

Anglicans at Sea: The Church of England, the Royal Navy and the First World War

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This article examines the role of the Church of England in the Royal Navy before and during the First World War. It highlights the importance and ultimate fragility of their historic alliance, its reputational consequences, and their significance for our wider understanding of the impact of the war on England's established church.

Historians of the Church of England in the era of the First World War have largely overlooked its links with the Royal Navy.¹ While studies of the church's fortunes in the British Army and on the home front have multiplied,² its privileged position in the Senior Service has usually passed unremarked, and only recently have aspects of its dominance begun to be explored by Matthew Seligmann (for the pre-war years) and, to a more limited extent, Laura Rowe (in relation to its wartime chaplains and the Navy's culture of 'paternalism').³ This comparative neglect also

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¹ A pattern set in the 1970s by Stuart P. Mews, 'Religion and English Society in the First World War' (PhD, University of Cambridge, 1973); Albert Marrin, *The Last Crusade: The Church of England in the First World War* (Durham, NC, 1974); Alan Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (London, 1978).

² See, for example, Edward Madigan, *Faith Under Fire: Anglican Army Chaplains and the Great War* (Basingstoke, 2011); Michael Austin, 'Like a Swift Hurricane': *People, Clergy and Class in a Midlands Diocese 1914–1919* (Chesterfield, 2014); Robert Beaken, *The Church of England and the Home Front 1914–1918* (Woodbridge, 2015); Stuart Bell, *Faith in Conflict: The Impact of the Great War on the Faith of the People of Britain* (Solihull, 2017).

³ Matthew S. Seligmann, *Rum, Sodomy, Prayers, and the Lash Revisited: Winston Churchill and Social Reform in the Royal Navy, 1900–1915* (Oxford, 2018), 96–137; idem, "'Mass Anywhere on Sea or Land': Catholicism and the Royal Navy, 1901–1906", *War in History* 29 (2022), 763–81; Laura Rowe, *Morale and Discipline in the Royal Navy during the First*

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stands in contrast to the interest shown in the church's links with the Navy during the French Wars of 1793–1815,⁴ and is a lacuna that would have surprised contemporaries. For, at the turn of the twentieth century, the Church of England was deeply entrenched in Britain's most expensive and respected institution, the supreme embodiment of 'national pride and prestige', whose warships (and especially HMS *Dreadnought*, launched in 1906) stood at the pinnacle of industrial and technological achievement.⁵ On the threshold of war, the Royal Navy was the world's most renowned fighting force and was the foundation and guarantor of British commerce and the British empire, consuming the lion's share of government expenditure: so much so, that in 1909 the bishop of London, Arthur Foley Winnington-Ingram, decried the nation's drinking habits in terms of the number of additional dreadnoughts that could be built with the £166 million spent each year by the bibulous British public (almost four times the Navy estimates for 1913–14).⁶

For the Church of England, reinvigorated by nineteenth-century currents of reform and renewal, and now the mother church of a global communion, its links with the Navy were as flattering as they were historic. However, and as one of the surviving bastions of Anglican privilege at the turn of the twentieth century, the Navy's spurring performance between 1914 and 1918 posed problems for both institutions. Despite the decisive role played by the Navy in the blockade of Germany throughout the war (an abstraction to most Britons), a succession of embarrassments at sea (whether real or imagined) fed a mood of public alarm and recrimination. These were reactions which put the leading prelates of the Church of England, as well as the Admiralty, very much on the back foot: as G. R. Searle has put the situation, 'The Royal Navy had totally triumphed, albeit in circumstances which exuded an atmosphere of anticlimax.'⁷ Naval work also proved to be difficult for

World War (Cambridge, 2018), 226–38. For further context, see also Tom Scherb, 'Royal Navy Chaplains', *Stand To! The Journal of the Western Front Association* 127 (2022), 40–6.

⁴ Richard Blake, *Evangelicals in the Royal Navy, 1775–1815: Blue Lights and Psalm-Singers* (Woodbridge, 2008); Gareth Atkins, 'Christian Heroes, Providence, and Patriotism in Wartime Britain, 1793–1815', *HJ* 58 (2015), 393–414.

⁵ Ronald Spector, *At War at Sea: Sailors and Naval Combat in the Twentieth Century* (London, 2002), 24; N. A. M. Rodger, *The Price of Victory: A Naval History of Britain 1815–1945* (London, 2024), 215.

⁶ Mike Farquharson-Roberts, *A History of the Royal Navy: World War I* (London, 2014), 12; HC Deb. (5th series), 9 October 1912 (vol. 42, cols 473–92), at col. 488; *Naval Annual* (Portsmouth, 1913), 461.

⁷ G. R. Searle, *A New England? Peace and War 1886–1918* (Oxford, 2004), 734.

its Anglican chaplains, who, until the outbreak of war, enjoyed a de facto monopoly on seagoing ministry. In aggregate, the anticlimactic course of the surface war (there were no serious fleet actions after the battle of Jutland in 1916); the practice of posting chaplains to (seemingly under-employed) larger warships; the nature of naval combat; and the Navy's frugality with honours and awards all helped to depress the profile and reputation of its Anglican chaplains. Despite the huge prestige of the pre-war Navy, it was telling that no naval equivalent of the celebrated army chaplains 'Woodbine Willie', 'Tubby' Clayton and Theodore Bayley Hardy emerged from the war years. Instead, and in consequence of the public perception of 'Jack' taking his ease with the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow while 'Tommy' fought and bled in the trenches, it seems that a perception of Anglican naval chaplaincy was conceived which emerged years later in response to one of the Church of England's most famous cases of clerical scandal, that of Harold Davidson, rector of the parish of Stiffkey, who had been, as the popular press delighted to recount, a wartime chaplain in the Royal Navy.⁸

CHURCH AND NAVY

All this was a far cry from the gilded, pre-war years, when the Navy and the Church of England stood in a mutually beneficial embrace. As Prince of Wales, in 1877 Edward VII had favoured the *Royal* Navy by sending his two surviving sons to train as officer cadets on HMS *Britannia*.⁹ Hence, not only was King George V, the 'Defender of the Faith and Supreme Governor of the Church of England', a former Navy officer, but by 1914 the Prince of Wales and the prospective Duke of York had also followed in his wake, the latter even serving at Jutland. According to his eldest son, King George V retained the character of a Navy officer throughout his life: 'long after he had taken up his work ashore, the habits and outlook he had formed in the Navy continued to regulate his daily routine ... He believed in God, in the invincibility of the Royal Navy, and the essential rightness of whatever was British.'¹⁰ Like the royal family, the Anglican Communion was

⁸ See below, pp. 345–7.

⁹ H. C. G. Matthew, 'Edward VII (1841–1910)', *ODNB*, online edn (2004), rev. 26 May 2016, at: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/32975>>, accessed 14 June 2025.

¹⁰ Edward, Duke of Windsor, *A King's Story: The Memoirs of the Duke of Windsor* (New York, 1951), 8, 27.

also served and shaped by the Navy. As a midshipman, in 1881 the future George V had helped to lay the foundation stone of St Thomas's Church, North Sydney.¹¹ Moreover, while the Navy guarded the far-flung settler colonies from which the communion had emerged, it also assisted Anglican missionary ventures. For example, the first Anglican bishop in Korea, Charles John Corfe, was an ex-Navy chaplain who had served for many years on the China station, while the medical work of his diocese was funded by donations from the Service.¹² Likewise, the Navy's campaign against the slave trade on the coasts of West and East Africa burnished the moral and Christian credentials of the empire.¹³ Notably, its mission liberated Samuel Ajayi Crowther, who was freed from a Portuguese slave ship in 1822, baptized in 1825, and became the first African bishop of the Anglican Communion in 1864.¹⁴

However, the Navy was itself an object of missionary interest, drawing the energies of Anglican evangelicals in particular.¹⁵ While the Missions to Seamen, which coalesced in 1856, was primarily aimed at merchant mariners, it also embraced the Navy.¹⁶ Moreover, from the 1870s naval work was dominated by the evangelical laywoman, Agnes Weston. Exploiting her public image as a mother figure to the Navy's ratings and marines, by the turn of the twentieth century Weston presided over a philanthropic, missionizing empire centred upon her vaunted 'Sailors' Rests'.¹⁷ A champion of the Royal Naval Temperance Society (founded in Devonport in 1873, with the bishop of Exeter in the chair), and a keen supporter of purity work and of the (officers-only) Royal Naval Christian Union,¹⁸ by 1914 Weston was

¹¹ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 August 1881, 3.

¹² Frederic Sawrey Lowndes, *Bishops of the Day* (London, 1897), 140; *Official Year Book of the Church of England* (London, 1897), 306.

¹³ Richard Blake, *Religion in the British Navy 1815–1879: Piety and Professionalism* (Woodbridge, 2014), 212–15.

¹⁴ John Flint, 'Crowther, Samuel Ajayi (c.1807–1891)', *ODNB*, online edn (2004), rev. 17 September 2015, at: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/refodnb/6836>>, accessed 14 June 2025.

¹⁵ Atkins, 'Christian Heroes', 395.

¹⁶ *Official Year Book of the Church of England* (1897), 677.

¹⁷ Alston Kennerley, 'Weston, Dame Agnes Elizabeth (1840–1918)', *ODNB*, online edn (2004), rev. 24 May 2008, at: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/refodnb/36842>>, accessed 14 June 2025; Mary A. Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack: Representing Naval Manhood in the British Empire, 1870–1918* (Manchester, 2009), 66–98.

¹⁸ Agnes Weston, *My Life Among the Bluejackets* (London, 1910), 90–1, 120–1, 156, 272, 324–5.

the most influential figure in the religious life of the Navy.¹⁹ By 1910, her fundraising efforts had raised nearly £1 million, and her (now ‘Royal’) Sailors’ Rests were hosting 350,000 overnight visits a year.²⁰ Weston was appointed Dame Commander of the British Empire in 1918 and, when she died later that year, this much-lauded ‘Mother of the Navy’ was buried with full naval honours.²¹

The ties between the Navy and the Church of England had deep historical roots. For generations, the Admiralty had served as a significant source of patronage and clerical livelihoods, having scores of chaplains’ commissions – and even parochial livings – at its disposal.²² The English church was also part of the Navy’s cultural DNA. As parallel projects pursued after 1660, the links between the restored, episcopal Church of England and the resurrected, post-Restoration Royal Navy were manifested in many ways. They were apparent in the Navy’s dockyard chapels (the first of which, at Sheerness, dated from the 1660s);²³ in the regularization of naval chaplaincy (from 1677, all chaplains were required to hold ‘A Certificate from the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Bishop of London’);²⁴ and in the contents of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. Unlike earlier iterations of the Prayer Book, this included ‘Forms of Prayer to be Used at Sea’, among them daily prayers for use by the Royal Navy, a ‘Prayer to be said before a Fight at Sea against any Enemy’, ‘Special Prayers with respect to the Enemy’, prayers for the burial of the dead at sea, and prayers of intercession and thanksgiving. The British Army had no equivalents. Furthermore, the first of the 1661 Articles of War, which was upheld until 1957 by the Naval Discipline Act of 1866,²⁵ required:

That all Co[m]manders Captaines and other Officers att Sea shall cause the publike Worshipp of Almighty God according to the Liturgy of the Church of England established by Law to be solemnly orderly and reverently performed in their respective Ships And that prayers and preachings by the respective Chaplaines in holy Orders of the respective

¹⁹ Ibid. 156.

²⁰ Ibid. 128, 325.

²¹ Kennerley, ‘Weston’.

²² Montague Hainsselin, *Grand Fleet Days* (London, 1917), 33–4.

²³ Sheerness Dockyard Trust, online at: <<https://sdpt.org.uk/news/2017/7/25/an-island-rich-in-history-zx2wn>>, accessed 22 July 2025.

²⁴ Kew, TNA, ADM 1/8369/46, Minute by Perrin, 6 March 1914.

²⁵ Legislation on Naval Discipline, online at: <<https://www.pdavis.nl/NDA.htm>>, accessed 29 August 2024.

Ships be performed diligently and that the Lords Day be observed according to Law.²⁶

The 1913 edition of *King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions* showed how little had changed by the eve of the First World War. Its chapter on 'Discipline' commenced with an exposition on 'Chaplain, Divine Service, &c', matters that seemingly took precedence over issues such as 'Deserters and Absentees' and 'Discipline Generally'.²⁷ The section began by proscribing Sunday work ('other than that which may be strictly necessary for the public service'), and required 'that the Chaplain [be] treated at all times by the officers and men with the respect due to his sacred office'.²⁸ It also instructed commanding officers to ensure:

That Divine Service is performed every Sunday according to the Liturgy of the Church of England, and a sermon preached . . . The Captain and all officers and men not on duty are expected to attend this service, unless permission to be absent has been formally obtained on the ground of religious scruples.²⁹

This last, rather grudging, clause reflected piecemeal concessions to Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, and Nonconformists from the mid-nineteenth century,³⁰ but did not amount to a serious weakening of the Navy's Anglican fabric. Indeed, an extensive pre-war experiment in permitting Roman Catholic chaplains to say mass on board ship lasted barely two years, from 1901 to 1903, an indulgence that amounted to little more than a procedural 'subterfuge'.³¹ If a small minority of sailors were exempted from Church of England services on the Sabbath, and permitted to go ashore to worship, the Navy's Anglican regime was fortified by the promotion of daily prayers on the part of the Admiralty.³²

²⁶ 'Charles II, 1661: An Act for Establishing Articles and Orders for the regulating and better Government of His Majesties Navies Shippes of Warr & Forces by Sea', *British History Online*, at: <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/statutes-realm/vol5/pp311-314>>, accessed 21 July 2025.

²⁷ *King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions*, 2 vols (London, 1913), 1: 216.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Blake, *Religion*, 146.

³¹ Seligmann, 'Mass', 771–80; Michael Snape, 'All in the Same Boat? Anglicans, Catholics, and the Royal Navy in the Era of the First World War', *Cultural and Social History* 22 (2025), 545–65.

³² Blake, *Religion*, 124.

By 1913, commanding officers were to ensure ‘That on every weekday after morning quarters or divisions short prayers from the [Church of England’s] Liturgy are read’. On warships without a chaplain – the majority – ‘the best arrangements’ possible were to be made ‘to give effect to these instructions as to Divine Service and Morning Prayers’.³³ Besides the salience of the Prayer Book on His Majesty’s ships, an impressive ‘Ship’s Bible’ was a normal feature of naval inventories (in fact, two large Bibles from HMS *Warspite* still bear the scars of the battle of Jutland), while Scripture was the only literature available in ships’ cells.³⁴ Nor was the King James Bible confined to the purely religious sphere: a profound cultural familiarity meant that biblical references were often signalled to expedite ship-to-ship communication, a practice which had the effect of turning the Authorized Version into a naval code book.³⁵

Whereas the British Army had broadened its religious provision to accommodate Roman Catholics and Presbyterians on similar terms after the Crimean War (and included Scottish and Irish regiments that were treated as culturally ‘Presbyterian’ or ‘Roman Catholic’), the mid-Victorian period saw a strengthening of the Royal Navy’s already ‘robust Anglicanism’.³⁶ In 1859, the role of chaplain of the fleet was formalized: henceforth, he would be the senior chaplain of Greenwich Hospital and rank as a Rear-Admiral.³⁷ In 1875, more than twenty-five years since any member of the royal family had launched a naval vessel, the Princess of Wales launched HMS *Alexandra* at Chatham. In a significant departure from the hitherto secular ‘christenings’ of Royal Navy ships, this saw the debut of a service led by Archbishop Tait, comprising Psalm 107 (‘They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters’; AV); a prayer for the ship’s company; the

³³ *King’s Regulations*, 1: 216.

³⁴ One of these Bibles was damaged by a shell which exploded outside the ship’s chapel: see London, Imperial War Museum [hereafter: IWM], Documents 24344. A second, according to a note on its flyleaf, was ‘struck by a piece of German shell in the Chaplain’s Cabin’: see Portsmouth, National Museum of the Royal Navy, 2022/88/1; Christopher McKee, *Sober Men and True: Sailor Lives in the Royal Navy 1900–1945* (Cambridge, MA, 2002), 39–40.

³⁵ For numerous illustrations of the use of Scripture as late as the Second World War, see CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum, online at: <<http://www.navalandmilitarymuseum.org/archives/articles/sailors-life/chapter-and-verse>>, accessed 21 July 2025.

³⁶ Blake, *Religion*, 143.

³⁷ Gordon Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains: A History of the Chaplains of The Royal Navy* (Oxford, 1978), 280–1.

Lord's Prayer; and a blessing.³⁸ As the *Church Times* reported, this Admiralty-approved liturgy was now 'to be used at the Launching of Ships of Her Majesty's Navy'.³⁹ Accordingly, in 1911, at the height of the Anglo-German naval race, Archbishop Randall Davidson led the service at Canning Town which saw his wife launch the new super-dreadnought HMS *Thunderer*, then the largest ship to be constructed on the River Thames.⁴⁰ By this point, facilities for worship were also being enhanced, as the size of the Navy's largest warships now allowed for the installation of shipboard chapels, fulfilling a longstanding ambition, growing since the 1870s, of reserving shipboard space for smaller services, private prayer, religious instruction, and pastoral guidance.⁴¹ The first of these chapels was installed in 1913 on the 27,000-ton, £2,078,000 battle cruiser *Queen Mary*.⁴² Although an initiative taken by its captain, this example led the Admiralty to direct that chapels be incorporated into all battleships then being built.⁴³ A third indication of the Church of England's enduring grip on the Navy was its adoption of the Rev. William Whiting's 'Eternal Father, strong to save', which appeared in the first edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (1861) and, by the end of the century, had become the de facto hymn of the Royal Navy. Frequently revised by Whiting in his lifetime, in the First World War a further verse was added to reflect the hazards faced by the aircrew of the fledgling Royal Naval Air Service.⁴⁴

Perhaps the strongest practical argument that could be offered in justification of this Anglican hegemony was demographic, namely that the Navy remained a very largely English – and overwhelmingly Anglican – institution. Whereas the rank and file of the British Army were drawn from across the British Isles,⁴⁵ the Navy's 'lower deck' was mainly drawn from the southern and western seaboard of England, a

³⁸ *The Times*, 8 April 1875, 8.

³⁹ *Church Times*, 7 June 1878, 321; John Moore, ed., *Jane's Fighting Ships of World War I* (New York, 1990), 39.

⁴⁰ *New York Times*, 2 February 1911, 7.

⁴¹ Waldo E. L. Smith, *The Navy Chaplain and His Parish* (Ottawa, 1967), 124.

⁴² Taylor, *Sea Chaplains*, 361–2; Brian Lavery and W. M. James, *The Royal Navy Officer's Jutland Pocket-Manual 1916* (Oxford, 2016), 132.

⁴³ Taylor, *Sea Chaplains*, 362–3; *Naval Annual* (1913), 220; Moore, *Jane's Fighting Ships*, 43.

⁴⁴ Sheila Doyle, 'Eternal Father, strong to save', *The Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology*, online at: <<http://www.hymnology.co.uk/e/eternal-father,-strong-to-save>>, accessed 8 September 2025.

⁴⁵ David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People, c.1870–2000* (Oxford, 2005), 33–5.

recruiting base which, despite the historic strength of Methodism in Cornwall, helped to guarantee a large Anglican majority among its sailors. This situation was formalized in the 1890s, when the three great naval bases of southern England – Portsmouth, Devonport and Chatham – became self-contained ‘Divisions’, each with its allotted ships, sailors, shore facilities, and recruitment areas. Devonport, for example, recruited primarily from the West Country, eked out by smaller-scale recruitment in London, the English Midlands, Ireland, and South Wales.⁴⁶ In March 1906, the chaplain of the fleet, William Stuart Harris, wrote to Randall Davidson with a gloss on official statistics of religious affiliation, figures which indicated that 75.5 per cent of the Service was Anglican.⁴⁷ However, as these figures routinely omitted commissioned and warrant officers, Harris surmised that the Anglican majority was significantly larger, more in the order of 80 per cent, a proportion sustained well into the 1920s.⁴⁸ By 1913, and in a Navy that had expanded since 1906, the Anglican preponderance among the lower deck had grown by another two percentage points. In contrast, the Anglican proportion of the army hovered just below 70 per cent, while (in the absence of hard census data) the Anglican population of Great Britain has been estimated at around 64 per cent. (In Ireland, in contrast, the census of 1911 showed that it was barely 13 per cent.)⁴⁹

The historic religion of the Navy was especially marked among its officers. For example, Lord Walter Kerr, First Naval Lord from 1899 to 1904, was the only Roman Catholic admiral in the service.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the towering figure of the pre-war Navy was a quasi-ecclesiastical figure in his own right, namely Sir John (‘Jacky’) Fisher, First Sea Lord from 1904 to 1910 and again (as Baron Fisher of Kilverstone) from 1914 to 1915. Having served as a midshipman under an evangelical ‘Blue Light’ in the 1850s,⁵¹ Fisher married Frances Broughton, daughter

⁴⁶ Brian Lavery, *Able Seamen: The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy 1850–1939* (London, 2011), 116–18, 131–2.

⁴⁷ Seligmann, *Rum, Sodomy*, 96.

⁴⁸ London, LPL, Davidson Papers, vol. 118, fols 404–5, William Stuart Harris to Randall Davidson, 6 March 1906; Smith, *Navy Chaplain*, 134.

⁴⁹ Seligmann, *Rum, Sodomy*, 96; Michael Snape, *A Church Militant: Anglicans and the Armed Forces from Queen Victoria to the Vietnam War* (Oxford, 2022), 80, 109; Clive D. Field, “‘The Faith Society’? Quantifying Religious Belonging in Edwardian Britain, 1901–1914”, *JRH* 37 (2013), 39–63, table 6, at 62; 1911 Census of Ireland, online at: <https://www.visionofireland.org/census/table/IRL1911POP_M29>, accessed 12 June 2025.

⁵⁰ Rodger, *The Price of Victory*, 175. This title was changed to First Sea Lord in 1904.

⁵¹ Lord Fisher, *Records* (London, 1919), 12.

of Thomas Broughton, rector of Bletchley and a prominent ritualist.⁵² As First Sea Lord, Fisher was a daily churchgoer and, as a keen student of Scripture, loyally defended Nelson's notorious affair with Emma Hamilton a century earlier by contending that 'we don't think any the worse of Abraham because he was the husband of more than one wife'.⁵³ Significantly, Fisher revolutionized the Navy while drawing inspiration from the Church Fathers, writing in October 1904: 'I am ready for the fray. It will be a case of *Athanasius contra mundum*. Very sorry for *mundum* as *Athanasius* is going to win!'⁵⁴ Of his elevation to the peerage in 1909, Fisher wrote: 'Dread Nought is over 80 times in the Bible ("Fear Not"). So I took as my motto "Fear God and Dread Nought."⁵⁵ While Fisher also boasted of being the grandson of 'a splendid old parson of the fox-hunting type',⁵⁶ such ties between the parsonage and the wardroom were commonplace at the turn of the twentieth century. The Antarctic explorer Robert Falcon Scott, the Navy's greatest hero of the pre-war years, had married a clergyman's daughter and was honoured by a memorial service in St Paul's Cathedral.⁵⁷ Among his other distinctions, Winnington-Ingram had a brother who, having risen to the rank of admiral, was licensed as a lay reader in 1917.⁵⁸ Throughout the war, obituaries in the church press testified to the endurance of the ties between the Anglican clergy and the officers of the Royal Navy. After Jutland, Anglican newspapers mourned the deaths of at least nineteen sons of the clergy, including three officers on board the *Indefatigable*, four on the *Invincible*, and six on the *Queen Mary*.⁵⁹

⁵² Paul G. Halpern, 'Fisher, John Arbuthnot, first Baron Fisher (1841–1920)', *ODNB*, online edn (2004), rev. 23 September 2010, at: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/33143>>, accessed 14 June 2025.

⁵³ *The Papers of Admiral Sir John Fisher*, ed. P. K. Kemp, 2 vols (London, 1964), 2: 3; Lord Fisher, *Memories* (London, 1919), 160.

⁵⁴ Christopher Lloyd, *The Nation and the Navy* (London, 1954), 241. Italics original.

⁵⁵ Fisher, *Memories*, 200, 276.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 138.

⁵⁷ Alexander Watson and Patrick Porter, 'Bereaved and Aggrieved: Combat Motivation and the Ideology of Sacrifice in the First World War', *HR* 83 (2010), 146–64, at 150; H. G. R. King, 'Scott, Robert Falcon [known as Scott of the Antarctic] (1868–1912)', *ODNB*, online edn (2004), rev. 1 September 2017, at: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/35994>>, accessed 14 June 2025.

⁵⁸ *Guardian*, 10 May 1917, 367.

⁵⁹ *Church Times*, 9 June 1916, 534 and 14 July 1916, 30; Richard Ussher, *Roll of the Sons and Daughters of the Anglican Church Clergy throughout the World and of the Naval and Military Chaplains of the same who gave their lives in the Great War* (London, n.d.).

As archbishop of Canterbury from 1903, Randall Davidson was, ineluctably, deeply involved in naval affairs: a function of his status as primate, his earlier role as bishop of Rochester (in which capacity he had oversight of Chatham), and of the maritime situation of the diocese of Canterbury. Although he refrained from joining the populist Navy League, which was at odds with a Liberal government that seemed to be building too few battleships, in 1909 his reply to the League's overtures was sympathetic, acknowledging 'the responsibility which belongs to every citizen in matters of this kind'.⁶⁰ Randall Davidson was also keen to put the church's ministry to the Navy on a stronger footing. As its three 'Divisions' reflected, the 1890s had been years in which the Navy 'came ashore', with the construction of large naval barracks and extensive shore facilities.⁶¹ This was accompanied by the building of more naval chapels, which raised the awkward question of what should be done with structures funded by the taxpayer but used overwhelmingly by the Church of England.⁶² Wisely, the archbishop opted for dedication over consecration, preferring not to attract the ire of its critics, especially given the plight of the Church of England in Wales and the Liberal electoral landslide of 1906.⁶³ Furthermore, this vast expansion of the Navy's shore facilities caused local problems in the civilian church, especially with the influx of civilian workers and sailors' families. By 1914, the bishops of Winchester, Exeter and Rochester had rallied behind the Royal Naval Ports Church Fund, which sought to raise £50,000 'to provide church accommodation' in Portsmouth, Devonport and Chatham.⁶⁴ At the same time, Randall Davidson initiated an amendment to English matrimonial law: according to the Naval Marriages Act of 1908, banns could now be published at sea, rather than simply in sailors' home parishes.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ LPL, Davidson Papers, vol. 158, fol. 124, Davidson to Robert Yerburgh, 16 February 1909.

⁶¹ Lavery, *Able Seamen*, 133–5.

⁶² LPL, Davidson Papers, vol. 106, fols 311–4, Vincent Baddeley to J. V. Macmillan, 21 October 1905.

⁶³ LPL, Davidson Papers, vol. 118, fols 421–4, Correspondence between Bishop of Rochester and Davidson, 28–29 November 1906. The Church of England in Wales was disestablished under the Welsh Church Act of 1914, with the new, non-established Church in Wales coming into being in 1920.

⁶⁴ *Guardian*, 2 July 1914, 842.

⁶⁵ *King's Regulations*, 1: 218–20.

Randall Davidson also persevered with the reform of Navy chaplaincy begun by his predecessor, Frederick Temple. In 1902, and against a backdrop of renewed anti-ritualist agitation in the Church of England,⁶⁶ a surge that culminated in the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline of 1904, an order in council endowed the chaplain of the fleet with the office of archdeacon, under the authority of the archbishop of Canterbury. Significantly, it would be fifty years before the army's chaplain-general would be similarly honoured.⁶⁷ This measure had the backing of King Edward VII and issued from negotiations between Temple, the Admiralty, and the chaplain of the fleet, William Stuart Harris. Under this dispensation, the archbishop would license Navy chaplains at the recommendation of the chaplain of the fleet; such licenses could, however, be 'revoked on good cause being shewn to the Archbishop by the Chaplain of the Fleet acting under the directions of [the Admiralty].'⁶⁸ Another means of tightening ecclesiastical and naval discipline lay in a new system of short service commissions for chaplains, an idea broached to the chaplain of the fleet (chiefly for financial reasons) by the First Lord of the Admiralty, the earl of Selborne, in March 1903.⁶⁹ Introduced by another order in council, its advantages were explained by Harris at the 1903 Church Congress in Bristol. Here, Harris elucidated that the scheme had been well received by the bishops on the grounds that 'young clergy' would benefit from the discipline of naval life; from encountering 'the Church Catholic' in the course of their travels; and from sustained exposure to an invigorating male environment.⁷⁰ As a good churchman, and as part of his drive for efficiency and economy in the Navy, Fisher gave his support to these arrangements. In his *Naval Necessities*, Fisher claimed that short service commissions would benefit the church and the Treasury: they would save the Admiralty thousands of pounds per annum in pension liabilities, and give young clergymen the opportunity for useful and remunerative service in the

⁶⁶ Paul Nicholls, *Khaki and the Confessional: A Study of a Religious Issue at the 1900 General Election in England* (Melbourne, 2000); Martin Wellings, 'Anglo-Catholicism, the "Crisis in the Church" and the Cavalier Case of 1899', *JEH* 42 (1991), 239–58.

⁶⁷ Taylor, *Sea Chaplains*, 325.

⁶⁸ LPL, Temple Papers, vol. 55, fol. 114, Harris to Frederick Temple, 30 August 1901. See also LPL, Temple Papers, vol. 55, fols 116–17, Earl of Selborne to Temple, 9 November 1901.

⁶⁹ Seligmann, *Rum, Sodomy*, 100–1.

⁷⁰ *Report of Church Congress* (London, 1903), 388.

early stages of their careers.⁷¹ A decade later, Harris's successor, Hugh Singleton Wood, claimed that the system had created a diverse body of chaplains 'not unrepresentative of the whole body of the Church', a stark contrast, incidentally, with the fractious state of the Army Chaplains' Department, where a partisan evangelical, Bishop John Taylor Smith, held sway. Since 1911, and excepting only two very 'High' Anglo-Catholics, Wood had appointed four high churchmen ('not extreme'), eleven who were 'Moderate High', and nineteen who were 'Broad or Evangelical'.⁷²

As the church overhauled its care of the Navy, some of its leading figures played a prominent part in trying to defuse Anglo-German naval tensions. In 1907, when the imperial yacht *Hohenzollern* and its escorts anchored at Portsmouth (Kaiser Wilhelm II was, ironically, an honorary admiral in the Royal Navy),⁷³ Agnes Weston hosted a welcome dinner at her Sailors' Rest. With the Kaiser's permission, her workers distributed New Testaments and 'a large number' of illustrated scriptural 'text-cards' in German.⁷⁴ The naval race also gave rise to a high-profile friendship movement in the British and German churches, the highlights of which were reciprocal visits by delegations of German and British churchmen in 1908 and 1909.⁷⁵ Significantly, in drumming-up a decent turnout for the visit to Germany in 1909, Randall Davidson fretted that 'it would be disastrous were it to appear as if the Nonconformists were anxious for friendliness with Germany, while we Churchmen were only anxious to build more dread-noughts'.⁷⁶ Among the chief Anglican participants was the bishop of London, who made fulsome professions of Anglo-German amity at the Albert Hall in June 1908.⁷⁷ Though usually linked with the army due to his wartime record and status as chaplain to the London Rifle

⁷¹ *Papers of Admiral Sir John Fisher*, 2: 136–8.

⁷² TNA, ADM 1/8379/138 [1914], Wood, undated note; Michael Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department 1796–1953: Clergy Under Fire* (Woodbridge, 2008), 178–9, 185–6; IWM, 85/26/1, Reverend T. W. L. Caspersz RN, fol. 38.

⁷³ Michael Epkenhans, 'Wilhelm II and "His" Navy, 1888–1918', in Annika Mombauer and Wilhelm Deist, eds, *The Kaiser: New Research on Wilhelm II's Role in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, 2004), 12–36, at 12; IWM, 85/26/1, Caspersz, fol. 40.

⁷⁴ Weston, *My Life*, 310–11.

⁷⁵ Keith Clements, 'The Anglo-German Churches' Exchange Visits of 1908–09: A Notable Anniversary', *Ecumenical Review* 59 (2007), 257–83.

⁷⁶ John A. Moses, 'The British and German Churches and the Perception of War, 1908–1914', *War and Society* 5 (1987), 23–44, at 29–30.

⁷⁷ *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 2 June 1908, 6; Wilkinson, *Church of England*, 22.

Brigade, London was the principal port of the empire as well as a major ship-building centre. Besides having a brother who became an admiral, from 1904 Winnington-Ingram was an honorary chaplain of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve and was closely involved with the Royal Naval Scripture Readers Society and the Missions to Seamen.⁷⁸ However, gestures of amity did little to halt the momentum of the naval race or dispel underlying suspicions. Amidst the exchange visits of 1908–9, the *Church Times* struck a discordant note, echoing the Navy League by deploring the reluctance of the government to build more battleships and lambasting a public letter that had put ‘The German Case’ for naval expansion.⁷⁹

THE WAR YEARS

When war broke out in August 1914, the Royal Navy was in a high state of readiness. Moreover, from the Church of England’s point of view, there were ample grounds for confidence in its leadership. In October 1914, Fisher was recalled as First Sea Lord, replacing the German-born Prince Louis of Battenberg. Better still, on the day war was declared Sir John Jellicoe was appointed to command the Grand Fleet at Scapa. On taking command, he issued a message on behalf of the Naval and Military Bible Society from his flagship, HMS *Iron Duke*, one that spliced Joshua 1: 9 and 1 Peter 2: 17: ‘Be strong and of good courage: be not afraid neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee withersoever thou goest. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the King.’⁸⁰ Great things were expected of Jellicoe, who evoked reassuring memories of Nelson: small in stature, Jellicoe came from a modest background, had risen purely on merit, and had been badly wounded during the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901). A respected tactician, he was also notably popular with the lower deck.⁸¹ In 1911, Fisher had hailed him as ‘THE FUTURE

⁷⁸ LPL, Miscellaneous Papers MS 3407, fol. 54; *Guardian*, 18 March 1915, 251 and 6 May 1915, 407.

⁷⁹ *Church Times*, 26 March 1909, 403, and 8 April 1909, 500.

⁸⁰ Anon., *A History of Britain’s First Bible Society: Naval Military and Air Force Bible Society* (Portsmouth, n.d.), 38.

⁸¹ Andrew Gordon, *The Rules of the Game: Jutland and British Naval Command* (London, 2015), 17–18; Andrew Lambert, ‘Jellicoe, John Rushworth, first Earl Jellicoe (1859–1935)’, *ODNB*, online edn (2004), rev. 30 May 2013, at: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/34171>>, accessed 14 June 2025.

NELSON – he is *incomparably* the ablest Sea Admiral we have'.⁸² In contrast to Nelson, however, Jellicoe led a blameless matrimonial life, the energetic and outspoken Lady Florence Jellicoe being a keen supporter of Anglican charities for seafarers, including the Royal Naval Ports Church Building Fund and St Andrew's Waterside Church Mission, the latter having been founded in 1864 in reaction to the allegedly 'irresponsible and so-called inter-denominational societies which work in the same field'.⁸³ Like so many Navy officers, Jellicoe also had close family links with the clergy. His younger brother, Frederick, was rector of Freemantle, Southampton,⁸⁴ and he was also related to Fr Basil Jellicoe, the Church of England's housing reformer, whose work he supported in the interwar years.⁸⁵

Naturally, Jellicoe was highly regarded by the senior bishops of the Church of England. Writing of his visit to the Grand Fleet in 1915, the archbishop of York, Cosmo Lang, described him as quiet, cheerful, patient, and supremely professional. If Winston Churchill famously observed that Jellicoe was the only man capable of losing the war in an afternoon,⁸⁶ Lang claimed to have discerned the source of the calm that characterized 'Silent Jack', despite the immense burden placed on his shoulders:⁸⁷

[T]he secret of [his] unhurried work, of this steadfast confidence, lay deeper than his own disciplined character. It lay in his constant inner remembrance of God. Sunday after Sunday he was fortified by the Holy Sacrament. He trusted in God for strength and guidance as each need might arise and when 'the day' [of reckoning with Germany] might come. It was this unfailing reserve of trust that kept his judgment clear, his nerve steady, and his heart free from apprehension or fear.⁸⁸

⁸² *Fear God and Dread Nought: The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone, 2: Years of Power 1904–1914*, ed. Arthur J. Marder (London, 1956), 399. Italics and capitals original.

⁸³ *Guardian*, 8 April 1915, 317; 24 June 1915, 588; 17 May 1917, 400; Peter F. Anson, *The Church and the Sailor: A Survey of the Sea-Apostolate Past and Present* (London, 1948), 42–3.

⁸⁴ Alfred Temple Patterson, *Jellicoe: A Biography* (London, 1969), 15; *Crockford's Clerical Directory* (London, 1913), 797.

⁸⁵ Percy Maryon-Wilson, 'Jellicoe, (John) Basil Lee (1899–1935)', *ODNB*, online edn (2004), at: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/refodnb/34170>>, accessed 14 June 2025; Temple Patterson, *Jellicoe*, 15; Roger Lloyd, *The Church of England 1900–1965* (London, 1966), 320.

⁸⁶ Lambert, 'Jellicoe'.

⁸⁷ George Bonney, *The Battle of Jutland 1916* (Stroud, 2010), 98–9.

⁸⁸ LPL, Lang Papers, vol. 144, fols 79–82, Archbishop of Canterbury note on Lord Jellicoe with the Grand Fleet 1915.

Winnington-Ingram also hailed Jellicoe's example as a weekly communicant, noting in 1916 that, besides daily prayers, a communion service was held every day aboard *Iron Duke*.⁸⁹ By 1916, and with Sir Douglas Haig (who had returned to his Presbyterian roots) now in command of the British Expeditionary Force on the Western Front, Anglicans drew some comfort from the church's enduring grip on the Royal Navy. On 24 February, the *Guardian* newspaper rejoiced that:

The war has been prolific in bringing to light the strong religious feeling which marks some of the principal leaders in the struggle on the English side, most of all perhaps in the Navy, in which two of the most prominent Admirals – Jellicoe and Beatty – have come out definitely as practising Christians. To these may now be added the name of Sir Robert Lowry, Commander-in-Chief on the East Coast of Scotland, who has just accepted a seat on the Committee of that excellent Institution the Missions to Seamen.⁹⁰

However, the battle of Jutland on 31 May and 1 June 1916 shattered this complacency, as it did so many assumptions. The long-awaited clash between the Grand Fleet and Germany's High Seas Fleet (or 'Der Tag' as the Germans hailed the prospect)⁹¹ ended in severe losses for the British – some fourteen ships and more than 6,000 men – and the hasty flight of their adversaries. If this 'most contentious naval action of all'⁹² proved a strategic victory for the Royal Navy, it was very, very far from being the second Trafalgar the British public (and the renowned American naval historian and strategist, Alfred Thayer Mahan, a solid Episcopalian) had anticipated.⁹³ Even before this titanic clash in the North Sea, the course of the naval war had proved a source of growing concern. Although not a constant litany of disasters, the Royal Navy's performance had already fallen short of expectations: early war embarrassments included the sinking of the cruisers *Aboukir*, *Cressy* and *La Hogue* by a single German U-boat in September 1914; the destruction of a British squadron off

⁸⁹ Arthur Foley Winnington-Ingram, *Fifty Years' Work in London (1889–1939)* (London, 1940), 120; IWM, 85/26/1, Caspersz, fol. 38.

⁹⁰ *Guardian*, 24 February 1916, 174.

⁹¹ Gordon, *Rules*, 20.

⁹² John Brooks, *Dreadnought Gunnery and the Battle of Jutland* (London, 2005), xii.

⁹³ Nigel Steel and Peter Hart, *Jutland 1916* (London, 2003), 11–14; Suzanne Geissler, *God and Sea Power: The Influence of Religion on Alfred Thayer Mahan* (Annapolis, MD, 2015).

the Chilean port of Coronel in November; and the hit-and-run bombardment of Hartlepool, Scarborough and Whitby that December. 1915 began with the failure of an Anglo-French fleet to break through the Dardanelles, a setback that issued in the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign, and saw the launch of unrestricted U-boat warfare against Allied and neutral shipping.⁹⁴

Exacerbated by the shroud of secrecy that enfolded naval operations, even before Jutland this growing list of embarrassments had induced Winnington-Ingram to voice concern over the faltering image of the Navy. Speaking at the annual meeting of the Royal Naval Scripture Readers Society in March 1915, he complained that:

[I]f the English nation was not grateful to the Navy to-day it had got no gratitude in it ... because we heard comparatively little about it, we might forget the sailors, and they might not have the same attention or gratitude as the soldiers. 'For instance ... here I am on Friday off to the trenches [in France] for a fortnight. But who is going to the sailors for a fortnight? We do not even know where they are.'⁹⁵

That summer, however, the nation was reminded of the Grand Fleet by Lang's expedition to Scapa, Invergordon and Rosyth.⁹⁶ According to his account, published in *The Times* on 28 July 1915, the archbishop of York went to take 'a message of thanks and remembrance from the Motherland and of benediction from the Mother Church which has the great majority of [the Navy's officers and men] under her care'.⁹⁷ A former vicar of Portsmouth's great naval parish of Portsea, Lang went at Jellicoe's behest, emulating the sorties that had already been made to the Western Front by several episcopal colleagues.⁹⁸ Entering Scapa on board a destroyer, Lang later stressed that 'the public were not permitted to know where [the Grand Fleet] was', and even claimed to have been 'the first civilian to penetrate its hiding place'.⁹⁹ Significantly, Lang was careful to remind readers of *The Times* of the vital – if invisible – role the Grand Fleet was playing in guarding

⁹⁴ Farquharson-Roberts, *History of the Royal Navy*, 179.

⁹⁵ *Guardian*, 25 March 1915, 263.

⁹⁶ J. G. Lockhart, *Cosmo Gordon Lang* (London, 1949), 257.

⁹⁷ *The Times*, 28 July 1915, 7.

⁹⁸ Michael Snape, ed., 'Archbishop Davidson's Visit to the Western Front, May 1916', in Melanie Barber, Stephen Taylor and Gabriel Sewell, eds, *From the Reformation to the Permissive Society*, Church of England Record Society 18 (Woodbridge 2010), 458–65.

⁹⁹ LPL, Lang Papers, vol. 144, fol. 79, 'Note on Lord Jellicoe'.

Britain's sea lanes and blockading Germany. He also painted a picture of its sailors' receptiveness, cheerfulness, and general readiness, and heaped praise on their commander:

I cannot refrain from saying here that I left the Grand Fleet sharing to the full the admiration, affection, and confidence which every officer and man within it feels for its Commander-in-Chief, Sir John Jellicoe. Here assuredly is the right man in the right place at the right time... quiet, modest, courteous, alert, resolute, holding in firm control every part of his great fighting engine – [Jellicoe] has under his command not only the ships but the heart of his Fleet. He embodies and strengthens that comradeship of single-minded service which is the crowning honour of the Navy.¹⁰⁰

For his part, Jellicoe remembered Lang's visit with fondness, noting in his memoir *The Grand Fleet 1914–16* (1919):

A short visit was paid to the Fleet at Scapa Flow by the Archbishop of York ... He held a Fleet Confirmation in the *Iron Duke*, and a great open-air service on Flotta Island, many thousands of officers and men attending; there was another service at Longhope, and, in addition, he visited the majority of the ships. He was indeed indefatigable and he left amidst the most sincere expressions of regret. To me personally his visit gave the greatest pleasure. From Scapa he passed to Invergordon, where, during a two days' stay, he held a large open-air service and visited most of the ships based there, moving on to Rosyth, where an impressive open-air service took place in one of the large graving-docks.¹⁰¹

Given this championing of the Navy, news of Jutland and audacious claims of a German victory, proved as shocking to the Church of England as they did to the wider British public. As the dean of Durham, Herbert Hensley Henson, noted on 3 June: 'A great naval action in the North Sea is reported in which the British losses are so severe that the Germans appear to have scored a substantial success.'¹⁰² A correspondent for the *Church Times* even noted that 'the first tidings of the Battle' hung like a pall over a mass meeting of the Mother's

¹⁰⁰ *The Times*, 28 July 1915, 7.

¹⁰¹ Admiral Viscount Jellicoe of Scapa, *The Grand Fleet 1914–16: Its Creation, Development and Work* (London, 1919), 229.

¹⁰² The Henley Henson Journals, online at: <<https://henson.durham.ac.uk/journals/16-06-03>>, accessed 19 June 2024.

Union in London on 5 June.¹⁰³ But the grim news was soon compounded by the death of Lord Kitchener of Khartoum, Britain's well-known secretary of state for war and another good churchman, on HMS *Hampshire* later that day. While the *Hampshire* fell victim to a German mine off the Orkneys – another sign of the Navy's shortcomings – the deaths of nine Anglican Navy chaplains (one of them on board the *Hampshire*) in less than a week at least garnered some good, short-term publicity,¹⁰⁴ especially as the battle of Jutland coincided with Ascension day, Thursday 1 June. Wallace Mackenzie LePatourel, formerly vicar of St Dunstan, East Acton, who died with the entire company of HMS *Defence*, was pictured on the front page of the *Sunday Pictorial* on 4 June. He had been in the Navy barely two months.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, *The Daily Telegraph* reported that the long-serving Henry Dixon Wright, chaplain of HMS *Barham* (a new battleship with a particularly impressive chapel), had prayed for victory as he lay dying of horrendous wounds.¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, a sense of shock, humiliation and anger hung heavy in the air. Of public reactions to Jutland, one petty officer recalled: 'It was impossible to believe that the long unconquerable reign of the British Navy was coming to an end'.¹⁰⁷ Limping up the Firth of Forth to Rosyth, the badly damaged *Warspite* was even pelted with lumps of coal hurled from the Forth Bridge by civilian labourers.¹⁰⁸

Lang, in contrast, was swift to pay tribute to the Navy, and moved quickly to Jellicoe's defence. Widely reported was his sermon in the Yorkshire fishing port of Bridlington on Sunday 4 June. Oblivious to the colossal explosion which had shattered the *Queen Mary*, Lang reflected:

When you read in the papers that ... *Queen Mary* had been sunk, with its nine hundred or a thousand men, in the midst of appalling noise and confusion, you realized the scene at once: the crew standing steadfast,

¹⁰³ *Church Times*, 16 June 1916, 573.

¹⁰⁴ The death of a tenth chaplain, the Roman Catholic Stewart Phelan on HMS *Black Prince* was largely ignored: see Tom Johnstone and James Hagerty, *The Cross on the Sword: Catholic Chaplains in the Forces* (London, 1996), 64.

¹⁰⁵ Steel and Hart, *Jutland*, 200–1; Taylor, *Sea Chaplains*, 355; TNA, ADM 6/444, Civil Branch Officers' Service Records, vol. 6.

¹⁰⁶ Taylor, *Sea Chaplains*, 355, 362; *Guardian*, 29 June 1916, 565; TNA, ADM 6/443, Civil Branch Officers' Service Records, vol. 5.

¹⁰⁷ Quintin Colville, *The British Sailor of the First World War* (Oxford, 2015), 62.

¹⁰⁸ Steel and Hart, *Jutland*, 209–10, 422–3.

every man at his post, and then going down ... I see their faces before me now as I speak to you. They have met the challenge without fear and without faltering. They did not hesitate to engage at once a force vastly superior in guns and armour to their own. They held it until it was forced to retire, and then, having done their duty, they died in that grey sea where their bodies are left.¹⁰⁹

The following week, Lang wrote to Jellicoe with personal words of succour and consolation:

I hope you are well, and bearing up under all this tremendous strain: and may you have once again another chance, and when it comes, the same backing but better luck, and a result which will settle for ever the great struggle for the sea ... Let me just say quite simply that every day I pray for you, and commend you in your great task and all [it] brings you to the help of the strong spirit of God.¹¹⁰

Such was the public mood, however, that even memorial services for Jutland were controversial, and not on the foreseeable grounds of theology or churchmanship. Some critics noted of the sung eucharist for 'The Fallen Heroes of the North Sea Battle' held in St Paul's Cathedral on 14 June (a service attended by an 'immense concourse') that it was too sombre and lacked an appropriate note of thanksgiving. This implied charge of defeatism was rejected by the *Church Times*, which protested that the bishop of London had directed that a *Te Deum* be sung, 'or some other special act of thanksgiving made', in every church in the diocese the previous Sunday.¹¹¹ A further sign of a more general resolve to make the best of a bad situation came in the form of Winnington-Ingram's tour of the Grand Fleet that July.¹¹² Calling it 'one of the great recollections of my life',¹¹³ in its wake the bishop of London was still more disposed to rebuke the Navy's critics. In the lee of Nelson's Column, and across Trafalgar Square from the Admiralty, in his Trafalgar day sermon at St Martin-in-the-Fields that October, the bishop enlarged on 'his recent visit to the Grand Fleet'. According to the *Guardian*:

¹⁰⁹ *Church Times*, 9 June 1916, 549.

¹¹⁰ *The Jellicoe Papers*, ed. Alfred Temple Patterson, 2 vols (London, 1966), 1: 277–8.

¹¹¹ *Church Times*, 23 June 1916, 585.

¹¹² S. C. Carpenter, *Winnington-Ingram* (London, 1949), 289; Winnington-Ingram, *Fifty Years' Work in London*, 122.

¹¹³ *Guardian*, 7 September 1916, 755.

[He] was struck with the quiet, reticent confidence of the whole Fleet, and the amusement, not unmixed with annoyance, at the idea that they had been beaten in the battle of Jutland. There was an absolute readiness to meet the enemy whenever they chose to come out, and there was the quiet, restrained religion of the Navy. 'We have come here,' added the Bishop, 'to appeal to the God of Righteousness, to thank Him for the victories of the past, and claim His help for a great victory in the present.'¹¹⁴

Much was also done in the wider church to sweeten the cup of humiliation. On Sunday 3 June 1917, an anniversary thanksgiving service for Jutland was held at the London Opera House: with the bishop of Willesden presiding, it was attended by 'an immense crowd', and Hensley Henson spoke for half an hour.¹¹⁵ For his part, R. H. Malden, chaplain of the battleship HMS *Valiant*, embarked on a personal crusade to vindicate the Navy's performance, writing a lecture on the battle which he delivered to sailors of the Grand Fleet and which he published in 1918 in aid of naval charities.¹¹⁶ Malden's tone as a veteran of Jutland was stern and insistent:

What is the test of Naval Supremacy? What more can a Navy do than secure the use of the sea for its own side, and prevent the enemy from making any use of it at all ... We have seen less of the German Navy since the Battle of Jutland than we saw of the French after Trafalgar.¹¹⁷

The process of memorialization, already in train, also served as a prop to the Navy's shaken reputation. In June 1916, an elaborate marble memorial was unveiled at York Minster to the late Rear-Admiral Sir Christopher Cradock,¹¹⁸ who, along with most of his squadron, had perished at Coronel in November 1914. Though 'the first defeat suffered by the Royal Navy in a naval action in more than one hundred years',¹¹⁹ it announced that Cradock 'fell gloriously in action on All Saints' Day, 1914', citing the text of 1 Maccabees 9: 10, 'God forbid

¹¹⁴ *Guardian*, 26 October 1916, 921.

¹¹⁵ *Guardian*, 17 May 1917, 400; The Henley Henson Journals, online at: <<https://henson.durham.ac.uk/journals/17-06-03>>, accessed 19 July 2024.

¹¹⁶ Edinburgh, NLS, Acc. 11023/4, Rev. R.H. Malden: Jutland Memoirs, *The Battle of Jutland*.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 39.

¹¹⁸ *Guardian*, 22 June 1916, 533.

¹¹⁹ Paul G. Halpern, *A Naval History of World War* (London, 1994), 93.

that I should do this thing, to flee away from them: if our time be come, let us die manfully for our brethren, and let us not stain our honour'.¹²⁰ Moreover, by the summer of 1916, there was a growing demand in England's cathedrals for 'Battle Relics' of Jutland and other naval actions. At Canterbury in July 1916, the shell-torn ensign of the cruiser HMS *Kent* (from the battle of the Falkland Islands), and of the light cruiser HMS *Canterbury* (from Jutland) were presented to the cathedral in separate ceremonies.¹²¹ However, and due to the posthumous fame of sixteen-year old Boy (First Class) John Travers Cornwell, the most potent of these relics was presented to the Cathedral Church of Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary, Chester.

A native of Manor Park, Essex, 'Jack' Cornwell had joined the Navy aged fifteen in 1915. A former member of St Mary's Mission Boy Scout Troop, while at Plymouth Cornwell had sung in the church choir, signed the temperance pledge, and had been confirmed, an all but inevitable part of naval training for younger recruits.¹²² Though badly wounded at Jutland, Cornwell remained by his gun on the light cruiser HMS *Chester*, amid a deluge of shells that wrecked its superstructure and killed its chaplain, Cyril Ambrose Walton.¹²³ After his death in a Grimsby hospital, Cornwell became a national hero when his conduct was singled-out in Vice-Admiral David Beatty's dispatch on the battle, a report that cast Cornwell 'standing alone at a most exposed post, quietly awaiting orders till the end of the action, with the gun's crew dead and wounded all round him'.¹²⁴ Given Beatty's recommendation that Cornwell be given 'special recognition in justice to his memory',¹²⁵ his corpse was hastily disinterred from an unmarked grave in Manor Park Cemetery and reburied with full naval honours: 'Eternal Father, strong to save' was sung before his coffin was lowered into the grave, and the service was led by the bishop of Barking, Thomas Stevens, who gave a eulogy.¹²⁶ That September, and on a sustained

¹²⁰ *War Memorials Online*, at: <<https://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/200667/>>, accessed 21 July 2025.

¹²¹ *Guardian*, 6 July 1916, 589 and 20 July 1916, 644.

¹²² IWM, 719, William Arthur Ford, Reel 19; Henry Baynham, *Men from the Dreadnoughts* (London, 1976), 208–9.

¹²³ Steel and Hart, *Jutland*, 179–83; Taylor, *Sea Chaplains*, 354; Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack*, 168.

¹²⁴ *The Scotsman*, 7 July 1916, 8.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *The Times*, 31 July 1916, 3.

wave of public acclaim, Cornwell was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross, becoming the youngest sailor to receive the award.¹²⁷ Having remained at his post ‘with just his own brave heart and God’s help to support him’, as the captain of the *Chester* informed Cornwell’s mother,¹²⁸ in death the teenaged delivery boy (whose mother Henson deemed to be ‘a rather formidable lady’ of the type who enlivened ‘the proceedings of the police courts’) was transfigured into a paragon of Christian manliness and a model for British youth.¹²⁹ Amid a flurry of projects to perpetuate Cornwell’s memory, the mayor of Chester asked that the ensign flown at Jutland by HMS *Chester* be given to the city, the ceremonial presentation taking place in Chester Cathedral that November, where ‘the flag of H.M.S. *Chester* was accepted by the Dean for safe-keeping’.¹³⁰ Placed near to the flag in which James Wolfe had been wrapped at Quebec in 1759,¹³¹ the *Church Times* reverently (if erroneously) explained that ‘It was beneath this flag that the young naval hero, Cornwell, died at the post of duty’.¹³²

However, these palliatives did nothing to assuage public and political anxiety over the existential danger of the U-boat threat. Consequently, and to get a grip on the anti-submarine war, Jellicoe was removed from command of the Grand Fleet, replaced by Beatty, and appointed First Sea Lord in November 1916. As the naval historian Andrew Gordon has observed:

To be appointed First Sea Lord was hardly ignominious, but it cut Jellicoe deeply to pack his bags and go ashore, and he carried with him a sense of failure. It would not, now, befall him to redress the missed opportunities of Jutland; and his abilities as a fighting admiral would forever be defined by that anti-climactic event ...¹³³

Beatty’s flamboyant style and raffish character contrasted starkly with that of his predecessor. If Jellicoe’s fate was disconcerting for senior

¹²⁷ Richard Davenport-Hines, ‘Cornwell, John Travers [Jack] (1900–1916)’, *ODNB*, online edn (2004), rev. 1 September 2017, at: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/45719>>, accessed 14 June 2025.

¹²⁸ Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack*, 170–1.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 160–92; The Henley Henson Journals, online at: <<https://henson.durham.ac.uk/journals/17-06-03>>, accessed 19 July 2024.

¹³⁰ *Church Times*, 17 November 1916, 431; *Guardian*, 16 November 1916, 986.

¹³¹ *Church Times*, 17 November 1916, 431.

¹³² *Church Times*, 20 October 1916, 348.

¹³³ Gordon, *Rules*, 520.

churchmen, little consolation could be garnered from Beatty's command of the Grand Fleet. Despite his public pieties and warm endorsement by the *Guardian* in 1916, Beatty 'had in him some elements of a bounder'.¹³⁴ A serial adulterer, he had courted his wife, Ethel, a wealthy American heiress, while she was still married to her first husband. They had tied the knot in a civil ceremony in 1901, only ten days after Ethel's original spouse had secured a divorce on the grounds of desertion. Though they went on to live an indulgent and extravagant lifestyle, by 1917 Beatty had taken another mistress, this time the wife of a fellow naval officer.¹³⁵ If Beatty's colourful personal life contrasted starkly with that of the chaste and decorous Jellicoe, in religious terms Beatty combined an overlay of conventional Anglicanism and 'a simple faith in the guiding hand of Providence' with a medley of occult beliefs and practices that would have alarmed more orthodox churchmen.¹³⁶ Throughout his career, Beatty was beholden to a succession of society fortune-tellers and was known to bow three times to the new moon when on the bridge of his flagship.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, he proved a cordial if calculating host to further episcopal visitors to the Grand Fleet (namely the bishops of Kensington and Brechin in 1917, and of Western New York in 1918), while Lady Beatty threw herself into YMCA and other philanthropic work for the Navy.¹³⁸ Beatty himself was careful to observe the proprieties of Nelsonian piety: in 1915, he declared that 'until a Religious Revival takes place at Home, just so long will the war continue',¹³⁹ and in 1917 pronounced that 'There will be no victory until the nation is on its knees'.¹⁴⁰ Although the Grand Fleet was denied a face-saving rerun of Jutland, on taking the surrender of the High Seas Fleet in November 1918, and 'in words reminiscent of Nelson's signal after the battle of the Nile', Beatty ordered 'a massed service of thanksgiving to be held simultaneously in all ships of the Grand Fleet'.¹⁴¹ Given such

¹³⁴ Ibid. 521.

¹³⁵ Bryan Ranft, 'Beatty, David, first Earl Beatty (1871–1936)', *ODNB*, online edn (2004), rev. 5 January 2012, at: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/30661>>, accessed 14 June 2025.

¹³⁶ *The Life and Letters of David, Earl Beatty*, ed. W. S. Chalmers (London, 1951), 423.

¹³⁷ Stephen Roskill, *Admiral of the Fleet Earl Beatty: The Last Naval Hero. An Intimate Biography* (London, 1980), 33–4, 136–7.

¹³⁸ *Life*, ed. Chalmers, 418–19.

¹³⁹ Ibid. 423.

¹⁴⁰ Donald Davidson, *In Righteousness Make War* (London, 1940), vii.

¹⁴¹ *Life*, ed. Chalmers, 348, 423.

nuances of character, Cosmo Lang, now as archbishop of Canterbury, drew a suitably double-edged comparison with Nelson in his sermon at Beatty's funeral in St Paul's Cathedral in March 1936.¹⁴²

As for Jellicoe, his move to the Admiralty left him still more exposed to public scrutiny and criticism: 'The press will get me now and I am finished', he remarked presciently.¹⁴³ In January 1917, he unburdened himself in a personal letter to Cosmo Lang:

The outlook is not altogether bright. The submarine war against merchant ships as carried out by the Germans is very difficult to counter, but I do think we shall succeed in keeping our losses down and if only we build fast enough we shall see daylight ... precious time has been lost & much shipping wasted over the import of luxuries.¹⁴⁴

However, at least in the eyes of his political masters, Jellicoe was fated to fail in this role as well. Germany resumed unrestricted submarine warfare in February 1917 and, although this was instrumental in bringing America into the war, by the spring Allied merchant ships were being sunk at an unprecedented rate.¹⁴⁵ Although Jellicoe initiated measures (including the expansion of the convoy system) whose success could only be judged in the longer term, his lack of political connections and natural caution, now bordering on outright pessimism, undermined his position. With the blessing of Lloyd George (Britain's first Nonconformist prime minister, and not a friend of the Church of England) Jellicoe was dismissed by Sir Eric Geddes, the First Lord of the Admiralty, on Christmas Eve 1917.¹⁴⁶ As 1918 dawned, it was left to the *Guardian* to lament, with some bewilderment, how the mighty had fallen:

Sir John Jellicoe's retirement from the post of First Sea Lord will be received with real regret by the country, coupled with a certain wonderment. When he was Commander-in-Chief of the [Grand] Fleet we were told that he was a great, bold, and resolute seaman; when he was displaced we were assured that he would make an ideal organiser of maritime victory. Now we are informed that new blood is needed. It is difficult to reconcile these contradictory views It is hinted that Sir

¹⁴² Ibid. 428–9.

¹⁴³ Gordon, *Rules*, 520.

¹⁴⁴ LPL, Lang Papers, vol. 190, fol. 11, Sir John Jellicoe to Cosmo Lang, 14 January 1917.

¹⁴⁵ Farquharson-Roberts, *History of the Royal Navy*, 184.

¹⁴⁶ Lambert, 'Jellicoe'.

John Jellicoe will shortly be given another important appointment, and in the meantime he receives a Peerage. But these rapid descents of popular idols ... produce an uncomfortable impression. That a genius and a hero should in the course of two or three years become a failure or a fossil does not seem altogether likely, and the observer suspects either that the original adulation was overdone or that something less than justice is meted out.¹⁴⁷

The toll of the U-boat war, Jellicoe's fall from grace, and growing impatience with the Navy help to explain Randall Davidson's ecstatic response to the Zeebrugge raid in April 1918. Mounted from Dover on St George's day (facts that contributed to the archbishop's elation), this sortie from Kentish shores by a flotilla of blockships, submarines, destroyers, and converted Mersey ferries was mounted with the aim of rendering Zeebrugge unusable for German submarines. Executed by volunteers from the Grand Fleet, it was mounted as much to restore public confidence in the Navy as it was to thwart German submariners. Launched at the signal of 'St. George for England', it was, however, a costly operation – and only partially successful. Still, with the war going badly on the Western Front, this display of Nelsonian audacity served as a major boost to public morale.¹⁴⁸ It certainly helped Randall Davidson's, who (according to his biographer, George Bell) 'followed the fortunes of Navy and army alike with the closest attention'.¹⁴⁹ On reading an early newspaper report on the raid, the archbishop dashed off an exuberant note to its commander, Admiral Sir Roger Keyes:

The news which tonight's paper gives us is of the sort which makes a man 'hold his breath' in admiration of the magnificent courage and skill involved in such an enterprise As one to whom our Kentish shores mean much – for they lie within Canterbury Diocese – I should like (on St. George's Day) to say to you and to your brave men how intensely we appreciate the heroism of such deeds, and how proud we are of those who are thus adding lustre to the long and varied records of English seamanship and naval prowess.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ *Guardian*, 28 December 1917, 1017.

¹⁴⁸ Halpern, *Naval History of World War I*, 412–15.

¹⁴⁹ G. K. A. Bell, *Randall Davidson*, 2 vols, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1938; first publ. 1935), 2: 897.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

The church press was also delighted. Giving pride of place to Zeebrugge in its weekly war news, the *Church Times* applauded 'the Navy's wonderful achievement', hailing 'the extraordinary dash and cool daring' of its sailors and marines.¹⁵¹ There was good news, too, in the tally of heroes produced by the raid. Richard Douglas Sandford, a submariner and son of a former archdeacon of Exeter, earned the Victoria Cross.¹⁵² There was also a rare award for gallantry in action for an Anglican Navy chaplain, for at Zeebrugge Charles John Eyre Peshall, chaplain of HMS *Vindictive*, earned the Distinguished Service Order (D.S.O.) for 'His cheerful encouragement and assistance to the wounded, calm demeanour during the din of battle, strength of character, and splendid comradeship'. Peshall, a future chaplain of the fleet, showed 'great physical strength, and did almost superhuman work' in hauling the British wounded to the safety of his ship, exploits that led him to be considered for the Victoria Cross.¹⁵³

APPRAISALS AND REPUTATIONS

Although Jutland was never avenged by the Grand Fleet (large-scale mutinies in the German Navy in the autumn of 1918 precluded that), Zeebrugge helped to revive flagging public confidence in the Navy. Moreover, the blockade maintained by the Grand Fleet slowly strangled Germany's war economy. Hence, when the Armistice was signed on 11 November 1918, Randall Davidson and Lang sent a fulsome note of congratulation to the Grand Fleet and its commander, David Beatty: 'We join with you in thanksgiving to God to-day for the glorious outcome of the incomparable work and watch of the Navy during four eventful years, and we share in the gratitude of the whole Empire to its gallant officers and men.'¹⁵⁴ This solidarity was also registered in attitudes towards the ongoing blockade of Germany between the Armistice and the Treaty of Versailles. When the German theologian, scriptural scholar, and ecumenist Gustav Adolf Deissmann appealed to Randall Davidson for help in ending it, his overtures were coolly rebuffed, the archbishop being convinced that the blockade was

¹⁵¹ *Church Times*, 26 April 1918, 311.

¹⁵² *Church Times*, 3 May 1918, 336; *Guardian*, 28 November 1918, 975.

¹⁵³ *Church Times*, 26 July 1918, 66; Taylor, *Sea Chaplains*, 343; TNA, ADM 6/444, Civil Branch Officers' Service Records, vol. 6.

¹⁵⁴ *Guardian*, 14 November 1918, 912.

the only means of guaranteeing peace.¹⁵⁵ Conversely, there was great anger at the scuttling of dozens of ships of the High Seas Fleet, then interned at Scapa, on 21 June 1919. This, the *Church Times* fulminated, was typical of the Teutonic contempt for international law which had caused the war in the first place. Defending the Navy, which had been forbidden from placing guards on these captive vessels, it deplored a case of misplaced trust and averred that 'What we regret most is the undeserved loss of prestige sustained by His Majesty's Navy.'¹⁵⁶

Nevertheless, Randall Davidson seemed to be fully aware of the reputational damage the Navy had incurred because of the war. As Brian Lavery put it:

Despite a good deal of patriotic bluster, the war had done the image of the navy no good. The vastly expensive fleet of dreadnoughts had not deterred war. It had failed to bring the enemy to a decisive action, as the navy had allowed the public and press to expect. It began to emerge that the navy had only begun to tackle the submarine effectively after pressure from outside.¹⁵⁷

Moreover, although the Navy's losses were hardly slight, they were dwarfed by those of the army. Whereas the Navy suffered around 43,000 fatalities, the army's numbered around three-quarters of a million. Furthermore, the intensity of the land war was reflected in the fact that one-fifth of the Navy's dead were from the Royal Naval Division, whose sailors and marines fought as soldiers at Antwerp, in the Dardanelles, and on the Western Front.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, one of the major (if seldom-remarked) changes wrought by the war was the way in which civilian perceptions of the army and the Navy were inverted: whereas the army (very much the poor relation) came to embody the courage, resolve and self-sacrifice of the nation-in-arms, 'the navy was seen as having barely participated in the war'.¹⁵⁹ However unjust this may have been to what the American bishop Charles Henry Brent termed 'the wonderful, hidden service [the Grand Fleet] has rendered the world',¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ Bell, *Randall Davidson*, 2: 934–9.

¹⁵⁶ *Church Times*, 27 June 1919, 615.

¹⁵⁷ Lavery, *Able Seamen*, 265.

¹⁵⁸ Henry Newbolt, *History of the Great War: Naval Operations*, 5 vols (London, 1931), 5: appendix K, 434–5.

¹⁵⁹ Farquharson-Roberts, *History of the Royal Navy*, 3.

¹⁶⁰ Greenwich, National Maritime Museum, BTY/16/1-24, Bishop C. H. Brent to David Beatty, 14 November 1918.

it was a perception that Randall Davidson sought to challenge in his sermon at the memorial service for the Navy held in St Paul's Cathedral on 13 June 1919.¹⁶¹ Here, he claimed, 'we do well, King and Queen and people, to remember before God in our great Cathedral, over the graves of Nelson and Collingwood, what these men have done and given'.¹⁶² Still, and in making his case, it was to the witness of the army that the archbishop felt obliged to appeal:

The Army is ever foremost to testify that its task in Flanders or the East, nobly planned and stoutly done, was made possible only by the dauntless skill which guarded the waters untiringly for the ceaseless passage of armaments and men. No other record like to this stands in the annals of the seas.¹⁶³

While the Navy had failed to fulfil expectations, its Anglican chaplains generally played a low-key part in a frustrating performance. Ignored (unlike the Grand Fleet's medical officers) in Beatty's dispatch on the battle of Jutland,¹⁶⁴ the nub of the matter was reflected in reactions to Beatty's belated message of thanks for the services of Anglican chaplains with the Grand Fleet. Written to Randall Davidson early in December 1918, Beatty summarized their contribution thus:

I am assured that their labours for the spiritual welfare of the Ships' Companies cannot fail to bear fruit, whilst their assistance in promoting a cheerful tone, in organising recreation for the men, and in helping generally to lessen the natural monotony of life afloat has been of great value.¹⁶⁵

It was the blandest of compliments. So much so, that on the same day a second letter was sent to the archbishop by John Daughlish, chaplain of Beatty's flagship HMS *Queen Elizabeth*, advising him to publish 'the purport of the letter, but not the text of it' in the 'Church newspapers', and to withhold its contents entirely from 'the public press'.¹⁶⁶ Consequently, the *Guardian* printed the anodyne report that 'In correspondence with the Archbishop of Canterbury Sir David Beatty,

¹⁶¹ LPL, G199 38.48, *St. Paul's Cathedral. June 13th 1919. Memorial Service for the Royal Navy* (London, 1919).

¹⁶² Randall Davidson, *The Testing of a Nation* (London, 1919), 214–15.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.* 216.

¹⁶⁴ *The Scotsman*, 7 July 1916, 8.

¹⁶⁵ LPL, Davidson Papers, vol. 345, fol. 305, Beatty to Davidson, 4 December 1918.

¹⁶⁶ LPL, Davidson Papers, vol. 345, fols 306–7, John Daughlish to Davidson, 4 December [erroneously dated 4 November] 1918.

on behalf of the Grand Fleet, has given expression to the warm admiration he entertains for the manner in which the Naval Chaplains have throughout the war performed their difficult duties.¹⁶⁷ In his diplomatic reply to Beatty, Randall Davidson dwelt on the positives, asserting that 'it is difficult to conceive any nobler field for the exercise of a first-rate [*sic*] man's best powers than that which a Naval Chaplaincy affords', and 'That the Chaplains should have been privileged to share in [the Grand Fleet's] continuous exhibition of self-forgetful public spirit is a fact for which the whole Church is thankful, and indeed the whole people too.'¹⁶⁸

More obfuscation followed. According to figures sent to Archbishop Davidson by the chaplain of the fleet, the Navy's 132 commissioned chaplains of August 1914 had been reinforced by 166 Anglican 'Acting Chaplains for Temporary Service', and 16 'Honorary Chaplains'¹⁶⁹ (most of whom worked with the Missions to Seamen).¹⁷⁰ Their losses amounted to 17 'killed on Active Service', one 'died on Active Service', and just one '[w]ounded'.¹⁷¹ Eight had perished at Jutland. This loss of chaplains, in well under twenty-four hours, was unequalled by any equivalent period in the land war; in fact, seldom (if ever) have so many clergy of the Church of England died so quickly and so violently.¹⁷² Nevertheless, and despite the carnage of Jutland, there was an awkward feeling among some Navy chaplains that they were sitting out the war. Writing from the pre-dreadnought battleship HMS *Agamemnon*, then in the Dardanelles, in May 1915, Walter Frederick Scott told his family that 'one can see the fighting on land and get a fairly good view, with comparative safety at times. But it is like seeing a cinema.'¹⁷³ A week later, Scott admitted that 'we are spared a great deal of suffering ... A light wound on board is dressed at once and the man made as comfortable as possible. Whereas in the Army out here it sometimes takes 24 hours or more before the man gets to anything like comfort aboard a hospital

¹⁶⁷ *Guardian*, 12 December 1918, 1037.

¹⁶⁸ LPL, Davidson Papers, vol. 345, fol. 308, Davidson to Beatty, 10 December 1918.

¹⁶⁹ LPL, Davidson Papers, vol. 345, fols 326–7, John Hooper to Davidson, 24 May 1919. See also Taylor, *Sea Chaplains*, 360.

¹⁷⁰ *Church Times*, 9 May 1919, 460.

¹⁷¹ LPL, Davidson Papers, vol. 345, fol. 327, John Hooper to Davidson, 24 May 1919.

¹⁷² *Church Times*, 9 June 1916, 534.

¹⁷³ IWM, 11496, Private Papers of Reverend W. F. Scott RN, W. F. Scott to his family, 4 May 1915.

carrier.¹⁷⁴ Significantly, at least two Navy chaplains resigned their commissions to join the army. One, Arthur Baillie Lumsdaine Karney, a pre-war veteran of the Missions to Seamen, was commissioned in 1914, resigned in 1917, joined the Army Chaplains' Department, and was captured on the Western Front in March 1918.¹⁷⁵ A sadder case was that of Gerald Trueman Fielding of the Church of Ireland, a pre-war Navy chaplain who resigned his commission in December 1915 'to take up [a] commission in [the] Army'.¹⁷⁶ Joining the Royal Artillery, he died near Ypres in April 1918.¹⁷⁷ However, and though armed with figures for the Navy, in his address at the memorial service for army and Navy chaplains held in Westminster Abbey on 27 June 1919, Davidson addressed the army alone:

In the Church of England more than seven thousand clergy offered themselves for whole-time service with the troops. Commission was given to three thousand and sixty. One hundred of these laid down their lives. One hundred and seventy-eight were wounded or disabled, and our annals are enriched for Church and people by the recorded heroism of not a few.¹⁷⁸

Therein lay another rub, for whatever criticisms were hurled at Anglican army chaplains during and after the war, their lengthy tally of decorations stood as a handy and potent corrective.¹⁷⁹ In 1920, *Crockford's Clerical Directory* gave this list as three Victoria Crosses, thirty-eight D.S.O.s, 250 Military Crosses, plus numerous lesser awards.¹⁸⁰ In contrast, their Navy counterparts earned two D.S.O.s (Peshall's, and a second which went to a chaplain of the Royal Naval Division);¹⁸¹ a clutch of C.B.E.s and O.B.E.s (in the Military Division, for non-combatant service);¹⁸² and a Bronze Medal for

¹⁷⁴ IWM, 11496, Private Papers of Reverend W. F. Scott RN, W. F. Scott to his family, 10 May 1915.

¹⁷⁵ TNA, ADM 6/444, Civil Branch Officers' Service Records, vol. 6; IWM, 11091, Private Papers of Right Reverend A. B. L. Karney.

¹⁷⁶ TNA, ADM 6/444, Civil Branch Officers' Service Records, vol. 6.

¹⁷⁷ 'Fielding, Gerald Trueman', *The War Dead of North Down and Ards*, online at: <<https://barryniblock.co.uk/world-war-one-list-of-dead/names-listed-alphabetically-by-surname/field-to-fulton/fielding-gerald-trueman/>>, accessed 16 July 2024.

¹⁷⁸ Davidson, *Testing of a Nation*, 220.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ *Crockford's Clerical Directory* (London, 1920), v.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.; TNA, ADM 6/444, Civil Branch Officers' Service Records, vol. 6.

¹⁸² *Crockford's Clerical Directory* (1920), v; TNA, ADM 6/444, Civil Branch Officers' Service Records, vol. 6.

Gallantry in Saving Life at Sea, an honour bestowed by the Board of Trade.¹⁸³ With their rosters of awards a matter of keen and competitive interest for Britain's churches, such lack of recognition for Anglican naval chaplains was noted with some chagrin by the *Church Times* in May 1919.¹⁸⁴ This was not helped by the scarcity of decorations available to naval personnel in the first place, nor by the fact that the Navy's larger ships saw less and less action as the war went on.¹⁸⁵ Still, and despite this embarrassment, in December 1918 the *Guardian* voiced its confidence that, like 'the battlefields of Flanders', the Grand Fleet would yield a harvest of post-war ordinands equipped 'with a wider vision of life, [who] understand the lives and ways of their comrades, requisites in the equipment of a clergyman who some day will take charge of a parish'.¹⁸⁶ Such hopes were not entirely in vain, for a notable post-war ordinand was Vice-Admiral Alexander Woods D.S.O. and bar, Jellicoe's Fleet Signal Officer at Jutland. Though suffering from muscular dystrophy, Woods was ordained by Winnington-Ingram in 1933 and served as a curate to the dockland parish of St Paul's, Whitechapel, and as a residential chaplain to the nearby Sailors' Home and Red Ensign Club for merchant seamen.¹⁸⁷

Although the Royal Navy worked hard, and successfully, at repairing its prestige and refurbishing its image in the interwar years,¹⁸⁸ this was not true of Anglican naval chaplaincy, for it was not the career of the saintly and self-effacing 'Father Woods' that commanded national attention in the early 1930s. On the contrary, unflattering deductions and impressions were focused and revived by the ludicrous trajectory of Harold Francis Davidson (no relation to Randall Davidson), rector of Stiffkey with Morston, who furnished the British public with a 'ribald anti-clerical entertainment throughout the whole of 1932, the

¹⁸³ Taylor, *Sea Chaplains*, 342–3; *Guardian*, 12 October 1916, 873.

¹⁸⁴ *Church Times*, 2 May 1919, 416.

¹⁸⁵ 'Recommendations for Military Honours and Awards 1935–90', *The National Archives*, online at: <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/recommendations-military-honours-awards-1935-1990/>>, accessed 21 July 2025.

¹⁸⁶ *Guardian*, 5 December 1918, 1021.

¹⁸⁷ Arthur Calder-Marshall, *No Earthly Command* (London, 1957); Barrie Kent, *Signal! A History of Signalling in the Royal Navy* (Clanfield, 1993), 322–3; Winnington-Ingram, *Fifty Years' Work in London*, 120.

¹⁸⁸ Rowan Thompson, 'Naval Pageantry, Heritage, and Commemoration in Interwar Britain', *HJ* 68 (2025), 376–96.

year of the yo-yo'.¹⁸⁹ Described by Callum Brown as 'the most notorious British clergyman of the twentieth century',¹⁹⁰ it is not within the scope of this article to rehearse the twists and turns of a shady post-war career that carried Harold Davidson from his living on the Norfolk coast, through 'rescue' work among young women in London, to a lengthy trial in Church House, Westminster, and a tragicomic death playing Daniel in Skegness Amusement Park in 1937. However, it is important to emphasize that, from the outset, his public persona and notoriety were inflected not only by the surname he shared with the archbishop, but by his image and record as a wartime Navy chaplain.

Coming hard after the wartime example and performance of Anglican army chaplains had been thoroughly impugned by Robert Graves in *Good-Bye to All That* (1929) and by C. R. Benstead in his novel *Retreat* (1930),¹⁹¹ and barely a year after a parliamentary bid to defund army chaplaincy had been mounted, the stock of Anglican military chaplaincy was already low when Harold Davidson's trial commenced in March 1932: by this time, according to Roland Blythe, 'Stiffkey was as notorious as Babylon and its incumbent as celebrated as Al Capone'.¹⁹² Unfortunately for the image of Anglican Navy chaplaincy, the defendant's alleged immorality was exposed by the *Daily Mirror* in a front-page splash which featured a photograph of Harold Davidson in his tropical Navy 'whites' (ever the impresario, few of its readers would have known that Navy chaplains had no official uniform, only a distinguishing lapel badge).¹⁹³ Furthermore, and with typical crassness, he flaunted his career as a chaplain by revelling in his self-styled role as the 'Prostitutes' Padre',¹⁹⁴ and by appearing in his pulpit wearing his service medals. The *Daily Mirror* also noted that Harold Davidson's first brush with authority on account of his pastoral interests in young women was when, as chaplain of the elderly cruiser

¹⁸⁹ Roland Blythe, *The Age of Illusion: England in the Twenties and Thirties 1919–40* (Harmondsworth, 1964), 156; Jonathan Tucker, *The Troublesome Priest: Harold Davidson, Rector of Stiffkey* (Norwich, 2007).

¹⁹⁰ Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow, 2006), 134.

¹⁹¹ Edward Madigan, 'Hidden Courage: Postwar Literature and Anglican Army Chaplains on the Western Front, 1914–1918', in Heather Jones, Jennifer O'Brien and Christoph Schmidt-Supprian, eds, *Untold War: New Perspectives in First World War Studies* (Leiden, 2008), 63–94.

¹⁹² Blythe, *Age of Illusion*, 160.

¹⁹³ Brown, *Religion*, 132; TNA, ADM 1/8493/160, 'Suggested distinctive uniform for Naval Chaplain during war', undated [1914–18].

¹⁹⁴ Blythe, *Age of Illusion*, 158, 172.

HMS *Fox*, he had been arrested in a police raid on a Cairo brothel. As even he admitted before his trial began, it was a problem for his defence 'that malicious people can say: "The padre of the *Fox* was raided in a disorderly house."' ¹⁹⁵ Other details of his naval career also crowded in. As chaplain to the 10th Cruiser Squadron in the Shetlands, he had antagonized the lower deck by holding parade services whenever the opportunity arose, and this with the blessing of Vice-Admiral Sir Reginald Tupper, an eccentric widely derided as 'Holy Reggie'. ¹⁹⁶ Confidential reports of Harold Davidson's conduct were also poor, with one from HMS *Fox* in November 1916 stating that he was 'Very unpractical & unable to adapt himself to ship life, has shown a great lack of tact, & has been on bad terms with a number of his mess-mates.' ¹⁹⁷ If it was not sufficiently ironic that, in Horatio Nelson and Harold Davidson, Norfolk's rectories produced the country's foremost naval hero as well as the clergy's most public disgrace, the latter was defrocked in a service held in Norwich Cathedral on 21 October 1932, a date ordinarily observed as Trafalgar Day. ¹⁹⁸

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this examination of the Church of England's ties with the Royal Navy casts new light on both institutions. Despite party divisions, in its pre-war dealings with the Navy a renewed and dynamic church proved adaptable to the needs of the most expensive, sophisticated, and prestigious arm of the British state. In a more democratic age marked by a spirit of popular navalism, the pastoral, political and public relations benefits of its place in the Royal Navy were grasped and exploited to the full. In turn, and spurred by 'Jacky' Fisher's reforms, the pre-war Navy remained committed to its close and manifold ties with the Church of England, bonds which had endured for 250 years. However, the shock of war exposed the vulnerabilities of this partnership, and it was in the war at sea (rather than on land, or on the home front) that the Church of England faced its clearest disappointments. The performance of the Royal Navy (and the Grand Fleet above all), with its historic and vaunted Anglican character, command

¹⁹⁵ Tom Cullen, *The Prostitutes' Padre* (London, 1975), 46.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 45–6.

¹⁹⁷ TNA, ADM 6/444, Civil Branch Officers' Service Records, vol. 6.

¹⁹⁸ Blythe, *Age of Illusion*, 174–7.

and connections, fell way short of public expectations, however inflated those may have been. Indeed, the Navy was temporarily displaced in the nation's affections by the army, whose Anglican chaplains (however impugned in the 'war books' boom of subsequent years) hugely outnumbered and plainly outshone their naval counterparts. Perhaps fittingly, and despite the strengths and promise of Anglican navy chaplaincy in the pre-war years, its most telling legacy to the interwar period was neither a 'Woodbine Willie' nor a 'Tubby' Clayton, but a very different kind of showman: namely Harold Davidson, the absurd and scandalous rector of Stiffkey.