

Waterlooville U3A Modern History Group 1 Research Projects 2020

Introduction

Prior to the restrictions brought about by Covid 19, our Modern History Group met fortnightly on a Thursday morning at the home of one of our members. Each session, members would take it in turn to bring a subject of historical interest to the table that they had researched. This would be presented to the group, followed by much lively discussion led by Ted Packer our Group Co-Ordinator

Since March of course we have not been able to meet 'round the table' but from the beginning of August we resumed our sessions using Zoom. After some initial reservations and getting to grips with the technology, most of the group have come back together and our sessions have continued much as before.

The aim of the group has always been, in keeping with the U3A ethos, to learn through our own research and endeavours and to enjoy sharing that knowledge with others in a friendly and enjoyable manner.

When, through necessity, the Open Day was cancelled in October, the Group came up with the idea of sharing our collectively gained knowledge more widely by posting a precis of each of our research topics from 2020 on the WU3A website.

As you will see, the subjects are varied and wide ranging and invoked much debate and discussion.

We hope you enjoy reading what follows and that it may inspire you to find out more!

Anna Leonowens (1831 – 1915)

Anna Leonowens was born in 1831 to a military family in British India and later became a tutor to the King of Siam's children. Having lost her husband at a young age, she had to become instantly independent. Her colourful life took her to Australia, Siam and later to America where she became an eminent speaker and advocate of the women's suffragette movement. She was a family orientated woman who instilled values on her children and was instrumental in bringing up her grandchildren. She wrote many books including her autobiography from which her character emerged in the popular film *The King and I* (1956). She was a determined and forceful character of the 19th century.

Captain Arthur Phillip (1738 – 1814)

Captain Arthur Phillip, born in 1738 and educated at Greenwich, commanded the First Fleet from Portsmouth, England to New South Wales on 13th May 1787. The fleet of eleven ships weighed anchor from Portsmouth carrying approximately 1373 persons, including 759 convicts. The First Fleet arrived in Sydney on 26th January 1788. Phillip's task was to settle the convicts whilst maintaining law and order, integrate with the native peoples and establish the makings of a colony, which he achieved. After serving as the first Governor of New South Wales, he returned to England in 1792, eventually retiring from the Royal Navy as Admiral. Arthur Phillip died in 1814

Dame Stephanie 'Steve' Shirley born 1933

(the first women computer programmer)

Arriving in England alone with her sister in 1939, escaping Hitler as refugees.

She started what became Xansa (now part of SOPRA).

In 25 years as its CEO, she developed it into a leading business technology group pioneering work practices and changing the position of professional women.

Also a lifelong philanthropist, after giving birth to her autistic son.

Edward Pellew 1st Viscount Exmouth (19th April 1757 - 23rd January 1833)

Described as the greatest frigate Captain in the age of sail, Edward Pellew was born into a low-ranking Cornish family. Orphaned at the age of 8, he fought his way up from the bottom ranks in the Navy to Fleet Command, Knighthood, Admiral and a Viscountcy. He saw service in both the American and French Revolutionary wars and is thought to be the model for several literary Commanders.

In our discussion we talked about rank, privilege and ambition in the 18th & 19th Century and whether it is still apparent in our society today

Sources: Commander by Stephen Taylor.

<https://morethannelson.com/officer/sir-edward-pellew-1st-viscount-exmouth>

[The National Archives](#)

Elon Musk (Surely a modern Industrialist) born 1971

A South African self-made millionaire, emigrating to America in his late teens, an engineer, scientific visionary and investor. His different enterprises are=-

PAY PAL HOLDINGS

SPACE X

DEEP MIND (artificial intelligence)

TESLAR INC (electric car production)

THE BORING COMPANY

He also has a keen interest in saving the Planet from Global warming.

Immunization against Smallpox before Jenner's Vaccination:

Although immunization against smallpox had been practiced in China and in Turkey and the Ottoman Empire before the 17th Century, the knowledge was unknown in the West before Lady Mary Wortley Montagu learned about it while accompanying her husband as British Ambassador to Turkey in the early 18th Century. She brought it back to England and initiated the use of immunization using reduced smallpox virus ("variola"), in spite of a great deal of opposition. It was taken up, by a variety of British medical practitioners and scientifically-minded lay people throughout the eighteenth century, until Jenner developed the method of using the related cowpox virus ("vaccination"), which became the standard practice.

Sources: Oxford Dictionary of Biography <https://www.oxforddnb.com/> (articles accessible using your Hampshire Library card); various linked Wikipedia entries;

King William IV (1765 – 1837)

William IV was born 21st August 1765 at Buckingham House, London. Died 20th June 1837 (Age 71 years). Reign - 26th June 1830 to his death on 20th June 1837. Third son of King George III and succeeded his elder brother George IV and became the last King and penultimate monarch of the British House of Hanover. At the time of his death William had no legitimate children and was succeeded by his niece - Queen Victoria.

Mary Seacole (1805 – 1881)

Mary Seacole, 1805 -1881 A British-Jamaican nurse, healer and business woman, who set up the "British Hotel" behind the lines during the Crimean War to treat sick and convalescent officers.

Mary was the daughter of James Grant, a Scottish Lieutenant in the British Army and a free Jamaican woman.

She died on 14th May 1881 in Paddington London

Sources: Wonderful Adventures of Mary Seacole by Mary Seacole published by Penguin Classics

Oloudah Equiano (1745 – 1797)

Oloudah Equiano was captured and sold into slavery as a child. He had a very eventful life including time in the Royal Navy, fighting in several wars and then being resold back to the West Indies. After becoming a trader and managing to buy his freedom, he settled in England and became a leading figure in the anti-slavery movement and wrote a remarkable autobiography.

Percy Shaw OBE 1890 -1976 – Inventor and entrepreneur

Before the second World War driving on unlit roads was difficult and hazardous. Percy Shaw often used light reflected from tramlines built into the roads to guide him but by the 1930's many of these tramlines were being removed. One night in 1933 Shaw was driving back to his home in Halifax when he saw his headlights reflected in the eyes of a cat, alerting him to the fact that he was veering off the road. He immediately thought that reflectors embedded in the road would make night driving much safer.

After much design testing, he filed a patent in May 1935 for a rubber stud incorporating two reflective lenses in a rubber housing mounted in a cast iron base that could be set into the road. They would light the way by reflecting car headlights

In 1937 the government tested Cats eyes against ten other types of road stud, and after two years the Catseyes were the only ones still reflecting. They were officially adopted just as war broke out. They proved invaluable during the blackout and have been an indispensable part of road safety ever since.

Prince Rupert of the Rhine: (1619-1682)

A brief survey of the life of Prince Rupert. Although best known as a hero of the English Civil War, Prince Rupert earned his spurs in Europe in the Thirty Years War, and during the British Republican period he endeavoured to support the impoverished and refugee young Charles II and his family by piracy. After the Restoration of the Monarchy, Rupert returned to England, where he was involved in the early years of the Royal Society and was a scientific and gunnery inventor. He also took an active part in the British naval wars against the Dutch, and was patron of the Hudson Bay Company.

Source: Oxford Dictionary of Biography <https://www.oxforddnb.com/> (articles accessible using your Hampshire Library card)

Reds Under the Bed

The topic began with an introduction to Communism in the U S A in the 1920s and 30s but concentrated on the growth of anti-Communist mania in the 1940s and 50s : in particular the activities of the F B I , Richard Nixon and Senator McCarthy. We were also able to make links with the Space Race and modern day Trumpism / Republicanism

Main sources: The Cold War by J. Isaacs and T. Dowling
The Twentieth Century by T. Howarth
Presidents of the United States by E. Grey.

Ronald Price Hickman OBE (1932 -2011) – Design Engineer

Ron Hickman was born in Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa. Even though he had no formal engineering or design qualifications, Ron Hickman was a very successful design engineer for Lotus Cars being principal designer of the Elan (1962) the Elan Plus 2 (1966 -1967) and the Europa (1965).

After nine years with Lotus, Hickman left the company to pursue his own ideas, one of which was the workbench that would later achieve world fame as the Black & Decker Workmate workbench and make Hickman a multimillionaire.

He conceived the idea one weekend in 1961 whilst using a Swedish whitewood chair as a sawhorse and decided to develop the ideas of a portable foldable workbench. Initially Black & Decker and Stanley Tools rejected the idea and Hickman patented the product and set up his own company Mate Tools in 1968. Four years later when sales were booming, Black and Decker realized their mistake and agreed to a licensing deal that saw Hickman retire to Jersey as a tax exile. The Black & Decker Workmate was born.

The Building of the Panama Canal:

The idea for a Canal dates back to the discovery of the Isthmus by Vasco Núñez de Balboa in 1513. It was not completed until 1914 by the United States following a French attempt from 1881-94.

Main Source: Matthew Parker: Panama Fever

The Early Days of Postal Services.

The first letters were conveyed by a personal messenger or by a common carrier. The development was traced via the King's Post and the Queen's Post to the founding of the first General Post Office in 1657. Later the Mail Coach service was introduced and the talk concluded with the issue of the first postage stamps, the Penny Black, the Two penny Blue and the Penny Red.

Main Source: Duncan Campbell-Smith: Masters of the Post

The Education of Women in the 19th Century

The state of education at the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign was very poor, especially for girls. Some little-known Victorian women fought hard, against huge opposition, to establish schools for girls, allow them to take the same exams as boys and eventually to gain admission to universities. They also fought to get teachers properly trained and standards raised in all schools. They combined this struggle with one for women's rights generally, including representation on School Boards and paved the way for the fight for women's suffrage.

The Portland Spy Ring

The Portland Spy Ring was a Soviet Operation which took place around Portland, in Dorset during the late 1950's until 1961. It was established to obtain information about the capabilities of the British nuclear submarine fleet. The five known members of the ring were Harry Houghton, his mistress Ethel Gee who both worked at the underwater base at Portland, Gordon Lonsdale (aka Konon Trofimovich) a lifelong Russian spy with a wife and family in Russia, and Peter & Helen Kroger (aka Lona & Morris Cohen) who posing as a book seller and his wife transmitted the secrets to Russia from their suburban bungalow in Ruislip, Middlesex. The ring was finally broken by MI5 in 1961 and the 5 members brought to justice.

Who doesn't love a good spy story and the group discussed treason, patriotism and the role of MI5.

Sources: <https://www.intriguing-history.com/historic-themes->

The Postal Museum, 15-20 Phoenix Place London WC1X 0DA

Soviet Spy Ring by Arthur Tietjen

[The Portland Spy Ring | HistoryofSpies.com - Your Resource for Espionage on the Web](#)

The National Archives

The Post Office Rifles

The Post Office Rifles was a unit of the British Army, first formed in 1868, from volunteers as part of the volunteer force, which later became the Territorial Force. The unit evolved several times until 1921, after which the name was lost during one of many re-organisations.

Today the Post Office Rifles are remembered for their role as infantry on the Western front in World War 1. Their actions on the Somme, Passchendaele and elsewhere have earned the Battalion high praise and a place in British History.

Sources: <https://www.intriguing-history.com/historic-themes->

The Postal Museum, 15-20 Phoenix Place London WC1X 0DA

Victoria's Cross

The Victor Cross was introduced in January 1856 by Queen Victoria to honour acts of valour by Servicemen during the Crimean War. Since that time the VC's prestige had taken precedence over all other medals and orders in Britain. A book entitled 'Victoria's Cross ' written by Gary Mead supported the talk by covering untold stories and questions regarding Britain's highest award for bravery. The author questioned our long-held assumptions about Britain's highest honour and reminded us of the complex background to the creation of the VC. The book revealed how this decoration was a means of recognising exceptional individual gallantry which has possibly become to be a potent/ powerful political tool - far removed from its original roots.