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WOMEN IN WAR

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Anna Roosevelt, Sarah Churchill and their fathers aboard the USS Quincy, Valletta Harbor, Malta, February 2, 1945

(Source: Wikimedia Commons)

In this issue, we have a review of Catherine Grace Katz's book on the Daughters of Yalta, a discussion on the Blue Plaque to Krystyna Skarbek aka Christine Granville by Gabriella Bullock, an essay on women in war by Georgina Natzio, and an article about one of the formidable women who shaped the Middle Ages, Nest, the Helen of Wales, by Tony Heathcote.

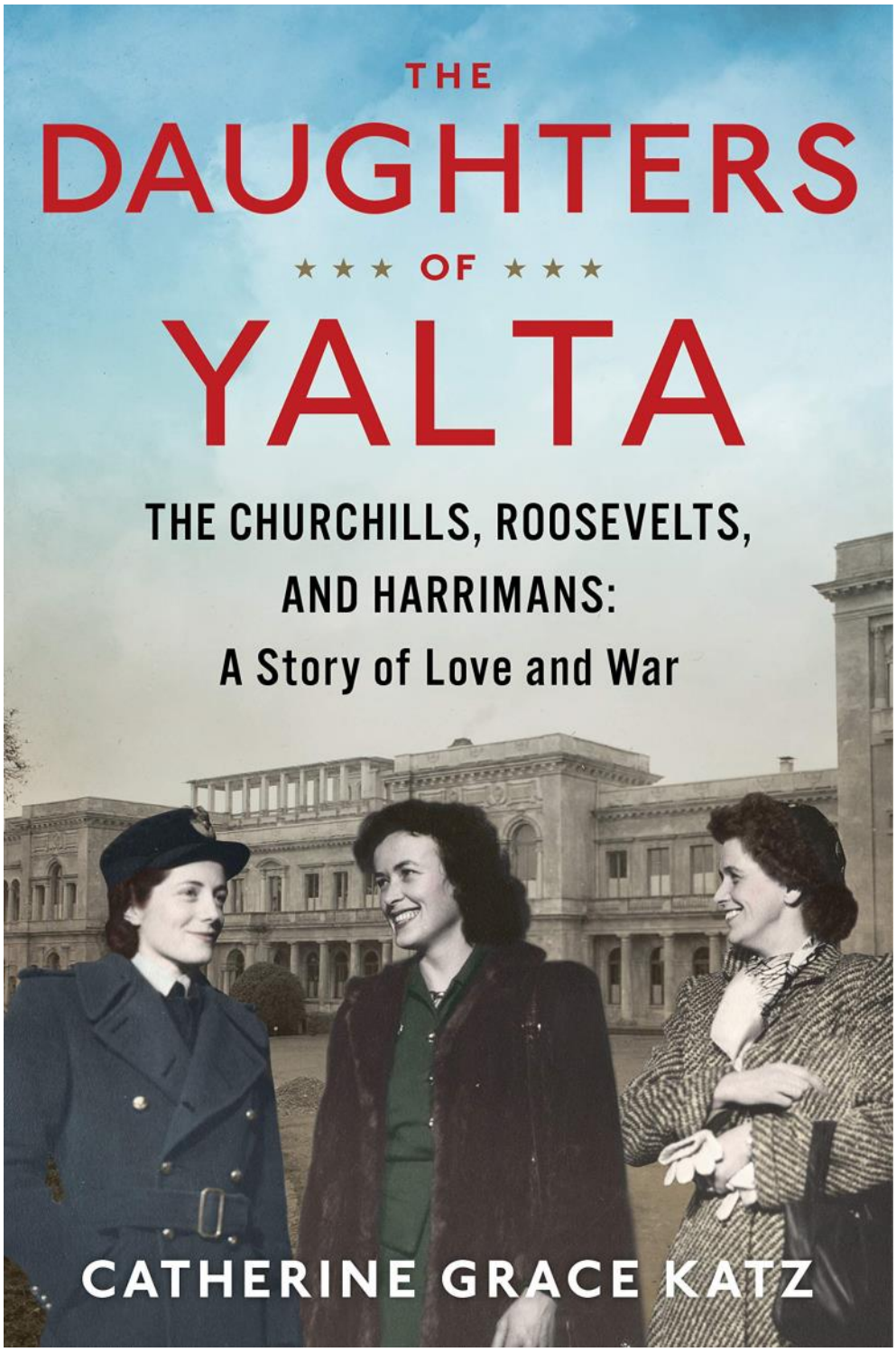
Newsletter edited by Paul Strong and Celia Lee

The Daughters of Yalta: The Churchills, Roosevelts, and Harrimans: A Story of Love and War

Pub: hard copy Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

By Catherine Grace Katz

Reviewed by British Defence Writer, Georgina Natzio



If you were a daughter to a great man, life could be very difficult, especially if you were entering the adult world. The problem for the children of great personages during the first half of the twentieth century was one of not necessarily experiencing a comprehensive upbringing as we understand this. Today's upbringing of most children, in the West in particular, involves close relationships with parents who are suitably streetwise and furthermore, have the time to spend getting to know their children. Time, in particular, something which great personages of the past were frequently short of, meant their children's upbringing was frequently left to nurses, later governesses, or tutors. Such were likely to have been the experiences of the parents themselves, presenting difficulties for them in getting to know their children, their characters and suitability for taking on certain tasks in their lives ahead.

Catherine Grace Katz has provided us with an invaluable insight into the lives and work of three women, where special working relationships had developed with their fathers. They were daughters to Winston Churchill, Theodore Roosevelt, and Averell Harriman, who met, most Women in War members will recall, in conference at Yalta at Joseph Stalin's behest, effectively between February 4th and their departure on February 11th, 1945. The purpose of the Yalta conference was to discuss elements affecting the future stability of Europe in particular, amid several private conversations concerning means of finally concluding the conflict.

In embarking on what will be found to be an absorbing read, especially for those with International Women's Day recently in mind, it is important to remember how different the world was during the first half of the twentieth century from today. For a start, it was a much more deferential place, even among the great democracies. Rank and position were held to be of considerable consequence - certain things simply did not happen in the ambit of those countries' leaderships. To put the daughters into a deeper context, other than their time during the Second World War, working with their fathers as their personal assistants, sometimes advisers, the author has gone the extra mile to provide as much as she could find in her extensive researches of the atmosphere of the times, the pressures, indeed 'the actuality of war', and of the profound necessity of working towards world stability, notably across Europe. The future of nations such as Poland were of prime importance, it was thought by some, not only that of France and of how a new German nation could be constructed to reinforce work to find a healthy democratic solution to that country's future structure.

The influence of Stalin on the discussions was contemplated by Churchill, assisted by his daughter, Sarah, while Averell Harriman with the help of his daughter Kathleen, was supporting President Roosevelt and his daughter Anna, as the President was paralysed and therefore physically immobile. He was, in fact, quite ill throughout the occasion. Yet, he was there.

All three adult daughters before they accompanied their fathers to the Conference, had life, training, or career experiences of their own to bring to their interpretations of the scene around them. The three Allied leaders were alert to the value of the work which women had undertaken since 1914 in the enormous number of varied roles to which they had been assigned. They trained as munitions workers, medical staff at every level, ambulance drivers, gun crew members, signals operators, intelligence interpreters, photographic interpreters, air transport auxiliaries delivering new aeroplanes, army, air force and naval personnel, and as secret agents. All three men as political leaders would have been acutely aware of all this and evidently wished to show solidarity and loyalty to the female workforces and their families, by bringing their own daughters to the Conference as their assistants.

Catherine Grace Katz's account is a remarkable work, well worth reading in conjunction with that of Martin Gilbert in his volume, Road to Victory, Winston S. Churchill 1941-1945. Both works rely on intense recounting of detail, which brings alive the physical as well as the linguistic, intellectual, social, and practical difficulties of turning the Yalta summit gathering's exchanges into a real basis for future international action after the final conclusion of hostilities. The settlements in practice, reflected earlier divisions of Europe and Soviet ambitions in the Eastern territories.

The lives of the three young women then, and after, and their interactions and pressures are vividly and humanely described. Altogether, Daughters of Yalta should become required reading for all students of the diplomatic and social history of the Second World War.

Yalta Monument

(Source: Wikipedia Commons)

Blue Plaque to Krystyna Skarbek aka Christine Granville

By Gabriella Bullock

Gabriella Bullock

(Source: Author)

Gabriella Stanley Bullock is the daughter of William Stanley Moss – soldier, writer, traveller. Her mother was Polish, and her parents met during wartime, in Cairo.

On Wednesday 16th September 2020, a Blue Plaque was unveiled at 1 Lexham Gardens, Kensington, West London, commemorating Christine Granville, and giving her the recognition many people believe is long overdue: 2022 will be the 70th anniversary of her death.

Polish-born Krystyna Skarbek operated as British SOE agent under the name of Christine Granville (1), Britain's first and longest-serving woman agent of the Second World War. Her recruiting agent had described her as 'a flaming Polish patriot, an expert skier and great adventuress'. The plaque reads:

CHRISTINE GRANVILLE

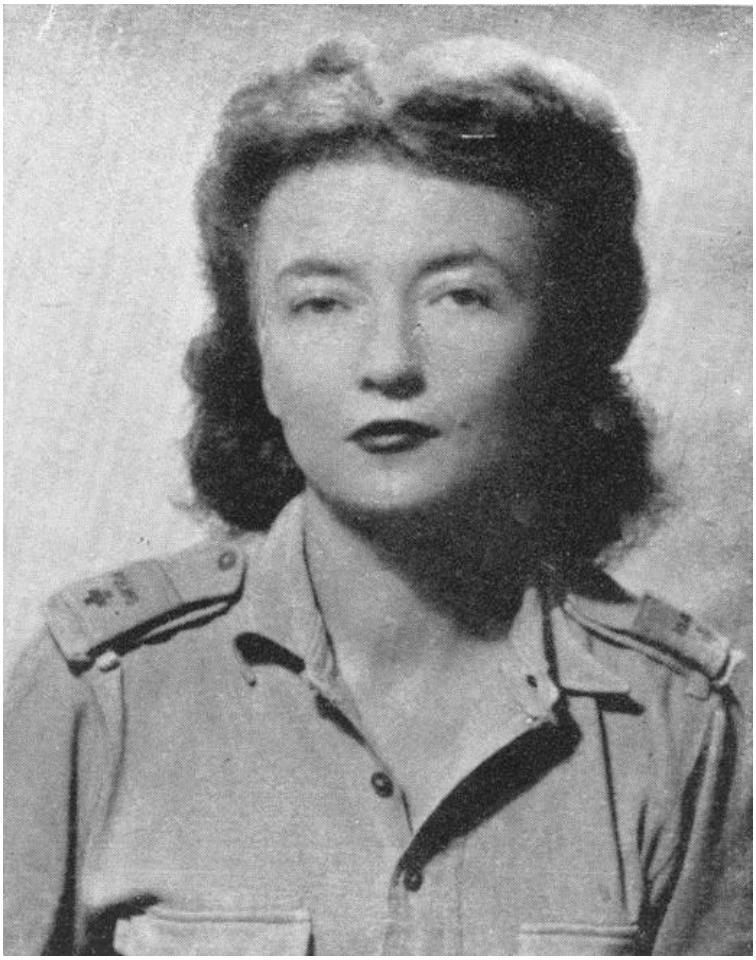
born KRYSTYNA SKARBEK

1908-1952

SOE Agent

lived here

1949-1952



Zofia Tarnowska (Sophie) Moss, born Countess Tarnowska, mother of Gabriella Bullock.

(Source: Photo as published in her husband's W. Stanley Moss's book A War of Shadows)

The evening following the unveiling, 17th September 2020, Women in War group members were treated by the Polish Hearth Club, Ognisko Polskie, to a remarkable event on Zoom to mark the moment. Zoom notwithstanding, the Ognisko couldn't have been a more appropriate location since, like Lexham Gardens, it is in Kensington, which was the heart of the post-war Polish expatriate community: at the London Oratory on Brompton Road, Poles used to gather for Polish Mass on Sundays, before heading up Exhibition Road to the Ognisko, or down to Daquise close to South Kensington tube station – a little bijou restaurant which still exists, though now minus its Feliks Topolski murals. The Sikorski Museum & Polish Institute is also nearby, at the southern entrance to Hyde Park. In the years immediately after the war, when life was a real struggle for people like Christine Granville, 1 Lexham Gardens, a little way to the west, was run by the Polish Relief Society, and provided welcome cheap accommodation. She lived there from 1949 until her death.

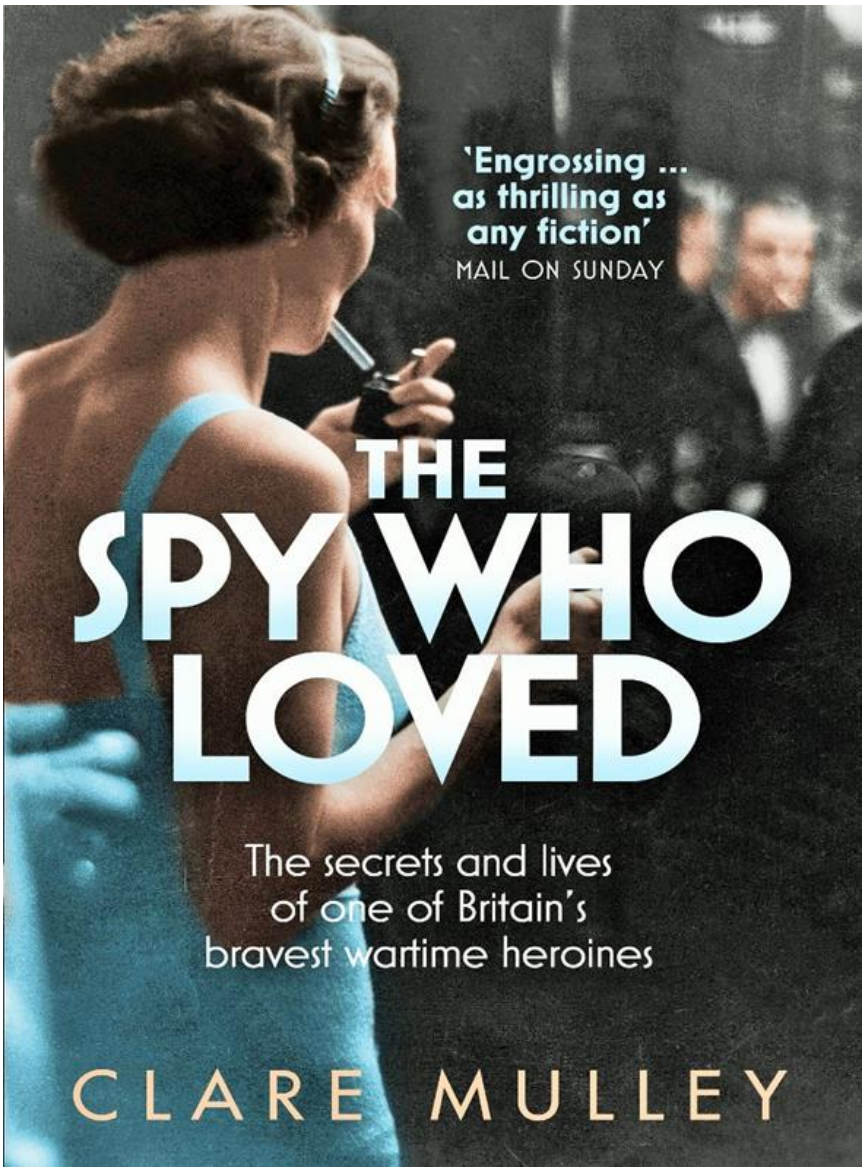
With her usual warm smile, Director Anna Mochlinska of the Ognisko Executive Committee welcomed everyone to the Zoom event and chaired the enthusiastic proceedings. The guests were Anna Eavis, Curatorial Director at English Heritage which has responsibility for the Blue Plaque scheme; and Clare Mulley, biographer and tireless champion of Christine Granville, who had proposed this Blue Plaque six years before. Her long campaign was at last crowned with success – and at the plaque's unveiling under Covid19 restrictions, she emerged as the only member of the public present – which seems entirely appropriate.

On behalf of English Heritage, Anna Eavis spoke about how much she had enjoyed learning about Christine Granville, and about how bravely and brilliantly she had served Britain during the Second World War; and how she hoped that the blue plaque would lead others to discover Christine's remarkable story and her connection with London.

Clare Mulley with the plaque to Krystyna Skarbek aka Christine Granville.

(Source: Clare Mulley)

There followed a conversation between Clare Mulley – very familiar to the Women in War Group and to the Ognisko – and an equally familiar and popular contributor, the actress Rula Lenska. Side-stepping Rula's references to Christine's good looks and many lovers, as well as the rumoured story of Christine being the inspiration behind Ian Fleming's 'Bond girl' Vespa Lynd in Casino Royale, Clare Mulley emphasised instead Christine's accomplishments: 'All too often women in the resistance are remembered for beauty and courage, while their achievements are overlooked. Krystyna Skarbek, aka Christine Granville, was one of the most effective special agents to serve Britain during the Second World War, male or female.' Clare Mulley outlined these achievements, which included securing the defection of an entire German garrison in a strategic pass in the Alps, and saving the lives of many of her male colleagues - leading Churchill to call her his favourite spy, and Britain to honour her with the George Medal and OBE.



Cover from *The Spy Who Loved*, Clare Mulley, 2012

Then followed the showing of an unforgettable documentary, re-worked from the 2011 work of acclaimed author and director Mieczyslawa Wazacz, *No Ordinary Countess*. Now entitled *Krystyna Skarbek - Secrets and Spies,* and narrated by Rula Lenska, it features interviews with many who knew and some who loved Christine, including Francis Cammaerts (2) whose life she famously saved, and shines a powerful torch into all sorts of corners of Christine's life – creating an extraordinarily vivid impression of this elusive, enigmatic person.

From a personal point of view (3), it was very special to see my own late mother Zofia Tarnowska (Sophie) Moss interviewed in this film, and to hear her voice – at the beginning and again at the end - describing Christine as a "flower of war" -- the image clearly struck Mieczyslawa Wazacz, who used it as the title of another documentary. My mother died only 10 years ago. Her life in Poland was swept away with the war in a way unimaginable to us in this country. She was from an old, privileged but slightly impoverished aristocratic background. She was gifted and creative, and brave. We discovered quite recently that she inspired two characters in novels by the historian James Holland, and that he also wrote her obituary in the Times. Her obituary in the Guardian was written by author Elisa Segrave – they were very close.

Rula Lenska, famous actress and recent star of Coronation Street

(Source: Wikimedia Commons)

It was very poignant also to see the interview with Francis Cammaerts. Sadly, probably all those interviewees, like him, have now died.

This led seamlessly into the final element of this compelling event: Clare Mulley and the writer Michael Morpurgo in conversation. He is famous of course for *War Horse*, but also, as Francis Cammaerts' nephew, his recent book *In the Mouth of the Wolf* tells his heroic uncle's story and includes a good deal about Christine.

This wonderful conversation was a privilege to witness. Mulley and Morpurgo obviously know each other well, and there is clearly, a huge amount of mutual trust and admiration, making for that rarest of things on the screen – a truly uninhibited atmosphere – with both of them indeed getting a little carried away in the most delightful way, as they discussed Christine's life and achievements.

Anna Mochlinska, who had chaired this discussion – indeed the whole event – with deft and light touch, then brought things to a close. It had been a triumph!

Notes:

(1) Christine later wrote: 'I want to keep the name Granville that I have made for myself, and of which I am rather proud'.

(2) As well as Ian Fielding's - I urge anyone interested in this episode to read the extraordinary account in Fielding's book *Hide & Seek*: as a piece of writing it is incomparable, so evocative. From it we also learn that "characteristically, Christine never told us exactly what methods she had used to secure our release". The book is dedicated to her, and poignantly concludes with her.

(3) Both my parents – Billy Moss and Zofia Tarnowska Moss – knew Christine in Cairo. After the war, my father, a writer (author of *Ill Met by Moonlight*) who much admired her, wanted to write about her. In 1949, when my parents were expecting their first child, Christine asked that if it were a girl they call her Christine, "because it has been a lucky name"; my sister's name was Christine Isabelle Mercedes Stanley Moss.

My father had begun to work on Christine's biography at the time of her awful death. At this point – I can only imagine because there was much about her life, and even her death, that could be, and already had been, misinterpreted; or, frankly, that laid itself open to judgement - her friends stepped in (including my parents' great friend Andrew Kennedy, as well as Cammaerts), protective of her reputation, and my father bowed to their wish. Enough time has passed now, and she can be lionised in a way that she never was in her lifetime.

Krystyna Skarbek aka Christine Granville

(Source: Wikimedia Commons)

Women in War - How was that again?

By Georgina Natzio Defence Writer (Ret'd?)

You know how it is. You go looking through your collection to find a particular book and find three others which, taken together, could be examined for their female content. Well, this happened when I came across *Afgantsy, The Russians in Afghanistan 1979-89* by Rodric Braithwaite, first published 2011, *Good Evening, Mrs Craven, the wartime stories of Mollie Panter Downes*, written between 1939 and 1944, but not collected in book form until 1999, and *Going to the wars, The Experience of the British Civil Wars, 1638-1651*, by Charles Carlton, published 1992.

A look at these volumes' authors shows them to be deeply thoughtful observers, their own lives and experience providing critical insights forming the basis of their accounts.

Sir Rodric Braithwaite GCMG was British Ambassador to Moscow, 1988-1992, later becoming a writer and speaker on current affairs. His time in Moscow overlapped with the end of Soviet presence in Afghanistan.

Mollie Panter Downes wrote about women's experiences in England during the Second World War. Wartime gave impetus towards finding her short story voice. The form lent itself to the watchful, careful, stoical, almost curt conversational tone she adopted, fully in the spirit of her times, the population labouring under sustained duress.

Charles Carlton, Emeritus Professor of History at North Carolina State University, dedicated his investigation into the British Civil Wars of the 1600s to the memory of his father, Colonel Charles Hope Carlton, MC, Royal Army Medical Corps, who as a surgeon in two world wars knew only too well the actuality of battle, and also to his own children, trusting that they might never know the reality of what he was trying to describe. This is particularly significant because Charles Carlton's own life has a strong ingredient of military training. A part-time soldier in the British Territorial Army for five years, he served as an officer in the Welch Regiment, the Special Air Service, and the Intelligence Corps. Born in England, so the biography on his volume's cover goes, educated at University College, Cardiff and the University of California, Lost Angeles, he was later a Visiting Fellow at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and Wolfson College, Cambridge.

Taking the English Civil Wars first, we're reminded of the famous Lady Mary Bankes who in the summer of 1643, twice successfully defended Corfe Castle, Dorset, against roundhead assaults in the absence of her husband, Sir John, Chief Justice of Common Pleas, who was with the King at Oxford. There were three assaults in all, the first besiegers consisting of a force of forty inebriated Parliamentarian seamen, repelled by Lady Bankes, her daughters, maidservants, and a small group of soldiers, with cannon fire.

The second, a serious siege, where the assaulting force of 500-600 parliamentarian troops were driven off by Her Ladyship and her small group, heaving stones and hot embers over the battlements, killing and wounding, according to the Wikipedia account, over 100 men. But in 1646, one of her officers from the small number of troops who were assisting with the castle's protection, a Colonel Pitman, betrayed her by leading a party of Parliamentarians into the castle by a sally gate. These men under the command of another colonel reversed their jackets and were mistaken for Royalists. Outnumbered, Lady Bankes was forced to surrender the castle, where she had remained with her children, (together she and Sir John had had four sons and six daughters) her servants and a force of five men.

Evidently, what happened to Lady Bankes could just as easily have been encountered by a man employing similar resistance. Further, anyone who happens to have seen the slighted remains of Corfe Castle which survive to this day, would also have been able to observe the enormously steep precipices the castle was built upon. It seems probable, using some infelicitous hindsight, that only a betrayal of the kind described could have captured the castle other than an assault by cannon fire reducing the edifice to a ruin, a favourite Parliamentarian habit, as the roundheads' legacy of devastated castles in England still shows.

Lady Bankes efforts, however, were not unusual for the Civil Wars. Carlton lists eight noblewomen who organised the defence of their castles during their husbands' absence, while four hundred other women, Carlton noted, (quoting from J.W. Bund's 1903 account of the Civil War in Worcestershire) "ordinary sort of women out of every ward," worked daily, often during bombardments on the defences. Women stood guard, put out fires started by incendiary arrows, reloaded the soldiers' muskets, and fired at attacking royalists. They also delivered refreshments to the men and nursed the wounded.

Mary Bankes

(Source: Wikimedia Commons)

Not all women during the Second World War were employed in uniform in multiple non-traditional occupations alongside the armed services; as doctors or nursing staff in military hospitals and some forward medical units, in munitions or other factories, as ambulance drivers or working on the land. Many with small children or elderly dependents, kept house, while others volunteered for social work of different kinds within their immediate communities. Yet others continued with some forms of domestic service. This last, however, virtually ceased, as an entire order of domestic management underwent a revolution. Why? Because, even allowing for those exempted, women in large numbers were needed elsewhere, and the concept of paid domestic work went right out of favour with the female work force. Patriotism and public relations alerted women to the possibilities of learning new skills, not least those they might well be able to use after hostilities had ended. Mollie Panter-Downes stories originally published in The New Yorker magazine remained uncollected and inaccessible for fifty years, Subtle, as well as very much to the point, fiction and fact are pervaded by character descriptions and associated behaviour with succinctly inserted essential background information, as if the author were speaking directly to the reader over a cup of tea:

"Let's hear more about Miss Judd's drawing-room. I can't remember if it's got cupboards or not, In the last war we used to put the work away in cardboard boxes, but in this war I suppose we'll have to be a good deal more fussy."

Another quote, the first lines from Cut down the Trees, dated 4th September 1943:

"The old lady, Mrs Walsingham, lived alone in the big house by the river with her maid, old Dossie. Alone, that is to say, except for forty Canadian soldiers who had taken over most of the house, parked their trucks in the lime avenue, and built their huts on the damp, English meadows, sloping down to the slow, heron-haunted, English stream."

And finally,

"D-Day sneaked up on people so quietly that half the crowds flocking to business on Tuesday morning didn't know it was anything but Tuesday, and then it fooled them by going right on being Tuesday … nobody was smiling … the un-English urge to talk to strangers which came over Londoners during the blitzes, and in other recent times of crisis, was noticeably absent. Everybody seemed to be existing wholly in a preoccupied silence of his own, a silence which had something almost frantic about it, as if the effort of punching bus tickets, or shopping for kitchen pans or whatever the day's chore might be, was in its quiet way, harder to bear than a bombardment."

In fact, most of Mollie Panter-Downes's journalism and fiction appeared in *The New Yorker*. For many years producing a *Letter from London*, this collection opens with one dated 3rd September 1939. Broadly her stories deal principally with the reactions and survival methods of females from the upper middle classes - and her descriptions of unease at the sound of aeroplane engines rumbling overhead, set against the social interactions going on below, stay long in the mind.

This is all brought into sharper focus by a glancing reference to an obituary I tipped into the collection from the Independent newspaper for 28th February 2014, of Lady Llewellyn, formerly Joan Williams, an officer in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF). In 1942, she established a cipher office within the Cabinet Office and eventually led a team of 48 staff, which became crucial to Winston Churchill's centre of operations. In 1944, as a result, she was awarded Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE).

The third volume takes us to Afghanistan, some thirty-five years later. Here, Sir Rodric Braithwaite describes the Russians' presence there from 1979-89. The Russians had a difficult time in their sojourn in the country, as other nations such as our own historically and the US later have also experienced. Nonetheless Sir Rodric describes what life was like then in a way which shows a reader how some thoughtful insights can illuminate the relationship between older and more modern realities of war and occupation. Accordingly, the Ambassador provides us with an invaluable timeline running from 1717 to 2001 - an essential reference from the outset. In 1919 the third Anglo Afghan war took place, and by 1921, an Afghan-Soviet Friendship Treaty was signed. President Eisenhower visited Afghanistan in 1959, and by 1965 an Afghan Communist Party was founded. By 1978 that Communist Party seized power, but in March of the next year, an anti-Communist rising occurred in Herat. In December 1979 the Soviets entered Afghanistan to UN condemnation. Against massive demonstrations in Kabul the Soviets began major operations. In early 1983, however, UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar was discussing withdrawal with Yuri Andropov. Moving on through successive negotiations, by April 1988, Agreements for Soviet withdrawal were signed in Geneva, followed in May, by the beginning of withdrawal by the 40th Army. Mid-February 1989 saw the last Soviet troops leave Afghanistan.

All this was conducted against a background of constant internal turmoil and assassinations of Afghan leaders. The tribal rivalries had persisted. In Herat, Sir Rodric describes an explosion of violence in March 1979. There had been a bloody Communist coup the previous year which provoked resistance to change in the treatment of women and improvement of their civil rights throughout the country.

The Afghan Communists had promised that women were to be given the right to education, they were told that they owned their own bodies, could marry whom they liked and shouldn't have to live in their houses like pets. The Communists, however, knew this would be deeply unpopular with the conservative people of Afghanistan and acted ruthlessly to put resistance down, starting a reign of terror. The violence, Sir Rodric noted was, in one account reported by the commander of a local band of mujahedin - Muslim fighters against the Communists and the Russians. It was triggered by peasants in an outlying village, who, incensed by a decision of local Communists to force their daughters to school, rose up, killed the Communists, killed the girls for good measure, and marched on Herat.

The Russians entered Afghanistan to assist the Afghan Government to restore some social order and, despite any realpolitik aspects their intentions, as described by Sir Rodric, were to secure the towns and roads and withdraw as soon as the Afghan Government and its armed forces were in a state to take over governance responsibilities for themselves. The civil war which greeted them, however, persisted for several years after their departure until it concluded with a Taliban victory in 1996. The Russians "..discovered instead that most Afghans preferred their own ways and were not going to change them…". Afghans were underwhelmed by promise of stable government, health and agricultural reform, development, and education for women as well as men.

To give a further glimpse of how Sir Rodric has treated the subject of women in this context, he went on to describe Russian women's work in Afghanistan. "Women went to Afghanistan during the war for various reasons. If they were in the military, they were simply posted, whether they liked it or not. By the 1980s, women made up just over 1.5 per cent of the total number in the Soviet armed forces. Unlike the women who fought in the Second World War as bomber or fighter crews, as tank commanders, and as snipers, these women served on the headquarters staff as archivists, cipher clerks, and interpreters, at the logistic base in Pul-i-Khumri and in Kabul, or in the military hospitals and in front-line medical units as doctors and nurses. Female civilian contract workers began to arrive in 1984, and worked in offices, in regimental libraries, as secretaries, in military stores and laundries, and in Voentorg (the network of military shops). The commander of the 66th Independent Motor-rifle Brigade in Jalalabad even managed to get hold of a typist who could double up as a hairdresser."

Apart from the complex lie of the land, with discrete communities living in their own way in the mountain fastnesses, or farming on the plains below, tribal rivalries in Afghanistan were seldom, if ever, truly resolved to the point of their disappearance. Inevitably, men bore the brunt of providing defence against attack, a situation in which women and children were caught up. After the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers, New York City the US entered the fray in Afghanistan, and recently decided to leave. Overall, there has been a high loss of life not only to incoming troops but also in great numbers to the Afghans who find themselves unable to free their nation from Talibani or Isis-led organisations and their influences.

From all the foregoing, it can be appreciated how intricately women's lives, educational development, health and well-being have been involved in their nation's cultural fates. The northern and western nations, including Britain, and America, and much of Europe have a Norse heritage which might have been stronger and more influential in the accomplishment of women's emancipation than perhaps is realised. The Norse folk if our legends have it accurately, were far more aware of women as significant to their survival, being a people of a roving and savage ethnicity. Somehow, they looked to women for a concept of identity and stability.

Women feature in Norse sagas as potent and sometimes seriously powerful. Homemaking was not looked down upon and nor was female involvement with some activities largely held to be male, such as hunting or defence of their new settlements. Circumnavigating the world, Norsemen and women were a seagoing people on the move, and new horizons may well have sharpened their sensitivities to change and adaptation more powerfully than over the years has been found in Afghanistan, landlocked, its people confined within myriad boundaries and subject to recurring civil conflict.

The British, the Americans and Soviets, all customarily employed women in their armed forces, and during the time these developments were relatively new, now and again it was noted what extra skills women could bring to their tasks - not least on overseas deployments as instinctive negotiators ready to ameliorate harm inflicted by conflict on the innocent and unprotected. That this was regarded as a strength, has been well noted at times during the years of conflict since 1914. All three nations have since then histories of women carrying out non-traditional tasks for the good of their communities. That women have a special relationship with thoughts of the future, all that female effort can bring to international or nation-wide events and their management is now far more generally realised and understood. It is as yet still not entirely accepted throughout the world but - we can but hope!

Soviet Nurse in Afghanistan

(Source: Wikimedia Commons)

NEST, THE HELEN OF WALES

by Tony Heathcote

The kingcup, but a minted flower,
Cup of a king in gold.
Was there not a king who sought him
The perfect chalice, and bethought him
The breast of Helen for his mould?
A wild bird's nest and Helen's breast
What lovely things that spring did hold!

In this passage from *The Land,* her tribute to the High Weald of Kent, Vita Sackville-West took it for granted that her readers understood the reference to Helen of Troy. The waterside kingcups were growing beside a moorhen's nest, an English homophone for the Welsh name Nest, a variant of Agnes or Annis. Even after 3,000 years the tale of Troy survives, with the 2004 Hollywood blockbuster starring Brad Pitt and Orlando Bloom, a 2017 TV series and, currently, a video game. History does not repeat itself, but it can resemble itself. The colourful life of the historical Nest ferch Rhys ap Tewdwr (or Agnes the daughter of Reece the son of Theodore) has enough in common with that of the mythical Helen of Troy for even so unromantic a work as the Oxford History of England to accept her as "The Helen of Wales". Like her legendary counterpart, she was not only a woman in war, but the cause of war.

The Helen of the Greek epics was the daughter of Zeus, king of the gods, and Leda, the wife of King Tyndareos of Sparta. As a young girl, Helen was abducted by the hero Theseus, but was rescued and brought home by her twin brothers Castor and Pollux. A great beauty, she had many suitors, from whom Tyndareos selected Menelaus, the brother of Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, and abdicated the throne of Sparta in his favour. Ten years later, the Trojan prince Paris, to whom Aphrodite, goddess of erotic love, had promised the most beautiful woman in the world, came to Sparta, where he was entertained with lavish hospitality. Aided by Aphrodite, he seduced Helen and carried her off to Troy, taking many of Menelaus' valuables with him. On the Trojan refusal to send her back, Menelaus appealed to Agamemnon and the other kings of Greece, so beginning the great war that would last ten years. Paris was killed and Helen's hand was given to his brother Deiphobus, but the match was not a happy one. When Odysseus, king of Ithaca, entered Troy disguised as a beggar, Helen recognised him and told him she regretted ever leaving Sparta, and now only wanted to go home to her husband and their daughter Hermione. In the final attack on Troy, she hid Deiphobus's weapons while he slept, and let Menelaus and his men into the house to kill him.

Menelaus had intended to kill her for her infidelity but, when he saw her naked breasts, he remembered how beautiful she was, and through Aphrodite's influence, his sword dropped from his hand. She returned safely home to Sparta, where Homer's *Odyssey* depicts her some later, living contentedly as a model wife and hostess. She remains, in popular imagination, the model of female beauty, in the words of Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, "the face that launched a thousand ships and burn't the topless towers of Ilium".

Wales, like Greece, is a land of long coastlines, rugged mountains and fertile valleys. When the historical Nest was born, to mortal parents, it had a society resembling that of the heroes in Homer's epics. Kings went forth to war in person, each accompanied by a war-band composed of his noble kinsmen and mighty men of valour. In 1075 Bleddyn ap Cynfyn, king both of Powys (eastern central Wales) and of Gwynedd (northern Wales), was killed in battle by Rhys ab Owain, king of Deuheubath (south-west Wales). Three years later, Rhys ab Owain himself was killed, and a brief war of succession ended at the battle of Mynydd Carn (1079) with the victory of his cousin, Rhys ap Tewdwr. By 1081 Rhys ap Tewdwr had established himself on the throne of Deuheubath firmly enough to attract a visitation by William I, King of England, ostensibly on a pilgrimage to the shrine of St David in Pembrokeshire (Sir Benfro). As the Conqueror was not noted for his piety it was more likely to have been a top-level conference where Rhys ap Tewdwr acknowledged William as overlord and paid him a cash tribute, in return for William accepting him as king of Deuheubath and halting further Norman expansion into South Wales. Hoping to secure his northern borders with Powys, Rhys ap Tewdwr then married Gwladus ferch Rhiwallon, whose brother Meilyr ap Rhiwallon (nephew of the late King Bleddyn ap Cynfyn) had been killed fighting against him in the battle of Mynydd Carn. They later had a son, Gruffudd, and a daughter, Nest, who was born c. 1092.

William the Conqueror died In 1087. In his will, he divided his lands between his three sons. The eldest son, Robert Curt-hose, was left the Duchy of Normandy; the second, William Rufus, was left the kingdom of England; and the youngest, Henry Beauclerc, was left a fortune in silver. Within months, many of the Norman barons who held lands on both sides of the Channel rose in rebellion, claiming that England and Normandy should remain under a single ruler and preferring the easy-going Robert Curt-hose to the harsh William Rufus, of whom it was said that he feared God little and man not at all. Most of the great Norman lords of the Welsh Marches, led by Roger de Montgomery, Earl of Shrewsbury, came out for Robert, but were defeated at Worcester by the saintly Bishop Wulfstan. When William Rufus regained control, he allowed the rebels to retain their lands in returning for swearing fealty, with only their leader, the Hastings veteran Bishop Odo of Bayeux, being banished to Normandy .

In Wales, after the death of Bleddyn ap Cynfyn in 1075, the kingdom of Powys was divided between three of his sons, Cadwgan, Madog and Rhirid, who became reluctant feudatories of Roger de Montgomery, their powerful neighbour. In 1088, while the great Marchers were distracted by rebellion, they revived their father's claims to Deuheubath and launched a sudden attack on Rhys ap Tewdwr. Taken by surprise, Rhys fled to Ireland, where he hired a fleet and

an army of mercenaries with which he returned to recover his kingdom. Madog and Rhirid were killed in battle and Cadwgan ap Bleddyn was driven back into Powys. The Deuheubath treasury, however, was greatly weakened both by the effects of the fighting and by the need to pay Rhys's mercenaries, some of whom, when payment was delayed, raided his coastal towns. To the east of Rhys's dominions, the former kingdom of Brycheiniog (Brecknock) had become with a tempting prize to its neighbours, with the great Norman baron Bernard de Neufmarche among them. Bernard's wife, Nest (also called Agnes) was a daughter of the great Marcher lord, Osbern FitzRichard and a grand-daughter of the even greater Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, the only Welsh king ever to have ruled over all Wales. Her dowry had included Glasbury-on-Wye, part of Brycheiniog adjoining Bernard's lands in Herefordshire, and so opening a way into Wales. In 1088 Bernard de Neufmarche joined his father-in-law in Odo's rebellion but was subsequently pardoned and encouraged to turn his energies westwards. He thereafter began an advance along the Usk valley, from where late in 1092 he reached Aberhonddu (the modern town of Brecon). In accordance with the Norman standard operational procedure, he began to build a castle, a hastily-constructed fort of timber and earth rather than a stone stronghold such as this term later implied, but still a sign that he had come to stay.

Rhys ap Tewdwr's agreement with the Conqueror had, both by Welsh and Norman custom, lapsed with the latter's death. Possibly concerned at the renewal of Norman expansion towards his own borders, Rhys responded to an appeal from the men of Brecon and marched to their aid. He was a skilful and experienced general, but in the open field his army was no match for the mailed Norman knights, the main battle tanks of their day. In a battle fought soon after Easter 1093 he was defeated and killed, leaving Deuheubath defenceless. Within weeks of Rhys ap Tewdwr's death, Cadwgan ap Bleddyn invaded and seized control of the kingdom he had long claimed. He was, however, soon displaced by Normans from Shrewsbury led by Roger de Montgomery's youngest son, Arnulf, and retreated to Powys. In the following year, 1094, Cadwgan was among the leaders of a fierce revolt in Gwynedd that halted the Norman conquest of North Wales for a generation. In the south, a similar rising against the Norman occupation at first had equal success, with most of the new Norman castles being destroyed. Pembroke, sited on a rocky headland by Arnulf himself, was one of those that held out, under its constable, Gerald Fitzwalter, also known as Gerald de Windsor. A man of great determination, when fifteen of his Norman knights grew demoralised and escaped by sea, he knighted fifteen of their retainers and afterwards gave them the deserters' lands. As the siege dragged on, he planted a false message to Arnulf for the Welsh to find, reporting that he would not need relief for another four months. This piece of disinformation led to the siege being raised, so that Pembroke remained in Norman hands and became a major base for the reconquest of South Wales by William Rufus the following year. During this revolt, Roger de Montgomery died, leaving the earldom of Shrewsbury to his son, Hugh, who defeated the rebels in Gwynedd and forced Cadwgan to seek asylum in Ireland. In 1098, Earl Hugh, campaigning in Anglesey (Ynis Mon), was killed by a chance arrow, and the earldom then passed to Roger de Montgomery's eldest son, Robert de Belleme, who had already inherited

his lands in Normandy. Noted as a military architect, Earl Robert constructed new fortifications at Shrewsbury and Bridgnorth to secure the northern Welsh Marches, but abandoned the campaign in Gwynedd.

If Cadwgan ap Bleddyn had retained control of Deuheubarth, his cousin Gwladus ferch Rhiwallon, King Rhys's widow, would have come under his protection. With Arnulf's victory, however, she and her daughter Nest were taken by the Normans. In Welsh society, women, even those from royal families, had few rights, least of all to thrones, but In Norman society the position was different. The Conqueror's own claim to the crown of England derived in part from Emma, the "Flower of Normandy" who was the mother of Edward the Confessor and wife, en secondes noces, of the Conqueror's late uncle, Duke Richard of Normandy. Arnulf might well have calculated that, when Nest reached marriageable age, her noble Welsh connections could be useful to an ambitious husband, just as those of her namesake had been to Bernard de Neufmarche. Like Helen, Nest had two brothers but neither could come to the rescue. The elder, Hywel, a son of King Rhys's first marriage, was himself held captive by Arnulf, while the younger, Gruffudd was too young to fight and, had been rushed to safety in Ireland. Nest therefore remained in Norman hands and was to be brought up as a young Norman lady. At some point, William Rufus judged her too valuable an asset to be left with an over-mighty subject, and made her a royal ward. In her mid-teens, having grown into a beautiful young woman, she came to the notice of William Rufus's youngest brother, Henry Beauclerc.

Henry, born in 1068 and a noted philanderer, rapidly made Nest his latest mistress. As an impressionable teenager, she may simply have succumbed to a charming older man, a substitute for the father-figure she had never known. He was a great prince, who, in a cruel and dangerous age, could be expected to defend her from the misfortunes her family had suffered. Life at court with him was certainly a better prospect than being put into a convent, for which she had no vocation. As the mistress of a prince, Nest enjoyed high status, and, in the eyes of her contemporaries, had done well for herself. On 2 August 1100 William Rufus was mysteriously killed by an arrow while hunting in the New Forest. Duke Robert of Normandy was absent on crusade, leaving the way open for Henry, who was conveniently (as some thought, suspiciously) nearby, to hasten to Winchester, the ancient capital of England. He seized the treasury and was crowned at Westminster three days later. William Rufus, openly preferring young men to young women, had never taken a wife. On 11 November 1100 Henry strengthened his own claim to the throne by marrying the Anglo-Scottish princess Edith (Eadgith), daughter of the late Malcolm Canmore, King of Scots. Then aged twenty, and thus older than most princesses of the time on their wedding day, she was very good-looking, and said never to need cosmetics. Nevertheless, to Henry, her most important attraction was her descent from the line of Alfred the Great, through her late mother, King Malcolm's queen, Saint Margaret. The match was resisted by those who said that Edith had been a nun, from her time under the care of her maternal aunt, the Saxon princess Cristina, abbess of Romsey. At a conclave of bishops called to consider the question, Edith deposed that, to defend her virtue

from the Normans, her aunt had indeed thrown a black veil over her, but she had torn it off and stamped on it, for which she had been scolded and beaten. She had resisted taking any vows and for a time expected to marry Alan Rufus, Count of Richmond, one of the Conqueror's comrades at Hastings. It was known that, at her baptism, the baby Edith had tugged at the head -covering of her god-mother, Matilda of Flanders, William the Conqueror's queen, a sign that she would become a queen herself one day. Henry, as Queen Matilda's youngest son, was already acquainted with her god-daughter, who shared his love of learning, knew English, French and Latin and (something he would have admired even more than her good looks) was a capable accountant. On her marriage, she changed her Saxon baptismal name to its Norman equivalent, Matilda, colloquially shortened to Mald or Maud. With a pious and strong□willed new wife, Henry for a time gave up his mistresses and sought a suitable husband for Nest.

This proved to be the valiant Gerald de Windsor, sixteen years previously the defender of Pembroke Castle, for which he had gained much admiration. A younger son of Walter Fitz Otho, William the Conqueror's castellan of Windsor (where Gerald was born c. 1070), he was one of the adventurous young Norman lacklands who had followed Arnulf de Montgomery in the conquest of Deuheubath. Arnulf, created Earl of Pembroke, acknowledged Gerald's part in defeating the 1094 rising and made him one of his most trusted companions. In 1102, however, Arnulf and his brother, Robert de Belleme, encouraged by Duke Robert of Normandy, rose in rebellion against King Henry. They were defeated and banished, and with their fall, Gerald, who had loyally served them, was replaced as constable of Pembroke. His inexperienced successor proved unable to cope with its wider role (effectively, as the Norman governor of south-west Wales) so that within the year, Gerald, having regained the king's confidence, was back in Pembroke with his young wife Nest by his side. Though the marriage of Gerald and Nest was primarily one of convenience, both parties gained something from it. Despite Henry's well-deserved reputation for parsimony (he kept strict accounts and his nick-name "Fine-Scholar" could have referred as much to his numeracy as his literacy), he always provided for his illegitimate children and their mothers. Nest, who had given him a son, Henry Fitz Roy or Fitz Henry, thus came with a dowry in the form of the manor of Carew (Caeriw), near Milford Haven, a site once associated with her royal ancestors. Gerald de Windsor was a brave and wealthy man who could protect her and her young child and keep them both in the style to which she had become accustomed. He was almost twice her age, but the disparity was not unusual for the time, and rich men often marry young trophy wives. Nest, by this time in her late teens, was very beautiful and, with her experience of Norman high society, likely to be an accomplished hostess. Moreover, she had shown she could bear a healthy son, an important consideration to men anxious for a legitimate heir. Gerald himself was still in the prime of life and, in the early years of their marriage, Nest bore him two sons who were given Norman names, William and Maurice, and a daughter given a Welsh one, Angharad. Having King Rhys's daughter as his lady could have helped conciliate the men of Deuheubath to Gerald's rule.

If Nest had grown up in her mother's company, she spoke the Welsh language as well as the French of their Norman guardians. A bi-lingual wife would have been a valuable asset as a reliable interpreter in Gerald' dealings with the Welsh lords on his frontiers.

One of these was Nest's uncle, Cadwgan ap Bleddyn. While the Normans fought among themselves in 1102, he returned from exile at King Muircheartach's court and re-established himself in Powys. In 1109, he held a great feast at which bards sang of the beautiful chatelaine of Cilgerran (Cenarth Bychan), near Glamorgan, a new castle built by Gerald to meet a possible threat from Cadwgan. The warrior prince Owain, Cadwgan's intrepid son, declared that he had to see her beauty with his own eyes. Attended by fifteen members of his war-band, he visited Cilgerran on the pretext of a courtesy call to his kinswoman and was entertained appropriately. According to the monkish chronicles, In the one supernatural episode in Nest's story (unlike the many in Helen's), Owain was tempted by the Devil with her beauty, and decided he had to take her for himself. After nightfall, he returned and found a way through the castle's defences. While some of his men created a diversion by setting fire to outlying buildings, Owain himself led the remainder to the castle's private apartments. With Nest's help (or, by one account, at her suggestion), Gerald, outnumbered and unarmed, escaped down the garde-robe sewer. Owain broke in, seized Nest and her children, and carried them off with as much treasure as he could lay his hands on. One romantic account postulates a case of love at first sight between both Owain and Nest, and that she went willingly with her swashbuckling second cousin, or even connived at her own abduction. She certainly stayed with him for some time, after bargaining for the return of her children to Cilgerran. With them safe, she might have decided just toaccept her situation, hoping that Gerald would eventually find her. On the other hand, she might have become a victim of Stockholm syndrome, whereby hostages develop an affection for their captors. The whole affair might simply have been a raid that went wrong, with Owain's real target being Gerald de Windsor rather than Nest. Great feasts such as that given by Cadwgan were often used as cover for preparing an invasion, much in the same way as military exercises are at the present day. A pre-emptive strike against Cilgerran, taking out the commander of the Norman occupation forces, would have been a great triumph for the Welsh resistance. With Gerald himself having escaped, his wife (especially if she was as beautiful as the bards said) could have been seized as a prestigious alternative.

In the event, Owain ap Cadwgan, whether actuated by love or patriotism, had miscalculated. King Henry could not overlook what was both a challenge to his authority and a personal insult, the abduction of a former royal mistress and her children, with his own son Henry Fitzroy possibly among them. Owain's rash conduct, involving theft, kidnapping, attempted murder, possible sexual assault, and breach of the sacred laws of hospitality, united both Normans and Welsh against him. Cadwgwn, aware of the likely consequences, appealed to his son to send Nest back, but to no avail, and came under suspicion himself. At Shrewsbury, after the fall of the house of Montgomery, the great earldom had been left vacant. Henry's local deputy was a royal justiciar, Richard de Belleis, a powerful Norman baron holding lands in Shropshire.

Richard had avoided involvement in the recent rebellion and been rewarded by appointment as bishop of London but remained in post at Shrewsbury, where his local knowledge now proved valuable. In the common practice of colonial warfare, he exploited existing rivalries by making alliances with local chiefs. In return for the rescue of Nest and the arrest of Cadogan and Owain, he offered their lands to the princes Madog and Ithel, the sons of Rhirid ap Bleddyn who had been killed in Deuheubath twenty years previously. They readily accepted Bishop Richard's offer and were soon joined by other Welsh princes. Owain and Cadwgan were hunted from place to place until Powys, prey to rival armies, became too hot to hold them. Owain found asylum with King Muirchertach ua Briain, just as Cadwgan had done earlier. Cadwgan himself took refuge with his Norman wife's family in Shropshire and was later allowed to keep his lands on paying a large fine and promising to give no further help to his son. Nest returned safely home, where she was re-united with Gerald and had further children with him.

Owain soon returned from Ireland and began a new war, attacking the Flemish settlements in Pembroke, so giving Gerald, whose area of responsibility this was, a further grievance against him. Flemings, coming from an infertile country such as much of Flanders then was, had long found employment as mercenaries. Indeed, William the Conqueror's invasion army in 1066 had included a strong Flemish contingent, which remained with him in his new kingdom. To strengthen the isolated Norman position in the far west of Wales, King Henry had encouraged large numbers of Flemings to migrate to Pembroke as military colonists, displacing the local Welsh inhabitants. Owain's attacks on the Flemings were joined by Madog ap Rhirid, who had fallen out with Bishop Richard at Shrewsbury and then fought against Ithel ap Rhirid, his brother. Always quarrelsome, Madog soon broke off the alliance and in 1111 started a new family feud by killing Owain's father, Cadwgan ab Bleddyn. This continued until 1113, when Owain captured Madog, blinded him and seized his lands. The following year, King Henry entered Wales with an army, obliging Owain to swear allegiance in return for being allowed to keep the lands he had variously inherited or taken. The next year, Owain was called on to honour his feudal obligations by serving in a war against Nest's own brothers. Of these, the younger, Gruffudd ap Rhys, returned from Ireland to Wales in 1114. Gerald de Windsor, as his brother-in-law, made him welcome at Pembroke castle, although as Gruffudd was the son of the last king of Deuheubath, and a potential figure-head for Welsh dissidents, Gerald may also have found this a useful way of keeping him under surveillance. Gruffudd subsequently accepted the leadership of a new uprising, during which, in 1115, his brother Hywel escaped his Norman guards and joined him. Throughout Pembroke, Norman castles were besieged and Flemish settlements came under attack. Industrious and enterprising, the Flemings had flourished as traders and farmers in their new lands. By 1116 their numbers had multiplied sufficiently for them to muster a small army for the defence of Henry's realm, with Gerald de Windsor, as an experienced soldier and the king's local representative, in command. Owain ap Cadwgan also turned out for the king, probably hoping, like several other Welsh princes who took the field against Gruffudd, to benefit from a share of rebel lands. Nevertheless, although

King Henry, ever the pragmatist, had forgiven Owain, the Flemings and Gerald had not. To the Flemings, Owain was a bandit chief who had burnt their houses, stolen their cattle and abducted their women and children to be sold in the Irish slave-markets. To Gerald, he was the man who seven years earlier had abused his hospitality, insulted his wife, and humiliated him in the eyes of the world. On the other side, to Owain and his men, the Fleming settlers were enemies of their blood, invaders who had dispossessed them of their native land. With a history of mutual hatred, when the two forces met it was not to co-operate but to pay off old scores. There was a prolonged exchange of arrows in which Owain was killed. His estates then offered easier pickings to raiders than the well-prepared Pembroke and the insurrection petered out. Gruffudd was defeated near Aberystwyth and forced into hiding. Gerald returned to Cilgerran with his and Nest's wrongs finally avenged. Nest may have subsequently played a part in reconciling him with her two brothers, as the chroniclers make no further mention of his campaigns. Gruffudd was pardoned and left with modest land-holdings. Gerald probably died soon afterwards, leaving Nest as an attractive and vulnerable widow in a frontier society. She then married a prominent Fleming, Hait, the sheriff of Pembroke, perhaps under some coercion to accept him as a protector. She had a son, named William Hay, but the sheriff himself seems to have died shortly afterwards, as Nest is known to have married again. This time her hand was given to Stephen, the constable of Cardigan castle. She was still a noted beauty, and though probably older than her new husband, quite young enough, in her early forties, to bear him a son, Robert Fitzstephen.

Almost all the men in her life went to war, a circumstance that to women of her class and time would have seemed unexceptional. Her father, King Rhys, was killed in battle, as was her abductor, Owain ap Cadwgan. Her first husband, Gerald de Windsor, was a veteran of many combats. Her lover, King Henry I, though remembered primarily as an administrator and law-giver, led campaigns and commanded In battle, most famously at Tinchebrai (28 September 1106) where he defeated and captured Duke Robert Curt-hose. Henry died in December 1135, aged sixty-seven, having ruled England for nearly thirty-six years and Normandy for twenty-nine. His final years were darkened by the death of William Adelin, the only legitimate son among his twenty-five children, in the wreck of the White Ship, the Titanic disaster of its time. His attempt to secure the throne for his daughter (another Matilda or Maud) ushered in the Anarchy of 1135-54 when, as men said, Christ and His saints slept. Nest's second husband, Hait, came from the martial Flemish community and, as a sheriff, commanded his county's posse commitatus, the assembly in which all able-bodied free men were liable to serve against raiders and outlaws.

In 1136, as the Anarchy began, Nest's brother Gruffudd ap Rhys again took up arms to throw off the Norman yoke. The princes Owain and Cadwaldr, the sons of Gruffudd ap Cynan, king of Gwynedd, King Rhys's old ally, invaded Deuheubath. Nest's' third husband, Stephen the Constable of Cardigan, took the field against them, accompanied by Nest's sons, William and Maurice Fitzgerald and the teenage Robert Fitzstephen. Gruffudd ap Rhys defeated Stephen's army In a battle where Nest's husband fought against her brother, and her sons against their

uncle. He then moved north to join forces with Owain and Cadwaldr, leaving Deuheubath under the command of his wife, Gwenllian, the daughter of King Gruffudd ap Cynan. Just as beautiful as her sister-in-law and about seven years younger, twenty years previously she had eloped at the age of sixteen with Gruffudd ap Rhys, a guest at her father's court, and shared his subsequent adventures. Following Gruffudd ap Rhys's departure, Maurice de London, lord of Kilwelli, re-asserted Norman power in south Wales. Gwenllian, a second Boudicca, rode forward in battle at the head of her army, only to be defeated with one of her two sons (Nest's nephews) being killed in the fighting. Gwenllian herself, with her other son, was captured and both were beheaded by Maurice's men in disregard of the conventions of chivalry. Gruffudd ap Rhys avenged their deaths by laying waste to much of Pembroke, but died himself soon afterwards.

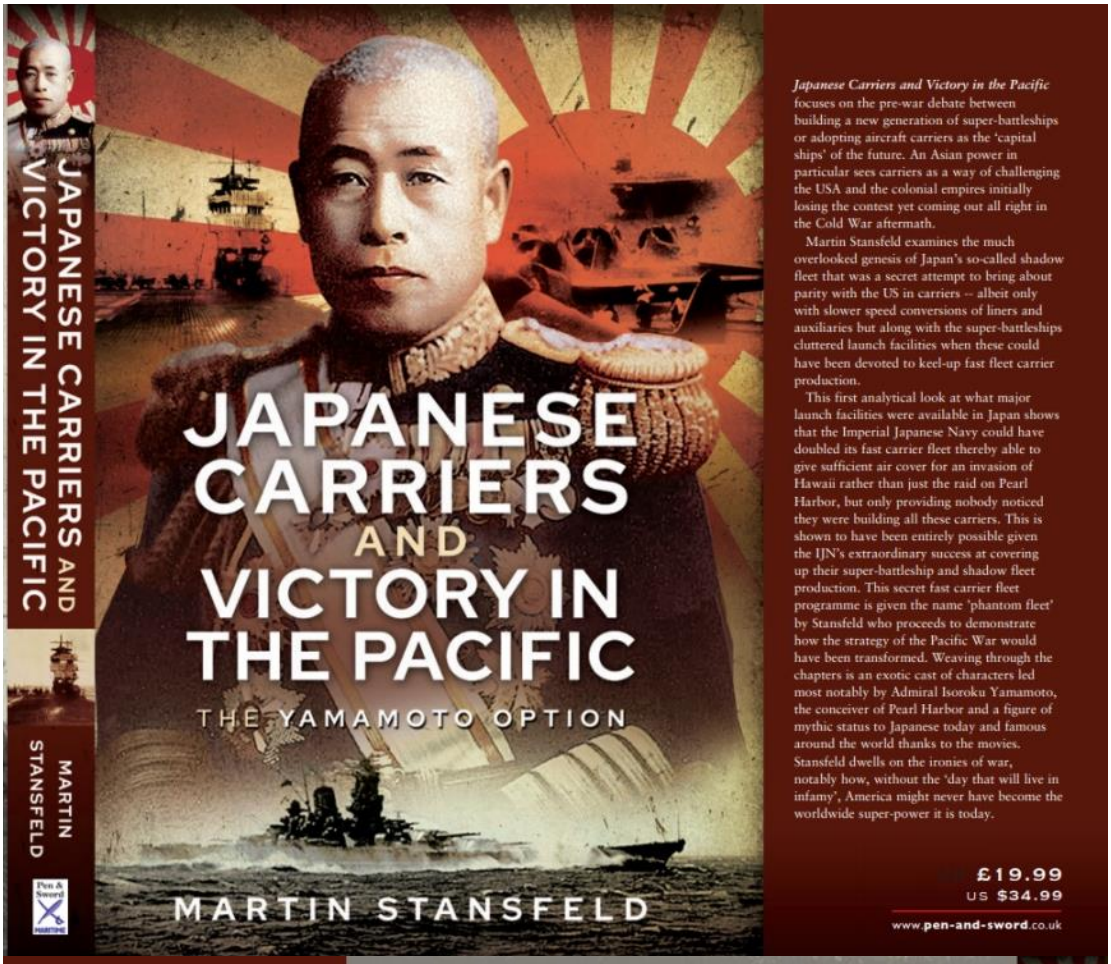
Nest's son William FitzgGerald succeeded his father as constable of Carew castle and changed his surname to de Carew, a family that later played an important part in English history. His brother Maurice Fitzgerald was granted the lordship of LLansteffan, Carmarthenshire, and in 1169, with his sons, took part in the Norman invasion of Ireland. His descendants, the Fitzmaurices and Fitzgeralds or Geraldines, became major figures in the Irish peerage and eventually, it was said, more Irish than the native Irish themselves. Nest's first-born, Henry Fitzroy, gave his own son a Welsh name, Meilyr, and held lands in Pembroke. In 1158, he was killed while leading an expedition sent by his royal nephew, Henry II, against Owain ap Gruffudd, king of Gwynedd (Owain Mawr or Owain the Great, the same Owain who had fought alongside Nest's brother in 1136). Her youngest son, Robert Fitzstephen, who succeeded his father as castellan of Cardigan, took part in Henry II's 1157 campaign against Owain of Gwynedd. Her son David Fitzgerald did not serve in the wars but entered the church, and rose to become Bishop of St David's. Her daughter Angharad married Walter Fitzodo de Barri, a Norman knight whose father had served under William the Conqueror and been rewarded with the grant of Manorbier in Pembroke, and Barry on the south Wales coast. Several members of this family took part in the Norman invasion of Ireland, where their descendants, like those of the Fitzgeralds, gradually inter-married with the Irish nobility and rose high in the peerage. Her daughter Angharad's son, Gerald Fitzwalter, entered the church through the patronage of his uncle the bishop, whom he was expected to succeeded. His preferment was blocked by Henry II, fresh from the conflict with Archbishop Thomas a Becket and he accordingly turned to an academic life, where, as Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales), he wrote many valuable books on the history and geography of his country. He was very proud of his distinguished Welsh ancestry, and his books give special mentions of his great-aunt Gwenllian and his grandmother Nest.

Nest, daughter of a Welsh king, mistress of a great Norman prince, a colonial governor's lady, and the ancestress of three aristocratic dynasties, has attracted attention mostly for being kidnapped and the cause of a war. The most recent account of her life, on which this article is largely based, is *Princess Nest of Wales, Seductress of the English* by Kari Maund (Tempus

Publishing, Stroud, Gloucestershire, 2007). A recognised authority on the history of medieval Wales, Dr Maund is in this instance ill-served by her title. Nest was not a princess of Wales, nor, though much-married, was she a seductress, least of all of the English, as her various husbands and lovers were all Normans, Welsh or Flemish. The book in fact is a scholarly study of Welsh history and society at the turn of the first millennium, supported by authoritative end-notes, source references and an exhaustive bibliography. Its numerous illustrations include photographs of the various castles associated with events in Nest's life, invaluable as a companion to any battlefield tour of Wales undertaken as a post-Covid or post-Brexit substitute for North-West Europe. Although Edward I's massive fortifications in North Wales are more famous, South Wales bristles with castles. Manorbier, a name familiar to the many anti-aircraft gunners who attended practice camps at its School of Artillery, has a fine castle, noteworthy as the birth-place of Gerald of Wales. In family ownership and used as a wedding venue, its grounds are open to visitors for a modest charge. Carew Castle, still owned by the Carew family, is leased out to Cadw, the Welsh heritage authority, and open to the public. There, visitors in need of refreshment may take advantage of Nest's Tea Room, a tribute to the Helen of Wales.

Nest with Henry I

(Source: Manuscript illustration in the British Libary)



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MARTIN STANSFELD endured a professional career in public communication in London and in New York as a publicist latterly notably worldwide for Sotheby's in particular. He was educated at Eton and at Christ Church College, Oxford and graduated in Modern History. For his special subject he chose naval history and the theory of war, which became one of his abiding hobbies thereafter. Gifted as a child with a Janes Fighting Ships annual he was inspired to model the entire Imperial Japanese Navy in plasticine and to scale. Why the IJN? Because their ships looked far sexier than anyone else's (as seems a choice made by the model ships hobby in more modern time). His other main historical interests have focussed on the transition of the Age of Late Antiquity into the Dark Age, which involved him as leader in Debrett's Quest for King Arthur (later published by Doubleday) and with Debrett's the publication of Debrett's Texas Peerage as editor of Debrett's American Society series published by Putnam. Following that phase in New York he returned to his native lowland Scots roots in Angus to look after inherited rural properties and to redevelop them, after habitat enhancement and subsequent management, for future sale; and in the course of that settling in semi-retirement on the Riviera. He is married to Monica originally from Ohio, US. His hobbies are art and antique collecting, salmon fishing, and history reading.

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