

(essentially treating publications and records as “war booty”)? Did these collecting missions ever cross the line into the realm of illegal takings? Did the mass acquisition of materials for American libraries interfere with the needs for cultural reconstruction in many areas across Europe? In the case of rare books, archival materials, manuscripts, and other materials whose ownership might be traceable (such as through unique bookplates or institutional stamps), were the efforts to reconnect items to their true owners sufficient? To these, and many other ethical questions, Peiss explores the complications in finding clear answers.

One illustrative ethical dilemma detailed in *Information Hunters* involves the 1946 discovery of Joseph Goebbels’s diaries, the Hoover Library’s acquisition of them, and Doubleday’s deal to publish the diaries in 1948. Peiss capably walks readers through conflicting testimonies of how the diaries were discovered, the circumstances under which they left Germany, and the theories for why the Hoover Library should be the legitimate repository for the diaries and for why Doubleday had permission to publish them. It is a fascinating example that showcases the tangle of bureaucracy, law, international treaties, and ethics that a single work or artifact can present. (In the end, the Alien Property Custodian permitted the diaries to remain in the Hoover Library, but ruled that they had not left Germany through proper channels, and it issued an order in 1949 claiming literary property rights in the published diaries; royalties were siphoned to funds for American prisoners of war and civilian internees.)

Altogether, Kathy Peiss’s *Information Hunters* chronicles an incredibly important slice of World War II history that has largely escaped historical attention. It is a significant contribution to World War II scholarship and a reminder of the preciousness of the written word.

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Jonathan Rée, ed., *A Schoolmaster’s War: Harry Rée, British Agent in the French Resistance*

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This gem of a book tells the story of Harry Rée, British teacher in peacetime, secret agent during World War II. During his life, Rée wrote and rewrote the saga of his work in the French Resistance, in different genres and for various audiences. *A Schoolmaster’s War* opens to view this clandestine war, its nature, and its ethical complexity.

The son of an American heiress and industrial chemist, Rée was born into a life of privilege, which he turned toward a commitment to the common good. He became a socialist and pacifist as a youth, attended Cambridge University, and then taught in a South London school. With Adolf Hitler's rise, Rée abandoned pacifism and, after France fell in 1940, he enlisted in the British Army. Soon he was recruited into the Special Operations Executive (SOE), a secret wartime agency dedicated to espionage and sabotage behind the lines. Rée parachuted into France in April 1943, and over nine months he worked with hundreds of local partisans in the Franche-Comté region near the Swiss border. He organized parachute drops of weapons and explosives, and planned operations to blow up factories and railways. With the liberation of Europe, his daring exploits, and those of other SOE agents, became known and celebrated. Yet Rée was a reluctant hero, discomfited by fame and critical of the narratives that had sprung up to define his war. In the years after World War II, he renewed his calling in education, as a teacher, headmaster, and professor. He also wrote newspaper articles, poetry, pieces on education reform, and told stories about the war.

Historian and philosopher Jonathan Rée has thoughtfully compiled and edited his father Harry's writings about life as a British agent, including a contemporaneous private memoir, short stories for children, anonymous talks on the BBC, and later reflections about his war work. Also included are a selection of letters from Harry Rée's colleagues and friends in the Resistance, biographical information about many of them, and a chronology. *A Schoolmaster's War* juxtaposes these accounts in the book, complicating and deepening our understanding of Rée and the Resistance.

The SOE attracted "individualists," Harry Rée commented, those who wanted to be responsible for their own fates. He surprised his schoolmasters, who did not think he would be successful at covert operations, but the head of the French section ignored their advice and deployed him. Rée and the other SOE agents understood the risks they were taking, and many did not survive the war. Jonathan Rée suggests his father's success lay in keeping a low profile and being underestimated. He was not caught up in his own legend. After the war, he longed to teach again and contribute to the good of society.

In his writings, Harry Rée often presents an image of British insouciance and composure in the face of danger. Familiar metaphors deflect the realities of war. Rée bicycles around the countryside as if on holiday, finds family meals in farmhouses, and slips silently across borders. A fistfight and gun battle that nearly caused his death reads like a Hollywood film script. He explained on the BBC how he was a student in a "School for Sabotage," where he took lessons in parachuting, operating radios, bomb-making, and espionage. By the end, Harry Rée commented, he looked at everything in terms of how to destroy it.

A close listener may have found in Harry Rée's arch, distancing language the work of a subtle saboteur, but it was likely lost on his audience. The government, media, and public wanted tales of heroic exploits to underscore British resolve in defeating Nazism. Harry Rée complied, even working with a production team on a Royal Air Force film, *Now It Can Be Told*. But he was uncomfortable with these stories and, to varying degrees, pushed back against them.

Harry Rée's sensibility as an educator comes through in the short stories he wrote for children. He sketches scenes of adventure and narrow escapes, yet reminds his young readers that the French state, unlike Great Britain, was not at war. The Resistance, he notes, "took place against a background of peacetime life" (p. 55). This context raised a question left unasked in these stories, yet one that occupied Rée himself, about the ethics and legality of British paramilitary operations.

Harry Rée downplayed his own heroics to focus attention on the "ordinary people who somehow edged themselves, almost involuntarily, into the front line" (p. 159). Villagers, tradespeople, café waiters, matronly innkeepers, even gendarmes helped this stranger in their midst. Rée took particular note of the many teachers involved in the underground. The stories are sometimes humorous: Rée relied on a young man who had girlfriends in Switzerland and France to smuggle messages back and forth across the border. More often, he conveys their everyday courage, risk-taking, spirit of unity, and suffering at the hands of Germans. Resistance networks were built on and part of the fabric of everyday life, as an extension of family, friends, coworkers, and communities. Rée's admiration for the French people he met and worked with shines throughout the book.

In many ways, however, it is not Harry Rée's reminiscences but rather the letters he received from those in the French underground that convey what was at stake for them, and something of their unusual bond with him. They were intensely loyal to Rée and treated him like a son or brother. Indeed, he owed his very survival to these locals. One mother could have spared her own son's life, but she refused to betray Rée to the Gestapo. The letters also relate the hunger and suffering during the final year of the war. Arrests, torture, murders, and deportations to death camps mounted as the Nazis tried to stamp out the Resistance. Rée loved and felt responsible for them. As Jonathan Rée writes, his "nonchalant charm bore witness to an enormous inarticulate grief" (p. xix).

Harry Rée was a beautiful writer—expressive, droll, attuned to the everyday. Yet he found it difficult to represent his experience in his own words, to break through the narratives of daring and adventure, the stuff of spy novels and war films. He had little expectation that audiences, for whom the war was Britain's "finest hour," would understand. Our contemporary awareness of the social and psychological dimensions of war makes it more possible for us to grasp Harry Rée's reminiscences, as well as his misdirection and silences. Reading *A Schoolmaster's War* has many rewards: an insider's look at the Resistance, a refusal of heroic myths, an insight into how ordinary people step up to oppression and defend their lives and values, and a life guided by a moral compass. The schoolmaster's lessons, taught with a light touch, remain with this reader.