institution are all of similar status and both live and work within it,

²¹⁵ Tosh, *Man’s Place*, pp.112-119; Wilkinson, *Prefects*, pp.14-16

²¹⁶ Paris, *Warrior Nation*, p.9 and pp.90-104; Boyd, *Manliness*, p.49; DeGroot, *Blighty*, pp.32-39

²¹⁷ Alec Waugh, *The Loom of Youth* (London: G.Richards, 1917; repub.d. London: Meuthen, 1984; repr.d [Minneapolis MN]: Filiquarian, [2011]) p.6, the reaction to the book is discussed pp.7-8

²¹⁸ Hickson, *Poisoned Bowl*, p.29

having little control over their daily lives. Inmates are typical stripped of their individuality, being required to dress and behave in a certain way.²¹⁹

In this way the naval colleges were essentially no different from other public schools. They demanded loyalty to the Royal Navy and adherence to its customs and heritage, rather than to a school and its traditions. However this loyalty was obtained in much the same manner – through an insistence on adhering to rigid custom, an intolerance of individuality, and the forced subordination of the boy to the institution.

The cadets themselves were not actually in the Royal Navy. They had signed no contract, taken no oath, and received no commission. Their parents were paying not only for their education but also for their keep including their uniforms and pocket money. There was no official rank of 'cadet', *Kings Regulations* referred to 'naval cadets', other documents used the two descriptions indiscriminately. Cadets occupied an anomalous place in the naval hierarchy, being obliged to obey the orders of ratings who stood below naval cadets in the chain of command.²²⁰

When the question arose of whether the boys at Dartmouth should be titled cadets or naval cadets, the Head of the CW Branch, JA Phillips, pointed out that as they were *appointed* to the college 'it would appear they must be either officers or misters'. In response the C-in-C Plymouth, Admiral Phillimore, stated that 'they are not even ratings'.²²¹ Within the college the question did not occur – the image that cadets were being moulded in was indisputably that of the naval officer.

In reality the naval colleges were not public schools – they were naval establishments. They existed solely to produce naval officers and this requirement dictated their curricula and atmosphere. Their resemblance to public schools was the result of a shared agenda of producing a certain type of boy – gentlemanly and physically and mentally robust. If the Navy had desired

²¹⁹ Wakeford, *Cloistered Elite*, pp.38-40, the theme of socialisation is explored pp.43-66. Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (Garden City NY: Anchor, 1961; repr.d Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968)

²²⁰ Article 169 of King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions placed naval cadets at the bottom of the list of military branch officers below midshipmen, warrant and commissioned warrant officers; article 218 specified their place above chief petty officers.

²²¹ ADM 1/8690/223, CW.6865/25 Note by Head of CW (JA Phillips) 7 August 1925; letter No.1128/p.440 'Official Title of Cadets at the Royal Naval College Dartmouth' from the C-in-C Plymouth (Sir Richard F Phillimore) to Phillips 18 July 1925. Officers received appointments to ships, ratings were drafted. Mr was most commonly used to refer to individual warrant officers or midshipmen.

young officers of a different type it would have followed a different pattern; life at Dartmouth and Osborne was very different from that at the training establishments for boy seamen.

It must be asked how successful Dartmouth and Osborne were, both as schools and as naval establishments? From an educational viewpoint, they were enormously successful. They were repeatedly praised by school inspectors, both for the quality of the teaching, and for the innovation of their curricula. Many modern teaching methods were pioneered or developed at them. However they existed solely to produce officers for the Royal Navy, and in this respect they were less successful.

Their products were frequently described as lacking in one aspect or another of officer-like qualities, be it seamanship, initiative, or self-discipline. The term system tended to produce cadets who were insular and inward looking. Few of them had much practical leadership experience.

On the other hand, the colleges produced the majority of the Royal Navy's executive officers and these officers were undoubtedly successful. The early products of the scheme acquitted themselves well in the First World War, a particularly great achievement given that many were removed early from Dartmouth and sent to sea at the age of fifteen or sixteen. The college supplied a high proportion of the professional executive officers who served in the Second World War, including many flag officers and captains of ships. The success of the Navy in this war undoubtedly owed much to the skill, determination and spirit of these officers – ideals they had absorbed at Dartmouth.

Chapter Three – The Special Entry

By 1913 it was clear that the Fisher-Selborne scheme could not meet the demands of the ever-expanding fleet. More officers were needed and they must be produced with relative haste. The Navy adopted a variety of solutions to the problem. The need for officers undoubtedly acted as a spur to the Mate scheme; although the type of officer it produced – old, junior, and under-educated – was not ideal. A number of men entered from the merchant navy bringing practical seagoing experience but lacking in naval upbringing and scientific knowledge. Neither of these groups represented a long term solution to the Royal Navy's problems – what was needed was a permanent system of entry for young men educationally qualified to become naval officers, the professional and social equals of their Fisher-Selborne scheme colleagues.

The solution was the Special Entry scheme which entered its first cadets in September 1913. Recruited largely from the public schools, these seventeen year olds were intended to spend eighteen months aboard a dedicated training ship before joining the fleet as midshipmen. As midshipmen and sub-lieutenants they were to follow the same curriculum as Fisher-Selborne scheme officers but, because of their age on entry, would be slightly older when commissioned. Although these officers would not have the engineering and scientific background of those who had been at the colleges, they were none the less expected to conform to the same principles of inter-changeability.¹

The idea came from Churchill, inspired by a visit to the new Royal Marine officer training school at Walmer – the officer production system that the Royal Marines had chosen in place of the Fisher-Selborne scheme. Churchill wrote to Prince Louis of Battenberg, the Second – and soon to be First, Sea Lord suggesting an annual entry of twenty boys from the 'great public schools'. Such boys could ultimately form about 15% of the officer entry, with 70% through the Fisher-Selborne scheme and the remainder from the lower-deck.²

In early 1913 the scheme began to take shape, driven by Churchill but with the enthusiastic support of Battenberg and the new Second Sea Lord, Sir John Jellicoe – who, as will be shown, had his doubts about the officers produced by the Fisher-Selborne scheme. Initial plans were produced by Ewing

¹ TNA ADM 116/1213, 'Report of the Committee on the Training of Cadets to be Entered from the Public Schools and Elsewhere' (Evan-Thomas Committee), 21 April 1913

² Beattie, *Churchill Scheme*, p.13

but finalisation of the scheme was left to a committee of which he was a member. The committee was headed by Rear-Admiral Hugh Evan-Thomas, a former captain of Dartmouth.³

The final plans for the Special Entry revealed several clear objectives. Firstly it was hoped that the cadets would be recruited from the top public schools – the scheme was not intended to be democratic.⁴ Although the scheme was advertised in thirty-three local and national newspapers, liaison officers were sent to only a few schools.⁵

Secondly the education of Special Entry cadets placed a heavy emphasis on naval subjects. The academic curriculum had little space for normal school subjects but concentrated on seamanship, engineering and navigation. It was hoped that the cadets would have acquired sufficient general education at their schools.⁶ This was, in some ways, an acknowledgement that Osborne and Dartmouth and their engineering based curricula were unnecessary and that naval officers could be produced by normal public schools. However the entrance examinations sought a degree of scientific and mathematical knowledge that was not acquired in the course of a normal public school career.

Thirdly the plans placed enormous emphasis on Special Entry cadets being absorbed into naval life as quickly and fully as possible. The construction of Dartmouth and Osborne was part of a trend to move naval training ashore and had been followed by the opening of HMS *Ganges* to train boy seamen in 1905. This policy was reversed with the Special Entry. The decision was made to train the cadets in a ship, the aim being to fully immerse them in naval life. It was hoped that this total immersion would compensate for the relative shortness of the training period.⁷ The Special Entry training ship also enabled cadets to quickly put into practise what they had learnt; and she was to undertake a programme of instructional cruises.

This effectively combined the first two stages of the Fisher-Selborne cadet's naval career, providing theoretical education and an introduction to

³ Beattie, *Churchill Scheme*, pp.13-16

⁴ TNA ADM 116/6354 contains reports from the first two interview boards both of which comment on the number of candidates from top public schools showing the matter was clearly of importance. (Report of the first interview committee 7 May 1913, report of second interview committee un-dated)

⁵ Beattie, *Churchill Scheme*, p.18

⁶ TNA ADM 116/1213 Evan-Thomas Committee Report p.6

⁷ *ibid*, p.4

seagoing life. But whereas the two colleges were shared academic and naval territory, the ship was indisputably naval – there was no question that the boys aboard her were anything other than embryonic naval officers. There was no need to stuff her with naval relics or go beyond the normal range of naval ritual. The officer status of the cadets was reinforced by calling the midday meal luncheon rather than lunch or dinner.⁸

The Special Entry training cruiser was not a normal warship; she had a reduced complement, altered accommodation, and her own programme which kept her separate from the normal activities of the fleet for much of the time. She was manned by active service officers and ratings and ensured that cadets had some exposure to the real navy rather than the sanitised version experienced by their Osborne and Dartmouth brethren. In general Special Entry cadets were rather less isolated than those at the colleges and their experience was broadening rather than narrowing. They were less physically isolated and the shortness of the training, combined with the older age of cadets, meant that patterns of behaviour could not be forced to the same extent.

Training Special Entry cadets in a ship also meant that their education was liable to be disrupted by wider events and concerns and this makes for a complex chronology which deserves to be examined in some detail. A detailed consideration is possible given the limited number of Special Entry cadets in training at any time and the availability of source material.

Chronology of Special Entry Training

There was to be only one Special Entry per year, the cadets joining in September. This meant that the training periods of successive entries would overlap which, in turn, dictated a requirement for two training cruisers. The ship chosen for the first entry was HMS *Highflyer*, a *Highflyer* class cruiser first commissioned in 1899. After refitting for her new role she commissioned on 27 August as a Devonport based ship commanded by Captain Buller.⁹ On 15 September the first cadets joined.¹⁰

⁸ Beattie, *Churchill Scheme*, p.18

⁹ TNA ADM 53/44291 Ship's log of HMS *Highflyer*, 14 June 1913- 31 May 1914, entry of 27 August 1913

¹⁰ *ibid*, entry of 15 September 1913

As at the colleges, *Highflyer's* officers had been carefully chosen for their role. One cadet later described the First Lieutenant, Commander John Casement, as paying 'an enormous amount of attention to the cadets'; he 'set an example of smartness and leadership, which really set us on our way'. The senior ratings were also impressive – the cadet gunner Robert Haydyn was 'always immaculate, a great disciplinarian, a born leader'.¹¹

Highflyer spent most of the next few months in Devonport but made several short cruises visiting Torbay, Dartmouth and Penzance. When she visited Dartmouth her interaction with the college was quite limited.¹² A rugby match was played and a *Highflyer* correspondent appointed for the *Britannia Magazine* but the two groups of cadets do not seem to have had much contact with each other.¹³ There was one consolation for the cadet inhabitants of the college, although *Highflyer's* crew were allowed to go ashore in Dartmouth her cadets were not! This visit set the pattern for the relationship between the two groups of cadets – which thereafter tended to be a sporting rivalry, tinged with mutual curiosity, rather than a close professional association. *Highflyer* visited Dartmouth again the following February having in the mean time visited Portsmouth.¹⁴

Highflyer's trip to Portsmouth remains shrouded in mystery, with no record of what the cadets did whilst they were there; they may have gone to see the future of the Navy in the form of the submarine service, or the history in the form of HMS *Victory* – perhaps both. In any case this series of short trips introduced the cadets to seagoing life and also provided them with a glimpse of their future colleagues.

In late March, and with the cadets accustomed to naval life, *Highflyer* sailed for the Mediterranean where she remained until July. The Mediterranean was an ideal place for *Highflyer*, the cadets and her company had access to a wide range of facilities ashore in Gibraltar and Malta, the spring weather was far more suited to sea training than that of the UK, and the powerful Mediterranean

¹¹ Vice-Admiral Basil Brooke letter to John Beattie 1977; Beattie, *Churchill Scheme*, p.23

¹² TNA ADM 53/44291 Ship's Log of HMS *Highflyer*, entries covering: Torquay visit 10-13 October 1913; Dartmouth visit 25-26 October 1913; Penzance visit 28 November- 1 December 1913.

¹³ BRNC *Britannia Magazine* Michaelmas 1913 p.645

¹⁴ TNA ADM 53/44291 Ship's Log of HMS *Highflyer*, entries referring to: Portsmouth visit 23-27 January 1914; Dartmouth visit 21-23 February 1914

Fleet provided a range of training opportunities. The shore leave of cadets was strictly limited but they were still exposed to a range of cultures and conditions.

Highflyer returned to Devonport to give summer leave and thereafter took part in the fleet review and test mobilisation. She seems to have been successful in her training role – official files offer no hint of any disquiet. However on the outbreak of war *Highflyer* immediately became an active unit of the fleet leaving the Special Entry cadets without a ship or a training programme.¹⁵

By the time the new entry joined in September an emergency programme had been put in place for their training. They joined the Royal Naval Engineering College at Keyham where Engineer Captain Taylor was instructed to prepare a three-month course covering seamanship, signalling, navigation and boat handling. Significantly engineering was not included in the curriculum – and whilst a three-month course could hardly have been expected to teach more than the bare essentials, this was none the less a clear sign that in the future inter-changeability would be sacrificed on the altar of operational expediency. Taylor and his instructional staff were to ‘find the cadets work to do and to encourage them to instruct themselves in every possible way’. Cadets who learnt quickly could be sent to sea early.¹⁶ The emphasis on self-education ran contrary to just about every other naval educational programme but it was probably a response to the shortage of instructional staff rather than a change in policy. Certainly the whole scheme appears to have been hastily thrown together in response to the emergency situation.

This state of affairs could not be allowed to continue. The Admiralty was hardly likely to allow an old style engineer to conduct the training of executive officers. An executive replacement was appointed on 14 September. Training took place at Keyham throughout the war, the number of recruits much exceeded pre-war plans and in 1917 a second entry per year was added. Inevitably the plans originally made for the Special Entry were abandoned as the Navy struggled to produce officers as quickly as possible. However, *Highflyer*'s work had evidently been considered a success, for in January 1919 sea training was resumed for Special Entry cadets.

¹⁵ *ibid*, entries of 27 March- 31 May 1914; TNA ADM 53/44292 Ship's Log of HMS *Highflyer* 1 June 1914 – 31 March 1915, entries of 1 June- 4 August 1914

¹⁶ TNA ADM 1/8569/274 Copy of letter from the Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir William Graham Greene) to the C-in-C Plymouth (Admiral Sir George Le Clerc Egerton) 16 August 1914

The following five years were a period of confusion and uncertainty for the Special Entry. There was never any question of ending it but the declining strength of the Royal Navy was reflected in the continual changes to the scheme. These changes affected all aspects of the scheme – how many cadets joined and when, how long they were trained for, and what their training involved. There were two entries in 1919 but thereafter only one per year until 1925. From 1926 onwards there were two entries per year, and from 1937 three.

In 1921, in view of the increasing re-segregation of the engineering and executive branches, it was decided to shorten the Special Entry training course to one year. This course, with minimal engineering content, consisted of two terms in a static training ship followed by one at sea in HMS *Thunderer*. This was followed by two years and four months as a midshipman and then the courses appropriate to the officer's chosen career.¹⁷

The introduction of this course spelt the end of inter-changeability for the Special Entry. The midshipman serving ashore could not hope to develop the skills and experience needed by an executive officer at sea. In 1924 the decision was made to separate Special Entry cadets from the moment of entry. Special Entries subsequently entered as executive or engineer cadets; the executive and engineering branches had a shared one year course in HMS *Erebus*, after which the former went to sea and the latter to Keyham.¹⁸

Separate engineering and executive cadetships were introduced at the behest of the Engineer in Chief, Engineer Rear-Admiral Robert Dixon, who was concerned at the lack of candidates for his branch and feared that if the shortage of cadet volunteers continued parliament would force 'dilution' via the promotion of men from the lower-deck.¹⁹ By the end of 1925, a clear line had been drawn between the two groups of cadets, at least in the minds of many at the Admiralty. When the question of training the two branches separately from entry arose DTSD, Captain Hugh Tweedie, commented that the engineering

¹⁷ TNA T 161/136, Treasury File S.11618, Letter CW.5446/21 From the First Principal Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir Vincent Baddeley) to The Secretary of the Treasury (Sir George Barstow) 11 August 1921; Treasury letter S/11618 Barstow's reply 27 August 1921

¹⁸ Bush, *How to Become a Naval Officer*, p.9, p.18 and p.25

¹⁹ TNA ADM 1/8670/201, CW.1615/24 'Entry of Officers for Engineering Duties' submitted by the Engineer in Chief (Engineer Rear-Admiral Robert B Dixon) to the Board of Admiralty 11 February 1924.

cadets were, 'actually commencing to learn another profession'.²⁰ Nobody cared to disagree with him.

Thus the abandonment of inter-changeability affected the Special Entry rather more than Dartmouth. The latter changed its curriculum but continued to train all its cadets with one aim in mind, whereas the Special Entry was obliged to produce a variety of officers to pursue separate professions. The abolition of inter-changeability also condemned the engineering branch to a lower social status than the executive, if only because the vast majority of executive officers were educated at Dartmouth – which required greater parental resources than the Special Entry which produced the overwhelming majority of engineers.²¹

In the early 1920s Special Entry training was seriously disrupted by the continual decommissioning of ships axed from the ever shrinking fleet. The tendency to conduct cadet training in older vessels was particularly damaging in this respect, resulting in the frequent movement of training activities from one ship to another. In January 1919 the new and existing Special Entries went to sea in HMS *Carnarvon*; in September she was joined by HMS *Cumberland*, the intention appearing to be that the two cruisers would accommodate alternate new entries. *Cumberland* paid off in May 1920 leaving *Carnarvon* to soldier on, able to accommodate all the cadets now that their numbers had been dramatically reduced. *Carnarvon* herself paid off in July 1921.

The 1920 entry started their careers in HMS *Temeraire*, and that of 1921 in HMS *Antrim*. The 1922 and 1923 entries started their careers in HMS *Courageous* flagship of the Reserve Fleet at Portsmouth. All these cadets did the second part of the training in the seagoing cadet training ship HMS *Thunderer*.²² This larger ship was able to accommodate both the Dartmouth and Special Entry cadets and did so until May 1924 when the decision was made to

²⁰ TNA ADM 1/8695/34, M.5245/25 DTSD's (Captain Hugh J Tweedie) proposals for Special Entry cadet training – separation of executive and engineering cadets, 10 November 1925

²¹ In 1919 the minimum cost of supporting a Fisher-Selborne Scheme cadet was put at £264 and the cost of supporting a Special Entry cadet at £160 (ADM 1/8567/249, CW.27972, Memorandum on the cost of supporting a cadet prepared by Head of CW (JA Phillips) for the attention of the Second Sea Lord, First Sea Lord and Financial Secretary 28 August 1919). In 1938 the cost of supporting a Fisher-Selborne scheme cadet was put at £840 (assuming full fees were paid) and the cost of supporting a Special Entry cadet at £160 (TNA ADM 1/16624 Informational pamphlets for cadet parents; 'Financial Aspects of a Cadetship at the Royal Naval College Dartmouth' July 1938; 'The Financial Aspect Regarding Special Entry Cadetships (executive and engineering) and Paymaster Cadetships of the Royal Navy' July 1937). The expenses as a midshipman and acting sub-lieutenant were the same for both schemes. It must however be born in mind that the majority of Special Entry cadets were privately educated, many of them at establishments more expensive than Dartmouth.

²² Beattie, *Churchill Scheme*, pp.116-117; various editions of the *Navy List* 1919-1924

abandon cadet sea training. *Thunderer* was reduced to Reserve Fleet status and remained at Devonport, still housing the Special Entries, until she herself was decommissioned to meet treaty obligations in the summer of 1926.

The Admiralty wished to continue with shipboard training and eventually opted to house cadets aboard the monitor HMS *Erebus*. So desperate were the circumstances that the cadets did not have the ship to themselves; she was also used for gunnery training – but was moored in an isolated area of Devonport dockyard thus preventing the cadets from contamination but requiring gunnery trainees to make a daily return journey by boat.²³ *Erebus* often served as the flagship of the Reserve Fleet, the resultant hustle and bustle disrupted both groups of students, and her remote location dislocated the smooth running of the Reserve Fleet. The minesweeper HMS *Carstairs* was attached to *Erebus* and provided short training cruises for cadets similar to those undertaken by *Highflyer* in the autumn of 1913.

This system persisted until the end of 1932. The decision having been made to revive sea training, HMS *Frobisher* commissioned as cadet training cruiser in January 1933. *Erebus* was moved to Portsmouth where she continued her gunnery training role, now as a tender to HMS *Excellent*. As ships were in short supply, *Frobisher* was obliged to carry both Dartmouth and Special Entry cadets, meaning that the latter could expect to depart on a long training voyage within a week or so of joining the Navy! The shared training turned out to be of benefit to both groups, as detailed in the chapter on the training cruisers.

In 1937 *Frobisher* was reduced to reserve status awaiting a refit; she was replaced by her sister *Vindictive*. However at this time, the Special Entry was expanded to three entries per year, and a new entry of air branch midshipmen introduced. *Frobisher's* refit was inevitably cancelled; through much of 1938 she housed the air midshipmen whilst *Vindictive* was used for all cadet sea training. *Erebus* accommodated the newly joined Special Entries; executive cadets spent one term aboard her followed by two in *Vindictive*. With war on the horizon the fleet needed every available ship. It was decided that *Frobisher* was to be

²³ TNA ADM 1/8695/34 The use of *Erebus* was suggested by the C-in-C Plymouth (Admiral Sir Richard F Phillimore) in letter 48/M.865 'Training Ship for Special Entry Cadets' to the Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir Oswyn Murray) 9 January 1926; 'Report of the Committee Appointed to Investigate the Possibility of Replacing HMS *Thunderer* by HMS *Erebus* as Special Entry Cadets' Training Ship' 4 February 1926 p.2; M/S.0692/26 Phillimore was informed that his proposals had been accepted by a letter from Murray, 20 February 1926

remilitarised, and *Erebus* refitted as a harbour defence ship for use by the Royal South African Navy.²⁴

In May 1939 Special Entry training finally moved ashore. It did not return to Keyham (from where the over-crowded Royal Naval Engineering College was in the process of moving to Manadon) but instead went to Dartmouth where the cadets occupied what had been the ship's company barracks and were referred to as 'Frobishers'. The change was doubly fortuitous, not only did it mean that the three ships were available for war service more quickly than would otherwise have been the case; it also enabled Princess Elizabeth to meet her future husband – Prince Phillip of Greece, a Special Entry cadet, whom she first encountered on a visit to the college in the summer of 1939.

The Special Entry cadets at Dartmouth were largely segregated from their Fisher-Selborne scheme colleagues. This was more or less inevitable given that the two groups were studying different curricula and were accommodated separately (given the expanded numbers in both groups, and the reorganisation of the college accommodation necessitated by the house system, the college could not house all the cadets). However there was some social contact, largely on the sporting field. Special Entry cadets quickly started appearing on college teams and, had the war not intervened, their presence might have heralded a golden age of college sport. As it was, in the summer of 1939, the athletics team (consisting of three college cadets, three Frobishers and one Royal Marine) took joint first place in the naval athletics championship, and the college swimming team won the naval championships which had previously been utterly dominated by the naval barracks.²⁵

The good relations between the two groups could reasonably have been expected given that Special Entry officers had long been serving successfully as term officers at the college, and that the two groups of cadets had very much benefitted from each other's company aboard the training cruiser. However they also reflected the shared outlook and values that the Navy had inculcated into both groups and the homogeneity of the young officers the Royal Navy produced. None the less there were differences between the two entries and these differences must be explored.

²⁴ Information gleaned from *Navy Lists* of the period; logs of HM Ships discussed herein; Francis E McMurtrie *Ships of the Royal Navy, Including Forces of British Dominions Overseas* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co, 1940). For the transfer of *Erebus* to South Africa see TNA ADM 1/9832.

²⁵ Hughes, *Dartmouth*, p.129

Comparison of Dartmouth and the Special Entry

The curriculum for Special Entry cadets was virtually unaltered throughout the inter-war period. Even after inter-changeability had been abandoned, engineering and executive cadets continued to follow a common course in the training ship. Once the difficulties associated with the abolition of inter-changeability had been overcome the training of Special Entry cadets attracted little official interest. The system was generally viewed as very successful and this was reflected in articles submitted to the *Naval Review* and comments made to official committees.

This was in great contrast to the continual debate surrounding Dartmouth and inevitably comparisons between the two were frequently made. The subject was amongst the most dominant in the *Naval Review*. The merits of the two systems were debated continually from 1920 to 1926 although neither side seems to have had much success in converting their opponents or expanding their repertoire of arguments. The subject was absent in 1927 but reappeared in 1928 – a string of articles on *Britannia*, the Dartmouth term system and other aspects appearing. Vigorous debate on the entry and training of officers was rejoined in 1933 but by the end of the following year it had disappeared and thereafter few articles appeared.

If submissions to the *Naval Review* are any guide the selection and education of officers was a subject in which many officers were interested but not one on which there was a great deal of revolutionary thought. It was only raised through specific stimuli – in the early 1920s debate centred on which group of officers was most likely to win the next war. In the early 1930s it was prompted by Invergordon and by Richmond's book *Naval Training*. The arguments being raised in favour of one scheme or the other were largely the same in 1934 as they had been ten years before.

As viewed by *Naval Review* contributors the Special Entry had much to recommend it, not least the lower cost and greater flexibility that resulted from the shorter training period. It was also suggested that Special Entry officers, at least as midshipmen and sub-lieutenants – were more enthusiastic, more mature, learnt faster, showed more initiative and generally out performed their

ex-Dartmouth colleagues. The variety in their school education was also seen as an advantage as it offered a wider variation of outlook and experience.

Dartmouth was criticised for forcing boys into a mould and so turning out a never-ending stream of officers with the same ideas, opinions and failings. It was also considered unfair to enter boys at the age of thirteen and keep them in the service irrespective of how suitable they turned out to be.²⁶ Some officers, most prominently Richmond, thought that the Special Entry (or some other scheme involving the entry of boys aged seventeen or so) could supply all the Royal Navy's officers and urged the abolition of the thirteen year old entry.²⁷

The thirteen year old entry had many adherents and they tended to dominate discussions about officer training (perhaps because officers who had entered the Royal Navy as seventeen year olds were greatly outnumbered by those who had joined at a younger age). They argued that the thirteen year old entry attracted more talented candidates and that the officers it produced had a wider variety of hobbies and interests and a deeper attachment to the Navy.²⁸ Dartmouth turned out cadets to the standard required by the Navy – many schools delivered a poor or patchy education. Furthermore, whereas the public schools tended to be lukewarm at best about the Special Entry, the prep schools supported Dartmouth and directed some of their brightest pupils to the college.²⁹

Much the same arguments were heard by the two committees that considered the relative merits of the two schemes – the Bennett Committee of 1931 and the Watson Committee of 1938. The Bennett Committee asked its naval witnesses to compare the two schemes. Captain Hamilton, formerly captain of *Erebus*, considered Special Entry midshipmen to be livelier, worldlier,

²⁶ Sub-Lieutenant GH Jocelyn Evans, 'Some Aspects of Naval Education' *The Naval Review* 8 (1920) pp.183-187 (p.186); Admiral Sir WH Henderson, 'Naval Education' *The Naval Review* 15 (1927) pp.146-154; Admiral Sir WH Henderson, 'The Entry and Training of Naval Officers' *The Naval Review* 21 (1933) pp.222-230 (p.224); Anonymous, 'The Entry and Training of Officers' *The Naval Review* 21 (1933) pp.478-482

²⁷ Richmond's ideas influenced many writers in the *Naval Review* although he himself did not produce an article on the subject between 1919 and 1929. His ideas were best expressed in his book *Naval Training*.

²⁸ Lieutenant JS Mackenzie-Grieve, 'Dartmouth College – The Naval Public School' *The Naval Review* 9 (1921) pp.66-70; Lieutenant RC Crookes, 'Correspondence – Osborne and the Special Entry' *The Naval Review* 8 (1920) pp.122-123; Captain EA Astley-Rushton, 'The Case for Early Entry' *The Naval Review* 8 (1920) pp.338-341; Lieutenant-Commander JS Mackenzie-Grieve, 'Early Entry vs. Late Entry' *The Naval Review* 13 (1925) pp.59-62; 'NAW', 'The Entry and Training of Naval Officers: A Logical Case for the Retention of Dartmouth' *The Naval Review* 21 (1933) pp.668-682

²⁹ Lieutenant WS Green, 'The Training of a Naval Officer' *The Naval Review* 10 (1922) pp.248-276 (p.270)

and better leaders than their contemporaries from Dartmouth.³⁰ Rear-Admiral Astley-Rushton, who had no strong links to either scheme but a marked preference for Dartmouth, thought Special Entries more self-reliant.³¹ Commander Berthon, who had been on the staff at Keyham for three years, thought the two groups equally capable, but generally preferred Dartmouth midshipmen; he thought officer-like qualities were particularly important in the engine room and so wished more Dartmouth products would take up engineering.³²

Admiral Richmond who had long campaigned against the thirteen year old entry held the strongest opinions. He thought Dartmouth did not give cadets sufficient general education or prepare them for promotion to high rank. Apart from having more initiative, he considered Special Entry cadets more enthusiastic, faster at learning, and more responsible.³³

Three ex-Dartmouth sub-lieutenants thought that both groups were equally happy with service life but that the Special Entries had a broader outlook and were definitely at an advantage on first going to sea. They thought Dartmouth would be improved by doing away with the term system and so making it more public school-like and providing more leadership opportunities.³⁴ Conversely the former captain of the college, Dunbar-Nasmith, suggested that public schools would introduce the term system if it were practical for them to do so.³⁵ This contradicted the evidence given by Charterhouse Headmaster Mr Fletcher.

Fletcher was also asked when boys should enter the service. He thought that by entering boys at thirteen the Royal Navy got better candidates than it would if it relied on the seventeen year old entry. The best seventeen year olds were directed to university or to other more lucrative careers. On the other hand some boys developed later than others.³⁶ The naval officers generally agreed – their main argument against extending the quantity of the Special Entry was a predicted decline in quality.

³⁰ TNA ADM 116/2799 Evidence of Captain Hamilton p.15

³¹ *ibid*, Evidence of Rear-Admiral Sir EA Astley-Rushton p.5

³² *ibid*, Evidence of Commander DP Berthon pp.8-10

³³ *ibid*, Evidence of Admiral Sir HW Richmond p.2

³⁴ *ibid*, Evidence of Sub-Lieutenants JL Rathbone, DS Johnston, PWF Stubbs p.3, pp.7-9

³⁵ *ibid*, Evidence of Rear-Admiral Sir ME Dunbar-Nasmith p.6

³⁶ *ibid*, Evidence of Mr F Fletcher p.7, p.9 and p.13

Astley-Rushton, thought seventeen year olds were less attracted to naval service – ‘brass buttons are not what they mean at the age of twelve’.³⁷ The Admiralty Advisor on Education, McMullen, was of the same opinion.³⁸ Kempson, the Headmaster of Dartmouth, and Captain Meyrick, the Captain of the College, offered more practical evidence. Kempson cited his previous experience as a teacher at Rugby and as a schools inspector – during which he had noted the poor quality of the seventeen year old candidates for Army entrance.³⁹ Meyrick thought the Army had become a dumping ground for otherwise unemployable public school boys. He worried that public school boys might prefer the Army and RAF to the Royal Navy, which would further damage the quality of the officer entry.⁴⁰ The committee did not ask the Army or RAF about their situations.

Meyrick also cited American experience, saying an American officer had told him that twenty-four year old Annapolis graduates entering the fleet were ‘no damn use to the Navy’.⁴¹ Conversely, Richmond cited the United States Navy as proof that older entrants could be turned into naval officers.⁴²

The points raised in discussing the relative merits of Dartmouth and the Special Entry are indicative of wider concerns. That ‘initiative’ was mentioned with such frequency suggests a feeling within the Royal Navy that the First World War might have been fought with more success had more of it been demonstrated.⁴³ Concerns about the narrowness of the Dartmouth curriculum

³⁷ *ibid*, Evidence of Rear-Admiral Sir EA Astley-Rushton p.6

³⁸ *ibid*, Evidence of Mr AP McMullen p.12

³⁹ *ibid*, Evidence of Mr EWE Kempson p. 7

⁴⁰ *ibid*, Evidence of Captain SJ Meyrick pp.10-12

⁴¹ *ibid*, Evidence of Captain SJ Meyrick p.16

⁴² *ibid*, Evidence of Admiral Sir HW Richmond pp.10-11

⁴³ Historians have extensively criticised the failings of the Royal Navy in this area, from examples see: JJ Tritten, ‘Doctrine and Fleet Tactics in the Royal Navy’ in *A Doctrine Reader: The Navies of the United States, Great Britain, France, Italy and Spain*, ed. by L Donolo and JJ Tritten (Newport RI: Naval Institute Press, 1995) pp.1-36 (pp.25-27); Higham, *Military Intellectuals*, p.32; Roskill, *Naval Policy I*, pp.533-534; Barnett, *Engage the Enemy*, pp.6-7. These failings were also recognised by contemporary Royal Navy officers some of whom wrote of the need for captains to act on initiative rather than waiting for orders, for examples see: Alfred Ernle Chatfield, *The Navy and Defence: The Autobiography of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Chatfield* (London: W.Heinemann, 1942) p.227; Richmond, *Naval Policy and National Strength*, pp.260-261. One might also point to the Royal Navy’s extensive tactical re-thinking during the inter-war period most of which tended to emphasise the freedom of action of individual captains, these changes are discussed Jon Sumida, ‘The Best Laid Plans’: The Development of British Battle-fleet Tactics, 1919-1942’ *International History Review* 14 (1992) pp.681-700 (pp.690-696).

might have reflected these concerns or a desire for officers better able to fight the battles of Whitehall.⁴⁴

Significantly, the 1938 Watson Committee declared the products of the Special Entry superior to those of Dartmouth, at least as midshipmen and sub-lieutenants, although Dartmouth products were more likely to be promoted to commander.⁴⁵ Given the Navy's long defence of Dartmouth against outside attack, it is perhaps surprising that the respondents agreed with the committee! DTSD Captain William Jackson felt there was a lack of high quality candidates for Dartmouth but that the education provided by the college was not at fault. On the other hand the Director of the Education Department, Instructor Captain Arthur Hall, and the Second Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Martin Dunbar-Nasmith, considered the Dartmouth course to be too intense.⁴⁶ The committee had very little impact on the Special Entry, which had already been dramatically expanded to meet the increased demand for officers.

It was difficult to compare the two schemes fairly given that both were so new. At the start of the First World War, the oldest Fisher-Selborne scheme officers had less than two years seniority as lieutenants, the first Special Entries were cadets. Neither group rose to high level command during that war although some did command small vessels; it was not until the late 1930s that they began to arrive in the higher ranks of the fleet, and only in 1941 did the first man reach flag rank. Comparisons therefore focussed on the performance of the two groups as junior officers, between the ranks of midshipmen and lieutenant, and since the Special Entries generally performed better in these ranks they were frequently seen as the better officers.

In 1946 the Brind Working Party, charged with considering post-war officer education, produced an analysis of those executive officers who had been appointed as midshipmen in the period from September 1923 and September 1927. The results were produced in tabular form, focussing on how many officers from each group had been promoted to commander. The table

⁴⁴ Andrew Lambert has been particularly critical of the failure of the inter-war Admiralty to counteract the demands of the Treasury and the Air Ministry see Andrew Lambert, *Admirals: The Naval Commanders who Made Britain Great* (London: Faber, 2008) pp.367-376. See also Orest Babij, 'The Royal Navy and the Defence of the British Empire, 1928-1934', in *Far Flung Lines*, ed. by Kennedy and Neilson, pp.171-198

⁴⁵ TNA ADM 116/3763 'Interim Report of the Committee on the Training of Junior and Specialist Officers' (Watson Committee) 19 March 1938 (no page numbers) para.76-78

⁴⁶ TNA ADM 116/3709, CW.16970/38, Paper B.31, Dunbar-Nasmith's memorandum on the report of the Watson Committee 16 July 1938; and attachment 'Watson Committee: Summary of Findings and Remarks of Departments'

also reported how many men in each category had been lost to the service before entering the promotion zone, on one hand through death or incapacity, and on the other through resignation, court-martial or redundancy.⁴⁷

Commander was the first rank for which promotion was by merit rather than seniority, men with between two and six years of service as lieutenant-commanders being eligible (although some officers who had passed through the 'zone' were promoted). The oldest officers in this sample became eligible in early 1938; the youngest were moving out of the zone as the report was compiled. Thus this group of officers had been well placed to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the war and, perhaps more importantly, it was the generation of officers from which the future leaders of the Royal Navy were beginning to be selected.

Although they were a logical choice, no particular significance was attached to the selection of this group of officers as the sample for comparison. Whilst the performance of the two groups as combat leaders may have been a factor under consideration, no reference was made to the war records of the men involved – nor to which of them showed the most promise. There was no information as to the seniority of individuals when promoted. Those compiling the table did however take account of how the subjects had performed as cadets. Fisher-Selborne scheme officers were divided into those who had achieved a first or second class pass out from Dartmouth, and so gained time enabling them to be promoted early to sub-lieutenant, and those who had not. Special Entry officers were simply divided into top and bottom halves.

⁴⁷ TNA ADM 116/5786 'Report of the Working Party on the Entry and Early Training of Officers' (Brind Working Party) Appendix II, 19 September 1946

Table 9 – Comparison of promotion rates to commander of Fisher-Selborne and Special Entry officers promoted to midshipman between September 1923 and September 1927. Reproduced from TNA ADM 116/5786.⁴⁸

FISHER-SELBORNE	Original no of Mids	Killed or invalided	Other Wastage	Promoted to Cdr	Not promoted
Gained time on passing out of Dartmouth	302	45 (15%)	59 (20%)	151 (50%)	47 (15%)
Did not gain time on passing out	164	23 (14%)	62 (38%)	42 (20%)	37 (22%)
TOTAL	466	68 (15%)	121 (26%)	193 (41%)	84 (18%)

SPECIAL ENTRY	Original no of Mids	Killed or invalided	Other Wastage	Promoted to Cdr	Not promoted
Top 50%	45	4.5 (10%)	5 (11.5%)	26.5 (59%)	9 (20%)
Bottom 50%	45	4.5 (10%)	12 (26%)	14.5 (32%)	14 (31%)
TOTAL	90	9 (10%)	17 (19%)	41 (45%)	23 (25.5%)

These results suggest that the Special Entry was the superior of the two schemes, although as there were more than three times as many ex-Dartmouth officers in the sample the results cannot be regarded as entirely conclusive. The evidence for both groups suggests that performance in training was a

⁴⁸ ibid

reasonable guide to an officer's career prospects; those that did better were more likely to be promoted to commander and less likely to leave the Navy.

Retention was better among the Special Entry officers; whereas 41% of the Dartmouth men had been lost to the Navy, only 29% of the Special Entry had departed. This is not conclusive proof that the Special Entry were superior officers; Dartmouth officers were more likely to be killed or invalided, suggesting they were more likely to volunteer for hazardous duties such as flying or submarines. However the lower rate of Special Entry wastage to other causes indicated that these officers were less likely than Dartmouth men to be court-martialled, selected for redundancy, or choose to leave the service. This suggested that the benefits of Dartmouth in inculcating a love of the Navy and officer-like qualities may have been overstated. However it might also be that the superior performance of Special Entry men as young officers gave them a head start in forging a career.

The data is somewhat misleading, given that the Special Entries are divided into the top and bottom halves whereas the bottom third of the Dartmouth officers are separated from the rest. This makes it hard to directly compare the two groups, and in particular those who fell into the middle third, therefore all conclusions must be tentative. The data shows the Special Entry officers to be superior, with a larger percentage being promoted to commander. Although the best Dartmouth men significantly out-performed the weaker Special Entries, they were out-performed by the top half of the Special Entries. The weaker Dartmouth officers were significantly out-performed by the weaker Special Entries, although the disparity in the data is probably particularly relevant here.

Overall the evidence gathered by the Brind Working Party suggested that the Special Entry was the superior source of officers. However it had numerous weaknesses. It did not consider how likely officers from each source were to be promoted beyond commander (inevitable given that the few of the officers concerned had moved into the promotion zone for captain) nor did it distinguish between the various forms of 'other wastage'. The data cannot be considered representative of other cohorts of officers, as promotion rates for the officers concerned must have been particularly influenced by the Second World War.

These conclusions are further undermined by the data collected by the Watson Committee in 1938; this data was also concerned with promotion to

commander but focussed on when men were promoted. It too suffers from various weaknesses, although it states that the ex-Dartmouth cadets concerned had entered the service between 1912 and 1918 it does not say when the Special Entry officers entered. More importantly it gives no data as to what proportion of each type of officer was promoted to commander.

Table 10 – Table showing the zones from which lieutenant-commanders were selected for promotion to commander during the years 1934-1937.

Reproduced from TNA ADM 116/3763.⁴⁹

Percentages refer to the proportion of promotions in each zone, e.g. 33% of the ex-Dartmouth officers promoted to commander were promoted with between 3 and 4.5 years seniority as lieutenant-commanders.

Zone	Seniority (years as lieutenant-commander)	Percentage of total of each type of entry			
		Dartmouth (total promoted 125)		Special Entry (total promoted 53)	
Early	3	5		4	
	3.5	6		2	
	4	10		9	
	4.5	12	33%	4	19%
Average	5	13.5		19	
	5.5	13.5	27%	9	28%
Late	6	18		25	
	6.5	21		28	
	7	1	40%	0	53%

This data suggests that the officers produced by the Fisher-Selborne scheme were superior to the Special Entry. Their performance as young lieutenant-commanders was better which made them more likely to be promoted to commander at a young age; which, in turn, suggested they had the greater potential. The data concerned promotions from the 1934-1937 period in which

⁴⁹ TNA ADM 116/3763 'Table Showing the Zones from which Lieutenant-Commanders were Selected for Promotion to Commander During the Years 1934-1937'. Interim Report of the Watson Committee, Appendix VII

there was no opportunity for officers to distinguish themselves in war but, as the fleet began to expand, the demand for commanders rose. The performance of the Fisher-Selborne scheme officers is particularly impressive given that most of their educations had been severely curtailed by the First World War.

Taken together, these two data sets do not provide clear evidence that either entry was markedly superior. To argue over which was better masked the truth – that the combination of the two groups was of great advantage to the service. Dartmouth produced a steady stream of officers, all of them steeped in naval tradition and educated for their future careers. Given the difficulties experienced by all three services in recruiting sufficient high quality officer candidates in the Special Entry age group there can be little doubt that, had the thirteen year old entry been abolished, the Royal Navy would have struggled to attract sufficient good quality candidates. On the other hand, the Special Entry provided a flexible number of officers who brought variety to the officer corps. Keen boys had two chances to join, and the seventeen year old entry also gave a chance to those who had not decided on a career at the age of thirteen. The variation in the number of entrants was, however, among a variety of factors that adversely affected Special Entry recruiting.

Shortage of Special Entry Applicants

The lack of applications for Special Entry cadetships was amongst the problems investigated by the Bennett Committee. Captain Moore, then captain of *Erebus*, suggested that the considerable variation in the number of Special Entry cadetships offered on different occasions hampered the scheme, as did the small number of executive cadetships on offer.⁵⁰ Astley-Rushton thought continual defence cuts had made boys uncertain of their prospects in the service, especially as they feared that naval training would not fit them for a change of career.⁵¹

The Royal Navy consistently struggled to attract enough candidates of high quality and frequently clashed with the public schools. Additional difficulties were caused by the Special Entry becoming the primary vehicle for democratisation. The public schools had several grounds for complaint. The

⁵⁰ ADM 116/2799, Evidence of Captain Moore p.4 and p.6

⁵¹ *ibid*, Evidence of Rear-Admiral Sir EA Astley-Rushton pp.1-2 and p.4

most important was the small number of cadetships on offer, typically around fifteen executive cadetships each year.⁵² This caused a number of difficulties for the schools which were, after all, businesses and therefore reliant on making a profit.

Because there were so few cadetships, the chances of a candidate failing to secure entry were high, and this discouraged the schools which did not wish to be associated with failure of any kind. It also meant that they were likely to steer their best boys away from the Navy and towards the more reliable prospect of a university scholarship. The Navy also had specific requirements, meaning a standard of mathematical and scientific knowledge beyond that normally taught in public schools.

By 1931 the Admiralty was sufficiently concerned that the Bennett Committee was required to investigate the success of the Special Entry in attracting recruits by means of a comparison with the other services. Candidates for all three services took the same Civil Service examinations and were entitled to list the different service options in order of preference. These options were not limited to choice of service but allowed candidates to choose a branch of the Army and Royal Navy. Those wishing to join the Army would put either Sandhurst or Woolwich as their first choice, depending on which branch of the service they wished to join (cavalry and infantry officers trained at Sandhurst, others at Woolwich). Those who wanted to join the Royal Navy could choose between executive, engineering, paymaster, and the Royal Marines.

The Bennett Committee compared the number of candidates listing each option as their first choice with the number of vacancies advertised.⁵³ In the table, reproduced below, abbreviations are as follows:

Exec- Royal Navy executive
Eng- Royal Navy engineering
Pay- Royal Navy paymaster
RM- Royal Marines
Wool- Army Woolwich
Sand- Army Sandhurst

⁵² TNA ADM 116/4734, B.185 'Executive Officers - Sources of Entry, With Proposals for Scholarships to Dartmouth'; Memorandum for the Board of Admiralty 3 January 1941, Appendices B and C

⁵³ TNA ADM 116 /2791 Bennett Committee Report, Appendix D part B

RAF- Royal Air Force (all officer entrants trained at RAF Cranwell). The number of candidates putting each option as their first choice is in normal text, the number of advertised vacancies is in bold.

Table 11 – Candidates per advertised vacancy 1928-1930. Reproduced from TNA ADM 116/2791.⁵⁴

	Exec	Eng	Pay	RM	Wool	Sand	RAF
June	60	21	42	12	104	188	30
1928	9	12	7	9	80+	200+	35
Nov	41	16	33	4	93	202	53
1928	5	8	4	6	80	200+	35
June	53	22	44	10	94	207	56
1929	8	9	6	4	80	200+	35
Nov	32	19	42	7	84	176	51
1929	4	8	7	4	73	200+	35
Jun	32	15	30	9	97	177	50
1930	6	10	6	4	91	200	25
Nov	21	11	19	5	86	168	58
1930	6	10	11	8	85	200+	25

From this table, the average number of first choice candidates per advertised place can be calculated as follows: Executive 6.4, Engineering 1.9, Paymaster 5.8, Royal Marines 1.8, Woolwich 1.1, Sandhurst 0.9, and RAF 1.6.⁵⁵ Thus it appears that the Royal Navy was a popular option for young men wishing to become officers in the armed services; with the number of applicants greatly exceeding the number of available places. The Admiralty could be satisfied with the competition to become an executive or paymaster officer, although the lack of potential engineers was worrying. Young men inclined towards soldiering found it harder to enter the Royal Marines than either Woolwich or Sandhurst.

However, the Royal Navy was advertising far fewer vacancies than the Army, fewer than forty as opposed to nearly three hundred. Consequently, it is

⁵⁴ *ibid*

⁵⁵ Method - for each examination divide number of candidates for each option by number of places, add these together for each option and divide by six (total number of examinations).

unsurprising that there was more competition for each place. The lack of places offered by the Royal Navy does not appear to have deterred suitable candidates from applying, although it doubtless put off weaker boys who would have had little chance of success. Whilst candidates did not come forward in vast numbers, the competition to join the Royal Navy was still greater than that to join any other branch of the armed forces.

The Bennett Committee suggested that the number of Special Entry cadetships should be standardised and that the majority of officers should be obtained from this source. Local education authorities should be approached with a view to providing scholarships for poorer boys. The curriculum of Dartmouth and the term system should be reconsidered and possibly Special Entry training should move there.⁵⁶ None of these suggestions were taken up in the period immediately following the submission of the report in June 1932. The number of Special Entry cadetships continued to vary as the number of officers needed by the fleet changed.

An additional difficulty was posed by the Navy's 1932 decision to enter boys at the age of seventeen rather than seventeen and a half. Public schools generally preferred their boys to leave after their eighteenth birthdays and prepared their curricula with this in mind. Consequently candidates for naval cadetships missed out on leadership and sporting opportunities and had to be crammed to pass the entrance examinations. In 1934 the HMC wrote to the Admiralty to express its concerns.⁵⁷

These arguments were not born out by the examinations in 1933. Of the thirty-seven successful candidates for the executive and engineering branches, thirteen were under seventeen and a half, and on average they outperformed their older comrades by sixty-two marks in the academic tests although they did one mark worse in the interview.⁵⁸ Admittedly the younger cadets lacked disciplinary and physical training, but early entry was attractive to parents and, in any case: 'A round jacket is not a suitable type of uniform for officers who have reached their majority'.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ TNA ADM 116/2791 Bennett Committee Report, pp.11-15 para.28-40

⁵⁷ TNA ADM 1/9056 'Headmaster's Conference: Memorandum of Discussion of Special Entry' EWE Kempson, presented to the Board of Admiralty 28 February 1934, date of meeting not recorded

⁵⁷ TNA ADM 1/9056 Un-dated and unidentified note by Head of CW (Philip Marrack)

⁵⁸ TNA ADM 1/9056 Un-dated note by Marrack

⁵⁹ TNA ADM 1/9056 'Remarks on the Age of Special Entry Cadets' by Deputy DTSD (Captain Frederick N Attwood) 8 March 1934

The available evidence suggests that the Navy was not concerned with midshipmen's dress, but with their development and equality; entering Special Entry cadets at a younger age enabled them to become sub-lieutenants at the same age as Dartmouth entrants. Whilst sympathetic to the headmasters' views Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, the Second Sea Lord, told them that naval policy would be governed by results – the seventeen year old entry would be retained as long as it was successful.⁶⁰

In 1936 the maximum age of entry was raised by six months to eighteen and a half. This gave candidates three chances to secure entry and so widened the field of selection. The headmasters again requested the minimum age be raised and again were rebuffed, younger candidates were still performing best in the entry tests.⁶¹ No further changes were made. This lack of change was fairly typical of the consistency of the means by which Special Entry cadets were selected and trained. Having considered this process from an official viewpoint it is also necessary to consider the experiences of the officers produced by the scheme.

Special Entry Experiences

Relatively few accounts of Special Entry training are available to historians. The small number of officers the scheme produced is undoubtedly a factor in this, but so too was the nature of the course. The short course did not make as great an impression on cadets as four years at Dartmouth, and the memories of Special Entries might also be overwhelmed by the associated new experiences of shipboard life and travel. Brief accounts are contained in the autobiographies of Charles Jenkins and Robert Clarkson, the former joined in April 1919 and the latter in May 1939 so neither had a typical cadet experience.

⁶⁰ TNA ADM 1/9056 'Summary of Discussion Between the Second Sea Lord and the Headmasters of Winchester and Charterhouse at the Admiralty 24 May 1934'. Attendees: Second Sea Lord (Admiral Sir Dudley PR Pound), Admiralty Advisor on Education (Alexander McMullen), D/DTSD (Captain Frederick N Attwood), Headmaster of Charterhouse (Mr Frank Fletcher), Headmaster of Winchester College (Rev Dr AP Williams); Fletcher and Williams represented the HMC. Summary prepared by Mr Medrow of the CW Branch 25 May 1934

⁶¹ TNA ADM 1/9056 Letter from Rev. Spencer Leeson (Headmaster of Winchester College, representing HMC) to the Second Sea Lord (Admiral Sir Martin E Dunbar-Nasmith) 19 February 1937; Dunbar Nasmith's reply 24 February 1937

Jenkins found his time aboard *Cumberland* 'enjoyable' but was critical of the system of training.⁶² He complained that: 'we had neither the advantages in education which could have been obtained at a good school nor the broader training which would have followed greater freedom to pursue our interests onboard', cadets were frequently treated like children and rarely allowed to go ashore unsupervised.⁶³ His complaints suggest that Special Entry training suffered from the same weaknesses as Dartmouth – it did not provide a broad or high quality education; and cadets had no opportunity to develop leadership skills, indeed they were not even required to take responsibility for themselves. As later commentators did not voice these complaints, perhaps Jenkins was unfortunate. *Cumberland* spent six months swinging round a buoy at Queenstown which cannot have been the most thrilling of experiences.

Clarkson had a more enjoyable time, as a paymaster cadet he went straight into sea training in *Vindictive*, and thus straight on a cruise of North Sea and Channel ports. He does not say that the training was particularly good, but clearly he valued the range of practical experience gained which included bridge watch-keeping, boat handling, seamanship and handling ratings. He was immediately made to feel part of the Royal Navy, admittedly an insignificant and partly trained one.⁶⁴

Much useful information comes from the work of Eric Bush who served as a term officer aboard *Thunderer*. Aside from an autobiography, he also produced a Special Entry orientated version of *How to Become a Naval Officer* published in 1927. Although he seems to have enjoyed his time aboard *Thunderer*, Bush's autobiographical account is brief and concentrates largely on sports. He recounts how a cadet who joined late was instantly accepted after winning a boxing match, the correction of a wimpish rugby player and the importance of cross-country running.

His account generally emphasises the importance of manly behaviour – ignoring pain, seasickness and other difficulties and so producing the best possible results. It appears the cult of sports was at least as powerful aboard *Thunderer* as at Dartmouth. Bush seems to have carried out his duties in the way that he would have had he been a term officer at Dartmouth, constantly interacting with his cadets and consciously providing an example of how to

⁶² Charles A Jenkins, *Days of a Dogsboddy* (London: GG Harrap, 1946) p.13

⁶³ *ibid*, p.19

⁶⁴ Clarkson, *Headlong*, pp.5-17

behave; he does not seem to have made much allowance for the greater age and maturity of his charges, nor is there evidence that they had much more freedom than cadets at Dartmouth.⁶⁵

How to Become a Naval Officer (Special Entry) reveals much about the tone of the training Bush and his colleagues were providing. The assumption was that the cadet came from a public school, he was amongst gentlemen and behaved as a gentleman. The good cadet did not need to be academically outstanding provided he was good at the practical side of his job – that he played hard at every game, helped his colleagues and never shirked. As an officer, he was not merely the product of training but also of naval tradition: ‘by constant effort and a loyalty founded on pride in the traditions of ten centuries you may worthily aspire to bear your portion of that glorious heritage’.⁶⁶

These ideas are very much in keeping with ideas about military professionalism. Although technical skills were important, it was more important to subscribe to the prevailing professional ethic which emphasised the typically military values of obedience, loyalty, determination, hard-work, bravery and sacrifice. The Special Entry officer was part of a long-standing tradition rather than merely a practitioner of a specialised set of skills. His skills, talents and outlook entitled him to take his place in the community of naval officers.

These ideas are very similar to those that dictated training at Dartmouth and suggest that the atmosphere and tone of the two schemes was similar and that naval history was used in the same way – to inspire cadets to imitate the officer-like qualities of their predecessors. Thus was produced an officer corps united in heart and mind; the two groups of officers were happy to work together and present a united front to outsiders because they had been trained in the same way and inculcated with the same ideas and values. This homogeneity was further enhanced by the posting of Special Entry officers to Dartmouth and vice-versa, which strengthened links between the two.

The Special Entry might be summed up by the word ‘compromise’. It was developed to balance fleet requirements against training ideals, and it evolved in response to changing manpower demands, pressure for democratisation, and the abandonment of inter-changeability. The number of cadets and the location for their training changed constantly and it was vulnerable to any whim of the

⁶⁵ Bush, *Bless Our Ship*, pp.131-136

⁶⁶ Bush, *How to Become a Naval Officer*, p.83

Admiralty or the Treasury. These varying pressures meant that the scheme was subject to constant adjustment, which, combined with the small number of officers it produced should have spelt doom.

On the contrary the Special Entry scheme had never been stronger than in the summer of 1939 – it was producing more officers than ever before, via a well established system, and was respected by the Navy and by civilian educators. The Special Entry was successful in spite of the many difficulties that attended it because it was both simple and flexible. By entering cadets at the age of seventeen rather than thirteen, the Admiralty avoided the difficulty of how to provide a general education geared exclusively to a naval career. Because the initial training course was so short, its content was largely confined to essentials and therefore less open to debate. The short period of training also meant that the number, age, or type of entrants could be varied without undue difficulty (although not without a knock-on effect as the fleet subsequently experienced a glut or shortage of midshipmen). After the Second World War, aided by the raised school leaving age and the changing educational aspirations of navy and nation, it was the Special Entry and not the Fisher-Selborne scheme that provided the framework for training the officers of today's Royal Navy.

Chapter Four – Cadet Sea Training

Amongst the most difficult problems of officer education was that of introducing young officers to seagoing life. Naval life at sea was a unique experience and one which very few cadets would have had any experience of prior to joining (those with close naval connections may have experienced it for short periods). It was, of course, essential for every naval officer to be at home in a seagoing environment – both competent and confident; after all the professional expertise of the naval officer lay in his ability to function in a warship under any conditions. Therefore it was essential that the introduction to sea service be as effective as possible.

For an introduction to seagoing life in the Navy to be effective various conditions must be met. Firstly, it should be enjoyable – a young officer who found he disliked going to sea was likely to lose enthusiasm for his future career. Secondly it should give confidence, an officer who lacked confidence was unlikely to give clear, prompt, and effective orders, or provide inspiring and dynamic leadership. Thirdly, it should promote good professional skills, not only in terms of seamanship, ship handling, navigation and engineering but also in terms of leadership. Finally it must promote a feeling of fellowship with other naval personnel, irrespective of their rank or trade.

A variety of ways of introducing seagoing life were available and most were used or considered by the Royal Navy in the 1903-1939 period. In obliging cadets to go through a course of training before joining their first ships the Royal Navy had acknowledged that the theoretical and practical stages of an officer's education were best carried out separately. From the 1860s onwards the two were slowly separated, with *Britannia* concentrating on the theoretical side of naval officership. This created a new problem, that of providing a uniform system for introducing young officers to life at sea.

Theoretical education could be provided in a non-seagoing ship, as it was in *Britannia*, but ships had severe limitations as schools given the inflexibility of their accommodation, small size, and high maintenance costs. Although living in a ship did help to introduce cadets to life at sea, *Britannia* and *Hindustan* became increasingly anomalous as the fleet was modernised and so their educational value was reduced. The opening of Osborne and Dartmouth greatly aided the education of the cadets, but although the colleges taught

seamanship, navigation, sailing and pulling and were run upon naval lines with service routines being observed and naval terminology used, life in them was not very similar to life in a ship.

The use of *Highflyer* for the Special Entry cadets did combine the theoretical and practical aspects of an officer's training with a great deal of success. However *Highflyer* was not part of the fleet in the normal sense; she had special facilities and a special schedule – she was foremost a floating naval college rather than a warship. But she did solve most of the problems of introducing cadets to seagoing life – her cruises were enjoyable, and she was devoted to education which ensured that cadets got the teaching and support they needed.

It would not have been practical to provide the sort of education being provided at Dartmouth and Osborne aboard a ship; the college curricula meant that specialist teaching facilities were needed and they had to be ashore. Educating cadets ashore also allowed the provision of superior recreational and sporting facilities, required fewer naval personnel, and was far simpler from a planning and logistical view point. Recruiting and, more especially, retaining civilian teaching staff was also simplified by their not being required to live a life radically different from that of their peers in other schools.

Cadets educated ashore needed a managed introduction to seagoing life which had to meet the conditions outlined above. There were essentially two options – to send the young man straight into the fleet, or to provide an intermediate step in the form of a dedicated training vessel. Such a vessel could take one of two forms – either undertaking short training voyages during a cadet's college career, or as a separate stage of training immediately following it. There was also the question as to what type of ship was most appropriate, options ranging from sailing ships via destroyers and cruisers to battleships. At varying times all of these options were used or, at least, considered.

Cadet Sea Training in the Early Years of the Fisher-Selborne Scheme

The original plans for the Fisher-Selborne scheme proposed that those passing out of Dartmouth should immediately be promoted to midshipman and serve in

the fleet in that rank for three years.¹ These matters rested until 1904 at which point the Douglas Committee was appointed to consider the question of how Fisher-Selborne scheme officers should be educated after leaving Dartmouth. The appointment of the committee was indicative of the novelty of the scheme — yet another aspect of the original plans coming under revision now that experience had been gained.

However the committee was also a sign of the changing tone of naval education. Its terms of reference required it to investigate the role of naval instructors in the new scheme; were they still needed and appropriate and if not who should replace them?² Naval instructors were teachers, charged with teaching midshipmen subjects such as mathematics and French. The availability and quality of naval instructors had traditionally been extremely variable, with their duties frequently being undertaken by chaplains as a means of supplementing their income.³

The Douglas Committee saw little place for naval instructors. Instead it suggested that the education of young officers at sea should be entirely in the hands of commissioned officers. The committee also proposed that Fisher-Selborne scheme cadets should spend eight months (i.e. two terms) aboard a dedicated training cruiser. This ship should have an independent schedule calculated for maximum educational value and her officers should be carefully selected.⁴

The committee noted that in 1902 HMS *Isis* had been adopted for use by cadets, those in their fourth term taking a cruise aboard her rather than remaining in *Britannia*. *Isis* had been a great success, she had proved excellent for teaching seamanship and navigation, and the cadets who had served in her had adapted to life in the fleet far more quickly than was normally the case.⁵ The committee hoped to replicate this success and their educational aims can be clearly identified.

¹ TNA ADM 7/941 'New Scheme of Training Officers and Men 1903', 'Scheme for Entry, Training and Employment of Officers, Men and Boys for the Royal Navy', Minute for the Board No.1045, 21 November 1902

² TNA ADM 268/37 The Committee was appointed by letter N.14295 of 15 December 1904 and submitted its report on 7 March 1905. 'Report of the Committee Appointed to Consider the Training of Junior Naval Officers under the New Scheme' (Douglas Committee), 7 March 1905, p.1 para.3

³ Dickinson, *Educating*, pp.19-23, pp.59-61 and p.81

⁴ TNA ADM 268/37 Douglas Committee Report, 7 March 1905, p.2 para.5-7

⁵ *ibid*, p.2 para.6

Firstly, educational responsibilities were to be handed almost entirely to executive officers. They were expected to pass on their professional skills, and to teach the cadets how to behave – whether ashore, on the bridge, or in dealing with ratings. The committee did not state what qualities the carefully selected officers should have, but as they were expected to teach practical professional skills ability in this area was clearly an essential; otherwise self-discipline, loyalty, bravery, tact and determination were essential characteristics.

The officers would be treading a difficult line. They would have to provide gentle encouragement and reassurance whilst ensuring the highest possible standards of professional skills and officer-like qualities. Their paternalistic responsibilities for the cadets in their charge would have to be balanced against their individual styles of leadership which might rely on driving or threatening. Their situation would be considerably eased by the fact that the ship was not a normal part of the fleet, allowing the normally distant social relationships between officers and cadets to be relaxed.

Cadets were also expected to learn from the ratings aboard the training ships, gaining an insight into their lives and work. They were required to work alongside ratings at menial tasks such as cleaning and painting, and whilst doing so might talk to the men. Relations between cadets and ratings were relatively informal and relaxed, allowing much information to be gleaned through casual conversation. The training ship provided a unique space for these relationships to flourish and for cadets to develop a deeper understanding of the men they were to lead.

The separation of the training ship from the fleet meant that her programme could be arranged for maximum educational value, and that time could be allowed for recreational activities in desirable spots. Thus the training ship had the potential to meet all the demands of successful sea training outlined above – enjoyable, encouraging confidence, developing strong professional skills, and promoting a feeling of fellowship.

The ship chosen for the role was HMS *Cornwall*, a *Monmouth* class cruiser, which took up her training duties when the first Fisher-Selborne scheme cadets passed out of Dartmouth in 1907. In 1908 she was joined by sister-ship HMS *Cumberland*, the two sharing duties until the outbreak of the First World War. The two ships undertook a series of cruises lasting around three months

each and visiting a variety of destinations. Each term of cadets went on two cruises, visiting some combination of the Mediterranean, West Indies, east coast of North America, Baltic, North Sea and Channel ports as well as various parts of Britain.

This variety ensured that cadets gained a useful introduction to many of the ports that they could expect to encounter later in their careers. They experienced foreign lands and cultures, which again was useful experience for the future. They saw the Navy at work and at play. They were able to sail, swim, and undertake practical seamanship and navigation in warm, safe waters. The training cruiser thus provided an introduction to most aspects of a naval officer's career, always in an environment where the cadet was supported, encouraged and enthused.

The Custance Committee of 1912 approved of the training cruisers in principle but found that, in reality, they were failing in their duties. It suggested that the curriculum should be rearranged so that there was more emphasis on gunnery, torpedo, and electrical subjects, and less on mathematics. Under this proposed scheme, a 27 week cruise would have included 242 hours of engineering instruction 121 hours each of navigation and seamanship (with an additional 60 hours of pilotage), 81 of torpedo and electrical, and 60 each of gunnery and physical training.⁶ These proposals were largely rejected, although the revised orders issued in the response to the committee's report did place more emphasis on practical learning of all types.⁷

The proposals produced by the committee demonstrate the difficulties associated with the practical implementation of cadet sea training. There was a vast array of knowledge and skills to be assimilated, especially given the emphasis placed on engineering, and many subjects vied for priority. However, the imposition of such a large academic syllabus would inevitably have required cadets to devote a great deal of time to theoretical rather than practical learning. That these plans were largely rejected demonstrates that the Admiralty viewed cadet sea training as a time for developing practical skills rather than theoretical knowledge.

⁶ TNA ADM 116/1288 Vol 1 Second Report of the Custance Committee, 14 June 1912 p.8 para.3

⁷ TNA ADM 116/1288 Vol 3 Admiralty Circular CW.8774/1912 'Education and Training of Cadets, Midshipmen and Junior Officers of HM Fleet' April 1913, p.1 para.2

Cruiser training was suspended on the outbreak of the First World War. The cadets serving in *Cumberland* and *Cornwall* were sent to the fleet; eight of them were killed at the battle of Coronel.⁸ During the war Fisher-Selborne scheme cadets were sent straight to the fleet on completion of their (shortened) college course. The cruisers had clearly been very successful, so much so that they resumed their work in January 1919. Again *Cornwall* and *Cumberland* were used, but both were old and small. In 1920 the battleship *Temeraire* was substituted, she was several years younger and was able to carry all the cadets which saved money, simplified administration, and ensured a more even standard of instruction.⁹ *Temeraire* herself was replaced by HMS *Thunderer* in 1921, the replacement being necessitated by the reduction in the strength of the fleet – treaty restrictions meant that the number of battleships had to be reduced and the retention of the obsolete *Temeraire* clearly could not be justified.

The number of officers under training shrank dramatically during the early 1920s so that *Thunderer* was comfortably able to hold both the Dartmouth and Special Entry cadets. When economy measures were made in 1922, there was a determination to retain dedicated cadet sea training ships because of their essential value in developing seamanship and leadership besides developing understanding of ratings (best gained while young) and ensuring that the cadets thought of themselves as naval officers rather than school boys.¹⁰

Battleships were rather unsuited to cadet training – they were extremely expensive to operate, required expert handling, and did not offer any training facilities that could not be provided aboard a smaller ship. Training could have moved back aboard a cruiser – the smaller vessels were better suited to the role, being more economical to operate but large enough to offer comfort and a variety of facilities. However the job of policing the Empire fell largely to these ships; their bulk, flexibility, and endurance making them well suited to showing the flag, protecting trade, and discouraging illegal activities. Large numbers of

⁸ Hansard HC Deb (5th series) 19 November 1914 c.538

⁹ *Temeraire* had been launched in 1907 and was of an early dreadnought type; by the time she became a training ship she was, for battle fleet purposes, obsolescent.

¹⁰ TNA ADM 1/8619/18 'Training of Naval Cadets: Modifications in, with a View to Reducing Expenses' memorandum for the Board of Admiralty by the Second Sea Lord (Admiral Sir Henry F Oliver) 26 January 1922 p.3. As an alternative way of saving money, Oliver proposed reducing the Dartmouth course to nine terms.

cruisers were also needed by the battle fleet for tasks such as scouting and the suppression of enemy destroyers. They were one of the most important groups of ship in the Navy and were in great demand; unfortunately they were also expensive to build and operate and, worse still, increasingly restricted by international treaty. With ships and money in short supply no cruiser could be spared for sea training.

In 1924, defeated by the increasing reductions in the strength of the fleet, the Admiralty reluctantly abandoned dedicated sea training for cadets.¹¹ On leaving Dartmouth, Fisher-Selborne scheme cadets now went straight into the fleet, serving as cadets for eight months before promotion to midshipman. Special Entry cadets were promoted to midshipman on passing out of *Thunderer* and sent to join the fleet.

The Admiralty remained anxious to provide cadets with some seagoing experience before they joined the fleet. It was decided to provide small vessels to take cadets on short voyages of up to a week in length. Dartmouth cruises were initially made in the old destroyer HMS *Sturgeon*, which had previously taken cadets to sea on trips of a day or so, but in 1925 the minesweeper HMS *Forres* was attached to the college.

Only the senior college cadets used these ships. This was natural given that capacity was limited, and that the older cadets had a more pressing need for experience. It also emphasised the prestige of the older cadets compared to the younger. Courtney Anderson wrote that cadets 'came back green with seasickness but infused with new glamour', inspiring younger cadets as well as themselves.¹² The mere presence of *Forres* in the River Dart provided all cadets with a constant, enthusing, link to their future.

Most cadets thoroughly enjoyed their trips in *Forres* – apart from their educational value the trips encouraged interest in the Navy besides providing a break from routine. *Forres* cruises are recorded in enthusiastic depth in the Blake Term Log, added excitement being provided by the sloop's trips to Devonport where cadets were able to visit a variety of warships.¹³ It is clear that an effort was made to make the voyages as enjoyable as possible as well as familiarising cadets with life at sea and with some of the ships and ports they would encounter in the future.

¹¹ TNA ADM 1/8668/177, CW.2320/24 Promulgated as AFO 813/24, 29 March 1924

¹² Anderson, *Seagulls*, p.15

¹³ RNM 189.394 Blake Term Log, Easter term 1932

Special Entry cadets enjoyed similar trips in the sloop HMS *Carstairs*, which carried twenty cadets at a time on voyages lasting one or two weeks and going as far afield as Scotland. Executive and engineering cadets could expect a *Carstairs* trip in each of their three terms; paymaster cadets, who spent two terms in *Erebus*, went only once. The focus was very much on the practical; *How to Become a Naval Officer* noted that ‘the theoretical instruction given in the classrooms of HMS *Erebus* is developed under actual seagoing conditions’.¹⁴

It is clear that the emphasis of these trips was on seamanship in the traditional sense of word – on the craft skills required of the seaman. These skills, such as boat work and acting as a look out, remained essential. However in the modern Royal Navy ‘seamanship’ had come to embrace the rather broader range of tasks that occupied the executive officer on a daily basis such as organising seaboats and greeting visitors appropriately.¹⁵ It was in teaching these skills that *Forres* and *Carstairs* failed and thus the revised system of cadet sea training proved ineffective.

The Failure of the Revised System

The trips aboard *Forres* and *Carstairs* did accustom cadets to short voyages but they did not bear much resemblance to the normal work of the fleet. Cadets did not experience the daily life of drills, cleaning and watch-keeping, nor the monotony of long voyages, or foreign lands and cultures. Most critically, with a large number of cadets jammed into a small ship with a tiny complement, they had little chance to meet the men of the fleet or learn how to command them. Because they were only aboard for a short period they were unable to develop strong and trusting relationships with ratings and so missed out on the understanding thus gained.

The weaknesses of the system became apparent when cadets who had been through the revised training scheme started to join the fleet. Frank Twiss later recalled being repeatedly confused, scared and humiliated. Nobody in *Revenge* seemed to have much time or sympathy for newly joined cadets and

¹⁴ Bush, *How to Become a Naval Officer*, p.63

¹⁵ The broadness of the tasks categorised as seamanship can be seen in the examination papers below and in the *Manual of Seamanship* which included sections on saluting, divisional organisation, and victualling allowances and instructions as to how to commission a ship.

the disillusioned Twiss 'wondered if perhaps I had really made a dreadful mistake in joining'.¹⁶ Bob Whinney, who first went to sea as a cadet in HMS *Resolution*, found that 'to start with, life was constant confusion, fear and bewilderment'. As a cadet, Whinney was 'a truly low form of life'; he and his colleagues were further disheartened by being beaten for offences which arose solely from their ignorance.¹⁷

These difficulties did not go unnoticed but nobody seemed inclined to do much to alleviate them. It was not until 1932 that Captain Norman Wodehouse, the Captain of Dartmouth, wrote to various officers asking them for their opinions of the cadets their ships were receiving. Wodehouse had been in command of Dartmouth for two terms and was aware of a certain amount of dissatisfaction with its products.

The Captain of *Valiant* replied that there was 'very little wrong' with the cadets when they left the college, but that once aboard ship they suffered because of their immaturity, especially when compared to Special Entries. He also suggested that the college should place more emphasis on seamanship, and that cadets should have more freedom and lead a less sheltered existence – with more emphasis on self-discipline. The reply from *Resolution* was similar – Dartmouth cadets were disorganised, lacked motivation, and were poor at sailing.¹⁸

These deficiencies did not arise entirely from the lack of a training ship. Complaints about the young officers sent to the fleet were hardly a new development, midshipmen who had been through the training cruiser had also been criticised, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter. Eight months aboard the cruiser could not entirely correct any habits of irresponsibility and laziness developed over four years at Dartmouth. Whilst it was a good way of developing skills of seamanship and boat work, the basics were learnt (or not) at Dartmouth. However the training cruiser meant that cadets were eased into life at sea, which meant that they developed self-confidence alongside their professional skills. Thus motivation could be restored, and cadets could become

¹⁶ Howard-Bailey, *Social Change*, pp.14-17

¹⁷ Whinney, *U-Boat Peril*, p.22

¹⁸ BRNC Captain Wodehouse's investigation into the quality of the cadets produced by the College, Wodehouse's letter of 6 October 1932; reply from the commanding officer HMS *Valiant* (Captain Wellwood GC Maxwell) 7 December 1932; reply from the commanding officer HMS *Resolution* (Captain Charles E Turle) 13 June 1933

accustomed to the standards of self-discipline and responsibility expected in the fleet.

By the time Wodehouse sent out his letters a solution was already on the horizon – the decision had been made to resume cruiser training at the beginning of 1933. This decision arose largely from the naval confidence crisis that followed the Invergordon mutiny of October 1931. In the aftermath of the mutiny Admiral Sir John Kelly took command of the Atlantic Fleet. Kelly produced a long official report on the mutiny. Assisted by Captains Tovey and Somerville, he visited all the capital ships and cruisers of his new command interviewing officers and collecting the views of ratings.¹⁹ The report declared the pay cuts and their mishandling the sole cause of the mutiny. Although morale had been poor beforehand, relations between officers and men had been good. Kelly reiterated an earlier statement that everyone in the fleet held the Admiralty responsible, before turning to the events of the mutiny itself.

The officers of the fleet had failed to anticipate their men taking concerted action but faced with the mutiny had, in Kelly's view, responded sensibly. Despite the high turnover of officers preventing them from getting to know their men, discipline in the fleet was generally good both before and during the mutiny. However the officers did not have the trust of their men – a key factor in their failure to anticipate events. The executive officer complement of ships was based on action rather than peacetime requirements, with the result that many officers were under-employed and lacked responsibility. Small and simple evolutions were supervised by senior officers which limited the leadership opportunities for younger men. Kelly pressed for wholesale reform, writing that 'It is abundantly clear that the present system of training and appointing officers is in many ways unsatisfactory'.²⁰

Senior ratings were also criticised. Kelly thought that three-quarters of petty officers were ineffective disciplinarians, with stokers the most deficient. Their development was hampered by the prevailing socialist sentiment amongst naval schoolmasters, the men responsible for preparing them for examinations. The authority of three badge able seamen was far in excess of their rank, senior ratings having virtually no control over them.²¹

¹⁹ NMM KEL/109 Report by the C-in-C Atlantic Fleet (Admiral Sir John Kelly) 'State of Discipline in the Atlantic Fleet' 9 November 1931

²⁰ *ibid*, para.33

²¹ *ibid*, para.39-50

The Board of Admiralty agreed in part with Kelly. The First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Frederick Field, had long been concerned about the leadership abilities of young officers and the mutiny provided momentum for his attempts at reform. Field's reforms were mostly directed at midshipmen, and are discussed in length in the next chapter, but they also had important implications for cadets.

In 1929 Field, then serving as C-in-C Mediterranean, had written a long letter addressed to the Secretary of the Admiralty which laid out the deficiencies of current training practises in excruciating detail. Field and his subordinates were of the opinion that cadets were sent to sea too late; if they were six months or a year younger they would be more impressionable and develop better officer-like qualities. Their development would also be aided by reforming the overly detailed and extensive syllabus of classroom education. Field was firmly of the view that young officers went at sea to learn seamanship and leadership.²²

Field's paper was circulated for comment; discussions centred around the training of midshipmen, but some comments were also made about cadets. DTSD Captain Edward Cochrane also criticised the existing system. He felt it failed to encourage initiative and that the loss of the training cruiser had resulted in more technical instruction taking place in the fleet.²³

Admiral Sir Alfred Ernle Chatfield was consulted in his capacity as C-in-C Atlantic. He thought the cadets coming to sea 'deficient in personality for their age' and particularly poor at self-education. Although the ex-Dartmouth cadets were good men they lacked both personality and self-confidence, and many had become bored in their last year at the college. These problems were exacerbated by their feeling useless upon joining their first ship. He suggested that Dartmouth terms should mix more – older cadets should be given more responsibility – and that more care should be taken in preparing cadets to go to sea.²⁴

Alexander McMullen, the Admiralty Advisor on Education, cautioned against sending cadets to sea younger. Learning ability peaked at the age of

²² TNA ADM 116/2806A, CW.11/1930 Mediterranean Fleet letter No.2195/638/161 'Training of Midshipmen' from the C-in-C Mediterranean (Admiral Sir Frederick L Field) to the Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir Oswyn Murray) 27 December 1929

²³ *ibid*, Remarks on 'The Training of Midshipmen' prepared for DTSD (Captain Edward O Cochrane) 26 March 1930

²⁴ TNA ADM 116/2806A, CW.2301/1930 Atlantic Fleet Letter No.285/A.F.240 from C-in-C Atlantic (Admiral Sir Alfred Ernle Chatfield) to Sir Oswyn Murray 7 March 1930

sixteen to seventeen, meaning that this year was well spent in absorbing theory. If sent to sea younger cadets would be less self-confident, adaptable, and responsible. They would also be looked down on by the increasingly educated lower-deck. The alpha scheme would have to be abolished and the prestige of Dartmouth would be reduced; recruitment would inevitably be damaged, for the college would be little more than a 'glorified prep-school'.²⁵

The Captain of Greenwich was told to collect the views of his students. The sub-lieutenants under instruction felt that Dartmouth cadets needed more and better seamanship instruction (including more time aboard *Forres*) and that the training cruiser should also be reintroduced. The lieutenants under instruction agreed with the Dartmouth reforms suggested by the sub-lieutenants and also suggested that better seamanship instruction was needed aboard ships.²⁶

Discussions continued but little action was taken until June 1931, by which time Field was First Sea Lord (and had been for eleven months). That the discussion was revived at this time is evidence that Field was concerned about the leadership deficiencies of the Royal Navy's officers well before Invergordon. As C-in-C Mediterranean he had produced a detailed list of these deficiencies; as First Sea Lord he sought to remedy them, although there is no evidence in the file which explicitly states that Field revived the discussion.

Amongst the proposals considered was the reintroduction of sail training. The proposal had not originally been made in response to Invergordon, but stemmed from the London Treaty forced abolition of the Third Battle Squadron, which doubled as the training squadron for boy seamen. The squadron commander, Rear-Admiral Sir George Hyde, suggested that a squadron of sailing ships would provide a cheap replacement, with the added attraction that as the ships had no military function they would be unaffected by treaty restrictions. In any case: 'Seamanship – the sea habit – is best acquired in youth and under canvas'.²⁷

²⁵ TNA ADM 116/2806A Remarks on 'The Training of Midshipmen' by the Admiralty Advisor on Education (Alexander McMullen) 29 April 1930

²⁶ TNA ADM 116/2806A, CW.89/1931 Summary of Greenwich students views on 'The Training of Midshipmen' submitted by the officer commanding Greenwich Royal Naval College (Captain Richard HO Lane-Poole) 29 December 1930

²⁷ TNA ADM 116/3283, N.3581/30 Letter No.290/350 'Training of Young Seamen from Entry Until Rated Able Seaman' submission by the Rear-Admiral Commanding Third Battle Squadron, (Rear-Admiral George F Hyde) 23 October 1930 (para.7)

Hyde's letter was accompanied by a list of suggested training schemes submitted by the officers of his flagship *Emperor of India*. Although various training schemes involving sloops or cruisers were proposed, sail found most favour. Aside from the advantages listed by Hyde, it was also stated that sail was better than steam for developing self-reliance, weather knowledge, freedom from seasickness, and good eyesight.²⁸

Although the London Treaty made sail training more attractive, there was already some enthusiasm. In March 1930 DTSD Captain Edward Cochrane had advocated sail training as an 'unfortunately barred' means of teaching initiative to junior officers.²⁹ By May 1931 sail training for boy seamen was being actively discussed; a note by Cochrane's successor Captain James Ritchie suggested that if introduced it should be extended to cadets.³⁰ This proposal had the support of the Captain of Dartmouth, Captain Sidney Meyrick, who requested that *Forres* be replaced by a sailing vessel (Dartmouth already enjoyed the services of the racing yacht *Amaryllis*).³¹

The proposal to reintroduce sail training was not then the act of a desperate navy, reaching out to the past in response to Invergordon, but the response to reasoned discussion about the deficiencies of personnel and to the strictures of the London Treaty. Even so it does appear to owe more to reactionary sentiment than practicality; a view that wooden ships and iron men had been succeeded by the opposite – that the men of the old navy were far superior to their successors. Whilst there were undoubtedly subscribers to this view, both inside and outside the service, there were also strong practical arguments for introducing sail training. These were laid out by the unknown author of an undated paper entitled 'The Training of Seamen', probably written shortly after Invergordon by the new First Lord, Sir Bolton Eyres-Monsell.

Some form of sea training was wanted for both officers and men and sail offered a number of advantages over steam. There was no need to refuel meaning the vessel could remain at sea for long periods at minimal cost. All

²⁸ *ibid*, 'Training of Young Seamen from Entry until Rated Able Seaman' submission by HMS *Emperor of India* 11 October 1930 section IV p.13, attached to Hyde's letter of 29 October 1930

²⁹ TNA ADM 116/2806A, CW.414/1930 Remarks On 'The Training of Midshipmen' for DTSD 26 March 1930 (para.3)

³⁰ TNA ADM 116/2806A, CW.89/31 Remarks on the training of junior officers for DTSD 19 May 1931

³¹ TNA ADM 116/3283, CW.9630/1931 'Sailing Tenders for the French Naval College' submission No.7 from the officer commanding Dartmouth Naval College (Captain Sidney J Meyrick) to the C-in-C Plymouth (Vice-Admiral Sir Hubert G Brand) 14 October 1931 para.3

hands would be kept busy and would learn seamanship and initiative, as well as feeling their efforts were essential to the ship. Going aloft would teach resourcefulness and self-confidence, making men less vulnerable to lower-deck trouble makers.³² The ships could serve a useful purpose – carrying supplies to the Mediterranean or even for the African, West Indies or Cape squadrons.³³

It was suggested that a sail training squadron would give boy seamen a better introduction to seagoing life than the current system of sending them straight into the fleet. In the fleet boys tended to become bored and discontented – losing enthusiasm for the service. Spending their time in classrooms and at menial tasks added to these problems and did little to develop smart, practical seamen. The author of the proposal felt that this early period in boys' careers lay at the heart of the Navy's problems: 'Disillusionment, if it has to come, should certainly be absent from the experience of the first year at sea'.³⁴

Perhaps this argument also applied to young officers. In any case it was proposed that cadets should train alongside boy seamen. Their accommodation would be the same as that provided for the boys, although separate, and they would act as leading seamen – taking charge of groups of boys. This would provide cadets with an easier introduction to leadership than pitching them into the fleet, and would enable cadets and boys to develop closer relationships and mutual understanding. The shared experiences of sail training would ultimately strengthen relationships at all levels of the fleet.³⁵

The proposals were received with some enthusiasm, the Admiralty receiving a number of supportive letters.³⁶ The writers varied from long retired officers recalling their own experiences to prominent officers of the modern navy including Martin Dunbar-Nasmith. Many officers, both serving and retired, offered their services as instructors but very few combined youth with experience in sailing anything larger than a yacht. The lack of experienced personnel posed a particular difficulty; the losses of the training ships HMS *Eurydice* with 376 men in 1878 and HMS *Atalanta* with 281 men in 1880 provided ammunition for opponents of the scheme.

³² TNA ADM 1/8756/150 'The Training of Seaman' Part 2 pp.10-11

³³ *ibid*, Part 3 p.5

³⁴ *ibid*, Part 1 pp.3-4 (p.4)

³⁵ *ibid*, Part 3 pp.3-4

³⁶ TNA ADM 1/8756/150 contains these letters

A meeting held at the Admiralty on 15 March 1932 led to the proposals being revised. All those present agreed that both cadets and boy seamen needed sea training before joining the fleet. Sail training was thought most appropriate for boy seamen and four sailing barques were subsequently added to the naval estimates.³⁷ However, at a subsequent meeting held on 26 May, it was decided that the cadet training cruiser should be revived, HMS *Frobisher* being chosen for the role.³⁸

The Revival of the Cadet Training Cruisers

This decision effectively rejected the suggestions made by Kelly of deficient character amongst some officers, (small ships, and sailing generally being viewed as best for character development) and of a widening gap between officers and ratings. Although this meeting approved of the plan to build sailing barques for boy seamen it did not think it was appropriate for them to train with cadets. Instead, the professional and leadership development of cadets was judged to be best served by placing them in a vessel similar to those they would serve in as midshipmen – a training geared towards the practicalities of the naval officer's profession rather than the more abstract and idealistic approach represented by the sail training proposals.

By the following January, Admiralty attention had shifted to the deficiencies of senior ratings. The Second Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, suggested sailing ships were the best leadership school for petty officers.³⁹ Perhaps this suggestion was made in a desperate effort to revive the scheme, which had now been rejected by Field's successor as First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Alfred Ernle Chatfield. Chatfield felt that purchase of four sailing ships was hard to justify when personnel were suffering financially. He remembered the sail training ships of the 1890s and did not consider that the men who had passed through them were superior to those who had not – on the contrary they had embraced the easier life of the fleet and thus been outperformed by

³⁷ TNA ADM 116/3283, M.0676/32 Minutes of meeting held at Admiralty 15 March 1932; the First and Second Sea Lords were present and all fleet C-in-Cs had sent comments.

³⁸ *ibid*, Extract from Board Minutes No.2943, minutes of meeting of the Board of Admiralty 26 May 1932

³⁹ TNA ADM 1/9086 Memorandum for the Board of Admiralty by the Second Sea Lord (Admiral Sir Dudley PR Pound) 27 January 1933. Appendix I of this letter is a list of the officers who had volunteered for sail training, there were few that combined youth and experience in sailing anything larger than a yacht and only three had served as officers in sailing vessels.

colleagues who had not gone through sail training. He also thought that candidates for petty officer would be put off by the prospect of sail training.

Chatfield explicitly linked the proposals to Invergordon and rejected them on that basis. The senior officers who had presided over the mutiny had trained under sail and had still failed to provide the necessary leadership. Chatfield firmly supported Kelly's conclusions – that the fleet suffered principally from the surplus of officers, and from the inability of petty officers to lead.⁴⁰

Chatfield's lack of enthusiasm, combined with the practical difficulties and the cost of building the ships, conspired to kill the sail training scheme. From the start it had suffered from confusion; the identities of both the proposed learners and the proposed teachers was subject to change, and no effort seems to have been made to lay down a clear list of training objectives, let alone how they were to be achieved.

However ill thought out, the sail training proposals were a clear rejection of the Fisher-Selborne scheme and its emphasis on technology – further recognition that the work of the officer revolved around men and not around material. Instead they placed an emphasis on providing an environment in which seamanship and officer-like qualities could be developed without the pressures and strictures of service in the fleet.

That the training cruiser was revived, in spite of the high costs that would be incurred and the ongoing shortage of cruisers, demonstrated that it was seen as by far the best way of introducing young officers, especially those educated at Dartmouth, to seagoing life. It would have been feasible to use smaller ships, but a cruiser offered far greater operational range, a more comfortable (and therefore effective) teaching environment, and a greater freedom of movement. It also meant that all the cadets under training, both Fisher-Selborne and Special Entry, could be contained in one vessel.

The revived training cruiser had the potential to meet all the requirements for successful cadet sea training. Its programme could be arranged to ensure maximum enjoyment through the provision of sporting activities and exciting port visits. Because the ship was devoted to training, everything necessary could be done to ensure that cadets developed self-confidence and good professional skills – all the necessary facilities and staff could be provided. By

⁴⁰ *ibid*, Memorandum for the Board of Admiralty by the First Sea Lord (Admiral Sir Alfred Ernle Chatfield) 30 January 1933

carefully selecting the officers and crew of the ship, and allowing a degree of informality, feelings of fellowship could be developed, particularly between cadets and ratings.

After its revival in 1933 the work of the training cruiser went unchallenged until 1938 when the Watson Committee examined the training of junior officers. The committee took a very favourable view of the training cruiser, feeling that the cadets currently under-valued their time aboard. They suggested that reallocating the additional seniority Dartmouth cadets could earn through good examination marks so that the majority was earned through their cruiser performance which would encourage greater application amongst cadets, as well as giving a better reflection of their professional merits.⁴¹

The committee emphasised the importance of practical education in the training cruiser and argued that cadets serving in her should concentrate on practical, rather than theoretical, studies.⁴² This was particularly important as the duration of the course for Dartmouth cadets had been reduced to four months in order to speed up the officer production process. The time spent as a midshipman was also reduced, meaning that a total of eight months of seagoing experience was lost – making it even more important that the training cruiser provided high quality practical experience.

The most remarkable aspect of the training programme introduced in 1933 was that Special Entry cadets joining the Royal Navy reported straight to the training cruiser, with no preliminary training at all. It was true that Special Entry cadets had previously joined a ship with no naval experience, but in the days of *Highflyer* they had at least been given some time to adjust gradually rather than almost immediately setting sail for foreign climes. The Navy eventually thought better of this system, replacing it with one in which executive and engineer Special Entry cadets did their first term in the static HMS *Erebus*.

The 1933 system placed the Special Entries at a considerable disadvantage compared to ex-Dartmouth cadets who had already been in a naval environment for almost four years and so adapted more quickly to life aboard ship. Tension between the two groups was inevitable. The Dartmouth cadets, well aware of the importance the rest of the service attached to

⁴¹ TNA ADM 116/3709 Report of the 'Committee on the Training of Junior and Specialist Officers' (Watson Committee) 30 June 1938 p.1 para.Ai, p.2 para.Aii

⁴² TNA ADM 116/3763 Interim report of the 'Committee on the Training of Junior and Specialist Officers' (Watson Committee) 19 March 1938 para.79

seniority, could hardly be expected to welcome being placed on a par with cadets who had only just joined. This, combined with the strong bonds formed at Dartmouth, might mean adopting a cliquish and superior air. This assumed superiority was likely to be resented by the Special Entry cadets who were older and had generally led a less sheltered existence.

Under these circumstances it is hardly surprising that the two groups tended to take an instant dislike to each other. For Edward Ashmore 'attraction was neither instant or mutual'.⁴³ Courtney Anderson recalled that the *Frobisher* went to sea 'the cadets working ship, or rather the Dartmouth cadets working ship after a fashion, the pubs getting in everyone's light'.⁴⁴ Charles Owen recalled that, in the early days of the revived system, friction between the two groups was so bad that *Frobisher's* captain threatened to abandon the cruise.⁴⁵

Sometimes first impressions were more favourable – John Wells wrote that his term was impressed by the wider educational background of the Special Entries.⁴⁶ However, hard work, seasickness, and familiarity soon eased the differences between the two groups. Suspicions were inevitably reduced as cadets got to know each other better and the two groups came to respect each other. This was not always welcomed, some naval officers such as Herbert Richmond feeling that the younger but more numerous Dartmouth cadets stifled the Special Entries when they would have benefited from the latter's greater maturity, initiative, and enthusiasm.⁴⁷

The variety of entertainment provided for cadets ashore was impressive and ensured they learnt to function in most social circumstances. Robert Browne told his parents 'we have had something arranged for every moment we have been ashore'.⁴⁸ For Courtney Anderson, cocktail parties, balls and drinking were part of his education.⁴⁹ Edward Ashmore remarked that 'it was indeed a cruise and there was much to enjoy'.⁵⁰ These impressions are strongly supported by the reports sent to Admiralty after the cruises of *Vindictive* in

⁴³ Ashmore, *Battle and the Breeze*, p.9

⁴⁴ Anderson, *Seagulls*, p.21

⁴⁵ Owen, *Plain Yarns*, p.41

⁴⁶ Wells, *Royal Navy*, p.153

⁴⁷ TNA ADM 116/2799 Evidence of Admiral Sir HW Richmond pp.1-2

⁴⁸ RNM 1981/368-374 Cadet Robert Brown's letter to his parents 15 March 1936

⁴⁹ Anderson, *Seagulls*, p.25

⁵⁰ Ashmore, *Battle and the Breeze*, p.10

1938-1939 – the ship's Captain, Henry Bovell, complained about the lack of sea time, indicating a full diary of shore engagements.⁵¹

The views older officers expressed at the time tend to support the subsequent recollections of the former cadets. The work of the training ships was well documented, their captains were required to make regular reports and information can also be gleaned from the ship's logs. The Second Sea Lord, the officer in charge of naval personnel, took a particularly keen interest – in the period immediately after the First World War the ships were assigned to him rather than a port division or fleet. The officers in charge of the cadets were required to submit reports on their training. These reports were of particular interest to the naval authorities where they involved a direct comparison of the performance of the two groups of cadets.

However enjoyable their time aboard, cadets were reminded of the professional purpose of the cruise by the examinations at the end. These were relatively simple affairs, with papers on navigation, seamanship, gunnery, torpedo, and engineering. Most of the questions concerned themselves with practical routine matters. For example in the autumn of 1938 the seamanship paper asked who was responsible for: serving the meals of ERAs, seaboat readiness, supervising the rum issue, the readiness of rockets at sunset, special sea dutymen, the placing of lights, 5.5 inch wire hawsers, and the payment of mess bills. Candidates were also questioned about boat handling, the sequence of events when abandoning ship, procedures for anchoring and mooring, turning over a watch, and fog signals.⁵²

The Dartmouth cadets generally did better in the autumn 1938 examinations than the Special Entries, but the latter did better over the cruise as a whole – of the 14 prizes on offer 7 went to Special Entries, 6 to Dartmouth cadets and one to an Australian. However there were far more Special Entry cadets aboard – 79 compared to 29 Dartmouth cadets. The captain of the ship seems to have regarded the two groups as roughly equal, his report does not suggest that one out-performed the other.⁵³

⁵¹ TNA ADM 116/3962, CW.17215/1938 *Vindictive* letter No.1/12 'HMS *Vindictive* - Autumn Cruise 1938 - Report on Training' from the officer commanding HMS *Vindictive* (Captain Henry C Bovell) to the C-in-C The Nore (Vice-Admiral Sir Edward RGR Evans) 7 December 1938; CW.7190/1939 *Vindictive* letter No.1/12 'HMS *Vindictive* - Spring Cruise 1939 - Report on Training' Bovell to Evans 5 April 1939

⁵² TNA ADM 116/3962, CW.17215/1938 Attachment to *Vindictive* letter No.1/12 'HMS *Vindictive* - Autumn Cruise 1938 - Report on Training' from Bovell to Evans 7 December 1938

⁵³ *ibid*

The results from one cruise cannot be taken as clear evidence that one type of entry was superior to the other and evidence from other cruises undertaken by *Vindictive* suggests that standards varied widely. The captain's report from the summer of 1938 showed the Dartmouth cadets to be ahead of the Special Entries. Conversely in the spring of 1939 the Special Entries were far better. The performance of the Dartmouth cadets on this occasion was very poor indeed, averaging 119 marks worse than the Special Entry cadets in the engineering examination, 36 worse in seamanship and 30 worse in navigation. The gap for torpedo was only 11 marks and the Dartmouth cadets did better in gunnery. Bovell suggested that the Special Entry cadets were advantaged by the purely professional nature of their training.⁵⁴

In the aftermath of this report the Director of the Education Department, Instructor Captain Arthur Hall, was commissioned to produce a comparison of the two groups of cadets to be laid before the Second Sea Lord. Hall concluded that the Special Entries generally did far better on the training cruiser and that there were a number of reasons for this. The Special Entries were older and were far more enthusiastic. Dartmouth did not prepare cadets to go to sea; Hall suggested that the eleventh term of the college course should focus on professional training, with as much time as possible spent aboard *Forres*.⁵⁵ The naval authorities rejected these suggestions, preferring to keep the existing Dartmouth course, to give the two groups different examinations aboard the training cruiser, and to leave the final allocation of marks to an independent authority rather than the ship's officers.⁵⁶

Overall these reports and the reactions to them suggest that both groups of cadets performed satisfactorily aboard the training cruiser. The performance of the Special Entry cadets was, on average, better than that of the Dartmouth cadets but there was considerable variation in the standards achieved by both entries. The shipboard training was most useful to the Dartmouth cadets who, although they had been in the Navy far longer, had less practical experience than the Special Entries. Aside from data on the performance of cadets, official

⁵⁴ TNA ADM 116/3962, CW.7190/1939 *Vindictive* letter No.1\12 'HMS *Vindictive* - Spring Cruise 1939 - Report on Training' from Bovell to Evans 5 April 1939

⁵⁵ TNA ADM 116/3962 CW 14715/39 Un-titled paper by Director of the Education Department (Captain Arthur E Hall) for the Second Sea Lord (Admiral Sir Charles J Little) 27 June 1939

⁵⁶ TNA ADM 116/3962 Admiralty Letter CW.7190/39, 27 June 1939 is referred to in CW.14715/39 *Vindictive* letter No.1\12 'HMS *Vindictive* - Summer Cruise 1939 - Report on Training' from Bovell to Evans 2 August 1939, there is no copy of Admiralty letter CW.7190/39.

reports also offer the historian an account of the events of the cruises; these events can also be seen through the eyes of the cadets themselves.

Experiences of Education in the Cadet Training Cruisers

The best documented cruises are those made by HMS *Temeraire* in the summer and autumn of 1920. These cruises were far from typical because Prince George, the third son of King George V, was amongst the cadets aboard. The prince was aboard to undergo training rather than for royal or diplomatic purposes, but his presence still caused some difficulty.

Prince George and his fellow cadets joined *Temeraire* on 29 May; two days later they were inspected by the C-in-C Portsmouth, after which the ship sailed for Ireland – being subject to mock submarine attacks en-route. They were thus provided with a brief and exciting introduction to life at sea. The ship visited a number of Irish ports including Dunmore, Galway, and Buncrana. A great deal of boat work was done in these sheltered anchorages but opportunities for shore leave were limited because of the unrest ashore.⁵⁷

Temeraire then sailed for Scottish waters, visiting Campbeltown and Scapa Flow. En-route the cadets fired the four inch guns and exercised the seaboats. They also watched the ship's company launch torpedoes.⁵⁸ In contrast to the initial trip to Ireland, this leg of the cruise was similar to many normal peacetime training voyages undertaken by Royal Navy ships.

Temeraire then sailed for Norway where she lingered for some days, largely for social purposes. Prince George was allowed to stay overnight with his cousin King Haakon but was obliged to return aboard for work each day. The King visited the ship on several occasions, carrying out an inspection and taking in a dance. The cadets were lectured on polar exploration by Captain Evans (who was holidaying in Norway) and also enjoyed sailing, picnics and various trips ashore.⁵⁹ Although a great deal of work was done, this visit also served admirably to introduce the cadets to the social life of their profession and gave them a good idea of how they could expect to be entertained ashore in the future.

⁵⁷ TNA ADM 1/8591/116, M.42077/20 *Temeraire* letter No.869 Donaldson's report of 14 June 1920; M.42262/20 *Temeraire* letter No.978 report of 10 July 1920

⁵⁸ TNA ADM 1/8591/116, M.42550/20 *Temeraire* letter No.1015 Report of 24 July 1920; M.42550/20 *Temeraire* letter No.1036 Report of 7 August 1920

⁵⁹ TNA ADM 1/8591/116, M.43036/20 *Temeraire* letter No.1081 Report of 30 August 1920

On returning to the United Kingdom the cadets were sent on five days leave before rejoining the ship. After being inspected by the First Sea Lord on the 9 September, *Temeraire* left for a cruise of the Mediterranean; she first sailed for Vigo, carrying out gunnery exercises en-route. A planned visit to Algiers was cancelled because of an outbreak of bubonic plague, *Temeraire* was rerouted to Palermo.⁶⁰ The ship spent several days at Gibraltar where the cadets were occupied with pulling and rifle shooting. More torpedo exercises followed, after which *Temeraire* sailed for Malta, again cancelling a visit to Algiers. Malta proved to be an ideal destination – the cadets were able to visit many different ships, use the gymnasium ashore, visit historic sites and devote hours to bathing and games.⁶¹

Temeraire's final port visit was to Lisbon, yet another interesting experience. The visit was almost cancelled because of bubonic plague but the Portuguese naval attaché assured the Admiralty that there was only one case in Lisbon and such a thing was only to be expected at that time of year!⁶² In any case, *Temeraire*'s visit was highly anticipated and would also offer a boost to the country's failing economy. The ship's week long visit went ahead – her officers were well entertained ashore but, in contrast to the Norway visit, no entertainment was arranged for the cadets or the ship's company. This lack of entertainment was hardly surprising given the turmoil Portugal was in; two days after *Temeraire* left the government fell – the ship's presence had done nothing to bolster either its popularity or its perceived legitimacy.⁶³

The day after leaving Lisbon the ship was struck by lightning. No damage was done, and she arrived safely at Arosa Bay an anchorage frequently used by the Mediterranean Fleet. Arosa Bay offered little by way of entertainment but was an ideal venue for the cadet examinations to take place. On 1 December, six days after arriving, *Temeraire* finally sailed for home. She arrived at Torquay on the 3 and there the cruise came to an end.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ TNA ADM 1/8591/116, M.631513/20 *Temeraire* letter No.113N Report of 15 September 1920

⁶¹ TNA ADM 1/8591/116, M.43547/20 *Temeraire* letter No.162/2 Report of 5 October 1920; M.64850/20 *Temeraire* letter No.P131/2 Report of 19 October 1920

⁶² TNA ADM 1/8591/116, M.43841/20 Letter No.928 B.(P7) from the Naval Attaché to the Portuguese Legation, (Commander Branco) to the Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir Oswyn Murray) 8 November 1920

⁶³ TNA ADM 1/8591/116, M.43929/20 *Temeraire* letter No.J144/2 Report of 24 November 1920

⁶⁴ TNA ADM 1/8591/116, M.44068/20 *Temeraire* letter No.M44068/20 Report of 3 December 1920

Temeraire's cruises had been far from normal. Even without the added complications of Prince George's presence, they had been subject to many excitements and changes of programme. None the less most of the time was devoted to activities designed to benefit the cadets. They saw many of the ports they would operate from in the future and many of the ships they would serve in. They developed a wide range of practical skills, all of which would be of immediate use to them as midshipmen and which must have given them a great deal of self-confidence. Finally, they enjoyed themselves, experiencing a number of countries and having access to a variety of recreational activities. In these respects, *Temeraire's* cruises were entirely typical of those made by cadet training ships between 1903 and 1939.

More mundane accounts can be found in the logs of the cadet training ships. Whilst these logs do not reveal much about the lives of those aboard they do tell us much about the activities of the ships. They can reveal a great deal about the training undertaken by cadets. The increased competence of the cadets aboard *Vindictive* in the autumn of 1937 is illustrated by the increased frequency with which seaboat exercises were carried out (although it must be remembered that not all places were equally suitable for doing this work). Otherwise one gains an impression of many hours of onboard instruction, combined with sailing and pulling at every available opportunity, although there is no detail of what instruction was actually given.⁶⁵

Logs provide complete itineraries of destinations visited, along with details of how many visitors were entertained aboard. The historian may question how much work was done by *Frobisher's* cadets on her visits to Narvik and Tallinn in June 1937 given that the ship was open to the public at both ports and received a combined 1175 visitors. In the same month she visited Flensburg, Lappvik, and Copenhagen; if nothing else her cadets got a good deal of sea time.⁶⁶ Unfortunately ship's logs give little idea of what went on actually went on ashore or the significance of any visitors to the ship. The summer 1919 cruise of British waters undertaken by *Carnarvon* may have had considerable emotional significance, but again her log is silent.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ TNA ADM 53/106706 Ship's Log of HMS *Vindictive* September 1937; TNA ADM 53/106707 Ship's Log of HMS *Vindictive* October 1937; TNA ADM 53/106708 Ship's Log of HMS *Vindictive* November 1937; TNA ADM 53/106709 Ship's Log of HMS *Vindictive* December 1937

⁶⁶ ADM 53/103467 Ship's Log of HMS *Frobisher* June 1937

⁶⁷ ADM 53/37103 Ship's Log of HMS *Carnarvon* 16 April- 31 December 1919, entries of 7 May to 1 August 1919

Frustratingly, there is little evidence from ratings who served aboard training cruisers; which is doubly disappointing as ratings were key to the whole experience, arguably the most important aspect. This importance derived from the fact that cadets – whether at Dartmouth, Osborne, or in a static training ship – rarely came into contact with naval ratings and then only in small numbers and in a controlled atmosphere. Under these circumstances cadets learnt little of the life and mentality of the lower-deck man, let alone how to lead him. This was a problem given that, as a midshipman, the young officer was expected to lead ratings.

Service in a training ship provided a convenient halfway house. The ship carried many ratings and cadets were constantly thrown into contact with them. The two groups worked together, often more or less as equals, and so were able to develop friendships that could not have existed under normal circumstances. Many cadets acquired a so called ‘sea daddy’ – an experienced rating who took them under their wing, taught them seamanship, and explained the realities of life in the lowest ranks of the service.

Sea daddies were common throughout the Navy, and were normally older able seamen taking an interest in young ordinary seamen. The younger member of the partnership was often known as a ‘winger’ – he had been taken under the older man’s wing. The relationship between cadets and their sea daddies differed from the normal in that it was confined to working hours and the instruction was mostly in professional practicalities; there was no protection from bullying superiors and no educational runs ashore.⁶⁸

Sea daddies also provided advice on leadership, reminding the cadets that they would soon be in charge of men who were older and vastly more experienced than themselves and who required tactful leadership, rather than being machines who would obey unthinkingly. Cadets also became aware that any failings of theirs would be picked up on by ratings and either exploited or used as an excuse for poor performance.

The knowledge thus acquired was doubly useful as most cadets, especially those from Dartmouth, had grown up amongst boys of their own class and so had little conception of the lives, hopes and dreams of working class men. Such knowledge was essential if a young officer was to begin to

⁶⁸ Wardle, *Forecastle to Quarterdeck*, pp.22-23 discusses the value of being a winger. McKee, *Sober Men*, pp.197-200 suggests that good looking or vulnerable young ratings were most likely to become wingers and that the relationships often had a homoerotic element.

understand the problems of the ratings under his command. These conversations also helped to overcome any feelings of hostility derived from distrust of the working class.

Ratings, and especially sea daddies, occupy a key place in autobiographical narratives of cadet sea training – reflecting their importance to the process. Courtney Anderson wrote that ‘cadets, sailors and marines laboured affably together on terms of mutual affection and respect. We talked, laughed, argued, questioned and discussed. And all the time we learned about the Navy, our job, and the men we should one day lead’.⁶⁹ This view is endorsed by John Wells: ‘It was later apparent that six months in *Frobisher* was better value for cadets than a similar period spent in the gunrooms of the fleet. Perhaps the best part was getting to know the ratings, sharing their jobs and listening to a caustic view of the Navy from an un-ambitious three badge AB’.⁷⁰

Charles Owen described the curriculum meted out by his sea daddy thus: ‘the first lesson was in perks, protocols and precedent. This was easy and based on simple justice’. When the two set about their normal task of cleaning a group of ventilator mouths, Owen did all those that were hard to reach or dirty and his sea daddy those that could be done easily! The main lesson, delivered in an undertone whilst working, consisted of ‘the philosophy of the seagoing underdog’ delivered largely as a commentary on the habits and failings of passing officers. Thus was Cadet Owen provided with an ‘invaluable’ education in officer-like qualities as viewed by ratings.⁷¹

All the officer autobiographers who served aboard the training cruisers describe their experiences in glowing terms. Their enjoyment translates itself into romanticised accounts – ratings are sympathetic, social experiences exciting, and the overall experience highly rewarding. The overall picture presented by autobiographies may therefore be over-positive but it cannot be denied that these officers had an enjoyable and educational experience.

Their positive recollections are backed up by contemporary sources. However the success of the cadet training ships is perhaps best signified by the speed with which they were re-instated after the two world wars. In both cases, within a few months of hostilities ending, the training ships had again taken up their duties. Specialist sea training for officers who had just completed their time

⁶⁹ Anderson, *Seagulls*, p.25

⁷⁰ Wells, *Royal Navy*, p.153

⁷¹ Owen, *Plain Yarns*, p.41

at Dartmouth continued in one form or another until 1992. Further positive evidence can be seen in the near-unanimous praise expressed for the ships by cadets and the naval authorities, both in contemporary and retrospective accounts.

This success arose from the unique combination of circumstances aboard the training ship. They employed serving naval personnel and copied many of the normal routines and activities of the fleet, thus when cadets joined their first ship they felt at home. However the training ships were devoted to education, imparting a great deal of useful information and skills, and increasing the self-confidence as well as the competence of cadets. The newly promoted midshipman who had served in training ship was a far more capable, confident, and prepared individual than the cadet sent straight to the fleet. The success of the teaching aboard the training ship owed much to the atmosphere aboard. Cadets were relatively relaxed and were supported in their attempts to learn rather than being punished for their ignorance. Aside from producing better young officers, this supportive atmosphere ensured that cadets retained or increased their enthusiasm for their chosen career.

At the start of this chapter various conditions for an effective introduction to seagoing life were listed. As has been seen, some training systems were pursued which did not all meet these conditions. Only the provision of a dedicated training ship ensured that cadets combined enjoyment of seagoing life, self-confidence, good professional skills, and a feeling of fellowship with other naval personnel. When there was no training ship these conditions were not met, cadets instead found themselves disillusioned, lonely, and confused. For these reasons, the training ship was a highly effective aspect of naval training and ensured that the transition from early training to life at sea was extremely well handled by the Royal Navy.

Chapter Five – The Education of Midshipmen

In many ways the most crucial stage of the officer education process was the time spent as a midshipman. This period, normally lasting two years and four months, focussed on the development of professional skills and leadership, and as such was the primary means of developing officer-like qualities. It was the key to producing a practical naval officer. As a midshipman the young officer was, for the first time in his career, expected to demonstrate effective leadership of naval ratings. He was also expected to develop the social skills and graces required of a naval officer. The education of midshipmen was a contentious issue, and one to which many naval reformers devoted their efforts.

Most of the difficulties and debates associated with the education of midshipmen arose, at least in part, from disputes over what midshipmen should be expected to learn. These debates centred around professional function – if the naval officer was to be an engineer, then the midshipman must learn engineering; if he was to be a seaman, the midshipman must learn seamanship. There was also disagreement as to the type and the extent of knowledge needed. The professional functions of an executive officer clearly required knowledge of gunnery, but should midshipmen concentrate on the aiming, firing, or maintenance of guns?

The education of midshipmen was based on immersion – they were placed in a fleet ship and set about their duties. Midshipmen served mostly in the largest ships of the fleet – apart from a four-month spell in destroyers – they served in battleships, battlecruisers or cruisers. A ship could have up to twenty midshipmen, living together in the gunroom under the command of a sub-lieutenant.

Aboard ship midshipmen were occupied by a wide variety of tasks. They were expected to take part in the work of the ship including drills and maintenance, keep watch on the bridge and in the engine room, and were responsible for operating the ship's boats. There was some formal instruction, including lectures on various subjects, a navigation work book and the requirement to keep a journal. Thus midshipmen gained knowledge through instruction, observation, and practical experience.

There were numerous difficulties in providing effective training for all midshipmen. Firstly they served in widely varying conditions and in a variety of

ships, some of which lent themselves to a balanced education and some of which did not. Maintaining consistent standards across the fleet was a constant difficulty. Secondly there was considerable conflict as to exactly what midshipmen should study. This conflict centred on how much theoretical content there should be and how much practical experience. Thirdly midshipmen occupied an awkward position in the Navy, they were certainly not ratings, but neither were they commissioned officers and their appropriate treatment was a matter of debate.

So great were the difficulties associated with the education of midshipmen that it was subject to frequent re-examination. The reforms in midshipmen's training that occurred in the 1903-1939 period generally served to greatly increase the emphasis on professional skills, particularly seamanship and navigation, at the expense of theoretical knowledge and engineering.

Early Difficulties

As originally implemented, the Fisher-Selborne scheme required midshipmen to complete an extensive academic syllabus the subjects of which included engineering, seamanship, torpedo, gunnery, navigation, signalling, mathematics, science, French, English, and naval history.¹ They were expected to become competent assistant watch keepers on the bridge and in the engine room, to be capable boat handlers, to be capable of taking charge of various seamanship evolutions, to master the basics of navigation, and to pass numerous examinations. Examination passes were awarded in three classes — from first to third; those gaining first class passes received accelerated promotion to lieutenant and emerged as early front runners in the race to highest ranks of the service.

It may come as no surprise that this workload proved beyond most midshipmen, there were simply not enough hours in the day for them to master the required theoretical knowledge and gain sufficient practical experience. Stressed and exhausted, many midshipmen presented a poor appearance, at odds with any conventional definition of officer-like-qualities. In 1912, Admiral Sir Herbert King-Hall wrote privately to his brother, Admiral Sir George King-Hall, that the latter's son, twenty year old Midshipman Stephen King-Hall was:

¹ TNA ADM 268/37 Report of the Douglas Committee, 7 March 1905, pp.1-5 para.8-21

'Like many midshipmen very boyish for his age [...] They are a mixture of fashionable young men and unsophisticated children. In our generation we were grown men by that age'.²

Such criticism of a younger generation is hardly unique, and one midshipman cannot be said to represent his entire generation of naval officers. None the less, Herbert King-Hall's comments do suggest that the Fisher-Selborne scheme was not producing mature and capable young officers. This criticism is born out by comments made through official channels.

In May 1912 Vice-Admiral Sir John Jellicoe wrote to the Admiralty revealing many of the problems posed by Fisher-Selborne Scheme midshipmen.³ Although more knowledgeable than their predecessors they were not capable of, or responsible enough to do, the work of a lieutenant. They had not absorbed the lessons of the colleges or training ship and were especially poor at navigation. Their education had been disrupted – some of them had been in six ships in two years. They knew little of specialist work, having often being put to typing or similar tasks by the very officers supposed to be teaching them.

This letter demonstrates widespread failings. Possibly the selectors were not always choosing suitable boys – allowing the irresponsible to enter the Navy. Certainly the colleges were failing to ensure their students absorbed the required knowledge, acquired the habit of studying in their spare time, or obtained any sense of responsibility. The system of educating midshipmen was unsatisfactory – they were not learning science, seamanship, or leadership. The training of midshipmen, and associated issues such as the examinations for promotion to lieutenant, were key subjects for the Custance Committee appointed in early 1912.

The committee was so concerned about the examinations for lieutenant that it quickly produced a first report. The committee was of the opinion that these examinations were the root cause of most of the problems in educating midshipmen. Midshipmen were entirely pre-occupied with study and were

² Letter from Admiral Sir Herbert King-Hall to Admiral Sir George King-Hall, in ed. by L King-Hall, *Sea Saga*, p.356

³ TNA ADM 116/1288 Vol 1, Letter 719/P.81 from the Officer Commanding Second Division Home Fleet (Vice-Admiral Sir John R Jellicoe) to the Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir William Graham Greene) 25 May 1912

neglecting their practical training as a result.⁴ This tendency was encouraged by officers who were anxious for their midshipmen to pass as well as possible and midshipmen were examined weekly in many ships.⁵ This pre-occupation stemmed from the fifteen months seniority to be gained from the examinations and the inclusion of voluntary subjects. These subjects were designed to promote habits of self-education, but in fact were neglected apart from pre-examination cramming.⁶ The examinations themselves were a frightening prospect – twelve three-hour papers over six days, followed by a further five days of oral examinations.⁷

The performance and behaviour of midshipmen provoked particularly adverse comment from witnesses. Captain Richard Phillimore of HMS *Inflexible* complained that the midshipmen of his ship were anxious and obsessed with examinations. The volume of information they were required to absorb meant that they had a wide range of superficial knowledge, but lacked detailed knowledge of any subject except engineering. Additionally, they were incapable of carrying out independent research or learning without supervision and were deficient as seamen and leaders.⁸ Lieutenant Humphry Walwyn, gunnery officer of HMS *Neptune*, complained that midshipmen took six months to become at all useful and that constantly moving between ships and departments harmed their development, as well as hindering the ship.⁹

The committee recommended that seamanship and navigation examinations should take place at sea and should be largely oral.¹⁰ Gunnery, torpedo, and engineering examinations should take place ashore after a further period of preparation.¹¹ The committee felt that languages and history were not essential and should be learnt elsewhere. The function of the examinations was to test professional knowledge and not to cultivate learning – therefore they should concentrate on professional subjects. By reducing the amount of

⁴ *ibid*, First Report of the Committee 'Appointed to Enquire into the Training of Cadets, Midshipmen and Junior Officers of His Majesty's Fleet and Cognate Subjects' (Custance Committee), 18 May 1912, pp.1-2 para.3-5

⁵ *ibid*, First Report of the Custance Committee, enclosure No.3: 'Second Division Confidential Training Memorandum No.7' (Second Division Home Fleet), 27 January 1912

⁶ *ibid*, First Report of the Custance Committee, p.4 para.8

⁷ *ibid*, Third Report of the Custance Committee, 13 September 1912, p.37 para.27

⁸ TNA ADM 116/1288 Vol 2 'Minutes of the Evidence taken before the Committee on Education', evidence of Captain Richard F Phillimore, HMS *Inflexible*, pp.22-26

⁹ *ibid*, Evidence of Lieutenant Humphry T Walwyn, HMS *Neptune*, pp.27-28

¹⁰ TNA ADM 116/1288 Vol 1 Third Report of the Custance Committee, p.37 para.29

¹¹ *ibid*, Third Report of the Custance Committee, p.38 para.32

seniority available to eleven months the pressure to study was reduced, and the time spent as a sub-lieutenant increased to at least thirteen months.¹²

The orders subsequently issued to the fleet stated that, whilst midshipmen in their first year at sea should prioritise attendance at instruction, older midshipmen should gain as much practical experience as possible. To ensure that midshipmen were gaining the required experience, and being taught properly, one lieutenant in each ship was detailed to take charge of them – this officer subsequently became known as the ‘Snottie’s Nurse’. Although midshipmen would be periodically examined in various subjects, they were only to take two major examinations. These were in seamanship and navigation (the latter counting for only 70% of the final mark in the subject) and were to be taken at the end of the midshipman’s training period. After three months at sea as an acting sub-lieutenant the young officer was to sit preliminary papers in gunnery and torpedo. All these examinations were to be taken whilst serving at sea; the acting sub-lieutenants were to move ashore before taking their engineering examination. After short shore courses in gunnery, torpedo and navigation the young officer would proceed to sea as a fully fledged, commissioned, sub-lieutenant.¹³

These recommendations were the precursors of inter-war change; setting a pattern of reducing the scope and importance of academic study and emphasising the practical. However, the abolition of the naval history examination effectively removed tactics and strategy from the curriculum. The abolition of the examinations in English and foreign languages also had a negative impact, making the curriculum extremely narrow and technical. The removal of these subjects also took away much of the scope for self-education. Instead of having some freedom to read, write and think midshipmen were now required only to conquer a mass of technical detail.

The First World War prompted several changes to the education of midshipmen. It was impossible to implement the full training programme under wartime conditions; many ships were constantly at sea and often at action stations. Classroom instruction was inevitably curtailed and it was hard for midshipmen to gain experience in all areas of their duties. In particular the

¹² *ibid*, First Report of the Custance Committee, p.3 para.17

¹³ TNA ADM 116/1288 Vol 3 Circular to fleet CW.8774/1912 ‘Education and Training of Cadets, Midshipmen and Junior Officers of HM Fleet’ April 1913

requirement for midshipmen to spend a third of their time in the engine room was proving impossible to meet.

Admiral Sir John Jellicoe wrote to the Admiralty in August 1915 discussing the problems faced by the Grand Fleet which he commanded. Midshipmen were making satisfactory progress in some areas of the syllabus but not in navigation or engineering. Because they were constantly needed on deck, midshipmen were not spending sufficient time in the engine room to become competent watch keepers. Their roles in the action organisation of the ship also prevented midshipmen from practising navigation. Although peacetime routine was being followed in harbour, midshipmen were not completing the academic syllabus.¹⁴

The logical solution was to reduce the time devoted to engineering which would not be the future career of most midshipmen. In November 1915 the proportion of time midshipmen were required to devote to engineering was dropped from one-third to one-eighth. However midshipmen were able to choose to specialise in engineering with a view to becoming engineer officers in the future. Midshipmen who chose to specialise in engineering were able to devote most of their time to the subject, becoming part of the engine room complement for watch-keeping and action stations.¹⁵ Those midshipmen who did not wish to specialise in engineering were able to devote more time to seamanship and executive specialist subjects such as gunnery. However only with the abolition of inter-changeability in the 1920s was the Navy able to really address the deficiencies in the education of executive midshipmen.

Inter-War Reform – Focus on Executive Skills

There was no doubt that reform was needed, the Goodenough Committee report of 1918 painted a sorry picture of midshipmen: ‘memories overtaxed, minds insufficiently active and without a notebook, slide rule and a book of

¹⁴ TNA ADM 116/1478 Grand Fleet Letter No.1646/HF.997 from the C-in-C Grand Fleet (Admiral Sir John R Jellicoe) to the Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir William Graham Greene) 11 August 1915. Enclosure in the report of the committee to ‘Consider and Report as to the Immediate Steps Which Should be Taken in Conjunction with the Course of Instruction and Examination of Junior Officers for the Rank of Lieutenant on the Termination of the War’ (Lowry Committee) 28 June 1916

¹⁵ TNA ADM 116/1478 Report of the committee ‘on the Engineering Training of Midshipmen in the Fleet During War’ (Duff Committee) 13 November 1915 (enclosure in the Lowry Committee Report); p.33 para.4, pp.33-37 para.6-12; the Duff Committee’s recommendations were promulgated as AWO 2158 on 10 December 1915

logarithms they are lost'; midshipmen were bad at mathematics, incapable of self- education and irresponsible.¹⁶ A 1920 letter to the Treasury admitted that: 'No satisfactory method has ever been devised for continuing afloat their general education'.¹⁷

In February 1923 new orders for midshipmen's training were published in the form of AFO 442/23 which clearly stated the purpose of the training: 'The primary object of midshipmen serving at sea is to enable them to obtain experience in their duties as officers. Training based on formal instruction is a secondary objective'. This AFO required midshipmen to devote two out of every three months to seamanship and the remainder to technical subjects. The development of officer-like qualities was to take priority over instruction – all midshipmen were to take as full a part as possible in the work of the ship. Officer-like qualities were to be developed through boat work and assisting specialist officers. Executive officers were all to aid in the development of these qualities, although the snottie's nurse and the ship's captain retained overall responsibility.¹⁸

A clear picture of how midshipmen actually spent their time is provided by a 1923 report from HMS *Queen Elizabeth*. The report stated that the average midshipman served two years and two months in the fleet, spent as follows:

Weekends 200 days,
Fleet exercises etc 123 days,
Formal instruction 122 days,
Leave 91 days,
General drills 49 days,
Regattas and sporting contests 39 days,
Boat work 36 days.¹⁹

These numbers suggest that the practical work done by midshipmen tended to be heavily supervised and there was not a great deal of it. No

¹⁶ ADM 116/1734 Goodenough Committee Report, 3 March 1918 pp.2-4 (para.2)

¹⁷ TNA T 161/94, Treasury paper S.7016, Admiralty letter CW.16117/20 from the Deputy Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir Vincent Baddeley) to the Secretary of the Treasury (Sir George Barstow) 12 January 1921 para.4

¹⁸ TNA ADM 1/8688/183, CW.7475/25 Contains a copy of AFO 442/23, which was promulgated on 23 February 1923

¹⁹ *ibid*, CW.7475/25 Submission 1667/AF.237 'Midshipman - Training' from the C-in-C Atlantic (Admiral Sir John M de Robeck) to the Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir Oswyn Murray) 8 August 1924

comparative figures exist and so comparisons cannot be made to either later periods or ships excluded from the *Queen Elizabeth* survey.

As part of their training midshipmen spent four months in destroyers, and undertake a two week course in signalling – which always took place ashore. Although executive midshipmen were no longer expected to master the details of engineering, they were still required to spend two months working in the engine room. This more specialised training all took place in the final year of the young officer's time as a midshipman. The senior midshipman's duties generally included acting as assistant officer of the watch and assisting specialist officers. Junior midshipmen concentrated on gaining as much practical experience as possible, taking part in all manner of drills and other activities. Theoretical study, boat work, and practising for the examinations in seamanship and navigation, occupied all midshipmen.

It is hardly surprising that, despite the best efforts of the reformers, the exhaustion amongst midshipmen remarked upon by the Custance Committee still existed. In 1923, the commanding officer of HMS *Carysfort* complained that midshipmen needed to be 'shaken into shape'; while the commanding officer of HMS *Dragon* remarked that they were 'tame' and lethargic.²⁰ While many officers were sympathetic, some were not – although few approached the venom of Rear-Admiral Thesiger who, in 1922, wrote that: 'If a midshipman does not get a second, he is wanting in ordinary intelligence'.²¹

In 1925 the task of reforming midshipmen's training fell to DTSD Captain Vernon Haggard. He thought that officer-like qualities were best developed by midshipmen filling responsible roles and taking a full part in the running of their ship whilst undertaking an academic syllabus of limited scope.²² Haggard succeeded in getting the academic syllabi for midshipmen dramatically reduced, but nothing else was done to ease the situation

Despite these concerns, Haggard's reforms seem to have been reasonably satisfactory for no more reform occurred until the early 1930s. By

²⁰ *ibid*, Un-numbered enclosures: HMS *Carysfort* letter No.D2.958 from the officer commanding HMS *Carysfort* (Captain Frederick P Loder-Symonds) to de Robeck 24 April 1924 (para.6) and HMS *Dragon* letter No.115/5 from the officer commanding HMS *Dragon* (Captain Bernard WM Fairbairn) to de Robeck 10 March 1924 (para.2)

²¹ TNA ADM 1/8669/178, CW.14878/22, Letter No.61/A/12 from the officer commanding HMS *King George V* (Rear-Admiral Bertram S Thesiger) to the C-in-C Mediterranean (Admiral Sir Osmond de B Brock) 16 December 1922 (para.8)

²² TNA ADM 1/8688/183, CW.7574/24 Memorandum for the Board of Admiralty produced by DTSD (Captain Vernon HS Haggard) 6 February 1925

1929 however it had become clear that AFO 442/23, although an improvement on previous systems, was not a cure for all evils. In this year Admiral Sir Frederick Field, C-in-C Mediterranean, wrote a long letter laying out the deficiencies of the revised system. Field was entirely sympathetic with the aims of AFO 442/23 but thought that it had not gone far enough in reducing the academic workload of midshipmen: 'The very comprehensive and detailed syllabus must if carried out practically defeat the primary object'.²³

Field considered most of the technical information learnt by midshipmen to be of little practical value; especially as the sub-lieutenants courses covered the most important information – that needed by an officer on a daily basis. He particularly criticised the ship construction and signal courses. In Field's view, midshipmen should devote a great deal of time to working with boats, especially under sail or oar. A certificate of boat handling proficiency should be introduced. Midshipmen should also spend more time practising navigation. To ensure high standards there should be fewer midshipmen in each ship (currently there were up to twenty in a capital ship and twelve in a cruiser) and the captain of the ship should be personally responsible for their development. Fleet education officers should visit each ship, advising the captain and inspecting the work of the instructors.²⁴

Field's paper was circulated around the different Admiralty departments for comment. The Director of Tactical Division, Captain Henry Thursfield, was cautiously in favour of change. Although he agreed that improvements were needed, he thought constant changes to the curriculum would cause more damage than the existing shortcomings. Any new system should be left in place for five years. Perhaps the solution lay in a change of routine, midshipmen could do the work of the ship during the day and study in the dog watches rather than playing sport or going ashore.²⁵

The Captain of the Portsmouth Signal School, Captain WB Mackenzie, agreed that the signal course was too technical. He suggested that midshipmen should spend a month attached to the signal division, learning its work and the signalling required of the officer of the watch. However the nature of the work of the specialist signal officer should not be covered until the sub-lieutenants

²³ TNA ADM 116/2806A Letter 'The Training of Midshipmen' from the C-in-C Mediterranean (Admiral Sir Frederick L Field) to Murray 27 December 1929, para.4

²⁴ TNA ADM 116/2806A, *ibid*, para.6-8

²⁵ TNA ADM 116/2806A, CW.2301/1930, TD.3308/30 Comments of the Director of Tactical Division (Captain Henry G Thursfield) on 'The Training of Midshipmen' 10 February 1930

course. He favoured the appointment of a committee to consider the training of cadets and midshipmen.²⁶

Opinion was firmly in favour of reforming the syllabus for midshipmen. Whilst it was agreed that midshipmen must devote most of their time to practical work, argument raged over what amount of academic work was necessary or desirable. Although the Advisor on Education, Alexander McMullen, continued to argue in favour of academic work, his was an increasingly isolated opinion.²⁷ Opposition to McMullen's views was encapsulated by Captain James Ritchie: 'DTSD entirely concurs that it would be disastrous to allow the young officer's brains to rust at this period, but parts company with him when he implies that rusting can only be prevented by the contemplation of non-corrosive ink applied to paper'.²⁸

Further discussion ultimately resulted in the promulgation of AFO 2315/32 on 30 September 1932. The AFO took four months to draft – illustrating the importance attached to it. This AFO gave each period in the education of the junior officer a clear purpose, thus providing officer training with a structure it had previously lacked. Cadets were to be educated – absorbing the theoretical and background information needed later in their careers – and Dartmouth should provide both general and professional education; Special Entry cadets required only professional education. Midshipmen were to acquire officer-like qualities including leadership and seamanship. Finally, sub-lieutenants were to enhance their professional knowledge – learning the details of their profession.

For midshipmen there was a greatly reduced academic syllabus which excluded all material covered by the sub-lieutenants courses. This syllabus, unlike its predecessors, did not require a set number of hours; instead it required around two hours of lectures or classes per week. Officers were to supervise all the instruction midshipmen received aboard their ships. Efforts were made to reduce the number of midshipmen in each ship, and to keep

²⁶ TNA ADM 116/2806A, CW.11/1930 Comments of the Captain of Portsmouth Signal School (Captain WB Mackenzie) on 'The Training of Midshipmen' 21 March 1930

²⁷ TNA ADM 116/2806A, Comments of the Advisor on Education (Alexander McMullen) on the training of midshipmen 29 April 1930

²⁸ TNA ADM 116/2806A, CW.6101/31 Comments of DTSD (Captain James SM Ritchie) on the training of midshipmen 27 November 1931

midshipmen in the same ship for long periods and so ensure continuity of learning.²⁹

AFO 2315/32 tackled most of the deficiencies in the early career education of Royal Navy officers. As well as the concerns raised by Field, it also addressed most of the concerns raised by the Invergordon mutiny; indeed the Watson Committee subsequently saw it as the direct product of the mutiny.³⁰ The new regulations ensured that once at sea young officers were provided with the time and help they needed to learn the practical duties of their profession.

Further discussion stemmed from a submission made by the C-in-C North America and West Indies, Vice-Admiral Sir Reginald Drax, in September 1934 suggesting that, owing to the harsh climate, only older midshipmen should be sent to his station and even they should not stay longer than a year.³¹

It is unclear what prompted this suggestion as the healthiness of the West Indies station does not seem to have been a concern at the time. DTSD, Captain Geoffrey Arbuthnot, agreed with Drax – he thought that midshipmen should not serve in the West Indies, East Indies or African squadrons. Apart from health concerns he also cited the small number and limited variety of ships on these stations (which limited professional experience of carrier, destroyer, and battle fleet operations), and the disruption caused by travelling to and from the station. He favoured confining midshipmen to the Home, Mediterranean, and China stations. The inclusion of China is slightly puzzling given that it is far further from the UK than the West Indies but presumably the distance was compensated for by the variety of ships on the station. Arbuthnot also suggested that there should be fewer midshipmen in each ship and wanted midshipmen to spend all their time in one ship (other than destroyer and aviation time).³²

These suggestions were ultimately rejected and the reasons for their rejection indicate the changed attitude towards midshipmen. Naval Assistant to the Second Sea Lord, Captain George Edward-Collins, stated that experienced midshipmen were needed by all ships including those newly commissioned;

²⁹ TNA ADM 116/2806A, CW.7042/1932, AFO 2315/32, 30 September 1932

³⁰ TNA ADM 116/3763 Interim report of the 'Committee on the Training of Junior and Specialist officers' (Watson Committee) 19 March 1938, para.46

³¹ TNA ADM 116/3334, CW.7914/1934, Submission No.511 'Midshipman's Examination' from the C-in-C West Indies (Vice-Admiral Sir Reginald Drax) to the Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir Oswyn Murray) 6 September 1934

³² *ibid*, TSD.2575/34, DTSD's (Captain Geoffrey S Arbuthnot) comments on the training of midshipmen 14 November 1934

changes of ship were essential.³³ Director of Naval Ordnance, Captain Bruce Fraser, stated that midshipmen did responsible work and that moving them between ships impaired efficiency.³⁴ Director of Personnel Services, Rear-Admiral Sir James Somerville, remarked that if midshipmen were removed from ships they must be replaced by senior ratings, which were in increasingly short supply.³⁵

Although they did not agree with each other as to how long midshipmen should serve on a ship, all three respondents felt that they were an important part of the ship's company and doing vital work. These sentiments were entirely in line with AFO 2315/32. Thus the requirement for midshipmen to do the practical work of their profession prevented the removal of midshipmen from certain stations and dictated the frequency with which they must change ship — meaning that no formal policy changes could be made. The number of midshipmen in each ship was being steadily reduced as the fleet began to expand.

Many officers outside the Admiralty were concerned about the education of officers in one way or another — there was an increasing recognition that the existing system was far from satisfactory, and a quantity of official correspondence on the subject. In 1934 a letter from the C-in-C Home Fleet, Admiral Sir William Boyle, proclaimed that 'The most important activity of the fleet in peacetime is the training of officers'.³⁶ This letter was concerned primarily with ignorance of strategy and tactics, and it was to these subjects that naval attention turned in 1935.

In 1935 the James Committee was appointed to consider what education officers should receive in strategy and tactics. This committee was not concerned with questions of seamanship, technical knowledge, or leadership, but purely with the neglected areas of tactical and strategic knowledge — what might be termed the arts of war. The James Committee concerned itself with officers ranked sub-lieutenant and above and consequently its work is largely

³³ *ibid*, Naval Assistant to the Second Sea Lord's (Captain George FB Edward-Collins) comments on the training of midshipmen 6 December 1934

³⁴ TNA ADM 116/3334, CW.9432/34 Director of Naval Ordnance's (Captain Bruce A Fraser) comments on the training of midshipmen 29 December 1934

³⁵ *ibid*, Director of Personnel Services' (Rear-Admiral Sir James F Somerville) comments on the training of midshipmen 25 January 1935

³⁶ CCA RMSY 6/3 The Papers of Admiral Sir Bertram Home Ramsay, letter from the C-in-C Home Fleet (Admiral Sir William HD Boyle) to the Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir Oswyn Murray) 18 July 1934 (Para.3)

outside the scope of this thesis. However, it is worth noting the committee's conclusion that the only education in strategy and tactics that cadets received was the study of naval history, while midshipmen received none at all.³⁷

Midshipmen did in fact receive a limited education in tactics and strategy, as discussed below, but it was delivered in a piecemeal style and varied enormously in both quality and quantity. Such negligence was to some extent unavoidable. Midshipmen's training was increasingly geared towards seamanship and leadership; a midshipman could not simultaneously stand at a plotting table studying an exercise and develop his leadership skills in a gun turret or range finder. Despite the reduced curriculum, midshipmen still had a great deal to learn, and many officers would have agreed with Andrew Cunningham who – as Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff – wrote: 'There is in my opinion a danger that young officers will attempt to run before they can walk if they start to think about policy and higher strategy before they have a sound knowledge of their profession'.³⁸

Cunningham's comments illustrate that this was not really a new dilemma. Although the problem of teaching young officers the arts of war was newly a matter of concern, it was, like the teaching of academic studies, seamanship and leadership, compromised by the vast amount of information that midshipmen were required to absorb. The James Committee realised that midshipmen knew very little of tactics and strategy but significantly offered no remedy. It suggested a war course for sub-lieutenants but no changes to the training of cadets and midshipmen.³⁹ This policy was in accordance with AFO 2315/32 – by now firmly established as the guiding policy in the early career education of officers – which prescribed that such education should be left until officers reached the rank of sub-lieutenant.

The final inter-war committee to consider officer education was the Watson Committee of 1938. It had a wide remit, concentrating on the courses undertaken by sub-lieutenants, but also including the training of midshipmen, cadets, and specialist officers. The membership of the committee was

³⁷ TNA ADM 1/9041, CW.4100/35 'Report of the Committee on Training of Naval Officers for War' (James Committee) 21 May 1935, p.20 Appendix I

³⁸ TNA ADM 1/9591, CW.16622/38 Comments of the Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff (Vice-Admiral Sir Andrew B Cunningham) 6 December 1938; Cunningham was commenting on a paper on the education of officers in tactics and strategy presented to the Board of Admiralty by the Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff (Rear-Admiral Sir Lancelot E Holland) 28 November 1938

³⁹ TNA ADM 1/9041, CW.4100/35 James Committee Report, 21 May 1935 p.7 para.19-20, also p.20 Appendix I

exclusively naval; it was not intended to make an in-depth study of the academic curricula studied by junior officers, but to concentrate on their professional education and in particular the development of officer-like qualities.⁴⁰ The Watson Committee was the first since the Custance to enjoy this wide remit – and it enjoyed freer rein than its predecessor, which had been concerned with tweaking the Fisher-Selborne scheme.

The formation of the Watson Committee was prompted by the increasing shortage of junior officers in the fleet and the consequent desire to reduce the length of their training. However it also reflected the dissatisfaction of many officers with the existing scheme of education – this being illustrated by the fact that the committee was appointed only after the decision had been made to shorten the course by a total of thirteen months (the time spent on the training cruiser was halved to four months, the time spent as a midshipman reduced by four months to two years, and the Greenwich course for sub-lieutenants cut from six months to one). The committee's work concentrated on the problems of scientific and mathematical education – how much was needed, when it should be received, and how courses ashore should be balanced with gaining practical experience.⁴¹ It was therefore entirely in keeping with the bulk of the Royal Navy's inter-war educational debates.

The Watson Committee published its report on 30 June 1938; a summary of the findings was circulated for departmental comment by the Second Sea Lord on 16 July.⁴² The committee declared the existing scheme of junior officer education essentially sound, although some changes were needed. The problems raised by the committee were to be expected; the course as a whole was too intense and did not encourage self-education, midshipmen did not derive enough value from their time at sea, and the technical courses for sub-lieutenants were too hard.

For a solution the Watson Committee looked to the First World War. It argued that the war had been won by officers who were not trained scientists, but were keen, motivated, and self-educated. Much of the equipment they used

⁴⁰ The committee members were Rear-Admiral Bertram C Watson, Captain Noel V Grace, Captain Clifford Caslon, and Captain William R Slayter. Its remit was laid out in letter CW.7206/1937 and the full terms of reference can be found in ADM 116/3763 Interim Report of the Watson Committee para.1-3

⁴¹ TNA ADM 116/3763 Interim Report of the Watson Committee, para.6-9

⁴² TNA ADM 116/3709 CW.16970/38, Paper B.31, Second Sea Lord's (Admiral Sir Martin E Dunbar-Nasmith) memorandum on the report of the Watson Committee 16 July 1938; and attachment 'Watson Committee: Summary of Findings and Remarks of Departments'

they had themselves developed. On the other hand the pre First World War Royal Navy had emphasised technical development at the price of training in fighting. Therefore, self-education must be encouraged, technical courses made simpler, and midshipmen should do no schoolwork except that required for navigation. All officers should be encouraged to study the wider aspects of their profession rather than technical minutiae.⁴³

The Watson Committee's findings and suggestions demonstrate the lack of progress made in reforming the early career education of officers by the inter-war Royal Navy. The concerns raised by the committee were much the same as those raised by earlier committees indicating that many problems, although well known, went unsolved. However the rejection of the committee's suggestions, and the feeling that excessive change had contributed to the difficulties, was recognition that the problems the Royal Navy faced were insoluble – at least as long as it persisted in entering officers who had not completed their general education. These insoluble problems, combined with the demands of finance and fleet growth, meant that the Watson Committee had very little practical impact.

Reforming the education of midshipmen would have been far easier had they all been serving in near identical circumstances. Instead there was enormous variation arising not only from changed syllabi and changing regulations but also as a result of varying circumstances – service aboard different types of ship, in different parts of the world, sometimes at war and sometimes not. Midshipmen were also prey to the whims and character flaws of those set in authority over them.

The Realities of Midshipmen's Education

As with almost everything aboard ship, responsibility for the education of midshipmen rested on the captain, he was expected to take some interest in the midshipmen under his command but his role was ill-defined. Day to day authority rested with the snottie's nurse. This officer, normally the navigator, was required to oversee the midshipmen, making sure that they progressed in their studies and ensuring that discipline and humanity reigned in the gunroom.

⁴³ TNA ADM 1/9461 'Final Report of the Committee on the Training of Junior and Specialist Officers' (Watson Committee) 30 June 1938 Appendix I para.7-8

Within the gunroom authority rested with the sub-lieutenant although senior midshipmen had some power over the junior. The sub-lieutenant dispensed justice, kept order, and ensured that midshipmen carried out their duties. For the purposes of instruction midshipmen were subordinated to other officers, petty officers, or ratings. In theory, this system exposed the midshipman to a variety of influences, each of which had its own specific role to play.

The instruction of midshipmen was carried out in various ways. For most subjects there would be a programme of lectures, normally delivered by an officer with appropriate specialist qualifications, private study such as reading or essay writing, and some opportunity to see or use the equipment in question. Because ships often carried large numbers of midshipmen, assigned to a variety of duties, theoretical instruction might not be in tune with practical. A midshipman might find himself first drawing the steering gear, then assigned to a party maintaining it, before finally being lectured on how it worked.

Midshipmen were supposed to be available to take part in the work aboard ship as required and were generally given specific duties such as navigator's assistant, bridge watch keeper, or being in charge of a boat. In these situations, how much the midshipman learnt depended on how willing the officers in charge of him were to give him responsibility, what teaching he was given, and how much he understood of what was going on.

At all times midshipmen were required to keep journals. Time was allotted every Sunday for writing-up journals which were expected to contain an entry for almost every day. Journals were essentially diaries, recording the progress of the ship and the activities it carried out as well as the personal and professional lives of the writers. Additionally they contained essays written on a huge variety of topics, observations on current affairs, and a wide variety of artwork. They were articles of importance – the snottie's nurse inspected them monthly and the captain of the ship occasionally. A journal could earn up to fifty marks when the midshipman came to be examined for the rank of sub-lieutenant.

All journals contained a sheet of instructions laying down the value of the journal in examination, the penalties for losing or abusing it, and the frequency with which it was to be examined. From 1928 onwards there was a list of the objects of writing it. Journals were intended to train young officers in

observation, self-expression, and habits of orderliness. These objects were never challenged officially but instead we find Field writing that journals: 'Should be regarded as a means of providing opportunities for young officers to write clear and intelligent accounts and appreciations of current events including fleet exercises'.⁴⁴

Many record the details of the daily evolutions of the ship, as well as the subjects being studied by their midshipman author. The production of the journal seems to have ensured that lessons were well learned, also demonstrating how much midshipmen understood of what was happening around them. Although they rarely reveal their author's emotions, journals are an excellent source for the historian – providing great insight into the daily lives and education of midshipmen.

Daily drills are often recorded in detail and accompanied by sketches. Journal entries reveal the benefit midshipmen derived from these evolutions, as well as how far they understood them. For instance, one midshipman recorded: 'I find it useful and at the same time quite interesting to be on the bridge as a special sea dutyman'.⁴⁵

In addition to drills and evolutions, journals reveal their owners grasp of shipboard life and organisation. Whilst the finer details of such things escaped many midshipmen, it is clear that most had a good understanding of the principles. Within days of joining *Royal Oak* in the Mediterranean, Midshipman Mackeown recorded the following observations: 'It is useless to expect anyone to work hard in the heat of the day' and 'It is a sound idea to encourage anyone to apply to sickbay at once for minor things'.⁴⁶ Such simple observations formed the base of an officer's ability to effectively run a ship and lead her company.

Midshipmen's journals are littered with discussions of fleet exercises, tactical diagrams, and discussions of the use of various weapons. They are therefore the best available means of gauging the tactical and strategic knowledge of midshipmen and also give some indication of how these subjects were taught.

Examples include the journal of Frank Twiss, which contains a discussion of the role of the cruiser in trade protection, along with a map of

⁴⁴ TNA ADM 116/2806A Letter 'The Training of Midshipmen' from the C-in-C Mediterranean (Admiral Sir Frederick L Field) to the Secretary of the Admiralty (Oswyn Murray), 27 December 1929 para.8d

⁴⁵ RNM 1987.13 Journal kept by Midshipman Henry H Mackeown entry of 17 September 1927

⁴⁶ *ibid*, entry of 7 September 1927

trade routes, and the realisation of 'vast ocean areas, the responsibility for the policing of which is thrown on our much reduced cruiser squadrons'.⁴⁷ John Worth recorded a lecture and demonstration of the uses of star shell.⁴⁸ Henry Brooke recalled attending a tactical course in Malta where he studied the functions of different types of ship.⁴⁹

Journal entries suggest that midshipmen generally had a sound grasp of tactical and strategic theory – at least on a basic, and somewhat fragmented, level. They also suggest that midshipmen rarely received any practical experience, despite the availability of suitable facilities and opportunities. Although midshipmen were obliged to work in every department of their ship, their journals rarely consider the difficulties posed by logistics or the limitations of equipment. Midshipmen rarely participated in the planning of exercises, or in tabletop explorations of tactics and strategy, other than as observers – senior officers choosing to exclude them.

One of the few exceptions to this appears to have been Captain Kenneth Dewar of the *Royal Oak*. Dewar took the flagship's midshipmen ashore to the tactical exercise table at the Fleet Education Centre in Malta (presumably the venue of the course attended by Brooke) and actively encouraged them to role play as commanders of cruisers and destroyers. Dewar insisted on all his executive officers taking part in these exercises, some of which anticipated future events with impressive accuracy. The *Royal Oak's* officers brought urgently needed stores convoys through enemy waters and Commander Wake-Walker masterminded the escape of his small scouting force from a superior enemy.⁵⁰

Journals also offer a useful insight into the instruction midshipmen received whilst on the aviation courses provided for them. By the mid 1920s the Royal Navy was sufficiently convinced of the importance of the aircraft to make aviation part of every executive officer's education. Royal Navy aircraft carriers made visits to Torbay in the course of which their aircraft visited Dartmouth where a landing strip had been specially prepared. AFO 1382/25 of May 1925 provided for all midshipmen to spend a fortnight in an aircraft carrier. Midshipmen were not compelled to fly, but there was a syllabus designed to

⁴⁷ RNM TWISS/1978.925 Journal kept by Midshipman Frank R Twiss entry of 11 January 1930

⁴⁸ RNM 1985.154 Journal kept by Midshipman John H Worth entry of 24 November 1938

⁴⁹ RNM 1985.206/2 Journal kept by Midshipman Henry JA Brooke entry of 28 January 1935

⁵⁰ RNM 1987.13 Journal kept by Midshipman Henry H Mackeown entries of 18 November 1928; 25 November 1928; and 9 November 1928

introduce them to all aspects of naval aviation and their attendance was noted on the E190 forms which provided a record of their training.⁵¹

Midshipmen seem to have enjoyed their aviation training, writing positively of the experiences in their journals. However whereas most of the fourteen journals I have read contain discussions of the strategic and tactical use of destroyers, cruisers, or submarines, very few consider the value of aircraft – suggesting that the course did not have the intended effect. Of the four journals I particularly studied for reactions to the air course, two contain a detailed account of the course itself but no indication as to how much information had been absorbed.⁵² In both cases, the course had been very busy with multiple lectures on many days. One writer showed a marked lack of interest in the course.⁵³

Only one of these journals contained a detailed discussion of the role of aircraft in naval warfare, advocating their potential for controlling narrow seas and carrying out reconnaissance. The author stressed the need for air and sea services to co-operate closely and the potential for shore-based aircraft to disrupt civilian life. However this midshipman's experiences were unusual – he had served in *Royal Oak* and Captain Dewar had taken care to ensure his midshipmen were well versed in strategy and tactics.⁵⁴

Carrier service often provided an introduction to the perils of naval service – fatal accidents were a common occurrence. Flying accidents were the first exposure that many young officers received to violent death and they learnt to react calmly and stoically as they must in action. One cadet's letter to his parents contained the bland remark: 'Rather an unfortunate smash occurred between two of the machines landing on *Courageous* and both pilots were killed and I believe both planes sunk'.⁵⁵

Midshipmen seem to have enjoyed the aviation course provided for them but it does not appear to have achieved its educational aims – perhaps owing to

⁵¹ TNA ADM 116/25541, CW 9920/26 Memorandum prepared for the Board of Admiralty by the Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff (Rear-Admiral Sir Dudley PR Pound) 21 October 1926 pp.1-2

⁵² RNM 1987.112/1 Journal kept by Midshipman Ian M Balfour, air course in HMS *Glorious* 21 June- 2 July 1932; RNM 2004.27/1 Journal kept by Midshipman Frank Morgan, air course in HMS *Glorious* 7 January- 25 January 1933

⁵³ RNM 1994.292/6 Journal kept by Midshipman Peter E Fanshawe, air course in HMS *Hermes* 23 March- 4 April 1931

⁵⁴ RNM 1987.13 Journal kept by Midshipman Henry H Mackeown, air course in HMS *Courageous* 16 June- 30 June 1929

⁵⁵ CCA DUPO 4/3 Biographical material collected by Donald McLachlan relating to Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound, letter from Cadet Brian Jones to his parents 26 May 1931

its extensive syllabus and the general unfamiliarity of midshipmen with tactical and strategic thinking. Carrier service was also valuable because it taught the importance of equipment maintenance, correct drills, and maintaining performance in the face of death or serious injury. Finally, all exposure to military aviation served to open midshipmen's eyes to the changing nature of naval warfare.

Another eye opener was the time midshipmen spent in destroyers. Midshipmen spent four months in destroyers and most remembered the experience fondly and considered it a vital part of their training. Destroyers were small and tended to be cramped and uncomfortable but there were numerous compensations. Midshipmen lived in the wardroom, benefiting from spending time with the officers, and they had more responsibility than aboard big ships while the atmosphere was generally more relaxed and informal.

Henry Mackeown benefited from his time in *Witherington*, noting that fleet exercises looked very different when viewed from a destroyer.⁵⁶ Edward Ashmore found that his service in *Dainty* 'was tremendous fun and less uncomfortable than I had expected. All we midshipmen wanted to be in destroyers when we became sub-lieutenants, and it was good to have a little practical experience which bore out all our expectations – few officers, plenty of action and easier relations than those in bigger ships'.⁵⁷ In fact autobiography writers appear unanimous in praising their destroyer time.

Older officers were more divided in their opinions. In preparing AFO 442/23, Haggard sought the views of many officers serving in the fleet. One of the most divisive issues was the value of service in destroyers. The C-in-C of the Atlantic Fleet, Admiral Sir John de Robeck, felt that service in destroyers bred self-reliance, self-confidence and initiative.⁵⁸ The fleet instructor captain felt it bred over-confidence, slackness, self-importance, and a tendency to imitate the Navy's more idiosyncratic officers who tended to gravitate to small ships.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ RNM 1987.13 Journal kept by Midshipman Henry H Mackeown entry of 16 March 1929

⁵⁷ Ashmore, *Battle and the Breeze*, p.21

⁵⁸ TNA ADM 1/8688/183, CW.5728/23, Letter No.859/AF.237 'Midshipmen - Training' submission from C-in-C Atlantic Fleet (Admiral Sir John M de Robeck) to the Secretary of the Admiralty 4 June 1923 para.2

⁵⁹ TNA ADM 1/8688/183, CW.5728/23, Letter No.45/2/18 'Educational Arrangements in the Atlantic Fleet', report by the Instructor Captain Atlantic Fleet, (Instructor Captain Francis H Batchellor) submitted to de Robeck 20 March 1923; enclosed in de Robeck's submission of 4 June 1923

Aside from service in destroyers, midshipmen gained most of their practical experience in ship handling and responsibility through boat work. Handling powered boats gave early lessons in ship handling, teaching the importance of alertness, forethought, maintenance, and intimate knowledge of how an individual craft handled. Sailing craft were particularly valuable in teaching young officers to react quickly in order to avert disaster. Being responsible for the smart appearance and work of any boat taught the importance of attention to detail. These lessons were better learnt whilst in command of a motor boat rather than a destroyer, and in a situation in which the inefficiency or incompetence of a crew member primarily imperilled a midshipman's leave rather than a ship and her men.

Great emphasis was placed on boat work by many naval officers. The Goodenough Committee of 1918 declared that if a boat was moving a midshipman should be in it and that the young gentlemen 'must command their boats on all occasions'.⁶⁰ Field's emphasis on boat work is described above. Perusal of *The Naval Review* suggests a great enthusiasm for boat work, but considerable debate as to what form it should take.

Debate centred on the relative value of sailing and powered craft. Advocates of the former pointed towards the development of teamwork and endurance, along with seamanship skills, in particular the ability to anticipate and react to difficulties.⁶¹ Advocates of the latter pointed out the obsolescence of sail, the dangers it posed to inexperienced personnel, and that making trips under sail condemned men to a longer, colder and wetter journey than was necessary.⁶² It was also suggested that modern ship handling skills were better developed in powered craft, one writer noting that many officers 'acquired any ability we may have to think quickly and to keep calm in an emergency from the handling of powerboats and cars or motorcycles'.⁶³

Generally, the normal work of the fleet was done in powered boats, ranging from small motor boats to large steam powered drifters. The experience of working in powered boats fulfilled the expectations of midshipmen; it was a

⁶⁰ ADM 116/1734 Goodenough Committee Report, p.5 para.10

⁶¹ Lieutenant JP Dingle, 'Correspondence – Boat Sailing' *The Naval Review* 8 (1920) pp.669-670

⁶² Commander RL Edwards, 'Boats' *The Naval Review* 7 (1919) pp.482-485; Commander RL Edwards, 'The Case Against Boat Sailing' *The Naval Review* 8 (1920) pp.394-396; 'Autoboat', 'This Boat Question' *The Naval Review* 23 (1935) pp.88-89

⁶³ 'Remus', 'This Boat Question' *The Naval Review* 23 (1935) pp.346-247 (p.346)

responsible and exciting role offering variety, the chance to build a strong relationship with ratings, and some degree of danger. The challenge was heightened by the tendency to judge a ship by her boats, highly visible symbols of her smartness and general efficiency. Doubtless many midshipmen would have agreed with Ian Balfour who, after his first day running a boat, admitted that it 'is not as easy as it looks'.⁶⁴

Managing a boatload of drunken sailors was a critical test for the midshipman, who had to ensure the safe and orderly arrival of the boat. This could only be achieved if the passengers were quiet and orderly, frequently bringing the midshipman into conflict with argumentative and violent drunks. The good behaviour of the passengers was in any case essential as the small, heavily laden boats were at risk in bad weather. Undoubtedly, the rewards of successful boat handling were great. For Charles Owen it was 'an opportunity to demonstrate dash, style and competence'.⁶⁵ For Edward Ashmore, whilst irrelevant in war, smart boat handling became a means of instilling pride in a peacetime fleet.⁶⁶

Under these circumstances midshipmen were heavily dependent on their boat crews, in particular the leading seaman who acted as coxswain. Apart from ensuring the safety of the boat the coxswain played an important role in keeping it clean and seaworthy. He played a particularly important role in quieting drunken and fractious libertymen. It is hardly surprising that officers who later wrote autobiographies placed great emphasis on these relationships.

In hindsight the relationship between midshipman and boat's crew seems to take on a great significance. Boat's crews are portrayed as taking a paternal interest in ensuring the success of their midshipmen, and images are presented of a strong and happy relationship between midshipman and crew.⁶⁷ Courtney Anderson had much cause to be grateful to his boat crew remarking 'over and over again they saved me from my own incompetence'.⁶⁸ Conversely Charles Owen found there was 'no prouder participant or onlooker than his own crew when a midshipman pulled off a really smart manoeuvre'.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ RNM 1987.112/1 Journal kept by Midshipman Ian M Balfour, entry of 2 June 1931.

⁶⁵ Owen, *Plain Yarns*, p.118

⁶⁶ Ashmore, *Battle and the Breeze*, p.23

⁶⁷ Apart from the accounts quoted below see also Holloway, *Dartmouth to War*, p.56; Hayes, *Face the Music*, p.55; Whinney, *U-Boat Peril*, p.24

⁶⁸ Anderson, *Seagulls*, p.33

⁶⁹ Owen, *Plain Yarns*, p.118

Boat work was all the more attractive to some midshipmen because it had played a significant role in attracting them to the Navy. Many had been inspired by tales of midshipmen; or by the sight of these young men, seemingly little older than themselves, carrying out glamorous and responsible tasks. As a young Ludovic Kennedy stepped out of HMS *Nelson's* boat, he was consumed by envy and desire: 'I thought, I want to be you, I want to wear a uniform like yours, I want to command a boat like yours, to belong to a ship like yours, like you to be part and parcel of the Navy'.⁷⁰

Joining their first fleet ship meant that midshipmen at last became part of the real navy – rather than being a species of schoolboy – the transformation being confirmed by the state actually paying them for their services. *How to Become a Naval Officer* differentiated between sea service as a cadet and as a midshipman – noting that for cadets joining the training cruiser 'the Promised Land has at last hove in sight'⁷¹ thereby implying that it was only entered on becoming a midshipman. *How to Become a Naval Officer* reinforced the image of midshipmen as responsible naval officers – promising that 'a snottie is an indispensable unit in a big ship'.⁷² Certainly the time for school boyish attitudes and actions had gone – 'the midshipman should cloak himself in a mantle of humble and respectful awe for all things and all men'.⁷³ This advice was echoed by officers at Dartmouth – one cadet was told 'the lowest form of life at sea was a snottie'.⁷⁴

Potential young officers were left in no doubt as to the importance of their time as midshipmen. The gunroom, they were promised, was the centre of shipboard mischief, noise, and high spirits – an unequalled environment for the making of a boy.⁷⁵ Despite the known attractions of picket boats to small boys, *How to Become a Naval Officer* did not place emphasis on this activity. Instead readers were informed that midshipmen take part in the work of the ship – gaining experience in areas including boat work, drills, watch-keeping, and the duties of divisional officers. If they were selected to enter the Navy the education they received as midshipmen would emphasise the practical –

⁷⁰ *ibid*, p.34

⁷¹ Gieves, *Naval Officer* (1923), p.21

⁷² *ibid*, p.25

⁷³ *ibid*, p.23

⁷⁴ Whinney, *U-Boat Peril*, p.22

⁷⁵ Gieves, *Naval Officer* (1923), p.24

academic work being less important than learning the duties of an officer and developing officer-like qualities.⁷⁶

The initial experiences of most midshipmen met their expectations and fulfilled the promises of recruiting literature. Many ships greeted new midshipmen with a promise that if they behaved like responsible adults they would be treated as such. On joining *Valiant* in 1940 Adrian Holloway was informed that he would only be treated like an officer if he behaved like one.⁷⁷ Jock Ritchie was of the opinion that midshipmen, such as his colleagues in *Queen Elizabeth*, who were treated as responsible adults performed far better than those who were treated as children.⁷⁸

New arrivals were typically given twenty-four hours to acclimatise, as well as a guided tour, but there was still much to become accustomed to. Seven days after joining *Royal Oak*, Henry Mackeown – having joined in the work of his division – admitted in his journal that: ‘This was my first general drill and so I was astonished at the shouting, running and amount of gear left lying around’.⁷⁹

The ship itself was not the only new experience; at Dartmouth and in the training cruiser the cadets had out-numbered the officers (and at Dartmouth they had also out-numbered the naval ratings). Most of the naval personnel they had come into contact with had been hand-picked. On joining the fleet midshipmen were exposed to a full range of personnel – including men of all ranks who were unsympathetic, bloody minded, incompetent, or alcoholic. Some midshipmen must have been over-awed by their first sightings of the mess desks where the ratings lived, and intimidated by their occupants. It was only in the fleet that midshipmen were fully exposed to issues such as sex and alcohol consumption, let alone behaviour forbidden by the law or naval regulations such as sodomy and drunkenness.

For some joining was swiftly followed by disappointment. The Royal Navy seems to have failed to prepare its young entrants for the realities of active service. Bertram Ramsay complained that almost all midshipmen and boys deteriorated rapidly on going to sea – becoming slovenly, undisciplined, and disinterested – although within six months 90% of them had recovered

⁷⁶ *ibid*, pp.25-26

⁷⁷ Holloway, *Dartmouth to War*, p.46

⁷⁸ Ritchie, *Letter of Proceedings*, p.140

⁷⁹ RNM 1987.13 Journal kept by Midshipman Henry H Mackeown, entry of 8 September 1927

sufficiently to be a credit to the service.⁸⁰ In both cases this behaviour must have owed something to the young man finding himself suddenly free, not only of the stifling discipline of Dartmouth or the boys training service, but also of the close supervision of the training ships. None the less it is clear that many young men struggled to adapt.

The primary cause of disillusionment was the realisation that the midshipman was not, after all, 'indispensable'. Many midshipmen found they were dividing their time between academic studies, menial uninteresting duties, and watching officers do things they did not understand. Some travelled long distances to join their ships only to find them elsewhere.

Many midshipmen were given very little real responsibility, even if nominally in charge of something they might be subject to constant supervision. Often the coxswain of a boat was actually in charge of the midshipman and would take responsibility for the safety of the boat, correcting the midshipman's mistakes and discouraging stupid or irresponsible behaviour. Whilst this undoubtedly saved many a boat from disaster, it also meant that midshipmen did not gain as much experience as they might have in either handling boats, or in anticipating and responding to responding to dangerous situations, and thus the educational value of boat work was diminished.

One midshipman wrote to the *Naval Review* suggested that this was symptomatic of a wider malaise, it was generally unclear whether midshipmen were supposed to be treated as officers or not, they were frequently treated as subordinate to senior ratings, and were punished as if they were children rather than naval officers. When they were given duties, such as assistant officer of the watch, they tended to be treated as students under instruction rather than being given responsibility. Under these circumstances it was hardly surprising that they behaved irresponsibly.⁸¹ This article crystallised the views expressed by many officers in writing to both the *Naval Review* and to the naval authorities but does not seem to have had any impact.

Above all, the midshipman's enjoyment of his service depended on the atmosphere in the gunroom. This in turn depended on the character and leadership abilities of the sub-lieutenant. The difficulties faced by sub-

⁸⁰ CCA RMSY 6/2 The Papers of Admiral Sir Bertram Home Ramsay; letter from Captain Ramsay HMS *Royal Sovereign* to Captain Gerald Harrison HMS *St Vincent* (training school for boy seamen) 14 September 1934 p.3

⁸¹ Midshipman J Hughes-Hallett, 'Training and Instruction of Junior Officers' *The Naval Review* 9 (1921) pp.584-595

lieutenants were great especially when they had not had much leadership experience. One *Naval Review* writer complained that newly appointed sub-lieutenants 'lose all sense of proportion'.⁸² This was perhaps not surprising given that a sub-lieutenant was 'an absolute ruler'.⁸³

Despite being in their first appointment as commissioned officers, sub-lieutenants were placed in charge of midshipmen little younger than themselves, of equal social status, and perhaps not as amenable to discipline as most ratings. An inexperienced sub-lieutenant, lacking in self confidence, was vulnerable to the combined weight of the senior midshipmen who 'had gone through the often highly unpleasant experiences themselves and probably looked forward to their own little 'kingdoms' later on'.⁸⁴ Under these circumstances much rested on the ability, and willingness, of the snottie's nurse to intervene in a timely and appropriate manner – or alternatively order the sub-lieutenant to cane the recalcitrant midshipmen.

The extreme youth of the cadets sent to sea during the First World War stirred the paternal tendencies of some sub-lieutenants. Stephen King-Hall, sub-lieutenant of HMS *Southampton* in 1914 recorded in his diary: 'We have two young officers from Dartmouth on board, whom I chase always and beat at times in a fatherly manner. I have assured them that, as far as lies in my power, they shall die as an adornment to their profession'.⁸⁵

Bullying tendencies amongst sub-lieutenants could be checked by the presence of Special Entry or Royal Navy Reserve midshipmen, often older than the sub-lieutenant himself. One former officer, himself a product of Dartmouth, suggested that Special Entry midshipmen had no interest in violent gunroom games, doubtless regarding such things as beneath them.⁸⁶ However these midshipmen did not always have a positive influence. They could also be a disruptive element and, during the First World War, some officers saw their presence in the gunrooms of the fleet as detrimental.⁸⁷

⁸² *ibid*, (p.587)

⁸³ Adrian Holloway email to author 14 February 2011

⁸⁴ *ibid*

⁸⁵ Stephen King-Hall diary entry for 27 August 1914, *Sea Saga*, p.376

⁸⁶ Adrian Holloway email to author 14 February 2011

⁸⁷ TNA ADM 156/21 Contains various items illustrating these views including: Letter from Charles Beresford to the First Lord (Arthur Balfour) 4 October 1916; 'Finding of a court of inquiry to investigate into alleged cases of bullying in the gunroom of HMS *Benbow*' 10 January 1917 p.1 para.6 and p.27 para.384; internal Admiralty discussion of bullying in the fleet contained in HF.0012.

The authority of the sub-lieutenant could be overthrown if sufficient force could be mobilised against him. In 1917, Sub-Lieutenant JPF Turner was convicted of claiming to have committed sodomy with another cadet whilst at Dartmouth. Diligent investigation by Turner's mother revealed that he was the victim of a conspiracy by six Royal Naval Reserve midshipmen and a Royal Naval Reserve lieutenant. The allegations arose from resentment of the discipline enforced by Turner although there is no evidence this was unusually harsh.⁸⁸

There is evidence that there was a substantial amount of bullying in the Grand Fleet. This bullying probably resulted from the conditions under which the fleet operated – it spent much of its time in the barren and isolated Scapa Flow preparing for an encounter with the elusive German High Seas Fleet. An inquiry held in January 1917 concluded that the junior midshipmen aboard HMS *Benbow* had been bullied by their seniors and the sub-lieutenant in charge of the gunroom. Although the bullying activities had taken the form of normal gunroom 'evolutions', they had been distinguished by the degrading, humiliating, and punishment-like way in which they had been inflicted. In the aftermath of the inquiry, an Admiralty circular letter informed the captains of ships that they were responsible for supervising their gunrooms and ensuring that bullying did not occur.⁸⁹

Bullying was not a wartime phenomenon but rather a constant feature of gunroom life. In some ships senior officers became aware of bullying in the gunroom and rebellions which should – under naval law – have been severely punished, went completely unremarked, or even resulted in the swift removal of the bully from the ship.

In 1921 the midshipmen of HMS *Repulse* had 'the most ghastly time' and the reason for this is clear – 'the bullying was absolutely unspeakable'; the perpetrators included the sub-lieutenant of the gunroom and a senior midshipman. Frustrated, and otherwise helpless, the junior midshipmen reacted

⁸⁸ TNA ADM 156/156, NL13669/9 Report by court of inquiry into the court martial of Sub-Lieutenant JPF Turner submitted to C-in-C The Nore (Admiral Sir George A Callaghan) 13 March 1918 pp.1-2

⁸⁹ TNA ADM 156/21, Grand Fleet submission No.151/H.F.0012, Letter No.035/5 Submission from Admiral Commanding First Battle Squadron (Acting-Admiral Sir Charles E Madden) to the C-in-C Grand Fleet (Admiral Sir David R Beatty) 16 January 1917. Enclosure: No.D.94/1 'Findings of the Court of Enquiry to Investigate into Alleged Cases of Bullying in Gunroom of HMS *Benbow*' 10 January 1917; NL.2/12698 Admiralty Circular Letter No.2/5843 of 16 February 1917. See also LEL Rowe "At the Sign of the Foul Anchor: Discipline and Morale in the Royal Navy During the First World War" (2009) pp.44-47

violently against their tormentors. An attempt was made to murder the midshipman by setting an up-turned dirk under his hammock and then setting fire to the nettles in the hope that he would land on the dirk. This creative scheme failed when the falling midshipman missed the dirk, but the incident went un-investigated and unpunished. When six midshipmen physically attacked the sub-lieutenant he was immediately withdrawn from the ship. Instead of being punished, the midshipmen responsible were sent to HMS *Dragon*, the best appointment they could have hoped for.⁹⁰

The concerns of wider society were directed towards Royal Navy midshipmen by the publication of Charles Morgan's *The Gunroom* in 1919. The novel, written during the author's time as a prisoner of war, dealt with the experiences of the fictitious Midshipman John Lynwood aboard HM ships 'Arthur' and 'Pathshire'. It was in fact semi-autobiographical, discussing Morgan's own service aboard the *Good Hope* and *Monmouth*. Morgan's wartime experiences undoubtedly contributed to his bitterness towards the Royal Navy, he was captured in 1914 and spent the rest of the war as a prisoner. However the book focuses on the frustrations and disappointments of his pre-war service, experiences so disillusioning as to have prompted his resignation from the service as a midshipman in 1913.

The book discussed the life and education of midshipmen in the fleet, as well as their relationships with their seniors and subordinates. It highlighted gunroom evolutions (dangerous, and sometimes degrading, games played by junior midshipmen for the amusement of their elders), the bullying of junior midshipmen by their seniors, the disinterest of some officers, the exhausting regime and the boredom of seagoing life, as well as unfair discipline and a lack of culture (poetry, literature and the arts). It was deeply critical of the Royal Navy, and had it come to widespread public notice some reforms may have been forced.

The Gunroom made little impact, perhaps because after the initial run in 1919 no further copies were produced until 1968. It has been suggested that the book was suppressed by the Admiralty but this seems unlikely and no evidence can be found. In fact it appears that Morgan himself was responsible for the book not being republished in his own lifetime. *The Gunroom* appeared

⁹⁰ CCA MISC 27 Churchill Archives Centre Miscellaneous Holdings, Commander JCH Nelson *Memoirs of a Life in the Royal Navy 1918-1950* (unpublished memoir) p.2

on a list of the top boys books of 1920 and was advertised in the national press.⁹¹ Louis Le Bailly mentions that ‘like most of my generation, I had read Charles Morgan’s *The Gunroom*’, this may be an exaggeration, but does suggest that copies were to be found in many private or prep school collections.⁹²

The Gunroom certainly was widely read by naval officers. A review of the book appeared in the *Naval Review* of February 1920, the author noting that the review may be superfluous – most officers in home waters having read the book already.⁹³ Correspondence about the book appeared in the *Naval Reviews* of May and August 1920 and February 1921, confirming that interest was widespread within the fleet.

The reviewer, Lieutenant CH Drage, noted that since the end of the war ‘a series of literary attacks had been made on existing institutions, by authors who nursed grievances against the institutions in question’.⁹⁴ So clear was the sense of grievance in *The Gunroom* that no official response was needed and none had been made. Drage made a number of attacks upon the book. In the first place, he suggested that Morgan ‘makes the natural operation of a bracing and essentially human discipline appear to be the brutal grinding of a heartless machine’.⁹⁵ The characters of the book generally combined negative characteristics such as laziness and cruelty, almost all being completely uncultured – the major exception being Lynwood himself, whom Drage considered to lack both thickness of skin and a sense of humour.

Two of the three correspondents agreed with him. However the first published response, printed in May 1920, was opposed to his views. This writer stated that the review author ‘must be congratulated on his selection of passages to pillory’ and suggested that the Royal Navy was not above criticism, in fact it was the duty of all officers to criticise if the service benefited as a result. Whilst he criticised the ‘morbid atmosphere’ of the book, the writer declared ‘in no other book of naval fiction has so much truth appeared’. In particular the book demonstrated the petty tyranny and stupidity ‘which undermine true discipline’. This author insisted that it was time for the Royal Navy to re-examine

⁹¹ Morgan, *Gunroom*, pp.v-ix in forward by Eiluned Lewis

⁹² Le Bailly, *Around the Engine*, p.20

⁹³ Lieutenant CH Drage, ‘*The Gunroom* by CL Morgan’ *The Naval Review* 8 (1920) pp.116-121 (p.116)

⁹⁴ *ibid*, p.116

⁹⁵ *ibid*, p.118

itself and its system of officer education – going so far as to state that perhaps the Lynwood type would make an excellent officer if given the chance.⁹⁶

The second letter largely ignored the charges made against the commissioned officers of the Navy, instead concentrating upon Morgan's attack on the midshipmen. This writer insisted that Lynwood's life on the China station before the war could not have been any more monotonous and unpleasant than patrolling the Red Sea in wartime as the letter writer had done. The writer noted that, far from midshipmen feeling degraded and demoralised and their minds turning into cesspools, a debate club had flourished and at one stage three gunroom magazines had competed with each other. In this writer's eyes the problem lay not with the bulk of midshipmen but with Morgan himself, a man clearly unsuited to naval service and given to self pity.⁹⁷

This opinion was matched by the final correspondent who had been an officer during Morgan's time aboard the '*Pathshire*'. He complained that Morgan had produced 'a mass of gross exaggeration, insinuations, omissions of good points and even misrepresentations'. The ship had been extremely happy and Morgan's sole motivation must be bitterness at his own failings. Certainly Morgan had been something of a misfit, neglecting his work in order to write and taking little interest in his budding career.⁹⁸

Taken together these writings present a reasonably clear picture. Morgan was undoubtedly a misfit and his leaving the Royal Navy was probably beneficial to both parties. Although lacking refinement, culture was certainly present in the gunrooms and wardrooms of the fleet. The system of educating midshipmen, in particular the arrangements for their supervision, was imperfect but was generally viewed as satisfactory. Overall reactions to *The Gunroom* as expressed in *The Naval Review* suggest little appetite within the fleet for reform at this time.

The lack of public criticism of the Royal Navy resulting from the book, along with the willingness of boys to serve despite having read it, suggests that the general public too was happy with the status quo. The book had little immediate impact on the fleet. John Hayes thought *The Gunroom* an accurate

⁹⁶ Lieutenant EH Cameron, 'Correspondence - *The Gunroom*' *The Naval Review* 8 (1920) pp.311-313

⁹⁷ Lieutenant GH Jocelyn-Evans, 'Correspondence - *The Gunroom*' *The Naval Review* 8 (1920) pp.479-480

⁹⁸ Lieutenant-Commander TH Baillie-Grohman, 'Correspondence - *The Gunroom*' *The Naval Review* 9 (1921) pp.164-166

account of his own experiences as a midshipman aboard *Royal Oak* in 1930.⁹⁹ He states that conditions for midshipmen did not substantially improve until the mid 1930s – perhaps, not coincidentally, the time at which officers who had read *The Gunroom* as boys began to reach positions of influence.

The harsh conditions in the gunrooms of the fleet were not representative of the service's normal treatment of midshipmen – which was generally benevolent. Although the *Repulse* case seems exceptional it was not uncommon for midshipmen who had committed quite serious crimes to be treated with considerable leniency. In 1923 a paymaster midshipman of HMS *Malaya*, already criticised for his spending habits and poor choice of friends, was convicted of stealing £25 from the gunroom wine accounts of which he had charge.¹⁰⁰ His actions were held to be the result of weak mindedness rather than criminality but there were still ample grounds for his dismissal. Instead he was punished with three months loss of seniority, the withdrawal of his wine and extra bills, and dismissal from his ship. Quarterly reports from his next ship HMS *Emperor of India* revealed his determination to improve¹⁰¹ – until he was assigned to work unsupervised in the Captain's Office, where he proved himself irresponsible, careless, and lazy as well as prone to keeping bad company and living beyond his means.¹⁰²

Even so, had he received a satisfactory report from his next ship he would have been promoted to sub-lieutenant and continued his career. Instead it was reported that although capable, popular, and dedicated to the service, he needed constant supervision, could not be trusted with money, was irresponsible, and suffered from an 'utter lack of moral stamina'.¹⁰³ Only now was he discharged from the service, twenty-two months after his initial offence,

⁹⁹ Hayes, *Face the Music*, p.41

¹⁰⁰ TNA ADM 178/56, NL.3739/23, *Malaya* Letter No.06 from the Commanding Officer HMS *Malaya* (Captain Roger RC Backhouse) to Vice-Admiral commanding First Battle Squadron (Vice-Admiral Sir Edwyn S Alexander-Sinclair) 12 July 1923

¹⁰¹ *ibid*, CW.12326/23, *Emperor of India* letter No.1 'Paymaster Midshipman Robley J Tannett R.N - Report' 1 December 1923; CW.3257/24, *Emperor of India* letter No.1 'Paymaster Midshipman Robley J Tannett R.N - Report' 19 March 1924; CW.9951/24, *Emperor of India* letter No.1 'Paymaster Midshipman Robley J Tannett R.N - Report' 2 September 1924

¹⁰² *ibid*, CW.463/1925, *Emperor of India* letter No.1/F 'Paymaster Midshipman Robley J Tannett R.N - Report' 9 January 1925

¹⁰³ *ibid*, CW.3350/25, *Conquest* letter No.C.D.30 'Paymaster Midshipman Robley J Tannett, R.N - Report' 31 March 1925 (para.3)

the authorities having demonstrated remarkable patience and faith in his improvement.¹⁰⁴

Generally, the Royal Navy appears to have treated midshipmen benevolently. Punishments for serious offences were often quite light, demonstrating forgiveness for youthful lapses. Midshipmen who wanted to be discharged were, whilst others were retained at the cost of, or risk to, the Royal Navy. This treatment was something of a contrast to the tough conditions prevailing in the fleet and so indicates that the Royal Navy as a service respected midshipmen and valued their services.

Toleration of the abuse of midshipmen probably owed something to a general belief within the Royal Navy that it was acceptable for midshipmen to suffer; according to Courtney Anderson junior midshipmen were the 'only section of the whole Naval community who had no rights at all'.¹⁰⁵ Few people in the service argued in favour of their having an easier existence, nor did they take any action to ease their lot. Frank Twiss considered the caning of midshipmen – a punishment that was often ordered by officers, to be 'almost part of the daily life'.¹⁰⁶

That this harshness was accepted owed much to tradition, or at any rate habit, and something to ideals of masculine endurance. The Royal Navy had never been given to the mollycoddling of juveniles; countless accounts speak of poor food, bad living conditions, and harsh treatment. Many older officers felt that as they had suffered as midshipmen, the younger generations should also suffer. Others saw practical merit – one officer argued for the beating of midshipmen to be encouraged as a way of instilling manliness and self-control.¹⁰⁷

Many midshipmen were treated kindly by ratings, especially the older men. It was not unknown for midshipmen to have sea daddies, and the importance of their relationships with their boat crews has already been discussed. However the kindness of ratings towards midshipmen was tempered

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*, Discharge ordered by Admiralty Letter CW.3350/25 Charles Walker to the C-in-C Atlantic Fleet (Admiral Sir Henry F Oliver) 1 May 1925; CW.4386/25 'Paymaster Midshipman Robert J Tannett R.N' letter reporting discharge from the officer commanding HMS *Conquest* (Captain Robert R Turner) to the C-in-C Atlantic Fleet 4 May 1925, enclosed in Atlantic fleet letter No.799/AF.0053 from the C-in-C Atlantic Fleet to the Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir Oswyn Murray) 5 May 1925

¹⁰⁵ Anderson, *Seagulls*, p.29

¹⁰⁶ Howard-Bailey, *Social Change*, p.24

¹⁰⁷ 'Popeye', 'Boat Work, Sail Training, Midshipmen' *The Naval Review* 26 (1938) pp.610-612 (p.612)

by the fact that many of them had endured a tough upbringing in the service and expected their officers to be as tough, or tougher, than them. According to Harry Wardle, a seaman rating of the period, 'there was no question of their having an easy ride'.¹⁰⁸

Under these circumstances, the harsh treatment of midshipmen could be viewed as a way for naval officers to retain the respect of their men. It also ensured that midshipmen were aware of the potential for junior members of the service to be made miserable by their seniors. Charles Owen thought that ratings attached great importance to midshipmen being required to prove themselves: 'the lower-deck, through fellow feeling, and a fascination in the moulding process taking place before their eyes, having enjoyed the Roman holiday, were well satisfied with such a 'democratic' officer making ritual'.¹⁰⁹ Another officer thought that the caning of midshipmen increased the respect ratings had for officers.¹¹⁰

Midshipmen certainly felt some pressure to prove themselves to ratings, feeling the need to somehow compensate for their youth and inexperience. The pressure to prove oneself is seen in a letter written by Brian Jones, who appreciated being attached to the boy's division of HMS *Norfolk* because: 'I'd sooner have to give orders to chaps about the same age as myself than have to boss about men old enough to be my father'.¹¹¹

The midshipmen themselves rarely complained about their treatment, they did not complain to senior officers, write to their parents, or leave the service in droves. Nor were the boys who joined the service as cadets necessarily ignorant of the miseries of life as a midshipman. Midshipmen may have accepted the indignities of their life as the price to be paid for the future career. In some cases they may also have relished the toughness, feeling that it strengthened their connection with the Navy's past, their authority over the ratings, or their chosen masculine identity. Unfortunately, their journals, letters and autobiographies remain largely silent on the matter.

The world of the midshipman was overtly masculine. The living spaces provided for naval personnel were impersonal, generally Spartan, and

¹⁰⁸ Wardle, *Forecastle to Quarterdeck*, p.20

¹⁰⁹ Owen, *Plain Yarns*, p.129

¹¹⁰ 'Popeye', 'Boat Work, Sail Training, Midshipmen' *The Naval Review* 26 (1938) pp.610-612 (p.612)

¹¹¹ DUPO 4/3 Biographical material collected by Donald McLachlan relating to Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound, Cadet Brian Jones letter to parents 30 April 1931

deliberately masculine. Furniture and fittings were standardised across the fleet, wardrooms resembled sections of gentleman's clubs; gunrooms were more like public school common rooms – sparsely furnished they offered little comfort and no privacy. The décor was both functional and masculine; frills and frivolity were absent but sporting magazines were supplied and the display of trophies encouraged.¹¹²

Whereas the commissioned officer was able to decorate his cabin with reminders of his home and family the midshipman had to keep almost all his possessions inside his chest – a large trunk of standardised pattern. Family photographs could be pinned to the inside of the lid but space was limited and the chest subject to inspection. There was neither room for personal items nor time or peace in which to enjoy them.

Women were rarely to be found aboard His Majesty's warships, they were occasionally carried as guests or as refugees but most came aboard as visitors. Commissioned officers entertained female visitors in their cabins, a privilege denied to those who lacked these private spaces. The absence of women helped to strengthen the masculine identity of naval personnel and further discouraged any attempt at softening living conditions. The lack of female contact did not mean that midshipmen had no social lives, on the contrary they were engaged in a wide variety of entertainments. Most of this activity was officially condoned, and in some cases it was compulsory.

Gunrooms were lively places, their furniture rarely in good repair. Gunroom social activities focussed around relaxation but also enabled the senior members to reinforce their authority over the junior. Midshipmen played a great deal of sport; pulling and sailing were seen as essential accomplishments, while team games maintained fitness and developed skills of teamwork and leadership. They were expected to take an intelligent interest in the places they visited, and many visited historic sites or toured on bicycles or on horseback. However it was also important for midshipmen to develop social skills and cultivate gentlemanly characteristics – consequently attendance at balls, parties and other social events was always encouraged and sometimes compulsory.

Midshipmen's social lives were entirely at the mercy of the senior officers. Leave could be stopped for even minor misdemeanours. They might be ordered to attend specific events, preventing them from spending their time as

¹¹² Colville, 'Shipboard Homes', pp.45-65, (pp.49-59)

they wished and occasionally disrupting their entire schedules. In some cases particular activities were encouraged, often to the point of being compulsory.

Many officers firmly believed that midshipmen benefited from physical exercise – the most notorious among them was probably Rear-Admiral Sir Robert Arbuthnot. In January 1914 his flagship HMS *Orion* was refitting in Devonport and during this period her midshipmen rose at 0600, ran a mile and a half, and swam three lengths of the swimming baths before returning aboard to start work at 0730.¹¹³ Arbuthnot was a great advocate of motorcycling and insisted his midshipmen take up the sport.¹¹⁴ While the ship was at Scapa Flow, where shore facilities were very limited, Arbuthnot required the midshipmen to undertake daily boxing sessions under his personal tuition - those perceived to be slacking were obliged to fight him.¹¹⁵

In the late 1920s the enthusiasm of C-in-C Mediterranean Roger Keyes for polo spread throughout the officers of the fleet, percolating as far as midshipmen. Keyes' enthusiasm for polo was shared by several subordinates who viewed polo as a suitable activity for the development of young officers. Prominent amongst them was Lord Louis Mountbatten who remarked: 'I have never met a keen, dashing polo player who was not also a good officer'.¹¹⁶ As desirable as polo might be, the cost of playing regularly was beyond the means of most midshipmen. Peter Gretton, who kept two polo ponies as a sub-lieutenant, had little social life outside the sport.¹¹⁷ Some senior officers preferred cheaper activities. Chatfield was an advocate of fishing: 'Catching salmon or trout requires a tactical mind, judgement and patience, all naval qualities'.¹¹⁸

There was a widespread belief within the Navy, as demonstrated through *The Naval Review*, that sport contributed to the development of officer-like qualities. One letter writer suggested that games were a useful vent for energy and far preferable to the development of vice. They helped to develop initiative,

¹¹³ Harry PK Oram, *Ready for Sea* (London: Seeley, 1974; repub.d. London: Futura, 1976) pp.78-79

¹¹⁴ *ibid*, p.94

¹¹⁵ *ibid*, p.113

¹¹⁶ Phillip Ziegler, *Mountbatten The Official Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1985) p.79

¹¹⁷ CCA GRTN Reminiscences of Vice-Admiral Sir Peter Gretton, Unpublished Reminiscences of Vice-Admiral Sir Peter Gretton, p.52

¹¹⁸ Chatfield, *Navy and Defence*, p.27

self-confidence, and rapid decision making.¹¹⁹ One article author thought that they developed fast thought, loyalty, and obedience. However he criticised the tendency of officers to neglect work in favour of games, and also thought that sporting ability played too great a role in promotion.¹²⁰ Another writer suggested that games were a useful way of demonstrating courage, endurance and determination. He also thought that participation in sports such as cricket, tennis, golf, and shooting should be encouraged as they marked the officer out as a gentleman. He urged that midshipmen be required to box and ride.¹²¹ Various other articles appeared, pressing the claims of sport in general, or specific activities such as boxing or hiking.¹²²

The officers that wrote to the *Naval Review* had certain shared ideas about the role of sports in the lives of officers. They argued that physical fitness was highly desirable and that sports were also useful in developing officer-like qualities, particularly of courage and endurance. Whilst most authors argued strongly that sporting ability should play no role in promotion, all thought that participation was highly desirable. The sports they favoured were those most closely allied to officer-like qualities – boxing which required courage, rugby in which teamwork and courage were essential, and sailing which was professionally useful. There was also great enthusiasm for sports such as hunting, polo, and flying which, whilst developing useful qualities (speed of thought and courage), were generally associated with the upper classes.

Most midshipmen would have participated keenly in sport and other social activities had they not been compulsory. The Royal Navy aimed to recruit young men who were physically active and sociable. Sporting and social activities were emphasised in recruiting literature. The 1927 Special Entry edition of *How to Become a Naval Officer* informed its readers that: 'You will also have the entrée, almost without exception, to every club in the world, and wherever you may be sent there is sure to be plenty of sport of every kind.'

¹¹⁹ Lieutenant-Commander CH Ralston, 'Correspondence – Reply to Games' *The Naval Review* 7 (1919) p.567

¹²⁰ Lieutenant-Commander CH Rolleston, 'Correspondence – Games' *The Naval Review* 8 (1920) pp.204-207

¹²¹ Captain R Plunkett-Ernle-Drax, 'Winning his Spurs' *The Naval Review* 11 (1923) pp.692-697

¹²² Anonymous, 'Boxing in the Navy' *The Naval Review* 20 (1932) pp.101-106; Anonymous, 'The Royal Naval Flying Club' *The Naval Review* 20 (1932) pp.107-109; Anonymous, 'Organised Sport' *The Naval Review* 20 (1932) pp.737-744; Anonymous, 'The British Navy Goes Hiking' *The Naval Review* 21 (1933) pp.435-441

Incidentally the Navy is very hard to beat at most games'.¹²³ The Dartmouth edition of 1923 also emphasised the social and sporting possibilities of the Navy, giving particular regard to hunting 'the Englishman's inborn instinct'.¹²⁴

Owing to their lack of liberty and money midshipmen were not full participants in the social life of the fleet. In fact, if restricted to their official annual allowance of £20, the social activities of midshipmen were very limited. One report found that a midshipman serving in the Mediterranean could not survive on this allowance. The social costs of a midshipman including membership of the Malta Junior Officers Club and the Marsa Sports Club in addition to transport, civilian clothing, on board entertainment, and attendance at parties, totalled around £25-30 a year.¹²⁵

In addition midshipmen had to pay the various costs associated with living in the gunroom. Monthly expenses included a mess bill of around £1 17s 6d, a wine bill up to 15s, extras up to 10s, subscriptions 10s, laundry and hammock boy £1, and 10s of incidental expenses, a total of around £5 2s 6d. Midshipmen could meet their onboard expenses from their daily pay of 5s, but could not live in any degree of style. However, as a memorandum informed parents, 'officers in the Royal Navy are not encouraged to cultivate expensive tastes'.¹²⁶ In fact many penniless midshipmen rarely went ashore. Courtney Anderson and his friends occasionally went to the cinema but otherwise: 'There was nothing for us to do but sit on board in the sweltering heat and yellow glare of Grand Harbour in summertime. It was not a very pleasant existence'.¹²⁷

Many parents provided their sons with additional money. Amongst those making these (officially forbidden) arrangements were naval officers – including Edward Ashmore's father who 'knew the form, and made me an allowance of £5 a month'.¹²⁸ Even with these unofficial allowances few midshipmen appeared to be rich. Phillip Seymour, who himself received an annual allowance of £50, wrote that 'I really have no idea how many of my comrades received any

¹²³ Bush, *How to Become a Naval Officer*, p.4

¹²⁴ Gieves, *Naval Officer* (1923), p.5

¹²⁵ TNA ADM 1/16624, CW.7943/1938 Note for the Director of Personnel Services (Rear-Admiral Henry D Pridham-Whippell) 10 August 1938

¹²⁶ TNA ADM 1/16624 'Memorandum for Parents: Financial Aspects of a Cadetship at the Royal Naval College Dartmouth' July 1938

¹²⁷ Anderson, *Seagulls*, p.46

¹²⁸ Ashmore, *Battle and the Breeze*, p.12

subsidy from their parents. It may be said that none was perceived to be wealthy'.¹²⁹

Their lack of money encouraged many midshipmen to play team sports – which apart from occupying their time often ended in free meals. Sport was an important part of life for many midshipmen; young, fit, and well trained they were a key component of many ship's teams. Those who did not represent their ships were frequently involved in contests between gun-rooms; such matches could be fiercely competitive, although skill was rarely a major component and one-sided results were common. Competitive pulling and sailing were held to be very important. Traditionally a midshipmen's gig race took place before the main regatta and the winning ship received a great boost in confidence before the main event.

Preparing for the Atlantic Fleet regatta in 1933 *Hood's* gun-room crew trained two or three times a day and enjoyed improved food (subsidised by the ward-room). For their efforts they received an afternoon off in which the wardroom officers first played them at golf and then took them to the pub.¹³⁰ Victory for the gun-room, and subsequently the ship, was rewarded with a case of champagne. Similar preparations were recorded by Henry Brooke serving aboard HMS *Devonshire* in the Mediterranean in 1934. Rejoining the ship at Trieste after a trip to Rome the midshipmen were immediately sent out in the boats and soon after were training twice a day.¹³¹ In this case they were training not for the regatta but for obstacle races in which boats had to be both sailed and rowed.

As naval officers midshipmen were expected to be gentlemen – and developing gentlemanly attributes was an aspect of their education. In addition to formal dinners and other events which taught them to function in naval society, midshipmen attended many events ashore. They also socialised with friends, relatives or the population of the places they visited. It was entirely acceptable for midshipmen to socialise with girls of suitable background and manner although such socialisation was normally undertaken in groups or with chaperones.

For Dartmouth graduates reasonable freedom to associate with the opposite sex was a new experience. There were dances on the college

¹²⁹ Seymour, *Africa*, p.35

¹³⁰ Le Bailly, *Around the Engine*, p.26

¹³¹ RNM 1985.206/2 Journal kept by Midshipman Henry JA Brooke entry of 14 September 1934

quarterdeck several nights a week, but with very few women available cadets partnered each other or danced with masters. Women were largely excluded from Dartmouth and cadets received very little sex education beyond being actively discouraged. The strict separation of terms combined with constant supervision hindered any homosexual activity or 'corruption' of younger cadets by their elders.

The situation was not improved by the inexperience of some term officers; John Hayes generally had a very positive opinion of 'Dippy' Evans but thought he would have been utterly useless if confronted with a sexual question.¹³² House officer Peter Gretton later admitted it was 'a case of the blind leading the blind', and opted to illustrate his talks on the subject by referring to the more familiar sex lives of dogs.¹³³

Under these circumstances it is hardly surprising that most midshipmen appear to have been more or less celibate. They danced with, courted, and occasionally kissed, 'suitable' girls but their relationships were rarely consummated. Strict supervision, the need to be a gentleman, and a certain amount of fear served to keep young officers away from brothels. John Hayes did reach the doorway of Annie, a Maltese prostitute recommended by an able seaman of *Royal Oak*, but there his nerve failed him. Hayes is more forthcoming than most about his sexual experiences; he also recalled being repeatedly invited into the cabin of a bachelor instructor officer at Dartmouth.¹³⁴

Often the worst social activity for most midshipmen was dining with the captain of their ship or the admiral of their squadron. This was acknowledged by many senior officers, some of whom tried to ease the situation by inviting a number of guests, while one greeted midshipmen with a cheery 'this evening you are going to be subjected to ordeal by dinner'.¹³⁵ This situation hints at a wider problem – that relations between midshipmen and commissioned officers, especially in big ships, were generally distant. This distance had a number of negative implications.

Firstly professional – if midshipmen did not trust their senior officers and feel comfortable around them, they were unlikely to ask questions or venture opinions. This particularly hampered midshipmen working on the bridge or in

¹³² Hayes, *Face the Music*, p.38

¹³³ CCA GRTN Reminiscences of Vice-Admiral Sir Peter Gretton, Unpublished Reminiscences of Vice-Admiral Sir Peter Gretton, p.70

¹³⁴ Hayes, *Face the Music*, p.38 and p.61

¹³⁵ Ritchie, *Letter of Proceedings*, p.155

the plotting room who did not gain as much knowledge of tactics and strategy as they might have. More contact with senior officers would also have taught midshipmen more about social and diplomatic situations. Secondly, a lack of interest and supervision contributed to other difficulties faced by midshipmen, in particular it allowed bullying and other unpleasantness to flourish in gunrooms. Finally it discouraged midshipmen, exacerbating any suspicions that the wrong profession may have been selected.

Sometimes the normal rhythms of a midshipman's life were disrupted. In particular, the First World War posed considerable difficulties for naval training. The changes made to midshipmen's training during the war were outlined above. The end of the war did not spell the end of the difficulties in training midshipmen. Whilst some ships returned to peacetime routines, including the completion of the midshipman's syllabus, others remained on wartime duties such as minesweeping, or were supporting operations in Russia. Large numbers of ships spent long periods of time in Scapa Flow guarding the surrendered German ships. All this meant that the practical experience and educational levels of midshipmen continued to vary widely.

Some ships found that although there was now time to hold lectures for midshipmen there were no suitable facilities available. Such a problem was faced by the Grand Fleet's destroyers based at Port Edgar. Although eighty-six midshipmen were present there was nowhere suitable for instruction to take place and no instructor. A building was converted into a classroom, furniture borrowed from Rosyth, and an instructor officer provided.¹³⁶

Other problems were posed by the reduction in fleet strength. Many instructors were discharged to return to their civilian occupations. The reduction in the strength of the active fleet meant that large numbers of midshipmen found themselves serving in the Reserve Fleet. They could not gain seagoing experience in ships that never left harbour and the much reduced crews limited learning and leadership opportunities.

One solution to these problems was pursued in the Reserve Fleet at Devonport where the sloop HMS *Zinnia* was used for midshipmen's training. *Zinnia* made fortnight long cruises, during which she was underway almost every day and sometimes at night. The training was almost entirely practical – midshipmen practised navigation and acted as officer of the watch, but they

¹³⁶ See TNA ADM 1/8553/177

also did all the work of the crew apart from stoking the boilers. In many ways, this scheme imitated the peacetime training cruiser, even to the extent of providing opportunities for social development with midshipmen being granted leave on the same terms as young ratings.¹³⁷

The *Zinnia* scheme demonstrates how wartime experience was applied to officer training early in the inter-war period. There was an emphasis on practical skills, but also upon the midshipmen doing the work of ratings. This suggests that officers who had served in wartime thought it very important that midshipmen should understand their men. Although successful the scheme was cancelled because of the costs that would be incurred in altering the ship to better fulfil her role; an early sign of the effects financial pressure would have on inter-war officer training.¹³⁸ One area of the ship particularly in need of improvement was the accommodation – ratings' work may have been suitable for midshipmen, but rating's living conditions were not!¹³⁹ That the scheme evolved at all showed that wartime experience had convinced some senior officers that officer education should be a high priority.

It was not only the education of young officers that suffered under wartime pressure. The shortage of time and instructors meant that boy seamen, candidates for petty officer, and those who wished to study for their own benefit, all suffered. In the immediate post-war period some localised measures were taken to improve the education of the fleet as a whole.

In Malta a disused building became the Fleet Education Centre.¹⁴⁰ All the naval instructors and schoolmasters of the fleet were assigned to work at the centre, which had six classrooms one of which was reserved for midshipmen.¹⁴¹ By concentrating staff and facilities in this way it was hoped that all fleet personnel could be provided with high quality instruction in a suitable environment.

¹³⁷ TNA ADM 1/8573/312, CW.35692/19 Submission from the Commanding Officer HMS *Centurion* (Captain Hugh LP Heard) to the C-in-C Plymouth (Admiral Sir Cecil F Thursby) 7 November 1919 enclosing report by the Commanding Officer HMS *Zinnia* (Lieutenant-Commander Keith R Farquarson) 5 November 1919

¹³⁸ *ibid*, Letter CW.35692/19 from the Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir Oswyn Murray) to Thursby 17 December 1919

¹³⁹ *ibid*, Letter from Heard to Thursby 20 October 1919, enclosure 1 in Letter No.2607/313 from Thursby to Murray 13 November 1919

¹⁴⁰ TNA ADM 1/8597/6, N.6485/21, Mediterranean Fleet letter No.1191/6046/10 from the C-in-C Mediterranean (Vice-Admiral Sir John M de Robeck) to the Secretary of the Admiralty (Sir Oswyn Murray) 17 April 1921. Enclosure No.2: Mediterranean Station Temporary Memorandum No.95 February 1921

¹⁴¹ *ibid*

The centre was a useful and popular innovation. In February 1921, shortly after opening, it was attended by 234 midshipmen, 337 adult ratings, and 490 boy seamen. In May 315 midshipmen, 443 adult ratings, and 527 boys were in attendance. A report by the officer in charge stated that the centre was particularly benefiting midshipmen who tended to struggle with mathematics and navigational theory.¹⁴²

Official responses to the scheme varied. In May C-in-C Mediterranean Fleet, Admiral Sir John de Robeck, was given the freedom to use his instructors as he wished, effectively permitting the establishment of a permanently staffed centre. Despite this it was felt important that instructors should go to sea with their own ships so that the men they were assigned to teach received continuous teaching.¹⁴³

In July Their Lordships told de Robeck that the arrangements 'reflect well on the officers involved'.¹⁴⁴ Despite this enthusiasm, the centre was ordered to close when the fleet received its full complement of instructors. Although the acting schoolmasters working at the centre could be paid for their duties no money was available for prizes to be awarded to students. In spite of this official ambivalence the Fleet Education Centre Malta remained in operation. Unfortunately very little evidence about the centre is available and so most of its work remains shrouded in obscurity.

If midshipmen's experiences varied considerably, there was one certainty – examinations. A midshipman remained a midshipman until he passed the examinations for promotion to acting sub-lieutenant (or was discharged from the service after multiple failures to do so). No midshipman could afford to rest on his laurels, for there were examinations of one type or another at frequent intervals, even the repeated reductions of the syllabus did not entirely succeed in eliminating them.

Midshipmen's reactions to examinations varied – generally depending on the difficulty of the material and the amount of preparation. Often a journal merely notes that the owner had been examined, giving no detail. This suggests that exams were a frequent event and rarely difficult. On the other hand they were clearly a matter of concern. John Worth noted that a torpedo examination

¹⁴² *ibid*, Mediterranean Fleet letter No.1191/6046/10 from de Robeck to Murray 17 April 1921. Enclosure No.1 report by Instructor Commander Francis H Batchellor 1 April 1921

¹⁴³ TNA ADM 1/8597/6, N.6485 Comments on the Fleet Education Centre by the Advisor on Education (Alexander McMullen) 10 May 1921

¹⁴⁴ *ibid*, Letter N.6485 from Murray to de Robeck 11 July 1921

was 'much easier than I thought it would be' and a mock paper in navigation 'fairly easy'.¹⁴⁵ Ian Balfour was more negative, glumly noting that 'nobody knows any wireless' and that an examination in ship construction 'we found very difficult, not having done more than two days of ship construction before'.¹⁴⁶ Clearly examination success was at least partly dependent on the amount of instruction a midshipman had received. These accounts suggest that despite efforts to reform them, midshipmen's examinations still required hours spent studying material of little practical value – a clear indication that naval educational reforms were not always successful.

The final seamanship examination, taking the form of an oral examination by three captains and lasting around an hour, was an important and unnerving occasion. Although failures were extremely rare, a good performance was necessary to secure a first class certificate which gained the holder four months seniority and some prestige. Bob Whinney, denied a first by the miscalculation of marks, noted bitterly 'A 'one' in seamanship really counted'.¹⁴⁷ Considerable effort was devoted to preparation, and as midshipmen's results reflected on their ships most were excused their duties in order to study and many were given revision sessions and mock examinations.

The experience could be exhausting for the examiners. Harry Oram noted that it was essential for the examiners to appear to know more than the candidates, and admitted that a board of examiners of which he was part met beforehand to revise their own knowledge!¹⁴⁸ Under these circumstances it is perhaps unsurprising that many midshipmen found their examiners to be either very demanding or very relaxed.

Frank Twiss considered that he had 'three very fair examiners who were out to see what we did know and not what we didn't know'.¹⁴⁹ Conversely William Davis found the examinations a 'fairly formidable experience'.¹⁵⁰ Twiss and his colleagues left their examination 'feeling like new men'.¹⁵¹ Wild parties normally followed these examinations, involving drunkenness, the destruction of

¹⁴⁵ RNM 1985.154 Journal kept by Midshipman John H Worth entries of 30 December 1938 and 17 January 1939

¹⁴⁶ RNM 1987/112.2 Journal kept by Midshipman Ian M Balfour entries of 1 September 1933 and 31 August 1933

¹⁴⁷ Whinney, *U-Boat Peril*, p.25

¹⁴⁸ Harry PK Oram, *The Rogue's Yarn* (London: Leo Cooper, 1993) p.137

¹⁴⁹ RNM Twiss/1978.294 Journal kept by Midshipman Frank R Twiss entry of 16 July 1930

¹⁵⁰ CCA WDVS 1/1 Papers of Admiral Sir William Wellclose Davis (unpublished memoir 'My Life') p.51

¹⁵¹ RNM Twiss/1978.294 Journal kept by Midshipman Frank R Twiss entry of 16 July 1930

furniture, violent games, and the kidnapping of senior officers. Phil Durham recalled the ceremonial de-bagging of Admiral Somerville.¹⁵²

Examinations passed, midshipmen were promoted to acting sub-lieutenant and could look forward to a spell of courses ashore and more examinations before being confirmed in the rank and commissioned. Becoming an acting sub-lieutenant therefore signalled the end of the young officer's early career education. He had been educated in the theory of his profession ashore in the colleges, or in a static training ship. He had then gained practical experience as a midshipman.

He may or may not have enjoyed the formative years of his career but in the coming years he would come to appreciate their effect on his professional and personal character. The period spent as a midshipman was particularly important in this respect, it was this period that did most to shape the young man as a leader and professional naval officer.

This importance was understood by the naval authorities who poured a great deal of effort into making it as effective as possible. Throughout the period their efforts were dogged by numerous difficulties. It was very hard to find the right balance between practical and theoretical education and this problem was never entirely solved. There was also the problem of deciding what experience each midshipman must have and providing a continuity of experience across the service.

The efforts of the Royal Navy were moderately successful. The vast majority of midshipmen went on to be entirely satisfactory, and in many cases very successful, naval officers. However the education of midshipman was marred by controversy and frequently the subject of reform with no entirely satisfactory solution being reached in this period.

¹⁵² Phil Durham, *The Führer led but we overtook him* (Edinburgh: Pentland, 1996) p.37; Somerville was an invited guest of the gunroom.

Conclusion

By 1939 much of Fisher's grand scheme for the officer corps of the Royal Navy had been abandoned. Inter-changeability had long been rejected in favour of separate branches of engineering and executive officers, the members of which did not share the common upbringing Fisher had desired – for few Dartmouth cadets became engineers. The two branches differed greatly in terms of work and prospects, and there was some tension between them – although it did not have the disastrous effects on the officer corps as a whole that Fisher and Selborne had so feared.

It can be argued that the net result of the various reforms in officer education and employment was that the executive officers of 1939 were closer to being genuine military professionals than those of 1903. Whilst many specialist officers still did a great deal of technical work, the education and training of executive officers was increasingly geared towards the 'management of violence' rather than technical minutiae, even if the arts of war – tactics and strategy – remained somewhat neglected.

Despite the changes, the educational basis of the Fisher-Selborne scheme remained largely intact; whilst there had been considerable curricular change, the training process was virtually unaltered. The scheme was supplemented by the Special Entry which provided a cheaper and more flexible source of officers. Methods of officer selection were virtually unchanged since 1903, and most cadets came from the same backgrounds as their predecessors. There had however been a genuine, if small, movement towards the democratisation of the officer corps.

Having abandoned inter-changeability the Royal Navy had proceeded to reform the curriculum at Dartmouth to place more emphasis on English and history, largely at the expense of engineering. This change in emphasis moved the college away from its original aim of using engineering as a way of teaching cadets to think in a certain way and provide them with a wide variety of practical skills of use throughout their careers. The revised curriculum placed less emphasis on these practical mechanical skills and more on communication, a logical change given the movement of the executive officer corps away from engineering and towards problems of war-fighting.

The alpha scheme allowed cadets to develop their talents for English, history, and foreign languages; paving the way for them to become the thinkers and staff officers now demanded by the Navy. Later, the adoption of houses in place of terms improved the leadership opportunities available to cadets and also encouraged them to broaden their outlook – removing the narrowing and inward focus of the terms.

The abolition of terms was a triumph for innovation over tradition but the latter remained a prevailing factor in naval education. While civilian educators were given more or less a free hand in creating the curriculum at the colleges, outside the classroom the lives of cadets were steeped in tradition and naval heritage. The Fisher-Selborne and Special Entry schemes were clear (if dramatic) developments of the previous system of officer education and their origins can be traced back to at least the seventeenth century. This adherence to tradition was largely beneficial – it encouraged the devotion of young officers to the Royal Navy, the continuation of suitable methods and loyalty to a common cause. The Navy was able (and generally willing) to change when required, although it would at times have benefitted from changing faster – the term system being a case in point.

The most important of the reforms in terms of preparing officers for their future professions was that of midshipmen's education. The enormous academic curriculum and large amount of practical engineering prescribed by Fisher was gradually abandoned. The midshipman of 1939 did little school work, and only that directly connected to professional skills such as navigation. Instead he devoted a large proportion of his time to practical work on deck and in boats. True he was still liable to be treated as a child and starved of responsibility, but this was largely the result of naval manning policies (over-officering and competition for promotion) and not of the training system.

The development of midshipmen was greatly aided by the restoration of the training cruisers in 1932 – these ships provided a crucial opportunity for cadets to gain seagoing experience and self-confidence before joining the fleet. Particularly important was the opportunity to develop strong relationships with naval ratings in the relatively relaxed atmosphere aboard these ships. These relationships were an important part of the way in which the Navy taught leadership.

The Royal Navy eschewed formal leadership training in favour of a system where young officers learnt from the people around them, not merely from those assigned as their instructors, but from all naval personnel with whom they came into contact. This had the great advantage of allowing young officers some freedom in developing, at their own pace, a leadership style that suited them. On the other hand it exaggerated the effects of poor leadership on individual young officers, and allowed poor leadership techniques to be perpetuated rather than wiped out. These problems were particularly acute in the fleet, where midshipmen were segregated from the officers and ratings who otherwise supervised and taught them, and were instead at the mercy of the bullying tendencies of the more senior occupants of the gunroom.

Leadership was not the only area in which the Royal Navy relied heavily on young officers learning through immersion. From their first day in the service they were constantly immersed in naval life, customs, and behaviour. The atmosphere in the naval colleges was as naval as possible, uniform was worn, naval routines followed, and every effort was made to teach cadets about the proud heritage of the service they were joining. This immersion in the ways of the service was at least as important as the development of academic knowledge and practical skills in forging the Royal Navy officer.

The development of a naval identity in young officers was particularly important in forming their professional identities. The history and traditions of the Royal Navy were constantly reaffirmed by serving personnel and those who were unwilling to embrace them were not welcome in the service. The strict and exhausting regimes inflicted on young officers served to reaffirm their naval identities.

The academic teaching at the colleges was of high quality and innovatory in nature. They profited from Fisher's determination to staff them with the best educational minds of the day, and the freedom that these men were given in developing the curriculum and selecting the teaching methods. The work of the academic staff was, to some extent, undermined by their inferior status within the service – they invariably played second fiddle to their naval colleagues. Within Osborne and Dartmouth however the civilian staff had a great deal of influence, as a result of their remaining there for long periods, whereas the naval staff was subject to continual turnover. Certainly the civilian educational

staff employed by the Royal Navy had far more effect on naval policy than did politicians attempting to influence officer selection and education.

Political interference was largely resisted because the Navy remained relatively autonomous. Politicians did not have enough power within the service to force change, and there was not sufficient public interest to compel parliament to take a decisive stand. The democratisation of the officer corps, whilst something of a lingering sore, never threatened any kind of crisis in military-civil relations. Nor was there a great desire within the service to force change – the majority of naval officers seemed to have welcomed some degree of democratisation but they were not anxious to throw the officer corps open to all. The net result was a process of gradual change, driven as much by matters of supply and demand as by the demands of reformers.

Those naval officers not serving in the Admiralty or at the naval colleges had a complex relationship with naval educational policy. Whilst charged with the education of midshipmen, and to some extent cadets, they had little role in determining what was to be taught or how. Their official submissions were received with interest by Their Lordships, but the complicated and often prolonged discussions that followed generally ensured that any changes to policy were not in line with the original suggestion. Those officers who chose to campaign outside official channels made little headway. The *Naval Review* provided a useful platform for discussion amongst interested parties but had no influence over policy decisions, possibly because the opinions expressed within it were rarely unanimous. Officer education appears to have been a steady topic of discussion in the wardrooms of the fleet but opinions diverged widely – indicating the complexity of the problems faced by the Royal Navy.

The naval colleges have an important place in the development of modern educational methods in mathematics and science. Teaching methods pioneered by Osborne and Dartmouth are widely used today. This important work has been largely neglected by educational historians, perhaps because the engineering based curriculum was relatively short lived and did not spread to other schools. The highly specialised nature of the education provided by the colleges also had a negative impact on recruiting because parents were reluctant to enter their boys into an institution which was designed to prepare them for one career alone.

This was a particular problem in the inter-war period when large numbers of naval redundancies made the service appear a dubious career prospect; officers faced the dangerous prospect of being thrown out of the service in their twenties or thirties ill-equipped to enter another career. Recruiting difficulties also resulted from the inability of the colleges to compete with conventional public schools in attracting pupils, through reducing fee rates or entry standards, or to induce preparatory school headmasters to encourage parents to direct their sons into the service.

Relations between the Royal Navy and the civilian educational sector were generally cordial but not close. The Navy's desire to enter boys at as young an age as possible conflicted with the normal rhythms of private education – causing boys to be removed from their preparatory or public schools earlier than would normally have been the case. The entrance examinations, like the colleges themselves, placed an emphasis on science and mathematics at odds with most civilian educational establishments, especially as the Navy had little use for Latin, which retained primacy in private civilian education.

Relations with state educators were even more awkward. Naval requirements were at odds with the normal ages for pupils to change or leave their schools and the state curriculum was at odds with naval requirements. Most importantly the Navy, to some extent, treated state educated boys as second class citizens – choosing to concentrate on entering those who had been educated in the private sector.

This was inevitable given the high cost to parents of supporting a young officer until the age of twenty-one, which consequently excluded most families who were not able to afford private education. All desires and attempts to democratise the officer corps were bound to prove ineffectual whilst this barrier of cost remained. The requirement for parents to support their sons as trainee officers was enforced primarily by the Treasury rather than the Admiralty; a truly democratic officer corps was impossible whilst the country was unwilling to pay for it. Notwithstanding this the inter-war period saw considerable progress in democratisation and this owed as much to developments in civilian education as to changes in naval policy.

The expansion of state grammar schools, and the availability of scholarships to private schools, opened up high quality secondary education to

a wider section of society than ever before. Many of these schools copied the uniforms, customs and curricula of the public schools as far as possible. Their pupils were thus socially trained and educationally suited to becoming naval officers, and were able to prove their qualities through excellent performance in the new national examination system. These new sources of suitable boys remained largely untapped by the Navy for a number of reasons.

In the first place, these schools did not have any tradition of sending their pupils into the Navy and preferred instead to develop strong relationships with the universities and the Civil Service. The Royal Navy itself was anxious to maintain strong relationships with existing (and proven) sources of officers. Through much of the inter-war period the number of cadets entering the service was very low. Under these circumstances there was little imperative for the service to develop new source of officers and no reason for the Treasury to grant additional funding so that boys from poorer backgrounds might be taken. Promotion from the lower-deck suffered particularly under these circumstances; even once demand for officers began to increase in the mid 1930s there was little scope for increasing it owing to small rating entries in earlier years and dramatically increased demand for senior ratings.

The increased demand for officers was met largely by increasing the number of Special Entry cadets. Flexibility was one of the greatest assets of the scheme, along with the lower cost to the state and the shorter period to produce each officer. It was also cheaper for parents than putting a boy through Osborne and Dartmouth, and so helped to democratise the officer corps. Special Entry cadets had a wider variety of background and education than those at the colleges and, as junior officers, outperformed their colleagues. However the thirteen year old entry attracted a wide variety of personalities and some very able boys who might not have joined the Navy at the age of seventeen.

Fisher-Selborne scheme officers were arguably the backbone of the service and, in particular, of the executive officer corps. They out-numbered colleagues from other sources, and the steady stream of midshipmen entering the fleet from Dartmouth was in contrast to the great fluctuation in the numbers from other sources. The colleges provided a focal point for naval tradition and custom and their graduates were expected to imbue their colleagues with the ideals they had learnt there.

Speculation as to the results of abandoning the thirteen year old entry must at best be haphazard. It is certainly possible than the Royal Navy would have experienced the same difficulties as the Army in attracting suitable older boys in sufficient quantities. More candidates might have been attracted to the Navy, including those who would otherwise have joined the Army or the RAF, but many would have been undone by the high academic standards required. It is by no means certain that public school headmasters would have given the same support to the scheme as prep school headmasters gave to Dartmouth. Whilst the increased number of cadetships would have made the scheme a more attractive prospect, headmasters would still have been reluctant to lose boys at the age of seventeen, and a naval cadetship would still have been inferior to an Oxbridge scholarship.

The abolition of the thirteen year old entry would have considerably simplified the organisation of officer education, removing the need for a naval public school providing a general education, and enabling naval educators to concentrate entirely on professional subjects. Syllabi could have been simplified and fewer civilian staff would have been required. It might have led to a more organised system of officer education in which the different stages were more closely integrated.

The variety and complexity of the problems of officer education formed a continual barrier to effective reform. The advantages of the thirteen and seventeen year old entries could be laid out simply enough, but there was no clear evidence that one was significantly better than the other. Any proposed alteration to the syllabi of instruction was certain to meet with opposition from some quarter – the aims of officer education were clear enough, but there were many potential ways to achieve them. It was accepted that theory was best learnt ashore and practical lessons at sea. But this policy proved very hard to implement. There was never any real agreement as to what the average officer should ideally know and be able to do – clearly he must be a capable seaman and leader and a sound tactician with some scientific and technical knowledge, but which aspects should be prioritised? The concept of officer-like qualities remained ill-defined throughout the period although there was no change in the qualities desired.

It is hardly surprising that the numerous committees which enquired into various aspects of officer education, despite bringing together large numbers of

talented and experienced men, were rarely able to come to unanimous agreement. These committees were formed with a clear purpose and provided with all the necessary facilities and materials. However they were faced with complex questions and, on occasion, considerable stubbornness. The most important committees of the period were the Custance Committee of 1912 and the Bennett Committee of 1931. The former, through a series of generally small reforms, was able to alter the Fisher-Selborne scheme into a more practical proposition. Its true impact is hard to gauge as the First World War interrupted the implementation of many of its measures. The latter committee carried out a thorough investigation into all aspects of the selection and early career education of officers and laid down a programme of reforms which, although largely rejected in the short term, had almost all been adopted by 1939.

The amount and variety of reform is indicative of a system of selection and education which required considerable modification. In its original form the Fisher-Selborne scheme placed too much emphasis on science and engineering, believing that mastery of these subjects would produce a perfect naval officer. The demise of the scheme was inevitable given the increasing variety and sophistication of naval equipment and, thus, the impossibility of combining the user and maintainer roles. In the meantime young executive officers suffered from a curriculum that over emphasised engineering, rather than the seamanship, navigation, and leadership needed to provide the basis of their professional expertise.

The reformed system of officer selection and early career education, as it evolved from 1912 onwards, must be considered successful in that it provided the bulk of the professional naval officer corps which made the Royal Navy a highly effective fighting force in the Second World War. The success of the wartime Navy rested on the technical knowledge, seamanship, and leadership ability of those it had educated in peacetime – faced by skilful and determined enemies, rapidly advancing technology, and vast numbers of newly recruited personnel with limited training, they responded magnificently – demonstrating admirable skill in the ‘management of violence’. The Navy had chosen men of courage, intelligence, and determination and trained them as seamen, scientists, and tacticians. Although they did not have the common upbringing envisaged by Fisher, the different branches of the officer corps combined to great effect.

This study has gone some way in addressing the hitherto neglected subject of officer selection and education in the early twentieth century, but there is considerable scope for expansion. A more detailed consideration of the syllabi of instruction and their evolution might be undertaken but it would perhaps be more rewarding to focus on the factors that drove naval policy. The democratisation issue offers particularly fertile ground for an investigation into naval relations with the Labour Party and other pro-democratisation campaigners. Similarly there is scope for a more detailed survey of naval opinion, covering both the ward-room and lower-deck, and certainly for deeper consideration of how far democratisation was a practical proposition taking into account social, financial, and educational constraints.

The Navy's relationship with the civilian education system is also in need of further investigation. It is clear that the naval colleges were innovatory and influential establishments, but the extent and exact nature of their influence remains unclear. Equally whilst it is readily apparent that the Royal Navy was affected by national educational trends, in particular the expansion of state funded secondary school provision, the exact nature of the relationship is open to examination.

A detailed study of the changing role of the executive officer in this period would shed considerable light on the educational problems faced by the Royal Navy. Attention has hitherto focused on the amalgamation and subsequent re-separation of the executive and engineering branches and, to a lesser extent, on the increasing emphasis on strategy and tactics. Both subjects deserve more attention, but there is other ground to be covered. In particular the abortive attempt to form an electrical engineering branch in the early 1920s offers an insight into changing perceptions of the officer corps in general and the executive officer in particular. It is clear that there was considerable disagreement as to what the duties of a professional fighting sea officer should be, and what responsibilities should be devolved to his colleagues.

In short, this thesis demonstrates the development and evolution of the Royal Navy's systems of executive officer selection and early career education in the 1903-1939 period. It shows that what officers were taught was dictated by the work they were expected to do and thus that changes in the employment of officers inevitably resulted in educational reform. It examines the effects of the

failed experiment in inter-changeability. It discusses how naval officers were selected, what boys were chosen and how this changed over the period.

Finally it explores the relationship between the Royal Navy and the civilian educational sector, in particular the development of state secondary education and modern teaching methods. Overall it provides a picture of the young men commissioned as executive officers in this period and thus a foundation for exploring their professional and personal lives and the life and work of their service.

Appendix I – List of committees concerned with the selection and early career education of Royal Navy officers 1902-1939

Osborne and Dartmouth 1905 (Fawkes Committee) – Considered living conditions at the colleges with a view to reducing costs and maintaining a suitably naval atmosphere.

Douglas Committees – Between 1905 and 1907 Admiral Sir Archibald Douglas, C-in-C Portsmouth, presided over a series of committees concerned with the practical implementation of Fisher's reforms.

1905- System of sea training for Fisher-Selborne scheme cadets and midshipmen

1905 – Engineering education for Fisher-Selborne scheme cadets, future employment of officers as engineers

1907- Integration of engineering and Royal Marines officers into the executive officer corps

Custance 1912 – Reconsidered the practical operation of the Fisher-Selborne scheme

Special Entry (Evan-Thomas Committee) 1913 – Formulated the system of entering and educating Special Entry Cadets.

Osborne (May Committee) 1917 – Investigated living conditions at Osborne, paying particular regard to cadet health

Goodenough 1918 – Considered the education of young officers in general but especially midshipmen, including consideration of whether the integration of engineer and executive roles was realistic

McKenna 1918 – Considered the future of naval engineering. Had the Fisher-Selborne scheme produced enough engineering officers, and if not what should be done?

Anderson 1919 – Investigated whether financial conditions were affecting the number and quality of candidates for the Special and Fisher-Selborne schemes and suggested remedial measures

Ricardo 1919 – Investigated the possibility of a scheme for the development of suitable boy seamen into officers

Bennett 1931 – Concerned with the democratisation of the officer corps; including the desirability of democratisation, how far it could reasonably be carried out and the backgrounds of existing officers

Larken 1931 – Investigation into promotion from the lower-deck – were sufficient opportunities available to bright young men and what prevented suitable candidates from achieving promotion.

James 1935 – Education of executive officers of all ranks in tactics and strategy

Watson 1938 – General reconsideration of sea training for young officers, focussing particularly on midshipmen – subjects of study, and the need to gain as much practical experience as possible

Other committees of relevance include the Lowry Committee (1917) which was concerned with the education of officers who had been sent to sea early during the First World War; the Field/Waistell (1920), Tudor (1921) and Tweedie (1924) Committees concerned with the allocation of engineering based duties between the torpedo, engineering and proposed electrical branches; the Dawson Committee (1926) which investigated the health of cadets at Dartmouth; and the Kelly report into the Invergordon Mutiny (1931) which discussed the deficiencies in the training and employment of officers.

Appendix II – HM Ships employed in cadet training 1907-1939

Antrim – Devonshire Class cruiser launched in 1903 and sold for breaking up in 1922. In 1921 she was briefly used for Special Entry training, at the same time serving as radio and ASDIC trials ship at Portsmouth.

Carnarvon – Devonshire class cruiser used for sea training of Special Entry cadets from 1919 to 1921. She was launched in 1903 and sold for breaking up in 1921.

Carstairs – Hunt class minesweeper (*Aberdare* group) launched in 1919 and sold for breaking up in 1935. *Carstairs* was used to provide Special Entry cadets with seagoing experience between 1924 and 1932.

Cornwall – Monmouth class cruiser launched in 1902 and sold for breaking up in 1920. *Cornwall* provided sea training for Dartmouth cadets between 1908 and 1914, and resumed these duties in 1919.

Courageous – Lead ship of the *Courageous* class of battle cruisers, launched in 1916. *Courageous* was used by Special Entry cadets from 1923-1924. On relinquishing these duties work began on converting her to an aircraft carrier, the refit being completed in 1928. Sunk by U-29, 17 September 1939.

Cumberland – Monmouth class cruiser launched in 1901 and sold for breaking up in 1921. *Cumberland* provided sea training for Dartmouth cadets in the years before the First World War, after the war she housed both Dartmouth and Special Entry cadets.

Erebus – Lead ship of the *Erebus* class of monitors. Launched in 1916 and sold for breaking up in 1946. *Erebus* spent most of the inter-war period as a static training ship and was used for both gunnery and Special Cadet training. Refitted for active service she served throughout the Second World War including in the invasion of Sicily and the Normandy landings.

Forres – *Hunt* class minesweeper launched in 1918 and sold for breaking up in 1935. *Forres* was stationed at Dartmouth from 1925 to 1932 and was used to familiarise cadets with life at sea, undertaking training voyages of up to a week in length.

Frobisher – *Hawkins* class cruiser launched in 1920 and sold for breaking up in 1949. *Frobisher* was converted for cadet sea training in 1932 and remained in the role until 1939. After reconversion, she saw active service during the Second World War at the end of which she was resumed her cadet training role.

Highflyer – Lead ship of the *Highflyer* class of cruisers; launched in 1898 sold for breaking up in 1921. Carried the first class of Special Entry cadets 1913-1914.

Sturgeon – R class destroyer launched in 1917 and sold for breaking up in 1926. *Sturgeon* was attached to Dartmouth from 1919 to 1925 and was used to provide cadets with seagoing experience. Amongst her commanding officers was Frederick Dalrymple- Hamilton who subsequently returned to college as Captain.

Temeraire – *Bellerophon* class battleship launched in 1907 sold for breaking up in 1921. In the years after the First World War she provided sea training for both Dartmouth and Special Entry cadets.

Thunderer – *Orion* class battleship launched in 1911, the last and the largest warship built on the River Thames. Sold for breaking up in 1926. *Thunderer* was used for cadet sea training from 1921-1924 and thereafter employed as a static training ship for Special Entry cadets.

Vindictive – *Hawkins* class cruiser launched in 1918 and sold for breaking up in 1946. *Vindictive* had a varied career, being used as an aircraft carrier, cadet training ship (1937-1939) and finally as a repair and depot ship.

Zinnia – *Acacia* class sloop launched in 1915 and sold to the Belgian Navy in 1920. *Zinnia* was briefly used to provide sea training to Reserve Fleet midshipman at Devonport in 1919.

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