



Historical

Special Interest Group Newsletter

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Introduction by the new Chair, Pete Davies

Members of the ICPEM Historical Special Interest Group (SIG) will be aware that a small committee has been established to co-ordinate our contribution to the Institute's motto: "Excellence in disaster research". As the first Chair of the Historical SIG – a position I'm honoured to accept following nomination by fellow members – I'm delighted to pen a few introductory remarks for this latest edition of our newsletter.

We all lead busy professional and personal lives which often leave little time for yet more 'extra-curricular' activities. However, the old adage – "You only get as much out of life as you put into it" – certainly holds true in the context of the Institute. This was clearly demonstrated at our recent annual conference in London where it was great to catch up with many friends, old and new, to listen to, discuss and debate a number of perspectives on the theme of "The reality of leading in a crisis". The success of the conference was just one sign of the resurgence of the Institute and it's hoped that the SIGs will also provide fertile ground for members to share and develop their own interest and expertise in specific areas of our profession.

In that context, we currently have a library of five articles – the details of which appear elsewhere in this newsletter – all written by members of the Historical SIG. It is intended to publish two of them in the December edition of *Alert!* two more in the June 2020 edition, and, thereafter, a minimum of one in each future edition. In addition, an entry from the Historical SIG will appear in editions of *Communiqué*, reminding all ICPEM members of the existence of the SIG, providing a round up of what's been going on within the group and inviting them to join.

I recall that on the inside front cover of the first emergency plan I ever wrote I included a couple of quotes, one of which was: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (George Santayana, 1863-1952, in Volume 1 of *The Life of Reason: The Phases of Human Progress (1905-1906)*).¹ In his own remarks elsewhere in this newsletter, our Editor reminds us that this quote epitomises the importance of studying past disasters and applying their lessons to today's emergency management operations. In Otto von Bismarck's (1815-1898) words: "A fool learns only from his own mistakes. A wise man learns from the mistakes of others."²

My first contribution to the SIG was to submit a hitherto unpublished article which revisited the lessons from the 1966 Aberfan disaster, written as we approached its 50th anniversary in October 2016. The research took me to a conference held in Cardiff to commemorate the disaster and to hear from many of those directly involved in the response. It was a moving experience and clearly demonstrated that we should not assume that the passing of time means that every lesson which can be learnt has been learnt. Some people may not start talking about their experiences until many years later and they may be the very people who can provide insights into things which, in their valuable experience, can be improved in the future.

Indeed, it was worrying to hear that just a few weeks ago, [Godre'r Craig Primary School](#) near Pontardawe, South Wales was forced to close after geological experts discovered a medium level risk from a quarry spoil tip near the school which was linked to springs and ground water.³ Sound familiar?

In closing, I hope that members of ICPEM's Historical SIG will be enthused to revisit the lessons from past incidents, think about what they still have to offer to current professional practice and share their findings with the Institute's membership through contributions to both *Alert!* and *Communiqué*.

"Don't forget the past – learn from it."

Committee of the Historical Special Interest Group

Peter Davis - Chair

Pete Davis is currently Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Service Liaison Officer for the Avon Fire and Rescue Service. He has a BEng (Hons) degree in Fire Engineering from the University of Leeds and was awarded an MSc, with a distinction in Civil Emergency Management at the University of Hertfordshire in 1998, where he joined the Institute of Emergency Management (IEM). He is a Founding Fellow of the Institute of Civil Protection and Emergency Management (ICPEM). Pete has a deep interest in the history of disasters as will be seen in the next year when two of his historical papers appear in *Alert*.

Ken Hines – Committee Member

A qualified medical practitioner since 1969, Ken Hines started out as a General Practitioner (GP) in East London and Immediate Care Provider in London and South Essex in support of the ambulance service. He is a founder and current member of the Executive Committee of the British Association for Immediate Care (BASICS), an organisation he has served for 42 years. In addition to being the Medical Incident Officer at a number of incidents, he has performed the role of Event Medical Officer at major events. Currently the Honorary Librarian and archivist for BASICS, he brings his vast knowledge of medical response to a wide range of disasters. Formerly a Fellow of the Institute of Emergency Management (IEM), he is a Founding Fellow of the Institute of Civil Protection and Emergency Management (ICPEM).

Robin Woolven - Committee Member

In his first career, Robin spent 23 years in the Royal Air Force as a Specialist Navigator. He then took a late degree course before spending the next 17 years with the Security Services. Retiring to the Cotswolds in 1997, Robin's PhD research at King's College, London, was on Civil Defence in London 1935-45. He was a Visiting Fellow at the University of Southampton (UK Nuclear History Project), then organised witness seminars at the Institute of Contemporary British History at King's. He wrote the long introduction to the London County Council Bomb Damage Maps (2005). Edited *The London Diary of Anthony Heap 1931-45* (2017) and continues to research and write on public protection and nuclear matters. He was treasurer of the Institute of Civil Defence and Disaster Studies for 7 years before becoming a Founding Fellow of the Institute of Civil Protection and Emergency Management (ICPEM).

Tony Moore - General Secretary

A former soldier, senior police officer and pseudo-academic, Tony was latterly the Associate Director of the Resilience Centre at Cranfield University. He has been an officer of Institutes connected with civil protection and emergency management for a number of years, firstly as Chair of the Institute of Civil Defence and Disaster Studies (ICDDS). In 2009 when the ICDDS merged with the Institute of Emergency Management (IEM) to become the Institute of Civil Protection and Emergency Management (ICPEM) he became the founding Co-Chair of the Executive Council, before, in 2010, becoming Vice-President, a position he held until 2014. He is now a President Emeritus. He holds an M.Phil degree from the University of Southampton and is the author/co-author of a number of books relating to emergency management, including three editions of *Tolley's Handbook of Disaster and Emergency Management: Principles and*

Editor's Comments on the Importance of History

I have often been asked what is the use or relevance of studying the history of crises, disasters and emergencies? Things are different now I am told. We have more sophisticated ways of storing and circulating information. Much of the equipment available is more complex and can enable people to respond in a way that could not be envisaged fifty years ago. The Bradford Stadium football fire⁴ couldn't happen now because we have all-concrete stadiums. But what is relatively unchanged, it can be argued, is human behaviour; the behaviour of both the victims or potential victims, and the behaviour of the planners and responders.

The Chair has already referred to the quote by the Spanish born philosopher George Santayana, i.e. 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.'⁵ These words are as relevant today as they were over one hundred years ago, particularly in the field of civil protection and emergency management. The history of crises, disasters and emergencies is littered with examples of where people responding to such events are unaware of what has gone before and consequently have repeated mistakes that had been made previously⁶ as we shall see when the Historical SIG begins to issue a series of articles on past events.

History gives us the opportunity to learn from past mistakes. It helps us to understand why people behaved in the way they did or, more importantly, perhaps, why they made certain decisions and failed to make others.

So, understanding the linkages between past and

present is absolutely essential for obtaining a good understanding of why we do things in the way that we do them today. Unfortunately, too many people, including those involved in civil protection and emergency management insist on 're-inventing the wheel'. As an example, the Strategic, Tactical, Operational concept of command was introduced as something new by the Metropolitan Police in 1986⁷ to deal with public order situations. It was subsequently adopted by the emergency community when responding to crises and emergencies. But Charles Rowan, one of the two first commissioners of the Metropolitan Police had adopted such a system in responding to the Cold Bath Fields riot of 1833.⁸ He had just not called it by that name. But, as Santayana points out, 'not all readaptation is progress'; rather 'progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness'.⁹

Finally, history is just plain interesting. That is why emergency management courses are littered with case studies. Rather than just putting forward theory, which can be very boring, they bring to life what is being said. And, research has shown that people, particularly those involved in managing crises and emergencies, are more likely to learn from case studies than they are from pure theory.

On a sadder note, elsewhere in this Newsletter we report the death of Wendy Hines (Neal), the wife of Historical SIG Committee Member, Dr. Ken Hines. The Institute and the Historical SIG was represented at her funeral by another Historical SIG member, Tony Thompson.

Articles Wanted and Received

The General Secretary is now in possession of four articles of specific events:

- Aberfan: Continuing lessons from yesteryear? by Peter Davies
- The Clapham Junction Railway Accident: A Personal Perspective, by Tony Thompson
- The 3rd March 1943 Bethnal Green Shelter Disaster by Robin Woolven
- Moorgate: 'If there's a hell, I've lived to see it' by Peter Davies

He is also in possession of one more general article

- Medics must learn the Lessons of Disasters, by Ken Hines

All are written by members of the Historical SIG. **But we want more.** So, if you have a 'favourite' crisis, disaster or emergency that you would like to write about, please let the General Secretary (Tony Moore at tmdisman@gmail.com) know, just to check that non-one else is writing about it at the same time.

A Touch of History – 80 Years ago

Robin Woolven very kindly told me that he was recently looking through his transcription of the diary of the Right Honourable Euan Wallace, who was Minister of Transport under Neville Chamberlain from 1939 to 1940, and then Senior Regional Civil Defence Commissioner for London from 1940 to 1941. Robin thought it was interesting that Wallace 'had a word' with the inspector investigating a railway accident before he wrote his report as this entry to the diary describe:

Monday 16th October, I had a talk with Colonel Mount in the railway accident at Bletchley – he has already been down there. Mount expressed to me the extreme difficulty of driving an express train in black-out conditions which, if a driver misses a signal, he has no effective method of checking his position by land marks and making sure he has passed or not yet reached it. The situation in regard to this particular accident is more serious by the fact that the train was double-headed therefore it appears that two drivers and two firemen failed to observe two separate signals against them. It is very much to be hoped that the coroner and the police will have a lenient view of the Bletchley accident as it would appear a serious thing if locomotive drivers were to lose confidence and feel that they were being asked to work under impossible conditions.

The accident had happened three days previously, on Friday, 13 October 1939. The 07:37 Euston to Inverness express, running a few minutes later, was stopped at the station and a shunter was in the process of adding an additional coach to the rear of the train. At 08:44, a second express, the 07:50 Euston to Stranraer service, which was running three minutes early, came into

Bletchley on the same line. The force of the collision was such that rolling stock was forced up and onto the platform, demolishing the waiting and refreshment areas. Four people, including the driver of the shunter, were killed and forty others were injured. The primary cause of the accident, according to Colonel Mount, was driver error, together with fireman error. The secondary cause of the accident was excessive speed and blackout conditions, although, of course, the accident occurred in daylight hours! The engine driver was acquitted of manslaughter.¹⁰

A further entry in the diary reads:

Wednesday, 10th January. Meeting of the Home Policy committee in the new boardroom at 3 Richmond Terrace. Hugh Sefton, Arthur Penn, 'Cheeko' Leathers and I travelled on the 1.10 p.m. train from Euston to Lancaster as guests of Mr. Arthur Ashton-Davies, Vice President of the Company, in the Directors' Observation Car. The other two passengers were Royale (Operating Superintendent) and Mosley (Works and Buildings) – I spent practically the whole journey in an armchair looking through the back window and listening to 'railway' shop from Ashton-Davies and his colleagues. It was particularly interesting after dark and the thing which struck me most was the remarkable intensity of the electric coloured light signals. They can be seen for miles ... The railway people, whenever one is with them, give an impression of tremendous efficiency; if it is genuine they are unlucky in not having more intimate contacts with the public.

Is a conflict of interest detected here??

Obituary, by the Chair, Pete Davies

Wendy Hines MSc(Dist)

Friends and colleagues will be deeply saddened to learn of the death of Wendy Hines (Neal), the dear wife of fellow Historical SIG member Dr Ken Hines, on 26 June 2019.

As well as being an international authority in the world of her beloved bearded collies, Wendy had a considerable interest in the world of disaster and emergency medicine and raised over £100,000 for the immediate care charity, BASICS. After writing her first book on emergencies and disasters in Victorian London

“With Disastrous Consequences ... London Disasters 1830-1917”, Wendy also completed her MSc degree in civil emergency management and graduated with distinction from the University of Hertfordshire in 1998. More recently, she had two acceptances to undertake a PhD but was yet to make a start.

Our sincere condolences are extended to Ken, Wendy’s two sons Aiden and Alex and all their family and friends.

“To a friend, fellow student, academic and author – may you rest in peace and your memory will shine on.

Research Tips from the Chair

I have followed on from the first contribution I made to the Historical SIG, Aberfan mentioned in my introductory address, with a further contribution, this time on the Moorgate Underground disaster in February 1975. Researching this topic led me to the National Archives in Kew, my first visit in many years. My research there reminded me of just what a valuable resource the Archives really are and rekindled a passion for trawling the files to cast light on the background to Government decisions which have subsequently been made public under the 30 Year Rule. I would certainly recommend that anyone who has never been there (or, like me, had not visited in several years) plans a visit as a treasure trove of priceless history undoubtedly awaits. (Editor’s addition) Committee member Robin Woolven is a frequent visitor to the National Archives at Kew and is willing to undertake limited research for members. If anyone wishes to take advantage of this offer, please contact the General Secretary, Tony Moore, at tmdisman@gmail.com in the first instance.

I’d like also to point fellow members in the direction of two valuable resources on the internet. The first – the

Firefighter Safety Database¹¹ – has been developed by the Institution of Fire Engineers and is designed to enable firefighters and others to learn from past experience where incidents have resulted in injury or loss of life to firefighters, or where critical learning points have been identified. As incidents are added to the system, the database is developing into a comprehensive online resource including investigation reports, newspaper articles, video clips and other items of interest to researchers.

The second is the EPC’s Disaster Database,¹² a free resource that provides a set of details, resources, references and links to tell the stories of around 400 disasters and emergencies. Most are examples from the UK and Europe, but the EPC has also included numerous global studies. Many these incidents are presented as an easy-to-navigate interactive map alongside a fully comprehensive, conventional spreadsheet which contains the full list. Well worth a look.

New Members of the Historical Special Interest Group

Since the publication of the first Newsletter in February, we are pleased to welcome two new members to the Historical Special Interest Group:

- Brian Glover
- Brian Porter

We have also had one resignation:

- Roger Young, who has decided to leave the Institute as he is no longer engaged in civil protection and emergency management.

This means that membership of the Historical Special Interest Group currently stands at fourteen.

Request for Information

The Historical Special Interest Group is in the process of compiling a list of books that have been written, in English, on crises, disasters and emergencies, initially confined to those that have occurred in the United Kingdom. If you know of a book that exists, please send the title, the name of the author, the name of the publishers and the year it was published to the General Secretary of the Historical SIG, Tony Moore, at tmdisman@gmail.com. If the particular crisis, disaster or emergency is not immediately apparent from the title of the book, please briefly state the events the book covers. It is intended that the list will eventually

be deposited in the Historical SIG repository on the Institute's website.

If any member has an interesting story to tell, such as Robin Woolven's, please send the details to the General Secretary, as above, for publication in a future Newsletter.

Finally, if any one reads a book on the historical aspects of crises, disasters or emergencies, or an event of this kind, and would like to write a book review, no more than 500 words, for publication in a forthcoming newsletter, it will be gratefully accepted.

References

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6. See, for instance, Pollock, Dr. Kevin (2013). Review of Persistent Lessons Identified Relating to Interoperability from Emergencies and Major Incidents since June 1986. Emergency Planning College, Easingwold, Occasional Paper New Series No. 6.
7. Metropolitan Police (1986). Policing policy and serious public disorder. Special Police Order, dated 30 June.
8. See Moore, Tony (2019) Rowan and Mayne: A biography. Forthcoming
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10. For more details of the accident, go to www.railwaysarchive.co.uk/events/summary.php?eventID=336
11. www.ife.org.uk/firefighter-safety
12. www.epcresilience.com/services/thought-leading/knowledge-centre/the-disaster-database