

SIR COSMO HASKARD: AN OBITUARY

by

David Tatham

‘The Haskards found the Falklands a place very much to their liking’ wrote Sir Cosmo in the autobiographical essay which he contributed to the *Dictionary of Falklands Biography*. He was describing his arrival at Stanley by ship in October 1964, accompanied by his wife Phillada and his son Julian. Sir Cosmo identified the features of Falklands life which appealed as the austere beauty of the Islands, the somewhat conservative way of life and the friendliness of the people. He was not deterred by the absence of an air service or an external telephone link.

Cosmo Haskard had spent his adult life in crown service, either in the army (King’s African Rifles) during the war or in the colonial service thereafter. He had emerged with credit from a state of emergency in Nyasaland in 1959 and was appointed CMG the following year. He could have expected a reasonably tranquil tour as Governor of the Falklands.

It was not to be. John Leonard’s photograph of his arrival on the *Darwin*, handsome in uniform with Phillada a pace behind him was reprinted by the Argentine magazine *Panorama* under a headline: “The Last English Governor?” While he was travelling out, the Argentine airman Miguel Fitzgerald made his quixotic flight to land on Stanley racecourse. Argentine pressure on the British Government and on Falkland Islanders was to be the continuing theme of his tour in office.

Sir Cosmo (he was knighted - KCMG - in 1965) was appointed by the Colonial Office with its tradition of pastoral care for the people governed. During his term the Foreign (or correctly Foreign and Commonwealth) Office took over responsibility for the Islands so the Falklands became primarily a problem in relations with Argentina, one to be resolved. Sir Cosmo was concerned that London seemed to have very little understanding of Islanders’ points of view, while Islanders themselves had no way of expressing their opinions. In his essay in the *DFB* he traces the succession of events and his attempts to convey Islanders’ views to London. One high point (or perhaps low point) was a couple of meetings with the Foreign Secretary George Brown in February 1967. At the first meeting Brown, who had just returned from a cheerful lunch, was under the impression that Sir Cosmo was the British Ambassador to Argentina. The second meeting the following day was arranged to allow the Foreign Secretary to make amends.

When Sir Cosmo returned to the Islands he briefed Executive Council privately on his visit and on talks between Britain and Argentina to agree a memorandum of understanding to resolve the dispute. Councillors were dismayed and, disregarding

the need to keep the Governor's briefing secret, appealed to Parliament in Westminster and to the British press. How far Sir Cosmo encouraged Councillors to make their appeal is not clear: he was a very correct civil servant, but he may have turned a blind eye to their plans given his sympathy for their deep concern. In October 1968 the junior Foreign Office minister Lord Chalfont paid a visit to the Islands and received a stormy reception. Matters eased somewhat when the new Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart gave an explicit assurance in December 1968 that HMG would not transfer sovereignty against the wishes of Islanders.

The Argentine issue must not be allowed to obscure all the normal activity of an energetic governor. Sir Cosmo was keen to visit all the farms in camp, either by FIGAS sea-plane or on horseback. His term saw the visit of the economist C W Guillebaud in 1967 and the mission led by the agronomist T H Davies in 1969 which spent seven months on the Islands and produced a practical report. As High Commissioner for the British Antarctic Territory, Sir Cosmo paid several visits to the Antarctic research stations and to South Georgia. In 1970 he recommended that the SS *Great Britain* should be returned from Stanley Harbour to Bristol, a move which produced satisfactory publicity for the Islands. Of lesser consequence but of more recent interest, in 1966 he gave permission for Stanley Golf Club (secretary R F Thompson) to lay out a 9-hole course at an area known as "Goose Green" between Mile Pond and Eliza Cove.

Sir Cosmo knew he was fortunate in his Colonial Secretary, W H (Tommy) Thompson whom he described as 'a kindred spirit'. Tommy was the founder of this *Journal* and received enthusiastic backing from the governor. Indeed, if Tommy was the father of the *FIJ*, we may say that Sir Cosmo was its godfather and he contributed several articles to the *Journal*. Tommy notes that while Cosmo gave his blessing he added the standard civil service caveat "provided nothing gets charged to Government or the taxpayer". His 1971 piece, modestly entitled *Some notes on Government House*, still stands as the definitive history of that iconic building. His article (2001) on the Winter Quiz between East Falkland and West Falkland - at which he set the questions and was also quizmaster! - reflected both his attention to detail and sense of humour. He admitted in the article that in one question he had the spelling of the Latin name of the grass Yorkshire Fog wrong by one letter - and had given the East Falkland team a quarter point for their answer. However, if they had received the full point, it would not have affected the outcome of the quiz! Classic Cosmo. In 2002 he provided a valuable addendum to Stephen Palmer's history of forestry in the Falklands with his own reminiscences of forestry in the islands. He was eventually able to put his great interest in, and enthusiasm for, forestry into practice on his own estate in west Cork. He also committed his recollections on the repatriation of the Great Britain (illustrated by some previously unpublished pictures taken by his wife) to print in 2010.

On retirement Cosmo and Phillada Haskard withdrew to his family house on the shores of Bantry Bay in Co Cork, close to his mother's family lands. He continued to follow Falklands' matters closely and was invited to become a Vice-president of the Falkland Islands Association in 1977. During the 1982 Conflict he provided detailed information and photographs to the Special Air Service and the 7th Gurkhas, through his son Julian, an officer in the 2nd Gurkhas. His house was a calling place for Islanders and friends of the Falklands visiting Ireland and the Haskards continued to pay occasional visits to the Falklands annual reception at Lincoln's Inn until he was well into his nineties. He and Phillada followed the nearby restoration of the *Ilen*, a vessel of huge historical significance to the Falklands, with great interest. On 25 November 2016 he celebrated his one hundredth birthday, receiving telegrams of congratulations from both the Queen and the President of Ireland. The Falkland Islands Government sent him a painting of Government House by Vicky Chater, and it was hanging over his bed when he died on 21 February 2017. Phillada, Lady Haskard, did not long survive him, dying in hospital after a short illness on 7 July of the same year.

We send our deep sympathy to his son Julian and his wife Michelle and to their three children, Cosmo's grandchildren, Cosmo, Piers and Hugo.

If the Haskards had found the Islands 'much to their liking', Islanders felt equal affection for the Haskard family. As Governor, Sir Cosmo had provided leadership and support during a difficult time when it had become apparent that the old colonial status quo was changing and that the government in London no longer shared the Islanders' view of their future. In so many ways he was the perfect English gentleman, except that as he once said he was 'Irish among the British and British to the rest of the world'.

May Cosmo and Phillada rest in peace!

David Tatham



A picture from Phillada, Lady Haskard's collection. Her hand written caption reads *'Three cheers for the Great Britain. L to R. Lord Strathcona, Cosmo, Miss Madge Biggs and self. 23rd April 1970'*. The occasion was the farewell ceremony for the Great Britain.

Sir Cosmo's Memories

Friends of the Haskards may be interested to read Sir Cosmo's Irish family memories which he contributed to *Voices of the Great Houses: Cork and Kerry* by Jane O'Hea O'Keeffe. Published by Mercier Press (Cork 2013). Sir Cosmo's chapter can also be found on the internet at www.Ornaverum.org/family/bantry/hutchins. Scroll down the descendants of Robert Hutchins until you reach 'Sir Cosmo Haskard' and click on 'Recollections'. Incidentally, Mrs O'Keeffe is the wife of Maurice O'Keeffe, who visited the Islands as a Shackleton Scholar in 2010 to record people's memories (*Falkland Islands Journal*, 2010). The recorded interviews are held on disc in the Museum in Stanley.