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The Unrepentant Historian: Sir Michael Howard and the Birth of War Studies

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ABSTRACT

Sir Michael Howard is widely recognised as the founder of 'War Studies', a Department of Kings College, London, which embodied a new intellectual agenda for the study of war. Yet whilst his influence as a founder was significant, it has been overstated. In this article we contextualise the emergence of War Studies as part of a longer series of attempts to establish war-oriented study at the University of London, and situate Howard's endeavours alongside those of more senior colleagues. In so doing, we also emphasise the limited and pragmatic approach to war studies that Howard developed during this period.

'But I am unrepentantly a historian and not a social scientist. I think in terms of analogies rather than theories, of process rather than structure, of politics as the realm of the contingent rather than of necessity.'

Sir Michael Howard¹

Introduction

Long before his death in 2019, Sir Michael Howard found himself celebrated as the founder of the Department of War Studies at King's College London, one of numerous achievements that marked him out as a towering figure in the study of war. For many

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¹Michael Howard, *Studies in War and Peace*, (London: Temple Smith, 1970), p. 13.

years his portrait could be found amongst the procession of notable alumni that lined the route to the Strand entrance of King's College, where War Studies had found an institutional home in the 1950s. The story of Howard's efforts to establish War Studies is familiar to anyone – staff or student, past or present – connected to the department. Its essence runs as follows.² At the close of the Second World War, Howard returned to Oxford to complete the undergraduate degree that had been interrupted by active service with the Coldstream Guards. By his own admission, study proved less agreeable to him after this resumption and, graduating with a second class degree, Howard lacked the academic qualification to pursue a competitive tutorial fellowship. Instead, in 1947 he found employment as an Assistant Lecturer in history at King's College London. This led, in 1953, to his appointment as a Lecturer in War Studies, his credentials burnished not only by his recently co-authored history of the Coldstream Guards, but also by the Military Cross he had won during the Italian campaign in 1944. Shortly after taking up his new appointment, Howard arrived at the realisation that the history of war could not be limited to the study of military operations, which apparently formed the mainstay of contemporary 'military history'. Rather, the study of war required 'the study of entire societies.' Equipped with a firm conviction that he needed 'to learn not only to think about war in a different way, but also to think about history itself in a different way', Howard then went on to establish a department wholly devoted to the study of war, which has grown exponentially in the sixty years since its inception.³ This success stemmed, in no small part, from Howard's inspirational example, and the long shadow he cast in what was, for many years, a relatively small university department. As the Department's 60th Anniversary publication summed up, 'The Department...is the world's leading academic institution for the study of war. Its success owes much to its founder.' His efforts in adopting an 'holistic approach' to war has 'shaped DWS since its creation' and remains responsible for its position of pre-eminence.⁴

This origin story is seductive in its simplicity. It casts Howard as an heroic figure, almost single-handedly shouldering the task of establishing War Studies, and of delivering the study of war from the academic wilderness. It has offered the Department a focal pioneering figure with which to differentiate itself within the University. Yet it is also a story that Howard himself consciously cultivated in response

²Howard's own account of his professional and intellectual development can be found in his autobiography, Michael Howard, *Captain Professor: a life in war and peace*, (London: Continuum, 2006).

³*Ibid.*, pp. 144-5. See also Michael Howard, *A Professional Autobiography*, (unpublished typescript. Eastbury, Berkshire, 2 October 1991).

⁴KCL Department of War Studies, 'War Studies at 60: Past, Present, Future', 2021, <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/warstudies/war-studies-at-60/dws-celebratory-publication>, Accessed 25 May 2022, p. 8.

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to the institutional and disciplinary imperatives to distinguish his new role as a clear departure from earlier approaches to the study of war at King's. It is, nonetheless, a foundational myth that only partially reflects the circumstances in which the Department of War Studies was founded, and under which an intellectual endeavour called 'war studies' emerged. In this article, we seek to offer a more nuanced account. Our approach focuses on the institutional manifestation of 'War Studies' at Kings, but also seeks to place events within the broader context of the study of war in the mid-twentieth century. We chart the repeated attempts to give a foundation to the academic study of war within the University of London stretching back into the nineteenth century, whilst also underlining the role of other key individuals in advocating the validity of scholarship focused on war, and of historical scholarship on war in particular.

In most writing on Howard, Basil Liddell Hart occupies a pre-eminent position as a mentor and sponsor of Howard's career – a debt which Howard freely acknowledged. Along with so many other young scholars from his generation, Howard described how he was 'willingly bound in an exacting, exhausting, delightful and immensely rewarding slavery' to Liddell Hart from the mid-1950s until the latter's death in 1970.⁵ As many commentators have noted, this relationship played an important role in shaping Howard's own thinking about war: first as inspiration, then as a point of departure.⁶ In order to cast fresh perspective on Howard's relationship with War Studies, we take some inspiration from Howard's own insistence that his respect and admiration for Liddell Hart ought not to stand in the way of rigorous argument and an exchange of ideas. Thus, in this article we focus in particular on the influence of two senior historians, Sir Charles Webster and Sir Keith Hancock, both of whom were instrumental in providing institutional support for the creation of the War Studies

⁵Michael Howard, *The Causes of Wars and other essays*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1983), p. 198.

⁶Of particular note in this regard is Howard's essay 'The British Way in Warfare: A Reappraisal' in *The Causes of War*, pp. 169-187. For Howard's intellectual relationship with Liddell Hart see Brian Holden Reid, 'The Legacy of Liddell Hart: The Contrasting Responses of Michael Howard and André Beaufre', *British Journal for Military History*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2014), pp. 66-80. Brian Holden Reid; 'Michael Howard and the Evolution of Modern War Studies', *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 73, No. 3 (2009), pp. 870-904; Hew Strachan, 'Michael Howard and the dimensions of military history', *War in History*, Vo. 27, No. 4 (2020), pp. 537-551; Lawrence Freedman, 'Michael Howard: A Reminiscence' 17 December 2019 <https://warontherocks.com/2019/12/michael-howard-a-reminiscence/>. Accessed 29 June 2022.

Department during the 1940s and 1950s.⁷ By doing so, we can better position Howard's individual achievements in relation to both a longer history of attempts to establish the academic study of war within the university, and the heightened awareness of the importance of that study in the wake of the Second World War. Seen in this light, Howard appears less as a pioneer than a culminating figure, doggedly bringing to fruition a project longer in the making, yet abetted in this task by broader receptivity amongst peers and elders than is often supposed.

Howard's role in the birth and development of the Department of War Studies also affords an insight into his understanding of the parameters and limitations of war studies as an academic subject which challenges some of the ways in which his image has been used subsequently to describe the ethos and success of the Department. Howard articulated a limited conception of 'War Studies' which did not extend far beyond an umbrella grouping that might allow for the co-existence of numerous disciplinary approaches to war. In part, this was the result of a pragmatic approach to the development of the Department in its earliest days that at times came close to 'muddling through', rather than a more programmatic attitude. It was also a consequence of the delineation of Howard's own academic activities, in which the study of history, whether in its own right or as a guiding approach to strategic studies, always drove his thinking and writing. Thus, while Howard understood from the very beginning that 'War Studies' needed to incorporate more than a revived history of war – that it equally had to be a home for the 'the economists, the international lawyers, the social scientists, the international relations specialists, even, if possible the scientists' – he remained a self-described 'unrepentant historian.'⁸

As demonstrated by his departure from King's College and the department he founded in 1968, Howard was not driven by a desire to foster a distinct disciplinary approach to war studies. As Tarak Barkawi and Shane Brighton note, he 'made no effort to theorise his approach, either in terms of method or a substantive theory of war.'⁹ Instead, he followed a path via Oxford and Yale, that took him from the history of war to strategic studies prior to his retirement. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that those who have been most heavily influenced by him have defined his legacy in terms of his contribution as an historian and strategist – areas which are entirely compatible with Howard's inclusive understanding of 'War Studies', but which underline its lack of a

⁷Howard acknowledges both men, along with the economist Lionel Robbins, in his autobiography, although not in expansive terms. Howard, *Captain Professor*, p. 140, p. 145, p. 147.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 147. Howard, *Studies in War and Peace*, p. 11.

⁹Tarak Barkawi and Shane Brighton 'Absent War Studies? War, Knowledge, and Critique', in Hew Strachan & Sibylle Scheipers, eds., *The Changing Character of War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 529.

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programmatically.¹⁰ Brian Bond, for example, one of the earliest recruits to Howard's department, whilst emphasising Howard's 'broad inclusive approach to the study of war, with military history as its bedrock' equates war studies closely to the 'War and Society' approach to military history, and further seeks to distinguish Howard's contribution as a 'military historian' from Arthur Marwick's contribution as a 'social historian'.¹¹ Brian Holden Reid, meanwhile, a later Head of the Department of War Studies and Howard's official biographer, writes that Howard 'helped found, in short, a distinct field of enquiry – war studies, or security/strategic studies, as it is known in the United States; to this may be applied a variety of disciplines in either a "multi" of interdisciplinary fashion.'¹² Such attempts at delineation underline the lack of disciplinary clarity that has always characterized War Studies, for good and ill. Consequently, modern war studies – as encapsulated by the activities of the Department of War Studies at King's College – is driven by disciplinary impulses that are often far removed from Howard's historically shaped understanding. Yet this too can be at least partially attributed to the legacy of Howard and his reluctance to engage in discipline building at the foundation.

The foundations of the study of war at King's

Howard was appointed to the post of Lecturer in Military Studies in the Department of History in July 1953, having spent the previous half decade as a Lecturer in History.¹³ Late the following year he admitted that 'it is only some eighteen months since I began to take an interest – a professional interest that is – in military affairs'.¹⁴ Writing at the beginning of what would become a lifelong correspondence with Liddell Hart, Howard was quite clear about the conditions of his appointment: 'I was given this post not as a military expert or military historian, but as a professional historian interested in the general problems which war raises for society.'¹⁵ He recognised that this approach was not an entirely novel one, crediting foreign writers with having appreciated the importance of studying the 'social and economic aspects of war in close connection with studies of military techniques: which the Germans have done for a hundred years (Jähns, Delbrück) and the Americans for twenty'.¹⁶ Yet from the outset he viewed

¹⁰See Lawrence Freedman, Paul Hayes, and Robert O'Neill, eds., *War, Strategy, and International Politics: Essays in Honour of Sir Michael Howard*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

¹¹Brian Bond, *Military Historian: My Part in the Birth and Development of War Studies*, (Solihull: Helion & Co., 2018), p. 33.

¹²Holden Reid, 'Michael Howard', p. 870.

¹³King's College archives (hereinafter KCA) KA/FPA 1968. Howard, M. Page 42.

¹⁴King's College London Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (hereinafter LHCMA) LH 1/384, Howard to Liddell Hart, 23 Nov 1954.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶LHCMA, LH 1/384, Howard to Liddell Hart 10 December 1955.

British military history as lagging behind the example set by foreign scholarship. 'If the word "military" evokes narrow and technical associations', he wrote in an article the following year, 'the fault lies with the type of military history which we have been accustomed to read'. Howard was clear with whom the blame for such problems lay: 'military historians have not always been conscious of this wider conception of their task.' For him, the study of war demanded 'far more than the limited resources and technique of the old-style military historian', and to that end the more inclusive and academically driven 'war studies' approach offered an antidote.¹⁷

From the outset, then, the institutional mythology of what would grow into the 'War Studies' department was predicated upon a claim of intellectual departure from what went before it. Yet much as Howard contributed to an injection of new life into the study of war in Britain from the 1950s onwards, it is important to highlight that the subject in general, and particularly within King's College and the University of London, had evolved considerably further than this depiction might suggest.

King's College had first established a department of 'military science' in 1848. This venture, undertaken partly in response to the wave of revolutions that year and intended to provide instruction for aspirant military professionals, proved short lived. No investment was made in a library to support the programme, student numbers were low, and the department dissolved before its twentieth anniversary.¹⁸ In so doing, it set something of a precedent, becoming the first in a series of short-lived initiatives related to the study of war at King's that were to characterise the subsequent century. Yet whilst these initiatives did not prove enduring in an institutional sense, they did reveal the development of a more wide-ranging intellectual agenda than is often recognised. By the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, naval history had established a presence in the College under the auspices of Sir John Knox Laughton. Whilst plans for a formal Department foundered after his death in 1915, Laughton did succeed in embedding the study of war more firmly within the College, across the University of London, and within the discipline of history.¹⁹ By opening access to the Admiralty archives and being a founding member of both the Navy Records Society and *The English Historical Review*, he made a significant contribution to bringing the study of warfare at sea into a position of respectability within the broader discipline.

¹⁷Michael Howard, 'Military History as a University Study', *History*, Vol. 41, No. 141 (Oct., 1956), pp. 185-86, p. 190.

¹⁸A.M Shadrake, 'The War Studies Library at King's College, London University', *Aslib Proceedings*, Vol. 29, No. 8 (1977), pp. 295-301; Fossey John Cobb Hearnshaw, *The Centenary History of King's College London, 1828-1928*, (London: G.G. Harrap & co., 1929), pp. 176-8, 260.

¹⁹Andrew Lambert, *The Foundations of Naval History: John Knox Laughton, the Royal Navy and the Historical Profession*, (London: Chatham, 1998), pp. 212-18.

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He was also central to early plans for the founding of the Institute of Historical Research and served as the inaugural chair of the University of London's History Board.²⁰ From the outset of his career as an educator, Laughton's approach to history had reflected the requirements of his previous life as a naval officer. His approach to the 'scientific' study of the past was thus intended to act as a spur to doctrinal development and conceptual innovation within the Navy. Yet his understanding of history was far broader than a simplistic focus upon military technique. He was critical of contemporaries who 'have spoken of the Navy as a mere engine for fighting battles and sometimes for winning victories, glorious, but of no great consequence', and sought to place naval warfare within a wider imperial and international context.²¹

The First World War and Laughton's death curtailed plans to place naval history on a more sustainable institutional basis. The aftermath of the conflict, however, prompted a series of new initiatives related to the study of international affairs and conflict within the University of London. The establishment of The Royal Institute of International Affairs, and the Stevenson Chair in International History at the London School of Economics (LSE) in 1926, reflected a consensus that issues of war and peace were appropriate, indeed urgent, areas of academic enquiry.²² The Institute of Historical Research acted as a further focal point, with a 1934 report noting that 'the Institute has from the outset made special provision for the study and teaching of war history', including seminar rooms and the nucleus of a valuable library.²³ Supporters of these initiatives pre-empted some of the developments which Howard ultimately oversaw. Writing in 1927, in a volume with a dedication by the former Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey, George Aston underlined that 'it is necessary to pay continuous attention to aspects of modern war which affect the lives of statesmen and citizens... It is hoped that these needs will be met in due course by the School of War Studies, which has now been established in the University of London.'²⁴ King's participated in this process by hosting a new chair in Military Studies to which Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice was appointed in 1927. Maurice, who had been Director of Military Operations in the Imperial General Staff during the First World War, was the principal of the Working Men's College (later Queen Mary University of London) and had

²⁰Andrew Lambert, 'Laughton's Legacy: naval history at King's College London', *Historical Research*, vol. 77, no. 196 (2004), pp. 277-78.

²¹John Knox Laughton, 'Historians and Naval History', in Julian Corbett, ed., *Naval and Military Essays*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1914), p. 5; Lambert, 'Laughton's Legacy', p. 278.

²²David Stevenson, 'Learning from the past: the relevance of international history', *International Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 1 (2014), pp. 5-22.

²³Institute for Historical Research: IHR 9/3/5, 'War History at the Institute of Historical Research', 1934.

²⁴George Aston, *The Study of War for Statesmen and Citizens*, (London: Longmans & Co., 1927), p. viii.

delivered the Lees Knowles Lectures on the American Civil War the previous year. For his inaugural lecture, delivered on 14 January 1927, he chose to speak in disciplinary terms 'on the uses of the study of war'. Maurice argued that

Bitter experience has taught us, what the generation that immediately preceded us did not realise, that a struggle between nations in which vital interests are involved is not merely the concern of professional soldiers, sailors, and airmen but affects directly every citizen, and calls for the whole resources of the nation. We have learned that statecraft, economics, the supply of raw material, science, and industry are factors which are of prime importance to the issue, and we realise that the tendency is for the importance of the last two to increase. Soldiers have long insisted that morale is of supreme importance in armies. We have learned that the morale of the peoples is of even greater importance, and may, with the development of aircraft, become the prime object of attack.²⁵

The logical extension of these observations was, he argued, to establish war as a legitimate field of academic enquiry, in order that citizens and soldiers together could be educated in its nature. Any such field ought, he claimed, to have a critical and rigorous appreciation of history as its basis: 'my faith in military history as the foundation of military study remains unshaken, and military history is but a special branch of the general study.' This would require historical rigor, a comparative approach which included the study of both opponents in a conflict, and a combination of civilian and military expertise and knowledge. 'The fact is', Maurice observed, 'that too often sailor and soldier historians have lacked the technique of the civilian historian, and the civilian historian the technique of the sailor and soldier.'²⁶

The chair in military studies was charged with addressing these deficiencies, to 'encourage military studies in the university and to create an interest in them amongst the general public.'²⁷ To this end, Maurice continued a course of instruction for undergraduates within the University of London into the 1930s and the Second World War, before the programme became defunct. He also remained engaged in military education, lecturing at the Army's Staff College, and contributing to debates over the 1929 edition of *Field Service Regulations*.²⁸ Whilst Maurice did not immerse himself in archival research, nor perhaps fully depart from his association with the Army, the parallels between many of the views he espoused, and those which Howard was to

²⁵LHCMA, LH 3/6/19. Maurice, 'On the Uses of the Study of War', p. i.

²⁶Ibid., pp. vii-viii.

²⁷Ibid., p. xi.

²⁸See Maurice, *British Strategy*, p. v. and Alaric Searle, 'Inter-service Debate and the Origins of Strategic Culture: The 'Principles of War' in the British Armed Forces, 1919-1939', *War in History*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (2014), pp. 18-19.

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champion, are clear. Indeed, Howard used Maurice's inaugural lecture to structure the introduction to his own discussion of 'Military Power and International Order', a lecture delivered in May 1964 to mark his appointment as professor.²⁹ Yet, as had been the case on previous occasions, the achievements made in the inter-war period proved fleeting. The Military Studies Department was briefly re-named War Studies in 1943, however it was closed in 1948, with the provision offered to officer cadets reverting to the ad hoc arrangements which had existed before 1914.³⁰

Webster and Hancock: support for the study of war at the mid-century

When Howard arrived in the History Department in the autumn of 1947, the study of war at King's was thus at something of a low ebb. Given this state of affairs, Howard's major achievement through the 1950s lay in simply keeping military studies alive by his own efforts. Unfortunately, his success came through conflict. In his autobiography, Howard recounted the clashes with his head of department, Professor C H Williams, whom he described as 'a genial little Welshman whose talent for evasion amounted to genius', that followed his appointment to the military studies role.³¹ The conflict arose from Howard's insistence that his appointment brought with it the authority to create a new programme in its own right, outside of Williams' control. Although Howard reflected that the spat was an ugly episode that did little credit to either party, it was only through obstinacy that he was able to enforce his will. 'If I took this job I would be my own man', he wrote, 'I could escape from the narrow confines of the history department... I could make something of it, I thought.'³² Consequently, throughout the rest of the decade he refused to do more within the department than lecture on the history of war. Howard painted Williams as a barrier to the establishment of a war studies programme, however, it is worth noting that Howard's contract from 1953 as 'Lecturer in Military Studies in the Department of History at King's College' did place him under the professor's jurisdiction. Williams' exasperation is, perhaps, understandable.³³

Moreover, it should be noted that, although Howard was locked in a personal dispute with Williams until the latter's retirement, he was able to bolster his position by capitalising on the pre-existing structures of the military studies programme. These had survived within the University bureaucracy despite the demise of the old department. The Board of Studies for Military Studies continued to function within the

²⁹The original text is in LHCMA, LH 1/384 part IV, and it was re-printed in an abridged version in *International Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 1 (2009), pp. 145-55.

³⁰'War Studies 60', p. 10.

³¹Howard, *Captain Professor*, p. 132.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 141.

³³See the contracts in Howard's file in the KCL archives. KCA KA/FPA 1968. Pages 46 and 42 respectively.

University of London, offering a strand of continuity from the old endeavour to the new. This made it easier for Howard to resurrect the curriculum in order to transform it, rather than having to champion an entirely new syllabus. The old course, Howard later noted, retained a 'vocational bias', reflective of its origins as a means to enable 'members of the Officers Training Corps to use the knowledge acquired during their professional military training to gain an academic degree.' In 1954 the board of studies permitted Howard to change the syllabus 'to give it a more solid academic content', although it retained a heavy historical component.³⁴ By 1955, Howard gained approval from the Academic Council for a new 'War Studies' programme to replace the 'military studies' subject for internal candidates on the B A General Degree. 'Unlike the old 'military studies' programme', Howard wrote, 'this is not a course of semi-technical studies for students with a professional interest in the army. It has been re-designed as a broad survey of the development of military affairs during the past two hundred years.'³⁵ In the same period, he also organised a lecture series on 'War and Society', which brought a range of inter-disciplinary perspectives to bear on the study of conflict, including contributions from scholars of international relations, law, and political economy.³⁶ In this manner, 'military studies' began its practical transformation into 'war studies'.

Developments during the 1950s helped pave the way for the establishment of a department in its own right. Nevertheless, full autonomy for War Studies within King's College had to wait until 1961, followed shortly thereafter by Howard's elevation to Professor. The slow pace of change reflected barriers to innovation inherent within university bureaucracy, such that Howard's tenacity was absolutely necessary. Yet he was never entirely isolated in his travails: the move to revive and expand the study of war within the University of London was instigated and lent weight by more senior academics. Howard acknowledged three such figures as particularly important for the institutional support that they provided: Sir Charles Webster, Sir Keith Hancock, and Lionel (later Baron) Robbins.³⁷ For all three individuals the new 'war studies' was not simply a bureaucratic but an intellectual necessity. In important respects they had already embarked on intellectual trajectories that mirrored Howard's own. This is best exemplified in the case of the two historians amongst them: Webster and Hancock.

³⁴LHCMA, 1990/KDW/9. 'War Studies at the Undergraduate Level' M.E. Howard, 16 June 1962. Howard's new syllabus comprised papers on the History of War to 1914, the problems of war and military organisation since 1914, and a choice of either economic aspects of war or legal problems of war.

³⁵LHCMA, LH 1/384. 'BA General Degree: 'WAR STUDIES'', 1955.

³⁶LHCMA, LH 1/384. 'War and Society' lecture series advert. Many of Howard's collaborators at this time came from the LSE. Howard, *Captain Professor*, p. 147.

³⁷Howard, *Captain Professor*, p. 140.

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Webster, 'a blunt and massive Yorkshireman', was described by Howard as 'the true godfather of War Studies in London', to whom he even attributed the name of the department. Howard recounted how, in a meeting to decide the matter, Webster struck the table 'with a fist the size of a large ham and demanded: "It's about war isn't it? So what's wrong with War Studies?"'³⁸ By the time of his involvement with War Studies, Webster's academic career was coming to a close. He had held positions at the universities of Cambridge, Liverpool, and Aberystwyth, before taking up the Stevenson Chair of International History at the LSE, from which he would retire in 1953.³⁹ A scholar of diplomatic history and foreign policy, Webster was a committed opponent of appeasement during the 1930s who believed that scholars in possession of a better understanding of the international system might work towards the avoidance of future calamities.⁴⁰ He combined his academic activities with practical engagement with international affairs during both World Wars, culminating during the second conflict in roles with the Research Department and the Economic and Reconstruction Department at the Foreign Office.

Webster's most direct scholarly engagement with war came only in the last decade of his life. Despite his impending retirement, in 1950 he was persuaded by J R M Butler, chief historian of the British official military history of the Second World War, to take on the official history of the Anglo-American Strategic Air Offensive in conjunction with a much younger co-author, Noble Frankland, a veteran navigator recently awarded a doctorate in air power history.⁴¹ The partnership resulted in four volumes, which were published shortly after Webster's death in 1961. Whilst Webster never became a 'military historian' in the traditional sense of the term – the arrangement he made with Frankland ensured that the younger man took charge of the strategic and operational dimensions of the work – his experience with the official histories convinced him of the relevance and importance of war as a field of scholarship.⁴² It also led him to take an interest in resurrecting the dormant Lectureship in Military Studies and in bringing the position to the LSE as the kernel of a new department, not for Howard's benefit but rather for Frankland, then struggling to find a secure

³⁸Michael Howard, 'Military history and the history of war', in Williamson Murray and Richard Hart Sinnreich, eds., *The Past as Prologue: the importance of history to the military profession*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), pp. 12-13; Howard, *Captain Professor*, p. 145.

³⁹For Webster's biography see George Norman Clark (revised by Muriel E. Chamberlain), 'Webster, Sir Charles Kingsley', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/36807> Accessed 29 June 2022.

⁴⁰Stevenson, 'Learning from the past', p. 12.

⁴¹A detailed account of the process can be found in Noble Frankland, *History at War: the Campaigns of an Historian*, (London: Giles de la Mare, 1998), pp. 42-59.

⁴²*Ibid.*, pp. 82-4.

academic post. When the position went to King's and to Howard, Frankland recalled, Webster was 'very disappointed'.⁴³ Nevertheless, he threw his support behind Howard once the choice was made.

Like Webster, Hancock's distinguished academic career eventually led to engagement with war as an object of study through involvement in official history.⁴⁴ For Hancock, however, this came during the Second World War itself, when in the summer of 1941 he was approached by the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Edward Bridges, with an offer to head up the civil series of the official history of the war. He was eminently qualified to manage such a task, having already produced his three volume *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs* (1937-42). The five years he devoted to the project resulted in the publication of thirty volumes, including *British War Economy* (1949) which he co-authored with Margaret Gowing.⁴⁵ When he joined the University of London in 1949 as the inaugural Director of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, a post which he held until he returned to his native Australia in 1956, Hancock was no doubt relieved to bring to a close the project that had consumed him for so long. In subsequent years, however, war continued to figure amongst his academic concerns.⁴⁶

Notably, when invited to give the Wiles Lectures at Queen's University Belfast in 1960, established to 'encourage the extension of historical thinking into the realm of general ideas', Hancock chose to speak to the theme of war and peace in the twentieth

⁴³Ibid., pp. 136-7.

⁴⁴For concise biographies see: Kenneth Stanley Inglis (revised), 'Hancock, Sir (William) Keith (1898-1988)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/39810> ; Jim Davidson, 'Hancock, Sir William Keith (1898-1988)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hancock-sir-william-keith-460/text22673>, published first in hardcopy 2007, Accessed 23 August 2021. See also Jim Davison, *A Three-Cornered Life: the historian W.K. Hancock*, (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2010).

⁴⁵Hancock's wartime activities are detailed in his autobiography, *William Keith Hancock, Country and Calling*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), pp. 178-208.

⁴⁶Hancock's post-war projects included a two-volume biography of the South African soldier-statesman Jan Smuts, completed in the years following his return to Australia in 1957. As well as being involved in the creation of Howard's position, Hancock was one of the electors to the Chichele Professorship of the History War at Oxford University in 1946, choosing Cyril Falls for the chair which had been unfilled since the retirement of Ernest Swinton in 1939, in preference to Liddell Hart. See Hew Strachan, 'The Study of War at Oxford 1909-2009', in Christopher Hood, Desmond King, and Gillian Peele, eds., *Forging a Discipline: A Critical Assessment of Oxford's Development of the Study of Politics and International Relations in Comparative Perspective*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 213-214.

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century.⁴⁷ He later reflected that the lectures afforded him the opportunity to distil 'the essence of my thought' on the major problems of historical inquiry which had preoccupied him since 1919, amongst which war was one.⁴⁸ In the first of his lectures, Hancock considered the changing character of war over a long historical sweep. Beginning with consideration of British strategy stretching back into the eighteenth century, reminiscent of arguments about the British 'way in warfare', Hancock juxtaposed the historical rupture to major war presented by the dawn of the nuclear age with the apparent continuity of irregular war into the 1950s, concluding with a discussion of the challenges of nuclear confrontation. His observations included overt reference to canonical texts including Carl von Clausewitz's *On War*, Charles Callwell's *Small Wars*, and Bernard Brodie's *Strategy in the Missile Age*.⁴⁹ The driving question, he wrote in outline notes for his presentation, was 'do the hydrogen bomb and the rocket render the historical study of war irrelevant, or does there still survive some continuity of historical experience?' The answer, he suggested, was that 'a realistic and unemotional study of war is justified not only in itself, but as a necessary preliminary to the more difficult, but more important study of peace'.⁵⁰

The careers and intellectual choices of Hancock and Webster demonstrate the degree to which Howard's approach to the historical study of war echoed convictions held more widely in the scholarly community at large, and within the University of London. For both men the Second World War brought to the fore the significance of war as a subject of historical scrutiny, to be pursued along broad rather than narrow lines. As Hancock had learned when he joined the civil official history project, in the war then in progress

the armed forces nowadays were no more than the cutting edge of the nation at war and their history had no higher importance than that of munition making and agriculture, of shipping, land transport, mining and all the other civilian activities.⁵¹

⁴⁷Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University (hereinafter NBAC): Sir Keith Hancock Research Papers, P96/15/11. Eric Ashby to Hancock, 4 Feb 1957. In response to a request for a list of scholars to be invited to his lectures, Hancock included both Webster and Robbins. See NBAC P96/15/11. Hancock to Michael Roberts, 2 May 1960.

⁴⁸William Keith Hancock, *Professing History*, (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1976), p. 66.

⁴⁹William Keith Hancock, *Four Studies of War and Peace in this Century*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1961), pp. 1-32.

⁵⁰NBAC, P96/16/18. 'WAR IN THIS CENTURY' outline note.

⁵¹Hancock, *Country and Calling*, pp. 196-7.

Both scholars also brought to their studies explicit engagement with the past in the context of the present which pre-dated their engagement with official history. Where Webster had made clear his commitment to historical education for the sake of future peace, Hancock reflected that his teaching in 1930s Birmingham on the subject of the origins of the First World War was enmeshed with his overt anti-appeasement stance and carried for his students ‘both intellectual and moral relevance’.⁵² Howard, then, was a beneficiary as much as he was a proselytiser, offering revelations about the history of war and its contemporary relevance which were more commonly held than is often supposed. Hancock, for example, argued for the contribution of the historian to the study of war in terms strikingly reminiscent of those advocated by Howard in his influential and oft-quoted essay on ‘the use and abuse of military history’. He repudiated ‘the common reproach against historians – that they are backward-looking people who foster the common human weakness of “preparing for the last war”’, arguing instead that:

The very opposite of this is true, for the good historian knows too much about past events to expect that they will ever repeat themselves mechanically. It is his constant endeavour to discover both the continuing and the contingent elements in human experience. He does not regard recorded history as a lesson book that contains all the answers. He does expect to find in it questions that are likely to be worth asking both now and in the future.⁵³

Hancock and Webster thus both did more to aid the institutional revival of war studies at King’s than to provide simple bureaucratic weight within the University of London. Their scholarship contributed to the growing academic credibility which the study of war and international affairs enjoyed during the 1930s and 1940s, and their roles in government and the official history programmes catalysed new approaches to the subject based upon extensive engagement with the conduct of the Second World War.

Pragmatic not programmatic: Howard after the establishment of War Studies

The third figure in Howard’s triumvirate of influential figures exerted a different kind of influence. Like Hancock and Webster, the economist Lionel Robbins had combined scholarship with government duties during the Second World War, although in contrast to them he had also seen active service in the Great War.⁵⁴ Already an

⁵²Hancock, *Professing History*, p. 143.

⁵³Hancock, *Country and Calling*, p. 205.

⁵⁴For Robbins’ biography see Susan Howson, ‘Robbins, Lionel Charles, Baron Robbins’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/31612>. Accessed 29 June 2022. Also, Lionel Robbins, *Autobiography of an Economist*, (London: Macmillan, 1971)

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eminent scholar by the outbreak of the Second World War, after 1945 Robbins' stature grew such that in 1961 he was appointed to chair a government committee tasked with looking at the future of higher education in the United Kingdom. The report that he produced in 1963 laid a foundation for the democratisation of university education in line with rising student numbers, offering recommendations on the form of institutions and the content of courses.⁵⁵

For Howard, the timing of the Robbins report was fortuitous since, he noted, it advocated 'sweeping reform of syllabuses of existing ones [universities], involving the creation of "bold and exciting" new degrees. This was exactly what I had myself been doing.'⁵⁶ Yet Howard did not seek to capitalise on the opportunity the report presented to expand and embed war studies at the undergraduate level. Rather, during the same period in which Robbins' committee carried out its inquiry his attitude towards undergraduate study became increasingly unfavourable. In a memorandum written in the summer of 1962, in response to low enrolments and the decline in status of the BA General Degree, he advocated that war studies form part of the BSc (Econ) Degree.⁵⁷ He noted that specialising in war studies at the undergraduate level 'seems to the undergraduates to be undesirable too'. As a result, he considered that 'it therefore seemed to me that the place for it was embedded in the International Relations syllabus, among papers which would ensure that the candidates had been grounded in some firmer academic disciplines'.⁵⁸ Little had changed two years later when the Academic Board argued that War Studies was 'not suitable for undergraduate teaching, embracing as it does too many disciplines to be properly assimilated by the immature mind'. Instead, Howard proposed a new MA degree by examination, which would replace the existing MA degree by thesis – the only existing postgraduate war studies course, along with the PhD – and allow candidates to choose from a greater range of disciplinary and subject-focused papers.⁵⁹ The MA course that began in earnest the following year became, in the words of Brian Bond, 'the core or

⁵⁵Robbins' work with the committee and his reflections on its report can be found in Robbins, *Autobiography*, pp. 272-8

⁵⁶Howard, *Captain Professor*, p. 148.

⁵⁷LHCMA, 1990/KDW/9. 'War Studies at the Undergraduate Level' M.E. Howard, 16 June 1962.

⁵⁸LHCMA, 1990/KDW/9, Howard to G.L. Goodwin, 1 November 1962.

⁵⁹LHCMA, 1990/KDW/1. 'Proposals for an M.A. Degree and an Academic Diploma in War Studies', appended to Secretary to the Board of the Faculty of Arts to Prof Geoffrey Goodwin (copy), 22 July 1964. See also 'Draft Proposals for the Board of War Studies for the Institution of an M.A. Degree by Examination and an Academic Diploma in War Studies', M.E. Howard, 10 Feb 1964.

flagship of our teaching' for the next twenty-five years, bringing with it only graduate students and low numbers.⁶⁰

Thus, while Howard manoeuvred adroitly to give War Studies permanency in the postgraduate sphere, he showed little appetite to take advantage of the Robbins report and subsequent reforms of UK higher education to make War Studies a major undergraduate course. Rather than seek to follow the vision that Aston had articulated in the 1920s, of a programme of instruction about war intended for a broad civic constituency, Howard pursued a more focused approach, which included attempts to revive closer links with the armed forces that presaged larger scale developments in military education at King's some thirty years later. Writing in 1965 he appeared to anticipate that a significant proportion of future MA students would be military officers, noting that Henry Hardman, recently appointed permanent secretary to the Ministry of Defence, was 'quite enthusiastic' about the masters programme, and that 'the services may take this up in a fairly big way'.⁶¹ In part this reflected 'the need to improve the quality of the students taking the course' as 'the younger men coming to the Department shortly after taking their first degree have very much the status of second class citizens as the ablest of their peers go immediately into research.'⁶² The legacy of the 'technical' education for those with a professional interest in the military, which Howard had criticised, thus endured.

This focus upon postgraduate instruction reflected a mix of intellectual and pragmatic factors, as well as an inclination towards working with more mature students. Nor was it wholly out of keeping with the tenor of the Robbins report, which placed particular emphasis on the expansion of postgraduate courses.⁶³ Nevertheless, it reflected the limits of Howard's ambition in pursuing war studies as a disciplinary endeavour, or to make that endeavour a life's work. For Howard 'War Studies' situated war as the referent object of study, but allowed for a disciplinary eclecticism that would build bridges between the traditionally narrow and technical confines of 'military history' or 'military studies' and a wider community of scholars working on issues related to conflict. This made for a 'catholic' approach, in keeping with that

⁶⁰Bond, *Military Historian*, pp. 32-3. Members of the Department of War Studies continued to offer papers for extra-departmental programmes.

⁶¹LHCMA, LH 1/384, part V. Howard to Liddell Hart, 13 December 1965.

⁶²KCA 1990/KDW/9. 'The MA and academic diploma in war studies: some proposals for discussion.' [no date]

⁶³See *Report of the Committee appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins 1961-63*, (London: HM Stationary Office, October 1963), Chapter VIII – University Courses, pp. 87-106.

<http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/robbins/robbins1963.html>. Accessed 29 June 2022.

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championed by Robbins and Webster, but it also meant scholarly co-habitation rather than a closer union.⁶⁴ As Howard wrote in a draft report for the Social Science Research Council in 1966, war studies was

not a coherent field of study but a collection of different disciplines, each capable of far wider application. This is obviously true of such subjects as economics and public administration, but no less so of such apparently specialised studies as strategy, conflict studies and operational research, all of which have application in many fields other than international armed conflict.⁶⁵

Howard was entirely comfortable with such an arrangement, not least because it allowed him to prioritise his own research agenda without hindrance. Although he admitted that in pursuing war studies he 'had to skim the surface of many disciplines without having the chance to thoroughly master any one' it was nonetheless as an historian that he continued to see himself and historical projects that he sought to pursue.⁶⁶

Having fought for the institutional establishment of war studies during the 1950s and having overseen its creation during the 1960s, Howard left King's College London before the decade was over, taking a visiting position at Stanford prior to accepting a Fellowship at All Souls.⁶⁷ Although his departure in 1968 seemed abrupt to his colleagues, it came as the culmination of years of frustration at the university. Howard later reflected that he had 'acquired a deep affection for King's'.⁶⁸ Yet as early as 1961 he had offered his resignation to the College due to the lack of an imminent promotion and his desire to be free of the teaching and administrative responsibilities that prevented full focus on his work on the Official History of the Second World War. He was wary of becoming what he described as the 'God Professor', 'the permanent head of a department who condescended to lecture once a week and whose staff had been hand-picked from a court of dependent servile graduate-students', and by the mid-1960s was still more perturbed by the prospect that he might further climb the administerial ladder. 'If I remained in London' he wrote in his memoir, 'there seemed little prospect of my ever doing any serious work again.'⁶⁹ In a letter to Liddell Hart

⁶⁴Howard, *Captain Professor*, p. 147.

⁶⁵KCA 1990/KDW/3 – Folder: I.S.S. Study Group (Sponsored by S.S.R.C) "War Studies" research projects. Draft: Report of the Social Science Research Council Study Group on War Studies, December 1966.

⁶⁶Howard, *Studies in War and Peace*, p. 12.

⁶⁷The circumstances of his departure are recounted in Howard, *Captain Professor*, pp. 195-6 and Bond, *Military Historian*, p. 34.

⁶⁸Howard, *Captain Professor*, p. 195.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 182 and 195.

from 1961, he put it more bluntly: 'I have been here for fourteen years, and it really isn't the sort of place in which one wants to spend one's life.'⁷⁰ Howard was true to his word. After departing King's for his Oxford Fellowship, appointments as Chichele Professor of the History of War and Regius Professor of Modern History, followed by a final move to Yale in 1989, ensured that he did not return to a post at King's College London for the rest of his professional career.

The department that Howard left behind was small, consisting of its new head, the strategist Laurence Martin, the military sociologist Wolf Mendl, the military historian Brian Bond, and the departmental secretary June Walker. It would remain small for the next twenty years, retaining something of the essence of the model Howard had presided over before his departure. During this time Howard maintained direct connections with the department in the form of guest lectures and personal ties. Former graduate students of Howard's from Oxford now came to play a more significant role in the development of the department at King's, such as Beatrice Heuser and Lawrence Freedman. Indeed, it was the latter who took responsibility for, in Howard's words, transforming war studies into 'that vast empire...on both banks of the Thames' during the 1990s, marked at the outset of that decade by the creation of a new bachelor's degree in war studies and compounded by an extension into military education at its close.⁷¹

By the time that transformation took hold Howard had reached the end of his professional career. Although he would continue to write and publish until his death almost thirty years later, his retirement afforded the occasion to take stock of his scholarly impact. As the editors of his 1992 *festschrift* noted, Howard had maintained interests that were 'exceptionally wide-ranging', further remarking that 'He is unusual among academics in that he has made major contributions to two separate, though related, areas of study.' Tellingly, the authors defined these fields as military history and strategic studies, not 'war' studies.⁷² This was an apt conclusion to draw from Howard's scholarly pursuits since the 1960s. Although his first book, co-authored with John Sparrow, had been a regimental history, he went on to publish acclaimed works of military history, the most widely read English language translation of Clausewitz's *On War*, and a number of concise collections of essays such as *War and the Liberal Conscience*. He wrote widely on the impact of nuclear weapons upon strategy and international affairs, was a prolific reviewer of books, and served as an official historian of the Second World War.

⁷⁰LHCMA, LH 1/384, part III. Howard to Liddell Hart, 16 February 1961.

⁷¹Howard, 'Military history and the history of war', p. 13.

⁷²Freedman, Hayes, and O'Neill, *War, Strategy, and International Politics*, p. v.

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Displaying such range and acuity, Howard's work was frequently lauded as rigorous in ways that were often ahead of their time, as compellingly written and conceived, and as reflecting deep insight. This did not mean, however, that Howard necessarily felt that he accomplished all of his scholarly ambitions. Indeed, throughout the 1960s and 1970s his desire – and part of his motivation for leaving King's – was to secure adequate research time to focus on a significant research project on 'the changing nature of war' during the period of 'transformation which occurred between the battle of Waterloo and that of the Somme a hundred years later'.⁷³ This agenda, which might have led to a more substantive scholarly treatment of war as a historical phenomenon than Howard produced in his lifetime, was frustrated by new opportunities and diversions that further underpinned Howard's pragmatic approach to scholarship. In terms of historical work, this came in the form of his contributions to the official history of the Second World War, the first volume on grand strategy and the second on intelligence.⁷⁴ It was also a consequence of his interest in contemporary problems of strategy and defence. The pursuit of such projects eventually afforded him a means of escape to Oxford as a Fellow in Higher Defence Studies, but the path that led away from the Strand began in the mid-1950s with Howard's willingness to put himself forward as a commentator on issues of the day. Howard's membership of Chatham House led to substantive work in the realm of international affairs, most notably as a founder member of the International Institute for Strategic Studies.⁷⁵ Despite this, Howard's identity as a historian underpinned his *oeuvre*, informing his perspective on war from each of the many angles he sought to illuminate the subject. By viewing history as essential to understanding war, Howard established a 'particularly British' approach to contemporary conflict, predicated upon a dialogue between historic and modern war.⁷⁶ Yet more united his thought than its disciplinary basis. As Hew Strachan has observed, 'very often the "new" military history has seemed to be the history of war with the fighting left out. Michael's interest has been too firmly rooted in the *phenomenon of war itself* for this to have been an attractive route for him to go down.'⁷⁷ Indeed, he retained his belief that war was a vital and coherent object of study into the latter stages of his life. As he argued in a critique of the global war on terror in 2008, 'in international politics "war" has a specific meaning'. He continued, presciently, to reflect on the repercussions of depicting Western actions in the language of war:

However well they may behave, however many sweets they give children, foreign soldiers can never be very popular, certainly not for very long, and

⁷³Howard, *Studies in War and Peace*, pp. 11-12.

⁷⁴Howard, *Captain Professor*, pp. 150-2, 188-191, Publication of the latter volume was blocked until 1990.

⁷⁵Ibid, pp. 157-165.

⁷⁶Strachan, 'Michael Howard and the dimensions of military history', p. 543.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 545. Our italics.

certainly not if they believe they are 'at war' and are therefore immune from normal civil restraints. It then becomes all too easy for their opponents to depict them as the agents not of a global civil society, but of an alien hegemony, and condemn those who support them as traitors.⁷⁸

and

Thus, however much the agenda of 'broadening' the study of war away from the battlefield was necessary and beneficial, at the center of the history of war there must lie the study of military history – that is, the study of the central activity of the armed forces, that is, *fighting*.⁷⁹

Yet much as this conviction and focus united Howard's own work and thought, it remains far from commonly accepted amongst scholars who work on aspects of conflict, or indeed within the Department of War Studies itself.⁸⁰ In the twenty-first century Howard's name is invoked on the one hand by those critical of the suggestion that the history of war constitutes a 'discipline of its own', and on the other by those who contend that establishing a disciplinary basis for 'war studies' is a necessary step in advancing the field.⁸¹ His image supports attempts to sustain the 'broadening' of military history away from the conduct of armies, yet remains cherished by 'operational' military historians.⁸² In part this reflects the inherent flexibility, even ambiguity, with which war studies, as department and idea, assumed its modern form and label under Howard in the 1950s. The philosophy of disciplinary inclusivity

⁷⁸Michael Howard, 'Are we at war?' in Michael Howard and Benjamin Rhode, *An Historical Sensibility: Sir Michael Howard and The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1958-2019* (London: Routledge, 2020), p. 371.

⁷⁹Howard, 'Military history and the history of war', p. 20.

⁸⁰On the broader point see Tarak Barkawi and Shane Brighton, 'Powers of War: Fighting, Knowledge, and Critique', *International Political Sociology*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (June 2011), especially pp. 127-29. On the Department see Mark Condos and Gavin Rand, 'Coercion and Conciliation at the Edge of Empire: State-Building and its Limits in Waziristan, 1849-1914', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 61, No. 3 (2018), pp. 695-718; Claudia Aradau, 'Security, War, Violence – The Politics of Critique: A Reply to Tarak Barkawi', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 1, 2012, pp. 112-23.

⁸¹On the former point see Kim Wagner, 'Seeing like a soldier: the Amritsar massacre and the politics of military history' in Martin Thomas and Gareth Curless, eds., *Decolonization and Conflict: Colonial Comparisons and Legacies*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2017); on the latter see Barkawi and Brighton, 'Powers of War', p. 132.

⁸²Website for 2022 KCL lecture series 'New Directions in the History of War and Violence' <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/events/series/new-directions-in-the-history-of-war-and-violence>. Accessed 29 June 2022.

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Howard bequeathed had clear and long-lasting benefits, yet the fact that war studies remains a 'non-discipline' means that the rich variety of outstanding scholarship produced on conflict can often amount to less than the sum of its parts, 'very helpful but a little bewildering' as Howard described the referees' comments on his Oxford *Very Short Introduction to the First World War*.⁸³

Conclusion

In this article we have sought to recontextualise Sir Michael Howard's role in the establishment of the Department of War Studies. We have argued that Howard's achievement in placing War Studies on a firm institutional footing needs to be understood less as a revolutionary breakthrough than as the culmination of fitful progress towards similar goals over the preceding century, and that in the aftermath of the Second World War there was significant support for the academic study of war within the University of London. We have demonstrated that Howard's approach to the historical study of war was reflective of ideas held by key individuals who offered him support, notably Sir Charles Webster and Sir Keith Hancock. Furthermore, we have shown that Howard's conception of 'war studies' was always pragmatic, rather than disciplinary – perhaps with the exception of an insistence that history and an historical mode of thought were important to the study of war. Accepting Howard's lack of allegiance to War Studies as an academic project helps explain his willingness to leave the department he founded before the end of the 1960s, to pursue academic projects and hold posts variously focused on defence studies, strategic studies and history.

By proposing such arguments, we have engaged in a conscious attempt to pierce some of the mythology that surrounds Howard and his legacy. Such a course is liable to draw criticism, yet it is also in keeping with Howard's approach to mythology and to his own mentor, Liddell Hart. When Howard began to carve out a unique academic role for himself in the 1950s, Liddell Hart offered crucial guidance. Howard was fulsome in his praise for Liddell Hart, and the two men's correspondence of that era displays a genuine warmth and interchange of ideas.⁸⁴ Yet he did not refrain from making critical assessments of Liddell Hart's work and practice. In a BBC interview given whilst Liddell Hart was still alive, Howard reflected that his subject 'does not suffer fools gladly and his definition of a fool is a very catholic one. He is merciless with anything that he regards as cant.'⁸⁵ After Liddell Hart's death Howard was still more critical of a number of his ideas, not least the 'British Way in Warfare', which

⁸³Howard, 'Military history and the history of war', p. 83.

⁸⁴On Liddell Hart's impact upon Howard see Holden Reid, 'The Legacy of Liddell Hart'

⁸⁵LHCMA, LH 1/384. 'Contribution by Michael Howard to 'Liddell Hart' Feature', undated.

he rejected as ‘anachronistic survivals from some earlier and happier age’.⁸⁶ Yet if he felt justified in making such strident critiques, it was because he knew that they aligned with Liddell Hart’s own insistence on rigour. As he explained, ‘Nobody stressed more often the need for ruthlessly dispassionate analysis as a basis for both history and theory; but he himself sought to escape from the dilemma of his generation by what was, in the context of his times, little more than rationalization of nostalgic wishful thinking.’⁸⁷

In attempting to recontextualise Howard’s role and activities in the early decades of his career we offer our observations in a spirit which we hope Sir Michael would have approved. Any attempt to re-appraise Howard’s influence must acknowledge the towering legacy his life left upon his students, colleagues, and friends. Yet an account of the development of war studies and of the institutional and intellectual approach formulated by Howard during this critical period that accepts uncritically some of the things we think we know about the origins and evolution of war studies would amount to a most inappropriate tribute. In his treatment of the history of war, Howard was keen to underline the persistence of historical myth; of recognising the significance of its function whilst exposing its variance from historical reality. As he observed, ‘myth does have a useful social function’, but the role of the historian ‘must inevitably involve a critical examination of the “myth”’.⁸⁸ Such critical examination must surely extend also to the historian, not just the things that they studied.

⁸⁶Howard, *The Causes of Wars*, p. 186.

⁸⁷Ibid, p. 206.

⁸⁸Ibid, pp. 189-90.