

The Worthing Society

Conserving, Preserving
and
Safeguarding our Heritage

Heritage Leaflet No: 4

PHILIP McCUTCHAN



(1920-1996)

This is the fourth of a series of leaflets being produced by the Worthing Society to accompany the plaques erected throughout the Town to commemorate notable people, buildings, and events in the town's history. For more information about the Society and its activities go to our Web Site at:

www.worthingsociety.org.uk

PHILIP McCUTCHAN
1920-1996
AUTHOR OF
CONTEMPORARY THRILLERS
AND HISTORICAL MILITARY
FICTION
LIVED HERE
1963-1996

- 1 GROSVENOR RD
- 2 HUMPHRYS RD
- 3 GRAFTON PL
- 4 STANFORD SQ
- 5 MARKET ST
- 6 GUILDBOURNE CENTRE

Philip McCutchan was born in Cambridge in 1920. His childhood was divided between His parents' home in Portsmouth and and his grandparents' homes, Conington Hall, near Cambridge and Glenlo Abbey in County Galway. Philip's father was a Master Mariner who achieved his Master's Ticket under sail and was still serving in the era of the Nuclear Submarine.

Philip always wanted to join the Royal Navy and applied to Dartmouth. However, to his disappointment, he failed the Maths paper for the entrance exam and passed automatically into Sandhurst. There he spent one miserable term before war broke out and he decided to fulfil his ambition by joining the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve as an Ordinary Seaman. He was quickly spotted as officer material and served as a Lieutenant for the remainder of the war. He saw action escorting North Atlantic convoys and in Operation Torch. After the war he spent three years in the Merchant Service making voyages to East and South Africa, Australia and India before returning to London to take up a post with the Anglo Oranian Oil Company. The City lifestyle did not suit him. So, by now married to Elizabeth, and with his ambition to write becoming stronger, he tried his hand at Prep School Teaching. This experience provided rich material for one of his earliest published novels, "For the Sons of Gentlemen". Later Philip and Elizabeth opened a tea shop in the village of Rowlands Castle. This enabled him to start writing more seriously and his early successes included Radio Plays and Short Stories.

By 1963 his writing career and his family were well established and he moved to 107 Portland Road, Worthing. At the time he was writing his "Commander Shaw" novels, with the sixth of these being published shortly after he moved in. Commander Shaw worked for British Intelligence, a tough character with a licence to kill. Following this series Philip began writing Crime fiction and in 1967 he became Chairman of the Crime Writers' Association.

His greatest successes, however were his historical Naval and Military series. His Naval novels were set in two different periods in history: Lt St Vincent Halfhyde served in Queen Victoria's Navy, while Lt Cameron's adventures took place in World War 2, drawing heavily on his own experiences at sea.

The military novels were written under his pseudonym of Duncan MacNeil. This was a strategy suggested by his publisher, who felt that readers would be confused to read such accurate novels about two very different fields by the same author. His eye for detail was so acute that he would receive fan mail from old soldiers who had served on the North West Frontier of India saying they felt he must have served there with them. In reality he had never even been there. The protagonist in these novels was Captain James Ogilvie of the 114th Queen's Own Royal Strathspeys.

These characters were all brought alive through the pages of McCutchan's novels but in a sense they also almost became part of the family. His routine was to start at 8am and work until lunchtime tapping out the stories, using two fingers, on a noisy but trusty typewriter: only towards the end of his life did he begin to use an electric typewriter with a word processing facility. Smoking his pipe or with a cigarette continuously burning, in the room beside the plaque, he produced manuscript after manuscript. His London publishers would say they knew when a "Philip McCutchan" was in the building, as the pages smelled so strongly of smoke. His publishers also described him as "green fingered." By this they meant he could "just do it". They knew his writing was so reliable his work would need very little editing. As a result he had three or four books a year published until the total reached over 130.

In 1990 the Public Lending Right Law was passed and it quickly proved that he was one of the top most borrowed Library Authors. He had been active in campaigning for authors to be paid a sum of money each time their books were borrowed and he was delighted when this finally came to fruition.

107 Portland Road was a popular destination for the London based editors from his several different publishers. They would be met at the station by Elizabeth and would spend the morning working on the latest book with Philip. This would be followed by lunch and a trip to the beach before catching the train back to London. One of the editors from Weidenfeld and Nicholson became such a close family friend she was invited to both children's weddings.

Philip died in 1996. He never really retired and his last novel was published in the August after his death.



The son and daughter (left of picture) of Philip M.Cutchan at the unveiling of his commemoration plaque at Myrtle Cottage, 107 Portland Road, Worthing on the 6th July 2013

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