



Alresford Historical & Literary Society

NEWSLETTER 1st July 2021



THE SOCIETY'S PLANS & NEWS

We are now closer to a time when we can meet again “properly”. The Methodist Church is unable to take bookings, not just because of Covid restrictions but also one of their rooms has a leaking roof! Moreover that venue, whilst excellent in many ways, has a limited capacity for our increased membership. We have been exploring other options for our November meeting and have agreed in principle to meet in St John’s Church on 17th November with a live talk by someone special! This will of course be subject to detailed negotiation and good behaviour by Covid! We may be able to simulcast by Zoom so those unwilling to meet do not feel pressured to do so. In the meantime we’ll continue with Zoom meetings every month for July, August, September and October.

OUR NEXT MEETING – Wed 21st July

"International Influences on Southampton Through Time" Wed 21st July 7.30 pm
An online history talk with “See Southampton” tour guide **Katie Belo dos Santos**.



“This talk will encompass ten centuries of foreign influences on the city of Southampton: from merchants to royal visits in medieval and Tudor times, and from the French Huguenots to Paganini and Garibaldi in 1800s, not forgetting the two million troops who passed by in 1944 and our students from overseas!”

Here’s the link opening Jul 21, 2021 07:15 PM

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81146076409?pwd=Mnp3bXljN21hSVFUb0dhdXhLN3JtUT09>

A REVIEW (by Glenn) OF OUR LAST MEETING 16th June 2021

44 computers were connected, around 70 members (counting couples).

“The Portland Spy Ring”

by Stephen Dalziel

Stephen Dalziel currently heads DLC, a training & consultancy organisation, but has a background as a Russian expert – Russian Studies at the University of Leeds, Soviet Studies Research Group at RMA Sandhurst, BBC Russian Affairs Analyst and then Executive Director of the Russo-British Chamber of Commerce.



We were very lucky to have attracted such a high calibre presenter to both inform and entertain us with the story (as far as it can be told) of the Portland Spy Ring which obtained Royal naval secrets for the Soviet Union of the late 1950s. The tale was of greed (disgruntled P/O Harry Houghton & his lover Ethel Gee), ideology (dedicated Communists & antiquarian booksellers “Peter & Helen Kroger”, actually Morris & Lona Cohen) and professionalism (“Canadian businessman Gordon Lonsdale”, actually KGB officer Konon Molody).

The assertion that Alresford Public Convenience was used as a drop box was thoroughly discussed and found plausible – though the details on the memorial plaque would seem not wholly accurate. The greater mystery was that our security services did not apparently think that the alcoholic Houghton, living well beyond his means, was a security risk, but eventually a tip-off from Poland and his brash amateurism led to the downfall of the professionals. Not all the associated documents have been released, so more information may come to light. [GG]



FORUM MEETINGS

Wed 18th August – to be advised (Glenn’s working on it!)

Wed 15th September – an online (culinary!) celebration of De Lucy Day
Bishop De Lucy (or De Luci) died in September 1204 - information to follow.

Wed 20th October – (Zoom) “Charles Kingsley & the Water Babies” by Peter Covey-Crump

Wed 17th November ‘Unremarked Ancient Curiosities in Alresford’ by Peter Pooley

GLIMPSES OF ALRESFORD'S PAST (4) - by Brian Tippett

ALRESFORD'S FIRES

"We are informed that the Town of Alton in Hampshire, tho' but a small Place, has collected £50 for Relief of the Sufferers by the late Fire at Alresford." (Report in a regional newspaper.)

Alresford's great fire in May 1689, which destroyed almost the whole town, is well known. But this newspaper report of Alton's generosity relates to another almost forgotten fire forty-seven years later, in May 1736. Although this was less extensive than the previous fire it was still immensely destructive. It began in a brewhouse and at first it was wrongly rumoured that three people had been lost. A few weeks later another newspaper summed up the destruction in these words:

"The fire at Alresford in Hampshire, of which we lately gave an account, burnt to the Ground seventeen Houses and fifty-six Outhouses, Barns, Malhouses, Stables, &c. with a great quantity of Corn, Hay, Malt, Stock of various sorts, and Household Goods; twelve other Dwelling-Houses were greatly damaged. The Fire began at one end of the town, and the wind being then very high, and in Quarter to drive the Flames directly up the high Street, the whole Town must have been inevitably in Ashes, had not the Wind providentially changed to a different Point."

No wonder that, ever since, Alresford has set such store by its fire engine! There is more about the town's fires in the new history of Alresford to be published later this year. [BT]

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

☑ John Miller recommends the new book on Jack Kennedy by Fredrik Logevall entitled simply "JFK". John writes: *It is extraordinarily well-researched, with 200 pages of Acknowledgments to prove it. Just as important is that it is so well-written, covering 666 pages of narrative, and this is only Volume One; so I am keen to move on to Volume Two and his Presidency and tragic assassination. I still remember that sad day, as I had to cover it for BBC Schools TV at the time. JFK was a great President, and it is sad that it is always the good guys who get assassinated in the history of the USA.* [JM]

☑ For further reading on a Russian theme our June speaker, Russian expert Stephen Dalziel, recommends *Dead Doubles, The Extraordinary Worldwide Hunt for One of the Cold War's Most Notorious Spy Rings* by Trevor Barnes.

See you Zoomers for Katie's talk on 21st July - and "tchau"

Mike Dickens, Secretary