



Reflections

A Literary Supplement to the Newsletter of the *CS Forester Society*
Number 6: November 2003

Winston Churchill: Leader and Historian

In the bleak years after 1945, when Churchill was in the political wilderness, the appearance of his history of World War II was a major publishing event. Forester reviewed *The Gathering Storm* for the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine.



My favourite CS Forester book: A Symposium

- Judith Edwards on *A Ship of the Line*
- Pete Tessier on *The Voyage of the Annie Marble*

Don Beadle: *The Admirable Hornblower* – Churchill on Forester

Ken Napier: *Pellew* and *Les Droits de l'Homme*

At the Admiralty again – Adrian Taylor continues his sequel to *Crisis*

Scott's grave at Ecclesfield; 1805 and the Nelson bicentennial; Forester's last words; *Sea Warriors* and *Hotspur* on video and DVD

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CORRESPONDENCE

1805 and all that!

A Clergyman at Sea and on Land

Thank you very much for the issue of *Reflections* you posted through my door. I was very interested to read the article and have passed it on to one of my parishioners who has a keen interest in the Gattys and Dr Scott. Unfortunately we don't have a magazine at the moment, though I am working our way back to one hopefully. In the meantime if you or Christopher Smith wish to look further into the Ecclesfield connection, I enclose two names who are probably the best people for you to contact.... Canon Ralph Mayland, who took a keen interest in the Gattys and the naval connection while he was here as Vicar is now living near York. With best wishes,

Tricia Impey, Vicar of Ecclesfield

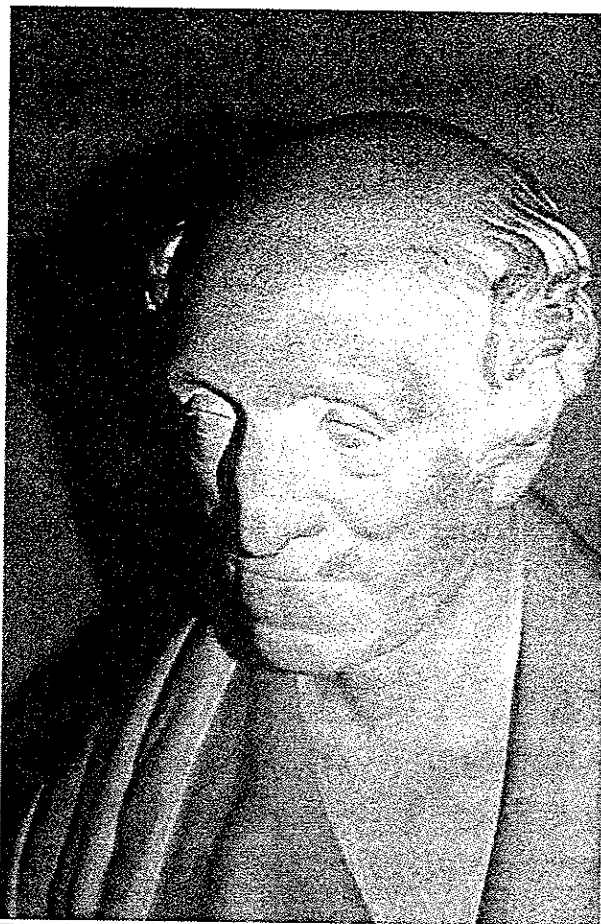
On Nelson, and editorial policy

I should be glad to have more information about other references to the Scott biography of Nelson (*A clergyman at sea and on land*, *Reflections* 5). I don't think they will have pre-echoed me too much as I slanted my piece in a distinctly Hornblowerish direction.

As for Nelson, I think I can well see your scepticism, even though his reputation was high in Norfolk. With a king who was, to put it mildly, a doubtful quantity and when France has a leader so charismatic (if in other ways so frightful) a leader as Napoleon, England needed heroes. It found what it was looking for in Nelson and later in Wellington, with their hours of glory at Trafalgar and Waterloo. But my question about Nelson was not really intended to prompt a debate on him. Rather, my feeling is that 1805 will be a great year for him and that the *CS Forester Society* probably ought to get in on the act. To let the occasion pass might be a missed opportunity, could even appear churlish, especially as Forester did write a biography of Nelson and as Hornblower is a fictional figure of the Nelsonic era.

Just what have I in mind? I am not sure, I'm afraid. But one could imagine that, if the dates of the republication had been different, my piece on Scott might have been right for an issue of *Reflections* in what some might be thinking of as "Nelson Year". In other words, various parallels might be thought appropriate. It is not for me to interfere with your editorial policy. But a number of things on the lines I have in mind might be possible.

Dr Christopher Smith, Norwich.

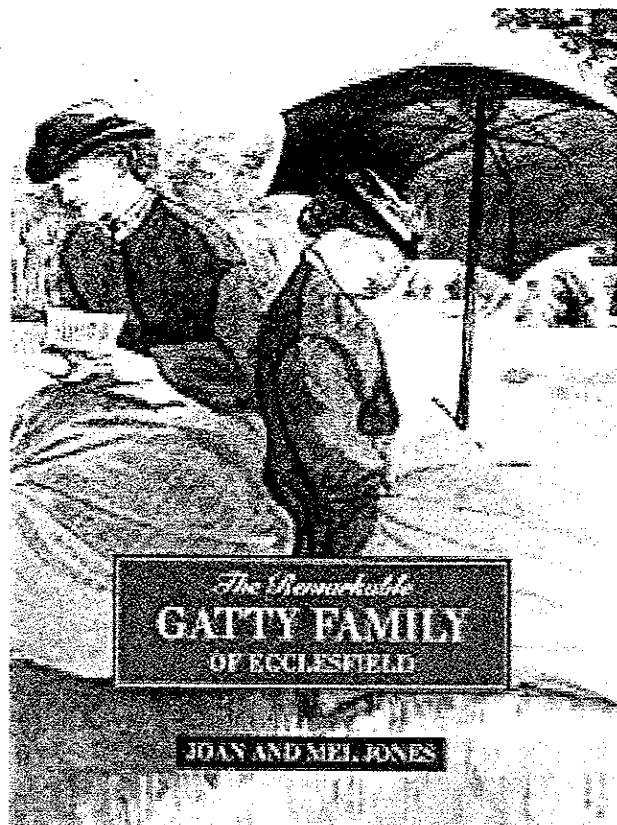


This 28" high plaster bust of Alexander Scott is in the library of St John's College, Cambridge. An identical bust is in the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich, donated by Scott's great grandson, Col.W Mackenzie Smith DSO, in 1951. The sculptor is described as 'unknown' Reference: DNB xvii 948 Tr 21.

I have expressed scepticism over Nelson in two articles. The greatest Briton who (n)ever lived?, Reflections 2, page 16, briefly compared him with Hornblower. A longer one, still in draft form, discusses some Nelson parallels in the Hornblower saga and compares Forester's apparent perspective(s) on Nelson with those of Barry Unsworth's novel Losing Nelson. But these articles express my personal views -- which are on a par with those of anyone else. Reflections editorial policy is to publish any submission relevant to the aims of the Society. Nothing that meets this criterion is unwanted or excluded.

As you say, then, a long debate on Nelson would not be appropriate - but the topic of 1805 and the Bicentennial is clearly of interest. The last meeting of the Society discussed a programme for 2004. 2005 has not been discussed, and ideas will be more than welcome.

David Stead, Editor.



The remarkable Gatty family

Your recent letter to the Vicar of Ecclesfield about Alexander John Scott was passed on to me so that I could put you more fully into the picture. I must say that I'm surprised that his connection with Ecclesfield came as a complete surprise to you – especially during the past year. The local history group of which I am a member – the *Chapelton & High Green Archive* – held a Gatty Festival in the village in March 2003 to mark the 100th anniversary of the death of Dr Gatty. I gave a talk, and this was followed by a 3-day photographic exhibition, two special church services, and the *Priory Players* gave 4 performances of a play about the family called *The Gattylogue*. Plenty of references to Scott throughout, of course. And 23 Scott/Gatty descendants came from all over the country. Associated with the Festival we published a copiously illustrated book, *The Remarkable Gatty Family of Ecclesfield* (by Joan and Mel Jones, £8.95) which was well reviewed in *The Star*, *Sheffield Telegraph* and the *Yorkshire Post*. We even did a 15-minute slot on BBC Radio 4 *Woman's Hour*. The book has a short section on Scott with a portrait. You can find it in all good bookshops! More about the Gattys can also be found in a further two of my recent publications.¹

¹ Juliana Ewing, children's writer and Ecclesfield's countryside, in M Jones (ed.), *Aspects of Sheffield, volume 2*, Wharcliffe Publishing (1999), pages 112-130; A remarkable literary and artistic family: the Gattys of Ecclesfield, in Melvyn Jones, *South Yorkshire yesterday: glimpses of the past*, Smith Settle (2003), pages 96-105.

Mrs Gatty was, of course, not only a famous children's writer, she was an expert on sundials and is still revered by the Sundial Society, and a first-rate marine biologist – her book of seaweeds (which can fetch more than £200 if you can find a copy) was still used at coastal research stations until the 1950s. And she could paint and draw – and her daughters even better. Many of the family's watercolours are still preserved in Sheffield Archives. Husband Alfred Gatty is most famous, of course, as the reviser and editor of Hunter's *Hallamshire*.

Scott's Gatty grandchildren also had outstanding talents – one of the four boys... was chief herald at the College of Arms and organised King Edward VII's and George V's coronations, and another was Lord Chief Justice of Gibraltar (and his daughter married Siegfried Sassoon). Of the four girls, Juliana (as Mrs Ewing) became more famous than her mother as a children's author. And Baden Powell "pinched" the name *Brownies* from one of her stories for the junior branch of the Girl Guides. I hope this puts you more in the picture on the Scott-Gatty-Ecclesfield connection.

Meivyn Jones, Thorpe Hesley, Rotherham.

I had written to the Reverend Impey with a copy of the last issue, carrying Dr Christopher Smith's review of a new edition of Scott's Recollections, as it is editorial policy to contact those whose books are reviewed and anyone else likely to be interested. It is also policy not to publish articles, or seek further information from outside sources, without considerable "homework" on my part.

Upon that basis, my surprise over the Scott-Ecclesfield link was entirely justified. My search engine produced two results for "ecclesfield"AND"scott"AND"trafalgar", 1 of them with the vital detail that Scott died in Ecclesfield. The material, from St John' College, Cambridge, is in another online archive.² From this, it was surmised that if Scott had died in Ecclesfield, then he could be buried there too! This had not seemed very likely, as I had not heard it anywhere else.³ But I also knew that Sheffield is adept at hiding such lights under bushels. Fieldwork therefore located and photographed the grave and transcribed its inscription. Dr Smith then offered a revised version he made of his article - which now included a paragraph on Margaret's fiction and theology, and the transcript of the inscription on the gravestone.

² This archive is at www.zonnewiizer.co.uk/biograph.htm. The Chapelton and Highgreen Archive is at www.chgarchives.co.uk. The University of Pennsylvania Digital Library Programs and Projects (Penn's Digital Library) at www.digital.library.upenn.edu has an excellent index to *A Celebration of Women Writers* with much on Margaret Gatty and Julia Horatia Ewing (her daughter) and some interesting references to Rev. Alexander John Scott. Another book is: Christabel Maxwell, *Mrs Gatty and Mrs Ewing*, Constable (1949). The Ecclesfield memoril is noted in Giles Brearley, *Grave tales from South Yorkshire*, Wharcliffe Books (2000), pages 143-145.

Scott's grave is not mentioned on the Ecclesfield Local History web page - or on the Chapelton and High Green Archive page! Until I looked up the references you gave, the only account I had seen was an as-yet-undated clipping I found between the pages of a second-hand copy of David Hey's 1967 History of Ecclesfield, bought from a dealer in Staithes. The clipping was about a previous commemoration of Scott, and said that his link with Ecclesfield was little known!

Hence my surprise! And an ironic comment I made that the link seemed doomed to oblivion. The remedy is not entirely in my hands.

I must however apologise for any offence given, if you feel that I have trespassed upon your territory. I will also send you a copy of the next edition of our bulletin, with extensive correspondence on Scott and the year 1805.

David Stead, Editor.

Parting thoughts

CSF's last words? (Reflections 5, 19-20). The last words of the published version of *Hornblower during the Crisis* are: "He was about to become a captain at last, and he was about to become a spy." These form a fitting end to their paragraph, and allow following on to a different subject in a new paragraph.

I have not seen the manuscript of *HDC* since that day. It may have ended up in Austin, Texas, with others. Whether CSF wrote more than that, a word or two that were cut by the editors, or half a paragraph, I do not know. However, there he was, lying on his back beside his writing table, his pen on the floor beside him and the manuscript on the table, white faced, breathing heavily, moaning a bit, moving slightly, but unable to otherwise communicate. Dorothy assumed that this was a heart attack, but I recognised that it was much more likely to be a stroke, or, at least, some neurological disaster.

On a more cheerful note *Sink the Bismark* may be made again; 20th Century Fox has bought an option. With modern film technology, that could be quite a show!

John Forester, MS, PE, Lemon Grove, California.

The Michael Joseph edition of CSF's unfinished novel, entitled *Hornblower and the Crisis*, also ends with the sentence you quote, which forms an appropriate ending to a paragraph, or even a chapter. The anecdote about the taciturn philosopher comes about a page before this final sentence, and is an integral part of a final scene (structured around Marsden's moral blackmail of *Hornblower*) which forms a coherent whole. The anecdote is thus certainly part of CSF's last finished composition.

Michael Joseph ended their text with a few lines of explanation. CSF's "notes" had *Hornblower* brushing up his Spanish with the "ruddy faced" Miranda, and reflecting that 'He would have to watch every word and gesture, his life depended on doing nothing that would betray them'. This sentence appears in inverted commas, which suggests that it words are CSF's own, and I cannot imagine why it should be suggested that Miranda was "ruddy faced" unless CSF had himself made such a comment.

Then comes an apparent paraphrase of part of another scene, which gives us access to the workings of *Hornblower's* brain:-

As he is rowed towards the ship that will take him from Spithead to Spain *Hornblower* thinks: One stage further along a hateful voyage. Each stroke of the boatman's oars was carrying him nearer to a time of frightful strain, to something close to a certainty of a shameful and hideous death...

It seems, then, that we have two or three fragments of CSF - and students of *Xenocrates of Chalcedon* would be bowled over by a comparable discovery!

Continuing *Hornblower and the Crisis*

Please find enclosed a further chapter of the continuation of *Hornblower and the Crisis*. I have written eleven chapters and thus I suppose it is finished. One fault with my version may be that forged orders are *not* sent to Villeneuve - one has to make the assumption that he sets sail from Cadiz through following Bonaparte's actual instructions. I am uncertain about the history here, but perhaps a passage from *Nelson* by CSF, Chapter V, suggests that Villeneuve had good reason to leave Cadiz. To quote:-

A damaged fleet forced into a distant port and blockaded there was likely to remain damaged; indeed, with the inevitable depreciation following the passage of time, it was likely to fall into worse and worse material condition, without taking the moral effect into consideration at all. The reward of victory was therefore proportionately greater, and the pressure of blockade upon a fleet in port had a positive influence in forcing that fleet to come out and risk an action before the chances against it became greater still, or to attempt to escape to some other port where the difficulties of supply and replacement were not so overwhelming. The considerations which led the Franco-Spanish fleet to leave the safety of Cadiz after its action with Calder off Ferrol did not avail to bring the German fleet to risk action after Jutland.

Perhaps the notion of forged orders rather muddies the waters in the attempt to write convincing fiction - at least that which is faithful to historical fact.

Adrian Taylor, Norwich.



At the Admiralty again

A further episode in the continuation of
Hornblower and the Crisis by

Adrian Taylor

Horatio Hornblower entered the room at the Admiralty in which he had already attended some four interviews with Marsden, the First Secretary. Once more there had been the now routine row across the Thames to the north bank, after the usual substantial breakfast in *The Saracen's Head*. The wherryman made very much the same remarks about the war with France and when he said the word "Boney" he spat with some vehemence into the grey-green water. As Hornblower sat in the bows of the boat, the late summer sun streaming down quite strongly even at that hour of the morning, he thought of yesterday's letter from Maria. He must write to her that evening if not before. The letter which had supposedly come from his distant wife a week or so ago – or was it longer? These were such hectic days that in some odd way time seemed to have concertinaed – had raised his suspicions to a marked degree. It seemed probable that it was a forgery and he had made a mental note to mention this to Marsden as the boat danced over the water. To Hornblower's fevered imagination it seemed as though one half of the population of England was engaged in copying the other half's handwriting in some strange mad game. Perhaps Doctor Claudius could be of assistance with the interpretation of the letters.

Hornblower had been sitting in Marsden's office for some ten minutes. The First Secretary had merely said to him on his arrival, "I'll be with you in a minute. Take a seat, will you?" before he continued to shuffle some papers on his desk. Evidently an Admiralty minute was a long drawn out period which lengthened to suit those who held the reins of power. But it wasn't very long before Marsden looked up and said with a deadpan expression, "There! That should keep the First Lord quiet for a while.

"Ah, Barrow," – the Second Secretary had entered with yet another sheet of paper – "you've got the letter we received yesterday?"

"Yes, sir." And he handed his senior the paper and then withdrew with a slight inclination of the head and a smile to the waiting Hornblower.

"Now, captain." Hornblower marvelled once again at the First Secretary's complete self-possession. One may never have guessed that Britain was at war with a bloodthirsty tyrant. The visitor found himself wondering whether the man ever yielded to a human emotion. "This letter we received here yesterday, as you heard my saying to Barrow. It is from a Reverend Thomas Clive who is the parson of the church of St Thomas à Becket in Portsmouth. I trust that you are familiar with the name and the church itself?"

Hornblower shifted on his chair. Suddenly it seemed not so comfortable as it had done. A host of memories welled up in his mind, not all of them pleasing. His marriage of a few years ago had seemed to him at the time an ill-advised affair; now it seemed to him to have been positively reckless, the ill-considered action of a man devoid of at least nine-tenths of his manly marbles. He cleared his throat and re-crossed his legs. When he spoke there was a dusty dryness in his mouth and his voice sounded to him unnatural, as if he were pronouncing a sentence of death on a well-loved acquaintance. Finally he managed to say, "Yes, I remember him well, sir. The good reverend married my wife, Maria, and myself at that very church."

Marsden seemed to be deep in thought. Then he handed Hornblower the letter in his hand.

"You'd better read this, captain. It'll save me explaining its details." Now Marsden went to the door, treading softly on the pile of the carpet. "I'll be back in a few minutes." And so saying he disappeared with a slight rush of air, leaving Hornblower to absorb the contents of the letter in his own good time.

When he had finished reading Hornblower coughed another dry cough and re-crossed his legs. His ever-lively mind was making connections, drawing tentative surmises from the evidence that he had acquired thus far. This William Wilson character seemed to be a man with a mission indeed. The Reverend Clive was to be congratulated at his contacting the Admiralty in such a fashion. Now Hornblower thought of that first letter from Maria which he had received in his room at *The Saracen's Head*. And so he pondered, in the peace of this well-carpeted office in the bowels of the Admiralty, the seat of British naval power from which that great nation ruled the Seven Seas. From where he sat in his

peaceful reflection it seemed an impregnable fortress which would give no quarter. Surely the Antichrist Napoleon Bonaparte would never conquer such a well-founded island race.

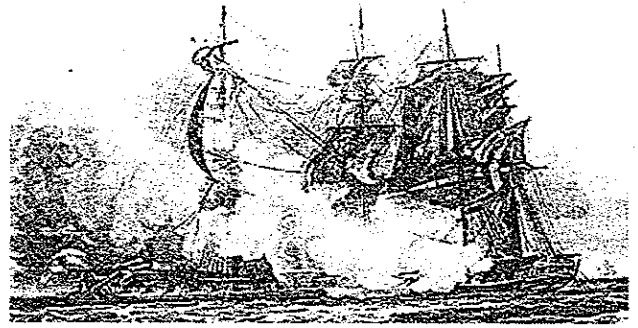
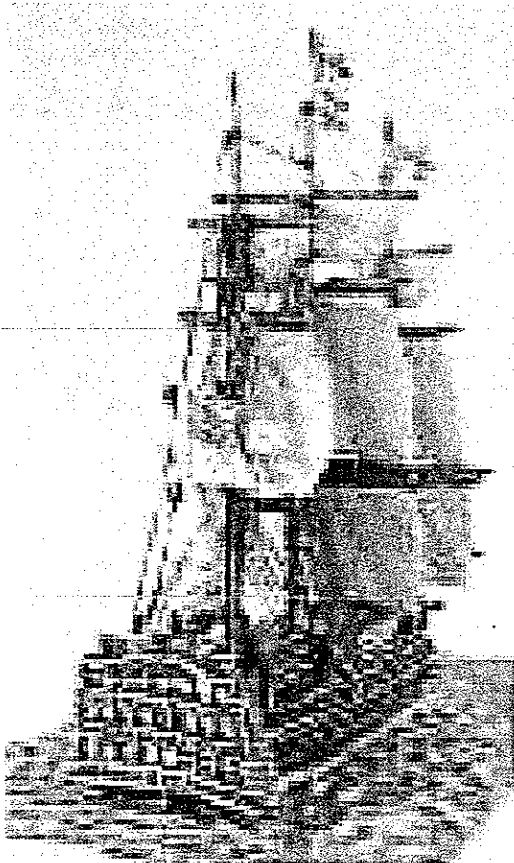
Hornblower felt a slight rush of air once more and the imperturbable Marsden re-entered the room.

"What do you make of it, captain?"

"Well, sir," said Hornblower. I think that the Reverend Thomas Clive has done well. It remains to be seen precisely how well."

Marsden said, "I've got a man on to this fellow Wilson. If there's anything that you can do from your end, all to the good." He took the letter back from Hornblower.

"I'll see what I can do, sir." That was about all he could say at present. Now Marsden cleared his throat, it was perhaps the first sign, at least at this interview, that the First Secretary might be blessed with any such corporal organ as a mere human larynx. Now Hornblower found himself shaking hands with his interlocutor and he was free for a space before he must return to *The Saracen's Head* for a bit of refreshment. As he left the illustrious portals of the Admiralty he wondered vaguely how Doctor Claudius was progressing with his forging of Bonaparte's orders.



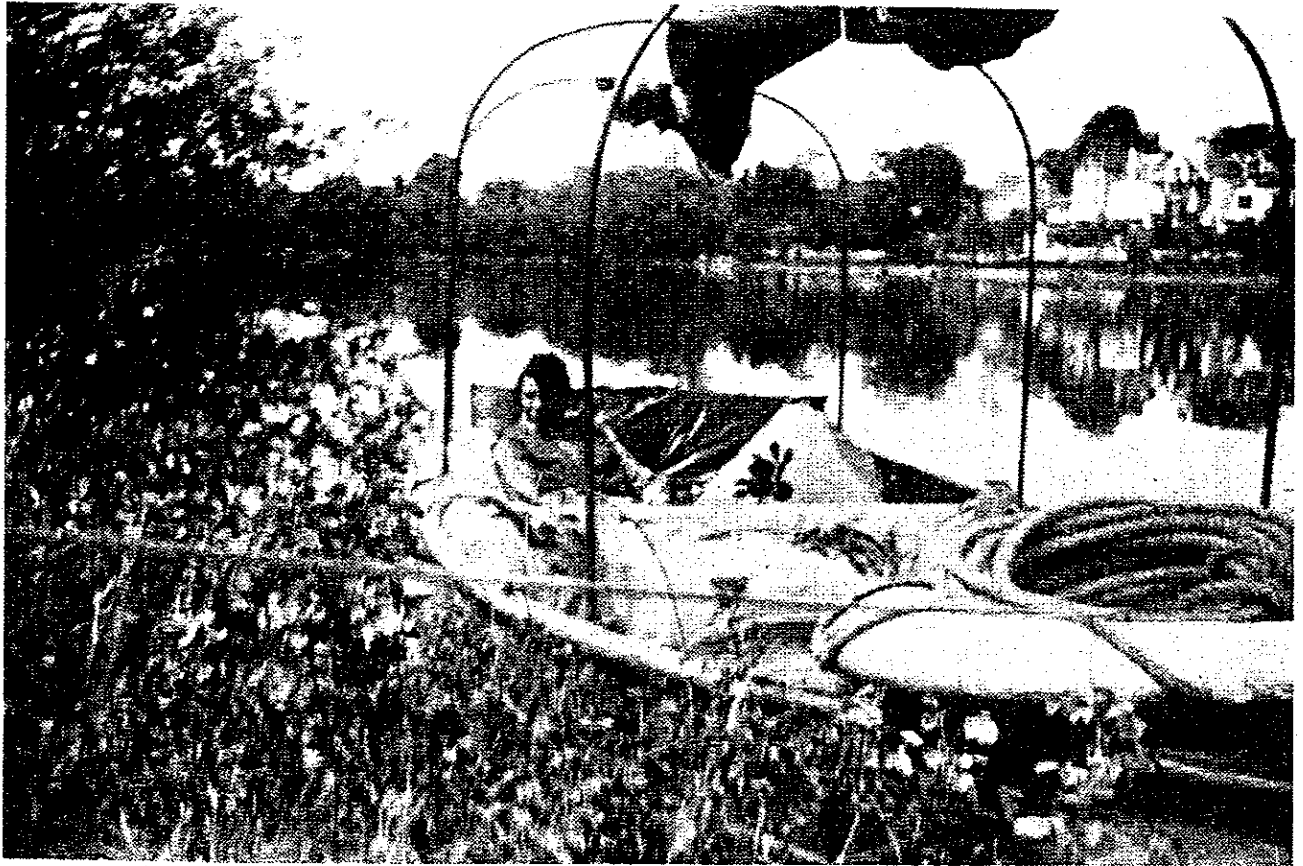
My favourite CS Forester book – *A Ship of the Line* Judith Edwards

I have two sets of reasons for liking *A Ship of the Line*. One is sentimental, the other considers the structure and content of the book itself. It was the first "proper" Forester book I ever read, at the age of eight, after a couple of *Cadet* editions of Hornblower books. It was also the first I ever owned – I read a copy from the public library first, but my mother bought me the *Mermaid* edition which I still have and, of course, treasure.

So why do I still like and admire *A Ship of the Line*? It's a well-structured book, with a beginning, middle and end. The beginning is an excellent introduction to the setting of the Hornblower novels with some interesting social history in it, for example details of the costumes and uniforms of the time. It also gives us plenty of information about Hornblower's character, which is interesting to see in a non-shipboard environment.

The middle is episodic in nature, with a succession of small actions. These maintain the pace and the interest, and display different aspects of our hero's range of abilities. His personal courage when burning the boats in the étang, his seamanship in rescuing the *Pluto* after the storm, and his strategic foresight in destroying the troops on the coast road. Many of the actions are of course based on real ones, those by Thomas Cochrane in the frigate *Impérieuse* in the same area. Forester actually refers to these, which occurred in 1808 and so place the date of *A Ship of the Line* as 1809.

The ending of the book is unhappy and untidy. I must confess that I like sad endings – they're more like real life. This is the only occasion on which Hornblower could be said really to have failed, in that his ship is destroyed under him, he surrenders and is taken prisoner – but that really happened many times, so why not to Hornblower too? Finally, of course, this ending really leaves you wanting more. Forester had a ready-made audience for his next episode in the Hornblower saga, *Flying Colours*.



The Voyage of the *Annie Marble* Pete Tessier

The method of travelling which saves most bother is to carry your house about with you and the easiest way to carry your house about is to go by water.

So starts my favourite CS Forester book. Published in 1929 it appears to have been well received by the critics. "One of the most charming books of travel that have appeared these many years", according to *The Daily Telegraph*.

"One is tempted to call Mr Forester an impossible writer, for so gaily, so attractively, does he write of his cruise along the rivers Seine and Loire, that the reader's continuous and all but irresistible impulse is to fling down the book in his haste to go and do likewise." *New Statesman*.

The Voyage of the Annie Marble points the way to a delightful and cheap holiday... The book is written in a gay, light-hearted vein and is, in addition, an eminently practical guide to the famous Chateau country from an entirely new aspect." *The Spectator*.

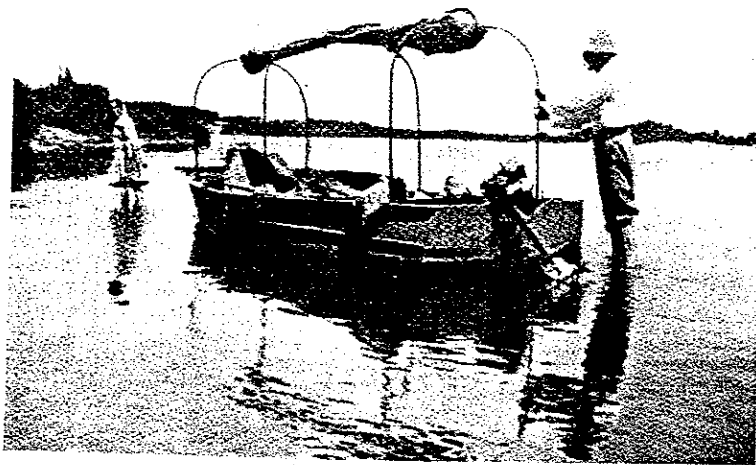
Forester himself, in *Long before Forty*, observed:-
As I have noticed when writing books about my travels, it is far more interesting to write and read about difficulties than about anything else in real life."

Looking forward to this particular journey, he adds:-
I may merely be a swollen corpse with my body rolling down the emerald green rapids of the Upper Loire, bumping gently against the golden beaches, being ground against the foam bordered rocks or eddies of that queen among rivers... I am starting out with my ridiculous little motor boat to descend the more dangerous half of the Loire."

I have utilised the critics because they affirm and provide the bedrock for my own view. A view that is founded on four constituent parts:-

- a) It is a book by my favourite author;
- b) It is a well crafted, beautifully observed adventure;
- c) It gives an interesting insight into CSF's character;
- d) Its impact on CSF's career.

I will not dally on the first point as I would be preaching to the converted! For the second, I suggest that CSF has a wonderful capacity for observation and reporting. He provides an insight into the lives of ordinary French people; their generosity, red-tape and authority, their disinclination to be overtaken! I was fascinated by his detailed description of an occupation that I will never



Members of this Society have been made aware of the views of CSF's sons. In *Annie Marble*, you will find this:-

I have conscientiously endeavoured to write the truth in this book, and I have found it a harder task than I expected, although it should not be very surprising that a professional novelist (and, still more, a professional biographer) should find difficulty in writing the truth.

know – that of the bargee. His observation about writing and reading about difficulty is spot on and the details of such add to that compulsion to turn the next page. Like all good writers and teachers he was an enthusiast, especially about the French countryside and as a francophile myself I can picture the places described and imagine visiting them. It is just a pity that the photographs let the text down.

The third part is, I think, the most interesting. When you consider the period we are talking about it takes quite a character to persuade a publisher to fund such an expedition on the basis of fortnightly articles to be followed by a book. Now I find from our own *Society Newsletter* (Volume 2, Issue 13) that he also persuaded the manufacturers of the Evinrude Fastwin outboard motor to supply that on the basis of the subsequent publicity. Then he goes on to be quite scathing about the operating instructions and starting problems. This leads to a further insight. He is no Hornblower. Can you imagine our hero arriving in France with the engine completely untested? Or allowing the floorboards to catch fire because a new pocket Primus was also untested?

A reviewer in *The Observer of Desolation Island* suggests that Patrick O'Brian packs more humour into his books. This may be so but whilst *en route* in *Annie Marble*, CSF allows himself a gentle and wry self-deprecation using *Annie*, *Kathleen* or his unnamed sister (either *Grace* or *Madge*) to deliver the barbs.

I also noticed that, as subsequently confirmed in *Two-and-Twenty*, he cannot resist an opportunity to pick fault with other writers if they are factually inaccurate about such matters as steering barges.

Combined with observations scattered through this book, I believe CSF was well aware of his own character. One attractive side to his personality and the book can best be encapsulated by pinching a line from *Crocodile Dundee*. It is: "Doesn't know what day it is and doesn't care. Lucky bastard."

Finally, it is my belief that this book was a milestone in CSF's career. It led to *The Annie Marble in Germany* which, perhaps axiomatically, lacks the freshness and capacity to enthral of the original. An influence can be found in *The Sky and the Forest*, in that the "empire" was expanded by river exploitation.

Take a man, a woman, a small boat and a river. Moving beyond the quality of his writing, I will leave you to speculate whether *The African Queen* would ever have been written without the *Annie Marble*.

For me, the crux is to be found in a passage in *The Hornblower Companion* which provides a commentary on a major part of the story line in *Flying Colours*. There you will find about Hornblower and, I suggest, CSF:-
He was experiencing the pleasures of the land, seeing beauty all new to him, like the dawn creeping mistily over a silent river, or a line of willows against the background of the different green of the hills. He was on the move too – a necessity for the happiness of a restless fellow like him, but sedately, without pressure, and with a sufficiency of trivial incidents (such as finding a channel through sandbanks) to keep his active mind from racketing itself into discontent.

When first I was reading this book, I knew that it was my favourite. Being asked to sit and re-read it to analyse why merely confirms my view. I commend *The Voyage of the Annie Marble* to you.

Judith Edwards and **Pete Tessier** thus contributed to a Symposium, organised by *the CS Forester Society* in Oxford in October 2003, on *My favourite CS Forester book*. Other contributions will follow – and are invited

Sir Edward Pellew and *Les Droits de L'Homme*

Ken Napier



While visiting Cornuaille, a district in Brittany west of Quimper, I came across a memorial to the men of the *Droits de l'Homme*. Hornblower was of course serving in *indefatigable*, under Captain Pellew, at the time! *Indefatigable* was a big 44, made by taking a deck out of a 64 gun ship. *Droits de l'Homme* was a 74.

Droits de l'Homme had taken part in the ill-fated French attempted landing in Bantry Bay. Wolfe Tone had come to France in the summer of 1796, and a plan was created to invade Ireland. Eventually a great fleet emerged from Brest in mid December: 17 Line of Battle ships, 13 frigates, 6 corvettes and 7 transports. They had onboard an army of 18,000 men, horse foot and artillery. Captain Sir Edward Pellew commanded the blockading Inshore Squadron, off Brest, including the frigates *Revolutionnaire*, *Amazon* and *Phoebe* as well as his own *indefatigable*. Pellew sent *Phoebe* to inform the blockading fleet, and *Amazon* to Portsmouth with the news. He then joined in the fun of the Fleet emerging from the risky Raz du Sein. A French corvette had been stationed to fire guns, rockets and burn lights, to guide the Fleet; so Pellew sailed into the middle of the enemy and created total confusion with guns and fireworks of his own - the 74 *seduisant* became a total loss with over 700 dead. Having confirmed that the Fleet could not return to harbour against the easterly winds, he then

sent *Phoebe* to inform the blockading British fleet of the French force's position and course and a lugger to Falmouth with the news. He himself went to Falmouth later in the day to semaphore the details - there was no point in staying off Brest with nothing to watch.

Evading the British blockading fleet, the French arrived at Bantry Bay, but despite all their efforts failed to achieve a landing - the winter weather was freezing and stormy and eventually after several ships were lost or in collision, the survivors retreated, being chased by six frigates from Cork.

Droits de l'Homme was commanded by Commodore La Crosse, a good officer, and also had onboard the renowned General Humbert. He had captured a small British privateer off the Shannon, and her crew were onboard as prisoners.

In continuing dirty weather he returned to France, and on 13 January 1797 thought himself to be 80 miles west of Belle Isle. The weather was foul, with strong westerlies. Eventually approaching the coast, he spotted two ships between himself and shore - *Indefatigable* and *Amazon*, now back on their station. Just after he sighted the British, a strong squall carried away his fore- and main topmasts. As he had a valuable full infantry battalion as well as the General on board, he decided to avoid action if possible.

Pellew knew his frigates were heavily outgunned, but only when the storm allowed the 74's lower gun ports to be opened (a similar problem to Crespo's in the *Natividad*). He caught up with *Droits de l'Homme* at 1730, in fading light and an increasing westerly - onshore - storm. *Amazon* was eight miles astern, but made for the gun flashes, arrived about 1845, and fired a broadside into the French ship's quarter. With considerable skill La Crosse managed to get both frigates on his windward side, allowing him to fire full broadsides. The frigates then moved ahead, to repair damage, and bring up more ammunition.

The action resumed at 2030, and continued all night, the ships manoeuvring as they could, the frigates trying to remain on the French bows, out of range of the full broadsides. The wind was still rising, and the seas ran high - the gundecks were awash. *Indefatigable* had several guns break loose, tearing ringbolts from the decks and bulkheads.

The frigates' fire killed numerous French guns' crews, but soldiers replaced them. At 2230, *Droits de l'Homme* lost her entire mizzen-mast, which had to be cut loose after it was damaged and swaying dangerously. The fore and aft driver was attached to the mizzen, and its loss made steering the ship very difficult. Two hours later, she had fired all of her round shot, and started to use shells. She must have fired in excess of 4,000 rounds.

By 0400 on 14 January extreme exhaustion was setting in, after eleven hours of night fighting in the most difficult conditions - cold, wet gales, and violent ship movement, with the possibility of disaster at any moment. *Amazon* had three feet of water in her hold, had lost her mizzen-mast and almost every other bit of rigging was in terrible condition, although her casualties were only three dead and fifteen injured. *Indefatigable* had four feet of water in her hold. Her masts were still standing but her rigging was in very poor condition. *Droits de l'Homme* was in much worse condition with 103 killed and 150 wounded.

At 0430, Lieutenant Bell, Fourth of *Indefatigable*, whose action station was the foc's'le, spotted breakers ahead after a break in the scudding clouds allowed some moonlight. Pellew reacted instantly, ceasing fire and getting his ship to go about into wind - a very difficult feat in her damaged condition. *Amazon* had been made aware of the land, but could not turn into wind. She tried to wear round, but had insufficient sea room and ran aground. *Droits de l'Homme* tried to go about too, but lost her damaged bowsprit and foremast, leaving only her badly torn mainsail. She struck heavily on a sandbank, struck again, and turned onto her side with the huge waves breaking right over her.

By dawn, after *Amazon's* desperate manoeuvring, *Indefatigable* could see her ashore, with *Droits de l'Homme* two miles south and the surf breaking over her. Pellew could do nothing to help. The ships had run aground in the west facing Bay of Audierne, with the Pointe du Raz and its shoals to the north and the Pointe de Penmarc'h with its shoals to the south. Captain Reynolds in *Amazon* got rafts constructed and when there were enough for the crew, all were ashore and taken prisoner by 0900, having run aground at 0500.

On *Droits de l'Homme*, turned on her side, the crew panicked. The British prisoners were released from the orlop. Although the ship was barely 200 yards offshore, it was five days before the full rescue ended, and two thirds of the survivors, sailors and soldiers, had died of exposure.

On the British side, Pellew's action was a quite outstanding feat of seamanship and bravery, and he went on to become Commander in Chief Mediterranean after the death of Collingwood.

Sources and adaptations

For a full account, Ken recommended James Henderson, *The Frigates* - a book with much more of interest. The Wordsworth paperback of 1998, still in print, is a facsimile of the 1970 first edition. Both are available through www.abebooks.co.uk.

The primary sources are Pellew's letters, and an account that Henderson mentions by an army officer who was a prisoner of war. *The narrative of the dreadful shipwreck of Les Droits de l'Homme... by Elias Pipon, lieut., 63rd regiment* was in volume VIII of the edition of the *Naval Chronicle* that Forester bought to read on the voyage of the *Annie Marble*. These documents are in Volume 1 of the new consolidated edition.⁴ Another secondary source that Forester probably read is C Northcote Parkinson's scarce 1934 biography of Sir Edward Pellew. It is on the web page of the Honourable Peter Pellew.⁵ The *Maritime History and Naval Heritage Homepage* is worth visiting for more than its links to Audierne Bay - *To Annoy the Enemy* - family history by Adam and Giles Quinan - the descendants a father and son, both named John Thomson, both on board *Indefatigable* in the battle, which saw the elder promoted from First Lieutenant to Master and Commander, the younger from Master's Mate to Lieutenant - going on to serve on the (real) *Renown* and to be awarded a 50-guinea sword by the Patriotic Fund! Plus a page with Pipon.⁶

Audierne Bay apparently featured somewhere in Marryat - and may have inspired Herman Melville's 1891 allegory of the year 1797. It might be far-fetched to identify the deeply-religious and strict disciplinarian Edward Vere as Pellew, or *Indefatigable* as *Indomitable* (74), did not the latter, redeemed by Billy Budd's calvary, go on to defeat the French *Athéiste*, and had not Billy been impressed from a ship named by its owner after Paine's *Rights of Man*.

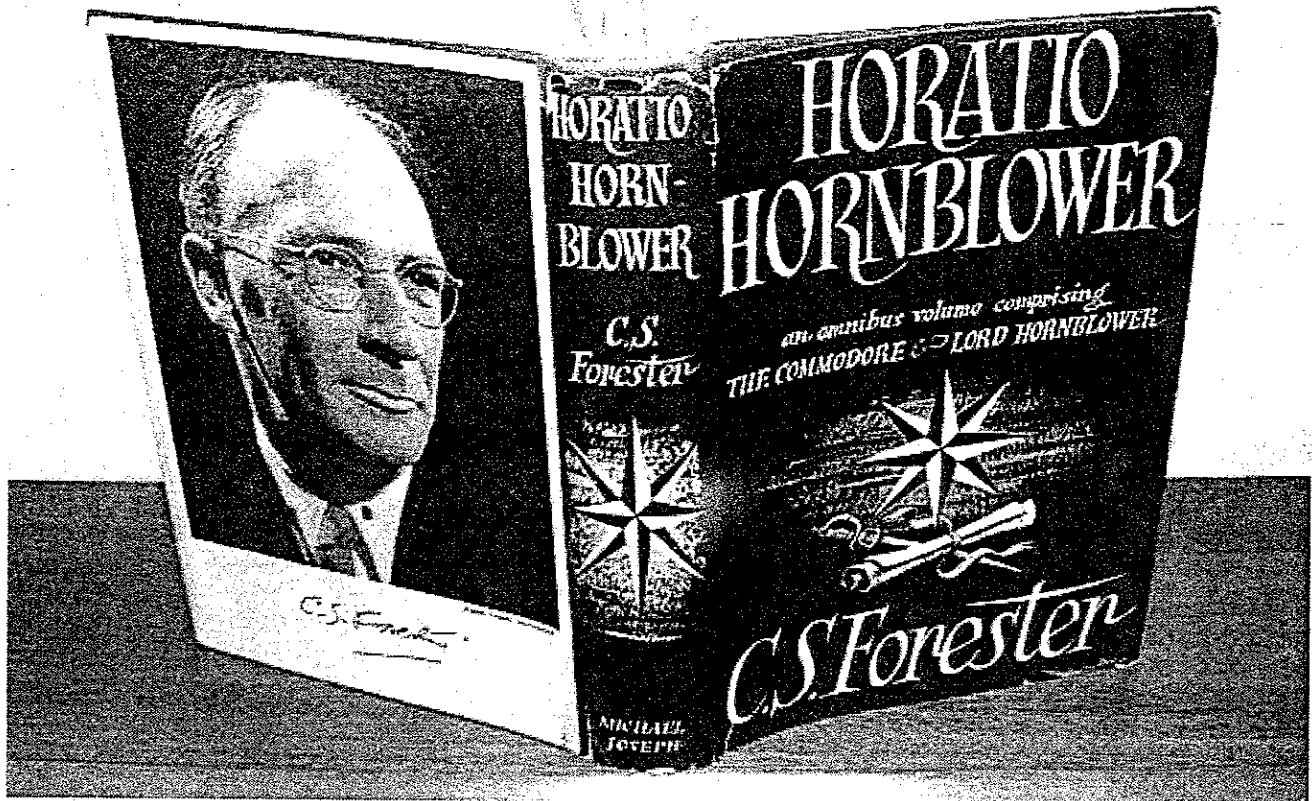
But most interesting is how the sinking of *Droits de l'Homme* - and other incidents in Pellew's career - seem to influence the development of Forester's own hero. In *The Happy Return*, first written as a stand-alone story, Hornblower tells "how Pellew took his frigates into the very surf to sing (sic) the *Droits de l'Homme* with two thousand men on board". Elsewhere, if I remember rightly, he is said to have been casting the lead! But *The Duchess and the Devil*, written much later, has Pellew based at Gibraltar, not Falmouth, and Hornblower taken prisoner off Cape St Vincent on 14 February 1797 (just a month after Audierne Bay), then freed for aiding Spanish sailors shipwrecked by an English frigate. Perhaps Forester recycled Audierne Bay into this story, conflating it with a reworking of Pellew's rescue of survivors from the *Dutton* Indiaman off Plymouth on 26 January 1796.⁷ Pipon's remark that "in consequence of the help we afforded in saving many lives, a cartel was fitted out by order of the French Government, to send us home without ransom or exchange", could offer confirmation. Unfortunately I have not found anything more about Pipon. David Stead

⁴ Nicholas Tracy (editor), *The Naval Chronicle, volume 1*, Chatham Publishing (1998), pages 168-170.

⁵ Go to www.pellew.com, choose [exmouth](#), then [parkinson](#).

⁶ www.cronab.demon.co.uk/marit.htm.

⁷ David Gore, *Graduates of the sea: Edward Pellew*, *Osprey Military Journal* 3.6 (2001), pages 27-29.



Alexander of Macedon kept Homer by his bedside. Others, more recently, have looked elsewhere.

Admirable Hornblower! Churchill on Forester

Don Beadle

Recently I was reading Roy Jenkins' well-written biography of Churchill and was interested to note how he referred to Churchill reading some of the books of C.S. Forester. I therefore took down from my bookshelves the comprehensive volumes of Martin Gilbert's biography and found quite a few excellent references to Churchill's reading habits and his particular liking of Forester books. I used our public library for further quotes and found one or two but was disappointed that John Colville, Churchill's private secretary, although mentioning some other authors, did not mention Forester – however, his diaries make fascinating reading so it was enjoyable if unproductive research. The following records my findings but I hope it may inspire other members of the Society to come up with further information about how Forester was appreciated not only by Churchill but also by other famous people.

The date of the first mention of Churchill reading Forester is August 1941 when he was taking passage in HMS *Prince of Wales* on his way to Newfoundland for the historic meeting with President Roosevelt that

resulted in the production and signing of the Atlantic Charter. Gilbert quotes from the diaries of his Private Secretary, John Martin, as follows:

At midday on August 5, the Prince of Wales altered course to avoid a U-boat reported ahead. It was a comparatively idle day with Churchill reading a novel. As Churchill himself recorded, "for the first time in many months I could read a book for pleasure". The book he chose had been given him by Oliver Lyttelton: it was Captain Hornblower RN, which he recalled, "I found vastly entertaining".

On August 9 *Prince of Wales* waited to enter Placentia Bay:-

Churchill sent a telegram to Oliver Lyttelton to thank him for his leisure reading. It read simply: HORN BLOWER ADMIRABLE. This message, Churchill later recalled, "caused perturbation in the Middle East Headquarters where it was imagined that "Hornblower" was the code-word for some special operation, of which they had not been told.¹

¹ Martin Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, pages 1156; 1158.

The next mention also records some leisure reading whilst he was again on board a battleship crossing the Atlantic for a further meeting with President Roosevelt. To quote from Gilbert:

On Sunday December 21st, 1941 the Duke of York reached United States territorial waters. On his last day on board ship, Churchill dictated a letter to his wife, setting out the account of his voyage.

It included the following:

I have read two books Brown on Resolution and Forty Centuries Look Down. You would like both of them particularly the opening part of Brown on Resolution which is a charming love story most attractively told. The other is a very good account of Napoleon's relations with Josephine.... I will bring them both back for you.²

In a footnote, Gilbert notes "Brown on Resolution" by C.S.Forester (1899-1966) was published in 1929. It is a story of individual courage and resistance, set in the First World War.

Churchill's private comments on *Brown on Resolution* will strike a bell with most of us who have especially enjoyed that book. With Churchill's direct responsibilities for naval matters in the First World War the strategic background would have been of special interest to him and it is good to see how he was appreciating Forester beyond Hornblower.

It is not until 1951 that there is a further reference to Churchill's appreciation of Forester and this is recorded by Gilbert as follows:

Churchill had returned to Chartwell, where at once he began and finished, a book which its author had sent to him: C.S.Forester's novel, Lord Hornblower. On 5th July 1951 he wrote to its author:

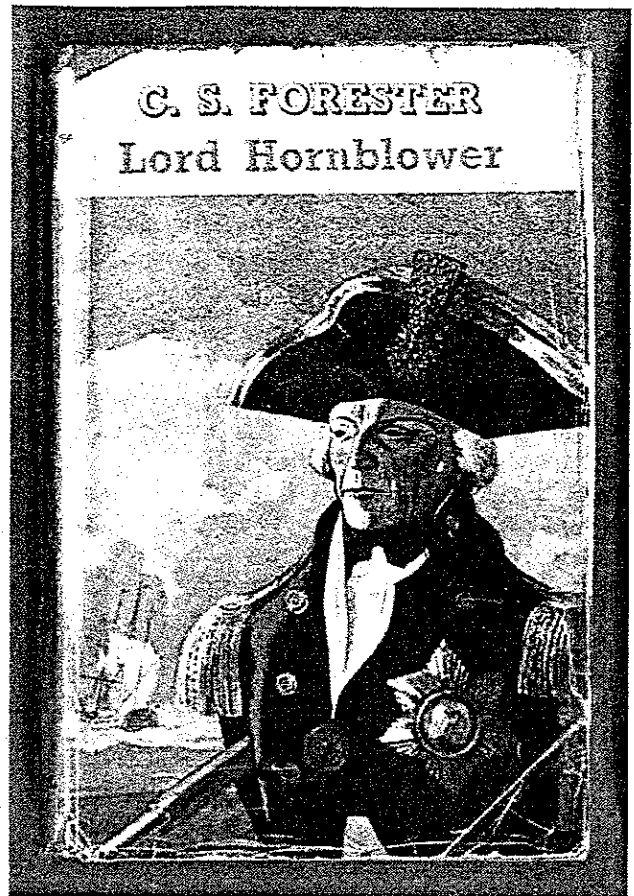
"I read Lord Hornblower during twenty-four hours. I have only one complaint about it; it is too short. This is a fault which, if I may say so, belongs in my opinion to all your writings on this inspiring topic. You have created a personality which calls back from the past a grand but hard manifestation of the Royal Navy, in its age of glory. The dark side is not concealed but, after all we fought and conquered not only for Britain against Napoleon, but kept our place among nations to render other services to the whole world in a succeeding century.

"Thank you so much", Churchill ended, "for sending me a signed copy which I shall always prize. Please write more about it all"³

I think this is the most interesting quote that I have unearthed. Churchill's criticism about the shortness of some of Forester's books is one that I have sometimes felt appropriate. In particular I thought his masterly

² Martin Gilbert, *Road to Victory*, page 20.

³ Martin Gilbert *Never Despair*, page 620



"He's like Nelson," as Bush told Barbara. Never more so than on the jacket of the first edition of Lord Hornblower!

biography of Nelson ended almost abruptly, the last sentence reading "Then followed the three hours of excruciating agony, when a victory being reported to Vice-Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson he then died of his wounds". No account is given of what happened to his remains or how the nation mourned him as a national hero. Possibly other researchers may be able to discover from Forester's papers what he thought about this criticism.

Churchill returned to power as Prime Minister in October 1951 and resumed his travels to many conferences abroad so it is not until December 1951, just after his 79th birthday, when he went to Bermuda for discussions with President Eisenhower and the French Prime Minister, that there is another reference to Forester. Gilbert records it as follows:

"At midnight on 1 December 1953 Churchill left London by air for Bermuda. "Lunched at a table for four" Lord Moran noted during the flight. "the Prof and the P.M. on one side, Anthony Eden and I opposite. After greeting Anthony cheerfully, Winston took up his book Death to the French by C.S.Forester, and kept his nose in it throughout the meal."⁴

Roy Jenkins also refers to this occasion:-

⁴ Martin Gilbert *Never Despair*, page 916

"Moran recorded how, at lunch on the plane between Gander and Bermuda, Churchill ignored his table companions (Eden, Cherwell and Moran himself) and voraciously read C.S.Forester's *Death to the French*, an unfortunate title if it was observed in his hand when he disembarked. (for a conference with the Americans and the French)."⁵

John Ramsden's new discussion suggests that Churchill mischievously used the book to tease the French: *In Bermuda, delighted that the illness of the French premier, Laniel, meant that he missed most of the meetings, Churchill was immersed in a novel by C.S.Forester called *Death to the French* and managed to get himself photographed by the press with the book in his hand and the title clearly visible.*⁶

A further reference by Gilbert shows that Churchill's enjoyment of Forester was well recognised by his family. It is a pity that the titles are not mentioned and sometime I must go to Chartwell and examine the library. The reference was:

*As planned, Christmas (1957) was a quiet one. The gifts that year from relatives and friends included some C.S.Forester books from Randolph.*⁷

Finally, and rather sadly, just two and a half years before Churchill's death, Gilbert records:

*On July 20 (1962) Churchill had two visitors at the Middlesex Hospital... "He has certainly made a wonderful recovery" Macmillan noted in his diary, "He was sitting up reading a novel of C.S.Forester..."*⁸

That completes my research into Churchill's appreciation of Forester but, as I suggested at the beginning of this article, other members of the Society may be able to add to it and, perhaps, also find records of similar appreciation of Forester by other famous people. I have for instance noted the following from Philip Zeigler's biography of Mountbatten:

*"From the early 1940s biographers had indeed been bombarding him with requests that they should be allowed to take him as a subject. His own choice would probably have been C.S.Forester, who had been asked by the Ministry of Information in 1944 whether he would undertake the task. "If ever there is to be a biography written about me (which God forbid)," wrote Mountbatten, "there is no single writer I would more willingly have as an author... since you undoubtedly succeed in capturing the spirit of the sea better than any other author I have read"."*⁹

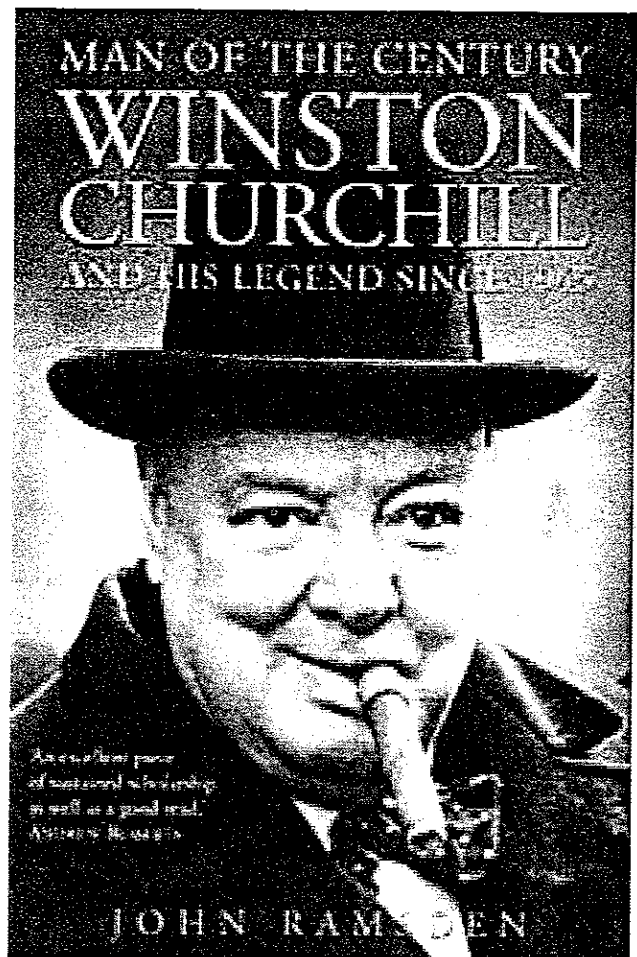
⁵ Roy Jenkins *Churchill*, page 872

⁶ John Ramsden, *Man of the Century: Churchill and his Legend since 1945*, (2003)

⁷ Martin Gilbert, *Never Despair*, page 1257.

⁸ Martin Gilbert, *Never Despair*, page 1337.

⁹ Philip Ziegler, *Mountbatten*, page 666



Breaking the Mould?

He is commemorated throughout the world by museums, statues and street signs, and on shelves of books, many written by Churchill himself. Political figures are objects of intense posthumous scrutiny, but few have achieved such impact, and fewer still have so orchestrated their own place in history. *Man of the Century* is the story of how Churchill, in his last years, crafted his reputation for posterity, and reveals him as the 20th century's first, and perhaps most gifted, "spin doctor." It is also a far-ranging account of Churchill's continuing impact on British, American, and European politics, and of the powerful legacy of his vision of a common destiny and heritage for English-speaking peoples around the world. Author John Ramsden, Professor of History at Queen Mary, University of London, draws on fresh material and extensive research to show how Churchill's personality and jingoism have contributed directly to events of several decades - including the role of the Anglo-American alliance in promoting and protecting a certain vision of world order. For Churchill's legacy cemented that alliance through the first half of the Cold War. His 'lessons on Munich' helped steer Britain to Suez Crisis and the United States into Vietnam, while the Churchillian conviction that Britain was still a great imperial power contributed to the country's painfully slow adjustment to post-war realities, and continues to hamper Britain's role in Europe today

Right about Everything? – Forester on Churchill

David Stead

Forester's recently-discovered, and highly enigmatic, 1948 review of *The Gathering Storm*

Introduction

The editor's task *should* be simple! A new article by CS Forester has been discovered – a review published in the *Atlantic Monthly* of August 1948. Hence, a need for a little research, to facilitate a brief commentary that will clarify historical details for readers who might not fully grasp them. But in this case, research soon reveals a string of odd emphases, omissions and exaggerations in the new text – which one must struggle to explain.

The end result will seem controversial, or worse. So let me stress that I am not a revisionist historian, and do not consider myself an expert on the period in question. The only event involving Churchill that I recollect is his funeral. That said, some might prefer to skip this article!

Churchill: a short biography

Winston Churchill (1874-1965) traced his origins to John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, a key player in the fall of James II and the wars of Queen Anne (1688-1714). He was born in Marlborough's Blenheim Palace. His father held office in the Conservative Government of 1886-92, and it was for this party that Winston entered Parliament in 1900. In 1904 he joined the Liberals, rapidly rising, to become First Lord of the Admiralty (1911-1915).

His role in World War I was controversial. His support for the disastrous Gallipoli campaign forced his demotion and resignation. After Lloyd George replaced Asquith as Prime Minister, he returned to high office. Defeated in the 1922 General Election, he returned as a Conservative in 1924, to become Chancellor of the Exchequer in Baldwin's second government (1924-29). He left Baldwin's third administration (the National Government, formed with erstwhile Labour leader Macdonald) in 1931, over its concessions to the Indian independence movement. He was recalled by Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain when Britain declared war on Germany in September 1939, and reinstated at the Admiralty.

Churchill became Prime Minister in May 1940. He worked with President Roosevelt to win military and political support from Washington. After the Soviet Union and the USA entered the war in 1941, Churchill forged close personal ties with Roosevelt and Stalin. Conferences of the "Big Three" defined post-war Europe. But Churchill lost power to the Labour Party in the election of 1945.

Forester would have been surprised by Churchill's return as Prime Minister in 1951! He finally retired in 1955, to devote his last years to painting and writing. He had always been a prolific historian. His works include series on *The World Crisis* (1923-29), *Marlborough* (1933-38), *The Second World War* (1948-53), and *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples* (1956-58).

The Gathering Storm: Churchill 1924-36

The first section of Forester's article covers part of the first half of *The Gathering Storm*, itself the first volume of Churchill's history of *The Second World War*. The next two parts of this article will briefly compare Forester's account of events with standard histories and some personal research, and contrast Forester's 1948 verdict on Churchill's activities with his own pre-war views.

After brief allusions to the 18th-century Prime Ministers Walpole (made by Churchill) and North (in office during the War of American Independence), Forester turns to the years 1920-1939. An accurate aside on the Weimar Republic interrupts a tendentious account of the early years of the "National Government" (1931-1945). The surprise is the omission of the middle years (1937-39), those of Chamberlain's "appeasement" of the growing menace of Hitler, culminating in the Munich "betrayal" of September 1938. Instead, we have a nod to what is largely legend. Churchill spoke out (true); *only* he spoke out (false), as Hitler went from strength to strength. There is neither space nor justification to fill that gap here. Let us focus on what Forester does say.

Churchill cannot have been always right, after all! For Von Seeckt, Weimar's commander-in-chief (1920-26), who had served on the German, Austro-Hungarian and Turkish General Staffs, was allowed to reform military doctrine and tactics. The 35-division, 100,000-man army permitted at Versailles was trained in mobile combined operations, aided by opportunities opened by the 1922 German-Soviet Rapallo Treaty. Seeckt thus indeed created the foundation for the *Wehrmacht* and the *blitzkrieg* tactics of 1939-1940.¹⁰ Weimar Germany also joined the League of Nations, and received US aid through the Dawes Plan – no doubt one of the American mistakes which Churchill and Forester chide. As if Germany *could* have been permanently quarantined!

¹⁰ James S. Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg: Hans von Seeckt and German Military Reform*, University Press of Kansas (1992).

Wrath now falls upon the French – who let Hitler have the Rhineland – and the British – for conceding naval control of the Baltic. In fact, the National Government agreed an Anglo-German ratio of 100:35 in surface ships, with submarines at 100:45 or even 100:100 in case of danger from Russia, in June 1935. Germany had nothing like 35% of British naval power or any conceivable chance of achieving it. The result of what was MacDonal's blundering violation of the letter of Versailles was to alienate both France and Italy, Britain's allies in the creaking Stresa Front against aggression! Italy then invaded Ethiopia and in March 1936 Hitler moved on the Rhine. Neither France nor Britain would (or could!) react. In the League, Soviet Russia urged sanctions, an *advocacy enough to damn the proposal*. Many had protested over Ethiopia, although Italy had airforce and navy astride the route to Suez, and Britain – should war come – no ally. The outcry had sufficed for the November 1935 election, when Baldwin obtained an unobtrusive mandate for rearmament.

Churchill had not joined the Ethiopia protest – he was abroad at the time.¹¹ And Forester's own fervour to contain Mussolini might not predate his reading of *The Gathering Storm*. The climax of *The Ship* offers an in-depth discussion of Italian politics, presenting Italy as a reluctant and unreliable ally of Germany, and Mussolini (admittedly now past his prime) as one who practised caution as unflinchingly as he preached risk.¹² This independent judgement – written in 1942, well before Italy's switch of sides – shows some acumen. In 1948 – with Mussolini long gone – Forester echoed Churchill's retrospective preaching of action against him!

Looking back again, Forester berates the cowards who had feared the bomber – an unknown quantity, so he claims, in the 1930s – and lamenting the endemic delusion that war would never return. By now, half of *Hornblower* – emblem of armed resistance to continental tyranny – stood between Forester and his own pacifist past! By contrast, Churchill was the bomber's fervent champion. In March 1936, his recall was prematurely anticipated – as Minister for Defence – but another man was appointed. A committee was then set up, under Sir Henry Tizard, which quietly deployed the newly-invented radar to the eastern approaches, and persuaded the government that fighters were cheaper than bombers! Churchill burst upon the committee with his own adviser, FA Lindemann, "rough, impatient, and intolerant of any ideas except his own – some of which were crackbrained". Tizard had Churchill and Lindemann ejected. Four years later, the radar and fighters saved Britain. The sequel need not concern us here.¹³

¹¹ AJP Taylor, *English History 1914-1945*, Penguin (1975), pages 463-478 (emphases added).

¹² CS Forester, *The Ship*, Michael Joseph (1950), page 177 (ch 25).

¹³ Taylor, pages 479-483.

A deafening silence

The General makes comments on British politics, which can be compared with actual events. Curzon's Conservative father-in-law predicts that Asquith will admit some of the Opposition to office. To the historian, the sudden death of Britain's last Liberal government remains enigmatic, though Conservative leader Law got his greatest wish! "The one great casualty" was Churchill – with a footnote that "the Unionists also insisted on excluding Haldane, the lord chancellor, because of his alleged pro-German sympathies". Forester's emphasis is the exact opposite! For him, the most disastrous loss was "the greatest War Minister England ever had". Haldane had held that office in the pre-war Liberal Government, creating the modern army: the General Staff, the Territorials, the doctrine of the BEF. Churchill simply packed his bags and slunk away, in surely significant silence from Forester.¹⁴

Lloyd George's ejection of Asquith in December 1916 was a key event, a very British revolution, – the new man as a latter-day Napoleon, dynamite replacing a damp squib. To win Conservative support for his Coalition, Lloyd George cynically excluded Churchill. This time, Forester's silence was total. *The General* does not refer to the coup at all! "War socialism or a negotiated peace were the stark alternatives"¹⁵ now facing Britain – the first preached from the back benches by Churchill as Forester finished school. Some 15 years later, he still shrank from the abuse that greeted "Lord Lansdowne's very sensible suggestion" of negotiation. Lansdowne first urged this course in November 1916. A year on his proposal appeared in the *Daily Telegraph*, after rejection by *The Times*.¹⁵

Forester missed yet another chance to praise Churchill – when he was supposedly at the very helm, in 1914:-

"The tremendous strength of England was to be exerted against Von Spee's squadron... There was a new power at the Admiralty – Fisher, who had become First Sea Lord at the time of the disaster at Coronel. Spee was to be hunted down and exterminated... *Leopard* had been stationed for three weeks already in the West Indies... But to the new personality at the Admiralty any such defensive attitude was distasteful and obnoxious. *Leopard* must be used offensively." To stress the point, Forester gives his imaginary ship a dramatic transit of the Panama Canal.¹⁶ But surely the sudden mention of Fisher, when the reader will have already guessed "Churchill", is even more startling. The silence is surely deafening.

¹⁴ Taylor, page 60 and note 3; SE Koss, *Lord Haldane: scapegoat for Liberalism*, Columbia (1969), p 53; Forester, *The General*, ch 13).

¹⁵ CS Forester, *Long before Forty*, Michael Joseph (1967), page 81; Taylor, pages 59-60; 100-101; 104-109; 134;

¹⁶ Forester, *Brown on Resolution*, ch 17.

Winnie's back! (1939-1940)

The second section of Forester's article gives a long account of some of Part Two of *The Gathering Storm*. It focuses almost entirely on the naval war and combined operations of 1939-40, during Churchill's second stint at the Admiralty. A coda discusses Churchill as a historian – comparing him to Thucydides and Tacitus! If we compare Forester's discussion of strategy with a standard modern account - we find another catalogue of bewildering inclusions, omissions - and exaggerations. Not even Churchill would have claimed that he was reappointed to the Admiralty on the strength of his own account of his first incumbency!

The quality of the Navy was shown at the battle of the River Plate (December 1939). But if Forester's text was all we had, we might conclude that *Exeter* had defeated the bigger *Graf Spee* in a brilliant single ship duel! The truth, of course, is that *Exeter* would have been lost but for her escorting cruisers, that *Graf Spee* reached a neutral harbour, that Captain Langsdorff was driven to scuttling and suicide by diplomacy and deception.

No note is taken of a catalogue of disaster: the loss of *Courageous*, the near loss of *Ark Royal* and *Hood*, through the Admiralty's disdain for the realities of air and submarine warfare; the eviction of the Home Fleet from Scapa; the penetration of the Thames estuary and Loch Euwe - and the sacrifices (*Glow Worm*, *Rawlpindi*). As "hunting units" ranged distant seas to little effect, the navy could barely keep its head above home waters.¹⁷

The armchair strategist sees genius behind three more schemes. The *Altmark* affair - the liberation of prisoners-of-war from a false-flagged tanker, was really little more than a boys' comic incident, but one which might have underpinned a chapter of *The Commodore*. But control of the Baltic was a problem that had once defeated the combined brains of Churchill and Fisher, or so we are told. Churchill's idea was to revamp Gallipoli: to convert a squadron of battleships into lumbering monitors, whose deployment would win command of the sea, rob Hitler of Swedish iron ore and bring most of Scandinavia if not Russia too into the war on Britain's side. He was obsessed with this pet project, which Fleet Admiral Pound needed much ingenuity to thwart.¹⁸ But Fisher had been no Pound! Gallipoli had driven him from despair to resignation, in May 1915, hastening the First Coalition, and the traumatic demise of Churchill!¹⁹

The third episode was Norway. Avoiding inconvenient detail, Forester takes much space to show that, but for

¹⁷ Correlli Barnett, *Engage the enemy more closely: the Royal Navy in the Second World War*, Penguin (2000), pages 57-118

¹⁸ Barnett, pages 93-96; 101-102.

¹⁹ Barnett, pages 58-59.

the perversity of fortune, genius would have surely triumphed. But the weather was against the British; it had not been fully appreciated that people get killed in wars; and neither Churchill's Cabinet nor the Germans had read up on the 1807 Baltic campaign! Unlike Churchill – and Forester, who had recently transferred some details to *The Commodore*!²⁰

A historian might have better weighed results, which were not all negative. The affair had been ludicrously misconceived, a very Churchillian disaster, a strategic defeat which left Germany in total control of Norway. But at a price: German losses were more serious, despite more blunders that put *Glorious* and *Acasta* under the guns of battlecruisers.²¹ But perhaps this was an irrelevant *encore*. Hitler was about to strike massively in the west, and to call Churchill to even higher things.

Come the hour, come the men!

The rationale of this article was a commentary on Forester's rediscovered piece on Churchill. Forester's own rationale still eludes me, though 3 notions can be discarded. He did not give an objective account of *The Gathering Storm*. He did not write a serious piece of independent historical analysis. Whatever he implied, he had *not* been a supporter of Churchill through the Wilderness Years! So, what alternatives remain?

Commissioned to write a review for a prestigious magazine, that would help the *Atlantic Monthly* to benefit from what was a very important publishing event, Forester could have dashed off a facile piece in which he indulged in his own pet theories, knowing he would be paid, published, read - and most likely taken seriously by legions of fans. But this does not account for the tone - for which "adulatory" would not be too strong a term. Perhaps the rationale is in the context of 1948.

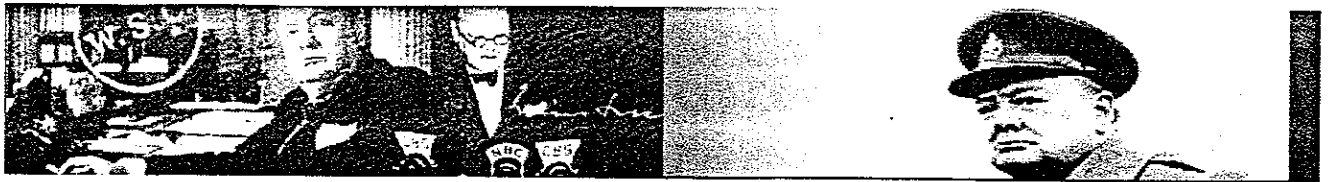
Churchill was now out of office again, reinventing himself as a World Statesman. Two years before – and somewhat prematurely, though with President Truman's prior knowledge - he had denounced the descent of the Iron Curtain on Europe. In spring 1948, Truman was being assured by diplomats and the CIA that Stalin could achieve Hitler's dream if he struck before the West was ready; that war was inevitable in one year rather than two, that peace could not be guaranteed beyond 60 days.²² The immediate result was confrontation over Berlin; the long-term consequences lasted 40 years.

This writer does not believe Forester was a real Cold Warrior. He does not doubt that he was an opportunist!

²⁰ Richard Woodman, *The Sea Warriors*, Robinson (2002), page 210.

²¹ Barnett, pages 119-139.

²² Martin McCauley, *The origins of the Cold War*, Pearson (2003), pages 41-49.



Winston Churchill, Leader and Historian

C S Forester

1

Winston Churchill's new book falls into two distinct halves – Out of Office and In Office – if not as different as chalk from cheese, at least as different as ice and water. In the last three hundred pages of *The Gathering Storm: The Second World War* (Houghton Mifflin in association with Cooperation Publishing, \$6.00) he tells of his own deeds; in the first four hundred he gives us the history of the years between the wars, during most of which he was a spectator – a highly privileged spectator and one whose keen insight and innumerable friendships gave much weight to his opinions, but a spectator all the same.



Guilty Men? The brunt of the blame for the British Foreign Policy of the inter-war years, which is presented as a prime cause of World War II, falls on Prime Ministers Ramsay MacDonald (Labour turned Nationalist, 1931-35) and Stanley Baldwin (Conservative/Nationalist, 1935-37).

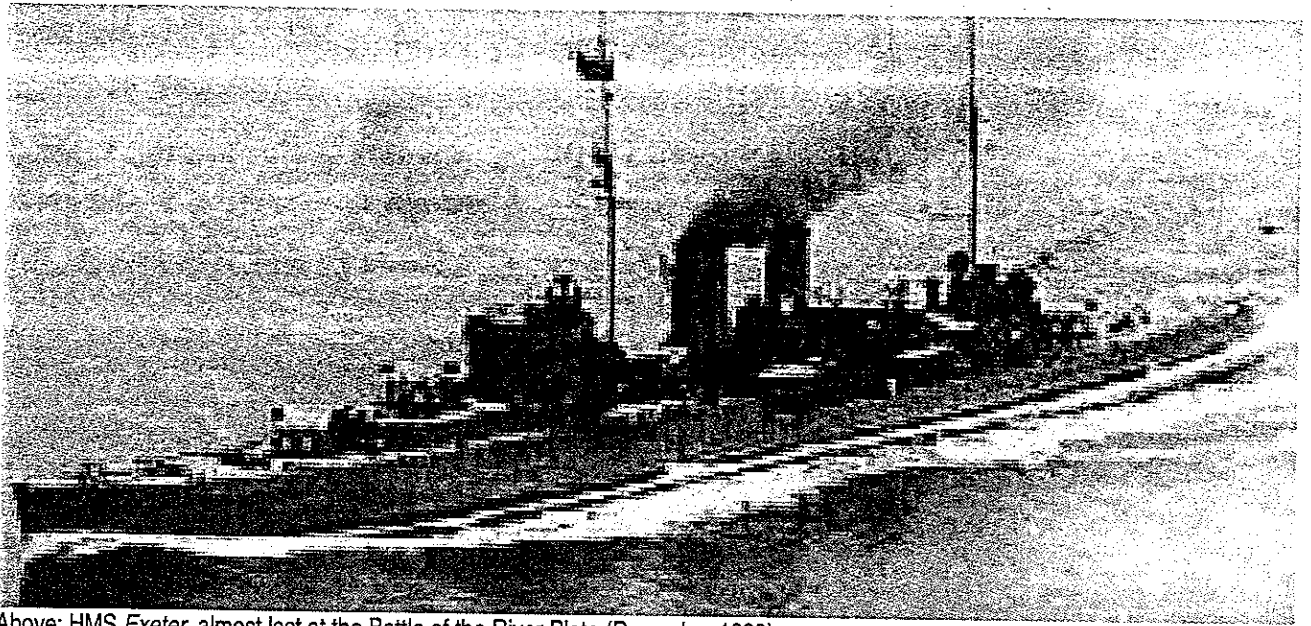
The authorities whom he quotes have nearly in every case long been published, and the history with which he deals has mostly been written before. He assails the governments whose foreign and military policies (Mr Churchill is at his best in his insistence upon the close relationship between military power and foreign policy) during those fatal years were as inept as anything history can show. He draws an analogy between the Baldwin-MacDonald regime and the Walpole administration of two centuries earlier, but he need not have gone back quite so far. There appears to be a closer analogy between Mr Baldwin and Lord North; in each case we have a prime minister carrying through a fatal policy by the aid of astute party management. Mr Baldwin was obsessed with the notion (not uncommon among Prime Ministers) that the stability of the country depended on his continuance in power; Lord North

wished to maintain the royal ascendancy; but each persisted in a course of action which, within a very few years, was proved to be utterly wrongheaded.

Perhaps Mr Churchill does not lay quite enough stress on one factor which accounts for much of the national acquiescence in the Baldwin-MacDonald policy – namely, the almost universal belief that nobody outside an asylum (certainly no one in a responsible position) would be such a fool as to start war again. Statesmen might threaten and bluster, or even, as became apparent later on, might send inconsiderable Japanese against negligible Chinese, Italians against Abyssinians, to kill or to be killed, but no one would ever take a decision that would put the soldiers back in the trenches of Passchendaele; the voting public of the world believed that, confronted by such possibility, no one could possibly commit such an act of criminal folly. At the last moment the blusterers would draw back. Nowadays we can at least profit by the knowledge that it can happen again.

Yet allied with this feeling among the masses was another feeling among the leaders: fear. It was fear which, in the last word, held back the British government from dealing with Mussolini in the Mediterranean as he should have been dealt with and as (history now shows) he could have been dealt with. Fear influenced the foreign policy of every government, whose true interest lay in the maintenance of law and order, to such an extent that even after the die had been cast and war was an actual though still almost unbelievable fact, the French government was afraid to stir up Hitler by offensive action for fear of reprisals. They thought of death raining from the skies; no one knew how effective air warfare might be, and no one was anxious that his people should find out first. Today statesmen face similar problems.

From the moment of the accession of Hitler to power, the need of a leader on the opposite side was of vital urgency, and yet no such leader arose, no one man who could rally not only the opinion but the military potential of civilized Europe in the cause of peace. If Mr Baldwin had only possessed Mr Churchill's military insight and



Above: HMS *Exeter*, almost lost at the Battle of the River Plate (December 1939)

his fearlessness of responsibility - ! If Mr Churchill had only possessed Mr Baldwin's ability to manage an electorate - !

Looking back as Mr Churchill does we are as amazed as he is both at the number and at the magnitude of the mistakes of the British government, of the French government, and for that matter of the American government. Mr Churchill himself was in high office during the time when the first seeds of future troubles were being sown; he was Chancellor of the Exchequer for five years while Seeckt was laying the foundations of the German army with which later Hitler nearly conquered the world, and therefore he must bear a little of the responsibility himself. But after that Mr Churchill held no office; part of the time he was not even a Member of Parliament, and part of the time he was not a member of the Conservative Party, and he could only utter warnings to which no attention was paid, while the civilized governments slid steadily down the slope towards destruction - and sometimes leapt down it voluntarily.

From mere inertia the French government permitted the reoccupation of the Rhineland; of its own free will the British government entered into the naval agreement with Hitler which made war possible for Germany by ensuring her dominance of the Baltic, and everybody kept silence - save Mr Churchill - while Hitler pushed on that rearmament of Germany in the air and on the land which was the most dangerous violation of the Treaty of Versailles. Mr Churchill uttered continual cries of warning, and in every case that he quotes he was proved right by subsequent events - we could wish we could be as right in any single thing as Mr Churchill was right in everything.

2

THEN CAME WAR, and Mr Churchill was instantly requested by Mr Chamberlain to assume the responsibilities of the Admiralty; the correctness of his predictions entitled him to office, as well as his record as a fearless and ceaselessly energetic minister in wartime, and we can guess that the brilliance of the opening volumes of *The World Crisis* played a large part in the decision as to which office he should actually hold. Mr Churchill took over the direction of a navy for whose development and organization others had been responsible for more than twenty years. It was a superb fighting force, remarkably free from the purely materialistic obsessions which had characterized British naval thought (in defiance of the Nelsonian tradition) in 1914, when tonnage was weighed against tonnage, and armament against armament, and yet German gunnery control enabled German guns to commence hitting in half the time it took British guns to hit back, and German night-fighting arrangements (as Jellicoe subsequently complained) were so superior to those of the British as to make a night action undesirable on those grounds alone.

The navy in 1939 was trained and equipped for its tasks, and the action in the River Plate speedily demonstrated the fact, when the *Exeter* scored hits on the *Graf Spee* as quickly as that crack ship with her bigger guns scored hits upon her. Mr Churchill describes the action with all the brilliance and lucidity we have come to expect of him, and the victory there was the direct result of teamwork of the highest order. Mr Churchill himself was responsible for the deployment of the navy in the "hunting units", each strong enough to deal with a surface raider, and in the areas where the hunting units

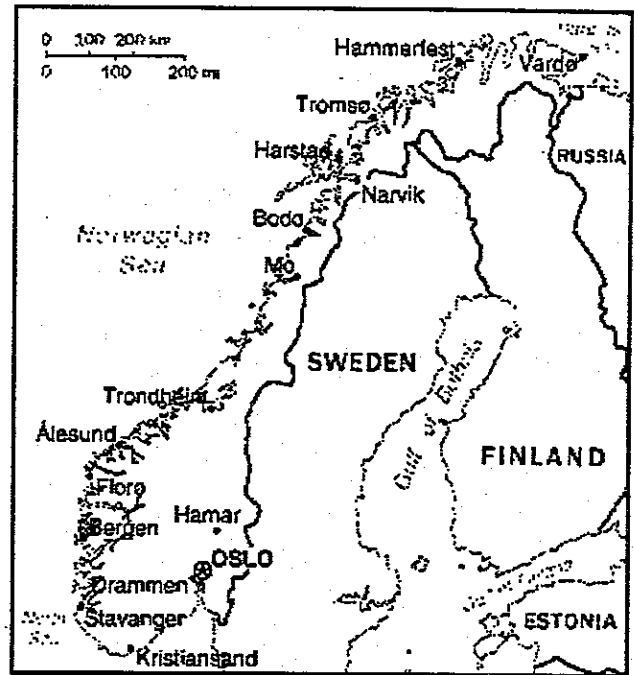
would be most effective, and it was Commodore Harwood's brilliant intuition which took Force G to the River Plate at the very hour when the *Graf Spee* appeared there, and it was the excellence of the British tactics and training that did the rest.

Meanwhile Mr Churchill had been dealing with vigor and resolution with the multifarious problems of a First Lord of the Admiralty – problems on which the life of the nation depended: the institution of convoy, the allocation of forces to watch the Italian fleet, and the priorities regarding new construction. He saw at once the necessity for escort vessels – ships more economically and more rapidly built than destroyers, and formidable only to submarines – and was responsible for the early construction of those frigates and corvettes which, when the German submarine campaign was later at its height, retained the command of the sea in the hands of the cause of justice. Inevitably he explored the possibilities of wresting from Hitler the command of the Baltic – the most fatal offensive blow sea power could deal him – but he could find no solution to that problem which he and Fisher had tried to solve a generation earlier and which the Allies in all their might found insoluble three years later.

Equally inevitably, he was bound to be led from these considerations to contemplate with dismay the consequences of Norwegian neutrality. With the freezing of the Baltic the railway to Narvik and the inland passage through the Leads took on greater importance. Norwegian neutrality made it possible for Hitler to bring iron ore from Sweden, which really meant that Norwegian neutrality was maintaining Hitler in power. England – and Churchill as the wielder of English sea power – was faced with a situation of such frequent occurrence in English history as to be hackneyed.

Academic or punctilious respect for neutral rights meant damage to the national cause, and it was the vital duty of a British statesman to try at least to circumvent those rights. Even direct violation of them might be justifiable, as regards both national necessity and the danger to civilization. In 1914 to 1918, Norway had acquiesced – had even cooperated – in technical violations of her neutrality, and it was to be expected that today, with the cause of right and wrong so much more evident, she would raise no greater objections.

In this connection the incident of the *Altmark* was of special significance. The *Altmark* was carrying a cargo of British prisoners down the Norwegian coast towards Germany. The Norwegian government stated that after search she had been found neither to be armed nor to contain prisoners. Mr Churchill himself framed the



orders, absolutely explicit, which sent Captain Philip Vian (as he then was) in the *Cossack* to board the *Altmark* in defiance of Norwegian protests. The *Altmark* was captured and the prisoners freed – a stirring tale to delight a world-wide public suspicious of the “phony war”. The world saw only the dashing exploit, and it is only now that we know that it was Mr Churchill who bore the whole responsibility and who would have been held up to execration if (as was perfectly possible) Norwegian sailors had been killed in action with the British navy and the Norwegian government's statements proved correct.

But the affair had gone off brilliantly. No lives had been lost, the operation had been justified in public opinion by its spectacular success, and, most important of all, Norway had been proved – or at least Norwegian officials speaking for their government had been proved – to have submitted to gross violations of Norwegian neutrality by Germany. It was fear of war with Germany – fear of the bombs and brutality – which was influencing the Norwegian government; moreover, Norway's protests against the British action, stultified as they were by her having been proved in the wrong, were feeble in the extreme. It seemed to make it possible, both legally and practically, to insist on Norway's agreeing to the closure of the Leads by a minefield. But that could not be all, for precautions must also be taken to prevent Germany from sweeping the mine field, as she undoubtedly would try to do, and to make impossible a German occupation of Norway which would guarantee Hitler against any recrudescence of the trouble. If Hitler were contemplating such a thing – and there were hints that he was – he must be forestalled: in other words there must be an Allied military occupation of Norway, and Mr Churchill pressed for it.

Logically, and to the mind of someone knowing his secret history, such a stroke was perfectly justifiable, but many will not agree with Mr Churchill in what he said in his memorandum to the Cabinet: that "no evil effect will be produced upon the greatest of all neutrals, the United States." This was December, 1939; at that time, the justice of the British cause would have been seriously endangered in American eyes if England had landed an army for the conquest of Norway; it was well for the happiness of the world that Hitler struck first and overran Norway with an even more cynical disregard for international rights and opinion.

More effectively, too. He struck with all his force and with unparalleled efficiency. Mr Churchill's story of the British counteroffensive makes pathetic reading. In 1807, when the British countered an almost exactly similar move by Napoleon in Denmark, they were ready (thanks to the experience of fourteen years of war) with a fleet and army that ensured success; it is almost unbelievable that in 1940 the Cabinet had to scrape up single battalions – single companies even – of infantry to throw on the Norwegian coast, months after the operation had first been suggested. There was ill fortune too – storms, snow, the death of important individuals – but that does not really lessen the gravity of the charge of complete ineptitude leveled against the government whose expiring act was this unavailing and feeble defense of Norway.

So the book closes with the fall of the Chamberlain government and the rise of Mr Churchill to the Premiership on the very day when, coincidentally, the German assault opened in the West. It is a book for every historian to study. As a literary achievement it falls somewhat below Mr Churchill's previous lofty standard. It shows marks of haste in composition. Tanga was unsuccessfully attacked in 1914, not 1917, and in one or two cases the admirable British system of putting the month in Roman figures, when writing a date, has led in the Appendix to some self-evident errors. And Mr Churchill is occasionally careless of his English. He speaks of a "vengeance thrust," and he says "a lot had happened," and he frequently lapses into colloquialisms unnatural in such a deep student of Gibbon and Macaulay. But there can be no doubting the lofty spirit of the author; and his self-dedication to the general good, [which] will remain an example to succeeding generations forever.

Mr Churchill occupies a special position and is under a special responsibility as a writer of English prose. In millennia to come, his work will be studied as we now study Thucydides and Tacitus, as source books of incomparable value. He is happily devoid of the almost

morbid self-consciousness which restrains most of his contemporaries from employing eloquence, for fear lest they fall into rhetoric, and he will use on occasion an exalted phrasing entirely compatible with his theme and with the emotions both of himself and his reader. The sheer beauty of some of his passages is admirably set off by the directness and common sense of his parallel commentary; he will make a truth enchantingly obvious where Tacitus would have used a crabbed epigram or Thucydides a portentous profundity, all the three cases demonstrating perfect mastery of the medium employed, and giving the pleasure a display of mastery always gives. That is why we should like Mr Churchill to do it every time.

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