

## COLONEL EVELYN THISTLETHWAYTE

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the incumbent Squire of Southwick was Col. Evelyn Thistlethwayte. Living at the Mansion House which dominated the sleepy, secretive village, he was quite unprepared for the momentous events that were to alter his family destiny forever. The family had owned the village with its Church, St James Without the Priory Gate, both pubs and the nearby hamlet of South Boarhunt and its Church, St. Nicholas, together with Southwick Park and its surrounding 8000 acres for some 400 years stretching back to the Dissolution of the Monasteries presided over by Henry VIII.



Col. Evelyn Thistlethwaite planting a sapling oak in 1937 to commemorate the Coronation of the King, George VI.

## POACHING WAS RIFE!

There was little contact between the villagers, who were almost all employees of the Estate and lived in tied cottages, and their lord and master. Until the mid 1930s, what communication took place was relayed by the Land Steward and or his chaplain, both also in the employ of the Squire.

The various Squires had all been fanatical sportsmen and were jealous of the estate covers which swarmed with game and bird. The combination of proximity and pot-worthiness was to prove irresistible to some villagers and poaching was rife! However, it was the humble pheasant that would lose the Squire his Mansion House!



## THE PHEASANT'S REVENGE !



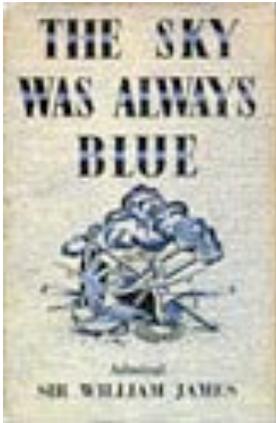
## ADMIRAL SIR JAMES COMES SHOOTING!

Immediately after the outbreak of the Second World War, Col. Evelyn Thistlethwayte was in the habit of offering a gun on the Estate's shoot to an Admiral Sir William James. He was the Naval Commander in Chief at Portsmouth. The Admiral, who later was to accept some of the blame for the Navy requisitioning Southwick Mansion, set the scene and atmosphere of the time in the following extract from his book "The Sky Was Always Blue" published by Methuen, London.



Admiral Sir William James

## Extract from Admiral Sir William James' book:



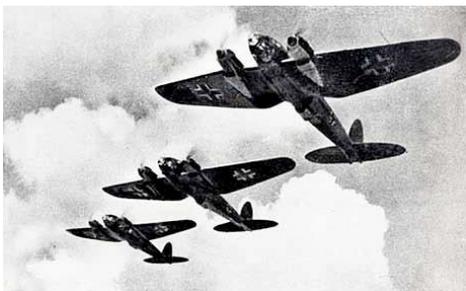
"I had always been accustomed to taking exercise every day and during the previous summer I had kept fit by walking along the top of Portsdown Hill every afternoon, but just when I was getting rather bored with this walk Col Thistlethwayte invited me to a day's shooting on the reverse side of the hill. That was the beginning of a remarkable shooting season .... I owe a great debt to the Colonel. The sirens were screeching nearly every night that winter (*in Portsmouth*) and there was no better refreshment to body and mind than an hour or two in the country with keepers who still thought in terms of wildlife and talked of the habits of birds and animals instead of the habits of Hitler and his gangsters."

## ROYAL NAVAL SCHOOL OF NAVIGATION

In giving the Admiral the run of his shoot, unbeknowingly, Col Evelyn encouraged a cuckoo to settle comfortably in the Southwick nest! The intruder was to be the Royal Naval School of Navigation, that was based in the Portsmouth Dockyard shore base *HMS Dryad*.



## PORTSMOUTH DOCKYARD IS BOMBED



On 11<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> July 1940, the Dockyard experienced its first air raids and from then on irregular attacks were endured to the end of the year. The Navigation School's buildings were especially susceptible to fire so it was necessary to organise night patrols, which had to be drawn from the teachers and students.

## NEW SLEEPING QUARTERS AT SOUTHWICK HOUSE

This resulted in a fairly tired set of chaps, many unable to stop falling asleep during lectures. The base Captain mentioned the problem to Admiral James who, in turn, persuaded the good Colonel, early in 1941, to allow the officer pupils to spend their nights at Southwick House.



Vice Admiral Schofield

## FIRST HAND ACCOUNTS

Even here, the air raid sirens caused the officers to retreat to the cellars to complete their night's sleep. Vice Admiral Schofield relates a number of first hand accounts of these trying times from the diaries of Admiral James, including the following memories of a Capt. R.H. Graham\*

\*(With acknowledgement to 'Navigation and Direction, The story of HMS Dryad' by Vice Admiral B B Schofield, published by Kenneth Mason, Emsworth.)

“One night when the sirens had sounded, we dutifully descended to the cellars for shelter. After a lapse of half an hour, during which nothing happened to disturb our peace, there was a sudden clatter in the cellar. We looked up to see Col. Thistlethwayte appear clad in a heavy woollen dressing gown and seated in a wheelchair, being propelled by two manservants. He was protesting loudly at being dragged down to the basement at that hour of the night.

**“... We looked up to see Col. Thistlethwayte appear clad in a heavy woollen dressing gown...”**

**“... Then the awful truth dawned on us; it was a land mine ...!”**

On another occasion, we awoke early one morning and, looking out of our bedroom window, across the park saw the white tresses of a parachute entangled in a magnificent oak tree on the edge of the lawn to the south of the house. Ah, we thought, a filthy hun who had been ... shot down by our .... night fighters. We assumed the dark shape at the end of the harness must be his body hanging still and lifeless. Ought we to go and cut him down, and report our action to the Commander in Chief’s office? On closer inspection the dangling shape appeared too regular to be that of a body. Then the awful truth dawned on us; it was a land mine which had failed to explode – as yet! We washed and dressed, returning to the Navigation School (in Portsmouth) for breakfast and subsequently heard that the bomb disposal experts came later and removed the offending object.”



An unexploded parachute land mine

## **PARACHUTE SILK IS RECYCLED!**

The land mine story is well remembered by a villager, then a young bar assistant at the Golden Lion pub. She was given a length of the parachute cord and, together with other villagers, shared out the silk parachute material which was quickly machined into glamorous underwear! Most welcome in those days of clothing coupons and rationing.



Land mine cord fragment