

Summer/Autumn Reading List 2016

The Rt Hon Keith Simpson MP

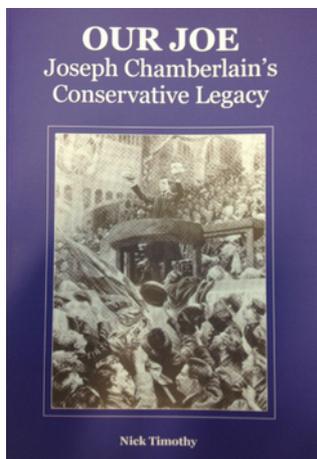


After the recent political roller coaster of the EU referendum, the resignation of Prime Minister Cameron, the Conservative leadership contest and the triumph of Theresa May who became the Conservative leader and then Prime Minister, the continuing agonies of the Parliamentary Labour Party and the challenge to the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, politicians and journalists will escape on holiday with “chic-lit” and “old lag lit” packed for a relaxing recess break.

Of course, in forming her government Prime Minister May has purged a whole raft of ministers, reshuffled others and promoted or recalled to the colours some who have lingered on the back benches. Those who have been given their ministerial P45s or failed to catch the selector’s eye have more time to read and contemplate their future.

For those who relish the opportunity to read something substantial from a rich crop of recently published books on politics, history and war then here are a few suggestions.

Given the political leadership challenges facing both Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn they might care to revisit Doris Kearns Goodwin Team of Rivals The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln published in 2005.

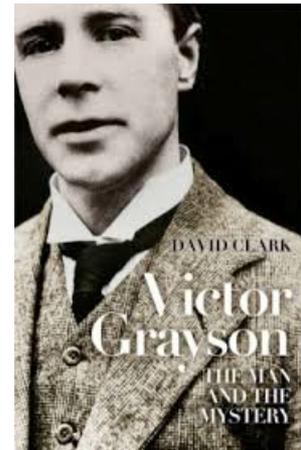


In analysing the political thinking behind those close to Theresa May Conservative MPs and journalists have turned to Nick Timothy her joint Chief of Staff, who is credited with crafting first her Birmingham speech and then her first speech as Prime Minister. He has been a regular contributor to ConHome and in 2012 wrote a sixty page pamphlet for the Conservative History Group Our Joe Joseph Chamberlain’s Conservative Legacy, in which he explored his political life as a Radical and a Unionist, outsider and Cabinet Minister and a fierce advocate of social reform. Of course Chamberlain’s advocacy of his political beliefs meant he split the old Liberal Party in the 1880s and joined the Conservatives whom he then divided in the 1900s.

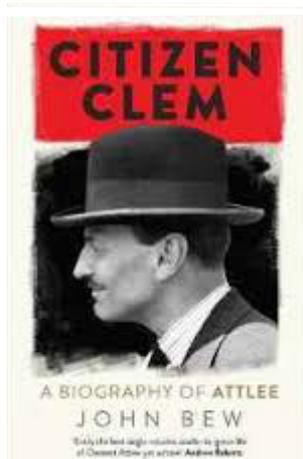
Sadly, the distinguished historian David Cesarani did not live to see his last book published, Disraeli The Novel Politician (Yale £15) in which he considers Disraeli’s Jewishness and what if anything it meant to his life as a novelist and politician.

The socialist Victor Grayson was born in the slums of Liverpool, a non-conformist preacher, who won the Colne Valley by election as a socialist in 1907 which he lost in 1910. He went to New Zealand and served on the Western Front before being invalided out and returning to the UK. Suspected of working for both the Soviets and the IRA he accused Lloyd George of selling honours. In 1920 he disappeared and there has been speculation on what happened

to him. David Clarke, former Labour Cabinet Minister has now updated with new evidence his 1985 biography Victor Grayson *The Man and the Mystery* (Quartet Books £16.59).



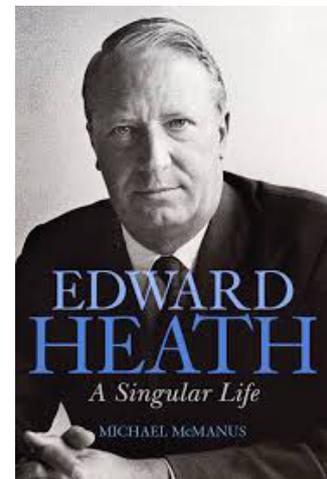
Philip Sassoon was a member of the fabulously wealthy and exotic Sassoon family. He succeeded his father as MP for Hythe in 1912 and served as Private Secretary to Haig during the First World War and then as PPS to Lloyd George. After the war he served as an Air Minister and then First Commissioner of Works until his death in 1939. Our colleague Damian Collins, MP for Folkestone and Hythe has now written his biography Glamour Boy *The Phenomenal World of Philip Sassoon* (William Collins £20) showing how he used his wealth and influence to further his political career, support the arts, and bring together politicians, writers, painters and journalists. Damian Collins skirts round Sassoon's ambivalent sexuality.



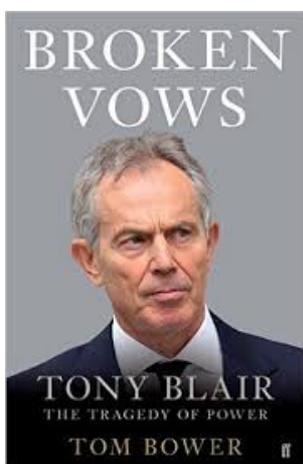
For those members of the Labour Party, and especially the Parliamentary Party, plunged into gloom over the leadership, then taking Attlee as a leadership role model is a comfort. There have been several biographies and now John Bew, author of Castlereagh, and a frequent contributor to the New Statement has written what looks like a stimulating reassessment Citizen Clem *A Biography of Attlee* (Riverrun £30) published on 1 September.

Published to coincide with the centenary of the birth of Harold Wilson and a reassessment of his political life is an edited volume by Kevin Hickson Harold Wilson *The Unprincipled Prime Minister?* (Biteback £20).

Also published to coincide with the centenary of his birth is Wilson's Prime Ministerial rival Ted Heath - Michael McManus Edward Heath *A Singular Life* (Elliott & Thompson £25). The author was Heath's political secretary and effectively wrote his autobiography. Using material from dozens of interviews with Heath's contemporaries McManus does not write a conventional



biography, but rather an assessment of Heath's motivations and psychology.

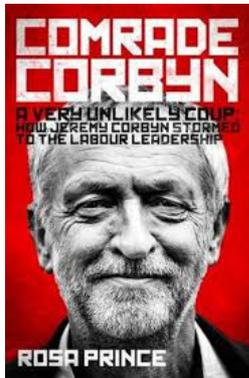


Tony Blair has seen his reputation shredded since he stood down as Prime Minister, not least in connection with the Iraq War and the findings of the Chilcot Inquiry. Tom Bowers, noted for his investigative journalism and demolition of important people's reputations, such as Robert Maxwell, has written a no-holds barred case for the prosecution in Broken Vows *Tony Blair: The Tragedy of Power* (Faber & Faber £20). But he has some shrewd observations about what made Blair tick.

Bernard Donoughue served as an adviser to both Wilson and Callaghan and his earlier diaries are a fascinating insight into their premierships. A Peer and briefly a Blairite minister, his Westminster Diary A Reluctant Minister under Tony Blair (I B Tauris £25) has some merit but is not in the same class as their predecessors.

Malcolm Rifkind enjoyed a distinguished ministerial career under Thatcher and Major at the Scottish Office, Defence and then the FCO. More recently he was Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee. In Power and Pragmatism The Memoirs of Malcolm Rifkind (Biteback £25) he recounts his political life but is, perhaps, a little too discreet.

The magnificent Ken Clarke has been an MP since 1970, and served as a Cabinet Minister under Thatcher, Major and Cameron. His leadership ambitions were thwarted by his outspoken support of the EU, but he has been, nevertheless, a great beast in government. Like Denis Healey he has had a large hinterland of interests besides politics, including jazz and bird watching. Published in October Ken Clarke Kind of Blue A Political Memoir (Macmillan £25) will be neither boring nor discreet.



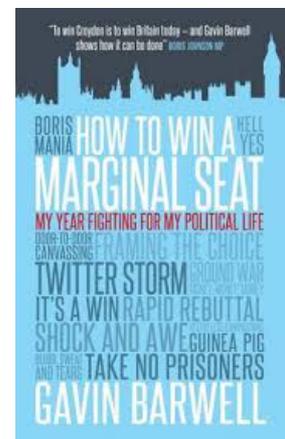
Instant political biography can be superficial and a scissors and paste job, but Rosa Prince's Comrade Corbyn A Very Unlikely Coup (Biteback £20) is well written and draws out Corbyn's political beliefs and world view.

Who knows where he would be now if Ed Balls had not lost his seat in May 2015? A bruiser and not one to be backward in coming forward to sing his own praises, he is, nevertheless a big political beast, if now no longer active in front line politics. His Speaking Out Lessons in Life and Politics (Hutchinson £20) combines autobiographical details as well as reflections on the use and abuse of power and why politics matter. Published just in time for the Labour Party Conference.

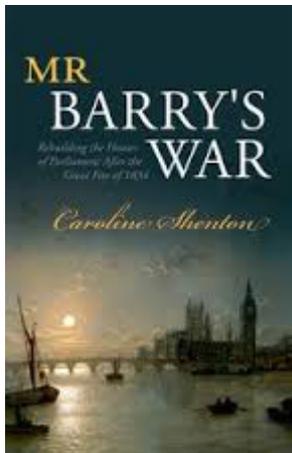
Another casualty of the 2015 election was Nick Clegg, who survived the virtual wipe out of his Parliamentary Party. In his Politics Between the Extremes (Bodley head £20) he combines a political memoir with reflections on the changing nature of politics and life in the coalition, based partly on his diaries.

Gavin Barwell, the Conservative MP for Croydon Central won a marginal seat in 2010 and held it – just – in 2015. In his How to Win a Marginal Seat My Year Fighting for My Political Life (Biteback £12.99) he does just that by describing how much time and effort he put in day in and day out, the targeted communications with his constituents and emphasising his local roots. A must for every candidate.

Being a Parliamentary Whip is to belong to a Praetorian Guard, members of whom see themselves as a “broederbond” or by their critics as the Gestapo or Stasi. The Labour MP, Helen Jones, Warrington North, was a government whip for the final two years of



the Brown government Her How to Be a Government Whip (Biteback £12.99) is a warts and all account which describes some of the measures used by the whips to maintain a house and get through government business. An essential read for members of the “awkward squad” and newly appointed Government Whips.

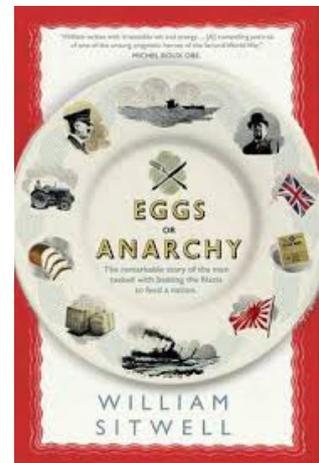


Just as Parliament has to make a decision about the options for a complete renovation of the old Palace and whether to move out during the period completely or partially, Caroline Shenton, Parliamentary Archivist has written Mr Barry's War Rebuilding the Houses of Parliament after the Great Fire of 1834 (OUP £25). This book takes up where the author's The Day Parliament Burned Down concluded, and shows the fierce rivalries between architects and politicians and the staggering challenges of building on what was an area of unstable quicksand. I am sure not a precedent but it took Barry twenty-five years to complete the new Palace and only three times over budget.

Paul Bew, a Peer and father of historian John Bew, has written a short but absorbing book on Churchill and Ireland (OUP £16.99). Surprisingly, this is the first major study on a relationship which was literally central to Churchill's family, life and political career.

There have been a number of books written on Churchill's wartime coalition and Roger Hermiston's All Behind You Winston Churchill's Great Coalition 1940-45 (Aurum Press £20) is the latest very readable account.

For my parents' generation rationing, the British restaurants and Woolton pies symbolised the wartime Home Front. A crucial figure in organising food production and distribution was the businessman Lord Woolton, who is one of the unsung heroes of Churchill's Coalition. William Sitwell, one of Britain's foremost food writers, has written Eggs or Anarchy! : The Remarkable story of the man tasked with the impossible task : to feed a nation at war (Simon & Schuster £20) which recounts the life and work of Lord Woolton, who later played an important role in Conservative politics after 1945.



There is a generalised assumption that between the wars the old English country houses went into terminal decline and many were demolished. In The Long Weekend Life in the English Country House (Jonathan Cape £25) Adrian Tinniswood challenges this generalisation. This was the experience of many country houses, but the majority survived being bought by wealthy British and American businessmen, whilst old families adapted. This is a wonderful book looking at architecture, gardens, farming and above all the social life with the eccentricities of both owners, visitors and staff.

Alcohol has always lubricated political life, as any student of ancient Greece and Rome will testify. Prodigious boozing in the world's representative assemblies reflects the culture of the time and the enforced proximity of legislators who endure long periods of boredom. Ben

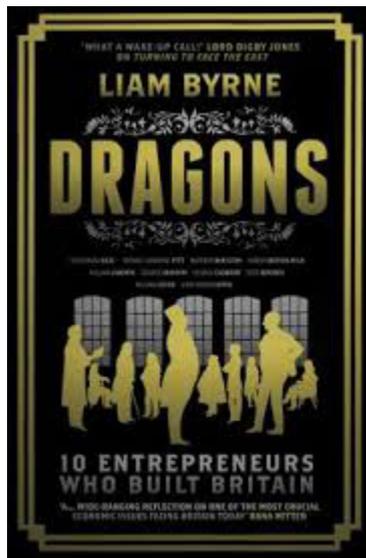
Wright's Order, Order! The Rise and Fall of Political Drinking (Gerald Duckworth and Co £16.99) is mainly about the British experience with examples of careers enhanced and destroyed by booze.

Asquith as a minister, and later Prime Minister, had a reputation for inebriation, not least at the despatch box, and hence his nickname "Squiff". Also he had a reputation, like Lloyd George, for casting a discerning eye and wandering hand over young women. One of these young women who Asquith became besotted with was Venetia Stanley. His obsession was such that during the early part of the First World War he was writing to her two or three times a day during Cabinet and taking her for motor rides. Fortunately he was very indiscreet about political life and cabinet discussions. A large selection of his letters were published thirty years ago and now Stefan Buczaki has written My Darling Mr Asquith The Extraordinary Life and Times of Venetia Stanley (Cato & Clarke £30).



Without doubt the best book written to date by a minister inside the Conservative-LibDem Coalition is David Laws Coalition The Inside Story of the Conservative –Liberal Democrat Government (Biteback £25). Laws was determined to establish the achievements of his Party but, based upon notes he kept and those by

Clegg, he has detailed accounts of many important decisions and shrewd pen portraits of his ministerial colleagues. We await a Conservative account.



Liam Byrne was the last Chief Secretary in the Brown Government and became infamous for the note he left his incoming successor, who he assumed, wrongly, would be a Conservative. He has now written Dragons 10 Entrepreneurs Who Built Britain (Head of Zeus £30) in which he argues that Britain's rise to global dominance owed as much to the energy and creativity and ruthlessness of traders, industrialists and bankers, as it did to ministers, diplomats or military men.



Much of what is written about the British intelligence and security agencies suffers from either a lack of access to sources or a touch of the Ian Flemings. Richard J Aldrich and Rory Cormac are academics who have had access to some recently retired members of the intelligence establishment combined with an ability to discover gems in official papers that have escaped the weeders. The Black Door Spies, Secret Intelligence and British Prime Ministers (William Collins £30) explores the evolving relationship between successive British

Prime Ministers and agencies, from Asquith's Secret Service Bureau to Cameron's National Security Council. A must read for parliamentarians and ministers, not least Boris Johnson and David Davis.

To many people, particularly school children, the Holy Roman Empire was a joke, summed up as neither Holy, Roman nor an Empire. Shades of scepticism about the European Union. But Peter H Wilson in his block buster of a book The Holy Roman Empire A Thousand Years of Europe's History (Allen Lane £25) argues that to understand the developments in European history from Charlemagne to Napoleon it requires an understanding of the nature of the Holy Roman Empire.

Albert Speer cheated death at Nuremberg by appearing intelligent and civilised and accepting some responsibility for crimes of the Third Reich. He lived off this reputation after serving a sentence of twenty-five years. Now Martin Kitchen has demolished Speer's carefully constructed reputation and in Speer Hitler's Architect (Yale £20) shows his central role in the Nazi state and use of concentration camp labour.

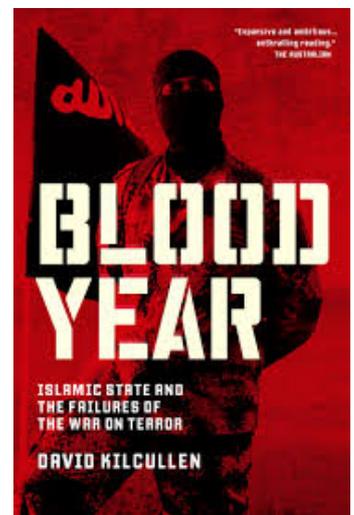
France is still haunted by the memories of wartime collaboration and resistance. Anna Sebba takes an unusual approach by looking at the experience of women in Paris during and after the occupation in Les Parisiennes How the Women of Paris Lived, Loved and Died in the 1940s (Weidenfeld & Nicolson £20).

Simon Sebag Montefiore has written extensively on Russian and Soviet history and for those looking for a vigorous romp through the Imperial Russian royal family then his The Romanovs 1617-1918 (Weidenfeld & Nicolson £25) is just the answer.

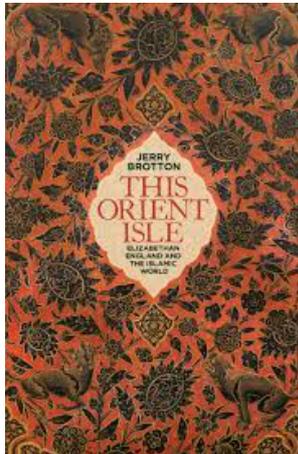
This year is the centenary of the East Rising in Dublin and Fearghal McGarry addressed the basic questions of why it happened and the experiences of ordinary people in The Rising Ireland : Easter 1916 (OUP £20) using recently discovered testimonies of over 1,700 witnesses.

Lawrence of Arabia continues to fascinate those who see him as the leading exponent of irregular warfare, his role in the so-called Arab Uprising and as the author of Seven Pillars of Wisdom. Neil Faulkner, a wonderfully unreconstructed Marxist historian places Lawrence in the wider political and military context of the British Empire and the war in the Middle East in Lawrence of Arabia's War The Arabs, the British and the Remaking of the Middle East in WWI (Yale £25).

Since the Western military drawdown in Afghanistan the outpouring of books on the conflict has diminished and there has been relatively limited assessment. David Kilcullen, a former Australian Army officer and an adviser and guru to senior US military commanders has previously written The Accidental Guerrilla and Counterinsurgency. Now Kilcullen has written Blood Year Islamic Terror and the Failures of the War on Terror (C Hurst & Co £10) which combines mea culpa with warnings of new threats beyond ISIS.



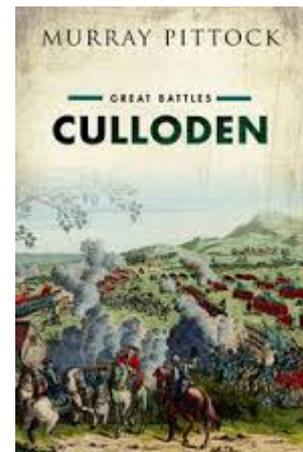
In the continuing and brutal civil war in Syria the suffering of the people of Aleppo and the destruction of a marvellous city of history and culture stand out. Philip Mansel is an authority on the civilisation of the Levant and in using extracts from the letters and diaries of European traders and tourists as well as local people he has brought to life an amazing city home to so many religious and ethnic groups – Aleppo The Rise and Fall of Syria's Great Merchant City (I B Tauris £18).



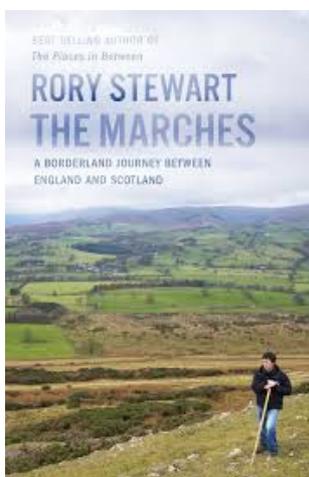
Elizabeth I sought allies everywhere to counter the threat from Catholic Spain, and encouraged commercial, diplomatic and military links with the Moslem powers of the Mediterranean and Levant which Jerry Brotton explores in his This Orient Isle Elizabethan England and the Islamic World (Allen Lane £20).

This autumn should have seen Boris Johnson's Shakespeare The Riddle of a Genius (Hodder & Stoughton £25) or as the wags have it William Shakespeare's Boris Johnson The Riddle of a Genius. Rumours round the Whitehall bazaars suggest that since his elevation to a reduced role as Foreign Secretary the great man is unlikely to finish the old magnus opus. Perhaps that duty could be transferred to his former campaign partner Michael Gove?

OUP has produced a series entitled "Great Battles" which include Waterloo. Short books they put the battle into a wider context than military history and examine how they have been interpreted and re-interpreted through history. Murray Pittock a distinguished historian and open supporter of Scottish independence has written an admirably balanced volume on Culloden (£19) which should be required reading for non Scottish MPs.



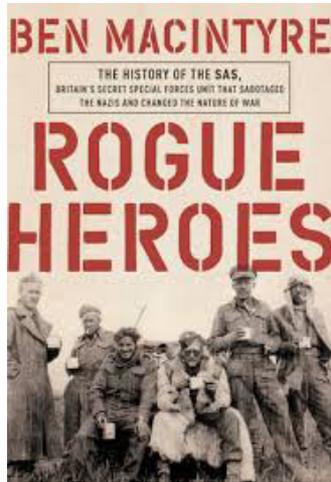
Rory Stewart, former army officer, diplomat, provincial governor and now Conservative MP and minister at international development and all round good egg, is a renowned author of books based on his



experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. As MP for Penrith and the Border, the nearest thing we have in Britain to the northwest frontier straddling Pakistan and Afghanistan, Rory Stewart has walked all over his constituency holding the equivalent of tribal jirgas with Parish Councils. This experience has been turned into The Marches A Borderland Journey Between Britain and Scotland (Houghton Mifflin) which it is hoped will be published this autumn.

India played a central role in the British Empire's two World wars, not only supplying over a million men and women for the armed forces, but finance, supplies and weapons. Srinath Raghavan has now written about this from the Indian perspective in India's War The Making of Modern South Asia 1939-1945 (Allen Lane £30).

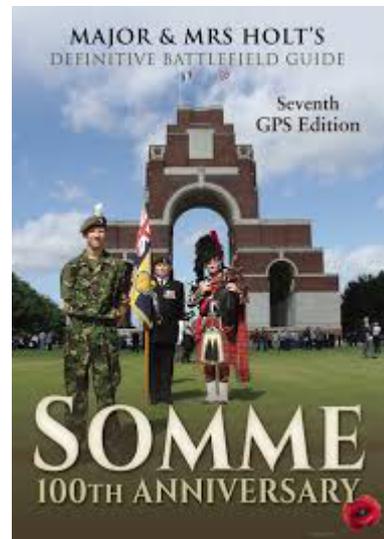
Dan Todman's Britain's War Into Battle 1937-1941 (Allen Lane £30) is the first of two volumes of what is a narrative history that combines the political, military, industrial and social from the experiences of the governing class to ordinary people.



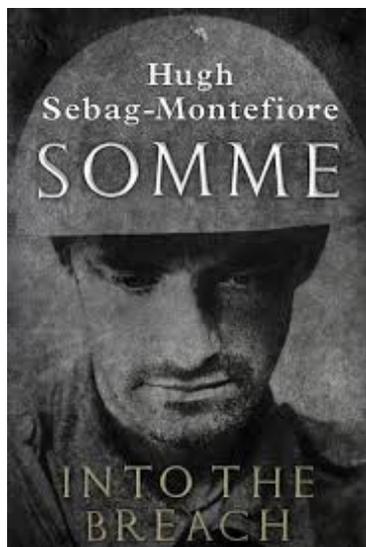
Ben McIntyre has specialised in excellent books about the intelligence war and special forces during the Second World War. This autumn his SAS Rogue Heroes: The Authorised Wartime History (Viking £20) should provide reading material for veterans such as the Secretary of State for Brexit as well as the general reader.

This year we commemorate the centenary of Jutland and the Somme. The reader might begin with the late Keith Jeffery's magnificent overview 1916 A Global History (Bloomsbury £10).

For those who wish to visit the Somme battlefields on what the Army Staff College called "Battlefield Tours" then the best guide is Tonie and Valmie Holt Major and Mrs Holt's Definitive Guild to the Somme expanded, brought up to date, well illustrated and full of detailed information (Pen & Sword £15).

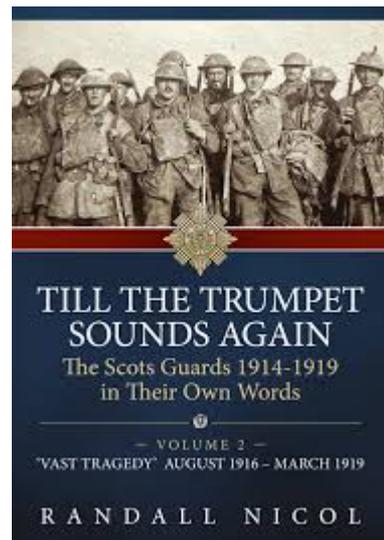


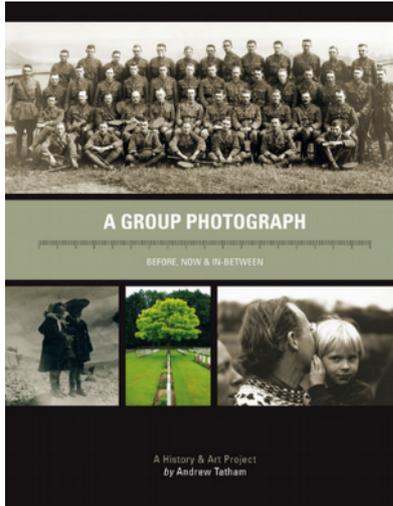
A recent excellent account of the battles of the Somme is Hugh Sebag Montefiore Somme Into the Breach (Viking £25).



A book critical of the British generals and supportive of the politicians is Allan Mallinson Too Important for the Generals Losing and Winning the First World War (Bantam Press £25). A sophisticated defence of Douglas Haig is Gary Sheffield Douglas Haig From the Somme to Victory (Aurum Press £25).

The experience of regimental soldiers is addressed in great detail and sympathy by Randall Nicol in his two volumes on the Scots Guards on the Western Front Till the Trumpet Sounds Again (Helion).





Privately produced is Andrew Tatham's magnificent [A Group Photograph Before, Now and In-Between](#) (Arvo Veritas). His grandfather, a pre-war regular officer was given command of a Kitchener Army battalion in 1914 and the group photograph is of the officers before the Battle of Loos. Tatham then follows their lives, and all too often deaths, of each officer.

Finally a novel written in 1961 by John Harris who was a journalist on the [Sheffield Telegraph](#). He was fascinated by some of his seniors who had volunteered in 1914 and served in the Sheffield City Battalion of the York and Lancaster

Regiment which suffered heavy casualties on the first day of the Somme. [Covenant With Death](#) (Sphere £10) is a novel about the men and women of the City of Sheffield and their experiences in 1914-1916. A moving tribute.



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