



By: *Catriona M. Munro, TA Editor in Chief*

Honours and Dishonours



Every year that is drawing to a close in the UK has a potential to offer us a bit of excitement to assuage the disappointment of having to wait a whole new year before another chance to celebrate - by which I mean overeat and drink too much alcohol.

We don't have a National Day, and there's only a coronation or royal wedding once every century or so..

First is the annual Honours List, which tends to provoke more of a sneer-fest than any kind of altruistic good wishes (you'll recognise a former colleague, a neighbour, a worthy from your parents' village or suburbs, a military comrade in arms.

Or someone who's "done something". The chances are you won't like any of them either.

The 30-year Rule

But the second annual event - and the UK is not alone in this - is what we call the "30-year rule".

Of course, everyone wants something sensational - and preferably salacious - and anything conspiracy theory-related would be welcome.

The 30-year rule is only really institutionalised in the UK, Australia, and to a certain extent, Canada

But the 30-year rule is only really institutionalised in the UK, Australia, and to a certain extent, Canada. It entails the declassification and public release of what has hitherto considered detrimental to national security, or potentially damaging to individuals.

There are exceptions of course - not everything will ever see the light of day.

Although there are exceptions: a Security

Officer during World War 2 called Anthony Blunt, who subsequently became curator of the Queen's art collection and had been spying for the USSR throughout the war to the full knowledge of his Establishment bosses who protected him for decades.

He was unmasked by Margaret Thatcher shortly after she became prime minister. She had no truck with "the Establishment" protecting their friends and class affiliations.

Everyone likes a Political Scandal

The only semi-significant piece of 30-year rule this year released in the UK so far is arguably more of a vignette that stemmed from a political scandal.

The minister for war in an early 1960's Conservative government was having an affair with a young English prostitute who, unfortunately for him, was also sleeping with the Soviet naval attache at the London Embassy.

The police got wind of it, and when he issued a statement to parliament denying the whole story, the police investigation exposed him as a liar and he was forced to resign.

Not because he had shared a lover with a Soviet diplomat/spy, but because he had lied to the House of Commons.

The whole scandal, which also involved a notorious court case, brought down the government as well, which didn't do much for his popularity with his colleagues.

He spent most of the rest of his life in ignominy as far as his upper class friends were concerned, but he devoted a lot of time working for charities.

He died some years ago, but has re-emerged this week In a story issued under the 30-year rule.

It seems that before he became embroiled in his descent into shame, Profumo helped to put a firm lid on a potential scandal involving the royal family, and sought to protect the Queen.



Soldiers were being used as grouse beaters at the hunt at Balmoral Castle instead of bodyguarding the senior royal echelons

Horror of horrors, soldiers were being used as grouse beaters at the hunt at Balmoral Castle instead of bodyguarding the senior royal echelons.

A backbench Conservative MP, Bill Carr, received an outraged letter from a constituent, writing, "I think it is a damned disgrace that soldiers should be used to wave white flags...so that Snowdon [the Queen's then brother-in-law] can go home with his 'bag' [of grouse]".

Backbencher Carr, not welcoming this kind of intrusion from a civilian, passed the entire conundrum to Profumo, who as Minister of War, technically held the portfolio, which he tackled manfully and discreetly. He never told, even when he had the opportunity to do so.

As for Mr Carr, he lost his parliamentary seat at the next election and returned to his former profession as a solicitor. Shortly later, he was sentenced to 18 months in prison for fraud.

And the Royal Family does it again

The other piece of 30-year jollity as we teeter on the brink of welcoming a New Year, was

"her again" - Diana. She used to joke about "being thick" and that's difficult to dispute given that a note from the Irish Ambassador, Joe Small, in 1993, at the height of the Troubles, has just been published making it clear she had no idea that Ireland and Northern Ireland were different countries.

When she met the Ambassador in London, she allegedly commented, "oh, I was in your country yesterday".

She really had no real acknowledgement of constitutional niceties.

Nothing surprising about Margaret Thatcher's Decade

Thanks to the 30-year rule, we can now access papers in the National Archive personally annotated by Margaret Thatcher throughout her 1980's premiership.

Nothing is really surprising for those of us who lived through that era, although there's a nice report of a Japanese offer of "karate ladies" - an all-female protection unit to be deployed at a forthcoming summit in 1979 in Tokyo.

Her Cabinet Secretary turned down the offer, and replied in writing that Thatcher would attend "as prime minister and not as a woman per se".