

The Chainletter

An e-newsletter by and for the escape community

April 2020
Volume 11
Issue 114



UKEA Roll Call: From bottom left to right

Andy Robertson, Allan Taylor, Rebecca Taylor, Chris Gower, Joe Cooper, Tim Houlton, Robin Fox, Matthew Redmond, Michael Diamond, Andy Storm, Rob Shersby, Tony Gough, Jake Bullet, Dave Richards. Also Josh Sangwin who attended but not on the photo.

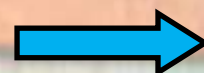
This month's Chains...

Special all UKEA issue!

U.K.E.A. 2020 Annual General Meeting

The 18th Annual General meeting of the United Kingdom Escape Artists (UKEA) took place on Saturday the 14th of March 2020 in Northampton with a strong turnout of both professional and amateur escape artists. The meeting comprised a number of lectures and presentations and also saw the 5th annual "Mick Hanzlik" award competition and the 03rd David De-Val Award.

The agenda for the day consisted of a Talk by Chris Gower titled 'Unique and Almost Unique Handcuffs'. A talk by Allan and Becki Taylor regarding their visit to David Copperfield's museum with George Hardeen, Shonie Hardeen and Lee Terbosic. We also had an amazing Q&A with George Hardeen a pre-recorded video by Allan, Becki and George, we had a full explanation of Tim Houlton's historic transport Cell escape, an amazing insight into underwater training by Dave Richards and a presentation by Andy all about his journey into getting a replica Iron Mask made that was originally featured on an Early David De-Val escape. We finished the day with a



visit from Doncaster Restraint Museum who brought along a large collection of restraints for us to play with, this also gave Jake a challenge to set some pretty tough challenges.

Tim Houlton – Transport Cell Escape

The first talk of the day was given by Tim Houlton, this was all about the methods he used to escape, and unfortunately I will not be discussing this here so we will just tell you all about the actual escape.

So where on earth do you get a Transport cell from I hear you ask? Well, it's a funny story but the prisoner transport unit was originally sold at a motor auction and purchased by a vehicle recovery company. They bought it for its chassis cab with the intention of converting it into a new recovery truck for their fleet. The prison truck body was then removed and put up for sale on E-Bay.

Before the truck was sold the usable electronics had been removed and kept for spares and when they did so, cable looms were cut through and further damage was caused to the electronic systems. On the positive side the mechanics of the security systems on the truck were intact as were all the internal fixtures.



The escape

The concept of a cell escape in terms of my escapology performances isn't one I had previously considered; I enjoy the audience participation aspect of performance. The idea of adding a cell escape to my range of performances came from Andy Robertson's Escape from a cell at Peterhead Prison on 31st October 2017 along with David De-Val's book "Cell Escape – The Real Secret" presented to me by Rebecca as a thank you for assisting with an escape that she and Allan performed. The prison truck escape idea actually came about during a conversation with Allan Taylor whilst replacing his kitchen floor, we were talking about the Discovery channel series "Houdini's Last Secrets" Allan and his Wife Rebecca featured on the show and had been involved in the episode that spoke about the Siberian Cell escape.



So taking this discussion one step further, we knew the many rumours about how Harry had succeeded and defeated the technology of his day but could we do it again in the modern age?

First step was to make this beleaguered prison transport unit actually work and that was quite a project. Getting a Haynes manual for this truck basically isn't happening, I've never seen the inside of one of these trucks and the equipment that remains was largely approaching the end of its life.



"Wild about Harry"
John Cox' Houdini web site
www.wildabouthoudini.com



I started with the wiring that didn't go anywhere and with the display from the main panel and worked from there. Originally the truck would have had a central panel running down the ceiling down the truck from one end to the other. This panel had the main lighting, Fire detection, CCTV, speakers for the sound system (yes it had a sound system) and some form of indication of the status for the locking systems on the cell doors. The status indicator was critical as the signals from the locks went into it and emerged in another format to communicate with the main panel. So in short I had a puzzle and people who know me will tell you I love a good puzzle. Many hours and days later the systems were in working order and that's when the real challenge begins on how to defeat this thing. The obvious solution is the escape trap hatches on the roof.

The locking mechanism release involves operating a lever inside the truck body and another one that would have been inside the cab. The lever that would have been inside the cab is badly rusted and seized, even if I could operate both at the same time from inside a cell the one outside cannot be released. The trap hatches and the locking mechanism for them have sensors on them that will trip the alarm system. The cell doors don't have a hatch so that option isn't viable. I have a 50mm gap under the door that



is a meter away from the main lock on the outside of the cell and the auxiliary lock and both of those mechanisms are also monitored by the alarm. The cell door is in a

solid steel

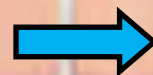
structure and the 3 stage locking system goes 40mm into the door in the center and at the top and bottom. I'm sure you agree it's an interesting challenge.



Chris Gower – Lecture

Chris Gower was introduced, his talk was titled 'Unique and Almost Unique Handcuffs'. Rather contradictory but Chris explained that it was from a recent discussion he had with Alex Nichols. Alex who is an honorary life time member of the UKEA and author of the two greatest books on Handcuffs. One of his pet hates is when people describe an item as

'almost unique'. Of course he is right something is either unique or not unique!



The Magic Nook
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"Do-It-Yourself" Magic for
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A great tribute site to the amazing
David De-Val

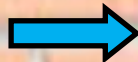


<http://www.davidde-val.com/>

Chris brought along a selection of very rare handcuffs, his first two items were very early 17th century unique restraints that locked with a wedge type lock. With industrialization companies like Griffin, Hiatt and Nichols established themselves. Although their products were produced in vast numbers they were all hand made so in a way each one is unique.



Fast forward 100 years and Chubb were asked by The Home Office to produce a high security Handcuff for prisoner transport. The result was their Escort Handcuff. With over 6 million key differs the keys are almost unique. Later on Chubb patented their Arrest Handcuff, this only has 24 key combinations and although most have the same key, Chris showed how to pick open the restricted issue models. In the 1970's Smith & Wesson produced their model 94 Handcuffs. Their lock is based on the ACE tubular lock but there were only 4 pins. Furthermore the key is either has a cut or no cut, so there are in theory 16 combinations, with 14 that were practical to use. Ian McColl in Australia printed an excellent 4 page article on these about 20 years ago. Ian gave his permission to reprint this article for the UKEA members and it shows the different key combinations.



This site is well worth the time to study if you want to learn about lock picking
www.lockpickguide.com

Begging Box!

Your input
is our output!

This is the part of The Chainletter where the editor begs for you to give him some material to publish. No idea what to write?



Well, How about...

- ♦ Your first escape.
- ♦ How did you learn to escape?
- ♦ Your creative process.
- ♦ Your last escape.
- ♦ Who is your hero? Why?
- ♦ What makes a good escape.
- ♦ Your escape bio.
- ♦ An escape you saw on TV.
- ♦ An escape you saw live.
- ♦ Anything escape related.



If you are interested in occult escapology, you want S. Rob!
<https://www.srob.co.uk/>

"Without a key"
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Chris showed two tools that could be used to open all the possible key differs. Chris explained that the model 94 was disconnected and many years later BOA were commissioned to make a high security device that could be attached to an existing handcuff or Leg irons. These are made and use a high security Medico Lock. The Medico Lock is unusual as not only is it necessary to lift the pins but they also need to be rotated to enable a side bar to slot into the rotating barrel. The keys are restricted and cannot be copied! He showed a new kit that is available to make a mold and cast a key with a low melting point alloy. Taking a standard 5 pin padlock he mixed up the two part compound and took a mold of the key. Allowing a couple of minutes the mold was set and the alloy poured in. Unfortunately there was a problem with the material and the key looked okay but did not work! However, he did show keys that he had cast earlier for the Medico High Security Handcuffs, Chubb Escort AVA key and Chubb Arrest Handcuffs!

Finally Chris had seen on YouTube the effect of Gallium metal on an Abus Titanium Padlock. The Gallium was melted and put onto the padlock with amazing results, so beware there is a weakness on aluminium handcuffs.

At last year's meeting Chris Gower did not have time to finish his talk on 'Myth Busters'. He showed three tools that were illustrated by Houdini in his book 'Handcuff Secrets' relating to Plug type restraints. The first was a large tool designed to remove the plug, this was clearly of little use, the size of it made it totally useless and as it had fixed spikes could not be guaranteed to fit all models.

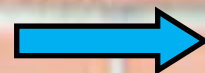
The second tool was like an L shaped piece of metal designed to open the handcuffs, it worked well on certain cuffs but if there was a spike on the rotating collar and the key had a central hole the tool would not work. Finally the tool designed to remove the plug in difficult situations, the idea being to put the tool in your mouth and use your tongue to rotate the inner bar that by using two gears turned the two prongs. Totally impossible to use but a beautiful tool.

The man in the iron mask by

Andy Robertson

The late David De-Val's roller coaster challenge escape that he undertook in Blackpool, England in September 1984 was indeed remarkable. He was challenged by three people who each supplied restraints. Derek Lever supplied a full metal head mask, and thumb screws. The late Mick Hanzlik supplied two Padlocks and Georgie Clark supplied the Handcuffs (Hamburg eights)

I think this clip was instrumental in my interest with David De-Val. This has remained with me and I had always wanted to personally see the actual mask and restraints used.



**Have the lads at
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can help...
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info@fenyxfyre.ca**

Through the passage of time now this is sadly not possible, but I was lucky enough to see the actual Brass sailors lock used several years ago at a UKEA meeting, owned by Allan and Becki Taylor.

My personal quest began to then make or find replica items and have the opportunity to share it with others who found it of interest. To my knowledge no one ever has replicated these items.

THE MASK

The metal mask with reference to the “Man in the iron mask” in the clip of the escape



attempt is without a doubt iconic through history and with David’s escape. So I had thought about making it myself and soon found that it was not as easy as first thought. I had originally gave up on the idea as I had significant difficulty in getting the mask replicated even by metal fabricators. That was until JP Fabrications in Dalmarnock, Scotland. The owner of JP Fabrications is Jason Patterson. Jason was able to replicate the mask and he did a fantastic job. I had made plans for him to make it which were all based on Video stills and old photos. After its initial completion I refined some of the shaping and then I painted it as well as fitting an internal detachable head support (As it’s a heavy). This year at the United Kingdom Escape Artist 2020 meeting I officially revealed it which was greatly received by all those in attendance.

THE PADLOCKS

The two padlocks that were used were a “Brass Sailor’s lock” and a huge multiple locking padlock which I later identified as having come from Clitheroe castle in England. (The Original Brass lock is with David’s Daughter Rebecca Taylor). I was lucky enough to find a replica lock the exact same as he brass lock to use but the other lock I had never seen anything like it, so I decided to make it.

I manufactured this to look as much as possible but was unable to make the working internals of such a lock which was the compromise.

THE HANDCUFFS

These were Hamburg eights, and I was able to obtain a replica modern set from Chris Gower. Chris also advised with his expert knowledge of restraints that an original set of Hamburg eights would cost about £200.

THE THUMB SCREW

This was also another item that was most probably either custom made or not mass produced as I never seen one like it in my search. So only option left was to make this. It was made of wood and had working top screw and internal lock. Again I was unable to make the working internals of such a lock which was the compromise.

The mask and items are best seen close up, so If you are ever in Scotland then you are welcome to see it! I hope you also enjoy the photos, and that this has helped keep Escapology alive as well as David De-Val’s memory.





Dave Richards – Underwater Training

Dave Richards gave us a fascinating insight into the work of underwater escapes and the training and discipline that goes into the preparation. Again something that isn't to be documented here so you guys will just need to get to our next meeting.



Doncaster Restraint Museum

Jake from the DRM who is one of our newest members of the UKEA decided to bring a long part of his comprehensive collection for the members to try out, Jake is the first to admit that he prefers putting people into restraints rather than escaping out of them. Check the museum out here <https://www.facebook.com/doncasterrestraintmuseum/>



Photos:



The Hanzlik Awards

This year we had 4 people (ok 5 but Allan and Becki are a pair) perform an escape on the day, Tony Gough, Tim Houlton, Andy Robertson and Allan & Becki



Andy Robertson

At the UKEA 2020 meeting Andy Robertson demonstrated a pillory escape. His escape was indeed very different as often you see this type of escape



either behind a curtain or other such barrier. Andy, however did this not only in full view but also with added restraints. The added restraints were large hasp and locks as well as hand cuffs on extended chains. The escape also was to teach others what to do should an escape go wrong and you find yourself in a situation where you may be unable to actually get out.

The pillory was hand made by Andy which many of his escape items are, this way it's made for him and he can ensure it works as intended. It was made from wood and easy to assemble as well as transport which is vital for taking it to and from shows.

It is hard to actually think how it was possible to escape let alone get access to the locks and remove the handcuffs as there is just little opportunity to even reach them when he is secured in it by my hands and neck. Prior to the escape he had a UKEA member (Josh) inspect it to check for any aids or apparatus that could aid my escape to which there was none. So in he went and was locked in securely by UKEA (Tim)

Andy showed that even when you think you cannot get out there is opportunity to use what is accessible to you. We will not reveal the method but say this....Sometimes the answer to escaping is staring you in the face!



Allan and Becki Taylor

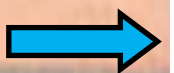
'Tis the year of Our Lord Sixteen hundred and twelve and we have unclean souls living amongst us! These heathens have chosen to forsake Our Lord and Savior and the good work of His Church! Instead they willingly consort with demons, practice witchcraft and sorcery, and have signed their names in the Devil's book!

Here in Pendle Hill, we do not stand for such blasphemy! Here in Pendle Hill, we obey the word of God and the word of God says that we should not suffer a witch to live! What say you, good people? Do we find Allan and Rebecca Taylor guilty of witchcraft? Aye, we find them guilty a'right and the sentence be summary execution upon the Holy Cross of Our Lord! The town locksmith has welded an iron mask onto your faces, the better to still your lying tongues and the gaze of your eyes, lest you attempt to bewitch us with Satan's enchantments! May the Lord have mercy on your dark souls! Rest in peace and torment us no longer!

Allan and Becki were handcuffed to a steel cross, placed in iron masks padlocked together.



The masks are also based on the original De-Val masks – See Andy's earlier document.





Tony Gough A.K.A James Bond

First act to compete for the coveted Mick Hanzlik Award was Tony Gough. Immaculately dressed in his Dinner Suit and bow tie, he was placed in handcuffs and two padlocks secured them on his wrists. He then got into a mail bag and with the assistance of Andy Robertson the solid metal bar was threaded through the rings. The bar was secured in place with two padlocks and the James Bond theme music started. Tim placed a large explosive device with timer on it near the sack. One and a half minutes later Tony's hand appeared through the top of the Mail Bag with a lock pick. After some careful manipulation and a further minute he opened the padlock and released the bar.

Rolling over and getting clear of the explosive device he got out of the sack holding a gun James Bond style and fired it just as the timer on the explosive device rang. He took his bow to great applause.



Tim Houlton

Tim decided to bring a whole new version of the mail bag challenge to the UKEA, he had recently been challenged by a fellow escape artist from the states to get shackled and zipped up into a sports bag and then padlocked securely in. Luckily for Tim he had skipped breakfast that morning so Rebecca managed to get the bag zipped up and secured. Around 3 minutes later Tim broke out to great applause. Once again Tim redefines an old escape and put his own unique stamp to it.





The Award Winners

The Hanzlik award was won by Andy Robertson. Andy came up with an unusual escape and possibly the first of its kind anywhere in the world.

The Award is named after Houdini Historian and Master Locksmith Mick Hanzlik and is presented for the “Best Escape” of the day and is voted for by all members.



The second award goes to Allan Taylor as he became the third person to win the prestigious David De-Val award for his efforts during the last 12 months in promoting the art form. We had 3 nominations this year, Tim Houlton for his Transport Escape and Andy Robertson for his caged escape.



Is there room?

What an incredible event that must have been! Could there be more such events is there room? A few years back I used to gather escape artists at various restaurants because Southern California seemed to have many such people with many such interest. This seems to have faded away, and I wonder what it would take to bring such events back. I think one of the best things we could do as escape artists is to gather locally. Not only does this benefit creativity and everyone involved, it also sets the stage for the potential major event if it ever does happen. Be honest, how many of you, if you had the time and the means, would come to a major gathering of escape artists complete with demonstrations, lectures and competitions? I know I would. You never know... One day maybe I will show up at the UKEA meeting myself. Time will tell.

- Your editor.

