**Dunwich’s own James Bond?**

by Cliff Nicholson

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St. John Ratcliffe Stewart ‘Jock’ Horsfall lived at Cliff House, Dunwich from 1911 to 1940. He was born on the 31 July 1910, at Morningthorpe in Norfolk. The youngest of seven children, he spent his formative years tinkering with motorbikes and racing around the grounds of Cliff House.

He became adept at taking the bikes to pieces, rebuilding them and tuning them to go faster. He had a love for motorcycles and as a young man worked for West Ham Speedway, tuning motorcycles to

great success.

He became a stockbroker. However, his career was not his passion. From motorcycles he developed a love for motor cars. He was becoming an accomplished, self-taught, engineer. He even tuned a car to run on methanol. This was a popular choice with racing drivers at the time as it gave an additional ten per cent of power output. The country lanes around Dunwich echoed to the roar of Jock Horsfall trying out his latest engine rebuild.

Driving fast and furiously, he became a noteworthy figure on the racing scene in the late 1930s. By the time he was 23 years old he owned the love of his life, an Aston Martin. In 1934 he won a Special Award in Class at Brooklands.

Dress code was important to Jock. He seldom wore race leathers or a helmet. His preferred turnout for events was a shirt, tie and sleeveless pullover. Somewhat strangely, he was seriously near-sighted and refused to wear glasses. Although quiet, he had a wonderful sense of humour and loved practical jokes.

Then in 1939, the Nazis threw the world into war. Jock’s mother had been a driver for Sir Eric Holt-Wilson, who had been deputy head of the Home Section of the British Secret Service Bureau during the First World War and throughout the 1920s and ‘30s. The two families remained close’; the

Horsfalls had at one time rented Redgrave Hall, part of the Holt-Wilson’s estate on the Suffolk- Norfolk border.

Along with Vernon Kell (‘K’). Sir Eric Holt-Wilson was sacked from his British Secret Service Bureau post in 1940 by Winston Churchill, but he was then redeployed as commander of what’s now the Ministry of Defence Police. Sir Eric was aware of Jock’s blossoming racing career and wanted a driver with a difference; someone who was utterly discreet

and could drive fast. Jock landed himself a unique position. He drove British agents around the country, collecting them from remote airstrips. He collected noteworthy German prisoners and took them to secretive meetings. Key members of the military were regular passengers. Other roles involved checking out security levels at British high-security establishments.

Whilst not given an official level of authority, he would report his findings to the commanding officer of the site and expect action. He became respected at all levels. Jock’s attributes landed him a rather special job. He was told by MI5 to collect a cargo in his Ford van, reputedly tuned to reach 100mph. Then he was to drive the 430 miles from London to Holy

Loch in Scotland as quickly as possible. This cargo, a sealed container, held a body stored in dry ice. The corpse was dressed in a naval uniform. In his pockets were identification papers, letters from his fictional fiancée, restaurant receipts and other personal items. This gave a new identity to

the real dead person, a Welsh tramp who had died in London from pneumonia. Attached to the wrist by lock and chain was an official briefcase.

Jock drove at night (no mean task with blacked-out

headlamps) and delivered the body to *HMS Seraph*, a submarine. It then silently slid out of port.

On the morning of April 30 1943, the body was gently lowered into the sea off the southerly coast of Spain. Spain was a neutral country but had many Nazi sympathizers. A few hours later it was found by a Spanish fisherman and taken to the authorities ashore. They quickly identified the body

as that of Major William Martin of the Royal Marines.

German Intelligence was informed and they took a special interest in the security briefcase. They opened the case, the contents were copied and

rushed to Berlin for analysis. The body and case were handed to the British consul. ‘Major Martin’ was buried with full military honours in Huelva. The grave can be visited to this day and now carries the name of the Welsh vagrant Glyndwr Michael.

This MI5 covert activity was codenamed Operation Mincemeat. It was orchestrated by a naval intelligence officer, Lieutenant-Commander Ewen Montagu. It was the perfect double bluff. The documents in the briefcase detailed plans for the Allied invasion of Sardinia and Greece, with a

bluff invasion of Sicily, to be staged as a diversion. This deception meant the Nazis moved more than 100,000 troops to Sardinia and Greece, making the actual invasion of Sicily easier and considerably shortening the war. When the invasion of Sicily started, just ten weeks after the

discovery of ‘Major Martin’, the Nazis soon understood it was just a diversion.

Two films have been made about Operation Mincemeat and the deception. The 1956 film *The Man Who Never Was* was based on the book written by Ewen Montagu a decade after the event. The 2021 film *Operation Mincemeat* and more recently a West End musical, staged at the Fortune

Theatre, have brought the story up to date.

After the war Jock returned to motor racing. It was difficult in Britain because of continued rationing, but the Continent was more open. In 1946, along with a co-driver, he won the Belgian Spa Grand Prix. Additionally, he won the Grand Prix Automobile de Belgique, driving his Aston Martin, renowned as “The Black Car".

In 1948, Jock was employed by Aston Martin. Partnered

with Leslie Johnson, they won the Spa 24-Hour race, driving an Aston Martin DB1 prototype. The following year he again entered the Spa 24-Hour race, this time with co-driver Paul Frère, who had never driven an Aston Martin before. Jock decided to drive the entire race on his own. He

completed 1,821 miles at an average speed of 76.25 mph. He finished in fourth position in what was hailed by all his race colleagues as an outstanding achievement. This car became known as the “Spa

Special”.

Sadly, on 20 August 1949, whilst racing at Silverstone, Jock’s ERA car clipped a straw bale whilst going into Stowe Corner on the 13th lap. The car rolled several times. Jock, trapped underneath, was killed instantly, his neck broken. It was the first fatality at Silverstone. He was just 39.

Jock is buried at St. James’s Church, here in Dunwich. Cliff House is now a holiday park. Jock’s beloved black Aston Martin was retained by the Horsfall family and was partially restored in 1973. It is now owned by an Aston Martin enthusiast and is one of the most famous cars Aston

Martin ever built. The Aston Martin Owners Club has an annual Horsfall Trophy event. The trophy is a model of ‘The Black Car’. It is of little surprise to learn that the Horsfall family often presents the trophy.

Ian Fleming, author of the James Bond spy novels, worked in naval intelligence with MI5 during the war and was heavily involved in Operation Mincemeat. It’s possible that he and Jock met. The similarities between Jock and James Bond are striking: Classic dress code, a privileged lifestyle, spying, Aston Martin cars and fast driving.

CAPTION: **“Jock” Horsfall holds cups won during the 1946 Belgian Grand Prix**

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