

[Homosexuality, Bureaucracy and the Admiralty: The Suppression of so-called 'Unnatural Vice' in Churchill's Navy, 1911-15](#)

Announcement published by Lucy Dale on Friday, January 13, 2023

Type:

Seminar

Date:

March 21, 2023

Location:

United Kingdom

Subject Fields:

British History / Studies, Maritime History / Studies, Political History / Studies, Social History / Studies

Date and Time: 21 March 2023 | 5.15pm - 6.30pm

As First Lord of the Admiralty from 1911 to 1915, Winston Churchill is best known for his efforts to prepare Britain for war against Germany. He also embarked upon a radical programme of social reform during this period. His efforts included progressive measures such as better pay, improved conditions, and attempts to promote temperance - but there was also a darker side to naval social reform measures.

The Admiralty, swayed by a new moral panic about homosexuality, had begun a new campaign to suppress what it called 'Unnatural Offences' shortly before Churchill's appointment. After several failed proceedings and legal missteps, officials eventually settled on a new means of investigating and charging those deemed to have committed so-called 'offences against morality', which led to an upsurge in court martial prosecutions. This little-known campaign would thus have significant consequences for gay men in the Royal Navy.

Why was this campaign launched and what form did it take? Why is so little known about it? How did it affect the lives of sailors in the Royal Navy? How was the Admiralty's approach to homosexuality at this time different to that of its predecessors?

Join us for a free online talk discussing these difficult and complex issues. Professor Matthew Seligmann (Brunel University London), author of *Rum, Sodomy, Prayers & the Lash Revisited* (2018), *The Royal Navy and the German Threat, 1901-1914* (2012) and *Spies in Uniform* (2006), will provide new insights by drawing on overlooked Admiralty records that shed light on important files that have been destroyed.

Event details

This event is free and open to everyone, and will take place via Zoom. There is no need to book; please click on the link below shortly before 5.15pm on the day.

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Contact Info:

Lucy Dale

Contact Email:

ldale@rmg.co.uk

URL:

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