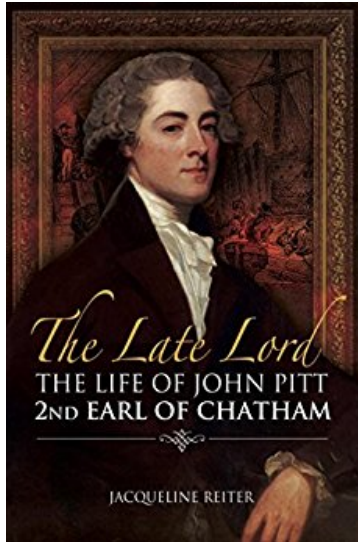


## The Napoleon Series Reviews

Reiter, Jacqueline. *The Late Lord: the Life of John Pitt, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Chatham*. Barnsley (UK): Pen & Sword History, 2017. ISBN# 9781473856950. Hardcover. \$39.95/£19.99



The life of John Pitt, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Chatham, was always overshadowed by his famous father and equally famous younger brother, who each dominated British politics for a generation. While these connections gave him great opportunities, they also came at a price, for he was repeatedly required to sacrifice his own career, both as a soldier and a politician, to the interests of the family. When at last, after his brother's death, he emerged as a figure in his own right, the result was the military disaster at Walcheren and his subsequent resignation in disgrace. He sank into obscurity, remembered, if at all, as a slothful general whose quarrels with his naval counterpart were responsible for the failure of the 'Grand

Expedition' of 1809:

Lord Chatham with his sword undrawn,  
Stood waiting for Sir Richard Strachan,  
Sir Richard, longing to be at 'em,  
Was waiting too – for whom? Lord Chatham.

Even serious historians have seldom paused to consider Chatham's role in events apart from Walcheren and the subsequent enquiry, and have been content to attribute all his actions – or the lack of them – to indolence and a deep seated dislike of activity, his own or others. Jacqueline Reiter is the first writer to go beyond this cliché and explore Chatham's personality and views in depth. In less skillful hands the result might have been a crude and unconvincing attempt at rehabilitation, but Reiter is a fine and perceptive historian, who does not hesitate to acknowledge Chatham's many faults, but who shows that this was not always the whole story. Her Chatham is a fully rounded figure, a man whose ill-treatment by those he most trusted made him a suspicious and unhelpful colleague; and a husband whose devoted care of a seriously ill and much loved wife was one of the most engaging features of his life. Reiter accepts that as a minister Chatham was often dilatory and generally averse to reform, but also demonstrates that he had firm views on policy, and sometimes used procrastination rather than argument as a means of getting his way, or ensuring that he was included in discussions over strategic policy. Chatham was not primarily responsible for the failure at Walcheren, and nor was Sir Richard Strachan, but neither of them showed much ability in overcoming the formidable difficulties they faced. It is characteristic of Reiter's work that she does not stop at the easy answer that

excuses Chatham from the principal blame, but goes on to ask the further, more difficult question that produces a more nuanced and satisfying answer.

*The Late Lord* is based on impressive research in the archives and published sources and the author is completely at home in the period. Reiter's judgment is thoughtful, perceptive and well balanced, while her prose is lively and entertaining. After two hundred years of neglect, Chatham has been immensely fortunate in being the subject of such a fine biography.

Reviewed by [Rory Muir](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: March 2017