



14th Levantine Heritage Foundation Zoom lecture gathering with guest speaker Ian Lyster
28 September 2021, 6pm (UK time)

The Lyster family in Constantinople/Istanbul 1884-1980

My grandfather, Alfred James Lyster (1860-1949) was sent from London to Constantinople in about 1886, to join the Imperial Ottoman Bank, and married there in 1887, and my father - Henry Newbolt Lyster, was born there in 1888. My father also joined the OB - in London-, and was sent in 1915 to repatriate the gold bullion from the Paris branch of the bank before the Germans arrived. He had written an account of his strange journey back to the UK with his valuable "cargo", complaining that he could not get enough to eat on the train journey North to Calais!

Earlier, he had also been sent to France to offer an emissary of the Imperial Ottoman Government, 100 million Turkish pounds to "stay on our side", but the meeting did not take place, and the Turks then accepted another offer of 2 million in gold from the Germans (Great Powers); apparently only one million was actually paid, but by then the die had been cast.

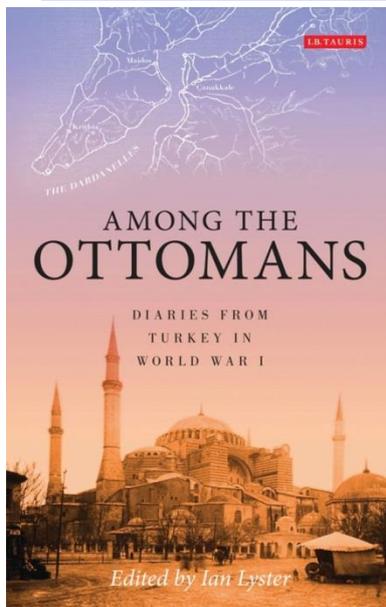
Still working for the OB in London, he joined the local "Territorials" and was commissioned into a dubious outfit called "The Sportsman's Battalion", on a training night in Essex, they were awakened from a short rest by a "Zeppelin" flying over. Eventually being told they would be embarking on a ship and to a secret location - this proved to be Mudros, and then on to Suvla Bay so my father found himself back in Turkey. Once on shore he was put in charge of some Lancashire Fusiliers. With the withdrawal/retreat from the campaign, he was transferred to the Intelligence Corps as his knowledge of local languages was considered too important than to move him to the Western Front. He negotiated with the local Nationalist forces before the Sultan was deposed.

His diaries continue in length covering the Dardanelles campaign, and after the armistice he was appointed as Military Governor of Eastern Thrace, with a French General being the same for Western Thrace. His mother had been in Constantinople during the whole of the war - as a Christian, she was allowed to take in German lodgers!, and reported to the Dutch (neutral) Legation to get funds. She also kept a (hand-written) diary, which I summarised in my book "Among the Ottomans".

My father stayed in the city and took-up as a commercial agent for various UK firms, but I feel still had a minor espionage role as he (with his new wife and my brother) were expelled from Turkey in 1935.

Following the 1945 Armistice, I was living with my mother and brother in Exeter when dad was about to be demobbed, but the RAF were hoping to sell Vampire jets to the Turkish airforce and as they had no Turkish-speaking officers, dad was moved to an RAF unit back to Turkey and my mother and I followed him there in 1947. A great stroke of luck for her to be able to re-unite with her local family.

Booking essential: <https://ian-lyster-presentation.eventbrite.co.uk>



Ian Lyster born in London attended the English High School for Boys in Istanbul. He went to a UK boarding school from 1951-55, and returned to Istanbul for the summer holidays each year. His mother was from local Italian stock and the family owned property where they enjoyed pleasant times. He had a career in the UK book-printing industry.

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