

## SECRETS, SILK AND CYANIDE

The Society Chair, Ian Orton, arranged for Bill Robins to give a re-run of his November 2021 presentation to the Society's AGM. He gave the second talk on 12 April 2023 in the University's Vinson Auditorium. This time the talk was addressed both to the Society and to the Intelligence, Security and Cyber course students of Professor Julian Richards at Buckingham University. We were delighted to welcome the Vice Chancellor Professor James Tooley and his wife Cynthia to the lecture.

The talk covered the clandestine agencies hosted in many of the great houses around North Buckinghamshire during the Second World War. They supported lethal conflicts with the German occupation forces across the European continent. Bill summarised the work of some eleven of them and then focused on the Special Operations Executive (SOE), its wireless stations at Poundon and Grendon Underwood and their role in communicating with agents operating undercover to support resistance movements in Europe. One of the buildings used, Poundon House, is shown here.



Bill covered the 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.

We learnt of the brilliant work by the SOE Codemaster, Leo Marks, and of the 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.