



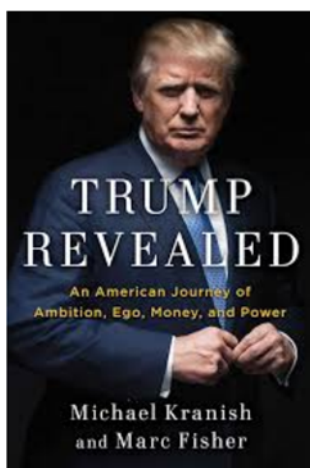
## Christmas/New Year Reading List 2016



**Rt Hon Keith Simpson MP**

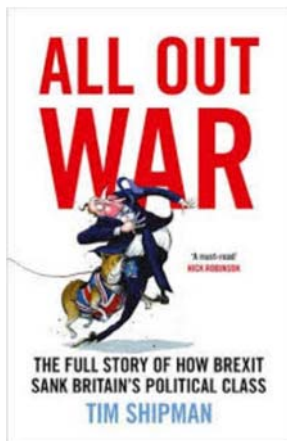
This has been politically a roller-coaster of a year with the EU referendum which resulted in the resignation of David Cameron and the accession of Theresa May, the re-election of Jeremy Corbyn, the resignation and then American tribute tour of Nigel Farage and the success of Donald Trump as US President elect. We live in an age of Post –truth politics in which all the old certainties have been overturned. In a world of unreason and the distortion of facts through social media it is a relief to turn to books.

This has been another bumper year for books on politics, history and war. Once again this is a personal selection which I hope that colleagues and friends will find useful.



As politicians, journalists and pollsters desperately scramble around trying to establish what makes Trump “tick” two useful guides give us an indication based upon his life story and experiences as a businessman. Trump Revealed An American Journey of Ambition, Ego, Money and Power (Simon&Schuster) was published in August

before he was elected. Although the authors Michael Kranish and Marc Fisher are Washington Post reporters, this is not a hatchet job, but is well researched. Also published in August was The Making of Donald Trump by David Cay Johnson, an investigative journalist and winner of the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for journalism.

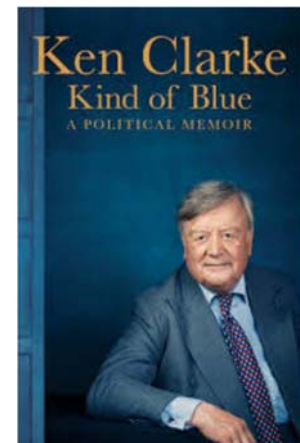


Amongst the plethora of books on the EU referendum and its consequences Tim

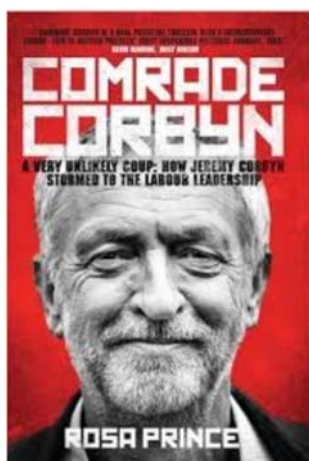


Shipman's All Out War The Full Story of How Brexit Sank Britain's Political Class (William Collins) is without doubt the best overall account with lessons for Prime Minister May and her close advisers.

One of the great beasts of Parliament will retire in 2020 – Ken Clarke's memoirs Kind of Blue (Macmillan), reflects his commitment to politics, his long ministerial experience, and a wide hinterland of good wine, brandy, cigars, jazz, port, bird watching and motor racing. Of particular interest is his relationship with Margaret Thatcher and



ministerial roles at Health, Education, Home Office and the Treasury.



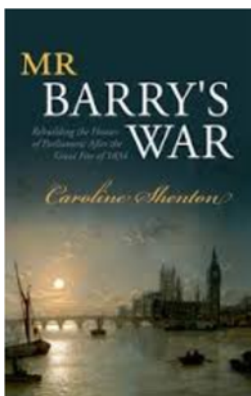
Rosa Prince is a freelance journalist and wrote Comrade Corbyn an insightful biography of Jeremy Corbyn. To be published in January will be Theresa May The Path to

Power (Biteback) which may provide some clue as to the political beliefs and modus operandi of, a by nature, secretive politician.



Iain Martin, a financial journalist has written an excellent bluffer's guide for economically challenged parliamentarians on what has happened in the City and financial world since Big Bang in 1986. Crash Bang Wallop (Sceptre) combines history, analysis and anecdote to make this a highly readable book.

For those colleagues who want their little grey cells to be stimulated then they should read two books by the Israeli writer Yuval Noah Harai. Sapiens A Brief History of Humankind (2011) and then Homo Deus A Brief History of Tomorrow (Harvill Secker 2016) roam across history, anthropology, the environment and technology and are challenging and provocative.

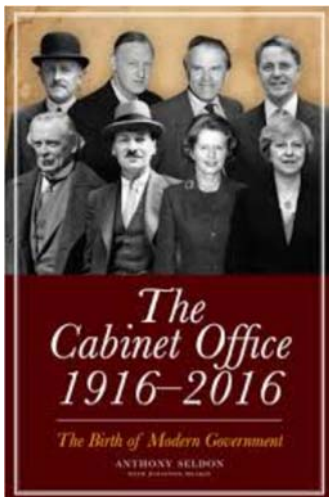


Just as Parliament has to make a decision about the options for a complete renovation of the old Palace and whether to move out during the period partially or completely, Caroline Shenton, formerly Parliamentary Archivist, has written Mr Barry's War Rebuilding the Houses of Parliament after the Great Fire of 1834 (OUP). This volume takes up where the author's The Day Parliament Burned Down concluded, and shows the fierce rivalries between architects, peers and MPs – who insisted on remaining on what was effectively a building site and adding to the problems. I am not sure

that it is a precedent but it took Barry twenty-five years to complete the new Palace and only three times over budget.

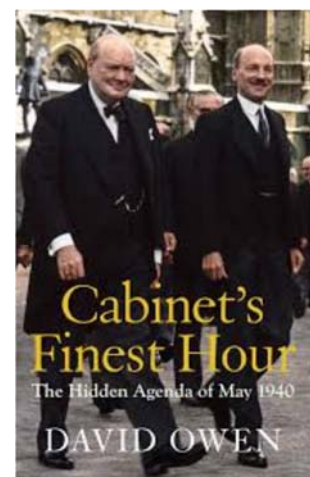


For those members of the Labour Party, and especially the Parliamentary Party, plunged into gloom over the leadership, then taking Attlee as a leadership role model is a comfort. There have been previous biographies, but now John Bew, author of Castlereagh has written a stimulating reassessment in Citizen Clem A Biography of Attlee (Riverrun)



Anthony Seldon has written and edited more than forty books on politics, including assessments of Blair, Brown and Cameron and prime ministerial governance. The role of the Cabinet office, the prime ministerial engine in Whitehall, has been looked at before, but in The Cabinet Office 1916-2016 The Birth of Modern Government (Biteback) Seldon, through trawling the archives and interviewing leading personalities, has written the best modern account. In the words in the forward by Jeremy Heywood, the current Cabinet Secretary, Seldon “has created in this volume, a manual, a set text, on being the Cabinet Secretary”.

David Owen, the former Cabinet minister and now in the Lords has been quite a prolific author, particularly in political history. Although Churchill and the crisis of May 1940 is a subject almost over written by many authors, David Owen in Cabinet’s Finest Hour The Hidden Agenda



of May 1940 (University of Chicago Press) uses Cabinet papers as well as private ones to explore the debate over whether to seek a negotiated peace. Owen argues that it was collective debate and discussion in Cabinet that finally rejected this proposal.

Since 1984 the Cabinet War Rooms have been opened to the public and are the responsibility of the Imperial War Museum. There have been previous guides but the IWM has now produced a magnificent history and guide, superbly illustrated, written by Jonathan Asbury – Secrets of Churchill's War Rooms (Imperial War Museum) takes the reader to areas not easily accessible to the public.



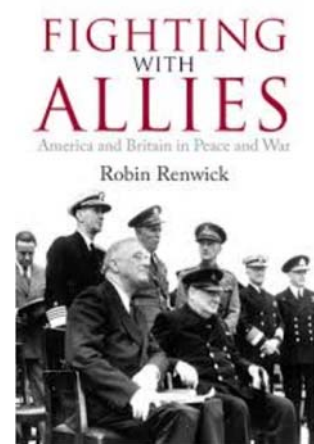
Fascist in the Family The tragedy of John Beckett MP (Routledge) cannot have been easy for Francis his son to write, although he is an experienced political biographer. John Beckett was Labour's youngest MP in 1924 but ten years later was Mosley's propaganda chief and a leading anti-Semite despite his Jewish ancestry. Interned during the war he never abandoned his fascist sympathies.

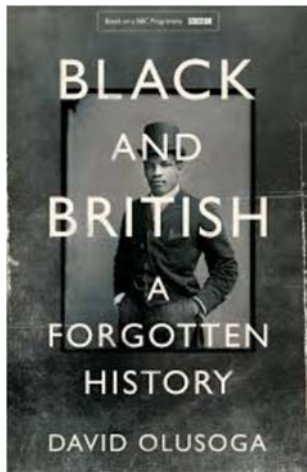
On a related theme Richard Griffiths, author of Fellow Travellers of the Right, and Patriotism Perverted has turned his attention to those on the far right who at the beginning of the war divided between ones who held to their sympathetic support for Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy and those who supported the war effort whilst secretly maintaining their beliefs. His What Did You Do During the War? The Last Throes of The British Pro-Nazi Right,

1940-45 (Routledge) makes an important contribution to our understanding of the far right during this period.

Rachel Reeves, Labour MP for Leeds West, and in internal exile from the Corbyn Shadow Cabinet, has been fascinated by the life and political career of one of her Leeds predecessors, the redoubtable Alice Bacon. Using official and private papers and interviews with Alice Bacon's family and friends she has achieved an impressive tribute in [Alice in Westminster](#) The Political Life of Alice Bacon (I B Tauris). Born into the Labour Party she saw deprivation at first hand and was elected to Parliament in 1945. Mentored by Herbert Morrison and Hugh Gaitskell she was appointed a Home Office and then Education minister under Wilson before being made a Peeress. She helped introduce substantial social changes and was a formidable opponent of the extreme left. Apart from the life and achievements of Alice herself, the reader will conclude that [Alice in Westminster](#) is a contrast in Labour politics with the Corbynists and momentum.

Robert Renwick is a retired FCO mandarin who was our ambassador in Washington in the 1990s. The author of several books he now has, rather timely, written [Fighting With Allies](#) America and Britain in Peace and War (Biteback). From Churchill and Roosevelt to Blair and Bush he looks at the roller-coaster history of the "special relationship" and it provides a useful background reader to Brexit and the relationship between Trump and Farage – I mean Theresa May.





David Olusoga is an accomplished historian and TV presenter.



Accompanying the programme of its name in 2014 he wrote The World's War a fascinating and disturbing account of the millions of mainly men of the British and French colonial empires who fought and worked for the allied war effort. Now he has fronted a TV series and written the companion volume Black and British A Forgotten History (Macmillan) in which he shows that immigrants from Africa and the Middle East have a presence dating back to the Roman period.

Linda Kelly has written several books on the political and social life of eighteenth century Franco-British relations and she returns to this theme in her forthcoming book in the New Year, Talleyrand in London The Master Diplomat's Last Mission (I B Tauris). The old diplomatist and reprobate who had served both Napoleon and the Bourbons arrived in 1830 as the new French ambassador. His political and social skills are something which our present Foreign Secretary might usefully study.

Craig Murray served as the British ambassador to Uzbekistan and resigned over allegation of human rights abuses. Fascinated by Central Asia and the Great Game he has researched the life and times of his fellow Scot, Alexander Burns – soldier, diplomat, explorer, archaeologist, adventurer, Freemason and an unusually enlightened agent of the British Empire. In Sikunder Burnes Master

of the Great Game (Birlinn) he advances the case for the defence of his hero who was to meet a brutal death in Kabul in 1841.

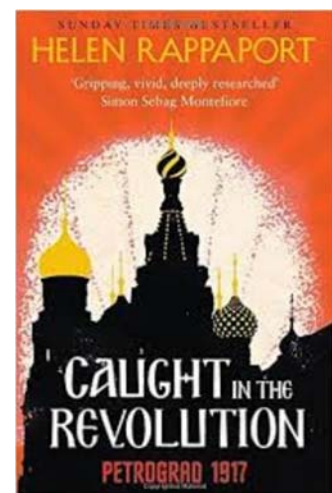


At a time when Americans are trying to assess their President elect against his predecessors, one whose outstanding military leadership was tainted by political and financial corruption within his administration was Ulysses Grant. A humble man who knew success and failure, he was the outstanding Union general of the Civil War. Even his Presidency had redeeming features and in his retirement he showed outstanding qualities as Ronald C White argues in American Ulysses A Life of Ulysses S Grant (Brilliance Corporation )

Few figures in Russian history have been more obscured by myth and legend than Gregory Yefimovich Rasputin, the “mad monk” and confidant of the last Tsar and Tsarina. Now Douglas Smith has written the definitive biography Rasputin (Macmillan) having examined a wealth of new documents and placed Rasputin as a crucial figure in late Imperial Russian history.

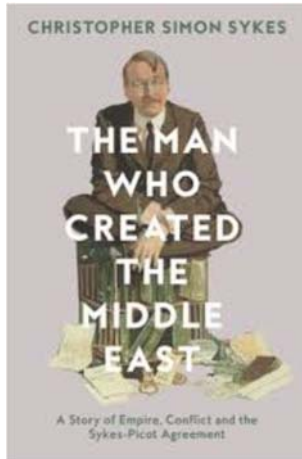
In Caught in the Revolution Petrograd 1917

(Hutchinson) Helen Rappaport chronicles the events of 1917 in Petrograd through the eyes of foreigners - diplomats, journalists, merchants, factory owners, charity workers and Russophiles. These men and women observed and experienced the final months of





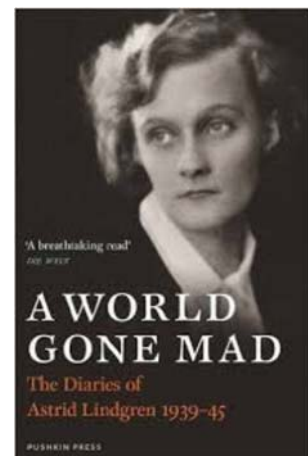
the monarchy, the protests, the overthrow of the Tsar and then the eventual triumph of the Bolsheviks.



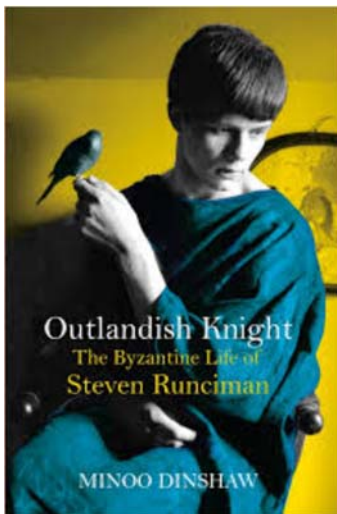
Mark Sykes is best remembered for being one half of the Sykes – Picot agreement in 1916 between the British and French to divide up what was thought to be the imminent collapse of the Ottoman Empire. His grandson, Christopher Sykes, using extensive family papers has written The Man Who Created the Middle East A Story of Empire, Conflict and the Sykes- Picot Agreement (Wilhelm

Collins). The title is an exaggeration but the book shows Sykes to have been a well travelled, well informed Arabist, with excellent political contacts, and whose career included Parliament and political service in to the War Cabinet.

Astrid Lingren was better known as the author of children’s books, but living in Stockholm she kept a diary during the war A World Gone Mad the Diaries of Astrid Lindgren 1939-45 (Pushkin Press) which has now been translated from Swedish. Lingren emerges as a morally courageous critic of violence and war, aware of her comfortable and safe life in Sweden, and an observer of the threats from Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union and the ambiguities of Swedish neutrality.

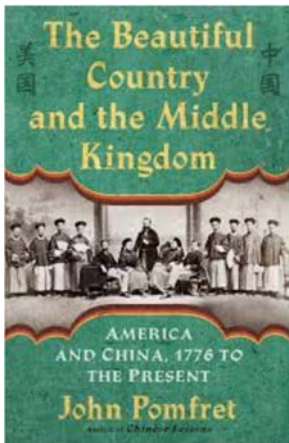


Joseph Lelyveld traces the last challenging months of FDR's life as President, Statesman, Commander-in-Chief and Party leader in His Final Battle The Last Months of Franklin Roosevelt (Knopf Publishing). FDR was worn out by his responsibilities and seriously ill with a dangerous heart condition which some of his senior doctors chose to keep from him and which he himself preferred not to be told about.



Steven Runciman's life almost covered the twentieth century as he died aged 97 in 2000. The child of wealthy parents, his father was a leading Liberal politician, Runciman was able to indulge in his interests and academic pursuits. This first book by the young author Mino Dinshaw is a triumph. In Outlandish Knight The Life of Steven Runciman (Allen Lane) he brings to life the eccentric character of Runciman, the great historian of the crusades and Byzantine world, the Grand Orator of the Orthodox Church and Laird of Eigg. His friendships, curiosities and intrigues entangled with a vast number of well-known and obscure academics, artists, politicians, spies and camp young men.

Alan Clark, the politician and diarist, had an ambivalent attitude towards his father, 'K', or as Private Eye called him "Lord Clark of Civilisation", a figure of fun to a younger generation in his final years. Now James Stourton's biography Kenneth Clark Life, Art and Civilisation (William Collins) has rightly resurrected his reputation as a brilliant curator and art historian.

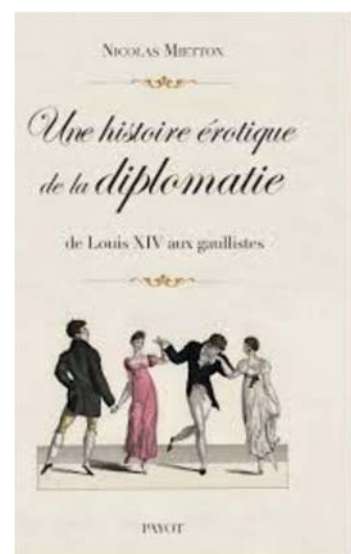


As President- elect Trump appears to be recalibrating American relations with China it is apposite that we can turn to John Pomfret’s recently published The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom America and China, 1776 to the Present (Henry Holt and Company) Pomfret served as a correspondent for the Washington Post and has an extensive knowledge of China. This is a wonderful book full of insights and fascinating vignettes.

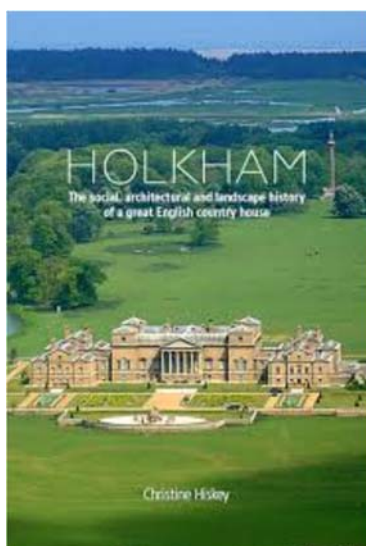


Adrian Goldsworthy has made a reputation for himself as a scholar who writes in an accessible way on Roman history. In Pax Romana War, Peace and Conquest in the Roman World (Weidenfeld & Nicolson) he argues that Roman power did not exclusively rely upon military force and brutality but on a series of complex arrangements with conquered peoples.

French diplomacy has achieved some of its greatest successes less from its diplomats and politicians and more from its amatory pursuits – at least that is the claim of Nicolas Mietton in Une histoire érotique de la diplomatie (Payot). His An Erotic History of Diplomacy documents the heroic exploits of spies, seducers and courtesans in the service of France. Something for Boris to put on his FCO diplomatic reading list.

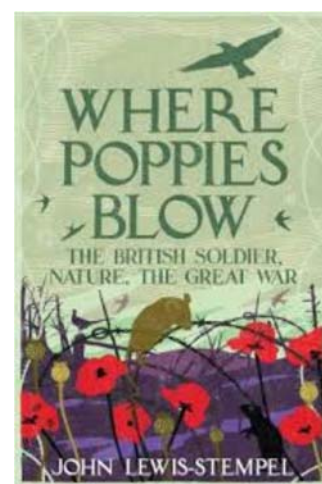


Lady Anne Barnard was a charismatic Georgian society hostess who used her personality and talents to overcome shabby gentility. She was eccentric, a seasoned traveller, artist and observer and left behind a memoir and a marvellous collection of papers. Stephen Taylor has written a wonderful biography Defence The Life and Choices of Lady Anne Barnard (Faber & Faber).



Downton Abbey has stimulated an interest in the great country houses and the lives of the owners and staff. Some great houses have been in the same family for centuries and masses of papers and records have accumulated in the library, bedrooms, stables and outhouses. Such is the case of Holkham Hall in Norfolk, the seat of the Leicesters. Christine Hiskey trawled through thousands of papers scattered across the estate and has produced a wonderful portrait Holkham The Social, Architectural and Landscape History of a Great English Country House (Unicorn Publishing).

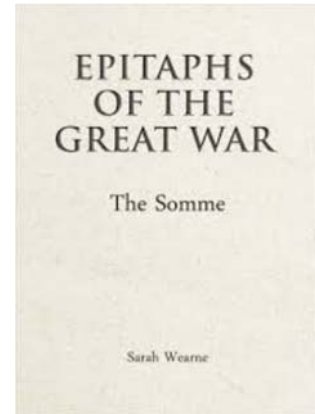
Amongst the many books published this year to commemorate the Somme campaign, two stand out as having an original and evocative theme. John Lewis-Stempel is both a countryman and an author of books on the First World War. In Where Poppies Blow The British Soldier, Nature, The Great War (Weideneld &



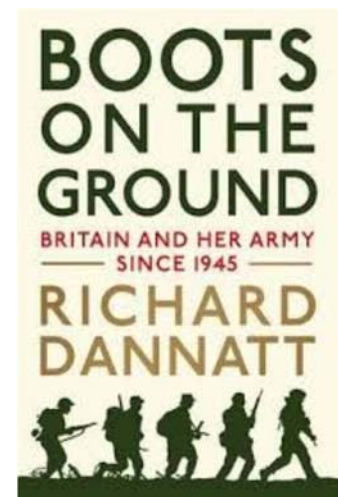


Nicolson) he shows through contemporary letters and diaries just how important landscape, the seasons, wild life and nature was to many British soldiers. The reliance on horses and mules, the acquisition of pet dogs, cats and birds who provided links with life at home.

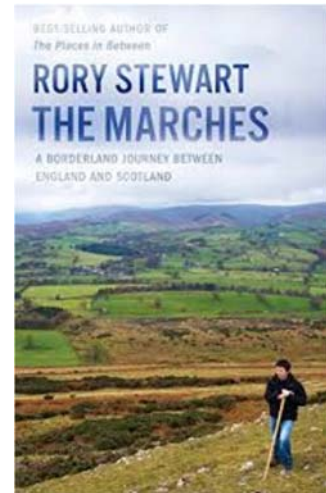
Sarah Wearne had the original idea of putting on a website photographs of CWGC headstones to document the brief personal inscriptions from loved ones. Epitaphs of the Great War The Somme (Unicorn) is a small, beautiful and very moving tribute to the families of dead soldiers. She has selected a cross section from those who died on the Somme, with inscriptions taken from the bible, literature or just homely remembrance. An original and lovely memorial.



Retired British generals like to write military history that understandably glorifies the British Army and tends to be critical of politicians and civil servants. Richard Dannatt as a former head of the army and having written his autobiography has now produced Boots on the Ground Britain and Her Army Since 1945. A case for the defence, but former ministers and policy making civil servants, let alone senior RN and RAF officers might have a different perspective.



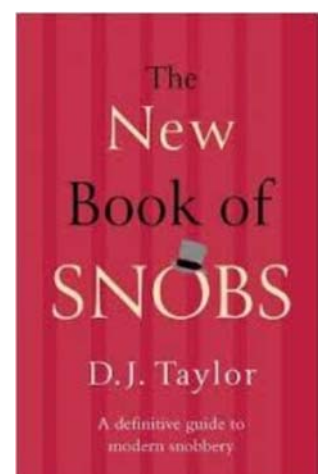
Rory “Sahib” Stewart is now a minister in Dfid and before he was an MP worked in the FCO and other organisations. A serious knowledge and experience of Iraq and Afghanistan resulted in two books and a TV programme. As Conservative MP for Penrith and the Border he has tramped across the border area and the debateable land. His latest book The Marches (Jonathan Cape) is loosely based upon his travels, off and on with his elderly and much loved father, Brian. The Marches combines history, geography, culture, archaeology, family connections and life and death.



Jeremy Greenstock is a retired FCO mandarin who was our man at the UN before and during the Iraq War, and then sent as our representative to the US regime in Iraq. His book Iraq The Cost of War (William Heinemann) was originally written a decade ago but publication was prevented by Jack Straw so that it would not conflict with the Chilcot Inquiry. Thus it loses some of its originality and impact and although it gives a good perspective from an FCO point of view it confirms the suspicion that the UK was a useful but not equal partner to the US.



Now for the stocking fillers. D J Taylor is a literary biographer and novelist. His The New Book of Snobs A definitive guide to modern snobbery (Constable) is effectively an update of Thackeray’s The Book of Snobs (1848) and Taylor is Thackeray’s’ biographer. Taylor argues that snobbery is a key to our national life and



looks at trends in different professions and stratas of society, including hilarious examples from politics. In the contemporary Tory Party the Etonians have given way to the Garagistes!



A variation and particular kind of middle class snobbery can be found in Dan Hall Highgate Mums Overheard Wisdom from the Ladies Who Brunch (Atlantic Books). Based on a twitter account this hilarious collection brings together the most outrageous snippets of conversation that have been overheard in the shops, cafés and at the school gates of this gentrified North London suburb.



Matthew Parris has given us hours of delight through his newspaper columns and books. Scorn The Wittiest and Wickedest Insults in Human History (Profile Books) is the latest edition of one which has had frequent updates. The familiar now rub clichés with the latest from Brexit and social media.

Traditionally the English, even more than the Irish and Scots, have a well earned reputation for boozing on a gargantuan scale. But the history of alcoholic drinks, and the British love of drinks acquired from being a trading nation and imperial power are explained in an informative but amusing way by Henry Jeffreys Empire of Booze British History Through the Bottom of a Glass

(Underworld). A book dedicated to the Temperance Chapter of the Press Gallery.