

LSE Literary Festival event

# Based on a True Story with James Owen

**James Owen**

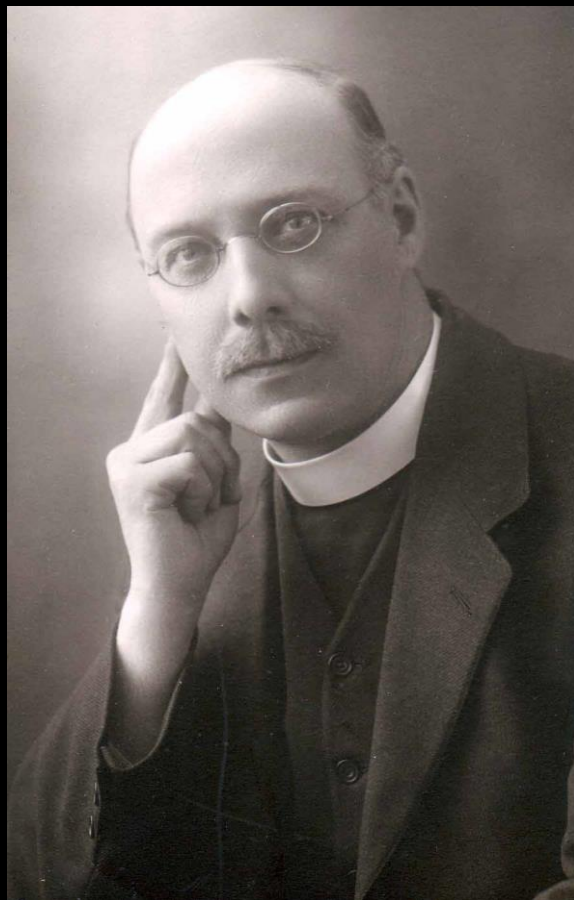
*Royal Literary Fund Fellow, LSE*

*Author of A Serpent in Eden, Danger UXB and  
Commando*

Suggested hashtag for Twitter users: #LSElitfest

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## Maurice Keen

Leading medieval historian who taught at Balliol for 40 years and wrote the scholarly classic *Chivalry*

Maurice Keen's most lasting contribution to medieval scholarship is likely to be his magnum opus, *Chivalry*. But for his devotion to another creation of the High Middle Ages — Balliol College, Oxford — he might have had his pick of professorships elsewhere which would have further consolidated his reputation. Instead, for 40 years he was content to remain principally an admired and inspired tutor and academic supervisor, albeit one whose intellectual diffidence and lack of worldly ambition were perhaps unexpected in a Balliol man.

He also stood apart from the main currents that directed the teaching of history at Oxford in the 20th century. When he was appointed a Fellow in 1961 the influence of the French Annales school, which favoured mass social and economic analysis, was starting to displace the traditional emphasis on the study of institutions. With K.B. MacFarlane as their champion, many medievalists began to concen-

**He rejected claims that chivalry had scant relation to the realities**

trate on the history of the nobility and that of England's provinces.

But Keen had little interest in institutions, and neither did he share MacFarlane's belief in the local roots of English politics. He also resolutely rejected the history school's Anglo-centrism. Although his work was wide in scope, its subject matter might be defined as the regulation of late medieval society. Keen was a historian of political ideologies, notably those of war and of the aristocracy.

His thesis, published in 1965 as *The Lives of War in the Late Middle Ages*, examined the conventions which governed one of the central activities of the period. For evidence of them Keen looked not so much at contemporary treatises on their application as at examples of contemporary practice recorded by chroniclers and by the courts of both England and France.

This distinction between the ideals of the knightly classes and their observation lies at the heart of the debate about the nature of medieval chivalry. Johan Huizinga famously characterised life in the Middle Ages as having such stark extremes that it bore "the



Keen: he treasured the hours of solitary contemplation he spent fly-fishing

mixed smell of blood and roses". For him chivalry was at best an aspiration which had scant relation to the realities of the time, but Keen succeeded in anchoring it within them by rescuing it from its connotations of romance.

He saw chivalry as an evolving set of secular values, with what began as a common code of conduct for professional soldiers developing into a sophisticated expression of their social standing. Chivalry provided a framework of beliefs which limited some of the excesses of warfare, yet also made the use of violence more legitimate.

Over time these beliefs would mutate into concepts of honour and

responsibility which coloured expectations of the behaviour of the upper classes across Europe in later centuries. Keen's insight that these social rules could be traced back to the early laws of war is testament to the quality of intellectual analysis and international range of *Chivalry*, which was awarded the Wolfson History Prize in 1984.

Maurice Hugh Keen was born in London in 1933. His father was a Fellow of Balliol and Keeper of the University Chest. Maurice won a scholarship to Winchester, and another to Balliol, which he took up after National Service with the Royal Ulster Rifles. He became the protégé of the

medieval historian Richard Southern, but did not let his studies interfere with membership of clubs such as the Armold and Brackenbury or the *Crutcheons*, once being sentenced to dig the Holywell Manor Garden as punishment for the raucous singing of Orange songs.

Keen's three years as a Junior Research Fellow at The Queen's College yielded *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend* (1961), much of which was about Robin Hood. Keen later revised his conviction that class antagonism lay behind many of the stories. Yet the book prompted others to treat them as important sources rather than mere legends, and pointed up Keen's growing interest in the relationship between the law and socially acceptable violence.

At 28 he succeeded to Southern's fellowship at Balliol, his youthful looks leading him on one occasion to be mistaken as a fellow candidate by those waiting to be interviewed by him for a scholarship. He was the college's Tutor for Admissions from 1974 until 1978 and Vice-Master from 1980 to 1983. Despite a natural conservatism, Keen welcomed the vote which in 1979 admitted women to Balliol for the first time.

His other publications included two panoramic surveys, *The Pelican History of Medieval Europe* (1988) and *England in the Later Middle Ages* (1973), and a collection of essays spanning his career, *Nobles, Knights and Men-at-Arms in the Middle Ages* (1996).

Keen's room at Balliol was austere and unchanging and he treasured his hours of solitary contemplation fly-fishing on the Itchen and the Torridge. Yet beneath his reserve there was warmth and a gift for friendship, and many of his students held him in great affection. He was a governor for many years of Winchester and of Blundell's School, Tiverton. He kept a cottage in North Devon where he and his wife entertained generations of students.

After the historian retired in 2001, Balliol named Keen's history fellowship in honour of his family's service to the college. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1990, and in 2004 appointed OBE.

He is survived by his wife, Mary, the sister of the historian Sir John Keegan (obituary, Aug 4, 2012), and by their three daughters.

**Maurice Keen, OBE, historian, was born on October 30, 1933. He died on September 11, 2012, aged 78**

### Lives remembered

#### Lord Chilver

**David Arnold writes:** Nobody who read civil engineering at UCL in the mid-1960s could be unimpressed by the quality of the teaching of Henry Chilver (obituary, September 28). Stress analysis, in two and three dimensions, is a mathematical pursuit that has a fascination which, before the use of computers (or calculators), at under-

Terence Crolley writes: In the early 1980s I was an MSc student at the then Cranfield Institute of Technology. Sir Henry, as he was then, was Vice-Chancellor and led the institute with style and vision. Your otherwise excellent obituary failed to mention two lesser but equally important roles during his incumbency. First was the development of the School of Social Policy. There, postgraduate students from

were the late John Dankworth (obituary, Feb 8, 2010), who lived near by at Wavendon, and the flautist Richard Adney (obituary, Jan 21, 2011). These concerts were well attended by staff and students alike.

Lord Chilver was greatly admired by his students. Many of us are grateful to this day for his vision and enterprise in forging links not only with industry and the scientific community but also

You print the date of the Cologne raid as May 31-June 1. I opened up my father's complete service long-flying logbook to see that he has the Cologne raid as May 30-31, 1942, flying Wellington DV830, taking off at 23:00 with a load of five Small Bombs Containers, returning five hours 50 minutes later.

As is so common with such records, the only other entries on the single log









Front  
Kite  
windows  
at  
Palmerina  
S. Giovanni  
Rome.



SHORTLISTED FOR THE CRIME WRITERS' ASSOCIATION GOLDEN DAGGER (NON-FICTION) 2005

# A SERPENT IN EDEN

'The greatest murder mystery of all time'  
Erle Stanley Gardner, creator of Perry Mason.



'Nailbiting' *Daily Mail*

## JAMES OWEN



Malt House,

Ch. Herms,

Wils.

Dear Mr. Connell.

I cannot write anything that will  
not sadden you, for if I ~~will~~ speak  
of my own sorrow it will remind you  
of your greater loss that nothing in  
the world can restore. Yet if I speak  
of his great gifts as a soldier you  
must contrast his short life with the  
long, happy & useful life he might have

apart from his men forming & steeling  
them into soldiers. No one is born a  
soldier; he has to be hardened into one.  
This Jocelyn did superbly well. It cannot  
be done by kindness or brute force or  
a mixture of the two. It is done  
by leadership.

I have said that he  
had a romantic attitude to soldiering  
& he brought to the Commandos all  
these ambitions. He wanted to be a  
splendid leader of shock troops who would  
be able to carry out whatever tasks  
they were given. This was his ambition &  
here his success. He landed at Bardia  
and blew up the guns. ~~He~~





JAMES OWEN

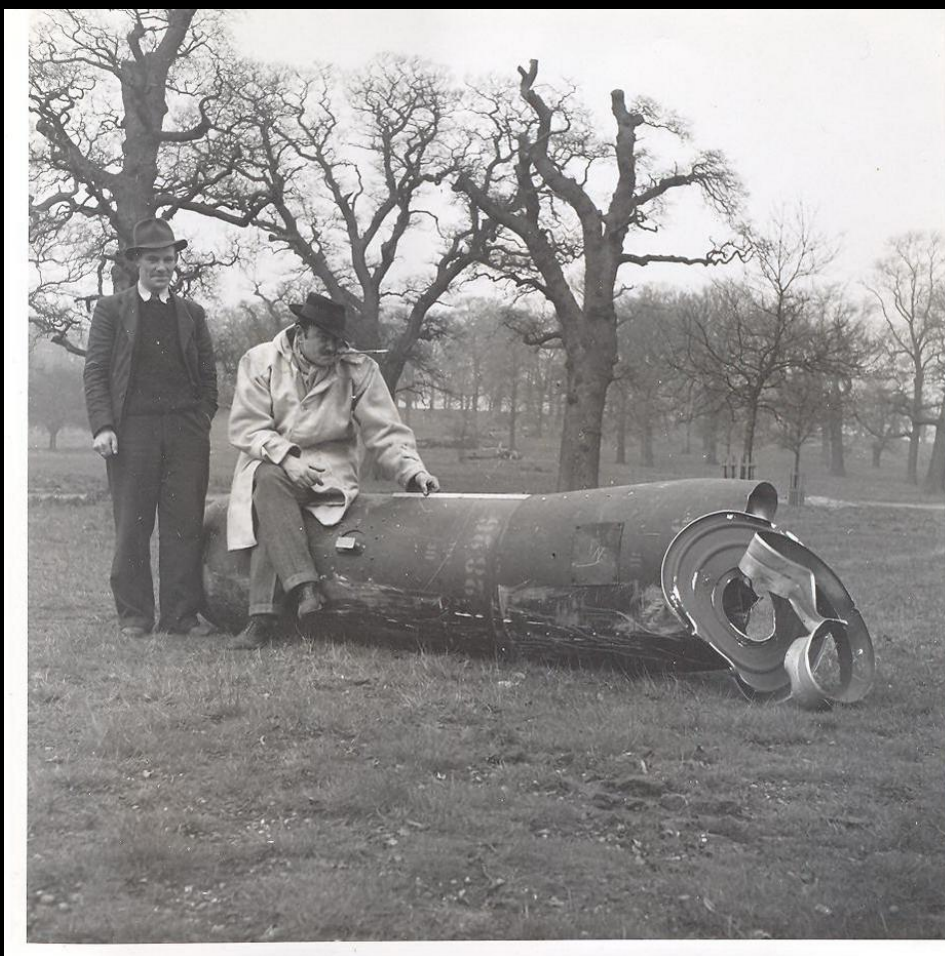


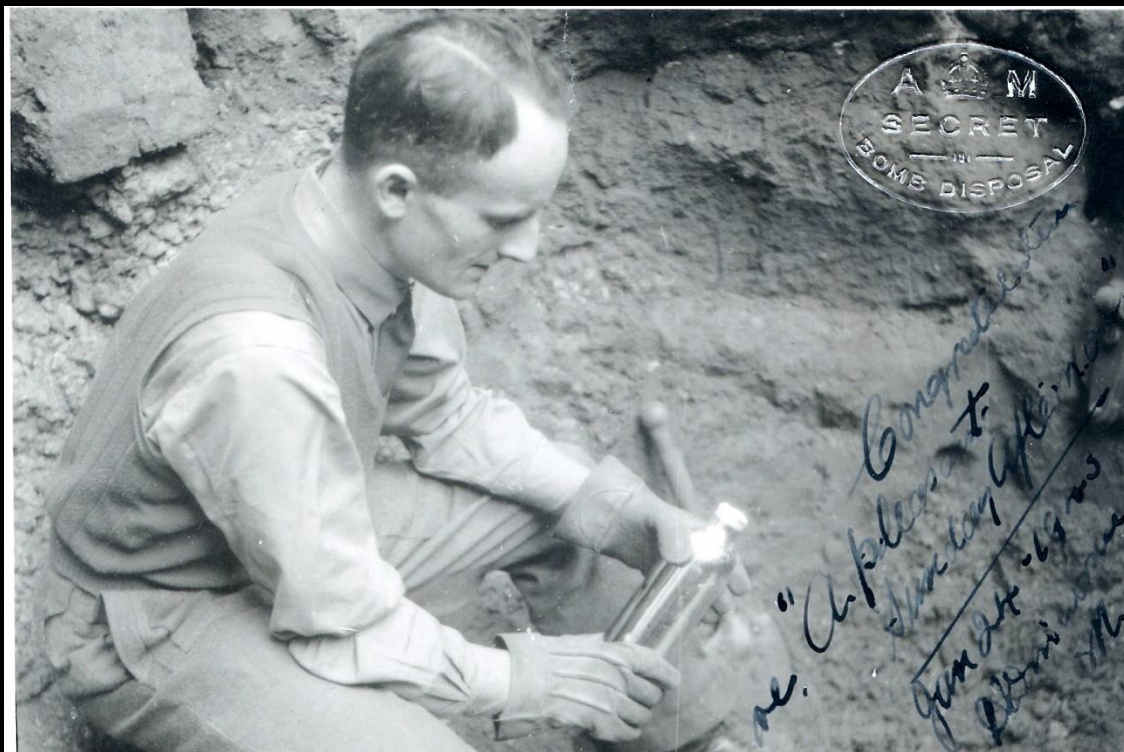
*'A challenging and provocative read' The Times*

# NUREMBERG EVIL ON TRIAL

THE EXTRAORDINARY STORY OF HOW THE NAZIS WERE BROUGHT TO JUSTICE





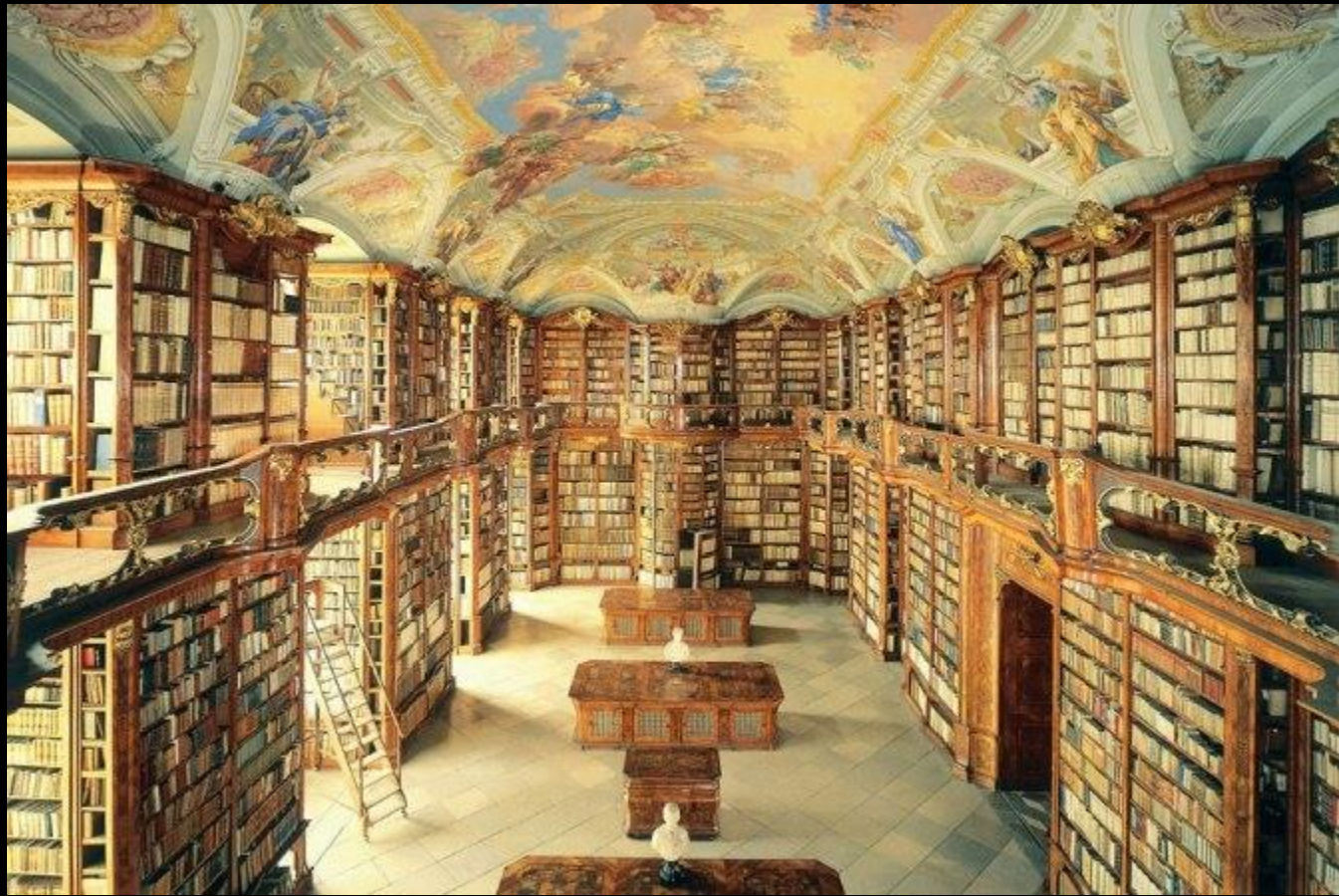












JUST DO IT.



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