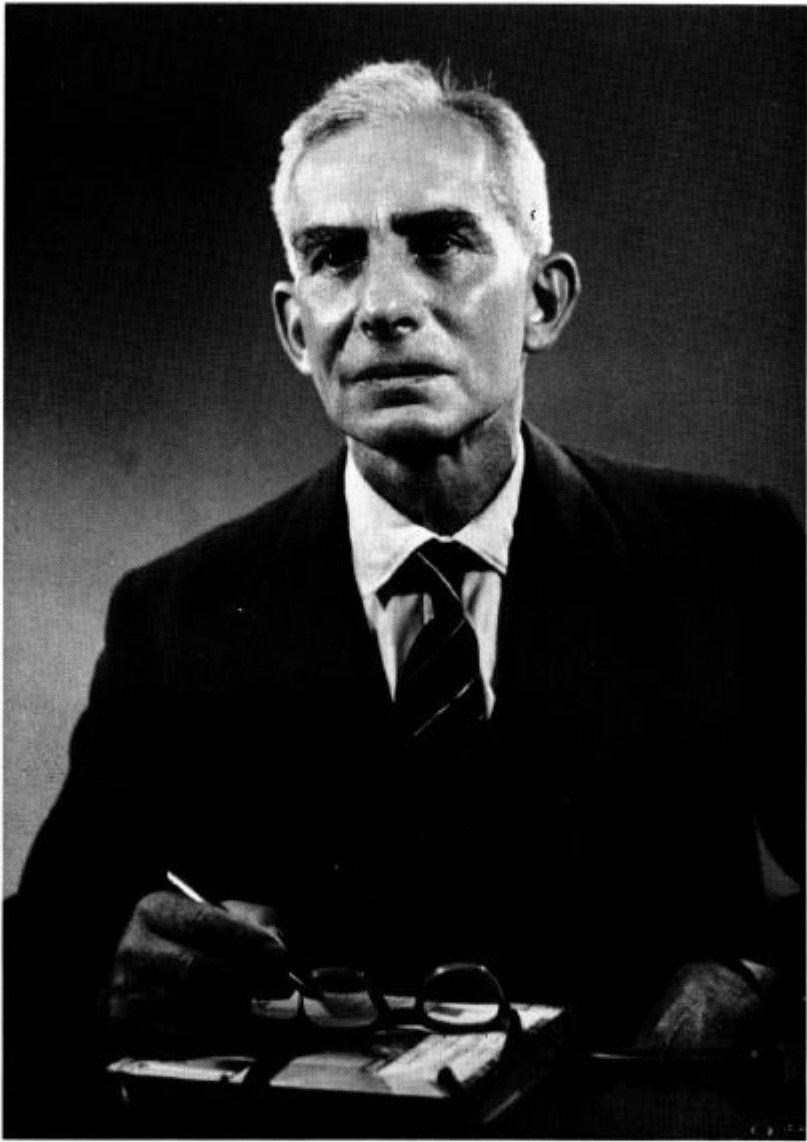


PLATE XVII



S. W. ROSKILL

Mark Gerson

STEPHEN WENTWORTH ROSKILL

1903-1982

I

STEPHEN WENTWORTH ROSKILL was born in London on 1 August 1903, the second son of John and Sybil Roskill. His father, of a family settled in Manchester, became a King's Counsel and Judge of the Salford Hundred Court of Record. His mother was a daughter of Ashton Wentworth Dilke, Member of Parliament and proprietor of the newspaper *The Weekly Despatch*. The four children of the marriage, all sons, all attained distinction: Ashton (later Sir Ashton) as a Queen's Counsel and Chairman of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission; Stephen as a naval historian; Oliver as an industrial planner and consultant; Eustace as a Judge of the High Court, Lord Justice of Appeal, and Lord of Appeal in Ordinary.

The family background was cultivated and politically Liberal. John Roskill had been a pupil and then member in the chambers of his fellow north-countryman Herbert Asquith, and stood twice unsuccessfully for Parliament; Sybil Roskill was a niece of Sir Charles Dilke. She was also, on her mother's side, a niece of Mrs Donald Crawford, whose husband cited Dilke in the celebrated divorce case which ruined the latter's career. Stephen and his brothers were thus, as he recorded, 'in the singular position of being great-nephews of both the respondent and the correspondent'. He was interested in these ramifications, and towards the end of his life arranged for some collections of family papers to be placed in the Archives Centre of Churchill College, Cambridge, where his own are to be found.

There was nothing in his parents' predilections to encourage the boy towards a naval life. That came in fact from his time at a day school whose headmaster, a Mr Egerton, was, as his pupil recalled, a 'relentless' enthusiast for the Empire and the navy in particular. Aged eight, Stephen promptly 'fell in love with all things naval', and remained so at his boarding school of Horris Hill until he was able to apply for a cadetship at the age of thirteen. His parents were doubtful, perhaps the more so as there seemed every likelihood that he could have sat successfully for a Winchester scholarship. But they were not

prepared to object, and in 1917 he passed into the Royal Naval College at Osborne.

Roskill later declared himself entirely opposed to the system of the thirteen-year-old entry. He was not particularly happy at Osborne, or at the new college at Dartmouth where he spent the final year. There was a good deal of brutality, he did not—though himself a good athlete—much enjoy organized sports, and his term officer (always a naval Lieutenant) did not think highly of him. He derived more interest from the civilian teaching staff, particularly from two of the historians, Michael Lewis and Guy Pocock. Under their stimulus he emerged with a first-class leaving certificate, and an Admiralty prize for French.

In 1921 Roskill was posted to a cruiser on the China Station. He thoroughly enjoyed himself, having the usual midshipman's excitements—including an escape from bandits on his motor cycle—and the less usual one of looking up facts for the ship's torpedo officer, Stephen King-Hall, who was completing a first book, *Western Civilization and the Far East*. Returning to take the examinations for Lieutenant, he gained first-class certificates in all five subjects, and a further Admiralty prize.

Fortified by these experiences, Roskill began to develop quickly in the mid 1920s. His confidential reports at first had been lukewarm: one described him as 'of a dreamy artistic temperament. Has brains which he will probably use more when fully grown.' The growth was now taking place, and the tone of the reports began to alter—'keen', 'gifted', 'a very good officer and shipmate', 'a good leader' (this last a change from college days). During his next appointment, to a sloop on the North American and West Indies Station, he was officially commended on the report of the Flag Captain of the squadron, A. B. Cunningham, for his conduct in the Bermuda hurricane of 1926; and soon afterwards he took the qualifying course to become a specialist in gunnery—still, as it had long been, the most powerful of the powerful specialist schools. Once more the final certificate was a first class, and this was followed by a junior post on the school's instructional staff. Throughout the 1930s Roskill served as a gunnery officer: in a battleship in the Mediterranean, an aircraft carrier on the China Station, and, after a year as an instructor at the Gunnery School, in HMS *Warspite*, the flagship of the Mediterranean fleet. In 1938 he was promoted Commander, remaining temporarily in *Warspite* as Executive Officer.

This was a promising career. It was also a happy period, for in 1930 Roskill was married (by Bishop Charles Gore) to Elizabeth

van den Bergh, and their family of seven children was started with the birth of a son the next year. In 1936, while back at the Gunnery School, he found the home he was now seeking after the usual naval round of temporary bases, in the house and farm of Blounce, at South Warnborough in Hampshire. Wife, family, and house gave him deep contentment; and an appointment to the Admiralty in 1939, initially in the Training and Staff Duties Division, promised a spell ashore in which, whatever the possibility of war might bring, he would manage to see them.

The Admiralty appointment lasted until 1941 (latterly in the Gunnery Division). At its close Roskill felt, in his own words, that he 'left behind . . . a legacy of mistrust, and even dislike, among some senior officers'. This impression may in fact have been exaggerated. But he was certainly plunged into controversies, in which he would seem to have given quite as good as he got. He was unfortunate in some at least of those with whom he disagreed: in his former Commander-in-Chief on the China Station, Admiral Sir Frederic Dreyer, a talented but unsympathetic figure, and above all in the formidable Professor Lindemann (later Lord Cherwell) who appeared at the outbreak of war in the wake of the new First Lord. Lindemann favoured a project for an anti-aircraft device known as the Naval Wire Barrage (eventually the Unrotated Projectile), in which a parachute was fired pre-set to open at a given height and trail a long wire to intercept the attacker. Roskill, quite rightly, thought little of the idea, and argued vigorously and persistently against it—his view is reflected in a footnote on p. 406 of the first volume of his *War at Sea*. The urgency of war may well have lent an edge to an intellect and temper by now impatient of folly (and this proved to be one of Lindemann's more foolish conceptions); for if Roskill's temperament remained artistic it had long ceased to be dreamy: he was a determined, vigorous man, with high standards and clear-cut opinions, and most reluctant to admit defeat. When he was appointed at very short notice as Executive Officer to a cruiser in the Pacific, he accordingly concluded that he was being sent out of the way.

It was true that the posting represented no advancement: Japan had not yet entered the war, and Roskill was leaving the centre for the periphery. But it was not of an abnormal kind for a Commander of his seniority, and he may in fact have been chosen at least partly because all was not well with the cruiser in question. He had been a successful gunnery instructor and Executive Officer, the latter in a testing post, and discipline in the ship was

apparently lax. He was soon able to confirm this, and took matters quickly in hand. They soon improved, and in 1943 he could see the results, when the cruiser was engaged in action in the Solomon Islands, sustaining damage in which he himself was wounded. She was well fought, and the damage control system—the particular responsibility of the Executive Officer—performed highly satisfactorily. Roskill was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for continuing to direct it despite his wounds. He was promoted Acting Captain and reappointed to the ship in command, and the next year the rank of Captain was confirmed.

Soon afterwards Roskill returned closer to the hub of affairs, on the staff of the British Admiralty Delegation in Washington, of which he became in due course Chief Staff Officer for administration and weapons. This was a highly successful appointment, at the end of which he was made an Officer in the United States Legion of Merit. While not a born diplomat, he liked Americans and had been impressed by what he saw in the Pacific; he was dealing with technical problems suited to his experience and imagination; and—always of importance to him—respected and liked his immediate superiors. The duties brought him into contact with the development of the atomic bomb. In 1946, when preparations were in hand for the first post-war test of a major nuclear weapon, he was nominated Senior British Observer. The event took place at the Bikini Atoll. In 1947 he went to the Admiralty as Deputy Director of Naval Intelligence and Liaison Officer with the American naval forces in Britain.

By now, however, Roskill was almost certain that his naval career was coming to an end. Ever since the qualifying days on the gunnery course his hearing had been causing trouble. It is indeed astonishing that no warning of possible damage, or precautions to avoid it, were given to young officers in the 1920s: Roskill himself, as an instructor, later enforced the wearing of protective ear pads by his course, none of whom suffered from gun deafness then or afterwards. The disability, aggravated by his wounds, was becoming marked in the later years of the war, and it was not helped by further exposure to firings in the United States. By 1948 he knew that he was likely to be deprived of a further seagoing command—almost a prerequisite of promotion to flag rank. A medical inspection confirmed his misgivings, and in January 1949 he asked to be retired rather than wait the remaining four years of his time as a Captain. In March he left the navy, with the official regrets of the Board of Admiralty that his career had been ‘prematurely terminated through injuries received in peace and war’.

II

At the age of forty-five Roskill had therefore to think what to do. The problem was solved for him almost at once. The Military Series in the *United Kingdom Histories of the Second World War* (the Official War Histories in common parlance) was taking shape in those years, and in 1949 an author was being sought for a volume or volumes on naval operations primarily in the Atlantic. A request for names, sent to the Admiralty, coincided with Roskill's retirement. The suggestion was put to him, he agreed, and the Board approved, thanks largely it would seem to the quality of his report on the Bikini nuclear test. After discussions with the Chief Military Historian, J. R. M. Butler, and the Cabinet Office which administered the histories, he was given the appointment.

So, in a sense by chance, this highly fortunate choice was made. It was by no means an obvious one. Roskill had written an essay on Jutland for the Admiralty's annual history prize in the early 1920s, which had shown enough promise for him to be sent for by Richmond, the principal judge. He was known to be well read and have literary tastes—he kept up his classics throughout his career—and subscribed to *The Naval Review*, the service's own journal of opinion and debate for internal use. But he had not published anything on naval history or current naval questions; his few appearances in print were confined to an occasional light piece in the nature of what used to be called *belles-lettres*, and a memoir, privately printed in 1945, of the Revd Francis Claude Webster, who had been his chaplain in the Pacific. His capacity could really be measured only by his professional reports, above all that on the Bikini test. It was very soon to prove more than adequate. The first indication was his recasting of his task. Resting on the classical arguments for viewing maritime strategy as an indivisible whole, he persuaded Butler and the authorities to discard the original plan of a volume restricted mainly to the Atlantic. One obvious objection to his case was the risk of undue overlap with the various campaign series, which were conceived on an inter-service basis. But this was finally accepted, and Roskill was soon at work on the first phase, ending in December 1941, of a comprehensive history.

Volume I of *The War at Sea*, published in 1954, made Roskill's name as a historian. It also made an important contribution to the official histories as a whole. This was not only because it was the most popular of the series so far, going into a second impression within five months and selling steadily thereafter, but also because

in its preparation Roskill won a battle against a possible threat to his treatment of events. It was not to be expected that all would be plain sailing in an undertaking of this kind, and he encountered reservations on three subjects in particular. Two of these—the treatment of Admiral Dudley North at Gibraltar in 1940, and more generally the extent and degree to which the Admiralty exercised its function as an operational headquarters in relation to commanders at sea—caused comparatively little trouble. But the third was a different matter. Roskill's account of the dispatch of the *Prince of Wales* in 1941 to the Far East, where she was shortly sunk with *Repulse*, raised the question of Churchill's personal responsibility for a decision in which, it seemed, the First Sea Lord had tacitly concurred after earlier opposition. No Admiralty signal in fact could be found giving a final order after the ship had reached Capetown, where it had been agreed she should be sent meanwhile. When the Prime Minister (as he had again become) was shown the relevant part of the draft volume, he objected that his point of view was not adequately expressed or given proper weight. He was said to 'feel very emotional' about the subject, and a long pause ensued while the author waited for agreement to his text.

The silence in fact lasted from May 1953 to the end of the year. By July Roskill was becoming restive, and by the autumn he was very anxious. He could not know that Churchill had suffered his unpublished stroke in June, and was being shielded so far as possible from business for some time thereafter. But the continued lack of response became ominous. Roskill did not fear so much that there might be an outright demand for a change of text as that there would be skilfully worded 'suggestions' which might carry the day. He knew of his predecessor Corbett's experience of pressure after the First World War, and was resolved not to suffer any loss of independence. The issue in the end was not put to the test; after seeking opinion from others, Churchill agreed reluctantly to let the account stand. By then the affair had affected Roskill's health. In October he was advised to rest, and went off with Elizabeth to Gibraltar and Spain. But the break was not enough, and after correcting his final proofs early in 1954 he was admitted to hospital, where he was recuperating when the volume was published in May.

The outcome did not owe its success to Roskill alone. He could have counted on weighty support if it had come to the point, and the Prime Minister was wisely advised before that became necessary. The upshot indeed can be thought to have been to his

credit also. But without Roskill's firm, indeed fierce, response to the very possibility of pressure that upshot might not have emerged in the way it did. The example was not lost on those concerned, within the war histories or among those affected by them; and Roskill's own later volumes—II published in 1957; III, Part I in 1960; III, Part II in 1961—did not encounter a comparable difficulty. They received much the same welcome as the first, and the work, taken together, was recognized as a major achievement. It could be seen as 'raising . . . official naval history writing in Britain to a high level of independence'.¹ It also impressed by its confident handling of an extensive subject: by the balance and proportion in the treatment of the various themes, and perhaps above all the sense of a lucid and dispassionate judgement coming to bear on an exhaustive investigation of events. The structure was raised stone by stone with an architect's skill, and the comments, where made explicitly, did not obtrude. Throughout the work indeed Roskill disciplined some strong personal views, and one of its strengths might be held to be his sureness of touch with praise and blame. There was a magisterial quality about the successive volumes. At the close the impression was one of a patient, relentless search for truth.

This has not changed despite the knowledge now that one significant omission was then necessary. No mention could be made at the time in any detail of the part played in the war at sea by the interception and the deciphering of enemy signal traffic, and particularly by the breaking of the German 'Enigma' ciphers, with the results classified as Ultra intelligence. Roskill, like others among the official historians, was able to inform himself in these matters, and in any case knew of them from his time as Deputy Director of Naval Intelligence. By that same token he was better placed than most to assess the contribution without specifically elaborating the sources. If one reads his volumes afresh in the light of information available since,² one is struck by the skill with which the problem is surmounted. The great importance of intelligence is acknowledged and conveyed, without underrating the many other factors that affected operations and guided strategy. In some ways indeed the history might have been overloaded had an attempt been made to analyse a subject so

¹ D. M. Schurman, *The Education of a Navy* . . . (1965), p. 191.

² Particularly in Patrick Beesley, *Very Special Intelligence* (1977), and above all F. H. Hinsley *et al.*, *British Intelligence in the Second World War* . . . , 3 vols. so far (1979, 1981, 1984). Roskill secured some of Mr Beesley's papers for the Archives Centre at Churchill College.

complex and demanding professional treatment. But of course there were disadvantages in the constraint, and perhaps still more in the lack of retrospective expert analysis the results of which had to wait for a decade or more. There could be no discussion for instance of the circulation and handling of Ultra intelligence, which bore on the question, of great interest to Roskill, of the Admiralty's responsibility for operational orders to sea. More generally, a dimension would have been added if he could have been more explicit. The fact remains that he took into careful account all he knew, whether specified or not, and that the lack of mention in detail did not affect his considered treatment.

As the war history progressed, Roskill came under some demand from publishers. He was anxious to supplement his salary as a temporary civil servant, and this proved possible without interfering with the history itself. In 1955 he edited a compilation entitled *Escort, The Battle of the Atlantic*, in 1957 he published a narrative of the successive HM ships *Warspite*, and in 1959 an account of *The Secret Capture* of a U-boat intact in the Atlantic. The next year he distilled his official labours into a short history of *The Navy at War*. These books, which had ready sales, were (apart from the first) published by Collins, with whom he continued, apart from two special exceptions, for the rest of his life. Three more followed, two in 1962—*The Strategy of Sea Power* and *A Merchant Fleet in War* (the ships of Alfred Holt & Company)—and one in 1964 on *The Art of Leadership*. Altogether he produced ten books from 1954 to 1964.

By this last date Roskill was ready to embark once more on some substantial studies. This was facilitated by the fact that his research assistant for Volumes II and III of the War Histories, Commander Geoffrey Hare, had agreed to continue working with him, as he did until the late 1970s. With such supplementary aid, a programme developed of considerable proportions. One product was a volume of *Documents Relating to the Naval Air Service* which Roskill offered to edit for the Navy Records Society. With his usual thoroughness he made of it a massive compilation. His publisher has said that to get him to quote from a document instead of printing it in full was like drawing a tooth: an admirable disinclination, but one not always welcomed by those concerned with producing and selling a book. The result here, some 790 pages covering the years 1908 to 1918, was indeed something of an embarrassment to a Society whose finances at the time were depressed. Thanks partly to a grant from the Academy, however, publication went ahead, and Roskill himself was convinced that

close treatment was desirable for a matter of policy which raised almost continuous controversy over a critical decade. He was anxious to illustrate and clarify the issues, constitutional as well as strategic, and to that end used a range of private papers in addition to those of the Cabinet and its committees and the departmental files. The volume, designed as the first of either two or three and published in 1969, amply fulfilled its purpose. Roskill remained anxious to continue, and indeed had done much of the work on a successor—which will be completed and published by the Society—before his death.

The other major study begun in the mid 1960s was on British *Naval Policy Between the Wars*. This required careful preparation. Satisfactory access to comparatively recent records was of course essential, given the terms of the fifty-year rule. Cabinet papers for instance had been catalogued in the Public Record Office only to 1922, whereas Roskill was ending the first of a two-volume work at 1929. But fortunately the official files for that whole period had at any rate reached the PRO, and his acknowledged standing after the official history made it possible for him to be given the necessary facilities and the co-operation of the Cabinet Office and the Ministry of Defence. He was also able again to consult a wide range of private papers in this country, and to receive much friendly support in the United States, whither his searches took him twice. This last was particularly welcome, for the period covered in the first volume was partly, as its subtitle indeed proclaimed, one of 'Anglo-American Antagonism'. The depth and endurance of that suspicion—surprising many readers in the 1960s—was one theme permeating the book. Others were the development of the base at Singapore, the size of capital ships in the light of experience from the First World War and of the current disarmament conferences, and (soon to be foreshadowed in his Navy Records Society volume) the prolonged debate over naval aviation. The ground had not been covered in detail before by a historian with full access to papers and, where still possible, persons. While the often arid and nugatory discussions did not lend themselves to graphic treatment, the book, published in 1968, represented a further basic contribution to the history of British defence in the first half of the twentieth century.

The second volume, which had been intended to follow shortly, was however delayed for some eight years. This arose from a sequence of causes. When Roskill set to work, he found that not all the papers for the 1930s had reached the PRO, so that the facilities he had enjoyed earlier were available now only in part. The

alternative, of studying files in the departmental offices before their final assembly, was a daunting prospect, particularly since some might be withdrawn for the latter purpose while he was at work. He was considering the problems when he was invited to write the authorized life of Lord Hankey, which he decided to do; and that undertaking took him to 1973. When he returned to *Naval Policy Between the Wars* a rather different situation had arisen, superficially more attractive but presenting fresh obstacles. For in the interval the Official Secrets Act had been amended to replace the fifty-year with the thirty-year rule for access to state documents. The change, sought and welcomed by many historians in the course of public debate, had been viewed in point of fact more circumspectly by others who had seen something of the needs, and ways, of Whitehall. For it could well be that an apparently, and indeed generally, liberal move would raise its own new difficulties; and so Roskill discovered, to his annoyance though not greatly to his surprise. Some files, and categories of files, which had normally been available after fifty years, were now placed in a longer closed period under the terms of the thirty-year rule. In certain respects indeed he was worse off than before, unable to consult some series open to him under his earlier facilities. He pointed out the illogicality, and permission was restored so that Volume II in the event was written from the sources available for Volume I. But these various complications and commitments postponed publication until 1976.

The second volume was subtitled 'The Period of Reluctant Rearmament'. Roskill was able of course to consult more survivors of the period than for Volume I. He had also to extend his inquiries more seriously to Germany and Italy and Japan. The book appeared in the same year as Volume I of the Grand Strategy series in the official histories of the Second World War, which was devoted to much the same period and added its dimension. Seen in the context of Roskill's own development, his new work also complemented the biography of Hankey by which it had been delayed.

That full-scale life appeared as *Hankey, Man of Secrets*, in three volumes in 1970, 1972, and 1974. It attracted great interest. The papers, very largely untapped in the few years since Hankey's death in 1963, were of major importance, yielding matter of fresh significance even for the period of his own published memoirs centred on the First World War, from which much had been deleted. The task enlarged Roskill's horizons, already widening from his study of naval policy as an aspect of national and

international affairs. He had now to be more than a maritime historian, just as Hankey, starting as a Royal Marine officer, had suffered a land change. The extension remained in the areas which he already knew best: of policy, and administration as a reflection of policy. Indeed, there is a certain resemblance in this respect between the biographer and his subject. Hankey, while centrally involved in a great range of business, was concerned in the last resort to steer it into execution, and himself retained a prime enthusiasm for matters affecting defence, with naval strength as its keynote. Roskill could appreciate the administrative skills, and was well attuned to the emphasis on defence. In these respects he mirrored and accounted faithfully for the great Secretary's interests and influence; like Hankey, he did not have so well established an instinct for politics and their historical framework. The volumes, like those indeed on naval policy between the wars, need supplementing in this respect. As a meticulous, objective account of a unique career, and of national policies as Hankey saw them in relation particularly to the guidelines for defence, they make 'a continuously interesting commentary on half a century of British history'.¹ They also strengthened the author's expertise in the area of that history which he was making his own.

III

While Roskill was producing this flow of books his life was changing. After the war he continued to live at Blouce, where he took the farming in hand. But in 1961 he was offered a Senior Research Fellowship at Churchill College, Cambridge. The invitation came as a surprise, and he entered the university world with an interest which soon became delight. But under these new circumstances Blouce, much as he loved it, posed growing problems, demanding attention in a triangular life spent between Cambridge, London, and Hampshire. The costs too were mounting, and in 1971 he decided, sadly but wisely, to leave. He and Elizabeth had been provided with quarters in college; but they now found a home at Frostlake Cottage in Malting Lane off Queen's Road, which curiously enough had once belonged to his Osborne master Guy Pocock. This they soon made into a small house of great charm. They both had excellent taste, with an interest in and knowledge of the arts, and Elizabeth had inherited as a life tenant some fine pottery and pictures—some of the last of

¹ Christopher Andrew, review in *The English Historical Review*, 90, no. cclvii.

which she passed to public galleries, as she was able, through the National Art-Collections Fund. There was now the chance to enjoy uninterruptedly the Cambridge life of which they were so fond; and Cambridge fully returned their affection. There is indeed a certain parallel here between Roskill and Sir Herbert Richmond, both of them sailors and historians, and both ending their lives in Cambridge, where both found much happiness and earned wide popularity. Roskill loved his college in particular. He was proud to have been elected a Fellow (and in 1970 a Pensioner Fellow), and played a prominent part in its affairs. A hospitable man, he greatly enjoyed entertaining in its rooms; a good conversationalist, he inquired and reminisced with his colleagues; a man of lively religious faith, he did much for the chapel and cared for its place in college life. Above all he was largely instrumental in developing the remarkable Archives Centre which was designed to cover the era of Winston Churchill. This emerged from an approach by the statesman's trustees early in 1963, to see if his papers could be housed in due course in the college founded as his monument. Given their importance and bulk (they are likely to amount in all to some 2,000 boxes under the Centre's arrangements) the accession would mean providing accommodation over and above the library already planned. In the event a special archives building was added, equipped to high standards and with space not only for the Churchill papers but for those of others, centring on his life span, which might be acquired. It was an ambitious project, which found in Roskill an energetic and persuasive advocate. Together with others in the college he worked and fought hard for the Centre, seeking out likely sources and supervising its growth from the mid 1960s to the last year of his life. The results are impressive: at present the Centre houses some 160 collections, varying from small groups of papers to major, significant archives. Much has been preserved that might otherwise have been lost or dispersed. Roskill, perhaps the prime inspiration, is rightly commemorated in the name of the search room.

Among the undergraduates whom he taught for the history tripos the Captain became known as the Ancient Mariner. He was beginning to look the part. A man of distinguished appearance, lean and dark complexioned, he now had a venerable air. His health was uncertain, following a serious haemorrhage from a duodenal ulcer in the 1950s. But it improved in that respect after an operation in 1974. On the other hand, his deafness was continually increasing, and this was a real handicap: '... many of

us had the amusing experience of watching Roskill and someone else talking to each other about different subjects'.¹ It was a tribute to his courtesy and keen interest in all around him that conversation continued nevertheless to flow.

Appointments and distinctions came Roskill's way throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In 1961 he gave the Lees Knowles Lectures at Trinity, and that same year and again in 1965 was a Distinguished Visitor Lecturer at the United States Naval Academy, Annapolis. In 1967 he was the Richmond Lecturer at Downing College, Cambridge—the occasion of an interesting address on Richmond himself. Four years later he was awarded a Doctorate of Letters by the university, elected a Fellow of the Academy, and appointed a Commander in the Order of the British Empire. In 1975 he received the Chesney Gold Medal of the Royal United Service Institution. In 1975, too, he was made an Honorary Litt.D. by the University of Leeds, and in 1980 an Honorary D.Litt. by the University of Oxford. From 1956 he served assiduously on the Council of the Navy Records Society, from which, after two spells as a Vice-President, he received the signal tribute of an honorary Vice-Presidency for life in 1976.

Roskill's productivity did not decrease. He contributed a stream of reviews and articles to academic journals and national newspapers, while his correspondence multiplied, as did requests for advice. He had the unenviable and time-consuming distinction of being called as an expert witness in the celebrated court case resulting from Mr David Irving's book *The Destruction of P.Q. 17*. But his own works continued to appear in his final years: an edition of *The Mutiny and Piratical Seizure of HMS Bounty* (for the Folio Society) was followed by *Churchill and the Admirals* in 1977, and in 1980 by *Admiral Lord Beatty, The Last Naval Hero*.

These last two books engendered controversy; Roskill was indeed no stranger to disputation, as is often the lot of historians concerned with recent events. But there was a combative strain in his nature, reinforced probably by the growing deafness which cast him back on his own resources. He had a deep respect for scholarly standards—intensified by his late entry as a historian—and indeed was humble in approaching his task. He was not proud, and had a ready sympathy and generosity of spirit; but also some vanity, and a passionate temperament which could escape

¹ Professor Owen Chadwick, in his Memorial Address in Great St Mary's Church, Cambridge, 26 Nov. 1982.

when controversy loomed and upset the deliberation he sought and normally achieved. Having taken great pains to satisfy himself as to evidence, he was disposed if publicly challenged to see the arguments in black and white. This tendency—at once constrained and fortified by careful scholarship—contributed to one debate in particular, with his fellow historian, the American Arthur Marder. Indeed, as often in such cases, the names of the disputants became linked, and are likely to remain so, in association. This is not the place—and there is not the space—to enter into the arguments, deployed with growing acrimony by the two most prominent naval historians of their day. But two things may be said. If the exchanges became wearisome they ensured at any rate that little of note escaped attention, so that every one could benefit from the results. And secondly, despite their differences each man recognized the other's quality. In 1976 Roskill was invited to contribute an assessment of Marder to a *Festschrift* for the latter. The piece was not published; it included much criticism; but also a notable tribute: 'Marder has gained for himself a place in the Valhalla inhabited by the comparatively few [historians] who have made an enduring contribution to our understanding of events of the past, and of the men who in greater or lesser degree sought to guide and in some cases to control them'. In the early 1980s, when Marder was suffering from the cancer which killed him, the breach, according to Roskill, was 'healed', and his old sparring partner's last letter was 'very cordial'.

Churchill and the Admirals, which embraced the First as well as the Second World War, was fuelled by this disagreement, for Roskill and Marder held opposing views of the extent and merits of Churchill's interventions, above all as First Lord in 1939–40. This naturally affected their separate assessments of some of the Admirals themselves, particularly of Sir Dudley Pound as First Sea Lord in 1939–43. They had been exchanging shots for some years, Roskill maintaining broadly that there was endemic and excessive interference, Marder broadly the reverse. Both could summon personal support, in addition to the record, from sailors and civil servants; neither was disposed to modify his opinions. Rather indeed these sharpened under opposition, and parts of *Churchill and the Admirals* may be regarded as an exercise—significant and acute—in polemics. *Beatty* was a larger work in that it tackled a complex personality and an important career in the round. As such it raised difficulties, when Roskill's wish to explain the parts played by the Admiral's marriage and

liaisons encountered strong resistance from the Admiral's son. The resulting portrait may not be definitive—Beatty's shade has always proved ambiguous and troublesome—but its value is not in doubt. The book provided newly published information. It gave Roskill's mature assessment of the Admiral as a sea commander—gifted but flawed—and as a great and sorely tried First Sea Lord. It also represents more sharply than any of his previous works a concern with the impact of domestic pressures on public life.

By 1980, when *Beatty* appeared, Roskill was feeling his age. Deafness now seemed almost total, and the nervous energy which had driven him through a busy life was declining. His sight too was fading, and he was greatly saddened in the next two years by a long illness which afflicted Elizabeth. His mind remained as active as ever; he dealt with his affairs and a large correspondence, and was contemplating another book, this time as a joint author. But he knew that time was drawing short, and took care to clear his desk. He died in Cambridge, after a few days' illness, on 4 November 1982.

Roskill's achievement was singularly complete. In essence, he wrote all the books that he wished to write. He was not a historiographical innovator: he was concerned with the familiar themes of policy and operations. On those lines and within that sphere his contribution was of the first importance. In the canon of *Hankey*, *Naval Policy Between the Wars*, and *The War at Sea* he covered with majestic sweep a third of a century of naval history in the context of national defence and global war. Together with Marder—*concordia discors*—on the First World War and its antecedents, he is the historian of the final phase in the classical period of independent British sea power. He never glossed over faults and inadequacies as he saw them; his judgements were searching and could be stern. But his books are pervaded by a sense of pride in and lasting affection for the service with which he fell romantically in love as a boy. This impression of tempered but deep attachment gives an extra dimension to the works which made him, with Corbett and Richmond, one of the three foremost British naval historians of this century. He laid sure professional foundations for study of the 1920s to the mid 1940s in particular; more remarkably in a sustained span of original research, he built on those foundations a commanding structure that will long endure.

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