

Duncan Barrett

Writer

Duncan Barrett is a writer and editor, specialising in biography and memoir. He grew up in London and studied English at Jesus College, Cambridge. In 2010 he edited the First World War memoirs of pacifist saboteur Ronald Skirth, published as *The Reluctant Tommy*.



Agents

Laura Macdougall
LMacdougall@unitedagents.co.uk

Assistant
Eleanor Horn
ehorn@unitedagents.co.uk
02032140831

Publications

Non-Fiction

Publication Details	Notes
THE GIRLS WHO WENT TO WAR 2015 - 2016 HarperCollins	Sunday Times Bestseller --- The personal accounts of three young women who joined up in 1940. Eighteen-year-old Jessie Ward defied her mother to join the ATS, Margery Pott signed up for the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, and nanny Kathleen Skin the WRNS. They left quiet homes for the rigours of training, the camaraderie of the young women who worked together so closely and to face a war that would change their lives for ever. Overall, more than half a million women served in the armed forces during the Second World War. This book tells the story of just three of them - one from the Army, one from the Navy and one from the Air Force. But in their stories are reflected the lives of hundreds of thousands of others like them - ordinary girls who went to war, wearing their uniforms with pride.

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MEN OF LETTERS 2014 AA Publishing	<p>When the First World War broke out, the Post Office was the biggest employer in the world, with its own company of volunteer part-time soldiers, The Post Office Rifles. Suddenly catapulted into conflict, ordinary postmen and messenger boys found themselves in the trenches of the Western Front, hoping that their own letters would reach home - and relying on the letters and parcels they received for comfort and much-needed boosts to morale. By the war's end, 1,500 of them had been killed. Using the personal stories, letters and diary entries of the men who joined the Post Office Rifles, this is a moving account of how the war touched the lives of ordinary people - how it changed communities, how women took up men's work, and, of course, the vital role the mail played in winning the war.</p>
GI BRIDES 2013 HarperCollins	<p>Sunday Times & New York Times Bestseller --- The “friendly invasion” of Britain by over a million American G.I.s bewitched a generation of young women deprived of male company during the Second World War. With their exotic accents, smart uniforms, and aura of Hollywood glamour, the G.I.s easily conquered their hearts, leaving British boys fighting abroad green with envy. But for girls like Sylvia, Margaret, Gwendolyn, and even the skeptical Rae, American soldiers offered something even more tantalizing than chocolate, chewing gum, and nylon stockings: an escape route from Blitz-ravaged Britain, an opportunity for a new life in affluent, modern America.</p> <p>Through the stories of these four women, G.I. Brides illuminates the experiences of war brides who found themselves in a foreign culture thousands of miles away from family and friends, with men they hardly knew. Some struggled with the isolation of life in rural America, or found their soldier less than heroic in civilian life. But most persevered, determined to turn their wartime romance into a lifelong love affair, and prove to those back home that a Hollywood ending of their own was possible.</p>

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THE SUGAR GIRLS 2012 World All Languages: Collins	<p>Sunday Times Bestseller and Daily Mail Book of the Week ---</p> <p>In the years leading up to and after the Second World War thousands of women left school at fourteen to work in the bustling factories of London's East End. Despite long hours, hard and often hazardous work, factory life afforded exciting opportunities for independence, friendship and romance. Of all the factories that lined the docks, it was at Tate and Lyle's where you could earn the most generous wages and enjoy the best social life, and it was here where The Sugar Girls worked. Through the Blitz and on through the years of rationing The Sugar Girls kept Britain sweet. The work was back-breakingly hard, but Tate & Lyle was more than just a factory, it was a community, a calling, a place of love and support and an uproarious, tribal part of the East End. From young Ethel to love-worn Lillian, irrepressible Gladys to Miss Smith who tries to keep a workforce of flirtatious young men and women on the straight and narrow, this is an evocative, moving story of hunger, hardship and happiness.</p> <p>Tales of adversity, resilience and youthful high spirits are woven together to provide a moving insight into a lost way of life, as well as a timeless testament to the experience of being young and female.</p>
THE RELUCTANT TOMMY: RONALD SKIRTH'S EXTRAORDINARY MEMOIR OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR 2010 UK: Macmillan; German: Rowohlt;	<p>In the First World War, Ronald Skirth was an ordinary tommy. His experiences were like those of many others: fighting in the trenches under constant bombardment, seeing all his friends die around him, suffering under a cowardly commanding officer, enduring shell shock and finally, somehow, surviving.</p> <p>But Skirth's story is more extraordinary than that. For on the Flanders battlefield he had a moment of epiphany when he came across the dead body of a teenaged German soldier. The boy was just like him. His corpse was bizarrely untouched, and in his hand was a photo of his girlfriend, who looked just like Skirth's own sweetheart, Ella.</p> <p>Afterwards Skirth resolved that he would never again help to take a human life. He altered the trajectory of guns so that they fired harmlessly, and embarked on other small acts of sabotage at huge risk to his own life. Under immense pressure from the authorities he suffered breakdowns and attacks of amnesia, but somehow Skirth maintained his campaign of active pacifism, lived out the war, and returned to marry Ella.</p> <p>Making use of Ronald Skirth's letters and postcards to Ella, his contemporary journals and the memoir he wrote in his retirement fifty years later, THE RELUCTANT TOMMY is the fascinating story of a man who stuck by his principles in impossible circumstances, and who had the courage to risk being shot as a 'coward'; an ordinary soldier with a truly remarkable story.</p>

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STAR TREK: THE HUMAN FRONTIER 2000 Polity (UK)/Routledge (USA)	<p>The Independent: Book of the Day ---</p> <p>In a world that has been shrunk by modern communications and transport, Star Trek has maintained the values of western maritime exploration, and the discovery of "Strange New Worlds" in space. This 'Starry Sea' has become a familiar metaphor in the thirty-year history of Star Trek, providing a backdrop to the relentless questioning of human nature.</p> <p>The progressive politics that underpinned the original programme is still very much a part of Star Trek's overall philosophy. The earlier series of Star Trek shows a faith in science and rationalism, and in a benign, liberal leadership. This 'modern' order is now in decline, as we can see in the introduction of religion, mental illness and fragmented identities in Deep Space Nine and Voyager.</p> <p>This book addresses these issues in philosophical, literary, historical and cultural contexts, bringing together an unusual combination of authorial expertise. Written to appeal to those who don't know Star Trek from Star Wars, as well as those with the ferociously detailed knowledge of the true Trekker, it explains the ideas and ideals behind this significant cultural phenomenon.</p> <p>'Star Trek has been subject to a lot of scrutiny by literary and cultural critics ... The bad conscience that many have about serious discussion of popular culture means that Star Trek can still be read simplistically, as a stalking-horse for denouncing the modernity of the American century. The Barretts are more subtle. A television series is a product of a variety of creators and so, inevitably, a rich complex of signs, hints and idealisms. There is no final reading of Star Trek; just an endless journey.' -- The Independent (book of the day)</p>
When The Germans Came 2018 Simon & Schuster	<p>In the summer of 1940, we came perilously close to invasions. The Battle of Britain scuppered Hitler's plans to cross the Channel, but we've been haunted by what might have been ever since. What would a British occupation have looked like?</p> <p>The answer lies closer to home than we might imagine. For five years, the people of Jersey, Guernsey and Sark lived our nightmares as their everyday reality. They watched in horror as their buildings were draped in Swastika flags, their cinemas began showing Nazi propaganda films, and Wehrmacht soldiers goose-stepped down their high streets.</p> <p>Based on interviews with over a hundred men and women who lived through the occupation of the Channel Islands, this book lifts the lid on life under German rule - and how 70,000 British people survived it.</p>