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A Great American Scholar of the Royal Navy? The Disputed Legacy of Arthur Marder Revisited

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This article examines the scholarly reputation of the late Professor Arthur J. Marder. Once universally acclaimed as the doyen of historians of the Royal Navy in the First World War era, in recent times his work has come in for sustained criticism from a small group of revisionist historians, who not only dispute his conclusions, but argue that his entire methodology and approach were fundamentally flawed. This article assesses the specific charges of inadequate scholarship levelled against Marder by these revisionist historians and concludes that, while aspects of Marder's analysis may well be open to dispute, there are no grounds for attacking his scholarly integrity. On the contrary, he thoroughly deserves his reputation as a pioneering and painstaking scholar.

KEYWORDS

Arthur Marder; naval history; Admiralty records; revisionism

Professor Arthur J. Marder was the author of many landmark texts, including: *The Anatomy of British Sea Power*, the first systematic scholarly examination of British naval policy in the pre-dreadnought era; the collected papers of two important British Admirals, Sir Herbert Richmond, published as *Portrait of an Admiral*, and Lord Fisher of Kilverstone, released in three volumes under the title *Fear God and Dread Nought*; and also *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, a magisterial five-volume study of the Royal Navy in the era of the First World War.¹ Given the scale of his achievement it was no surprise that, upon his retirement in 1977, Marder was fêted with the publication of a major Festschrift in his honour.² An impressive collection of leading international academics working on twentieth-century naval history, retired senior officers, and defence analysts lined up to express their admiration for Marder's important body of scholarship. They were not alone. Only a year previously, John Keegan, doyen of military historians and widely read public intellectual, was fulsome in his praise of Marder's achievements. 'Professor Arthur Marder,' Keegan wrote, 'has achieved in his study of the British navy in the First World War standards of archival research and organization of material which defy betterment.'³ So unqualified was this accolade that it was hard to imagine how it might be challenged and yet, four decades later, Marder's scholarly standing is more mixed. While his works are still widely read and admired, continue to be cited on a frequent basis, and remain the starting point for all serious scholarship on the Royal Navy of the First World War era, an increasingly vocal body of critics have become ever more strident not just in disputing Marder's

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interpretations, which, of course, they are perfectly entitled to do, but also in castigating his research methodology and seeking to subvert his high scholarly standing. By way of illustration, one of Marder's more recent critics has gone so far as to imply that so flawed was his research that his influential work does not even deserve the 'orthodox' label that is usually applied to it. In her view, those who seek to revise and supplant it are not 'revisionist' historians in the classic sense; rather their work 'is really the first orthodox history based on adequate command of the relevant primary sources'.⁴ This assertion is as bold as it is adamant, but, insofar as it relates to Marder, readers might legitimately wonder if it can really be true that Marder's previously much praised research has turned out to be so very inadequate that it does not even merit being labelled as the first orthodox account, despite its undeniable influence on later generations of scholars. They might further wonder how such manifest flaws not only escaped notice at the time, but were actively obscured under a mountain of praise. In pursuit of answers to these questions, this article will look at the specific charges levelled by the four historians who have been most outspoken in their criticisms of Marder's work. It will go on to consider the validity of their accusations by assessing the basis for the claims regarding the defects of Marder's scholarship against the evidence presented for these apparent deficiencies. In the process, it will suggest that far from being deficient in either research or writing, Marder was an outstanding naval historian, whose reputation as a tenacious scholar and as a pioneer in his field is richly deserved.

I.

No historian escapes criticism and to this inevitable rule Arthur Marder was and is no exception. Yet, although many aspects of Marder's work were challenged both during his lifetime and also after his death⁵, the first scholar to present a truly concerted attack upon his work, one that went beyond re-evaluating certain of his findings, but actually and explicitly questioning its fundamental soundness and integrity, was fellow American Charles H. Fairbanks, Jr. In an article published in the 1991 edition of *The International History Review* Fairbanks sought to discount the idea of a pre-First World War revolution in warship design centred on the iconic British battleship HMS *Dreadnought*.⁶ Fairbanks did not dispute the proposition that this warship represented a major paradigm shift that would decisively influence all future battleship design, but he did contest the idea, which in scholarly terms he associated principally with Marder - tacit admission that Marder had articulated the orthodox view - that this had been the intention of the British Admiralty when authorising the vessel. In Fairbanks's view, in designing and building this new class of warship the goal of First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir John 'Jackie' Fisher, had not been to endow the Royal Navy with a fleet of the very latest battleships, as Marder had maintained, but to abolish the battleship and replace it with the new *Invincible* class large armoured cruiser, a type of vessel later dubbed the battle cruiser. Accordingly, *contra* Marder, Fairbanks rejected the idea of a '*Dreadnought* revolution' and suggested instead that a better title would be the '*failed Invincible* revolution'.

The details of this debate are of only passing interest here; what is relevant is that in making his case Fairbanks not only offered an alternative analysis, he also severely

castigated Marder for his supposedly poor scholarly techniques. Asserting that Marder's 'account of the dreadnought revolution ... is deeply flawed', he alleged:

Marder overlooked crucial documents; in others, which he cited and edited, he overlooked plain statements, particularly Fisher's statements preferring the armoured cruiser and the battle cruiser to the battleship, which conflicted with his interpretation. Many of Marder's statements of fact are not documented; many of his interpretations not valid; and he frequently takes polemical or partisan judgements at face value. It would be too harsh to treat these flaws as carelessness; they probably flow from the choice, deeply rooted in Marder's era, to see the past as the coming-to-be of the present rather than of interest in itself.

The final comment, which by the author's own admission was entirely conjectural, can be ignored. What about the other criticisms? Fairbanks's article, as its subtitle actively proclaims, adopted a largely historiographical approach to the topic, commenting mainly on the interpretations advanced by different historians. As a result, while Marder's views were frequently contrasted (unfavourably) with those of other scholars, the kind of deep-rooted analysis of Marder's arguments and, more particularly, of his evidential base that might sustain Fairbanks's profound objections to Marder's research methodology was largely lacking.

The only paragraph which went into any great detail about the flaws in Marder's archival research and scholarly methodology related specifically to three 'key documents' that Fairbanks believed undermined Marder's argument and which he claimed Marder had inexplicably ignored. The documents in question all date from late 1905 or early 1906 and are respectively: 'Proposals Respecting Design of the New Vessels to Be Laid Down in 1906–7 and Employment of Armed Mercantile Cruisers'; the same document as contained in the report of the *Navy Estimates Committee, 1906–7*; and a summary of a meeting held on 'Saturday, 2nd December 1905' bound into *Naval Necessities IV*.⁷ The first two are now part of the Fisher Papers at the Churchill Archive Centre in Cambridge, although at the time Marder was undertaking his researches they were in the possession of the Dowager Duchess of Hamilton; the latter was and is still in the Admiralty Library, then in London, now located in Portsmouth. In respect of these documents, Fairbanks commented:

It is very surprising that Marder ... completely ignored them. They were in two collections of papers apparently used by Marder.... Overlooking documentary evidence so important has to make one wonder about the care with which Marder did his research. There is something mysterious about Marder's handling of admiralty documents, which historians ought to clear up. He frequently quotes from documents and gives only the mysterious reference 'Adm. MSS' [*sic*]: his only explanation is the cryptic remark 'It has, unfortunately, not been possible to indicate the source of some of the documents cited in footnotes'. Why?

This paragraph is on the face of it damning. However, close examination of these specific claims shows that Fairbanks's indictments are not as well grounded as they might seem. The first charge is that Marder saw the collections in which these three documents were contained before writing his analysis of the origins of the *Dreadnought* and *Invincible*. He must, therefore, either have inadvertently overlooked them or worse deliberately ignored them. Both conclusions would cast Marder in a negative light. The first would imply careless scholarship; the latter would suggest a wilful distortion of the evidence. However, as we shall see, neither is true. Marder first outlined his account of the genesis of Fisher's new warship types in *The Anatomy of British Sea Power*, a book first published in 1940. As part of his research for this volume, Marder did indeed visit the Admiralty Library and did

use *Naval Necessities IV*. For reasons that will soon become obvious, it can categorically be stated that he saw the print 'Saturday, 2nd December 1905'. That being so, one might legitimately wonder, if it is as important a document as Fairbanks claims - a judgement, it should be stated, that is anything but incontestable - why Marder failed to quote from it. Or at least, one might wonder this up to the point one reaches page 103 of *Anatomy* and finds that Marder has both quoted extensively from this paper and précised several of the parts not directly reproduced. How did Fairbanks miss this? Admittedly, Marder neglected to provide a citation, meaning that one has to be familiar with the document to know that Marder is quoting from it; however, since Fairbanks has presumably read the document in question, it is surprising that he does not recognise it. The explanation may be that Marder's selection from the document does not correspond to the passages that Fairbanks would most likely have privileged. This is hardly surprising given that Marder interprets this paper in a different way to Fairbanks. Be that as it may, to say that Marder had 'completely ignored' the document, as Fairbanks does, is simply wrong. A fairer representation of the facts would be that Marder had seen the paper in question, drew different conclusions from it and used it for a different purpose and in a different way to Fairbanks. In pointing this out, had he done so, Fairbanks would, of course, still have been entitled to disagree with Marder's analysis, but he could then have done so without raising the (unwarranted) implication of archival negligence.

A different set of circumstances apply to the document entitled 'Proposals Respecting Design of the New Vessels to Be Laid Down in 1906–7 and Employment of Armed Mercantile Cruisers'. In this instance, Fairbanks is correct to suggest that the document in question does not appear in *Anatomy of British Sea Power*. However, he is in error about the reason for this. Fairbanks asserts that this paper was part of a collection used by Marder. This statement is true as far as it goes, but ignores one important consideration, namely chronology. Marder did indeed gain access to the Fisher papers, but that was not until 1946, several years after the publication of *Anatomy*. It should be pointed out that even then, the collection he saw was not as complete as it is now. Many important papers were withheld until 1951 and Marder did not see any of these until 1955 at the earliest.⁸ At what point the document in question became available to Marder, if it ever became available at all, is, therefore, unclear. What is clear, however, is that with the Fisher papers *terra incognita* to him until six years after the publication of *Anatomy*, it would have been literally impossible for Marder to have included these supposedly key documents - and again it must be stressed that their importance is a matter of judgement not of fact - in his original analysis of the *Dreadnought* revolution. Consequently, Fairbanks's pejorative comment 'about the care with which Marder did his research' is shown to be based upon an entirely false premise.

Fairbanks's next reservation concerns the manner in which Marder cited his documentary sources. It is undeniably true that Marder's methodology for referencing his principal primary archival collection was to say the least, Spartan. In *Anatomy* documents from the Admiralty Record Office went entirely without citation. In *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, the five volumes published between 1961 and 1970 that took the story of the Royal Navy to 1919, documents from this depository were identified as from the 'Admiralty MSS'. Sometimes, as Fairbanks correctly noted, they were not identified at all. Frustrating as this is for subsequent researchers, there were reasons for this sorry state of affairs that lay outside of Marder's control. In the case of *Anatomy*, the research for which, as we shall

see, included a four-week examination of closed naval files, the Admiralty insisted that there be no specific citation of papers in their possession. Marder had no choice but to agree; and he did. As he wrote to S. H. Phillips, one of the principal assistant secretaries to the Admiralty, in April 1940, 'following your own suggestion I have omitted all foot-note references to the Admiralty archives.'⁹ The book, thus, appeared without any archival citations in respect of this collection. The situation had improved somewhat by the time Marder wrote the first volume of *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*. He was no longer prevented from giving citations to documents held in the Admiralty Record Office; accordingly, he referenced them as coming from Admiralty Record Office Manuscripts, a source normally abbreviated by him to 'Admiralty MSS'. Fairbanks finds this citation 'mysterious'. It is not immediately obvious why; but a solution to the mystery, if mystery it was, was readily to hand and had been since 1970 in the bibliography at the end of volume five. More understandable is Fairbanks's frustration with Marder's disclaimer: 'It has, unfortunately, not been possible to indicate the source of some of the documents cited in foot-notes.' This is undoubtedly irritating, as Marder was himself aware. However, Fairbanks's immediate question in response - 'Why?' - shows a remarkable unwillingness on his part to read between the (very obvious) lines. As was the case with the prohibitions surrounding citations in *Anatomy*, so, too, there were limits to what Marder was permitted to disclose in *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*. Put simply, Marder did not indicate all his sources because he was not allowed to indicate all his sources and, naturally enough, those who would not allow him to do this did not wish this fact revealed. It was this that led to the so-called 'cryptic remark'. To go into the matter in more detail, in 1956 Marder was once again allowed to conduct research in the Admiralty Record Office. The officials who granted this privilege thought they were according him the right to view closed Admiralty files. What they neglected to consider was that those files might also contain papers that had originated in other government departments and over which the Admiralty had neither the right nor the discretion to accord special access. The records of the Cabinet Office, which included the papers of the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID), were a case in point. Many CID minutes and memoranda were incorporated within Admiralty files that were shown to Marder. As was subsequently discovered when he presented his completed manuscript for clearance, he wanted to reproduce extensive sections from many of these. The problem was that the Cabinet Office had not accorded the Admiralty the right to show these papers to him and was not willing to allow Marder to quote from Cabinet papers in Admiralty custody. This put the Admiralty in a quandary. Demanding that Marder remove these quotations would clearly ruin the book, but advertising the Admiralty's breach of Cabinet Office rules by allowing him to cite these documents with reference to the 'Admiralty MSS' was also unacceptable. The solution finally reached was to allow Marder to quote from these CID papers, as he had originally intended, but to change the citations. For the most part this was straightforward. Duplicates of many of these papers were held in private collections that Marder had used. For example, Marder found 'the printed minutes of every CID meeting, 1908–1914' in the Asquith papers. In such eventualities Marder was allowed to provide a citation to the private collection in question and so, as he noted in a confirmatory letter to the Admiralty, in this instance he was able 'to substitute "Asquith MSS" for "Admiralty MSS" wherever I have a footnote reference to CID minutes'.¹⁰ Various other collections, most notably the Fisher papers, provided a further crop of references which Marder was able to cite. By such means, most of

the Cabinet Office papers in question could be accounted for, but there were exceptions; papers that Marder had only seen at the Admiralty. Where this occurred, Marder was still allowed to reproduce quotations, but he was not permitted to provide any indication of where he had seen them. Marder was well aware this left 'a glaring gap' in his text, but he had no option but to comply. This did not trouble him greatly. While he recognised that the 'discerning reader would ask: "Now, where did he consult this paper? He doesn't say,"' Marder consoled himself with the thought that the 'shrewd reader would deduce the explanation'.¹¹ There were evidently exceptions.

As can be seen Fairbanks's quarrel with Marder's archival work is ill-founded. No doubt one could level criticisms at Marder's sparse citations and unhelpfully inexact references, but the grounds on which Fairbanks does this shows no understanding of, let alone sympathy for, the conditions of access and subsequent citation under which Marder was labouring. It is in the contextual vacuum that Fairbanks complains about 'overlooked crucial documents' and undocumented statements. Had he examined the context more closely, he might have concluded otherwise.

In addition to his criticisms of Marder's research, Fairbanks also complains that 'many of his interpretations are not valid'. Disputed interpretations are, of course, at the very heart of the historical process and historians can quite legitimately disagree on such matters; and they frequently do. To state that an interpretation is invalid - rather than simply disputed or debated - therefore requires a high degree of proof. This is not only lacking in Fairbanks's article, but it also transpires that many of the interpretations of Marder's that Fairbanks holds to be invalid are disputed on dubious grounds. To take one example, Fairbanks criticises Marder for suggesting that the *Dreadnought* was designed and built in order to facilitate long-range gunnery. Several objections are advanced for this proposition. In particular, Fairbanks takes Marder to task for suggesting the following: 'a longer battle range was desirable so that gunnery skills could be used to best advantage. Close ranges ... were ... to the advantage of the least-trained guns' crews.' This, Fairbanks, asserts confidently, 'is the opposite of the truth', the implication of this obvious euphemism being not only that Marder was wrong and definitively so, but that Marder did not properly understand the intricacies of the matter in contention. The extent of Marder's knowledge of naval gunnery is not something that can now be easily reconstructed. Yet, even if it was not of the highest order, that turns out to be largely irrelevant because, unbeknown to Fairbanks, in the sentence under examination, Marder was not offering his own opinion, but was summarising a view expressed in the minutes of the Admiralty's own Committee on Designs. This body was set up in late 1904 to work on the blueprint for the new warships *Dreadnought* and *Invincible*. Amongst its members were the Director of Naval Intelligence, the Engineer-in-Chief of the Fleet, the Rear Admiral commanding Torpedo and Submarine Flotillas, the in-coming Controller of the Navy, the in-coming Director of Naval Ordnance, the Naval Assistant to the First Sea Lord and the in-coming Naval Assistant to the Controller. It is, of course, always possible that these distinguished officers and high officials were wrong to view long-range gunnery in those terms, although one would expect them to have more practical experience of the subject than Fairbanks, but, be they right or wrong, this was evidently a view that influenced their thinking. Marder's statement, whether one agrees with it or not, is clearly not 'the opposite of the truth': it was the view of the Admiralty at the time.

II.

That Fairbanks's 1991 article was the first to launch a serious assault on Marder's scholarship is in some respects surprising because Fairbanks based most of his conclusions and derived a lot of his arguments from the work of another scholar, Jon Sumida. Sumida had published a book on Arthur H. Pollen's gunnery-fire control system in 1989. It was clear from the text of this volume that Sumida disagreed with a great many of Marder's conclusions, but at this point he was relatively circumspect in how he presented this. He disputed Marder's arguments in the relevant places, but did not seek to suggest that Marder's scholarship was at its root fundamentally defective. However, in the years thereafter, his position began to shift. In an article published in the *Militär-geschichtliche Zeitschrift*, Sumida outlined objections to Marder's entire approach as an historian.¹² The headline charge levelled against him was that Marder, for all his standing, was little more than a 'scissors-and-paste historian' who employed an 'antiquated historical technique'. At the root of this 'methodological backwardness' was the belief that the job of the historian was simply to collect and collate all the available sources and, having done so, to spin these into a comprehensive narrative. For Sumida this meant that Marder's 'inquiries were not prompted by independent questions'; rather he acted as if 'evidence could be gathered and comprehended without recourse to creative thought'. These were certainly not trivial accusations, although they had at their heart the rather anachronistic presumption that Marder should have rejected the empirical tradition common to the discipline at the time he was writing and adopted instead patterns of self-reflection that would not become commonplace until the later 'post-modern' era. This was akin to suggesting that Marder should somehow not have been a product of his times; clearly an unrealistic expectation. Nevertheless, however unfair this might have been, the question naturally arises: were Sumida's criticisms sustained in the article's substantive analysis?

The article was a short commentary on the state of naval scholarship rather than a detailed examination of Marder's works and, given the nature of the piece, it is little surprise that it did not contain a systematic evaluation of Marder's supposed flaws. Insofar as it made a case against Marder, it was that his 'methodological conservatism' led him uncritically to accept familiar explanations for British naval policy. Thus, Marder endorsed the view that the rise of German maritime power drove British naval development before 1914; that the British response was largely driven by Fisher's dreadnought policy; and that material progress rather than strategic and tactical innovation were the key issues. As it was Sumida's contention that these propositions were all false - that naval policy was actually designed to deal with multiple threats rather than a single one; that battle cruisers not dreadnoughts were the desired assets; and that changes in the means of waging naval warfare were key - the real objection, on the face of it, was not to Marder's methodology but to his conclusions. This produced a wholly circular argument: if Marder had employed a better methodology he would have reached better conclusions, this being proved by the supposedly inadequate conclusions he had reached. In effect, the 'proof' that Marder was fundamentally flawed as an historian was that he had not arrived at the same interpretation as Sumida.¹³

If this self-evidently did not sustain the charges levelled, it must be admitted that Sumida's citations implied that the detail behind the accusations was to be found elsewhere, namely in an article published in 1995 in the *Journal of Military History*.¹⁴ In all fairness,

this did take a more sustained look at Marder's research. It was extremely critical. Sumida acknowledged that Marder had researched widely, looking at numerous private collections of papers, seeking and obtaining interviews with former naval officers and civil servants, and, of course, gaining special entry into the Admiralty Record Office. Nevertheless, despite this semblance of breadth, it was Sumida's contention that Marder's understanding of British naval policy, especially of Fisher's revolutionary warship policy, had a much narrower base: it hinged largely on a 'number of confidential printed policy papers from Fisher's time'. This was unfortunate, because, while these 'prints' seemed authoritative, they were - or so Sumida averred - merely a form of naval propaganda. Although bedecked with phrases such as 'secret and confidential' that might suggest they provided genuine insights into Admiralty thinking, such markings were in reality only added for effect and as a means of enhancing the provenance of the document. It was not genuinely meant and rather than outlining Admiralty thinking on the issues under discussion, these 'prints' - which, unlike genuinely confidential documents, existed in relatively large numbers¹⁵ - were designed instead 'to influence thinking along the corridors of power by pre-empting or countering the attacks made by critics of Admiralty policy'. In short, they were no guide to policy and in relying on them Marder had misunderstood their role and significance, with the inevitable consequence that his analysis was based upon a misconception and hence fundamentally flawed.

This diagnosis raises numerous questions and is problematic in several respects. The first concerns the certainty with which Sumida discusses the evidential basis of Marder's conclusions. Marder may well have relied upon the prints in question, as Sumida avers, but it is very difficult to say this for certain. As has already been explained, in *Anatomy*, the book in which Marder first discussed these reforms, Marder was prohibited from citing documents from the Admiralty Record Office. It is clear from the Admiralty papers now deposited in the National Archives that Marder was shown a fair number of original dockets - that is, files containing manuscript documents with original memoranda and minutes - because many of them still include the original Record Office voucher indicating that they were issued to him that year. However, if any of these manuscript documents informed his judgement, especially if he paraphrased rather than quoted from them, we would, owing to the absence of any citation, be none the wiser. Further complicating matters, for reasons that will be discussed later, there is no guarantee that all the documents that were available to Marder in 1938 still exist today, instilling a further element of uncertainty. How would we know if Marder saw and was influenced by a document that he was prohibited from citing and from which he provided no quotations to act as a clue to its use and which no longer exists today? Clearly, we would not.

Sumida's comments concerning the restricted value of 'prints', a term he does little to define or narrow, also needs to be qualified. There were many reasons why the Admiralty might have a document set in type and printed in numbers. Certainly, creating a polemical propaganda piece for wide-scale distribution was one of them, especially under Fisher, who began the process with the Admiralty House papers even before he became First Sea Lord. However, it was far from being the only one. A document that was sufficiently important to need to be seen and used by various disparate offices within the Admiralty or, indeed, the navy more generally would also need to be printed and distributed. Somewhat ironically, Sumida himself refers to a number of such documents in this very article. One of these is a minute on armour protection written by the Third Sea Lord, Rear Admiral

Archibald Moore. Sumida cites this with reference to Moore's complaint about a lack of clear policy papers about warship-design policy. The fact that it exists only as a 'print' and that 50 copies were created and circulated does not appear to be a barrier to its deployment as valuable evidence in this instance. The same point can be made in relation to Admiralty Board Minutes. Sumida criticises 'prerevisionist' historians for neglecting this valuable source. There is certainly some validity to the suggestion that these are important documents. However, it is worth noting that they, too, are 'prints'. Not only that, but they were often printed in large numbers. If we take as our example 1904 - the year in which Fisher became First Sea Lord and the process of ordering *Dreadnought* and *Invincible* began - we find that they were produced in runs of 55 or 60 copies. Again, this high figure does not seem to involve any suggestion that the documents in question were 'polemical articles' designed to persuade. Finally, it is worth noting that Sumida's own arguments often rest on evidence largely composed of prints. Among the key documents put forward for the contention that Fisher wished to abolish battleships is the record, already referred to, of a meeting held on 'Saturday, 2nd December 1905'. This, too, was a print with a run of 25 copies. No suggestion has been made that this limits or invalidates it as evidence.

Sumida concludes his critique by suggesting that Marder (and others) may have been misled by 'intentionally deceptive writing on the part of leading policy makers ... so persuasive as to dominate collections of internal official papers'. This may well be true, but what is the test for it? The mere fact of a paper having been printed and marked secret cannot be the guide because, as we have seen, it describes no end of important documents that numerous historians, Sumida included, have used and are happy to use. Equally, judging a memorandum to be propaganda because one does not agree with its argument and/or conclusions is no less unsatisfactory. Ultimately, in the absence of a proper test, it is inconsistent to criticise Marder for using one set of 'prints' while simultaneously using another and advocating the use of another still. Yet that is the contention of his article.

III.

Following Sumida's efforts, works directly and explicitly critical of Marder disappeared for a while. Perhaps the expectation was that with such trenchant assaults on his reputation already in the public domain, there was no need for anything else to be added. If that was the calculus it clearly did not work. Underling this fact, all five volumes of *FDSF* were recently reprinted in a new edition featuring a valuable and judicious set of introductory essays penned by the leading Canadian naval historian Barry Gough. These pointed to Marder's enduring legacy and continued value as a foundational set of historical writings, a view that was echoed by a series of excellent reviews of the new edition by several well-known members of the naval-history establishment. Eric Grove, for example, entitled his review 'Still the Grand Fleet's definitive history', praise that requires no elaboration and stands in marked contrast to the message of Fairbanks and Sumida.¹⁶

It was in this context that a new (hostile) evaluation of Marder appeared, this time penned by Nicholas Lambert, a historian whose outlook may be deduced from the fact that he has explicitly described Sumida as his 'coconspirator [*sic*]'.¹⁷ Not surprisingly, Lambert does not share the favourable opinion of Marder found in the many positive reviews of the re-issue, but echoes the disparaging assessment of his fellow revisionists. Indeed, if

anything, Lambert is even more disparaging, characterising Marder's research and the undeserved reputation (he believes) it garnered in the following terms:

Marder's legacy rests largely on the perception that he had mastered the relevant archives. ... We now know that Marder's archival research in pre-1914 documents was limited. *Anatomy* was built chiefly upon secondary material, seasoned with a few primary documents misfiled [*sic*] in the Admiralty Library plus interviews with retired officers and officials. In September 1938, just as he was set to leave Britain ... Marder was granted special access to the Admiralty archives. Given at *most* four weeks, and shown only certain documents selected by the staff ... Marder plundered what he could.¹⁸

There is an element of truth in this, but it is certainly not the whole truth and the presentation is ungenerous in the extreme. As we have already seen, Marder did undertake research in Britain in 1938, he did visit the Admiralty Library and he did speak with retired officers, officials, and naval journalists, whose insights, it should be noted, are no longer available to the rest of us. However, as a dedicated scholar he naturally wanted to see the main source: the naval papers for 1885–1905. Unfortunately, these had not yet been released to the Public Record Office, as the British National Archives were then called, but were still held in the Admiralty Record Office. This was a closed archive and access to it by outsiders was routinely refused. Marder, as a very junior scholar and foreigner, was unlikely to top the list for receiving exceptional treatment. Moreover, his timing was unpropitious; it was not as if the Admiralty was at such a loose end in autumn 1938 that considering his pleas was the first call on their time. Nevertheless, Marder, through a mixture of tenacity and luck, did gain entry.¹⁹ Lambert observes disdainfully that Marder was 'given at *most* four weeks', but this was four weeks more than most others received. In any case, a lot of research can be done in four weeks, especially if one has the incentive of access to a closed collection, one to which there is no guarantee of ever being able to return. Lambert adds that stringent restrictions were placed on what Marder could see. This was certainly the intent (and hardly something that can be blamed on Marder), but there are reasons for thinking that the actual regime proved more lenient. Marder noted in his account that one of the restrictions, the vetting of documents by Record Office staff before they were passed to him, proved too time-consuming, leading the officials to devolve the task down to him.²⁰ Perhaps for this reason, Marder was shown documents that should have been excluded on a strict interpretation of his conditions of access. Prohibited from seeing war-planning documents, for example, Marder was nevertheless issued with the docket 'British Intervention in the Event of an Attack on France by Germany' from June 1905. How restrictive his access was is, therefore, open to question. The case of this particular document also illustrates another salient point, as it no longer survives. The reason for this is that before depositing its files in the Public Record Office, the Admiralty routinely destroyed a substantial number of them. Consequently, the collection which Marder visited was considerably larger than that which exists today. In the four weeks he was there, Marder was in a position to view documents that are now gone forever. His mastery of the papers is, therefore, qualitatively different from anyone else's and his judgements are difficult to test because in some cases they rest on materials now missing. Lambert denigrates what he calls the 'constricted character of his archival research', but this not only neglects the pioneering aspects of Marder's work and ignores the impossibility of duplicating parts of it, it also minimises the scale of the achievement. No doubt he saw less than he would have liked, but the corpus of material he viewed was certainly

not insubstantial and his judgements rested in places on papers that the rest of us, Lambert included, can never see.

Lambert ends his hostile appraisal of Marder with the apparently clinching observation that it was shared by officials in the Admiralty at the time. As he puts it: 'Subsequently, and to the distress of Admiralty officials, [Marder] allowed people to believe he saw much more than he really did.'²¹ No evidence for this claim is supplied in the text, but the footnotes highlight four minutes, which the reader is led to presume confirm it. They are comments from 19 and 21 March 1946, both attributed by Lambert to Richard Powell; a minute from 27 February by David Bonner-Smith; and a minute from 24 April 1950, again by Powell.²²

The first minute relates to Marder's request to see the closed Admiralty files for the years after 1905. In response, Powell, the Head of Military Branch II, observed that the Record Office would have great difficulty accommodating this as it was extremely busy 'being swamped by papers being sent in from bases closing down'. As to the general principle involved, Powell noted that, while there were no clear rules for access to closed papers from the years 1885–1939, guidelines for Second World War papers did exist. Powell summarised them: 'It is within the discretion of the service departments, where they consider that a useful purpose would be served thereby ... to answer questions or give guidance to any author or writer on specific points ...'. If this principle were applied to Marder's request, then questions might be answered but access itself would be denied. Commenting further, Powell concluded by considering the difficulties created by Marder's previous privileges:

It is unfortunate that Professor Marder was given access to records [from 1885–1905] for the purpose of his earlier book, and that he publicly acknowledged this in his preface, but I feel that we should stand firm on a refusal to give him more than he has already had. The records from 1885 to 1905 were no doubt comparatively harmless, but those for the period 1905–1919 undoubtedly contain much explosive material which it is undesirable to allow a foreign author to see first.

However one looks at it, no part of this argues that Marder exaggerated his 1938 researches in the Admiralty Record Office. Insofar as there is any comment on the papers to which Marder once had access, the implication is not that he saw relatively little, but that he was shown more than was desirable.

The next piece of evidence is the very next minute on the same docket. Dated 21 March 1946, it is also attributed by Lambert to Powell, but as it is initialled 'R.W.' this is clearly wrong. It was penned by Richmond Walton, the Deputy Secretary. Being short, it can be quoted in full.

I agree. We are already embarrassed by having yielded to Mr Marder's importunity in 1938. If he were to be granted access to selected Admiralty records of 1905–1919, similar access could not reasonably be denied to any authentic historian and the complete confidentiality of our official records would be lost.

Once again it offers no support to Lambert. Allowing Marder to see the files for the First World War era was undesirable not because Marder had exaggerated the extent of his researches in 1938, but because access to these papers would be the thin end of the wedge.

The minutes from 1950 differ from those of 1947 in as much as they relate to Marder's edition of the private papers of the recently deceased Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond. In late 1949 Marder sent a copy of the manuscript of this putative new book to the Admiralty for approval. It caused a storm. Richmond's diaries were filled with extremely frank and highly disparaging comments about a large number of important Admiralty officials and senior naval officers - some still alive - whose intelligence, competence, and determination were all questioned by Richmond in no uncertain terms. The officials who read Marder's text were appalled and angry in equal measure. Even the normally emollient Librarian, David Bonner-Smith, could not contain his outrage, dismissively referring to Marder in one outburst as 'the little American Jew'. Such was the anger that every one of the civil servants who saw the document agreed that the Admiralty needed to do everything it could to dissociate itself from the publication. The main difficulty in this regard was that in the proposed preface Marder had thanked several institutions for their aid, including the Admiralty Library and the Admiralty Record Office, and had also appended a statement about Crown copyright material being reproduced by permission of H.M. Stationery Office. It was in this context that the two minutes to which Lambert refers were written. The first, Bonner-Smith's of 27 February, states that he had 'had no communication with Mr Marder in connection with this book', although, of course, the unuttered corollary of this carefully worded sentence was that Marder might well have found materials useful for his study of Richmond in his previous trips to the Admiralty Library. The second, Powell's minute of 24 April, observes that 'the assistance given by Record Office has been confined to verification or amplification of minor details'. For this reason, Powell certainly believed that Marder's reference to the contribution of Record Office, while strictly speaking true, might 'give a very exaggerated idea of the amount of help he has received', although this did not trouble him enough to suggest any modification of the text. As to the permission to reproduce Crown copyright material, Powell did not believe the statement 'would be regarded as more than the formality which it is'. Accordingly, despite his acknowledgement that many of Admiral Richmond's diary entries were 'distasteful', he saw no grounds for 'attempting to interfere with publication'.

What are we to make of this? It is certainly true that many Admiralty officials were 'upset' with Marder in 1950, but this had nothing whatsoever to do with Marder exaggerating the extent of his 1938 access to the Admiralty Record Office. The chief cause of the sudden ill-will towards him was Marder's decision to place in the public domain the caustic comments from Richmond's diary, comments that many of the officials reading the manuscript professed to believe that Richmond would not have wished to have revealed. In short, as was the case with the two 1947 minutes, those from 1950 do nothing to support Lambert's contention that Marder's researches in the Admiralty Record Office were limited, but deliberately and misleadingly presented as extensive. They do, however, confirm that in Richmond's diaries Marder discovered a valuable and previously unknown source. Accordingly, if they have any bearing on the matter in hand, it is to confirm that Marder was a tenacious researcher with a gift for rooting out new materials, casting serious doubt on Lambert's claim that he should be dismissed for want of mastery of the relevant archives.

A final point that Lambert neglects amplifies this further. Marder managed to secure privileged access to the closed Admiralty files not just on one, but on two separate occasions. The story of how Marder attained his second period of special entry into the

Admiralty Record Office in 1956 has been ably told by Barry Gough; it requires no repetition here.²³ However, the very fact of this taking place demonstrates once again Marder's scholarly tenacity.

IV.

Closely following on Lambert's heels has come a similar exposition from Katherine Epstein.²⁴ Her critique of Marder is buried within a piece comparing British and US relative decline. Arguing that many current analyses of the latter and how to manage it are grounded in the historical parallel of Britain at the start of the twentieth century, she asserts that the basis for this comparison is fundamentally unsound because it rests (in her view) on Marder's analysis of British naval policy, which she condemns as 'fatally flawed' and suffering from 'critical weaknesses'.²⁵ Upon close examination it quickly becomes clear that her complaints are essentially the same as Lambert's. As these have already been dealt with, their reiteration by Epstein does not need to be evaluated here. However, she did advance two new points that do require some consideration. First, compounding Lambert's grumble that in 1938 Marder had spent less than a month in the Admiralty Record Office, Epstein added that this was 'an era without digital cameras or photocopying machines for copying documents to examine later', the implication presumably being that the limited time that Marder had among the files must have substantially restricted his scope for subsequent reflection on what he had seen. It is, of course, undeniable that digital cameras and photocopiers did not exist in the period in question, but this was not quite the limitation that Epstein suggests as two alternative technologies were available that could provide Marder with sections of documents that he could examine later at his leisure. The first of these was pencil and paper, a traditional means that had, in all seriousness, well served generations of scholars embarking upon archival research in the pre-digital era.²⁶ The second was microfilm, a reproduction technology of nineteenth-century origins that had really come into its own in the decade before Marder's first visit to the Admiralty Record Office. We can be certain that Marder was aware of this technology because copies of some of the Jellicoe papers were made for Marder in this way. We also know that Marder was allowed to microfilm documents when he visited the Admiralty Record Office in 1956. We do not know if this was true for 1938, but he clearly had some means of copying the text of letters and memoranda that interested him as long quotations appear from Admiralty files in *Anatomy*.

Epstein's second charge is more implicit. Maintaining that Sumida was 'the first historian systematically to examine the difficult but critical ADM 1 series (Admiralty Secretariat files) in the British national archives for the prewar period', she effectively suggests that Marder (and many others) did not do so. The validity of this criticism, of course, hinges on what one means by 'systematically'. However, it is worth stressing something that Epstein glosses over, namely that the collection of docketts that became the ADM 1 series at the National Archives and which Epstein argues that Sumida examined first was the very same collection that Marder worked on in the Admiralty Record Office in 1938 and 1956. As Epstein concedes that she does not know 'exactly' what Marder 'saw on the 1956 trip', one might wonder how she can be so certain that his examination of these docketts was not done 'systematically'. It is also worth recording that, like Lambert, she neglects to mention that the selection process that took place in 1958 saw many of these files destroyed

prior to their transfer from Admiralty custody. Thus, while Sumida might well have found materials of value in files that Marder ignored, the obverse is also true that Sumida cannot replicate Marder's research in files that were destroyed two years after Marder saw them. In short, both historians undertook the best research they could under the circumstances in which they were operating. That they came to very different conclusions is evident. That this fact makes Marder's research 'fatally flawed' is an unsustainable leap.

V.

This analysis has shown that the hostile depiction of Marder's scholarship contained in critiques by Fairbanks, Sumida, Lambert, and Epstein is misplaced. Whilst there are doubtless deficiencies in Marder's work and numerous points upon which 75 years of further research has (unsurprisingly) improved our understanding, there are no grounds for suggesting that Marder was an inadequate and careless researcher or a flawed 'scissors-and-paste' historian. On the contrary, his books continue to command respect not just because he was an excellent writer with a gift for capturing personalities and events, nor even because, despite two decades of criticism, his conclusions still seem to fit the facts, but because he was a pioneer in his field who gained insights from historical players now dead and ferreted out key documents now lost. Acknowledging as much does not require anyone to agree with his analysis or to accept his conclusions, but the converse is also true that disagreeing with his interpretation does not necessitate an assault upon his scholarly reputation. The revisionist historians who have been most active in the attempt to undermine his reputation seem to think otherwise, apparently believing that by so doing they will bolster the credibility of their own rival interpretations. However, they would do well to keep in mind the wise words of one of today's most judicious naval historians:


The difficulty with any work that sets out to be directly revisionist is that it almost inevitably becomes destructive in its criticism. No true historian can ever believe that he or she has written the last word on a subject. Conversely, he or she should not despise the efforts of predecessors or seek to detail their faults without granting equal exposure to their merits.²⁷

Notes

1. A.J. Marder, *The Anatomy of Sea Power: A History of British Naval Policy in the Pre-Dreadnought Era, 1880–1905* (London, 1964 [1940]); idem., *Portrait of an Admiral: The Life and Papers of Herbert Richmond* (London, 1952); idem., *Fear God and Dread Nought: The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone* (3 vols, London: Jonathan Cape, 1952–9); idem., *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow* (5 vols, Oxford, 1961–70).
2. G. Jordan (ed), *Naval Warfare in the Twentieth Century 1900–1945: Essays in Honour of Arthur Marder* (London, 1977).
3. J. Keegan, *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme* (London, 1976), 27.
4. K.C. Epstein, *Torpedo: Inventing the Military-Industrial Complex in the United States and Great Britain* (Cambridge, MA, 2014), 211.
5. Marder's dispute with Stephen Roskill over the relationship between Churchill and Pound is a case in point. This debate is well covered in B. Gough, *Historical Dreadnoughts: Arthur Marder, Stephen Roskill and the Battles for Naval History* (Barnsley, 2010), 216–51.

6. C. H. Fairbanks, Jr., 'The Origins of the *Dreadnought* Revolution: A Historiographic Essay', *The International History Review*, xiii (1991), 246–72.
7. *Naval Necessities* was Fisher's manifesto for Admiralty reform. It contained a selection of policy papers that both individually and collectively argued for the changes that Fisher wanted to introduce. Intended as a vehicle for buttressing his case, Fisher had the volume printed and circulated among key decision-makers. Originally a single volume only, Fisher's subsequent need to defend and extend the reforms he had introduced led to further volumes being produced. Of these, volumes two and three were likewise printed and distributed to the influential. However, volume four did not receive the same treatment. It was never set in print and only a single copy exists.
8. Marder, Copy of a Report to the American Philosophical Society about his research up to the end of 1956, [Oxford, Oxford University Press Archive], OP 1301/9589.
9. Marder to Phillips, 22 April 1940 [Kew, United Kingdom National Archives], ADM[iralty records] 178/207.
10. Marder to Sir John Lang, 28 Feb. 1960, TNA: ADM 1/28267.
11. Marder to Sir John Lang, 21 Feb. 1960, *Ibid.*
12. J. T. Sumida, 'Demythologizing the Fisher Era: the Role of Change in Historical Method', *Militär-geschichtliche Zeitschrift*, lix (2000), 171–81.
13. A general summary of flaws in this article can be found in C. M. Bell, 'The Myth of a Naval Revolution by Proxy: Lord Fisher's Influence on Winston Churchill's Naval Policy, 1911–1914', *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, xxxviii (2015).
14. J. T. Sumida, 'Sir John Fisher and the Dreadnought: The Sources of Naval Mythology', *Journal of Military History*, lix (1995), 619–38.
15. Admiralty prints, with the exception of those set in type at the Foreign Office, had the print run along with the month and year of printing placed in the footer of the first page.
16. E. Grove, 'Still the Grand Fleet's Definitive History', *Navy News* (November 2013), 42.
17. N. Lambert, *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution* (Columbia, S.C., 1999), xi.
18. N. Lambert, 'Righting the Scholarship: The Battle Cruiser in History and Historiography', *Historical Journal* lviii (2015), 275–307. This quotation from 285.
19. Gough, *Historical Dreadnoughts*, 9–10.
20. Marder, 'Fate Knocks Three Times', 4 [University of California, Irvine, Special Collection], Marder Papers, box 32.
21. Lambert, 'Righting the Scholarship', 285
22. All the minutes come from ADM 1/28267.
23. Gough, *Historical Dreadnoughts*, 104–6.
24. K. C. Epstein, 'Scholarship and the Ship of State: Rethinking the Anglo-American Strategic Decline Analogy', *International Affairs*, xci (2015), 319–31.
25. Many might contest the view that explanations for British decline rest on Marder's work, but such is Epstein's proposition.
26. Many of today's PhD students assume an air of bewilderment and incredulity when told that these were once the main research tools. Nevertheless, it was so.
27. J. Goldrick, *The King's Ships were at Sea: The War in the North Sea August 1914–February 1915* (Annapolis, 1984), x.

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