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HALIFAX
MILITARY HISTORY
SOCIETY

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Image on front page : Bosworth Field Reenactors

Editor's Notes

Douglas Haig always used to open his diary entries with a note on the weather, and I've noticed a similar tendency in these 'Editor's Notes'. So welcome to Autumn which seems to have arrived more suddenly than usual this year. Wasn't it still summer last week?

We have another varied collection of articles, this time with a Second World War bias, although the mix is somewhat esoteric - a royal conspiracy story, chamber pots and British citizens fighting for the enemy. Look out for Stuart Wilkinson's My American Cousins – a family history to die for, and of course, our regular series from our patron, Peter Liddle, reflecting on the books he has read and loved.

Many thanks to our contributors to this edition and a reminder that this eMagazine is open to all. If you have an idea for an article or a series of articles, please get in touch using the email below or speak to one of the committee at one of our meetings. Suggested length is 500-1000 words.

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The Magazine of the Halifax Military History Society

BOOKWORMING : Medieval

Peter Liddle

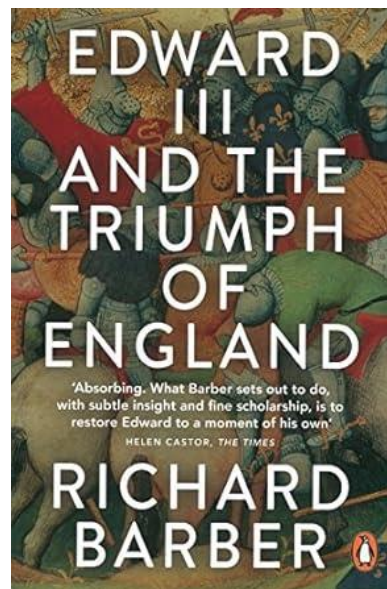
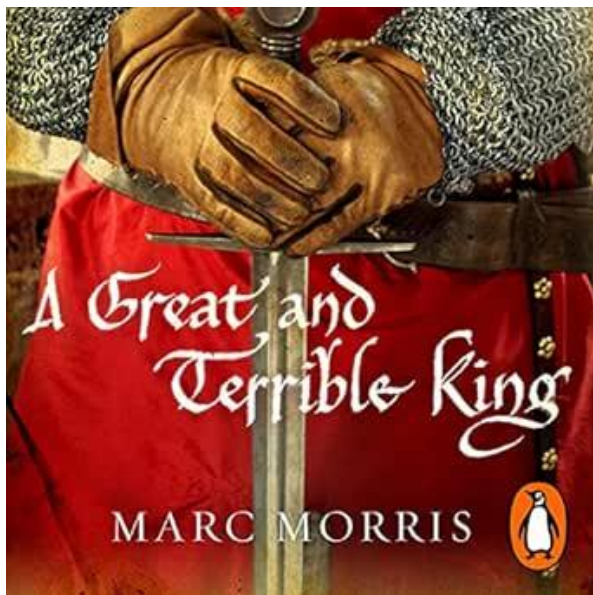
Let me write now about books on the **medieval** period, an era not studied since days at university but for some time now quite methodically selected. It may be thought that this commitment was founded 'quite schoolboyishly'. Why? Because notable Kings, victorious battles with the French, castles, siege warfare and also it must be said, ecclesiastical architecture, dominate my reading!

The origin of this interest dates from days as a teacher, further fostered in lecturing and field working with students. First, a dawning thrill within me for the magic of the Past and no, not an idealised picture of the Past but one where there were discoveries to be made. There were first hand sources to be explored, of course with various forms of help. There were sites and buildings to bring the Past nearer, a growing awareness that the evidence that remained of our Past was threatened. When, much later, I came upon living memory as a very obvious threatened source, it came to direct my professional life and inner drive.

There is quite an interesting link, or perhaps more appropriately, twist, between those early teaching years and my current reading interests. In the 1960s and 70s I became pretty well-informed in particular on castle design, so much so that it might have led to my first publication. Throughout Britain and in France too, with family, schoolchildren or students, I had visited hundreds of castles from their earliest to their final form in the age of gunpowder but my knowledge of their Tenants in Chief or appointed castillans, and life for everyone in a castle in times of peace, was inadequate. To some extent, my more recent reading has been filling in the gaps.

BOOKWORMING : Medieval

For the Kings: *Edward I, A Great and Terrible King*, by Marc Morris I thought was superb, but would not, for good reason, recommend it to any Scottish or Welsh friends! *Edward III, the Perfect King* by Ian Mortimer was outstanding too, so engagingly written and deeply researched, Richard Barber's *Edward III and The Triumph of England*, was also good I judged. *Edward III and the Order of the Garter* by Paul Barber, offered considerably new information to me on the courtly circle, the highly sophisticated entertainment and fashion in clothing and my goodness the expense involved.



BOOKWORMING : Medieval

I have learned a great deal about hitherto sketchily familiar leading personalities in Britain's medieval world and warfare from the following volumes:

Eleanor of Aquitaine by Alison Weir,

The Greatest Knight, (William Marshall) by Thomas Ashbridge,

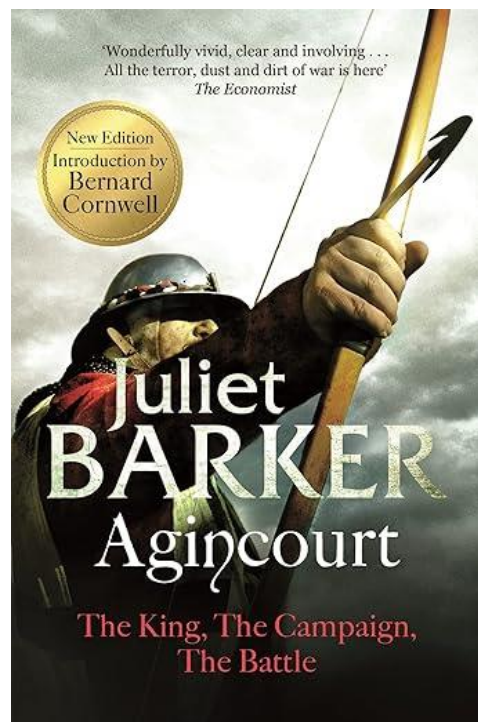
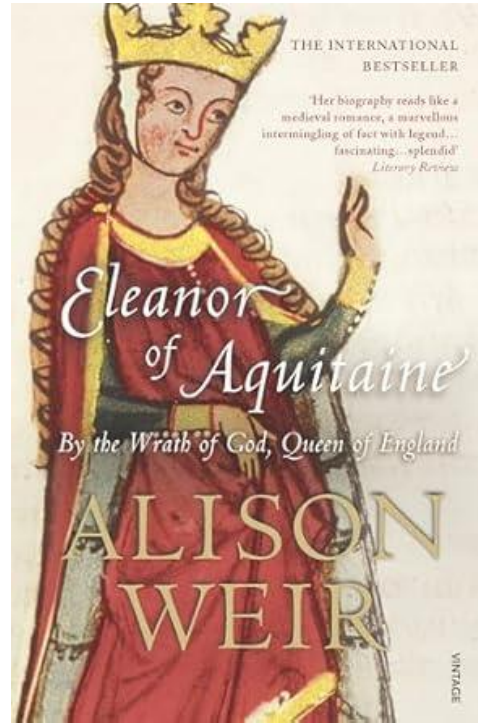
The Red Prince (John of Gaunt) by Helen Carr,

The Black Prince and the Capture of a King by Marilyn Livingstone and Morgen Witzel,

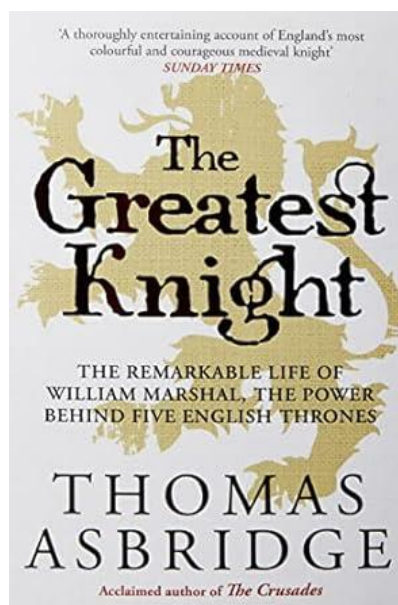
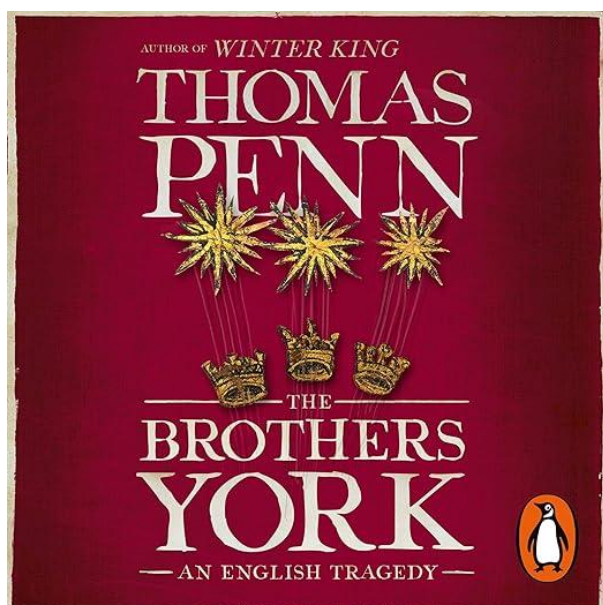
Chivalry and the Art of War by Stephen Cooper,

By Sword and Fire: Cruelty and Atrocity in Medieval Warfare, by Sean McGlynn,

The Castle at War: Medieval England and Wales, by Dan Spencer, though this book was a little disappointing in that its intense detail obscured what I felt was essentially, a sense of the evolutionary development of fortification. Penultimately, *Agincourt* by Juliet Barker, was absolutely enthralling.



Jeffrey James's *Edward IV* was always interesting and Thomas Penn wrote well in *The Brothers York*, a massively researched volume. Its only defect for this aged reader being its discordant use of ultra-modern idioms, phrasing and vocabulary. Chris Skidmore in *Richard III* made a convincing case for this maligned monarch to be judged by the standards of his time and I liked this insistence while naturally shuddering at the evidence provided of top level duplicity and ruthlessness. An intriguing element that Skidmore draws attention to, is a North South divide in allegiances. PW Hammond and Anne F Sutton's self-declared story-telling theme, *Richard III and the Road to Bosworth* has its own merits too.



This long gone world is for me endlessly fascinating but the thought of actually living in it oneself sets up instant apprehension. When people talk of 'oh I would like to have been alive at that time', an immediate response should be, at what level in society and on whose 'side' in the almost inevitable peril of being involved in a great family power struggle.

A RIGHT ROYAL MYSTERY

Ian Richardson

Out of the blue, my wife's family received a letter from an author researching the death of the Duke of Kent in a 1942 plane crash, in which my wife's uncle was also killed. This revived sad memories and old conspiracy theories, as many rumours swirled around the unexplained crash, principally because of the controversial central character - Prince George, the younger brother of Kings Edward VIII and George VI.

The Duke of Kent had been the classic playboy aristocrat, during and after a spell in the Royal Navy. He was a heavy user of cocaine and morphine; he had numerous affairs with men and women - such as the singer Jessie Matthews, the Duchess of Argyll, and Noel Coward (allegedly), and after his marriage to Princess Marina in 1934 he became a leading host in London society. In 1940 he joined the Royal Air Force and assumed the role of Air Commodore in the welfare section of the RAF Inspector General's staff and visited air bases etc. to boost morale.

My wife's Uncle John had been employed by the Duke of Kent since 1934 initially as a footman and subsequently as his valet, and when he joined the RAF John became his batman as LAC 027117 in 228 Squadron RAF Volunteer Reserve.



John Hales with the Duchess of Kent



LAC Hales in Canada 1941

A RIGHT ROYAL MYSTERY

In August 1942 the Duke of Kent was scheduled to visit RAF Reykjavik, principally to thank American troops based there after the USA had joined the war. The journey from a seaplane base, RAF Invergordon, in Scotland to Iceland, on 25th August was in a Short Sunderland Mark III flying-boat and was scheduled to fly over the North Sea up the north-east coast before heading north-west to Reykjavik. At 1 p.m. the plane took off in foggy conditions, and half an hour later it crashed into Eagle's Rock, near Dunbeath in Caithness, and exploded in flames. Fourteen of the 15 passengers and crew were killed, including the Duke of Kent and my wife's Uncle John, but one man (the wireless operator) survived. The Duke of Kent was the first member of a British Royal Family to die on active military service since James IV of Scotland at Flodden in 1513.



The conclusions of the Aircraft Accident Court of Enquiry were reported to Parliament in October 1942. It found that the accident was caused by the (official) pilot Flt. Lt. Goyen's error: despite being an experienced pilot of this type of plane he was said to have "flown on a track other than that indicated in the flight plan...and at too low an altitude to clear the rising ground."

It has also been suggested that the weather conditions may have caused the pilot to turn in a north-westerly direction too soon, and that the Sunderland seaplane, despite having four engines, was underpowered and unable to navigate the mountainous terrain.

A RIGHT ROYAL MYSTERY

The funeral of Prince George, Duke of Kent, was held at St. George's Chapel, Windsor, on 29th August. It is claimed that the Duchess of Kent was responsible for the inscription on the crash-site memorial, and that the wording was significant in referring to the "special mission" on which the aircraft was engaged.



Prince
George,
Duke of
Kent



Memorial
Cross

The only surviving crew member, Flt.Sgt. Andrew Jack, served in the RAF until 1964. He is alleged to have told his niece in the 1970's that the Duke was piloting the plane and that he extricated him from the pilot's seat. He said that there was an extra person on the flight - identity unknown but believed to be the Duke's lover, although in other versions it was said to be German politician Rudolf Hess. This seems far-fetched, as Hess was generally understood to be held captive in a hospital near Abergavenny, Wales since his flight to Britain in 1941. Hess – according to received history - was tried as a war criminal and committed suicide 45 years later in Spandau Prison, Berlin. One theory was that the plane was struggling to gain height after picking up Hess from Loch More, and the destination was Sweden. This was said to be supported by the claim that Kent had a briefcase containing a large amount of Swedish krona currency attached to his wrist (not very useful in Iceland!), perhaps suggesting negotiations would take place with the return of Hess to Germany via neutral Sweden.

MY AMERICAN COUSINS

Stuart Wilkinson

[ED Some time ago Stuart Wilkinson became aware of a branch of his family which had emigrated to America in the 18th century. After some extensive research he was fascinated to discover that not only they had prospered but they were destined to be bound up in no small way with the early history of what was initially a British colony and later the fledgling United States of America. It was the kind of revelation that family historians dream of!]

My Grandmother x4 was Rebecca Kershaw born in 1732 at Baitings Gate, situated on the Rochdale Road coming out of Ripponden. Her brothers were Joseph (born 1728), Ely (born 1743) and William (born in 1747).

They sailed to America, initially going to Charleston in South Carolina where Joseph worked as a clerk for James Laurens who was the brother of one of the founding fathers. The brothers later moved inland into the wilds of South Carolina to a place called Pine Tree Hill near Camden. Here they were traders and opened several very successful businesses and obtained many thousand acres of land.



MY AMERICAN COUSINS



British surrender to American colonials. WIKI

With the arrival of the War of Independence (1775-83) Joseph had become a Colonel on the side of the American settlers. His brother Ely was similarly aligned with the settlers but the youngest brother, William sided with the British, a reminder that the War of Independence was in some ways a civil war that could divide families.

Joseph and Ely were involved in several battles and eventually were captured and sent to Bermuda as prisoners. Whilst in exile Joseph mortgaged his lands to support the patriot cause, but unfortunately the goods were seized and confiscated. His brother Ely died whilst in prison.

MY AMERICAN COUSINS

Joseph had a son called John who was sent "home" to be educated at Rishworth School and then Oxford University where he studied law. Later he held prominent political positions becoming a member of the House of Representatives and Chairman of the Accounts Committee.

All the Kershaws were prominent slave holders, but it was said that they were caring for their people. John was a judge and was instrumental in condemning to death several slaves who were plotting an insurrection.

At the outset of the Civil war, John served in the military, but it was his son Joseph Brevard Kershaw who rose to prominence becoming a Brigadier General in charge of 'Kershaw's brigade' which fought in many battles including Bull Run and Gettysburg.



MY AMERICAN COUSINS



Joseph Brevard Kershaw

He also became a lawyer and after the war went back to his own town of Camden and practised for many years. He pursued a highly significant political career becoming Grand Master of the South Carolina Lodge and President of the State Senate. When he died, he was interred in the family grave in Camden in Kershaw County (named after his Grandfather Joseph)

[ED By way of further development of this remarkable story, the military exploits of Kershaw's Brigade was the subject of a talk given by Rob Hamilton at our September meeting this year.]

The Magazine of the Halifax Military History Society

THEY FOUGHT FOR THE FUHRER

Rob Hamilton

On 2nd May 1945, realising that the war was almost over and Germany was defeated, two members of the of the Waffen SS (the combat arm of the dreaded Schutzstaffel) discarded their military uniforms and donned Allied uniforms before surrendering to the advancing American forces. They were Thomas Cooper and Fred Croft, both Englishmen. What were they doing serving in the German Armed Forces? They were members of the British Free Corps, a detachment of the Waffen SS comprised of volunteers from the British and Commonwealth forces who had been taken prisoner earlier in the war. This is their story.



It all started with a renegade British man, John Amery. He was a rabid anti-Semite and anti-Bolshevik who happened to be in France when it was occupied by the Germans. Additionally, he was a son of Leo Amery MP, a minister in Churchill's Cabinet, so when he offered his services to the Germans, they readily accepted realising his propaganda value. His career as a radio broadcaster to England was unsuccessful as his broadcasts were so virulently anti-Semitic and anti-Bolshevik that not many people bothered listening.

THEY FOUGHT FOR THE FUHRER

After the German invasion of Russia, thousands of Europeans from the occupied countries volunteered to fight for the Germans against the Russians as they believed they were the greater threat to European civilisation. Inspired by this Amery proposed forming a British Legion from prisoners of war. Hitler readily accepted the suggestion and Amery began his recruiting campaign at a civilian internment camp in France. The Commandant had been ordered to assemble 50 possible fascist sympathisers and Amery addressed them urging them to volunteer for the new force which he had grandiosely named the Legion of St George. The meeting was a disaster with one of the prisoners who had known Amery previously denouncing him in no uncertain terms as a traitor and that anybody who volunteered was also one. The meeting ended in complete disarray and eventually only four people volunteered.

One was far too old for military service, another was recruited by the German intelligence service and parachuted into England as a spy where he was promptly captured and executed. A third was simply using the opportunity to contact the resistance and escape to England to join the Armed Forces and the fourth, who inexplicably thought that Amery was the British Foreign Secretary, was arrested by the Gestapo suspected of being involved in his colleagues escape and spent 10 weeks in their custody before being released. The campaign was a fiasco and Amery was sidelined.



THEY FOUGHT FOR THE FUHRER

The Germans, however, were still intrigued by the idea and tried a different approach. In September 1943 they set up a holiday camp at Genshagen near Berlin for PoWs staffed by English speaking Germans and also a small number of perceived German sympathisers from the PoW population. Life in PoW camps has been glamourised by films such as *The Great Escape* and *The Wooden Horse*. In reality conditions were very harsh, food was scarce, discipline could be a problem with violent gangs gaining control of some camps and although the officers were not required to work the men were, on a variety of jobs such as agricultural labourers, road builders and factory workers.

In view of this it is not surprising that some men were tempted by the better and more plentiful food, the more relaxed conditions and the greater freedom on offer. Once they were there the British sympathisers, who were already in place, attempted to recruit them into a Waffen SS unit which had now been officially named as the British Free Corps.



THEY FOUGHT FOR THE FUHRER

When the true purpose of the holiday camp was revealed, most men opted to return to their PoW camps and those few who did volunteer were mainly opportunists who wish to retain the better conditions they would have in the SS and had no intention of fighting the Russians. There were a few Nazi supporters but there were also men who decided to volunteer for the sole purpose of disrupting the unit. For instance, the senior NCO at Genshagen, Battery Quartermaster Sergeant John Brown, had been chosen as he had been collaborating with the Germans almost immediately from the time he was captured in 1940. The Germans were, however, unaware that this was only to facilitate a very successful black-market operation that he was running. He jumped at the chance to continue his operation at the holiday camp where there would be much less restriction on his activities. He had also by this time made contact with MI6 in England and was sending coded messages back to them regarding this strange new unit that was being formed.

During the entire time of its existence only 57 men passed through the ranks of the British Free Corps and its maximum strength at any one time was only 27. Recruitment had proved to be so disappointing that the Germans resorted to coercing people to join by offering men who had fallen foul of German military laws the opportunity of volunteering as an alternative to spending time in German military prison. There was continuous tension between the opportunists and the men who were actively sabotaging the unit on the one hand and the Nazi sympathisers on the other which led to many men either leaving the unit or being forcibly removed.

THEY FOUGHT FOR THE FUHRER

By October 1944 the Germans had lost patience and the 27 remaining men were sent to Dresden to be trained as combat engineers and after helping to deal with the aftermath of the British air raids on the city in February 1945 they were sent to the Eastern Front where they eventually joined the Nordland division which comprised of a mixture of Germans, Dutchmen, Danes, Norwegians, Flemings, Swedes and Swiss. During the time they were with the division they did not take part in any fighting but the tensions between the different factions in the unit came to a head and they asked to be pulled out from the front line. Surprisingly their wish was granted and they were sent to divisional headquarters where they were employed as drivers.

By the end of April even the diehard commanders of the SS realised the game was up and withdrew their men to the West in an attempt to surrender to the Allied forces. It was during this disintegration of the German army that the members of the British Free Corps dispersed and made their own way to the Allied lines.

After the war British intelligence, helped by the numerous reports sent to them by John Brown, tracked down most of the members of the Free Corps and many of them were found guilty under army discipline regulations and sentenced to terms of imprisonment. The instigator of the unit in the first place, John Amery, was found guilty of treason and executed in December 1945. The only other man to be sentenced to death was Thomas Cooper who is mentioned at the beginning of this article, but his sentence was reduced to life imprisonment. He had been born in England to a British father and German mother and had joined the British Union of Fascists in 1938. When war broke out, he was in Germany living with relatives and joined the SS in 1940. In 1942 he was severely wounded by shellfire on the Eastern Front and received the German wound badge, one of the very few Englishmen to receive a German combat award. He was seconded to the British Free Corps where he openly boasted of having participated in the execution of Jews although there was no evidence to support this claim. He was released from prison in 1953 and like so many other members of the Corps he disappeared into obscurity, very much like the Corps itself.

GEST-A-PO CHAMBER POTS

Alan Rhodes

Peter JF Henderson, a friend of mine from the Goss Collectors' Club has kindly contributed the following, together with a couple of photographs of his collection:

My family lived in Portsmouth, the southern naval base in Hampshire that was heavily targeted during the Second World War. My Mother recalled Junkers Ju 87 or "Stuka" aircraft strafing the streets at the outcome of hostilities, and later numerous German Bomber raids, mostly at night. My Father, whose pre-war Apprenticeship in the Naval Dockyard qualified him to join the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers in the Army, the "REME", where he became a Staff Sergeant, was away in the East.

At home air raid shelters were brick built with a reinforced concrete roof in the gardens, and many in our extended family moved out of the city to temporary and overcrowded accommodation every night to attempt some proper rest. Consequently everyone was familiar with the practical need for chamber pots, and the derogatory 'jokes' about the Nazi leaders on the Fieldings miniature ashtrays were a light relief for all.



GEST-A-PO CHAMBER POTS

Alan Rhodes

While seeking other Collectables at Antique and Vintage Fairs I came across the Hitler potties and was amused and moved to collect the ones in the illustration. Later I found the Fieldings mugs of the Royal family and was struck by the similarities of the colour and edging pattern the company had used in all of them. The Hitler potties are quite common and retail for about £40, but the spiderweb ashtray and the ones with Himmler, 'Piggy', and Mussolini, 'Wop', are much rarer and more expensive



GEST-A-PO CHAMBER POTS

Fieldings were a Stoke-on-Trent pottery company who used the trademark Crown Devon. They produced a wide range of practical and decorative ceramics including musical tankards and jugs with single tune mechanisms in the base. Subjects ranged from John Peel, Widdecombe Fair, a Bicycle Made for Two, and Auld Lang Syne, to Royal Commemoratives playing the National Anthem. Peter has located a piece I have never come across, a full-sized musical Hitler chamberpot which plays either Rule Britannia or the National Anthem. The illustrated example is in the Katz Ehrenthal Collection housed at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

<https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn537102>

Peter also directed me to an article by Roslyn Sugarman the Head Curator of the Sydney Jewish Museum in Australia about a miniature Crown Devon "Jerry" which dates to the early stages of the War. Extracts from her article follow overleaf:



GEST-A-PO CHAMBER POTS

Hitler's black 'toothbrush' moustache is an easily identifiable feature of this dictator's face. Numerous cartoonists satirise his distinctive features. David Low, a prominent New Zealand political cartoonist and caricaturist living in the United Kingdom earned fame for his merciless satirising of German dictator Adolf Hitler, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini and other leaders of the time. His depictions of Hitler and Mussolini led to his work being banned in Germany and Italy and being named in The Black Book – the list of those the Nazis planned to arrest in the aftermath of an invasion of Great Britain.

The caricature of Hitler inside the pot is the work of David Low. The chamber pot contains all the ingredients of anti-German propaganda, starting with 'Jerry', the traditional nickname for Germans and a common term for a potty. Mocking Hitler was common in Britain during the 1930s and early in the war, but satirical propaganda such as this became less common as the seriousness of Hitler's actions became apparent and death tolls increased as the war progressed. As Charlie Chaplin later said, their crimes were too immense for comedy.

See: <https://sydneyjewishmuseum.com.au/artefacts/toilet-humour/>