
WHITEHALL WARRIORS: THE POLITICAL FIGHT FOR THE ROYAL AIR FORCE, 1917–29

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by SOPHY GARDNER
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ABSTRACT

Founded in the heat of public pressure to respond to German bombardment, the creation of the RAF merged naval and military air services into an independent force months before the end of the First World War. This heralded the arrival of three-way inter-service competition and the RAF faced successive assaults on its independence post-war. Many scholarly works have focused on the doctrinal and economic arguments made by the RAF's leadership in its defence. The significance of the RAF's lack of history in the context of the period and how the 'Whitehall Warriors' at the Air Ministry harnessed that to their advantage remains unexplored.

This gap will be addressed by critically evaluating the intentions and actions of the Air Ministry's senior leaders in order to interrogate their political understanding of the significance of creating and promoting a distinctive RAF culture. The RAF's novelty, it will be argued, predisposed the Ministry to use the subtler arts of influence, political lobbying, and the promotion of the young service to the public. Meanwhile, escalating inter-service competition encouraged the Air Ministry to take a politically aggressive attitude to its rivals.

This thesis will analyse the tensions between tradition and modernity, characteristic of the era and central to the Air Ministry's challenge. It will investigate the Ministry itself: its status, relations with the establishment and the press, and the networks it used to further the RAF's cause. A framework of identity, space, time, and power will be used as a methodology for understanding how the RAF created a resilient culture, underpinned by strong foundations and operational experience. This thesis reassesses inter-service rivalry, arguing that virulent attacks on the RAF aided its transition from a fledgling force to a secure one. This offers a new cultural perspective on competition between the armed services in the inter-war years.

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* (author's own photograph)

TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Names and titles — since many of the characters who feature in this thesis accumulated titles and therefore changed their forms of address, they are referred to normally by their first and last name, unless they were primarily identified with a single title (for example, Lord Londonderry rather than Charles Vane-Tempest-Stewart) and even if they held the title for only part of the duration of this study period (for example, Lord Beaverbrook instead of Max Aitken).

Under Secretary of State and Air Vice Marshal — official documents of the Air Ministry in the 1920s vary in their use of hyphenation for ranks; the convention used in the Ministry's Official List of Staff and Distribution of Duties has been followed.

ABBREVIATIONS

CAS — Chief of the Air Staff

CIGS — Chief of the Imperial General Staff

CID — Committee for Imperial Defence

GOC — General Officer Commanding

RAF — Royal Air Force

RFC — Royal Flying Corps

RNAS — Royal Naval Air Service

WRAF — Women's Royal Air Force

INTRODUCTION — WHITEHALL WARRIORS: THE POLITICAL FIGHT FOR THE ROYAL AIR FORCE, 1917–29

These are the fluid frontiers of the sky. Until our time these were the regions where men do not belong. Until our time the clouds moved unconsidered over the troubled and splendid world of men, over cities at peace, over armies and navies at war. The sky had nothing to do with history. And then quite suddenly after all the centuries, within the lifetime of most of us, the sky became an arena: over the world, over Europe, over England. [...]

[The First World War] was fought not by a small professional army but by millions. Vast armies locked in a struggle in which the individual hardly seemed to count. Yet from the heart of it was borne this new service in which the individual was the unit — the soldier of the air!

British Pathé, 'The Battle For Britain 1910–1949'.¹

The very act of creation of a third service, the Royal Air Force, the first major independent air force in the world, was one that produced great, often unanticipated, reverberations within defence and the government.² Flight in Britain was less than a decade old, but war had produced a new martial breed, airmen, now assembled under a single service banner. The RAF was founded in the heat of public pressure to respond to German bombardment of the UK mainland in 1916–17, and considerations of the destabilisation of inter-service equilibrium were not highly prioritised, if they were explicitly articulated in those terms at all. Then, as the First World War came to an end, debates about the future of the RAF collided with the two older services' need to commemorate, learn from, and review the recent past. The Royal Navy and the British Army

¹ 'The Battle For Britain 1910–1949', online documentary tracing the role of the Royal Air Force in wartime, British Pathé, <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/the-battle-for-britain> [accessed 26 May 2019].

² Finland's Air Force formed with one aircraft on 6 March 1918, 'The history of the Finnish Air Force' [https://ilmavoimat.fi/en/history - The Beginnings of the Finnish Air Force \(1918\)](https://ilmavoimat.fi/en/history - The Beginnings of the Finnish Air Force (1918)) [accessed 1 June 2018].

resented the new service's challenge to their identity and power. This provoked outwardly negative and sometimes backward-looking arguments from them: responses that were conditioned by the different environments and cultures of the sea and the land. The RAF, in contrast, distanced itself from the negative and sought a more positive narrative in reply.

Lying at the heart of political arguments, battles over identity and power, and the changed landscape of defence, with a third service occupying new physical and conceptual territory, were networks. Particularly relevant were the ones frequented by Hugh Trenchard (CAS for much of the period under consideration), Samuel Hoare (four times appointed Secretary of State at the Air Ministry), and a cast that included other politicians, service personnel, the royal family, commentators, and supporters, all networks within which they exercised influence. Rather than focusing on debates concerning doctrine and economics, the intention of this thesis is to explore the use of influence, political lobbying, and external facing 'public relations' to evaluate the early politics of air power. Here influence is broadly defined as the use of political currency, personal power, intellectual cachet, and reach into organs of political and public opinion to procure support. Peter Gray has identified a tendency in air power history to 'take strategists, or air power prophets, in relative isolation', and has acknowledged: 'It is much easier to do so than to place them in their broader context. It is even more difficult to take a loose society of individuals and chart the linkages between them.'³ However difficult, understanding those linkages, and analysing how they brought together different agents with the variable amounts and types of power they possessed, is the path to understanding how influence was brought to bear in making the case for air power and service independence.

In political as well as in military history little attention has been paid to the political arguments that the RAF won in the 1920s by means of the softer arts of

³ Peter W. Gray, *Air Warfare: History, Theory and Practice* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), p. 52.

influence and political lobbying that were marshalled to its cause.⁴ The wresting of power away from the other two services and in favour of the RAF's continued independence did not just take place through doctrinal arguments about the utility of air power or inter-departmental quarrels about the division of the annual estimates. Political power was harnessed, it will be argued, via networks of influence, which emanated from the locus of parliamentary and governmental politics: Whitehall and Westminster. A core argument pursued throughout this thesis is that the historiographical gap which falls between political and military history can be explored through the networks that connected serving personnel and politicians, and the use of socio-cultural instruments to bolster the RAF's position. The RAF's role in finding empowered actors, and in harnessing the potential influence of commentators, supporters, and public opinion, was critical to legitimising the RAF as an established, and enduring, entity. Additionally, the role of the press and public relations in improving the visibility of the force and establishing its reputation and identity during the early post-war period has received scant attention. Hoare wrote about his crusade, with Trenchard, to improve the confidence and standing of the Air Ministry and the RAF. He talked about the need 'to convince the world that the Air Force was no less firmly established than the Navy and Army, and that it was a normal and essential institution in the life of this country'.⁵ This was a 'strategic plan for influence' which ranged in its targets from the reigning monarch to the ordinary citizen.⁶

Outline of the Thesis

This thesis aims to answer several interrelated questions through the exploration of the political and cultural arguments made by these, and other, central figures in the post-First World War political battles within Whitehall. The specific research questions to be addressed are these. First, how did the Air Ministry operate in relation to the rest of government and how did its leaders

⁴ Throughout this thesis, the term 'military' is used to denote army formations, organisations, and practices, and also as a term for all three services in contrast to civilian personnel and organisations.

⁵ Samuel John Gurney Hoare Templewood, *Empire of the Air: The Advent of the Air Age 1922–1929* (London: Collins, 1957), p. 182.

⁶ The plan outlined by Hoare does not appear to have been formally named so is here referred to, simply, as the strategic plan for influence.

develop the Ministry to serve the ends of the RAF? Second, how did the RAF manage its lack of history and how significant was the strategic plan for influence and the elements laid out within that plan? The RAF had no history or tradition apart from those elements brought to it from the other (competing) services. Handling the tension between tradition and modernity may have had its challenges, but it also provided unexpected opportunities. This leads to the third area of questioning: what impact did the creation of a third service have on inter-service rivalry, at the political level? The period 1917–29 is a fruitful time to ask: ‘what do revolutionaries do when they get their revolution?’⁷ Although the Air Ministry formed part of the government and the RAF was created by government, there is a sense of insurgency in the way that the third service rescued its future from the attacks of its somewhat complacent senior siblings. The Army and the Navy had nothing to gain, at least in their own eyes, from a new and hungry third service adding further competition for resource and power. Their reaction and the way that they responded to this challenge is crucial to understanding the impact of air power on inter-war defence policy.

In response to these questions, this study analyses the strategies that senior political and military leaders used first to establish and then to entrench the RAF as a third service. It embraces the concepts of stabilisation and destabilisation, and of tradition and modernity, to consider how successfully the early politics of air power were manipulated to serve the purposes of supporters of the RAF and the utility of air power. Tradition in this context is associated with preservation of the establishment, defence of empire, nostalgia for Britain’s pre-war pre-eminence in certain military capabilities, such as maritime power, and nostalgia for an era when Britain was truly an island.⁸ The potential of science and technology to revolutionise ways of living and ways of fighting, including through popular fictional outlets, and the newness of flight are examples of how

⁷ Though it is accepted that Trenchard was hardly a pioneering revolutionary given his early misgivings about an independent air force.

⁸ In the Second Reading of the Air Force Bill in 1917, Major Baird MP (Parliamentary Secretary to the Air Board) made explicit reference to the fact that ‘we are no longer solely an island’, HC Debate (1917) Fifth Series, Vol. 99, Col. 137, 12 November 1917. Edgerton argued that this concept was important in shaping English attitudes to the aeroplane, David Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane: Militarism, Modernity and Machines*, rev. edn (London: Penguin, 2013), p. 70.

the concept of modernity was conceptualised as a rupture with the past. The period under investigation starts in 1917, when the Air Force (Constitution) Bill, which created the RAF the following year, was debated and passed, receiving Royal Assent on 29 November 1917. However, some of the earlier iterations in the development of aviation, and its relationship with politicians, the public, and the press, provide necessary context. The year 1929 offers a natural break to the research, since this was the final year of the tenures of two central characters — Trenchard and Hoare — at the Air Ministry. It also marks the point at which King George V stated to Hoare on his departure from office that the RAF was no longer in danger of disbandment.⁹

John Ferris criticised a tendency to judge the RAF historically against a benchmark of perfection rather than against the standard of its peers: other nation's air forces.¹⁰ This study does not attempt comparisons with the air forces of other countries; what is evaluated instead is the RAF's success in deflecting the machinations and hostile activities of the rival British services. The thesis also focuses not on doctrinal or economic arguments per se, though they provide relevant and important context, but on the exercise of political influence, internally within government and externally in the public gaze.¹¹

The chapters to follow will use the framework of physical and conceptual time and space to explore issues of identity and power which shaped the early politics of air power. The Air Ministry was created and located near, but significantly not in, Whitehall; the location of its key players and advocates as they moved around Westminster provides a starting place for the analysis. During the period from 1917 to 1929 the use of this space, the accessibility of vital support networks, and the operations of the Air Ministry and other

⁹ Cambridge University Library (CUL), Personal Papers of Viscount Templewood, Part V:4 (51), 'The Resignation of the Second Baldwin Government', 13 June 1929.

¹⁰ John R. Ferris, 'Review Article: The Air Force Brats' View of History: Recent Writing and the Royal Air Force, 1918–1960', *The International History Review*, 20.1 (1998), 118–43 (p. 120); see also Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*.

¹¹ In defining doctrine, Barry Posen's characterisation of military doctrine is apposite: the subcomponent of grand strategy that deals with military means — 'what means shall be employed and how shall they be employed?', Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 13.

government departments with which it most often interacted changed as the politics of air power developed and the plan for the entrenchment of the RAF took form. This did not occur in isolation, of course, but partly in reaction to hostile arguments and new political developments.

In terms of time and identity, as already mentioned, the RAF faced unique challenges and opportunities upon its creation. Stefan Maul described the conception of time in the Ancient Near East, considering the Mesopotamians' language and thinking on the past and the future, and how they advanced along a time-line not facing their future but with their eyes on the past: 'The ideal society and state for the Mesopotamians — their utopia, as it were — always had its settled place in a long-ago age and never in the future.'¹² The point of this aside is: the RAF had no 'settled place in a long-ago age' but its competitors in the Army and Navy did, and this contrast provides a useful way of thinking comparatively about the respective experiences of the three services in the inter-war period. As a result, this thesis considers how the RAF harnessed a temporal narrative to juxtapose itself against the other services, which were constrained by history and memorialisation in a way that the RAF was not.

This leads on to the consideration of identity and power: the foundations of the amphitheatre of tri-service rivalry. Power, and the resource that it could afford, had in a defence context to be shared three ways rather than two; as well as the obvious additional constraints on resource that building an air force provided, it is important to examine the reverberations of the new three-way construct. The RAF faced the peculiar challenge of having to build networks of political influence and cultural foundations almost *ex nihilo*, notwithstanding the relationships that the Air Ministry leadership brought with them from their earlier careers. The other two services, by contrast, enjoyed long-standing and extensive networks of political and institutional support. The way in which the two established service ministries conducted their business was inevitably

¹² Stefan M. Maul, 'Walking Backwards into the Future: The Conception of Time in the Ancient Near East', in *Given World and Time: Temporalities in Context*, ed. by Tyrus Miller (Budapest: CEU Press, 2008), pp. 15–24 (p. 21).

affected by the introduction of a third: yet imaginative thinking about how best to address this change was in short supply. Throughout the 1920s, successive governments resorted to outsourcing the key juridical questions (and the disruptions they caused) to a string of appointed committees. These were populated by a small subsection of Westminster insiders, with some key individuals revolving between successive committees. The effort expended with the establishment of each committee, particularly by the three services and their ministries, in returning to rehearse their respective inter-service arguments was perhaps excessive. We need, though, to engage with this committee process in order to grasp how far such lobbying honed the RAF's vision both of its own future and of the justifications required to advance it. Meanwhile, these debates simultaneously shackled the Army and Navy to a retrospective justification of what they could prove they had achieved to date.

The final dynamic to be considered here is between power and space. Politics was dominated by a homogeneous political elite, for the most part socially privileged and overwhelmingly male, the great majority with either direct experience of, or proximity to, military service. The First World War had touched the lives of British families in a way that no previous war had, due to the vast numbers of men from across society who had been conscripted. The disproportionate losses of young officers early in the war and the enduring nature of the conflict meant that even older generations of the privileged classes, from which parliamentary politics drew many of its representatives, had been scarred by war, whether physically or psychologically.¹³ Governments in the period were dominated by the Conservatives, as was the Air Ministry's political leadership. The Labour Party's tenure in government in 1924, though short, heralded a number of notable political changes, but these were largely in the domestic sphere, relating to welfare, education, and housing. Politics around air power was left largely unchanged. Uncovering the ways in which the Air Ministry and the RAF approached the consolidation of its power base requires research into the networks that operated between and around the public spaces of confrontation, including the very particular and unusual nature

¹³ David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 83.

of the Ministry's relationship with the press. These were conceptual spaces in which battles for power were sought, and the focus here is on those networks within and around Whitehall and Westminster.

Political science, in grappling with civil–military relations, military innovation, and the theory of cultures and organisations, provides some welcome extra-disciplinary inspiration, offering alternative approaches to tackling the political history of defence-related subjects. Samuel Huntington's assessment of the inter-service dimension to civil–military relations considered air power a 'powerful stimulant for the military quest for ideology', and explored the tension between greater unification between armed services and the intensification of inter-service rivalry.¹⁴ This offers a useful lens through which to investigate the RAF in the inter-war years.¹⁵ Additionally, the study of organisational and strategic culture has become increasingly dominant in exploring military innovation, and again political science provides useful theoretical approaches when considering the organisational and cultural aspects of the Air Ministry and the type of air force it strove to create.¹⁶

Review of Historiography

The immediate post-war years have been widely depicted as a period of change, instability, and challenging economic conditions. For example, Richard Overy's *The Morbid Age* characterised the entire inter-war period as one of anxiety in which fears of the end of civilisation developed an explanatory power of their own, propelling Britain towards the Second World War.¹⁷

Characterisations of the 1920s as a decade of mourning and morbidity following the war contrast with those that reflect on the hedonistic and futuristic nature of

¹⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, 'Interservice Competition and the Political Roles of the Armed Services', *The American Political Science Review*, 55.1 (1961), 40–51 (p. 48).

¹⁵ This tension, from the perspective of the US government suppressing Service perspectives in the United States in the 1960s, is also instructive, as explored in A. J. Bacevich, *The Pentomic Era: The U.S. Army Between Korea and Vietnam* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1986).

¹⁶ Stuart Griffin, 'Military Innovation Studies: Multidisciplinary or Lacking Discipline?', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 40 (2017), 196–224 (p. 200).

¹⁷ Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilisation, 1919–1939* (London: Penguin Books, 2010).

the time, offering useful parallels with the services' experiences. In *Rites of Spring*, Modris Eksteins argued convincingly that war “‘took care to camouflage itself” as it roamed not only the streets but the corridors of power’ and, as will be seen, the RAF’s approach to memorialisation reflected a perceived need to commemorate at pace rather than to reflect at length.¹⁸ The development of the RAF and its distinct identity in the 1920s can only be understood if placed within wider debates about tradition and modernity during the period. This appears emblematic of a broader cultural phenomenon in the 1920s, one that contrasted the pre-war past with the new decade, a phenomenon surveyed by Matt Houlbrook. His exploration of the confidence trickster speaks more broadly to this tension: in a sense, the RAF was exploiting the same ‘unsettling legacies of the Great War, shifting relations of class [...] and new forms of mass democracy and culture [which] disrupted how Britons interacted with institutions and one another’ to win the confidence of politicians and the public at a time when it had no history or established reputation.¹⁹ Zara Steiner’s interpretation of the 1920s as years of reconstruction, presaging the 1930s as a decade of disintegration, in fact presents a nuanced picture of the first inter-war decade in which hopes for a better future disguised more complex forces; creativity, myth, and confidence will be useful concepts in unpicking the emerging identity of the third British service in the early post-war years.²⁰

In reviewing histories of the political–military relationship in the 1920s, Andrew Thorpe’s portrayal of the period’s ‘flatness’ chimes with the domestic political backdrop to the RAF’s inter-war experience.²¹ In many ways, politics was remarkably consistent in relation to the third service: regular reviews and committees each in their turn reached broadly the same conclusion, and, for the period under consideration here, the service was presided over by either Conservative politicians or, for a brief period, by a Labour government that

¹⁸ Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), p. 256.

¹⁹ Matt Houlbrook, *Prince of Tricksters: The Incredible True Story of Netley Lucas, Gentleman Crook* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 4.

²⁰ Zara Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History 1919–1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²¹ Andrew Thorpe, ‘Introduction’, in *The Failure of Political Extremism in Inter-War Britain*, ed. by Andrew Thorpe (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1989), pp.1–10 (p. 7).

adhered faithfully to extant policy with respect to the Air Ministry. During a period of significant change for the key political parties, as Labour ascended to second party status above the Liberals, the impact on the Air Ministry was limited. The connections between the far-right and flying, as Richard Griffiths identified are, however, an exception to this 'flatness'. Griffiths illustrated a broader crossover between military backgrounds and fascism, though he looked at veterans generally rather than RAF personnel in particular.²²

Continuing on the theme of veterans, specifically of veteran MPs of all political hues, Richard Carr's frustrating conclusions found that their pattern of voting and views on foreign and imperial policy were not uniform.²³ He missed the point that so much separates servicemen of different ages, services, and experiences that uniformity of beliefs across the entirety of the military exists more in appearance than in reality. Matthew Johnson's study of armed forces representation in Parliament during the war evaluated the impact of serving members on the civil–military relationship. He highlighted the paradox of these members posing a threat to Parliament's autonomy whilst also performing a representative function. He identified their ability to 'frustrate both the ambitions and the operational autonomy of the professional military establishment', while making clear that serving and veteran members also challenged the civilian leaders of the service departments.²⁴ We shall return to Lord Hugh Cecil and Sir John Simon's role in undermining Lord Rothermere in 1918 in Chapter Five.

The changing nature of civil–military relations in the inter-war period, as these historiographies demonstrate, was one of recalibration following the seismic impact of the Great War, reflecting aforementioned debates over the distinctiveness of the era. Susan Grayzel dwells specifically on the blurring of distinctions between the civil and the military, a phenomenon she examines

²² Richard Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany, 1933–9* (London: Constable, 1980).

²³ Richard Carr, *Veteran MPs and Conservative Politics in the Aftermath of the Great War: The Memory of All That* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013).

²⁴ Matthew Johnson, 'Leading from the Front: The Service Members in Parliament, the Armed Forces, and British Politics during the Great War', *English Historical Review*, 130 (2015), 613–45 (p. 645).

through the prism of the experience of air raids.²⁵ Her arguments about changing relationships between the state and the home, and the combatant and the civilian, are particularly pertinent to the Air Ministry's experience, since the department presided over both military and civil aviation. Deborah Cohen's review of disabled veterans' relationships with the state in Britain and Germany also highlighted the second order effects of government decision-making with respect to the military. She demonstrated the state's more laissez-faire approach to veterans in Britain. Government encouragement for voluntary organisations to take an active role in veterans' care altered relations between military and state for the better.²⁶ This interaction between associations and armed forces personnel invites further enquiry into the role of such voluntary groups in the RAF's post-war development, for example in relation to the RAF's swift reaction to commemoration of their dead and care for their living via the RAF Memorial Fund.

The post–First World War imperial context is an important theme in this thesis. Jon Lawrence argued that, following a turbulent first three years, British politicians contained socially destabilising forces by playing on the myth of a 'peaceable kingdom', albeit one propped up by imperial violence.²⁷ His conclusions are borne out by John M. MacKenzie's thesis that imperialism, rather than being 'immolated' by the First World War, remained central to British identity in the 1920s.²⁸ The RAF, it will be argued, capitalised on this period of falling defence expenditure following rapid demobilisation at home by carving itself a distinct role in suppressing growing imperial unrest. Air policing operations in the 1920s provided a practical expression of air power as well as making well-documented monetary savings for the Treasury. Historians have,

²⁵ Susan R. Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire: Air Raids and Culture in Britain from the Great War to the Blitz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

²⁶ Deborah Cohen, 'Civil Society in the Aftermath of the Great War: The Care of Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany', in *Paradoxes of Civil Society*, ed. by Frank Trentmann (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2003), pp. 352–68.

²⁷ Jon Lawrence, 'Forging a Peaceable Kingdom: War, Violence, and Fear of Brutalization in Post–First World War Britain', *The Journal of Modern History*, 75 (2003), 557–89.

²⁸ John M. MacKenzie, *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986). John M. MacKenzie, "'Comfort' and Conviction: A Response to Bernard Porter", *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History*, 36.4 (2008), 659–68 (p. 661).

since the 1990s, reappraised the RAF's colonial air policing activities.²⁹ David Omissi concluded that the 'success' of air policing (in imperial terms) was the primary factor in the survival of the RAF in the 1920s.³⁰ The changing nature of empire, plus inter-service rivalries over command and responsibility for operations, were also, it will be argued, an important element in the nature of developing inter-service competition. The role of command, in particular, merits closer analysis. Robert Fletcher's book on British imperialism in the Middle East elegantly demonstrated the significance of these distant operations in providing 'both the flashpoints and the touchstone of wider imperial authority'.³¹

Kim Wagner is one of a handful of historians (David Richardson being another) who, in tracing racist violence in the British Empire, draws out the distinction between the activities of the RAF in colonial outposts and those in Ireland.³² As will be discussed in Chapter Two, the Air Ministry actively curated its presentation of air policing to maximise public and political support, but Ireland did not feature as part of these performative efforts. The growth of the peace movement during the 1920s eventually curtailed the RAF's most egregious representations of its colonial operations to the British public in the form of showcase bombings at the RAF's annual air pageant, although the movement's efforts were more effective in the 1930s.³³

A further case study in Chapter Two will examine in more detail memorialisation during the period. Recent scholarship as a result of the emergence of historical research into memory explores the political and cultural meanings behind remembrance but makes limited allowance for the distinct

²⁹ See Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia: The Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain's Covert Empire in the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008).

³⁰ David E. Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. x.

³¹ Robert S. G. Fletcher, *British Imperialism and 'the Tribal Question': Desert Administration and Nomadic Societies in the Middle East, 1919–1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 275.

³² Kim A. Wagner, 'Savage Warfare: Violence and the Rule of Colonial Difference in Early British Counterinsurgency', *History Workshop Journal*, 85 (2018), 217–37; David Richardson, 'The Royal Air Force and the Irish War of Independence 1918–1922', *Air Power Review*, 19 (2016), 10–33.

³³ Grayzel, p. 180.

approaches of the three armed services.³⁴ Stefan Goebel, exceptionally, looked specifically at the difference between the aerial and trench experiences in affecting the post-war treatment of commemoration, in particular identifying the contrast between the individualism of airmen and ‘the anonymity of operations in the trenches’ which chimes with the quote that heads this introduction.³⁵ The development of the RAF is best understood when located within a deeper understanding of the RAF’s relationship with British post-war identity.

Historiography of the armed forces during this period has benefited in recent years from a spirited rebuttal of the dominant declinist narrative of the services in the 1920s. Emphasising the economic and industrial history of the period, David Edgerton’s analysis, in particular, has argued not only that the RAF made compelling arguments for economic support in competition with the Navy and the Army, but that it was relatively well funded compared to other nations’ air services, independent or otherwise, which were developing at the same time. He argued that the English were more militaristic and favourable towards technology and the aeroplane than previous theses had allowed.³⁶ John Ferris’s complementary analysis also challenged the characterisation of the RAF as financially relatively weak, taking aim at Trenchard’s manipulative approach in preserving the Air Force at the expense of its sister services.³⁷ At a time of fiscal constraint, the RAF made sufficiently convincing financial arguments to stave off attacks from its more senior service counterparts. These revisionist historians robustly challenged the view posited by Corelli Barnett and others that the overriding theme of the inter-war years was one of decline.³⁸

³⁴ Alex King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014); Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, 2nd rev. edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

³⁵ Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War and Remembrance in Britain and Germany, 1914–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 229; see also Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2014), p. 16.

³⁶ Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*; David Edgerton, *Warfare State: Britain, 1920–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); see also Joe Maiolo, *Cry Havoc: The Arms Race and the Second World War, 1931–1941* (London: John Murray, 2011); Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas About Strategic Bombing, 1914–1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

³⁷ John R. Ferris, ‘Review Article’; John R. Ferris, *Men, Money, and Diplomacy: The Evolution of British Strategic Policy, 1919–26*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 107 and 117.

³⁸ Correlli Barnett, *The Audit of War: The Illusion & Reality of Britain as a Great Nation* (London: Macmillan, 2011).

Given the paucity of official documents then available to outsiders, early scholarship on the Air Ministry and the RAF was confined to commentary from insiders and specialist debates were most apparent in forums like the Royal United Services Institute. Walter Raleigh's officially authorised review of the RAF in the First World War was almost certainly influenced by Trenchard, who understandably wanted a history which reflected his experience.³⁹ Clive Richards argued that, given Raleigh was working on the review during Trenchard's time in France in 1918–19, it was unlikely he exerted influence on the author's selection. However, Richards also contended that they struck up a relationship in March 1919 and Raleigh's papers show that his 'pen was [just] beginning to go' in March 1919.⁴⁰ Raleigh's successor, chosen after his untimely death, was last on the Air Ministry's list of possible replacements; as a result, the volumes have been derided as providing a contrived presentation of early British air power.⁴¹ Of the insiders, J. M. Spaight's *The Beginnings of Organised Air Power* offers a factually driven, if uncensorious, picture of the RAF's early development.⁴² In flagrant contrast, C. G. Grey, the editor of *The Aeroplane* for the entire inter-war period, was a highly controversial commentator.⁴³ A fascist with a 'pungent pen', he was outspoken in his support for aviation and the RAF.⁴⁴

³⁹ Michael Paris, 'The Rise of the Airmen: The Origins of Air Force Elitism, c. 1890–1918', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 28.1 (1993), 123–41 (p. 138).

⁴⁰ Clive Richards, 'On What Grounds has the Official History of the UK and Commonwealth Air Operations during the First World War, *The War in the Air*, been Criticised; and to what Degree is this Criticism Justified?' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Birmingham, 2017), p. 19; University of Liverpool Archives, Personal Papers of John Sampson, Sampson SP.1/1/170, letter from Raleigh to John Sampson, 9 March 1919.

⁴¹ Walter Alexander Raleigh, *War in the Air: Being the Story of the Part Played in the Great War by the Royal Air Force* (n.p.: Forgotten Books, 2015); Mahoney references the debate around Raleigh's replacement, Ross Mahoney, 'The Forgotten Career of Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory, 1892–1937: A Social and Cultural History of Leadership Development in the Inter-War Royal Air Force' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 2015), p. 19; see also Paris, p. 138; Robin Higham, *The Military Intellectuals in Britain: 1918–1939* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1966), pp. 120–21; Malcolm Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power: British Air Policy in the First World War* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), p. xvii. For an alternative view of *War in the Air* as 'an authoritative, balanced and objective account' see Peter John Dye, 'Air Power's Midwife: Logistics Support for Royal Flying Corps Operations on the Western Front 1914–1918' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 2014), p. 21 and Clive Richards, 'The War in the Air'.

⁴² J. M. Spaight, *The Beginnings of Organised Air Power: A Historical Study* (London: Longmans, 1927).

⁴³ Charles G. Grey, *A History of the Air Ministry* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1940).

⁴⁴ Thurstan James, 'Charles Grey and his pungent pen', *The Aeronautical Journal of the Royal Aeronautical Society*, 73 (1969), 839–52.

Much of the military history of the RAF's inter-war years has focused on the development of doctrine, though the term was not used by the RAF until 1922 when it issued its first doctrine manual, *CD-22 Operations*.⁴⁵ Many have since stressed the prominence attached to bombing as the means of winning war, recognising that, although the activities of the Independent Air Force of 1918 did not provide decisive evidence for that strategy, the arguments in its favour were advanced by the first generation of RAF leaders.⁴⁶ As a result of this emphasis, the bomber was given primacy over the fighter, at least during the 1920s, and, in consequence, over air defence of the UK. As this suggests, the RAF made its case for independence in terms of the strategic role of an offensive deterrent bomber force, distinct from the roles played by sea and land power.⁴⁷ Analysis of the 1930s highlights the ways that the RAF recovered the balance between bomber and fighter to ensure that it was sufficiently prepared to fight the Battle of Britain in 1940, albeit only just. Malcolm Cooper, like others, was scathing in his criticism of the focus on strategic bombing.⁴⁸

Alongside analysis of economic arguments and of inter-war doctrine, the historiography is dominated by discussions of policy and strategy. Examples in this field include works by Montgomery Hyde and Barry Powers. Hyde described his book *British Air Policy Between the Wars* as 'essentially a history of policy', and it should be read in the context of his connections with Lord Londonderry.⁴⁹ Powers combined military with political history, paying particular attention to politicians' contributions in parliamentary debates.⁵⁰ Gray's treatment of the RAF's experience during this period as one concerning strategy, supply, and administration provides a useful counterbalance to the doctrinally focused narratives. His consideration of the 'bureaucratic context'

⁴⁵ Martin Van Creveld, *The Age of Airpower* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), p. 237. For more in-depth discussion of RAF doctrine in the period, see Neville Parton, 'The Development of Early RAF Doctrine', *The Journal of Military History*, 72.4 (2008), 1155–78.

⁴⁶ Malcolm Smith, *British Strategy Between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), although his overall conclusion was that economics ensured the RAF's survival during this period, p. 32.

⁴⁷ See for example Barry D. Powers, *Strategy Without Slide-Rule: British Air Strategy, 1914–1939* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), pp. 205–06.

⁴⁸ Malcolm Cooper, 'Blueprint for Confusion: The Administrative Background to the Formation of the Royal Air Force, 1912–19', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 22.3 (1987), 437–53 (p. 450). See also for example Higham, *The Military Intellectuals in Britain*, p. 139; Biddle, pp. 97–98.

⁴⁹ H. Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy between the Wars 1918–1939* (London: William Heinemann, 1976), p. xiii.

⁵⁰ Powers.

chimes with attempts in this thesis to unpick the significance of the organisational arrangements of the Air Ministry, while also looking beyond Gray's interest in *materiel*.⁵¹

Important companions to these benchmark studies are the key histories of policy within the other two services. Brian Bond argued for a more sympathetic treatment of the Army, the 'Cinderella Service' as he termed it, and incorporated useful analysis of the War Office, including its physical presence. He also identified the significance of the (lack of) continuity of tenure at its apex.⁵² David French focused on the Army's distinctive institutional and bureaucratic culture, defending the regimental system in *Military Identities*.⁵³ Stephen Roskill's *Naval Policy Between the Wars* was long the dominant text on the senior service, although more recently Christopher Bell has led revisionist reassessment of the naval leadership in the inter-war period.⁵⁴ Andrew Lambert's work has sought out the naval personalities of the era (and the legacies of earlier admirals, particularly Nelson), reflecting the hold of individual leaders' narratives upon a service that was still drawn by the lure of Trafalgar.⁵⁵ On naval aviation, Geoffrey Till's forceful case for the centrality of arguments over doctrine to inter-service rivalry between the RAF and the Navy

⁵¹ Gray, 'The Air Ministry and the Formation of the Royal Air Force', in *Changing War: The British Army, the Hundred Days Campaign and the Birth of the Royal Air Force, 1918*, ed. by Gary Sheffield and Peter W. Gray, Birmingham War Studies (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 135–148 (p. 135).

⁵² Brian Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

⁵³ David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People c. 1870–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); David French, *Raising Churchill's Army: the British Army and the War against Germany, 1919–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁵⁴ Stephen Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars 1: The Period of Anglo–American Antagonism 1919–1929* (Barnsley: Seaforth Publishing, 2016); Stephen Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars 2: The Period of Reluctant Rearmament 1930–1939* (London: Collins, 1976); Christopher M. Bell, *The Royal Navy, Seapower and Strategy between the Wars* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

⁵⁵ Andrew Lambert, 'The Legacy of Trafalgar', *The RUSI Journal*, 150 (2005), 72–77; Andrew Lambert, *Admirals: The Naval Commanders Who Made Britain Great* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008); see also Don Leggett's assessment of the legacy of Trafalgar in the 1920s Don Leggett, 'Restoring Victory: Naval Heritage, Identity, and Memory in Interwar Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 28.1 (2016), 150–78.

leaves room for further research on the organisational and socio-cultural underpinnings of Whitehall battles.⁵⁶ These too are central to the thesis ahead.

Other works on the armed forces have favoured a cultural focus. In this category Martin Francis and John James have each written on the RAF, though neither work dwells on the early post-war period specifically. Francis discussed the importance of modernity to RAF culture but did not explore the impact of the immature or precarious status of the new force on the development of its identity.⁵⁷ Fin Monahan and Ross Mahoney both explored cultural theory in their theses on Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory and RAF Organisational Culture respectively, though the former concentrated primarily on the officer cadre.⁵⁸ David Cannadine called for historians to direct their attentions onto those who ‘consciously or unawares’ build cultures ‘rather than to an intricate and decontextualized analysis’ of those cultural forms themselves.⁵⁹ Cannadine’s plea echoes the intention here to analyse the Whitehall battles of the 1920s partly through analysis of how the RAF’s identity was deliberately constructed by its leadership, and also subconsciously reinforced by its detractors such as its sister services and hostile elements of the press. The newness of the RAF meant that its cultural identity had to be first invented, then consolidated throughout the period in question, a gradual process which challenges Williamson Murray’s assertion that ‘cultural patterns were set almost immediately after the First World War’, a finding which fares better in relation to certain doctrinal stances than to institutional adjustment to developing identity and culture.⁶⁰ In the RAF’s case, it will be argued that factors that were superficially disadvantageous were often addressed creatively to find silver linings that remained hidden to its senior service counterparts.

⁵⁶ Geoffrey Till, ‘Competing Visions: The Admiralty, the Air Ministry and the Role of Air Power’, in *British Naval Aviation: The First 100 Years*, ed. by Tim Benbow (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 57–78.

⁵⁷ Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force, 1939–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); John James, *The Paladins: A Social History of the RAF up to the Outbreak of World War II* (London: Futura, 1991).

⁵⁸ Mahoney; Fin Monahan, ‘The Origins of the Organisational Culture of the Royal Air Force’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 2018).

⁵⁹ David Cannadine, ‘The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the “Invention of Tradition”, c. 1820–1977’, in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 101–164 (p. 162).

⁶⁰ Williamson Murray, ‘Does Military Culture Matter?’, *Orbis*, 43.1 (1999), 27–42 (p. 36).

The extension of the franchise in 1918 and the rise of new forms of mass culture fuelled by the increasing provision of state education encouraged political parties, the royal family, and other organisations and businesses, keen to reach their audiences, to see the people as a 'social formation', as Houlbrook has argued.⁶¹ This interpretation is supported by Mark Hampton's assessment of the importance of the press, and press barons specifically, in emphasising the role of popular newspapers as a voice for the ordinary man or woman.⁶² The relationship between the RAF and the press has been largely overlooked beyond treatments of Lord Rothermere's tenure at the Air Ministry and deserves more detailed analysis. Cannadine's contribution to Eric Hobsbawm's and Terence Ranger's elucidation of the concept of invented tradition focused on the monarchy, whose shifting fortunes during this period of social change were paralleled by the efforts of the Air Ministry.⁶³ In that department there was a drive to create a sustainable identity and culture for the RAF that could be communicated both in the press and beyond it, harnessing forms of public relations. Frank Prochaska laid emphasis upon the Palace's appointment of its first press secretary in 1918, as the monarchy also grasped the need to embrace public relations. Prochaska also highlighted the divisions within the royal household between modernisers and 'troglodytes', identifying Private Secretary Clive Wigram as an enthusiastic member of the former group, a conclusion supported by evidence from the Royal Archives presented in this study.⁶⁴ Having no real tradition, the RAF traded on its relationship with the country's oldest institution, investing significant effort to improve its reputation through association with the royal household, as will be examined in detail in Chapter Seven.

In the context of vigorous inter-service rivalry, there are two areas which stand out as meriting further study. First, the Air Ministry as an organisation has received only glancing attention since the works (in 1927 and 1940

⁶¹ Houlbrook, p. 227.

⁶² Mark Hampton, *Visions of the Press in Britain, 1850–1950* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), p. 132.

⁶³ Cannadine, 'The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual'.

⁶⁴ Frank Prochaska, *Royal Bounty: The Making of a Welfare Monarchy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 187.

respectively) of Spaight and Grey. Secondly, the way that the RAF transitioned from a new third service to an established entity has been approached in many ways, but, apart from the recollections of Samuel Hoare, few have analysed the softer art of securing power by influence, political lobbying, and public relations activity. His memoir, *Empire of the Air*, read in parallel with personal papers of the time provides a valuable insight into the methods and goals of the senior leadership at the Air Ministry.⁶⁵ Hoare is largely absent from historical analysis during the period concerned, with the exception of J. A. Cross's biography.⁶⁶ The memoir is also a place to look for the construction of myths. George Egerton argued that 'a major lacuna exists in the analysis of the functions performed by political memoir in shaping popular perceptions of both past history and contemporary political processes'. In researching networks and influence, reviewing perceptions created by memoir ('largely hidden and seductive') is part of the task.⁶⁷ Egerton singled out Lloyd George in an attempt to demystify the memoir in the political culture of the inter-war years, and he referenced other military and political men, from John Jellicoe to Lord Beaverbrook, many of whom also feature in this thesis. There are numerous memoirs from and of the period, including many written by the less well-known, all of which help to recreate networks and relationships. Here it will be important to recreate context through the use of comparative sources, as memoir is by definition, as a personal testament, routinely polished and censored.

The resources to be used in this thesis start with the prolific papers of Lord Brabazon.⁶⁸ Brabazon's archive includes correspondence with the press and its barons, with politicians, early aviation pioneers, American contacts, air power supporting organisations, and specialist commentators like Grey. Brabazon's correspondence, like so many of his counterparts, demonstrates the

⁶⁵ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*.

⁶⁶ John Arthur Cross, *Sir Samuel Hoare: A Political Biography* (London: Cape, 1977); Matthew Coutts' thesis focuses on the 1930s and acknowledges Hoare's absence in the historiography of this earlier period, Matthew Coutts, 'The Political Career of Sir Samuel Hoare during the National Government 1931–1940' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leicester, 2010).

⁶⁷ George W. Egerton, 'The Lloyd George "War Memoirs": A Study in the Politics of Memory', *The Journal of Modern History*, 60.1 (1988), 55–94 (pp. 56–57).

⁶⁸ RAF Museum (RAFM), Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara.

fluidity of movement between the military and civil realms of aviation. These provided the route to further archival research of primary sources, including personal papers as well as official documents and records from multiple archives. Chapters will investigate the roles of the many personalities concerned with the development of air power and the political challenges of inter-service rivalry, a task that requires mapping correspondence between collections and reconstructing the relationships which populate the Venn diagrams of interested parties. Published commentary of the era, both scholarly and popular, offers additional perspectives. The RAF's leadership, as will be seen, succeeded during the early inter-war period in convincing their ministers of the validity of their cause: a critical factor in the service's survival. A number of characters predominate in these early years and their activities are woven through the chapters of this thesis. Four of them are briefly here introduced up to the time of their appointment to the Air Ministry.

Key Actors

John 'Ivor' Moore-Brabazon (1884–1964), first Baron Brabazon of Tara, embodied the central challenge that the newly created RAF faced: that of combining tradition and modernity. His papers, held at the RAF Museum, have never previously been fully researched and catalogued. They provide a rich resource for understanding a man born in the nineteenth century into a life of privilege and tradition, educated at Harrow and Cambridge, who rose through the military and political ranks becoming latterly a minister and then a peer.⁶⁹ Yet Brabazon, from childhood, embraced technology and change, and he looked constantly into the future, often presciently. Amongst several examples, his papers contain his predictions for 50 years hence from 1953 which included that the helicopter would become a 'safe and general method of getting quickly out of urban areas' and become a 'private mans [*sic*] runabout' and that military flying would become dominated by unmanned aircraft.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Cannadine referred to him as one of the 'landed luminaries' which is unlikely to be a term Brabazon would have recognised for himself, Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, p. 609.

⁷⁰ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC Box AC 71/3 Box 16, document addressed to the Royal Aero Club, 16 December 1953.

Like another aviation enthusiast, Lord Montagu, Brabazon was drawn to the world of technology and engineering via an early passion for motor cars, which took him to France and the cradle of European experimentation with early aviation.⁷¹ In 1909, he became the first Englishman to fly in England, though he subsequently eschewed recreational piloting at the request of his wife after the death of his friend and mentor Charles Rolls (this may have been a useful cover for the fact that he had run out of money to finance his hobby). Rolls, similarly, had had a dual interest in cars and aviation. However, Brabazon's technical vision and abilities found a natural home in the RFC when war broke out, where he was one of the drivers in the development of aerial photography. Applied to this specialised area of air power, the pioneering element of Brabazon's cultural make-up supported his belief in the importance of technical superiority in air warfare. He had to fight to get his 'new devices and inventions' accepted by a conservative officer corps reluctant to adopt them, and here he developed confidence in his own instincts. He recalled that Trenchard carried aerial photographs in his pocket 'trying to make people use them'.⁷² Writing much later in 1940 to Beaverbrook at the Ministry of Aircraft Production about potential aircraft developments, Brabazon lamented: 'I still think I am right, however, and I am one of those unfortunate people like Cassandra — when I prophesy nobody ever believes me, but I am always right — it is a distressing thing to be.'⁷³

Brabazon was elected to Parliament as a Conservative and Unionist MP in the 'coupon' election of 1918. By the time he entered Parliament, Brabazon had a cultural orientation which was superficially conventional for the elite of his era, but which was nonetheless unique in some ways. Though he shared a similar background to many of his air-minded contemporaries, he was not senior during the First World War and pursued politics to recover his status as

⁷¹ Montagu took a similar route first with the motor car and engineering leading to a passion and lifelong advocacy for aviation, see Michael Collins, 'A Technocratic Vision of Empire: Lord Montagu and the Origins of British Air Power', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 45 (2017), 1–20.

⁷² *The Brabazon Story* (London: W. Heinemann, 1956), pp. 92 and 94.

⁷³ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC Box AC 71/3 Box 7, letter from Brabazon to Beaverbrook, 7 June 1940.

‘quite a big noise’.⁷⁴ Nor was he as wealthy or independently successful as characters like Beaverbrook and fellow aviation supporter William Weir. He shared a military background with many fellow MPs, but unusually he talked more of the sacrifice of aviation pioneers before the war than of the ‘Generation of 1914’. At the same time, as he entered the fray of post-war English politics, he sat firmly at the centre of the networks of aviation, the armed forces, and politics: three fields which were collectively to shape the future of air power. He entered the Air Ministry as Parliamentary Private Secretary to Winston Churchill in 1919.

Hugh Trenchard (1873–1956) came to flying relatively late in life compared to the young aviation and motor enthusiasts, like Moore-Brabazon, drawn to the RFC before and during the First World War. Having served in the Army since 1893, Trenchard was a relatively experienced officer by the time he took up flying. A physically imposing presence, he had learnt to fly in 1912 just before his fortieth birthday in order to meet the age stipulations for entry into the Central Flying School, since ‘repeated attempts [in a traditional army role] to secure a wider outlet for his energies had so far failed’.⁷⁵ He applied the unflinching drive that he was later to demonstrate in his second post-war tour as CAS to his flying career, despite lacking the natural flair of the most proficient pilots of the time (later he would confide that he was ‘the worst pilot in the RAF’ speaking at a graduation ceremony).⁷⁶ The First World War transformed Trenchard’s fortunes from a forty-something major in the Army to the chief of the world’s first independent air force.

Trenchard’s problematic relationship with his RFC contemporary, Frederick Sykes, appears to have started from their first interactions, and the relationship remained fractious throughout their lives.⁷⁷ After qualifying as a pilot, Trenchard worked for Godfrey Paine at the Central Flying School as his Chief Staff Officer (utilising his considerable administrative abilities), a place

⁷⁴ Brabazon, p. 105.

⁷⁵ Andrew Boyle, *Trenchard: Man of Vision* (London: Collins, 1962), pp. 95–101.

⁷⁶ A history of Halton claimed that he flew to the ceremony and only safely landed his Bristol aircraft at the airfield after several attempts, Paul Tunbridge, *History of Royal Air Force Halton: No. 1 School of Technical Training* (London: Buckland, 1995), p. 25.

⁷⁷ Malcolm Smith, p. 20.

where Sykes had few friends.⁷⁸ On the outbreak of war in 1914, Sykes departed for France as Chief of Staff to General David Henderson. Henderson, GOC RFC, left Trenchard to command the Military Wing at Farnborough following a cantankerous handover from Sykes. Trenchard's view was that he was left with very little with which to build the squadrons that Henderson had tasked him to provide, though Sykes contested with justification that he felt he had no option but to 'throw every man and machine into the field at that threatened point'.⁷⁹ Within months, however, Trenchard was commanding No. 1 Wing in France, one of three operational wings being formed, as Henderson's immediate deputy, and within a year he had succeeded Henderson as GOC RFC.

Despite this poor relationship with Sykes, and though Trenchard had a reputation for inarticulacy, the many other relationships that he built during the First World War illustrate that he was capable of generating intense loyalty and that he already well understood the importance of cultivating influential people. He formed a strong bond with General Douglas Haig, whom he first met when Haig was commander of the First Army and with whom he worked closely to secure the trust of the Army regarding the rapidly developing capabilities of air power. There is evidence that Haig had previously shown little interest in military aviation, though Gary Sheffield has argued otherwise, but either way Haig became a close ally of the RFC through his relationship with Trenchard.⁸⁰

It was at this time that Trenchard first met Brabazon, four years before Brabazon would become Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for War and Air when Trenchard was CAS, and their relationship endured throughout their careers. Brabazon, long after he left the Air Ministry, was responsible for organising a dinner in honour of Trenchard at White's Club in December 1929 on the occasion of his retirement as CAS.⁸¹ Their first meeting

⁷⁸ Eric Ash, 'Air Power Leadership: A Study of Sykes and Trenchard', in *Airpower Leadership: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Peter W. Gray and Sebastian Cox (London: The Stationery Office, 2002), 160–77 (p. 163).

⁷⁹ Frederick Sykes, *From Many Angles: An Autobiography* (London: G.G. Harrap, 1942), p. 124.

⁸⁰ Sir Walter Windham recounted offering Haig: 'all the 'planes I had with me when I was in India (1909–1910), but he tactfully declined', Walter Windham, *Waves, Wheels, Wings: An Autobiography* (London: Hutchinson, 1943), p. 150; Sheffield and Gray, p. 5.

⁸¹ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC 71/3 Box 7, letter detailing plans for the dinner, 14 December 1929.

was over lunch in the Mess at No. 1 Wing and was marked by sparring between the two, with Brabazon characteristically drawing attention to himself with his appetite for confrontation. Having been reprimanded by Trenchard for correcting him on the time of day, Brabazon stayed silent when he realised that the cutlet at lunch had been served with paraffin. When Trenchard demanded of Brabazon why he had not ventured that there was something wrong with the food, Brabazon replied, 'I thought I'd spoken quite enough during lunch for the first time'.⁸² The work on aerial photography led, through the work of No. 2 and No. 3 Squadrons, to the RFC directly influencing Haig's plans for the spring offensive in 1915 by compiling a picture of the German trench system from the air. By September of 1915, Brabazon wrote to his mother:

You know that Trenchard who was the Colonel of the First Wing when I came here at first is now a General and commands the whole show which is rarhe [*sic*] nice as any trouble I go straight to him. He was in here last night and was very pleasant.⁸³

The relationship between Haig and Trenchard remained strong throughout their wartime experience in France: Grey recounted the arrival of Major Philip Game, later to become Air Member for Personnel, who reported for duty, after Trenchard had requested the support of a staff officer from Haig's headquarters in 1917, bearing a note from Haig saying: 'Here is my best Staff Officer. Do what you like with him.'⁸⁴

One of Trenchard's most cherished friendships was also an improbable one: that with his Private Secretary, Maurice Baring. Baring was from an aristocratic family, son of Lord Revelstoke (one of five Barings sitting in the House of Lords at the time). Maurice Baring attended Eton and Cambridge, and had had a twenty-year career in the diplomatic corps and journalism before persuading Henderson to give him a commission after the outbreak of war in 1914. Assigned to Trenchard on his appointment as GOC in 1915, Baring was

⁸² Brabazon, p. 94.

⁸³ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC 71/3 Box 65, letter from Brabazon to his mother, 17 September 1915.

⁸⁴ Grey, p. 132.

initially told by his new commander that ‘he was willing to keep me for a month’, but in the event he remained his right-hand man for the rest of the war, and they stayed close for the rest of Baring’s life.⁸⁵ John Slessor, CAS after the Second World War, referred to meeting Trenchard for the first time ‘with faithful Maurice Baring’ and Brabazon recalled that ‘nobody ever dared to go and see him [Trenchard] until they had consulted the great Maurice Baring, who was always in his confidence’.⁸⁶ Brabazon’s papers contain a poem ‘To Maurice Baring from Brab’ which looks to have been written for Baring’s departure and evidences the esteem with which he was held by colleagues.⁸⁷

Trenchard’s strong personality and ability to form relationships with those most able to facilitate him in his pursuit of the development of air power in support of the Army, with superiors and juniors alike, was combined with an aura of authority that inspired his men to follow him, often at great sacrifice to themselves. He clearly understood that this new form of fighting power needed its own personality and rhythm of being; there was an ‘easy informality’ that separated the RFC from their army brethren, and he is credited with turning the squadrons in France into a human society.⁸⁸ Baring’s own recollections bear witness to the way that Trenchard confronted the stark losses that faced the pilots and observers of the RFC:

This morning we had a gloomy piece of news. No. 99 Squadron lost seven D.H. machines on a raid. The General [Trenchard] sent for me and told me the news. He was very much upset. We went out to the Squadron at once. The General spoke to the pilots, and told them that where we had the advantage over the enemy was that our spirit was such that we could face and get over our losses and go on in spite of

⁸⁵ Maurice Baring, *Flying Corps Headquarters 1914–1918* (London: Buchan & Enright, 1985), p. 105; see also Aimée Fox, *Learning to Fight: Military Innovation and Change in the British Army, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 141.

⁸⁶ John Slessor, *The Central Blue: The Autobiography of Sir John Slessor, Marshal of the RAF* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957), p. 47; Brabazon, p. 96.

⁸⁷ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC 71/3 Box 65, poem which ends: ‘We don’t complain that somewhere else your [sic] wanted, We should feel gratefull [sic] that you have been here, But in the “missing” mutely say we “Thank you”, Forgive all this, but surely you should know’, undated.

⁸⁸ Russell Miller, *Boom: The Life of Viscount Trenchard — Father of the Royal Air Force* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2016), p. 114; John James, p. 226.

them, and that the enemy couldn't. We had luncheon with the Squadron.⁸⁹

This combination of skills, together with his wartime experience, Henderson's mentoring, and his extensive time as GOC, placed Trenchard in the running to be CAS from a limited pool of candidates on the creation of the post on 3 January 1918. His initiation as CAS into the world of the Whitehall Warrior was to be swift, eventful and brutal.

Samuel Hoare (1880–1959), later Viscount Templewood, was first appointed Secretary of State for Air on 1 November 1922. He arrived at the Air Ministry having had a conventional journey into Conservative politics, as the son of the first Baronet Sir Samuel Hoare who was the Conservative and Unionist MP for Norwich, and with considerable experience of the machinations of party and parliamentary politics.⁹⁰ Educated at Harrow, which Brabazon noted in his letter of congratulations on Hoare's appointment ('I am very pleased to see that another Harrovian has the control of the destinies of the Air Ministry'), and Oxford, he had first been elected as an MP to the constituency of Chelsea in 1910.⁹¹ Prior to this, he had served as a London County Councillor from 1907 to 1910, during which time he first demonstrated his inclinations towards the liberal wing of the Conservative Party and his independence from partisan politics.⁹² During the First World War he served in the Army, specialising in intelligence having leant on his parliamentary colleague Major John Baird for introductions, was posted to Russia and then Italy, and reached the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. In his own memoirs and papers he made limited reference to this period, lending support to Robin Higham's view that the more 'political' nature of his military experience did not put him at a 'psychological disadvantage' as a minister in his dealings with significantly more senior officers.⁹³ He returned to politics having gained extensive experience of diplomacy, intelligence, foreign

⁸⁹ Baring, p. 287.

⁹⁰ Adams, R. (2011, January 06). 'Hoare, Samuel John Gurney, Viscount Templewood (1880–1959), politician.' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁹¹ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC 71/3 Box 19, letter from Brabazon to Hoare, 1 November 1922.

⁹² Cross, p. 8.

⁹³ Higham, *Armed Forces in Peacetime Britain*, p. 283.

affairs, and defence, all of which were to stand him in strong stead at the Air Ministry. Alongside this, his role in navigating the inter-departmental disputes between the secret service and Foreign Office diplomats, 'with the particular function of smoothing out the differences', provided prescient experience.⁹⁴

As a politician, Hoare's reputation as a backroom political operator was cemented in the lead-up to the 1922 Carlton Club Committee meeting, organising a key meeting of MPs on the eve of the decisive gathering which helped persuade Andrew Bonar Law to lead, ultimately successfully, the revolt against Lloyd George's coalition.⁹⁵ Hoare himself recounted that he had come to know Bonar Law as much on the tennis court as in Parliament, playing at least weekly with his close friend Beaverbrook at the latter's court in Fulham.⁹⁶ When Bonar Law became Prime Minister he offered Hoare the Secretaryship of Air with the advice that the post might be abolished. Bonar Law, Hoare recalled, had been taking the counsel of his son-in-law, and Trenchard adversary, Sykes, and said:

Sykes tells me that the Independent Air Force and the Air Ministry cost much too much, and that there is everything to be said in peace time for going back to the old plan of Navy and Army control. I agree with him. I shall therefore expect you, if you take the post, to remember that it may very soon cease to exist.⁹⁷

Hoare arrived at the doors of the Air Ministry with little experience or knowledge of the still vulnerable third service. He wrote to his mother: 'I am going down to make my bow at the [Air Ministry] office tomorrow morning at 11. The whole thing is so new to me that I do not know in the least where I am.'⁹⁸ Awaiting his arrival on 2 November 1922 was Trenchard; the men had never met.⁹⁹ Churchill

⁹⁴ Cross, p. 41.

⁹⁵ Stuart Ball, *The Conservative Party and British Politics, 1902–1951* (London: Longman, 1995), p. 15; Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, pp. 26–27.

⁹⁶ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p. 17.

⁹⁷ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p. 36.

⁹⁸ CUL, Personal Papers of Viscount Templewood, Part V: 1(1), letter from Hoare to his mother, 2 November 1922.

⁹⁹ By this time, Sykes had left the Air Ministry; he was subsequently elected as MP for Sheffield Hallam in the November 1922 general election.

wrote to Hoare on 9 December 1922: 'I am sure you will very much enjoy being head of this brilliant little service and will do all you can for it. Trenchard was the rock on whom I always relied. He never failed.'¹⁰⁰ If Hoare's own account of their meeting and his early impressions of Trenchard were not too rose-tinted by the passage of time, then Churchill's letter arrived too late to be necessary.¹⁰¹

Frederick Sykes (1877–1954), avowed enemy of Trenchard, became the second CAS in April 1918. In fact, Sykes and Trenchard had much in common. Neither had attended one of the great public schools or progressed to university and both spent a significant amount of their early army careers in India and Africa, though Sykes alone was an Army Staff College graduate. Both were shot in the chest during the Boer War. Sykes, however, had developed an interest in the air environment earlier than Trenchard, starting with ballooning, and he was only the sixth British officer to receive his aviator's certificate, in 1911.¹⁰² He showed an early flair for public relations, attracting press interest for breaking altitude records and for the 1914 summer camp at Netheravon: 'He entertained visiting dignitaries and placated reporters with the impressive statistics and aerial photographs they eagerly published. Sykes even allowed journalists to join some phases of the exercise.'¹⁰³

As mentioned, on the outbreak of war he deployed the RFC to France, leaving Trenchard and their poor relationship back in England temporarily. Following his time in 1914–15 as Chief of Staff, Sykes spent much of the war away from the Western Front, first being sent to the Dardanelles to oversee joint naval and military operations. He gained considerable experience in setting up organisations while working in the General Staff, including with the Machine Gun Corps and the Women's Army Auxiliary Force, and was less embroiled in the confrontational nature of First World War civil–military relations which characterised the experiences of Trenchard and Haig.¹⁰⁴ Sykes was also much

¹⁰⁰ CUL, Personal Papers of Viscount Templewood, Part V: 1(6), letter from Churchill to Hoare over a month after Trenchard's and Hoare's first meeting, 9 December 1922.

¹⁰¹ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, pp. 41–42.

¹⁰² Eric Ash, *Sir Frederick Sykes and the Air Revolution, 1912–1918* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), p. 23.

¹⁰³ Ash, p. 43; see also Monahan, p. 79.

¹⁰⁴ Ash, pp. 93 and 97.

more at ease with politicians than Trenchard and returned to take up the post of CAS after Trenchard's resignation in 1918 from Versailles where he had been working on the planning staff of the Supreme War Council. His contribution to the development of air power before, during, and after the First World War has received significantly less attention than Trenchard's, primarily because Sykes was CAS for less than a year and when Trenchard regained the position their antipathy towards each other poisoned his legacy. Trenchard wrote in 1953: 'Even now, if we pass in the street and an umbrella is up he holds it between us.'¹⁰⁵

Chapter Summaries

This study will begin by considering the advantages of having little or no history. The first chapter explains how the RAF's newness, which is normally represented as an integral element of its vulnerability, provided it with the opportunity to craft a resilient identity. The specific context of the early post-war years will be explored from the perspectives of the three services. In the case of the RAF, elements of tradition and modernity were self-consciously selected and deployed in ways unavailable to the Army and Navy. The immaturity of the Air Force has been presented as a negative attribute but, as will be shown, a lack of history provided the fledgling force with distinct advantages. These themes are explored in further detail in the second chapter, illustrated with three case studies on memorialisation, training and social mobility, and air policing. The first of these analyses the comparative experiences of the services in memorialising the First World War through the archival evidence of the Navy's and the RAF's pursuit of a London memorial to their fallen. The second examines the RAF's approach to attracting and training modern technically able apprentices and to the social mobility of their recruits. The final case study considers the role of air policing in Ireland and Iraq, demonstrating the Air Ministry's agile management of the different challenges posed by these contrasting colonial environments. The deft handling of the modern and

¹⁰⁵ CUL, Personal Papers of Andrew Boyle, Add. 9429/1B/265, letter from Trenchard to Lockhart, 3 February 1953.

traditional will be further discussed, as will the Air Ministry's developing understanding of influence and public relations.

The third chapter examines the physical and conceptual space that an independent air force demanded. It will demonstrate how significant this new environment was in destabilising an existing equilibrium between the land and sea power concerns for the army and navy. Starting with the battle *for* Whitehall, the physical positioning of the Air Ministry and the importance of place close to the heart of government, the chapter then looks at the battle *of* Whitehall, between the two established departments of the Admiralty and the War Office, and the new Air Ministry. The conceptual space demanded by a third service, and the specific nature of the air environment, disrupted the equilibrium between the older departments pre-war. The chapter then identifies the need to explore the battle *beyond* Whitehall: to consider how the Air Ministry exercised increasing influence while under attack both from the Admiralty and War Office and other stakeholders. The fourth chapter is an exploration of the networks, formal and informal, exploited by the Air Ministry's senior leadership, and the influencers who circulated between them. Here again, the RAF's lack of history, and the potential advantage enjoyed by the older services of long-established networks, are appraised in the light of the capital that air-supporters brought to their cause and the cohering nature of the fight that they faced.

The latter part of this thesis hinges upon Trenchard and Hoare's plans for gaining influence, with key stakeholders and with the public. The curious role of the press in both creating and demonising the RAF will be explored in Chapter Five, investigating the relationship between the press and the RAF and how the concepts of civil and military were blurred at the Air Ministry. Trenchard and Hoare's specific and articulated strategic plan for influence, as retrospectively outlined in Hoare's memoir (with all the attendant risks acknowledged of such memoirs' authenticity), have not previously been tested against the archival evidence to establish their accuracy, efficacy, or implications for the RAF's survival under the battering of 1920s inter-service rivalry.¹⁰⁶ This research and

¹⁰⁶ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*.

analysis forms the basis of the sixth chapter. This will be followed by a case study in influence, supported by new research in the Royal Archives, explaining the importance of royal relations in increasing the RAF's long-term security. Britain's oldest and newest national institutions, it will be argued, had more in common and more to gain from each other than has previously been understood.

The final chapter weaves together the strands of inter-service rivalry which thread through its predecessors. Key turning points in the changing, and deteriorating, relationships between the three services will be analysed. The significance of command in military operations will be explored, arguing that the symbolic implications of the issue have been largely overlooked in assessing early competition between the three services. The chapter suggests that many of the Whitehall battles of the 1920s were rooted in culture and identity, rather than in finance or doctrine, and that the first post-war decade was, critically, primarily one of cultural and organisational innovation in the RAF.

In July 1917, General Jan Smuts was appointed to the Committee on Air Organisation and Home Defence Against Air Raids. Lord Cowdray, President of the Air Board, counselled that the Board should be converted into a full Air Ministry, advice with which Smuts agreed in his subsequent recommendations to the War Cabinet and which led to the creation of the RAF.¹⁰⁷ One hundred years later, in July 2017, the RAF's annual conference was grappling with the challenges to innovation in the twenty-first century. The vexed question of innovating, in the face of an 'immense cultural and legacy challenge' and of 'deep vested interests', contrasts starkly with the story of the birth of the RAF, when an entire armed service had not only to fight for its establishment, but to create a cultural identity and sustainable pedigree, with very little legacy.¹⁰⁸ Having a history is part of the contemporary RAF's challenge, and having none may well have been one of its most significant, and least well understood, advantages in the inter-war years. This thesis argues that the RAF's leadership

¹⁰⁷ Spaight, p. 138.

¹⁰⁸ Tim Robinson, 'Time for a British "Third Offset"?', <https://www.aerosociety.com/news/time-for-a-british-third-offset/> [accessed 8 August 2017].

at that time understood the important symbolism of air power and aviation as representative of modernity and the future, with both positive and negative connotations (such as fear of bombing), whilst also appreciating that a military culture, even one based on a modern concept, needed to create traditions and secure a position within the 'establishment' of government and society. The Air Ministry and the RAF negotiated the temporal dimension in a way best suited to creating an individual service identity and securing institutional permanence.

CHAPTER ONE — CREATION AND IDENTITY: THE ADVANTAGES OF HAVING NO HISTORY

It takes three years to build a ship. It takes three centuries to build a tradition.

Admiral Cunningham¹

The RAF, newly formed in April 1918, did not have the luxury of three centuries of 'tradition-building' when the Armistice ended the First World War. The only history it had was that inherited from the RFC and the RNAS and they had been separate organisations with individually distinct cultures and identities. Though the leadership of the new RAF was dominated by former RFC officers, whose earlier career experiences had been within the Army, there were some senior ex-naval men at the new Air Ministry. Yet lacking a unifying heritage, these men and the politicians who were appointed to lead the Ministry built an identity, if not a tradition, within a few years: one that was both strong enough to withstand the attacks on air force independence in the 1920s and mature enough to support rapid expansion when war loomed again in the 1930s. The RAF had to negotiate the inherent tension between creating 'new traditions', representing itself as a permanent presence, and distinguishing itself sufficiently from its sister services to forge objectives independent of them. This it did while utilising its newness to best advantage; if the RAF had existed before the First World War or formed much earlier during the conflict then it would have been hampered by significantly more legacy challenges in the war's aftermath.

This chapter and the next will consider the period from the RAF's creation to the mid-1920s, after which it entered a period of increased stability and consolidation, and will explore the concepts of time and identity in relation to the new third service. Particular attention will be paid to the political agility of the RAF's principal Whitehall advocates in claiming to represent the cutting edge of military modernity while, at the same time, cultivating a distinctive

¹ Quoted, for example, in Lambert, 'The Legacy of Trafalgar', p. 75. Though Cunningham made this remark in 1941 it reflected a view held by the older services from the earliest days of the RAF about their relative authenticity.

service tradition. At the end of the First World War the RAF was less than a year old. The organisation was still to finalise key service concerns such as uniform and ranks. This newness left the RAF uniquely vulnerable to attacks on its permanence post-1918. That being said it is contended that the RAF's novelty provided a relatively blank canvas on which men of imagination and drive could construct a singular service identity. The development of tradition normally requires the passage of time, during which rituals and a group identity are established. Lacking the luxury of time, the RAF's requirement to forge a new identity was nonetheless critical. Indeed, in their efforts to define the distinct ethos and practices of this new service, the RAF's key founders deliberately chose to invent their own military traditions, harking back to the recent past whilst also looking forward to a technologically modern future. Discipline, uniform, language, and ethos have both internal and external purposes. Internally, these military building blocks provide a framework for self-identity. Kirke discussed the 'loyalty/identity' structure as one of four social structures within the military (he focused on the Army): 'Key themes include ideas about belonging, supporting, history, "us" versus "them" (defined by the context), doing it "our" way, and being "the best".'² Externally, presenting a homogeneous image to the outside world, using symbolism recognisably similar to the older services, was the obvious way to signal the existence of a legitimate separate service. Establishing an identity that combined elements of the modern and traditional was imperative not just for the RAF's self-image but for its very survival. Meanwhile the service was developing a sophisticated and multi-faceted approach to communicating its novelty and appeal through what would now be recognised as a form of public relations.

The RAF's newness presented other opportunities, among which the ability to construct and present itself as more socially mobile and less politically and militarily traditional than the Army and the Navy proved especially advantageous. As will be seen in more detail in Chapter Two, the RAF embraced a new prototype of technical training, three-year apprenticeships designed to attract and develop men capable of providing the engineering

² Charles Kirke, *Red Coat, Green Machine: Continuity in Change in the British Army 1700 to 2000* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), p. 32.

expertise vital to supporting air power as it evolved in the inter-war period. The highest performing apprentices were then selected to progress to officer training. Men from relatively humble backgrounds, without a private education, were to advance from the apprenticeship scheme to senior officer and even air ranking (one-star rank and above) positions by the Second World War, as Hugh Trenchard, who was CAS throughout most of the period under consideration, recorded in a speech to the House of Lords:

The Halton-trained men have provided the nucleus on which the great expansion of the Air Force was centred. They have set and maintained an extraordinarily high standard of efficiency. You have only to look at the promotions and the honours gained. Over 1,000 high honours have been gained, and a large number of these men are very senior Air Vice-Marshals and Air Commodores, running the highest technical offices in the Air Force.³

Additionally, the RAF operated in a less politically orthodox manner than its sister services. As well as working with the trade unions and building lines of communication with Labour Party politicians, the RAF offered radical new ways of policing the British Empire, from the air, giving politicians economically attractive options which directly challenged the conventional capabilities of the other two services.⁴ The lack of history allowed the RAF's leadership significant freedom in framing its future: 'We must capture the new generation and soft soap the old for the time being.'⁵ The RAF also avoided a tendency to introspection that the other two services could not avoid, such as in the context of commemoration where the service could address the issue without the burden of the Army's hundreds of thousands of wartime casualties or the Navy's preoccupation with its wartime legacy measured against pre-war expectations.

The identities of the Army and Navy were based on centuries of history, which celebrated famous British victories such as Trafalgar and Waterloo and

³ HL Debate (1944) Fifth Series, Vol. 134, Col. 134, 6 December 1944.

⁴ Hyde, pp. 151–2.

⁵ Lord Londonderry quoted in Hyde, p. 71.

their roles in creating and sustaining the British Empire. They had long-established traditions and cultures, and they benefited from strong and sustained networks that connected into the British Establishment, from the royal family to the public school system. The older services viewed the RAF as inferior, an upstart service lacking their established cultural practices. Army and, even more so, Navy planners harboured inherent and understandable suspicions of a new rival; as Omissi put it, though Trenchard might have been wrong in suspecting that the First Sea Lord ‘looked down on him’, ‘he feared with rather more reason that the air force high command lacked the Admiralty’s “dining-out power”’.⁶ They also viewed the new service as a potentially temporary element of the armed forces, a matter which was debated during a succession of reviews in the 1920s. They were supported in this view by elements of the national press; as early as December 1918 the *Daily Express* was reporting ‘Air Ministry To End’.⁷ As these points suggest, the other two services considered their longevity to be an advantage, conferring superiority over the RAF. Only slowly did it dawn on senior Admiralty and War Office figures that there were advantages to having little or no history, particularly in the initial aftermath of the First World War. Trenchard spelled out this thinking to his fellow Chiefs, Admiral Beatty and General Wilson, in a letter written in 1919: ‘Foundations have now been laid afresh and a new Force built upon them; it is not a question, as in the case of the Navy and the Army, of restoring and modernising a historical edifice.’⁸ The subtle condescension in the use of the term ‘historical edifice’ is evidence that Trenchard understood that the RAF’s challenge, and its opportunity, were unique. He saw that the other services were also vulnerable, for different reasons, not to elimination but to competition. Lord Londonderry, writing to Trenchard a few months later, opined: ‘The Navy are 100 years behind the times and even the war has not modernized them.’⁹

⁶ David Omissi, ‘The Hendon Air Pageant: 1920–37’, in *Popular Imperialism and the Military: 1850–1950*, ed. by John M. MacKenzie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 198–220 (p. 200).

⁷ *Daily Express*, 18 December 1918.

⁸ The National Archives (TNA), AIR 1/718/29/7, ‘Memorandum by the Air Staff on the Reconstruction of the Royal Air Force’ from Trenchard to Beatty and Wilson (hereafter Beatty and Wilson Memorandum), 17 November 1919.

⁹ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/240, letter from Londonderry to Trenchard, 30 August 1920.

It is argued that, although the post-war period was difficult for all three armed services, the challenges of the era played out very differently for the most junior of the three. The legacies of the First World War and the related public perceptions of each service and their spatial 'environments' (air, land, and sea) presented opportunities for the RAF, particularly when contrasted with the Army and the Navy. Ferris, referring to Edgerton, maintained that Britain invested considerably more in air power than the 'declinists' have suggested, stating 'the real question is why Britain chose to be so great in the air rather than why it was so weak'.¹⁰ This chapter seeks answers to that question. It does so by exploring how the RAF actively managed its identity and reputation in the early post-war years. It also examines the ways in which a confluence of ostensibly problematic factors worked serendipitously in the RAF's favour.

Riding the National Wave

Evidence of the war's impact was all around, but very different meanings could be associated with it.

Daniel Todman¹¹

The period from Armistice Day to late 1924, identified in 1919 by Trenchard as years of transition for the RAF, was one of significant readjustment for Britain and the British public.¹² The challenges of the age included demobilisation, significant economic difficulties, reconciliation with the scale of death and injury inflicted by the First World War and with the nature of war itself, and ongoing social and political change, much of it accelerated by wartime, including mass enfranchisement. The RAF, like other organisations, was affected by all of these developments, but additionally faced uncertainty about its future existence. For all the recriminations that the Army and the Navy faced about their First World

¹⁰ John R. Ferris, 'Review Article', p. 122.

¹¹ Todman, p. 16.

¹² In a speech at the Independent Air Force Dinner in 1919, Trenchard stated that 'The transition period through which the Air Force must pass is measured by the time it will take to train the cadets for the future service, i.e. 4 years.' RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/98, 1 of 9, Speech 1b Independent Force Dinner, 1919.

War record, their future was never in doubt.¹³ But there were aspects of the testing post-war political environment that played to the RAF's strengths, allowing the third service to 'ride the wave' of opportunities that proved less accessible or even invisible to the other services. Some of these challenges and the concomitant opportunities were coincidental and even apparently counter-productive to the RAF's aims, such as straitened economic circumstances. However, the leadership's singularity of purpose in surviving as an independent force, combined with the agility inherent in a new organisation and small burgeoning Ministry, helped them tackle the difficulties of the specific post-war context.

Demobilisation was one of the factors cited in making Churchill joint Secretary of State for War and Air in January 1919, since the challenges of reducing force numbers in the Army and RAF were considered analogous. Though the numbers to be demobilised from the Army were much larger, both services faced significant contractions in their manpower (and womanpower: the WRAF, which numbered tens of thousands, was disbanded in April 1920, just two years after its creation). Bonar Law made the argument in support of Churchill's dual roles, on 15 December 1919 in the House of Commons, pointing out that there were synergies between the War Office and Air Ministry roles: 'Demobilisation and the Air Force go closely together. [...] I think it is a distinct advantage that the same man should have both problems before his mind at the time he is working on them.'¹⁴ Yet, Prince Albert wrote to his mother, Queen Mary, that same year reflecting on the unease that the demobilisation process created in an organisation that was new and, in the eyes of its critics, ephemeral:

There has been a certain amount of discontent out here in the RAF about demobilization. Not actually here but in Germany in some of the squadrons and Aircraft Depots near Cologne. It seems to be quieting down again now but it might be very awkward. If things are explained to

¹³ Although there were occasional predictions, mainly from avid supporters of the RAF, that the Army and the Navy might cease to be required, see for example Powers, p. 140.

¹⁴ HC Debate (1919) Fifth Series, Vol. 123, Col. 101, 15 December 1919.

them properly then they understand. It is due to the uncertainty of what is going to happen to the RAF after peace. We are all feeling it here a bit and especially as the Air Minister is now being joined with the War Minister.¹⁵

A memorandum prepared for the Lord Chancellor laid out the government's argument in more detail:

the demobilisation of the Army and the Air Force had to proceed simultaneously. They were intermingled in the fighting forces in every theatre of the war. Their general demobilisation problems were practically identical. Uniformity and simultaneity of practice so far as possible were indispensable.¹⁶

All these sources recognise the process of demobilisation as problematic. What bears emphasis, however, is that the reach and scale of Army demobilisation dwarfed the RAF's challenges, touching far more of the general population than the equivalent RAF process. As in so many areas, not least in popular culture which 'came to focus on the soldier in the trench as the iconic experience of real war', the scale and duration of the land war and the soldiers' experiences of it eclipsed the RAF's, allowing the RAF to escape the sense of cultural disillusionment surrounding army service.¹⁷ Trenchard outlined the precarious nature of the make-up of the new service:

officers and men alike [brought from the RFC and RNAS] were almost entirely on temporary engagements. The Officers had either been seconded from one or other of the parent services or given temporary commissions, whilst the men were mainly enlisted for the duration of the war.¹⁸

¹⁵ Royal Archives (RA), RA QM/PRIV/CC011/3, Letter from Duke of York to Queen Mary, 15 January 1919.

¹⁶ Parliamentary Archives (PA), Personal Papers of Lloyd George, LG/F/9/1/52, memorandum for the Lord Chancellor on justification for combining Secretaryships for War and Air, 14 July 1919.

¹⁷ Todman, p. 26.

¹⁸ TNA, AIR 1/718/29/7, Beatty and Wilson Memorandum, 17 November 1919.

Although demobilisation stripped out expertise at the more junior levels of the RAF, it carried with it the unspoken advantage of allowing Trenchard and his senior team the opportunity to restructure radically and refocus a force that had been created by an amalgamation of RFC and RNAS assets.

During Churchill's tenure at the Air Ministry the more abrasive aspects of his leadership style, which had led to rifts during his time at the Admiralty, proved to be less important than his energetic support for the post-war Air Force. Although the RAF was yet to win over Buckingham Palace and Churchill had done little to ingratiate himself with King George V when First Lord of the Admiralty, the Palace was not the priority in these early days.¹⁹ Churchill's strong endorsement of Trenchard, whom he reinstated as CAS in early 1919, and his plans for a reformed RAF prioritising foundations over size and cost, as well as for colonial air policing, were highly important for the adolescent RAF. In the straitened post-war economic environment, there was an understandable appetite for reductions in defence spending. Trenchard's memorandum on 'An Outline of the Scheme for the Permanent Organization of the Royal Air Force', put before both Houses in December 1919 by Churchill, offered an attractive package lower in cost and squadron footprint than his predecessor's earlier vision. The memorandum talked about conceptual foundations such as Air Force Spirit, and it also contained a section on physical foundations, unimaginatively entitled 'Necessity for large capital outlay on accommodation'.²⁰ Air Marshal Sir Philip Joubert de La Ferté later recounted that the press humorously called the RAF 'The Royal Ground Force' because of this well-planned building scheme. He went on:

Trenchard and his advisers had learned one supreme lesson during the war. It takes a long time to design new aircraft, and while waiting for the post-war novelties to show their utility and become worth the money to

¹⁹ For example, Churchill fought a long and ill-tempered battle with Buckingham Palace over the naming of new naval ships from 1911 to 1913, prompting Lord Esher to write to King George V's Private Secretary of Churchill: 'For so clever a man he is sometimes so exceedingly foolish', RA PS/PSO/GV/C/G/285/25, letter from Derby to Stamfordham, 4 November 1912, and other letters 1911–1914, RA PS/PSO/GV/C/G/285.

²⁰ TNA, AIR 8/12, *Permanent Organization of the Royal Air Force*, 11 December 1919.

buy them there was the task of laying down what is now known as the 'infra-structure' of the R.A.F.²¹

As well as laying out foundations for the RAF at home, Trenchard's memorandum also included explicit discussion of the advantages of using air power for policing in the British Empire and the potential for substituting RAF squadrons for land garrisons — a convenient use for aircraft that the RAF already had (as opposed to acquiring post-war novelties). Here, even counter-productive challenges like a very difficult economic climate allowed the RAF the chance to develop the concept of substitution as one that would offer highly economical colonial rule.

However, to put this into some context, the Air Ministry was wisely much more cautious in its operational activities closer to the UK mainland. The early post-war years in Britain were characterised by labour unrest and civil strife, amid circumstances of mass demobilisation and worsening economic hardship. Although, as early as 1917, RAF aircraft had been used in Britain to drop leaflets calling on aero engine workers to call off their strikes, and after the war they were used to fly urgent dispatches which otherwise would have been disrupted by a rail strike, patrols and postal deliveries formed the limited purview of their homeland operational role.²² Trenchard recognised, somewhat instinctively given the lack of scholarship on civil–military boundaries at the time, that there should be lines drawn around armed action at home: 'A military machine, he stated [in the context of aircraft for police action in Ireland or industrial disturbances], was the worst possible weapon for such a purpose, and should never be used except for reconnaissance.'²³ He remained consistent in this argument, mostly restricting RAF operations in Ireland to patrolling and mail duties, despite pressure from Churchill for more aggressive activity, while also recognising that there were better arenas in which he and Churchill might

²¹ Philip Joubert de la Ferté, *The Forgotten Ones: The Story of the Ground Crews* (London: Hutchinson, 1961), p. 120.

²² According to Gray, p. 47.

²³ Andrew Boyle, p. 371.

test the coercive nature of air power.²⁴ The RAF sought a more prominent role overseas, one that would be highly economical to the British Government.

As well as the unrest in Ireland and on the mainland, the burden of administering a restless empire combined with the need to constrain spending had presented the British Government with additional post-war challenges. Slessor later described the post-war landscape: ‘embers of the War [...] were still smouldering’.²⁵ As Priya Satia has discussed, the appetite for using aerial weapons during the inter-war years was promoted by the British Government in those parts of the empire where the population was classed as native and inferior rather than ‘advanced’.²⁶ The racist tone of much of the internal Air Ministry discussion of air policing was reflected in racist arguments made in Parliament when the issue was discussed, not least by Trenchard whose confidence in the ethics of the operations was probably influenced by his earlier army experiences.²⁷ In the promotion of air policing, distance from home (and consequent media invisibility) was an important factor to the Air Ministry; it would have significantly more control over the narrative that was delivered to the British population on operations in Iraq and Somaliland than it would have done using similar tactics across the Irish Sea.

Once again, the confluence of apparently negative factors (in this case economic retrenchment, unrest in the empire, and a bullish Secretary of State pushing the boundaries) came together to provide an opening for the third service, albeit one that was open to ethical question despite the zealous

²⁴ David Omissi found that air power was used coercively in Ireland, albeit in a very small number of cases, Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control*, p. 43.

²⁵ National Archives College Park (NACP), Record Group (RG) 165, Military Intelligence Division Correspondence (MIDC) 1917–41, 2083-1259–1272, 2083-1271, ‘The Development of the Royal Air Force’, lecture by John Slessor, 6 June 1931.

²⁶ Priya Satia, ‘The Defense of Inhumanity: Air Control and the British Idea of Arabia’, *The American Historical Review*, 111 (2006), 16–51 (p. 37). Rieger also discussed the differentiation between ‘primitive’ and ‘advanced’ responses to advanced technologies, Bernhard Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity in Britain and Germany, 1890–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 36.

²⁷ See, for example, Trenchard’s speech where he maintained that tribes had ‘no objection to being killed’, HL Debate (1930) Fifth Series, Vol. 77, Col. 25, 9 April 1930. In his autobiographical notes, he recounts incidences of human sacrifice, murder, and mutilation in West Africa in 1903: ‘The country was very thickly populated and the people were really nothing but savages or monkeys.’ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/61, 1 of 2, autobiographical notes, undated.

conviction of those primarily responsible for its deployment. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, the RAF saw the chance to provide the government with an economic alternative to land forces in air policing overseas. The agility with which the Air Ministry responded to the vexed question of colonial unrest was aided by Churchill's move to the Colonial Office in early 1921, which Richard Toye has suggested was influenced by Churchill's interests in Middle Eastern affairs.²⁸ Churchill's active promotion of the RAF as its Secretary of State made him an ideal advocate for imperial air policing, and the economies that it offered, in the early 1920s. For Trenchard, the opportunity to maintain flying squadrons overseas using existing air assets also gave his airmen additional operational experience, as well as colonial administrative experience, that would consolidate their role as an asset to the British Empire.²⁹

Back at home, the nation was coming to terms with the aftermath of four years of bloody fighting. The British population had been touched by war on a scale never seen before and British fatalities had been greatest in the Army, by some order of magnitude. Jay Winter calculated:

casualty rates in the army were much higher [at one in eight] than in the navy or RFC/RAF where, respectively, one in sixteen, and one in fifty was killed. The proportion wounded in the army was ten times higher than in either of the other two services.³⁰

Understandably, the narrative around war casualties and memorialisation of loss centred on the land warfare experience in the trenches, with France and Flanders characterised as the 'deadliest theatre of operations'.³¹ For the RAF, this took the focus away from its losses, allowing the service to calibrate carefully its involvement in memorialisation while prioritising the future, unencumbered by the implicit accusation that it had wasted hundreds of thousands of lives in the preceding war. In 1920 when the importance of

²⁸ Richard Toye, *Churchill's Empire: The World That Made Him and the World He Made* (London: Macmillan, 2010), p. 142.

²⁹ Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence*, p. 182.

³⁰ Winter, p. 72.

³¹ Winter, p. 84.

including the sailor and airman, as well as the soldier, in the conceptualisation of The Tomb of the Unknown Warrior was being considered by Buckingham Palace, the Archbishop of Canterbury wrote: 'I imagine that the Navy could be made to realise that after all the War was mainly a land war and that the number of men who died in the field was infinitely larger than those who died at sea.' Although the term 'Warrior' rather than 'Soldier' was chosen for the Tomb, the Archbishop reflected a public focus on the Army's experience of war, not even mentioning the RAF in his letter.³²

As well as the conceptual distance of the RAF from mass casualties and trench warfare, the language available to the RAF in the immediate post-war period was partly shaped by the difference in public representation of the air war and the pilot. Maryam Philpott reflected on the differing presentations of the air and land components:

Understandably, pilot activities and lifestyle looked exciting in comparison with the experiences of the silent, battle-scarred soldier, broken by his experience of war. The transformation of the pilot into a figure of manly heroism was affected as much by the veteran-pilot as by the media. Consequently the picture of war created by veteran-pilots was largely stripped of death in favour of sanitized notions of glory and heroism.³³

The combination of sanitisation from the horrors of warfare and the romantic presentation of flying and aerial combat allowed the RAF to move its narrative away from the losses it had suffered (and, of course, the majority of these losses were suffered by the RFC and the RNAS and so were not specifically the RAF's 'territory'). In 1919, Trenchard gave a speech in which he spoke of the RAF's experience of the First World War in terms that would have sounded graceless if used in the context of the Army's experience:

³² RA PS/PSO/GV/C/O/1637/6, letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury to Stamfordham, 13 October 1920.

³³ Maryam Philpott, *Air and Sea Power in World War I: Combat and Experience in the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Navy* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), p. 171.

We too have our tradition and spirit — the Air Spirit — the spirit of adventure and of offensive action which during four years and more of war, carried our machines far over enemy territories and seas in almost every part of the globe.³⁴

Words like ‘adventure’ and ‘spirit’ were available to Trenchard in reflecting his airmen’s experiences, and language that focused on ‘our machines’ provided the RAF with additional semantic distance from the human cost of war.

That said, the bombing of the mainland during the First World War had brought air power’s destructive potential to the public’s doorstep: the ‘silver streak’ of water which separated Britain from continental Europe no longer provided the insulation on which pre-war generations had intuitively relied.³⁵ Air raids on the United Kingdom had demonstrated, in the most graphic way, that air power presented a unique and novel challenge to the island mentality. King George V’s diary entries, so often mundane in their accounts of day-to-day administrative business (accompanied by reports of the weather and daily leisure activities), reveal the strong impressions that the bombings of London in 1917 made on the monarch, as will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.³⁶ The nature and length of the war, the use of aerial bombing, and the proportion of the population who had served, meant that for the first time in living memory war had not been a distant conflict fought by an impersonal professional military. Both the bombing of the mainland and the broader national experience of the First World War had a profound effect on the national psyche. Overy discussed this shift in *The Morbid Age* and in it quoted a speech by George Bernard Shaw: ‘once confident and uncomplicated, the mental landscape was now a bleak and dangerous realism’.³⁷

Yet the RAF was still able to delineate itself from the other services in these early post-war years. Partly this stemmed from the RAF’s argument that it

³⁴ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/98 2/9, speech, 1919.

³⁵ David G. Morgan-Owen, *The Fear of Invasion: Strategy, Politics, and British War Planning, 1880–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 1.

³⁶ RA GV/PRIV/GVD/1917–1920, King George V diaries.

³⁷ Overy, *The Morbid Age*, p. 19.

alone would be able to deter future continental enemies with the threat of the offensive bomber, presenting the positive jingoistic slant on the negative connotations of the bomber. As Tami Davis Biddle astutely surmised, the emerging German threat of the 1930s later made that (still unproven) claim more difficult to deploy, but it could be done and was done in the 1920s when the RAF walked 'a fine line between deterring the enemy and frightening the domestic polity into a state of self-deterrence'.³⁸ Here the RAF used the threat from the French to reinforce its arguments, though the Air Staff couched their submissions in terms which could be interpreted as both artful and disingenuous. A CID paper by the Air Ministry on the 'Vulnerability of the British Isles to Air Attack' of 8 November 1921 began with a short minute by Trenchard. His first statement was that the memorandum was 'on the strength of the continental air menace that exists at the present time' followed immediately by the contradictory statement that [the Air Staff] 'have not attempted [...] to argue the probability of this menace immediately developing'. The paper contained a detailed assessment of the threat posed by France, again using cavalier phraseology: 'In order to cite a concrete example of what this country has to expect to-day from an aerial attack by a continental Power, it will be necessary to take the case of France.'³⁹ France appeared to provide a convenient vehicle for the argument the Air Ministry wished to deploy on bombing, rather than present to the Ministry a material threat of any seriousness. Chapter Seven will consider in more detail the significance of the paper in influencing King George V's thinking. The RAF's appeals for support, behind the scenes, as a modern force with technological answers to deterring future war were critical to winning the attention of the influential.

Given that the history of Britain as a genuine parliamentary democracy covered the same historical period as that of the RAF and because the RAF was formed due to pressures to improve home defence of the civilian population, Overy argued that there was a more direct relationship between the

³⁸ Biddle, p. 81.

³⁹ TNA, CAB 3/3/102, 'Vulnerability of British Isles to Air Attack', 8 November 1921. This paper is also held in RA PS/PSO/GV/C/G/1739.

RAF and the public that gave it 'a distinct democratic function'.⁴⁰ Mass enfranchisement in 1918 brought the right to vote to all men over twenty-one and for women with specific property rights over thirty. With the number of parliamentary electors rising from 7.7 million in 1910 to 21.3 million in 1918, the Fourth Reform Act 'signalled the opening of a new phase in the nation's political life'.⁴¹ That said, outside the role of home defence, it is not clear that a 'direct relationship' between the RAF and the public existed during its earliest years. Even so, the novelty and self-conscious modernity of aviation provided a route to the public's imagination. So, too, the arguments in favour of offensive bombing appealed to a population struggling to come to terms with the implications of enemy bombing for the perceived safety of living on an island, one that, it was becoming shockingly clear, required much more than the protection of the 'silver streak' already mentioned.

The amplification of public debate during an era of substantial growth for mass circulation newspapers served an RAF CAS with an eye for propaganda. When sent to run the Independent Force in spring 1918, Trenchard demonstrated that he already understood the power of the press; Biddle recounted that he sent his first press release, before his first telegram to the Air Ministry, within two hours of his arrival in post. He then:

upgraded the communications links to England, and made a point of complaining whenever his press releases were not printed, or not followed verbatim in major English papers. The IF [Independent Force] organized an extensive program of daily, weekly, and monthly news releases and dispatches for public consumption.⁴²

Reinstated as CAS in 1919, Trenchard's appetite for engaging with the public is evidenced in his personal papers: for example, in 1920 he wrote to Lord Londonderry: 'I am indulging in a little propaganda for recruiting purposes, so if

⁴⁰ Richard Overy, 'Identity, Politics and Technology in the RAF's History', *The RUSI Journal*, 153.6 (2008), 74–77 (p. 74).

⁴¹ Helen McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain', *The Historical Journal*, 50.04 (2007), 891–912 (p. 891).

⁴² Biddle, p. 41.

you see things in the paper you will know. I am also going to have some films done.⁴³ Unlike his opposite numbers in the Navy and Army, who tended to use their links with the press to promote letters and articles supporting their political arguments, Trenchard also understood the imperative to communicate directly with the public as well as opinion-formers. The currency of the RAF's appeal allowed him to do that without jeopardising the service's dignity, not least because of the unusual, and advantageous, space it occupied in Shaw's 'bleak and dangerous' times.⁴⁴ With the press at its apogee, there were a plethora of outlets as Modris Eksteins described: 'Never before or since have there been as many newspapers or as many readers of the printed word. The press was the source of news, information, and entertainment. Every European capital had dozens of newspapers.'⁴⁵ That said, as will be explored in Chapters Five and Six, Trenchard's difficult post-war relationship with the press barons required some creativity in finding alternative routes to the public.

Eksteins expanded further on the *zeitgeist* of the early 1920s discussing the material difference between commemoration and contemplation. He compared people's inability to contemplate the meaning, or pointlessness, of the war with their far greater appetite to commemorate and memorialise. In place of considering meaning, he argued that people focused instead on living. This, fortunately for the RAF, chimed with the tropes of modernity and excitement that flying and aviation also embodied. The difficult questions posed by the First World War were nowhere near being answered in the three to four years after 1918, but they also, as Eksteins argued, helped to usher in a different mood:

As people became less able to answer the fundamental question of the meaning of life — and the war posed that question brutally in nine million cases — they insisted all the more stridently that meaning lay in life itself,

⁴³ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/240, letter from Trenchard to Londonderry, 30 August 1920.

⁴⁴ Overy, *The Morbid Age*, p. 19.

⁴⁵ Eksteins, p. 249.

in the act of living, in the vitality of the moment. The twenties, as a result, witnessed a hedonism and narcissism of remarkable proportions.⁴⁶

Eksteins argued that, in thinking about the war, the 'horrendous' idea that it might not have been worth the effort forced people to bury the thought and with it comprehension of the war, at least for a time.⁴⁷ Descriptions such as 'morbid' and 'brutal' have been deployed to encapsulate the mood of the period, yet the prospect of technological advance combined with a desire to forget the troubles of the Great War created a nuanced mood, simultaneously cautious and unshackled. The partial political enfranchisement of women, along with social and technological change brought about by the war, added to a *zeitgeist* of modernity.

Additionally, the cult of youth and, with it, a fascination with the new and the modern were concepts that played to the RAF's (partly mythical) appeal of dashing pilots and cutting-edge technology. This form of post-war experience would have been more recognisable and accessible to the wealthy and privately educated: the social class most at liberty to embrace hedonism, modern opportunities, and the 'dashing' lifestyles that presented a glamorous alternative to grimmer reality was the upper class. These were the same younger generation that the RAF was targeting to form its future officer corps, and they were from the same backgrounds as families who had disproportionately suffered losses of young men fighting as young officers in the Army during the war. As Winter has demonstrated in his detailed quantitative research on First World War casualties, there was a 'surplus mortality' of officers in the Army, and, though there was also a surplus of officer deaths compared to other ranks in the RFC/RAF (though not the Navy as the nature of fighting, warfare, and death was literally 'all of one company' in a ship at sea), the numbers were so much smaller that they could not have had anywhere close to a comparable impact. He also illustrated the significantly higher casualty rates suffered by men from Oxford and Cambridge universities and from British public schools.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Eksteins, p. 256.

⁴⁷ Eksteins, pp. 253–54 and 256.

⁴⁸ Winter, pp. 86–98.

Here again, in these early inter-war years, the RAF was able to offer a more positive career path, with glamour and public acclaim (as demonstrated by public interest in air displays and pageants), to the younger generation. This also afforded the RAF a route out of the cycle of memorialisation and past reflection within which the other two services, understandably, found themselves trapped. The modern and relatively cutting-edge RAF's appeal reached beyond the most privileged, with keen competition for entry to apprentice training as well, though these recruits came from backgrounds far removed from the lifestyles of the most privileged.

The RAF, constructed in wartime from two branches of the older services, faced a hostile Whitehall environment from birth. The new service had to secure essential funding and resource support in the most unpropitious economic circumstances and in the face of antipathy from politicians, the Army, and the Navy. Central to its ability to meet these challenges was the manner in which RAF supporters handled the diametrically opposed concepts of tradition and modernity to frame its identity as a core component of Britain's defences: as Martin Daunton and Bernhard Rieger have argued, those who embraced modernity often did so 'partially or selectively'.⁴⁹ A singularity of purpose, and an ability to recognise and capitalise on strange happenstance, distinguished the service from its rivals. The sense in which the RAF managed to ride the wave of turmoil that engulfed Britain and empire after the First World War describes an organisation which embodied the agility that its pilots and aircraft displayed in the air. The Army and the Navy were carrying too much baggage to match the younger service's agility and much of that baggage was dominated by the legacy of the war.

The Navy and the Army — Legacy of the First World War

The immediate post-war period was contextually different for the Navy and the Army. The Royal Navy, in particular, had approached the war in 1914 with

⁴⁹ Martin Daunton and Bernhard Rieger, *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), p. 7.

confidence, anticipating decisive action. The senior service had proven adept at mobilising public opinion around its mast; Jan Rüger argued that pre-war naval celebrations of the fleet had become increasingly elaborate and ‘offered such a powerful arena for late Victorian and Edwardian identity politics because it combined some of the most potent sources of national identification in one symbol’, embracing nation, empire, and the monarchy.⁵⁰ Whether it was the scale of these celebrations and the ships they paraded or the imagery around the celebrations that made the greatest impression, Jeffrey Richards made the important point that the monarchy and empire were moving from the 1880s onwards ‘above political and class differences [...] to be seen as a symbol of the nation and thus an object of the general patriotism’.⁵¹ These naval celebrations captured something of the same journey. Also, the public energy and attention that the *Dreadnought* had attracted reflected the pre-war focus, in defence terms, on the race with Germany to win the battle for naval supremacy. Steiner wrote that Beatty’s assumption that war would prove the Navy could deliver final victory ‘was shared by a wide variety of supporters, not just navalists and imperialists but traditional Conservatives, economy-minded Liberals, radicals and Labour supporters’.⁵² The Navy entered the war in 1914 with a nation anticipating a ‘Nelson-like triumph’.⁵³

It should be noted that the men of the RFC, though not believing that they were to make the decisive contribution when war was declared, were, like the Navy, anticipating a relatively short affair. During interviews with Trenchard in 1920, he recalled that RFC officers at Netheravon left notes in 1914 on their doors saying ‘Not to be opened until I return’, not predicting that the war would last for years, not months.⁵⁴ That said, the expectations of the RFC at the beginning of the war bore little resemblance to the contribution that air power

⁵⁰ Jan Rüger, ‘Nation, Empire and Navy: Identity Politics in the United Kingdom 1887–1914’, *Past & Present*, 185 (2004), 159–87 (pp. 164 and 184).

⁵¹ Jeffrey Richards, ‘Boy’s Own Empire: Feature Films and Imperialism in the 1930s’, in *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, ed. by John M. MacKenzie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 140–164 (p.161).

⁵² Zara Steiner, ‘Views of War: Britain Before the “Great War” – and After’, *International Relations*, 17.1 (2003), 7–33 (p. 12).

⁵³ Jan Rüger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 257.

⁵⁴ TNA, AIR 718/29/3, ‘Notes on interview with Air Marshal Sir H. Trenchard “Early War Period”’, 2 September 1920.

made through rapid advances in technology during the war, exculpating the RAF from recriminations that dogged the other two services.

Four years later in 1918 the combination of a mixed war record without decisive action, the end of the German challenge to British naval supremacy, and the straitened economic circumstances of the era posed serious problems for the senior service.⁵⁵ Research on the activities of the Navy League in this immediate post-war period reflect a partial paralysis of policy which appears to have afflicted the Navy more widely. Duncan Redford wrote: ‘Little policy-making occurred during 1920; the League considered that the government had no policy on the Navy so that it saw no need to produce any further proposals in response.’⁵⁶ Certainly, history records that much energy was expended by the Navy, and Beatty as First Sea Lord for the duration of his tenure in particular, in shaping the legacy of the Battle of Jutland. The argument between Beatty and his predecessor Jellicoe entailed attempts to pin the blame for the failure to turn Jutland into a decisive action. Andrew Cumming, no fan of the RAF, summarised:

When peace finally came in 1918, the reputation of the traditional services emerged in tatters. Victory, according to some of the returning soldiery, was achieved by attrition rather than inspired leadership [...] The Royal Navy’s failure at Jutland and friction between Lloyd George and the Admiralty over the convoy system did nothing to inspire public confidence in the senior service either. On the other hand, the Royal Air Force seemed to have come out of the conflict comparatively well.⁵⁷

Andrew Gordon concurred, observing that the Navy ‘failed to obtain a result accordant with its heritage — and immune to the mendacious constructions of

⁵⁵ Although Till argued that Jutland was a decisive battle, ‘but of a confirmatory sort’: Geoffrey Till, ‘Trafalgar and the Decisive Naval Battles of the 21st Century’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 18.3 (2005), 455–70 (p. 457).

⁵⁶ 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*, 96 (2011), 48–67 (p. 53).

⁵⁷ Anthony J. Cumming, *The Battle for Britain: Interservice Rivalry between the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy, 1909–1940* (Annapolis, Maryland MD: Naval Institute Press, 2015), p. 41.

journalists'.⁵⁸ As David Banft has argued, the Jutland controversy was not simply a personal spat between Beatty and Jellicoe, but a product of the 'total experience' of the First World War and reaction to it in the aftermath.⁵⁹ In terms of handling the upcoming fights over ownership of air power, the Admiralty and Navy were further handicapped by the transfer of many of their senior cadre of airmen to the RAF. Given the technological and novel nature of military aviation, those more senior men who transferred across to the third service were a self-selecting group of the most forward-looking. Arguably, they consisted of the relatively select number of officers from the Navy who could range freely across the middle ground between 'the "romantic" and the "scientific"'.⁶⁰

In public terms, the unedifying dispute between Beatty and Jellicoe over Jutland, combined with the majority of the public's distance from the maritime war effort, made a coordinated communication of the Navy's contribution to the First World War and its relevance to the immediate post-war environment significantly more difficult. In terms of memorialisation, Don Leggett has argued persuasively that the lack of a decisive victory at Jutland failed to provide the Navy with a hook on which to hang its commemoration of the sailors who died during the First World War. As will be seen in Chapter Two, its attempts to commemorate the naval dead were drawn-out and somewhat confused, and the restoration of HMS *Victory* in the 1920s points to a search for 'a dependable icon of naval strength' in a period of uncertainty and economic constraint.⁶¹ While the scuttling of the German fleet at Scapa Flow might have offered some compensation as an image of British supremacy, it did not come near the symbolism or lasting quality of a decisive battle.

For the Army, the immediate post-war years were even more challenging, given the enormous loss of life during the war, the demands of demobilisation, and the difficulty of articulating and communicating a clear post-

⁵⁸ Andrew Gordon, *The Rules of the Game: Jutland and British Naval Command* (London: Murray, 1996), p. 505.

⁵⁹ David Beatty and Bryan Ranft, *The Beatty Papers: Selections from the Private and Official Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Early Beatty, Volume 2: 1916–1927* (Aldershot: Scolar Press for the Navy Records Society, 1993), p. 419.

⁶⁰ Andrew Gordon, *The Rules of the Game*, p. 353.

⁶¹ Leggett, p. 65.

war land role. The transformation in the British (and European) conception of war most obviously affected views of, and was effected by the experience of, the Army's war. Thousands of men returned to their communities bringing home with them visible and verbal evidence of the realities of modern war. Like the Navy, for the Army a long and drawn-out war had seemed far-fetched, if not practically impossible in 1914.⁶² Having started the war with a strength of less than 250,000 and expanded during the First World War to five and a half million men, the service had been stretched and distorted in a way that made the old Edwardian model seem a distant memory, yet that was the Army cherished by its senior leadership.⁶³

Certainly, they did not take the end of the war as a signal to revolutionise training or doctrine in early years after the war, preferring to 'return to the old pre-war peacetime training routine'.⁶⁴ The regimental system, strongly embedded at the heart of the Army's culture and identity, was a system inherently sceptical of large-scale change. Coupled with a reliance on 'obsolescent weapons and equipment', Bond argued that the Army was destined to take on the role of the 'Cinderella Service'.⁶⁵ French was more positive about the regimental system, which he argued had been used by historians as a repository for general criticism of the Army, and about the attitudes of the inter-war Army to the future and to change. He pointed to funding as the key reason behind the arrested development of mechanization and other technological advances in the Army during the inter-war years. Both French and John Gooch conceded that the Army's size and the limited powers of the General Staff relative to the regiments' autonomy reduced its agility.⁶⁶ In contrast, the RAF was small and centred very much on Trenchard and his senior leaders, most of whom emerged united from their wartime experiences;

⁶² Steiner, 'Views of War', p. 9.

⁶³ Kirke, p. 182.

⁶⁴ Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars*, p. 34.

⁶⁵ Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars*, p. 33.

⁶⁶ French, *Military Identities*, pp. 263–70; John Gooch, "A Particularly Anglo-Saxon Institution": The British General Staff in the Era of the Two World Wars', in *The British General Staff: Reform and Innovation c. 1890–1939*, ed. by Brian Bond, David French and Brian Holden Reid (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 160–70.

they seized on low cost opportunities like air policing to make the most of the technology that they already had.

The Army also faced the prospect of leading, or at the very least participating centrally in, the very public debate about commemorating the lives of those who had died and recognising the contribution of all who had fought. Though clearly the burden of the war had fallen on all three services, as earlier mentioned the sheer size of the Army's contribution and sacrifice, combined with familiarity with the British 'Tommy' and portrayal of trench warfare as emblematic of the Great War itself, meant that the Army continued to be the key focus of memorialisation. Even more recent interpretations of memorials, memory, and meaning have not approached the subject in a comparative manner between the three armed services, arguably because so much of the memorialisation that followed the First World War focused on the fallen soldier. As will be examined further in Chapter Two, these differences in approach provide texture and depth to exploration of the RAF's newly developing identity.

Additionally, the Army and the Navy had long-established relationships and a method of working within Whitehall institutions, which the RAF and the Air Ministry challenged. Although rivalry over resources had always been part of that relationship, the respective roles of the two services were distinct and, for the most part, accepted. The demarcation between land and sea was conceptually simpler than that between air and the surfaces beneath it. The arrival of air as a new environment for armed power projection meant that Britain's battles would involve at least two of the three services working together. Air power always interacts with the surfaces below it, be they land or sea; in contrast, before the development of air power, naval or land battles could be fought and won in isolation from the other medium, though there are some interesting examples where earlier joint efforts had demonstrated friction in the littoral environment.⁶⁷ For this reason, the creation of the RAF caused conceptual as well as organisational disruption and the combination had a

⁶⁷ Jacqueline Reiter, "'A breach between the two services': The Walcheren Expedition, Lord Chatham's narrative and army–navy relations, 1809–1810', conference paper, Society for Army Historical Research, 16 November 2017.

synergistic effect. The existence of a third service threatened and disrupted the pre-war legacy inter-service relationship and the RAF's enthusiasm for substitution presented an early challenge. Bond argued that 'the army did not dispute the pre-eminence of the Royal Navy in the vital task of maintaining sea supremacy as the basis of the system of Imperial Defence'.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the post-war strategic interests of managing unrest in the empire were more suited to land than maritime forces, and thus the Army became, initially at least, the default force for imperial policing, soon to be challenged by the RAF, as discussed further in the second case study of Chapter Two.

Modernity and Tradition

Many academics have discussed the air environment in the context of the ancient and the modern, the chivalrous and the technological.⁶⁹ The RAF was to make the most of being able to appear both traditional and modern; it could face both ways at once to fashion its identity as it wanted. Maryam Philpott summarised this dual context:

The suggested combination of both 'ancient' and 'modern' warfare with the pilot at its apex was a key perception at this time. The RFC suggests that the airman was the embodiment of the medieval crusader in personality, who utilizes cutting-edge technology, stepping directly from the past into an aeroplane.⁷⁰

Eksteins argued that what differentiated war in the air was that:

In the air war one could maintain values, including respect for one's enemy, values that lay at the foundation of civilization and that the war on the ground appeared to be negating. The most significant technological achievement of the modern world was thus also seen as a means of affirming traditional values.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 73.

⁶⁹ See, for example, Goebel; also Rieger.

⁷⁰ Philpott, p. 182.

⁷¹ Eksteins, p. 265.

So, while the pilot embodied chivalry, the aircraft allowed the RAF's identity to embrace modernity simultaneously. As Rieger said in relation to the technology of passenger liners and airships:

Since most observers lacked detailed knowledge of how [they] came into existence, these markers of modernity appeared devoid of any past. With their individual histories hidden, they seemed to burst into the present from nowhere.⁷²

Civil and military aviation carried the possibilities of power projection over vast distance, of speed and reach (and unprecedented access to instant, exploitable intelligence, not just imagery intelligence but reliable local reportage of what was happening on the ground), and most importantly of agility. These concepts help to explain the concomitant mindsets of the RAF's leadership: agile and adaptable in the service of the RAF. Yet at the same time the RAF was some way from writing doctrine and the first RAF staff college course would not graduate until 1923; there was freedom in having no history and limited expectations of what could be achieved in strictly doctrinal terms in these early years.

From its earliest days, the vision for the RAF from its leaders had been to focus on the new and the modern, to differentiate the service from its ancestral military and naval counterparts. Weir, writing at the time of the Trenchard resignation row, described his view of the purpose of the new service: 'to work out its development in its own way unhampered and free from precedents and stereotyped methods which might tend to handicap its progress'.⁷³ Given the paucity of resource with which to build the RAF once the war had ended, Trenchard (once back as CAS) focused on fundamental building blocks and emphasised the importance of technological training. For Trenchard, this was about foundations, and these started with quality apprentice training to develop

⁷² Rieger, p. 34.

⁷³ Churchill Archives (CA), Personal Papers of Lord Weir, WEIR 1/6/1, letter from Weir to Lloyd George, 27 April 1918.

technicians capable of handling aviation technology which was advancing rapidly and required adaptable skills. He was fond of analogies to buildings as this quote, resonant of several others, demonstrates:

You have all heard the tale of the man who built a magnificent house but made the small omission of neglecting to provide any stairs. The Air Service is like a house and we must cultivate the all-round man otherwise we run the danger of having very fine rooms but no means of ingress to them.⁷⁴

His School of Technical Training was established at RAF Halton; this was one of the key means of 'ingress' and he believed it was the basis for a functioning air arm. As he said, in 1921: 'My orders when I became Chief of the Air Staff were to build up an Air Force. That is plainly a very different thing to maintaining an already existing and long established Service.'⁷⁵ The importance of these foundations will form the second case study of Chapter Two.

While the concepts of technology and modernity were strong aids to differentiating the RAF positively from the other two older services, the RAF had no qualms in picking elements of tradition to complete its developing identity. The arguments it had with the Navy about the creation of an RAF ensign are illustrative of the Air Force's tenacity over an issue which could be perceived as insignificant. It had proposed an RAF ensign design similar to the Royal Navy's ensign and chose to fly one of its airships over Windsor on 17 April 1919 to exhibit the newly designed flag. The Royal Archives record that King George V's Private Secretary alerted the King to the proposed flypast that morning and *The Times* recorded:

On Thursday afternoon an airship flew very low round the Castle and quite close to the Round Tower. This airship was flown by Major-General J. E. B. Seely to display before the King, the General-in-Chief of the

⁷⁴ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/98 1/9, Speech 1 Airship Officers, undated.

⁷⁵ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/98 4/9, speech to Glasgow Royal Aeronautical Society, 17 November 1921.

Royal Air Force, the new flag of the force [...] The design has received the approval of the Air Council. In appearance the new flag is similar to the White Ensign of the Royal Navy, the two points of difference being that a blue cross takes the place of the Red St George's Cross [*sic*] in the naval emblem, and that the centre of the flag bears in gold the Crown and Bird of the Royal Air Force.⁷⁶

Clearly the RAF had briefed *The Times*, probably subsequent to the event given the report appeared two days afterwards on the Saturday; the Palace generously stated: 'The enclosed statement from to-day's "Times" has possibly not been officially authorised.' The Palace continued, writing to Jack Seely, that the King thought the proposed design too similar to the naval White Ensign; the Navy certainly objected.⁷⁷

The argument rumbled into 1920 when the Board of Admiralty discussed the issue and prepared a paper which was forwarded by the Naval Secretary to the King. It records exchanges between the Admiralty and the Air Ministry — at Secretary of State level — with the Admiralty holding the line that 'there is no more reason for taking the Ensigns [...] than for taking any other piece of bunting'. The RAF offered redesigns removing the St George's cross, using a blue background and adding a target 'universally employed during the late war as a recognition mark on all types of aircraft'.⁷⁸ The Admiralty Board still objected:

The Board therefore agreed that the Air Ministry should be recommended to use the Union Jack on their shore buildings, like other Departments of State, and that if they wish a different flag to be flown from aircraft they should deface the Union Jack with the aircraft target, instead of attempting to adapt one of the Maritime Ensigns.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ 'New R.A.F. Flag', *The Times*, 19 April 1919, p. 10.

⁷⁷ RA PS/PSO/GV/PS/RAF/24870, letter from Cromer to Seely, 19 April 1919.

⁷⁸ Letter from the Air Ministry to the Admiralty, 20 June 1919, referenced in RA PS/PSO/GV/PS/RAF/24870, 'Distinguishing Flag' memo, 15 July 1920.

⁷⁹ RA PS/PSO/GV/PS/RAF/24870, letter from Naval Secretary to Stamfordham with Board of Admiralty Paper, 15 July 1920.

Despite such vigorous objection from a paper from the Admiralty Board, no less, the RAF stood firm and by 20 December 1920 the King had agreed to approve an RAF ensign and to the 'embodying instructions as to the procedure to be followed in flying the Royal Air Force ensign'.⁸⁰ Such intransigence on an issue which revolved around a historic and significant naval emblem demonstrates that the RAF wanted to refashion some of its forefathers' heritage, regardless of the fact that the Navy objected even to the use of the word 'ensign' (the Naval Secretary acknowledged that naval objections were perhaps sentimental rather than practical).⁸¹ Issues such as uniform and rank clearly mattered to the new force, which understood that identity in a service organisation had to include heritage, stolen or otherwise.

Conclusion

British military air power had been forced by the First World War to innovate and develop at pace; this rapid progress also brought about the RAF's creation when the demands of a third environment asked more of the existing system than it could bear. The long-held view, not least by the RAF's sister services, has been that the RAF, beleaguered and under constant attack in the first few years after its birth, suffered a thoroughly bruising early life. Its immaturity, combined with an unfavourable economic climate and formidable opponents who were better networked and established, was seen then predominantly as evidence of vulnerability. Air power historians have sometimes echoed the senior leaders of the time and have been criticised for tendencies 'to emphasize failures while ignoring successes and context'.⁸² More recent historiography has recognised that the RAF's consolidation as an independent service was significantly more successful than these characterisations have acknowledged. The significant and obvious point here is that the RAF leadership at the time did not have the benefit of hindsight. Several times in these early years the RAF was brought very close to abolition, and its leaders were taking decisions and

⁸⁰ RA PS/PSO/GV/PS/RAF/24870, letter from Admiral Lambert (Air Ministry) to Stamfordham and record of approval, 18–20 December 1920.

⁸¹ RA PS/PSO/GV/PS/RAF/24870, letter from Naval Secretary to Stamfordham with Board of Admiralty Paper, 15 July 1920.

⁸² John R. Ferris, 'Review Article', p. 120.

making arguments without knowing whether they would succeed or fail, in a politically and economically vulnerable environment. Understanding the building of a service identity within the context of the time is crucial to appreciating why it survived.

This was a unique period in British history and 'normal rules', it is argued, did not apply. Not only did the RAF derive advantages from its novelty, and later from the attacks it faced from the Army and the Navy, but its leaders actively utilised these advantages while many in the Whitehall defence establishment and particularly in the other two services failed to see what was hiding in plain sight. The RAF was able to sidestep comparisons with any pre-war promise, since any such claims for the potential of air power had been made by its pre-war ancestors, the RFC and the RNAS. Its relatively few, though still substantial, number of dead, combined with the perception of heroism in the manner of an aviator's combat and death (notwithstanding that the nature of many aircrew deaths was horrific and the denial of parachutes to aircrew caused many unnecessary deaths), allowed the RAF to manage its First World War legacy in a unique way. It was able to embrace the future much sooner than its older history-bound counterparts. An economically attractive offer to police the outreaches of the empire from the air, restructuring caused by demobilisation but advantageous to a force which needed to become more than just an amalgamation of defunct arms, and an appeal to the modern and to the future allowed the RAF to ride a wave of opportunity. This perspective has often been overlooked in an era characterised by its downsides.

By considering themes of commemoration, empire, and social change, through the respective specific case studies of memorialisation of the First World War, air policing, and RAF technical training, it is intended to explore in more detail in the next chapter specific examples of the RAF maximising its advantage of presenting itself as modern, while acknowledging the benefits of studiously applied appeals to heritage and tradition. In this way, the 'circumstances and cunning' behind its tenacious development in its first four

years will be explored and exposed.⁸³ Robert Wohl said, in relation to the 'Generation of 1914': 'It is people who make history, not the other way around. But it is also true that people make history within limits, of which one of the most important is their date of birth.'⁸⁴ Within the limits of its date of birth, the new third service made history from small beginnings, while simultaneously rejecting the trappings of history when expedient, combining modernity and tradition to maximum effect.

⁸³ In a review of Rieger's *Technology and the Culture of Modernity in Britain and Germany, 1890–1945*, Betts described a 'scholarly turn of attention away from the long-inventoried failures of modernity toward something else altogether: the very circumstances and cunning behind its remarkable triumph'. Paul Betts, review of *Technology and the Culture of Modernity in Britain and Germany, 1890–1945*, by Bernhard Rieger, *The Journal of Modern History*, 79.2 (2007), 395–97 (p. 395).

⁸⁴ Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980), p. 235.

CHAPTER TWO — CASE STUDIES IN TRADITION AND MODERNITY

Study One — Memorialisation

The end of the First World War presented the vexed question of how to memorialise the dead and commemorate the sacrifice of military service. As well as the many local monuments to the fallen, in villages and towns, schools and workplaces, there was also a recognition of the need to provide a focus for national grief, primarily, though not always, in the national capital. In London, fifteen out of the thirty monuments built during the 1920s were war memorials, with a large concentration of them in Westminster.¹ Priority was given to memorials to the fallen, the Cenotaph and the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior being the most prominent, with memorials to individual military leaders following later in the century. During 1918 a number of committees were formed, including one to consider a National War Memorial and a British War Memorial Committee, and the first conference on war memorials (for the 'Great War') was held at the Royal Academy.²

The rapidly growing historical field of memory and mourning, brought into sharp relief by the centenary of the First World War, provides a large body of work analysing the memorials to the First World War, but few offer a comparative analysis of the three services' approaches, beyond a recognition of the supremacy of the soldier as the representative personification of the human contribution and sacrifice to Britain's war.³ Yet the individual services also turned their attentions to memorialisation of their own, albeit in different ways. Timothy Ashplant et al summarised the function of memorials to the individual services, sub-branches, and regiments as consolidating institutional identity, and it is instructive to look in detail at the contrasting approaches the services took to expose deeper differences in culture and rehabilitation in the early post-

¹ Philip Ward-Jackson, *Public Sculpture of Historic Westminster, Vol. 1*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), p. xxxvii.

² Ward-Jackson, p. xxxviii.

³ One exception to this is Maryam Philpott who, in her book comparing the RFC and the Royal Navy, considered the contrasting representations of airmen and soldiers. Philpott, p. 171.

war period.⁴ Ashplant argued that scholars have agreed that First World War commemoration was ‘unproblematical’ at a state level, as:

Britain had emerged victorious from the war, with its territory and prestige undamaged, and endured relatively limited internal conflicts over the next twenty years. These circumstances are apparent in the forms which war commemoration took between 1919 and 1939.⁵

Commemoration combines the ‘four uncomfortable bedfellows’ of the military, religion, death, and society. Although perhaps unproblematical at a state level for Britain, at service level the varied approaches to memorialisation demonstrate different types of ambivalence, it will be argued, for different reasons related to the history and heritage of the respective service.⁶ Commemoration and memorialisation have functions beyond remembrance, offering politicians and the military a platform to present a crafted identity and potentially circumvent the ‘awkward bedfellows’, as, it seems, the RAF managed to do. Exploring the layered political and cultural meanings behind the approaches of the Royal Navy and RAF to a metropolitan memorial reveals deeper undercurrents about their respective identities and relationships with the aftermath of the First World War.

This study will therefore compare specifically the naval and RAF approaches to memorialisation in the early post-war years, in contrast to the focus of most recent debate which has centred on the Army. Philip Ward-Jackson argued that despite the lack of overall coordination of memorials in London, following the rejection of a National War Memorial at the edge of Hyde Park, there was ‘a strong sense of continuity in some of Westminster’s war memorials’ with the features of John Bell’s Guards Crimea Memorial (see

⁴ *Commemorating War: The Politics of Memory*, ed. by Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson, and Michael Roper, 3rd edn (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006), p. 25.

⁵ Timothy G. Ashplant, ‘War Commemoration in Western Europe: Changing Meanings, Divisive Loyalties, Unheard Voices’, in *Commemorating War*, ed. by Ashplant, Dawson and Roper, pp. 263–273 (p. 263).

⁶ S. M. Simpson, ‘At the Going Down of the Sun and in the Morning, We Will Remember Them? Commemoration in the 21st Century’ (unpublished JSCSC Defence Research Paper, 2007), p. 26.

Figure 2.1) recurring in post-war memorials: ‘the austere monolith, the sombre figure placed against it, and the literal representation of weapons of war’.⁷



Figure 2.1 Guards Crimea Memorial.

Yet the RAF Memorial bears little resemblance to these pre- and post-war elegiac monuments, as will be discussed. In the Navy’s case, memorialisation offered a potential platform, ultimately unrealised, to present a crafted identity and a retrospective presentation of the naval heroic. Overshadowed by the Army in the peace celebrations of 1919, it had no ‘triumphal naval spectacle’ to endorse its contribution to the Great War.⁸

⁷ Ward-Jackson, p. xxxix.

⁸ Rüger, *The Great Naval Game*, pp. 258–59.

Royal Navy National Memorialisation

There is no national memorial to the sacrifices of the Royal Navy in London. Initially the Admiralty appeared to have resisted any memorials to the sailors lost in the First World War, but its senior leaders were told by the Imperial War Graves Commission:

you convey their Lordships [*sic*] decision that no attempt should be made to erect memorials to sailors who lost their lives at sea or who were lost or buried at sea. I am directed to point out to Their Lordships that the Imperial War Graves Commission are by their charter charged with the duty of commemorating all men who fell during the war.⁹

The following year, 1921, the Navy was allocated £40,000 of government money by the National Battlefields Memorials Committee (over and above funds for naval memorials in the home ports). This money was provided ‘to commemorate the achievements of all branches of the service under the Board of Admiralty’.¹⁰ As a result of this allocation, the Admiralty convened a Naval War Memorial Committee, which was tasked with recommending the form and location of a memorial. Committee members initially reviewed a variety of designs, such as a pylon, arch or column, and locations, such as Dover, Varne Shoale, and London. They chose London due to it being central and accessible to members of the public many of whom, the Committee thoughtfully noted, did not regularly travel by sea.¹¹ However, even the minutes of these early meetings demonstrated a level of incompatibility between the Navy’s view of the memorial it deserved and the limitations of resource and practicality that actually prevailed. Regarding the form of the memorial, the Admiralty felt that ‘the limited funds available, which at present day prices, if expended on a trophy, would provide one that would be inferior to many regimental memorials of former

⁹ TNA, ADM 116/2091, letter from Arthur Browne, Principal Assistant Secretary, to The Secretary, The Admiralty, 23 June 1920.

¹⁰ TNA, ADM 1/8603/55, letter from the Naval Secretary to the Secretary to the First Sea Lord, 15 March 1921. This amount climbed to £60,000 by 1924, see TNA, ADM 1/8658/51, Royal Naval Memorial Committee papers, 7 March 1924. Archival references vary in referring to the Committee as the Royal Naval Memorial, Naval Memorial, and Naval War Memorial Committee.

¹¹ TNA, ADM 1/8603/55, Royal Naval War Memorial Committee minutes, 24 May 1921.

wars'.¹² The committee papers are redolent with a sense of entitlement that gives an indication of the levels of pre-war public reverence invested in the senior service, which must have lingered with its senior leadership even after the First World War.

It was the choice of a location for a metropolitan naval memorial that appears to have been the biggest drag on the progress of the project. An early meeting in May 1921 was conducted on foot, scouting for potential sites: 'The Committee then proceeded down the Embankment noting the various unfinished pedestals for statues which are a feature of the Embankment design.'¹³ The Admiralty Board favoured a memorial in Trafalgar Square but the First Commissioner at the Office of Works advised against that location because of limitations of space: 'the physical conditions are such as to preclude any monument of emphatic importance'.¹⁴ The Committee also singled out a site on the Embankment across from Temple Gardens, and Temple Tube Station, favoured by the Office of Works, as depicted in the diagram (Figure 2.2) below.

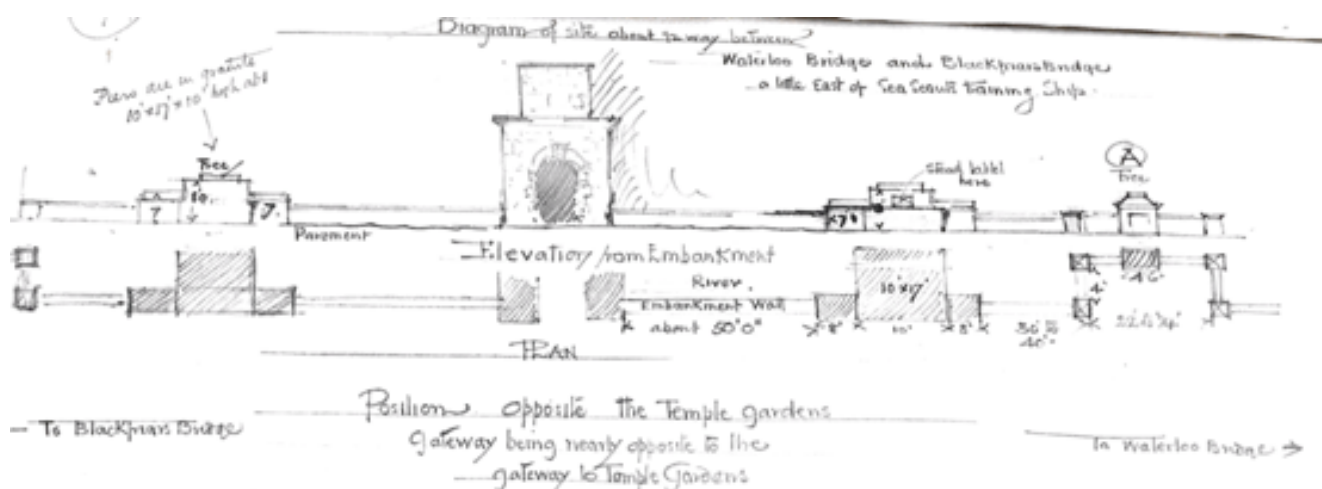


Figure 2.2 Diagram of Potential Naval Memorial Site at Temple.¹⁵

¹² TNA, ADM 1/8603/55, Atlantic Fleet Temporary Memoranda – Naval War Memorial, 1921.

¹³ TNA, ADM 116/2091, Naval War Memorial Committee minutes, 31 May 1921.

¹⁴ TNA, ADM 116/2091, letter from First Commissioner of Works to First Lord of the Admiralty, 15 July 1921.

¹⁵ TNA, ADM 116/2091, 'Diagram of site about 1/2 way between Waterloo Bridge and Blackfriars Bridge', 2 June 1922.

However, while meetings and plans proceeded at a leisurely pace, unbeknownst to the Naval War Memorial Committee other committees representative of sub-branches of the Navy such as the Royal Naval Division and the Submariners had been progressing their own commemorative plans for some time. Records show that the Submarine Memorial Committee had chosen or been allocated a pylon adjacent to the Navy's Embankment location at Temple. Once the Naval War Memorial Committee was alerted to these plans in June 1922, a flurry of communication ensued, with the Office of Works providing mediation between the Naval and Submariners' Committees.¹⁶ Due to the advanced nature of the Submarine Memorial Committee's plans, the Admiralty had little choice but to authorise that memorial (see Figure 2.3) and it was dedicated and unveiled on 15 December 1922.¹⁷



Figure 2.3 National Submarine War Memorial at Temple.

¹⁶ TNA, ADM 1/8603/55, record of meeting at the Office of Works between the Royal Naval Memorial Committee and the Submarine Memorial Committee, 7 June 1922, various minutes and letters, 1922.

¹⁷ TNA, ADM 1/8603/55, Royal Naval War Memorial Committee minutes, 31 May 1921.

The Royal Naval Division Memorial Fund, led by Brigadier General A. M. Asquith, son of the former Prime Minister, had also raised its own independent funds to commemorate the First World War naval infantry arm. Asquith eventually agreed, after negotiations with the Naval War Memorial Committee, that they should combine their projects.¹⁸ He later regretted this as evidenced by his impatient tone in a letter to the First Lord of the Admiralty in 1923:

You will remember that in March we discussed the question of the Trafalgar Square site, and you said you thought it would be difficult to get a decision out of your Committee before Easter. Our position is that our Committee have had money, subscribed for our Division Memorial, in hand for something like three years, and owing to choppings and changeings about the site, we have not yet been able to produce any dividend in the form of a Memorial!¹⁹

The Naval War Memorial Committee turned its back on the Embankment scheme, probably because the National Submarine War Memorial encroached on its plans, and cast around for another location. There is a cutting attached to the Admiralty files on the memorials which states that the First Sea Lord reported to the Admiralty Board, in November 1922, that 'he had approached the King as to the Duke of York's Column, but that His Majesty was not prepared to agree to the removal of the statue of the Duke of York'. A letter which formed part of an enquiry in 1943 into the saga of the London Naval Memorial (the enquiry was known as Case 1160) revealed that Beatty suggested that the Duke of York should be 'replaced by Britannia, to match Nelson on the other column'.²⁰

The Admiralty's partiality towards Trafalgar Square, a location redolent with centuries of naval heritage surveyed by Nelson from his column, appears to have stalled advancement of naval plans for the memorial for nearly two

¹⁸ See, for example, correspondence between Asquith and the First Lord (Lee), TNA, ADM 1/8603/55, letter from Asquith to Lee, 12 May 1922.

¹⁹ TNA, ADM 1/8658/51, letter from Asquith to Amery, 30 April 1923.

²⁰ TNA, ADM 1/14977, letter from Amery to Alexander, 27 September 1943.

years.²¹ Despite the advice from the First Commissioner of Works against Trafalgar Square as a location for a memorial, in May 1923 the First Lord of the Admiralty, by then Leo Amery, replied to Asquith's letter of frustration, saying: 'The Naval Memorial Committee have just met and come down in favour of the Trafalgar Square site.'²² Plans had developed over the course of these two years, but the Admiralty still had no agreement from the Office of Works on a confirmed location in Trafalgar Square.

The Admiralty now proposed a memorial to take up the north wall and parts of the side walls of Trafalgar Square. The north wall, at the time, was an uninterrupted façade flanked by two pedestals and two staircases, and consisted of nine panels, each twenty-five feet long. Here the Navy attempted, again, to depose a member of the royal family. The same day that Amery replied to Asquith, he also wrote again to the Office of Works, asking for the statue of King George IV on Trafalgar Square to be moved to make way for the elaborate naval memorial: 'I suppose there is no possible chance of finding an adequate alternative site for George IVth [...]?'²³ The reply, unsurprisingly, rejected this tentative request, but also revealed the immaturity of the project even in 1923:

I fear there are two or three points raised in your letter which would meet with the strongest opposition [...]

We have already, on a previous occasion, had the question raised as to the removal of George IV in connection with another scheme, and it met with most hostile opposition from the Sculptors and artistic gentlemen who watch over us on these matters, who took the view that inasmuch as that statue was designed by Chantrey for the particular place and plinth, it was an outrage to attempt to remove it and an insult to the Artist who was no more. [On progressing the broader project:] The next step would

²¹ The Navy League had arranged wreath-laying ceremonies commemorating the men killed at the Battle of Jutland from 1916 at Nelson's Column, King, p. 45.

²² TNA, ADM 1/8658/51, letter from Amery to Asquith, 11 May 1923.

²³ TNA, ADM 1/8658/51, letter from Amery to Sir Lionel Earle, Permanent Secretary to the Office of Works, 11 May 1923.

then be to ask for two or three designs from well-known Sculptors in association with some first-class Architect.

This reply was annotated (by an unnamed contributor from the Admiralty on 17 May) with the note to 'Put off till after Whitsun'.²⁴ The Navy's preoccupation with Trafalgar and Nelson reflected the status that the senior service enjoyed as a result of its defining success just over a century earlier.²⁵ Discussion in the Admiralty during the Second World War about possible post-war memorials reveals that Trafalgar Square remained talismanic; a covering minute to a file records: 'So far as the site in Trafalgar Square is concerned, it is I think the general view of the Navy that Trafalgar Square should be regarded entirely as a naval square, and that the military and other statues there should be transferred elsewhere.'²⁶

As it transpires in subsequent papers, the project eventually gained some level of approval for a scaled-down plan for a section of the north wall of Trafalgar Square 'for a commemorative frieze with a Central Monument flanked by a staircase on either side'.²⁷ However, it was at this stage that the Admiralty rediscovered a decision which had been made by the Treasury in 1921 to curtail expenditure on memorials for financial reasons and hand all responsibility to the Imperial War Graves Commission. By 1924 there were no funds available for the London Naval Memorial project. This later decision was imposed on the Admiralty due to 'curtailing expenditure on memorials, and giving a greater importance to the three Naval memorials now reaching completion at the three Home ports'.²⁸ So, the plans came to nothing; there is

²⁴ TNA, ADM 1/8658/51, letter from Earle to Amery, 15 May 1923. Papers from the 1943 enquiry suggest that approval was given for King George IV's statue to be moved to Virginia Water but that this was then overtaken by events, TNA, 1/14977, covering minute by 'JSB', 7 October 1943.

²⁵ Lambert, 'The Legacy of Trafalgar', p. 72.

²⁶ TNA, ADM 1/14977 minute from 'JSB', 7 October 1943, and references in subsequent letters between A. V. Alexander (First Lord) and Amery (former First Lord), October 1943.

²⁷ TNA, ADM 1/8658/51, note from Eastwood (Secretary, Naval War Memorial Committee), 7 March 1924.

²⁸ TNA, ADM 1/8658/51, note from Eastwood (Secretary, Naval War Memorial Committee), 7 March 1924. The Imperial War Graves Commission erected obelisks as Memorials to naval ranks and ratings lost or buried at sea in the three Manning Ports of Chatham, Portsmouth, and Plymouth, National Maritime Museum (NMM), CNM/49, 1939–1945 Naval Memorials in the United Kingdom, 1952.

no evidence of any appetite within the Admiralty to fundraise themselves when government money became unavailable, perhaps because of the enormous sum of money which would have been needed and the fact that the monuments at the three home ports of Chatham, Portsmouth, and Plymouth were nearing completion. Having prevaricated for years, eschewing other sites and more modest concepts, as well as proposing to move at least two members of the royal family from their plinths, the Admiralty withdrew and no London memorial to the Royal Navy's fallen was built.

The postscript is that Asquith and the Royal Naval Division Memorial Committee, having waited patiently for years, still had their own funds and went ahead with their own plans. They were given permission in 1924 to build a memorial in the form of a fountain on Horse Guards Parade, designed by Edwin Lutyens and located, somewhat ironically, outside the Naval Secretary's window. This was duly unveiled on 25 April 1925 by Churchill; that memorial (Figure 2.4), the National Submarine War Memorial and the Merchant Navy Memorial at Tower Hill remain the only major London memorials built during this period to naval sacrifice in World War One.²⁹



Figure 2.4 Royal Naval Division Memorial, Horse Guards Parade.

²⁹ See the Imperial War Museum's database of Memorials, <http://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/search> [accessed 21 December 2017].

The Navy League and the Society for Nautical Research had both, separately, addressed the memorialisation of the First World War, working at one remove from the Admiralty. The Navy League set out five different areas of activity or policy to be promoted, all of which included the term 'Memorial' and were to come under a new motto of 'Sacrifice: Service'. The emphasis was thus simultaneously on memorial and education, weaving in the legacy of Nelson and the glorious past of the Navy.³⁰ In parallel, the Society for Nautical Research promoted the restoration of HMS *Victory* with the support of the First Lord, Amery, who saw the *Victory* embodying 'in a quite unique degree the history and tradition of sea power ... the central shrine to our great Naval Tradition', and the King.³¹ Both these appeals were firmly rooted in the concepts of memory, the past, and, notably, Nelson and *Victory*; for the Navy the past seemed to provide refuge from the less palatable present.

RAF National Memorialisation

In contrast to the machinations of the Admiralty over a metropolitan memorial, the RAF moved at considerable pace with monthly meetings of the RAF Memorial Committee from its inception in 1919 to the delivery of the RAF Memorial at Whitehall Steps on Embankment in the summer of 1923. As well as the Memorial, TNA records show that the RAF also held a Memorial Service, at relatively short notice, in early 1919, and had a window in Westminster Abbey dedicated in 1922, working to an even tighter timeline with invitations for the event on 26 May circulated only three days in advance.³²

The RAF Memorial Fund was established in light of a suggestion from John Salmond, then GOC RFC in the Field, to the Secretary of the Air Ministry that there should be a permanent memorial to the services of the RAF and

³⁰ Redford recorded the five priorities: 'The Memorial of Commemoration and Thanksgiving, The Memorial of Sea Service, The Memorial of the Ships, The Memorial from Overseas, and The Memorial of Sacrifice and Service', see Redford, pp. 51–52.

³¹ Amery quoted in Leggett, p. 58. RA PS/PSO/GV/PS/NAVY/35991, letter from Stamfordham to the Naval Secretary, dated 24 March 1922.

³² TNA, AIR 2/223, 'Allocation of tickets for Unveiling of Memorial Window at Westminster Abbey', documents from May 1922 and AIR 2/100/A11798.

Dominion Flying Services in the Great War.³³ Salmond's letter, which suggested 'This Memorial would take the form of an R.A.F. Chapel and a Club for "other ranks" in London', was followed by the establishment of the Committee of the RAF Memorial Fund, which first met on 1 February 1919.³⁴ The Committee rejected the concept of a club, given that there were several already in existence, and opinion coalesced initially around the concept of building a chapel, though this was soon rejected on cost grounds.³⁵ The RAF was not awarded public money for a national memorial in the same way that the Navy and, indeed, the Army was: Cabinet records show no mention of the RAF in the discussion on allocation of funds to the Army and the Navy, and the Air Ministry was not represented at that Cabinet meeting.³⁶ The Memorial Committee decided to pursue endowing an existing church, while at the same time writing to all officers for consultation. This pragmatic and consultative approach was explained in a General Memorandum, the wording of which included the following:

The original proposal was that a sum of anything between £100,000 and £200,000 should be collected [fundraised] and spent in acquiring a new site and building a new Chapel in London. We have been into this proposal very carefully but for various reasons, — the undesirability of spending so much money at the present moment, and probable difficulty of obtaining it, and the great difficulty of finding a suitable site — we have come to the definite conclusion that such a large scheme is impossible.

[Suggesting the unendowed Grosvenor Chapel in South Audley Street]:
Our proposal is to subsidise this Chapel either by endowing it or giving it some form of yearly grant, and in return for this subsidy to have the right

³³ Given that the brothers John and Geoffrey Salmond were both important senior RAF officers in the period, John Salmond will be referred to as Salmond and his brother as Geoffrey Salmond.

³⁴ TNA, AIR 2/73, letter from Salmond to Secretary, Air Ministry, 27 November 1918.

³⁵ TNA, AIR 2/73, 'Report of Committee of the RAF Memorial Fund and Discussion with Units as to form of RAF Memorial' (hereafter RAF Memorial Fund Committee), various papers 1918–1920.

³⁶ TNA, CAB 23/24, Cabinet Conclusions, 8 March 1921.

to erect Air Force memorials in the building and hold Air Force Services, Memorial, Marriage and Burial Services, whenever desired.³⁷

This plan came with an estimated cost of £20,000. However, at the following committee meeting it was reported that ‘the consensus of opinion was not in favour of this proposal’. The Committee raised the possibility for the first time ‘that a monument should be erected in any National War Memorial erected in London’.³⁸ By July 1919, Brigadier-General Vyvyan, who later became a key member of the RAF Memorial Fund, wrote as the new President of the RAF Memorial Committee stating that ‘opinion has changed somewhat in the meantime, there being a feeling that all money raised be expended on the dependants of Members of the Air Force, instead of on bricks and mortar as the Parsons would have it “For the Glory of God”’.³⁹

Records then begin with the newly established RAF Memorial Fund (later to be renamed the RAF Benevolent Fund), meeting from 23 October 1919 in Victoria Street.⁴⁰ Early meetings focused on invitations to prospective committee members and to Prince Albert to become President of the Organisation (an invitation which he accepted). By 5 December 1919, the committee had fixed on four priorities: provision for children of airmen in the form of a residential school; assistance to the sick; assistance to disabled officers; and a monument that ‘should be erected in London at a cost not exceeding £10,000 preferably in connection with St Paul’s Cathedral or Westminster Abbey’. Meeting for the third time that month, on 30 December 1919, demonstrating a considerable sense of momentum, the committee decided:

The Draft Appeal was submitted and after discussion with representatives from Lord Haig’s Committee and also the United Services Fund, it was decided to amend the Appeal so as to primarily mention the Memorial or Monument, and secondly the two 1st

³⁷ TNA, AIR 2/73, RAF Memorial Fund Committee, 19 March 1919.

³⁸ TNA, AIR 2/73, RAF Memorial Fund Committee, 8 April 1919.

³⁹ TNA, AIR 2/73, letter from Vyvyan to Paine, Brancker, Groves and Henderson, 10 July 1919.

⁴⁰ RAF Benevolent Fund Archives (RAFBF), RAF Memorial Fund Committee Minutes, 23 October 1919. A ledger containing the written minutes is held by the RAF Benevolent Fund.

(Educational) objects, afterwards in general phrase to refer to the assistance to be given to Sick and Disabled Officers, airmen and their dependants.⁴¹

In the spring of 1920, the concept of a flying display was first mentioned, in the context of fundraising, with a decision that Salmond, Vyvyan, and Mr H. E. Perrin 'form a committee to arrange a flying display at Hendon and to report at the next Meeting'.⁴² In brief references within the minutes for the spring and early summer, it can be seen that the first RAF 'Flying Pageant' was organised primarily for the benefit of the Memorial Fund. A meeting of 20 July 1920 (following the first successful pageant held on 3 July 1920 and the forerunner to an enormously popular annual event) records that 'Sir J. Salmond reported that the sum of about £6,800 would be handed over to the Fund'.⁴³

Subsequent minutes for 1920 show that, after enquiries for a memorial within the grounds of Westminster Abbey were rejected, the committee moved that the Chairman write to the Office of Works:

to enquire whether they could offer the Committee the choice of suitable sites for the proposed Memorial and further to communicate with the Admiralty and War Office, to ascertain whether the Navy and Army had any purpose of erecting a Memorial to the Sailors and Soldiers who fell in the War.⁴⁴

By January 1921, the committee had received an answer from the First Commissioner of Works which offered the site at Whitehall Steps and by 17 February 1921 the proposed site was provisionally approved.⁴⁵ Subsequent meetings throughout the spring of 1921 mention design plans and in July the committee chose Sir Reginald Blomfield to be invited to furnish a preliminary design. As Ward-Jackson later wrote, Blomfield proposed a pylon structure

⁴¹ RAFBF, RAF Memorial Fund Committee Minutes, 30 December 1919.

⁴² RAFBF, RAF Memorial Fund Committee Minutes, 22 March 1920.

⁴³ RAFBF, RAF Memorial Fund Committee Minutes, 15 July 1920.

⁴⁴ RAFBF, RAF Memorial Fund Committee Minutes, 25 November 1920.

⁴⁵ RAFBF, RAF Memorial Fund Committee Minutes, 17 February 1921.

similar in design to war memorials he had designed for Torquay and Luton, 'on each occasion crowned with a different feature', and given the limitations of the dimensions of the area surrounding the site he chose an eagle and globe atop the pylon to achieve the requisite height given the small ground footprint available (see Figure 2.5).⁴⁶

The memorial was constructed during 1922–23 at a cost of approximately £6,000 and was eventually unveiled by the Prince of Wales on 16 July 1923. *The Times* report of the unveiling described the memorial and the atmosphere at the event:

The memorial consists of a simple pylon of the same stone as that of the Cenotaph, with a bronze globe at the summit surmounted by a golden eagle, which faces out over the river with uplifted wings as if on the point of flight.

[Lord Cecil's speech said that officers and airmen] would be moved at the sight of it to thoughts of pride and sorrow when they recalled the brave men it commemorated; it would bring to mind many pleasant reminiscences, as well as heroic memories.

And *The Times* article also reported: 'After the Prince had inspected the memorial, he left, amid cordial cheers from the crowd.'⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Ward-Jackson, p. 358.

⁴⁷ 'R.A.F. Memorial. Unveiling by the Prince of Wales. Tribute to the Dead', *The Times*, 17 July 1923.



Figure 2.5 RAF Memorial, Whitehall Steps, Embankment.

The contrast between the two services' approaches to a metropolitan memorial reflect the differences in their respective identities and relationships with the aftermath of the First World War and the mood of the time. It also shows the difference in the way that the two departments of state thought and behaved. Both services had lost many fewer men than the Army, and in the RAF's case it shared many of the Flying Services' casualties with its forerunners — the RFC and RNAS. The Flying Services lost nearly 10,000 personnel, but of that the majority died before the creation of the RAF in April

1918.⁴⁸ Philpott has argued that it was the romantic vision of the pilot that had allowed a different attitude to develop around the memorialisation of the air contribution 'in favour of sanitised notions of glory and heroism'.⁴⁹ Goebel made a more nuanced point about the typical versus the exceptional:

The overemphasis on individualism in the lionisation of air aces may explain why narratives of air warfare, although ingrained in popular culture, had a negligible influence on public war remembrance. The purpose of war memorial sculpture was to portray the typical, common victim rather than the exceptional hero.⁵⁰

It is argued that, as well as the differentiation, culturally, between the concept of airman and soldier, the Air Ministry's approach (and notably that of its senior leadership) was significantly different in tone and attitude to that of the Admiralty. While the Admiralty retained close control over its plans, the Air Ministry devolved much of its work to the Memorial Fund which operated out of a separate location. The RAF cut its cloth according to its means, which were considerably less than those of the Admiralty, and in keeping with Trenchard's constant early post-war mantra of efficiency. The Air Force asked for advice and, having no centuries-long heritage to conflate its war record, settled for a modest solution to a national memorial costing one-sixth of the Navy's allocation, which through prevarication the Admiralty never spent on a memorial. With no need to invoke past battles or earthly sacrifice, the simplicity of the eagle and the globe avoided visual and symbolic association with death and instead presented a romantic and attractive monument, and the ceremony,

⁴⁸ Although the majority of deaths 'in the air' were suffered by the RFC and RNAS, Chris Hobson's work argues that the numbers were close (4754 (RFC 4053 RNAS 711) and 4364 (RAF)). However, Jones's records give a total of 6166 airmen of all services killed during the First World War with 845 killed between the RAF's birth and 21 July 1918 and Jay Winter records 6166 as the total for the RFC and the RAF during the First World War. Chris Hobson, *Airmen Died in the Great War 1914–19: The Roll of Honour of the British and Commonwealth Air Services of the First World War* (Colchester: Hayward, 1995); H. A. Jones, *The War in the Air Vol. VIII* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), Appendices XXXVI and XXXVII; Jay Winter, 'Britain's Lost Generation of the First World War', *Population Studies*, 31.3 (1977), 449–466 (p. 451).

⁴⁹ Philpott, p. 171.

⁵⁰ Goebel, p. 229.

unusually for such occasions, referred to pleasant reminiscences and included cheers from the crowd.

The RAF's approach to memorialisation was matter-of-fact, efficient (in financial and temporal terms), and proceeded at, possibly unseemly, pace. It provided a closure to memorialisation and established the RAF Memorial Fund, the future RAF Benevolent Fund. The first fundraising flying display at Hendon grew into a much larger, celebrated event that was held annually throughout the rest of the decade and into the 1930s, as will be discussed in more detail in later chapters. Faced with the challenge of commemoration, the RAF barely looked back, consulted its own officers, sidestepped the aforementioned 'uncomfortable bedfellows' of memorialisation of religion, death, and society, and built foundations, through the Memorial Fund, which echoed the emphasis on firm foundations laid out by Trenchard in his 'Permanent Organization of the Royal Air Force' memorandum published within weeks of the Fund's first meeting.

The contrast with the Navy is stark: the Admiralty seemed to be working at odds with sub-branches such as the submariners, insisting on pursuing an elaborate (especially in the context of increasingly straitened economic circumstances and the conservative approach of the Office of Works) memorial plan which bore little acknowledgement of reality. Like pro-navy associations such as the Navy League and the SNR, the Admiralty could not resist the pull of Nelson when contemporary wartime achievements had not matched the heroic past. The view that memorials to the Great War and associated reflections polarised between a backward-looking view 'unable to reach beyond the horizons of pre-war thought' and 'a critical view which faced the awful facts, finally breaking with old attitudes' misses the third way, found by the third service.⁵¹ This was to face the future, embrace the fact that the modern associations of air power gave the RAF the opportunity to sidestep many of 'the awful facts', and march smartly forward towards a more secure tomorrow.

⁵¹ King, p. 250.

Study Two — Social Mobility and Apprentice Training in the Inter-War Years

In many ways, the newly created RAF's approach to the resource and recruitment challenges of the early inter-war period was highly modern, presaging later educational reforms such as academic selection to grammar schools and promoting meritocratic principles long before Michael Young's dystopian critique coined the term 'meritocracy'.¹ The RAF inherited, at the time of its creation, existing organisations responsible for training officers and other ranks. Both the RFC and the RNAS had developed their own early systems before 1914 and had then to react to the immense pressures of world war, combined with the rapid technological advancements being made in the use of air power, to train the multiplying numbers of pilots, observers, and ground staff needed. Skilled mechanics were in short supply, with the bulk of the available manpower absorbed by industry in the early First World War years before the contribution of air power had been fully realised. Cooper quoted the *History of the Ministry of Munitions*: 'Aeronautical supply was the last large service to impose its claims on industry during the war. It had therefore to be content with a comparatively small ration of skilled labour, though it actually required an exceptionally large one.'² The RFC found the input from the regular Army provided insufficient trained manpower at a time when forty-seven mechanics were needed to support one front-line aircraft.³ This high number per aircraft may be partly explained by the high accident rate both on operations and in training; unnecessarily large numbers of aircraft were 'pranged' as a result of inadequate flying training for pilots in the early years of the war (it was to be much improved, mainly as a result of the efforts of Robert Smith-Barry who introduced the 'Gosport' system of instruction). As a result, training of skilled labour for aviation as part of the military training machine was required and developed at locations around the country, from Netheravon to Edinburgh.

¹ Michael Young, *The Rise of the Meritocracy: 1870–2033; an Essay on Education and Equality* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976).

² Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power*, p. 93.

³ Trenchard Museum Archive (TMA), The Royal Aeronautical Society Halton Branch, Trenchard Memorial Lecture 'The Legacy of the Trenchard Apprenticeship Scheme', Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Armitage, 19 April 1990, not accessioned.

Halton, which became the spiritual home of the RAF's ground-breaking post-First World War apprentice scheme, had first been used by the RFC during the Army's summer manoeuvres of 1913, using a hill spur on the estate as the landing ground for a squadron of aircraft.⁴ The land was owned by the Rothschild brothers, Alfred and Nathaniel, and at the outbreak of war in 1914 they offered the Army use of their adjoining estates. As pressure grew on the RFC to expand its technical training, Sir Sefton Brancker, then Director General of Military Aeronautics and later to become Director of Civil Aviation in the Air Ministry, proposed that such training be centred on a new school at Halton. In 1917, the regular Army departed the estate lands to make way for the RFC's new school.⁵ Conditions at the camp were spartan and hut-living facilitated the spread of disease, but towards the later stages of the First World War there were attempts to buy the estate and establish it as a more permanent facility. Following Alfred Rothschild's death on 31 January 1918, negotiations involving the newly formed Air Ministry progressed and terms of sale were agreed on 28 May 1918.⁶ The RAF had acquired an established centre for training, but one that was in need of radical overhaul given its hasty development under wartime pressures.

This was RAF Halton, which became home to No. 1 School of Technical Training (Boys), part of Trenchard's post-war plan for the 'Permanent Organisation of the Royal Air Force'. He had singled out the training of men (as opposed to officers) as: 'The most difficult problem of all in the formation of this force'.⁷ The RAF was a service born of technology and had to juggle competing demands for limited resources in a difficult financial climate. This came down to a choice, in the view of Trenchard and the Air Ministry, between embracing advancing technology and investing in the less glamorous attributes of buildings, training, and personnel. The key factor in deciding this was outlined by Joubert de la Ferté (as mentioned in Chapter One), namely that the senior leadership at the Air Ministry had learned 'one supreme lesson' during the war

⁴ TMA, 'Preface to the History of the Royal Air Force, Halton, Period 1720 to 1919', undated, not accessioned.

⁵ Bill Taylor, *Halton and the Apprentice Scheme* (Leicester: Midland, 1993), p. 9.

⁶ Taylor, pp. 10–11.

⁷ TNA, AIR 8/12, *Permanent Organization of the Royal Air Force*, 11 December 1919.

and that was the length of time it took to design and develop aircraft of practical and financial worth.⁸ Sykes had presented his 'Memorandum by the Chief of the Air Staff on Air Power Requirements of the Empire' in December 1918 and its over-ambitious, 'highly optimistic' appeal for a large peacetime force ultimately contributed to his replacement as CAS by Trenchard.⁹ In contrast to Sykes's more ambitious and ultimately unsuccessful earlier prescription, Trenchard firmly favoured foundations over aircraft and squadrons. Apprentice training for boys at RAF Halton was outlined in significant detail in Trenchard's 1919 memorandum and was to form a key part of the new RAF's identity, with a scheme that ran in a form recognisable from its roots until 1993.

This scheme contained significantly more than the seeds for the future growth of a skilled workforce and a fundamental building block of the service. It had a strong and important public-facing aspect to it with an offer of a good education for young boys from less privileged backgrounds, promising solid prospects for later civilian life. Additionally, from the outset it consciously promoted social mobility, the realisation of which benefited the RAF of the Second World War and beyond, as much as it changed the lives of the many individuals who made the journey from secondary school to senior RAF officers. Yet the implications of the apprentice scheme for technical training have often been lost in much academic discussion about the RAF's role, fights over defence estimates, and the development of doctrine. James was an exception:

The innovation of an educated body of non-commissioned officers and airmen was in itself a social revolution. It was very much a favourite project of Trenchard, and it is unlikely that he failed to understand the implications. Equally revolutionary was the proviso that of each entry, the best three apprentices should be awarded cadetships at the RAF College at Cranwell, which was to prepare them together with the normal entrants for full careers in the service, with promotion possible, and even likely, to group captain and beyond.¹⁰

⁸ Joubert de la Ferté, p. 120.

⁹ Ash, p. 171.

¹⁰ James, p. 111.

Higham, however, described Trenchard's memorandum and his focus on training in dismissive terms: 'The bulk of the Memorandum is innocuous in that it deals primarily with the organization of the air services and not with their role.'¹¹ What has been written of inter-war training has tended to focus on the education of officers, of aircrew, and the development of staff colleges, rather than on the training of the boys who were to form the backbone of the RAF, yet the latter was more innovative and radical.

Trenchard wrote in a letter to his counterparts in the Admiralty and War Office in 1919 about the condition of the RAF's real estate:

There were no pre-war instructional establishments that could be re-opened. With one or two exceptions such as Cranwell, there was not a permanent station; even the land at the various aerodromes was not Government property, but was held in almost every case on a temporary basis. There were no barracks or permanent buildings and indeed, for some years to come, their provision will represent a large item of capital expenditure which must absorb an undue proportion of the annual funds available. Adequate living quarters are, however, essential, more especially for the young boys under training, and the absence would undoubtedly impair the health, and therefore, the efficiency, of the force.¹²

Trenchard's comments about the state of living quarters and health are borne out by others' recollections of the time. Memories of sleeping on straw beds without sheets that spread impetigo, and outbreaks of measles, mumps, and scarlet fever testified to the challenging environment at Halton at the end of the war:

Whilst rigorous training and a severely rough outdoor life may be necessary for military training, as a means of toughening up the

¹¹ Higham, *The Military Intellectuals in Britain*, p. 165.

¹² TNA, AIR 1/718/29/7, Beatty and Wilson Memorandum, 17 November 1919.

individual, it could be undertaken and withstood by most adults, but not for boys still in the process of growing up when food was in short supply. This sort of Spartan life was too severe for boys who, not being mature enough, had not the reserve of strength and bodily stamina to cope with such dreadful and out-of-date conditions.¹³

The Air Ministry decided to retain two main boys' training establishments at Cranwell and Halton with the first course starting at Cranwell in January 1920, while Halton was rebuilt due to the poor state of its infrastructure. The fifth entry was the first to start at Halton in January 1922, with RAF Halton finally home to boy trainees of No. 1 School of Technical Training (Boys). Each course lasted three years and consisted of a broad educational syllabus, as well as core vocational skills for future aircraft technicians, service training, and the inculcation of a particular and self-confident RAF identity.

Training boys from the age of fifteen allowed the RAF to mould their charges and also to attract and train a ready future supply of technicians, since civilian men who had already completed apprenticeships could command wages more attractive than those on offer in service.¹⁴ There is also evidence of a suspicion of the politicisation of civilian-trained apprentices. Trenchard wrote to the Under Secretary for Air in early 1920, before the new scheme had arrived at Halton, of the staff on a visit there: 'They are of a very bad class, and I should think very socialistic in their teaching. Something must be done to get the Educational Scheme through quickly.'¹⁵ The scheme relied on spending money on buildings and training, in order to build identity and foundational strength in a key pool of personnel; the apprentices were expected to make up 37.5% of all groundcrew in the RAF and 62.5% of skilled tradesmen.¹⁶

¹³ John Ross, *The Royal Flying Corps Boy Service RFC — RNAS — RAF: The Link Is Forged* (London: Regency Press, 1990), p. 111, see also pp. 56–7.

¹⁴ Taylor, p. 11.

¹⁵ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/240, letter from Trenchard to Londonderry, 22 March 1920.

¹⁶ TMA, The Royal Aeronautical Society Halton Branch, Trenchard Memorial Lecture 'The Legacy of the Trenchard Apprenticeship Scheme', Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Armitage, 19 April 1990, not accessioned.

The Geddes Committee on National Expenditure, which looked in detail at reducing defence and Air Ministry spending, was initiated in 1921 before the first Halton course had started and it paid close attention to the investment being made both in the buildings and the training. The relevant archives provide detailed information about the plans, which were successfully defended by the Air Ministry following one of the Committee's recommendations that the Halton establishment should be closed. As a result of these recommendations, Churchill was appointed Chairman of the Cabinet Committee on Defence Estimates, a fortunate choice since he was the politician most familiar with Trenchard's plans. Although Churchill's familiarity with the Admiralty might have invited some favouritism, this proved not to be the case. In fact, it gave him additional leverage on Admiralty excesses: Martin Gilbert quoted Churchill, "'on the other hand [rather than close Halton] I have to turn and squeeze Beatty cruelly to get rid of the naval 'fat' as opposed to brain and bone and muscle".¹⁷

In the arguments the RAF made in favour of apprentice training, it provided some stark figures on recruitment of skilled men from civilian life: after 'a special effort was made to enlist 40 skilled fitters per month' only 192 joined in six months; for electricians, instead of thirty per month, thirty were recruited in six months, and those who were recruited still required six to twelve months of specialist training. In contrast, interest in the boys apprentice scheme, the Air Ministry argued, was paying dividends: 'a very good type of boy is being obtained. In July last there were some 1,100 applicants for 500 vacancies.' The total cost per boy per annum was given as £237, which partly explains the scrutiny of this spending by Geddes, the Cabinet and the Treasury, since it was a figure easily compared with lesser sums for annual private school fees.¹⁸

The Air Ministry approached the challenges of attracting sufficient applicants by reaching out to those geographically and economically distant from many opportunities for social mobility. Working with Local Education Authorities (LEAs), who provided vital local access and knowledge to the

¹⁷ Martin Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life* (London: BCA, 1991), p. 443.

¹⁸ TNA, Air 8/42, 'Memorandum on Air Expenditure prepared by the Air Ministry for the Committee of National Expenditure', October 1921.

centralised bureaucracy of the post-war RAF, the Air Ministry devised a system in which boys were either nominated by their LEA for examinations held locally, applied via the Civil Service Commissioners' exams, or were nominated as sons of service fathers by the Air Council. The age of enlistment was from fifteen to sixteen and a half years old, for a commitment of twelve years, of which the last two were to be spent in the reserve. A letter from the Directorate of Training and Organisation at the Air Ministry summarised the benefits of the LEA nomination system and bears full quotation:

The 'nomination' system has certain advantages, which render it preferable to other methods of selection for entry, and is one which no system of open competitive examination can adequately replace. It brings the examination to the candidates [*sic*] own town or school and thus opens the door to many boys whose parents could not afford the expense of sending them to some distant examination centre. The Service and the country benefit by the selection for entry being made in the light of the local knowledge of a boy's character, temperament, and general fitness for the life and work of a skilled mechanic in the Royal Air Force, instead of being made to depend simply on a competitive test of book knowledge. The examination for the 'nominated' boys being mainly a qualifying test, the papers for which are specially set and issued from the Air Ministry, is brought as far as possible into line with the ordinary work of the schools so that a boy can take it without special preparation and without disturbance to the normal routine of his school life beyond that of the single day required for the examination.¹⁹

The same file contains letters from parents and boys asking for information about the nomination process, recommendation letters from headmasters, and press cuttings demonstrating the way that the Air Ministry reached out to generate applications. A cutting from the *Exeter Express & Echo* from 1921 reads (see over):

¹⁹ TNA, Air 2/148, 'Boy Mechanics, Royal Air Force', letter from unnamed Air Ministry official (Educational Adviser for Air Commodore Director of Training and Organisation), 9 May 1921.

Your Boy's Future

8/11/21

Many a parent of the great middle class is to-day wondering what he shall do with his boy—the boy of fifteen or thereabouts, who is getting near his time for leaving school. Our youngest Service—the Royal Air Force—furnishes a way out which may well be favourably considered by the parents of boys who are medically fit and well educated. Such boys are required to pass an examination which is held four times a year, the next examination taking place on the first Tuesday in December. Successful candidates for three years are to devote their time to studying a trade, and continuing his education. During all this period the boy is paid, fed, clothed and housed. At the age of 26 he is free of the Service, if he so desires, and able to take up work as a skilled tradesman. Parents who are anxious to obtain a first-class training for their boy and ensure his future well-being for the next ten years should immediately apply to the local Education Authority for nomination for their son to sit at the next examination; this should be filled up and returned to the Education Authority, who should forward it to reach the Air Ministry not later than the first week in November.

Figure 2.6 *Exeter Express & Echo*.²⁰

A briefing note held in the archives at Halton demonstrated the demand for places: 'such was the response from the Local Education Authorities that this first examination [in 1919] was confined to their nominees'.²¹ The Fisher Act of 1918 had made provision for continuation schools for vocational training and Lord Thomson, Labour's 1923 Secretary of State for Air, testified that boys fed the apprentice system throughout the 1920s from secondary, continuation, and technical schools attracted by 'a good technical training and general education'.²²

The factors pertinent to the RAF developing the apprentice scheme, as with so much of the RAF's early post-war development, were a confluence of needs and aspirations that came together in a modern and novel form. The RAF wanted to cement its identity and develop a cadre of men who were RAF to the core, with no previous allegiance to the other services or trade unions.

²⁰ TNA, AIR 2/148, 'Your Boy's Future', *Exeter Express & Echo*, 1 November 1921.

²¹ TMA, 'Aircraft Apprentice Training at Halton', briefing note, undated, not accessioned.

²² Lord Thomson, *Air Facts and Problems* (New York: Doran, 1927), pp. 68–70.

Recruitment of skilled workers was inadequate for the needs of the service and so attracting teenage boys, with whom the populist cultural and symbolic appeals of aircraft and aviation were probably most effective, gave the RAF a ready pool of applicants. Demonstrating a desire to open doors to candidates unable to afford travel to or tuition for entry tests, and offering a comprehensive further education, afforded the RAF additional reputational prestige. Of course, as Young has argued in discussing meritocracy in this period, more perceptive employers were motivated not only by correcting injustices in the education system, but by profiting themselves as the RAF most certainly did in the inter-war years.²³ Additionally, the boys selected then increased the geographical footprint of advocates for the third service within communities far away from the few existing RAF aerodromes.

This explicit effort to make the apprentice scheme as accessible as possible to 'ordinary' boys in state-funded education would have been an admirable attempt at improving social mobility even without the additional plan to offer the top graduating apprentices the opportunity to progress to cadetships at the RAF College Cranwell, for officer training. This emerged as a key element of the scheme at its earliest stages and was refined and developed during the 1920s. Copies of Air Publication (AP) 134, 'Regulations in Regard to the Entry and Training of Aircraft Apprentices, Royal Air Force', show an evolving policy regarding the cadetships. The 1920 version of the document stated:

A certain number of boys of exceptional promise will be selected on the completion of their three years' training for a further advanced course, and will be promoted forthwith to corporal. From among those who complete the advanced course satisfactorily some may be offered cadetships in the Royal Air Force.²⁴

²³ Michael Young, p. 81.

²⁴ TNA, T 161/58/9, 'Regulations in regard to the entry and training of Boy Mechanics', RAF F.S. Publication 134, July 1920.

Treasury files reveal discussions between the Air Ministry and the Treasury that led to concrete financial support for the scheme. The Air Ministry wrote to the Secretary of the Treasury in 1920:

Paragraph 14 of the existing regulations holds out a suggestion that boys who complete the course of training satisfactorily may be offered cadetships in the Royal Air Force, but this offer will be meaningless unless it is accompanied by a remission of the fees ordinarily payable by the cadets.

The fees at Cranwell (approximately £75 a year) were well out of the reach of ordinary boys from families who could not afford school fees. The letter continued: 'The [Air] Council trusts that Their Lordships will give favourable consideration to the proposals contained in this letter. They feel that under modern conditions considerable facilities for promotion from the ranks are required.'²⁵ Minute sheets in the files then record an internal discussion between Mr Pemberton and Mr Pinsent, of the Treasury, with Pemberton offering the view:

This seems to be the question of how far we can go in the direction of 'democratization' of the forces. [...] I think it is not unreasonable to say that the RAF is altogether a more democratic force than the Army or Navy. It is clear from 39947/19 that the senior officers of the Army are desirous of adhering to the aristocratic tradition as far as possible and from what I know of the Navy their views are the same. At any rate I think it very unlikely that they would want to send boys of the Air Mechanics class to Dartmouth.

In reply, Pinsent pointed out that other documentation showed the Navy also aspired to be 'democratic' and he confirmed that the Treasury had already sanctioned a scheme 'even more generous' (financially one assumes from the

²⁵ TNA, T 161/58/9, letter from Assistant Secretary at the Air Ministry, McAnally, to Controller of Supply Services, G. L. Barstow, 22 September 1920.

Treasury viewpoint) for Naval candidates for Dartmouth.²⁶ The Treasury concurred with the Air Ministry's petition and wrote to support up to twelve cadetships a year, exempting the successful candidates from fees and from payments for uniforms and books, as well as giving grants on graduation for outfits and camp kit.

The revised 1924 copy of the regulations outlined the cadetship scheme in more detail than the 1920 version reflecting the concrete funding of twelve places:

On the completion of the three years' course of training a certain number of boys will be nominated [...] with a view to selection for the award of cadetships. [...] The total number of cadetships awarded in any one year will not for the present exceed twelve.²⁷

The original Treasury agreement in 1920 for 1921 survived into subsequent years and, as well as the cadetship scheme, regulations also laid out additional opportunities for progression through commissions at a later stage and selection for training as airman pilots. As a result, significant numbers progressed from apprentice training to either a cadetship or later commission. The apprentices who won cadetships also performed well at Cranwell, despite their very different backgrounds. One winner of a cadetship was Frank Whittle, later Group Captain and father of the jet engine, who in an article for the *Halton Magazine* recorded: 'it is worthy of record that the six of us of the September [19]23 entry who became Flight Cadets took six out of the first seven places on passing out of the R.A.F. College'.²⁸ The *Cranwell Character Book*, which recorded details of RAF College Cadets, showed that airmen apprentices came

²⁶ TNA, T 161/58/9, Treasury minute sheet recording discussion between Mr Pemberton and Mr Pinsent, 8–16 October 1920.

²⁷ TNA, AIR 10/70, 'Regulations in regard to the entry and training of Boy Mechanics', RAF Air Publication 134, August 1924.

²⁸ TMA, 'Per Ardua Ad Astra Suprema Petimus Perseverantia', Group Captain Whittle, *Halton Magazine*, 1944, not accessioned.

top of the officers' course on seventeen out of thirty-two courses on which there were cadets (while constituting on average only 10.5% of the attendees).²⁹

The quality of the apprentices who were awarded cadetships on the basis of exceptional performance at Halton was partly due to the very extensive education that the boys received during their three years there. The boys were taught by 'university trained staff' in advanced mathematics, mechanics, English and general studies, among other subjects, with much theoretical content as well as the teaching of practical skills.³⁰ One of Halton's alumni who went on to progress to air rank was Air Marshal Sir Kenneth Porter. He had applied for an apprenticeship as a result of being orphaned with no financial means at the age of fourteen. His recollections of Halton included his specific praise of the curriculum:

The syllabus covered mechanics, mechanical drawing and a general subject titled English. This last subject covered amongst other things a broad coverage of the history of civilisations starting at the Stone Age and finishing with the organisation of local and Parliamentary Government, and the reading of Shaw's Plays, it was not only most interesting but taught what few, if any, schools taught. [...] Looking back I think that the excellence of the education was the reason that the many Apprentices who were commissioned during the war did so well and reached high rank. I found when I became a cadet at Cranwell that I had already done more mathematics than the syllabus required and the rest of the education course gave me no difficulty.³¹

That said, there were teething problems and Trenchard oversaw a first Halton graduation where only 136 of 399 achieved the pass rate, which he attributed to the reorganization and revision of the syllabus. For this frank assessment, he was praised in *The Times* 'which emphasized that no attempt had been made to

²⁹ RAF Cranwell Archive, CRN/D/2011/71, RAF College Character Book, quoted in Monahan, p. 181.

³⁰ Tunbridge, p. 33.

³¹ TMA, 'One of Trenchards Brats' [sic], Air Marshal Sir Kenneth Porter Recollections, undated, not accessioned, pp. 8–9.

gloss over this which showed that Halton was determined to build up a high standard of efficiency'.³² A report by the Board of Education on Apprentice Training at Cranwell later in the 1930s shows that this attention to teaching beyond trades skills and sciences to the arts and humanities had continued, ensuring the boys were in a position to compete successfully with cadets who had had a public school education.³³

In addition to offering cadetships to the highest achieving boys, the RAF pursued trade union recognition for the apprentice course and liaised with unions to secure their recognition of the RAF apprentice training as equivalent to civilian apprenticeship service. The Boys' Wing Magazine Spring 1922 reported: 'In January 1922 the Amalgamated Engineering Union and Air Ministry officials on the occasion of their visits to the Cranwell workshops and school were most impressed with the facilities and submitted a favourable report.'³⁴ Hyde noted that Trenchard had consulted trade union leaders himself for advice on the scheme.³⁵ That said, Trenchard wanted boys free from the influence of unions while they served, using the argument against recruiting qualified civilians in fighting the Geddes recommendation that:

they [skilled men] would have already been imbibed with the spirit of trade unionism, which, in its present form at all events, is neither conducive to keen endeavour nor easily compatible with the necessary discipline of fighting services.³⁶

The records show that informal relations between the Air Ministry and the trade unions were established in the early post-war years:

³² Tunbridge, p. 51.

³³ TNA, ED 114/509, 'Report of Inspection of the Training Scheme for Aircraft Apprentices', Royal Air Force Cranwell, 1936, included a recommendation limiting history teaching 'to 19th century History and be continued to the present day. This plan would allow more time to be given to the remaining parts of the syllabus which could be dealt with more fully', 1936.

³⁴ Quoted in Tunbridge, pp. 48–49.

³⁵ Hyde, pp. 151–52.

³⁶ TNA, Air 8/42, Appendix to 'Air Ministry Memorandum upon the Report of the Committee on National Expenditure Prepared for Mr Churchill's Cabinet Committee', 16 January 1922, p. 12.

the Air Council arranged some time since for official representatives of the Unions to visit the various training centres in order to acquaint them with the character of training given. The Council have not however put forward up to the present any formal request for recognition [...] the independent experts who have visited the Royal Air Force training centres have reported favourably on the course of training and indicated that it is, in their view, in some respects superior to that obtainable in ordinary civilian workshops.³⁷

The Air Ministry did, subsequently, arrange for the service qualification to be officially acknowledged in the civilian workplace. This required negotiation since the RAF was asking for acknowledgement that its three-year course was comparable to a five- or seven-year civilian apprenticeship.³⁸ Formal recognition had been sought and obtained by the 1930s; the timing of the first tranches of former apprentices reaching the end of their ten-year full-time engagement with the RAF in the early 1930s may have been a catalyst for this process.

The need to overhaul training radically, the chance to build on the RFC's nascent boy's scheme at Halton, the shortage of skilled civilian labour, and the drive to build an air force identity favoured the development of the apprentice scheme. This represented a confluence of features of the post-war environment for the Air Ministry. The employment situation, the introduction of the Fisher Act, and the attractiveness of the apprentice scheme's offer aided the project's success. It was certainly reliant on the vision of the proponents of the scheme, but without the 1920s context might not have succeeded. However, such a scheme could still have been conservative in its vision and, as with some other aspects of the early RAF such as discipline or ensigns, based largely on an already existing army or navy model. The RAF College at Cranwell and the Staff College at Andover emulated their older siblings more closely in style and

³⁷ TNA, AIR 2/148, letter from Secretary of the Air Ministry to Secretary of the Ministry of Labour, 11 June 1922.

³⁸ An article in *The Aeroplane* referred to the RAF 'turning out' in three years what would normally take seven years of apprenticeship, and that the Amalgamated Engineering Union admitted ex-RAF apprentices to membership, 'Service Technical Training', *The Aeroplane*, 13 April 1938. See Tony Mansell, 'Flying Start: Educational and Social Factors in the Recruitment of Pilots', *History of Education*, 26.1 (1997), 71–90 (p. 81).

content. With the apprentice scheme, the Air Ministry, led by the vision of Trenchard, created a scheme which attracted good quality recruits, compared more than favourably with civilian levels of education, provided the RAF with a backbone of men with a strong single service identity, and embraced social mobility, capturing the changing social and political dynamics in the country.

Trenchard consistently attached high importance to the apprentice system. In 1919, he described the planned Technical Boys' Training as 'the backbone of the Royal Air Force'. In the House of Lords debate earlier referenced, thirty-five years later during the Second World War, he hailed Halton and the 'Halton spirit' as 'a pillar of strength', continuing: 'It was a great experiment and it was bitterly criticized at the time. Nevertheless, I feel justified in saying that the experiment has richly justified itself.'³⁹ The Second World War is the key benchmark against which the achievements of apprentice training can be viewed. Though Trenchard was perhaps overly fond of metaphors about foundations and buildings, with the Halton system the metaphors were apt. The training scheme provided a large cohort of the RAF with a firm sense of identity forged through a shared experience of a long, testing, and intense training process. The graduates of Halton became known as 'Trenchard's Brats'. The origins of the term are contested, but the most plausible explanation remains that the confidence of these young men, filtering out into the wider RAF, attracted disdain from older, overwhelmingly less well educated airmen. T. E. Lawrence (an exception in terms of his education) referred to the phenomenon in his account of his experiences as an RAF airman:

The boys come fresh from school, glib in theory, essay writers, with the bench-tricks of workmen: but they have never done the real job on a real kite: and reality, carrying responsibility, has a different look and feel from a school lesson. So they are put for a year to work with men. An old rigger, with years of service, whose trade is in his fingers, finds himself in charge of a boy-beginner with twice his pay. The kid is clever with words,

³⁹ TNA, T 1/12533/16599, letter from Trenchard to Barstow, 1 October 1919; HL Debate (1944) Fifth Series, Vol. 134, Col. 134, 6 December 1944.

and has passed out L.A.C. from school: the old hand can hardly spell, and will be for ever an A.C.2. He teaches his better ever so grumpily.⁴⁰

Yet he also recognised this would be a passing phase in the life of the RAF as the older cohort adjusted to this new reality. In truth, the Halton graduates became proud of their label and regarded Trenchard's investment in a meritocratic system providing good education as their shield against this criticism.

A graduate of the system, who eventually reached the rank of Air Chief Marshal via a cadetship, reflected on Trenchard's central role in building the identity of the RAF through the apprentice training scheme:

because Trenchard explicitly created that spirit at Halton, it became a spirit and tradition within the wider spirit and tradition of the Royal Air Force. It was a spirit that spread throughout the Service, and helped in a very significant way to make the Royal Air Force [...] a pioneer Service.⁴¹

The sense of identity built around a meritocratic system also increased the external appeal of the scheme. As well as the identity-building happening internally, strengthening the RAF's culture and resilience, there was an important outward-facing aspect to the project. Starting with the public appeals in the press, but also including liaison and relationship-building with LEAs and trade unions, the scheme increased the RAF's appeal to the post-war general public. The opportunity for cadetships and access, therefore, to an overt form of social mobility was innovative and neoteric. It also stood in contrast with the post-war attitudes of the other services. The War Office, facing shortages of skilled men in various wireless trades, resorted to public advertisements and offers of £100 bounties to join, yet after fifteen months it had attracted only 244

⁴⁰ T. E. Lawrence, *The Mint: A Day-Book of the R.A.F. Depot between August and December 1922 with Later Notes by 352087 A/c Ross* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955), p. 195.

⁴¹ TMA, The Royal Aeronautical Society Halton Branch, Trenchard Memorial Lecture 'The Legacy of the Trenchard Apprenticeship Scheme', Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Armitage, 19 April 1990, not accessioned.

out of the required 1250 men.⁴² It seemed that the concept of training boys from a young age with the offer of valuable skills, endorsed by unions, and a chance to progress to airman pilot or officer, in a more modern and future-focused service, outshone the offer of a bounty. The scheme was a success from the start and between 1923 and 1958 over 20% of the boys who graduated were granted commissions; 80% of the rest became senior Non-Commissioned Officers.⁴³

⁴² RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/100, 2 of 3, letter from Air Commodore Game to Trenchard, 24 October 1921.

⁴³ TMA, The Royal Aeronautical Society Halton Branch, Trenchard Memorial Lecture 'The Legacy of the Trenchard Apprenticeship Scheme', Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Armitage, 19 April 1990, not accessioned.

Study Three — Empire and Air Policing

If one were able to pick up Iraq like a good piece of china and turn it over, it would bear the legend: 'Made in Whitehall, 1920.'

Toby Dodge¹

Britain's imperial responsibilities in the aftermath of the First World War were considerable and policing a restless empire was economically and militarily challenging. British political ambition outstripped available resource, in particular that of the Army which was shouldering the burden of policing increasingly hostile colonial communities.² During the First World War, the geographical extent of RAF operations had rapidly expanded, with airmen and aircraft deployed across the Middle East, Asia, and Africa as part of the war effort. After the war, the RAF faced the challenge of defining its peacetime utility; meanwhile many of those RAF assets remained deployed overseas employed as part of the effort to enforce 'peace'. Denied the right to be classed as citizens against whom war might be declared, the concept of peace as applied to colonial states and subjects was nonsensical. Rather than enforcing peace, the RAF was developing its application of colonial violence from the air: 'this unorthodox method offered one solution to a central dilemma of post-war imperialism', that between the British desire to maintain control of its new and existing territories and the need to reduce expenditure on the endeavour.³

The specific doctrine of substitution (the practice of replacing ground forces with — the euphemistically termed — air policing) was not publicly outlined until Trenchard's Memorandum was placed before Parliament in 1919. This underlined the RAF's potential in the early post-war period:

¹ Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (London: Hurst, 2003), p. xi.

² Although Townshend argued that in Iraq the Chief of the Imperial Staff was more concerned with a top-heavy military administration, Charles Townshend, *When God Made Hell: The British Invasion of Mesopotamia and the Creation of Iraq, 1914–1921* (London: Faber, 2011), pp. 461–62.

³ Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control*, p. 211.

Recent events have shown the value of aircraft in dealing with frontier troubles, and it is not perhaps too much to hope that before long it may prove possible to regard the Royal Air Force units not as an addition to the military garrison but as a substitute for part of it.⁴

'Recent events' included ongoing operations in Arabia and India, and also the pursuit of Mohammed bin Abdullah Hassan in British Somaliland which was underway at the time. The Under Secretary of State for Air, arguing for a greater colonial role for air, stated the following spring:

twelve aeroplanes played a most decisive part, and in three weeks broke up the power of the Mullah over a district which he had devastated for 17 years at a very heavy cost in life and expenditure. The Force, therefore, has proved a most valuable addition to the methods by which in the future we may police our distant Empire.⁵

Here, the Air Ministry demonstrated its burgeoning ability to curate its contributions to maximise the role of air power in the imperial arena while minimising its limitations including, in this case, continued reliance on ground forces for the prosecution of the operation.⁶ Air policing became the RAF's primary overseas operational role in its first decade and some, such as Omissi, have argued that this role was the most compelling factor in securing the RAF's permanence in the 1920s.⁷

The RAF's experience of air policing during the 1920s encompassed theatres of operation from India to the Middle East and Africa, as well as (in a limited capacity) Ireland. The approach to the latter from senior RAF officers differed markedly from more distant colonial regions. This difference demonstrates how the RAF used air policing both selectively and opportunistically; enthusiastically embracing the role where the benefits to the

⁴ TNA, AIR 8/12, *Permanent Organization of the Royal Air Force*, 11 December 1919.

⁵ HC Debate (1920) Fifth Series, Vol. 126, Col. 1583, 11 March 1920.

⁶ James S. Corum, 'The Myth of Air Control', *Aerospace Power Journal*, 14.4 (2000), 61–77 (p. 63).

⁷ Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control*, p. x; John R. Ferris, *Men, Money, and Diplomacy*, p. 67.

air service were substantial, as in Iraq, and avoiding the role where reputational risk was judged to be significant, as in Ireland. Iraq, it is argued, provides a distinctive and important example of colonial air policing, because of the nature of the chain of command which differed from most other theatres. In Iraq the RAF was given direct command from 1922 over operations for a substantial territory, reporting directly to the Air Ministry and then into Cabinet. Slessor, in the RAF at that time, later succinctly described the conduct of overseas operations in the Middle East and Asia as 'a veritable cat's cradle of inter-departmental responsibilities'.⁸ In the case of India, for example, the RAF's operations came under the command of the Army, who were themselves reporting to the India Office, rather than directly to the War Office. Direct command in Iraq, in contrast with the RAF's subordination to the Army and via the Colonial Office in other theatres of operation, presented the RAF both with new challenges, administering a colonial state and policing a large and physically diverse territory from the air, but also with opportunities which resonated beyond the territory itself. That said, as R. M. Douglas has identified in relation to discussions around the use of gas bombs in Iraq (which he argued were probably never actually dropped in anger from the air), when it suited the Air Ministry to communicate via Churchill as Colonial Secretary rather than to the Cabinet directly it chose that route instead.⁹

In Iraq, resistance to colonial rule erupted in 1920 with a series of summer risings, yet back in Britain the press had been questioning the cost of operations in Mesopotamia (which became Iraq in April 1920 after the creation of the mandate at the San Remo Conference).¹⁰ Public appetite for expending British effort on dealing with these hostilities was in short supply amongst the British public at home. From the Shi'a marshlands of the south, via the Sunnis of the central provinces, to Iraqi Kurdistan, the Army faced rebellions costing British lives and money, exacerbated by the flood of stocks of modern weapons and ammunition into the region over the course of the First World War which had narrowed the weapons balance between oppressors and oppressed. Air

⁸ Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 48.

⁹ R. M. Douglas, 'Did Britain Use Chemical Weapons in Mandatory Iraq?', *The Journal of Modern History*, 81.4 (2009), 859–87 (p. 876).

¹⁰ Townshend, p. 454.

power offered a modern technological solution, albeit that the Air Force had not been created with imperial policing in mind.¹¹ The Army had been the default martial power for policing empire, but the aeroplane allowed the RAF to encroach on traditional militarist territory.¹² Thomas and Dodge both identified the centrality of control, as opposed to occupation, as uniquely characteristic of air power in this context, and recognised its significance in changing the nature of colonial government: 'The strategy governing this new military tool was to have an entirely different logic, one governed by RAF personnel and distinct from anything that had preceded it.'¹³ This would include the deployment of RAF Special Service Officers to deliver intelligence and administrative support on the ground. They inherited many of the roles of British Political Officers and were responsible at a local level for directing military operations. Their inexperience and the very nature of the air policing role decontextualized a complex picture on the ground.¹⁴ The elimination of complexity inherent in an air targeting process, even more so a century ago, 'heroically stratified' the situation further.¹⁵

Yet air policing, highly imperfect in practice, was the chance to demonstrate that air power could be deployed independently to carry out the British Government's intent: to secure Iraq following a series of uprisings during 1920 and contain nationalist opposition to colonial rule. Although, ultimately, this was more about stemming a tide (and holding a position which became untenable in the longer term), the short-term achievements of air policing in the early 1920s were favourably referenced by the government of the time. Though there were limits to what air policing could achieve, the financial saving in employing air power, relative to the cost of land forces, was the jewel in the plan

¹¹ Dodge, p. 133.

¹² Edgerton, *Warfare State*, p. 280.

¹³ Martin Thomas, 'Markers of Modernity or Agents of Terror? Air Policing and Colonial Revolt after World War I', in *Britain in Global Politics: From Gladstone to Churchill, Volume 1*, ed. by Christopher Baxter, M. L. Dockrill, and Keith Hamilton (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 68–98 (p. 69). Dodge, p. 145.

¹⁴ Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence*, p. 130.

¹⁵ Dodge, p. 152.

that glinted most brightly for the British Government, as the Air Ministry's senior leadership was all too aware.¹⁶

Although economic arguments were the most eye-catching for politicians, for the RAF the opportunity to command offered many benefits that were more visible to servicemen than their political counterparts. They were familiar with the colonial context as a result of their collective knowledge of the task from the land perspective given their pre-war army experiences and they brought with them a dehumanised view of the colonial tribal subject. However, they also appreciated that the leverage and prestige of command would afford influence for the young air service. Designated command of a theatre such as Iraq, with a reporting chain direct to the Air Ministry, allowed the RAF to gain vital experience that it lacked in its immaturity. The Air Force would be operating at every level from colonial administration on the ground to lead command of a theatre of operations. At all those levels, including operational flying roles, officers were gaining a unique education which would prepare them for higher command and future operations, however uneven that experience was. Direct command at the highest possible level also gave the RAF the greatest flexibility to test and develop tactics and procedures.

It is worth reflecting on the debate around command that had taken place in Parliament just five years earlier, when Colonel Gretton MP moved an amendment to prevent the Air Council (as was) from independently conducting 'warlike' operations, raising 'the difficulty of a third command' and the implications for unity of command in war. He referenced 'the long experience of partial failures and sometimes disasters [which] have revealed the general principles on which amphibious operations should always be conducted'.¹⁷ Spaight referred to this debate (in his book on organised air power published in 1927):

¹⁶ Keith Jeffery, *Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson a Political Soldier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 251.

¹⁷ HC Debate (1917) Fifth Series, Vol. 99, Col. 533, 14 November 1917.

Sir Frederick Smith explained [in reply to Gretton] that after the needs of the Army and the Navy had been supplied, any surplus air forces would be at the disposal of the Air Council for such operations as might be considered necessary. The fantastic idea that the new Air Council might be disposed to indulge in a little private filibustering, to engage in an aerial *guerre de course* of their own, needed apparently no specific refutation.¹⁸

His sarcasm reflected his strongly held view that a country with a unified air service had 'organised air power at its command', and that those who did not accept this unquestioningly, like Gretton, were mistaken. In Spaight's view such concerns were undeserving of a fulsome response. Gretton's amendment (tabled on 14 and 16 November 1917) was defeated, yet he was prescient in his recognition that a third armed service would disrupt the *status quo*.

In Iraq, the first RAF supreme commander-in-chief would be Salmond, who had been GOC RFC in the First World War after Trenchard, had established (as earlier mentioned) the first Hendon air pageant to fundraise for the RAF Memorial, and later became CAS. Salmond had the ideal skillset and experience to take the position.¹⁹ Having just written a report on the RAF in India, he was fully aware of the challenges of air policing as a subordinate command to the Army.²⁰ Although the RAF had been a significant contributor to operations in Iraq since the 1920 uprisings, the transfer of command in October 1922 was key to the importance of air policing for the RAF and its future. There was a symbolic as well as practical importance to command in Iraq, something which would have been galling for the other two more senior services and added to a sense of competition as much as the tussles over financial allocations. The inter-service implications of command status and its contribution to the battles of Whitehall will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Eight.

¹⁸ Spaight, p. 151.

¹⁹ Townshend called him 'one of the RAF's most brilliant commanders', Townshend, p. 512.

²⁰ Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 34.

As well as exploiting the opportunity presented by air policing in Iraq to promote the value of air power as an efficient and effective operational role, and using the prestige and experience of full command of the theatre to wield influence in Whitehall, air policing in Iraq also provided an important testing and training ground. This was not limited to refining the tactics of policing from the air; arguably more important was experience gained in administration as well in broader developments made in aviation. The scale of the task in Iraq, compared to Palestine where the Air Ministry had also taken command, gave a much larger number of RAF officers colonial administrative roles. Although their inexperience, for example as Special Service Officers in place of political officers, was clearly a disadvantage, colonial government exposed relatively junior RAF officers to a range of new tasks and challenges.²¹ At more senior levels, leaders such as Salmond, Ellington, and Brooke-Popham would progress from command in Iraq to become future air force chiefs. On the operational side, although there were practical developments in technology related to the specific air policing task, of more significance were the general challenges presented in operating from the air over a large and varied country. Iraq was, and is, a country of geographical diversity, with mountains, plains, deserts, and densely populated towns and cities. Advances in disciplines such as navigation, long-distance flying, and mountain operations were made in Iraq. The RAF's experiences there were later described by Hoare as a proving ground for aviation in the 1920s and an education for the post-war cadre of air operators.²²

Air control in Iraq was often indiscriminate, as a result of a lack of regard for the rights of civilian subjects and because operations from the air were anything but precise. In Parliament, Trenchard, reflecting his pre-war Army experiences, argued that 'natives' loved fighting and because women were indistinguishable from men, they were also legitimate targets.²³ The senior

²¹ As Thomas points out the lack of knowledge of RAF appointees meant that the Air Ministry soon widened its selection to suitable Army personnel, Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence*, pp. 182–83.

²² CUL, Personal Papers of Viscount Templewood, V:8 (21), speech by Hoare, 11 May 1925.

²³ Trenchard's speech to the House of Lords contains extensive reference to his previous experiences as an Army officer and compared use of the air environment with the land

leadership of the RAF at this time was predominantly ex-army and many, including Trenchard, of an age where they had served in colonial postings as army officers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There are two reasons why the service backgrounds of the RAF's highest ranks deserve consideration. First, this meant that the racialised nature of military operations in the colonies, typical of the Army at that time, was firmly embedded in the thinking of those at the top of the Air Ministry. Trenchard recounted numerous experiences, for example in West Africa (during his time there in 1908), in which he described the colonial population as 'savages or monkeys'.²⁴ Thus the senior leadership had been exposed to 'the conceptualization of a colonial military doctrine [...] predicated on the "othering" of the enemies of Empire, who were furthermore assumed to possess essential characteristics that could be easily categorized'.²⁵ Trenchard had no difficulty in translating his pre-war experiences and views of Indian and African colonial subjects to the tribesmen of the newly created land of Iraq. The contrast with his approach to more progressive policies at home such as promoting opportunities for boys through the apprentice scheme demonstrates that his values were firmly entrenched in the imperial mindset of the establishment at the time. They lend credence to an argument that, as in so many themes around the fight for the RAF, Trenchard's decision-making was single-mindedly focused on what was best for the future of the air service.

Secondly, the military ancestry of the RAF's leadership is pertinent to its success in arguing for the substitution of air policing for ground forces. Ex-army officers almost certainly found replacing a ground role conceptually straightforward to comprehend. Trenchard compared use of the air environment with the land environment in stark terms: 'I have never understood why we may starve women and children by blockade, but we may not use the weapon of the air'.²⁶ They had an understanding of the Army's role from previous experiences

environment: 'I have never understood why we may starve women and children by blockade, but we may not use the weapon of the air', HL Debate (1930) Fifth Series, Vol. 77, Col. 62, 9 April 1930. Satia, 'The Defense of Inhumanity', p. 39.

²⁴ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/61, 1 of 2, autobiographical notes, undated.

²⁵ Wagner, p. 221.

²⁶ HL Debate (1930) Fifth Series, Vol. 77, Col. 62, 9 April 1930

and would have been well qualified to articulate their substitution thesis. Their experience of both the land and air environments gave them a unique vantage point and credibility from which to deploy these arguments with their political masters. A note from Churchill to Cabinet colleagues supporting substitution in 1920, made the specific point that 'Sir Hugh Trenchard has great experience of West Africa and his opinion is valuable from this point of view as well as from that of military aviation'.²⁷

In this case study, the primary focus is not on the details of the execution of the air policing role, nor on the efficacy and morality of air policing as an air power role and the important colonial implications related to that. The ability of air power to police borders and urban areas, 'hold ground', and the morality of using indiscriminate bombing (both in terms of targeting civilians and the actual inability to target accurately due to limitations of the weaponry at the time) are important focuses for discussion and analysis.²⁸ These issues were the subject of contemporary disagreements in the 1920s, between those who vehemently promoted air policing and those who doubted its efficacy. Both the execution and effectiveness of air policing have been revisited since the 1990s as earlier discussed. Here, however, the importance of air policing to the Air Ministry's political fights in the 1920s, specifically in Iraq and Ireland (with highly contrasting political, geographical, racial and colonial, and operational constraints and challenges), is the primary focus. Iraqi air policing, for all its dubious practices and colonial connotations, deserves analysis in relation to the fight for the RAF's survival, not just because it was economically attractive, but because of the opportunities it created for the RAF to anchor itself more firmly and favourably in Whitehall. Influence was a valuable currency for the RAF at this critical stage in its evolution.

A comparative analysis of the attitudes of the key stakeholders regarding air policing in colonial states such as Iraq and in Ireland provides useful insight into the opportunistic instincts of the RAF leadership who understood the

²⁷ TNA, AIR 1/426/15/260/3, note from Churchill, 23 March 1920.

²⁸ Thomas recognised that 'Aerial attacks did not produce the tangible results of land operations: occupations of hostile territory, the capture of rebels, and a permanent physical presence on the ground' denying valuable intelligence, Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence*, p. 142.

importance of controlling a narrative about its role. Trenchard's single-minded focus on the RAF's future informed his concerns about the risks of being drawn into a much more presentationally detrimental theatre of operations, in Ireland, than he considered to be the case with Iraq.

The Cabinet and the War Office were considering the use of policing from the air to suppress revolutionaries in Ireland at the same time that the Air Ministry was making the case for a substitution role in Iraq. The contrast in Trenchard's approach to pressures from his erstwhile Secretary of State for War and Air, Churchill, on the matter is telling. Trenchard's reticence reflected Satia's point that: 'What was permissible only in wartime in advanced countries turned out to be *always* permissible in Iraq.'²⁹ As Michael Silvestri recognised, the complex position of the Irish as colonial subjects, but also viewed as racially superior to their non-white counterparts in India and the Middle East, presented Trenchard with a dilemma which brought him into conflict with his political masters.³⁰ Writing to Churchill on the use of guns and bombs in Ireland, Trenchard stated: 'I am most anxious that such action should not be permitted until a definite state of war is declared to exist in Ireland.'³¹ Arguments about the different responses of tribal populations were difficult to translate directly to white Irish rebels and the Air Ministry's objections recognised issues of targeting and discrimination in relation to Ireland that contradicted its language around similar operations in Iraq. The elimination of complexity promoted by the air targeting process proved more problematic in the proximal environment of Ireland.

It does not appear that the argument against aggressive air policing in Ireland was based solely on views of the use of aerial attack against 'civilised' rather than 'semicivilised' opposition. Tellingly, concerns about the public reaction to collateral damage were aired by Trenchard in relation to Ireland, with geographical proximity precluding greater control of the narrative. He continued:

²⁹ Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, p. 248.

³⁰ Michael Silvestri, *Ireland and India: Nationalism, Empire and Memory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 180.

³¹ TNA, AIR 8/22, letter from Trenchard to Churchill, 4 October 1920.

I am convinced that there are bound to be mistakes made in firing from the air and then a tremendous agitation would start in the Press against the 'irresponsible' Pilots and I am convinced it would then be impossible to see they had fair play.³²

This lack of enthusiasm due to presentational concerns chimes with the public relations awareness demonstrated by Trenchard more broadly. Richardson also highlighted the financial downsides of Irish operations given that the Treasury had decided that the Air Ministry should meet the costs of 11 (Irish) Wing out of its routine budget, but this point applied, as he acknowledged, to the theatre as a whole rather than arming *per se*.³³

The matter of arming aircraft in Ireland came to a head in the spring of 1921 amidst rumours of a planned uprising and an increase in the overall tempo of operations. The Army, in particular the GOC, General Macready, petitioned government and the War Office, with the result that the discussion returned to the Cabinet. The Cabinet meeting at which the decision was finally made to allow Macready 'the discretion to employ armed aeroplanes in Ireland under very special regulations [...] only after their approval by the Prime Minister' took place while Churchill and Trenchard were in Egypt promoting air policing in Iraq at the Cairo Conference (Churchill was at the time Secretary of State for Colonies and Air and relinquished the 'Air' role a week later). The only armed forces department represented at the critical Cabinet meeting on arming aircraft in Ireland was the War Office; the Air Ministry had no voice. The minutes show that debate centred around 'risk of death and injury to innocent people', though they do not demonstrate whether it was the physical risk to 'civilised' civilians, the public relations risk, or a combination of both which were key to the final decision.³⁴

³² TNA, AIR 8/22, letter from Trenchard to Churchill, 4 October 1920.

³³ Richardson, p. 16. Richardson does not consider that the differing attitudes of the Air Ministry were significantly influenced by a view of white Irish men and women as 'civilised' and not therefore 'suitable' targets.

³⁴ The Cabinet Minutes also recorded that: 'they should never use their arms while in the air except when acting in conjunction with troops on the ground', TNA, CAB 23/24, Cabinet Conclusions 15 (21), 24 March 1921.

In reality, even after Cabinet authorised the use of armed aircraft they were rarely put to operational use, and there are no records of any casualties (Sinn Fein or otherwise). The Army's General Headquarters (GHQ) in Ireland had additionally earlier proposed the use of bombs and guns for training purposes as a deterrent:

G.H.Q. consider that ground target practice from the air regularly carried out at all aerodromes would have a salutary effect; that to clear an area in, say, the Wicklow Hills for bombing practice with dive bombs would be most useful and should be started at once. Flights might even, perhaps, be sent over from England to Baldonnel (where there is room) to do a course of bombing, as I believe there is difficulty in finding a suitable ground in England.³⁵

Records show that this suggestion (at least the former part) was actioned and there are a number of records of practice gunnery and bombing. One monthly report from the RAF Wing in Ireland in 1921 recorded:

A demonstration of bombing and aerial gunnery over the aerodrome was carried out on the occasion of an inspection by Col Commandant Cameron. Four 20lb bombs were dropped and Lewis Guns practice carried out. Several hits were recorded. The moral effect on civilians working on the camp appeared to be most satisfactory many of them never having experienced any warfare of this description.³⁶

The preference in the Air Ministry for the use of armed aircraft as deterrence, rather than to kill and injure, appears to have been the uneasy compromise that was found between the Army's and Churchill's enthusiasm and the Air Ministry's reticence for air policing in Ireland. That reticence demonstrated a clear understanding that the benefits of air policing in Iraq were not transferable to the Irish context where risks were judged to far outweigh any tangible benefits

³⁵ TNA, AIR 8/22, minute from Assistant Secretary to Churchill to Trenchard, 28 September 1920.

³⁶ TNA, AIR 5/214, 'Monthly Reports on Operations in Ireland', report from April 1921, entry for 12 April 1921.

to the junior service. Douglas's review of Air Ministry attitudes to the use of gas bombs in Iraq and Ireland reinforces the picture of a department judicious in avoiding political direction with which it disagreed: 'With some reluctance Trenchard authorized continued efforts to produce a gas bomb, although he added that "it is not of first urgency." His subordinates evidently shared his opinion, for work proceeded at a glacial pace.' Like Trenchard's treatment of bombing in Ireland in general, he acted as a handbrake on the use of gas bombs specifically. Douglas concluded that 'practical difficulties rather than moral qualms' prevented their use.³⁷

The RAF's delivery of air policing in Iraq, and elsewhere in the empire, in contrast with Ireland, gave the threatened service a permanent operational toehold. It was economical, and although issues of excessive violence and civilian casualties were raised at the time and garnered more attention later in the 1920s, the geographical remoteness of the Middle East gave the Air Ministry the advantage of managing public communications about operations. 'Out of the reach of nosey correspondents and acting against people without any direct communication to the British government or League of Nations', the use of air policing in Iraq avoided the scrutiny that kinetic air operations in Ireland might have allowed.³⁸ For the RAF, the opportunity to project an identity as a force in supreme command that could bolster and defend the British Empire, combined with the efficiency of the offer, provided an attractive package to present to the public, as much as to government. Though the reality was that operations involved indiscriminate targeting, civilian deaths, and 'appallingly bad' bombing accuracy, concerted information management confined much contemporary criticism, particularly in the early 1920s, to internal discussion in Whitehall.³⁹ Meanwhile 'the RAF pushed its version of the success story in military journals, parliamentary reports, and releases to the general public. Eventually, the RAF view of air control became well established in the public mind.'⁴⁰ Thomas identified the paradox presented by air policing

³⁷ Douglas, pp. 870 and 880.

³⁸ Corum, p. 66.

³⁹ Corum, p. 71.

⁴⁰ Corum, pp. 71–72.

emphasising control of colonial space while at the same time concealing an absence of control on the ground.⁴¹

The importance of the RAF's successful advancement of air policing, in substitution for larger and more expensive land forces, has been widely recognised as bolstering the air service's defence of its independence and providing politicians favourable to the permanence of the RAF with quantitative economic justifications. This was much assisted by the discredit heaped on the Army by its actions in Ireland and at Amritsar; the inquiry into the Amritsar massacre was, arguably, pivotal in shifting opinion towards not only low cost but also less visible air policing and the RAF's 'light touch' in policing Ireland ensured attention stayed firmly with the Army's activities there. There was an additional cultural dimension to the contribution of air policing to the RAF's fate. The previous case studies have discussed memorialisation, and the RAF's ability to use its lack of history to its advantage, and apprentice training, where there was a modern and radical appeal that promoted social mobility publicly to populate the new service. In the case of air policing, the RAF was using modern technology, aviation (albeit the machines used early on were recycled First World War aircraft which, of course, made the project even more financially attractive), in an imperial setting.⁴² The association with British Empire, and its role in administering a state on behalf of the British Government, gave the RAF a useful public relations angle whereby the fledgling force could demonstrate its credentials in a traditional context. The distance of Iraq from the United Kingdom allowed the Air Ministry to manage the presentation of its imperial activities. It also maximised the opportunities for publicly demonstrating the use of modern technology in an establishment-friendly imperial setting at events such as the annual Hendon air pageant, discussed in more detail in Chapter Six: public relations which deftly combined the modern with the traditional. Beyond air policing, the Middle East also provided an important stage for civil aviation with the first air route to Iraq, from Cairo to Baghdad, approved by

⁴¹ Thomas, 'Markers of Modernity or Agents of Terror?', p. 92.

⁴² C. G. Grey made this point in letters to the *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail* in 1922, on the occasion of the RAF's air pageant, pointing out that all the aircraft on operations in India, Iraq, Somaliland, and Arabia were at least four years old since they were of First World War vintage, National Aerospace Library (NAL), CGG 6 1916, press cuttings, 24 June 1922.

Cabinet; these imperial air routes are also the subject of further examination in Chapter Six.

A neglected area of analysis regarding the Air Ministry's promotion of air policing as a core RAF role in the early post-war years has been its direct impact on inter-service competition. Rivalry between the services has been seen in the broader context of the attacks on the independent air service by the Army and the Navy, their political masters, and public supporters. However, air policing in Iraq provided a distinct and important source of ignition for the impending conflagration. Townshend argued that air policing 'would simultaneously provide the RAF with a major imperial role (so protecting it from the jealousy of the older services), and keep the Empire viable', but rather than the RAF gaining protection by shouldering some of the colonial burden instead its expanded role became a central source of sister service ire.⁴³ The issue of command and the RAF taking overall control of operations in Iraq antagonised the older services; as Ferris concluded: 'This new balance between strength and commitments had one devastating result. Whereas in 1920 the army had too little strength to meet its commitments, in 1921 it had too few commitments to justify its strength.'⁴⁴ As Neville Parton has argued, the role of doctrine during this period was subordinate to the need for survival and demonstrating the worth of the post-war independent Air Force.⁴⁵ Serious arguments over doctrine and the future core role of the RAF were still to come. Air policing allowed the RAF to project itself as both equal to the Army and the Navy (holding command of a theatre of operations) and a bulwark of empire. As will be discussed later in relation to the Air Ministry's able grasp of public relations, the displays at Hendon further fanned the flames, promoting both the imperial role in the desert and the superiority of air power over sea power. This emasculated both older services in a very public way and invited escalating attacks on the nascent air service.

⁴³ Townshend, p. 456.

⁴⁴ Ferris, *Men, Money, and Diplomacy*, p. 86; Overy has argued the same from the perspective of the opposite end of the RAF's first century, Richard Overy, *The Birth of the RAF, 1918: The World's First Air Force* (London: Penguin Books, 2018), p. 98.

⁴⁵ Parton, pp. 1176–77.

Conclusion

By 1922, the Geddes Report was lauding the Air Force and air power: 'by the intelligent application of air power it is possible to utilise machinery in substitution for and not as a mere additional to man-power'.⁴⁶ Yet border enforcement, occupying territory, and delivering a long-term peace were all objectives that air power struggled to achieve.⁴⁷ Perhaps this was always inevitable in a colonial context in the aftermath of the post-1919 revolutionary anti-colonial wave. Britain had created a country, Iraq, essentially as a topographical construct and the long-term maintenance of civil peace proved to be an intractable problem, leading to Iraq's eventual independence in 1932. However, well before lessons on the limitations of air policing were being fully digested in the inter-war period (and arguably related concepts are still contested today), the RAF won its permanence, deploying arguments based on the efficiency of air policing in support of its independence which strengthened its position considerably both in Whitehall and with the British public.

In their own ways, each of the developments described in the three case studies in this chapter also trace the development of inter-service competition. The latter stages of the First World War, after the creation of the RAF in April 1918, can be seen predominantly as a period of uneasy truce, or postponement of hostilities, between the services until the war was over. The period from the Armistice to 1923, which encompassed the completion of the RAF Memorial, the establishment of apprentice training, and the handover of command to the RAF in Iraq, was critical in shaping the course and development of inter-service rivalry. These early arguments, and the way that the RAF handled tradition and modernity to its best advantage, at a time when the other services were struggling to adapt to the many challenges of this post-war period and address the legacies of the First World War, shaped not only the politics of defence into the 1930s but can be traced directly to the modern British armed forces' inter-service relationships.

⁴⁶ Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archives (CPA), PUB 220/55, 'Gleanings and Memoranda', Vol. XLVII, 1922.

⁴⁷ Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence*, p. 142.

The next chapter will consider the growth of inter-service rivalry from a spatial perspective, arguing that both physical and conceptual space are useful approaches for understanding how this competition developed during the early and mid-1920s. The geography of Whitehall and Westminster will provide a starting point for exploration of how physical space impacted the development of the Air Ministry. The last case study on air policing provides an insight into how the RAF was beginning to occupy conceptual space that had not been evident to the other services before the end of the war. Understanding the broader destabilisation caused by this invasion of space will inform the rest of the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE — WHITEHALL WARRIORS: BATTLING FOR SPACES AND PLACES

The Royal Palace of White Hall, under the expansive ambitions of King Henry VIII in the sixteenth century, appropriated land from Charing Cross to Westminster Abbey and from the banks of the Thames to the parkland now known as St James's Park. Entertainment for the court included spectacles of combat between humans as well as animals, in the form of a tiltyard for jousting, hand-to-hand duels, and bear-baiting, and a cock-pit for cock fighting. The tiltyard was located on what is now Horse Guards Parade, a site redolent today with military associations from the Horse Guards building itself (home to GOC London District) to Trooping the Colour, the striking Guards Division Memorial, and the elaborate southern façade of the Admiralty Building. The cock-pit, which was later restored as the Cockpit Theatre by Inigo Jones in the early seventeenth century, lay where the Cabinet Office now sits at the intersection of Downing Street and Whitehall. Whitehall is the real and symbolic home of British governmental conflict, culminating at its southern end in the nexus of political theatre, the Houses of Parliament. The Admiralty and War Office had long associations with it from centuries before the Air Ministry came into existence in January 1918. Whitehall was still bounded, as it had been in the sixteenth century, by the park and the river, and was then also demarcated by the major road intersections at Parliament Square and Trafalgar Square with their barriers of traffic and pedestrians. The discrete cultural community of political leaders and decision-makers that occupied the privileged acreage of Whitehall had easy access to one another and to the great institutions of power. The Air Ministry was to find itself on the outside in more ways than one.

The Admiralty's changing role in the seventeenth century, as the command of the Royal Navy developed and formalised, coincided with an increasing role for Parliament, rather than the royal court, in governing the country. This was accompanied by a shift to governing from purpose-built offices rather than from premises which housed domestic and bureaucratic roles simultaneously. The home of the first Duke of Buckingham, Lord High

Admiral, had been used to conduct naval business in the early seventeenth century and it later became the site of the Admiralty Offices and the 'Ripley building'. The latter still stands and was specifically designed for Admiralty use in 1726, though it was the subject of much criticism for its unusual architectural proportions. As Colin Brown recounted, the Admiralty ordered Thomas Ripley, the architect, to stretch the classical column design vertically and as a result he became a laughing stock for critics: 'Vanbrugh said every time he saw Ripley's name in public he laughed so much he "had like to beshit himself"'.¹ Despite these architectural arguments, the Navy occupied a seat at the heart of the machinery of government ideally placed to lobby and influence. Later the entire Admiralty staff were relocated to extended Admiralty buildings which came to occupy the area from Horse Guards Parade to Admiralty Arch (administrative staff were transferred in the late nineteenth century, from Somerset House at the end of the Strand).

The Army had a less concentrated structure until reforms after the Crimean War brought the entire military command under the Secretary of State for War. The Cardwell reforms relocated army staff from Horse Guards (whose offices had been rebuilt in the mid-eighteenth century) to a set of rambling buildings across St James's Park in Pall Mall: 'It was a conglomeration of ancient houses numbered 80 to 91 Pall Mall, which were thrown together mainly by the simple process of making doors in the walls between them, with no alteration of the level of floors.' General Charles Gordon was reported to have said that it 'was easier to find his way around Africa than through the Pall Mall labyrinth'.² Attempts in the nineteenth century to bring the Admiralty and the War Office under one roof in Whitehall were the subject of two Royal Commissions in the 1860s (a competition was launched in 1868 under the remit of the strategic necessity of consolidating the War Office, Admiralty, and Horse Guards), but these efforts, ahead of twentieth century arguments for a Ministry

¹ Neil R. Bingham, 'Victorian and Edwardian Whitehall: Architecture and Planning 1865–1918' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 1985), pp. 32–33; Colin Brown, *Whitehall: The Street That Shaped a Nation* (London: Pocket Books, 2010), p. 203.

² Hampden Charles Gordon, *The War Office* (London: Putnam, 1935), p. 74; Bill Jackson and Dwin Bramall, *The Chiefs: The Story of the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff* (London: Brassey's, 1992), p. 11.

of Defence, were ultimately unsuccessful.³ However, by the early twentieth century the War Office had a new purpose-built home opposite the Admiralty on the eastern side of Whitehall. Designed to reflect and complement its surroundings, adjacent to Banqueting House, the building was opened in 1906 just three years after the milestone of the Wright brothers' first flight, but before an aircraft had flown in Britain and six years before the establishment of air power as a formal military arm. By the time the RAF was formed in 1918, office space in central London had been at a premium for four years due to the additional needs of a wartime government. The War Office alone occupied, around Whitehall, fifty-nine buildings.⁴ Though the threats to London from the air had helped create the RAF, the notion of the new Air Ministry securing a Whitehall space comparable to the older two services was out of the question.

The creation of the RAF and the Air Ministry demanded physical and conceptual space, neither of which were readily available in wartime 1918. However, as we shall see, the RAF's creation disrupted the pre-war ways of working between the Army and the Navy, and between the individual services and the machinery of government. This disruption was London-based, more specifically a Whitehall- and Westminster-based phenomenon. Edgerton has argued that personal and political networks 'encouraged the aeroplane to be specifically English, and indeed so connected to London and its environs'.⁵ This chapter will address the geographical and physical dimension, before broadening to the conceptual, and will introduce the battle *for* Whitehall, and a place for the Air Ministry. This will be analysed through the machinations surrounding the search for a physical home for the department, and its attempts to exercise influence in Whitehall from the periphery: the aim of the first section of this chapter. The next section will turn to a broader discussion of the conceptual space that air power occupied, the promotion of 'air-mindedness' to differentiate the air environment from those of the land and the sea, and the RAF's argument that airmen had a distinct identity and intuitive epistemology. Hyde concluded that there would have been 'no possibility of fighting the Battle

³ Neil R. Bingham, p. 62.

⁴ Hampden Charles Gordon, p. 306.

⁵ Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*, p. xxvi.

of Britain in 1940' without winning 'the battle of Whitehall' in the 1920s.⁶ This battle and the development of inter-service competition can be better understood in terms of the fight conducted from within the nascent Air Ministry by its Whitehall Warriors. Their activities, along with those of some key allies and supporters, introduce the concept of networks and the battle *beyond* Whitehall.

Space and Place

Space, in historical terms, is a complicated and contested concept; Leif Jerram's 'Space: A useless category for historical analysis' provides a handrail for discussing space and place. He articulated definitions of space, location, and place as distinct concepts. First, he defined 'space' as material, to be considered to describe 'proximate physical disposition of things in relation to one another and humans'. 'Location' is defined as relational or positional, i.e. 'the location of things on the earth's surface, and the relationship between those locations and the scale/density/complexity distribution of those relationships'. 'Place', which can be real or imagined, is meaningful and is capable of encompassing 'the values, beliefs, codes, and practices that surround a particular location'.⁷ The journey of the Air Ministry reflects Jerram's argument that space is important because *changing* space is an inherently challenging endeavour requiring 'a level of money, power, skill, relationships, debate, consensus-forming (or violence) and sheer physical brutality'.⁸ If spaces are fixed once a man-made environment is created, their intractability creates 'an obduracy that leaves us having to deal with them as a sort of "second nature"', having to adapt to what already exists.⁹ The Air Ministry had to adapt to a political system and geography in London that had evolved over centuries, and it had little inherent political, financial, or relational power at its inception.

⁶ Hyde, p. 504.

⁷ Leif Jerram, 'Space: A Useless Category for Historical Analysis?', *History and Theory*, 52.3 (2013), 400–19 (pp. 404–05).

⁸ Jerram, p. 415.

⁹ Jerram, p. 419.

The footprint of the RAF on British soil was small, because aircraft were deployed overseas during wartime and remained so in the early inter-war years. Many squadrons remained abroad after the end of the First World War and, as has been seen in Chapter Two, some were redeployed across the empire for air policing duties. Post-war economic constraints, as discussed in Chapter One, forced Trenchard and the Air Ministry to concentrate resource at home on building foundations (the eponymous 'Royal Ground Force') while demobilising aircrew and closing wartime stations. It was said of Trenchard that he 'hid the Air Force in the Colonies' and, though he denied this was a deliberate policy, the visibility of the RAF at home in the early post-war years, Hendon air displays excepted, was relatively low.¹⁰ This partly explains Edgerton's aforementioned supposition that London became a focus for the networks and connections that grew to support the proponents of the air and the aeroplane. Whitehall was, as it had been under Henry VIII, a scene of combat and the epicentre of British political power.

Secretary of State for Air, Hoare, recalled the Balfour sub-committee deliberations of 1923 and a particular vignette that encapsulated the degree to which the difficulties that were to envelop relations between the three services were Whitehall-focused. Members of the sub-committee visited the carrier *HMS Eagle* as they deliberated on the problematic relationship between the Navy and the RAF at the time:

At the end of the day all three compared their experiences, and found to their surprise that they had come along different routes to the same conclusion. The dual system was working excellently, there was no serious friction between the Naval and Air Force personnel, and there was an admirable spirit of companionship and co-operation throughout the carrier. They came back to London convinced that the war between the two Departments was a war in Whitehall.¹¹

¹⁰ David Divine, *The Broken Wing. A Study in the British Exercise of Air Power* (London: Hutchinson, 1966), p. 158.

¹¹ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p. 64.

Hoare's recollections were no doubt coloured by his pro-RAF prejudices as accounts of the visit vary, but the RAF prevailed in this argument.¹² Although relations between the different services at an operational level were not altogether harmonious, it appeared that the especially negative aspects of relations were the ones most likely, understandably, to filter up the chain of command. These difficulties found amplification in the fractious Whitehall environment of the early inter-war years. Routine reports of co-operation were by their nature unexceptional and less likely to draw attention. Command, which was at the heart of much of the inter-service friction, was an issue of utmost importance at the highest levels of the Navy, as reflected in Admiral Beatty's evidence to the Balfour sub-committee:

I have complete control [as Commander-in-Chief], and I can trust implicitly every unit because I have trained it myself and can therefore rely upon them. I have not got to rely upon the co-operation of a unit which belongs to another arm.¹³

Co-operation was insufficient for Beatty, and, although at sea the Balfour sub-committee observed sailors and airmen co-operating with each other, command and control, not co-operation, mattered to those further up the command chain.

Whitehall as a *place* invokes a sense of codes and practices of political behaviour. However, in considering the responses of the machinery of government to the creation of the RAF and an Air Ministry, technically Westminster, here, is a more accurate term for the *space* under consideration. Colin Seymour-Ure considered Whitehall and Westminster interchangeable terms, 'a fairly compact district containing parliament, Downing Street, the core civil service, party headquarters, political officers of media and lobbyists, and (a key component of news exchange) clubs and "watering holes"'.¹⁴ However, for

¹² See William J. Reader, *Architect of Air Power: The Life of the First Viscount Weir of Eastwood 1877–1959* (London: Collins, 1968), p. 107; Andrew Boyle, p. 486; Mark Andrews, *Fledgling Eagle: The Politics of Air Power* (Peterborough: Stamford House Publishing, 2008), p. 151.

¹³ TNA, AIR 8/66, Committee of Imperial Defence: Sub-Committee on Relations Between the Navy and the Air Force, report of Beatty's evidence, 1924, p. 32.

¹⁴ Colin Seymour-Ure, *Prime Ministers and the Media: Issues of Power and Control* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2008), p. 67.

the duration of the inter-war years, and beyond, the Air Ministry was located outside Whitehall, with its centre of gravity for the 1920s at the junction of Aldwych and Kingsway on the eastern extremity of the City of Westminster. Here Westminster is the *space*, the material disposition of the borough, rather than the *place* 'Westminster' which holds specific connotations of the Palace of Westminster and parliamentary decision-making. The Air Ministry was to be located in the technical space of Westminster (though only 300 metres from the border with the City of London), but distant from the more important political 'place'.

The Air Ministry — The Battle for Whitehall

The Air Ministry grasped this idea and another battle between the ancients in Whitehall and the moderns in Kingsway was fought.

Robin Higham¹⁵

Higham's assessment of a relationship between 'ancients' in Whitehall and 'moderns' in the Air Ministry's headquarters on Kingsway, its home from 1919 until after the Second World War, is perhaps an over-generalisation, but it neatly summarises the distance in outlook as well as geography that the Kingsway Ministry lay from the rest of Whitehall. The Air Board had been located at 19 Carlton House Terrace and in January 1917 the Hotel Cecil in the Strand was requisitioned to provide office accommodation for staff.¹⁶ In January 1918, the first Secretary of State and CAS, Rothermere and Trenchard, arrived at the recently created Ministry in the Hotel Cecil. Sir Almeric Fitzroy's memoir mirrors other references to the fact that the British Museum had also been under consideration for the new Ministry.¹⁷ Spaight, an Air Ministry insider, was

¹⁵ Higham on arguments regarding armoured cars in the early 1920s, Higham, *Armed Forces in Peacetime Britain*, p. 155.

¹⁶ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (LHMA), Personal Papers of Lord Cowdray, Douglas-Scott-Montagu/3/13, letter from Lord Sydenham of Combe to Montagu, 29 June 1916. Spaight, p. 109.

¹⁷ 'Lord Rothermere came to see me this morning in preparation for his being sworn in tomorrow. He told me his department was to be installed at the British Museum, and incidentally had much to say on the swollen staff he had found at the Hotel Cecil, where 4,000 men and

convinced of the importance of bringing together all departments in one building:

The Hotel Cecil seemed in fact to gather all the departments concerned with air administration into its capacious embrace and almost to force them into a union. The mere juxtaposition was an incentive to closer amalgamation. The influence was felt not on the side of supply alone. It had a much wider range. The military departments as well as those concerned with supply were concentrated within the same four walls.¹⁸

He was no fan of the building, however, calling it 'dreadful' and 'architecturally deplorable, damned aesthetically'.¹⁹

[This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons]

Figure 3.1 Whitehall and Westminster Map showing the Admiralty (dark blue), War Office (red), and Air Ministry (light blue) first in the Strand (the Hotel Cecil) then at the eastern base of Kingsway.²⁰

women were engaged, including 600 commissioned officers?', Almeric William Fitzroy, *Memoirs* (London: Hutchinson, 1930), p. 666.

¹⁸ Spaight, p. 113.

¹⁹ Spaight, p. 19.

²⁰ From 'The Pictorial Plan of London',

<http://www.geographicus.com/mm5/cartographers/geographia.txt> [accessed online 7 August 2018]

The Cecil was known by the unofficial and unaffectionate nickname 'Bolo House' or 'Hotel Bolo', after Bolo Pasha (a French-Egyptian official who had been tried, convicted, and shot for espionage on behalf of Germany).²¹ Grey, who visited the building as editor of *The Aeroplane*, recounted: 'The reason given by the inventor of the name was that everybody in the Hotel Bolo was either actively interfering with the progress of the War, or was doing nothing to help its progress.'²² The hotel's layout was not conducive to effective working: with individuals confined to small bedrooms as offices, the corridors became meeting places for gossip. Sykes described the place as a 'vortex' and Grey referred to the layout as 'complete chaos' for its 'inmates'.²³ Additionally, although the Hotel Cecil was the home of the Ministry, wartime necessitated that some departments were located elsewhere. In 1919, Churchill listed the buildings which had been occupied by the Air Ministry (in updating the House of Commons on the process of post-war drawdown), including the Hotel Cecil, Adelphi Hotel, Orchard Hotel, Covent Garden Hotel, and Cavendish Hotel. In the same debate he also referred to the War Office's use of De Keyser's Hotel; this had been the London headquarters of the RFC (which had soon outgrown its single room in the War Office after war was declared) and was the first named 'Aadastral House'.²⁴

Despite the Hotel Cecil's shortcomings, the forcing together of disparate departments from the Ministry of Munitions, the Admiralty, and the War Office in 1917, followed by the collective effort required in the first months of 1918 to create a departmental machine ready for the formal establishment of the RAF on 1 April, embodied a sense of 'place' to the Hotel Cecil.²⁵ Sykes, once installed as CAS in April 1918, used his staff and organisational

²¹ Divine, p. 99.

²² Grey, p. 67.

²³ Sykes, *From Many Angles*, p. 215; Grey, p. 66.

²⁴ Geoffrey Dorman, 'Aadastral Houses', *The Aeroplane*, 1955, 201–02 (p. 201). HC Debate (1919) Fifth Series, Vol. 116, Col. 1809, 3 June 1919.

²⁵ The Cecil name had, incidentally, been associated with this area of the Strand since Sir Robert Cecil, First Earl of Salisbury, had his home there; Cecil was baptized in St Clement Danes, which in rebuilt form became the RAF's church and lies within sight of the mouth of Kingsway. Croft, Pauline. 'Cecil, Robert, first earl of Salisbury (1563–1612), politician and courtier'. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. John Stow, *The Survey of London* (London: Everyman's Library, 1970), p. 398.

experience to instil a measure of order and by August the RAF's continued growth demanded more room for staff. The drawing rooms in the hotel were taken over and bedrooms from the Constitutional Club were requisitioned to accommodate new departments such as meteorology, intelligence, training, and even an Air Ministry library for technical research (under the administration of an S. C. Isaacs in Room 349, as the October 1918 telephone directory shows).²⁶ Although the telephone directories included remote office locations as well, it is notable that the June 1918 document extends to twenty-seven pages, whereas the October 1918 contains forty-seven demonstrating the department's rapid expansion.²⁷ Despite the arrangement being a necessity of wartime in terms of location, a compromise in terms of design, and with some offices located elsewhere, it was sufficiently fit for purpose to get the Air Ministry in reasonable order to Armistice Day and beyond. The sense in which the Air Ministry then became geographically marginalised on its 1919 relocation to Kingsway was consolidated by the retrenchment of government, and in particular its military and naval offices, from its wartime behemoth spread across the City of Westminster back into the Whitehall heartland. A House of Commons debate recorded that accommodation nearer Whitehall would have been preferable for the Air Ministry but there was not 'adequate and satisfactory accommodation', with all potential buildings 'in full occupation by other Government staffs'.²⁸

The Air Ministry moved to 'three grim buildings' in Kingsway on its south-east corner, which intersected with Aldwych, in the summer of 1919.²⁹ Whereas the symbolism of an Air Board and cross-government departments coming together in the Hotel Cecil may well have served to advance the development of an independent air force, the marooning of the Air Ministry away from its sister services and the machinery of government in Whitehall was

²⁶ Ash, p. 137; Air Historical Branch (AHB), 'Air Ministry. List of Staff and Distribution of Duties', October 1918, p. 4.

²⁷ AHB, 'Air Ministry. List of Staff and Distribution of Duties', June and October 1918.

²⁸ HC Debate (1919) Fifth Series, Vol. 112, Col. 1601, 25 February 1919.

²⁹ The significance of the initial lease period (not specified in references to it) was interpreted as both positive and negative: Spaight argued that the length of the lease 'for years' demonstrated a governmental faith in the permanence of the RAF, while Templewood described the lease as 'short', Spaight, p. 213; Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p. 48.

a symbolically isolating move for the RAF. It was negative not only because it kept the political and service leadership of the Air Force twenty minutes' walk from the centre of Whitehall, diminishing their ability to influence government, but it also distanced them and their staffs from their counterparts at the War Office and Admiralty. Put simply, there was less chance of them meeting and interacting. Location, the relational concept, was actively converting a geographical, spatial fact into a sense in which Adastral House was a separate place, with the meanings and connotations that that carried. Additionally, records show that the Adastral House buildings were not in an attractive setting. Work was just beginning on Bush House and large tracts of the Aldwych area were empty. A diagram contained in files discussing possible land for the erection of an RAF Memorial (as discussed in Chapter Two) shows empty land in pink (Figure 3.2). Similarly, an aerial photograph from 1921 shows the unfinished and unkempt nature of the area (Figure 3.3). Trenchard said in a speech in 1919 in which he refers to the foundations of Bush House:

Outside my office in London the beginnings of a great building are being made, and the place is just a mass of muddy puddles. But the building will rise and overlook all London, and the Air Service of which we are laying the foundations will rise too, and overlook the whole British Empire.

Though he put his natural spin on the backdrop of 'muddy puddles', in his element with building metaphors, the contrast with the commanding offices of the Admiralty and War Office in prime positions in Whitehall carried an explicit message about the relative status of the third service.³⁰

³⁰ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/98, 2 of 9, speech to a university, 1919.

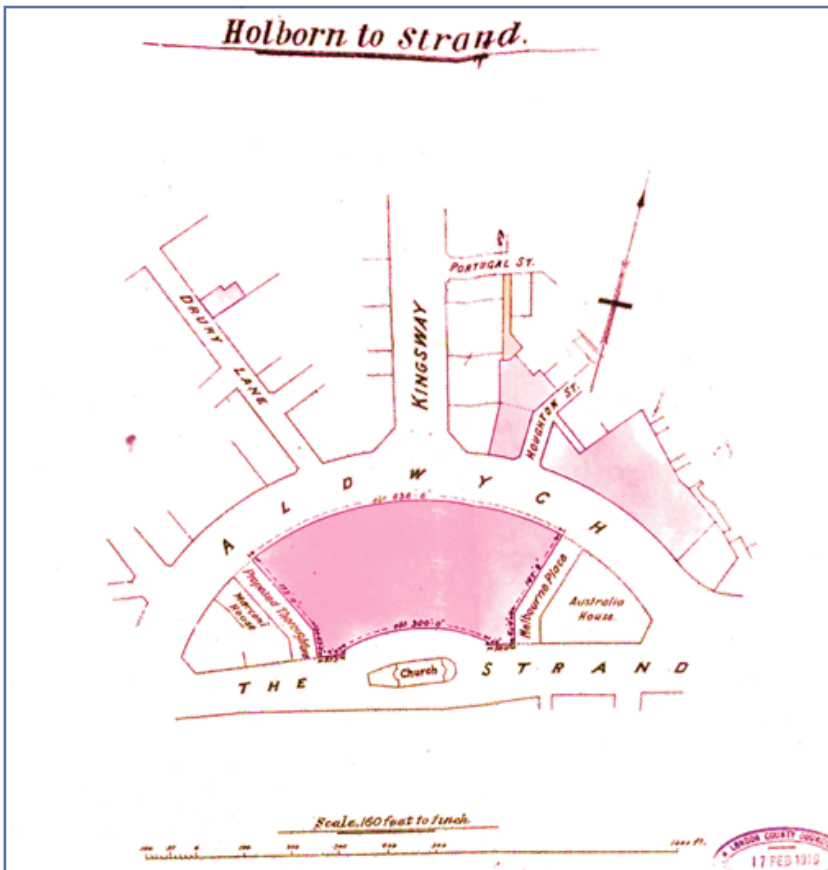


Figure 3.2 Derelict space in Aldwych 1919.

[This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons]

Figure 3.3 Construction in Aldwych 1921.³¹

³¹ EPW006151 'India House, Drury House and Bush House under construction on Aldwych, London', 1921, <https://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/en/search?keywords=EPW006151&country=global&year=all> [accessed online 5 June 2018].

The obduracy of the Air Ministry's environment is evident in an exchange over an ostensibly trivial, but illustrative, issue. Having moved into the Kingsway building in 1919, a meeting took place on 8 January 1920 at the behest of the Assistant Secretary to the Air Council, H. W. W. McAnally, regarding improvement of the appearance of the exterior of the main entrance. Despite a hastening letter to the Office of Works from Mr Cohen (a clerk in the Establishment Division, according to the 1919 Air Ministry Directory), it appears that no progress was made and so the matter escalated back up to the office of the Secretary of the Air Ministry.³² Writing to the Secretary of the Office of Works in July 1920, McAnally repeated his request for the improvement works to be carried out, which included 'Fixing a copper scroll with "Air Ministry" thereon across the top of the inner door' and 'Removal of the brown notice board with "Air Ministry" on it'.³³ The Office of Works replied the following month rejecting the change to the signage on the building:

As to the suggested substitution of a copper scroll instead of the notice board, while possibly this would improve the appearance of the entrance, any expenditure on matters of this kind seems hardly warranted at present. It should be mentioned that other Government Departments are provided with painted wooden notice boards, and the board at the Air Ministry is of a rather better class and description than usual.³⁴

McAnally wrote again to the Secretary of the Office of Works in September 1920, disputing the point:

I am commanded by the Air Council to point out that, while They [*sic*] realise that the external cleaning is the liability of the Landlord, no less than eight months have elapsed since the visit of the representative of

³² AHB, 'Air Ministry. List of Staff and Distribution of Duties', November 1919. TNA, AIR 2/220/329771/22, letter from P. Cohen to A. J. Pitcher, 23 February 1920.

³³ TNA, AIR 2/220/329771/22, letter from McAnally to The Secretary, Office of Works, 20 July 1920.

³⁴ TNA, AIR 2/220/329771/22, letter from Connolly to The Secretary, Air Ministry, 25 August 1920.

the Office of Works who agreed as to the necessity for some improvement.

The Council also desire that the copper scroll with 'Air Ministry' thereon may be fixed to the top of the inner door. The existing board is a separate matter and was put up to direct letters and telegrams, etc., to Canada House, and other departments are not required, so far as this department is aware, to rely on a painted wooden notice board of this nature.³⁵

Despite further hasteners the matter remained unresolved, but in July 1921 the Air Council decided to rename the building 'Astrak House' (reflecting its RFC ancestry). The archives do not show whether this was in part a ploy to secure additional improved signage, but in January 1922 the Office of Works wrote agreeing to the name change and 'The Director of Works of this Department is being asked to proceed with the work of altering the names on the buildings after consultation with you as to the position in which it is desired to place the new name.'³⁶ The change was made officially on 1 March 1922.³⁷ Though the issue of signage is minor compared to the larger controversies of the period, it demonstrates Jerram's point about the obduracy of environment: making changes to physical space requires power and in this case the Air Ministry appeared to have relatively little, once again signalling its relative position in government and also the need for it to react creatively to challenges as a new organisation.

Hoare was also shocked by the accommodation and staffing offered to the Secretary of State in Astrak House, which may well have been a reflection on his predecessors' lack of activity in this area. He recalled:

³⁵ TNA, AIR 2/220/329771/22, letter from McAnally to The Secretary, Office of Works, 15 September 1920.

³⁶ TNA, AIR 2/220/329771/22, letter from Raby to The Secretary, Air Ministry, 16 January 1922.

³⁷ TNA, AIR 2/220/329771/22, Air Ministry Office Memorandum No. 242, dated 23 February 1922.

My own room bore striking witness to the weak and precarious position of the Ministry. It was no more than the office that had been intended for a cashier in a business house. A partition door with a glass panel was all that separated it from the rest of the Department. There was none of the usual organisation for the Minister's private office. Unlike every other great Department, there was no post of private secretary, as other Ministers understood it.³⁸

He installed an experienced civil service secretary and he and his wife insisted that the Office of Works improve his working environment. Lady Maud apparently threatened to have a culture taken from the dust in his office, and action was then taken to clean and decorate.³⁹

The compact nature of Whitehall has always lent itself to interactive ways of inter-departmental working. Of the first Secretaries of State to occupy Adastral House, alongside Trenchard as CAS, Churchill held dual departmental responsibilities (with the War Office, and then the Colonial Office) so maintained a Whitehall office and staff as well as one in the Air Ministry.⁴⁰ Guest, who was not a member of Cabinet, has not been remembered with much acclaim either in relation to his eighteen-month tenure at the Air Ministry or more widely: Cannadine described him as 'a snob, a playboy and a lightweight' and Pirie wrote 'He was no politician and often got his facts and figures wrong. Even his supporters said no one took him very seriously in the House of Commons.'⁴¹ The issue of the 'intolerable' Kingsway location for the department's political chief was only properly articulated when Hoare became Secretary of State in 1922. He recalled:

The distance from Whitehall still remained a most serious obstacle to the smooth working of the Department. Although the three Service Ministers

³⁸ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p. 50.

³⁹ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, pp. 51–52.

⁴⁰ The directory shows War Office telephone and room numbers for some of Churchill's staff, AHB, 'Air Ministry. List of Staff and Distribution of Duties', November 1919.

⁴¹ David Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy: Grandeur and Decline in Modern Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 139; Gordon Pirie, *Air Empire: British Imperial Civil Aviation, 1919–39* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 62.

needed to be in the closest possible touch, particularly in 1922 when the Turks were threatening Iraq, we were separated by the traffic blocks of the Strand and Trafalgar Square. This geographical isolation was an example of the general attitude of indifference to the new Ministry.⁴²

Though the arguments over improved signage at the Air Ministry described earlier were minor, they serve to reinforce Hoare's political understanding of the significance of place and the values and meanings they embodied. The reference to traffic blocks echoed an earlier comment about the proposed co-location of the Admiralty and the War Office in the nineteenth century:

Probably either of those great persons [Minister of War and his C-in-C] would think twice about traversing several public streets to ask a question of the other, but neither of them would hesitate about crossing St James's Park for the purpose. It is not the distance that makes the difficulty of communication between offices, but the impediments in the way.⁴³

Dislocation from the beating heart of Whitehall was as much of an issue in the early twentieth century and probably more so, as Hoare described, due to the advent of the motor car and the concomitant increase in traffic.⁴⁴

Hoare was successful in his campaign for a small base for senior and outer office staff in Whitehall and the chosen location of Gwydyr House, beside the Royal United Services Institute and Banqueting House, and within 500 feet of both the Admiralty and the War Office, was ideal. His Under Secretary of State for Air, Sir Philip Sassoon, argued in Parliament that the advantage of a duplication of offices for himself and the Secretary of State was 'proximity to the Houses of Parliament and other Ministers'.⁴⁵ The move was made by July 1925 (Hoare had returned to office after the defeat of the Labour Government) as

⁴² Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p. 52.

⁴³ *Builder*, 6 March 1868, p. 181, quoted in Neil R. Bingham, p. 61.

⁴⁴ By 1913 'motors had won the battle for omnibus supremacy' over horses, Stefan Goebel and Jerry White, 'London and the First World War', *The London Journal*, 41.3 (2016), 199–218 (p. 205).

⁴⁵ HC Debate (1925) Fifth Series, Vol. 186, Col. 1826, 20 July 1925.

demonstrated by the relevant Air Ministry Directories, which include handwritten amendments of some office telephone numbers from Adastral House to Gwydyr House.⁴⁶ Correspondence from the 1930s reinforces the value placed on this Whitehall vantage point for the Ministry. Christopher Bullock, the Permanent Under Secretary, summed up the importance of Gwydyr House to his Ministers in 1935: 'we have always regarded [it] as a spearpoint in Whitehall staking out a claim for the early accommodation of the Air Ministry in that area under a single roof'; the prized location for the entire Ministry was the ultimate goal.⁴⁷ In another minute from Bullock, which also lamented any prospect of losing Gwydyr House because of its prime location for viewing the coronation, he claimed: 'We have been handicapped enough by the way we have been treated in the matter of accommodation ever since the war.'⁴⁸ The primary department responsible for these decisions was the Office of Works, which had been against the earlier improvement of signage at Kingsway. Bullock (along with Spaight) is named in the first Air Ministry Directory published in 1918 and continuously thereafter, becoming Permanent Secretary to the Air Ministry in 1931, so was well qualified to comment.⁴⁹ A base for the Air Ministry in Gwydyr House, though not secured until 1925 because it required the commitment to the task and political nous of Hoare, represented a meaningful presence for Hoare and his staff in the heart of Whitehall. When Gwydyr House did have to be vacated for the works which prompted the above exchanges in 1935, the Whitehall Annex (or 'V.I.P. Annex') of the Air Ministry was relocated to King Charles Street, also a prime position in Whitehall, where it would remain until after the Second World War.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ AHB, 'Air Ministry. List of Staff and Distribution of Duties', July 1924 and July 1925.

⁴⁷ TNA, AIR 2/6074, minute from Christopher Bullock to Secretary and Under Secretary of State for Air, 26 June 1935.

⁴⁸ TNA, AIR 2/6074, minute from Christopher Bullock to Secretary of State for Air, 4 May 1936.

⁴⁹ AHB, 'Air Ministry. List of Staff and Distribution of Duties', June 1918. Bullock was then SO3 Intelligence Organisation, Receipt and Distribution of Intelligence, Bomb Raids and Targets, and Spaight was Principal Stores, Supplies, Quarterings and Transport Division.

⁵⁰ Dorman, p. 201.

The Battle of Whitehall

a new race of men [...] will have learnt to think in three dimensions. For many centuries past soldiers and sailors have been confined to the narrow horizontal plane; you airmen are mastering the vertical, and will have freedom of movement of which your predecessors did not dream.

Frederick Guest⁵¹

The Admiralty and the War Office had not, of course, worked in entirely peaceful harmony before the creation of the Air Ministry and the RAF. The Maritime and Continental views of defence and security had vied for supremacy for centuries.⁵² The argument for the primacy of naval supremacy in maintaining the security and prosperity of Britain and empire competed with that for the overriding importance of the balance of power in continental Europe, and these debates were well rehearsed. The relationship between the Army and the Navy, before the First World War, harboured both tensions and inefficiencies, while the Maritime and Continental schools vied for the upper hand and, with it, resource. The CID was established in 1904, designed to improve co-operation and replacing Balfour's Cabinet Defence Committee. Bill Jackson and Dwin Bramall have argued that the wholesale replacement of the War Council, at the time the CID was created, allowed the Admiralty to advance the case for a maritime strategy which dominated the pre-war period.⁵³ They also opined that, under Churchill as First Lord at the beginning of the First World War, 'closer and more genuine co-operation' between the two departments led to them collaborating directly on war plans, weakening the CID's position.⁵⁴ Despite inter-service tensions, the two services did not, however, argue for autonomy over their counterpart's environment. Land and maritime environments were relatively easy to delineate physically and conceptually. The introduction of air

⁵¹ Guest, when Secretary of State for Air in 1922, addressed future RAF pilots at RAF Cranwell; Guest's speech was reported in the RAF Cadet College Magazine 1922, as quoted by Peter Adey, *Aerial Life: Spaces, Mobilities, Affects* (Chichester: Wiley, 2010), p. 25.

⁵² Jackson and Bramall, p. 30.

⁵³ Jackson and Bramall, p. 39.

⁵⁴ Jackson and Bramall, p. 47.

power, and an Air Ministry before war's end, terminated their exclusively bilateral relationship for good.

When an independent air force was created, not only did the Air Ministry upset the established relationship between the Admiralty and the War Office, but the new service confused the settled nature of fighting environments. For centuries, war had been fought on the surfaces of the earth, the land and the sea: two-dimensional in nature and two clearly demarcated environments. Sykes wrote of the development of air power:

Prior to air power, defence forces could be satisfactorily, if not economically, segregated with a small degree of co-ordination of high policy. Broadly speaking, they were in all respects elemental. The advent of air power has effected a complete change.⁵⁵

The pervasive nature of the third environment 'surrounded' the land and the sea.⁵⁶ Tim Ingold, in considering the nature of weather, discussed James Gibson's division of the world into medium, substances, and surfaces. For Ingold, the view of the world as a surface for human occupation was 'deeply sedimented in the canons of western thought', where surface comes before medium as a 'stage-set' for activity.⁵⁷ The birth of military aviation created a challenge for armed services familiar for centuries with the limitations of their subdivision of the 'stage-set' and, though they contested one another for strategic primacy, with a mostly settled view on what that subdivision comprised. The creation of an independent air service which operated in a medium rather than on, or below, a surface compounded this disruption for it detached the uniformed advocates of the medium of air into a separate organisation. Independence consolidated them as a competitive force in confrontation with War Office and Admiralty counterparts. This was an upset

⁵⁵ F. H. Sykes, 'Air Power and Policy', Book Review of J. M. Spaight, *Air Power and War Rights*, October 1925 in RUSI Library, 'Collection of articles on matters concerning air forces', undated, p. 384.

⁵⁶ Adey, p. 208.

⁵⁷ Tim Ingold, 'The Eye of the Storm: Visual Perception and the Weather', *Visual Studies*, 20.2 (2005), 97–104 (p. 103); James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1979).

more visceral and more complicated than that of a third call on defence resource, disrupting irrevocably 'the absolute answering of the land and sea to each other'.⁵⁸

Although there is evidence that some level of 'trouble' had been foreseen with the establishment of the Air Ministry as a separate department of government, the fundamental change in the nature of inter-service competition appears to have been deliberately sidestepped (as the aforementioned Gretton exchange highlighted) due to the exigencies of war.⁵⁹ Though departmental responsibilities were outlined, these were not correlated 'with those of other departments'.⁶⁰ Gray argued that inter-service rivalry was 'at its most virulent in the debates over budgets in times of austerity such as the interwar years', citing key secondary sources on the Navy, Army, and RAF (Roskill, Bond, and Hyde respectively).⁶¹ Jackson and Bramall saw resource, or the drive for economies, as one of three agents of change in the British military, with the others being defeat and the pressures of public opinion.⁶² The latter two change agents were of course at the heart of the reasons behind the creation of the RAF, though compressing 'the decade or so' time period over which, they argued, it usually took for these issues to accumulate into pressure for change. It is the former, resource, that historians have often cited as the primary cause of inter-war inter-departmental friction. However, the changes caused by the creation of the RAF (not the causes of its creation) in terms of space and place reverberated beyond arguments over budgets. The disruption did not just play out in arguments over money or operational capability, but fundamentally undermined the generations-old *status quo*. An all-pervasive medium challenged the centuries-old concept of surface warfare.

⁵⁸ Gillian Beer, 'The Island and the Aeroplane', in *Nation and Narration*, ed. by Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 265–90 (p. 273).

⁵⁹ LHMA, Personal Papers of Lord Montagu, 5/1–19, letters to and from Montagu during his period of membership of the War Air Committee of 1916 discuss the issue, including reference to the fact that there would be a 'risk' of 'trouble', 'at any rate at first', 14 April 1916.

⁶⁰ Sykes, 'Air Power and Policy', p. 391.

⁶¹ Gray, *Air Warfare*, p. 9.

⁶² Jackson and Bramall, p. 7.

Though resource was a central issue, it could not create conceptual space in Whitehall or instil air-mindedness. No Treasury largesse could infuse a belief in the idiomatic epistemology of the airman with those naval and military leaders and their political counterparts who rejected that claim. Stretching warfare into the third dimension profoundly affected the place that was the battle 'field'; the 'temporal and terrestrial' nature of land and sea could not be directly translated to that of the air. Returning to Jerram, the 'air' took on meaning, values, and beliefs as both a real and imagined place. Making the argument that those meanings, values, and beliefs were unique to the air was the conceptual undertaking of the Air Ministry and its supporters. It is instructive to quote Spaight, writing in 1927:

Something more than a new administration had to be created. The need was deeper and more fundamental than that. What was required was a new mode of thought, a new spirit, a new mental climate. It was necessary to break away from the occupational prejudices of the older services, to abandon the traditional outlook, to shift the angle of vision of the sailor and the soldier. A new kind of warfare and a new kind of fighting had now appeared. The truth was well expressed in an article which Lord Sydenham published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* [...]. 'Looking forward to the future,' he wrote, 'the point of cardinal importance is that the airman is a new human product working in new conditions and exercising new faculties. He differs as much from the sailor and soldier as either from the other, and any organisation of the Air Service which does not recognise this fact will prove a certain failure.'⁶³

Sentiments such as these, from early supporters of the RAF, illustrate the sense in which there was a deeply held belief within this air-minded tribe that there was something inherently transformative about the air environment. This was accompanied often, as here, by a distancing from the 'older services', whose promotion of their own dominance was interpreted as backward-looking intransigence, reflecting Guest's reference (at the start of the section) to 'a

⁶³ Spaight, pp. 134–35.

freedom of movement of which your predecessors did not dream'. The introduction of a third category of warrior and environment, as different from the other two as they were from each other, was embodied in Whitehall with the creation of a third department, a third physical presence in stone and staff. Instead of inextricably linking the surface and the medium, for example in an overarching Ministry of Defence (a topic debated at regular intervals during the inter-war period), the creation of the Air Ministry formalised and solidified the divide between the three service environments. The constructive disruption that a third environment caused was replicated in the divisions in departmental terms between the senior Whitehall-based established Admiralty and War Office ('the ancients') and the junior, forward-looking, and creative new Air Ministry.

Although, inevitably, memoirs and official papers do not routinely refer to the working environment of the department, it appears that the 'moderns' of Kingsway were perceived as operating differently. Bond describes the post-war War Office as 'the *fons et origo* of an incredible mass of unnecessary rules. It had acquired a deserved reputation for red tape and officialdom.' The activities of the Army's Finance Branch invited particular criticism, in contrast to an Air Ministry where finance officers were better integrated into the newer organisation.⁶⁴ Echoing the theme of Chapter One, the Air Ministry lacked a settled tradition, established ways of working, and therefore focused on moving forward in its organisational design. There were several reorganisations during the early 1920s, as Grey comprehensively discusses using Air Force Lists to catalogue the changes.⁶⁵ Adaptability was a useful quality in this new department, as it reacted to political and technological change. Although the relative stature of the Air Ministry indicated an inherently lower status, a fresh outlook from the new Ministry led to new approaches unhindered by long established procedures.

Along with the physical Ministry and the new conceptual fighting environment, language mattered. The early debates on air issues in Parliament included the development of an argument for the individuality of air-mindedness

⁶⁴ Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars*, pp. 38–39.

⁶⁵ Grey.

and of a singular air spirit. For example, in a debate on air estimates in December 1919 Churchill and others made reference to 'air spirit'.⁶⁶ Reference to 'air spirit' chimed with Trenchard's declaration in his 1919 Memorandum: 'to make an Air Force worthy of the name, we must create an Air Force spirit'.⁶⁷ The term 'air-minded' was also promoted in Parliament and Hoare summarised what he had wanted to achieve in making the public 'air-minded' in the House of Commons: 'the aim of making the country generally better instructed upon air questions, making our citizens more capable of forming sound judgments upon air questions, and making people more directly interested in flying'.⁶⁸ Though he was talking on that occasion in the context of civil aviation, his words provide a sound general definition.

More contemporary definitions include 'a given nation's response to the airplane' and 'an enthusiasm for aeroplanes, for aviators and for aviation and everything associated with it'.⁶⁹ Brett Holman has pinpointed an important aspect of air-mindedness sometimes missing in analysis, and that is the negative connotations of the concept and the specific cultural response of fear of the air and the threats it could bear. In Britain, especially as a result of the attacks on the mainland in 1917, which were the essence of the creation of the RAF, air-mindedness could be negative and positive at the same time: fear of attack from the air coexisted with support for the RAF who could (in theory in the 1920s and in practice in the summer of 1940) defend Britain. The use of distinctive terminology was indicative of a concerted attempt by the Air Ministry to create a separate ontology for airmen and the air environment. New concepts were being espoused, new language was entering the military vocabulary, and a new, more technical operator was required. Air-mindedness became a concept that, if not embraced, demonstrated the divide between those in Whitehall who understood it and those who did not. Lord Thomson encapsulated the sense in which air-mindedness untethered thinking from the two-dimensional environments of land and sea, when he termed subordination

⁶⁶ HC Debate (1919) Fifth Series, Vol. 123, Cols. 114, 117, 132, 15 December 1919.

⁶⁷ TNA, AIR 8/12, 'Permanent Organization of the Royal Air Force', 11 December 1919.

⁶⁸ HC Debate (1928) Fifth Series, Vol. 220, Col. 1914, 30 July 1928.

⁶⁹ Scott Palmer quoted in, and Holman in, Brett Holman, 'Dreaming War', *History Australia*, 10.2 (2013), 180–201 (pp. 180–81).

of air squadrons to their army and navy counterparts as 'harness[ing] Pegasus to a cart'.⁷⁰

This compounded difficulties in communication and coordination between the Admiralty, War Office, and Air Ministry. Aside from the barriers of terminology and language, coordination between three rather than two departments was inherently different. The disputes between the Air Ministry, the Admiralty and the War Office over the first five years of the RAF's existence demonstrated the disruption that a third department and a third dimension had introduced. Three-way dialogue may include two organisations speaking together ahead of dialogue with a third; an organisation can present one argument or point of view to the second department and a different one to a third in separate dialogues. It appears that attempts to embed liaison officers across the three departments to improve coordination achieved mixed results. A note to Trenchard from J. A. Chamier, in the Directorate of Operations and Intelligence, provides a useful insight into the source of the coordination problems:

I feel most strongly that in the field ... there is no lack of co-operation between the Navy and the Air Force. [...] Where we fail in co-operation, I am sure, is between the Naval and Air Staffs.

[...] You will remember that we have no liaison officer at present, other than the Coastal Area Commander, who has done admirable works for units in the field but naturally cannot assist Staff relations. I do not wish to support any suggestion of an Air Officer permanently sitting in the Admiralty or vice versa, the objections to which course are well known. But I think if we adopted the War Office practice and had a definite Air Staff liaison living in the Air Ministry but going in every day [...] we might get improvement. I consider that in this respect the War Office and ourselves are in much closer touch than the Admiralty and ourselves. Whenever I have a particularly knotty problem I ring up Major Hannar

⁷⁰ Thomson, p. 155.

and say 'Come and discuss this with me' and a great deal of good is done, and a great deal more good could be done when once [sic] the question of the continued existence of the Air Force is settled.⁷¹

The problem was pre-eminent in Whitehall, just as the Balfour sub-committee concluded the following year.

Of particular significance were the Salisbury Committee's deliberations on coordination between service departments, which led to the establishment of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COS), discussed further in Chapter Eight. This was necessitated, as Jackson and Bramall have argued, by the creation of a separate air service as: 'Before that, naval and land warfare had not overlapped enough for special inter-Service coordinating machinery to be necessary' and what was needed was 'machinery with the knowledge and determination to cut Gordian knots'.⁷² Trenchard challenged the concept that a third service complicated matters. He described any suggested abolition of the RAF (in 1923) as 'further separation' between the services. For him, returning command of elements of the country's air assets to the Navy and the Army amounted to additional complication, by creating additional air services over and above the single all-pervasive environment controlled by the RAF. He also made the initial suggestion of a committee of Chiefs of Staff with an emphasis on the 'revolutionary' concept of collective responsibility.⁷³ Thus part of his evidence to the hearings contributed to the creation of a committee which would stand the test of time.⁷⁴ The Air Ministry, given its position at the margins and immature in departmental terms, and as a disruptive third force representing the new warfighting environment of the air, was stimulating new ways of working across Whitehall.

⁷¹ TNA, AIR 8/17, note from Chamier, Deputy Director of Operations and Intelligence, to CAS, 16 March 1922.

⁷² Jackson and Bramall, pp. 440, 445.

⁷³ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, pp. 66–67.

⁷⁴ Hyde, p. 139.

The Battle beyond Whitehall

The conceptual challenge of a third environment, and its pervasive and all-encompassing nature, required new ways of working, a new language, and was inherently disruptive to the settled routines of pre-war Whitehall. The battle *for* Whitehall and sites for the Air Ministry was accompanied by the battle *of* Whitehall, for a third spatial defence environment and its place alongside the senior services and their established departments. The argument for the RAF then had to be made and supported *in and beyond* Whitehall, connecting like-minded advocates through networks of influence. The inter-service competition stimulated by the creation of the RAF and its Air Ministry, it is argued, disrupted the traditional channels of power and influence, decisively changing the nature of that rivalry. The three-way relationship between the departments became the subject of many committees' deliberations, of parliamentary debate, and of press commentary. It allowed for subterfuge, disingenuous and Machiavellian behaviour, and the statistically higher chance of misunderstandings, particularly as the three departments were not co-located.

As Gordon Pirie argued forcefully, the fights over air power and an independent RAF, and its continuing existence after the war, took place predominantly in London, even while aviation was pushing the boundaries of military reach across the empire:

Unlike Britain's maritime Empire that had several home anchors, the new air Empire was centred in London. [...] For most of the inter-war period, the new engine of Empire was effectively landed in the imperial capital. It would be run from there for twenty years. [...] Speeches and contacts were made at imperial conferences and air conferences in the capital, in Parliament, and in city-based aeronautical clubs and societies. London was where plans were hatched, budgets drafted, legislation passed, inquiries held. Gala meals in smart West End hotels anticipated and

celebrated imperial air achievements. Street parades and public exhibitions displayed aircraft and their heroic pilots.⁷⁵

Additional to the examples above, central London was home to the media, both the national press and specialist publications like *Flight* and *The Aeroplane*.⁷⁶ It was also the site, as has been seen in Chapter Two, of the RAF's memorial to the First World War. The Duke and Duchess of York, who were early supporters of the RAF, lived at 145 Piccadilly and the RAF Club opened at 128 Piccadilly in 1919. Between these locations, hotels, clubs, and offices, the web of networks supporting the Air Ministry's arguments gradually developed. Charting the growth and nature of these networks and linkages beyond Whitehall is the aim of Chapter Four. As part of that analysis, the men and women who pioneered an independent air force deserve examination. They included politicians, such as Londonderry and Sassoon, politicians' relatives, including Lady Trenchard and Lady Hoare, commentators such as Grey, and other members of the establishment.

In discussing the pioneers of air warfare, the RAF as an independent force, and the science and technology of the air environment, the concept of time and looking to the future, rather than the past, dovetails with the nature of the new, third environment of the air. Peter Adey described it thus: 'Even the act of looking up at the sky is culturally understood as a gesture of forward thinking, or "blue skies": the possibilities of something new coming along the horizon.'⁷⁷ The Air Ministry needed advocates to gain 'address' and the challenges of arguing for an innovation that disrupted settled political and military ways of working made those individuals and networks even more important:

The patronage of politicians and senior military leaders is essential [...], for prophets by their nature tend to end up on the cross of professional

⁷⁵ Pirie, pp. 241–42.

⁷⁶ *Flight*'s offices were at 36 Great Queen Street, Kingsway, and *The Aeroplane*'s editorial offices were at 175 Piccadilly.

⁷⁷ Adey, p. 208.

prudence. Political intervention is especially crucial in innovations that cross or merge service specialities.⁷⁸

The importance of political advocacy — and capital — lies at the heart of the next chapter.

Conclusion

It has been argued in this chapter that the physical lack of space for an Air Ministry in Whitehall and marginalisation of the air staff to the unfinished outer reaches of the City of Westminster had effects beyond the very real practicalities of a twenty-minute walk to Whitehall. First, it isolated the organisation from the rest of government including the Admiralty and War Office, reducing inter-service interaction and increasing the symbolic distance of the RAF from its counterparts. Secondly, it made the business of influencing and lobbying more challenging. Thirdly, however, it cohered the organisation and challenged the leadership to think imaginatively. Although there were disadvantages to the separation of senior politicians on their move to Gwydyr House from the air staff at Kingsway in 1925, as well as the benefits outlined, Hoare and Trenchard had a well-established relationship by then, more than strong enough to withstand the awkward geography between Kingsway and Gwydyr House. Finally, and significantly, the relegation of the Air Ministry to a partially derelict backwater of London had a symbolic resonance. As well as the physical practicalities of the arrangement, the marginalisation of the Air Ministry added to the sense in which it was regarded as potentially impermanent, of a lower status than the Admiralty and War Office, and not accepted or conceptually embraced by the Whitehall system. The physical space that the Air Ministry sought was matched by the conceptual fight for continued independence for its department and fighting force.

⁷⁸ Allan Reed Millett, 'Patterns of Military Innovation in the Interwar Period', in *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*, ed. by Williamson Murray and Allan Reed Millett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 329–368 (p. 368).

Building on the first two chapters which considered time and identity, and the RAF's creativity in handling a lack of history and a challenging early post-war environment, this chapter has considered the spaces that a third independent department, leading a new armed service, had to fight for and secure. The two key personalities of Hoare and Trenchard could not succeed in glorious isolation. What the Air Ministry also needed was influence around and beyond Whitehall, into the organisations that fed off the power that resided in Whitehall. To secure permanence and power, they needed advocates and networks. These were centred on London and included an eclectic array of personalities linked together by their belief in the future potential of the air environment and the RAF, and they form the basis of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR — BUILDING NETWORKS: PIONEERING FLIGHTS TO POLITICAL FIGHTS

In 1919, *The Harrovian*, the quarterly publication of Harrow School, included a notice listing former pupils of Harrow who had won seats in the General Election of December 1918.¹ Among them were ‘Rt. Hon. Winston S. Churchill’ (who had already been appointed Secretary of State for War and Air), ‘Lieut-Col. Sir S. J. G. Hoare’ (to be Secretary of State for Air in three governments during the 1920s), Stanley Baldwin (who appointed Hoare to that post and gave it Cabinet status), and ‘Maj.-Gen. Right Hon. J. E. B. Seely’ (who had as Under Secretary of State to the Air Ministry made his first statements on the 1919 Air Estimates less than a month before this edition of *The Harrovian* was published). Harrow launched many politicians’ political careers and, as Toye records, its headmaster counted the subsequent election in December 1923 as an ‘*annus mirabilis*’ for the school.² *The Harrovian* edition listing successful old boys elected that year (thirty-six, of whom two were Labour MPs) stated:

We shall not be accused of undue partiality if we venture to congratulate Mr. Stanley Baldwin and Col F. S. Jackson on their share in securing for the country the Government which it evidently wanted. Nor can we feel anything but pride and confidence in a Government which has a Harrovian Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rt. Hon. W. S. Churchill), and has entrusted the charge of our Imperial relations and Air Defences to Harrovians (Colonel Amery, and Sir Samuel Hoare).³

Also listed amongst the thirty-six was an old Harrovian who would have been known at the time of his first election to Parliament in 1918 primarily for his pre-war flying exploits: ‘Col. J. T. C. Moore-Brabazon’. He was to become a member of the many formal and informal networks that supporters of the RAF developed and energised after the war. Brabazon was typical of those involved: privileged, white, and male, passionate about the potential of aviation, and

¹ *The Harrovian*, 32.2 (1919), p. 13.

² Toye, p. 19.

³ ‘Absentium Praesentium’, *The Harrovian*, 37.7 (1924), p. 110.

willing to use his social, cultural, and political capital to promote the cause of air power. Many of them started their journeys at Harrow and Eton. The men elected to Parliament in the immediate post-war period included some key supporters of an independent RAF, and they were joined in this undertaking by other members of the upper classes and aristocracy. This group included some self-made men, but the majority had been 'born to rule' having inherited wealth, political privilege, and rank.⁴ Their social connections and networks, which began with their education, became integral to the fight for the survival of the third service in the post-war period.

The concentration of power and influence against the backdrop of the political arena of central London is the subject of this chapter. The previous chapters have considered time and identity, and space and identity. The physical and intellectual networks that cleaved to support for the RAF post-war represented the confluence of space and power. The view of networks as a framework to explore and analyse the use of collective power and influence is accompanied by the danger that the ubiquity of the concept dilutes its meaning. Gary Magee and Andrew Thompson addressed the perils of analysing networks in the following way:

At worst, the network concept serves as little more than a shorthand for human behaviour deemed too collective to be determined by pure individual choice, yet too diffuse and personal to be taken up by formal state or market institutions.⁵

Here, then, it is important to define what is, and is not, being considered when discussing air-supporting networks. These networks sat outside the formal machinery of Whitehall, beyond government institutions and organisations. They were created by supporters, were self-administered, and were voluntarily joined by like-minded individuals (in many cases by invitation). Some were

⁴ N. C. Fleming, *The Marquess of Londonderry: Aristocracy, Power and Politics in Britain and Ireland* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2005), p. 6.

⁵ Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, c.1850–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 45.

formal, with an organisational structure discernible from outside, while others were informal and sometimes primarily social in nature. They could also be described as pressure groups, especially those with a campaigning agenda (such as the Air League), but not as single interest groups since their members brought multiple agendas. That said, as will be seen, these members' commitment to an independent air force in the inter-war years was the common principle which united them.

The intention is to move to the debates and arguments being made outside Adastral House and Gwydyr House. The organisation of the Air Ministry and its rival departments only tells part of the story; the social interactions and connections beyond it need to be incorporated into an exploration of this critical phase in the RAF's history. To borrow from Ann Stoler, the intention is to explore the history of these air-supporting networks 'in a minor key', reaching beyond histories of the Air Ministry to the sometimes semi-private spaces of these networks.⁶ As Michael Collins has observed, much of the historiography, though he excepts some more recent contributions, has neglected the role of the pre-war movement in support of air power, and the role of technocrats (such as his subject, Lord Montagu) and other aviation advocates.⁷ Though his argument focused primarily on civilian aviation and empire, his point applies equally to the neglect of these networks in examining the fight for the survival of the RAF after the First World War. Similarly, Fletcher proposed that 'the study of personal connections and forms of social organization can provide a window onto the systems, public worlds, and historical processes in which our subjects took part'.⁸ Here the focus is on networks in and around Whitehall and Westminster. Some of the organisations, such as the Aeronautical Society (which became the Royal Aeronautical Society in 1918), had memberships that reached around the country and beyond into empire reflecting the types of vibrant and local networks that Helen McCarthy has analysed.⁹ The next

⁶ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 62.

⁷ Collins, p. 2.

⁸ Fletcher, p. 11.

⁹ McCarthy.

chapter will consider the more nationally-orientated activities of the RAF and its supporters in appealing directly to the public.

Moving beyond the Air Ministry also moves the argument 'beyond Trenchard' acknowledging that, while he was a man of many striking qualities, networking was not one of them. Though 'shrewd in his political relations with politicians', he had to rely on those politicians and other aviation supporters to make the broader case for his service.¹⁰ As Thurstan James recounted, quoting the words of Grey, he was not a natural networker: "Don't you find, Sir, that you recognise faces and forget the names that belong to 'em?" "No" grunted Boom [Trenchard's nickname] "I forget 'em both."¹¹ Trenchard, along with many of his senior officers in the post-war Air Ministry, was not born into the same social circles as the old Harrovians and Etonians who formed a significant proportion of the post-1918 political generation. He was, however, someone who understood the importance of the 'aristocratic embrace', a key theme of this chapter: how and why the RAF embraced aristocrats and the broader establishment to advance its arguments despite its future-facing character.¹²

A significant number of supporters of air power journeyed from an interest in new technology before 1914, via varied experiences in the First World War, to a commitment to campaigning to maintain an independent air force in the 1920s. The pioneering flights of the 1900s inspired them to take up the political fights of the 1920s. Pre-war flying was costly and these pioneers reflected in literal terms Ross McKibbin's perceptive point that the status of the upper class was determined 'by how money was spent rather than how it was earned'.¹³ This chapter will demonstrate that the networks they joined were shared fields in which they invested their capital both for the cause of independent air power and for their own advantage, providing an illuminating picture of the forces at work in support of the RAF post-1918. It argues that this

¹⁰ John Slessor, *These Remain: A Personal Anthology: Memories of Flying, Fighting and Field Sports* (London: Michael Joseph, 1969), p. 80.

¹¹ Thurstan James, p. 846.

¹² As Fleming reflected, in discussing Lord Londonderry becoming godfather to Trenchard's first child in 1921, Fleming, *The Marquess of Londonderry*, p. 82.

¹³ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918–1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 1.

dovetails with Cannadine's argument that leading aristocratic figures were predisposed towards modern and technological ideas to combat their status as 'a class in decline'.¹⁴ He pointed to a disproportionate concentration of aristocrats declaring their air-mindedness and promoted to positions in the Air Ministry, and argued that the attraction of cleaving to a modern and technological concept was that they saw this as a way of extending their relevance.¹⁵ Griffiths and others have followed this aristocratic and right-wing theme into the 1930s by way of aviation's association with fascism. Though outside the scope of this chapter, the maturation of air-supporting networks provided fertile territory in that subsequent decade for those with a particular far-right leaning and merits some discussion.¹⁶

Following an overview of capital and networks and the interaction between those concepts, this chapter will then use Brabazon's background and career path to illustrate this argument. His route to the 1920s echoes a trajectory familiar to many, though not all, of the individuals prominent in air power supporting networks. This leads to a broader discussion of the nature of the individuals who committed themselves to fighting alongside the RAF for its continued independence and the networks within which they worked. It will describe their pre-1918 experiences, which gave many of them a shared collective history and similar outlooks, derived from commonalities of experience. The fourth section will introduce some of the predominant networks developed in support of the RAF. The networks to be analysed, in the context of the arguments for an independent air force, varied in type from formal to informal. Some, such as the Royal Aeronautical Society and the Air League, were formal bodies with members and regulations, theoretically accessible to a fairly broad sector of society. Other more informal networks were private in their dealings and exclusive in nature. The formal ones used their platform to communicate with the public via lectures, speeches, or interactions with the press. The focus here, however, is on the internal or politically focused aspects

¹⁴ Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy*, p. 1.

¹⁵ Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy*, p. 70.

¹⁶ Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right*, pp. 137–38. Brett Holman traces the links, in the 1930s, between individuals and some of the networks discussed in this chapter, 'The far right and the air', <https://airminded.org/2010/06/19/the-far-right-and-the-air/> [accessed 25 August 2018].

of these networks, and their relations with each other. In the final section, the efficacy of these networks will be examined.

Capital, Networks, and 1918

In addressing, in this chapter, the networks that supported aviation and the RAF after the First World War, Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field will be employed to examine the accumulation and flow of capital among networks and their advocates. Many of the influential members of these networks shared similar family, educational, and social backgrounds which afforded them social and cultural capital, imbuing them with similar experiences and ingrained orientations. Bourdieu described the notion of habitus having several virtues:

agents have a history and are the product of an individual history and an education associated with milieu, and [...] they are also the product of a collective history, [...] in particular, their categories of thinking, categories of understanding, patterns of perception, systems of values, and so on, are the product of the incorporation of social structures.¹⁷

Peter Jackson interpreted the concept of habitus in a way which describes why many of the individuals who campaigned for an independent air force after 1918 may have been drawn to the same networks because of shared life experiences. He explained:

The habitus is constituted by conscious and unconscious learned experience on the one hand and by cumulative impact of practices on the other [...] Acquired through a process of inculcation, the dispositions of habitus become 'second nature' and generate understandings and socially acquired intellect and physical 'habits'.¹⁸

¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu and Roger Chartier, *The Sociologist and the Historian* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), p. 52.

¹⁸ Peter Jackson, 'Pierre Bourdieu, the "Cultural Turn" and the Practice of International History', *Review of International Studies*, 34.1 (2008), 155–81 (p. 164).

The backgrounds and affiliations of this cohort of campaigners will be explored in order to understand their predispositions and unconscious orientations. These they brought to the networks that were utilised to promote the cause of the RAF. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field are useful tools for conceptualising their interaction, as is the concept of capital to describe what differentiated the contributions of their members. These terms are used because they help to illuminate the arguments contained in this chapter and to paint a picture of the characteristics and activities of the various networks described.

Magee and Thompson in *Empire and Globalisation* provided a useful description of the importance of social capital as a network-based phenomenon and a concept which encapsulates the concept of accumulated knowledge, education, views, and connections. They quoted Bourdieu's description of the concept:

the volume of social capital possessed by a given agent depends on the size of the network connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected.¹⁹

Their thesis was based on the premise that: 'To understand social capital, one needs to know about networks.'²⁰ Additionally, and implicit in their argument, to understand networks, one needs to know about capital. Network agents, the brokers who shaped and connected networks, such as Brabazon, were in possession of significant cultural and social capital (most also had significant economic capital). The RAF was a new, immature, and, as was seen in the last chapter, marginalised organisation in Whitehall at the end of the First World War. It was to rely on these agents and their use of existing and newly formed networks to maximise the application of that capital in the pursuit of power and influence on behalf of the third service. Understanding the nature of their

¹⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital' in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. by John G. Richardson (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 241–58 (p. 249). Magee and Thompson, pp. 50–51.

²⁰ Magee and Thompson, p. 51.

capital, how it varied between individuals, and how it was pooled collectively helps explain the value of networks to the fledgling RAF. The existence of a network did not of itself aid the cause: it was the influence and power of the people who joined them which had the synergistic effect.

There is an inherent tension at the centre of this discussion. Many of the most important actors in these external networks were also at the heart of the establishment. Their elite nature contrasted both with the general make-up of the RAF and the progressive nature of some of its plans. In a sense, this reflects the tension between modernity and tradition which seemed to flow through the post-war RAF's attempts to position itself politically within Whitehall and also at the same time in the public's consciousness. Inherently the RAF was future-focused. As has been argued in Chapter One, it had no past, its technology was modern, and it had no old guard harking back to an idealised former existence. There were no glory days of horse-mounted cavalry or Nelsonian battles about which to reminisce. The outside world in the 1920s was changing too and perhaps the RAF, by nature of its young age and less aristocratic officer composition, was better able to adapt to that. However, the senior leadership of the RAF understood the importance of influence in their overarching drive to survive, and was prepared to maximise the benefits they could accrue from tacking between modernity and tradition. The RAF understood a need for establishment support, for the aristocratic embrace.

The changes to the political–military divide that took place as a result of the wartime service of many MPs and the influx of veterans into Parliament in 1918 is also relevant in explaining the complexities of the relationship between officer, veteran, and politician and their interactions across air-supporting networks. As Johnson has highlighted, the inevitable tensions between wartime service and representation in Parliament vexed the government and commentators during the First World War, creating a paradoxical situation in which 'Service Members' could be viewed as both threatening Parliament's autonomy and providing essential representation.²¹ The representative nature of

²¹ Johnson, p. 615.

serving and ex-serving members spilled over into the 1918 election and inter-war years. Arguments during the war that these men were in touch with 'that large and select part of the nation' (servicemen) normalised their credibility in speaking for the armed forces afterwards.²² Not just service, but contact through the service of family members, had increased awareness of defence-related issues in Westminster and Whitehall, and the lines between the two were easier to transgress in the post-war environment.

Finally, the existence of other networks, already embedded and mature, which supported the Army and Navy are also part of this narrative. The peculiar challenge that the RAF faced was building networks almost *ex nihilo* while the other two services enjoyed well-established relationships with their supporters. The Navy League, for example, was founded in 1894 and had participated actively in debates about the role of the Navy before the First World War. It was an example of a network that supported aviation, but not an independent air force. Though mature and established, the League may also have suffered from that maturity; the agenda of more developed organisations can diffuse as they grow and mature. A comparison with the newer RAF-supporting networks demonstrates once again that immaturity and adversity were not wholly negative attributes: the singular focus of the developing air networks in favour of the RAF's existence aided their effectiveness, at least until the late 1920s. Though arguments for air power were not analogous with arguments for an independent air force post-war, the two causes were often deliberately interwoven or even blurred by RAF supporters to make their case. It is argued that the networks which developed post-war in support of aviation and of the RAF were a vital, and often overlooked, element in the fight for the RAF's survival.

The development of air-supporting networks pivots around 1918. Before the war, aviation in Britain had been embryonic and had touched few ordinary lives. Flying was the preserve of the wealthy and, fairly obviously, of those with the economic capital that allowed them the free time needed to pursue the

²² *The Times*, Leader, 13 September 1916, quoted in Johnson, p. 643.

activity. As mentioned, Cannadine discussed the relationship of the aristocracy to aviation, highlighting that many early adopters of aviation had progressed from an interest in the motor car before the war.²³ He stated: 'I was naturally drawn into [...] two other areas [along with railways] of post-equine transport with which the aristocracy has been connected, albeit less influentially: cars and aeroplanes.'²⁴ Even with the advent of military aviation, a pilot's licence could only be obtained using private finance, until the exigencies of war changed matters.²⁵ War also brought aviation to the attention of the wider British public: the RAF had been created in the context of a wartime government under pressure from the press and public to respond to German bombing attacks in 1917.²⁶ However, apart from the periods in which those attacks were inflicting significant casualties, politicians' wartime interest in air power was limited to a small cohort; it was essentially a niche interest in Whitehall. The 'air agitators', such as Montagu, William Joynson-Hicks, and Noel Pemberton-Billing, dominated large swathes of wartime debates on air power.²⁷

Cannadine has also argued convincingly that the First World War marked a shift in the prospects of the aristocracy, specifically the landed gentry and in particular in relation to representation in the House of Commons where by the 1930s less than one in ten MPs were landed.²⁸ The aristocracy is defined here as comprising the highest class in society: 'a hereditary ruling group' carrying 'associations of authority and leadership' who inherited land, titles, and wealth, with the royal family at the apex of this most privileged section of society.²⁹ Within this group, however, there were quite significant variations in status, the subtleties of which can be too easily smoothed over with generalisations. Cannadine, for example, categorised Brabazon in *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* as a landed luminary of Churchill's 1940s wartime

²³ He cites among others Sir Archibald Sinclair and Lord Edward Grosvenor, Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy*, pp. 67–68.

²⁴ Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy*, p. 3.

²⁵ Malcolm Hall, *From Balloon to Boxkite* (Stroud: Amberley, 2010), p. 227.

²⁶ Malcolm Cooper, 'A House Divided: Policy, Rivalry and Administration in Britain's Military Air Command 1914–1918', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 3.2 (1980), 178–201 (p. 190).

²⁷ Alongside Northcliffe's vociferous commentary in *The Times*, as noted by Cooper, 'Blueprint for Confusion', pp. 441–42.

²⁸ Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, p. 184.

²⁹ Jonathan Powis, *Aristocracy* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1984), pp. 1–3.

government, although his family's estate in Ireland was affected by the early twentieth century Irish Land Acts and the house fell into disrepair and was demolished in the inter-war years.³⁰

He also identified a preponderance, after the First World War, for some of the most privileged (predominantly, but not uniformly, Conservative in political leaning) to cleave themselves to aviation attracted by its association with modernity and technological progress.³¹ By the end of the war, aviation was becoming a mainstream concept (though not a mainstream interest) and its future potential, both civil and military, was aided by the rapid technological developments that war had stimulated. The creation of the RAF provided a focus for the debate, and the fight for its survival provided the rich, privileged, influential, and political with an ideal cause: 'For members of the inter-war aristocracy, constantly afraid that their day was done, the attractions of proclaiming their "airmindedness" were very great indeed.'³² Networks supporting the argument for the survival of an independent armed service provided an appealing location for these men (and they were mostly men) to pool their capital in favour of both themselves and the argument for air power. Although their numbers might have been small, they could add legitimacy to a concept through their patronage and their activities: just as they 'helped to legitimate the social system on whose summit they perched', they lent credence to the embryonic networks coalescing around the RAF's cause.³³ The needs of an embattled RAF coincided with a time when wealthy and privileged men were looking to redefine their place in civil society after four draining years of war, in a changing social and political environment. The campaign for aviation and the survival of the RAF provided them with somewhere to invest their capital, in their own futures as well as that of the third service.

³⁰ Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, p. 609; Brabazon, p. 9.

³¹ Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy*, p. 70; see also Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*, p. 86.

³² Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy*, p. 70.

³³ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 2.

Brabazon

Brabazon features as a thread running through the chronology of this period, the institutions from which the RAF's supporters came, and the networks they joined. From his schooling, to his passion for motor cars and flying, to his war service and subsequent entry to Parliament, he knew and corresponded with many of the other key individuals involved in air-supporting networks, as his personal papers reveal. He combined an educational background, shared with other leading supporters of air power, with membership of other intersecting groups: aviation pioneers, veterans of flying in the First World War, members of the founding British aviation organisations, and politicians in the early post-war Parliament. His relevance is as a 'network agent', affording a route into and around the intersecting worlds of the air-minded advocate. He was not the most powerful and was less influential than some of the more exalted members of these networks and he has been afforded only passing reference in the historiography as a result. However, his networks provide an insight into the Venn diagram of relationships that pro-RAF and air-minded individuals of influence utilised. He was also an exemplar in his unswerving support for the survival of the RAF. He had a particular form of capital earned at the age of twenty-four, as outlined in the Introduction, 'Pilot Certificate No. 1' issued by the Royal Aero Club, for the first flight of an Englishman (his Irish descent notwithstanding) in England in 1909.

During the First World War, Brabazon had served competently and contributed significantly to the development of aerial photography. However, he was a Lieutenant Colonel amongst many and he felt displaced from his pedestal by the growth of the air services during the war. His cultural capital, as a pre-war pioneer, combined with the social capital he had by virtue of his family background and education, gave him the assets he needed to stand successfully for Parliament. As he admitted himself rather candidly, his motivation was not the political ideology of the Conservative party: 'I was Conservative for the thoroughly unsatisfactory reason that my father was Conservative before me, and his father before him; so it never entered my head

to stand under any other colour.³⁴ He had less economic capital than might have been expected: as we have seen, he spent his inheritance on cars and aircraft before the war (and never had much money afterwards).³⁵ Brabazon's pre-war exploits gave him a cachet which he fully understood and exploited. He referred to his 1909 aviation achievements in many of his letters, articles, and speeches, and he vigorously contested other claims to the first Englishman's flight in Britain.³⁶ A. V. Roe, a distinguished aviator, challenged Brabazon's record repeatedly as he had made some short 'hops' at Brooklands in June 1908 and the matter had finally to be settled by a specially appointed committee of the Royal Aero Club in 1929.³⁷ Brabazon understood the value, the cultural capital, of his achievement and fought hard to maintain it throughout his life. Politics gave him additional social capital. He went on to exemplify the role of the network agent as a politician and exponent of air power. He also straddled two generations; at the outbreak of war he was thirty years old so had an established network of adult interests and friends before 1914, unlike many of those with whom he would network post-war whose passage from adolescence to manhood coincided with the war (the 'generation of 1914').³⁸

While Brabazon was representative of the backgrounds of many of those engaged in air-supporting networks, other notable individuals brought different levels and types of capital into these networks. Sassoon provides an interesting counterpoint to Brabazon, given that he had more consistent tangible influence on air power post-war, but was less embedded, at least in the early post-war period, in the aviation community (and not at all before the war). Sassoon served as Under Secretary of State for Air twice, first from 1924 to 1929. Aged

³⁴ Brabazon, p. 105.

³⁵ His own papers contain numerous examples of his querying bills and payments for relatively small amounts and Boyle's notes from discussions with Brabazon's last secretary provide further evidence of his relative lack of resource: 'There are a lot of letters wh. still exist ([...] Pam P is likely to destroy as unfit for a biographer) and wh. show how relations stood between the Brabs, man and wife, on the subj. of money. He had to write cringing [*sic*] letters, apologetic letters (she reproachful?) on the horrid subject of £sd. Brab never had much money – nor could he keep it.' CUL, Personal Papers of Andrew Boyle, 9429/2A/23, notes from a conversation with Pamela Patchett, 1 July 1964.

³⁶ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC 71/3 Box 66, "'Everybody's' Correspondence', AC 71/3 Box 71, 'Air — Early Flights', AC 71/3 Box 75, 'Air — A. V. Roe Dinner 1928'.

³⁷ Walter Windham claimed to have witnessed Roe flying 'about 75 feet' on 8 June 1908 at Brooklands and continued to support Roe's claim over Brabazon's, Windham, p. 57.

³⁸ Wohl, p. 217.

only twenty-four, he had inherited a huge fortune, more than half a million pounds, on the death of his father. Edward Sassoon had been MP for Hythe and, in the by-election prompted by his death in 1912, his son succeeded him with support from the Rothschild family.³⁹ (Philip) Sassoon had air strips at both of his mansions, Trent Park and Port Lympne, although he did not learn to fly himself until much later. He had been educated at Eton and was superbly well connected: 'Mrs Asquith, the P.M.'s wife, had been his mother's dearest friend [...] The Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, was another old family connection, while Balfour, First Lord of the Admiralty, had known Philip from the cradle.'⁴⁰ During the First World War he served as Private Secretary to General Haig from December 1915 until after the Armistice. This role exposed him to Prime Ministers, royalty, and media magnates (he corresponded throughout the war with Lord Northcliffe).⁴¹ He also became increasingly acquainted with the role of air power in war given Haig's belief in the importance of the capability, which stemmed in part from Haig's close relationship with Trenchard. Sassoon was also flown frequently between France and England in the line of his duties.

After the war, he became Parliamentary Private Secretary to Eric Geddes and then to the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, before being appointed as Under Secretary of State in the Air Ministry in 1924. It was Sassoon's family wealth and connections, more than any other factor, that contributed to his journey to this position (Hoare, his Secretary of State, had been a regular guest at his three homes, as were Beaverbrook, the Prince of Wales, and Churchill, amongst many others). He brought vast economic and social capital to the networks around the RAF with which he was to become intimately acquainted. Hoare, as well as appreciating Sassoon's useful connections and assets, was clearly fond of him, lending Sassoon his frock coat for Privy Council meetings, and standing aside from the Honorary Air Commodoreship of 601 Squadron for him.⁴² By the end of the decade he was also chairman of the Royal Aero Club.

³⁹ Peter Stansky, *Sassoon: The Worlds of Philip and Sybil* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 30.

⁴⁰ Stanley Jackson, *The Sassoons: Portrait of a Dynasty* (London: Heinemann, 1989), p. 166.

⁴¹ British Library (BL), Personal Papers of Lord Northcliffe, ADD 62160.

⁴² Stanley Jackson, p. 197. CUL, Personal Papers of Viscount Templewood, RF.3 (51), 'Relations with the King and Court', undated, and AND:1 (74), letter from Hoare to Lady Maud Hoare, 5 February 1930.

He gave talks at the best public schools entreating their students to join the RAF, and Peter Stansky credited him with significantly improving the attraction of an RAF commission: 'By 1939 it was at least as smart to go into the R.A.F. as into a good country regiment, and that, in twentieth century England, was an astonishing achievement.'⁴³ Yet, unlike Brabazon, he brought no prior cachet in the aviation world; instead he brought money and connections.

Brabazon and Sassoon typify the narrow spectrum of men who came to join air-supporting networks. Like Conservative MPs, most came from the aristocracy or had achieved success in business, the military, or the professions. Montagu and Weir provide another illustrative juxtaposition of the backgrounds and habitus of men drawn to aviation. Montagu was an aristocrat, educated at Eton and Oxford, who like Brabazon failed to complete his degree due to a passion for cars (and trains and motor boats), before taking up aviation. He helped found the Aerial League of the British Empire in 1909 and was one of the wartime agitators for air power.⁴⁴ In contrast, Weir attended Glasgow High School before leaving at sixteen to enter the family engineering business as an apprentice.⁴⁵ By 1902 he was managing director of the business, and his passion for motor cars led him to help found the Royal Scottish Automobile Club and become a director of the Darracq et Cie car manufacturer.⁴⁶ He served during the war as controller of aeronautical supplies at the Ministry of Munitions and replaced Rothermere as the second Secretary of State for Air in April 1918. Though he resigned at the end of the war to return to business, he remained closely involved with aviation and the future of the RAF, sitting on a number of advisory committees and in consultancy positions.

Montagu had economic, social, and cultural capital to bring to air-supporting networks: his pre-war aviation experience combined with his political track record and aristocratic connections. Weir came to aeronautics armed with few connections but a strong business record. His wartime experience and

⁴³ Sassoon visited Harrow as evidenced in *The Harrovian*, 42.1 (1929), p. 8. Stansky, p. 177.

⁴⁴ Collins, pp. 3–4.

⁴⁵ Davenport-Hines, R. (2009, May 21). 'Weir, William Douglas, first Viscount Weir (1877–1959), industrialist and public servant.' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁴⁶ Reader, p. 28.

success earned him a Ministry, unusually for two months without a seat in either House in Parliament, which in turn merited him his peerage. His habitus was very different to Montagu's, and his capital had been earned rather than inherited, but the fields in which they operated towards the end of the war were converging. Weir, however, was less representative of key air-supporters post-war: for all its meritocratic ideals, the RAF was to rely heavily on a narrow, and highly privileged, aristocratic elite for its journey to sustained power.

Shared Experiences

The routes to post-war air-supporting networks had included, for many but not all, education at the leading public schools and at Oxbridge. Eton and Harrow were the favoured educational training grounds of future politicians, both in the Commons and the Lords. Simon Haxey calculated that while 0.1% of boys went to Eton or Harrow, 30% of Conservative MPs were educated at these schools.⁴⁷ Though Carr argued that the First World War robbed many of the veteran MPs elected in 1918 of an Oxbridge education, many were older, like Brabazon, and had at least attended university, even if they had not completed their degrees.⁴⁸ Wohl's view that it was a myth that 'the generation of 1914' who had been educated at top public schools and Oxbridge 'sat by helplessly during the interwar years and watched the old politicians flounder in incompetence and squander their victory' is supported by the enthusiastic manner in which they relaunched themselves at the war's end, participating actively in the politics of the post-war era. Most of them shared a similar unconscious orientation as a result of their similar levels of privilege and experience of public school education. What differentiated the air supporters was emphatically not their social composition but, rather, their distinctive interest in technology. There was amongst them a preponderance of what we would now call early adopters.

⁴⁷ Figures for 1938, Simon Haxey, *Tory M.P.*, Left Book Club Edn (London: Gollancz, 1939), p. 180. A House of Commons paper estimated the number of pupils at public sector secondary schools in 1909 as 172,000 which would put the percentage educated at Eton and Harrow closer to 1% before the war, House of Commons Briefing Paper, SN04252, Paul Bolton, 27 November 2012, p. 3, <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN04252#fullreport> [accessed 10 September 2018]. Carr estimated that one in four of veteran MPs went to Eton, Carr, p. 19.

⁴⁸ Carr, p. 10.

As has been seen with Brabazon, Rolls, Montagu, and Weir, the motor car was often the gateway to a fascination with aviation for Edwardian young men. These men were fundamental to the creation of some of the very earliest clubs and societies supporting aviation: Montagu with the Aerial League (later the Air League) in 1909 and Rolls the Aero Club in 1903.⁴⁹ Their pre-war numbers were few although perhaps not as low as Walter Windham had opined in an interview: 'The number of English aviators, mostly amateurs, can be counted on one's fingers. [...] [There are] a mere handful of competent aviators in England.' He compared this number with 165 licensed aviators in Germany at the time.⁵⁰ Yet by the beginning of 1912 (the year that Trenchard first saw the potential of aviation, not least in advancing his own career) the Royal Aero Club, as it had become in 1910, had issued 168 certificates, comparable with Windham's tally of the number of German aviators.⁵¹ Incidentally, Windham's interview was given in St Moritz which was a popular haunt of the same type of men who adopted the technology of aviation early; they were risk takers. The Cresta Run provided ample exhilaration for thrill seekers, and Brabazon raced there from 1907. It is an ice run (and a private members' club), ridden face-forward on a toboggan at considerable speed with ample scope for injury:

Just bravery will get you nowhere at all except the hospital — and that very quickly — unless you appreciate that this run has to be taken seriously and understood. [...] The track is about six feet wide and about three-quarters of a mile long. It has an average gradient of about one in seven, with bits as steep as one in two.⁵²

⁴⁹ Jeremy, D. (2017, September 01). 'Rolls, Charles Stewart (1877–1910), motor car promoter and aviator.' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁵⁰ Interview, *New York Herald*, 11 March 1912, quoted in Windham, p. 147.

⁵¹ Grace's Guide online, https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/1912_Aviators_Certificates_-_UK [accessed 6 September 2018].

⁵² Brabazon, pp. 131–32.

References to St Moritz pepper the archives, biographies, and memoirs of supporters of air power including those of key figures such as Trenchard, Sykes, and Hoare.⁵³

These early pioneers were adventurers, early technology adopters, and forward-looking, sometimes visionary in technological terms, yet still mostly culturally and politically conservative. Harold Balfour, who became Under Secretary of State for Air in 1938, was too young to have flown before the war, but joined the RFC in 1915 and remained in the RAF until he was 26. As a teenager, he attended Claude Grahame-White's air displays at Hendon and spent his pocket money on weekly editions of *Aero* and *Flight*. He had idolised and met the pre-war aviation pioneers and said of them: 'They were individualists. Some were eccentric, some wild, quite a number boastful but all were dedicated. They carried something that betrayed a consciousness of difference to fellow men.'⁵⁴ Sometimes this trait was reflected in a frustration with not being understood, as reflected in Brabazon's pompous lament that like Cassandra he was always right but never believed.⁵⁵ This may simply have demonstrated inherent self-confidence or over-confidence, plausible traits in pioneers of a dangerous pastime, or, perhaps, a more distinct sense of superiority over their peers and others. The latter characteristic, while applying at a general level to a privileged class, might also explain a predisposition in the later inter-war years of promoters of aviation towards far-right leanings (though the inverse was not necessarily so).⁵⁶ The pioneers' 'consciousness of difference to fellow men' illustrates a philosophy which, probably not coincidentally, also manifested itself in far-right politics.

Of this group of pioneers, most of those who had survived their early adventures and were of a suitable age went on to serve in the First World War. The shared experience of war was an important element in the habitus of many

⁵³ For example, CUL, Personal Papers of Viscount Templewood, Part V:3 (56), letter from Hoare to Philip Game, 30 December 1928; Miller, p. 3; Sykes, *From Many Angles*, p. 38.

⁵⁴ Harold Balfour Lord of Inchrye, *Wings over Westminster* (London: Hutchinson, 1973), p. 20.

⁵⁵ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC 71/3 Box 7, letter from Brabazon to Beaverbrook, 7 June 1940.

⁵⁶ Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*, pp. xxiii and 75–76.

air-supporters of the inter-war era.⁵⁷ Sassoon, Brabazon, Cecil, and many others served in, or were closely entwined with, the development of military air power within the RFC and latterly the RAF. This shared experience of warfare and the relationships that were built over those four years would have engendered a sense of trust in their understanding of what the future senior RAF leadership was trying to achieve. Their extended immersion in the milieu of warfare was an experience from which they would not completely detach. It carried forward into the fight for the continued independence of the RAF in the inter-war years. As Magee and Thompson theorised: 'Central to almost all analysis of networks is the integral role played by trust.'⁵⁸ The pioneers of pre-war aviation, the military servicemen with their experiences and contacts amassed during the war, shared a belief in their cause and an understanding of the medium of flight. From the very earliest days of the war, the leaders of the RFC had been insistent that their force should be divided into military wings, to be attached to army units, over which they retained direct command. This derived from the unwavering belief that 'army commanders had not the specialist knowledge to dispose of their aircraft as they might their artillery or engineers'.⁵⁹ That ethos translated centrally into the RAF's *raison d'être*, and these former airmen and those closely associated with them understood that creed. That certainty gave them trust in their mutual understanding and the networks that they were to join and promote.

However, those who had been civilian aviators before the war were perhaps not so well suited to the constraints of military life and many, like Brabazon, moved on afterwards. Cooper astutely observed that their particularly headstrong personalities and individualistic natures did not sit well with authoritative military institutions.⁶⁰ They were also, given their embrace of the future, perhaps more positive and energetic than the aristocratic stereotype

⁵⁷ Of note, one who could have served but did not was C. G. Grey, who used his connections to ensure he stayed in London agitating from the editorial offices of *The Aeroplane*. NAL, Personal Papers of C. G. Grey, letter from Churchill to Grey containing advice on appearing before a tribunal to decide on a possible call-up for Grey, 4 July 1917.

⁵⁸ Magee and Thompson, p. 52.

⁵⁹ Cooper, 'A House Divided', p. 182.

⁶⁰ Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power*, p. 21.

lamenting the changing times.⁶¹ Given the wealth they would have needed pre-war to take up flying, most were upper class and sufficiently well connected to influence politics and the future of the RAF either directly in Parliament or indirectly through other means. Those means included formal and informal networks around Whitehall and Westminster. The British aristocracy may have been entering an extended period of decline, but in 1918 they still populated much of Parliament and Cabinet, fronted esteemed organisations and societies, and dominated leading London societal events.⁶² A belief in the future potential of the aeroplane and in the distinct nature of air-mindedness was at the heart of their post-war commitment to the fight for the survival of the RAF.

The creation of the RAF, the end of the war, and the December election of 1918 catapulted these air-supporters into the political *melée*. As discussed, there was a sense in which many of them were ‘relaunching’ themselves after the four-year suspension of their pre-war lives. The sense of career plans in abeyance contrasts with the remarkably rapid progress of air power during the war. With a shared passion for technology, the ongoing promotion of air power presented an attractive project. Some, like Brabazon, stood in the election and took up a seat in the House of Commons. Others, such as Simon, a Liberal MP who had served in the RFC and had spoken in Trenchard’s defence against Rothermere during the April 1918 debacle, lost his seat in the election, but returned to the Commons in the early 1920s to continue to speak out for the RAF.⁶³ Some returned from the war to seats which they had held throughout, like Sassoon, ready for the next phase in their careers. Those with titles returned, like Cecil, to full-time political participation with their seats in the Lords and active campaigning on air-related issues. Combined, they provided a welcome and vital stimulus to the air-supporting networks which already existed, as well as creating informal ones of their own.

⁶¹ As Carr and Hart discuss with reference to Robert Wohl’s and Richard Overy’s treatises on the inter-war years, Richard Carr and Bradley W. Hart, ‘Old Etonians, Great War Demographics and the Interpretations of British Eugenics, c.1914–1939’, *First World War Studies*, 3.2 (2012), 217–39 (pp. 218–19).

⁶² ‘Even in the interwar period, noble rank, to say nothing of the untitled gentry, still provided a useful entrée into the House of Commons’, Fleming, *The Marquess of Londonderry*, p. 3.

⁶³ Powers, p. 145.

Networks

Formal Networks

The prominent aviation supporting networks in the inter-war period were all established before the First World War but had small memberships dependent on a diminutive pool of aviators pre-war. The oldest, by some margin, was the Royal Aeronautical Society. Formed as the Aeronautical Society of Great Britain in 1866, it had struggled with impact and membership until the reinvigorating leadership skills of Major B. F. S. Baden-Powell (brother of Robert, founder of the Scouting movement) were brought to bear on the organisation.⁶⁴ Baden-Powell had been at the Battle of Magersfontein in 1899 where he sent up a balloon to take photographs ('At that battle captive balloons scored their first notable success in action') and, having been a member since 1880, he became first its honorary secretary and then president in 1902.⁶⁵ Parenthetically, Baden-Powell and Brabazon were friends in the early 1900s and Brabazon's diaries record numerous appointments for breakfasts and lunches.⁶⁶ The Society was unusual in being a scientific 'society' rather than 'institution', which accorded aviation's professional body a higher status than its engineering counterparts.⁶⁷ After the war, an initial peak in membership was followed in the early 1920s by a difficult period for the organisation, as membership fell from 1100 in 1919 to 600 in 1925 as a result of the austere financial climate of the period. However, the Air Ministry and the Society of British Aircraft Constructors stepped in to help and private aircraft firms were entreated to encourage their employees to join the Royal Aeronautical Society. Also during this period, the Society hosted the first International Air Congress in London in 1923, which attracted the royal patronage of the Prince of Wales (a joint patron of the Society) and the Duke of York, as well as 551 representatives from twenty-one countries.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ A. M. Gollin, *No Longer an Island: Britain and the Wright Brothers, 1902–1909* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1984), p. 21.

⁶⁵ 'Death of Major Baden-Powell', *Flight*, 7 October 1937, p. 359.

⁶⁶ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC 71/3 Box 3, 'The Badminton Diary', see for example the year 1904.

⁶⁷ Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*, p. 88.

⁶⁸ 'The Royal Aeronautical Society: Part 3 – First Flight', <https://www.aerosociety.com/news/the-royal-aeronautical-society-part-3-first-flight/>, 'The Royal Aeronautical Society: Part 4 – The

This was the same year that the RAF enticed King George V to the annual Hendon air display for the first time, marking a concerted effort to attract support from the royal family. The Hendon displays had emerged, as has been seen in Chapter Two, from the RAF Memorial Fund and that fund became another supporting network with its emphasis on benevolence for RAF personnel and their dependants. Cecil was very active in the early years of the fund and this was one of the few networks that actively sought the patronage of prominent women on its committees.⁶⁹ Another club with a physical presence was the RAF Club, which had been established from Lord and Lady Cowdray's largesse in 1919. Although Cowdray had resigned as Chairman of the Air Board in 1917, furious that Lloyd George had favoured Northcliffe over himself at the head of the new Air Ministry, he retained his affection for the RAF. Initially housed at the original Royal Flying Corps Club, he made a gift to provide the Club with a permanent building in Piccadilly, which was formally opened in 1922.⁷⁰ This club was for officers of the RAF, however, rather than the networkers with capital that are the focus here.

The Aerial League of the British Empire included Montagu, the Marquis of Salisbury, Lord Esher, and H. G. Wells amongst its prominent members before the war.⁷¹ By the end of the First World War, the League was in a state of abeyance, but in 1920 there was an initiative to revive its fortunes. Renamed the Air League of the British Empire, its president was the Duke of Sutherland (Under Secretary of State for Air 1922–24) from 1921, and it became an important institution promoting aviation, especially air power, in the inter-war period.⁷² Though never a mass movement in the 1920s, it undertook public

1920s', <https://www.aerosociety.com/news/the-royal-aeronautical-society-part-4-the-1920s/> [accessed 6 September 2018].

⁶⁹ Lady Henderson, wife of General David Henderson, was a Vice-President of the Fund and Dame Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, former Commandant of the Women's Royal Air Force, was on the board. RAFBF, RAF Memorial Fund Committee Minutes, 1919–1923.

⁷⁰ 'Club History', <https://www.rafclub.org.uk/club-history> [accessed 7 August 2019].

⁷¹ A. M. Gollin, *The Impact of Air Power on the British People and Their Government, 1909–1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), p. 129.

⁷² Pirie, p. 24.

education and political lobbying and was populated by many ex-RFC and ex-Air Ministry personnel who served in senior positions at the League.⁷³

The Aero Club of the United Kingdom opened its first aerodrome, in Sheppey, in February 1909, having been established originally in 1901 in support of air ballooning.⁷⁴ The Club was concerned with the issuing of pilots' licences and training of aviators; its members trained most military pilots ahead of the First World War, before initial flying training was formalised as an internal military activity. It was also the organisation responsible for recreational and sport flying. After the war, like the Air League, it made concerted efforts to revive itself and Grey referred to this in a letter to Brabazon: 'As regards the Aero Club, they really do seem to have been shaken up a bit, and the poor dears seem to be doing their very best to get a move on.'⁷⁵ In the mid-1920s the Club worked with the Air Ministry to establish flying clubs under the Light Aeroplane Club scheme. Brabazon's records show that in 1925, the first year of that project, the scheme opened five clubs and, by 1931, there were twenty-three with a total membership of 6711 and 1554 new pilots.⁷⁶ It also played an important role in raising the profile of aviation across the country, supporting air races and the British Schneider Trophy attempts. At a time when the RAF's assets were scarce on the ground or in the air in Britain, due to demobilisation, economic circumstances, and the significant proportion of RAF aircraft deployed overseas policing the empire, events and flying clubs helped raise the profile of aviation. As will be seen in the next two chapters, the public-facing activities of the Club were important in communicating an excitement around recreational and private aviation, in line with the Air Ministry's wider promotion of air-mindedness amongst the British population.

⁷³ Rowan Thompson, "Millions of eyes were turned skywards": The Air League of the British Empire, Empire Air Day and the Promotion of Air-mindedness, 1934–1939', unpublished article for *War in History*.

⁷⁴ Gollin, *No Longer an Island*, p. 436. See also John Blake, 'A Brief History of the Royal Aero Club', <http://royalaeroclub.co.uk/history-and-origins.php> [accessed 6 September 2018].

⁷⁵ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC 71/3 Box 11, letter from Grey to Brabazon, 25 February 1920.

⁷⁶ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC 71/3 Box 11, 'Air Estimates, Grants to Light Aeroplane Clubs', 27 February 1932.

In April 1909, the Aeronautical Society, the Aero Club, and the Aerial League had met to agree their respective domains so as to work collaboratively rather than in competition. The Aeronautical Society was to be the scientific authority on aviation, the Aero Club was to concentrate on sport and the 'art of aeronautics', and the Aerial League was to devote its efforts to patriotic movements and education.⁷⁷ After the war, Brabazon sat at the intersection of these different groups, an agent corresponding with other members of the three organisations, coordinating their efforts in support of independent air power. Brabazon was an enthusiastic and early member of the Aero Club, having taken his first flight at Sheppey and owning the first Aero Club flying certificate. But he was also active within the Royal Aeronautical Society, first as a member of its Council in the early 1920s before becoming its Chairman in the 1930s. Though not a member of the Air League until 1930, he corresponded with and about its future and purpose long before that.⁷⁸ While each organisation had members and campaigners with other priorities, such as empire air routes, sporting rules and regulations, or airships, supporters in each arena also worked towards the same goal: the survival of the RAF.

Informal Networks

Beyond these societies, with their councils and committees, there existed a more informal layer of networks. These formed around gentlemen's clubs and other social and sports groupings and, as Ball has observed, they included both clubs that had a physical presence and others which were networks for like-minded individuals.⁷⁹ Their impact is hard to measure but their intersections reveal the cross-pollination that occurred between influential air advocates of the time participating in such groups. Again Brabazon provides an entry into these worlds: White's club was a second home to him (he corresponded from there frequently during the period under review), and he was also a member of

⁷⁷ Gollin, *No Longer an Island*, p. 459.

⁷⁸ See, for example, RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC 71/3 Box 75, Air League of the British Empire, 1928 onwards, AC 71/3 Box 11, Correspondence with the Royal Aero Club, 1920 onwards.

⁷⁹ Ball, *Portrait of a Party*, p. 337.

The Other Club, although not until 1936.⁸⁰ The Other Club was established by Churchill and F. E. Smith; Trenchard was invited to join while Churchill was Secretary of State for War and Air despite what Russell Miller calls his ‘doubtful qualifications — the criteria for membership being a convivial personality and scintillating conversational skills’.⁸¹ Colin Coote noted in his biography of The Other Club that representation of air pioneers was notably strong, albeit that the club did not meet as a result of the changing fortunes of Churchill’s political career between 1922 and 1925.⁸² Ball summarised the importance of these organisations in linking politicians with similar ambitions:

The effect of these interactions was the construction of many complex and interweaving social networks, in which most MPs were acquainted with many others on an informal basis, together with a more select number with whom they tended to dine, take refreshment, and sit in the chamber.⁸³

White’s became, for example, Lord Grosvenor’s recruiting ground for 601 Squadron. It intersected with Sassoon’s support of the RAF through his provision of accommodation for RAF officers at his country house, Port Lympne. Hoare recalled: ‘The annual training [for 601 Squadron] was at Lympne, the station that adjoined Philip Sassoon’s seaside house. [...] One of my friends described the fortnight’s training as the summer holiday of White’s club.’⁸⁴

Sassoon’s social hosting stretched beyond the flying squadrons to the wider aviation network, as a letter regarding a misunderstanding over the invitations of Aero Club officials to one of Sassoon’s garden parties demonstrates:

⁸⁰ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC 71/3 Box 59, letter from Guest to Brabazon, 9 March 1936.

⁸¹ Miller, p. 257.

⁸² Colin Reith Coote, *The Other Club* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1971), pp. 31–32 and 58.

⁸³ Stuart Ball, *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain 1918–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 331.

⁸⁴ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p. 194.

no invitation had been sent to any person in the Aero Club who would ordinarily be invited officially [...] I gather from Perrin [secretary of the Aero Club] that he pointed out to Oldfield that this was a direct snub to the Club. [...] I believe that Perrin was acting under a misapprehension [...] He has written a letter to Sassoon in which he apologises for his mistake which in my private opinion was due to excess of zeal for the Club and which was doubtless rough in its method.⁸⁵

Sassoon's parties and other social events were highly valued by the RAF as his 'hospitality, enthusiasm and social position made aviation a huge social — and therefore a popular success'.⁸⁶ Hoare, as Secretary of State for Air, also recalled Sassoon's 'weekly luncheon' which provided another opportunity for informal associations behind closed doors.⁸⁷ Sassoon when Under Secretary of State also encouraged Bullock, Principal Private Secretary, to lunch out in an effort to improve the Air Ministry's networks. Bullock recalled:

[As Principal Private Secretary] I was able to vastly expand the range of my contacts in political and other circles useful to the Royal Air Force. The Air Ministry needed every friend it could get in the House of Commons and the House of Lords in those days [...]

Successive Ministers made it their practice to refer interested (or tiresome!) M.P.'s [*sic*] to me, and I think I may claim my educational efforts were not entirely unsuccessful. I can remember, for example, Sassoon [...] asking me to take one awkward M.P. after another out to lunch to expound and educate [...].⁸⁸

Bullock also described how he also regularly met with supporters like Brabazon ('to whom the Royal Air Force owes much') and in this way informal meetings

⁸⁵ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC 71/3 Box 11, letter from F. K. McLean to Brabazon, 9 July 1925.

⁸⁶ Stansky, p. 117.

⁸⁷ Cross, p. 113.

⁸⁸ CUL, Personal Papers of Andrew Boyle, Add. 9429/1B/283, 'Notes by Sir Christopher Bullock on his years at the Air Ministry', accompanying covering letter, 19 October 1953.

provided an opportunity for insider briefings with those who were also members of networks external to Parliament.

The Efficacy of Air Networks

From formal societies, to self-selecting clubs, and other social gatherings, the networks discussing air power and aviation were numerous, with their intersecting memberships containing a relatively small core of influential enthusiasts and politicians. Some of these individuals held capital by virtue of their wealth, some, additionally, because of their position in society, either through birth or professional appointment, still others because of their qualifications and expertise in aviation. Networks provided a forum for social interactions and relationships where capital could be mobilised. But how effective were they?

Social and political influence provided forms of capital which conferred specific powers, but also contributed collectively to the symbolic capital that strengthened and supported the different networks. While immature, their efficacy rested partly on those that supported the RAF capitalising on a particular confusion that arose in the post-war politics of air power. Cooper has argued, quite plausibly, that the RAF entered this period without a clearly defined strategic function, but he also emphasized that 'the future of airpower became confused with the future of the independent air service'.⁸⁹ Though he is right to argue that this confusion affected the development of coherent doctrine within the Air Ministry and RAF, for the networks discussed here the confusion allowed their members to coalesce around a combined goal. Passion for aviation, the future potential of air power, and the ongoing independence of the RAF were fused into a tangible cause: the survival of the RAF. For the other two services, a passion for the Navy or Army translated into multiple aims and goals, none of which were focused on survival since their permanence was not in question. The RAF provided a cause around which pre-war aviation pioneers, and First World War veterans who had become converted to the utility of air

⁸⁹ Cooper, 'Blueprint for Confusion', p. 450.

power in war, could cleave in the inter-war period. Carr talks, in relation to veteran MPs, of 'a fervour to achieve something after 1918' and the cause of continued air force independence was one which this relatively small, but well connected and networked, group of influential men chose to champion.⁹⁰

In terms of working together, the three key aviation networks appear to have coexisted after 1918 working along the lines that they had agreed before the war: dividing responsibilities into science, training and sport, and education and propaganda. Their pre-war tripartite agreement, clarifying these responsibilities and communication between them, seems to have held firm at least until the late 1920s. This was referred to in a letter from W. F. Sempill (Colonel the Master of Sempill as he styled himself), then President of the Royal Aeronautical Society, to Brabazon in 1928, when tensions were emerging between the organisations, partly stoked by Brabazon himself:

Under the tripartite agreement between the Royal Aero Club, the Air League, and this Society, we are all bound to respect and not encroach on one another's activities, and I am sure you will agree that the clear line of demarcation between these bodies is an excellent thing.⁹¹

Brabazon's answer revealed his view on the origins of the tripartite arrangement:

It was due to an attack by a mushroom organisation run by Wyndham [*sic*], called the Aeroplane Club, and at that time it was no doubt wise to enter into an agreement. But I cannot help telling you that the Air League would have expired [years] ago, due to more efficient bodies, if it had not been for the closing of that avenue of exploration and activity by the Agreement with the two other bodies.⁹²

⁹⁰ Carr, p. 193.

⁹¹ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC 71/3 Box 75, letter from Sempill to Brabazon, 23 April 1928.

⁹² RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC 71/3 Box 75, letter from Brabazon to Sempill, 25 April 1928.

There are only a few references to the Aeroplane Club, which has been described as 'short-lived' and was created in 1908; Brabazon's explanation accords with the timings of the agreement and Windham's project.⁹³

Brabazon's views of the Air League reveal the differences of opinion emerging between the organisations in the late 1920s. P. R. C. Groves, a long-time critic of Trenchard and Hoare and friend of Sykes, as well as respected correspondent and air power author, became Honorary Secretary-General of the Air League in 1927. Groves had been a constant critic of the Air Ministry and he argued that the air community had become a 'house divided'. He saw his views as consistent with those of his preferred 'protagonists' of the air, but not with those who were more supportive of the Air Ministry: they were on the other side of the argument: 'Consequently air protagonists have had to compete not only with public apathy, naval and military opposition and, only too frequently, Air Ministry antagonism as well, but also with the opposition of some air interests.'⁹⁴ Yet, these two groupings were united in believing in an independent air force. Brabazon had a diametrically opposite view to Groves, believing Groves's camp to be the detractors of aviation:

Now Groves comes along [as Air League Honorary Secretary General], an avowed enemy of the Air Ministry [...] Anything you use against the Air Ministry is seized upon by the enemies of aeronautics in general, with the result that you get the friends of aeronautics in general who look at the Air Ministry as not vigorous enough combining with those who hate the air and everything to do with it. That is the present danger, and one that certainly needs watching. If it were not for these political considerations I would be an enthusiastic supporter of the Air League,

⁹³ Brabazon and Windham's fractious relationship, borne of their disagreement over Brabazon's claim to the first flight over A. V. Roe, continued until Windham's death in 1942. For reference to the Aeroplane Club and Windham, see Hugh Driver, *The Birth of Military Aviation, Britain, 1903–1914* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1997), p. 63.

⁹⁴ Percy Robert Clifford Groves and Ernest Swinton, *Behind the Smoke Screen* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934), p. 273.

because I would rather have an active body committing bloomers right and left than a somnolent body doing nothing at all.⁹⁵

The argument over the strategy that the Air Ministry had followed, prioritising efficiency in the early 1920s over ambitious growth, provoked Groves's combative stance against the Air Ministry and its leaders. Unsurprisingly, his vocal criticisms of the Air Ministry made relationships between the primary networks more difficult after his appointment at the Air League in 1927. However, for much of the 1920s they had, as Sempill's words conveyed, worked relatively harmoniously and had remained united on the need for the RAF.⁹⁶ A singular focus on RAF survival naturally held priority in the immediate post-war years, but, once that survival seemed assured, there was by 1926–27 space for conflict over other issues. It was inevitable, then, that by the end of the 1920s disagreements over the doctrinal direction of the RAF, the strategies and policies of the Air Ministry, the primacy of the bomber, and disarmament versus rearmament, had emerged between individuals within and across networks.

Comparison with a more established Royal Navy network demonstrates the different challenges resulting from the relative maturity of the networks supporting the older two services. The experiences of the Navy League after the First World War, in light of its activities before the war, are useful in contrasting this mature organisation with the less mature air-supporting formal networks. Formed in late 1894, from its inception the Navy League contained two distinct groups with divergent attitudes to campaigning. N. C. Fleming described the majority as reluctant to criticise either the Admiralty or the government, while a minority 'disproportionately active at its highest levels, regarded the organization as an unofficial overseer of naval policy'.⁹⁷ These

⁹⁵ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC 71/3 Box 75, letter from Brabazon to Sempill, 25 April 1928.

⁹⁶ Throughout the 1930s, both Groves and Brabazon continued to make the case for a separate air service. See, for example, J. T. C. Moore-Brabazon, 'The Case for the Royal Air Force', *Empire Review and Magazine*, 438 (July 1937) in RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC 71/3 Box 6, and Groves and Swinton, pp. 26–27.

⁹⁷ N. C. Fleming, 'The Imperial Maritime League: British Navalism, Conflict, and the Radical Right, c.1907–1920', *War in History*, 23.3 (2016), 296–322 (p. 297).

disagreements led to the formation of a break-away organisation in 1908: the Imperial Maritime League (IML), whose members disagreed with the Navy League's support of Admiral Fisher and the Liberal Government.⁹⁸ When the two organisations first came to debate aviation and the 'new peril of the air' in 1913, they chose similar campaigns, launched within days of each other.⁹⁹ The IML struggled on during the war; it is mentioned in the pages of *The Harrovian* in 1918 (for a lecture on 'The Work of the Navy') where it was described, possibly too kindly, as 'believed to be the step-child of the Navy League'.¹⁰⁰ However, it failed to retain support and its ultimate demise came in 1921. The IML failed to make a significant mark on the popularity of the Navy League in the years before the First World War: the latter's membership had climbed to 100,000 across the empire by 1914.¹⁰¹

Before the war, the Navy League's agenda was closely attuned to the Navy's arguments for supremacy in armament terms. Additionally, the inspired establishment of Trafalgar Day, using the reassuring tropes of naval success and of empire, as the embodiment of sea power had been a public relations success. The Navy League continued to commemorate the day during the First World War, linking it to memorialisation of lost sailors. In the immediate post-war period, the Navy League suffered a crisis precipitated by the heightened international pressure for disarmament. By 1921, the League was arguing in favour of naval arms limitation by international treaty while emphasising an increasing focus for its own activities around memorialisation and education, in contrast with its pre-war traditional pro-Navy propagandist record. This led to committee resignations and rancour within the organisation at a time when the air-supporting bodies were united on the theme of RAF survival. As Duncan Redford argued, in the early 1920s 'the British didn't need a Navy League to argue in favour of reduced defence spending and a reliance on collective security'.¹⁰² The struggle of the Navy League to find immediate relevance post-war echoed that of the Air League, but, unlike the Air League which re-

⁹⁸ W. Mark Hamilton, 'The Nation and the Navy: Methods and Organization of British Navalist Propaganda, 1889–1914' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, 1977), p. 158.

⁹⁹ Fleming, 'The Imperial Maritime League', p. 318.

¹⁰⁰ *The Harrovian*, 31.5 (1918), p. 87.

¹⁰¹ W. Mark Hamilton, p. 124.

¹⁰² Redford, p. 66.

energised itself in 1920, the arguments over disarmament continued to diminish the Navy League's impact in the early 1920s.¹⁰³

The Navy League's heyday had been before the First World War, and over the ensuing decades it was to shift its emphasis from politics to charitable endeavours towards young people and education. Brabazon made a pertinent observation comparing the Air League and Navy League in 1929, when suggesting that the Air League needed 'new blood' rather than the "Older Gang": 'I think the Air League must take up a different policy than in the past if it is to be the power in the future that the Navy League was in the past.'¹⁰⁴ Although the Navy League played an active role in the fight to establish the Fleet Air Arm in the 1930s, the diversity of issues which the Navy faced in the 1920s, from disarmament, to developing technology not least with submarines, to the argument for control of its own air service, diluted its efforts. The Navy's principal pressure group, by 1921, was campaigning for real terms reductions in the size and capability of the service it had been established to represent. The group's post-war focus on memorialisation, as well as its pleas for additional state and voluntary support for veterans, complicated its political messaging still further. This contrasted with the networks fighting for the RAF and the Air Ministry; when extinction was threatened, little else mattered for air-supporting networks than the survival of the independent air service. Naval and, even more so, army pressure groups and charities focused more on raising funds for veterans, the disabled and their families, not to mention local memorials.¹⁰⁵ Despite the relative immaturity of the case for air, the singularity of the case and the sense in which they represented an 'insurgent' force reinforced a shared culture amongst air advocates.

As has been mentioned, the increasing confidence of the far-right in the 1930s was reflected strongly in the membership of air-supporting networks. As Griffiths outlined, the 'fellow travellers of the Right' broke cover in the early

¹⁰³ Fleming, 'The Imperial Maritime League', p. 321.

¹⁰⁴ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC 71/3 Box 75, letter from Brabazon to Colonel Davson, 11 September 1929.

¹⁰⁵ Cohen.

1930s, reaching a peak in 1936 and 1937.¹⁰⁶ Cannadine argued that the same aristocrats who were increasingly confronted with declining power in that decade found some resonance in the offer of fascism.¹⁰⁷ Londonderry provides one example: an enthusiastic Secretary of State for Air (and aviator) in the early 1930s. However, once disenfranchised from ministerial position his entanglement with fascism in the late 1930s increasingly ostracised him from the mainstream.¹⁰⁸ The extreme views of Grey included virulent racism, which 'made even Rosenberg's pale into insignificance'.¹⁰⁹ As editor of *The Aeroplane* he held a particular position of influence, alongside other public-facing commentators campaigning for the survival of the RAF.

However, in the period under consideration to the end of the 1920s, there was less focus on far-right views and attraction to fascism within the regular discourse and correspondence between air-supporting network members. Indeed, from the progressive wing of the Conservative Party to Labour MPs and peers, there was more diversity in political viewpoints in these networks than there was in terms of the education and classes of key agents.¹¹⁰ Grey wrote an intriguing letter to Brabazon at the close of the decade discussing the next chairman of the Air League:

Robert Yerburgh was a pretty hard-baked Conservative when he was Chairman of the Navy League, so a strong party politician might not be a disadvantage [as Air League Chairman].

The chief trouble on this account is that apparently the Socialist-Labour people seem to be the strongest patriots in these days. Snowden is the first Cabinet Minister since Palmerston who has shown a proper feeling for 'them Foreigners'. So perhaps we had better look for a Labour Chairman for the Air League.

¹⁰⁶ Griffiths, p. 4.

¹⁰⁷ Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, p. 547.

¹⁰⁸ As an army officer he had expressed his admiration for 'the splendid lot of boys' of the RFC and unsuccessfully petitioned Lord Derby, Secretary of State for War, to join the Corps, Fleming, *The Marquess of Londonderry*, pp. 39 and 43.

¹⁰⁹ Griffiths, p. 69.

¹¹⁰ Ball identifies Hoare as on the left of the party, Ball, *Portrait of a Party*, p. 349.

You know the House of Commons pretty well inside out. Can you suggest a rich member of the Labour party who would be likely to take on the job? I don't like Oswald Mosley and I do not know any other Labour man who is rich and ambitious, but probably you do.¹¹¹

He was quite serious, and received a serious response back from Brabazon, demonstrating, in his own caustic way, the triumph of cause and capital over personal or party politics, in the continued fight for the future of independent air power.¹¹² Michele Haapamäki summarised that, beyond his racism, Grey 'did enjoy an extensive tenure of pre-eminence and influence through his editorial post and unofficial connections with both military and civilian aviation'.¹¹³ Like other individuals and networks explored in this chapter, he was corresponding across the air-supporting networks from his offices in Piccadilly:

Charles did not arrive at the office early and when he did arrive, he either dawdled through his mail or more likely talked to visitors. Such talks were a great part of life at 175 Piccadilly. The great point of having an office in Piccadilly is that everybody who is anybody internationally must walk by at least once a year. What better than to drop in on *The Aeroplane* where you were sure of a glass of sherry from Jacksons in the morning or a cup of tea and a slice of cake from Fortnums in the afternoon.¹¹⁴

His office was physically located at the intersection of the political and social networks that occupied Whitehall, St James's and Mayfair: committees and clubs, leagues, and societies.

¹¹¹ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC 71/3 Box 75, letter from Grey to Brabazon, 12 September 1929.

¹¹² RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC 71/3 Box 75, letter from Brabazon to Grey, 13 September 1929.

¹¹³ Thurstan James and Michele Haapamäki both wrote about Grey's influence beyond his far-right politics: Thurstan James; Michele Haapamäki, *The Coming of the Aerial War: Culture and the Fear of Airborne Attack in Inter-War Britain* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), pp. 70–71.

¹¹⁴ Thurstan James, p. 841.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on those individuals who operated beyond 'the smoke-filled rooms and corridors of Whitehall' inhabited by Trenchard and his fellow officers and into the networks, formal and informal, that encircled Whitehall.¹¹⁵ These networks are part of the air history of Britain after the First World War and, though their discrete impact is hard to quantify, their structures and cultures, and the capital and habitus of their members, show how much was invested by an important group of politicians and technocrats in their cause. Brabazon's papers provide rich evidence of the volume of correspondence that passed between them, and the changing letterheads and titles testify to their circulation through the various organisational boards and presidencies or chairmanships. The more formal organisations championed this cause with conferences and lectures, exhibitions and campaigns, as well as through their publications and communications.

A fascination with aviation and belief in the potential of air power was the particular quality which self-selected these individuals into these networks. The armed forces and their supporters have often been characterised as conventional, conservative, and resistant to change. The Army and the Navy had innovators amongst their number and their supporters, but the RAF and its supporters were innovators by definition. Embracing and supporting an independent air force and modern aviation, they were the early adopters of the early twentieth century. This gave them a particular identity, which, combined with their homogeneous backgrounds, marked by wealth, privilege, education at the most prestigious public schools, and connections within and across the establishment, endowed the RAF with a potent cohort of supporters. Their number was small and their networks, relative to their more established counterparts, were immature. Yet here, again, there was also advantage in adversity and immaturity. The fight for the continued existence of the RAF was a simple, compelling narrative and a goal around which they could coalesce.

¹¹⁵ Gray, *Air Warfare*, p. 48.

Although at variance with the image of a modern, meritocratic service that the Air Ministry sought to present, the RAF, as it had done with air policing and air pageants, was becoming adept at concurrently maximising benefits from association with tradition and the establishment. As the *New Statesman's* review of Hoare's air memoir surmised: 'it is easier to secure major reforms if one works with the social grain of the country rather than against it'.¹¹⁶ The RAF proved adept at working with the social grain, but in more than one direction: appealing to aviation supporters and inspiring air-mindedness with visions of the future, but also mindful of the legitimisation of the traditional. Though it had no past of its own with which to establish continuity, which Hobsbawm and Ranger argued manifested itself in the practice of invented tradition, association with the establishment — with other organisations with 'a suitable historic past' — provided an opportunity to legitimise a new organisation with tropes of 'the traditional'.¹¹⁷ The human relation of air advocates with the past and the future was unique and entirely different from that of advocates of the other services. The older services and their networks were revisiting their wartime records, remembering their dead, and caring for their damaged. They grappled with the tensions between modern technology and more traditional capabilities, the advent of three-way service rivalry, and the challenge of contending with the medium of the air and the advent of air power. These were all subjects that supporters of the RAF could either side-step (such as memorialisation) or felt they better understood intellectually (they embraced the new medium and accepted that inter-service rivalry was their central challenge — at least until the RAF's future was assured). As will be discussed in a later case study, perhaps the most compelling example of this contradictory relationship between the modern and the traditional was that of the RAF's relationship with the royal family. Here, the oldest national institution and the newest were to form an increasingly strong relationship during the 1920s. These institutions at either ends of the maturity 'scale' were both, it will be argued, forced to pay more attention to their public image in this early post-war period and they saw something in each other's image that could be helpful to their own.

¹¹⁶ Cross, p. 106.

¹¹⁷ Hobsbawm and Ranger, p. 1.

The exclusive nature of aviation pre-war entailed another kind of self-selection: for individuals with capital. The politicians and aristocrats, the men with the most economic and social capital, that supported the RAF were a cross-section of the wealthiest class. Flying before the war had been the prerogative of the wealthy, predominantly those who came from upper class families with inherited wealth, but also technocrats and businessmen who had been drawn to the newest technologies. Thus, when the RAF faced opposition (from the other services, their supporters, and the pressures of the economic climate of post-war Britain), the individuals drawn to air-supporting networks brought with them significant economic, social and cultural capital. Some may have been attracted, as Cannadine argued, to the technological and modern service because it advanced their own cause at a turning point in the fortunes of the aristocracy.¹¹⁸ 1918 and the Armistice provided the pivot; as the war drew to a close, the wealthy and privileged relaunched themselves in post-war London and the modernity of aviation provided an attractive magnet. Their capital provided the power to drive these networks.

The more formal organisations discussed had, as well as their internal and inter-organisational interactions, a public-facing role. This chapter has explored their members and the points of intersection in their interests. The following chapter will therefore consider the press and other commentators who translated the arguments around aviation to the broader public, often based on the conversations that were happening within these networks. That chapter and Chapter Six will investigate in more detail the world of lobbying, persuasion, and influence, building on the role of the media and ‘air-minded’ commentators. Chapter Six will examine the Hoare–Trenchard strategic plan for influence. The external-facing work to promote air-mindedness more broadly within society will be analysed to consider how the RAF approached the utilisation of public relations for support.

¹¹⁸ Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy*, p. 70.

CHAPTER FIVE — A TANGLED WEB: THE PRESS, AVIATION, AND THE AIR MINISTRY

In 1922, the *Daily Mail* experimented with advertising using the latest fashion, skywriting, exploiting the novelty of this new application of aviation: ‘An aeroplane looped and dived over London, scribbling *Daily Mail, Daily Mail* in smoke.’¹ The use of aviation to sell a mass circulation newspaper to the public contrasted ironically with the fractious relationship that existed between CAS, the Air Ministry, and the proprietors of many of the major national and provincial newspapers in the 1920s. Using newspapers to sell the RAF to the public was proving more problematic.

Trenchard had a difficult relationship with the press, not least because of his early clashes with Rothermere (owner of the *Daily Mirror*, among other titles). Beaverbrook of the *Daily Express* described the RAF chief as ‘enjoy[ing] bitter hatreds’.² While the press proprietors were drawn to aviation-related stories, and clearly believed they sold copy, they were not so willing to promote or favour the RAF. In the early 1920s, daily national newspapers like the *Daily Mail* provided the British population with its primary source of news and information. The *Daily Mail* was the brainchild of Northcliffe, older brother of Rothermere with whom he had developed the tabloid, and he had long experimented with novel stunts and imaginative promotions to attract readers.³ Before the First World War, Northcliffe’s interest in aviation prompted his instigation of a succession of *Daily Mail* Flying Prizes which started with model competitions in 1907 and quickly progressed to headline-grabbing feats including offering the prize that led to Louis Blériot’s first flight across the Channel. The *Daily Mail* along with the *Morning Post* also helped the government with the early development of non-rigid dirigibles.⁴ The close and complex nature of the relationship between aviation and the press continued

¹ Paul Ferris, *The House of Northcliffe: The Harmsworths of Fleet Street* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), p. 258.

² 1st Baron Beaverbrook, *Men and Power, 1917–1918* (London: Hutchinson, 1956), p. xxv.

³ In this chapter, Alfred Harmsworth will be referred to as (Lord) Northcliffe, and Harold Harmsworth as (Lord) Rothermere, although they only acceded to these titles in 1905 and 1914 respectively.

⁴ HC Debate (1909) Fifth Series, Vol. 8, Col. 1570, 2 August 1909.

with the creation of the RAF. Historians have analysed the linkages between aviation, the far-right, and the right-wing press.⁵ Yet the RAF and the Air Ministry's, frankly unique, relationship with the press in its formative years has generally received only tangential comment.⁶

Alongside the paradoxical disparity between the press's appetite for aviation and its ambivalence towards the independent air service in the inter-war years lay another irony: the central role of the print press in the creation of the RAF following its promotion of independence for air power in the latter years of the First World War. Historians differ over the overall influence of the clamour from the newspapers for government action in the wake of German bombing of the UK mainland in 1916 and 1917, but agree that the bombings represented a strategic shift in the concept of Great Britain as an impenetrable island, historically protected by her powerful Royal Navy from the threat of incursion. It is also factually evident that the press speculated at length on the appropriate response to German bombers, particularly the increasingly lethal Gotha aircraft which attacked from occupied Belgium in 1917, and newspapers such as Northcliffe's *Daily Mail* and *The Times* forcefully argued for a new independent force.⁷ Although there is debate about the causal connections between these bombings, the decision to create an independent air force, and the role of the press in this journey, most politicians at the time were mindful of what they perceived to be public opinion.⁸ Spaight described the connection: 'If ever there was a reform which was demanded and supported by the *vox populi*, it was that which took shape in the air organisation of the end of 1917.'⁹

Northcliffe and his fellow press proprietors were to be drawn closer into the debate by Lloyd George on the formation of the Air Ministry, as the Prime Minister searched for his first Secretary of State for the RAF. He offered the role

⁵ See, for example, Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*; Jack Williams, 'The Upper Class and Aeroplane Sport between the Wars', *Sport in History*, 28.3 (2008), 450–71.

⁶ Brett Holman's analysis of the public's view of bombing is a notable exception, Brett Holman, *The Next War in the Air: Britain's Fear of the Bomber, 1908–1941* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2014).

⁷ Holman, *The Next War in the Air*, pp. 222 and 232–33.

⁸ David Edgerton described the role of the Northcliffe press as 'vital' 'in propaganda and agitation', Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*, p. 26.

⁹ Spaight, p. 139.

to Northcliffe who turned it down, and then to Rothermere, who accepted but resigned acrimoniously months later. The newly created RAF's relationship with the press after the First World War was mercurial. The major newspapers were opinionated about the role of air power both during wartime and in the inter-war years. Indeed, Holman has argued that periods of public 'panic' at the dangers of aerial bombing also proved the optimum moments to transmit ideas about war in the air.¹⁰ However, after the First World War, the Air Ministry suffered 'vituperative' attacks from press barons who were at the height of their reach and influence.¹¹ The challenge for the Ministry and the RAF was to reach the general public, whom they wanted to educate about their role, and promote air-mindedness.

In the post-war period, Trenchard's acrimonious relationship with Rothermere and Beaverbrook's antipathy towards him (he later infamously called Trenchard 'the father who tried to strangle the infant at birth') forced the Air Ministry to think more creatively about public engagement.¹² At the war's end, it began to feel its way towards practices which were more akin to public relations, sensing that it needed to reach around the press at times to connect directly with the public. This agenda will be considered in more depth in the next chapter; however, it is instructive here to define what is meant by public relations and why the Air Ministry's approach in this period is particularly important. In the historiography of public relations, some have argued that the practice is as old as communication or humankind, but that interpretation of public relations is rejected here in favour of the understanding of public relations as 'the management of communication between an organisation and its public'.¹³ The early inter-war years marked a period of change in the management of organisational communication; as earlier referenced, the royal household had itself employed a press secretary for the first time in 1918. The extent to which organisations explicitly sought favourable publicity was changing, but, as will be seen, the different armed services had contrasting

¹⁰ Holman, *The Next War in the Air*, p. 244.

¹¹ Miller, p. 273.

¹² 1st Baron Beaverbrook, p. 220.

¹³ Grunig and Hunt quoted in *Perspectives on Public Relations Historiography and Historical Theorization: Other Voices*, ed. by Tom Watson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 29.

views on embracing this burgeoning form of professional management of image, identity, and reputation. The unique composition of the Air Ministry, containing military and civil departments, provided opportunities post-war that were unavailable to the other service departments. It could blend management and messaging, sometimes using civil aviation as a 'cover' to promote aviation and the RAF more generally. The close relationship between the military and civil environments, under the roof of one government department tasked with delivering hard power as the third armed service, echoes the contrasting interpretations exposed by Edgerton in *England and the Aeroplane*, between one view of the aeroplane as 'liberal, civil, and anti-militaristic' and his view of aircraft as a fundamentally military technology.¹⁴ The RAF, it is argued, was to take advantage of this juxtaposition within its ministerial walls.

This chapter will consider the relationship between the mainstream national press, aviation, and the RAF. The role of the press in the RAF's creation, the leadership of the press becoming that of the Air Ministry, and the popularity of aviation as a seller of copy for the papers demonstrate the intertwined relationship between the press and the RAF from its inception, a phenomenon exclusive to this service department. The focus here on the press, as opposed to other developing forms of media, reflects its dominance in the 1920s; the national dailies provided a huge readership with news, information, and entertainment.¹⁵ In the first section, the history of the relationship between early aviation and the press will be reviewed, examining Northcliffe's role, in particular, in pre-war aviation matters. The relationship between the press barons and air power immediately before and after the creation of the Air Ministry will then be considered. The next section will look at the Air Ministry's approach to its complex relationship with the press and the difference in its handling of press matters from the Admiralty and War Office. Analysis will highlight the important implications of the department's unique composition, containing both RAF and civil wings.¹⁶ This co-location of the civil and military within the Air Ministry, and the blurred lines between civil and military aviation in

¹⁴ Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*, p. xxxii.

¹⁵ Eksteins, p. 249.

¹⁶ The RAF part of the Air Ministry will also be referred to here as 'military' in contrast with its 'civil' department.

public activities, from sporting activities to government aid, will be examined, demonstrating the youthful service's agility in finding novel solutions to novel post-war challenges. The final section will consider how the appointment of politicians close to the leading newspaper proprietors partially negated the problematic relationship that CAS himself had with the powerful men of the fourth estate

The Press and Aviation before 1918

Northcliffe's publishing success in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries presaged the explosion in daily national newspaper consumption that characterised the inter-war years. By 1905 his papers included the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Mirror*, and the *Observer*. He acquired *The Times* in 1908. These titles enabled him to enter the political fray and, in relation to the armed forces, to push the case for naval rearmament and the Dreadnought in the early twentieth century. At the same time, and before the military potential of flight was realised, he was an early supporter of pioneer aviators and became friendly with Wilbur Wright after meeting him in south-west France. However, while admiring the early flyers' achievements, he also recognised presciently the strategic implications of air power. In 1906, at the time of Santos-Dumont's first European flight, he telephoned the *Daily Mail* 'telling them angrily that their four-line paragraph wasn't sufficient: didn't they realise that England was no longer an island?'.¹⁷

His zest for using competitions to expand readerships (his ideas had matured from earlier quizzes such as 'guess how many people walked across London Bridge in a day') metamorphosed into the world of aviation in the form of the *Daily Mail* Flying Prizes.¹⁸ Shortly after Santos-Dumont's maiden flight, he announced the offer of a prize of £10,000 for the first flight from London to Manchester, an ambitious target at a time when no-one had flown in Britain and the challenge allowed only two fuel stops for the long flight. Under this banner, a series of more modest competitions allowed the newspaper to maintain

¹⁷ Paul Ferris, p. 154.

¹⁸ Paul Ferris, p. 36.

interest in the bigger prize until technology caught up with ambition. For example, in April 1907, the *Daily Mail* held a model aircraft competition at Alexandra Palace with flying tests of aircraft, designed with the London to Manchester prize in mind, inside and outside the hall:

In the hall, where the preliminary trials will be held, thousands will be able to watch the proceedings in comfort. In order that no errant machine may injure the spectators or damage itself, nets will be hung round the hall. Outside, where there is room to run, if an aeroplane should show some eccentricity of flight, spectators will be better able to look out for themselves.¹⁹

Within two years of these model contests, Brabazon had won the first 'circular mile' prize, and reports a year later of the eventually successful flight from London to Manchester on 27–28 April 1910 attest to the huge public interest that had been generated in the intervening years in aviation achievements and technological breakthroughs.²⁰ Reports of the event from a special train that trailed Louis Paulhan's successful flight include references to crowds cheering at the finish, the route 'alive with enthusiasts', and:

We pass the keenest sportsman of them all. In the roadway beside the line [at 5.21 am] stands a man with nothing on save a nightshirt, a nightcap, and a pair of slippers. His bare legs look uncomfortably blue, but he takes no count of cold or wind, and is talking volubly to three companions and pointing after M. Paulhan.²¹

Brabazon had himself attracted considerable attention in late 1909 with a more modest 'stunt' when he offered to prove that pigs could fly, getting airborne with a small piglet in a basket (see Figure 5.1). The archives show that this event was coordinated with the *Daily Mirror*. Andrew Horrall identified the first usage

¹⁹ Reproduced in Paul Wittreich, *The Daily Mail Flying Prizes: 1907–1919* (Victoria, BC: Trafford, 2006), p. 23.

²⁰ Brabazon later admitted that although he won £1,000 for the first 'all-British' mile, the effort cost him £25,000. RAF Museum, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC 71/3 Box 70, article by Claude F. Luke, undated.

²¹ Reproduced in Wittreich, p. 91.

of the term 'stunt' in relation to aerobatics at roughly the same time, in a September 1909 *Flight* article. He also recounted the activities of Grahame-White promoting his Hendon air displays in 1912, for example loading his aircraft with rose petals and 'dispersing them on the crowds below' as he flew across the capital.²²

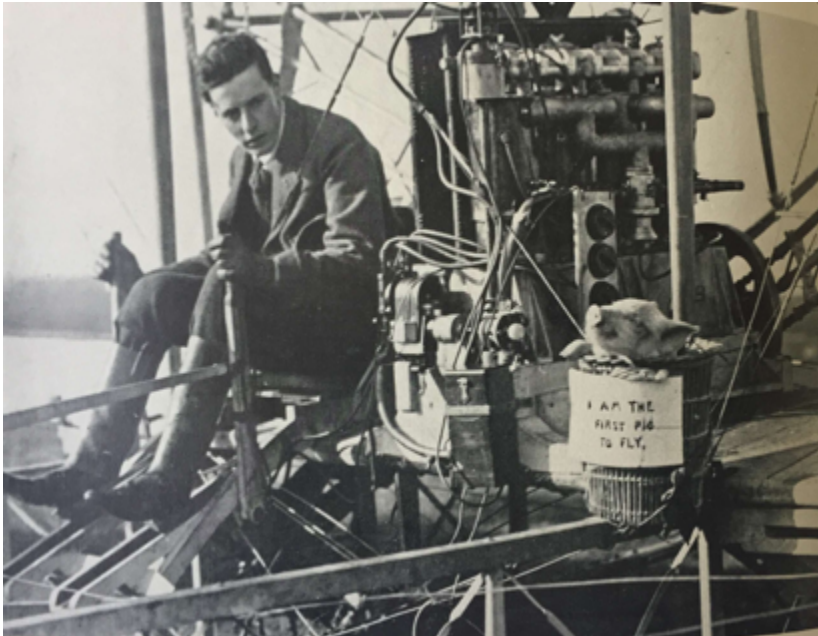


Figure 5.1 'I am the First Pig to Fly' — Brabazon and Pig 1909.²³

At the same time that newspapers were dramatically reporting each milestone in the advancement of civilian flight (as well as stunts like Brabazon's and Grahame-White's), the presentation of military air power was a parallel preoccupation of Northcliffe's press, aided by aviation journals, focusing on the vulnerability and unpreparedness of Britain from aerial attack. After a vocal campaign from his newspapers, the Parliamentary Aerial Defence Committee was established in 1909 (Northcliffe's brother Cecil Harmsworth MP became an officer of the committee). Northcliffe had conceived of the prize to cross the English Channel as much to demonstrate Britain's vulnerability and increase the

²² Andrew Horrall, *Popular Culture in London c. 1890–1918: The Transformation of Entertainment* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 87–89.

²³ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC 71/3 Box 89, framed photo of 'First Pig to Fly', undated.

air-mindedness of the public as to increase readership.²⁴ He chose to restage the competition on its first anniversary in May 1910, keeping the matter of Britain's defencelessness alive in the minds of his public audience.

The theoretical threat from the air highlighted by the Northcliffe and Rothermere newspapers, and by a handful of politicians as well as fiction writers such as H. G. Wells, was soon superseded by the realities of the First World War. Air power technology advanced rapidly under wartime pressure and strategic aerial attack became one of many air capabilities corralled under the banner of the RAF on its creation in 1918. The threat of bombing from the air, along with the disharmony over aircraft production between the RNAS and RFC, was a central reason for the calls for an independent air ministry. Even before the Gotha attacks of 1917, the press had been agitating for the reform of air administration: 'a gathering movement for reform' from early 1916.²⁵ *The Times* editorial of 11 February 1916 led with an article criticising the 'present ruinous and wasteful system of competition in construction between the Army and Navy', which should be 'terminated at once' in favour of 'unity of control'.²⁶ Newspapers provided a forum for articles and readers' letters, and their editorial leaders reflected and stimulated public interest in response to the lethal raids. The commissioning of Jan Smuts's reports was a reaction to the problem of bombing and the clamour for government action; his second report was instrumental in the Cabinet's decision to separate air power from the Navy and the Army in autumn 1917. Commentaries from newspapers like *The Times* maintained pressure on the government in the weeks ahead of the Air Force (Constitution) Bill being debated in Parliament. An editorial in October argued:

Had the Government and the military and naval authorities abandoned their limited outlook, and realized that aircraft and airmen must become a great separate arm organized to wage extensive warfare on its own account, we should not now be hampered by any lack of aeroplanes for every purpose.²⁷

²⁴ Gollin, *No Longer an Island*, p. 366.

²⁵ J. M. Spaight referenced a *Daily Mail* article of 3 April 1917 in Spaight, p. 38, see also p. 60.

²⁶ 'The Government and the Air Services', *The Times*, 11 February 1916, p. 7.

²⁷ 'Air Warfare and its Expansion', *The Times*, 1 October 1917, p. 9.

The RAF was thus created in the midst of public clamour about the administration of air power and the dangers of bombing. As press opinion crystallised around the need for unity, so did parliamentary opinion not least, as Spaight reflected later, because Parliament itself 'might suffer from above the fate which Guy Fawkes designed for it from below'.²⁸

The Air Ministry 1917–18

The close interest that the press had taken in flight, both for political and commercial reasons, and the media's role in shaping and promoting the debate around reform of air administration during the war might reasonably have been expected to result in a strong relationship between the Air Ministry's leadership and the press. However, the birth of the RAF was complicated by the way in which Lloyd George entwined press relations, and specifically press barons, with its formation. The First World War had catapulted Northcliffe from newspaper proprietor, the most influential, creative, and egotistical of the pre-war media scene, to the status of a political operator working with the wartime government. His appointment by Lloyd George as the head of the British War Mission to the United States in May 1917 was rumoured to have been an attempt by the Prime Minister to put some distance between Northcliffe and London. This may have backfired, as a letter from Northcliffe to Sassoon (then Haig's military aide) in early 1918 demonstrated. In it he disclosed how his months away from Britain had reinforced his sense of a shift in public opinion against the government, which probably strengthened his instinct to abandon working inside government, instead challenging it from outside.²⁹

Soon after his return, the Prime Minister offered him the post of Secretary of State at the Air Ministry, but he rejected the proposition in the most public manner, publishing his letter to Lloyd George in *The Times*. It has also been suggested that Northcliffe may have been insulted by this offer, his

²⁸ Spaight, p. 122.

²⁹ BL, Personal Papers of Lord Northcliffe, ADD 62160, letter from Northcliffe to Sassoon, 17 January 1918.

expectations being of higher political advancement (he was said to have hoped to become War Secretary, which would have been a Cabinet level appointment).³⁰ Whichever theory is more plausible, Northcliffe elected to remain independent of government and the manner of his rejection also made sure that Cowdray, who had most expected to get the post and was humiliated by the public snub, resigned as President of the Air Board. Cowdray's role as a major shareholder of the *Westminster Gazette* may also have been relevant to the debacle. In September 1917, the *Gazette* had published a report insinuating that the Prime Minister had left London for his Walton Heath residence to avoid an air raid. David Divine suggested that this was the central motivation for Lloyd George's rebuff of Cowdray.³¹ The Prime Minister was sufficiently incensed with the *Gazette* article that he successfully sued for defamation.

After Northcliffe's rebuttal, Lloyd George offered the Air Ministry to Northcliffe's brother and fellow press heavyweight, Rothermere, who accepted. Paul Ferris wrote of the appointment: 'Newspaper government was carried a stage further', which understates the birthing complications of the infant Air Ministry as a direct result of the relationship between Lloyd George and press proprietors.³² The Prime Minister's political manoeuvring left the RAF harnessed to Rothermere as its political leader, who was later, with Beaverbrook, to dominate newspaper ownership in the 1920s. The complexity of the relationship between the Air Ministry, the RAF, and the big beasts of the press at the end of the First World War was unique. Neither of the departments of the Admiralty or the War Office had ever been offered to a press baron; their political leaders during the First World War and in the years afterwards were the conventional mixture of former military officers, lawyers, and colonial administrators, most of whom were also long-standing politicians. The Air Ministry was breaking new territory with its Secretary of State, at a time when it might have benefited from the leadership of a more conventional statesman. The novel structure of the Air Ministry, containing a civil element alongside a war-fighting one, and the

³⁰ Stanley Jackson, p. 170.

³¹ Divine, p. 125.

³² Paul Ferris, p. 212.

challenge of building a culture for the new Air Force added to the breadth of the RAF leadership's task.

Rothermere became problematic for the RAF as a result of his appointment as the first air minister and the nature of his departure months later. He arrived in post with a combative attitude about the need to reform the Hotel Cecil and firm views about the strategic changes he intended to make to the air effort, many of which directly contradicted those of his CAS. Trenchard recorded later his version of events, lamenting Rothermere's prioritisation of independent air over combat support to the Army on the Western Front and the concomitant critiques from his brother's newspapers:

From the very first I discovered that Rothermere was all out for me to claim everything for the Air, and nothing for the Army. Time and time again I refused to have anything to do with this. It became a fight between myself and the Northcliffe press. [...] Several people said to me, 'you have taken on the Northcliffe press – you have got something more formidable now than you have ever had'.³³

Rothermere had made his views on the primacy of air reprisals clear just a day before he and Northcliffe convinced Trenchard to take the post of CAS.³⁴ At Gray's Inn on 15 December 1917, the political leader of the future RAF had said:

At the Air Board we are wholeheartedly in favour of air reprisals. It is our duty to avenge the murder of innocent women and children. As the enemy elects, so it will be the case of 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth', and in this respect we shall slave for complete and satisfying retaliation.³⁵

³³ CUL, Personal Papers of Andrew Boyle, Add. 9429/1B/209, 'Notes for Major Lockhart', Trenchard's autobiographical notes, undated.

³⁴ His night-long interrogation at the Ritz ahead of his first short-lived appointment as Chief of the Air Staff was conducted by Northcliffe and Rothermere.

³⁵ John Evelyn Leslie Wrench, *Struggles: 1914–1920* (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1935), diary entry, 15 December 1917.

Sir Almeric Fitzroy confirmed that these views were deeply held commitments, recalling in his diary:

His intention is, for every raid upon London, absolutely to wipe out one or two large German towns [...] he contemplates the possibility of an attack [...] comprising 100 to 150 aeroplanes and carrying bombs enough to lay the place attacked level with the ground.³⁶

Trenchard, once in post, resented Rothermere's disregard for his advice that this approach was neither practically possible nor strategically preferable. The men also came from very different backgrounds and Trenchard's previous experiences in Whitehall had been within the rigidly hierarchical structures of the War Office. Rothermere seems to have approached his first ministerial job, unsurprisingly, in the way that he approached running a newspaper. Cooper characterised the Minister's treatment of his CAS as 'he might a more pliable newspaper editor'.³⁷ The press baron also appointed Evelyn Wrench, his former Sales Manager at Amalgamated Press, as his Private Secretary. Wrench's diary records him and Rothermere dining with other newspaper men amongst their busy schedule at the Air Ministry.³⁸ Rothermere also imported his practice of seeking out able juniors with potential: in the newspaper world he could promote them rapidly into positions of responsibility. The rigidity of the armed forces frustrated him, and his penchant for seeking the views of junior officers and other acquaintances, though not dissimilar to some of Trenchard's Western Front practices, was viewed as inappropriate by the service hierarchy. Trenchard's diary reflected his lack of respect for Rothermere:

The broad principle is that when the right CAS has been chosen he should be given the power, without interference from irresponsible people, to carry out, as far as material and manpower permit, his policy of how to defeat the enemy in the air in conjunction with the army and navy. The continual meddling by irresponsible persons who have no

³⁶ FitzRoy, p. 667.

³⁷ Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power*, p. 122.

³⁸ Wrench, various diary entries, Chapter 19.

expert knowledge and are not responsible for the air must be stopped or we shall lose the war in the air.³⁹

Trenchard also reportedly fell out with Northcliffe at a formal lunch for the President of Canada, arguing against Northcliffe's populist plan to award *Daily Mail* medals to young pilots (an early precursor to modern campaigns supporting 'our boys').⁴⁰

Rothermere's later views of his time in post were also understandably tainted by his personal traumas while at the Air Ministry from late 1917 to April 1918. His middle son, Vere, had been killed in the war in November 1916 and a year later, as he took office, his eldest, Vyvyan, was badly wounded in France. Rothermere was not happily married and, in any case, his wife was abroad during the same period; he lived in hotel suites and brought Vyvyan back to be nursed for a period at the Ritz. Vyvyan died in a nursing home as a result of his war wounds in February 1918. His Private Secretary recorded in his diary that from 20 January onwards, as Vyvyan's condition deteriorated, Rothermere became distracted from his work and his son's death changed him:

His sub-conscious self was otherwise absorbed. [...] If only he could have become engrossed in his work I knew it would help him through the valley of desolation. But it is easy for onlookers, who have not drunk the cup of despair, to make plans for those stunned by sorrow.⁴¹

As the advent of the RAF approached, at a time of personal bereavement for the inexperienced Secretary of State, the arguments over policy between the civil and military leaders of the Air Ministry came to a rancorous head and Trenchard tendered his resignation. Although Rothermere asked him to delay until after the RAF's birthday of 1 April, their disagreements continued over support to the battle for France and he finally accepted the resignation on 10 April 1918.

³⁹ Quoted in Miller, p. 194.

⁴⁰ Miller, p. 194.

⁴¹ Wrench, diary entry, 24 February 1918.

As well as Rothermere's differences of opinion with his CAS, he had to endure criticism from two Air Ministry staff officers who also held seats in Parliament. John Simon and Hugh Cecil were Trenchard supporters who used their parliamentary positions to eviscerate their civilian leader. Cecil clashed with Lloyd George in February 1918 over the influence of the press on government, when the Prime Minister attempted to criticise the same press whose proprietors he had inside his ministerial team. Cecil in response sailed close to the wind with his assessment of the relative merits of government and the military:

The real apprehension in the minds of the public is this, that the distinguished soldiers who advise the Government should be overruled by the Government upon strictly military questions. [...] If really it unhappily happened that the Government disagreed with their military advisers upon a capital point of military policy [exactly the position within the Air Ministry], I am sure that they would crown the many great services they have rendered to the country by resigning office and allowing some ministerial reconstruction. This would enable the country to be assured that if the military advisers of the Government were to be overruled it was not on the account of the opinion of one politician, or even of three or four politicians, but that it was the sober conviction of those who had impartially reviewed the situation.⁴²

Beaverbrook recalled of Cecil and Simon:

they evidently had a humorous concept of the discipline demanded of non-combatant officers. For both were combining their positions on the Air Staff with violent attacks, as members of the House of Commons, on the political head of their own Service.⁴³

⁴² HC Debate (1918) Fifth Series, Vol. 103, Cols. 31–32, 12 February 1918.

⁴³ 1st Baron Beaverbrook, p. 227.

Soon after Trenchard's departure, Rothermere decided he had tired of the pressures of leading the Air Ministry.

Beaverbrook, in his book *Men and Power*, discussed his role in redrafting the resignation letter that Rothermere intended to send to the Prime Minister. The original letter complained that Cecil and Simon, 'officers of the Royal Air Force holding junior Staff appointments' called for an early day debate on the resignation of Trenchard (and General Henderson) and that Simon had been 'sequestered' in the Air Ministry as an assistant to Trenchard.⁴⁴ Rothermere was persuaded (by Beaverbrook, or so Beaverbrook subsequently claimed) to remove this complaint partly so as not to draw Lloyd George into a constitutional argument about the privileges of MPs serving in the armed forces. Rothermere also expunged his deleterious assessment that the RAF required 'iron discipline. Unless this is stamped upon at its birth it is most improbable it will reach the full measure of its possible achievements in this war.'⁴⁵

Paul Ferris recounted the ill-disciplined behaviour of Air Ministry staff following Rothermere's departure, which must have further reinforced the outgoing Minister's concerns about discipline and the conduct of civil–military relations:

Passers-by in the Strand heard cheering from the windows of the Hotel Cecil, where the Ministry was housed, and saw Air Force officers leaning out and waving newspapers. Asked what they were celebrating, one of them shouted: 'A victory at home. Lord Rothermere has gone.'⁴⁶

The alienation of Rothermere in 1918 from the apparatus of the Air Ministry, as a result of both his experiences during his tenure as Secretary of State and his intense dislike of the workings of the Hotel Cecil, did not bode well for the service in the post-war period. Rothermere's ascendance following the death of

⁴⁴ Letter contained as an appendix in 1st Baron Beaverbrook, p. 381. The House of Commons debate to which Rothermere referred was HC Debate (1918) Fifth Series, Vol. 106, Col. 670, 22 April 1918.

⁴⁵ 1st Baron Beaverbrook, p. 381.

⁴⁶ Paul Ferris, p. 214.

his brother increased his power and stock exchange value. By 1923 he controlled three morning daily papers, two London evening papers, and three national Sundays, as well four provincial dailies and three provincial Sundays.⁴⁷ He was an unfortunate enemy for Trenchard to have made.

Before his resignation, Rothermere recommended Sykes as Trenchard's replacement, and he himself was replaced by Weir, who was made a peer and took a seat in the House of Lords as the second Secretary of State at the Air Ministry. Weir and Sykes worked well together; Weir had been included in the decision to appoint Sykes.⁴⁸ The controversy that had raged around air power both externally in the press and internally in the Ministry subsided as the war progressed towards the Armistice. As discussed in Chapter Three, Sykes set about bringing order to the Hotel Cecil, using his extensive experience of constructing new organisations. Friends with Bonar Law and his Parliamentary Private Secretary, J. C. C. Davidson, he was well-connected politically. Weir had sat on the Air Board since 1916 and became Director General of Aircraft Production in November 1917, so he was eminently more experienced than his predecessor in the field of air power and aviation. Between them, they brought stability to the Air Ministry and Sykes began to implement policies, for example on training, discipline, and pay, which the fledgling force badly needed.⁴⁹

However, once war ended Weir was resolute that he wanted to withdraw from government and the choice of his successor determined Sykes's future as well. Here, again, the press began to agitate, discussing potential candidates. Northcliffe's *The Times* lobbied for Churchill to take over at the Air Ministry:

which needs drive, enthusiasm, and imagination more than any other Department of Government [...] Mr Churchill certainly possesses these qualities, whatever others he might lack [...] We shall need a new and very elaborate policing of the air.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Boyce, D. George. (2011). 'Harmsworth, Harold Sidney, first Viscount Rothermere (1868–1940), newspaper proprietor.' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁴⁸ CUL, Personal Papers of Viscount Templewood, Part V:1(13), letter from Rothermere to Hoare, 6 April 1923.

⁴⁹ Monahan, pp. 114 and 118.

⁵⁰ 'The Future of the Air Ministry', *The Times*, 3 January 1919, p. 7.

Churchill took over as Secretary of State for War and Air; he used the opportunity, and had little other choice in the financial circumstances, to review the Ministry's strategic plans and, in particular, their financial implications. Post-war, Sykes had planned a number of significant initiatives, but his tenure did not last long enough for him to implement them fully. As well as apprentice schemes and an RAF Staff College, projects which survived and flourished under Trenchard into fruition, Sykes also drew up (as discussed in Chapter Two) a memorandum on the future structure of the Air Ministry. The memorandum itself stalled as Churchill balked at the extravagant bid, as the core tenet of the document, for a well-funded and sizeable post-war RAF. Though it has attracted much less attention than Trenchard's subsequent version, significantly Sykes proposed a ministry 'consisting of military and civil elements under a Secretary of State for Air' to replace the wholly military organisation.⁵¹

It was at this point that Churchill turned to Trenchard, demanding his counter proposal to Sykes's memorandum, and decided on the basis of the former CAS's parsimonious offering to reinstate him. The significant change to a ministry that fully incorporated separate departments responsible for civil and military aviation was only implemented when Sykes was replaced in March 1919 by Trenchard; Sykes became the first Controller General Civil Aviation (CGCA).⁵² Sykes resigned his commission, arguing that he passionately believed that an advocate for civil aviation should be a civilian; he may also have wanted to avoid being outranked by his rival.⁵³ Within a year he also married Bonar Law's daughter, further inveigling himself into the political scene (he would later stand for Parliament, elected in 1922 as MP for Sheffield Hallam).

⁵¹ Sykes, *From Many Angles*, p. 271.

⁵² The post of CGCA is sometimes also referred to as DGCA (for 'Director' rather than 'Controller') but the Air Ministry Telephone Directories use CGCA consistently, AHB, 'Air Ministry. List of Staff and Distribution of Duties'.

⁵³ Sykes argued for the former reason in his memoir: Sykes, *From Many Angles*, p. 273.

Sykes's tenure had been short but significantly more settled than that of his predecessor and successor, Trenchard. Trenchard returned to the Air Ministry, still in the Hotel Cecil but soon to move to Kingsway, as CAS under Churchill at a time when the future of the RAF was still under debate. Sykes's legacy included the initiation of many strands of work to establish the Air Force permanently, but his overambition and poor luck in the withdrawal of Weir combined to limit his impact. Yet in separating the Ministry into civil and military departments, his behind-the-scenes influence was to live beyond his eventual departure in April 1922.

The Air Ministry Organisation

In order to explore the management of press relations within the Air Ministry, it is necessary to return to pre-war preparations. In 1912, a group of government officials and press representatives met to discuss the control of the press in the event of imminent preparations for war. These included the Secretary of the Admiralty, the Director of Military Operations, and the Assistant Secretary at the War Office, and representatives of the Newspaper Society, the Newspaper Proprietors Association [*sic*], the Irish Newspaper Society, and the Federations of the Northern and Southern Newspaper Owners. The concept from the government's perspective was a 'friendly arrangement with dominant Press interests' which would agree a method by which naval and military news might be withheld from publication if 'detrimental to the public interest'.⁵⁴ This grouping became the 'Admiralty, War Office and Press Committee' which established the system of serving 'D' notices (or 'Parker' notices) suppressing press reporting of issues of national interest and sensitivity such as troop movements and coal shortages. During the war a total of 749 'D' notices were issued by the Committee and its first post-war meeting in 1919 recorded satisfaction with the arrangement: 'In reply to an inquiry as to how many of the messages were disregarded, Sir Edmund Robbins said practically none, except by one or two publications of a certain kind. The Press as a whole had loyally observed the

⁵⁴ TNA, DEFE 53/1, 'Memorandum on the Formation of a Standing Committee of Official and Press Representatives to deal with the Publication of Naval and Military News in Times of Emergency', 5 November 1912, p.1.

warnings.’ This meeting also discussed peacetime arrangements and agreed that the Air Ministry should be asked to send a representative to future meetings. The minutes also indicated that post-war press management at the Admiralty and War Office would consist of a single liaison officer in each department.⁵⁵

At the next meeting, with Walter Nicholson, Secretary to the Air Council, representing the Air Ministry, the committee discussed the arrangements regarding press relations at the three service departments. The representatives’ responses are indicative of the differing attitudes to media engagement held by their respective departments. Nicholson is reported in the minutes for 14 May 1920 as saying:

The Air Ministry, unlike the other two Service Departments, had a dual capacity, both Service and civil, and it was on the civil side that for the moment publicity was most called for. They were dealing with an infant industry in process of rapid development, and the public were in the dark very generally about it. The Air Ministry were charged with the duty of promoting research and encouragement in other ways of the civil aviation industry; and, as part of that, it was natural and inevitable that there should be a publicity organisation. As it existed in that form it was used also for Service purposes, and through that same organization Service *communiqués* were put out.⁵⁶

The Admiralty’s organisation and view of the role was described by Sir Oswyn Murray:

[He] said it might be of interest if he explained the Admiralty’s post-war arrangements for dealing with the Press. They had not now an Admiralty ‘Publicity’ Department. They were anxious to get rid of that word which had a suspicious flavour about it, as if they were going to try and

⁵⁵ TNA, DEFE 53/1, Admiralty, War Office and Press Committee, minutes of meeting, 22 July 1919.

⁵⁶ TNA, DEFE 53/1, Admiralty, War Office, Air Ministry, and Press Committee, minutes of meeting, 14 May 1920.

influence the Press in some way. What they had done was to centralize their arrangements for the issue of news to the Press in Section No. 2 of the Naval Intelligence Division.⁵⁷

The War Office, represented by Sir Herbert Creedy, said its arrangements were similar to those of the Admiralty. The Air Ministry's embrace of 'publicity' stood in stark contrast to the circumspect views of its counterparts.

Nicholson's reflections on this meeting are contained in an Air Ministry file where he recorded his thoughts in a minute sheet. They demonstrate that he had not expected to be asked to brief on his department's arrangements, which lends credence to the frankness of the comments since they had not been pre-prepared or approved. Other documentation in the same file supports his evidence. Nicholson wrote to CGCA and to CAS: 'I was not aware when I attended this meeting that I should be called on to make a statement as to the Air Ministry's procedure, but as it seemed to be expected I had to do my best without preparation.' In the light of a suggestion at the meeting that the Air Ministry should reform its processes in line with the Admiralty and War Office, Nicholson appeared to dismiss that inducement, continuing:

The press representatives did not seem to be personally conversant with the working of the communications from the three service departments, and I did not derive the impression that there was any pressure for an alteration of our existing system. Sir E. Robbins' remark that it would be advisable to adopt the plan of the Admiralty was perhaps natural, after listening to Sir O. Murray's formal statement and my informal one, but I do not think it represented any very considered opinion.⁵⁸

The Air Ministry had after the end of the First World War changed its ways of working with the press, and these changes provide some insight into the atypical nature of the department's arrangements.

⁵⁷ TNA, DEFE 53/1, Admiralty, War Office, Air Ministry, and Press Committee, minutes of meeting, 14 May 1920.

⁵⁸ TNA, AIR 2/151, minute from Nicholson to CGCA and CAS, 7 July 1920 (he presumably wrote the note on receipt of the minutes from the meeting).

After the creation of the RAF in April 1918, Air Ministry telephone directories show that external communication on behalf of the department was split between the Correspondence and Legal Division, and the Censorship and Propaganda Section. The former sat within the Air Secretary's department and included 'press work, e.g. announcements [...] Contradictions of erroneous Press statements regarding Air Ministry Administration'. The latter sat within the Directorate of Intelligence under CAS's overall control and the directory details its responsibilities regarding the press:

Educational Publicity [...] Production and issue of matter for the Press. Communications in regard to operations and the operational aspect of the war. Articles of propaganda value. 'D' notices to the Press Bureau [...] Lecture organisation.⁵⁹

After the war, the Air Ministry reorganised, creating a 'News' section under the Controller of Information's purview, who sat within the Department of the CGCA. The section's duties included:

General enquiry bureau and clearing house for Press. Issue of communiqués, news, articles, etc., to the British and Foreign Press, and compilation of daily and weekly Press Index. All communication with Press. Arranging for report of speeches and for interviews with officials of the Air Ministry. Issues of passes to Press to visit home aerodromes and airship stations.⁶⁰

This move of news control from CAS (Trenchard) and the Air Secretary to CGCA (Sykes now having relinquished his role as CAS) is significant since it distanced press management from the military arm but provided specifically for support to CAS. The Air Ministry appeared, from the minutes of the Admiralty, War Office, Air Ministry, and Press Committee, to have a more proactive

⁵⁹ AHB, 'Air Ministry. List of Staff and Distribution of Duties', October 1918, pp. 4 and 13.

⁶⁰ AHB, 'Air Ministry. List of Staff and Distribution of Duties (provisional)', 25 November 1919, p. 31.

attitude to the role of publicity as part of its departmental activities and a very different organisational approach. Nicholson made a strong argument for the practice, in contrast to Murray's viewpoint of the 'suspicious' flavour of the term 'publicity', and the presence of a civilian department within the Air Ministry appeared to provide the flexibility to prioritise promotion of civilian activities while still explicitly supporting the RAF. It also eased the heavy workload of the RAF's section; the Director of Operations and Intelligence (who came into post at the same time that press activities were moved to the civil side) recalled later: 'I had a very small Staff for operations [...]. On the intelligence side the Staff was smaller still [...]. We struggled on with this set up for some time and it was of course a very gruelling business'.⁶¹

The Air Ministry file also contains a 'Memorandum on Air Ministry (C.A.S.) Press Arrangements' which describes in more detail the way that CGCA's News section was also responsible for RAF publicity. It stated: 'This [Press] Section acts for C.A.S. in exactly the same way as it does for all other Departments of the Ministry. The Section was originally part of Air Intelligence and was transferred for working purposes to C.G.C.A. in March 1919.'⁶² The Air Ministry Office Memorandum contains the formal workings of 'Issues of information through, or dealings with, the Press' and includes the topic of Informal Communications:

Information imparted to the Press for publication as being obtained from official sources, but not as an official communiqué [...]

This can be circulated in a written form to the newspapers or can sometimes be given out verbally to newspaper correspondents.

Information which might help educate the public, advertise aviation, or be of assistance to British industry and effort would usually be given out in this way.⁶³

⁶¹ CUL, Personal Papers of Andrew Boyle, Add.9429/1B/333, letter from J. M. Steel to J. G. Lockhart, 24 March 1955.

⁶² TNA, AIR 2/151, 'Memorandum on Air Ministry (C.A.S.) Press Arrangements', 1920.

⁶³ TNA, AIR 2/151, 'Office Memorandum No. 128', 25 September 1919.

The Air Ministry had chosen a different route from the other two services. The location of news management in the civilian side of the Air Ministry provided the potential for both conflict and opportunity, given that Sykes, *bête-noire* of Trenchard, was CGCA. However, as was discussed in Chapter Four with networks, the use of the civil arm of the Ministry enabled the RAF to benefit from the ambiguity that allowed the concept of air-mindedness to be deployed in support of civil and military aviation simultaneously.

The tension between Trenchard and Sykes might explain the latter's specific interest, as evidenced by the Air Ministry records, in the support given to CAS by CGCA's Controller of Information and News section. Sykes was well aware of the importance of the press in helping to educate the public, and he was provided with a brief on arrangements by his Controller of Information in July 1920, in which the ambiguous handling of RAF publicity is described:

Unpaid publicity. To advertise or give publicity for the benefit of the British Industry and Civil Aviation, accounts of operations or achievements of a 'demonstration' nature carried out by the R.A.F. have been, and are issued to the Press both as official and unofficial Communiqués in order to advertise British efforts but not to advertise the R.A.F.⁶⁴

Whether the irony of not intending to advertise the RAF when publicising RAF operations and achievements was apparent to the department is not recorded, but the promotion of aviation generally, and RAF activities specifically, could hardly have harmed the profile of the junior service. Of note, the Air Ministry was accused by Commander Bellairs, a prominent naval supporter, in Parliament of allowing civil aviation to be 'controlled to a large extent by a fighting Air Ministry' and Hoare's rebuttal of Bellair's next accusation that he had 'in the Air Ministry what no other Department of the Fighting Services has, a special man for dealing with propaganda in the Press' is contradicted by the

⁶⁴ Sykes, *From Many Angles*, p. 112. TNA, AIR 2/151, minute from Swinton to Sykes, 29 July 1920.

evidence presented here.⁶⁵ The Air Ministry was unique amongst the service departments of state for having civil and military organisations under one roof, and as a whole it was more attuned to the utility of publicity than its Admiralty and War Office counterparts.

The Press Barons and the Air Ministry Post-War

The 1920s were an exciting decade for the daily papers, with the expansion of two intersecting populations providing a growing market for their wares: the reading public and the electorate. At the end of the First World War, the *Daily Mail* had around one million readers; Northcliffe wrote to H. G. Wells in 1917 of his view that his then 900,000 readers were ‘a very influential and useful part of the community’.⁶⁶ By the end of the 1920s, its circulation had more than doubled.⁶⁷ By the 1930s, radio had moved beyond the experimental and the BBC had become established as a national institution; cinema and broadcasting combined with the written word as ‘mass media’.⁶⁸ However, even by the late 1930s newspapers remained pre-eminently influential, as Holman noted in referencing a Mass Observation poll on bombing and the sources forming the basis of people’s opinions: 35% newspapers, 17% friends, 13% radio, 5% books.⁶⁹ That said, the direct influence of the newspapers on public opinion remains a matter for debate, without verifiable means of proof of causality. Since the period in question here pre-dates opinion polling and Mass Observation (which began in 1937), the actual level of support for, or interest in, aviation and the RAF in the early post-war era is impossible to recreate.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, in this period the national daily newspapers reached far further into the public realm than all other forms of media.

⁶⁵ HC Debate (1926) Fifth Series, Vol. 192, Cols. 2025–27, 8 March 1926.

⁶⁶ Northcliffe claimed 900,000 readers at the time. BL, Personal Papers of Lord Northcliffe, ADD 62161, letter from Northcliffe to Wells, 12 April 1917.

⁶⁷ Jon Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 102.

⁶⁸ Siân Nicholas, ‘Media History or Media Histories?’, *Media History*, 18 (2012), 379–94 (p. 383).

⁶⁹ Holman, *The Next War in the Air*, p. 171.

⁷⁰ Holman, *The Next War in the Air*, p. 168.

The popular press of the 1920s was a medium very different to the newspapers of the Edwardian era. Before the war, the majority of national newspapers wrote for a limited audience of 'gentlemen' with the time to read and absorb dense newsprint containing lengthy political speeches printed verbatim. A book written on political strategy at the end of the decade lamented the decrease in reported political speeches, a change which had taken place in a 'generation'.⁷¹ As Adrian Bingham wrote, the news post-war 'was not just what men talked about in Clubs', but had moved into the spheres of home, workplace, and social settings.⁷² Northcliffe and Rothermere started the trend towards a more accessible style before the First World War, but the expanding electorate and the increased appetite for entertainment and separate leisure time propelled the dailies to a different order of popularity in the 1920s. Content became lighter, articles shorter, and the growing press preoccupation with personality changed the nature of reporting, even on politics. Political figures became of interest as personalities; just as in the realms of royalty or film, the worship of celebrity was emerging. Jean Chalaby's comparative analysis of reporting in the British and French press found a disparity between the completeness of reporting on issues of national importance. In reviewing coverage in the *Daily Mail* and *Le Petit Parisien* of the 1922 Genoa peace conference, he concluded that the British newspaper's coverage was less comprehensive and coherent: 'The newspaper did not give a complete account of the conference, but offered its readers a succession of unrelated discursive snapshots.'⁷³ The newspapers were also increasingly adopting Northcliffe's pre-war novelty of promoting publications with stunts, prizes, and gimmicks. These have been defined by Hampton 'as an artificial, even contrived, news item manufactured to publicise and thus sell a particular newspaper' and aviation provided a source of such projects.⁷⁴ The *Daily Mail* Flying Prizes continued into the post-war period, with the pinnacle of them being the first non-stop transatlantic flight by Alcock and Brown in June 1919.

⁷¹ Philip G. Cambray, *The Game of Politics: A Study of the Principles of British Political Strategy* (London: J. Murray, 1932), p. 170.

⁷² Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 26.

⁷³ Jean K. Chalaby, 'Twenty Years of Contrast: The French and British Press during the Inter-War Period', *European Journal of Sociology*, 37.1 (1996), 143–59 (p. 154).

⁷⁴ Hampton, p. 41.

After the war, the press barons continued to use their publications to promote their views on the relative merits of the three services and, in particular, on the future and permanence of the RAF. Northcliffe, the founder of the first two newspapers to reach one million readers, saw his power wane in the post-war period as his health deteriorated before his death in 1922. Nevertheless, his legacy was a radically reformed press:

In the Northcliffe sense, which by now was widely copied, “news” didn’t mean raw material presented for the readers’ intelligent inspection. It meant packaged information, news that was chosen and treated so as to make it attractive.⁷⁵

Before his death, he published a series of articles on air power by Groves in *The Times* which Major General Ernest Swinton (then a Professor of Military History) and Groves claimed had such an impact that ‘the attention surrounding them and the resulting Press campaign was largely responsible for an immediate slight addition to our Air Force’.⁷⁶ Groves had served as Director of Flying Operations under Sykes, as had Swinton as Controller of Information. These articles were published months before Northcliffe’s death and formed a small part of his greater legacy, bringing Groves a level of prominence such that he has been erroneously referred to as the Air or Aerial Correspondent for *The Times* rather than as an independent contributor.⁷⁷ As discussed in the previous chapter, he would go on to head the Air League and continue to criticise the Air Ministry and, by implication, Trenchard’s leadership throughout the 1920s and 1930s (he described Trenchard’s memorandum as ‘a narrow parochial scheme’) in the press, specialist publications, and books.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Paul Ferris, p. 225.

⁷⁶ These were later published in a book, and Swinton (who had been Controller of Information at the Air Ministry in 1919) wrote the preface in which he expressed this view, Groves and Swinton, p. ix; see also P. R. C. Groves, *Our Future in the Air* (London: G.G. Harrap, 1935), pp. 101–02.

⁷⁷ See Brett Holman’s view on Groves’ position: <https://airminded.org/2009/12/16/air-men-of-the-times/> [accessed 14 December 2018].

⁷⁸ Groves, p. 101.

Rothermere and his competitor and close friend, Beaverbrook, were to dominate the post-war years as the leading press barons after Northcliffe's death. Unsurprisingly, Rothermere was zealous in his criticism of the RAF. In 1923 he wrote a characteristically robust article, in the *Daily Mail*, in support of the Navy. He began and ended the article by emphasising his credentials as the first Secretary of State for Air, and went on to 'advocate the ultimate complete disappearance of the R.A.F. as a separate unit' as the alternative was 'an Air Force ultimately carrying a great number of costly senior officers in sham jobs'.⁷⁹ The article clearly touched a nerve, as Trenchard and Brabazon corresponded about it in the mid-1930s, long after they had both left the Air Ministry.⁸⁰ Beaverbrook was also a public critic of Trenchard. This was probably influenced by his closeness to Rothermere, his relationship with Bonar Law, and his friendship with Sykes (Bonar Law's son-in-law).⁸¹ Sykes, who later sat on the Board of the *Daily Express*, recalled 'he [Beaverbrook] has always shown great kindness to me'.⁸² The contrast with Beaverbrook's relationship with Trenchard could not have been starker. One of Trenchard's stalwart staff officers, John Slessor, disclosed his view of Beaverbrook's treatment of Trenchard: 'The headline of a derogatory article on Trenchard in (I need hardly say) a Beaverbrook newspaper asks: "Was this man a hero or a prima donna?".'⁸³ Trenchard's biographer revealed in a letter to Sir Arthur Harris that the dislike was mutual and also that Beaverbrook had attempted to influence the posthumous biography: 'Once, when I was working on the biography of Trenchard, Beaverbrook tried to buy my soul for his equivalent of Judas's thirty pieces of silver: it wasn't for sale that day, alas for his hopes.'⁸⁴ It would appear that Beaverbrook, like Rothermere, focused his ire primarily on CAS's part of the Ministry, rather than the civil side, which had, of course, been led by Sykes in the early post-war years. Beaverbrook kept a file on Trenchard, which

⁷⁹ 'The Eyes of the Fleet', *Daily Mail*, 30 July 1923, p. 7.

⁸⁰ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC 71/3 Box 11, letter from Brabazon to Trenchard, 13 March 1935.

⁸¹ Beaverbrook himself recounted that he had consulted Rothermere before buying the *Daily Express* and Rothermere advised him to do so, William Maxwell Aitken Beaverbrook, *Politicians and the Press* (London: Hutchinson, 1927), p. 11.

⁸² Sykes, *From Many Angles*, p. 322.

⁸³ Slessor, *These Remain*, p. 78.

⁸⁴ CUL, Personal Papers of Andrew Boyle, 9429/2C/4, letter from Boyle to Harris, 22 July 1979.

included contributions from journalists working for him and prominent political personalities, none of them complimentary about the airman.⁸⁵

The Civil and the Military

Although the RAF, as argued in Chapter One, was able to maximise opportunity from adversity in the early post-war years, the early alienation of Rothermere and Beaverbrook was a significant setback. No more propitiously, the feud between Trenchard and Sykes that played out during the dying embers of the Great War led to the two enemies working under the same roof in 1919. Importantly, however, Sykes's plan to separate the Ministry into civil and military departments had been carried through and the civil department provided an obvious location for press activities. The older services were coy around publicity during the early post-war period and, as will be discussed further in the next chapter, the RAF were soon staging public pageants while the Navy avoided such parades for several years. Civil aviation, and general promotion of aviation, provided a route into the popular press for the Air Ministry, while the RAF under Hoare and Trenchard was to devise more creative routes to reach out to the public. The RAF's confidence in seeking publicity, under and alongside the banner of civil aviation, is illustrated by the examples of support to civil powers and sporting achievements.

The ambiguity between military and civil aviation was aided by the promotion of aviators, serving, veteran, and civilian, as pioneering adventurers by the press. While the heroic masculinity of pre-war imperial fiction and history had been challenged by the images and realities of years of trench warfare and wounded and shell-shocked soldiers, the press, as Bingham argued, was still capable of 'venerating manly sportsmen and heroic explorers'.⁸⁶ With RAF airmen participating in sporting aviation challenges, and pageants at Hendon where demonstrations of air power were corralled as a form of leisure entertainment, the lines were sufficiently blurred for the RAF to benefit positively from press fascination with flying and pilots, whatever their provenance. T. E.

⁸⁵ PA, Personal Papers of Lord Beaverbrook, BBK/D/500, 'Trenchard Papers'.

⁸⁶ Adrian Bingham, p. 7.

Lawrence's fame also embodied the way that the dichotomy between military and civil could be traversed. Though his Arabian associations were the reason for his celebrity, his work in the RAF became part of the narrative, blending his identity in the minds of the public. Sykes, incidentally, was not altogether won over by him, later writing: 'while his sincerity was never in question, there was a good deal of the *poseur* about Lawrence'.⁸⁷ Regarding aviation challenges, Dermot Boyle's memoir recounted his participation (then a junior officer) with two RAF colleagues in an air race from Cambridge airfield at the request of the organisers, which also demonstrated the awareness amongst RAF airmen of a delicate balance in promoting the RAF alongside civil aviation. The airmen agreed before the race: 'it would be a poor show for us professionals to win the race, which was really intended for a number of private amateur pilots'. However, they outstripped the competition and had to complete the race flying as slowly as aerodynamically possible, 'pray[ing] that at least one of our civilian competitors would pass us before the winning post'. The outcome was that 'two aircraft did pass us just before the post, but one of us, I forget which, rather disgracefully won the third prize'.⁸⁸

Participation in sporting activities required an understanding of what constituted 'successful' public engagement, which Boyle clearly possessed. As the Controller of Information on the civilian side of the Air Ministry had reassured Sykes, 'achievements of a "demonstration" nature' carried out by the RAF were issued to the Press 'in order to advertise British efforts but not to advertise the R.A.F.'⁸⁹ The activities of Boyle and his colleagues, and of the RAF pilots challenging somewhat more competitively in other races and prizes, gained reflected glory for the junior service, thus identifying the Air Force with glamour, technological advancement, and excitement, and escaping the long shadow of the very recent war. Reports from *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* in June 1919 on the first air race since the war demonstrate again the insinuation of the junior service into the public mind via civil aviation. On this occasion there was no attempt to temper competitive spirit. *The Times* welcomed the Aerial

⁸⁷ Sykes, *From Many Angles*, p. 249.

⁸⁸ Dermot Boyle, *My Life: An Autobiography* (Fairford: Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund, 1990), p. 44.

⁸⁹ TNA, AIR 2/151, minute from Swinton to Sykes, 29 July 1920.

Derby on 21 June 1919 for the *Daily Mail* Gold Cup and 'Shell' prizes as the first 'serious civil flying' of the post-war era by 'airmen of reputation'.⁹⁰ Entrants were pictured on the back page of the *Daily Mail* (see Figure 5.2) surrounding an illustration of the course. Despite the race being a civil aviation event, only three entrants (including the favourite, Harry Hawker) were listed without military rank, lending a distinctly 'service' flavour to the commentary. The 190-mile race from Hendon around the outer London suburbs was watched by 'thousands of people' and Queen Alexandra presented the winning cup alongside Sykes who also presented the 'Shell' trophies as CGCA.⁹¹ The winner was Captain Gerald W. Gathergood AFC, a former RFC and serving RAF officer. The *Daily Mail* published Captain Gathergood's story 'How I won' on 23 June. Although an oil leak meant that he was 'partly blinded', he could see enough both to compete and appreciate the scale of the crowds amassed to watch the race: 'The Downs were black with people and I could see them waving, but by the time [*sic*] I had both hands full – one on the control lever and the other constantly wiping the oil from my goggles.'⁹² Here was a decorated airman given prominent copy on page three of Monday's *Daily Mail*, with exciting, uplifting news. Although the RAF was not supposed to 'advertise' and its Chief's relationship with the press barons was abysmal, aviation and the interweaving of the military with the civilian resulted in positive press for an RAF officer in a newspaper part-owned by Rothermere.

⁹⁰ Reproduced in Wittreich, p. 270.

⁹¹ 'The Aerial Derby', *The Times*, 23 June 1919, p. 14.

⁹² Reproduced in Wittreich, p. 277.

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TO-DAY'S AIR DERBY: COURSE AND COMPETITORS.

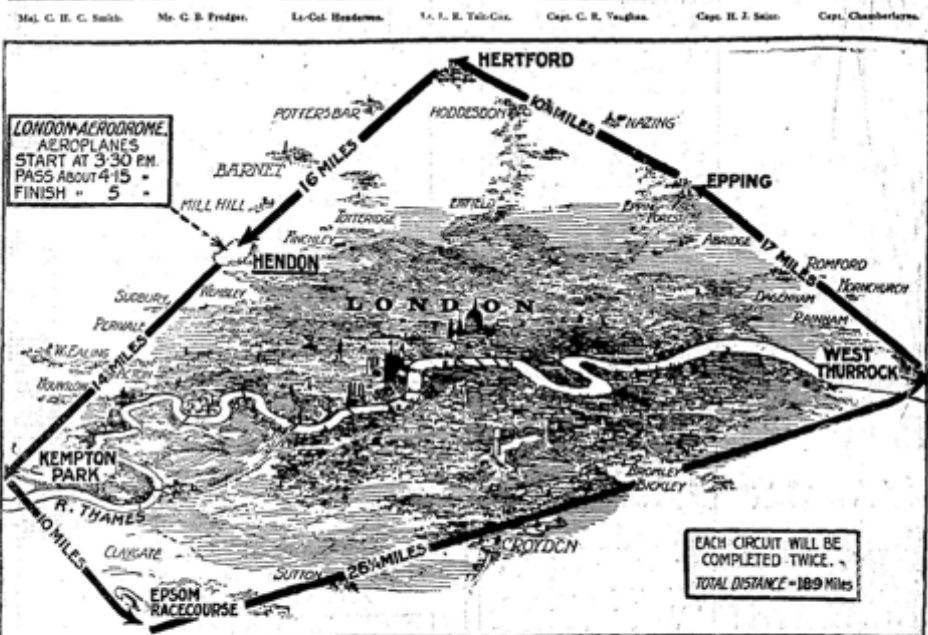


Figure 5.2 Daily Mail, Back Page, 21 June 1919.⁹³

The Air Ministry was also to play a specific 'military aid to the civil powers' role, which was both newsworthy and involved the RAF in delivering press and propaganda, during strikes in 1919 and 1926. Here the civil-military interface was explicit and also important in giving the RAF a higher profile and direct interaction with the public. The RAF was first deployed in support of the

⁹³ Daily Mail, 21 June 1919.

government within Britain during the rail strike of September 1919, highlighting the flexibility that air power could bring to logistical problems. RAF aircraft were employed to transport government communications, mail, and newspapers.⁹⁴ The value of maintaining these services was fully recognised by the government:

in a crisis [...] failure in the postal services and the non-delivery of newspapers will do more to unsettle the public and to give credit to fantastic rumours than almost any conceivable disaster, conversely ability to maintain these services will do much to hold public confidence and to strengthen the hand of the government.⁹⁵

Here, the RAF operated alongside its civilian counterparts. The Air Ministry prioritised the use of RAF aircraft for priority communications, as well as delivery of propaganda, and supported their work with civil aircraft.⁹⁶ For example, *The Times* reported on 4 October 1919:

Fifty R.A.F. aeroplanes were employed on the distribution of mails yesterday. The Paris mail was also carried. Civil Aviation machines carried mails between London and Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle, and Glasgow; also to Brussels for Belgium, Norway, Sweden and Denmark.⁹⁷

A report written by the US Embassy in London highlighted that the relative efforts of military and civilian aircraft were heavily weighted towards the RAF. During interviews with representatives from the civil and military sections at the Air Ministry, the civil side reported that it took over and operated eight civil aircraft during the strike, whereas the RAF used approximately 100 of its aircraft

⁹⁴ Joshua Edgcombe, 'The 1919 Railway Strike: The Government's Response' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Hertfordshire, 2017), p. 62.

⁹⁵ TNA, AVIA 2/1747, 'Memorandum on the use of Civil Aircraft During the 1919 Railway Strike', 9 October 1919.

⁹⁶ '3 tons of government propaganda was distributed by [service] air. Propaganda mentioned was a system for informing the public as to the issues of the strike.' NACP, RG 165, MIDC 1917-41, 2083-43-125, 2083-75, 'Utilization of Air Service during period of Railway Strike in England', 28 October 1919.

⁹⁷ *The Times*, 4 October 1919, p. 9.

daily and 'approximately 1,000 pilots were called into service during the strike'.⁹⁸ The strike was short-lived and presaged the more significant role that the RAF played in the 1926 General Strike. There is no evidence of hesitation from the Air Ministry in supporting the government in the face of working-class protest.

During the 1926 strike, Churchill oversaw the production of a government newspaper, the *British Gazette*. Trenchard, always keen to promote the peacetime uses of the RAF, seized on the opportunity to provide the means for the distribution of the *British Gazette*, along with mail, as a way of connecting with the public. Since many national newspapers had ceased printing, the government's worries, echoed above, about the dangers of an uninformed public applied all the more in 1926. The Secretary of State for Air, Hoare, accompanied Churchill when he went to take over the staff and machinery of the *Morning Post* in order to produce his controversial government paper. Hoare mobilised the RAF in support of its distribution and later recalled:

Public confidence could not be shaken so long as the lines of communication were kept open, and the sight of aeroplanes landing and taking off, morning and evening, showed that though the railways were practically at a standstill, the King's Writ ran unchallenged over the highways of the air.⁹⁹

Dermot Boyle described the public impact of the RAF's role delivering the *Gazette*: '[it] brought the work of the air force right in amongst the public and did an enormous amount of good' for the service.¹⁰⁰ The RAF had twice then supported the government's communication and dissemination of information, and of news more generally, during national strikes. Edgerton has interpreted the aircraft, in the case of this strike, as taking sides in class war, pitted against the older technologies of rail and print.¹⁰¹ However, for the Air Ministry's

⁹⁸ NACP, RG 165, MIDC 1917-41, 2083-43-125, 2083-75, 'Utilization of Air Service during period of Railway Strike in England', 28 October 1919.

⁹⁹ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p. 212.

¹⁰⁰ 'Lord Trenchard', speech by Sir Dermot Boyle, 20 February 1958, <https://www.aerosociety.com/news/audio-classic-lecture-series-lord-trenchard-by-sir-dermot-boyle/> [accessed 25 October 2018].

¹⁰¹ Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*, p. 75.

leadership there was a different dynamic at play. Their motivation appeared to be practical rather than ideological: an opportunity for self-promotion through the visibility of these aircraft delivering mail, news, and government literature. Like skywriting, the medium was also the message, which provided a useful direct route to the public.

At the top of the Air Ministry, the civilian political leadership also sought to promote the RAF through personal relationships with the press proprietors, once again using the civil to promote the service. Though Beaverbrook disliked Trenchard, he was close to the most dominant Secretary of State for Air in the 1920s, Hoare. Ahead of Hoare's appointment at the Air Ministry, as earlier mentioned, they had played tennis 'once or twice a week' at Beaverbrook's Vineyard residence in Fulham.¹⁰² A biographer of Hoare identified a gap in constant correspondence between them from September 1922 to May 1923 (Hoare became Secretary of State at the Air Ministry in November 1922) when 'they clearly saw each other so constantly that letters became superfluous'.¹⁰³ Their relationship remained close into Hoare's third tenure as Secretary of State for Air in the second half of the 1920s. After a negative article about the RAF in the *Daily Express*, Beaverbrook wrote to apologise saying: 'I am very sorry that such a violent attack on the Air Force and Air Ministry appeared in the "Daily Express" today. I do not approve the article [*sic*] and I shall tell Blumenfeld so this morning and Baxter the same this afternoon.'¹⁰⁴ The front page splash, 'Another Royal Air Force Tragedy', highlighted the eighty-second Air Force fatality of the year and featured criticism of 'high command' and the burden of administrative regulation that distracted squadron commanders from their primary duties. It called for an inquiry into 'the entire administration of the Royal Air Force [...] that is fearless, either of departments or personalities'.¹⁰⁵ The apology was obviously accepted as, only two months later, Hoare wrote to Beaverbrook's *Daily Express* editor about giving interviews during a visit to Paris, saying that he would only speak to 'Max's papers': 'Much to the

¹⁰² Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p. 17.

¹⁰³ Cross, p. 69.

¹⁰⁴ CUL, Personal Papers of Viscount Templewood, Part V 2(68), letter from Beaverbrook to Hoare, 8 December 1926.

¹⁰⁵ *Daily Express*, 8 December 1926, p. 1.

annoyance of other reporters I gave two long interviews to representatives of the Evening Standard and I told my staff that I did it because we [Hoare and Beaverbrook] were particular friends.¹⁰⁶

Hoare's predecessor, Guest, fell out with Beaverbrook when the press man supported Guest's opponent in the 1922 general election who ousted him from his East Dorset seat. However, prior to this he had been, at least according to Beaverbrook, an 'intimate friend'.¹⁰⁷ Hoare, on returning to the Air Ministry in 1924, appointed Sassoon, another friend of Beaverbrook (and formerly a confidante of Northcliffe), as his Under Secretary. Beaverbrook said of Sassoon that he 'gathered the aged, the beautiful, the clever and over all the powerful at his dining room' and no doubt the press baron considered himself as one of the most powerful to be included.¹⁰⁸ A year later, Hoare also brought Geoffrey Butler onto his team as his Parliamentary Private Secretary. During the latter stages of the First World War, Butler had acted as press adviser to the British War Mission in the United States and stayed there after the war as director of the British Bureau of Information until 1919. This had given him extensive exposure to Northcliffe and Beaverbrook, as well as the skills to exert influence in creative ways, often behind the scenes.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

The formidable trio of Northcliffe, Rothermere, and Beaverbrook dominated the relationship between politicians and the press before, during, and after the creation of the RAF. Though their power might feel exaggerated with hindsight (Beaverbrook's own musings are a case in point), as Bingham assessed 'few contemporaries thought so'.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, the perceptions of senior politicians of the power of the press are evidenced by their courting of the

¹⁰⁶ PA, Personal Papers of R. D. Blumenfeld, BLU/1/20/TEM.9, letter from Hoare to Blumenfeld, 24 February 1927.

¹⁰⁷ William Maxwell Aitken Beaverbrook, p. 57.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Stansky, p. 32.

¹⁰⁹ Stephen Parkinson, 'Sir Geoffrey Butler and The Tory Tradition', *Conservative History Journal*, 2.2 (2014), 18–26 (pp. 20–21).

¹¹⁰ Beaverbrook never underestimated himself, see 1st Baron Beaverbrook; see also Adrian Bingham, p. 4.

proprietors. The press barons managed artfully to be both within and without, members and critics of the establishment. Sometimes they held official roles (and in Rothermere and Beaverbrook's case took an active part in parliamentary politics later in the 1920s) and at other times they portrayed themselves as independent bastions of democracy, challenging politicians and the government from outside. Their papers were popular and populist: the press barons presented themselves as being on the side of the people who bought and read them. Though they canvassed for and accepted peerages for themselves, they saw themselves as apart from British aristocracy. Beaverbrook claimed: 'Certainly I had no respect for the aristocracy and no lingering admiration for the doings of the squire and his family'; Northcliffe, in particular, demonstrated a distrust of public school backgrounds.¹¹¹

In relation to the RAF, their self-proscribed independence, along with their interest in the future of aviation, might have predisposed them to the independent air service and to the potential of air power. However, their varied experiences and differing relationships with senior leaders at the Air Ministry complicated that picture. Northcliffe's combative but pro-aviation position was superseded, in Rothermere and Beaverbrook, by a critical focus on the uniformed side of the Air Ministry and on its senior leadership. Their personal animosity towards Trenchard and their relationships with Sykes and Groves further weaponised their attacks. However, the political leadership of the Ministry, in the form of successive Secretaries and Under Secretaries of State, benefited from significantly more friendly relationships. Hoare and his colleagues had a politician's understanding of the developing relationship between government, the electorate, and the popular press. Trenchard's problems with the press were partly ameliorated by his political masters; in addition, together they pursued increasingly more imaginative ways, as will be examined in the next chapter, to reach the public.

Despite Trenchard's fractious relationship with the media, in the early 1920s the RAF benefited from cross-pollination with civil aviation in the same

¹¹¹ 1st Baron Beaverbrook, p. 43. Paul Ferris, pp. 25–26.

department, with continued press interest in the feats and sporting achievements associated with aviation, and with a civilian-led press department designed to publicise aviation and air-mindedness. Sykes's position as CGCA until 1922 probably also helped, given his good relationship with Beaverbrook, but not afterwards. During the period, newspapers had reached the height of their popularity, before they were seriously challenged by radio and then television. At the same time, the era of clientelist politics had given way to a more robust and combative relationship between the press and politicians. As Beaverbrook himself wrote in 1927:

The old opinion was that the newspaper man truckled to the statesman and supported his policies humbly in return for scraps of information. The new opinion is that the two powers, being much more nearly equal, are frequently in conflict.¹¹²

The Air Ministry, and its politicians, recognised that a modern approach, more akin to public relations, was required. Positive coverage and a favourable public opinion of the RAF, and the promotion of air-mindedness, was a cause that Hoare led from the very top of the Air Ministry. His plan now was to reach beyond press *communiqués* and find ways to propagate this message.

Northcliffe's voracious promotion of flying prizes before 1914 demonstrated his belief that there was a public appetite for aviation and the Air Ministry was keen to capitalise on that market as well. The early history of the relationship between the press and the RAF has highlighted again that the young Air Force was agile and imaginative enough to capitalise on ambiguity and immaturity. While the Admiralty had distanced itself from 'publicity' because of its 'suspicious flavour', the Air Ministry was able to argue that it needed to pursue a public-facing agenda because aviation was still in its infancy. As the only service department to incorporate a civil arm, it was able to promote aviation in a way that benefited the RAF. The lines between military and civil achievements in aviation were often blurred, as illustrated by examples such as

¹¹² William Maxwell Aitken Beaverbrook, p. 9.

the strikes in 1919 and 1926. Here the RAF provided assistance to the government, within the borders of the United Kingdom, and very visibly supported communications to the civilian public. The motivation was both self-promotion and self-preservation for the Air Force. The achievements of RAF aircrew in aviation feats, flying further, longer, and faster, echoed the achievements of their civilian counterparts, and both were celebrated in similar tones. This permeability between public perceptions of aviation generally, and of RAF aircrew and aircraft, was matched by the combined civil and military nature of the Air Ministry and its press practices.

The dissonance that the ill-feeling between Trenchard and Rothermere created, and its legacy in their poor relationship into the 1920s, was ameliorated by the same elements that had created the initial disagreements. The clash between the approaches of armed forces novice and civilian, Rothermere, and that of battle-hardened soldier and Haig acolyte, Trenchard, had been at the heart of their problems. However, the juxtaposition of civil and military sections within the Air Ministry also provided part of the solution, as did the more politically shrewd civilian leadership of the department post-war by its ministers. Civil and military combined in a unique manner in the Air Ministry, and from that the RAF benefited. By the mid-1920s, the alignment of Hoare, Sassoon, and Butler at the Air Ministry introduced a fresh burst of creativity in relation to promoting the RAF. The next chapter will consider in more detail the world of lobbying, persuasion, and influence. It will look in detail at the Hoare–Trenchard strategic plan for influence, which constituted a more structured and organised public relations campaign, and the partnership of Secretary of State and CAS at the Air Ministry. The external-facing work to promote air-mindedness more broadly within society will be analysed to consider further how the RAF reached *around* the press to deliver its message.

CHAPTER SIX — REACHING BEYOND THE PRESS: THE STRATEGIC PLAN FOR INFLUENCE

On 9 February 1921, Trenchard chose to circumvent his Secretary of State for War and Air, Churchill, and wrote directly to the Leader of the Conservative Party and the Leader of the House of Commons, Bonar Law, setting out his argument that the Air Ministry should have a Secretary of State devoted to the Air Ministry alone. He acknowledged the circumvention: ‘you will perhaps think, and think rightly, that I have no business to approach you otherwise than through my Secretary of State’. The letter artfully included reference to the fact that he had ‘spoken to Sykes, and he, though perhaps not agreeing with the whole of the paper, is thoroughly in agreement with the necessity of having a separate Secretaryship of State for Air, which he regards as very necessary indeed’.¹ Given Trenchard’s fractious relationship with Sykes, and Sykes’s position both as CGCA within the Air Ministry and son-in-law of Bonar Law, the reference to Sykes seemed designed to reassure Bonar Law that Trenchard meant no mischief with regard to his adversary. Bonar Law replied to Trenchard on 17 February, referring to the change in Churchill’s position as he had become Secretary of State for the Colonies and Air on 14 February, writing: ‘You will have seen, and I hope approve, of the temporary arrangement which we have made but we have come to no decision as to the future.’²

Six weeks later Bonar Law withdrew from politics due to ill-health and Guest was then appointed as Secretary of State for Air alone. However, eighteen months later, Bonar Law returned to the heart of parliamentary and party politics as both Prime Minister and (again) Leader of the Conservative Party and his decision to replace Guest with Hoare was arguably one of the most important ministerial appointments in the RAF’s inter-war history. Hoare formed a formidable pairing with Trenchard at the Air Ministry, one which would reach beyond engaging with the press to broader efforts at public relations, in a way far advanced from the practices of the Admiralty and the War Office, to

¹ PA, Personal Papers of Bonar Law, 100/2/12, letter from Trenchard to Bonar Law, 9 February 1921.

² PA, Personal Papers of Bonar Law, 101/5/49, letter from Bonar Law to Trenchard, 17 February 1921.

promote their cause. When Bonar Law stood down as Prime Minister in May 1923 with terminal cancer, it was his successor, Baldwin, who gave Hoare a seat in Cabinet, a first for a Secretary of State for Air alone. After the short-lived Labour Government of 1924, Hoare returned to the Air Ministry again as Secretary of State for Air that November. Trenchard and Hoare served together in the Air Ministry until 1929 and this chapter focuses primarily on their approach to elevating the RAF's status during their shared tenures.

As has been discussed, in the early 1920s, the Air Ministry had prioritised building the foundations of the RAF, fighting attacks on its independence, and, as one commentator recalled, Trenchard 'was concentrating all the efforts of his young and unseasoned organisation on building up its own prestige, individuality, and tradition'.³ Chapter Eight will look in more detail at the inter-service battles that took place during the period. Once those attacks had subsided somewhat, the next organisational priority was promoting the independent Air Force outside of Whitehall, reaching beyond the press. Hoare summarised the aims of his and Trenchard's explicit plan to improve the standing and extend the influence of the RAF amongst the public:

our next objective was to spread the roots of the service more deeply and widely in the national life. Like a young tree, the new plant needed space for its roots if it was to become wind-firm. As things were, it looked puny and neglected beside the forest oaks of the older services.⁴

He characterised their agreement, that they needed to establish the RAF more firmly in the public consciousness, as 'our carefully planned advance' and thus the strategic plan for influence was born.⁵

This chapter builds on the last engaging with the concepts of public opinion and public relations. As discussed in Chapter Three, a central concept in the political and cultural argument for the RAF was that of air-mindedness. In

³ CUL, Personal Papers of Andrew Boyle, Add. 9429/1B/343 (ii), 'The Navy and Air Force Controversy', paper sent to Major J. G. Lockhart, 13 April 1955.

⁴ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, pp. 181–82.

⁵ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p. 182.

part, the term was intended to differentiate the airman's thinking from his soldier and sailor counterparts and delineate separate ideational and spatial territories for those who thought and operated in three dimensions. At the same time, the senior leadership of the Air Ministry also talked about the importance of increasing air-mindedness in the general public: it was a concept for both the air expert and the layperson. The relevance, then, of public opinion becomes central to understanding the motivation behind the latter goal. Daniel Hucker has attempted to develop a methodology with which to study public opinion (in the context of international history). Given the difficulty for historians of recreating public opinion at the time under scrutiny, he argued for approaching the subject through the actions and perceptions of policy-makers.⁶ The concerted efforts of Trenchard and his Secretaries of State, in particular Hoare and Thomson, to promote air-mindedness amongst the public, not just in Whitehall, demonstrates that they perceived that the British people were not generally conversant with air power or the arguments for an independent air force. Hucker's argument supports the view that if the leading politicians in the Air Ministry felt the need to publicise their purpose and potential, and raise public awareness of the air environment, they must have perceived a lack in that area: 'After all, decision-makers' attempts to manipulate opinion can reveal much about their perception of it in the first place.'⁷

However, Bernard Porter's categorisation of the interaction of propaganda with public opinion is less tautological and provides a more practical positioning of the intentions of the leaders of the Air Ministry. Fundamentally, the air environment was novel to much of the population, and the aim of the strategic plan of Hoare and Trenchard was to embed the RAF as an institution of the establishment and simultaneously reach out to the public. Arguably the aim of increasing public awareness was to overcome the perception of the RAF as an outsider thus giving it a parity of status with the older services in the eyes of the public. Porter categorised different ways in which (imperial) propaganda aroused public opinion including enthusiasm,

⁶ Daniel Hucker, 'International History and the Study of Public Opinion: Towards Methodological Clarity', *The International History Review*, 34. 4 (2012), 775–94 (p. 781).

⁷ Hucker, p. 788.

hostility, indifference, and pride. His fifth category was 'passive acceptance of it [empire], as a "fact of life"; a sixth was acceptance of it as a kind of *imagined* identity, or myth'.⁸ The architects of the strategic plan for RAF influence would have settled for, in fact were aiming for, the fifth, since that passive acceptance would also confer permanence in the public consciousness, while the sixth perhaps encapsulates attempts to create an imaginative resonance around the alternative environment of the 'air'.

This plan for influence was about entrenching the junior service within the establishment and creating a sense of air-mindedness amongst the British people. There is an argument to be made about the RAF's relationship with the British public related to the timing of its creation. The development of 'new techniques and instruments of propaganda' during the war, Steiner has argued, led directly to the post-war requirement for politicians to continue to respond to 'popular pressure'; and popular pressure had partly created the Air Force.⁹ At the same time the general public's relationship with politics was changing, given expanding enfranchisement and substantial growth in mass circulation newspapers. The creation of the RAF represented a microcosm of the post-war emphasis on the concept of popular sovereignty embodied by Wilsonianism, and by Lloyd George in calling for a Europe based on 'government with the consent of the governed'.¹⁰ The new and independent RAF had access to a cultural shorthand reflecting modernity and the changing nature of national sovereignty. The Army and Navy were having to adapt their long-established cultures to a new era, whereas the RAF was a product of it.

This chapter considers the conduct of public relations in the 1920s, analysing the Air Ministry's attempts to enhance the reputation of the RAF, including the social standing of the service. The intention was also to expand the RAF's footprint, at relatively low cost, into other communities across the country, with the development of the RAF Auxiliary Air Force (AAF), Reserves, University Air Squadrons (UASs), and private flying clubs. The Air Ministry's

⁸ Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 261.

⁹ Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, pp. 7–8.

¹⁰ Quoted in Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, p. 8.

dual civil–military responsibilities allowed the RAF to extend its reputation for operating in far-flung parts of the British Empire alongside civil operations, once again demonstrating how lines were blurred in the promotion of aviation. These messages about flying, the RAF brand, and air activities at home and in the empire were brought together at the increasingly popular air displays at Hendon which publicised the RAF to thousands of members of the public every year. Hoare’s efforts to secure the attendance of the royal family at the air pageants reflect his view that the first objective of the plan for influence was Buckingham Palace and King George V:

we had to soften the King’s very natural prejudices against a new service that questioned many of the beliefs of the older services, and that in particular threatened the established doctrine of naval supremacy in the system of British defence.¹¹

The first Hendon display, in July 1920, was attended by Prince Henry, Duke of Gloucester, and in 1923 King George V attended for the first time at Hoare’s and Trenchard’s requests.¹² The attentions of the royal family, which thread through the RAF’s narrative of the period, deserve specific attention and will form a separate case study in Chapter Seven.

The RAF in Society

Hoare recognised that the RAF had a number of problems with its reputation, including the lack of standing that its officers had relative to their peers in the other services. Hoare identified the problem as RAF officers being ‘seldom seen in what was known in London as “Society”’. This social isolation was bad both for the service and the country.¹³ Many army and navy officers regarded the Air Force as socially inferior, an attitude exemplified by an artillery lieutenant who wrote in June 1922:

¹¹ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p. 182.

¹² King George V recalled this first attendance in his private diary, RA GV/PRIV/GVD/1923–1925 (2 volumes), King George V diary entry, 30 June 1923.

¹³ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p. 186.

Nobody appreciates the [hoi polloi] more than I do; I love them when they are in the right place, but I can't say I love them when they are planted down alongside me on the same footing [...] Dad, where on earth do the RAF get their officers from?¹⁴

The US Embassy in London investigated the reception of invitations (in 1919) to naval officers from Osborne and Dartmouth to transfer to the RAF. The records demonstrate similar views from the senior service. The US Military Attaché's view was that the scheme would benefit the RAF as officers of a naval upbringing would give the air service 'a fillip up for social and disciplinary purposes', while one Royal Navy sub lieutenant interviewed for the report listed 'Inferiority of the Air Force with regard to fellow Officers in the Navy' as a disadvantage of transferring to the RAF.¹⁵

The Army and the Navy had had centuries to establish firm links with the ruling classes who dominated political and social life. Hoare, as he did in other projects, secured junior ministers in the Air Ministry who had the contacts and social advantages needed. He chose as his Under Secretary of State first the Duke of Sutherland and then, on returning to the Ministry in 1924, Sassoon. Both had wealth and grand properties which were used to introduce RAF officers to upper class life. As highlighted in Chapter Four, Sassoon was enormously wealthy; he owned Trent Park, in London, which had its own golf course, and Port Lympne in Kent (where officers could stay in purpose-built bachelors' quarters), as well as a Park Lane mansion, an art collection, a light aeroplane, and a Rolls Royce car, and he worked 'unpaid out of interest and pleasure'.¹⁶ He invested his efforts, with Hoare's encouragement, into the developing officer class of the RAF. His parties were attended both by 'a smattering of air force officers' and the royal dukes, and Stanley Jackson described RAF officers as being 'a little overawed' on encountering Churchill and the Prince of Wales at Port Lympne.¹⁷ Sassoon also promoted the RAF to

¹⁴ Quoted in Omissi, 'The Hendon Air Pageant, 1920–37', in MacKenzie, *Popular Imperialism and the Military*, p. 200.

¹⁵ NACP, RG 165, MIDC 1917–41, 2083-43–125, 2083-125, 'Opportunities for Air-Service Training for Osborne and Dartmouth Officers', 8 December 1919.

¹⁶ Pirie, p. 73; Stansky, p. 117.

¹⁷ Stanley Jackson, p. 198; Stansky, p. 117.

the top public schools, a project fully supported by Trenchard who had been attempting to engage with their headmasters in order to 'get on an even footing' with the other services.¹⁸ Though the Navy often took future officers at a young age to educate them as teenage cadets, the Army's top regiments recruited heavily from the most prestigious schools.

The RAF's attempts during the 1920s to improve the status of the service were probably assisted by the outwardly homogeneous nature of its officer class. The Army's regimental system was perceived as hierarchical with the Cavalry preeminent and unfashionable regiments like the Royal Army Service Corps further down the pecking order.¹⁹ The Navy's officer corps was split into different branches and during the 1920s suffered a number of revisions to its branch structure including, in 1926, relegating the engineering branch from its supposed equality of status with deck officers.²⁰ In contrast, almost all RAF officers joined as aircrew until the engineering branch was created in the 1930s, which simplified the challenge of improving their status as a group.²¹

The wives of Trenchard and Hoare also played their part in introducing officers to a more refined social life. Lady Hoare hosted dinner and garden parties at the Hoares' London home where RAF officers mingled with members of the aristocracy and were drawn out of the isolation that worried her husband so much.²² Lady Maud Hoare, the daughter of the sixth Earl Beauchamp, was highly motivated in support of her husband's career and her social connections and networks surpassed Hoare's.²³ He described her as possessing 'hereditary training for social life'.²⁴ Boyle quotes Trenchard saying to his wife when invitations to three separate and simultaneous functions were delivered by post:

¹⁸ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/291, letter from Trenchard to Hugh Cecil, 8 January 1923.

¹⁹ French, *Raising Churchill's Army*, p. 51.

²⁰ HL Debate (1926) Fifth Series, Vol. 64, Col. 1064, 14 July 1926.

²¹ There were a few specialist branches created in the RAF, such as legal and medical, but the vast majority of officers trained as pilots.

²² See, for example, correspondence from Hoare to the Duke of York about a garden party in April 1923, which the Duke and Duchess of York eventually attended on 29 June 1923, RA ADYH/MAIN/8, 2 April 1923 and 10 May 1923.

²³ Cross, p. 10.

²⁴ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p. 186.

'It's a good sign. They're beginning to chase us socially now.'²⁵ The aspiration to assimilate RAF officers into these circles raises the question, echoing Huntington's work on how militaries reflect their broader societies (as opposed to high society), whether there was any consideration of the need to mirror society and whether this created a tension between values of elitism and accessibility. As Stephen Rosen has argued, Huntington's work, well supported by others, has demonstrated 'that societies are uncomfortable with military organizations whose structures do not reflect the dominant characteristics of their societies'.²⁶ He also argued that technical services like the RAF, and those which are isolated from society by deployment as the RAF was with imperial operations, are likely to be more distinct from society as a whole. There was an ambivalence to the RAF's projection of itself as providing opportunities for social mobility through the apprentice programme (as seen in Chapter Two) with the need, in Hoare's view, to improve the social standing of RAF officers within the establishment. In part, the coexistence of these projects helps explain the rigid demarcation between officers and their non-commissioned colleagues, whether aircrew or other trades, which had long been entrenched in RAF ethos by the Second World War, as Francis has discussed.²⁷

Yet the RAF, with its unique narrative of the pilot as leader, adventurer, and member of an elite corpus, and its embrace of modernity, had the scope to be both distinct from and simultaneously attractive to society. Francis describes this useful ambivalence:

The flyer could be imagined as a classless meritocrat, a tribune of the people's war, or he could be envisaged as an anti-democratic superman, rendered omnipotent by his ability to literally ascend above the rest of

²⁵ Andrew Boyle, p. 517.

²⁶ Stephen Peter Rosen, 'Military Effectiveness: Why Society Matters', *International Security*, 19.4 (1995), 5–31 (p. 17); Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil–Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).

²⁷ Francis, pp. 50–51.

humanity. He could be an emblem of scientific modernity or a reincarnation of the chivalric heroes of a medieval past.²⁸

This ambivalence between tradition and modernity mirrored the ambivalence in the Air Ministry between military and civil aviation. Its leaders were comfortable with these contradictions, manipulating them at their convenience. Eksteins's analysis of Charles Lindbergh, the American aviator and US Army Air Corps Reservist who shot to fame with his solo non-stop transatlantic flight in 1927, echoed this inherent ability of flying and air power to embrace ambiguity and contradiction. Eksteins argued that Lindbergh appealed to a world 'in the throes of decline' of values and decorum, but also to a world emerging, one of modernity.²⁹ In a sense, echoing Steiner's concept of the 1929–33 years as representing the 'hinge' between a decade of reconstruction and one of disintegration, the RAF was able to maximise its use of the changing post-war mood in the decade of reconstruction to appeal as both conservative and progressive.³⁰ The RAF fitted the modern *zeitgeist*, while promoting and improving the social standing of its officers in accordance with aristocratic constructs of class and high society.

The Strategic Plan for Influence

Beyond the London-centric priorities of embedding the RAF into the upper echelons of society, the strategic plan for influence included several initiatives designed to reach out beyond the capital and build relationships with external organisations and the general public. Hoare turned his attention next to universities, once more using political appointments to the Ministry to obtain maximum influence, appointing Sir Geoffrey Butler as his Parliamentary Private Secretary in 1924. Butler was one of two MPs for Cambridge University, an intellectual with an extensive academic network and, as described in Chapter Five, a flair for private influence.³¹ Hoare, with Butler, laid the groundwork for the

²⁸ Of course the RAF was a class-based organisation but Francis captures a more broad-brush impression of the aviator. Francis, p. 13.

²⁹ Eksteins, p. 250.

³⁰ Steiner, *The Lights That Failed*, p. 635.

³¹ Parkinson, p. 21.

establishment of a UAS in a visit to Cambridge, meeting with the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Seward, and President of the Board of Military Studies, Professor Inglis. The first two objectives of the formation of a UAS at Cambridge had been laid out as: '(a) To stimulate interest in the air. (b) To promote the flow of candidates for the RAF, the AF Reserve and the AAF'.³²

Trenchard subsequently dined at Cambridge before addressing the Cambridge Union Society on 'The Air Defences of Great Britain' and finished his speech outlining the scheme for a UAS at Cambridge:

The Air Force squadron which, during term time, must be mainly kept alive by means of courses of instruction in engines, rigging, wireless, etc., and by lectures, with possible flying as observers at Duxford or some other Air Force station during the term, if the university authorities will allow this, and with further flying during the long vacation, will, I trust, be the means of stimulating interest in the air as a whole at the university, and that the interest will be continued after members have gone down from the university and gradually throughout the country.

Professor Inglis, proposing a vote of thanks to Trenchard, was then reported as inferring that CAS saw Cambridge as a national incubator for hatching new and progressive ideas.³³ Hoare recalled that Butler was also focusing on the 'new and progressive', suggesting that the RAF avoid replicating the Army's Officer Training Corps (OTC) model: 'Keep entirely clear of the OTC methods. They are out of date and not suitable for a new chapter in a plan for the new world.'³⁴ Pertinently, one of the attendees at the dinner was the Officer Commanding the OTC and President of the Board of Military Studies, General Costello, who had previously been Chief Staff Officer to the Air Officer Commanding in Palestine. He was reportedly supportive of an arrangement which would relieve him of direct responsibility for an air unit through the establishment of an independent

³² TNA, AIR 2/312, 'Flying Training in the Cambridge University Air Squadron', 1 September 1928.

³³ *Flight*, 'The Air Defences of Great Britain: Sir Hugh Trenchard's Address at Cambridge University, 17 (7 May 1925), 273–5.

³⁴ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p. 196.

UAS.³⁵ Progress was rapid with Cambridge and the RAF's first UAS was formed on 1 October 1925. In order to reduce concerns about an overtly military-style unit, seen to be unpalatable both to parents worried about aircraft accidents in the RAF and to the university authorities, the Cambridge unit was essentially civilian in appearance. The squadron eschewed uniform and rank, and the Officer Commanding was titled instead the Chief Instructor: 'In fact the whole scheme was an excellent example of our English way of persuading our consciences that things are not as they are.'³⁶

Hoare had followed his visit to Cambridge with one to his alma mater, Oxford, but found the reception there somewhat cooler. He rightly judged that, once Cambridge embraced the concept, Oxford would review its position, and Oxford UAS formed soon after Cambridge UAS.³⁷ In the first seven years of the scheme, Oxford and Cambridge trained 292 students to fly, and 143 took commissions in the Reserve. An American report described the extensive facilities available to students, which included an instructional headquarters where the theory of flight, practical rigging experience, and the working of aero engines was taught. The Oxford facility contained an Aero training machine, a Bristol Fighter for rigging practice, and 'a Napier Lion and a Jaguar radial engine [for] an insight into modern water-cooled and air-cooled engine design'.³⁸ Another American intelligence report from 1932 summarised the object of the training beyond recruitment as:

to encourage an interest in flying, to assist those who wish to take up aeronautics as a profession, and to afford instruction to those who, by their characteristics or future profession, are likely to exert a useful influence on the national and Imperial development of aviation.³⁹

³⁵ Clive Richards, 'The University Air Squadrons Early Years 1920–39', *COMEC Occasional Papers*, 7 (2016), 1–40 (p. 17).

³⁶ Grey, p. 197.

³⁷ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, pp. 197–8.

³⁸ NACP, RG 165, MIDC 1917–41, 2083-1141–1158, 2083-1151, 'Lecture Hall for Oxford University Air Squadron', 5 November 1932.

³⁹ NACP, RG 165, MIDC 1917–41, 2083-1046–1062, 2083-1050, 'University Air Squadrons', 23 December 1932.

Not only were the squadrons successful in increasing air awareness at these important centres of learning and research, but the Cambridge, Oxford, and London (created in 1935) UASs were to provide a significant number of officers to the war effort from 1939 onwards: for example, ninety-seven were to fight in the Battle of Britain, with twenty-three losing their lives.⁴⁰ Less tangible, but also highly important from an influence perspective, Hoare and Trenchard had expanded their networks into the major universities of the country, into the world of university science and academia, and imbued air-mindedness into future influencers. Hoare visited the new UAS at Cambridge within months of its establishment and by July 1926 he had been made an honorary fellow of Butler's own college, Corpus Christi.

At the Cambridge Union Society dinner in April 1925, Trenchard had also described in some detail the next element in the Hoare–Trenchard plan for influence: the AAF. This was to enable the RAF to gain footholds in locations across the country and embed itself within civilian life. He described the concept in his speech:

We feel very much indeed the importance of trying to get the nation intimately connected with the air service for home defence, and we feel that all good men of the different types — the pilot, the engineer, the dashing motor driver, the literary man and the scientific man — which so largely predominate in the English public, all could be of use in the defence of this country. [...] Remember that if we get the best and, in the future, if it is looked upon as much of an honour to belong to one of these auxiliary Air Force squadrons as it is to belong to a good club or a good university, so will it be a great means of enabling the spirit of aviation to be spread throughout the country for civil purposes and for service purposes.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Richards, p. 21.

⁴¹ *Flight*, 'The Air Defences of Great Britain: Sir Hugh Trenchard's Address at Cambridge University, 17 (7 May 1925), 273–75.

Sykes had been against 'part-time' flying and Hoare blamed him for stalling the Bill on the AAF, which was drawn up during Hoare's first term but brought onto the statute books during Thomson's short spell as Minister. Hoare recalled that the Bill 'remained in the pigeon-holes of the Air Ministry', and believed that Sykes had used his influence on his father-in-law, Bonar Law, then Prime Minister.⁴²

Unencumbered by Sykes and Bonar Law in 1924, Hoare and Trenchard were free to proceed and, within eleven days of Hoare's return, produced a paper outlining the future for the AAF. The document noted:

Each AAF Squadron will provide a means whereby the surrounding neighbourhood can be brought into closer touch with aviation and members of the civil community can take a very real part in the Air Defence of the country.⁴³

Trenchard had envisioned the role of the AAF as reaching the general public across the country in an earlier 1921 speech in Glasgow: 'This [...] would be the means of spreading knowledge of the Air among our great civilian population, and would strengthen the general desire for air travel.'⁴⁴ Trenchard's 1925 speech showed a much more advanced plan with the locations of the first six squadrons outlined and by 1929 six squadrons were already operating and three more were about to form. Like the UASs, the auxiliary concept served the dual purpose of influence in civilian life and later as a vital source of manpower for the Second World War. Although the first two squadrons, 600 and 601, both based close to London, gained a reputation for exclusivity attracting wealthy, aristocratic members, the subsequent squadrons took the RAF's footprint far further into the country. The first three squadrons established distant from the capital were in Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Birmingham (County of Warwick), and in 1929 the Air Ministry announced a further expansion, with an additional London unit as well as ones for Newcastle/Sunderland and the North Riding

⁴² Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p. 190.

⁴³ TNA, AIR 8/71, 'Confidential Air Staff Memorandum No. 30 on the AAF', 17 November 1924.

⁴⁴ TNA, AIR 1/718/29/4, speech given to the Scottish Branch of the RAeS, Glasgow, 14 November 1921.

area. The latter 'will, it is hoped, largely appeal to the men of the Middlesbrough area'.⁴⁵

Also designed to increase awareness of the RAF and aviation was the explicit support the Air Ministry provided to flying, or light aeroplane, clubs. Air Vice Marshal Geoffrey Salmond was an early proponent of the project, which had taken root in Hoare's first tenure as Secretary of State starting in 1922, and Geoffrey Salmond saw clubs becoming 'centres of air enthusiasm'.⁴⁶ Jack Williams has researched the funding mechanisms behind the private flying movement and concluded that it:

was largely dependent on financial support from the Air Ministry. [...] In 1925 the Air Ministry began subsidizing light aeroplane clubs on the basis of how many members gained RAeC licences [...]. Originally intended to last for only four years, subsidies were paid for the remainder of the inter-war period.⁴⁷

Inter-club competitions were encouraged to stimulate activity and interest with the Air Ministry offering prize monies.⁴⁸ Like the AAF, the concept of flying clubs had been outlined in the early 1920s, but momentum built in 1924 when Thomson announced that ten clubs were to receive financial support. On Hoare's return to office, he actively encouraged the scheme, visiting the clubs to publicise their activities.⁴⁹ The original scheme provided a subsidy of £50 per pilot trained, additional funding for hours flown by qualified members, and for renewal of their licences.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ NACP, RG 165, MIDC 1917-41, 2083-777-794, 2083-777, 'New Auxiliary Air Force Units and Aircraft', 27 August 1929.

⁴⁶ Geoffrey Salmond was Director-General of Supply and Research at the Air Ministry, a post that was later renamed Air Member for Supply and Research; TNA, AVIA 2/205, 16 October 1923.

⁴⁷ Jack Williams, p. 461.

⁴⁸ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p. 201.

⁴⁹ Cross, p. 105.

⁵⁰ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon of Tara, AC 71/3 Box 11, Royal Aero Club statement, 'Air Estimates: Grants to Light Aeroplane Clubs', 27 February 1932.

Hoare highlighted the significance of the development of the De Havilland Moth, which survived the disapproval of sections of the Air Ministry due to the personal support of Geoffrey Salmond and Hoare, and, he claimed:

The main object of the experiment was achieved. The provinces became more widely interested in flying, and if the further advantage of providing pilots for the war had also been gained, it was one more example of the need to develop civil aviation at the same time as the regular Air Force.⁵¹

By 1930, the De Havilland company offered to hire out the Moth to flying clubs, partly to stimulate the growth of new clubs which could not afford a substantial outlay before local support was stimulated.⁵²

The success of flying clubs as centres of aviation interest has been contested beyond the fact that the movement grew throughout the inter-war years, with membership numbers increasing by 1928 to 2,744: 'the Air Ministry has tried with some success to disseminate a knowledge of civilian flying in our great cities'.⁵³ Of these members, there were only 315 licensed pilots of which 206 qualified on club aircraft, which raises questions over the composition of the non-flying membership.⁵⁴ Grey concluded that overall membership numbers did not equate to Hoare's claims of success, in that the clubs were preaching to the converted:

Unofficially the hope was that the clubs might become a source of supply for future pilots for the RAF. But the numbers of old men, women, and children, and of the maimed, the halt, and the blind who joined the clubs soon exposed the fallacy of that idea. The official excuse for subsidizing the clubs was that they might become centres of aeronautical thought and action all over the country, which by increasing the psychological momentum among the people who would help to make the nation air-

⁵¹ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p. 203.

⁵² NACP, RG 165, MIDC 1917-41, 2083-1213-1224, 2083-1222, 'Hire of D H Moths to Flying Clubs', 14 November 1930.

⁵³ HC Debate (1928) Fifth Series, Vol. 220, Col. 1915, 30 July 1928.

⁵⁴ HC Debate (1928) Fifth Series, Vol. 220, Col. 1915, 30 July 1928.

minded, and would persuade the taxpayer to stand the cost of a big Air Force. In fact, as a writer of the period remarked, the flying clubs were very much more little bands of apostles among the heathen than serious sources of supply for the RAF.⁵⁵

Grey was, of course, freer in temperament and position to comment in such florid terms. The overall impact of the flying clubs in terms of providing trained aircrew was limited (and by the end of the decade only thirteen clubs were being subsidised by the Air Ministry, with a total membership of 2047).⁵⁶

Their more significant contribution was in spreading the footprint of aviation further across the country. The number of requests the Prince of Wales received to open or give patronage to new clubs and the Air Ministry's engagement on the subject with his office provides evidence of their proliferation. By 1934, the Comptroller wrote in reply to one such request:

The fact is that there are so many Aerodromes springing up all over the country, from which His Royal Highness has already had several similar requests, that he finds he cannot add this particular sort of engagement to the many others that he has.⁵⁷

Again, with these clubs, the divide between the civil and military sides of aviation was unclear. The budget was allocated to civil aviation, but a senior airman, Geoffrey Salmond (then Air Member for Supply and Research responsible for RAF and civilian aircraft), had been key to the programme. When the Prince of Wales's office corresponded on the subject in relation to his potential patronage of a specific club, Trenchard replied to the Prince's secretary. A follow-up letter from the Air Ministry's Principal Private Secretary added:

⁵⁵ Grey, p. 199.

⁵⁶ NACP, RG 165, MIDC 1917-41, 2083-1117-1126, 2083-1126, 'Light Aeroplane Clubs', 7 December 1929, and 'Civil Flying Clubs', 18 November 1929.

⁵⁷ RA EVIIPWH/PS/MAIN/2041, Aeroplane and Municipal Airports, letter from the Comptroller to The Secretary, Sywell Aerodrome, 15 May 1934.

I should [...] like to emphasise that the Air Ministry is most desirous of fostering the light aeroplane club movement by all means in its power, since if it is successful it should do much to promote the development of aviation and stimulate public interest in the air.⁵⁸

The flying club project was just the tip of a much larger iceberg: the general public's increasing interest in aviation, demonstrated not only by the popularity of displays and local air races, but also by imperial air travel and landmark aviation achievements.

Hoare was convinced that by his own example (and that of his wife) he could demonstrate the capabilities of the aeroplane, and he endeavoured to achieve this with a number of high profile and ambitious overseas trips, including to India and Iraq. Pathé archives contain records of various trips by the Hoares, some titled 'Our Flying Minister'. From his first spell in office, he resolved to:

'Fly yourself, and whenever possible with your wife, and show that you can keep to a definite time-table in carrying out a flying programme' — that was the marching, or rather flying order that I gave myself. No minister in any part of the world had ever used an aeroplane for official tours.⁵⁹

He was committed to the promotion of civil aviation and civil air routes, not least to demonstrate the peaceful benefits to trade and relations that aviation could deliver away from the horrors of war.⁶⁰ While it is understandable that Hoare's colonial travels have been interpreted from the perspective of using air to extend imperial relationships, and that he 'set about this task with gusto', another reading of his enthusiasm is that increasing awareness of aviation more

⁵⁸ RA EVIIPWH/PS/MAIN/2041, Aeroplane and Municipal Airports, letter from Trenchard to Halsey, 29 March 1928, and from Bullock to Trenchard, 27 April 1928.

⁵⁹ http://www.britishpathe.com/search/query/Hoare/search-field/record_keywords [accessed 1 June 2017]; Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p. 96.

⁶⁰ See, for example, speeches by Hoare, CUL, Personal Papers of Viscount Templewood, Part V: 5, speeches 1923–1929.

generally, using empire to extend air-mindedness, was his primary motivation.⁶¹ Trenchard, amongst others, talked in parallel about the RAF's use of empire air routes referring to Cairo as 'the Clapham Junction of the Air Force'.⁶²

Hoare's India trip, accompanied by Lady Hoare and Geoffrey Salmond who was due to command the RAF in India, departed from London in December 1926, arriving in Delhi on 8 January 1927. This was the farthest a Secretary of State had ever journeyed by air and 'a pungent statement of power and prestige, as the Hoares' reception in New Delhi confirmed'.⁶³ This followed flights to Iraq by Hoare in 1925 and by the Labour Secretary of State, strongly encouraged by Hoare who had hoped to carry out the first Iraq trip before losing office, in 1924. Hoare and Lady Maud received 'something like a hero's welcome' on their return from India, after 12,000 miles of air travel, and both were recognised in the 1927 birthday honours list.⁶⁴ They were also invited to lunch with the King at Buckingham Palace after their flight: 'The practice is that only outgoing or incoming Governors and their wives lunch at the Palace. It was therefore a very special invitation that was offered to us.'⁶⁵ Sassoon also flew overseas extensively promoting both 'the mobility of empire aircraft' and the RAF specifically. In 1928 he visited almost every RAF unit outside Britain covering 17,000 miles in five weeks.⁶⁶

Another element of the Air Ministry's public relations campaign was its support (specifically Hoare's) for the Schneider Trophy in the late 1920s. Hoare argued in *Empire of the Air* that the contest had become too expensive and complicated for purely private ventures, and that: 'A victory meant greater prestige for British industry, and even if we did not win, the making of machines and engines was certain to add considerably to our knowledge about speed and

⁶¹ Pirie, p. 106.

⁶² TNA, T 1/12533/16599, letter from Trenchard to George Barstow (Controller of Supply Services at the Treasury), 1 October 1919.

⁶³ Pirie, p. 105.

⁶⁴ Cross, p. 101.

⁶⁵ CUL, Personal Papers of Viscount Templewood, RF.3 (51), 'Relations with the King and Court', undated.

⁶⁶ NACP, RG 165, MIDC 1917-41, 2083-1046-1062, 2083-1061, 'Activities of the Royal Air Force during 1928', 4 January 1929.

its effect on men and materials.⁶⁷ The RAF won the Trophy in 1927 and again in 1929, and public interest in the event developed from passive interest in the first to active participation in the second. The 1927 event took place in Venice, but the 1929 event was held on the south coast of England and may have amassed the largest crowds at any sporting event in the inter-war years. Reports vary between an optimistic estimate of a million spectators and the half a million estimated to be on Southsea beach alone; there were many more members of the public at the other viewing locations of Gosport and Ryde.⁶⁸ Under Hoare's direction the RAF had once more placed itself firmly in the public eye reaching ever greater numbers of people during the second half of the 1920s.

Part of the inspiration for much of this activity must have been the growing success of the RAF pageant from the beginning of the 1920s. Its role in supporting fundraising for the RAF Memorial Fund was discussed in Chapter Two, but its wider significance, publicising the RAF, merits further examination. The RAF and the Air Ministry were quick to realise the value of displaying their machines and prowess to the public with an annual air pageant, the first of which took place in July 1920. Designed to advertise 'its successful independent existence to a sceptical or ignorant public', it was a very effective early public relations exercise by the nascent third service.⁶⁹ The pageant featured static and flying displays, including aerobatic and formation manoeuvres. In 1921 the programme drafted by the Air Ministry included a flying demonstration comparing aircraft which were used at the beginning and end of the 'Late War', in order to demonstrate the improvement in speed, climbing, and manoeuvring ability that had been made.⁷⁰ So the RAF showcased rapid technological and strategic progress; the spectacle was literally and figuratively about moving forward. In 1925, the pageant was renamed a display 'to emphasise that the RAF was not putting on a flying circus to entertain the public but was merely demonstrating what it had achieved in the

⁶⁷ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p. 206.

⁶⁸ Jack Williams, pp. 456–57.

⁶⁹ Omissi, 'The Hendon Air Pageant, 1920–37', in MacKenzie, *Popular Imperialism and the Military*, p. 200.

⁷⁰ TNA, Air 2/4427, 'Draft of the Proposed Programme of Flying', 1921.

previous year's training'.⁷¹ Trenchard outlined the grounds for approval of the first pageant as a necessary and important part of the training of the RAF, and the later name change reinforced that message, notwithstanding the many elements of the displays which reached beyond internal training objectives. Significantly it also served a role, which increased throughout the 1920s, to exhibit the purpose of the RAF and, as Omissi argued, to act as a vehicle to propagandise about the RAF's activities overseas, particularly colonial air policing.⁷² As discussed in Chapter Two, the Air Ministry enjoyed significant control over the presentation of its activities in command in Iraq and the air pageants are an exemplar of this reputation management.

Hendon was an obvious choice of venue, located in North London and easily accessible by motor vehicle and public transport, especially after Colindale underground station opened in 1925, and preferable to RAF airfields further from the capital.⁷³ It had been the site of an early pre-war flying school and regular air races which attracted a 'smart, gay crowd' before the RAF's foray into display events.⁷⁴ Hoare expressed concerns over the size of the site and the risk of aircraft accidents, but was convinced by Trenchard's firm belief that it would stimulate public interest in the RAF.⁷⁵ The first display attracted approximately 40,000 spectators with numbers rising during the intervening years to 170,000 in 1932; several hundred thousand more would gather to watch from outside the enclosures.⁷⁶ Combined with the accompanying BBC radio and press reporting, and the advertising that surrounded the event, the Hendon pageants must have reached hundreds of thousands of the general public in their early years and millions by the late 1920s.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Omissi, 'The Hendon Air Pageant, 1920–37', in MacKenzie, *Popular Imperialism and the Military*, p. 201.

⁷² Omissi, 'The Hendon Air Pageant, 1920–37', in MacKenzie, *Popular Imperialism and the Military*, p. 206.

⁷³ Ian Smith Watson, *The Royal Air Force 'at Home': The History of RAF Air Displays from 1920* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Aviation, 2010), p. 11.

⁷⁴ Balfour, p. 16.

⁷⁵ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p. 185.

⁷⁶ Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control*, p. 171.

⁷⁷ Expenditure for the 1921 Royal Air Force Aerial Pageant included poster design, billposting, fly posting, general posters and pamphlets, sandwichmen, press advertising and a press cuttings service, TNA, AIR 2/4427, balance sheet showing 'Expenses', 1921.

The use of Hendon pageants to showcase RAF operations overseas was a key aspect of the displays and one that encompassed not just public relations but propaganda. In Hoare's view, 'Iraq provided the finest training ground for airmen in the world' and the air displays offered the RAF the opportunity to inform the public of its contribution to empire, while curating the content to present a sanitised version of actual operations.⁷⁸ Thomas argued that the RAF's independence 'rested in a large part on its capacity to prove itself as an economical means to uphold colonial control in the Arab world'.⁷⁹ With the Hendon displays, the RAF promoted a particular narrative about 'native' characteristics and their susceptibility to the power of the aeroplane, to complement its economic arguments in Whitehall for air policing. Omissi interpreted the displays as having a clear propagandist purpose and highlighted the 1922 *Bombing a Desert Stronghold* display (as it was described in the programme at Figure 6.1) which involved the re-creation, at Hendon, of a tribal desert fort where a Bristol Fighter had been forced to land:

The stranded machine was at once heavily attacked by the locals – British airmen disguised as gaily coloured [blacked-up] 'Wottnotts'. [...] British bombers then attacked the fort – an impressive structure with minarets and loopoled towers 100ft high – and sent it up in flames.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ CUL, Personal Papers of Viscount Templewood, V:8 (21), speech by Hoare, 11 May 1925; Trenchard was closely involved in the detailed content, for example suggesting the inclusion in the 1922 programme of events 'An exhibition of loading men and guns into a machine and unloading them, on similar lines to the experiments carried out in Egypt by Sir Geoffrey Salmond', TNA, Air 2/4428, minute sheet, 22 July 1921.

⁷⁹ Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence*, p. 141.

⁸⁰ Omissi, 'The Hendon Air Pageant, 1920–37', in MacKenzie, *Popular Imperialism and the Military*, p. 203.

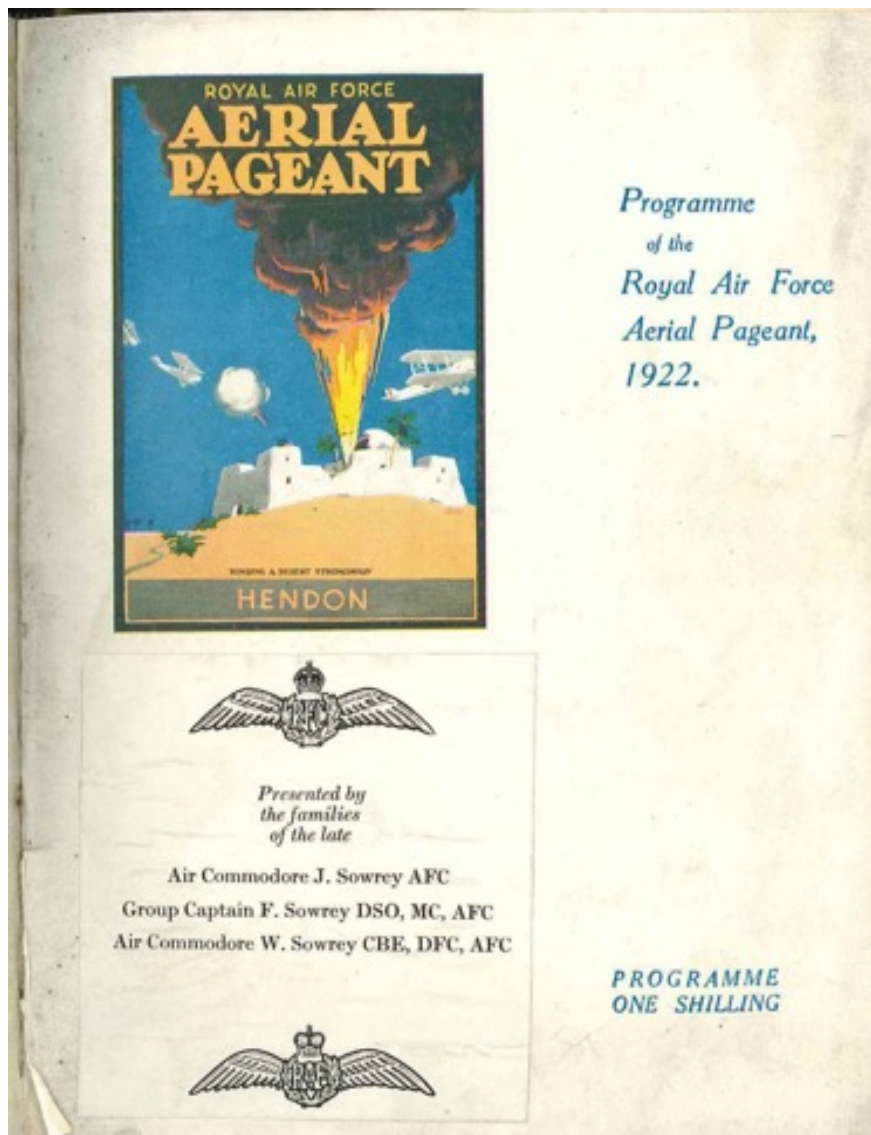


Figure 6.1 Royal Air Force Pageant 1922 Programme Cover.⁸¹

As Figure 6.1 shows, prominent imagery directly referenced colonial operations.

These artificial representations demonstrated the RAF's attempt, in a controlled but public environment, to reconcile what Satia has described as 'ethical scruples' with 'actual violence', by depicting the efficacy of colonial air power, presenting bombing as accurate at hitting targets, and reinforcing the image of Arabia as 'the land of the RAF'.⁸² Dramatically illustrated posters used to advertise the event and programme descriptions both served to glorify the role that the RAF was playing in the Middle East and beyond and, though there

⁸¹ Image provided courtesy of the RAF Museum.

⁸² Satia, 'The Defense of Inhumanity', p. 18.

were some changes over time as the public became more attuned to discussions about disarmament, exposed the public to one of the main justifications — air policing — for its continued existence. The timing of the establishment of the air displays is particularly interesting in relation to the debate over whether Britain was an imperial society rather than just an imperial nation, notably between MacKenzie and Porter. Porter argued that it was the challenge to empire in the early twentieth century that made the domestic argument for empire more pressing than it had been earlier. Fortuitously, given the Air Ministry's opportunistic streak, these challenges were multiplying at a time when the RAF was the only service with a strong appetite for courting publicity. He also cautioned equating evidence of imperial propaganda with impact: 'one can be impressed without being educated'.⁸³ In the case of the pageants, any attempts at education were sufficiently skewed by the curation of the RAF's message to inform only in a way that its leadership wanted. At Hendon, the RAF was providing a 'crowd-friendly' demonstration: for colonial rule at a knock-down price in blood, manpower, and treasure, while reinforcing an imperialist narrative of Britain's superiority over its colonial subjects.

The Other Services

In the context of the Hendon displays, Omissi also described the machinations behind a decision to withdraw a 'set piece' showing air force bombers sinking a battleship, stating that the option 'was ruled out for fear of offending the Admiralty and thereby deepening the political problems of the Air Ministry'.⁸⁴ It appears that this tactful decision in 1922 did not survive the turbulence with the Navy over the next couple of years, as Davidson's papers, from his time as Parliamentary and Financial Secretary to the Admiralty, reveal. They include correspondence from 1926 between Commander Bellairs MP and Hoare concerning Bellairs' accusation that the Air Ministry had been engaged in propaganda against the Admiralty and the Navy, in which Bellairs wrote:

⁸³ Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, p. 265.

⁸⁴ Omissi, 'The Hendon Air Pageant, 1920–37', in MacKenzie, *Popular Imperialism and the Military*, p. 203.

If the Air Ministry is now really desirous of stopping propaganda against the Navy, I can supply a test.

It is the habit of the Air Ministry to arrange at exhibitions and at Hendon, a display in which a warship model is blown up from the shore while an air plane comes over.

The propaganda motion is to send every spectator home with the idea that a battleship, costing millions, is at the mercy of a single bomber costing £20,000. Nothing could be more remote from the truth. The effect is to undermine public confidence in the Navy, and not even the Bolsheviks could render the country a worse disservice.⁸⁵

It was at this time that the Navy was struggling with an aversion to overt public relations, which Bell argued was rooted in the Navy's distaste for self-promotion and its attachment to the ideal of a 'Silent Service'. He quotes Lord Burnham (proprietor of the *Daily Telegraph*) in 1926 writing that the Navy's 'policy of silence has been carried too far. [...] It is obvious that if you shut down the discussion of naval problems and the recital of naval achievements you must damp down the ardour and appreciation of the nation.'⁸⁶

By the autumn of 1926 the Navy had established a committee tasked with holding a pageant in Portsmouth, ostensibly as a fundraising activity, and from 1927 until 1938 'Navy Weeks' became a popular public feature in the annual calendar. Given the accusations from Bellairs of propaganda, Bell's footnote on the participation of aircraft in Navy displays is telling:

Notably, it was only after the Navy regained control of the FAA [Fleet Air Arm] that aircraft began to play a prominent part in Navy Week displays. These usually took the form of mock air attacks on British ships, and

⁸⁵ PA, Personal Papers of J. C. C. Davidson, DAV/172/U17, letter from Bellairs to Hoare, 18 April 1926.

⁸⁶ Bell, p. 166.

always ended with the ships still afloat and several of the attacking aircraft 'destroyed'.⁸⁷

The Navy came late to the party in terms of public relations in the 1920s and Bell's assessment that a more extensive propaganda effort from the Navy would not have helped in terms of naval estimates does not consider the counter-argument that its reticence cost it influence.⁸⁸ The RAF's assiduous courting of public attention by parading and celebrating modernity, in combination with the reassuringly traditional elements of empire and of the royal family, aided in overcoming the sense that its youth made it vulnerable and thus strengthened its position in relation to the Navy.

Rüger argued convincingly that the Navy had been actively publicity-conscious before the First World War, believing that public enthusiasm was a critical element to success in attracting increased funding.⁸⁹ However, the post-war environment in the 1920s, with the emphasis on economic belt-tightening, drawdown, and disarmament, almost certainly contributed to a change in the Admiralty's stance. The tensions that existed in the Navy around its post-war self-image, particularly over its war record and the changing global maritime balance of power, already discussed, almost certainly reinforced its 1919 view of publicity as having a suspicious flavour. Also, as discussed in Chapter One, the Army faced its own particular challenges: the enormous losses it had suffered; the process of memorialisation which took place across the country after the war, which focused on the soldier (rather than sailor or airman); and the challenges of demobilisation. It returned to traditional displays, such as band concerts and tattoos, but had little novel or distinctly modern to present, in contrast with the glamour of dashing pilots and frequent new aviation firsts.⁹⁰ Their posters showed soldiers in traditional ceremonial dress in images reminiscent of the pre-war era (see Figure 6.2 below).

⁸⁷ Bell, pp. 174 and 177.

⁸⁸ Bell, p. 179.

⁸⁹ Rüger, *The Great Naval Game*, p. 76.

⁹⁰ Bell, p. 179.



Figure 6.2 Royal Tournament Poster 1920s.

Conclusion

The partnership between Trenchard and Hoare, which began with the latter's appointment as Secretary of State for Air in 1922, had by the late 1920s developed into a multi-layered relationship with the pair pursuing their shared goal of strengthening the RAF's foundations, while embracing the modernity it embodied and its nascent future potential, within traditional concepts of establishment and society. Once Hoare returned to the Air Ministry in late 1924, the RAF was drawing clear of the worst of the inter-service battles that dominated the first half of the decade, and the already established and highly effective Hoare–Trenchard partnership was ready to address more ambitious themes and objectives. Their strategic plan for influence combined reaching into establishment stalwarts such as the royal family, Oxbridge and high society, with a broader appeal to the public, and the inculcation of air-mindedness and

awareness of the RAF by placing the RAF 'brand' amongst communities with the AAF and the promotion of private flying. It eschewed reliance on the press barons reaching out to the establishment and the public directly. This was a project of great ambition, yet it was largely achieved during Hoare and Trenchard's time at the Air Ministry.

The scheme was never formalised and took shape primarily because Hoare returned to the Air Ministry in 1924, was afforded five years' working alongside Trenchard, and had the ambition, contacts, background, and political capital to see through the plan. Hoare has been viewed through the historical prism of his later ministerial career, not least his time as Foreign Secretary culminating in his resignation over the Abyssinian crisis. References to him from his period as Air Minister in history are limited and sometimes present him during the 1920s only in order to provide stark relief to the more controversial ministerial career that followed.⁹¹ Yet he embraced his first ministry with energy and enthusiasm and when he was promoting civil aviation and broader arguments about empire, rather than the RAF, his efforts were complementary and mindful of his CAS, the men under command, and the new service arm they fought to establish. In terms of the strategic plan for influence, Hoare prioritised the areas where he had unique influence, starting with the royal family and elite circles, as well as utilising what his Private Secretary described as 'his usual flair for picking the right man'.⁹² Trenchard had a more populist eye and he excelled with his vision for the RAF's place in the country, his close supervision of the Hendon air display planning, and his proactive command and shaping of his service.

It is worth noting that, many years later, Trenchard described Hoare's contribution in a faintly patronising manner, possibly riled that Hoare had declined to co-operate with Trenchard's then biographer Major Lockhart (whose papers were later passed to Andrew Boyle). The timing was ironic since Hoare had refused on the basis that he was busy with his own autobiography, which

⁹¹ Pirie, p. 73.

⁹² CUL, Personal Papers of Andrew Boyle, Add. 9429/1B/283, Christopher Bullock's recollections, 19 October 1953.

would be hagiographic in its handling of Trenchard. Trenchard advised Lockhart: 'there are many things I know he would like to be patted on the back for'. He went on to list a number of Hoare's credits, including his contributions to air control, Halton, and Cranwell, and his political handling of the estimates and of the Air Ministry's enemies, but finished by saying: 'Of course, all this does not need great elaboration, but give him a pat on the back.'⁹³

The Hendon air displays demonstrate, perhaps best, the melding of these different strands: harnessing the media and mass public interest, while courting the royals and society through Hoare's and Trenchard's entreaties and provision of enclosures and boxes leading to favourable comparisons with Ascot.⁹⁴ They also showed the use of various influence and public relations strands to promote, and indeed illustrate, the RAF's current and future roles. Omissi's view that 'The Hendon display was propaganda, in that its object was to persuade rather than inform, but successful propaganda feeds off the preoccupations, anxieties and prejudices of its audience' encapsulates the way in which promotion of air-mindedness contained subtexts about the utility of air power, in defending the home population and projecting power through colonial air policing. It served a populist function placing the RAF firmly at the heart of the notion of country and empire post-war.⁹⁵ Although the enormous interest in the displays does not prove a seismic shift in public mindset, and Holman assessed that the growth in their popularity was more about love of a spectacle than an interest in air power, in the case of the promotion of the RAF, passive acceptance rather than conversion to active advocacy was sufficient reward.⁹⁶

Besides the RAF's ability to navigate such ambiguities, the 1920s was arguably the first fully 'democratic' decade, with mass enfranchisement (by 1928 women were given the vote on the same terms as men) and a popular press. As Lieutenant Commander Kenworthy MP observed perceptively in a House of Commons debate in 1929, the RAF 'was established in an age of

⁹³ CUL, Personal Papers of Andrew Boyle, Add. 9429/1B/270, letter from Trenchard to Lockhart, 6 April 1954.

⁹⁴ *Flight*, 2 July 1926.

⁹⁵ Omissi, 'The Hendon Air Pageant, 1920–37', in MacKenzie, *Popular Imperialism and the Military*, p. 216.

⁹⁶ Holman, *The Next War in the Air*, p. 170.

democratic tradition' whereas the Army and the Navy had developed over centuries when 'the existing tradition was an aristocratic tradition'.⁹⁷ Perhaps this alignment with the contemporary *zeitgeist* was exploited cynically at times, but the RAF seemed in that decade to consider consistently its public brand, reputation, and reach. To borrow from Divine, the danger for the RAF was in believing too fervently in its own rhetoric.⁹⁸ In the reconstruction era of the 1920s, the RAF was able to harness ambiguities over tradition and modernity, civil and service aviation, elitist officers and socially mobile airmen, and the ethics of air control through curation of the message. Some of these compromises and contradictions were to prove significantly more difficult to sustain in the succeeding decade, but they assured the RAF's permanence as an independent air service in the 1920s.

While Trenchard's memorandum had laid the foundations on which the RAF's argument for survival had been built, their combined efforts from 1924 utilised Hoare's complementary understanding of the 'social grain' and his access to those relevant networks.⁹⁹ While Cannadine has dismissed Hoare and his 'patrician' political colleagues in the Air Ministry as genteel ministers who contributed 'at the social rather than the political level', the social was political.¹⁰⁰ The reputation and standing of the RAF in Britain mattered in winning the argument in Whitehall. The novel had to embed itself in the normal and, in working with the 'social grain', Trenchard and Hoare found their route, alongside the economic and doctrinal arguments about the utility of air power, to establishing the RAF as an institution which never again faced the serious challenges to its independence that it had experienced in the immediate post-World War One years. In many ways, the RAF benefited from being so modern and novel that it could exist above or alongside broader society, without the need to mirror it, while working within the establishment to improve the standing of its officers. The next chapter will consider the specific case study of harnessing the support of the royal family in promoting the third service,

⁹⁷ HC Debate (1929) Fifth Series, Vol. 226, Col. 1006, 12 March 1929.

⁹⁸ Divine, p. 148.

⁹⁹ *New Statesman*, 26 January 1957.

¹⁰⁰ Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy*, p. 71.

analysing the parallel needs of the oldest and newest institutions of the post-war period.

CHAPTER SEVEN — THE PARADOX OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY: THE MONARCHY AND THE ROYAL AIR FORCE

On 1 April 1918, King George V commended the establishment of the world's first independent air force as its General-in-Chief. The statement from the sovereign congratulated the Royal Air Force on 'its birth and [we] trust that it may enjoy a vigorous and successful life'.¹ As the country's newest national institution and the third British armed service, its immaturity stood in stark contrast with the edifice of British royalty. George V headed the country's oldest institution, the British monarchy, which sat at the apex of the British Establishment. The Crown, however, was not without challenges of its own and had only recently reinvented itself as the House of Windsor, consigning the Saxe-Coburg-Gotha name to history and distancing itself from Germanic connotations. As well as the domestic changes politically and socially at home in the United Kingdom, both empire and the European map had been drastically altered by war. The British royal family was the last of the great-power monarchies on the continent, shorn of their Hapsburg, German, and Russian counterparts. In 1918, the monarchy and the RAF lay at opposite ends of the spectrum between maturity and youth, and in their relationship publicly with tradition and modernity. The RAF was associated with modern and technological machines, and embraced its association with the glamour of aviation, but also wanted to be seen as credible, secure, and accepted by the establishment. The monarchy was embedded at the heart of the British traditions of nation, empire, and hereditary privilege, but some members of the royal family and their advisers were becoming increasingly conscious of the importance of their relevance and public image in changing times.²

As has been argued, though the RAF faced a recurring debate throughout the 1920s about its permanence, the organisation's ostensible weakness had also bestowed on it a subversive quality, ready to use any

¹ RA PS/PSO/GV/PS/RAF/22015/26, statement from Buckingham Palace, 1 April 1918.

² Edward Owens, 'All the World Loves a Lover: Monarchy, Mass Media and the 1934 Royal Wedding of Prince George and Princess Marina', *The English Historical Review*, 133 (2018), 597–633 (p. 600). *The Windsor Dynasty: 1910 to the Present*, ed. by Matthew Glencross, Judith Rowbotham and Michael D. Kandiah (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 10.

tangential advantage in an opportunistic and sometimes cynical manner. This willingness to think and operate outwith the normal codes of conduct for a service department of government manifested itself, for example, in the Air Ministry's early intuition for the power of public relations. As seen in the previous chapter, the strategic plan for influence embraced using the RAF's association with modernity to appeal to public opinion and cleave to public interest in aviation, while identifying the venerable royal family as its primary objective.³ This was not because the RAF's leaders were 'deferential or dazzled': like other societies and organisations, as Williamson argued, 'They identified with royalty because they expected benefits for themselves.'⁴ Unlike voluntary societies, however, George V was their newly appointed and self-styled General-in-Chief, and they had better access to their commander and the House of Windsor as a result.

In the profusion of commentaries on the early struggles of the fledgling RAF, the Crown's relationship with that service is mentioned only occasionally and not as a subject in its own right. Perhaps the divide between science, progress, internationalism, aeroplanes, and technology on the one hand, and war, nationalism, religion and royalty on the other, as described by H. G. Wells, dissected by George Orwell, and elucidated by Edgerton, helps explain why scholarly commentary on aviation, modernity, and technology has rarely intersected with the subject of monarchy.⁵ This chapter attempts to reappraise the paradoxical relationship between modernity and tradition in the early development of the RAF through this lens. As discussed in previous chapters, the blurring of boundaries between the military and civilian within the Air Ministry highlights its more complex relationship with science and modernity, on the one hand, and militarism and tradition on the other. The relationship between the RAF and the royal family, and its development to mutual benefit throughout the 1920s, helps to demonstrate that the modern and scientific could weave itself deftly into the militaristic and traditional, rather than exist in

³ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p. 182.

⁴ Philip Williamson, 'The Monarchy and Public Values 1910–1953', in *The Monarchy and the British Nation, 1780 to the Present*, ed. by Andrzej Olechnowicz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 223–57 (p. 230).

⁵ Edgerton, *Warfare State*, p. 319.

opposition to it. It helps to highlight and explain the incongruity of a new armed service using progressive tools while being led by traditionally conservative (and predominantly Conservative) men who were not in themselves radical modernisers.⁶ They were capable of cultural creativity, but also familiar with the workings of the establishment. The monarchy, it is argued, provided them with a route to consolidating the RAF's position within society.

This chapter examines the relationship between the RAF and the royal family from the former's conception to the end of the 1920s. Although that relationship was identified as a public relations priority by the Air Ministry, the records show a deeper and more complex relationship which often centred on matters of protocol and ceremonial importance. Much of this developed away from the public gaze in correspondence between the royal household and the Air Ministry. The disarray in the Ministry in 1918, with cliques and resignations hindering the smooth establishment of a government department, combined with the royal family's more natural affiliation with the Royal Navy, augured poorly for strong monarchical support for the new air service. Yet the characterisation of George V as being 'against' aeroplanes, in the same way that he was purported to dislike submarines, overlooks nuances that primary sources from the time provide.⁷ The relationship between the royal household and the Air Force grew and matured over the course of the 1920s, as the Royal Archives (a repository for a large amount of correspondence on the RAF) and other collections of personal papers help illuminate.

The question of why this happened concerned not only the personalities involved, but also the transactional reality that, despite the monarchy and the RAF emerging from the war at opposite ends of the spectrum of age and maturity, they both had something to offer the other party, and something to gain. Buckingham Palace sought to 'let a little more light in on the Crown, but only light that caught the royal family in a favourable pose' following increasing

⁶ Malcolm Smith, p. 250.

⁷ See for example Cannadine, who equates the King's understandable hostility to war with a general dislike of modern technology, David Cannadine, *George V: The Unexpected King* (London: Allen Lane, 2014), p. 5.11, Kobo ebook.

engagement with the public during the war.⁸ The monarchy was renewing its public image at a time when the RAF was creating one. The latter organisation had no history or institutional memory, making it necessarily adaptable, opportunistic, and aware of the need to establish a peacetime identity of its own. The two organisations were both looking to the future and with hindsight it is evident that mutual benefit was derived from their growing ever closer during the 1920s.

The Early Post-War Period

As examined in Chapter Five, the Air Ministry started life in poor political shape, with disagreements and resignations at the very top of the organisation. The RAF under its command comprised a disparate organisation of men and women transferred from the Navy and the Army, lacking a standardised uniform or finalised rank structure. George V looked on with some despair, considering in particular Trenchard's resignation 'a great misfortune'.⁹ Lloyd George and Rothermere had declined to tell the King of the full scale of the 'internal troubles' of the RAF when they saw him on 13 April 1918, which prompted his Private Secretary to visit the Prime Minister to remonstrate over the matter. Less than a fortnight after the RAF's creation, the King indicated that he would have intervened, and asked for Sykes's appointment to be delayed, if he had been informed.¹⁰ A letter to his Private Secretary described the Air Ministry as 'a mass of intrigue' and the machinations over Trenchard's and Rothermere's resignations were relayed via unsympathetic onlookers.¹¹

An exchange between Davidson and Lord Stamfordham (Private Secretary to George V) in August 1918 revealed ongoing concerns, though Davidson seemed more predisposed to Sykes than George V subsequently proved to be (the King refused to appoint Sykes as his Aide-de-Camp in September 1918 partly because he lacked the 'distinguished service'

⁸ Frank Prochaska, 'George V and Republicanism, 1917–1919', *Twentieth Century British History*, 10.1 (1999), 27–51 (p. 49).

⁹ RA GV/PRIV/GVD/1917–1920, King George V diary entry, 13 April 1918.

¹⁰ RA RA/PS/PSO/GV/C/K/1291/3, private note on Windsor Castle notepaper, 14 April 1918.

¹¹ RA PS/PSO/GV/C/K/1291/19, note from Admiralty to Lord Stamfordham, 19 April 1918.

necessary).¹² Davidson reported: 'There are none of the solid foundations in the Hotel Cecil that there are to be found in the traditions of the Admiralty and the War Office.' Stamfordham replied:

I myself realise that things have not settled down as you say on a 'constitutional basis': moreover there exist the 'Trenchard' 'Sykes' and [John] 'Salmond' parties. [...] Very early days for a new national organisation to disintegrate into cliques.¹³

The turbulence and tensions at the Air Ministry during 1918 had not improved the standing of the barely adolescent RAF in the eyes of the royal court, but the archives do demonstrate a high level of interest in the matter, reflecting the seriousness with which the monarch viewed his command responsibilities.

At a more prosaic level, the Air Ministry also failed to impress George V with its early uniform design, a subject close to the King's heart and one where flamboyance was unlikely to impress. Harold Nicolson, his official biographer, described the sovereign's approach to the subject: 'He himself favoured the fashion before the last and was inclined to regard any deviation from the norm of the previous decade as indicating affectation, effeminacy, or potential decadence.'¹⁴ It had been arranged that in January 1918 the Air Ministry would provide 'an officer and a man' in the new uniform of the Air Force along with an officer and a man in the RFC uniform 'so as to be able to compare the two at a glance'.¹⁵ Following the royal viewing, Sir Frederick Ponsonby, the Keeper of the Privy Purse, summarised the King's main objection: 'Your Majesty had come to the conclusion that the short sword or dagger should be abolished. It was quite unEnglish and there was a touch of the Opera Bouffe about it.' Ponsonby recounted his visit to the Air Ministry to break the news to Admiral

¹² RA PS/PSO/GV/PS/RAF/23952/11, letter from Wigram to Sir Maurice Bonham-Carter, 16 September 1918.

¹³ RA PS/PSO/GV/PS/RAF/24573, letters from Davidson to Stamfordham, and Stamfordham to Davidson, 27 August and 30 August 1918.

¹⁴ Harold George Nicolson, *King George the Fifth: His Life and Reign* (London: Constable, 1984), p. 391.

¹⁵ RA PS/PSO/GV/PS/RAF/22110/5, memorandum from Earl of Cromer to Wigram, 28 January 1918.

Kerr and General Branker: 'Mark Kerr was rather put out as he had just written an order for 500 of them at a cost of £850. Branker [sic] on the other hand was delighted and quite agreed with the view Your Majesty took.'¹⁶ In this matter, the King's disapproval protected the RAF from the inevitable ridicule of an air service claiming a dagger as its emblem.

While the new air service was attempting to stabilise itself politically, the monarchy also faced existential challenges as it adapted to the domestic and international realities of a world transformed by conflict. These political, social, and cultural changes were of a different order of complexity to the birthing pains and departmental in-fighting of a new organisation. While George V's diary contains his staid accounts of visits to military units interspersed with records of stamp collecting, behind the scenes change was afoot. The King and palace courtiers such as Lord Esher, Stamfordham, and Wigram were applying their thoughts to the future of the monarchy and its relationship with the public after the war. They predicted a public disenchanted with mobilisation and difficult economic circumstances which, combined with the potential spread of socialism and Bolshevism, presented a threatening cocktail of challenges for the last great-power monarchy in Europe. For the 'reformers' in the household, there was a need for 'imagination and boldness' in re-engaging with a newly enfranchised population.¹⁷ The mass media system, developing rapidly in this period encompassing radio, newsreel, and the print press, propelled the monarchy on a journey to modern public relations: 'the House of Windsor assumed its modern, ubiquitous presence as a truly national symbol which connected a mass public to the institutions of state'.¹⁸

The declining constitutional power of the monarchy and the severing of the strong connection with continental royalty forced the monarchy to rebalance itself, identifying increasingly with the patriotic: country and empire. These were, usefully, themes that the RAF hoped would help the air service create a sense in which they were a trusted institution embraced as part of the establishment.

¹⁶ RA PS/PSO/GV/PS/RAF/22110/10, letter from Ponsonby to George V, 1 February 1918.

¹⁷ Prochaska, *Royal Bounty*, p. 182; Ross McKibbin, *Parties and People: England 1914–1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 33.

¹⁸ Owens, 'All the World', p. 598.

The particular nature of the post-war decade, and in particular the matter of an expanding, media-consuming electorate, meant that both the RAF and the monarchy found themselves in uncharted waters. It was also significant that the RAF was created during wartime, when the King had become accustomed, whatever the limits to his constitutional powers, to frequent communications and updates about his armed forces. Even before the formation of the RAF on 1 April 1918, issues ranging from the appointment of the Secretary of State to the choice of a new uniform were matters discussed regularly with and by the royal household.

The Royal Family and their RAF Connections

George V had joined the Royal Navy in 1877 as a young prince and made life-long naval friends during his tours of duty. He also participated as a naval officer in Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee ceremonies.¹⁹ His pre-war experience both as a member of the royal family and a naval officer had entrenched him in the doctrine of British naval supremacy. Not a supporter of Admiral Jellicoe, he welcomed the appointment of his old friend 'Rosy' Wemyss as First Sea Lord in 1917. Wemyss wrote to the King on this occasion and the sovereign's reply evidenced their close relationship:

My Dear Rosy [...] My dear R you are one of my oldest friends, having known you now for over 40 years, during this war wherever you have served and whatever you had to do, you have done right well. You have many excellent qualities, but you are too modest to mention them, anyhow I consider that you have three which will enable you to fill the very important and responsible post of 1st Sea Ld, namely common sense, great tact and you are an absolute gentleman.²⁰

George V was favourably disposed towards General Haig, who had in turn worked closely with Trenchard from 1915 to 1918. Haig had written to

¹⁹ Matthew Glencross, 'George V and the New Royal House', in Glencross, Rowbotham and Kandiah, pp. 33–56 (p. 38).

²⁰ RA PS/PSO/GV/C/G/1239A/4, letter from King George V to Admiral Wemyss, 26 December 1917, in reply to Wemyss's letter of 25 December 1917.

Stamfordham on the occasion of Trenchard's 1918 resignation: 'He will be an almost irreparable loss to the Flying Corps at this time.'²¹ George V would probably have first met Trenchard when visiting the Western Front during the war. He recorded meeting him in St Omer in 1917 where he 'saw some machines fly' and that visit coincided with events in Britain which were generating calls for the formation of an independent air force. The King noted, in same diary entry from 1917, that there had been repeat raids on London by German bombs. His direct contact by the Armistice with aviation was probably limited to these RFC visits (and he had first visited the RFC soon after its formation in 1913 at Farnborough), as well as wartime visits to the aerodrome at Hendon, and to injured aircrew.²² Perhaps more significantly, his second son was transferred from the RNAS to the RAF on 1 April 1918.

Prince Albert, having served at his father's behest in the Navy before the war, had seen active duty in the Battle of Jutland, but due to ill health was transferred from the regular Navy to the RNAS.²³ He was instructing at RNAS Cranwell, in Lincolnshire, at the time of the creation of the RAF. The King visited there soon after, on 11 April, to inspect the newly created force comprising former RFC and RNAS personnel where he was met by Brigadier General Biggs and Prince Albert.²⁴ One of the first RFC boys to be sent to Cranwell to join up with their naval counterparts recalled the mixture of uniforms to be found at the time, although whether George V was privy to this is not recorded:

Now that the RAF had been formed, we were notified that there would be no further issues of the Royal Flying Corps uniforms, but we had permission to wear it as long as it remained passable; the same partly applied to RNAS personnel. As replacements were required, the re-issue was mainly naval because the stores had stocks of Naval equipment. When we RFC replaced certain articles we looked a mixed and motley lot. Many of us were dressed in working and walking out outfits, looking

²¹ RA PS/PSO/GV/C/Q/1287/1, letter from Haig to Stamfordham, 15 April 1918.

²² RA GV/PRIV/GVD/1917–1920, King George V diary entries, 31 May, 13 June, 24 November, 14 December 1917.

²³ Cynthia Mary Evelyn Asquith, *Queen Elizabeth: Her Intimate and Authentic Life-Story from Childhood up Til To-Day* (London: Hutchinson, 1939), p. 144.

²⁴ RA GV/PRIV/GVD/1917–1920, King George V diary entry, 11 April 1918.

half-soldier and half-sailor.²⁵ [see Figure 7.1 below]

[This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons]

Figure 7.1 Cartoon captioned 'Say George Old Bean, what d'ye think of this month's RAF?'.²⁶

Cranwell's confused mixture of naval and military routines did not suit the Prince and he was soon transferred to RAF Headquarters at St Leonards-on-Sea.²⁷ This difficult atmosphere at Cranwell is reflected in Ross's recollection that, having been inspected by the King and told that the 11 April parade would be

²⁵ Ross, p. 130.

²⁶ Cartoon from *Air Pie*, reproduced in Wg Cdr C. G. Jefford, *Observers and Navigators and Other Non-Pilot Aircrew in the RFC, RNAS and RAF* (London: Grub Street Publishing, 2014), p. 106.

²⁷ Tunbridge, p. 40.

remembered as the foundation of the new Air Force, 'We were then marched off to our part of the station to the accompaniment of cat-calls and boos from distant RNAS men.'²⁸ By 1919 the Prince was with the RAF British Expeditionary Force in Belgium, from where, as earlier mentioned, he wrote to his mother about his concerns regarding the uncertainty within the RAF about future demobilisation.²⁹ Though his experiences may have been variable, the future King George VI's time serving in the regular RAF acclimatised him to the air 'mind'; a more significant affection for the third service was to develop further during the 1920s.

Before and after his marriage the Duke of York, as he became in 1920, took part in several key events in the early post-war history of the RAF, including the opening of the RAF Club in Piccadilly (doors away from the home he would share with the Duchess of York). The prince's staff directed: 'The Duke desires the ceremony to be as simple and informal as possible, because His Royal Highness feels that the Club is a Service Club and there should be as little "pomp and circumstance" as possible.'³⁰ This was a foretaste of his later dealings during the 1920s with the air service: they were often less formal in nature and included events such as private garden parties and the RAF Lawn Tennis Championships where the duke competed in the singles and the doubles (partnered by Wing Commander Louis Greig, his RAF equerry).³¹ By this time, Hoare was making his presence felt at the Air Ministry and Lady Hoare entreated the duke and duchess to attend and host events for RAF officers as part of the drive to improve the airmen's social standing. On the more formal side, the duke visited the boys' training camp at RAF Halton in late 1922 and attended the unveiling of the RAF Memorial in 1923, although these duties were standard fare by this time for the Windsor household. During the 1920s, George V along with Wigram, 'a master of propaganda', encouraged the royal family to undertake thousands of public engagements, bringing the monarchy closer to the people.³² The private correspondence behind these

²⁸ Ross, p. 117.

²⁹ RA QM/PRIV/CC011/3, letter from Prince Albert to Queen Mary, 15 January 1919.

³⁰ RA ADYH/MAIN/6, letter from Comptroller of the Duke of York to Brigadier General More, 18 February 1922.

³¹ RA ADYH/MAIN/8, letter from Greig to Squadron Leader Young, 3 May 1923.

³² Prochaska, *Royal Bounty*, p. 187.

formal visits, and the communications around the more informal events like the lawn tennis championships, demonstrate the increasing familiarity (in terms of their language and forms of address) between palace courtiers and Hoare, Trenchard, and their outer office staff. The drive to improve relations was paying dividends.

Other members of the royal family also formed ties with the RAF during this period. Prince Edward, the Prince of Wales, was close to Sassoon including during the latter's tenures as Under Secretary of State for Air. Sassoon's diaries record that the prince rang him on the occasion of his first appointment to the Air Ministry 'to say he wd. drink a cocktail on the strength of it'.³³ Prince Edward had served in the Navy like his younger brother and then in the Grenadier Guards during the war, and it was said that the senior service retained its primacy in his affections.³⁴ However, he learnt to fly and was an enthusiastic pilot. The Air League corresponded with him regularly and advertised the fact that he had flown with Kerr 'over London in a twin-engined Handley-Page machine in 1919', under the banner 'A Royal Airman'.³⁵ The prince borrowed RAF aircraft at will until this activity was reined in at Trenchard's request: 'The flying keenness of the Prince of Wales is causing me a great deal of anxiety. There is no doubt he is extraordinarily keen on it, but I think we ought to do our best to limit his flying considerably.'³⁶ It appears that Buckingham Palace shared these concerns about him having ready access to an RAF 'machine' and the prince later purchased a Gipsy Moth for private use.³⁷ The lure of flying to young aristocrats applied to the younger royal family members and later would also entice the Duchess of York. She was believed to be the stimulus behind a 1930s Air Council Instruction requiring Air Council clearance to fly members of the royal family, after a Flight Lieutenant Boyle (later to become CAS, the

³³ Stansky, p. 119.

³⁴ Viscount Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years* (London: Collins, 1954), p. 215.

³⁵ RA EVIIPWH/PS/MAIN/2161, copy of *Air* (Air League Magazine), September 1928, p. 12.

³⁶ RA PS/PSO/GV/PS/RAF/26440, letter from Trenchard to Wigram, 10 May 1919.

³⁷ RA, PS/PSO/GV/PS/RAF/26440 and 28915, letters from Trenchard to Wigram and Stamfordham, 10 May and 29 November 1919. NACP, RG 165, MIDC 1917-41, 2083-1127-1140, 2083-1132, 19 September 1929, the Prince of Wales 'has now taken to flying quite seriously' and though he had 'for some time made use of a Royal Air Force 'plane for his public engagements' he had acquired his own Gipsy Moth for private flights. By 1930 he had two Gipsy Moths and one 'Puss' Moth, RA EVIIPWH/PS/MAIN/2183, letter from Halsey to Salmond, 10 November 1930.

Dermot Boyle of Chapter Five) was persuaded to take her flying while at a luncheon at one of the homes of Sassoon.³⁸

Hoare later wrote a paper about 'Relations with the King and Court' which recounted his time as Secretary of State for Air. After recollections about visits to Sandringham and Balmoral, and audiences at Buckingham Palace, he provided a succinct assessment of his achievements in this period and of the importance of the King's media conscious advisor: 'when I went to the Air Ministry he was strongly prejudiced against flying, the Air Ministry and the Air Force. It was with great difficulty that with Wigram's help I was able to somewhat wear down this prejudice.'³⁹ The Royal Archives contain several examples of Hoare's perseverance and his willingness to reopen matters with the monarch via copious correspondence with Stamfordham and Wigram (who succeeded as Private Secretary in 1931). One indicative example was the Air Ministry's wish to enlist Princess Mary, the King's daughter, as head of the Royal Air Force Nursing Service. Correspondence from late 1918 demonstrates that the matter had been raised during Sykes's time as CAS and both the Princess and her mother, Queen Mary, were favourable to the suggestion. The debate was terminated by the sovereign, as Stamfordham relayed in a handwritten note appended to a letter on the matter from Wigram to Stamfordham in which Wigram recommended that the Princess 'grew up with' the service. Stamfordham's note read:

I have spoken twice to the King on this subject: but HM says the service is in its infancy: who are its doctors where are its nurses [*sic*] — Princess Mary must wait until it has developed into at all events youth, if not manhood! I have told HRH.⁴⁰

On Hoare's arrival in office, he raised the issue once again with Stamfordham, reminding him that the RAF's nursing service by that time outstripped the Navy's in strength. In reply, the Palace consented and the Princess Mary Royal

³⁸ Dermot Boyle, pp. 54–55.

³⁹ CUL, Personal Papers of Viscount Templewood Papers, RF.3(51), 'Relations with the King and Court', undated.

⁴⁰ RA PS/PSO/GV/PS/RAF/24485, letter from Wigram to Stamfordham, 2 October 1918.

Air Force Nursing Service was born. (The service was not renamed, as would have been the protocol, when Princess Mary became the Princess Royal due to George V agreeing that a Princess Royal Royal [sic] Nursing Service would be a 'clumsy' title.)⁴¹

From the Presentational to the Political

The patronage of Princess Mary is one of many examples of perseverance on the part of the Air Ministry eventually resulting in closer ties between the Palace and the RAF. Once established, these ties were hard to break and importantly they increased the royal family's emotional commitment to the RAF. The sense of duty towards the armed forces that characterises British monarchs meant that ceremonial and symbolic agreements such as this, while appearing potentially superficial, were in fact central to the newest service attaining the trappings which marked it as permanent and deserving of equivalence with the Navy and the Army. The diversity of issues discussed in correspondence between the monarchy and the Air Ministry during this period was broad and ranged from those which could be viewed as trivial to the politically sensitive and significant. However, even those in the former category could disguise deeper implications for relationships between the three services in Whitehall and often exercised the King.

One episode, discussed in detail in Chapter One, over the RAF Ensign illustrated both how an ostensibly marginal issue could intersect with the competing agendas of the services and George V's occasional role as arbiter between them. Issues like the design of an ensign for the RAF might appear relatively petty in comparison with the weightier matters that formed the agendas of the CID and the Cabinet. This, however, was exactly the category of dispute which exercised the King's interest and this case was significant because it involved a power struggle between the Navy and the RAF. It also demonstrated that his longstanding affiliation with the Navy did not automatically confer his loyalty to the senior service in such debates. Though

⁴¹ RA PS/PSO/GV/PS/RAF/24485, letter from Hoare to Stamfordham, 27 April 1923, and letter from A.H.L. Hardinge to Dorothy Yorke, 14 January 1932.

the Navy and the Army might not have fully verbalised it, each of these interactions with the royal household and each decision by it to support an Air Ministry argument or suggestion further strengthened the RAF's position. In 1922, for example, Trenchard spoke with the King about an honorary rank for the Prince of Wales and reflected in a subsequent letter to the royal heir:

Considering the amount of flying the Prince of Wales has done in the past, I need hardly tell the Prince what an honour we would deem it if he would accept rank in the Air Force, and wear the full R.A.F. Uniform with Wings; we are all very keen on it.⁴²

The Prince of Wales agreed to taking the rank of Group Captain in reply to him. Similarly, the RAF expended considerable energy ensuring that Trenchard was appointed an Aide-de-Camp to the King, in line with the tradition of the older services.⁴³ Though developments of this nature made little material difference to the future of the RAF, together they cemented the relationship between royalty and the RAF. Given that most of these concessions had been agreed by the early 1920s, in many ways the royal relationship was ahead of that of the RAF with the broader establishment.

The Air Ministry also used a potential crisis to communicate the importance of command status, and contrast the advantages of lead command for the RAF with the disadvantages of subordination to the Army elsewhere, directly to the monarch. An exchange from the Royal Archives regarding India refers to articles in *The Times* in 1922 which featured the letters of Major Luard, who had died in an aircraft crash in Dardoni, India. His letters, released to the newspaper by his father, catalogued failings of equipment and resource. *The Times* leader reported shortages of propellers, 60–70% of bombs on one expedition 'which failed to burst', and poor command and control with aircraft mounting expeditions to targets two hundred miles distant, though closer airfields were available. It said that Luard's letters:

⁴² RA EVIIPWH/PS/MAIN/1237, letter from Trenchard to Thomas, 1 November 1922.

⁴³ RA PS/PSO/GV/PS/RAF/23952/18, letter from Lord Londonderry to Stamfordham, 21 February 1921.

show without possibility of contradiction that members of the Royal Air Force engaged in the 'pacification' of Waziristan are asked to do their work in conditions that render it an almost impossibly difficult and dangerous task.

[...] it is to be noted that a heavy share of the blame for the state of affairs to which we call attention lies at the door of the Air Ministry itself.⁴⁴

George V's Private Secretary wrote soon after to the Secretary of State for Air, Guest, quoting from *The Times* and saying that, if correct, '[His Majesty] must, both as King and as the Head of the R.A.F., appeal with all possible earnestness that immediate steps be taken to rectify a conditions of things [*sic*], which [...] is discreditable to us as a nation'.⁴⁵ The reply from the Air Ministry carefully explained that the RAF in India was under the administrative control of the Indian Government and continued:

The difficulties of the R.A.F. in India are still further increased by the fact that they are in complete subordination to the Army authorities in that country and have no direct right of access to the Government of India itself. [...] For a very long time it has been apparent to the Air Ministry that loss of efficiency must result from this lack of status and the Ministry have been persistently urging the necessity for an alteration in this state of affairs. [...] The whole situation in India merely affords an illustration of how slow will be the full and efficient development of the Air Arm, as long as it is subordinated to either of the older Services.⁴⁶

Iraq, at the time, was providing the opportunity for the RAF to demonstrate how much more efficient the service could be if allowed command. Subsequent

⁴⁴ 'Who is Responsible?' *The Times*, 30 August 1922, p. 13.

⁴⁵ RA PS/PSO/GV/PS/RAF/37420, letter from Stamfordham to Guest, 1 September 1922.

⁴⁶ RA PS/PSO/GV/PS/RAF/37420, letter from Guest to Stamfordham, 1 September 1922, which was accompanied by a 'Memorandum for the Cabinet by the Secretary of State, Shortage of Equipment of the Royal Air Force in India' also dated 1 September 1922.

correspondence with the India Office demonstrates the acceptance of Stamfordham and by extension the Palace of their ignorance of the RAF's chain of command in India.⁴⁷ This brief archival exchange illustrates the sense of responsibility the King felt as the head of the RAF and the importance of the Air Ministry using such opportunities to make its case and extend its influence. It also demonstrates the symbolic and practical importance of command in Iraq, which, at the time of this correspondence, was weeks away from becoming a reality.

Another strategically important discussion between the Palace, government, and the Air Ministry in particular concerned the debates in the 1920s over disarmament of aircraft and the role of aerial bombing in future warfare. Ferris has legitimately accused the RAF, and Trenchard specifically, of manipulating the 'threat' from French aerial invasion at the time of the 1921 Washington conference to strengthen his hand.⁴⁸ As mentioned earlier, George V has been charged with comprehensively disliking modern technology including submarines and aircraft. His personal papers, and his handwritten annotations of these papers, offer a more complex reading of his views. The King, like many of his subjects, had witnessed the wartime attacks from the air on the British mainland, which had profoundly changed public views on the inviolability of the 'island' of Great Britain. *The Times*, on 10 July 1917, reported on a crowd which had met 'on Tower Hill' demanding reprisals for the attacks and the newspaper printed their telegram to George V.⁴⁹ This asked of him: 'if your Ministers do not take steps to protect us we implore your Majesty to dissolve Parliament and appoint Ministers who will do their duty'.⁵⁰

His diary entries are noticeably animated during the bombings in 1917 when he talked of hospital visits with the injured with 'blood everywhere', reflecting that the 'Germans are indeed beasts dropping bombs on London'. On 24 September, he recorded an air raid while at Buckingham Palace: 'While we

⁴⁷ RA PS/PSO/GV/PS/RAF/37420, letter from Stamfordham to Peel at the India Office, 9 September 1922.

⁴⁸ John R. Ferris, *Men, Money, and Diplomacy*, p. 107.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Biddle, p. 31.

⁵⁰ 'Appeal to the King: Tower-Hill Demand for Reprisals', *The Times*, 10 July 1917; Buckingham Palace replied, 'Your telegram has been received and forwarded to the Prime Minister'.

were at dinner an air raid took place, about 5 bombs were dropped, one in the Green Park close to Piccadilly, all the guns were firing and search lights marking, but I could see nothing.' On 21 October he saw, on a visit to Camberwell, 'several damaged houses and talked to the people, there was a large crowd there'.⁵¹ The King's active interest in the subject in the early 1920s must have been informed, in part, by his proximity to the effects of bombing during the First World War.

Although George V expressed his dislike both of submarines and bombing squadrons, Trenchard's focus on the French air threat in 1921 appears to have captured the monarch's interest and led to a divergence between his strongly anti-submarine position and his views on air power. On submarines, the King expressed his view in 1921 that Britain 'should press strongly for the total abolition of submarines. Like bombing squadrons, they were aimed even more at non-combatants than combatants; they were an unhuman weapon.'⁵² This view remained unchanged over subsequent years, as confirmed when Stamfordham wrote to Captain Hardinge in 1925, following the loss of a navy submarine: 'If only the general public knew what are the King's feelings on this subject [abolition of submarines], outside pressure on the Government might become irresistible.'⁵³

His views on bombing seem to have been considerably influenced by the Air Ministry's memorandum on the 'Vulnerability of the British Isles to Air Attack and the Preponderance of French Armaments', discussed in Chapter One, which came to the attention of the royal household within days of its publication. The Memorandum was headed with a note from Trenchard:

The Air Staff have prepared the attached Memorandum on the strength of the continental air menace that exists at the present time.

⁵¹ RA GV/PRIV/GVD/1917–1920, King George V diary entries, 13 June, 24 September and 21 October 1917.

⁵² RA PSO/GV/C/G/2030/1, 'Note made for the Prime Minister of an interview given by the King to Sir Edward Grigg on the question of disarmament in view of the forthcoming conference at Washington', November 1921.

⁵³ RA PS/PSO/GV/C/G/2030/3, letter from Stamfordham to Hardinge, 14 November 1925.

They have not attempted in this paper (with which I am thoroughly in agreement) to argue the probability of this menace immediately developing, nor have they attempted to show how best it could be met; but in my opinion, it is obvious from the facts set forth in the attached paper that the longer we delay making an organisation that is capable of dealing with it, the longer we are really helpless, in the defence of the British Isles, to meet a situation that might develop suddenly.⁵⁴

The King asked Stamfordham to relay his concerns to 10 Downing Street, which his Private Secretary did calling the Prime Minister's attention to Trenchard's paper:

No doubt the Prime Minister has read Sir H. Trenchard's Secret Memorandum of the 8th instant [...]. The King feels that we are especially exposed to this menace, the possibilities of which become greater year by year with the development of chemical research.

Downing Street replied that the CID had decided to appoint a special committee to investigate the matter.⁵⁵ The King, while supporting the RAF's argument in Trenchard's paper, wrote soon after: 'I hope we will insist on abolition of submarines.'⁵⁶

Of course, the monarch's role in the twentieth century involved political counsel rather than the exercise of sovereign power that his ancestors had wielded in earlier centuries. Williamson argued, at the time of George V's reign:

Constitutional niceties and civil service procedures ensured that they [royals] were normally kept informed, and that their comments and questions received respectful and considered responses. Nevertheless

⁵⁴ TNA, CAB 3/3/102, 'Vulnerability of British Isles to Air Attack', 8 November 1921.

⁵⁵ RA PS/PSO/GV/C/G/1739, letter from Stamfordham to Grigg at 10 Downing Street, 18 November 1921, and reply 22 November 1921.

⁵⁶ RA PS/PSO/GV/C/S/1739, King George V's handwritten note on letter from Grigg to Stamfordham, 23 November 1921.

the quantity of this activity far exceeded its importance and effect.⁵⁷

How much the royals influenced politicians and whether George V's appeals to Lloyd George on the matter of bombing and a perceived threat from France made a difference to government policy is a moot point.⁵⁸ However, the King's active engagement in issues concerning the RAF gave the Air Ministry leadership more direct contact with the royal household. The increasing connections being made between the monarchy and the public in the 1920s in the form of visits, attendance at events, broadcasts, and press coverage marked a step change in royal engagement with the British people and were another opportunity for co-operation between the institutions.

Where Hoare and Trenchard had the most tangible success was in persuading the royal family to engage with them publicly, including at the annual air displays at Hendon which were examined in detail in the last chapter. Before the First World War, the Navy's elaborate reviews centred around the monarchy dating from naval celebrations of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887, which brought together 'potent national signifiers [...] into one dramatic display that made the celebration of the Navy such a powerful stage for identity politics'.⁵⁹ With the Navy stepping back from public engagement in the early post-war period, the RAF displays offered the RAF and the royal family a very visible opportunity to meet in the public eye under the banner of nation and empire.

The US Military Attaché in London (providing an outsider's view of the event less prone to hyperbole than the British press) reported back to Washington on the 1929 display and the royal family's presence:

It is estimated that 100,000 persons attended the annual display of the Royal Air Force at Hendon Aerodrome on the outskirts of London, July 13. The display, which was admirably conducted, drew spectators from

⁵⁷ Philip Williamson, 'The monarchy and public values 1910–1953', in Olechnowicz, p. 233.

⁵⁸ Glencross et al, for example, challenge assumptions of monarchical ornamentalism, Glencross, Rowbotham and Kandiah, p. 6.

⁵⁹ Rüger, 'Nation, Empire and Navy', p. 186.

all parts of England. It is an annual event which besides promoting popularity of the Air Service, produces a large sum for the Air Force memorial fund. [...]

There was a grandstand also various inclosures [*sic*] on the ground for spectators. The Royal inclosure, specially decorated and provided with easy chairs, was limited generally to the Royal party, including the Prince of Wales, the Duke and Duchess of York, members of the Government, officials of the Air Corps, diplomatic representatives and guests from other services and departments. A special inclosure was provided for each House of Parliament.⁶⁰

This report reflects the place that the pageant had grown to occupy into the mid-1920s as an important event in the annual sporting and society calendar. George V had encouraged the royal family to increase their presence at sporting events, including Ascot, Wembley, Lords, Twickenham, and Wimbledon, and the pageants were to become part of society's summer schedule.⁶¹ He first attended the Hendon RAF Display in 1923, lending prestige to the event as well as attracting fellow family members, as reported in *Flight* magazine:

This year Their Majesties the King and Queen came to the Pageant, and stayed until almost the end, whilst other members of the Royal party present consisted of Queen Alexandra, the Duke and Duchess of York, the Empress Marie Feodorovna of Russia, Princess Beatrice, Princess Victoria, the Grand Duchess Xenia, and the Crown Prince of Sweden.⁶²

The King's visit to the pageant in 1925 elicited an entry in his diary on the spectacle of new accomplishments and modern aircraft: 'May and I went to the RAF Display at Hendon, which was very interesting, 36 planes flown together in

⁶⁰ NACP, RG 165, MIDC 1917-41, 2083-937-944, 2083-929, 'Royal Air Force Display at Hendon', 16 July 1929.

⁶¹ Cannadine, *George V*, pp. 4.22-3.

⁶² 'The Fourth R.A.F. Aerial Pageant', *Flight*, 5 July 1923.

formation and we saw many new machines.’⁶³ The patronage of three generations of the royal family was a coup for the RAF and one which had taken significant efforts behind the scenes. Both the monarchy and the RAF, two institutions separated by age and reputation, were respectively repositioning or positioning themselves in the 1920s to present a curated image to the British public. At Hendon, the realms of traditional and modern united.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored why the monarchy mattered so much as to be the RAF’s primary strategic influence objective and why, in turn, the royal family reacted positively to these entreaties when they had strong affiliations to the RAF’s primary critic, the Navy, as well long-standing connections with the Army. Both organisations, the most venerable and the brand-new, faced the challenges of the post-war environment with ingenuity, positioning themselves in a way that found opportunities instead of obstacles. The King and his more progressive courtiers understood that the mass media provided channels to engage the public and promote an image of the royal family as patriotic, embodying Britain and empire, and in touch with the people through public engagements and interaction with the press. The RAF leadership understood that, while there was an advantage to a service built on modern technology and innovation, they lacked deep roots within the establishment. The Hendon pageants encapsulated their answer to that challenge: embrace the modern, but harness tropes of tradition by association with the monarchy and empire, at an event increasingly designed to resemble society staples like Ascot while attracting interest from large numbers of the general public. Each institution had something to offer the other and something to gain as well.

Though the older generation of the royal family was closer to the naval tradition and wary of the negative aspects of air power, the glamour of aviation attracted the younger generation just as it did many in Britain at the time. During the 1920s, the assiduous attentions of the RAF brought the royal family closer

⁶³ RA GV/PRIV/GVD/1923–1927, King George V diary entry, 27 June 1925.

to its cause in public and private, whether through charitable endeavours, sporting events, private parties, or frequent correspondence with the Palace over matters ranging from disarmament to decorations. The relationship between the two institutions exemplified a mutual understanding that the boundaries between the traditional and the modern could be transgressed to the advantage of both. This straddling of both worlds by the Air Force sat in contrast to the Navy and the Army, whose identities more closely matched the more traditional elements of royalty. Although the latter two services' leaders regarded the inferiority and immaturity of the RAF as inferring greater import on their respective relationships with the monarchy, the modern and insurgent nature of the 1920s' RAF offered the junior service a different route to interlacing the two worlds. In the many individual correspondences, agreements on protocol, and ceremonial acknowledgements between the RAF and the royal household, the monarchy gave the young service a growing endorsement of its equivalence as a third legitimate service.

Every communication seems to have been approached by the Air Ministry as an opportunity, demonstrating the adaptability and flexibility of the new institution. Hoare, by then Viscount Templewood, described the 1920s organisation: 'The Air Ministry and Air Force that I had known had been a new and struggling department and a small *corps d'élite* that Trenchard and I had managed almost as a family party.'⁶⁴ Though it struggled, it was also agile, creative, and forward-thinking. With little history, it was forced to think about the future. The monarchy, while it was redolent with history, was at the same time considering its future in a changed world. Under George V's reign, the sense of rebranding reached beyond the Windsor name change. The royal family's identification with country and empire over old continental familial connections, and their attitude to public engagements and the media, was a strategy for modernisation. Although the two institutions were contrasting — one ancient, grand, established, and traditional, the other new, overshadowed by older siblings, immature, and modern — there were solid reasons for an attraction between them. Both, in their different ways, were vulnerable to the challenges

⁶⁴ Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years*, pp. 427–28.

facing them and Britain at the time of the Armistice. Both needed to reach out to the public for support and invent, or reinvent, their brand. They each had an element of glamour, in the lustre of royalty or the dynamism of aviation, and the particular nature of the 1920s, with a much-expanded electorate informed by a widely read popular press, made glamour a valuable asset in public relations.

The politicians leading the Air Ministry were crucial to strengthening the relationship between the monarchy and the RAF. Londonderry and Sassoon both lobbied the royal household on behalf of the Air Ministry; both eminently well connected for the task. However, the RAF benefited most from Hoare's efforts, with his strategic vision and prioritisation of the relationship. He engaged with the royal household tirelessly. It is quite possible that his fixation on royalty was partly due to his rumoured pomposity, as the Royal Archives also reflect. In an aside during a letter concerning the dedication of the RAF Memorial, Cecil confided in the Prince of Wales's Private Secretary in 1923: 'Between ourselves, I am told the Secretary of State is slightly huffy that more notice has not been taken of him.'⁶⁵ Whatever Hoare's underlying motivations or pretensions, his selection of the monarchy as a vital — primary — tool in the RAF's fight for acceptance was shrewd and successful. In 1929, in the ultimate display of aviation technology, Hoare overflew Sandringham in the futuristic R101 airship and the King and the ex-Secretary of State exchanged messages using modern radio telephony; this was almost certainly the first time the monarch and one of his ministers had communicated from ground to air, and back (and also the first time that — the then — Princess Elizabeth's reaction to air power was recorded).⁶⁶ This was also the year that George V told him, 'there could now be no question of breaking up the Air Ministry or the Air Force'.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ RA EVIIPWH/PS/MAIN/1237, letter from Cecil to Thomas, 14 July 1923.

⁶⁶ RA PS/PSO/GV/PS/RAF/50185, letter from Hardinge to Bullock, 2 November 1929. RA GV/PRIV/GVD/1927–1931, King George V diary entry, 1 November 1929, included reference to 'great excitement on the part of Lilibet' at seeing the airship.

⁶⁷ CUL, Personal Papers of Viscount Templewood, Part V:4 (51), 'The resignation of the second Baldwin government', June 1929.

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CHAPTER EIGHT — CULTURE, IDENTITY, AND INTER-SERVICE RELATIONS: MATTERS OF THE HEART

we contend that the British policy is to develop the independent conception of the air as an art, as an arm, and as a service: and that this method alone will secure the qualitative ascendancy and superiority which the safety of the country requires.

Winston Churchill, 1921¹

As has been highlighted throughout this thesis, at the end of the First World War the RAF was just over eight months old and faced a perilously uncertain future. Formed with the grudging agreement of the Navy and Army, its future permanence came under attack from the elder services in the strained economic climate of post-war Britain. The RAF was only semi-established as a singular force in November 1918, still to equip its men (and women at that time) properly with their own uniforms and ranks, let alone with coherent doctrine. Yet by the end of the war the British Air Force had exercised all the elements of operational activity that feature in modern air power doctrine.² At the crucial War Cabinet meeting at which the generals and admirals, and their political masters, after lengthy discussion, approved the recommendation by Smuts to amalgamate the RFC and the RNAS, the minutes record: 'It was generally agreed that after the war there must be a unified service under a Ministry of the Crown, to control absolutely the existing Air Services.'³ However, as with so many statements on future political intent, these words are open to interpretation given their context in the minutes as a part of a paragraph presenting the President of the Air Board's testimony.⁴ Time and again during the inter-war years, the older services sought to exert their authority over the RAF or eradicate it entirely. The way in which the Air Ministry's leadership

¹ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/563, 'Appendix "C". Mr Churchill's Views on a Separate Air Force', 24 October 1921.

² David Jordan, 'The Genesis of Modern Air Power: The RAF in 1918', in Sheffield and Gray, pp. 191–206 (p. 203).

³ TNA, CAB 23/4, War Cabinet 223, 24 August 1917, p. 6.

⁴ Lord Cowdray.

handled its lack of history, through deft interweaving of aspects of tradition and modernity, has been explored throughout this thesis. This chapter analyses why the services clashed so violently, and not simply over estimates and resource. With limited funds to fight over and in a climate of demobilisation and disarmament, issues of the 'heart' mattered. The RAF needed a coherent identity with which to shield itself from successive attacks and creative ways to inveigle its way into a position of parity with its rivals. This identity was created in the crucible of inter-service rivalry and, it is argued, was all the stronger for it.

This chapter will consider the creation of three-way inter-service rivalry from the perspective of armed forces culture and will argue that many of the clashes between the Navy, Army, and RAF in the 1920s had their roots in culture and identity rather than money or doctrine. In the 1930s, with the rising threat of war, finance and economic dominance mattered more, but in the preceding decade a fight for parity of status meant that other less tangible factors, such as identity, command, parity, and conceptual distinctness, were pivotal. It will consider some key episodes in the journey of the three services during this turbulent period that illustrate the importance of culture in the development of the early RAF and its fight for independence. Like the press and bias against the Air Ministry in some key newspapers, discussed in Chapter Five, inter-service rivalry and the opprobrium of the Admiralty and War Office are normally presented as forces mainly ranged against the smaller, weaker, newer third service from the end of the First World War. But, like the press, the RAF was also created partly by its future service tormentors and owed its survival, it is argued, as much to their vehemence which forced the junior service to hone its arguments and political tactics.

In order to understand the cultural nature of service competition in the inter-war period, it will be instructive to return to and examine a series of convulsions in the development of British air power from its earliest roots. The first was the development of separate naval and air arms soon after the creation of the RFC and their journey to intransigent opposition during the darkest months of the First World War. This in turn resulted in the Smuts Report that recommended the creation of a separate air service. The role of Trenchard and

his conversion, from his opposition to the concept of independence in wartime, to become the leading advocate of the RAF as the reappointed CAS from 1919 onwards was the next critical turning point. The issue of command brought the War Office firmly into the inter-service Whitehall fray, joining the Admiralty more vocally in opposition to the Air Ministry. After the war a succession of government reviews considered the role of the third service and its relations with its older sister services. Although they were all important in sharpening the Air Ministry's arguments and stance, the Salisbury Committee is especially notable, given its timing soon after command had been handed from the Army to the RAF in Iraq and because it found firmly in favour of the RAF, recommending significant expansion of the force. (Here the term 'Salisbury Committee' encompasses both the CID sub-committee chaired by the Marquis of Salisbury and its sub-committee chaired by Balfour.) Finally, this chapter will consider the significance of growing three-way inter-service rivalry in the RAF's development and identity, arguing that its strengthening position during the 1920s was derived partly from attacks on its independence and that those attacks formed part of the Air Force's cultural journey to a service unique in outlook and organisation. Issues of culture and identity, the 'heart' of the service, were key to the RAF's success in arguments of the 'head', such as finance and doctrine.

The Early British Flying Services

The decision to establish a British flying service in 1912 hailed not only the establishment of British air power as a distinct form of warfare but also the institutionalisation of arguments about the role of air power within the armed services. It was created as the RFC, with a military and naval wing and centralised training and procurement, but the Navy quickly set its stall by independence from the Army. Later, evidence given by the First Sea Lord to the Salisbury Committee of 1923 demonstrated the informal nature of the evolution of the RNAS (and Beatty's unfamiliarity with its early development):

Lord Beatty: I never saw the charter of the R.N.A.S.

Lord Weir: I do not think there ever was one.

Sir Maurice Hankey: They began as a Naval unit of the Royal Flying Corps. As it seemed to us, from our point of view, they surreptitiously developed into the R.N.A.S.

Lord Beatty: When did they develop – before the war?

Sir Maurice Hankey: Shortly before the war – in 1914, I should say.

Lord Beatty: That was Churchill?

Sir Maurice Hankey: That was Churchill.

Lord Beatty: The two branches developed independently.⁵

Churchill's enthusiasm for air power as First Lord at the Admiralty between 1911 and 1915 was a central factor in shaping the naval air service's early spirit of independence. He backed Murray Sueter, who was made Director of a newly created Air Department in the Admiralty in 1912 within months of the supposed creation of a single armed air force. Reflecting the vague recollections of Beatty and Weir, Sueter choreographed the gradual development of the Navy's air arm through a series of informal and formal changes, renaming it the 'Naval Air Service' (from 'Naval Arm') in 1913 and submitting his proposals for its reorganisation in early 1914. An Admiralty Circular Letter later that year laid out the formal organisation of the RNAS although, as Eric Grove catalogued, the service remained technically a naval wing of the RFC. However, Sykes described the reconfiguration as placing 'the naval air force on a self-supporting basis [...] the entity of the Royal Flying Corps as a whole, as originally provided for, was lost'.⁶

Grove argued that part of Churchill's attraction to the RNAS was its semi-detachment from both the Navy and Army: 'Churchill was growing to like the idea of his own air force, notionally part of the RFC and thus separated from the rest of the Navy, but also separate from any War Office control.'⁷ Despite this early separation of the two flying arms, and though there were tensions between the Admiralty and the War Office, their relationship was managed

⁵ TNA, AIR 8/66, 'Evidence to Sub-Committee on Relations between the Navy and the Air Force', 18 June 1923, p. 33.

⁶ Eric Grove, 'Seamen or Airmen? The Early Days of British Naval Flying', in Benbow, pp. 7–26 (p. 24); Sir Frederick Hugh Sykes, *Aviation in Peace and War* (Lexington, KY: Forgotten Books, 2011), no page numbers.

⁷ Grove, 'Seamen or Airmen?', in Benbow, p. 22.

through an early precursor to the COS Committee, the 'High Level Bridge': a joint committee attended by the First Lord, First Sea Lord, Secretary of State for War and CIGS. Hankey later recalled that the arrangement sprang from the relationship between Churchill and Seely, then Secretary of State for War, who were 'intimate friends': 'this arrangement [...] did thanks to the personal friendship between Mr. Churchill and Colonel Seely, bring about the co-operation between the Admiralty and War Office in carrying out their initial plans when war broke out in 1914'.⁸

The advent of the First World War, however, upset the delicate balance between the two now separately administered air services. When war broke out Britain had, essentially, two land-based forces since development in flying from ships was still in its infancy. Both services were gradually to waken to the potential of air power for their fighting environment and thus they descended into the first significant inter-service crisis. In the RNAS, Sueter continued to champion the potential of naval aviation and his service pioneered new techniques in the early stages of the First World War. In September 1914 it carried out the first 'strategic' bombing attack, of Zeppelin sheds in Antwerp and Dusseldorf, and in 1915 carried out the first aerial torpedo attacks in the Dardanelles. It also established inland fighter defence stations in the United Kingdom at Hendon, Chingford, Wormwood Scrubs, and Roehampton.⁹

However, significant breakthroughs in the development of aircraft handling and carrier construction were not achieved before 1918, so for much of the war large portions of the RNAS were physically separated from their sea-going colleagues and their efforts were directed in other areas than carrier capability. This, in turn, engendered a lack of mutual confidence between the RNAS and the sea-going Navy which was articulated at the highest levels by the Prime Minister's Private Secretary responding to Sueter's calls for further independence:

⁸ CUL, Personal Papers of Andrew Boyle, letter from Hankey to Trenchard, Add. 9429/1B/67(i), 5 February 1954.

⁹ TNA, AIR 41/45, 'Volume 1 – The Atlantic and Home Waters – The Prelude April 1918 to September 1939', Air Historical Branch document, undated, pp. 17–18.

The military wing [the RFC] is a success largely because it has been developed and trained as a branch of the army and with military objects strictly in view. The naval wing is a failure because it has not been designed for naval objects with the result that it has degenerated into a crowd of highly skilled but ill-disciplined privateersmen. What is wanted is to make the naval wing more naval, not more aerial.¹⁰

By formalising themselves as a naval air service, these early aviation pioneers created a highly skilled and specialised organisation, but they were labelled individualistic for their separateness from the regular Navy.¹¹ Both the Army and the Navy were used to fighting in teams, shoulder to shoulder with their comrades, whether within regiments or within ships. The naval air service looked, to outsiders, like a group of mavericks, but the nature of aviation, including in its civil development before the war, had been inherently idiosyncratic. Aviation pioneers were non-conformist and idealistic, many driven by a passionate belief in the potential of flying before air power had been fully embraced by the mainstream. Bringing a group of individuals together and giving them a strong internal identity, as Sueter did, set them against the traditional Navy.

The Admiralty reacted to this and to the rapid expansion of the force by taking control of the RNAS, removing Sueter and replacing him with a sailor without an aviation background:

in effect a new air service was formed in which there was a large proportion of regular naval officers with no special knowledge of aircraft but who brought with them powers of organisation, a strict sense of naval discipline and the pride of the ancient service to which they belonged.¹²

¹⁰ Letter from Bonham-Carter to Hankey, 10 June 1915, quoted in Grove, 'Air Force, Fleet Air Arm — or Armoured Corps?', in Benbow, pp. 27–56 (p. 35).

¹¹ Sykes, *Aviation in Peace and War*, no page numbers.

¹² TNA, AIR 41/45, 'Volume 1 – The Atlantic and Home Waters – The Prelude April 1918 to September 1939', Air Historical Branch document, undated, pp. 18–19. Admiral Vaughan-Lee became Director of the Admiralty's Air Department in late 1915, Divine, p. 79.

This change to proactive ownership of the air service in turn damaged the balance of relations between the Navy and Army. When the Admiralty took control of the RNAS, the problem morphed from an intra-service issue into one of inter-service competition, as it competed with the War Office for resource. Once the Admiralty started to flex its muscles over its share of air assets, inter-service rivalry over air power was the inevitable outcome. The arguments over resource, supply, and operations that ensued were magnified by German bombing of the British mainland, which provoked mounting public and parliamentary concern over home defence throughout 1916 and into 1917, as discussed in Chapter Five. Inter-service rivalry between the air services of the Navy and Army ironically contributed to both services losing their air arms with the creation of the RAF in 1918.

In addition to the novel nature of a fighting force which was composed of individual pilots in charge of single machines, the air environment was a different conceptual space, existing above land and sea, defying conventional military geography. This, too, challenged settled definitions of land and sea power. The issue of home defence during the First World War eventually forced these tensions into the public eye and onto the agenda of politicians, exposing many of them for the first time to the intellectual challenges of defining and adjudicating between 'naval air' and 'army air'. As Trenchard put it: 'There is but one "air," and, with the best will in the world, nobody can decide where the line is. [...] The Air is one and cannot be divided.'¹³ Murray described, in the context of military innovation, a 'temporal and terrestrial framework to operations on land and at sea that is not evident in air operations'.¹⁴ The film *Dunkirk* implicitly demonstrates the specific temporal challenge that air presented. In it, the three environments are intertwined in the narrative by focusing on one week on the ground, one day at sea, and one hour in the air.¹⁵ How better to demonstrate the temporal differences between the operations of an air force and its earth-tethered counterparts? The air environment resisted division into a naval or military arm because it straddled both and operated at a different tempo in three

¹³ TNA, AIR 8/66, 'Evidence to Sub-Committee on Relations between the Navy and the Air Force', 3 July 1923, p. 2.

¹⁴ Murray and Millett, p. 98.

¹⁵ *Dunkirk*, dir. by Christopher Nolan (Warner Brothers, 2017).

dimensions. The struggles to define and compartmentalise the use of air power in warfare highlighted the conceptual challenge that the air environment posed for the long-established arms of military power. The novelty and potential of air power, and the impossibility of characterising it as wholly encompassed within the doctrines of land and sea power, would give the RAF its nascent identity, as Smuts would give it legitimacy.

The Smuts Reports

The next tremor in the evolution of inter-service rivalry came, of course, with the creation of the RAF. Its roots, in the German bombings, press agitations, and the clashes over supply of aircraft between the Navy and the Army, have been discussed in earlier chapters. Views differ on the key factor in the creation of the RAF. In truth, there were multiple factors in play which precipitated Lloyd George's commissioning of Smuts to write his 1917 reports. Smuts was tasked to consider the questions of home defence, the organisation of air services, and the role of air power more generally. Once he began the review an important, but erroneous, influencing argument around the future capability of air power came to the fore, which became the next frontier for service competition. Henderson, the army Director General of Military Aeronautics in the RFC, played a central role in advising Smuts and convinced him of the feasibility of long-range independent bombing. Exaggerated predictions of aircraft production were presented by Weir and Henderson, arguably in good faith, which inevitably influenced Smuts's decision to find firmly in favour of an independent air force.

Regardless of this over-inflation of production potential, Trenchard was among many who later acknowledged the importance of Henderson's vision beyond the immediate over-ambitious predictions of British and American aircraft production: 'There is no doubt whatever that David Henderson, with whom I sometimes disagreed in the past, was the one man more than any other who had the true picture of the Air Force of the future in these early days.'¹⁶

¹⁶ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/542, 'Note by Lord Trenchard on reading Syke's [*sic*] book "From Many Angles" written at the end of 1942', 19 January 1943.

Smuts produced two reports, the second of which had a profound impact on the development of air power in Britain. The recommendation to create a unified air force run by an independent Air Ministry was the key element of that report, though Powers was right to conclude that the Report did not emerge from a vacuum: it was the culmination of a process, 'a long-building trend towards a single controlling body'.¹⁷ The Smuts Reports gave a legitimacy to, but could not enshrine an identity for, an independent force. That became the work of the future leaders of the Air Ministry, but without Smuts's recommendations there would have been no force on which to build an identity.

Much of the reaction of the Admiralty to the Smuts Reports has been analysed in the literature as a singular position, but the reaction of the Navy and that of the RNAS are better viewed separately. The senior naval leadership accepted the outcome of the Smuts Reports and the recommendation to create a separate air organisation, although the concerns aired by the First Lord over command and ownership at the August 1917 War Cabinet meeting were a harbinger of things to come.¹⁸ Roskill recounted that Beatty, then Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet, 'felt that its creation would be conducive to providing "an Air policy which we have lacked hitherto"'. He was therefore "generally in agreement with the conclusions arrived at" by the Smuts Committee.'¹⁹ The senior leadership of the Admiralty appeared to accept that an independent air force would provide them with better support than had been achieved with the RFC and RNAS in direct competition. A letter to King George V's Private Secretary from Admiral Hopwood (who would become Secretary of the Navy League in 1919) in late 1916 offers another insight into the Admiralty's inner workings:

The attitude of our Board on the air question is to me quite wretched. The Army and Navy are fighting an action on the Whitehall front not in

¹⁷ Powers, p. 93.

¹⁸ TNA, CAB 23/4, War Cabinet 223, 24 August 1917, p. 4.

¹⁹ Miller, p. 177; Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars 1*, p. 238; John Sweetman, 'Crucial Months for Survival: The RAF 1918-19', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 19 (1984), p. 535.

France. We must agree and even give way in the presence of a common enemy. If we don't the country will hold us responsible.²⁰

Though the Admiralty held fire from attacking the RAF until after the war, it would have been naïve to expect a newly created air force with little coherent identity in these latter stages of conflict to proceed unchallenged into the post-war peace.

However, evidence shows that the grassroots of the RNAS were dismayed by the momentous decision to amalgamate them into an independent force, to be dominated by the RFC. At Cranwell, a young apprentice, Ross, recalled the tensions that existed after the RAF's creation in 1918:

The Royal Naval Air Service, being an intrinsic [*sic*] part of the Navy, was steeped in Naval traditions, which were held in much regard. Therefore it was without doubt that Cranwell was going to retain its Naval methods and ideas up to the very last.

[...] The Royal Flying Corps being a young service and composed of many Military men from practically every type of unit of the Army had not much to lose.

[...] This new Royal Air Force seemed to adopt a more Military principle and classification. It was not surprising that the RNAS were not so keen about the amalgamation.²¹

The increased navalisation of the RNAS as the Admiralty exerted control over its air arm had inculcated its personnel with a strong naval identity. Since the RAF adopted predominantly army ways of working, such as the transposition of the Army's disciplinary procedures and council structure as the framework for the RAF's, it was inevitable that members of the RNAS would have felt a crisis of identity greater than that of their RFC counterparts.

²⁰ RA PS/PSO/GV/C/G/1039/1, letter from Hopwood to Stamfordham, 1 November 1916.

²¹ Ross, p. 132.

A letter written shortly before the RAF's creation summarised the frustration that members of the RNAS felt about the change:

Of course the whole of this 'swinging the lead' by the junior service Army people is caused by the Army receiving the R.F.C. with open arms and the Navy snobs looking upon the R.N.A.S. as a thundering nuisance and something to be exterminated.

The author of this letter speculated on the RNAS calling a strike to demonstrate disapproval of the arrangements:

There is a very strong feeling running through the R.N.A.S. at the present time which a great many hope will develop into a comical sort of revolution. Personally I loathe the R.F.C., the Army and everything connected with it and only wish to work at aviation connected with the sea and the Navy.²²

Distrust of the Admiralty's attitude to the RNAS, combined with a dislike of the RFC, alienated the grass-roots of naval aviation, though it is noteworthy that Gieves, the uniform providers, received orders for new RAF uniforms from RNAS officers interned in Holland in March 1918. They were informed in reply that interns and prisoners of war would not be transferred and would remain under Admiralty administration.²³

Fifty-five thousand naval personnel were transferred over to the RAF in April 1918, but at the war's end the RAF had 193 operational squadrons, 187 training squadrons, 27,333 officers and 263,837 other ranks. Ex-naval personnel would have made up at most a fifth of the entire force so were significantly outnumbered by former RFC airmen. It is unsurprising they felt so disenfranchised but the difference in their viewpoint from the Admiralty is

²² NAL, Personal Papers of C. G. Grey, CGG 5 1915–19, letter from Hampton to Grey, undated but written shortly before the formal establishment of the RAF on 1 April 1918.

²³ TNA, AIR 2/148, letter from James Gieve to Colonel Fletcher at the Air Ministry, and reply, 8 and 19 March 1918.

noteworthy even so. The parallel forces of the dynamism of a new air service and the demands of demobilisation played to the RAF's advantage. Frustrated RNAS transferees found that competition with their RFC counterparts made parity of treatment difficult. Comptroller-General of Equipment, Sefton Brancker raised this with the Air Council saying:

I find, myself, great difficulty in placing Naval Air Service officers in any high appointments that I find available, because we are practically accepting the Army system of repair and supply as it stands, and naturally the men who have grown up in it are best suited to control it during the critical moments of amalgamation.²⁴

As argued in Chapter One, the lack of a history forced the air service to face the future, and disgruntled transferees could be swept out of the organisation in the savage manpower cuts of the early post-war period.

Trenchard's Conversion

Trenchard, a vehement opponent of the creation of the RAF in wartime, utterly changed his attitude in the post-war era. He expended significant energy from 1919 onwards, and in retrospective arguments later in life, explaining this transition. For him, it was not so much a 'conversion' but a change of circumstances that explained his emergence as the most dogged campaigner for the RAF in the 1920s. He always claimed that his objections in 1917 were based solely on his view of the priorities of the Western Front and that the condition of war was the central reason for his intransigence. At the time the government was considering the potential of creating an independent bombing force, he, along with Haig, argued — on the basis of practicalities — that there were insufficient aircraft to fulfil all proposed wartime tasks. On this they were technically correct. Inherent in their objections was their belief that the war would be won on the Western Front with the RFC supporting ground troops and not through the use of air power alone.

²⁴ TNA, AIR 6/16/57, letter from Sefton Brancker to The Secretary, Air Council, 26 February 1918.

Although Trenchard was right to doubt the potential of independent air power in 1917–18, his arguments were sufficiently vehement to paint him as an implacable opponent of the overall concept. He was also wrong that the creation of the RAF in 1918 would detrimentally affect the course of the war, though this risk was mitigated by his own hand in his role as commander of that independent force. Sam Leith described Trenchard's approach to this first wartime phase of the RAF's existence as 'like pushing a donkey up a flight of stairs' and no doubt his loyalty to Haig and his former comrades on the Western Front tempered the independent force's efforts.²⁵ Trenchard later accepted his error of judgement regarding the timing of the RAF's creation, writing:

I thought if anything was done to weaken the Western Front the war was lost and there would be no air service united or divided. I wanted to unify it, but later on, at a more suitable opportunity. Smuts thought it should be done at once, and he proved to be right, and although it was a fearful risk at the time, we managed to work it and yet not get defeated in the field on the Western Front.

He went on to reflect, correctly, that if he had won the argument at the time of the Smuts Reports the chances of creating a unified air force after the war would have been minimal, thus accepting retrospectively the validity of the decision to create the RAF during wartime.²⁶

His return to the Air Ministry in 1919 as a passionate advocate and leader of the RAF understandably provoked criticism of his contradictory positions. Debate continues on the extent to which his change of heart stemmed from the opportunity to think more strategically about the RAF's future after war's end or whether it was motivated by his wish for status and 'a devotion to private empire building'.²⁷ However, his conversion reflected his core

²⁵ Sam Leith, 'Spectator Books: The Birth of the RAF', podcast interview with Professor Richard Overy, 10 May 2018, <https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2018/05/spectator-books-the-birth-of-the-raf/> [accessed 1 April 2019].

²⁶ CUL, Personal Papers of Andrew Boyle, notes on biography chapters, 1953–54.

²⁷ Divine, p. 157.

belief that the air environment was no longer divisible between land and sea. This argument was about the identity of air power, what made it unique and why it was singular. He described asking himself in early 1919 whether it might be better to use the 'great and well-established' Navy with its 'great prestige in the British Empire, great political power and administrative ability' as 'the guardian of the new off-spring of war instead of entrusting it to an entirely new and untried organisation'. He continued:

Then I thought of another metaphor: the old saying 'never put new wine in old bottles'. The air service would work over land, over the sea, and independently in its own element. Would it develop as quickly as part of an older Service welded either to the sea or to the land, as it would if it were to be solely responsible for meeting the new problems of air warfare. Obviously not.²⁸

The separation of an air service, created as one in 1912, into two by the time of the First World War provided an early lesson in the contested nature of the air environment. That split was to serve as a key tenet in the RAF's subsequent case for its survival and in Trenchard's arguments during the 1920s. A retrospective paper prepared by him summarised his view of the implications of the 'Break away of the Naval Air Service': 'when the 1914–1918 war started we had two air services in spite of the government ruling two years before. This led to disastrous results in the first years of the war both in matters of supply and operations.'²⁹ Post-war independence for the RAF became his personal crusade.

Trenchard's conversion also had a significant impact on the identity of the RAF and its airmen. His leadership qualities have been discussed in Chapters One and Two. The strong identification that his apprentices, known

²⁸ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/563, 'Memorandum by Marshal of the Royal Air Force The Viscount Trenchard on the arguments which led to the organisation of an independent air force and Air Ministry in Great Britain in 1918 and also on the arguments advanced for their preservation when the navy and army wanted to abolish them immediately after World War 1', sent to General Spaatz, hereafter 'Spaatz Memorandum', 1 October 1946.

²⁹ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/563, 'Spaatz Memorandum', 1 October 1946.

collectively and proudly as 'Trenchard's Brats', had with him reflected the centrality of his personality to the RAF's early development. As Monahan assessed, this was 'an example of an unofficial culture-in-practice that made the apprentices feel that they had a direct link to CAS'.³⁰ T. E. Lawrence (admittedly an ardent fan of Trenchard and therefore perhaps not wholly representative) wrote about his experiences as a junior airman:

The Royal Air Force is not antique and leisurely and storied like an army. We can feel the impulsion of a sure, urging giant behind the scurrying instructors. Squad 5 is today the junior unit of the service. There are twenty thousand airmen better than us between it and Trenchard, the pinnacle and our exemplar: but the awe of him surely encompasses us. The driving energy is his, and he drives furiously. We are content, imagining that he knows his road.³¹

Men of all ranks in the RAF identified strongly with Trenchard and his indomitable leadership during the turbulent 1920s. As well as these junior airmen and apprentices, within his air staff he crafted a loyal band of middle-ranking and senior officers who were to form the leadership of the RAF that prepared for and fought in the Second World War.

After Trenchard, his pupils, Ellington, Newall, Dowding and the Air Staff designed a new Air Force, using Trenchard's social basis in the squadrons, but made ready to fight one particular way, one campaign, even one battle, in the traditional way of a Great General Staff.³²

Trenchard is a conundrum, known for his strong will and intransigence but also for his *volte-face* on the efficacy of strategic bombing. It was war's end and the other services' assumptions that the RAF might then be quickly disassembled that provide the context for both of these characterisations and explain the turning point in his views.

³⁰ Monahan, p. 151.

³¹ T. E. Lawrence, pp. 94–95.

³² John James, p. 226.

The Significance of Command

These early sources of tension between the services — over the conceptualisation of air power, the legitimacy given by Smuts's endorsement of an independent service, and the emergence of an RAF identity under Trenchard — were joined by concerns over the emergence of the RAF as an operational force post-war. The next significant factor in inter-service rivalry, which was to bring the Army centrally into hostilities, was that of command. The responsibilities and authority invested by the allocation of command are important and emotive concepts for the armed forces. Command of an operation, in which other services are also contributing, brings with it power, influence, and symbolic recognition. With command comes the authority to influence events and task subordinate organisations, as well as investing the primary responsibility to execute martial operations in a single-service commander. Identification of a soldier, sailor, or airman with their respective service is an inherent element of the organisational culture of the armed forces. Kirke has described the total immersion of a soldier in his service's way of life: 'I am not describing some temporary or fleeting aspect of a soldier's life, but a milieu from which he or she is unlikely ever to be fully detached.'³³ Subordination to another service's command on operations meant serving under a Commander-in-Chief from another service.

The symbolism of command was raised earlier in this thesis as part of the case study on air policing. Londonderry, then Under Secretary of State for Air, wrote to Trenchard in 1920 counselling him that problems with the Navy were 'nothing personal', rather, 'it is the thought that an Air Force Officer may one day be C-in-C [Commander-in-Chief]. So far the seaman and the landsman has each had a very clearly marked province. The conquest of the air changes all this.'³⁴ This reflected his understanding of the central importance of lead command status for the armed services. The potential for the RAF to be

³³ Kirke, p. 7.

³⁴ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/240, letter to Trenchard from Londonderry, 30 August 1920.

assigned that status, putting the Navy and Army in subordinate roles (designated 'subordinate commands'), was a touchstone issue for the older services. Giving the RAF command of an operation would challenge significantly the settled view of the Army and Navy, and their personnel, of the RAF as a *de facto* junior, and therefore perpetually subordinate, service. It would signify an increase in the RAF's political and national prestige.

1922 proved to be a landmark year for the RAF. In February, the Secretary of State for War laid a paper before Cabinet which proposed the transfer of the Air Ministry to the War Office.³⁵ In March 1922 the Cabinet met to discuss the RAF, attacks on its independence, and uncertainties about its future. The Secretary of State for War was not present but had discussed his views by telephone with Austen Chamberlain.³⁶ Chamberlain, Lord Privy Seal, gained agreement to make a statement in support of the Air Force the following day, 16 March 1922. Churchill, as Colonial Secretary, had added his strong endorsement in a letter to Chamberlain, copied to the Prime Minister, ahead of the Cabinet meeting.³⁷ In his Commons speech, Chamberlain confirmed the independence of the RAF and outlined its relationships with the other services, including a specific statement on command:

In the first place, that the Air Force must be autonomous in matters of administration and education.

Second, that in the case of defence against air raids the Army and Navy must play a secondary rôle.

Third, that in the case of Military operations by land or Naval operations by sea, the Air Force must be in strict subordination to the general or admiral in supreme command.

³⁵ TNA, AIR 41/45, 'Volume 1 – The Atlantic and Home Waters – The Prelude April 1918 to September 1939', Air Historical Branch document, undated, p. 68.

³⁶ TNA, CAB 23/29, Cabinet Conclusions 18 (22), 15 March 1922.

³⁷ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/164, letter from Churchill to Chamberlain, 11 March 1922.

Fourth, that in other cases, such as the protection of commerce and attacks on enemy harbours and inland towns, the relations between the Air Force and the other services shall be regarded rather as a matter of co-operation than of the strict subordination which is necessary when aeroplanes are acting merely as auxiliaries to other arms.³⁸

In 1931 Slessor referred to this section of the speech as a 'clearly defined [...] statement of policy which has since remained the basis of those relations', demonstrating the significance that the Air Ministry attached to it.³⁹

Chamberlain's statement did not explicitly mention the possibility of command or the appointment of Commanders-in-Chief but by the time of his speech in spring 1922 the RAF had already been deployed to Iraq, with a view to it taking lead command status, and in October command transferred from the Army to the new service. In saying, 'What is now required [...] is that the three Services should regard themselves as the common servants of the nation in endeavouring to attain a single object', he also reinforced a narrative that put the RAF on the same footing as its peers.⁴⁰

Given that the RNAS had pioneered bombing in the war, it is perhaps understandable that the RAF's early adversary would be the Navy, and the great inter-service battles in Whitehall were fought most fiercely between the Admiralty and the Air Ministry. Beatrice Heuser has argued that air power theory inherited more from naval thinking, in that both services believed in their potential to win war alone through decisive action and also in their ability to circumvent the battlefield and take war to civilian cities.⁴¹ After the losses of the Western Front, these claims were particularly appealing both to the political elite and the wider public. This again highlights why the naval and air services were predisposed to clash. However, with command in Iraq transferring to the RAF, the Army faced a usurpation of its position as primary guardian of the British Empire. Thus, the RAF was to face attack on both naval and military fronts.

³⁸ HC Debate (1922) Fifth Series, Vol. 151, Col. 2477, 16 March 1922.

³⁹ NACP, RG 165, MIDC 1917-41, 2083-1259-1272, 2083-1271, 'The Development of the Royal Air Force', lecture by John Slessor, 6 June 1931, p. 2.

⁴⁰ HC Debate (1922) Fifth Series, Vol. 151, Col. 2480, 16 March 1922.

⁴¹ Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy: Thinking War from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 297-98.

The use of the RAF in Iraq to substitute for the Army has often been cited as key to the RAF's survival and has been discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. Rarely is the specific symbolism of handing command to an Air Marshal explored for its emotional impact on the Army and the Navy. The decision to give command to the Air Marshal Sir John Salmond in Iraq did not yield a major financial dividend in favour of the RAF in the estimates of the early 1920s; unsurprisingly given that air control was offered as a cost-saving exercise. Additional finance was not the driver for embarking on air policing. However, what was significant was the acknowledgement of the equality of the RAF as a service which could be appointed to lead major long-term operations, just as the Navy and Army had done for centuries.⁴² RAF command of Transjordan and Palestine followed soon afterwards and in 1928 the RAF assumed responsibility for Aden. Churchill's enthusiasm as Colonial Secretary for air policing and, with it, the large-scale substitution of air power for ground forces provoked the so far somnolent War Office.

Air Marshal Brooke-Popham highlighted the issue of command and control in response to a paper written by CIGS in 1921, in which the latter had argued that force size should dictate ownership of anti-aircraft defences:

Does CIGS seriously contend that counting heads should form the basis of an organisation? How far would he be prepared to carry this argument? Did not the number of personnel employed in munition making in the last war exceed the number of soldiers fighting in France? Would it then have been logical to place the Army under the Ministry of Munitions? The question must be decided by finding out what is the dominant factor, the pivot on which all else hinges.⁴³

Wilson, CIGS at this time, refused to co-operate with the pending handover of command to the RAF in Iraq and 'filibustered' in the provision of armoured cars. After a meeting at which the financial secretary to the War Office told senior

⁴² Although Malcolm Smith's point that in the inter-war years the RAF never won command of a theatre with 'more than minimal risk of war with a major enemy' is acknowledged, Malcolm Smith, p. 30.

⁴³ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/140, letter from Brooke-Popham to Captain Marson (Private Secretary to CAS), 11 October 1921.

officials at the Air Ministry that the Air Force would have to manage without armoured cars, since he was not empowered to help them, they returned to debrief CAS. Trenchard apparently decided that the stand-off could only be resolved in one bold way, which was for the Air Ministry to build and operate the capability themselves. Although Trenchard's biographer claimed that 'Trenchard did not even then crow over the War Office', the Hendon air pageant that summer featured RAF-operated armoured cars as part of a display demonstrating air policing.⁴⁴ The reaction of the War Office's leadership to this provocation can only be speculated upon. Its public reaction was, largely, a tactful silence — the private reaction was no doubt different, however.

The majority of the soldier manpower provided in Iraq came from the Indian Army, but in London CIGS and CAS clashed over the deployment of British battalions. However, Wilson resigned from the Army in February 1922 (to stand as an MP) and was replaced by Lord Cavan. Major General 'Boney' Fuller's judgement of Cavan is a pithier version of more recent academic commentary which rates him as ineffectual: 'As CIGS in the War Office he was as much out of place as a nun in a night club.'⁴⁵ Trenchard's papers reflect the easier reception he had with Cavan over Iraq in May 1922: '[we] had a long friendly and frank talk about my views on the 4 battalions question, and he was extraordinarily sympathetic and understood the point I was making, promising to view this very favourably'.⁴⁶

However, the War Office continued to agitate against the RAF. This was in part because the Army objected to RAF propaganda, which presented operations in Iraq as reliant solely on air power with no acknowledgement of the ground forces supporting them. At a meeting between the US Military Attaché and the War Office, General Burnett-Stuart, Director of Military Operations and Intelligence on the General Staff, complained of the 'completely erroneous impression' given out by the RAF. The attaché reported the conversation:

⁴⁴ Andrew Boyle, p. 388. Omissi, 'The Hendon Air Pageant, 1920–37', in MacKenzie, *Popular Imperialism and the Military*, p. 203.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Jackson and Bramall, p. 127; Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars*, p. 74; Higham, *Armed Forces in Peacetime Britain*, p. 246.

⁴⁶ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/164, letter from Trenchard to Churchill, 17 May 1922.

It has been broadcast, [the General] said, that all the policing of Iraq is done by airplanes and no mention is ever made of ground troops. [...] The facts in the case were that the proportion between Air Force and ground troops in Iraq was almost identical with that which held between a division and the Air Force which would operate with it in time of war. That [sic] the armed forces in Iraq consisted of two battalions of British infantry, about 15,000 native troops, and a very material number of native police, but that to suit their propaganda the Royal Air Force never mentioned anything except that there were but two British battalions in all of Iraq.⁴⁷

The Air Ministry was clearly enjoying its command status, controlling propaganda as well as the theatre of operations. The attaché's reports contain frequent reference to War Office complaints about the existence of a separate air force, sometimes couched in the terms that these views were kept internal to the department. The War Office's arguments with the Air Ministry were more often conducted in private than those of the Admiralty, but its frustrations were keenly felt.

Colonial air policing gave the RAF the chance to demonstrate a practical independent role, and the Air Ministry took every opportunity to highlight their achievements in command and, demonstrating the importance of command, to remonstrate about the disadvantages, in other theatres, of subordination to the Army. As was seen in Chapter Seven, the Air Ministry used an enquiry from King George V about poorly maintained aircraft in India, where the Army was the lead command, to educate his Private Secretary on the nuances of command and the RAF's objections to subordination.⁴⁸ In a lecture in 1931, Slessor presented the Indian arrangements in contrast to those where the RAF was in command such as Iraq and Aden. He described the Indian episode as a 'disaster' which 'overcame the Air Force':

⁴⁷ NACP, RG 165, MIDC 1917-41, 2083-817-883, 2083-819, 'Opinions in British Military Circles on a Separate Air Service and Air Operations in Mesopotamia', 12 August 1925.

⁴⁸ RA PS/PSO/GV/PS/RAF/37420, letter from Guest to Stamfordham, 1 September 1922, which was accompanied by a 'Memorandum for the Cabinet by the Secretary of State, Shortage of Equipment of the Royal Air Force in India', 1 September 1922.

The consequent inquiry set on foot by the India Office resulted in important modifications in the system of control of the Service in India. The Air Officer Commanding was afforded direct access to the Viceroy, with control over a separate Air Vote in the Indian level, and the squadrons rapidly attained the respectable level of efficiency that prevailed elsewhere in the Empire.⁴⁹

He went on to explain that 'from that date' the Air Force became instantaneously the first port of call for 'tribal' operations, and of course he finished by listing a set of successful examples to demonstrate his point. However, he did concur that operations against tribesmen in India in 1930 offered 'a clue to the correct distribution of functions between land and air forces' in that the Army could provide close defence of important administrative centres while the RAF was better suited to providing 'longer range striking power'.⁵⁰ He later wrote of the Salmond report of 1922 on the problems of command in India: 'this sort of experience does in part explain why RAF officers [...] were so sensitive to any suggestion that the Air Force should be in any degree subordinate to the control of another Service'.⁵¹

The RAF's encroachment into overseas air policing also challenged the concept of Britain's global holdings as a 'blue water' empire, at a time of difficulty for the Navy. The 1922 Washington Naval Treaty, following on from the previous year's conference, had replaced the Anglo-Japanese alliance with multilateral guarantees and agreed a reduction in British capital ship tonnage.⁵² At the same time, the large inland spaces that were added to the empire in the post-war settlement lay beyond the reach of traditional naval imperial policing. As Fletcher has discussed, British policy in the Middle East had relied on a limited and littoral footprint in the nineteenth century. After the First World War, Britain 'had emerged as the paramount power across a great swathe' of the region. Though maritime power was still central to imperial governance and

⁴⁹ NACP, RG 165, MIDC 1917-41, 2083-1259-1272, 2083-1271, 'The Development of the Royal Air Force', lecture by John Slessor, 6 June 1931, p. 7.

⁵⁰ NACP, RG 165, MIDC 1917-41, 2083-1259-1272, 2083-1271, 'The Development of the Royal Air Force', lecture by John Slessor, 6 June 1931, p. 8.

⁵¹ Slessor, *The Central Blue*, p. 34.

⁵² Andrew Gordon, *British Seapower and Procurement between the Wars: A Reappraisal of Rearmament* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 70.

identity, desert regions required new technologies and institutions which, although distant from Whitehall, provided another theatre for departmental and inter-service friction.⁵³ The RAF's encroachment, indeed its expansion in physical, command, and operational terms, into empire could not have come at a worse time for the senior service, coinciding as it did with the emasculation of the Far East Fleet and the Navy's ship-building ambitions at the Washington Conference.⁵⁴

Air policing also sat well with a force which, though created partly for defensive reasons (to protect the homeland from enemy incursion), preferred an offensive posture. This characteristic trait was partly the result of Trenchard's personal robust preference for 'relentless and incessant offensive', as he had demonstrated in command of the RFC on the Western Front, which then percolated into the identity of the RAF.⁵⁵ Overy has argued that the decision to approve air policing 'under an RAF Supreme Commander, challenged military prerogatives' and incited the campaign to break up the Air Force.⁵⁶ Documents from the year following the handover of command to the RAF in Iraq are explicit in making this connection, demonstrating the ire that the events of 1922 had invoked. A 1923 note by the Secretary of State, Hoare, stated that 'The attacks of the Admiralty and the War Office on the responsibilities, independence and existence of the Air Force date, mainly, from about twelve months ago', and he continued, 'the whole weight of both Admiralty and War Office was directed against crushing the Air Ministry out of existence'.⁵⁷ In finding a role and parity through command, in demonstrating a purpose for an independent air force and an imperial function, the RAF faced full-blown three-way rivalry, with both older services lining up side by side rather than fighting their individual battles. In early 1923, at the height of the rancour between them, the Prime Minister called another review, the Salisbury Committee.

⁵³ Fletcher, pp. 3–4 and 129.

⁵⁴ Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Penguin Books, 2017), p. 276.

⁵⁵ Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power*, p. 71.

⁵⁶ Overy, *The Birth of the RAF*, p. 98.

⁵⁷ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Brabazon, AC 71/3 Box 12, 'Notes by Secretary of State on relations of the air force to the navy and army', 1923.

The Salisbury Committee

When Hoare was appointed by Bonar Law in November 1922, relations between the services were at their most poisonous and the Prime Minister responded to the situation by establishing a CID sub-committee, chaired by the Marquis of Salisbury. This committee was asked to consider 'the co-operation and co-relation between the Navy, Army and Air Force from the point of view of National and Imperial Defence generally'.⁵⁸ Salisbury, in turn, appointed Lord Balfour to consider specifically relations between the Navy and RAF. The deliberations were lengthy, consisting of scores of hearings and visits, and, although the investigation was just one of a succession of governmental reviews, their timing at the height of inter-service rivalry provides ample evidence of the emotional investment of the three services in their intransigent positions. The first two post-war committees had been held in 1921–22: the Balfour Committee and the Geddes Review (notably both had been led by former First Lords of the Admiralty, but still found in favour of retaining an independent air force). Describing in detail the numerous reviews of the 1920s has been the subject of much historical attention; suffice to say that since the RAF survived the decade, and the Fleet Air Arm was not created formally as a naval arm until the late 1930s, they all found broadly in favour of an independent air force.

The Salisbury Committee is discussed here in further detail partly because it occurred at a time of unrelenting attacks on the Air Ministry as both the Admiralty and the War Office railed against it, the Army having been mobilised by the situation in Iraq. Hoare described the atmosphere in autumn 1922:

As soon as I became Secretary of State I came up against the full shock of the attack. Crisis followed crisis, and usually at the week-end. There was scarcely a Sunday on which I was not dragged off to the Air Ministry or Downing Street to face some new threat.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Powers, p. 186.

⁵⁹ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p. 56.

Air policing had demonstrated a capability that was government-friendly: cost-saving and lower in manpower footprint. Both older services were sensing that the RAF was increasingly being treated by government as a third equal service. Their sense of superiority over the junior force was in jeopardy. In the Admiralty, Beatty had been in post for over two years and was keen to reverse the earlier review decisions. The testimonies of Beatty and Trenchard to the committee provide telling evidence of their different approaches to battle-by-committee and highlight their frustrations and their talents: the 'famed' committee was notable for these hearings and the 'heroic struggle between the two service chiefs'.⁶⁰

Before considering Beatty and Trenchard's detailed evidence, it is important to recognise that while the Balfour sub-committee, considering relations between the Navy and Air Force, has received considerable attention, the War Office also put up a spirited resistance. The Army's leaders had been less vocal in their objections to an independent air force in this period relative to their senior service counterparts. The Secretary of State for War tacitly admitted as much, citing only two instances when the War Office protested the tri-service model (in May 1921 and February 1922) in written evidence to the Committee. His argument demonstrated the deeply embedded army viewpoint on the limits of air power, significantly and unresolvably at odds with those of the Air Ministry: 'The surface of the earth on which we live is the decisive plane; the Army and Navy have each their distinct sphere of action on that plane, while the Air Force is supplementary to both in a secondary plane.' His paper specifically referenced the experience of command by the RAF in Iraq and Palestine stating: 'The taking over by the air authorities entails the entire substitution of one control by another – an extravagant process.' It went on to argue that the Air Force could never be in control of armed operations at the beginning or end of a campaign.⁶¹ Unfortunately for the War Office, the committee sittings took place at the same time that Salmond had been masterfully commanding operations in Iraq, re-establishing control around Mosul from Turkish forces.⁶²

⁶⁰ Powers, p. 187.

⁶¹ TNA, CAB 24/160, 'The Relative Status of the Army and the Royal Air Force', 28 June 1923.

⁶² Townshend, p. 512; Jackson and Bramall, p. 128, Malcolm Smith, pp. 28–9.

His successes contradicted these arguments about command: an airman was proving capable of marshalling air and ground assets to impressive effect. The War Office's protests to the Salisbury Committee fell on deaf ears.

Admiralty arguments also centred on the vital control of assets but additionally focused specifically on the type of airman that should operate aircraft; Weir's biographer characterised the debate as one where the Navy attempted to convince the committee of the need for a 'flying sailor' rather than a 'navalized airman'.⁶³ Many of these arguments rested on examples of problems of operating at sea with RAF airmen, which ultimately relied on the politicians of Balfour's sub-committee agreeing that the extant ways of working were failing. The role of the naval commander-in-chief was presented by Beatty in his verbal evidence:

I point out that the case of a Naval Commander-in-Chief is a very important one in the fact that he can rely upon his units which he himself has trained; he himself knows all that goes to make the efficiency of that unit, and in the present circumstances, under the existing scheme and under the existing conditions, no Naval Commander-in-Chief can rely on his own personal touch being conveyed to a unit, and a very important unit, of the Fleet, as long as it remains under another Department.⁶⁴

Beatty's evidence is striking for its attention to the personal touch of naval command, onboard relationships between airmen and sailors, and to tactical arguments. Hoare, retrospectively, belittled Beatty's evidence: 'Beatty gave the impression that his case was so simple that it needed no argument to support it, and that all that was required was to repeat the commandments that had been brought down from the naval Sinai.'⁶⁵ The editor of *The Fighting Forces* described his view of the failure of the Admiralty to win the argument during the Salisbury Committee's deliberations:

⁶³ Reader, p. 106.

⁶⁴ TNA, AIR 8/66, 'Evidence to Sub-Committee on Relations between the Navy and the Air Force', 18 June 1923, p. 32.

⁶⁵ Templewood, *Empire of the Air*, p. 61.

In actual fact, the Admiralty have always had a good case and it is not difficult to sympathize with their point of view, but there is no doubt that their dogmatic, uncompromising 'Senior Service' methods of presenting their claims aroused hostility and was certainly not helpful to a sound solution of a difficult problem.⁶⁶

When it came to giving evidence, Beatty's approach combining arrogance with querulousness was trumped by Trenchard's appeal to core strategic arguments.

The transcripts from the sub-committee show that the First Sea Lord chose to catalogue a series of complaints about the different ways of working of the two services as evidence of their incompatibility in co-operating on naval aviation. Tellingly, Trenchard's maturity of approach to his evidence contrasts with the tetchy nature of Beatty's, as demonstrated by their preliminary statements. Beatty's, made on 22 March 1923, consists of a litany of his frustrations with the Air Ministry. He complained of being misled in agreeing 'not to harass the unfortunate Air Ministry, struggling to gain their feet'. He continued:

in the years that have passed, nothing was done and the opposition only stiffened as I have already outlined. Months have slipped by, and it is now a period of two years since we took up the cudgels vigorously on behalf of achieving what we want.⁶⁷

In contrast, Trenchard's opening statement made the following day started by offering to set out, 'it will not take me two minutes', 'to give the three main considerations why we feel that it would not be in the interests of the country that there should be a separate Air Arm – without being in any way aggressive'.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ NACP, RG 165, MIDC 1917–41, 2083-1225–1240, 2083-1237, G-2 Report 'The Air Ministry – and After', reproduction of an article by the editor of *The Fighting Forces*, 6 February 1931.

⁶⁷ TNA, AIR 8/66, 'Shorthand Notes of Evidence given by the First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff before the Sub-Committee at their Second Meeting', 22 March 1923, p.2.

⁶⁸ TNA, AIR 8/66, 'Shorthand Notes of Evidence given by the First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff before the Sub-Committee at their Second Meeting', 23 March 1923, pp. 1–2.

His arguments centred around the defence of the nation, the vulnerability of Britain to air attack, and the efficiency and power of the extant Navy with its RAF air units. The contrast between his strategic arguments and Beatty's extended complaint must have been striking to the sub-committee members. Beatty also focused at a strikingly tactical level on the services' different disciplinary approaches:

When a man gets drunk in the Navy, he gets a heavy punishment, but in the Air Force — that is more on Military lines — to mulct [fine] a man of a day's pay, which is a common punishment in the Navy, would be a much more serious matter because he receives so much more pay than the poor sailor.⁶⁹

Conversely, Trenchard cleaved to his three key arguments and much of his evidence reinforced these while avoiding anecdote or tactical detail. He expressed his strongly held view that further separation would be disadvantageous to the nation given the difficulties of coordinating between separate services. In the case of potential air attacks, he argued the need to avoid having a 'handover point' or dividing line between land and sea for these operations:

we feel it is much easier for an Air Service working in one element, the air, to co-operate with another Service working in another element, the sea, than it would be for one Air Service working in the Air to co-operate with another Air Service working in the air [*sic*] which it amounts to.⁷⁰

His final case concerned the need for shore-basing for naval aircraft, again challenging the notion of a clear divide between land and sea.

There was also a more personal angle to the committee hearings, centred on the animosity and strength of personalities of Beatty and Trenchard.

⁶⁹ TNA, AIR 8/66, 'Evidence to Sub-Committee on Relations between the Navy and the Air Force, 22 March 1923', p. 9.

⁷⁰ TNA, AIR 8/66, 'Evidence to Sub-Committee on Relations between the Navy and the Air Force, 23 March 1923', p. 2.

Trenchard referred to the relationship between the chiefs in patronising style, telling Churchill that coordination between the Admiralty and the Air Ministry was improving 'in spite of the little frictions over administrative details involving personal dignity'.⁷¹ Beatty and Trenchard were an interesting match. Chuck Steele recently described Beatty as 'lucky, idiosyncratic, and good at leadership (leadership in wartime and management in peacetime)', which is a description fitting of Trenchard as well.⁷² Yet Trenchard's charisma appealed to his internal audience, his Air Ministry senior leadership, and his airmen, while Beatty also had a polished public persona and friends in the press. Trenchard and Beatty shared a flair for leadership, dogmatic loyalty to their service, and strong wills. However, Trenchard could not match Beatty's glamour and profile. The Admiral had been one of the youngest captains in history, was a fêted popular figure, renowned sportsman, and wealthy (due to his wife) socialite. It is perhaps unsurprising that Trenchard had little time for him, since he could claim none of these attributes (although his marriage was significantly happier).

Trenchard's biographer, amongst others, claimed that Beatty and Trenchard had agreed a 'truce' in 1919 at the behest of CAS. There had been regular exchanges between the Admiralty and the War Office in the spring and summer of 1919, with disagreements on issues concerning manning, command, division of responsibilities etc. At one point the Air Ministry had even proposed that aircraft carriers were simply mobile aerodromes and that they 'should come completely under the command of the G.O.C. Royal Air Force (Marine) and have only a nucleus naval crew for steaming and navigation'.⁷³ While Admiral of the Fleet in the summer of 1919, Beatty had laid out his position on air power in an interview with the American Aviation Mission. He told the US Navy's representative from the Mission that:

⁷¹ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/164, letter from Trenchard to Churchill, 9 March 1922.

⁷² Chuck Steele, 'The Great War at Sea: The Search for Meaning', conference paper, The First World War at Sea: Conflict, Culture and Commemoration, National Maritime Museum, 9 November 2018.

⁷³ TNA, AIR 41/45, 'Volume 1 – The Atlantic and Home Waters – The Prelude April 1918 to September 1939', Air Historical Branch document, undated, p. 49.

he does not consider the R.A.F. organization a proper one, as far as it applies to the Navy and Army; the phrase "Navy and Army and Air" is an attractive one but it isn't sound in the military sense; in War, aviation should be a corollary in each profession – Navy and Army – and there should be no independent fighting force in the Air.⁷⁴

CAS had written to Wilson and Beatty in November 1919 explaining the challenges facing the Air Staff in 'reconstructing' the RAF and asked for the forbearance of their respective departments. He sent a copy of the paper to his Secretary of State, and Churchill had noted its contents, writing 'I agree' on the minute sheet.⁷⁵ According to Boyle, Beatty then undertook to refrain from attacking the RAF giving the junior service a 'year of grace' before hostilities resumed in 1921.⁷⁶

It is possible, however, that Beatty's relationship with Churchill is more relevant than has been acknowledged in the suspension of hostilities from the Admiralty. Churchill held Beatty in high esteem; their relationship dated back to his tenure as First Lord from 1911 to 1915. He had made Beatty his naval secretary and then commander of the Battle Cruiser Squadron, Beatty having become a rear-admiral at the age of 38 in 1910.⁷⁷ Beatty's personal papers include notes from Churchill, one of which is undated but was wrongly attributed to Walter Long, suggesting it was written at the time Long was First Lord (the same period that Churchill was Secretary of State for War and Air). Churchill wrote: 'I think you were masterly. I have never heard such powerful statements by the 1st Sea Lord.'⁷⁸ A letter from Churchill to Beatty in 1924 confirmed the origins of their close relationship in their shared time at the Admiralty:

I am one of your greatest admirers and I never cease to proclaim you as an inheritor of the grand tradition of Nelson. How I wish I could have

⁷⁴ Library of Congress, Personal Papers of Captain Henry Mustin, Box 3, interview with Admiral Beatty, 15 July 1919.

⁷⁵ TNA, AIR 1/718/29/7, Beatty and Wilson Memorandum, 17 November 1919.

⁷⁶ Andrew Boyle, p. 386.

⁷⁷ Andrew Gordon, *The Rules of the Game*, pp. 26–27.

⁷⁸ NMM, BTY 14/4/6, note passed at Cabinet meeting from Churchill to Beatty, undated. Estimated by the Navy Records Society to have been written in 1925, Ranft and Beatty, p. 225.

guided events a little better and a little longer. Jutland would have had a different ring if the plans already formed in my mind after the Dogger Bank for securing you chief command had grown to their natural fruition. I live a good deal in those tremendous past days.⁷⁹

The end to the uneasy truce and the start of the vicious arguments between the Admiralty and Air Ministry, which were to lead to the Salisbury Committee, are dated to spring 1921. The RAF's third birthday also coincided with Churchill leaving his responsibilities at the Air Ministry to be replaced by Guest. It is possible, therefore, that Churchill, rather than Trenchard's letter, had been the key factor in restraining Beatty from attacking the Air Ministry. Given the timings of the truce (agreed within a month of Beatty becoming First Sea Lord and Churchill becoming Secretary of State for Air) and its end (spring 1921 when Churchill rescinded responsibility for the Air Ministry), it is perfectly plausible that their private relationship mattered more than Trenchard's negotiations.

Beatty referenced Churchill in his evidence to the Salisbury Committee and this suggests that perhaps his strong relationship with the politician had clouded his judgement about what Churchill could actually deliver:

The reason [that relationships had deteriorated sufficiently to merit an inquiry] was that the last Secretary of State for the Colonies thought that he had powers of persuasion greater than those of any other man, that he was going to be the angel of peace, was going to rule out all the difficulties without any trouble, and that it would not be necessary to go through this procedure of having a Committee.⁸⁰

Churchill did broker informal talks between CAS and the First Sea Lord throughout 1922, but these had broken down ahead of the hearings, as reflected in Beatty's sentiments above. By then, Churchill, having championed the RAF's role in imperial air policing, had left office and Beatty could no longer

⁷⁹ NMM, BTY 14/4/4, letter from Churchill to Beatty, 11 November 1924.

⁸⁰ TNA, AIR 8/66, Evidence to Sub-Committee on Relations between the Navy and the Air Force, 22 March 1923, pp. 1–2.

rely on his direct influence on the review. There is a sense in which Beatty approached this review, as he did others, with irritation at having to make an argument for something he held to be profoundly obvious given his view of the Navy's unchallengeable seniority over a service akin to an uppity sub-branch. Perhaps both the Admiralty and the War Office believed themselves to be participating in a form of intra-service competition, fighting to recover their sub-arms from a non-permanent and unwelcome interloper. In stark contrast, this fight was the *sine qua non* for the Air Ministry and it was for the survival of its independent service. Paradoxically it was fighting to ensure the continuance of three-way inter-service rivalry, while the other two services were fighting to end it.

The Salisbury Committee proved to be an important axis in the development of inter-service relations. It marked the first serious test of the Hoare–Trenchard relationship in the Air Ministry which, as has been seen in earlier chapters, was to withstand the challenges of the rest of the decade. It also saw the establishment of the COS Committee, an important first step in formally coordinating the three service departments. Given that the issues of command had been so central to the tensions between them and the key personalities leading them, it is perhaps unsurprising that a change of CIGS and First Sea Lord heralded a new argument about the chairmanship of the COS Committee. Later in the decade, Cavan had been replaced by Sir George Milne in 1926 and Beatty by Sir Charles Madden in 1927. Trenchard, who had been promoted to become the first Marshal of the RAF on 1 January 1927, lobbied Hankey for his turn as chairman. Beatty had held the chair since 1923, and by late 1927 Trenchard was the longest serving chief on the Committee. This eventually led to the position being held in rotation between the three services, with Hankey reporting to Trenchard that the Prime Minister, Baldwin, was 'quite convinced that the principle of equality is the right one and that the Chairmanship should go in rotation'.⁸¹ This was despite opposition from Madden; there is not a little irony in the service chiefs arguing about the chairmanship of a committee designed to address inter-service competition.

⁸¹ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/101, letter from Hankey to Trenchard, 11 October 1927.

Heart versus Head

Gray has reflected on the ferocity of early inter-service rivalry and its causes. He concluded that the primary reason for the level of animosity was because the RAF 'became a hungry rival for funding'.⁸² Though it would be foolish, and inaccurate, to deny that arguments over resource were not central to the rivalry, it is argued that they mattered less in the 1920s (as opposed to the 1930s) than the less tangible provocations of challenges to identity and fights over command, influence, and parity of treatment. Here parity does not mean achieving equal proportions of resource, but the transition to general acceptance of the RAF as an equal peer to its rivals. This would mean its embodiment as a legitimate third pillar in the country's long-term defence and security planning. As discussed in the last chapter on the royal family, acknowledgement and acceptance were symbolically important, as when the monarchy agreed to grant the air service a flag, patronise its pageants, adopt its nursing service, or accept RAF rank for heirs to the throne.

Inter-service rivalry can be at once destructive and creative, vital and invidious. In the RAF's case inter-service rivalry was also its begetter. The creation of an air service, the emergence of a third environment for fighting war, changed the face of inter-service relations and it was born of rivalry between the early flying military and naval wings of the established services. In Britain's case, the tensions created by air power were apparent from its inception. These tensions have commonly been explained in terms that can be characterised as rational, largely quantitative, and relatively transparent: issues of the head rather than the heart. Arguments over budgets, force composition, doctrine, and procurement are laid out in the records of Hansard, the Cabinet, and the CID, and in factual documents and publications. Reading the cultural causes of inter-service competition, the heart over the head, requires a more qualitative and emotional narrative, and in particular an understanding of what matters most to service people: the rank and file as well as the senior leadership. At the heart of

⁸² Gray, *Air Warfare*, p. 121.

arguments between armed services lie issues of identity, command, language, relationships, conceptual friction, and influence. These issues are often less tangible than estimates or doctrinal arguments, but they are often the ones that cause the most profound difficulties and generate the most resonance amongst uniformed personnel.

In the government departments of the armed forces where politicians and service leaders worked shoulder to shoulder, those politicians who understood the symbolism and emotion that commitment to one's service identity required were those who achieved the best results for their ministry. The Air Ministry was fortunate in having first Churchill and then Hoare as Secretaries of State (and Londonderry and Sassoon as Under Secretaries) during the early post-war period. All these men demonstrated, through their actions, the networks they inhabited, and the evidence left in their papers, that they understood the distinctive nature of the air service and that issues that appealed to the heart mattered. These were patrician politicians confident in the security of their positions within their parties, excited by the potential of this new government department, and eager to understand and deploy strategic arguments in the Air Ministry's favour. Economic arguments during this period were often used in support of the permanence and identity of an independent air force. The RAF was presented, and presented itself, as parsimonious, offering value for money (air policing and the arguments in the Geddes Report are both examples), and in need of political support as much as increases in cash. Where the Air Ministry gained uplifts of money, it remained pragmatic about timescales for delivery of new squadrons and aircraft. Trenchard discussed this in relation to the Home Defence Scheme, which was a product of the Salisbury Committee that proposed a force of fifty-two RAF squadrons.⁸³ He spoke to his own officers in 1926 about the delays in delivering the scheme:

You may have seen in the papers statements that the scheme is going to be deferred and reduced. Do not be under any misapprehension at all.

The Air Force Expansion scheme still exists, but the financial situation is

⁸³ Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars*, p. 73.

such that it may be necessary to slow the scheme up as much as possible. This does not mean altering one comma of it – it simply means that owing to the financial situation we go slow.⁸⁴

To Trenchard it was the existence of the scheme, rather than immediate delivery of ready cash from the Treasury, that mattered, because it was the concept of the scheme that helped give the service political legitimacy. From political legitimacy flowed confidence in the RAF's continued independence and in its cultural identity.

The Air Ministry's 'softly, softly' approach to expansion was, of course, to become a more significant problem in the 1930s as the threat of war with Germany became increasingly apparent. As aircraft were becoming more technically capable, and complex, the timescale for their design and production was extending. As historians of the Second World War, the Battle of Britain, and the development of Bomber Command testify, the scramble to produce sufficient modern aircraft in the late 1930s left the RAF precariously close to failure in the early years of that war.⁸⁵ Speaking of all three services, Higham argued that they suffered from 'a distinct failure to understand the increasing time-lag between desire for and delivery onto the battlefield of modern weapons'.⁸⁶ In the RAF's case, this was compounded by, or confused with, the need to win the battles of Whitehall whether the estimates allocated to air were adequate or not. In any case, if the Air Ministry had secured more money to build more aircraft in the 1920s, those machines would have been obsolete well before the Second World War. What mattered more in the first half of the inter-war years to the RAF's future performance was that it consolidated, with a strong identity, solid foundations, and confidence. Trenchard's Brats, as outlined in Chapter Two, for example, became the backbone of that late 1930s expanding force. The auxiliaries and reserves, discussed in Chapter Six, formed a cadre of more experienced young aircrew in the opening months of the war

⁸⁴ RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/42, 'Report of lecture delivered by the Chief of the Air Staff to officers of the Royal Air Force at Uxbridge on the 22nd January 1926', 22 January 1926, p. 10.

⁸⁵ Cooper, 'Blueprint for Confusion', p. 450.

⁸⁶ Higham, *Armed Forces in Peacetime Britain*, p. 263.

against Nazi Germany. Winning the arguments of the heart in the 1920s was central to the formation of a strong and healthy cultural identity which would later withstand the vicissitudes of six years' war.

Inter-Service Rivalry and Military Innovation

Rosen defined military innovation as 'a change in one of the primary combat arms of a service in the way it fights or alternatively, as the creation of a new combat arm'.⁸⁷ The establishment of the RAF was a significant innovation, reflecting the latter part of his definition, although its impact was complicated by the transition from war to peace at the end of 1918. In essence, either side of the Armistice, the RAF also matched the first part of the definition in terms of changing the way it fought. During war-fighting in 1918, the Independent Force was formed to carry out long-range bombing of strategic targets. Though the impact of this bombing in terms of the outcome of the war is generally considered to be minimal, the incorporation of this new doctrine as the independent element of air power prefaced the adoption of strategic bombing as the post-war doctrine of the RAF. After the Armistice, although Trenchard and his acolytes espoused this mantra at every opportunity, in truth their real innovation was to grasp the opportunity and promote the concept of substitution. Air policing was not just a concept that could be easily explained to politicians as a saving in blood and treasure. Between the services, and perhaps less obvious to some politicians, and certainly to the public, the issues of command, parity, and identity mattered. The timing of the Salisbury Committee coincidental with Salmond's triumphant operations around Mosul was a source of severe vexation to the Army and the Navy, embedding long-term grudges. Thus, the new way of fighting with aircraft to repress colonial subjects was an innovation that evoked a heartfelt reaction and entrenched rivalry. The RAF survived and consolidated its place as an independent service by killing Iraqi and Indian rebels, using bombing on a tactical rather than a strategic scale but again demonstrating its appetite for using offensive tactics with disregard for civilian casualties. The threat posed by the RAF to a 'blue

⁸⁷ Stephen Peter Rosen, *Winning the next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 7.

water' empire, policed on the ground by soldiers, was an important element in its survival and its revilement: it trod on the toes of both its older siblings.

Inter-service rivalry was heightened by the sense in which the RAF was offensive in its attitude and its tactics. Its choice of approach to warfare, in arguing for the power of bombing from the air, was inherently offensive, but so was its combative approach to the battles in Whitehall. Because it was under frequent attack in the early 1920s, it is unsurprising that it chose to define itself in terms of what differentiated the air from the other two environments. By actively and vigorously setting itself apart from the other two services its identity cohered faster than it might have done in a more lukewarm environment. The RAF was no proverbial frog-in-slowly-warming-water: it was thrown in when the water was at an already life-threatening temperature. However, it is argued that this aggressive environment was, in fact, the making of the RAF. Each successive review or committee ordered by the government allowed the RAF to hone its messages. The attacks on the RAF and the Air Ministry by the older services were the source of much of the discord of the 1920s, but they were also critical to the RAF's survival in cohering airmen together and defining its identity against its rivals. T. E. Lawrence described the view from the junior ranks, just as important in forming a robust identity:

Yet, whether keen to fly or not, we are airmen, with the new character the force is making for itself. About the R.A.F. there is nothing military except the intelligence of some of its officers. Airmen go scatty when the public call them 'Privates in the Air Force'. Deliberately, punctiliously, to the point of folly, the Air Ministry has made its service unlike either Army or Navy. Look at our ranks! Aircraftmen second-class (all of us now), ditto first-class leading aircraftmen. Unwieldy stupidities of names! Ourselves we shorten them to LAC, AC I, AC II, and speak of ourselves as 'ack-emmas' (the air mechanic of the Great War) or 'urks' [*sic*]. Urk corresponds with matlow or swaddy, the fellows' own name for their serving condition.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ T. E. Lawrence, p. 78.

An offensive service arm (in doctrinal terms) created to meet defensive needs, the defence of Britain, forged an offensive identity in order to defend itself from inter-service attacks. The RAF had to define itself explicitly as uniquely different from the other two services, changing the paradigm that had existed under a two-service system for good. As Huntington argued, previous doctrines of land and sea power had been outlined 'without specifically denigrating' the other, but the arrival of an air arm changed that.⁸⁹

Conclusion

The first two periods discussed in this chapter have addressed the formation of a single service, from the first beginnings of military air power, to the implementation of the recommendations of the Smuts Reports five years' later. Trenchard's conversion demonstrated the journey from legal legitimacy to forming an identity, his vision for independence as well as his understanding that where money was spent was more important than how much money would be available. The Air Historical Branch observed on this point:

It is a measure of [Trenchard's] far-sighted wisdom that the major proportion of these limited resources were devoted to carefully planned training and research programmes instead of to current production of contemporary aircraft. We thus avoided the error of building a numerically imposing front line force such as was done by France and which on the approach of war was found to be largely obsolete.⁹⁰

The government's decision to support air policing in Iraq, giving the RAF lead command status, was the next significant development in inter-service rivalry. Just as the Admiralty, and Beatty, were choosing to re-engage with their arguments against the RAF, the ire of the War Office was aroused. This combination of the Admiralty and the War Office aligned together against the Air

⁸⁹ He quotes Mahan, Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, p. 48.

⁹⁰ TNA, AIR 41/45, 'Volume 1 – The Atlantic and Home Waters – The Prelude April 1918 to September 1939', Air Historical Branch document, undated, p. 57. This narrative was written by a naval officer, D. V. Peyton-Ward.

Ministry led to one of the most significant of the 1920s reviews and its timing matched the culmination of inter-service rivalry, at the most critical and potentially dangerous period of the 1920s for the Air Force, but also one of intense difficulty for the older services.

The first era of three-way inter-service rivalry began in Britain. Creating the first independent air force proved challenging and presaged similar challenges in other countries embracing air power. The early pivotal moments in the fights to retain an independent air force, created by equally hard-fought battles between the naval and military services, were, it is argued, an inevitable consequence of the introduction of the novel environment of the air, particularly at a time of such constrained budgets. Though there was a succession of reviews throughout the 1920s, with the other services fighting hard against an independent air service, the wartime years had demonstrated to the decision-makers — the politicians — that two services each with their own air service comprised essentially four different environmental bodies and introduced additional intra- as well as inter-service arguments. These arguments were very recent memories to the politicians of the 1920s. The difficult economic circumstances of the decade and the arguments in favour of disarmament also meant that at the time none of the armed forces considered themselves well-funded, but these scraps over the annual estimates were a perennial and well-worn process. The arguments over concepts and ownership, command and identity, were more personal, and, it is argued, mattered more to the emotional heart of each service. Numerous memoirs and retrospective accounts demonstrate that memories of Whitehall battles over these issues remained ingrained in the memory of those who fought them. Although these often contain recollections of battles over money, those written by servicemen and the politicians who led their ministries demonstrate more emotion over issues of the heart than those of the head. After all, even in the twenty-first century service personnel of all ranks remember slights to their professionalism or identity long after they forget the details of a financial review. Of course, both heart and head issues mattered, but the issues that invoked identity, culture, and emotion were the ones that bonded airmen together. They were also the issues that the older services' leaders were less capable of appreciating or

countering. The RAF's motto, *Per Ardua ad Astra* ('through adversity to the stars'), although adopted by the RFC long before the RAF was conceived, reads like a covert warning to those services. They were facing an insurgency which chose asymmetric methods to attack and the insurgent grew stronger in the adversity of each fight.

The RAF was both created and shaped by these forces. The Air Ministry intuitively understood that a new service required a culture and identity to withstand them. Its identity was forged by conflict and inter-service rivalry strengthened it. Stuart Griffin lamented that those taking a cultural approach to military innovation are 'hesitant about taking a leap of faith that culture can and does have considerable explanatory, even causal, power'.⁹¹ It is argued here, however, that much of the innovation of the fledgling service in the post-war period was cultural rather than technological, partly because this required less capital expenditure than new aeroplanes with an indeterminate life expectancy but also because the insurgent force needed a strong cultural identity. In accentuating the importance of identity, command, influence, and foundational resilience, the leaders of the Air Ministry helped cohere the men of the RAF, at all ranks, around their service. The post-demobilisation RAF was small with few squadrons, which made it easier to marshal an identity around the service as a whole. Ironically, the attacks from the Navy and the Army served to harden airmen's solidarity, erasing wartime tribal identities inherited from the RNAS and RFC. As well as cohering the men, this succession of arguments and attacks being made against the RAF sharpened the abilities of their leaders at the Air Ministry to make their case repeatedly at the highest political level. The battles of the 1930s would be about economics: the money to expand and acquire increasingly sophisticated technology. In the 1920s, the battle for the survival of the RAF centred on culture and identity, because without these elements the force would not have had the energy, creativity, or legitimacy to win the many arguments it faced.

Later Trenchard reflected on his abiding philosophy:

⁹¹ Griffin, p. 215.

In 1919, in a White Paper which I have before referred to, I said that as the Air Service developed there would be an arm for the Navy, and an arm for the Army, with a central body. Some have interpreted that to mean a separate arm. I have yet to learn that anybody could read that paper and interpret it in any other way than that I have two arms and they are not separate from my body.⁹²

Trenchard's frustration at having to explain continually what he found to be blatantly obvious about 'his body' was no doubt exacerbated by the numerous committees and reviews which returned to the subject of potentially separating arms from the Air Ministry's body. However, these fights were existential for the Air Ministry and the RAF, less so for the other services. Salmond, writing to *The Times* in 1931, showed similar frustration listing 'ten separate and emphatic verdicts in favour of the retention of a single unified service [...] given either by special committees or successive Governments after independent reviews of the findings of such committees'.⁹³ Yet in the 1920s they never lost their fight. Although the experience was clearly painful, inter-service rivalry was to be the making of the third service.

⁹² RAFM, Personal Papers of Lord Trenchard, MFC 76/1/42, 'Report of lecture delivered by the Chief of the Air Staff to officers of the Royal Air Force at Uxbridge on the 22nd January 1926', 22 January 1926, p. 12.

⁹³ RA PS/PSO/GV/C/G/1887/6, newspaper cutting from *The Times*, 18 April 1935.

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CONCLUSION

This thesis has analysed the RAF's experience in the decade or so after its creation from a political, socio-cultural, and organisational standpoint. Its premise was that the specific context of the early post-war years shaped the contours of inter-service competition with lasting implications for the development of the RAF and British defence in the inter-war years. The initial questions focused on the Air Ministry's development, the significance of its political and service leadership, and the relevance of the RAF's lack of a history in the post-First World War environment. The thesis explored the networks that were deployed in support of a service under attack and explained how influence in favour of the RAF was generated from a standing start and in a hostile Whitehall environment. In asking what 'what do revolutionaries get when they get their revolution?', there was an invitation to consider the nature of the Air Ministry's approach to the challenges it faced — economic, political, and structural — and the sense in which the third service behaved in an insurgent fashion soon became apparent.

The archival research began with the papers of Lord Brabazon and, with hindsight, the tentacles that spread from that archive extended into all of those that were subsequently researched. His changing interests as he moved into politics and his concomitant contacts with the general public evident within his correspondence reflect the class and societal changes taking place in the 1920s. He moved freely between the traditional aristocracy and the newer rising scientific, technical, and industrial classes. His papers are a microcosm of the research which spiralled out from the initial research questions of this thesis. Giving a sense of symmetry, the range of subjects discussed in two particularly productive archival forays, in the Royal Archives in Windsor and in the records of the US Embassy's military attachés during the period under scrutiny held in the National Archives at College Park, cover a similar and broad span of topics.

This thesis set out to address the 'softer' issues around influence, networks, and identity, considering the socio-cultural and organisational

underpinnings of the early Air Force. These issues often remain overlooked or have sometimes been relegated in importance within the existing historiography assessing the RAF's and Air Ministry's economic and doctrinal challenges over the same period. Through archival research, combined with contemporary commentary and important memoirs, the preceding chapters have argued that the 1920s were, for the RAF, a decade focused on identity and influence. Innovation in this period by the new service was most important in relation to developing a culture, organisation, and sense of confidence that could steer it through the choppy waters of the early 1920s when the RAF was under attack, sometimes at its own invitation through deliberate provocation, from the older two services. Ferris, in talking about state power, assessed that power through the categories of material, administration, and ideas.¹ The material circumstances of the time, especially the economic conditions, forced the Air Ministry's leadership to manage resource tightly and Trenchard's obsession with buildings and foundations is reflected in the physical and organisational projects initiated early on. In administrative terms, an ability to maximise the capital available in the networks around Whitehall, thereby securing a firmer footing in Whitehall, harnessed power for the Air Ministry. The most important ideas in these early post-war years were not just those about doctrine, but those about image, promotion of air-mindedness, and management of public relations. This research has shown how the management of publicity, curation of image, and a deliberately ambiguous approach to modernity and tradition, together with the promotion of civil and military aviation, helped circumvent the resistance of a conservative establishment and a hostile press.

In critiquing the relative merits of having a history, the underrated benefits of the RAF's lack of heritage have been exposed. While immaturity disadvantaged the service in terms of its standing and early coherence as a community, the assumptions made at the time, and reinforced by much of the historiography, that an organisation lacking developed traditions was by default weaker, are challenged by the findings of this thesis. In the particular context of the early post-war period, the RAF was uniquely able to distance itself from the

¹ John R. Ferris, "The Greatest Power on Earth": Great Britain in the 1920s', *The International History Review*, 13.4 (1991), 726–50 (p. 730).

negativity surrounding a long and draining war and was forced to face its future imaginatively and without significant 'baggage'. The condescension directed at the junior service by the ruling elite and the Admiralty and War Office hindered their understanding of the agility that a lack of history afforded. As the research has shown, whether in relation to memorialisation, education, air policing, networks, public relations, or establishment relationships, the Air Ministry's leadership embraced modernity, albeit selectively. Over the period in question, the Air Ministry's senior personnel learnt to combine the modernity of the service and aviation with elements of tradition, borrowed or invented.

Central to this were the Whitehall Warriors: Trenchard and Hoare, along with other key politicians such as Churchill and Sassoon, who worked within an immature organisation but brought considerable experience from their pre-Air Ministry lives. Between them, they understood the workings of the Army, Navy, Whitehall politics, and the networks which surrounded Whitehall. In addition, the continuity in command of the Air Ministry and RAF throughout the period, in contrast with that of the older two services, provided a sense of unity of purpose which was compounded by the attacks it sustained. While the older networks that supported the pre-war *status quo* were riven with divisions over the record of the First World War, memorialisation, and tensions over their future direction, those that supported air power cleaved to the simple concept of survival. The successive reviews into the RAF's continued existence from the end of the war helped its leaders to sharpen their arguments and to approach this scrutiny with impressive energy and ingenuity. The leadership can rightly be accused of cynicism and opportunism, but, with hindsight, this was an obvious response from an insurgent organisation which was prepared to take risks and operate unconventionally compared with its long-established counterparts.

The Air Ministry's curious relationship with the press has received surprisingly scant attention. Its willingness to adopt self-consciously modern practices of public relations was, it is argued, sophisticated for the time, particularly for a government department. It learnt to be mindful of the internal Whitehall audience, the networks it could harness in its support, and the value of shaping its image with the broader public in mind. Here again, the stability of

the leadership at the Air Ministry in the 1920s (which included Thomson's 1924 tenure) ameliorated the poor relationship that developed as a result of Rothermere's tempestuous tenure as the Ministry's first Secretary of State. Hoare, Thomson, and Under Secretaries of State such as Sassoon, Butler, Londonderry, and Sutherland smoothed the feathers of the establishment and the press barons, while the Air Ministry found indirect routes to attracting press coverage. National strikes, pageants, and air races were examples of opportunities which the RAF exploited to maximise their public profile.

At a time when society was adapting to the post-war landscape, with a better educated and informed public, this was an era that could be simultaneously morbid and yet future-facing. The particular characteristics of air power matched these contradictory themes allowing the RAF to benefit from both. For example, it avoided dwelling on its fallen of the First World War both in its handling of the London memorial and in its hasty announcements of memorial services, but drew on fears over aerial attack in the Air Ministry's inflammatory paper on the French threat from the air which so seized the King. Meanwhile, public interest in air stunts and spectacles allowed the RAF to present itself as the modern, technological service, and its apprentice training system appealed to boys excited by aircraft and technology, recruiting some of the best from around the country. The newest service created a distinctive culture, inventing tradition and inveigling its way into the establishment.

The impact of the RAF's creation on inter-service rivalry threads through the research findings. In considering time, space, and identity as themes in the early chapters, it became clear that the creation of a third service of the air destabilised the, perhaps unstable, equilibrium that existed in Whitehall before 1914 in ways unanticipated in the wartime arguments over its establishment. Though the Admiralty and the War Office had clashed over their supremacy in British defence policy and specifically over the 'blue water' versus 'Continental' approaches, their operational environments were mostly clearly delineated, and both could operate and fight independently of the other. The air environment could not be so neatly packaged and arguments during successive reviews struggled with teleological discussions of arms, forces, and intersections of

operational activity. The RAF's composition, formed of air-minded progressives (in technological rather than political terms) from the Army and Navy, combined with mass demobilisation following the war's end, gave the Air Ministry and the RAF a unique make-up. Though delays in confirming new ranks, uniforms, and other trappings of armed service attracted the derision of the older services, as well as cartoonists, the unity of purpose that characterised air-supporting networks was complemented by the consolidation of the majority of British air power experience from the First World War within the RAF and those networks. Several events vital to the evolution of inter-service rivalry in the early post-war years were identified in the final chapter, the pivot being the Salisbury Committee. Until 1923 the Air Ministry had been under continual attack, while still establishing itself — finding its niche operationally within the empire while building the early foundations of its future force in Britain — and grappling with the machinery of Whitehall. After 1923, with a foothold in Whitehall itself, the return of Hoare to the Air Ministry for a five-year term in late 1924, and the implementation of the strategic plan for influence, building UASs, the AAF, and targeting the monarchy and the social standing of officers as building blocks towards resilience, the RAF turned the corner in terms of attacks on its permanence aided by its developing air-supporting networks. Of course, the Navy continued to petition, eventually successfully, for its own naval air arm, but questions of abolishing the Air Force were muted.

In critically assessing the political, socio-cultural, and organisational development of the RAF and the Air Ministry during this period, this thesis has come to several overarching conclusions. Though vulnerable and immature, the air service was not inherently weak as a result of the context of the times and the very different circumstances of the Army and Navy post-war. In fact, the RAF's lack of history and the challenges of the time provided it with opportunities unavailable to its rivals. History and heritage for the armed services can be, it is argued, a hindrance to peacetime innovation. The insurgent quality of the Air Ministry's approach stemmed from its immaturity and unsettled the conventional political management of the armed forces.

This thesis has revisited the leadership of Trenchard and concluded that his legacy cannot be understood without reprising the contributions of Hoare. Analyses of the latter figure have been overshadowed by his career in the 1930s, most notably in his 1935 resignation as Foreign Secretary over the 'Hoare–Laval' pact. This study has contributed to the historiography of the RAF's early inter-war years by evaluating in detail their joint partnership and the development of the Air Ministry specifically over the same period. They were quite different men and, though they stayed close for the remainder of their lives, the admiration expressed by Hoare in his subsequent memoirs was not fully reciprocated by Trenchard. Yet it was their working relationship during the 1920s that proved so formidable against Whitehall adversaries such as Beatty and Wilson, as well as critics in and of the press. Assessments of Trenchard's legacy, whether finding broadly for or against his methods, are limited without this understanding of his partnership with Hoare, Whitehall Warriors both. The role of the Air Ministry, its organisation including its geographical position and unique civil and military complexion, is also central to better understanding of this period and has benefited from re-examination.

There is scope here for further research on the effect of battle narratives, and indeed narratives of war, on agility and innovation in peacetime. A glorious past can mask the cold realities of the present. Rigorous critical battle analysis is, of course, important in the context of learning lessons but successes can become overly romanticised by a complacent service and failures neglected. There are also other open areas for further investigation. The thesis concludes in 1929 at the end of the tenures of Hoare and Trenchard, but research in the US archives has shown that the Air Ministry faced a further crisis that was judged by US commentators to threaten the future of its independence once again: the R101 crash of October 1930.² The threat posed by the Geneva Conference soon after also preoccupied a small Air Staff whose efforts might have been focused more productively elsewhere. These events offer a pivot point to the next decade when, it has been argued, the battles over resource and doctrine rose in importance as war loomed once again. The role of women

² NACP, RG 165, MIDC 1917–41, 2083-817–883, 2083-819, G-2 Report 'Repercussions from the R101 Disaster', 13 November 1930.

in these networks would be a subject for research in its own right. The wives of Hoare and Trenchard were active in the fight, and the interlinkages between them and others deserve fresh attention. Katherine Trenchard's sister was married to Admiral Keyes, Sykes married Bonar Law's daughter, Lady Hoare was a significant character in her own right, and their networks extended into the royal family and beyond the male dominions of Whitehall.

Many fine analyses of the inter-war years that foreground battles concerning estimates and doctrine recognise the value of socio-cultural approaches. This thesis is a reply to invitations to approach the topic from the perspective of culture, social context, and identity, placing the actors and framing the networks within the political and ruling establishment and the specific environs of Whitehall. A detachment from the past, with the service facing the future, forced it to innovate in winning influence and in developing a coherent identity and culture. Continual attacks from the other two services catalysed this process, strengthening the RAF's position. Services that emerge from war broken, or at least bent out of shape, would benefit from understanding how their cultural heritage affects their ability to innovate. Emerging militarised environments, such as space, might be better understood by reflecting on the experiences and achievements of fledgling organisations destabilising long established practices in Whitehall. It is also important that historians and commentators understand the inner motivations of service personnel — why the heart matters as much as the head — and so why better doctrine or funding for equipment may not have helped the air service in its earlier years, even though the assumption has been that they should. The pivotal experience of air policing in Iraq was not just about finding a role for the early RAF, it was about controlling a narrative, about taking over command and the symbolism that came with that. Finally, the RAF's project was about exercising influence: achieving parity of treatment through all means available. The RAF, and its leaders in the Air Ministry, used its novelty in cultural and organisational terms to make politically modern arguments, placing itself in sharp relief against the Navy and the Army. At the heart of this thesis is the relationship between time, space, power, and identity, and the context of the early post-war environment. Embracing the future whilst selectively harnessing

tradition and explicitly creating and projecting an identity beyond Whitehall were critical to the RAF's survival.

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