

Probus Club of Beaconsfield



Beaconsfield at Christmas

Christmas Newsletter from The Probus Club of Beaconsfield

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A Word from the Editor



As I sit here over a cup of coffee (it is only 9am!) I can't believe we are on to Edition 8 of the Club Newsletter I started way back in May. What a year it has been!

I hope publication has achieved what I set out to do in what has been a challenging few months -- mainly to reinforce the very valuable network of friendship that has been such a long-standing and invaluable strength of our Club.

An innovation that has taken off this year has been the introduction of Online Speaker Meetings originally suggested by **Chris Belk**. Virtual meetings have not been everyone's cup of tea, but attendance has been really good, and the quality of the presentations have been excellent thanks to the hard work **Alun Walters** who will soon be succeeded as Speaker Secretary by **Mike Collier**. No pressure Mike! Anyone still wanting to join the meetings who is unsure about the technical aspect, please contact me (details in the covering email) and I can talk you through the process in a one to one session.

Thanks to everyone who has contributed to this bumper Christmas Edition: **Donald Stanley** – on the Author and Broadcast Executive, Norman Collins Chairman **Graham Lang** – looking forward to getting back on Safari **Tom Aspinall** – salutatory advice on why you shouldn't go off-piste in Europe during Covid-19.

You will recall **Geoff Gudgion's** novel *Draca*, mentioned in our May edition.

We have another successful author in our midst –

Rick Marshall – lets us know how he came to write his novel *Kuskovo*.

It is encouraging that the benefits of an effective vaccines are likely bare fruit over the coming months. Let's hope so, in order that, in the long term, we can consider meeting up once more in a venue somewhere in Maxwell Road, to take part in **Alan Schofield** organised visits to places of interest, to enjoy **David Webster** organised holidays and to safely navigate to a local country pub courtesy of **Tom Aspinall**. Not to mention being able to attend a 2021 Christmas Dinner organised by **David Kendall** and for the annual opportunity to tell bad jokes at Hazelmere Golf Club organised by **Peter Taylor**.

Just to give you a glimmer of hope, our illustrious chair has asked me to let you know about a proposed Social Event in May 2021 - details below

Let me just conclude by wishing you all a Very Merry Christmas and all the best for a more socially possible New Year.

Ian Petrie - Editor



Our Online Speaker 17 December 2020

Our next Speaker is **Nigel Smales**

He will be speaking to us about "The Rise and Fall of Skindles" the well-known Maidenhead Hotel and associated Nightclub .



The usual Zoom Meeting link will be sent out to you shortly

An Important Note for your Diary 2021



In anticipation that the vaccine will have been successful, **Chairman Graham** has asked me to inform you about a **Celebratory Lunch** for Members and their Wives or Partners
Where : **Fitzwilliam Centre**
When : **Saturday, 8 May 2021**
Watch this Space!



Norman Collins



Several bestselling authors have lived in Beaconsfield but only one, now largely forgotten, was born here:
Norman Richard Collins.

His early home from his birth in 1907 was in one of the houses in Penn Road that have become business premises; in his case the Nationwide Building Society.

Upon leaving school he became an editorial assistant at the Oxford University Press from which he moved to the News Chronicle. Travelling by train to cover a story about afternoon tea on the flight from what was then London's airport at Croydon to Paris he wondered who now lived in the big houses he passed which had once been the homes of families with several servants and were now divided into flats. This led him to write his first successful novel London Belongs to Me which was made into a film starring Richard Attenborough.

He became Deputy Chairman of Victor Gollancz's publishing company, a Left Wing concern which made its money from such authors as Daphne du Maurier whose spelling Norman, as her editor, described as 'atrocious'; he has been credited with the famous opening of Rebecca, "Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley".

Early in the Second World War Norman joined the BBC as a trainee rapidly rising to become Controller of Overseas Programmes in which capacity he read the news in his pyjamas one night when the newscaster was too drunk to do so.

In the 1930s the BBC had been encouraged to pioneer television so that upon the outbreak of war we would have the nucleus from which the country's radar network could be built.

In 1947 Norman became Controller of BBC Television from which he resigned to become one of the leaders of the campaign to replace the Corporation's monopoly with commercial television for which he devised the name Independent Television.

Researching Norman's life led me to the late Tony Benn who had also campaigned to end the BBC's monopoly. Keeping clear of party politics, I found him charming and courteous



Norman Collins ... continued

In 1954 the monopoly was ended by the Television Act. Amongst those who sought franchises was the theatrical agent, the late Lord Lew Grade. As he lacked the necessary social cachet he joined forces with Norman to found Associated Communications Corporation which I joined in 1979 by which time it was a major force in the entertainment industry having acquired thirteen of London's theatres and expanded into films and music publishing in addition to property and other interests.

Norman continued his writing, filling exactly five pages in longhand each night after his family had gone to bed, revising them next morning before handing them to his secretary in ACC to type up. One of the chores he and I had was to write a script for Lew Grade to follow at ACC's Annual General Meeting. We would include such 'stage directions' as 'Pause for applause' which, if in a mischievous mood he would read out aloud. To deflect unwelcome questions, he would burst into the 'Charleston', of which he had been world champion in the 1930s, complete with trade mark cigar clamped firmly in his mouth.

Sadly it all came to an end when the three Western Australians: Bond, Holmes a Court and Murdoch raided English companies, the second talking Lew Grade into handing over his controlling interest in ACC which he promptly broke up selling off, amongst other assets, the Beatles catalogue which Michael Jackson purchased out of the proceeds of one album.

In writing a biography of Norman which is lodged in Beaconsfield's Film and Television School, I talked with the actress Dulcie Gray, widow of the actor Michael Denison, who lived in a flat at Shardeloes to which she invited me to coffee which extended to a pre-lunch sherry

Donald Stanley





First Encounters

During these uncertain times Liz and I have missed our wildlife holidays and I thought I would show you a few first encounters with animals.

During one of our visits to India we went to Bandhavgarh and Kanha National Parks. In less than fifteen minutes, from entering the main gate at Bandhavgarh we saw our first tiger. A fully grown male, in the tall grass, about three metres from the track. Our driver/guide did really well spotting him, as he was so well camouflaged. We saw eleven different tigers in the two National Parks



Danum Valley is a conservation area in Sabah, North East Borneo.

When we were having lunch on the first day, in the lodge, and were told there

was an orangutan in a tree near the lodge.

We found him in a small tree, not far from the path, and were able to observe him for fifteen minutes, just the two of us. Such wonderful animals. We saw eight wild orangutans during our stay on Sabah.



First Encounters ...continued

Shamwari is a private game reserve in South Africa. It was here we saw our first white rhino. They are not so dangerous and irritable as the black rhino, which is why we were able to get so close to her.



In Northern Argentina is an area known as Ibera. This is the second largest wetland area in the world and a haven for all sorts of animals.

One morning we encountered a juvenile yellow anaconda. We were on foot with our friends Alun and Sue. What amazed me the most was how fast this snake could move. We also met up with some gauchos. When on horseback they do not wear boots and have rope stirrups. They wear boots only when they have to dismount, in the fields, because of venomous snakes.

Now we are close to possible vaccination and hopefully the world begins to open up again, we should be able to return to having wonderful holidays.

Graham Lang

Why not to go off-piste in Europe during Covid Lockdown



Here is a salutary tale:

My son lives in Switzerland which is very intent on minimising Covid. Some friends of his recently went for a few days to Italy, parts of which were permitted by the Swiss Government at that time to Swiss Residents.

On their return, at Italian/ Swiss border, they were stopped and asked where they had been. "Along the Adriatic coast", they replied. This was permissible.

"No sir" replied the Swiss border official. "We have evidence from Number Plate Recognition records that you entered Rome and stayed there for 2 days. This is not permissible to Swiss residents. You have lied to us, which is a criminal offence. You will be fined and you must self-isolate for 14 days."

Another family similarly went into France (also permissible at that time). On return, they answered "just around Cannes."

"No sir, we have evidence that you drove into Spain... Not allowable to Swiss Residents... You will be fined...."

The fines were 20,000 Swiss Francs per person : ie 40,000SF for the first couple. 80,000SF for the family of four who went to Spain !!

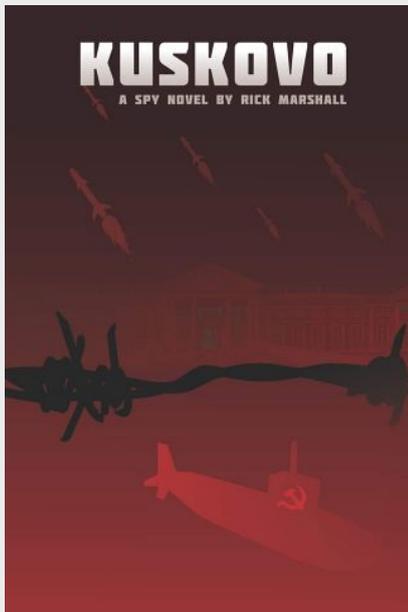
The morale of the story is "don't tell fibs to Swiss Border officials"

Tom Aspinall



*The Common
Penn & Tylers Green*

Kuskovo - The Story of a Novel



I can't remember why, but a few years ago Sue and I were having lunch at home with our son and his wife, when the conversation turned to writing. I mentioned that I had heard that 'everyone has a novel in them' and that I would love to try but was so uncreative I wouldn't know what to write about. My daughter-in-law piped up and said, "You've lived an interesting life; why not try writing about that?" "What?" I replied; "My memoirs? I don't think so!"

But the seed was sown and I slowly came round to the idea of just writing down all the strange and funny things that had happened to me in my globe-trotting life – as much as anything to see if I could write.

It turned into a monster - unpublished and occupying a pile of A4 folders a foot high... of interest to no-one, except perhaps one day my children and grandchildren. But I did discover I could write... and to my surprise, enjoyed it.

"What now?" I thought. "Maybe I could create a fictional story from some of this background?"

My favourite books have always been those of Jean Le Carré and Frederick Forsyth, and before them, Ian Fleming's Bond books, all portraying the world of international spying, intrigue and treachery. So I thought, "That's for me". I'm also into high-tech - I worked most of my life in it – so I thought, "I'll throw a bit of that in too... and a love angle." And so *Kuskovo* was born, (although I originally entitled it *Guidance* as the technical core of the story was about nuclear missile guidance... until someone said 'people will think it's an instruction manual for a washing machine or something!'). I started by sketching an outline of a story – a skeleton, if you will – onto which I slowly added flesh and clothing.

Some books in this genre start with several separate stories which gradually become entwined as the book develops. Others employ extensive use of flashbacks. I've always found these a bit confusing, so one other factor for me was to tell the story in a straightforward 'linear' way.



Kuskovo ...continued

The writing turned out to be the easy part. What took more time, and this surprised me somewhat, was the detailed research I had to do into technical and political fields where I had only a passing knowledge - missile targeting, computing, secret services. Fortunately, the internet came to the rescue, saving me the task of visiting libraries and seeking out experts to interview... which for novelists in the past was the only way.

As for the spying aspect, my frequent visits to Russia in the 1970s often generated the whispered question, "Are you a spy?"... which gave me the cue to return the whisper with the classic line, "Well, you may think so, but I couldn't possibly comment!".

I've not been disciplined in my writing... just pecking at it now and then when I felt like it. Some professional authors, I've heard, knock out several books a year. Not me; mine took a few years, but my typing got faster! So what now? "Well, I'd better get a few friends to read it and let me know what they think". And so began the lengthy process of editing which transformed my scribbles, leaving enough material on the cutting room floor for another novel... almost. In the end, what started out as a thriller, became a love story.

In summary, I think I had spent 40% of the time researching, 40% editing and only 20% writing... and I found I was not done yet.

I proudly sent my masterpiece off to a dozen or more carefully selected publishing agents... to be rewarded with a resounding string of 'niets', which I learned was more or less the norm for an unknown writer. Rather than pursue this avenue further, an old friend of mine in New York in the publishing business suggested I try self-publishing. As I knew nothing about this, he offered his help, which together with a successful round-robin request to my friends to find someone in the book cover creation business, gave us the package. There were more decisions than I could have dreamed of in this process; type face, type size, page dimension (which together dictated the number of pages, further influenced by the fact that this had to be a multiple of eight!), and cover design as examples.

But it was done, and was published by Amazon Books in digital and paperback formats.



Kuskovo ...continued

I e-mailed all my friends and acquaintances with the good news and thought, "Great - just sit back and wait for the royalties to roll in". But nothing much happened and I realised you have to do much more, especially as an unknown, to spread the word further.

That's pretty much where I am. I've now had it professionally reviewed (which I'm relieved to say is positive) which will be published in the English-speaking world's biggest book magazine, the US based 'Publishers Weekly', and others.

Another book? Maybe. I've started but have 'writer's block' at the moment. We'll see.

Rick Marshall

Rick's book can be obtained from Amazon, including in e-Book and Kindle formats

KUSKOVO IS AN INTERNATIONAL THRILLER SET IN THE 1970'S AT THE HEIGHT OF THE COLD WAR.

In the midst of Russia's drive to catch up with the West in the arms race, Dr Samantha Endel, an expert in missile technology leading a top-secret government project, is involved in a tragic accident... or is it? In his search for answers, her colleague and lover Alex Zoravar embarks upon an action-packed, cross continental trail of intrigue in his search for the truth.

RICK MARSHALL is a retired international business executive and was a frequent visitor to the Soviet Union during this period. He worked in the technology industry in California, where he lived for some years, and the UK, providing the firsthand background for Kuskovo. He lives now in Southern England.

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