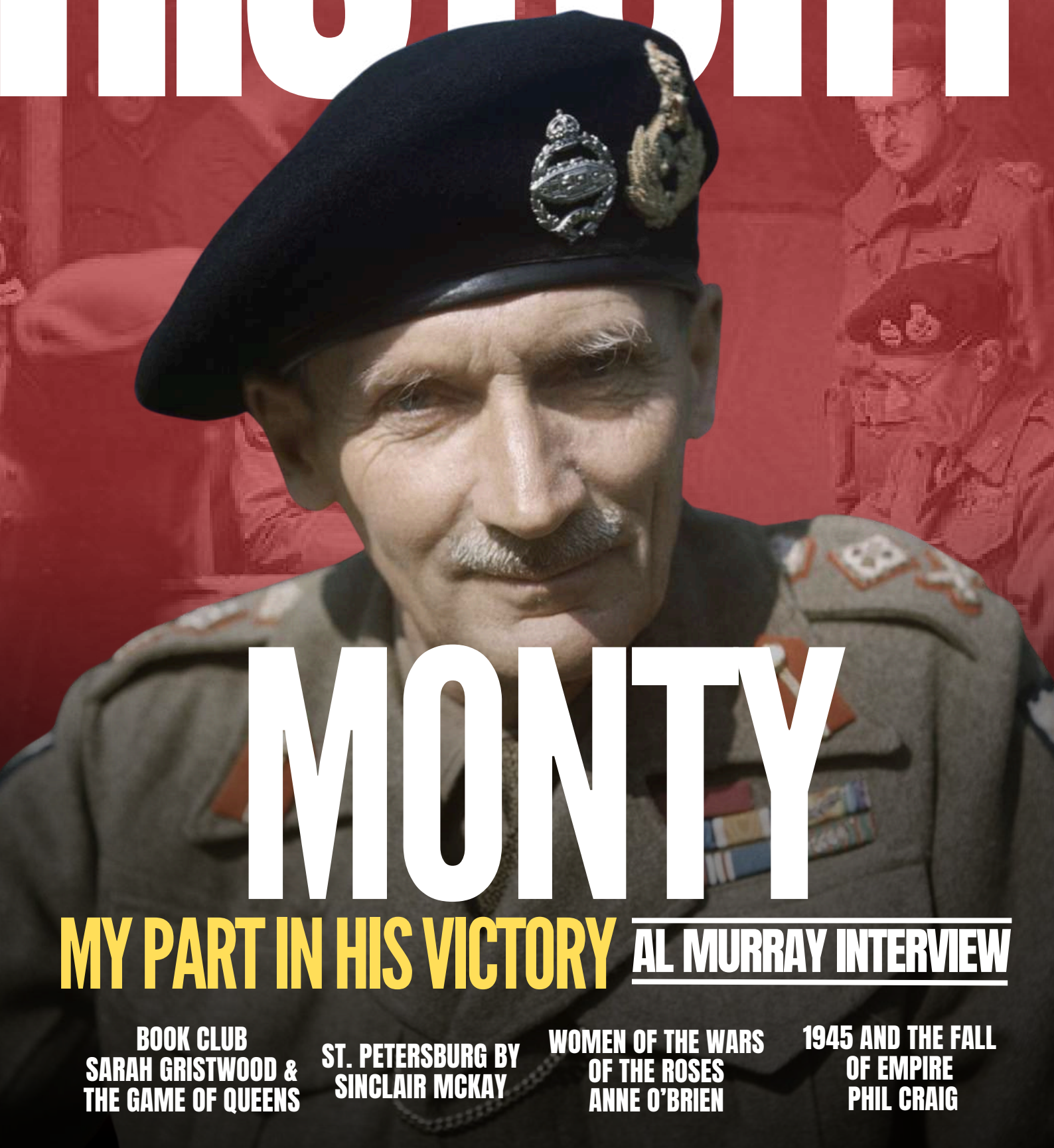


THE PAST ISN'T DEAD,
IT ISN'T EVEN PAST

ISSUE 27
APR/MAY 2025

ASPECTS OF

HISTORY



MONTY

MY PART IN HIS VICTORY **AL MURRAY INTERVIEW**

BOOK CLUB
SARAH GRISTWOOD &
THE GAME OF QUEENS

ST. PETERSBURG BY
SINCLAIR MCKAY

WOMEN OF THE WARS
OF THE ROSES
ANNE O'BRIEN

1945 AND THE FALL
OF EMPIRE
PHIL CRAIG



EDITOR'S NOTE

I was having a conversation with two female historians recently, Sarah Gristwood and Miranda Malins, which is available on our podcast. Our chat has been on my mind for weeks since. The context was Women's History Month, which ran throughout March, and my first question to them was whether such a month is a 'good thing.' Sarah made the point that it's similar to growing old. Bad until one considers the alternative. She then went on to make a mild observation, though perhaps I'm being optimistic, and it was a criticism, that Aspects of History's output is weighted male. The difficulty as an editor is that our World War Two podcasts, articles, and substacks prove overwhelmingly popular. But we have produced a new anthology, Herstory, containing many contributions from women historians, including Margaret MacMillan, Antonia Fraser, Leanda de Lisle, as well as from Sarah and Miranda. The strength of the writers in this collection is testament to the health of female writing out there and in here.

Inevitably, as we are at the 80th anniversary of the Allied victory in Europe, it must take centre stage as that most deadly conflict came to a close. Montgomery's overstep, detailed in the piece, is discussed by Al Murray, who, alongside James Holland, has written an insightful account of the various surrenders in 1945.

The AoH Book Club title is Sarah Gristwood's Game of Queens, in which she writes the extraordinary stories of women such as Isabella of Castile, Anne de Beaujeu, Anne Boleyn and others. Sarah was part of a new wave of female historians during the 2000s, finding figures from the past and presenting them in a new way. This book is no different.

Our Historical Hero is Pug Ismay. John Kiszely, a recent addition to Aspects of History, has written a masterful account of Churchill's chief military advisor, known in Whitehall as 'the man with the oil can,' who skilfully navigated the treacherous waters between the heads of the armed forces and Churchill himself. This new book really has brought to the fore a man who had been overlooked by many.

Author Platforms remain open for historians, historical novelists, academics and students to write about their books and history in an ongoing way. In addition, we can provide publishing and promotional services to assist authors and would-be authors, from pitch to publication and beyond. If you are a member of a historical society or creative writing group, then do get in touch.

If you are interested in finding out more, please visit our website at aspectsofhistory.com, follow us on Twitter @aspectshistory, or email me at editor@aspectsofhistory.com. I am always happy to hear from readers and writers alike. This continues to be as much your magazine as ours.

OLIVER WEBB-CARTER
Editor, & Co-Founder, Aspects of History

ASPECTS OF HISTORY

EDITOR

OLIVER WEBB-CARTER

ADVISORY BOARD

SAUL DAVID
RICHARD FOREMAN
ROGER MOORHOUSE
ANTONIA SENIOR

BOOKS EDITOR

ZEB BAKER-SMITH

DESIGN

NICK KEVERN

WEB DESIGNER

LUKE ROGERS

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

TARA FLYNN

SOCIAL MEDIA

BETHANY HALL

BACK ISSUES & SUBSCRIPTION

WWW.ASPECTSOFHISTORY.COM



@ASPECTSHISTORY



@ASPECTSOFHISTORY



ASPECTSOFHISTORY

INTERVIEWS

- 04 My Part in Monty's Victory
Al Murray
- 18 The Queen and the Countess
Anne O'Brien
- 76 Murder in Anglo-Saxon England:
Annie Whitehead

ARTICLES

- 10 War, Empire and the Struggle for a New World
Phil Craig
- 14 Sacrifice and Redemption in St Petersburg
Sinclair McKay
- 22 Same-Sex Love in the Early Modern Period
Gareth Russell
- 30 Better than the Age,
John Rees
- 46 How Do You Solve a Problem Like Postumus?
Fiona Forsyth
- 50 Why You Won't Find King Arthur in My New Dark Ages Trilogy
MJ Porter
- 54 England's Lost King: A Study in Missed Opportunity
Paul Bernardi
- 58 A Reign Marked by Change
Sophie Austin
- 62 The Best-Kept Secret of the Cold War
Charlie English

HISTORICAL HEROES

- 34 General Hastings 'Pug' Ismay
John Kiszely

SHORT STORIES

- 38 The Complainant
R.N. Morris
- 66 Lies, Damned Lies and Misinformation
Alan Bardos

ASPECTS OF HISTORY CONTENTS



04



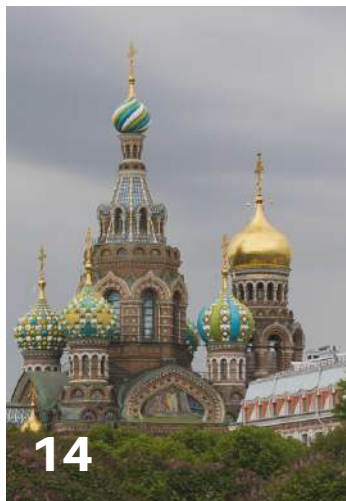
26



18



22



14



76



50



30



46



34



58

REVIEWS

Victory '45: The End of the War in Eight Surrenders 80
James Holland & Al Murray

1945: The Reckoning: War, Empire and the Struggle for a New World 81
Phil Craig

Saint Petersburg: Sacrifice and Redemption in the City that Defied Hitler 82
Sinclair McKay

The Queen and the Countess, 83
Anne O'Brien

Queen James: A New History About the Life and Loves of Britain's First King, James Stuart 84
Gareth Russell

The Fiery Spirits: Popular Protest, Parliament and the English Revolution 85
John Rees

General Hastings 'Pug' Ismay: Soldier, Statesman, Diplomat - A New Biography 86
John Kiszely

Death and the Poet 87
Fiona Forsyth

Men of Iron 88
M.J. Porter

Uprising 89
Paul Bernardi

The Lamplighter's Bookshop 90
Sophie Austin

The CIA Book Club: The Best Kept Secret of the Cold War 91
Charlie English

Ancient Greece: The Definitive Visual History from 92
Dorling Kindersley

Murder in Anglo-Saxon England: Justice, Wergild, Revenge 93
Annie Whitehead

AOH BOOK CLUB

Sarah Gristwood on the Women Who Made Sixteenth-Century Europe 26

Q&A

MY PART IN MONTY'S VICTORY

AL MURRAY

Al Murray's latest book, coming soon after *Arnhem: Black Tuesday*, is a joint effort with James Holland, and examines the eight surrenders throughout 1945 from the Western Front to the Eastern and beyond to the Far East theatre. He met with our editor recently to discuss the work.





Above:
General Sir Bernard Montgomery in England, 1943

With the succession of surrenders that ended the war in Europe in April and May 1945, it is tempting to look down the list and pick out a few highlights. My personal favourite is the Japanese surrender later that year on 15 August, when Emperor Hirohito spoke to his people - the radio broadcast reportedly was the first time they had heard his voice. Who cannot but smile with wry amusement at the words, 'the war situation has developed not necessarily to Japan's advantage.' Whenever I have a huge climbdown to make, those are the words I use; for example, when assessing my football team's performance in the Premier League, I simply say, 'the season has developed not necessarily to Southampton's advantage.' For those uninitiated, the club currently lies rooted firmly at the bottom of the table, recording only two wins all season, and on schedule to muster the fewest points in the league's history.

The reason for my speculation is down to a new book, *Victory '45*, a

joint project by Al Murray and James Holland, the presenters of the phenomenally successful podcast *We Have Ways of Making You Talk*. The pair have written about each surrender of 1945 in a pacy and thrilling narrative that one races through. I recently met with Murray to discuss the book, and it seems the prose was shaped by the tight deadline he and Holland committed to, as the idea only emerged in the summer of 2024. Knowing the publishing world as I do, it is quite a feat to have a book written and published in under a year. As a reader, though, the speed of the process is all the more satisfying whilst reading the book, and Murray makes clear that this was intentional: 'When I was reading about the decision to use the atomic bomb and there was disagreement at the top in [the United States of] America. Admiral Leahy thought it would be crossing the line. He said, "Why don't we just gas their cities? If we're to do this [the bombing]...it would be the same as gassing them all. It's on a par with that. And that's

unacceptable. We don't do that."

'One of the guys talking about this says academics sit and think about this for months on end or years on end. They toss and turn whether to deploy the atom bomb. They didn't have the kind of time people have to think about this stuff now. This was happening to them right then and there. The decisions were upon them.

'I'm much more interested in history that reflects that rather than if you stop and think about it, because they [the allies] didn't have time to stop and think about it. "History is just one thing after another" - it is a quote I really love.'

This is Murray's third book, after *Command and Arnhem: Black Tuesday*, and his first with Holland. When we spoke, he was about to head north on a whirlwind tour of Skegness, Sheffield and York performing his 'Pub Landlord' alter-ego. Throw in his podcast, the festival it inspired and the British Drum Co., this is a busy man.

Back to the surrenders – particularly the one featured on the book's cover: a thoroughly defeated Grand Admiral von Friedeberg signing the document on 4 May, watched over by a satisfied yet stern Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery. Von Friedeberg and his delegation had arrived by car, having been dispatched by Admiral Dönitz to submit to British forces a day earlier. Dönitz, who had been appointed in Hitler's last testament as the new German Head of State, felt it beneath him to surrender to a mere Field Marshal. Von Friedeberg would commit suicide within the month. But what of Montgomery? Did he 'win' the surrender in the West?

'Absolutely. I think it's really interesting. After they've gone to see him at Flensburg, Donitz's government are talking about the first encounter with Monty when von Friedenberg first goes to see him. Keitel, who is one of the senior people, afterwards says, "We should have gone to Eisenhower, because we'd have been able to bamboozle him and string him along and all this sort of thing. The problem is we went and saw a proper professional soldier who saw us for what we were, defeated, and he saw through us. He saw his opportunity and made us surrender then and there in the way we did."

'Obviously, Monty then passes them on to Ike, but basically, he set the ball rolling. He's made them sign a surrender. He's made them surrender forces. He's made them do it. The surrender Montgomery gets the Germans to sign at that point, he isn't authorized to offer and isn't authorized to issue, but does anyway, because he's a soldier. He knows he's got to grab his moment. And they know that, he knows that. And as a result, I think he wins in that regard.

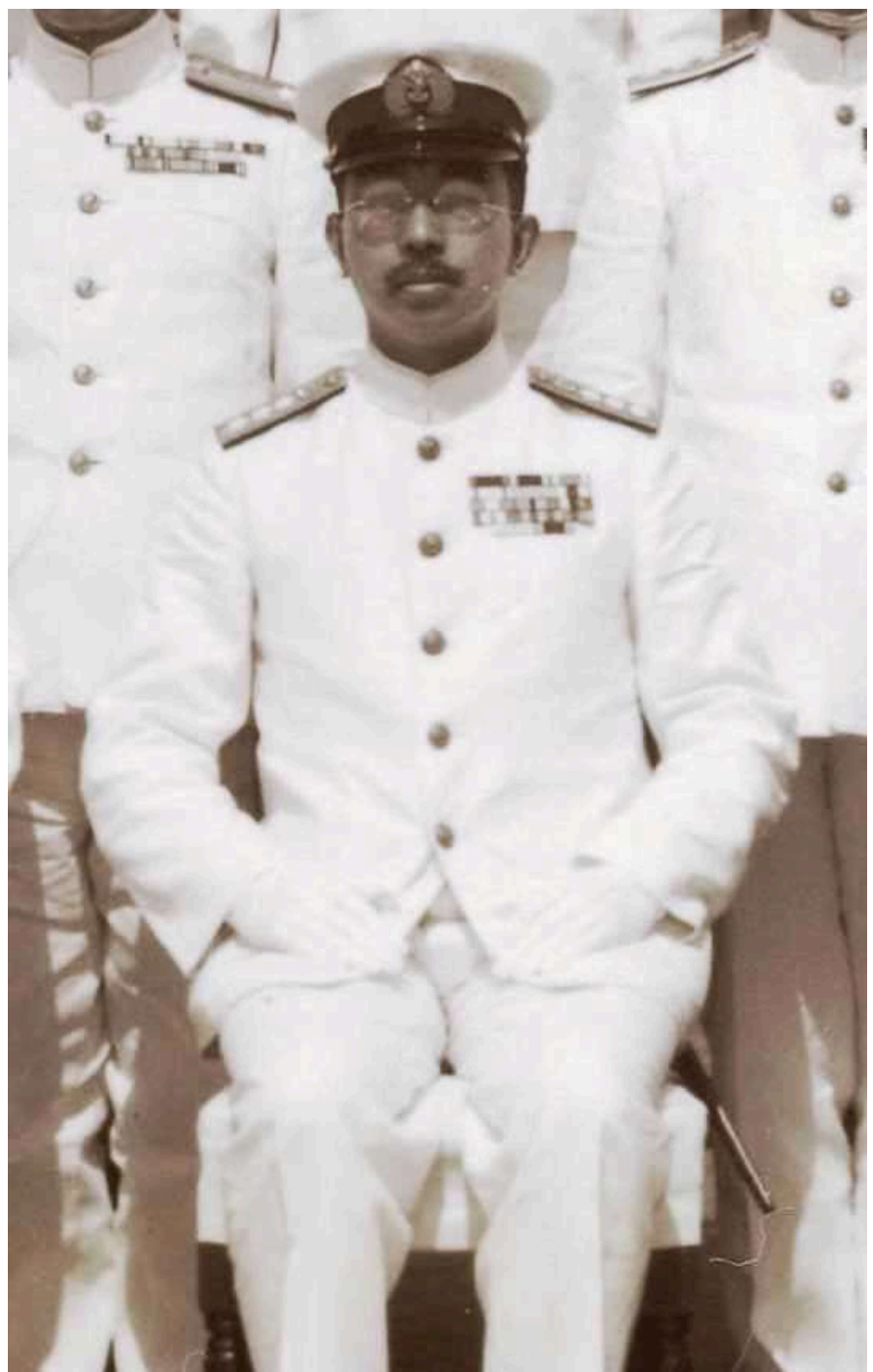
'It's very interesting because he's really miffed about not going to Berlin where he thinks the political capitulation will occur, and he's right. The fact that they come to him first, the fact that he takes the first surrender in Germany, of the Reich, because we've had the Italian surrender before on the 29 April, but it's all about what's happening in Germany at this point. I think this is really important. I think that, yes, he does

win. He knows what he's doing. He's got this group of journalists with him and the BBC, so he makes damn sure that everyone knows about it as well. He fails to contain the news somehow.'

By taking the surrender of forces in Germany, did Montgomery overstep the mark? Has the military superseded civilian authority? A (slightly) similar comparison, thirty-seven years later, was when Admiral Leach answered a question from Margaret Thatcher as to whether the re-taking of the Falklands was possible. Leach answered that it was, but then,

unusually, "and we must!". Mrs. Thatcher replied, "Why?" Leach responded, "Because if we do not, or if we pussyfoot in our actions and do not achieve complete success, in another few months we shall be living in a different country whose word counts for little." Admiral Leach had overstepped the mark and strayed into treacherous constitutional territory, although nothing came of it but helpful encouragement to the Prime Minister. Was this a similar overreach from Montgomery?

'Well, to an extent, but also, he wants the war over. He wants it to



end. He's sick of his guys being killed. He's not fussed about killing Germans. What is very interesting is when he says to the Germans, "You've got a deadline... if you want to carry on the war, I'll be delighted to help you do that. We will carry on killing Germans, and that won't bother us." But he doesn't want any more British soldiers killed.

This is a side of Monty that perhaps gets missed, certainly by me. Clearly, this is something that exercises Murray, and I must assume he speaks passionately about it on the *We Have Ways* podcast, but warming to his theme he continues:

'There's so much historiographical controversy around him. There has been so much heat and light around his reputation, largely because of the memoirs he published in the 1950s, which are all: "What a genius I was! I got that right!"'

'I think what's interesting is just the fortnight before, he lost one of his Liaison Officers, a guy called John Poston, who's killed out on a trip. What Monty would do is send officers out; they had license to go anywhere and ask questions on his behalf and then report back him in the evening. So, he didn't have to rely on reports from his subordinates, he sent guys out to find out and see how things correlated with what he was being told. Poston is killed just three weeks before the surrender. Poston has been with Monty since Monty became Monty, essentially, with Eighth Army. It's someone he really has great affection for. He's not some detached, aloof general that doesn't understand the cost of what he's doing.

'He knows perfectly well what war is. There's a great encounter before D-Day where he's doing the rounds, inspecting everyone. He says to a soldier, "What's the most important thing in your possession?" And the soldier says, "My rifle, sir," thinking he's got the right answer. And Monty goes, "No, it's your life. That's the most important thing in your possession."

'That's who he is, really. I know he's a prig, and I know he's difficult. I know he's into his self-publicity. I know he's very big-headed by the end of the war and all that sort of stuff. But actually, what he's trying

to do is get as few British people, Allied soldiers, killed as possible. That's what he's trying to do. Ending the war and grabbing the moment and taking that moment, that opportunity is entirely within his remit. Although he's not supposed to have done that, but who cares?'

He's very rude about Eisenhower, who, of course, was President at the time.

'Yes. Is that terrible? I think I write in the book that he gave himself the worst character reference anyone has ever given themselves, after the war. The memoirs constitute that. I think that's true. But the truth is he's coming at it from the perspective of the First World War. He was shot through the lungs, left for dead, and he's very badly injured. The man who goes to dress his wounds is killed and lies on top of him all night. Monty knows what war is. He's not detached or aloof.

'Montgomery, as people claim from 80 years distance, is probably autistic; he was probably a paedophile; then he was probably a homosexual. Whatever the explanation du jour has been ladled onto poor old Monty.

'He's a widower, his wife dies before the war. He just decides to shut himself down and devote himself to my job, which is now seen as "Oh, he's a weirdo, he's emotionally cauterised", and all that! Well, no, maybe his wife died, he can't cope, he's done emotionally in that respect. That happens to people, doesn't it? The fact that he's a big field marshal who upset lots of people after the war, I don't care about that. I'm more interested in: is he effective? Is he going to do a good job? Because one of the things that always gets applied to him is that he is overcautious. That's about not wanting your men to be killed, which strikes me; we live in a risk-averse age, and for some reason, we're supposed to not like Montgomery!'

Before we conclude, Murray discusses the process of writing the book with his comrade James Holland. But there is also a strange criticism he addresses, one which I suggest to him is simply not

serious.

'Jim has this indefatigable energy and also his experience. This is my third history book, and his experience, knowing where to look, knowing what sources to go to, and all that is something he leaves me for dust. I think I've got this, and I think I found that. He says, "You need to look at this." He is still very much the pro, and I'm very much the amateur. The book came about very quickly as a result. One of the criticisms we get with the podcast: "Well, you've never been a soldier. So, how can you write about the military history?"'

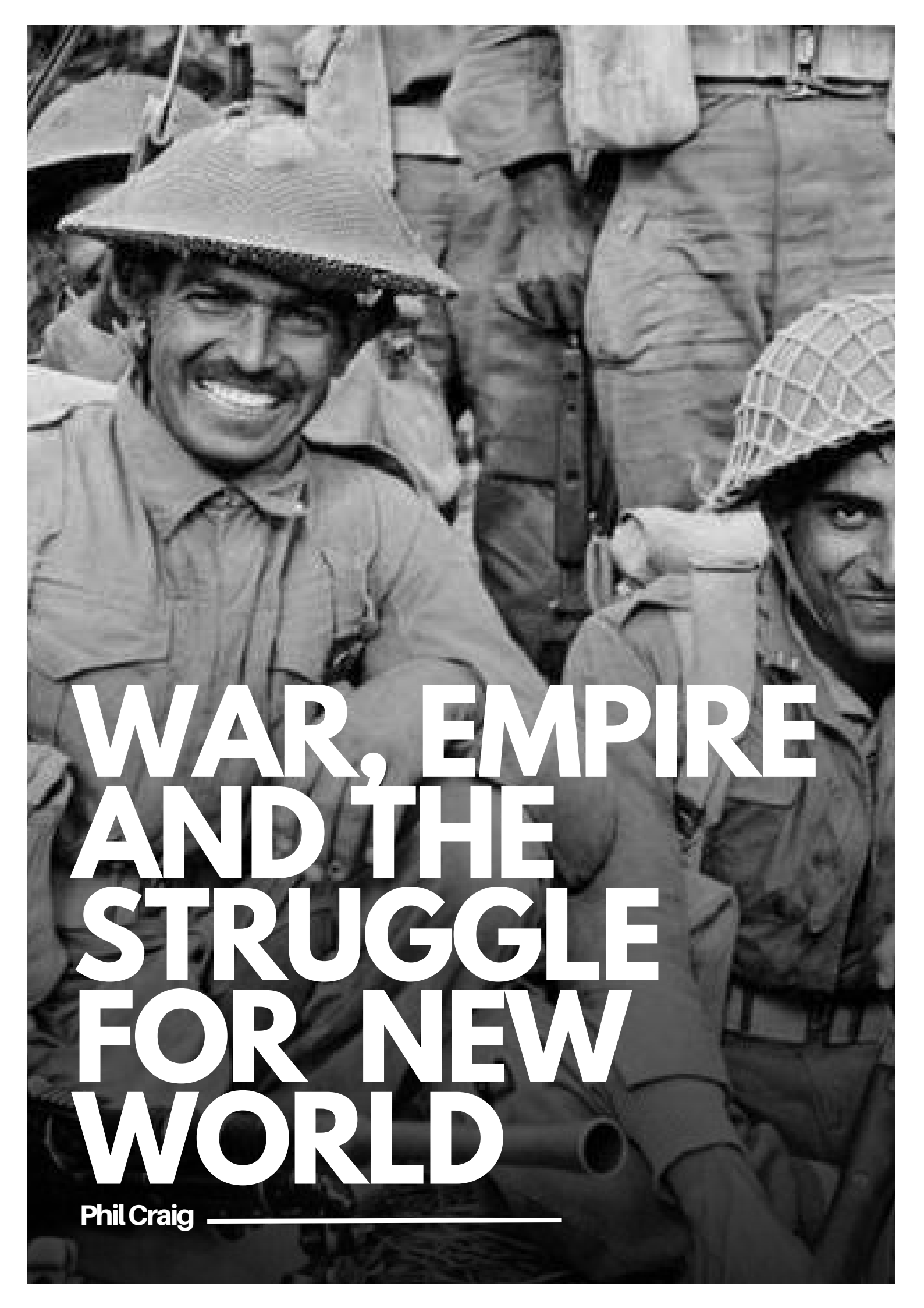
'No one has been a Roman legionary. You may have been a soldier recently, but you weren't a Second World War soldier. Whatever. You've never played football for England. You're not allowed an opinion on the last England match. You've never managed an England football team. So, you're not allowed to criticise Thomas Tuchel. You would be amazed how often this pops up, right?'

Right. Our conversation is at an end, and Skegness beckons. Having visited the seaside resort once, I rather enjoyed it, but Murray is less enthusiastic, this being his fifth or so visit. Well, he has plenty to plan on his journey north, and, of course, there will be the next book to think about.



Al Murray is the author, with James Holland, of *Victory '45: The End of the War in Eight Surrenders*.





WAR, EMPIRE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR NEW WORLD

Phil Craig

Bestselling author and award-winning film-maker Phil Craig explains why he felt compelled to tackle the historical forces at play in his new globe-crossing examination of the final year of World War Two.

Not every distinguished historian announces his arrival by the roar of a V8 engine, but Robin Prior is no ordinary historian and - for me at least - this was to be no ordinary lunch. I was planning a new book, the final volume in my *Finest Hour* trilogy about Britain and its empire in WW2. I wanted it to celebrate an astonishing achievement and the people who made it possible. But there were things I needed to discuss. If 1940 was about fear, and conquering fear, and 1942 was the pivot point where things could still have gone badly wrong for Britain and her Allies, what was 1945 about? The outcome of the war was no longer in doubt, only its timing, and all the really big questions concerned the future. Would promises be kept? Would a better, safer world emerge, or a new kind of great power confrontation? Would the age of empires end, or at least begin to end?

I would have to address some thorny questions, and in doing so, I was keen to view Britain not only through the eyes of her people but also through those of her Allies, her dominions such as Australia and, most importantly, her subjects. From the perspective of Singaporeans, Malays or Burmese, the imperial motherland may have

been a 'plucky underdog' in 1940, but for many decades beforehand, she had been anything but. She'd been the greatest of the great powers, more overdog than under and at times a bully to be feared. This explains why Britain's initial humiliation at the hands of Japan was greeted with joy in much of Malaya and Burma, and greeted with hope by those in India no longer wanting to be subjects anymore.

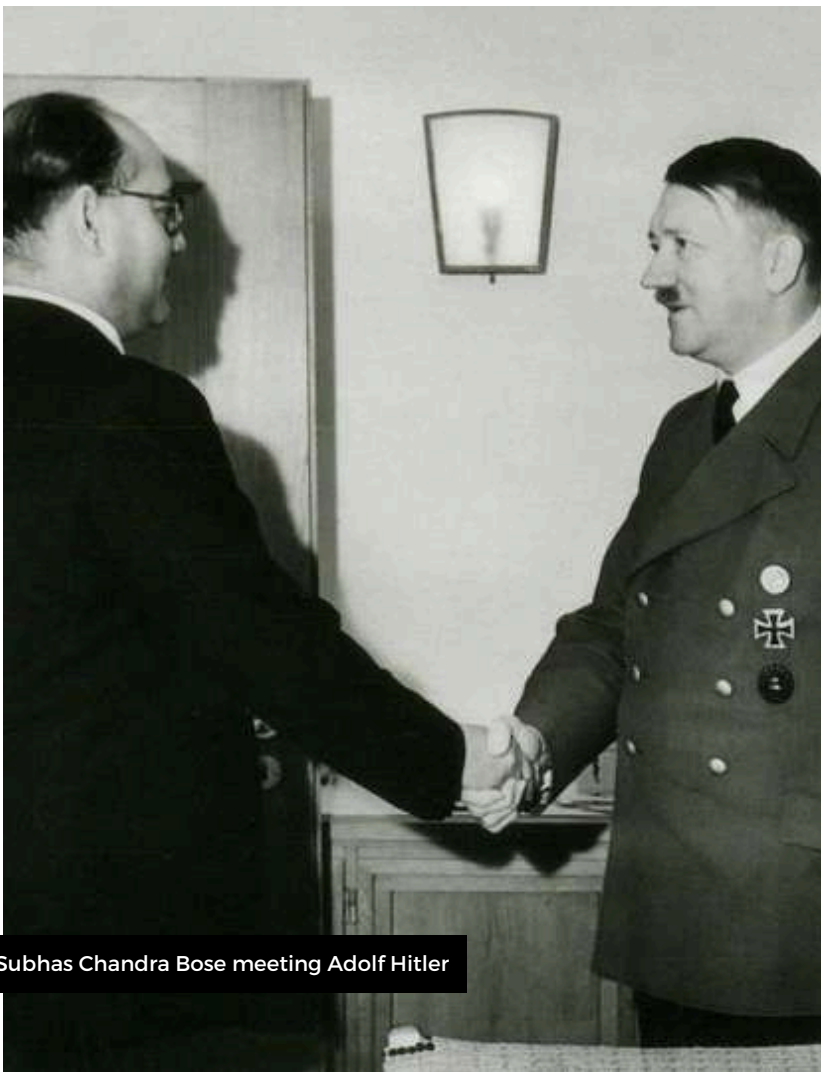
I wanted to dig into the complicated psychological and political struggles that took place between Indians who remained loyal to a King-Emperor in faraway London, and those who did not. And especially, the painful conflict between Indian nationalists, who identified a rapid route to independence through a deal with Japan, and those, every bit as committed to freedom, who concluded that fighting under British command one last time made more sense, both militarily and morally. I was planning to do this through the interconnected lives of INA leader Subhas Chandra Bose and Indian Army officer Kodandera Subayya Thimayya (aka Colonel Timmy). Timmy felt the pressures of these days intensely, especially when his own much-loved brother decided to follow

Bose, and he faced the prospect of meeting him on the battlefields of Burma.

Finally, I felt it was important to ask whether the values and principles that the Churchill and Attlee governments claimed to underpin Britain's war effort were truly upheld, particularly in relation to the optimistic and progressive vision of the future first articulated in the Atlantic Charter. All of this would take me into some of the darker corners of the story and - inevitably - highly politicised and voluble 21st Century debates about colonialism and race.

Such thoughts had drawn me to Jolleys Boathouse restaurant on the banks of the River Torrens. As I heard the thunderous sound of the Ford Mustang approach, I was re-reading its driver's introduction to his superb account of British strategy across the two great wars of the 20th Century, called *Conquer We Must*. It begins with words I already knew well and would return to time and time again.

'In the Twentieth Century it fell to Britain to confront a number of regimes which represented a threat to the civilised world... Taking the two world wars



Subhas Chandra Bose meeting Adolf Hitler

together, Britain was the only power on the Allied side to fight these regimes from beginning to end. And, given the nature of the powers it was fighting, it was essential that any chance of a liberal world order (however imperfect) emerging with peace, depended on Britain being on the winning side.'

This fundamentally positive view of the role played by Britain, her dominions and her colonies in the great struggle against German fascism and Japanese imperialism in the Second World War is one I shared then and share now. I like to think that it is encoded in the two earlier volumes of this trilogy. Yet, how to square it with some of the less pleasant, and certainly less liberal, things that Britain actually did as the war came to an end?

Amongst many other things, Robin and I discussed J.C.D. Clark, the historian who created the famous phrase 'long 18th Century' for the period between 1660 and 1832. As a conservative-minded critic of what was once called the 'Whig' or

'Marxist' interpretation of history, Clark was controversial when I studied the subject and remains so today. But he provides some useful lessons for anyone – academic or otherwise – trying to comprehend the past as it really was. His central insight is that historical characters were much more likely to be influenced by the forces of tradition – patriotic, conservative, and religious – than by a vision of a more liberal or progressive world to come. He believes that historians all too often let their own knowledge of that 'world to come' influence their judgments, thus creating a barrier to understanding what really mattered in the times they study. Where others stress change, Clark stresses continuity. Instead of writing with an unspoken assumption that, for example, the decline of organised religion or the extension of the voting franchise were inevitable, he believes that studying the resistance to such changes – a reluctance to reform, the clinging to ancient ways and patterns of thought – better helps us grasp what the past and its people were truly like.

How does a debate about the 18th Century apply to the end of the Second World War, or indeed to a lunch in Adelaide? Well, many years studying how the most important politicians and generals of the 1940s communicated and acted have led Robin to believe that J.C.D. Clark's insight can be applied here, too. We know today that the age of empires was coming to an end, so we assume powerful people at the time did so too and acted accordingly. Some did, but many didn't. We know today of the pride postwar Britain took in its new welfare state and assume this was the cause that inspired its fighting forces by the end, rather than the old slogans of 'God, King and Empire'. Some people in uniform certainly believed that victory would bring a new and better Britain, but a desire to remain a global 'overdog' and the satisfaction of crushing the King's enemies remained powerful motivators too. We know today that Australia was set to chart a proudly independent course in the postwar era, looking increasingly to Washington for trade and security rather than to London. We can assume that a suspicion of British command was an important factor in its wartime decision-making. Sometimes it was, but often it was not.

I hope that potential readers of 1945: The Reckoning will be pleased to learn that it is not primarily a work of historiography. Applying some of the ideas that Robin and I discussed to the people and the stories that figure in this book helped me understand them better. The power of older ways of thinking and the allure of tradition are particularly relevant to the story of the Indian independence movement, which a substantial part of the book explores. Without them, how could we explain the reserves of trust that remained in India despite the many disasters of the early years of the war and the horrors of the Bengal famine? They also, I believe, help us understand why officials in London sometimes displayed an aggressively colonial mindset, whatever the Atlantic Charter said, a kind of 'imperial muscle memory'. The principles that Britain was publicly fighting for – self-determination, a new world of independent nations – were often set aside when it mattered, as older views of the national interest

reasserted themselves. Some who had trusted and fought for Britain – and in some cases Australia – found themselves let down and perhaps even betrayed.

For example, a rapid retreat from brave liberal promises in what we now call Vietnam stored up many new problems for the future. Few in Britain today know anything about the actions of UK-led forces in Indo-China during 1945, nor how they battled against the very people who had helped drive the Japanese Empire out of power to put the French one back in. This campaign, directed from London and Paris, was all about re-imposing a colonial settlement (although now rebranded as ‘anti-communism’), and it set the scene for two more ghastly wars to come.

The British Empire is the subject of many duelling books and documentaries, while social media is full of ‘Empire good, no Empire evil, you’re blocked’. As I researched and wrote about it for this book, I found another quote from another historian, David Olusoga, most helpful: ‘History is not there to make us feel good, proud or comforted. It’s simply there to be fully understood, in all its wonder, pain and yes its cruelties and injustices.’

And one such injustice, in this writer’s opinion, is the way the war is remembered in the India of today. Subhas Chandra Bose, the warrior-prophet, the widely acclaimed Netaji or ‘most respected leader’, is now studied, revered and, truth be told, near-worshipped as much if not more than the original heroes of independence, Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. His choice of anthem, Jana Gana Mana (‘Thou art the ruler of the minds of all people’), is now India’s national song, and his rousing cry of Jai Hind is ubiquitous across national life, particularly amongst the soldiers of the army that once fought him. Indian politicians raise statues of Bose, open schools named for Bose, and regularly invoke Bose’s long struggle for freedom. Any mention of India and the Second World War in an online forum rapidly evolves into a debate about his importance then and now, with Bose’s many young fans prominent, adulatory and loud.

One person who would definitely not be surprised at his modern-day prominence is Bose himself, since he was never one to underestimate his own historical significance. But even he might be shocked to see how quickly his invasion of his own country – an invasion that quickly turned into a military disaster by any standards – transformed him into a mainstream folk hero.

Bose could not have anticipated political and cultural change in Britain, or even the Atlantic Charter, when he decided to throw in his lot with Hitler and the Japanese Empire. The example of heroic sacrifice that he provided throughout his life did, indeed, move Indian opinion. To that extent, he is more than entitled to the posthumous adulation he receives, and doubtless expected, but it’s a shame that those who did not make the compromises with evil that he felt necessary, the Timmys of India, are not granted such a place in its history.

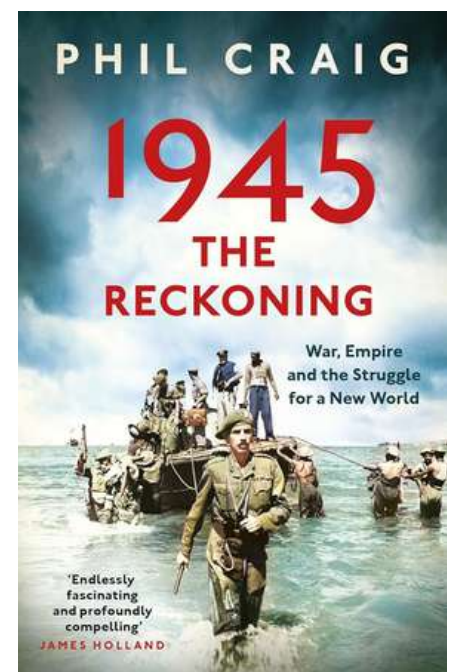
We may look back and think 1945 was Timmy’s victory more than it was ever Bose’s, and every military historian would agree. But, as J.C.D. Clark might say, the further we move away from 1945, the easier it is to forget about the traditional and conservative forces that shaped the players. This is why a reckoning now can never be the same as a reckoning then. A residual loyalty to Britain, even in a nationalist like Timmy, was understandable in the 1930s and 40s in a way it simply isn’t today. Conversely, as we leave the age of European empires behind, and focus our attention on their brutal and rapacious aspects, we’re naturally more inclined to favour those like Bose who were implacably opposed to them from the start, whatever deals they did with whatever devils.

There’s no expensive, heartstring-tugging drama series being made about Timmy’s Hyderabadis fighting alongside British commandos to keep the Japanese out of India. However, there is a lavish, cloyingly sentimental 10-part epic about the Indian National Army on Amazon Prime, and many millions have watched it. The all-female unit that Bose created features prominently, with numerous implausible battlefield



Above:
General Kodandera Subayya Thimayya

triumphs. But there’s little or no reference to the cruelty of Bose’s Japanese allies or his genocidal Kameraden in the SS. One reason why I found myself on the banks of the River Torrens admiring a large red sports car.



Phil Craig is a bestselling historian and the author of 1945: The Reckoning: War, Empire and the Struggle for a New World.



SACRIFICE AND REDEMPTION IN ST PETERSBURG

Sinclair Mckay

A spotlight is shone upon the '900-day' siege of Leningrad, and the people who endured it, in this new portrait of a storied city spanning the rule of Peter the Great to Vladimir Putin.

Hitler's imagination – so shadowed, crabbed, and distorted – simply could not compass the rich layers of a city like St Petersburg. This prospect of exquisitely coloured baroque palaces, cathedrals, and theatres, blended with the furnaces and cooling towers of the most modern industry, did not fit in any way with the backwards, barbarous story of Russia that he sought to tell himself and his people. 'Petersburg – the poisonous nest from which, for so long, Asiatic venom has spewed forth into the Baltic – must vanish from the earth's surface,' Hitler told the ambassador to the Vichy regime a little after he had launched Operation Barbarossa: his nightmare invasion of eastern Europe and Russia in 1941.

'The city is already cut off. It only remains for us to bomb and bombard it, destroy its sources of water and power and then deny the population everything it needs to survive.' He was talking on the eve of what was to become one of the most terrible sieges in history. His Wehrmacht forces in Army Group North would effectively encircle the city from the autumn of 1941 to the beginning of 1944. Death – from starvation, from cold, from bombing, from shelling – was on a scale that is still scarcely conceivable. It is reckoned – though it can never now be known for sure – that over one million civilians were killed.

The Siege of Leningrad (as Petersburg was during the war) is an atrocity that continues to resonate today. Vladimir Putin, who was born in the city to parents who themselves had suffered terribly through the ordeal, returns every year for commemorative events. Putin lost a brother: Viktor, a two-year-old who starved to death in 1942, and who was consigned, like hundreds of thousands of others, to the horrifying anonymity of a burial pit. Putin's anger when he speaks at these events is unfeigned.

Curiously, this terrible story also throws unsettling light on the deeper history of Petersburg: until the revolutions of 1917, this was the capital of an empire, the seat of emperors – but a city in which beauty and bloody death had always walked hand in hand. Here was a city that moulded Russian leaders, and inspired the greatest poets and novelists, dancers and composers. Yet beneath it all, there was always a steady blood-pulse of violence – perhaps it was this that gave the city's citizens their uncanny powers of endurance.

Before the siege, they had endured Stalin's purges in the 1930s (the Great Terror began in Leningrad with the assassination of the city's Party Secretary Sergei Kirov in 1934 – a bloody act that was the catalyst for the authorities to compile ever lengthening lists of 'traitors' and

'saboteurs' and 'wreckers' which then came to engulf the entire country). Thus, there was the hunger that came with the murderous catastrophe of the Holodomor, and Stalin's liquidation of so many millions of Ukrainians. Reaching back further, St Petersburgers had long been oppressed by the shadowed forces of Tsarist secret police. Being jailed upon a whim, being sent into exile into raw freezing wildernesses, being put up before a firing squad without any real trial, being starved into submission: all these were familiar landmarks of life to so many in St Petersburg.

Yet throughout all of this – and through the war – an extraordinary defiance shone through in the city's love of art, music, literature, and even raucous comedy, all of which remained essential to its identity. From the lustrous productions of the Kirov ballet to the compositions of Shostakovich and Prokofiev, to the daring satire (incredibly not only tolerated but enjoyed by Stalin) of Arkadii Raykin, St Petersburg – or Leningrad – revelled in its own aestheticism and intelligence.

Bolshevism was, in part, the venom that Hitler was talking about. Yet, Hitler failed to see that this city, the cradle of revolution, had a soul that was much more ambiguous. Situated near the Finnish border – and straddling a more spiritual

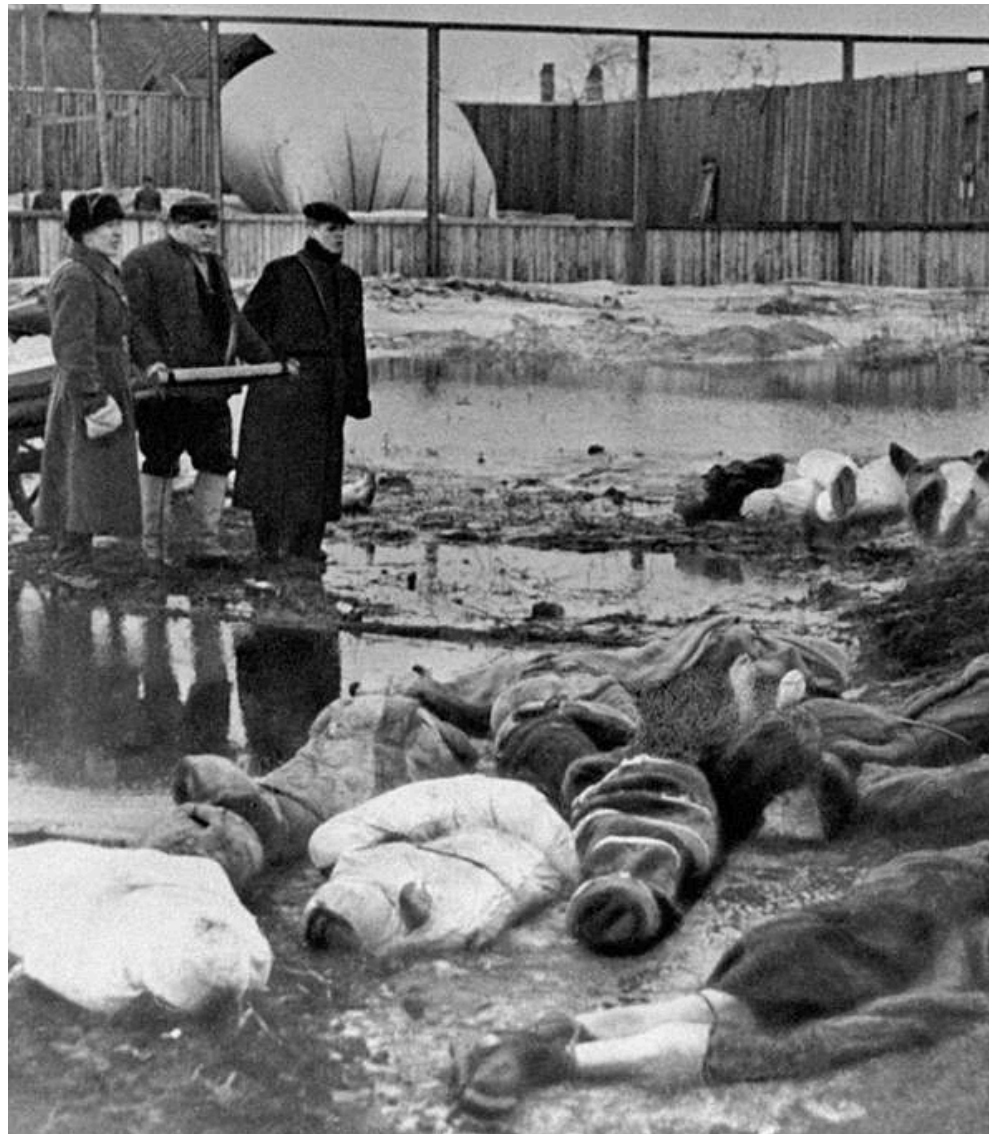
between East and West, where night and day blurred during the long, sunlit summer nights – Petersburg in many ways remained little changed from the early 18th century, when Tsar Peter the Great summoned a city of stone from the frozen Finnish marshes.

As the first of the Tsars to explore the world beyond Russia at the end of the 17th century, Peter the Great brought many influences back from his journeys into Europe. He had stayed near the naval docks of London's Deptford at the house of Sir John Evelyn (and his statue overlooks the Thames towards the Isle of Dogs today). He observed Britain's nascent maritime power and explored with fascination the work at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich. Petersburg – famously intended as a 'window upon the west' – might more accurately have been deemed a portal that might have been stepped through either way.

From the start, in 1703, the architecture was consciously European, and the sensibility was wrought through its institutions, too. There was ugliness that lay underneath: these palaces were raised partly by slave labour, and the city's foundations rested upon many bones. But the wonder of what Peter sought to create at the head of the Gulf of Finland also attracted prominent architects and engineers from right the way across Europe. By 1712, Petersburg was Russia's capital: there would be efforts in the years following Peter's death to have the honour restored to Moscow, but from 1728, St Petersburg was immovably the home and the heart of the Romanov dynasty.

The landmarks we most associate with the city today were largely built throughout that extraordinarily fecund 18th century period: the awe-inspiring baroque scale of the Winter Palace, reconstructed in the middle of that century, a spectacle of white and turquoise, still stands proud. The ludicrously ornate palaces in the city's forested outskirts – Peterhof, Catherine, Gatchina – also still stand, monuments to Tsars from Catherine to Paul, with traces of Anglophilia in their garden designs, though assailed terribly during the

Below:
Three men burying victims of Leningrad's siege in 1942



war. Meanwhile, the Winter Palace faces the bow-shaped neo-classical Building of the General Staff, built from 1819 and intended to commemorate the city's great triumph over Napoleon in 1812. The golden-domed St Isaacs Cathedral, another early 19th-century addition to the skyline, was commissioned by Tsar Alexander I. In essence, the city, through decades and centuries of travail and bloodshed, never lost that extraordinary European flavour of imperial pomp and superiority.

One of the more beautiful landmarks is the Church of the Saviour on Spilled Blood: a colourful multi-onion-domed fantasia of Old Russia. The exterior shines with enamelled blues and yellows; the interior glows with rich icons, large eyes of the saints that

are believed by some to be direct windows into heaven. At first glance, one might assume that this church had stood since the Middle Ages, yet it was only built in 1881. It was a monument to the assassinated Tsar Alexander II, who was killed in the world's first suicide bombing at the hands of revolutionaries. The church was, quite literally, built around the paving stones that bore his 'spilled' blood.

This mingling of beauty and death resonated through the city's artistic life as well. Alexander Pushkin, Russia's finest poet, a writer with unbounded imagination, fought a fatal pre-dawn duel in 1837; the blood that issued from his wound was so hot that the snow hissed. Later, one of the finest murder/detective stories in fiction –

Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, published in 1866 – is in part a portrait of the dark side of St Petersburg. Nihilist axe-murderer Raskolnikov moves through pitiless streets of dusty poverty, observes a silent suicide from a bridge, and himself becomes a haunted fugitive during feverish summer White Nights, when the city is bathed in uncanny nocturnal light and the houses and the canal-side paths attain an almost hallucinatory quality.

Equally, one of the most luridly Gothic episodes in Petersburg's real history – the murder of the mendicant Rasputin in 1916 at the hands of noblemen fearful of his influence upon the Tsar's wife – also suggests an element of a fever dream: the mad monk greedily gulping the wine and the cakes laced with cyanide, yet failing to die; one of the noblemen forced to shoot him, looking on in horror as Rasputin continued to move.

By the time of the Bolshevik revolution in November 1917, overturning the Provisional Government, and then later slaughtering the Tsar and his young family in a frenzy of bullets and bayonets, the city had been renamed Petrograd. The city had been starving: one of the horrific repercussions of the Great War. And it was to starve again in the civil war between Lenin's forces and the counter-revolutionary 'White Russians' (aided in part by the British).

But throughout all of this, there was the steady march of technological progress and mighty industry: a skyline to the south dominated by mighty shipyards and metalworks. The St Petersburg Iron Foundry had been opened in 1801 (a curious magnet for Scottish engineers – Scots and St Petersburg enjoyed a long affinity). In time, this became the Putilov Works, manufacturing rails that would withstand the deep rigours of the vast Russian wildernesses. By the late 19th century, it was in and around these vast cathedrals of industry that Lenin and others were moving, spreading the new gospel of socialism. The dual splendour and visceral violence of St Petersburg were encapsulated on the freezing day in January 1905 that came to be known as Bloody Sunday: a peaceful march of thousands of workers upon the Winter Palace that became a



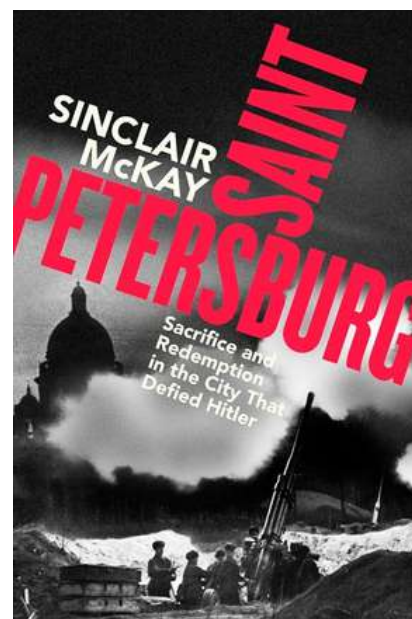
Above: Vladimir Putin, the Leningrad schoolboy in the 1960s

massacre at the hands of sabre-wielding Cossacks. This was the first flame of revolution; within 12 years, St Petersburg would be the city from which that flame would roar out across the world.

The Siege of Leningrad is remembered now as an extraordinary story of the limits of human endurance and suffering. From a starvation winter where the daily ration of bread was the size of a playing card, and where the temperatures fell to minus 43 degrees, and where the numbers of corpses were so vast that the dead had to queue to be buried – to the no less extraordinary years when the survivors somehow rebuilt their lives and their love for artistic beauty – the *Blokadniki* as those who went through the ordeal became known, became emblematic of a certain idea of Russianness. It persists today: one siege diarist, describing herself as 'a Scythian' (i.e. a noble warrior of the steppes), wrote: 'Dear Europeans, are you not afraid of us?'

The city had been deliberately constructed as the heart of an empire: the Tsars understood their power to reach deep into Finland, south to Ukraine and the Black Sea, across the Baltic States, as well as eastward right the way across the

globe. Russia's current President, Putin – a child of that city – also believes in the old span of empire and yearns to restore it. But St Petersburg itself has never lost its curiously uncanny duality, sitting on the borderlands not merely between east and west but also of identity and philosophy. Through which side of that 'window on the west' should Petersburgers look?



Sinclair McKay is a bestselling historian and is the author of *Saint Petersburg: Sacrifice and Redemption in the City That Defied Hitler*.

Q&A

THE QUEEN AND THE COUNTESS

**ANNE
O'BRIEN**

The Wars of the Roses is examined from the perspective of two women of influence, one of Lancaster and the other of York, in the author's latest novel.





Above:
Margaret of Anjou

Anne, many congratulations on the new novel. We're in England in the early 1450s and just at the start of the Wars of the Roses. Queen Margaret and Anne, Countess of Warwick, are the two main characters. What was the genesis of the story?

The battles and political struggles of the Wars of the Roses are well-known. My purpose was to examine the role of women rather than that of the menfolk. I wished particularly to re-balance what we know of two women from the most vital families in the conflict: Margaret of Anjou, the vicious She-Wolf who would stop at nothing to achieve her ambitions, and Anne, Countess of Warwick, who has faded into insignificance beside her more infamous husband. Did their paths ever cross? Was there a connection between them when it did? Margaret's influence on events is clear, but what of the Countess of Warwick?

In your research, what did you find about the characters of both Margaret and Anne?

There is far more evidence for Margaret, although much of it tends to be negative. She is usually shown as arrogant, ambitious, driven and proud, a dominant woman unwilling to take advice. In comparison, Anne is a mere shadow, although not, it seems, without character. When trapped in confinement by Edward IV, Anne did not simply accept it but fought for her rights and continued to do so throughout her life until some of her inheritance was restored to her. It is the role of historical fiction to give Anne a platform to stand on.

When Margaret gave birth to their only son, Edward, her husband, Henry VI, succumbed to a breakdown. Why do you think that happened?

At the age of 31, King Henry suffered a dramatic mental illness, becoming mute and unresponsive. Henry recognised neither his wife nor his newborn son. When he recovered some of his faculties, he was often apathetic, with a deterioration in his ability to make decisions and in his care for the royal impression he made.

This illness has been diagnosed by modern historians as catatonic schizophrenia, a condition characterised by symptoms which all seem to fit well with what we know of Henry at this time. Other historians have left the jury out on this and simply called it a mental breakdown. Whatever it was, it rendered Henry unfit to rule, casting the whole burden onto Margaret's shoulders.

Margaret and Anne make an alliance in the novel, bridging the Houses of Lancaster and York. How important is the female element story of the Wars of the Roses?

In general, it has to be said that the role of women, apart from Queen Margaret, is of secondary importance in the Wars which are stories of ambitious men. Even so, because I write about medieval women, I thought they deserved an airing. Margaret is an essential part of the main story, of course, but how did she react to the women connected with the House of York? They did not live in a bubble, their lives quite separate from each

other. Was there any empathy between the women? Was any level of friendship ever possible? An interesting element to explore.

With Henry VI incapacitated, how effective were Margaret's political skills – and is this something we perhaps neglect in this period?

In our appreciation of Margaret, we have been overshadowed by Shakespeare's view of the She-Wolf. Queens in their own right were not popular; thus her policies were disparaged when she took on the mantle of royal power. Margaret had little choice but to fight if she wished to preserve her husband's crown and the inheritance of her son, driving her on to defeat the House of York. It has to be said that Margaret was not an easy woman to live with, finding it easier to make enemies than friends. History has stayed too close to the She-Wolf and perhaps not taken into account her lack of choice.

Anne, Countess of Warwick, was married to the Kingmaker. How influential was she on him, since historians question his abilities, but not hers?

We have very little idea of Anne's influence on her husband. He owed much of his initial wealth and certainly his title to her, but regardless of any opinion she might have, Warwick was driven by personal ambition, and once on the path to power in England, it was impossible for him to retreat. His downfall became inevitable when he sided with Queen Margaret and returned to England to fight for the Lancastrians.

What political conversations were exchanged between Warwick and his wife? There is no evidence of any, although of course they existed. What could Anne do but follow her husband and hope for the best? She needed his power and his protection. When she lost it and Warwick was dead, her position became untenable, and she fell into King Edward's hands.

The vicious fighting during this era (e.g. St Albans) was matched by the political machinations. How much did Anne as the daughter-in-law of Margaret, prolong their relationship after the death of her husband Edward in 1471?

The relationship between all three

women, Margaret, Anne and Anne's daughter Anne Neville, was hacked about by circumstances imposed upon them. All three had no alternative but to follow royal orders. Margaret was placed in confinement by King Edward IV until he could arrange a financial deal to send her back to France. Countess Anne was equally kept under duress because of the value of her inheritance. Anne Neville might have been the connecting link between them, but she was drawn into marriage with Richard of Gloucester, thus her future loyalties given to him rather than her mother.

Did the Queen and the Countess communicate at all in these later years? I imagined that they might. Margaret's prayer roll, depicting her in prayer and kneeling at her prie-dieu, found its way back to England and is now in the care of the Bodleian Library. We know these objects were often given as gifts from one female to another. Did Margaret send it to Countess Anne when they were separated in later life? No evidence, but a nice thought.

[SPOILER ALERT] Margaret died impoverished in 1482. What is her legacy?

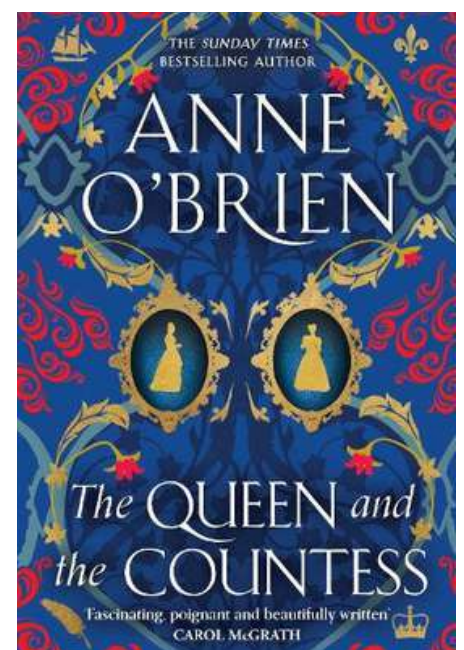
Sadly, in spite of her troubled life, a definitive legacy does not exist for Margaret. With no heirs, she had no permanent influence on England unless it is a dislike of queens who wield too much power in their own right. Both Mary I and Elizabeth I had to struggle against this. Margaret died in poverty, loneliness and isolation in France, with only her failure as a constant companion.

What are you working on next?

I have abandoned medieval women and stepped across the divide into the Tudors, signing up a three-book deal with Orion Publishers about Queen Elizabeth I. I may have changed the era, but I am sticking with women! What an opportunity she presents to write about a woman of power in a man's world. I am well into the first book, which is her uneasy early life up to becoming Queen. Sometimes it is a surprise that she survived to wear the crown.



Above:
Anne Countess of Warwick



Anne O'Brien is a bestselling writer of historical fiction and the author of *The Queen and the Countess*.

A portrait of a man with a full brown beard and blue eyes, wearing a black cap adorned with pearls and red and blue jewels. He is dressed in a red tunic with a white collar and a green sash. The background is dark and textured.

SAME-SEX LOVE IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

Gareth Russell

A new profile of the first Stuart King unearths the social context behind his affairs with men and explores the turbulent backdrop of the Jacobean court.

In 1594, late in the reign of Elizabeth I, the poet Richard Barnfield wrote in his *The Affectionate Shepherd*, 'If it be a sin to love a lovely lad, Oh then sin I.' As the Virgin Queen's regime entered its twilight, several English writers were pushing the boundaries of what they could get away with in terms of homoeroticism.

Within a decade of Barnfield's poem, those limits had been pushed as far as the throne. Despite his marriage to Anna of Denmark and their three surviving children, England's new king, James I - Scotland's James VI - was known to have a strong preference for men. This was so well-known among the English aristocracy that, within days of James's arrival in London, the competing court factions had been trying to find handsome young gentlemen to plant as the King's next favourite. The chief minister, Sir Robert Cecil, was urged by the Countess of Suffolk to promote the Scottish courtier Sir James Hay, but the prize ultimately went to Lord Philip Herbert - the handsome heir to the Welsh earldom of Pembroke. Having backed the wrong candidate, the Howards could only bring themselves to refer to Philip as 'the Welsh earl' in their

correspondence.

James was thirty-six when he became King of England and Ireland in 1603, but he had been King of Scots since a coup overthrew his mother when he was thirteen months old. It was from his time in Scotland that his future English subjects had acquired their knowledge of what kind of person would capture James's interest. When James went through puberty, there had been some concern among his courtiers about intense crushes - as we might call them - that the young King was developing. Aged seventeen, those doubts had started to crystallise thanks to his infatuation with the 'pre-eminently beautiful' courtier Patrick Grey, James's favourite from late 1583 to early 1587. The first surviving piece of evidence we have from James himself that points to feelings that had moved beyond the platonic was a letter, written when he was twenty-one, to the future Marquess of Huntly: 'I may on my soul swear unto you, that since your parting from here I was never one hour unthinking upon you, but when I was sleeping and scarcely then.'

After Huntly, there had been other favourites in Scotland, including two of James's gentlemen-in-

waiting. In 1590, he had ended one of those relationships after a two-week retreat to pray for guidance on his marriage. James admitted that he had no desire to marry - as he put it, 'God is my witness how I could have abstained longer.' Marriage was, however, a dynastic imperative. For several years after his wedding to Anna, James seems to have had no male favourite, until speculation in and out of the palace was inflamed by rumours about James's closeness with a courtier.

King James existed in a unique position. As monarch, he was insulated against many of the dangers that faced other homosexual or bisexual men in the same generation. Yet, he was exposed to the same kind of mockery that they were, albeit in his case, on a much larger scale. Certain pamphleteers had a field day with real and imagined details about the King's romances.

The same was not true with the laws in James's new kingdom of England. Homosexual sex between two men had been made a death penalty offence for the first time in England by the Buggery Act, enacted by Parliament in the reign of Henry VIII. It had been used to help secure the execution of Lord Hungerford in 1540, but the

Buggery Act's bark was worse than its bite. To be more accurate, it did not bite very often and, when it did, it was seldom at two willing male sexual partners.

Reflecting on the Buggery laws during James's reign, the lawyer Sir Simonds d'Ewes dismissed them as legislation 'of no great moment' (meaning 'of no great importance'.) Textbooks for legal students passed over sodomy and buggery in minimal detail, conveying the impression that they were cases that no lawyer really needed to prepare for, because they were so rare. In the combined reigns of Elizabeth and her sister Mary I (1553-1603), there were six times more arrests for the extremely rare crime of bestiality than there were for same-sex relationships.

This was fuelled in part by a failure to define what sodomy meant. It covered many sexual acts. In 1596, 'sodomy' was used to describe the activities of Elizabeth Hipwell, a housewife who had committed adultery with two men at the same time.

Matters were further complicated by the fact that the Buggery Act did not distinguish consensual sex and acts of coercion, but its focus seemed to be the latter. In much of the surviving paperwork, the prosecutions related to a sexual assault. A case heard in the Virginia colony in 1624, specifically stated that the captain of a ship had sexually assaulted a crew member 'by force' and then went into detail about the attack.

The statute was also used to target child molesters. In 1569, it secured the execution of a paedophile called Roland Dyer in Margate. Similar legislation was enacted in the hope that it would cover and protect girls. More than half of the cases regarding rape in the Elizabethan period concerned attacks on girls under the age of twelve. Looked at in this light, it seems that the legislation was part of the early modern English government's attempts to protect minors, under two different pieces of gender-specific legislation, and to prosecute cases of rape. Consensual sex between adults was not something that seemed to concern the law courts.

If the laws in place had little to do



with homosexual sex, what of the cultural reaction to homosexual relationships?

There was a degree of public acceptance that was arguably greater than one might have seen at later periods in British history, especially the Victorian era or the 1950s. Until the reign of Charles II (1660-85), almost every time a Londoner went to a theatre, the female lead was played by a man. Men flirting with and kissing one another was, therefore, hardly an unusual sight in sixteenth-century cities, even if in the guise of fantasy. It is unsurprising to find plays like Christopher Marlowe's 'Edward II' germinating in this environment, likewise for contemporary jokes about homosexuality being rife in the theatre.

Within the aristocracy, the accepting attitudes shown by

people like the Countess of Suffolk or Robert Cecil were more common than otherwise. A large part of this was because it pertained to the King, and courtiers responded with an eye to the main advantage, in the way that adultery was a sin that had been tolerated in previous kings. Some aristocrats may also be somewhat familiar with it, thanks to their education. A typical Renaissance curriculum was heavy on the Classics. This meant that young royals and nobles might grow up being familiar with a few Classical myths dealing with same-sex relationships, such as the story of Jupiter and Ganymede, or Achilles and Patroclus. Traditional moralists in Italy and France blamed overexposure to pagan stories in the classroom for the alleged rise in 'buggery' among young upper-class men in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The idea that homosexual activity was an upper-class 'vice' was a long-running contemporary joke. It was common for gentlemen from the elite to fund scholars' research, who in return would usually dedicate their work to their patrons. In an era when most servants were the same gender as their employer, it was also customary for gentlemen to spend a great deal of time solely with their male servants. The design of upper-class homes changed significantly in this period, thanks in part to an increased emphasis on privacy. The most intimate room became the gentlemen, or lady of the house's closet, a sitting room was typically hidden away from the prying eyes of others, which gave rise to the phrase "closeted away". It was often in these closets the scholars would visit their wealthy patrons to discuss their latest theories.

Sources from the time reveal how much these closets featured in gossip about what went on between the gentlemen, their scholars, or their servants. One 16th-century gentleman complained that 'jealous women and some men also will be apt to think that any man [that] useth it that hath ... a young man to serve him or that he useth his servants in his chamber'.

Acceptance – whether begrudgingly or cheerfully given – was, however, only one component. Another was genuine ignorance. Some observers, particularly from the countryside or Puritan communities, had never heard of same-sex desire and did not know what they were looking at. An eyewitness at James's court wrote that the King seemed to have mistaken his favourite's gender, since he was treating him like a lady. Another was confused when he saw the King and the Duke of Buckingham 'hugging very seriously.'

Others at court knew exactly what was going on and were disgusted. Sir Henry Rich turned down a prestigious post in James's household because he was so worried that any advancement he subsequently achieved would be attributed to an intimate relationship with the King. The Member of Parliament for Sudbury described same-sex love as 'the darling sin' of courtiers. Thousands

George Villiers
1st Duke of Buckingham
by Peter Paul Ruben



of pamphlets circulated in London mocking the King and his lovers. Debates in Parliament asked why the King had created a royal household, like a cistern, that was constantly being drained 'by private cocks.' Similar opprobrium thrived elsewhere in England, where the few clergymen who would preach on the topic described it as 'a sin fearful to name' and acts of violence against male couples who were discovered were always a possibility. Homosexual activity remained a sin, even if it was not of interest as a crime

Many of these critical contemporary sources survive, along with romantic and erotic letters between James and the Duke of Buckingham, and show us the nuanced reaction to same-sex love in the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras. On the one hand, society's interaction between ignorance, legal silence and cultural ambivalence produced an elaborate uncertainty. Lesbianism, for instance, is far less frequently mentioned and never alluded to in law. Legal prosecutions about sexuality tended to focus on non-consensual acts, suggesting that legislators, unlike contemporary moralists, had very little interest in prosecuting 'closet sins.'

Yet, there was also simultaneously far more tolerance of consensual gay sex between two males than we might initially suppose, as shown by the public works of writers such as Christopher Marlowe and Richard Barnfield and by the private correspondence of James VI & I. The latter is a remarkable testament to the details of an important monarch's private life and the impact on his government.



Gareth Russell is a historian and broadcaster, and the author of *Queen James: A New History About the Life and Loves of Britain's First King*.

WOMEN WHO MADE SIXTEENTH- CENTURY EUROPE

SARAH GRISTWOOD



In a century of turmoil and conflict, both religious and political, women often stood up to govern and rule, assuming serious roles in the absence of male counterparts.

Historian Sarah Gristwood discusses with our editor the stories and successes of several female leaders who wielded influence across the continent.





Left:
Depiction of Anne and St. John the Evangelist by Jean Hey

things together for a husband, brother or son.

In France Salic Law was in place, but not necessarily an impediment to women dominating a kingdom, as power could be exercised through regency. Which figure exhibited the most ruthlessness in this regard?

I'd go with Anne of France, Anne de Beaujeu - one of those figures we really ought to know better (especially since she provided the French troops who helped Henry Tudor to victory at Bosworth!). She governed France on behalf of her underage brother and won herself far more power than their father's will actually allowed. (She also wrote a book for her daughter on how women should handle power!) But I'd tip my hat, as well, to Louise of Savoy, the mother of Francois I. She didn't have any formal power, since Francois was 18 when he acceded to the throne -but while he was off hunting and womanising, she took care of the actual business of running the country.

You write that England was the least female-friendly European power. Why was it that when we saw Mary I and Elizabeth I as monarchs during the century?

It's about the history of the years before. England. Unlike France, unlike the territories that would become the Habsburg empire, or even Scotland, England had no great history of women acting as regents. (The attempt of Matilda back in the twelfth century to become a reigning queen had triggered civil war; women like Isabella of France and Margaret of Anjou were seen as 'she-wolves'.) It's as if the fact that France, for example, had that so-called Salic 'Law', meaning women could never gain ultimate power, meant it was safer to grant them a limited measure of it ...

Come the mid-1500s in England, of course, that changed. But it's notable that when Mary won the throne, and Elizabeth held it for so

Sarah, what are your thoughts on *Game of Queens* today, nearly ten years after it was published?

It's one of the books of which I am most proud - because I really did feel that for the general reader (even one with a special interest in the sixteenth century) I was opening up a new 'aspect of history'. The history presented to English-speaking students and readers has tended, traditionally, to be very Anglo-centric, and that obscures the degree to which the Tudors themselves were aware of playing on a European stage. We may be aware of colourful continental figures like Catherine de Medici, or a few of the Italian Renaissance heroines, but the dots

still needed joining up.

The book follows a rich period of history for female rulers in the sixteenth century: Isabella of Castile, Elizabeth I, Anne of France, Catherine de Medici and Marie of Guise, to name but a few. What does this reveal about women throughout the 1500s?

It shows both the possibilities and the problems for women in the sixteenth century (or what you might call the long sixteenth century, since we start with Isabella's accession in 1474 and end with Elizabeth's death in 1603). On the one hand, a striking number of women successfully exercised power. On the other, resistance was even greater than one might think - especially to a woman, like Elizabeth I, actually becoming sovereign (a role with a quasi-religious element) rather than just stepping in temporarily to hold

long in the teeth of many challengers, all of the competitors were also women, from Lady Jane Grey to Mary Queen of Scots. In 1553, and again in 1558, England had to accept a woman's rule, because there simply weren't any men of royal blood available! But even so, they did it only reluctantly and with difficulty.

The title seems to be a play on Game of Thrones – if there is one figure that played and lost, it was Anne Boleyn. Is there a character from the TV show she most resembles?

Let me confess a dreadful secret - I wasn't a regular watcher of Game of Thrones! Yes, I was still shameless enough to ride its coattails for the title ... I know Anne is thought to be a possible inspiration for Margaery Tyrell - a charismatic power player, a woman who refused to be a mistress and held out for being a wife. And, of course, another for who, like Anne, things ended badly!

But I'd say all the forceful, not to say terrifying, women in the series in some sense reflect Anne ... or at least, the person we take Anne to be. Because I've often felt the real point about Anne Boleyn - part of the reason she exercises such a hold on the imagination - is that we really know so little about her. We know the huge effect she had on Henry and his court, on England's religious future. But we have singularly little evidence, in terms of her own writing or even portraiture, as to what was really going on in her head. In a sense, it's that blank slate itself that triggers such fascination.

You wrote about the match between Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn recently in Tudors in Love. Is there a difference in how you wrote about it in GoQ?

In GoQ, she figures as a piece in the chess game of power, a pawn who made it to the far side of the board and, briefly, became a queen. The Tudors in Love is more about exploring the mechanisms, the cultural climate that allowed her to hold Henry in thrall. It's about the other great 'game' of courtly love, which captured the imagination of aristocratic Europe for centuries.

Your latest book, Secret Voices, featured diary entries of women

“
It's one of
the books of
which I am
most proud
- because I
really did
feel that for
the general
reader I
was opening
up a new
'aspect of
history'
”

for every day of the year. Is there one woman from GoQ who, if she wrote a diary, you would like to read an entry on a particular date?

Oh dear - this is going to get monotonous! But I'd have to say Anne Boleyn, for all the reasons above. And I'd settle for any day on which she had direct dealings with Henry.

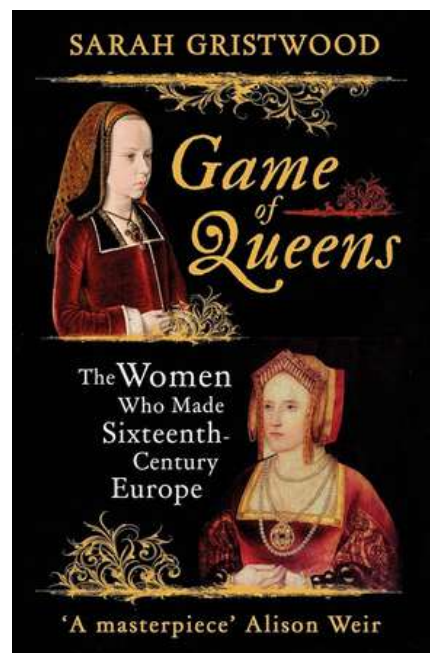
Was there one female figure from the book you most admire?

Yes - to me, the great unsung heroine (or undersung in English-speaking countries, anyway) is Margaret of Austria,

Habsburg regent of the Netherlands and a major player in European diplomacy. One of her contemporaries declared that it was Madame Margaret on whom the future of the continent depended. And yet she also managed to be a great patron and performer of the arts, a wonderful friend and guardian, and a passionate woman. The one of all the protagonists in this book, with whom you'd want to be stuck on a desert island.

If your publisher were to release a new edition, would you change anything?

The sad thing is that I wouldn't - sad, because I'd really, really love to have been adding a postscript on women's return to the centre stage of power. I wrote this book at a time when it looked as though Hillary Clinton might become the leader of the Western world, to say nothing of figures like Angela Merkel on the scene. I had huge hopes for Kamala Harris. Now it looks as though Fortune's Wheel has turned downwards again. Still, the women in Game of Queens knew all about that. And yet they managed to come through!



Sarah Gristwood is the author of **Game of Queens: The Women Who Made Sixteenth-Century Europe** and editor of **Secret Voices: A Year of Women's Diaries**. You can listen to Sarah on the **Aspects of History Podcast**.

A portrait of John Rees, a man with a beard and dark hair, wearing a white collar and a dark garment. The background is dark and textured. The word "now" is written in a small, gold, serif font in the upper left area of the portrait.

now

BETTER THAN THE AGE

John Rees

John Rees relates the story of the English Civil Wars and brings to the foreground one of the republicans who would head the radical Parliamentary movement in the lead-up to regicide.

Henry Marten was different.

Different in his Republicanism to practically every other MP in the Long Parliament, at least when it assembled in 1640. Different to his Puritan colleagues, as different 'as light from darkness', said his contemporary John Aubrey. Different to most people in the 17th century in his extreme tolerationism, which stretched not only to Catholics, but to Jews and Muslims as well.

Different to all but the Levellers in thinking that MPs should 'take instruction' from the crowds at the doors of Parliament. Different to every lawyer in thinking that juries should keep their hats on in the presence of judges since jurors, not the bench, embodied the law. Different to practically every English politician, parliamentarian or royalist, in thinking that England had no business trying to subdue Ireland. Different from the moralists of every religion since he left his wealthy wife and lived publicly with commoner Mary Ward.

So, on the face of it, not a figure likely to be able to assemble and lead a wider group of similarly minded politicians. And yet he did. They were 'Henry Marten's gang' in the words of one contemporary, or the 'fiery spirits' as they were also known. The fiery spirits included Alexander Rigby, the lawyer who sat as MP for Preston, and who turned soldier when the civil war

began. Also, a fiery spirit was William Strode, MP for Bere Alston in Devon, a veteran of the revolt against the King in the 1629 parliament. He had spent the 11 years Personal Rule, when Charles had abolished Parliaments, in prison for his pains. They were joined by Peter Wentworth, whose family had been campaigning for Parliament to have more power over the Crown since his ancestor, also Peter Wentworth, sat in Elizabeth I's parliaments.

How did Marten do it? He certainly began from a very isolated position. Early in the Long Parliament, he told Edward Hyde, later Earl of Clarendon and Charles I's trusted advisor, that 'I do not think one man wise enough to govern us all,' Hyde recorded that he had never heard such views expressed before and that they would have been utterly abhorred if spoken publicly.

Marten was undeterred. He began a parliamentary guerrilla campaign against the monarchy and against those who wanted to compromise with the King. Marten had some personal strengths that he could draw on and which made him an effective parliamentarian. He was hard-working in a House of Commons that contained a fair proportion of seat-warmers, and a fair number that could not be bothered to attend very much at all. Marten was an assiduous committee member at a time when Commons' committees were beginning to become the executive

power of the legislature. Previously, only the Monarch and the Court performed that function. His speeches were brief and to the point, where many MPs were prone to drone on at eyelid-wearingly length. And he was witty and amusing. Then, as now, most MPs were not. 'He alone has sometimes turned the whole house,' noted John Aubrey.

With these assets, Marten and his followers began to chip away at the political legitimacy of the monarchy and to undermine the King's supporters in the Commons. Should the King's opponents, like future Leveller John Lilburne, be freed from jail and compensated? Yes, said the fiery spirits. And then they laboured to make it so. Should the Commons declare that the King no longer had the power to dissolve parliament? Yes, said Marten's gang, and William Strode was at the forefront of the legislation which enacted that idea. Should King's advisors, the Earl of Strafford and the Archbishop of Canterbury, be arrested, tried, and executed? Yes, said Marten. Should the Queen be impeached? Yes, said the radicals. Should the national church structure be transformed 'root and branch'? Absolutely, said those the King called 'violent spirits'.

In attempting to win a wider audience for these ideas, Marten had no better ally than the King himself. Whenever moderates might question the need for radical

courses of action, the King's absolutist strategy would undermine the moderates' position. The attempt to put the Tower of London in the hands of cavalier-extremist Captain Thomas Lunsford provoked days of armed mass demonstrations in the capital. So did the attempt to arrest five members of the House of Commons on treason charges in early 1642. That gambit badly backfired, provoking such widespread popular anger that the King was forced to flee London.

The King declared a war he hoped to win in order to recover from the revolution he had just lost in his capital. Marten wrote to his cousin that 'if his majesty should take the advice of his gunsmiths and powdermen, he should never have peace'. Once hostilities broke out, Henry Marten and his supporters were at the forefront of the 'war party', those who wanted to fight the war to a final and decisive victory over the King. They were not, at first, a majority. Most MPs saw the war as a kind of armed negotiation in which the objective was to return the King to his throne as soon as possible, hopefully with a less belligerent attitude to Parliament, but with all his essential powers intact.

Marten and the fiery spirits were at the forefront of raising men and money to fight the King. Marten was in charge of seizing horses and plate, even the King's royal regalia, to help the war effort. Alexander Rigby was in his native Lancashire, raising a regiment to fight the royalists. Marten shocked the Commons by seeming to disregard the King's life, saying that 'if the king put out his finger to be cut, what was it to them?'. Cromwell had voiced a similar thought, telling his troopers that if the king were 'in the body of the enemy that he was to charge, he would as soon discharge his pistol upon him as at any other private person'. Marten, his allies, and radicals in the City of London wanted a mass popular movement to help raise a new army with more hardline commanders. The Commons also agreed when it appointed a Committee for the General Rising. In the end, such sentiments took longer to reach any real and substantive end. But ultimately, they did when the radicals pushed



Marten's Tower at Chepstow Castle

aside the old moderate commanders and created the New Model Army.

There was still a substantial body of moderate opinion in the Commons, but they now faced a new opponent: a radicalised army. They tried to disband the New Model or to send its troublesome regiments to fight in Ireland. But this led in 1647 to an army-wide revolt, the election of regimental 'agitators' (meaning agents or representatives), and the creation of a new and decisive phase of the revolution. Marten was now gaining new allies. Some more radical MPs were being elected to

the Commons to replace those who had gone over to the King, like Leveller ally and senior officer Colonel Thomas Rainsborough, and Commonwealthsman Edmund Ludlow. And outside Parliament, both in the New Model and in London, there was a widening radical constituency, frequently expressed by the growing Leveller movement.

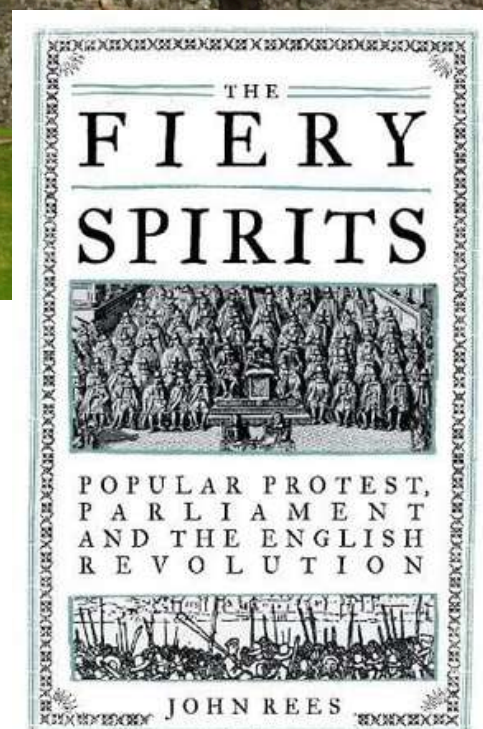
The hostility to the King was accelerated by Charles' promotion of a second Civil War. It was short-lived and relatively contained geographically, mainly fought in Wales, the south-east, and north-west, where Alexander Rigby was



once more in arms against the royalists and their Scottish supporters. Marten raised his own regiment, a battle-flag bearing the inscription 'For the Peoples' Freedom against all tyrants whatsoever'. The defeat of the royalists once more was the beginning of the end for Charles. Moderates were purged from Parliament, and the King was put on trial for treason. Marten was one of his judges and a key figure in the design of the trial.

After the King was found guilty and executed on a scaffold outside the Banqueting House in Whitehall, a Republic was declared in 1649. Marten designed its seal and was charged with disposing of the late

King's personal effects. Marten had travelled a long way since his conversation with Edward Hyde at the opening of the Long Parliament. He had been an important part of doing what no other commoner had ever done in England, or anywhere else. He had put his sovereign on trial for treason against the people. For all time, he had shattered the godlike status of monarchs. That declaration echoed through history and was heard in America in 1776, in France in 1789, and thence entered into the political commonsense of millions, generation after generation: no one man is wise enough to govern us all.



John Rees is a Visiting Research Fellow at Goldsmiths, University of London, and author of *The Fiery Spirits: Popular Protest, Parliament and the English Revolution*, recently published by Verso.



HISTORICAL HEROES

GENERAL HASTINGS 'PUG' ISMAY

John Kiszely

If the qualification for inclusion among Historical Heroes is fame and renown, General Hastings 'Pug' Ismay - Lord Ismay - is a non-starter. Few people have ever heard of him. If, however, courage, outstanding achievements and noble qualities have anything to do with it (as the Oxford English Dictionary indicates), he most certainly deserves consideration. The story of his long and distinguished life is replete with these attributes in large measure.

It was from an early age that he displayed outstanding physical courage. Aged just twenty, he was a troop commander in an Indian Army cavalry regiment confronting Afghan tribesmen on India's North-West Frontier. When he and his troop came under lethal rifle-fire, he immediately led them in a bold charge which scattered the enemy, an action viewed with admiration and pride by onlookers. Seven years later, he was again to find himself at the forefront of a battle, this time in British Somaliland (modern-day Somalia), where he was serving as a member of a counter-insurgency force, the Somaliland Camel Corps. In a dismounted assault on an enemy-held fort, he and two other officers were the first to reach the fort's gate. The officer to his left was shot dead, and the officer to his right was shot in the eye. Ismay was unhit and undaunted, but lucky to be alive. Five years later, just before he left Somaliland, now a lieutenant colonel commanding the Camel Corps, he led his force in an epic, long-range pursuit of the

insurgents through the desert, successfully confronting them and bringing an end to the insurgency, an action for which he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, and now a major general, he was deputy secretary of the War Cabinet in London. When Churchill became Prime Minister in May 1940, he chose Ismay to be his chief staff-officer. Churchill had seen Ismay's success in Whitehall and observed his many qualities, notably his wisdom and sound judgment, his complete integrity and sense of duty, and his ability to get things done. Churchill sensed that Ismay was just the person he needed as his right-hand man and that they would make a winning team. And so, it was to prove. Ismay was to become a close confidant of Churchill, constantly at his side. Indeed, throughout the war, he was to spend more time alone with Churchill than anyone outside the Churchill family.

Ismay's most challenging role was acting as a mediator and conciliator between Churchill and the objects of his most violent ire: the Service Chiefs of Staff (the heads of the armed services). The subject of their disagreements was almost always strategy and relative strategic priorities. Churchill's constant desire and impatience to get at the enemy, and his endless flow of ideas for doing so, met with the caution and circumspection of the Chiefs, whose job it was to balance the ends to be achieved against the ways and means available. Tension between them and Churchill was constant, and remained so, throughout the war. At times, it erupted into serious clashes with threatened resignations and potential constitutional crises. Ismay saw it as his role to prevent these disastrous outcomes and, above all, to keep the show on the road. In this, he was highly successful. Amongst other things, it required Ismay to tell the Chiefs and Churchill what they needed to hear

rather than what they wanted to hear: telling the truth unto power. And it required much moral courage: at times, both sides accused him of being an agent of the other side.

Ismay played a similar role as an intermediary between the British Chiefs of Staff and their American opposite numbers. A series of overseas conferences of the Joint Chiefs of Staff took place during the war, all of which, from 1942 onwards, Ismay attended. Almost all these conferences started in an initial atmosphere of discord, sometimes of acrimony, with frayed tempers and raised voices. Again, the subject of dispute was usually strategy and conflicting strategic priorities. And again, Ismay saw it as his job to maintain or re-establish cordial relations between the two sides and was adept at doing so. Almost all the conferences ended in a spirit of cooperation, goodwill and friendship. The success of the transatlantic alliance depended on it.

The wartime pressure of work on Ismay was unrelenting. He suffered two little-known mental breakdowns, off work for three weeks after each. On a further occasion, at the Quebec conference in October 1944, the pressure from Churchill, at his most recalcitrant, caused Ismay to submit his resignation – a resignation that Churchill talked him out of. It is perhaps surprising, given the pressure he was under for five long years working for Churchill, that he did not totally succumb to exhaustion. But their close personal relationship endured. And when Churchill left office following the July 1945 general election, it was a sad parting between the two, with Churchill showing his gratitude by successfully recommending Ismay for the Companionship of Honour. Churchill's private secretary, John Colville, later wrote that it was Ismay 'to whom Churchill owed more, and admitted that he owed more, than to anyone else, military or civilian, in the whole of the war.'

It was typical of Ismay, and a tribute to his integrity and sense of duty, that he gave to Churchill's successor, Clement Attlee, exactly the same complete loyalty he had

given to Churchill. And although at the war's end he was weary and wishing to retire, he nevertheless stayed on at Attlee's request. Attlee showed his gratitude in June 1946 by recommending Ismay for the GCB (Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath); and, on Ismay's retirement six months later, in the New Year's Honours List, for a barony: a most unusual double-award.

The now 'Lord' Ismay was looking forward to his retirement, but when his friend and colleague Admiral Louis Mountbatten was appointed to be the last Viceroy of India, to oversee the transfer of power, Ismay offered to accompany him as his chief of staff. When both men arrived at Delhi at the end of March, much of India was in turmoil, and the relationship between the Muslim and Hindu communities was already highly tense and in places severely violent. He and Mountbatten quickly realised that, if a descent towards anarchy was to be avoided, the transfer of power would need to be brought forward, and they agreed that plans for that transfer would need to be made and announced within the next six weeks. Ismay held a series of meetings with the political leaders, notably Jawaharlal Nehru of the Hindu Congress Party and Muhammad Ali Jinnah of the Muslim League and drafted a plan which would be acceptable to both sides and to the Government back in London. He was under no illusion that the outcome would be peaceful, or that the plan was anything other than the least-worst option.

In the months of extreme and widespread inter-communal violence that followed Independence Day on 15 August, Ismay was again at the forefront of negotiations with political leaders to mitigate the situation: with Nehru in Delhi and with Jinnah in the Pakistan capital of Islamabad. But he became increasingly unhappy about what he perceived as Mountbatten's lack of impartiality, epitomised by his close personal relationship with Nehru. He wrote to him, accordingly, asking to be released 'as soon as possible' but making it clear that 'I would not dream of quitting in the middle of a battle'. He finally left India at the end of

November and never diverted from his view that his eight months there were among the unhappiest of his life.

In October 1951, there was a general election in Britain, and Churchill was returned to power. He immediately brought Ismay into his cabinet as Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations. However, it was to be a short tenure for Ismay. Six months later, the members of the NATO Alliance, formed three years earlier, decided to greatly enhance its central staff secretariat and relocate from London to Paris, where it would be led by a new appointment of Secretary General.

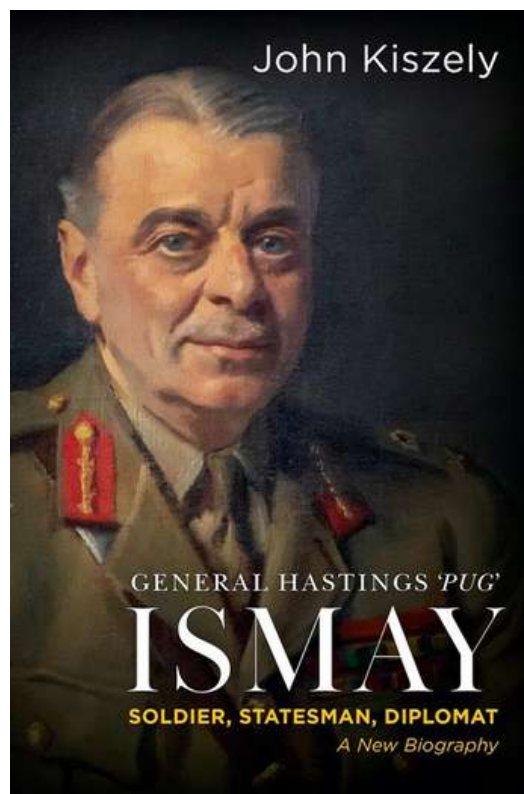
Ismay was selected as the first incumbent. He was to face some major challenges. It was the height of the Cold War, Stalin was still the Soviet leader, and the Alliance was far from united. Some members doubted its longevity, and there were many critics and sceptics who did not approve of the post of Secretary General, or the appointment of him personally.

There were also a number of specific issues on which NATO members were deeply divided, for example, whether West Germany should be admitted to the Alliance. Within a year, Stalin was dead, and NATO faced a very different challenge. His successors cleverly announced their 'Declaration of Peaceful Intent,' correctly predicting that many people (including those who should have known better) would take them at their word. This severely undermined support for NATO and, despite Ismay's robust argument that this was Russian deception and propaganda, the NATO council abandoned the expenditure goals it had agreed on the previous year.

Two years later, however, he was successful in persuading the United States to shelve its plan for further cuts. In 1956, Ismay's last full year in the job, came the greatest challenge: the Suez crisis. Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalised and blocked the Suez Canal. Israeli planes bombed Egypt. Soon after, British and French troops invaded – a deeply divisive move within NATO and one roundly and publicly condemned by President Eisenhower.

All of these challenges and crises threatened the cohesion and effectiveness of NATO. In all these challenges, Ismay played a key leadership role in holding the Alliance together. He did so largely by persuasive argument, continually emphasising the Soviet threat and the vital need for cohesion and collaboration in the face of it. He was also an inspirational leader whose integrity and sense of duty were matched by warmth of personality and great modesty. NATO's firm foundations were his legacy as Secretary General. To this day, he is widely credited as being one of the Alliance's greatest holders of the office.

In summary, throughout his life, and in a series of appointments of historic significance, Ismay displayed those attributes of courage, outstanding achievements and noble qualities by which historical heroes are (or should be) judged. That he would have been the first to decry any suggestion that he should be counted among their number is all the more reason for including him.



John Kiszely is a historian and the author of *General Hastings 'Pug' Ismay: Soldier, Statesman, Diplomat: A New Biography*.



Churchill, Ismay (standing on the right) and Chiefs of Staff

SHORT STORY

THE COMPLAINANT

R.N. Morris

Porfiry Petrovich found himself with time on his hands between appointments. This being St Petersburg, he was therefore engaged in a philosophical discussion with his clerk, Alexander Grigorevich. The subject of their discussion was the deceptiveness of appearances. It was an argument on which they were both in agreement, and yet they spoke heatedly, as if each were arguing a different point.

'This city is like a painted backdrop!' cried Porfiry. 'With its pink palaces and looming tenements. It makes us believe we are players upon the stage.'

'Yes, yes! That's what I'm saying!' objected Alexander Grigorevich. 'Everyone is playing a part.'

At that moment, noises off – that is to say, voices raised on the other side of the door – interrupted their dialogue.

Porfiry consulted his watch as Alexander Grigorevich went out to investigate. The next appointment was not due for another twenty minutes. He had summoned a professor of history from the university, against whom certain unpleasant allegations had been made by one of the new female students, who were now permitted to attend certain lectures.

Really, why couldn't people just

behave themselves? he sometimes wondered.

Alexander Grigorevich poked his head around the door, his expression amused. 'There is a man. He insists on seeing you. He says that a great crime has been committed.'

'It is not Professor M-?'

Alexander Grigorevich shook his head.

'Cannot someone else see him?'

'He insists he will see none but the great Porfiry Petrovich.'

Porfiry sighed. 'Very well.' What harm could it do to hear what the fellow had to say? 'But the moment Professor M- arrives, you will tell me.'

The man who shuffled in was evidently playing the part of a gentleman fallen on hard times. He wore an ill-fitting overcoat over what appeared to be a civil service uniform. The overcoat was in a respectable state, but everything else about him was either grubby, frayed, or dishevelled. His hair stood up in every direction and even seemed to have hayseed caught in it. An incipient beard shadowed his features, so that if he were a civil servant, it must have been some time since he had presented himself at his

department. His face was layered with grime, his lips chapped and cracked, his hands scabbed with sores.

The pungent odour of destitution accompanied him into the room.

Despite this unprepossessing appearance, Porfiry had the impression that if he were cleaned up and straightened out, he might be capable of cutting a handsome figure.

The man began abruptly in a sceptical, rather insulting tone: 'So you are Porfiry Petrovich?'

'I am.'

'The same Porfiry Petrovich who was responsible for bringing the student Raskolnikov to justice?'

Porfiry bowed, acknowledging his role in that famous case.

'You do not look like a great investigator. You look like an imp. Or a demon. A plump little demon.'

Porfiry found that he was speechless. He could only blink his eyes in ferocious astonishment. The man stared at him insolently for several moments without speaking. 'Let us say that you are Porfiry Petrovich,' he granted at last.

'I am Porfiry Petrovich!'

'You have a reputation, I think, for psychology. That is to say, you are known to look into the psychology of a case. Is that not so?'

Porfiry had the unpleasant sensation that he was the one being interrogated. 'Naturally, I look into every aspect of a case.'

This reply did not seem to satisfy the man. 'Perhaps I was mistaken in coming here,' he muttered distractedly.

'Why have you come here? Wearing someone else's overcoat!' Porfiry made the observation sound as much like an accusation as he could.

'How do you know it is not mine?'

'Your wrists protrude a clear three inches from the cuffs. And it is in a much better state than the rest of your clothes.'

The other man dipped his head in acknowledgement. 'It was given to me. By a man who had no further use for it.'

'Oh? And why is that?'

'Because immediately after he had given it to me, he threw himself into the Neva.'

'I see. And when did this occur?'

'Today. Shortly before I came here. It was on the Nikolaevsky Bridge. I went there with the very same intention.'

'You meant to kill yourself, too?'

'Yes.'

'But this fellow giving you his overcoat changed your mind?'

'I made up my mind to come here instead.'

'Why?'

'A crime has been committed. A terrible crime.'

'I see. I will need to take some details. Name?'

'But that is the essence of the crime!' cried the man. 'There! You have got to the nub of the matter, straightaway! Like an arrow striking home!'

Porfiry frowned. 'I don't quite follow.'

'My name! My name has been stolen! My life has been stolen! I have been stolen!'

'Is that possible?'

'He is a fiend. A supernatural fiend. Anything is possible to him.'

Porfiry took a deep breath. Not to put too fine a point on it, he realised that he was in the presence of a madman. It was therefore necessary to proceed with caution and compassion. 'Kindly take a seat. We will get to the bottom of this, I promise you. But I am relying on you to help me. What can you tell me about this fiend?'

The other man collapsed gratefully onto a seat on the other side of Porfiry's desk. 'He has stolen my name. He has stolen my apartment. My manservant. My position at the department. I am - or was - a titular counsellor. He has stolen my fiancée. My mother. My sister. My friends, too. And the goodwill in which I was held by all who knew me.'

'Good heavens!'

'Now do you begin to understand?'

But Porfiry was not sure that he did. 'A name, though... I must insist.'

'Fyodor Ilyich Lobov,' said the other at last.

'So, you are Fyodor Ilyich Lobov? And he is Fyodor Ilyich Lobov?'

'Correct.'

'Address?'

'His address or my address?'

'Let us start with his address.'

'Ask for him at the Kozel building on Myestchansky Street. He currently occupies a flat on the third floor there.'

'I see. And your address?'

'The same. Or at least it was until this human cuckoo took it over.'

'And now?'

'I sleep wherever I can. The last few nights, I have found a berth on a hay barge. I managed to pull open the tarpaulin and crept in.'

'One moment, please.'

Porfiry tore off a section of the paper he had been writing on. He then rose from his desk and went out into the waiting area outside his chambers, where Alexander Grigorevich had his desk.

'Any sign of Professor M-?'

'No.'

Porfiry let out an extended sigh. 'Have Virginsky and a couple of uniformed officers go to this address and bring in a fellow who goes by the name of Fyodor Ilyich Lobov.' Porfiry handed Alexander Grigorevich the scrap of paper.

'Anything else?'

'Yes. Have we had any suicides off the Nikolaevsky Bridge reported?'

'I shall look into it.'

When Porfiry returned to his chambers, he found Lobov asleep, with his head thrown back, snoring loudly. Porfiry took a cigarette from a brightly coloured enamel case on his desk and lit it. The smoke both stimulated and calmed him. His mental faculties came into focus, and he felt himself enlivened by a nervous energy.

The cigarette smoke also went some way to masking the eye-watering stench that was making itself at home in his chambers.

Yes, the fellow was undoubtedly insane. But if the experiences he had related were true, wouldn't that be enough to drive anyone mad?

Lobov's nostrils began to twitch as the smoke roused him from his slumber.

He regarded Porfiry Petrovich with a glare that was somewhere between fearful and menacing. It was the look of a wild animal, cornered by hunters.

'Calm yourself,' began Porfiry, as soothingly as he could. 'Can you think of anyone who would be able to back up your story?'

'It is not a story!'

'Nevertheless...'

'I am estranged from all to whom I might once have looked for such support.' Lobov slumped deeper into dejection. 'Today is my birthday, you know.'

'Indeed? How very... Well, that is to say, I wish you -'

'All the good wishes that are mine by rights are at this very moment being conferred upon that impostor. They are there with him now.'

Porfiry held up a hand and hurried from the room.

He was just in time. Virginsky was that moment, receiving his instructions from Alexander Grigorevich.

'What's this all about, Porfiry Petrovich?'

Porfiry conveyed the essentials of Lobov's case to Virginsky. When he had finished, Virginsky gave a sympathetic chuckle. 'I must say, Porfiry Petrovich, you do pick them!'

Porfiry did not have time for such facetious observations. 'If this fellow exists, and you find him, there is a possibility that there will be a number of other people there with him.'

'What other people?'

'Let us say a mother and a sister. Some friends. A fiancée, perhaps.'

'I see. And so?'

'Bring them all back here, will you?'

'All?'

'As many as you can.'

'On what pretext?'

'Oh, you will think of something, I have every confidence!'

Returning to his chambers once more, Porfiry felt himself the object of Lobov's impatient scrutiny as he crossed to his desk.

'What are you going to do about it?' Lobov demanded.

'You must understand that as an investigating magistrate, I am obliged to tread very carefully in cases like this.' Though for the life of him, Porfiry could not think of any other cases remotely like this one. 'I must listen to all sides before making a judgement. The complainant, you, I have heard from... I must also allow the accused to tell his side. Witnesses must be summoned. Statements taken. The evidence must be weighed.'

'And then?'

'And then a decision will be made. A judgement will be cast.'

'And the imposter will be thrown in jail!'

Porfiry chose to busy himself in tapping the ash from his cigarette rather than give an answer.

'There will be restitution, too? My life will be restored to me? I will be returned to my apartment, to my job at the department? My career? My fiancée will come back to me?'

'If your claim is found to have merit then I see no reason why at least some of this may not come to pass.'

'Some?'

'As far as the fiancée is concerned, I can make no guarantees.'

'This is a joke to you, I see.'

Porfiry frowned in bemusement. 'I have been told that I have a frivolous mind. It is an accusation that I refute absolutely. Absolutely!' He gave the word an imposing emphasis. 'On the contrary, my mind is quite serious and at times even deep, although it frequently appears otherwise. You also mentioned psychology, I think. My mind is one of the most psychological you will ever encounter. Ask anyone. Ask Virginsky. Ask Ivanov. You may even ask Petrovich.'

'You are Petrovich.'

'I meant the other Petrovich.'

'You are mocking me now!'

'Forgive me, I meant nothing by it. It is a common patronymic. Who

can say how many Peters there are, and if each of those Peters has a son, then it goes without saying that there will be a lot of Petroviches. Except, no – perhaps there was method to my madness.' 'What do you mean by that? Why speak of madness?'

'Oh, nothing. You mustn't pay me any attention.' It was Porfiry's habit, it might even be called his method, to throw out such absent-minded remarks, and then to disavow them. What he hoped to accomplish was unclear, perhaps even to himself. For now, all he succeeded in doing was to agitate a man whom he had earlier been at pains to pacify.

Despite these diversions, the time passed slowly. The two men fell into an uneasy silence. Porfiry smoked several cigarettes. Lobov watched him warily.

And still Professor M- made no appearance.

At length, there was a knock at the door: Virginsky. He was momentarily taken aback by the appearance of Lobov. 'Ah! So, this is the other one! They do look alike, I must say.'

'No no no!' cried Lobov. 'He is the other one. I am the one. The original. The true.'

'Good luck with this!' said Virginsky, with a wink to Porfiry Petrovich.

'You have him?' demanded Porfiry. 'The other?'

'Yes. That is to say, I have a man who claims to be Fyodor Ilyich Lobov.'

'Very good.'

'As you requested, I also have a mother and a sister and a fiancée. And some other fellow, whom we may describe as a friend. You didn't tell me they were having a party.'

Porfiry answered as if Virginsky had said something else entirely: 'I think we will start with the other Lobov. And only if that fails to resolve the situation need, we trouble the others.'

Although their features bore superficial similarities, it would be hard to imagine two men who

created a more different impression upon entering a room. Whereas the first Lobov had been hunched and halt, this Lobov strode in with a confident, upright air. An immaculate overcoat was draped over his shoulders. His bottle-green civil service uniform bore not a speck of dust, its buttons shining with the spotless gleam of a clear conscience. Not a hair on his head was out of place. His cheeks were smooth and clean, with a faint pink lustre. His eyes twinkled with honest goodwill – until, that is, he saw who was waiting for him in Porfiry's chamber.

'What is the meaning of this?'

Porfiry looked between the two men several times. Hair, the same dark brown; eyes, the same icy grey; faces (except that the second Lobov's was somewhat plumper), the same essential structure.

'Do you know this man?'

'I refuse to know him.'

'You are aware of the allegations he makes against you?'

'I am aware that he is a dangerous individual and a slanderer of innocent men, myself included.'

'You deny, therefore, that you have supplanted him in his apartment, his place of employment, in the very bosom of his family and in the affections of one to whom he was engaged?'

'Most emphatically.'

'He is lying!' cried the first Lobov. 'You must see that! He is a scoundrel and a liar!' 'Calm yourself, Fyodor Ilyich.'

'How dare you call him by that name! That is my name!' cried the man who had just come into the room, whom we shall call the second Lobov.

'So, you insist that you are the true Fyodor Ilyich Lobov?'

'Of course!'

'Liar!' cried the first Lobov.

The second Lobov, pursed his lips contemptuously. 'Here is the truth, if you are interested. Somehow, I

don't know how, I came to the attention of this individual. I dare say he noticed some passing similarity between us and latched onto it, like a limpet onto a rock. But in so doing, he could not help but see how far short of me he fell in his own life. He was consumed, I believe, by envy. He saw all that I had that he did not. My position, my friends, my family, my accomplishments... And so, he set about claiming them for himself by concocting these absurd allegations against me. It is pure fantasy on his part, you must see that?'

'No, no, no! It's not true. It is the other way round. He envied me!'

'How could I possibly envy such an individual? My life is well-ordered. Undeniably, I have advantages that he lacks. It would be natural for such a fellow, a destitute and we must assume dissolute, wretch, to want what his superior has. Instead of working hard to earn it, he simply arrogates it to himself. It is understandable, I suppose. We might blame the recent reforms and the more liberal atmosphere that now prevails in Russia. No man is content with his lot anymore. The serf aspires to be a landowner. The lackey to be a lord. Everyone believes he may get what he desires simply by reaching out and grabbing it. And now even the law courts are constituted to aid these criminals in their revolution. For be in no doubt, this is nothing less than revolution!'

'I will give you revolution!' And with this, the first Lobov launched himself at his enemy with his hands played to grasp him about the throat.

Fortunately, Virginsky was there to pull him away before he was able to strangle his double.

'Ah, now you see!' said the second Lobov, rubbing his neck where the other had squeezed him. 'He would have killed me. He is a murderer, as well as a fantasist.'

Porfiry addressed the first Lobov. 'If you cannot conduct yourself in an orderly manner, I will have you taken to the cells and decide this case without you.' Porfiry observed a sly grin creep over the mouth of the second Lobov upon seeing his enemy rebuked. 'Virginsky, bring in the first of the witnesses.'

The two Lobovs drew themselves up, one uneasily, the other with a sneering confidence.

Virginsky ushered in a young woman, respectably dressed, her eyes cast down modestly. She bore a familial resemblance to both Lobovs, but because of the cleanliness and good health of the second, if you had to choose, you would have said he was her brother.

At the sight of her, the first Lobov could not contain himself. He dropped down onto his knees and held his arms out in front of him. 'Any! It is I, Fedya! Your brother! Will you not look at me?'

But she steadfastly refused his invitation.

'Do you remember,' continued the first Lobov, his voice cracking with emotion, 'when we were children? You had a china doll. She had blue eyes. And a blue dress. You used to comb her yellow hair endlessly. You loved that doll so much. You took her everywhere with you. You would not let her out of your sight. And then one day, you couldn't find her. You cried so much. And I-I had hidden her! I don't know why. Perhaps I was jealous. But I remember, I remember being so shocked by your tears, by the depth of your grief. I, of course, pretended to find her! And you were so happy, oh yes! You hugged me tightly! You covered my face in kisses!'

'What was she called?' The young woman's voice was devoid of sympathy.

'What was she called? Oh, my, now - let me see if I can... It was so long ago. But I can see her. I can picture her. I remember how she felt in my hands. The weight of her porcelain head.'

'And so, her name?'

'I have been ill recently. My thoughts are confused. I have not slept well...'

'Masha,' supplied the other Lobov.

'Yes! Her name was Masha!' confirmed Anya Ilyinichna jubilantly.

'But I was right about the doll?
There was a doll?'

'What little girl does not have a
doll?' observed the second Lobov
drily.

The next witness to be brought in
was a young man.

Porfiry noticed that he, too, was
unable to meet the eye of the first
Lobov, whereas he nodded
decisively towards the second.

'You are?'

'My name is...'

'Apollon Apollonovich!' shouted
the first Lobov excitedly. 'My oldest
friend!'

'I am Apollon Apollonovich. That
much is true.'

'And how long have you known
Fyodor Ilyich?'

'Since boyhood.'

'What pranks we used to play!
What games!'

Apollon Apollonovich frowned
disapprovingly at this attempt by
the first Lobov to recall better
times.

'Do you have anything to say that
might prove which of these two
men is the true Fyodor Ilyich? A
question, perhaps, to which only
the real Fyodor Ilyich would know
the answer?'

'When we were pupils at the
seminary together, we had a
nickname for one of our teachers,
Father Nikon.'

'Yes, yes! I remember! The Goat -
we called him the Goat!'

'Is that correct?' asked Porfiry.
'No. Father Vasily was the Goat.
Father Nikon was...'

'The Holy Spirit,' said the second
Lobov. 'On account of the fact that
his breath always smelled of
vodka.'

'That's right,' confirmed Apollon
Apollonovich.

'Yes, yes. Now I remember. Father
Nikon was the Holy Spirit. Of

course. We had nicknames for all
the fathers. It is not surprising that I
have grown a little confused. It was
so long ago.'

'I remembered,' pointed out the
second Lobov.

'But I remembered the other
father's name. Does that count for
nothing?'

The third witness to be brought
before them was Katerina
Semyonovna Lobova, the mother of
Fyodor Ilyich Lobov.

'I will not ask you which of these
men you believe to be your son,'
began Porfiry. 'We must allow for
the possibility that you may have
been deceived by one or other of
them. You may, in other words, be
mistaken in your belief. However,
let us accept that one of them is
indeed your son. That you gave
birth to him and brought him up
from a baby. You nurtured him and
clothed him and loved him. Once
upon a time, you even bathed him.
And so, I will ask you this. Are you
aware of any distinguishing
birthmarks on his body, and if so,
could you describe them and give
their precise location?'

Katerina Semyonovna smiled
complacently. 'My son has a
birthmark the size, shape and
colour of a cherry on his calf.'

'A-ha!' cried the first Lobov. He
hurriedly bent down to roll up the
right leg of his trousers. 'See, see, I
have such a mark!'

He turned his back to allow his calf
to be examined.

There was something there,
perhaps, a faint cherry-coloured
smudge, obscured grime and a
dark layer of hair.

'Madam, can you confirm that that
is your son's birthmark?' pressed
Porfiry.

Katerina Semyonovna screwed her
face into an expression of disgust.
'It's very dirty.'

'But he does have a mark,'
observed Porfiry.

'As do I,' said the other Lobov at
last, rolling up one of his own
trouser legs, but in his case the left.

The birthmark he showed to the
room was indubitably cleaner and
more distinct than his enemy's. In
truth, it looked as though it had
been recently inked in. It formed a
perfect representation of a cherry.

Too perfect by half, thought
Porfiry, who felt a great temptation
to take a damp handkerchief and
rub at it. The second Lobov
dropped his trouser leg before he
had the chance. 'Which calf was it,
madam? Right or left?'

'He is my son,' said Katerina
Semyonovna, pointing
unambiguously at the second
Lobov.

A tremendous groan of distress
came from the other.

'You have been engaged to Fyodor
Ilyich for how long now?'

A girl of around nineteen or twenty
years of age now stood before
Porfiry. Nastasya Sergeyevna
Luzhina appeared somewhat
overawed by her surroundings,
keeping her head bowed and
pulling at the fringe of her shawl
with nervous fingers. She was
pretty enough to be cast as the
fiancée in this drama, though her
eyes flashed with an intelligence
that suggested she would bring
something interesting to the role.

'For twelve months,' she spoke in a
whisper that Porfiry had to strain to
hear. 'We have been waiting, in the
hope of a promotion that Fedya
has been promised.'

'I see. Now, you must know him
more intimately than anyone, I
would venture to assert?'
She gave a diffident shrug.

'And a woman, a woman in love - is
that a fair description of you?'

Her face flooded with colour;
nonetheless she nodded.

'A woman in love is especially
sensitive, would you not agree, to
any little changes in her lover's
behaviour? You scrutinise and
interpret his every deed for signs of
subtle changes in his feelings for
you? Is that not how it is?'

'Yes.'

'Does he love me as much today as he did yesterday? Such are the questions you torment yourself with - am I right?'

'Yes.'

'Did you ever feel that Fyodor Ilyich's behaviour towards you changed?'

Her nostrils flared. She lifted her head decisively. Her shy whisper grew in confidence. 'There was a time when he was neglectful of me.'

'And that changed?'

'He grew more thoughtful. More tender in his solicitude. He took my feelings into account more.'

'And what did you put it down to, this change in him?'

'We had quarrelled. I believe he made a conscious effort to reform.'

'I see.'

The first Lobov let out an anguished cry. 'I was... I confess, I was a thoughtless beast. I didn't deserve you. But you must believe me, I always loved you.'

'I don't know who this man is.' Nastasya Sergeyevna spoke firmly now, with chilling finality, and not a trace of her earlier shyness. She pointed at the first Lobov, her arm held out straight, a fierce, unforgiving glare fixed on him.

The heartbroken sob of despair that this provoked was for Porfiry the most telling evidence in the case so far.

Porfiry called all the witnesses back to hear his findings.

'I have four witnesses who say that this man is the genuine Fyodor Ilyich Lobov.' Porfiry indicated the second Lobov with a dismissive flick of his hand.

'No! It's not true!' cried the first Lobov.

'So, they are mistaken? Is that it?'

'He has deceived them!'

'And yet he is in possession of certain information that only the

genuine Lobov could know. The name of your sister's childhood doll, for example, as well as the shape and location of a birthmark attested to by your mother. Either he is who he claims to be, or he was supplied with this information by the witnesses. If the latter is the case, we must conclude that all four of these witnesses have willingly entered into a conspiracy with the false Lobov. If so, one has to ask why.'

The first Lobov shook his head in despair. 'It can't be!'

'Exactly, it cannot be. It makes no sense. Unless... looking at this from a purely psychological point of view, you understand... Considered in that light, and that light alone, it is perfectly possible that they know very well that he is not the genuine Lobov. But that they simply prefer him. That this Fyodor Ilyich Lobov is a better brother, a more devoted son, a more loyal friend, a more considerate lover than, you, the genuine Fyodor Ilyich Lobov ever were.'

The four witnesses simultaneously dipped their heads, as clear an indication of their complicity as Porfiry could ask for.

The first Lobov cried out in dismay: 'How could you?'

His old childhood friend was the first to offer an explanation, though the flatness of his voice betrayed his lack of conviction in the line he was obliged to deliver: 'We thought it was you.'

His sister's excuse contained a grain more honesty: 'We wanted it to be you.'

Whereas his mother's was charged with maternal disappointment: 'Oh, why could it not be you!'

As for his former fiancée, she spat hers out with all the merciless defiance of youth: 'I don't care if it isn't you. I love him.'

Porfiry had heard enough. 'A fraud has been committed. You, sir, you cannot simply take over another man's life. The law does not allow it. Even if you are better at living his life than he ever was. Case adjourned until a date for a trial has been set. I advise you to appoint one of our new defence attorneys, who will no doubt urge you to moderate your remarks

concerning juries.' He turned to the first Lobov. 'Fyodor Ilyich, you are now free to return to your apartment and pick up the threads of your life as best you can.'

The man we must now call the genuine Lobov let out a triumphant cry. 'My overcoat! I demand restitution of my overcoat!'

Porfiry nodded to Virginsky, who stepped forward to relieve the false Lobov of the contentious garment. He relinquished it with a defiant snarl: 'You're making a terrible mistake!'

But Porfiry could not, and did not, allow doubt to creep in now. His decision had been made. He did not expect the party he had found against suddenly to abandon his deceit. That is not the way the criminal mind works. And he certainly would not allow the distraught shrieks of a fiancée to influence him.

As the false Lobov was led away by a uniformed policeman, the genuine Lobov greedily put on the coat that had been restored to him. It fitted him perfectly. He drew himself up to his full height and looked down at his sleeves admiringly.

The room was cleared of witnesses and complainant, with no sign of reconciliation between them. Porfiry picked up the ill-fitting coat that had been discarded on the floor and made a cursory search of its pockets. It wasn't long before he retrieved a folded sheet of paper.

As he began to read what was written there, the door burst open, and a breathless Alexander Grigorevich rushed in. 'Porfiry Petrovich, it was just as you said. They fished a body out of the Neva, close to the Nikolaevsky Bridge. And listen to this, the body had on its back a knapsack and in the knapsack, they found...'

'The severed head of a young woman. She is Marya Petrovna Dementyeva, a student at the university.'

'Good heavens! How did you know?'

'It is all here in Professor M-'s suicide note,' said Porfiry calmly, holding out the sheet of paper for Alexander Grigorevich to read.

EMPIRE OF SHADOWS: BOOK THREE

DEATH OF A PRINCESS

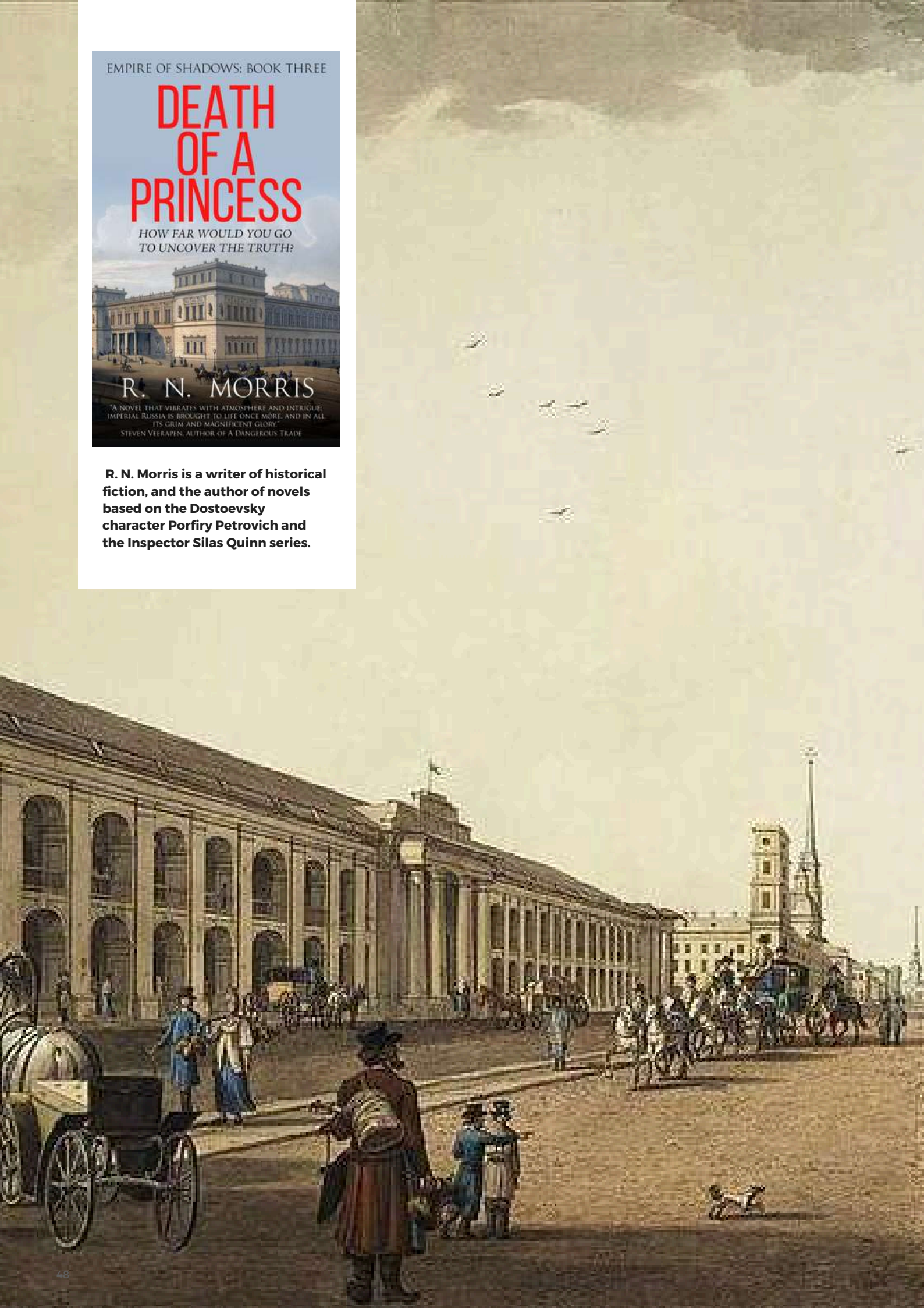
HOW FAR WOULD YOU GO
TO UNCOVER THE TRUTH?



R. N. MORRIS

"A NOVEL THAT VIBRATES WITH ATMOSPHERE AND INTRIGUE;
IMPERIAL RUSSIA IS BROUGHT TO LIFE ONCE MORE, AND IN ALL
ITS GRIM AND MAGNIFICENT GLORY."
STEVEN VEERAPEN, AUTHOR OF A DANGEROUS TRADE

R. N. Morris is a writer of historical fiction, and the author of novels based on the Dostoevsky character Porfiry Petrovich and the Inspector Silas Quinn series.







HOW DO YOU SOLVE A PROBLEM LIKE POSTUMUS?

Fiona Forsyth

Succession and exile were common concerns in the imperial household as the author delves into the life of one of Augustus' grandsons.

Have you ever thrown a coin into the Trevi Fountain in Rome? You probably stood with your back to the fountain, as advised by everyone around you, but when you turned back, you may well have caught a glimpse of Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa. He is the armoured gentleman carved on the left-hand panel above the fountain. He is gazing at the plans being shown him by a minion, plans for an aqueduct called the Aqua Virgo that feeds the Trevi still. Agrippa was a man who got things done.

When Agrippa died in 12 AD, his friend, the Emperor Augustus, was devastated. They had met as teenagers, and since then, Agrippa had served Augustus and Rome devotedly. He had built useful things like aqueducts, provided baths for the citizens of Rome, and won the crucial Battle of Actium (amongst many other victories) for his friend. He had even married his friend's daughter and helped provide the emperor with grandchildren, two boys and two girls. Augustus had adopted the two sons, Gaius and Lucius, and was clearly bringing them up as his heirs. The girls, of course, could be used to make marriage ties with the right people.

After Agrippa's state funeral, the widow was married off again swiftly, maybe even before she could give birth to her husband's last child in the summer of that year. It is easy to imagine that the boy born several months after his father's death was a treasured child, born into Rome's most important family. This may not have been an easy burden, though – the emperor had high hopes and high standards for his family, and Agrippa's life of faithful hard work was always going to be hard to live up to in the manner expected of Roman sons.

As young Postumus grew, he would have been quickly aware of his place in the scheme of things. He was not the heir or the spare, but he was a potential, and I'm sure he also saw the possibilities. His grandfather and father, between them, had fought civil wars to gain power and bring peace to Rome. Poets sang their praises. The city was slowly being transformed for the better. Agrippa and Augustus had also spent many years planning for the crucial moment when power would be transferred at the death of the emperor.

The emperor had been preparing for his own death and the transfer

of power for many years. In the first case, he had looked to his family. He had one daughter, Julia, from a very early and brief marriage to a woman who was divorced almost before she could rise from childbed. Augustus moved on with scandalous swiftness to his next wife, Livia, but in the ensuing fifty years and more of marriage, she and Augustus had no children. She brought two useful sons by her first husband to Augustus' family, but they were not of Augustus' blood.

One child, and a daughter at that, was not going to be enough, so Augustus started to look for a way around: if he married off his nephew Marcellus to his daughter Julia and waited for them to produce some children, then he would at least have heirs of his blood. The scheme was thwarted by Marcellus' early death, prompting Augustus to lower his expectations and marry Julia off to the trusted friend, the loyal, if not family, Marcus Agrippa. Agrippa's two elder sons, Gaius and Lucius, were adopted, and Augustus oversaw their education closely, even teaching them things like swimming himself. These two boys contained all his hopes, and when Gaius and Lucius were introduced to politics in their teens, Postumus

knew that he could be part of the budding dynasty when one of his brothers took over from Augustus.

Unfortunately, by the time young Postumus was a teenager, the carefully prepared line of succession was in tatters, and his home life was much less secure. When he was ten, his mother Julia was sent into exile after a disgraceful sex scandal, when he was fourteen, his brother Lucius died, and then Gaius two years later in 4AD. Augustus moved swiftly, adopting Livia's son Tiberius, who was by now 46 years old and Postumus, who was only 16. Tiberius was what Augustus clearly needed, an efficient administrator and a respected general, while Postumus as Augustus' only grandson had at least that all-important blood.

It wasn't long before Postumus started getting into trouble. Our sources mutter darkly about his character: Suetonius mentions his "ingenium sordidum" (nasty character), Tacitus witheringly says he was "rudem sane bonarum artium et robore corporis stolide ferocem" (his good qualities were unformed, and his physical strength made him fierce). Velleius even says, and such dismissive words have led modern scholars to wonder if, Postumus suffered from mental health issues. Augustus tried sending Postumus out of the public glare in Rome to Surrentum on the Bay of Naples, but this did not work. Cassius Dio tells us that Postumus enjoyed fishing and called himself Neptune, which is hardly a picture of the paragon that Augustus needed to train up to rule. "As he got no better, indeed became more and more out of his mind, he was exiled to an island," says Suetonius. This probably took place in 7 or 8 AD, although relative timings are hard to work out.

Postumus was not the only person exiled at this time. Exile was Augustus' way of dealing with members of his family who didn't suit. Postumus' mother had been living on the small island of Pandateria since 2 BC, while his sister Julia the younger, disgracefully pregnant by her lover, was similarly exiled to Tremorus off the east coast of Italy in 8 AD. And Augustus did not confine himself to members of his own family. At

the same time, the poet Ovid was exiled to Tomis on the coast of the Black Sea, hence the speculation that he was somehow involved with Julia the younger or maybe even Postumus himself. To be a friend to either in 7 or 8 AD would have brought the poet to the attention of the emperor.

Keeping these unsatisfactory relatives away from the public eye was supposed to keep them from becoming the nucleus of any group wishing to make trouble. The last years of Augustus' reign were filled with distressing incidents that caused unrest. For example, the Varian disaster of 9 AD, where three full legions of the Roman army were lost in the German Teutoburg forest. Should unrest grow to say, insurrection, there were figureheads available, and we do hear stories of plans to "rescue" Postumus or his sister. Nothing came to fruition.

Postumus remained on the island of Planasia until 14 AD, when, according to Tacitus, Augustus visited his grandson. He told nobody but the one friend he took with him, and nobody can say what occurred during that visit. It is tempting to see it as the forerunner of reconciliation – a fading Emperor making amends for his treatment of a misjudged young man – but there are other, less romantic explanations. Maybe Postumus was ill, maybe Augustus, at the ripe old age of 75, felt that he must check one last time on his only grandson's character. We can't be sure, and indeed many historians think the whole episode is a fabrication.

Our sources are fairly unanimous in what happened when Augustus died on 19 August of that year: an order was immediately sent to Planasia, and Postumus was executed. Our best sources, Tacitus and Suetonius, admit that they don't know who sent that order, but they come up with several ideas: it was Augustus' own instruction, it was Tiberius (though he denied it), it was Livia who made the fateful decision.

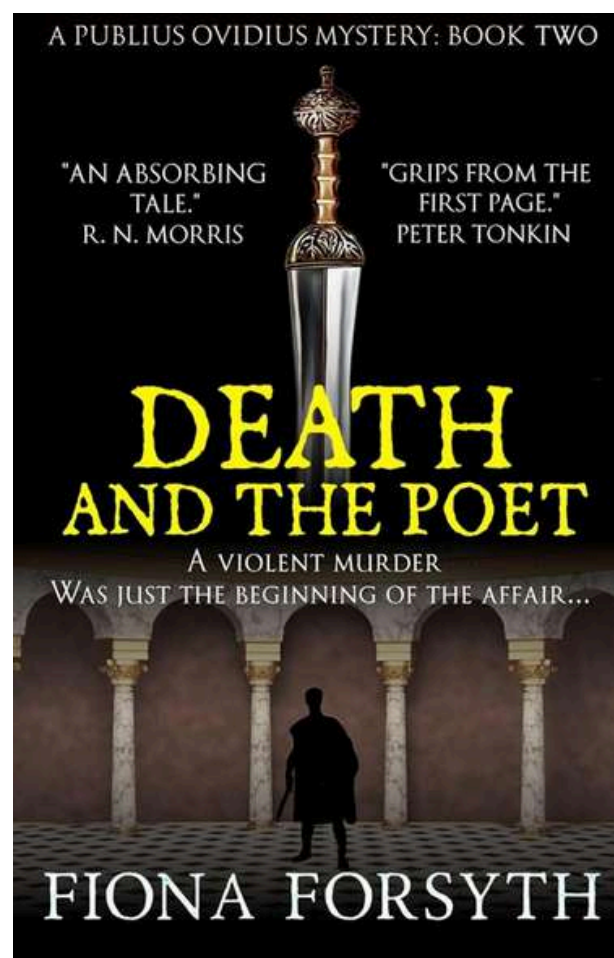


Right:
The relief of Agrippa by the Trevi Fountain



Enough suspicion surrounded the death of Postumus that a couple of years later, an impostor came forward, claiming to be Postumus and trying to raise support. It is a familiar story to anyone who has followed the fates of the various Pretenders during Henry VII's reign. The sources generally assign this to Postumus' ex-slave, Clemens, and the attempt was short-lived.

Postumus was only 26 when he died. We don't know how much he wanted to be the centre of attention, a focus for hopeful insurgents, someone too dangerous to be allowed to live in prison on a tiny island. In the end, the picture is a sad one of a young man who had spent his life disappointing his grandfather and only wanting to fish.



Fiona Forsyth is the author of *Death and the Poet*, the second instalment of *The Publius Ovidius Mysteries*, published by Sharpe Books.



WHY YOU WON'T FIND KING ARTHUR IN MY NEW DARK AGES TRILOGY

MJPorter

The legendary monarch dominates the headlines in early British history, but, beyond that legend, this period has a rich landscape to be explored and enjoyed.

As an undergraduate student, I studied the historical and literary sources for the legend of Arthur for my dissertation. It didn't go well (slight understatement). I was then 'punished' for not doing well on that project, by only being able to find one part-time distance learning course when I came to my study for my master's back in the early 2010s, and you guessed it, it was mostly about the legend of Arthur and indeed called 'Arthurian Studies.' But this hasn't led me to hate Arthur (which might surprise you). It does, however, mean I'm sceptical about any possible historical Arthur, even though I will accept the Arthurian Legend has a history of its own, and it is a fascinating one. But for those seeking some answers to what was happening within Britain during the 'true' Dark Ages, roughly the period between about 410 and 600, Arthur and these legends are not where the answers will be found.

So, you might ask what my problem is with the possibility of a historical Arthur. After all, there are other names from long-ago times that I'm more willing to accept, such as Vortipor and his ilk. First and foremost, there is no mention of Arthur in any surviving written source until many centuries after it's believed he lived. Some will cite the words of Gildas and his Latin text *De Excidio Britanniae*, dated sometime between about 480 and 540, as some sort of early and

contemporary proof; however, Gildas doesn't reference Arthur, even if he does mention a battle later assigned to Arthur by another early source, the *Historia Brittonum*. The perceived relevance, therefore, comes from cross-referencing two of the earlier sources, for Badon Hill is also mentioned in the battle list of the *Historia Brittonum* (surviving in a 12th-century manuscript), which does mention Arthur. And this is how trying to build a picture of the legends of Arthur continues; one source 'might' corroborate another, or it might not. Sometimes, in the frantic endeavours to find the 'historical' Arthur, people fall over themselves attempting to seek the much-desired 'proof' that these intriguing legends have a historical background. It would be fabulous if they did, but alas, this desire to 'find' Arthur so often overshadows what is already a thrilling, mesmerising, and complex situation. It also overlooks another captivating thread: the tracing of the development of the legend of Arthur with all its political significance. As is often the case, the legend of Arthur and its many iterations tell us more about the people and milieu of those who wrote the legends than about a 'historical' Arthur. In looking for the 'proof,' much else is dismissed as irrelevant and sometimes misunderstood as well.

However, the quest for Arthur has

fuelled developments within archaeology, both in terms of technological advances and financial resources to discover so much more about the true 'Dark Ages.' No longer are archaeologists 'looking' for the characters who appear in the earliest surviving records, or rather for Arthur. Now, they search for the situations described. After all, it's far easier to find evidence of war and large-scale population displacement than of a single individual. And just as easily, they can demonstrate that such displacements did not occur, contrary to what some early sources have claimed. Continuity, and not always change, is often found in the quest for the archaeological 'truth' of what was happening at this period, and if not always continuity or change, then the slow march towards something different from what had happened before. It is also revealing, excavation by excavation, that some of the written records we do have are potentially incorrect, or, if I'm being kinder, can't be applied in such a widespread manner as has happened before to the whole of what is now England and Wales.

The historical and archaeological record of the true Dark Ages is filled with faceless and nameless individuals who were born, lived and then died. We often only have records of their burial or cremation. We often only have surviving metal objects, a meagre amount of

clothing, and very few coins. These reveal more about the deaths of our ancestors than they do about how they lived.

It is time these 'others' received far more attention than a legendary figure who survives in much later source material. Admittedly, the Arthurian legend has been put to good use by a huge number of interested parties in the intervening period, from giving credence to claims to kingship (I'm looking at you Henry VII, and your son, named Arthur, who tragically died as a young man) to writers who genuinely believed a historical Arthur must have existed (Geoffrey of Monmouth and his little book) and therefore perpetuated the myth. While I could never reimagine this period in a non-fiction book, if it possible to do that when writing fiction.

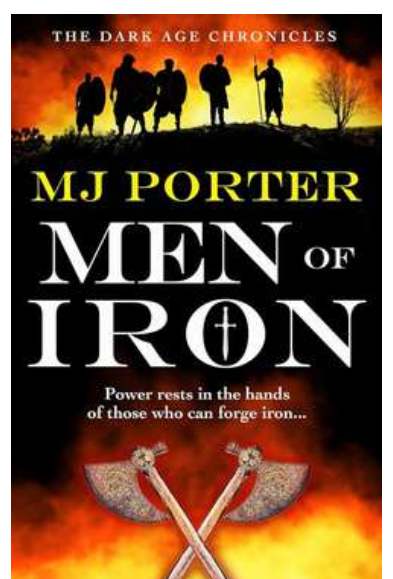
This period fascinates me. It could be the lack of certainty about a great deal because I'm nothing if not a little lazy when writing my stories. But it is how these people lived that I want to bring to life. The Dark Age Chronicles are a story not of a 'historical person' as my books so often are, but rather of fictional people who 'might' have lived in this reimagined period. What was it like to live in a world inhabited by the physical remains of Roman Britain? Did people revert to the Iron Age tribal affiliations, or did the centuries of Roman rule make them live in an entirely new way? Who spoke what language? Who revered which God or Gods? Did they travel large distances? Did they not? Did they fight their neighbours or live in peace? How did they contend with drought, famine and plagues? Too often, this period is overlooked, the allure of the downfall of Roman Britain and the emerging earliest Saxon kingdoms absorbing our attention, but the interval between these two is upwards of two centuries. We all know a great deal can happen in a matter of weeks, let alone in the space of two hundred years.

And so, you won't find Arthur in my new Dark Ages series, but you will find a lived experience where family, betrayal, and the need to survive dominate. If you would like to explore this period for yourself, then I recommend two excellent non-fiction accounts. If you prefer an archaeological exploration, Britain After Rome by Robin

Fleming, and if you'd prefer one with more of a nod to the source material, but which will entangle you in the archaeology as well, The First Kingdom by Max Adams. Mind, if someone does find a grave that genuinely has a 'Here be Arthur' marker on it, I'll happily eat my words, and maybe, let him have a little starring role.



Detail of The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon (1898), by Edward Burne-Jones



MJ Porter's historical fiction covers the periods of the Early English, Vikings and the British Isles as a whole before the Norman Conquest. She is the author of *Men of Iron*, the first of the *The Dark Ages Chronicles*.



ENGLAND'S LOST KING: A STUDY IN MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Paul Bernardi

If only the politics of succession behind the Norman Conquest were that simple. The author makes the case for a forgotten Anglo-Saxon monarch, the last of the Wessex dynasty.

He made a brief appearance in one of my early novels (Thurkill's Revenge), but in Uprising (book two of my Rebellion trilogy, also published by Sharpe Books), Edgar (the) Aetheling returns in a more central role as a serious claimant to the English throne. Yet few, outside of historical circles, may know much about him or have even heard of him.

The story of Edgar Aetheling evokes a range of emotions. His life plays out as an almost romantic endeavour filled with so many 'what ifs', but, at the same time, is overshadowed by mistakes, misfortunes and misdeeds. It is a shame that not more is known of this individual (he cries out for a proper biography), and his role in the dynastic power struggles of the second half of the 11th century. To my mind, there is a strong case for calling Edgar – rather than Harold Godwineson – the last Anglo-Saxon king of England. At the very least, he deserves to be reinstated in the regnal list of England.

The Last Scion of the House of Wessex.

So, who was this man, and whence did he come? To answer that question, we need to go back fifty years to 1016: the time of the other

successful but less well-known conquest of England in the eleventh century.

Following the death of Aethelraed Unraed in April 1016, his eldest surviving son – Edmund Ironside – did what he could to rally England's nobles to defend the kingdom against King Knut's Danish forces. However, despite remaining unbeaten across four great battles that year, Edmund was unable to convincingly defeat the invader before he died in November.

At the time of his death, Edmund was father to two infant sons (Edmund and Edward) who fell into Knut's hands. And you'd be right to fear the worst. But Knut was far too smart to do the deed himself; he didn't want the 'child-killer' epithet on his CV, not when he had yet to become secure on the throne. So instead, he sent the boys to King Olof of Sweden, where he no doubt hoped they'd be murdered quietly.

For reasons unknown, though, King Olof either defied or ignored the instructions. Details of what happened are sketchy, but it is thought that he sent them on to Kyiv, where they grew up at the royal court and met another exiled

prince, Andrew of Hungary, in the 1030s.

Evidently, in 1046, the two Saxon princes decided to join Andrew on his return to Hungary to help him in his fight to reclaim the Hungarian throne. By now, the two English Aethelings (or 'throne-worthy' ones) were roughly 30 years old. Not much, if anything, is known about Edmund – other than he disappeared from the record, suggesting his death (perhaps in battle). But Edward (known as the Exile) married a noblewoman, Agatha (most likely a descendant of the Holy Roman Emperor's half-brother), with whom he had three children: Edgar, Margaret and Cristina.

A Sort of Home Coming

By 1054, it was apparent that the reigning King of England, Edward the Confessor, was unlikely to sire any children due to a combination of his frail health, his advancing years and the supposed fact that his marriage to Edith, sister of Earl Harold Godwineson, was chaste. With Norman influence growing (Edward had spent c.25 years in Normandy after 1016 and had William the Bastard (as he was then) as a cousin), the Witan (or king's council) was desperate to

find a suitable candidate, someone who was, above all, English and preferably of the royal line.

So, when someone remembered the king's surviving nephew (i.e. the son of his half-brother, Edmund Ironside), the assembled nobles jumped at the chance. A direct male descendant of the House of Wessex would be the perfect choice. And so, Edward the Exile was suddenly Edward the Aetheling, potential future ruler of a country he'd last seen as a babe in arms 40-odd years before.

Disaster Strikes

After much political machination at the court of the Holy Roman Emperor in Cologne, Edward duly arrived in London in 1057. It must have made for an odd sight as The Exile disembarked from his ship to be greeted by crowds of well-wishers, who were curious to see this new heir to the throne. Quite what they made of the middle-aged man wearing strange clothing and unable to speak English is hard to know and certainly wasn't recorded.

It soon became apparent, however, that all was not as it seemed, as Edward found that he was being blocked from meeting his uncle, The Confessor. Then, within mere days of his return, Edward the Exile died. His son, Edgar (himself now Aetheling), would have been little more than 5 years old.

No cause of death is mentioned, but it is – perhaps – telling that no mention is made of illness. That Edward might have been poisoned by factions at the royal court opposed to his succession to the throne cannot be proven, but also cannot be ruled out. Though I can't help but think that the person who benefited most from The Exile's demise was Earl Harold Godwinson.

What now for Edgar?

Edward the Exile's widow, Agatha, and her three children continued to live at the king's court, welcomed and cared for by The Confessor. With the Exile's death, however, concerns about the succession were, once again, at the forefront of people's minds, not least due to the perceived threat from the Danes, keen to recover



Knut's kingdom.

Whilst it cannot be proven definitively, I think there is a strong case for arguing that King Edward hoped for a solution that saw his great-nephew, Edgar, on the throne, backed by the might and wealth of Earl Harold and his brothers.

With the benefit of hindsight, it was naïve to say the least to think that Harold, already arguably more powerful than the king, would willingly play second fiddle to a child, and that the Witan would not deviate from the centuries-old tradition of choosing a descendant of the royal line of Wessex. And then there was William of Normandy, newly arrived on the scene and claiming that The Confessor had promised him the throne. How would a child fare against a proven warlord? The pieces were thus set for the

thrilling denouement, one in which Edgar never really managed to assert himself.

1066 and all that (Part 1)

The Aetheling's first missed opportunity came on 5th January 1066, with the death of his kinsman. Closest to the king at the very end was Earl Harold. There are mixed reports as to what the Confessor's last words were; whether he merely entrusted his wife and his kingdom to Harold's care (as the most powerful noble) until Edgar came of age, or whether, as Harold later claimed, Edward had nominated him to succeed.

Whatever the truth, the pieces had begun to move on the board, and Edgar – a young teenager with no retinue of his own – was hopelessly out-manoeuvred by the wily earl. Within hours, Harold had

assembled the Witan and used Edward's deathbed bequest to secure their support. Whether they believed Harold's claim or not, the council must have been swayed by the thought of Normans to the south and Danes to the east, greedily eyeing the country. If there was going to be fighting, better to have a proven, stalwart general as king than an untested, beardless boy, no matter what his lineage.

So, with Harold's skill, support and wealth denied to him, Edgar was powerless to prevent the usurpation of his familial right.

1066 and all that (Part 2)

Edgar's second chance came later that same year. With Harold's death at the Battle of Hastings on 14th October, the reign of the so-called usurper was at an end. However, William of Normandy did not immediately become King of England; that would take another 10 weeks or so. For now, all he had achieved was to kill the king, two of his brothers and a significant proportion of the nobility and fighting men of England.

Those lords who remained (including Earls Edwin and Morcar of Mercia and Northumbria) were mostly assembled in London with Edgar. Now was his time, surely? There were no other surviving male members of the House of Wessex.

With no desire to bend the knee to this foreign invader, the remaining members of the Witan duly elected Edgar to be their king. Though he was never formally crowned, as far as Anglo-Saxon laws and traditions were concerned, it was the act of election that made you a king, not the placing of a piece of shiny metal on your head in a big church. Thus, it could be said that it was Edgar, not Harold, who was the last Saxon King of England. And although he lasted less than two months, we do see him confirm the new Abbot of Peterborough in that time – an undeniably kingly act of state.

Unfortunately for Edgar, he was unable to secure his position. There are doubtless many reasons for this, of which a couple leap out. First and foremost, he lacked the military support to mount a serious challenge to William. Things might

have been different had Edwin and Morcar stood with him, but as soon as they withdrew north, his chances were all but dead. Then there was his age and lack of experience (not to mention warriors of his own). This may explain why the remaining great lords didn't stand with him; they doubted his leadership credentials

Finally, hailing from Hungary at the age of three or four and unable to speak English, it cannot have made it easy for him to command loyalty and respect. And it was a task that became a bit harder when his father died within a matter of days of their arrival on these shores.

Therefore, it comes as no great surprise that Edgar realised the game was up before he'd even set his pieces out on the board. Faced with the inevitable, the Aetheling rode out to meet William at Berkhamsted in mid-December. There, he knelt before the Conqueror to formally renounce his claim and swear fealty to the new king.

Aftermath

Edgar never again came close to winning back the throne during the remainder of his life, despite being either involved in or a figurehead for several rebellions over the years that followed.

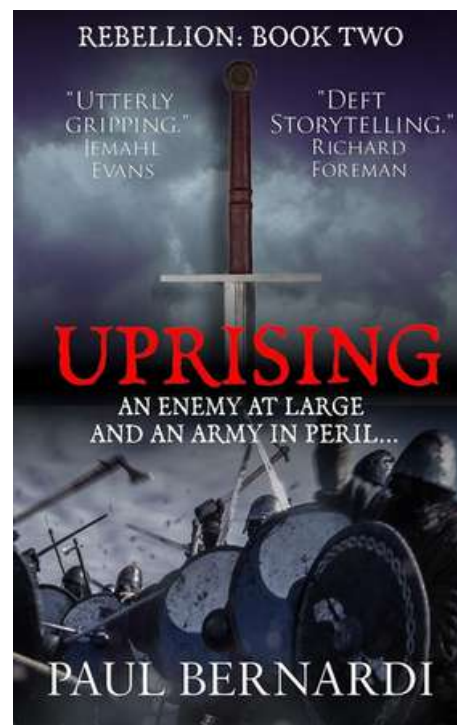
In some ways, however, he had the last laugh in that his line lived on through his sister's daughter, who later married the Conqueror's youngest son, Henry I. This union brought the Norman and English houses together to establish a line of succession from our present-day monarch back through Alfred the Great, to Cerdic (the founder of the West Saxon dynasty) and ultimately to Woden (and no one is too cool to have an actual God in their family tree, right?).

Perhaps the one remaining surprise is that Edgar lived until around 1125 (probably just marking his 70th birthday). Given William's reputation for ruthless brutality, the fact that Edgar represented his most likely rival to the throne and the fact that he was twice brought before the Norman king, having risen in rebellion, I am perplexed as to why William didn't just do away with him quietly or otherwise.

It's almost as if William did not see the Aetheling as a serious threat. Perhaps that is the greatest insult of all.

Note: Edgar features in both of my trilogies: during *The Huscarl Chronicles*, we find him in London after the battle of Hastings, trying his best to marshal support to defend what remained of the kingdom; and in the *Rebellion* trilogy when he leads the uprising against King William from Durham and York in 1068. I have always been fascinated with this Lost King of England: from his father's odyssey-like travels across Europe, to his return to England and his ultimately doomed attempt to claim his birthright.

Hopefully, you agree with me that he was and should be recognised as a rightful (and the last Anglo-Saxon) King of England. That he has been marginalised is almost solely the result of the concept of the winners being able to write history.



Paul Bernardi is a writer of historical fiction and the author of *The Huscarl Chronicles* and *Uprising*, the second book in the *Rebellion* series.



A REIGN MARKED BY CHANGE

Sophie Austin

Sophie Austin makes a strong case that Britain was transformed under Queen Victoria, and it is the speed at which societal norms shifted that informs her debut novel.

In the 64 years that Queen Victoria was on the throne, Great Britain changed dramatically. We witnessed the invention of the steam engine, the telegraph, and the telephone. Oil lamps were swapped for bright electric bulbs, and bicycles began to clutter the roads alongside horse-drawn carriages, trams and even early automobiles. Technology changed Victorian society just as it is changing ours today, but what made the Victorian era unique was the speed and scale of this transformation.

A snapshot of Great Britain in 1837

If you took a snapshot of Great Britain on the day of Queen Victoria's coronation in 1837 and compared it to a picture from 1901, you would see a very different Britain.

Though Great Britain was the most powerful country in the world in 1837, poverty and hardship were widespread, and the gap between rich and poor was growing. The Industrial Revolution (which began around the 1750s and continued until 1830) had turned Britain from a primarily agricultural society into one that revolved around factories and newly industrialised cities, crowning Britain as a world leader in industrial power. While the working class toiled long hours for

low pay, the middle class began to expand, although the majority of the profits and the power still sat with Britain's aristocracy.

Though more people flocked to the cities, hygiene and overcrowding were enormous issues in the Victorian era, and travel and transportation were slow and expensive. The railway, which would see its golden age by the end of Victoria's reign, was very much in its infancy in 1837, the first passenger line (running between Liverpool and Manchester) being just seven years old. Travel between cities was a time-consuming ordeal and people still relied primarily on horse and carriage or even travelled by foot to get from A to B. Communication was similarly slow, as letters could take days, if not weeks to arrive and these, too, were expensive before the invention of the stamp, or the Penny Post. This delay in sending and receiving communication impacted the immediacy of the news, as well, at a time when the majority relied on newspapers to stay abreast of current affairs.

Fast forward 67 years

If we look towards the end of Queen Victoria's reign, we see a transformed Britain. The expansion of the rail network turned a day-long coach ride from London to

Manchester into a four-hour train journey, with every major UK city and town now on the map. The invention of the Penny Post (1840), the telegraph system (1837) and the laying of the first transatlantic cable between Ireland and Newfoundland (1866) meant communication was cheaper and faster than ever, both domestically and internationally. Newspapers saw an explosion of popularity, especially after the abolition of the "tax on knowledge" in 1855, and steam-powered presses coupled with faster distribution networks through the railway and postal system meant Britain was more interconnected with the rest of the world than ever before. Stock markets and businesses thrived as suddenly merchants could track pricing, orders, and even shipments in almost real-time.

Greater demand for labour also saw the populations of major cities boom. By 1901, urbanisation had increased dramatically, and London's population, which was a little over 2 million in 1837, had ballooned to over 6.5 million people. Social reform and public health initiatives such as the introduction of the Public Health Act (1848), new sewage system in London (1860s), and Artisans' Dwellings Act (1875) had improved the living conditions, and the opening of the London

Underground in 1863 had made travel around the growing metropolis more readily accessible.

Meanwhile, the invention and introduction of electricity not only provided alternatives to steam power, horsepower and even water-wheel power for Britain's industries, but it also paved the way for a cultural shift. Electric lights replaced the gas lamps dotting city streets, replaced horse-drawn trams with electric trams, and made the city safer at night. Electricity allowed for extended business hours for theatres, restaurants and encouraged citizens to spend their hard-earned money enjoying a growing nightlife.

The Victorian era also saw the rise of department stores. Whereas most clothing would have been expensive and hand-made at the start of Queen Victoria's reign, the emergence of mass-production technologies coupled with Britain's growing industry made ready-made clothing cheaper and more readily accessible. In turn, this transformed women from mass-creators to mass-consumers and sparked the dawn of mass-market advertising through mail-order catalogues, and more.

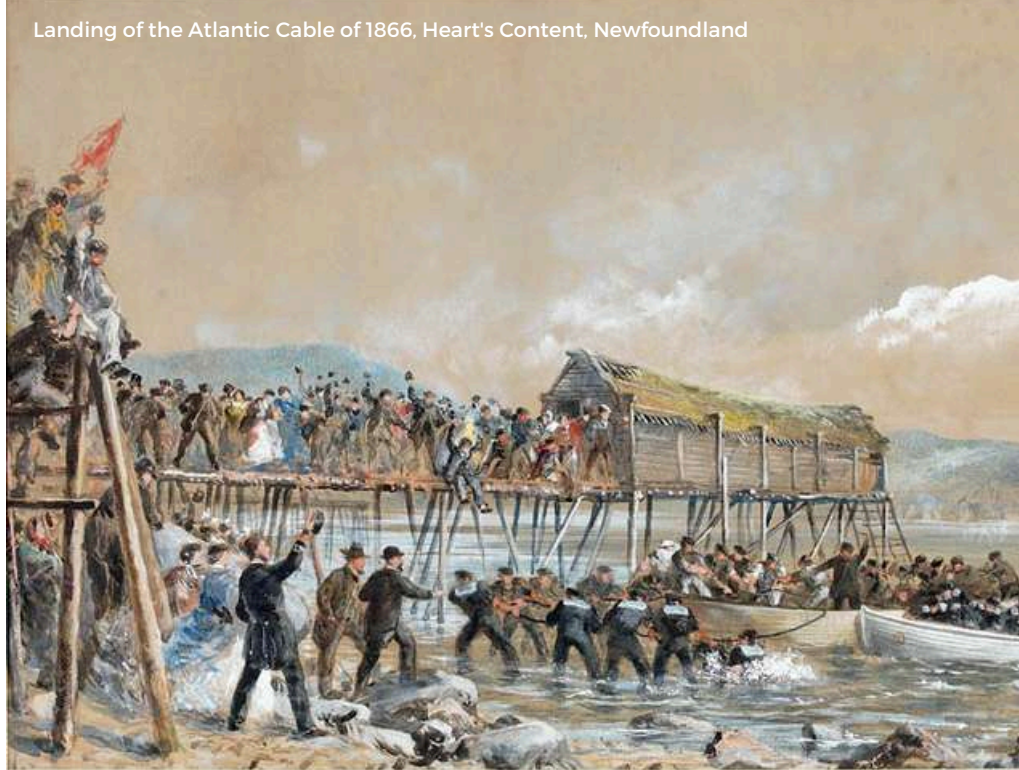
Impact on women's role in society

The changing times gave women more opportunities, but also more obstacles – something I was particularly interested in exploring in my debut historical fiction novel, *The Lamplighter's Bookshop*. In 1837, a woman's social status was very dependent on who she married, and there were very few occupations and opportunities for women. However, as the demand for labour (both skilled and unskilled) increased, and the accessibility of education for women improved, more women entered the workforce, challenging the traditional Victorian view of women as primarily homemakers.

Women became advocates for improved working conditions, education, and suffrage, and began to enter professions previously dominated by men. However, just as our modern society struggles to reconcile societal norms with rapid change, so did the Victorians. As the opportunities for women



Marble Arch tube station c.1900

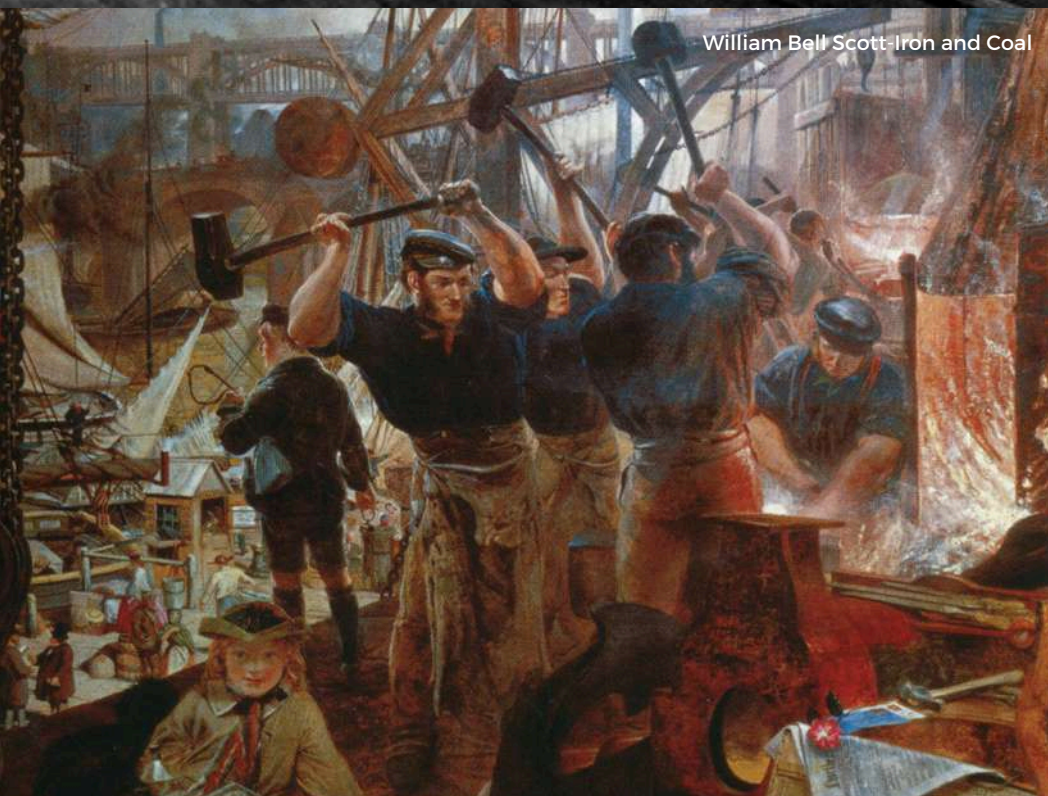


Landing of the Atlantic Cable of 1866, Heart's Content, Newfoundland

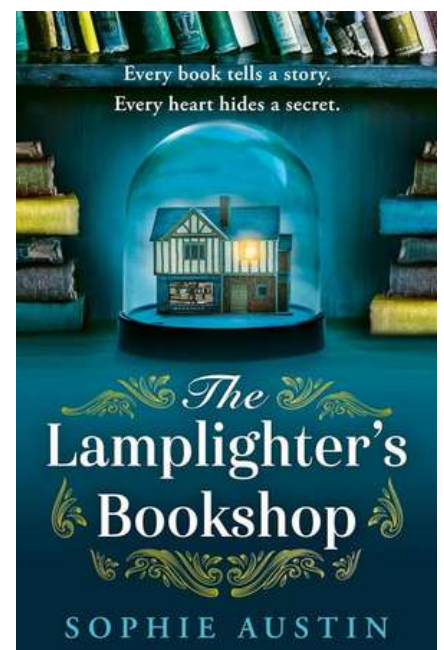


expanded, so did the discourse around whether women were suited to such work. Women were still expected to be the “Angel in the House” – a term coined by Coventry Patmore in 1854 in his poem describing the ideal Victorian woman as pure, selfless, nurturing, and utterly devoted to her husband and children. This, however, was in sharp contrast to the view of the “New Woman” (thought to have been coined by Henry James in his 1880 novel *The Portrait of a Lady*) – educated, independent, and rapidly seeking more agency and participation in a life outside of the home. The Victorian era was truly a time when old traditions came head-to-head with new opportunities and values, which is why I have always been so fascinated by it.

While Britain has seen many periods of change throughout history, the scale and speed of change witnessed during the Victorian era were unprecedented. The advancements from the Victorian age laid the foundation for industrial economies at scale, medical advancements, gender equality, social reform, and more, and to this day, its legacies remain unique and fascinating for historians and history-lovers alike to explore.



William Bell Scott: Iron and Coal



Sophie Austin is a writer of historical fiction and the author of *The Lamplighter's Bookshop*, her debut novel.



THE BEST-KEPT SECRET OF THE COLD WAR

Charlie English

A father's daring that could have been the cause of a crucial regime's downfall, this new title tells of a bookish rebellion behind the Iron Curtain.

To begin with, a book. A very special book, which lives these days in the library of the social sciences department of Warsaw University. The volume's glossy dust jacket shows a 1970s computer room, where high priests of the information age, dressed in kipper ties and flares, tap instructions into the terminals of some ancient mainframe. The only words on the front read "Master Operating Station", "Subsidiary Operating Station" and "Free Standing Display". Is any publication less appetising, I wonder, than an out-of-date technical manual?

Turn inside, however, and the book reveals a secret. The pages here are brittle, ragged-edged, and although the spine has been reglued, the leaves still threaten to tumble to the floor. This isn't a 1970s publication at all, nor a technical manual. It is a Polish-language edition of George Orwell's famous anti-totalitarian novel 1984, which was banned for decades during the Cold War by communist censors in the Eastern Bloc. How did it arrive here, and why? To answer those questions, I turned to the woman who owned the book for much of its life.

Teresa Bogucka lives with two cats in the Warsaw suburb of Solec, in an apartment crowded with books

and artwork. It was her father, the art critic Janusz Bogucki, who delivered the book to Poland. In 1957, during a short window of liberalization that opened after Stalin's death, Janusz was allowed to visit the West for the first time, and he chose to see Paris. He picked up the Orwell translation from a Polish distributor there, probably Libella, a small bookshop on a quiet backstreet on the Île Saint-Louis, not far from Notre-Dame. He took several other titles, too, including a collection of poems by the future Nobel Prize-winner Czesław Miłosz, and several copies of the Polish émigré journal *Kultura*. Although all of these were banned in Poland at the time, Janusz smuggled them back through the border in his luggage and brought them to the rural town where he and his family had moved to escape the Stalinist purges. He gave 1984 to his daughter. Teresa was ten or eleven years old then, but she was a precocious reader, and Orwell's story struck her like a thunderbolt. 'I was absolutely traumatized by it,' she said.

Even at a young age, she recognized the ways in which communist Poland mirrored Oceania, Orwell's fictional dystopian state. The language her teachers used at school was highly

codified, designed to promote communist ideology and prevent dissenting thoughts. This was very different from the way her parents spoke at home, but her mother and father couldn't tell her the school was lying in case word got back to the Party. To live in communist Poland required what Orwell called 'doublethink', which meant the ability to hold 'two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously' and accept they were both true.

In the mid-1960s, Bogucka won a place at Warsaw University, where she joined a circle of bright young people who wanted to question everything. She took her books with her and loaned them out. Some of her friends had never seen uncensored material before and were scared: if they were caught with the books, they could be thrown off the course and blackmailed by the secret police. But those who did dare to read were bound together by their shared, illegal act. They entered into a conspiracy.

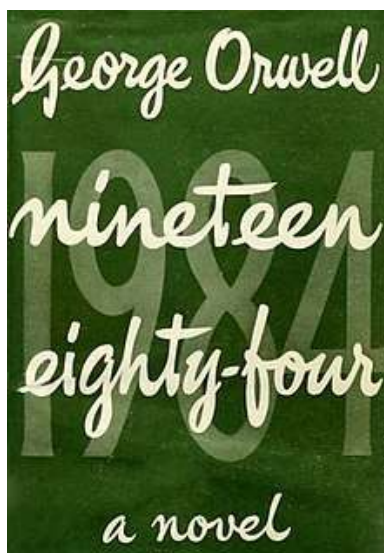
Bogucka and her fellow students had all been brought up in the communist system, trained to see the world through Marxist-Leninist philosophy, but they were also confident in their own intelligence. 'Everywhere around us, they would

be talking about the Marxist dialectic,' she said, 'whereas we believed we were young revisionists. We wanted to understand what it was really all about.' They devoured as many books on economics and sociology as they could, because they wanted to know, was Marx right? In time, they reached the heretical conclusion that would define their adult lives: Marx was wrong.

Some years later, in 1976, when the country was rocked by strikes and unrest, Bogucka joined the emerging opposition movement. She had the idea then of creating an uncensored library, to give people access to history they weren't meant to know and literature they weren't supposed to read. She told her friends she wanted their books, and donated her own collection, including her 1984. The SB security service, Poland's KGB, kept continual watch on her, eavesdropping on her conversations, arresting her and searching her apartment, so she asked neighbours to store the books. Much of the time, though, they would be circulating among the readers, since this would be a 'Flying Library', which rarely touched the ground.

The system of covert lending ran through a network of coordinators, each of whom was responsible for their own tight group of readers. Bogucka sorted the books into categories – politics, economics, history, literature – and divided them into packages of ten, before allocating each coordinator a particular day to pick up their parcel, which they took away in a rucksack. The coordinator would drop the books back the following month at a different address, before picking up a new set.

The demand for Bogucka's books was such that soon she needed to find more. They could only come from the West. Activist friends smuggled word out to London, where émigré publishers arranged to send shipments of thirty or forty volumes at a time. They would take them to the Gare du Nord in Paris, the western terminus of the transcontinental sleeper service that shuttled back and forth across mainland Europe. A courier would board the train there with a suitcase of books and head to a



toilet compartment, where they would unscrew a ceiling panel and push the case into the roof space. After leaving the train, they would pass on the number of the carriage to Warsaw via a coded telephone call. In Poznań, the first train stop in Poland, another passenger would board, unscrew the panel and remove the case, bringing the books to Bogucka.

By 1978, Teresa Bogucka's Flying Library had a stock of 500 prohibited titles. She opened sub-branches in other Polish cities, and when she moved over to other opposition activities, she passed the library to another activist, who continued to loan out the books through the 1980s. How many people read this copy of Orwell's book in those crucial Cold War years? Hundreds, probably thousands. And this was just one of millions of titles that arrived illegally in Poland, which in turn was just one country in the wider Soviet Bloc of nations, every one of which received great quantities of banned publications.

Books arrived by every possible means: smuggled in trucks, aboard yachts, sent by balloon, in the post or inside travellers' luggage. Mini editions were hidden in the sheet music of touring musicians, packed into food tins or Tampax boxes. In one instance, a copy of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* was carried on a flight to Warsaw hidden in a baby's nappy. From the late 1970s, banned books and pamphlets were also reproduced in huge quantities by underground printers in Poland, on presses smuggled in from the West,

amplifying the literature's effect. Increasingly, the underground would publish homegrown titles, too, and by the mid-1980s, the so-called 'second circulation' of illicit literature in Poland grew so large that the system of communist censorship began to break down.

The impact of this literary tide was huge. Poland was the most crucial of Eastern Bloc nations: when communism collapsed in 1989, this was the first domino to fall, and it was literature that won the war here, as the Polish dissident Adam Michnik maintained. 'We should build a monument to books,' he told me. 'I am convinced it was books that were victorious in the fight. A book is like a reservoir of freedom, of independent thought, a reservoir of human dignity. A book was like fresh air. They allowed us to survive and not go mad.'

What some suspected, but very few knew for sure, was that the uncensored literature flooding the country wasn't reaching Poles by chance. Much of it was sent as part of a decades-long US intelligence operation known in Washington as the 'CIA book program', whose strategy was to build up circulating libraries of illicit books on the far side of the Iron Curtain. Bogucka's copy of 1984 is an early example of works the programme sponsored. It was published, along with the Miłosz poems and the issues of *Kultura*, by a US intelligence asset in France known to the CIA as QRBERETTA, and the Libella bookstore where Janusz picked it up was a long-running distributor for the CIA scheme. If Bogucka's book had spent thirty years quietly undermining Soviet communism from within, that was precisely the job it was designed to do.

Almost four decades after the end of the Cold War, influence campaigns are everywhere. Intelligence agencies, activists and terrorist organizations now have a near-infinite number of ways to launch political-psychological operations and sway opinion, and the propaganda space is in some ways more important than the battles fought on the ground. Disinformation threatens Western liberal democracy as never before, while censorship and book bans are once again turning schools and

libraries into ideological battlegrounds. Viewed from today's vantage point, the CIA literary programmes appear almost quaint. This was an 'offensive of free, honest thinking', according to the programme's leader, George Minden, which they believed would work because 'truth is contagious', and if they could only deliver it to the oppressed peoples of the Soviet Bloc, it was certain to have an effect.

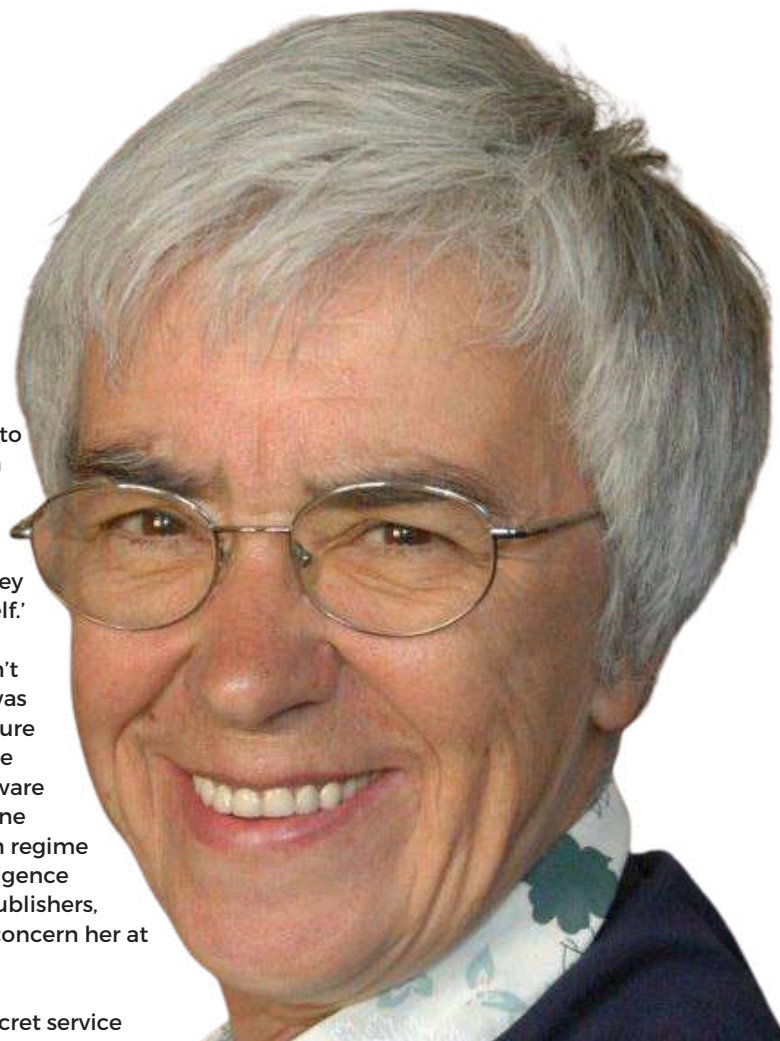
The result must rank among the most highbrow intelligence operations ever undertaken. As well as glossy lifestyle magazines such as *Marie Claire* and *Cosmopolitan*, the CIA sent copies of the *New York Review of Books* and *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, works by the Nobel Prize winners Boris Pasternak, Czesław Miłosz and Joseph Brodsky; philosophical texts by Hannah Arendt, Albert Camus and Bertrand Russell; literary fiction from Philip Roth and Kurt Vonnegut; writing advice from Virginia Woolf; the plays of Václav Havel and Bertolt Brecht; and the spy thrillers of John le Carré, to name a few. Where some early titles have a whiff of cultural imperialism and aim to promote American art, in later years, the most popular works were often by Soviet or East European writers, chosen and edited by people who lived in the bloc, or by émigrés.

Almost all files relating to the CIA books programme remain classified, as do those documenting the Agency's wider operation in support of the Polish opposition, QRHLPFUL. To relate this story in *The CIA Book Club*, then, I had to find other sources, including many people who published and smuggled books. In Poland, the subject of CIA support for Solidarity, the key Polish opposition movement in the 1980s, remains taboo. Some veterans accuse the Americans of trying to steal credit for a Polish victory, or fear being cast as stooges who simply did the CIA's bidding. Neither of these is true: the Agency supported the dissidents more than it directed them. But there is no question that the Americans played a significant role in defeating communism in Poland, and few Poles who knowingly benefited from covert US support had bad words to say about it. They were caught up in a conflict between two superpowers, after all,

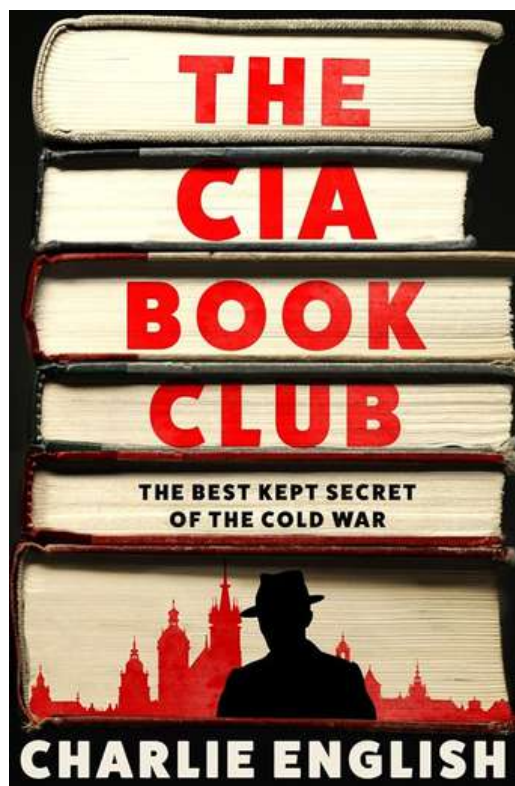
and were desperate to liberate Poland from Soviet oppression. In such a situation, as one dissident put it, 'I'd almost take money from the devil himself.'

Teresa Bogucka didn't know for sure who was paying for the literature she received from the West, but she was aware of the propaganda line pushed by the Polish regime that American intelligence supported émigré publishers, and the idea didn't concern her at all.

'I thought, wow, a secret service supporting books,' she said. 'That's fantastic.'



Above: Teresa Bogucka
Below: Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in 1974.



Charlie English was formerly Head of International News at the *Guardian* and is the author of *The CIA Book Club: The Best Kept Secret of the Cold War*.



SHORT STORY

LIES, DAMNED LIES AND MISINFORMATION

July 1938

Alan Bardos

Polite applause crept around Wilhelmshaven's ancient lecture hall; to Danny Nichols, it was like thunder. He grasped the lectern and stared at the fresh-faced members of the Christian Students for Peace symposium, neatly sat in ascending rows that dwarfed him.

The crowd began to murmur, sensing his apprehension. Nichols thought of what his father had told him before he was made to address his congregation, "Come on, old man, you're rather letting the side down." Reverend Nichols would wake most nights screaming, reliving the Somme and Passchendaele. It had terrified Danny as a child and made him resolutely believe in pacifism.

Nichols knew exactly what to say, of course. He'd spoken at these types of events from Oxford to Prague, but it never paid to be too eager. He worried that he would end up like all those other people who shouted their beliefs at the tops of their voices and didn't realise what utter nonsense they were talking.

'When Herr Hitler came to power in Germany, it seemed to me perfectly reasonable that he would

want to redress the harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles. I therefore wholeheartedly supported my government's policy of appeasing this aspiration.'

Nichols didn't recognise his voice: it had taken on a nasal twang, but his German was flawless.

'I knew the only way to reach an understanding and break down the barriers that were threatening Europe was to start a dialogue. To that end, I learnt German and applied to study at Vienna University, so I could better tour Europe in the name of peace and meet other young people united in the cause of appeasement.'

Nichols paused to allow more polite clapping. He didn't see the need to mention that he specifically went to Vienna to study under Freud, and the German intervention in Austria had now made that impossible. Nichols could still hear the drone of German aircraft flying over Vienna the day Hitler marched in. It was the threat from the sky that really scared him.

'It all seems pretty simple to me. The Treaty of Versailles was made by statesmen stuck in the

o Nineteenth Century, who made a nineteenth-century peace to settle a Twentieth Century War - dividing up the spoils and imposing guilt and reparations. It is up to us to make sure our statesmen learn the lessons of the past and find a better peace, a Twentieth Century peace. Especially now modern bombers can lay waste to whole cities, as happened in Guernica less than a year ago.'

That raised a murmur of concern from the delegates. Nichols focused on the fine stonework of the auditorium. Each block was intricately designed to support the next tier, in a solid mass that held up the roof. Nichols had tried to construct his mind in such a fashion of strength and self-assurance.

'Of course, I cannot speak to the rights and wrongs of German foreign policy: that is politics. Nonetheless, I commend Herr Hitler for abandoning his plans to occupy Czechoslovakia in May, and I hope he will continue to settle his territorial claims peacefully. And, like me, will make friends across Europe in the hope of creating a cultural understanding. I just have one last thing to say to you all -

Prost!

There was a muted response of 'Prost'. Nichols was not a man to arouse great passion, even amongst students for drinking.

No one joined him after the conference. Nichols sipped Riesling, enjoying the sweet wine and the embarrassed looks as the delegates clamoured to avoid him. He couldn't blame them. A banner with a finely stitched dove and a Swastika looked down on them and neatly summed up the event. Everyone supported the idea of peace, but he supposed that for a German to be too enthusiastic might bring them to the attention of the authorities.

A few embarrassed glances from the crowd told him he should leave, so they could have some fun. Nichols glanced at his watch; it was time he got some air.

The seafront was filled with rowdy sailors from the Kriegsmarine in blue and gold uniforms. Nichols moved out of their way and stopped to look out at the harbour. Wilhelmshaven might be one of the less fashionable resorts, but it was the Germans' only deep-water port and was full of ships.

He had always been fascinated by things that float, taking his boat out on adventures that would be considered far too dangerous by his parents, so developing the ability to lie had been vital. Deceit and deception to get what he wanted had always come naturally to him. Nichols wondered if lying to a vicar was a really very wicked sin when, as a result, he got to go sailing.

'Quite a beautiful sight, isn't she?'

Nichols realised he'd been paying too much attention to a large battleship under construction across the bay. She was indeed beautiful, in a threatening and sinister kind of way.

He glanced around, thinking he was being addressed by an SS man, and was relieved to see a portly boy of eighteen in an ill-fitting black suit. The sort of boy instantly picked on, but the most heroic person Nichols had met.

'Beautiful isn't quite the word I'd use, Willi.' Nichols patted him on the shoulder and walked on. He was jumpier than he'd realised.

'The Tirpitz's hull will soon be completed,' the boy said, falling into step with him. Nichols couldn't help but think of Willi as a boy, even though he was only two years younger than himself. Nichols supposed it was his boyish enthusiasm.

'Tirpitz is the sister ship of the Bismarck, the most powerful battleship afloat. Imagine Germany's naval power when she is fully completed.'

The thought of the two of them rippling through the North Sea towards his homeland terrified Nichols. He wondered how, and more accurately who, would stop them. Since the events at Guernica, Nichols had found himself taking more of an interest in air power and the growing belief that it would soon surpass the mighty battleship. In America, an Air Force General named Mitchell had sunk a battleship through aerial bombardment. Although that had been under test conditions, looking at the size of the Tirpitz now, Nichols found it hard to believe that would ever happen if the ship was shooting back.

'I suppose she wouldn't have much trouble getting to England, would she, Willi?'

'Oh no, none at all, her range is far greater than fifteen thousand kilometres.'

Nichols sat on a bench and looked around. There was no one within earshot, and he smiled for Willi to continue. Nichols took careful note as Willi reeled off a list of facts about the Tirpitz's armament and armour with sickening precision. It seemed incredible that any ship could be so powerful. Nichols was awed that this plucky boy would risk everything to give him the information.

He had met Willi at a student conference in Danzig. As a Quaker, Willi was horrified to have been made to work at the Wilhelmshaven Naval shipyard. Like Nichols, he felt that sharing information about the capacity of weapons was the only way to avoid catastrophe. Nichols had made many such acquaintances across Europe, attending peace rallies and writing articles.

Nichols had an interminable journey back to Vienna; the train

was shunted backwards and forwards, delayed by high-priority traffic. At every jolt, he waited for the shrill call of police whistles and the baying of dogs before leather-coated men stormed his carriage.

The return to Vienna gave little relief to the constant need to be on guard. He still hadn't got used to the change in mood that had permeated his favourite city.

Nichols had spent a blissful year studying and enjoying everything Viennese cafe society had to offer, and then in March, Hitler had proclaimed the Anschluss.

Nichols had watched helplessly as Hitler paraded triumphantly through Vienna with all his military might. After that, philosophy and psychology did not seem important, and reasoned debate was futile when confronted with the hate of the baying mobs that forced the city's Jews to scrub the streets.

The barbarity of it appalled Nichols, and the fact that he was unable to stop it made him sick. He had never felt so powerless or humiliated. All he could think to do was to go to the British Embassy and register his protest.

He'd met Kendrick, the head of British intelligence in Vienna, outside the passport office, scaring off brown shirts who were harassing Jews trying to get British papers. Nichols didn't think he'd met a finer man and gladly allowed himself to be recruited. His peace campaigning made the perfect cover to collect intelligence. Nichols reasoned that he could use information to stop Hitler, rather than bullets. It was, he felt, still a pacifist stance, but a more robust and assertive one.

A few days later, he was introduced to his handler, Johnny Swift, a hedonist of the worst type, who was rumoured to be one of Churchill's backbench drinking pals. He delighted in shocking Nichols, insisting they meet in his favourite watering hole, a cabaret club of the more vulgar variety.

Nichols found Swift in a corner booth surrounded by cartoon burlesque baroque figures on the walls. He was drinking champagne and watching a pair of twins perform some kind of striptease, accompanied by gypsy violinists playing one of Brahms' Hungarian

dances.

They sat and watched the performance for a while, then Swift acknowledged him by turning his champagne bottle over in its bucket and signalling for another.

'I trust you have something of interest to have interrupted my afternoon repast?' Swift said and smiled dryly. Nichols imagined in his day, Swift might have been quite a player. Now in his forties, a career spent on the frontline of the world's fleshpots was catching up with him; hard lines were drawn across his face like a treasure map to the best brothel in town.

'As a matter of fact, I do.' Nichols handed Swift a note of the information he'd got from Willi. Swift looked pleased. He told him that London was desperate to get their hands on anything about the Tirpitz.

'Excellent. This agent of yours is shaping up into a little gold mine.'

Nichols felt a little uncomfortable with the idea that he was running an agent, but Willi was certainly a gold mine. He'd already provided information on German U-boats that could prove invaluable in warning London of German capabilities and highlighting the need to avert war.

'It all seems a little too good to be true, though, doesn't it?' Swift asked and tilted his head in the questioning way a parent might employ with a confused child.

'I have spent the past year studying psychology under the finest mind in the field, so I think I might know when I'm being deceived. If that's what you mean.' Swift laughed, and Nichols hoped he hadn't sounded pompous, but he'd never been more sure of anything in his life.

'I wonder if you'll feel the same way when you've finished your degree.' Swift took a drink, and allowed himself a glance at the stage before returning to his work.

'You're my best operative, Danny, so I'll trust your judgement on this matter. You have a stupid face, well-defined no doubt, but totally lacking in guile. A face that women trust, and men tell their secrets, a face people would think incapable

of deceit.'

'I see,' Nichols expected that was what was meant by a backhanded compliment.

'Oh come, Danny Boy. All I meant was it's perfectly possible that this Willi character is what you say he is and trusts you enough to betray his country for you, in the name of peace.'

Nichols wasn't sure that made him feel any better.

'I'm due to meet Willi again in Czechoslovakia next month for a prayer and reflection seminar.' Nichols said pointedly to show he hadn't lost all his values. Swift stifled a laugh, 'If there is a Czechoslovakia next month.'

'But Hitler has been put in his place. Mr Chamberlin made it perfectly clear -'

'He did no such thing. The Germans simply weren't ready to invade, and Czechoslovakia was well protected. Hitler won't be able to waltz into Prague as he did here. Not unless we let him at the next conference.'

Nichols was horrified after all his efforts, 'But surely if we allow him the Sudetenland ...'

'Do you think he'd stop there? I doubt it. The Sudetenland was not part of Germany before the war, nor was Austria for that matter. So, you can hardly use your snivelling little argument about righting the wrongs of Versailles. My God, do you think the Germans would have shown us any mercy if the boot had been on the other foot? Look at the peace they imposed on the Russians at Brest-Litovsk, half their country was taken!'

Nichols found Swift a little coarse after his bouts of afternoon drinking, but there was some logic to what he had to say.

'There was an increase in rail traffic towards the Czech border. It totally disrupted my return journey.'

'Yes, there are many such reports, but they could just be manoeuvres. Our job is to find out what the Bosche's intentions are towards the Czech border. I have a line on a source in the German Staff, who

can tell us precisely that. For a price.'

'You want me to go back to Germany?' Nichols asked anxiously.

'No, Prague. My contact got the information from Czech intelligence.'

'That's slightly better, I suppose.'

'That's the spirit. Reminds me of myself at your age. Just tread lightly. The Germans are starting to round up our agents.'

Nichols always marvelled at the fairy-tale atmosphere of Prague's old town square that became more sinister as he turned into a Kafkaesque warren of vaulted arcades. A flicker of shadow in the twilight caught Nichols' eye, and he ducked behind a pillar. The shadow became a drunk staggering home on the cobbles. Nichols felt himself breathe and quickly scuffled down the steps of a crowded cellar bar. He stood at the darkly varnished bar and ordered a pils. Nichols had not really been one for drink before he met Swift, he reflected and took a gulp.

A man with a scar on his face limped towards him. Nichols tried not to clench his hands around his glass too tightly. The man passed him, and Nichols saw a glint of light on his pince-nez. Nichols finished his beer and felt that the money he had in his pocket was gone, and that there was a wad of paper there.

Nichols continued to be gripped by the same repressive feeling of impending doom on the train back to Vienna. He spent the journey summarising the typed documents he'd received and burned the originals in the lavatory. There had been something unnerving in Swift's warning, and it almost felt inevitable when a group of men in fedoras and leather trench coats grabbed him outside the station.

Nichols was left in a brightly lit cell. Unable to sleep or see daylight, he lost track of time. His only connection to the outside world was the sound of screaming echoing up the corridor, but even that could have been his mind playing tricks.

After what felt like a week, Nichols

was strapped into a chair with a desk light shoved in his face. He could hear footsteps behind the light.

'What the hell is going on?' Lack of sleep had left Nichols in something of a blue funk.

'Really, you have no idea why you've been brought here?' An amused voice asked.

'Someone must have been telling lies about Danny Nichols.' Nichols said. He heard a chuckle.

'I think not. Someone has been playing games with Danny Nichols.' A grim face briefly came into focus behind the light.

'You may address me as Detective Inspector Sauer, and if you answer my questions, we shall all get along famously.'

Nichols heard a second person chuckling in the corner behind him.

'You have no right to do this. I'm a British citizen, a student working for peace.' Nichols felt himself unravelling, his self-control crashing down, and it was that which he found terrifying.

'May I ask what you care about Czechoslovakia – a sham country, cobbled together from the remnants of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy?'

'People have a right to self-determination.'

'Yes, but it only seems to be some of the people. There were no prayer meetings when the victors were taking chunks of Hungary and Austria, displacing thousands of its people and stealing their homes.'

'I'm sorry if that happened to you, I'm working to try and redress injustice.'

Nichols heard a loud snort. His interrogator did not want his sympathy and thought his efforts worthless. Nichols felt his face flush, his anger helping to pull himself together.

'I wouldn't expect someone like you to understand the nobility of peace, putting the greater good first.'

'Since when is committing acts of espionage in a foreign state

working for peace?'

'I beg your pardon -'

'Don't waste my time. I know you've been collecting information about the Reich. Tell me who sent you to Prague.'

'My father, the Reverend Gerald Nichols, enrolled me into the International Christian Appeasement Movement.' Nichols tried to picture the solid structure of his church.

Sauer kicked the chair, 'Who is your contact in the Vienna Passport office?'

Nichols felt himself jolt, not sure how they knew about that. Somewhere in the shadows, he heard the menacing creak of floorboards; there was definitely someone else in the room. He fought to maintain an impassive face. He knew he must stick to his story. If he admitted to anything, he was finished.

'I can't imagine anyone in the British passport office would be engaged in anything like that.'

'If that is the case, who have you been passing your intelligence to?' 'I don't know anything about intelligence.'

'Don't play these childish games. You were carrying a large amount of statistical material about German troop dispositions.'

Nichols' sleep-deprived mind swirled, and he began to panic. They'd caught him out in a childish lie, and in a moment of clarity, he realised what he must say. He just hoped Swift had been right about people thinking his face incapable of deceit.

'Forgive me, Detective Inspector Sauer, you are perfectly correct. I have been mistaken.'

'Of course.'

'There is a misunderstanding. I have not been conducting espionage, but I have been gathering information.'

'Don't trifle with me.'

'I'm sorry I didn't understand your questions, but none of it is secret. I've been working for the peace movement, trying to foster peace

through shared knowledge. If mutually assured destruction is inevitable, then why would either side go to war?'

'Your childish motives are of no consequence. The fact that you admit you have been working for British Intelligence is all that matters.'

'I'm completely unaware of any connection to British Intelligence. I write for a pacifist international periodical, but the British may have seen my articles along with statesmen in Germany, France, and Russia.'

Sauer laughed, 'You really believe that nonsense! Very well, I see no point in continuing this. You are clearly what you say you are. Your parents have also made quite a fuss. They're threatening to write a letter to the Times.'

'What?'

'It is now necessary to release you to prevent any distractions from the coming peace conference in Munich.' Sauer turned the light off, and Nichols saw a stern face that seemed to reinforce the belief that he was just a naive boy.

'You know, of course, that your so-called peace movement is riddled with spies.'

'I think I'd know if it was, I am a student of the human mind,' Nichols said, unable to contain his feeling of triumph. He heard a hissing giggle, and a familiar face appeared from the shadows.

'Willi, they got you too...' Then Nichols realised his mistake. 'You're one of them!'

'I've been playing you for a fool – a bloody fool!' Willi's glee was nearly enough to crack Nichols' reserve.

'A useful fool, nonetheless, we've been using you to plant false information. To make our enemies think we are stronger than we really are, and that destruction would be inevitable if they stood in our way – their destruction, not ours.'

Nichols remained silent. They were only telling him this because no one would listen to him now. The legend of Germany's overwhelming strength had been firmly planted in the minds of Western politicians.

Swift organised a car to get them out of Vienna the following day and was in a buoyant mood when he collected Nichols from his rooms.

'You did a splendid job.'

'But the Germans nabbed me.'

'I shouldn't worry. The whole network's being rolled up. The Germans are clearing the board before they swallow up Czechoslovakia.'

'Then there will be a war?'

'Eventually.'

'I lost the information that could have stopped it.'

'Misinformation actually.'

'I'm sorry?'

'I played a little prank on the Germans. That chap in Prague who prepared the documents is an old friend of mine – a former Austro-Hungarian officer.'

'You set me up...'

'Look, it seemed pretty obvious to me that we were losing the intelligence war. The Germans had penetrated our networks and were misleading and misdirecting us. The information you were getting seemed grossly exaggerated and contradicted our other sources.'

'So, I was sacrificed to plant false information?'

'It wasn't exactly false. Just exaggerated, to make the Germans think we knew more than we did and to try and slow them down as they looked for a phantom spy running a network in Prague and reordered their troop dispositions. "Lies, damned lies and statistics", as Churchill says.'

'I believe it was Disraeli, actually.'

Nichols gazed out of the window as the city he loved flashed by. He was exhausted and totally defeated, played by both sides.

'You have a feel for this type of work, Danny.'

'Being made to look a fool.' The shame of being so totally taken in

was overwhelming.

'For lying and deception, even to yourself. You fooled the Gestapo into thinking you weren't working for SIS, and more importantly, you kept your mouth shut about me.'

Nichols didn't see it that way. He was just trying to be whatever the person he was speaking to wanted. Something he'd learnt watching his father talk to his parishioners; people he criticized in private to his wife were praised in public to the congregation. The Reverend was a man for all seasons if ever there was one.

'Just learn from your mistakes, Danny boy. Now you've been knocked off your high horse, you'll be more wary next time.'

'Next time?' Nichols felt a shudder run through him. The only thing his sleep-starved mind knew was that, after what he'd just been through, he had no wish to be a spy.

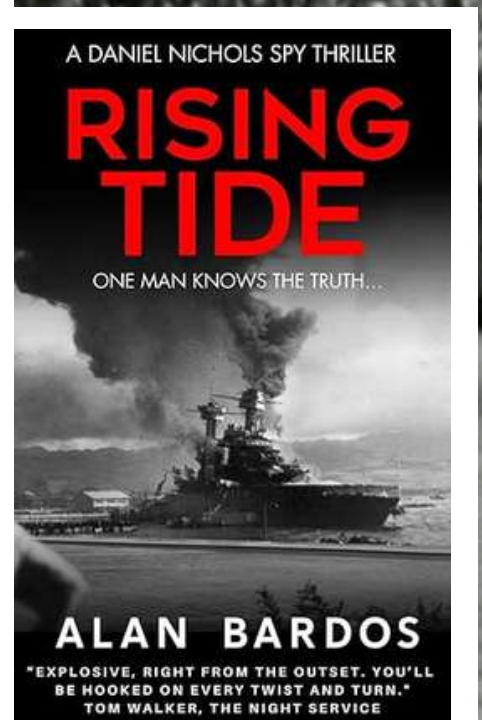
'I'm going to need people like you, Nichols - your country is going to need people like you.'

'No, thank you, Mr Swift. From what I've seen, the best way to protect my country is either to join the Navy or the Air Force. I expect air power will be the decisive factor in any coming war.'

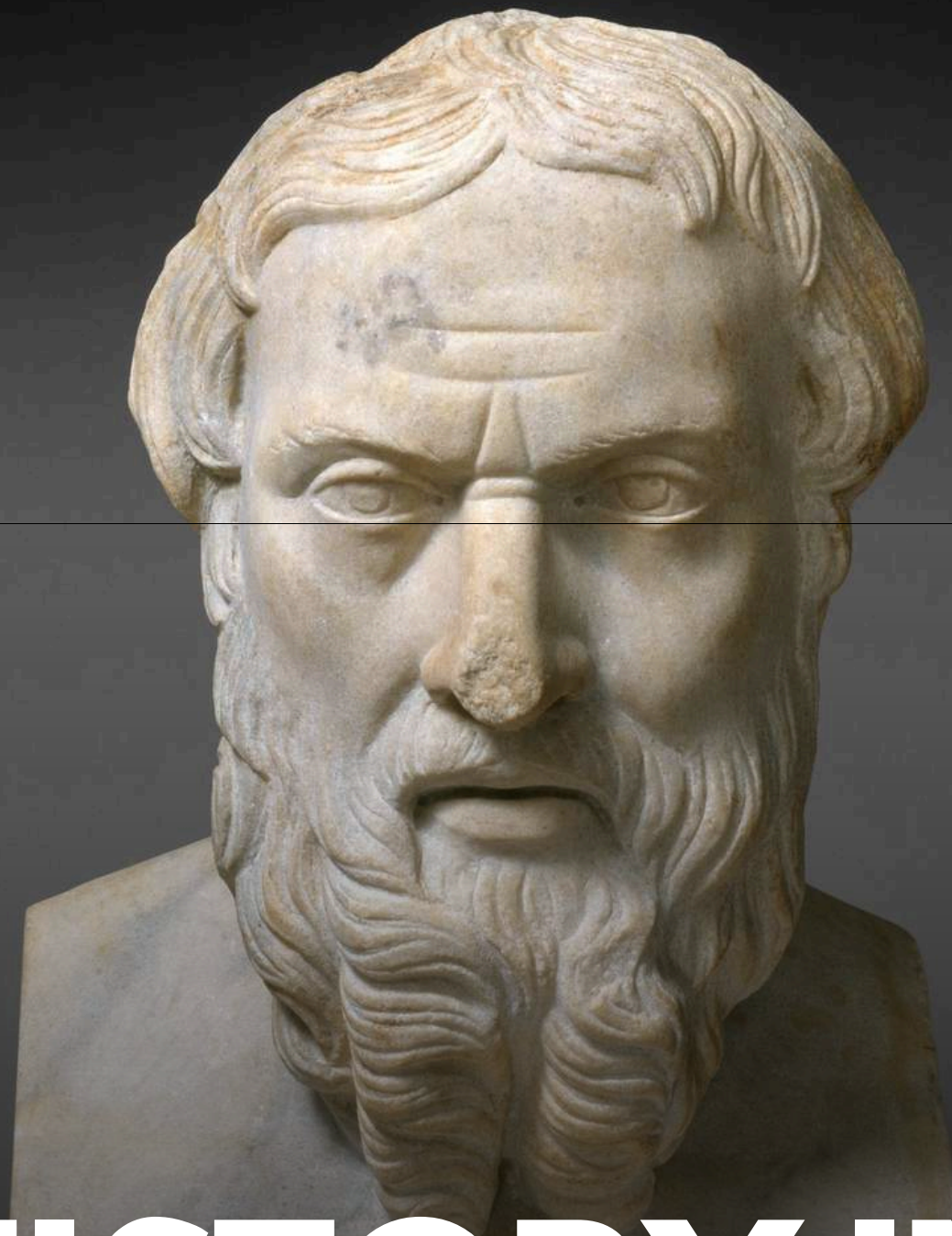
'Very well, if that's your final word, I'm not going to force you. I know what that's like. I have contacts in the Admiralty who can organise a Board for the Fleet Air Arm.'

The rocking motion of the car finally put Nichols to sleep, as he watched the Vienna suburbs drift away. He'd left behind the dark world he was so clearly ill-equipped for.

Alan Bardos is a writer of historical fiction set around the First World War and author of the Johnny Swift Thrillers.







HISTORY IN ANCIENT GREECE

Zeb Baker-Smith

A swift eulogy to the 'Father of History' precedes a featured excerpt of Dorling Kindersley's recent offering.

It was my aunt who first introduced me to Herodotus. A rainy afternoon at the grandparents' house in Suffolk, name a better way to entertain a ten-year-old who had just started learning Latin at school...! The Father of History was the tagline to reel me in, as it had done to many for over two thousand years since Cicero coined the epithet. And reel it did.

The haze of two decades blurs many of the details, but from memory, it was the giant gold-digging ants of northern India in Book 3 of The Histories that did it. No doubt this is preaching to the historians' choir, but with Herodotus, those far-fetched images stay firmly put in the minds of the reader.

Studying Greek later and having read Themistocles' antics before Salamis in Book 8 in the original, Tom Holland's 2013 rendition, thrilling and divisive in equal measure, was the first translation I had counted down the days for. It brought alive the offbeat and extraordinary sketches that have been subject to understandable scrutiny ever since.

Thucydides, brusque and hawkish in comparison, did not stand a chance when I graduated to 'proper' historiography a year or so afterwards. Western history is

nothing without either, but it was the predecessor of Hallicarnassus whose side I would always take. The sweeping leaps across the continent, the down-the-pub hearsay that he relied upon to explain customs and folklore, will always be charming.

In recent weeks, that same fondness has been reignited by reading Ryszard Kapuściński's Travels with Herodotus, in which the Polish journalist tethers his journeys as a reporter to India and China in the 50s and 60s to the same tradition of ἱστορίαι (enquiries). The eponymous author's leitmotif of a divide between Asia and Europe, which memorably plays out in the Greco-Persian Wars, bears a striking resemblance to the ideological conflict between East and West that was the state of play for most of Kapuściński's career.

Herodotus is unlikely to have followed the Nile to its source in the Mountains of the Moon, now thought to be the Rwenzori Mountains on the border of Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, as an exile from the town of his birth, it can be supposed that he travelled widely for a man in the 5th century BCE, all over the central and eastern regions of the Mediterranean.

To a large degree, the maps that can be drawn up from his investigations are accurate, and many of his claims, once considered too bold, have been revealed to be correct, as the 2019 discovery of the remains of a vast 28-metre-long hull in the Nile demonstrated. His introduction is admittedly a bit of an insurance policy, though, his intention to ensure that ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θωμαστά (great and marvellous deeds) might not be forgotten. If these investigations were humanly possible, Herodotus went there and did them, either seeing or hearing the 'facts' and jotting them down. And the results are occasionally too marvellous – but they are marvellous.

Herodotus - historian, geographer and storyteller

"In Herodotus, the **father of history**... there are a **countless number of legends**." - Cicero, Laws

Author of the first major work of narrative history, Herodotus has been both lauded as the "Father of History" for his attempt at objectivity and labelled the "Father of Lies" for his inclusion of many outlandish anecdotes.

Herodotus's great literary achievement, his nine-book



Histories, tells us much about a turbulent period that accompanied the Persians' two invasions of Greece in the early 5th century BCE, but little of his own life.

We do know that Herodotus was born around 484 in the Ionian Greek town of Halicarnassus (now Bodrum in western Türkiye). At the age of around 24, he was exiled to Samos when the tyrant Lygdamis II took power in Halicarnassus. He only returned when Lygdamis was overthrown, around 454 BCE. He remained in his home town for about ten years before emigrating to the Athenian colony of Thurii, in southern Italy.

By then, Herodotus was already writing the Histories. Indeed, by 445 BCE he already had enough material to "read his books" to the Athenian Council. He finished writing sometime after 430 BCE.

The first historian

Herodotus took an innovative

approach to history. He was the first to reject explanations of events based on the actions of the gods and instead seek empirical evidence for why people acted as they did. He travelled widely, and there are references in his work to first-hand evidence collected in the Eastern Mediterranean, Libya, Egypt, and Scythia. He also carefully recorded the geography, folklore, customs, and traditions of the Greeks and their enemies.

However, Herodotus's express purpose was to explain the causes of Greece's war with Persia and analyse the course of the campaign. His critique of the events led the Roman orator Cicero, writing in the 1st century, to call Herodotus the "Father of History".

Yet some of the material Herodotus included, such as the claim that there were ants the size of foxes in Persia, led the historian Plutarch to dismiss Herodotus as the "Father of

Lies". Still, Herodotus's attempt to make a historie (an enquiry) founded on the actions and motives of people, rather than gods, makes him the first great historian.

The "Father of History"

A 2nd-century CE Roman copy in marble of a Greek bronze statue of Herodotus from the early 4th century BCE, this bust was found in Benha, Egypt, and reflects the admiration the Romans felt for Herodotus and other Greek writers.

The world according to Herodotus

This map reconstructs how Herodotus may have viewed the world as known to him: centred around the Mediterranean Sea and with all landmasses surrounded by an ocean.

The Histories

This 15th-century CE Italian edition of Herodotus's work was translated into Latin by scholar Lorenzo Valla

A case of mistranslation - was the Persian word for marmot misheard as ant?



and has a portrait of the author by miniaturist Francesco Rosselli.

492 BCE Persia's Darius I invades Greece; Xerxes' invasion follows in 480 BCE

c. 484 BCE Herodotus is born in the Ionian city of Halicarnassus (Bodrum)

460 BCE Herodotus is exiled from Halicarnassus to Samos

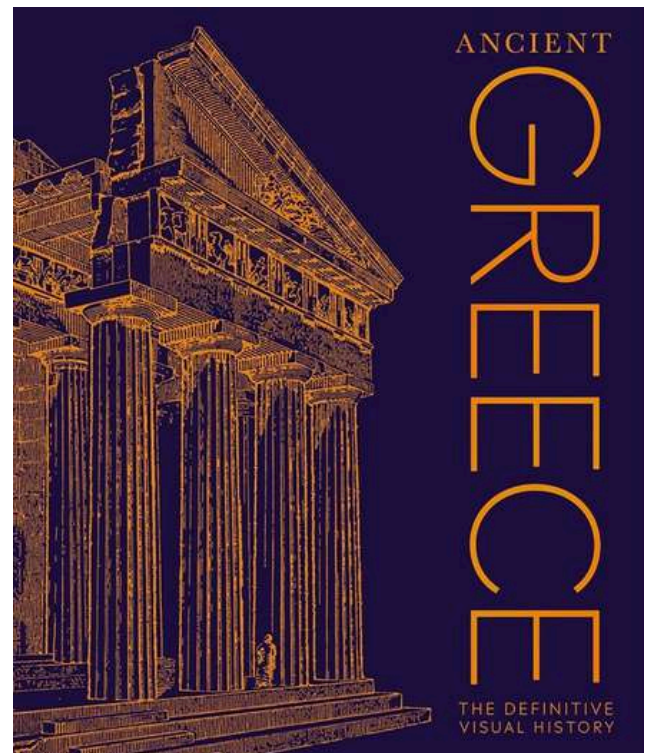
c. 454 BCE Herodotus returns to his home town, Halicarnassus

c. 445 BCE Herodotus gives a public reading of some of his work in Athens

c. 444 BCE Herodotus migrates to the new colony of Thurii in southern Italy

430 BCE Last datable event in the Histories: the execution of two men from Tegea in Athens

c. 425 BCE Herodotus dies in Thurii



Ancient Greece: The Definitive Visual History is a recent release from Dorling Kindersley.

Zeb Baker-Smith is a classicist, freelance journalist and Books Editor at Aspects of History

Q&A

MURDER IN ANGLO- SAXON ENGLAND

**ANNIE
WHITEHEAD**

A casebook of a hundred cases of slaughter that strikes themes of justice, wergild and revenge is the author's latest offering as she sat down in discussion with Paul Bernardi.





Above:
Murder by a minor and the subsequent paying of wergild, in Heidelberger Sachsenspiegel Cgm 165 fol. 11r

Annie, first of all, many congratulations on the publication of your new book, *Murder in Anglo-Saxon England: Justice, Wergild, Revenge*. As a lover of all things pre-conquest, it was a must-have for me, and let's just say, I wasn't disappointed.

Thanks so much!

What was it that made you want to take on the challenge of writing such a broad, sweeping analysis across such an extended period?

As I go about my daily life writing and researching, I'm frequently reminded of murder stories from the Anglo-Saxon period, and as I was already aware of so many of these tales, I realised it would be interesting to investigate as many as I could find, to see whether they are based on fact, and why later chroniclers might have embellished them. I also wondered

what such a study would throw up regarding society and kingship in that era.

Sources for this period are often problematic, whether that be because they are lacking or that they are in some (not so) subtle way biased for or against their subjects. What challenges did this present in the researching and writing of this book?

In a way, they were the same for any study of the period, in that the more contemporary sources often lack the detail of the later ones. But therein lies a problem because often the later ones provide detail that is not as reliable or believable. Trying to get somewhere near the truth in the murder cases, though, was harder because not only did I have to think about the motives and biases of the chroniclers, but also of the individuals involved, or not, in the murders themselves.

You're one of those annoying (I very much jest!) people who seem equally at home writing fiction and non-fiction. I'm sure it's not as effortless as you make it look, so what are the main differences and the challenges between the two?

The research is pretty much the same, although with fiction, you need more everyday details as well as the actual historical events. Where they really differ is that in fiction you need to fill in the gaps in the history in a way that fits with your plot and with your characters, and if you take them on a journey you need to give details, whereas in non-fiction you can just say 'The king took an army to York.' On the other hand, with non-fiction, you can't make anything up, and if you offer any opinions, you have to back those up.

Your book covers a wide period of time - from the 7th to the 11th

centuries. In what way would you say did the attitudes to, or responses to, the act of murder change? Are there any themes to pick out?

Very much so. The earlier murders were, in the main, part of a wider story of emerging English kingdoms, with men fighting to gain the throne or secure it for their sons, by removing rival claimants and neighbouring rulers. The later centuries saw a number of state-sponsored murders, or, if the kings were not complicit, they were certainly turning a blind eye. These were feuds, or political assassinations, and almost seem not to have been regarded as murder, even though laws were clearly being flouted. I think it shows how society was changing, from a warrior society to a political scene dictated by 'over-mighty' nobility.

One of the things that struck me in the book is the role played by women. In many of the contemporary sources, women are afforded little in the way of profile; Bede famously tells us of how King Raedwald's wife persuaded him not to betray Edwin of Deira to King Aethelfrith in the early 7th century, but then fails to even name her. But you've managed to bring them more to the fore, which is great. I'm left wondering, though, whether you have simply helped redress the balance or whether women played a more significant role in conspiring to murder their husbands, rivals or enemies.

Many of the women were maligned by the later chroniclers, who were writing at a time when Church attitudes towards women had shifted significantly. A quick example would be Offa's wife, accused by Anglo-Norman chroniclers of inciting murder, but written off by a contemporary Churchman in nothing but glowing terms. There are exceptions: Ælfifu of Northampton, mother of King Harold Harefoot, may have had a hand in the blinding and murdering of his rival, but that's my interpretation of events, and she wasn't accused at the time. A question mark remains over the mother of Æthelred the Unready's involvement in the murder of his half-brother. As with all things, I

think it depends on the personalities involved. Forceful, politically 'savvy' women such as these two might not have flinched at the idea of murder.

Tell me about the wergild. How effective was it, do you think, as a deterrent for murder?

Wergild is 'man-price' – the value of a person's life in monetary compensation, according to his or her rank in society, payable in the event of death by the murderer or their kin. Laws were also in place for fines payable for injuries, and on the whole, I think it worked, because we don't hear of many cases where feuds got out of hand, and with kin liable for any defaulting on payment, the likelihood is that family members would have talked their relatives out of a fight more often than not.

I have the sense from reading the book that you had a lot of fun writing it. Is that so?

I did! Especially when analysing some of the more lurid and frankly 'over the top' stories. But it was a moving experience, too, more so, I think, with the 'nameless' victims, those found in mass graves, or when I went to Crowland Abbey and saw a skull with a sword injury. It was a salutary reminder, as if one were needed, that, as with all history, we are writing about real people.

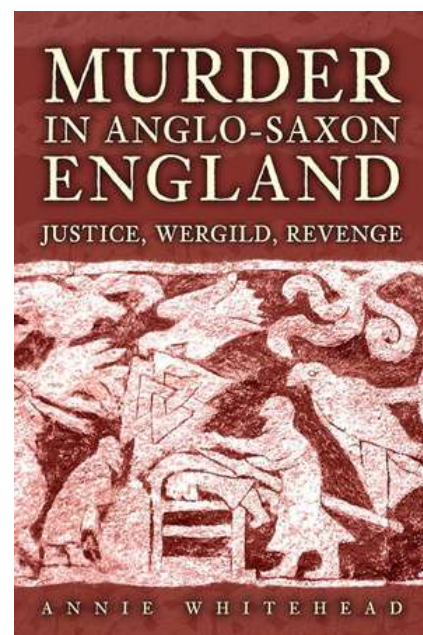
If you could travel through time, how do you think you would fare as an Anglo-Saxon murder-solving sleuth?

I think I'd be at a loss in that era without my creature comforts! But writing about history requires constantly asking 'why?' so perhaps where those around me might not question a death, I might be inclined to wonder who stood to gain from it, and whether any poison might have been administered!

Finally, what do we see next from your pen?

I'm currently working on a novel, which was shelved while I researched and wrote about the murders. It's set in the 10th century, and it involves Mercians, Northumbrians, Vikings, Scots, and,

as it happens, a murder or two! I've finished the first draft and am now at the dreaded editing stage.



Annie Whitehead is a prize-winning writer, historian and the author of *Murder in Anglo-Saxon England: Justice, Wergild, Revenge*.

Paul Bernardi is writer of historical fiction and the author of *The Huscarl Chronicles*.



VICTORY '45: THE END OF THE WAR IN EIGHT SURRENDERS

JAMES HOLLAND & AL MURRAY

REVIEW BY ROBERT LYMAN

This brilliant book is what you get when you marry two first-class historians (and communicators) of the Second World War. I enjoyed its pace, its storytelling and the sheer enthusiasm these two characters have for their subject. Despite its subject matter, it was fun. The combination of Murray and Holland is a marriage made in heaven, as aficionados of the We Have Ways phenomenon will readily attest.

Not long-ago James asked me how I managed to collaborate with someone else in writing a book: my last two books have been written with General Lord Dannatt. I told him that it was easy, as it halved the workload and doubled the brain power required to produce 120,000 reasonably sensible words every 12-months. He's clearly taken my advice, and this is the result.

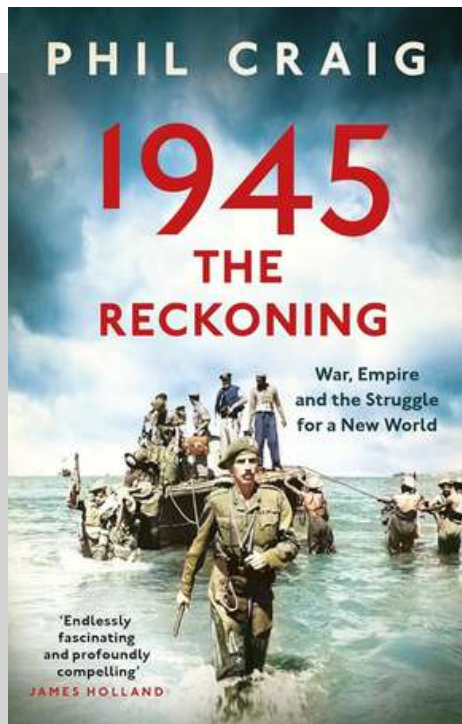
The subject is quite brilliant too. How many new ways can one find to look at the greatest ever drama in human history? Well, this spectacular duo has found it: the ending of the war, rather than its beginning or its middle (both of which James has dealt with in detail in the two volumes of his War in the West). It's always the hardest thing to do (ending a war that is; starting one is quite easy in comparison), so it's fascinating that so

few historians have ever examined the end of the Second World in its granular detail, from a holistic (i.e. all the surrenders taken into consideration) and a narrative (storytelling) perspective. The secret to this book's success is that both writers have grasped its sheer human drama. Imagine what General Wainwright must have been thinking when he was mobbed by 100,000 compatriots on the White House lawn after his three years of brutal captivity? Yet he shed tears for General Yamashita when the Tiger of Malaya was marched off to his trial and execution. Extraordinary.

James Holland has demonstrated that he is as forensic an historian as any in the hallowed halls of academia (look at Italy's Sorrow for an example) while Al Murray is the perfect chatty man (or pub landlord?), without losing any profundity by being so. They've both perfected the art of telling stories. The fusion of these two voices gives us a fast-paced human-filled drama of the road to the end of the war across the globe (from Rome to Berlin, Luneburg Heath and Tokyo) through many of the voices of many of those involved, high and low. It's not comprehensive (there is no surrender of the Japanese to Marshal Zhukov in Manchuria for instance) but this isn't a criticism:

there is only so much of this story of the end of the way one can tell, and writers (as I regularly insist) are their own masters: they are free to pick and choose what stories they tell. But it's the contrasting stories of Wainwright contrasting the nasty fascists Donitz, Kesselring, Keitel and Kaltenbrunner that had me hooked. But the heroes were those who saw, and survived to tell their stories: Yelena Kagan, Helmut Altner, Hugo Gryn, Alan Moskin and many others all had me spellbound. After all, war is primarily about the people who are forced to fight it, especially those who do so out of duty or service rather than passion or nationalist or ideological conviction. Holland and Murray have scooped the prize on telling person-centric narratives about the greatest drama on earth. Bravo! The only problem? I'm now looking forward to the next foray, knowing that it will be at least a year away. Come on boys!

Robert Lyman is a historian and the author, with Richard Dannatt, of Victory to Defeat: The British Army 1918-40.



1945: THE RECKONING: WAR, EMPIRE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR A NEW WORLD

PHIL CRAIG

REVIEW BY ROBERT LYMAN

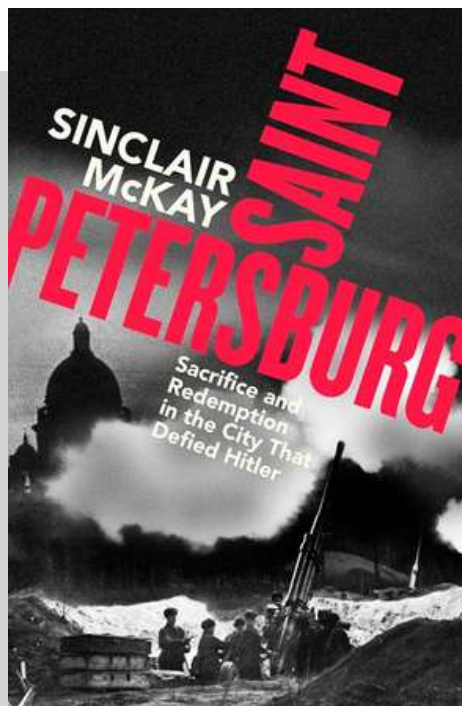
How does one make any sense of the end of the Second World War in Asia in 1945, a war that ended just as quickly and unexpectedly as it had begun? Thirty-nine agonising months separated the Japanese invasion of Southeast Asia in December 1941 and the collapse of its ill-fated attempt to secure an Asian empire in August 1945. Those months could very well have been a century or two, given the vast changes that were brought about because of this most egregious of wars, one that, we need to remind ourselves, began as far back as the Japanese adventure in China in 1931, ten years before. Few of the characteristics and consequences of this total war had previously been envisaged by policymakers or soldiers. Indeed, no one could have realistically foreseen the horror of these years before they actually occurred. The vast amount of blood shed in Japan's vainglorious attempt to subdue the region, some 20 million dead, was one such, as was the sudden, shocking arrival of the atomic age. It seemed that all of a sudden, the world emerged, blinking into a very different landscape than that which had existed in November 1941. European empires found themselves shadows of their former selves while a new one – the United States – had emerged from its pre-war insularity with the greatest

military capability and capacity of any country in world history, though it was to take another war, five years later in Korea, for it to realise it. The discombobulation in 1945 can best be seen by battalions of Japanese soldiers serving directly under British commanders in the post-war Indian Army restoring law and order in the French and Dutch colonial possessions of Indo China and Java, Kalimantan and Sumatra, respectively. Who would have thought this possible?

The way Phil Craig has decided to answer the question about how to think about the end of the war is to look at the great events of 1945 through the eyes of a range of participants, in India, Borneo, Formosa and elsewhere: British and Indian. It's a good way to do it, for while histories that trace movements and wars that shape the destinies of billions are important, it is only by understanding how people thought about the great events they were immersed in that we can appreciate the great issues of the age. It is a method that accepts that people's views are as different as their backgrounds but as equally

important to the political firmament, then and the historian now. One of the problems of some contemporary historical discourse is the assumption that it was the big events that mattered, that individual thought and aspiration were never so important as the big movements. Sensible people know this to be an ideological deceit. Everyone living had agency and, to an extent, a voice, whatever the variegated nature of their experience. The war that ended in 1945 gave expression to many different ones, and Craig traces a few of them in this endlessly interesting book. His big narrative is how some empires ended, and others emerged; the small narrative is the voices of a handful of those who experienced this tumultuous and epoch-making year. Ranging from Europe to Asia, though focused very much on the later, this fascinating book has many stories to tell.

Robert Lyman is a historian and the author of *A War of Empires*.



SAINT PETERSBURG: SACRIFICE AND REDEMPTION IN THE CITY THAT DEFIED HITLER

SINCLAIR MCKAY

REVIEW BY TREVOR JAMES

For those of us who feel well-informed about the Siege of Leningrad from 1941 to 1944, this extremely well-researched volume provides a number of additional perspectives. Sinclair McKay has examined sources, that were previously hidden or obscured, all of which transform our understanding of exactly what happened.

These new sources are surviving personal accounts and dairies, which give insights into what happened during those years, all of deeply moving intensity. His research reveals that the scale of deprivation was such that, in addition to possibly one million deaths, the medical effect on the population was simply horrifying. Beyond the extraordinary limits of the rationing of the food supply, the diaries reveal the consumption of pets, most significantly cats, and undisguised evidence of cannibalism. The effect that relentless starvation can have on the human frame is conveyed in a discrete but lucid manner.

People in Leningrad were being deliberately starved into submission by Hitler's encirclement, possibly because it was the location rather than the people that he wished to conquer and acquire. Leningrad, or as we now know it again, St Petersburg,

was a hugely significant location in pan-European understanding. It was the product of the mind of Peter the Great, one of the highly significant figures of European history, and its cultural life gave it a unique status in Europe. This latter cultural status was so significant to the people of the city that during this extraordinary siege, their orchestral, ballet and literary traditions were maintained to symbolise their appreciation of their unique standing.

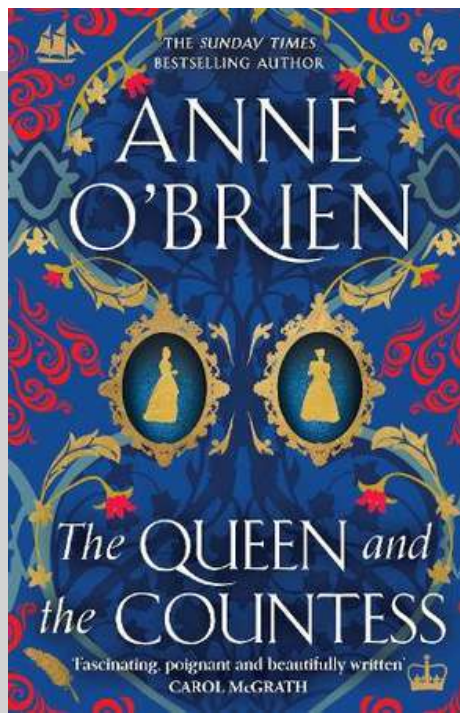
The inter-relationship of the local leadership and the wider Soviet government is carefully revealed: Stalin's government knew that they needed to support St Petersburg, and resources were dispatched, and the 'ice bridge' across Lake Lagoda was key to this support. Families being sent to safety in other parts of Russia were the beneficiaries of this facility, but most important was the potentially hazardous route by which further essential supplies did arrive.

There is, however, a wider perspective within this remarkable book because Sinclair McKay identifies the effect of this siege on the behaviour and approach of Vladimir Putin. It reveals itself in several ways. Vladimir Putin's older brother died of starvation during the siege, and indeed, his mother at another point fainted so severely with starvation that she only just avoided

being loaded onto a cartload of corpses en route for disposal. Putin was himself born in 1952 and grew up in the midst of their attempts to recover from the economic and physical devastation that the city had endured, but there is a wider dimension.

Before Stalin's death in 1953 and under future Soviet leaders, there was a sense that Moscow was 'uneasy' with St Petersburg's 'exceptionalism'. It is a continued and persistent posture. Putin has inherited both sides of this contradictory context: he is a product of the suffering, and yet, it also informs his behaviour towards those who seemingly threaten 'Mother Russia'. His attitude to Ukraine is particularly significant. His approach is to depict those who rule in Kiev as 'Nazis', just like the forces who threatened St Petersburg in the years of the siege. This is not to excuse or exonerate Putin – although at a very simplistic level it is difficult to accept the Jewish Volodymyr Zelensky as a potential Nazi – but, using very helpful sources, Sinclair McKay has very powerfully given us a wider background from which to appreciate just how Vladimir Putin may have developed his aggressive and yet, in his terms, defensive approach to wider political manoeuvres.

Trevor James is the former editor of The Historian.



THE QUEEN AND THE COUNTESS

ANNE O'BRIEN

REVIEW BY ELLA BEALES

The Queen and the Countess is Anne O'Brien's latest medieval historical fiction, following two women on opposing sides of the Wars of the Roses. Set between the 1450s and 1480s, this novel centres on Margaret of Anjou (Queen of England and wife of the House of Lancaster's King Henry VI) and the Countess Anne of Warwick (wife of the Yorkist 'Kingmaker' Richard, Earl of Warwick).

Renowned for writing about the overlooked women of medieval history, O'Brien creates an unusual yet compelling pairing in her choice of protagonists. Though on opposite sides of the war, Margaret and Anne share many strikingly similar experiences - particularly the uncertainty of motherhood and the loneliness, pain, fear and despondency they must have felt as they awaited the return of their absent husbands. For most of their lives, Margaret and Anne were defined by their titles: Queen, Countess, Wife, Mother. O'Brien doesn't shy away from this, but she ensures that they are remembered not only for these roles but also for their fortitude, resilience, courage, determination, love and sacrifice.

With rich descriptions of characters, settings, crowds and clothing, this novel immerses readers in both the

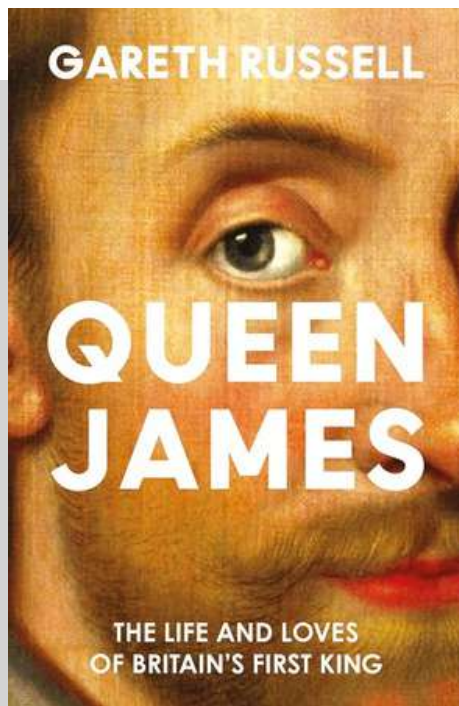
era and the lives of its complex protagonists. Spanning three decades, it follows Margaret and Anne from Loveday in 1458 - a symbolic reconciliation attempt between the warring Houses, orchestrated by Henry VI - to the far-reaching consequences of the Act of Accord, a pivotal legislation that ultimately leads both families to face exile, violence, and the sorrows of war.

Written in the first person, with each chapter containing the perspectives of both Margaret and Anne, readers gain a unique insight into how these women view themselves and how they are perceived by others. This clever narrative device allows for a deeper understanding of their private and public personas. It is particularly fascinating to see how both women interpret the same events, especially in terms of their perception of power (or lack thereof), and their ability (or inability) to influence outcomes. Bound by societal gender expectations and often used as pawns in marriage alliances or to secure wealth and titles, O'Brien presents Margaret and Anne as examples of how many women were treated during this period. Yet, despite these constraints, both women continue to fight for their voices and what they are owed.

This novel considers several interesting questions: What is love? Or perhaps, more accurately for women of their status, what is owed to them in marriage? What does it feel like to no longer feel at home in a place you once cherished? And what is it to be a woman reduced to a pawn in a man's relentless and indiscriminate quest for power and glory?

The Queen and the Countess shows the human cost of the 'cruel game of crowns and kingdoms'. Whilst this could be seen as a tale of two women who ultimately fall victim to the ambition of others, it is, arguably, the opposite. It is a story of two women who sacrifice everything in their fight to protect their families - and themselves.

Ella Beales is a historical researcher, archivist and public historian.



QUEEN JAMES: THE LIFE AND LOVES OF BRITAIN'S FIRST KING

GARETH RUSSELL

REVIEW BY STEVEN VEERAPEN

The Stuarts, at last, seem to be having a moment. As Gareth Russell demonstrates in his latest book, the wickedly titled "Queen James", it's a well-deserved one. The story of James VI and I's personal life is one which has, historically, given cause for either discreet veils (these drawn, for example, by the Victorians, who could only lament his 'favouritism') and outright disgust by certain 20th-century historians who openly derided the first Stuart king of England as a 'deviant'. Every piece of scurrility and homophobia dredged up since James' own day (and the mocking 'Elizabeth was king, now James is queen' dates from the early 16th century) has coloured accounts of his life and only served to obscure what was a passionate, idealistic, deeply emotional man. Russell, as should be expected given his catalogue of excellently researched and sensitive historical biographies, does James full justice.

Queen James might well be subtitled 'the life and loves of James VI and I', as it traces every one of his romantic relationships (without ignoring their political dimensions – and these were always present) from the earliest to the last. In doing so, Russell is scrupulously fair when it comes to such early innamoratos as Esmé Stewart, 1st Duke of Lennox and Patrick Gray, Master of Gray. Treated

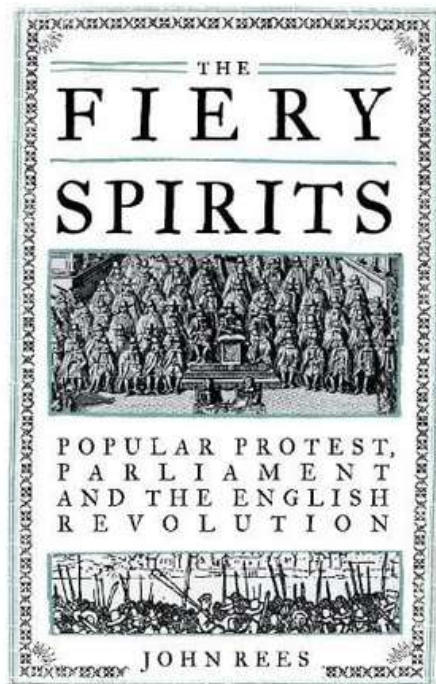
with care and diligence too are Sandy Spynie and Queen Anna of Denmark (expect no old stereotypes about vacuity or political uselessness here!) and those later beaux, Somerset and Buckingham. It is tempting, of course, in any biography of this king to give way to entirely modern readings of sexuality – and here Russell is attuned to the period. In discussing James's love life, he is not at all prurient or salacious; the book sets the king's same-sex relationships squarely in the context of early modern attitudes (courtly and common), making Queen James a critical book in the history of sexuality.

Of major importance, too, is the colour the text gives to what could, in less skilled hands, become a confusing tangle of Scottish noblemen and politicians (elaborate kinship networks being a feature of the era's politics). In this superbly personal tale, the men and women around James come startlingly to life, their personalities leaping from the page. In large part, this is because Russell has an exceptional eye for anecdote; he is frequently hilarious (as when wryly pointing out how unusual it was for a king to publicly kiss an accused traitor) and heart-rending (as when recounting the funeral of the king's daughter Margaret, laid to rest with her favourite Florentine ribbons).

**FOR THOSE WHO
KNOW ONLY THE
INACCURATE
SHAMBLING FOOLERY
OF ANTI-STUART
LIBELS, THERE WILL
BE AS MUCH TO
SURPRISE AS TO
DELIGHT.**

Queen James thus serves not just as a thorough account of the king's life and loves but a thumping-good read in its own right: a highly readable, highly relevant tale of passion, politics and, above all, people. For those familiar with James VI and I, there will be much here to love in terms of personality. For those who know only the inaccurate shambling foolery of anti-Stuart libels, there will be as much to surprise as to delight. First-rate.

Steven Veerapen is an academic, writer and the author of fiction set during the Tudor and Stuart periods, including his novel *Of Blood Descended*.



THE FIERY SPIRITS: POPULAR PROTEST, PARLIAMENT AND THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION

JOHN REES

REVIEW BY MARK TURNBULL

The *Fiery Spirits* by historian, broadcaster, and campaigner John Rees is a compelling exploration of both popular protest and Parliament during the reign of King Charles I. As Rees explains, the book's purpose is to detail the role played by radicals and republicans 'in the coming of the English Revolution'. These fiery spirits were extremists on the fringes of even the Independents and had shared histories of running up against authority, be that James VI/I or Elizabeth I.

But just who were they? For Rees, Henry Marten tops the list, followed by Alexander Rigby, William Strode, and Sir Peter Wentworth. Fervently fuelled by religion, being devout Puritans, opposition burned in their bellies. One royalist described them as 'half a dozen popular discontented persons'. Even men and women from their own side, such as Lucy Hutchinson and Denzil Holles, became shocked by their stance. The book really shines in its fascinating portrayal of these men, and Rees explains their backgrounds, motives, and tactics with sympathy and understanding.

Examining the first years of Charles I's reign, Rees begins with forced loans, one of the monarch's dubious methods of raising money. He does not detail the precursor. Parliament's refusal to grant the king, at his

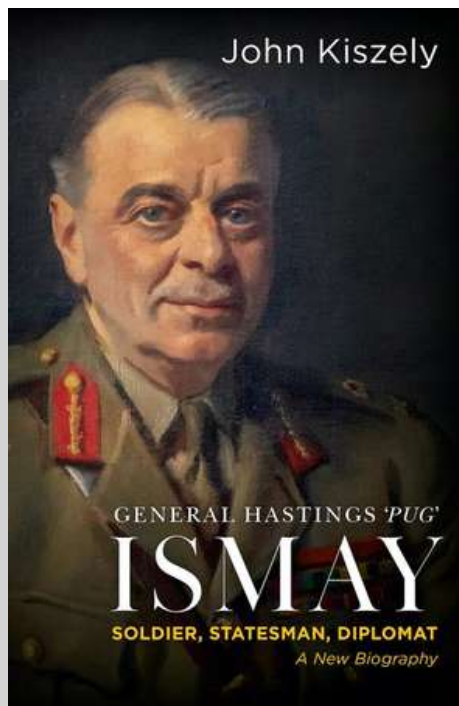
accession, the revenues from Tonnage and Poundage that his predecessors had been given for life, provoked an existential crisis of the first order. Charles inherited three crowns, along with debts of £1,000,000 – the equivalent of over £131,000,000 today – and the withholding of finances brought the government to its knees. Whilst calling for a redress of grievances over previous methods of government, MPs dangled the Tonnage and Poundage carrot. This was an unprecedented strike at the balance of power between the three estates of Crown, Lords, and Commons, and the seeds of civil war were planted.

Riots over disafforestation, drainage of the Fens, martial law, grain, and taxation in the 1620s and 1630s are explored. The government response could be ineffective – even overly clement at times – leaving the fiery spirits scenting blood. Parliament was then spectacularly dissolved in 1629, and the king ruled alone for 11 years. Of this period, Rees examines the cases of Burton, Bastwick, and Prynne – Puritan martyrs – before touching upon the first and second Bishops' Wars of 1639-40 and the 'Short Parliament'. The 'Long Parliament' of 1641 and the significant royal concessions it wrested, are naturally covered in much greater detail.

In the decades leading up to civil war, the fiery spirits drove a steady revolutionary course from within Parliament. They strategically marshalled their allies in the field and the corridors of Westminster, aligning with individuals and groups as need dictated. The king's eventual defeat fractured the parliamentary cause, allowing the fiery spirits to take the wheel from their compatriots and ram-raid any moderate settlement. Their hand was strengthened after the New Model Army purged the Long Parliament, whereupon they steered the country from revolution to regicide, and then republic. They changed the face of England forever, and with it, that of Scotland and Ireland.

The fiery spirits triumphed by seizing opportunities to accelerate their agenda, but they never carried widespread support along with them. Instead, they remained fringe radicals, and as a result, their new world burned out after eleven years. John Rees expertly uncovers their hidden histories as well as their impact.

Mark Turnbull is an author and historian specialising in the 17th-century Wars of the Three Kingdoms.



GENERAL HASTINGS 'PUG' ISMAY : SOLDIER, STATESMAN, DIPLOMAT

JOHN KISZELY

REVIEW BY ROBERT LYMAN

The British Army has produced a remarkable array of soldier-scholars over the years. Lieutenant General Sir John Kiszely is one of these. His meticulous examination of the Norway Campaign of 1940 showed the weakness of the British Army's approach to campaign planning, and its embarrassing inability to execute a half-competent military operation on a distant shore. His study is a brilliant examination of the constituent parts of military failure, the existential experience that poor armies seemingly have to experience before they hope to improve.

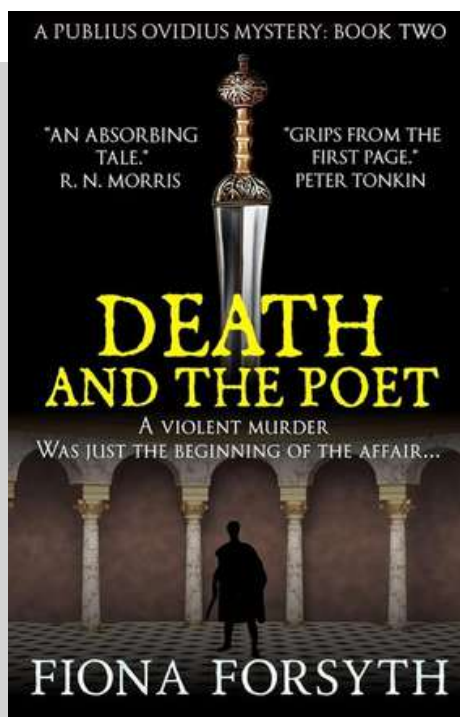
In this book Kiszely demonstrates his forensic talent in presenting to us a man who sat at the heart of Churchill's Cabinet and decision-making process throughout the war, but who hid his light under a bushel to the extent that his name has been almost entirely erased from the popular memory of these times: Major General Hastings 'Pug' Ismay. In this revealing book, Kiszely shows us a new side to the decision-making process of the war, through the revealing perspective of an insider who was uniquely placed to record and influence the great events of the war. He wore, simultaneously, a series of hats that makes it remarkable that he has been all but ignored by historians. He was Churchill's chief of staff, head of his secretariat, deputy

military secretary to the War Cabinet, and a member of the Chiefs of Staff Committee. He was, therefore, at the beating heart of Britain's war machinery. It is impossible to understand how the decision-making of the war was conducted, without appreciating the role he played. Kiszely has given us this full-orbed and hitherto unappreciated portrait of a key member of the Churchill and the Chiefs of Staff's thinking apparatus.

Who was Ismay in all this? He was a cog in a complex machinery that, though rarely seen and often prosaic, was nevertheless indispensable for all that. Kiszely's genius has been to uncover this cog and to reveal the role he held behind the scenes in the war's decision-making machinery. He was commissioned into the Indian Army and enjoyed his fair share of adventures as a young officer, but in middle rank found his métier as a thinker and coordinator of high-level planning. Before long, he was an indispensable companion to important committees, Secretaries of State and a single Prime Minister – Winston Churchill. In this role, he acted as the dispenser of healing balm, a smoother of ruffled feathers. No matter how cross he became privately with this matter or that (and on one occasion he proffered his

resignation to Churchill), on the outside he remained a paragon of amity and calm. An Army officer, he liked and got on well with Americans, as well as with officers of the RAF and Royal Navy, appreciating their perspectives in a way alien to more prejudiced men. It was in his close relationship with Winston Churchill that he will be remembered, as with the bond he cemented with General Dwight Eisenhower. Keeping both men calm, and working together on parallel tracks was his primary duty, a task he achieved with classic self-effacement. It wasn't easy, and Ismay felt fit to burst on occasions. But he stood firm, despite being tossed to and fro by his oftentimes intemperate boss and by challenges sometimes seemingly too difficult to resolve. By no means perfect, he was nevertheless a brilliant man, in the right place at the right time. He had a broad, fast and capable brain. If any of Churchill's generals can be credited with winning the war, it was Ismay. Kiszely has given us a careful, intelligent and illuminating account of this great man. We should, collectively, be ashamed that his name is not better known.

Robert Lyman is a historian and the author of *A War of Empires*.



DEATH AND THE POET

FIONA FORSYTH

REVIEW BY LILY LOWE

It is 14 AD, and Ovid is only five years into his exile to the sleepy Greek town of Tomis. And yet, he has already saved the town from one mysterious killer, and now there is another murder to solve. Ovid returns as an unlikely detective in *Death and the Poet*, Fiona Forsyth's hotly anticipated sequel to *Poetic Justice* and the second instalment in the *Publius Ovidius Mysteries*.

Ovid, the celebrated – albeit grumpy – Roman poet, has not been enjoying a quiet exile in Tomis. Situated on the western shore of the Black Sea, Tomis is a world away from the bustling, literary city of Rome. *Death and the Poet* opens with the murder of Dokimos, a vegetable seller at the market, which throws the town into frenzied conspiracy and, suspiciously, some delight. Ovid teams up once again with his friend Avitius, a retired centurion, and the two make a comic, but surprisingly well-matched, double act.

Forsyth is the Richard Osman of the ancient crime fiction world. Using her background in Classics, Forsyth effortlessly weaves fact with fiction, breathing new life and modernity into ancient figures. It turns out that Ovid isn't too different from the rest of us. He is an unexpected delight; Forsyth has written him as funny, honest and, above all, cantankerous, which makes for some very amusing interactions.

FORSYTH IS THE RICHARD OSMAN OF THE ANCIENT CRIME FICTION WORLD.

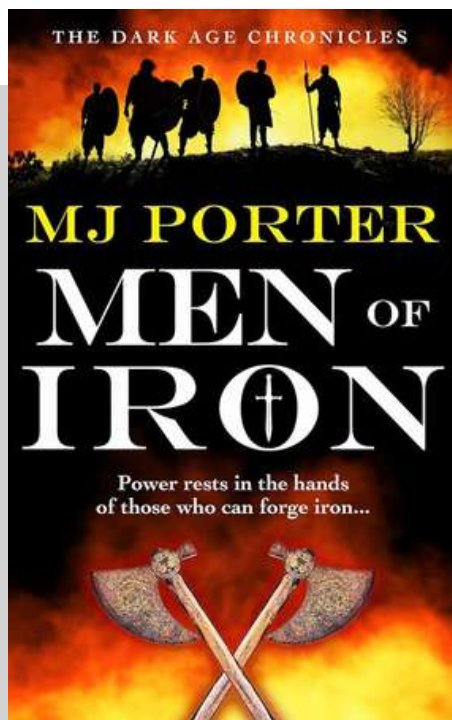
After five years in Tomis, Ovid has settled in more than he would care to admit. His close-knit gang of friends – Avitius and his sister and brother-in-law, as well as his housekeeper Bella – keep him in check, and he knows all of the best places to sample Tomis' finest wines. Forsyth has created a brilliant cast of characters, and Tomis itself is so richly described that it has a distinct personality too. *Death and the Poet* sees the reunion of Ovid with his wife Fabia, a formidable woman who takes Tomis' life into her stride and proves a useful mind to have when solving a murder. There are a few new shady characters in town, too, whom Ovid and Avitius must investigate with care.

The murder investigation plot is punctuated with records of meetings taking place in the Palatine Office in Rome and letters exchanged between Roman officials. They hint at the underlying political changes occurring as the Empire awaits the imminent death of Augustus, the first Emperor of Rome. It is all more tightly linked to the plot than you may initially think.

Death and the Poet is an enjoyable, witty read with memorable characters and lively dialogue. Fans of the series will be thrilled to revisit Tomis and to find Ovid in fine form.

FORSYTH EFFORTLESSLY WEAVES FACT WITH FICTION

Lily Lowe is an Editorial Intern at Aspects of History.



MEN OF IRON

M.J. PORTER

REVIEW BY ZOE BRUNSKILL

MJ Porter strikes a bold note with *Men of Iron*, the opening to a captivating new series *The Dark Age Chronicles*. Set in 540 AD - a period of mystery due to limited historical documentation - the novel introduces us to a world that is thrilling and gloomy. Tackling the challenge of writing at a time with scarce records, Porter shares in the historical notes that she has focused on archaeological research to bring this novel to life and accurately portray life in the Dark Ages.

The author's dedication to authenticity stands out. The novel is evidently grounded with material research which enriches the story with historical credibility. We learn about the intricate art of blacksmithing, clan warfare, and the magic behind seeresses, displaying that *Men of Iron* educates just as much as it entertains, without feeling like a textbook. Another detail would be the use of historically accurate names - although these may be difficult to keep track of, Porter has included a helpful list of the characters at the start of the novel.

The Dark Ages were a time of diverse peoples, where customs and beliefs varied across the regions. Porter captures this through her portrayal of Villa Eorlingas and the Gywre. The

narrative structure of the novel keeps us on our toes - a dual POV alternating each chapter from Meddi of the Eorlingas to Waermund of the Gywre. This keeps the reader hooked throughout as well as building suspense, revisiting one character before you find out the fate of the next. This technique helps to explore the different aspects of tribal life and volatile conflict.

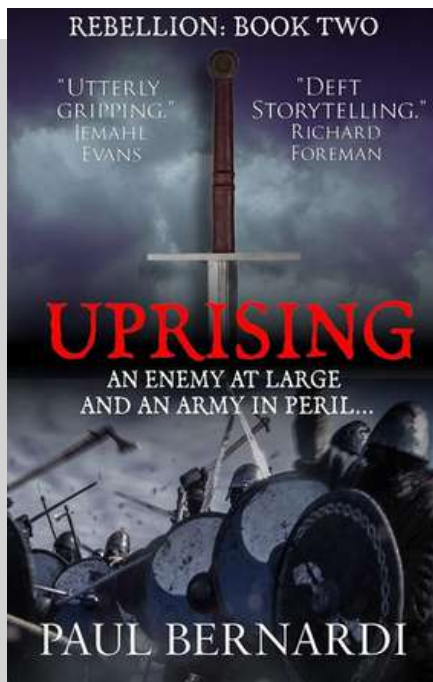
The use of first-person narrative creates a strong emotional connection between reader and character, drawing us directly into their thoughts and inner struggles. Meddi and Waermund both explore personal conflicts still faced today, such as grief, motherhood, and sibling rivalry. Porter reminds us that people from the Dark Ages led a completely different life, but shared familiar and relatable emotions to us. *Men of Iron* is not lacking in some intense battle scenes which are well-paced and contribute to the plot. This action masterfully balances out the historical and emotional depth of the story, teaching us about the brutal reality of tribal conflict and ensuring that there is something for every reader.

Men of Iron has a satisfying end with notable character development from

start to finish. However, Porter skillfully sets up the plot for the next installment, leaving just enough excitement and curiosity for what lies ahead in the continuation of the series. Although the two main characters are yet to cross paths, it seems their stories will soon intertwine. There is no doubt that loyal readers of this novel will be eager for the next to plunge deeper into the emotional complexities of characters and historical analysis of the Dark Ages.

In summery, *Men of Iron* is a powerful novel that successfully bridges the gap between vivid historical fact and compelling fiction. There is confidence, depth, and appreciation of the past between these pages. Whether a fan of historical fiction or fascinated by the Dark Ages, then you will not be disappointed.

Zoe Brunskill is an Editorial Intern at Aspects of History



UPRISING

PAUL BERNARDI

REVIEW BY ANDREW ROLLO

Uprising is the second book in Paul Bernardi's Rebellion series set in northern England in the aftermath of 1066 and picks up the story a short time after the end of the first book, Blood Feud. Like Blood Feud, it is an action-packed tale written in the third-person from the perspective of the series' protagonist, Oslac. The story starts briskly, with Oslac narrowly surviving two assassination attempts in a matter of hours. The investigative trail leads directly to Gundulf, the principal villain of Blood Feud, who is supposed to be rotting in Bebbanburh's dungeon whilst awaiting execution. Oslac sets off with a handful of retainers to request that his cousin, Earl Oswulf, execute Gundulf, but after meeting Oswulf on the road, learns that Gundulf has escaped and that Oswulf is now hunting him. This sequence of events launches readers into the remainder of the book, which culminates in the first Northumbrian rebellion in 1068.

As with Blood Feud, the plot is fast-moving and richly detailed, allowing readers to effortlessly immerse themselves in the world of 11th-century Northumbria. The historical records for these events are sparse on detail, but Bernardi faithfully uses what there is as a framework upon

which to build the story and make any additions plausible. The text is well-written, with clear links between plot points and nothing which feels contrived. Oslac is a minor nobleman and therefore not entitled to a seat in the council chamber itself, but his kinship with the Earls of northern Northumbria makes his presence close to the main players believable. The book's only weakness is that the protagonists tend to be more well-rounded characters than the antagonists.

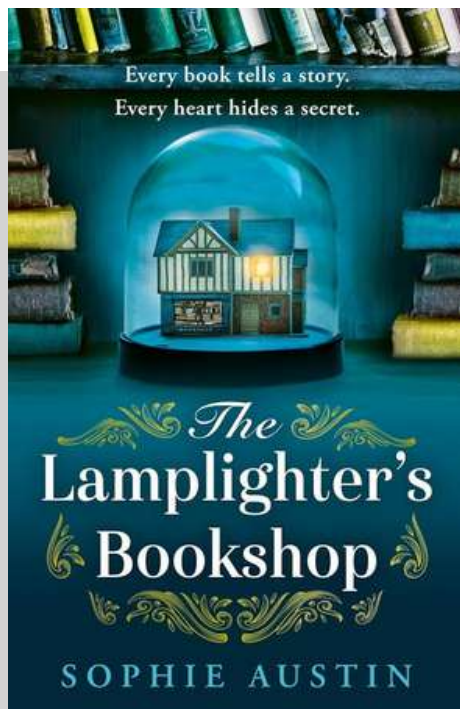
There are also notable differences between the two books. In Blood Feud, the plot is condensed into a few weeks and is contained within the area between Bamburgh and the River Tyne. Uprising, by contrast, takes place over the course of eighteen months and is on a much larger stage, taking its characters as far south as the River Humber. This expansion in its world view is also reflected in the larger cast of historical characters who feature, ranging from Edgar Aetheling to William the Conqueror.

The principal difference, though, is that, in Blood Feud, the Anglo-Danish were the antagonists, and

although the Normans were present, they were very much in the shadows. Uprising reverses this situation, and while the Anglo-Danish initially retain their position as the key antagonists, they are rapidly replaced by the Normans, two of whom emerge as major villains during the book. This reflects the wider situation in northern England in the years after 1066, as the importance of local rivalries in the minds of the native aristocracy were superseded by the threat that the Normans posed. However, they did not entirely forget their internal disputes, and the resulting infighting is a major plot line in Uprising.

Overall, this is an excellent book for anyone who enjoys Bernard Cornwell's Last Kingdom series and who is interested in the history of northern England in the early stages of the Norman Conquest.

Andrew Rollo completed an MA History degree at Bangor University. His particular area of interest is medieval history.



THE LAMPLIGHTER'S BOOKSHOP

SOPHIE AUSTIN

REVIEW BY ELLA BEALES

The *Lamplighter's Bookshop* is Sophie Austin's debut novel. Set in 1899, this romantic historical fiction blends an exploration of superficial, moralistic Victorian high society with a captivating enemies-to-lovers romance.

Readers follow Evelyn Seaton, daughter of Baron Seaton, as her life is upended by her father's recklessness. Forced out of their family home, Evelyn and her mother seek refuge at her great-aunt Clara's house in York, where high society increasingly scorns them. Evelyn's anger at her helplessness drives her to take action to secure her financial independence, against the express wishes of her mother. After seeing a job advertisement for a local bookshop, Morton's Imperium (colloquially known as The Lamplighter's Bookshop), Evelyn sets out to persuade its owner that she is the perfect candidate for the job. But the bookshop owner's nephew, William, is also vying for the position, and he has secrets of his own.

The *Lamplighter's Bookshop* explores a side to Victorian high society often ignored in other romantic historical fiction novels: the complex and toxic underbelly of the elite, and the oppressive expectations placed upon its members. As Evelyn increasingly confronts the consequences of her

father's blind pursuit of fame and fortune, she must find the courage to turn away from the stifling society she was raised and embrace the life she wants for herself. Similarly, after a lifetime of feeling as though he must fight to earn his place in the world, William's encounters with Evelyn force him to reconsider what he values most in life.

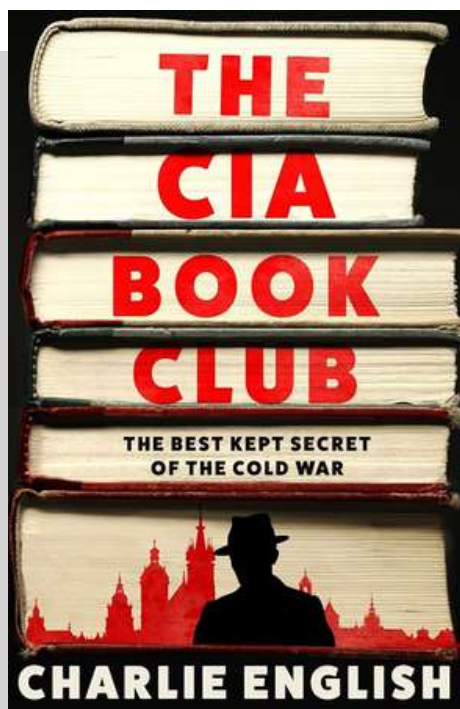
Austin's writing is easy to read, engaging, and immediately immersive. Within just a few pages, she offers readers an insight into Evelyn's character and how she is received by others: blunt, matter-of-fact, and, at times, brutally honest. Evelyn's principles are quickly understood. This provides a solid foundation for the rest of the book, which strongly revolves around the protagonists' relationship with the truth. Austin's ability to capture a character's personality so vividly is also evident in her descriptions of other characters, with one individual described as having 'the hunch of a man who'd spent his life trying to appear smaller than he was.' *Steel Lobsters* re-examines the gripping story of the 'firebrand radical who set out to change the world and ultimately failed to do so, by reaching for the tools of the past he sought to leave behind.' It's a fascinating and enjoyable read that appeals to anyone with a love of history. As Cole

says in his epilogue, the story of the *Lobsters*, and the people and history that made them, is 'more gripping than any novel we could ever write.'

In addition to her vivid descriptions of people, Austin brings to life the buildings her characters pass, the smells and sounds of the cityscapes, and the fashion they wear. She also seamlessly integrates historical context, ensuring it enhances the story without pulling readers away from the plot. For example, when Evelyn reads a newspaper, the headlines subtly convey historical information without shifting the focus from Evelyn's journey as a protagonist.

This is a story about moments, connections, and how a single decision can change your life forever. It is a tale of love, lies, found family and courage. But most importantly, it is a reminder that kindness begets kindness, and that life happens when you stop waiting for change and start working towards it.

Ella Beales is a historical researcher, archivist and public historian.



THE CIA BOOK CLUB: THE BEST KEPT SECRET OF THE COLD WAR

CHARLIE ENGLISH

REVIEW BY ANTONIA SENIOR

In March 1980, a Polish publisher called Mirosław Chojecki went on a hunger strike. He had been arrested more than forty times by the Polish authorities for publishing uncensored material – history books, literature, anything with a message contrary to the force-fed diet of Soviet-approved literature.

Chojecki's parents had both fought against the Nazi occupation of World War Two. Occasionally, his father would ask, exasperated: 'Do you think your little words will make a difference?' As Charlie English makes clear in his eye-opening new book, *The CIA Book Club*, this flood of unauthorised material was central to the eventual collapse of a Soviet system, which, from within, seemed eternal.

Chojecki starved and shrank for the principle of freedom of speech, until, after more than a month, the prison authorities forced mush down a tube and into his throat. English is unsparing in detailing the cost of Chojecki's defiance.

Chojecki was just one source of uncensored words. There were other underground presses and illegal magazines. In Poland, a

young member of the opposition called Teresa Bogucka wanted to spread the word. In 1976, she decided to create a 'Flying Library', through which she loaned covert titles smuggled in from abroad.

There was also the CIA project of the book's title. From inauspicious offices in Manhattan, a small team within the CIA was sending out contraband reading material to the whole Soviet Empire. From Poland to Belarus, they sent everything from high literature to fashion magazines. The recipients did not know that it was the CIA behind the scheme, and, if they guessed, they did not care. The point was the contact with a world beyond the Iron Curtain. English's book concentrates on Poland, but an astonishing ten million titles were smuggled across the Soviet sphere from the Project's embryonic moves in 1951, to its winding up in 1991.

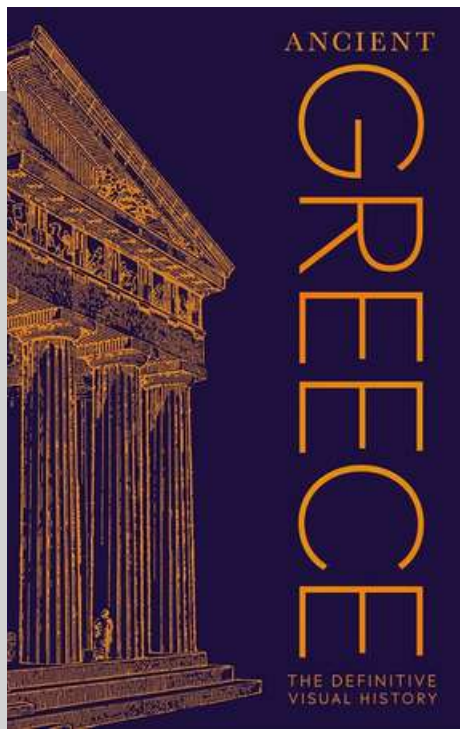
One of the people who received a quantity of literature in Polish and English was Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, who was elected Pope John Paul II. The CIA bigwigs were quick to tell President Jimmy Carter about this coup. But within the organisation, this was not seen as a prestige

operation. All the money and glamour were in covert ops in Afghanistan.

But, contrary to the expectations of Chojecki's father, it was the words, not the guns, which counted most. As English makes clear, authoritarian systems cannot survive a tidal wave of wrong-think. The Polish dissident Adam Michnik said that it was books that brought about the collapse of the Soviet system in Poland, the first domino to fall in the extraordinary collapse of the Soviet Empire. He said: 'I am convinced it was books that were victorious in the fight. A book is like a reservoir of freedom, of independent thought, a reservoir of human dignity. A book was like fresh air. They allowed us to survive and not go mad.'

This is a wonderfully written page-turner. But it is also a vitally important reminder of the power of books, in an era of digital noise. In today's thuggish politics, in which any untruth repeated loudly enough becomes true, it also makes a bold and gorgeous claim: truth matters. Beauty matters.

Antonia Senior is a writer and journalist who reviews historical fiction for *The Times*.



ANCIENT GREECE: THE DEFINITIVE VISUAL HISTORY

DORLING KINDERSLEY

REVIEW BY ZEB BAKER-SMITH

The Phaistos Disc was excavated in 1908 from a Minoan palace site in southern Crete. Its depiction in the opening chapter of *Ancient Greece: The Definitive Visual History* sets up the reality of observing or studying ancient civilisation. The terracotta artefact is a mere 6 inches in diameter, the 242 signs spiralling over the two sides contain 45 separate symbols, and it is undecipherable. It bears no resemblance to hieroglyphs or Linear A, the earliest form of writing in Minoan Crete some four thousand years ago. The purpose of the disc, whether religious or calendrical, remains a mystery for now.

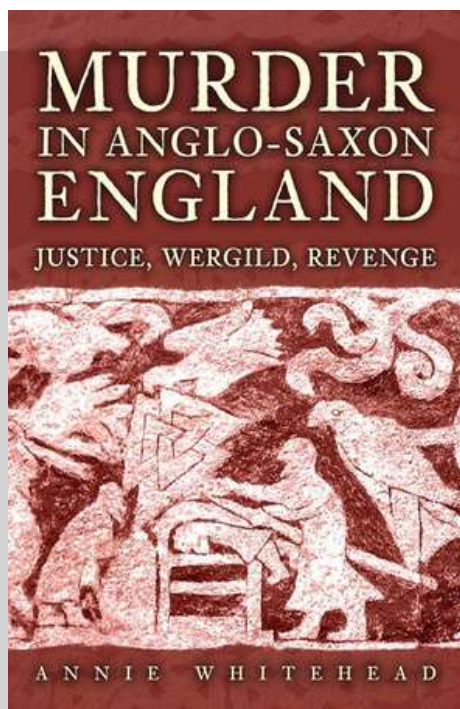
That sense of being on the cusp of uncovering such an enigma, but not quite, invades the confidence of every classicist on a recurring basis, but Dorling Kindersley's newest tome is a repository that will go some way to consoling the oft-thwarted Hellenist. Following on from previous sumptuous histories of Ancient Rome, Ancient Egypt, Imperial China and Africa, it covers, in comprehensive detail, several millennia of the Greek past from

early neolithic activities on the Balkan peninsula through to its legacy upon the Byzantines throughout the Middle Ages. Eye-catching, informative and far-reaching, the polarity between conflict and trade in the region in the early period (pre-1,000 BC) immediately sets out the thematic stall for what ensues in the region, now and then just the mainland and archipelago of isolated islands, but more often the centre of transcontinental exchange.

As the specialist team of contributors weave their way through the aeons into the familiar climes of the 5th century BCE, the scope of the topics (including investigations into life as a slave or foreigner, the status of disabled citizens and cartographic techniques) is matched only by the breadth of this cache's explanatory approaches. Be it digitally-generated cross-sections of landmarks, for example the lighthouse at Pharos or the Athenian Agora; double-page photograph spreads of temple sites such as the Temple of Poseidon at

Cape Sounion; or profiles of major figures, like Sappho, Herodotus or Pericles, much can be garnered from a dip into or skim of the four hundred pages worth of illuminations or, likewise, an extensive read-through of the text and exhaustive accounts of the crucial events and the relevant topics. No matter the inclination to a political, military, social or cultural perspective, there is a plethora of knowledge and spectacle to be gained by either the most battle-scarred historians or the fledgling enthusiasts.

Zeb Baker-Smith is a classicist, freelance journalist and Books Editor at *Aspects of History*



MURDER IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND: JUSTICE, WERGILD, REVENGE

ANNIE WHITEHEAD

REVIEW BY PAUL BERNARDI

Picture the scene... A dark and stormy night, the wind howling beneath the eaves of King Edwin's Hall by the banks of the River Derwent in the Kingdom of Deira. The evening meal has been cleared away, and Edwin lounges in his chair in front of the hearth-fire, a cup of mead in his hand. A churl waits at his shoulder, ready to pour more of the heady brew when bidden.

The king is restless; his wife, Aethelburga – daughter of the previous King of Kent – has gone into labour. It's to be their first child, and a time that is fraught with danger for mother and child alike. Then, unexpectedly, the steward informs him that a West Saxon messenger has arrived. At this hour? Irritably, Edwin gestures for the man, Eomer, to approach.

But as he draws in close, Eomer pulls a hidden, poison-tipped knife from within his cloak and lunges at the king...

For those familiar with Bede's Ecclesiastical History, it is a famous story, underpinning several of the monk's key themes, not least of which is the Christianisation of the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Edwin's survival (sorry – spoiler!) plays a key role in that; when the child is born, Edwin 'gives her to God' in thanks for

his deliverance. On top of which, he promises that – should God grant him victory in battle against the West Saxons – he will convert.

It is a fitting starting point, therefore, for Annie Whitehead's new book on murder in Anglo-Saxon England. From this first chapter on the 7th century, the author takes us on a whirlwind – but always well-researched – tour of the various kingdoms across four and a half centuries, up to around 1075.

Interspersed with these narrative chapters, packed full of juicy detail of murders, plots, intrigue and dastardly deeds (including more than one case of a victim being 'surprised' by a spear when sitting down to attend to a call of nature), Ms. Whitehead provides much fascinating insight on the social mores of the day – as evidenced in the many surviving law codes from the era. It was something of a surprise to me that you were more likely to be executed for theft than for murder. This is where the wergild (or man-price) of the title comes in, enabling the culprit to escape a capital sentence by compensating the victim's family for having caused death or injury.

I've read books by Annie before and always found them to be engaging, well-written and accessible. This work is no exception. Despite the complex

**A FABULOUS READ
THAT'S A LITTLE
BIT OUT OF THE
ORDINARY AND
BRINGS MUCH FUN
TO A STUDY OF THE
ERA,**

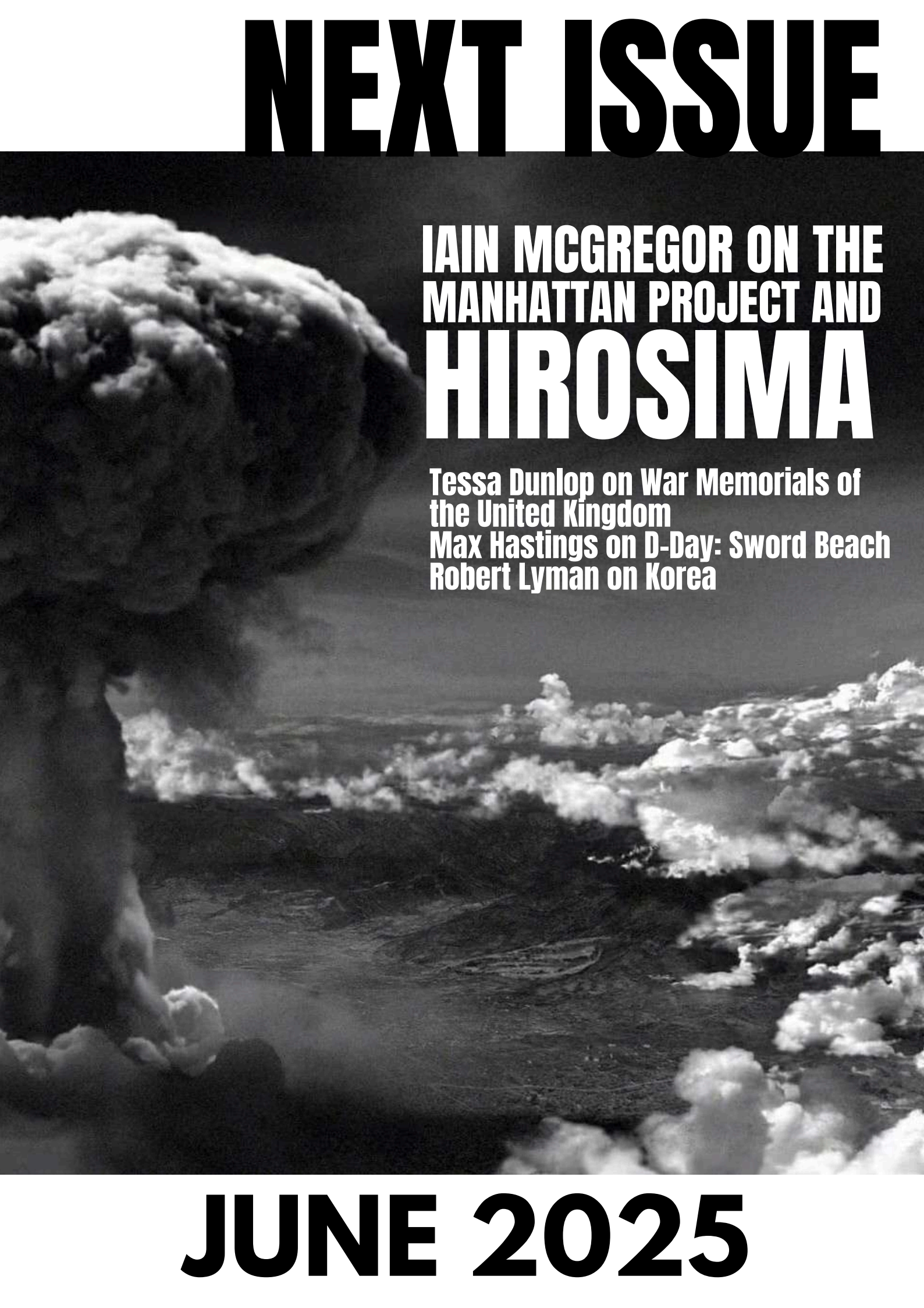
array of names, relationships and connections, I never felt lost or confused. It's a fabulous read that's a little bit out of the ordinary and brings much fun to a study of the era, whether you're a keen amateur or practised historian.

Finally, without giving too much away, I hope I am moved to share my favourite detail from the book; that of a person whose head was struck from their shoulders, amid reciting the Lord's Prayer. You will be pleased to know that the severed head still managed to see the prayer through to the end.

Paul Bernardi is a writer of historical fiction and the author of *The Huscarl Chronicles* and *Uprising*, the second book in the Rebellion series.



NEXT ISSUE

A black and white photograph of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, showing a massive mushroom cloud rising from the city. The cloud is dark and billowing, with a bright, white, cloud-like base at the point of impact. The sky is dark, and the city below is visible as a dark, flat expanse with some lighter patches of smoke or debris.

IAIN MCGREGOR ON THE MANHATTAN PROJECT AND HIROSIMA

Tessa Dunlop on War Memorials of
the United Kingdom

Max Hastings on D-Day: Sword Beach

Robert Lyman on Korea

JUNE 2025

ASPECTS OF HISTORY