

CANTERBURY ROTARY BOOK CLUB

NOTES OF A MEETING HELD ON 10TH JANUARY 2019 AT THE HOME OF PAULINE

1. PRESENT: Alan, Jennifer, Neil, Gill, Judith, Viv, Caroline, Pauline, Brian
2. APOLOGIES: Richard, Georges, Tony. All present had expressed deep regret at the recent death of Colin, and Jennifer asked that future meetings take place at her home, which invitation was gladly accepted.
3. BOOK: "Red Notice " by Bill Browder. the author of this non-fiction book, is an American of Russian descent who, broadly , works in the financial services industry. He sees the opportunities of the great sell off of nationalised businesses by the Yeltsin administration, and makes a fortune for himself and investors in his funds, setting up a business in Russia in the process, and acquiring a Russian second wife. With the change in political climate, he largely liquidates the funds and expatriates the proceeds, but then discovers someone has acquired title, according to the Russian Companies' Register, to some of his subsidiary companies which have become dormant, and, eventually, that the enormous sums that were paid in tax to the Russian treasury by the subsidiaries have been reclaimed . Using his Russian lawyers, he tries to recover control of the subsidiaries, but comes up against a corrupt judicial system. one of his Russian lawyers is imprisoned and dies of maltreatment, and Browder and his family are lucky to escape to the west. He becomes convinced that Putin and his oligarch friends are behind the plot, and then discovers the Russians have used the Interpol "Red Notice " procedure to demand extradition to Russia, though he eventually persuades the US and EU to pass legislation blocking this. Neil had suggested this book, which he found for 50p in a church sale, having been to Moscow, where he had a Russian guide. He pointed out that Browder 's father was a communist nd gave him ideas how people made money. Lots of Russians would have regarded Browder as a terrible person for the way he took advantage of the situation in the country. To him, the book read like a detective story - and we all agreed. Pauline got hooked and could not put the book down: thought the way Browder exploited Russia made it risky he would be bumped off now he lives in this country. Jennifer was amazed he never learned Russian - must have relied on his wife - years ago when colin worked in Africa he had to have the language. Viv was quite shocked at Browder's opportunist capitalism and fascinated by the way the oligarchs were shown to exploit the system. Caroline had worked in Russia in the 80s - a different world was depicted. Judith had never read anything like it - thought it dreary at first, then could not put it down. Gill understood why his first marriage failed as he was up to his eyes in work all the time. Neil brought up the theme of Russian disregard for ordinary people e, who were dispensable. Caroline mentioned "The Romanovs" by Sebag Montefiore showing the same attitude and Viv mentioned his Russian trip in 1990. Jennifer thought the death of Browder's lawyer , Magnitski, in prison was an example, and that Browder had that on his conscience. Neil thought it sobering that in 2 years' time Germany would be getting 80% of its gas from Russia, and as evidence of the tension in the area, Caroline mentioned BT had not been able to use Russian engineers in the Ukraine. At the end of the book, Browder arranges for Magnitsky's widow and son to relocate to Uk and that reminded her that her cousin had adopted a young Russian orphan boy who had t`ken years to settle. Alan recalled seeing Yeltsin cross Red Square in his limousine when Alan was on an official visit there. He found the book gripping, and thought it had been written , in autobiographical style, in the white heat of anger over the death of Magnitski. The love-making helped it along. He compared the reach and power of the oligarchs with a report of an inquest into the death of a russian emigre that was held in Surrey on 20th December, attended by Browder, when the coroner airily accepted natural causes - as has been the case with a number of other very odd sounding russian deaths in this country. This book can usefully be compared with "Snowdrops" by A D Miller, shortlisted for Man Booker prize in 2011, where a naive British lawyer goes to work in Russia . He has to manage an enormous mortgage loan on an oil drilling ship, relying on the certificates of engineers/surveyors to release funds. After authorising the last of these, he decides to go to see for himself the ship (in the arctic North) - and, of course, finds it does not exist. There are numerous other instances in the book of corruption affecting people e rich and poor, and, in real life , a gullible lawyer of BD's acquaintance spent several y ears in the country before returning for unstated reasons, while BP found how

dangerous it is to work in Russia as partner of a State owned Russian company when there is no rule of law there as we know it. A good read - 9/10

4. OTHER READS: Caroline - The Rabbit Chronicles - John Updike - a US family in the 60s & 70s, which she would not recommend. Viv - Donna Leone - "Earthly Powers" - another Venetian DL, Also Lee Child - a John Reader story - Midnight Crime - 2 day read; Jo Nesbo - "MacBeth" - follows the plot of MacBeth, a bit contrived, but he enjoyed it. Judith "The Co-op's got bananas" Northern story set just after WW2 - quite good. Pat Barker - "Toby's Room" WW1 story. Francis Brodie - "Death of an Avid reader"; "Kips" - H G Wells - like The History of Mr Polly. - very interesting. David Lodge "Changing Places"; Conan Doyle - "The adventures of Sherlock Holmes". Pauline - Sarah Durnant "In the company of the Courtesan" - about a 16th woman and her servant going to set up as courtesan in Venice - ordinary acts such as getting the clothes without much money from s/h shops etc. Gill - has just started Michelle Obama's book which seems great. Neil - Val McDermot "Insidious Intent" - easy style and really enjoyed Blind Mans Buff - about submarines (? have I the right one); Matt Hilton - Simon Carley. Jennifer had just started a book about gardens by Penelope Lively. Alan - Graham Green - "Our man in Havana" - great entertainment, and a Bond set up, but obviously written when he had not been to Cuba - no local colour. Also "The Silk Roads" - Peter Francopan. Brian - finished biography of Attlee by Bew - interesting and available for anyone who wants it - dangerous to read in bed on account of the weight. "Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man" - Siegfried Sassoon gentle and interesting country ramble from the 1890s. Gertrude Stein - "An autobiography of Alice Toklas" - but actually of Stein herself as Grande Dame in the 1920s art world of Paris. "Milkman" - Anna Burns - extraordinarily written novel with no identifying names, but obviously in Ireland during the troubles - well worth reading.

5. THINGS DONE: Caroline - had been to see some films esp "Colette" - excellent, The Favourite - different. Visit to National Gallery for Landseer collection inc Monarch of the Glen. Viv - flew to Dubai and back and enjoyed "The Rennant", "The shape of water" and "Christopher Robin" on the way, all of which he enjoyed, and visited the Emirates, which he found strange. Judith enjoyed the Rotary visit to the Fire Station (sat in the engine), Nadfas talk, and a U3A talk about a 1960s trip round the world in a double decker, a political satire based on Gilbert & Sullivan, concert at the Royal Albert Hall and Xmas in Lanzerotte with the Talbots. Pauline - Mary Poppins, Linden Hall art gallery and the film "Disobdience" which is about Jews in N London and a love affair between 2 women. This reminded Pauline that when she was 17, she went to be interviewed for her 1st job in N London where she was asked if she was a gentile. She was subsequently told that she would not have been considered for the job if she had been a Jew. Also, "Bohemian Rhapsody" and the pantomime 'Cinderella', both of which she loved, and a talk by Peter Medhurst about the history of the 12 days of Xmas, which she didn't. Gill - trip to US before Xmas - Pennsylvania and Massachusetts to see relatives, and Xmas in the Cotswolds. Films - Bohemian Rhapsody and King & I. Neil - went to a dozen events at Folkestone Book Festival, which he enjoys and intends to keep supporting, "Katrina and the Waves" at Aston theatre in Deal and talk by Keith Aiken about British PMs. Jennifer had not been able to go out much, but was planning to see The F favourite. Alan - saw transmission of Swan Lake from Covent Garden and, subsequently I think, the version where the swans are danced by men. He had been to the panto Cinderella with his grandchildren, and was going to another panto - Rapunzel - at Barham. He was also about to see the saxophonist John Harlow at Colyer Fergusson and exhibition of the work of Alfred Munnings at Imperial War Museum. Brian - Anglo Saxon Kingdoms Exhibition at British Library - very good and several films already mentioned.

6. DONM: Thursday 21st February 7.30pm chez Jennifer at 1 Harkness Drive

FINALLY a very big Thank You to our host, Pauline