

Michael Renshaw: A Society Figure in War and Peace

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The chances are you will not have heard of Michael, or Mickey as he was widely known, Renshaw. The main biographical reference works tell us nothing, and even Google provides only the scantest biographical detail. A *Times* obituary is the only standard source from which to glean anything about his life.¹ Yet, remarkably for a man who left behind such a negligible biographical footprint, his circle of correspondents and friends included some of the most important figures of the mid-twentieth century, and came from a wide spectrum encompassing the arts, fashion, politics, and the aristocracy.²

The Renshaw collection³ came to the British Library in 2008 and forms part of a small but fascinating niche within the Western Manuscripts collections of the papers of those who, rather than being famous themselves, had famous friends. For example, Barbara Coombs, a member of staff at the National Gallery and Longleat House, corresponded with Ivon Hitchens and Eric Newton.⁴ The simple coincidence of engaging the same architect resulted in an eight year correspondence between Henry James and a neighbour, Ethel Ford.⁵ Robert Ferns Waller, a BBC radio producer, poet, and an early leader of the environmental movement, corresponded with Desmond MacCarthy, T. S. Eliot, and many other leading figures from literature and the arts in the middle third of the twentieth century.⁶ His correspondence with Eliot ran for twenty years.

¹ *Times*, 10 March 1978. There is also a much shorter obituary in the *Daily Telegraph*, 10 March 1978. Photographs of Renshaw are equally scarce. The only known published image of him is in Hugo Vickers (ed.), *The Unexpurgated Beaton Diaries: The Cecil Beaton Diaries As They Were Written* (London, 2002), between pp. 116-17, although there are other (presumably unpublished) images in the Cecil Beaton Studio Archive held by Sotheby's Picture Library.

² The full list of Renshaw's correspondents can be found in the catalogue records for the collection, Add. MS. 89068, at <http://searcharchives.bl.uk>.

³ The collection comprises letters received by Renshaw. His written output is as elusive as photographs of him and few of the letters he wrote have been traced. Eleven letters of a social nature to Elizabeth, Marchioness of Salisbury, discussing mutual friends, holidays, and snippets of news are held at Hatfield House Archives (ref. 5 MCH). Eight letters to Clarissa Eden are in the Avon Papers at the Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham (ref. AP31/1/136, AP31/1/136A-G). Letters Renshaw wrote to his mother during World War II, as well as wartime letters he received and a diary he kept whilst serving in north west Europe, are held by the Department of Documents, Imperial War Museum, London (ref. Documents.22599; hereafter IWM, Renshaw Papers). A small file of correspondence and papers, both professional and personal, can be found in the general alphabetical sequence of Denis Hamilton's correspondence in the as yet uncatalogued papers of Denis and Olive Hamilton (British Library, Dep. 10696). The Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College London, holds two letters Renshaw sent to Maj. John North relating to the latter's *North-West Europe 1944-5* (London, 1953) and the tenth anniversary of D-Day (ref. North II/3/319, North II/3/320). One letter to Dilys Powell, relating to obtaining an introduction at Ealing Film Studios for American actress Muriel Bremner, and a note to Leonard Russell about whether the *Sunday Times* should accept advertisements for books of a sexual or erotic nature, can be found in the British Library's collections (Add. MS. 87639). There is a strong possibility that many of his letters survive in private collections.

⁴ Add. MS. 89045.

⁵ Add. MS. 89051. The James letters have a fascinating provenance, told in Rosalind Bleach (ed.), *Henry James's Waistcoat: Letters to Mrs Ford 1907-1915* (Settrington, 2007).

⁶ Add. MS. 71221; Add. MS. 71231; Add. MS. 89056/1-2.

Like all collections of letters Renshaw's generally tells us more about the writers than the recipient. For the biographer of Hardy Amies, Cecil Beaton, Sir Anthony and Lady Eden, Ian and Ann Fleming, Robert 'Bobbety' and Elizabeth Gascoyne-Cecil, 5th Marquess and Marchioness of Salisbury, and the interlinked circles in which they moved, the collection is a rich and useful source. In amongst the society gossip can be found fascinating historical insights and comment: reports of life during, and just after, World War II in England and north west Europe;⁷ comments on the Cyprus crisis;⁸ discussion of British politics and society in the strife-torn 1970s;⁹ and references to the killing of James Pope-Hennessy, one of the most shocking events that is likely to have befallen Renshaw's circle.¹⁰ Unsurprisingly for someone who knew choreographer Sir Frederick Ashton, actresses Fabia Drake and Maxine Elliott, ballet designer Ronald Wilson, and painter Graham Sutherland, comments by Renshaw's correspondents on the arts scene abound.¹¹ As early as 1948, Paul Hollister was describing Michael Redgrave (whom Renshaw 'won't have heard of') as 'a superb actor' despite looking 'like a sheepdog coming through a field of dandelions' owing to his enormous beard in *Macbeth*.¹² Alec Guinness also came in for praise. Daphne Straight's view, having seen *The Old Country*, was that 'One should always make sure of never missing a Guinness performance and this was no exception.' Baryshnikov was not so well thought of, at least not by Maud Russell, 'no presence, not a Nureyev'.¹³ The fully nude ballet at Sadler's Wells, 'swinging in every sense' but interrupted as someone had strewn the stage with itching powder, amused Hardy Amies, who also enjoyed *Jesus Christ Superstar* in New York so much that he saw it twice.¹⁴ Peter Sellers's presence in Cyprus, where Renshaw was living, in late 1973 appears to have been somewhat disruptive, judging by Ann Fleming's comment that she hoped Renshaw had managed to 'exorcise' Sellers and company's presence.¹⁵ Joan Acton wrote of her and husband Antony's appearance as extras in a film being made on Corfu, where the couple lived, and meeting the film's leading actors, Jacqueline Bisset and Anthony Quinn.¹⁶

⁷ Add. MS. 89068/1/2, passim; Add. MS. 89068/1/3, passim; Add. MS. 89068/1/4, passim; Add. MS. 89068/1/5, ff. 10-24; Add. MS. 89068/1/8, ff. 92-3, 95-6, 98; Add. MS. 89068/1/9, ff. 17-28, passim.

⁸ Add. MS. 89068/1/1, ff. 4-6, 9, 11, 13-14, 16, 128; Add. MS. 89068/1/7, ff. 28-31; Add. MS. 89068/1/9, f. 50.

⁹ Add. MS. 89068/1/1, ff. 22, 65v, 70, 123v, 125v; Add. MS. 89068/1/5, f. 54; Add. MS. 89068/1/6, ff. 70, 103v, 128-9; Add. MS. 89068/1/9, f. 50.

¹⁰ Add. MS. 89068/1/1, ff. 53, 125v; Add. MS. 89068/1/5, f. 152; Add. MS. 89068/1/9, ff. 46, 47v.

¹¹ Add. MS. 89068/1/1, ff. 37-40; Add. MS. 89068/1/5, ff. 1-6, 100-138; Add. MS. 89068/1/9, ff. 81, 86v.

¹² Add. MS. 89068/1/7, f. 7. Hollister must have witnessed Redgrave's performance at the National Theatre (now the Nederlander), New York where *Macbeth* ran from 31 March to 24 April 1948. Flora Robson played Lady Macbeth.

¹³ Add. MS. 89068/1/9, ff. 52v, 62.

¹⁴ Add. MS. 89068/1/1, ff. 25, 30. The disrupted ballet was Glen Tetley and Hans Van Manen's *Mutations*. Ground glass was also sprinkled on stage. See <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/may/04/hans-van-manen-dance> [accessed 14 May 2014] and <http://londondance.com/articles/features/sadlers-wells-story/> [accessed 14 May 2014].

¹⁵ Add. MS. 89068/1/5, f. 154; Peter Evans, *Peter Sellers: The Mask Behind the Mask* (London, 1981), pp. 231-5; Roger Lewis, *The Life and Death of Peter Sellers* (London, 1995), pp. 409-10, 468-70, 565-7, 583-6, 965-6, 1003-12. Sellers was filming the ill-fated *Ghost in the Noonday Sun* which was never released. It was an unhappy set, with constant disputes between members of the cast, the director, and the production team, and Sellers at his most difficult. Even off set, the production left its mark. Sellers had a very public argument with a girlfriend in a restaurant at Kyrenia. Renshaw, who had a villa in Kyrenia, will certainly have heard of such incidents, even if he did not witness them.

¹⁶ Add. MS. 89068/1/1, f. 17. The film was *The Greek Tycoon*, loosely based on the relationship between Aristotle Onassis and Jacqueline Kennedy.

At first glance the letters tell us little about Renshaw, other than that his life seems to have been a whirl of parties and balls and high society. Yet, a closer reading, in conjunction with passing mentions in published works by or about some of his circle, and his own wartime papers, reveals a good deal about Renshaw's life and personality.

Michael Oliver Wenman¹⁷ Renshaw was born in 1908, the youngest of three sons of Arthur Henry Renshaw (1851-1918) and Lady Winifred Renshaw (c. 1875-1966).¹⁸ Arthur Renshaw, a J.P., of Watlington Park, was the brother of Sir Charles Bine Renshaw, 1st Bart, MP for West Renfrewshire, and in 1917 was appointed High Sheriff of Oxfordshire.¹⁹ Lady Winifred was the eldest daughter of Robert and Winifred Clements, 4th Earl and Countess of Leitrim, and granddaughter of Thomas William Coke, 2nd Earl of Leicester.²⁰ The Renshaws were close friends of Horatio Herbert, Viscount (later 1st Earl) Kitchener and Arthur Renshaw had been Kitchener's financial adviser since the 1890s.²¹ They named one of their sons Horatio Herbert, and one of Michael Renshaw's godparents was Kitchener 'whom he resembled', although Kitchener, despite being 'a great *ami* of [Renshaw's] mother [...] was not Mickey's father', so Renshaw assured James Lees-Milne, as the 'dates did not work out.'²²

Very little is known about Michael Renshaw's early life. He was educated at G. O. Smith's Ludgrove preparatory school in Cockfosters, and at Eton, where his fellow students included Lees-Milne and Ian Fleming, both of whom were to be life-long friends. It is not known whether he attended university, but if he did so it was not Oxford or Cambridge.²³ By the age of twenty-four Renshaw was working in advertising for Viscount Kemsley's *Sunday Times*, and dining and corresponding with the likes of Malcolm Bullock, MP, Paul Latham, MP, and Henry 'Chips' Channon, who was married to the brewing heiress, Lady Honor Guinness, and was soon to be elected a Conservative MP.²⁴

¹⁷ Not Wenham, as the *Times* obituary had it.

¹⁸ 'Renshaw-L Archives', <http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/RENSHAW/1999-08/0934950352> [accessed 14 May 2014]. Michael Renshaw also had two sisters. See *Who Was Who 1916-1928* (London, 1947), p. 881.

¹⁹ *Burke's Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Peerage, Baronetage and Knightage* (London, 1949), p. 1683; *The London Gazette*, issue 29982 (13 March 1917), p. 2509. Watlington Park had been bought by Arthur Renshaw in 1910 and was sold by Lady Winifred to Oliver Brett, later 3rd Viscount Esher, in 1921. See Mary D. Lobel (ed.), *A History of the County of Oxford* (London, 1964), vol. viii, p. 223.

²⁰ *Burke's Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Peerage, Baronetage and Knightage*, p. 1205. Lady Winifred has been described as looking and sounding like Queen Mary. See Jean Trumpington, *Coming Up Trumps: A Memoir* (London, 2014), p. 63. She had her portrait painted, with Michael's eldest brother Thomas, by Henrietta Rae in 1902. The painting was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1903 and recently came up for auction at Christie's, South Kensington, Sale 9603, 14 November 2013, lot 160. See Algernon Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts. A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and Their Work from its Foundation in 1769 to 1904* (London, 1906), p. 224 and <http://www.the-saleroom.com/en-gb/auction-catalogues/christies-south-kensington/catalogue-id-2892436/lot-19693296> [accessed 6 November 2014].

²¹ Arthur Renshaw was instrumental in finding Broome Park in 1910 as Kitchener's family home. See Trevor Royle, *The Kitchener Enigma* (London, 1985), pp. 189, 233-4 and Sir George Arthur London, *The Life of Lord Kitchener* (London, 1920), vol. iii, p. 366. Arthur Renshaw's papers relating to Kitchener are held by the Department of Documents, Imperial War Museum, London (ref. Documents.22598). Getty Images has a 1911 photograph of Lady Winifred with Kitchener. See <http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/field-marshal-lord-kitchener-with-lady-winfred-renshaw-news-photo/3280994> [accessed 6 November 2014].

²² James Lees-Milne, *Through Wood and Dale: Diaries, 1975-1978* (London, 1998), p. 238; 'Renshaw-L Archives' <http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/RENSHAW/1999-08/0934950352> [accessed 14 May 2014]. When Lady Winifred died in 1966 Charles E. Kitchener, great nephew of the 1st Earl, sent a letter of condolence to Michael Renshaw. See IWM, Renshaw Papers, Charles E. Kitchener to Michael Renshaw, 30 January 1966.

²³ *Times*, 10 March 1978; emails to the author from the archivists at Eton College, University of Oxford, and University of Cambridge, 22 January 2014 and 24 January 2014.

²⁴ Add. MS. 89068/1/1, ff. 72, 97-100; Add. MS. 89068/1/7, ff. 13-16; *Times*, 10 March 1978.

Renshaw was staying with the retired American actress Maxine Elliott in the south of France when World War II broke out. Along with his fellow guests, Sir Michael Duff and Charles (later Sir Charles) Birkin, he was of fighting age and all three men hurriedly packed and returned to England to join up.²⁵ Renshaw was commissioned into the Welsh Guards and by 1940 was a 2nd Lieutenant in the Royal Army Service Corps.²⁶ He crossed to Normandy on 28 June 1944, enduring a rough crossing, ‘the boat rolling most unpleasantly [...] vehicles swaying [...] dangerously, people looking ghastly [...] Would sell my soul for some brandy’. Even the smell of a naval officer’s pipe was enough to induce nausea. The mood was lifted by the ‘fantastic sight’ of masses of vessels, of every type, off the Normandy coast but there was still an understandable feeling of melancholy and uncertainty as disembarkation severed ‘the last link with England. I think we [are] all rather unsure when we shall return’.²⁷

In Normandy, at the rank of Captain, Renshaw commanded the Provost Company of the Guards Armoured Division and served with the artist Rex Whistler, some of whose works Renshaw owned.²⁸ The pair, taking advantage of Renshaw having his own vehicle, spent part of the three week lull following their landing in Normandy visiting chateaux, sourcing wine and calvados for the mess, arranging to have camembert flown home, and picnicking in orchards and by rivers. At the recently captured Cherbourg harbour, ignoring the ‘No Entry’ signs, Renshaw drove through at speed and with the horn blaring, whilst Whistler, instructed by Renshaw to ‘puff himself up like a general’, ‘nonchalantly’ returned the salutes of the duped sentries. Despite the risk of booby traps they rifled through drawers, wandered through ammunition dumps, tunnels, and barrack rooms, and generally did everything they ‘had been lectured, taught and trained not to do’.²⁹ The tour with Renshaw was to be one of the final acts of Whistler’s short life. Edith Olivier, Whistler’s close friend, described it as ‘probably the last bit of sheer pleasure he had on this earth’.³⁰ Having eschewed obvious, and theoretically less hazardous, roles in camouflage or as an official war artist, Whistler chose to be a tank troop leader. He moved north on 6 July 1944 ‘to join in a terrific shoot’ and on 18 July, as part of Operation Goodwood, he took part in an attack across the river Orne, east of Caen, and died of a broken neck caused by a shellburst near Le Mesnil. There was not a mark on his body. It was his first action, and had lasted just a

²⁵ Diana Forbes-Robertson, *Maxine* (London, 1964), p. 253. Birkin was an old friend who had been at Eton with Renshaw. When Birkin was wounded during the war he amended his will naming Renshaw as guardian to his children ‘to educate, cherish, and nurture’ them until they reached their majorities. See IWM, Renshaw Papers, Charles Birkin to Michael Renshaw, n.d.

²⁶ *Times*, 10 March 1978; National Library of Ireland, Collection List No. 49, Leitrim Papers, <http://www.nli.ie/pdfs/mss%20lists/leitrim.pdf> [accessed 14 May 2014].

²⁷ IWM, Renshaw Papers, Diary 28-29 June 1944.

²⁸ Add. MS. 89068/1/5, ff. 10-20; Harold Hobson, Phillip Knightley and Leonard Russell, *The Pearl of Days: An Intimate Memoir of The Sunday Times 1822-1972* (London, 1972), p. 237; Christie’s, South Kensington, Sale 5438, 30 November 2008, lots 190-192, <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/salebrowse.aspx?intsaleid=21925&viewType=list> [accessed 1 October 2014]. A small amount of correspondence with Whistler’s family and agents, relating to Renshaw’s acquisition of some of Whistler’s work following the latter’s death, can be found in IWM, Renshaw Papers.

²⁹ IWM, Renshaw Papers, Diary 1 July 1944 and loose leaf insert; Laurence Whistler, *The Laughter and the Urn: The Life of Rex Whistler* (London, 1985), pp. 282, 289; Hugh and Mirabel Cecil, *Rex Whistler: His Life and Work* (London, 2012), pp. 236-9. The loose leaf insert in Renshaw’s diary also records his reminiscences of Whistler in England, before their embarkation for Normandy, including Whistler’s state of mind, his view of army life, and his attitude towards the possibility of dying in action. Much of the text is similar to that which appears in the Cecils’ book, although Renshaw had been dead for nearly twenty-five years when that book was published.

³⁰ IWM, Renshaw Papers, Edith Olivier to Michael Renshaw, 26 September 1944.

few minutes.³¹ Renshaw thought Whistler's death 'a great loss and a great waste' and wrote that he 'Always wish[es] Rex was still around'.³²

It is not clear whether Renshaw himself ever went into battle. Given his role in the Provost Company it is likely he did not as his company had a policing role, as well as responsibility for lighting roads and erecting signposts when tanks and armour moved, and designating suitable routes for different types of vehicle.³³ It was exhausting work and in the run up to a battle or a major movement of armour there would be endless maps and battle orders to study, and a telephone ringing ceaselessly, at all hours. Renshaw wrote to his mother that, at times, he was getting two to three hours sleep in every twenty-four, and on one occasion that he had had no sleep for four days. His life consisted of 'plans + maps roads + tracks, the usual chaos.' He would work for hours on movement plans only to have to revise them at short notice because of the change of fortune in a battle or the state of the weather.³⁴

The wider Division certainly saw active service and Renshaw's diary records the progress of several battles, in sometimes stiff fighting, including the loss of thirty-six tanks in one day, as well as many references to casualties. In an enlightening letter to his brother, Thomas, Renshaw noted 'progress is rather more bloody and less floral [...] We seem always to be what I believe the military call the van, a glorious position but at times rather unpleasant.'³⁵ Even being behind the lines, as Renshaw may have been for much of the time, was not always safe. His diary and letters recorded frequent shelling and air raids and he noted that 'The Luftwaffe are now paying us a certain amount of attention.' He wrote eloquently of the earth 'groaning and trembling' and it seeming to 'scream with pain.' In classic understated English officer style, he rather insouciantly described the experience of being shelled as 'not pleasant'.³⁶ In an echo of this, he also recorded drinking whisky with R.A.F. officers at a nearby airfield when enemy aircraft attacked. Whilst the pilots dived for cover under chairs, tables, and lorries, and into ditches, Renshaw and Rex Whistler nonchalantly remained upright, whisky glasses in hand.³⁷ One would like to think they did not spill a drop.

Renshaw's Division fought its way from Normandy, through Belgium and the Netherlands, and into Germany. James Heathcote-Drummond-Willoughby, who had been at Eton with Renshaw, was anxious that Renshaw's unit was having a hard time, given the number of Guards Armoured Division casualties being brought into the hospital where he was recuperating.³⁸ He was right to be anxious. Total casualties for the Division have been given as 956 killed, 3946 wounded, and 545 missing; one in three from a complement of 14,400.³⁹

³¹ Ibid., Diary 3 July 1944; Whistler, *The Laughter and the Urn*, pp. 285-94; H. B. Grimsditch, 'Whistler, Reginald John [Rex] (1905-1944)', rev. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn, January 2011, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36856> [accessed 14 November 2014]. Renshaw knew Whistler so well that the artist's brother, Laurence, asked him to check the accuracy of his manuscript of *Rex Whistler; 1905-1944: His Life and His Drawings* (London, 1948). See IWM, Renshaw Papers, Laurence Whistler to Michael Renshaw, 5 December 1947, 12 December 1947, 17 December 1947.

³² IWM, Renshaw Papers, Michael Renshaw to Lady Winifred Renshaw, 26 July [1944], Diary 24 August 1944.

³³ Ibid., Diary 6 July 1944; Whistler, *The Laughter and the Urn*, pp. 282, 287.

³⁴ IWM, Renshaw Papers, Michael Renshaw to Lady Winifred Renshaw, 1 August [1944] and n.d., Diary 16 July 1944, 17 July 1944, 23 July 1944.

³⁵ Ibid., Michael Renshaw to Thomas Renshaw, 21 September [1944], Diary 1 July 1944-13 August 1944, passim.

³⁶ Ibid., Michael Renshaw to Lady Winifred Renshaw, 26 July [1944], Diary 9 July 1944-4 August 1944, passim.

³⁷ Ibid., Diary 14 July 1944; Whistler, *The Laughter and the Urn*, p. 289.

³⁸ IWM, Renshaw Papers, James Heathcote-Drummond-Willoughby to Michael Renshaw, 21 August 1944, 15 September 1944, 2 October 1944. Heathcote-Drummond-Willoughby was MP for Rutland and Stamford and later 27th Baron Willoughby de Eresby and 3rd Earl of Ancaster. He had a foot amputated after being trapped under a tank.

³⁹ G. L. Verney, *The Guards Armoured Division: A Short History* (London, 1955), pp. 49, 162. The history of the Guards Armoured Division in World War II has been told by Verney, op. cit., Robert Boscawen, *Armoured Guardsmen: A War Diary, June 1944-April 1945* (Barnsley, 2010), Earl of Rosse and E. R. Hill, *The Story of the Guards Armoured Division* (London, 1956), and John Sanders, *British Guards Armoured Division 1941-45* (London, 1979).

Like all officers, Renshaw faced the unenviable task of writing to the families of those of his men who were killed. Judging by the replies he received from some of those families it is a task he carried out with sensitivity and the utmost respect. The resignation and sadness in a simple diary note such as ‘another letter to widow’ speaks volumes about how hard writing such letters must have been.⁴⁰

The weather was a constant worry and shelter was not always adequate. At one stage Renshaw’s unit was billeted in a pig sty with four walls, a window with no glass, and a door that did not fit its frames and on another occasion he found himself dug in next to a somewhat pungent cemetery. When his unit reached Brussels, Renshaw was installed in what had been the former Gestapo’s headquarters, complete with what he described, chillingly, as blood stained cellars.⁴¹ The north western European winter of 1944/1945 was severe. He frequently wrote to his mother thanking her for sending clothing or anxiously enquiring about the whereabouts of winter clothing that had been promised and wrote of ‘bitter cold here, my hands, feet, and toes are just chilblains.’⁴² Edith Olivier pictured him blowing on his fingers in a land of ‘dykes and dykes, canals and rivers, covered in mist or shrivelling under an icy breeze’ and said the last line of Renshaw’s most recent letter to her had ‘pierce[d] [her] to the heart.’ Renshaw had written: ‘Warmth I find is almost the essential factor in life’.⁴³

Even good weather could create problems. Hot, dry days led to Renshaw complaining of being ‘so covered with dust that I was hardly recognizable. Hair white with it.’ He feared rain as his clothes, being ‘so impregnated with clay dust’, would become stiff as a board. Summer rains came the very next day and lasted for four whole days, flooding headquarters, Renshaw’s billet, and all his clothing and bedding. It also left the roads under two feet of mud, making his job of ensuring they were clear for vehicle movements virtually impossible.⁴⁴

In such trying times, things that would once have been taken for granted took on huge significance, and consequently food and drink became a constant source of happiness to Renshaw and his companions. Occasional small mercies included capturing German food dumps, whilst the abundant game was no match for soldiers with time on their hands and easy access to rifles. Woodcock, pheasant, partridge, quail, and plover were all sampled. Camembert and butter was readily available; bread, meat, tobacco, and chocolate less so. There was always the risk of overindulgence (Renshaw made himself sick eating too much cream, his first for three years) but such changes in diet, lessening the monotony of army biscuit, helped lift morale.⁴⁵

Obtaining alcohol was another welcome boost and despite the difficulty in sourcing wine, the ‘champagne and brandy [were] still holding out well’, and Dutch gin, apricot brandy, and German rum could also be found. The discovery of the Germans’ vast alcohol store, ‘miles and miles’ of it, in the Brussels customs house was the cause of unalloyed joy.⁴⁶ Renshaw devised an ingenious method for storing his supplies, albeit not one conforming to proper use of military equipment. As he wrote to his brother: ‘Have turned the Humber into a moving wine chest using all available 3 Tonners as well. Consequently I sweat with fear during shelling, mortaring, aerial bombardment

⁴⁰ IWM, Renshaw Papers, W. Tomlinson to Michael Renshaw, 16 August 1944, 9 October 1944, F. Monk to Michael Renshaw, 19 September 1944, Diary 22 July 1944.

⁴¹ Ibid., Michael Renshaw to Lady Winifred Renshaw, 26 July [1944], 2 October 1944, Michael Renshaw to Thomas Renshaw, 8 September [1944].

⁴² Ibid., Michael Renshaw to Lady Winifred Renshaw, 2 October 1944, 14 October 1944, 22 October 1944, 24 January [1945].

⁴³ Ibid., Edith Olivier to Michael Renshaw, 1 November 1944.

⁴⁴ Ibid., Michael Renshaw to Lady Winifred Renshaw, 19 July [1944], Diary 18 July 1944-23 July 1944.

⁴⁵ Ibid., Michael Renshaw to Lady Winifred Renshaw, 30 June [1944], 8 July 1944, 24 August [1944], 27 September 1944, 2 October 1944, 22 October 1944, Michael Renshaw to Thomas Renshaw, 30 October [1944], Diary 3 July 1944. Renshaw did find one use for the army biscuit: his white Angora rabbit, Jezebel, which he found and adopted whilst in France, was partial to it.

⁴⁶ Ibid., Michael Renshaw to Lady Winifred Renshaw, 30 June [1944], 27 September 1944, Michael Renshaw to Thomas Renshaw, 8 September [1944], 30 October [1944].

etc lest the precious vehicles be hit.⁴⁷ Renshaw even turned budding entrepreneur: ‘Am doing quite a good trade with a local Frenchman. Cigarettes and chocolate for butter, cider, and cherries. I don’t know which side is most pleased.’ Clearly the 200 cigarettes a month he had asked his mother to send were not all for his own consumption.⁴⁸

There was also some time for relaxation. Renshaw visited Brussels, although he was less than impressed with the absence of hot water and the fact that the restaurants and nightclubs were all closed, as well as Bayeux and Rennes.⁴⁹ He hoped to visit Ernest Hemingway and the American army at some stage and wrote that he was planning to see *This Happy Breed* at the cinema.⁵⁰ A curious incident occurred when Renshaw was in Holland with the Second Army. As the Allied armies advanced towards Germany he visited Hermann Goering’s aunt who lived in Beek, a village in no-man’s land on the Dutch-German border, just 1000 yards from the German front lines. The incident was reported by American journalist Virginia Cowles and appeared in the *Daily Telegraph*. Whilst the report gave no firm evidence that the officer was in fact Renshaw, Peggy, Marchioness of Crewe, having seen the report, assumed it was Renshaw based on the fact that the British officer described in the article shared a first name (the officer was named ‘Mickie’ in the article) and long legs with Renshaw. She went on to write that Renshaw’s letter to her confirmed it was indeed him and Renshaw himself referred to it in a letter to his mother in which he describe Goering’s aunt as ‘an astonishing woman’.⁵¹

Renshaw was gratified by the goodwill shown to the Allies as they progressed through north west Europe. Whenever he and his men passed through any town or village in France and Belgium, as soon as the locals realized they were British, food would be produced, and flowers, and drink. Music and dancing would begin. Hugs and kisses would be proffered, even the use of bathrooms (Renshaw had his first bath for two months when he visited Rennes).⁵² Renshaw found the Dutch ‘kind and hospitable’ and noted that ‘the French seem pleased to see us in spite of the devastation’ the arrival of the Allied forces had inevitably wrought.⁵³ Such receptions must have been a welcome relief from the destruction he witnessed on a daily basis. The devastation wrought by the war is a recurring theme in Renshaw’s letters and diary with comments such as ‘Devastation in villages and towns perfectly frightful, nothing living, nothing upright’ being typical. Some French villages and towns had completely disappeared. He noted that corpses, both human and animal, abounded and referred to atrocities carried out by retreating German forces in France. He hoped that the Allies’ constant harrying of the Germans would not permit them the time to carry out similar atrocities in Belgium.⁵⁴

His wartime letters and diary do not give a great deal away about Renshaw’s innermost feelings, but there are occasional glimpses of what the war was doing to him. Having written to his mother that he was ‘very busy, hot, tired, filthy’ he described the war as ‘extraordinary and most unpleasant’ before very simply and bluntly, and without embarrassment, admitting that he was ‘at times very frightened.’⁵⁵ His chief emotion seems to have been confusion, with

⁴⁷ Ibid., Michael Renshaw to Thomas Renshaw, 21 September [1944].

⁴⁸ Ibid., Michael Renshaw to Lady Winifred Renshaw, 30 June [1944], Diary 26 July 1944.

⁴⁹ Ibid., Michael Renshaw to Lady Winifred Renshaw, 24 August [1944], 6 September [1944], 14 October 1944, 22 October 1944, Diary 3 July.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Michael Renshaw to Lady Winifred Renshaw, 14 October 1944, 22 October 1944. Hemingway was reporting from northern France. It is not known whether the meeting ever took place.

⁵¹ Ibid., Michael Renshaw to Lady Winifred Renshaw, 22 October 1944; Add. MS. 89068/1/2, f. 25; *Daily Telegraph*, 20 October 1944, p. 4.

⁵² IWM, Renshaw Papers, Michael Renshaw to Lady Winifred Renshaw, 24 August [1944], 6 September [1944], Michael Renshaw to Thomas Renshaw, 8 September [1944].

⁵³ Ibid., Michael Renshaw to Lady Winifred Renshaw, 6 August [1944], n.d.

⁵⁴ Ibid., Michael Renshaw to Lady Winifred Renshaw, 30 June [1944], 26 July [1944], 6 September [1944], 3 February [1945], Diary 22 July 1944.

⁵⁵ Ibid., Michael Renshaw to Lady Winifred Renshaw, 19 July [1944].

a constant veering between optimism at the war ending soon and fatalism that it was far from over. As early as January 1942 he thought that hostilities might end before the following winter and in July 1944 he reported ‘wild rumours floating about Rommel dead, peace in 72 hours [...] Am trying to sober the optimism of my troops, though am madly optimistic myself.’ Even when that did not come to pass he could still write ‘Days and weeks may see the end not months’.⁵⁶ Renshaw’s diary and letters contain frequent references to good news and ‘mad optimism’.⁵⁷ He wrote of how tiring it was chasing fast-moving retreating Germans across France, that morale in the German army was low and S.S. officers were being shot by the *Wehrmacht*, and that German prisoners were either very old or very young, ‘frightened [...] and very ragged’, and more liable to give in.⁵⁸ Yet, around the same time he wrote ‘fighting all the way to Berlin seems probable’ and ‘Having partially liberated three flaming countries I suppose we shall be launched to conquer Germany’.⁵⁹ He also recognized the German army’s stamina and its tenacious fighting spirit, and noted his begrudging admiration for an enemy which could withstand being on the receiving end of fifty shells for every one it launched.⁶⁰ The conflicting, see-sawing emotions, the highs and lows, and the rapid changes from one to the other can only be seen as a consequence of living in such extraordinary, and extraordinarily dangerous, times. The constant battle between hope and realism that is played out in war was clearly felt by Renshaw.

Renshaw’s war was characterized by, as he put it, ‘great contrasts.’ Whether it was the variable quality of accommodation, the frequent movement between optimism and pessimism about how long the war would last, or the wild variations in weather, nothing seemed settled and constant. Renshaw himself summed up these contrasts in a more elemental way, highlighting how quickly his life was able to change from an apparently civilized existence to a basic matter of survival:

One night I eat partridge, quail etc and wash it down with champagne, wine, brandy, Cointreau, Benedictine etc [...] The next moment one is lying in a hole or fingering the trigger of a gun.⁶¹

The wartime papers end in August 1944 so there is no record of Renshaw’s personal progress through the last nine months of the war. It is known that he was promoted Major in 1945, although, according to one correspondent, he was unlikely to be impressed by such recognition, and he was twice mentioned in despatches for service in north west Europe. He left the army in November 1945 with the rank of Honorary Major.⁶²

On demobilization, Renshaw returned to his post at the *Sunday Times*. In 1948 he was appointed Advertisement Manager and joined the board of Kemsley Newspapers as Advertising Director in 1953. He was in post when Roy Thomson bought the newspaper, along with the rest of Viscount Kemsley’s titles in 1959.⁶³ The change in ownership was a major upheaval and

⁵⁶ Ibid., Michael Renshaw to Lady Winifred Renshaw, 5 January 1942, Diary 30 July 1944, 8 August 1944.

⁵⁷ Ibid., Michael Renshaw to Lady Winifred Renshaw, 24 January 1944, 12 August 1944, 21 December [1944], 3 February [1945], Diary 2-3 August 1944, 11 August 1944.

⁵⁸ Ibid., Michael Renshaw to Lady Winifred Renshaw, 31 August [1944], n.d., Diary 2 August 1944, 12 August 1944.

⁵⁹ Ibid., Michael Renshaw to Lady Winifred Renshaw, 24 August [1944], n.d., Michael Renshaw to Thomas Renshaw, 21 September [1944].

⁶⁰ Ibid., Michael Renshaw to Lady Winifred Renshaw, 26 July [1944], Diary 4-5 August 1944.

⁶¹ Ibid., Michael Renshaw to Lady Winifred Renshaw, n.d.

⁶² Add. MS. 89068/1/4, f. 65; *Supplement to the London Gazette*, issue 37213 (7 August 1945), p. 4051; issue 37521 (2 April 1946), p. 1691; IWM, Renshaw Papers, War Office to Michael Renshaw, 8 November 1945. Renshaw’s oak leaf emblems, issued to all servicemen mentioned in despatches, are amongst his wartime papers at the Imperial War Museum (War Office to Michael Renshaw, n.d.).

⁶³ *Times*, 10 March 1978; Lord Thomson of Fleet, *After I Was Sixty: A Chapter of Autobiography* (London, 1975), pp. 71-2; Russell Braddon, *Roy Thomson of Fleet Street* (London and Toronto, 1965), p. 267; Hobson et al., *Pearl of Days*, p. 237.

a time of great uncertainty. Renshaw and others, ‘props of the place [...] who had been with Lord K[emsley] since they were young men, were left abandoned to their new master, without contracts’. Thomson swiftly put this situation to rights, and issued contracts on the very first day he officially met Renshaw and others left in limbo by the change in ownership.⁶⁴ It was a wise move. According to Denis Hamilton, Renshaw was ‘brilliant in the advertising field and Roy could never have built up Thomson Newspapers without him.’ Renshaw rewarded Thomson’s loyalty by remaining with him for another nine years, including putting ‘a great deal of work into developing the advertising side’ of *The Times* when Thomson bought that title in 1967.⁶⁵

Renshaw played a major part in the launch of the *Sunday Times Magazine* in January 1962, the country’s first colour magazine supplement, and went to Moscow, where he met Khrushchev, with Thomson and 168 leading businessmen in February 1963 to mark the magazine’s first birthday.⁶⁶ Renshaw’s role in the success of the magazine cannot be overstated. Convincing conservative advertising agencies to buy space in a hitherto untried and untested new medium was not an easy task, yet with a month to go before the launch the first issue was treble booked and could have run sixty pages of advertisements. However, many of the advertisements were for one issue only, as advertisers waited to see if the magazine was a success, and which other companies were advertising in it. This cautious approach jeopardized the survival of the magazine. As there was a five to six week lead in for each issue, advertisers who were prepared to commit to longer term advertisements were desperately needed. Renshaw decided to take a gamble to try and break the ‘wait and see’ attitude of the advertisers. Major discounts were offered to huge organizations such as Ford and the Central Office of Information. Once the forward bookings of these large players were confirmed, agencies and smaller firms were contacted and told of the types of advertiser that had already booked space, in the expectation that the smaller players would not wish to be left behind, and would want the cachet of being seen in the same publication as the likes of Ford. The plan worked and, while the magazine lost £900,000 in its first year, advertising space totalling £1 million was booked for 1963 before the end of January of that year. By the mid-1960s the magazine’s future was secure and rivals were launching their own versions.⁶⁷

The modernization of the *Sunday Times* was supported by Renshaw who urged Thomson to appeal to a younger readership and take a non-partisan political line. These views, also held by other directors, convinced Thomson to offer a settlement to the editor, H. V. Hodson, and replace him with Denis Hamilton, a move that Renshaw was sure would be welcomed by the whole staff. Having worked for Kemsley’s and Thomson’s newspapers for over thirty-five years, Renshaw went into semi-retirement in 1968, retaining a consultant role,⁶⁸ and had himself a villa built at Ayios Georgios, near Kyrenia on the north coast of Cyprus.⁶⁹

Renshaw was clearly good at his job, a capable director who was an ‘established administrator’, and he was well-liked too. He had ‘a quiet, courteous manner [which] won him the respect of the staff and the esteem of the [*Sunday Times*’s] owner.’⁷⁰ Having stayed with him in Cyprus

⁶⁴ Hobson et al., *Pearl of Days*, p. xxv; Thomson, *After I Was Sixty*, pp. 71-2.

⁶⁵ Denis Hamilton, *Editor-in-Chief* (London, 1989), pp. 95-6; *Times*, 10 March 1978.

⁶⁶ Thomson, *After I Was Sixty*, p. 126.

⁶⁷ Hobson et al., *Pearl of Days*, pp. 351-2, 365-7.

⁶⁸ Braddon, *Roy Thomson*, pp. 304-5; Hamilton, *Editor-in-Chief*, p. 105; *Daily Telegraph*, 10 March 1978. Renshaw remained a consultant until 1972. A small sample of his consultancy work can be found in the file relating to Renshaw, general alphabetical sequence of Denis Hamilton’s correspondence, Denis and Olive Hamilton Papers, British Library, Dep. 10696.

⁶⁹ *Times*, 10 March 1978. According to Mark Amory, Renshaw had had a house in Cyprus in the 1950s but had returned to London when it was ransacked by Turks, but there is no supporting evidence for this. It can be assumed that Amory has mistaken it for the villa Renshaw had built in the late 1960s and which was caught up in the Turkish invasion of northern Cyprus in July 1974, after which he returned to London. See Mark Amory (ed.), *The Letters of Ann Fleming* (London, 1985), p. 228. See pp. 11-12, below.

⁷⁰ Braddon, *Roy Thomson*, p. 265; *Times*, 10 March 1978.

after Renshaw had left the organization, Roy Thomson wrote ‘anything we can do for you here you know we are always at your service. Incidentally, I passed on your regards to all the boys here and they were delighted to hear from you.’⁷¹ It seems for his part, Renshaw was equally keen to hear about goings-on at the newspaper with Dilys Powell wondering whether Renshaw ‘might enjoy gossip from Leonard [Russell, Powell’s husband and chief literary editor of the *Sunday Times*] about what goes on nowadays in the *Sunday Times*.’⁷²

Whether in his London flats or his Cypriot villa, Renshaw’s good taste was widely recognized.⁷³ ‘The house is the unique achievement of rare and fastidious taste’, wrote Fabia Drake. She also approved of its having ‘seven baths to seven beds’.⁷⁴ Cecil Beaton, who stayed in Cyprus with Renshaw in March 1972, felt Renshaw had made a ‘wonderful home’ for himself and thought he had ‘a real flair for making a design for living’.⁷⁵ Raymond Mortimer described the villa as ‘a constant pleasure to the eye’ and exclaimed ‘How shabby my homes look by comparison!’ Charles Greville, 7th Earl of Warwick, was of the opinion that Renshaw’s ‘pictures and bibelots [...] are an expression of the good taste I would expect you to have’.⁷⁶ Renshaw dressed his homes with paintings by Pavel Tchelitchew,⁷⁷ had Hardy Amies offering to help find him furnishings, plants, and linen, and Lucian Freud offering three of his paintings for sale.⁷⁸ Renshaw’s taste was such that when Olive, Lady Baillie, owner of Leeds Castle, died in 1974, and the castle was entrusted to a group of trustees, Renshaw was appointed artistic adviser, ‘co-opted as a man of taste, he having been an intimate friend of Lady Baillie.’ He was

⁷¹ Add. MS. 89068/1/9, f. 68. A mark of the high regard the industry held Renshaw in can be gleaned from the list of attenders at his memorial service in 1978. See *Times*, 3 May 1978.

⁷² Add. MS. 89068/1/8, f. 91.

⁷³ Renshaw’s first post-war flat, and its interiors and antiques, at 6 Apple Tree Yard, converted from a stable that had once adjoined an orchard owned by the monarchy, was the subject of a brief, illustrated article in *Vogue House and Garden Book*, ii: 3 (1947), pp. 38-9. Apple Tree Yard, near St James’s Square, is now a service area and the stable block no longer stands.

⁷⁴ Add. MS. 89068/1/5, f. 3; Fabia Drake, *Blind Fortune* (London, 1978), p. 193. It was staying with Renshaw in Kyrenia that convinced Drake to buy her own house in Cyprus.

⁷⁵ Add. MS. 89068/1/1, f. 60; Vickers, *Unexpurgated Beaton Diaries*, pp. 238-42.

⁷⁶ Add. MS. 89068/1/6, f. 134; Add. MS. 89068/1/8, f. 9. An idea of Renshaw’s taste in antiques, furniture, and art can be gleaned from the sale of some of his property at Christie’s, South Kensington, Sale 5438, 30 November 2008, lots 120-192. See <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/salebrowse.aspx?intsaleid=21925&viewType=list> [accessed 1 October 2014].

⁷⁷ Add. MS. 89068/1/1, f. 19. A Tchelitchew that Renshaw acquired from Stephen Tennant was sold at Christie’s, King Street, Sale 7906, 8 June 2010, lot 44. See <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/paintings/pavel-tchelitchew-flowers-in-a-jug-5321913-details.aspx?intobjectid=5321913> [accessed 2 October 2014]. Tennant apparently sold Renshaw a number of Tchelitchews. See Philip Hoare, *Serious Pleasures: The Life of Stephen Tennant* (London, 1990), p. 356. A collection of twenty-five letters sent by Tennant to Renshaw came up for auction at Sotheby’s, London, Sale L10408, 16 December 2010, lot 148. See <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2010/english-literature-history-and-children39s-books-illustrations-110408/lot.148.html> [accessed 5 November 2014]. The collection’s current whereabouts are not known.

⁷⁸ Add. MS. 89068/1/1, f. 23; Add. MS. 89068/1/6, f. 6. The paintings, which Freud thought amongst the best of his recent works, were ‘Man with red hair’ (£500), ‘Head of a painter’ (£500), and ‘Man with glasses’ (£700). It is not known whether Renshaw bought them. A painting with the title ‘Man with red hair’ appears on the Bridgeman Art Library online collection of Freud’s archive. There are no exact title matches for the other two paintings. See <http://www.bridgemanart.com/en-GB/lucian-freud/> [accessed 14 May 2014].

so involved in the task that he was working on the project right up to his death, even taking telephone calls from his hospital bed.⁷⁹

Appearances meant much to Renshaw and he took just as much care in his person and bearing as he did in choosing art, antiques, and furniture. Physically, he was striking: very tall and thin, even ‘elongated’.⁸⁰ Whilst his fashion sense has been described as ‘outré’, the ‘transparent good breeding’, ‘style and elegance’, and ‘exquisite manners and clothes’ Renshaw brought to the *Sunday Times* office were also recognized. Cecil Beaton thought him ‘so well-bred and English as he goes about his garden, doing very hard work for long hours, but never becoming hot and sweaty’ as he comported himself ‘like an officer in the Lancers’.⁸¹

Renshaw’s parties were legendary. Comments such as ‘a heavenly time’, ‘quite the best party I have been to for years’, ‘a most enjoyable and delicious evening’s entertainment’, ‘You always give the most delightful dinners but last night was one of the best and I enjoyed every moment of it’ occur time and again in the letters Renshaw received.⁸² His hosting skills and food even gave Elizabeth, Marchioness of Salisbury, an inferiority complex about entertaining at Hatfield House and Swan Walk.⁸³ Guests staying at Renshaw’s Cypriot villa, for which he left London in 1970, were equally generous in their praise of their host. Rhoda Birley described her stay as ‘idyllic’ and Renshaw as ‘the most generous and thoughtful of hosts’, a view echoed by Lady Zuckerman, who thought Renshaw ‘the nicest possible host’.⁸⁴ Ann Fleming said she ‘had never known such an unselfish and thoughtful host’. Sybil, Marchioness of Cholmondeley, felt ‘No one could have taken more trouble to make my week happy and enjoyable’, whilst Elizabeth Salisbury was equally fulsome in her praise.⁸⁵ Rory Cameron urged Renshaw, ‘please have me again, one day.’ James Pope-Hennessy, going by the ‘gleaming descriptions of your house and your hospitality’ longed ‘to relish these at leisure’.⁸⁶

Life in Cyprus was idyllic, some might even have described it as charmed, but it had not always been thus. To begin with Renshaw had ‘no bannisters, no electricity, no frigidaire, no hot water and no curtains.’ What he did have was ‘unlimited asparagus, black artichokes, cauliflowers, new potatoes, lamb, French cheeses, delicious Cyprus wines, arum lillies, wild flowers, glorious scenery, sunshine and blue skies’. As one of his first guests, Robert, 5th Marquess of Salisbury, put it, Renshaw had ‘all the luxuries and none of the necessities’.⁸⁷ The roads were poor and the terrain rough, and yet everything seemed to work out for Renshaw. A well was found, solving at a stroke the question of water supply, the value of the land increased greatly after Renshaw bought, and he secured excellent domestic staff. The gamble, as Beaton described Renshaw’s move from London, certainly paid off.⁸⁸

⁷⁹ *Times*, 10 March 1978; David A. H. Cleggett, *Leeds Castle Through Nine Centuries* (Maidstone, 2001), p. 329; Lees-Milne, *Through Wood and Dale*, p. 101. Renshaw’s friendship with Lady Baillie stretched back to the 1950s and he was such a friend of the family that, having dressed what were formerly the housekeeper’s flat and servants’ rooms on the second floor of the castle with furniture bequeathed by Renshaw in his will, the Leeds Castle Foundation decided to name the rooms the Renshaw Suite. Whilst the name fell out of use, Renshaw’s furniture remains (David Cleggett, email to the author, 30 September 2014).

⁸⁰ Anthony Russell, *Outrageous Fortune: Growing Up At Leeds Castle* (London, 2013), p. 66; Charles Duff, email to the author, 27 November 2014. Duff writes that his father, Sir Michael Duff, and Renshaw looked alike and were occasionally mistaken for each other.

⁸¹ Russell, *Outrageous Fortune*, p. 66; Hobson et al., *Pearl of Days*, p. 237; Braddon, *Roy Thomson*, p. 265; Vickers, *Unexpurgated Beaton Diaries*, pp. 238-9, 242.

⁸² Add. MS. 89068/1/1, ff. 42, 109; Add. MS. 89068/1/7, f. 56; Add. MS. 89068/1/9, f. 35.

⁸³ Add. MS. 89068/1/6, ff. 100, 102v.

⁸⁴ Add. MS. 89068/1/1, f. 62; Add. MS. 89068/1/9, f. 87v. Lady Zuckerman met Graham Sutherland whilst staying with Renshaw and was flattered that Sutherland spoke to her ‘painter to painter’, Add. MS. 89068/1/9, f. 87.

⁸⁵ Add. MS. 89068/1/1, f. 120; Add. MS. 89068/1/5, f. 146; Add. MS. 89068/1/6, f. 73.

⁸⁶ Add. MS. 89068/1/1, f. 93; Add. MS. 89068/1/8, f. 89.

⁸⁷ File relating to Renshaw, general alphabetical sequence of Denis Hamilton’s correspondence, Denis and Olive Hamilton Papers, British Library, Dep. 10696.

⁸⁸ Vickers, *Unexpurgated Beaton Diaries*, pp. 239, 242.

The Turkish invasion of northern Cyprus in July 1974 brought Renshaw's happy Cypriot sojourn to an end and he returned to London.⁸⁹ Using his *Sunday Times* contacts to obtain a letter of authority to facilitate his travels, Renshaw went back to Cyprus in October 1974 to salvage what he could of his belongings. He found his villa badly damaged by shell and bullet holes, but not as badly looted as he had feared. It had been occupied successively by refugees, the National Guard, and the Turkish army, and had been left without water. Renshaw loaded up his car and drove back to London. He never returned.⁹⁰ On his return to London Renshaw wrote a scathing eight-page piece on how 'ineffective, unhelpful, wet and weak' the British High Commissioner's handling of the Cyprus crisis had been. By contrast, the Turkish authorities in both London and Cyprus had done their utmost to help Renshaw reach Kyrenia, and had even offered him an escort. When he arrived in Kyrenia he found 'universal praise' for the United Nations forces, 'Air Marshall Aitken' [*sic*],⁹¹ the Royal Navy, and the United Kingdom Citizens' Association, and 'universal contempt for the apathy and ineffectiveness of the British High Commission.' Blaming a system 'which permits people to hold positions which they are incompetent to fill especially in times of stress and strain', Renshaw hoped Foreign Secretary James Callaghan would sweep 'some of the rubbish away' much as George Brown had done when he was Foreign Secretary in the 1960s. Inspired by the image, Renshaw called his piece 'Get Out Your Broom, Mr Callaghan' and urged Denis Hamilton at the *Sunday Times* to have one of his journalists 'knock [the piece] into shape' for publication.⁹²

Not only was Renshaw a generous host, but he was equally much sought after as a guest. His correspondence is peppered with invitations to dine, or spend weekends, with the likes of Alan Lennox-Boyd, Rhoda Birley, Dollie Rothschild, Elizabeth Salisbury, and Umberto II of Italy who 'very much' wanted to meet Renshaw.⁹³ Sybil Cholmondeley's invitation for Renshaw to spend the weekend at Houghton Hall is annotated by Renshaw on the verso: 'Alas could not accept as was going abroad. Almost unknown for anyone to be invited to Houghton'. Lady Baillie certainly enjoyed his company, Renshaw being a regular guest at her weekend parties since 1950 and was urged to stay 'the longer the better'.⁹⁴ James Lees-Milne, with whom Renshaw stayed in June 1972, described Renshaw as 'a very good guest, easy, willing to be entertained or to sit and read, full of fun and chat of the wicked sort'.⁹⁵ Kitty Miller felt her arrival in London, 'this gloomy town', would be enlivened by seeing Renshaw, whilst Paul Latham insisted he had enjoyed his summer much more than usual, owing to Renshaw's company. Ann Fleming's 'spirits and health were much improved' by being with Renshaw, and Elizabeth Salisbury felt Renshaw's attendance at one of her dinners had made all the difference to the evening's success.⁹⁶ In short, 'his breadth of knowledge and dry sense of humour made him a delightful companion.'⁹⁷

⁸⁹ *Times*, 10 March 1978.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*; file relating to Renshaw, general alphabetical sequence of Denis Hamilton's correspondence, Denis and Olive Hamilton Papers, British Library, Dep. 10696.

⁹¹ Actually Air Marshal Sir John Aiken (1921-2005), Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Near East Air Force, Commander British Forces Near East, and Administrator, Sovereign Base Areas, Cyprus, 1973-1976. See 'Aiken, Air Chief Marshal Sir John (Alexander Carlisle)', *Who Was Who*, online edn, April 2014, <http://www.ukwhoswho.com/view/article/oupww/whowaswho/U5095> [accessed 4 December 2014].

⁹² File relating to Renshaw, general alphabetical sequence of Denis Hamilton's correspondence, Denis and Olive Hamilton Papers, British Library, Dep. 10696. The piece does not appear in *The Times Index* (Reading, 1975) for October-December 1974 or January-March 1975 so would appear to be unpublished.

⁹³ Add. MS. 89068/1/1, f. 70; Add. MS. 89068/1/6, ff. 42-122, *passim*; Add. MS. 89068/1/7, ff. 34-54, *passim*; Add. MS. 89068/1/9, ff. 30, 69.

⁹⁴ Add. MS. 89068/1/1, ff. 46, 107; Cleggett, *Leeds Castle*, p. 150.

⁹⁵ James Lees-Milne, *A Mingled Measure: Diaries, 1953-1972* (London, 1994), p. 251.

⁹⁶ Add. MS. 89068/1/5, f. 148v; Add. MS. 89068/1/6, f. 106v; Add. MS. 89068/1/7, ff. 14, 59.

⁹⁷ *Times*, 10 March 1978.



Fig. 1. Renshaw by the pool at Leeds Castle. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Trustees of the Leeds Castle Foundation.

However, not everybody concurred. Ian Fleming, admittedly a lone voice of dissension, described Renshaw as the least satisfactory guest he had ever had to stay at Goldeneye, Fleming's house in Jamaica, being 'psychologically unable to say anything but to old foreign Duchesses'.⁹⁸ Fleming's observation of Renshaw's predilection for the company of elderly, often aristocratic, women was echoed by Lees-Milne, who wrote: '[Renshaw's] friends were chiefly grand old women like Sybil Cholmondeley, Dow. Lady Salisbury and Maud Russell.'⁹⁹ Pope-Hennessy also noticed it, seeing Renshaw at a party in 1950 standing beside an 'enthroned' Peggy Crewe, 'like a courtier.'¹⁰⁰ This tendency is certainly borne out in the correspondence where the likes of the marchionesses of Cholmondeley, Crewe, and Salisbury, the Duchess of Buccleuch, and the countesses of Portarlington and Rosebery appear at regular intervals, either as correspondents or as names mentioned by mutual friends. That said, Renshaw did have plenty of friends and correspondents who were far from elderly: Cecil Beaton, Charles Birkin, Sir Michael Duff,¹⁰¹ Hardy Amies, Ian Fleming, Fabia Drake, and Lady Bridget Parsons, for example, were all contemporaries or near-contemporaries, so Lees-Milne (who himself was born the same year as Renshaw) was being a little simplistic.

⁹⁸ Andrew Lycett, *Ian Fleming* (London, 1995), p. 282.

⁹⁹ Lees-Milne, *Through Wood and Dale*, p. 237.

¹⁰⁰ Peter Quennell (ed.), *A Lonely Business: A Self-Portrait of James Pope-Hennessy* (London, 1981), p. 183.

¹⁰¹ Renshaw was best man at both of Duff's weddings, to Joan Marjoribanks in 1935 and to Lady Caroline Paget in 1949 (Charles Duff, email to the author, 27 November 2014).

Renshaw never appears to have enjoyed the best of health, indeed it was medical reasons that prompted his semi-retirement in 1968.¹⁰² Illness, stays in hospital, back problems, operations, lung problems, use of barbiturates, pleurisy, jaundice, and arthritis are all referred to by his correspondents from as early as 1938.¹⁰³ By early 1978 Renshaw was in serious decline, as noted by Loelia Ponsonby in the February of that year.¹⁰⁴ Just six days later James Lees-Milne, having visited Renshaw at the latter's Cheyne Court flat, gave this graphic account of his condition:

I fear he is dying. A terrible change, he is thin as a knife, moves painfully across the room, lies on the sofa and speaks with so weak a voice, with a boiling sound coming from his poor chest. Cannot eat, or even watch others eating; is undergoing radium treatment. So unlike Mickey, too, not to respond to any quip or gossip. I fear he is in a bad way. Talked of celebrating his seventieth birthday next August, which I doubt his reaching.¹⁰⁵

Lees-Milne's prediction proved correct and it was no surprise to him when, almost a month to the day, on 9 March 1978, Renshaw died in his sleep aged sixty-nine, 'long before life had run its race' for him.¹⁰⁶ Being a former Welsh Guard, it was fitting that Renshaw's memorial service took place at the Guards Chapel, with 'beautiful psalms, hymns and [a] Bach anthem'. There was no address, but as Lees-Milne put it, 'how could one eulogize poor Mickey.'¹⁰⁷

Renshaw never married. He had affairs and relationships with both men and women but seems to have been prone to mistaking fondness for something more, and on occasion his feelings went unrequited as the objects of his affections did not feel they could make him happy.¹⁰⁸ One of the women Renshaw fell in love with was Anne Hamilton-Grace, a debutante who served in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force and worked at Bletchley Park during World War II. He was certainly not alone in his attraction to Hamilton-Grace; she had turned down twenty offers of marriage by 1945. Following a motoring holiday through France and Italy with Hamilton-Grace and Charles and Janet Birkin in 1947, Renshaw proposed marriage in a direct fashion, albeit by telegram, 'I want you – will you marry me – love, Micky'. Hamilton-Grace clearly took the proposal seriously, writing in her diary 'Who am I to marry? Micky, John Guest, Mike Lloyd, Sam or Willy Segrave?' She ultimately chose the last and in a letter to Renshaw went to some lengths to apologize for informing him of her decision in a way she had not intended.¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, Renshaw sometimes instigated separation. The letter of one correspondent contains a tangible sense of pain at his rejection. He wrote of his hurt that Renshaw had ignored him for three weeks and had not told him why he no longer wanted to see him. The writer felt that he had failed but did not quite know how. Even five years later, he

¹⁰² *Times*, 10 March 1978; *Daily Telegraph*, 10 March 1978.

¹⁰³ Add. MS. 89068/1/1, ff. 18, 20, 135; Add. MS. 89068/1/5, f. 68; Add. MS. 89068/1/6, ff. 41, 60, 62, 83; Add. MS. 89068/1/8, ff. 35, 38; Add. MS. 89068/1/9, ff. 15, 36, 119; Cambridge, St John's College Library, Papers of Sir Cecil Beaton, Juliet Duff to Cecil Beaton, 11 January [c. 1938], A1/165/4; Hatfield, Hatfield House Archives, Papers of Elizabeth, Marchioness of Salisbury, Michael Renshaw to Elizabeth Salisbury, 13 February 1970, 5/MCH.

¹⁰⁴ Add. MS. 89068/1/8, f. 76.

¹⁰⁵ Lees-Milne, *Through Wood and Dale*, pp. 229-30.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 237; Hamilton, *Editor-in-Chief*, p. 59. The cause of death is not known, but Lees-Milne did refer to Renshaw's condition as terminal and his reference to radium treatment (*Through Wood and Dale*, p. 229) suggests cancer, as does the request in Renshaw's death notice for donations to the Cancer Research Fund (*Times*, 10 March 1978).

¹⁰⁷ Lees-Milne, *Through Wood and Dale*, pp. 251-2. For a list of attenders at the memorial service, see *Times*, 3 May 1978.

¹⁰⁸ Add. MS. 89068/1/7, ff. 1-3; Add. MS. 89068/1/9, f. 15.

¹⁰⁹ Add. MS. 89068/1/7, ff. 1-3; Elisa Segrave, *The Girl From Station X: My Mother's Unknown Life* (London, 2013), pp. 225, 265; Anne Hamilton-Grace, unpublished diary entries, 22 August 1947-18 September 1947, courtesy of Elisa Segrave.

was still referring to his confusion and regret over their relationship.¹¹⁰ Renshaw's later years were spent in a happy relationship with a 'dear, good, kind man' whom he had known since at least 1970 and who mourned him more deeply than did Renshaw's family, according to James Lees-Milne.¹¹¹

It is clear from the letters and from the memoirs of his friends and colleagues that Renshaw was a complex person. Independently-minded, Renshaw's intense shyness and reserve was often mistaken for an aloof manner by those who did not know him but he would go out of his way to help his friends.¹¹² In the 1950s he bought a house in Lennox Gardens, London and converted it into flats for friends such as Diana Campbell-Gray (later Viscountess Gage) and Lady Bridget Parsons.¹¹³ Hardy Amies referred to Renshaw's kindness to him spanning twenty years, and both Lees-Milne and James Pope-Hennessy thanked him for introductions at the *Sunday Times*.¹¹⁴ Renshaw was also instrumental in bringing Alan Searle and Liza Hope (later Lady Glendevon) together during bitter legal action relating to Somerset Maugham's estate. Both parties were extremely grateful to Renshaw for his intercession.¹¹⁵

The complexities and contradictions in Renshaw's personality were very clearly set out by James Lees-Milne. On the one hand Renshaw was 'companionable [...] always entertaining, tremendously giggly, and of course socially sophisticated', 'strictly fair, and generous' and Lees-Milne was 'very fond of him' and would miss him.¹¹⁶ Renshaw's generosity was also apparent in letters from Fabia Drake and Lady Baillie thanking him for thoughtful and beautiful gifts, in his donation towards a new organ at the Henry Wood Hall, and in his using his *Sunday Times* connections to raise over £1000 worth of advertising for the souvenir programme for a Night of 100 Stars charity gala.¹¹⁷

Yet Lees-Milne also thought Renshaw a 'deeply selfish', 'ruthless', 'impersonal' man who 'shunned all emotional expression', was 'never cosy', and could be 'cruel'. He was 'thoroughly egocentric. Number one came first'. In thirty years of working for him, Renshaw's housekeeper, Irene Ratcliffe, was never once asked if she had any relations, and he was similarly incurious about the home and family of his closest companion.¹¹⁸ The cruelty in Renshaw's nature, referred to by Lees-Milne, was echoed by Clarissa Eden who told Renshaw he had a 'nasty, vindictive' nature.¹¹⁹ Anthony Russell, grandson of Lady Baillie, in his memoir of growing up at Leeds Castle, describes Renshaw as enjoying causing distress, with a venomous sense of humour, and a tendency to 'focus his agile mind on destroying as many reputations as possible with a stream of hypercamp critiques and *bons mots*.'¹²⁰

However, for every person who thought Renshaw cruel or unkind there was someone else who thought very highly of him. Hugo Vickers, whilst never meeting Renshaw, 'knew some people who did and held him in high esteem'. David Cleggett, the Leeds Castle Foundation's historian

¹¹⁰ Add. MS. 89068/1/9, ff. 76-78.

¹¹¹ Add. MS. 89068/1/8, f. 106; Lees-Milne, *Through Wood and Dale*, pp. 237, 252, 288.

¹¹² *Times*, 10 March 1978.

¹¹³ Amory, *The Letters of Ann Fleming*, p. 228.

¹¹⁴ Add. MS. 89068/1/1, f. 19; Add. MS. 89068/1/7, f. 33; Add. MS. 89068/1/8, f. 88.

¹¹⁵ Add. MS. 89068/1/7, f. 8; Add. MS. 89068/1/9, ff. 53-5. Hope, Maugham's daughter, appealed against his adoption of Searle as his son as it would disinherit her. She had also been involved in legal action against her father relating to his sale of paintings which had formerly been assigned to her in return for her signing away her rights to his royalties.

¹¹⁶ Lees-Milne, *Through Wood and Dale*, pp. 237-8, 252.

¹¹⁷ Add. MS. 89068/1/1, ff. 47-8; Add. MS. 89068/1/5, f. 2; Add. MS. 89068/1/7, f. 58; Add. MS. 89068/1/8, f. 19.

¹¹⁸ Lees-Milne, *Through Wood and Dale*, pp. 237-8, 252; Lees-Milne, *A Mingled Measure*, p. 251. Renshaw did, however, leave Mrs Ratcliffe an annuity of £500 in his will (proved 11 September 1978).

¹¹⁹ Add. MS. 89068/1/5, f. 35.

¹²⁰ Russell, *Outrageous Fortune*, pp. 67, 144-7.

from 1975 to 2005, remembers Renshaw as ‘a charming gentleman’, whilst Anne Hamilton-Grace’s daughter, Elisa Segrave, who met Renshaw once, briefly, recalls him as ‘a man of enormous charm and charisma’. Charles Duff knew Renshaw slightly and was impressed by his ‘intelligence (rare in that world) and perception’ and his ‘generous and illuminating’ insights into people’s characters.¹²¹

Renshaw has been described as ‘a social gadfly of ill-defined occupation’.¹²² The first part of that description is undeniable; whether in London or Cyprus, his life seemed to revolve around parties and friends and gossip. As the letters in the British Library show, there was little he liked better than entertaining or attending parties. However, the second part is not true, as his thirty year career in one of the world’s leading newspaper stables, where he was instrumental in the success of a major innovation in newspaper publishing, attests.¹²³ He was clearly a complex, contradictory man, and not to everyone’s tastes. It seems a somewhat glib summary for such an interesting, multi-faceted individual, but perhaps Lees-Milne summed him up best: ‘Strange man.’¹²⁴

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¹²¹ Emails to the author, 8 February 2014, 30 September 2014, 26 November 2014, and 27 November 2014.

¹²² Russell, *Outrageous Fortune*, p. 66.

¹²³ Renshaw has, however, also been described as an art dealer, an interior designer, and a journalist. The confusion over exactly what he did do for a living perhaps bears out Anthony Russell’s description. See Hoare, *Serious Pleasures*, p. 356; Sotheby’s, London, Sale L10408, 16 December 2010, lot 148, <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2010/english-literature-history-and-children39s-books-illustrations-110408/lot.148.html> [accessed 5 November 2014]; Cleggett, *Leeds Castle*, p. 329; and James Lees-Milne, *Ceaseless Turmoil: Diaries, 1988-1992*, ed. Michael Bloch (London, 2004), p. 169.

¹²⁴ Lees-Milne, *Through Wood and Dale*, p. 252.