Patrick Leigh Fermor
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Patrick Leigh Fermor in 1966

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Born</th>
<th>Patrick Michael Leigh Fermor</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11 February 1915</td>
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<td></td>
<td>London, England</td>
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<td>Died</td>
<td>10 June 2011 (aged 96)</td>
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<td>Dumbleton, England</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Author, scholar and soldier</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>British</td>
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<tr>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Travel</td>
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<td>Notable Works</td>
<td>A Time of Gifts</td>
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<td>Notable Awards</td>
<td>Knight Bachelor; Distinguished Service Order;</td>
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<td>Officer of the Order of the British Empire</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spouse</td>
<td>Hon. Joan Elizabeth Rayner</td>
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Sir Patrick Michael Leigh Fermor, DSO, OBE (11 February 1915 – 10 June 2011), also known as Paddy Fermor, was a British author, scholar and soldier who played a prominent role behind the lines in the Cretan resistance during the Second World War. He was widely regarded as “Britain's greatest living travel writer” during his lifetime, based on books such as *A Time of Gifts* (1977). A BBC journalist once described him as ”a cross between Indiana Jones, James Bond and Graham Greene.
Early life and education

He was born in London, the son of Sir Lewis Leigh Fermor, a distinguished geologist, and Muriel Aeyleen, daughter of Charles Taaffe Ambler. Shortly after his birth, his mother and sister left to join his father in India, leaving the infant Patrick in England with a family in Northamptonshire. He did not meet his family in person until he was four years old. As a child, Leigh Fermor had problems with academic structure and limitations. As a result, he was sent to a school for "difficult children". He was later expelled from The King's School, Canterbury, when he was caught holding hands with a green-grocer’s daughter.

His last report from The King's School noted that the young Leigh Fermor was “a dangerous mixture of sophistication and recklessness.” He continued learning by reading texts in Greek, Latin, Shakespeare and History, with the intention of entering the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. Gradually he changed his mind, deciding to become an author instead, and in the summer of 1933 relocated to Shepherd Market in London, living with a few friends. Soon, faced with the challenges of an author’s life in London and rapidly draining finances, he set upon leaving for Europe.

Early travels

At the age of 18, Leigh Fermor decided to walk the length of Europe, from the Hook of Holland to Constantinople. He set off on 8 December 1933, less than a year after Hitler had come to power in Germany, with a few clothes, several letters of introduction, the Oxford Book of English Verse and a volume of Horace’s Odes. He slept in barns and shepherds’ huts, but also was invited by landed gentry and aristocracy into the country houses of Central Europe. He experienced hospitality in many monasteries along the way. Two of his later travel books, A Time of Gifts (1977) and Between the Woods and the Water (1986), were about this journey. A book on the final part of his journey was unfinished at the time of Leigh Fermor’s death, but was published as The Broken Road: Travels from Bulgaria to Mount Athos in September 2013 by John Murray. The book draws on Leigh Fermor’s diary at the time and on an early draft he wrote in the 1960s.Ⅲ

Leigh Fermor arrived in Constantinople on 1 January 1935, then continued to travel around Greece. In March, he was involved in the campaign of Royalist forces in Macedonia against an attempted Republican revolt. In Athens met Balasha Cantacuzène (Bălaşa Cantacuzino), a Romanian Phanariote noblewoman, with whom he fell in love. They shared an old watermill outside the city looking out towards Poros, where she painted and he wrote. They moved on to Baleni Galati, the Cantacuzene house in Moldavia, where they were living at the outbreak of the Second World War.

Second World War

As an officer cadet, Leigh Fermor trained alongside Derek Bond and Iain Moncrieffe, and later joined the Irish Guards. Due to his knowledge of modern Greek, he was commissioned in the General List in August 1940 and became a liaison officer in Albania. He fought in Crete and mainland Greece. During the German occupation, he returned to Crete three times, once by parachute. He was one of a small number of Special Operations Executive (SOE) officers posted to organise the island’s resistance to the occupation. Disguised as a shepherd and nicknamed Michalis or Filedem, he lived for over two years in the mountains. With Captain Bill Stanley Moss as his second in command, Leigh Fermor led the party that in 1944 captured and evacuated the German commander, General Heinrich Kreipe. There is a memorial commemorating Kreipe’s abduction near Archanes in Crete.
Moss featured the events of the Cretan capture in his book *Ill Met by Moonlight* (The 2014 edition contains an Afterword written by Leigh Fermor in 2001, setting the context of the operation.) It was later adapted into a film by the same name. It was directed & produced by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger and released in 1957. In the film, Leigh Fermor was portrayed by Dirk Bogarde. Leigh Fermor's own account *Abducting A General - The Kreipe Operation and SOE in Crete* was published in October 2014.

**Wartime honours and legacy**

- Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE)
- Distinguished Service Order (DSO)
- Honorary Citizen of Heraklion, of Kardamyli and of Gytheio

The National Archives in London holds copies of Leigh Fermor's wartime dispatches from occupied Crete in file number HS 5/728.

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**Post war**

In 1950, Leigh Fermor published his first book, *The Traveller's Tree*, about his post-war travels in the Caribbean. The book won the Heinemann Foundation Prize for Literature and established his career path, although it has received negative attention for its approach to racial issues. It was quoted extensively in *Live and Let Die*, by Ian Fleming. He went on to write several further books of his journeys, including *Mani* and *Roumeli*, of his travels on mule and foot around remote parts of Greece.

Leigh Fermor translated the manuscript *The Cretan Runner* written by George Psychoundakis, a dispatch runner on Crete during the war, and helped Psychoundakis get his work published. Fermor also wrote a novel, *The Violins of Saint-Jacques*, which was adapted as an opera by Malcolm Williamson. His friend Lawrence Durrell, in *Bitter Lemons* (1957), recounts how, during the Cypriot insurgency against continued British rule in 1955, Leigh Fermor visited Durrell's villa in Bellapais, Cyprus:

> "After a splendid dinner by the fire he starts singing, songs of Crete, Athens, Macedonia. When I go out to refill the ouzo bottle...I find the street completely filled with people listening in utter silence and darkness. Everyone seems struck dumb. 'What is it?' I say, catching sight of Frangos. 'Never have I heard of Englishmen singing Greek songs like this!' Their reverent amazement is touching; it is as if they want to embrace Paddy wherever he goes."

After many years together, Leigh Fermor was married in 1968 to the Honourable Joan Elizabeth Rayner (née Eyres Monsell), daughter of Bolton Eyres-Monsell, 1st Viscount Monsell. She accompanied him on many of his travels until her death in Kardamyli in June 2003, aged 91. They had no children. They lived part of the year in their house in an olive grove near Kardamyli in the Mani Peninsula, southern Peloponnese, and part of the year in Gloucestershire.
Leigh Fermor was knighted in the 2004 New Years Honours. In 2007, he said that, for the first time, he had decided to work using a typewriter, having written all his books longhand until then. The house at Kardamyli was featured in the 2013 film Before Midnight.

Death and funeral
Leigh Fermor was noted for his strong physical constitution, even though he smoked 80 to 100 cigarettes a day. Although in his last years he suffered from tunnel vision and wore hearing aids, he remained physically fit up to his death and dined at table on the last evening of his life. For the last few months of his life he suffered from a cancerous tumour, and in early June 2011 he underwent a tracheotomy in Greece. As death was close, he expressed a wish to die in England and he died there, aged 96, on 10 June 2011, the day after his return. His funeral took place at St Peter's Church, Dumbleton, Gloucestershire on 16 June 2011. A Guard of Honour was provided by serving and former members of the Intelligence Corps, and a bugler from the Irish Guards sounded the Last Post and Reveille. Leigh Fermor is buried next to his wife in the churchyard at Dumbleton.

Awards and legacy

- 1950, Heinemann Foundation Prize for Literature for The Traveller’s Tree
- 1978, WH Smith Literary Award for A Time of Gifts.
- 1991, elected an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature
- 1995, Chevalier, Ordre des Artes et des Lettres
- 2004, accepted the knighthood (Knight Bachelor) which he had declined in 1991.
- 2004, awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award of the British Guild of Travel Writers.
- 2007, the Greek government made him Commander of the Order of the Phoenix
- His life and work were profiled by the travel writer Benedict Allen in the documentary series Travellers’ Century (2008) on BBC Four.
- A documentary film on the Cretan resistance The 11th Day (2003) contains extensive interview segments with Leigh Fermor in which he recounted his service in the S.O.E. and his activities on Crete, including the capture of General Kreipe.