

South of the border (occasional snippets from)

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The further adventures of Boris Johnson

By the time you read this, the thrilling event that was '*Boris on Brexit, Live*'¹ will have taken place. This *Daily Telegraph* event was due to happen on 26 March 2019. It is officially described thus:

'Three days before the UK's planned departure from the EU, Boris Johnson, in conversation with former Editor and columnist Charles Moore, will deliver his thoughts on Brexit in a unique event presented by The Telegraph's Editor, Chris Evans.'

Although the European Union has already agreed to Theresa May's request for a delay in the date for Brexit, the *Telegraph* site at the time of writing, 25 March 2019, is still stating the event as being 'Three days before the UK's planned departure from the EU'. Fingers definitely on the pulse, then, at the Torygraph.

In other 'celebrity' news. . . .

April 5th sees a cheaper (tickets from £28 to £35) but equally pointless event when the National Archives at Kew (NA) hosts 'An evening with Dame Stella Rimington'.² It would appear that the NA holds nothing of significance from her time as a spook. As an example, the publicly available files on MI5 monitoring of the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL) only extends as far as February of 1934.³ This is laughable because, undeniably, this continued well

¹ <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/rewards/events/Boris/>>

² <<https://tinyurl.com/y6yfje7j>> or <<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/an-evening-with-dame-stella-rimington-tickets-56097429923>> The former Director-General of MI5 has been retired for more than twenty years and three other people have held the top post since she left. <<https://www.mi5.gov.uk/former-dgs>>

³ See records KV2/663 to KV2/667 at <<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/browse/r/h/C14997>>.

into the latter half of the Twentieth Century.⁴

Of course Stella Rimington's actions during her time at MI5 still have echoes today. In early March, the BBC's Dominic Casciani reported on how a 'Secret document reveals police "blacklisting"'.⁵ Part of the story detailed how:

'Blacklisting began with the Economic League in 1919 which shared records on left-wing activists with industry to keep them out of the workplace. It was closed in 1993 after a Parliamentary inquiry. The Consulting Association sprang up to replace it.'

This transition was, therefore, in the middle of Stella Rimington's tenure as chief of MI5. Given that her path to the top included a significant stretch in MI5's F2 counter-subversion section, I expect that she would have been fully aware of the situation. The Consulting Association sounds to me like it was an MI5 front anyway, as it was essentially just a one-man operation that, apparently, managed to blacklist 'more than 3,000 construction workers'.⁶

The Consulting Association was closed down following a raid by the Information Commissioner's Office in 2009 but there is an echo that brings this fully up to date and relevant today. Part of the monitoring of workers was carried out by undercover police officers, such as Mark Jenner, from the Special Demonstration Squad, who are now the subject of the Undercover Policing Inquiry.⁷

⁴ A team from *New Statesman*, including Duncan Campbell, was the first to cover this in depth with '*The MI5 affair: can the spooks be trusted?*', 5 December 1986 (archived online at his site by Campbell at <<https://tinyurl.com/y5kl8pny>> or <<http://www.duncancampbell.org/menu/journalism/newstatesman/newstatesman-1986/MI5.pdf>>).

⁵ <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-47457330>>

⁶ See 'The one-man firm that blacklisted thousands' in the *Financial Times*, 9 May 2016, at <<https://www.ft.com/content/3eba9f9c-15e1-11e6-9d98-00386a18e39d>> or the *Guardian* version at <<https://tinyurl.com/ycwb7ajx>> or <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/feb/27/on-the-blacklist-building-firms-secret-information-on-workers>>.

A report by The Canary included extracts from a police inquiry showing that Special Branch and MI5 had supplied the Consulting Association with information. See <<https://tinyurl.com/yxhnyl3g>> or <<https://www.thecanary.co/exclusive/2019/03/06/secret-report-confirms-ricky-tomlinsons-allegation-that-police-colluded-in-blacklisting/>>

⁷ Jenner's real identity and cover name have both been in the public domain since at least 2013. (See <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/mar/01/police-spy-fictional-character>>). In spite of this, he applied to the Inquiry in 2017 to maintain his anonymity – he is 'HN15'. (See <<https://www.ucpi.org.uk/cover-names/>>). This is one of the very, very few cases where such an application has been refused. (See <<https://tinyurl.com/y3hutcz4>> or <<https://www.ucpi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/20171220-Direction-for-HN15-HN58-HN104.pdf>>).

It's not all a waste of time

Bearing the above cynicism about the National Archives in mind, I should perhaps point out that there is an event at the NA that might be very interesting. Wednesday 1 May is the date for the lunchtime (2pm – 3pm) event 'UFOs and the Cold War'.⁸ Tickets are only £4 - £5 and one would hope that there will be a discussion of the tranche of files on UFOs that have previously been released by the National Archives.⁹

Hess and the Doppelgänger Hess

Andrew Rosthorn's piece on Rudolf Hess in the current issue¹⁰ makes mention of the BBC Timewatch episode 'Hess: The Edge of Conspiracy'. The programme was fronted by the eternally smug Professor Christopher Andrew – he who was chosen by MI5 to be the custodian of their officially published history. One segment of that Timewatch had a voice analyst compare the recorded voice of Hess from a speech at a Nazi rally with the recorded voice of 'Hess' from the Nuremberg trials. The Timewatch claim was that the two voices matched perfectly because the two voices shared some very unusual characteristics (pitch, vowel/consonant sounds, etc.).

What concerns me about this is that there was zero discussion as to whether the two recordings, as presented for analysis, were of a sufficiently similar quality, had been preserved in the same way in the intervening years, or had even been made in sufficiently similar circumstances in the first place.

Disregarding the issue of whether the quality of the two voice recordings were actually comparable, would a similarity in voice not be possible because the Hess who spoke at the Nazi rally during the war was already the 'Doppelgänger' Hess who testified at Nuremberg?

⁸ <<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/ufos-and-the-cold-war-tickets-56113866084>>

⁹ For a list of the 208 files, see <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ufos/existing-files.htm>>. At £3.50 a pop for online (i.e. not physically at the NA in Kew) access to each file, makes for a total of £728.

¹⁰ <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster77/lob77-dna-hess.pdf>>