

300 pages, Grainger covers 350 years of interaction between the East India Company and the Royal Navy. While the story may be familiar to some, this work provides new students with a clear starting point and a summary of the events and forces that shaped this region. An ample bibliography and thorough references provide ample material for both newcomers and those more familiar with the subject, along with places to branch out from Grainger's text and explore individual aspects in greater detail. While useful, the general nature of this work also constitutes its weakness. Grainger covers so much ground that a reader never dwells for long in any one place or time period. His chapters average between fifteen and twenty pages and each one covers around twenty years, a compressed time frame that may disappoint those wanting more detail, because they will need to look elsewhere. Although Grainger addresses everything with broad strokes, he concentrates on the age of sail, thus, slightly shortchanging the impact events of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had in shaping both the Indian and Pacific regions and the British Empire.

While it does not limit the content of the work, accessibility is another hurdle that may affect readers' ability to appreciate this work. The price of UK £85.00 and US \$99.00 hinders access by casual readers, especially students, perhaps encouraging cost-conscious readers to wait for a paperback or electronic edition. The lack of maps and photographs might also persuade readers to choose a digital version.

Grainger's latest book sheds light on British imperial influence in the Indian and Pacific Oceans and the role that these regions had in shaping the empire. It is particularly useful for new students who are looking for a place to start their exploration of this part of the world. While not covering any particular time period in great detail, the author does provide readers at all levels with a leaping-off point for their exploration of a fascinating subject.

Michael Razer,  
Ward, Arkansas

**Peter Hore. *Bletchley Park's Secret Source: Churchill's Wrens and the Y Service in World War II*. Barnsley, S. Yorks: Greenhill Books, [www.pen-and-sword.co.uk](http://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk), 2021. xiv+210 pp., illustrations, glossary, notes, references, index. UK £13.99, cloth; ISBN 978-1-78438-581-1. (E-book available.)**

Bletchley Park and its top-secret role in the decoding of the various German Enigma ciphers of the Second World War is probably familiar to many readers, if for no other reason than the greatly oversimplified movie of 2014 starring Benedict Cumberbatch and Keira Knightley, *The Imitation Game*. It is said

that at the peak of its activity, Bletchley received up to 3000 messages per day, and yet, as Peter Hore rightly points out, the source of all that message traffic has, for the most part, been ignored by historians. Redressing that neglect – all the more unjust, perhaps, in that the vast majority of those working in the role were members of the Women’s Royal Naval Service (WRNS, the “Wrens”) – is the author’s explicitly stated goal in the writing of this book.

In fact, the Wrens working in Wireless Intercept (abbreviated WI, pronounced “wye”) were involved in many more activities than intercepting coded Morse messages intended for analysis at Bletchley Park. At the start of the war, many women who had studied, in one way or another, the German language, were hired to provide rapid written transcription of plain-language voice transmissions. Similarly, when Italy entered the conflict, those with knowledge of Italian were hurriedly recruited. As the war progressed, however, their duties as Wrens of the Y service grew to include, but were not limited to, oscillographic analysis of filmed Morse transmissions, radio direction-finding, and transcription of encoded Japanese Morse *kana*.

While the nineteen chapters of this work are arranged, for the most part, chronologically, the real narrative framework of the book relies on a small number of biographical studies examining Wrens in this line of work. The author’s reliance on this type of material proves to be both a strength and a weakness. Accounts based on the memories of the participants are veritable gold mines for such things as conditions of service, for example, and are justifiably the bread and butter of social historians. They can be quite dodgy, on the other hand, for such things as the concrete details of the workings of an institution as a whole. This, of course, is due to the limitations of the perspective of an individual participant, made all the more acute, in this case, by the rigorous stove-piping imposed on work of such secrecy. Hore employs a great many other sources as well, but these serve mainly to fit the recollections of the former Wrens into the broader chronology of the naval war as a whole, rather than to flesh out the details of the organization they worked for. This book cannot, then, be taken as an institutional history of the Royal Navy’s Y service – some men, too, served in it, and glimpses are provided of their contributions – but rather as an anecdotally based social history of the women it employed.

While good in concept, the author’s integration of the biographical accounts, each of which follows its own chronology, into the broader framework of the book leaves something to be desired. Material on a given Wren will typically begin with her academic and, if applicable, linguistic background, followed by how she became aware of the WRNS, how she was recruited, descriptions of training, uniforms, etc. Most individuals are introduced in the early chapters of the book, and so the stages on their respective journeys appear close together

both chronologically and in terms of their location in the text. Less happily, a number of Wrens are introduced further on in the book, but the author still goes right back to the beginning for that individual. So, for example, we will read yet another account of training at Greenwich whose location in the text is many chapters away from the others. Understandably, chronology starts to become difficult. Even hemispheres are displaced in this manner: on the second page of Chapter 18, “Last Acts in the East,” dealing with the Pacific theatre, we are introduced to a Wren who acquired her particular specialty analyzing U-boat transmissions. The reader is thus forced back to the Atlantic for a few paragraphs, for no compelling reason, before returning to the Pacific.

Rather than a lack of organization, I think the problem lies with the author’s reluctance to leave anything out of the anecdotal accounts recorded for posterity by the Wrens in question. While a praiseworthy sentiment, it has the unfortunate result here, of more than a little bit of repetition – work with oscilloscopes, for example, is described on at least three separate occasions. I think it is fair that the editorial staff share some of the blame.

Hore’s goal of integrating the recollections of women who worked in wartime signals intelligence with the broader picture is worthwhile, but I think others have done it better. For example, I would recommend Tessa Dunlop’s *The Bletchley Girls* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2015) and Michael Smith’s *The Debs of Bletchley Park* (London: Aurum Press, 2015). For those more interested in the role of women in the specifically naval side of wireless intelligence, there is really no alternative at present to *Bletchley Park’s Secret Source*, but the prospective reader must be prepared to accept writing and editing that are less than first-rate.

Brian Bertosa  
Cobourg, Ontario

**Christoph Irmscher and Richard J. King (eds.). *Audubon at Sea. The Coastal and Transatlantic Adventures of John James Audubon*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, [www.uchicago.edu](http://www.uchicago.edu), 2022. xix+334 pp., illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, indices. US \$30.00, UK £24.00, cloth; ISBN 978-0-226-75667-7.**

This is a book about seabirds seen through the lens of the writings of the great observer of the avian world, John James Audubon. Everyone has a notion about the word “Audubon” as icon of the modern-day environmental movement – this work introduces the person who was John James Audubon through his writings. It consists of selections about seabirds and the seafaring life from his journals and published books between 1826 and 1833. Audubon’s prose