

A Note on a Remarkable Copy
of T. E. Lawrence's *The Mint* (1955)

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The Mint is not, I think, a masterpiece of literature, it is too episodic for that, but no one can say after reading it that Lawrence was not a writer.

John Morris, "The Lawrence Enigma" in *Encounter*,
Vol. IV, No. 4 (April 1955) : 78-80 ; 80.

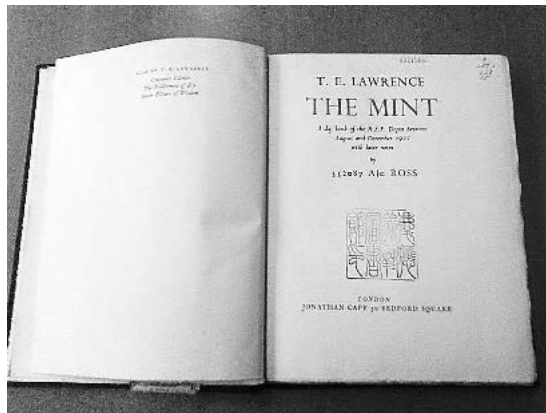


Fig. 1 Title page: *The Mint*: a day-book of the R. A. F. Depot between August and December 1922, with later notes, by 352087 A/c Ross (1955) 206 p. ; 26 cm. (With the permission of Keio University Library.)

* 'If one jumps over the edge, one is bound to land somewhere.'
'But isn't it very risky?' asked Ursula.

David Herbert Lawrence (not to be confused with the author of *The Mint*!), *Women in Love*

This brief paper is dedicated with gratitude to Professor Yuiichi Okayama, who befriended me in Matsuyama after I took a risky leap by leaving the U. K. and landed in Japan almost 30 years ago.

Among the rare and unusual books contained in the collection of Keio University Library is a first (unexpurgated) edition of T. E. Lawrence's (Thomas Edward : 1888-1935) *The Mint : a day-book of the R. A. F. Depot between August and December 1922, with later notes* (London : Jonathan Cape, 1955) written under the pseudonym of 352087 A/c Ross and limited to 2000 copies. This particular volume is numbered 141 and its curious distinction is the bookplate which verifies that it was once owned by Matilda Constance Ismay (née Schieffelin : Nov. 19, 1877—Feb. 20, 1963 ; see Figs. 2 and 3 below). She was an American heiress who married Charles Bower Ismay, younger brother of Joseph Bruce Ismay and an owner of the White Star Shipping Line. This once highly prominent British shipping company is today perhaps most famous for its ill-fated vessel *RMS Titanic*, which sank in the North Atlantic Ocean on 15 April, 1912, after colliding with an iceberg during her maiden voyage from Southampton in the UK to New York City with the loss of 1,502 passengers and crew.¹⁾

Soldier, adventurer and writer better known by his byname "Lawrence of Arabia", when T. E. Lawrence enlisted in the ranks of the R. A. F. in 1922 under the name John Hulme Ross,²⁾ he was suffering from nervous exhaustion as a consequence of his wartime experiences. Lawrence, then in his early 30s, found the physical and mental stress of being a raw recruit more than challenging. His brother A. W. Lawrence remarked that "Presumably the years of over-exertion had resulted, when the need for activity ceased, in a condition of mind which allowed only negative decisions to be taken without intolerable effort. Life in the ranks,

1) An account is given in Wilton J. Oldham, *The Ismay Line : The White Star Line, and the Ismay family story*. (Liverpool : The Journal of Commerce, 1961), pp. 188 passim.

2) A name chosen by Air Marshall Trenchard's assistant Air Vice-Marshall Sir Oliver Swan. See Phillip Knightley and Colin S. Simpson, *The Secret Lives of Lawrence of Arabia*. (London : Nelson, 1969), p. 209.

where a decision would never be required, therefore seemed the right solution, though to a man in such a state the rigours were bound to be magnified.”³⁾ Upon discovery of his identity in January 1923 Lawrence was discharged, but was allowed to re-enlist two and a half years later, this time using the name Shaw, under which he served in the Tank Corps. Around 1928 from his notes, many times re-written and revised, he constructed *The Mint*. The author himself wrote that he “had the ambition before I turned my back in 1923 and saw the inadequacy of my Seven Pillars⁴⁾ in the cold light of revision—to write a real book : and I thought I might find the subject in the Royal Air force.”⁵⁾ According to Lawrence's Will, it was not to be published until after his death, which it was, 20 years later in 1955.⁶⁾ There were two editions, the partially expurgated one⁷⁾ and a limited edition containing the full uncensored text of which the Keio copy is one example.

In *The Mint* Lawrence recounts the harassing experience of boot camp and military life at the RAF training Depot at Uxbridge, which lasted from August to December 1922, with a few gems of human insight and reflection. As an accurate and honest record of his life as lived in the pre-World War Two RAF, “scribbled from notes at night between last post and lights out in bed”⁸⁾ it is highly

3) “Note by A. W. Lawrence” *The Mint : a day-book of the R. A. F. Depot between August and December 1922, with later notes, by 352087 A/c Ross*. (London : Jonathan Cape, 1955) pp. 7–10 ; p. 10.

4) *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1922 ; 1926), his autobiographical account his experiences while serving as a liaison officer with rebel forces during the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Turks of 1916 to 1918.

5) “An Explanation”. Introduction to *The Mint* Part 3, p. 165.

6) “I will not publish these notes (whose present name is *The Mint*) in my day. And I hope that you will not... publish them, if the option is yours, before 1950. They are very obscene.” To his brother, A. W. Lawrence, 2. 5. 28 [Drigh Road, Karachi] David Garnet, ed., *The Letters of T. E. Lawrence* (London : Spring Books, 1938 ; 1964) p. 600.

7) The first English edition (O'Brien A173), published at approximately the same time (February, 1955) as a limited issue, omitted words deemed to be “objectionable”, leaving blank spaces. The words were restored in the 1973 definitive edition).

8) “Note by A. W. Lawrence” *The Mint*, p. 7.

illuminating, and also in a period before the infamous Lady Chatterley trials, highly controversial in its candid language and attitude to sex.

However, the then Marshal of the Royal Air Force (later Lord) Hugh Trenchard⁹⁾ considered that the publication of the book would be a disservice to the Air Force, although his concerns were arguably more personal in nature. Lawrence comments in Biblical terms to the gulf between the juniors in the service and its head, Trenchard, who is likened to God :

Trenchard has designed the image he thinks most suited to be an airman ;
and we submit our nature to his will, trustingly.

(*The Mint* 118)

He goes on : “Our God is a jealous God : and man’s very best offering will fall disdainfully short of worthiness, in the sight of St. High and his angels”.¹⁰⁾ This is ironic given that the use of an assumed name for enlistment was illegal, and depended on the cooperation of such high ranking RAF officials as Trenchard himself.¹¹⁾ When Lawrence’s true identity was leaked he was expelled from the RAF on the grounds that he “might subvert discipline” and he subsequently made threats of suicide to friends including Trenchard.¹²⁾ In the end he made an agreement with the Air Marshall that the work would not be published until 1955, by which time it was supposed its content would have no damaging effect on the RAF :

9) Hugh Montague Trenchard, 1st Viscount Trenchard GCB OM GCVO DSO (3 February, 1873 – 10 February, 1956).

10) See Andrew Williams, *The Toxic Morsel : T. E. Lawrence and The Mint*. Peter Lang, 2008, p. 103.

11) See Williams, p. 45.

12) Williams, p. 45.

I have told him [Trenchard] that in my life-time nothing of *The Mint* will be published : and that I have asked my brother (who is my heir) to withhold it at least until 1950. That should see us all off the stage.

(Garnett, *Letters* 601)

John Morris,¹³⁾ in his review in *Encounter* with which I prefaced this brief paper, notes that the book is “lacking in shape” and “the emphasis on the more sordid side of life in the ranks yet the extraordinary variety in the writing”.¹⁴⁾ With his employment of so-called “dirty words” in his style, Lawrence was obviously seeking authenticity and following new trends in writing, particularly influenced by such writers as D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce.¹⁵⁾ While Lawrence himself claimed that the work was an iron, rectangular, abhorrent book, one which not many would willingly read”¹⁶⁾ Morris states the opinion that it “does suggest that Lawrence, had he lived, might have become a very considerable writer.”¹⁷⁾

Returning to the Bookplate, Charles Bower Ismay married the American heiress, Matilda Constance Schieffelin daughter of George R. Schieffelin, of New York and “one of the oldest and most respected families in New York society.”¹⁸⁾ She was granddaughter of the poet and Quaker Hannah (Schieffelin) Lawrence (1758-1838),¹⁹⁾ who incidentally wrote under the pen-name “Matilda”, in 1900 in

13) C. J. Morris, 1895-1980, C. B. E., adventurer, intellectual and music lover, participant in two, including the first Everest expeditions, and Controller of the BBC classical taught at Keio University from 1938-1942.

14) Morris, 79-80.

15) See Williams, p. 11.

16) *The Mint*, p. 11.

17) Morris, p. 80.

18) Oldham, p. 103.

19) The Schieffelin family of New York and Pennsylvania <<http://catalog.nypl.org/record=b119853> 52>

New York.²⁰⁾

Her elder sister had married his brother, Mr. J. B. Ismay, some 12 years before in Liverpool. They first met in 1889.²¹⁾ Bower's mother was not pleased as "she felt that they were both too young, and it was too soon after his father's death, but they were married at St. Paul's, Knightsbridge, on January 13th, 1900. Charles Bower died unexpectedly in 1924: on a business trip by train to London from his Northamptonshire home, he was found "unconscious in a first class carriage and taken to The Royal Free Hospital... suffering from sleepy sickness which he had contracted during his service in Africa. He died on May 25th, 1924, at his home, a comparatively young man."²²⁾ He left his wife to run the estate which they purchased in 1908, Haselbech Hall, which is located about 12 miles west of Kettering. She died age 90 on February 20th, 1963, at Marylebone, London.²³⁾

Matilda Constance Ismay's interest in the Sahara can be traced to the fact that among many overseas tours she made between 1907 and 1949 which the records of the Northampton Record Office reveal²⁴⁾ including trips to South America, India, Australia, New Zealand, Europe and Africa, was a journey made 'Across the Sahara in a Rolls Royce' which has gone down in the annals of the history of the car :

20) Court Circular, *The Times*, 15 January, 1900. "The marriage was accelerated owing to the bridegroom's having volunteered for South Africa."

21) Oldham, p. 114.

22) Oldham, p. 231.

23) < <http://www.ismayons.com/pedigrees/web/> >

24) < <http://archiveshub.ac.uk/api/sru/hub?operation=searchRetrieve&version=1.1&query=bath.personalName+all+'ismaycharlesbower'+and/relevant+dc.subject+all+'wom?n'&maximumRecords=1&startRecord=1&recordSchema=ead> > (The archive of Charles Bower Ismay, his wife, their daughter Florence Delaphanie and Dr. Dora K. Smee, which among other things contains about 200 reels of cinefilm of domestic life at Haselbech Hall.)

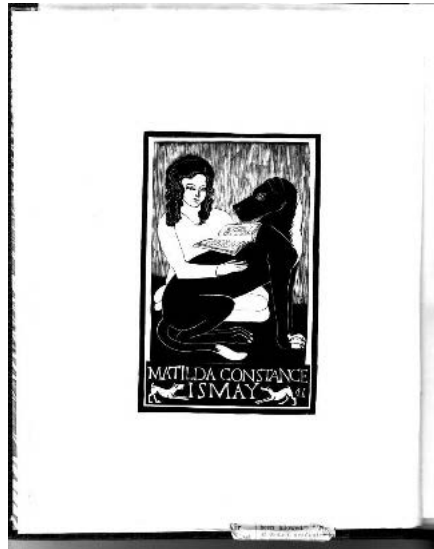


Fig. 2 Pictorial Bookplate, signed GH (the “artist” of this plate, is unknown.) (With the permission of Keio University Library.)

There must be a score of contenders for the title of Most Fearless Hero in the Rolls-Royce sage. About the heroine, there can be no argument. Step forward, Mrs. Bower Ismay. In the early 1930's Mrs. Ismay took her lady's maid and her chauffeur on a 3,000 mile journey through Europe, then across the Sahara to the fabled city of Timbuktu, in her Phantom II limousine. The dauntless lady had only one fear-the dark. So she stopped off en route at Fortnum and Mason to buy her most important provision : twelve dozen candles.”²⁵⁾

25) Mike Fox and Steve Smith, *Rolls-Royce : The Complete Works. The Best 599 Stories about the World's Best Car* (London : Faber & Faber, 1984), pp.125-26. As the authors note, Lawrence commented in his *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* that “A Rolls in the desert is above rubies” (p. 110).

The Keio copy of *The Mint* also contains some clippings from *The Sunday Times* February 1955 concerning the controversy that the book caused upon publication. These concern Lawrence's portrayal of Bonham-Carter, his Commanding officer ("The Commandant") whom some referred to as a "martinet" and whom he loathed :

Once he [Bonham-Carter] was a distinguished soldier : -and now the R. A. F. is his pitying almoner... I found myself trembling with clenched fists, repeating to myself 'I must hit him, I must,' and the next moment trying not to cry for shame that an officer should so play public cad.²⁶⁾

The Mint, pp. 69-71.

One correspondent writes : "I venture to state that Lawrence's appreciation of the character of the Commandant at the time... reflects the majority vote of those who remember." Another says that "any future writer who resumed to pronounce for or against Lawrence without reading "The Mint" would put himself out of court as a witness before posterity." Phillip Knightley and Colin S. Simpson, however, contend that "there is no reason to think Bonham-Carter deliberately picked on Lawrence" and that he "simply held the view, not uncommon at the time, that firm handling and lots of drill made good servicemen."²⁷⁾

26) *The Mint*, pp. 69-71.

27) Knightley and Simpson, p. 211.



Fig. 3 Mrs. C. Bower Ismay (shown possibly with her mother?) date unknown. (Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Bain Collection- Reproduction number : LC-DIG-ggbain-39204 (digital file from original negative Held at the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D. C. 20540 USA <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print>> Rights Advisory : No known restrictions on publication.)