



Roll of Honour:

Mr Francis Harry Hinsley

Name

Mr Francis Harry Hinsley

Certificate of Service

[View online \[following\]](#)

Service

FO Civilian¹

Rank

TSAO²

Summary of Service

Bletchley Park November 1939 - 1945. Hut 4,³ Block A(N)⁴ and Mansion (room 5). Naval Section,⁵ Head of German and Italian Intelligence Sub-section. NS Intelligence Staff Officer 1943 - May 1945. Chairman TICOM^{6 7} committee 1945. Private Secretary to Director, GCCS, May 1945.

¹ Foreign Office.

² Temporary Senior Administrator Officer.

³ Housed part of the Naval Section from early 1940 until mid 1942. Later occupied, at various times, by other sections, including Air Section, Intelligence Exchange, Military Section, CTR/CMY and WTC.

⁴ Housed the Naval Section from summer 1942 and the Air Section from then until summer 1943.

⁵ Produced intelligence reports from German Navy Enigma signals decrypted by Hut 8. Also decrypted and produced intelligence reports from non-Enigma naval ciphers, including Italian and Japanese.

⁶ Term for the study of enemy cryptographic equipment.

⁷ The basic concept of TICOM was to form teams of cryptologic experts, mainly drawn from the code-breaking center at Bletchley Park, to go into Germany with the front line troops and to capture the documents, technology and personnel of the various German signal intelligence organizations before these precious secrets could be destroyed, looted, or captured by the Russians. <http://www.ticomarchive.com/home/origin-of-ticom>

Commemorated On The Codebreakers Wall

Yes

University

Cambridge - St John's College

Billeted

Simpson

Other Information

Appointed OBE in 1946. Married Hilary Brett-Smith of Hut 8,⁸ et al. Post-war distinguished academic career; edited "British Intelligence in the Second World War". Knighted 1985.

Online obituaries

Independent [following]

Harry Hinsley 1918 - 1998

Harry Hinsley arrived at Bletchley Park in October 1939, aged 20, and worked on naval Traffic Analysis.⁹ In June 1940 he warned the Admiralty that German battle cruisers were to come out of the Baltic. They ignored him, and HMS Glorious was sunk, but later he became a very effective channel between Bletchley Park and the Admiralty. In May 1945 he became private secretary to the Director, and played a major part in the liaison between the UK and the USA. He became an eminent historian, editing 'History of British Intelligence in World War 2', became Master of St John's College and Vice Chancellor of Cambridge University.

Francis Harry Hinsley was born in Walsall on 26 November 1918, the son of a waggoner. He went to Queen Mary's Grammar School, Walsall and to St John's College, Cambridge. Because he was recruited by Government Code and Cypher School he never completed his degree. At Bletchley Park, the young Hinsley studied German radio: Traffic Analysis.

On 7 June 1940, Hinsley warned the Admiralty that German battle cruisers were about to emerge from the Baltic. His advice was ignored, and on 8 June Scharnhorst sank the carrier HMS Glorious.

Later, however, Hinsley became the trusted interface and interpreter between Bletchley Park and the Admiralty. The relations were close and harmonious; illustrated by a reply to an enquiry from the Home Fleet to the Admiralty: 'What is your source?' to which the answer was simply 'Hinsley'!

When it became apparent that captured material would be needed before the Atlantic Enigma key, Dolphin, could be broken, Hinsley remembered that German weather trawlers in the North Atlantic were using Enigma. This led to the capture of the München on 7 May and the Lauenburg on 28 June 1941, enabling the Hut 8 cryptographers to break Dolphin on virtually every day.

⁸ One of the original wooden huts, housing the section that decrypted German Navy Enigma signals. This section moved to Block D in February 1943 and continued to be known as 'Hut 8'. The wooden building was then renumbered 18.

⁹ Study of origin, destination and frequency of enemy signals, to build up a picture of the enemy's organisation.

After the Germans adopted a separate key and the four-codewheel Enigma for their U-boats in February 1942, Hut 8 could not break that key for nine long months. Hinsley received relentless pressure from the Admiralty until that memorable day on 13 December 1942 when Bletchley Park was able to warn the Admiralty Operational Intelligence Centre that Shark was at last coming out, giving the positions of 13 U-boats. Hinsley was now able to survey the hundreds of signals a day that went from Bletchley Park to the Admiralty, spotting significant changes in German behaviour.

On 1 October 1942, Edward Travis, Director of Bletchley Park, signed an agreement on co-operation with the US naval cryptographers, leaving the 23 year old Hinsley to settle the details. He was now regularly involved in the co-operation discussions with Washington, an experience that was to determine his main field of historical study for a life-time. In May 1945 he was appointed private secretary to Travis.

Hinsley returned to Cambridge in June 1946, as a research fellow of St John's, rising to professor in 1969. He served as Master of his college, 1979-1989, and as Vice-Chancellor of the university from 1981 to 1983. A vivid teacher and most effective administrator, he established a research school in the history of International Relations, and published several books in the field.

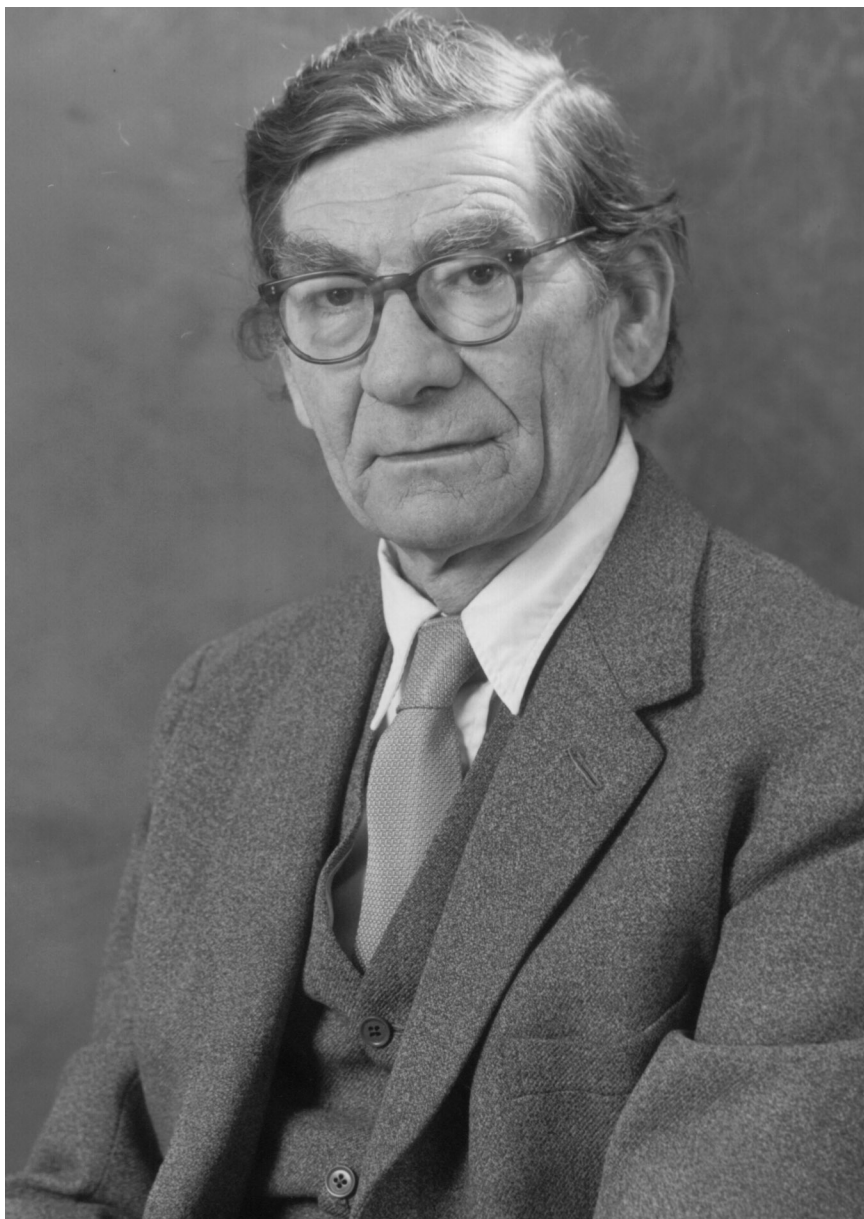
Somehow he found time (1979 to 1988) to be Editor-in-Chief of the official 'History of British Intelligence in the Second World War'. He made it largely devoid of personal anecdotes, but edited a set of personal accounts of the work of Bletchley Park under the title 'Codebreakers'. He was appointed OBE in 1946, and was knighted in 1985. He had married Hilary Brett Brett-Smith, who had joined Bletchley Park in 1940, in 1946, and they had three children. He never really retired, dying in Cambridge on 16 February 1998.

Mr Francis Harry Hinsley



FO Civilian, TSAO

For service in support of the work of Bletchley Park during
World War Two. We Also Served.



HARRY HINSLEY

Francis Harry Hinsley 1918–1998

SIR HARRY HINSLEY, who died in Cambridge on 16 February 1998, was a cryptanalyst, an historian, and an effective university administrator. He was recruited to Bletchley Park in 1939 as a cryptanalyst and remained there for the duration of the war. Following his wartime service, Hinsley returned to St John's College, Cambridge, where he had been elected a research fellow in 1944. He became a university lecturer in history in 1949, Reader in the History of International Relations in 1965, and Professor of the History of International Relations in 1969. He also served as President (1975–9) then Master (1979–89) of St John's College, and as Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University (1981–3). He was made OBE for his work at Bletchley in 1946 and knighted in 1985. He was born on 26 November 1918 at 28 Rowland Street, Walsall, the son of Thomas Henry Hinsley, ironworks wagoner, and his wife Emma, née Adey. He went to the local elementary school and then to Queen Mary's Grammar School, Walsall, and in 1937 won a scholarship to St John's College, Cambridge.

This steady rise up the academic ladder was rudely interrupted by the onset of the Second World War in Europe. When the war broke out, he had taken a First Class in Part I of the Cambridge Historical Tripos but had not completed a first degree and was never to do so. During the summer vacation of 1939 Hinsley made a typical student's trip to Europe and particularly Germany. He saved resources by hitch hiking and liked to recall how he had succeeded in getting a lift up to Berchtesgaden in an official limousine. There he found himself in a small crowd and in

touching distance of Hitler as he emerged to leave. At the last possible moment, even a little beyond it, he returned to England safely by train and went back to Cambridge for his second year. There he discovered that his intellect had attracted the attention of two Cambridge dons, Martin Charlesworth of St John's and F. E. Adcock of King's. They had been asked to find suitably able candidates for the Government Code and Cypher School at Bletchley Park and Hinsley was enlisted to the unit. There he joined the Naval Section and worked for the Admiralty's Operational Intelligence Centre.

Congregated at Bletchley was a group of young, highly accomplished men and women, living a completely secret life in conditions somewhat resembling a physically uncomfortable University Senior Common Room. 'It was a lovely life', he later recalled. 'Bletchley Park was like a University. We lived the anarchic lives of students. There was a tremendous social life, parties, amateur dramatics, lots of young ladies and lots of young men.' Young as he was, Hinsley became the leading expert on the decryption and analysis of German wireless traffic. Hinsley's interpretative skills became highly significant after May 1941, when, acting on his instinct that German trawlers stationed off Iceland were carrying Enigma code machines, the OIC arranged to capture one. Together with cryptanalytical material secured from the U-boat 110 and a second trawler captured in June 1941, the information gained enabled Bletchley Park to read the German naval enigma traffic. This achievement played a vital role in supplying the Admiralty with crucial intelligence analysis derived from Admiral Doenitz's signals—information which helped to win the battle against U-boats in the Atlantic. 'I knew Doenitz best of all', he later said. 'He ran the U-boats like a prep school. There was a time when I could tell you whether Doenitz was personally on duty. I could tell from the way he planned it. He was good. Mind you, he had a fairly rigid mind.' Hinsley's powers as an interpreter of decrypts was unrivalled and was based on an ability to sense that something unusual was afoot from the tiniest clues. He was not always believed, particularly in early days. His warning, for example, that something was happening in the Baltic just before the German invasion of Norway went unheeded. He knew the British naval mind, too. Young as he was, his insights came to be respected—they called him the Cardinal—and he made several extended visits to Admiral Tovey's flagship at Scapa Flow, on one occasion organising an attempt to bring the German battleship *Tirpitz* within range, which only narrowly failed. His description of his role in the sinking of the *Bismarck* was later to become a famous Hinslaic set piece once it became possible to deliver it.

The secrecy of Bletchley Park was scrupulously observed both during the war and for thirty years after it. The result was an inevitable lack of assessment of the role of intelligence in the streams of books recounting the history of the war. Only after 1979, with the publication of the first of his five monumental volumes on the history of *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, was it possible for Hinsley to discuss the significance of what he and others had achieved during the war at Bletchley Park. He said that the long period of enforced silence was made easier because he could at least discuss it with his wife, Hilary Brett Brett-Smith (the daughter of Herbert Francis Brett Brett-Smith), whom he married on 6 April 1946, and who had been there too. The official history dealt with both successes and failures, such as Montgomery's decision to ignore warnings about Hitler's intention to hold the Scheldt which led to the Arnhem debacle, and set out to be dispassionate in every way. It was thought to be heavy going and dry, but Hinsley, who had wrestled with every kind of sensitivity during the writing of the histories—internal and those of foreign governments—simply responded that 'it was meant to be bloodless'. Sir Maurice Oldfield, former Director-General of MI6, complained that it was 'remarkable in that there are hardly any names in it. You get the impression that the intelligence war was won by committees in Whitehall.' When all was over, however, he supplied a highly entertaining version, edited with Alan Stripp, of Bletchley Park memoirs under the title *Codebreakers: The inside story of Bletchley Park* (1993) which served to add the flesh and blood excluded from the official account. Perhaps most interesting of all was Hinsley's personal assessment of the ultimate result of the intelligence effort. It had not been a 'war winner' but was a 'war-shortener'. He thought that the war might have been as much as two years longer without it, certainly one year. 'Without it', he often said, 'Rommel would have got to Alexandria. The U-boats would not have done us in. But they would have got us into serious shortages and put another year on the war.'

The desperately important and occasionally highly dramatic contribution to the British Second World War intelligence effort that was made by the specially recruited group of scholars at Bletchley Park has been well documented in recent years. Harry Hinsley's significant role within that remarkable effort has also been very widely acknowledged since it became possible to discuss it at all.¹ His achievement in bringing

¹ Donal J. Sexton, *Signals intelligence in World War II: a research guide* (Westport, CT, 1996). Since 1996, see Michael Smith, *Station X: the codebreakers of Bletchley Park* (London,

the official histories to completion should not be underestimated. He demonstrated qualities of persistence and patience which triumphed over what at times were serious efforts to persuade him to abandon the project altogether. He could occasionally be testy with those who failed to comprehend the hard realities in any situation—a fairly common occurrence in academic life, but that never affected the way in which he conducted business or thought about intellectual problems. It might be guessed that it was the results of both his historical output and his patience that eventually led to the offer of a knighthood which he felt he could accept.

Hinsley's second public career was carved out in academic life. Here there was a remarkable progression of apparent improbabilities: he became a Fellow of St John's College when he had no degree, not even a first degree, he fathered one of the most significant research schools of the twentieth century in international and diplomatic history without himself conducting basic research or proceeding to a Ph.D., and eventually he was to be elected Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge when he had not yet actually been admitted to the Mastership of his College—an unheard of event, at least in modern times. The last of these was both a genuine improbability and a very wise move: Hinsley was always a highly competent, conservative in the true sense—occasionally parsimonious, and common-sensical administrator. It was probably as well for Cambridge that he was Vice-Chancellor during a particularly difficult period of straitened finances coming near the beginning of the long squeeze imposed by successive Cabinets on British universities during the last quarter of the twentieth century. He had some success in reducing costs within the University, but did not foresee how much worse the situation was going to become and that the University urgently needed to begin to raise funds from private sources.

The first two unlikelyhoods, however, were the consequences of the war and the post-war educational emergency that arose as universities tried to cope with the arrival of a massive backlog of delayed student entry. A very large number of Hinsley's junior members of St John's College, Cambridge stretching from the 1940s to the 1970s are able to testify to the extraordinary personal relationship which they enjoyed with him either as undergraduate or graduate students or because he was their

1998). David Syrett (ed.), *The Battle of the Atlantic and Signals Intelligence: U-boats and trends, 1941–1945* (Aldershot, 1998). David Alvarez (ed.), *Allied and Axis Signals Intelligence in World War II* (London, 1999). See also the novel *Enigma* by Robert Harris (London, 1995).

tutor. He had an amazing memory for personal histories and in addition gave to each student his complete attention while they were at Cambridge. He never forgot any student he had taught or been tutor to and they never forgot their exposure to the way he thought about things and the often striking language and style of delivery he used to describe what he thought. They also never forgot the risk of personal annihilation which visiting him entailed. The threat came from showers of books which could and did fall from hopelessly overstressed and ancient shelves, themselves in evident danger of falling. He had the gift of total concentration on the person he was dealing with, whatever the circumstances, and was perfectly capable of forgetting that there were often other people waiting in his room during tutorial consultations. No one in more contemporary, privacy protecting, conditions would be likely to hear a fellow student asked, with evident interest and the usual slightly odd Hinslaic emphases, 'and what happened, my boy, *after* you set fire to the factory . . . ?' In short, he brought tremendous vigour and enthusiasm to every aspect of being a Cambridge don in his own time.

One important consequence of his vigour was the creation of the Centre for International Studies. Cambridge had never generated the kind of department of politics and/or international relations which became common in universities during the second half of the twentieth century. This meant that both teachers and students from several disciplines whose interests were essentially in the field of international relations broadly interpreted had no common place to pursue projects and exchange ideas. The connections between international history, international relations and international law would particularly benefit if some kind of common roof could be created. Hinsley, together with the eminent lawyer, Clive Parry, tried to arrange for this in a small way. They had no idea at the outset what was going to happen. The Centre was formed in 1975, existing under the wing of the History Faculty, and began to act as a central point for graduate students, interested dons and visiting fellows to exchange ideas and, a little later, to provide a home for a very small number of students taking a new one year M.Phil. degree in International Relations. Shortly afterwards the Chancellor of the University, Prince Philip, began to suggest that more work should be done in strategic studies, ideally by means of a separate Tripos. This suggestion was modified into a successful proposal that teaching in strategic studies should be funded by the Ministry of Defence and that a small cohort of talented senior officers should come to Cambridge each year to take the M.Phil. degree. This arrangement began in 1978 and at the same time, the

unusual character of the degree, compared with the more familiar courses offered elsewhere based on international relations theory, attracted students from all over the world, particularly North America but including the foreign ministries of Japan and Mexico, as well as others. The numbers rose rapidly and despite opposition within the history faculty as well as great stress on a small number of teachers, Hinsley found that he had been the godfather of a major enterprise within both the British and international academic community. Over time the Directorship of the Centre became a full time post (1987), initially funded by St John's College and the University took over responsibility for providing all the teaching and, eventually, separate and congenial physical accommodation for the Centre.

While Hinsley did all these things with enthusiasm, he did them not because they were primary interests or ambitions, but because they came with the job. The job itself was an intellectual enterprise. It is certainly arguable that it was in his writings and his supervision of graduate students that Hinsley made his most significant long term impact. Two published tributes exist to his role as leader of a major research school of international and diplomatic historians. The first is *British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey* (CUP, 1977) which he edited. It was the cumulative result of the work of many of his students who had seized on the opportunities offered as the 1960s saw the archives of the immediately pre-war years opened under the then fifty-year rule. Serious investigation of the archival records of the immediate antecedents of the First World War could and did begin. The causes of the 1914 war were a major topic of interest for Hinsley, partly because he so strongly rejected the idea that wars occur accidentally and partly because he was suspicious of the widely believed notion that all could be explained by reference to the playing out of the Final Crisis itself. The book could have stood as a first *festschrift* for him, had he not been its editor and it certainly gives a good picture of the product of his first wave of research students. It has remained and is likely to continue to be, a generally accepted standard work.

The second tribute came in the form of a deliberate *festschrift* dealing with a later period and essentially bringing together the work of a second wave of Hinsley's students who had been able, following the introduction of a thirty-year rule by Harold Wilson's first Cabinet, to concentrate on the Second World War and its antecedents. This, too, was a serious interest of Hinsley's, as it would have been to any significant participant, like himself, and also because of the profound disagreement he had with

A. J. P. Taylor's interpretation of both the background to and the conduct of Hitler's policies.² *Diplomacy and Intelligence during the Second World War* (CUP, 1985) dealt with some of these issues and others and proved unusually successful for a collected work, having to be reprinted in 1987. Even these two works do not by themselves fully convey the power of the Hinsley network. Because his research students were international in origin and because his establishment of a research seminar attracted many other interested scholars, his way of thinking about international history and current international political issues spread to the United States, throughout the Commonwealth and to other countries as well. Nor can they convey the extraordinary atmosphere of the seminar itself. It was thus described in the introduction to the 1985 *Festschrift*

The seminar became famous. Gently and often amusingly directed from behind clouds of pipe smoke, current research students could try out their latest interpretations of their material, describe what archives they had found, visitors from abroad—an increasingly common phenomenon—could be cajoled into presenting their own latest topics and existing teaching historians could from time to time be induced to talk to the seminar about their own research. The sessions could often be exhilarating and provided at once a sense of companionship and a sense of the broad scope which international relations offers and which was represented by the broad scope of subjects being studied under Harry Hinsley's direction. This breadth did not provide any apparent difficulties for Harry Hinsley himself, nor any constraints upon the life of the seminar. The reason . . . (has been) . . . touched on by Jonathan Steinberg.³ . . . He comments on the fact that Harry Hinsley did not, because of the war, come into academic life possessing the usual research experience in terms of method, but he did come with a formidable experience in analysis. This was reflected in the way he reacted to the work of his pupils, or to the papers presented at the seminar. He did not primarily react to archival problems, or to the methodological problems, though both could and did engage his careful attention, he reacted to the wider implications of what had been discovered or reassessed; and he would comment rapidly, almost electrically, on the true significance of what he had

² His review of Taylor's *Origins of the Second World War* (London, 1961), was reprinted as chapter 15 of *Power and the Pursuit of Peace*. It contains one powerful passage which is worth quoting for its strong taste of vintage Hinsley. 'It is to be regretted that Mr. Taylor's analysis of these crises is insulated not only from all regard for the policy of the man who almost wholly caused them on one level but also, as was established earlier, from all recollection of the extreme international unbalance that was the chief cause for them on the other. It is only when crises are studied in this, their proper, context that it emerges to what a large extent Hitler was responsible, and to what a small extent the conditions or the conduct of other men, for the outbreak of the second world war.' p. 332.

³ Jonathan Steinberg, 'F. H. Hinsley, an essay in bibliography', in *Diplomacy and Intelligence during the Second World War*, ed. Richard Langhorne (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 12–21.

just heard or read. It was these flashes of illumination which made supervision by him or attendance at his seminar so memorable and so valuable.⁴

Hinsley's own writings gain part of their power from the remarkable consistency of approach that he employed. Whereas many scholars deploy their expertise on an unfolding topic as revealed by the results of their basic research and thus define their intellectual role, Hinsley, who did not have or subsequently gain the experience of doing basic research, defined himself by the adoption of a particular starting point. This point was in many ways reminiscent of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, and, perhaps unsurprisingly, his treatment of Kant, Vattel, and Rousseau in *Power and the Pursuit of Peace* (CUP, 1963) is particularly comprehensive and sympathetic. It led to a persistently rational approach to the discussion of human behaviour, always most marked when he discussed decisions made about foreign policy and particularly peace and war. Politicians, even Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin, made their decisions based on rational calculations of advantage and disadvantage. They might get those calculations wrong, but that assessments of relative advantage were made, he had no doubt. This was the principal basis of his epic disagreement with Alan Taylor. When politicians calculated, they based themselves on assessments of contemporary conditions, on an all-round view of the international and internal context in which they found themselves. This was for Hinsley a permanent fact about human affairs: human beings always belonged to a political society of some sort and always conducted themselves in relation to it in fundamentally similar ways, regardless of geography, culture, or historical period. These conditions meant that there were no barriers to describing, elucidating, and comparing aspects of human behaviour at very widely spaced intervals of time; nor, equally, any reason not to make assessments of the surrounding conditions in which very different human societies found themselves.⁵ This explains the simultaneous existence of works on British Naval History, Hitler's Strategy, Sovereignty, Nationalism, and the official history of British Intelligence during the Second World War.

⁴ Richard Langhorne, 'Introduction' in *Diplomacy and Intelligence*, pp. 6–7.

⁵ In order to learn what he needed to know about distant periods, Hinsley relentlessly mined the available skill resources in Cambridge. When *Sovereignty* was under construction in the mid-1960s, and the Ancient World had already been conquered, two of his students observed that Dr Walter Ullmann, a medievalist of world renown, had been invited over from Trinity College for dinner. The following day they enquired how the conversation had gone: 'that' came back the deliberately ambiguous reply 'has finished off the Middle Ages'.

But mainly what fascinated him was the progression of peace and war since states had become the most common form of political organisation among human societies and their near universality had induced the creation of an international system among them. Here are to be found the main thrusts of his three core books: *Power and the Pursuit of Peace* (CUP, 1963), *Sovereignty* (Watts, 1966), and *Nationalism and the International System* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1973). Of these, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace* is the most substantial, *Sovereignty* the most important and original of his writings, while *Nationalism* represents a further working out of a very important theme from *Power and the Pursuit of Peace*. All of them demonstrate two preoccupations: the first is the evolution and function of the state, the relationships that develop between states and the effect that this part of the general context of the age had on the actions of politicians and rulers. The second is to show how taking a reasonably long view an essentially rational interpretation of history revealed a record of progress in the conduct of affairs. This was not necessarily steady progress, nor progress derived from the application of good intentions, but inevitable progress, as predicted by Kant, whom Hinsley believed to have been ahead of his time rather than hopelessly idealist in the context of his own.⁶

All three books naturally carry the distinctive marks of Hinsley's method and style. The method depends on the construction of argument. Information is there, but it is there to support the argument not the other way round,⁷ and it is usually there in the form of recording what human beings have thought about their own conditions in order to explain their responses to them. There is therefore a constant tension between condition and response and it can show in Hinsley's written style. Highly complex sentences may follow each other where the interplay between each element requires that the reader possess either the mental reflexes of a steeple chase jockey or the willingness to reread and

⁶ 'The Rise and Fall of the Modern International System', the Martin Wight Memorial Lecture, *Review of International Studies*, 8, i (1982), p. 8.

⁷ The occasionally subordinate role of information, and arguments about the nature of specific information, in Hinsley's writing sometimes led him to cut straight through a thicket of dispute. The significance of imperialism in the later nineteenth century was a hot topic when he was writing *Power and the Pursuit of Peace* in the early 1960s, but he did not allow it to delay his progress. 'Whatever further elaboration may be needed for its complete analysis, these developments were the sufficient cause of the increase in imperialist activity and sentiment which marked the last fifteen or twenty years of the century.' 'These developments' had been covered in one paragraph. *Power and the Pursuit of Peace*, pp. 264–5.

think again. In *Power and the Pursuit of Peace*, Hinsley discusses efforts to achieve peaceful international relations both by philosophers and philanthropists, a unique account which takes up the first half of the book, and by the actual behaviour of governments up to and beyond the creation of the United Nations, which constitutes the second half. This is a book on a large scale, and it contains some of Hinsley's best writing: in particular the chapter on Kant in Part I, and the discussion of the causes of the Second World War in Part III. Partly because this structure enabled Hinsley to avoid complicated juxtapositions within single chapters, and partly because it contained straightforwardly useful information, students used to find the account of modern international relations in Parts II and III to be the most approachable, but parts of it have inevitably now become outdated. It is the discussion of international thought in the first half that has stood the test of time. Over and above that achievement, the book had another significance. The power of the interconnections that Hinsley created between the philosophical effort and the realities as they unfolded in international politics changed the way in which the subject of international relations in general was studied. It did not produce agreement about it—far from it—but it altered the intellectual basis of the discussion. It may be that his persistent refusal to acknowledge or use the quantitative techniques and methodological theories of political science limited the impact of his work, particularly overseas. But few scholars achieve such turning-points and Hinsley was one of them.

Hinsley's near passion for discussing the evolution of states, then the states' system, and his belief in the contemporary centrality of the state over the great issues of peace or war, or, as it became in his time, potential annihilation, can give the impression that he could only conceive of a state-centric world. He did so in the sense that what he observed about the world as he saw it and as it had been since the eighteenth century convinced him that it was indeed state dominated and controlled. He did not do so, however, as a general intellectual conviction. His most elegantly argued book, though also one of his more difficult discussions, *Sovereignty*, demonstrates this. Out of a finely wrought structure of tightly organised sentences the message clearly emerges that the man who wrote so powerfully about the significance of the fully sovereign state in modern international relations did not believe that sovereignty was inextricably bound up with the state, still less that it conferred upon states or the rulers of states special and overwhelming powers. It followed from the fact that 'for all men at all times, there has been no choice but to belong

to a political community⁸ and that 'men will often in history have debated and quarrelled about who should rule and by what right.'⁹ How they resolved that problem was subject to contemporary conditions and those conditions might produce the institutions of the state at some point and in fact did so, climaxing in the first half of the twentieth century. Even so, there were always limitations:

At no time, in no society, has its identification with, or control over, the society been complete. Even under the regime of the state, the most powerful and effective of all the political institutions which societies have so far developed, and even under the rule of the most powerful of states, other institutions exist alongside it, men still speak of 'we' and 'they', and it is not uncommon for the society to limit the state by laying down fundamental rules by which it may or may not undertake certain tasks. . . . For while all societies, however, primitive, possess political institutions—we cannot say that every society must develop the state. Nor has every society yet developed it. We inhabit a world in which there still exist both stateless political societies and societies which are ruled by states. The distinction between the state and other political institutions is as decisive as is the distinction between a society and its political system.¹⁰

Similarly with nationalism: Hinsley is generally approving of the idea that nationalism is a state of mind in which

political loyalty is felt to be owed to the nation [because i]t does not assume that when nationalism comes to exist where it did not exist before, it does so because men have discovered a political loyalty which they previously lacked. On the contrary, it implies that men have transferred to the nation the political loyalty which they previously gave to some other structure—that what has changed is not the quality of this loyalty but the object on which it is showered or the vehicle through which it is expressed.¹¹

Here again, it is the machinery of change that has engaged Hinsley's attention rather than any one position in time.

It is worth drawing attention to these aspects of Hinsley's manner of thinking because they emphasise the way in which the consistency of his point of view allows his work to escape from any time-specific, issue-specific restriction. Except for the last chapters of *Power and the Pursuit of Peace*, which have been overtaken by events in specific instances, his work remains and will remain useful for building assessments of the very different conditions which are developing in the contemporary world.

⁸ *Nationalism and the International System* (London, 1973), p. 11.

⁹ *Sovereignty*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, 1986), p. 27.

¹⁰ *Sovereignty*, pp. 4–5.

¹¹ *Nationalism*, p. 11.

Hinsley would have been perfectly able to write about the consequences of the decline in the authority of the nation state wrought by the onset of economic globalisation. In discussion in his last years he would point cheerfully to the way in which his prescriptions explained, for example, the transfer of political authority in certain circumstances to humanitarian organisations working in areas where the institutions of a state had ceased to function. He would with reason have claimed to have foreseen the contemporary state of affairs at the United Nations. Moreover, given his deliberately wicked tendency to make improbable predictions for the amusement of others—most of which naturally did not then occur—the concluding observations of his 1982 Martin Wight Memorial Lecture about the future of the international system have a genuinely prophetic ring: ‘Such are the grounds for suggesting that we are now witnessing the formation of an international system which will be even more different from the modern system than that system was from all its precursors, and which will be so because its leading states will abstain from war with each other.’¹²

It is a tribute to the complexity of Hinsley’s approach to international relations that idealists might have claimed him for his optimism, while rejecting entirely the basis for it, and realists have felt comfortable with his techniques while being entirely unable to accept his conclusions. This was not a case of being all things to all men, for he was wholly his own man, even a phenomenon of nature. It was more that he dug out a great quarry and the stones from it have provided and will yet provide material for others to build their own structures—perhaps the best kind of epitaph.

RICHARD LANGHORNE

*Center for Global Change and Governance
Rutgers University*

¹² Martin Wight Memorial Lecture (1982), p. 8.



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Obituary: Professor Sir Harry Hinsley

Peter Linehan | Thursday 19 February 1998 01:02 |



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IN 1943 Harry Hinsley was sent to Washington to negotiate the "Brusa" codebreaking agreement with the United States government, the agreement which committed both parties to exchange all intelligence information in their possession relating to the Axis powers. As well as preparing the emissary for the complexities and double dealing of the academic world in which he was to spend the rest of his life, the entrusting of such a mission to a 24-year-old undergraduate serves as a striking reminder of the opportunities that the Second World War provided for highly intelligent individuals from very humble backgrounds.

The son of an employee of the coal department at the Walsall Co-op and a school caretaker, Hinsley had come up to St John's College, Cambridge, as an Entrance Exhibitioner in 1937, and two years later was awarded a First in Part I of the Historical Tripos. Then, with Part II in view and no doubt another First on the cards, one day in the winter of 1939-40 he was asked to call on Martin Charlesworth, the Fellow of St John's to whom, together with F. E. Adcock at King's, the Cambridge end of the recruitment process for the Government Code and Cipher School had been entrusted. So Hinsley went to Bletchley, and for the time being History went to pot.

The experience of those heady days Hinsley later recorded in *Codebreakers: the inside story of Bletchley Park*, the volume he edited with Alan Stripp in 1993, whilst the achievements of "BP", since they were chronicled by him as editor-in-chief of the monumental *British Intelligence in the Second World War (1979-90)*, and the

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Hinsley's particular activity at Bletchley was the study of German naval wireless traffic. This brought him into contact with Admiralty Intelligence, a liaison so intimate that a signal from Home Fleet querying some item "What is your source?" received the one-word reply "Hinsley". Years later Hinsley's "How I Sank the Bismarck" (which was the undergraduates' title for it, not his, or not entirely his) was a regular show-stopper at Cambridge college history societies.

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In 1946 he married Hilary Brett-Smith, whom he had met at Bletchley and in whose serene company he returned to Cambridge to St John's where he had been elected to the Fellowship two years before.



The first time I met him, when I presented myself as a scholarship candidate in 1960, he seemed very old. I clearly remember wrongly spotting a resemblance to Franz Liszt in extremis. Indeed so old did he seem that on not seeing him about the place in 1961 I drew that wrong conclusion often drawn by those ignorant of the existence of academic

He was a wonderful teacher. Associating himself with an earlier age, he took the view that any intelligent historian could teach anyone, even a Johnian, any intelligible period of history. This conviction may have derived from his own experience at Bletchley. But what with Caius on the up, as it was then, in 1962 such studied amateurishness struck even us as high-wirism. Even so, with Hinsley it worked. "If you want to do modern this term, you'll go to Mr Miller, because he's a medievalist," he informed us. "But if you want to do medieval, then you'll come to me, because I'm a modernist." And we all assented to this and nodded gravely. And we weren't all fools, or just rugby players (which Hinsley himself had been, which was extraordinary, though, given that, the rest was altogether credible. He had especially enjoyed playing in the rain).

So I was supervised by him on "The Coronation of Charlemagne", which was only one of his set-pieces, and in accordance with some Hinslaic variation of the immutable Hinslaic precepts also went to him for modern things and benefited from his deconstruction of his own *Power and the Pursuit of Peace* (1963).

As a lecturer, he was spell-binding then, and 30 years on was spell-binding still. Less than a year ago I listened to him as he kept an enormous postprandial Cambridge audience on the edges of its collective seat while he reminisced on Bletchley days, without a note and for exactly the hour prescribed. Many of the audience on this occasion were candidates for the MPhil degree in International Relations, the degree course which Hinsley invented in the aftermath of *Power and the Pursuit of Peace*, and which has brought no end of interesting students to Cambridge in recent years, as well as spawning so many more more questionable courses in its wake.

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Small of stature and dapper in appearance, Hinsley was notable for the distinctiveness of his pronunciation, the idiosyncrasy of which was more often feebly mimicked than artfully reproduced. "That was a caricature, wasn't it?" he asked after one more than usually accurate representation.

His contribution to St John's College, to which he was permanently attached for the last 52 years of his life, is incalculable. As Fellow, Tutor, President and Master, he was forever about the place. It was during his Mastership that at long last the college decided to "go mixed". Hinsley was not by nature a mixer, but once the change had been made he proved wholly supportive of it.

Because he was Reader in the History of International Relations, when in 1967 he said that there would be no war in the Middle East people took notice. And when, later that year, he said at lunch that Wilson wouldn't dare devalue and as he said it the Fellowship rose as one from its anxious eggs on toast and made its way down to Lloyds to see what could be salvaged, Hinsley's view was that the Fellowship was rushing it.

Shortly after being elected Master of St John's, in 1981 he was catapulted into the Vice-Chancellorship of the university. By 1981 Cambridge's spate of occupations and sit-ins was happily over. He wouldn't have been comfortable with those. The fashion now was for economy. Economy was a regime not altogether uncongenial to Hinsley. ("Just half a scuttle," he indicated from the chair at a meeting of his college council at about this time, as the fire was about to go out in the course of a discussion on the subject of how the college might cut corners.) In the history of the university he will be especially remembered for his promotion of the cause of early retirement.

invariable black beret. In mid-August, with the temperature in the nineties, the plastic mac and beret cut a particular swathe through the queues in the Cambridge Sainsburys. He was a rare man.

Francis Harry Hinsley, historian: born Walsall, Staffordshire 26 November 1918; War service, HM Foreign Office, 1939-46; Fellow, St John's College Cambridge 1944-79, 1989-98, Tutor 1956-63, President 1975-79, Master 1979- 89; OBE 1946; Lecturer in History, Cambridge University 1949-65, Reader in the History of International Relations 1965-69, Professor of the History of International Relations 1969-83, Vice-Chancellor 1981-83; Editor, Historical Journal 1960-71; FBA 1981; Kt 1985; married 1946 Hilary Brett-Smith (two sons, one daughter); died Cambridge 16 February 1998.

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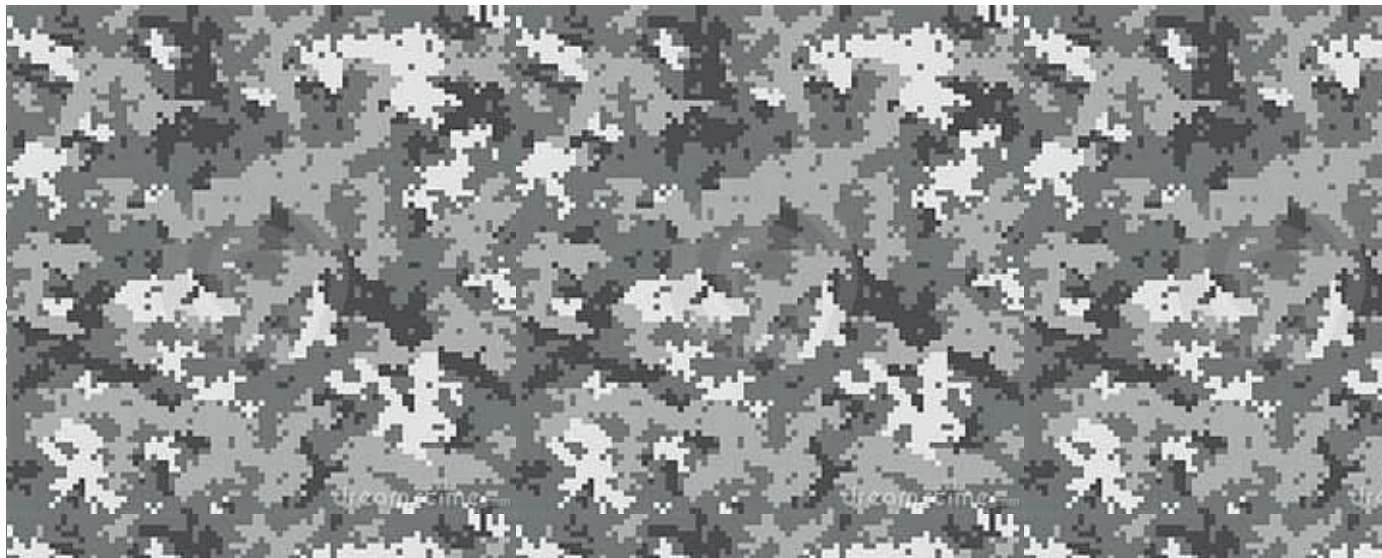
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Harry Hinsley

Sir Francis Harry Hinsley OBE (26 November 1918 – 16 February 1998) was an English historian and cryptanalyst. He worked at Bletchley Park during the Second World War and wrote widely on the history of international relations and British Intelligence during the Second World War. He was known as Harry Hinsley.

Contents [show]

Early life Edit

Hinsley was the son of a miner. His mother Emma Hinsley (née Adey) was a school caretaker, and they lived in Birchills, then in the parish of Bloxwich, Walsall.^[1] Harry was educated at Queen Mary's Grammar School, Walsall, and in 1937 won a scholarship to study history at St. John's College, Cambridge.^[2] In October 1939, while still studying at St. John's, he was summoned to an interview with Alastair Denniston, head of the Government Code and Cypher School (GC&CS), and was thereby recruited to Bletchley Park's naval section in Hut 4.^[3]

Bletchley Park Edit

At Bletchley Park, Hinsley studied the external characteristics of intercepted German messages, a process sometimes termed "traffic analysis": from call signs, frequencies, times of interception and so forth, he was able to deduce a great deal of information about the structure of the German Navy's communication networks, and even about the structure of the German Navy itself.^[4]

Hinsley helped initiate a programme of seizing Enigma machines and keys from German weather ships, such as the Lauenburg, thereby facilitating Bletchley Park's resumption of interrupted breaking of German Naval Enigma.

In late 1943, Hinsley was sent to liaise with the [U.S. Navy](#) in [Washington](#), with the result that an agreement was reached in January 1944 to cooperate in exchanging results on [Japanese Naval](#) signals^[5]

Towards the end of the war, Hinsley, by then a key aide to Bletchley Park chief [Edward Travis](#), was part of a committee which argued for a post-war intelligence agency that would combine both signals intelligence and human intelligence in a single organisation. In the event, the opposite occurred, with GC&CS becoming [GCHQ](#).^[6]

On 6 April 1946, Hinsley married Hilary Brett-Smith who had also worked at Bletchley Park, in [Hut 8](#).^[2]

Hinsley was awarded the [OBE](#) in 1946, and was knighted in 1985.^[2]

Sir Harry Hinsley was cremated, and his family buried the ashes privately in Cambridge.

Career as a historian [Edit](#)

After the war, Hinsley returned to St John's College and lectured in history, being in 1969 appointed *Professor of the History of International Relations*.^[2] From 1979 to 1989 he was Master of St John's College and from 1981 to 1983 he was [vice-chancellor of the University of Cambridge](#).^[7]

Hinsley edited the multi-volume official history *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, and argued that Enigma [decryption](#) had speeded Allied victory by 1–4 years while not fundamentally altering the war's outcome.

He was criticised by [Marian Rejewski](#)^[8] and [Gordon Welchman](#),^[9] who took exception to inaccuracies in Hinsley's accounts of the history of Enigma decryption in the early volumes of his official history, including crucial errors in chronology. Subsequently a revised account of the Polish, French and British contribution was included in volume 3, part 2.

The volumes of *British Intelligence in the Second World War* edited by Hinsley and published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO) London are:

- Volume 1: Its Influence on Strategy and Operations, F. H. Hinsley with E. E. Thomas, C. F. G. Ransome and R. C. Knight, (1979, HMSO) [ISBN 0-11-630933-4](#)
- Volume 2: Its Influence on Strategy and Operations, F. H. Hinsley with E. E. Thomas, C. F. G. Ransome and R. C. Knight, (1981, HMSO) [ISBN 0-11-630934-2](#)
- Volume 3, Part 1: Its Influence on Strategy and Operations, F. H. Hinsley with E. E. Thomas, C. F. G. Ransome and R. C. Knight, (1984, HMSO) [ISBN 0-11-630935-0](#)
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 - Includes *Bibliography* (pages 961-974), and *The Polish, French and British Contributions to the Breaking of the Enigma; a Revised Account* (Appendix 30, pages 945-959).
- Volume 4: Security and Counter-Intelligence, F. H. Hinsley and C. A. G. Simkins, (1990, HMSO) [ISBN 0-11-630952-0](#)
- Abridged Version, F. H. Hinsley, (1993, HMSO) [ISBN 0-11-630956-3](#) (& 1993, Cambridge University Press) [ISBN 0-521-44304-0](#)

Hinsley also co-edited (with Alan Stripp) and contributed to *Codebreakers: The Inside Story of Bletchley Park* (1993), which contains personal accounts from those who worked at Bletchley Park.

The Hinsley Memorial Lecture, an annual lecture on an international relations topic, is held every year at [St John's College, Cambridge](#), in memory of Harry Hinsley.^[10]

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External links Edit

- [Sir Harry Hinsley: The Influence of ULTRA in the Second World War](#)
- [Comments on Hinsley's publications](#)

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 THE ORDERS OF KNIGHTHOOD
 ST. JAMES'S PALACE, LONDON S.W.1

15th June 1985

THE QUEEN has been graciously pleased, on the occasion of the Celebration of Her Majesty's Birthday, to signify her intention of conferring Peerages of the United Kingdom for Life upon the undermentioned:

Life Peers

To be Barons:

Sir Walter Charles MARSHALL, C.B.E., Chairman Central Electricity Generating Board.
 The Right Honourable Robert Joseph MELLISH, Deputy Chairman, London Docklands Development Corporation.

THE QUEEN has been graciously pleased, on the occasion of the Celebration of Her Majesty's Birthday, to declare that the undermentioned shall be sworn of Her Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council:

Privy Counsellor

Barney (Bernard John) HAYHOE, Minister of State, H.M. Treasury and Member of Parliament for Brentford and Isleworth.

CENTRAL CHANCERY OF
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15th June 1985

THE QUEEN has been graciously pleased, on the occasion of the Celebration of Her Majesty's

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Knights Bachelor

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 Bernard Melchior FEILDEN, C.B.E. For services to architecture.
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Francis Harry Hinsley



Francis Harry Hinsley, the son of Thomas Henry Hinsley and his wife, Emma Adey, was born in [Walsall](#) on 26th November, 1918. His father was a wagoner who drove a horse and cart between the local ironworks and the railway station. After attending the local elementary school he went to [Queen Mary's Grammar School](#). (1)

In 1937 won a scholarship to [St John's College, Cambridge](#), to read history. A talented student he found himself interviewed by [Alastair Denniston](#), the head of of the Government Code and Cypher School (GCCS) in July 1939. During his interview Denniston went through his CV, noting that he was good at sifting through old documents such as the [Domesday Book](#). Hinsley said the kind of questions they asked me were: "You've travelled a bit, we understand. You've done quite well in your Tripos. What do you think of

government service? Would you rather have that than be conscripted? Does it appeal to you?" (2) Hinsley later discovered that his name had been suggested by his history tutor, [Hugh Gatty](#). (3) Hinsley commented: "Denniston... recruited the wartime staff from the universities with visits there in 1937 and 1938 (also 1939 when he recruited me and 20 other undergraduates within two months of the outbreak of war)." (4)

Francis Harry Hinsley in GCCS

In the summer of 1939 Hinsley spent his vacation in [Nazi Germany](#). His girlfriend lived in [Koblenz](#) and because of the political situation, Hinsley was ordered to report to the local police station each day. On 23rd August [Adolf Hitler](#) signed the [Nazi-Soviet Pact](#). The authorities now considered war more unlikely and the police told Hinsley that he no longer needed to visit the station every day and that they would get in touch with him if any problems came up. A week later, a German policeman advised the parents of his girlfriend, "Get him out of the country by tomorrow at the latest." Hinsley immediately left and was able to cross the French border before it closed. (5)

As arranged by [Alastair Denniston](#), Hinsley reported to Bletchley Park on the outbreak of the [Second World War](#), that took place a few days after arriving in England. His biographer, [Richard Langhorne](#), has pointed out: "Congregated there was a group of young, highly accomplished men and women, living a completely secret life in conditions somewhat resembling a physically uncomfortable university senior common room." (6) At first Hinsley worked under [Phoebe Senyard](#). She later described him as

"a slight, bespectacled young man with wavy hair" with a outstanding intellect. She later recalled: "I can remember quite well showing Harry some of the sorting and how delighted he seemed when he began to recognise the different types of signals... If I was in difficulty, I knew I could go to Harry. It was a pleasure because he was always interested in everything and took great pains to find out what it was and why. Those were very enjoyable days indeed. we were all very happy and cheerful, working in close cooperation with each other." (7)

Francis Harry Hinsley was originally sent to Hut 3: "Hut 3 was set up like a miniature factory. At its centre was the Watch Room - in the middle a circular or horseshoe-shaped table, to one side a rectangular table. On the outer rim of the circular table sat the Watch, some half-dozen people. The man in charge, the head of the Watch or Number 1, sat in an obvious directing position at the top of the table. The watchkeepers were a mixture of civilians and serving officers, Army and RAF. At the rectangular table sat serving officers, Army and RAF, one or two of each. These were the Advisers. Behind the head of the Watch was a door communicating with a small room where the Duty Officer sat. Elsewhere in the Hut were one large room housing the Index and a number of small rooms for the various supporting parties, the back rooms. The processes to which the decrypts were submitted were, consecutively, emendation, translation, evaluation, commenting, and signal drafting. The first two were the responsibility of the Watch, the remainder of the appropriate Adviser." (8)



Bletchley Park in 1939

Frank Birch was head of the German section in Hut 4. He told Hinsley that they were trying to read intercepted German naval messages. The code used by the Germans had not yet been broken. That being the case, Hinsley was to do his best to find out as much as he could from the information they

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did have about these messages. It was quickly apparent that there was not much evidence to go on. There was the date of the messages, their time of origin and their time of interception, and the radio frequency used by the German morse code operators. Sometimes Hinsley would be told where the messages came from, information which had been gleaned using the Royal Navy's direction finding service." Hinsley became involved with what became known as "traffic analysis". This was defined as "looking at all the evidence relating to enciphered messages which could not be read, and reaching a conclusion on what the enemy was doing." (9)

Admiralty's Operational Intelligence Centre

After Norway was invaded in April 1940, Hinsley was allowed direct contact with the Admiralty's Operational Intelligence Centre (OIC). The following month Hinsley noticed that German naval messages were being sent on frequencies which had never been used before. Hinsley came to the conclusion that the Germans were about to move some of their ships from the Baltic Sea to the Skagerrak, the narrow stretch of sea separating Denmark and Norway. He passed on this information to OIC. However, they failed to notice the significance of this information. Unknown, to the British, the Germans had broken the Royal Navy's codes and they were using this information to track HMS Glorious, the aircraft carrier, on the way to Norway.

At about 5.30 p.m. on 8th June, the German battleship, Scharnhorst opened fire, "hitting Glorious with salvo after salvo of shells shot out of her 11-inch guns, until the British aircraft carrier was just a blazing inferno full of mutilated corpses". (10) The two escorting destroyers, were also sunk, leaving behind just three survivors. The total killed or missing was 1,207 from Glorious, 160 from Acasta and 152 from Ardent, a total of 1,519. (11)

Shortly after the sinking of Glorious, Hinsley was asked to go up to the Admiralty's Operational Intelligence Centre in London, to explain how his traffic analysis worked. The meeting was attended by Rear Admiral Jock Clayton and Commander Norman Denning: "The OIC, which operated in the basement of the Citadel, had its own intelligence team, and Clayton wanted them to be well briefed, so that everyone could react quickly next time Hinsley rang them up. Clayton and Denning must have been surprised when Hinsley was ushered into their office. For standing before them was a man who was young enough to be one of Clayton's grandchildren. Hinsley was acutely aware that his long hair and casual clothing, which no one thought twice about in the laid back dons' common room atmosphere at Bletchley Park, was out of place beside all the spotless naval uniforms and suits worn at the Admiralty. Perhaps that was one reason why Hinsley found that his ideas did not receive a good reception from the junior officers he was supposed to be teaching. Another reason was that traffic analysis was not as easy as it sounded. Not everyone could cope with hours of searching through incomprehensible enciphered messages in the often vain hope of finding a ray of light hidden amongst the sea of paper. Hinsley on the other hand was well prepared for the job he had been given. His medieval history course at Cambridge had required him to look for the minuscule changes made to the charters he was analysing." (12)

Francis Harry Hinsley still had difficulty in communicating important information to the OIC. His colleague, Alec Dakin, wrote about this problem to Frank Birch who was head of the German section in Hut 4. Dakin suggested that the military establishment was prejudiced against Hinsley's working class background. "In their present state of ignorance, these people are not able to interpret and pass on

Read

any information they receive from Hinsley or the watch. That they should be jealous of his success is understandable, and that they should dislike him personally is a small matter, but that they should be obstructive is ruinous. (13)

Two days later Hinsley also wrote to Birch: "The only conclusion is that they not only duplicate our work and other people's work, but duplicate it in so aimless and inefficient a manner, that all their time is taken up in groping at the truth, and putting as much of it as is obvious to all on card indexes. If they duplicated in the right spirit, and with some purpose, they would be able to answer questions properly, and also possibly to contribute to general advancement... One reason that prevented them from doing this, appeared to be a competitive spirit, which instead of being of a healthy type, is obviously personal and couched itself in a show of independence and an air of obstruction. It appeared to be based on personal opposition to Bletchley Park. It was increased by the fact that the presence of one person from BP appeared to them to remove all their *raison d'être*. They felt themselves cut out... Apart from the above, I suspect that another reason for their inadequacy is incapacity, pure and simple. They know facts... But they seem to have no general grasp of these facts in association. They lack imagination. They cannot utilise the knowledge they so busily compile." (14)

According to his biographer, [Richard Langhorne](#), the OIC eventually began taking his advice: "His powers as an interpreter of decrypts were unrivalled and were based on an ability to sense that something unusual was afoot from the tiniest clues. Hinsley became the leading expert on the decryption and analysis of German wireless traffic, and, particularly after the capture of German Enigma code machines and materials, which allowed their settings to be broken, played a vital role in supplying the Admiralty with crucial intelligence analysis derived from Admiral Doenitz's signals." (15) His work was vitally important in the [Battle of Atlantic](#). As a result of the work done at Bletchley Park, nearly a hundred [U-boats](#) were sunk in the first five months of 1943. On 23rd May, after hearing of the loss of the forty-seventh U-boat that month, [Karl Dönitz](#) ordered the wolf packs to be withdrawn from the Atlantic. (16)

Francis Harry Hinsley at St John's College

At the end of the [Second World War](#), Hinsley returned to [St John's College, Cambridge](#), where he taught history. He also published *Power and the Pursuit of Peace* (1963) and *Sovereignty* (1966). In 1969 he was appointed as professor of the history of international relations in 1969. "He was a great teacher, an important writer, and a notably competent administrator. Countless generations of undergraduate historians at Cambridge remembered the extraordinarily vivid way in which he taught them, but the research school in the history of international relations that he established in the 1960s and 1970s was one of his greatest achievements." (17)

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Sir Francis Harry Hinsley by Michael Noakes (1980)

Frederick Winterbotham, who had worked at Government Code and Cypher School during the war, approached the government and asked for permission to reveal the secrets of the work done at Bletchley Park. The intelligence services reluctantly agreed and Winterbotham's book, *The Ultra Secret*, was published in 1974. Permission was now given to Francis Harry Hinsley, to publish his five volume *British Intelligence in the Second World War* (1979-1990). He also published *Codebreakers: the Inside Story of Bletchley Park* (1993), which served to add the flesh and blood excluded from the official account.

One of his students later recalled: "Hinsley was a strikingly rich character, almost a phenomenon of nature, in contrast to his bespectacled and physically slight appearance.... For many of his students, it was Hinsley's analytical skills honed at Bletchley Park that affected them most. Whether in private and always assisting discussion the work of the famous weekly seminar he ran for all interested parties at every level, from behind a thick pall of pipe smoke, he reacted to the wider implications of what had

been discovered or reassessed; and he would comment rapidly, almost electrically, on the true significance of what he had just heard or read. He never forgot any student he had taught or been tutor to, and his students never forgot their exposure to how he thought about things and the often striking language he used to describe what he thought." (18)

Sir Francis Harry Hinsley died of lung cancer at [Addenbrooke's Hospital](#) in [Cambridge](#), on 16th February 1998.

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By John Simkin (john@spartacus-educational.com) © September 1997 (updated December 2014).

Primary Sources

(1) Francis Harry Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War: Volume One (1979-1990)*

By 1937 it was established that... the German Army, the German Navy and probably the Air Force, together with other state organizations like the railways and the SS used, for all except their tactical communications, different versions of the same cypher system - the Enigma machine which had been put on the market in the 1920s but which the Germans had rendered more secure by progressive modifications.

(2) Michael Smith, *Station X: The Codebreakers of Bletchley Park (1998)*

Harry Hinsley had arrived at Bletchley in late 1939 and was immediately put in Phoebe Senyard's care. Unlike many of the dons, he did not have a privileged background. Hinsley was a grammar school boy from Walsall, in the Black Country. His father was a wagoner who drove a horse and cart between the local ironworks and the railway station. A slight, bespectacled young man with wavy hair, who had won a scholarship to St John's College, Cambridge, he was an immediate hit with Senyard.

(3) Francis Harry Hinsley, quoted by Michael Paterson, the author of *Voices of the Codebreakers (2007)*

The Security Officer on the gate used his telephone and summoned up a WAAF officer. She led me across a noble lawn, with on the left a Tudorbethan mansion, on the right a large lake; in front a small office. (It should be noted that the hut numbers not only designated the huts themselves but were also used as cover-names for the work going on in them. When, towards the end of the war, the Hut 3 work was transferred to a brick building, it was still called Hut 3.)

In my initiation stress was laid on the value of work going out from Hut 3. It was "the heart of the matter" and of immense importance. The Enigma had been mastered. The process up to the production of raw decrypts was carried out in Hut 6 next door. It was the task of Hut 3 to evaluate them and put the intelligence they contained into a form suitable for passing to the competent authorities, be they Ministries or Commands.

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(4) Hugh Sebag-Montefiore, *Enigma: The Battle For The Code (2004)*

Frank Birch was head of the German section in Hut 4. He told Hinsley that they were trying to read intercepted German naval messages. The code used by the Germans had not yet been broken. That being the case, Hinsley was to do his best to find out as much as he could from the information they did have about these messages. It was quickly apparent that there was not much evidence to go on. There was the date of the messages, their time of origin and their time of interception, and the radio frequency used by the German morse code operators. Sometimes Hinsley would be told where the messages came from, information which had been gleaned using the Royal Navy's direction finding service.

Using all of the available information, Hinsley worked out that the German Navy only had two radio networks: one for the Baltic and one for outside the Baltic. There did not appear to be a separate network for surface ships and a different network for U-boats. Hinsley could only hope that would change once the Germans began conducting major naval operations. For the moment, he was stuck in a dead end job with no opportunity to make his mark.

(5) Phoebe Senyard, quoted by Michael Smith, the author of *Station X: The Codebreakers of Bletchley Park* (1998)

I can remember quite well showing Harry some of the sorting and how delighted he seemed when he began to recognise the different types of signals. He joined up with Miss Bostock working on frequencies and callsigns. I then had to pass to Harry any strange, new or unknown signals. If I was in difficulty, I knew I could go to Harry. It was a pleasure because he was always interested in everything and took great pains to find out what it was and why. Those were very enjoyable days indeed. We were all very happy and cheerful, working in close cooperation with each other.

(6) Francis Harry Hinsley, quoted by Sinclair McKay, the author of *The Secret Life of Bletchley Park* (2010)

It remained a loose collection of groups rather than forming a single, tidy organisation... Professors, lecturers and undergraduates, chessmasters and experts from the principal museums, barristers and antiquarian booksellers, some of them in uniform and some civilians on the books of the Foreign Office or the Service ministries - such for the most part were the individuals who inaugurated and manned the various cells which sprang up within or alongside the original sections. They contributed by their variety and individuality to the lack of uniformity. There is also no doubt that they thrived on it, as they did on the absence at GC&CS of any emphasis on rank or insistence on hierarchy.

(7) Francis Harry Hinsley, quoted by Michael Paterson, the author of *Voices of the Codebreakers* (2007)

Hut 3 was set up like a miniature factory. At its centre was the Watch Room - in the middle a circular or horseshoe-shaped table, to one side a rectangular table. On the outer rim of the circular table sat the Watch, some half-dozen people. The man in charge, the head of the Watch or Number 1, sat in an obvious directing position at the top of the table. The watchkeepers were a mixture of civilians and serving officers, Army and RAF. At the rectangular table sat serving officers, Army and RAF, one or two of each. These were the Advisers. Behind the head of the Watch was a door communicating with a

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small room where the Duty Officer sat. Elsewhere in the Hut were one large room housing the Index and a number of small rooms for the various supporting parties, the back rooms.

The processes to which the decrypts were submitted were, consecutively, emendation, translation, evaluation, commenting, and signal drafting. The first two were the responsibility of the Watch, the remainder of the appropriate Adviser.

(8) Hugh Sebag-Montefiore, *Enigma: The Battle For The Code* (2004)

Shortly after the sinking of *Glorious*, Hinsley was asked to go up to the Citadel in London, the building in the Mall where the OIC was situated, to explain how his traffic analysis worked. The OIC, which operated in the basement of the Citadel, had its own intelligence team, and Clayton wanted them to be well briefed, so that everyone could react quickly next time Hinsley rang them up. Clayton and Denning must have been surprised when Hinsley was ushered into their office. For standing before them was a man who was young enough to be one of Clayton's grandchildren. Hinsley was acutely aware that his long hair and casual clothing, which no one thought twice about in the laid back dons' common room atmosphere at Bletchley Park, was out of place beside all the spotless naval uniforms and suits worn at the Admiralty. Perhaps that was one reason why Hinsley found that his ideas did not receive a good reception from the junior officers he was supposed to be teaching.

Another reason was that traffic analysis was not as easy as it sounded. Not everyone could cope with hours of searching through incomprehensible enciphered messages in the often vain hope of finding a ray of light hidden amongst the sea of paper. Hinsley on the other hand was well prepared for the job he had been given. His medieval history course at Cambridge had required him to look for the minuscule changes made to the charters he was analysing. His upbringing also helped. He had been brought up to make the most of the little which was available to him. Money had always been in short supply when he was young. His father was an occasional labourer, who spent most of the 1930s out of work. His mother worked as a cleaner, providing just enough to keep the Hinsley family clothed and fed. He was proud of the fact that when he went to Germany in 1939, he managed to survive on a meagre budget of just £5 for the entire summer.

(9) Alec Dakin, letter to Frank Birch (21st October 1940)

ID8G, its relations with us and its attitude to our staff. Here the prime test is Hinsley and his dope; practically we stand or fall with him. I believe that anyone who reads one or two of Hinsley's best Y serials, (especially the *Glorious* one, of course), and bears in mind that A.C.N.S. has been letting him send signals to the fleets, must conclude that there is something in it, that Hinsley's linkages do give him "indications" of future activity, which examination of the bulk of the traffic do not give. But ID8G, not least the day and night watchkeepers, who are the people concerned, seem never to have studied a Y... and if one discusses the validity of the linkage approach with them one has to start at the very first principle, and say that a non-linked message may be dummy, or weather, or "I have anchored because of fog", or even 'The captain's wife has had twins', whereas a linked message is pretty certain to mean something. In their present state of ignorance, these people are not able to interpret and pass on ^{spare information they receive from Hinsley on the watch. That's for 20 years. Values of} his successes ^{is understandable, and it's not} they should dislike him personally is a small matter, but that they should be obstructive is ruinous.

(10) Francis Harry Hinsley, letter to Frank Birch (23rd October 1940)

The only conclusion is that they not only duplicate our work and other people's work, but duplicate it in so aimless and inefficient a manner, that all their time is taken up in groping at the truth, and putting as much of it as is obvious to all on card indexes. If they duplicated in the right spirit, and with some purpose, they would be able to answer questions properly, and also possibly to contribute to general advancement... One reason that prevented them from doing this, appeared to be a competitive spirit, which instead of being of a healthy type, is obviously personal and couched itself in a show of independence and an air of obstruction. It appeared to be based on personal opposition to Bletchley Park. It was increased by the fact that the presence of one person from BP appeared to them to remove all their *raison d'etre*. They felt themselves cut out... Apart from the above, I suspect that another reason for their inadequacy is incapacity, pure and simple. They know facts... But they seem to have no general grasp of these facts in association. They lack imagination. They cannot utilise the knowledge they so busily compile.

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Harry Hinsley

Sir Francis Harry Hinsley *OBE* (26 November 1918 – 16 February 1998) was an English historian and cryptanalyst. He worked at Bletchley Park during the Second World War and wrote widely on the history of international relations and British Intelligence during the Second World War. He was known as Harry Hinsley.

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Early life

Hinsley's father worked in the coal department of the Walsall Co-Op.^[1] His mother Emma Hinsley (née Adey) was a school caretaker, and they lived in Birchills, in the parish of St Andrew's, Walsall. Harry was educated at Queen Mary's Grammar School, Walsall, and in 1937 won a scholarship to read history at St. John's College, Cambridge.^[2] He went on to be awarded a First in part one of the Historical Tripos.^[1]

In August 1939 Hinsley visited his girlfriend in the German city of Koblenz. Police required him to report to the police station daily. However, this requirement was waived following the signing of the German-Soviet Pact. A week later Hinsley was advised by police via his girlfriend's parents to get out of Germany by "tomorrow at the latest". This enabled him to cross the Franco-German border before it was closed. He made the crossing at the bridge between Kehl and Strasbourg. Stripped of his Reichsmarks by German border guards without French Francs or British Pounds in exchange, Hinsley was left penniless. This led to his sleeping on a park bench in France. Hinsley hitch-hiked to Switzerland from where he returned to the United Kingdom. He made his return just before Britain declared war on Germany.^[3] In October 1939, while still at St. John's, he was summoned to an interview with Alastair Denniston, head of the Government Code and Cypher School (GC&CS), and was thereby recruited to Bletchley Park's naval section in Hut 4.^[4]

Harry Hinsley

Born	Francis Harry Hinsley <div>26 November 1918</div> Walsall, Staffordshire, England
Died	16 February 1998 (aged 79) <div>Cambridge, England</div>
Nationality	British
Occupation	Historian
Known for	Cryptography
Title	Sir
Spouse(s)	Hilary Brett-Smith
	Academic background
Alma mater	St John's College, Cambridge
	Academic work
Institutions	Cambridge University <div>1949-65</div>
Notable works	British Intelligence in the Second World War (1979-90); <div>Codebreakers:The inside story of Bletchley Park (1993)</div>

Bletchley Park

At Bletchley Park, Hinsley studied the external characteristics of intercepted German messages, a process sometimes termed "traffic analysis": from call signs, frequencies, times of interception and so forth, he was able to deduce a great deal of information about the structure of Nazi Germany's *Kriegsmarine*'s communication networks, and even about the structure of the German navy itself.^[5]

Hinsley helped initiate a programme of seizing Enigma machines and keys from German weather ships, such as the *Lauenburg*, thereby facilitating Bletchley Park's resumption of interrupted breaking of German Naval Enigma.

In late 1943, Hinsley was sent to liaise with the US Navy in Washington, with the result that an agreement was reached in January 1944 to co-operate in exchanging results on Japanese Naval signals.^[6]

Towards the end of the war, Hinsley, by then a key aide to Bletchley Park chief Edward Travis, was part of a committee which argued for a post-war intelligence agency that would combine both signals intelligence and human intelligence in a single organisation. In the event, the opposite occurred, with GC&CS becoming GCHQ.^[7]

On 6 April 1946, Hinsley married Hilary Brett-Smith, a graduate from Somerville College, Oxford, who had also worked at Bletchley Park, in Hut 8.^[2] They moved to Cambridge after the war where Hinsley had been elected a Fellow at St. John's College.^[1]

Hinsley was awarded the OBE in 1946, and was knighted in 1985.^[2]

On his death, Sir Harry Hinsley was cremated, and his family buried the ashes privately in Cambridge.

Career as a historian

After the war, Hinsley returned to St John's College and lectured in history, being in 1969 appointed *Professor of the History of International Relations*.^[2] From 1979 to 1989 he was Master of St John's College and from 1981 to 1983 he was vice-chancellor of the University of Cambridge.^[8]

In 1962, Hinsley published *Power and the Pursuit of Peace*, which is important as a study of early idealist thought about international relations.^[9]

Hinsley edited the multi-volume official history *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, and argued that Enigma decryption had speeded Allied victory by 1–4 years while not fundamentally altering the war's outcome.

He was criticised by Marian Rejewski^[10] and Gordon Welchman,^[11] who took exception to inaccuracies in Hinsley's accounts of the history of Enigma decryption in the early volumes of his official history, including crucial errors in chronology. Subsequently, a revised account of the Polish, French and British contribution was included in volume 3, part 2.



Photograph of British cryptoanalysts Harry Hinsley, Sir Edward Travis, and John Tiltman

The volumes of *British Intelligence in the Second World War* edited by Hinsley and published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO) London are:

- Volume 1: Its Influence on Strategy and Operations, F. H. Hinsley with E. E. Thomas, C. F. G. Ransome and R. C. Knight, (1979, HMSO) [ISBN 0-11-630933-4](#)
- Volume 2: Its Influence on Strategy and Operations, F. H. Hinsley with E. E. Thomas, C. F. G. Ransome and R. C. Knight, (1981, HMSO) [ISBN 0-11-630934-2](#)
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- Volume 3, Part 2: Its Influence on Strategy and Operations, F. H. Hinsley with E. E. Thomas, C. A. G. Simkins, and C. F. G. Ransom, (1988, HMSO) [ISBN 0-11-630940-7](#)
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- Volume 4: Security and Counter-Intelligence, F. H. Hinsley and C. A. G. Simkins, (1990, HMSO) [ISBN 0-11-630952-0](#)
- Abridged Version, F. H. Hinsley, (1993, HMSO) [ISBN 0-11-630956-3](#) (& 1993, Cambridge University Press) [ISBN 0-521-44304-0](#)

Hinsley also co-edited (with Alan Stripp) and contributed to *Codebreakers: The Inside Story of Bletchley Park*, which contains personal accounts from those who worked at Bletchley Park.^[12]

The Hinsley Memorial Lecture, an annual lecture on an [international relations](#) topic, is held every year at St John's College in memory of Hinsley.^[13]

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External links

- Sir Harry Hinsley: The Influence of ULTRA in the Second World War (<https://web.archive.org/web/19990117024915/http://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/Research/Security/Historical/hinsley.html>)
- Comments on Hinsley's publications (http://intellit.muskingum.edu/uk_folder/ukwwii_folder/ukwwiihinsley.html)

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