



University  
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

**IAIN O'SHEA**

MA (University of New Brunswick, 2010)  
BA (Simon Fraser University, 2008)

**“The Anatomy of Panic:  
The Impact of Naval Scares and Public Opinion in Late  
Nineteenth-Century Britain”**

Department of History

Monday, August 21, 2017  
10:00 A.M.  
Clearihue Building  
Room B017

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. David Zimmerman, Department of History, University of Victoria (Supervisor)  
Dr. Simon Devereaux, Department of History, UVic (Member)  
Dr. Lisa Surridge, Department of English, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Christopher Bell, Department of History, Dalhousie University

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. John Meldrum, School of Exercise Science, Physical Health and Education, UVic

## **Abstract**

Popular navalism in nineteenth-century Britain was a natural but not inevitable outcome of the geographical reality of an island nation possessing a large maritime empire. The long-term evolution of democracy and the rapid growth of the mass-circulation press transformed the civil-military relationship in the last decades of the century, leading to a series of naval scares. These were episodes of intense public interest and engagement in naval affairs, manifested through Parliamentary speeches, newspaper and periodical contributions and in private correspondence. Naval historians have emphasized technological and strategic narratives in the modernization of the Royal Navy, and in the process neglected the dramatic political struggles in 1884–94 that provided the vital precondition for naval reform and expansion — money. The relevant question is not whether the naval scares were objectively justified, but how public discourses were employed by individuals and interest groups to transform the naval political economy by creating a ‘blue-water’ strategic common sense that would support the creation of ocean-going battlefleets designed to win and maintain ‘command of the sea.’ A triangular relationship between the Government, the navy and the public, connected largely through the press, rapidly evolved over the course of three naval scares, in 1884, 1888 and 1893. A pro-navy political equilibrium was constructed that raised peacetime naval expenditure to unprecedented heights and laid the foundations for the more widely known reforms of the twentieth-century ‘Fisher Era.’