

‘Will make a good Admiral’: a reassessment of Captain Scott’s naval career

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ABSTRACT. In his book *Scott and Amundsen* (1979) Roland Huntford described Captain Robert Falcon Scott R.N. as ‘not well thought of in the Service’ and ‘an obscure, rather dull torpedo lieutenant with mediocre prospects’. A myth has subsequently arisen that Scott was forced into Antarctic exploration as his only route to naval promotion. In reality, Scott was an extremely able officer held in high regard by his naval contemporaries; he was on course for promotion to flag rank (rear-admiral and above) had he not taken up polar exploration; and his primary motivation for polar work was financial support for his family. In addition to a chronological account of Scott’s career, this article will present his Admirals’ reports in full.

Introduction

Although Robert Falcon Scott is widely known as a polar explorer, his expeditions were secondary to his primary career as a British naval officer. The purpose of this paper is to introduce a comprehensive review of Scott’s professional career, which in virtually every respect runs counter to the narrative presented by Roland Huntford in his book *Scott and Amundsen*, sometimes titled *The last place on earth* (Huntford 1979, 2002).

Huntford’s first charge would seem to be that the Edwardian-era Royal Navy (RN) was mediocre at best and incompetent at worst, and that even within such an organisation Scott was perceived as ineffectual and unworthy. Huntford repeatedly presents the navy as mediocre or worse in ability:

The Royal Navy of the last two decades of the nineteenth century, though numerically imposing, was backward, drowsy and inefficient (Huntford 1979: 117, 2002: 111).

[T]he system of blind obedience and centralization . . . maintained the hierarchy of rank rather than the efficiency of function . . . Officers, even captains of Her Majesty’s ships, became automata, acquiring life only through orders from a superior (Huntford 1979: 118, 2002: 112).

Sir Clements [Markham] upheld Naval domination and ensured, at a critical time, the rule of regimented mediocrity (Huntford 1979: 143, 2002: 135).

The national myth was all against a systematic and professional approach. The Navy, in the words of Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond, was ‘breeding amateur Naval officers’ (Huntford 1979: 162, 2002: 155).

In a situation calling for judgement and initiative, Naval discipline failed (Huntford 1979: 538; 2002: 520).

Huntford’s charges that the navy of this era was ‘backward, drowsy and inefficient’ are vague and anecdotal,

lacking the concrete evidence necessary to support such strong assertions. By contrast, naval historian E.J. Grove paints a portrait of a navy which reacted positively both to criticism from within its own ranks and to European rivals’ developments during this period (Grove 2005: 69–107). Huntford’s image of all naval officers as no better than ‘automata’ is highly unrealistic. Moreover, Huntford’s cited source for his criticism is itself problematic: he cites Richmond in 1909 as an authority, and lists Richmond’s observations from 1909–1920, *Portrait of an admiral* (Marder 1950) as a source in his 1979 bibliography (Huntford 1979: 616). However, Richmond’s attacks on poor training did not concern officers of Scott’s generation. Both Scott and Richmond trained in the 1880s: in 1909 Richmond ‘disagreed’ with the ‘educational scheme’ (Marder 1950: 18) of the naval reformer Admiral Sir John ‘Jacky’ Fisher, a scheme implemented from 1902 onwards. Huntford’s general suggestion of naval incompetence can be countered by a look at the Royal Navy’s contribution to WWI: as Massie points out, ‘had [Britain’s] massive surface sea power not existed, Germany would have won the war’ (Massie 2005: 745). Puzzlingly, Huntford argues for German ‘ascendancy in Europe’ and British ‘decay’ from 1870 onwards (Huntford 1979: 115, 2002: 109–110) but one should never lose sight of the fact that it was the *British* navy whose strategic blockades proved a decisive factor in the 1918 victory, and it was the *German* navy that was incarcerated at Scapa Flow at the end of the war.

Huntford has also made many negative statements concerning Scott’s naval competence. These have been allowed to go largely unchallenged, and we aim to refute them. Primary evidence relating to Huntford’s charges is available, so we intend to go deeply into Huntford’s conclusions, with each argument identified and addressed. Huntford’s original 1979 edition of *Scott and Amundsen* contained some specific references and endnotes, though these were removed from the revised 1983 shorter edition and subsequent editions (Rosove 2001: 204–205). This removal is a pity, especially in the light of a comment in one of Huntford’s own book reviews that ‘*The fate*

of *Franklin*. however, is marred by one particular sin: Mr Owen has concealed his sources... In a book such as this which (effectively) makes much use of quotations, sources are mandatory' (*Times Literary Supplement* (London) 12 May 1978: 519). We could not agree more that clearly-cited sources are mandatory: our quotations from Huntford's work will cite pagination from both his original 1979 and later 2002 (1999 revision) editions.

Our first aim is to identify those statements of Huntford's which are not backed up with specific citation of evidence, or which cite sources not strictly relevant to the topic. Our second aim is to identify statements which appear to be based upon a misreading of evidence, or ignorance of other crucial evidence. As well as this, we hope to provide an overall view of the Royal Navy in Scott's era and to establish a context lacking in Huntford's presentation. The evidence shows it to have been an organisation that recognised and commented upon both fault and merit in its men, and Scott appears to have been one of the most able naval officers of his generation.

Scott's early naval career, 1882–1899

Scott entered the Navy aged 14 as a cadet on the training ship HMS *Britannia*. His naval record (Scott 1881–1912) shows a first-class certificate as a cadet; in his five lieutenant's examinations Scott achieved 4 first-class certificates and 1 second-class. Only 5 sub-lieutenants in the list of 53 candidates (*Navy List* August 1889: 94–95) achieved these high grades, and no candidate received 5 first-class certificates across the board. Scott achieved joint first place ranking alongside four others, graduating in the top 10% of his class. Huntford himself allows that Scott achieved four first-class passes out of five, stating in 1979 (though not in his 1999 revision) that Scott had come out 'near the top of his class' (Huntford 1979: 119, 2002: 113). Huntford's later charge that Scott had only 'mediocre prospects' (Huntford 1979: 133, 2002: 126) is untenable, given Scott's excellent results. In Scott's sub-lieutenant's record, Captain E.J. Church stated in 1885 that he was 'a promising young officer' and in 1886 Captain G. Noel called him 'an intelligent and capable young officer' (Scott 1881–1912).

Career progression for an officer in the Victorian/Edwardian navy was as follows (Fig. 1). This progression is based on the authors' analysis of *Navy Lists*, in particular the July 1907 issue (*Navy List* July 1907: 85–147). Two years as a sub-lieutenant usually led to promotion to lieutenant. The next 10–12 years were critical: if a lieutenant reached commander, promotion to captain would normally come within 5–6 years. Once a captain, flag rank was a near-certainty as long as sea time and shore establishment requirements had been met. From this one would progress through the ranks of rear-admiral, vice-admiral, admiral with the highest being admiral of the fleet. A brief outline of the administrative roles within the Admiralty is also useful. The First Lord of the Admiralty, the navy's civilian chief, was either a

ROYAL NAVAL OFFICER HIERARCHY

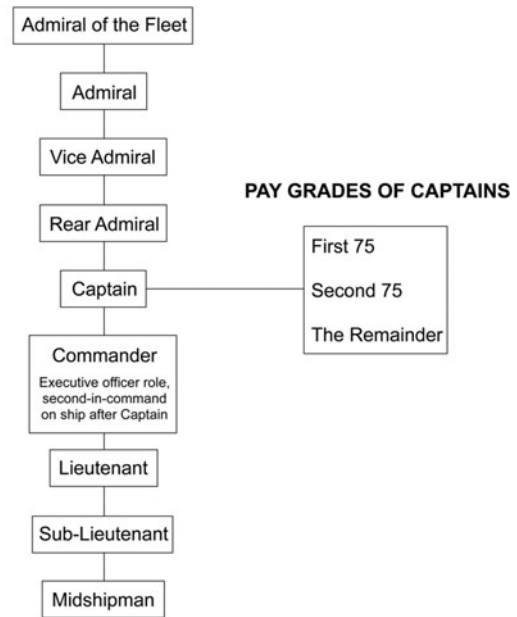


Fig. 1. The hierarchy of the Royal Navy

member of the House of Lords or the Commons. He was a member of the cabinet, and personally responsible to the prime minister. Within the Admiralty itself were four sea lords, each with his own department. The first was the chief naval adviser to the First Lord of the Admiralty, and could be regarded as the *professional* head of the navy; the second was in charge of naval personnel; the third, of procuring and equipping the fleet; and the fourth, of supplying the fleet.

To return to Scott's career, it should be noted that *all* active duty lieutenants started as general service officers. Out of these, a small minority were sent on courses to become torpedo officers, gunnery officers and navigators. These special qualifications were recognised by additional pay: for torpedo and gunnery officers an additional £63 17s above the normal pay of £182 10s, for navigators £45 12s 6d (*Navy List* 1899: 629). In 1891 Scott applied for the 2-year torpedo officers' course on HMS *Vernon*: with 49 lieutenants applying for only 5 places he was initially doubtful of his chances (Crane 2006: 44), but succeeded, probably due to his excellent examination results and praise from Captains Noel, Church and Hulston.

Upon graduation, Scott served as torpedo officer with the designation '(T)' before his name: this offered prestige and a pay increase. However, Huntford calls Scott 'an obscure, rather dull torpedo lieutenant with mediocre prospects' (Huntford 1979: 133, 2002: 125–126), even arguing that the torpedo specialism could have *limited* Scott's future:

The Royal Navy was starting to expand... As long as [Scott] avoided the grosser forms of incompetence he could expect a reasonable career. But he was typed as a torpedo specialist. The summit of his profession,

the captain on the bridge of a battleship, the admiral commanding a fleet, seemed beyond his reach (Huntford 1979: 123, 2002: 116).

Huntford's argument appears to be that the torpedo specialism could have barred Scott from reaching even the rank of captain. In reality, lieutenants with special qualifications in the demanding field of weaponry had higher status than others not so qualified. Huntford further alleges that torpedo work was inferior to gunnery ('Gunnery was the premier branch, but it attracted the best officers, and Scott sensed his chances there were slim' (Huntford 1979: 121, 2002: 115)), but he cites no evidence for this, and no such distinction was made in practice: torpedo and gunnery officers received the same annual bonus (*Navy List* 1899: 629). Holding a specialism did not indicate limitations. Should vacancies occur on a ship, a gunnery or torpedo officer was often expected to perform not only his specialist duties but those of an absent general service officer too, as can be seen in 1897 (although Gwynn misdates this to 1899) with Scott taking over his colleague Lt C.S. Hickley's general service duties on HMS *Majestic*, the flagship of the Channel Fleet, after Hickley's departure (Gwynn 1939: 37).

By July 1898 Scott also had the executive officer role of first lieutenant on HMS *Majestic*. This workload was further increased in July 1899, when Scott became acting commander until the new commander arrived in September. Scott's work must have merited praise, as in June 1899 Vice Admiral H.H. Rawson submitted Scott's name to the Admiralty for promotion, following this with further recommendations in November 1899 and May 1900 (Scott naval record).

Thus it is misleading to suggest that a 'torpedo officer' could suffer barriers to promotion: in fact, torpedo work was a common factor with many naval high-fliers. Torpedo officers who reached 'the summit of their profession' include Admirals of the Fleet Sir A.K. Wilson; Sir H.B. Jackson; Sir F. Doveton Sturdee; Sir C. Madden; Sir F. L. Field; Sir D. Pound, and Sir J. Somerville. Contrary to Huntford's allegations, torpedo work evidently did attract some of the 'best officers'.

HMS *Amphion's* Captain Hulston stated of Scott in 1889 that 'as officer of the watch Mr Scott has merited my confidence, I consider him a most promising young officer' (Memorandum 1900). However, during this period Huntford has alleged misconduct from Scott. Huntford has identified missing time in the records during Scott's 1889 assignment in Coquimbo, Chile, concluding that '[t]here is the hint of an irregular trip home, the protection of a superior officer and a cover up' (Huntford 1979: 120, 2002: 114). Huntford cites no evidence placing Scott in England during this period. In 2005 the biographer David Crane undertook archival work reducing the 'missing time' in Scott's official record to only eleven weeks in total, finding Scott on active service during 1889 and filling in other gaps as well as confirming that there

was no direct ship to convey Scott to England and back again during the relevant period (Crane 2006: 39n–40n). Huntford not only suggests deliberate misconduct from Scott without citing evidence, but further speculates that 'a superior officer' could have engaged in a 'cover-up' to protect Scott. We can find no evidence to indicate naval 'cover-ups' of gross breaches of protocol from junior officers, and no reason even to speculate that Scott could have received such favouritism. Scott's one family naval connection, his maternal uncle W.H. Cuming, had retired two years earlier in 1887 as a Rear-Admiral (*London Gazette* 14 June 1887: 2) and would have had no influence. Moreover, Scott was in Huntford's own words 'the son of a provincial brewer, under the plebeian necessity of living on his pay' (Huntford 1979: 133, 2002: 126) and hence not the class of person for whom any 'superior officer' would have risked his career in a 'cover-up'.

Scott's graduation from the *Vernon* torpedo course in 1893 with a first class certificate (Scott naval record) was marred by his only recorded naval error: running his first command, the torpedo boat TB-87, aground in Falmouth harbour. His Captain's report states:

August 1893: Due care does not appear to have been taken to keep Torpedo Boat off ground in Falmouth harbour, and cautioned to be more attentive in future. (Scott confidential records).

Huntford finds great significance in Scott's early error:

It was an odd incident in a first command. There is the suggestive image of excellence in theory and deficiencies in practice following hard upon each other. There is the glimpse of an unlucky officer. Scott left *Vernon* with a tiny question mark hanging over him (Huntford 1979: 122, 2002, 115).

Torpedo Boat No. 87, [Scott's] first command, had run aground where it required exceptional ill fortune to do so. In the service of the sea, luck is a very real personal attribute (Huntford 1979: 230, 2002: 219).

In reality, this was hardly 'suggestive', 'exceptional ill fortune' or 'an odd incident in a first command': accidents sometimes happen when inexperienced young officers are first given charge of naval vessels. Scott's colleague on HMS *Majestic* H.H. Campbell is a case in point, having grounded the gun-boat HMS *Starling* early in his career for which he was court martialled and 'severely reprimanded' (Campbell confidential reports, April 1887). However, this did not prevent Campbell's becoming Admiral Sir H.H. Campbell by 1921. Evidently the navy could pardon a novice error at the start of an officer's career.

Scott's Captains' reports are presented below:

Dec 94: 'Vulcan'. Capt. Durnford. Very satisfactory + promising - has performed duties in most creditable manner. Skilful and successful Torpedo Officer .

Aug 96: ‘Defiance’. Capt. Jackson. Very zealous, hardworking, and clever officer. Recommended for advancement.

July 97: ‘Jupiter’ Capt. MacLeod. Recommended for advancement – very attentive and painstaking. (Scott confidential reports)

Captain C.G. Robinson of *Vulcan* also described Scott as ‘a zealous and excellent torpedo officer’ (Summary of certificates 1900). On Scott’s main naval record we find for the 1899–1900 period on *Majestic*: ‘Recommended for promotion by Adml. Rawson 1 June’ 99. May 1900 name submitted for promotion V. Adml H.H. Rawson. 21 Nov ‘99 recommended for promotion by V.A. Rawson’. (Scott naval service record).

Huntford writes that by June 1899 ‘Scott had at long last been recommended for promotion’ (Huntford 2002: 126) but Scott’s first recommendation for advancement had come three years earlier in August 1896, from Jackson; this was followed by another recommendation from MacLeod in July 1897.

From his novice error of 1893, Scott had risen by 1898 to first lieutenant on the Channel Fleet’s flagship HMS *Majestic*. As with ‘torpedo lieutenant’, ‘first lieutenant’ was not an official rank but it was third-in-command, an executive officer role. Sadly, Scott’s official naval records do not state explicitly that Scott was *Majestic*’s first lieutenant. However, other primary evidence confirms this fact: Scott states, in *The voyage of the Discovery* (1905), ‘In [1899] I was serving as first lieutenant of the *Majestic*, then flagship to the Channel Squadron’ (Scott 2009: 33). Scott’s *Terra Nova* colleague E.R.G.R. ‘Teddy’ Evans writes that in 1900 he was on ‘the battleship *Repulse*. Our flagship in the Channel Fleet was the *Majestic*, which had as her Torpedo Officer and First Lieutenant, Robert Falcon Scott’ (Evans 1958: 1). Above all it is confirmed by the Navy Lists, where Scott gained first place amongst *Majestic*’s lieutenants by August 1898.

Scott was appointed first lieutenant by his captain Prince Louis of Battenberg, who commended Scott for ‘great zeal and judgement’ (Summary of certificates 1900). A brief farewell note of 4 July 1899 indicates Battenberg’s trust in Scott:

Dear Scott

Herewith £2 for B___d [Board?]. I am very glad to hear so good an account of the Commander – your coaling is indeed first rate + taking the enormous amount into account, a distinct record like the other two. I shall be very glad to help Bates in any way. If you will write out whatever is wanted I will gladly sign it. It had better be dated 27 June[.]

I too regretted not seeing you on leaving – the fact is I tried to slip away without saying goodbye to anyone. You have nothing to thank me for. I required a reliable first Lieut + was glad to get him

Ever yours truly

Louis Battenberg (Battenberg 1899)

From this we see that Battenberg trusted Scott to settle an unpaid bill for him; that Commander E.E. Bradford had given a ‘good account’ of Scott to Battenberg; that Scott’s ‘coaling’ (a strenuous refuelling exercise) warranted praise; that he was willing to assist Scott’s friend ‘Bates’, even to backdating a document for him; that he could safely confide in Scott his wish to ‘slip away’ discreetly; and that he considered Scott ‘a reliable’ first lieutenant and was ‘glad’ to have had his services. Such written evidence of trust and approval directly counters Huntford’s assertion that Scott ‘had not impressed the captains under whom he had served’ (Huntford 1979: 123, 2002: 116).

In addition to being *Majestic*’s torpedo officer and first lieutenant, Scott spent ten weeks as acting commander, second in command of the ship, to cover the period between Bradford’s departure on 30 June 1899 and Commander D. de Chair’s arrival in September. Scott’s letter home reveals the weight of this responsibility: ‘I am Commander until De Chair arrives in England ... [I]t is a wonderful opportunity but it means work unending as my own torpedo work has to go on somehow’ (Scott 1899a). When de Chair arrived, Scott wrote that he ‘is very green and depends pretty much on me so for the present I shall have a pretty difficult task’ (Scott 1899b). Scott continued in a supporting command role for some time afterwards: by 15 October 1899 he wrote that ‘[t]he new captain [Egerton] is very pleased with the ship and the way things are done’ (Scott 1899c).

As noted above, Huntford’s verdict on Scott is that he ‘had not impressed the captains under whom he had served. In the background lurked mistrust of his capacity to deal with men and ships’ (Huntford 1979: 123, 2002: 116–117). To ascertain the justice of this, one must consult the primary evidence. There is no criticism in Scott’s written record after 1893. Captains Durnford, Robinson, Jackson, and MacLeod all explicitly praised him, the last two recommending promotion. Battenberg had praised Scott, trusting him with Hickley’s duties; his note indicates that Commander Bradford had praised Scott as well. Egerton appointed Scott as acting commander, second-in-command, in July–September 1899, leaving Scott effectively to run *Majestic*’s 670 officers and ratings (Gardiner 1979: 34). On three separate occasions Vice-Admiral Rawson recommended Scott’s promotion. The evidence indicates that Scott *had* ‘impressed’ his superiors.

Crane, however, appears unimpressed by Scott’s commendations, stating that by 1900:

Nobody suggested that he would sooner go into battle or spend a polar winter with [Scott] than any man in the service. No captain thought him one in a thousand. All, when brought to think of him, spoke simply in terms of ‘entire satisfaction’ ... ‘a most promising officer’ ... ‘a zealous and painstaking young

officer'... 'of most value to the service' (Crane 2006: 84).

With the phrase 'one in a thousand' Crane is clearly citing someone else's report, judging Scott inferior by comparison. His source is Huntford, who contrasts Scott with his *Discovery* junior officer Lieutenant Charles Royds as follows:

Egerton, Scott's commanding officer on H.M.S. *Majestic*... was strangely tepid when asked for a recommendation [for Scott's Royal Geographical Society reference]. 'No officer having previous knowledge of Arctic or Antarctic work being forthcoming', he wrote, 'I am at a loss to name any officer who is likely to be more suitable.' Of Royds, by contrast, one of his captains had written that he was 'one in a thousand and if I had to select a man from the whole navy to follow me into action or to spend an arctic winter with, I should certainly choose Royds' (Huntford 1979: 136; 2002: 128–129).

Royds' polar reference was written by Captain C.H. Cross. Before using Cross's superlatives as their yardstick for judging Scott, both Huntford and Crane should have checked Cross' authority for judging Royds. Royds' service record reveals that this 'one in a thousand' had served under Cross on HMS *Champion* as a sub-lieutenant, a low rank, from 8 October 1897 to 9 January 1899 (Royds 1892–1909). One cannot believe that Royds, then an inexperienced sub-lieutenant aged 21–22 and assigned minor duties mostly under supervision, could have proved himself worthy of Cross' rapturous description. Cross' inflated praise may have been due to Royds' connection with the influential Rawson family: Royds' uncles were the late polar officer Commander W. Rawson and Vice-Admiral H.H. Rawson, another of Royds' three polar referees. Since Huntford knew of the nepotistic Royds-Rawson connection (Huntford 1979: 135, 148, 2002: 127–128, 142), it is a pity he was not more sceptical of Cross' excessive praise for an officer whose performance Cross would have witnessed only at the lowly and limited rank of sub-lieutenant.

Finally, Cross had no polar experience, so could not fairly judge Royds' aptitude; however, Egerton had served on the Nares Arctic Expedition of 1875–1876 (Coleman 2007: 201) and could assess Scott's potential. Huntford calls Egerton's evaluation 'strangely tepid', but let us examine it in full:

Lieutenant Robert F. Scott the Torpedo Lieutenant of H.M. ship under my command is in my opinion a very worthy candidate for the command of the Antarctic Expedition and no officer having previous knowledge of Arctic or Antarctic work being forthcoming I am at a loss to name any officer who is likely to be more suitable. Lieut. Scott is an officer of great capabilities and possesses a large amount of tact and common sense, he is of strong physique and robust health –

a scientist and an expert in electricity. Very keen, zealous, of a cheerful disposition, full of resource and a first rate comrade. He has had considerable experience in square rigged ships and writes a clean and concise report. I therefore have much pleasure in recommending him to the Committee of selection (Egerton 1900a).

Huntford's evaluation, 'strangely tepid', must be considered a misreading. Seen in full, a more accurate evaluation would be 'enthusiastic'. Egerton also wrote to Sir C. Markham in April 1900:

You certainly could not do better than put Scott in command he is just the fellow for it, strong steady and as keen as possible, genial, scientific, a good head on his shoulders and a very good officer. I am in hopes he will get his promotion [to Commander] in June, he thoroughly deserves it (Egerton 1900b).

Scott was indeed promoted in June 1900. A memorandum 'on the qualifications of Lt R.F. Scott' survives in the RGS Archive, listing commendations from 9 superiors (Memorandum 1900): in the same archive a 'summary of certificates' lists a total of 16 positive comments from 14 superiors (Summary of certificates 1900). In the next section, Scott's motivation for going to Antarctica will be examined.

The *Discovery* expedition, 1900–1904

Huntford's argument appears to be that Scott had no talent as a naval officer and that, to rise within the navy, he was forced towards polar exploration:

[Scott] was not well thought of in the Service. Each month the Navy List rubbed in the point with its tale of contemporaries getting on and leaving him behind. The path ahead seemed blocked... When the Antarctic Expedition was announced, Scott, evidently acting on a hint, saw in it the much sought passport to promotion (Huntford 1979: 132, 2002: 124–125).

However, this is unquestionably incorrect. Scott's 'path to promotion' was not 'blocked': after ten years as a lieutenant, he had five promotion recommendations. Antarctic exploration even had a chance of *delaying* Scott's promotion to captain. It normally took 5–6 years for a commander to attain eligibility, and a requirement was a year's sea service on a warship (Order in Council 1870). Scott could not meet this requirement until after his expedition. Moreover, when Scott returned from Antarctica in 1904 the First Sea Lord W. Kerr hinted strongly that he could not afford further absence from active duty. Upon Scott's requesting leave to write his memoir, Kerr commented to Lord Selborne that whilst the Admiralty had no objection, 'For [Scott's] own sake and that of his future in the Service I hope he may be available for Naval service, as apart from geographical, after six months' (Gwynn 1939: 91). Kerr's distinction between 'Naval' and 'geographical' service shows that

polar exploration was extraneous to naval concerns: he even hints that too long an absence could damage Scott's 'future in the Service'. Thus we see that polar exploration could not be considered a 'passport to promotion' for Scott's naval career.

Scott applied for the expedition primarily for financial reasons. In 1898, after the deaths of his father and younger brother Archie within an 8-month period, Scott became the 'man' of the family, supporting his widowed mother and two unmarried sisters. His sister Ettie's husband, the politician William Ellison-Macartney, had agreed to cover Archie's £120 share of the £190 needed to support the Scott family (Gwynn 1939: 33). However, Scott still had to take the swiftest possible route to financial security: in the event of a change in Ellison-Macartney's finances, Scott could not afford the full £190 on his lieutenant's pay.

In 1899 Scott's base pay as a lieutenant of over 8 years' standing had risen from £182 10s to £219, and with his additional torpedo specialist's pay of £63 17s 6d and senior lieutenant's bonus of £27 7s 6d he would have received a total of £310 5s (*Navy List* 1899: 628). Out of this Scott provided £70, roughly 22% of his income, to help support his mother and sisters. Assuming promotion to commander, Scott would have had his senior lieutenant and torpedo specialist's bonuses removed, and hence only a slight increase to £365 *per annum* (*Navy List* 1899: 628). This was for a commander who served as a second-in-command; however, a small minority of commanders were in charge of their own vessels, serving as captains, receiving additional pay of £68 (*Navy List* 1899: 628). An annual salary of £433 would have provided the £190 necessary to support Scott's family in Ellison-Macartney's absence, but this would have afforded Scott no real relief from financial worries.

Thus Scott was keen to command the proposed Antarctic expedition. He drew around £569 for the year planning the expedition, getting £32 5s per month from the expedition alongside naval half-pay of 10s per day (not his full pay of £1 per day stated by Pound) (Pound 1966: 27) and at sea this became £885 per annum: RGS pay of £10 per week (£520) added to his base naval pay of £1 per day (£365) (Pound 1966: 33). Scott was more than doubling his pay: with food provided, he had no mess bills or other naval expenses. On his return in September 1904, he was finally able to treat his family to a better standard of living:

During his time in the Antarctic, he had been able to save money. His first thought now was to make up his mother's allowance to £200 a year. He also settled her and his two sisters in a rented house, 56 Oakley Street, Chelsea Embankment. As a rare personal indulgence, he 'went to a first-class tailor to be provided with a first-class suit', a gesture of release from the penury he had so long endured (Pound 1966: 115).

Thus it is clear that it was primarily financial concerns, not ambition, which drove Scott to the Antarctic.

As his mother would tell him in 1908, 'You have carried the burden of the family since 1894, it is time now for you to think of yourself and your future' (Gwynn 1939: 106–107). It is strange that Huntford does not stress Scott's long-term financial support for his mother and unmarried sisters (Huntford 1979: 236, 2002: 225). Scott's other biographers think this issue highly relevant (Gwynn 1939: 31–33; Seaver 1940: 25–29; Ludlam 1965: 28; Pound 1966: 17, 115; Brent 1974: 21, 100; Thomson 1977: 21, 23, 86; Huxley 1977: 20, 135; Fiennes 2004: 23; Crane 2006: 53–59).

Scott was paid in full by the navy throughout the expedition, and he was placed on the books of HMS *President*, a depot ship. His duties were described on his record as 'Service with the National Antarctic Expedition' (Scott naval record). Scott was told in his letter of appointment that 'we [the Royal Society (RS) and the RGS] have requested that your time may be allowed to count as service at sea, while so employed' (Lister and Markham 1900). The aim was to safeguard Scott's naval career, and Scott expressed his gratitude: '[I] feel that whilst in your service, I can confidently leave in your hands, my interests in a profession to which I am devotedly attached' (Scott 1900).

Huntford has argued that Scott's being permitted to leave for the Antarctic indicated naval disapproval:

First-class officers would not now want to bury themselves in the Polar regions for two or three years; the Navy would be unwilling to let its best men go... The whole pattern of Scott's career, before going to the Antarctic, points to mistrust of his ability to handle ships, and a tendency to keep him away from the pathway leading to command (Huntford 1979: 133, 228, 2002: 125, 218).

Such suggestions of 'mistrust' and deliberately curtailed career progression are erroneous. By the end of 1900 Scott had already been the first lieutenant, and acting commander, on the Channel Fleet's flagship, with five recommendations for promotion. The First Lord of the Admiralty G. Goschen had indeed been reluctant to see Scott depart, lamenting that Scott was 'relinquishing a brilliant naval career' (Pound 1966: 23). The navy would never have permitted an incompetent officer to lead a highly-publicised polar expedition: the Admiralty even sent extracts from Scott's confidential reports to the Royal and Royal Geographical Societies (Memorandum 1900; Summary of certificates 1900), demonstrating its support for Scott.

Scott was accordingly chosen as leader. The *Discovery* expedition's achievements (1901–1904) are beyond the scope of this article. Yelverton's *Antarctica unveiled* (2000) provides a thorough assessment. We will therefore only comment on that element which has been alleged to have had a negative impact on Scott's naval career. This was the presence of the relief expeditions of the SY *Morning* and the former whaler SS *Terra Nova*. *Morning*

first arrived in 1903 and attempted, unsuccessfully, to extricate *Discovery* from the ice, then returned in 1904 accompanied by *Terra Nova*. Both ships assisted *Discovery*'s release, all three returning safely to New Zealand on 1 April 1904.

Huntford argues that the mere fact that the *Discovery* was in need of relief expeditions would have damaged Scott's naval prospects: 'By letting *Discovery* be frozen in two seasons in a row, he had caused an impressive rumpus... The Admiralty were not amused by the affair, and blamed Scott for allowing *Discovery* to be frozen in' (Huntford 1979: 184, 2002: 177, 178).

Some examination of context is needed. The charge that Scott was to be 'blamed for "letting *Discovery* be frozen in" is hindsight': in 1901 it was not evident to Scott that this would have resulted in getting stuck for longer than one season, as de Gerlache's *Belgica* had been frozen in and then released after a year in the Antarctic in 1898–1899. Scott also did not know of, and could not be blamed for, the tortuous negotiations that had gone on in his absence. In September 1901 Scott's patron Sir C. Markham of the RGS bought the whaler *Morning* for the first relief expedition; she found *Discovery* in January 1903, but when she left in March for New Zealand, *Discovery*, in spite of all efforts, was still trapped in the ice 5 miles from open water (Huxley 1977: 103, 109). This news resulted in Markham's second relief effort, a joint application by the RS and RGS for a Treasury grant of £12,000 and two relief ships. In May 1903, Prime Minister Balfour stated in Parliament, 'The Government are prepared to contribute to the relief of the officers and men on board the "*Discovery*," which is now ice-bound... The course taken by the two learned societies responsible for the expedition in respect to the contribution of money and men made by the Government is greatly to be regretted.' Balfour then made serious criticisms of the RS and RGS's handling of the expedition's funding (*Hansard* (London) 26 May 1903). The government's displeasure must have been made clear to Scott: however, his subsequent swift promotion demonstrated that the Admiralty did not penalise him for a situation beyond his control.

Yelverton (2000: 313–314) and Tarver (2006: 45–46) state that *Discovery*'s release was achieved by *Terra Nova*'s butting the ice, explosives laid by the crews of all three ships, and a significant change in the weather. However, Huntford in 1997 was the first to allege that '[*Discovery*] was rescued by a relief ship, the Dundee whaler *Terra Nova*, whose captain, Harry Mackay, skilfully blasted a passage through the ice – an uncomfortable fact which Scott tried to cover up' (Huntford 2010: 492). Aldridge's *The rescue of Captain Scott* (1999) expands to book length the idea that MacKay (sometimes spelled 'McKay', but 'MacKay' in contemporary reports) deserved sole credit for releasing *Discovery*, and that Scott deliberately concealed rescue efforts made by both MacKay and the *Morning*'s Captain William Colbeck.

To build its negative portrait of Scott, Aldridge's book has misquoted archive material (as demonstrated in Judy Skelton's book review (Skelton 2000: 16–17)), which seriously undermines Aldridge's credibility. Moreover, Aldridge's charge that Scott 'gave Harry McKay and his crew a passport to oblivion' (Aldridge 1999: 144) can be refuted by primary evidence. In response to erroneous negative media coverage, Scott sent a corrective telegram on 8 April from New Zealand which was reported in *The Times* ('Indignant learn reported I declared dispatch *Terra Nova* wasteful expenditure; reason for dispatch fully realized and ship provided great assistance - SCOTT' (*The Times* (London) 9 April 1904: 10)). Scott also wrote to the Admiralty stating 'I would not have it appear that we undervalue the services of the relief ships. Everything that could possibly be done for us, they were willing to do' (Gwynn 1939: 89). A new national award, the Polar Medal, was approved by the King for the captains and crews of all three polar ships (Yelverton 2000: 393–395, 398–399, 405, 407). Finally, Scott named a cape on Antarctica's Ross Island 'Cape MacKay' in MacKay's honour (Bertrand and Alberts 1956: 200), and 'Cape Colbeck' on the Edward VII Peninsula for Colbeck (Bertrand and Alberts 1956: 89). It is difficult to understand how Huntford and Aldridge could have thought Scott's permanent cartographical tributes of Cape Colbeck and Cape MacKay indicative of ingratitude, a 'cover up', or of MacKay being given 'a passport to oblivion'.

On the voyage back to Britain in 1904 Scott expressed worries over promotion in a letter to his mother: 'My future is dependent on the Admiralty' (Pound 1966: 111). Huntford has suggested that Scott's brother-in-law Ellison-Macartney used 'influence' to push through Scott's promotion: 'a letter from his mother told Scott that his brother-in-law, William Ellison-Macartney, now deputy master of the Mint, was again, under her prompting, using his influence' (Huntford 1979: 185; 2002: 179). However, Hannah Scott's letter, dated 4 June 1904, shows that Ellison-Macartney's 'influence' could not objectively be seen as significant:

Willy [Ellison-Macartney] is doing all he can and if he is not writing by this mail perhaps I had better tell you that he has seen Lord Walter Kerr, who tells him you are a marked man and assures Willy there is no cause for anxiety, that the ability you have shown is sure to make its mark. I know that Willy is doing his best... we have had many talks about it at the Mint and generally Willy is advised to lie low just now (Scott H, 1904).

Far from wielding a powerful backstage influence on Scott's career, here Ellison-Macartney is clearly being humoured by Kerr, then First Sea Lord, and even 'advised to lie low'. His efforts were unnecessary: the Admiralty would honour Scott's abilities promptly.

Scott was concerned because he had not met his requirement for warship service. The regulations of 1870,

revised in 1899, clearly stated that ‘To qualify a Commander for promotion to the rank of Captain on the Active List, he must have completed 2 years’ Sea Service as Commander, or its equivalent in Harbour Service, but one year of such period must be Sea Service in a ship of war at sea’ (Order in Council 1870). Strictly speaking, Scott *should* have served for a further year on a warship after returning from the Antarctic. The Admiralty waited until 10 September, the date of Scott’s arrival in Portsmouth, to announce Scott’s promotion: amidst the acclaim for the holder of the ‘Farthest South’, the omission of a year’s warship service from his naval record would have been considered too trifling to merit an objection. Though this could be deemed irregular, Scott’s achievements were sufficiently meritorious for advancement: furthermore, the Admiralty would never have waived the ‘warship’ technicality had Scott been considered incompetent or unpopular. Strangely, Huntford appears to think this timing indicative of an Admiralty *snub*:

Promotion did come but only, as Scott feared, when he returned to England. It was pointedly dated September 10th, the day that *Discovery* berthed at Portsmouth, a hint, perhaps, for all to read, that it was due to the Antarctic and not merit as a naval officer (Huntford 1979: 186; 2002: 179).

In reality, a 36 year old naval commander had just returned from leading a major national polar expedition, achieving a record with the ‘Farthest South’ and bringing honour to Britain and his service: naval promotion was the least he deserved. In the next section we shall examine Scott’s career as a captain, his advancement to important roles despite his junior status, and his brief association with the Freemasons.

Scott’s service as a captain and his first Admiralty position, 1904–1906

After Scott’s return Huntford states that ‘Scott had enemies in the Admiralty, particularly Captain Mostyn Field, who had opposed his appointment’ [to *Discovery*] (Huntford 1979: 185, 2002: 179). Huntford appears unaware that Field, a hydrographer, did not work in the Admiralty command section, and that Field changed his opinion of Scott after *Discovery*’s return, later stating ‘I have the highest admiration for the way in which Captain Scott conducted the expedition... no officer could be better qualified for carrying out what he undertook’ (Yelverton 2000: 327, 412). Huntford names no other alleged ‘enemies’ of Scott’s, but states that the Admiralty welcomed Scott’s leave of absence in 1904–1906 to write *The voyage of the Discovery* after his return. ‘If he went off to write his book, My Lords of the Admiralty could postpone any decision about his future’ (Huntford 1979: 188, 2002: 181). However, First Sea Lord Kerr recorded his hope that Scott would return to active duty soon (‘I hope he may be available for Naval service... after six months’ (Gwynn 1939: 91)): this is not the behaviour

of someone who wanted Scott out of the way. Huntford further alleges that Scott was now seen as ‘a problem’, as he had been absent from the Navy ‘at a time of rapid technical development’ (Huntford 1979: 188, 2002: 181). In fact, technical developments were irrelevant to Scott. As a captain, Scott’s concerns were strategic: like any other RN captain he could leave technical questions to his engineer, torpedo and gunnery officers.

In his pages covering the years 1904–1906, Huntford states that Scott had no experience of a chief executive officer’s role before being appointed captain:

Scott had never yet been a chief executive officer. This is the post of running a ship, usually considered an indispensable preliminary to command. Amongst other things, it teaches the future captain what it is like to translate orders into action (Huntford 1979: 228, 2002: 218).

In reality Scott’s strict naval training from the age of 14 had already taught him how to ‘translate orders into action’. In alleging that Scott had ‘never yet been a chief executive officer’ (a commander or first lieutenant), Huntford has overlooked Scott’s declaration (Scott 2009: 33) that he was *Majestic*’s first lieutenant, third-in-command. Huntford also missed Scott’s service as acting commander, second-in-command, which was soon followed by Rawson’s recommendation for promotion. Most puzzlingly, with his erroneous emphasis on Scott’s supposedly never having been a chief executive officer, Huntford is apparently suggesting that Scott had no experience which would fit him to be a captain *despite* Scott’s 3 years and 2 months’ stint as captain, first-in-command, of RRS *Discovery*. A commander usually serves under a captain’s guidance: however, contrary to Huntford’s assertion that RN officers were ‘automata, acquiring life only through orders from a superior’ (Huntford 1979: 118, 2002: 112), with *Discovery* Scott supervised his ship’s construction, independently recruited and organised his crew, and led a scientific expedition in unknown territories.

Huntford overlooks the *Discovery* expedition repeatedly. He asserts that Scott ‘had now been away from Naval service for more than five years [from 1901 to 1906], yet in between had risen from a rather senior lieutenant to a very junior captain’ (Huntford 1979: 228, 2002: 218). One might mistakenly infer from this that Scott had skipped an entire rank, that of commander (see Fig. 1), an erroneous impression reinforced with incorrect phrases such as ‘hoisted straight from Lieutenant (Torpedo) to Post Captain’ (Huntford 1979: 188, 2002: 181), and

Scott went to sea on H.M.S. *Victorious* [in 1906] for his first experience as the captain of a warship. His last Naval service afloat had been six years before [in 1900], as torpedo lieutenant of H.M.S. *Majestic* (Huntford 1979: 229, 2002: 218).

‘His last Naval service afloat’: with this phrase, Huntford sweeps aside the *Discovery* expedition of July

1901–September 1904 as if it had never existed. In reality, during this period Scott had indisputably held the official naval rank of commander, with the power of an independent captain. Huntford appears to believe that the technicality that Scott was not on official naval duties during the *Discovery* expedition allows him to disregard *Discovery* as part of Scott's command experience.

Upon promotion to captain Scott became the most junior captain on the active list, around 240 in total. The following analysis of the hierarchy (Fig. 1) is based on *Navy Lists*, particularly June 1907 (*Navy List* June 1907). Captains were divided into three pay grades, based on seniority (date of appointment). The longest-serving first 75 captains had an annual salary of £602 5s; the second 75 a salary of £501 17s 6d; and the remaining 90 or so captains ('the remainder') a salary of £410 12s 6d (*Navy List* October 1904: 774). Normal progression up the captains' list was as follows: the lowest tier or 'remainder' (those captains below the first 150 on the seniority list) normally commanded small protected cruisers, progressing to command armoured cruisers. The highest tier ('first 75') had the best opportunities, commanding one of approximately 50 first-rate battleships, landing a senior staff job with an admiral, or an administrative role in the Admiralty building in London.

Scott was still part of the 'remainder' on his return to active duty in 1905; however, instead of starting with a typical remainder-level job, Scott was given an Admiralty administrative role, the kind of job usually reserved for the top 75. Scott began in December 1905 as a 'temporary' member of the naval and marine staff (*Navy List* January 1906: 532), rising on 15 January 1906 to become an assistant director to the chief of the Naval Intelligence Division, Captain C. Ottley. Huntford appears to have misunderstood the importance of Scott's position, writing that 'at the end of 1905 he was made Assistant to the Director' (Huntford 1979: 229, 2002: 218): in fact Scott became one of five Assistant Directors, the second-highest rank in the department. In Gwynn's words, '[Scott's] special task here was to consider the whole question of trade routes in war, and to lay plans for the provision of extra defence by armed merchantmen' (Gwynn 1939: 99). Scott left in August 1906 after an offer from Rear Admiral Egerton, second-in-command of the Atlantic Fleet, to become his flag captain.

To clarify his new duties, a flag captain was in command of a ship carrying a flag officer (all grades between rear admiral and admiral of the fleet), hence the term 'flagship'. Just as with a regular captain, a flag captain was in command of the ship: however, unlike the former who could be fully independent, a flag captain was also subject to his superior officer's wishes.

Scott was not obliged to accept Egerton's job offer; he could have stayed in the Admiralty's convenient office routines. Back in 1905 he had also been offered the chance to become head of the naval training school Osborne College by Captain R. Wemyss, who, according to Wemyss' wife, had 'long felt boundless admiration' for

Scott (Wester Wemyss 1935: 142). Instead, Scott opted for active command, and as Egerton's flag captain again found himself in a 'first 75' job whilst still drawing a 'remainder' captain's pay.

Considering the esteem in which Scott was evidently held, it is difficult to understand Huntford's comments on this period: 'Scott worked with about twenty officers in the same department... but seems to have made little impression... Scott did his work competently, however, suggesting his bent may have been with facts and figures rather than with men and ships' (Huntford 1979: 229; 2002: 218). Scott was certainly 'competent' in 1906. He progressed from general 'naval and marine staff' to become an Assistant Director in Naval Intelligence, and Fisher would not have allowed him to rejoin the Admiralty in 1909 had he not worked to a high standard during his previous appointment. The reason why Scott made 'little' recorded impression is because his work was on *secret war plans*, a matter of national security. Huntford 'suggests' that Scott's 'bent' was 'with facts and figures rather with than men and ships', but Scott evidently preferred active service to administration, choosing to return to sea as Egerton's flag captain.

Since Egerton was a Freemason, one must address the issue of Masonic preferment in Scott's career. Like Ernest Shackleton (Huntford 2009: 42), Scott joined the Freemasons. This was common practice amongst naval officers: he joined in 1901, rising to a higher rank in 1904 (Crane 2006: 101–102). Far less common is a formal leave-taking from the Freemasons: Scott resigned from Navy Lodge No. 2612 in 1906 (Crane 2006: 102). In his 1999 revised edition Huntford comments on Scott's departure, 'Influenced perhaps by his new raffish acquaintances, he was a Freemason no more' (Huntford 2002: 226). Huntford's speculation on Scott's motivation for leaving, suggesting 'raffishness' and a weak will easily 'influenced', in no way acknowledges Scott's strength in tendering his formal resignation from a powerful society. The Freemasons is not an organisation that takes kindly to its members departing, but Scott must have been confident that his abilities would shield him from punishment. Crane lists Egerton, Beresford and Bridgeman as Masonic admirals (Crane 2006: 102); from 1906 to 1909 Scott served under all three. From their praise, as cited in the admirals' reports, it is clear that Scott was sufficiently talented for his Masonic superiors to overlook his defection from the Lodge.

In the next section we shall discuss the incident of the HMS *Albemarle*'s collision with HMS *Commonwealth* during a manoeuvres exercise on the night of 11 February 1907.

The *Albemarle-Commonwealth* collision, 1907

Huntford has seized on this incident as evidence of Scott's incompetence. His suggestion appears to be that it was fundamentally Scott's fault, and that the navy engaged in a cover-up to protect Scott from punishment.

This suggestion is emphasised in Trevor Griffiths' first scene with Scott in his 1985 television adaptation of Huntford's work, *The last place on Earth*. Griffiths invents a scenario in which his fictionalised Scott left the bridge to 'deliver a birthday greeting to a senior officer. Like any bell-boy' (Griffiths 1985). In reality Scott was forced to leave the bridge due to circumstances beyond his control, and cannot be accused of having been in dereliction of his duty that night.

Huntford's first charge against Scott is that Scott was not at his post ('Scott deserted the bridge of HMS *Albemarle* on an unnecessary errand just before she collided with HMS *Commonwealth*' (Huntford 1979: 370, 2002: 355)). However Scott's departure was due to his superior officer Rear-Admiral Egerton being absent from his battle station: furthermore, Scott was not engaged in 'an unnecessary errand'. The context was a military exercise. From Scott's 2 February 1907 letter we learn that in this exercise 'there is to be a good deal of testing of the wireless Telegraphy and actions of both Fleets will try + communicate + effect junctions whilst interfering + preventing such junctions in the Enemy' (Scott 1907a). In other words, 11 February would see a war game, in which ships would execute manoeuvres following wireless instructions sent by the head of each fleet.

All personnel were expected to be at their battle stations by 8pm (Gwynn 1939: 100), a time independently confirmed by another captain involved (Wester Wemyss 1935: 89). In the 15 February letter Scott explains that at 7.50pm he, Scott, was on deck, visiting first the after bridge 'to see that the wireless telegraphy office was in order' (Gwynn 1939: 101) and then the fore bridge. Scott remained on deck until 'after the signal had been executed' (the signal given by the flagship, Vice-Admiral W.H. May's *King Edward VII*, for an increase of speed), whereupon he 'left the ship in the hands of the officer of the watch, knowing that the Navigating Commander was also on the bridge' (Gwynn 1939: 101).

Scott left the fore bridge and 'went aft to get the cipher signals concerning the enemy' (Gwynn 1939: 101). These coded instructions for action were crucial: as Scott states in a letter of 20 February, 'I found at the time of the accident many, if not the majority of captains, were doing precisely what I was doing that is looking out the position of the Enemy as signalled and everyone agrees that considering the interest we all took it was a natural task for the moment' (Scott 1907b). Scott decoded the signals himself and at 8.08pm took them to his superior officer, Egerton. To do this, Scott had to leave the upper deck and go below to the admiral's 'cabin' (Gwynn 1939: 101).

Scott explains that 'there was nothing to cause anxiety until 8.12pm, four minutes after I had left the deck' (Gwynn 1939: 102). He continues:

[O]ne of the ships swung to starboard until her green side light became visible – this meant that she must be at least four points off her course. The next ship

to us the 'Africa' saw this in time and swung off to starboard in the same way. Then came our turn and our navigator, the coolest and most excellent officer, took charge of the ship directly and swung the ship off by a prompt act which alone saved us from colliding with the 'Africa' ... To show how quickly everyone must act at such times it is only sufficient to say that we struck [*Commonwealth*] at 8.17 only five minutes after that fatal green light showed ahead of us (Gwynn 1939: 102–103).

At 8.17pm Scott had been absent from the bridge for only nine minutes when the collision happened. Scott's letters and diagrams (Gwynn 1939: 100–104, Scott 1907b) explain how the collision occurred. The eight ships were in close formation: first came May's flagship HMS *King Edward VII*, and followed, in order, by HMS *Britannia*, HMS *New Zealand*, HMS *Africa*, HMS *Albemarle*, HMS *Commonwealth*, HMS *Hibernia* and HMS *Hindustan*. Soon after the start of this exercise the leading flagship *King Edward VII* had given instructions for the entire column, aligned on a diagonal from northwest to southeast and between 220–400 yards apart from each other, to increase speed. However, May failed to increase the speed on his own leading flagship, and the ship following directly behind her (*Britannia*) banked sharply to starboard to avoid colliding with her: this placed her in the path of *New Zealand*, which swerved to starboard to place herself in the path of *Africa*, who then swerved to starboard to place herself in the path of *Albemarle*. However, in banking to starboard to avoid *Africa*, *Albemarle* was then faced with *Commonwealth* directly in her path. Instead of taking prompt evasive action like the other ships, *Commonwealth* continued on her course directly in front of *Albemarle* which could not then avoid ramming *Commonwealth* side-on.

Huntford's first charge against Scott is that Scott should have been on the bridge of the *Albemarle*. In reality, since Scott had placed a trained officer in charge, he had fulfilled his duty as ship's captain; in going directly to Egerton he was fulfilling his responsibility as flag captain, answerable directly to Egerton. Huntford alleges that the decoding of the message and its delivery to Egerton are 'menial tasks, usually left to subordinates. Scott was running errands and fussing round a superior' (Huntford 1979: 230, 2002: 220). In reality, the evidence shows that it was not Scott but *Egerton* who tended to 'fuss' over trivial matters and who forced his officers into menial work. Scott wrote in a private letter to his sister on 21 March that during a typical day

it is impossible to sit down and work owing to the repeated interruptions and exasperating hours devoted to trivialities ... I know much now and could run this show off my own bat – but then in steps my Admiral – he is the dearest nicest man really but his methods are nigh impossible to me – he is always worrying over trifles and frittering away my time and his own over

details which ought to be left to subordinates – can you understand – he has no notion of his mission as an Admiral which is continually to take a wide grasp of fleet affairs and the larger organization which allows to each individual a specific sphere of usefulness (Scott 1907d).

This rather bitter letter, written five weeks after the accident, answers the question of why Scott had personally decoded and delivered the message. Scott preferred independence, but Egerton evidently had a habit of ordering Scott to go beyond his 'specific sphere of usefulness' and waste his time on 'details which ought to be left to subordinates'. Huntford attacks Scott for 'running errands', but as Egerton's flag captain Scott obviously could not *refuse* to run these errands. Scott had to meet his admiral's expectations, even if by doing so he was removed from the immediate centre of operations.

Huntford's and Griffiths' attacks on Scott disregard the context of the collision: they either do not mention, or place no significance upon, the fact that Scott's superior officer Egerton was still in his cabin at 8.08pm when Scott went below to deliver the instructions to him. Given that Egerton would have known in advance that the manoeuvres would start at 8pm (Gwynn 1939: 100; Wester Wemyss 1935: 89), it is difficult to understand why Egerton was still in his cabin after the 'battle' had commenced. One possible explanation is that, by staying in his cabin and requiring Scott to come below decks to him, Egerton was ensuring conditions of privacy for a discussion. Whatever Egerton's reason for remaining below, Scott as Egerton's subordinate could not have sent a man below with a message ordering his superior officer to come up on deck to see *him*. For Scott to rely on a messenger at this point risked the possibility of delay, or of Egerton's response being misreported. It should also be noted that May was known to be a poor communicator: Wemyss, in a private letter of 10 February 1907 (the day before the collision) wrote that 'this afternoon we have another meeting on board the flagship and it is much required because Admiral May's orders are so badly worded that they are difficult to grasp. What a real blessing is lucidity!' (Wester Wemyss 1935: 89). Had May's decoded instructions been unclear or ambiguous, Scott would have needed to go below to discuss them with Egerton in person.

Huntford states of the collision that 'It was one of those crises of command when the instinct of every captain ought to be – and indeed of every other captain of this fleet was – to stay at his post. Scott alone deserted it' (Huntford 1979: 231, 2002: 220). In reality, not every captain in the formation had been 'at his post': many were engaged in an equally 'natural task for the moment', that of 'looking out the position of the Enemy as signalled' (Scott 1907b), a task which would have distracted them from assuming command on the bridge. Huntford argues that 'as far as Scott was concerned, the nub of the matter is that [Scott] had not remained on the bridge until the

fleet had settled down to a change of speed' (Huntford 1979: 231, 2002: 220). Here Huntford uses Scott's own words against him. Scott, in describing the incident, evaluates his own role as follows:

I was quite justified in leaving the ship in charge of the officer of the watch, knowing that a highly experienced navigator was on the bridge; but it is arguable that the moment I chose for going below would have been more wisely deferred until after the ships had settled down from a change of speed. Furthermore, it is only since the accident that the full dangers of the formation and the circumstances under which we were placed in it, have become evident to me. I won't deny that if I had realized these as fully as I do now, I should not have left the bridge (Gwynn 1939: 103).

'If I had realized these as fully as I do now': at the time Scott's first duty was to Egerton and, in the absence of any indication of danger ('there was nothing to cause anxiety' (Gwynn 1939: 102)), Scott was entirely justified in leaving the ship in his subordinates' care. Had Scott left the ship unsupervised he would have borne some blame, but Scott evidently ensured the ship was in safe hands before he went below. Contrary to Huntford's allegation that 'the dangers were apparent at the time' (Huntford 1979: 230, 2002: 219), Scott on the bridge of the *Albemarle* could not have foreseen catastrophe at this point.

Furthermore, a change of speed in formation at night was not usually 'a critical manoeuvre' (Huntford 1979: 230, 2002: 220), but routine: it would not have required the captain's personal supervision. Scott could not reasonably have envisaged that, a mere four minutes after his departure, there would be a startling change of circumstances and that his ship would have to execute last-minute emergency evasive procedures. As the *Albemarle's* captain, Scott naturally wonders whether his presence above deck might have changed the outcome. In reality, even if Scott had remained on the bridge, it is unlikely that he could have prevented *Albemarle* from avoiding a collision with the oblivious *Commonwealth*.

In his account Huntford alleges that 'the fault [for the collision] was *Albemarle's* in not signalling with her syren as the others had done' (Huntford 1979: 230–231, 2002: 220). Here Huntford has evidently misread Scott's 15 February 1907 letter: he has consulted this text (Gwynn 1939: 100–104), since it is listed as reference 11 in Chapter 16 of his 1979 edition (Huntford 1979: 230, 593), yet he erroneously states that *Albemarle* alone had failed to signal with her siren when Scott's letter clearly states

[the 'New Zealand'] did not signal on her syren. The 'Africa' had to follow suit but she did not signal. Our navigator had to follow suit – though this act was the immediate cause of the collision it is quite clear that [Johnson] would have been into the 'Africa' had he

not put his helm over – the one thing he did not do was signal on his syren, but neither of the other ships had done so and it is doubtful whether anyone called on to act so promptly would have remembered to do so (Gwynn 1939: 103).

So we see that *Albemarle* was not the *only* ship that had failed to sound her siren in the crisis. Furthermore, even if Scott had been present on the bridge and thought to sound the siren, *Commonwealth* still might not have moved out of *Albemarle*'s path in time as she was at the crucial moment undergoing a change of personnel: as Scott states in his letter

the next ship [*Britannia*], found herself chasing the leader . . . & swerved to starboard, and the other ships followed suit down to the Commonwealth, in that ship the officers of the watch were relieving and neither the relieving or the relieved officer appreciated the situation so that practically she did nothing (Scott 1907c).

The accident was officially determined to have been caused, not by *Albemarle*, but by the faulty signal by the fleet's commander-in-chief Vice-Admiral W.H. May, from his flagship *King Edward VII*, which disoriented the entire close formation. As Scott remarks in his 20 February letter, 'I had some talk with Robinson of the *Africa* + he told me his view of the Fleet, that everyone condemned the formation + the signal that governed it' (Scott 1907b). A court of enquiry was later held at Gibraltar, 'To enquire into the Causes of this collision etc. with special reference to the signal made . . . by the C-in-C' (Scott 1907c). Scott writes to his mother that the evidence given:

was exactly what I expected and it established the case exactly as I have tried to put it before you. The report cannot but be very severe on the signal – May is at home to meet this – incidentally his evidence showed that the King Edward did not increase speed when she made the signal + this was the final cause of this Telescoping of the line (Scott 1907c).

In his drama, Griffiths' fictionalised Scott is summoned to an admiral for a reprimand (Griffiths 1985). However, the truth of Scott's post-collision communication with Vice-Admiral May is shown in his letter of 20 February 1907 (Scott 1907b). Far from condemning Scott, May admitted that the collision was caused by his own failure to increase the *King Edward VII*'s speed after having signalled for the following ships to increase theirs. In reality:

May told me he took the blame on himself and this is private—he said there would be an Enquiry but that he intended to be at home when the report came and to do his best to hush the whole thing up. He discussed the whole thing very plainly and it is evident he has discussed it and finds Sir A. Wilson in agreement –

he acknowledges the fault of the foundation of his signal but he argues that these sorts of things must be expected to happen occasionally (Scott 1907b).

However, despite having publicly admitted culpability for the collision, May avoided a court-martial. Perhaps May escaped punishment due to his connection with the First Sea Lord Fisher. May was scheduled to move from the Atlantic Fleet to working in Fisher's Admiralty as Second Sea Lord. Fisher was an irascible character whose tenure in the Admiralty had been characterised both by stringent naval reforms and an open feud with a rival, Admiral Lord C. Beresford, who was actively attempting to have Fisher replaced. This feud had polarised much of the naval establishment into joining either the 'Fishpond' (Fisher's supporters) or Beresford's adherents (Freeman 2009). One may speculate that, as Fisher now needed every possible supporter, he could not afford to dismiss May for this error.

But, there may be more to May's lack of punishment than Fisher's protecting a supporter. We must revisit Scott's 20 February letter. The comment that May intended to 'hush the whole thing up' is interesting: what would have needed to be 'hushed up'? May could not have hoped to prevent the news from being reported in the media: by 20 February the *Albemarle-Commonwealth* collision had *already* been mentioned in Parliament (Hansard (London) 18 February 1907). Scott's phrasing here may be revealing: 'May told me he took the blame on himself' could suggest that May had 'fallen on his sword' to protect some other party. If so, this party cannot have been Scott; not only was Scott not to blame, but the notion of a Vice-Admiral assuming personal blame to shield a mere *captain* is objectively unbelievable. It is possible, however, that May assumed official blame (and did 'his best to hush the whole thing up') in order to protect the Navy's reputation, and its commission of the 'King Edward VII' class of battleships in particular.

Of the eight battleships in the Atlantic Fleet's echelon that night, seven were of the recent 'King Edward VII' class: only Scott's ship, *Albemarle*, was not. This class were, in February 1907, the largest and most heavily-armed battleships before Fisher's new and magnificent *Dreadnought* was publicly unveiled in March. However, the 'King Edward VII' class had significant design flaws:

Owing to a quirk in the design of their underwater lines, they moved slightly crabwise through the water, their bows pointing a little to port or to starboard of the course they were steering. When seen steaming together as a squadron they appeared to make a crooked line and were known as a class as the 'Wobbly Eight' (Archibald 1984: 155).

These ships 'were difficult to keep on a steady course' (Gardiner 1979: 38). Their shortcomings were already known in naval circles: Vittorio Cuniberti of the Italian Navy referred to 'the eight new battleships of the King

Edward Class... scheduled to join the fleet in 1905 and 1906, as "monsters with short legs" (Massie 1991: 474). This was a jibe at their lack of speed and stamina; though this class of battleships was designed for 18–19 knots, they rarely reached full speed and could not sustain it for long periods (Massie 1991: 474). One ship in this class had already been noted for defective steering: *Commonwealth* 'developed such a degree of 'rudder wobble' during her first commission [in March 1905] that there was nothing for it but to pay her off into dockyard hands for the rudder seating to be modified and strengthened' (Parkes 1967: 430).

So seven ships out of the eight in the Atlantic Fleet on 11 February 1907 were of the 'Wobbly Eight', ships which had difficulties in keeping 'on a steady course' and problems with maintaining speed. It is therefore unsurprising that a sudden 'Telescoping of the line' occurred between *King Edward VII*, *Britannia*, *New Zealand* and *Africa*, and that *Commonwealth* failed to steer out of *Albemarle's* path in time. No-one has officially stated that these design flaws played any part in the collision of 11 February 1907; however, if this had been the case, this could never have been addressed at the Gibraltar Court of Enquiry. To prevent criticism of government and Admiralty, it would have been best not to publicise the fact that these British battleships found it difficult to keep on a steady course.

Was the collision entirely down to May's faulty signal, or did May take public responsibility for the purpose of concealing these battleships' defects? We will probably never know for sure. What we do know is that Scott himself played no part in causing the collision. Scott's success as *Albemarle's* flag captain is underlined by the farewell note from Vice-Admiral Curzon Howe in August 1907 to Egerton, 'The general conduct of HMS *Albemarle* whilst carrying your flag reflects the greatest credit on your Flag Captain and staff' (Gwynn 1939: 100), and Howe's own personal note to Scott, 'It has been a very great pleasure to me to have known and served with you. I shall watch your career with the truest interest' (Gwynn 1939: 100). In Griffiths' drama Scott is here told that he had 'no future in battleships' (Griffiths 1985), but the real Scott went on to command the battleship HMS *Bulwark* on 25 May 1908. As he states in a letter, 'From a service point of view this is a very good appointment. I shall be the most junior captain in separate command of a battleship' (Gwynn 1939: 119). This prestigious assignment demonstrates the Admiralty's awareness that Scott was not to blame for the collision. In the next section we shall examine Huntford's remaining charges against Scott's active service as a captain.

Scott's service as a captain on active duty, 1906–1909

The first of Huntford's charges against Scott appears to be that Scott did no discernible work in his role:

Scott held two commands within the year [1906], first H.M.S. *Victorious*, then H.M.S. *Albemarle*... both under curiously unsatisfying circumstances. In each case he was brought in towards the end of the commission, the ship already 'worked up'. His predecessor had trained the crew and got the vessel functioning as an organic whole... In two and a half years, Scott held four commands, all under like conditions (Huntford 1979: 229, 2002: 219).

Huntford is familiar with the term 'working up' a ship (bringing aboard a fresh crew and training them into a team), but does not convey what a captain's transfer means in human terms. Scott was not stepping into an easy, ready-made billet: change is stressful for both captain and crew. Whilst it is laborious to 'work up' a ship from scratch, a captain can often employ known and trusted crew members: it is far from easy to inherit an unfamiliar crew used to a previous leader's organisation. That Scott succeeded, despite this, in gaining excellent results testifies to his authority.

Furthermore, Huntford is factually incorrect in implying that Scott only commanded ships 'worked up' by others. Huntford once more disregards *Discovery*, which Scott 'worked up' in June 1900 with an entirely fresh crew. Furthermore, Scott's letter of 17 July 1908 to his wife states that 'We received orders to pay off, and re-commission on 18th August at Chatham. One small blow - a new crew for the *Bulwark* is to come from Devonport' (Gwynn 1939: 127). From 18 August 1908 to 24 March 1909 Scott worked up *Bulwark* from a 'nucleus crew' (a skeleton crew of essential officers and ratings) to a complete trained crew of 714 men (Gardiner 1979: 37): his success in this is shown by praise in his Admirals' reports.

Next, Huntford alleges that Scott's command of HMS *Essex* was somehow a punishment:

HMS *Essex*... was a cruiser; a step down from the battleships he had commanded, and which, taken with the long time on half pay, might have been interpreted as oblique censure for the collision of *Albemarle* (Huntford 1979: 238, 2002: 227).

This is another error: with the move to HMS *Essex* Scott had been appointed 'next senior to the Admiral in [his] fleet' (Gwynn 1939: 109) and given command, not of a single cruiser, but of a division of *three* cruisers (Gwynn 1939: 109–110). Instead of commanding around 670 men on a battleship, Scott now commanded three first-class cruisers (Gardiner 1979: 70) with crews totalling over 1800 men. This was not 'a step down'.

Huntford also thinks Scott's five months on half pay 'a long time': in reality, periods of unemployment on half pay were a necessary evil. There were 234 captains on the July 1907 *Navy List* (*Navy List* July 1907: 90–96) and around 200 jobs, so around 34 captains were unemployed by default at any given time: naturally many waited for suitable postings rather than taking the first job offered.

For example, Captains Beatty, Bridgeman and Egerton all had uninterrupted periods of unemployment of over a year: all rose to the rank of Admiral or higher.

Finally, Huntford states of Scott's leadership: 'He found himself with strong executive officers, like Commander (later Admiral Sir) W.W. Fisher, who really ran his ships' (Huntford 1979: 229, 2002: 219). This is a welcome change from Huntford's earlier assertion that all officers were 'automata, acquiring life only through orders from a superior' (Huntford 1979: 118, 2002: 112): evidently Huntford is aware that RN officers *were* capable of being 'strong' and of possessing agency and independent thought. One might gain from Huntford's summary the erroneous impression that Scott as captain did nothing whilst his subordinates 'really' did the work. In fact Scott kept a close eye on his executive officers' performance, as shown in a letter of May 1908: 'The commander is rather a nice sort of person but desperately slow, this first lieutenant who is also navigator is not brilliant either - this state of affairs calls for close supervision and is trying - things will improve doubtless with time' (Scott 1908). Contrary to Huntford's allegations, Scott did not always have 'strong' executive officers. The evidence shows that Scott was successful both with his own crews and those bequeathed to him: he was the one who 'really ran his ships'.

Upon leaving *Bulwark*, Rear Admiral S. Colville wrote to Scott on 15 August 1908:

It has been a very great pleasure to me having you as Flag Captain and I have so very much appreciated the way in which you have so ably carried out the duties and also assisted me in every way - from a selfish point of view I sincerely wish you were staying on with me (Scott 1881-1912)

In the next section we shall examine Scott's final Admiralty post; his relationship with Admiral Fisher, and Huntford's mischaracterisation of Scott as 'a 'big ship' man' and 'pointedly passed over' by his fellow naval officers.

Scott's second Admiralty position, 1909

Scott's last naval position was as an administrator in Sir John 'Jacky' Fisher's Admiralty from March- December 1909, serving as Naval Assistant to the Second Sea Lord Admiral Sir F. Bridgeman. In Gwynn's words, '[Scott's] special concern was with questions of personal qualifications - the judgment and selection of men for promotion' (Gwynn 1939: 161). Huntford clearly states that Scott's wife Kathleen had 'wangled for her husband' this position:

[She preferred] to stay close to the rulers of the Navy in the Admiralty building at the entrance to the Mall... She cultivated influential Admiralty officers; two in particular: Captain Mark Kerr and Captain Henry Campbell, an old shipmate of Scott. On them she exerted her forceful and fascinating personality.

By the end of the year she had wangled for her husband an Admiralty appointment as Naval assistant to Vice- Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman (Huntford 1979: 242-243, 2002: 231).

Such scheming is a very serious charge against both Scotts. Huntford cites no evidence in support, and a close look at his argument shows it to be unfounded. Campbell had no connection with Bridgeman's department, and Huntford's allegations of Kathleen's 'cultivating' Campbell make no sense in context: Campbell was more than just 'an old shipmate' of Scott's, as he had actually been Scott's best man at his wedding (Crane 2006: 373). As one of Scott's closest friends, Campbell would scarcely have required *Kathleen* to 'exert her forceful and fascinating personality' to influence him in Scott's favour.

As for Captain M. Kerr, Kathleen's other supposed target, he was not only not an 'Admiralty officer', but had not even been in London for Kathleen's 'cultivation'. In his 1979 edition Huntford states that Kerr held 'three commands in four years' from 1905 to 1909 (Huntford 1979: 230), hence Huntford should have been aware that from June 1907 to September 1908 Kerr had captained HMS *Implacable* in the Mediterranean Fleet (Kerr confidential reports), far from the Admiralty building in London. Furthermore, from September 1908 onwards Kerr was stationed in Tyneside (Kerr 1933: 47), supervising the completion of the battle cruiser HMS *Invincible*. Kerr's full-time supervision would have left him little time free for casual travel from Newcastle to London. When Kerr visited London to find Bridgeman his assistant in November 1908, it is most probable that Bridgeman himself had suggested Scott for the role.

Correspondence reveals that, far from 'wangling' her husband a job, Kathleen initially *refused* Kerr's offer on Scott's behalf (in an archive letter erroneously marked '01.12.1908' in another hand, but which could only have been sent *before* Scott's 30 November reply):

Dearest, Mark Kerr has been here for hours. Has got a thing he wants to know if you will take I told him you wouldn't - It's assistant to the 2nd Lord of the Admiralty in April - It will be Bridgeman. Full pay & maintenance pay - I told him you wanted to get in your sea time - he said he was sure you would have by April - I said I was sure you wouldn't - & there it is (Scott, K. 1908).

In summarily refusing this job offer on her husband's behalf without consulting him first Kathleen went too far, but the reason for her refusal is clear: Scott needed to accumulate sufficient 'sea time' for timely promotion to Rear-Admiral, and after two periods on leave and half-pay Kathleen believed he would prefer active duty. However Scott did want this job, replying in a letter to Kathleen clearly dated 30 November 1908:

Your letter has just come, *only just* come although it was post marked 28th... [A]ll things considered,

I'd be inclined to accept the offer made through Mark Kerr... The pros are – I should be at head quarters, ready to pick and choose in the future... The cons are certain points in sea service experience... Well, but it's too late I suppose. If so, don't worry; I am very well as I am. If not too late, you may tell Mark Kerr that I'll take the job (Gwynn 1939: 153).

Scott is evidently concerned that Kathleen's initial refusal to Kerr could have denied him this opportunity. We cannot understand how Huntford could have concluded that Kathleen had 'wangled' Scott this position: from this correspondence it is clear that Kathleen had in all innocence nearly *lost him* this job. Furthermore, Kerr was evidently so eager to recruit Scott that he spent 'hours' trying to convince Kathleen. Scott did not need *his wife* to persuade others to employ him: his proved abilities were sufficient recommendation.

On 20 March 1909 Scott wrote to Kathleen, 'Bridgeman... wants the organization of the office. I've sent something after much labour' (Gwynn 1939: 157). Scott had evidently been authorised to organise affairs. A position in the Second Sea Lord's division, dealing with personnel, gave Scott useful information on officers and men for his forthcoming expedition. In addition Bridgeman approved of Scott's polar venture, and agreed to assist him (Ross 1998: 148).

Bridgeman was known for delegating heavy administrative duties to subordinates: as Bridgeman's chief of staff in 1907 Captain Bacon had been 'greatly overworked', and upon his departure Fisher sent the reputable Captain Madden as replacement (Ross 1998: 141). In the words of Bridgeman's biographer Ross, '[w]hatever Bridgeman's limitations, Fisher made sure they were adequately compensated by the calibre of those around him' (Ross 1998: 141). Hence Fisher himself demonstrably had confidence in Scott's abilities.

Huntford states that Fisher 'could not have been less sympathetic to Scott' and that 'Scott was under a cloud' (Huntford 1979: 186–187, 2002: 180). However, Fisher was an eccentric man of extreme enthusiasms and hatreds, who declared a policy of being 'Ruthless, Relentless and Remorseless' and who, in his biographer Jan Morris' words, 'had no compunction in sacking people, humiliating them, slandering them and plotting behind their backs' (Morris 1995: 179). If Fisher had disliked Scott in 1909, Scott would never have been permitted to work in the building.

Furthermore, at this point Scott risked possible dismissal due to perceived allegiance to Fisher's *bête noire* Admiral Lord C. Beresford. Back in June 1908 Scott had accepted command of HMS *Bulwark* in the Home Fleet under Rear Admiral A.M. Farquhar: however, in October this ship moved to the Channel Fleet under Beresford's command, which could easily have made Scott appear one of 'Beresford's men' in Fisher's eyes. The historian Massie describes the Fisher-Beresford feud as follows:

By the beginning of 1908, the Fisher-Beresford vendetta had escalated into open civil war. Mere mention of Beresford's name could drive Fisher into a rage; every officer in [Beresford's] camp had become a traitor. Captain Edmund Slade, the Director of Naval Intelligence, kept a worried eye on the First Sea Lord. 'Sir J[ohn] is in a most nervous state as regards Lord C[harles] and what he may do' (Massie 1991: 527–528).

Things had not improved by 1909: in May, Bridgeman accidentally stumbled upon a clandestine gathering of anti-Fisherite admirals in Beresford's house (Massie 1991: 535–536). Now, with Fisher in a paranoid state, an explicit connection to Beresford could easily have damaged Scott's career.

Unfortunately Beresford's report in March 1909 praised Scott in glowing terms: 'No defect, very zealous and excellent judgment, fine physical qualities. Strongly recommended for advancement. An excellent officer of very varied experience, handles his ship very well. Will make a good Admiral' (Scott confidential reports). This should have finished Scott's chances at the Admiralty; however, Fisher allowed him to start working for Bridgeman that same month. Only an officer of marked ability could have survived the 'kiss of death' of Beresford's praise to be welcomed into Fisher's Admiralty.

Huntford appears to believe that Fisher disliked Scott due to Scott's polar exploration:

The *Discovery* expedition especially aroused [Fisher's] antagonism because, as he later said, the money it cost might have been better spent on the purchase of a new battleship. 'It is worse than a crime, it is a blunder', about summed up Sir John's opinion. In spite of promotion, Scott was under a cloud (Huntford 1979: 187, 2002: 180).

Two elements of this paragraph must be examined. First, a casual reader might believe 'It is worse than a crime...' Fisher's own words. In fact this is a Napoleonic-era quotation ('*C'est plus qu'une crime, c'est une faute*') attributed to Joseph Fouché (Durant and Durant 1975: 192). We can find no instance of Fisher's using this quote when discussing Scott's polar exploration. It appears that Huntford has encapsulated his own opinion within a quotation and attributed this strongly negative sentiment to Fisher. It is unfortunate that Huntford has used Fouché's quotation rather than his own phrasing: the sight of quotation marks could mislead the reader into believing that 'it is worse than a crime...' were Fisher's specific words. This cannot have been Fisher's opinion of Scott. Fisher would never have allowed someone he considered a 'blunderer' or 'criminal' to work at the Admiralty once, let alone *twice* as with Scott (in 1906 and 1909).

Secondly, Huntford states that Fisher attacked Scott's *Discovery* expedition. Huntford takes a letter from Fisher dated 2 January 1907, refusing naval financial assistance

to a proposed expedition by M. Barne, as grounds for stating that Fisher detested polar exploration and, by extension, Scott. The covering letter to Barne from Sir D. Probyn, Keeper of the Privy Purse, comments

I gathered from what Sir John said that he is not very much in favour of these expeditions. Evidently 'money is tight' and he considers, such being the case, the money that it would cost the Admiralty if they had anything to do with your Expedition might be better employed in the 'purchase of a new Battleship' he said (Probyn 1907).

Though Fisher was not greatly 'in favour of [polar] expeditions', Fisher's 'battleship' comment is clearly specific to Barne's proposed venture of 1907, not Scott's *Discovery* expedition of 1901–1904. Though Fisher refuses Barne Admiralty assistance in his 2 January letter, he does not dismiss polar exploration entirely: 'Certainly, it is not for the Admiralty to throw obstacles in the way of a fresh Expedition, if organized by private enterprise. But neither can it fairly be expected to assist in pushing a fresh expedition on an apparently somewhat reluctant public' (Fisher 1907). However, Huntford appears to believe Fisher held all polar explorers in contempt:

Especially did Sir John scorn polar service as a school for fighting officers: 'What on earth good accrues from going to the North and South Poles', he once said, 'I never could understand – no-one is going there when they can go to Monte Carlo!' (Huntford 1979: 186–187, 2002: 180).

In fact, when read in context, in Fisher's 1919 memoirs, these words possess a far gentler tone:

There are statues of Franklin and of Robert Falconer [sic] Scott in Waterloo Place; but neither of these displayed his heroism in naval action. They were each peaceable seekers — but what on earth good accrues from going to the North and South Poles I never could understand — no one is going there when they can go to Monte Carlo! (Fisher 1919: 163n).

Though Huntford seems to think this passage indicates Fisher's 'scorn' for Scott and polar exploration, Fisher clearly states here that Scott displayed heroism. Unfortunately Huntford appears not to understand that, at the end of this passage, Fisher is making a joke: as a devotee of hedonistic Monte Carlo, Fisher is declaring himself baffled that anyone should wish to visit the austere polar regions. Finally, Huntford states that for the *Terra Nova* expedition Scott 'was the wrong kind of captain. He was a 'big ship' man, used to the anonymity of large and complex crews, where what was really wanted was a 'small ship man', the captain of a destroyer, a light cruiser, or even a submarine; used to close contact with his men' (Huntford 1979: 398, 2002: 381). Here Huntford again disregards Scott's time in charge of *Discovery*. Huntford's suggested 'light cruiser' is not a compar-

able 'small ship': a second-class cruiser crew was 275–400 men (Gardiner 1979: 74–79) and a third-class cruiser, 200–300 men (Gardiner 1979: 80–85) whereas *Discovery* and *Terra Nova* had 50–70 men. Destroyers were small ships with crews of around 50 men (*Navy List* 1907: 269–270a), but were normally commanded by lieutenants of 5–7 years' seniority. Edwardian submarines had crews of 8–16 men (Gardiner 1985: 86–87) and were typically commanded by junior lieutenants in their early twenties.

Scott cannot fairly be called 'a 'big ship' man': his experience of commanding 'big ships' (battleships and cruisers) had been 2 years and 3 months, and his command of *Discovery* 3 years and 2 months. Though Huntford alleges that Scott as a captain was 'surrounded' with 'isolation' and 'swathed in a mystique, like God Almighty on his ship' (Huntford 1979: 398, 2002: 381), Scott's own journals clearly demonstrate his 'close contact' with, and observation of, his men. On the *Discovery* expedition, from 22 November to 24 December 1903, Scott spent a month exploring the Victoria Land region in a three-man team alongside two ratings, Petty Officer Edgar Evans and Leading Stoker William Lashly: hardly the behaviour of a captain 'swathed in a mystique'. In his *Discovery* memoirs, published in 1905, Scott stated of Evans and Lashly during this period:

In the evenings we have long arguments about naval matters, and generally agree that we could rule that Service a good deal better than any Board of Admiralty. Incidentally I learn a great deal about lower-deck life – more than I could hope to have done under ordinary conditions (Scott 2009: 552).

Scott was not a 'big-ship' captain, remote and unapproachable: here he is clearly enjoying friendly contact with ratings. Order and discipline had to be observed during an expedition (as with any professional endeavour, the leader must maintain authority), but if any single captain in the 1910 navy could be called a 'small ship man', that man was Scott.

Finally, Huntford appears to believe that Scott was generally disliked, stating that he 'features in few [naval memoirs], even after he became famous; often he was pointedly passed over. He seems enveloped in a conspiracy of silence... Scott clearly did not make an impression on his brother officers, or perhaps he was under a cloud, or both' (Huntford 1979: 121, 2002: 114). In reality, Scott's circle of close naval friends did not write memoirs, and those naval memoirs which mention Scott describe him positively (Fisher 1919: 163n; Wester Wemyss 1935: 142–143; Goodenough 1943: 139). Of all his many sources, Huntford can cite only three RN officers recorded as disparaging Scott. Two were from the *Terra Nova* expedition, E.R.G.R. Evans and Surgeon E.L. Atkinson, who made private post-expedition criticisms of Scott (Huntford 2002: 542–543). However, recent research indicates that both Evans and Atkinson inadvertently contributed to that expedition's tragic *dénouement*

(May 1912), hence post-expedition criticism of Scott may well have been their coping mechanism.

The third is Barry Domville: in 1913 Commander (not 'Lieutenant', as Huntford states) Domville wrote, on hearing of Scott's death, 'I have never been keen on these Expeditions for naval officers and though of course I am sorry about Scott, I cannot unduly enthuse over it' (Huntford 1979: 558, 2002: 540). Huntford mentions that Domville (in his spelling, 'Domville') was 'later Admiral Sir Barry Domville' (Huntford 1979: 558n, 2002: 540n), which may give the reader the impression that Domville's later rise in the navy makes him a reliable authority. Sadly, Huntford seems unaware that Domville was not representative of the average officer and cannot reasonably be taken as an authority, as in 1940 Domville was arrested for being a Nazi sympathiser and imprisoned in Brixton alongside the Blackshirt leader Oswald Mosley (Domville 2008: 111).

With these three exceptions, the general feeling towards Scott from his naval contemporaries was positive. The final section will present Scott's admirals' reports to show the high regard in which Scott was held.

The admirals' reports

Like all captains, Scott was subject to confidential admirals' reports. Any admiral who dishonestly recommended an incompetent would lose his reputation: assessments were cautious and praise had to be deserved. Scott's admirals' reports (Scott confidential reports) are presented here without edits.

Sep '07: His general ability energy and capability for command are so well known that it is needless for me to remark on them. He has much to learn in purely service matters but as each question arises he goes into it thoroughly. Is rather restless of ordinary routine duties and thirsting for more active employment. An officer of excellent physique + likely to have a brilliant career if opportunities offer. (R[ear] Adml. G. Egerton)

[**Sep '07:** Admiral C. Howe: 'As a Captain of a ship under my command Captain S. has verified my highest approbation'.]

Nov '07: Gunlaying tests. Heavy and light guns: 1907. T. L's [The Lords' of the Admiralty] appreciation expressed of particularly good results obtained by *Albemarle*.

Dec '08: Handles his ship v. well: a most excellent off[ice]r and desirable in every way. R[ear] Admiral Farquhar. Vice Admiral Bridgeman concurs.

Mch '09: Adml Lord C. Beresford: 'No defect, very zealous and excellent judgment, fine physical qualities. Strongly recommended for advancement. An excellent officer of very varied experience, handles his ship very well. Will make a good Admiral.'

Scott's naval record also comments 'Materially contributed to satis. (G) practice results in HMS *Essex*. T.L's apprec[ia]tio[n] expressed' (Scott naval record). If Scott's admirals' reports are compared with those for other captains during this period who later rose to Admiral or higher, it is apparent that Scott's praise is well beyond the average. To cite just one case, these are the confidential reports for Captain [later Earl, Admiral of the Fleet and First Sea Lord] D. Beatty (Beatty confidential reports), November 1900–January 1910:

Jan '04: Fouling of *Arrogant's* propeller. Cautioned to be more careful in future.

June '05: Sir C. Domville's report thoroughly satisfactory.

Aug '05: Court of Inquiry for fouling of p[ro]peller of *Suffolk* at Port Said on June 26/05. Error of Judgement on the part of Com[mand]ing officer.

Dec '09: Order in council was obtained to authorise Captain Beatty's special promotion to Flag Rank in spite of his not having qualified for full period of service under the Regulations. [*Authors' note: as captain Beatty had a total of three years and eight months on half-pay.*]

Promoted to Rear Admiral 1st January 1910 in accordance with the provisions of the Order-in-Council recorded above.

To cite Scott's confidential reports in isolation would leave the reader wondering if such praise was the general rule, so it is instructive to compare him with another RN captain who had achieved both national fame and early promotion. A war hero wounded during active service in the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, Beatty undoubtedly enjoyed higher status in the navy than Scott. However, Beatty had his errors clearly recorded in these reports for posterity: it is therefore untenable to suggest that Scott, a mere polar explorer, would have been protected from having his errors recorded when the famous war hero Beatty enjoyed no such protection.

We have received confirmation from ARK records enquiries, National Archives, Kew (personal communication, 6 March 2012) that Scott's captains' and admirals' reports (Scott confidential reports) were not made public until 1986. Huntford could not have read them before evaluating Scott's naval abilities in 1979. Nonetheless one wonders how Huntford reached the conclusion that Scott was 'not well thought of in the Service' (Huntford 1979: 132, 2002: 124): in 1979 Huntford could have consulted Scott's naval record at Kew (Scott naval record), Scott's naval file, then in the possession of the Scott family (Scott 1881–1912) and relevant files at the RGS Archive, including Scott's commendations (Summary of certificates 1900; Memorandum 1900). It is a pity that Huntford did not consult Scott's newly-released confidential reports for his revision of *Scott and*

Amundsen in 1999. These reports, too many and varied to be explained away as favouritism, demonstrate that Scott was an objectively meritorious officer headed for the highest levels.

Scott maintained a successful naval career despite his scientific and polar commitments, his resignation from the Masons in 1906 and the Fisher-Beresford feud in 1909. An incompetent or even mediocre officer could not have overcome such obstacles; Scott soared high above them. Huntford has stated that '[i]nfluence had got him where he was' (Huntford 1979: 228, 2002: 218). In reality, Scott did not have high birth or personal fortune. After severing his Masonic ties in 1906 Scott certainly could not have depended upon 'influence', and his subsequent success shows he did not need 'influence' to advance his career. It was not 'influence', but hard work and talent, which had got Scott where he was.

Conclusion

Despite extensively researching Scott's naval career, Huntford appears to have found no concrete evidence that Scott was 'unsuited to command' (Huntford 1979: 231, 2002: 220). However, despite a lack of evidence, Huntford has nonetheless presented Scott's naval career as characterised by incompetence; furthermore, he has built upon this grievous misunderstanding to allege that Scott therefore went on to become an incompetent polar expedition leader. Since Scott showed himself an extremely able organiser and leader in his naval career, it is difficult to believe the argument that Scott had serious personality flaws which interfered with his judgement and which directly led to the *Terra Nova* expedition tragedy.

Huntford even lists Scott's supposed professional flaws in his book's index: 'command, unsuitability for'; 'insight, lack of'; 'irrationality'; 'judgment, defective'; 'leadership, failure in'; 'panic, readiness to'; 'recklessness'; 'responsibility, instinct to evade'; 'vacillation' (Huntford 1979: 660, 2002: 595). There is no hint of these professional flaws in Scott's reports. In the navy such would have been noticed, and reflected in official reports by faint praise at best and criticism at worst. Scott's performance continually attracted explicit praise: his uniformly positive reports may be taken as a reflection of his professional abilities.

History is, or should be, an attempt to seek a fair verdict using primary evidence and an understanding of historical context. For this reason, judgement on Scott's professional abilities in handling 'ships and men' must be based on the verdicts of those who witnessed his work, such as Captains E.J. Church; G. Noel; J. Durnford; C. G. Robinson; H. B. Jackson; A. MacLeod; Vice-Admiral H.H. Rawson; Rear-Admiral G.L. Egerton; Vice-Admiral A.G. Curzon Howe; Rear-Admiral A.M. Farquhar; Vice-Admiral F. Bridgeman; Rear-Admiral S. Colville; Admiral Lord C. Beresford; and Prince Louis of Battenberg. All these officers (all later admirals or admirals of the

fleet) made their approval of Scott a matter of written record. To counter their testimonials we have only Huntford's allegations, 70 years afterwards, of Scott's being an unworthy officer with a posthumously whitewashed reputation. Which must be considered more reliable: a modern writer describing Scott without citation of evidence as 'not well thought of in the Service' (Huntford 1979: 132, 2002: 124) and 'unsuited to command' (Huntford 1979: 231, 2002: 220), or the numerous positive comments of Scott's naval contemporaries?

It is our conclusion that Huntford's essential arguments that without polar exploration Scott's 'future in the Service' would otherwise have been 'bleak' (Huntford 2002: 126), that he 'lacked the talent that could have overcome obstacles of money and birth' (Huntford 1979: 123, 2002: 117) and that he only achieved success through 'influence' are repeatedly refuted by a large amount of primary evidence showing Scott to have been a meritorious and well-esteemed officer.

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