

The Making of the Modern Admiralty

This is an important new history of decision-making and policy-making in the British Admiralty from Trafalgar to the aftermath of Jutland. C. I. Hamilton explores the role of technological change, of the global balance of power and, in particular, of finance and the First World War in shaping decision-making and organisational development within the Admiralty. He shows that decision-making was found not so much in the hands of the Board but at first largely in the hands of individuals, then groups or committees, and finally certain permanent bureaucracies. The latter bodies, such as the Naval Staff, were crucial to the development of policy-making, as was the civil service Secretariat under the Permanent Secretary. By the 1920s the Admiralty had become not just a proper policy-making organisation, but for the first time a thoroughly civil–military one.

C. I. HAMILTON teaches modern European history at the University of the Witwatersrand. His previous publications include *Portsmouth Dockyard Papers, 1852–1869: From Wood to Iron* (2005).

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The Making of the Modern Admiralty: British Naval Policy-Making 1805–1927

C. I. Hamilton



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To the memory of the Permanent Secretary
to the Board of Admiralty

Men . . . who feel themselves unequal to great questions, may commonly be observed to fly at the smaller ones which lie in any way within their province . . . whereas their duty would be to devolve upon others, or even utterly neglect (if it could not be helped) the easy and less important matters, and thereby make time for the great.

This then is the great evil and want – that there is not within the pale of our government any adequately numerous body of efficient statesmen . . . to be somewhat more retired and meditative in order that they may take thought for the morrow.

Call him what you will, the man who estimates the relevancy and significancy of the respective facts of a case does in reality form a judgement upon it; and the statement which conveys the facts in the spirit of that judgement, conveys the judgement itself.

Strong men . . . are apt to rejoice unduly in self-dependence and the consciousness of substantive power, and to surround themselves with such men as will rather reflect them as mirrors, than adequately serve them as instruments. (106)

HENRY TAYLOR, *The Statesman* (1836, new edition, 1957), pp. 43f., 81, 95, 106

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Preface

As always, an historian owes warm thanks to the staff in the archives, and here both time and number of documents ordered leads me to single out the people working at the great Public Record Office at Kew, presently subsumed in some mysterious way within the prosaically named National Archives (UK). Particular reference must also be made to the William L. Clements Library in Ann Arbor, especially for their kindness in allowing me to cite and quote from their fine collections of Croker and Melville papers.

Various obligations are owed to various bodies for the research grants essential to any work forcing one to travel to widely distributed archives. I wish to acknowledge the generosity of the University of the Witwatersrand, the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the University of Edinburgh, and the American Philosophical Society. I am also bound formally to state (which I gladly do) that the material which follows is in part based on work supported financially by the National Research Foundation (of South Africa), through research grant 2053710 UFGR. Any opinion, findings and conclusions in this work, though, are the author's, and the NRF can have no liability for them.

I owe a very great deal to the work of historians who have previously ventured into the muddy waters of naval administrative history, and notably John Ehrman, Daniel Baugh, N. A. M. Rodger and Roger Morriss. Particular mention should be made also of Sir Oswyn Murray, Secretary of the Admiralty from 1917 to 1936, whose own history of the department was, unfortunately, left incomplete, but whose luminous minutes during his distinguished official career have so often lit a way through obscurity for naval historians. They point one not just to the great questions, but are often an exception to the annoying rule referred to by one of his predecessors, John Wilson Croker, in a letter of 1845 to Sir Robert Peel: 'Nothing is more vexatious than the difficulty of discovering small matters which because everybody knew no one thought of recording.' Those small matters, of course, are so often crucial in an attempt to re-create office lives and practices.

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Furthermore, I am obliged to various people inveigled over the years into describing their experience of defence administration. It was of great utility to draw on the memories of veterans of the Whitehall of the 1940s and 1950s – beyond the period in which I was ostensibly interested, of course, but a most useful check upon tendencies which might be discerned in the earlier organisation. Here I should mention David Dell, CB, Sir Richard Lloyd-Jones, KCB, the Rt. Hon. Sir Patrick Nairne, GCB, Frank Mottershead, CB, and Geoffrey Harris: I am additionally indebted to the latter for kindly putting me into contact with the others mentioned.

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Finally, the traditional and necessary disclaimer: any error remains the responsibility of the author alone.

C. I. HAMILTON
Johannesburg