

## Response to Angela Reid's presentation about the Mitford Sisters

From Geoff Kennedy

I have very much enjoyed reading about the Mitford Sisters, particularly as my knowledge previously was sparse and limited to Unity and Diana and, vaguely, Nancy. With six of them, it is a massive subject..

Their stories worked for me on several levels: there is, of course the lifestyle and expectations of the minor aristocracy at that time, including the interrelationships and mutual backscratching; in addition, it provided a useful window into the views held by many people then on communism, fascism and Hitler and gave a counterbalance to the perception that he was just a rabid demagogue; also the effect of the second world war and the deaths that took place. It is generally informative to see how two of the sisters, Unity and Diana, clearly very intelligent, could become so attached to Hitler and Mosley that they remained blind to their excesses and excused and justified their actions. Decca's attachment to communism, which is easy to dismiss as an upper class fad (and I have some sympathy with that!) also reflected the drive, intelligence and passion that she had, but, as with the other five, to whom society had little to offer other than finding a husband and producing an heir. Above all, though, the realisation of what an enormous talent existed in those six siblings and their achievements, without much of a formal education. It is possible, I suppose, that today the education system would have knocked some of the individuality and eccentricity out of them, but to operate a society that effectively denied them the constructive outlets they needed was a loss to them and to the country at large.

This, presumably, was replicated elsewhere, as it had been for centuries and highlights the nonsense of denying the talents of half of the population to the disbenefit of the nation at large. Their lives were certainly full of incident and no little adventure and the relationships between them were complex. Very enjoyable.