

Miscellaneous Essays

This is a collection of essays on topics that have interested me, and on some aspects of my life. To access any one of them, click on one of the 5 title links below.

1. [A Scottish Jacobean Politician - Alexander Seton, 1st Earl of Dunfermline](#)

Synopsis: It is a remarkable fact that few could dispute that Scotland was better governed for the 22 years, during which King James VI, reigned in London, 400 miles from the capital, Edinburgh, than it had been, in almost any previous period. Much of this was to the credit of the King, whose undoubted flaws and foibles have been allowed by most historians to outweigh very strong points in his favour. However, the subject of this essay, Alexander Seton, played a major role, as for almost 2 decades he served as Scotland's Lord Chancellor, and presided over the administration in Edinburgh. It is scarcely credible that he did this as a Roman Catholic, at a time when Scotland had turned away from that religion, though fierce debates still sometimes became violent. Seton had become discreet about religious matters, though he still got dragged into them sometimes, incurring obloquy, and the anger of the King. This essay owes much to the work of Professor Maurice Lee, but the opinions expressed are not always his. It is a minibiography, which tries to use all available information.

2. [An Essay on Golf](#)

Synopsis: The essay contains some personal reminiscences, dealing mainly with my introduction to the game, and my experience of university golf. However, the main part is a consideration of what is best described as the demise of high level amateur golf as I knew it in the 1960s and 1970s. I acknowledge that there was an inevitability about some of the changes that have had this result, as they reflected wider cultural movements, but I pin much of the blame on organisations, which should have been guardians of amateur golf. Instead, they have become facilitating arms of professional golf, without apparent concern for consequences. I am pleased that participation in golf seems to have ticked up, post pandemic, but remain concerned about longer-term trends which seem to threaten its future. Once more, I think the above-mentioned organisations have been found wanting, but I go on to suggest some ideas for remedial action, some quite radical. I fear for the game if no action is taken.

3. [Starting Working Life in Middlesbrough in the Early-1970s](#)

An account of my experiences after I moved from Edinburgh to start working on Teesside.

4. [Musings around the Philosophy of Science](#)

Synopsis: The essay is most likely a naïve take on the current status of the philosophy of science, by a qualified scientist who moved to other concerns in working life, but maintained an interest in the questions considered here. The scene is set by a historical resumé backed up by an appendix, and I then try to follow a logical pathway through issues of philosophical import, namely such matters as materialism, empiricism and realism. I devote space to modern philosophers like Popper and Kuhn, before attempting to find a workable definition of science. I consider the social dimension, including the Science Wars, and the impact of such concepts as feminism, post modernism and relativism. I end by drawing tentative conclusions, but my feeling is that this is still work in progress, to which I hope to return. January 2023

See over

5. [The Life and Times of William de la Pole, 1st Duke of Suffolk](#)

Synopsis: William de la Pole was a great-grandson of a namesake who began as a fisherman and/or minor trader, but rose to be a money-lender to Kings, and the 1st Mayor of Hull. His grandfather rose even higher to become Chancellor of England, and an earl but ended his life in exile and disgrace. His father re-established the family fortunes, but died along with his eldest son and heir in the Agincourt Campaign of 1415. The subject of this essay, by then the 4th Earl of Suffolk spent the next 15 years campaigning in France, as part of the effort to create a viable English kingdom of France. After some successes but as many serious failures as a commander, Suffolk returned to England, and fairly rapidly built himself an important role in government, mainly by acquiring the confidence of mentally challenged King Henry VI. By 1541, Suffolk was dominant in the affairs of England and English France, but had to cope with the disintegration of the English position at the hands of resurgent France, and the fall-out cost him his life in bizarre circumstances, in 1450. Information on details of Suffolk's life, on his personality, and relationships are scanty, hence the decision to write a 'life and times' essay setting what is known in the context of events and actions of others.

6. [Some Thoughts on History](#)

Synopsis: When I retired, and began to produce some historical documents of various types, I spent little time thinking about wider issues associated with the writing of history, and theories concerning how history might be viewed as an entity. However, that gradually changed, and this document contains some of my thoughts on matters, like the attitudes of professional historians, the use of historical sources, and the criteria appropriate for judging the words and actions of people, who lived in past centuries. I also give my views of different philosophies of history, and indicate a preference, for a framework incorporating a fairly steady change in the features which make up the human experience, combined with a cyclical progression expressed as the rise and fall of states and empires. The document is a work in progress, and is likely to be revised in the future.

7. [The Campaigns of Field Marshal August von Mackensen \(1849-1945\) on the Eastern Front during the 1st World War](#)

Synopsis: Mackensen's career was remarkable on a number of counts. Prussian aristocrats dominated the army of the German Empire between 1870 and 1918, yet Mackensen was a Saxon of relatively humble birth; the 'von' was awarded by the Kaiser, when its recipient was a 50-year old colonel. His war began with a battlefield disaster for which he was not blameless, but he was not dismissed, and thereafter scarcely put a foot wrong. He ended the war having commanded at Gorlice-Tarnow, which stands with Tannenberg as one of the two greatest victories achieved by the Germans against the Russians, and as the conqueror of Serbia, and Romania; he had received every German decoration available. He is fairly accounted one of the few great field commanders to emerge during the 1st World War. This essay focuses on this phase of his life. After the war he remained a committed Royalist, and held to the belief that the German army had been stabbed in the back by left-wing politicians in 1918. His attitude to the Nazi regime seemed ambiguous, but he did make public criticisms, which would have endangered his life, had he not then been in his 90s.