In this Edition...

The Reunion proved to be another enjoyable occasion with much sharing of early experiences. The report on the day, included within, is longer than usual so as to provide more by way of background for those unable attend and to serve as an update re. the newsletter and the website.

Contributors to this edition are Peter Clark, describing his full and interesting life in the army and (surprisingly :) the civil service; and Keith Holbrook relating a touching story which he unearthed after seeing a name on the new War Memorial in Carshalton. Our thanks to them both.

Since the reunion we have heard from Bill Pizey the sad news that his wife Beryl lost her battle with cancer in January. Please remember Bill in your thoughts and prayers.

To echo a request made in October, please consider submitting a piece for inclusion in a future ‘Reflections’ and thus help us maintain it’s standard and size.

And finally an administrivia request... To assist in keeping costs down, if you currently receive 'Reflections' by post and might now be able receive it via email, please let us know and we will send a test message to you. Also please get in touch if you no longer wish to be on the post or email mailing lists - thank you.

Dave
When they reached 18 most of my peer group was called up for National Service, so many of you will have a similar story to tell. It was a tough call for parents to see their sons go off to possibly some dangerous place for 2 years. In our case it broke up the family. Three of us children had been evacuated early in the war. Ten years later Owen and I were to join the army and sister Jean was off to Westminster Hospital to train as a nurse.

The BB was quite a good preparation for army life as it was similar but more so. We had to clean our uniform and attend drill parades. Instead of camping for a week in August we were permanently camping in barracks or when abroad, in a tent. The food was generally similar and there were a lot of chaps of one's own age around so there was a lot of fun. And it was like a permanent club night with ping-pong and billiards in the NAAFI in our free time.

I joined the RAMC (Royal Army Medical Corps, or ‘run away matron’s coming’). Basic training in a camp near Aldershot was not difficult. As a non-combatant corps we were allowed to fire rifles only to defend our casualties so we did not do rifle drill. I remember re-assuring my brother Owen that with our experience of the Company and athletics, army training was no problem. In fact he had been granted a deferment to complete his external BSc and joined 6 months after me. He joined the Signals and went to Cyprus where he worked long shifts receiving and decoding signals. Troops there were largely confined to camp because of terrorism.

Following basic training we were assigned our future roles. Some went off to train as hospital staff, some to Field Hospitals but a group of us including former trainee meat or sanitary inspectors, were sent to the Army School of Health and Hygiene to learn about pests and the spread of diseases, water supply and sanitation. The school was at Mytchett, an improvement on our former barracks. The weather was beautiful and of an evening I would cycle round the country lanes and over the Hog’s Back. Sometimes I would visit friends of the family, Jack and Phyllis Mayhew who were officers in the 1st Farnham BB and Lifeboys and at weekends I would cycle home, a pleasant way to pass the summer.

After training I had the good fortune to be posted to Libya, one of the best postings. Others were not so fortunate with postings to outposts of empire, usually troublesome. Our purpose in going to Libya was eventually revealed as preparation for the invasion of Egypt, another fine mess and the whole expensive exercise proved pointless and embarrassing for the Government.

Our function was to maintain hygiene in the various camps, which proved very interesting as North Africa including Libya had been the bread basket of Rome 2000 years earlier and there was much evidence of Roman occupation still visible, in particular the vast towns of Sabratha and Leptis Magna. So while visiting camps on the coast I took the opportunity of seeing these two towns, which had been substantially preserved, rather like Pompeii but under sand instead of ash and pumice. Libya was a very peaceful spot and people nowadays would pay a large sum of money for such a long holiday in the Mediterranean.

My time in the army was not wasted since as well as improving my ping-pong I learnt how to press trousers using a shaving brush, a bowl of water and some brown paper with the iron plugged into the light bulb socket (best not to try this at home). I also developed a professional acquaintance with cockroaches and bed bugs. As some of you will know from your foreign holidays, the latter are
clever little chaps who hide in the crevices in the joints of beds, in door locks and picture rails from where they emerge to visit you at night. Their activities are identified by a double puncture of the skin. We were called upon to spray officers’ married quarters in town and tactfully did not dispute parents’ allegations that their children were suffering from mosquito bites.

After 2 years real life caught up with me and I returned to England to re-join the civil service. My friend Brian Rance had recommended the service as he pointed out that it left you free to do other things and did not intrude too much into your private life. Thus I had time to work with Brian with the Company athletics team and the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award Scheme.

Brian was in the Post Office Department and at that time he was an expert on telephone poles and could read their hieroglyphics to say who had supplied them and when they had last been maintained.

When I started in the Ministry of Housing and Local Government it was a busy time for the authorities as they were encouraged to demolish the slums, buy up land and build large numbers of houses and then blocks of flats. At a time when there was little cash to spare they were building over 350,000 units a year. See. It can be done!

We occupied the Treasury building on the corner of Whitehall and Parliament Square so were well placed to see the Opening of Parliament and visits by Heads of State. St James’ Park was also just out the back, handy for a lunch-time stroll.

The Department covered a wide range of topics so as I progressed I moved to several different parts of the Ministry from housing to planning, including the development of a further wave of New Towns and later on to Noise, then Housing Associations and Hostels. The latter were interesting as they provided for people with particular problems and as a result I found in the course of my visits a hostel which served the best soup in London.

The Noise job was good because it meant that we looked after a number of non-civil servants. The Noise Advisory Council included, groups of experts in all aspects of noise, professors, ear specialists and representatives of Heathrow protest groups as well as the aviation industry. The council sponsored the Darlington Quiet Town Experiment to see if by increasing public awareness noise nuisance in the town would be reduced through influencing behaviour. In fact the perception of noise increased. A reasonable subjective result.

These Quangos involving outsiders were most interesting and I was lucky to serve on 2 Commissions responsible for helping staff who were in danger of losing their jobs as a result of local government re-organisation. The commissioners were drawn as usual from the ‘great and the good’, mainly retired town and county clerks plus a trade unionist.

It was here while serving the 1974 Commission that I first heard a dictum that has stood me in good stead ever since. I had to represent the Chairman at a fund raising event in aid of Chetham’s School at the Whitbread Cellars. It was a good lunch and I sat next to the bursar and made the Chairman’s apologies. When I reported back to the Chairman that afternoon, he said “I hope that you promised them every assistance short of actual help”. So whenever I hear someone in Government saying how concerned they are about a particular issue, I say to myself “every assistance…”

Peter Clark
Reunion 2014...

The Reunion on October 11th went well with laughter and chatter again filling the Longley Rd middle hall. There was a larger than usual contingent of ex. GLB / GB members thanks to the efforts of Daphne Knights and Pam O’Brien, while the number of Old Boys was slightly reduced when compared with 2012. Overall 48 people registered which, taken together with those who somehow managed to sneak past Keith and Bettie Holbrook at the reception desk, took us just over the 50 mark.

For those unable to attend, the extract below is as delivered on the day during the more formal session

Points and comments made at the time and afterwards are shown thus.

Absent Friends...

Avis Rance and Jack Mayhew, both of whom passed away this year, were two friends who would have undoubtedly been here today. We much miss their presence and positive personalities. It is good that Alan feels he can be with us and we welcome Jean, Avis’s sister. We also fondly remember Brian Flint who was with us here in 2012.

Those too sick to join us today are Bill Pizey, Jack Fishpool and ex. Captain Neil Pheasant. Bill and Jack have had some real ups and downs this year and Neil, whose health is not good, would I know, love to be with us. They all send their good wishes;

please keep them and Neil’s wife Karen in your thoughts and prayers.

We have also received ‘absence notes’ from Bob Verrills, Harvey Dunford and Mike Wallace, they all request their best wishes be passed on.

The Future...

Time rushes by and as we ‘regulars’ get older we can start to envisage a time when the numbers who are able to attend a Reunion will diminish to the point when it is no longer viable. Our hope remains that we can, by that time, have interested a younger group to ‘carry the torch’ - they too, as they grow older, may wish to be reminded of early shared experiences and friendships, much as we do. Our efforts to facilitate such a transition will continue and we will keep in touch with any developments...

For all the advantages and historical links associated with meeting in the Tooting Junction Baptist Church halls, they are not well situated for transport access; car parking in particular. At the Reunion there were more stories than usual of people spending much time trying to locate a parking space, paying £2.50 per hour for the pleasure and then having to leave early. With this in mind, the committee is investigating possible alternative locations in the general area and a communication will be sent out eliciting opinions should any likely alternatives be identified.
The ‘Reflections’ Newsletter...

Thanks to Alan and all the contributors for maintaining the newsletters’ high quality. The contributions pipeline is however almost dry and if this remains so then smaller, less frequent editions are in prospect. If anyone has thoughts on this please contact Alan or myself.

The Website...

All has been quiet as we have now exhausted the Company material digitised as part of the 2008 Centenary Project. The website now exists principally as a digital repository to make the Company archive material readily accessible.

We agreed in 2012 that, at the next Reunion, we would review the future of the web site, ie. does it’s value to us and others match it’s cost of around £90 per year?

It was agreed that we would continue to fund the website and review the situation again in 2016.

Not an exact science as it is based on a ‘cookie’ stored when a person enters the website, but the total number of website ‘hits’ in 2014 are reported as: 170 first time visits and 99 return visits.

Our Finances...

The Reunion collection in 2012 was £224, thank you. The items of expenditure since then have been...

- Website running costs are approx. £90 p.a. - mainly the site hosting fee of £72. Our site is now considered a large one!

- ‘Reflections’ posting and stationary costs - £20 per issue (we post to 39 OBs and friends) and we are indebted to Chris Buss who continues to get copies printed for us. Chris is hopeful that this can continue up to March 2016 when he plans to retire. We also send out ‘Reflections’ via email to around 60 people.

Reunion expenditure - consists of a donation to the Church of £50 and the cost of ingredients for the large homemade cakes.

After taking into account the expenditure for today, our current balance is £24.

The collection on the day was £315.50 and subsequently an anonymous donor contributed £90 specifically to fund one year’s website costs. Many thanks to all. After making a donation to the Church and reimbursing the cake maker, we are left with a healthy balance of £430.22.

With Thanks...

Thank you all for coming. Our thanks also to Tooting Junction Baptist Church, to Janet and the Church ladies for again looking after us so well and lastly to the committee for their work over the past two years and here today.

To end this session we can sing ‘Will Your Anchor Hold’ and then close with prayer (Les Wright).

After a short break we sang some BB and other familiar Hymns - thanks to Alan for accompanying. We did not quite raise the roof, but we are definitely getting louder... For those with an interest, the pieces requested were:

- ‘To God be the Glory’, ‘Blessed Assurance’,
- ‘We Thank Thee O Our Father’, ‘The Day Thou Gavest’, ‘My Faith it is an Oaken Staff’, ‘Love Divine all Loves Excelling’, ‘O Jesus I have Promised’ and ‘Underneath the Banner’.

That is all I think, as ever, thoughts and comments welcome

Dave
Caption Competition

Here we have John Ward and Bob Verrills at a recent pub gathering of old boys in Sussex...

Here are some suggestions of what was said:

From Alan Rance...
  Bob: “Are you sure it was today John?”

Alan Verrills...
  John: “Those Windeaze tablets are working really well for you Bob.”

Bob Verrills...
  “Can’t believe they wouldn’t let us in without proof of age!”

Dave Richardson...
  Bob: “Was it something we said?”
  John: “I only asked whose turn it was to buy the next round.”

Jack Fishpool...
  “Didn’t we camp here with the BB in 1956? Bob?”
  “No John, your memory’s going, that was the Isle of Wight.”

Plus a couple more from the above...

  “Embarrassing being thrown out for fighting, John.”

  “Am sure they were here a moment ago Bob…”
  “Quick John, now’s your chance to get us a beer.”

Thanks to all...

Our next Pub lunch gathering for ‘Southern’ OB’s will be at the Victory Inn, Staplefield, West Sussex in April 2015. If you may be interested in joining us, please contact Dave.
In Memory of Deck Boy Walter Pook…

A new war memorial was recently unveiled in Carshalton’s Garden of Remembrance. It is for the fallen of WW2 and is situated alongside Carshalton Ponds. Walking through the park one day last November I had a closer look at the Memorial. While casually reading the columns of the dead engraved in the stone I came across a name that sounded familiar - Walter Pook. I thought I had seen that name on our website; so on returning home checked the archives section and came across the entry ‘540 Walter Pook Devonshire Road 1941’. Knowing that Les Wright had been an NCO around that period I contacted him and got the following response.

“Oh yes, I remember Wally, he joined with a lot of other lads early in the war. Can’t remember much about him - he was just another boy in the company with nothing particular about him that stood out.”

I decided to try to find out more. A local historian was helpful as were various websites. What I have discovered may not give the full story but reveals an intriguing glimpse of a very brave lad who lost his life in the service of his country.

Walter joined the 70th around his sixteenth birthday and was probably a member for less than 18 months. When he died he was 17 years old and serving in the Merchant Navy, at that time a highly dangerous place to be. The battle of the Atlantic was then at its height with the potent U-boat threat ever present. Why did Walter join the Merchant Navy? Could it be because of his age the only service a 17 year old could join was the Merchant Navy? Though it is unlikely that answers to these questions will ever be known I think it can be assumed that he was so keen to serve that he took the only option open to him.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission has been the most informative and Walter is ‘Remembered with Honour’ on the Tower Hill War Memorial, in London. This Memorial commemorates men and women of the Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleets who died in both World Wars and have no known graves. Walter joined the SS Carperby which was a cargo ship based at West Hartlepool and as a crew member was classified as a Deck Boy - not an easy life as one can imagine! The ship’s final voyage was crossing the Atlantic as part of Convoy ON-66 before dispersing off Halifax, Nova Scotia. SS Carperby then sailed as an independent but 400 miles off the coast of Newfoundland was then torpedoed by U-boat S88 on March 1st 1942 and was lost with all hands.

Thus concludes this sad story of youthful heroism in which a former member of the 70th lost his life.

Keith Holbrook
Remember these?

Just when we thought that 70th archive material had all but dried up, we have received copies of Membership Cards, including names of Staff and Squad members, for the years 1955-56, 1956-57, 1957-58 and 1960-61.

Scans of the originals came from Ron Sale, via Jack Fishpool and Alan Verrills, thanks to them all.

They are ideal material for the website and transcriptions have been added to the site’s ‘Archives’ section.

If anyone has cards for other years, or other Company material of interest, please get in touch.