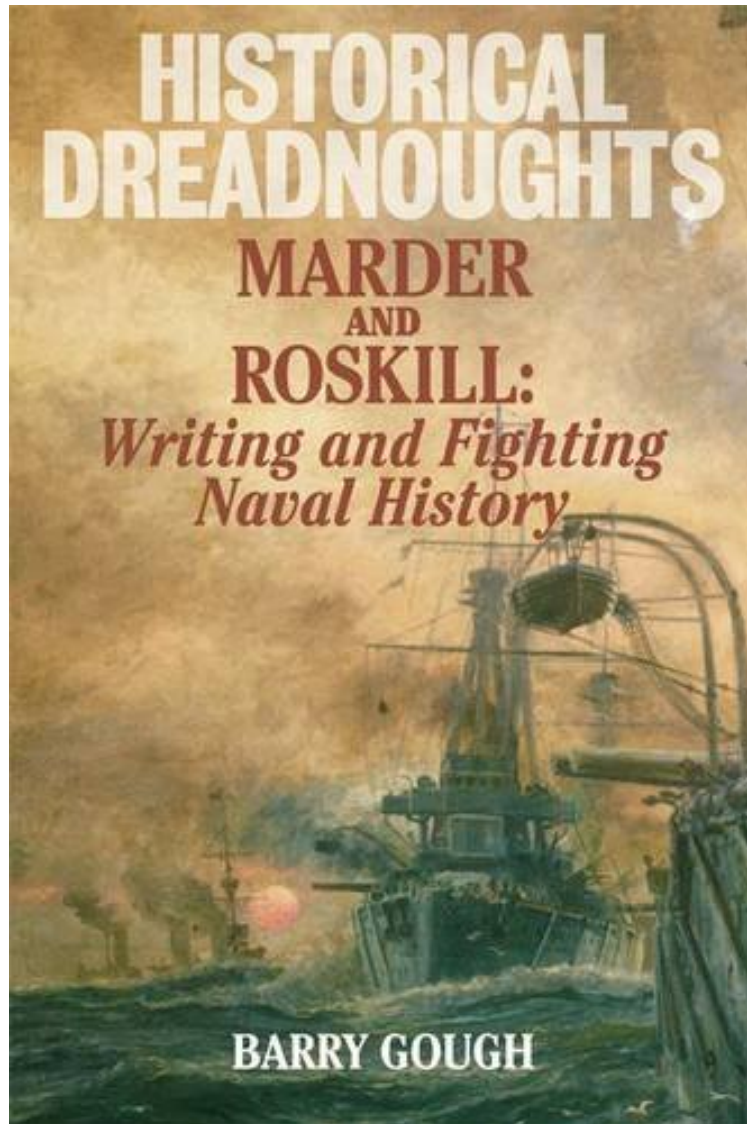


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Historical Dreadnoughts: Marder and Roskill: Writing and Fighting Naval History

Barry Gough

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Barry Gough : Historical Dreadnoughts: Marder and Roskill: Writing and Fighting Naval History before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Historical Dreadnoughts: Marder and Roskill: Writing and Fighting Naval History:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Parallel lives, parallel historyBy Alexander T. GaffordBarry Gough has written a quite good history about the life and works of Arthur Marder and Stephen Roskill who, between them,

well defined the history of the Royal Navy in the first half of the twentieth century. I first encountered the works of these authors in 1965 and 1966 in my college library and was fascinated, even enthralled, by the accounts they presented and the way they wrote, Marder extremely well organized, systematic and complete, Roskill clear with graceful narrative prose and a strong sense of connection with the event. Gough divides the book into three parts. Part One, of six chapters, covers in alternating chapters the life and development of Roskill and Marder up to the point where their interests and opinions began to conflict. Part Two, of three chapters, is titled Collision Course and covers the two controversies about source material and one about interpretation that drove the formerly friendly historians apart. Part Three, of two chapters, covers the ends of their careers and lives and is followed by an epilogue that summarizes the matter. There is a nice selection of photographs, mostly of the people who are of significance in the narrative. A useful bibliography follows. Gough does a good job of describing how different the lives of the two men were, though I think he does not give that enough emphasis in describing how they came into conflict. The arguments about disposal of source material, which were really the sources of bitterness and distaste on the part of both, appear to me to stem from their very different positions in life. Marder was the consummate academic historian, highly honored during the course of his career, yet always with a load of undergraduate and graduate teaching, academic administration and professional involvement. Roskill, despite his "official" status, was a free-lance writer who depended on income from his books to support himself and his family. At no time did either seem to appreciate these facts about the other and so could not understand each others actions and motivations. The disagreement about the roles of Churchill and Dudley Pound seems a more straightforward disagreement of historical interpretation. It is the type of thing that will never be settled by historians because it is very likely the actors at the time did not agree about whether Churchill interfered in tactics and operations too much and whether Pound was strong enough or healthy enough to stand up to him. I don't think this could have been the cause of the estrangement between the men which should be found in the matters mentioned above. It is a sad story in some ways, since they never seemed to have reconciled though mutual respect endured. On the other hand, as Gough points out, they both contributed much to history and our attempts to understand how the Royal Navy coped with the terrible events of the times. Though this is a well organized and written book, I have given it only four stars because I am not sure just how many people will be interested in the level of detail Gough brings to bear on the relationship of these two. As a long essay I could see it being of more general interest. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Giants at loggerheads By Chris Sterling If Royal Navy history is your thing, then the names of Arthur J. Marder and Stephen Roskill need no introduction. The former is best known for his five volumes on the 1905-19 period (FROM THE DREADNOUGHT TO SCAPA FLOW, 1961-1970), while the latter wrote the official history of the Royal Navy in World War Two (THE WAR AT SEA, 1954-61, 3 vols in 4). Both authored numerous other titles, many now collector's items on the used book market. Sadly, they eventually fell out with one another, after many years of constructive effort. Gough, a well-respected Canadian historian, traces both of their lives with a focus on their research and publication. The result is a fascinating and well-written tale that explores what happened and why. Both subjects could be thin-skinned, but I came away with the notion that both were very hard-working (dedicated is the word) historians, usually working against deadlines, and thus not always showing patience. But many of their disagreements were fact-based...who did what or how did a specific event take place. Gough makes it all into a very readable narrative that sheds light on the world of the professional (academic in Marder's case) historian. This is a sometimes sad tale, but an illuminating one just the same. And it's a great read . . .

This is the story of the remarkable, intersecting careers of the two greatest writers on British naval history in the twentieth century - the American professor Arthur Marder, son of immigrant Russian Jews, and Captain Stephen Roskill, who knew the Royal Navy from the inside. Between them, these contrasting characters were to peel back the lid of historical secrecy that surrounded the maritime aspects of the two world wars, based on the privileged access to official papers they both achieved through different channels. Initially their mutual interests led to a degree of friendly rivalry, but this was to deteriorate into a stormy academic feud fought out in newspaper columns and the footnotes of their books - much to the bemusement (and sometimes amusement) of the naval history community. Out of it, surprisingly, emerged some of the best historical writing on naval themes, and a central contribution of this book is to reveal the process by which the two historians produced their literary masterpieces. Anyone who has read Marder's *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow* or Roskill's *The War at Sea* - and they were both bestsellers in their day - will be entertained and enlightened by this story of the men A J P Taylor called 'our historical dreadnoughts'. This is the story of the remarkable, intersecting careers of the two greatest writers on British naval history in the twentieth century - the American professor Arthur Marder, son of immigrant Russian Jews, and Captain Stephen Roskill, who knew the Royal Navy from the inside. Between them, these contrasting characters were to peel back the lid of historical secrecy that surrounded the maritime aspects of the two world wars, based on the privileged access to official papers they both achieved through different channels. Initially their mutual interests led to a degree of friendly rivalry, but this was to deteriorate into a stormy academic feud fought out in newspaper columns and the footnotes of their books - much to the bemusement (and sometimes amusement) of the naval history community. Out of it, surprisingly, emerged some of

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This very thorough and eminently readable book is the story of the lives and interactions of the two great writers on twentieth century British naval history, the successors to the legendary Alfred T Mahan and Julian Corbett. A book about naval historians and their differing approaches to writing history might be dry and dull, but in the author's capable hands (as a Canadian, he is neutral in the dispute) makes a fascinating read. It is a naval book with a difference and one that cannot be too highly recommended for the bookshelf. - Warship 2012