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## Empire, Community, and the Limits of ‘Sea-Mindedness’: The Navy League and Worcester, c. 1896–1914

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### ABSTRACT

Worcester was the site of one of the earliest branches of the Navy League. It attracted the support of leading political figures in the area, as well as working- and lower-middle class members. It channelled imperialist enthusiasm in the locality and had access to local schoolchildren. Its efforts met with little opposition, though it encountered mockery in some quarters. The widespread acceptance of its message, however, did not mean that the branch was able to maintain the momentum of its early growth. Membership stagnated as rival patriotic leagues emerged that were better able to harness local sentiment. The branch’s decision in 1906 to concentrate on schools did little to stem its decline, and an effort to revive it on the eve of the First World War was undermined by that conflict. Examining the Navy League in Worcester reveals how a section of the city’s community promoted imperial patriotism and the limits of what they could achieve.

### KEYWORDS

Worcester; Navy League; empire; militarism; associational culture; Royal Navy

The city of Worcester might appear to be an inauspicious location for the promotion of ‘sea-mindedness’, the term used by the Navy League to describe its public campaign to strengthen the Royal Navy. Yet, from 1897, Worcester was the location of one of its earliest established branches.<sup>1</sup> Within two years it had 150 members, and it attracted the support of Members of Parliament and councillors across Worcestershire. The Worcester branch encouraged local schools to fly the Union flag and to celebrate ‘Empire Day’. It also helped to cultivate local awareness of ‘Trafalgar Day’, so that in 1905 over a thousand Worcester children marked the event. It organized lectures and circulated naval and imperial propaganda to local schools and organizations. If the Navy League’s activism was more obvious in port towns and cities, the first decade of the Worcester branch demonstrates that the cultivation of sea-mindedness could take root and grow in an urban centre some 60 to 70 miles from the sea, and in a small cathedral city more readily associated with its military heritage.

Viewed from the perspective of the Navy League, Worcester’s inland location was irrelevant. Sea-mindedness was expressed as six objects: to inform people about the United Kingdom’s reliance on imports, to encourage them to regard naval expenditure

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<sup>1</sup>*The Times*, 27 January 1898, p. 4.

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as ‘insurance’, to enlist supporters from all classes, to place the Royal Navy above party politics, to equate naval supremacy with prosperity and liberty, and to unite the British empire in this cause. The essence of their message was that failing to maintain the world’s largest navy would increase the likelihood of Great Britain being blockaded, leading to ‘national starvation’, and rendering the island more vulnerable to invasion. That being said, Worcester had direct connections to the maritime world that added a measure of credibility to navalism in the area. The city had long been an entrepôt as the mighty Severn linked it to the Bristol Channel.<sup>2</sup> Even after the coming of the railways, Worcester’s manufacturers relied increasingly on export markets, so that the companies and their thousands of employees had a vested interest in the merchant marine and Royal Navy in so far as these facilitated global free trade.

That same reasoning, however, could be applied to towns and cities across the United Kingdom where the Navy League had failed to take root as quickly as it had in Worcester. To contextualize the city’s early adherence to navalism, it is necessary to acknowledge its social and political complexion. Industrial growth in the nineteenth century had enlarged Worcester, but it did not bring with it the changes typically witnessed in many other industrializing centres. Non-conformity, while present, had failed to establish a strong presence, so that Worcester remained a predominantly Anglican city. It had also retained its large middle-class population. Worcester boasted two venerable schools, King’s School and the Royal Grammar School, as well as nearby Malvern College. Public schools such as King’s and Malvern were integral to the early growth of the Navy League, and its Worcester branch quickly established relationships with both.<sup>3</sup>

The political aspect of the above features was the return of a Conservative MP at every general election during the years examined.<sup>4</sup> In the same period, every constituency contiguous with Worcester returned a Conservative or Liberal Unionist candidate, with the conspicuous exception of Droitwich in 1906.<sup>5</sup> That dominance was not taken for granted by Worcester’s Conservatives. In both 1892 and 1906, the bountiful provision of alcohol and other small bribes was found to have been responsible for influencing hundreds of voters.<sup>6</sup> Local lodges of the National Conservative League were implicated in the earlier episode, in particular, the habit of holding open meetings at which the chairman stood drinks to anyone who attended.<sup>7</sup> An ancillary working-class movement outside the formal party organization, its lodges tended to cluster in industrial areas where local party leaders demonstrated a marked determination to cultivate working-class support.<sup>8</sup> Early on, the Navy League’s Worcester branch worked

<sup>2</sup>D. Whitehead, *The Book of Worcester: The Story of the City’s Past* (Chesham: Barracuda Books, 1976), p. 131.

<sup>3</sup>N. C. Fleming, ‘The Navy League, the Rising Generation, and the First World War’, in *Histories, Memories and Representations of Being Young in the First World War* ed. by M. Andrews, N. C. Fleming and M. Morris (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 102–104.

<sup>4</sup>H. Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections 1885–1910* (London: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 192, 201; S. Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1975), pp. 15–75; J. P. Parry, *Democracy and Religion: Gladstone and the Liberal Party, 1867–1875* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 200–28; H. McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City* (London: Croom Helm, 1974), pp. 171–75.

<sup>5</sup>M. Kinnear, *The British Voter: An Atlas and Survey since 1885*, 2nd edn (London: Batsford, 1981), pp. 13–37.

<sup>6</sup>C. O’Leary, *The Elimination of Corrupt Practices in British Elections 1868–1911* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), pp. 198, 220–22.

<sup>7</sup>Pelling, *British Elections*, pp. 192–93.

<sup>8</sup>S. Ball, *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain 1918–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 159.

with local lodges of the National Conservative League to promote sea-mindedness. Its comparative lack of engagement with the local Primrose League habitation, the Worcester Dames, or the many more habitations in the county, suggest that the branch saw its purpose as cultivating sea-mindedness among the working-class.<sup>9</sup> Like other imperial-minded propagandists, this focus arose from its pessimism about the commitment of working-class voters to imperial ideals, especially when these were challenged by radicals and socialists.<sup>10</sup> The Navy League, of course, claimed to be non-party. It had the support of a respectable number of Liberal parliamentarians, for whom navalism offered an alternative to Prussian-style militarism, and more importantly, a vehicle for promoting the freedom of the seas.<sup>11</sup> But the league's message tended to resonate most with Conservatives and their Liberal Unionist allies, for whom it was a movement committed to the maintenance of Great Britain as the pre-eminent global power.<sup>12</sup>

Navalism in Worcester went hand in hand with the Church of England and the Conservative party. Yet, if this overlap aided the early growth of the Navy League in the city, it is likely to have been a significant reason for limiting its further development in the decade that preceded the First World War. Widespread acceptance locally of the navalist message, at least among Conservative supporters, would have invariably raised the question of what the Navy League could offer members in return for their subscriptions. As Frans and Marilyn Coetzee argue, people might agree with the cause promoted by patriotic organizations such as the Navy League, but other factors were just as relevant in explaining whether or not they decided to join, including material inducements, social attractions, and personal prestige.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, if the Worcester branch of the Navy League in its early years was able to pose as the local standard bearer of imperial patriotism, it was joined by new patriotic leagues in the wake of the South African War, each identifying other areas of concern and offering rival panaceas.<sup>14</sup>

Whatever the combination of factors, the initial burst of enthusiasm that placed the Worcester branch among the earliest adherents of navalism had waned significantly by the end of its first decade of existence, even as neighbouring latecomer, Cheltenham, witnessed significant growth. Indeed, it is possible that the Navy League's success in Cheltenham and Birmingham might have reinforced its decline in Worcester, with some members substituting a thriving branch in place of one preoccupied with remaining solvent. What is more certain is that the contrasting trajectory of Cheltenham and Birmingham indicate that Worcester's proximity from the sea was not the main reason for its problems. A more likely explanation is that Worcester's early enthusiasm for navalism required constant cultivation, and that for local reasons, this became increasingly difficult after almost a decade. Far from being an anomaly, a similar pattern is

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<sup>9</sup>M. Pugh, *The Tories and the People 1880–1935* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp. 236–37.

<sup>10</sup>B. Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 222–3.

<sup>11</sup>See M. Johnson, *Militarism and the British Left, 1902–1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 66–89.

<sup>12</sup>F. Coetzee, *For Party or Country: Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Popular Conservatism in Edwardian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 3–8; I. Cawood, *The Liberal Unionist Party: A History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), pp. 73–6; N. C. Fleming, *Britannia's Zealots, Volume I: Tradition, Empire and the Forging of the Conservative Right* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), pp. 55–6.

<sup>13</sup>F. Coetzee and M. S. Coetzee, 'Rethinking the Radical Right in Germany and Britain before 1914', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 21, 4 (1986), 515–37.

<sup>14</sup>Coetzee, *For Party or Country*, p. 7.

observable in the case of other branches, including Cheltenham, as early periods of growth were followed by stagnation during the First World War.

The enthusiasm of navalist activists was something commented upon by contemporaries. This is hardly surprising given that sea-mindedness was alarmist, catastrophist, and fixated with armed conflict. As a result, in Worcester and beyond, the Navy League's propaganda was just as likely to encounter mockery as overt support.<sup>15</sup> The significance of enthusiasm to the identity of organized navalism has long been recognized by scholars.<sup>16</sup> It is invoked by Arthur Marder to explain why the Navy League ultimately failed to convert the nation to its specific understanding of sea-mindedness. The 'great mass of the population had all along been prepared to acquiesce in the doctrine that a powerful fleet was essential not only to the security but to the existence of the empire'. The public required 'reminding', Marder continues, 'not conversion, and the former kind of work does not engender mass enthusiasm'.<sup>17</sup> It follows that the First World War had a catastrophic impact on the Navy League. The promotion of sea-mindedness was undermined from the outset by its decision to join the campaign to enlist men into the British Expeditionary Force. Many of its hitherto most active members became involved with war work, including joining the armed forces, making it harder for those remaining to carry the considerable burden of raising subscriptions and sustaining branches.<sup>18</sup>

As this suggests, the rise and decline of the Worcester branch adumbrated the fate of organized navalism nationally. Yet, the circumstances of its trajectory were ultimately grounded in its local context. In the absence of surviving records, the branch's history is traced through local and national newspaper reports, and coverage in the Navy League's journal. These sources provide often frank assessments of its progress, a reflection of the navalists' anxious preoccupation with the public's receptiveness to sea-mindedness, and their tendency to conflate support for the Navy League with support for a big navy. Beyond meetings of the Worcester branch, press reports shine a light on the practices employed by the Navy League to extend and consolidate its influence in Worcester, as well as the limitations that these encountered. Section I provides a brief survey of the Navy League's origins, activities, and methods. The emergence of the Navy League's Worcester branch and its first decade of existence is examined in section II. Section III surveys the succeeding period and assesses several explanations for the branch's stagnation and decline. Sections IV and V focus on how the Worcester branch responded to two campaigns instigated by the Navy League's executive committee: its lukewarm response to the drive for 'British seamen for British ships', and the branch's more successful involvement with local schools.

<sup>15</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, 31 July 1907, vol. 179, cols 987. See C. K. Melby, 'Rethinking British Militarism before the First World War: The Case of "An Englishman's Home" (1909)', *English Historical Review*, 137, 588 (2022), 1377–401.

<sup>16</sup> Coetzee, *For Party or Country*, pp. 26–31, 72–84, 108–114; A. S. Thompson, *Imperial Britain: The Empire in British Politics, c. 1880–1932* (London: Longman, 2000), pp. 110–32; D. 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, 321 (2011), 48–67; B. Cesario, *New Crusade: The Royal Navy and British Navalism, 1884–1914* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), *passim*.

<sup>17</sup> A. J. Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power: A History of British Naval Policy in the Pre-Dreadnought Era, 1880–1905* (London: Frank Cass, 1972), p. 55.

<sup>18</sup> Fleming, 'The Navy League', pp. 109–18. For impact in Worcestershire see M. Andrews, A. Gregson and J. Peters, *Worcestershire's War* (Stroud: Amberley, 2014), pp. 9–23.

The Navy League was established in 1894–95 as the result of a naval scare first propagated in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and which was soon after taken up by other Fleet Street organs.<sup>19</sup> It was a period when imperial patriotism, or jingoism, had become a more noticeable feature of newspapers, popular entertainments, and political platforms.<sup>20</sup> The Navy League's principal demand was for the active maintenance of the 'two-power standard' enshrined in the Naval Defence Act 1889. This stipulated that the Royal Navy should be at least equal in size to the combined strength of the next two largest navies. At first, the Navy League attracted a coterie of former naval officers, journalists, defence enthusiasts, and parliamentarians. It expanded steadily in the years that followed. In 1900 it claimed to have around 14,000 members.<sup>21</sup> By the eve of the First World War, it announced that it had 100,000 members across the British empire.<sup>22</sup>

From the outset of its existence, the Navy League sought to cultivate public opinion. Initially, this was accompanied by a disposition to question and even criticize the naval policies of the Admiralty and the government, but the ensuing controversy meant that the practise was abandoned in 1902.<sup>23</sup> Concentrating thereafter on cultivating public opinion did not mean that the Navy League abnegated its interest in policymaking. The promotion of sea-mindedness among the public, it reckoned, would exert pressure on parliamentarians, who in turn would put pressure on their front benches, and as a result shape government policy. This dynamic was clearly understood by the founder and driving force behind the Navy League in Worcester, the Rev. C. Poyntz Sanderson. Speaking in April 1901, he declared that 'it was of the utmost importance that every Englishman should realise that he was not only a citizen of the locality in which he lived, but also a citizen of a great nation, and remember that government was by public opinion rather than by the initiative of great statesmen'.<sup>24</sup> The following year, he informed the *Berrow's Worcester Journal* that 'The object of the Navy League is to educate and formulate public opinion on which in this country the power of the Government of the day depends so that the nation may demand with no uncertain voice the maintenance of our naval supremacy not for purposes of aggression but as the surest guarantee of peace'.<sup>25</sup> Like the Navy League's executive committee in London, Sanderson recognized the press as a vital instrument for navalist objectives: 'In this country the kind assistance of the Press has always afforded the fullest publicity to the proceedings of our annual meetings, and as the speakers on these occasions are gentleman who have the confidence of the public it may be claimed that they have a real influence in the formation of public opinion'.<sup>26</sup>

Navalist propaganda was not confined to reiterating the six objects outlined above. The Navy League pioneered the public celebration of Trafalgar Day by gathering

<sup>19</sup>The definitive study remains W. M. Hamilton, 'The Nation and the Navy: Methods and Organization of British Navalist Propaganda, 1889–1914', (PhD diss., University of London, 1977).

<sup>20</sup>J. M. McKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880–1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 1–12; Thompson, *Imperial Britain*, pp. 1–132.

<sup>21</sup>W. M. Hamilton, 'The "New Navalism" and the British Navy League, 1895–1914', *Mariner's Mirror*, 64, 1 (1978), 38.

<sup>22</sup>Hamilton, 'New Navalism', 124.

<sup>23</sup>Cesario, *New Crusade*, pp. 57–59.

<sup>24</sup>*Worcestershire Chronicle (WC)*, 6 April 1901, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup>*Berrow's Worcester Journal (BWJ)*, 15 February 1902, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup>*BWJ*, 15 February 1902, p. 5; Cesario, *New Crusade*, *passim*.

annually beneath Nelson's column in Trafalgar Square, which was bedecked for the occasion with nautical flags.<sup>27</sup> Local branches were encouraged to organize similar events around the country, with many succeeding in securing the attendance of dignitaries and coverage in the local press. The Navy League's wall map of the British empire became a ubiquitous feature in school classrooms and railway stations.<sup>28</sup> At the local level, branches were encouraged to lobby school boards for access to pupils, and for greater attention to be given in their curricula to imperial and naval matters. In these and other ways, the Navy League's branches operated locally to implement the strategy of its executive committee in London, adapting where necessary to take into account local circumstances.

Given the urgency of their message, and the various means employed to advance it, navalists were in turns baffled and alarmed by what they interpreted as the public's indifference. 'In England we cannot appeal to the sense of duty', the Navy League's journal complained in May 1897, 'for neither in board school, nor in public school, nor in university are men taught that the claims of country come before the claims of self'.<sup>29</sup> The organization's preoccupation with naval rivalry had a counterpart in its envy for Germany's navy league. In May 1914, the same organ observed that in contrast to the latter's success, 'one turns with feelings of disappointment to the much smaller measure of success, as indicated by membership, which the British Navy League has attracted to its banner during a period of almost 20 years of ceaseless propaganda'.<sup>30</sup> The Worcester branch had already reached this stage of exasperation in 1906, and decided as a result to concentrate its efforts on schools. It portended a similar decision by the Navy League's executive committee taken after the conclusion of the First World War.<sup>31</sup>

## II

The Navy League had established 12 branches in the United Kingdom when its branch at Worcester met for the first time in 1897. Four were in London, the remaining eight were located at Bristol, Bath, Brighton, Cambridge, Sydenham, Liverpool, Bedford, and Windsor.<sup>32</sup> The *Leamington Looker-On* noted the significance of the branches in Worcester and Windsor given that Portsmouth, Devonport, Chatham, Sheerness, and Pembroke, 'which draw their very life from the Navy', had 'to their discredit' failed to establish branches.<sup>33</sup> As this demonstrates, geography, or maritime employment, do not easily explain the Navy League's early pattern of development.

An early account of the Worcester branch's foundation, intended to celebrate the Rev. Sanderson, lays the responsibility squarely at his feet. Without him 'there would have been no Navy League in Worcester'.<sup>34</sup> The *Berrow's Worcester Journal* likewise observed in 1902 that the 'vitality' of the local branch 'is mainly due to the Rev. C.P.

<sup>27</sup>M. Czisnik, 'Commemorating Trafalgar: Public Celebration and National Identity', in *Trafalgar in History: A Battle and its Afterlife* ed. by D. Cannadine (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 139–54.

<sup>28</sup>Hamilton, 'New Navalism', 42.

<sup>29</sup>*Navy League Journal (NLJ)*, no. 23 (May 1897), pp. 1–2.

<sup>30</sup>*NLJ*, 19, 5 (May 1914), p. 134–35.

<sup>31</sup>Fleming, 'The Navy League', pp. 115–18.

<sup>32</sup>*Morning Post (MP)*, 25 January 1897, p. 6. There were an additional seven branches overseas, in Malta, New Zealand, British Guiana, South Africa and Australia.

<sup>33</sup>*Leamington Looker-On*, 27 November 1897, p. 17.

<sup>34</sup>*WC*, 6 April 1901, p. 6.

Sanderson, who is an enthusiastic hon. secretary'.<sup>35</sup> Sanderson was 'an occasional preacher' and member of the city's Chamber of Commerce. He lived in Barbourne, a wealthy part of the city, in 'the mansion known as the Blanquettes ... formerly the residence and still the property of the Stallard family'.<sup>36</sup> The son of a clergyman based near London, Sanderson had the status, means, and time to devote himself to navalism. And he was not averse to utilizing his vocation to justify it, conscious no doubt that some would have found it morally questionable. 'Perhaps, as a clergyman I may be allowed to add a protest against the inhumanity of making war without sufficient preparation', he remarked in 1900, against the backdrop of British setbacks in the South African War. 'We may perhaps "muddle through", but we do so at the cost of much needless suffering and much unnecessary loss of life'.<sup>37</sup> In 1902 he likewise claimed that 'those of the clergy who took an interest in the British Navy and in the strength of the forces of the Crown might claim as ministers of peace that there was no greater instrument for securing the peace of the world than the British Navy'.<sup>38</sup>

Sanderson did not launch the Worcester branch into a vacuum. Local newspapers, like their Fleet Street equivalents, published reports in 1895 on the Navy League's first public celebration of Trafalgar Day at Trafalgar Square.<sup>39</sup> The following year, the *Berrow's Worcester Journal* noted that the Navy League had 'received hundreds of messages of congratulation on the success of the celebration'. The newspaper used the opportunity to recall at length Admiral Lord Nelson's visit to Worcester on 29 August 1802, when he was given the freedom of the city and returned the compliment with references to its loyalty and patriotism.<sup>40</sup>

The first attempt to instigate the formation of a branch in Worcester was the result of an initiative by the Navy League's executive committee. Its secretary, Commander W. C. Crutchley, wrote to chambers of commerce across the country to ask for support in setting up branches. When the request came before the Worcester chamber, on 1 January 1896, it had a cool reception. The chairman, J.M. Skarratt, 'thought it would be more a matter for the city than the chamber'. Another member, C.E. Simes, complained that while the Navy League's stated aim of keeping the Royal Navy up to a sufficient strength was an 'important matter', it had provided insufficient information about its objects, that is, 'whether it was for obtaining more ships or more men'.<sup>41</sup> It is not clear from press coverage whether or not Sanderson was present at the meeting, but it is likely that he subsequently identified himself to Crutchley as someone connected with the chamber who was willing to set up a local branch. This perhaps explains the bullish claim advanced by *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, in the wake of the chamber's meeting, that there was support in Worcester for the Navy League. Alternatively, the declaration might have been self-referential, for the Conservative-supporting newspaper endorsed the extreme navalist position that even the two-power standard might not be

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<sup>35</sup>*BWJ*, 22 February 1902, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup>*WC*, 13 September 1902, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup>*WC*, 24 November 1900, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup>*WC*, 22 February 1902, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup>*WC*, 26 October 1895, p. 3; *BWJ*, 26 October 1895, pp. 2, 4.

<sup>40</sup>*BWJ*, 24 October 1896, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup>*BWJ*, 4 January 1896, p. 8.



enough: 'to keep our navy only equal to a probable combination of foes is to court disaster'.<sup>42</sup>

In November 1896 the Navy League announced a list of towns and cities in England where it intended to organize meetings, 'with a view to rousing public opinion once more to the necessity for friendly pressure on the Government', ahead of the latter's announcement on naval estimates.<sup>43</sup> Worcester was listed, and given the unhelpful response of its Chamber of Commerce at the start of the year, the executive committee's confidence in naming the city is an indication that it had recruited Sanderson. On 12 December, *Berrow's Worcester Journal* duly carried the notice of a lecture to be given by Sanderson on the 21st, at St Stephen's Schoolroom, Barbourne, on 'The work and requirements of the British navy'. It announced that admission would be free and that it would be 'illustrated by lime-light view'.<sup>44</sup> Days later, the lecture was also publicized nationally, in the staunchly Conservative *Morning Post*, with the observation that the work of the Navy League 'is being pushed actively in Worcester'.<sup>45</sup> Sanderson afterwards wrote to *Berrow's Worcester Journal* to drum up further publicity for his lecture. He indicated that it was being done at the suggestion of Commander Crutchley, and he addressed the matter of Worcester's geographic location directly. 'Branches of the League are already established at Bristol and Liverpool, which as seaport towns are naturally most alive to the necessity of command of the sea. But we in the inland city of Worcester are equally dependent on the sea-borne commerce, which is the source of our national wealth, and on the supply of food - three fourths of our bread and two fifths of our meat - which is brought to us across the ocean'.<sup>46</sup>

The meeting itself, reported the *Morning Post*, was 'large and enthusiastic'.<sup>47</sup> Presided over by the vicar of St Stephen's, the Rev. B. H. Sheppard, the limelight illustrations were used by Sanderson to show images of Worcester Bridge and the cathedral, which had been supplied by a local man, Henry Earle, along with other images sent by the Navy League. The 'lecturer said it looked particularly safe and free from foe, but it was not so', reported the *Berrow's Worcester Journal*. 'They in Worcester were just as exposed to danger of invaders as their forefathers were'. Nelson was invoked at length, including his 1802 visit to the city, but the bulk of the talk was given over to the need for a big navy to guarantee the country's security.<sup>48</sup> Patriotism and pride of empire were prominent themes. The meeting heard that it was 'the duty of Englishmen to maintain the Empire as a force for justice and progress ... and that our only safety lay in the principle that the true frontiers of the British Empire are our enemies' shores'.<sup>49</sup> The audience appears to have warmed to Sanderson's message, for during the course of his lecture, when he made reference to 'Rule Britannia', those assembled sang the song of that name.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>*BWJ*, 11 January 1896, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup>*MP*, 27 November 1896, p. 2.

<sup>44</sup>*BWJ*, 12 December 1896, p. 5. The same notice was published the following week, see *BWJ*, 19 December 1896, p. 1.

<sup>45</sup>*MP*, 15 December 1896, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup>*BWJ*, 19 December 1896, p. 8.

<sup>47</sup>*MP*, 24 December 1896, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup>*BWJ*, 26 December 1896, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup>*MP*, 24 December 1896, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup>*BWJ*, 26 December 1896, p. 3.

The first quarterly meeting of the Worcester branch took place on 9 April 1897. In marked contrast to the schoolroom that hosted the first Navy League event in the city, the meeting was held in the old council chamber at the Guildhall. Sanderson on this occasion occupied the chair. The Birmingham branch's secretary, Graham Milward, delivered an address to the 60 people in attendance on 'The commerce and food supply of England'. In one of several reported contributions from the floor, Tempest Radford warned – at a time when Germany was not regarded as the Royal Navy's main rival – that 'if England allowed France or Russia to outstrip her the result would be disastrous'. The Rev. W. H. Chappell 'thought that the Colonies should do something towards supporting the Navy, not only by contributing money, but by supplying ships and men'. He also expressed the hope 'that the younger people would be educated in their duties as Englishmen'. 'Some old seamen', it was likewise reported, 'also took part in the discussion, expressing the opinion that it was a mistake to retire the men too early, and also offering to assist in preparing for the Navy some of the idle boys loafing about the town'.<sup>51</sup>

The branch grew steadily in the years that followed. At its annual general meeting held in July 1899, Sanderson was elected honorary secretary. In this office he remained the central figure. He even gave the address at that meeting, on 'England and China', which dwelt on competition between the various world powers active in east Asia.<sup>52</sup> His knowledge of the topic had provided him with the pretext to write to the celebrated rear-admiral, Lord Charles Beresford, and to publicize in the local press Beresford's brief but courteous reply: 'I am extremely glad to find that the Worcester Branch of the League are so alive to the necessities of the situation in China'.<sup>53</sup> As honorary secretary, Sanderson was able to gain the patronage of the city's mayor, J.A. Steward, who agreed to serve as president during the year of his mayoralty. The precedent would be upheld by his mayoral successor, and Steward would later return to occupy the presidency in his own right.

It was reported at the 1899 annual general meeting that the membership roll included 150 names, 26 full members and 124 associate members. The former paid one shilling annually, the latter a reduced amount that was intended to facilitate lower-middle-class and working-class membership.<sup>54</sup> Those listed as full members give an indication of the early adherents of navalism in Worcester. These included the mayors of Worcester and of Kidderminster, a general, an inspector-general, two canons of the cathedral, a captain and a doctor.<sup>55</sup> One of these distinguished persons, Inspector-General Cowan, successfully pressed for the branch to write to the mayors of surrounding Worcestershire towns to invite them to become vice-presidents during their term of office, a signal that the branch intended to represent the county and not just the city: 'those gentlemen had great influence in their respective districts, and could not fail to

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<sup>51</sup>*MP*, 14 April 1897, p. 2.

<sup>52</sup>*WC*, 31 March 1900, p. 7.

<sup>53</sup>*WC*, 8 July 1899, p. 5.

<sup>54</sup>Hamilton, 'Nation and the Navy', p. 124.

<sup>55</sup>Rev. Poyntz Sanderson; J. A. Steward; General Davies; Inspector-General Cowan, RN; the Mayor of Kidderminster; Canon the Hon. H. Douglas; Canon Teignmouth Shore; Mr and Mrs F. Ames; F. Corbett; John Corbett; T. Tempest Radford; C. Raymond; Mrs Roland Berkeley; Dr McCarthy; Captain Sherwill; Mrs Ashton; G. E. Francis; J. A. McNaught; Raymond Ross; Robert Clarke; Michael Tomkinson; Charles Williams; W. H. Maxey; R. Cliff; and A. J. Wetherall.

be of benefit to the branch'.<sup>56</sup> At the following year's annual general meeting, it was reported that the branch had recruited 'the chief Magistrates of most of the towns in Worcestershire'.<sup>57</sup>

The Liberal-leaning *Worcestershire Chronicle*, which had reported the 1899 annual general meeting at length, published a week later the purported proceedings of the 'Spectators Club', held at the city's 'well-known hostelry, the 'Black Pears''. The lengthy account, provided by 'The Scribe', was in fact a wry and satirical overview of local news through the contributions of various archetypal speakers: 'The Philosopher', 'Oliver Gownsmen', 'The Youngster', and 'Jim Partysmart', to name a few. In a rhetorical question, 'Peter Quiz' asked if the Navy League is satisfied with steadily increasing the size of the Royal Navy. Gownsmen replied 'You need hardly ask that. It is not the business of the League to be satisfied ... Criticism is its reason for existence, and a very good reason too'. Referring to the Navy League's call for more British boys to train for the merchant marine, the Philosopher observed that its Windsor branch had purchased a training ship, 'Why not have one at Worcester? It would be immensely popular'. Quiz recommended that they induce nonconformists to take up the matter, as the established church will follow the lead, a barbed reference to the emergence of militaristic youth organizations that had begun in the 1880s with the nonconformist churches, and which was emulated afterwards by the Church of England.<sup>58</sup> Gownsmen thought that it would be good to have a training boat rigged up on the Severn, for 'People would flock down to the river to see it', and the 'boys themselves would be taken off the streets'. The Philosopher concluded by hoping that it would be considered by the Navy League's Worcester branch, 'Poyntz Sanderson ... is full of energy and enthusiasm for all things appertaining to the Navy. If the proposal has anything in it he will doubtless let the public know'.<sup>59</sup>

The newspaper's gentle mockery serves as a reminder that in Worcester, as elsewhere, the Navy League's propaganda did not always elicit the desired reaction from the public. Mockery could even come from otherwise sympathetic quarters. At an 'Old Vigornians' dinner in January 1901, held by the old boys of the King's School, 'Paymaster Hargreaves' gave a speech in which he observed that 'when the British Navy was brought before the public, mainly through the instrumentality of the Navy League, the worst view of it was invariably taken, for the purpose, of course, of furthering the object for which the League was formed'.<sup>60</sup> The subject was raised again at the following year's event. The 'Old Vigornians were loyal not only to their old school but in the larger sense of the term', C. T. E. Clarke remarked in proposing a toast to the armed forces. 'The navy was as powerful as ever it was, but it was questionable if its numerical strength was sufficient. So, he learned from the Navy

<sup>56</sup>WC, 8 July 1899, p. 7.

<sup>57</sup>WC, 31 March 1900, p. 7.

<sup>58</sup>WC, 15 July 1899, p. 5. See A. Summers, 'Militarism in Britain before the Great War', *History Workshop Journal*, 21 (1976), 104–23; J. Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society: British Youth Movements, 1883–1940* (London: Croom Helm, 1977); M. Rosenthal, *The Character Factory: Baden-Powell and the Origins of the Boy Scout Movement* (London: Collins, 1986); A. Warren, 'Sir Robert Baden-Powell, the Scout Movement and Citizen Training in Great Britain, 1900–1920', *English Historical Review*, 101, 399 (1986), 376–98; R. H. MacDonald, *Sons of the Empire: The Frontier and the Boy Scout Movement, 1890–1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

<sup>59</sup>WC, 15 July 1899, p. 5.

<sup>60</sup>WC, 12 January 1901, p. 8.

League (Laughter).<sup>61</sup> Even the supportive *Berrow's Worcester Journal* conceded in 1902 that the 'motives of those who have sustained the League are excellent, though here and there the zeal of members has raised the suspicion of a little overweening perception and patriotism'. Its work was nonetheless justified, the newspaper went on, because 'Generally, the objects may be regarded as justifying the methods ... The League is decidedly useful so far as it informs and stimulates'.<sup>62</sup> Locally and nationally, the Navy League was aware of such criticisms, as well as the more forthright expressions of opposition to its promotion of 'Prussian militarism' among children.<sup>63</sup> The 'style of the Navy League manifestos may be detestable', its executive committee conceded in November 1900, but the 'candid friend seldom charms by his style'.<sup>64</sup>

Mockery, criticism, and opposition were obviously unwelcome, but these were hardly the only reactions to the Navy League. Addressing the Worcester branch's annual general meeting on 28 March 1900, six months into the conflict with the Boers, Sanderson's report observed that the war 'has greatly increased the public interest in Imperial questions, and especially the defence of the Empire and of the United Kingdom, and the League now found itself in harmony with the prevailing sentiment in this part of England'.<sup>65</sup> In February 1902 he reflected that when the Worcester branch 'was first commenced it was thought a mad thing to talk of patriotism, and still madder to talk of danger to the country. Now, it was not unconventional to express a love for one's country, and it was not considered fanatical to suggest that it was necessary to defend one's country'.<sup>66</sup> As Donal Lowry observes, setbacks in the South African War fundamentally altered the way that British people regarded imperial strength, giving a boost to organizations that had previously warned of decline.<sup>67</sup> Given that public attention during the conflict was largely focused on the exploits of soldiers, the Navy League did its best to use the situation for its own purposes, expressing its concern about the poor level of naval planning. In Worcester, Sanderson dutifully placed its case before the local press.<sup>68</sup>

At first, the membership figures betrayed Sanderson's hopeful assessment of the public mood, for the 1900 annual general meeting reported a slight fall from the previous year, from 150 to 141. And at the same meeting, the chairman recorded his disappointment with the small attendance.<sup>69</sup> It might be, however, that Sanderson was not so much incorrect about the public mood as mistaken in assuming that it would translate into support for the Navy League. The war, after all, had done little to draw the public's attention to the significance of the Royal Navy. In contrast, the Worcestershire Regiment was heavily deployed in southern Africa, which in turn led to the establishment of local charities to raise money for wives and widows. Sanderson implicitly acknowledged the greater interest in the army in his address to the Coventry Lodge of the National Conservative League, given in February 1900. Rather than take as his

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<sup>61</sup>*BWJ*, 4 January 1902, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup>*BWJ*, 22 February 1902, p. 4.

<sup>63</sup>R. Kennedy, *The Children's War: Britain, 1914–1918* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 130.

<sup>64</sup>*WC*, 24 November 1900, p. 5.

<sup>65</sup>*WC*, 31 March 1900, p. 7; *BWJ*, 31 March 1900, p. 9.

<sup>66</sup>*WC*, 22 February 1902, p. 6.

<sup>67</sup>D. Lowry, 'The Boers were the beginning of the end? The wider impact of the South African War', in *The South African War Reappraised* ed. by D. Lowry (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 222.

<sup>68</sup>*WC*, 24 November 1900, p. 5.

<sup>69</sup>*WC*, 31 March 1900, p. 7.

subject the Royal Navy, ‘The Transvaal War’ dwelt on the failings of successive governments to pay due heed to the men on the spot. His conclusion, that ‘Their mistake was that they forgot that diplomacy and military preparation must go hand in hand’, might have resembled the warnings embedded in sea-mindedness, but his topic suggests that his priority was cultivating imperial sentiment rather than extolling the necessity of a big navy.<sup>70</sup> And as detailed below, other campaigns soon emerged in Worcester which were directly inspired by the South African War, and which similarly sought to harness the empire as a political cause.

The slight dip in the Worcester branch’s membership reported in 1900 was not itself an indication of decline. As noted above, it had recruited a number of Worcestershire mayors. The Conservative MP for Bewdley, Alfred Baldwin, also publicly signalled his support for the branch.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, its financial situation had improved on the previous year, its balance rising from £15 17s 11d to £19 19s 1d. Subscriptions received totalled £32 4s, with £15 remitted to the Navy League’s head office.<sup>72</sup> There was further good news at the annual general meeting held on 31 March 1901, when it was reported that the membership roll had increased by 17.<sup>73</sup> At the following year’s annual general meeting, the membership roll was said to have been ‘maintained’, though no figure was given in the press report.<sup>74</sup> The overall pattern that emerges is that the first five years of the branch were characterized at the start by very quick growth, only for membership to level off at around 150, with the majority of those involved being associate members. Given that associate membership was intended as a means of recruiting working-class and lower middle-class members, the Worcester branch’s roll suggests a measure of success in that endeavour. It is impossible to ascertain how many of its associate members were working-class, but it is clear that the branch cultivated such support. In 1900, for example, it sent speakers to address the Beaconsfield Lodge of the National Conservative League, as well as the city’s St Stephen’s Institute and Working Men’s Club and the Bromsgrove Institute. The branch also sent to the first two of these organizations books that dealt with ‘Imperial subjects, such as, e.g. the stories of the Empire Series’.<sup>75</sup>

The political character of several of these organizations was unambiguously Conservative, which led Sanderson in April 1901 to give the reassurance that the Navy League was non-political and that it would ‘make grants of books of an Imperial character to any society which may apply for them, whether it be Conservative or Liberal’.<sup>76</sup> As noted already, his claim was ostensibly true, but time and time again, especially in Worcester, the Conservative bias of most though not necessarily all of its supporters was obvious. During the course of the general election held between 26 September and 24 October 1900, the Worcester branch used the opportunity to further publicize itself, and the cause of navalism, by asking the candidates for Worcestershire constituencies whether or not they supported the Navy League’s aims. The replies must be read in the context of what became known as the khaki election, on account of the Conservatives’ concerted efforts to use the South

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<sup>70</sup>*BWJ*, 3 March 1900, p. 2.

<sup>71</sup>*WC*, 7 April 1900, p. 5; *BWJ*, 7 April 1900, p. 4.

<sup>72</sup>*BWJ*, 31 March 1900, p. 9.

<sup>73</sup>*WC*, 6 April 1901, p. 6.

<sup>74</sup>*WC*, 22 February 1902, p. 6.

<sup>75</sup>*WC*, 6 April 1901, p. 6.

<sup>76</sup>*WC*, 6 April 1901, p. 6.

African War to their advantage on the stump. Even so, it is noteworthy that of the four replies published in the press, all in the affirmative, three were from Conservatives, George Allsop, Charles W. Long, and Richard B. Martin, and only one from a Liberal, Cecil B. Harmsworth.<sup>77</sup> Harmsworth's inclusion on this occasion is significant, as in 1906 he would become the member for Droitwich, mentioned above, and later still be counted as a member of the Navy League.<sup>78</sup>

### III

The large associate membership and comparatively small full membership of the Worcester branch are suggestive of its long-term problems. If it succeeded in its early years in recruiting a significant number of working-class and lower middle-class associate members, it would still have left it financially precarious given the imbalance between full and associate members. As Mark Hamilton notes, the Navy League's 'finances were a continual problem'.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, it appears from subsequent reports that many of these members found little satisfaction in attending branch meetings, and in such circumstances, it is probable that subscriptions were allowed to lapse. It is also possible that some middle-class members opted for associate membership rather than pay full membership, and if so, it would suggest that their commitment to the branch was less than wholehearted. In any case, it is clear that the core of its middle-class membership struggled to maintain the momentum established in its first five years, and that what followed was a period of stagnation before decline set in and became irreversible.

Sanderson was undoubtedly the driving force behind the establishment and early successes of the Navy League's Worcester branch. As outlined below, he oversaw its local involvement in two nationwide campaigns, overseeing its response to 'British seamen for British ships', and increasing the Navy League's influence in educational institutions. He had balanced the expectations of the Navy League's executive committee in London with what could be achieved on the ground in Worcester, and he loyally presented the former's position in the local press.<sup>80</sup> In September 1902, after almost six years at its helm, it was announced that Sanderson would be moving from the area. 'He intends spending the winter abroad – we believe in Greece and Sicily', the *Worcestershire Chronicle* reported, 'and then to settle down in the neighbourhood of London, where his father is the incumbent of a country parish ... Mr Sanderson has done valuable work in the city and district. His genial disposition and his readiness to assist in any good cause have been much appreciated'.<sup>81</sup> After moving to London, Sanderson quickly became involved with its National Conservative League.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>77</sup>*WC*, 6 October 1900, p. 5; *BWJ*, 6 October 1900, p. 5. Martin was a Liberal Unionist, and his reply indicated that his wife was a member of the Navy League. Long had previously signalled his support earlier in the year, see *BWJ*, 14 April 1900, p. 4.

<sup>78</sup>*NLJ*, 13, 6 (June 1908), p. 168.

<sup>79</sup>Hamilton, 'Nation and the Navy', pp. 124–25.

<sup>80</sup>See, for example, *WC*, 13 July 1901, p. 5.

<sup>81</sup>*WC*, 13 September 1902, p. 4.

<sup>82</sup>It was reported in March 1903 that Sanderson had been appointed rector of Doverdale, near Droitwich, and it seems that he remained on the committee of the Worcester branch after his resignation as secretary. But he did not take an active role in the branch, and he appears to have moved several times in the years that followed, see *The Times*, 28 March 1903, p. 13; *The Times*, 4 March 1903, p. 11; *NLJ*, 11, 4 (April 1906), p. 94. For his obituary, see *Portsmouth Evening News*, 18 December 1933, p. 9.

Sanderson was succeeded as secretary by A. C. Coney, sometime treasurer of St Stephen's Working Men's Club and member of the local Salisbury Lodge of the National Conservative League.<sup>83</sup> The change of personnel coincided with a marked diminution of news about branch activities. In contrast to the Navy League's active branches in London, Lancashire, and Scotland, its journal had little to report on Worcester outside brief synopses of its annual general meetings.<sup>84</sup> As noted above, the Worcester branch was obliged to re-evaluate its purpose in 1906. At its annual meeting that year, held on 17 March and presided over by the sitting mayor, a report was presented that candidly admitted that 'the work of the branch for the past year had been of quiet description'. This involved making school visits, giving lantern lectures, and distributing prizes, maps, flags, as well as 'several thousand copies' of Rudyard Kipling's poem, 'Recessional', written to mark Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee, in which Kipling warned about the transient nature of imperial power. Those gathered – the Navy League's journal noted the 'small attendance' – were prepared to draw an important lesson from the report, as they passed a resolution 'That the future work of this branch be mainly educational, by systematically presenting flags, maps, etc., to the various schools, and holding lantern and descriptive lectures as often as the funds will allow'. The resolution's seconder, J. Twinberrow, was moved to compare 'the apathy of the British public with the eagerness shown in Germany for the continual enlargement of their navy'.<sup>85</sup> Almost two years later, in March 1908, the branch's annual report 'said it was greatly to be regretted that more interest was not taken and support accorded to the branch, as in the present condition of affairs in regard to national defence a strong and efficient Navy was imperatively required'.<sup>86</sup>

The problems experienced by the Worcester branch were evident before the Navy League in May 1907 entered a period of bitter internal acrimony over its refusal to criticise Admiral Jackie Fisher's changes to naval organization and deployment.<sup>87</sup> The end result was the establishment the following year of the breakaway Imperial Maritime League.<sup>88</sup> There was some interest locally in the dispute. The Worcestershire MP, Alfred Baldwin, actively sympathized with the malcontents, though he did not live long enough to join the new league.<sup>89</sup> If he had, it is a moot point whether he would have carried with him a significant number of others from the Worcester branch, for the above evidence suggests that its problem was apathy not frustrated zealotry.<sup>90</sup> In any case, the preference of the Imperial Maritime League's leaders for national campaigning, in place of building up a network of local branches, is a significant factor in explaining why on the eve of the First World War it had only 1,460 members.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>83</sup>WC, 13 September 1902, p. 5.

<sup>84</sup>See, for example, *NLJ*, 13, 4 (April 1908), p. 123.

<sup>85</sup>*NLJ*, 11, 4 (April 1906), p. 94.

<sup>86</sup>*NLJ*, 13, 5 (May 1908), p. 144.

<sup>87</sup>See C. Bell, 'Contested Waters: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era', *War in History*, 23, 1 (2016), 115–26.

<sup>88</sup>N. C. Fleming, 'Imperial Maritime League: British Navalism, Conflict, and the Radical Right, c. 1907–1920', *War in History*, 23, 3 (2016), 296–322.

<sup>89</sup>H. F. Wyatt and L. G. H. Horton-Smith, *The Passing of the Great Fleet* (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company), pp. 165, 180, 185; *BWJ*, 20 July 1907, p. 4.

<sup>90</sup>Worcester and Worcestershire are conspicuously absent from the lists of mayors, high sheriffs, and lords lieutenant published by the Imperial Maritime League to demonstrate influential support for its petition opposing the Declaration of London, see L. G. H. Horton-Smith, *Perils of the Sea: How We Kept the Flag Flying: A Short History of a Long Fight* (London: Imperial Maritime League, 1920), pp. 201a–201x.

<sup>91</sup>Fleming, 'Imperial Maritime League', 320.

The emergence of the Imperial Maritime League nevertheless had the effect of gingering up the Navy League, provoking the latter to undergo internal changes in its organization and governance and assume a more assertive profile in public debates on naval matters. Both leagues were part of the clamour demanding that the Liberal government construct eight dreadnought-class warships to see off Germany's ambitious naval construction plans. The Worcester branch's 1909 annual general meeting passed a resolution to this end.<sup>92</sup> But the Navy League's otherwise successful efforts to rejuvenate itself do not appear to have had any impact on navalism in the city. This can be contrasted with nearby Cheltenham, where a branch was established in 1908 that in the following two years grew from 75 to 300.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, the West Midlands witnessed a renaissance of navalist enthusiasm in the years that followed. Birmingham boasted 617 members in 1913.<sup>94</sup> And in neighbouring Hereford and Kidderminster, it was announced in March 1912 and May 1913 respectively that efforts were being made to form branches.<sup>95</sup> The best that could be reported about Worcester in the same period is that in April 1913 'several' boys at King's had joined the Navy League following a lecture delivered at the school.<sup>96</sup>

The Birmingham branch's success led its organizing secretary, E. C. Thomas, to take steps in the summer of 1914 to reorganize the Worcester branch. Securing 'the assistance of several prominent local ladies and gentlemen', it was announced in the August number of the Navy League's journal that the city's MP, Edward Goulding, would take on the role of president.<sup>97</sup> The eve of the First World War, however, was an inauspicious moment to start such an initiative. As noted above, Navy League branches across the country suffered thereafter from shortages of personnel and income. It is not surprising therefore that in the final year of the war, Thomas was still hard at it promoting the Navy League in what its journal called the 'West Midland District', with Worcester listed alongside Warwick, Hereford, and Stafford as sites where he intended to 'promote the movement'.<sup>98</sup> This and subsequent references to the West Midland District suggest a conscious effort to capitalize on the Birmingham branch's resilience throughout the war, and an acceptance that reviving or starting branches elsewhere in the region was unlikely to bear fruit.<sup>99</sup>

If the Imperial Maritime League was not the cause of the Worcester branch's decline, it is possible that the emergence of other imperialist causes had an adverse impact on its development. The Tariff Reform League was established in the wake of the South African War to promote Joseph Chamberlain's scheme to foster imperial economic co-operation.<sup>100</sup> Chamberlain's Birmingham fiefdom meant that it had significant support

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<sup>92</sup>*NLJ*, 14, 5 (May 1909), p. 142.

<sup>93</sup>*NLJ*, 14, 11 (November 1909), p. 345; *NLJ*, 15, 7 (July 1910), p. 193.

<sup>94</sup>*NLJ*, 18, 9 (September 1913), p. 267.

<sup>95</sup>*NLJ*, 17, 3 (March 1912), p. 81; *NLJ*, 18, 5 (May 1913), p. 142.

<sup>96</sup>*NLJ*, 18, 4 (April 1913), p. 113.

<sup>97</sup>J. R. Anthony was appointed as chairman, assisted by Lieutenant C.F. Lousada as secretary, and C. Raymond as treasurer. In addition to Raymond, several other stalwarts from the branch's early days were still members in this period, including F. Ames and Canon Chappell. See *NLJ*, 19, 8 (August 1914), p. 235.

<sup>98</sup>*NLJ*, 23, 3 (April 1918), p. 42.

<sup>99</sup>*NLJ*, 23, 5 (October 1918), p. 85.

<sup>100</sup>See Thompson, *Imperial Britain*, pp. 81–109.



in the West Midlands, and its protectionist agenda certainly resonated with some businesses in Worcestershire.<sup>101</sup> The adoption in 1907 of Goulding as the Conservative parliamentary candidate for Worcester – after allegations of corruption at the 1906 general election were upheld by a royal commission – ensured that tariff reform quickly assumed a central place in the city's politics.<sup>102</sup> Not all Conservatives in Worcester were content with this development, but as the *Morning Post* commented, Goulding's 'earnest advocacy of Tariff Reform is heartily approved, because gloving, porcelain, and other staple industries are badly hit by hostile tariffs'.<sup>103</sup> Little wonder that when the Navy League's Birmingham branch sought to revive the Worcester branch in 1914, it secured Goulding's agreement to serve as its president, but by that point even his patronage could not reverse its decline. It is conceivable that some imperial enthusiasts in Worcester saw more value in promoting tariff reform than navalism, especially as there was cross-party consensus on the necessity of maintaining the two-power standard. Conservatives, in particular, would have found the Tariff Reform League to be of greater utility, as it was a means of promoting their interests at elections that overcame the spending limits placed on parties by the Elimination of Corrupt Practices Act 1883.<sup>104</sup>

Tariff reform was not the only cause to challenge the Navy League's place among Worcester's imperialists. The campaign to erect a large memorial to the near two-hundred men of the Worcestershire Regiment who had fallen in the South African War was launched in February 1903. Like similar campaigns across the country, its fundraising committee came 'from those either already in a position of influence or unencumbered by other demands and therefore able to dedicate time and energy to a memorial project, which in practice usually meant those in a comfortable financial position'.<sup>105</sup> It is noteworthy that within a few months even it complained about apathy: 'Worcester city, in particular, has done comparatively little, in spite of the excellent lead given by the Mayor'.<sup>106</sup> Notwithstanding this early frustration, the campaign ultimately succeeded in its objective in 1908 when a large bronze sculpture was unveiled outside the cathedral. The campaign had the support of the Lord Lieutenant of Worcestershire, the Earl of Coventry. This was to be expected given the historic role of Lord-Lieutenants, but his support, and the memorial itself, still served as a reminder that the Worcestershire Regiment was the area's most significant connection to the armed forces. Had Lord Coventry confined himself to this largely ornamental role, his lack of involvement with the Navy League's Worcester branch would not be that remarkable. But in 1907, Coventry consented to become president of the Worcestershire branch of the National Service League.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>101</sup>See *MP*, 21 September 1903, p. 3; D. Porter, 'The Unionist Tariff Reformers 1903–1914', (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 1976), pp. 258, 428; D. Thackeray, 'Building a peaceable party: masculine identities in British Conservative politics, c. 1903–24', *Historical Research*, 85, 230 (2012), 651–73.

<sup>102</sup>O'Leary, *Elimination of Corrupt Practices*, pp. 197–198; *BWJ*, 21 December 1907, p. 6; *BWJ*, 27 January 1912, p. 6.

<sup>103</sup>A. Sykes, *Tariff Reform in British Politics 1903–1913* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 162–3; *MP*, 24 January 1908, p. 8.

<sup>104</sup>D. A. Hamer, *The Politics of Electoral Pressure: A Study in the History of Victorian Reform Agitations* (Hassocks: Harvester, 1977), p. 4. For local debate on this practice, see *BWJ*, 29 June 1907, p. 4.

<sup>105</sup>M. Connelly and P. Donaldson, 'South African War (1899–1902) Memorials in Britain: A Case Study of Memorialization in London and Kent', *War and Society*, 29, 1 (2010), 20–46.

<sup>106</sup>*WC*, 7 February 1903, p. 4; *WC*, p. 7 March 1903, p. 5.

<sup>107</sup>*BWJ*, 7 September 1907, p. 6.

Established in 1902 to promote military training, the National Service League grew significantly after 1905 when the celebrated veteran of South Africa, Field Marshal Earl Roberts, agreed to be its president. In February 1907 *Berrow's Worcester Journal* published an appeal from R. C. Temple to establish a branch in the county.<sup>108</sup> Like Sanderson before him, Temple agitated through the local press and went on to become secretary of the branch that he founded.<sup>109</sup> Within months the branch held its first meeting at the Guildhall and it sponsored a competition that drew significant interest from local rifle clubs.<sup>110</sup> When Roberts visited Overbury Court in South Worcestershire in September 1907, to attend a miniature rifle and air gun meeting organized jointly by the local branch of the National Service League and the Society of Miniature Rifle Clubs, he was met by Coventry 'supported by a large company of the nobility and residents'. This turnout of county society, alongside the attendance of '500 competitors', points to the National Service League's strength in rural areas.<sup>111</sup> This and its public meetings held in the years that followed were in marked contrast to the relative inactivity of the local branch of the Navy League.<sup>112</sup>

#### IV

In 1899 the Navy League published *British Seamen, Boy Seamen and Light Dues*, a pamphlet penned by C. McL. McHardy. It addressed concern in navalist circles about the presence of tens of thousands of 'lascars' and 'foreigners' in the merchant marine. They reasoned that this endangered British defence because the Royal Navy relied on the merchant fleet for its reservists. 'The employment of Foreigners in place of British seamen', McHardy claimed, 'is almost entirely due to the fact that for many years past the training of boys in the Merchant Navy has been practically discontinued, with the result that there is an insufficient supply of British seamen' for the Royal Navy. He averred that shipowners had convinced him that they were not at fault. They did not prefer foreign sailors, or paying lower wages, McHardy assured his readers, nor did they regard lascar and foreign sailors as less insubordinate than their British counterparts or think that they were easier to satisfy 'with inferior food and accommodation'. As a result, McHardy identified two solutions: to encourage shipowners to take increased numbers of boys to train and employ, and to assist in that task by establishing a nationwide network of training brigs.<sup>113</sup>

The general thrust of McHardy's pamphlet found support at the Worcester branch's annual general meeting the same year. Local members, however, articulated views that diverged from those advanced by McHardy and the Navy League's executive committee. Whereas the latter were reluctant to call upon the government to take a hand in the matter, F. Ames did just that, and asserted that it would only do so if called upon by people across the country. Similarly, in contrast to McHardy's representation of shipowners, Charles Williams declared that 'there was no sentiment in the mercantile

<sup>108</sup>*BWJ*, 23 February 1907, p. 5.

<sup>109</sup>*BWJ*, 31 August 1907, p. 5; *BWJ*, 7 September 1907, p. 5.

<sup>110</sup>*BWJ*, 22 June 1907, p. 4; *BWJ*, 31 August 1907, p. 5.

<sup>111</sup>*BWJ*, 7 September 1907, p. 6.

<sup>112</sup>See, for example, *BWJ*, 19 August 1911, p. 2; *BWJ*, 5 October 1912, p. 7; *Gloucester Journal*, 26 April 1913, p. 10.

<sup>113</sup>C. M. McHardy, *British Seamen, Boy Seamen and Light Dues* (London: Navy League, 1899).

marine, and ship owners and directors of shipping companies found that they could supply all their needs with foreigners, who did their work satisfactorily, were sober, and, perhaps, a little cheaper'. Like Ames, Williams looked to the state to correct the problem. 'The present Government had shown weakness over their finances', he remarked of the Marquess of Salisbury's Conservative and Liberal Unionist administration. 'They had given doles to "Tom, Dick, and Harry", where they were not wanted, and had enriched the pockets of the wholesale tobacconists needlessly . . . Let them show the Government that it was a matter of votes, and they would gain their point, for they all knew that whatever Government was in power would do anything for votes'.<sup>114</sup>

The need to recruit boys to the merchant marine was discussed at successive annual general meetings in the early 1900s. Contrary to the prediction made by the *Worcestershire Chronicle's* fictional 'Scribe', the Worcester branch does not appear to have considered emulating the example set by the Windsor branch, which in 1899 had acquired a Thames barge to serve as a training brig for local boys.<sup>115</sup> In an address at King's School on 4 March 1904, the Navy League's only full-time lecturer, Lieutenant H. T. C. Knox, expressed his hope that 'it might be possible for the Worcester Branch to establish a training brig on the Severn similar to the one placed on the Thames by the Windsor and Eton Branch', and he indicated that the Navy League's secretary 'would be glad to give any information'.<sup>116</sup> As this suggests, the executive committee was not in a position, financially or otherwise, to initiate such schemes from the top down. What eventually became known as the Boys' Naval Brigade, which evolved over time into the Sea Cadets, was originally the product of local initiative, either the decision of youth groups to attach themselves to Navy League branches, or branches taking the initiative by setting up cadet units. The result was a patchy network of units across the United Kingdom.<sup>117</sup> It was probably no accident that Knox cited the example of the Windsor brig when he visited Worcester, for it too was located many miles from the sea. Moreover, Windsor was joined in 1908 by a campaign in Reading that resulted in its branch's acquisition of the *King Alfred*.<sup>118</sup> Two years later, a National Training Brig Fund was established to better co-ordinate the otherwise disparate initiatives of several branches to raise money for river- or estuary-based training brigs, but during these years the Worcester branch was in no financial position to follow suit.<sup>119</sup>

Not that Worcester had nothing whatsoever to do with the Navy League's training brigs. In June 1905, Worcestershire County Council passed a motion to formally recognize the Liverpool branch's training home at Liscard as an establishment 'to which boys might be sent from the county'.<sup>120</sup> This 'Sea Training Home for Poor Boys', inaugurated on 3 August 1903, was intended to deal with both the lascars 'problem' and the predicament of boys from the local 'waif and stray class', by enrolling

<sup>114</sup>WC, 8 July 1899, p. 7.

<sup>115</sup>Hamilton, 'Nation and Navy', p. 150.

<sup>116</sup>NLJ, 11, 4 (April 1904), p. 100.

<sup>117</sup>N. C. Fleming, 'Navalism and Masculinity before the First World War', in *Negotiating Masculinities and Modernity in the Maritime World, 1815-1940: A Sailor's Progress?* ed. by J. Begiato, K. Downing and J. Thayer (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 245-65.

<sup>118</sup>NLJ, 13, 7 (July 1908), p. 224.

<sup>119</sup>Navy, 17, 1 (January 1910), p. 22; Navy, 17, 4 (April 1910), p. 107; Navy, 17, 8 (August 1910), p. 223.

<sup>120</sup>*Evesham Standard and West Midland Observer*, 24 June 1905, p. 6. The council's decision is in marked contrast to its earlier hesitation about cooperating with the Navy League's 'British seamen for British ships' campaign, see WC, 23 March 1901, p. 6; WC, 15 June 1901, p. 7.

working-class boys aged between 13½ and 15½. The Navy League's executive committee celebrated Liscard and the Liverpool branch's role in establishing it, but no other branch had the resources or inclination to follow Liverpool's example, and so Liscard remained the only brig exclusively for poor boys.<sup>121</sup> Indeed, left to local branches, Navy League training brigs and Boys' Naval Brigade units appear to have followed the example of other uniformed youth organizations, eschewing high-flown rhetoric about rehabilitating poor boys, and boys from all classes mixing together, in favour of recruiting the sons of middle-class and 'respectable' working-class families.<sup>122</sup> With Worcester's middle-class and 'respectable' working-class boys already enrolled in the plethora of militaristic youth organizations that emerged in the late nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries, there was little incentive for a struggling branch to establish a training brig that would recruit boys unlikely to join the merchant marine, or to seek the significant investment that would be required to offer free training to working-class boys. That no boys' clubs affiliated to the Worcester branch suggests that the Church of England had largely monopolized such organizations, something that Worcester's navalists were not inclined to challenge. This is not to suggest that it was beyond anyone's power to disrupt the status quo. When General Robert Baden-Powell visited Worcestershire in May 1911, to inspect his recently established Boy Scout movement, it was reported that it already had 'about 1,700' members in the county.<sup>123</sup> Tellingly, it was announced later the same year that a member of the Worcester branch, General Henry Fanshawe Davies, was one of Worcestershire's Scout commissioners.<sup>124</sup>

In not establishing a training brig or sponsoring a cadet unit, the Worcester branch largely confined itself to repeating its calls for the government to encourage the recruitment of British seamen to the merchant marine. In 1900 Sanderson lamented that 'At present, the easiest way to get into the marine was by committing a crime . . . A seafaring life ought to be the reward of good character (Applause)'.<sup>125</sup> The stereotype of the irresponsible, rum drinking 'Jack Tar' had for some time been a matter of concern in naval and navalist circles, and it had motivated an array of naval professionals and their supporters to make various attempts to correct it.<sup>126</sup> When the branch discussed the campaign the following year, it again called for the government to invest in training ships, and that it improve life in the merchant service to make it more attractive to British youths.<sup>127</sup> Likewise in 1902, the branch passed a resolution calling for the standard of food to be improved in both Royal Navy and merchant marine ships, as a way of improving the stamina of sailors, and also of preventing desertion to the United States Navy. Sanderson channelled the spirit of the contemporary national efficiency movement in his remark that:

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<sup>121</sup>*Navy*, 11, 9 (September 1904), pp. 243–44. See Fleming, 'Navalism and Masculinity', pp. 257–259.

<sup>122</sup>Rosenthal, *Character Factory*, p. 281.

<sup>123</sup>*BWJ*, 20 May 1911, p. 5.

<sup>124</sup>See *BWJ*, 9 September 1911, p. 2.

<sup>125</sup>*WC*, 31 March 1900, p. 7.

<sup>126</sup>M. A. Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack: Representing Naval Manhood in the British Empire, 1870–1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); C. McKee, *Sober Men and True: Sailor Lives in the Royal Navy, 1900–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002) pp. 1–12; M. S. Seligmann, *Rum, Sodomy, Prayers and the Lash Revisited: Winston Churchill and Social Reform in the Royal Navy, 1900–1915* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 14.

<sup>127</sup>*WC*, 6 April 1901, p. 6.

No doubt there was a good deal of waste in the money spent on the Navy ... If we could get a little efficiency into our Government so that we might secure value for our money people would soon see that the sailor is served well'.<sup>128</sup>

## V

The Worcester branch's involvement in local education was markedly more whole-hearted and successful than its tepid attitude to the executive committee's 'British seamen for British ships' campaign. At its very first quarterly meeting, the Worcester branch heard calls for younger people to 'be educated in their duties as Englishmen'.<sup>129</sup> Two years later, at the 1899 annual general meeting, Sanderson discussed a request from the Navy League's executive committee that branches organize the delivery of lectures to local elementary schools.<sup>130</sup> The former took it upon itself to oversee propaganda work in public schools, preparatory schools, and private girls' schools, largely through the efforts of its lecturer, Lieutenant Knox.<sup>131</sup> Local branches, in contrast, were expected to make contact with local board schools and other educational institutions. In the case of the Worcester branch, however, several leading members had connections to King's School and the cathedral to which it was historically and physically attached.<sup>132</sup> This meant that the branch delivered lectures to both King's and local elementary schools.

Sanderson's resolution at the 1899 annual meeting was coupled with another calling for 'national flags' to be displayed at elementary schools, 'so that a sense of patriotism and of duty towards their country might be fostered in the minds of the scholars'. The report of the meeting went on to note that school managers would welcome this initiative, 'and in a great number of cases, would arrange for lectures to be given and for the flags to be displayed'. One of those in attendance, Robert Clarke, promised to present to the schools of his parish, St Peter's, a set of flags, 'and they who knew how little children knew of such matters would welcome his action (Applause)'. Sanderson's resolutions were seconded by Raymond Ross, who 'suggested that the young mind should be impressed with the trials and dangers through which the English flag had gone, and that extracts from history dealing with the most notable naval battles should be introduced into the lectures. By such means ... the patriotism of schools would be raised to a very high pitch (Hear, hear)'.<sup>133</sup> Reasonable if slow progress was reported in April 1901, when it was noted that the branch had presented 'national flags' to Powick and Feckenham elementary schools, and that it had given lectures at St Stephen's and St Barnabas' elementary schools.<sup>134</sup> Flags were not just distributed to schools. The branch is very likely to have been responsible for the simultaneous donation of three flags –

<sup>128</sup>WC, 22 February 1902, p. 6; BWJ, 22 February 1902, p. 2; see G.R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899–1914* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), *passim*.

<sup>129</sup>MP, 14 April 1897, p. 2.

<sup>130</sup>WC, 8 July 1899, p. 7.

<sup>131</sup>Hamilton, 'Nation and the Navy', pp. 147–149, 173; G. Best, 'Militarism and the Victorian Public School', in *The Victorian Public School: Studies in the Development of an Educational Institution* ed. by B. Simon and I. Bradley (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), p. 130.

<sup>132</sup>See, for example, WC, 20 October 1900, p. 5; BWJ, 20 October 1900, p. 4.

<sup>133</sup>WC, 8 July 1899, p. 7.

<sup>134</sup>BWJ, 3 March 1900, p. 2; WC, 6 April 1901, p. 6.

a Union flag, a white ensign, and a red ensign – to the city’s Victoria Institute, opened a few years previously, which housed a library, museum, and art school.<sup>135</sup>

In addition to King’s, the local civic elite that constituted the full membership of the Worcester branch facilitated its entry to elementary schools. Not only because several of them were clergymen, but because they and others had direct connections with several schools, most likely as managers. At the prize day for Hounds Lane board school, held on 1 March 1900, Sanderson attended alongside the mayor, Alderman John Millington. Sanderson used the opportunity to speak ‘of the aims of the Navy League, and especially the desire to give the best equipment to our army and navy’. This was part of a vote of thanks to the mayor that was seconded by Inspector-General Cowan, the three men all belonging to the Navy League. Others in attendance were also connected with its local branch, including Martin Curtler, J. Mayglothling, Rev. W. H. Chappell, and Tempest Radford.<sup>136</sup> Thus, when it was reported in 1905 that it was the local education authority that organized a Trafalgar Day event, in which the ‘children of the sixth and seventh standards of the elementary schools in Worcester, numbering upwards of 1,000, took part in a demonstration’, it is not hard to discern the influence of the local branch of the Navy League across the city’s schools. That the occasion concluded with ‘evensong at the Cathedral on Sunday’, at which ‘the “Recessional” and a verse of the National Anthem were sung’, similarly point to the involvement of local Anglican clergy in the branch.<sup>137</sup>

Trafalgar Day and Empire Day both served the branch’s purposes when it came to organizing events at schools. In 1907 St Clements School held a flag ceremony in its playground following the gift of a Union flag by the Worcester branch, which was represented on the day by E. C. Coney. It was reported that the donation was in response to an application by the headmaster, T. G. Watts, who provided the flagstaff and had it erected in the playground. At the morning ceremony, which could not be held on Empire Day itself—24 May – as the school was closed for Whitsuntide, it was hoisted by Mrs Richings.

The children, under the conductorship of the Headmaster, sang a couple of patriotic songs as the flag was hoisted, and then the Rev. F.H. Richings addressed the children on the history of the Union Jack. The Headmaster said that the flag would be hoisted upon the King’s birthday and on the natal days of other members of the Royal Family and of Empire builders, and upon the anniversary of great events in history. On these occasions short lessons on the events and personalities would be given to the children, and he hoped this object lesson would teach them to admire and imitate the noble qualities of those who had helped to build up the Empire and make the Union Jack famous.<sup>138</sup>

The newspaper report neglected to mention that the headmaster, Watts, sat on the Worcester branch’s committee.<sup>139</sup> He was not the only member to use his personal influence to advance the cause. On 11 April 1902, the retired lieutenant-general, Henry Fanshawe Davies, gave a lecture on great admirals in history at his family seat in the Worcestershire village of Elmley Castle. He had briefly served in the Royal Navy in 1852–53, in the second Anglo-Burmese war, before entering the army in 1854. Davies noted that the Navy League had given a lecture at Elmley Castle the year before, and he

<sup>135</sup>WC, 23 December 1899, p. 4; ‘Opening of the Victoria Institute, Worcester’, *The Library*, 1 (January 1896), p. 568.

<sup>136</sup>BWJ, 3 March 1900, p. 2.

<sup>137</sup>*Gloucester Citizen*, 23 October 1905, p. 3.

<sup>138</sup>BWJ, 18 May 1907, p. 2.

<sup>139</sup>NLI, 11, 4 (April 1906), p. 94.

commended the good work of the organization's lectures, but he added that at the time 'he thought too much was said about modern ships, and that he would like to hear a lecture on the great deeds of their navy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and part of the 19<sup>th</sup>. People in the country were ignorant of the deeds of our great Admirals'. A local newspaper report on this event noted that 'The proceedings were appropriately opened by the singing of "Rule Britannia" by the Rev. H. B. S. Fowler', the vicar, 'and the audience heartily joined the chorus'.<sup>140</sup>

The confidence and reasonable success of Worcester's navalists in getting access to local schools is noteworthy given that at nearby Leamington, in 1897, the town council and school board had turned down a request from the Navy League to instruct schoolteachers to celebrate Trafalgar Day. The council refused, it was reported, 'out of consideration for the feelings of the French people'. At the board, concerns were also raised about keeping up a 'war like spirit'. Its members divided equally on the question, but the casting vote of its chairman, 'a Nonconformist Minister', ensured that the Navy League's request was rejected.<sup>141</sup> Aware of such criticisms, the Navy League's executive committee publicly indicated in 1898 that it would not initiate or take part in a centenary celebration of the Battle of the Nile, 'In initiating Trafalgar Day, the object sought for by the Navy League was . . . not triumph over former foes, but recognition of the principles of duty and courage personified in the life and death of Nelson'.<sup>142</sup> Other branches encountered similar resistance, such as at Bristol in 1902, when an attempt by the Navy League to work with local board schools led several board members to complain about the 'worship of mere brute force'.<sup>143</sup>

The Worcester branch faced no such difficulties with its local board. Sanderson attended one of its meetings in 1899 with the two-fold resolution on speakers and flags that had been passed by his branch that year, and it was accepted without qualification.<sup>144</sup> It was subsequently reported that at the next board school prize distribution 'the ceremony of presenting to the school a large Union Jack will take place', and that Sanderson had secured permission 'to display the national flag in the schoolroom, and the one that is to be presented is a gift of the League he represents'.<sup>145</sup> But if it faced little opposition locally, it did not prevent Lieutenant Knox, in his address to King's School in November 1906, from tackling the question. He informed his audience that he 'had noticed that day a poster on the hoardings throughout Worcester, headed "Military Training in Schools"', which he said contained three questions: 'Is it right to implant thoughts of enmity in boys' minds?', 'To train them in the use of murderous weapons?', 'To teach to kill?', and 'Are our schools to teach peace or to educate in strife?' Knox in response said that 'it never seemed to occur to the well-meaning, but not very practical people, who held these views that we could be trusted with a trained manhood for the same reason that we could trust ourselves with the British Fleet'. His rationale, he went on to outline, was that as the Royal Navy had not fought a major engagement since 1854, 'our one guarantee of peace was a supreme Fleet'.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>140</sup>*BWJ*, 12 April 1902, p. 2. See also *NLJ*, 14, 5 (May 1909), p. 142.

<sup>141</sup>*Standard*, 21 September 1897, p. 2.

<sup>142</sup>*Nottinghamshire Guardian*, 11 June 1898, p. 4.

<sup>143</sup>*Western Daily Press*, 27 May 1902, p. 6.

<sup>144</sup>*WC*, 4 November 1899, p. 7. Board members in attendance included Alfred Webb, Rev. Father Kernan, Alderman Harry Day, Martin Curtler, J. Mayglothing, J. Manning, G.B. Wetherall, J. Stallard Jun., and W. Noake.

<sup>145</sup>*WC*, 23 December 1899, p. 4.

<sup>146</sup>*NLJ*, 11, 12 (December 1906), p. 341–42.

In keeping with the practice of other Navy League branches, it was announced in 1901 that the Navy League had awarded an essay prize at King's.<sup>147</sup> It was subsequently reported that the prize had been won by F. L. Steward, son of the one time branch president and mayor of Worcester, J. A. Steward.<sup>148</sup> In the next county, Hereford Cathedral School had a similar prize presented by the Navy League, which is likely to have been organized through the Worcester branch as there was no branch in Herefordshire.<sup>149</sup> Nearby Malvern College had established its own Navy League branch in 1899, under the presidency of its headmaster, Rev. S. R. James; the second public school branch in the country, the first having been formed at Harrow.<sup>150</sup> It remained active in the years when the Worcester branch was in decline, no doubt helped by the constant replenishment of its young membership.<sup>151</sup> Not unexpectedly, the Worcester branch's difficulties appear to have had an impact on its ability to award prizes at King's, for a press notice in 1910 indicated that the prize was offered by the 'National Navy League'.<sup>152</sup> It is difficult to assess what impact the above lectures, flag days, and prizes had on the school-children involved. Navy League propaganda aimed at the young tended to reflect public school values of hierarchy and conformity, and at these institutions its message probably had a sympathetic hearing, although the mild mockery of old Vigornians suggests a nuanced reception. Scholarship on the receptiveness of working-class children to such messages, in contrast, highlights that public school values did not transfer easily to the very different context of elementary schools.<sup>153</sup>

## VI

Like many other parts of the United Kingdom, Worcester was able to channel navalist enthusiasm into a local branch of the Navy League for a limited period. As a relatively early adherent to the cause, the stagnation and decline of the Worcester branch occurred even as it was ignited or reignited in nearby urban centres. The navalist message met with little real opposition in Worcester, though it encountered mockery in some quarters. The Worcester branch was quickly able to establish itself and attract the support of leading political figures in the area, as well as a significant number of associate members, a category typically intended for the working- and lower-middle classes. It provided a lightning-rod for those anxious about imperial rivalry, and it succeeded in spreading its message to local schools, with some notable success in distributing flags and literature among elementary schools. The widespread acceptance of the Navy League's ideas in the locality did not mean, however, that the branch was able to maintain the momentum of its early growth. If it had helped to boost imperialist sentiment in Worcester, rival patriotic leagues emerged in the wake of the South African War that were better placed to benefit from this development. The Worcester branch's decision in 1906

<sup>147</sup>WC, 19 October 1901, p. 8.

<sup>148</sup>WC, 22 February 1902, p. 6.

<sup>149</sup>WC, 2 August 1902, p. 7. A talk by Lieutenant Knox in Hereford, on 5 November 1906, heard the chairman and Mayor of Hereford, Alderman E.C. Gurney, call for a branch to be established there, see *NLJ*, 11, 12 (December 1906), p. 339.

<sup>150</sup>WC, 8 July 1899, p. 7.

<sup>151</sup>*NLJ*, 11, 5 (May 1911), p. 133.

<sup>152</sup>*Evesham Standard and West Midland Observer*, 15 October 1910, p. 5.

<sup>153</sup>Rosenthal, *Character Factory*, pp. 104–105; J. Benson, *The Working Class in Britain 1850–1939* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), pp. 148, 151; Kennedy, *Children's War*, p. 91; S. Olsen, *Juvenile Nation: Youth, Emotions and the Making of the Modern British Citizen, 1880–1914* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p. 21.



to concentrate on education highlighted the one area in which it had enjoyed marked success, but it was done reluctantly and was not sufficient in itself to maintain let alone resuscitate navalism in Worcester. A belated attempt in August 1914 to revive the branch, through the external assistance of the Birmingham branch, was undermined by the outbreak of the First World War. As a consequence, it was not until the Second World War that navalism enjoyed a revival in Worcester. A significant reason was the Navy League's purchase in 1940 of a century-old brig formerly engaged in the Bristol tobacco trade, which was converted into the Training Ship *Bounty* and moored on the Severn. The *Bounty* accommodated 48 youths aged 17 and older, hailing from across the country, and provided them with four weeks training as wireless telephonists for the Royal Navy.<sup>154</sup> But the more enduring legacy from this time was the establishment in 1937 of a Navy League Sea Cadet unit in the city, which went on to provide maritime training to generations of boys, and more recently girls, through to the present day, and which continues each year to publicly mark Trafalgar Day.

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<sup>154</sup>*Hull Daily Mail*, 23 December 1940, p. 3; *The Times*, 30 March 1942, p. 2.