

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

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Glyndŵr and King Arthur. After school, he shunned the Manchester factories and headed for adventure (probably stowing away on a brig bound for Rio). He found his way to Colorado, and worked as a cowboy. Accused of murder after an end-of-trail shoot-out, he changed his name to Robert Glendower and made for the Wyoming gold rush. As well as prospecting, he worked as a scout in the Indian wars, gaining experience that would later prove useful in South Africa. He may also have been active in South American wars, but his biographer is uncertain.

Back in Britain in 1886, and preferring the more genteel name Milne to Mills, he, despite having only an elementary education, reinvented himself as Owen Rhoscomyl, a historical novelist whose work combined fervent Welsh patriotism with narrative gusto. Reviewing *Battlement and Tower* (1896) *The Times* critic commended the author for doing his historical homework, but shied away from sentences like: 'The grisly red of the great blade's length flashed round in a mighty sweep, and the head of Francisco van Bruges, rider to Rupert of Clenneneu, leaped into the ditch to fright the sweet water-lilies and forget-me-nots below.'

For Rhoscomyl the Welsh were a warrior race whose future was in the Empire, and the Boer War was their opportunity. Having travelled to Cape Town by unorthodox means, and now calling himself Keith Vaughan, he arrived just before the war began, and started recruiting an irregular regiment of 'Welsh Horse' from immigrants already there. Without any official commission, he raised two hundred men – until firmly told to leave the supposedly neutral colony because this enterprise was politically inconvenient. He headed for the front, gathering volunteers on the way, and joined Rimington's Guides, an irregular regiment of scouts. They would spy out territory, 'knock about the enemy lines by night', and keep themselves supplied by raiding Boer farmhouses. Sometimes they served as mounted infantry, and Vaughan claimed to have developed the technique of rapid, mounted suppression fire which 'became the settled policy of Rimington's Guides.' He fought several battles, gained a reputation for bravery verging on foolhardiness, and earned the D.C.M. He also courted and married the daughter of a Boer farmer. Though his reputation was tainted by accusations of war crimes, he ended the war with the rank of captain.

Returning from the war with a colonisation scheme that could have made his fortune, but did not, as he was always hopeless about money, Owen Rhoscomyl kept writing. He produced, for example, *Old Fireproof* of 1906, a novel whose narrator, an army chaplain, relates, with considerable admiration, a Boer War career closely paralleling Vaughan's.

He also wrote books like *Flame-Bearers of Welsh History*, whose martial spirit challenged then conventional ideas of the Welsh as a nation of peaceful chapel-goers.

His discovery of a heroic Welsh heritage convinced few serious historians, but earned him a key role in the Welsh National Pageant of 1909 and the 1911 investiture of the Prince of Wales. His romantic enthusiasm conferred on Welsh history a glamour only rarely discovered by more accurate and academic writers.

In August 1914 he immediately, and again unofficially, began recruiting a Welsh Regiment of Horse. Kitchener approved the unit, but when it became established, it was not under Rhoscomyl's command. This was not a cavalryman's war, but he made himself useful and ended the war as a temporary lieutenant colonel. He was awarded the D.S.O. and the O.B.E.

He died of liver cancer in 1919, with the dramatic question: 'Is it heaven or is it hell?' on his lips. His novels, his politics and his ideas about Welsh history now all seem impossibly dated, but John S. Ellis's biography is a suitably entertaining monument to a lively man who added colour to his age.

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Paul Cobb, *The Race for Paradise: An Islamic History of the Crusades*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Notes. Bibliography. Index. 368pp. ISBN: 978-0-1987-8799-0. Paperback. Price £12.99.

Paul Cobb's *The Race for Paradise* is an engaging and refreshing history of the crusades as they were perceived by medieval Muslims. It is a 'history of the crusaded, not just the crusaders' (p.278) intended for non-specialist readers, originally published in 2014 and recently made available in paperback. Cobb sheds light on the 'crusaded' by using an array of medieval Arabic sources which for too long have proved lamentably inaccessible for the many historians whose specialism and training lies in the history of western Europe. It is significant that it is these sources which provide the scaffold for Cobb's history: it is so often the case that sources from the Islamic world are used in a piecemeal fashion in studies of the crusades, and then usually in translation.

The Race for Paradise rewards the reader with both breadth and depth, simultaneously offering an overview of events from a Muslim perspective spanning from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries, from the Iberian Peninsula, to Sicily, North Africa and the Levant, and sketching tantalising portraits of the individuals who witnessed, formed and were shaped by these changes. The extended chronological and geographical reach of this study is consistent with the overarching premise that an East-West perspective on these events must inevitably take a