

**OBITUARY**  
**Christopher Seton-Watson\***  
**1918–2007**

Christopher Seton-Watson, who died on 8 September 2007, was the founder of the Association for the Study of Modern Italy (ASMI). He came from a Scottish family of distinguished historians. His father, R.W. Seton-Watson, was *the* authority on South-Eastern Europe, and his brother Hugh, in his turn established himself as an authority on Eastern Europe more generally, including the Soviet Union.

Christopher was born in 1918 and educated at Winchester. He went up to New College, Oxford, to read P.P.E. [Politics, Philosophy and Economics] in 1937. Like many other undergraduates, in 1939 he did not return but was called up because of the outbreak of the Second World War. He served in the British Army, Royal Artillery, from 1939 to 1945, first in Belgium and France: he was evacuated from Dunkirk on 30 May. In late 1940 he was posted to Egypt and served in the disastrous Greek campaign during which he was awarded the Military Cross. He returned to North Africa in the summer of 1941 and took part in all the campaigns against Rommel, including El Alamein and the Battle of Tunis, and was wounded. In March 1944 he was sent to Italy and from then until the Liberation, fought his way up the peninsula. He ended his military career as a major commanding a battery.

Christopher's wartime diaries and letters, published by Buckland Press in 1993 as *Dunkirk-Alamein-Bologna: Letters and Diaries of an Artilleryman, 1939–1945*, are extraordinarily vivid and gripping. He captures place and situation brilliantly, and makes many shrewd judgements about the people he met. In his Foreword to the book, Sir Michael Howard says this of Christopher:

Christopher Seton-Watson had a good war in every sense of the word. It was a good war in a military sense, for he performed with constant efficiency and courage. . . . It was a Good War in the moral sense, for he was fighting evil, and he never doubted it, no amount of historical revisionism has proved him wrong. And it was a good war in the human sense; his positive experiences and achievements far outweighed the negative aspects inseparable from military activity.

He returned to Oxford after demobilisation and was elected to a fellowship and lectureship in Politics at Oriel College, where he taught from 1946 until 1983. There he started his studies of Liberal Italy. The result, his groundbreaking and authoritative work *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism*, was published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson in 1967 and quickly became a classic. It is still essential reading for students of Italy and the translation is still on sale in Italian bookshops. Christopher supervised generations of PhD students who would later become historians and political scientists of Italy, and inspired

and encouraged others. In 1983, Christopher was made a *Commendatore* of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic.

In 1982 he founded the Association for the Study of Modern Italy to bring together geographers, historians, political and social scientists and others teaching and researching on Italy, because, as he said, 'We only seem to meet in the bookshops of Rome', and he served as its first Chair from 1982 until 1987. In 1994 he was delighted when ASMI published the first edition of its own scholarly journal. He regularly attended the annual conference and AGM until a couple of years ago when he had increasing difficulties with hearing and walking.

Christopher was a charming, kind, modest and shy man but a great conversationalist when he got going. I remember once travelling with Christopher in a little *locale* through Umbria on our way to a conference in Spoleto. Suddenly, he leapt up and rushed to the window on the other side of the carriage, shouting in a loud voice, 'Yes, I remember this place. We set up our guns over *there!*' pointing to a small hill town. Much to the astonishment of the other passengers he continued to move about the carriage explaining to me that in one village we passed the Fascist mayor had been 'an absolute b\*\*\*\*\*d'.

The Association, and Italian studies in the United Kingdom more generally, owe an enormous debt to Christopher.

John Pollard  
*University of Cambridge*

\*This is a modified version of an obituary which appeared in *The Guardian* on 4 December 2007 and we are grateful for their permission to publish it.