

The Diarists of 1940

The Diarists of 1940:

An Annus Mirabilis

By

Andrew Sangster

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The Diarists of 1940: An *Annus Mirabilis*

By Andrew Sangster

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I am very grateful as always to my wife Carol for her support and comments, and her understanding that I spend more in the past than the present day.

We would both like to dedicate this book to our friend Andrew Henley Washford, who in his long illness showed the courage and strength of character of a man like Klemperer, the good intentions of Hassell, the sense of Brooke's duty, enjoyed life like Colville, had a milder cynical streak than Orwell, had a natural suspicion of men like Ciano, and a complete distaste for Göbbels.

Andrew Henley Washford, 8th June 1948 - 8th October 2019

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PREFACE

The year 1940 was often referred to as *Annus Mirabilis* which carries many forms of possible interpretations. This Latin phrase can be used in the sense of a remarkable or auspicious year, and it was possibly first used in 1603 known as the year of the plague, but it was more associated with the year 1666. This was the year during which France declared war on England, there was a naval conflict against the Dutch known as the Battle of Dunkirk, and the famous Fire of London. There is a somewhat ironic parallel with 1940 with Britain at war against Germany, initially with France as an ally, and then resulting in the Royal Navy sinking the French Fleet. The year 1940 started with the Phoney War which resulted in defeat and the British retreat from Dunkirk, to be followed by the sea and air battles, the latter resulted in the bombing of London which gave the appearance that London was on fire.

In 1940 the survival of Britain was seriously challenged, France, the Low Countries with Denmark and Norway were occupied by a belligerent Nazi driven Germany looking to Italy and Spain for support, and enormous question marks hovering over the future direction of the Soviet Union and America. During 1940 never had the modern world been so uncertain about its immediate and long-term future.

In his speech to the Commons about Chamberlain's death Churchill said that "history with its flickering lamp stumbles along the trail of the past, trying to reconstruct its scenes, to revive its echoes, and kindle with pale gleams the passion of former days."¹ The use of diaries helps pave the way of that trail. Historians have examined and explored the events, intentions, motivations in great depth, but always with the benefit of knowing what eventually happened. The desire for appeasement and peace is often cast in the light dictated by the subsequent events and the outcome. This book does not ignore historical study, and each month is given its factual background, but the main thrust is to read and comment on what various people wrote in their diaries on the day or week as the events unfolded. They wrote their thoughts and interpretations of what was happening without knowing what would happen next, and with no knowledge of the years ahead. Many diarists are quoted, but the reason the selected ones have been chosen is because of the apparent integrity of their diaries; "integrity" implying that

the diaries have not been tampered with postwar in the light of subsequent events in the hope of self-justification or glorification.

The diarists, with one exception, were well-known and some stood near the centrifugal centres of power. Ulrich von Hassell a diplomat, and Göbbels a Nazi leader were Germans, but they were diametrically opposed in their views. Ciano was Mussolini's Foreign Minister and son-in-law and understood Mussolini better than most. Colville was a British Civil Servant working at 10 Downing Street and privy to Chamberlain and Churchill's inner sanctums. Brooke was a senior British military commander responsible for the defence of Britain and close to the political power structures. George Orwell was the well-known writer and Left-wing Socialist with powerful but cynical political views. The less well-known diarist was Klemperer who was a German-Jewish academic and through his diary depicted the suffering caused by the brutal anti-Semitism and repression of Nazism.

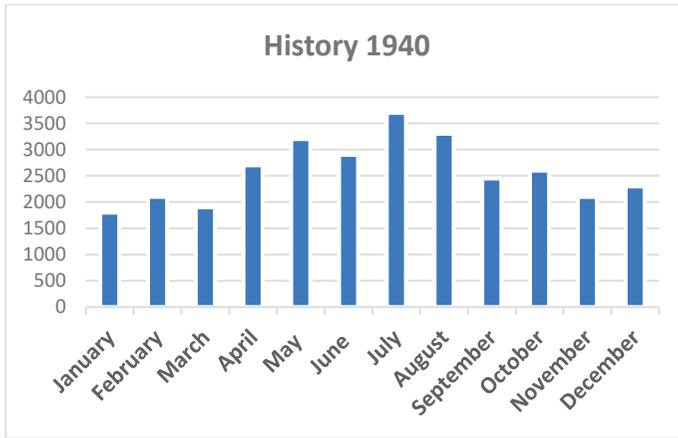
Behind all the gathering momentous world events stood individual people who plotted and planned, but who had no idea of the eventual outcome. This book explores what they thought at the time, what they considered would happen, and their reflections as these crucial times unfolded in 1940, the *Annus Mirabilis*.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Nature of the Book

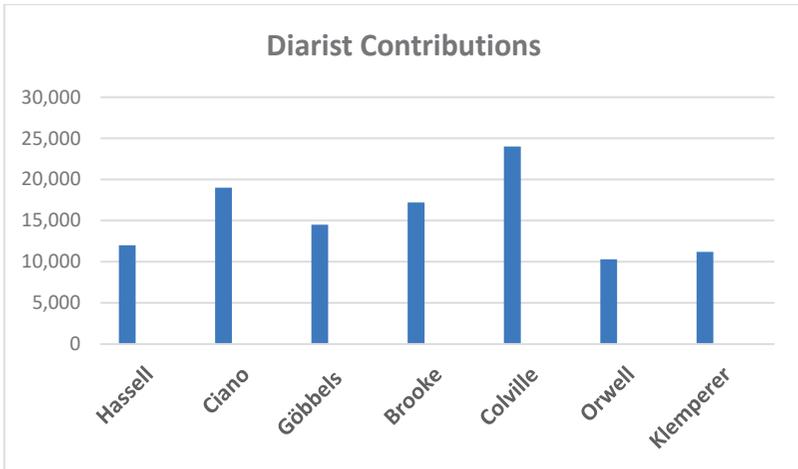
This study contains two main components; first an objective month by month historical review, secondly comments by the diarists about what they perceived was happening both in their own lives and worldwide, and what was important to them. The chosen diarists are generally well-known, but a brief biography is given for each, and a few explanations explored as to why diaries are kept, including the nature of the integrity of the diary. A diary is only of interest when its main bulk has not been tampered with after the events; namely the critical interest is what the diarist thought at the time of writing, not in the light of what happened later. Written at the very moment when historical events were unfolding.

The causes of the Second World War are briefly sketched as part of the essential background. The months of September to December 1939 are a form of introduction in order to explain the situation as it appeared on January 1st, 1940 and includes general comments by the diarists. The year 1940 is then examined month by month starting with the historical survey of that month, and then followed by an analysis of the diarists' entries. The personal natures of the diarists, their nationalities, political views and how the events affected them often means they differ in their opinions and viewpoints. The history sections vary in length because, as with all years there were months of frenetic activity, and other months when not so much was happening. The first three months of 1940 were known as the Phoney War and for everyone, the soldiers, the politicians, and the wider population little appeared to be happening. From April to August 1940, momentous events occurred with war, invasions, occupation by enemy forces, the threat of more trouble to come, which sent most countries into a sense of sheer panic. Like a temperature chart the pressure eased off for a time in the autumn, but because of previous events and the uncertain future these months were more active than the first months of the year. Below is an analysis chart of the year indicating the amount of words needed in the history sections to outline the events.



The order of the diarists in the text was a cause of concern but after some thought the German-Jewish Klemperer was placed last, because his personal suffering set the whole ghastly unravelling of events into a deeply personal and significant context. The first diarist is Ulrich von Hassell, the upper-class German intellectual diplomat who was patriotic but hated the Nazi regime. He is followed by Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister, and then by Göbbels the Propaganda Minister and a leading Nazi leader. In stark contrast follows Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke, who was not a Field Marshal at the time of writing, but he was a military commander whose diary was full of his personal thoughts and reflections. He is followed by Colville who worked for Chamberlain and Churchill, and who provided considerable insights into the reactions of the British government and other major events. Following this diarist George Orwell's deeply anti-establishment and socialist views stand in contrast to the previous upper-class diarist Colville. As noted, the last diarist is Klemperer, the Jewish academic.

Their diaries vary in length and interest. The longest diary is that of Colville, though this may have been challenged by Göbbels had all his diary survived. Brooke and Ciano are substantial but more succinct, and Hassell and Klemperer have fewer entries because of the nature of their daily lives. Orwell's diary is the shortest and for many months he obviously left it tucked away inside his desk. Some are more interesting than others; Colville's diary was the easiest to read, Göbbels' diary was often repetitive, Ciano leaves much unsaid, and some draw more necessary comment than others.



Each diarist differs in his length of entries, style of expression, but above all in their perceptions at the time of writing. Brooke and Colville later added postwar comments to their diaries; Brooke by way of explanation, and Colville often with an apology for some of the views about people and events he had expressed as a young man. These additional comments are largely ignored because the importance of their views at the time of writing provides a more revealing picture of the time in which they were written. There are self-evidently many common themes attracting the diarists' attention, ranging from the effectiveness and fear of the bombing raids, the reasons for the collapse of France, the potential reactions of the USSR under Stalin, and the USA awaiting the election of Roosevelt or Willkie. There are frequent references to Italy, its conduct under Mussolini and its military failures as a member of the Axis. Colville gives some curious insights into both Chamberlain and Churchill, Göbbels provides a major Nazi Party member's view of Hitler and his policies, and Ciano opens the door on Mussolini. From time to time the writer of this exploration adds comments about the validity of an entry, or its outcome, and the reader undoubtedly may want to do the same in the margins.

Why 1940?

There are many significant years in the twentieth century. The Great War's opening year of 1914 and the end of the war's Treaty of Versailles were significant. The social upheaval of the 1930s, with the Great

Depression and the General Strike in Britain, the arrival of Fascism in Italy, Germany and Spain, and the ascendancy of Stalin, another dictator under the guise of Communism. All these events provide significant years of note. Later there are other more important years as Europe tried to reconstruct itself as a Common Market then a Union, and in 1989-90 the collapse of the Soviet Union. Every country has significant dates and years, but the year 1940 was unquestionably significant in Europe with vast ramifications across the globe, from New Zealand to South Africa to Canada and the USA.

The year 1940 opened with Poland being invaded by Germany and the Soviet Union, and Britain alongside France declaring war on Germany; this was a highly significant conflict. Across the other side of the world Japan was also at war as it had been for several years, and the outlook around the globe appeared bleak. Many countries in 1940 were wondering whether they could avoid the conflict, or whether to try and predict the ultimate victor for the sake of their survival. Smaller states such as the Low Countries offered to broker peace deals, and Eastern countries such as Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and the Balkans looked nervously West towards Germany and East to Stalin's Soviet Union, wondering which side to pander to, especially after the attack by Russia on Finland. The major countries wondered whether Italy would step into the fray once German success was assured, and there was a high degree of anxiety about Spain under Franco. In short, the whole of Europe was more unstable than it had ever been in modern times.

The British had sent a very small number of troops to France where they "expected danger and found damp," but the war at sea started and continued throughout the year. The more astute realised that the German war machine was formidable, others felt that it would be a repeat of World War One with the same results. It was a time of fraught nerves and dreaded anticipation. The balloon went up in April with the occupation of Denmark and Norway by the Germans, and during May and June France collapsed, and the British fled from Dunkirk. If the Germans were surprised by their success the rest of the world were horrified, especially the British who were all too aware that Operation *Sea Lion* could happen at any moment. The confidence level in Britain varied, but there were times when it must have felt very low, especially after Italy joined in late as anticipated by many observers. Only Churchill's ebullient and belligerent confidence helped those who were faltering in the belief of survival. For many the invasion seemed highly likely. There followed the Battle of Britain and then bombing raids by both sides. There were those in Germany thinking the bombing raids would bring Britain to its knees, and many in Britain who wondered whether the Germans could ever be beaten. The hopes emerging in this year was that

America would join the British, and that there would be problems between Germany and Russia. This, as is well-known happened, but in 1940 it must have felt to many observers a mere pipedream. Some wanted peace by the autumn of 1940, but this appeared extremely unlikely. By the end of the year there was some growing confidence in so far that after the air victories by the RAF the invasion was becoming less likely. The confidence was given a further boost by Italy's disastrous campaign in Greece, and her losses against the British in North Africa. Nevertheless, the bombing was persistent, the U-boat war was causing a serious drop in food and other essential supplies, and Britain was waging an undeclared war against Vichy France.

The year of 1940 started with a sense of anxiety, led to a state of devastation across Western Europe, and in Britain a genuine fear of an invasion more sinister than the last time, the tribal one in 1066. By the end of the year despite the conflict growing, and still being alone without major allies, there was a growing hope and confidence inside Britain which undoubtedly gave justification to the title *Annus Mirabilis*.

Use of Quotation Marks

In trying to analyse and convey the thoughts of the diarist it is often necessary to change tense as a direct quotation is lifted from the diary in question. This book is written about people writing long ago, but when they are quoted the verbs are in the present tense. It is because they were writing at the time which makes diary reading so interesting and important. It was how they thought or perceived the situation to be as at that time, not later with the benefit of hindsight. Generally, such extracts are marked by an endnote reference so any reader can check its validity. When the quoted text does not have an endnote attached it is because it can be found on the same page of the original text or the same day of writing. This is not the writer's laziness but an effort to make the text more readable. Frequently some word or words appear within "quotation marks" because they have been lifted from the original text to convey the language used by the diarist, or his strength of feeling or cynicism. Often what a diarist is thinking, or feeling can sometimes be conveyed in a single phrase or a word, and so the choice of lifted words can be important as an insight into the writer's frame of mind.

Often these selected words typify the diarist and his thinking. From the number of times Orwell refers to "Blimps" it is easy to perceive he is about to attack the class-system and those in charge. When Colville described Churchill's "affectionate nature" it is a sure sign that the man he once held

as a “half-breed American” is changing in Colville’s estimate. When Göbbels uses the word “liquidate” it sends a cold shudder down the spine, and when Colville writes of “criminal recklessness” he is always speaking of the Nazi regime and Ribbentrop in particular, a view shared by Ciano who uses the word “sinister” for the same reason. Whenever Brooke refers to “God” it is a sure sign that something momentous has happened in his personal or national life. Klemperer’s quiet irony emerges with the careful and cynical use of “Aryan” and his personal state is often one of “depression.” These words are plucked from the actual diaries to describe what the diarist is writing and have been carefully chosen as not only as representative of the original text, but often of the person as well.

THE INTEGRITY OF DIARIES

The question as to why people write diaries can have no definitive answer, and at the best it can only amount to a series of speculations. Samuel Pepys' diary was one which recorded important and interesting events but was interspersed with his amorous love life in detail, and he is probably one of the most acknowledged diarists of all times. It has been claimed that keeping a diary is a matter of self-discipline and even a productive way to conclude a day. Anne Frank's famous diary helped her cope with her fear and sense of loneliness; it was almost a matter of having a hidden friend to confide one's innermost thoughts. Brooke's military and political diary was ostensibly addressed to his wife. It was also his way of "letting off steam" and revealing his own anxieties and pressures of responsibility he felt but could not disclose publicly.

Others might keep a diary because they then have a constant reference to their side of the story or the events of the day. Keeping a diary is always a matter of motive, but often there must be the expectation that one day it will be read. Chips Channon once wrote that when he asked himself why he kept a diary, he was unsure whether it was to relieve his feelings, or act as a consolation in his old age, or to dazzle his descendants. Some may be meant to be entirely personal, but the possibility that others will read it at a future date can never be cast aside by the diarist. The personal side is important, and for some people it is a means of coping, a matter of debriefing oneself.

Many ordinary people do this, but their literary efforts are only of interest or value to their family, and usually when they have died. If they were important people of social or political standing, or were witness to great events, they then become of interest to historians. If it amounts to detailing a quarrel with the next-door neighbour over dustbins or a squabble in the family over money, it is too ordinary to concern anyone beyond the family. This changes if the diary recorded the effects of the Blitz in an ordinary street, then social historians would start logging and analysing the details. A person who writes out of self-discipline or as a way of being productive may find it fulfilling and useful, but that is a matter of personal judgement. It has been projected that this type of diary writing can almost amount to a healing process as the days and weeks are mulled over and put

into perspective. Again, this is of importance only to the individual and his or her closest family.

Sometimes diary writing might be a matter of confidence or self-confidence when the actions of the day are given some form of perspective. It may be that this is an effort to justify some actions or even the need for self-confidence that "I am not a waste of time and space." It may be assumed such a person tends to be a motivated type of character, seeking perspective in life and especially at a personal level. It may even be an effort to link the past with the present; a sense of order to evaluate any causal links or even to understand if previous plans worked. It could be that such a person uses the diary process as a means of keeping the brain uncluttered, give a sense of order to events, and simply recording events or feelings in order to remind the writer if similar occasions or events occur in the future. One thing is clear the person keeping the diary is a motivated type of character.

There are multitudinous reasons for diary writing, and ambition, self-propaganda, or even using it as a means of contact with loved ones or a future generation of the family may be the motivation. There is little doubt that when Göbbels wrote his diaries his motives changed with his circumstances. His early diaries are an account of his puerile love life and frustrations at not being a recognised author of value; they amount almost to the rantings of a self-obsessive teenager; had his children survived it is hoped he would not have wanted them to read his murky behaviour and thoughts. As he rose to power, ambition played the dominant part in all his motivations. He probably saw his diaries as highly publishable and possibly to be used as a mainline historical document for the new Nazi world order. In the diaries of this year of 1939-40 they were handwritten, but as he started to believe they would be the foundation of the Reich history he used a stenographer. Some parts of his work are missing in 1940, but there is no doubting their validity. He praises himself, tells what he must have known to be lies, panders to Hitler, but despite all this the diary is of considerable interest because of what it reveals about the Nazi mindset.

Ciano was somewhat different in his motivations, and he may have felt that because he was near the top of the political tree during momentous times, his role and his thoughts should be recorded. In his final entries before he was executed, he expressed the wish the diary would justify him and his actions. How far they were later "doctored" remains a contentious issue, but his sense of self-importance and ambition appear to have been one of the driving forces. His diary is more interesting than Göbbels if only because of his cynical sense of humour and honesty. Some of his insights if genuine, which most believe to be the case, are revealing about Germany and the Italian relationship, but most especially his insights into Mussolini. It has

been suggested that he later changed his diaries, but this is unlikely given the “rapid” circumstances of his lifestyle and execution. He also shared the diary with the American Sumner Wells when they met in 1940.

General Alan Brooke’s diaries were written as his means of communicating with his wife. He was fond of his wife and trusted her, and the impression was that this was a home diary to share his life with her. This is another reason for diary writing to stay in touch for those who of necessity must live away from family; many prisoners used and still use this method. In Brooke’s case it appears he expected his wife to read about his hopes and fears when he brought the diary home; it was his means of “talking to her.” However, after the war Brooke was obliged to go through his diary because it contained elements which needed to be censored, and sometimes his downright criticisms of others could almost be libellous. Despite this editing the reader is often astonished by his frank disclosure of his thoughts about Churchill, other generals in the British army, including the American and French commanders. It was not a diary seeking applause, but Brooke had an incisive mind and his revelations are both interesting and useful for historians.

Jock Colville should not have kept a diary by Civil Service Regulations, but he was a man of order and precision and there is a possibility he often treated it as a record, not only of critical events, but of conversations, some of a minor social nature. He was more like a filing cabinet, but very aware that he was near the centre of power as momentous events were taking place. Colville, somewhat like Brooke, knew he was not the power base, was not self-evidently overly ambitious, but probably from a sense of duty felt the need to record his thoughts for prosperity. The fact that at one stage he interrupts his diary with a later and additional note to explain that some of his comments about Churchill needed to be understood in the context of his youth, and the influences of the day is curious; these postwar notes of apology and explanation indicate a sure sign of the diary’s integrity.

Hassell, unlike Colville, was not breaking convention by keeping a diary, but he put his life at risk in doing so. His attacks on Hitler and his henchmen if found by the Gestapo, who, he was aware, were watching him from early on in 1940, would have meant a concentration camp and unquestionably death. This happened to him in the end, not by the disclosure of the diaries but by his involvement in the July 20th plot against Hitler. Given the circumstances in which he lived, it is difficult to understand why he kept written notes, but it was an act of bravery which clearly showed that there was German opposition to Hitler and the Nazi regime. It was not ambition on his part, but it is easy to reach the conclusion that he wanted others to know that not all Germans were Nazi supporters.

The final diarist is Viktor Klemperer the Jewish academic in Dresden who kept a diary most of his life. This was for him an academic pursuit of a man who liked to record life, events, and to unclutter what was happening in his own mind. He was brave like Hassell in so doing because it would have been instant death without a trial, and on reading his diaries and what happened it seems he was very lucky not to have been discovered. He had a sharp and astute brain and felt as a German he had a right if not a duty to comment on what was happening. He was lucky to survive the war and return to his academic life under communist rule which he referred to as the Fourth Reich. If Ciano can be amusing, Göbbels distasteful, Brooke revealing, then Klemperer must be read with care because his work is the most emotionally disturbing. It is a diary of a resistantly strong personality, who was clever and astute, and who despite his very helplessness won through.

These diarists all present different pictures of the 1940 *Annus Mirabilis* but make the history of this period more interesting by their individual reflections and interpretations.

The Value of a Diary

The diary gives a new dimension to the past. When David Margesson reported on Chamberlain's serious illness he and Colville spoke of how the ex-Prime Minister had been greatly maligned, and Colville noted "but I believe historians, if they try to throw themselves back into the conditions in which decisions were taken, and refrain from judging solely by what happened afterwards, will mix their censure with much praise for his honest efforts."² Historians have occasionally been somewhat guilty of passing a judgment based first on the benefit of hindsight and on what eventually happened. For years those who were dubbed appeasers, that is those who wanted peace, were cast in a quasi-villainous role and for some they were even blamed for the catastrophe of an ill-prepared war. The question may be asked as "to how would I have reacted?" The reading of an original diary helps in throwing historians "back in time" to understand the "feeling" and circumstances of the day in question.

There have been, since the war, moral criticisms of bomber pilots, of soldiers shooting the emerging enemy trying to surrender, of abandoning survivors at sea, but such criticisms should be avoided unless the historian has experienced the emotional ups and downs of such situations. Comfortable armchair judgement from the cosiness of a study is all too easy and often superficial. Reading a diary written at the time can be much more revealing about the true nature of a man or an incident or a major event. A

diarist might commit in their personal reflections that as the bombs fell, he or she were terrified, but later claim they were not. This underlines the virtue of a diary which has not been tampered with. Colville, quoted above, and one of the chosen diarists, later adds his apologies for some of his views of people, but he did not change his original text, which gives it a sense that “it was of that time, and as of that time” from his perspective. Brooke in his published work later added some explanations, but he did not appear to change the original text, and the additions are in italics to make this clear. For the historian a diary is much more revealing than an autobiography which can be a form of apologia, or self-justification, or even self-glorification. For these reasons some diaries can be suspect if they show signs of being re-written.

Soul of the Diarist

When any person writes a diary, which is honest to themselves, it inevitably tells the reader more about the nature of that person than even an autobiography, which often benefits from later and perhaps more mature or even self-serving reflections. If it is a young person’s diary it may reflect their concerns as a child and with careful reading reveal something of their nature. If a child wants a puppy for Christmas and is concerned only about its colour that is understandable for a child. If they add phrases about their hope of being able to care for it, or whether the parents can afford it, this demonstrates that the child is more sensitive beyond his or her own needs. This simplistic insight is true of all diary reading; it is possible to understand the nature of the person who is being read; or at least their nature at the time of writing, as people do change, unlike leopards who cannot change their spots. It also reveals to a lesser or greater extent the feelings and atmosphere of the day.

Without reading a biography or history notes on **von Hassell** it is easy to grasp the fact that he came from what might be called the upper reaches of society, in German often referred to by the Prussian expression of the Junker Class, who were the landholding gentry. It also becomes immediately clear that Hassell was an ardent patriot but not an aggressive nationalist. At the worse he was an irredentist nationalist who desired the return of German lands taken after the Treaty of Versailles. He was not like Hitler who was an extreme expansionist nationalist. Running throughout his text is a sense of integrity, morality and this was underpinned by his constant reference to his Christian background. In short, the diary leaves the reader with the idea he was somewhat old-fashioned and hankering after the days of decency lost in the past; a decent upright man of high standards, which

like Brooke he expected from others. This is the reason as to why he found Hitler and the Nazi regime confusing and downright evil. There is a slight sense of the naïve in some of his words if only because he did not have the benefit of hindsight. Such was the appalling conduct of the Nazi regime, their behaviour was simply beyond his traditions and way of thinking, and they had overstepped his known traditional boundaries. He does not come through as a realist with his hopes for the future, mainly because he underestimated the grip that the Nazi regime held over most people.

In total contrast to Hassell is the propagandist Dr **Göbbels** who although undoubtedly clever, cunning, and intelligent, had cast any morality he may have had as a youth into his pursuit of ambition. He was self-centred, unbelievably egotistical, he had grasped the Machiavellian principles for seeking power and was a sex addict. The abuse of women comes out more in his early diaries, but the year 1940 under scrutiny clearly indicates a man who is ambitious in the extreme, fawning on his idol Hitler, and raging against those who may stand in his way. He was a calculating liar, and his diary creates an image of a man who was a bully and extremely dangerous. He had once been an avid Christian and not anti-Semitic, but unlike leopards he changed his mental configurations because of his obsession for power. He was a disagreeable and dangerous man, and the diary reveals only one softer side to his unpleasant nature, which was the love for his children, whom, with his wife, he later killed. He did so, it is purported, because he thought they would suffer under the hands of the incoming enemy. This did not happen to the children of other Nazi leaders which somewhat validates the old motto of *Honi soit qui mal y pense*.

Another diarist, the Italian **Ciano** was also ambitious but not as extreme as Göbbels, and although somewhat egotistical he comes across as a person whom people could like. The American Sumner Wells and the British and French Ambassadors at least found him approachable. He simply had the ambitions and egotistical outlook of many politicians who find themselves in authority. He enjoyed this power but openly admitted that he had to take care, or he would be in danger of losing his high-ranking post. He was always cautious with Mussolini, but it is clear from Ciano's diary, that unlike Göbbels, he did not fawn upon his master when out of his presence. He enjoyed the social life, golf, accruing wealth, loot, collecting art, and women, but there is not the same sense of depravity which is possible to detect in Göbbels' work. Ciano had an ironical streak in him, which sometimes lightens his diary, and he held vastly different opinions from those of the Duce. Had Ciano been the Duce it may speculatively have meant trouble in the Balkans, but Italy would probably have avoided the devastating inferno of the Second World War. It was not that Ciano was a

pacifist, but more a level-headed pragmatist, which made him to miscalculate that invading Greece would be easy. He evidently loved his position in power and society, but he comes over as very human.

As with Hassell, **Colville** came from the same upper-class of society, revelled in his Gentleman's Clubs, horse-riding in Richmond Park and dancing and dining at the Savoy. His family had connections with the Royal Family, and he mixed socially with the upper echelons. Unlike Göbbels and Ciano he was not part of the power play, but he was close to the centre of power, "on the fringes" as an astute observer. At all times he comes over as an honest man, spilling the beans on his innermost thoughts about Churchill before he came to power, yet retaining them in his diary as a matter of integrity. He listened into major decision making and often disagreed with the conclusions, and he heard the thoughts and rumours of important people. In a few of his possible asides regarding policies, the public was fortunate that his personal opinions were not asked for or acted on. He would have succumbed to the French request to send Britain's defensive fighter planes to France, when a month later they were essential for Britain's defence against a possible invasion. In many ways he was like Hassell in so far that he comes across as an honest and moral person with a deep Christian faith, wondering whether Hitler would initiate war on Good Friday.

Unlike the others, **Brooke** was a professional soldier of the highest order. He was a man of duty which he never failed to commit himself to every hour of the day. Some of his critics have called him a habitual "moaner," because the high standards he personally maintained, he expected to find in others. He was also a military expert and was often able to see the situation more clearly than politicians. This led him to criticise his superiors such as Lord Gort, think Eden was being too political, and this characteristic of being suspicious of politicians, later led to head on clashes with Churchill whom he also admired. Hindsight has often proved that his judgements and opinions were mainly correct. He was a keen bird watcher and a homely man, and he kept his diary for his wife of whom he was deeply fond. As mentioned earlier it was probably his way of expressing personal feelings which he could not make public. He was a good family man, attending the sickbed of his eldest son Tom until duty called him away. He was a soldier of duty first, a man of high standards, moral and deeply Christian, often wondering what God was thinking of the mess man had created.

George Orwell was the only professional writer amongst the diarists. There has never been an official biography of Orwell by family wish, but his diary gives a sense of his life sometimes better than a biography can achieve. It is a matter of "bits and pieces" not least because he was a

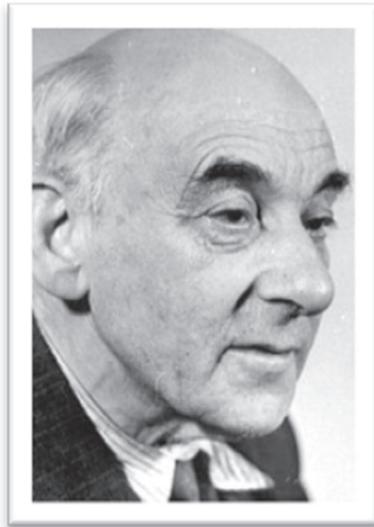
professional journalist, critic and novelist and his literary efforts took much of his time. It is almost a private-type diary because there are pages of information about his vegetable gardens and livestock, the weather, and these are often referred to as his domestic diaries. His inter-mixed wartime diaries sometimes give the appearance of having been fitted in as an after-thought, but Orwell was a political person of strong Left-wing leanings, and his intellectual insights gathered force as he focused on the events of war. His entries took on a sharper concentration during May and June 1940 when Britain appeared to be staring into the face of a national disaster. Klemperer's diary may well have been similar had he not been caught in the anti-Semitic trap with a priority of personal survival. Orwell was not a healthy man, but he was reasonably safe in Britain and was able to take a more considered but pithy view of events. Orwell's domestic diary contained immense details of his parsnips and onions clearly indicating that this was a personal diary. However, such was the activity of his intellect it tends to indicate Orwell belonged to that group of individuals who feel intensely about events, and who generally expressed personal feelings within their own private pages. Orwell's soul and mind revolved around perceived injustice and the need to change for a better future, a future always dominated by his strong Left-wing socialism and the expectancy of a socialist revolution.

Klemperer had been a high ranking academic, he was Christian, but ethnically Jewish. He had married a German Aryan and despite the fact this brought some alleviation to the suffering, he was persecuted as a Jew and it was simply astounding that he survived. Somewhat like Hassell he proved to be a brave man in so far that keeping this type of diary meant his life was in perpetual danger. His diary is not about the ups and downs of life, but of his continuous descent into abject misery. However, he still managed to keep an open eye on the international situation with comments, which if seen by the Gestapo, would have meant an immediate and painful death; he was a brave man, especially for an elderly man of academia and libraries. His courage must be read between the lines because he nowhere refers to this self-evident feature of his personality. He was a sensitive soul who cared about his neighbours and friends, and even worried over his pet cat. His greatest virtue was trying to see the best in other people even when they were dressed in SA uniforms.

These diarists all had differing perspectives and details in mind, but they have the history of events in common. They are a mixture of British, German and Italian who naturally regard everything from the perspective of their nation home. First it is important to look briefly at these diarists' lives.

THE DIARISTS

Victor Klemperer 1881-1960



Victor Klemperer was born in 1881, the son of the Rabbi Dr Wilhelm Klemperer in Landsberg an der Warthe which is now part of Poland bearing the name Gorzów. He studied in the universities of Munich, Switzerland, France and Germany, taught at Naples University, and during the Great War he was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal while serving as a volunteer in the German Army. He became Professor of Romance Languages (Latin based languages) at Dresden Technical College until the 1935 Nazi Racial Laws had him dismissed. After the end of World War Two he returned to academic work in East Germany until he died in 1960. He was fortunate to have married an Aryan wife called Eva, which partially helped him avoid the extermination camps, and during the later bombing of Dresden he managed to hide himself amongst the refugees and survivors. At all times he considered himself German, and although Jewish by birth he was never a religious man, and he was baptised as a Protestant in Berlin in

1912 as he felt this was more compatible with being a German. Whether Christian or Jewish by faith was irrelevant to the Nazi regime, because he was ethnically Jewish and therefore considered “sub-human.”

During his life he maintained his diary, and his writing continuously reflected the state of misery he experienced under the Nazi regime. He even found time to study the way the Nazis managed to pervert the German language, a subject close to his academic heart which was language. His diary is an horrific chronicle of a highly restricted and brutal story of survival; it includes nearly every aspect of daily life under the German regime, often interspersed with astute comments about the national and international situation he gleaned from newspapers and friends. The Klemperers were eventually obligated to put down their cat called Muschel because Jews were not allowed to own pets. He was obliged to add the name *Israel* to his personal documentation and identity card, which he did himself at the earliest opportunity after the Dresden bombing raid. Throughout his diaries he gives accounts of life under the Nazi regime, of house searches, bully-boy behaviour and the disappearance of old and new friends to concentration camps, Theresienstadt especially.

Despite this he continuously made the claim “I am German, and I am waiting for them to come back.” During the end days of the war when he was able to observe more widely it was clear that this remained a complex problem. He was deeply disturbed by the anti-Semitism not just amongst the Nazis but even amongst those who opposed them. He contemplated fleeing to America, and on one occasion to Chile, but he felt compelled to stay in his own land as a dedicated natural-born German, even though throughout his experience he was constantly humiliated by the authorities and others. He was only able to survive with minimum food because his wife Eva was an Aryan and had better coupons. He listened and watched all that happened around him and to the rumours, but there was a paucity of reliable information and it took time for him and many others to realise the existence of the extermination camps. Even on the night preceding the bombing he witnessed the delivery notices to remaining Jewish friends of their imminent deportation.

After the war he and Eva managed to return to their original home and reclaim a property which had been “Aryanised.” He found a new life in a university post at Leipzig, and he became a significant character in the developing intellectual life, and he was a delegate to the Cultural Association of the GDR from 1950 to 1958, but complained it was more of a ceremonial role. He died in 1960 often referring to the Russian occupation as the Fourth Reich, and his diary was not published until 1995 when it was regarded as a literary sensation.