

‘The four most memorable years of my life’: Winston Churchill at the Admiralty, 1911-14



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* **Title Quote:** Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis Volume I: 1911-1914* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1968), p.63.

** **Title Picture:** Winston S. Churchill, *First Lord of the Admiralty, speaking with First Sea Lord Admiral of the Fleet Lord John ‘Jacky’ Arbuthnot Fisher in 1914*
<<http://www.britishempire.co.uk/images4/churchillfisher.jpg>> [accessed 1 March 2016].

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Preface

Abbreviations:

APOC: Anglo-Persian Oil Company

CID: Committee for Imperial Defence

RNAS: Royal Naval Air Service

Glossary:

First Lord of the Admiralty: the minister appointed to represent the Royal Navy in Cabinet.

First Sea Lord: the professional head of the Royal Navy.

Naval Estimates: the projected annual budget for the Royal Navy announced by the First Lord to Commons in March each year. The 1912-13 Naval Estimates, for example, were announced in March 1912.

Conventions:

All quotes are *ad verbatim*.

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Introduction

In 1967, A.J.P. Taylor described Winston Churchill's indomitable legacy by justly applying to him John Dryden's couplet, 'A man so various that he seemed to be | Not one, but all mankind's epitome.'¹ As a subaltern in the 4th Hussars, Churchill participated in the last British cavalry charge at Omdurman in 1898, and traversed the decades to lead his nation to victory in the Second World War, before dicing with hydrogen bombs amidst the Cold War tensions of 1953-54. After Churchill's death in 1965, his memory passed into the hands of historians, whose judgements on him have tended towards either hagiography or iconoclasm. Naturally, therefore, facets of Churchill's career that do not easily fall into the broad categories of success or failure have been relatively neglected by his biographers. Consequently, out of Churchill's four years as First Lord of the Admiralty, his role in the 1915 Dardanelles disaster is saturated with literature, whereas the three previous years – a period characterised by Croesan expenditure, immense political opposition, and a vigorous modernisation of the Royal Navy – have been somewhat overlooked.² When Churchill resigned over the Dardanelles fiasco, even the steely Lord Kitchener reassured him, 'There is one thing, at least, they can never take away from you – when the war began you had the fleet ready.'³

The biographic accounts of Churchill's pre-war Admiralty years are rife with opposing points of view. The revisionist Robert Rhodes James cites Churchill's decision to raise the 1912-13 Naval Estimates as part of his wider argument that the First Lord had no conviction

¹ As noted in Paul Addison, 'The Political Beliefs of Winston Churchill', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 30, 1 (1980), 23-47 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3679001.pdf>> [accessed 14 February 2016] (p.23) [hereafter Addison, *The Political Beliefs*].

² Churchill was appointed First Lord of the Admiralty again on September 3rd 1939 and held the post until May 11th 1940.

³ Paul Johnson, *Churchill* (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 44; Churchill's role in the Dardanelles operation is very well-documented and requires no further explanation in the study.

in Liberalism.⁴ The hyper-critical John Charmley, who delivers his biography ‘with barely disguised contempt’, postulates that Churchill’s increased naval budget was strategically unsound but proffers little to substantiate his claim.⁵ Pro-Churchill historians, Henry Pelling and Roy Jenkins, provide scant detail on how the Anglo-German naval race shaped Churchill’s policymaking, largely due to their limited research.⁶ Whereas Pelling was denied access to the Churchill Papers in the 1970s, Jenkins forwent archives altogether and relied solely on published sources, though perhaps he can be forgiven on account of his age when writing *Churchill*.⁷

The revisionist school provides many perceptive theories that explain Churchill’s weak standing in Cabinet from 1911 to 1914, but offers comparatively little on the First Lord’s relations with Chancellor David Lloyd George and Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith. Jenkins, however, has striven to account for the positions of these two men in relation to Churchill. Nevertheless, the literature generally posits that Churchill’s stance during the Irish Home Rule Bill crisis, which came to a head in mid-1914, was pivotal to his position in Cabinet, without paying adequate attention to how the First Lord circumvented the Cabinet coalition demanding his resignation in January 1914.⁸ This is especially true of biographies by Rhodes James and Geoffrey Best.⁹

In 1969, Ronald Hyam lamented the lack of detail on how Churchill and former First Sea Lord, Sir John Arbuthnot Fisher, devised the 1911-14 naval reforms in Randolph S.

⁴ Rhodes James, *Study in Failure, 1900-1939* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970) [hereafter Rhodes James, *Study in Failure*].

⁵ Rasor, Eugene L., *Winston S. Churchill, 1874-1965: A Comprehensive Historiography and Annotated Bibliography*, (Greenwood Press, 2000), p. 55; John Charmley, *The End of Glory: A Political Biography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1993), p. 78.

⁶ Henry Pelling, *Winston Churchill* (London: Macmillan, 1974); Roy Jenkins, *Churchill: A Biography* (London: Pan Books, 2002).

⁷ Rasor, p. 54; Jenkins was 80 when he published *Churchill* and suffered from heart problems in later life, which culminated in a fatal heart attack in 2003.

⁸ For an account of Churchill’s stance on Irish Home Rule, see Jenkins, pp.233-40.

⁹ Geoffrey Best, *Churchill: A Study in Greatness* (London: Hambledon and London, 2001).

Churchill's second volume of the official biography.¹⁰ In the subsequent decades, Churchill's most distinguished biographers have failed to overturn this neglect; between them, Henry Pelling, Geoffrey Best, Rhodes James, Jenkins and Charmley dedicate less than a handful of pages to the matter. In the overlapping field of naval history, modern scholarship overwhelmingly centres on Fisher's strategy after 1914, as demonstrated by the "flotilla defence" debate, which was only laid to rest in the last decade when post-revisionists convincingly demonstrated the theory was based upon a 'virtual archival vacuum'.¹¹ Consequently, the record of Churchill's involvement in the naval advances of the era has remained largely unchanged since the publication of Arthur J. Marder's five-volume epic, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, in the 1960s.¹²

To remedy these deficiencies, this study has examined archival documents kept at the Parliamentary Archives in Westminster, the British Library and the Archives Centre at Churchill College, Cambridge. The Jellicoe Papers chronicle Admiralty woes during the naval race, whereas the Lloyd George Papers shed light upon the First Lord's relations with leading members of the Asquith Cabinet.¹³ Folder CHAR 13 of the Chartwell Papers is the most thorough collection of letters, memoranda, notes, and minutes that crossed the First Lord's desk between 1911 and 1914.¹⁴ Furthermore, its various subfolders hold the unexpurgated record of the correspondence between Churchill and Fisher.

¹⁰ Ronald Hyam, 'Winston Churchill Before 1914', *The Historical Journal*, 12, 1 (1969), 164-73 <<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=3226568&fileId=S0018246X00004167>> [accessed 21st April 2016] (p. 164); Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill Volume II: Young Statesman 1901-1914* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1967) [hereafter Randolph S. Churchill, II].

¹¹ The term 'flotilla defence' was first introduced in Nicholas A. Lambert, 'Admiral Sir John Fisher and the Concept of Flotilla Defence, 1904-1909', *Journal of Military History*, 49 (1995), 639-60; quote from Christopher M. Bell, 'The Myth of a Naval Revolution by Proxy: Lord Fisher's Influence on Winston Churchill's Naval Policy', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 38, 7 (2015), 1024-44 <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/01402390.2015.1005449>> [accessed 14 February 2016] (p. 1027).

¹² Arthur J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: the Royal Navy in the Fisher era, 1904-1919, Volume I: The Road to War, 1904-1919* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961) [hereafter Marder, I]

¹³ London, The British Library, The Jellicoe Papers [hereafter J/]; London, The Parliamentary Archives, The Lloyd George Papers [hereafter LG/].

¹⁴ Cambridge, Churchill College, The Chartwell Papers, CHAR 13 [hereafter CHAR 13/]; the Chartwell Papers originate from before July 27th 1945, the date that Churchill's first term as Prime Minister ended and were

Since the archival material pertaining to Churchill's career is especially dense, a broad range of published sources have also been examined. Aside from public and parliamentary speeches, Rhodes James' *Winston Churchill: His Complete Speeches, 1897-1963* contains minutes from Committee for Imperial Defence (CID) meetings that illuminate Cabinet concerns over Anglo-German tensions.¹⁵ Churchill's *The World Crisis*, despite being widely considered an 'apologia' for the Gallipoli campaign, offers useful insights into the First Lord's mind when its content is supported by documentary evidence.¹⁶ Furthermore, the memoirs and diaries of contemporaries such as C.F.G. Masterman, Sir Charles Hobhouse, and Sir Roger Keyes reveal personal opinions towards Churchill in both Cabinet and Admiralty spheres.¹⁷

The first chapter dismantles the revisionist account of why Churchill raised the 1912-13 Naval Estimates by accounting for the strategic questions that permeated his thoughts and the lengths he ventured to avoid budgetary increases amidst the imminent 1912 amendment to the *Flottengesetze*.¹⁸ The following chapter accounts both for why Churchill was resented in Liberal, Tory and Admiralty circles and how he nevertheless overcame the coalition baying for his resignation. The final chapter charts the First Lord's collaboration with Fisher to modernise the Royal Navy, which has been grossly overlooked in most biographic accounts of the pre-war Admiralty years. The two common threads binding the chapters are that each

originally owned by the Chartwell Trust. Papers dating from after July 27th 1945 were given to Churchill College by Lady Churchill in 1969 and are catalogued as the Churchill Papers.

¹⁵ Robert Rhodes James, *Winston Churchill: His Complete Speeches, 1897-1963, Volume I* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1974 [hereafter Rhodes James, *Speeches I*]; Robert Rhodes James, *Winston Churchill: His Complete Speeches, 1897-1963, Volume II* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1974) [hereafter Rhodes James, *Speeches II*].

¹⁶ Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis Volume I: 1911-1914* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1968) [hereafter Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis I*]; quote from: Edward J. Erickson, 'One More Push: Forcing the Dardanelles in March 1915', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 14, 3 (2001), 158-76 <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01402390108437849#abstract>> [accessed 23 February 2016] (p. 173).

¹⁷ Lucy Masterman, *C.F.G. Masterman* (London: Nicholas and Watson, 1939) [hereafter Masterman]; Sir Charles Hobhouse, *Inside Asquith's Cabinet: From the Diaries of Sir Charles Hobhouse*, ed. by Edward David (London: John Murray, 1977) [hereafter Hobhouse]; Sir Roger Keyes, *The Naval Memoirs of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes, The Narrow Seas to The Dardanelles* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1934) [hereafter Keyes].

¹⁸ *Flottengesetze* or "Fleet Acts" are hereafter referred to as Navy Laws.

aims to challenge the existing literature to more clearly delineate Churchill's career from 1911 to 1914 and to ultimately contribute to the ceaseless debate concerning the overall measure of the man.

This study commences on 25 October 1911, when Churchill replaced Reginald McKenna as First Lord, following the failure of the latter to provide an adequate war plan to the CID after the Agadir Crisis. It concludes three years later at the outbreak of the First World War. Overall, by offering refreshed perspective on Churchill's pre-war Admiralty years – a comparatively understudied portion of his career – this thesis aims to modestly influence the way he is remembered.

I: ‘A strong tremor of unrest’¹⁹

The sharp increase in Churchill’s naval expenditure began on 18 March 1912, when he announced to Commons his intention to raise the 1912-13 Naval Estimates to £44 million. The revisionist record falls short in accounting for why Churchill decided to increase the naval budget. Foremost, Rhodes James argues, unconvincingly, that this decision – a marked contrast from Churchill’s previous opposition to McKenna’s proposed increases to the 1909-10 Naval Estimates – was symptomatic of his weak commitment to Liberalism.²⁰ Archival sources, however, show that until late January 1912, Churchill was committed to slashing the Naval Estimates. Furthermore, Charmley doubts Churchill’s grasp of naval strategy and questions the rationale behind the 1912 increases.²¹ Conversely, documentary evidence suggests that Churchill’s heightened 1912-13 Naval Estimates were indeed warranted and supports his assessment of the German naval challenge following the Dreadnought revolution, Berlin’s refusal of a naval holiday, and the imminent 1912 Navy Law.²²

Churchill’s attitude towards the navy is of great historiographical importance. As a young officer stationed in India, Churchill read Alfred Thayer Mahan’s *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, which impressed upon him the Empire’s need for a strong fleet.²³ Before migrating from the Tories to the Liberals in 1904, Churchill had opposed expensive Conservative army reforms and argued ‘any danger that comes to Britain would not be on land; it would come on the sea’ before adding, ‘the superiority of the Navy is vital to our

¹⁹ Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, p. 1877

²⁰ Rhodes James, *Study in Failure*, p. 32

²¹ Charmley, p. 78.

²² Charmley, p.75-79; the term ‘Dreadnought revolution’ denotes the impact the 1906 launch of *HMS Dreadnought* had upon naval thinking and is borrowed from Charles H. Fairbanks Jr., ‘The Origins of the Dreadnought Revolution: A Historiographical Essay’, *The International History Review*, 13, 2 (1991), 246-72 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40106366.pdf>> [accessed 25 February 2016] (p. 246).

²³ Tuvian Ben-Moshe, *Churchill: Strategy and History* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rien Publishers, 1992), p. 8.

national existence'.²⁴ Accordingly, Rhodes James' contention that in his early career, Churchill resembled a pacifist, 'so strong were his denunciations of military expenditure' is flawed; in reality, Churchill was simply unwilling to support arms expenditure unless it was vital to the Empire.²⁵ Curiously, this claim also contradicts Rhodes James' argument in *Churchill: A Study in Failure, 1900-1939*, in which he states that Churchill's stance on naval matters was Tory 'in principle' and thus – according to him – perpetually in favour of high naval expenditure.²⁶ He goes on to argue that Churchill's opposition to McKenna's proposed 1909-10 Naval Estimates was 'politically out of character'.²⁷ However, in 1908 and 1909 Churchill frequently denounced the possibility of war with Germany as 'nonsense', thereby suggesting he saw little rational basis to support increased Naval Estimates that year.²⁸ Furthermore, these occasions are all documented in Rhodes James' own collection of Churchill's speeches, which suggests his account of 1911-14 in *Churchill: A Study in Failure, 1900-1939* is twisted to suit his overall narrative.²⁹

Nevertheless, the 1909-10 Naval Estimates debate remains a significant episode in the story of Churchill's relationship with the navy. Whereas McKenna had insisted that six Dreadnoughts were necessary, on the basis that the Admiralty feared the High Seas Fleet would reach four-fifths the size of the Royal Navy by 1912, Churchill argued that 'Britain's 47 first-class battleships, against 24 German ones' warranted the laying down of just four Dreadnoughts over 1909-10.³⁰ As First Sea Lord, Fisher instead demanded that eight were required. In the end, Asquith decided to lay down four Dreadnoughts in 1909 and a further four in 1910. Several of Churchill's contemporary critics were sceptical of his calls for just

²⁴ Rhodes James, *Speeches I*, p.74; Rhodes James, *Speeches I*, p. 83.

²⁵ Rhodes James, 'The Enigma' in *Churchill as Peacemaker*, ed. by James W. Muller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.6-23 (p. 12).

²⁶ Rhodes James, *Study in Failure*, p. 32.

²⁷ Rhodes James, *Study in Failure*, *ibid.*

²⁸ Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, p.1085.

²⁹ Despite this flaw in Rhodes James' reasoning, his book, *Churchill: A Study in Failure 1900-1939*, is an excellent account of Churchill's life that sparked the realisation that the man was not infallible.

³⁰ J/MS 48990/18, note by Jellicoe, 1909 showing that the Admiralty expected the German navy to reach four-fifths of the Royal Navy by April 1912; .LG/C/24/3/2, note produced by Churchill on 1909-1910 Naval Estimates, 1908.

four Dreadnoughts, such as Lord Knollys, who opined that the decision ‘cannot be from conviction or principle as the very idea of his having either is enough to make one laugh’.³¹ Despite these shafts of criticism, the relative strengths of the British and German fleets in 1912 suggest that there had been no real need for six – or indeed, eight – Dreadnoughts in 1909-10 because ‘Britain’s preponderance at sea was answered’.³²

Of yet greater significance to Churchill’s stance on naval expenditure is the Agadir Crisis of 1911, after which the state of European affairs undeniably heated up and was conflated by typically heavy-handed remarks made by German politicians. Amidst the crisis, Bethmann-Hollweg’s curt reply to Britain’s call for a “clean slate” in Franco-German relations was, ‘The slate has been written on quite recently with a hard pencil, and the slate has become scratched in consequence.’³³ Churchill aired his concern over the growing tensions on 3 October 1911 and said, ‘A strong tremor of unrest has passed through the gigantic structure of fleets and armies which impress and oppress the civilizations of our time.’³⁴ However, he continued to float his ambition to reduce the Naval Estimates even after the despatch of *SS Panther* to Morocco had ‘alerted the Chancelleries of Europe [...] to the growing ambition of Germany’.³⁵

To understand why Churchill did not increase the Naval Estimates after the Agadir Crisis, it is necessary to briefly examine whether he believed that war was likely. After his visit to Germany in 1909, where he observed army manoeuvres as a guest of the Kaiser, Churchill circulated a minute around Cabinet that predicted Germany would try to solve its internal problems through either a restrained foreign policy or external adventurism.³⁶ By

³¹ Marder, *I*, p. 160.

³² Randolph S. Churchill, *II*, p. 514.

³³ Edward C. Blech and Harry L. Sherwood, eds, *British and Foreign State Papers. 1911. Volume CIV* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1915), p. 1000.

³⁴ Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, p. 1877.

³⁵ Randolph S. Churchill, *II*, p. 523.

³⁶ Ben-Moshe, p. 13.

Churchill's own admission, this was his 'first sinister impression' of Berlin's intentions.³⁷ Whereas Churchill had once been 'virtually an isolationist', around this time he began to align himself with Haldane's plan to send an expeditionary force to France in the event of a war with Germany.³⁸ Churchill's wariness of German militarism causes Jenkins to postulate that after the Agadir Crisis, Churchill believed in the 'likelihood' of war.³⁹

Yet this is not wholly convincing. Although the Agadir Crisis was the back-cloth of Churchill's advent at the Admiralty, there is scant evidence to suggest he actually believed war was imminent or inevitable in late 1911. He even wrote 'I do not believe in the theory of inevitable wars' in a letter dated around Christmas 1911.⁴⁰ Although Churchill may have been writing *sub rosa* on this occasion, the fact he did not even speak of raising the Naval Estimates in his first months at the Admiralty suggests otherwise. In reality, Jenkins' assertion that Churchill believed in a coming war with Germany is symptomatic of a wider historiographical debate over European beliefs in the inevitability and improbability of war in the years leading up to 1914.⁴¹ On the whole, Churchill's private correspondence certainly implies that upon his advent at the Admiralty, he thought war with Germany was possible but, on balance, improbable.

Furthermore, until early 1912 the British government expected Berlin's naval programme to fall by half, as legislated by the existing German Navy Law.⁴² Accordingly, on 11 November 1911 at the Lord Mayor's Banquet, Churchill announced his desire for 'some reduction from the abnormal level' at which the Naval Estimates stood and assured his audience that in any case 'the high-water mark' of naval spending had been reached.⁴³ This

³⁷ Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis I*, p. 66.

³⁸ Randolph S. Churchill, *II*, p.511; Martin Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life* (London: BCA, 1992), p. 234.

³⁹ Jenkins, p. 212.

⁴⁰ Gilbert, p. 242.

⁴¹ For a discussion of belief in war's inevitability and improbability in pre-1914 European societies, see Holger Afflerbach, 'The Topos of Improbable War in Europe before 1914' in *An Improbable War? The Outbreak of World War I and European Political Culture Before 1914* ed. by Holger Afflerbach and David Stevenson (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), pp. 161-82.

⁴² Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, p. 1892.

⁴³ Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, *ibid*.

evident reluctance to sanction greater Estimates, even after Agadir, is the final nail in the coffin of Rhodes James' argument that Churchill's move to the Admiralty 'marked the decisive end of the "social reform" period' of his career, after which he instantly relinquished Liberal parsimony towards armaments.⁴⁴ Moreover, Churchill complemented these remarks with two qualifications. Reductions could only be achieved if 'national security is not in the slightest degree compromised' and with the understanding that British 'naval preparations are necessarily based upon the naval preparations of other countries'.⁴⁵ Overall, there is little to substantiate the charge that Churchill 'instantly abandoned' thoughts of economy upon stepping into his Admiralty shoes.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, the aforementioned qualifications were breached on 31 January 1912, when Churchill received a letter from Sir Ernest Cassel detailing Berlin's intended amendment to the existing German Navy Law, which denoted an intensification of its naval programme. In place of the extra 17 battleships, four extra battlecruisers and 12 extra small cruisers that the existing Navy Law planned to construct by 1920, the 1912 amendment proposed building 25, 12 and 18 of each vessel, respectively. This was accompanied by an addition of 15,000 officers and men to the existing 86,500 German naval personnel alongside a mandate for the construction of over 50 submarines.⁴⁷

More significantly, the amendment enacted 'an increase in the striking force of ships of all classes which will be available, immediately available, at all seasons of the year'.⁴⁸ Effectively four-fifths of the High Seas Fleet would be kept in year-round active commission, meaning there would be 25 German capital ships in the North Sea against just 22 British ones,

⁴⁴ Rhodes James, *Study in Failure*, p. 40.

⁴⁵ Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Richard Ollard, 'Churchill and the Navy' in *Churchill* ed. by Robert Blake and Roger Louis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 375-96 (p. 382): Churchill 'instantly abandoned' economy upon taking office at the Admiralty.

⁴⁷ Gilbert, p. 243.

⁴⁸ Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, p. 1982.

including the Atlantic fleet.⁴⁹ The Admiralty's woes were worsened by the CID's expectation that by 1915, the Kiel Canal would be deepened to enable Germany's largest battleships to pass unchallenged into the North Sea.⁵⁰ Consequently, Churchill intensified Fisher's doctrine of fleet concentration in home waters and eventually signed an agreement with France on 10 February 1913 that called for naval co-operation in the Mediterranean, the Straits of Dover and the Western Channel.⁵¹ In expectation of the amendment, Churchill glumly told Commons while presenting his first budget on 18 March 1912 that 'the financial aspect of the Naval Estimates is not cheerful' and stood them at a new high of £44 million.⁵²

Churchill's 1912-13 Naval Estimates speech was entirely antithetical to his argument against McKenna in 1909, when he had opposed increased naval expenditure because of Britain's advantage in pre-Dreadnoughts. Accordingly, Jenkins describes this shift in stance as 'zig-zagging on a formidable scale'.⁵³ This judgement neglects that the politico-military situation had radically changed in the interim. Additionally, Charmley disputes whether Churchill correctly interpreted the ramifications of the 1912 Navy Law and contends that he may have been misled by the 'numbers game' and erroneously intensified British Dreadnought production.⁵⁴ However, as Rasor observes, in *Churchill: The End of Glory*, Charmley presents a flawed description of the 1909 naval debates that calls into question his own capacity to interpret dense naval statistics.⁵⁵ Overall, Charmley's claim is conjecture, devoid of statistical support and stimulates more than it satisfies a discussion of Churchill's grasp of strategy in 1911-14.

⁴⁹ Gilbert, p. 243.

⁵⁰ Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, p. 1974; Jenkins, p. 220, the deepening of the Kiel Canal was in fact completed in June 1914.

⁵¹ Christopher M. Bell, 'Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution Reconsidered: Winston Churchill at the Admiralty, 1911-1914', *War in History*, 18, 3 (2011), 333-56 <<http://wih.sagepub.com/content/18/3/333.full.pdf+html>> [accessed 14 February 2016] (p. 337); Randolph S. Churchill, *II*, p. 597.

⁵² Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, p. 1919; The Lloyd George Papers, LG/C/3/16/3, letter from Churchill to Lloyd George, 19 January 1914.

⁵³ Jenkins, p. 211.

⁵⁴ Charmley, p. 78.

⁵⁵ Rasor, p. 55.

Principally, Charmley neglects the impact of the 1906 launch of *HMS Dreadnought*, which induced a paradigm shift in naval thinking. She was the physical manifestation of Fisher's vision for the Fleet and could make 21 knots, boasted ten 12-inch guns and possessed armour that was 11 inches thick in some places.⁵⁶ The superiority of the Dreadnought was so significant that first-class vessels were classified as either Dreadnoughts or the somewhat obsolete pre-Dreadnoughts and naval strength was essentially determined by how many of these new ships a fleet could boast. This granted Germany 'a nearly level start in the competition for naval supremacy'.⁵⁷ A 1909 memorandum produced by Sir John Jellicoe summarises the impact of the Dreadnought revolution upon relative fleet strengths:

In future years as the older ships fall out of the fighting line, the comparison will have to be made on the Dreadnoughts alone; this fact by itself makes it imperative for us to maintain a good lead on Germany in battleships of the Dreadnought type.⁵⁸

In 1912, Churchill was fully aware of the threat posed by German Dreadnoughts to British naval supremacy. The 1889 Naval Defence Act had decreed the Two-Power Standard as Britain's measure of superiority over foreign navies and required the Royal Navy to be at least equal to the combined fleets of the next two strongest naval powers, which in 1889 were Russia and France. Phillips Payson O'Brien notes that by 1907 this standard had begun to fall into abeyance as Germany became the Admiralty's almost sole preoccupation.⁵⁹ The completion of the first German Dreadnoughts in 1909 caused Jellicoe to write that year, 'the struggle is to maintain the One-Power Standard against Germany alone'.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Robert K. Massie, *Dreadnought: Britain, Germany and the Coming of the Great War* (New York: Random House, 2007), p. 63.

⁵⁷ Nicholas A. Lambert, 'British Naval Policy, 1913-1914: Financial Limitation and Strategic Revolution', *The Journal of Modern History*, 67, 3 (1995), 595-626 (p. 596) [hereafter Lambert, *British Naval Policy*].

⁵⁸ J/MS 48990/19, memorandum by Jellicoe, 1909.

⁵⁹ Phillips Payson O'Brien, 'The Titan Refreshed: Imperial Overstretch and the British Navy before the First World War', *Past & Present*, 172, 2 (2001), 146-69

<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3600779.pdf?acceptTC=true>> [accessed 22 February 2016] (p. 153).

⁶⁰ J/MS 48990/19, note by Jellicoe regarding relative fleet strengths, 1909; as stated in: Lambert, *British Naval Policy*, p. 595.

Moreover, by February 1911, Britain had lost the Two-Power Standard in terms of Dreadnoughts against the combined German and French fleets, who could field a total of 15 Dreadnoughts against the Royal Navy's 14.⁶¹ The unlikelihood of a Franco-German alliance against Britain further emphasises how the Two Power Standard was an anachronistic measure belonging to a bygone era. Churchill shared Jellicoe's opinion and when presenting the 1912-13 Naval Estimates, said that the Two-Power Standard had 'lost much of its good sense and its reality' and announced the Admiralty's formal adoption of a 60 per cent standard of superiority over the German fleet.⁶² Evidently, Churchill had grown to appreciate the delicate issue of comparative fleet strengths, which had perhaps eluded him in 1908-09.

However, Churchill also remarked that the 60 per cent standard was 'moderate' and warned that:

Every addition Germany makes, or may make, to the new ships she lays down each year must accelerate the decline in the relative fighting value of our pre-Dreadnoughts, and, therefore, requires special measures on our part.⁶³

Consequently, in anticipation of the imminent amendment to the Navy Law, Churchill declared Britain would implement a 'two-keels-to-one standard' on any ship that Germany added to its existing programme.⁶⁴ Therefore, to counter Berlin's new six-year Dreadnought construction programme of three-two-three-two-three-two, Churchill embarked on a programme of five-four-five-four-five-four, as opposed to the more extravagant six-four-six-four-six-four that Fisher desired.⁶⁵ This was nevertheless a costly policy, leading Charmley to write that 'the whole of the nation's wealth could have been poured into the Admiralty without satisfying its voracious appetite'.⁶⁶ However, contrary to Charmley's proclamation

⁶¹ J/MS 48990/48, note by Jellicoe, 1911. This note details the relative fleet strengths of the German and British navies, as well as the number of Dreadnoughts that each Power could field.

⁶² Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, p. 1923.

⁶³ LG/C/24/3/23, note titled "Mr. Churchill, House of Commons, March 1912".

⁶⁴ Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, p. 1923.

⁶⁵ Jenkins, p. 220.

⁶⁶ Charmley, p. 77.

and Fisher's insistence that a two-keels-to-one standard over all German ships ought to be the 'Key Note' of Admiralty policy, Churchill reserved this standard only for ships Berlin laid down above its existing Navy Law.⁶⁷ Since the 1912-13 *Queen Elizabeth*-class Dreadnoughts cost on average £3 million apiece, this policy was substantially cheaper than what Fisher had proposed.⁶⁸

Although much has been made of Churchill's steep naval expenditure, biographers provide little detail of Germany's investment in the High Seas Fleet. In 1913, while drawing up the 1913-14 Naval Estimates, Churchill wrote to Fisher that since 1908, Germany had spent over £74 million on new vessels against Britain's £98.7 million, which meant that British Dreadnought expenditure was just 35 per cent ahead of Germany's.⁶⁹ Furthermore, as McKenna noted in 1909, the German naval programme was codified in law, allowing its costs to be met 'without recourse to the Reichstag'.⁷⁰ Against this backdrop, Britain's increased Naval Estimates seem less astounding and more necessary. Contrary to Charmley's position, it seems the First Lord played the so-called "numbers game" rather well.

However, Churchill did not increase the 1912-13 Naval Estimates without first trying to broker mutual Anglo-German naval reductions. At first, his attempts were clumsy. During his famous "*Luxus-flotte*" speech on 9 February 1912 he declared, 'The British Navy is to us a necessity and, from some points of view, the German Navy is to them more in the nature of a luxury.'⁷¹ Churchill's bluntness incensed Berlin and no one more than Tirpitz, who sensationally pronounced that the First Lord's words threatened Germany.⁷² Nevertheless, Churchill's point remained; how would Germany have reacted if Britain had begun developing an army to rival theirs? Churchill was not alone in this sentiment and on 29

⁶⁷ CHAR 13/16/28-31, letter from Fisher to Churchill, 25 February 1912.

⁶⁸ Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis I*, p. 132.

⁶⁹ CHAR 13/6A/199-200, minute by Churchill, 1913 (no exact date given).

⁷⁰ LG/C/24/3/2, a reply to Mr Churchill's note on Naval Estimates, 1908.

⁷¹ Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, p. 1910. "*Luxus-Flotte*" or "Luxury Fleet" is the name generally applied to this speech, by both Churchill's German contemporaries and modern scholars.

⁷² CHAR 13/33/24, Admiralty telegram, 30 April 1912.

January 1912 Lloyd George wrote to him, 'If Germany dropped the challenge to our own naval superiority we promise that it shall be no part of our policy to oppose her interests.'⁷³ Similarly, Grey asked Churchill what could be done to 'prove that agreed naval superiority on our part would not restrict their expansion'.⁷⁴ After the failure of the 1912 Haldane Mission, Churchill wrote to Lloyd George on 17 February that it was 'not worth bargaining about a single ship' and that only a concerted bilateral programme of arms control would suffice.⁷⁵ In order to preserve British naval supremacy, Churchill was adamant that any increase above the existing Navy Law would be unquestionably met with corresponding British increases.

Despite Churchill's 1912-13 Naval Estimates speech aiming to impress upon Germany the futility of any attempt to supersede the Royal Navy's superiority, he 'coupled' the two-keels-to-one warning with a proposed naval holiday, consisting of a one-year retardation in each power's naval programme.⁷⁶ Churchill offered this to Berlin as turning 'a blank page in the book of misunderstanding'.⁷⁷ He also carefully stressed the financial benefits of scrapping its naval programme and claimed that Germany would save between '£6,000,000 and £7,000,000 sterling' if the planned amendment to the Navy Law was scrapped.⁷⁸ Lastly, Churchill played upon the military aspect of the naval race and stated that if Tirpitz abandoned the three additional battleships he intended to construct in his six-year programme, five British ships would essentially be eradicated, which was more than was possible even 'in a brilliant naval action'.⁷⁹ However, the veritable impasse of Tirpitz and Kaiser Wilhelm II

⁷³ LG/C/3/15/14, letter from Lloyd George to Churchill, 29 January 1912.

⁷⁴ LG/C/3/15/15, letter from Grey to Churchill, 31 February 1912.

⁷⁵ LG/C/3/15/15, letter from Churchill to Lloyd George, 17 February 1912; the Haldane Mission is well documented and needs no further detail. See

⁷⁶ John H. Maurer, 'Churchill's Naval Holiday: Arms Control and the Anglo-German Naval Race, 1912-14', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 15, 1 (1992), 102-27

<<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01402399208437475?journalCode=fjss20>> [accessed 14 February 2016] (p. 105).

⁷⁷ Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, p. 1925.

⁷⁸ Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, *ibid.*

⁷⁹ Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, *ibid.*

rebuked Churchill's attempt to lessen the burden of each power's naval budget and a deadlock was reached.⁸⁰

Owing to its failure, historians have contemplated whether the naval holiday was ever a viable proposal. A.J.P. Taylor wages that 'probably only Churchill took it seriously', which seems an overly cynical view of the matter.⁸¹ By contrast, Philip Towle describes the naval holiday as an 'original contribution to the way people think about disarmament by concentrating attention on the strategic effects of any agreement'.⁸² Nevertheless, the Kaiser's refusal of the naval holiday and his insistence that such an arrangement could only be made between allies also accentuates Berlin's determination to challenge the Royal Navy and thus reinforces the importance of Churchill's increased Naval Estimates.⁸³

Furthermore, the naval holiday is a particularly useful avenue of enquiry for historians seeking to explore Churchill's contribution to peacekeeping. G.M Thomson argues that Churchill was in fact one of the main antagonists of the Great War, which fits well with what Rhodes James identifies as an inevitable tradition that considers him 'principally a man of war'.⁸⁴ Contemporary and modern charges of Churchill being a warmonger are undoubtedly fuelled by his clear fascination with war. On the eve of the Great War, Lloyd George recalled that 'Winston dashed into the room, radiant [...] You could see he was a really happy man' and Churchill himself wrote to his wife Clementine that he was 'interested, geared up, and happy' with war preparations.⁸⁵ Not dissimilarly, Churchill remarked that he 'felt a profound

⁸⁰ Richard Langhorne, 'The Naval Question in Anglo-German Relations, 1912-1914', *The Historical Journal*, 14, 2 (1971), 359-70 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2637960.pdf?acceptTC=true>> [accessed 22 February 2016] (p. 369); the offer of a naval holiday was extended by Churchill three times between 1911 and 1914, but thrice they were rejected.

⁸¹ A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe* (London: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 501.

⁸² Philip Towle, 'Winston Churchill and British Disarmament Policy', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2, 3 (1979), 335-47 <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/01402397908437029>> [accessed 14 February 2016] (p. 346).

⁸³ Randolph S. Churchill, *II*, p. 569.

⁸⁴ G.M Thomson, *The Twelve Days* (London: Hutchinson, 1964); Rhodes James, *The Enigma*, p. 11

⁸⁵ Martin Gilbert, *Winston Churchill, Volume III: The Challenge of War, 1914-1916* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1971), p. 31.

sense of relief' upon being appointed wartime Prime Minister in 1940.⁸⁶ The naval holiday provides a direct antithesis to Thomson's allegation and perfectly demonstrates Manfred Weidhorn's opinion that despite Churchill's 'notoriety as a warmonger, the story of his career finds him repeatedly among the compromisers'.⁸⁷ In 1914, as in 1940, Churchill was exhilarated by the prospect of war – but this should not be equated to a desire for conflict. Churchill himself stated at the Royal Naval Association lunch on 12 November 1933:

You have heard me described as a warmonger. That is a lie. I have laboured for peace before the Great War, and if the naval holiday had been adopted the course of history might have been different.⁸⁸

After the Reichstag ratified the 1912 Navy Law on 21 May, Churchill appealed for Supplementary Estimates totalling £5 million in early June.⁸⁹ At the 7 July CID meeting Churchill voiced his anxiety and said 'the idea of sudden and aggressive action on the greatest scale against a great modern naval Power, is undoubtedly the guiding principle of German naval policy'.⁹⁰ Contrary to Rhodes James' postulation, Churchill's decision to raise the 1912-13 Naval Estimates was inherently reactionary. The revisionist argument that Churchill committed a remarkable *volte face* concerning the naval budget upon stepping into his Admiralty shoes is poorly supported by primary evidence. As demonstrated by Churchill's hesitation to adopt the two-to-one standard over Germany and his offer of a naval holiday, he was fundamentally loath to increasing the Naval Estimates without full cause. Overall, the 1912 Navy Law precipitated a significant change within Churchill; from mid-1912, he no longer considered whether a German naval attack would come, but instead applied his energies towards ensuring that the Royal Navy could defeat one. The heightened 1912-13

⁸⁶ Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War* (London: Cassel & Co, 1959), p. 84.

⁸⁷ Manfred Weidhorn, 'A contrarian's approach to peace' in *Churchill as Peacemaker* by James W. Muller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 24-54 (p. 26).

⁸⁸ Martin Gilbert, *Winston Churchill, Volume IV: The Prophet of Truth, 1922-1939* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1979), p. 523.

⁸⁹ Randolph S. Churchill, *II*, p. 598: interestingly, Churchill received little opposition in Commons or Cabinet to the Supplementary Estimates, even though they were quite a significant amount.

⁹⁰ Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, p. 1982.

Naval Estimates were the first of a series of incremental budgetary increases that led to British naval expenditure exceeding £54 million by 1914.⁹¹

⁹¹ LG/C/3/16/6, letter from Churchill to Asquith, 23 January 1914.

II: ‘An isolated Liberal’⁹²

In a Liberal Cabinet formed of men largely opposed to armament spending, Churchill’s heightened Naval Estimates inevitably weakened his political standing. However, his reputation suffered from the consequences of his own behaviour; accordingly, an examination of the First Lord’s conduct will find much to support what Addison describes as a historiographical tendency to regard Churchill as ‘a rootless, unsocialised individual, peculiarly weak in values or convictions of any kind, and singularly deficient in public purpose’.⁹³ This angle has been extensively explored by Rhodes James and Charmley who offer perceptive reasons for why Churchill was a figure of obloquy within Liberal, Tory and Admiralty circles from 1911 to 1914 and why a Cabinet coalition demanding his resignation and reduced Naval Estimates formed in late 1913. With the exception of Jenkins, however, the literature has proven somewhat neglectful of how Churchill, despite the throes of the anti-Winston brigade, was able to push the 1914-15 Naval Estimates beyond the £50 million barrier.⁹⁴ Renewed focus on such relationships may help understand what Brooke Allen calls:

The paradox of a man who was overweeningly ambitious, bumptious, slapdash, reckless, and a monster of egotism, yet who has been generally judged as the greatest British statesman of the twentieth century.⁹⁵

Churchill’s personal political creed is a topic that extends well beyond the scope of this paper.⁹⁶ According to Addison, ‘Churchill thought of himself not as a Liberal or a Tory, a champion of the services, of the aristocracy, the poor [...] but as a freelance man of

⁹² Charmley, p. 84.

⁹³ Addison, *The Political Beliefs*, p. 24

⁹⁴ The term ‘anti-Winston brigade’ denotes the Cabinet coalition that formed against Churchill in late 1913 and is borrowed from Charmley, p. 91.

⁹⁵ Brooke Allen, ‘More than The Sum of His Parts: The Enigma of Sir Winston Churchill’, *The Hudson Review*, 55, 2 (2002), 312-318 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3853008?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents> [accessed 14 February 2016] (p. 312).

⁹⁶ For a thorough discussion of Churchill’s personal political ideologies, see Addison, *The Political Beliefs*.

destiny.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, before 1911, Churchill identified most with advanced Liberalism. In 1897, he wrote to his mother 'I am Liberal in all but name' and denounced Conservative military expenditure.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, he followed the footsteps of his father, Lord Randolph Churchill, and entered Parliament as a Tory in 1900.⁹⁹ Three years later, he broke from the official Conservative doctrine and became the most outspoken Tory advocate of Free Trade.¹⁰⁰ During the Tory debates between Protectionism and Free Trade, Churchill branded Prime Minister Arthur Balfour, 'slipshod, slapdash, haphazard' in Commons, to the horror of his colleagues.¹⁰¹ After he left the Tories to join the Liberals in 1904, Conservatives considered Churchill 'a shameless opportunist, a turncoat and a cad'.¹⁰² Churchill's refusal to adhere to the line of his party was also exceedingly apparent during the Admiralty years.

The opposition, however, gave Churchill relatively little trouble between 1911 and 1914 because many Tory navalists supported his heightened Naval Estimates. Churchill grew particularly close to Balfour in this period and frequently invited him aboard the Admiralty yacht, *Enchantress*, to discuss plans for the fleet.¹⁰³ However, this slight reprieve was stymied by Churchill's repeated shuffling of senior admirals, who were typically Tory-inclined. Furthermore, many Conservatives still resented Churchill for his earlier treachery; the *Spectator* questioned whether he had 'the loyalty, dignity, the steadfastness to make an efficient head of a great office'.¹⁰⁴ Overall, Churchill's standing amongst the Tory party was

⁹⁷ Addison, *The Political Beliefs*, p. 37.

⁹⁸ Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill Volume I: Youth, 1874-1900* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1966), p. 318.

⁹⁹ John Douglas Fair, 'Savrola and Winston Churchill's Search for Meaning', *The International History Review*, 37, 2 (2014), 282-302 <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/07075332.2014.900816>> [accessed 14 February 2016] (p. 289).

¹⁰⁰ Gilbert, p. 154, at this time most Tories were in favour of Protection.

¹⁰¹ Rhodes James, *Study in Failure*, p. 20.

¹⁰² Paul Addison, 'The Three Careers of Winston Churchill', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 11, 1 (2001), 183-99 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3679420.pdf>> [accessed 22 February 2016] (p. 188) [hereafter Addison, *The Three Careers*].

¹⁰³ CHAR 13/8/17, letter from Balfour to Churchill, 9 January 1912: Balfour thanks Churchill for sending him a copy of a paper on the creation of the Naval War Staff; CHAR 13/22A/106, letter from Churchill to Balfour, 3 June 1913: Churchill invites Balfour aboard *Enchantress* to watch naval exercises.

¹⁰⁴ Marder, *I*, p. 152.

essentially dependent on his ability to deliver on his ‘big navy’ plans.¹⁰⁵ If major decisions regarding reforms or top command had gone manifestly awry, his ‘heart in the right place’ desire to bolster the Royal Navy would not have prevented Conservative wrath from descending upon him.¹⁰⁶

At the Admiralty, Churchill gained a very mixed reputation. Ratings, junior officers and a clutch of admirals welcomed his energy and enthusiasm, but most senior admirals considered him ‘intrusive, impertinent and rude’.¹⁰⁷ Younger officers warmed to the plucky First Lord who ‘allowed their say, even if it involved criticism of commanding officers’ – a reflection, perhaps, of Churchill’s own tendency to unabashedly chastise colleagues who were superior to him in age, experience or seniority.¹⁰⁸ The admirals, however, considered themselves ‘gentlemen’ and despised Churchill’s refusal to treat them as such.¹⁰⁹ In his first five weeks at the Admiralty, Churchill dismissed three of the four Sea Lords. Most significantly, on 5 November 1911, Churchill asked Asquith to retire First Sea Lord Arthur Wilson because he opposed the institution of a Naval War Staff.¹¹⁰ The objective of the Naval War Staff, Churchill wrote in *The World Crisis*, was to shift from a position in which ‘all plans were locked up in the mind of one taciturn admiral’.¹¹¹ Unsurprisingly, many admirals were reluctant to divest their most senior rank of any authority.

However, Churchill avoided significant fallout following Wilson’s dismissal by deftly arguing that his designated retirement date of March 1912 would interrupt the preparations of the new Naval Estimates and nominating the widely-respected Sir Francis Bridgeman as his

¹⁰⁵ Jenkins, p. 214.

¹⁰⁶ Jenkins, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Best, p. 46.

¹⁰⁸ Pelling, p. 149.

¹⁰⁹ Charmley, p. 84.

¹¹⁰ CHAR 13/1/1, letter from Churchill to Asquith, November 5th 1911; for an explanation of Wilson’s opposition to the Naval War Staff, see R. McGregor Dawson, ‘The Cabinet Minister and Administration: Winston Churchill at the Admiralty’, *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, 6, 3 (1940), 325-58 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/136904.pdf?acceptTC=true>> [accessed 22 February 2016] (p. 334)

¹¹¹ Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis I*, p. 62.

successor.¹¹² Churchill was less fortunate when he controversially displaced Bridgeman on dubious grounds of ill-health and was woundingly criticised in Commons by Tory leader Andrew Bonar Law and Lord Charles Beresford.¹¹³ Nevertheless, Bridgeman's replacement, Prince Louis of Battenberg, proved popular. Even Lord Selborne, a previous critic of Churchill, commended the appointment and wrote that if Battenberg's 'name had been Smith, he would by now have filled various high offices to the great advantage of the country.'¹¹⁴ However, Churchill had few prominent friends at the Admiralty beyond Permanent Secretary to the Board of Admiralty Sir Graham Greene and Sir Roger Keyes. Churchill promoted the latter to Commodore of the Submarine Service on August 21st 1912.¹¹⁵ Their friendship blossomed and in the 1930s, Keyes was a frequent attendee at Churchill's 'little dinner club'.¹¹⁶ He even sided with Churchill against Chamberlain's Munich Agreement in 1938.¹¹⁷ But in 1914, Keyes was not the senior figure he later became and Churchill was bereft of noteworthy allies in the navy.

The majority of the opposition that Churchill faced between 1911 and 1914 emanated from his own Liberal Party. Much of this hostility stemmed from the feeling that Churchill had little genuine conviction in Liberal values. In a sense, therefore, the Tory and Liberal impression of the young Churchill was quite similar; both parties perceived him to be a political weathervane, but whereas the Tories merely resented him, Liberal sentiment tended towards suspicion. Many found it difficult to believe that the scion of Blenheim could relate to their causes, despite Churchill's best efforts to align himself with the leader of the Liberal

¹¹² Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, p. 1894.

¹¹³ A record of this Parliament discussion can be found in: Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, p. 2041.

¹¹⁴ CHAR 13/1/34, letter from Lord Selborne to Churchill, 29 November 1911.

¹¹⁵ London, The British Library, The Keyes Papers, ADD MS 82379/1, letter from Churchill to Keyes, 21 August 1912: 'I hope this will facilitate your work in the Submarine service which may certainly be expected to expand in the future.' [hereafter ADD MS 82379]

¹¹⁶ ADD MS 82379/27, letter from Churchill to Keyes, 21 November 1930.

¹¹⁷ T.A Heathcote, *British Admirals of the Fleet, 1734-1995* (London: Pen and Sword, 2002), p. 147.

Radicals, Lloyd George, whose mercurial personality very much matched his own.¹¹⁸

Although Lady Asquith's writing is often doubted, she summed this up perfectly:

From Lloyd George he was to learn the language of Radicalism. It was Lloyd George's native tongue, but it was not his own, and despite his efforts he spoke it with a different tongue.¹¹⁹

The official biography omits mention of the memoirs of C.F.G. Masterman, presumably because it shows that Churchill's conviction in Liberalism was, to a degree, questionable. A passage recalling a conversation between Churchill and Masterman is particularly insightful:

I challenged [Churchill] on his exposition of his desire to do something for the people. 'You can't deny you enjoy it all immensely – the speeches, and crowds, the sense of increasing power.' 'Of course I do,' he said. 'Though shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn. That shall be my plea at the day of judgement.'¹²⁰

Clearly Liberals were right to be suspicious of Churchill's integrity. However, his proclivity for self-promotion did not equate to an utter lack of Liberal principles; after all, despite opposition to his ever-growing Naval Estimates, Churchill successfully lobbied for increases in the pitifully low remuneration of Lower Deck sailors. Thus, his contemporary detractors were wrong to entirely doubt his belief in Liberalism.

Rhodes James makes a perceptive observation that attributes some contempt for Churchill to his meteoric rise to the upper echelons of the Asquith Cabinet:

Youth and Ambition are regarded with suspicion in England. Activity and Energy are hardly less suspect. Young men who tackle problems with ardour, unafraid of committing errors

¹¹⁸ For a perceptive assessment of the pair's friendship, see John Grigg, 'Churchill and Lloyd George' in *Churchill* ed. by Robert Blake and Roger Louis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 97-112.

¹¹⁹ Margot Asquith, *Margot Asquith's Great War Diary 1914-1916*, ed. by Michael Brock and Eleanor Brock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 161; the accuracy of Lady Asquith's writing is questioned in Jenkins, p. 213.

¹²⁰ Masterman, pp. 97-98.

and prepared to accept these as necessary price for great advances, tend to be regarded with much concern.¹²¹

To his colleagues, Churchill's rapid climb up "the greasy pole" probably appeared an 'unwelcome throwback' to the aristocratic society that once enabled William Pitt the Younger and Charles James Fox to attain high office in spite of their youth.¹²² After all, for most of his time in the Asquith Cabinet, Churchill served as its youngest and most divisive member. Often his extravagance was only tolerated because of 'his amazing industry and ability'.¹²³ Moreover, prior to Churchill's entrance into politics, he had enjoyed a brief but successful spell in the army and had also become the highest paid journalist of his era.¹²⁴ Two of his books, *The River War* and *Lord Randolph Churchill*, were ranked amongst the works of professional historians – an impressive feat for someone lacking a formal higher education.¹²⁵ Prodigious achievement, youth, and ebullience are certainly powerful ingredients for generating discontent.

However, this was all exacerbated by Churchill's ostentatiousness, which was recalled by his fellow Liberal, Sir Charles Hobhouse. He complained that the First Lord was 'ill-mannered, boastful' and – crucially – 'unprincipled'.¹²⁶ In social gatherings, Churchill did little to assuage these impressions of him – in fact he frequently entertained them. His rather unblushing reply to a friend's nihilistic reminder that 'we are all worms' at a dinner party was: 'Yes, but I believe that I am a glow-worm!'.¹²⁷ Accordingly, the Admiralty years

¹²¹ Rhodes James, *Study in Failure*, p. 41.

¹²² Disraeli's remark about "the greasy pole" is found in Richard Aldous, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Gladstone vs Disraeli* (New York: WW Norton & Company), p. 189; Charmley, p. 85.

¹²³ Hobhouse, p. 121; Edwin Montagu served as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster from January-May 1915 and promptly supplanted Churchill as the youngest member of the Asquith Cabinet.

¹²⁴ Gilbert, p. 131.

¹²⁵ Addison, *Three Careers*, p. 186; Churchill's ability as an academic is somewhat of an enigma: he struggled through school, forewent university, and enrolled at Sandhurst – after attempting the entrance exams three times.

¹²⁶ Hobhouse, p. 121.

¹²⁷ Violet Bonham-Carter, *Winston Churchill As I Knew Him* (London: W&N, 1995), p. 6.

certainly support Rhodes James' contention that the young Churchill 'played a significant part in the dislike he aroused'.¹²⁸

Alongside the immediate consequences of his own personality, Churchill's weak standing amongst Liberals was diminished by his palpable obsession with his new department. Lloyd George branded him 'a water creature' and Asquith admonished how he discussed naval plans with Balfour 'all day and all night'.¹²⁹ He also lost his standing with the Radicals, who believed his swelling naval budget was exorbitant and detested his gravitation towards Grey's foreign policy, which they perceived as excessively anti-German and pro-French.¹³⁰ Churchill's isolation from his own party was worsened by his growing associations with right-wing media magnates, such as J.L. Garvin and the notable Germanophobe, Lord Northcliffe, who in 1911 wrote to Churchill that he believed his 'inquiring, industrious mind is alive to the national danger'.¹³¹ The pair even discussed how to release news of naval matters to the public.¹³² Before long, Northcliffe was lauding Churchill's policies in jingoistic articles in the many newspapers he owned.¹³³ Consequently, Churchill's Liberal colleagues perceived him to be utterly deficient in the contemporary code of gentlemanly conduct that was as real a force in the governing circle as was trade union solidarity amongst the working classes.¹³⁴ Accordingly, the revisionist arguments for why Churchill was despised by his own party certainly bear weight.

However, between 1911 and 1914, Churchill, could generally rely upon favourable relations with at least one out of Grey, Lloyd George and Asquith. In late 1911 Churchill had grown closer to the Foreign Secretary than the Chancellor in the professional sense, largely

¹²⁸ Rhodes James, *Study in Failure*, p. 20.

¹²⁹ Herbert Henry Asquith, *Letters to Venetia Stanley*, ed. by Michael Brock and Eleanor Brock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 508 [hereafter Asquith, *Letters to Venetia Stanley*].

¹³⁰ Charmley, p. 84.

¹³¹ Adrian Gregory, 'A Clash of Cultures: The British Press and the Opening of the Great War' in *A Call to Arms: Propaganda, Public Opinion, and Newspapers in the Great War* ed. by Troy R.E. Paddock (London: Praeger Publishers, 2004), pp. 15-50 (p. 17); quote from A.J.A. Morris, *The Scaremongers: The Advocacy of War Rearmament 1896-1914*, p. 295.

¹³² CHAR 13/1/41, letter from Lord Northcliffe to Churchill, 1 December 1911.

¹³³ Charmley, p. 87.

¹³⁴ Addison, *The Political Beliefs*, p. 24.

due to Grey's sympathy for his increased Naval Estimates. Yet they were mostly 'allies of circumstance' and by 1914 rumours that Churchill sought to replace Grey with Balfour at the Foreign Office were in circulation.¹³⁵ After the two were ousted from the Asquith government – Churchill in 1915, and Grey in 1916 – they hardly saw each other.¹³⁶ From 1911 to 1914, however, Haldane observed that Churchill and Grey, along with Lloyd George and Asquith, usually 'dined together each week'.¹³⁷

A heavy-spending minister is always going to arrive at odds with the Chancellor; the Churchill-Lloyd George pairing was no different. After the presentation of the 1912-13 Naval Estimates, Lloyd George lambasted Churchill for 'having looked out for opportunities to squander money'.¹³⁸ Churchill retorted that 'naval finance cannot be conveniently studied on the basis of a single year'; repeated that his 1912-13 Estimates were 'almost entirely made [...] two years ago' by his predecessor McKenna; and constantly reiterated that his increases were 'necessary for the safety of the State'.¹³⁹ Upon hearing that Austria-Hungary planned to intensify their naval programme in mid-1912, Churchill recognised the need to raise the 1913-14 Naval Estimates and at once wrote to Lloyd George, 'Look at this. Do you realise what it means if it is true? I can no more control these facts than you can.'¹⁴⁰ Despite Churchill delivering his case with precision, extreme clarity and promising 'an unshakeable foundation for every item put forward', it was still with reluctance that Lloyd George agreed to Churchill's 1913-14 Naval Estimates.¹⁴¹

Regardless of their obvious conflict of interest and the Chancellor's cynical maxim, 'no friends at the top', Churchill and Lloyd George remained personally close between 1911

¹³⁵ Jenkins, p. 222.

¹³⁶ Jenkins, *ibid.*

¹³⁷ As noted in Cameron Hazlehurst, 'Asquith as Prime Minister, 1908-1916', *The English Historical Review*, 85, 336 (1970), 502-31 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/563193.pdf?acceptTC=true>> [accessed 22 February 2016] (p. 510).

¹³⁸ Gilbert, p. 247.

¹³⁹ Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, p. 1919; Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, p. 1912.

¹⁴⁰ Gilbert, p. 247.

¹⁴¹ Randolph S. Churchill, *II*, p. 605.

and 1914.¹⁴² Their friendship was undeniably strengthened by Churchill's decision to support Lloyd George in Commons during the Marconi scandal in 1912-13, which threatened to topple the latter's career.¹⁴³ Churchill even treated Lloyd George and his wife to cruises aboard *Enchantress* throughout the affair.¹⁴⁴ Interestingly, this episode is not mentioned in biographies by Rhodes James and Charmley. Although it was Asquith's ceaseless support that ultimately saved Lloyd George, it is difficult to believe that the First Lord's warmth did not resonate in the Chancellor's mind during the 1913-14 Naval Estimates debates; throughout the winter of 1913-14, when the pair were deeply divided over the following year's budget; or, as Norman Rose postulates, in July 1917 when Lloyd George appointed Churchill Minister of Munitions despite the registered disapproval of over one hundred Tories.¹⁴⁵

Churchill was similarly endearing when Asquith was in the depths of a near-breakdown in 1911. During the Parliament Bill crisis that year, Churchill took over negotiations with Balfour when the Prime Minister was clearly too drunk to continue.¹⁴⁶ The only passage in all of Churchill's writing in which he is even slightly critical of Asquith hails from this period; in a letter to his wife, Churchill described how he 'squirmed with embarrassment' at the Prime Minister's inebriated state at a dinner party.¹⁴⁷ Helped in part by his *amitié amoureuse* with Venetia Stanley – one of the many young women in whom Asquith sought reprieve from his marriage – the Prime Minister regained his form in mid-1912. Curiously, although Jenkins details Churchill's decision to help Asquith and Lloyd George, he does not explicitly state that the First Lord's closeness to them ultimately derived from this magnanimity. Admittedly, this is a slight criticism of an otherwise brilliant account of Churchill's position in the Asquith Cabinet and Jenkins' account of the period nevertheless

¹⁴² Lord Hankey, *The Supreme Command, 1914-1918, Volume I* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1961), p. 5.

¹⁴³ Jenkins, p. 223; for a thorough account of the Marconi Scandal see Jenkins, pp. 223-37.

¹⁴⁴ Jenkins, p. 225.

¹⁴⁵ Norman Rose, *Churchill: The Unruly Giant* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1994), p. 166.

¹⁴⁶ Gilbert, p. 226.

¹⁴⁷ Churchill, Sir Winston S. and Clementine Churchill, *Speaking For Themselves: The Personal Letters of Winston and Clementine Churchill*, ed. by Mary Soames (London: Black Swan, 1999), p. 43.

supports Addison's assertion that despite Churchill's flaws, 'friendships meant much' to him.¹⁴⁸

By late 1913, he needed these friendships and his 'secure store of affection' with the Prime Minister and Chancellor.¹⁴⁹ Widespread Liberal dislike of the First Lord had culminated in the formation of a Cabinet coalition against him led by Sir John Simon, which counted as members, McKenna, Walter Runciman, Lord Beauchamp and Herbert Samuel.¹⁵⁰ This anti-Winston brigade foremost demanded Churchill's resignation and secondly lobbied for reduced Naval Estimates. On 29 January 1914, Simon conveyed this by writing to Asquith that 'large Admiralty estimates may be capable of being carried out *only* because W.C. has gone.'¹⁵¹ Hobhouse recalled that when Asquith expressed his surprise at the vitriolic nature of the anti-Winston brigade, Simon brusquely replied, 'Oh, this is a personal question.'¹⁵² Evidently, the coalition's principal purpose was to oust the First Lord.

The surfacing of the anti-Winston brigade coincided with Churchill and Lloyd George disagreeing sharply over the projected 1914-15 Naval Estimates, which broke the £50 million barrier. The Chancellor asked Churchill to predict future Naval Estimates to demonstrate how he intended to reduce naval spending in the near future. Churchill complained to Asquith that 'no forecasts beyond the year have ever been made' by his predecessors and assured him that the budget had been 'prepared with the strictest economy'.¹⁵³ Churchill was adamant that five Dreadnoughts needed to be built over 1914-15, and refused to 'throw a baby or two out of the sledge'.¹⁵⁴ Jenkins stipulates that during his 1913-14 Christmas break, Churchill accepted

¹⁴⁸ Addison, *The Political Beliefs*, p. 38.

¹⁴⁹ Jenkins, p. 232.

¹⁵⁰ Charmley, pp. 90-91.

¹⁵¹ Churchill, Randolph S., *Winston S. Churchill, 1901-1914 Companion, Volume III* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1969), p. 1859.

¹⁵² Hobhouse, p. 156.

¹⁵³ LG/C/24/3/2, note produced by Churchill on 1909-1910 Naval Estimates, 1908.

¹⁵⁴ Gilbert, p. 254.

that he would have to resign over the 1914-15 Naval Estimates because neither Lloyd George nor the bulk of the Cabinet supported his proposals.¹⁵⁵

Critical to Churchill's position, however, was Lloyd George's decision not to side with the anti-Winston brigade, despite their mutual aim of decreased Naval Estimates. Evidently, the Chancellor was averse to joining a faction whose central mission was the downfall of the man who had, in both official and unofficial spheres, supported him when he had faced the near-demise of his own career. In the end, the matter was concluded by a triangular meeting between Asquith, Lloyd George and Churchill that consisted of 'five hours of *tête-a-tête* talks' and culminated in the First Lord's promise for reductions in the 1915-16 budget and the Chancellor's acquiescence to the 1914-15 Naval Estimates.¹⁵⁶

Owing to the Prime Minister's intervention, Charmley writes that 'Asquith's favour and his own abilities were the only two props' of Churchill's career at this juncture.¹⁵⁷ In a very narrow sense, Charmley is correct. Indeed, Asquith's ability as a 'shrewd manager of men' enabled him to play upon the division between Lloyd George, who wanted reduced Naval Estimates, and the anti-Winston brigade, who simply wanted Churchill out.¹⁵⁸ Contrary to Charmley's argument, however, Asquith did not merely support Churchill to avoid a Cabinet crisis prior to the imminent Irish Home Rule Bill.¹⁵⁹ Instead, the pair shared a close relationship that endured up to, and well beyond, the Great War.

Asquith's daughter Violet attributed her father's friendship with Churchill to the latter's enthusiasm being a welcome contrast to the 'scholars steeped in the classical tradition' that the Prime Minister was otherwise surrounded by.¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, Asquith's private correspondence is full of mordant remarks that regard Churchill with a mixture of amusement

¹⁵⁵ Jenkins, p. 233.

¹⁵⁶ Pelling, p. 153.

¹⁵⁷ Charmley, p. 88.

¹⁵⁸ Grigg, p. 101.

¹⁵⁹ Charmley, p. 91.

¹⁶⁰ Bonham-Carter, p. 17.

and admiration. In 1914, he wrote that Churchill had ‘a curious dash of schoolboy simplicity [...] and what someone said of genius – “a zigzag of lightning in the brain”’.¹⁶¹ Whereas others were annoyed by Churchill’s obsession with his new department, Asquith was entertained and after observing a naval gunnery display he said of the First Lord, ‘My young friend yonder thinks himself Othello, and blacks himself all over to play the part.’¹⁶²

Yet even Asquith’s patience had its limits. The Prime Minister’s laconicism was a striking contrast to Churchill’s self-centred loquaciousness. Hobhouse recalls an instance when Asquith terminated one of Churchill’s characteristic drawn-out Cabinet speeches by interjecting that his words were ‘pure cynicism defended by sophistry’.¹⁶³ With Churchill’s closeness to Balfour in mind, Asquith deemed that ‘he will never get to the top in English politics, with all his wonderful gifts...if [he] does not inspire trust’.¹⁶⁴ Nonetheless, even after Asquith fell from grace in 1918, he lauded his former protégé. After the wedding of Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon (the Queen Mother) and the Duke of York (the future King George VI), Asquith wrote ‘the ennui of long waits were relieved for me by being next to Winston, who was in his best form and really amusing.’¹⁶⁵ Evidently, despite profound differences in character, both men connected on a deeply personal level.

Crucially, Charmley also overlooks that the underlying current of the Prime Minister’s thought, much like Grey’s, was consonant with Churchill’s increased Naval Estimates. Contrary to the Gladstonian tradition, Asquith was a Liberal Imperialist, along with Grey and Haldane.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, despite presiding over a Cabinet formed largely of men who were opposed to high naval spending, Asquith supported Churchill’s designs for the Royal Navy.

¹⁶¹ Asquith, *Letters to Venetia Stanley*, p. 45.

¹⁶² Paymaster Rear Admiral W.C.R. Martin, *The Adventures of a Naval Paymaster* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1924), pp.218-19; Asquith, *Letters to Venetia Stanley*, pp. 266-67.

¹⁶³ Hobhouse, p. 140.

¹⁶⁴ Asquith, *Letters to Venetia Stanley*, p. 508.

¹⁶⁵ Herbert Henry Asquith, *Letters to A Friend, Volume II* ed. by Desmond McCarthy (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1934), p. 53.

¹⁶⁶ H. C. G. Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists. The Ideas and Politics of a Post-Gladstonian Élite* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 136-37.

Randolph Churchill notes that although his father's calls for 'thought and action' after the Agadir Crisis fell upon the deaf ears of many Cabinet and CID members, Churchill 'deeply impressed the Prime Minister', who accordingly appointed him First Lord.¹⁶⁷ At the 11 July 1912 CID meeting, Churchill revealed the Admiralty's fear that Austria-Hungary would possess four Dreadnoughts by 1915. Asquith's sombre response was 'the extent of the Austrian sea-coast...is 300 miles...and they have no overseas possessions of any kind'.¹⁶⁸

It was largely due to this confluence of opinion concerning the navy, as well as Asquith's evident fondness for the First Lord that the Prime Minister shielded Churchill from Lloyd George's frustration during the 1914-15 Naval Estimates debates and persuaded the Chancellor to 'climb down'.¹⁶⁹ In some ways, therefore, the near-Cabinet crisis of early 1914 was strikingly similar to the 1909-10 Naval Estimates dispute, though of course many key participants had radically altered their stances during the interim. Asquith, however, was steady in his desire for a strong navy, whether during McKenna's Admiralty in 1909 or Churchill's in 1914. Graciously, Churchill acknowledged Asquith's help during this trying period in *The World Crisis* by describing how he was aided by 'the unwearying patience of the Prime Minister and [...] his stolid, silent support'.¹⁷⁰

Churchill's conduct between 1911 and 1914 demonstrates the quintessential deficiencies in his character, as delineated by Addison. After all, the coalition demanding his resignation in 1914 was not opposed to his Naval Estimates in the way Lloyd George was. Its members took issue instead with Churchill's abrasiveness; his deep-rooted and well-founded reputation for political infidelity; and perhaps, as Rhodes James postulates, were also jealous of him. After all, McKenna, whom Churchill had replaced at the Admiralty, was near its helm. Consequently, even the deeply cynical Charmley is correct in asserting that animosity

¹⁶⁷ Randolph S. Churchill, *II*, p. 535.

¹⁶⁸ Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, p. 1977.

¹⁶⁹ Grigg, p. 101.

¹⁷⁰ Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis I*, p. 142-43.

towards Churchill was ‘made worse by his own behaviour’.¹⁷¹ However, Asquith’s support and Lloyd George’s latent good will, deepened after the Marconi affair, ultimately outweighed the popular resentment towards Churchill that the anti-Winston brigade epitomised. Hence, in March 1914, the First Lord secured Naval Estimates of £51.55 million.¹⁷² With the exception of Jenkins, judgements cast on Churchill’s relations in the period have disproportionately emphasised his poor standing amongst the bulk of Parliament, without appropriately considering how he nevertheless anchored himself to office. Whereas Rhodes James convincingly suggests that the young Churchill ‘appreciated the importance of gaining a name for himself by assailing the biggest men’, his actions between 1911 and 1914 suggest he also fully understood the value of counting “big men” as personal friends.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Charmley, p. 84.

¹⁷² LG/C/3/16/6, letter from Churchill to Asquith, January 23rd 1914; this figure is without the Supplementary Estimates that were added after March 1914, which took the 1914-15 budget above £54 million.

¹⁷³ Rhodes James, *Study in Failure*, p. 20.

III: ‘Courage in design’¹⁷⁴

Due to Churchill’s weak standing amongst most Liberals, Tories, and senior Admiralty staff, it is unlikely that even the favour of the Prime Minister would have kept him in office had any of his costly reforms ended in disaster. Yet these reforms scarcely feature in even the most distinguished Churchill biographies. This is explained, perhaps, by historians assuming the impetus for the 1911-14 naval advances came from Fisher, rather than Churchill. This was certainly the viewpoint of Robert MacGregor Dawson, who penned a little-known article in 1940 that claimed Churchill ‘used not so much his original as his selective powers’ by merely instituting Fisher’s ideas between 1911 and 1914.¹⁷⁵ Marder offers a more extensive account of the pair’s collaborative efforts in his seminal work, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, and described Churchill as ‘an abrasive, but authentic innovator’ whose reforms ‘owed much to the ideas and stimulation of Fisher’.¹⁷⁶ By merging this line of argument with the CHAR 13 papers – which Marder was not privy to – this chapter demonstrates not only how Churchill masterfully handled his capricious *éminence grise*, Fisher, but also that he played a crucial role in the development of the 15-inch gun, the conversion of the fleet to oil-fuel and the institution of the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS). Shedding new light on these neglected achievements goes some way in addressing Bell’s concern over ‘how much still needs to be done’ regarding Churchill and sea power.¹⁷⁷

Fisher and Churchill first met in Biarritz in 1907 and immediately recognised in one another an exceptional specimen.¹⁷⁸ Fisher, considered then and now, the greatest admiral since Lord Nelson, had just launched *HMS Dreadnought* and was radically overhauling every

¹⁷⁴ Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis I*, p. 82.

¹⁷⁵ Dawson, p. 335.

¹⁷⁶ Marder, pp. 156-57; Marder, p. 253.

¹⁷⁷ Christopher Bell, *Churchill and Sea Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. vii.

¹⁷⁸ Jenkins, p. 217.

corner of the fleet to realise his dictum, 'INSTANT readiness for war!'.¹⁷⁹ Churchill was taken up with the admiral's prestige, while the older man sensed the rising quality of his spirited acquaintance who was rapidly making a name for himself in Campbell-Bannerman's government. The pair began writing incessantly to one another, with Fisher typically signing off his long letters (made longer by his barely legible and absurdly tall characters) with ridiculous salutations such as: 'Yours to a cinder', 'Yours till Hell freezes' or 'Yours till charcoal sprouts', leading Churchill to write in *The World Crisis* of the fiery climax in which their friendship culminated after Gallipoli, 'Alas there was a day when Hell froze and charcoal sprouted and friendship was reduced to cinders.'¹⁸⁰ However, when Churchill arrived at the Admiralty, that day was three-and-a-half years away.

Crucially, were it not for his providence of naval advice, Churchill had little other cause to pursue a conventional friendship with Fisher, simply because the very notion was beyond the old admiral. Marder writes that 'Fisher, whatever his defects, was a genius'; but these defects were profound and he was arguably half-mad.¹⁸¹ Between 1904 and 1910, Fisher's penchant for nurturing enmities as much as Beresford's disputatiousness had ruptured the Royal Navy into distinct anti-Fisher and pro-Fisher camps.¹⁸² Fisher's colleagues complained he 'did not forget easily' and deplored the 'senseless way' he insulted senior officers.¹⁸³ Marder cites an especially insightful anecdote that recounts Fisher's response when advised to cultivate moderation: 'I am going to kick other people's shins if they kick mine!'.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ Paul Haggie, 'The Royal Navy and War Planning in the Fisher Era', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 8, 3 (1973), 113-31 < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/260283.pdf?acceptTC=true> [accessed 28 February 2016] (p. 113).

¹⁸⁰ Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis I*, p. 79.

¹⁸¹ Marder, *I*, p. 406.

¹⁸² For a thorough account of Fisher-Beresford rivalry, see Marder, *I*, pp. 88-104.

¹⁸³ Admiral George Fowler King-Hall Papers, 6400/HMS Revenge and Chief of Staff <<https://sites.google.com/site/kinghallconnections/6400-g-hms-revenge---chief-of-staff>> [accessed 13 February 2016]; William Jameson, *The Fleet that Jack Built: Nine Men who Made a Navy* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962), p. 131.

¹⁸⁴ Marder, *I*, p. 264.

As early as 1907, Churchill was Fisher's student of the Royal Navy. A passage from *The World Crisis* offers a picture of their private conversation:

We talked all day long and far into the nights...all about Dreadnoughts, all about submarines, all about the new education scheme for every branch of the Navy, all about big guns [...] I remembered it all [...] I could have passed an examination on the policy of the then Board of Admiralty.¹⁸⁵

Consequently, there is little to support Ollard's claim that Churchill arrived at the Admiralty in 1911 'not knowing the sharp end of a ship from the blunt' – though of course he could hardly be considered a naval expert either.¹⁸⁶ In 1908, at the dawn of the Asquith Cabinet, Churchill expressed his desire to be appointed First Lord – a request the Prime Minister declined because the position was still occupied by the ailing Lord Tweedmouth.¹⁸⁷ Therefore, it seems that throughout their early acquaintance, Churchill leveraged his friendship with Fisher to acquire an understanding of the affairs of the department he wanted to head.

This is significant because despite an 'instant affinity of zeal and purpose', the Churchill-Fisher relationship was chequered from the beginning.¹⁸⁸ Fisher's rambunctiousness reared its head when the pair found themselves on opposite sides of the 1909 Dreadnought debate. After Fisher had successfully wangled four extra Dreadnoughts, he could not contain his smugness and wrote to Churchill that they ought to be named '#1 Winston, #2 Churchill, #3 Lloyd and #4 George'.¹⁸⁹ Following the dispute, the pair did not see each other until Churchill 'knew for certain' that he was going to the Admiralty in late

¹⁸⁵ Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis I*, p. 73.

¹⁸⁶ Ollard, p. 384.

¹⁸⁷ Gilbert, p. 193, Lord Tweedmouth was Churchill's uncle.

¹⁸⁸ Gilbert, p. 241.

¹⁸⁹ Barry M. Gough, *A War of Combinations: Churchill and First Sea Lord*

<<http://www.winstonchurchill.org/the-life-of-churchill/rising-politician/533-a-war-of-combinations-first-lord-of-the-admiralty-and-first-sea-lord>> [accessed 23 April 2016].

1911, at which point he immediately sent for Fisher.¹⁹⁰ Clearly, Churchill deduced that suffering Fisher's immaturity, impertinence, and occasional idiocy was a bearable price for his providence of invaluable naval advice. After all, why else would Churchill, himself an immensely proud individual, tolerate personal attacks from a retired admiral?

Charmley is particularly critical of Churchill contacting Fisher in 1911 and writes that the latter was 'not a fit companion to take on a tiger hunt'.¹⁹¹ However, until the fateful decision to reinstate Fisher as First Sea Lord in October 1914, Churchill would have concurred with Charmley's opinion.¹⁹² He twice decided against bringing back Fisher between 1911 and 1914 (following the resignation of Wilson, and later Bridgeman). Nevertheless, Churchill reported to Asquith that these decisions were made 'with a good deal of reluctance', implying that had Fisher been a milder man, he may well have been recalled to the Admiralty sooner.¹⁹³ Furthermore, Churchill knew that during Fisher's brief spell of retirement at Lucerne, he had not forgotten his many quarrels. In his letters to Churchill, Fisher repeatedly derided Third Sea Lord Charles Briggs a 'slug', 'a servile copyist' and 'stupid timid Briggs' and labelled more traditional-minded admirals as the 'old women' of the Admiralty.¹⁹⁴ Consequently, regarding his decisions not to recall Fisher in 1911 and 1912, Churchill wrote 'it was not the outcry that I feared...but it was the revival and continuance of the feuds'.¹⁹⁵

As such, Churchill was faced with the problem of securing Fisher's aid without granting him a platform to reignite his numerous conflicts. In mid-1912 after one of Fisher's characteristic outbursts, Churchill succeeded in having his cake and eating it. Following

¹⁹⁰ Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis I*, pp. 76-77.

¹⁹¹ Charmley, p. 87.

¹⁹² In October 1914, following public outcry at First Sea Lord Battenburg's German heritage, Fisher was brought back as First Sea Lord and was involved in the Dardanelles disaster. This is well-documented in most biographies of Churchill and books about Gallipoli but is outside of the temporal scope of this paper.

¹⁹³ CHAR 13/1/1, letter from Churchill to Asquith, 5 November 1911.

¹⁹⁴ CHAR 13/2/29-32, letter from Fisher to Churchill, 11 November 1911; CHAR 13/2/54-56, letter from Fisher to Churchill, 10 December 1911; CHAR 13/2/58-60, letter from Fisher to Churchill, 3 December 1911.

¹⁹⁵ Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis I*, p. 78.

Churchill's promotion of Sir Hedworth Meux, Sir Berkely Milne and Sir Reginald Custance in April 1912, Fisher wrote to him, 'I fear this must be my last communication with you in any matter at all. I am sorry for it but I considered you have betrayed the Navy in these appointments.'¹⁹⁶ Fisher even contrived and propagated the rumour that the promotions were made to ensure Churchill's wife Clementine did not suffer 'social ostracism' should her husband fail to elevate popular men.¹⁹⁷ However, rather than break ties with his acquaintance, Churchill offered Fisher the chair of the newly set up Oil Commission, which was a strictly advisory role that did not enable him to directly influence policy.¹⁹⁸ Churchill personally penned a letter to Fisher (in noticeably better handwriting than usual) that contained a good deal of flattery. He insisted Fisher was essential for the post because 'no one else can do it so well' before adding, 'Perhaps no one else can do it at all.'¹⁹⁹ After some mock reluctance, Fisher accepted the offer and the pair resumed their unorthodox acquaintance.

Jenkins stipulates that Fisher probably orchestrated a 'lover's tiff' over the promotions to bring himself nearer the Admiralty sphere.²⁰⁰ However, Churchill had managed to secure Fisher's future providence of naval advice by giving him an actual, albeit advisory, role *and* attach the man labelled the 'Oil Maniac' to his enterprising search for a suitable source of fuel for the fleet's growing oil needs.²⁰¹ This begs the question, therefore, of who was "using" the other more: it seems that Churchill, on balance, had more to gain by giving Fisher the Oil Commission chair – though of course also far more to lose.

Furthermore, Churchill's hunger to learn all he could about his new department contradicts Charmley's claim that between 1911 and 1914 he 'had little time or space for

¹⁹⁶ CHAR 13/16/50-52, letter from Fisher to Churchill, 2 March 1912.

¹⁹⁷ Massie, p. 773.

¹⁹⁸ Sara Reguer, 'Persian Oil and the First Lord: A Chapter in the Career of Winston Churchill', *Military Affairs*, 46 (3) (1982), 134-38 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1987894.pdf?acceptTC=true>> [accessed 22 February 2016] (p. 134).

¹⁹⁹ CHAR 13/5/25-26, letter from Churchill to Fisher, 11 June 1912.

²⁰⁰ Jenkins, p. 217.

²⁰¹ Marder, *I*, p. 45.

other people and their opinions’.²⁰² During his first eighteen months at the Admiralty, Churchill spent 182 days aboard *Enchantress* and visited every dockyard, naval station and important ship in home waters and the Mediterranean in order to familiarise himself with the administration, personnel and *matériel* of his new department.²⁰³ Within weeks of assuming office, Churchill wrote to Fourth Sea Lord Charles Madden about torpedo shortages, debated construction strategy with Admiral of the Fleet Sir Gerard Noel, asked Battenberg for his views on new battlecruiser designs, and mused about installing a wireless station in Shetland with Rear Admiral Alexander Bethell.²⁰⁴ Although the eminent naval historian, Stephen Roskill, criticises Churchill’s meddling in naval matters, this opinion was not unanimously shared by contemporary officers; indeed, Keyes remarked in his memoirs that the First Lord’s ‘intervention was in the best interests of the service.’²⁰⁵

There is certainly much to support Keyes’ judgement. Whereas Fisher had improved Lower Deck allowances and food plans, Churchill secured explicit increases in pay for ratings and improved sailors’ offshore facilities ‘so that the men have proper places to go when spending the night ashore’.²⁰⁶ Moreover, Churchill reformed naval administration such that merit, and merit alone, became the ‘passport to advancement’.²⁰⁷ This was in alignment with Fisher’s own hatred of ‘Buggins’ turn’ – his name for the navy habit of promoting according to seniority, rotation or length of service.²⁰⁸ Fisher complained to Churchill that ‘our

²⁰² Charmley, p. 85.

²⁰³ Marder, *I*, p. 283.

²⁰⁴ CHAR 13/1/4, letter from Churchill to Fourth Sea Lord Charles Madden, 15 November 1911; CHAR 13/1/12, letter from Admiral of the Fleet Gerard Noel to Churchill, 17 November 1911; CHAR 13/1/26-27, letter from Churchill to Admiral of the Fleet Gerard Noel, 22 November 1911; CHAR 13/1/2, letter from Churchill to Battenberg, 10 November 1911; CHAR 13/4/2, minute from Churchill to Rear Admiral Alexander Bethell, 31 October 1911.

²⁰⁵ Keyes, p. 43.

²⁰⁶ Roger Parkinson, *Dreadnought: The Ship that Changed the World* (London: IB Tauris, 2014), p. 49; Gilbert, p. 247.

²⁰⁷ Marder, *I*, p. 268.

²⁰⁸ Sir John Arbuthnot Fisher, *Fear God and Dread Nought: The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone, Volume 1*, ed. by Arthur J. Marder (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952), p. 181.

officers are restricted now to less than 1/40th of the population' before writing 'we want the brains of the other 39/40ths!'.²⁰⁹ Churchill, a natural and genuine paternalist, concurred.²¹⁰

Additionally, Churchill and Fisher were often united in their opinions of senior admirals, with the 1912 appointees being the most notable exception. Fisher, much like Churchill in later life, was unabashedly prone to favouritism and called it 'the secret to efficiency', while his disciples were collectively labelled the "Fish Pond".²¹¹ Churchill shared Fisher's opinion of Jellicoe and Battenberg, who were both members of the "Fish Pond" and wrote to Asquith in late 1911 that he found himself 'in cordial agreement' with Battenberg on most naval matters.²¹² He also poised Jellicoe for greatness by repeatedly placing him in high offices from which he could eventually ascend to First Sea Lord, albeit briefly, from November 1916 to December 1917. As for Fisher, he bestowed upon Jellicoe the greatest compliment of which he was capable by labelling him 'Nelsonic'.²¹³

Churchill and Fisher were also agreed upon the need to increase the calibre of naval artillery and collaborated to develop the 15-inch gun. Seligmann argues the main impetus for Fisher's development of *HMS Dreadnought* had indeed been progress in the science of gunnery.²¹⁴ Furthermore, in 1909 Fisher urged McKenna to enlarge the existing 12-inch gun to a calibre of 13.5 inches, to thereby increase the projectile's weight from 850 pounds to 1,250 pounds.²¹⁵ The 13.5-inch gun was the dominant naval weapon of 1911. Churchill wrote in *The World Crisis* that upon his advent at the Admiralty he 'immediately sought to go one size better'.²¹⁶ The CHAR 13 papers do not offer any documents that contradict Churchill's claim that he himself had been the progenitor for the 15-inch gun although, as Marder argues,

²⁰⁹ CHAR 13/16/33-40, letter from Fisher to Churchill, 2 March 1912.

²¹⁰ For a discussion of Churchill's paternalism, see Addison, *The Three Careers*, p. 189.

²¹¹ CHAR 13/16/4, letter from Churchill to Fisher, 6 January 1912; Spencer E. Tucker, *The European Powers in the First World War: An Encyclopedia* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 253.

²¹² CHAR 13/1/1, letter from Churchill to Asquith, 5 November 1911.

²¹³ CHAR 13/16/7-8, letter from Fisher to Churchill, 14 January 1912, describes Jellicoe's 'Nelsonic attributes'.

²¹⁴ Matthew S. Seligmann, 'New Weapons for New Targets: Sir John Fisher, the Threat from Germany, and the Building of HMS "Dreadnought" and HMS "Invincible", 1902-1907', *The International History Review*, 30, 2 (2008), 303-31 (p. 331).

²¹⁵ Massie, p. 782.

²¹⁶ Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis I*, p. 122.

the idea certainly derived from Fisher's own shift towards larger guns.²¹⁷ CHAR 13 is saturated with letters displaying Fisher's instant enthusiasm for the new weapon; he believed it would "stagger humanity!" and warned Churchill that 'to shrink from the endeavour was treason to the Empire'.²¹⁸ Before long, he wrote 'I think we should be prepared with a 16 inch gun as I read that Krupps had 14 and 15 inch designs' before deciding that 'the argument for the 16-inch gun is incontrovertible' and envisaging 'a hundred ton gun throwing a ton projectile!'.²¹⁹ Fisher's extreme affinity for the new weapon has perhaps caused historians to falsely assume that he, not Churchill, had conceived the 15-inch gun, which would explain its scarce mention in the biographical literature.

Jenkins does somewhat emphasise the riskiness of developing the 15-inch gun, though with inadequate discussion of the various factors involved.²²⁰ In conjunction with his policy of building no ship before her time, Churchill aimed to install the new guns into the five super-Dreadnoughts being laid down in 1912-13.²²¹ As Jenkins notes, this entailed re-measuring and re-manufacturing thousands of parts for the new vessels without any prior guarantee that the larger guns would actually work; had they failed, Churchill would certainly have been deposed as First Lord.²²² However, this was to an extent an unavoidable risk because as Fisher observed, AG Krupps was also working on larger naval artillery, thereby substantiating Churchill's claim in Commons that naval science was 'moving on literally from week to week'.²²³ Consequently, the First Lord deduced that it would be a strategic and costly mistake to equip the new Dreadnoughts with soon-to-be-outdated weaponry. Furthermore, had Churchill outfitted the new ships with the smaller 13.5-inch gun, Tory navalists may well have turned the matter into a scandal. To a degree, therefore, Churchill

²¹⁷ Marder, *I*, p. 253.

²¹⁸ CHAR 13/2/21-25, letter from Fisher to Churchill, 10 November 1911.

²¹⁹ CHAR 13/16/93-94, letter from Fisher to Churchill 4 September 1912; "Krupps" refers to Friedrich Krupp AG, the predominant German arms producer; CHAR 13/16/18-21, letter from Fisher to Churchill, 1 February 1912.

²²⁰ Jenkins, p. 219.

²²¹ Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, p. 1923.

²²² Jenkins, p. 219.

²²³ Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, p. 1937.

was damned whichever avenue he pursued; he addressed this in *The World Crisis* by remarking that the 15-inch gun caused him more anxiety than any other administrative decision to date.²²⁴

Fully aware of the risks of developing the new gun, both to his career and British naval supremacy, Churchill united his Admiralty Board before embarking on the endeavour. He worked closely with the scientists and engineers of the Ordnance Board to make sure that the 15-inch gun was a viable prospect.²²⁵ Within the Admiralty, Admiral Noel, a frequent opponent to Fisher's naval strategies, opposed the operation and initially so too did First Sea Lord Bridgeman. Recognising the need to have Bridgeman on his side, Churchill insisted that 'courage in design now may win a battle later on' and eventually won him over.²²⁶ He also ordered the Admiralty to hurry through the construction of one 15-inch gun, four months ahead of the rest of the outfit, so that the others could be better calibrated.²²⁷ In the end, the project was a brilliant success. Although McKenna also achieved a 1.5-inch increase in gun calibre, the two feats are incomparable. McKenna had the substantial advantages of having the prescient Fisher as First Sea Lord as well as a two year window, whereas Churchill had half that time and needed to inveigle his Board to see his point of view.

The second major technological reform produced by the Churchill-Fisher combination was the increased speed of the navy. In 1906, Fisher persuaded the Admiralty to lay down three *Invincible*-class battlecruisers, which combined the firepower of the largest battleships and the speed of armoured cruisers, at the expense of heavy armour. Between 1911 and 1914, Fisher constantly chimed "“armour is vision”" and urged Churchill to focus on building lightly-armoured battlecruisers and even reduce the armour of the smaller *Blonde* and *Swift* classes, so as to increase their striking power by freeing space for larger guns. For these

²²⁴ Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis I*, p. 82.

²²⁵ David Jablonsky, 'Churchill and Technology' in *Churchill and Strategic Dilemmas Before the World Wars: Essays in Honor of Michael I. Handel* ed. by John H. Maurer (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 121-58 (p. 137).

²²⁶ Jablonsky, *ibid*.

²²⁷ Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis I*, p.82; and Jablonsky, p. 137.

smaller vessels, Fisher's maxim was: 'There is only ONE defence and that is SPEED!'.²²⁸ Fisher lamented that the Admiralty wanted to 'perpetuate battleships of the "Tortoise" type - all armour and no speed!' and instead advocated capital ships with armour no thicker than four inches that were capable of reaching 30 knots.²²⁹ After he was reinstated as First Sea Lord, Fisher succeeded in realising his vision of heavily-armed, lightly-armoured battlecruisers, which he called 'Big Light Battle Cruisers' and were epitomised by the *Courageous*-class "hush-hush cruisers" built in 1915-17.²³⁰ From 1911 to 1914, however, Churchill would not comply with Fisher's vision of such lightly-armoured capital ships and wrote that to 'put the value of a first class battleship into a vessel which cannot stand the pounding of a heavy action is false policy'.²³¹ Evidently, contrary to Dawson's stipulation, Churchill did not merely institute Fisher's reforms, and instead actively challenged his ideas.

This disagreement led to perhaps Churchill's greatest achievement at the Admiralty: the conversion of a coal-driven navy to an oil-fuelled one. Despite differing over armour, Churchill concurred with Fisher's desire to establish a speed advantage over Germany to enable the Royal Navy to 'cross the T' in combat manoeuvres.²³² The solution, he concluded, was to create a Fast Division of battleships that possessed both firepower *and* armour, but were yet capable of outmanoeuvring, outgunning and withstanding a barrage from the largest foreign vessel.²³³ Instead of sacrificing two of the 1912-13 Dreadnoughts' 15-inch guns to allow for the additional propulsion machinery required to achieve this speed, Churchill decided the fleet needed to convert to oil fuel.²³⁴ Although Fisher had pioneered the use of oil in *HMS Dreadnought*, it was on a far smaller scale than what Churchill proposed; the original

²²⁸ CHAR 13/2/6-9, letter from Fisher to Churchill, 4 November 1911; Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis I*, p. 93.

²²⁹ CHAR 13/2/58-60, letter from Fisher to Churchill, 3 December 1911.

²³⁰ John Roberts, *Battlecruisers* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997), p. 51; for "hush-hush cruisers" see R.A. Burt, *British Battleships of World War One* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1986), p. 301.

²³¹ Massie, p. 784.

²³² Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis I*, p. 127; 'Crossing the T' was a manoeuvre first used by Admiral Togo in the battle of the Sea of Japan.

²³³ Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis I*, p. 85: he remarked that this would give the Royal Navy an 'inestimable and a decisive' advantage over the High Seas Fleet.

²³⁴ Massie, p. 784.

Dreadnought sprayed oil onto the coal fires to increase heat, but was still primarily fuelled by coal. The CHAR 13 documents show that Fisher, taking on the role of a teacher, outlined the advantages of oil to Churchill, so that the First Lord could impress the benefits of liquid fuel upon Commons while presenting his 1912-13 Naval Estimates on 18 March 1912.²³⁵

All the same, it was Churchill who orchestrated the delicate operation to convince Parliament to sanction the funds for the requisite costs of the oil venture. Since Britain had no oil reserves of her own, Churchill knew the move to liquid fuel would face stiff opposition in Cabinet and Commons. He therefore initiated a two-pronged campaign to convince the required parties to agree to his proposals. Firstly, as head of the Oil Commission, Fisher located a cheap source of oil and leveraged his connections to gauge the benefits of liquid fuel. Fisher calculated that *HMS Incomparable* would be able to circumnavigate the world without refuelling if she were to run solely on oil and, more pertinently, suggested that the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) was a suitable provider of oil.²³⁶ Secondly, Churchill wrote to First Sea Lord Battenberg in December 1912 ordering the Naval War Staff to produce a report outlining the Fleet's oil needs.

In early March, Churchill personally met with Charles Greenway of the APOC who convinced him that a forward contract with the company was in their mutual interest.²³⁷ The eventual Naval War Staff report 'praised Persian oil because of its high grade, reasonable price and economic freight arrangements' and advocated securing a four-year forward supply from the APOC.²³⁸ Churchill was then able to present to Cabinet that the Admiralty, Naval War Staff and Fisher's Oil Commission were all in favour of securing a controlling stake in the APOC and the following year, Parliament sanctioned the £2.2 million sum required to

²³⁵ CHAR 13/2/54-56, letter from Fisher to Churchill, 10 December 1911.

²³⁶ CHAR 13/16/99, letter from Fisher to Churchill, 13 September 1912.

²³⁷ Reguer, p. 135; if the Admiralty bought over the APOC, the company would be able to avoid being taken over by Royal Dutch Shell, which was rapidly establishing a global oil monopoly.

²³⁸ Reguer, *ibid*.

make the purchase.²³⁹ Amidst the scholarly discussion of how fractious Churchill proved at the Admiralty, the APOC purchase is a striking, though largely overlooked example of his ability to delegate, collaborate and liaise to great effect.

A keen pilot himself, Churchill's institution of the RNAS in 1912 best demonstrates his ability as a strategist and innovator.²⁴⁰ The 1913 amendment to the 1911 Aerial Navigation Act, which legislated that officers should shoot down foreign aircraft that refused to land, reflected Britain's wariness of reconnaissance planes.²⁴¹ Fisher exhibited a similar view in his correspondence with Churchill. He encouraged the First Lord to pursue aircraft production because 'aviation gives you 'Dartmouths!'' and argued that there was no need for the *Dartmouth*, *Blonde* and *Swift*-class ships because planes could perform their navigational and scouting functions better and more cheaply.²⁴² The CHAR 13 papers also show that Churchill repeatedly pressed Asquith to address Britain's Air Programme, which by mid-1913 was falling behind those of rival powers, thereby highlighting his prescient belief in the importance of air power.²⁴³

Ultimately, Churchill's vision for the RNAS superseded navigation and reconnaissance. In 1912, he told Parliament of his intention to offer 'an adventurous career' to the 'younger petty officers and other smart and really competent youth who come so largely into the Navy every year'.²⁴⁴ Consequently, he began 'uniquely cultivating the skills of aerial bombing' and made both bomb-dropping and machine gunnery part of RNAS experimentation in 1912.²⁴⁵ This is recorded to some extent in most major Churchill

²³⁹ Reguer, p. 137.

²⁴⁰ Jeffrey Arnett, 'Winston Churchill, the Quintessential Sensation Seeker', *Political Psychology*, 12, 4 (1991), 609-21 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3791549.pdf?acceptTC=true>> [accessed 26 February 2016] (p. 610).

²⁴¹ Edward C. Blech, ed, *British and Foreign State Papers. 1913. Volume CVI* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1916), pp. 5-6.

²⁴² CHAR 13/16/1-3, letter from Fisher to Churchill, January 1912 (no exact day given).

²⁴³ CHAR 13/22A/118, letter from Churchill to Asquith, 7 June 1913; CHAR 13/22A/126-127, letter from Churchill to Asquith, 12 June 1913.

²⁴⁴ Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, p. 2000; CHAR 13/6A-B/248-250, minute from Churchill to Fourth Sea Lord Lambert, 13 May 1914: Churchill expressed his pleasure at receiving naval officer Captain Frederic Dreyer's application to the RNAS.

²⁴⁵ Best, p. 46; Gilbert, p. 240.

biographies but relatively little weight has been placed upon it.²⁴⁶ Although aerial bombing was only seriously advocated by air theorist Giulio Douhet in the 1920s and the first bombing raid was carried out in 1916 in the Saar Basin – a year after Churchill left the Admiralty – it is significant that he was pioneering such tactics as early as 1912. Historians, such as David Jablonsky, seeking to explore Churchill's relationship with technology may find his contribution to the RNAS especially useful to their research.

Churchill's vigorous modernisation of the Royal Navy legitimised his repeated reassurance to Asquith that despite the German threat, British 'ships will also have a certain superiority over theirs, because we are still leading the way in naval construction'.²⁴⁷ The *status quo* amongst modern scholarship seems to be that Fisher somewhat "used" his acquaintance with Churchill to haul himself back into the sphere of the service he loved.²⁴⁸ On the evidence examined, however, it is clear that Churchill, by keeping Fisher close but not endowing him with any real power – until the woeful decision to reappoint him as First Sea Lord in 1914 – understood both the value and drawbacks of the volatile. Furthermore, while the pair enjoyed harmonious outlooks regarding Lower Deck conditions, admirals, speed and bigger guns, they were divided over lightly-armoured battle-cruisers, which to an extent led to the APOC purchase and the conversion of the fleet to liquid fuel. Although many of these advances were extensions of Fisher's strategic conception, Churchill was critical to their formulation as well as their institution. The extent of his involvement in the development of the 15-inch gun and his role as the 'prime motivator' of the RNAS particularly demonstrate his capacity as an innovator.²⁴⁹ Overall, the lamentable absence of a thorough discussion of

²⁴⁶ Pelling, pp. 152-53.

²⁴⁷ Rhodes James, *Speeches II*, p. 1976.

²⁴⁸ See Jenkins,

²⁴⁹ Malcolm Cooper, 'Blueprint for Confusion: The Administrative Background to the Formation of the Royal Air Force, 1912-1919', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 22, 3 (1987), 437-53
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/260745.pdf>> [accessed 25 February 2016] (p. 441).

Churchill's contribution to the 1911-14 naval reforms in the biographical literature evinces Justin D. Lyons' assertion that 'Churchill's status as a thinker is underappreciated'.²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ Justin D. Lyons, 'Strength Without Mercy: Winston Churchill on Technology and the Fate of Civilization', *Perspectives on Political Science*, 43, 2 (2014), 102-08
<<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/10457097.2013.817750>> [accessed 14 February 2016] (p. 102).

Conclusion:

Sea combat during the First World War was a universally frustrating experience, which seemed not to justify the exorbitant amounts that had been spent on fleets. Nevertheless, when “the guns of August” sounded, naval supremacy lay with the Royal Navy.²⁵¹

The first chapter established that arguments posited by Rhodes James and Charmley concerning Churchill’s decision to increase the 1912-13 Naval Estimates are unsubstantiated by primary evidence. The decision to raise naval expenditure was made only after correctly determining that the 1912 Navy Law threatened British naval supremacy. Furthermore, the offer of a naval holiday is powerful antithesis to the poorly-founded, though lingering allegation that Churchill was a warmonger. Additionally, although there is certainly much to support the argument that Churchill’s weak standing in Parliament in 1911-14 was his own fault, the second chapter identified that the literature has unjustly neglected the significance of his friendships with Lloyd George and Asquith. Were it not for these relationships, Churchill would have succumbed to the anti-Winston brigade and been ousted from the Admiralty before the Dardanelles failure precipitated that end in May 1915. The purpose of the final chapter was to demonstrate that scholarly neglect of Churchill’s involvement in the 1911-14 reforms is unjust; if not for Churchill, perhaps the five super-Dreadnoughts laid down in 1912-13 – the future *Queen Elizabeth*-class battleships – would not have been armed with 15-inch guns, oil-driven, protected by 13-inches of armour and thus have gone on to see action in *both* world wars.

In a largely critical obituary of the former Prime Minister, Michael Foot also wrote:

²⁵¹ “the Guns of August” is borrowed from the title of Barbara Tuchman’s volume of the prelude to the First World War.

Seen from any angle the scale of the figure on the vast canvas is stupendous [...] The first and last impression left by the Colosseum concerns its size. So with Churchill: the man was huge.²⁵²

Churchill's magnitude is the central difficulty facing historians seeking to study him; after all, the term "Churchillian" increasingly denotes impressive proportions rather than outstanding oratory ability. Consequently, a discussion of Churchill's later offers of a naval holiday, a lengthier analysis of his relationships with Lloyd George and Asquith, as well as a closer inspection of his role in the plethora of naval reforms not explored within this study, could all factor into a more sizeable work on the period.

Addison's postulation that 'Churchill's character and opinions, his repertoire of political roles, and his view of the world, were largely settled by 1915' was left out of this paper's introduction because substantiating the claim beyond reasonable doubt would require a study of its own.²⁵³ Nevertheless, over the course of this study it has become clear that despite many vicissitudes over the decades, the faculties that enabled Churchill to attain his inimitable reputation after 1940 were certainly apparent between 1911 and 1914. His foresight, his ambivalence to party politics, his arrogance, his interest in war and its instruments, his appetite for work, his paternalism, his passion for technology, his tenacity, and – as demonstrated by how he supported Lloyd George and Asquith through crises – even his magnanimity, were superabundant during the Admiralty years. As First Lord, Churchill never confined himself to the narrow ground beneath his feet. Instead, he remained transfixed on the proverbial bigger picture – maintaining British naval supremacy – despite costs, his (albeit questionable) Radicalism, the voices of his countless detractors, and Fisher's unpredictability. The razor-sharp focus with which Churchill later came to view the rising threat of Nazism was being whetted some twenty years prior, against the menace of the High Seas Fleet. Consequently, owing to the patchy literature on the period and its historiographical

²⁵² Michael Foot, *Loyalists and Loners* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), p. 168.

²⁵³ Addison, *The Three Careers*, p. 185.

significance to the wider study of Churchill, the pre-war Admiralty years are ripe for reassessment.

With figures of Churchill's magnitude, substantial revisionism is inescapable. In 1945, the Austrian-British philosopher, Karl Popper, explained the revisionist phenomenon by observing that 'each generation has its own troubles and problems, and therefore its own interests and its own point of view'.²⁵⁴ Hence, the renowned bibliographer, Eugene L. Rasor, contended that the wave of Churchill revisionism, spearheaded by the 1993 publication of Charmley's *Churchill: The End of Glory*, 'was a manifestation of a political climate of pessimism'.²⁵⁵ Nonetheless, thirteen years have gone by since Roy Jenkins passed and it is a little over a year since Sir Martin Gilbert died. Geoffrey Best is currently in his nineties and with him, an entire generation of pro-Churchill biographers draws to a close. Although the First World War was evidently not won at sea, owing to Churchill's efforts, there was never a true chance of Britain losing it there either. Perhaps future historians seeking to take up the mantle of upholding the legacy of Sir Winston Churchill amidst the next, inevitable wave of revisionism will cite in his defence the contribution he made to the preponderance of the Royal Navy during his peacetime years as First Lord of the Admiralty.

²⁵⁴ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1945) p. 473.

²⁵⁵ Rasor, p. 55.

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