

BOOK REVIEWS

BACKER, Steve. *British Battlecruisers of the Second World War*. Shipcraft 7. Seaforth Publishing/Pen and Sword Books, Barnsley, 2007, 64 pages, numerous illustrations. ISBN 978 1 84415 698 6. Price £14.99.

(Reviewed by Eric Grove)

Since the Seaforth subsidiary of Pen and Sword have begun publishing they have produces, in association with Classic Warships Publishing in the USA, a series of illustrated booklets called 'Ship Craft' aimed at modellers which give a brief history of a class of warship, a list of the construction kits available, a showcase of models built y skilled makers, notes on the ships changes of appearance (supported by excellent coloured camouflage drawings as appropriate), and finally a set of line drawings. The books are intended primarily for the model maker as a source both of facts and, perhaps, inspiration. They are very well produced and reasonably priced and this one is no exception.

It covers three ships, Repulse, Renown and Hood. One can quibble with some of the history. The discussion of Hood would have benefited from input from our Channel 4 book on the subject and the work of my old sparring partner Bill Jurens of Navy International. The paragraph on the reasons for Hood's blowing up needs updating as to the current state of the controversy. Also, there are other models which might have been included, notably the two classics of Hood by Colin Vass. Taken as a whole, however the booklet offers excellent value and can be recommended not just to model makers but to anyone interested in these magnificent ships. This is a series worth keeping one's eye upon and which offers excellent value for money.

WISE, Jon. *Vickers Barrow Built Warships*. Maritime Books, Liskeard, 2008. 138 pages, 135 illustrations. ISBN 978 1 904459 35 4. Price £17.99.

(Reviewed by Eric Grove)

It is good when a book delivers more than its title suggests. In this Maritime Books collection Jon Wise has used Barrow connections both within and without the shipyard to produce not just an album of Vickers Barrow built warships but what is effectively a pictorial history of the warship building and related activities at Vickers and its successor companies at Barrow since 1896. The photographs range from HMS Powerful and smaller protected cruisers fitting out that year to the submarine HMS Astute emerging from the Devonshire Dock Hall a hundred and eleven years later. The author's sources were the Vickers archives at the Dock Museum in Barrow, prolific local photographer Ken Royall and BAE Submarine Solutions (as they now are) who have released some very interesting recent material.

The captions are highly informed and informative and sometimes quite technical, e.g. the discussion of submarine steel and welding that accompanies a fascinating picture of HMS Ambush's bow section. Although Barrow has built many surface ships, from battleships and carriers to the recent LPDs Albion and Bulwark,

submarines tend to predominate; as in only proper for a yard that began and has ended the Twentieth Century as Britain's only provider of these craft to the Royal Navy. The contrast between the diminutive Holland 5 being carried aboard a coaster and the enormous bulk of the Trident submarine Vanguard dwarfing the people around it could not be more telling.

A major strength of the book is its inclusion of much more than pictures of ships and boats being launched fitted out or on trials. It includes pictures of the gunshop and some of its products. The author reminds us that Vickers at Barrow was one of the two major gun founders in the country in the early Twentieth Century. There are many photographs of the process of submarine construction, demonstrating how this has been transformed over the years and also several pictures demonstrating Barrow's vital contribution to the warship export market from Japanese capital ships to refitting the VSEL build Upholder class submarines for Canada.

Given the variety of activities illustrated, my only quibble in this centenary year of Naval Aviation is that there is no picture of the ill fated Naval Airship Number 1. There is however, a picture of its shed in the background to a fascinating photograph of the Japanese battlecruiser Kongo and her British half sister HMS Princess Royal fitting out side by side. A production glitch has changed the order of this shot with one of Kongo being launched but this is not really important as the pictures face each other and the captions can be easily read across to refer to the correct photograph.

This book is definitely one for those with an engineering frame of mind and I cannot recommend it more highly to readers of this Journal. It is hard backed and exceptional value in every way.

PATERSON, Lawrence. *Donitz's Last Gamble. The Inshore U-Boat Campaign 1944-45*. Seaforth Publishing 2008. 208 pages with 95 b/w photographs, diagrams and maps. Together with 3 Appendices, Notes, Bibliography and a comprehensive Index. ISBN 978 1 84415 7143. Price £25.

(Reviewed by Iain HIME)

I have read this book twice now! I didn't mean to but, having read it in November I shoved off for a long and lovely expedition to Australia which involved the wedding of eldest son to feisty Greek Australian (just what he needs) followed by UK return match, Christmas and the New Year. So by the time I sat down to write the review there were some distinct gaps in the memory.

Regular readers will be familiar with Lawrence PETERSON'S previous books reviewed, with much acclaim, in these columns. And, just in case you are wondering, this book is no exception. As usual, one of its strengths is the wealth of anecdotes, diary entries, signals and other war records from both sides which help tell the story. Picking one may be invidious but Jack CHERRETT, the Lighthouse Keeper of Wolf Rock who stepped outside to 'spend a penny' must have been surprised when U1209 hit the rocks in front of him and for a while remained wedged there until 'a huge wave carried her back into the water'.

So this is the history of an almost unknown inshore U-boat war that commenced in the Channel with the allied landings in Normandy and flowed around the British Isles until the end of the war. DONITZ committed all available U-boats to the battle in an attempt to disrupt supply line with some early success. These were the early days of the Schnorchel and it soon became clear what an advantage this gave to a submariner who could now remain submerged for the duration of a patrol. Sometimes for as long as 42 days. When combined with the improving air radar warning devices the technological advances which had won the Battle of the Atlantic were soon eroded. Furthermore submerged U-boats did not make nearly so many radio transmissions so enigma interceptions dried up. Mind you, this was something of a two edged sword because DONITZ was also denied information about his boats and was slow to react to changing allied tactics. A comparison of boats lost to boats at sea illustrates the point:

April/May 1944: lost 23 - at sea 42

Nov/Dec 1944: lost 7 – at sea 49

DONITZ was firmly convinced that the war was not lost and could be turned with the introduction into service of new designs. The Type XVIII Walter hydrogen peroxide powered boats and the 2 classes of electro-boats designed with high underwater speed aimed at outrunning its hunters with their speed limited Asdic. The 1620 ton Type XXI armed with 6 torpedoes had a top underwater speed of 18 knots. Its little brother weighted in at 234 tons and 12 knots underwater but carried only two torpedoes. Their revolutionary design production and introduction into service make you thankful that it all came too late to be of benefit. It is astonishing that a German seemingly on its last legs could have come so close to succeeding in this venture. As CHURCHILL recorded,

"The new revolutionary submarines never played their part in the Second World War. This weapon in Soviet hands lies among the hazards of the future"

Quite quickly the tide turned and better use of mine warfare, better weapons and escort group tactics took their toll and by March 1945 of 24 boats sailed 15 were sunk. On 7 May 1945 formal instructions for their method of surrender were transmitted to all areas where combat U-boats still sailed. The last chapter tells the story of some of the surrenders including the dramatic tale of U-977s 66 days submerged en route to Argentina.

Another good read from Lawrence PATERSON - give it a go!

RIPLEY Tim. *16 Air Assault Brigade. Britain's Rapid Reaction Force*. Pen and Sword Books Limited. 272 pages with 216 photographs, diagrams and maps, and an Index. ISBN 978 1 84415 743 3. Price £25.

(Reviewed by Iain HIME)

This book really should be subtitled *The Army's Rapid Reaction Force* because as is very briefly acknowledged in one short and inadequate sentence the Royal Navy

had been in the rapid reaction business for many years and certainly as long as I can remember. But Tim RIPLEY does not seem to be a friend of the RN blaming,

"Inter-Service rivalry between the RAF and Royal Navy as a main cause of the British Army's failure to move more aggressively to utilize helicopters in combat."

Say what?! Well we certainly had our share of battles with the R.A.F but there wasn't one about Support Helicopters and even less about the Army Air Corp and its helicopters. And what does this quotation reveal?

"Until the 1990s it was not even clear if the UK Armed Forces were really serious about fielding a major force capable of using helicopters to bring about a decisive effect on the battlefield."

I wonder what he thinks Amphibious Warfare is all about?

So what about the book? Tim RIPLEY has certainly spent a lot of time with elements of 16 Air Brigade and traces its evolution from its inception in January 1999 through various campaigns to Afghanistan in 2006. But it is very varied. Some of it reads like a not very good 'Commission Book' other sections are strictly magazine articles. Sometimes he uses anecdotes to good effect but mostly they just fill the pages and contribute little to the story. Somewhat like the photographs many of which were taken by Tim RIPLEY in person and many of which are of the same quality you might have found in a commission book from a frigate without Snaps. To be fair he does tell the story warts and all and reveals how often troops were sent into areas inadequately supported. Like 1 Para going to Sierra Leone without stocks of anti-malaria tablets - 20 people caught malaria. Or the first wave of 2 Para arriving in Afghanistan without live ammunition! You have to be a 16 Brigade enthusiast to get real benefit from this account until you get to Chapter 11.

Chapter 11 is about The Queen's APACHES, as the MACDONNELL DOUGLAS technicians in Arizona knew them. I read with mounting gloom of the increasing use of unproven UK specific items, the lack a single prime contractor to coordinate the build. The failure to get the simulators in service on time. The failure to integrate the communications suite with the rest of the Army. And so on. It seemed as if we had learned nothing about Defence procurement since the 70s and are doomed to make the same old mistakes over and over again. Nevertheless the APACHE is a success story and has significantly moved the Army (and RAF) into integrated air manoeuvrability and warfare. And this is not better illustrated than in the authors much longer, more authoritative and readable chapter on Operations in Afghanistan in 2006.

So there are at least two Chapters worth reading but you might want to borrow a copy from the library rather than fork out the twenty-five pounds.

WHITE Rowland. *Phoenix Squadron*. Published by Bantam Press. 377 pages with 85 photographs. Together with 2 Appendices devoted to *Eagle* comic style cutaways of the BUCCANEER and PHANTOM. ISBN 978 0 593 05450 5. Price £18.99.

(Reviewed by Iain HIME)

The 'phone rang. It was the Editor,

"Would you like to review a book about the exploits of some BUCCANEERS and PHANTOMS?"

My pulse raced. At last I was to be elevated from reviewer-of-books-on-submarines to something to do with the FAA! Surely this meant that the Editor was pleased with my humble offerings.

"I would have got MACDONALD or KERR to review it but they are a part of the story..."

Ah, vain glory.

Now it also happens that I have a friend who was in the RAF and he recently commended to me a book by Rowland WHITE called *Vulcan 607*. It is the story of One Bomb BEETHAM and his lone VULCAN attack on Stanley Airfield. How can you write an interesting book about such a straightforward sortie, I wondered? And promptly ignored my friend. This was a mistake that I will very shortly rectify because Rowland WHITE has **A Gift**.

Phoenix Squadron (?) (Squadron badge) (Aka 809) is the story of;

'HMS Ark Royal, Britain's last Topguns and the untold story of their most dramatic mission.'

Thus says the blurb from the publisher. In fact it is a simple story of one very long-range sortie undertaken by two BUCCANEERS to overfly Belize City for 10 minutes or so and then return to Mother. Stir into the pot Ark Royal at her peak, albeit in the twilight of her career; add a belligerent Guatemalan Government seeking to expand its real estate and a small British overseas territory on the brink of independence and the plot thickens. Weave this with the views from the FCO and her representatives in Guatemala and Belize and still you do not have a story!

But give this thin tale to a writer with **A Gift** who absorbs atmosphere like a leech, who is prepared to listen to endless aviator yarns and who can take a series of disconnected fragments from the most unlikely of places and segue them into a seamless yarn - and you are onto something.

This book captures life in an RN aircraft carrier like no other I have read. I have served in Ark, know most of the characters and (despite that) this is A Wonderful Book. I hope lots of politicians read it and remember the lessons it teaches us about the awesome flexibility of Air Power launched from the only truly independent resource available to them. **Buy those new carriers NOW: buy this book now.**

Oh! And I can do no better than echo Jeremy CLARKSON commenting on this book when he writes,

"It takes an obscure corner of British military history and weaves a story as gripping as any Tom CLANCY thriller. It's completely riveting."

WORTH Jill. *Home is where my hat is*. Ad Hoc Publications 2008. 148 x 210 mm, 192 pages, 20 illustrations. Laminated card, square-back covers, sewn binding. ISBN 978 0 946958 64 1. Price £8.95

(Reviewed by Peter RICKARD)

This fascinating book, wonderfully illustrated by Paf GRANT, is part travelogue, part light-hearted account of the domestic joys, trials and frustrations experienced by the wife of a Royal Navy officer lucky enough to travel the world 'married accompanied'.

For Jill WORTH, a quarter of a century on the move encompassed twenty-three different homes and some very sharply contrasting ways of life.

Her story is of sea voyages on board the *Queen Mary* back in the sixties; of two glorious years with the US Navy in sunny California followed by a return to the north of Scotland (*Lossiemouth* of course) and a freezing house fit only for demolition; of the equatorial heat of Singapore and living with an amah who would not let her 'Missie' near the kitchen-and then the shock of the return to being Mrs Absolutely Nobody who had to scrub her own floors in a Plymouth married quarters; of magical and frequently hysterical days in Italy; of coping in the diplomatic world as the wife of an Attaché in South Africa; and of the 'in-between-periods living together and often apart, never knowing quite where the next adventure would take place.

Some of the homes were glorious, some were terrible; some were occupied for mere weeks, others for very much longer.

All that is contained in the publicity for the book to be read on the cover. But there's more!

This is really much how one naval wife found things in the latter half of the twentieth century. To sum it up – as far as the Service (the RN) was concerned you were invariably 'on your own'. Married accompanied did not mean help for those married and many naval wives (but the same is probably true of the other Services) found that as well as making the travel arrangements, getting the food for the family and doing the packing the wives were also mainly in the front-line for finding the accommodation. And in the Navy in those days married when under the age of 25 meant no allowances and no Service accommodation so any shore appointments meant that it was 'non-married accompanied' for a young married officer. It was then left to the individual to totally fund the move and obtain whatever there was in the way of local accommodation - if he wanted to be with his wife.

Perhaps the other Services were different however in the Reviewers personal experience a married quarter which flooded when it rained resulted in a complete carpet change each time, rather than attending to the root cause, which was that all the windows leaked and indeed this particular married quarter, which the navy reserved especially for medical officers was later turned down by the RAF as unsuitable accommodation for junior airmen! Such maybe is the way the Services viewed things somewhat differently. Happy days.

The book though is really a little gem. Only 192 pages indeed, but immensely readable, full of humour and completely accurate. Jill recounts her experiences with spice and clarity and indeed this is certainly a book where one turns the pages expectantly for the next saga in her life. Occasionally Jack her husband also gets a mention but like all naval husbands he tended to be a shadowy figure although the comradeship of the married patches and service quarter areas is very clear and helped to make up for the times hubby was away.

Apart from all else, the humour, accuracy (after a great foreign appointment stand-by for something awful – same with the husband's job of course), the sharp perceptive view of life in the Services: so also this can honestly be seen as a great social history book for those times.

Do buy it – the wife will love it. Actually so will the husbands.

BEATTIE John - Collator, JOLY Rick - Editor, HOWARD Lee - Illustrator. *Fly Navy. The view from a 'Jungly' Cockpit 1958 – 2008*. Paperback, 192 pages, 16 photographs. ISBN 978 0 9561841 0 8.

Copies are available through the office address below, RNNF website on-line shop or FAAM. It cannot be bought at other bookshops, (although it does have an ISBN number). On-line is best for us. £10.99 per copy plus £2.00 P & P if required to be posted to a UK address or £3.50 abroad. Orders should include UK cheque, we cannot take credit cards unless ordered through our website. Local hand delivery should be possible within reason.

KATIE CAMPBELL
RN HISTORIC FLIGHT
RNAS YEOVILTON
ILCHESTER
BA22 8HT

(Reviewed by John SHEARS)

I was very pleased to have the opportunity to review this book as I really enjoyed my time as the AEO of a Wessex V squadron. As a rough guess, in my time, approximately 90% of defects were mechanical, which I appreciated as an AEO(M)! As for the electrical side, most of these defects could be placed in the Part 2 and at the end of a three week exercise most aviators were lucky to have any channels operating in the ASE!

This excellent book consists of 54 short articles from the early days to operations in Afghanistan. All are well written and make easy reading, but the book appears to be in two sections. The first 40 articles are a mixture of 'daring do' and amusing incidents. Some of these incidents can cause outbursts of laughter, which may get people looking at you in a train! The final articles are on the serious side and give a good insight into what is happening to today's Jungly. I wonder if this is due to the fact that the authors are still serving and have their careers to think about?

Now, I must admit to being around when some of the incidents mentioned in this book occurred. In 'Ode to the Wessex' David BASTON mentions the high speed

landing at *Culdrose* by the Squadron CO. I watched this landing from 'B' site and can confirm that a high speed WESSEX going down the main runway was a spectacular sight. He also mentions the fact that sometimes the WESSEX would be temperamental to start. In the late 60s this could be due to starter motors, starting relays, FCUs. The starter not engaging could be solved with a sharp blow with a chock. Relays could be persuaded to operate either by the pilot stamping on the cockpit floor or the maintainers applying sharp blows to the starboard side just under the cockpit. As for not enough fuel flow, this could be temporarily overcome by the use of a wardroom spoon or in my case the aircrewman's knife jammed into the FCU. This later trick was normally done by an AEO and not a Senior Rate, in order to save the chief's rate if the engine was damaged.

I was also the AEO when Paul BELDING took off on Monday morning from *Simbang*. Miles CULLEN, the Staff Officer had had a good weekend and the last thing he wanted was to get airborne first thing on Monday morning. I can still see his figure as they took off, slumped in the left hand seat. Soon after we get the message that the aircraft was down. Ever optimistic, I got airborne with a toolbox and Chief 'Biggles' PARSONS to fix it. One look where the aircraft was and it was obvious that we couldn't fix it. Having been lowered to the ground I was met by a wide awake Staff Officer muttering about how at one stage he had been able to count individual rotor blades. The aircraft was recovered from the plantation, but when they reached the causeway to Singapore it wouldn't fit under the Customs shed so it then had to have the gearbox removed.

Finally, the scurrilous tale by David BASTON concerning the 'Double Engine Failure'. The trouble with age is that one does lose one's memory, especially old aviators. The year was 1968 and not 1970. I wasn't the AEO of 707, Chris HOWAT was, and I was just there for three months before joining 848. I had been with David on Station Flight (WHIRLWIND Mk9s) and when he knew I was going with him on that test flight he did say that he would be showing me the advantage of having an aircraft with two engines! The rest of the story is correct, see below.

John BEATTIE says that he has already had a drip from a grubber, saying, "Where is the book of grubber's dities, no-one's done one of those". I did tell the idle b*****d to get and write one!

This book is thoroughly recommended and I hope there will be another edition containing all those other stories that I am sure are out there. Finally, the one story that caused the loudest outburst of laughter must be 'Trevor 'Lead Boots' JACKSON'.

BELL DAVIES Richard. *Sailor in the Air*. Seaforth Publishing 2008. Paperback, 264 pages. ISBN 978 184 832 0116. Price £9.99.

(Reviewed by Nick KERR)

This book was first published in 1967 and David HOBBS' Introduction to this edition says it all, about being a well written story of one of the Royal Navy's first and most highly decorated aviators.

The early description of the very first landings and takeoffs from ships depicts clearly the emergence of embryo airmanship from seamanship, and BELL DAVIES continuing service on surface ships sustains this link particularly through his many years in what is now the MoD trying to get some progress in naval flying during its disastrous period as a part of the RAF.

The success of naval flying during WW1, particularly at Gallipoli is an event that is rarely mentioned in accounts of that time and was completely discounted in future contests for resources during the years of peace and the rundown of the forces.

As David HOBBS points out the first publication in 1967 coincided with the cancellation of CVA 01. I wonder if this edition will coincide with second cancellation of carrier *Queen Elizabeth*, or do some believe that this government will fund it!

BELL DAVIES's account of the continual struggle during the 20's and 30's to keep Naval Aviation alive must be remembered in the present attempt by the Air Force to take over the Navy's Fixed wing element leaving us again on the hind tilt of money not only for new aircraft but also for naval pilots.

This book is a good read and full of significant historical fact of which present policy makers should be reminded.

HOBBS David. *A Century of Carrier Aviation*. Seaforth Publishing 2009. 304 pages, 208 photographs, 33 illustrations. ISBN 978 1 84832 019 2. Price £40.

(Reviewed by Nick KERR).

This book has all the hallmarks of a Coffee table ornament, big, bright and with many interesting photographs however it is a first class and fascinating account of the evolution of Naval Flying from the first launches from a deck of planks laid on the turret of a cruiser to a dedicated carrier capable of carrying and launching over 80 fully armed aircraft. It must not be forgotten that all this progress was to get more weapons on the target not just to fly aircraft. The author remarks that in the very early tests (and maybe always) it was useful to have a naval officer around who knew what was going on around him in the ship. We could have had "echelon left" or "break right", but the design of the hook to solve the problem of lifting and lowering a seaplane in a seaway resembles very closely the CALEY gear, which was used on lifeboats.

Despite the often-held impression that the Royal Navy did not think much of aviation, naval aircraft were much in evidence in the First World War, spotting at Gallipoli and shooting down airships and if the information from an aircraft flying over Jutland had been passed more quickly to the command a much more decisive victory might have ensued. It was during the 1920's and 30's that the Royal Navy faced it's two biggest foes, the RAF who in the words of the author, "Wanted to strangle the Naval Air Service at birth," and the Admiralty who even until World War 2 revered the battleship as the most effective strike weapon. The Germans and the Japanese came much later. During this period the Air Ministry attempted to limit the Air Arm to spotting and reconnaissance only, asserting that bombing

was for the RAF exclusively. From this book it appears that in the many joint committees that were set up the Air Ministry gave the Navy, still very short of aviation expertise, duff information particularly about fighter aircraft that left the Navy very badly equipped at the beginning of the War.

The account of the differing development of carriers by the three most concerned nations, the USA, Japan and Great Britain is expertly recounted. The USN developed the carrier force unfettered by their traditional Surface Fleet and produced literally a floating airfield with no other mission than to carry and launch aircraft. This resulted in the often ridiculed unarmoured deck. However their philosophy was that the carrier should be able to look after itself with its own fighter aircraft and some close range weapons. The RN however, confident in the superiority of the battleship, deemed it necessary to protect the carrier from gunfire from battleships and cruisers and hence heavy armour including the armoured deck. This resulted that for the same displacement the RN got smaller, narrower and slower ships. Smaller meant less aircraft thereby limiting the effectiveness of the ship.

The Japanese mainly following the RN line but never adopted the catapult limiting its aircraft numbers. The account of the operation of aircraft from the different types of carriers in particular the continued use of the straight deck, Batsman and the barrier all during World War II, despite all three suffering similar rate of 20% deck accidents is a saga in itself. Although here again the Japanese differed in not using batsmen. Strangely enough the invention and rapid introduction of the angled deck and the mirror landing sight appeared not to stem from previous experience but was in answer to the introduction of jet aircraft to the deck.

The chapter on 'What might have been' is the story of CVA 01 the new large carrier we almost had in the 1960s. Although the maxim "Bigger does not mean more expensive" can refer to carriers, but only if the ship keeps to its original design. With CVA 01 every department of the Navy wanted a slice, with a Taskforce Commander's fit of big Ops Room, and tons of communications, more air defence SEA DARTs, disregarding the carrier's own air defence fighters, a comprehensive Anti-Submarine fit. A later carrier Captain is said to have spent hours on dummy A/S exercises whilst his air group twiddled their fingers. All of course pushed up the price enormously bringing about its cancellation.

I feel that due to the mass of detail given in this book I have overdone the Review. No apologies it is a damn fine book which deserves a careful read but maybe on occasions with a pinch of salt.

FALKNER James. *Fire Over the Rock The Great Siege of Gibraltar 1779 – 1783*. Pen and Sword Books Ltd, May 2009. Price £19.99.

(reviewed by D J Swindell, Principle Engineer)

The great siege of Gibraltar was the longest recorded in the annals of British Military history.

It was a period when Britain stood alone apart from their Hanoverians allies against the might of the Spanish & French to defend this small but strategically important entrance to the Mediterranean.

The extraordinary leadership shown by the garrison Commander George Eliott is an outstanding feature of this book along with the elaborate variety of massive engineering schemes undertaken by both sides during this conflict.

It also reflects on the hardships and tenacity shown by soldiers and civilians alike during this very difficult siege, the ferocious bombardment and counter-bombardments, the attack and counter-attack are fascinatingly reported throughout the book.

For all those history buffs out there this book is very well written albeit a little mind boggling at times but it has it all, it's packed full of historic information particularly the detailed maps that vividly illustrate the extent of the siege operations over the three and a half years.

This book is described by the publishers as 'an exciting tale of a huge and complex operation', exciting is stretching the imagination some what, however for readers like me who just wanted a good read it was hard going at times.

To end this brief review on a positive note, the composition of the various letters that pop up from time to time are a joy to read and a great reminder on how the British language has changed over the years.
