BOOK REVIEWS


Most readers will be familiar with the trend in the movie industry towards making movies about movies, for example *The Making of Forest Gump, The Making of Apollo 13*, and so on.

This is, essentially, what *Searching for Frederick and adventures along the way* is all about. The book is an account of the research done by Verner and his wife Gillian into the life and times of Frederick Stewart (1836-1889) culminating in the publication of Gillian’s book *The Golden Needle: The Biography of Frederick Stewart (1836-1889)* in 1997 (reviewed in JHKBRAS, Vol. 38).

*The Golden Needle* was an excellent book and a lot of effort has gone into *Searching for Frederick* as well. I’m told that it’s Verner’s first book - outside of textbooks, that is - and it has been written in a bellettristic style.

Verner’s command of the English language is superb as well it might be because, amongst his many accomplishments, he is Chairman of the English-Speaking Union in Hong Kong.

The book is a ‘...guide to processes of historical and biographical research for family historians and for those interested in “life-writing,” history and language education. The book...introduces the reader to certain libraries, archives, record offices, societies and other repositories, and explains how to use, join or contact them.’ There’s also a lot of peripheral information included as well.

In his foreword, Sir James Hodge states in part: ‘Verner Bickley writes in a mostly light-hearted vein, with a gentle humour, whether about the loss of a much-loved pair of cotton socks or his ‘wig.’ The book is peopled with astrologers, landladies, hoteliers and others and takes the reader on a trail after Stewart, with many diversions including the Knights Templar, Culloden, whiskey distilleries, ‘Seven Deadly
Sin Cocktails’ and advice never to whistle in a stone frigate.’

The majority of the book concerns itself with an account of the Bickleys’ 10 years of research around the world, but notably in Hong Kong, England and Scotland. They travelled many miles and visited countless places and institutions. The result is what is probably the definitive biography of Frederick Stewart. Searching for Frederick also contains a lot of anecdotal information and a large number of ‘Notes for Searchers.’

It is on sale at bookshops throughout Hong Kong.

PETER HALLIDAY

1 Belles-lettres: Writings or studies of a literary nature, especially essays and criticisms.