

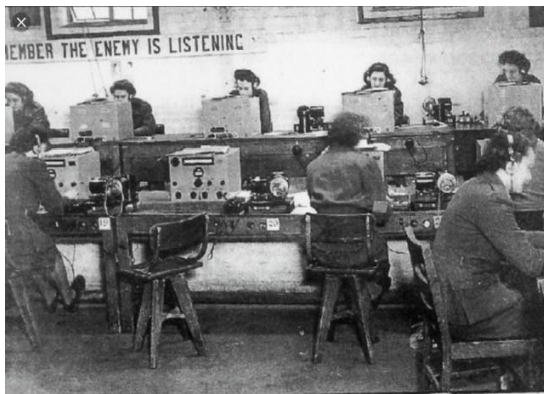
SECRETS, SILK AND CYANIDE

After the AGM, Bill Robins gave a talk on the clandestine agencies hosted in many of the great houses around North Buckinghamshire during the Second World War. They supported lethal conflicts against the German occupation forces across the continent. The picture on the right shows Poundon House, one of the sites.



He summarised the work of some eleven secret organisations operating around North Buckinghamshire between 1939 and 1945 and then focused on the Special Operations Executive (SOE), its wireless stations at Poundon and Grendon Underwood and their vital role in communicating with agents

operating undercover to support resistance movements in Europe.



He covered the vital work of the women of the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) in support of SOE and outlined SOE's frequently toxic relationship with its sister agency, the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS).

The talk followed the tragic fate of both the French Prosper network and the Dutch SOE network and of two of the women agents operating undercover in France, the gentle wireless operator Noor Inayat Khan and the feisty Violette Szabo. Remarkably, Una Robinson shared with us that the best friend of her favourite aunt was also a doomed SOE agent: Yolande Beekman was held prisoner with Noor and was executed with her at Dachau.

The speaker outlined the brilliant work of the SOE codemaster, Leo Marks, and fierce leadership by the redoubtable SOE fighter, Pearl Witherington, and her 2000 resistance fighters as they battled to delay the German troops trying to get to the Normandy beaches to fight the allied landings.

Finally, the talk briefly outlined two opposing views of the morality of these subversive operations and closed by summarising the fate of the North Buckinghamshire SOE sites after the War.