

Adventurous Lives: Emsworth's Two Black Rods

by Christine Bury

Sir Brian Horrocks

"During this lovely summer of 1959, day after day, I have sat at the window of our cottage in Emsworth writing (the first edition of my autobiography), while the sun shines down outside and in front of me lies a wide expanse of Chichester Harbour, stretching away to Hayling Island, covered with white, blue and yellow sails. I can see my own boat, a 16-ft. Emsworth One Design, bobbing about at her moorings. Eventually, I can stand it no more. I step on board, cock an eye at the weather, feel the wind and cast off.

My little craft turns and heads out into the wider waters of the Harbour. The irritations and frustrations slip away. The only things that matter are the pulse of the restless sea coming to me through the tiller, and the chuckle and talk of the water against the sides of the boat.

The enchantment lasts until the westering sun sends me reluctantly, in golden twilight or stormy sunset, back to the shore and the seaward end of the lane which leads to every day."

Extract from *A Full Life*. Reprinted by permission of Harper Collins Publishers Ltd
© Lt. Gen. Sir Brian Horrocks, 1960

The 'every day' job to which Sir Brian refers was as Black Rod, a post which he held from 1949 until 1963. The cottage 'window' was at the bottom of Bath Road by the sailing club.

Brian Gwynne Horrocks was born in India in September 1895 and after school at Uppingham entered the Royal Military College at Sandhurst in February 1913. A month before his 19th birthday, he was commissioned into the 1st Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment as a Second Lieutenant. His active war lasted just a few weeks for he was wounded and taken prisoner at the beginning of the battle for Ypres on 21st October 1914. Horrocks was incarcerated for four years and repeatedly tried to escape but to no avail. He became quite fluent in French and German. When transferred to a Russian officer's camp, in the hope that the language barrier would deter him from escaping, he learnt Russian.

After the war, Horrocks remained with the Army. He took up the modern pentathlon and was picked for the British Olympic team that contested the 1924 Paris Olympics. In later life he always maintained that one of

the keys to an energetic and long life was the ability to relax and this took the form in the inter-war years of sports and marriage.

On the outbreak of the 2nd World War Brian Horrocks was an instructor at Sandhurst, but rejoined his regiment in time for the retreat from Dunkirk. In March 1942 he was appointed to the 9th Armoured Division and sent to Egypt to command the Eighth Army's XIII Corps. He took part in many operations during the North African Campaign and accepted the surrender of the Axis forces in May 1943. A month later Horrocks was severely wounded and underwent five operations and fourteen months in hospital before he was well enough to return to the front. He took command of XXX Corps at the Battle of Falaise Gap and led the land forces at the Battle of Arnhem and on into Germany. When hostilities ceased he was by the River Ems in north western Germany.

Brian Horrocks retired from the Army in 1949 as a Lieutenant General and in the same year King George VI created him Knight Commander of the British Empire. He was subsequently appointed Black Rod.

The Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod is an officer of the Order of the Garter and is best known for his role in the State Opening of Parliament when the Monarch addresses both Houses of Parliament. He is charged with summoning members of the House of Commons to gather in the House of Lords. The title, Black Rod, was created in 1350 and the name relates to the ebony staff of office. Sir Brian called his black court dress uniform 'his romper suit'. Among the officer's duties is responsibility for maintaining the services, building and security of the Palace of Westminster, to be present when the House of Lords is in session and to organize ceremonial events. Horrocks held this office for fourteen years.

Following his retirement from the Army, Sir Brian wrote his autobiography as well as many other books and articles on military matters which led to a successful career as a radio broadcaster and television presenter. In 1977 he acted as military adviser for the film 'A Bridge Too Far' and was portrayed on screen by Edward Fox. He also became a director of the construction company, Bovis. He enjoyed many hobbies including golf but sailing offered 'great contentment'.

Sailing was one of the many pleasures he shared with his wife, Nancy but sadly he had to give it up at the age of 77. The



Sir Brian Horrocks, right, presenting a trophy at Emsworth Sailing Club in 1978

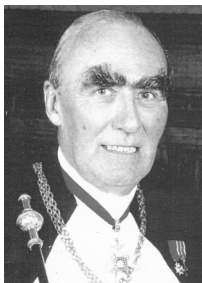
couple married in April 1928. While living in Emsworth they also had a house in London but eventually moved to Somerset. Later, they returned to live in Sussex. Lt. Gen. Sir Brian Horrocks died in Fishbourne in January 1985, aged 89.

Memories

Pauline Marshall, EM&HT life member and daughter of Rene and Norman Boutell, knew him well and remembers Sir Brian taking her sailing. Sir Brian and his wife, Nancy, lived next door to the Boutell family.

Bernie Gudge, EM&HT photo archivist, described him as a 'lovely' man. He recalls helping maintain Sir Brian's outboard motor while an apprentice motor mechanic at Lillywhites Garage.

Sir William Richard Scott Thomas



Until 2002 the position of Black Rod rotated among retired senior officers from the three services. Emsworth has been privileged to have had two men living in the town who have held the office, the second being Admiral Sir William Richard Scott Thomas who lived in King Street. He joined the Royal Navy in 1951 and was given command of the destroyer *HMS Troubridge* in 1966. Richard Thomas saw action in the Second Cod War between the United Kingdom and Iceland in the 1970s. Following promotion to Captain, he helped develop the Polaris missile at the Ministry of Defence and commanded the Commando Assault Ship, *HMS Fearless*. After various staff appointments Thomas was appointed Admiral and became Deputy Supreme Allied Commander at Norfolk, Virginia in 1987. Before retirement in 1992 he was the UK military representative to NATO. Admiral Thomas served as Black Rod from 1992 to 1995 and died in 1998.