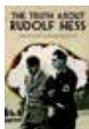


REVIEWS



The Truth about Rudolf Hess

By James Douglas-Hamilton
Frontline Books
£19.99

James Douglas-Hamilton's fascinating book sheds light on the remarkable story of Rudolf Hess's peace mission, writes **Lord Lexden**

This year marks the 75th anniversary of an extraordinary pilgrimage for peace between Britain and Nazi Germany. Undertaken in the utmost secrecy by air in a Messerschmitt 110, it brought Hitler's deputy, Rudolf Hess, an accomplished pilot, from Augsburg in Germany to Lanarkshire on 10 May 1941 (the same day that the Luftwaffe bombed the House of Commons).

Hess had come to see the Duke of Hamilton, whom he had never met. "We have a friend in common", Hess explained to his astonished captors in the Home Guard.

The Duke of Hamilton, a former

Unionist MP and a famous airman (he was the first person to fly over Everest) who held a senior RAF post in Scotland, interviewed the unwelcome stranger in Glasgow where he was in the custody of Corporal William Ross, a future Labour secretary of state for Scotland. It emerged that their mutual friend was Albrecht Haushofer, an important figure in the German Foreign Office with great influence on Hess who had always pressed for an alliance with Britain.

"The Fuhrer", said Hess, "did not want to defeat England and wished to stop fighting". In return "Britain would give up her traditional policy of always opposing the strongest power in Europe". He then asked: "Will you please have me moved out of Glasgow, as I am anxious not to be killed by a German bomb?"

“The extent of the author's personal victory over unduly secretive officials is evident in this memorable and moving book”

The whole remarkable story of Hess's flight and subsequent 46 years in prison has been investigated in meticulous and fascinating detail by the Duke of Hamilton's son, James Douglas-Hamilton – for years one of Scotland's most popular Tory MPs – who now contributes vigorously to the work of the Upper House as Lord Selkirk of Douglas. The task has involved extensive research in his own family records, among private papers in Germany and at the National Archives in Kew.

The material swelled following the release of classified files for which Douglas-Hamilton himself successfully pressed, often in the face of strong official resistance. There is an important lesson to be learned here. As he points out in a revealing account of his difficulties, "holding on to documents longer than is strictly necessary encourages speculation and can present conspiracy



Rudolf Hess salutes crowds in Munich in January, 1933

theorists with an apparent open goal". A few files are still being withheld from him while in others the names of individuals long dead have been redacted. Recently, historians in the Lords came together to press the government to improve its procedures for the release of material.

The extent of Douglas-Hamilton's personal victory over unduly secretive officials is evident in this memorable and moving book, a much expanded version of an earlier work published in 1971. It consists largely of two interlocking biographical studies. The first brings Hess himself into sharp focus. He was a born fanatic who found total fulfilment in carrying out Hitler's orders to the best of his limited ability. He had a particular fondness for instigating anti-Jewish decrees. Having fallen badly in his master's esteem in the late 1930s, he sought to win back lost favour through his madcap peace mission.

More interesting in some ways is the second figure in this tale of ambition, tragedy and folly. Albrecht Haushofer, the link between Hamilton and Hess, was described by MI5 as "Germany's foremost expert on the British Empire". He devised plans for the peaceful revision of the hated Versailles Treaty in a form that Britain was likely to find acceptable. Rejected by the Nazi leaders bent on war, this dedicated servant of the state was drawn steadily further into the ranks of the German opposition to Hitler and was shot by the SS a few days before the war ended.

Many questions have been asked over the years about Hess's doomed peace mission. Was he insane? Did Hitler have any advance warning? How did his plane elude British radar? Why didn't Churchill exploit this propaganda gift to embarrass Hitler? Why did Hess remain in prison until his suicide in 1987, long after other Nazi leaders had been released? Definitive answers can be found in this absorbing book. 🏰



Lord Lexden is a Conservative peer and historian



Victor Grayson: The Man and the Mystery

By David Clark
Quartet Books

David Clark delves deeper into a mysterious disappearance, and the result is intriguing, writes **Wayne David**

Victor Grayson was a beguiling and fascinating individual. In 1907, he was elected as the Independent Labour Party MP for Colne Valley, the seat which his biographer David Clark, now a Labour peer, represented many years later.

Grayson was a popular, tub-thumping mob orator, but failed to knuckle down to parliamentary work. Having an ongoing problem with the demon drink, he fell out with the leaders of the Labour Party and tried, unsuccessfully, to set up his own political party.

Disillusioned with politics in Britain, Grayson travelled the US on a lecture tour. When the first world war broke out, he went to the Western Front as a journalist and then to Australia and New Zealand to rally support for the British war effort.

On his return to Britain, Grayson considered a return to politics, flirting with the pro-war National Democratic Labour Party, but decided against this and, instead, withdrew entirely from public life. In September 1920, Grayson disappeared.

Despite many reported sightings, his disappearance remains a mystery.

David Clark's well researched and clearly written book describes and examines all aspects of Grayson's fascinating story. It's a subject Clark first examined in his 1985 book, *Victor Grayson: Labour's Lost Leader*. This updated version is the result of Clark's continued sleuthing

and includes new evidence which gives fresh insight into Grayson's intriguing life.

For instance, Clark strongly suggests that Grayson's pro-war speaking tours of the antipodes were financed and organised by the authorities. Also, Clark suggests that Grayson's very comfortable lifestyle after the war was, in some way, connected to his dubious relationship with Maundy Gregory, known as Lloyd George's 'honours broker'.

There is tantalisingly little that is specific, but the trail of circumstantial evidence suggests that Grayson's enjoyment of "the finer things in life" was financed through the receipt of considerable government funds. For example, the rent on his sumptuous flat in London was paid from an unknown source and that "every two weeks a package was delivered" to Grayson's apartment by two men "in uniform or livery".

This, it is suggested, may well be connected to Grayson's mysterious disappearance in late 1920. Clark describes how Grayson left his home, taking almost all his personal belongings because he had clearly prepared for "a major change of lifestyle". Clark therefore dismisses the suggestion that Grayson wandered off, suffering from memory loss, or that he'd died from natural causes. He also rejects the idea that Grayson was murdered.

David Clark is inclined to the view that Grayson "decided for some



Victor Grayson was 'a popular, tub-thumping mob orator, but failed to knuckle down to parliamentary work'