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**The Peculiarities of British Militarism:
The Air and Navy Leagues in Interwar
Britain**

Rowan G. E. Thompson

PhD

2019

**The Peculiarities of British Militarism:
The Air and Navy Leagues in Interwar
Britain**

Rowan G. E. Thompson

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements of the
University of Northumbria at Newcastle
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Research undertaken in the
Faculty of Arts, Design and Social Sciences

December 2019

Abstract

This thesis examines the role of the Air League of the British Empire and the Navy League – founded in 1909 and 1895 respectively – in the (re)militarisation of state and civil society in interwar Britain. More broadly, it considers the place of militarism, militarisation, and military culture at a time when internationalist counter-currents enjoyed significant resonance in British society. Both Leagues occupied a position between ‘high’ and ‘low’ politics, and their case offers new insights into the susceptibility of British popular and political culture to militarism. The two organisations played a prominent part in national debates on militarism, internationalism, youth, modernity, and rearmament. Their activities thus allow us to re-consider familiar themes in the history of interwar Britain in a fresh and conceptually challenging way – national defence, contested notions of Britain’s national status, the impact of war on British society and politics, political activism, and the relationship between state and civil society.

This thesis draws on a wide range of sources, including minute books, private papers, memoirs, parliamentary proceedings, posters, pamphlets, government records, local and national newspapers, journals, oral testimony collections, newsreels, photographs, and satirical cartoons. The discussion is divided into two main parts. The chapters in Part A analyse the ways in which the Air League and Navy Leagues engaged with different political questions and contexts. The analysis developed shows how both Leagues promoted aerial and naval rearmament while having to negotiate the rise of issues such as disarmament, arms limitations, pacifism, collective security, and international diplomacy. The chapters in Part B detail how each League addressed civil society. Their focus on young people is traced through their educational ventures and youth organisations (the Air Defence Cadet Corps and the Sea Cadet Corps), while their targeting of mass audiences is explored through their staging of large-scale celebrations on Trafalgar Day and Empire Air Day.

With the principal exception of David Edgerton’s work, most studies of British militarism terminate in 1914. However, the outbreak of the First World War did not constitute a terminus for organised militarism, nor did it mark the end of martial values or militaristic sentiment in mainstream British political culture. Overall, this thesis contends that militaristic leagues, the type of which featured prominently in the liberal political culture of Edwardian Britain, occupied a similar, if more contested and complex, place in the associational culture of interwar Britain. It argues that institutional, cultural, and popular forms of militarism were able to continue despite the growth of internationalism, fears that society had been brutalised by the experience of the First World War, the popularity of interwar peace movements, and the widespread support for issues such as disarmament and collective security. Finally, this thesis demonstrates the ways in which the Air and Navy Leagues contributed to the military preparedness of the nation upon the outbreak of the Second World War.

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List of Abbreviations

ADCC	Air Defence Cadet Corps
AL	Air League
ARP	Air Raid Precautions
ATC	Air Training Corps
BSUASC	Ball State University, Archives and Special Collections
BNB	Boys' Naval Brigade
BL	British Library
BLPES	British Library of Political and Economic Science
BUF	British Union of Fascists
CHUR	Churchill Archives, Cambridge
CAG	Civil Air Guard
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
ILP	Independent Labour Party
IML	Imperial Maritime League
IWM	Imperial War Museum
KCL	King's College London, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives
LEC	Ladies Emergency Committee of the Navy League
LNU	League of Nations Union
LCC	London County Council
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
MSSC	Marine Society & Sea Cadets Archive
NAL	National Aerospace Library (Royal Aeronautical Society)
NFWI	National Federation of Women's Institutes
NLA	National League of Airmen
NMM	National Maritime Museum
NSL	National Service League
NL	Navy League
NLAR	Navy League Annual Report
ORF	Navy League Overseas Relief Fund
NCS	New Commonwealth Society
PPU	Peace Pledge Union
RAC	Royal Aero Club
RAeS	Royal Aeronautical Society
RAF	Royal Air Force

RFC	Royal Flying Corps
RFCFRF	Royal Flying Corps Families Relief Fund
RNVR	Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve
SCC	Sea Cadet Corps
SNR	Society for Nautical Research
SBAC	Society of British Aircraft Constructors
TNA	The National Archives
T&W	Tyne and Wear Archives
UDC	Union of Democratic Control
WAL	Women's Aerial League
YAL	Young Aerial League

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Dedications

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Ewan Brown (1991–2019)

Acknowledgements

Over the course of writing this thesis I have benefitted from the advice and guidance of a number of scholars. First of all, I must offer my gratitude to my primary supervisor, Dr Daniel Laqua – the most patient, kind, and enthusiastic of mentors. His comments and suggestions on numerous drafts of conference abstracts, chapters, articles, and blogs have been invaluable. I would like to thank my secondary supervisor, Dr James McConnel, whose guidance and support has helped to shape the thesis immeasurably. Professor David Edgerton and Professor Matthew Kelly – my two examiners – have provided invaluable feedback on the thesis and have given me much excellent advice. I would like to offer them my sincere gratitude. I would also like to thank the History staff at Northumbria University for their support throughout the thesis. I am similarly grateful to Dr N.C. Fleming, Mr Anthony Gorst, Professor Julie Gottlieb, Professor Susan Grayzel, Dr Brett Holman, and Dr Matthew Johnson for their advice and encouragement.

In addition, I am grateful for the financial support offered by Northumbria University which enabled me to conduct my research and attend a number of conferences. I am similarly thankful for the bursary provided by the Royal Historical Society, which allowed me to conduct archival research at the Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge.

I am also indebted to the staff at numerous archives and libraries. For particularly kind hospitality, I would like to thank Fraser Lowe at the Marine Society and Sea Cadets for allowing me to view material relating to the Navy League. I would also like to offer my gratitude to Emma Mistry and Andrew Brooks at the Air League. I am grateful to staff at the National Archives; the British Library of Political and Economic Science, LSE; the Royal Aeronautical Society (National Aerospace Library); the Churchill Archives Centre; the Imperial War Museum; the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College London; the London Metropolitan Archives; the Royal Air Force Museum; the Parliamentary Archives; the National Maritime Museum; the Tyne and Wear Archives; the Scout Association Archive; the Ball State University, Archives and Special Collections; the National Library of Scotland; the British Library; and finally the staff at Northumbria University Library.

I would like to express my appreciation to the friends who have offered encouragement and support during the three years of research and writing. Thanks to Nathan and Ann-Marie for reading various chapter drafts and to Nick, Harry, Mark, and Ed for warm hospitality whilst carrying out archival trips. Thank you to Amy and Islay for accompanying me on many trips to the tops of mountains – which provided such a welcome distraction – and for being such an important part of my life. Finally, thanks must go to my family for their support during the thesis and beyond. It would not have been possible without their assistance.

Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the Faculty Ethics Committee on 30 August 2017.

I declare that word count of this thesis is 84,612 words

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Introduction

In her 1976 article, ‘Militarism in Britain before the Great War’, Anne Summers bore witness to her realisation that there ‘was such a phenomenon as *British* militarism’.¹ British militarism, Summers argued, was distinctly divorced from ‘Prussianism’ which, with its politically influential military caste, compulsory military service, and large standing army, was often seen as being synonymous with militarism. This was a view shared by many at the time. As Max Scheler, the German philosopher, wrote in 1915: ‘Militarism was simply the natural organic form in which the Prussian spirit expressed itself’.² For Summers, however, British militarism was ‘more than a ruling class ideology, and far more than an ideological instrument of the professional armed forces’. It became an ‘integral part of the liberal political culture of the country’.³ Summers pointed to the popularity of the Victorian Volunteer Forces, and the success of militaristic extraparliamentary associations such as the Navy League and the National Service League (NSL), as evidence of the development of both institutional and associational forms of militarism before 1914. For Summers, patriotic and militaristic leagues represented a prominent element of the political and cultural landscape of the period. This thesis contends that this prominence and importance did not end with the First World War. Indeed, it argues not only that the Air League of the British Empire and the Navy League (founded in 1909 and 1895 respectively) occupied a similar, if

¹ Anne Summers, ‘Militarism in Britain before the Great War’, *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1976), p. 104.

² Cited in Martin Ceadel, *Thinking about Peace and War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 23. For Prussian/German militarism see Gerhard Ritter, *The Sword and the Sceptre: The Problem of Militarism in Germany*, 4 vols (Eng. tr., London: Allen Lane, 1972–3); Nicholas Stargardt, *The German Idea of Militarism: Radical and Socialist Critics, 1866–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Geoff Eley, *Reshaping the Radical Right: Radical Nationalism and Political Change After Bismarck* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991). For military culture, see Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005).

³ Summers, ‘Militarism’, p. 105.

more complex and contested, place in the associational culture of interwar Britain, but also that they were important in the re-militarisation of state and civil society in the period.

Prior to Summers's article, the British historical experience of militarism was portrayed in rather different terms.⁴ Writing in 1902, the Italian historian Guglielmo Ferrero noted that militarism in England was 'reduced to a minimum'.⁵ Albert Lauterbach, writing in 1944, observed that militarism was traditionally less 'absolute and aggressive' in Britain than in Germany.⁶ Caroline Playne advanced similar arguments in her 1928 account of the 'pre-war mind' in Britain. She observed that, while militarism existed in Britain, and was therefore not a uniquely Prussian experience, it was less natural in comparison to other European societies:

The Briton has little of the sense of the glory of fight and conquest, of the pure, simple military spirit . . . Neither does the Briton care for the order and method of Militarism, the fashion and show of Militarism, which appeal to the German. He has no need for conscious display of power, no conception of collective ordering of might.⁷

For Playne, militarism was 'acquired rather than instinctive', and was the 'product of imperialism'.⁸ That militarism in Britain was 'reduced to a minimum', less 'absolute and aggressive', or less natural than in other countries, seemingly pointed to a continuity in British political history. What emerges from such accounts is an image of British exceptionalism; militarism in Britain was 'exceptional, archaic, even exogenous'.⁹ The strength of existing political and parliamentary institutions, as well as social attitudes, so this

⁴ Olive Anderson's study of 'Christian militarism', which examines the interrelationship between military and religious practices and ideals in Britain following the Crimean War, provides another notable contribution to the study of militarism in Britain. Olive Anderson, 'The Growth of Christian Militarism in Mid-Victorian Britain', *The English Historical Review*, vol. 86, no. 338 (1971), pp. 46–72.

⁵ Guglielmo Ferrero, *Militarism: A Contribution to the Peace Crusade* (London: Ward, Lock & Co., 1902), p. 279.

⁶ Albert T. Lauterbach, 'Militarism in the Western World: A Comparative Study', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 5, no. 4 (1944), p. 458.

⁷ Caroline E. Playne, *The Pre-War Mind in Britain: An Historical Review* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1928), p. 125.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁹ Although militarism in modern societies is conventionally viewed in similar terms. See John R. Gillis (ed.), *The Militarization of the Western World* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), p. 3.

narrative ran, consolidated by a peaceable national character meant that where militarism existed in Britain, it did so in a muted form. Militarism was constructed as being fundamentally divorced from British ideas, values, and sentiments. However, Summers's article challenged these conventional wisdoms and pointed to a number of ways in which militarism, in certain guises, was actually both relevant and popular within British society.

Summers's analysis has been influential for scholars working in this area since the 1970s. However, for all the conceptual and analytical rigour of Summers's article, her assertion that 'popular British militarism after 1918 had nowhere very much to go' requires revision.¹⁰ As this thesis demonstrates, institutional, cultural, and popular forms of militarism were, in fact, able to continue despite the fear of post-war brutalisation, anti-war sentiment, the growth of internationalism, the popularity of inter-war peace movements, pacifism, and the support for disarmament and collective security.¹¹ Her conclusion does, however, draw attention to a wider problem in debates about British militarism.

Militarism in Britain, in the last few decades, has been the subject of serious scholarly debate. As evidence of militarism in Edwardian Britain, scholars point to the success of organisations such as the NSL, the Navy League, and the Imperial Maritime League (IML), alongside the growth of martial and militaristic values.¹² Similarly, the rise of paramilitary

¹⁰ Summers, 'Militarism', p. 121.

¹¹ Jon Lawrence, 'Forging a Peaceable Kingdom: War, Violence and Fear of Brutalization in Post-First World War Britain', *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 75, no. 3 (2003), pp. 557–589.

¹² For the Navy League see, in particular, Summers, 'Militarism'; W.M. Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy: Methods and Organization of British Navalist Propaganda, 1889–1914* (New York: Garland, 1986); Chapter 3 of Matthew Johnson, *Militarism and the British Left, 1902–1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); and Chapters 1, 4, and 5 of Frans Coetzee, *For Party or Country: Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Popular Conservatism in Edwardian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). For the National Service League see Chapter 4 of Johnson, *Militarism*; Chapter 2 of Coetzee, *For Party or Country*; RJQ Adams, 'The National Service League and Mandatory Service in Edwardian Britain', *Armed Forces & Society*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1985), pp. 53–74; and Matthew Hendley, "'Help us to Secure a Strong, Healthy, Prosperous and Peaceful Britain": The Social Arguments of the Campaign for Compulsory Military Service in Britain, 1899–1914', *Canadian Journal of History*, vol. 30, no. 2 (1995), pp. 261–288. For the IML, see N.C. Fleming, 'The Imperial Maritime League: British Navalism, Conflict, and the Radical Right, c. 1907–1920', *War in History*, vol. 23, no. 3 (2016), pp. 296–322.

youth organisations, such as the Boys' Brigades, the Lads' Drill Association, the Jewish Lads' Brigade, and Baden-Powell's Boy Scouts, as well as the spread of martial juvenile literature, has been highlighted to point to the existence of militarism.¹³ Yet, most current studies of British militarism terminate in 1914 and so, in a sense, reflect Summers's account.¹⁴ N.C. Fleming's observation that 'few militaristic leagues survived the Great War' may be true, however the 1914–1918 conflict did not mark the end of martial values or militaristic sentiment in mainstream British political culture.¹⁵ This thesis shows that certain elements of the popular culture of militarism, alongside militaristic discourses, ideas, and practices, were able to survive in the post-war world.¹⁶

II. The Air and Navy Leagues in Interwar Britain

One reason why militarism in the interwar years has not received more attention is because these years have been widely regarded as 'a halcyon period for liberal internationalists'.¹⁷ Yet, the Air and Navy Leagues were linked to the two technological arms, accorded the

¹³ See, for example, J. O. Springhall, 'The Boy Scouts, Class and Militarism in Relation to Youth Movements 1908–1930', *International Review of Social History*, vol. 16, no. 2 (1971), pp. 125–158; John Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society: British Youth Movements, 1883–1940* (London: Croom Helm, 1977); Martin Dedman, 'Baden-Powell, Militarism, and the 'Invisible Contributors' to the Boy Scout Scheme, 1904–1920', *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 4, no. 3 (1993), pp. 201–23; Richard A. Voeltz, '...A Good Jew and a Good Englishman': The Jewish Lads' Brigade, 1894–1922', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 23, no. 1 (1988), pp. 119–127; and V. Bailey, 'Bibles and Dummy Rifles: The Boys' Brigade', *History Today*, vol. 33, no. 10 (1983), pp. 5–9.

¹⁴ See, for example, Anne Summers, 'The Character of Edwardian Nationalism: Three Popular Leagues', in Paul Kennedy and Anthony Nicholls (eds), *Nationalist and Racist Movements in Britain and Germany before 1914* (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 68–87; Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*; Johnson, *Militarism*; Coetzee, *For Party or Country*; and N. P. Quinney, 'Edwardian Militarism and Working-Class Youth' (unpub. D.Phil thesis, Oxford University, 1987).

¹⁵ Fleming, 'The Imperial Maritime League', p. 321.

¹⁶ The way in which such discourses, ideas, and practices undermines British exceptionalism also raises an interesting comparison when examining the extent to which imperial Germany was following a *Sonderweg*. Particularly relevant for the present study is Chapter 3 of Thomas Weber, *Our Friend "The Enemy": Elite Education in Britain and Germany before World War 1* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), pp. 99–136. Weber challenges both the *Sonderweg* thesis and notions of British exceptionalism and, in studying university students in pre-1914 Heidelberg and Oxford, suggests that militarism (both elite and participatory) was less prominent among the former and far more prominent among the latter than has traditionally been assumed.

¹⁷ Michael Pugh, *Liberal Internationalism: The Interwar Movement for Peace in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 2.

highest military and strategic priority by the state in the interwar years, the Royal Air Force (RAF) and the Royal Navy. Neither League acted as a mere conduit for the espousal of Air Ministry or Admiralty views; indeed, each League at times acted as their most vociferous critics. However, links of personnel and objectives often meant that an almost symbiotic relationship existed between League and each service department.

Alongside the Air and Navy Leagues, the Army, Home and Empire League (Army League) was formed in 1937 by Leo Amery, the Conservative MP and staunch opponent of appeasement, to promote rearmament and campaign for the introduction of conscription.¹⁸ Founded as a non-political organisation, its purpose was to help make ‘defence a national issue’.¹⁹ The Army League had a membership of several thousand and carried out propaganda in a similar style to the Air and Navy Leagues, producing an official organ, several publications, and holding public meetings, although on a much smaller scale to either organisation. Its leadership, like the Air and Navy Leagues, included ex-servicemen, former cabinet ministers, MPs, and military theorists.

Like the Air and Navy Leagues, the Army League could certainly be considered militaristic – indeed, its publications sought to avert potential accusations of militarism – and therefore worthy of study in the context of this thesis.²⁰ While there were elements of rivalry between the three organisations, they had pronounced and important links in terms of objectives and personnel – in fact, the Army League was even founded using the Navy League as inspiration.²¹ Amery was a long-standing Navy League member, while Lord

¹⁸ Renamed the Citizen Service League in 1938.

¹⁹ David John Mitchell, ‘The Army League, Conscription and the 1956 Defence Review’ (unpub. PhD thesis, University of East Anglia, 2012), p. 93. See Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge (hereafter CHUR), The Papers of Leopold Amery, GBR/0014/AMEL, AMEL 1/7/78 and AMEL 1/7/82, as well as The National Archives (hereafter TNA), WO 32/4644, Army and Home and Empire Defence League, for the early activities and organisation of the Army League.

²⁰ Mitchell, ‘The Army League’, p. 80.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

Lloyd, Navy League president in the 1930s, was a member of the Army League's Council.²² The Army League also published in support of Air League schemes as we shall see. However, as the Army League's influence was more marginal than either the Air or Navy League's, as it has already received recent scholarly attention, and finally due to limitations of time and space, it will not be the focus of study here. It does, however, provide further evidence of the existence of organised militarism in the 1930s.

This thesis is a study of 'politics in its widest social setting' as manifested through popular leagues, extraparliamentary associations, and social movements not always directly linked with political parties.²³ One fundamental aim of this thesis is, of course, to situate the ideas, activities, and development of the Air and Navy Leagues more firmly within the wider landscape of politics, culture, and society in the interwar years than has previously been the case.²⁴ The value of studying the aims, ideas, values, practices, and policies of the Air and Navy Leagues is that it reveals much about political and associational culture in interwar Britain. Both Leagues occupied an intermediate position between 'high' and 'low' politics, and their case offers new insights into the susceptibility of British popular and political culture to militarism.²⁵ The two organisations played a prominent part in national debates on militarism, internationalism, youth, modernity, and rearmament. Their activities thus allow us to re-consider familiar themes in the history of interwar Britain in new and conceptually challenging ways – national defence, contested notions of Britain's national status, the

²² 'The Army and Home and Empire Defence League', *Rising Strength*, August 1938, p. ii.

²³ As defined by Lawrence Black, *Redefining British Politics: Culture, Consumerism and Participation, 1954–70* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 2–4.

²⁴ The principal exception to such neglect is Philip Noel-Baker, *The Private Manufacture of Armaments: Volume I* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1936), pp. 290–345 which pointed to the influence of private manufacturers and bemoaned the Air and Navy League's constant opposition to collective security and disarmament. Alfred Gollin, *The Impact of Air Power on the British People and their Government, 1909–1914* (London: Macmillan, 1989) examines the Air League, although only up until the First World War, while Duncan Redford, 'Collective Security and Internal Dissent: The Navy League's Attempts to Develop a New Policy towards British Naval Power Between 1919 and the 1922 Washington Naval Treaty', *History*, vol. 96, no. 321 (2011), pp. 48–67 examines the Navy League up until 1922.

²⁵ Much like the organisations studied by Coetzee. Coetzee, *For Party or Country*, p. 6.

impact of war on British society and politics, political activism, and the relationship between state and civil society.

This thesis will, however, go beyond simply examining the institutional and organisational minutiae of each League, and will also explore the place of militaristic associational practices, as carried out by each organisation within the interwar years. It will also consider Alfred Vagts's assertion that, 'generally speaking, militarism flourishes more in peacetime than in war'.²⁶ Manifestations of military culture – air shows, naval commemorations, and militaristic youth organisations – gained widespread support in the 1920s and 1930s, despite pacifist and liberal internationalist counter-currents. The Navy League – whose *raison d'être* of achieving, 'as the primary object of the national policy "the Command of the Sea"' – was Britain's largest naval lobbying organisation in the interwar years and, as such, formed an important part of the associational and political culture of the period.²⁷ The Air League's aim of securing 'the maintenance of an Air Force capable of obtaining the mastery of the air wherever it may be called upon to operate' as well as 'the establishment of a thriving aircraft industry' was, despite opposition, eventually achieved.²⁸

The Air and Navy Leagues never publicly embraced their associations with militarism and each League went to great lengths to reject the epithet 'militaristic'. The Navy League positioned itself as 'above party', as a non-partisan organisation, as well as being a 'peace society in the truest sense of the word', yet it clearly had militaristic overtones.²⁹ The Air League, which also claimed to be 'above party', was similarly accused of being both

²⁶ Alfred Vagts, *A History of Militarism: Civilian and Military* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1959), p. 15.

²⁷ Marine Society & Sea Cadets Archive, London, Navy League Papers (hereafter MSSC), Navy League Minute Book 1895 (hereafter NL Minute Book), Meeting held on 11 December 1894, p. 2. See also, 'The Objects of the Navy League', *The Navy League Journal*, December 1895, p. 1.

²⁸ 'The Policy of the Air League', *Air League Bulletin*, December 1923, p. 8. The Aerial League became the Air League following a resolution passed on 26 March 1920. The Air League, London, (hereafter AL), Air League Minute Book (hereafter AL Minute Book), Extraordinary General Meeting, 26 March 1920, p. 1. The 'Imperial Air League' was initially suggested, although this was dropped – after the Home Office objected to the use of 'imperial'. TNA HO 144/1487/353595, Title Royal: Imperial Air League – Refused, 1917.

²⁹ Noel-Baker, *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*, p. 294.

‘militaristic’ and ‘reactionary’ but stressed that ‘nothing could be further from the truth’. The League argued that it was ‘not militaristic but realistic in its outlook’.³⁰ Stephen Marples, the Air League’s first secretary, argued that it was not ‘an association of scaremongers’ and was not characterised by ‘sensationalism’, however this did little to fend off such accusations.³¹

If, however, one accepts the interpretation advanced by Jon Lawrence that, following the First World War, Britain became a ‘peaceable kingdom’ – ‘a nation where both state and people had renounced the barbarism of war and turned their back on the “militarist spirit” that it had fostered’ then there should be little room for the study of militaristic organisations.³² This is supported by current scholarship on both Leagues. One reason for this may be the strength of liberal internationalist, pacifist, and anti-war sentiment during the interwar period, which has led to the construction of a narrative, encapsulated in recent work by Helen McCarthy and Matthew Hendley, which argues that the post-war evolution of associational bodies rested on an ability to embrace a non-partisan and domestically orientated agenda, free from militaristic discourse.³³

The presence, and relative success, of groups such as the League of Nations Union (LNU), created in 1918; the Union of Democratic Control (UDC), formed in 1914; the No More War Movement, founded in 1921; the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, established in 1915; and the Peace Pledge Union (PPU), formed in 1936 and with a membership of 130,000 by 1939, appears indicative of such a narrative.³⁴ Indeed, as

³⁰ ‘The Air League to its Members’, *Air Review*, October 1934, p. 14.

³¹ ‘The Mansion House Meeting and its Lessons’, *Flight*, 10 April 1909, p. 204.

³² Lawrence, ‘Forging a Peaceable Kingdom’, p. 588.

³³ Helen McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, Citizenship and Internationalism, c.1918–1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); Matthew Hendley, *Organized Patriotism and the Crucible of War: Popular Imperialism in Britain, 1914–1932* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2012).

³⁴ For peace activism in the interwar period see Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain 1914–1945: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); Chapters 8, 9, and 10 of James Hinton, *Protests and Visions: Peace Politics in 20th Century Britain* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989); Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of David

McCarthy shows, ‘whatever its ultimate failures as a mechanism of collective security’, the LNU inspired ‘a rich and participatory culture of political protest, popular education and civic ritual’.³⁵ Its membership was, at its peak, over 400,000.³⁶ In 1933, the LNU’s journal *Headway* could boast that over one million people had belonged to the Union since its inception.³⁷ Assessing the significance of the Air and Navy Leagues is also problematic when viewed in the context of the emergence, following the First World War, of an international society, of transnational non-state actors, and the wider spirit of internationalism.³⁸ However, as this thesis will demonstrate, the Air and Navy Leagues were able to survive – and even prosper – in this seemingly inhospitable political and social landscape.

This thesis challenges the idea that there was a straightforward ‘dissolution of organized militarism’ following the First World War or that ‘[m]ilitaristic values were unacceptable’.³⁹ It argues that Hendley’s assertion that the ‘historiographical consensus on continuity between the pre-war and interwar period needs to be expanded to include patriotic

Cortright, *Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Chapters 3 and 4 of Cecelia Lynch, *Beyond Appeasement: Interpreting Interwar Peace Movements in World Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); Chapters 5 and 6 of Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilisation, 1919–1939* (London: Allen Lane, 2009); and Chapters 5 and 6 of Michael Howard, *War and the Liberal Conscience* (London: Temple Smith, 1978). David C. Lukowitz, ‘British Pacifists and Appeasement: The Peace Pledge Union’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 9, no. 1 (1974), p. 117. Even the British Legion could claim a membership of 400,000 by 1938. Niall Barr, *The Lion and the Poppy: British Veterans, Politics, and Society, 1921–1939* (London: Praeger, 2005), p. 58.

³⁵ McCarthy, *The British People*, p. 1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4. See ‘The Million’, *Headway*, April 1933, p. 1.

³⁸ See, in particular, Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002); Daniel Laqua (ed.), *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements Between the World Wars* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Chapter 6 of Casper Sylvest’s *British Liberal Internationalism, 1880–1930: Making Progress?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); and Pugh, *Liberal Internationalism*. For the intellectual antecedents of interwar liberal internationalism, see Sandi E. Cooper, *Patriotic Pacifism: Waging War on War in Europe 1815–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); and Martin H. Geyer and Johannes Paulmann (eds), *The Mechanics of Internationalism: Culture, Society and Politics from the 1840s to the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

³⁹ Bernhard Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity in Britain and Germany, 1890–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 268; Hendley, *Organized Patriotism*, p. 228.

and imperialist organizations' must also incorporate militaristic organisations.⁴⁰ The First World War did not mark a terminus for organised militarism. It demonstrates that militarism was able to manifest itself in myriad ways and that, even in an age of internationalism, militarism was able to enjoy resonance in the popular and political culture of interwar Britain. The Air and Navy Leagues successfully countered the propaganda of liberal internationalist, pacifist, and anti-war organisations, although met with staunch opposition from such groups. This thesis also argues that, through the militarisation of sections of British youth and the promotion of rearmament and military strength in the form of popular civic ritual, both the Air and Navy Leagues were able to contribute to the military preparedness of the nation at the outbreak of the Second World War. The thesis contends that, far from being marginalised for their associations with militarism as one might expect, both the Air and Navy Leagues were able to carry out their work on a local, national, and imperial scale, and were able to command the support of figures from the political, social, and military elite.

The remainder of this introduction will first explore the theoretical and conceptual issues surrounding militarism, and the similarly amorphous concepts of military culture and militarisation, before examining how relevant these were to the British state, and wider civil society, in the interwar period. In doing so, it contends that militarism is an important category of historical analysis. The introduction will conclude by outlining the structure and organisation of the thesis.

III. Understanding Militarism

While this thesis does not attempt to achieve a conceptual or epistemological re-examination of militarism, or offer any new definitional framework, it seeks to address some of the main

⁴⁰ Hendley, *Organized Patriotism*, p. 4.

debates surrounding the term as a necessary precursor to exploring militarism as a phenomenon in the interwar years and how militaristic organisations operated more broadly within civil society. As an analytical and explanatory term, militarism has eluded any sort of discernible scholarly consensus.⁴¹ Attempts to historicise the conceptual and theoretical debates surrounding its meaning even form the basis of study in its own right.⁴² Militarism, militarisation, and even military culture, often overlap in scholarly literature.⁴³ Where the term ‘militarism’ is used, it is altogether too frequently misunderstood, used polemically as a term of abuse, or simplistically conflated with terms such as fascism or imperialism.⁴⁴ As Matthew Johnson has observed, negative connotations surrounding the term have been apparent ‘since the first recorded usage of the term in English, in the 1860s, when the Italian patriot Giuseppe Garibaldi’s disdainful reference to ‘that disease of modern times, known under the sinister name of militarism’ was widely reported in the British press’.⁴⁵ Michael Howard has similarly warned that militarism ‘has become a term of such general illiterate abuse that the scholar must use it with care’, although his advice has not always been heeded.⁴⁶ Arguments such as Hendley’s that, following the First World War, there simply existed a ‘hostility to militarism’, or that ‘the post-war world was not a hospitable place for militaristic Edwardian patriotic leagues’ are therefore particularly problematic.⁴⁷

Militarism is traditionally understood as militancy, or aggressive foreign policy on the part of the state, a preponderance of the military in the state, and, finally, and most

⁴¹ Indeed, little has changed since the German socialist Karl Liebknecht pointed to the multifarious nature of militarism over a century ago. Karl Liebknecht, *Militarism and Anti-Militarism* (Eng. tr., Glasgow: Socialist Labour Press, 1917).

⁴² Volker R. Berghahn, *Militarism: The History of an International Debate 1861–1979* (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1981).

⁴³ As Laurence Cole makes clear in his study of military culture and popular patriotism in Austria. Laurence Cole, *Military Culture and Popular Patriotism in Late Imperial Austria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 12.

⁴⁴ Berghahn, *Militarism*, p. 2.

⁴⁵ Johnson, *Militarism*, p. 4.

⁴⁶ Michael Howard, *War in European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 109.

⁴⁷ Hendley, *Organized Patriotism*, p. 10 and p. 64.

commonly, the problem of civil-military relations.⁴⁸ As Johnson notes, militarism – understood as conflict between civil and military spheres of society – may refer ‘broadly to the excessive or disproportionate political influence of a military caste within societies nominally under civilian leadership, or to the freedom of the armed forces to act independently of civilian political oversight and control’.⁴⁹ Certainly, Vagts understood certain aspects of militarism in such institutional terms. Militarism, for Vagts, represented ‘a domination of the military man over the civilian, an undue preponderance of military demands, an emphasis on military considerations, spirit, ideals and scales of value, in the life of states’.⁵⁰ However, Vagts did also outline the ideological elements of militarism such as ‘the qualities of caste and cult, authority and belief’.⁵¹ The political role of the military in society is clearly a common theme within the scholarly literature on militarism. Such definitions are, of course, problematic and in part neglect the fact that civil and military spheres of any society often overlap. Indeed, defining militarism simply in institutional terms, as the disproportionate political influence of a military caste or purely as an overemphasis on the military considerations of the state, ignores many of the broader cultural and social aspects of militarism. Understood in such terms, militarism had little relevance to the British political system in the interwar years.

Stig Förster’s definition of militarism ostensibly adopts a similar line. For Förster, ‘militarism means the purposeful appropriation of the armed forces for internal politics and/or foreign aggression, along with an overemphasis on military policy compared to other areas of politics’.⁵² However, as Förster stresses, in order to understand militarism, a broader appreciation of the social and cultural implications of the term is necessary. The advantage

⁴⁸ For civil-military relations generally, see Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Practice of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957).

⁴⁹ Johnson, *Militarism*, p. 5.

⁵⁰ Vagts, *History of Militarism*, p. 14.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵² Cited in Cole, *Military Culture*, p. 12.

of a broadly conceived understanding of militarism, Förster argues, ‘lies in the fact that it allows for a broad spectrum of manifestations to be grasped. This is especially relevant to the fact that the phenomenon of militarism is in no sense confined to the military sphere.’⁵³ This distinction, and necessarily broad definition of militarism, is significant and particularly pertinent to the British case. As Nicholas Stargardt has demonstrated in his work, militarism is not merely about institutions and power, but also about ideas, culture, and society.⁵⁴ Given such terminological variations, it is indeed difficult to offer any general definition of militarism or even to speak of militarism as one phenomenon. Militarism was certainly not a crude, monolithic entity, but a much more multifaceted problem.⁵⁵ Militarism was appropriated differently by different states, by different organisations and groups. As John Gillis argues, ‘judging one’s own society against this “other”, even if it is an ideal type, begs the question of whether militarism itself might mean different things in different societies’.⁵⁶

As well as being understood as a problem of civil-military relations, there are also distinctions between ‘official’ and ‘popular’ forms of militarism. As Laurence Cole outlines, ‘official’ militarism includes ‘foreign policy, the state’s policy towards its armed forces, army politics, preparation for war, and financial and practical support for a public ‘military culture’’. ‘Popular’ militarism, on the other hand, has two principal attributes. In institutional terms, Cole argues that popular militarism is independent of the state ‘even if it may cooperate with organs of the state, receive official backing from government, and include employees of state institutions among its proponents (albeit acting in a private capacity as citizens)’. The second feature of ‘popular’ militarism ‘implies the spontaneous and active participation of broad sections of the population – not just of the social elites and bourgeoisie

⁵³ Cole, *Military Culture*, p. 13.

⁵⁴ Stargardt, *German Idea of Militarism*, p. 5.

⁵⁵ Johnson, *Militarism*, p. 10.

⁵⁶ Gillis, *The Militarization of the Western World*, p. 2.

– in activities which support the armed forces or help to cultivate a ‘military culture’ in society at large’.⁵⁷ For Cole, the exploration of militarism in terms of its social and cultural manifestations has led to the increasing relevance of the notion of ‘military culture’. Isabell V. Hull understands military culture in a largely organisational and institutional sense, to assess ‘why an army acts as it does in war’.⁵⁸ Yet, such an approach neglects the important, and in many ways more interesting, interaction between civil and military spheres in peacetime as Cole has noted. He instead employs a broader approach to military culture to incorporate the place, meaning, and impact of military symbols, ideas, and behaviours in society much more widely.⁵⁹ In attempting to explore such symbols, ideas, and behaviours, Cole is particularly interested in ‘patriotic activities in the public sphere that revolved around the military’ as well as military veterans’ associations.⁶⁰ This thesis is similarly interested in military culture, as defined by Cole, in interwar Britain.

IV. Militarism in Interwar Britain?

War, and the preparation for war, was rarely regarded as a normal or desirable social activity in Britain in the interwar years.⁶¹ There were fears that the First World War had had a brutalising impact on British society, a very palpable anti-war sentiment in the period, perhaps most vividly expressed in the ‘King and Country’ debate in the Oxford Union in February 1933, the East Fulham by-election in October 1933, numerous anti-war publications, demonstrations, and parades which had the purpose of ‘awaken[ing] people to

⁵⁷ Cole, *Military Culture*, p. 13.

⁵⁸ Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, p. 93.

⁵⁹ Cole, *Military Culture*, p. 16.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁶¹ According to Michael Mann, this is as a central facet of militarism: Michael Mann, ‘The Roots and Contradictions of Modern Militarism’, *New Left Review*, vol. 162 (1987), p. 35.

the evils of war'.⁶² There was also, of course, understandably a concern about the psychological trauma of the First World War.⁶³

If 'the British took pride in their own distinctive militarism' prior to the First World War, this pride appeared far less prominent in the aftermath of the conflict.⁶⁴ Perhaps the most obvious repudiation of militarism, and expression of a desire for peace, was the Peace Ballot of 1934 to 1935. The Peace Ballot was a LNU initiative in which almost 12 million adults voted on questions relating to the League of Nations and collective security. Philip Noel-Baker, Labour MP and a founder of the LNU, argued that the Ballot 'proved beyond a doubt that the British people understood the policy of world disarmament and the collective security of the league'. Lord Robert Cecil, the LNU's president, agreed, stating that Britons had shown 'overwhelming approval' of collective security.⁶⁵ The Ballot, however, has been interpreted in a number of ways. The LNU's refusal to denounce the international use of force led Winston Churchill to note that the Ballot 'combined the contradictory propositions of reduction of armaments and forcible resistance to aggression', while Lord Beaverbrook, proprietor of the *Daily Express*, described it as the 'ballot of blood'.⁶⁶ Since then, historians have offered several different readings. Martin Ceadel argues that the Ballot revealed the strength of public feeling behind collective security, only if understood as a 'middle way between isolationism and militarism'.⁶⁷ David Edgerton similarly notes that the Ballot is

⁶² Lawrence, 'Peaceable Kingdom'; Lukowitz, 'British Pacifists and Appeasement', p. 115. For the Oxford Union debate, see Martin Ceadel, 'The King and Country Debate', *Historical Journal*, vol. 22, no. 2 (1979), pp. 397–422. For the East Fulham by-election, see Martin Ceadel, 'Interpreting East Fulham', in C. Cook and J. Ramsden (eds), *By-Elections in British Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 94–111.

⁶³ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Aftershocks: Politics and Trauma in Britain, 1918–1931* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

⁶⁴ Martin Pugh, *State and Society: A Social and Political History of Britain Since 1870* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), p. 116.

⁶⁵ Philip Noel-Baker, *The First World Disarmament Conference 1932–1933, and Why it Failed* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1979), p. 141; J.A. Thompson, 'The Peace Ballot and the Public', *Albion*, vol. 13, no. 4 (1981), p. 381.

⁶⁶ Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War: Volume One: The Gathering Storm* (London: Cassell, 1950), p. 152; Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain* (London: Fontana, 1984), p. 538.

⁶⁷ Martin Ceadel, 'The First British Referendum: The Peace Ballot, 1934–5', *The English Historical Review*, vol. 95, no. 377 (1980), p. 838.

‘often misleadingly treated as an endorsement of pacifism’, while Donald Birn claims that the assertion that the Ballot showed that public opinion was pacifist was ‘one of the great myths’ of the 1930s.⁶⁸ Approaching the topic from a different angle, McCarthy interprets the Ballot as a case study in the democratisation of foreign policy and international relations.⁶⁹

Ceadel’s classification of war and peace is helpful to consider when exploring the place of militarism in the interwar years. For instance, the actions of the state cannot be said to encompass militarism, or at least Ceadel’s definition of militarism. Ceadel argues that militarism ‘is the view that war is necessary to human development and therefore a positive good. All wars are justified . . . even aggressive ones.’⁷⁰ However, this definition is rather limited and, as A.J. Coates has observed, underestimates ‘the diffusion and consequent influence of militarism’.⁷¹ More relevant to British military policy, perhaps, is Ceadel’s notion of ‘crusading’ – a justification of an aggressive war as a promotion of justice, order, or ideological ends.⁷² The imperial aspect of British aviation certainly had elements of ‘crusading’ as demonstrated by British ‘air policing’ in Iraq in the early 1920s.⁷³ The application of aviation and naval policy domestically seems to have had elements of ‘defencism’ – preparing for, and if necessary, engaging in war of a defensive nature – as did the construction of the Singapore Naval Base in the 1920s and 1930s.⁷⁴ Ceadel’s typology has, however, met with strong criticism. Coates argues that Ceadel’s treatment of militarism is far too ‘narrow’ and also rejects the notion that there is any distinction between

⁶⁸ David Edgerton, *Warfare State: Britain, 1920–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 54; Donald Birn, *The League of Nations Union 1918–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 143.

⁶⁹ Helen McCarthy, ‘Democratizing British Foreign Policy: Rethinking the Peace Ballot, 1934–1935’, *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 49, no. 2 (2010), p. 361.

⁷⁰ Ceadel, *Peace and War*, p. 4.

⁷¹ A.J. Coates, *The Ethics of War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 40.

⁷² Ceadel, *Peace and War*, p. 43.

⁷³ See Chapter 2 of David E. Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

⁷⁴ Ceadel, *Peace and War*, p. 72.

‘militarism’ and ‘crusading’.⁷⁵ ‘The hallmark of militarism’, for Coates at least, is a ‘lust for war’.⁷⁶ However, as Johnson has noted, Coates fails to acknowledge that Ceadel’s typology is not one of ‘empirical or descriptive categories’ but one of ‘ideal types and paradigms’.⁷⁷ As Ceadel himself observes, ‘almost every typology suggests that its categories are more rigidly differentiated than they in fact are: in reality they usually blur into each other’.⁷⁸ While Ceadel’s definition of militarism is perhaps too narrow, his wider typology of war and peace provides a useful model for thinking about the actions of the British state in the interwar years.

Edgerton’s definition of liberal militarism, dependent on state support for military science, technology, and industry as opposed to Prussian-style conscription, is particularly relevant to this thesis.⁷⁹ According to Edgerton, the British state was the ‘pioneer of modern, technologically focused warfare; its naval and air forces long led the world’.⁸⁰ Britain was thus developing as a ‘warfare state’. The scale of interwar British naval and aerial expenditure appears contradictory given supposed commitments to internationalism, peace, disarmament, and collective security.⁸¹ It is, of course, ‘one of the principal responsibilities of governments to make provision for the nation’s defence, and the fulfilment of this duty does not in itself constitute a manifestation of ‘militarism’’. As Johnson notes, ‘what distinguishes the latter phenomenon . . . is the implication that military, (or naval [or aerial]) expenditure is significantly in excess of the actual defensive needs of a state or that concern

⁷⁵ Coates, *Ethics of War*, pp. 40–42.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁷⁷ Johnson, *Militarism*, p. 8.

⁷⁸ Ceadel, *Peace and War*, p. 19.

⁷⁹ Edgerton, *Warfare State* and David Edgerton, ‘Liberal Militarism and the British State’, *New Left Review*, no. 185 (1991), pp. 138–169. Edgerton challenges declinist accounts of Britain in the twentieth century such as Correlli Barnett’s, *The Collapse of British Power* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1984) and Martin J. Wiener’s, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

⁸⁰ Edgerton, *Warfare State*, p. 1.

⁸¹ How far Britain had committed to the process of disarmament is the source of considerable debate. See John Ferris, *The Evolution of British Strategic Policy 1919–1926* (London: Macmillan, 1989) and Dick Richardson, *The Evolution of British Disarmament Policy in the 1920s* (London: Pinter, 1989).

with military or naval [or aerial] power has become an overweening obsession'.⁸² As well as maintaining high levels of defence expenditure, Edgerton has also noted that 'the Edwardian tradition of thinking about warlike strategy in political-economic terms was also very evident in the 1930s'. Basil Liddell Hart's concept of the 'British Way in Warfare', the practice of 'minimising resources devoted to warfare and of economy in the use of force', had air and sea power at its core.⁸³

Two distinct forms of militarism in the period, then, seem to have existed – naval and aerial militarism – making the focus of this thesis all the more relevant. The main, and most vocal, proponent of naval militarism (or 'navalism') in the interwar years, despite the perceived decline of the Royal Navy, was the Navy League. Navalism, defined by 'big navies, high level of naval armaments, and an escalating maritime arms race', had been a 'central part of the discourse on militarization before the outbreak of World War I'.⁸⁴ The Navy League's conception of navalism, however, also went far beyond understanding the navy in terms of national defence. As Johnson writes, navalism must be understood as 'a political, indeed *ideological*, movement, based on a conception of naval power not simply as a legitimate arm of national defence but as the basis of national might and prestige'.⁸⁵ There remained cultural and institutional expressions of navalism in the interwar years – in many respects, there still existed a 'cult of the navy' – which represented an important aspect of British national identity.⁸⁶ In terms of naval strength, one historian has argued that 'no

⁸² Johnson, *Militarism*, p. 67.

⁸³ Edgerton, *Warfare State*, p. 55.

⁸⁴ Dirk Bönker, *Militarism in a Global Age: Naval Ambitions in Germany and the United States Before World War I* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2012), p. 1.

⁸⁵ Johnson, *Militarism*, p. 69.

⁸⁶ Jan Rüger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 1.

doubt exists that the British Navy was the strongest in the world when the Second World War broke out in 1939'.⁸⁷

Can one also point to the existence of aerial militarism in the interwar years? The imperial role of the RAF in the 1920s – it was, as Edgerton has noted, the ‘only air force in the world whose primary mission was strategic bombing’ – and the priority given to aerial rearmament in the 1930s has led Edgerton to refer to the phenomenon of ‘airforceism’.⁸⁸ From its inception, the Air League had the principal aim of emphasising the importance of aerial strength to the British Empire, ‘upon which its commerce, communications, defence and its very existence depended’.⁸⁹ The League advanced this aim through a programme of public education and political lobbying. This programme included lectures, tours, pamphlets, printed propaganda, exhibitions, newspaper articles, and the creation of the Air Defence Cadet Corps (ADCC). Such activities were characteristic of interwar extraparliamentary associations. Less common, however, and perhaps the Air League’s most effective tool for the cultivation of ‘airmindedness’ and aerial militarism, was the introduction of Empire Air Day as will be explored in Chapter 7.

The Air League’s promotion of airmindedness was both a cultural and political phenomenon.⁹⁰ Moreover, the League’s conception of aerial power, much like Johnson’s definition of navalism, was concerned with projecting images of might and prestige as well as national defence. Brett Holman’s distinction between ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ forms of airmindedness is also useful in understanding the form of airmindedness promoted by the Air League. Positive forms of airmindedness, Holman notes, embraced aviation as a peaceful

⁸⁷ B.J.C. McKercher, ‘“Our Most Dangerous Enemy”: Great Britain Pre-Eminent in the 1930s’, *The International History Review*, vol. 13, no. 4 (1991), p. 753.

⁸⁸ Edgerton, ‘Liberal Militarism’, pp. 143–144.

⁸⁹ National Aerospace Library (Royal Aeronautical Society), Farnborough (hereafter NAL), ENV16A, Aerial League of the British Empire, ‘The Objects of the Aerial League,’ p. 3.

⁹⁰ Much as naval theatre was in the Edwardian era: Rüger, *The Great Naval Game*, p. 5.

and beneficial tool for ending wars, promoting trade and commerce, and as something which had the potential to transform society. Conversely, negative, more militaristic, forms of airmindedness encompassed fears that, in the next war, aeroplanes would lead to the ruin of civilisation and the death of millions through aerial bombardment.⁹¹ Holman's distinction is neatly encapsulated in the reflection of the first Englishman to fly a circular mile and Air League stalwart, J.T.C. Moore-Brabazon, that '[f]light, which was to knit the world together into a true internationalism, where to know all was to forgive all, has become the bogey and terror of the world from which we hide like rats'.⁹² Of course, in practice, positive and negative forms of airmindedness often overlapped as we shall see.

V. The Militarisation of Interwar Britain?

Studying militarism requires reflection upon the methodological and theoretical issues surrounding the related concept of militarisation. Is it profitable, or even possible, to speak of a militarisation of state or society in the interwar period? In 1940, Britain had the largest naval and aircraft production of any world power. In terms of defence expenditure and military preparedness, Britain was one of the most heavily militarised, modern states in Europe.⁹³ The nation's technological, industrial, and military capacity seems remarkable – even paradoxical – in the context of a long-established historical narrative which presents interwar Britain as a nation which had repudiated militarism, embraced disarmament, and relied upon international diplomacy for the preservation of peace. The promotion of military supremacy lay at the heart of Air and Navy League policy in the interwar years and, in a

⁹¹ Brett Holman, 'The Militarisation of Aerial Theatre: Air Displays and Airmindedness in Britain and Australia Between the World Wars', *Contemporary British History*, vol. 33, no. 4 (2019), pp. 483–484.

⁹² Lord Brabazon of Tara, *The Brabazon Story* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1956), p. 47.

⁹³ Edgerton, *Warfare State*, p. 58.

sense, this can be seen as an attempt to achieve the militarisation of both state and civil society. However, militarisation is also a problematic term with multiple meanings.

According to Gillis, 'militarism is the older concept, usually defined as either a dominance of the military over civilian authority, or more generally, as the prevalence of warlike values in society'. Militarisation for Gillis, 'does not imply the formal dominance of the military or the triumph of a particular ideology'.⁹⁴ Johnson expands this definition and outlines two distinct forms of militarisation. First:

where the subordination of society to military needs takes the form of an acceptance of military claims on economic or material resources, and where the energies of the state are channelled accordingly into military priorities such as armaments production rather than being exerted in other social or civilian directions, we might talk of the *militarization of the state*.

Second:

where, on the other hand, we are dealing with military attempts to harness not merely the economic or industrial resources of a society but the civilian population itself – that is to say, where the state endeavours to 'make a soldier out of each civilian', where the nation is conceived as the 'quiescent army', and where the problem concerns nothing less than the transformation of civilian society – it is more helpful and accurate to talk of the *militarization of society*.⁹⁵

Defined in such terms, one can reasonably speak of a militarisation of the state, as the high level of defence expenditure and military preparedness outlined suggests. The Air and Navy League attempted to create a particularly militarised, technocratic, and modern air-and-sea-mindedness in the interwar years and attempted to shape the ideas and attitudes of civil society in a particularly militarised fashion.

If militarisation is understood as 'the contradictory and tense social process in which civil society organizes itself for the production of violence' alongside the promotion of militaristic and martial values by militaristic extraparliamentary associations, then, perhaps,

⁹⁴ Gillis, *The Militarization of the Western World*, p. 1.

⁹⁵ Johnson, *Militarism*, p. 6.

Britain was more susceptible to the process of militarisation than previously understood.⁹⁶

In considering the militarisation of society, Emilio Willems has argued that three different processes need to be included within any definition of the concept:

first, the establishment and development of structures within society, such as paramilitary organizations or patriotic associations, which assist in and enable the expansion of the armed forces . . . secondly, the development of an ideological system, which views war as essential and historically necessary, and argues that readiness for armed conflict must take priority over other political goals, create propaganda to these ends, identify enemies to be overcome, and seek to establish a consensus within society around a militaristic programme; and thirdly, the spread of military values, ideals, styles of behaviour, and thought across all sections and classes of society.⁹⁷

Emerging from Willems's definition is the importance of exploring the cultural manifestations of militarisation. This thesis will particularly focus on the first and third elements of Willems's definition. It understands the militarisation of society as 'a way of denoting the increased deployment of material and financial resources towards military activity, the greater involvement of social actors in military institutions, and the growing visibility and prominence of the military in cultural terms'.⁹⁸ It also understands militarisation as a historical process, an 'ever-changing set of relationships between military and society'.⁹⁹

VI. Organisation of the Thesis

In examining these issues, this thesis uses a diverse range of sources, including minute books, private papers, memoirs, parliamentary proceedings, posters, pamphlets, government records, local and national newspapers, journals, letters, oral testimony collections, newsreels, photographs, and satirical cartoons. As well as drawing on more traditional sources, the thesis is also interested in the visual and material culture of conflict – which will

⁹⁶ Michael Geyer, 'The Militarization of Europe, 1914–1945', in Gillis (ed.), *The Militarization of the Western World*, p. 79.

⁹⁷ As cited in Cole, *Military Culture*, pp. 14–15.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁹⁹ Gillis, *The Militarization of the Western World*, p. 3.

be principally explored in chapters on Empire Air Day, Trafalgar Day, as well as chapters on the ADCC and the Navy League Sea Cadet Corps (SCC).

This thesis is organised thematically, rather than chronologically, and is divided into two parts. Part A (Chapters 1–3) looks at the relationship between the Air League, the Navy League, and the state. It examines how each League attempted to shape official policy and how they negotiated the rise of internationalist sentiment. Although each League were the most vocal proponents for military supremacy in the period, neither were unrelenting detractors of the state; indeed, there existed many formal (and informal) linkages between the state and each League as Part A will show. Chapter 1 will provide an organisational and institutional overview of the Air and Navy Leagues from their inception through to the outbreak of the Second World War and sets up the following chapters. Chapter 2 examines how both Leagues negotiated the rise of – and interacted with – issues of disarmament, arms limitations, pacifism, collective security, and international diplomacy. Chapter 3 looks at how the Leagues attempted to promote aerial and naval rearmament respectively. At the core of the Air and Navy League’s ethos, for the most part, was the promotion of military supremacy, yet this was not always without controversy as Chapters 2 and 3 highlight.

Part B (Chapters 4–7) details how the Leagues attempted to promote an air and sea-mindedness within society. Chapters 4 and 5 examine the educational efforts of the Air and Navy Leagues and the creation of militaristic youth organisations in the form of the ADCC and the SCC. The ethos of each Corps – much of which revolved around service, discipline, patriotism, and duty – linked citizenship, physical culture, and a militarised masculinity among boys. The ADCC and SCC were used to extoll the virtues of air and sea power to both state and civil society alike, to legitimate the Air and Navy League’s aims and objectives, and to draw together civil and military spheres of society. Chapter 6 highlights the Navy League’s interaction with public ritual and military ceremony in the form of its

celebration of Trafalgar Day, held annually to commemorate the death of Admiral Horatio Nelson, while Chapter 7, the final chapter, examines the Air League's construction of a distinctly militarised aerial theatre in the form of Empire Air Day.

The nature, causes, and consequences of militarism in interwar British society are something this thesis will examine in detail. Although the place of militaristic leagues in interwar Britain indicates continuity, militarism, in all its forms, was clearly unacceptable to a nation ravaged by war. Aerial and naval militarism was particularly technocratic, modern, and encompassed both 'official' and 'popular' forms of militarism as the thesis will show. Certain forms of institutional, organisational, and cultural militarism were able to exist, although they often met with opposition. The relationship between militarism and internationalism was oppositional, tense, and often ambiguous as we shall see. In terms of spending on armaments and military preparation, the British state, much as it was prior to the First World War, was one of the most heavily militarised states in Europe. Militarism in interwar Britain was able to exist as an ideological, cultural, political, and military phenomenon; the Air and Navy Leagues played an important role in this.

Part A:
Militarism and the State

Chapter 1: Scaremongers and Sensationalists? The Origins, Aims, and Activities of the Air and Navy Leagues, c.1895–1939

Hendley has recently argued that the ‘history of patriotic and imperialist organizations in early twentieth century Britain is incomplete. There has been little effort to establish continuity between the pre-war and post-war periods.’ As Hendley notes, much of the historiography on organised patriotism has taken its chronological lead from works such as Arthur Marwick’s *The Deluge*, which argues that ‘most of the existing social attitudes and social structures were swept away by the war’. Adopting this narrative of rupture, existing studies of organised patriotism terminate in 1914 ‘as if no further comment were necessary’.¹ Hendley instead argues that the First World War was a ‘crucible’ for organised patriotism, but it did not destroy it.²

According to Hendley, however, militaristic organisations were not able to survive the ‘crucible’ of war, yet this ignores many nuances and notable continuities – and indeed discontinuities – between pre-war and interwar British political culture.³ This is especially difficult to justify, as Hendley only engages with one militaristic, single-purpose organisation, the NSL. As this thesis demonstrates, organised militarism did, in fact, survive the ‘crucible’ of war. Indeed, in certain forms, popular, cultural, and institutional types of militarism were able to flourish as we shall see. This chapter will focus on the origins, aims, and activities of the Air and Navy Leagues, their political complexion, their membership composition, and their relationship with officialdom. It will also consider the role of women within each League, as well as the finances and charitable endeavours of each organisation, and how, despite their militaristic nature, they were able to find a place – often complex and contested – in post-First World War Britain.

¹ Hendley, *Organized Patriotism*, pp. 2–3. Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London: Bodley Head, 1965).

² Hendley, *Organized Patriotism*, p. 4.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 10; p. 64; p. 228.

I. The Formation of the Navy League and the Command of the Sea

The first page of the first issue of *The Navy League Journal* – the Navy League’s official organ until replaced by *The Navy* – warned that ‘by the Navy we stand or fall: if that is weak, there is unspeakable trial of war before us, war in which we must be worsted and trampled upon by our conquerors’.⁴ Founded in 1895, the League’s *raison d’être* focused, as has been noted, on securing, ‘as the primary object of national policy, The Command of the Sea’. The League aimed to ‘spread information showing the vital importance to the British Empire of the naval supremacy upon which depend its trade, empire & national existence’.⁵ As one of the largest extraparliamentary associations in Britain prior to the First World War, and a key part of the liberal political culture of the period, the Navy League was responsible for exerting considerable influence over government naval policy.⁶ On the eve of the First World War, the Navy League boasted nearly 125,000 members in more than 150 branches and so represented one of the largest associational presences in Edwardian Britain.⁷ While it could claim 250,000 members by 1916, its appeal for one million members was never achieved in the interwar years. The League was not, however, the only organisation interested in Britain’s naval defences.

The IML was formed in 1907 by two former Navy League members, Harold Frazer Wyatt and Lionel Graham Horton-Smith, a product of divisions over the style of navalism pursued by the Navy League. As Fleming notes, since its advent, two contending approaches to activism had existed within the Navy League. The first position, maintained by an albeit

⁴ Cited in Noel-Baker, *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*, p. 291.

⁵ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 11 December 1894, pp. 3–4.

⁶ The League’s influence was demonstrated during the 1909 naval estimates crisis and the January 1910 general election. The ongoing refrain ‘we want eight, and we won’t wait’ from the Navy League in favour of the construction of dreadnoughts was particularly significant. See Robert J. Blyth, Andrew Lambert and Jan Rüger (eds) *The Dreadnought and the Edwardian Age* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011). Coetzee, *For Party or Country*, p. 121.

⁷ ‘Navy League Presentation to Mr. Robert Yerburgh, M.P.’, *The Navy*, November 1913, p. 314. For pre-First World War membership figures see Coetzee, *For Party or Country*, p. 138.

influential minority within the League, saw the organisation as ‘an unofficial overseer of naval policy, and were prepared to use politics to exert pressure against the decision-making processes of naval professionals and ministers’. Conversely, the vast majority of members were more cautious of antagonising the Admiralty and instead stressed the importance of public education.⁸ It was the clash of these contrasting positions that led to the formation of the IML. Viewed as ‘a group of malcontents to whom every official action is *ipso facto* foolish if not traitorous’ by *The Navy League Journal*, the IML was concerned almost entirely by navalist preoccupations. Yet, as Fleming highlights, the advent of the IML did not precipitate an exodus of members from the Navy League.⁹

The IML frequently held public meetings, published pamphlets, books, letters, and other ephemera, and launched a number of public campaigns to strengthen Britain’s defences. However, while the IML was influential in its early years, by the outbreak of the First World War its influence had somewhat waned (both Wyatt and Horton-Smith had resigned by this point). The relationship between the IML and the Navy League had initially been hostile, however, by the outbreak of conflict, it was agreed that ‘both organisations should join forces and pursue united activities’.¹⁰ The IML finally wound up in April 1921 ‘owing to a lack of public interest’, although not before approaching the Navy League to combine into one organisation.¹¹ The Navy League’s terms for the amalgamation were rejected by the IML, drawing an end to the divisive relationship between the two bodies.¹²

⁸ Fleming, ‘The Imperial Maritime League’, p. 297.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 296–297.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 320.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 321; MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 11 March 1921, p. 1.

¹² MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 21 March 1921, p. 2. On the Society of Islanders, a more ‘secret’ organisation than either the Navy League or the IML, see Michael Humphries, ‘“Perfectly Secret and Perfectly Democratic”: Lord Esher and the Society of Islanders, 1909–1914’, *The English Historical Review*, vol. CXXXVII, no. 528 (2012), pp. 1156–1179.

II. An ‘Association of Scaremongers’? The Formation of the Air League

The Air League was formed by Marples and Colonel H.S. Massy, the ex-Bengal Lancer and the League’s first president, with its early Executive Committee comprised almost entirely of ex-servicemen or serving officers.¹³ The League’s inaugural public meeting was held at Mansion House, London in April 1909. Addressing those gathered, Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, one of its founding members, moved the following resolution:

That this meeting of the citizens of London . . . regards with considerable anxiety the rapid development of the science and practice of aerial navigation by other nations, and deplores the backwardness and apathy shown by this country regarding this new means of communication, which is of vital importance from a commercial as well as from a national defence point of view; and pledges itself heartily to support the object of the Aerial League of the British Empire.¹⁴

The gathering marked the first attempt by the Air League to promote the development of aviation for communication, commerce, and national defence on a nationwide scale. Marples was careful to stress that the Air League was not ‘an association of scaremongers’ with ‘an alarmist programme’ – and *Flight* similarly warned the League that it should avoid ‘the gospel of sensationalism’ – yet the meeting certainly underscored the importance of aviation to the nation in fairly alarmist terms.¹⁵

The coverage of the meeting underlined the importance of achieving aeronautical mastery for the preservation of Britain. While some newspapers stressed the importance of disavowing ‘all intention[s] of acting the part of “scaremongers”’, other reports were couched in precisely the sort of alarmist language that Marples attempted to distance the

¹³ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 3 May 1909, p. 2; p. 4.

¹⁴ ‘Flight at the Mansion House’, *Flight*, 10 April 1909, p. 209. Lord Montagu’s papers at the King’s College London, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (hereafter KCL), unfortunately contain little material covering pre-1910: Douglas-Scott-Montagu, Brig Gen John Walter Edward, 2nd Baron (GB0099 KCLMA Douglas-Scott-Montagu). However, the Correspondence and Papers of Alfred Charles William Harmsworth, Viscount Northcliffe (Add MS 62153-62397) at the British Library (hereafter BL) does include correspondence between Montagu and Northcliffe from 1908 onwards (Add MS 62165 B).

¹⁵ ‘The Mansion House Meeting and its Lessons’, *Flight*, 10 April 1909, p. 204; ‘The Awakening of Public Opinion’, *Flight*, 10 April 1909, p. 213. On scaremongering and rearmament in the period more broadly, see A.J.A. Morris, *The Scaremongers: The Advocacy of Rearmament, 1896–1914* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

League from.¹⁶ For example, *The Daily Telegraph* warned its readers that: ‘The conquest of the air has been achieved . . . the question now is not the conquest of the sky, but which nation shall secure its sovereignty . . . it behoves this country to wake up at once.’¹⁷

Much of the Air League’s early work focused on lobbying the political and military elite, although it was keen to celebrate the individual feats of aviators and was also concerned with education and youth. Unlike the Navy League, the Air League had no official journal to publicise its own activities or information initially. It therefore relied heavily on local and national newspapers – and on specialist aviation journals, particularly *Flight*, *The Aero*, and *Aerocraft* (all founded in 1909), as well as the more polemical *The Aeroplane* (founded in 1911) – to detail its work. Membership numbers were not published by the League, and while members of the public could join for one guinea, there appear to have been few attempts to attain a broad, cross-class, membership.¹⁸ Of course, membership numbers were not necessarily representative of the overall significance of the League. Prior to the First World War, the League focused on securing the support of an array of eminent social, political, and military figures, as well as many high-profile members, and it was largely successful in this endeavour.¹⁹ The Liberal peer Lord Esher was appointed president of the League in September 1909, but his tenure was not a harmonious one.²⁰ By December that year, he had resigned following a period of increased political lobbying against the Liberal

¹⁶ ‘Future of the Flying Machine’, *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 6 April 1909, p. 2; ‘Editors Notes’, *Aberdeen Press and Daily Journal*, 7 April 1909, p. 4.

¹⁷ ‘Today’s News’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 April 1909, p. 10.

¹⁸ ‘Aerial League of the British Empire’, *London Evening Standard*, 20 December 1909, p. 9.

¹⁹ Arthur Balfour, Austen Chamberlain, the Marquis of Salisbury, Sir Edward Grey, Lord Roberts, Lord Curzon, Winston Churchill, Rudyard Kipling, H.G. Wells, and others all supported the League in its various activities. ‘Navigating the Air’, *The Army and Navy Gazette*, 10 April 1909, p. 345; Michael Paris, *Winged Warfare: The Literature and Theory of Aerial Warfare in Britain, 1859–1917* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 90; ‘The Aerial League’, *The Times*, 25 May 1911, p. 8.

²⁰ Privately, Esher appeared to have been reluctant to align himself with the Air League from the very beginning (his initial response to the League was to offer them a ‘snub’ and ‘throw over the whole thing’). Maurice V. Brett (ed.), *Journals and Letters of Reginald, Viscount Esher: Vol. 2, 1903–1910* (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1934–1938), p. 396.

government and a trip by Massy to India (which Esher had not been informed of) to promote aviation to Indian officialdom.²¹

The outbreak of the First World War, perhaps unsurprisingly, affected the League's activities, with a variety of its schemes being suspended.²² One pressing concern for the League throughout the First World War remained the lack of a high-profile president following Esher's resignation in 1909. In late 1917, the League's long search came to end when Lord Montagu agreed to serve as president.²³ Montagu oversaw the restructuring of the League, the transition from war to peacetime, and was, perhaps most importantly, well-known throughout the political and aviation community. Montagu's tenure at the helm of the League ended in March 1920 – although he continued to be involved with the organisation – when J.E.B. Seely (later Lord Mottistone), former Secretary of State for War and Under-Secretary of State for Air, became the League's new president.²⁴ Unfortunately for the League, however, after a year, Seely intimated he would no longer be able to continue.²⁵ After the matter was held in abeyance, the Duke of Sutherland took the role in March 1922.²⁶ Thankfully for the League, Sutherland's presidency was a long one, lasting until 1944.²⁷

²¹ Brett, *Viscount Esher*, p. 425.

²² Accordingly, the Executive Committee decided not to hold its usual fortnightly meeting, instead meeting whenever it was deemed necessary. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 17 September 1914, p. 1. From late 1914 until mid-1917, the League was effectively moribund: it only met three times in 1915; twice in 1916; and, in 1917, it did not meet until late June (over a year since its last meeting). It did hold public lectures and meetings on topics such as 'Aircraft in the Great War', but lecturing tours were understandably on a much smaller scale than before the outbreak of war. 'R.A. Institution', *The Broad Arrow: The Naval and Military Gazette*, 7 January 1916, p. 10.

²³ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 2 October 1917, p. 1.

²⁴ AL, AL Minute Book, Special Meeting of the Executive Committee, 24 March 1920, p. 1.

²⁵ AL, AL Minute Book, Special Meeting of the Executive Committee, 7 July 1921, p. 2.

²⁶ AL, AL Minute Book, Special Meeting of the Executive Committee, 7 March 1922, p. 1.

²⁷ See Appendix I for the Air League's Executive Committee throughout the interwar years.

III. Organisation and Aims of the Navy and Air Leagues

Navy League

The Navy League employed a variety of techniques to preserve maritime and navalist values within civil society in interwar Britain. The League's attempts to educate the British public on the value of seapower, and to maintain popular pride in Britain's rich naval heritage, was achieved by distributing textbooks to schools, sending letters to the press, hosting public meetings and lectures, issuing pamphlets, leaflets, and films, through the publication of its official organ, *The Navy*, through the annual commemoration of Trafalgar Day, and through the activities of the SCC. Like the Air League, local and national newspapers reported extensively on the Navy League's work. While the League's membership numbers were certainly in decline, they are more difficult to assess following the First World War.²⁸ Membership subscription and branch donations were both less than £100,000 each year following 1919, while the number of branches was in steady decline from 1918 onwards.²⁹ By 1939 there were around 100 units of the SCC and around 10,000 cadets.

The Navy League's leadership in the interwar years included ex-servicemen, politicians, technocrats, military theorists, barristers, and members of the popular press. The Navy League was largely in patrician, Conservative hands during this period. The Duke of Somerset was president from 1918 to 1922. Somerset was educated at Britannia Royal Naval College, seemingly 'destined for the Navy', but later joined the 60th Rifles and took part in the Red River expedition of 1870.³⁰ Somerset's tenure was tumultuous, overseeing the abandonment in the early 1920s of what many viewed as some of the core tenants of Navy

²⁸ 'The Navy League', *The Times*, 7 July 1916, p. 21.

²⁹ See Figures 1 and 2 in Redford, 'Collective Security', pp. 64–65.

³⁰ 'Duke of Somerset', *The Times*, 22 October 1923, p. 14.

League policy. The appointment of the Duke of Sutherland in 1922, however, saw the Navy League once again assume its role as the protagonists of British naval interests.

The Duke of Sutherland, who was also president of the Air League and the Primrose League, the latter an extraparliamentary organisation formed in 1883 to promote Conservative values, as well as Under-Secretary of State for Air from 1922 to 1924, was Navy League president from 1922 to 1924.³¹ While Sutherland oversaw the League's return to a policy more closely resembling its pre-war programme, when navalism was at its zenith, he felt his involvement with the air made him unsuitable to continue as the League's president. Despite serving in the Royal Naval Reserve during the First World War, he informed the League's Grand Council Meeting in 1924 that: 'I have always made it my duty to watch the interests both of the Navy and of the Air Force, but I feel I cannot adequately do both, and I feel that it is primarily the duty of an ex-Minister from the Admiralty to watch these great interests in the Navy'.³² Lord Linlithgow was the figure chosen to replace Sutherland.

Linlithgow had served with the Lothians and Border Horse regiment throughout the First World War, ending with the rank of colonel, and later commanded a battalion of the Royal Scots. From 1922 to 1924, he served as Civil Lord of the Admiralty and later became the Viceroy of India.³³ Despite presiding over a period of increased political activity, especially surrounding the closure of the Singapore Naval Base in 1924 and the failed Geneva Naval Conference in 1927, Linlithgow was replaced by Lord Lloyd in 1930. George Ambrose Lloyd, 1st Baron Lloyd, was a diehard Conservative politician and one of the

³¹ Duke of Sutherland, George Granville Sutherland-Leveson-Gower, *Looking Back: The Autobiography of the Duke of Sutherland* (London: Odhams Press, 1957), p. 105.

³² 'Annual Meeting of the Grand Council', *The Navy*, June 1924, p. 159.

³³ Robin J. Moore, Hope, Victor Alexander John, Second Marquess of Linlithgow (1887–1952), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

earliest advocates of rearmament within his party.³⁴ Lloyd had previously been Governor of Bombay and later High Commissioner to Egypt. His attention in the 1930s, however, turned to national defence. The Navy League provided a platform for Lloyd to lobby both public and parliamentary circles for rearmament and he did so tirelessly, with ‘his debunking of collective security turn[ing] him into the bugbear of idealistic internationalists’.³⁵

All the League’s presidents had some form of military experience; all of the League’s permanent general secretaries in the interwar years were ex-servicemen; two of the League’s four chairmen were ex-servicemen; all of the League’s deputy presidents were ex-servicemen or had held positions in the Admiralty; and a number of the League’s honorary treasurers also had a military background.³⁶ The League’s Executive Committee throughout the interwar years was also often full of ex-servicemen. Of course, having served in the military did not necessarily make these figures militaristic or martial in their outlook, but it is important to note the strongly military complexion of the League’s most senior figures.

As well as attempting to operate effectively in the post-war period, there were efforts by the Navy League to achieve closer co-operation with the Air League and even an amalgamation of the two bodies. Initial approaches in the early 1920s were welcomed by Sutherland – then also Navy League president – but others on the Air League’s Executive Committee such as P.R.C. Groves, influential air power theorist and later Air League secretary general, and Ivan Davson, Conservative politician and long-standing vice chairman of the League, were less receptive to the idea.³⁷ Discussions continued until mid-1923, however talks did not progress and so, with the Navy League tired of the Air League’s

³⁴ John Charmley, *Lord Lloyd and the Decline of the British Empire* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), p. 1.

³⁵ Jason Tomes, Lloyd, George Ambrose, First Baron Lloyd (1879–1941), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

³⁶ See Appendix II.

³⁷ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 27 July 1922, p. 1.

indecision, the matter was held in abeyance.³⁸ The Navy League did, however, approach the Air League again in 1927 to assist it in its anti-disarmament propaganda as Chapter 2 will discuss.

Alongside opposition to disarmament, some within the Air League held ‘a peculiar fascination’ with the pre-war naval competition, with Philip Foster, Conservative MP and chairman of the League from 1918 to 1929, hoping that Air League members ‘would help make the League what the Navy League had been before the war – a great constructive force in our national affairs’.³⁹ In his autobiography, Colonel Norman Thwaites, editor of the Air League’s journal *Air* and acting secretary general of the League in the late 1920s and early 1930s, argued that the ‘teachings of the Navy League had informed the nation’, while Moore-Brabazon felt that the Air League must do the ‘same for aviation as the Navy League has done for the Navy’.⁴⁰ However, despite such pronouncements, the League often felt it was unable to occupy public platforms with the Navy League owing to the incompatibility of aims in relation to national defence.⁴¹ Less controversial for the Air League was the Navy League’s suggestion that it might co-operate in the publication of a map of the world, showing both the air and sea routes, which it agreed to do.⁴²

Air League

Like the Navy League, the Air League’s Executive Committee and list of vice presidents throughout the 1920s and 1930s contained an eclectic array of politicians, military theorists, journalists, ex-servicemen, technocrats, and figures from the social and political elite. Upon

³⁸ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 25 April 1923, p. 3; MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 17 May 1923, p. 2.

³⁹ Cited in Noel-Baker, *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*, p. 327.

⁴⁰ Lieut-Col. Norman Thwaites, *Velvet and Vinegar* (London: Grayson & Grayson Ltd., 1932), p. 15; ‘The Air League Comes of Age’, *Flight*, 16 May 1930, p. 532.

⁴¹ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 9 January 1928, p. 1.

⁴² AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 29 November 1929, p. 5.

its formation, the Air League, as has been noted, aimed to promote the importance of aerial supremacy to the British Empire, 'upon which its commerce, communications, defence and its very existence depended'. The League also had a number of aviation pioneers who served on its Executive Committee or as vice presidents. Such figures included Alan Cobham, best known for his flight to Australia and back in 1926, Moore-Brabazon, the Marquis of Douglas and Clydesdale, the first pilot to fly over Mount Everest's summit, and Alan Bott, the First World War flying ace. The League also made sure to celebrate the feats of pioneer aviators and held receptions or established memorials for figures such as Claude Grahame-White, Charles Rolls, S.F. Cody, Lindsay Campbell, A.V. Roe, James Sadler, Charles Lindbergh, and a number of others.⁴³

By 1919, the League had an official organ – *Aerial League Bulletin*, although this was subsequently replaced by *Air League Bulletin*, *Air*, *Air and Airways*, and finally *Air Review*. The League's journal contained information on its activities, news and opinions on aviation matters, and information for its members. This was not the sole – or perhaps even the most effective – vector of transmitting information on the Air League's aims and activities. Fortunately, however, local and national newspapers, and all the major aviation journals, reported on the work of the League.

Membership numbers for the Air League were never higher than 8,000, not including 4,000 junior members.⁴⁴ Although the ADCC could claim over 20,000 members by late 1939, such figures arguably suggest that organised militarism was indeed in decline.⁴⁵ In its

⁴³ 'Aeronautics', *The Times*, 14 December 1910, p. 12; 'C.S. Rolls Memorial', *The Times*, 1 April 1911, p. 6; 'The Late Mr. Cody', *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 August 1913, p. 10; 'An Air Victim's Widow', *The Globe*, 26 August 1912, p. 5; AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 27 February 1928, p. 1; 8 March 1928, p. 2; 25 May 1927, pp. 1–2.

⁴⁴ Uri Bialer suggests membership was 10,000 at its peak but provides no evidence for this. Uri Bialer, 'Elite Opinion and Defence policy: Air Power Advocacy and British Rearmament during the 1930s', *British Journal of International Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1980), p. 38. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 7 April 1936, p. 2.

⁴⁵ 'Air Defence Cadets', *The Times*, 6 December 1939, p. 6.

very first edition, *Aerial League Bulletin* declared that ‘the strength of the League is its membership. If we can double our membership, then we treble the power of the league to reach its great objective – the sustained supremacy of the British Empire in the air both in commerce and war.’⁴⁶ Viewed in terms of membership, the Air League failed in this objective. However, membership numbers were never a reflection of the League’s impact. Like the Navy League, the Air League’s membership comprised influential figures from the political, military, and societal elite.

Throughout the interwar years, the League organised lectures, issued pamphlets and letters to the press, staged exhibitions, hosted public meetings, lobbied in parliamentary spheres, organised Empire Air Day, and created the ADCC. While the League was often militaristic in tone, it was certainly not an unrelenting detractor of the state or the Air Ministry. In fact, the League’s policy in the late 1920s and early 1930s was even considered pacific by some, leading to the resignation of several members as Chapter 2 will explore. For most of the 1920s and early 1930s, the League’s public profile was fairly modest. Indeed, the League’s lack of public visibility was even criticised in 1934 by Groves, who argued that ‘unfortunately the Air League, though it was responsible for considerable criticism in parliament and the press, was not strong enough to carry out its propaganda on a nation-wide scale’.⁴⁷ While this may have been true for the Air League during Groves’s tenure, this was certainly no longer the case following J.A. Chamier’s appointment as secretary general in 1933 as we shall see.

The Air League was not the only organisation which had an interest in aviation. It was closely linked to the Royal Aero Club (RAC) and the Royal Aeronautical Society (RAeS). The Aeronautical Society (which became the Royal Aeronautical Society in 1918),

⁴⁶ ‘Affairs of the League’, *Aerial League Bulletin*, January 1919, p. 1.

⁴⁷ P.R.C. Groves, *Behind the Smoke Screen* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), p. 273.

whose membership comprised engineers and scientists, and which held a long-standing belief in the mechanical possibilities of flight, was formed as early as 1866. The Aero Club (which became the Royal Aero Club in 1910) was formed in 1901 and was primarily interested in ballooning and other forms of flight.⁴⁸ In order to define the nature, scope, and activities of each society, the three organisations first met in April 1909. It was agreed that the Aeronautical Society would be the ‘paramount scientific authority on aeronautical matters’, the Aero Club would be recognised as ‘the paramount body in all matters of sport, and the development of the art of aeronautics’, and the Air League would serve as ‘the paramount body for patriotic movements and for education’.⁴⁹

The Tripartite Agreement between the three bodies was a feature of the Air League’s re-organisation in the mid-1920s. The League agreed that it could co-opt two members from both the RAC and RAeS to serve on its Executive Committee for a period of one year (a feature of its Committee in the past), yet this was rejected by both organisations. However, the RAC was still ‘most anxious to assist and support the Air League’, while the RAeS assured the League that it wanted to help in ‘every possible way’.⁵⁰ The League then proposed a joint committee for discussing policy between the three groups, although this again was rejected.⁵¹ Discussions continued, however, and it was eventually proposed that a Committee of Enquiry (to be known as the Burnham Committee) would be established to examine the organisation and work of the League.⁵²

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

⁴⁹ ‘Unification of Aeronautic Policy in the United Kingdom’, *Flight*, 8 May 1909, p. 258; AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 3 May 1909, p. 4; ‘The Aeronautical Trinity’, *Aerocraft*, May 1909, pp. 6–10. The Air League temporarily withdrew from the agreement in late December 1911 after the Aero Club had sent a deputation to the War Office, which the Air League felt directly contravened the tripartite agreement. Royal Air Force Museum, London (hereafter RAF Museum), Royal Aero Club Minute Book 1901–1956 (hereafter RAC Minute Book), Meeting of the Executive Committee, 28 November 1911, p. 3; 6 December 1911, p. 4.

⁵⁰ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 26 November 1925, pp. 2–3; RAF Museum, RAC Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 18 November 1925, p. 3.

⁵¹ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 8 January 1926, pp. 2–3.

⁵² AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 27 May 1926, p. 3.

Chaired by Viscount Burnham, proprietor of *The Daily Telegraph* until 1928, the Burnham Committee was highly significant in the shaping of Air League policy. The Committee was formed in response to criticism levelled at the Air League, chiefly that it ‘had failed to carry out its function as a propaganda body and had neither aroused the public conscience to the need for a stronger Air arm in Imperial Defence, nor to the vital importance of Civil aviation’.⁵³ Eight meetings took place over four months, considering the constitution and conduct of the League, as well as how it could form a policy to rouse public interest and educate public opinion.⁵⁴ In examining the minutiae of the League, it was decided to form a Joint Standing Committee – comprising members of the RAeS and the RAC – and that the appointment of an efficient organising secretary was required, with Groves (a former member of the League’s Executive Committee) the figure chosen. Groves agreed to the position, on the proviso that he would be given free rein in the reorganisation of the League. Groves, who had served in the Royal Flying Corps (RFC), became the Director of Flying Operations at the Air Ministry in 1918, and was a representative at the Paris Peace Conference, eventually retiring in 1922. Groves was also instrumental in popularising the ‘knock-out blow’ theory as will be explored.⁵⁵ More controversial than Groves’s appointment, as Chapter 3 will highlight, was Frederick Handley Page’s offer of an annual sum of £5,000 for two years on the condition that Groves was appointed with a free hand.

Following the Burnham Committee, there were further attempts to improve the relationship between the Air League, the RAC, and the RAeS. At a meeting in April 1932, Frederick Guest, then chairman of the League, stressed that the League could not be effective

⁵³ KCL, GB0099 KCLMA, Papers of Brig Gen Percy Robert Clifford Groves, Minutes of the Committee of Enquiry on the Air League of the British Empire, 1926–1927, Report and Recommendations of the Committee of Enquiry, January 1927, p. 1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Holman, *The Next War in the Air*, p. 38. Groves’s appointment was welcomed by many within the aviation community, particularly Murray Sueter. Murray F. Sueter, *Airmen or Noahs: Fair Play for our Airmen: The Great “Neon” Myth Exposed* (London: Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1928), p. 303.

unless it worked in close harmony with other aeronautical bodies, principally the RAC, RAeS, and the Society of British Aircraft Constructors (SBAC).⁵⁶ While the Air League was still chiefly responsible for propaganda, it was agreed that members from both the RAC and RAeS would be appointed to the League's Executive Committee. Two members from the RAC, Lord Gorrell and Lindsay Everard, and two members of the RAeS, Griffith Brewer (who became deputy chairman of the League shortly afterwards) and Lawrence Wingfield (replaced by W.O. Manning after little over a month) joined.⁵⁷ This was shortly followed by the appointment of Chamier as secretary general, while Seely became chairman at the same meeting, leading Sutherland to express his satisfaction that 'the Air League management has never been in better hands'.⁵⁸ The League's increased activities following these appointments, as we shall see, certainly suggest this was the case.

IV. Above Party?

While both the Air and Navy Leagues portrayed themselves as independent of party or vested interests, one can certainly question each organisation's claim to be 'above party'. For instance, if one examines the Air League's Executive Committee or list of vice-presidents throughout the 1930s, one can note its strongly Conservative complexion, with few prominent Liberal or Labour representatives.⁵⁹ Unlike the Navy or Army League, the

⁵⁶ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 13 April 1932, p. 2.

⁵⁷ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 15 December 1932, p. 2; 30 January 1933, p. 1.

⁵⁸ AL, AL Minute Book, Annual General Meeting, 5 July 1933, p. 1.

⁵⁹ The most notable exception being the Labour MP, Lieut.-Commander The Hon. J.M. Kenworthy, a vice-president of the League. Frederick Guest had re-joined the Conservative Party in 1931. Mottistone had served as a Liberal MP in the 1920s but had swung to the right in the 1930s. Indeed, the lack of Liberal or Labour representation on the Air League was underlined in deciding to invite Kenworthy to become a member of the League, with P.R.C. Groves suggesting such an appointment was required to 'stress its non-Party character'. While this does not mean that claims to be 'above party' were disingenuous, it clearly had few members outside the Conservative party. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 25 October 1928, p. 2.

Air League significantly contained no ‘dissident’ Conservatives on its Council by 1938, although this did not prevent the League from calling for higher levels of rearmament.⁶⁰

In his exploration of the Navy League in the Edwardian era, Johnson notes that historians ‘interested in British navalism have typically portrayed it as a phenomenon of the political right’.⁶¹ In fact, as Johnson demonstrates, navalism was not merely the preserve of the political right, but instead appealed to figures across the political spectrum. In particular, Liberal participation with the navalist agenda and the Navy League itself was much greater than has previously been acknowledged, with more than a third of its support in the House of Commons found on the Liberal benches.⁶² However, while it is true that the League’s claim to be above party was not disingenuous, and that liberal participation with the organisation should not be neglected, there were certainly strong links with the Navy League and the political right in the interwar years.

Each League had a number of both funding and personal links with far-right, fascist, and pro-German organisations such as the British Union of Fascists (BUF), the January Club, the Anglo-German Fellowship, and The Link.⁶³ The Navy League also relied on donations from several individuals on the political right. Lady Houston, owner of the right-wing *Saturday Review* and a critic of Ramsay MacDonald’s National Government, donated £5,000

⁶⁰ A point raised in Edgerton, *Warfare State*, p. 26. See Simon Haxey, *Tory M.P.* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1939), p. 227. However, while the League was largely Conservative in character in the interwar years, it was able to appeal to politicians of all stripes prior to the First World War. As we have seen, Esher served as president, albeit briefly, while Winston Churchill, at the time a Liberal MP, wrote in support of League activities, as did Sir Edward Grey. The Liberal MPs, B.S. Strauss, chairman of the League for a time until resigning on the grounds of ill health in 1912, and Sir Ivor Philipps, sat on the League’s Executive Committee, while W.H. Lever, the Liberal MP, was a financial supporter of the League. Matthew Johnson, ‘Peace and Retrenchment? The Edwardian Liberal Party, the Limits of Pacifism, and the Politics of National Defence’, in Andreas Gestrich and Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann (eds), *Bid for World Power? New Research on the Outbreak of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 209.

⁶¹ Johnson, *Militarism*, p. 70.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 88–89.

⁶³ See Patrick Glenn Zander, ‘Right Modern: Technology, Nation, and Britain’s Extreme Right in the Interwar Period (1919–1940)’ (unpub. PhD thesis, Georgia Institute of Technology, 2009), pp. 10–19 for an outline of these organisations.

to the SCC in 1933 and later donated a further £10,000 to the League in 1936 to carry out a national propaganda campaign.⁶⁴ As well as financing the SCC as Chapter 4 will discuss, Lord Nuffield, philanthropist and motor manufacturer, was also a financier of Oswald Mosley's New Party, as well as its journal, *Action*, and the party's youth movement thereafter.⁶⁵ Lord Lloyd also suggested to the League's Executive Committee that General Blakeney of the British Fascists might be approached for assistance in raising funds on Trafalgar Day.⁶⁶ Perhaps more notable, however, were links of some of the most senior figures within the Navy League and the political right.

Viscount Lymington, the Navy League's chairman from 1934 to 1936, was an important member of the English Mistery, a 'reactionary ultra-royalist, anti-democratic body', and later formed the English Array, a back-to-the-land movement and 'more specifically pro-Nazi than the Mistery'.⁶⁷ He had met both Göring and Hitler in 1931, was a member of the January Club, and later became a member of the far-right group, the British People's Party.⁶⁸ He also went on to form an anti-war body, The British Council Against European Commitments, which believed that war would 'benefit no one but the Jews and the international communists'.⁶⁹ Lord Sydenham of Combe, deputy president of the League from 1926 to 1932, was a member of a number of right-wing organisations, such as the Liberty League, the Britons, the *Centre International d'Études sur le Fascisme*, and was also a leading writer for the pro-German newspaper, *The Patriot*.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 26 March 1936, p. 3.

⁶⁵ Matthew Worley, *Oswald Mosley and the New Party* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 70.

⁶⁶ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 10 September 1931, pp. 3–4.

⁶⁷ Thomas Linehan, *British Fascism, 1918–1939: Parties, Ideology and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 141; Richard Griffiths, *Patriotism Perverted: Captain Ramsay, The Right Club and British Anti-Semitism 1939–1940* (London: Constable, 1998), p. 53.

⁶⁸ The Earl of Portsmouth, *A Knot of Roots: An Autobiography* (London: Geoffrey Bles, Ltd., 1965), pp. 149–151; Martin Pugh, *'We Danced All Night': A Social History of Britain Between the Wars* (London: Bodley Head, 2008), p. 362.

⁶⁹ Griffiths, *Patriotism Perverted*, p. 53.

⁷⁰ Linehan, *British Fascism*, p. 46. See also, Markku Ruotsila, 'Lord Sydenham of Combe's World Jewish Conspiracy', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 34, no 3 (2000), pp. 47–64. Sydenham's autobiography was published

Other figures within the League also had links to the political right. For example, Sir Edmund Freemantle, an Executive Committee member in the 1920s and former vice chairman of the League, was a member of the British Fascists.⁷¹ Michael Beaumont, the Conservative MP and member of the League's Executive Committee, was a member of the January Club and the English Mystery, while Victor Raikes, fellow Conservative MP and Navy League member, was a founding member of the English Review Group and the pro-Franco group, Friends of Nationalist Spain.⁷² Admiral Wilmot Nicholson was a member of the Right Club, the Anglo-German Fellowship, and was a signatory of the 'Link letter' sent to *The Times* on 12 October 1938 which called for closer 'friendship and cooperation between Great Britain and Germany' to establish 'enduring peace'.⁷³ Captain Bernard Acworth was also a signatory of the letter and founded the anti-Semitic Liberty Restoration League.⁷⁴ Nicholson and Acworth's political associations in particular were, at times, a source of concern for the League. For example, after a lecture given in Kensington to a local Navy League branch by both men in 1935, *The Jewish Chronicle* accused them of using their platform for anti-Semitic propaganda.⁷⁵ It reported that 'malicious aspersions against Jews were uttered' by both Nicholson, Acworth, and by members of the BUF who had attended the meeting in uniform.⁷⁶ The League distanced itself from the statements made – and Acworth eventually won a libel action against the newspaper (which admitted its report was inaccurate, apologised for the publication, and granted Acworth a cash settlement) – yet the

in 1927 and so, unfortunately, does not contain information about his tenure with the Navy League, although it does provide an important insight into his time before his role as vice president of the League. Lord Sydenham of Combe, *My Working Life* (London: John Murray, 1927).

⁷¹ Linehan, *British Fascism*, p. 156.

⁷² Bernhard Dietz, *Neo-Tories: The Revolt of British Conservatives Against Democracy and Political Modernity (1929–1939)* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), pp. 178–182; p. 155.

⁷³ Griffiths, *Patriotism Perverted*, p. 251; 'To the Editor of The Times', *The Times*, 12 October 1938, p. 16.

⁷⁴ Griffiths, *Patriotism Perverted*, p. 59.

⁷⁵ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 4 December 1935, p. 5.

⁷⁶ 'Anti-Semitism at Kensington Town Hall', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 25 October 1935, p. 20.

political affinities of its members were clearly possible of damaging the League's claims to be above party or non-partisan.⁷⁷

Other members of the League who had links with the political right, or were involved in far right groups following their time with the Navy League, included Patrick Hannon, Arnold White, and Colonel John Gretton.⁷⁸ Others, such as Leo Amery, Admiral Sir Sydney Freemantle (Edmund's eldest son), and Lord Carson were all members of the English Review Luncheon Club, while Lymington also wrote for the far-right journal, *English Review*. The Luncheon Club, which hosted speeches from Navy League figures such as Amery, Carson, and Lloyd, was launched by Douglas Jerrold, the editor of *English Review*. One of the most notable moments in connection with the Club and Navy League members came in a meeting in 1933 (chaired by Lord Carson) in which it was proposed that Lord Lloyd could directly challenge the Baldwin government – and ultimately become a prospective temporary dictator.⁷⁹ This was not, as Bernhard Dietz notes, purely the 'fantasy of rightist intellectuals', but was also spoken of in similar terms by the *Daily Express*, who suggested Lloyd would make 'an excellent dictator . . . He is an almost fanatical patriot'.⁸⁰ Others also saw Lloyd's potential leadership qualities in a similar vein, with Lady Houston offering £100,000 to run a campaign based on 'good old-fashioned Conservative policy'.⁸¹

Ultimately, the leadership bid involving Lloyd failed, but this was not Lloyd's only connection with the political right. Lloyd was a member of the January Club and spoke at the Club's meetings (albeit on the condition that his speeches were not published).⁸² Lloyd

⁷⁷ 'Navy League's Emphatic Dissociation', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 1 November 1935, p. 12; 'Apology to Navy League Speaker', *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 15 April 1937, p. 11.

⁷⁸ Martin Pugh, *'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!': Fascists and Fascism in Britain between the Wars* (London: Johnathan Cape, 2005), p. 161; Fleming, 'The Imperial Maritime League', p. 299.

⁷⁹ Dietz, *Neo-Tories*, pp. 143–153.

⁸⁰ Dietz, *Neo-Tories*, p. 145; 'These Names Make News', *Daily Express*, 19 June 1933, p. 8.

⁸¹ Charmley, *Lord Lloyd*, p. 188.

⁸² Richard Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany 1933–1939* (London: Constable, 1980), p. 52.

also apparently indicated to Mosley his willingness to join the BUF, and, according to Labour Party research, was among a number of financial backers of the BUF.⁸³ On the Navy League's Ladies' Committee, Christobel Nicholson was a member of the Right Club and the Anglo-German Fellowship. Along with her husband, Admiral Wilmot Nicholson, she was also close friends with Captain Ramsay, founder of the Right Club, and Admiral Domville, founder of The Link.⁸⁴ Also on the Ladies' Committee was Lady Sydenham of Combe, who was a member of the British Fascisti, Britain's first fascist movement, and director of its youth group, the Fascist Children's Club.⁸⁵

Like the Navy League, the Air League also had various links to the far right. Chamier and Thwaites were associates of the January Club – the former was apparently also a generous financial backer of the BUF, while the latter became the Club's chairman in 1934 (and later a member of the Anglo-German Fellowship).⁸⁶ Rear Admiral Sueter was a member of all the main pro-German and pro-air leagues in the 1930s, Sir William Joyson-Hicks, an Air League vice president, was of the political right, while Colonel the Master of Sempill, a senior Air League member and a Navy League associate, was also a member of the Anglo-German Fellowship and The Link.⁸⁷ Moore-Brabazon, at various times a member of the Air League's Executive Committee and a vice president, was a long-time friend of Oswald Mosley, nearly joined his New Party in the early 1930s, and was still speaking in support of

⁸³ Stephen Dorril, *Blackshirt: Sir Oswald Mosley and British Fascism* (London: Viking, 2006), p. 335; BL, Labour Party, *Who Backs Mosley?: Fascist Promise and Fascist Performance* (London: Labour Research Department, 1934), pp. 10–11.

⁸⁴ Julie V. Gottlieb, *Feminine Fascism: Women in Britain's Fascist Movement* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), p. 328. Domville also spoke on Navy League platforms on occasion. MSCC, Finance and General Purpose Sub-Committee Minute Book (hereafter FGP Minute Book), 1931–1942, Meeting of the Sub-Committee, 15 February 1939, p. 4.

⁸⁵ Gottlieb, *Feminine Fascism*, p. 31.

⁸⁶ Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right*, pp. 137–138; Pugh, 'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!', p. 307; Dorril, *Blackshirt*, p. 261; TNA KV 5/3, Anglo-German Fellowship, Annual Report, 1935–6; p. 14. Chamier also spoke at January Club meetings on the subject of an International Air Police Force. 'England Could be Bombed Within 6 Minutes of War', *The Fascist Week*, 30 March–5 April 1934, p. 5.

⁸⁷ David Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane: Militarism, Modernity and Machines* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), p. 75.

Mosley in 1939.⁸⁸ The Marquis of Douglas and Clydesdale was a member of the Air League's Executive Committee and also a member of the Anglo-German Fellowship.⁸⁹ Sir Harry Brittain, an Air League member and on the Council of the ADCC, was similarly a member of the Anglo-German Fellowship, as well as serving as the president of the Friends of Italy, while another member of the League's Executive Committee, Francis Yeats-Brown, best known as the author of *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, was also later a member of the January Club, the Anglo-German Fellowship, and an admirer of Mussolini.⁹⁰ Finally, a number of Air League members also later became members or patrons of the Right Book Club, a publishing house formed in response to Victor Gollancz's Left Book Club, including Yeats-Brown, Thwaites (on the Club's selection committee), Sempill, Brittain, and Sueter.⁹¹

Meanwhile Lord Mottistone, the Air League's chairman from 1932, was an 'intimate of Ribbentrop's . . . and a considerable apologist for Nazi Germany'.⁹² Indeed, while serving as the League's chairman, Mottistone had visited Joachim von Ribbentrop in 1933 and returned to Germany onboard his boat, *Mayflower*, in 1935.⁹³ He informed the House of Lords in May 1935 that his 'many interviews with Herr Hitler', whom Mottistone described as a 'remarkable man', had convinced him that the German leader was 'absolutely truthful, sincere and unselfish'.⁹⁴ He also later described himself as an 'unrepentant believer' in the policy of appeasement.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Pugh, 'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!', p. 120; Commons Sitting, Dissemination of News, *HC Deb 15 February 1939 vol 343 cc1808-68*.

⁸⁹ Haxey, *Tory M.P.*, p. 198.

⁹⁰ TNA KV 5/3, Anglo-German Fellowship, Annual Report, 1935–6, p. 14; Zander, 'Right Modern', p. 70; p. 235; Griffiths, *Patriotism Perverted*, pp. 69–73.

⁹¹ Terence Rodgers, 'The Right Book Club: Text Wars, Modernity and Cultural Politics in the Late Thirties', *Literature & History*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2003), p. 4.

⁹² Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right*, p. 137.

⁹³ Roger Fulford (revised by Mark Pottle), Seely, John Edward Bernard, First Baron Mottistone (1868–1947), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁹⁴ Lords Sitting, Imperial Defence, *HL Deb 22 May 1935 vol 96 cc990-1068*.

⁹⁵ Lords Sitting, British Foreign Policy, *HL Deb 12 June 1939 vol 133 cc387-438*.

Although a number of these figures were key in the formation of Air League policy, most of these affinities were kept private and it is difficult to trace their bearing on the League's activities or aims. Moreover, such individuals staunchly promoted rearmament – thus confirming Edgerton's observation that being pro-German did not necessarily mean being anti-rearmament.⁹⁶ While the League was not altogether of a right-wing composition, there certainly appears to be overwhelming links with leading figures in the aviation community and the far-right as noted by several scholars.⁹⁷ Indeed, a further example can be found in Lord Londonderry, Secretary of State for Air from 1931 to 1935, and his relationship with Hitler and the Nazi Party.⁹⁸ These links certainly give credence to Robert Wohl's assessment that 'although there is nothing inherently fascist about flying, in the atmosphere of the 1930s it is easy to see how people could make the connection'.⁹⁹

V. The Navy League, the Air League, and Officialdom

As well as numerous links between both the Air and Navy Leagues and the political right in the interwar years, there were also various ties between each organisation and the state – particularly the Air Ministry and the Admiralty. For instance, ex-servicemen and retired officers made up a significant section of the Navy League's membership and the League was certainly valued by members of the political and military establishment as a vehicle through which public opinion could be educated on the importance of seapower. By 1934, as *The Times* pointed out, every Admiral of the Fleet on the active and retired list had consented to

⁹⁶ Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*, p. 78.

⁹⁷ See Zander, 'Right Modern', for the most detailed account of the link between aviation groups and the political right.

⁹⁸ Ian Kershaw, *Making Friends with Hitler: Lord Londonderry and Britain's Road to War* (London: Allen Lane, 2004). As Julie Gottlieb has noted, Londonderry's views on Nazi Germany were largely shared by his wife, Edith, with the latter contributing to publications such as the *Anglo-German Review*. Julie V. Gottlieb, 'Guilty Women', *Foreign Policy, and Appeasement in Inter-War Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 84–85.

⁹⁹ Robert Wohl, *The Spectacle of Flight: Aviation and the Western Imagination: 1920–1950* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 308.

become honorary vice presidents of the League without exception.¹⁰⁰ This was also commented upon by Noel-Baker, from a more critical perspective, who asked: ‘is it not certain that the Admiralty, the Department which buys our ships of war, and indeed the public, are likely to listen with attention to a body with such eminent support?’¹⁰¹ While it may not be the case that the Navy League supported the Admiralty uncritically, relations between the two bodies were certainly stronger than prior to the First World War. Indeed, David Beatty, First Sea Lord of the Admiralty from 1919 to 1927, felt that it was ‘wholly desirable that there should be some such organization as the Navy League’, while the then Fourth Sea Lord Ernle Chatfield stated that ‘if we had not a Navy League now we should have to create one’.¹⁰² As Geoffrey Calander, the naval historian and Navy League member wrote, the League’s primary goal was to ‘remind each generation of the lessons of the past; to awaken the intelligence of Britons at home and abroad by an educative process to a living sense of their imperial needs’.¹⁰³

The League was conscious of the naval-orientated nature of its leadership and the strength of its relationship with the Admiralty. Indeed, in considering the appointment of a new chairman in 1933, Lloyd felt that ‘it was important that the position should be occupied by a civilian and somebody who held a prominent position in political life rather than a distinguished Naval Officer’.¹⁰⁴ Despite desires to separate itself from the Admiralty, myriad figures all publicly supported the Navy League, particularly in its commemoration of Trafalgar Day and in the creation of the SCC as we shall see.¹⁰⁵ Of course, alongside moral

¹⁰⁰ ‘Navy League Vice-Presidents’, *The Times*, 3 May 1934, p. 8.

¹⁰¹ Noel-Baker, *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*, p. 304.

¹⁰² Christopher M. Bell, *The Royal Navy, Seapower and Strategy Between the Wars* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 167.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

¹⁰⁴ MSCC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 3 November 1933, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ Such figures included Churchill (then First Lord of the Admiralty), Admiral Sir David Beatty, Admiral Viscount Jellicoe, Rear-Admiral Sir Ernle Chatfield, Sir Roger Keyes, Viscount Bridgeman, Sir Samuel Hoare, the Earl of Cork and Orrery, Admiral Sir Edward Evans, Admiral Sir William James, Alfred Duff Cooper, and Admiral Sir Roger Backhouse.

and political support, there were more practical forms of support given by the Admiralty to the Navy League as later chapters will explore.

Following the First World War, the many links of personnel between the Air League and Air Ministry goes some way to explaining the often close relationship between the two. To begin, the Duke of Sutherland was Under-Secretary of State for Air from 1922 to 1924, during Sir Samuel Hoare's first tenure as Secretary of State for Air (1922 to 1924). Sutherland was also Lord Londonderry's cousin. Chamier had served in the RFC in the First World War and remained as the Corps was transformed into the RAF.¹⁰⁶ He became Technical Director at the Air Ministry in 1927 and then Air Commodore in 1928, holding this position until his retirement in 1929.¹⁰⁷ Chamier also served as secretary for the Air Ministry's Civil Air Guard (CAG), an organisation which aimed to provide a body of men and women between the ages of 18 to 50 'with a knowledge of flying to assist in time of emergency the Royal Air Force or in any other direction concerned with aviation for which their services might be required'.¹⁰⁸ As we have seen, Groves was also a senior member of the Air Ministry. Lord Mottistone briefly served as Under-Secretary of State for Air in 1919, while Moore-Brabazon had served as Churchill's Private Secretary when the latter was the Secretary of State for War and Air.¹⁰⁹

On the list of the League's vice-presidents in the early 1930s, Frederick Guest, chairman of the League, was Secretary of State for Air from 1921 to 1922, Sir Ernest Dunlop Swinton served in the Civil Aviation department at the Air Ministry, while Lord Weir was

¹⁰⁶ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 4 May 1933, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ Zander, 'Right Modern', pp. 107–108.

¹⁰⁸ 'A Civil Air Guard', *The Times*, 25 July 1938, p. 9; TNA AVIA 2/1332, Formation of Civil Air Guard, 1938–1939. Lindsay Everard, a former member of the Air League and member of the ADCC council, also agreed to serve as a commissioner for the CAG. TNA, AVIA 2/1364, Appointment of Civil Air Guard Commissioners, 1938, Letter from General Council of Associated Light Aeroplane Clubs to the Secretary of the Air Ministry, 10 August 1938, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ David Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy: Grandeur and Decline in Modern Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 70.

president of the Air Council in 1918, Industrial Advisor to the Air Ministry, Personal Advisor to Lord Swinton during his time as Secretary of State for Air from 1935 to 1938, and, significantly, was on the first Defence Requirements Committee Meeting.¹¹⁰ Lord Thomson, Secretary of State for Air in 1924, and again from 1929 to 1930, was also a vice president of the League, albeit not during his time at the Air Ministry.¹¹¹ The League invited Hoare to become a member of its Executive Committee in 1930, following his second tenure as Secretary of State for Air (1924 to 1929), although he was unable to join, citing numerous other commitments.¹¹² The Burnham Committee did, however, contact Hoare when considering the reorganisation of the League, stating that in order for the Air League ‘to fulfil its role in awakening popular interest in aviation, the recognition, and even the support on appropriate occasions, of the Air Ministry is essential’.¹¹³

Other members of the League later joined the Air Ministry, such as Harold Balfour who became Under-Secretary of State for Air from 1938, although this was long after his departure from the League on the basis that it was ‘too pacific’.¹¹⁴ He did, however, support the League in its creation of the ADCC as we shall see. Sueter was an important wartime naval aviator, while Sempill, like many of his fellow Air League members, served in the RFC. Admiral Mark Kerr, Deputy Chief of the Air Staff at the Air Ministry in 1918, was on the League’s Executive Committee for a time and attended several of the League’s Annual General Meetings. Sir John Salmond, the retired Marshall of the RAF, also served on the League’s Executive Committee and was the ADCC’s chairman. Finally, there were links of personnel between the Air League and the RAF Benevolent Fund (established by Air Marshal Sir Hugh Trenchard in 1919 to provide assistance to RAF personnel and their

¹¹⁰ Malcolm Smith, *British Air Strategy Between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 35.

¹¹¹ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 10 August 1927, p. 1.

¹¹² AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 18 June 1930, p. 1.

¹¹³ KCL, GB0099, Air League of the British Empire, Committee of Inquiry, 3 December 1927, p. 3.

¹¹⁴ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 16 June 1931, p. 1.

dependents). Lord Wakefield, chairman of the Fund, was a vice president of the League, while both Mottistone and Sutherland (and several other Air League members) were vice presidents.¹¹⁵ Wakefield also supported the League financially, donating to the Young Pilots' Fund and the ADCC.¹¹⁶ While such links do not necessarily imply an affinity between Air Ministry and League, and some figures only acted in an ex-officio capacity, this pattern may explain why the League was not always the most vociferous critic of the Air Ministry.

The Air League also ran a number of schemes directly with the Air Ministry – or that required Air Ministry support – and, as has been noted, had a number of figures who had previously held important roles within the Ministry, or within the RFC and RAF, engage in work on its behalf. One of the most notable figures was Sir William Sefton Brancker, who had retired from the RAF as Master-General of Personnel in 1919 and was appointed Director of Civil Aviation in 1922. Brancker initially carried out propaganda work for the League, interviewing lord mayors, provosts, and mayors in towns and cities with regard to organising public meetings for the Air League.¹¹⁷ He was fairly active in League activities, was present at meetings, worked on its behalf to find a new president, and also directed League propaganda away from 'industrial centres' in the early 1920s, arguing that it should instead be carried out in places such as Eton, Harrow, and Oxford, as well as at Chambers of Commerce and Rotary Clubs in other towns and cities.¹¹⁸ It was also Brancker who suggested – albeit on behalf of the Civil Department of the Air Ministry – that the Air League should produce a booklet (which became *Facts About Flying and the Civil Uses of Aviation*) to be published in all primary, secondary, and private schools.¹¹⁹ Finally, Brancker, along

¹¹⁵ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 3 March 1938, p. 1; Edward Bishop, *The Debt We Owe: The Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund 1919–1969* (London: Longmans, 1969), pp. 106–107.

¹¹⁶ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 26 March 1935, p. 2; AL, Air Defence Cadet Corps Minute Book (ADCC Minute Book hereafter), 1938–1947, 5 January 1939, p. 2.

¹¹⁷ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 23 November 1920, p. 3.

¹¹⁸ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 30 September 1921, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 25 October 1922, p. 3. See Chapter 5 on the Air League and education.

with Sempill, suggested to the League that it might hold an “Air Day”, with the assistance of the Air Ministry, at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924. However, the scheme met with an ‘apparent unwillingness’ on the part of the Empire Exhibition Authorities and so it was abandoned.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, it is clear that the Air League’s work in relation to education, and later Empire Air Day, had fairly long-standing links with the Air Ministry. It is also evident that links in personnel between the Air League, Air Ministry, and Air Council were not merely symbolic, rather they had a direct bearing on policy, activities, and organisation.

In terms of the Air League and its influence upon Air Ministry policy, Brancker was the League’s representative on the Civil Aviation Advisory Board (a body which aimed to act in close relation with the Air Ministry on civil aviation matters), while the Air Council also invited the League to nominate a representative to serve on its Air Conference Committee in 1922.¹²¹ Brancker was nominated, but was in Iraq at the time, so Colonel Davson took his place.¹²² Brancker did, however, speak at the conference itself on behalf of the League, as did Sir Charles Bright, engineer and a vice president of the League. Similarly, Sutherland, who felt that the Conference represented ‘the Parliament of the Air’, spoke, and chaired a session, at the Conference in 1923.¹²³ The Air Conferences, held in 1920, 1922, and 1923, were an important forum in which members of the Air Ministry, prominent figures within aviation circles, and others, presented and discussed matters of civil and military aviation.

¹²⁰ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 7 May 1924, p. 4; 12 June 1924, pp. 3–4.

¹²¹ ‘Air Conference’, *The Times*, 8 February 1922, p. 5; AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 3 March 1922, p. 2.

¹²² AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 3 March 1922, p. 2; AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 13 December 1921, p. 2.

¹²³ Air Ministry, Proceedings of the Second Air Conference, held on 7th and 8th February, 1922 (London: HMSO, 1922), p. 85; 94; Air Ministry, Proceedings of the Third Air Conference, held on 6th and 7th February, 1923 (London: HMSO, 1923), p. 87.

While the Air League was clearly more than simply a conduit for the dissemination of Air Ministry views, having served in fairly senior roles within the Air Ministry, many within the League had first-hand experience of inter-service rivalry and machinations and knew the difficulty in securing the support of other government departments for Air Ministry schemes. Indeed, associations with the Air Ministry were so strong that J.M. Kenworthy (later Lord Strabolgi), addressing the League's annual dinner in 1929, felt the need to assure his audience that he was not merely 'Lord Thomson's gramophone'.¹²⁴ Air League members also, at points, advised closer cooperation between the League and Air Ministry. For example, Moore-Brabazon told the League's Executive Committee in late 1929 that the Air League 'had attacked the Air Ministry and the man in the street was not interested . . . It was necessary to see where the League could work side by side with the Air Ministry and help them get ahead.'¹²⁵ The Air League had significant propagandistic value for the Air Ministry and it accordingly supported the League's activities in a number of areas – particularly the ADCC and Empire Air Day – as well as allowing the League advertising space in its Hendon programmes.¹²⁶

VI. Women in the Navy and Air Leagues

The promotion of aerial and naval supremacy was not an exclusively male domain. Indeed, women's League-related activism, particularly using public platforms to promote navalism and aerial strength, challenges the 'age-old binary opposition twinning femininity with the values of pacifism and masculinity with those of militarism'.¹²⁷ Of course, as McCarthy notes, such oppositions are always 'imaginatively 'constructed'', yet the 'maternalist-

¹²⁴ 'Second Annual Air League Dinner', *Air*, July 1929, p. 307.

¹²⁵ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 7 October 1929, p. 2.

¹²⁶ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 14 July 1931, p. 1.

¹²⁷ McCarthy, *The British People*, p. 182.

pacifist discourse has proven highly resilient'.¹²⁸ In contrast to this discourse, popular militarism, modernity, and patriotism were championed by women within both the Air and Navy Leagues and is important to highlight. However, alongside promoting the more militaristic aspects of each League's work, women were also involved in less controversial pursuits such as charity, philanthropy, and the organisation of social events, producing a somewhat 'paradoxical mix of gender traditionalism and gender modernity'.¹²⁹

One of the most significant areas of work performed by women in the Navy League was the Ladies' Emergency Committee (LEC). Presided over by Lord Beresford, former Admiral and MP, the LEC was formed immediately following the outbreak of the First World War and undertook an extensive programme of providing 'comforts' such as 'warm garments, games, tobacco, and other articles for officers and men in the Fleet', with notable contributors including Queen Mary.¹³⁰ In early 1915, the Committee had already collected 7 tons of chocolate alone and, by 1916, the Committee estimated that it had sent parcels of warm clothing and over 600,000 items to more than 700 ships, had forwarded over 31 tons of hospital equipment to naval hospitals, and was sending parcels of food and clothing to Royal Naval prisoners of war in Germany and Turkey.¹³¹ In 1917, as the Admiralty had commenced issuing free clothing to men in the Admiralty, the Committee instead focused on the importance of recreation for men in the Fleet, noting that it had sent 484 gramophones to various ships (as well as still providing clothing and medical equipment to ships and hospitals).¹³² By 1918, the Committee estimated that '[m]any millions of garments' had passed through its hands, as well as 600 gramophones, and sporting equipment for cricket

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ As in the case of the LNU, Ibid., p. 183.

¹³⁰ MSSC, Navy League Pamphlets, Navy League Annual Report for the Year (hereafter NLAR) 1914, pp. 19–20; 'The Navy League Ladies' Emergency Committee', *The Scotsman*, 28 October 1914, p. 10.

¹³¹ 'For Our Fighting Men', *The Navy League Quarterly*, January 1915, p. 1; MSSC, Navy League Pamphlets, NLAR 1916, p. 28.

¹³² MSSC, Navy League Pamphlets, NLAR 1917, p. 32.

and football all for the recreation of the Fleet. It also estimated that it had supplied over 82 tons of hospital equipment to Royal Naval Hospitals, Hospital Ships, and had sent vast amounts of food and clothing to prisoners of war in Germany, Austria, and Turkey.

The Committee was not without private criticism for the conditions in which prisoners were held, noting that they faced hardship and suffering in every country: ‘In Hunland – the rifle butt and bayonet; in Turkey – flogging and the bastinado; in Bulgaria – many punishments’. The Committee did, however, acknowledge that ‘Austria alone of the enemy powers has shown some sporting spirit’ and that the country had treated prisoners humanely.¹³³ Press appeals also focused on the importance of prisoner wellbeing, with one appeal quoting a repatriated prisoner saying that, without the assistance of the Emergency Committee, prisoners ‘would absolutely starve’.¹³⁴ Although it is difficult to measure the impact of such propaganda, the importance of the Committee’s work is in less doubt. Women in the Navy League also played a similar role in the Second World War, taking an active part in the Navy League Comfort Fund, an organisation with a similar purpose to that of the LEC.¹³⁵

Women served on the League’s Executive Committee for the most part of the interwar years – although it remained male-dominated – and were active at League events, such as its Grand Council Meetings and Trafalgar Day dinners. Women performed

¹³³ MSSC, Navy League Pamphlets, NLAR 1918, pp. 20–21. Also see, TNA FO 383/454, Turkey: Prisoners, Including: Supplies for Prisoners of War in Turkey, 1918, Letters from the Ladies’ Emergency Committee of the Navy League and TNA FO 383/43, Germany: Prisoners, Including: Treatment of British Prisoners and Conditions in Camps, 1915, British Naval Prisoners at Giessen. The Committee also made these criticisms public, producing a propaganda poster showing a German nurse pouring a cup of water in front of wounded British prisoners of war (with the text ‘I was thirsty and ye gave me—’), while a German soldier – wearing the obligatory pickelhaube – stands behind her laughing. Imperial War Museum (hereafter IWM), Art.IWM PST 10880, Ladies’ Emergency Committee of the Navy League, Poster, 1918.

¹³⁴ ‘Will you Help the Royal Navy Prisoners of War’, *The Globe*, 23 March 1916, p. 6; the Navy League also published letters of thanks from officers of the Fleet for the Committee’s contributions. For example, see ‘Warm Clothing and Other Gifts for the Fleet’, *The Navy League Quarterly*, October 1914, pp. 11–12.

¹³⁵ MSSC, NL Minute Book, 29 November 1939, pp. 1–4; ‘Comforts for the Navy’, *The Times*, 6 December 1939, p. 5.

secretarial roles for the Overseas Relief Fund (ORF) and for the SCC, served on the Executive Committees of local branches, and also spoke on public platforms for the League as lecturers throughout the country. Lectures were given in schools, libraries, to local Navy League branches, Boys' Clubs, Rotary Clubs, the National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI), and a number of other forums. Women were often far more active than their male counterparts in lecturing.¹³⁶ As lectures formed an important part of the League's work, such activities should not be undervalued.

Alongside lecturing, women also played an important part in the more ceremonial and symbolic aspects of the League's work. It was predominantly women of the League who would place a wreath at the foot of Nelson's tomb in St. Paul's Cathedral on Trafalgar Day. In the Antipodean context, the Navy League also displayed both 'masculine' and 'feminine' characteristics with women playing a prominent role in branch activities – with branches recording sizeable female membership – further complicating Hendley's binary divide between militaristic and masculine leagues and domestic and feminine ones.¹³⁷ However, while women undoubtedly played an important role in the League's daily affairs, on a local, national, and global scale, the Ladies' Committee itself does not seem to have been involved in activities much beyond hosting social events.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ For example, in 1925 Emily Taylor, a former schoolteacher for the London County Council, gave 84 lectures, while the most active male lecturer for the League only provided 66 lectures. In 1929, Miss M.G. Thomson spoke at 87 public meetings compared to the 66 lectures provided by the next highest male lecturer and, in 1931, Thomson again spoke at 100 meetings compared to her nearest male colleague who only gave 66 lectures. MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 9 July 1923, p. 4; MSSC, Navy League Pamphlets, NLAR 1925, p. 3; MSSC, Navy League Pamphlets, NLAR 1929, p. 4; MSSC, Navy League Pamphlets, NLAR 1931, p. 4.

¹³⁷ John Griffiths, *Imperial Culture in Antipodean Cities, 1880–1939* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 202.

¹³⁸ Perhaps rather tellingly, a bridge tournament in 1931 was considered 'the most successful enterprise the Ladies' Committee has undertaken since the War' and, while flag days on Trafalgar Day were one of the most important ways of acquiring funds for the SCC, they were not looked upon with relish. 'Grand Council Meeting', *The Navy*, June 1931, p. 172. As the Ladies' Committee's chair Lady Lloyd remarked: 'It is a horrid job selling flags in the street; everybody dislikes it', although she did stress that 'If we really believe in the Navy we have got to do spade work'. 'Grand Council Meeting', *The Navy*, June 1934, p. 179.

Alongside the Air League, a Women's Aerial League (WAL), similarly a self-avowed non-party organisation, was formed in May 1909.¹³⁹ Lady Alice O'Hagan occupied the chair, while Aimee Watt Smyth was the League's secretary. Among its founding members, were Agnes Baden-Powell, Mary Fraser, Ellen Blount, Beatrice Fry, and Anna Massy.¹⁴⁰ While the WAL was separate from the main Air League, there were links of objectives and personnel, close contact between each League, and considerations for an amalgamation of the two Leagues on several occasions.¹⁴¹

The objects of the WAL were outlined at its inaugural meeting in July 1909:

The objects of this society . . . are to encourage and stimulate the invention of aerial craft and the things appertaining thereto. To disseminate knowledge and spread information, showing the vital importance to the British Empire of aerial supremacy, upon which its commerce, communication, defence, and its very existence must largely depend. To use every constitutional means to bring about the objects for which the League is established, and to invite the support of men and women of all shades of opinion throughout the Empire.¹⁴²

The WAL was far more militaristic in tone than the early pronouncements of the Air League, stressing that it was resolved 'from purely defensive and patriotic motives that England should build more airships than any other possible combination of countries, and that she should build them quicker and better'. The League called for 'supremacy in the air complementary to, but no less absolute than, that supremacy on the seas which had been England's boast since navies were'.¹⁴³ Unlike the Air League, the WAL also spoke in support of other militaristic organisations such as the NSL.¹⁴⁴ Of course, associating with

¹³⁹ On gender, technology, modernity, and aviation more broadly, see Liz Millward, *Women in British Imperial Airspace, 1922–1937* (Montreal; London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007); Bernhard Rieger, '“Fast Couples”: Technology, Gender and Modernity in Britain and Germany during the Nineteen-Thirties', *Historical Research*, vol. 76, no. 193 (2003), pp. 364–388; Chapter 5 of Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity*; Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force, 1939–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Chapter IV of Joseph J. Corn, *The Winged Gospel: America's Romance with Aviation, 1900–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

¹⁴⁰ TNA BT 58/31/COS/1387, The Women's Aerial League of the British Empire, 1909, Letter from the Women's Aerial League to the Secretary of the Board of Trade, 28 May 1909, p. 3.

¹⁴¹ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 26 February 1914, p. 1.

¹⁴² 'The Women's Aerial League', *Flight*, 17 July 1909, p. 433.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ 'Need of Aerial Defence', *Dorking and Leatherhead Advertiser*, 31 May 1913, p. 8.

the cause of national service did little to help fend off accusations of militarism or scaremongering.

The activities of the WAL, described somewhat unfairly as ‘window-dressing’ by Michael Paris, consisted largely of public education and political lobbying. In attempting to counter the perceived apathy towards aviation throughout Britain, the WAL organised lectures and tours, wrote newspaper articles, held public meetings, and distributed leaflets and pamphlets.¹⁴⁵ Less characteristic of pressure group practices were attempts to collect funds to build an all-British airship. Lauded as ‘a tangible illustration of the energy and patriotism of the women of Great Britain’, the scheme was about the promotion of British engineering, science, and technology, but it was also about pride, patriotism, and national identity.¹⁴⁶ While *The Morning Post*’s airship scheme, launched in June 1909, praised the technological progress of France and Germany, the WAL’s scheme instead called for an airship built ‘by British workmen of British material, from the women of the Empire in defence of the British Empire’.¹⁴⁷ Despite the early success of the WAL, and despite the support it accrued from a range of influential figures, it was unable to enjoy the same longevity as the Air League and wound up voluntarily in July 1915.¹⁴⁸

The question of an Air League Women’s Committee or Ladies Auxiliary Committee was brought up on a number of occasions in the 1920s, yet the form and scope of suggestions were far more limited than the pre-war WAL. For example, in considering forming a Ladies Auxiliary Committee in 1923, the League suggested that the Committee could ‘assist in the promotion and organisation of the social events and functions of the League’, could ‘provide

¹⁴⁵ Paris, *Winged Warfare*, p. 91.

¹⁴⁶ ‘Aeronautics’, *The Times*, 7 July 1909, p. 13. The scheme did not have the support of all within the aviation community, however. For example, see ‘By Public Subscription’, *Aerocraft*, August 1909, pp. 5–8.

¹⁴⁷ ‘Women and Aviation’, *Daily Mail*, 13 July 1909, p. 3.

¹⁴⁸ TNA BT 31/18915/103800, Women’s Aerial League, The Women’s Aerial League of the British Empire: Special Resolution, 8 July 1915, p. 1.

a rota of members for the purpose of staffing the Air League stalls – interesting visitors, distributing literature and enrolling members, etc., – at places and special functions where the League is represented’, could ‘create and organise a bureau of women speakers prepared to address women’s meetings on the subject of the need for British Air Supremacy’, and finally could ‘co-operate in the establishment of branches of the Air League throughout the country and Empire’.¹⁴⁹ However, despite the limited nature of proposals, it seemed to go little further than discussions within the League’s Executive Committee.

When plans for an Air League Women’s Air Circle were placed before the League by Lady Elibank in 1928, it conceived of such a group in similar terms, noting that it ‘might be useful in organising social functions, dinners, receptions etc., but that any new organisation with separate offices and subscriptions was not desirable’.¹⁵⁰ The Women’s Committee (also described as the Ladies’ Sub-Committee) was created in 1928 and included many prominent female aviators on its Council, with most other members either holding a pilot’s license or having expressed an interest in acquiring one.¹⁵¹ Although the Duke of Sutherland felt the Women’s Committee had ‘rendered an invaluable service to the League and to the cause of British aviation’, the Committee never had much involvement with League affairs.¹⁵² The League did invite notable female aviators such as the Duchess of Bedford and Lady Bailey to become vice presidents of the League, and appointed two women – initially Lady Heath and Madame de Landa (chair and deputy chair of the Women’s Committee respectively) – to the League’s Executive Committee (Kathleen,

¹⁴⁹ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 6 June 1923, p. 3. Elsie Mackay, the actress and pioneer aviator, was, however, appointed as an advisory member to the League’s Advisory Committee of Airmen. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 5 December 1924, p. 3.

¹⁵⁰ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 4 May 1928, p. 2.

¹⁵¹ For a profile of each member, see ‘The Women’s Committee of the Air League of the British Empire’, *Air*, June 1929, pp. 268–271.

¹⁵² The Duke of Sutherland, ‘The Air League’, in C. G. Burge (ed.), *The Air Annual of the British Empire* (London: Gale & Polden, 1929), p. 41.

Countess of Drogheda, Eileen Forbes-Sempill (née Lavery), and Elibank also later served on the Committee).¹⁵³

One of the first activities of the Women's Committee, perhaps unsurprisingly owing to the League's objectives for the Committee, was to host a luncheon for Amelia Earhart, championing her achievements as an aviator.¹⁵⁴ However, the Committee was not without wider ambition. Lady Bailey, who had replaced Lady Heath as chair in January 1929, proposed the formation of Women's Committees in every county throughout the country, yet the League's Executive Committee made clear it could not involve any expense for the League and so was not pursued.¹⁵⁵ By late December 1932, the reorganisation of the League's Executive Committee to include members from the RAC and RAeS meant the resignations of Drogheda and Elibank from the League's Committee – this was the last time women served on the Committee throughout the 1930s.¹⁵⁶ By May 1933, the League was already talking of 'reviving' the Women's Committee, indicating that it had ceased activities: all evidence suggests this is the case.¹⁵⁷ The final consideration for a Women's Committee in the interwar years came in 1938 with Salmond suggesting that, rather than taking the same form as it previously did, 'a better plan would be to divide the country up into small areas or sections, and appoint a lady in each to foster the Air League's interests, arrange tea parties, etc., and act as a focal point for the Air League in that district'.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ AL, AL Minute Book, Annual General Meeting, 19 July 1928, p. 4.

¹⁵⁴ 'Luncheon to the Atlantic Fliers', *Flight*, 28 June 1928, p. 517. The League also held a dinner for the aviator Peggy Salaman following her flight (with two lion cubs) to Cape Town in 1931. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 8 December 1931, p. 2.

¹⁵⁵ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 21 January 1929, p. 1; AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 20 March 1929, p. 1.

¹⁵⁶ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 15 December 1932, p. 1.

¹⁵⁷ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 4 May 1933, p. 2.

¹⁵⁸ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 10 November 1938, p. 3. At a meeting in January 1939, it was agreed that a Women's Committee might organise a dance and the Air League's annual dinner, although there was no discussion of women operating throughout the country on the League's behalf as previously mentioned. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 26 January 1939, p. 2.

VII. Finance and Charity

As well as engaging in propaganda, both the Air and Navy Leagues were involved in a number of charitable schemes, either at the suggestion of the Air Ministry or Admiralty, or that contributed to the schemes of either department. While there is no space to adequately examine the charitable endeavours of each League in depth, a brief overview will be provided.

The Navy League, in particular, made charitable work a focal point of its activities during the First World War, as seen in the case of the LEC. Indeed, by the end of the conflict, the following charities were under control or directed by the League: the ORF, the Minesweepers' Fund, the Merchant Service Fund, the Navy League Education Fund, the Nelson Day Fund, the LEC, and the Royal Navy Prisoners of War Fund.¹⁵⁹ Voluntarism, charity, and philanthropy were key elements in the League's wartime work. The ORF was established following the Battle of Jutland in 1916, with Lord Beresford taking the chair until being replaced by V. Biscoe Tritton, the League's chairman from 1916 to 1922, following the former's death, in 1919.¹⁶⁰ The Fund's purpose was to provide general relief and educational assistance to the orphans and other dependents of those who lost their life in the Navy and Merchant Service during the First World War. In 1920, a trust was established by the Charity Commission, under which the funds remaining were devoted to purely educational purposes.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ 'Navy League Charities', *Hampshire Telegraph*, 5 July 1918, p. 7. On philanthropy, charity, and voluntarism in the First World War more broadly, see Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity* (New York; London: Routledge, 2014).

¹⁶⁰ MSSC, Navy League Pamphlets, NLAR 1916, pp. 27–28; MSSC, Navy League Pamphlets, NLAR 1919, pp. 12–13.

¹⁶¹ The Fund raised a figure of over half a million pounds, had investigated 10,705 cases, and assisted 3,283 children with educational grants, before it was eventually wound up in 1937. 'Navy League', *The Times*, 21 May 1937, p. 10. The Fund was not entirely without controversy, however. For instance, the Navy League was involved in libel action with Captain Garrett, secretary of the Association of Retired Naval Officers. Garrett was accused by series of naval officer's widows of inappropriate behaviour. One accused Garrett of 'forcing himself personally upon her', while it also appears that he kept a number of relief donations for himself. However, it was, in fact, Garrett who brought the libel action against the ORF, after a letter accusing Garrett

Alongside the ORF, the League was engaged in several other charitable endeavours throughout the First World War. The Sailors' Day Fund was inaugurated by the formation of a Joint Committee of the Navy League and the British and Foreign Sailors' Society, with an appeal being issued by Beresford to the heads of all municipalities throughout Britain. The Fund was largely for the benefit of the Mercantile Marine and for the training of boys for sea services.

The League also organised the Jack Cornwell Memorial Fund in July 1916. Cornwell was only 16 when he suffered mortal wounds at his post during the Battle of Jutland, for which he was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross medal, with his bravery attracting much attention. The Fund asked schoolchildren throughout Britain and the empire for donations which would fund the establishment of a ward for disabled sailors at the Star and Garter Home in Richmond. Publicly supported by figures such as Beatty, the response was high with millions of schoolchildren reportedly subscribing a penny to the fund (in return for a stamp bearing Cornwell's portrait), with the first instalment of £18,000 being presented to Queen Mary at Buckingham Palace in early 1917.¹⁶² A figure of £500 was also raised to provide Cornwell's mother with a weekly pension of 10s.¹⁶³

The other principal charitable endeavour the League was involved in was the Trafalgar Day Orphan Fund. The Orphan Fund was financed by a flag day held at Trafalgar Square, street collections, as well as collections in all naval establishments, on board ships,

of the above came into his possession. TNA PIN 15/508, Association of Retired Naval Officers v Navy League Overseas Relief Fund: Libel Action, Summary of Information, pp. 1–4; TNA PIN 15/508, Ministry of Pensions Minute Sheet 17, p. 1.

¹⁶² The Memorial Fund Committee also encouraged schools throughout Britain and the empire to honour the life of Cornwell by holding a 'Jack Cornwell Day' on 21 September, with over seven million children reportedly taking part. Mary Conley, 'Faithful unto Death': Commemorating Jack Cornwell's Service in the Battle of Jutland', in James E. Kitchen, Alisa Miller, and Laura Rowe (eds), *Other Combatants, Other Fronts: Competing Histories of the First World War* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), pp. 68–69.

¹⁶³ MSSC, Navy League Pamphlets, NLAR 1916, p. 29. On disabled veterans and ex-servicemen more broadly, see Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914–1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

and at the home ports in aid of the orphaned children of petty officers, non-commissioned officers, and men of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines.¹⁶⁴ The Fund was integral to raising funds for the SCC.

The Navy League itself relied on donations and membership subscriptions. The League also sent appeals for funds and members to local and national newspapers, often drawing on naval themes or key moments in British naval history. One such appeal was the Jutland Day appeal in 1923 on the seventh anniversary of the Battle of Jutland. In issuing the appeal, Sir Cyril Cobb, then chairman of the League, stressed that the maintenance and safety of the empire depended on sea power. Cobb was careful to emphasise that such sentiments were not ‘actuated by a jingoistic or warlike spirit’, but rather that a strong British navy constituted ‘the greatest moral and material assurance of the world’s peace’.¹⁶⁵ This was not the first time, however, that the League had considered commemorating the Battle of Jutland. Indeed, in 1916 the long-time member of the League, Arnold White, had proposed replacing the commemoration of Trafalgar with Jutland in order not to offend Britain’s allies, yet the League did not adopt the suggestion.¹⁶⁶

While the Air League was not particularly active during the early years of the First World War, like the Navy League it was concerned with those who would be affected by the conflict domestically, forming the Royal Flying Corps Families Relief Fund (RFCFRF) in 1914. This was designed to ‘help and comfort’ the wives and children of men of the RFC who would be killed or wounded in war.¹⁶⁷ The League worked closely with the War Office, which sent lists of RFC casualties to the League, as well as to the Soldiers’ and Sailors’

¹⁶⁴ ‘Nelson Day’, *The Times*, 21 October 1926, p. 9.

¹⁶⁵ ‘May 31st – Jutland Day’, *The Shields Daily News*, 30 May 1923, p. 4.

¹⁶⁶ National Maritime Museum (hereafter NMM), Greenwich, Arnold White Papers, WHI/118, 1916.

¹⁶⁷ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 14 August 1914, p. 1.

Families [and Airmen's from 1918] Association.¹⁶⁸ By February 1915, the RFCFRF had raised £422.19.4, although it had yet to receive claims, and by 1916 it was registered under the War Charities Act.¹⁶⁹

Charity remained important for the League following the First World War. Accordingly, in May 1919, the Executive Committee considered proposals for the creation of an Orphan Fund for the education and maintenance of children of members of the RAF who lost their lives during the First World War.¹⁷⁰ Although the League viewed its involvement in charitable funds in June 1920 as 'vital to the successful development of the Air League' and, more broadly, as 'essential to the progress of civil aviation' by October the same year, its Executive Committee resolved to hand the remaining funds over to the Royal Flying Forces Memorial Fund.¹⁷¹ Despite this, the work of the RFCFRF had laid the grounds for the RAF Memorial Fund (which became the RAF Benevolent Fund in 1933).¹⁷²

The Air League itself relied upon donations, membership subscriptions, and appeals for funds, yet its financial position throughout the interwar years was often parlous, and it rarely created revenue. Of course, it was not immune from national economic decline, with Sutherland noting that the League was 'among the first to feel the effects of financial stringency' following the Great Depression.¹⁷³ Indeed, Guest informed the League's Executive Committee in April 1932 that 'unless immediate steps were taken to strengthen

¹⁶⁸ An organisation founded by Major James Gildea in 1885 to provide assistance to the widows and children of serving officers. 'Soldiers' and Sailors' Family Association', *The Times*, 22 December 1886, p. 5.

¹⁶⁹ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 18 February 1915, p. 1; TNA AIR 2/60/24202/18, Offer of Air Force Families Relief Fund, Letter from General H.T. Arbuthnot to the Air Ministry, 11 June 1918, p. 1.

¹⁷⁰ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 9 May 1919, p. 4. While the League was conscious of such work overlapping with the RAC, it went ahead with the scheme as the 'Aerial League Orphan Fund', registering under the War Charities Act. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 13 June 1919, pp. 3–4; 9 December 1919, p. 2.

¹⁷¹ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 1 June 1920, p. 2; 15 October 1920, p. 2.

¹⁷² Which aimed to build a memorial to airmen who died in the First World War, to establish boarding schools for the children of deceased airmen, and to relieve distress among airmen's dependants. Bishop, *The Debt We Owe*, p. 4.

¹⁷³ AL, AL Minute Book, Annual General Meeting, 12 May 1931, p. 1.

the financial position of the League, bankruptcy was inevitable'.¹⁷⁴ By 1935, however, the League was financially stable enough to stress that its purpose was 'not to accumulate money and therefore efforts should be made to spend as much as possible in the cause of British aviation'.¹⁷⁵

VIII. Conclusion

This chapter has charted the organisation, ideas, and personnel of the Air and Navy Leagues from their inception through to the interwar years. It has highlighted the numerous official and unofficial links between each League and the service departments, as well as associations with the political right. In some respects, each League connected officialdom and the far right in the interwar years, with modern technology providing an important unifying link. Such links were rarely explicit, and were often informal, yet there were nevertheless discernible ties between aviation and naval groups, pro-German and fascist organisations, and officialdom. This chapter has also briefly explored the role of women within each League, questioning Hendley's divide between militaristic and masculine leagues and domestic and feminine ones. It has also considered the charitable endeavours of each organisation. In doing so, the chapter has shown that the historiographical consensus on continuity between pre-war and interwar Britain should also be extended to include militaristic, as well as patriotic and imperialist, organisations. The First World War did not mark the end of organised militarism, although as the next chapter will demonstrate, it did

¹⁷⁴ In response to this, the League formed a Finance Sub-Committee, which comprised Gordon England, J.M. Kenworthy, and Sir Basil Clarke (who succeeded Colonel Davson as the League's Honorary Treasurer shortly afterwards), with the purpose of framing the Air League's budget and providing financial recommendations to the League. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 12 April 1932, pp. 1–3. Following the re-organisation of the League in accordance with the Tripartite Agreement in 1932, however, it was announced that both the RAC and RAeS had made 'a generous offer of financial assistance' to the League which it felt 'would place it on a firm and permanent footing'. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 1 November 1932, p. 2.

¹⁷⁵ AL, AL Minute Book, Annual General Meeting, 10 July 1935, p. 3.

influence the nature and character of each League. Indeed, faced with the growth of internationalism, pacifism, and calls for disarmament and collective security, both Leagues met with opposition from a number of individuals and organisations on the political left. However, as will be revealed, organised militarism was able to endure such challenges.

Chapter 2: ‘Public Confidence Could Not Alone be Gained by Talking of Bombs and Battleships’: The Air League, the Navy League, and Disarmament

The strength of liberal internationalist, pacifist, and anti-war sentiment during the interwar period suggests that expressions of militarism or the promotion of armaments may have held little political or cultural purchase. Indeed, in reflecting on the causes of the First World War, many statesmen, diplomats, politicians, and intellectuals concluded that, as the arms race had played a principal part, the potentially ‘destabilizing effect of armaments’ should be eliminated through disarmament.¹ However, while the interwar years may have been ‘a halcyon period for liberal internationalists’ and, while disarmament was considered as the ‘great uniting issue of the interwar peace movements’, the peace movement was not a single, unified (or necessarily unifying) phenomenon and there was opposition to calls for disarmament, collective security, and the internationalisation of aviation – not least from the Air and Navy Leagues.²

Accordingly, this chapter will chart the ways in which the two Leagues negotiated the rise of – and interacted with – issues such as disarmament, arms limitations, pacifism, collective security, and international diplomacy. It will also explore how the leading actors within both institutions responded to the growth in pacifist, internationalist, and anti-war sentiment. While Britain may have remained a martial nation and a warfare state after 1918, there was an obvious surge of anti-war sentiment.³ This posed problems for the Air and Navy Leagues, both of which featured the idea of national defence at the centre of their ethos during the period. However, neither, perhaps surprisingly, were unrelenting critics of plans

¹ Carolyn J. Kitching, *Britain and the Geneva Disarmament Conference: A Study in International History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 1.

² Pugh, *Liberal Internationalism*, p. 2; Andrew Webster, ‘The League of Nations, Disarmament and Internationalism’, in Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin (eds), *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 145–146.

³ Edgerton, *Warfare State*, Chapter 1.

for reductions in aerial and naval armaments respectively. In the early 1920s, the Navy League supported the Washington Naval Conference, while in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Air League altered its aims by focusing more on civil and commercial aviation, rather than solely promoting its military potential. Conscious of anti-war sentiment, as well as public support for pacifism and internationalism, the policy of each League seemed to mark a point of departure from the previously militaristic programme pursued by both. Much in the same way that groups such as the LNU curtailed the more ardently pacific and anti-militarist supporters within its movement, both the Air and Navy Leagues attempted to rein in the more overtly militaristic elements of their respective memberships.⁴ Seen by many as an abandonment of the key principles of each organisation, these policies lost them support from many rank and file members, led to a number of high-profile resignations, and threatened the stability and even existence of each League. Support for disarmament and collective security was not, however, a long-lasting feature of either the Air or Navy League's work and each quickly reverted to a programme which lobbied for aerial and naval strength.

While the Navy League's support for collective security and failure to lobby for naval supremacy surrounding the Washington Naval Treaty has been documented by Duncan Redford, his analysis does not extend beyond the early 1920s. The Navy League's fragmentation in this period did indeed point to the difficulties facing militaristic pressure groups following the First World War, however it did not represent the 'collapse of British navalism'.⁵ This chapter differs from Redford in that it explores how the Navy League negotiated questions of disarmament and collective security far beyond the early 1920s and demonstrates that, contrary to Redford's assertion, navalism was able to occupy an important

⁴ McCarthy, *The British People*, Chapter 5.

⁵ Redford, 'Collective Security', p. 48.

place in the post-war landscape. The Air League's attitude towards such issues has hitherto received no scholarly attention. This chapter seeks to redress this neglect by arguing that the Air League played an important part in debates on disarmament, collective security, and the internationalisation of aviation.

As this chapter deals with both the Air and Navy Leagues, it is organised thematically, rather than chronologically. While this entails some chronological jumps, the chapter is broken down into the following sections to avoid confusion. The first section explores the abandonment of navalism within the Navy League in the early 1920s, before looking at how it approached questions of disarmament and arms limitations for the rest of the decade. It then examines how the Air League similarly abandoned a long-held policy which promoted military supremacy in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The next section highlights how each League interacted with the LNU – the largest liberal internationalist organisation within the interwar years. It then briefly details the ways in which both the Air and Navy Leagues came into conflict with other organisations and figures on the political left who advocated disarmament, pacifism, or collective security. The chapter then moves on to the policy of each League at the time of the Geneva Disarmament Conference, before examining the Navy League's opposition to the second London Naval Treaty. Finally, the chapter examines the Air League's opposition to the internationalisation of aviation and calls for an international air police force.

I. 'Pacifist Tendencies': The Navy League, the Air League, and the Abandonment of Militarism?

The policy adopted by the Navy League in the early 1920s, and by the Air League later in the same decade, was one which represented a fundamental departure from the principles, nature, and aims of each League prior to that point. For both Leagues, it threatened to cause

instability and led many to question the very purpose of each organisation. There was a clear desire by certain League members to steer away from a policy that could be considered militaristic, to one which supported arms limitations, or (in the Air League's case) focused on non-military elements of aviation. For both Leagues, this change in policy was only temporary, and it was not long until each was again lobbying both public and parliament for a strong navy and air force.

One of the most significant changes to occur within the Navy League during the interwar years arose from its policy surrounding the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922. This agreement, which marked the concession of formal parity with the US Navy, has been described by one historian as 'one of the major catastrophes of English history'.⁶ It is perhaps surprising therefore, given the Navy League's extensive programme of political pressure for British naval supremacy prior to the First World War, that the Treaty was commended by the League for its 'noble aims' and for 'the highest ideals of British policy'. While the League stressed that 'the primary object for which the Navy League exists remains unaltered – namely, to secure the adequate naval protection of British subjects and commerce the world over', this radical departure from its traditional message is significant.⁷ The League's argument in 1921 that 'today civilisation is not threatened by any maritime power' and that 'there is no alternative to competitive building of ships of war except an international agreement' was at odds with the dominant ideas, sentiments, and values of British navalism, particularly as expounded by the League prior to the First World War.⁸

Enacted by Biscoe Tritton and Rear Admiral Ronald Hopwood, the League's chairman and general secretary respectively, the Navy League's policy shift towards

⁶ Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power*, p. 272.

⁷ 'The Navy League', *The Times*, 31 December 1921, p. 4.

⁸ Redford, 'Collective Security', p. 54.

embracing international ideals of collective security and the preservation of peace through international agreement, thereby sacrificing British naval supremacy, was a radical departure from its traditional policy. Indeed, it even led to the resignation of five senior members from its Executive Committee.⁹ The failure of the League to lobby for the maintenance of British naval supremacy led to, as Redford has observed, a schism ‘that threatened to destroy’ the League.¹⁰ Among the dissenting voices was Patrick Hannon, who wrote that the policy would convert the ‘Navy League from a movement organised as the protagonist of British Naval interests into a subordinate of the League of Nations Union’.¹¹ Admiral Freemantle was of the opinion that ‘by persisting in its attitude of apathy, the League was failing to justify its existence’.¹²

In one respect, the League’s support of arms limitation on moral, as well as practical, grounds represented an abandonment of the ideological principles of navalism causing the character and identity of the League to be called into question. The organisation’s *raison d’être* appeared to be fundamentally altered. It also suggested a sensitivity towards being associated with militarism, with the League arguing that ‘expenditure on the navy is not in the nature of “militarism” . . . but of necessary insurance’.¹³ However, the decision taken by the Navy League to support the Washington Naval Treaty, and in effect adopt a policy of naval *realpolitik*, was clearly not at odds with the political, intellectual, and indeed financial climate of the period. As N.H. Gibbs writes ‘whatever the criticisms of the Treaty, it did prevent, for the immediate future, a costly naval arms race which Britain was in no state to

⁹ ‘Navy League “Apathy”’, *The Times*, 4 March 1921, p. 6.

¹⁰ Redford, ‘Collective Security’, p. 49. See also NMM, Arnold White Papers, WHI/136.

¹¹ Parliamentary Archives, London, Papers of Sir Patrick Joseph Henry Hannon, HNN, Letter from Hannon to Duke of Somerset, 12 October 1921, p. 1. Arnold White similarly described the League as a ‘Branch of the League of Nations’ in a letter to Somerset. NMM, Arnold White Papers, WHI/136, Letter from White to Duke of Somerset, 9 January 1922, p. 1.

¹² ‘Navy League “Apathy”’, *The Times*, 4 March 1921, p. 6.

¹³ ‘Our Empire’s Shield’, *The Times*, 20 October 1923, p. 15.

sustain'.¹⁴ If the Navy League was generally supportive of arms limitation in the early 1920s – even to the point where it threatened its very existence – then the tone of its public statements on the reduction of arms and wider disarmament radically changed shortly thereafter.

The League was a vocal and vehement critic of the decision by Ramsay MacDonald's Labour Government to suspend construction on the Singapore Naval Base in 1924. As Rhiannon Vickers has noted, from the early 1920s the internationalist, anti-war section of the party (initially highly critical of the League of Nations) strongly influenced Labour Party thinking on foreign policy and international affairs.¹⁵ MacDonald certainly feared that any proposed international agreement on disarmament might be hampered if Britain went ahead with the construction of the Naval Base, yet this was strongly denounced by the Navy League.¹⁶ While the League commended the government's decision to increase Britain's aerial strength, it warned that the 'paralysis of all industry at home and slow starvation through the cutting off of our supplies', which could result from the loss of the base in Singapore, would be 'no less painful an end than extermination by high explosives or poison gas'.¹⁷ The League circulated a statement to all its branches, and to the popular press, urging that 'the essential safety of the Empire should be secured so that no foreign rival may be tempted by our weakness to reach out the hand for the "glittering prizes" which a disarmed British Empire would offer . . . more than any other nation we depend upon Sea Power'.¹⁸ At the annual Grand Council Meeting in 1924, Sir Cyril Cobb accused the government of

¹⁴ N.H. Gibbs, *Grand Strategy Volume 1: Rearmament Policy* (London: HMSO, 1976), p. 22.

¹⁵ Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World: Volume 1: The Evolution of Labour's Foreign Policy, 1900–51* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 101.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁷ 'Singapore Base', *The Times*, 13 March 1924, p. 16. See also, 'The Navy League and Singapore', *The Manchester Guardian*, 13 March 1924, p. 3. For British policy towards the Singapore Naval Base, see James Neidath, *The Singapore Naval Base and the Defence of Britain's Eastern Empire, 1919–1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) and W. David McIntyre, *The Rise and Fall of the Singapore Naval Base, 1919–1942* (London: Macmillan, 1979).

¹⁸ 'Navy League Policy', *The Times*, 4 February 1924, p. 9.

not having ‘a proper sense of Empire . . . nor do they care much whether the Navy, so far as we can judge from their actions, is in a proper position to protect not only the Empire, but all our great trade routes throughout the Empire’.¹⁹ The closure of the Singapore Naval Base provided a catalyst for renewed Navy League activity. As Cobb underlined, ‘we are now in a position of a League that has something very definite to fight’ which resulted in a ‘much more definite programme than we had two or three years ago’.²⁰

Navy League opposition to the closure of the Singapore Naval Base was strongly supported by a number of influential figures, such as Lord Curzon, Leo Amery, and Winston Churchill, all of whom attended a public meeting arranged by the League as a protest against its abandonment. The League was similarly supported in its policy Stanley Baldwin, who wrote that he was ‘delighted to learn that the Navy League is taking up the question of Singapore with a view, no doubt, to educating opinion on what is a very vital matter’. He argued that ‘there are certain facts which, surely, no sane person can dispute. They are that our Navy is essential to our existence, to the maintenance of our trade routes . . . and to the security of our Empire.’²¹

While other organisations were ‘committed to creating and defending a space within associational life which was free of partisan or sectarian conflict’, the Navy League at times struggled to position itself outside the realm of party politics.²² Although the League was avowedly non-party and non-partisan, Liberal or Labour representation, in the interwar years at least, was fairly minimal as has been noted. The League was evidently an important platform for diehard Conservative figures such as Curzon, Amery, and later Lloyd, while other Conservative figures such as Baldwin and Churchill, the latter far more frequently,

¹⁹ ‘Annual Meeting of Grand Council’, *The Navy*, June 1924, p. 157.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

²¹ ‘The City and Singapore’, *The Times*, 29 March 1924, p. 17.

²² Helen McCarthy, ‘Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain’, *The Historical Journal*, vol. 50, no. 4 (2007), p. 892.

also supported the League. If groups such as the NFWI, the LNU, the British Legion, and Rotary International attempted ‘to create a distinctive kind of sociability, and to defend it from what were perceived to be the destructive forces of partisanship’, then the Navy League was seemingly less hesitant to engage in partisan or politically sectarian activities.²³ However, this did not mean that the League was an auxiliary for the Conservatives Party and, as we have seen, Lloyd in particular was willing to challenge Conservative leadership.

While disarmament had become a clarion call for liberal internationalist (as well as European socialist) campaigns focused on strengthening collective security in the late 1920s, for the Navy League it raised concerns for Britain economically, morally, and strategically.²⁴ Alongside its propaganda surrounding the Singapore Naval Base, the League was particularly outspoken in its opposition to the failed Geneva Naval Conference in 1927. The Conference (attended by Britain, the US, and Japan) attempted to halt the increase in the types of vessels omitted from the Washington Naval Treaty. However, owing to the entrenched positions adopted by those at the Conference, particularly Britain and the US, over the type and number of cruisers, the lack of preparation, and the influence of the service departments upon government policy, the Conference was a failure.²⁵ The government’s intransigence was supported by the Navy League, which had adopted a resolution at its Grand Council Meeting that year, stating that the League, ‘while welcoming any international agreements that would lessen the chances of friction between nations’, was of the opinion that Britain had the ‘inalienable right to decide the necessary naval strength of the Empire’.²⁶ Such sentiments were also clearly supported at the Conservative Party

²³ McCarthy, ‘Voluntary Associations’, p. 899.

²⁴ Pugh, *Liberal Internationalism*, p. 48; Talbot C. Imlay, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism: European Socialists and International Politics, 1914–1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), Chapter 4; Daniel Laqua, ‘Democratic Politics and the League of Nations: The Labour and Socialist International as a Protagonist of Interwar Internationalism’, *Contemporary European History*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2015), pp. 175–192.

²⁵ Kitching, *Britain and the Geneva Disarmament Conference*, p. 22. Cf. Richardson, *British Disarmament Policy*, Chapter 9.

²⁶ ‘Grand Council of the Meeting of the Navy League’, *The Navy*, June 1927, p. 168.

Conference that year, which supported a motion praising Baldwin's refusal to limit Britain's naval strength.²⁷ Indeed, as Dick Richardson has shown, the Conservative Party in general 'tended to distrust both the League [of Nations] and disarmament', while most of the foreign policy-making elite during this period were 'sceptical of, if not outrightly opposed to, the whole movement for arms limitation'.²⁸ Such views were not, however, supported by all.²⁹

Alongside hostility towards the Geneva Naval Conference, the Navy League also denounced the signing of the Kellogg-Briand Pact. The Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928, also known as the Paris Peace Pact, outlawed war as an instrument of national policy and, as Daniel Gorman argues, 'signalled a normative shift towards viewing war as illegitimate'.³⁰ Yet, this was not how the Navy League viewed the Pact. The League argued that while 'there is no race more desirous of peace than is the British race', the signing of the pact altered little in reality. It feared that 'it will encourage some people to believe the pacifist propaganda which is at present raging for great reduction in our navy' and stated that '[t]reaties, pacts, and other solemnly signed documents are all very well in their way, but, as we have learnt from bitter experience, they become "Scraps of Paper" when a nation decides on war as a continuation of policy'.³¹

²⁷ Pugh, *Liberal Internationalism*, p. 53.

²⁸ Richardson, *British Disarmament Policy*, pp. 25–27.

²⁹ See debates in *The Times* between the League and Gilbert Murray. 'Geneva and the Navies', *The Times*, 30 June 1927, p. 12; 'Geneva and the Navies', *The Times*, 2 July 1927, p. 8; 'Geneva and the Navies', *The Times*, 5 July 1927, p. 17. Also see opposition from Maxwell Garnett, 'The League and Naval Armaments', *The Manchester Guardian*, 16 March 1927, p. 20. Interestingly, proposals were placed before the LNU's Executive Committee in mid-1927 that the Union might work with the Navy League in agreeing on a naval strength sufficient to protect the country surrounding the Geneva Naval Conference, yet it viewed any such meeting as 'likely to be unprofitable'. British Library of Political and Economic Science, London, (hereafter BLPES), League of Nations Union Archive (hereafter LNU), LNU 2/8, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 16 June 1927, p. 5.

³⁰ Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society*, p. 260. Other scholars have gone further, with Oona Hathaway and Scott Shapiro suggesting that the Pact represented one of the most 'transformative events in human history'. Oona A. Hathaway and Scott J. Shapiro, *The Internationalists and Their Plan to Outlaw War* (London: Allen Lane, 2017), p. xiii.

³¹ 'The Peace Pact and the Navy', *The Navy League Quarterly*, October 1928, p. 2.

Much in keeping with its policy surrounding the Singapore Naval Base, the Geneva Naval Conference, and the Kellogg-Briand Pact, the Navy League was also a staunch opponent of the London Naval Conference in 1930. The Conference, and subsequent Treaty, set a tonnage ratio for cruisers and destroyers of 5:5:3.5 for the US, Britain, and Japan (although this was not agreed upon by France or Italy), while also calling for further cuts in battleship numbers.³² On the eve of the Conference, the League held a public meeting at which Lord Bridgeman, First Lord of the Admiralty from 1924 to 1929 in Baldwin's government, spoke on the importance of the sea to the nation, the empire, and British trade. Lloyd likewise stated that, although he wished the Conference success and stressed that the League wanted peace, the maintenance of a strong British fleet was a 'matter of life and death'. He felt that the reduction in British naval armaments seemed only to augment the armaments of other world powers.³³

The greatest publicity generated, however, revolved around a meeting convened by the Navy League with Churchill as its principal speaker. While the Navy League welcomed the publicity Churchill brought, Churchill also viewed the Navy League as an important platform from which to oppose disarmament. For instance, in a letter to Lord Arthur Balfour, former Prime Minister, Churchill noted that he had received an informal communication from the Foreign Office, informing him that a 'speech threatening the Government if they gave way any more would be extremely welcome'. Accordingly, Churchill wrote that he was going to 'give his Majesty's Government the support of a good hearty kick'.³⁴

³² Joseph Maiolo, 'Naval Armaments Competition Between the Two World Wars', in Thomas Mahnken, Joseph Maiolo, and David Stephenson (eds), *Arms Races in International Politics: From the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 100.

³³ 'Tory Fears for the Navy', *Daily Herald*, 16 January 1930, p. 2.

³⁴ CHUR, Sir Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill Papers (hereafter Churchill Papers), CHAR 2/169/55-56, Public and Political: General Correspondence, 1930, Letter from Churchill to 1st Lord Balfour, 22 February 1930, p. 2.

At the meeting, Churchill spoke of the ‘profound and growing anxiety’ among the public and hoped that ‘amid the froth and confusion of our present situation the British nation would still have the sanity and resolution to sustain that ancient naval power which across four centuries had so often defended good causes and had never defended good causes in vain’.³⁵ He added that ‘British naval requirements ought to be fixed by ourselves alone, because our life depends on the sea’.³⁶ Shortly thereafter, the LNU also privately recorded its anxiety at the seeming lack of progress at the Conference.³⁷ However, figures such as Gilbert Murray, the LNU’s chairman, spoke with more confidence in regards to the Union’s propaganda surrounding the Treaty. At a meeting of the LNU’s General Council, Murray was satisfied that it was ‘quite clear that what I may call the militarist party – the party that objected to an agreement is beaten . . . They fight like a minority, they speak like a minority, they feel like a minority. This is a great thing.’³⁸

Despite such criticism, Churchill evidently viewed Navy League meetings as an important opportunity to lobby the government. So, too, did the Admiralty. For instance, in an Executive Committee meeting in late 1930, Commander Denny, the League’s general secretary revealed to those assembled that the Admiralty had informed him ‘that they would like the Navy League very much to emphasise that the full amount of tonnage allotted under the Navy Treaty should be provided for’.³⁹ Clearly, while the Admiralty was cautious to publicly align itself with the League, privately it acknowledged its propagandistic value surrounding issues of disarmament. By the early 1930s, the League’s public pronouncements

³⁵ ‘British Naval Needs’, *The Times*, 27 February 1930, p. 16. For the full speech, see CHUR, Churchill Papers, CHAR 9/9/A–B, Speeches, Non House of Commons, 1930, Navy League Speech, 26 February 1930, pp. 221–229.

³⁶ ‘British Naval Needs’, *The Times*, 27 February 1930, p. 16. Clearly satisfied with the meeting, the League then printed Churchill’s speech as a pamphlet, disseminating it to the House of Commons, the House of Lords, and to overseas Navy League branches. MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 6 March 1930, p. 2.

³⁷ BLPES, LNU 2/10, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 6 March 1930, p. 5.

³⁸ BLPES, LNU 1/2, Minutes of a Meeting of the General Council, 26–27 June 1930, p. 60.

³⁹ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 6 November 1930, p. 4.

revolved around several themes: national and imperial strength, patriotism, duty, naval tradition, and a hostility to disarmament and collective security. The League had reassumed its role as ‘the public guardians of British naval supremacy’.⁴⁰

Air League

The Navy League was not alone in (temporarily) abandoning long-held principles advocating military strength. The Air League was also conscious of anti-war sentiment and its own militaristic appearance and, much like the Navy League, the policy adopted was one that (briefly) threatened its stability and future. Among the changes resulting from Groves’s appointment as secretary general in 1927 was a consolidation of the League’s aims and objectives. As Groves outlined in June 1927, the principal aims of the League were: ‘To secure a Home Defence Air Force equal to any other Air Force within striking distance of Great Britain, and the provision of adequate additional air force to meet the requirements of the Navy, the Army, and Imperial defence’, ‘To ensure the fullest development of British Civil and Commercial aviation’, and ‘To foster British interest in the encouragement of British Experiment and research in the Science of Aeronautics’.⁴¹ While such aims closely resembled earlier calls from the Air League for an air force ‘capable of obtaining the mastery of the air’, there was opposition to the policy adopted. For example, Sempill informed the League’s Committee that ‘objection had been raised to the first of these Aims as being militarist’ and so it was decided that a special meeting of the Committee would be called to discuss the matter.⁴²

⁴⁰ Duncan Redford, ‘The Royal Navy, Sea Blindness and British National Identity’, in Duncan Redford (ed.) *Maritime History and Identity: The Sea and Culture in the Modern World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), p. 73.

⁴¹ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 2 June 1927, p. 3.

⁴² AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 6 February 1928, p. 1. Its aims were even criticised by the BBC, with the corporation describing the first aim as ‘controversial’, later banning a proposed Air League broadcast because it ‘amounted to a serious attack upon the present policy of Air Defence’. ‘The Banned Broadcast’, *Air*, December 1927, p. 56.

Held in early 1928, Lieut. Colonel Mervyn O’Gorman, a member of the League’s Executive Committee, proposed that the wording of the League’s first aim should be altered to read: ‘To secure an adequate Home Defence Force in relation to any other air force, etc’. In support of this, O’Gorman stated that while he entirely agreed that we should have an Air Force equal to any other within striking distance, many people considered that the aim ‘savoured of militarism’. By altering the wording, O’Gorman argued, the League could dispel any suggestion that it was ‘too militarist’, without fundamentally altering its programme. Groves rejected the proposal on the grounds that, ‘in view of the peculiar vulnerability of this country to aerial attack, “equality” was the minimum requirement for national safety’. Groves stated that if the proposed alteration was accepted, he would be unable to carry out propaganda on behalf of the League – that the amendment ‘would modify a basic principle for which the League had always stood’. Groves then threatened to resign if the amendment was passed and so the motion was subsequently withdrawn.⁴³

Following Groves’s tenure, however, the Air League’s aims became a feature of Executive Committee discussions once again.⁴⁴ Indeed, by late 1929, Dr Gerald Merton, the League’s then chairman, stressed that the aims should be altered so that ‘less emphasis should be placed upon the military spirit now expressed in the first item of the “Aims” and that civil and commercial aviation should be given predominance’. He then suggested the League should ‘change its focus . . . and thereby add new members of more pacific frame of mind’.⁴⁵ Merton felt that public confidence, as he argued at a later meeting, ‘could not alone be gained by talking of bombs and battleships’.⁴⁶ Merton’s proposals for shifting the

⁴³ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 8 March 1928, pp. 1–2. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁴ Groves reportedly resigned because he had to move abroad ‘on account of his wife’s illness’, although he later criticised the League publicly and cut ties altogether by resigning as a vice president in 1931. AL, AL Minute Book, Annual General Meeting, 26 June 1930, p. 1; AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 15 September 1931, p. 1.

⁴⁵ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 7 October 1929, p. 2.

⁴⁶ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 15 January 1930, p. 2.

League's focus to commercial and civil aviation were agreed upon by those on the Executive Committee, with Yeats-Brown noting that 'the military idea did not appeal to people' and Moore-Brabazon stating that the policy of the League had 'hitherto been too much inclined to tell people that they would be murdered in their beds. This no longer frightened them . . . peace is what appeals to the Englishman today.'⁴⁷

The Air League subsequently favoured the advertisement of civil, rather than military, aircraft in its publications, wrote more frequently on civil and commercial aviation, was part of Alan Cobham's flying tours, and put in motion plans for the creation of an International Civil Air Week.⁴⁸ The published aims of the League also reflected its shift in emphasis towards civil and commercial aviation. As outlined in *Air and Airways*, the League's revised aims were to 'ensure the fullest development of British civil and commercial aviation' and to 'secure the maintenance of adequate air forces and of reserves for Empire and Home Defence'.⁴⁹ On air disarmament, the League's Committee agreed in June 1930 that

It is not within the competence of the Air League to put forward, officially, disarmament schemes which are bound to be of a technical nature. It should, however, be the policy of the Air League to support the ideal of general disarmament . . . and to help towards a reasonable international agreement.⁵⁰

Considering that the League boasted, at various points, aircraft engineers, manufacturers, aviation pioneers, air power theorists, and figures with experience at the highest levels of the Air Ministry among its members, this reluctance to engage with questions of disarmament due to a lack of technical expertise appears odd and it was not long until divisions arose over the League's shift of policy.

⁴⁷ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 7 October 1929, p. 2.

⁴⁸ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 15 January 1930, p. 2.

⁴⁹ 'Air League of the British Empire', *Air and Airways*, May 1931, p. xix.

⁵⁰ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 18 June 1930, p. 2.

In a meeting in April 1931, Balfour stressed that ‘the policy of the Air League should be one of full blooded patriotism’. He felt that the League’s policy was not nearly ‘aggressive enough as regards the national air strength’.⁵¹ Balfour resigned shortly thereafter, stating that the League’s policy was ‘too pacific’, while Yeats-Brown, citing the “pacifist tendencies” of the League, also resigned.⁵² At the same meeting, the League dispensed of Thwaites as acting secretary general. Thwaites vacated the role, but not before informing the Committee that the ‘relegation of National Defence to the background’ was a ‘radical departure from the League’s principles laid down over twenty years ago’.⁵³ Finally, reflecting upon his resignation from the Air League, Groves likewise bemoaned the influence of the League’s ‘pacifist chairman’.⁵⁴

II. A ‘Purely Nationalist Outlook’? The Air League, the Navy League, and the League of Nations Union

While influential elements within the Air and Navy Leagues may have been willing to engage with issues of disarmament and arms limitation throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, there was a much greater reluctance to associate with liberal internationalist organisations such as the LNU. This is important to note for several reasons. First, the LNU, whatever the ultimate failure of the League of Nations as an instrument of collective security, promoted widespread engagement with the formulation of British foreign policy, the limitation of armaments, and international cooperation. As a major presence within the political culture of the interwar period, representing one of the largest voluntary associations, it was important to both the Air and Navy Leagues that they actively challenged the LNU. In promoting military strength, the Air and Navy Leagues often clashed with the LNU and

⁵¹ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 14 April 1931, p. 2.

⁵² AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 16 June 1931, p. 1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Groves, *Behind the Smoke Screen*, p. 277.

it was important to each League to counter the Union's attempted mobilisation of public and parliamentary support.

The activities of the Air and Navy Leagues was clearly something which likewise rankled the LNU. Indeed, both the Air and Navy Leagues came into conflict with the Union's most senior leadership (chiefly Robert Cecil, Gilbert Murray, Philip Noel-Baker, David Davies, Norman Angell, Will Arnold-Foster, and Maxwell Garnett, the League's secretary). Beyond the institutional level, the attitudes of the two Leagues towards the Union sheds much light on their broader views on issues such as disarmament, collective security, and international diplomacy.

Much of the reluctance to engage with the LNU resulted from misconceptions within both the Air and Navy Leagues over the Union's apparent support for unilateral disarmament – despite its explicit and repeated denial – and over the organisation's seemingly pacific nature. This opposition, and uncertainty about what the LNU stood for precisely, was something that Robert Cecil, as president of the Union, was acutely aware of. As he later lamented: 'our opponents of the Right had got into their minds that the League [of Nations Union] was just a piece of unpractical pacifism, while on the Left it was said by some . . . that we were war-mongers'. The Union was accused of being both 'too militarist' and, conversely, a part of 'new-fangled pacifism'.⁵⁵ In 1932, Norman Angell, the well-known writer and one of the founders of the UDC (as well as a member of the LNU's Executive Committee), similarly queried how Lord Lloyd could accuse the LNU of "sentimental anti-militarism" when the 'commonest jibe flung by the anti-League press at the Union (and the League) this last few months has been the accusation of "militarism"'.⁵⁶ Such ideological

⁵⁵ Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, *All the Way* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1949), p. 170.

⁵⁶ Ball State University, Archives and Special Collections (BSUASC), Muncie, Indiana, Sir Norman Angell Papers, Box 56, Who are the Sentimentalists? Questions for the President of the Navy League, 1932, p. 105.

markers were important, especially as debates between the Air League, the Navy League, and the LNU were played out in public.

By the late 1920s, the Navy League was, once again, an avowed opponent of disarmament and an ‘unrelenting detractor’ of liberal internationalist groups such as the LNU.⁵⁷ Some within the League merely considered the Union a ‘dangerous society’, while other figures spoke in more hostile terms, with Lady Lloyd referring to the ‘bacillus of what we may call the spirit of the League of Nations Union’ which had ‘infected’ the British people.⁵⁸ Publicly, Lord Lloyd described the LNU as ‘neither British nor in favour of freedom’, while the Navy League dismissed the Union as a ‘pacifist organization which masquerades under the title of the League of Nations’ and stated that any support for the LNU was both ‘unwise and unpatriotic’.⁵⁹ The League’s self-appointed role as guardians of British patriotism – often through the evocation of Nelsonian principles and the promotion of navalism – was commonly framed in opposition to groups such as the LNU. Although debates between the League and the LNU often predictably focused on disarmament and patriotism, this was not the sole topic of conflict.

Responding to claims that the LNU’s Grand Council had passed a resolution requesting public authorities to refrain from encouraging the attendance of schoolchildren at naval, military, and air displays, the Navy League criticised the resolution as being ‘unpatriotic and contrary to the best interests of the Empire’.⁶⁰ The LNU’s General Council had indeed resolved in late 1927 that ‘in view of the urgent necessity for moral disarmament

⁵⁷ McCarthy, *The British People*, p. 141.

⁵⁸ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 3 November 1927, p. 1; ‘Annual General Meeting’, *The Navy*, June 1932, p. 179.

⁵⁹ ‘All that Sort of Stuff’, *Headway*, January 1931, p. 2; ‘Points from Letters’, *The Times*, 13 May 1927, p. 12.

⁶⁰ ‘Children and the Empire’, *The Times*, 28 June 1928, p. 17. On the work of the LNU in schools and colleges more broadly at this time, see National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, A Report on Work Done by the League of Nations Union to Help in Making Known the League of Nations in the Schools and Colleges of Great Britain, 1927.

as a condition of the material reduction of arms' it would request the Union's Executive Committee to ask public authorities to refrain from allowing children to attend military displays, because 'the mind of a child, lacking an adult's mature knowledge of the horror of war, is likely to be carried away by its meretricious glamour'.⁶¹ Murray saw fit to issue a lengthy response to the Navy League, noting that the LNU itself had not passed such a resolution, but had instead referred the matter to its Education Committee. The latter had, in fact, only agreed to protest against the more militaristic aspects of the display (rather than the event as a whole).⁶² In reference to military displays, Murray wrote that he, like the Education Committee, only objected to the martial and militaristic nature of the bombing of a "native village" at air displays. He felt it was 'not a piece of fun, nor a thing over which children should be encouraged to crow with delight'.⁶³

The education – and potential militarisation of youth – was an enduring point of conflict between the LNU and the Navy League. Addressing those assembled at the Navy League's Grand Council Meeting at Caxton Hall in 1932, Lloyd stated that wherever the Navy League went 'they found they had to deal with the union's teachings, which were opposed to the ordinary doctrines of patriotism'. Referring to the League's SCC, Lloyd felt that it was the

only organisation which is not ashamed to teach boys to defend their country. For a long time past there has been a sentimental idea that there is something to be ashamed of in holding a rifle or a gun . . . You may call it militarism if you like. I call it the cultivation of that national spirit without which every country has failed and fallen.⁶⁴

⁶¹ BLPES, LNU 1/2, Minutes of a Meeting of the LNU General Council, 16–17 December 1927, p. 11. The Union's Executive Committee had likewise previously expressed opposition to 'representations of natives being blown to pieces for public entertainment'. BLPES LNU 2/8 Minutes of the Meetings of the Executive Committee of the LNU, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 30 June 1927, p. 3.

⁶² 'Children and the Empire', *The Times*, 6 July 1928, p. 12; BLPES, LNU 5/24, Minutes of the Meetings of the Education Committee, 1926–1930, Meeting of the Education Committee, 16 February 1928, p. 3.

⁶³ 'Children and the Empire', *The Times*, 6 July 1928, p. 12. Cf. 'Hendon: 1929', *Headway*, August 1929, pp. 146–147.

⁶⁴ 'Anti-Patriotic Propaganda', *The Daily Telegraph*, 4 May 1932, p. 15.

The address, described by the *Daily Telegraph* as a ‘vigorous protest against a “sentimental” aspect of anti-militarism’, also attracted the attention of Norman Angell.⁶⁵ Angell objected to Lloyd’s suggestion that the LNU ‘teaches indifference to national defence or security’.⁶⁶ As an alternative to the competitive building of armaments, Angell instead stressed that the Union relied upon international law and collective security and that it was ‘simple distortion to imply that it is the repudiation of national defence’. He concluded by stating that the ‘world has come near to destroying itself through being guided by a certain type of “national spirit”’. If it is to save itself, if the nation is to be saved, it must discover by disciplined thought where that spirit has gone wrong.’⁶⁷ The hostility between the LNU and Navy League regarding questions of national defence, militarism, and the more nebulous concept of ‘national spirit’, was even more pronounced surrounding matters of disarmament.

In a joint memorandum issued with the Air League to *The Times* in February 1928, the Navy League objected to a policy of unilateral disarmament as favoured by a number of alleged ‘extremists’ within the LNU. The memorandum stated that the Air and Navy Leagues disagreed with ‘those who advocate one-sided disarmament’ and that any further reduction of armaments by Britain that was not matched by other nations would ‘not only jeopardize the security of this Country and the Empire but will imperil world peace’. It concluded by warning that it would be a ‘real danger to the Empire if the influence of the extremists should become supreme in the League of Nations Union’.⁶⁸ Despite the tone of the piece, it had originally been written with a view to gaining LNU support for opposition to one-sided disarmament, although it was unsurprisingly unable to secure the Union’s

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁶⁶ BSUASC, Norman Angell Papers, *Who are the Sentimentalists?*, p. 105. For Angell’s views on the Navy League prior to the First World War, see Norman Angell, *The Great Illusion: A Study of the Relation of Military Power in Nations to their Economic and Social Advantage* (New York and London: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1913 ed), pp. 345–346.

⁶⁷ BSUASC, Norman Angell Papers, *Who are the Sentimentalists?*, pp. 105–106.

⁶⁸ ‘Disarmament’, *The Times*, 24 February 1928, p. 10.

backing. Indeed, Groves contacted Cecil directly writing that it had ‘occurred to me that it would help the cause of disarmament if the Navy League and the Air League of the British Empire were to lend their support to the League of Nations Union by publicly endorsing its aims’. This, Groves argued, would go some way to countering the ‘widespread impression that the League of Nations Union stands for one-sided disarmament’.⁶⁹

Cecil felt that he was unable to give Groves his backing personally as the three organisations were ‘necessarily pursuing objects which are different though not necessarily contradictory. The two Service Leagues desire to maintain the Navy and Air Force at full strength for the present. The Union is aiming at the establishment of Peace by International Co-Operation.’ While Cecil remarked that there was nothing ‘necessarily antagonistic between the two points of view’, a compromise was unlikely to be reached because the ‘two Leagues are essentially national in their outlook, the Union is primarily international’.⁷⁰ While the LNU may have operated within national and international contexts, the Air and Navy Leagues were often firmly nationalist in orientation and perspective – or at least perceived to be so by liberal internationalists.

Seemingly chagrined at the lack of cooperation on the part of the LNU over the memorandum, Groves issued a further appeal to *The Times* several months later, protesting against the ‘unauthorized propaganda of these misguided extremists’ and called for the LNU’s General Council to publicly repudiate such propaganda.⁷¹ A letter in the same newspaper from John Hills, the LNU’s acting chairman, agreed with Groves that the LNU

⁶⁹ BL, Cecil of Chelwood Papers (hereafter Cecil Papers), Correspondence and Papers, 1893–1953, Add MS 51165, Letter from P.R.C. Groves to Lord Robert Cecil, 21 December 1927, p. 1.

⁷⁰ BL, Cecil Papers, Add MS 51165, Letter from Cecil to Groves, 23 December 1927, p. 1. The LNU did also emphasise to the Air League that it would ‘most cordially welcome and would greatly value the endorsements of its aims by the Navy League and the Air League’, yet it likewise noted that ‘[s]ome of the objectives of the three organisations are in fact distinct and could hardly be expressed in a common document’. BLPES, LNU 2/8, Revised Draft of a Reply from the L.N.U. to the Air League, 30 January 1928, p. 1.

⁷¹ ‘Disarmament and the League’, *The Times*, 17 July 1928, p. 12.

did not stand for unilateral disarmament, but argued that, as the Union had already made this explicit, it could do little more to distance itself from such a policy.⁷² Groves later admitted that the assumption that the LNU advocated unilateral disarmament was mistaken (and even agreed to join the LNU's sub-committee on the internationalisation of civil aviation and the creation of an international air force).⁷³ However, he still felt that the 'hysterical clamour' of those within the Union, who were adherents of unilateral disarmament, meant many possible supporters shunned the LNU 'as the arch-protagonist of national and Imperial abasement and defeatism'.⁷⁴

During the interwar years, militarism was not entirely antithetical to those on the political left or liberal internationalist groups such as the LNU. An important ideological marker, then, is Ceadel's distinction between 'pacifism' and 'pacificism'. The former is the 'belief that all war is *always wrong* and should never be resorted to', whereas the latter is the 'assumption that war, though *sometimes necessary*, is always an irrational and inhumane way to solve disputes, and that its prevention should always be an overriding political priority'.⁷⁵ This distinction is significant when considering the work of the LNU. As McCarthy observes, the LNU – including leading figures such as Cecil and Murray – remained firmly 'pacificist' in nature to the extent that the Union even accommodated 'certain elements of the popular culture of militarism'.⁷⁶

⁷² 'League of Nations Union', *The Times*, 19 July 1928, p. 12.

⁷³ BLPES, LNU 2/11, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 17 March 1932, p. 1.

⁷⁴ Groves, *Behind the Smoke Screen*, pp. 8–9. Groves was still bemoaning the existence of those within the LNU that advocated unilateral disarmament as late as 1935. P.R.C. Groves, *Our Future in the Air* (London: George G. Harrap & Co Ltd, 1935), p. 116.

⁷⁵ First coined by AJP Taylor. See AJP Taylor, *The Trouble Makers: Dissent over Foreign Policy, 1792–1939* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1957), p. 51; Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain*, p. 3. Emphasis in original. P.M.H. Bell argues a clearer distinction between the two may be pacifism and 'peace-minded internationalists'. P.M.H. Bell, 'Peace Movements', in Robert Boyce and Joseph Maiolo (eds), *The Origins of World War Two: The Debate Continues* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 273.

⁷⁶ McCarthy, *The British People*, p. 137. Donald Birn makes similar arguments in his account of the LNU, noting that, far from promoting unilateral disarmament, the League was often in favour of the use of force and eventually rearmament. Birn, *The League of Nations Union*, Chapter X. For further tensions within liberal internationalist thought, such as strong associations with conservatism, the politics of hierarchy, and empire

Despite assurances that it did not stand for unilateral disarmament, the Navy League was again accusing the LNU of precisely that by the early 1930s. The Navy League was confident that its activities were ‘instrumental’ in countering the alleged ‘long-continued endeavours’ of the LNU to promote unilateral disarmament. It hoped that, as a result of its work, the British public was beginning to see through the ‘fog of pacifist propaganda’.⁷⁷ The accusation that the LNU stood for unilateral disarmament was a long-standing feature of Navy League work. Indeed, even by 1936, Lily Yorke-Triscott, the secretary of the League’s Kensington Branch, saw fit to send a letter asking Cecil ‘What protest has the League of Nations Union uttered’ against unilateral disarmament ‘which had reduced the Defence Forces of the Crown to their present condition?’⁷⁸

Such accusations undoubtedly reflected an increasing sense of alarm within the Navy League over the effectiveness of LNU propaganda. Indeed, referring to LNU propaganda, and a meeting of the leaders of the three main political parties to consider the question of disarmament, Gretton considered the situation ‘absolutely terrifying’. In response, a sub-committee was formed to consider questions of Navy League propaganda.⁷⁹ With Lloyd as president, heralded as an ‘apostle of nationalism’ by some within the organisation, the Navy League dismissed those at the Albert Hall meeting as ‘defeatists’ and charged the LNU with trying to ‘persuade themselves and everybody else that the great thing that the Empire owed to mankind was to disarm as quickly as possible, whatever other nations might be doing’.⁸⁰

see Jeanne Morefield, *Covenants without Swords: Idealist Liberalism and the Spirit of Empire* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁷⁷ ‘To the Editor of *The Times*’, *The Times*, 27 January 1930, p. 8; for Murray’s response, see ‘Disarmament’, *The Times*, 29 January 1930, p. 10.

⁷⁸ BL, Cecil Papers, Add MS 51172, Letter from Lily Yorke-Triscott to Lord Cecil, 19 February 1936, p. 1. Cecil dismissed Yorke-Triscott’s assertions as ‘baseless’, arguing that the LNU had ‘consistently and repeatedly advocated the pursuance of a policy designed to secure the general reduction and limitation of armaments by all members of the League’ rather than unilateral disarmament. BL, Cecil Papers, Add MS 51172, Letter from Cecil to Yorke-Triscott, 6 March 1936, p. 1.

⁷⁹ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 4 June 1931, p. 4.

⁸⁰ ‘Disarmament and the Albert Hall Meeting’, *The Navy*, September 1931, p. 265; ‘Annual General Meeting’, *The Navy*, June 1932, p. 177; ‘Grand Council Meeting’, *The Navy*, June 1931, p. 172.

In response to such pronouncements, *Headway* stressed that: ‘Certain sections of opinion in the country might possibly wish the Union did advocate that [unilateral disarmament]. But the hard fact is that it never does and never has.’⁸¹ To avoid any further confusion, subsequent issues of the journal then printed the following disclaimer: ‘Disarmament, in any reference to the subject in HEADWAY, must be understood to mean the reduction and limitation of national armaments by international agreement’.⁸² Murray remonstrated with the Navy League more directly, lambasting the ‘blindness’ of a ‘purely nationalist outlook’ and accused the League of not confining its ‘propaganda within the limits of common sense’.⁸³ Noel-Baker likewise spoke of the ‘Navy League mind’ and the ‘old Navy League point of view’ in parliament.⁸⁴ He described such a mindset in the following terms: ‘they never did believe in disarmament; they do not believe in it now’.⁸⁵

Hostility towards the LNU reflected a growing concern within the Navy League over Britain’s perceived naval decline and indicated an unwillingness to engage with liberal internationalist ideas about national defence. As Lloyd articulated, there was clearly a sense within the Navy League that it was ‘up against the “active and hostile propaganda of the League of Nations Union”’.⁸⁶ However, the LNU’s response to Navy League pronouncements suggests that it was likewise concerned about the ‘active’ and ‘hostile’ propaganda of the League.⁸⁷

⁸¹ ‘What the Navy League Says’, *Headway*, June 1931, p. 103.

⁸² Disclaimer, *Headway*, July 1931, p. 123.

⁸³ ‘Disarmament’, *The Times*, 30 January 1932, p. 6.

⁸⁴ Commons Sitting, Mr. Bridgeman’s Statement, *HC Deb 14 March 1929 vol 226 cc1283-389*.

⁸⁵ Commons Sitting, Naval Treaty, *HC Deb 02 June 1930 vol 239 cc1791-923*. On Noel-Baker and disarmament, see P.J. Noel Baker, *Disarmament* (London: League of Nations Union, 1934).

⁸⁶ ‘The Navy League’, *The Scotsman*, 4 May 1932, p. 8.

⁸⁷ Indeed, the LNU also attempted to combat Navy League meetings on a local scale. For example, it reminded the Mayor of Goole that, as he was the president of the local LNU branch, he should not be presiding over Navy League meetings. The Union also ordered Boy Scouts within the region not to attend Navy League events. NLSCC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 3 May 1934, p. 3.

Much like the Navy League, there was also opposition to the LNU from within the Air League, despite concerns about its militaristic public image. Hostility towards the Union was particularly evident in the opposition towards Murray's suggestion in 1930 that the League could prepare a proposal for international air disarmament for discussion with the LNU. Balfour argued that the Air League should not be 'allying itself with a definite body of pacifism and extreme radicalism', Sir Charles Delme-Radcliffe 'distrusted and disliked' the Union, while Sempill felt any association would 'undoubtedly alienate the sympathies of many supporters'. Merton informed the Committee that, while there may have been some 'out-and-out pacifists' within the LNU, Murray had a more balanced view in relation to disarmament. Yet, owing to the outlined opposition, the matter was dropped.⁸⁸

Perhaps the greatest conflict between the Air League and the LNU, as the chapter will later examine, arose over calls for the internationalisation of aviation and proposals for the formation of an international air police force.⁸⁹ For many liberal internationalists, the modernity, the transformative qualities, and the 'inherently international nature of aviation' provided an opportunity to bring the world closer together – although only if 'freed from the shackles of the nation-state'.⁹⁰ There was widespread faith by figures on the left that aviation could be both 'civil and liberating' and long-standing hope that aviation could serve as an important technology of communication and commerce, capable of abolishing frontiers and ensuring peace.⁹¹ However, although the 'aerial internationalism' preached by figures on the left – characterised by 'an enthusiasm for the possibilities of modern science and scientific invention' – was supported by a range of influential figures, it was also met with ambivalence

⁸⁸ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 5 May 1930, pp. 1–2.

⁸⁹ For an example of debates between key figures of each League surrounding an international air police force and the internationalisation of civil aviation, see Chamier's article, 'The Internationalisation of Civil Aviation: The Case Against', *The New Statesman and Nation*, 21 October 1933, pp. 473–474 and Arnold Foster's response, 'A Reply', *The New Statesman and Nation*, 21 October 1933, pp. 474–475.

⁹⁰ Waqar Zaidi, 'Liberal Internationalist Approaches to Science and Technology in Interwar Britain and the United States', in Laqua (ed.), *Internationalism Reconfigured*, p. 30.

⁹¹ Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*, pp. 64–65.

and even hostility by some.⁹² For instance, the Air League was a vehement critic of both schemes for the internationalisation of aviation and an international air police force, clashing most frequently with eminent LNU figures such as Noel-Baker and Davies.

A further significant point of potential conflict in the interwar years can be found in the Peace Ballot. Despite covering the limitation of armaments, the abolition of aircraft by international agreement, and the private manufacture of arms, all subjects which concerned the Air League, the League provided curiously little in the way of opposition to the Ballot. Indeed, it did not offer any public comment, other than to note in *Air Review* that, in relation to the fact that over a million people voted against the abolition of naval and military aircraft, ‘It appears that, in spite of the blood-curdling prophecies regarding air warfare, many people still remember that war is older than aviation, and have not been deluded into the belief that the abolition of aircraft would bring peace on earth’.⁹³

III. The Air League, the Navy League, and ‘Insidious Pacifist Propaganda’

Alongside opposition to LNU propaganda, both the Air and Navy Leagues were vocal critics of other events that were seen as an endorsement of pacifism. For example, writing of the Oxford Union Debate – in which the Oxford Union carried the motion that ‘this House will in no circumstances fight for its King and country’ by 275 to 153 votes – *The Navy* described those at the debate as ‘young disloyalists yearning for notoriety’. The journal wrote that ‘[m]entally blinded by insidious pacifist propaganda these young men have failed to realise that no one is a worse enemy of peace than he who poses as a pacifist by profession’. The article argued that, rather than achieving peace through disarmament and pacifism, the ‘only true way to avoid war is to have the will to peace and the strong arm ready and able to support

⁹² Zaidi, ‘Liberal Internationalist Approaches’, p. 38.

⁹³ “‘The Peace Ballot’”, *Air Review*, September 1935, p. 87.

that will'. The piece concluded by again dismissing the resolution as 'disloyal' and 'irresponsible', asking readers to instead remember the Oxford men who 'rush[ed] to the defence of their King and Country with the same glorious spirit of loyalty and devotion that was shown by those gallant other of their kind in the year 1914'.⁹⁴ While the Navy League's description may have mirrored the reports of contemporary newspapers on the political right, it is significant to note that, while the League engaged with liberal internationalist groups such as the LNU, it also attempted to counter more radical pacifist sentiments in the 1930s.

As well as conflict with the LNU, both the Air and Navy Leagues met with opposition from a number of pacifist, anti-war, or left-leaning organisations in the interwar years. Indeed, as will be explored, Empire Air Day was criticised by a number of groups, including the PPU, the UDC, and the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). Noel-Baker also criticised Empire Air Day, yet the LNU itself was careful to distance itself from public expressions of direct anti-militarism. Other notable Air League activities, such as the publication of its book, *Facts about Flying and the Civil Uses of Aviation*, and the ADCC, were opposed by the Labour-controlled London County Council (LCC).

Meanwhile, the Navy League's opposition to the LNU also brought it into conflict with other organisations. For example, the Executive Committee of the NFWI resolved in 1934 that 'in view of the fact that some of the speakers sent out by the Navy League have violated the principles of the Women's Institute by attacking the League of Nations and pacifism' it would no longer invite Navy League lecturers to meetings.⁹⁵ Lloyd met with Lady Denman, the Institute's president, to discuss the matter, but, clearly angered by the decision, accused the NFWI of being a pacifist body.⁹⁶ In response, Denman wrote that,

⁹⁴ 'Pacifism at Oxford', *The Navy*, March 1933, p. 77.

⁹⁵ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 1 February 1934, p. 3.

⁹⁶ Gervas Huxley, *Lady Denman, C.B.E. 1884-1954* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), p. 84.

while NFWI members could ‘organize a meeting to advocate militarism or pacifism’ as individuals or as members of other bodies, most members believed that ‘to resist by force is morally wrong’ and that to use a meeting to attack pacifism was an infringement on the NFWI’s policy of avoiding any party political or sectarian ground.⁹⁷

Others on the left, such as the Independent Labour Party (ILP), also opposed both the Air and Navy League – particularly for their stance on armaments.⁹⁸ Indeed, support for organisations such as the Air and Navy Leagues could prove contentious for politicians. For instance, the Derby Council for the Prevention of War recorded its ‘strong protest’ against J.H. Thomas, Labour MP and former Secretary of State for Colonies, for supporting the Air League. The Council called for ‘all citizens to refrain from supporting any organisation whose aims and objects include the increase of armaments’.⁹⁹ Alongside the Council’s opposition, the Midland Divisional Council of the ILP considered an emergency resolution in 1928 calling for the expulsion of members of ‘bellicose organisations’ from the Labour Party. While there was opposition to the resolution, with one member dismissing it as ‘awful twaddle’, others felt that membership of either the Air or Navy League was ‘incompatible with the ideals and principles of the Labour movement’. As one member stated, if the ILP ‘stood for anything it was peace’. The same member asked what the use would be of any member of such organisations and the ILP ‘going out to preach anti-militarism’.¹⁰⁰

The *Daily Herald* was similarly wary of such organisations, dubbing the Navy League a ‘band of fanatics’ over its Singapore Naval Base policy and went as far as to label

⁹⁷ Huxley, *Lady Denman*, p. 85. This position was much to the satisfaction of the *Daily Herald*, which declared that: ‘Although Lord Lloyd is sometimes credited with having ambitions to be England’s future Dictator, he could not dictate to Lady Denman’. ‘No Nonsense from Lord Lloyd!’, *Daily Herald*, 13 April 1934, p. 14.

⁹⁸ ‘I.L.P. Resolution’, *Motherwell Times*, 24 January 1930, p. 6.

⁹⁹ ‘Prevention of War’, *The Derby Daily Telegraph*, 22 February 1928, p. 7.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Expulsion Resolution at Labour Conference’, *The Derby Daily Telegraph*, 6 February 1928, p. 5.

the League ‘warmongers’ in the early 1930s.¹⁰¹ The same newspaper was particularly critical of the Navy League over its opposition to disarmament in the early 1930s, with one article stating that it was the ‘job of responsible Ministers to keep the experts under control’. Citing Lord Salisbury, the former Prime Minister, the article continued: ‘If you give them their way . . . you will soon be garrisoning the moon as protection against an invasion by Mars.’¹⁰² Such criticism of the League is noteworthy, especially given that the *Daily Herald* was one of the most popular newspapers in the interwar years and Labour’s ‘unofficial newspaper’.¹⁰³

Individuals associated with both Leagues were also either subject to accusations of militarism, or felt the need to emphasise that their writings or views were not militaristic.¹⁰⁴ Harold Laski, the socialist intellectual, dubbed Lord Lloyd a ‘Supreme Autocrat’ and wrote that ‘[l]ife for him is a battle which the big artillery is decisive . . . International peace, as Geneva views it, he looks upon as sentimental vapouring.’¹⁰⁵ Opposition towards the Air and Navy Leagues, and key figures within each organisation, was chiefly directed towards the more militaristic elements of their rhetoric and, indeed, towards the ‘purely nationalist outlook’ which it was claimed often characterised both organisations.

IV. ‘Militarist Saboteurs’, the Geneva Disarmament Conference, and the Second London Naval Treaty

The Geneva Disarmament Conference opened on 2 February 1932 with representation from fifty-nine states, including all the major powers. The Conference, long in the making after a

¹⁰¹ ‘Navy League Again!’, *Daily Herald*, 13 March 1924, p. 4; ‘Warmongers Start Big Drive for More Arms’, *Daily Herald*, 21 October 1933, p. 1.

¹⁰² ‘The Navy League’, *Daily Herald*, 6 February 1930, p. 3.

¹⁰³ Laura Beers, *Your Britain: Media and the Making of the Labour Party* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 18; p. 20; Imlay, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, p. 187.

¹⁰⁴ In the preface to Groves’s *Behind the Smoke Screen* (published after his tenure at the Air League) Sir Ernest Swinton emphasised that Groves was not a “‘militarist” or apostle or force’ and that he neither ‘likes nor advocates war’. Groves, *Behind the Smoke Screen*, p. vii.

¹⁰⁵ ‘Our Supreme Autocrat’, *Daily Herald*, 17 June 1933, p. 10.

Preparatory Commission had been established in 1925, met with millions of petitions from across the world expressing hopes for peace.¹⁰⁶ Yet, despite such enthusiasm, the Air and Navy Leagues objected to disarmament on practical, strategic, and even moral grounds.

The Air League's policy regarding the Geneva Disarmament Conference was initially ambivalent. Concerns about the Air League's perceived pacifism have been noted and the League's response to the Conference was certainly not one resembling 'full blooded patriotism' as some members had hoped. Indeed, the fact that Merton even accepted an invitation to serve on a LNU sub-committee on the internationalisation of civil aviation and the creation of an international air force (while he was Air League vice chairman) suggests that certain members were not prepared to fully lobby against aerial disarmament.¹⁰⁷

The issue of Air League policy in relation to the forthcoming Geneva Disarmament Conference was initially raised by Bott in July 1931. While Bott stressed that a definite policy should be drafted so that the League might be properly prepared, others on the Committee stated that it was 'difficult to formulate policies on specific questions such as "parity" until it was known what other nations were prepared to do'.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, Bott persevered in his conviction that it was 'advisable to set up machinery to ascertain the views of experts in the many spheres of aviation' so that the League could 'formulate a definite policy and be ready to engage in opportune propaganda when the chance arose'.¹⁰⁹

While a Sub-Committee was formed to consider Bott's proposals, the Executive Committee instead agreed – somewhat remarkably – with Kenworthy, a member of the LNU's Executive Committee (although he frequently missed meetings) while he was an Air

¹⁰⁶ Zara Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History, 1919–1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 755.

¹⁰⁷ BLPES, LNU 2/11, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 17 March 1932, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 14 July 1931, p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 15 September 1931, p. 2.

League member, who suggested that the League ‘would be well-advised to abandon all further action [regarding the Disarmament Conference] as the subject was extremely complicated and one which was beyond the scope and capabilities of the League to deal with’.¹¹⁰ Similar sentiments were echoed by Guest in his capacity as chairman of the League. Addressing the Committee, Guest asserted that, while ‘there was a section of the public that maintained that the Air League should follow the Navy League’s principle by pressing for increased armaments’, he thought that there was ‘no great need . . . to pursue that principle, and suggested that the greater part of the League’s energies should be directed towards the development of civil and commercial aviation’.¹¹¹

Such proposals did not, however, involve the abandonment of long-standing Air League principles in toto. At the Annual General Meeting in 1932, Sutherland warned that it would be necessary for the League to formulate a new policy with regard to ‘Military Aviation if the Disarmament Conference lasted many more months’. Yet, Thwaites again charged the League with having relegated national defence to the background and that the abandonment of its military policy had resulted in its restricted activities.¹¹² The League’s state of inertia abruptly came to an end with the issuing of a manifesto, written in conjunction with the RAC and RAeS, to *The Times* in late 1932.

Patrick Kyba notes that, at the time of the Geneva Disarmament Conference, ‘organised anti-disarmament pressure group activity . . . was slight’.¹¹³ The Air and Navy Leagues were, in fact, among the few organisations to protest. The manifesto in *The Times*,

¹¹⁰ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 8 December 1931, p. 2.

¹¹¹ Guest did stress that ‘objects of propaganda would change’ and that the League must ‘aim at flexibility’ when framing its policy; yet, although this was not necessarily pacifist as the resigning members claimed, it was clearly at odds with previous Air League policy. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 13 April 1932, p. 2.

¹¹² AL, AL Minute Book, Annual General Meeting, 13 July 1932, p. 3.

¹¹³ Patrick Kyba, *Covenants Without the Sword: Public Opinion and British Defence Policy, 1931–1935* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983), p. 33.

also issued to every MP, was published in response to a parliamentary debate in November 1932 in which Guest had pressed the Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald on ‘whether it is clear that nothing in the line of the abolition of the Air Force can possibly take place without the permission of the House’. MacDonald’s response that the ‘Government must be free to negotiate the abolition or the extension of anything’, but that any negotiations would be conducted with the understanding that ‘final consent remains with this House’, was clearly not enough to assuage the Air League.¹¹⁴ In the letter, the League claimed that MacDonald had granted ‘plenary powers’ to the country’s representatives at Geneva. It was urged that ‘only the possession of adequate air forces can give us a reasonable measure of security at home and overseas and enable us to seek world peace and ensure it’.¹¹⁵

While the influence of the manifesto is difficult to measure, Noel-Baker bemoaned the League’s opposition to the Conference at length in *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*.¹¹⁶ Likewise, in his statement to the Royal Commission on the Private Manufacture of and Trading in Arms, Noel-Baker noted that the activities of the “‘Patriotic’ Societies’, who were concerned with air power (the Air League being at the forefront of such organisations), were ‘particularly intense’ during the Disarmament Conference.¹¹⁷ He asserted that the campaign of those with air interests – ‘patriotic’ societies, officials, writers in the aviation press etc – ‘was a principal factor in defeating the success of proposals for

¹¹⁴ Commons Sitting, Disarmament, *HC Deb 02 November 1932 vol 269 cc1780-3*.

¹¹⁵ ‘Disarmament in the Air’, *The Times*, 9 November 1932, p. 9. See also, ‘Britain and Disarmament’, *Air and Airways*, December 1932, pp. 293–294. On the RAF at Geneva, see Phillip S. Meilinger, ‘Clipping the Bomber’s Wings: The Geneva Disarmament Conference and the Royal Air Force, 1932–1934’, *War in History*, vol. 6, no. 3 (1999), pp. 306–330.

¹¹⁶ Noel-Baker, *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*, pp. 333–341. A second volume of *The Private Manufacture of Armaments* was commissioned by Victor Gollancz but, despite Noel-Baker preparing a manuscript (after delays due to illness and parliamentary work, and with much prompting from Gollancz), it appears never to have been published. CHUR, The Papers of Baron Noel-Baker (hereafter Noel-Baker papers), NBKR 7/14/1, Correspondence Regarding ‘Manufacture of Arms’, Letter from the US Treasury Department to Noel-Baker, 3 August 1940, p. 1; Letter from Victor Gollancz to Noel-Baker, 30 June 1937, p. 1. For an outline of the second volume, see NBKR 7/14/2, Volume II.

¹¹⁷ Royal Commission on the Private Manufacture of and Trading in Arms, *Minutes of Evidence* (London: HMSO, 1935–6), p. 263.

Air Disarmament in the Geneva Conference'.¹¹⁸ However, Kyba notes that anti-disarmament opinion during the first year of the Disarmament Conference was a 'weak, fragmented phenomenon', and it seems unlikely that Air League propaganda had any direct influence on the Conference.¹¹⁹

Although the League was hesitant to intervene in discussions surrounding the Conference initially, it was far more vocal in its opposition to disarmament following the appointment of Chamier as secretary general. Indeed, Chamier, who wrote that the Air League was inspired neither by 'jingoistic or pacifist ideals', argued that the reason disarmament conferences tended to fail was because they attempted too much and that '[e]xtreme measures spell extreme risks, and no sensible nation dares to take extreme risks at the present day'. He continued, stating that the League supported the limitation of armaments, and that this was 'desirable in the interests of peace and prosperity', but that it could not be at the expense of the security of the nation or empire, urging 'we should be inferior to no other power in the air'.¹²⁰

Navy League

In his final address as Navy League president before being replaced by Lord Lloyd, Linlithgow warned that 'any extremes on the part of the League, any jingoism or any sign by which it might lead to the charge of being cranky, would deprive the League of its useful services'.¹²¹ Despite describing the LNU in similar terms, some within the League's

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

¹¹⁹ Kyba, *Covenants Without the Sword*, p. 34.

¹²⁰ 'Disarmament', *Air and Airways*, June 1933, p. [110]; 'Armament Limitation', *Air and Airways*, July 1933, p. xxx. Such a shift was praised by figures such as Thwaites, who expressed his 'gratification of the Air League's policy', although his contention that the League had been pursuing a pacifist programme was refuted by Guest. Guest felt that the League had never 'been pacifist in its policy. There had been a time when there had been no threat to British aviation' and so the only policy the League could adopt was to mark time. AL, AL Minute Book, Annual General Meeting, 5 July 1933, p. 3.

¹²¹ 'The Navy League Policy', *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 May 1930, p. 8.

Executive Committee also feared being labelled as ‘unreasonable extremists’ surrounding its disarmament policy.¹²² Fears of sensationalism, scaremongering, and jingoism were held by many within the League at various points throughout its existence; yet, despite such warnings, the League’s pronouncements surrounding the Geneva Disarmament Conference were at times suffused with all three. Indeed, both the Navy League and the Air League were among those dubbed as ‘militarist saboteurs’ by Noel-Baker who, in considering their relationship with private manufacturers of armaments in relation to disarmament, reflected that the ‘sinister support for the military-industrial complex had some importance, since it created the illusion of public support for the militarist Ministers in the Government’.¹²³

Much Navy League propaganda surrounding Geneva was, of course, influenced by the LNU’s work. Addressing a Navy League meeting three weeks after the Conference began, Lord Lloyd told those gathered to do what they could to recruit members for the League and that such efforts were necessary in view of the LNU’s ‘persistent propaganda’.¹²⁴ The Geneva Disarmament Conference was also a feature of the well-publicised Navy League New Year messages. For example, the League’s New Year message in 1933 spoke of how, at Washington in 1922 and London in 1930, Britain was ‘fettered and bound by treaties which denied us the right exercised since the days of the Saxon Kings to maintain the sea power that our special national conditions demand’.¹²⁵ Navy League rhetoric surrounding disarmament, and in particular the Geneva Conference, was not limited to merely denouncing pacts and treaties, however, but also emphasised the long-standing importance of the sea to Britain’s national identity.

¹²² MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 18 March 1930, p. 1.

¹²³ Noel-Baker, *First World Disarmament Conference*, pp. 60–61.

¹²⁴ Noel-Baker, *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*, p. 302.

¹²⁵ ‘New Year Message’, *The Navy*, January 1933, p. 1.

The Disarmament Conference was high on the agenda at the League's Grand Council Meetings from 1931 to 1934. For instance, at the Grand Council Meeting in 1931, the Navy League stalwart Leo Amery called for clear thinking as to what constituted the conditions and foundations of peace. He bemoaned the 'incredible amount' of 'loose thinking', as well as 'loose' and 'sloppy talking', about peace and disarmament. Amery was particularly scathing about the suggestion that an absence of arms would lead to peace, dismissing such a view as 'dangerous folly and a menace'. It was not armaments that caused war, Amery argued, but conflict in ideas and ideals between nations. Drawing on Britain's status as an island nation, Amery concluded by urging that the strongest guarantee of peace was the maintenance of a navy strong enough to act as a deterrent and strong enough to counter any aggressor nation.¹²⁶ Lloyd then moved a resolution calling upon the government to build up the tonnage allowed by the London Naval Treaty to the fullest extent. This was followed by a further resolution, proposed by Sir Sydney Freemantle, calling for no further reductions in naval strength at Geneva. In an impassioned plea, Freemantle declared: 'We have made concession after concession, gesture after gesture, none of them have been reciprocated'. As a result, 'We have seriously imperilled our security; we have lost prestige; we have lost influence and power'.¹²⁷ For the Navy League, disarmament was not something that would only imperil trade, food supplies, commerce, and the empire; it would also constitute a blow to national might, national identity, and the prestige which had been accorded by its long-standing naval supremacy.¹²⁸ When speaking on Navy League policy surrounding Geneva, those gathered at Grand Council Meetings were careful to stress that it did not make them 'a

¹²⁶ 'Grand Council Meeting', *The Navy*, June 1931, p. 175.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

¹²⁸ See the debate between Lloyd and Cecil, broadcast on the BBC and republished in the Corporation's magazine, *The Listener*. 'Disarmament: Two Points of View', *The Listener*, 2 November 1932, pp. 623–625; p. 636. See also debates between representatives of the Navy League and the LNU on a local level. MSCC, NL Pamphlets, *Why a Strong British Navy is Essential*, 1935, pp. 3–11.

society in aid of militarism' and that the League's policy was not one of 'swank and swagger', but of self-preservation.¹²⁹

Navy League activities surrounding the second London Naval Conference of 1935 to 1936 were similar to its previous campaigns surrounding disarmament. Convened on 9 December 1935, attendees included Britain, the US, France, Japan, and Italy. Britain proposed that nations should disclose future naval building programmes, although Japan refused. When no agreement was reached over Japanese demands for a common upper limit (parity), Japan withdrew from the Conference in January 1936.¹³⁰ Further discussions centred around qualitative limitations – principally gun calibres and tonnage of certain vessels – rather than limitations on the overall size of fleets and was eventually signed by Britain, the US, and France on 25 March 1936.¹³¹ At its Grand Council Meeting in 1935, the League had moved a resolution which urged the government to enter no further agreement which would limit its ability to build its navy to the fullest extent upon termination of the Washington and London Naval Treaties (due for reconsideration at the end of 1935).¹³²

The Navy League was likewise opposed to the 1935 Anglo-German Naval Agreement, which fixed a ratio allowing the total tonnage of the German navy to be 35% of the total tonnage of the Royal Navy.¹³³ The German disclosures of its naval programme was met with alarm by some within the League, yet Lloyd tempered calls from members of the Executive Committee for immediate statements supporting an acceleration of Britain's naval

¹²⁹ 'Grand Council Meeting', *The Navy*, June 1933, p. 179. It was not just diehards such as Lloyd and Amery who spoke on disarmament within or on behalf of the Navy League. For example, at the Grand Council Meeting in 1934, it was Admiral Sir Roger Keyes who moved the resolution 'strongly deprecating further international entanglements, on the lines of the London Naval Treaty, which might prevent this country maintaining the number and type of vessels which were essential for the adequate protection of its trade routes'. 'Grand Council Meeting', *The Navy*, June 1934, p. 173.

¹³⁰ Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*, p. 328.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 329. Italy declined to sign the Treaty.

¹³² 'Grand Council Meeting', *The Navy*, June 1935, p. 180.

¹³³ Joseph A. Maiolo, *The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany, 1933–39: A Study in Appeasement and the Origins of the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 35–36.

building.¹³⁴ Lloyd did, however, open a debate within the House of Lords in which he expressed his uneasiness about the nature of the Agreement. He questioned the decision to accept the Agreement, an infringement of the terms laid out in the Treaty of Versailles, without consulting France or Italy and that such action ‘was bound to be painful to our old Allies’. He concluded by stressing that ‘Naval security was far more important than naval limitation, and this agreement was enfeebling throughout and strengthening of all the forces which were bad to this country and the world’.¹³⁵ Yet, if Lloyd was the principal vehicle for the dissemination of Navy League propaganda surrounding the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, the second London Naval Treaty provided an opportunity for more widespread activities.

In late 1935, the League was starting to acquire funds to launch a national propaganda campaign.¹³⁶ Lloyd deemed the naval situation significant enough to consider accepting donations from armament firms, something which the League was publicly opposed to until this point, alongside funds promised by Lady Houston.¹³⁷ However, both Lloyd and Michael Beaumont emphasised that the League’s propaganda campaign should ‘not embarrass our representatives at the Conference, nor draw the Navy League into unwise controversy’.¹³⁸ This did not stop the League being critical of the purposes of the Conference. For instance, in its New Year message in 1936, it wrote that it ‘seems certain that the Conference will end without any real advance towards the objective of disarmament’. It bemoaned that through ‘years of neglect, muddled idealism, and false economy, we have hazarded by default the

¹³⁴ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 2 May 1935, p. 3.

¹³⁵ ‘British Naval Strength’, *The Times*, 27 June 1935, p. 8.

¹³⁶ See the League’s increased advertising in *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*. ‘Navy League’, *The Times*, 12 December 1935, p. 21; ‘Join the Navy League Now’, *Daily Mail*, 14 January 1936, p. 6. Such adverts were also published in local newspapers. For instance, see ‘Why YOU Should Join the Navy League NOW’, *The Liverpool Echo*, 12 December 1935, p. 7.

¹³⁷ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 10 October 1935, p. 3. On the Navy League and armament firms, see Chapter 3.

¹³⁸ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 4 December 1935, p. 4.

glory and honour of our race'. For the Navy League, the lessons were clear; Britain 'must be free to build the ships we need'.¹³⁹ *The Navy* published a series of articles on the Conference, largely critical and dismissive in tone, and the League carried out an increased lecturing programme in local and regional settings, yet it did not carry out the same national propaganda as it had done surrounding previous naval treaties.¹⁴⁰

There was concern from within the Navy League that the government might commit to further naval limitations at the Conference, however Admiral Thursfield, Navy League member and naval correspondent for *The Times*, assured the League's Executive Committee that the Admiralty were 'alive to the danger and that no such situation was likely to arise'. Lloyd also stressed that, as the government was due to issue a White Paper on defence, the League might be best advised to limit its propaganda surrounding the Conference until this had been published.¹⁴¹ The government Defence White Paper in 1936, which emphasised the 'overwhelming importance of the Navy' for preserving sea communications to ensure the supply of food and raw materials as well as the passage of troops and supplies, clearly allayed the League's concerns.¹⁴² Indeed, Lloyd suggested to the League's Executive Committee that, owing to the White Paper, it would be best 'for a month or two to reduce propaganda work to a minimum'.¹⁴³ After this time, he argued the League would be in a better position to see whether the government intended to carry out its proposals. Lloyd also suggested that government policy and the recent White Paper was 'largely the result of the propagandist work of the Navy League up and down the country in the face of pacifists and

¹³⁹ 'Navy League New Year Message', *The Navy*, January 1936, p. 1.

¹⁴⁰ 'The London Naval Conference', *The Navy*, January 1936, pp. 3–4; 21; 'The London Naval Conference', *The Navy*, February 1936, pp. 36–37; 'The Naval Conference', *The Navy*, March 1936, pp. 66–67. Its Finance and Administration Sub-Committee noted that there had been a 'considerable increase in expenditure on propaganda and lecturing' during this period. MSSC, FGP Minute Book, Meeting of the Sub-Committee, 30 September 1936, p. 1.

¹⁴¹ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 5 February 1936, p. 7.

¹⁴² Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*, p. 337.

¹⁴³ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 26 March 1936, p. 2.

those who represented a dangerous ideology'.¹⁴⁴ While this may have overstated the influence of the League's propaganda, it again highlighted its continued opposition to those who advocated disarmament and pacifism. The League welcomed the government's intention to increase its armed forces at a public meeting after its Grand Council Meeting that year, yet, it also expressed concern about the increased propaganda in favour of air power, fearing this would be at the expense of the navy.¹⁴⁵ As Chapter 3 will discuss, following the second London Naval Treaty the League continued to press for a strong navy, although its chief concerns were the SCC, the Merchant Navy, and the influence of air power propagandists. In many respects, the Conference itself 'marked the end of the naval arms control experiment initiated in 1921. The naval arms race had already begun.'¹⁴⁶

V. 'When Nations go to War the Policeman is Impotent': An International Air Police Force and the Internationalisation of Civil Aviation

The German withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference in October 1933 – and the subsequent Japanese withdrawal from the Washington and London Naval Treaties – were ominous developments for proponents of disarmament. Accordingly, proposals for the internationalisation of civil aviation and the creation of an international air police force – seen by many historians as a sincere attempt to achieve collective security or disarmament – received widespread enthusiasm across the political spectrum.

As has been noted, there existed an enthusiasm among liberal internationalists for the potentially transformative aspects of aviation in relation to commerce, communications, and the maintenance of peace. The extent to which liberal internationalists engaged with

¹⁴⁴ 'Needs of the Navy', *The Times*, 14 May 1936, p. 11.

¹⁴⁵ 'The Navy League at Caxton Hall', *The Navy*, June 1936, p. 2; 'Grand Council Meeting', *The Navy*, June 1936, p. 6.

¹⁴⁶ Zara Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark: European International History 1933–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 152.

technology, technocracy, modernity, and even militarism in the interwar years (in the form of calls for an international air police force and the internationalisation of civil aviation) has been the subject of several studies in recent years.¹⁴⁷ Calls for the formation of an international air police force in the British case are often explained through the ‘long-standing liberal belief that international law could prevent war’ and, chiefly, as a manifestation of the ‘shadow of the bomber’ and corresponding fears of aerial bombardment.¹⁴⁸ In contrast, Waqar Zaidi argues that there was enthusiasm from liberal internationalists for aviation – and bombing in particular – which was much closer to militarist, than pacifist, streams of thought.¹⁴⁹

Largely absent from such accounts, however, is a consideration of the Air League’s response to such issues. While the Air League had been initially reluctant to engage with the Disarmament Conference or questions on the internationalisation of aviation, this ceased to be the case after the appointment of Chamier as secretary general. Issues surrounding the abolition of bombing, the international control of civil aviation, and, in particular, the formation of an international air police force proved to be a catalyst for renewed Air League activities. Its argument was perhaps most succinctly outlined in an article in *Air Review* which declared ‘disarmament will avail nothing . . . Peace in the next few generations of the machine age, at least, will be had only be accepted by those equipped to maintain it.’¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ In particular, see Waqar H. Zaidi, ‘Aviation Will Either Destroy or Save Our Civilization’: Proposals for the International Control of Aviation, 1920–45’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 46, no. 1 (2011), pp. 150–178; Brett Holman, ‘World Police for World Peace: British Internationalism and the Threat of a Knock-out Blow from the Air, 1919–1945’, *War in History*, vol. 17, no. 3 (2010), pp. 312–332; Pugh, *Liberal Internationalism*, pp. 69–89; and Roger Beaumont, *Right Backed by Might: The International Air Force Concept* (Westport, Conn.; London: Praeger, 2001).

¹⁴⁸ Holman, ‘World Police’, p. 313. See contributions to Inter-Parliamentary Union, *What Would Be the Character of a New War?* (New York: Harrison Smith and Robert Haas, 1933) for contemporary anxiety about the threat of aerial bombardment.

¹⁴⁹ Zaidi, ‘Aviation’.

¹⁵⁰ ‘War and Peace in the Machine Age’, *Air Review*, September 1934, pp. 21–22.

The idea of an international air police force had widespread support from a number of influential liberal internationalists and those on the political left in the 1930s, such as Angell, Davies, and Noel-Baker.¹⁵¹ One of the most influential proposals for an international air police force was that advanced by Noel-Baker in his contribution to *Challenge to Death*.¹⁵² He proposed the creation of ‘one single homogenous corps, recruited, organised, equipped, armed and paid by an international authority, the League of Nations, and owing allegiance to the League alone’.¹⁵³ He argued that internationally controlled planes could, if an aggressor persisted in bombing civilians, ‘bombard *his* cities until he stopped’.¹⁵⁴ Even though Noel-Baker emphasised that it would be a ‘desperate measure, undertaken in the last resort’, this reflected an apparent inconsistency in the notion of an international air police force – that aggression could ultimately be halted in the form of reprisal bombings.¹⁵⁵ Liberal internationalist calls for an international air police force provide, for Michael Pugh, an example of ‘militarised internationalism’ and they certainly can be seen as a ‘pacifist’ understanding of military aviation.¹⁵⁶

Clement Attlee, Labour Party leader from 1935, also supported the concept. Attlee – described as a ‘fool’ in certain aviation circles – published on the topic in 1934 (following a resolution at the Labour Party Annual Conference in 1933), arguing that an international air police force could be responsible for ‘preserving order in unquiet areas on the borders of civilisation’.¹⁵⁷ An earlier Labour proponent of the international air police force was Hugh

¹⁵¹ See Norman Angell, *The Menace to Our National Defence* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1934); Philip Noel-Baker, ‘The International Air Police Force’, in Storm Jameson (ed.) *Challenge to Death* (London: Constable & Co., 1934), pp. 209–34; and David Davies, *The Problem of the Twentieth Century* (London: Ernest Benn, 1930).

¹⁵² See Overy, *The Morbid Age*, Chapter 6 for the best discussion of this.

¹⁵³ Noel-Baker, ‘The International Air Police Force’, p. 214.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Pugh, *Liberal Internationalism*, p. 88.

¹⁵⁷ RAF Museum, Lord Brabazon of Tara Papers, AC 71/3, Letter from C.G. Grey to Moore-Brabazon, 21 July 1937, p. 1; C.R. Attlee, *An International Police Force* (London: The New Commonwealth, 1934), p. 7. Attlee’s support led Labour to promise, in its 1935 manifesto, ‘to propose to other nations the complete abolition of all national air forces, the effective international control of civil aviation and the creation of an international air

Dalton, the Labour MP who had made numerous speeches in favour of disarmament in the mid-1920s.¹⁵⁸ He likewise argued in favour of the abolition of military aircraft and suggested that an international air force, under the control of the Council of the League of Nations, could replace national air forces.¹⁵⁹ That Labour members supported such a scheme is somewhat unsurprising. When Labour again took office in 1929, it set about implementing, under its Foreign Secretary Arthur Henderson, a ‘League of Nations policy’.¹⁶⁰ For much of the 1930s the official Labour Party foreign policy was to oppose rearmament, commit to arbitration, international co-operation, and disarmament, whilst maintaining a belief in the ability of the League of Nations to deter aggression.¹⁶¹ L.E.O. Charlton, the air power theorist, was also a staunch supporter of the international air police force idea. He felt it was unlikely to be achieved, however, when ‘[m]ilitarism, in many insidious forms, permeates our social fabric’.¹⁶²

The idea of an international air police force was not only supported by those on the left; it was introduced in bills to Parliament on several occasions and supported by all the main parties at certain times – with Stanley Baldwin speaking favourably of ‘the abolition of the air forces of the world and the international control of civil aviation’.¹⁶³ Although the concept of an international air police force may well have been a panacea for many on the political left, it clearly transcended political boundaries.¹⁶⁴ Basil Liddell Hart, the military

police force’. Iain Dale (ed.), *Labour Party General Election Manifestos, 1900–1997* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 46.

¹⁵⁸ Ben Pimlott, *Hugh Dalton* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985), pp. 183–186.

¹⁵⁹ Hugh Dalton, *Towards the Peace of Nations: A Study in International Politics* (London: Routledge, 1928), p. 291.

¹⁶⁰ Henry Winkler, *British Labour Seeks a Foreign Policy, 1900–1940* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017 ed), p. xiii.

¹⁶¹ Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World*, p. 92; p. 94.

¹⁶² L.E.O. Charlton, *War from the Air: Past, Present, Future* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1935), p. 181.

¹⁶³ Beaumont, *Right Backed by Might*, p. 49. Although it met with firm opposition from Air League figures such as Sutherland, Mottistone, and Sueter. ‘The I.P.F. in Parliament’, *The New Commonwealth*, January 1934, pp. 40–42. Commons Sitting, International Affairs, *HC Deb 10 November 1932 vol 270 cc525-641*.

¹⁶⁴ Holman, ‘World Police’, pp. 320–321.

theorist, supported calls for an international air police force for a time, as did figures who had been associated with the Air League such as Moore-Brabazon and Thwaites.¹⁶⁵

On an associational level, there was also a number of proponents of an international air police force. For instance, Lord David Davies founded the New Commonwealth Society (NCS) in October 1932, a body concerned with the promotion of an international air police force. Among those later dismissed by E.H. Carr as a ‘utopian’ and ‘idealist’, Davies had previously formed the Chair and Department of International Politics at Aberystwyth, a position used to increase understanding of the League of Nations, and was a founding member of the LNU.¹⁶⁶ Davies set out his views on the creation of an international air police force in *The Problem of the Twentieth Century*, arguing that although ‘in the course of time the chariots of air will play a decisive part in the service of the international authority’, they were not then in a position to do so.¹⁶⁷ However, as Holman has pointed out, in reality the NCS published frequently on the concept of an international air police force.¹⁶⁸ The Society was of the opinion that an international air police force could apply military sanctions ‘which can be exerted upon states for the purpose of maintaining peace’.¹⁶⁹ The NCS’s membership was fairly limited, having reached little over a thousand members by mid-1936, yet its Council contained a number of influential figures (notably Winston Churchill, who became

¹⁶⁵ B.H. Liddell Hart, ‘An International Force’, *Royal Institute of International Affairs*, vol. 12, no. 2 (1933), pp. 215–218; ‘How to “Civilize” Civil Aviation’, *The New Commonwealth*, January 1934, p. 40; Norman G. Thwaites, *The Menace of Aerial Gas Bombardment* (London: The New Commonwealth, 1934), p. 19; p. 21.

¹⁶⁶ E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001 ed). Brian Porter, ‘David Davies and the Enforcement of Peace’, in David Long and Peter Wilson (eds), *Thinkers of the Twenty Years’ Crisis: Inter-War Idealism Reassessed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 59. For a reassessment of Carr’s influential work more broadly, see Long and Wilson (eds), *Thinkers of the Twenty Years’ Crisis*.

¹⁶⁷ Davies, *The Problem of the Twentieth Century*, pp. 367–368.

¹⁶⁸ Holman, ‘World Police’, p. 319.

¹⁶⁹ New Commonwealth, *The Aims and Objects of the New Commonwealth* (London: The New Commonwealth Society, 1932), p. 7.

president in 1936).¹⁷⁰ Others on the political right, including Alfred Duff Cooper and Mottistone, were vice-presidents of the Society, further highlighting its cross-party appeal.

Other organisations, particularly the Liberal-dominated centrist Next Five Years Group, also urged the government to ‘consider without prejudice’ the formation of ‘an international air force with the limited function of preventing misuse of civil aircraft’.¹⁷¹ Its founder, Clifford Allen, the pacifist and leading figure in the ILP, was convinced that ‘aviation will either destroy or save our civilization’.¹⁷² Likewise, by 1935, the LNU also supported the idea of an international air police force.¹⁷³ Aviation was clearly important to organisations on the left who displayed clear signs of liberal militarism as well as liberal internationalism.

Being anti-war did not always entail being consistently pacifist, anti-armament, or anti-militarist. Indeed, in the late 1930s – admittedly at a time when calls for collective security and disarmament no longer held much sway – the ‘liberal conscience was militant rather than appeasing’ and, by 1939, ‘the liberal conscience endorsed a national struggle as a just war’.¹⁷⁴ For all the LNU’s association with pacifism, British liberal internationalists ‘were not pacifists, but willing upholders, with force if necessary, of a liberal international

¹⁷⁰ Martin Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists: The British Peace Movements and International Relations, 1845–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 284. Churchill had earlier spoke in favour of an international air police force. See, for example, Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis: The Aftermath* (London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd, 1929), p. 27. However, as Michael Pugh has noted, there is little to suggest he viewed his presidency of the NCS as anything more than a ‘rostrum on which to espouse war preparations’. Pugh, *Liberal Internationalism*, p. 87.

¹⁷¹ Cited in Holman, ‘World Police’, pp. 320–321. On the convertibility of civil aviation to military aviation – and convertibility in relation to arms control more broadly – see S. Waqar H. Zaidi, ‘Convertibility and the Militaristic Perversion of Aviation in Disarmament Discourses, 1919–1945’, *History of Global Arms Transfer*, vol. 5 (2018), pp. 19–36.

¹⁷² Zaidi, ‘Aviation’, p. 162.

¹⁷³ Holding a conference on ‘Aviation as an International Problem’ (with two sessions on ‘the question of an international air force’) the same year. Zaidi, ‘Aviation’, p. 160; BLPES, LNU 1/3, Minutes of a Meeting of the General Council, 3–5 July 1935, p. 61. The League had, however, argued in favour of the internationalisation of civil aviation prior to this point. For instance, see ‘The Air Menace’, *Headway*, May 1932, p. 98.

¹⁷⁴ Howard, *War and the Liberal Conscience*, p. 106; p. 108.

order'.¹⁷⁵ Militarism was able to cut across conventional dividing lines of party politics within the interwar years, much as it did prior to the First World War.¹⁷⁶ Liberal internationalist views within the interwar period, at least in terms of aviation, were clearly not anti-militarist or pacifist as Zaidi has noted.¹⁷⁷ Likewise, Edgerton argues that Britain developed a 'strategy of liberal militarism alongside its liberal internationalism'.¹⁷⁸

Pacifists such as Helena Swanwick, however, were less receptive, arguing that as a knock-out blow would arrive with no warning 'all the International Force could do, perhaps, if not too late to do anything, would be to devastate the aggressor country and its inhabitants'.¹⁷⁹ The notion of an international air police force was seen as a 'utopian method of ensuring peace' by former Air League members such as Groves and similarly later lambasted as a 'purely utopian project' by E.H. Carr.¹⁸⁰ The most public denunciation of calls for an international air police force, however, came from the Air League itself.

The concept of an international air police force – as well as the internationalisation of civil aviation – once again brought the Air League into conflict with an array of liberal internationalists. Pithily conveyed in the two cartoons by Wyndham Robinson, the political cartoonist for the *Morning Post*, the League viewed the internationalisation of aviation 'as impracticable, undesirable, and contrary to the national interest'.¹⁸¹ Printed in *The Aeroplane* and *Air Review* respectively, both cartoons highlight the perceived futility of ideas for the

¹⁷⁵ Edgerton, *Warfare State*, p. 284.

¹⁷⁶ Johnson, *Militarism*. Alternatively, for an exploration of socialist critiques of, and opposition to, militarism in Edwardian Britain see Chapter 6 of Paul Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack: Englishness, Patriotism, and the British Left, 1881–1924* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998).

¹⁷⁷ Zaidi, 'Aviation', p. 152. See also Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*.

¹⁷⁸ Edgerton, *Warfare State*, p. 56.

¹⁷⁹ H.M. Swanwick, *New Wars for Old* (London: Women's International League, 1934), p. 28. Other pacifists, such as Beverly Nichols, supported the adoption of an international air police force. Beverly Nichols, *Cry Havoc!* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933), pp. 260–261;

¹⁸⁰ Groves, *Our Future in the Air*, p. 128; Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 30. It was also opposed by the Air Ministry, who authorised a public response in the form of James M. Spaight's, *An International Air Police*, which argued that a national air force comprising of heavy bombers acting as a deterrence was the best way to achieve peace. James M. Spaight, *An International Air Force* (London: Gale & Polden, 1932).

¹⁸¹ 'Disarmament in the Air', *The Times*, 9 November 1932, p. 9.

internationalisation of civil aviation and plans for an international air police force. Figure 1 draws attention to the contested and conflicting nature of an international air police force – especially its potential use of reprisal bombings – while Figure 2 highlights the issue of convertibility in respect to civil aeroplanes, the result being the same whether bombs are dropped from military aeroplanes or converted civil aeroplanes.

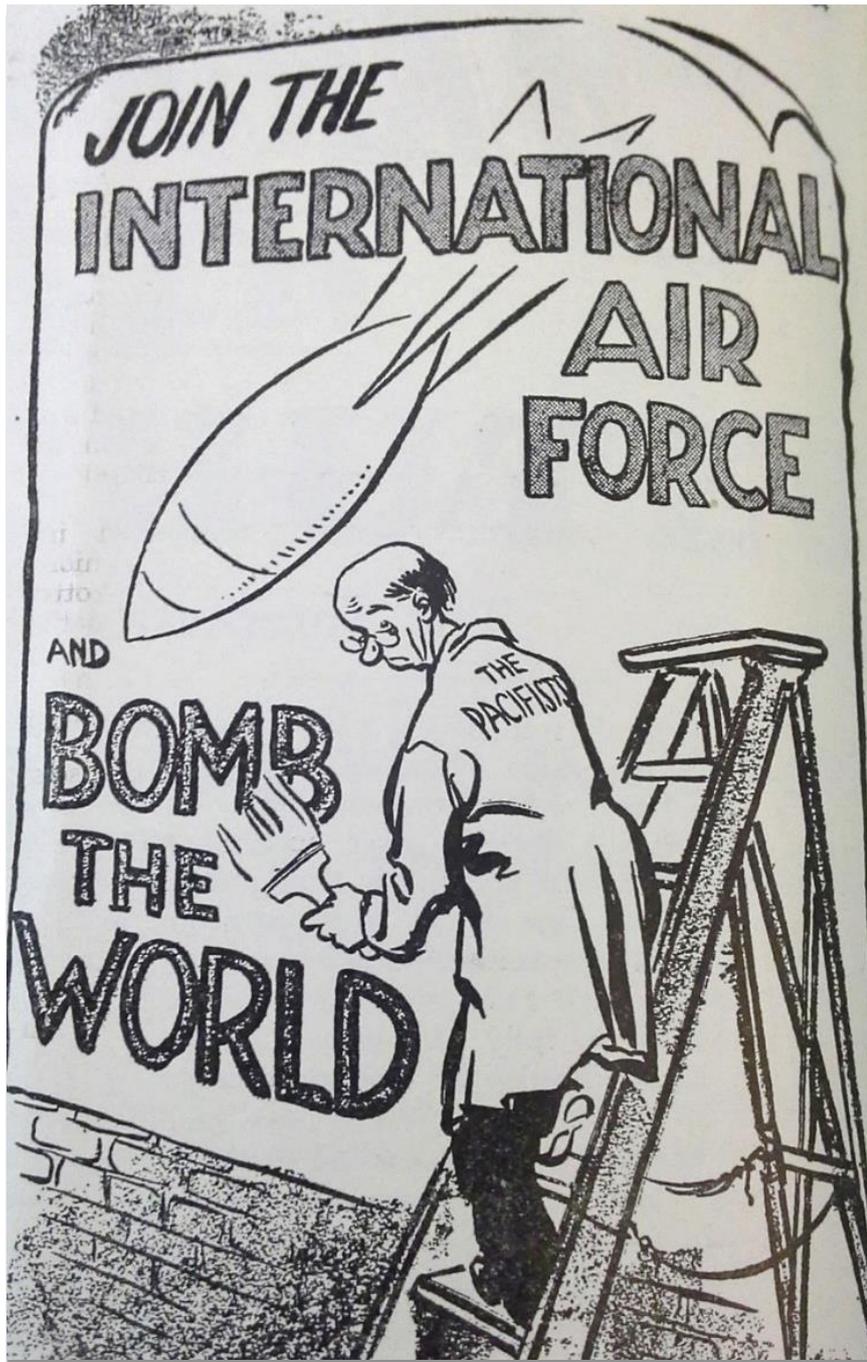


Figure 1:
‘Join the International Air Force and Bomb the World’, *The Aeroplane*, 22 August 1934, p. 214.

The fear of both was apparent in a speech made by the Duke of Sutherland at the Air League's Annual General Meeting in 1933. Sutherland regarded the concept of an international air police force with 'grave concern and considered that it prejudiced our safety while contributing nothing to the progress of disarmament'.¹⁸² He noted that: 'Experiments in idealism have been made and history records the consequences. In dealing with the complex problem of air disarmament, the Air League asks for realism and moderation.'¹⁸³ Of course, labels of 'idealism' and 'utopian', used by contemporaries and by historians such as Carr since, were fairly common in connection with the notion of an international air police force.¹⁸⁴ For *The Aeroplane*, an international air police force was one of the 'most persistent heresies of the present day' and represented the 'folly of internationalism'.¹⁸⁵ For the Air League, the international air police force was little more than a 'fallacy' and 'would not be a police force at all, but a plain military force armed with weapons of immense power'. The League suggested that, as the League of Nations could already employ military sanctions under Article 16 of the Covenant (which permitted the use of collective armed force against an aggressor in certain scenarios) an international air police force was also unnecessary.¹⁸⁶ Davies responded by arguing that League failures – notably its inability to intervene in the Manchuria Crisis of 1931 – only served to highlight the current weakness of the threat of military sections (and seemingly collective security), thus strengthening calls for an international air police force which could act as a deterrence.¹⁸⁷ Again, the Air League was far from receptive to such sentiments:

The League of Nations has a great role to play in the world but its paths must be the paths of peace. It is designed to be the conciliator, the arbitrator, the tactful friend, the originator of

¹⁸² AL, AL Minute Book, Annual General Meeting, 5 July 1933, pp. 1–2.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁸⁴ A charge its proponents were keenly aware of. See, for example, Noel-Baker, 'The International Air Police Force', p. 239.

¹⁸⁵ 'The International Air Force Fallacy', *The Aeroplane*, 22 August 1934, p. 213.

¹⁸⁶ 'International Police Force', *Air Review*, March 1934, pp. 17–18.

¹⁸⁷ 'Correspondence: An International Police Force', *Air Review*, June 1934, p. 84.

useful social international legislation . . . It is not right to set it up as a super State, armed against all comers: nor is it practical to do so.¹⁸⁸

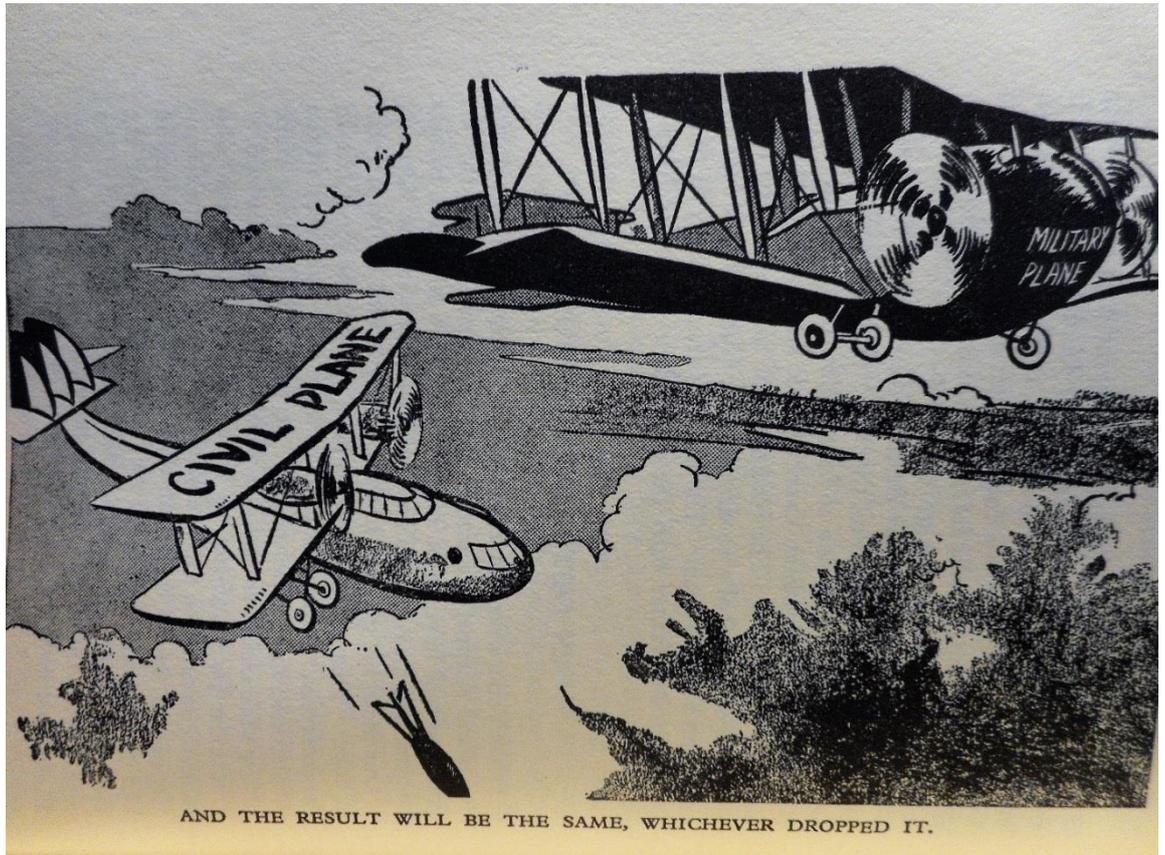


Figure 2: ‘And the Result Will Be the Same, Whichever Dropped It’, *Air Review*, July 1934, p. 20.

In practical terms, the League stressed that even if an international air police force might act as a deterrence, it could not prevent a frontier from invasion, nor was such a force a weapon of defence or measure of security. Moreover, in using an international air police force as a tool of international arbitration and justice, the Air League emphasised that any action taken against a potential aggressor could ‘result in the ruin of a whole people’.¹⁸⁹ An international air police force, and potential aerial bombardment, meant putting the ‘most feared and hated means of warfare in the name of peace and the League of Nations’ and, according to the Air League, it was ‘not for such bloody tasks that the League of Nations

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁸⁹ ‘International Air Police’, *The Times*, 21 June 1934, p. 10.

was formed'.¹⁹⁰ For the League, an international air police force – and the militarised form of internationalism this entailed – was both impractical and incongruous with the purpose of the League of Nations.

In response to its pronouncements on an international air police force and the internationalisation of civil aviation, the Air League once again faced charges of militarism, with *Air Review* noting the League had been 'accused of being a reactionary and militaristic organisation'. 'Nothing', the journal stressed, 'could be further from the truth'.¹⁹¹ However, if the League wished to distance itself from such associations, the shift in tone towards an international air police force in late 1934 did little to help. For example, as Chamier declared in November that year:

A school of thought has arisen that seeks to persuade our people that the only answer is to take all potent weapons, and particularly the air weapon, away from the nations, and entrust the maintenance of the world's security to a League of Nations Air Force, so strong as to be unchallengeable . . . Descriptions of this kind are misrepresentations based on misconception. When nations go to war the policeman is impotent: the resort must be to force, brutal and undisguised.¹⁹²

Of course, in referring to 'brutal' and 'undisguised' force, the League was in part merely outlining the potential of aerial warfare. Yet, its later statements were more controversial.

In considering schemes proposing the abolition of bombing in 1934, the Air League asserted that it supported the retention and use of bombing aeroplanes and 'denied the premise, so often assumed, that air power is essentially inhumane and must be specially discriminated against'.¹⁹³ Rather, for the League, air control (the use of bombing aeroplanes on frontiers) was both 'humane and effective'.¹⁹⁴ Mottistone believed that 'the conquest of the air by man was a great civilising power and capable of bringing great benefits to

¹⁹⁰ 'The Air League to its Members', *Air Review*, November 1934, p. 15.

¹⁹¹ 'The Air League to its Members', *Air Review*, October 1934, p. 14.

¹⁹² 'The Air League to its Members', *Air Review*, November 1934, p. 14.

¹⁹³ Noel-Baker, *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*, p. 337.

¹⁹⁴ 'Air Controls of Frontiers', *Air Review*, April 1934, pp. 11–12.

mankind', including the possibility to make war 'less inhumane' and 'less cruel'.¹⁹⁵ Yet, a writer in *Air Review* went further: 'at its worst, compared to an ordinary army – underpaid and bloodthirsty – cleaning up a village street, the bombing aeroplane is a dove of peace'.¹⁹⁶ The Air League objected to ideas of the internationalisation of both civil and military aviation on the very grounds of morality. Unsurprisingly, this contradiction with earlier pronouncements was questioned by figures such as Noel-Baker, who noted that the 'bombing plane, which is "humane and effective" in the hands of a national State, which is a "dove of peace" compared to "an ordinary army", becomes the "most feared and hated means of war", when it is a question of enabling the League of Nations to check aggressive use of civil aircraft'.¹⁹⁷ Accordingly, the League's statements were dismissed by Noel-Baker as 'not a serious contribution to the discussion of any problem of Disarmament, or even of national defence'.¹⁹⁸

The Air League's opposition to the international air police force seemingly had little influence at the level of grand strategy and the formulation of state policy, but it represented an important moment in the history of the League itself. It would soon begin to promote rearmament and British military prowess through Empire Air Day, as well as setting in motion plans for directly contributing to the military preparedness of the state through the creation of the ADCC. In some respects, the League's pronouncements echoed the sentiments of the Air Ministry surrounding an international air police force and so contributed to a political, and indeed moral, atmosphere in which the Ministry could act in

¹⁹⁵ AL, AL Minute Book, Annual General Meeting, 5 July 1933, p. 3.

¹⁹⁶ Cited in Noel-Baker, *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*, p. 337.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

¹⁹⁸ Noel-Baker, *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*, p. 339. Yet, the League did have the support of many within the aviation community. *The Aeroplane*, rather predictably owing to the far-right views of its editor, C.G. Grey, agreed with the Air League, feeling that 'from every point of view a strong Air Force is our best defence'. *Flight* likewise backed the League's 'sound commonsense and clear thinking' in its opposition to an international air police force. See Chapter 4 of Haapamaki, *The Coming of the Aerial War*. 'The Strong Air Force', *The Aeroplane*, 9 November 1932, p. 855; 'Editorial Comment', *Flight*, 8 June 1933, p. 530.

accordance with (at least some) areas of public opinion. Indeed, as David Reynolds has observed, pressure groups such as the Air and Navy Leagues had the ability to shape the ideological framework in which issues of national defence were discussed.¹⁹⁹ It was also, of course, important that the League did not allow liberal internationalist sentiments on aviation go unchallenged.

VI. Conclusion

As this chapter has demonstrated, the rise of internationalism, pacifism, and anti-war sentiment in the interwar years – alongside calls for collective security and disarmament – posed myriad challenges for both the Air and Navy Leagues. In attempting to respond to such issues, the policies adopted by each organisation were, if only briefly, radically different from what had gone before. This reflected an endeavour to find a place in a postwar society that may have indeed been inhospitable to certain elements of organised militarism. Fears of being labelled as alarmists, scaremongers, jingoists, and militarists were understandable concerns for both Leagues; yet, in shifting towards more moderate policies, the character and ideological stance of each organisation appeared compromised. Ultimately, however, support for disarmament and shifts towards a more pacific policy were not long-standing features of either League's work. After reverting to back to policies which advocated military strength, each League increasingly came into conflict with pacifist, anti-war, and liberal internationalist streams of thought. Liberal internationalists and key figures in the LNU such as Cecil, Angell, Davies, Murray, and Noel-Baker all directly attempted to counter Air and Navy League propaganda at some point, as did other anti-war and pacifist organisations. While it may have been the case that public confidence could not be gained

¹⁹⁹ David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy & World Power in the 20th Century* (London: Longman, 1991), pp. 39–41.

by talking of 'bombs and battleships' alone, following the apparent failures of collective security and disarmament, both the Air and Navy League once again focused on the promotion of military strength.

Chapter 3: ‘The British Lion is Old, His Claws Are Cut, His Teeth Decayed, and His Spirit Gone’: The Air League, the Navy League, and Rearmament

Given the nature and tone of Air and Navy League pronouncements surrounding issues such as disarmament, collective security, pacifism, and liberal internationalism, one might expect the late 1930s – when rearmament had become accepted as a necessity by many within state and society – to have represented the zenith of Air and Navy League militarism. However, the political promotion of aerial and naval supremacy in the late 1930s by each League was not overtly militaristic, but almost surprisingly measured and restrained. Neither called for unrestricted armaments and propaganda directed towards the state was significantly less hostile than it had once been. Once the expansion of the RAF and Royal Navy began, the energies of each organisation were channelled elsewhere. The Air League started to lobby for increased attention to Britain’s defensive measures to protect from aerial bombardment – which in certain respects did call for a militarisation of civilians – while the Navy League increasingly called for the deficiencies of the Merchant Navy to be remedied.

In part, the Air and Navy League’s limited calls for aerial and naval supremacy after 1936 was due to the increasingly symbiotic relationship between each organisation and the service departments. As Part B of this thesis will highlight, each organisation was largely dependent on the support of the Air Ministry and Admiralty respectively to carry out their most significant activities. More broadly, however, each organisation was alive to the limited nature with which rearmament could be carried out. Yet, the state’s awakening to the necessities of rearmament did not mark the end of the Air or Navy League’s activities. As Part B will explore, militarism and the promotion of aerial and naval supremacy did, in fact, enjoy particular resonance in the late 1930s, albeit not primarily through political or parliamentary channels.

This chapter will discuss a number of areas relating to Air and Navy League propaganda surrounding the question of rearmament. In doing so, it will first look at the Air League's contribution to the knock-out blow theory. The chapter will then examine the political promotion of air power by the Air League, before moving on to highlight the Navy League's response to the rise of airpower and the League's attitude towards rearmament in the mid-1930s. It will then discuss existence of other air leagues (and the implications of these leagues) in the 1930s. It will then detail the relationship between each League and the private manufacturers of armaments, before looking at the Air League's response to the threat from the air and the promotion of civil defence. Finally, the chapter will explore the Navy League's propaganda surrounding the Merchant Navy and the approach of war.

I. Nerve Centres and the Knock-Out Blow

If the interwar period was characterised by 'doomsday scenarios of the next war', then the Air League's role in the creation of such scenarios warrants examination.¹ This is especially so as one area in which the League proved particularly influential was in the construction of the knock-out blow theory. Much has been written about the shadow of the bomber in the interwar years and the anticipation of strategic bombing.² This is unsurprising given the extent to which apocalyptic warnings about the bomber featured in literature, art, films, newspaper columns, and the pronouncements of military theorists and politicians of all stripes. The previous chapter has outlined liberal internationalist responses to the threat of

¹ Haapamaki, *The Coming of the Aerial War*, p. 3.

² See e.g. Uri Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber: The Fear of Air Attack and British Politics* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1980); Barry D. Powers, *Strategy Without Slide-Rule: British Air Strategy, 1914–1939* (London: Croom Helm, 1976); Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing, 1914–1945* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002); Richard Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe 1939–1945* (London: Penguin Books, 2014), pp. 19–55. See Holman, *The Next War in the Air*, pp. 16–18 for one of the most up-to-date discussions. On the history of aerial bombing more broadly, see Thomas Hippler, *Governing from the Skies: A Global History of Aerial Bombing* (London: Verso, 2017) and Sven Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing* (London: Granta Books, 2002).

the aeroplane and the ways in which the Air League sought to counter such sentiments, yet the construction of the knock-out blow theory as a reflection of Air League policy – or as the initiative of Air League members – has been underexamined. This is curious, especially because the Air League certainly had a reasonable intellectual base. It had a strong core of military theorists and technocrats, some of whom were widely influential. The Edwardian ‘cult of the expert’ was undoubtedly evident in the Air League’s work, even if its rhetoric was sometimes characterised by ‘warlike overtones’.³ The League was able to influence government and aviation circles as many themselves were pioneer aviators, had served in the RFC during the First World War, or had experience within the Air Ministry.⁴

One of the earliest figures to warn of a knock-out blow was Lord Montagu of Beaulieu. At a meeting of the National Defence Association in early 1909, Montagu explained that London lay open to strategic air attack.⁵ Although aviation was still in its infancy, Montagu spoke of ‘nerve centres’ (government buildings, the Houses of Parliament, railway stations, the stock exchange etc) and the ‘paralysis which would result from a single well-directed blow’. He warned that ‘airships would come so swiftly, and strike so directly at the centres that the nation would be almost paralysed before armies or navies could come to her aid’.⁶ The threat posed to civil liberties – and the blurring of civil and military spheres

³ Johnson, *Militarism*, p. 65; Harald Penrose, *British Aviation: Widening Horizons, 1930–1934* (London: HMSO, 1979), pp. 223–224.

⁴ Although Conservative members of the Air League who were ex-servicemen and MPs after the First World War represented only a very small number of the 448 Conservative MPs who also had fought in the War, most held high positions and had very close associations with the Air Ministry. See Richard Carr, *Veteran MPs and Conservative Politics in the Aftermath of the Great War: The Memory of All That* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2016).

⁵ The National Defence Association was an organisation comprising civilians interested in military matters, alongside officers in the army and navy. Gollin, *The Impact of Air Power*, p. 7.

⁶ ‘Aeronautics’, *The Times*, 26 April 1909, p. 19. Others were slightly more sanguine in their predictions at the time. For example, Rudyard Kipling wrote to Massy that he did not think ‘yet that air ships can paralyze a country or a fleet’, although he admitted ‘it won’t be many years before they do’. Thomas Pinney (ed.), *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling: Volume 3: 1900–10* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004 ed), p. 406. Public interest in aviation was also fuelled by the publication of H.G. Wells’s prophetic *The War in the Air* (1908) and R.P. Hearne’s *Aerial Warfare* (1909) – both of which anticipated the effects of bombing on Britain and underscored the importance of science and technology for the preservation of the country. H.G. Wells, *The War in the Air* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1908); R.P. Hearne, *Aerial Warfare* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1909). Both Wells and Hearne were early supporters of the Air League, with the latter expressing

of society – which featured in Montagu’s speech would prove a prescient warning. As Holman has pointed out, Montagu’s nerve centre theory was highly influential – particularly his emphasis on the erosion of any distinction between combatant and civilian – and he was to be echoed in the rhetoric and discourse surrounding the knock-out blow in the interwar years.⁷

Indeed, as early as 1919, Moore-Brabazon argued that industrial centres would be the first object of an air attack in any future war and that ‘there is no defence against aircraft today . . . The only answer is to have a bigger Air Force so as to have the potential power of hitting back’.⁸ More influential in popularising the theory of a knock-out blow, however, was P.R.C. Groves.⁹ As part of a series of highly publicised letters to *The Times* on aviation starting in early 1922, Groves predicted that in future air wars ‘each side will at once strike at the heart and nerve centres of its opponent . . . at those nerve ganglia of national *moral* – the great cities’. Groves argued that ‘owing to the development of aviation war has altered its character’ and that a future war would take place across ‘areas’, not ‘fronts’. He bemoaned the size of Britain’s aircraft industry and warned that, if the Britain’s air force remained small, only ‘death, damnation and disaster’ awaited.¹⁰ While Groves was not formally appointed to the Air League’s Executive Committee until June that year, he was working

a desire to serve on the League’s Executive Committee. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 19 May 1909, pp. 1–2.

⁷ Holman, *The Next War in the Air*, p. 32.

⁸ Commons Sitting, Pay, Etc., of the Royal Air Force, *HC Deb 15 December 1919 vol 123 cc87-147*. Others who would later become important figures within the Air League also portrayed a future war in similar terms. For instance, J.M. Kenworthy warned that ‘[m]an’s conquest of the air must be followed by man’s conquest of war, or by the end of civilisation’. J.M. Kenworthy, *Will Civilisation Crash?* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1927), p. 264.

⁹ On Groves, see Robin Higham, *The Military Intellectuals in Britain: 1918–1939* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1966), pp. 170–176.

¹⁰ ‘Our Future in the Air’, *The Times*, 21 March 1922, pp. 13–14.

with the League before then, resolving to contact the Air Ministry on the matter of the air defence of Britain.¹¹

As well as including two of the most notable knock-out blow theorists within its leadership, the Air League also considered appointing Air Commodore L.E.O. Charlton, the distinguished RFC pilot and air force officer, as secretary general following the resignation of Groves. Charlton was another well-known air power theorist and one of the chief protagonists of the knock-out blow theory in the 1930s.¹² However, although Charlton was willing to entertain the Air League's proposal, no such offer was forthcoming due to lack of funds.¹³ While Charlton did not become secretary general, he later supported the ADCC.

The theory of the knock-out blow was so widespread by the 1930s that it was, as Holman has noted, accepted and promoted by pacifists and militarists alike.¹⁴ Indeed, the influence of such theorists is evident in the work of military strategists of the period such as Basil Liddell Hart, J.F.C. Fuller, and Charlton.¹⁵ The 'culture of anticipation' explored in Roxanne Panchasi's study of interwar France, then, was similarly a part of interwar Britain

¹¹ AL, AL Minute Book, Annual General Meeting, 1 June 1922, p. 1; AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 28 April 1922, p. 3. Groves did, however, offer the Air League any profits from the reprinted form of his articles, *Our Future in the Air: A Survey of the Vital Question of British Air Power*, which also included a condensed version of the League's aims. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 27 July 1922, p. 2; P.R.C. Groves, *Our Future in the Air: A Survey of the Vital Question of British Air Power* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1922), p. [6]. Sales of the publication were disappointing, however, with Groves subsequently informing the Air League he had no sum to contribute. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 31 October 1923, p. 3.

¹² Most notably, his *War from the Air* (1935), *War Over England* (1936), and *The Menace of the Clouds* (1937) all depicted the potential death and destruction that the next war might bring. Charlton, *War from the Air*; L.E.O. Charlton, *War Over England* (London: Longmans Green, 1936); and L.E.O. Charlton, *The Menace of the Clouds* (London: William Hodge, 1937).

¹³ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 9 July 1929, p. 2.

¹⁴ Holman, *The Next War in the Air*, p. 23. Not all were convinced by such predictions. For example, Neon's *The Great Delusion* was highly sceptical of the importance of air power and criticised the unparalleled 'volume of feverish propaganda to which this country has been subjected' regarding air power. Neon, *The Great Delusion: A Study of Aircraft in Peace and War* (London: Ernest Benn, 1927), p. xxxv. Neon's findings met with considerable criticism, principally in Seuter's *Airmen or Noahs*, and certainly did little to halt the influence of theorists such as Montagu and Groves. Neon is usually identified as being Mary Whiteford Acworth, but seems more likely to have been Bernard Acworth. Holman, *The Next War in the Air*, p. 75.

¹⁵ B.H. Liddell Hart, *Paris: Or the Future of War* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1925), p. 43; p. 47; J.F.C. Fuller, *The Reformation of War* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1923), p. 150; Charlton, *War from the Air*, pp. 153–154; Charlton, *The Menace of the Clouds*, p. 54.

with Air League members making a notable, albeit sometimes alarmist, contribution to such a culture.¹⁶ Indeed, in shaping fears of a knock-out blow, the Air League aided the Air Ministry by ‘emphasizing the decisive role that an air force would play in future war’.¹⁷

II. ‘Remember the Power of the Newest Bombs’: The Air League and Political Pressure

Although the Air League did not want it to be thought that its ‘sole concern was with war and with military aviation’, it exerted considerable effort in attempting to shape popular and parliamentary attitudes to the military potential of the aeroplane through the political promotion of air-mindedness – and in lobbying for British rearmament more broadly.¹⁸ This is important to highlight because, as Uri Bialer has noted, broadly speaking, public opinion is often seen to have had a malign influence upon the ‘process of rearmament when not obstructing it altogether’.¹⁹ The Air League was responsible for considerable activity in the press and in parliament at crucial moments in the history of the Air Ministry and the RAF. One such occasion was its support for the maintenance of the RAF as a separate service, with an independent Air Ministry in the early 1920s. Since the end of 1919, Winston Churchill had held the position of Secretary of State for War in tandem with the position of Secretary of State for Air. This was viewed by many as the subordination of the Air Ministry to the War Office, even leading to the resignation of Seely as Under-Secretary of State for Air.²⁰ The Air League objected to Churchill’s position and worked closely with Seely following his resignation. Indeed, Seely felt that the League was ‘rendering invaluable

¹⁶ Roxanne Panchasi, *Future Tense: The Culture of Anticipation in France Between the Wars* (Ithaca, N.Y.; London: Cornell University Press, 2009), p. 6.

¹⁷ Haapamaki, *The Coming of the Aerial War*, p. 44.

¹⁸ AL, AL Minute Book, Annual General Meeting, 10 July 1934, p. 2.

¹⁹ Bialer, ‘Elite Opinion’, p. 32.

²⁰ See Richard Overy, *The Birth of the RAF, 1918: The World’s First Air Force* (London: Allen Lane, 2018), Chapter 4.

service' to aviation through its work and shortly became the organisation's president after his departure from the Air Ministry.²¹

To promote an independent Air Ministry, the League sent a 'very large' number of telegrams to David Lloyd George, then Prime Minister, prior to the air estimates in 1920, yet it also carried out propaganda in more public spheres.²² It held a public – and well publicised – meeting at the Mansion House in June 1920, outlining its aims and stressing the importance of developing civil and military aviation for the preservation of Britain's island status.²³ The League considered the issue of an independent Air Ministry as the 'most important question that could exist with regard to aviation', later declaring that it was 'absolutely essential if we are not to be beaten in the race for air power'.²⁴

The League sent letters to MPs at all three general elections between 1922 and 1924, asking voters and MPs alike to remember that the question of the air was 'one that vitally concerns the safety of the Empire, and that a large and efficient Air Force based on a prosperous and highly organized system of civil aviation and a flourishing aircraft industry are indispensable'.²⁵ The League urged its members to lobby politicians on a local level, reminding them to 'see that your candidate promises to press for aerial development' and to 'remember the power of the newest bombs'.²⁶ The League likewise asked its members to promote the importance of aviation in the 1929 general election and to pressure local candidates 'to demand an enquiry into the whole air situation'.²⁷

²¹ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 22 January 1920, p. 2.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²³ 'Our Waning Air Supremacy', *The Times*, 9 June 1920, p. 11. *The Daily Herald* bemoaned the meeting, writing that 'We have had militarism and navalism. Airism comes next.' 'Airum Scarum', *The Daily Herald*, 9 June 1920, p. 3.

²⁴ 'To the Editor of *The Times*', *The Times*, 31 January 1921, p. 11.

²⁵ 'Electors and Air Power', *The Times*, 3 November 1922, p. 19; AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 22 November 1923, p. 2; AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 22 October 1924, p. 4.

²⁶ Air League of the British Empire, 'Remember the Power of the Newest Bombs', 1922, p. 1.

²⁷ 'The Air League and the General Election', *Air*, May 1929, pp. 228–229.

Following Groves's appointment, the Air League became even more vocal in its opposition to the perceived inadequacy of Britain's aerial position. For instance, in the first issue of *Air*, Groves wrote that the public had been 'misled by the optimistic oratory of the past nine years, to believe that Britain is at least holding her own in the sphere of aviation'. 'Nothing', Groves continued, 'could be further from the truth'.²⁸ Groves published on subjects such as air power and its application in modern warfare, air power in relation to sea power, air debates in parliament, the progress of civil aviation, and on a number of other topics.²⁹ As the editor of *Air*, Groves frequently used the journal as a vehicle through which to bemoan Britain's aerial position and as a 'spearhead of attack upon apathy, inertia and official ineptitude'.³⁰ Upon his appointment, Groves had warned the Air League's Executive Committee that he may have to take steps which would be considered 'inimical to the Air Ministry' and so it proved.³¹

Despite such pressure, the League appears to have been fairly inactive in parliamentary circles for much of the late 1920s and early 1930s. As noted in Chapter 1, this was a period in which the League underwent major structural and institutional changes. It had limited funds and no effective secretary general in between Groves and Chamier, with Thwaites only serving as acting secretary general (largely without the confidence of members of the Executive Committee).³² More importantly, as noted in Chapter 2, this period saw a dramatic shift in Air League policy. As has been highlighted, however, the appointment of Chamier undoubtedly galvanised the League and meant it once again became

²⁸ 'The Air Situation', *Air*, December 1927, p. 7.

²⁹ 'Air Power and its Application', *Air*, January 1928, pp. 7–10; p. 26; 'Air Power and Sea Power', *Air*, February 1928, pp. 7–10; p. 26; 'The Coming Air Debate', *Air*, March 1928, pp. 7–11; 'The Progress of Civil Aviation', *Air*, July 1928, pp. 7–11.

³⁰ 'Something Accomplished', *Air*, December 1929, p. 543.

³¹ Indeed, it was not long until Groves attracted the Air Ministry's ire, with the latter contacting Sutherland directly to complain about former's writing. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 10 June 1927, p. 3; AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 20 October 1927, p. 1.

³² AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 9 July 1929, p. 2; AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 12 May 1931, p. 2.

more influential in parliamentary spheres. Indeed, as Chamier revealed to the League's Executive Committee shortly after his appointment, he had been able to 'establish personal contacts with many of the friends of aviation in the House of Commons'.³³

In attempting to keep the issue of aviation at the forefront of parliamentary discussions, Air League members (or figures with close ties to the League) initiated two of the three parliamentary debates on air power between November 1933 and July 1934. Significantly, these debates were opened only a month after the German withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference, were prior to the formal acknowledgment of German rearmament, and were at a time when calls for the internationalisation of civil aviation and the creation of an international air police force were widespread. The League provided important parliamentary opposition to disarmament at the time of Geneva, instead lobbying for an increase in the RAF. As Bialer writes, the Air League and was able to construct a 'highly effective propaganda machine' and 'mobilized virtually everybody connected with civil and military aviation in Britain'.³⁴

Taking place in November 1933, two debates on Britain's strength in the air were opened: one, in the House of Lords by Sutherland (supported by Lord Lloyd), and the second in the House of Commons by Sueter. In the House of Lords, Sutherland expressed anxiety regarding the strength of the RAF in relation to European powers and argued that Britain's frontiers had changed because of the development of air power. Echoing Lord Montagu's 'nerve centre' speech of 1909 – and Groves's writing in 1922 – Sutherland declared that 'if London were destroyed, England would be destroyed. The heart and brain of the country would be destroyed.' He was careful to emphasise that he did not initiate the debate 'in any

³³ Allowing him, among other things, to inspire counter-motions against calls for the government to relinquish its use of police bombing. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 14 June 1933, p. 2.

³⁴ Bialer, 'Elite Opinion', pp. 38–39. Contemporary observers such as *The Tatler* similarly described the League as a 'genuine political force'. 'The Air League', *The Tatler*, 29 August 1934, p. 418.

martial spirit', nor did he suggest Britain should 'rattle the sabre by advertising to the world our intention of increasing our forces in the air', yet opposition from Lord Arthur Ponsonby, a founding member of the UDC, and Lord Cecil suggests that Sutherland's fears of appearing militaristic were seemingly well-founded. Nevertheless, Sutherland argued that a powerful air force, making Britain as impregnable as possible, would be one of the strongest arguments Britain could use in the 'peace councils of Europe'. He concluded that 'we should all work, hope, and pray that there would never be another war . . . but we should all see, if it did come, in spite of every human effort to the contrary, that we were not found hopelessly supine and apathetic'.³⁵

In the House of Commons, Sueter put forward a similar motion that 'this House views with grave disquiet the present inadequacy of the provision made for the air defence of these islands, the Empire overseas, and our Imperial communications', welcoming 'the need for a one-power standard in the air'.³⁶ Supported by the Air League stalwarts Moore-Brabazon and Guest, the motion was seconded by Balfour.³⁷ Baldwin drew the debate to a close, stating that Britain's inferiority in the air was due to a sincerity to secure disarmament and that the country was striving for disarmament as peace was a 'matter of will and not of armament'. Baldwin accepted the resolution, but asked for the tone of it to be altered. He felt that if it were passed it would create the 'worst possible atmosphere' in Germany by suggesting Britain wanted to rearm as quickly as possible.³⁸ These simultaneous motions received widespread coverage and support from newspapers and aviation journals such as the *Daily Mail*, *The Times*, and *Flight*, and meant that, not only were liberal internationalist

³⁵ 'Air Defence', *The Times*, 30 November 1933, p. 7.

³⁶ Commons Sitting, Air Defence, *HC Deb 29 November 1933 vol 283 cc958-1022*.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.* Alongside the debates in late 1933, Air League members were also prominent in debates on air power in mid-1934, helping to make the divergence of views between those who campaigned for disarmament and those who pressed for rearmament 'more acute . . . than it had ever been before'. Commons Sitting, Air Estimates, *HC Deb 08 March 1934 vol 286 cc2027-89*; Commons Sitting, Armaments, *HC Deb 30 July 1934 vol 292 cc2325-447*.

policies on aviation challenged, but the importance of air power and rearmament was kept before both state and society.³⁹

In attempting to influence parliamentary debates and cultivate political allies, the Air League had a number of representatives on the Parliamentary Air Committee (PAC). Sueter, considered an ‘old friend of the Air League’ by Sutherland, was chairman of the PAC, while numerous Air League figures – or individuals who had strong links with the League – sat on the Committee.⁴⁰ The PAC was an effective pressure group within Parliament, numbering around 80 MPs (predominantly Conservative and ex-servicemen) by 1934. In many respects, the PAC often pursued similar aims to the Air League. It lobbied the government on the necessity of maintaining an independent air force, and thereafter a strong RAF, criticised plans for disarmament in the early 1930s, supported the retention of air bombing for police purposes, and arranged tours for MPs to visit the factories of aircraft manufacturers.⁴¹ It also, like the Air League, was concerned with civil aviation, sending a deputation to see Ramsay MacDonald with suggestions for improvements in the organisation of civil flying in late 1934.⁴² While the PAC was not necessarily an auxiliary of the Air

³⁹ ‘The Air Terror’, *Daily Mail*, 29 November 1933, p. 10; ‘Air Defence’, *The Times*, 30 November 1933, p. 7; ‘Editorial Comment’, *Flight*, 14 December 1933, pp. 1251–1252. For Bialer, the activities of such air lobbyists ‘do something to redeem the honour of Parliament as a whole during the inter-war period’. Bialer, ‘Elite Opinion’, p. 46. Sutherland was certainly satisfied with the Air League’s increased parliamentary activity that year, noting that the debates had ‘proved of very considerable value in directing the attention of the public to the unsatisfactory state of British air power in comparison with England’s neighbours’. AL, AL Minute Book, Annual General Meeting, 10 July 1934, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Including Guest, Joyson-Hicks, Seely, Moore-Brabazon, Everard, Lord Clydesdale, Sempill, Balfour (the Committee’s vice chairman), and O’Gorman. Sueter insisted the PAC be known as the ‘Parliamentary Air Committee of the Conservative Party’, ‘Parliamentary Committees’, *The Times*, 21 January 1938, p. 8; AL, AL Minute Book, Annual General Meeting, 10 July 1934, p. 1. While members of the Air League served on the PAC, the Committee also often invited the most senior Air League members to its annual dinner. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 10 April 1934, p. 2; 19 November 1935, p. 3.

⁴¹ ‘British Air Power’, *The Times*, 10 July 1922, p. 10; ‘Disarmament and Aircraft’, *Flight*, 10 November 1932, p. 1043; ‘The Parliamentary Air Committee’, *Flight*, 6 July 1933, p. 665; ‘M.P.s’ Air Journey’, *The Times*, 23 July 1934, p. 9.

⁴² ‘Civil Aviation Development’, *Flight*, 6 December 1934, p. 1313.

League, there were evidently close ties between the two, helping to foster a largely symbiotic relationship.⁴³ Clearly, the Air League's political lobbying work must not be underestimated.

While the League never formally renounced its 'non-party' status, clashes with liberal internationalists, figures in the Labour Party, the ILP, and others on the political left, particularly over calls for the internationalisation of aviation and the creation of an international air police force did little to endear it to such groups and suggest its claim to be above party was something of a fig leaf. Yet, it was able to have a degree of success in parliamentary spheres, precisely because it did not attempt to cultivate cross-party support. Indeed, as Pugh has observed, 'Conservatives generally favoured national rearmament to militarised internationalism' and this was undoubtedly beneficial to the Air League.⁴⁴

III. The Navy League, Air Protagonists, and a 'More Virile Type of Patriotism'

While Air League members were some of the key contributors to the knock-out blow theory, there was a reluctance within the Navy League to engage with issues deemed to be of a technical nature, despite the fact that its membership comprised many naval authorities, former naval officers, and senior members of the Admiralty. As Lloyd informed the League's Executive Committee in December 1936, it had 'always been an unwritten rule of the Navy League that no part should be taken in controversial matters of technical detail connected with the ships of the Fleet'.⁴⁵ For Lloyd, this formed an important part of the League's relationship with the Admiralty more broadly. As he underlined in 1938:

our relations with the Admiralty have never been better . . . that is because we have steadily refused to take upon ourselves duties which are not within our competence to perform. It is

⁴³ Furthermore, such links were long-standing; the Air League was closely connected with the pre-war Parliamentary Aerial Defence Committee, the forerunner to the PAC, which was established shortly following Montagu's 'nerve centre' speech in 1909. The Parliamentary Aerial Defence Committee seemingly changed its title to the PAC in 1916. 'New Air Committee', *Daily Mail*, 10 August 1916, p. 3.

⁴⁴ Pugh, *Liberal Internationalism*, p. 88.

⁴⁵ NLSCC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 2 December 1936, p. 3.

not our duty to criticise the Admiralty on technical matters . . . Our job is to preach the sea services up and down the country.⁴⁶

He felt that while it was ‘always the business of the Navy League to press for a strong Navy’, it was ‘seldom its duty to interfere in matters of detail’.⁴⁷ Although Lloyd had previously stressed that it was ‘necessary to avoid any tendency for the Navy League to become a mere appendage of the Admiralty’, such pronouncements clearly highlight a desire within the League to avoid commenting upon subjects seemingly beyond its remit.⁴⁸

If there was a reluctance within the Navy League to comment upon issues of a technical nature, then it was far more willing to discuss the importance of the Royal Navy in relation to air power. At the League’s Grand Council Meeting in 1935, for instance, Lord Lymington ‘deprecatd the extraordinary propaganda for air power and the neglect of the sea service’.⁴⁹ Executive Committee meetings in early 1936 similarly reveal a deep-seated concern about calls for aerial supremacy from certain sections of the press. For instance, Admiral Stephenson called for increased propaganda to counteract the ‘grossly misleading and dangerous propaganda in favour of a supreme Air Force’ which he felt was attempting to ‘drive a wedge between the two services’.⁵⁰ Admiral Thursfield likewise criticised the ‘extreme propaganda at present indulged in by some of the air protagonists’ which he felt ‘was a menace and was seriously misleading the Public’. In combating such sentiments, however, Thursfield urged caution ‘lest the impression be given that the Navy League was old fashioned and not alive to modern developments’.⁵¹ Local Navy League branches also expressed apprehension at the primacy given to air power. For example, the League’s Bexhill

⁴⁶ ‘The Navy League Grand Council Meeting’, *The Navy*, August 1938, p. 1.

⁴⁷ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 15 June 1938, p. 2.

⁴⁸ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 18 November 1937, p. 4.

⁴⁹ ‘Grand Council Meeting’, *The Navy*, June 1935, p. 181.

⁵⁰ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 4 March 1936, p. 2.

⁵¹ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 26 March 1936, p. 2. Marsden also expressed frustration that, at the same time as the Navy League had published costly adverts in the *Daily Mail*, the same newspaper was running articles advocating the construction of a strong air force at the expense of the navy. MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 5 February 1936, p. 4.

Branch resolved that in view ‘of the overwhelming importance our Sea Communications, any increase in our Air Force should be considered as an accessory to, not as a substitute for, Sea Power’.⁵²

Fears that the air force was being built at the expense of the navy were a feature of the League’s Grand Council Meeting that year. Echoing the Bexhill Branch, the League’s Chelsea Branch similarly resolved that no increase in Britain’s air forces could be considered as a substitute for a modernised fleet, yet Thursfield urged that there should be no antagonism between the two services and argued that they both had a common object: ‘the security of the Country and of the Empire’.⁵³ Such fears display a desire to avoid inter-service rivalry, but also highlight an understanding that aviation – and the shadow of the bomber – perhaps had more hold upon public and parliamentary consciousness than naval threats. They underline the modernity and technological innovation of aviation in comparison with the tradition and heritage of the naval service. They are also interesting because, for the most part, the Navy League argued in favour of balanced armaments and was certainly alive to the importance of aviation for national defence. Indeed, as Lloyd stated to the League’s Glasgow Branch, ‘we in the Navy League, as the oldest and best known organisation concerned with the needs of National defence, are the first to recognise the absolutely vital needs of air supremacy’.⁵⁴

Alongside forming an important part at the Navy League’s Grand Council Meeting, air power was a central theme at its annual Nelson Day dinners. Expressing his satisfaction that Sir Cyril Newall, Chief of Air Staff from 1937 to 1940, was one of the principal speakers in 1937, Lloyd again urged that the Navy League stood for balanced armaments and that

⁵² NLSCC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 10 June 1936, p. 3.

⁵³ ‘Grand Council Meeting’, *The Navy*, June 1936, p. 6.

⁵⁴ CHUR, The Papers of Lord Lloyd of Dolobran (hereafter Lloyd Papers), GLLD, 22/16, Lloyd Lecture to the Glasgow Branch of the Navy League, 1 April 1936, p. 1.

‘co-operation [was] a source of security’.⁵⁵ Churchill, another key figure at the dinner, spoke with ‘particular pleasure about the British Navy’ and about the Navy League itself ‘which has played so great a part in maintaining its strength and not only maintaining its strength when these matters are common property and everyone’s sentiments, but in the years when so often defences are neglected’.⁵⁶ However, despite his praise, Churchill did stress that the ‘Air Force are in the front line now’ and that no ‘advocate of the Navy, no champion of the Navy League would go so far as to say Naval Defence would be able to defend us alone’.⁵⁷ Newall’s speech similarly underlined the importance of cooperation between the service departments. He argued that it was ‘only by co-operation that we can fulfil our duties’ and he hoped that the spirit of co-operation between the three services would increase.⁵⁸

The Navy League’s fears were shared at a more official level. A committee appointed by Baldwin in 1935, which focused on the ways in which air power had influenced the nature of warfare (particularly in relation to the long-standing demands of the navy regarding national defence) highlights this. The Committee explored inter-service rivalry and the pressure from figures in the aviation community lobbying for increased spending on Britain’s air force. As Chatfield, First Sea Lord of the Admiralty from 1933 to 1938, bemoaned, the navy had been ‘suffering from the most virulent attacks for a long time’ largely from ‘air protagonists [and] protagonists of air firms who want to rise to power on the ruins of the Navy’.⁵⁹

Attempting to limit inter-service rivalry, the Navy League suggested to the Air League in 1938 that it might combine into one organisation. This was rejected by the Air League’s Executive Committee on the grounds that it had sufficient strength to retain its

⁵⁵ ‘Navy League Dinner’, *The Navy*, November 1937, p. 332.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 335–336.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 336.

⁵⁹ Bialer, ‘Elite Opinion’, pp. 48–49.

independence, although a letter did appear in *The Times* calling for closer co-operation between the two bodies to make ‘the widest possible appeal’.⁶⁰ However, while there seems to have been no opposition from within the Admiralty, figures from within the Air Ministry were less enthusiastic about such proposals. For instance, Newall warned Chamier about associating with the Navy League, writing ‘the Air League should not do anything which would, by any conceivable means, tie its hands when propaganda for the Air Ministry and the Royal Air Force was required’.⁶¹ Lord Trenchard ‘strongly deprecated’ the proposal, while similar ‘unofficial views’ had also reportedly been expressed by members of the Air Council.⁶² Newall’s opposition is particularly interesting, given his calls for closer cooperation at the Navy League’s Nelson Day dinner the year before. More broadly, such statements highlight the Air League’s propagandistic importance, which will be further explored in Chapters 5 and 7, for the Air Ministry.

Following the second London Naval Conference, the Navy League limited its propaganda for a time. In late 1936, its Propaganda Sub-Committee felt that ‘the need for extensive and intensive lecturing had for the time being ceased and that the propaganda activities of the Navy League should be devoted to other channels, particularly in regard to the Merchant Navy, and an extension of the Sea Cadet Corps’.⁶³ At its Grand Council Meeting the following year, Lloyd noted that ‘after ten or fifteen years of persistent preaching, it has come home to the people of this country and to their leaders how manifest

⁶⁰ AL, AL Minute Book, A Special Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Air League, 23 June 1938, p. 1; MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 7 July 1938, p. 5; ‘Navy League and Air League’, *The Times*, 13 July 1938, p. 17.

⁶¹ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 20 July 1938, p. 1.

⁶² AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 6 October 1938, p. 1; 20 July 1938, p. 1.

⁶³ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 14 October 1936, p. 3. The League’s Finance Sub-Committee recorded a reduction of £500 spent on lectures and lecture tours by March 1937 as compared to early 1936, when the League was lobbying against the London Naval Conference. MSSC, FGP Minute Book, Meeting of the Sub-Committee, 10 March 1937, p. 1. It did, however, note that in general, the Navy League’s income and expenditure had more than doubled since 1931, with practically the entirety of this income being spent on active propaganda. MSSC, FGP Minute Book, Meeting of the Sub-Committee, 8 April 1937, p. 2.

is the impossibility of achieving any success in foreign policy . . . without adequate force behind it'. He felt that the Navy League had done its duty and that it could feel gratified and pleased at its role in bringing about rearmament. Yet, the extent to which the League directly influenced the policy of the Cabinet in relation to rearmament was made clear by Lloyd himself:

Our main task has been to provide public opinion throughout the country and although we can claim some measure of success in this connection, we cannot claim to have influenced the counsels of the Cabinet; no voluntary organisation can expect to do that, but it may help to influence them.

He felt that the League created a public opinion which the Cabinet could rely upon for support in pursuing rearmament and that the League's 'persistent propaganda against apathy and emotional pacifism has been largely instrumental in giving to the Government that united support for armaments which it has got now'.⁶⁴ However, while Lloyd observed that the League could no longer directly influence the form which rearmament would take, he stressed that there were other contributions which it could make to the military preparedness of the nation. The first was to lobby for improvements in the condition of the Merchant Navy, the second was the promotion of the SCC. Referencing the expansion of the SCC, he spoke of the 'futility of providing armaments if you do not provide the personnel behind them to wield them'.⁶⁵ This will be explored in Chapter 4, yet it is clear that the Navy League had a number of ways in which it felt it could contribute to rearmament. Speaking in support of Lloyd, Freemantle reminded those gathered that the Navy League had to carry out its propaganda at a time when 'a certain Organisation [the LNU]' had been particularly active. He stressed that the effect of the LNU's propaganda had been 'very serious indeed on public opinion, including the contemptuous ignoring of our armed forces'.⁶⁶ Thanks to a 'more

⁶⁴ 'Grand Council Meeting', *The Navy*, June 1937, p. 189.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁶⁶ Other Navy League figures had been even more hostile and warned that they needed to 'Watch the League of Nations Union like a cat watches a mouse . . . but don't play with it – stamp it out!'. 'Sea Power', *Kent & Sussex Courier*, 7 May 1937, p. 13.

virile type of patriotism’, however, Freemantle declared that the Navy League had contributed to the government’s decision adopt rearmament on a large scale and had achieved its main object, ‘the maintenance of a strong Navy’.⁶⁷

IV. The Many Air Leagues

In an associational sense, there were seemingly few organisations (aside from the Navy League) which were concerned with the political promotion of British naval power in the interwar years. Conversely, organisations such as the LNU, the NCS, and the Next Five Years Group all saw the potential of the aeroplane for achieving collective security through the internationalisation of aviation, through the creation of an international air police force, or through a combination of the two. While this may have represented a form of ‘militarised internationalism’, it was undoubtedly less militaristic than the policies pursued by a number of organisations on the political right who were also interested in aviation. Chapter 1 detailed the links of personnel and funding between the Air League and a number of groups on the far right, yet there were also a number of organisations which cut across the Air League’s work. One such organisation was the National League of Airmen (NLA). Founded in January 1935 by Lord Rothermere, owner of the *Daily Mail*, the NLA’s principal aim was to ‘make Britain air-minded and to make the rulers of Britain responsive to that air-mindedness’.⁶⁸ The League, which sought funding from Lady Houston, wanted ‘the condition of our aerial situation and development a matter of discussion and knowledge in every home in the country’.⁶⁹ With Captain Norman Macmillan, the flying ace and test pilot, as the

⁶⁷ ‘Grand Council Meeting’, *The Navy*, June 1937, p. 190.

⁶⁸ ‘A Nation of Airmen’, *Daily Mail*, 31 January 1935, p. 10. On the NLA, see Viscount Rothermere, *My Fight to Rearm Britain* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1939), pp. 89–96 and Holman, *The Next War in the Air*, pp. 2–3.

⁶⁹ N.J. Crowson (ed.), *Fleet Street, Press Barons and Politics: The Journals of Collin Brooks, 1932–1940* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1998), p. 77; ‘National League of Airmen for Britain’, *Daily Mail*, 30 January 1935, p. 9.

organisation's president, the NLA was conceived as being 'entirely directed by airmen. It must not be a hotch-potch of civilians with a few airmen who are unable to make their influence felt.'⁷⁰ As *Flight* pointed out, however, the work of the NLA was bound to overlap with the Air League and suggested 'a wastage of effort will arise'.⁷¹ The League itself also objected to the NLA.

The Air League initially considered approaching Rothermere to remove any misunderstanding between the two organisations, but Guest felt the former to be 'an extremely difficult man with whom to discuss a matter of this kind'.⁷² Despite this, the League wrote an open letter to Rothermere, to newspapers, and to its members, which stated that the aspirations of the NLA to create an airminded nation was welcomed by the League, but that it had a number of objections. It resented the NLA's reference to itself as "The Air League" as though the Air League of the British Empire did not exist', that 'by the use of "hotch-potch" of civilians" you [the NLA] should have disparaged the constitution and efforts of other organisations than your own who are engaged in like work', and finally that the NLA gave the impression that it had 'a monopoly of anxiety for the safety and progress of our nation in air matters'.⁷³ Despite criticism, by early 1938 Rothermere considered the

⁷⁰ 'National League of Airmen for Britain', *Daily Mail*, 30 January 1935, p. 9.

⁷¹ 'National League of Airmen', *Flight*, 7 February 1935, p. 146. *The Tatler* was even less welcoming of the NLA. While it described the Air League as 'eminently respectable and authoritative, senior and serious' it dismissed the NLA as 'pyrotechnic and impertinent' – a 'pert puppy, tearing the boots to bits'. 'Be-leaguered', *The Tatler*, 6 March 1935, p. 442.

⁷² AL, AL Minute Book, Special Meeting of the Executive Committee, 14 February 1935, p. 1. This assessment is interesting, particularly as Rothermere considered Guest to be one of the most 'helpful and suggestive of our supporters', as well as 'invaluable' in acquiring the support of flying clubs and in his parliamentary work on behalf of the NLA. Rothermere, *My Fight*, pp. 92–93. Despite Guest's warning, Sutherland and Chamier did later meet with Rothermere and Macmillan to discuss the NLA. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 25 June 1935, p. 3.

⁷³ AL, AL Minute Book, Special Meeting of the Executive Committee, 14 February 1935, pp. 1–2. In response, Collin Brooks, chairman of the advisory committee of the NLA, suggested that there was 'no attempt to establish a dictatorship of the air' and that neither 'implicitly in its formation nor explicitly in anything which has been uttered in its behalf has the N.L.A. desired to cast aspersions upon or to belittle in any way the Air League'. 'Air League of the British Empire', *Daily Mail*, 19 February 1935, p. 5. The conflict between the two organisations is also made more interesting when one takes into account that Macmillan later became closely involved in the Air Training Corps. For example, see Norman Macmillan, 'The Air Training Corps: Its History and Place in Contemporary Society', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, vol. 105, no. 5005 (1957), pp. 575–593.

NLA to have achieved its aims, noting: ‘In awakening the country to its danger and the need for rearmament in the air, and in making politicians conscious of the rising tide of public opinion in these matters, the League did a wonderful work’.⁷⁴

Alongside the Air League and NLA, there were other pressure groups on the political right which were concerned with aviation. As Edgerton and others have noted, aviators formed a disproportionate element in the BUF’s membership.⁷⁵ Mosley himself was a member of the RFC in the First World War – although only for several months after a crash (whilst showing off to his mother) brought his flying career to a premature end.⁷⁶ Despite his limited flying experience, Mosley attempted to cultivate a myth surrounding the airman, which incorporated idealised visions of war and youth.⁷⁷ Flying was undoubtedly of long-standing interest to Mosley – his parliamentary maiden speech in 1919 was, notably, on the Aerial Navigation Bill.⁷⁸ Mosley later called for ‘the creation of a British Air Force second to none in the world’ which perhaps goes some way to explaining the popularity of the BUF in wider flying circles and the support the BUF received from figures such as Rothermere and from journals such as *The Aeroplane*.⁷⁹ The BUF, in calling for the formation of a model airplane section of the British Union Youth Movement, stressed it could allow youths to make ‘themselves of real use to their country’ as well as ‘fitting themselves for a place in the aircraft industry of Britain’.⁸⁰ The BUF formed flying clubs in 1934, its journal *The Blackshirt* often published on the importance of maintaining a strong air force, it supported the NLA, and frequently argued that peace could only be maintained from a position of

⁷⁴ Rothermere, *My Fight*, p. 95.

⁷⁵ Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*, p. 77.

⁷⁶ Colin Cook, ‘A Fascist Memory: Oswald Mosley and the Myth of the Airman’, *European Review of History*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1997), p. 150.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 150; on aviation and the aviator in fascist myth, see Fernando Esposito, *Fascism, Aviation and Mythical Modernity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

⁷⁸ Cook, ‘A Fascist Memory’, p. 150.

⁷⁹ Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right*, p. 137.

⁸⁰ Cook, ‘A Fascist Memory’, p. 156.

power.⁸¹ Of course, while the majority of Air League members kept their political affinities private, it is clear that the BUF and the Air League shared a number of objectives.

A final organisation on the political right, the Hands Off Britain Air Defence League, is worthy of mention. Inaugurated in June 1934 by Oliver Locker Lampson, the right-wing MP, the organisation had ‘its purpose as an independent ginger group’. The first meeting was well attended, with speeches from Locker Lampson, the Duchess of Atholl, Sueuter, and Hannon. In a fiery address, Locker Lampson called for a ‘winged arm of long-range bombers, which would make the voice of England paramount again. Our prestige had sunk to zero. Once the British whisper reverberated around the world. To-day we might bellow in vain. For we lacked mastery in the air.’ He stated it was ‘unfair that because a politician was interested in the security of his country, he should be called a war-monger’.⁸² While Hannon and Sueuter had previously been Air League members, and while Locker-Lampson served on the PAC alongside Air League members, there were seemingly no further connections between the two organisations.⁸³ The most notable propaganda carried out by the Hands Off Britain Air Defence League was the distribution of a pamphlet titled ‘England Awake’. The pamphlet warned that ‘London can be bombed, battered and broken within a few hours’.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the League appears to have ceased operations in 1934 – and its influence appears to have been fairly marginal.⁸⁵ Significantly, however, it meant the Air League was not operating in a political vacuum. The place of the NLA, the BUF, and the Hands Off

⁸¹ This was an argument Mosley had espoused as early as 1924, suggesting such a policy was ‘not unreasonable or unthinking pacifism. It is reasoned pacifism . . . A weak Air Force provokes attack’. *Ibid.*, p. 149; p. 156; p. 155.

⁸² ‘Commander Locker Lampson on “England, Awake!”’, *The Times*, 29 June 1934, p. 12.

⁸³ ‘Civil Flying Development’, *The Western Morning News and Daily Gazette*, 28 November 1934, p. 9.

⁸⁴ Noel-Baker, *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*, pp. 322–323. Unsurprisingly the tone of the pamphlet was criticised, with a letter to *The Spectator* describing it as ‘hysterical propaganda’ as well as being ‘senseless and unpractical’. ‘Letters to the Editor: Hysterical Propaganda’, *The Spectator*, 20 July 1934, p. 88.

⁸⁵ However, for Noel-Baker, it was further evidence of the work of the private manufacturer of armaments and was part of the political pressure which resulted in the expansion of the RAF. Royal Commission, Minutes of Evidence, p. 235; Noel-Baker, *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*, p. 325.

Britain Air Defence League ensured that the Air League was not alone in its opposition to liberal internationalist ideas on aviation, or in calling for increased armaments.

V. The ‘Merchants of Death’ and ‘Sinister Organization[s]’: The Air League, the Navy League, and the Private Manufacture of Armaments

The private armament manufacturer (otherwise known as ‘The Merchant of Death’) was a long-standing feature of the British warfare state.⁸⁶ However, following the First World War, the private manufacture of armaments became even more contentious.⁸⁷ For Hugh Dalton, writing in 1928, armament manufacturers were ‘among the strongest and most unscrupulous opponents both of disarmament and peace. Until their power has been broken, the world will have no security against war.’⁸⁸ Beverley Nichols’s *Cry Havoc!* likewise detailed the presence of the private manufacturer of armaments, lamenting that ‘in our midst were these vast corporations, trading in death, profiting by death, owing their very existence to death’.⁸⁹ Fenner Brockway, the left-wing politician and anti-war campaigner, urged that ‘[m]ankind must either destroy the Bloody Traffic [the armament industry] or be destroyed by it’, while the UDC declared that if ‘Governments wish us to believe in their sincerity when they preach peace and discuss disarmament, they must begin by abandoning their unholy alliance with the vested interest in arms’.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Most notably encapsulated in George Bernard Shaw’s caricature of the sinister, amoral, and greedy arms trader, Andrew Undershaft, in his 1905 play *Major Barbara*. David G. Anderson, ‘British Rearmament and the ‘Merchants of Death’: The 1935–36 Royal Commission on the Manufacture of and Trade in Armaments’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 29, no. 1 (1994), p. 5. Fenner Brockway’s 1914 play, *The Devil’s Business* – which was also critical of the arms trade – is less well known. In part, this was because the play was seized by police shortly after its publication and the entire stock was subsequently ordered to be destroyed in line with the Defence of the Realm Act.

⁸⁷ Priya Satia, *Empire of Guns: The Violent Making of the Industrial Revolution* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018), p. 380. See also Richard Davenport-Hines, ‘The British Armaments Industry During Disarmament, 1918–1936’ (unpub. PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1979).

⁸⁸ Dalton, *Towards the Peace of Nations*, p. 196.

⁸⁹ Nichols, *Cry Havoc!*, p. 28.

⁹⁰ Fenner Brockway, *The Bloody Traffic* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1933), p. 19. Union of Democratic Control, *The Secret International: Armament Firms at Work* (London: Union of Democratic Control, 1932), p. 48. Cf. H.R.L. Sheppard, *We Say “No”: The Plain Man’s Guide to Pacifism* (London: John Murray, 1935), Chapter IX.

The League of Nations shared such sentiments, with Article 8 of its Covenant stating that ‘the manufacture by private enterprise of munitions and implements of war is open to grave objections’.⁹¹ The Labour Party was also a notable opponent of the private manufacture of armaments.⁹² The previous chapter has detailed the numerous campaigns waged by the peace movement in favour of disarmament, arms limitations, and collective security. A further area in which it lobbied against was, like the League of Nations, the private arms industry and the international arms trade.⁹³ This political and popular pressure forced the British government to establish the Royal Commission on the Private Manufacture of and Trading in Arms.⁹⁴

The Royal Commission was an official inquiry into the armaments industry which sat for twenty-two public sessions between 1935 and 1936. A vast quantity of evidence on the arms industry was generated by the Commission and this was supplemented by Noel-Baker’s publication of *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*, which used evidence he had provided at the Commission, in late 1936. Yet, as Edgerton highlights, ‘campaigners did not produce an adequate overall description of the interwar British military-industrial complex’.⁹⁵ While the Commission may have suggested that the ‘tide of popular feeling was

⁹¹ The League accordingly attempted to control the private manufacture of armaments through both a system of licences and by the publication of information on arms production, culminating in the League’s annual *Armaments Yearbook* (published from 1924 to 1938) in which states openly declared their armament levels. Andrew Webster, ‘Piecing Together the Interwar Disarmament Puzzle: Trends and Possibilities’, *International Journal*, vol. 59, no. 1 (2003/2004), p. 195.

⁹² Producing pamphlets such as: Philip Noel-Baker, *Hawkers of Death: The Private Manufacture and Trade in Arms* (London: Labour Party, 1935); Francis Williams, *The Sky’s The Limit! Plain Words on Plane Profits* (London: Labour Party, 1935); and W.H. Williams, *Who’s Who in Arms* (London: Labour Research Department, 1935).

⁹³ Edgerton, *Warfare State*, p. 25.

⁹⁴ Alongside publications such as H.C. Engelbrecht and F.C. Hanighen, *Merchants of Death: A Study of the International Armament Industry* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, Inc, 1934) which gives an account of the American Navy League and the private manufacture of armaments; Edward Frederick Packard, ‘Whitehall, Industrial Mobilisation and the Private Manufacture of Armaments: British State-Industry Relations, 1918–1936’ (unpub. PhD thesis, London School of Economics, 2009), p. 16.

⁹⁵ As Edgerton highlights, it was only the Communist Party of Great Britain who consistently, yet never comprehensively, pointed to the strength and connections of the British arms industry and to the size of the British arms trade. Edgerton, *Warfare State*, pp. 25–26. Cf. David Edgerton, ‘The British Military-Industrial Complex in History: The Importance of Political Economy’, *The Economics of Peace and Security Journal*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2008), pp. 6–10.

[now] running fiercely against private manufacture' of arms, it nevertheless failed to advocate any concrete action against such manufacturers.⁹⁶ However, the Commission, and later Noel-Baker, highlighted that armament firms used 'patriotic' societies, such as the Air and Navy Leagues, to lobby for increased spending on armaments as well as advertising on a considerable scale in aeronautical and naval journals.⁹⁷ This section does not attempt to explore the Royal Commission in any depth. Rather, it seeks to explore the charges brought against the Air and Navy Leagues concerning their relationship with the private manufacturers of armaments and how this influenced the character and policies of each League.

As noted in Chapter 1, Frederick Handley Page's offer to the Air League in 1926 of an annual sum of £5,000 for two years on the condition that Groves was appointed as secretary general with a free hand was highly controversial. Handley Page, founder of the aircraft manufacturing company Handley Page Limited, stressed that the offer was made 'entirely without condition as to the future policy of the Air League' and that the League 'would be free to settle its own affairs in its own way without dictation from any political body, trade interest or otherwise'.⁹⁸ Some within the League understandably feared such connections and were concerned that associations with aircraft manufacturers might hamper its independence. Despite this, the League's Executive Committee accepted Handley Page's offer. It was undoubtedly Sir Edmund Bartley-Denniss, the sole dissident regarding the offer and a figure who had previously considered the League's links with manufacturers as potentially 'disastrous, not only to the League but to the country', who leaked the story to

⁹⁶ Keith Krause, *Arms and the State: Patterns of Military Production and Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 6.

⁹⁷ Packard, 'Whitehall, Industrial Mobilisation and the Private Manufacture of Armaments', p. 18.

⁹⁸ KCL, GB0099, Letter from F. Handley Page to Viscount Burnham, 17 December 1926, p. 1.

The Times, which published proceedings of the meeting the following day.⁹⁹ This led to the withdrawal of the offer, with Handley Page noting that the ‘worst possible effect was being created by the suggestion that General Groves was the nominee of some body outside the Air League, and that the offer was made on behalf of those interested in production’.¹⁰⁰

Almost as remarkable as Handley Page’s offer, was the Air League’s invitation to Sir Basil Zaharoff, the arms dealer and archetypal ‘merchant of death’, to join it on public platforms and to become an honorary vice president.¹⁰¹ The Air League’s invitation was natural enough, given Zaharoff’s interest in aviation, yet his image and status would have made any association more difficult for the Air League to justify in the mid-1930s, when the ‘genuine [public] sentiment of revulsion’ against the profit in arms had reached its apogee.¹⁰²

It has already been observed that one of the League’s publicly stated aims was ‘the establishment of a thriving aircraft industry’ and this link was touched upon by other figures on the left. For example, it was noted by Clement Attlee in the House of Commons in 1926 (much to the annoyance of the League): ‘The suggestion conveyed in Major Attlee’s remarks that the Air League is a sinister organization, created to develop markets for some of our armament firms is wholly incorrect’. The League argued that ‘the names of well-known men, some of whom may be possibly interested directly or indirectly in aviation, from a manufacturing point of view, appear in the list of *personnel* of the League is only natural’.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ AL, AL Minute Book, Annual General Meeting, 23 June 1926, p. 2; ‘Offer to the Air League’, *The Times*, 14 January 1927, p. 14. It was also republished the following day in *The Daily Telegraph*, which stressed that *The Times* report contained inaccuracies: ‘Offer to Air League’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 January 1927, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ KCL, GB0099, Letter from F. Handley Page to Viscount Burnham, 16 February 1927, p. 1.

¹⁰¹ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 18 September 1918, p. 3; AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 2 June 1920, p. 2.

¹⁰² ‘Obituary: Sir Basil Zaharoff’, *The Times*, 28 November 1936, p. 17; Anderson, ‘British Rearmament’, p. 12.

¹⁰³ ‘Aims of the Air League’, *The Times*, 3 March 1926, p. 12. Emphasis in original.

Also natural, perhaps, was that manufacturers were among the friends of many Air League figures.¹⁰⁴

As well as being among the personnel of the League, manufacturers were also present on its public platforms. For example, in January 1926, in response to Hoare's announcement that the Air Ministry intended to slow down the rate of RAF production, the Air League held a luncheon to protest the decision. One of the key speakers was C.R. Fairey, founder of the Fairey Aviation Company and chairman of the SBAC, who, perhaps unsurprisingly, lamented Hoare's decision.¹⁰⁵ He was conscious of speaking from a position of vested interest, noting that 'when an aircraft manufacturer expresses any opinion on the subject of aerial defence, he lays himself open to the charge that the aircraft industry are very interested parties'.¹⁰⁶

This was not the end of the Air League's links with aircraft manufacturers.¹⁰⁷ Aircraft manufacturers (such A.V. Roe and Co. Ltd.) paid annual membership subscriptions to the League and were also considered when planning for increased propaganda activities.¹⁰⁸ A number of manufacturers (Fairey, Rolls-Royce, Saunders-Roe, and Armstrong-Whitworth) also supported the Air League by allowing visitors to attend their factories on Empire Air Day in 1934, with the Gloucester Aircraft Company allowing visitors to attend its factory in 1935, while contributors to Empire Air Day programmes included eminent manufacturers

¹⁰⁴ For example, Moore-Brabazon noted in his autobiography that 'all the leaders of the industry – Fairey, Handley Page, Spriggs, Dobson, Tommy Sopwith and Blackburn – have of course been friends of mine all my life', reflecting that it 'is a little cruel when they are described as 'armament makers''. Brabazon, *Brabazon Story*, p. 46.

¹⁰⁵ 'Mr. Fairey's Speech', *Air League Bulletin*, 21 January 1926, pp. 18–33.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁷ Indeed, as early as August that year, the League approached Armstrong Siddeley to support its activities with regard to an air pageant in Liverpool. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 24 August 1927, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 14 May 1930, p. 1; AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 20 December 1929, p. 3. The League also approached Fairey in connection with its proposed appeal for a R.101 memorial in memory of the 48 people (including Lord Thomson and Sefton Brancker) who died when the R.101 airship crashed in October 1930. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 17 December 1930, p. 2.

such as Geoffrey de Havilland and A.V. Roe.¹⁰⁹ Programmes on Empire Air Day were also replete with adverts for aircraft manufacturers.¹¹⁰

The League planned to arrange tours of the factories of aeroplane manufacturers for members of the Boy Scouts, and manufacturers were also considered in forming the ADCC, with Sutherland informing the League's Executive Committee that he would contact figures in the aviation and motor-car industry for assistance.¹¹¹ The ADCC did, in fact, receive financial backing from such companies, with Vickers donating to the Corps.¹¹² Adverts for aircraft manufacturers frequently appeared in *Air Review* and, as Noel-Baker suggested, the aeronautical press could not live without the advertisement contracts from armament firms.¹¹³ Alongside promoting manufacturers on Empire Air Day, the League received direct financial support from manufacturers such as Vickers-Armstrong and Imperial Chemical Industries (as well as unofficially approaching Fairey when struggling for funds in the early 1930s).¹¹⁴ The League also organised a trip for 30 MPs to Filton to visit the Bristol Aeroplane Company in 1934, only weeks before the announcement of plans for RAF expansion, to tour its factory.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Much to the annoyance of Noel-Baker. See Noel-Baker, *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*, p. 331; 'Arrangements for Empire Air Day in Gloucester', *Gloucester Journal*, 25 May 1935, p. 9; TNA AIR 2/449, Souvenir of Empire Air Day, produced by *Air Review*, 25 May 1935.

¹¹⁰ With Fairey, Rolls-Royce, Vickers-Armstrong, Handley Page, the Bristol Aeroplane Company, Hawker Siddeley, and a number of others all featuring (which the Air League hoped would partly, if not entirely, defray the cost of production). AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 19 November 1934, p. 2; NAL, Royal Air Force Official Programme: Empire Air Day 1939.

¹¹¹ AL, AL Minute Book, Joint Meeting of the Executive Committee and the Advisory Committee of Pilots, 5 February 1925, p. 2; AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 9 November 1937, p. 1.

¹¹² 'Air Defence Cadets', *The Times*, 15 October 1938, p. 7.

¹¹³ Indeed, as the SBAC emphasised in its statement to the Royal Commission, the '[aircraft] Industry does advertise in these trade journals and it quite prepared to believe that without these advertisements the trade journals could not survive'. Cited in Noel-Baker, *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*, p. 239.

¹¹⁴ Royal Commission on the Private Manufacture of and Trading in Arms (1935–36), Report (London: HMSO, 1936), p. 78; Royal Commission, Minutes of Evidence, p. 366; p. 453; AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 10 November 1931, p. 2.

¹¹⁵ 'M.P.s' Air Journey', *The Times*, 23 July 1934, p. 9. Alongside this, the Air League also organised tours for its members to factories at the Austin Motor Company. 'A Visit to the Austin Works', *Air Review*, February 1939, p. 11.

As well as financial contributions, there were occasions where private manufacturers seemingly directed Air League policy (as in the case of Groves's appointment) or at least heavily influenced it. For instance, Sir John Siddeley, director of Armstrong Siddeley, approached Lindsay Everard during the Geneva Disarmament Conference 'with the suggestion that the Air League might take action to safeguard British air interests'.¹¹⁶ The action taken was the appointment (with a contribution from Siddeley towards his salary) of Chamier as secretary general.¹¹⁷ It is also worth noting that Chamier was a director of Vickers Aviation and Supermarine before his appointment at the Air League.¹¹⁸ Likewise, Sir Henry White-Smith, the League's honorary treasurer in the late 1920s, also had strong ties to the aircraft industry.¹¹⁹ Chamier and White-Smith were not the only figures with links to the aircraft industry to sit on the League's Executive Committee, although the presence of such figures was not without opposition. Included in the Air League's restructuring in 1932, therefore, was the principle that no one actively associated with any aircraft manufacturer should have a seat on the Executive Committee.¹²⁰

Such links were mentioned in the Report of the Royal Commission and in Noel-Baker's subsequent book, which raised concerns that organisations such as the Air League were being 'used by the armament firms as a means of exerting indirect influence in favour

¹¹⁶ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 6 April 1933, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ This gives some credence to the UDC's suggestion that numerous observers throughout the Disarmament Conference had 'testified to the opposition to the cause of disarmament exerted through the Press and other channels [i.e. 'patriotic' societies] by the vested interests of armament manufacturers'. Union of Democratic Control, *The Secret International*, preface.

¹¹⁸ Noel-Baker, *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*, p. 333.

¹¹⁹ He was one of the founders of both the Bristol Aeroplane Company and the SBAC. 'Sir Henry White-Smith', *Flight*, 6 January 1944, p. 21.

¹²⁰ Accordingly, Sir Harry Brittain, Sir Alan Cobham, Sempill, and Gordon England (all of whom had strong links to the aircraft industry) were asked to resign. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 1 November 1932, p. 2. Despite this, an article in *Air Review* in January 1936 still claimed that 'To-Day the Air League does number among its members a few (too few !) people engaged in the aeronautical industry', although it stressed that 'the bulk of its members are ordinary British citizens'. Reflecting on the more long-standing links with the aviation industry, the same article noted that in 1909, the year the League was founded, there was 'no aeronautical industry then, so they could not be said to have had any axes to grind or fish to fry'. 'Why an Air League?', *Air Review*, January 1936, p. 64. Of course, the journal failed to mention that Sir Hiram Maxim, creator of the Maxim machine gun and armament manufacturer, was one of its earliest supporters. 'The Mansion House Meeting and its Lessons', *Flight*, 10 April 1909, p. 204.

of increased national armaments'.¹²¹ Noel-Baker particularly focused on Handley Page's offer: 'In plain English, £10,000 was offered to the League to help it to create opinion in favour of increased armaments in the air'.¹²² In his evidence to the Royal Commission, Noel-Baker similarly stated that the Air League should publicise its membership, subscribers, lists of donors, and 'ought not to have any connection with the industry by which . . . armed forces are to be produced'.¹²³

Financial links between the Air League and manufacturers were also touched upon by other figures. For example, Brockway and the journalist Frederic Mullally later suggested that such links explained why the Air League so 'assiduously pursued the "aim"' of establishing a 'thriving aircraft industry'.¹²⁴ However, given the often parlous financial condition of both the Air and Navy Leagues in the interwar years and the fact that both, on occasion, declined subscriptions from armament manufacturers, one should be careful of overemphasising the importance of such financial links.¹²⁵ While it may not be the case that either organisation was solely 'moved by patriotism freed from politics', neither League simply acted as a mouthpiece for armament firms.¹²⁶

Like the Air League, the Navy League was conscious of both financial and political associations with the armament industry.¹²⁷ For instance, when approached by R.T. Lang of

¹²¹ Royal Commission, Report, p. 60. The suggestion that the Air League was heavily subsidised by 'industrial money' also featured in the work of Alfred Vagts. Vagts, *Militarism*, p. 358.

¹²² Noel-Baker, *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*, p. 330. This was also detailed by the air power sceptic Neon, who spoke of the 'far-reaching, interlocking, and powerful influence of Scientific Pools and Salaried Bureaucrats, of Wireless, of Oil and the Aircraft Industry' in relation to Handley-Page's offer. Neon, *The Great Delusion*, p. 234.

¹²³ Royal Commission, Minutes of Evidence, p. 237.

¹²⁴ Fenner Brockway and Frederic Mullally, *Death Pays A Dividend* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1944), pp. 56–57.

¹²⁵ The SBAC, in its evidence to the to the Royal Commission, was particularly keen to distance the Air League from the private manufacture of armaments, observing that the aircraft 'industry has not sought to interfere in any way with the business of the Air League or to dictate its policy'. Royal Commission, Minutes of Evidence, p. 517.

¹²⁶ Davenport-Hines, 'The British Armaments Industry', p. 56.

¹²⁷ On the role of industrialists and private manufacturers of naval armaments, see Christopher W. Miller, *Planning and Profits: British Naval Armaments Manufacture and the Military Complex 1918–1941* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018).

Sell's Ltd., with a scheme to acquire funds from shipbuilding, steel, and armament firms for the Navy League to use in the education of the British public on the necessity of the navy, the League's Executive Committee was strongly opposed.¹²⁸ Similarly, in his report to the Royal Commission, Sir Charles Craven, chairman and managing director of Vickers, revealed that Vickers-Armstrong also offered subscriptions to the Navy League (as well as to the Air League) but that they were refused.¹²⁹ This was explained by Lloyd, who urged that it 'was imperative that no accusation that the League was supported by Armament firms could be made with any justification', and by G.O. Stephenson, general secretary of the League at the time, in the following terms: 'The League consider that, if they accepted subscriptions from armament firms, they would not feel themselves entirely free to form whatever opinion they might wish. They might be accused of having their policy dictated to them.'¹³⁰ However, in a later Executive Committee meeting, Lloyd discovered that the League had in fact been receiving funds from Vickers.¹³¹ Unaware of this, Lloyd was furious and lamented that 'in the full course of his career, he had never before been so badly let down as he had been in this instance'.¹³² In the same meeting, the League resolved to return a cheque for £100.00 to the Imperial Chemical Industries, due to the company's production of armaments.¹³³

While the Navy League clearly wanted to avoid the controversy that surrounded Handley Page's financial offer to the Air League, this did not stop it accepting financial contributions from Vickers to the SCC (or from approaching firms in the shipping industry for financial support for the Corps) yet there appears to have been curiously little hostility

¹²⁸ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 6 March 1930, pp. 1–2.

¹²⁹ Royal Commission, Minutes of Evidence, p. 366.

¹³⁰ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 8 November 1934, p. 1; Cited in Noel-Baker, *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*, p. 305.

¹³¹ It had also received funding from Imperial Chemical Industries earlier in the decade. MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 4 June 1931, p. 2.

¹³² MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 6 December 1934, p. 3.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

towards these contributions.¹³⁴ Similarly, there was little opposition to Vickers's offer to the Navy League of lantern slides illustrating the construction of a battleship for lecturing purposes or the fact that, in 1930, the League was receiving £154 per annum from aeroplane manufacturers and others within the aviation industry.¹³⁵ Alongside financial links, Lord Sydenham had spent a period on the board of Armstrong Whitworth, Patrick Hannon became a director of the Birmingham Small Arms company following his time with the Navy League in 1925, while Leo Amery became a director of the naval manufacturers Cammell Laird & Company in 1933.¹³⁶ Despite such links, however, the involvement of armament manufacturers in the organisational and institutional elements of the League appear to have been far less extensive than with the Air League. While the private manufacturers of arms may not have been able to dictate the policy of the Air and Navy Leagues, they certainly saw the propagandistic value of each League. Links of personnel, funding, and objectives – especially in the Air League's case – were numerous and undoubtedly significant. Associations with the 'Merchants of Death' also did little to help each organisation disassociate itself from accusations of militarism.

VI. The Air League, Rearmament, and Defence from the Air

Although Sutherland was satisfied with the Air League's increased parliamentary activity in late 1933, this did little to assuage his growing anxiety regarding Britain's aerial position. At the League's Annual General Meeting in 1934, he stressed that Britain's air force was currently 'pitiably below strength' and argued that:

no reasonable person could really look forward with pleasure to our entry on a race in air armaments with other countries but no sane citizen could look with equanimity on our present

¹³⁴ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 18 March 1937, p. 3.

¹³⁵ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 18 December 1923, p. 6; MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 6 November 1930, p. 4.

¹³⁶ Davenport-Hines, 'The British Armaments Industry', p. 183; Haxey, *Tory M.P.*, pp. 62–65.

position. There must be a speeding up immediately of the defences forces of this country . . . we had to get, by agreement or otherwise, an Air Force second to none in the world.¹³⁷

Speaking at a Navy League meeting in June 1934, Chamier likewise regretted that '[a]s matters stand, the world laughs at British peace plans: we hawk them round Europe, and no one cares and no one listens, because we have no weight behind our views. The British lion is old, his claws are cut, his teeth decayed, and his spirit gone.'¹³⁸ While the Air League may have been successful in awakening politicians and the public to the potential threat of the aeroplane, it was clear that it remained unsatisfied with Britain's aerial position. The League expressed 'bitter disappointment' over the air estimates in 1934, particularly Lord Londonderry's memorandum accompanying the estimates which described a 'widening gap between the present strengths of the Royal Air Force and of the Air services of the other great powers'.¹³⁹

Following the introduction of the first RAF expansion scheme, Scheme A – the first major expansion of the RAF since 1923 – and Baldwin's comment that 'since the day of the air, the old frontiers are gone. When you think of the defence of England, you no longer think of the White Cliffs of Dover; you think of the Rhine', the Air League was far less critical of both the state and the Air Ministry.¹⁴⁰ After the formal acknowledgement that Britain was pursuing parity with anyone within striking distance of its shores, *Air Review* wrote that 'it is a good start and a courageous one. A Government still hoping for some agreement on the limitation of armaments, and beset by the apostles of internationalism, can do no more.'¹⁴¹ The statement was not simply an attempt to lay the blame for Britain's

¹³⁷ AL, AL Minute Book, Annual General Meeting, 10 July 1934, p. 2.

¹³⁸ 'Defence of Peace', *Air Review*, June 1934, p. 60.

¹³⁹ 'Air Estimates', *Air Review*, April 1934, p. 9.

¹⁴⁰ Commons Sitting, Armaments, *HC Deb 30 July 1934 vol 292 cc2325-447*.

¹⁴¹ 'The Increase in the Royal Air Force', *Air Review*, September 1934, p. 13.

perceived aerial deficiencies on its liberal internationalist rivals, but instead seemed to genuinely reflect the Air League's stance on rearmament plans.

The formal announcement of German rearmament did little to alter the League's policy, rather it was merely confirmation of what it had been preaching for most of the 1930s. 'The great lesson to be drawn from Germany's rearmament', *Air Review* stated, 'is that any nation, though bound by Treaty and under constant surveillance by suspicious neighbours, can arm secretly if it intends to. The abolition of national military air forces would lead directly to this danger; the internationalisation of military or civil aviation can do nothing to remove it.'¹⁴² The Air League's opposition to the internationalisation of aviation and the creation of an international air police force was seemingly vindicated. According to the League, Britain had 'listened too long to theorists and internationalists' and the lessons were clear: 'We must have an Air Force for the defence of this country equal at least to that of any other power within reach of our shores, and we must have it quickly'.¹⁴³

The Air League did not call for an unrestrained armament programme, but instead suggested that an 'ordered progress – a steady strengthening of foundations to carry a solid structure – is preferable to spectacular spending that might only erect a flimsy façade'. It also noted that the RAF was suffering from 'sixteen years of neglect. The effects of sixteen years of neglect cannot be remedied in one year's Estimates.'¹⁴⁴ Sutherland did, however, stress that it was 'accepted that we must increase the Royal Air Force – and increase it rapidly – if we are to get out of a most dangerous situation'. He felt that it was, to some extent, due to the Air League's 'constant propaganda that we have obtained real public recognition of

¹⁴² 'Germany's Rearmament', *Air Review*, May 1935, p. 9.

¹⁴³ 'German Rearmament in the Air', *Air Review*, June 1935, p. 10–11.

¹⁴⁴ 'The 1935 Air Estimates', *Air Review*, April 1935, pp. 9–10.

the position, so that our sober and peace-loving peoples realise that we can no longer take the risk of inferiority in the air'.¹⁴⁵

As well as commenting on the need for rearmament, the Air League also often reflected on the best measures Britain could employ to defend against the threat from the air. The League questioned the apparent wisdom of Baldwin's the 'bomber will always get through' speech, suggesting that 'we can confidently assert that the bombing of women and children, or bombing in reprisal of attacks on women and children, is the most foolish form of utilising air power which it is possible to conceive'. The League objected to the way in which the term 'reprisals' was used in reference to air power and criticised suggestions that it was not possible to defend against aerial bombardment. It suggested that a more likely (or more efficient) scenario than the bombing of women and children would be that bombardment would be directed against a nation's Achilles heel, stressing 'only in the case of the most feeble-minded people would direct attack on the morale of the civil population come under this heading'. The best form of defence, so the League argued, was to attack the 'air establishments of the enemy [which] will serve to diminish very greatly the scale of attack which can be brought to bear on us'.¹⁴⁶

Similarly, following the formal announcement of German rearmament, the League reflected on the form of any potential conflict. An article in *Air Review* asked its readers: 'Which strategy is likely to triumph? – one that uses air power to choke docks with sunken ships, stop the production of munitions, and to attack the enemy air establishments? Or the one that attacks women and children and civilians in their homes?' The journal declared: 'Let us stop this constant cry of havoc . . . The sooner our possible enemies realise that we

¹⁴⁵ 'Twelve Months of Air League Work', *Air Review*, August 1935, p. 27.

¹⁴⁶ 'Reprisals', *Air Review*, March 1934, pp. 13–15.

are not to be scared into surrender by the bombing of civilians the less likely are we to suffer from such attacks'.¹⁴⁷

However, following the announcement of German rearmament, the Air League did call for the country to 'put our backs into defence as much as into counter attack', with members such as Chamier warning that, in a future conflict, mustard gas could be 'dropped like rain from the skies'.¹⁴⁸ Sutherland likewise urged in July 1935, the same month as the first Air Raid Precautions (ARP) circular was issued by the Home Office, that a 'big drive should be made for air defence'. He felt that the question of defence had not been properly tackled and was of the opinion that 'the country could be given a great measure of security against air attack'.¹⁴⁹ He also emphasised that 'too much stress should not be given to the counter attack which was a poor consolation to the individual citizen' and that the anti-aircraft gunnery, searchlight and sound locator operations, and other forms of defence should be promoted.¹⁵⁰ Air defence, although not as prominent as the counter offensive, was also part of Air League pronouncements surrounding the threat of the bomber in light of growing international tension beyond Europe. For instance, writing on the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, the League stressed that it did not believe that:

anything like sufficient attention has been given to this problem of defence – a defence which must involve every art which science can bring to our aid: aeroplanes, guns, searchlights, balloon aprons, aerial mine fields, camouflage, air defence training for civil population. Everything which can lessen casualties and prevent panic must have our urgent and earnest attention.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ 'Germany's Rearmament', *Air Review*, May 1935, p. 10.

¹⁴⁸ 'War from the Air', *The Scotsman*, 15 November 1935, p. 14; 'Germany's Rearmament', *Air Review*, May 1935, p. 10.

¹⁴⁹ AL, AL Minute Book, Annual General Meeting, 10 July 1935, p. 2. Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire*, p. 201.

¹⁵⁰ AL, AL Minute Book, Annual General Meeting, 14 July 1936, pp. 1–2.

¹⁵¹ 'The Air League to its Members', *Air Review*, November 1935, p. 18. Cf. 'Air Defence', *Air Review*, October 1937, pp. 7–8.

While the League hoped that events would not develop into a ‘European catastrophe’, it felt that Abyssinia underscored the importance of strengthening Britain’s air force, while also emphasising the vulnerability of civilians to aerial warfare.¹⁵²

Despite the Air League’s relative inactivity in matters of aerial defence, it was nevertheless approached with a number of schemes which revolved around precisely this. For instance, Chamier revealed to the League’s Executive Committee in June 1937 that he had received ‘highly confidential proposals’ for the Air League to organise a ‘National Air Defence Exhibition’ at Olympia.¹⁵³ The Exhibition seemingly did not take place, yet proposals for an exhibition on air defence, only months after the German bombing of Guernica, suggest that civil defence and the preparation for conflict were understandably becoming more pressing issues for the Air League in the late 1930s.¹⁵⁴ Similarly, the Air League was approached in March 1938 with a scheme for the evacuation of schoolchildren from large towns to specially-built schools in the country in the event of war.¹⁵⁵

Of course, events on the international stage made matters of defence more pressing and the threat of aerial bombardment more tangible. We have seen the Air League’s response to the Abyssinian Crisis and it was similarly vocal on the Munich Conference. Indeed, for the Air League, the lessons of the Conference were clear: ‘whether we are fighting to achieve peace with honour or struggling to maintain the peace secured to us by statesmanship, our efforts in our own defence must be intensified’. The League argued that ‘We must pay no

¹⁵² ‘The Air League to its Members’, *Air Review*, November 1935, p. 17. The League accordingly appointed a sub-committee – comprising Guest, Chamier, and W.O. Manning – to consider the question of defence, subsequently planning an air defence campaign. However, the government’s announcement that it would be further expanding the RAF and increasing subsidies to civil aviation (in the form of Scheme C) led the sub-committee to defer any action. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 10 December 1935, p. 1. On Scheme C, see Smith, *British Air Strategy*, pp. 152–159.

¹⁵³ Chamier did not reveal who the organisers of the exhibition were, yet told the Committee that he was to meet the officers of the three services and the Home Office, Air Raid Precaution Committee on 9 June to discuss the matter. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 8 June 1937, p. 3.

¹⁵⁴ On Guernica, see Ian Patterson, *Guernica and Total War* (London: Profile Books, 2007).

¹⁵⁵ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 3 March 1938, p. 2.

heed to those who, drawing false lessons from the Spanish or Japanese wars, say that aeroplanes are inconclusive' and warned that '[w]hen aeroplanes are skilfully used on a large scale they can destroy the sinews of war by striking ammunition works, factories and communications. Weakness in our air defence organisation might lead to our defeat.'¹⁵⁶

In response to the Munich Agreement, the League called for more active, and radical, defence measures. The League noted that most existing ARP schemes aimed at getting the majority of the population in underground air raid shelters, with the defence of the country being left in the hands of those in the services. Yet, the League suggested there was room for more active civilian participation. One suggestion was that civilians could lay smoke screens in the event of an air raid, yet it also felt it would be feasible to arm 'civilian "soldiers"' with light machine guns to combat low flying aeroplanes, asking: 'Is it so hard to train a man to fire with some accuracy against low flying aircraft? Would not the volume of fire make up to some extent for any inaccuracy?'¹⁵⁷ The militarisation of civil society was a theme of a further article in *Air Review* in February 1939. The article stressed that if Britons were to be forced underground, 'into holes like rabbits', and industry, commerce, and communications were disrupted, then 'utter chaos' would be caused and any war would be lost. It stated that it 'is on active defence that we must concentrate. If we can shoot down the enemy, or ward off his attack, the losses which will be inflicted upon our people will diminish.'¹⁵⁸ It was clear that the League felt civilians had an active role to play in conflict.

VII. The Navy League, the Merchant Navy, and the Preparation for War

If the Navy League felt that it had influenced the government's decision to pursue naval rearmament, albeit somewhat indirectly, it was less content about the condition of the

¹⁵⁶ 'Everyone Must Help', *Air Review*, October 1938, p. 7.

¹⁵⁷ 'Local Defences', *Air Review*, December 1938, pp. 7–9.

¹⁵⁸ 'Our Air Defences', *Air Review*, February 1939, pp. 7–9.

Merchant Navy in the late 1930s.¹⁵⁹ After expressing satisfaction in late 1936 that the League's lecturing and press campaigns for rearmament had reached millions – with the introduction of the government's White Paper its 'great reward' – Lloyd also declared that the League had 'every confidence in Sir Samuel Hoare's influence at the Admiralty'. He then stressed that the League would turn its activities to 'making the people of this country understand the terrible and dire effect which a depleted Mercantile Marine must have on the whole of the Empire'.¹⁶⁰ In doing so, the League frequently drew upon the importance of the Merchant Navy in the First World War and emphasised that in any future conflict the role of the Merchant Navy would be even greater. As Lord Beatty stressed in 1938, 'the great lesson of history was that there was no security for an Empire such as ours without sea power'. He hoped 'that the lesson that sea power was necessary meant also that the mercantile marine was not forgotten.'¹⁶¹ In attempting to disseminate its message, the League engaged in an extensive programme of political lobbying which included lecture tours, letters to the press, public meetings, letters to the prime minister, and pronouncements in the House of Commons and House of Lords.

At the Navy League's Grand Council Meeting in 1937, Lloyd was satisfied that the League had been active in both the House of Commons and House of Lords in relation to the Merchant Navy, but stressed that more could be done.¹⁶² Navy League branches on a local level also lobbied for improvements in Britain's Merchant Navy. For example, at the League's Edinburgh Branch it was argued that one of Britain's most 'urgent naval needs today was the provision of an adequate Reserve, properly trained and fully equipped in the

¹⁵⁹ The Merchant Navy had been a feature of discussions at its Grand Council Meeting in 1933, although lobbying against disarmament and in favour of rearmament took priority until 1936. 'Grand Council Meeting', *The Navy*, June 1933, pp. 178–182.

¹⁶⁰ 'Navy League Dinner', *The Navy*, November 1936, p. 309.

¹⁶¹ 'British Sea Power', *The Scotsman*, 2 February 1938, p. 8.

¹⁶² 'Grand Council Meeting', *The Navy*, 27 May 1937, p. 189.

strategy of defensive warfare . . . A shortage of seamen and ships in our Merchant Navy might prove disastrous in war.’¹⁶³

For the Navy League, naval supremacy rested not only upon a powerful Royal Navy, but also on a vibrant shipping industry and a large Merchant Navy with the capability to carry out trade, supply Britain’s food, and provide a reserve of manpower. A powerful Merchant Navy was important to trade, commerce, and communications with its empire, but it was also important for British prestige. Indeed, in early 1938 the League objected to the ‘scandal’ resulting from the ease with which registration to the Merchant Navy and consequent protection of the British flag could be obtained by foreign vessels. Lloyd had contacted Neville Chamberlain, then Prime Minister, directly, receiving a response noting that no further temporary registration would be granted by British Consuls without reference to the Board of Trade and that a number provisionally registered British ships had reverted to their foreign registration.¹⁶⁴ The League also considered the advisability of pressing for the appointment of a Minister of Marine at this point, although felt it could not be pursued owing to the political pressure it would involve. However, this did not prevent further propaganda on behalf of the Merchant Navy.¹⁶⁵ In attempting to increase its influence in this sphere, the League appointed Captain B. Shillitoe to serve, as a representative of the Merchant Navy, on its Executive Committee.¹⁶⁶ Lloyd also stated that just as every Admiral of the Fleet was a Navy League vice president and supporter, ‘so we desire that the Chairman

¹⁶³ ‘Our Merchant Navy’, *The Scotsman*, 3 March 1937, p. 19. At a Navy League meeting in Birmingham, Lloyd similarly argued that ‘To-day we cannot man our Merchant Navy and we are beginning to have difficulty in manning our Royal Navy’. In order to combat this, Lloyd called upon those gathered to support the SCC. ‘No Reserves for Navy’, *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 19 July 1937, p. 5.

¹⁶⁴ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 3 March 1938, pp. 1–2.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁶⁶ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 7 April 1938, p. 3.

and Directors of every Shipping Company and Shipbuilding Company shall join our ranks'.¹⁶⁷

Lloyd was active in lobbying for the Merchant Navy in the House of Lords on a number of occasions. He drew attention to the decline of British shipping in the Pacific in June 1936, impressing upon his audience that if the Merchant Navy – ‘its men as well as its ships’ – was ‘ineffective or enfeebled’, it could herald Britain’s ‘downfall as surely as naval defeat’. He stressed that no other country ‘is in so precarious a state as regards its food supplies as our own’ and that if Britain’s ports were closed or its ships sank then the people of the country would starve.¹⁶⁸ He again brought the matter of the Merchant Navy before the House of Lords several weeks later. He warned that Britain could not rely upon neutral tonnage to assist its Merchant Navy in a future war as it had done during the First World War, nor could it rely upon the fact that its cargo carrying tonnage had increased. He stated that it was not the tonnage that counts, but the number of ships and that a ‘torpedo or bomb does not sink a percentage of tonnage; it sinks a ship’.¹⁶⁹ Lloyd was part of a number of other debates as the decade progressed. In lobbying for the Merchant Navy, Lloyd felt ‘amazed at the complacency of Parliament, amazed that at the most critical period probably in the whole of our history we should not be more interested in or more concerned at the depletion in our shipping’.¹⁷⁰ Commander Marsden also lobbied in the House of Commons for improvements to the Merchant Navy, although seemingly met with little success.¹⁷¹

At the League’s Grand Council Meeting in 1938, the decline of the Merchant Navy was once again the central topic of discussion. Lloyd felt that as the Royal Navy was rapidly rearming, the decline of the Merchant Navy was the issue which ‘all our energies and [the]

¹⁶⁷ CHUR, Lloyd Papers, GLLD, 22/16, Lloyd Lecture, 1 April 1936, p. 5.

¹⁶⁸ Lords Sitting, British Shipping in the Pacific, *HL Deb 23 June 1936 vol 101 cc142-80*.

¹⁶⁹ Lords Sitting, Shipping, *HL Deb 30 July 1936 vol 102 cc411-49*.

¹⁷⁰ Lords Sitting, British Shipping (Continuance of Subsidy) Bill, *HL Deb 09 March 1937 vol 104 cc562-80*.

¹⁷¹ Commons Sitting, Mercantile Marine, *HC Deb 06 April 1938 vol 334 cc348-9*.

country's attention must be directed because the position is extremely grave'.¹⁷² He felt that there was little indication that either the government or the public appreciated the gravity of the situation. Reflecting on his own work, Lloyd stated that he had spoken in Parliament, had addressed important meetings throughout the country, and was in constant communication with the Shipping Federation, founded in 1890 to promote the interests of shipowners, and almost every important shipowner in the country. He nevertheless referred to the decline of British shipping in the Pacific, in the Baltic, and criticised the lack of protection to Britain's coastal trade.¹⁷³ Others spoke in more stark terms, declaring that the 'public must be roused from their comfortable coma to acute awareness of the disagreeable fact that the Red Ensign is being gradually ousted off the seas by the foreigner, and that the trident is being snatched from the hand of Britannia'.¹⁷⁴

Lecturing activities, public meetings, and letters to the press continued throughout 1938, yet the League remained unsatisfied. In October that year, Lloyd regretted that no scheme of rearmament would 'avail anything unless the Government can make up its mind to give immediate protection to the greatest of all its industries, namely, the Merchant Navy and the men who man the Merchant Navy'.¹⁷⁵ By 1939 Lloyd felt that the 'Merchant Navy was more than a great industry; it was an essential national and Imperial service, whose prosperity should be the concern of every man, since its services were necessary to our very life as individuals and as a nation and Empire'.¹⁷⁶ The League's endeavours in relation to the Merchant Navy received wide press coverage both locally and nationally and was supported by a number of figures, or former figures from the Admiralty, including Admiral Sir Roger Backhouse, First Sea Lord of the Admiralty from 1938 to 1939, Sir Roger Keyes,

¹⁷² 'The Navy League Grand Council Meeting', *The Navy*, August 1938, p. 1.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁷⁵ 'Navy League Dinner', *The Navy*, November 1938, p. 336.

¹⁷⁶ 'Dangerous Decline of the Merchant Navy', *The Times*, 14 February 1939, p. 9.

Admiral of the Fleet, and Duff Cooper, First Lord of the Admiralty from 1937 to 1938.¹⁷⁷ Lloyd also received the backing of Sir Samuel Hoare, First Lord of the Admiralty from 1936 to 1937. At the League's Nelson Day dinner in 1936, Hoare paid tribute to the 'sincerity of purpose, to the resolute courage and to the unshaken patriotism that Lord Lloyd has always shown to the country and to the Empire during the many years of his distinguished career'. Hoare also noted that while the Admiralty and Navy League had a 'particularly independent line of action and they do not always agree, both of us are engaged in the same task'.¹⁷⁸

By 1939, the League was calling for the appointment of a Minister of Shipping with Cabinet status to be responsible for the administration of the Merchant Navy.¹⁷⁹ While Lloyd argued there was still work to be done in relation to the Merchant Navy, he felt that the League could claim 'quite definitively that during the last two or three years we have done more than any other body to compel the Government to make proposals for subsidies for the Merchant Service'.¹⁸⁰ The League expressed satisfaction that the government had passed the Merchant Shipping Assistance Act in early 1939, granting large financial aid to the shipping industry, and felt this success was due to its long campaign on behalf of the Merchant Navy.¹⁸¹ It felt that the Act constituted an important contribution to the 'security of our country and merit[ed] the gratitude of both Government and people'.¹⁸² Such sentiments were shared by Duff Cooper, who remarked that 'the splendid state of the Navy owed much to the vigilance and energy of the Navy League'.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁷ 'Navy League Dinner', *The Navy*, November 1938, p. 336; 'Grand Council Meeting', *The Navy*, June 1937, p. 192; 'Our Danger at Sea', *Liverpool Daily Post*, 7 March 1939, p. 9.

¹⁷⁸ 'Navy League Dinner', *The Navy*, November 1936, p. 310.

¹⁷⁹ Despite criticism, a Minister of Shipping was not appointed until after the outbreak of the Second World War.

¹⁸⁰ 'The Navy League Grand Council Meeting', *The Navy*, July 1939, p. 237.

¹⁸¹ MSSC, Navy League Pamphlets, NLAR 1939, p. 3.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁸³ 'Our Danger at Sea', *Liverpool Daily Post*, 7 March 1939, p. 9.

While the Navy League's propaganda surrounding the Merchant Navy can hardly be described as militaristic, this did not mark the abandonment of navalism or attempts to contribute to the military preparedness of the nation. In the late 1930s the League was not reluctant to criticise the state or the public concerning its attitude towards the Merchant Navy, but it was less willing to publicly criticise the Admiralty. As Chapter 4 will examine, the League was dependent upon the financial, moral, and political support of the Admiralty for the SCC and for the promotion of navalism through British youth. By 1936, the League was satisfied that it had achieved its aim to awaken the government and the public to the importance of the Royal Navy for the maintenance of the nation and empire. Efforts, therefore, shifted to the militarisation of youth and the promotion of Nelsonian principles of duty, discipline, and sacrifice through Trafalgar Day.

VIII. Conclusion

By the late 1930s, Britain's rearmament programme was concentrated on two key 'technological arms' – the RAF and the Royal Navy – both of which 'were among the very strongest in the world'.¹⁸⁴ As Edgerton has highlighted, 'in absolute terms Britain spent at least as much as any other country on warfare, and about the same as it had spent in the Edwardian years'.¹⁸⁵ As Edgerton makes clear, the Royal Navy 'out-built all other navies in nearly all periods of the interwar years and in nearly all classes of warship'.¹⁸⁶ The RAF was accorded strategic priority in the 1930s and subsequently overtook the army, in 1937, and

¹⁸⁴ Edgerton, *Warfare State*, p. 58.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58. G.C. Peden, building on the work of Edgerton, has also recently explored how British defence policy was based on technological innovation. He argues that British grand strategy was, in fact, far more ambitious than is commonly assumed. G. C. Peden, *Arms, Economics and British Strategy: From Dreadnoughts to Hydrogen Bombs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 1. In his earlier work, Peden highlighted the ways in which the Treasury, rather than hindering rearmament, helped direct it towards the development of the air force and navy. G.C. Peden, *British Rearmament and the Treasury, 1932–1939* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1979).

¹⁸⁶ Edgerton, *Warfare State*, p. 32.

the Royal Navy, in 1938, in terms of total expenditure.¹⁸⁷ In 1940, Britain was the leading aircraft manufacturer in the world, producing 50 per cent more airframes and engines than Germany.¹⁸⁸ The Air and Navy Leagues were among the chief protagonists in supporting the development of Britain as a warfare state. Although the Air and Navy Leagues may not have influenced the shape of rearmament, both Leagues exerted considerable effort to keep issues of military strength within public and parliamentary consciousness. This did not entail a large-scale campaign for rearmament, but a more reasoned programme which still pointed to areas of deficiency when necessary. This did not mean that the Air and Navy Leagues no longer attempted to contribute to the military preparedness of the state – or to promote military prowess – as the next section of the thesis will demonstrate.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁸⁸ Richard J. Overy, *The Air War 1939–1945* (London: Europa Publications, 1980), p. 150.

Part B:
The Militarisation of Society

Chapter 4: ‘Tak[ing] the Place of Those Who Had Gone Before’: The Navy League Sea Cadet Corps, Navalism, and the Command of the Sea

On 9 March 1937 a national appeal for funds was launched at Mansion House, London, to expand the activities and organisation of the SCC.¹ At the meeting, it was announced that Lord Nuffield promised to donate £50,000 to the Corps – on the proviso it could raise £100,000.² Presided over by Sir George Broadbridge, the Lord Mayor of London, a number of speeches were made by influential figures, including Sir Thomas Inskip, the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence, Sir Alan Anderson, the Conservative MP, the Earl of Cork and Orrery, Admiral of the Fleet, and Lord Lloyd.

Opening the meeting, Broadbridge lamented that the City of London itself did not have a Corps, but felt that the SCC provided a reserve of manpower ‘disciplined and imbued with love of country’ and that such a movement was to the advantage ‘both of the youth of the nation and of the country itself’. Broadbridge spoke at length on the value of the SCC to both the nation and empire, themes which were important in the ethos and practice of the Corps itself, declaring:

We must command the seas or perish as an Empire. It was vital that a constant supply of sea-minded young men should be coming forward generation by generation to take the place of those who had gone before. It was only by the Nelson tradition of patriotism, service, and self-sacrifice that the Empire could be maintained. The Navy League, through its cadet corps, would take a great part in ensuring that that tradition would be preserved.³

Inskip was similarly enthusiastic, remarking that ‘I cannot imagine any more British institution than the Sea Cadet Corps . . . in spirit we are all sailors; we all love the sea; we

¹ Although the appeal was indeed national, the Navy League was not above ‘private begging’ for funds for the SCC, especially prior to the appeal. MSSC, FGP Minute Book, Meeting of the Sub-Committee, 10 February 1937, p. 2.

² £1,000 each was also donated from Vickers, Morgan Grenfells, Lord Wakefield, and the Maharaja of Patiala. MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 18 March 1937, p. 3. While the Navy League contacted prominent firms in the shipping, steel and shipbuilding industries in an attempt to accrue funds for the Corps, it was unable to raise this amount, although Nuffield donated the sum regardless. MSSC, FGP Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 2 July 1937, p. 2; ‘Navy League Dinner’, *The Navy*, November 1937, p. 332.

³ ‘Lord Nuffield’s Gift to Navy League’, *The Times*, 20 October 1937, p. 8.

all think of the sea as the element on which the Englishmen lives and flourishes.’⁴ In elevating the sea and the navy into a distinct political symbol – based around the preservation of empire and nation – both speakers implicitly signalled that it was something that, for members of the SCC, was worth fighting for. By evoking a long-standing institutional symbol – the Royal Navy – the Corps was frequently linked to a largely uncontested emblem of Britishness and national prestige.

The Mansion House meeting marked part of a concerted effort by the Navy League to recruit boys aged between 12 and 18 and train them in the habits of discipline, duty, self-sacrifice, seamanship, and to ‘instill into them a love of the Empire and a love of the Navy, on which that Empire absolutely depends for its existence’.⁵ While the SCC had a long history, the political, moral, and financial support at the Mansion House meeting proved to be a catalyst for the expansion and organisation of the Corps. Previous chapters have looked at the Navy League’s promotion of navalism in the form of public, political, and parliamentary pressure; this chapter will instead explore the resonance of navalism for British youth and the extent to which the Navy League attempted to imbue a sense of navalism among its Cadets.

While much has been written on youth organisations in the interwar years, and on youth culture more broadly, militaristic Corps such as the SCC and ADCC rarely feature in such accounts. Studies of organisations such as the Lads’ Drill Association, the Church Lads’ Brigade, the Jewish Lads’ Brigade, and the Boys’ Brigade focus largely on the Edwardian era, with the post-war period being framed as inhospitable to military, and militaristic, youth organisations. The current and following chapter will argue that such organisations were able to occupy an important place in the youth culture of the interwar years. While scholars

⁴ ‘The Navy League Sea Cadet Corps’ [hereafter ‘NLSCC’], *The Navy*, April 1937, p. 103.

⁵ ‘Sea Cadet Corps News’ [hereafter ‘SCCN’], *The Navy*, January 1936, p. 25.

have examined Navy League activities, it is surprising that little of this work has extended to explore the League's attempts to imbue a sense of navalism, and an often-atavistic 'naval patriotism', within Cadets.⁶ This is especially surprising as so much Navy League work revolved around youth. As W. Mark Hamilton has noted, 'an area of continual League effort was the awakening and influencing of British youth'.⁷

In part, this neglect no doubt results from the reluctance within naval and maritime history to embrace the cultural turn in historical scholarship until relatively recently. However, as Glen O'Hara has argued, British naval and maritime history has lately undergone 'something of a renaissance'.⁸ Certainly, works by Jan Rüger, Timothy Jenks, Mary Conley and, more recently, by Daniel Owen Spence, Duncan Redford, James Davey, and Quintin Colville suggest this is the case.⁹ The lack of historical attention may, then, be due to the popularity of rural and peaceable youth movements in the interwar period, and the ways in which groups like the Boy Scouts became associated with internationalism, alongside imperialism and militarism – characteristics of the movement's pre-war years.¹⁰

As the SCC was not a mass-membership organisation until the Second World War, and as interest in the SCC waxed and waned, one may question why a Corps that emphasised

⁶ On 'naval patriotism', see Timothy Jenks, *Naval Engagements: Patriotism, Cultural Politics, and the Royal Navy 1793–1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁷ Hamilton, *The Nation and the Navy*, p. 147. On the Navy League and navalism in children's literature, see Hazel Sheeky Bird, 'Naval History and Heroes: The Influence of U.S. and British Navalism on Children's Writing, 1895–1914', *The International Journal of Naval History*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2014). <http://www.ijnhonline.org/2014/07/01/influence-us-british-navalism-childrens-writing/> (accessed 23 September 2019).

⁸ Glen O'Hara, "'The Sea is Swinging Into View': Modern British Maritime History in a Globalised World', *The English Historical Review*, vol. CXXIV, no. 510 (2009), p. 1109.

⁹ Rüger, *The Great Naval Game*; Jenks, *Naval Engagements*; Mary A. Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack: Representing Naval Manhood in the British Empire, 1870–1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Daniel Owen Spence, *Colonial Naval Culture and British Imperialism, 1922–67* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015); Duncan Redford (ed.), *Maritime History and Identity*; James Davey and Quintin Colville (eds), *A New Naval History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

¹⁰ On the relationship between Scouts, imperialism and internationalism, see Scott Johnston, 'Courting Public Favour: The Boy Scout Movement and the Accident of Internationalism, 1907–29', *Historical Research*, vol. 88, no. 241 (2015), pp. 508–529. On youth culture more broadly, see David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, c.1920–c.1970* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

discipline, duty, physical culture, a martial, naval masculinity, and had distinctly militaristic overtones warrants specific attention. Yet, its lack of historical scrutiny is surprising for a number of reasons. The SCC, which occupied an uneasy position between civil and military spheres of society, played an important part in the cultivation of civic, local, and regional pride, as well as forming an important part of national ceremony, pageantry, civic and military ritual, and commemoration. The Corps also provides an insight into the relationship between the Navy League and the Admiralty and the extent to which the Admiralty valued the work of the SCC. The Corps made a direct military contribution to both the First and Second World Wars and provides a lens through which to examine the changing nature of navalism and Navy League policy more broadly. Finally, an exploration of the SCC provides an insight into the place of physical culture – and the associated anxieties relating to fears of a perceived decline in national efficiency – masculinity, citizenship, discipline, and patriotism in interwar Britain and the ways in which British youth engaged with military culture, especially in the prelude to the Second World War.

In exploring these themes, this chapter argues that the SCC represented a form of popular navalism, with the Corps being designed to make a direct contribution to the military preparedness of the nation. Moreover, owing to the voluntary nature of the Corps, youth participation in the SCC suggests that there was still an enthusiasm for the navy and military culture among British youth in the interwar years. By stressing the educational and character-building nature of the Corps, the leadership of the SCC was largely able to avoid accusations of militarism that were levelled at similar organisations, such as the ADCC. In examining these areas, this chapter will first briefly outline the history of the SCC from its inception in the mid-nineteenth century, up until the end of the First World War. It will then look at the emphasis the League placed on the education of youth in the aftermath of the conflict before examining the SCC's training and the organisation of the Corps. The chapter will then trace

the relationship between the Navy League and the Admiralty surrounding the SCC, before looking at a number of areas in relation to the Corps, such as: naval heritage and tradition, the Corps in military and civic events, annual camps, uniform, masculinity, and militarism. It will then outline the SCC's expansion following the Mansion House meeting and will briefly chart the activities of the Corps upon the outbreak of the Second World War.

I. Origins, Organisation, and the Admiralty

The emergence of the SCC – or a youth culture centered around the sea – was not an interwar development.¹¹ While an influx of uniformed youth organisations were created in response to concerns over national efficiency caused by the Boer War, the origins of the SCC can, in fact, be traced to the Crimean War. Sailors returning from Crimea, concerned by the apparent idleness and delinquency of youths, formed a Naval Lads' Brigade at Whitstable in 1856. A handful of other Lads' Naval Brigades were formed throughout the nineteenth century yet, as L.J. Collins notes, the work of naval veterans of Crimea in relation to naval brigades, and the activities of such brigades more broadly, are not well documented.¹² The Navy League itself described the origins of the SCC as 'little more than Boys Social Clubs with a salt atmosphere, some emphasis on sea interests, and later a uniform of "naval" character'.¹³ It was not until the League's involvement that such brigades had any discernible organisation or significance.

Formed from a collection of disparate naval brigades and naval organisations in late 1910, the Boys' Naval Brigade (BNB) was founded by the Navy League with a view 'to the establishment of a Central Organisation to deal with the various Companies of Boys' Naval

¹¹ On youth culture in the period more broadly, see David Fowler, *The First Teenagers: The Lifestyle of Young Wage-Earners in Interwar Britain* (London: Woburn Press, 1995).

¹² L. J. Collins, *Cadets: The Impact of War on the Cadet Movement* (Oldham: Jade Publishing Limited, 2001), p. 9.

¹³ CHUR, Lloyd Papers, GLLD 17/59, Report on Sea Cadet Corps, 1940, p. 2.

Brigades' and had two principal aims. The first was 'to secure uniformity in the management of existing Brigades, or those about to be formed in the future' and the second was 'to co-ordinate such volunteer effort as may be available for the promotion of Brigades, and to control and direct the training necessary for their efficiency'. The role of the BNB's Sub-Committee was to arrange competitions between brigades to 'induce a healthy rivalry', hold mass meetings of the brigades, organise excursions to naval ports 'in order to teach something about the Royal Navy and its work', publish a paper for the use of boys which would give news of the brigades, particularly the 'meritorious deeds on the part of the boys concerned', and to give advice generally on obtaining of uniforms, rifles, boats, and instructional equipment.¹⁴ Drill and quasi-military activities formed part of the BNB's early training and the outward appearance of the brigades was of a military nature. Indeed, even shortly after its formation, the BNB was conscious about its militaristic appearance, expressing concern over the War Office's objection to "armed parties" marching the streets'.¹⁵

Lack of funding, equipment, uniform, and organisation characterised the early years of the BNB, although there was a steady growth from its inception up until the outbreak of the First World War. While other organisations, such as the Boys' Brigade, were reluctant to become officially associated with the army, the Navy League quickly attempted to formalise links with the Admiralty and, in May 1913, the Navy League applied to the latter for recognition of its brigades. In attempting to justify official recognition, the League stressed that the BNB ensured that 'a constant stream of eligible boys pass[ed] into the Navy . . . no better means can be devised for the preparation of a better class of boys for sea service

¹⁴ MSSC, Central Boys' Naval Brigades Committee Minute Book, 1910–1915 (hereafter BNB Minute Book), The Navy League, Boys' Naval Brigades, undated, pp. [1–2].

¹⁵ MSSC, BNB Minute Book, Meeting of the BNB Sub-Committee, 12 March 1911, p. 2.

than that which is now afforded' through the BNB.¹⁶ Such proposals were eventually rejected, although this was largely due to the outbreak of war and many Admiralty members spoke enthusiastically about the scheme.¹⁷

The BNB played an active role in the First World War, with units engaged in a number of activities, for instance acting as messengers, signal boys, coastal watchers, and a range of other duties.¹⁸ Of course, as well as serving in civil defence, many boys applied for active service in the Royal Navy. By the end of the conflict, the BNB had contributed 164 officers and instructors and 3,099 boys to the fighting forces, with most serving in the Royal Navy or Mercantile Marine.¹⁹ While such figures are not particularly striking, the League took pride in its contribution, with *The Navy* asserting: 'When the demand for "British boys for British ships" is remembered, it is obvious that the movement is one which deserves official recognition and public support as a practical national asset'.²⁰ The BNB was, in fact, finally recognised by the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty as a Central Association in January 1919, formally becoming the SCC.²¹

Official recognition to SCC Units meant financial support and the loaning of equipment such as boats, rifles, and field guns. Officers and instructors were granted Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR) honorary commissions and were allowed to wear the RNVR uniform. However, recognition would only be granted by the Admiralty on a number of conditions. Units had to be financially self-supporting; had to comply with any rules, regulations, or orders issued from the Admiralty; had to have a minimum of 30 boys

¹⁶ TNA ADM 1/8384/187, Volunteer Cadet Corps and Sea Scout Associations. Request for official recognition of Boys Naval Brigades, Letter from P. J. Hannon to the Admiralty, 21 May 1913, p. 1; MSSC, BNB Minute Book, Meeting of the BNB Sub-Committee, 9 June 1913, p. 3.

¹⁷ See TNA ADM 1/8384/187, Volunteer Cadet Corps.

¹⁸ For example, see 'Stornoway Naval Corps and Stornoway Boys' Naval Brigade', *The Navy*, March 1916, p. 94.

¹⁹ Hamilton, *Nation and Navy*, p. 151.

²⁰ 'Boys' Naval Brigade: Admiralty Recognition', *The Navy*, October 1918, p. 98.

²¹ MSSC, BNB Minute Book, 1916–1921, Meeting of the BNB Sub-Committee, 3 February 1919, p. 1.

registered; and instructors had to be capable of ‘imparting elementary technical instruction to its members in an efficient manner’. Units then had to pass an Admiralty inspection and thereafter pass at least one inspection annually.²² The Admiralty saw the purpose of the SCC as providing ‘moral, social, and physical training’, which would improve the ‘welfare of boys’, who would receive ‘instruction of a nautical character’.²³ However, while the SCC had the support of the Admiralty, the Corps was not supported by all naval organisations.²⁴

The BNB was not a priority for the Navy League in the Edwardian era – or even throughout the First World War. However, following the conflict, there was a distinct shift in the League’s policy, and a far greater emphasis placed on education and youth.²⁵ Addressing the guests of the League’s first Nelson Day dinner since the Armistice, the Duke of Somerset noted that ‘perhaps the strangest of all England’s peculiarities is the ignorance of English people generally on the subject of its Sea Services and their vital importance to the nation, their history, and their everyday work’. In an attempt to remedy this, Somerset stressed that the League would create ‘an educational campaign amongst the children of this country’ that the organisation ‘hoped to make one of its principal works in the future’.²⁶

At the Grand Council Meeting in 1920, it was similarly stated that ‘the main duty of the Navy League would be to see that the youth of this country, those who guided the studies of the youth of this country, that those who were in a position of authority at universities and

²² TNA ADM 120/214, Memorandum Relating to the Official Recognition by the Admiralty of the Sea Cadet Corps, 3 October 1918, p. 2.

²³ TNA ADM 1/8545/310, Regulations Governing the Formation, Organisation and Administration of Units of the Sea Cadet Corps in the British Isles, 1918, p. 3.

²⁴ For example, the RNVR Committee objected to SCC officers wearing the RNVR uniform and having RNVR ranks as many had received ‘no naval training’, were ‘in no way under discipline’ and could not ‘be considered part of any fighting force’. TNA ADM 1/8645/186, Officers of Recognised Sea Cadet Corps. Designation and Uniform, RNVR Committee, 14 July 1922, p. 1.

²⁵ Although the Navy League did attempt to establish branches in secondary schools prior to the First World War. See TNA ED 24/1653, Formation of branches of The Navy League in Secondary schools, 1912.

²⁶ ‘Nelson Day Dinner’, *The Navy*, December 1919, p. 164.

secondary schools, should all appreciate properly the value of the sea to this country'.²⁷ The inculcation of navalist principles through schools and in the SCC was not without opposition.²⁸ For example, L.B. Perkin in *Public Schools* complained that 'the Navy League in particular is still spreading political notions of quite remarkable narrowness among preparatory schoolboys'.²⁹ While the League considered such remarks 'vitriolic', it was nevertheless satisfied 'as they showed our lectures were having some effect'.³⁰

Alongside its work in schools, the Navy League was present at the Schoolboys' Exhibition in 1929 (which had an attendance of 80,000), with the *Daily Mail* noting 'for the boy with a love of blue water in his veins . . . there is the Navy League exhibit'.³¹ The Navy League's presence at the exhibition did, however, meet with some criticism. Commenting on a film shown by the League, titled 'Keep Watch', the *Daily Herald* wrote that it would be 'unquestionably dangerous in [its] effects on the impressionable minds of the youngsters' and that it should be removed from the exhibition.³² It criticised the film for only showing the positive elements of life in the Navy and argued that the film should also show the bleaker elements such as 'a picture of a crowd of the disfigured and mutilated to follow those wherein the boys are shown [as] fine strapping youths, the acme of fitness, drilling and exercising'.³³

²⁷ 'Grand Council Meeting', *The Navy*, April 1920, p. 46. The League had already started to offer prizes for essays on naval history by this point, see TNA ADM 1/8530/193, Offers of Prizes for Naval History by the Navy League, 1918.

²⁸ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 2 June 1927, p. 4; 7 July 1927, p. 1.

²⁹ L.B. Perkin, *Public Schools: Their Failure and Their Reform* (London: Hogarth Press, 1932), p. 101.

³⁰ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 3 March 1932, p. 2.

³¹ 'Thrills for Schoolboys at To-day's Great Exhibition', *Daily Mail*, 31 December 1929, p. 7. The Navy League agreed to take part in the same exhibition in 1930. The *Daily Mail* again waxed lyrical about the League's display, promising it would ensure that boys would be 'thrilled with the might and majesty of British sea power'. 'Thrills for Schoolboys', *Daily Mail*, 16 December 1930, p. 4.

³² 'Arms & the Boy', *Daily Herald*, 4 January 1929, p. 4.

³³ "Catching 'Em Young", *Daily Herald*, 4 January 1929, p. 5. Despite the *Daily Herald's* opposition, the League was satisfied that a large number of maps, calendars, postcards, and pictures of Nelson had been sold, and that "Keep Watch" – which had been shown twice daily for a week – had attracted an average audience of 180 people per screening. MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 9 January 1930, p. 3. Propaganda for the SCC did, in fact, show the realities of life in the navy. For instance, one poster showed a British warship, in stormy conditions, firing on an enemy vessel and called for contributions to the Nelson Day Fund. IWM, Art IWM PST 7942, The Navy League, Nelson Day Fund, 1926.

Closely connected with the education of schoolchildren, was the development of SCC. The SCC was supported financially by the Nelson Day Fund (which was kept going from Flag Day contributions held on Trafalgar Day), as well as by private and public donations, membership subscriptions to the Navy League, and capitation grants from the Admiralty. The Corps also received donations from more controversial figures. One such figure was Lady Houston, who donated £5,000 to the SCC in 1933, although seemingly without much opposition.³⁴

The object of the SCC was ‘to continue the training of boys just before and after school leaving age, in habits of discipline, duty and self-respect’, ‘to educate them to love the British Empire and its splendid sea traditions’, and to help boys ‘desirous of joining the Royal Navy and Mercantile Marine to attain their ambition’.³⁵ The League hoped that members of the Corps would become ‘of practical use not only in time of peace but in time of war, and that they may be educated to believe in the British Empire and the British Navy’.³⁶ The League’s Committee considered the work of the SCC as ‘one of the most valuable methods of obtaining publicity for the League’, yet the Corps, and the Navy League itself, also had the private and public support of the Admiralty.³⁷ As early as 1924, Beatty felt that the League had succeeded in ‘instilling into the young generation the sea sense upon which the foundations of the Empire were built, and its work in that direction was a great national asset’.³⁸ Inspecting the Cowes Unit of the SCC in 1927, Lord Jellicoe, First Sea Lord of the Admiralty from 1916 to 1918, similarly argued that the Navy League ‘was never more needed than to-day’.³⁹

³⁴ ‘Grand Council Meeting’, *The Navy*, June 1933, p. 172.

³⁵ MSSC, Navy League Pamphlets, ‘Navy League’, 1936, p. 2.

³⁶ Navy League, *Pocket Manual for the Navy League Naval Units and Sea Cadet Corps* (London, 1939), p. [49].

³⁷ MSSC, Navy League Pamphlets, NLAR 1920, p. 17.

³⁸ ‘Navy League Fair’, *The Times*, 23 May 1924, p. 12.

³⁹ ‘Lord Jellicoe’s Inspection of Sea Cadets’, *The Times*, 17 January 1927, p. 7.

Upon recognition of the SCC in 1919, the Admiralty provided a capitation grant of 2s. (later 6s.) per Cadet which the Navy League considered to be of ‘immense help’ in maintaining the Corps.⁴⁰ Despite the League’s reliance on this grant, it received a letter from the Admiralty in early 1924, informing it that the capitation grant would be terminated.⁴¹ This was met with profound regret by the Navy League. Citing the importance of encouraging a sea-spirit through the SCC both within the nation and the empire, the League urged the Admiralty to reconsider, however the decision ultimately lay with the Treasury. The decision to stop the grant does seem to have been made with reluctance from the Admiralty, as many considered the Corps to be of ‘great national importance’ and ‘that the Sea Cadet Corps training does much to strengthen the morals of those young lads, instils habits of obedience and discipline . . . and in many cases gives them a taste for a sea career’.⁴² The Admiralty also felt that enthusiasm for the Corps would be lost if ‘divested of its naval or military character’.⁴³ As the capitation grant was restored in 1927, albeit reduced to 3s. 6d. per Cadet, this suggests that the Admiralty did indeed see the value of the SCC in such terms.⁴⁴

The Navy League’s Executive Committee was responsible for the SCC’s affairs and organisation generally, although the scheme was decentralised and local branches often handled the affairs of units in their areas. The administration of the SCC continued in this manner until mid-1935 when the SCC Sub-Committee was formed, undoubtedly improving the efficiency of the Corps’ organisation.⁴⁵ To facilitate training, the League produced a

⁴⁰ ‘The Sea Spirit and Good Citizenship’, *The Navy*, July 1927, p. 189.

⁴¹ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 6 March 1924, p. 2.

⁴² TNA T 161/1212, Fighting Services. Navy: Sea Cadet Corps. Volunteer Cadet Corps Attached to Royal Navy Establishments; Assistance to be given to Recognised Units, 1920–1925, Letter from the Secretary of the Admiralty, 10 November 1923, p. 2; TNA ADM 1/8633/179, Sea Cadet Corps. Recognition of New Units, Minute Sheet, 1 August 1922, p. 1.

⁴³ TNA T 161/1212, Letter from the Secretary of the Admiralty, 5 May 1920, p. 1.

⁴⁴ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 7 April 1927, p. 3.

⁴⁵ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 6 June 1935, p. 2. See Appendix IV.

pocket manual for the SCC which contained information on the discipline expected to be maintained by members of the Corps, seamanship, signalling, drill, rifle exercises, physical drill and exercise, model making, first aid, and various other topics. The manual also included the ‘Sea Cadet’s “Promise”’, which members of the Corps were required to sign. This was essentially a code of practice which the Cadet would live by while serving as a member of the Corps. The Cadet was required to declare loyalty to the King, to officers and instructors, and to his fellow Cadets. The final ‘promise’ required the Cadet to ‘try and follow the glorious example of Nelson and DO MY DUTY’.⁴⁶ The League emphasised that while the SCC did not seek to ‘*force boys into a Maritime career*’, the manual would provide an ‘excellent grounding’ for those who wished to join the services.⁴⁷ Although the Corps had the support of Admiralty in the interwar years, members of the SCC also attempted to gain recognition and legitimacy within public consciousness – on a local and national scale – by taking part in a number of popular civic events, rituals, and ceremonies.

II. The SCC and Popular Civic Ritual

In taking part in civic and military ritual, the SCC both participated in, and indeed promoted, military culture and put navalism on a public stage. The performative aspects of the SCC constituted a significant element in the promotion of sea-mindedness among boys and it was important to the leadership of the Corps that boys took part in a navalist ‘patriotic public sphere’.⁴⁸ Spectacle and imagery were important in the navalist ‘patriotic public sphere’, yet such imagery had a long and distinguished pedigree in British civic life.⁴⁹ Military theatre,

⁴⁶ Navy League, *Pocket Manual for the Sea Cadet Corps*, p. 42.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. [49]; p. [2]. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁸ Jenks, *Naval Engagements*, p. 11.

⁴⁹ Scott Hughes Myerly has shown the ways in which military imagery and martial spectacle was a crucial component of military management in the nineteenth century. He argues that martial spectacle helped to instil values such as: bravery, duty, discipline, order, efficiency, self-sacrifice, and loyalty to those in command – all of which were ‘embedded in the military model’ and were highly idealised military virtues. Scott Hughes

pageantry, ritual, and drill all contributed in steering members of the Corps towards serving the state in times of war.

Units of the SCC were present on important state occasions, such as the Silver Jubilee in 1935 and the Coronation of King George VI in 1937.⁵⁰ The Corps also had units present on important naval occasions, such as the Royal Naval Review at Spithead to celebrate the Silver Jubilee.⁵¹ In taking part in such ritualised performances of military culture, the SCC contributed to a range of overtly militaristic events, such as the Hendon Air Pageant, Empire Air Day, the Aldershot Tattoo, and navy weeks, which aimed to keep the military at the forefront of public consciousness in the interwar years.

The SCC also took part in commemorations of war. The Corps was often present on Armistice Day and commemorated the Battle of Jutland, the death of Jack Cornwell, and, of course, Trafalgar Day.⁵² However, the Corps' veneration of fallen military figures was not limited to the navy. The SCC also commemorated figures of empire, taking part in remembrance parades for 'that hero of the last century', General Gordon, who died at Khartoum.⁵³ The Corps also took part in the British Legion's Festival of Empire.⁵⁴ Of course, while Trafalgar Day was the most important annual commemoration for the Corps, the SCC clearly deemed it important to champion emblems of empire and Britishness more broadly.

While each unit had to reach a standard of efficiency as laid out by the Admiralty, the activities of units varied based on locations, funds, the size of the unit, and the experience

Myerly, *British Military Spectacle: From the Napoleonic Wars through the Crimea* (Cambridge, Mass.: London: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 11.

⁵⁰ 'SCCN', *The Navy*, May 1935, p. 164; MSSC, Sea Cadet Corps Sub-Committee Minute Book, 1935–1943 (hereafter NLSCC Minute Book), Meeting of the Executive Committee, 18 March 1937, p. 1.

⁵¹ 'SCCN', *The Navy*, July 1935, p. 256.

⁵² MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 24 November 1932, p. 3.

⁵³ 'SCCN', *The Navy*, March 1935, p. 97. On 'heroic imperialists' and the promotion of these heroes in Britain and France, see Berny Sèbe, *Heroic Imperialists in Africa: The Promotion of British and French Colonial Heroes, 1870–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

⁵⁴ 'SCCN', *The Navy*, January 1939, p. 32.

of local organisers. Drill, marching, seamanship, rifle training, field gun training, and physical fitness were part of most unit's activities. That martial and quasi-military training was central to the SCC, even after the First World War, suggests that the leadership of the Corps were intent on shaping boys into naval citizens of the nation. Such training was also reflected in – and an important part of – the SCC's public presence. For example, members of the Corps frequently participated in Empire Day parades and had the support of Sir William Wayland, chairman of the Empire Day Movement.⁵⁵ The visibility of the SCC in public arenas on Empire Day was a reflection of the SCC's growth and increasing ambition and was an important vector for publicly linking the Corps to the empire.

The Corps also took part in a number of other major civic events such as the Lord Mayor's procession in London. In one procession, Cadets followed a 'decorated motor-lorry, bearing a 12-pdr quick-firing naval field gun and section of gun's crew'. Upon the lorry was a white banner with the "Navy League Sea Cadet Corps," printed and below, the motto of the Corps, "Keep Watch". On either side of the lorry similar banners were displayed, emblazoned with "British Boys for British Ships".⁵⁶ Parades and marches not only gave an opportunity for members of the SCC to be present on important civic occasions, but also provided the 'thrill which comes with military movement'.⁵⁷ Reflecting on the presence of the Corps at a battleship launch in 1939, *The Navy* observed that '[e]xperiences such as this encourage and fortify the whole movement. Like the great parade in Trafalgar Square, they give these boys a vision of duty and a sense of usefulness to the state.'⁵⁸ While such occasions may not have necessarily elicited notions of duty or a sense of usefulness towards the state in all boys, members of the Corps did not passively take part in such events and

⁵⁵ 'N.L. Navy League Units and Sea Cadet Corps', *The Navy*, July 1924, p. 201; 'NLSCC', *The Navy*, July 1932, p. 226.

⁵⁶ 'NLSCC', *The Navy*, December 1927, p. 381.

⁵⁷ 'SCCN', *The Navy*, November 1936, p. 326.

⁵⁸ 'They Do Count', *The Navy*, March 1939, p. 66.

likely understood the militaristic nature of them. However, if boys did not appreciate the military nature of civic processions and naval commemorations, then they could hardly miss the more overt forms of militarism which was a feature of military tattoos and military fêtes.

The SCC's role in British Legion fêtes and military tattoos included parading, marching, rifle drills, signalling displays, physical training, the use of naval field guns, and even the storming of mock naval ports.⁵⁹ In its tattoos, the SCC provided displays of earlier conflicts, as well as of modern warfare. Such was the efficiency of SCC units in military tattoos that *The Navy* described them as being 'reminiscent of the Searchlight Tattoo at Aldershot'.⁶⁰ While this may have been something of an overstatement, military parades and tattoos provided an important opportunity for Cadets to publicly exhibit their physical and military efficiency and such visibility was undoubtedly important for the movement as a whole. As H.T. Bishop, general secretary of the SCC, noted:

the part they have played not only in the Northern Command Tattoo at Leeds, but on many purely military and naval occasions, have shown their substance in Lord Lloyd's claim that these boys are Britain's answer and the boys' own answer to the Hitler Youth Movement and the Italian Balilla.⁶¹

Although such occasions were unlikely to have acted as any particular deterrent, the Corps' leadership clearly saw the SCC as important instruments of propaganda. Vice Admiral J.E.T. Harper was similarly conscious of how the SCC – and the Royal Navy – might appear to aggressor countries and urged members of the Corps to 'uphold the prestige of the flag, and so to show the foreigner that the British lion had not become a British rabbit'.⁶²

While the SCC took part in a number of civic events in urban centres and port towns, the Corps had a presence in a range of public arenas and was also prominent in rural areas,

⁵⁹ 'SCCN', *The Navy*, August 1936, p. 234. On the SCC in military tattoos, see 'Leeds Sailor-Boys in Tattoo', *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 22 June 1938, p. 7 and 'Torchlight Tattoo', *Surrey Mirror*, 3 June 1938, p. 9.

⁶⁰ 'NLSCC', *The Navy*, June 1932, p. 190.

⁶¹ 'Youth at the Helm', *Hull Daily Mail*, 27 May 1939, p. 4.

⁶² 'NLSCC', *The Navy*, July 1932, p. 226.

particularly summer camps. Despite shifting leisure patterns in interwar Britain, camps remained an important part of popular recreation for youth. As Sian Edwards notes, the countryside was central in the formation of citizenship for youth.⁶³ The growth of woodcraft groups that emerged as part of a broad anti-militarist sentiment and challenge to pre-war notions of masculinity – as well as the perceived militarism of Scouting – certainly highlights the importance of the rural in youth and associational culture in the interwar years. The Kindred of the Kibbo Kift, the Woodcraft Folk Movement, and the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry, although none were mass-membership organisations, were peaceable and rural movements which emphasised the importance of nature and the countryside for citizenship and character-building.⁶⁴ John Springhall has similarly traced the importance of camp for Scouts and members of the Boys’ Brigade, noting that, while for leaders camp was an opportunity to instil discipline, for many boys it simply provided an opportunity for excitement, adventure, and relief from the ‘noise and dirt of urban existence’.⁶⁵ However, Springhall also highlights the blurring of leisure activities and entertainment alongside military-style training which often took place at annual camps.

Activities at SCC camps varied, but they were often martial and militaristic in nature. For example, at the annual camp of the Sussex SCC in 1922, activities included a mock raid of a camp suspected of the stealing the Corps’ boat, with the Corps ‘[a]rmed with rifles, bayonets and (blank) ammunition’ taking part in ‘a mimic attack upon an enemy position, in which field and machine guns were brought into use, followed up by an attack by riflemen and a final bayonet charge’. The remainder of the week was reportedly spent ‘in a wise

⁶³ Sian Edwards, *Youth Movements, Citizenship and the English Countryside: Creating Good Citizens, 1930–1960* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 9.

⁶⁴ Melanie Tebbutt, *Making Youth: A History of Youth in Modern Britain* (London: Palgrave, 2016), pp. 90–91. See also Rachel K. Cheng, “‘Something Radically Wrong Somewhere’: The Kindred of the Kibbo Kift, 1920–1932” (unpub. PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2016); and Hana Qugana, ‘The Cultural Politics of Englishness: John Gordon Hargrave, the Kibbo Kift and Social Credit, 1920–1939’ (unpub. PhD thesis, University College London, 2017).

⁶⁵ Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society*, p. 98.

combination of drill and liberty'.⁶⁶ Mock combat featured in many SCC camps, which Cadets often took seriously. One report noted that 'it was a good thing the rifles were not loaded'. The sight of Cadets being 'mown down when they came into the arena of imaginary machine gun nests' and Cadets 'sho[oting] themselves to pieces' was no doubt enjoyed by the boys, but the warlike nature of such training did little to help the SCC in claims that they were not training boys for service.⁶⁷

The rural was, as the activities of the SCC suggest, a site to engender a martial and militaristic spirit among boys, in contrast to the peaceable and pacifist ethos of woodcraft movements. Of course, as Kenny Cupers observes, youth camps were 'consciously shaped social practice[s]' and built environments 'with a particular internal logic and organization'.⁶⁸ Camps were designed to 'leave an imprint of specific values' and, for boys, provided 'a step towards manhood'.⁶⁹ While the place of camps as instruments of social control, where leaders of the SCC could instil a set of naval principles within Cadets, could be exaggerated, camps were undoubtedly part of an attempt by the Navy League to foster an interest in both navy and nation.

Drill, discipline, parades, and route marches were all part of camping life, with character-building, training, and citizenship part of the ethos and purpose of camps. In his study of the Boys' Brigade, Chris Spackman has noted that historians have overstated the appeal of camp for youth and that the 'historiographical consensus purports that camp was the key attraction for Boys wanting to join youth movements, with drill and militaristic elements deemed to be concessions to authority that were endured in order to spend a week

⁶⁶ 'The 1st Sussex (Eastbourne) Company, N.L. Sea Cadet Corps', *The Navy*, August 1922, p. 231.

⁶⁷ 'SCCN', *The Navy*, September 1938, p. 288.

⁶⁸ Kenny Cupers, 'Governing Through Nature: Camps and Youth Movements in Interwar Germany and the United States', *Cultural Geographies*, vol. 15, no. 2 (2008), p. 175.

⁶⁹ Cupers, 'Governing Through Nature', p. 181.

away under canvas'.⁷⁰ However, as Spackman points out, camps were 'underpinned by drilling and military discipline that were in place to instil order and create efficiency' and were an extension of normal activities.⁷¹ Physical, mental, and moral training at camp had a grounding in weekly training. Drill and discipline were an unescapable element of camp life for the Boys' Brigade – indeed, camp provided a platform for these activities – and the same can be said for the SCC.

The smartness and good behaviour of Cadets while at camp was often commented upon by locals, although the SCC's Executive Committee was clearly conscious that boys might get into trouble, with Seasalter, Whitstable being considered 'not at all suitable for camps for cadets owing to the proximity of Public Houses'.⁷² A wartime handbook, titled *Hints on Sea Cadet Camps*, similarly complained of 'drinking, smoking and girl-meeting expeditions which so often mar the Camp morale and tone'.⁷³

Despite control and strictness at camp, there was certainly the freedom for boys to get into trouble: games of football and cricket against Cadets from nearby camps, sunbathing, swimming, hiking, and cinema trips were all part of camp as, undoubtedly, was drinking, smoking, and 'girl-meeting expeditions'. Martial and militaristic training was unquestionably part of camp life, but it did not reflect the totality of activities at camp. Camp provided boys with excitement and adventure and a chance to escape normal routine.⁷⁴ Grants were provided towards Cadets' annual camp, particularly those from distressed areas,

⁷⁰ Christopher John Spackman, 'The Boys' Brigade and Urban Cultures, 1883–1933: A Relationship Examined' (unpub. PhD thesis, University of Portsmouth, 2016), p. 153.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁷² MSSC, NLSCC Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 14 October 1936, p. 3.

⁷³ Navy League, *Hints on Sea Cadet Camps: Handbook of the Sea Cadet Corps* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden Ltd. 1944), p. 16. Conduct of Cadets was important to the League's leadership more broadly. When Lloyd saw a member of the Stork Unit smoking in Piccadilly, he not only informed the Executive Committee but also contacted the Unit's commanding officer. MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 4 June 1932, p. 2.

⁷⁴ Some boys were even fortunate enough to take part in annual camps abroad, with the Steadfast Unit travelling to Leiden, Holland. However, as boys had to make a contribution to expenses, it is likely this would have been prohibitively expensive for most. 'NLSCC', *The Navy*, October 1931, p. 315.

with the SCC's Executive Committee stating that 'no financial handicap should be allowed to prevent cadets attending' summer camps and resolved to contribute where it could.⁷⁵

While the countryside was part of camp life for members of the SCC, so too of course, was the sea. Cadets often spent a fortnight on ships such as the HMS *Impregnable* and HMS *Implacable*, where '[s]o far as practicable service routine was followed' in order to 'emulate the work of the real Navy'.⁷⁶ The *Implacable*, like HMS *Victory*, had taken part in the Battle of Trafalgar, although originally on the French side before being captured by the British. In using the ship, the Navy League hoped it would ensure that boys 'realised their heritage'.⁷⁷ Six units spent two weeks onboard *Implacable* instead of camp in 1933. *The Navy* attempted to impress upon Cadets that they would not be subjected 'to hard fare' and 'stern discipline', but to "holiday training", although the journal noted that instruction, practical seamanship, and an insight into the work of the Royal Navy was all part of the 'holiday' element and Cadets were still expected to take part in physical exercise, drill, as well as being subject to inspections by members of the Admiralty.⁷⁸ Cadets also spent time on the Navy League's sea training brig *Lord Nelson* while at camp and on the training ship HMS *Ganges*.⁷⁹ While there is little trace of boys recording their experience of camp, one cannot assume that boys saw camp simply as a means to be trained in the service of state. Yet, at the very least, such statements give an insight into the intentions of the SCC's leaders.

The draw of the Royal Navy for members of the SCC was also no doubt in part due to the popularity of the Royal Navy's annual 'navy weeks'. Navy weeks were held at home

⁷⁵ MSSC, NLSCC Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 1 July 1936, p. 2; MSSC, NLSCC Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 3 June 1937, p. 2.

⁷⁶ 'NLSCC', *The Navy*, November 1932, p. 342.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ 'NLSCC', *The Navy*, October 1930, pp. 305–306; 'SCCN', *The Navy*, September 1937, p. 282.

⁷⁹ 'NLSCC', *The Navy*, September 1930, p. 270. Cadets on *Ganges* received 'first-hand training and experience of naval routine' and were given training in a range of activities, such as seamanship, rifle drill, field gun drill, heavy gun battery, signalling, boat work, and physical exercise. 'Sea Cadets in H.M.S. "Ganges"', *The Navy*, September 1936, p. 246.

ports between 1927 and 1938 – originally with the aim of raising funds for naval charities, although the propagandistic value was quickly realised. Spectators had access to the dockyards, museums, and a number of modern battleships.⁸⁰ Navy weeks were particularly popular and were ‘the most overtly propagandistic of the navy’s activities between the wars’.⁸¹ The Navy League was undoubtedly keen for the SCC to take part in navy week and arranged for units to visit dockyards, to be given tours of battleships and submarines, to be shown naval films, to hear performances from the band of the Royal Marines, and to visit HMS *Victory* and HMS *Hood*.⁸² SCC units frequently attended navy week events whilst at annual camp and the inclusion of tours onboard *Victory* and *Implacable*, in particular, were intended to remind Corps of the long-standing importance and tradition of the Royal Navy.

As well taking part in a number of public and popular civic rituals, in both urban and rural settings, members of the SCC also engaged in naval pageantry.⁸³ Pageantry – and the performance of war through pageantry – was a means through which many sections of the British public made sense of, and commemorated, the events of the First World War. Historical pageants provided a way to engage with the past prior to the First World War, yet pageantry in the aftermath of conflict could ‘affirm and propagandize political ideas about wars and the nations that fought them’, ‘showcase patriotism and imperialism’, and could convey ‘understandings of the nature of loss and sacrifice’.⁸⁴ Of course, historical pageantry

⁸⁰ See TNA ADM 116/2478, Navy Weeks at Home Ports, 1925–1931 and TNA ADM 179/63, Navy Weeks, 1935–1939.

⁸¹ Bell, *The Royal Navy*, p. 177.

⁸² ‘Newbury Schoolchildren and the Navy League’, *The Navy*, September 1930, p. 271.

⁸³ On theatre, war, and pageantry more broadly, see Gillian Russell, *The Theatres of War: Performance, Politics, and Society, 1793–1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁸⁴ Paul Readman, ‘The Place of the Past in English Culture c.1890–1914’, *Past & Present*, vol. 186, no. 1 (2005), p. 170; Angela Bartie, Linda Fleming, Mark Freeman, Tom Hulme, Paul Readman and Charlotte Tupman, ‘“And Those Who Live, How Shall I Tell Their Fame?” Historical Pageants, Collective Remembrance and the First World War, 1919–39’, *Historical Research*, vol. 90, no. 249 (2017), p. 640. See also, Ayako Yoshino, *Pageant Fever: Local History and Consumerism in Edwardian England* (Tokyo: Waseda Daigaku Shuppanbu, 2011).

was utilised by a range of different groups to convey contrasting messages, with the LNU and a collection of women's organisations also taking part in public pageantry.⁸⁵

Themes of patriotism, empire, loss, sacrifice, and nation undoubtedly ran through SCC pageantry, although SCC pageantry was not merely confined to the First World War, with re-enactments of the Peninsular War also taking place.⁸⁶ SCC pageantry also had imperial overtones, with one unit staging a 'comic opera' (titled "Out East") which presented a story 'deeply tinged with the activities of Arabs', while another pageant was merely titled "Hong Kong".⁸⁷ Other plays, such as the "Sons of the Sea on Board Ship", focused more on the training involved on board naval ships, including demonstrations of gymnastics, physical exercise, alongside band and drill displays.⁸⁸ Music was an important element of SCC training – with drum, fife, and bugle bands being part of drill and displays – but music also formed an important part of SCC pageantry, with concerts of a nautical nature a common feature throughout the interwar years, often finishing with a rendition of the national anthem or 'Land of Hope and Glory'.⁸⁹ A number of these performances were fairly light-hearted; particularly popular among units was the singing of sea shanties in full naval costume.⁹⁰

One, more conventional, play by the Hove and Brighton Unit of the SCC, titled "A Life on the Ocean Wave", was 'typical of the two phases of life in the Navy in peace and war'. In the play, which was set on board a mock British destroyer, the first act involved the crew going out to sea, enjoying themselves with 'a carouse with a sing-song and jollity', a

⁸⁵ Helen McCarthy, 'The League of Nations, Public Ritual and National Identity in Britain, c. 1919–56', *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 70, no. 1 (2010), pp. 108–32; Zoë Thomas, 'Historical Pageants, Citizenship, and the Performance of Women's History before Second-Wave Feminism', *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 28, no. 3 (2017), pp. 319–343.

⁸⁶ 'SCCN', *The Navy*, September 1936, p. 264.

⁸⁷ 'NLSCC', *The Navy*, April 1930, p. 107; 'SCCN', *The Navy*, January 1936, p. 24.

⁸⁸ 'NLSCC', *The Navy*, December 1931, p. 380.

⁸⁹ For an idea of SCC concerts, see 'SCCN', *The Navy*, January 1935, p. 30. On music in military tattoos, see Chapter 7 of Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism and Music: Britain, 1876–1953* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

⁹⁰ For example, see 'NLSCC', *The Navy*, July 1934, p. 222.

‘false alarm of “fire” on the boat’ which ‘resulted in a merry comedy scene’ with the concluding item being a rendition of ‘God bless the Prince of Wales’. In the second act, ‘an enemy battleship is sighted’. The destroyer ‘prepares for action; guns are manned and loaded, and a thrilling naval battle is enacted. Several of the guns’ crew “fall” in action, and the ambulance section administer first-aid to the wounded.’ Then, at the ceasefire, ‘the shade of Nelson appears, and the undaunted spirit of the Navy is typified by the brave death of Boy Jack Cornwell’.⁹¹ Such martial scenes – a hyper-realistic portrayal of conflict mixed with symbolism and allegory – were commonplace in SCC and wider public pageantry.⁹²

The SCC’s use of historical pageantry and recurring emphasis on duty, discipline, sacrifice, chivalry, hero-worship, war, and patriotism – particularly symbolised by the inclusion of Nelson and Cornwell – was an important means of conveying its message and contributing to the military culture of the interwar years.⁹³ Figures like Nelson and Cornwell represented important moral paradigms for the Corps, while pageants ‘told aspects of the national story’ enabling the SCC to construct a visual depiction of nation, naval heritage, and tradition.⁹⁴ Not only did the rhetoric of senior leaders of the SCC revolve around tradition, but the Corps’ activities – particularly pageants and its participation in Trafalgar Day – were firmly rooted in the past and an important site for the expression of navalism.

The leadership of the SCC had a long naval history – representing high points of British national identity – from which to draw upon and appropriate in an attempt to shape the ideas and values of members of the Corps. Indeed, as Mark Freeman has pointed out, historical pageants needed to include ‘some sense of a “usable” past, one which could be

⁹¹ ‘NLSCC’, *The Navy*, March 1929, p. 70.

⁹² Bartie, Fleming, Freeman, Hulme, Readman and Tupman, ‘“And Those Who Live”’, p. 654.

⁹³ On naval pageantry, see Emma Hanna, ‘Patriotism and Pageantry: Representations of Britain’s Naval Past at the Greenwich Night Pageant, 1933’, in Davey and Colville, *A New Naval History*, pp. 215–231.

⁹⁴ Angela Bartie, Linda Fleming, Mark Freeman, Tom Hulme, Alexander Hutton and Paul Readman, ‘Historical Pageants and the Medieval Past in Twentieth-Century England’, *The English Historical Review*, vol. 133, no. 563 (2018) p. 870.

brought into the service of present day'.⁹⁵ SCC pageantry undoubtedly attempted to underline the importance of the Royal Navy to the nation, with Nelson, in particular, representing a 'usable past'. More broadly, the Navy League certainly saw the propagandistic value of pageantry and theatre.⁹⁶ Military pageantry was, for the SCC, a highly politicised site, which could be utilised to transmit navalist principles and clearly the League saw theatre and pageantry as a means to counter sentiments of disarmament, collective security, and pacifism. However, it was not necessarily the most effective or popular format through which the SCC transmitted its message.

Perhaps the greatest public platform for the SCC was its role in Trafalgar Day. On Trafalgar Day, the Corps would march to Nelson's Column from the Navy League's head office in London and, as part of its 'patriotic endeavour', lay a wreath.⁹⁷ This was often followed by an inspection of the SCC units and boys would also attend church services on the day.⁹⁸ While the SCC was present annually at Trafalgar Day commemorations, it was not until the late 1930s that they featured prominently. Following Lord Nuffield's donation and the subsequent expansion of the SCC, over 2,000 Cadets, 'the greatest assembly . . . that has yet been organised', attended Trafalgar Day celebrations in 1938, with most units throughout the country being represented.⁹⁹

Addressing the assembled Cadets, Admiral Sir Edward Evans said the movement was one that should appeal to every boy in Britain. He told the Cadets that 'it must never be forgotten that our Empire was founded on the sea, and that it still depended on its Navy and

⁹⁵ Mark Freeman, "'Splendid Display; Pompous Spectacle": Historical Pageants in Twentieth-Century Britain', *Social History*, vol. 38, no. 4 (2013), p. 426.

⁹⁶ When approached for its support on a play on Queen Elizabeth in 1934, the League's Executive Committee agreed that 'any play of a really patriotic nature which would help counteract recent disloyal stage propaganda should be supported'. MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 4 January 1934, p. 2.

⁹⁷ TNA MEPO 2/1296, Trafalgar Square Meetings: Navy League Celebrations, Letter from the Navy League to the Chief Commissioner of Police, 19 October 1909, p. 1.

⁹⁸ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 4 November 1931, p. 2.

⁹⁹ 'About Ourselves', *The Navy*, November 1938, p. 325.

its glorious Mercantile Marine'.¹⁰⁰ Lloyd also linked the BBC's coverage of Trafalgar Day in 1939 to the dictatorship countries, noting that it 'let some people know they have not the monopoly of Youth Movements!'¹⁰¹ Such rhetoric did little to help the SCC disassociate itself from militarism. We have seen the ways in which the training and leadership of the Corps was undoubtedly militaristic, yet the Corps' uniform and notions of masculinity also connected the Corps to the Royal Navy and nation.



Figure 3: 'Admiral Sir Edward Evans Addressing the Parade of Navy League Sea Cadets in Trafalgar Square', *The Navy*, December 1938, p. 380.

¹⁰⁰ '2,000 Cadets on Parade', *The Times*, 24 October 1938, p. 11.

¹⁰¹ 'The Navy League Grand Council Meeting', *The Navy*, July 1939, p. 238.

III. Uniform, Masculinity, and Militarism

Uniform

Introduced in 1748, the regulated uniform of the Royal Navy represented masculine – and highly idealised – virtues such as duty and sacrifice, highlighted rank and status, although could also construct an *esprit de corps* among its wearers, as well as signifying Britishness when worn abroad. It impacted upon public perceptions of the navy, with officers in particular being viewed as ‘guardians of the nation’ and of ‘national honour’.¹⁰² It was upon such themes that the leaders of the SCC relied on when stressing the symbolic significance of uniform to members of the Corps. Although, as Melanie Tebbutt has suggested, the First World War compromised expectations of ‘being a boy’, especially ‘in relation to militarism and the jingoistic expectations of youthful masculinity’, the leadership of the SCC still clearly attempted to inculcate values such as discipline, patriotism, and duty – themes that were commonplace in Edwardian youth movements.¹⁰³

While it is difficult to trace how members of the SCC felt about their uniform, which resembled that of the Royal Navy, the leadership of the SCC, and senior members of the Admiralty, constantly attempted to impress upon boys its symbolic value. Speaking to the Slough Unit of the SCC in March 1939, Sir Roger Keyes, Admiral of the Fleet, told boys

they were really part of the Royal Navy: The uniforms you are wearing are those of the Service. That is indeed something that should be a source of pride to you all . . . you are learning the meaning of good comradeship, the meaning of the service, the tradition of the sea, and that should greatly influence your lives.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Of course, as Amy Miller has highlighted, such uniform was often reappropriated according to fashion trends and this was not the sole manner in which the British public viewed those who donned such uniform – and views on both the navy and masculinity shifted over time. Amy Miller, ‘Clothes Make the Man: Naval Uniform and Masculinity in the Early Nineteenth Century’, *Journal for Maritime Research*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2015), pp. 147–154. See also, Amy Miller, *Dressed to Kill: British Naval Uniform, Masculinity and Contemporary Fashions, 1748–1857* (London: National Maritime Museum, 2007).

¹⁰³ Melanie Tebbutt, *Being Boys: Youth, Leisure and Identity in the Inter-War Years* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), p. 70.

¹⁰⁴ ‘SCCN’, *The Navy*, March 1939, p. 100.

Chatfield, inspecting the London Divisions of the SCC, similarly remarked that ‘by wearing the treasured uniform of the Royal Navy, you have formed a definite connection with that great Service’. He continued: ‘No uniform occupies a higher place or commands a greater respect and affection among your countrymen, and I know you are proud of wearing it’.¹⁰⁵ Uniform could convey, and attempt to entrench, a particular set of values and beliefs among the boys, as well as moral, behavioural, and social codes, as evidenced by both Chatfield’s and Keyes’s speeches.

The leadership of the SCC attempted to imbue a sense of obligation within members that, when wearing the uniform of the Royal Navy, they were part of an important tradition and should act with dignity. Sir Sydney Freemantle, speaking in rather stern terms to the Wimbledon Unit of the SCC, declared:

I want you to understand what the uniform means and what it stands for . . . it is not just rather a joke or a fancy dress, but an indication that you belong to a community. It is the uniform of sailors of the King. If you disgrace yourselves then you disgrace the whole of the British Navy. Everything you do reflects to the credit or discredit of the Navy.¹⁰⁶

One inspector of a SCC unit in Jersey even went as far as to tell boys that ‘anyone who brought discredit on the uniform was not fit to live’.¹⁰⁷ As members of the SCC had propagandistic value for the Royal Navy, their conduct was clearly of the upmost importance.

Of course, aside from the military associations with donning uniform, there was the potential for the SCC – as other youth organisations did – to attract criticism for wearing uniform, particularly in working class areas.¹⁰⁸ Yet, boys were able to gain a sense of pride and dignity through wearing the uniform of the Royal Navy and this was understood by the

¹⁰⁵ ‘Naval Units and Sea Cadet Corps (London Division)’, *The Navy*, August 1921, p. 258.

¹⁰⁶ ‘NLSCC’, *The Navy*, May 1931, p. 154.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Jersey Sea Cadets’, *The Navy*, August 1923, p. 230.

¹⁰⁸ Tebbutt, *Making Youth*, p. 85.

League's Executive Committee.¹⁰⁹ There was certainly a desire among working class boys to be part of the SCC and to wear the uniform of the Royal Navy. This is evident in many applications by units to the SCC committee for uniform grants, particularly from distressed areas.¹¹⁰ While Quintin Colville has argued that the expense of the Cadet Officer's uniform was a deliberate attempt to 'exclude the sons of the poorest sections of society', the SCC provided provisions for Cadet uniforms, even if they did have reservations about certain types of boys.¹¹¹ Indeed, the Navy League alluded, both publicly and privately, to wanting a particular type of boy to join the Corps. In a meeting of the SCC's Executive Committee, T.G. Bedwell, Committee member, made it clear that: 'it was very harmful that the Navy League should give the impression that the type of boy they wanted for the Sea Cadet Corps was one off the street . . . only the very best type of boy is wanted'.¹¹²

While there was clearly a reluctance from the leadership of the SCC to recruit boys 'off the street', once put in uniform, discipline and manliness was seen to follow. *The Sphere* described this process in the following terms: 'In the course of a few months the average Sea Cadet is transformed from the raw material of unkempt urchin into a smart, alert vigorous young seaman'.¹¹³ While such transformations may have been somewhat exaggerated, life in the Corps clearly attempted to cultivate a change in attitude and behaviour among boys, with uniform playing an important part in this. As Commander J. Irving, who carried out

¹⁰⁹ Indeed, in considering whether it might change the SCC's uniform to something simpler, the League's Committee rejected the proposal unanimously, noting that 'boys were intensely proud' of being able to wear 'the correct naval uniform'. MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 4 December 1935, p. 7.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, MSSC, NLSCC Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 22 April 1936, p. 1; 25 February 1937, p. 3; p. 18 November, pp. 2–3.

¹¹¹ Quintin Colville, 'Jack Tar and the Gentleman Officer: The Role of Uniform in Shaping the Class – and Gender-Related Identities of British Naval Personnel, 1930–1939', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th Series, vol. 13 (2003), p. 107.

¹¹² MSSC, NLSCC Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 10 November 1938, p. 1.

¹¹³ 'Sea Cadets and the Navy League', *The Sphere*, 10 April 1937, p. 78.

much work on behalf of the Corps, remarked ‘we dress the boy in the uniform of one of his Majesty’s seamen, which immediately makes the boy want to play the part of the man’.¹¹⁴

Masculinity

Recent work has shown the ways in which gender operated within a maritime context and uniform was undoubtedly important in the construction of masculinity.¹¹⁵ Demonstrating the importance of material culture in shaping naval, social, and national identity, across rank and class, Colville has argued that naval uniform was used to ‘articulate, propagate and defend the hegemony of a specific male identity’ and to construct ‘military masculinity’.¹¹⁶ The leadership of the SCC similarly attempted to cultivate a ‘military masculinity’ amongst the Corps, with uniform being an important element in this.¹¹⁷ The Navy League wanted ‘real men of real value’ and argued that the Corps was ‘the best means by which they may pave their way to manliness’.¹¹⁸ Senior members of the Admiralty, such as Admiral Sir William James, similarly thought the SCC represented ‘the young manhood of this country’.¹¹⁹ Of course, as the SCC recruited boys aged 12 to 18, masculinity and calls for ‘real men of real value’ would have meant different things to boys depending on their age. Unfortunately, little trace of records relating to the age of Cadets exists. However, it is clear

¹¹⁴ Collins, *Cadets*, p. 56.

¹¹⁵ Quintin Colville, Elin Jones & Katherine Parker, ‘Gendering the Maritime World’, *Journal for Maritime Research*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2015), pp. 97–101.

¹¹⁶ Colville, ‘Jack Tar’, p. 118.

¹¹⁷ The Navy League had considered a girl’s SCC on several occasions – in February 1921, in April 1923, and in December 1927 – yet it rejected such proposals on the grounds that the Admiralty only recognised boys’ naval brigades and cadet corps. MSCC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 8 December 1927, p. 3. On women’s military organisations in the interwar years, see Chapter 5 of Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentler Sex, 1907–1948* (London: Routledge, 2006).

¹¹⁸ ‘NLSCC for Bristol’, *The Western Morning News and Daily Gazette*, 24 May 1938, p. 7; ‘The Value of Sea Training for Boys’, *The Navy*, December 1917, p. 161.

¹¹⁹ ‘Bristol Sea Cadet Corps Receive Colours’, *The Western Morning News and Daily Gazette*, 22 November 1938, p. 8.

based on photographs, newsreels, newspaper articles, and reports in *The Navy* that the age of Cadets varied; the Corps was a mixture of both boys and young men.¹²⁰

Discussion of the Corps in relation to masculinity, for both boys and young men, was often framed in reference to physical culture. Speaking at a Navy League dinner in 1937, Lloyd emphasised that '[a]ll through these years we maintained a standard of discipline for our boys, in the belief that you cannot build a man that is worth calling a man unless you train his will as well as his body' also noting that 'it is now being recognised that both training and discipline are essential to the making of what used to be called in Elizabethan days a "proper man"'.¹²¹ Such themes were evident in *The Navy's* report of an incident in early December 1938, where two officers of the SCC were rescued by members of the Corps on the River Severn. The journal described the boys as 'proper men' and claimed the incident illustrated 'the nerve and courage which are ideals of a Navy League Sea Cadet'.¹²² In attempting to make an example of such bravery, which other members of the SCC were expected to follow, Lloyd felt the League should institute a medal for gallantry.¹²³

Bravery and heroism were undoubtedly important in shaping masculinity among members of the Corps. As Graham Dawson has demonstrated, highly idealised narratives of soldier-heroes have been central in the construction of masculinity and the nation.¹²⁴ He argues that the 'soldier hero has proved to be one of the most durable and powerful forms of idealized masculinity within Western cultural traditions', with military virtues such as 'aggression, strength, courage and endurance' representing the most 'natural and inherent

¹²⁰ A.E. Morgan, the principal of University College Hull and later principal and vice-chancellor of McGill University, writes that four fifths of the SCC were between 14 and 18 although provides no evidence for this. He also incorrectly states that membership of the SCC reached 7,000 before the war, with the ADCC only reaching 10,000. A.E. Morgan, *Young Citizen* (London: Penguin Books, 1943), p. 116.

¹²¹ 'Navy League Dinner', *The Navy*, November 1937, p. 333; 'The Sea Cadet Campaign', *The Navy*, April 1937, p. 106.

¹²² 'SCCN', *The Navy*, January 1939, p. 29.

¹²³ 'Conference of C.O.s', *The Navy*, March 1939, p. 87.

¹²⁴ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire, and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 1.

qualities of manhood, whose apogee is attainable only in battle'.¹²⁵ The leadership of the SCC, as we have seen, attempted to use such hero models in the construction of naval identity – the League's pronouncements replete with images of Nelson.¹²⁶ Yet, if the soldier-hero was an important element in the Corps' masculinity, how else can it be characterised?

While Alison Light has portrayed a highly feminised and domesticated masculinity in response to the First World War in Britain, George Mosse has emphasised continuity, particularly in relation masculinity and militarism.¹²⁷ Rather than a feminised or domesticated masculinity, the masculinity of the SCC perhaps resembled more closely Sonya Rose's notion of 'temperate masculinity'.¹²⁸ The leadership of the SCC attempted to engender a masculinity which displayed fairly martial characteristics such as bravery and heroism, although such masculinity also had to avoid the hyper-masculinity of fascist youth organisations. For example, in his speech at the Mansion House meeting in 1937, Lloyd reflected on the efficiency of Germany and Italy in the training of youth, remarking: 'When I go to those countries and see what marvellous things are being done for every boy and girl under dictatorship, I envy at least that fruit – if no other – of the dictatorships of Europe'. Lloyd spoke at length about the voluntary system for recruitment in Britain, but did

not believe that we are going to exist as a people very long unless we can train and do for our boys and girls what other countries have done for theirs . . . if they are properly trained, I

¹²⁵ Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p. 1.

¹²⁶ The use of such hero models was similarly a part of scouting. As Sam Pryke observes, the 'chain of great men – Richard the Lion Heart, Raleigh, Drake, Captain John Smith . . . grounded the continuity and durability of the characteristics and aspirations of the Scouts'. Sam Pryke, 'The Popularity of Nationalism in the Early British Boy Scout Movement', *Social History*, vol. 23, no. 3 (1998), p. 315. See also Berny Sèbe's exploration of 'heroic imperialists' – figures imbued with political and cultural meaning, embodiments of 'patriotic and nationalist values' – which can similarly be applied to the Navy League's utilisation of Nelson. Sèbe, *Heroic Imperialists*, p. 183.

¹²⁷ Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991); George Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 108–112. For a discussion of this, see Michael Roper, 'Between Manliness and Masculinity: The "War Generation" and the Psychology of Fear in Britain, 1914–1950', *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2005), pp. 343–362.

¹²⁸ Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Britain 1939–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 196.

promise you that you shall see growing up – without the “million bayonets” of Mussolini – as fine a body of young men as will make proud the people of this country.¹²⁹

Comparisons were often made with youth organisations in dictatorship countries. Indeed, *The Navy* noted that both Germany and Italy trained ‘all their youth from the very earliest years in the use of arms, in the perfection of bodily vigour, and in the pursuit of patriotic and exceedingly national ideals. We must do something of the same or go down to defeat in the event of war.’ The journal also insisted that the SCC ‘was not at all militaristic, in the sense particularly opposed by the pacifists’ although admitted ‘they do fit boys for the service of sea in peace or war’.¹³⁰ By emphasising the voluntary nature of the Corps, the SCC attempted to avoid associations with continental and German forms of militarism – particularly conscription, national service, political repression, and state authoritarianism – something disliked by both liberals and many of those on the political right.¹³¹ Indeed, as Edgerton has noted, ‘military service was not seen as a civic duty but an unjust impost on youth, and a danger to freedom’.¹³² While conscription was seen as being antithetical to the British way in warfare, and to Britain as a liberal democracy, militarism and military service was certainly never far away from Navy League rhetoric surrounding the SCC and the organisation played an important role in the military – and indeed militaristic – culture of the interwar years.¹³³

Militarism

The nature of the Corps’ training, the emphasis on discipline, drill, and marching, the military nature of the Corps’ leadership, the wearing of military uniform, and the strong links

¹²⁹ ‘NLSCC’, *The Navy*, April 1937, pp. 106–107.

¹³⁰ ‘This Picture and That’, *The Navy*, July 1937, p. 193.

¹³¹ Johnson, *Militarism*, p. 103.

¹³² David Edgerton, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation: A Twentieth-Century History* (London: Penguin Books, 2018), p. 46.

¹³³ See David French, *The British Way in Warfare 1688–2000* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

with the Admiralty suggest that militarism was undoubtedly a feature of the SCC. However, Navy League pronouncements were careful to distinguish between militarism and navalism. For instance, as Arnold White declared in 1919, '[n]ever again should educated politicians and statesmen be allowed with impunity to confuse the public mind by telling them that Sea Power and Militarism are the same thing; or that British "Navalism" is a form of Prussian Militarism'.¹³⁴ As Prussian militarism was invariably linked with a regimented and militarised civilian population – as well as the preponderance of the military class – the League attempted to distance itself from such a policy by framing it as a 'foreign' problem, an invariable feature of Victorian and Edwardian popular conceptions of Prussian militarism.¹³⁵

As the SCC had a rather modest public profile until the mid-1930s, it attracted little criticism, although some within the Treasury held the view that the SCC were part of a number of 'vile bodies which inculcated militarism in the young' and that 'navalism is as reprehensible as militarism'.¹³⁶ Letters to local newspapers also reveal opposition towards the Corps' militaristic nature, with one letter considering the 'Navy League boys blaring forth martial airs' as constituting a 'menace to peace'.¹³⁷ The Corps' leadership certainly always remained conscious of accusations of militarism. For example, the Navy League temporarily cancelled field gun competitions in 1930 as it felt it was 'inadvisable to flaunt the militarism of the Sea Cadet Corps in the faces of the moderate pacifists'.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ 'The Future of the Navy League', *The Navy*, August 1919, p. 108.

¹³⁵ Johnson, *Militarism*, p. 90.

¹³⁶ TNA T 161/1212, Fighting Services. Navy: Sea Cadet Corps. Volunteer Cadet Corps Attached to Royal Navy Establishments; Assistance to be given to Recognised Units, 1926–1942, Letter from F.P. Robinson to A.P. Waterfield, 27 January 1931, p. 1.

¹³⁷ 'From Our Letter-Box', *Liverpool Echo*, 27 June 1930, p. 15.

¹³⁸ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 1 May 1930, p. 4.



Figure 4: ‘Kingston (T.S. “Steadfast”) S.C.C.’, *The Navy*, December 1928, p. 356.

The SCC aimed to inculcate in its members moral and physical strength, alongside notions of citizenship which revolved around service, duty, and naval patriotism. Providing education, ritualised and regimented physical training, and, most importantly, discipline, the Corps also attempted to combat juvenile delinquency and moral concerns over the youth of the nation.¹³⁹ Of course, despite invariable, and public, protestations to the contrary, military service and militarism more broadly were constant features of debates surrounding the true purpose of the SCC. While the leadership stressed that the Corps was ‘not a military corps

¹³⁹ On juvenile delinquency in the period, see Stephen Humphries, *Hooligans or Rebels? An Oral History of Working-Class Childhood and Youth, 1889–1939* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981).

at all; it is merely to teach good fellowship, good comradeship, and discipline’, such assertions did not reflect the true nature and organisation of the SCC.¹⁴⁰

The training of the SCC focused on physical and military efficiency and on preparing boys to contribute to national defence, even if the statements of the Corps’ leadership preferred to emphasise the character-building nature of such training. Indeed, the emphasis on the quality of the boys points to the importance of military efficiency and training for specific military purposes, with units often being rejected for low standards of fitness and training.¹⁴¹ Of course, the mere fact that units had to be inspected by the Admiralty before they were able to be formed suggests that military efficiency was an important element of the SCC.

Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska has demonstrated the importance of physical culture in linking ‘manliness, physical fitness, and patriotism in interwar Britain’, areas which are more commonly associated with the dictatorship countries, yet a similar emphasis on physical culture can be traced through the SCC.¹⁴² Debates surrounding the physical culture of the Corps were often imbued with military terminology. For example, speaking at the East Cowes Unit, Jellicoe told his audience that ‘if all boys in the country had the same opportunities for improving their physique, that C3 business would vanish and everyone would in time be A1’.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ ‘SCCN’, *The Navy*, February 1936, pp. 55–56.

¹⁴¹ See, for example, MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 24 November 1932, p. 3.

¹⁴² Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, ‘Building a British Superman: Physical Culture in Interwar Britain’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 41, no. 4 (2006), pp. 596. See also, Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health and Fitness in Britain, 1880–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹⁴³ ‘NLSCC’, *The Navy*, August 1933, p. 247. This categorisation was based on the War Office’s instructions in 1916 for medical examinations to be conducted on an A-B-C system of fitness for military service. ‘A’ recruits were deemed fit for active service, while ‘C’ recruits were seen as unsuitable for fighting service. J.M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 50.

The leadership of the SCC framed debates on the purpose of the Corps around national efficiency and combatting juvenile delinquency. In linking the Corps to increasing anxieties surrounding the physical condition of the nation, the Corps stressed that physical health and physical training could also improve the moral health of British youth. Reflecting on a 1937 War Office statement that two out of every three men were rejected for service because they were not physically fit, Lord Lloyd noted the corresponding increase in crime rates among boy offenders. While Lloyd attributed this to a lack of physical training among British youth, he also noted that ‘there has been a lack of training of wills . . . a lack of discipline, and that alone justifies the Navy League Sea Cadet Corps in having made, almost alone among the youth organisations of this country, a main point of discipline as well as of physical training’.¹⁴⁴ There was undoubtedly genuine concern among the leadership of the SCC to improve both the moral and physical health of members of the nation’s youth and such statements reflect a widespread concern about the state of youth in comparison to dictatorship countries.

Of course, the official line of the leadership of the SCC was that the Corps was not training boys for war but in citizenship, yet concerns about the physical and moral fitness of the nation was frequently employed in the rhetoric of senior Navy League figures and Admiralty. We have already seen the way that the SCC was linked to the Royal Navy on Trafalgar Day in both pronouncement and practice, but such statements were widespread in the discourse of the Corps. Speaking at Brighton Unit of the SCC, Earl Howe, deputy-president of the Navy League, remarked that many people thought that by forming the SCC the ‘Navy League was doing all it could to encourage militarism. But surely everybody in

¹⁴⁴ ‘NLSCC’, *The Navy*, April 1937, p. 106.

this country must feel it a duty to try and fit himself to play a useful part if ever the need should arise. That was the finest ambition that as an Englishman one could have.’¹⁴⁵

IV. The Mobilisation of the SCC

As international tension increased in the late 1930s, particularly following the Munich Conference, the SCC’s Executive Committee accordingly turned its focus to the role of the Corps in the event of war. Shortly after the Conference, Bishop reported that various units of the SCC had been in touch with him enquiring how their services could be best utilised in the event of war. Bishop subsequently visited the Naval Recruiting Officer and agreed with the Assistant Director of Naval Recruiting that a roster of Cadets of 17 and over would be ‘made available to the Admiralty who would be glad to accept such cadets for the Sea Service’.¹⁴⁶ Lord Lloyd also arranged for Cadets the right to do their compulsory service in the Royal Navy. Addressing the League’s Grand Council Meeting in 1939, Lloyd felt that there had been ‘anxiety amongst our Cadets, lest, after having patriotically given up their time in years previous to the compulsory service, they should suddenly be used for other military purposes’. On the Admiralty’s agreement with the Navy League, Lloyd noted that ‘[t]hus, the Sea Cadet Corps besides supplying a regular stream of recruits for the Sea Services, provides, for the service of the Crown, a body of partially trained young men, available in any emergency’.¹⁴⁷

There was undoubtedly enthusiasm amongst members of the SCC to serve the country during periods of emergency. For example, following Munich, Lloyd described ‘a stampede of all our boys who wanted to go and serve the country anywhere during the

¹⁴⁵ ‘SCNN’, *The Navy*, July 1938, p. 208.

¹⁴⁶ MSSC, NLSCC Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 6 October 1938, p. 3.

¹⁴⁷ ‘The Navy League Grand Council Meeting’, *The Navy*, July 1939, p. 238.

crisis'.¹⁴⁸ *The Navy* also outlined the work of the Corps throughout the Munich Crisis, noting that a large proportion of older members of the SCC 'at once volunteered for active service'. Many local units volunteered their service for ARP activities and members of the Corps were given jobs as messengers under the guidance of ARP wardens. It certainly seems to be the case that, as Rosie Kennedy has argued, while uniformed youth organisations 'did not always interpret their role in quite the same way as their leadership intended', they often wanted to play more of an active role in war, taking on even more responsibility than they had.¹⁴⁹

The expansion and development of the SCC were also principal themes in the Navy League's commemoration of Trafalgar Day in the prelude to the Second World War, particularly following Munich. Duty, loyalty, and service were key themes in both public and private speeches, giving little doubt that the SCC would be expected to contribute to the defence of the nation if required. An advert published in *The Times* on Trafalgar Day in 1938 stressed that the 'recent [Munich] crisis has made clear the gaps in our defences. These must be filled . . . it is the purpose of the Navy League Sea Cadet Corps to equip boys for these vital Services; to train them to uphold the age-old traditions of loyalty and duty.' 'The Sea Cadet Corps', the article continued, 'is moulding Britain's sons to be Britain's strength and safety'.¹⁵⁰ On Trafalgar Day in 1939, Lord Lloyd sent a letter to *The Times*, writing that 'each single member of the Sea Cadet Corps is fully aware of the responsibility which rests now upon him as an individual and upon the corps as a unit for proving that the traditions of the British Navy stand as firm to-day as when Nelson won his great victories'.¹⁵¹

Following the Mansion House meeting in 1937 – and in particular Nuffield's donation – the Corps increased both its scope and scale. Indeed, in 1938, units more than

¹⁴⁸ 'Navy League Dinner', *The Navy*, November 1938, p. 336.

¹⁴⁹ Rosie Kennedy, *The Children's War, 1914–1918* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 83.

¹⁵⁰ 'Navy League', *The Times*, 21 October 1938, p. 10.

¹⁵¹ 'The Sea Cadet Corps', *The Times*, 21 October 1939, p. 7.

doubled from 30 to 70, with units spread throughout the country. While over half of the SCC units in 1931 were based in London, these units represented only a quarter of total units by mid-1938 with that ‘proportion diminishing as the movement grows’.¹⁵² By June 1939, this figure had reached 100 units. In fact, the rate of expansion was so high that the Navy League decided to limit expansion of the Corps from June onwards in order to alleviate some of the administrative and organisational pressure.¹⁵³ Such expansion gained high praise from members of the Admiralty, with Admiral Sir Roger Backhouse assuring the Navy League ‘that the Admiralty view its activity with the greatest sympathy and will do everything they can to help it’ and that the SCC ‘is worthy of the support of the whole country’.¹⁵⁴ Reflecting on the expansion of the Corps in 1938, *The Navy* suggested that while this gave the country ‘young citizens physically and spiritually fit in times of peace’, it also provided ‘partly trained man power in war’.¹⁵⁵ Yet, while the Corps was undoubtedly important in recruiting cadets for the Royal Navy, it had a number of other, more unofficial, recruiters.

Interest in the SCC and the Royal Navy more broadly was also fueled by popular juvenile fiction, pulp fiction, magazines, and films. Despite the prominence of aviation and the aviator in interwar fiction, the Royal Navy still occupied an important place in the ‘pleasure culture’ surrounding war.¹⁵⁶ Fictional depictions of the navy were important in shaping, and indeed reflecting, the way that people thought about and understood the Royal Navy. As Michael Paris has argued, popular culture promotes a ‘martial spirit, elevates the warrior to heroic status and romanticizes war’.¹⁵⁷ The existence of such a pleasure culture of war, in Paris’s view, created an image of Britain as an ‘aggressively militant warrior

¹⁵² MSSC, FGP Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 22 March 1939, p. 2; MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 7 April 1938, p. 2.

¹⁵³ MSSC, FGP Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 26 June 1939, p. 1.

¹⁵⁴ ‘Navy League Dinner’, *The Navy*, November 1938, p. 341.

¹⁵⁵ ‘New Year Message’, *The Navy*, January 1939, p. 1.

¹⁵⁶ Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850–2000* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2000), p. 26.

¹⁵⁷ Paris, *Warrior Nation*, p. 11.

nation'.¹⁵⁸ While literature may not have been the sole – or even most effective – vector of creating an enthusiasm for the Royal Navy during the interwar years, there was still an interest surrounding fictional depictions of life in the navy. Particularly popular were C.S. Forester's novels centered around the character Horatio Hornblower. While the novels were set during the Napoleonic Wars, they were able to evoke 'feelings of pride in the sailors of the twentieth century'.¹⁵⁹

Hazel Sheeky Bird has similarly highlighted the ways in which the Royal Navy remained an important part of writing for children throughout the interwar years. She demonstrates how popular novels such as Percy Westerman's *The Keepers of the Narrow Seas* (1931) – originally published as *The Fritz Trafflers* in 1918 – utilised the Nelson tradition to 'encourage boys to take up service' and emphasised the importance of Nelsonian qualities.¹⁶⁰ Bird has also highlighted how the Nelson tradition was able to permeate naval cadet stories such as John Irving's 'Dick Valliant' novels.¹⁶¹ Such literature was undoubtedly important in shaping young naval minds, yet so too was cinema.

Cinema, Victoria Carolan argues, was able to construct, transmit, and represent the sea as a 'symbol of national identity and marker of national characteristics' in the interwar years, although this relationship had to be continually reinforced.¹⁶² Such films often, much like literature, evoked Nelsonian traditions and other hero models such as Drake, with more

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁵⁹ Collins, *Cadets*, p. 77. Kelly Boyd has similarly noted that boys' papers and popular fiction inculcated values of patriotism and imperial duty to British boys and 'performed important ideological work'. Kelly Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper in Britain: A Cultural History, 1855–1940* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), p. 4.

¹⁶⁰ Hazel Sheeky Bird, *Class, Leisure and National Identity in British Children's Literature, 1918–1950* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), p. 132.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 135–136. Navalist ideology, Nelsonian tradition, and the service ethos was underpinned much of the values and motifs in interwar fiction, even featuring in the popular 'Swallows and Amazons' (1930–1947) sailing stories written by Arthur Ransome. For a somewhat different perspective, see Michael Bender, 'Arthur Ransome's 'Swallows and Amazons' series: Harmless Holiday Adventures, or Detailed Preparations for the Next War?', *International Journal of Maritime History*, vol 30, no. 3 (2018), pp. 508–518.

¹⁶² Victoria Diane Carolan, 'British Maritime History, National Identity and Film, 1900–1960' (unpub. PhD thesis, Queen Mary University of London, 2012), pp. 12–13.

films that focused on either Nelson or Drake produced between 1912 and 1935 than at any other time previously.¹⁶³ The ‘cult of the navy’, as Carolan shows, undoubtedly manifested itself in the broad proliferation of naval and maritime films in the Edwardian and interwar periods. There were also specific films created for the SCC, such as *Youth at the Helm* (1939) which depicted the life and training of the Sea Cadet and the Ministry of Information film *Sea Cadets or Nursery of the Navy* (1941).¹⁶⁴ SCC activities also featured in newsreels in the interwar years, particularly its celebration of Trafalgar Day.¹⁶⁵

Upon the outbreak of Second World War, the SCC had 9,000 Cadets in over 100 units, ‘in training for the service of their country on the high seas’.¹⁶⁶ However, considerable difficulty was faced bringing the SCC onto a ‘war basis’. Large numbers of officers and instructors were called into service, drill halls were ‘commandeered’ by military authorities, while evacuations and blackouts caused units difficulty. While several units closed, most carried on and continued to hold meetings and training exercises. Upon the outbreak of war, ‘many thousands’ of ex-Cadets were already serving in the Royal Navy or Merchant Service, while many who were of age within the Corps volunteered. SCC units in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Rhodesia were also serving in the Imperial and in the Dominion Naval and Mercantile Marine Services.¹⁶⁷ The SCC was also providing ‘intensive training’ in visual signalling to 1,000 Cadets, to ready them to enter the Royal Navy as trained signalmen, while the younger Cadets were giving ‘splendid voluntary service’ as messengers and telephone operators at Naval bases on coasts. Cadets were also manning signal stations, acting as messengers to the fire service, filling sandbags, barricading

¹⁶³ Carolan, ‘British Maritime History’, p. 81.

¹⁶⁴ ‘SCCN’, *The Navy*, March 1939, p. 97; Collins, *Cadets*, p. 94.

¹⁶⁵ See, for example, ‘Trafalgar Day Celebrations in Liverpool’ (London, British Pathé, 1922); ‘Trafalgar Day in Liverpool’ (London, British Pathé, 1924); ‘Trafalgar Day in Liverpool’ (London, British Pathé, 1928); and ‘Trafalgar Day in Liverpool’ (London, British Pathé, 1929).

¹⁶⁶ ‘About Ourselves’, *The Sea Cadet*, September 1943, p. 2.

¹⁶⁷ MSSC, The Navy League, Forty-Fourth Annual Report, 1939, p. 6.

windows, acting as ARP messengers, digging trenches, guarding bridges and store depots, and ‘doing all kinds of useful work in support of Civil Defence Services’.¹⁶⁸ Such work was deemed to be of national importance, with the League receiving a letter from Winston Churchill stating: ‘We (The Admiralty) are deeply sensible of the work undertaken by the Navy League. It is our hope that this work can continue.’¹⁶⁹ In 1942, the Admiralty, recognising the value of the Corps, took responsibility for the organisation. King George VI became the Admiral of the organisation and the Admiralty assumed responsibility for its training, although the Navy League continued its administration. By the time the Admiralty had taken over the Corps, its membership had expanded to 400 units and 50,000 Cadets.¹⁷⁰

V. Conclusion

Writing in 1940, George Orwell reflected that

Most of the English middle class are trained for war from the cradle onwards, not technically but morally. The earliest political slogan I can remember is ‘We want eight (eight dreadnoughts) and we won’t wait’. At seven years old I was a member of the Navy League and wore a sailor suit with ‘H.M.S. *Invincible*’ on my cap . . . On and off, I have been toting a rifle ever since I was ten, in preparation not only for war, but for a particular kind of war.¹⁷¹

By the outbreak of the Second World War, the SCC embodied a form of navalism which went beyond the promotion of high naval armaments, but instead represented, for the Navy League at least, an expression of national might and prestige. Trained both morally and technically, the SCC formed an important part of the ‘patriotic public sphere’ in the interwar years and of military and martial spectacle, particularly in national ceremonies, civic and military ritual, and commemoration. The Corps employed pageantry and theatre to disseminate its message and enjoyed popularity in urban and rural areas. While the efficiency

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 6; see ‘SCCN’, *The Navy*, October 1939, pp. 338–341 for the Corps’ activities upon the outbreak of war.

¹⁶⁹ MSSC, The Navy League, Forty-Fourth Annual Report, 1939, p. 5.

¹⁷⁰ “About Ourselves”, *The Sea Cadet*, September 1943, p. 2.

¹⁷¹ George Orwell, ‘My Country Right or Left’, in George Orwell, *Essays* (London: Penguin, 2000 ed), p. 135.

of units varied, most had a good level of physical and military efficiency and a measure of training in seamanship. The Corps represented the Navy League's most direct contribution to the military preparedness of the state and to the militarisation of society; boys were, as Orwell reflected, being prepared not only for war, but for a 'particular kind of war'. The leadership of the Corps was keen to emphasise the defensive and passive elements of the SCC and the centrality of citizenship to the movement, yet it was undoubtedly militaristic. Naval heritage and tradition were important to the Corps and while the SCC was not able to draw on the modernity of movements like the ADCC, the movement still had a broad appeal, appearing to transcend class. The SCC occupied a more important place in the youth culture of the interwar years than has hitherto been realised and, as this chapter has shown, offers an important insight into debates about physical culture, masculinity, militarism, and leisure in the interwar years. While the SCC may not have achieved a truly constant supply of sea-minded young men, imbued with a Nelsonian tradition of patriotism, service, and self-sacrifice, clearly many young boys wanted to contribute to the command of the seas, to take the place of those who had gone before.

Chapter 5: ‘The Future Defenders of Our Country’s Heritage’: The Air League, the Air Defence Cadet Corps, and the Militarisation of British Youth

In a letter to the ADCC’s Executive Committee in October 1942, Lord Beaverbrook, the press baron who held various positions in Winston Churchill’s government during the Second World War, enthused that ‘the members of your cadet corps are the future defenders of our country’s heritage’. He continued: ‘they give the most splendid demonstration of the spirit of the youth of this country today. A spirit of willing and eager self-sacrifice deep rooted in the love of their country.’¹ Formed in a period of high international tension, the ADCC represented a vehicle through which the Air League was able to train the airminded youth of Britain to be ready, able, and willing to defend the nation. The Corps was used to extoll the virtues of airpower to both state and civil society alike and to legitimate the League’s aims and objectives. In many ways, the ADCC shared similarities with the aims, function, and activities of the SCC. Yet, while the SCC was linked to naval heritage and tradition, the ADCC was associated with modernity, technology, and the promise of flight.

The Corps was an ‘association of all those who have the welfare of their country in the air at heart’ and – by the outbreak of the Second World War – consisted of 17,000 uniformed, disciplined, patriotic, and knowledgeable boys aged 14 to 18.² The ADCC’s ethos – much of which revolved around service, discipline, patriotism, and duty – linked airmindedness, citizenship, and a militarised masculinity among boys. While the Air League emphasised the defensive and passive element of the Corps from its inception, there is little doubt that the League hoped members of the Corps would, like the SCC, make a direct military contribution to the nation. If, as John Springhall remarks, youth organisations ‘functioned as extremely sensitive barometers of shifts in public and governmental attitudes

¹ AL, ADCC Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 19 October 1942, p. 2.

² Air League of the British Empire, *Air Defence Cadet Corps Training Manual* (London, 1938), p. [3].

towards the military in British society', then the ADCC's activities – and indeed the SCC's – suggest that public opinion was at least reasonably favourable to a Corps designed to protect the nation.³ Fear of future conflict was clearly conducive for militaristic organisations such as the ADCC, the SCC, and militarism more broadly. However, despite Beaverbrook's praise and, despite the active role many ADCC members played in the Second World War, the Corps has received little scholarly attention.

Largely neglected by historians of youth and air forces alike, this chapter will examine the ADCC, particularly in relation to militarism and mobilisation. It is concerned with the creation, organisation, nature, ideas, and values of the Corps. Moving beyond more conventional paradigms of operational, strategic, and institutional histories of air forces, this chapter will explore the cultural, symbolic, visual, material, and performative aspects of aviation, through the lens of the ADCC. Like the SCC, the ADCC not only represented, but indeed promoted, popular forms of militarism and military culture that had resonance throughout large sections of British society. For all the Air League's various attempts to create a non-militarised airmindedness among Britain's youth, it was the ADCC that represented the League's most successful endeavour to interest young males in all things associated with aviation. This chapter will also explore the lived experience of ADCC members – drawing on written accounts and oral testimonies – the experience of life in the Corps, the interaction with aeroplanes, aerodromes, and military equipment and how boys perceived the RAF and the approach of war.

This chapter will outline the ADCC's origins, organisation, and objectives. It will then highlight how the Corps was financed and how a mutually beneficial relationship existed between the Air League and Air Ministry surrounding the Corps. The chapter will

³ Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society*, p. 13.

then move on to the question of the ADCC and militarism, before looking at the ways in which the Corps was involved in recruitment for the Air Ministry and the function of the Corps at the outbreak of the Second World War. First, however, an account of the Air League's broader activities surrounding youth will be provided as a necessary precursor to an examination of the ADCC.

I. 'Air Thrills' for Schoolboys: The Air League, Aviation, and the Education of British Youth

The creation of Boys' and Girls' Aerial League (later the Young Aerial League (YAL)), under the auspices of the WAL in 1909, represented one of the first organisations with the sole purpose of fostering an interest in aviation among British youth.⁴ While the WAL or Air League do not seem to have provided an extensive programme of activities for the YAL, lectures were part of the organisation's events, with speakers stressing 'the need for patriotic effort in urging the Government to spend more money on aeroplanes'.⁵

YAL activities were closely connected with the Boy Scouts. For instance, the Air League invited Scouts to flying meets, races, and persuaded the Association to include articles on aviators and their exploits in its publications.⁶ Scouts were clearly interested in aviation from an early stage, with a Boy Scout Balloon Club being formed in 1910 (after the sanction and approval of Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the Boy Scouts, and Massy).⁷ The YAL also arranged aeronautical courses for the Scouts, with those who passed receiving a certificate.⁸ Scouts were involved in Air League experiments, running and signalling in

⁴ 'Young Aerial League of the British Empire', *The Aerial Observer*, 1 October 1910, p. 7.

⁵ 'Children and Aeroplanes', *Daily Mail*, 16 January 1911, p. 5. See also, 'Young Aerial League', *The Aerial Observer*, 15 November 1910, p. 30. Essay prizes were also part of the YAL's activities. The WAL encouraged essays to focus on the importance of aviation to the nation and empire, and to be patriotic in nature.

⁶ Peter Adey, *Aerial Life: Spaces, Mobilities, Affects* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 28.

⁷ 'Boy Scout Balloonists', *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 August 1910, p. 14.

⁸ 'Aeronautical Courses for Boy Scouts', *Flight*, 8 June 1912, p. 520.

connection with balloons and aeroplanes (for which they received a medal) and were also permitted to attend YAL lectures free of charge.⁹ The organisation's journal, *The Scout*, also featured stories on the 'trials and adventures' of young aviators and included columns providing Scouts with technical information on aeroplanes.¹⁰ In seeking to formalise links further, the WAL placed a scheme before the Boy Scouts which involved the formation of a special branch of the YAL to be called the Boy Scouts' Division. This would provide Scouts with basic aeronautical training, enabling boys to 'identify machines, estimate their height, speed, direction of flight . . . thus enabling them to be of immediate service to their country in case of invasion'.¹¹

While the YAL represented an important contribution to the shaping of young aerial minds in an associational sphere, the League attempted to consolidate these links by initiating educational schemes in schools and universities, particularly following the First World War. The Air League contacted headmasters at many public schools proposing to deliver lectures on aeronautical subjects. The scheme involved sending an aeroplane, along with a 'pilot-lecturer', on a tour of public schools.¹² Among the schools contacted were Eton, Harrow, Westminster, Haileybury, Winchester, Rugby, Wellington, Cheltenham, and Marlborough, with most schools accepting.¹³ Although the scheme had the support of many within the aviation community, it was unable to secure the backing of the Air Ministry and Air Council. While the Air Council welcomed the proposal and was 'in entire sympathy'

⁹ 'Boy Scouts and Aeroplanes', *Daily Mail*, 20 April 1910, p. 7; The Scout Association Archive, London, Object Number: 2018-10-01-04: Aerial League bronze medal awarded to Sidney Mastin for first despatch delivered to the Aerial League headquarters, 30 April 1910; 'A Lecture for Youngsters', *Flight*, 6 January 1912, p. 13.

¹⁰ "Master of the Air", *The Scout*, 27 August 1910, p. 462; 'The Professor's Den', *The Scout*, 30 April 1910, p. 58.

¹¹ 'Scout News', *The Scout*, 2 December 1911, p. 312; 'Air Scouting Course on T.S. "Mercury"', *Flight*, 2 December 1911, p. 1040.

¹² At the end of the lectures, boys were permitted, with the headmaster's and parent's consent, to take a short flight with the instructor. 'Flying at Public Schools', *The Times*, 26 November 1925, p. 18.

¹³ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 23 April 1925, p. 4; AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 26 May 1925, p. 3.

with the scheme, from both the point of view of recruitment and for ‘developing a knowledge of the air among the younger generation’, it was unwilling to publicly support it, citing the aversion of headmasters to ‘providing the facilities’ which the Air League’s lectures required.¹⁴

Despite its endeavours, the League struggled to gain the widespread support of education authorities. When the LCC chose not to adopt *Facts about Flying and the Civil Uses of Aviation*, which was circulated widely in schools and popular among Scouts (with over 4,000 copies being ordered in 1925 alone), the League thought this rang of a ‘distorted mind . . . obsessed by the principles of pacifism’.¹⁵ In outlining the importance of *Facts about Flying*, the Air League wrote that the ‘plastic and receptive mind of the younger generation . . . is a fertile and virgin soil, in which the germs of the great principles which dominate aeronautics should be planted forthwith’.¹⁶

Clearly, the publication was not devoid of ideological content, with one section highlighting the importance of the development of aircraft as ‘an imperial necessity’, declaring that only through the air could Britain ‘retain its supremacy’.¹⁷ Such descriptions meant that the LCC was not the only source of opposition to the publication. For example, the *Daily Herald* wrote that although ‘it may be unfair to regard the Air League as already the successor of the Navy League, which used to preach the virtues of steel and gunpowder to young Britain’, the ‘real essence of militarism’ was ‘latent’ within the pamphlet.¹⁸

¹⁴ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 18 March 1926, pp. 2–3.

¹⁵ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 23 April 1925, p. 3; ‘London County Council Education Department’, *Air League Bulletin*, June 1924, p. 32. The book, which originated from a suggestion by the Civil Department of the Air Ministry – and was compiled with information from the same department – included information on the early history of flight, instructional and educational articles titled ‘How an Aeroplane Flies’ and ‘Learning to Fly’, as well as accounts of airline organisations and early aeronautical feats. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 25 October 1922, p. 3; Air League of the British Empire, *Facts about Flying and the Civil Uses of Aviation* (London, 1923).

¹⁶ ‘Affairs of the League’, *Air League Bulletin*, January 1923, p. 113.

¹⁷ Air League, *Facts about Flying*, pp. 14–15.

¹⁸ ‘People and Things’, *Daily Herald*, 29 March 1923, p. 1.

However, the publication did have some support, with *The Times* stressing that it was ‘essential that a steady interest in and realization of the importance of flying should be maintained and developed in the nation’, noting that the book went some way to preparing the ‘ground for future years’.¹⁹

In attempting to increase its influence in educational spheres, the League approached the two University Air Squadrons – Oxford and Cambridge (both formed in 1925) – in an attempt to interest them in the League, receiving letters from Oxford undergraduates supporting its policy. Encouraged by the letters, the League endeavoured to contact the University’s colleges for support, although this appears to have met with little success.²⁰ The University Air Squadrons provided flying training, however, as John James has stressed, these Squadrons were not purely recruitment agencies for the RAF. Instead, they also attempted to instil within future members of the establishment an understanding of the RAF and it seems likely the Air League understood the importance of University Air Squadrons in these terms.²¹

Unperturbed by wavering support from both schools and universities, the League even considered establishing a public school for aviation, along the lines of Wellington College for the army, which would have ‘an aviation bias, the same way that Wellington had a military bias’.²² Unofficially, Chamier had the support of the Air Council who initially ‘thought it excellent’. However, at a later Air League meeting, Chamier revealed that the Air Ministry was not, after all, ‘favourably inclined to the idea’ and so it was abandoned.²³

¹⁹ ‘Air Power and the Schools’, *The Times*, 3 April 1923, p. 7.

²⁰ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 10 February 1932, p. 3.

²¹ John James, *The Paladins: A Social History of the RAF up to the Outbreak of World War II* (London: Futura, 1991), p. 211.

²² AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 6 October 1936, p. 2.

²³ *Ibid*; AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 15 December 1936, p. 2.

Like the SCC and the Navy League, the Air League's activities in schools clearly met with some opposition. The Air League therefore attempted to improve links with other youth organisations, particularly, as we have seen, the Boy Scouts. Many within the Boy Scouts certainly saw the value of such cooperation with the Air League. For example, Lt. Colonel Drage, chief organiser for the Boy Scouts in Wales, was anxious that Scouts within his district should receive elementary education with regard to the air and requested a model aeroplane from the Air League. Drage also requested that the Air League might make arrangements for an aviator to fly to a Scout camp and provide lectures.²⁴

Alongside attempts to interest the Scout movement in aviation, the League took part in a number of public exhibitions. The League was present at the Boys' Own Exhibition, which took place in London in 1926, and was also present at the Aero Exhibition at Olympia in 1929, setting an essay prize for children (the winning entry was published in *Air*, titled 'The Importance of Aircraft in Imperial Communications').²⁵ The League, like the Navy League, was also present at the Schoolboys' Exhibition from 1929 to 1930.²⁶ It attended the same exhibition in 1934, with its section reportedly 'arous[ing] the most interest' of all those present.²⁷ However, despite such activities, *Air Review* still bemoaned that 'younger folk are ill-served' to gain experience of flight. The article continued, '[b]urning with an enthusiasm

²⁴ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 21 January 1925, p. 2; AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 4 February 1926, p. 3. Model aeroplanes were similarly requested from units in Whitstable, Canterbury, Halifax, Torquay, Edinburgh, and even South Africa. The Air League also received applications for models from other organisations such as the Boys' Brigade. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 26 May 1925, p. 2; 'Model Aeroplanes', *Air League Bulletin*, April 1926, p. 8; AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 12 October 1925, p. 5.

²⁵ 'The Importance of Aircraft in Imperial Communications', *Air*, April 1930, p. 167.

²⁶ The Air League's exhibition included a number of items, such as: scale models, photographs, information of famous flights and aviators, flying instruments, engines, and films, all with a view to 'impressing on the Citizens of To-morrow the importance of air communications to this Country and the Empire'. 'The Air League at the International Aero Exhibition', *Air*, July 1929, p. 313; 'The Schoolboys' Exhibition', *Air*, January 1930, p. 24.

²⁷ 'Schoolboys' Own Exhibition', *Flight*, 4 January 1934, p. 18.

foreign to his elders, the boy who has outgrown his aeroplane toys asks nothing but to be allowed to fly'.²⁸ To combat this, the Air League established the Young Pilots' Fund in 1935.

The idea for a Young Pilots' Fund arose out of a meeting in October 1934. The scheme was designed to subsidise half the costs for those who wanted to take their 'A' license at a flying club and gain flying experience.²⁹ In attempting to acquire money for the Fund, the League released an appeal in December that year which stressed that Britain's 'safety and progress demand that the rising generation should fly. They want to fly but cannot afford the cost . . . Other Governments are helping the new generation into the air; our young men must be helped too.'³⁰ *Air Review* stressed that it was not a 'militaristic scheme', although admitted 'no one can deny that the ability to fly will be an asset to the country if war should be forced upon us'. Chamier also framed the scheme in terms of nation and empire, emphasising it could 'set another young Englishman to start his path of mastery of the air, which means so much to us as a nation and an Empire'.³¹

The scheme had the support of a number of notable figures, including the Prince of Wales, Lord Londonderry, Lord Wakefield, and Sir Philip Sassoon, Under-Secretary of State for Air from 1924 to 1929 and again from 1931 to 1937, all of whom donated to the Fund.³² The response was high, with the League receiving hundreds of applications to the scheme by January 1935, leading *Flight* to declare that 'aviation has captured the imagination of youth'.³³ The League evidently saw the country's security as being linked to the creation of an air-minded youth, aiming to put 'a pilot into every village and every street'.³⁴ In a letter to

²⁸ 'Youth and Aviation', *Air Review*, May 1934, p. 36.

²⁹ From May 1919, the Air Ministry began granting 'A' licenses to private flyers and 'B' licences to commercial pilots.

³⁰ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 4 December 1934, p. 1.

³¹ 'What of 1935', *Air Review*, January 1935, p. 12; 'The Air League to its Members', *Air Review*, January 1935, p. 17.

³² AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 26 March 1935, p. 2.

³³ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 25 January 1935, p. 1; 'Youth's Opportunity', *Flight*, 10 January 1935, p. 29.

³⁴ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 4 December 1934, p. 1.

Moore-Brabazon, then president of the RAeS, the League requested his support, noting that ‘each of these young pilots will form a focus of enthusiasm among his relatives and friends so that we shall get that support for aviation and recognition of its possibilities which is as essential for our prosperity as for our safety’.³⁵

In attempting to make flying more accessible, the Air League also endeavoured to popularise the Pou-du-Ciel (‘Flying Flea’), a French home-made light aircraft designed by the French radio engineer, Henri Mignet.³⁶ The League translated and published Mignet’s book, *The Flying Flea: How to Build and Fly It*, a guide for building and flying the aircraft. 6,000 copies were sold within months and the League eventually formed a ‘Pou Club’ based on this enthusiasm.³⁷ Reflecting on the significance of Mignet’s work, Chamier wrote that he ‘has captivated a youthful generation; he has fired them with his own enthusiasm, and he has proved that the romance and the spirit which inspired the early pioneers of flight are still with us’.³⁸ Sutherland similarly hoped that the Flea could ensure that young people could ‘follow in the footsteps of the pioneers of aviation’.³⁹

Alongside the ‘Pou Movement’ and the Young Pilots’ Fund, the Air League also had its own junior section, with a membership of 4,000 by mid-1936, however little of the League’s work was directly tailored towards its junior section until the ADCC’s creation.⁴⁰ Indeed, even Chamier admitted that members got ‘little or nothing’ in return for their membership subscription.⁴¹ The League was far more active in its involvement in modelling

³⁵ RAF Museum, Lord Brabazon of Tara Papers, AC 71/3, Letter from J.A. Chamier to Moore-Brabazon, 2 January 1935, p. 1.

³⁶ After building its own Flea, the League arranged for Mignet to tour England, funded by the *Daily Express*, and fly its own Flea. The League’s Flea was subsequently displayed at Selfridges on Oxford Street, London, for a number of weeks. ‘The Air League to its Members’, *Air Review*, September 1935, pp. 14–15.

³⁷ Henry Mignet, *The Flying Flea: How to Build and Fly It* (London: Sampson Low, Martson & Co., Ltd, 1935); AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 26 March 1935, p. 2.

³⁸ Mignet, *Flying Flea*, p. vi.

³⁹ AL, AL Minute Book, Annual General Meeting, 10 July 1935, p. 2.

⁴⁰ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 7 April 1936, p. 3.

⁴¹ ‘Air League Junior Leaguer’s Scheme’, *Air Review*, November 1934, p. 23.

clubs, involving the Skybird League (created to oversee the growth of modelling clubs) in its junior section from October 1935 as well as publishing news and information on the Skybird League from December 1937 in *Air Review*.⁴² By February 1935, over 300 Skybird clubs had been formed around the country in an attempt to encourage airmindedness.⁴³ The League published its own journal, *The Skybird*, which later became *Aero Modeller* and, although the Skybird League was far less militaristic than the ADCC, its journal often featured articles on the RAF and on aviation as a career.⁴⁴ The Air League certainly valued the propagandistic elements of modelling, viewing it as a ‘highly educative means of interesting the people of this country’ and to be of ‘national importance, insomuch as it helps to spread an “air sense” . . . and is very often the means, especially in the younger generation, of producing the potential airman of the future’.⁴⁵ However, it was not until the ADCC that the Air League was able to appeal to British youth on truly a nationwide scale.

II. The Origins, Organisation, and Objectives of the ADCC

Chamier initially broached the idea of an Air Cadet Corps with Sir Donald Banks, Permanent Secretary of the Air Ministry, in November 1937. Chamier wrote that

For some time past we have been anxious to do some more for the youngsters and our ideas have gradually hardened into an Air Cadet Corps on the lines of the Sea Cadets or Sea Scouts. Based, in the first instance, at all towns where there are aerodromes, we feel that a Corps of this kind would be immensely popular.⁴⁶

⁴² ‘The Editor Talks’, *The Skybird*, October 1935, p. 1; ‘The Skybird League’, *Air Review*, December 1937, p. 52.

⁴³ ‘The Editor Talks’, *The Skybird*, February 1935, p. 1.

⁴⁴ See, for example, ‘Aviation as a Career’, *The Skybird*, Summer 1934, pp. 52–53; ‘Vacancies in the Royal Air Force’, *The Skybird*, Autumn 1934, p. 52.

⁴⁵ ‘Model Flying’, *Air League Bulletin*, July 1926, p. 16.

⁴⁶ TNA AIR 2/2716, Proposed Formation of Air Cadets Corps and Boy Scouts Air Patrols, Letter from J.A. Chamier to Sir Donald Banks, 19 November 1937, p. 1.

The idea was ‘to give the boys a uniform and discipline’ and ‘to instruct them in air matters’. Chamier felt that ‘volunteer cadets of this kind . . . would be an immense value to the country’.⁴⁷

In order to gain support for the Corps, the Duke of Sutherland arranged a luncheon party in December 1937. Guests welcomed the idea of an Air Cadet Corps, but felt that ‘the scale and scope of the scheme placed before them [was] too small’. The League consequently changed the name of the Corps to the ADCC and widened its scope.⁴⁸ Following this meeting, Chamier wrote to Banks again to outline the new scheme: ‘we could really aim for numbers of youngsters definitely trained to take an active part should war break out as well as to have a leaning towards the R.A.F. when they grew beyond the cadet stage’.⁴⁹ Chamier felt the Air League must ‘launch out largely while people are scared and while the future is obscured’.⁵⁰ Chamier received no official response initially, although he had been assured that the scheme met with the Air Ministry’s approval.⁵¹ Indeed, Sir Cyril Newall’s letter to Chamier in December 1937, which stressed that ‘the Air Cadets scheme has our whole-hearted approval’, was clearly enough for the Air League to proceed.⁵²

In January 1938, Chamier set out the ADCC’s aims and objectives to the Air Ministry in far clearer terms: ‘The main object of this organisation is to bring large numbers of young men between the ages of fourteen and eighteen who would otherwise be deprived of the opportunity into direct contact with aviation’. In doing so, these young men would ‘become to a great extent a reservoir of man-power for both Service and Civil aviation’. The ADCC was also envisioned as being important in civil defence measures and ARP services: ‘it is

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 3 February 1938, p. 1.

⁴⁹ TNA AIR 2/2716, Chamier to Banks, 21 December 1937, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

⁵¹ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 13 December 1937, p. 1.

⁵² TNA AIR 2/2716, Letter from Newall to Chamier, 20 December 1937, p. 1.

held that large bodies of Cadets of this kind will be a channel of communication of air raid precautions to the populace and will prove, in the event of war, of value not only to R.A.F. Stations . . . but to the officials of the Air Raids Precautions organisation'. More generally, the ADCC would be trained in 'discipline and patriotism'.⁵³ The proposal was to form two hundred units, of one hundred Cadets each, making 20,000 Cadets in total, which Chamier stressed would make 'a definite contribution to the security of the country'.⁵⁴

Following Chamier's letter in January, the ADCC gained the backing of many senior members of the Air Ministry and military theorists. Lord Swinton, Secretary of State for Air from 1935 to 1938, argued that the Corps: 'in helping to bring considerable numbers of young men into touch with aviation and stimulating interest in aeronautical and allied subjects, will fill a real need'.⁵⁵ Chamier, who felt the scheme was 'five years overdue', even suggested to the League's Executive Committee that it had the 'full support of the Air Ministry' and that 'certain officials . . . were anxious to see an extension of its scope in order that practical flying might be included in the training syllabus'.⁵⁶ Earl Winterton, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Deputy Secretary of State for Air from March 1938, publicly stated that 'the Air Ministry is in full sympathy with the project and had undertaken to give the corps all practicable assistance'.⁵⁷

The Corps likewise had the support of L.E.O. Charlton. Writing in the Army League's journal, *Rising Strength*, Charlton thought the Corps was 'destined to sweep the country in an access of belief that no boy or youth can do better in the sense of service than clamour for inclusion in the Air Defence Cadet Corps'.⁵⁸ Londonderry also attempted to

⁵³ TNA AIR 2/2716, Letter from Chamier to the Air Ministry, 7 January 1938, p. 1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵⁵ AL, ADCC Minute Book, Report of a Meeting to Consider a Proposed Scheme for an Air Defence Cadet Corps on a National Basis, 7 April 1938, p. 1.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.

⁵⁷ Commons Sitting, Air Cadet Corps, *HC Deb 13 April 1938 vol 334 cc1124-5*.

⁵⁸ 'Towards Airmindedness', *Rising Strength*, May 1938, p. 168.

accrue support for the Corps, requesting the assistance and patronage of the Association of Lord-Lieutenants of Counties, of which he was a member, at its Annual General Meeting in 1939. He urged that the Association assist the Corps ‘by persuading local subscribers that this Cadet movement is worth their fullest support both from a patriotic and from a charitable point of view’. While Londonderry noted that the Cadets could go into civil aviation, he also stressed that ‘when they grow to the military age, they can take up Service life’.⁵⁹ The scheme also had the backing of Lindsay Everard, despite his resignation from the Air League at the beginning of March 1938.⁶⁰

The ADCC also had the backing of Kingsley Wood, Secretary of State for Air from 1938 to 1940. In a letter to Sir John Salmond, retired Marshal of the RAF and ADCC chairman, Wood wrote that while the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve and the CAG existed, neither lessened the need for the ADCC. He felt that the Corps would ‘perform a most important service to civil aviation in this country by familiarising young men with all aspects of aviation, making them air minded in the best sense of the term’, and would ‘work for both the prosperity and the safety of this country in the air’.⁶¹ Wood made this support public in his address to the Corps’ Mansion House meeting in October 1938, at which Viscount Trenchard presided, by proclaiming: ‘I hope we shall be able to make some of the present generation knights of the air as their forefathers were conquerors of the sea’.⁶² The language and tone of Wood’s pronouncement is worth noting. It recalls David Lloyd George’s description of aviators in the First World War as ‘the Cavalry of the clouds’ and

⁵⁹ Parliamentary Archives, Papers of the Association of Lord-Lieutenants of Counties, ALC/1/17, Annual General Meeting of the Association of Lieutenants of Counties, 8 February 1939, p. 4.

⁶⁰ The reason given for Everard’s resignation was his inability to attend as many committee meetings as he would have liked to have done and, as Everard would become a member of the council of the ADCC, there is little reason to doubt this. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 3 March 1938, p. 1; Commons Sitting, Civil Aviation, *HC Deb 28 March 1938 vol 333 cc1721-803*.

⁶¹ TNA AIR 2/2716, Letter from Wood to Salmond, 30 August 1938, pp. 1–2.

⁶² ‘Sir Kingsley Wood wants Air Knights’, *Daily Mail*, 27 October 1938, p. 5.

as ‘the knighthood of the war, without fear and without reproach’.⁶³ It also echoes the image of Scouts as ‘young knights’.⁶⁴ The chivalric image of the aviator, and the promise of excitement which flying could provide, were an important draw for young members of the ADCC.

The Air Ministry’s support of the ADCC is, perhaps, unsurprising. The ethos of the Corps was closely tied to increasing anxieties about the nation and the prospect of war. As Peter Adey suggests, ‘young people were the susceptible clay from which a new kind of aerial being could be moulded, and the seedbed for a new form of aerial and political community’.⁶⁵ Adey sees the training of youth groups involved in aviation as a process involving ‘the inculcation of the air – an *aerial life* born through sets of associated practices of the mobile body which had their own benefits in the training of character and, importantly, the ‘capacities’ desirable for their militaristic use’.⁶⁶ Such idealised (male) bodies would be shaped through a combination of training and character building. Moreover, aerial bodies, and aviators in the First World War, were not associated with the dismemberment and disfigurement that many soldiers on the front-line faced.⁶⁷ Accordingly, there was little opposition to the creation of young aerial bodies or the construction of military and masculine identities in an aerial sense. Adey’s description of young people as ‘susceptible clay’ which could be ‘moulded’ is more problematic as it portrays young people as passive, takes away their agency, and neglects the voluntary nature of groups like the ADCC. However, his focus on mobile practices, character, and the bodily actions of young aerial lives are far more applicable to the activities of the Corps. The Air Ministry valued the Corps

⁶³ Laurence Goldstein, *The Flying Machine and Modern Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 87.

⁶⁴ See Robert H. MacDonald, *Sons of the Empire: The Frontier and the Boy Scout Movement, 1890–1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), pp. 186–191.

⁶⁵ Adey, *Aerial Life*, p. 28.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁶⁷ In particular, see Chapter 1 of Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men’s Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999).

as it was able to turn boys into useful, airminded, citizens of the nation. Indeed, the British state – and in particular the Air Ministry’s involvement in the ADCC – in many ways, represented an acquiescence in, and indeed promotion of, the militarisation of British youth.

The ADCC was a nationwide scheme, with squadrons ranging from Inverness to Land’s End.⁶⁸ There were two forms of squadrons: School Squadrons, which drew from pupils and ‘old boys’ and Open Squadrons, which recruited from the local community.⁶⁹ Decentralisation was a key component in the establishment of squadrons; for this purpose, the ADCC Committee divided the country into the following areas: Scotland, North West, Western, Eastern, South West, South East, London, and the North East (from December 1938) with each being headed by an area organiser.⁷⁰ These organisers were responsible for visiting the main towns within their areas, making contact with mayors, corporations, rotary clubs, chambers of commerce, and local gentry to encourage them to establish squadrons.⁷¹ The formation, training, discipline, accommodation, management, and financial maintenance of cadet units was placed in the hands of local organisers. Training was provided by ex-officers and men of the Royal Flying Corps, Royal Naval Air Service, Comrades of the Royal Air Forces Association, the British Legion, Civil Aviation Clubs, the RAF, and Auxiliary Air Force, many of whom often ‘enthralled the cadets with stories of their fighting days’.⁷²

The ADCC council, much like the Air League itself, contained many notable political, social, and military figures, ex-servicemen, members of the press, and aviation

⁶⁸ TNA AIR 2/3168, Employment of Air Defence Cadet Corps in Emergency, Letter from Chamier to the Air Ministry, 11 September 1939, p. 1.

⁶⁹ Ray Kidd, *Horizons: The History of the Air Cadets* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2014), p. 7. See also H. W. Lamond, *History of the Air Training Corps, 1938–1983* (British Library, 1984).

⁷⁰ AL, ADCC Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 15 September 1938, p. 1.

⁷¹ ‘The Air League to its Members’, *Air Review*, September 1938, p. 11.

⁷² TNA AIR 2/2716, Air Defence Cadet Corps, Objects, 3 July 1939, p. 2; ‘News from the Squadrons’, *Air Defence Cadet Corps Gazette*, June 1939, p. 7.

pioneers. The leadership of the Corps had a strong military background: two thirds of the Committee had some military experience, all of the area organisers were ex-servicemen, while slightly under half of the ADCC council had some form of military background.⁷³ The military nature of the Corps' leadership and organisation – on a national and regional level – is important to note because, although Chamier claimed that the Corps had 'a distinctively civilian organisation for administration', this was certainly not the case.⁷⁴ While, as Martin Dedman notes, there 'is a widespread tacit assumption that all military or ex-military men are likely to be 'militarist' in their views and inclinations', the military nature of the Corps' leadership certainly did little to help it distance itself from accusations of militarism.⁷⁵ However, if the 1920s were characterised by 'waves of virulent pacifism and anti-militarism mov[ing] public opinion against the idea of ex-soldiers training the young' then, by the late 1930s, such opposition was relatively small-scale, and did little to affect the activities or success of the Corps.⁷⁶

The ADCC's activities were reported on in *Air Review*. However, such was the popularity of the Corps that the Air League created an official organ, *Air Defence Cadet Corps Gazette*, which published news and information of general interest to the Corps, as well as reports from squadrons, rules and regulations, routine orders, and lists of appointments and promotions. A further indication of the ADCC's value to the Air League can be seen in the League's decision to suspend the publication of *Air Review* during the Second World War, while *Air Defence Cadet Corps Gazette* continued to be published. The

⁷³ See Appendix III. The ADCC's committee comprised Sutherland, as president, Sir John Salmond as chairman, Simon Marks as treasurer, with R. Ashwell-Cooke, Sir Basil Clarke, the Rt. Hon. The Viscount Elibank, the Right Hon. The Earl of Jersey, Captain R. L. Preston, his Grace The Duke of Richmond and Gordon, Colonel The Rt. Hon. The Lord Sempill, Brig.-General J. F. Trotter, and Nigel Tangye all serving as committee members. Chamier also effectively served as secretary general for the ADCC, as well as for the Air League.

⁷⁴ Leonard Taylor (ed.), *The Story of the Air Training Corps* (London: Rolls House Publishing Company Limited, 1946), p. 27.

⁷⁵ Dedman, 'Baden-Powell', p. 219.

⁷⁶ Springhall, 'The Boy Scouts', p. 128.

League also produced a pocketbook for ADCC members which included information on the Auxiliary Air Force, the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, the Royal Air Force Reserve of Pilots, how ADCC members could join the RAF, and the Air Ministry's policy on Cadets joining the RAF. The book included practical information for Cadets on a range of subjects from aircraft registration markings, to Morse code, and care of aeroplanes.⁷⁷ Alongside this, the League produced the *Air Defence Cadet Corps Training Manual*, based largely on the Officers' Training Corps' Training Manual, which set out the rules and regulations of the Corps and sold for 3.s 6.d. The manual emphasised to Cadets that they would not be accepted 'unless they show themselves to be in possession of those physical and moral qualities which make them a credit to their country in aviation'.⁷⁸ Much like the SCC's manual, clear themes of citizenship, masculinity, and service are evident in much of the rhetoric throughout the ADCC manual as, of course, was an emphasis on the character of the boys – Cadets, it was made clear, had to be physically and morally ready to serve the nation. For the ADCC, citizenship was clearly closely linked with duty, discipline, patriotism, and national defence – it became a form of militarised aerial citizenship.⁷⁹

Cadets were intended 'to form part of the civic life of the towns'. They were taught the elementary principles of aircraft engineering and maintenance, the handling of workshop tools and instruments, the general theory of flight, the identification of aeroplanes, Morse code, message carrying, meteorology, fire action, and model aeroplane making and flying. Cadets were also trained in ARP, given an insight into the working of the Observer Corps, the Balloon Barrage companies, anti-aircraft gunnery, searchlight and sound locator

⁷⁷ Tyne and Wear Archives, Newcastle upon Tyne (hereafter T&W), AF/ATC1/3, Pocket Book for the Air Defence Cadet Corps belonging to Gordon Blasdale.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7; p. 5.

⁷⁹ On the changing nature of citizenship from the late nineteenth century until the Second World War, see Brad Beaven and John Griffiths, 'Creating the Exemplary Citizen: The Changing Notion of Citizenship in Britain 1870–1939', *Contemporary British History*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2008), pp. 203–225.

operations, and other forms of ‘passive’ defence.⁸⁰ Each squadron was attached to an RAF or Auxiliary Air Force unit and was given instruction in drill, discipline, and physical exercise. The ADCC’s leadership wanted the Corps to provide youths with social, physical, and mental development.⁸¹

The Corps’ uniform consisted of a blue forage cap, blue tunic (similar to that of the RAF), trousers, a black belt, and chromium badges with the Air League’s logo superimposed. In attempting to give the Corps a cross-class appeal, the ADCC Committee provided grants, confined to squadrons in the Special Areas, of 8.s 6.d per Cadet which covered uniform and acted as a capitation grant.⁸² While the class composition of the Corps is difficult to measure, the fact that the ADCC Committee received many requests for funds to buy uniforms suggests that the Corps had a significant working-class appeal.⁸³ As we have seen, the SCC Committee similarly received requests from distressed areas for uniform grants. Although some considered uniform a ‘deterrent’ in peacetime, this does not seem to have been the case for the SCC or ADCC.⁸⁴

While it may not be the case that uniform was able to ‘dupe unruly youths into submission’, the symbolic nature of the Corps’ uniform is certainly important to consider.⁸⁵ Indeed, as Martin Francis notes, the distinctive blue RAF uniform provided a ‘beguiling emblem of the flyer’s allure’, associated with bravery, heroism, glamour, and even sexual magnetism. The appeal of the RAF’s uniform was even greater when contrasted with the

⁸⁰ Air League, *ADCC Training Manual*, p. 8.

⁸¹ RAF Museum, Object No. 014145, Pamphlet, ‘Who are these Air Defence Cadets?’, 1940, p. 10.

⁸² AL, ADCC Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 5 January 1939, p. 2.

⁸³ However, for those who were ineligible for the grant, there is some evidence that the cost of uniform was prohibitively expensive. One former cadet complained that the uniform was the equivalent of two weeks wages and, of course, not all would have been willing to pay this. IWM, Sound Archive, Acc. No. 10199, Reel 1, Paul Vincent Bartley Longthorp.

⁸⁴ Morgan, *Young Citizen*, p. 117.

⁸⁵ Humphries, *Hooligans or Rebels?*, p. 134.

‘drab brown uniform of the army’.⁸⁶ While the image and materiality of khaki gave it a place ‘in the distinctive visual culture that characterized First World War Britain’, the flyer’s uniform was one of the most striking visual and material characteristics of the Second World War.⁸⁷

Although military uniform may have constituted ‘soft forms of militarism’, it was also undoubtedly an emblem of ‘patriotic militarism’; the wearing of military uniforms by members of both the ADCC and SCC visually signalled the preparation of young bodies for military service.⁸⁸ The effect of military uniform on youth was something that had attracted the attention of figures such as Beverley Nichols, although he was far less positive than the leadership of either the ADCC or SCC. Considering toy soldiers, military pageants, and war memorials as constituting the ‘Microbes of Mars’ – which inculcated a martial and violent spirit within young boys – Nichols warned parents that if ‘war memorials are fever-spots, disseminating the germs of Mars, uniforms are even more dangerous as the carriers of the fever. It is essential that you should realize the tremendous importance of the uniform as a war force.’⁸⁹

The ADCC certainly highlighted the blurring of civil and military spheres of society in the late 1930s. Indeed, upon the outbreak of the Second World War, the Air Ministry sent a letter to the Air League stating:

the wearing of uniforms by Cadets and Cadet officers should be immediately discontinued in the event of the commencement of hostilities on land in the United Kingdom, inasmuch as the Corps is not part of the armed forces of the Crown, and the wearing of a uniform similar to the

⁸⁶ Francis, *The Flyer*, p. 23. On the materiality of uniform, and on uniform as a source of trauma, see Emily Brayshaw, ‘Remembering Roland Leighton: Uniforms as the Materials of Memory and Mourning in World War 1’, in Zahra Newby and Ruth Toulson (eds), *The Materiality of Mourning: Cross-disciplinary Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 40–60. On the British army uniform, see Jane Tynan, *British Army Uniform and the First World War: Men in Khaki* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

⁸⁷ Tynan, *British Army Uniform*, p. 11.

⁸⁸ Jane Tynan, ‘A Visual and Material Culture Approach to Researching War and Conflict’, in Alison J. Williams, K. Neil Jenkins, Matthew F. Rech and Rachel Woodward (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Military Research Methods* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 374; Tynan, *British Army Uniform*, p. 159.

⁸⁹ Nicholas, *Cry Havoc!*, pp. 219–224.

uniform of the Royal Air Force might expose the wearers to the danger of attack as combatants.⁹⁰

This apparently created ‘intense disappointment to all associated with the Corps, as it seems to minimise the responsible character of the work of the Corps’, although it did little to affect the ADCC’s war-time activities as the chapter will later discuss.⁹¹

The ADCC’s uniform was able to foster a sense of belonging and identity among its members and associate its wearers with the modernity of the RAF. It was part of the ‘spectacle of military display’ of the pre-war years and, in many respects, a part of the ‘paradigm of how the military body is envisaged within modern warfare’.⁹² As Adey notes, ‘emphasis was placed on the uniform’s symbolic value’ which was associated with ‘prestige and bravery’, owing to its likeness to the RAF’s uniform.⁹³ Jennifer Craik argues that there is often a ‘disjuncture between the ostensible meaning of uniforms . . . unity, regulation, hierarchy, status, roles’ and ‘the experience of uniforms’ yet, for many ADCC members, the wearing of uniform did seem to represent the supposedly ostensible meaning of uniform: unity, status, roles etc, alongside the promise of prestige and glamour.⁹⁴

As Adey stresses, there is ‘no doubt that the aesthetic form and connotations of the ADCC and ATC uniforms provided one of the biggest attractions to boys at this time’.⁹⁵ Uniform, however, was equally important for squadron leaders and instructors. Several contacted the Air League to request permission to wear their own RAF uniforms and badges. For example, a letter to the Air League from the governors of one school stressed that the headmaster felt unable to command the local ADCC squadron unless allowed to wear Royal

⁹⁰ RAF Museum, Object No. 003675, Pamphlet, Memorandum for presentation to His Majesty’s Secretary of State for Air, the Right Honourable Sir Archibald Sinclair, 1940, p. 3.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Tynan, *British Army Uniform*, p. 11.

⁹³ Adey, *Aerial Life*, p. 35.

⁹⁴ Jennifer Craik, *Uniforms Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), p. 5.

⁹⁵ Adey, *Aerial Life*, p. 35.

Observer Corps wings.⁹⁶ The Corps' uniform was clearly 'both a sign and a conduit for command and authority'.⁹⁷ Of course, the ADCC uniform did not have this symbolic value for all members, yet there was an element of prestige in the displaying of rank through badges – uniform could provide authority and 'dignity' to squadron leaders.⁹⁸



Figure 5: 'Air Commodore Chamier Inspecting the New Cadet Corps Uniform', *Air Review*, August 1938, p. 20.

⁹⁶ TNA AIR 2/4027, Air Defence Cadet Corps: Uniform, Letter from the Air League to the Air Ministry, 11 April 1939, p. 1.

⁹⁷ Adey, *Aerial Life*, p. 34.

⁹⁸ TNA AIR 2/4027, Letter from Mr J. W. H. Ratcliffe to the Air Ministry, 26 June 1939, p. 1.

Although the outward and visible signs of the Corps was related to the military – drill, discipline, uniform, the organisation into squadrons and parades (see Figure 6) – this did little to dissuade boys from joining the ADCC. Cadets would attend squadrons one night in the week (although this often became more frequent with the approach of war) and on Saturdays. That Cadets devoted their leisure time to the Corps is important to note and suggests that militaristic corps still had a place within the youth culture of the late interwar years and that boys welcomed the quasi-military culture of the Corps. Young men, of course, had agency and, for some, this meant exercising it by voluntarily joining the ADCC. It was, perhaps unsurprisingly, in flying that many members of the Corps seemed most interested in.

In a letter to the Air League’s junior section in June 1938, Chamier wrote that ‘I believe that many of you have got the idea that these Air Defence Cadets will all be pilots. I do not want to disappoint you, but it is not possible at this stage to make any definite promises like that.’⁹⁹ However, Chamier did hope that around 10,000 Cadets would eventually have the opportunity to fly. To facilitate this, the Corps was given some gliding experience after the British Gliding Association (founded in 1929 to popularise the sport of gliding) allowed 700 ADCC members to fly in the summer of 1939.¹⁰⁰ The ADCC leadership and Air League clearly understood the importance of flying for boys, ‘because the interest of the Cadets would be likely to sag if they were fed entirely on books and lectures, and were denied opportunities of practical flying’. Camps also brought members of the ADCC together for the first time, giving them the opportunity of developing the ‘*esprit de corps* so necessary for a movement of this nature’.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ ‘Air Commodore Chamier’s Letter to Leaguers’, *Air Review*, June 1938, p. 44.

¹⁰⁰ Commons Sitting, Gliding Clubs (Air Defence Cadet Corps Training), *HC Deb 01 March 1939 vol 344 cc1242-3*. For a sense of the Cadet’s experience of gliding, see RAF Museum, Charles Edward Brown Collection, Air Defence Cadet Corps.

¹⁰¹ ‘The Cadet Gliding Camps’, *Air Review*, October 1939, p. 23.

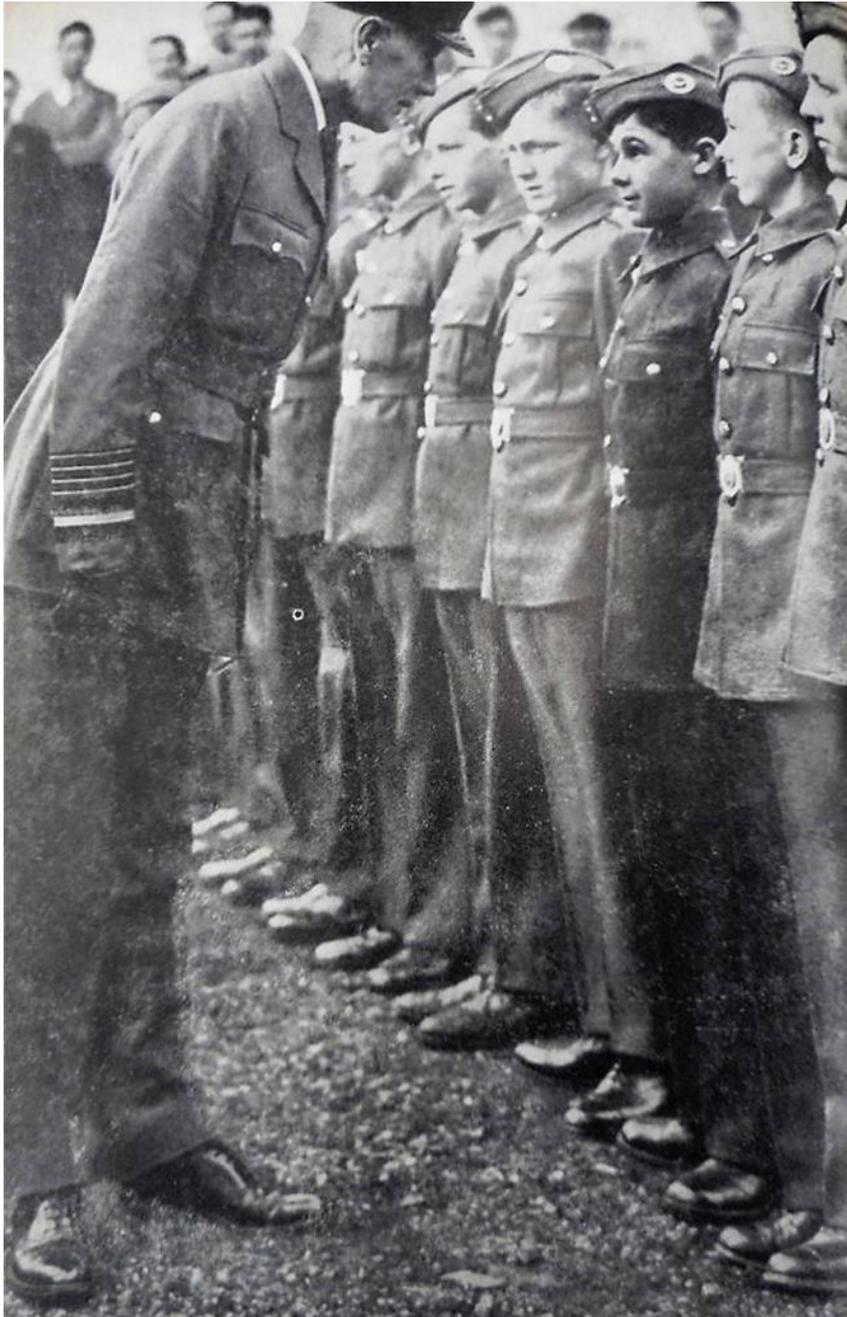


Figure 6:
'Marshall of
the Royal Air
Force, Sir John
Salmond,
Inspecting a
Squadron of
the Air
Defence Cadet
Corps',
October 1939,
Air Review, p.
8.

III. The ADCC Beyond London

Although the majority of ADCC squadrons were based in the south of England, with 33 squadrons in London alone, the Corps was also popular in many other regions and regional variations should not be overlooked. Urban and rural squadrons would have undoubtedly had a different experience from one another (this is especially so since some squadrons were over 60 miles away from the nearest RAF aerodrome) and, while it is beyond the purview

of this chapter to explore fully, a brief overview of the ADCC in the North East will be provided.¹⁰² The rapid growth of the Corps in the North East was not exceptional – but instead fairly representative of the Corps’ popularity – and by using the North East as a case study, in particular the minute books of local units and regional newspapers, this section intends to demonstrate the appeal of the Corps beyond the south of England.

The first squadron in the North East was set up in Sunderland in early 1939, with a second squadron being considered by May after over 400 boys attended a local ADCC meeting.¹⁰³ A squadron was affiliated to the RAF station at Addington in August 1939, with recruits coming from Blyth and Seaton Delaval, while Durham also created a squadron by August that year.¹⁰⁴ The Mayor of Durham, echoing the public pronouncements of the ADCC’s Committee, declared that ‘the primary function of the Corps is not for war, but to make youths air-minded’.¹⁰⁵ The establishment of the Tyneside Squadron of the ADCC, formed in May 1939, gives a further sense of the airmindedness of youth on a local and regional level. Eighty local boys had expressed their interest by May and, by December 1939, a second squadron had been proposed.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, by 1940, over five squadrons had been formed in Newcastle alone. School Squadrons were particularly popular in the region, with Dame Allen’s School and the Royal Grammar School both proposing squadrons.¹⁰⁷ The first commanding officer of the Tyneside squadron was Arthur George, the aviation pioneer, and the squadron was attached to the No. 43 Elementary and Reserve Flying Training School

¹⁰² ‘News from the Squadrons’, *Air Defence Cadet Corps Gazette*, June 1939, p. 7.

¹⁰³ ‘400 Boys Apply to Air Cadet Corps’, *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 27 May 1939, p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Air Cadets’, *Alnwick Mercury*, 18 August 1939, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ ‘Durham’s New Corps’, *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 4 August 1939, p. 11.

¹⁰⁶ T&W, AF/ATC1/1, No. 131 (Tyneside Squadron) Air Defence Cadet Corps, Minute Book, 1939–1947, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 31 May 1939, p. 1; Meeting of the Executive Committee, 8 December 1939, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ T&W, AF/ATC1/1, Tyneside Squadron ADCC Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 12 June 1939, p. 1.

at Newcastle Airport, Woolsington.¹⁰⁸ Like many local squadrons, as well as the ADCC Committee itself, the Tyneside Squadron faced difficulty upon the outbreak of the Second World War. Over half of the Corps was evacuated, with many officers and members of the Executive Committee being called into military service.¹⁰⁹

While the above picture of Cadets in the North East is fairly unremarkable, it gives an idea of the airmindedness of youth on a local scale, highlights how quickly squadrons were formed, and how enthusiastically the ADCC scheme was embraced throughout Britain. Indeed, as the first ADCC squadron was only formed in July 1938, the fact that 172 squadrons, comprising 17,000 boys, had been formed by the outbreak of the Second World War is remarkable.¹¹⁰ However, given the Air League's often parlous financial situation, as noted in Chapter 1, how was the ADCC Committee and the Air League able to fund such an ambitious scheme?

IV. Finance and the Interrelationship between the ADCC and Air Ministry

There were three principal sources of income that squadrons relied upon: £200 per squadron had to be raised by the local city or town before being registered with the ADCC; a central fund of £25,000 raised by the Air League over three years; and contributions from the Air Ministry of 3.s 6.d annually per Cadet, providing squadrons passed inspection. Cadets were also required to pay a weekly sum of 3.d for the maintenance of their kit.¹¹¹ At the Mansion House appeal to the public for contributions to the central fund in 1938, Salmond declared

¹⁰⁸ T&W, AF/ATC1/1, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 3 July 1939, p. 1; See T&W, AF/ATC1/2/1, Photograph album, p. 13 for an image of George inspecting the Corps.

¹⁰⁹ T&W, AF/ATC1/1, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 4 October 1939, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ This number is made more impressive when one considers that the total strength of the Cadet Force was only 20,000, despite having a far longer history. The War Office also took over control of the Cadets from the British National Cadet Association upon the outbreak of war. See Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society*, p. 79.

¹¹¹ This figure was based on the Admiralty's contribution to the Sea Cadet Corps. The Air League also made a contribution to the Corps from Empire Air Day proceedings.

that he wanted the ADCC to become ‘a living, national movement’ although argued ‘this object cannot be achieved without money’. The importance of this, as Salmond continued, was ‘not only to direct the enthusiasm of our youth in all things pertaining to aviation but also to provide a useful reservoir of air-minded, air-trained youth on which the nation can draw at the appropriate time’.¹¹² In response to this appeal, and the Mansion House meeting in October, Lord Nuffield promised the ADCC £10,000 if the fund reached £15,000.¹¹³ Although his contribution was less than his respective grant to the SCC, Nuffield nevertheless received praise from various figures. For instance, Newall wrote that, although he was not directly linked with the Air League or the ADCC, he was delighted to read of Nuffield’s gift, which he felt would ‘be of the greatest value to the Royal Air Force and to aviation in this country’.¹¹⁴ Wood also sent a letter to Nuffield, writing that his contribution was ‘very highly appreciated by all who are interested in the air’.¹¹⁵ However, despite Nuffield’s donation, it was not long until the ADCC Committee was pressuring the Air Ministry for greater funds.

While the Committee was initially content with the Air Ministry’s contribution of 3.5d per Cadet, by late 1938 it viewed this contribution as ‘miserable’ and urged that the grant should be reconsidered.¹¹⁶ Such sentiments were echoed by many of the squadrons. In July 1939, Salmond met with the first 100 squadrons of the Corps, most of whom demanded greater government support for squadrons on a local level.¹¹⁷ The Committee asked the Air Ministry for £2 per Cadet which would enable the rest of the money to be found from private

¹¹² ‘Air Defence Cadet Corps’, *The Times*, 14 July 1938, p. 10.

¹¹³ Which it did thanks to a contribution of £4,000 from its treasurer, Simon Marks. AL, ADCC Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 30 September 1938, p. 2.

¹¹⁴ TNA AIR 19/45, Lord Nuffield: Gift to Central Fund of Air Defence Cadet Corps, Letter from Newall to Nuffield, 3 December 1938, p. 1.

¹¹⁵ TNA AIR 19/45, Letter from Wood to Nuffield, 5 December 1938, p. 1. The Air League, of course, also appreciated the donation, with Chamier being satisfied that it put the Corps on ‘easy street’, if only for a little while. TNA AIR 2/2716, Letter from Chamier to Wood, 26 November 1938, p. 1.

¹¹⁶ ‘The Air League to its Members’, *Air Review*, December 1938, p. 12.

¹¹⁷ AL, ADCC Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 11 July 1939, p. 1.

sources 'which at the present are not convinced that the Government, in view of its small contribution, are seriously interested in this movement'. The Committee concluded that the Corps could not only become a 'most potent agent to buttress the voluntary system of the Royal Air Force' but could encourage 'the whole principle of National Service'.¹¹⁸ Chamier stressed this in more vehement terms in a letter to Sir Edward Campbell, Private Parliamentary Secretary to Kingsley Wood:

I would think that it one of the stupidest crimes a democracy could perpetrate if something like this which can spread like a fire through the country is stifled by the want of a small amount of Government support. It is not like a Territorial Cadet Corps: they have to search the by-ways for the boys: we are flooded with applications.

He concluded that the Corps would be 'of incalculable value to the whole foundations of aviation and to the whole idea of patriotic service to the State'.¹¹⁹ There was certainly little objection to the principle of national service from within the Air League's Executive Committee. When Salmond urged the League to publicly support a scheme of national service, the Committee agreed in principle, although plans appear to have got little further than this.¹²⁰

In response to concerns raised over matters of funding, Wood and Harold Balfour, at this point Under-Secretary of State for Air, met with Salmond, Elibank, and Chamier in May 1939. Wood and Balfour made clear that they were in sympathy with the ADCC's proposals, and assured the Committee that they would do all they could do secure a larger grant for the Corps; however, the proposal received far less sympathy from others in the Air Ministry. As a note on the Air League's proposals emphasised, 'no reason is given for this change of grant and beyond a vague statement that some units are in financial difficulties, there is no

¹¹⁸ TNA AIR 2/2716, The Support of the Air Defence Cadet Corps, 22 May 1939, pp. 1–4. Such pressure also resulted from a meeting in April 1939 between Lord Lloyd, the heads of the National Cadet Association and the ADCC. At the meeting it was decided that a demand for increased finances should be made 'to the authorities concerned'. Collins, *Cadets*, p. 57.

¹¹⁹ TNA AIR 2/2716, Letter from Chamier to Sir Edward Campbell, 22 May 1939, p. 1.

¹²⁰ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 6 October 1938, p. 2.

information as to how far the movement really needs further financial support' and so the contribution remained at 3.s 6.d.¹²¹

The Air League's criticism of the Air Ministry was somewhat unjust. Alongside financial contributions, declarations of moral, practical, and political support by senior members (as well as Salmond serving as the Corps' chairman, the council also included Lord Weir), the Air Ministry also provided the Corps with technical equipment and training films to squadrons, as well as letting squadrons use RAF aerodromes. The Air Ministry had denied Chamier's request for closer cooperation between the ADCC and the CAG on several occasions yet, for the most part, the Air Ministry was clearly supportive of the Corps.¹²² The Air Council agreed to grant the ADCC Committee the privilege of nominating authority for the purpose of the entry of Cadets into the RAF as aircraft apprentices or boy entrants.¹²³ The Air Ministry also provided a grant of £4,900 for the technical training of 700 Cadets in gliding.¹²⁴ Links of funding, personnel, as well as shared objectives in terms of the purpose of the Corps, demonstrates how valuable the Air League's work had become to the Air Ministry by the late 1930s.

V. The ADCC and Militarism

While the ADCC was able to gain the support of the Air Ministry, it was subject to accusations of militarism from elsewhere. The Corps met with criticism from some parliamentarians, who accused the Air League of being little more than a 'private propaganda organisation'.¹²⁵ The ADCC Committee was certainly conscious of accusations

¹²¹ TNA AIR 2/2716, Proposed Increased Contribution to Air Defence Cadet Corps – Note on Air League Proposals, 14 July 1939, p. 1.

¹²² AL, ADCC Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 27 July 1938, pp. 2–3. TNA AIR 2/4020, Civil Air Guard: Effect of National Service, Letter from W.P. Hildred to J.A. Chamier, 29 June 1939, pp. 1–2.

¹²³ TNA AIR 2/2951, Entry of Boys, R.A.F. Request Form from the Air Defence Cadet Corps for the Privilege of Nomination, Letter from the Under-Secretary of State for Air to the Air League, 1 June 1939, p. 1.

¹²⁴ AL, ADCC Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 2 March 1939, p. 1.

¹²⁵ Commons Sitting, Air Cadet Corps, *HC Deb 13 April 1938 vol 334 cc1124-5*.

of militarism and felt that ‘care should be taken not to antagonise parents by stressing the military aspect of the scheme . . . The Corps was a measure of passive defence against a common danger, and should be presented as such.’¹²⁶ This was further elaborated on in a speech by Salmond in October 1938:

When the question of aviation cropped up it was generally the parents who stood in the way. They were nervous for fear their sons would go into a dangerous career . . . It must not be thought that because these boys were trained in a Cadet Corps they were any more liable to military service than boys who had not joined such a corps.¹²⁷

A history of the Air Training Corps (ATC) also felt that the inclusion of the word ‘defence’ in the title of the ADCC was useful in attempting to ‘disarm possible criticism that it was a militant or aggressive body’ and, while one of the declared aims of the League was to ‘interest these boys [in aviation], not to militarise them’, the Corps struggled to distance itself from associations with militarism.¹²⁸ The ADCC certainly constituted a ‘paramilitary group’, as defined by Michael Blanch: the Corps was closely connected to the military, wore military uniforms, practiced drill, and were trained by ex-servicemen.¹²⁹

Naturally, the aims, objectives, and values of the Corps was strongly shaped by the Air League’s wider goals and so, from its inception, the ADCC had a distinctly militaristic character, despite the largely unconvincing attempts of its organisers to suggest otherwise. In debates about militarism in relation to the Scout movement, Springhall argues that ‘when Baden-Powell organized his Scout movement he did so with one primary motive – to prepare the next generation of British soldiers for war and the defence of the Empire’.¹³⁰ Similarly, Michael Rosenthal notes that Baden-Powell made ‘usefulness in times of war’ a focal point

¹²⁶ AL, ADCC Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 27 April 1938, p. 1.

¹²⁷ ‘Air Defence Cadet Corps’, *The Times*, 17 October 1938, p. 11.

¹²⁸ Taylor, *The Story of the Air Training Corps*, p. 27; ‘Air Cadets’, *Air Review*, December 1937, p. 8.

¹²⁹ Michael Blanch, ‘Imperialism, Nationalism and Organized Youth’, in John Clarke, Chas Critcher and Richard Johnson (eds), *Working-Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory* (Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1979), p. 105.

¹³⁰ John Springhall, ‘Baden-Powell and the Scout Movement before 1920: Citizen Training or Soldiers of the Future?’, *The English Historical Review*, vol. 102, no. 405 (1987), p. 935.

of scouting and suggests that ‘the notion of the Scout as a serviceable citizen trained to follow orders in wartime is at the heart of Scouting’.¹³¹ Both the ADCC and SCC certainly had similar ambitions; the rhetoric, aims, ideology, and practices of the two organisations closely revolved around both militarism and nationalism from their inception until, and indeed throughout, the Second World War. Of course, individual units differed and did not necessarily reflect the Air or Navy League’s official aims. Importantly, while the lived experiences of members of the Corps were not homogenous, many can still be characterised as militaristic.

The creation of the ADCC by the Air League certainly did little to assuage fears that the League was attempting to inculcate principles of discipline and militarism within schools. In response to the scheme, the Education Committee of the LCC refused to give permission to the Air League to form an ADCC squadron within one of its secondary schools.¹³² This was based on a resolution passed in 1935 by the LCC’s Education Committee that cadet corps would not be permitted in secondary schools. The Committee felt that cadet training provided ‘very little educational advantage’ and that it went against the ‘desire of the Council to encourage schools to inculcate the spirit of peace and international good-will’.¹³³ However, by 1939, there was opposition from within the Education Committee towards the LCC’s attitude concerning cadet corps and, in particular, the ADCC. John Hare, an alderman of the LCC, suggested that ‘recent changes in the international situation make it most undesirable that this Committee should hamper our air

¹³¹ Michael Rosenthal, *The Character Factory Baden-Powell and the Origins of the Boy Scout Movement* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), p. 162. For a discussion of the literature on the relationship between scouting and militarism, see Martin Crotty, ‘Scouts Down Under: Scouting, Militarism and “Manliness” in Australia, 1908–1920’, in Nelson R. Block and Tammy M. Proctor (eds) *Scouting Frontiers: Youth and the Scout Movement’s First Century* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. 74–80.

¹³² London Metropolitan Archives (hereafter LMA), LCC/MIN/2935, London County Council, Education Committee Minutes, 1939, Meeting of the Education Committee, 3 May 1939, pp. 192–194.

¹³³ LMA, LCC/MIN/2931, London County Council, Education Committee Minutes, 1935, Meeting of the Education Committee, 13 March 1935, p. 146.

defences'.¹³⁴ Hare went further by remarking that 'such views as those which the Socialist majority held in 1935 – that Cadet Corps in schools would make youths militaristic – were held only now by "eccentric old women and cranks"'.¹³⁵ *The Daily Telegraph* criticised the LCC for its 'priggish' attitude, while the *Daily Mail* described it as 'right out of touch'.¹³⁶ The latter wrote that

Their refusal is based on a decision of 1935. These were the days when the Peace Ballot was fobbed off on a public not so well informed on affairs as they are today. It was the time when the League of Nations Union had reached the heights of inglorious pacifism. Times have changed – and opinion with them. Resolutions – like treaties – are not eternal. The London County Council should rescind this one, which never brought them anything but odium.¹³⁷

The LCC did not rescind the decision, however the opposition to the resolution clearly reflected a growing concern about the nation's security.

Somewhat surprisingly, Chamier did not feel that the LCC were unfriendly to the ADCC and noted that the Council had agreed to allow posters and other publicity matters relating to the Corps to be displayed in secondary schools and in technical and evening institutes.¹³⁸ The Higher Education Sub-Committee of the LCC also approved, in principle, to the 'provision of classes of instruction for Cadets in subjects relating to their training in technical and evening institutes under the Council's control'.¹³⁹ However, while the Council did not disagree with the objects or need for the ADCC, they felt that their job was to 'educate the children, and not turn them into soldiers'.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ 'L.C.C. Boys Want to be Air Cadets', *Daily Mail*, 24 March 1939, p. 5.

¹³⁵ 'L.C.C. and Air Cadets', *The Daily Telegraph*, 4 May 1939, p. 11.

¹³⁶ 'The L.C.C. Thinks Again', *The Daily Telegraph*, 3 May 1939, p. 14; 'Quash It', *Daily Mail*, 3 May 1939, p. 10.

¹³⁷ 'Quash It', *Daily Mail*, 3 May 1939, p. 10.

¹³⁸ Indeed, Chamier contacted the LCC directly, writing: 'I would not have you think that the Air League of the British Empire has associated itself in any way with a campaign which has been run by certain newspapers casting stones at the London County Council for not allowing cadet corps in secondary schools under its control. We are fully appreciative of all that the Council has done to help us in the technical training of the air defence cadets, and we have, indeed, written to the Press drawing attention to this fact.' LMA, LCC/MIN/2935, London County Council, Education Committee Minutes, 1939, Meeting of the Education Committee, 17 May 1939, p. 226.

¹³⁹ 'L.C.C. and A.D.C.C.', *Flight*, 11 May 1939, p. 476.

¹⁴⁰ 'Air Cadets in L.C.C. Schools', *The Times*, 4 May 1939, p. 10; The creation of the ADCC was also much to the annoyance of Lord Milne and the British National Cadet Association, who felt the work of the ADCC

Of the 172 ADCC squadrons established by the beginning of the Second World War, 45 were School Squadrons. Clearly, as over a quarter of squadrons were school squadrons there was some degree of military influence in state-sponsored schools, despite the LCC's opposition. The success of the Corps evidently depended on the cooperation of education authorities, schools, and parents.¹⁴¹ Given the military background of those who trained the Corps, the support of the Air Ministry, alongside the military uniform of the Corps, as well as training in drill and discipline, accusations of militarism were somewhat understandable. Yet, the Corps was not created in a social or political vacuum and the lack of widespread opposition to the ADCC reflected the growing concern within British society about the threat of the aeroplane in any future conflict.

VI. The ADCC, Recruitment, and the Outbreak of the Second World War

The ADCC Committee and Air League understandably wanted to avoid associations with militarism, yet, as a leaflet issued by the Corps outlined:

In its eighteen months of existence the Corps has taken about 20,000 youths, inspired them with the ideals of the great flying pioneers, with the spirit of patriotism, of service, and of mental endeavour that is vital to the continuance of our nation . . . The Air Defence Cadet Corps is the visible expression of Britain's determination to continue its greatness, and of the realisation of the fact that its greatness depends on the mastery of the air by the whole of its young manhood.¹⁴²

Such rhetoric was commonplace in Air League language when discussing the ADCC and the Air League clearly viewed the Corps as being integral to British aviation, and to the preservation of Britain itself. In opening squadrons number two and three at Watford, Salmond outlined his views on the ADCC's importance, remarking that

was bound to cut across the work of the Cadets. TNA AIR 2/2716, Copy of a Letter from Field Marshal the Lord Milne to the Secretary of State for War, p. 1. Other sections of the Territorial and Cadet Associations also felt the work of the ADCC would 'only lead to confusion' among boys. AL, ADCC Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 15 September 1938, p. 3.

¹⁴¹ For the place of militarism in public schools, see C. B. Otley, 'Militarism and Militarization in the Public Schools, 1900–1972', *The British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 29, no. 3 (1978), pp. 321–339.

¹⁴² RAF Museum, 'Who are these Air Defence Cadets?', p. 10.

The totalitarian countries had the advantage of only having to press a button and the whole nation sprang to arms, organised and equipped to the last degree. In countries like our own, where freedom of the individual has been so precious to us, the transition from peace to war is a much slower and more hesitating movement . . . The Air Defence Cadet Corps will train you while you are still young to make good this time-lag and to be ready and equipped at a moment's call. We Britons must be ready in the air, and you young men are going to show the way in the years to come.¹⁴³

Increasing international tension clearly brought anxieties about the physical condition of Britain's youth to the fore and, in many respects, were similar to questions of national efficiency prior to the First World War. Sutherland addressed such themes in a letter to *The Times* in December 1939, declaring that the Corps was 'making a great contribution to the mental and physical fitness of the nation's youth'.¹⁴⁴ Fitness, manliness, and the health of Britain's young men were evidently important in light of youth movements in fascist countries as Salmond and Sutherland highlighted. This link was also explicitly made by sections of the Air Ministry: 'the phenomenal success of the Air Defence Cadet Corps shows . . . that there is a real demand for a popular youth movement which would emulate the good side of the Hitler Youth and young Fascists', although the note was also careful to stress that the Corps should avoid 'the pernicious ideology of those totalitarian bodies'.¹⁴⁵ As the international situation worsened, the need for the Corps became even more apparent.

Following the Munich Conference, *Air Review* urged its readers that '[w]e can no longer put any faith in princes, proletariats, pacts or pacifists. We must have more aeroplanes, more men to make them and more men to man them.' The appeal cited the RAF, the CAG, and, of course, the ADCC and concluded that '[w]e cannot get peace by wishing for it, or even by praying for it. We must be prepared, and well prepared, to fight for it.'¹⁴⁶ In many respects, this reflected the rhetoric surrounding the SCC following the Conference.

¹⁴³ "Time-Lag in Emergency", *Nottingham Post*, 17 October 1938, p. 5.

¹⁴⁴ 'Air Defence Cadets', *The Times*, 6 December 1939, p. 6.

¹⁴⁵ TNA AIR 2/2716, Proposed Increased Contribution to Air Defence Cadet Corps – Note on Air League Proposals, 14 July 1939, p. 2.

¹⁴⁶ 'Everyone Must Help', *Air Review*, October 1938, p. 7.

There was little doubt that the Air League similarly intended the Corps to make a direct military contribution to the nation. This is evident in the frequency of themes such as duty, service, and patriotism in discussions surrounding the Corps. For example, at the League's Annual General Meeting in 1938, Mottistone spoke of how he looked forward to 'twenty thousand Air Defence Cadets ready to serve their country'.¹⁴⁷ One newsreel similarly described the Corps as 'the defenders of Britain'.¹⁴⁸

One of the Air Ministry's primary concerns with the Corps was, of course, recruitment, as was made clear in a meeting to consider Air Ministry cooperation: 'it has to be borne in mind that our main interest in the Corps, although it has other virtues, is the recruiting aspect'.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, one of the main arguments which persuaded Treasury support was that 'the Corps would instil air-mindedness into the youth of the country, and so stimulate a flow of recruits into the R.A.F.'.¹⁵⁰ On the possibilities of RAF recruitment, the Air League wrote that it was 'clear that the Corps will afford a very fruitful recruiting ground for the Royal Air Force'.¹⁵¹ Yet, while the ambitions of the Air League and Air Ministry in the creation of the ADCC were clear, why did young men want to join such an organisation? Did members of the Corps see themselves as making a 'definite contribution to the security of the country'? Did they see themselves as part of a 'reservoir of air-minded, air-trained youth' on which the nation could draw upon at the appropriate time? Of course, it is important to explore '[aerial] youth as agent not as object' and it is to this question that the chapter now turns.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ AL, AL Minute Book, Annual General Meeting, 30 July 1938, p. 1.

¹⁴⁸ 'Defence Cadets – Watford' (London: British Pathé, 1938).

¹⁴⁹ TNA AIR 2/2716, Meeting to Consider R.A.F. Co-operation in Formation of Air Defence Cadet Corps, 17 February 1938, p. 2.

¹⁵⁰ TNA AIR 2/3168, The Position of the Air Defence Cadet Corps in War Time, 17 September 1939, p. 1.

¹⁵¹ TNA AIR 2/2716, Air Defence Cadet Corps, Objects, 3 July 1939, p. 3.

¹⁵² Arthur Marwick, 'Youth in Britain, 1920–1960: Detachment and Commitment', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1970), p. 38.

A series of letters to *Air Review* gives some indication as to why boys joined the Corps. One boy wrote that his reason for joining was that ‘last September [1938] we were threatened with war. At once I realised that I knew nothing, could do nothing to defend other people or myself. Here came a chance to learn how to defend other people, myself, to serve my King and country, by simply offering to learn.’¹⁵³ Another wrote that he wanted to become ‘a useful and worthy member of the Royal Air Force’, while another – whose letter revealed that his parents stopped him joining when he was 14 – was confident that ‘when we are all trained as pilots we’ll challenge any air force in the world’.¹⁵⁴ Another boy proclaimed that

Should war again come, let us hope that we may all do our allotted task with a good heart, and although it may not fall to any of us who have lately joined to take a noticeable part we can by obeying orders, do our bit and enable the qualified men to sweep the skies and shores of England of the enemy.¹⁵⁵

Striking here are notions of duty, patriotism, and sacrifice. Other letters expressed an interest in model making, drill, and engineering, although the desire to fly was a common theme. Even though the letters were published in *Air Review*, and so were unlikely to be critical of the Corps, they give an important insight into the attitudes of the boys themselves.

Further insight into motivations for joining the ADCC are provided in a series of interviews conducted by the Imperial War Museum in the late 1990s and early 2000s with men who had previously been part of the ADCC. These interviews provide an idea as to why the men joined and also outline some of the training undertaken as members of the Corps. One interviewee, Laurie Godfrey, joined the Corps in 1939 when he was 16 and speaks of his training which included rifle drill and sports, but said the Corps had ‘nothing to do with aircraft at that time’ and that it ‘was just like the Boy Scouts’. Godfrey does, however,

¹⁵³ ‘England Awakes’, *Air Review*, April 1939, p. 37.

¹⁵⁴ ‘The Spirit of Youth’, *Air Review*, May 1938, p. 23.

¹⁵⁵ ‘England Awakes’, *Air Review*, April 1939, pp. 37–38.

remember time spent at Hornchurch aerodrome loading ammunition belts.¹⁵⁶ Others go into more detail about why they joined. Alan Davis, part of a School Squadron, talks about drill, parading, and the type of training he had with the Corps. He discusses how members of his squadron would go to the local aerodrome to try and get free flights and that ‘that was what it was all about’.¹⁵⁷ Francis May, who joined when he was 14 after an announcement by his headteacher at school, recalls that he was ‘always interested in flying’ and this provided his motivation for joining the Corps. When asked what he learned, he remembers aircraft recognition, the workings of an internal combustion engine, the theory of flight, and Morse code. He felt that Morse code and aircraft recognition provided the most use to him during his service in the Second World War.¹⁵⁸

Douglas Fry recalls how he, and many others, joined the ADCC not solely as a result of interest in aviation, but also due to increasing international tension. He talks of how, after the German occupation of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, that it ‘was obvious that things were going to get tougher . . . all the youth of the country started to join things. Since I was interested in aeroplanes, I joined the Air Defence Cadet Corps.’ Again, Fry recalls parading, lectures, and in particular, drill, saying that he had no issue with drill and that he understood the purpose of it.¹⁵⁹ Another interviewee, Paul Longthorp, recalls how his mother was reluctant for him to join the Corps, owing to its ‘military background’. However, when asked about the interview when he joined the Corps, Longthorp felt that they were not looking for young men with ‘war-like intentions’ but for ‘young men to join the Royal Air Force’. Much like May and Fry, when asked about his motivation for joining the Corps he remarked that ‘aircraft were the beginning and end of everything for me’.¹⁶⁰ However, not all remember

¹⁵⁶ IWM, Sound Archive, Acc. No. 27799, Reel 1, Laurie Godfrey.

¹⁵⁷ IWM, Sound Archive, Acc. No. 30639, Reel 2, Alan Davis.

¹⁵⁸ IWM, Sound Archive, Acc. No. 17822, Reel 1, Francis John Cretchley May.

¹⁵⁹ IWM, Sound Archive, Acc. No. 27255, Reel 1, Douglas Robert Fry.

¹⁶⁰ IWM, Sound Archive, Acc. No. 10199, Reel 1, Paul Vincent Bartley Longthorp.

their time with the ADCC so clearly, or indeed, so fondly. Ernie Lummis, for example, struggled to remember when he joined the Corps and suggested that the Corps had very little training which he found to be of use, due to a lack of equipment.¹⁶¹ While it is not difficult to define the ADCC's aims and objectives as an organisation, it is much more challenging to tease out how those who joined felt about the organisation. Yet, taken together, these testimonies and letters provide an invaluable insight. If there were concerns that the ADCC represented a militarisation of the country's youth, then clearly many boys themselves did not object to the more militaristic aspects of the Corps.

As in the case of the SCC and popular culture surrounding the sea, the prominence of aviation and the aviator in a range of juvenile fiction, novels, magazines, and films in the interwar years also goes some way to explaining the willingness of boys to be a part of the ADCC and, in particular, their desire to fly. Popular American films such as *Wings* (1927), *Hell's Angels*, and *The Dawn Patrol* (both 1930) – all of which focused on the romance and nobility of aviation – as well as pulp magazines such as *War Ace*, *Sky Fighters*, *War Birds*, and *G2 Battle Aces* – were all part of the pleasure culture of the war in the air in Britain throughout the interwar years.¹⁶² The proliferation of martial and militaristic sentiment was also evident in W.E. Johns's creation of Biggles – one of the most popular fictional characters of the interwar period.¹⁶³ Rieger has suggested that, in the aftermath of protracted battles of attrition that had marked the First World War, 'eulogies of individual bravery sounded unconvincing to the ears of many contemporaries'.¹⁶⁴ Adult fiction often portrayed the devastating impact that aerial war would bring – particularly books such as H.G. Wells's

¹⁶¹ IWM, Sound Archive, Acc. No. 27800, Reel 1, Ernie Lummis.

¹⁶² Paris, *Warrior Nation*, p. 160.

¹⁶³ Dennis Butts, 'Biggles – Hero of the Air', in Tony Watkins and Dudley Jones (eds), *A Necessary Fantasy? The Heroic Figure in Children's Popular Culture* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000), p. 140. As well as previously authoring *Popular Flying*, by August 1940 Johns had become a regular contributor to *Air Defence Cadet Corps Gazette*. Johns also became a volunteer lecturer for the ADCC. Collins, *Cadets*, p. 75.

¹⁶⁴ Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity*, p. 268.

The Shape of Things to Come (1933) and Nevil Shute's *What Happened to the Corbett's* (1939). However, in 'their juvenile counterparts', as Michael Paris observes, 'the raids were usually foiled at the last moment by heroic young Britons, or destroyed en route by the RAF'.¹⁶⁵ As Paris continues, that 'young men could still view war as exciting and glamorous was due to the heroic and romantic images of war and violence which had been so much a part of juvenile fiction throughout the inter-war period'.¹⁶⁶ Those who joined the ADCC did not have to wait long to experience war.

The purpose of the Corps in wartime was set out in a letter from the ADCC to officers commanding all squadrons of the Corps in August 1939: 'In view of the tension existing at the present time, we would remind Squadron Commanders of the desirability of placing the services of such Cadets as are available and willing at the disposal of the country'. The letter continued, 'It is left entirely at the descretion [*sic*] of Commanding Officers how best the Corps may be employed, but we have now over 17,000 organised and disciplined boys and it would seem obvious that some use should be made of them in time of need'.¹⁶⁷ The Air League also stressed that '[s]hould the Air Ministry have in mind any specific use for Air Defence Cadets in time of emergency, every endeavour will be made by the Air League to supply them'.¹⁶⁸ Upon the outbreak of war, the ADCC comprised 172 squadrons and many Cadets were employed at RAF aerodromes, unpaid and largely without authority, and were engaged in a number of tasks.¹⁶⁹ These tasks included filling sandbags, message carrying, ambulance work, filling machine-gun belts, and taking part in ARP activities. Cadets also helped children at local train stations who were being evacuated.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ Paris, *Warrior Nation*, p. 184.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

¹⁶⁷ TNA AIR 2/3168, Letter from the Air League to all Squadrons of the Air Defence Cadet Corps, 24 August 1939, p. 1.

¹⁶⁸ TNA AIR 2/3168, Letter from the Air League to the Air Ministry, 24 August 1939, p. 1.

¹⁶⁹ TNA AIR 2/3168, Letter from Chamier to the Air Ministry, 12 September 1939, p. 1.

¹⁷⁰ 'Tunbridge Wells Air Cadet Corps', *Kent & Sussex Courier*, 8 September 1939, p. 6.

Such activities were widely reported and the work of the Corps in war received much praise. However, the presence of the Corps at aerodromes was not unproblematic. As the Air Ministry thought that one of primary objects of German attack would be RAF aerodromes, they felt they would be unable to defend the death of members of the Corps to Parliament or the public.¹⁷¹ While the Air Ministry did not object to ADCC activities upon the outbreak of war, it did not feel justified in allowing such employment to continue when there was ‘any serious danger of exposing boys to undue risk from aerial bombardment’.¹⁷² While the military preparedness of the Corps may have varied, the character of the boys was less doubtful and boys often did expose themselves to danger and risk. For example, there were many cases of Cadets rescuing people from burning buildings, smothering incendiary bombs, and controlling fires and many of these boys received the ADCC Gallantry Medal for their actions.¹⁷³

By October 1939, with concern growing over the possibility that war could destroy the ADCC headquarters in London, the number of ADCC areas was reduced to four: Scotland, Northern, South Western, and South Eastern.¹⁷⁴ Many members of the Corps’ leadership – as was the case for those in the SCC – were called to service, although the Corps survived. Indeed, such was the ADCC’s value to the Air Ministry that it subsequently took over the Corps in February 1941, renaming it the ATC. King George VI – who issued a Royal Warrant setting out the Corps’ aims – served as Air Commodore-in-Chief, while Chamier was appointed as Commandant.¹⁷⁵ The ADCC’s Committee ‘welcomed and

¹⁷¹ TNA AIR 2/3168, The Position of the Air Defence Cadet Corps in War Time, 17 September 1939, p. 6.

¹⁷² TNA AIR 2/3168, Letter from the Air Council to the Air Defence Cadet Corps Committee, 7 October 1939, p. 1.

¹⁷³ Bryan Philpott, *Challenge in the Air: The Story of the Air Training Corps* (Hemel Hempstead: Model and Allied Publications, 1971), pp. 17–18.

¹⁷⁴ AL, ADCC Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 11 October 1939, p. 2.

¹⁷⁵ Chamier, often described as ‘the founding father of the ATC’, was knighted in 1944 for his work with the Corps. Taylor, *The Story of the Air Training Corps*, p. 27.

accept[ed] the proposals made by the Air Ministry’ and this is significant to note.¹⁷⁶ While the Scouts avoided being too closely associated with the War Office in the First World War, the ADCC Committee was very quickly taken over by the Air Ministry.

By the time the Air Ministry took over the Corps, it had over 20,000 members. Many letters of appreciation were received by the ADCC Committee for its work, including letters from Balfour and Archibald Sinclair, Secretary of State for Air from 1940.¹⁷⁷ While the military efficiency of members of the Corps may have varied – owing to the somewhat ad hoc nature of training – many Cadets were already trained in drill, discipline, the correct way to wear a uniform, how to behave on aerodromes, and in a vast array of aviation matters, and so they naturally played a key role in the RAF. By the end of the Second World War, approximately 500,000 young men had passed through the ATC and, of course, many went on and joined the fighting Services.¹⁷⁸ The Air Ministry estimated that 98,500 Cadets had entered the RAF; 9,200 had entered the Fleet Air Arm; 17,662 had joined the other branches of the Navy and the Merchant Service, and 27,519 had gone into the Army. In total, it estimated that over 150,000 Cadets joined the Services.¹⁷⁹ The Corps, then, was clearly an important component in the military apparatus of the British state in the Second World War.

VII. Conclusion

Reflecting on the growth of the Corps, an article in *Air Review* in June 1939 enthused that ‘[n]one of the Air League’s activities has had a greater success and none could have been more valuable to the country’.¹⁸⁰ Militarism was a central feature of the ADCC – in the

¹⁷⁶ AL, ADCC Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 2 January 1941, p. 2. The Air League continued to work closely with the ATC and even published a drill book for the Corps. See Air League of the British Empire, ‘A Drill Book for the Air Training Corps’, 1943.

¹⁷⁷ AL, ADCC Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 19 October 1942, p. 3.

¹⁷⁸ Taylor, *The Story of the Air Training Corps*, p. 32.

¹⁷⁹ However, according to the Ministry, such figures did not take into account former Cadets whose Cadet service had not been noted or recorded. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁸⁰ ‘The Air Defence Cadet Corps’, *Air Review*, June 1939, p. 8.

organisation's rhetoric and aims, to the practices and policies of the Corps. It was downplayed by senior figures, with the defensive nature of the Corps being emphasised, alongside the educational aspects of the organisation, yet associations with militarism were unescapable. The ADCC was closely linked with a number of key political and military elites and its leadership had a strongly military complexion.

Taken together, a lack of organised opposition to both the SCC and the ADCC suggests that, if sections of society were not enthusiastic, they were at least resigned to the need for Britain's youth to be trained in all things related to the sea and air. Both organisations occupied important positions in the youth culture of the late 1930s and, as has been noted, offer important insights into issues such as masculinity, physical culture, leisure, and militarism. Indeed, both the SCC and ADCC represented a militarisation of sections of British youth which continued, and indeed only intensified, when taken over by the Admiralty and Air Ministry respectively.

Chapter 6: ‘England Expects That Every Man Will Do His Duty’: Trafalgar Day, Naval Commemoration, and National Identity, c.1895–c.1939

Trafalgar Day remains a resonant date in the calendar, commemorated in many places in the Anglophone world. The continuing significance of this day, remembered annually in so many places for almost two hundred years, is ample evidence of the mythic status of the action it commemorates and the most famous actor at the centre of that victory. Indeed, the legendary status of Horatio Nelson is probably the greatest of all the heroic myths created by the British to explain the essence and uniqueness of their history.¹

Despite John MacKenzie’s assessment, the legacy of both Trafalgar and Nelson – seemingly uncontested emblems of Britishness and national prestige – is not without opposition. Indeed, in the aftermath of clashes in Charlottesville in August 2017 between white supremacist protestors and antifascist demonstrators, over plans to remove the statue of Robert E. Lee, the Confederate general, Afua Hirsch wrote an article for *The Guardian* in which she labelled Nelson a ‘white supremacist’ and argued that Nelson’s Column should also be removed.²

At the heart of Hirsch’s article is the contention that many within modern British society either fail to confront, or have a particularly selective interpretation of, the past. More broadly, her comments force us to question the place of statues, works of art, and other forms of material and visual culture that are laden with ideologies that are no longer, or at least should not be, our own. She pointed to the fact that the Cecil Rhodes statue at Oxford University still stands, while a monument to Edward Colston, a slave trader, remains in Bristol.

Much of the response to Hirsch’s article was vitriolic, often consisting of little more than personal attacks on Hirsch herself. However, alongside this, there were some more

¹ John MacKenzie, ‘Nelson Goes Global: The Nelson Myth in Britain and Beyond’, in David Cannadine (ed.), *Admiral Lord Nelson: Context and Legacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 144.

² Afua Hirsch, ‘Toppling Statues? Here’s Why Nelson’s Column Should be Next’, 22 August 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/aug/22/toppling-statues-nelsons-column-should-be-next-slavery> [accessed 15 November 2018].

perceptive and reflective themes which characterised responses to Hirsch's piece. In particular, debates about nation and national identity, the importance of the past in contemporary society, and the highly politicised nature of national commemoration all represented some of the more cogent issues raised by those who objected to Hirsch's article. For instance, Andrew Lambert warned that pulling down Nelson's Column 'would rip the heart out of British identity, and begin a bonfire on our history that would not end until everything that is different, unique and important had been consumed, leaving nothing but universal platitudes. Changing the past is far more dangerous than understanding it.'³

Patriotism, nation, and national identity were also evident in reports of the bicentenary of the Battle of Trafalgar in 2005.⁴ For instance, in stark contrast to the arguments advanced by Hirsch, *The Sun* felt that such commemorations 'reminded us of what made this country great', declaring 'we must never be afraid or ashamed to salute our national heroes'. It also objected to the marginalisation of Trafalgar in the *son et lumière* re-enactment in favour of a 'red' versus 'blue' naval battle. *The Daily Mail's* protests took place along similar lines, with the newspaper reminding the 'panjandrums of political correctness that at Trafalgar the Reds did not fight the Blues – the British beat the French, resulting in the creation of the greatest navy and arguably the most beneficial empire in history'. *The Guardian*, on the other hand, suggested that celebrating the 'carnage of Trafalgar is obscene'.⁵

The legacy of Trafalgar and Nelson is evidently an enduring, yet contested and conflicting one. However, despite recent interest, the Navy League's celebration of Trafalgar

³ Tom Rogan, 'Britain's Foremost Naval Historian: Nelson's Column Must Stand in Place', 24 August 2017, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/britains-foremost-naval-historian-nelsons-column-must-stand-in-place> [accessed 15 November 2018].

⁴ Mark Connelly, 'Trafalgar: Back on the Map of British Popular Culture? Assessing the 2005 Bicentenary', in Holger Hooek (ed.), *History, Commemoration, and National Preoccupation: Trafalgar 1805–2005* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 83–102.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 90–92.

Day has received curiously little attention from historians of modern Britain.⁶ Where Trafalgar Day has been examined, little of this interest has extended beyond the Edwardian period.⁷ The imperial dimensions of Trafalgar Day have been explored in studies by Daniel Owen Spence and John Griffiths, although, again, only in passing.⁸ This chapter seeks to build on these works. It will argue that the presence and continuation of Trafalgar Day in interwar commemorative practices challenges untested assertions, such as those of Anne Summers, who argues that ‘the manufactured ritual’ of Trafalgar Day ‘struck few chords’.⁹

This chapter is concerned with the ways in which Trafalgar Day – and by extension navalism – was reconstituted after the 1914–1918 conflict. The commemoration of Trafalgar Day provided a platform for the Navy League to construct naval and national identity and to impress upon both state and society the importance of sea power. In short, Trafalgar Day was about keeping Britain’s rich naval heritage – and status as an island nation – relevant to society in the twentieth century. The Navy League’s construction and use of the past was highly politicised and, at times, strongly contested.

⁶ Recent edited collections by David Cannadine and Holger Hoock provide excellent discussions on the legacy of Trafalgar and Nelson, yet only one contribution, Marianne Czisnik’s ‘Commemorating Trafalgar: Public Celebration and National Identity’ in Cannadine’s *Trafalgar in History*, offers an extended discussion of the Navy League and Trafalgar Day. See David Cannadine (ed.), *Trafalgar in History: A Battle and its Afterlife* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Cannadine (ed.), *Admiral Lord Nelson*; and Hoock, *History, Commemoration, and National Preoccupation*.

⁷ Coetzee, *For Party or Country*; pp. 25–27, Hamilton, *The Nation and the Navy*, Chapter IV; Andrew S. Thompson, *Imperial Britain: The Empire in British Politics, c. 1880–1932* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), p. 46.

⁸ Chapter 7 of Spence, *Colonial Naval Culture* and John Griffiths, *Imperial Culture in Antipodean Cities, 1880–1939* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), especially Chapter 6.

⁹ Summers, ‘Militarism’, p. 118. Manifestations of public navalism, and attempts by the Navy League to place the navy at the centre of public imagination, certainly appear to be at odds with wider forms of commemoration in the interwar period. Adrian Gregory, for example, has explored the way in which peace societies attempted to make Armistice Day an anti-militarist display. See Chapter 5 of Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919–1946* (Oxford: Berg, 1994). See also Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2005), pp. 49–59; Alex King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: The Symbolism of Politics and Remembrance* (Oxford: Berg, 1998); and Bob Bushaway ‘Name Upon Name: The Great War and Remembrance’, in Roy Porter (ed.), *Myths of the English* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 136–167. For commemorations and the politics of memory and national identity see John R. Gillis (ed.), *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

The historiographical neglect of Trafalgar Day is surprising given the recent interest in the cultural and symbolic aspects of the Royal Navy.¹⁰ It is also surprising when one considers the vast historiography exploring the changing nature of memorials, monuments, and commemorative practices surrounding war in the interwar years, as well as the complex and contested relationship between national identity and the construction of ‘invented traditions’.¹¹ As Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger famously defined them, ‘invented traditions’ are practices ‘normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past’.¹² As McCarthy notes, under this conceptual framework ‘historians of modern Britain have analysed everything from civic centenaries and acts of remembrance to imperial pageantry and military tattoos’.¹³ In his study of patriotic rituals in First World War propaganda, David Monger similarly observes that ‘historians of modern Britain have taken regular interest in rituals, particularly those concerned with public and popular politics’.¹⁴

What such accounts highlight is that public ritual is crucial in the construction of identity.¹⁵ As Paul Connerton argues, rituals ‘have the capacity to give value and meaning

¹⁰ See Rüger, *The Great Naval Game*. See also Don Leggett, ‘Restoring *Victory*: Naval Heritage, Identity and Memory in Interwar Britain’, *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2017), pp. 57–82; Ralph Harrington, ‘“The Mighty Hood”: Empire, War at Sea and the British National Imagination, 1920–60’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 38, no. 2 (2003), pp. 171–185; Jenks, *Naval Engagements*; Redford (ed.), *Maritime History*, and Conley, *From Jack Tar*.

¹¹ The literature is vast, but see James M. Mayo, ‘War Memorials as Political Memory’, *Geographical Review*, vol. 78, no. 1 (1988), pp. 62–75; Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 285–327; Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); K.S. Inglis, ‘War Memorials: Ten Questions for Historians’, *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, no. 167 (1992), pp. 5–21; Alan Borg, *War Memorials: From Antiquity to the Present* (London: Leo Cooper, 1991); Bill Niven, ‘War Memorials at the Intersection of Politics, Culture and Memory’, *Journal of Culture Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2008), pp. 39–45.

¹² Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 1.

¹³ McCarthy, ‘The League of Nations’, p. 110.

¹⁴ David Monger, ‘Familiarity Breeds Consent? Patriotic Rituals in British First World War Propaganda’, *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 26, no. 4 (2015), p. 505.

¹⁵ McCarthy, ‘The League of Nations’, p. 110.

to the life of those who perform them'.¹⁶ Indeed, ritualisation can create a feeling of connection with the past and encode objects with a cultural status.¹⁷ Ritual, as an analytical and explanatory term, has been the subject of serious scholarly debate among historians.¹⁸ However, in attempting to understand the importance of Trafalgar Day as public and political ritual in British society, rituals will be understood as a 'rule-governed activity of a symbolic character which draws the attention of its participants to objects of thought and feeling which they hold to be of special significance'.¹⁹

This chapter explores a number of areas relating to the Navy League's celebration of Trafalgar Day. It will first outline the structure and content of Trafalgar Day celebrations and will provide an examination of the day until the end of the First World War. It will then explore how Trafalgar Day was celebrated beyond Nelson's Column. In attempting to understand the extent to which Trafalgar Day resonated within contemporary society, and was able to embed itself in popular civic ritual, the chapter examines the response of the popular – and regional – press to the commemorations. In looking at the shifting meaning of Trafalgar Day throughout the interwar years, the chapter then examines the Navy League's 'Nelson Day' messages. Although the form of ceremony on Trafalgar Day essentially remained the same throughout the period, the meaning of the day constantly changed, with the concept of navalism undergoing constant revision for the Navy League. Trafalgar Day was about ritual and commemoration, yet it was also about education, naval and national

¹⁶ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 45.

¹⁷ See Jan Assmann, 'Communicative and Cultural Memory', in Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (eds) in collaboration with Sara B. Young, *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 109–119.

¹⁸ Particularly since the publication of Emile Durkheim's, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1976). See also, debates in David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven, Yale University Press: 1988) and Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹⁹ Steven Lukes, 'Political Ritual and Social Integration', *Sociology*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1975), p. 291. For a further discussion of some of the issues surrounding the study of rituals, see Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 1–11.

identity, and propaganda. This chapter will demonstrate the importance of Trafalgar Day in the creation of sea-mindedness and an ‘imagined’ naval community, in the construction of national and imperial identity, and for extolling the virtues of seapower by the Navy League.²⁰

I. The Invention of Trafalgar Day

At the suggestion of Arnold White, Trafalgar Day was first held by the Navy League on 21 October 1895 to commemorate the ninetieth anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar.²¹ While Nelson’s Column was constructed in 1843 there appears, as Marianne Czisnik observes, ‘never to have been any regular habit of celebrating Trafalgar Day outside the Royal Navy’ until the Navy League’s celebration of Trafalgar Day in 1895. ‘This’, as Czisnik remarks, ‘was the beginning of a tradition’.²² While the first Trafalgar Day was relatively small, this did indeed mark the beginning of a tradition which remained important to the Navy League.

Celebrations the following year were on a much larger and grander scale. *The Times* recorded that celebrations were noticeable due to ‘an extraordinary manifestation of public interest and of patriotism’. The newspaper noted that its creation was ‘in large measure due to the Navy League’, but that the celebrations more broadly represented ‘widely-spread enthusiasm for a great hero of the past’.²³ *The Spectator* estimated that over half a million people must have seen the decorations on Nelson’s Column.²⁴ As the League itself

²⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991 [revised ed]). For the relationship between remembrance, commemoration, and the construction of national and supranational identities, see Tom Lawson, “‘The Free-Masonry of Sorrow’?: English National Identities and the Memorialization of the Great War in Britain, 1919–1931’, *History and Memory*, vol. 20, no. 1 (2008), pp. 89–120.

²¹ For the commemoration of Nelson throughout the nineteenth century see Marianne Czisnik, ‘Commemorating Trafalgar: Public Celebration and National Identity’, in Cannadine (ed.), *Trafalgar in History*, pp. 139–142.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 143.

²³ ‘Trafalgar Day’, *The Times*, 22 October 1896, p. 4.

²⁴ ‘News of the Week’, *The Spectator*, 24 October 1896, p. 2.

explained, ‘in initiating Trafalgar Day the object sought for by the Navy League was, not triumph over former foes, but recognition of the principles of duty and courage personified in the life and death of Nelson – a legacy of example for the present and future generations of the English-speaking people’.²⁵

Following the first celebration of Trafalgar Day, *The Navy League Journal* triumphantly declared:

It was as if the people had arisen to answer those who say: “They do not care; they have forgotten their dead . . .” the hundreds of thousands who for six days from morning till night defiled before the column have shown the unsuspected strength of feeling latent in British hearts. They have shown that Britons do care, that they have not forgotten, that they are still capable of devotion and self-sacrifice. Trafalgar – the very name, with its stirring associations, is a trumpet-call to the nation to do its duty . . . the great mass of people in the square were pilgrims, rather than spectators. And those who were mere spectators must have learnt from their gazings. They would realise that the British Navy still regards Nelson as its chosen hero.²⁶

Trafalgar Day was often reported on in a similar manner. For instance, *The Observer* felt there ‘was no anniversary in the history of any country’ which had ‘a better right to be celebrated’.²⁷ However, the extent to which the Navy League was invested in the commemoration of Trafalgar Day has been the subject of some debate. For instance, Barbara Tomlinson writes that, following the first Trafalgar Day, it ‘subsequently became popular nationwide but the League regarded this involvement with heritage as a distraction from its contemporary political objectives’.²⁸ This is not the case. The League used Trafalgar Day not to only expound its own political objectives, but also to create – and shape – sea-mindedness in Britain. The League’s use of the past, and of Britain’s naval heritage, was crucial for the construction of naval identity as we shall see. The early responses to the Navy League’s celebration of Trafalgar Day, and the particular attention to Nelson’s Column, also

²⁵ ‘The Navy League and Naval Celebrations’, *The Times*, 7 June 1898, p. 12.

²⁶ ‘Trafalgar Day’, *The Navy League Journal*, November 1896, p. 131.

²⁷ ‘Trafalgar Day’, *The Observer*, 22 October 1911, p. 13.

²⁸ Barbara Tomlinson, *Commemorating the Seafarer: Monuments, Memorials and Memory* (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2015), p. 55.

challenge Robert Musil's infamous claim that 'there is nothing so invisible as a monument'.²⁹

By 1898, *The Pall Mall Gazette* argued that 'public opinion, educated by journalists and the Navy League, has insisted upon the steady development of our naval resources. The days in which official lethargy had to be prodded into action by a series of scares have departed, we trust for ever.' *The Referee* likewise felt 'there cannot be a greater incentive to young Englishmen to join the navy than the celebration of Nelson's Day at Trafalgar Square', while *The Standard* declared that 'the anniversary of Lord Nelson's greatest victory was commemorated yesterday with unabated enthusiasm. The celebration is due to the Navy League, and it is to that association that the honour belongs of reviving the national interest in the greatest seaman of the century.'³⁰ There was, however, some opposition to the display. The author Arthur Conan Doyle felt that it would be 'unchivalrous to exult over a beaten foe', suggesting the Navy League instead name Nelson's birthday 'Nelson Day'.³¹ The playwright George Bernard Shaw similarly argued that rather than decorating Nelson's Column, the League might be best advised to pull it down.³² Given Conan Doyle's imperialist sentiments, and Shaw's ties with the Fabian Society, this suggests that Trafalgar Day was viewed as contentious by figures across the political spectrum.

Such criticism seemingly had little impact on Navy League policy, with Trafalgar Day celebrations only increasing in size. However, the League did feel the need to respond to such criticism. *The Navy League Journal* wrote that 'one or two unsympathetic letters in

²⁹ Cited in Siobhan Kattago, 'Written in Stone: Monuments and Representation', in Siobhan Kattago (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Memory Studies* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), p. 179.

³⁰ 'British Opinion on Trafalgar Day Celebration', *The Navy*, November 1898, pp. 164–165.

³¹ 'Nelson Day', *The Times*, 20 October 1897, p. 12.

³² Hamilton, *The Nation and the Navy*, p. 146.

the Press' had been published surrounding Trafalgar Day celebrations. 'To the writers of them', the journal remarked,

to those who would forget Trafalgar and erase its lesson from the nation's heart, we can say nothing. They are beyond reminders and reproofs. They had better emigrate to some distant island of the Southern Seas, where, safe from war's alarms and the exhilarating call of national duty, they can live the life of a tame rabbit in its hutch.³³

Despite such criticism, Trafalgar Day remained popular and there was certainly something of the 'cult of the centenary' surrounding the Navy League's centenary celebrations in 1905.³⁴ *The Navy League Journal* estimated that 20,000 people were in Trafalgar Square with queues for Nelson's Column reaching nearly three miles in length.³⁵ *The Daily Telegraph* likewise reported 'immense throngs' of visitors to Trafalgar Square and that 'the manifold Nelson gatherings, concerts, and banquets seem to have been marked by an outpouring of patriotic fervour'.³⁶ Yet, following the entente cordiale agreement in 1904, the patriotic elements of the display were somewhat muted in order not to offend Britain's new ally, France.³⁷ Indeed, as Roland Quinault notes, the centenary celebrations were striking in the way they sought to commemorate French and Spanish dead.³⁸ The centenary celebrations were also marked by the religious symbolism surrounding the display. As Czisnik notes, 'the whole event was hugely indebted to Christian symbolism of the saviour . . . including the notion of death and 'resurrection''.³⁹

³³ 'Trafalgar Day', *The Navy League Journal*, November 1896, p. 131. See also Arnold White's response to Conan Doyle, 'The Commemoration of Trafalgar', *The Navy League Journal*, November 1897, p. 276. For the League's response to Shaw, see 'Trafalgar Day', *The Navy League Journal*, November 1898, p. 158.

³⁴ Roland Quinault, 'The Cult of the Centenary, c.1784–1914', *Historical Research*, vol. 71, no. 176 (1998), pp. 303–323.

³⁵ 'Nelson Centenary Celebration', *The Navy League Journal*, November 1905, p. 273.

³⁶ 'To-day', *The Daily Telegraph*, 23 October 1905, p. 8.

³⁷ MacKenzie, 'Nelson Goes Global', in Cannadine (ed.), *Admiral Lord Nelson*, p. 157. Cf. Andrew Lambert, 'An Entente Centenary: Commemorating Trafalgar Without Wounding 'The Susceptibilities of France'', in T.G. Otte, *The Age of Anniversaries: The Cult of Commemoration, 1895–1925* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 61–81.

³⁸ Roland Quinault, 'Political Centenary Commemorations in the Early Twentieth Century', in Otte, *The Age of Anniversaries*, p. 186.

³⁹ Czisnik, 'Commemorating Trafalgar', p. 146.

While Trafalgar Day had clearly quickly assumed significance on a national level, it was also crucial to the survival of the League itself. As one Navy League pamphlet reflected:

When the Navy League had been under way for about six months, it was evident that something must be done to attract public support to the principle of Sea Power, if the League was not to die of inanition. Popular support . . . may generally be secured by linking a great idea to a great personality . . . So Nelson's life and death, it was foreseen, might be utilised to personify British Sea Power to the children, if not to the veterans, of British democracy throughout the world . . . Everything that emphasises the fact that England lives on a foundation of Sea Power exerts a healthy influence on national life and character.⁴⁰

This highly idealised moment in British history was able to invest Navy League practices with 'the authority and weight of tradition'.⁴¹ Navalism and the promotion of naval armaments was palatable in the form of naval commemoration, especially when centred around Nelson. Trafalgar Day and Nelson provided the Navy League with a usable past, one which could reinforce its contemporary propaganda on a wide range of issues.

II. The Form of Trafalgar Day

In commemoration of the Battle of Trafalgar, and in memory of Nelson, wreaths were annually placed at the foot of Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square. Displayed centrally was the Navy League's wreath bearing its motto, 'Keep Watch'.⁴² Initially the column, base, and plinth were decorated. The column would be 'encircled by a gilded naval crown . . . bearing nautical devices, while from this point downwards four festoons of laurel were entwined, extending from a point near the base as far as the Landseer lions, round the heads of which they were looped'.⁴³ However, from 1901, decorations were confined to the base and plinth.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ MSCC, Navy League Pamphlets, 'Nelson Day', Navy League Pamphlet, 1936, pp. 1–2.

⁴¹ T.G. Otte, 'Centenaries, Self-Historicization and the Mobilization of the Masses', in Otte, *The Age of Anniversaries*, pp. 26–27.

⁴² Tritton changed this motto to 'Sacrifice and Service'. Following Tritton's resignation in 1922, however, the League reverted back to 'Keep Watch'. 'Grand Council Meeting', *The Navy*, July 1922, pp. 188–189.

⁴³ 'Trafalgar Day', *The Navy League Journal*, November 1897, p. 274.

⁴⁴ 'Trafalgar Day Celebration', *The Navy League Journal*, November 1901, p. 201.

Nelson's Column was undoubtedly a site of remembrance and commemoration, yet it was also a site of political mobilisation.⁴⁵ The symbolic value of Nelson's Column is important to highlight; as Andrew Lambert remarks, 'Nelson on an Augustan column provided the ultimate expression of global maritime power . . . The impact of the column was, and remains, immense.'⁴⁶ Nelson's Column undoubtedly provided the focal point of Navy League ritual and commemoration. Nelson's Column, as well as the Battle of Trafalgar itself, acted as the League's *lieu de mémoire*.⁴⁷ However, Navy League commemoration went beyond the column.

As well as the wreaths on Nelson's Column, a wreath would also be placed at the foot of Nelson's tomb in St. Paul's Cathedral. Flown at Trafalgar Square and on Nelson's flagship, the HMS *Victory*, was Nelson's famous signal 'England expects that every man will do his duty'. Interestingly, commemorations on the *Victory* took place long before the Navy League's annual celebration at Trafalgar Square. As Colin White notes, by the 1840s, the custom of dressing the ship overall on Trafalgar Day had begun, alongside 'hoisting laurel wreaths between her masts as a sign of mourning for Nelson'.⁴⁸ In 1846, the custom of toasting to 'the immortal memory of Nelson and those who fell with him' was established. Around the same time, 'the custom of dressing the *Victory* overall on Trafalgar Day was replaced with the tradition of hoisting the flags of 'Nelson's 'England Expects' signal'.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ For Trafalgar Square as a site for political demonstration in general, see Rodney Mace, *Trafalgar Square: Emblem of Empire* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976).

⁴⁶ Andrew Lambert, 'Nelson, Trafalgar and the Meaning of Victory', *History Today*, vol. 54, no. 11 (2004), p. 58.

⁴⁷ Pierre Nora defines a *lieu de mémoire* as 'any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the material heritage of any community'. Pierre Nora (ed.), *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past, Volume I: Conflicts and Divisions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. xvii.

⁴⁸ Colin White, 'Nelson Apotheosised: The Creation of the Nelson Legend', in Cannadine (ed.), *Admiral Lord Nelson*, p. 109.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.



Figure 7: 'Nelson's Monument in Trafalgar Square', *The Navy League Journal*, November 1902, p. 237.

Accompanying Trafalgar Day, a religious service was also held each year, initially at St Martin-in-the-Fields and then at St Paul's Cathedral. The sermons would almost always address Britain's naval position and evoke the spirit and legacy of Nelson and Trafalgar. William Inge, the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, in a fairly typical sermon in 1919 addressed his audience thus:

There was no reason in the nature of things why a nation should grow old and decay. Nor was there any proof, in spite of disquieting symptoms, that we were a decadent nation. But we needed to unite and organise all the best elements in the nation, for we had a hard struggle before us. The Navy League stood for duty and discipline, the two things which we needed the most.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ 'Nelson Day Celebrations', *The Navy*, December 1919, p. 163.

The speech is made more interesting when one considers that the service was conducted by H.R.L. Sheppard, who later founded the PPU.

An annual Nelson Day dinner would also be held, which was attended by Dominion statesman, ambassadors, prominent British politicians, members of the royal family, members of the Admiralty, members of the British and Dominion Navy Leagues, and finally by members of the press. Each year a toast was made to ‘the glorious and immortal memory of Nelson and his comrades’. The dinner was a high point in the League’s social calendar and a further way in which the League attempted to disseminate its message. As Christopher Bell argues, the dinner highlights an example of the ‘Admiralty provid[ing] the Navy League with a clear vote of confidence and measure of moral support’.⁵¹ Such moral support was also provided by the royal family, with Edward VIII, Prince of Wales, stating in 1932 that he ‘agree[d] with all the purposes of the Navy League’.⁵² As the occasions boasted key public figures, and speeches on naval issues, press coverage was also fairly extensive.

While it is difficult to gauge attendance levels throughout the interwar years, thousands were regularly reported to have been present at Nelson’s Column. Alongside the aforementioned features of Trafalgar Day, the day would often include a host of other events in an attempt to remain in the public eye such as military parades, pageants, public lectures, essay competitions, dances, concerts, and film screenings. Trafalgar Day in wartime, however, was even more closely tied to the nation and national identity.

III. Trafalgar Day in the First World War

With the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, the Navy League’s celebration of Trafalgar Day took on new meaning. As *The Manchester Guardian* reported: ‘[Nelson’s] Column is now

⁵¹ Bell, *The Royal Navy*, p. 167.

⁵² ‘Nelson Day Dinner’, *The Navy*, December 1932, p. 363.

not only the symbol of a grand tradition but of a nation's spirit . . . No crowd could have gathered such as to-day's crowd except when nations were stirred to a deep sense of pride and determination.'⁵³ *The Times* similarly observed that 'it is doubtful whether such large crowds have ever been seen on any previous anniversary'.⁵⁴ The first Trafalgar Day in wartime was also modified in content, as well as meaning. Public dinners, decorations of monuments and public buildings, and the public meetings which had been held in 'support of a vigorous naval policy' were cancelled. The Navy League instead urged

that the occasion should be utilised for the especial object of concentrating public thought upon the incalculable blessings which have been conferred upon this nation and upon the British Empire as a whole through our supremacy at sea; to stimulate interest in the minds of the masses of the people in the welfare of officers and men of the Fleet, and to encourage solid and abiding confidence in the capacity of our sea power to secure the continuance of our liberties.⁵⁵

In 1915, Trafalgar Day was commemorated only nine days after the British nurse, Edith Cavell, was executed by a German firing squad in German-occupied Belgium. The event caused widespread condemnation and was addressed in the Trafalgar Day service that year.⁵⁶ At the service, the Bishop of London wondered 'what Nelson would have said if he had been told that an English girl had been shot in cold blood'. He felt he 'would have made more than the diplomatic inquiries which have been made by a great neutral into this crime . . . he would have made his inquiries by the thunder of the guns of the British Fleet.' He then suggested there was no need for a recruitment campaign, feeling that the execution of Edith Cavell was enough.⁵⁷ The description of Cavell's execution was neither novel nor exceptional, yet the appropriation of her death to invoke Nelson is significant. By linking

⁵³ 'Trafalgar Day in London', *The Manchester Guardian*, 22 October 1914, p. 6.

⁵⁴ 'Trafalgar Day', *The Times*, 22 October 1914, p. 8.

⁵⁵ 'Trafalgar Day', *The Daily Telegraph*, 12 October 1914, p. 6.

⁵⁶ For the reaction to Cavell's death, see Katie Pickles, *Transnational Outrage: The Death and Commemoration of Edith Cavell* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁵⁷ 'Bishop of London's Sermon', *The Daily Telegraph*, 22 October 1915, p. 11.

the contemporary conflict to the morality of Nelson, the Navy League could, yet again, transform the meaning of Trafalgar Day commemorations.

Trafalgar Day celebrations in 1915 were also marked by Navy League efforts to impress the legacy of Nelson upon schoolchildren. The Navy League contacted the chairmen of educational authorities throughout Britain to ‘make arrangements that a short discourse on the work of the Navy during the present War may be given at a convenient hour during the day in every primary school’.⁵⁸ In 236 districts, totalling approximately 27,000 primary schools, such a lecture was delivered.⁵⁹ In connection with the 1915 celebrations, the Navy League also published a message from Winston Churchill, then ex-First Lord of the Admiralty, who wrote that ‘the spirit of Nelson and the memory of Trafalgar stirring to-day in all hearts should rouse us now to sustain un-wearingly the darkening conflict, and by proceeding to all necessary extremes and laying aside every impediment, rescue Britain from dishonour and Europe from ruin’.⁶⁰ Reports of the 1915 Trafalgar Day certainly suggest that the spirit of Nelson remained strong. *The Daily Telegraph* wrote that ‘London celebrated Trafalgar Day in a spirit of patriotic fervour’ with hundreds of thousands of people present in Trafalgar Square.⁶¹ *The Manchester Guardian* suggested that the day was ‘mainly a recruiting rally . . . The crowds that poured round Nelson’s Column in the mist and rain this afternoon were not allowed to admire in peace the giant lions with wreaths in their mouths . . . there were recruiters on every plinth shouting a summons to duty.’⁶²

⁵⁸ ‘Trafalgar Day’, *The Navy*, December 1915, p. 377.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

⁶⁰ ‘Trafalgar Day’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 October 1915, p. 8.

⁶¹ ‘Trafalgar Day’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 22 October 1915, p. 11.

⁶² ‘Trafalgar Day in London’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 22 October 1915, p. 9.

The 1916 Trafalgar Day celebrations were closely linked with the Battle of Jutland. Trafalgar Day commemorations that year provided a further example of the way in which the League utilised the conflict to keep the legacy of Nelson alive. The day was devoted to

an expression of the profound gratitude of the British Empire to the officers and men of the gallant fleet for their brilliant achievement in the victory of Jutland on the 31st May last, and for the incalculable services which our Sea Power has rendered to civilisation and liberty since the beginning of the conflict.⁶³

That Trafalgar Day became closely associated with the remembrance of those who lost their lives at sea in the First World War is significant and goes some way to explaining the continuing relevance of the day in the interwar years. Most of the wreaths on Nelson's Column in 1916 were in memory of those who lost their lives at Jutland, with *The Navy* describing Nelson's Column as a 'great war shrine'.⁶⁴ The Navy League also decided in 1916 upon changing the name of Trafalgar Day to Nelson Day 'in order to express in a permanent form the warmest friendship with France and to increase the interest of the British people in the sea power of the Empire which is associated with the name of Nelson'.⁶⁵ In the interwar period, however, both Nelson Day and Trafalgar Day were used by the Navy League and the press.

The commemoration of ordinary sailors on Trafalgar Day in wartime reflected the shifting nature of commemorative practices more broadly and was part of a wider 'democratisation of death'.⁶⁶ As Reinhart Koselleck has noted, 'the nation, which had previously shored up its identity by way of victory monuments, now remembered all the dead individually'.⁶⁷ Bill Niven has similarly observed that 'monuments to triumph appeared to give way, in part at least, to memorials of human loss'.⁶⁸ By remembering those who lost

⁶³ 'Trafalgar Day', *The Manchester Guardian*, 16 October 1916, p. 6.

⁶⁴ 'Trafalgar Day', *The Navy*, December 1916, p. 306.

⁶⁵ "Nelson Day", *The Daily Mail*, 15 November 1916, p. 3.

⁶⁶ Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History*, p. 320. Cf. Winter, *Sites of Memory*.

⁶⁷ Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History*, p. 320.

⁶⁸ Niven, 'War Memorials', p. 40.

their lives in the war at sea, Trafalgar Day was able to enjoy resonance well into the interwar years, even if the focus remained on Nelson and Nelsonian qualities.

Throughout the First World War, Trafalgar Day was supported by many distinguished politicians and military figures including Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig, Amery, Churchill, as well as many members of the Admiralty, including Beatty and Jellicoe. The final celebration of Trafalgar Day in war met with much support from these key military figures. For instance, Beatty sent the Navy League greetings and ‘assurances of sympathy with its objects and appreciation of its excellent work’. Haig wrote that ‘on the anniversary of Nelson Day, the heart of every one in the British Army goes out with mine to all officers of the Royal Navy and the mercantile marine . . . I wish that this great national anniversary may in every way prove most successful’. Jellicoe thought that the day ‘emphasised to an exceptional degree the supreme value of sea power’ and that ‘it is fitting that on ‘Nelson Day’ the Empire should remember with profound gratitude all that it owes to its seamen, and should renew its determination to see that both the Navy and the Mercantile Marine retain that position which is essential to its safety and welfare’.⁶⁹ As Bell has noted, ‘Naval decision-makers valued the Navy League because it could and did appeal directly to the public, something the navy felt itself unable to do’.⁷⁰ While there was less pomp and ceremony surrounding Trafalgar Day celebrations throughout the First World War, the day remained an important occasion for the Navy League and for many throughout Britain.

IV. Trafalgar Day Beyond Nelson’s Column

Jay Winter has urged historians to ‘shrink the framework of discussions of commemorative forms in the twentieth century . . . shifting the scale of vision from the national and grandiose

⁶⁹ ‘Nelson Commemoration’, *The Navy*, October 1918, p. 83.

⁷⁰ Bell, *The Royal Navy*, p. 167.

to the particular and mundane may help transform our understanding of war monuments, and of the forms of remembrance which occur surrounding them.’ Winter argues that ‘great national sites of remembrance are exceptional, and their histories provide a misleading impression of thousands of others’.⁷¹ While this chapter has been careful to suggest that Trafalgar Day celebrations were heterogenous in scope and nature, it is undoubtedly important to assess the place on Trafalgar Day commemorations beyond Nelson’s Column. By the end of the First World War, the commemoration of Trafalgar Day throughout Britain was a well-established practice. While Nelson’s Column naturally provided a focal point, the day was celebrated throughout many towns and cities in Britain – particularly in port towns.

In Portsmouth, ‘as the premier naval port of the Empire’, Trafalgar Day held special significance.⁷² The *Portsmouth Evening News* viewed Trafalgar Day as ‘one of our great national days of remembrance’.⁷³ Nelson’s flagship, the *Victory*, was festooned with laurels on each Trafalgar Day, with a wreath being placed on the spot where Nelson fell.⁷⁴ A wreath was also placed on the Nelson Monument on Portsdown Hill in Portsmouth. Alongside the decoration of the *Victory*, Portsmouth would also hold a naval pageant procession on behalf of the Trafalgar Day Orphan Fund.⁷⁵ Nelson’s cabin on the *Victory* even played host to a dinner on Trafalgar Day in 1930, held by Sir Roger Keyes.⁷⁶

On Trafalgar Day in 1922, Admiral Frederick Charles Doveton Sturdee, president of the Society for Nautical Research (SNR), launched a public appeal to raise funds for the restoration of the *Victory*, arguing that ‘the value of the *Victory* is no transitory thing’, while

⁷¹ Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 135.

⁷² ‘Trafalgar Day’, *Portsmouth Evening News*, 21 October 1922, p. 6.

⁷³ ‘Nelson’s Famous Signal’, *Portsmouth Evening News*, 21 October 1932, p. 8.

⁷⁴ ‘Trafalgar Day’, *Portsmouth Evening News*, 21 October 1925, p. 3.

⁷⁵ See ‘Trafalgar Day – Portsmouth 1924’ (London, British Pathé, 1924).

⁷⁶ ‘Dinner in Nelson’s Cabin’, *Portsmouth Evening News*, 21 October 1930, p. 9.

Archibald Hurd, the journalist and Navy League member, contended that ‘the Victory would . . . be a lasting monument to an era in the history of our sea-power which is linked up intimately with the story of the great expansion of England’.⁷⁷ That Sturdee chose Trafalgar Day to launch his campaign is, of course, significant. As Don Leggett notes, the ‘campaign sought to preserve the physical remnants of Nelson’s ship and memorialize a moment in British history when sea power was at its height and the British Empire was securely guarded’.⁷⁸ The SNR also requested financial support from the Navy League, although due to the parlous conditions of the League’s finances at the time, it felt unable to help.⁷⁹

The restoration of the *Victory* was not the only campaign linked with Trafalgar Day in the interwar years. A similar scheme was launched on the eve of Trafalgar Day in 1925 to save the HMS *Implacable* by Lord Beatty. Beatty viewed the ship as a ‘national relic’ and later described the scheme to save the *Implacable* in the following terms: ‘The work that the *Implacable* was intended for was to build up that sea service and to inculcate it into the minds of many, so that they should follow in the footsteps of the great seamen of the past and maintain the heritage that had been passed down to us’.⁸⁰ These restoration campaigns provide further evidence of the myriad ways in which Britain’s rich naval heritage, and relevance of Trafalgar for contemporary generations, was kept alive.

Trafalgar Day also had a particular resonance in the North East of England. As Admiral Lord Collingwood was born in Newcastle upon Tyne, the strength of sentiment surrounding Trafalgar Day celebrations at Collingwood’s Monument in Tynemouth was,

⁷⁷ ‘Save the Victory’, *Portsmouth Evening News*, 20 October 1922, p. 5; Leggett, ‘Restoring *Victory*’, p. 61.

⁷⁸ Leggett, ‘Restoring *Victory*’, p. 61.

⁷⁹ The Navy League did, however, publish appeals for the *Victory* fund in *The Navy*. NMM, SNR 7/2, Society for Nautical Research Papers (SNR), Victory Correspondence, ‘Save the “Victory” Fund’. The Hawke’s Bay branch of the Navy League in New Zealand also provided a donation of £53.01 to the SNR, noting that such contributions represented a ‘general spirit of deep loyalty and patriotism’. NMM, SNR 7/2, SNR, Victory Correspondence, Letter from the Hawke’s Bay branch of the Navy League to the SNR, 8 August 1923, p. 1.

⁸⁰ ‘Ship that Fought the Victory’, *The Times*, 20 October 1925, p. 11; ‘The *Implacable*’, *The Times*, 21 October 1930, p. 17.

perhaps, unsurprising. Beginning in 1923, Tynemouth's commemoration of Trafalgar Day took a similar form to the one at Nelson's Column. A public procession would take place before a wreath would be placed at the foot of the Collingwood Monument. This was initially done by the Mayor of Tynemouth and then by the Duke of Northumberland, as president of the Northumberland County and City of Newcastle Navy League Branch. This was often followed by a service by the Vicar of Tynemouth. In performing the ceremony, the Duke of Northumberland thought the purpose of doing so was threefold:

It is to pay tribute to the memory of a great Englishman and a great Northumbrian Seaman: (2) in order to show our sense of the deep gratitude we owed to the British navy; and (3) to express our determination to maintain that navy . . . to protect the interests of the British Empire in the future as it had in the past.⁸¹

The form of commemoration resembled the Navy League's main celebrations at Trafalgar Square, although the strength of regional celebrations is important to note. Trafalgar Day was also important for cultivating civic pride on a local level. This is evident in the Mayor of Tynemouth's suggestion that the day was 'one of the greatest events in English history' and that 'there was no more suitable place [than Tynemouth] for the ceremony'.⁸²

In Bristol, the local Navy League branch was particularly active in Trafalgar Day celebrations. The branch would show naval films to around 2,000 schoolchildren each year 'with a view to bringing home to the coming generation the essential meaning of Nelson's victory and its influence on the Empire'.⁸³ By 1922, the *Western Daily Press* declared that 'Trafalgar Day has become an institution'.⁸⁴ Trafalgar Day was also celebrated in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, Norwich, Southampton, and in many other towns and cities throughout Britain. Urban centres and port towns, or places with particular links to the Battle of Trafalgar, saw the most popular celebrations of Trafalgar Day.

⁸¹ 'Trafalgar Day', *The Shields Daily News*, 21 October 1925, p. 1.

⁸² 'Trafalgar Day', *The Shields Daily News*, 23 October 1933, p. 3.

⁸³ 'Trafalgar Day', *Western Daily Press*, 22 October 1923, p. 4.

⁸⁴ 'Trafalgar Day at Bristol', *Western Daily Press*, 23 October 1922, p. 7.

However, smaller, regional celebrations of Trafalgar Day commemorations were often well attended and were widely reported on in the local press. As the *Yorkshire Evening Post* commented, Trafalgar Day represented ‘the greatest sea anniversary’ in Britain.⁸⁵ Although the local Navy League branches were often responsible for such commemoration, many local councils commemorated the day without Navy League pressure. These local forms of commemoration certainly suggest that Trafalgar Day had resonance beyond London.

V. Trafalgar Day and the Shifting Nature of Navalism: 1919–1939

In his study of Empire Day in Britain, Jim English notes that in the aftermath of the First World War ‘the survival of and (in some places) extension of Empire Day celebrations appears curious, given that its attendant militaristic rituals and jingoistic legacy appeared anachronistic after the catastrophe of the war’.⁸⁶ English’s conclusion provides a useful starting point and model for exploring the Navy League’s celebration of Trafalgar Day in the interwar years.⁸⁷ Indeed, as early as 1919, *The Daily Telegraph* noted that ‘Trafalgar Day begins to assume something of the same spirit as that of Empire Day, in that it emphasises the imperial significance of the anniversary in relation to the Royal Navy’.⁸⁸ Representing similar ‘militaristic rituals’ as Empire Day, Trafalgar Day focused on naval heritage, tradition, commemoration, and naval nostalgia. However, the display was in many respects Janus-natured. While Trafalgar Day attempted to evoke the legacy of Nelson and instil feelings of patriotism, self-sacrifice, and duty, it was also a crucial platform for the Navy League to narrate the Navy’s place in post-war Britain. Trafalgar Day represented a

⁸⁵ ‘A “Sea Evening”’, *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 23 October 1928, p. 11.

⁸⁶ Jim English, ‘Empire Day in Britain, 1904–1958’, *The Historical Journal*, vol. 49, no. 1 (2006), p. 260.

⁸⁷ This point is made by Daniel Owen Spence in his study of Trafalgar Day in Hong Kong, although it is equally true of the study of Trafalgar Day in Britain. Spence, *Colonial Naval Culture*, p. 187.

⁸⁸ ‘Trafalgar Day’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 October 1919, p. 5.

renegotiation of navalism – and of Britain’s status as a maritime nation – in the aftermath of the First World War.

With ‘naval treaties, economic slumps and the rise of airpower’ posing problems for the Royal Navy, together with the ‘ambiguous outcome of the Battle of Jutland’, Trafalgar Day marked an important point of continuity for the Navy League.⁸⁹ Indeed, as one Nelson Day message made clear, ‘In spite of all the contributions which the engineer and the scientist have made to human progress, we remain islanders’.⁹⁰ If ‘Empire Day was representative of the prevailing sentiment of imperialism that characterized the Edwardian era’, then could Trafalgar Day be seen as a continuation of the prevailing sentiment of militaristic rituals, which similarly formed an important part of the political and cultural landscape of Edwardian Britain?⁹¹ There was certainly little opposition to Trafalgar Day in the interwar years, despite the highly politicised and, at times, militaristic nature of the display.

In the immediate post-war period, the Navy League’s willingness to embrace international ideals of collective security, and the preservation of peace through agreement, while potentially sacrificing British naval supremacy, was seen by many members of the League as an abandonment of navalism as we have seen.⁹² Yet, this conflict within the League did little to influence the success of Trafalgar Day celebrations. Reporting on Trafalgar Day in 1921, *The Times* remarked that as ‘the years advance, and as the events, so fresh in the memory, of the greatest of all wars tend to recede into historical retrospect, Trafalgar Day assumes an ever larger and wider meaning’.⁹³ *The Daily Telegraph* similarly noted that ‘not for many years’ had ‘Nelson’s Day been celebrated with such fervour . . . all

⁸⁹ Leggett, ‘Restoring *Victory*’, pp. 64–65.

⁹⁰ ‘Nelson Day’, *The Navy*, November 1925, p. 301.

⁹¹ English, ‘Empire Day’, p. 248.

⁹² See Chapter 2.

⁹³ ‘Trafalgar Day’, *The Times*, 21 October 1921, p. 11.

day long crowds gathered in Trafalgar Square and reverently circled the monument . . . it was not until late in the afternoon that there was any appreciable decline in the votaries at our national naval shrine.’⁹⁴



Figure 8: ‘Nelson Day’, *The Navy*, November 1929, p. 313.

Alongside Trafalgar Day, the Navy League wanted the ‘institution of a Navy Day throughout the British Empire’. However, the League received a letter from the Admiralty informing them that ‘it was impossible to co-operate as suggested’.⁹⁵ The Admiralty’s rejection of this proposal is perhaps surprising, especially given its support of annual navy weeks. While the Navy League did not have sole custodianship of Nelson’s Column, it did

⁹⁴ ‘Trafalgar Day’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 October 1921, p. 10.

⁹⁵ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Navy League, 10 December 1923, p. 1.

often object to its use by other societies. For example, the League's Islington branch protested against the 'desecration of Nelson's Column by the Communist and Socialist meetings held from this national monument, such demonstrations being an insult to the memory of the gallant Admiral in whose honour it was erected'.⁹⁶

Nelson's Column clearly provided a visual and symbolic reminder of Britain's naval past, yet how did the Navy League go about disseminating its message more broadly? There were, of course, competing narratives of what Trafalgar and Nelson meant for Britain and so each year the Navy League published, in the popular press and its own journal, a 'Nelson Day' message which outlined the League's views on the legacy of Nelson, his relevance for contemporary society, and a critique of the naval situation at the time. Through Nelson Day messages, the League would attempt to nurture feelings of patriotism, duty, and naval identity. As the League declared in 1936:

In Nelson's day . . . the Navy needed no advertisement, and British Sea Power wanted no advocate . . . Nowadays, the people require instruction in sea sense and sea knowledge, advertisement is necessary, and an advocate for the Silent Navy must be found; and it is the Navy League which supplies these requirements of the age.⁹⁷

The Nelson Day messages essentially provided the Navy League with a platform to lobby the government on naval issues, and to shape the attitude of British society on the centrality of the sea to the nation. However, while Empire Air Day was used by the Air League to promote rearmament and the importance of aviation to the nation and empire through spectacular visual displays, Trafalgar Day utilised naval tradition and heritage to promote its message. Several distinct themes can be seen in Nelson Day messages throughout the interwar years – empire, a hostility towards collective security, disarmament, pacifism, internationalism, and finally calls for naval supremacy.

⁹⁶ MSSC, NL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 17 May 1923, p. 5.

⁹⁷ Cited in Noel-Baker, *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*, p. 292.

Empire

While it is beyond the purview of this chapter to provide any extensive exploration of the ways in which Trafalgar Day was celebrated in an imperial context, a few brief comparisons will be made. John Griffiths notes that the commemoration of Trafalgar Day in Antipodean cities, much like Empire Day, was rather underwhelming and failed to secure any prominence in a public setting.⁹⁸ Daniel Owen Spence observes that Trafalgar Day went some way to fortifying imperial unity in Hong Kong, although suggests that navy week had more cultural purchase.⁹⁹ However, if the day was not particularly popular in the Dominions or in the empire, Dominion Navy League branches were certainly active in their support of Trafalgar Day celebrations in Britain. Members of the Dominion Navy Leagues would often attend Nelson Day dinners, with wreaths sent yearly from the Dominions and from all across the globe. India, Hong Kong, Ceylon, South Africa, Malta, Newfoundland, Tasmania as well as many other countries would send wreaths and messages of support to the Navy League. Navy League branches throughout the world would also send messages to the Navy League in support of Trafalgar Day celebrations which were read out at Nelson Day dinners. The League also certainly valued its relationship with its Dominion branches. As one Nelson Day message made clear, 'it [the Navy League] has formed branches in every part of the Empire, and this world-wide organization has become an invaluable link between Great Britain and her people beyond the seas'.¹⁰⁰

Although Trafalgar Day may not have had the same resonance in the Dominions and parts of the empire as it did in Britain, the rhetoric and discourse surrounding the display often focused on the importance of the sea for Britain's empire. The Navy League also used the messages to criticise the government. We have seen the ways in which the League

⁹⁸ Griffiths, *Imperial Culture*, p. 211.

⁹⁹ Spence, *Colonial Naval Culture*, p. 187.

¹⁰⁰ 'Nelson Day', *The Navy*, October 1930, p. 280.

protested against the closure of the Singapore Naval Base by MacDonalld in 1924 and this was a feature of its Nelson Day the same year.¹⁰¹ The Nelson Day message in 1927 likewise spoke of Britain ‘facing dangers of which Nelson could not have dreamed’. The League urged that ‘Trafalgar Day should bring home to all loyal British citizens the “national policy” on which the Empire depends. Nelson, above all men, by precept and by demonstration, has taught us to “hold the sea.” That is the great lesson that the Navy League exists to proclaim.’¹⁰² However, rather than simply focusing on the defence of the empire, Nelson Day messages also emphasised the importance of commerce, trade, communication, and imperial unity. As the 1930 Nelson Day message stressed, the ‘navy is more than ever the “Sure Shield” of Britain, her Dominions and her Colonies, of the supplies which are the life-blood of the homeland, and of the sea communications which hold our family of nations together’.¹⁰³ However, towards the end of the 1920s, the content of Nelson Day – and the rhetoric surrounding the League’s commemorations – shifted once again.

Collective Security, Disarmament, and Pacifism

Reflecting the Navy League’s wider policy, the content and tone of Nelson Day messages from 1927 to 1934 was largely based around a hostility towards pacifism, disarmament, and collective security. The League used Nelson Day messages to lobby against the Geneva Naval Conference, the Kellogg-Briand Pact, the London Naval Conference, and the Geneva Disarmament Conference. For instance, the Nelson Day message of 1929 was particularly hostile in tone:

To Nelson the pacifism that is fashionable to-day would have been as inconceivable as the pathetic trust in treaties unsupported by force . . . it is the aim of the Navy League, in days when the strength of the national navy has become a subject of political bargaining, to strive

¹⁰¹ ‘Nelson Day Message’, *The Navy*, November 1924, p. 291.

¹⁰² ‘Nelson Day Message’, *The Navy*, November 1927, p. 317.

¹⁰³ ‘Nelson Day Message’, *The Navy*, November 1930, p. 309.

to keep alive the spirit which created and held our vast Empire – the spirit that Nelson embodied.¹⁰⁴

The Navy League's Nelson Day messages at the time of the Geneva Conference were similar in tone to its wider pronouncements, although also employed Nelsonian rhetoric and propounded highly idealised Nelsonian traits in relation to disarmament and national defence. For example, the 1932 Nelson Day message warned its readers to

be careful lest the spirit of patriotism and self-sacrifice . . . be undermined by uninformed clamour, and lest we come to rely too far upon the security provided by paper pacts, which have often proved an illusion in the past and have even been the cause of war itself . . . Now, more than ever, the peace of the world can be maintained by the existence of an efficient British Fleet.¹⁰⁵

Importantly, at the height of the Geneva Conference, the League utilised Nelson as an emblem of Britishness, as a synonym for naval might, and as an example of how the country should conduct itself on the global stage. As Lloyd declared at the Nelson Day Dinner in 1933: 'Now for ten or fifteen years the leaders of every party have preached pacifism. They forgot that, when Nelson said that England expected every man to do his duty, he was not suggesting that every man was to do his duty by Geneva or the League of Nations.'¹⁰⁶ For the Navy League, peace, stability, and security rested not upon treaties or pacts, but upon force. The League's hostility towards disarmament on moral as well as practical grounds, alongside its use of Nelson in its rhetoric, led to much criticism – particularly from figures such as Noel Baker. He felt that the League were 'still living, like Lord Lloyd, in the days of Nelson; they still believe that nations can grow great and can be safe by the methods which their heroes of the eighteenth century applied'.¹⁰⁷ The *Daily Herald* also bemoaned that Trafalgar Day was being 'exploited to work up panic and rush Parliament into spending millions more money on preparations for war'.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ 'Nelson Day Message', *The Navy*, November 1929, p. 305.

¹⁰⁵ 'Trafalgar Day Message', *The Navy*, November 1932, p. 317.

¹⁰⁶ 'Nelson Day Dinner', *The Navy*, November 1933, p. 324.

¹⁰⁷ Noel-Baker, *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*, p. 304.

¹⁰⁸ 'Warmongers Start Big Drive for More Arms', *Daily Herald*, 21 October 1933, p. 1.

Alongside issuing public pronouncements relating to Geneva on Trafalgar Day, the League also lobbied politicians more directly. In 1931, it sent out a letter to every candidate prior to the general election, outlining its stance on naval treaties and, again, evoked Nelsonian traits of duty and service. The League argued that British disarmament had only caused other nations to rearm and reminded candidates: ‘The General Election takes place within a week of Trafalgar Day, on which we celebrate the Immortal Memory of Nelson; may we hope that the example of duty and service of our National Hero will be in your mind when the “sea affair” is under consideration’.¹⁰⁹

National Defence and Rearmament, 1934–1938

The Navy League’s understanding of national defence and rearmament was conceived on an ideological and moral basis, as well as a strategic and military one. The content and tone of Navy League pronouncements, of course, reflect Navy League policy at that time. Yet, Nelson Day messages and the public pronouncements surrounding the League’s commemoration of Trafalgar Day towards the end of the decade were far less militaristic and patriotic in tone than one might expect. This resulted in part, as we have seen, from the focus on the development of the SCC and the Merchant Navy, but the tone of Nelson Day messages are surprising nonetheless. They revolved around naval strength and military duty, but they were by no means a call to arms.

The Nelson Day message in 1934 warned that the ‘future security of the Empire hangs precariously in the balance, for we are no longer supreme by sea, land or air, and our security depends on whether the peoples of the Empire are prepared and determined to maintain their strength at sea’.¹¹⁰ The League was sensitive to the importance of air power,

¹⁰⁹ MSSC, Navy League Pamphlets, NLAR 1931, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ ‘The President’s Trafalgar Day Message’, *The Navy*, November 1934, p. 317.

as we have seen, although still placed primacy on the Navy for protecting trade and shipping routes. The 1935 Nelson Day message was somewhat more ominous in tone: ‘crisis and the creeping mists of war have reawakened the sense of reality and exposed the perils of a weakened Fleet’.¹¹¹ The Nelson Day dinner that year boasted a particularly impressive guest list, including Jellicoe, Sir Roger Keyes, Churchill, Lord Derby, and Lord Runciman. Lord Lloyd described how the League had throughout ‘this long and dark decade of opportunism and naval neglect’ attempted to make clear the need for a ‘strong, sufficient and a supreme Navy’. The League’s sentiments clearly had the sympathy of the principal speaker Jellicoe, who declared ‘the voice of a powerful nation carries weight: that of a weak one does not’.¹¹²

The Nelson Day message of 1936 appears to be the last formal one before the outbreak of the Second World War, although the League continued Trafalgar Day commemorations and Nelson Day dinners. The 1936 Nelson Day message spoke of the ‘country going to work in earnest to make good the dangerous gaps in her defences and to build her fleets again’. Reflecting on the League’s work, the message spoke of how ‘the Navy League through many years, in all the alternating gusts of apathy and enthusiasm, has laboured diligently, unceasingly and successfully to see that the great lesson taught at Trafalgar is not forgotten or ignored’. ‘We are’, the message continued, ‘entering a new phase of national and Imperial endeavour . . . The Navy League has greater responsibilities and new opportunities . . . the Navy League means to shoulder these responsibilities and seize these opportunities.’¹¹³

One feature of Trafalgar Day in 1936 was the publication of a poem by Alfred Noyes. Speaking at the Nelson Day dinner that year, Noyes declared that ‘we shall never

¹¹¹ ‘The President’s Trafalgar Day Message’, *The Navy*, November 1935, p. 320.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 328.

¹¹³ ‘Trafalgar Day Message from the President of the Navy League’, *The Navy*, November 1936, p. 296.

get peace in Europe again until we discover some sure process for the safeguarding of the principal of right and wrong, and in the meantime the British Navy is the most salutary factor in the world to-day'.¹¹⁴ At the Nelson Day dinner, Sir Samuel Hoare, as First Lord of the Admiralty, was the principal speaker. This was the first time that an active first lord had attended a Navy League dinner, highlighting the symbiotic relationship that existed between League and Admiralty towards the Second World War.

Speaking at the Nelson Day dinner in 1938, Lord Lloyd, welcomed his guests by describing the mobilisation of the Royal Navy during the Munich Crisis as 'the only effective argument in the conversations that took place on the other side of the channel'.

Reflecting on the Navy League's work, Lloyd continued

in the days of toil and sacrifice that await us in the near future, the Navy League has a great part to play. Throughout the last 10 years of pacifism and disarmament, the Navy League has never ceased for one day in the year, with its speakers up and down the country, to warn this country of the dangers of Lord Baldwin's policy of disarmament; the Navy League has an even greater part to play in the future.¹¹⁵

This was Lloyd's last Trafalgar Day address before the war. Underlying this message were themes of duty, sacrifice, and patriotism – features of much Navy League rhetoric throughout the interwar years.

VI. Conclusion

The Navy League's commemoration of Trafalgar Day on 21 October 1939, over a month after the outbreak of the Second World War, was marked, as *The Times* reported, by a 'quicken interest and depth of feeling that are natural at a time when the best-loved of British sailors lives again in the thoughts of his people as he has always lived in the thoughts of the Royal Navy'.¹¹⁶ The annual inspection of the SCC was cancelled and

¹¹⁴ 'Navy League Dinner', *The Navy*, November 1936, pp. 309–310.

¹¹⁵ 'Navy League Dinner', *The Navy*, November 1938, p. 336.

¹¹⁶ 'Trafalgar Day', *The Times*, 23 October 1939, p. 5.

Nelson's Column lacked the usual resplendent decorations. There had been a plan to unveil memorial fountains to Jellicoe and Beatty, although this was also cancelled due to the outbreak of war. The League's Nelson Day dinner was also cancelled and no Nelson Day message was published. However, Admiral Sir Sydney Freemantle placed a wreath on Nelson's Column on the Navy League's behalf, which read 'In memory of those who fought at sea in the past for Britain's freedom, and in gratitude to the seamen of Britain and France, fighting side by side to-day'.¹¹⁷ On the Navy League's celebrations that year, *The Navy* wrote that: 'thus, in a new spirit, the Navy League paid its tribute to the defences of freedom. In doing so, the Navy League, strong in its own faith, made testimony of its confidence that sea power still rules the events of man and that sea power will determine this dreadful and abhorrent conflict.'¹¹⁸

Although the reception of the day is somewhat difficult to gauge, the manner in which Trafalgar Day was celebrated throughout Britain suggests that the day still had resonance for many. Thousands were yearly reported to have been present at Trafalgar Square although, as we have seen, commemorations went far beyond central London. Trafalgar Day was widely reported on and was supported by a number of key political figures, across the political spectrum. Trafalgar Day was also supported by many members of the Admiralty. Trafalgar Day was just one of the ways in which the navy remained an important cultural symbol in the interwar years.

This chapter has charted the evolving, adapting, and shifting meaning of Trafalgar Day from its 'invention' in 1895 to the outbreak of the Second World War. The study of Trafalgar Day provides a lens to view the changing nature of navalism and of the scope, scale, and significance of the Navy League itself. Nelson Day messages reflect the changing

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ 'Old and New', *The Navy*, November 1939, p. 341.

nature of the Navy League's politics and views on a wide array of subjects from internationalism, collective security, and pacifism, to empire, conceptions of national identity, and naval supremacy. The Navy League's message, of course, also changed over time. Far from becoming irrelevant at the outbreak of the First World War, the League attempted to impress upon the British public the importance of the Nelsonian spirit of patriotism, duty, and self-sacrifice. The lesson of Trafalgar and Nelson was consistently altered by the Navy League according to circumstance. Nelson could be used in League discourse which rallied against pacifism and disarmament, yet he could also be used to represent ideas of national identity. Upon the outbreak of the Second World War, the Navy League once again called upon the spirit of Nelson, issuing his famous clarion call: 'England expects that every man will do his duty'.

Chapter 7: ‘Millions of Eyes Were Turned Skywards’: The Air League, Empire Air Day, and the Promotion of Air-mindedness, c.1934–1939

On Saturday 20 May 1939, over one million people throughout Britain were present at 78 civil and military aerodromes. Marking the ‘coming-of-age’ of the RAF as a separate service, visitors witnessed a range of activities that day: formation flying, dive bombing, aerobatics, parachuting, balloon bursting, and even ‘crazy’ flying.¹ Spectators saw over 5,000 aeroplanes – including the latest types of fighters and bombers such as Spitfires, Blenheims, and Hurricanes – ‘[h]urling through the air, their engines roaring’, representing ‘the world’s finest aircraft’ and demonstrating the ‘winged might’ of Britain.² These performances formed part of Empire Air Day – an annual event that the Air League had launched in 1934. Reviewing the activities of 1939, the League was clearly satisfied with the progress that had been made, confidently proclaiming: ‘we have become an air-minded nation’.³ *The Aeroplane* responded with similar enthusiasm, referring to ‘one of the greatest aviation demonstrations in our history’ which had ‘demonstrated how air-minded our country has become and the secure and abiding place the Royal Air Force occupied in the hearts of our people’.⁴

A substantial literature exists on the military, political, and diplomatic aspects of aviation, giving credence to Allan English’s observation that little research has been carried out into the military culture of air forces.⁵ However, while the cultural, symbolic, visual,

¹ ‘Empire Air Day’, *The Times*, 22 May 1939, p. 9; ‘Pageant of 5,000 ‘Planes’’, *Daily Mail*, 20 May 1939, p. 11.

² ‘Britain to Show Her Air Might To-Morrow’, *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 19 May 1939, p. 5; ‘Empire Air Day Thrills’, *The Western Morning News and Daily Gazette*, 22 May 1939, p. 4.

³ ‘The Air League to its Members’, *Air Review*, July 1939, p. 8.

⁴ ‘Empire Air Day’, *The Aeroplane*, 25 May 1939, p. 646.

⁵ The literature is vast – see e.g. Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*; Hyde, *British Air Policy*; Smith, *British Air Strategy*. Allan D. English, *Understanding Military Culture: A Canadian Perspective* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), p. 7.

material, and performative aspects of aviation have been the subject of more recent scholarly enquiry, the celebration of Empire Air Day has received curiously little attention.⁶

This chapter redresses this imbalance by examining the Air League's creation of Empire Air Day, the social, cultural, and political responses to the display, and the League's promotion of airmindedness in the late 1930s. It argues that Empire Air Day – an important and largely militarised part of popular civic ritual – enabled the Air League to place before the British public a form of 'popular' militarism that was not only accepted, but widely celebrated. In doing so, it contributes to the growing literature on the cultural history of aviation and military spectacle in several ways. It advances our understanding of how 'aerial theatre' linked the aeroplane to the nation prior to the Second World War – as a symbol of modernity and technological prowess, but also as an instrument of deterrence.⁷ It also examines how Empire Air Day was linked to empire, in both rhetoric and practice. Moreover, the chapter highlights the interrelationship between the Air League and the Air Ministry, demonstrating how the Air Ministry valued aerial theatre as a vehicle for recruitment, propaganda, and as a way to project an image of military strength. More broadly, the study of Empire Air Day offers a fresh perspective on the ways in which British society interacted with – and ascribed meaning to – technology, technological change, modernity, and the visual and material culture of conflict in a period of high international tension.

The previous chapter detailed the importance of naval civic ritual for the Navy League and in the promotion of navalism more broadly. It showed the ways in which Trafalgar Day was used as a vehicle to construct national and naval identity and to champion

⁶ See, for example, Haapamaki, *The Coming of the Aerial War*; Holman, *The Next War in the Air*; Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire*; Wohl, *The Spectacle of Flight*; Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*.

⁷ I owe the term 'aerial theatre' to Brett Holman. Holman, 'The Militarisation of Aerial Theatre'.

military power. Both Trafalgar Day and Empire Air Day were linked by common themes such as empire and nation. Each was important to the Navy and Air League respectively for the promotion of specific messages and ideas, yet the use of civic and military ritual by each League was different in various ways. As we have seen, Trafalgar Day was largely characterised by tradition, heritage, and naval nostalgia, commemorating a high point in British naval supremacy. Of course, its meaning shifted and the legacy of Nelson was re-appropriated according to circumstance. Yet, tradition was undoubtedly at the heart of Navy League ritual and commemoration. Conversely, the Air League's contribution to civic ritual – in the form of Empire Air Day – was less concerned with heritage and tradition, but with modernity, technological innovation, and military theatre.

This chapter's line of enquiry draws on Holman's recent work on the militarisation of aerial theatre in Britain and Australia in the interwar years. The most successful format to promote airmindedness within society in the interwar years was, according to Holman, through what he labels 'aerial theatre': a 'spectacular display of aviation'.⁸ Aerial theatre, Holman argues, 'offers a new way to approach popular understandings of technology and modernity, nation and empire, war and peace. It was a spectacular and persuasive form of popular culture.'⁹ The focus on the visual, symbolic, and performative aspects of flight as a lens through which to explore wider themes of empire, nation, and, in particular, militarism, will be similarly employed in examining the cultural and political significance of Empire Air Day.

If one accepts the interpretation advanced by Jon Lawrence that, following the First World War, Britain became a 'peaceable kingdom' one would expect overt expressions of

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 484.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 499.

militarism to enjoy little resonance.¹⁰ However, the case of Empire Air Day shows that institutional, cultural, and popular forms of militarism were able to continue despite the fear of post-war brutalisation, anti-war sentiment, the growth of internationalism, the popularity of interwar peace movements, pacifism, and the support for disarmament and collective security.¹¹

As the introduction to this thesis outlined, one major problem confronting the scholar of militarism is its elusive nature. As has been noted, militarism is traditionally understood as militancy, or aggressive foreign policy on the part of the state, a preponderance of the military in the state and finally, and most commonly, the problem of civil-military relations. This chapter employs a broader understanding of militarism which embraces popular and cultural forms. Aerial theatre was a politically and culturally acceptable way of promoting rearmament, popular militarism, and the military capabilities of the British state in the prelude to the Second World War.

As a whole, this chapter aims to demonstrate that Empire Air Day occupied an important part of popular civic ritual in the prelude to the Second World War. To do so, it will first examine the creation, content, and nature of Empire Air Day. It will then focus on aspects that were central to the day and on the tropes that the rhetoric of aerial theatre largely revolved around – namely airmindedness, youth, empire, and nation. Finally, it will look at how Empire Air Day was received by both state and society. Before examining Empire Air Day itself, however, it is necessary to outline the place of airmindedness in interwar Britain.

¹⁰ Lawrence, 'Forging a Peaceable Kingdom', p. 588.

¹¹ Ibid.

I. Aerial Theatre and the Promotion of Airmindedness before Empire Air Day

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, the Air League's promotion of airmindedness was not simply concerned with national defence, but was centred around national might and prestige. However, the creation of airmindedness in Britain resulted not just from aerial pageants of military might, but also from the celebrity status enjoyed by the aviator. According to Bernhard Rieger, aviators 'became the subject of curiosity verging on the obsessive' following the First World War.¹² Aviation and the aviator were prominent in a range of juvenile fiction, novels, magazines, and films, while huge crowds were reported to have welcomed back aviators like Alan Cobham and Amy Johnson from their respective flights to Australia in 1926 and 1930.¹³

Flying also played an important part in sporting events during the interwar years. The King's Cup, celebrated from 1922, was Britain's principal annual air race. The Schneider Trophy, the most famous international air race in the period, was held in Britain in 1919, 1923, 1929, and 1931 and afforded the chance 'to prove that Britain led the world in aircraft design and engine manufacture'.¹⁴ The race played an important part in the creation of national prestige and was described 'as an abiding memorial of British supremacy in the air'.¹⁵ When the Labour Government confirmed at the start of 1931 that it would no longer finance the race, it met with widespread opposition.¹⁶ The Air League was one of the principal opponents to the decision, immediately contacting Sir William Mackenzie (1st Baron Amulree), Secretary of State for Air from 1930 to 1931, to protest.¹⁷ The League also

¹² Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity*, p. 117.

¹³ Paris, *Warrior Nation*, pp. 157–163; 'Sir Alan Cobham's Flight', *Air League Bulletin*, October 1926, p. 20; 'Miss Amy Johnson Honoured', *Flight*, 15 August 1930, p. 916. For a discussion of flyers in the Second World War, see Francis, *The Flyer*.

¹⁴ Pugh, *We Danced All Night*, p. 309.

¹⁵ 'If We Let the Schneider Trophy Go', *Daily Mail*, 23 January 1931, p. 11.

¹⁶ Commons Sitting, Schneider Trophy Race, *HC Deb 26 January 1931 vol 24 cc605-7*.

¹⁷ 'Schneider Trophy', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 27 January 1931, p. 7.

issued a strongly worded letter to the press, declaring that ‘never before has [any]one interested in the Nation’s prestige in the air world been so shocked as by the unutterable stupidity of the Government’s decision not to contribute to towards the expense of the contest this year’. It continued, stating that the winning of the Trophy was more than an advertisement of British aircraft and pilots but was the embodiment of the country’s brains and numerous industries and a ‘symbol of national skill’. The letter concluded by warning that to ‘permit a stupid, fuzzy-brained Cabinet to throw away a national asset of this order simply must not be tolerated. By such deeds shall we be brought to disaster.’¹⁸ Such pressure no doubt contributed to MacDonald’s announcement that RAF personnel and machines could be used, provided that the RAC could raise £100,000 to cover the costs. It was Lady Houston who donated the £100,000 necessary to fund the British team, declaring that she was ‘utterly weary of the lie-down-and-kick-me attitude of the socialist Government . . . I live for England and want to see England always on top’.¹⁹

The distinctly militaristic tradition of aerial theatre had a long and distinguished pedigree in British civic life. Empire Air Day was preceded by the Hendon Air Displays of 1920 to 1937 which, as David Omissi notes, ‘turned the progress of British military aviation into a yearly ritual, and drew attention to one of the main justifications of an independent air force’.²⁰ As a form of aerial and imperial theatre, it was highly politicised, distinctly militaristic, and even ‘war-like’.²¹ Spectators saw ‘formation flying . . . air races, parachute descents, bombing demonstrations, mock battles between fighters and bombers, parades of

¹⁸ ‘The Schneider Trophy’, *Daily Mail*, 22 January 1931, p. 8.

¹⁹ Jack Williams, ‘The Upper Class and Aeroplane Sport between the Wars’, *Sport in History*, vol. 28, no. 3 (2008), pp. 460–461. A further example of airmindedness in Britain, linked to patriotism, nation, and empire, can be seen in the response to the Mount Everest Expedition in 1933. See Patrick Zander, ‘(Right) Wings over Everest: High Adventure, High Technology and High Nationalism on the Roof of the World, 1932–1934’, *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 21, no. 3 (2010), pp. 300–329.

²⁰ David E. Omissi, ‘The Hendon Air Pageant, 1920–1937’, in John M. Mackenzie (ed.), *Popular Imperialism and the Military* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 206.

²¹ ‘The Set Piece’, *Flight*, 1 July 1932, p. 598.

the latest weaponry', and aeroplanes 'swooping down upon hordes of many-coloured "Wot Knotts" . . . blowing *everything* up with terrific bangs'.²² These set-piece bombings drew attention to the RAF's imperial role in the 1920s and nearly always featured aeroplanes 'swooping down upon vicious but comically bewildered "natives"'.²³ The set-piece bombings were used to emphasise the importance of the RAF in terms of empire, yet the inclusion of industrial and more distinctly European scenarios in the late 1920s also points to the ways in which Hendon was linked to the preservation of Britain.²⁴

Britain's imperial aerial policing was, in part, used to affirm the belief in European racial superiority; as Omissi observes, and as the previous descriptions suggest, 'perhaps the most striking feature of the imperial set piece was its racism'.²⁵ The highly militaristic nature of Hendon was also not lost on some observers. Geoffrey Dorman, the sub-editor of *The Aeroplane*, felt that the audience at Hendon understood, and approved of, the militaristic and patriotic symbolism of the event: 'Judging by the vast crowds gathered to see a purely warlike display without any civil interest in it whatsoever . . . there is still some difficulty in believing that we are a Pacifist . . . Nation'.²⁶ Another journalist, in the same paper, described the display in a similar manner: 'In spite of the soothing influence of Communist schoolteachers, children still love to see things blown up and burn'.²⁷ It was feared that Hendon elicited militaristic and 'martial impulses' in children, with the ILP worrying that Hendon was an 'attempt to create a war-minded people'.²⁸

²² Pugh, 'We Danced All Night', p. 310; 'The Set Piece', *Flight*, 1 July 1932, p. 598.

²³ Omissi, 'Hendon', p. 204.

²⁴ Holman, 'The Militarisation of Aerial Theatre', p. 489.

²⁵ Omissi, 'Hendon', p. 204.

²⁶ 'On the R.A.F. Pageant', *The Aeroplane*, 4 July 1928, p. 1.

²⁷ Cited in Omissi, 'Hendon', p. 213.

²⁸ Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Weekend: A Social History of Great Britain, 1918–1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940), p. 269; LSE, ILP Papers, ILP/10/10/41, Report of Committee on Hendon Campaign, 1935, p. 2.

The more militaristic elements of Hendon, especially the threat of the bomber, were also the focus of other contemporary observers. In *War Over England*, L.E.O. Charlton imagined the next war opening with a surprise attack by German bombers at the Hendon Air Display. The imagined bombing, dubbed the ‘Hendon holocaust’ by Charlton, had a ‘paralysing effect’, resulting in the ‘ruthless slaughter’ of those gathered.²⁹ Moreover, because the event was attended by MPs, cabinet ministers, dignitaries, and high-ranking military officials, the bombing was particularly significant. For the Air Force, because it was essentially present ‘*en bloc*’, the blow was ‘almost mortal’.³⁰ Charlton’s account gives a sense, albeit in fairly sensationalist terms, of the fear of the bomber, the vulnerability of civilians to aerial bombardment, and of the significance of air displays in terms of the nation and national defence. Furthermore, because of the accidents at Empire Air Day in 1937 (which will be examined later), such depictions were not too far removed from reality, even if they occurred on a much smaller scale than Charlton envisioned.

Hendon was well attended. Spectator numbers exceeded 100,000 in 1928 and by 1937 attendances reached 179,000.³¹ However, following the success of the first Empire Air Day in 1934, the Air Ministry recommended that the day ‘be accepted as an annual institution and that it should be developed with a view to ultimately replacing the Hendon Display’. The Air Ministry thought that the greatest advantage of this was that ‘it enables the public from a wide area to come and see the Air Force instead of confining the occasion practically to the south-east of England’ and that ‘Empire Air Day also provides an opportunity of a more intimate and more informal inspection of Royal Air Force activities’.³² Such was the

²⁹ Charlton, *War Over England*, p. 158; p. 161; p. 164.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

³¹ Williams, ‘Aeroplane Sport between the Wars’, p. 458.

³² TNA AIR 2/4421, Empire Air Day, 1934, Report on opening of Royal Air Force Aerodromes and Stations to the Public, 29 October 1934, p. 2.

success of the first Empire Air Day that the Air Ministry considered extending it to an 'Empire Air Week', although no agreement was reached on the matter.³³

Empire Air Day was not, however, the Air League's only, or even first, initiative which involved aerial theatre. While Chapter 1 discussed the League's failure to secure support for an air day at the British Empire Exhibition in 1924, proposals for some form of aerial theatre intensified in the early 1930s. In October 1931, the League was considering, alongside a number of other organisations, creating an 'International Civil Air Week'.³⁴ The chief objectives of the scheme were increased membership and publicity for the League. In attempting to achieve this, the week was provisionally arranged to coincide with Hendon and the King's Cup.³⁵ The emphasis on the civil side of aviation in the League's scheme is important to note, especially given the misgivings of Groves, Thwaites, Balfour, and others over the perceived pacifism of the League. While Empire Air Day attempted to showcase both the civil and military sides of aviation, with the event becoming increasingly militarised by later displays, the emphasis on the civil side of aviation would no doubt have been to the disappointment of certain members of the League. However, while the Air League was able to gain the support of the Air Ministry for an international civil air week in principle, it was unable to secure any financial support for the scheme and so the matter rested in abeyance.³⁶

Alongside proposals for an international civil air week, the Air League was also in discussions with Sir Alan Cobham who approached the organisation with a scheme for a National Aviation Day Tour. Cobham had previously approached the League to request funding for his flight to Australia in 1926 and also suggested the League might considerer

³³ TNA AIR 2/4449, Empire Air Day Arrangements, Agenda for a Meeting to Consider Empire Air Day Arrangements, 15 June 1935, p. 1.

³⁴ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 13 October 1931, p. 3.

³⁵ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 10 November 1931, p. 3.

³⁶ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 12 January 1932, p. 3.

supporting his earlier tour of Britain by holding it under its auspices.³⁷ Writing to the League for support of the National Aviation Day Tour, Cobham stated that he ‘particularly wished to have the Air League associated with the undertaking’ as it would give the League ‘an opportunity of getting in touch with the people’ and aid the League in ‘general propaganda work’.³⁸ The tour, which ran from 1932 to 1935, initially under the auspices of the League, began in April 1932 and included flying demonstrations, aerobatics, parachute displays, and offered spectators the opportunity to fly. In outlining the scheme, Cobham declared that ‘the importance of flying . . . the development of flying cannot be exaggerated. It is so essential that the public of Britain should become airminded.’³⁹ Yet, the League appeared to offer little in the way of practical support.⁴⁰ The Air League was, however, represented at Cobham’s tour and at the British Hospitals’ Air Pageants Tour, which similarly gave flying displays in towns and cities throughout Britain, as ‘an experimental measure’.⁴¹ The propagandistic value of aerial pageants and theatre was evident to the League from the early 1930s, yet it was not until the creation of Empire Air Day that the League was able to place the aeroplane, empire, and nation on a public stage.

II. The Creation, Content, and Nature of Empire Air Day

Empire Air Day was based on a proposal in October 1933 by Chamier to Sir Edward Ellington, the then Chief of Air Staff. Such an initiative, Chamier argued, could help to ‘get the public inside aviation’ and ‘give the public an ‘insight into the everyday life of the Royal

³⁷ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 27 May 1926, pp. 4–5; AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 24 May 1928, p. 1.

³⁸ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 8 December 1931, p. 3.

³⁹ ‘National Aviation Day’ (London: British Pathé, 1932–1935). See also ‘The Air Circus’ (London: British Pathé, 1932).

⁴⁰ For example, it was unable to provide Cobham’s tour with exhibitions of model aeroplanes as requested, although it did give the tour its ‘moral support’. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 6 April 1933, p. 2.

⁴¹ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 14 June 1933, p. 2.

Air Force'.⁴² The idea was 'not to keep the public behind fences but to let them roam about like they do on aboard the battleships'.⁴³ The Air Ministry felt that 'the object of R.A.F. participation in Empire Air Day is to afford some opportunity to the public of seeing the normal life and working conditions at R.A.F. stations'.⁴⁴

The displays were supposed to be 'at home' days, with *The Times* warning audiences that they 'must not expect flying displays or any spectacular variation of the normal duties'. However, in fact, aerodromes hosted a variety of activities on Empire Air Day: dive bombing, formation flying, blind flying, aerobatics, artillery observation, defence tactics, air combats between bombers and fighters, attacks on towed targets, and machine-gun attacks on ground targets.⁴⁵ While such activities were considered to come under the 'normal programme of training', they were often visually spectacular. There was certainly confusion within many aerodromes about what exactly the form of the displays should take.⁴⁶ In 1937, an Air Ministry memorandum stressed that the displays were supposed to fall 'within the scope of training' whereas '[e]xhibitions of "crazy" flying are not to be given'.⁴⁷ However, as a separate Air Ministry memorandum conceded two years earlier, 'the term "normal training" . . . is elastic'.⁴⁸

While Empire Air Day was designed to provide an insight into both civil and military aspects of British aviation, it was the military side of flying that people were seemingly most attracted by. Interestingly, given the ADCC's militaristic nature, Chamier expressed

⁴² TNA AIR 2/4421, Proposals for an Air Day by the Air League of the British Empire, Letter from Secretary-General of the Air League Air Commodore J.A. Chamier to Air Chief Marshal Sir Edward L. Ellington, 25 October 1933, p. 1.

⁴³ TNA AIR 2/4421, Chamier to Ellington, p. 1.

⁴⁴ TNA AIR 2/4421, Empire Air Day, 1935. Memorandum, Object of R.A.F. Participation, April 1935, p. 1.

⁴⁵ 'Empire Air Day', *The Times*, 11 April 1934, p. 11. For a fairly typical programme of Empire Air Day events, see TNA AIR 2/4445, Royal Air Force Official Programme, Empire Air Day, 1937.

⁴⁶ Commons Sitting, Royal Air Force (Air Day), *HC Deb 09 April 1935 vol 300 c966*; TNA AIR 2/4422, Empire Air Day – Flying Regulations, 6 August 1937, p. 1.

⁴⁷ TNA AIR 2/4442, Empire Air Day Arrangements 1937, Memorandum No. 1, 12 March 1937, p. 4.

⁴⁸ TNA AIR 2/4449, Agenda for Conference on Empire Air Day Arrangements, 19 June 1935, p. 1.

misgivings in 1939 about the form that Empire Air Day had taken. Chamier felt that ‘the idea of an “At Home” [day] had rather been lost and the day was in danger of becoming a series of miniature “Hendons”’.⁴⁹ Chamier also expressed these views publicly, writing in *Popular Flying* that he ‘regret[ted] more than anything else the complete militarisation of an event designed to embrace all aviation’ and desired ‘less pageantry’ from Empire Air Day.⁵⁰ However, as Peter Adey remarks, ‘although the displays were themed on the idea of being ‘at home’ and opening up local RAF stations to their communities, their ambitions composed a far more extensive sphere of influence . . . the airshows aimed to stimulate interest in British aviation and its capabilities as a strategic and global force.’⁵¹ Contemporaries also felt that the day’s importance lay in stressing the military significance of aviation. For example, a writer in the BUF’s, *The Fascist Week*, suggested that ‘whilst it must be admitted that the public interest in civil aviation needs stimulating, the fact that military aviation is being shamefully neglected, must not be forgotten’. The lesson of Empire Air Day, declared the article’s sub-heading, was that ‘Britain’s National Security is at Stake’.⁵²

The civil aspects of Empire Air Day certainly appeared to have been overwhelmed in the later displays. In 1934, civil aerodromes comprised over a third of the aerodromes open on Empire Air Day.⁵³ However, by 1939, of the 78 aerodromes taking part, only 4 were ‘purely civil aerodromes’.⁵⁴ Many of the events at civil aerodromes also merely reflected those at RAF aerodromes – mock battles, formation flying, bombing set pieces, and

⁴⁹ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 13 April 1939, pp. 1–2. This exact criticism was levelled at the Air League in a letter to *Flight*, although Chamier denied that the Air League had any intentions of creating ‘miniature Hendons’. ‘Empire Air Day Criticisms’, *Flight*, 22 June 1939, p. 642.

⁵⁰ ‘The Significance of E.A.D.’, *Popular Flying*, June 1939, p. 101.

⁵¹ Adey, *Aerial Life*, p. 61.

⁵² ‘Necessity for Air Strength Parity’, *The Fascist Week*, 18–24 May 1934, p. 3.

⁵³ ‘“Exhibits” Publicly Inspected on Empire Air Day’, *The Illustrated London News*, 26 May 1934, pp. 810–811.

⁵⁴ ‘Empire Air Day’, *The Times*, 1 April 1939, p. 12.

aerobatics etc.⁵⁵ Chamier lamented that '[m]ost of the civil aerodromes seem to have been overawed by the magnitude and magnificence of the military air pageants and to have felt themselves unable to participate in the scheme – no doubt fearing that their own small shows would bring them into contempt'.⁵⁶ This suggests that, although Empire Air Day represented a form of militarism that was not only acceptable, but widely popular, the Air League was not entirely content with the character of the display by the late 1930s.

Empire Air Day was propaganda in symbolic, visual, and ritual form, and the Air League made extensive use of public ritual and aerial theatre to legitimate its aims and objectives, to disseminate its message to the widest possible audience, and to put the air force and the nation on a public stage.⁵⁷ Figures such as Noel-Baker certainly understood Empire Air Day as propaganda, arguing the purpose of which was 'to influence public opinion, in order to determine the actions of the Government'. He noted that the nature of such propaganda could be 'summed up in two words: "great armaments"'.⁵⁸ While Noel-Baker's criticism may have been somewhat polemical, aerial theatre was clearly not devoid of ideological content. As Kenworthy noted in 1927, the RAF display at Hendon helped to 'inure the popular mind to the prospect of further wars and to familiarise it with the spectacle of death thrown from the heavens'.⁵⁹ In particular, Kenworthy protested the effect of such displays on children, writing that Hendon constituted a 'deliberate attempt' to 'familiarise the minds of school-children with the idea of war'.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ See, for example, 'Empire Air Day', *Reading Mercury*, 27 May 1939, p. 8; 'Empire Air Day', *The Leighton Buzzard Observer*, 23 May 1939, p. 5; and 'Empire Air Day', *Coventry Herald*, 29 April 1939, p. 1.

⁵⁶ 'The Story Behind Empire Air Day', *Flying*, 27 May 1939, p. 7.

⁵⁷ Much like naval theatre prior to the First World War: see Rüger, *The Great Naval Game*, p. 1. For military spectacle more generally, see Myerly, *British Military Spectacle*.

⁵⁸ Noel-Baker, *The Private Manufacture of Armaments*, p. 293.

⁵⁹ Cited in Holman, 'The Militarisation of Aerial Theatre', p. 499.

⁶⁰ Kenworthy, *Will Civilisation Crash?*, p. 187. However, his opposition to such displays was seemingly short-lived. By mid-1931, as has been noted, Kenworthy agreed to join the Air League's Executive Committee, later becoming a vice president, and was even part of the League's sub-committee considering proposals for an international air week in December 1931. AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 16 June 1931, p. 1; AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 8 December 1931, p. 3.

The Air Ministry certainly saw the propagandistic value of the displays. As Empire Air Day coincided with RAF expansion from 1934, the display provided a platform for the Air Ministry to project its increasing strength and modernity.⁶¹ Empire Air Day illustrates the often symbiotic relationship that existed between the Air League and the Air Ministry. The Air League required Air Ministry permission to use RAF aerodromes and had J.M. Spaight, Principal Assistant Secretary of the Air Ministry, dealing with Lloyds of London over the risks and necessary insurance behind the displays.⁶² Prominent figures from the Air Ministry contributed to programmes, attended displays and, as we shall see, provided ringing endorsements of Empire Air Day. Although the Air League suffered from a lack of funding, proceeds from Empire Air Day were donated to the RAF Benevolent Fund.⁶³ After only two Empire Air Days, *Air Review* claimed that the proceeds generated towards the RAF Benevolent Fund equalled two thirds of the proceeds by all of the Hendon air shows over a 17 year period.⁶⁴ By 1939, the figure raised by Empire Air Day was over £36,000.⁶⁵

Empire Air Day proved to be a useful recruitment tool for the RAF and many were reported to have joined the RAF as a result of the display.⁶⁶ Two days prior Empire Air Day in 1935, the Air Ministry announced a large-scale recruitment scheme with Londonderry appealing ‘to the youth of the nation to join the Royal Air Force’.⁶⁷ Recruitment efforts featured heavily in press coverage of the display that year. As one *Daily Mirror* article suggested, young men

wanted to see what service life really was like, to examine the machine and apparatus and surroundings among which they would live before entering on a new career in the air. Empire

⁶¹ On RAF Expansion Schemes A–M, see Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*, pp. 559–589.

⁶² TNA AIR 2/4421, Letter from J. M. Spaight to Captain A. G. Lamplugh, 1934, p. 1.

⁶³ This fund was established by Lord Trenchard in 1919 to provide assistance to RAF personnel and their dependents.

⁶⁴ ‘The Air League to its Members’, *Air Review*, May 1936, p. 10.

⁶⁵ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 6 June 1939, p. 1.

⁶⁶ For Airshows and recruitment more generally, see Matthew F. Rech, ‘A Critical Geopolitics of RAF Recruitment’ (unpub. PhD thesis, Newcastle University, 2012), especially part two.

⁶⁷ ‘R.A.F. Calls for 22,500 Men’, *The Morning Post*, 24 May 1935, p. 13.

Air Day gave them that opportunity, and for many of them the decision was made on the aerodromes there and then.⁶⁸

The *Manchester Guardian* similarly described ‘a long queue of young men . . . asking for particulars of entry into the Air Force’ and a ‘rush of would-be recruits for the Royal Air Force’.⁶⁹ Of course, Empire Air Day programmes also attempted to aid recruitment. The 1938 programme featured articles on a day in the life of an airman and on the RAF as a career, while Kingsley Wood’s contribution to the 1939 programme focused almost entirely on recruitment.⁷⁰

III. Empire Air Day, Airmindedness, and the Militarisation of British Youth

Attendance figures on Empire Air Day testify to the popularity of the display and certainly appear to be indicative of the airmindedness of many within British society. This especially seems to be the case when one takes into account that many aerodromes were difficult to get to, and three of the six displays were reported to have had particularly bad weather.⁷¹ This is important to note, as poor weather meant that flying programmes could be curtailed or, in some cases, completely abandoned.⁷² Attendance (as measured by ticket sales) in 1934 was around 137,000; in 1935 it was 200,000; in 1936 it was 214,500; in 1937 it was 353,000; by 1938 figures had reached 500,000, although *Air Review* claimed that the figure was closer to 750,000, and, by 1939, over one million people across Britain attended Empire Air Day.⁷³

⁶⁸ ‘Empire Air Day Thrills Helped Scores of Youths to Make up Their Minds’, *The Daily Mirror*, 27 May 1935, p. 9.

⁶⁹ ‘Empire Air Day’, *Manchester Guardian*, 26 May 1935, p. 19.

⁷⁰ TNA AIR 29/568, Royal Air Force Official Programme: Empire Air Day 1938, ‘Call it a Day!’, pp. 45–47; ‘The Royal Air Force as a Career’, pp. 49–53; NAL, Royal Air Force Official Programme: Empire Air Day 1939, pp. 10–11. For a sense of recruitment activities on Empire Air Day see also RAF Museum, Charles Edward Brown Collection, PC 98/173/5838/12, RAF Recruiting Vehicle, Empire Air Day, Hendon, 1939.

⁷¹ ‘Empire Air Day’, *The Aeroplane*, 29 May 1935, p. 616; ‘Empire Air Day’, *The Aeroplane*, 27 May 1936, p. 654; ‘Empire Air Day’, *Air Review*, July 1938, p. 7.

⁷² See, for example, ‘R.A.F. Mass Flight Over Yorks.’, *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 24 May 1938, p. 5.

⁷³ ‘Empire Air Day’, *Air Review*, March 1939, p. 7.

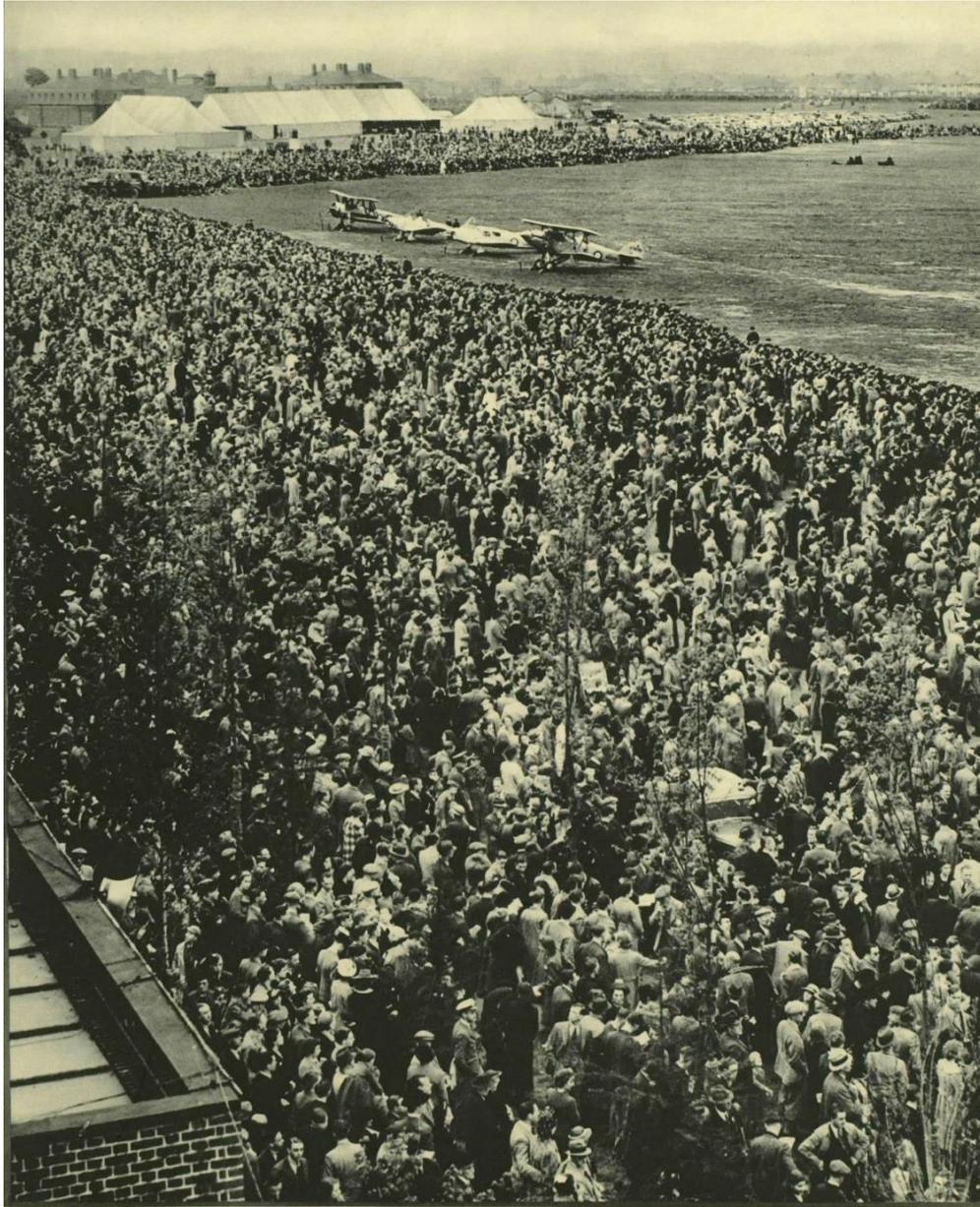


Figure 9: ‘Air-Minded Britain’, *The Illustrated London News*, 27 May 1939, p. 921.

Even if spectators went more than once, this figure of nearly 2.5 million across six displays is remarkable, especially if one considers that non-paying spectators are not factored in. Clearly, as McCarthy argues, ‘the popular culture of militarism . . . remained an important presence in Britain despite the ravages of war . . . the new peace-mindedness of the interwar decades did not attenuate the public thirst for military spectacle.’⁷⁴ Tickets for Empire Air

⁷⁴ McCarthy, *The British People*, p. 137.

Day cost substantially less than for Hendon: one shilling for adults and sixpence (reduced to threepence in 1935) for children, whereas prices at Hendon ranged from two shillings to seven pounds.⁷⁵ In an attempt to achieve the highest possible attendance on Empire Air Day, cheap fares on trains were arranged in connection with the day, with London Transport producing a poster advertising Empire Air Day which told spectators which station to go to in order to get to certain aerodromes in London.⁷⁶ Of course, attendance figures were undoubtedly helped by low admission charges.

Michael John Law notes that Hendon ‘catered for a wide range of visitors, ranging from the society elite, through the wealthy and motorised middle classes to the ordinary Londoner’.⁷⁷ Conversely, Empire Air Day was less concerned with the social elite, but rather with attracting the ‘man in the street’. When the Air Ministry suggested that ‘there should be various prices of admission, the holders of higher priced tickets to receive extra amenities such as seats or special enclosures’ on Empire Air Day, Chamier strongly protested. He pointed out that ‘one of the attractions of E.A.D. was the friendly atmosphere created by the mixing of all classes of people’.⁷⁸ In announcing its plans for Empire Air Day, the League expressed the view that Britain could not ‘take its proper place in aviation “unless there is a proper public appreciation of air matters”’. Empire Air Day is intended to interest the “man in the street.”⁷⁹

Airmindedness was also a recurring trope within newspaper reports – on a local as well as national scale – surrounding Empire Air Day. Describing the first Empire Air Day as ‘an emphatic success’, *The Daily Mirror* deemed it ‘abundantly evident from the large

⁷⁵ Michael John Law, *The Experience of Suburban Modernity: How Private Transport Changed Interwar London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), p. 67.

⁷⁶ ‘News in Brief’, *The Times*, 9 May 1939, p. 11; London Transport Museum, Posters, 1983/4/5030, Poster; Empire Air Day, 1938.

⁷⁷ Law, *The Experience of Suburban Modernity*, p. 67.

⁷⁸ TNA AIR 2/4435, Minutes of a Meeting held at the Air Ministry, 31 January 1938, p. 5.

⁷⁹ ‘Empire Air Day’, *The Times*, 11 April 1934, p. 11.

contingents of visitors to these aerodromes that this country is becoming enthusiastically air-minded'.⁸⁰ The *Daily Mail* similarly declared that 'all Britain must be air-minded . . . the first Empire Air Day marks a new epoch in the development of British flying'.⁸¹ However, one would perhaps expect increasing international tension in the 1930s to limit enthusiasm for Empire Air Day. In fact, the creation of the Luftwaffe, the use of chemical weapons by aeroplanes in the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, the intensive aerial bombardment of Madrid, Guernica, and other areas in the Spanish Civil War, and the increasing likelihood of another war following the Munich Conference in 1938, did little to deter visitors from Empire Air Day.⁸²

Edgerton has observed that 'aeroplanes were associated with England, rather than Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland' and that 'the heart of the association [with aeroplanes] lay in the Home Counties, with the sort of 'Englishness' that foreigners usually understand'.⁸³ Given that roughly half of the aerodromes open on Empire Air Day were located in the Home Counties, and aerodromes in Home Counties often recorded the highest attendances, the same can arguably be said of Empire Air Day.⁸⁴ However, although aeroplanes may be associated with England, particularly following the Battle of Britain and the Blitz, attendance figures outside London were often high, and Empire Air Day was covered in local, as well as national, newspapers.⁸⁵ Spectators across Britain were drawn to Empire Air Day by pageantry, entertainment, and technology.

⁸⁰ '81,000 See Air Day Pageants', *The Daily Mirror*, 25 May 1934, p. 6.

⁸¹ 'Make Britain Air-Minded', *Daily Mail*, 24 May 1934, p. 9.

⁸² See Holman, *The Next War in the Air*, pp. 55–80.

⁸³ Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*, p. xxxvii.

⁸⁴ 'Wings over England', *The Times*, 23 May 1938, p. 11.

⁸⁵ For example, in 1939, attendance at Aldergrove, Northern Ireland was 10,000; in Cardiff, Wales it was 15,000 while Turnhouse, Abbotsinch and Leuchars (all Scotland) had attendance figures of at least 15,000. 'Empire Air Day', *Northern Whig*, 22 May 1939, p. 11; '15,000 see Cardiff Air Display', *Western Mail*, 22 May 1939, p. 8; 'Empire Air Day', *The Scotsman*, 22 May 1939, p. 8. On the most recent intervention into 'four nations' history, see Naomi Lloyd-Jones and Margaret M. Scull (eds), *Four Nations Approaches to Modern 'British' History: A (Dis)United Kingdom?* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

Spectacle was clearly important in drawing crowds yet, so too, was the materiality of Empire Air Day. As one *Flight* article reported, '[o]nce cajoled to an aerodrome, young and old alike become consumed by a raging curiosity to see, touch, sniff and scramble upon aeroplanes at close quarters – especially military aeroplanes'.⁸⁶ As demonstrated in Figure 10, this sensorial and material engagement with aeroplanes particularly appealed to British youth. As *The Times* noted, the display provided an opportunity for 'hundreds of small boys' to climb into cockpits and work bomb release gears for the first time'.⁸⁷ The same newspaper reflected on 'the delight of the average boy at being able to handle a machine-gun and an empty bomb, at being able to sit in the pilot's cockpit'.⁸⁸



Figure 10: 'The Royal Air Force on View', *The Illustrated London News*, 27 May 1939, p. 920.

⁸⁶ 'Empire Air Day', *Flight*, 2 June 1938, p. 539.

⁸⁷ 'The Air Force at Home', *The Times*, 30 May 1938, p. 8.

⁸⁸ 'Empire Air Day', *The Times*, 25 May 1936, p. 9.

The draw of the more militaristic aspects on display was also noted by *The Aeroplane*, who remarked that ‘youth is more warlike . . . at all stations the youngsters crowded round the machine-guns and bombs and weapons of offence’ and described ‘[y]oung England’ as being attracted ‘by the most warlike display.’⁸⁹ Clearly, as a *Dundee Courier* headline declared in 1935, boys were ‘Happy Among the Bombs’.⁹⁰

As well as engaging with offensive weapons of war, boys were also encouraged to learn about, and interact with, items of civil defence – particularly the gas mask. Understandably, this met with conflicting reactions. For example, one journalist wrote that ‘[t]he scene of schoolboys wearing gas masks was a reminder that the next generation may be obliged to wear these grim instruments of protection if gas attacks are launched by air in another war’.⁹¹ While *The Aeroplane* stressed that youngsters ‘inspected with relish [the] gruesome drawings of gas blisters’ and got ‘a great thrill by being fitted with gas masks and being allowed to run about in them and get a whiff of tear gas’, it admitted that this was ‘to the horror of their parents’.⁹² Perhaps unsurprisingly, ADCC members were engaged in a number of activities on Empire Air Day, including selling programmes, drilling, parading, acting as runners and as stewards to car parks, as well as patrolling boundaries.⁹³ The way that children engaged with the material and sensory world of conflict in the form of gas and gas masks points to the further militarisation of the civil home front, and of British youth in particular, which occurred on Empire Air Day.

⁸⁹ ‘Empire Air Day’, *The Aeroplane*, 29 May 1935, p. 616; p. 621.

⁹⁰ ‘Day of Thrills at Leuchars’, *Dundee Courier*, 27 May 1935, p. 6. The inclusion of gas masks and anti-gas protection in Empire Air Day also points to the importance of the materiality of the display in terms of civil defence. See Susan R. Grayzel, ‘Defence Against the Indefensible: The Gas Mask, the State and British Culture during and after the First World War’, *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 25, no. 3 (2014), pp. 418–434 on the materiality of the gas mask and civil defence more broadly.

⁹¹ ‘Air Display Incident’, *The Western Morning News and Daily Gazette*, 27 May 1935, p. 5.

⁹² ‘Empire Air Day’, *The Aeroplane*, 1 June 1938, p. 684; ‘Empire Air Day’, *The Aeroplane*, 29 May 1935, p. 633.

⁹³ ‘News from the Squadrons’, *Air Defence Cadet Corps Gazette*, July 1939, p. 5.

Much like the SCC on Trafalgar Day, youth were clearly an important part of Empire Air Day. Yet, while Trafalgar Day emphasised to boys the long-standing importance of the sea to nation and empire, Empire Air Day offered a much more interactive experience with the visual and material culture of conflict. While Trafalgar Day was undoubtedly military pageantry, it was less overtly militaristic than Empire Air Day and the presence of children at the latter display accordingly received much wider criticism as a result.

On Empire Air Day, school children in parties of 12 or over were offered cheaper tickets, while children under 5 were given free admission. The Boy Scouts and uniformed youth organisations were also permitted free entry to rehearsals.⁹⁴ *The Ploughshare*, the organ of the Teachers Anti-War Movement, hinted at its uneasiness by including a picture of schoolchildren at an Empire Air Day display alongside a discussion on fears of aerial bombardment.⁹⁵ Similarly, when the Air League displayed Empire Air Day posters in schools, the Wood Green Education Committee reacted with hostility. Some members of the Committee felt that ‘these sort of things look like war’ and that Empire Air Day was little more than ‘disguised militaristic propaganda’. While they acknowledged the educational value of the display, members clearly feared that Empire Air Day would engender a martial and militaristic spirit among children, feeling that: ‘we have got to keep education apart from what may be purely militaristic policies’.⁹⁶ Such sentiments were not popular, however, leading to the Committee being labelled as ‘disloyal’ and a ‘disgrace to the borough’ (as well as ‘pretentious pedants’ and ‘attitudinising pedagogues’).⁹⁷ As Empire Air Day was an important recruiting ground for the RAF, children were undoubtedly among the intended

⁹⁴ ‘R.A.F. Displays for Empire Air Day’, *The Times*, 17 May 1939, p. 8.

⁹⁵ ‘Dialogue on Empire Day’, *The Ploughshare*, June–July 1936, p. 6.

⁹⁶ ‘Wood Green Education Committee “Up in the Air”’, *The Wood Green and Southgate Weekly Herald*, 20 April 1934, p. 9.

⁹⁷ ‘Wood Green Borough Council in Aerial Combat’, *The Wood Green and Southgate Weekly Herald*, 25 May 1934, p. 9; ‘Acute Pacifism’, *Air Review*, June 1934, p. 37.

audience of the displays and their vast numbers at aerodromes suggest that militarism, in the form of aerial theatre, proved attractive for British youth.

IV. Empire and Nation

‘The imperial *leitmotif*’, as Rieger argues, has ‘figured as an important, long-standard theme in British discussions about technology’.⁹⁸ Empire Air Day was no exception in this respect. The date chosen for Empire Air Day – namely Empire Day – reflected, of course, a conscious decision.⁹⁹ As *Air Review* made clear, it drew attention ‘to the lesson that the safety and prosperity of the Empire is connected with our place in the air’.¹⁰⁰ The connection of Empire and air power was a key trope in much of the discourse and rhetoric surrounding the display. Lord Londonderry certainly approved of the choice of Empire Day, writing to the Air League that ‘I am very glad that Air Day is being celebrated upon Empire Day, for this happy association shows clearly the great importance which aviation has for the Empire’.¹⁰¹ Such was the importance of Empire Day for the display that the Air League even raised objections to the army’s consideration for an ‘at home’ day falling on Empire Day.¹⁰²

The Air League’s appropriation of Empire Day clearly indicated the importance it accorded to aviation’s imperial dimensions. At the organisation’s Annual General Meeting in 1934, the Duke of Sutherland stressed his desire for the event to become ‘an annual institution’ which would ‘spread beyond the borders of this country to the Empire beyond

⁹⁸ Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity*, p. 231.

⁹⁹ In order to gain the highest possible attendance following Empire Air Day in 1934, Chamier felt that Empire Air Day should be held on the Saturday of Empire Week (if Empire Day did not fall on a Saturday). See TNA AIR 20/594, Empire Air Day 1935, Letter from Chamier to W.L. Welsh, 21 September 1934, p. 1. On Empire Day see English, ‘Empire Day in Britain’.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Empire Air Day’, *Air Review*, May 1934, p. 20.

¹⁰¹ ‘Royal Air Force on View’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 May 1934, p. 13.

¹⁰² TNA AIR 2/4421, Letter from J.A. Chamier to Air Ministry, 22 December 1934, p. 1. Londonderry subsequently wrote to Viscount Halisham, Secretary of State for War, arguing that a clash with Empire Air Day should be avoided and suggested that the Army might instead be able to use Waterloo Day. TNA AIR 2/4421, Letter from Lord Londonderry to Viscount Halisham, 2 January 1935, p. 1.

the seas'.¹⁰³ The published programmes for Empire Air Day would often comment on the importance of aviation for the preservation and defence of empire.¹⁰⁴

Links between empire and Empire Air Day were certainly commonplace in the public pronouncements of many senior Air League members, the Air Ministry, and politicians. However, the display also had resonance beyond Britain. Both Australia and South Africa celebrated Empire Air Day for the first time in 1935. The observance of Empire Air Day also spread to New Zealand and India, with the idea 'taking root' in Canada by 1937.¹⁰⁵ Empire Air Day was even observed in Bermuda by 1939.¹⁰⁶ Empire Air Day emphasised the importance of aviation for imperial unity, communication, and security, as opposed to merely the aeroplane's role in imperial policing. As we have seen, the Hendon displays were markedly imperial in terms and highlighted the importance of aerial bombing for policing the empire. Although there were some bombing set pieces on Empire Air Day, they were far less imperially-themed than the set pieces at the end of Hendon. By the time that the Air League had launched Empire Air Day, the RAF no longer lacked a strategic or ideological purpose with the threat of the bomber helping to preserve the 'RAF's institutional autonomy'.¹⁰⁷

Alongside its imperial role, Empire Air Day revolved around the nation. Domestically, Empire Air Day sought to instil a sense of pride among national audiences by displaying the aerial might of Britain, yet it also attempted to impress upon audiences the importance of the aeroplane for the preservation of Britain itself. Clearly, while the aeroplane has been linked to notions of Britishness after 1940, there was a strong relationship between

¹⁰³ AL, AL Minute Book, Annual General Meeting, 10 July 1934, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, TNA AIR 29/568, Royal Air Force Official Programme: Empire Air Day 1938, 'Air Defence of the Empire', pp. 28–31.

¹⁰⁵ 'Empire Air Day', *Air Review*, May 1939, p. 8; AL Minute Book, Annual General Meeting, 10 July 1935, p. 2; AL, AL Minute Book, Annual General Meeting, 14 July 1937, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ 'News in Brief', *The Times*, 28 March 1939, p. 13.

¹⁰⁷ Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, p. 2.

the aeroplane, aerial theatre, and the nation even prior to the Second World War. Indeed, as Peter Fritzche observes, ‘images of aviation’ could ‘validate claims of national prowess and technological mastery’.¹⁰⁸

Empire Air Day was an arena of deterrence, projecting an image of British aerial superiority to other nations. Speaking on Britain’s defensive forces in March 1938, Neville Chamberlain declared that ‘[t]he sight of this enormous, this almost terrifying power which Britain is building up has a sobering effect, a steadying effect, on the opinion of the world’.¹⁰⁹ While such pronouncements may have overestimated the strength of the German air force, were not necessarily shared by all within the Air Ministry, and may not have reflected the realities of either Fighter or Bomber Commands in mid-1938, Empire Air Day was undoubtedly intended as a performance of power visible to both domestic and foreign audiences.¹¹⁰

Empire Air Day exhibited to spectators the national importance of aviation, with debates about technology and the nation employing both defensive and offensive motifs.¹¹¹ For example, while one report of Empire Air Day in 1939 opened rather solemnly, stating: ‘Look up to the skies and see how Britain is preparing to defend herself against her enemies in the air’, Chamier underlined the more offensive potential of Empire Air Day, writing that ‘the Air Ministry . . . are using Empire Air Day to show the country – and the world – the power of Britain’s reborn Air Arm’.¹¹² Another reporter observed that crowds ‘were left in little doubt’ of the RAF’s efficiency after Empire Air Day, while *The Aeroplane* proclaimed:

¹⁰⁸ Peter Fritzche, *A Nation of Fliers: German Aviation and the Popular Imagination* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 138.

¹⁰⁹ Cited in Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark*, p. 605.

¹¹⁰ Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark*, p. 607.

¹¹¹ On debates surrounding technology and the nation, see Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity*, pp. 224–275.

¹¹² ‘Remember’, *Daily Mail*, 20 May 1939, p. 12; ‘The Significance of E.A.D.’, *Popular Flying*, June 1939, p. 99.

‘service pageantry is an opportunity to reveal to friends and enemies in other lands the type of men and equipment we can put into the field, onto the high seas or in the air when the time comes’.¹¹³ While early descriptions of Empire Air Day centred on the promotion of airmindedness, by the late 1930s the tone of coverage was far more defensive in nature and linked Empire Air Day to the military preparedness of the nation. The Air League, the Air Ministry, and many prominent politicians, as well as both the aviation and popular press, all saw the strategic and military value of Empire Air Day, to show that Britain’s air force did indeed lead the world.

Of course, at this point the state and the Air Ministry’s aim was deterrence. In 1936, Chamberlain spoke of his ‘enthusiasm’ for an air force which, fully developed, would possess ‘terrific striking power,’ which would be ‘the most formidable deterrent to war that could be devised’.¹¹⁴ By 1938, Kingsley Wood wanted ‘[a]n air force . . . built up to a strength sufficient to protect this country and to act as a deterrent to possible enemies, so that whatever the strength of the German air force, Germany itself would risk destruction if they attacked us’.¹¹⁵ The presence of modern aeroplanes such as Hurricanes, Spitfires, Blenheims, Hampdens, Wellingtons, and Whitleys, and the increasing number of monoplanes, which were largely replacing biplanes by 1938, certainly provided an indication of the increasing modernisation of the RAF. The Air League, the Air Ministry and many prominent politicians, as well as both the aviation and popular press, all saw the strategic and military value of Empire Air Day.

While both the Air League and the Air Ministry recognised the potential of aerial theatre for putting the air force and the nation on a public stage, one telling incident of an air

¹¹³ ‘Empire Air Day’, *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo*, 20 May 1939, p. 7; ‘Empire Air Day’, *The Aeroplane*, 8 June 1938, p. 645.

¹¹⁴ ‘Mr. Chamberlain on Peace’, *The Times*, 3 October 1936, p. 7.

¹¹⁵ Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*, p. 544.

attaché of the German embassy being questioned at an aerodrome on Empire Air Day after making notes of certain types of aeroplanes suggests that the Air Ministry was conscious of just how much the displays revealed.¹¹⁶ Similarly, aircraft on the ‘secret’ list were not exhibited to the public and, in late Empire Air Days, the Air Ministry did not want the public examining the cockpits or being given information about the equipment of its modern aeroplanes. Performance figures of aircraft were also prohibited from being included in the programmes.¹¹⁷

The striking visual elements of Empire Air Day lent themselves to film. British Pathé, Gaumont British, and British Movietone all covered Empire Air Day, often in a ‘nationalistic and militaristic manner’.¹¹⁸ Newsreel coverage invariably focused on the spectacular visual elements of the display, particularly formation flying, dive bombing, and aerobatics, pointing to the technological sophistication of the aeroplanes on display. Discussion of Empire Air Day in a war-like manner was commonplace in much newsreel footage: Hurricanes in formation flight were described in one newsreel as keeping ‘their formation like a line of infantry’, and the number of bullets a Spitfire could fire in a minute was also noted. Another newsreel shows a demonstration of fighters ‘repelling the invader’ highlighting the ‘efficiency of British pilots and British machines’.¹¹⁹ By 1939, newsreels assured their audiences that ‘the wealth, skill and determination of this little island has built up a stupendous fleet to take its place among the leaders . . . These pictures tell the world: the

¹¹⁶ ‘German Air Attaché on Airfield “Incident”’, *Evening Standard*, 22 May 1939, p. 15.

¹¹⁷ TNA AIR 2/4422, Empire Air Day: Policy, Letter from Charles Evans to the Secretary of the Admiralty, 28 March 1938, pp. 1–2.

¹¹⁸ Robert Michael Morley, ‘The Screen’s Threatening Skies: Aerial Warfare and British Cinema, 1927–1939’ (unpub. PhD thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2014), p. 113.

¹¹⁹ ‘Hurricane Fighters Rehearsing for Empire Air Day Review’ (London: Gaumont British Newsreels, 16 May 1938); ‘Empire Air Day Rehearsal’ (London: British Movietone, 27 May 1937).

skies are safe for Britain.’¹²⁰ This shift in tone reflected the changing nature of newspaper coverage but also of Empire Air Day itself.

Empire Air Day provided an opportunity to impress upon the British public the more threatening aspects of aviation domestically. Many aerodromes invited members of the public to wear gas masks and walk into a sealed gas chamber, where a ‘quite harmless’ gas would be released simulating a gas attack. They could then walk through a mild concentration of gas without a mask, to see the effect of the gas and function and efficiency of the gas mask. This blurring of civil and military spheres of society was another way of physically reminding ‘post-war inhabitants of the legacy of war waged against civilians at home’.¹²¹ This militarisation of Empire Air Day increased when John Anderson, who served in Chamberlain’s government as Lord Privy Seal and who was tasked with the co-ordination of defence measures, contacted the Air Council in 1939 about the inclusion of ARP exhibits and demonstrations on Empire Air Day. The Air Council subsequently contacted local authorities ‘with a view to the provision, where practicable, of air raid precautions exhibits’.¹²² The Air Ministry clearly felt that more could be done to include ARP displays after only four stations included exhibits of this kind in 1937.¹²³ Although Empire Air Day initially promoted both civil and military aviation, the inclusion of civil defence measures, the shift of tone in newspaper coverage, and the increasing militarisation of the display, reflected the broader preparation of the state for future conflict.

¹²⁰ ‘RAF Demonstration at Northolt Aerodrome’ (London: Gaumont British Newsreels, 29 May 1939).

¹²¹ Grayzel, ‘Defence Against the Indefensible’, p. 434.

¹²² TNA MH 79/184, A.R.P. Department Circular No. 98/1939, Empire Air Day, 2 May 1939, p. 1.

¹²³ TNA AIR 2/4435, Letter to the Air Raid Precautions Department, 8 April 1938, p. 1.

V. The Reception of Empire Air Day

The discussion thus far has stressed the scope and scale of Empire Air Day while also exploring themes of airmindedness, empire, and nation. An assessment of how Empire Air Day was received is more challenging. This is especially so since there is, unfortunately, little trace of audiences recording their reactions to Empire Air Day. Attendance levels are, of course, one important indication of approval. As we have seen, millions attended the event. Millions more would have read about the event in the both national and regional newspapers, the popular aviation press, and seen the display in newsreels.

Empire Air Day – in particular the technological innovation and modernity on display – elicited complex and often contradictory emotional states: fascination, enthusiasm, and excitement coexisted alongside fear, anxiety, and even horror. Rieger has argued that the British experience of modernity, and British responses to modernity, were characterised by ‘ambivalence about the modern that resulted from perceptions of change as both creative and destructive’.¹²⁴ This understanding of technological innovation – and of the emotional response to the aeroplane – can similarly be traced through Empire Air Day. The event occupied an intermediate position between aerial enthusiasm and aerial fear. While crowds could marvel at the speed and sleekness of modern machines, with the Spitfire being lauded as ‘an object of wonder’ by one reporter, the mass flights of fighters and bombers overhead – heralded by ‘the thunder of their engines’ – provided a reminder of the threat posed by the aeroplane.¹²⁵ Indeed, while one Empire Air Day report declared that ‘the giant all metal bombers’ inspired confidence in the spectators that ‘England is prepared for emergencies and does possess some marvellous war weapons’, another reporter noted that ‘spectators saw with mixed feelings the uncanny accuracy with which bombs can be dropped from attacking

¹²⁴ Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity*, p. 11.

¹²⁵ ‘Empire Air Day’, *Alnwick Mercury*, 26 May 1939, p. 5; ‘R.A.F. Wings Over Grimsby’, *Grimsby Daily Telegraph*, 19 May 1939, p. 1.

planes'.¹²⁶ Newsreels similarly spoke of aeroplanes both as 'machines of war' and 'as things of beauty too'.¹²⁷ While there may have been a 'culture of anticipation' in Britain surrounding the aeroplane, clearly it is wrong, as Edgerton has noted, to simply conclude that 'the English were afraid of the aeroplane and that they saw it as a hideous foreign invention'.¹²⁸

Empire Air Day stands in stark contrast to the 'splendid anachronism' of Britain's wider public pageantry in the 1930s.¹²⁹ David Cannadine suggests that pageantry in England was the antithesis of the 'technologically sophisticated forms of ritual' found in Italy, Russia and, in particular, Germany whose use of aeroplanes in rituals 'implied a commitment to technology and an impatience with anachronism'.¹³⁰ However, as a prominent feature of civic life, Empire Air Day clearly points to a commitment to modernity and 'technologically sophisticated forms of ritual'.

There was clearly an appetite within British society for military and martial spectacle in the form of aerial theatre, despite fears of a future war. While some may not have reflected on the more militaristic aspects of Empire Air Day, and attendance alone did not necessarily constitute an endorsement of militarism, spectators did not passively consume aerial theatre and would have been at least somewhat aware of the militaristic nature of Empire Air Day. Of course, this was not the only draw for spectators.

As *The Times* noted, the high attendance levels might also have been attributable to 'the growth of the class of people who have relations in the expanded Air Force, or by the increased interest of those who have been roused by recurrent threats from overseas, or

¹²⁶ 'Empire Air Day', *Boston Guardian*, 3 June 1938, p. 1; 'Empire Air Day at Montrose', *Brechin Advertiser*, 26 May 1936, p. 5.

¹²⁷ 'R.A.F. Hosts Empire Air Day' (London: Gaumont British Newsreels, 25 May 1936).

¹²⁸ Panchasi, *Future Tense*; Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*, p. 70.

¹²⁹ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (London: Allen Lane, 2001), p. 130.

¹³⁰ David Cannadine, 'The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c. 1820–1977', in Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, p. 148.

simply by the desire for a fine afternoon's entertainment'.¹³¹ As Empire Air Day coincided with RAF expansion from 1934, the growth in attendance may also be explained by the increasing scale and modernity of each Empire Air Day, especially as the emphasis at most aerodromes was on the military, rather than civil, aspects of aviation. Higher attendance figures in 1938 and 1939 are also likely to have resulted somewhat from the ending of the Hendon displays in 1937. There were clearly many factors that account for the high attendance figures: the 'air menace' and concerns about Britain's vulnerability to aerial bombardment were clearly important, although it may, of course, simply have been the draw of a fine afternoon's entertainment.

In comparison to popular reactions, the response of the aviation community, the popular press, and public figures is much easier to trace. Empire Air Day was endorsed not only by the Air Ministry, but also by many other leading aviation organisations and societies.¹³² Empire Air Day was publicly supported by an array of influential politicians, military figures, and even members of the royal family. During their respective premierships, both Ramsay MacDonald and Stanley Baldwin commended the Air League for its organisation of the event.¹³³ MacDonald's support is particularly interesting, given his previous assertion that 'so long as militarism in any shape or form exists it is a menace to peace'.¹³⁴ Clearly, militarism in the form of aerial theatre was somewhat palatable. On his visit to Bircham Newton aerodrome, King George V was reported to have been 'greatly

¹³¹ 'Empire Air Day', *The Times*, 22 May 1939, p. 9.

¹³² The SBAC, the RAeS, the RAC – who described the first Empire Air Day as a 'splendid success' – the General Council of Associated Light Aeroplane Clubs, Imperial Airways, the British Gliding Association, as well as the Empire Day Movement all supported Empire Air Day. RAF Museum, RAC Minute Book, Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee of the Royal Aero Club, 30 May 1934, p. 6; AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 30 January 1934, p. 2. However, the SBAC later withdrew their support of the display. See AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 10 April 1934, p. 1; AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 4 February 1936, p. 1.

¹³³ "'At Home" to the Public', *Daily Mail*, 24 May 1934, p. 9; 'Today's Empire Air Displays', *The Daily Telegraph*, 23 May 1936, p. 8.

¹³⁴ Ramsay MacDonald, *National Defence: A Study in Militarism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1917), p. 12.

impressed with the remarkable efficiency of those who took part in the air display'.¹³⁵ Empire Air Day was also supported by the Prince of Wales, Edward VIII. In 1935, he argued that 'it is impossible to exaggerate the importance for the country of the development of air-mindedness, not only among enthusiasts but among the whole population'.¹³⁶ Likewise, King George VI backed the organisation of Empire Air Day. In 1937, the Air League received a message from the King in which he affirmed his conviction that the event would 'afford striking proof of the progress which is being made in aviation'.¹³⁷ Successive Secretaries of State for Air, perhaps unsurprisingly, lent their support to, and attended, Empire Air Day events. Lord Londonderry thought that the day advanced 'both the security of the Empire and the cause of peace'.¹³⁸ Lord Swinton 'did not think there could be anything better for recruiting for the R.A.F.', and Kingsley Wood, whose first flight as Swinton's successor was on Empire Air Day in 1938, thought the day provided 'a convincing demonstration of the power and efficiency of the R.A.F.'.¹³⁹

However, Empire Air Day did not attract universal acclaim. A leaflet issued by the left-leaning UDC outside aerodromes in 1934 criticised the Air League for its opposition to the abolition of civil and military aircraft and for its organisation of Empire Air Day:

You can easily see but for propaganda in the press and displays like the one you have just enjoyed, there would be a fearful danger of the abolition of bombing . . . Thank you for your support. You have not only helped in a small measure the R.A.F. Benevolent Fund, you have done more . . . You have dropped another British bomb to explode disarmament and peace.¹⁴⁰

While *The Aeroplane* dismissed the leaflet as the work of 'half-witted pacifists', 'anti-British Communists', and 'anti-Air Force agitators', it is clear that in some quarters, there was strong

¹³⁵ 'The Royal Visit', *The Aeroplane*, 30 May 1934, p. 861.

¹³⁶ 'The Prince & Air', *Daily Mail*, 22 May 1935, p. 4.

¹³⁷ AL, AL Minute Book, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 8 June 1937, p. 2.

¹³⁸ TNA AIR 2/449, Souvenir of Empire Air Day, produced by *Air Review*, 25 May 1935, 'Foreword by the Marquess of Londonderry', p. 12.

¹³⁹ 'R.A.F. Recruiting', *The Times*, 22 May 1936, p. 11; 'Empire Air Day', *Manchester Guardian*, 28 May 1938, p. 13.

¹⁴⁰ Warwick Digital Collections, Coventry, Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians, Union of Democratic Control, 78/5/14/159, A Souvenir of the Great Empire Air Day of 1934 (leaflet), p. 4.

opposition to the display.¹⁴¹ Indeed, the pacifists of the PPU also criticised Empire Air Day. Forty PPU members distributed posters and 5,000 ‘*Burn the Babies!*’ leaflets outside Castle Bromwich aerodrome in 1937.¹⁴² The leaflet declared that:

There are some things no one would do – not even in the name of Patriotism. For instance, no one, however loyal, would put his neighbour’s baby on fire at the suggestion of the Secretary of State for War . . . Babies, we feel, are neutral . . . But modern warfare means war from the air. War from the air means bombing babies.¹⁴³

Despite the vivid imagery, the pamphlet’s influence is difficult to discern. It certainly did little to deter visitors from aerodromes. The PPU also demonstrated outside Kenley aerodrome in 1938. Posters were displayed, leaflets were distributed, and a small parade took place outside the aerodrome, although such activities were not widely reported.¹⁴⁴ Reflecting on military displays such as Hendon, the Aldershot Tattoo, and spectacles like Empire Air Day, Dick Sheppard, founder of the PPU, had similar objections. Rather than military displays, Sheppard instead called for a ‘great Peace Circus’ to tour Britain which could help ‘shatter the solemn conventions of militarism’.¹⁴⁵

The CPGB’s *Daily Worker* also attacked Empire Air Day, declaring: ‘[t]he “glories” of both the Empire and of the R.A.F., which the Government wants you to celebrate to-day, can only be exposed for what they are – mass murder, poverty, disease and grinding exploitation’.¹⁴⁶ The paper reported a number of protests outside aerodromes. At Bristol, members of the ‘Youth Anti-War Committee went to Filton Air Display with leaflets and posters, exposing its meaning’. This group was also reported to have dropped leaflets from an aeroplane at Romford. In Sheffield and at Hucknall aerodrome, large slogans were painted on the approaches to aerodromes reading “Displays To-day, Bombs To-morrow” and ‘AIR

¹⁴¹ ‘Empire Air Day’, *The Aeroplane*, 30 May 1934, p. 855.

¹⁴² ‘Empire Air Day’, *Peace News*, 12 June 1937, p. 5.

¹⁴³ Peace Pledge Union, ‘*Burn the Babies!*’ (1937), p. [1].

¹⁴⁴ ‘Air Displays were Challenged’, *Peace News*, 4 June 1938, p. 14.

¹⁴⁵ Sheppard, *We Say “No”*, p. 153; p. 156.

¹⁴⁶ ‘Why the R.A.F. is “At Home” on Empire Day’, *Daily Worker*, 24 May 1934, p. 2.

PAGEANT TO-DAY, GAS BOMBS TOMORROW'.¹⁴⁷ Demonstrations against a bombing range at Pwllheli also took place on Empire Air Day, although protests were reportedly drowned out by patriotic crowds singing 'God Save the King'.¹⁴⁸

The fragmented and seemingly sporadic nature of Empire Air Day opposition meant that it ultimately did little to affect the popularity of the display. There was little moderate or popular opposition, with demonstrations largely being carried out by those on the far left, signalling that Empire Air Day, and the promotion of rearmament and popular militarism through aerial theatre, was acceptable to large sections of British society. As Holman has argued, while 9.6 million people voted in favour of the international reduction of aircraft in the Peace Ballot, such sentiment did not prevent huge numbers from attending air displays in the late 1930s. Many spectators 'were seemingly comfortable with the destructive power of the bomber that was soon to be unleashed on their behalf and, in some cases, actually upon them'.¹⁴⁹

The other principal objection to Empire Air Day focused on the risks surrounding the display. From an organiser's point of view, Chamier felt that 'the risks are very much less than those present at any ordinary flying pageant or by the Air Display at Hendon'.¹⁵⁰ The Air Ministry was similarly confident that '[a]ny question of a catastrophe – such as might happen at Hendon – may be ruled out'.¹⁵¹ However, Empire Air Day in 1937 involved the loss of seventeen lives. Four died in rehearsal for the event in a mid-air collision the evening before, while thirteen people, including several civilians, died on the day itself. The deaths resulted from mid-air collisions, crashes during aerobatics, as well as one aeroplane

¹⁴⁷ 'Leaflets Drop from the Air', *Daily Worker*, 26 May 1934, p. 5; 'Wings over the World', *Air Review*, July 1936, pp. 38–39.

¹⁴⁸ 'Wings over the World', *Air Review*, July 1936, pp. 38–39.

¹⁴⁹ Holman, 'The Militarisation of Aerial Theatre', p. 500.

¹⁵⁰ TNA AIR 2/4421, Letter from J.A. Chamier to J.M. Spaight, 24 April 1934, p. 1.

¹⁵¹ TNA AIR 2/4421, Empire Air Day: The Question of Insurance, 1934, p. 2.

crashing into, and setting fire, to a house off the Isle of Man. One woman, who was already recovering in bed from surgery, was rescued from the house but later died of her injuries in hospital. Her husband and son were treated for burns, although fortunately survived.¹⁵² *The Morning Post* described Empire Air Day that year, with some justification, as one of the ‘blackest week-ends in the history of British aviation’.¹⁵³ The *Hull Daily Mail* also depicted the accidents in vivid terms, describing the ‘horribly charred bodies’, ‘women and children scream[ing]’ with ‘one or two’ fainting from seeing the accidents.¹⁵⁴ Another newspaper described the ‘horror of the crowd’ when a man’s parachute failed to open during a display. It reported that ‘women screamed as the body hit the ground with a sickening thud and bounced upwards’. Fortunately, in this case, the figure was a ‘sand-stuffed dummy’.¹⁵⁵

Although an *Air Review* editorial stressed that Empire Air Day did not ‘demand of pilots anything other than they are accustomed to do in normal training for their military duties’ the reasons behind the accidents was the source of considerable debate.¹⁵⁶ The accidents were raised in the House of Commons on several occasions. The cause behind the accidents were discussed, as was the possibility of limiting the type of flying which took place on Empire Air Day.¹⁵⁷ Although *Air Review* expressed dissatisfaction that the accidents were treated as news, a death toll of seventeen was hardly insignificant – especially when contrasted with Hendon, which had only seen one death in seventeen years.¹⁵⁸ Moreover,

¹⁵² ‘13 Deaths Mar Empire Air Day’, *Daily Mail*, 31 May 1937, p. 3.

¹⁵³ ‘Eleven Air Crashes: 17 Deaths’, *The Morning Post*, 31 May 1937, p. 11.

¹⁵⁴ ‘Tragedies, in Race and Displays, Mar Empire Air Day’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 29 May 1937, p. 3.

¹⁵⁵ ‘Grim Week-End Toll of Air Deaths’, *Ballymena Weekly Telegraph*, 5 June 1937, p. 11.

¹⁵⁶ ‘Empire Air Day, 1937’, *Air Review*, July 1937, p. 32.

¹⁵⁷ Commons Sitting, Royal Air Force (Accidents), *HC Deb 31 May 1937 vol 324 cc678-81*; Empire Air Day (Accidents), *HC Deb 28 July 1937 vol 326 cc3095-100* and Empire Air Day (Accidents), *HC Deb 30 June 1937 vol 325 c1955*.

¹⁵⁸ ‘Empire Air Day’, *Air Review*, July 1937, p. 30.

such casualties also highlighted a further way in which Empire Air Day saw clashes of civil and military spheres in society.¹⁵⁹

VI. Conclusion

As this chapter has demonstrated, Empire Air Day represented an important, and largely militarised, part of popular civic ritual in the prelude to the Second World War. It has shown the ways in which Empire Air Day provides an insight into how members of the public engaged with one of the defining technological instruments of the age – the aeroplane – as well as how the Air Ministry valued aerial theatre as a tool of propaganda and recruitment. Linking themes of nation and empire, the Air League was able to create an aerial theatre that, despite its militaristic nature, was supported by large sections of British society, key military figures, members of the royal family, newspapers across the political spectrum, and by politicians of all stripes. While the Second World War halted aerial pageantry, it did not herald an end to such displays. Although the Air League was unable to secure Empire Day as the principal day for public air events following the Second World War, it did support the organisation of the Battle of Britain ‘at home’ days, which began in 1945, as well as continuing to organise its own aerial pageants.¹⁶⁰

Empire Air Day afforded spectators a visual, material, and sensorial engagement with weapons of war, outside of conflict. Despite opposition to Empire Air Day, and despite the risk involved in the event, popular and cultural forms of militarism centred around military spectacle attracted genuine and widespread enthusiasm, especially among youth, in the late 1930s. Aerial theatre enabled the aeroplane to increasingly come to the British public in new,

¹⁵⁹ On public debate surrounding risk, accidents and aerial technology, see Chapter 3 of Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity*.

¹⁶⁰ See TNA BT 217/1310, Air Display at Blackpool (Squires Gate) Airport by Air League of British Empire, 1947–1949.

dramatic, and often distinctly militaristic ways. Indeed, through Empire Air Day, the Air League helped ensure that ‘millions of eyes were turned skywards’.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ ‘81,000 Visit R.A.F. Stations’, *The Western Morning News and Daily Gazette*, 25 May 1934, p. 7.

Conclusion

Reflecting on his organisation's work throughout the interwar years at its Annual General Meeting in July 1939, Sutherland claimed that 'the Air League has done a great deal to awaken the public and the government to a full recognition of the fact that the greatest threat to our security comes from the air and that precautions have to be made against such a threat'. He was satisfied that 'we need now fear no military competitor in the air' and felt that this in part resulted from the 'campaign which has been unremittingly carried on by the Air League since those dark days when the air forces of this country were cut down almost to vanishing point'. Furthermore, Sutherland regarded the changing attitudes towards aviation in the 1930s as 'the greatest success that the Air League has, or could have, achieved', being 'the result of steady and unspectacular propaganda'. He thought Britain's military preparedness and the support for aerial supremacy was particularly remarkable 'in a democratic nation wedded to the cause of peace'.¹ While Sutherland's pronouncements may have somewhat overstated the Air League's influence, through aerial theatre and pageantry in particular, its propaganda often was spectacular and ventured far beyond conventional pressure-group practices.

Only a month earlier at the Navy League's Grand Council Meeting, Lloyd was similarly self-congratulatory. Addressing those in attendance, Lloyd stated that 'the name of the Navy League carried a particular weight to-day. I doubt if there is any other patriotic organisation to-day that has such a solid and respected name in its own sphere.' Lloyd did stress, however, that the League's work was not complete and that it could not allow anyone to forget that 'on naval defence, fundamentally, primarily and finally depends the security of these islands, and that, therefore, the work of the Navy League is required as much to-day

¹ 'The Duke's Speech', *Air Review*, September 1939, p. 8.

as it ever has been before'.² While the tone of Lloyd's address was slightly more reserved than Sutherland's, he was likewise satisfied with the Navy League's work. He felt that the League had played an important part in awakening the British public to the significance of seapower, concluding that it had contributed 'something solid to this awakening, and the further security of the country, and the people, and the Empire'.³

It is clear that the leadership of the Air and Navy Leagues held their work in high regard. Yet, neither organisation was able to attract large memberships, despite boasting an array of influential political and military figures among its supporters. On the other hand, however, the activities of each organisation were able to mobilise public and political support on a mass level and they were able to carry out their work largely as suggested above. Moreover, assessing the legacy of each League through membership numbers alone would be to ignore the significance of both organisations in the political and associational culture of the interwar period.

Each League's influence can, in part, be measured by the opposition they faced. Key liberal internationalist figures – particularly Cecil, Noel-Baker, Murray, Davies, and Angell – all came into conflict with the Air and Navy Leagues as did the LNU more broadly. Other figures on the political left such as Brockway, Attlee, and Laski similarly opposed the Air and Navy Leagues. Anti-war, pacifist, and other left-leaning organisations, including the ILP, the Labour-controlled LCC, the UDC, the PPU, and the CPGB, all likewise objected to the policies or activities of each League. Newspapers on the left, particularly the *Daily Herald*, were also frequently critical. Most of this opposition was principally directed at the character and nature of each League. The Air and Navy Leagues were accused of being militarists, scaremongers, alarmists, jingoists, appendages to the 'merchants of death', and

² 'The Navy League Grand Council Meeting', *The Navy*, July 1939, p. 237.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

even warmongers by their detractors. In the context of the peace-mindedness of the interwar years, such opposition is fairly unsurprising. Certainly, it seems to suggest that ‘British distaste for militarism and patriotic excess was unmistakable after 1918’.⁴ However, the fact that such organisations and figures deemed it necessary to counter Air and Navy League propaganda highlights that, despite a distaste for it, organised militarism had at least some resonance. In fact, there existed a peculiarly British militarism in the interwar years. Peculiar as it relied on two technological arms – the RAF and the Royal Navy – rather than more traditional and conventional forms of Prussian militarism, but also peculiar in the context of the strength of liberal internationalism, pacifism, and anti-war sentiment in the period. Finally, it is peculiar because, according to numerous scholars, there was simply no place for militarism, in any form, in the interwar years.

While neither organisation was able to attain a broad membership – and faced hostility from a number of groups and figures on the political left – they were able to gain the support of a number of influential political figures and members of the establishment. Individuals such as Churchill, Amery, Curzon, Baldwin, and even MacDonald all supported the activities of the Air and Navy Leagues. So, too, did members of the royal family, who supported or spoke in favour of Empire Air Day, Trafalgar Day, the SCC, and the ADCC. Although neither organisation ever formally abandoned its non-party status, Liberal or Labour engagement was fairly low. While neither the Air nor Navy League was merely an auxiliary for the Conservative Party in the interwar years, each had strong links. As has been detailed, each organisation also had a number of strong ties to the far right during this period. Most of these affinities were kept private – and it is difficult to trace their bearing directly

⁴ Hendley, *Organized Patriotism*, p. 225.

on League policy – but they certainly did not stop the Air and Navy Leagues lobbying for increased aerial and naval armaments.

While the Army League was unable to gain the support of the War Office, the Air and Navy Leagues clearly had the backing of the Air Ministry and Admiralty respectively.⁵ Londonderry, Swinton, Wood, Trenchard, Jellicoe, Beatty, Keyes, and a number of others all spoke out in support of the Air and Navy Leagues, or supported the schemes of both. The Air and Navy Leagues were able to cultivate the support of the political and military elite and were able to carry out activities on a local, national, and imperial scale as a result. The Air Ministry and Admiralty undoubtedly saw the propagandistic value of each organisation and worked with the Air and Navy Leagues in their educational activities, their youth organisations, and in the promotion of aerial and naval theatre. Neither League acted simply as a conduit for the dissemination of official views, but as many members had served in the Air Ministry and the Admiralty, as there were a number of shared aims and objectives, and as the Air and Navy Leagues relied upon official support in a number of schemes, neither were persistent critics of the service departments.

Although the Leagues may not have had any decisive impact on the formation of military policy and grand strategy, their activities and propaganda undoubtedly contributed to the military preparedness of the nation upon the outbreak of the Second World War. Both the SCC and the ADCC were involved in civil defence at the start of the conflict and tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of boys were recorded as taking an active role in the services in wartime. Of course, both the Air and Navy Leagues attempted to cultivate a sense of discipline, duty, and sacrifice among boys, with each Corps representing a militarisation of sections of British youth. Empire Air Day, as we have seen, allowed spectators to engage

⁵ Mitchell, 'The Army League', p. 224.

with weapons of war in a number of different ways. Aiding recruitment was one of the ways in which Empire Air Day contributed to the military preparedness of the state, but aerial theatre more broadly was an acceptable way of promoting popular militarism, rearmament, and the military capabilities of the British state in the late 1930s. Trafalgar Day was used by the Navy League to emphasise the ongoing relevance of the Royal Navy to Britain. Evoking highly idealised Nelsonian principles, it provided the League with a public platform to construct naval and national identity and to impress upon both state and society the importance of sea power. Of course, both Leagues used more conventional methods to extoll the virtues of air and sea power to both state and civil society such as holding public meetings, issuing pamphlets, sending letters to the press, as well as lobbying politicians and speaking in parliament.

This thesis has provided the most complete account of the Air and Navy Leagues to date. It has advanced our understanding of the place of militarism in interwar Britain, and has shown how militaristic leagues, the type of which were an important part of the liberal political culture of Edwardian Britain, occupied a similar, if more contested, place in the associational culture of the interwar period. It has demonstrated that popular, cultural, and institutional forms of militarism were able to flourish despite the rise of internationalism, pacifism, and anti-war sentiment. Militarism and militaristic values occupied an important place within the Edwardian period and were, in various guises, able to survive the First World War. Attitudes towards militarism, military culture, and militarisation were complex, contested, and at times ambiguous. However, militarism was able to enjoy resonance and even widespread popularity, especially in the form of Trafalgar Day and Empire Air Day. Both the Air and Navy Leagues had to negotiate the rise of internationalist sentiment and support for disarmament, collective security, and pacifism. In doing so, the policy, nature, and very purpose of each organisation was (temporarily) unrecognisable from what had gone

before. Each League was briefly beset by internal divisions over the direction of policy and activities. However, the apparent abandonment of a policy which supported military security, if not always supremacy, was short-lived.

If one accepts that ‘patriotic and imperialist leagues from the pre-war period continued to play a vibrant if reduced role in post-war British society’, then the same is undoubtedly true of militaristic leagues.⁶ As this thesis has demonstrated, the historiographical consensus on continuity between pre-war and interwar Britain should be extended to include militaristic, as well as patriotic and imperialist, organisations.

⁶ Hendley, *Organized Patriotism*, p. 228.

Appendix I

Air League Executive Committee, 1919–1939

This list includes the most senior figures in the Air League's Executive Committee. It is not a complete record of the Executive Committee, nor does it contain vice presidents who held mostly ornamental positions and are difficult to trace with accuracy for the entire period.

President

1917–1920: John Douglas-Scott-Montagu, Lord Montagu of Beaulieu

1920–1922: Major General J.E.B. Seely (later Lord Mottistone)

1922–1944: George Granville Sutherland-Leveson-Gower, 5th Duke of Sutherland

Secretary

1918–1927: Douglas G.H. Gordon

Secretary General

1927–1929: Brig.General P.R.C. Groves

1929–1931: Lt. Col. N.G. Thwaites (acting secretary general)

1933–1939: Air Commodore J.A. Chamier

Chairman

1918–1929: Philip S. Foster

1929–1931: Dr Gerald Merton

1931–1932: Captain Frederick E. Guest

1932–1939: Lord Mottistone

Vice/Deputy-Chairman

1917–1927: C. Shirreff Hilton (deputy)

1923–1925: Admiral Mark Kerr (vice)

1924–1931: Lt. Col. Ivan B. Davson (vice/deputy)

1931–1932: Dr Gerald Merton (deputy)

1933–1937: Griffith Brewer (deputy)

1937–1939: William.O. Manning (deputy)

Honorary Treasurer

1917–1927: Sir Edmund Bartley-Denniss

1927–1929: Sir Henry White-Smith

1929–1931: Brig. General Sir Charles Delme-Radcliffe

1932–1938: Sir Basil Clarke (replaced by William.O. Manning in 1938)

Deputy Honorary Treasurer

1935–1938: William.O. Manning

Appendix II

Navy League Executive Committee, 1919–1939

As in Appendix I, this list includes the most senior figures of the Navy League's Executive Committee. It is similarly not a complete record of every member of the Executive Committee, nor does it contain vice presidents who mostly held only ornamental positions and are difficult to trace with accuracy for the entire period.

President

1918–1922: Algernon St Maur, 15th Duke of Somerset

1922–1924: George Granville Sutherland-Leveson-Gower, 5th Duke of Sutherland

1924–1930: Victor Alexander John Hope, 2nd Marquess of Linlithgow

1930–1940: George Ambrose Lloyd, 1st Baron Lloyd

Deputy President

1926–1932: Lord Sydenham of Combe

1932–1936: Lord Carson of Duncairn

1936–1939: Commodore the Rt Hon. Earl Howe

Chairman

1916–1922: V. Biscoe Tritton

1922–1934: Sir Cyril Cobb

1934–1936: Viscount Lymington

1937–1939: The Rt Hon. The Earl Beatty

Honorary Treasurer

1919–1922: V. Biscoe Tritton

1922–1923: Hon. Lt.-Commander H.W. Wheeler

1923–1931: Lt. Col. C. Forbes Buchan

1931–1936: [No honorary treasurer was appointed during this period]

1936–1937: J.H.C. Burton, Esq.

1937–1939: A.E. Griffin, Esq.

General Secretary

1919–1922: Rear-Admiral Ronald A. Hopwood

1922–1924: Lt.-Commander J.N. Benbow

1924–1925: Guy Eden (Acting General Secretary)

1925–1932: Commander H.M. Denny

1932–1935: Rear-Admiral G.O. Stephenson

1935–1939: H.T. Bishop, R.N.

Appendix III

Air Defence Cadet Corps Committee, 1938

President

His Grace the Duke of Sutherland, P.C., K.T.

Chairman

Marshall of the Royal Air Force Sir John Salmond, G.C.B., C.M.G., C.V.O., D.S.O.

Hon. Treasurer

Simon Marks, Esq.

Members

J. R. Ashwell-Cooke, Esq.

Sir Basil Clarke.

The Rt. Hon. The Viscount Elibank.

The Right Hon. The Earl of Jersey.

Captain R. L. Preston, A.F.R.Ae.S.

His Grace The Duke of Richmond and Gordon.

Colonel The Rt. Hon. The Lord Sempill.

Brig.-General J. F. Trotter, C.B., D.S.O.

Nigel Tangye, Esq., A.R.Ae.S.I., A.M. Tech.I. (Gt. Brit.).

Council

Edward Baron, Esq.

Major K. M. Beaumont, D.S.O.

Sir Harry Brittain, K.B.E., C.M.G., LL.D.

Comdr. Sir Dennistoun Burney, C.M.G., R.N.,

Sir Malcolm Campbell, KT., M.B.E.

Sir Nigel L. Campbell, KT.

E. F. Cecil, Esq.

W. Chance, Esq.

R. W. Cory, Esq.

Sir Edward Crowe, KT., K.C.M.G., C.M.G.

Hon. Air Commodore E.G. Dixon, O.B.E.,

Sir W. Lindsay Everard, M.P., J.P.

The Rt. Hon. The Lord Glendyne.

The Rt. Hon. The Lord Gorell, C.B.E. O.B.E.,

M.C. M.A.

R. Grant-Ferris, Esq., M.P.

Wing-Commander Sir Louis Grieg, K.B.E., C.V.O.,

R.A.F.

The Rt. Hon. The Earl of Halsbury.

The Rt. Hon. The Lord Hardinge of Penshurst,

K.G., P.C., G.C.B.

The Rt. Hon. The Lord Harris, M.C., J.P.

Edward Hulton, Esq.

Lt.-Colonel Sir Francis Humphrys, G.C.M.G.,

G.C.V.O

L. Kimball, Esq., M.P.

Sir Robert Kindersley, G.B.E.

Sir John Maffey, G.C.M.G., K.C.B.,

K.C.M.G., K.C.V.O., C.S.O., C.I.E.

Capt. G.F. Meager, A.F.C.

P.H. Mills, Esq.

Lt.-Col. J.T.C. Moore-Brabazon, M.C., M.P.

Colonel H.L. Nathan, D.L., M.P.

Squadron Leader Harold Peake.

The Hon. Clive Pearson.

J. L. Philips, Esq.

O.J. Philipson, Esq.

The Rt. Hon. The Lord Plender, G.B.E.

T. W. Robinson, Esq., A.C.A.

Sir George Schuster, K.C.M.G.

H.O. Short, Esq.

Lieut.-Commander The Hon. J. M. Southwell

A.F.R.Ae.S., R.N.

Gordon Stewart, Esq.

Lt.-Colonel H.M. Stobart, C.B.E. D.S.O. D.L.

Lieut.-Comdr. The Rt. Hon. The Lord Strabolgi.

Sir Henry Strakosch, K.B.E.

The Rt. Hon. The Lord Ventry.

The Rt. Hon. The Lord Weir, G.C.B.

Sir Sydney R. Wells, M.P.

Appendix IV

Navy League Sea Cadet Corps Committee, 1935–1939

This list only includes those responsible for organising the affairs of the SCC from 1935 centrally, when the SCC Sub-Committee was formed. Unlike Appendix III, it is not a complete record of every member of the SCC's Committee, nor does it contain vice presidents, or those who were responsible for governing the SCC on a local level.

Chairman

1935–1937: Rear-Admiral G.O. Stephenson

1937–1939: W.D. Wills

General Secretary

1935–1939: H.T. Bishop, R.N.

Secretary

1935–1939: Lt-Cdr E.L. Hill. R.N.

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ADM 1 Series, Admiralty Papers
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Daily Mail
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Dundee Courier
Dundee Evening Telegraph
Empire Air Pictorial
Evening Standard
The Fascist Week
Flight
Flying
The Globe
Gloucester Journal
Grimsby Daily Telegraph
Hampshire Telegraph
Harrogate Adviser
Hastings and St Leonards Observer
Headquarters Gazette
Headway
Hull Daily Mail
The Illustrated London News
The Jewish Chronicle
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