

Portsmouth in the Blitz, and Members felt that way too!

We were all looking forward to Andrew Negus delivering the final 4th talk of his Portsmouth Series, concentrating on the Blitz, and the modern day city.

Little did we know we would be caught up in our own slightly surreal version read on for the full story.

OK, get to the club early to set up all the equipment, Tony A doing the room layout, Dan and Tiffany on the bar – all good! Just one small issue the club Internet was not working!!! Panic, because this affects Zoom to all, and now of course the Bar!! News filtered through a nearby housing development had cut a major Openreach cable some days previously, and all landlines were out! So truly NO INTERNET.

Just like an incident on the sea, we rapidly assessed the situation and changed course for calmer waters. Cash was used at the bar, whilst a slow 3G card-reader was pressed into service. Andrew Negus plugged his computer directly into the projector – shock, horror, when did that last happen? More than three years ago, methinks? No camera, no microphones, no speakers, no Zoom. The good number of Members attending the club simply sat in a warm clubhouse, cocooned in the knowledge that they were able to listen at first-hand to a most excellent presentation by a seasoned talker; whilst all around local people were gnashing their teeth and wailing about the lack of “anything working”!

With an apologetic nod to all the Zoom attendees who couldn't, and David C who must have run around like a madman fielding questions and letting people down gently, there was literally nothing we could do in the time-frame, given the circumstances were out of our control, and not known in advance.

Andrew's talk started with a short precis of the previous three sessions, and was rammed full of Portsmouth facts, and pictures of Portsmouth, in the 20th century. A dockyard that had 23,000 workers at its peak in WWI, factory gates where you would get physically carried along by workers cycling off for lunch, complete streets flattened, 970 lives lost, 2,000 ships refitted or repaired, vast tunnels in the chalk Downs, used for storing “heavy” oil for ships, and myriads of tunnels with corridors completely devoted to 3 high bunks for the towns-people to sleep in.

Estate houses commandeered by the Navy for senior officers, later planning for D-Day (with a famous map, with the two carpenters locked up because they knew which map of the six that had been made was being used, pre-fabricated housing estates, the mysterious death of a famous frogman “Spy”, a Portsmouth lady to be the first Bunny Girl to be shown topless and bottomless in Playboy – this talk had it all!! I lost count after 30 minutes of the number of facts, and Andrew talked knowledgeably for 90 minutes! Not once referring to any notes. It was great entertainment, fascinating (you couldn't make some of it up!), and at times a tad controversial. Andrew's closing thoughts were that Portsmouth is now primarily a University city (with 28,000 students, 3,000 lecturers), and probably more genuinely prosperous now than it ever has been. A few questions were asked (don't mention Gosport!), and the evening rounded off with sustained applause for Andrew Negus.

At which stage our Commodore Andre Barlow stood up to offer sincere thanks to David Cockburn for all his hard work over the previous four Winter Programmes in arranging such excellent talks. Not able to be with us in the room, his wife was despatched to give him a big hug from us!

The next Event is next week, the 21st, for the official Launch of the Summer Programme and New Members evening. Please come along ... we don't know when the landlines will be repaired!!!!