

For better or for worse, in her hands, the diary raises as many questions as it answers. Even basic questions like which language the officers used to communicate with one another or why Joffre selected des Vallières for this important job remain unclear. Des Vallières did replace Victor Huguet, who developed a reputation as having grown far too close to his British hosts, an indication that des Vallières's own supposed anti-English views may have been an asset in Joffre's eyes.

Des Vallières died in the service of France in 1918, shot by a German machine gunner while commanding the 151st Division. He therefore had no opportunity to sanitise his papers, revise them, or clear up unresolved issues with an eye toward publication. The diary is therefore raw and incomplete. Still, there are critical insights here, notably the separation at the senior level between Haig and the French as the British Expeditionary Force grew larger and its commanders more confident in their own judgment. Des Vallières became liaison just as Haig became the new commander of the BEF. Thus the timing allows us to see both men growing into their jobs.

The timing also puts the Somme at the centre of this diary. Haig's discomfort with the Somme operation as originally conceived is evident, as are the daily tensions at the highest levels of inter-allied command. Des Vallières highlights the prosaic but critical problems of logistics that hampered inter-allied efforts and offers some strong criticism of the BEF's tactical approaches.

As Greenhalgh notes, this diary, and other sources like it such as Spencer Cosby's regular reports to Washington, are valuable not just for the new insights they provide. They can also serve to triangulate other sources and balance out their disagreements. Of course, they may themselves be wrong, meaning that the picture can become even more confused. Thus, *Liaison* does little to remove the ambiguity of the war, but perhaps that is just as it should be.

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**Jim Storr, *King Arthur's Wars: The Anglo-Saxon Conquest of England*. Solihull: Helion, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-910777-81-7. 304pp, 96 figures. Hardback. Price £20.29.**

Many books claim to present a ground-breaking development in our understanding of a given historical event or period. These claims rarely withstand closer examination. In the case of *King Arthur's Wars*, however, Jim Storr might be justified in making such

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a bold statement. Strangely little has been written about how Roman Britain became Anglo-Saxon England. The impression often given is that the population had become soft, easily swept aside by the vigorous newcomers once the last Roman military units were withdrawn. The Welsh remained, but as they had never really been Romanised, they were in a different category. History is written by the victors: the English claim descent from the Anglo-Saxons, so it is perhaps no surprise that the late Romano-British barely appear in our schoolbooks.

Great advances in understanding often come through applying skills and perspectives developed in one discipline to the issues of another. *King Arthur's Wars* presents an excellent example. Storr approaches the topic from the stance of a former infantry officer, a writer of military doctrine, and a trained civil engineer. This means that he has a soldier's eye for terrain, a general's view of strategy, and an engineer's understanding of earthworks. This has allowed him to see what he terms 'the elephant in the room' – the fact that England is criss-crossed by scores of defensive earthworks ('dykes') built in the Dark Ages. Many stretch for mile after mile, others carefully block fords, Roman roads or other key communications routes. These dykes, which stratigraphy demonstrates must date from this period, have been all but ignored in the existing literature. Indeed, as Storr shows, they are entirely absent from almost every recent account, yet they represent a substantial effort by the societies of the time. An effort that must have been driven by a pressing need.

Storr's soldier's eye, applied through painstakingly visiting most of the sites in person, reveals how carefully these dykes were placed in the terrain and the tactical value of even the smallest of them in greatly strengthening a defensive position. His engineering experience allows him to understand precisely how they would have been built and the surprisingly limited amount of manpower required. His general's view of strategy allows him to look at the map, seemingly covered in a random scattering of dykes, and understand how these reflect the ebb and flow of the Saxon conquest. This reveals the theatre-level planning undertaken by senior commanders, initially only the Romano-British leaders but subsequently also by the Saxons, who clearly learned from their enemy.

Having demonstrated that existing scholarship has overlooked a major feature of the period, Storr has deliberately stepped back from that literature and sought to take a fresh look at the source material, without being distracted by previous interpretations. He has also complemented his military expertise and reinterpretation of the ancient literary sources by drawing upon place-name analysis. The resulting conclusions are often startlingly different from the accepted tradition, but are always clearly argued. The result is to present the Romano-British in a far more favourable light. Not as decadent remnants, swept aside by the vigorous Saxons, but as highly-skilled strategists, steeped in advanced Roman military tradition.

Initially, they sought to hem the early Anglo-Saxon settlers into tightly-restrained areas of Kent, Essex and East Anglia. Later, they built long defensive lines, the equal in engineering expertise to Hadrian's Wall, to hold back the expanding zones held by the invading forces. Rather than sweeping across England in a matter of decades, Storr demonstrates how the Saxon conquest was a far slower process, of long periods of stability, sometimes lasting for generations, punctuated by sudden breakthroughs as the Saxons overcame one line of earthworks, only to be halted by a further position constructed on the next natural defensive feature, finally reaching the borders of Cornwall only in the late 700s A.D. Storr draws revealing parallels with the 'bite and hold' tactics employed by the British Army in 1917.

One of the key features of Storr's work is that his manner is always accessible and engaging. Almost 100 maps and figures, all drawn by the author himself, make clear the complex flow of operations. Seeking first to draw in the reader, Storr has deliberately left the discussion of technique and analysis of sources to the end of the book, after the detailed narrative that emerges from his methodology. This technique works well, though might have been more clearly signposted. He also maintains throughout a suitable modesty, always aware that the narrative he has developed is based on conjecture and probability, rather than certainty. But the result is convincing.

*King Arthur's Wars* is highly recommended to the general reader, with an interest in military strategy, as well as those focused on the Dark Ages. In addition, for the more academic reader, it offers an exemplar in historical technique, avoiding the temptation simply to accept the standard interpretation of events and instead consider the whole body of evidence with a fresh pair of eyes. Storr challenges us to see the elephant in the room.

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**John E. Ellis, *Owen Rhoscomyl – Writers of Wales*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-78316-949-8. Hardback. Price £19.99.**

'Owen Rhoscomyl' gives his name to this very readable biography, but that flamboyant and once celebrated propagandist for Wales is only part of the story. This book's subject had several names and expended his immense energy in a succession of remarkable exploits and achievements. Born Robert Scourfield Mills in Rochdale in 1863, his childhood was dominated by a formidable and charismatic Welsh grandmother, who thrilled him with legends of Welsh heroes like Owain