



In the Shadow of the Alabama: The British Foreign Office and the American Civil War by Renata Eley Long.

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A cloud of intrigue already hung over the *Enrica*, No. 290, when the vessel pushed back from the Laird Brothers Merseyside docks in late July 1862, ostensibly for a brief trial run. When it failed to return to dock and instead proceeded to rendezvous with Capt. Raphael Semmes in the Azores, the ship, now redesignated CSS *Alabama*, cruised into the annals of Civil War maritime history, leaving in its wake an enduring mystery. How had Confederate agent James Bulloch orchestrated the “escape” of the ship from British waters before the arrival of an order from the Crown to detain it for violating British neutrality? Was there an informant in the Foreign Office who had alerted Bulloch in the nick of time?

To answer these questions, historian Renata Long revives a story that began with Bulloch’s mention in his memoirs of an unnamed informant; Brooks Adams (son of the American minister to Great Britain during the Civil War) later identified Bulloch’s informant as Foreign Office clerk Victor Buckley.¹ The notion that a British mole was complicit in the launching of a ship that wrought substantial damage on both Union shipping and Anglo-American relations gained credibility when adopted by historian E.D. Adams a decade later.² In the late twentieth century, Frank J. Merli, the accepted authority on the *Alabama*, joined skeptics in downplaying the Buckley theory by diluting the significance of an alleged leak with the volume of evidence available to the astute Bulloch that a detention order was coming.³

Long promises new evidence for the significance of Buckley’s role in the *Alabama*’s escape:

Was Victor Buckley really the mole the Confederates claimed to have on their payroll, and was the British government’s support for the Confederacy such that it would stand by while his fateful message winged its way to Liverpool? New perspectives on British attitudes toward the American Civil War and fresh evidence revealed from hitherto neglected sources now point to the interesting conclusion that the young Foreign Office clerk was anything but insignificant. (2)

Although Long alerts the reader in a “Note for Historians” that she is not an academic, her reputation as a specialist on the *Alabama* was established long ago by her collaboration with Merli. Her effort to revive the notion of a Foreign Office mole must, therefore, be taken seriously.

The book’s twenty brief chapters concentrate on developing characters—some relevant, some simply interesting—and recounting the familiar story of Confederate efforts to secure British sympathies, arms, and finances. American officials like the minister to Britain, Charles Francis

1. In “The Seizure of the Laird Rams,” *Mass. Hist. Soc. Proc.* 45 (1911-12) 260.

2. In *Great Britain and the American Civil War* (NY: Longman, Green, 1925).

3. Merli’s findings were posthumously published by David Fahey in *The Alabama, British Neutrality, and the American Civil War* (Bloomington: Indiana U Pr, 2004). Merli noted that his collaboration with Long on the Matthew James Butcher memoir “triggered” his “decision to write this book” (34).

Adams, and the Consul in Liverpool, Thomas Dudley, likewise play their parts in Long's story of arms dealers, detectives, spies, lawyers, and diplomats. Confederate operatives, including arms procurement agent Caleb Huse and propagandist Henry Hotze, were bent on circumventing Britain's neutrality law, the Foreign Enlistment Act, while Adams and Dudley and their detectives/spies worked to expose the activities of Confederate agents, especially Bulloch, in order to convince the Lord Palmerston government to intervene.

After a brief biography in the first chapter, Buckley makes only cameo appearances for much of the book, as Long attempts to examine all the factors straining Anglo-American relations during the war. Everything from the behavior of the various operatives (inside and outside Britain), to the Trent Affair, the *Alexandra*, and the *Shenandoah* is discussed to some degree, before Long turns to the evidence gathering in the aftermath of the war to make the US case against Britain in the *Alabama* Claims dispute.

The pages devoted directly to the author's thesis are built on a few lines from Confederates describing a well-placed source of information, and, for Buckley specifically, a less-than-reliable British informant named Henry Hudson. Hudson told the American legation secretary in London, Benjamin Moran, that he had worked with Hotze on the Confederate propaganda paper the *Index*, but "had been badly treated by the rebels and was now disposed to turn against them. His principal reason for calling at the legation was to sell information" (148).

After some extraneous detail about the female Confederate spy Belle Boyd and her love life, Long assesses Moran's claim (in his diary) that he had dispatched Hudson, then a paid informant, to ascertain the "the name of the person who furnished the rebels with information of the intention of the British government to stop '290' and thus enabled them to get that ship away from Liverpool and avoid her seizure" (151). Long dismisses Hudson's initial report on a certain Buckley family as unrelated to Victor. She likewise concludes that a Liverpool firm with origins in Georgia and activities Britain was not involved in the escape of the *Alabama*.

Although Hudson's reports were riddled with errors, Moran believed a note copied by Hudson and brought back from France had "more than a whiff of authenticity" (159). Could this note, dated 26 July 1862, from Buckley to Hotze, stating that the "order will be issued 'immediately' for Liverpool" (159), be the much-desired proof of Foreign Office collusion? His superiors only briefly shared Moran's excitement over this possibility. In the end, Hudson, that "double distilled rascal" (168), failed to produce the promised original documents, and the illusory evidence of a mole faded into a footnote as the postwar negotiations over the *Alabama* Claims dragged on into the early 1870s.

The final chapter is a fitting conclusion to a story founded more on fiction than fact: in a discussion of Arthur Conan Doyle's writings about naval treaties and Foreign Office scandals, the author unpersuasively adduces similarities Buckley shared with Doyle's characters.

In the Shadow of the Alabama contributes to the growing literature on Civil War diplomacy though its interesting profiles of sometimes obscure figures and useful survey of Anglo-American interactions over shipbuilding and arms distribution. As for the significance of Buckley to Bulloch's orchestration of the escape of the *Alabama*, however, the evidence promised is shrouded by caveats from the source. Though Renata Long has renewed the debate over the existence of a mole and contended that Buckley's role "was anything but insignificant," she has not shown that he was directly implicated in Bulloch's decision to extricate the *Alabama* from Birkenhead.