

Admirals - The Naval Commanders Who Made Britain Great by Andrew Lambert.  
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As an island nation, the people of Britain would have been in serious trouble had they not been able to master and make good use of the seas surrounding them: that they did so, and then used that local mastery to build a world-conquering, empire-creating, navy is one of the glories of British, and quintessentially, English history.

In *Admirals*, Andrew Lambert, Professor of Naval History at King's College, London, and author of a superb biography of Nelson, writes not of the ordinary seamen who occupied the wooden world and its steel successor, but of their leaders, particularly their admirals. These were the men whose skill, resolution, tactical ability and quality of command exhorted their crews, and squadrons to extraordinary feats of bravery and seamanship.

In the ten chapters of the book, Andrew Lambert gives a biographical account of the naval careers of eleven men who epitomise the best of the British naval tradition between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. They are Lord Howard of Effingham, an Elizabethan and scourge of the Spanish; Robert Blake, a republican who transformed the navy and laid the foundations for its greatest successes; James II, who as Duke of York was a brilliant, and much under-rated naval administrator; George Anson, whose glorious (and lucrative) career inspired many others and, in Lambert's view, created the British Empire; Samuel Hood and John Jervis, who fought the French with singular determination and inspired and promoted Horatio Nelson; William Parker, Nelson's protégé, who served in more than one theatre of war and was the first truly professional admiral; Geoffrey Hornby, another officer with helpful family connections who rose to the heights of the Victorian navy, and the Admiralty, and who was the first admiral to conceive the structures of support between various ships of the line in a battle formation that made the Royal Navy into a modern fleet; John Fisher, a contemporary of Hornby, a fine leader and a martinet, fascinated by the modern technology of his day, who loathed war with a passion and didn't like the sea very much either; David Beatty, the least pleasant of the lot in human terms but a moderniser who spent eight years as First Sea Lord, and Andrew Cunningham who served with distinction in the Second World War and who claims the distinction of being the last admiral to command a theatre of war from his flagship.

Each of the chapters is highly informative, not just about the background, character and career of its subject but also about specific battles and actions in which they were engaged: there is something here for both biography and naval history buffs alike. Nelson, the non pareil admiral, casts a giant shadow over many of the lives in *Admirals*, and the book as a whole is a potent reminder of Great Britain's magnificent naval history and the men whose courage, determination and skill made it so.

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