



Royal Air Force Locking Apprentice Association

Newsletter

Serial 18

March 1998

Get fell in for Royal parade!

For some issues now the newsletter has been keeping you up to date with the news, or lack of it, of the closure of RAF Locking.

At last we can now reveal the programme of events which will mark the closure of RAF Locking, including an opportunity for you to take part in final Freedom of Weston Parade. The bad news (or good news depending on how you feel about marching again) is that we have been limited to one Flight for this Royal Parade!

The Parade will take place on Wednesday 23 September, with a Rehearsal and briefing for the LAA contingent in the previous afternoon, if it is deemed that such a rehearsal is necessary.

Volunteers for the honour of representing the Association should make themselves known to Charles Hart at the earliest opportunity. Although not yet finalised, there will be an agreed

dress standard for the occasion. As many members as possible are asked to make the effort to view the parade and support our representatives.

The midweek timing of the Parade has caused something of a problem for the committee in arranging this year's AGM, Reunion and dinner dance. After much discussion at committee, it is thought that many ex-apps will want to attend the closure activities, and it seems sensible to synchronise the AGM and Reunion with them. This does of course have the disadvantage that many members will have to take time off work, and so LAA events have been compressed as far as possible to minimise the time off needed to attend at least the FoW Parade, Reunion and AGM. The programme for events can be found at the back of the newsletter.

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Because the closure ceremonies involves a Royal Visit to Locking, it is not going to be possible to hold the AGM on camp on the day of the parade. An alternative arrangement has been made to use Dance Scene, and you are invited to move there from viewing (or taking part in) the Parade, where lunch and drinks will be served, followed by the AGM. The Dinner dance will take place at Dance scene later the same evening.

Elsewhere in this newsletter you will find details of other events taking place to mark Locking's closure.

Because of the obvious problem for those still at work, which may effect the numbers attending, you are urged to complete the application form as soon as possible so that the committee can gauge numbers intending to attend.

Those wishing to take part in the Freedom Parade should let the secretary know as soon as possible so that plans for rehearsals, dress standards, etc. can be arranged.

Bill Forbes (76th)

by Mike Collier (76th)

When I received my copy of the LAA membership list, I noticed that the name of Bill Forbes was still present. Sadly Bill died in 1997.

Bill was one of the three Rhodesians who joined the 76th Entry in 1954. If a popularity poll had been taken at the end of the course I have little doubt that he would have finished at the top. Although, like myself, he struggled with the technical material, his ready smile and great sense of humour won him many friends. In fact I never came across anyone who did not like him.

In January 1957 Bill returned to Rhodesia and worked on air and ground equipment as well as instrumentation and electrical installations. By September 1996 he was very seriously ill with cancer, but when we all thought it was time to say farewell, he rallied. During the next year he travelled around to see all his old friends and included a trip to Canada to visit relatives. Sadly the period of remission could not last and Bill died early in November 1997. With his passing the world lost a true Gentleman.

Bob Pritchard (82nd)

It is with great sadness that the death is announced of Bob Pritchard of the 82nd Entry, who died as a result of injuries received in a motor cycle accident in January. His funeral took place at Southampton crematorium on 26 January 1998.

After his RAF career, Bob retired to take a degree, following that with a Masters. At the time of his accident he was a lecturer in electronics at Southampton University.

He was the founder member of a close group of former Boscombe Down colleagues who kept in contact down the years. Bob was described by one of these, Raymond (Andy) Kappes, as a very special person, always the life and soul of any gathering and a man who never lost his sense of fun and adventure. Recently the group went to Alton Towers where every one except Bob decided that discretion was the better part of valour when it came to riding Nemesis.

Bob will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

Editorial

Thanks to every one for the wealth of input this time, including those whom I have had to leave over to the next Issue.

This is partly due to the unexpected, but very welcome piece from Tim Wyatt, fresh back from the Sri Lanka reunion.

His article, as received, included a lot which I haven't been able to squeeze in, but I hope I have preserved the essence of the original.

Please keep sending in those articles. Especially welcome would be some cartoons – any one handy with a pen?

On a sadder note we have to record the passing of two colleagues, one rather late because I wasn't informed any earlier. Please let me know if you hear of anyone passing on, preferably with an obituary, so that we can make our own farewells.

Committee Report

The 17th meeting of the LAA Committee was held at Royal Air Force Locking on 29 January. Several items of business were discussed, highlights of which are summarised below.

AGM Proposals

As announced elsewhere, the 1998 AGM will be held on 23 September at Dance Scene, Whitecross Road, Weston super Mare, commencing at noon.

Members wishing to propose any items for discussion at the AGM are requested to submit details in writing to the secretary before the end of May.

Treasurer's Report

The committee discussed a major item of expenditure which had occurred recently, the publication and distribution of the membership list. The total cost of this item was £516.87, which worked out at about £1.30 per member. Printing is now a significant cost to the Association, which although obtained almost at cost is expensive compared to previous arrangements (when it was free!). However, the membership list was a "one off"; future changes will be issued as amendments via the newsletter. (Newsletters typically cost less than 20p per copy for printing — Ed.)

Membership Secretary's Report.

At the time of the meeting the membership stood at 388 which represents a drop since the AGM. Part of the problem has been a significant number of members failing to renew their subscriptions. The workload and cost of sending out reminders is considerable, and it would be most helpful if members could pay by standing order.

The membership secretary and others have been actively promoting the Association through "Service Pals" on Ceefax, the Internet and *Flypast* and *Airmail* magazines with some suc-

cess. However, one of the most effective ways remains word of mouth. Members are encouraged to use all facilities at their disposal to publicise the LAA.

Memorabilia

With the closure of Locking comes the problem of what to do with the various items of memorabilia, especially the file boxes of photographs, Entry Shields, etc. Charles Hart reported that he had met the new CO of Cosford who seemed to be sympathetic to the upkeep and stewardship of memorabilia from Locking. He was hoping to set up a museum area for the storage and display of items should we choose to transfer them to Cosford. Members are asked to come up with ideas and opinions of what they would like to see happen to such items. Meanwhile the Chairman is to write to OC Cosford formally to see what is possible to avoid the splitting up and dispersal of items.

Over and Out

RAF Locking memoirs

By the time you receive this newsletter, the book published to commemorate the closure of RAF Locking should be about to hit the streets..

As described in previous issues, the book is a collection of anecdotes by personnel who have served at the station and will be priced at £12.95. *Over and Out* will only be available from RAF Locking, and anyone wishing to purchase a copy should contact:

RAF Locking on 01934 822131

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Hard to believe ...

It is hard to believe that it is almost forty six years since that morning of the 30th April 1952, I joined the Royal Air Force as Radio Aircraft Apprentice. On passing out as an Air Radio Fitter in March 1955 I have never been back to Weston-super-Mare, and have only seen – many years ago – about three of the actual entry.

Like many Radio Apprentices I hardly ever did radio again. In fact my service was done mainly at AWRE Aldermaston, a Joint Services Trials Unit, and Bomber Command on the Blue Steel Missile with the added Vulcan 2.

On leaving the RAF I joined, after a few traumatic months, the Gas Industry and specialised in instrumentation, telemetry and micro -wave radio systems.

In 1993 – just after the Grand National Cock Up – I had a heart attack, and retired some months later on the grounds of ill health. So I became a has-been, which me and my little dog somehow enjoy! No more long car milages, missed lunches, breakfast meetings, phone calls, working all the hours God sent – and paying all that income tax.

In the year of our Lord 1964, I was even awarded, it being the Queens Birthday, a medal for an empire which does not exist. No one is sure why, but I had to go on a Parade, and as those who may remember me know, I hated them. In fact I once sprained my ankle and missed out on the 68th's Parade – Deep Joy!

I was very sad to learn that Johnny Hardwick from New Zealand was dead, for he along with our drummer friend Manning, were the first people I met on my joining day in that wooden hut across from the Cookhouse. I also remember with sadness the day that Len Morley, a former CAA of I think the 67th, was killed on his scooter near Wimslow in Cheshire – he was on a Missile Course. He was the only Mormon I ever met in the service and it is nice not to forget him, for he was a very nice person.

Who could forget Dennis Ward — I never have!

Mr. One-Pause-Two, but did not he make us smart? That day we passed out even I felt proud – and I doubt if I have ever again been so fit. (How I loved the daily Prima-Donna contest between Cpl McLean of The RAF Regiment and Dennis!)

Do you recall the greatest Joy Day of all in the spring of 1956 – when all airmen could throw must of that damn webbing away? Wish I'd kept it now!

Best wishes to all. I may not see you again in person, nor strut about in my best blue with added shoulder pads and winglets, thanks to a useless tailor ... but I do remember you now and then.

Ernie Fisk, 71st

The following is a composite of a couple of Emails sent to Mike West. I hope Taff Edwards won't mind my paraphrasing.

Enjoyed reading the last newsletter. In it there was a request for the name of a 90th guy who lost a leg in an accident. An ex 93rd mate of mine by the name of Richard Brown told me a story about being based on a plateau in the mountains near Aden called Mukarees (pronounced appropriately 'Muck-ear-arse'). Because he was on overnight guard another ex-app had to do his morning transmitter checks for him. He waved him and the other guys off in their Landrover from the camp gates, and saw a mine explode under it as it drove down the road. His replacement lost a foot in the accident. His name is Ron Kelly and currently lives near Melbourne, Australia. He was recently on holiday in the UK and visited Richard. Richard has his address, and I am quite willing to act as go between if any of his mates want to write or Email him via me.

Richard (Taff) Edwards, 88th

(contact details in the members list — Ed.)

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Warning - literary stirrings ...

(A while back Derek Wood (88th) Emailed to warn me that he was "feeling some literary stirrings coming on!" Of course, being forever on the lookout for articles, I flashed back a priority reply to the effect that all literary stirrings should be vigorously encouraged. This was his reply.)

The literaries are still in the stirring stage but here are a couple of things to start.

I wonder if a 'humour' section would rattle a few brain cells? There must be a legion of SWoman and Crew-Chief stories out there. Here are a couple of starters:

SWoman Story Number 1

In the early days of the universal raincoat there didn't appear to be any official policy on wearing/not wearing badges of rank, and matters tended to be settled at a local level. Recently posted from a liberal regime I wandered into the Mess, removing my pristine raincoat as I entered. There was a blast of air and the SWO appeared in front of me like a genie from a bottle. He left me in no doubt about the raincoat policy on HIS station and requested my presence in his office next morning, complete with stripes.

I entered SHQ at the appointed hour. "I came to show you these, Sir" I ventured, pointing to the new stripes. "Congratulations Sergeant!" he roared, leaping to his feet and shaking me vigorously by the hand, "I look forward to welcoming you to the Mess".

Crew Chief story Number 1

Our Canberras were busy taking photos during a spot of local bother. Things were warming up and turnaround times became a priority. During one particularly fraught period our Crew-chief Stan rushed into the Engineering Officer with a F700 to sign.

"I can't sign that Chief" said the Eng Off, after

slowly perusing the detail.

"Then just put a bloody cross Sir!" shouted Stan.

How about it folks - lets be 'aving those SWoman and Crew-Chief stories, they would make ideal "fillers".

Sri Lanka

What kind of liaison exists between apprentice associations? I've recently had a letter from Annesley De Soyza one of the 75th brighter sparks; SAA, Henlow, resignation at 35, who is travelling from his Australian home to his native Sri Lanka late next month (February) to meet with the Royal Ceylon (sic) Air Force ex-Apprentice Group; they 'reunion' to commemorate 50 years association with the RAF Apprentice Scheme. Annesley was hoping, somewhat optimistically I thought, that 'one or two of the 75th will be able to attend'. (I can't - far too poor! And all those 75th who have made it good and are filthy rich pretend to be otherwise engaged. Miserable sods. No entry spirit in the 75th you know. We were the most complete shower that ever fell upon Locking! Far too wet for Maggie Thatcher, I fear)

The Newsletter has not carried information on this intended Colombo Reunion so presumably you as editor did not know about it. Perhaps we should contact the Secretary of the P.C.(sic) - I like that bit - A.P. ex-Apprentice Group:

Whimsically

Peter Platt

Unfortunately, I don't think that any official approach was made to the LAA. It seems that every one had a personal invitation, but alas, I fear, too late. However, at least one of our happy band made it - and returned to tell the tale! His account appears over leaf for us to, vicariously at least, enjoy the event! — Ed.

SRI LANKA REUNION

by
Tim Wyatt (99th)

Like many good things it started as a joke, when at the last A.G.M one of our Sri Lankan brethren announced that the next bash was to be in Sri Lanka. I was somewhat surprised when in January the invitation duly arrived!

We now jump to 10th February of this year when I was summoned to an urgent meeting with my company's Customer Support Manager. The chat went like this, "Tim we need to put a radio engineer into Sri Lanka for about two weeks — maybe six, are you interested in going please?" I thought about it for 5 micro-secs before deciding, but said that I would have to ask my wife and would let them know in an hours time.

"Sorry darling they need me to go to Sri Lanka. It's very urgent (well for me it was). Away for about a week or two — do you mind dear?"

"... So you get to go to your party, ... and I get a decent sapphire ring? Seems OK to me darling".

A visit to the company nurse revealed that all the stuff injected over twelve years in Bomber and Strike Command was now deemed useless and I would have to start again. For the next ten days the ex-casualty sister systematically practised her darts on my left arm, and I began to get a feel for all the nasty things they were trying to protect me from.

Just before we left, I was given a first aid kit which, it was pointed out, contained a sterile selection of goodies only to be opened by a para-medical or doctor. The seals were to remain intact otherwise. Then for the first time somebody casually mentioned that the *Tamil Tigers* had recently blown some of the previous in-country team across the office, and spoilt their day!

Soon we were Sri Lanka bound! Never having crossed six time zones before in one day I was surprised when they served dinner at 3 pm GMT and then switched the lights out! "When I had flown to the Emirates some thirty years before, it had been a three day affair with two night stops with subsequent hangovers, courtesy of a much loved Hastings.

At Colombo airport the door opened to let in an oven-like heat. We waited in a long line in the non-air conditioned terminal for Immigration to process our visas.

The fun began as soon as I arrived. All my life I have had problems with others spelling or mispronouncing my name 'Wyatt' (except the Norwegians for some strange reason, but I digress.) A smart young lady held up a board with three of our party's names and a Mr. Wyman. After several minutes it dawned on me that must be yet another version of my name. So for the next two hours I became Mr. Wyman — it was simpler that way!

We left in a taxi supplied by the hotel. On getting in we tried the seat belts. "They don't work", said the driver. "Only the air conditioning and horn works." He was right, the speedo didn't work, neither did the rev counter, fuel gauge, etc.

The rules of the road were simple — stay alive. We quickly discovered that traffic lights were merely advisory, the centre line of the road was for decoration and the quickest way through a roundabout was a straight line to your exit — clockwise or anti clockwise being OK.

Due to the problems with their Tamil brothers, the airfield looked as if a good TACEVAL was in progress, with aggressive car checks. However, they waived the white devils through with a smile. At the hotel guess who the reservation was for? You're right, a Mr. Wyman. They accepted my Amex card for a room reservation then asked, "Where is Mr. Wyman, he has not shown up yet!" It transpired that I had just taken another room in my proper name. I said that Mr. Wyman

had been taken ill and I had come in his place. This they accepted — simple really!

I got down to the serious part of the trip and rang the gentleman who wrote to us all, Farouk. When I got through I was told he was in England, but would I contact an Edgar Cooray? This was quickly done and one of the funniest invitations I have ever received duly arrived by fax.

On the Thursday before the party, my company informed me I was flying home on Sunday, immediately after the party, departing the hotel at 6:00am. A check of the party arrangements confirmed that dinner was not being served until 11:30pm on Saturday. So, about four hours to spare — but twelve hours to sleep on the plane.

Getting around Colombo is fairly haphazard due to the anti-terrorist measures. No lorries, coaches and mini buses are allowed to pass through the check points without being thoroughly checked. This gave me some concerns about finding my way to the party, especially with the unreliable maps provided. The hotel security guards had each given me different directions to the Mount Lavina Hotel. One had assured me I could walk to it, others had each pointed to different buildings around the city! By luck, and with two hours to spare I got my hands on the standard taxi fare chart and found the Mount Lavina Hotel was 39 Kms from mine — about one and a half hours drive!

Arriving at the Mount Lavinia is like approaching an old Raj residence as typified in many of the plays on TV. A splendid white building, it is approached from a built up lane. I formed the opinion it was very similar to Torquay near where I live.

A magnificent pair of freshly starched white shorts and tunic with a white pith helmet hovering above the shoulders suddenly appeared, checked my identity, and raised the barrier to let me into a court yard by a fountain, the agreed meeting place. After the air conditioned coolness of the taxi, my shirt immediately became soaked with sweat in the 85 degrees heat. The fountain looked very inviting.

I had walked less than three paces when hands were thrust out at me and the introductions began. I felt I was being greeted as the long lost son. Hand after hand was shaken with introductions to wives. I have to admit that the Locking was massively outnumbered by Halton.

The events began with the Sri Lankan Air Force Cultural Troupe escorting the assembled group up the staircase to the Empire ballroom. Describing their dress is difficult for me (I'm Radar not haute couture), but for the fashion conscious here goes. The men wore resplendent orange and gold turbans edged with gold sequins. Their short waist coats were of similar design with balloon type trousers gathered together at the ankles. The ladies of the troop had a similar dress, but their head dress was different — as far as I remember, similar to the costumes worn in *The King and I*.

Then followed the traditional lighting of the oil lamp, a respectful silence for those who had fallen in battle. The speeches came at the beginning of the night's events, from which I assume they expected us all to be drunk by the end of it.

After the speeches we were all required to go individually to the podium to announce ourselves and our entry number. The Locking contingent accepted precedence by going last. For me an ordeal, as I sometimes stutter on words beginning with 'L'. However if my memory is correct I think my speech went like this: "Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen, at the age of 52 I must be the sprog of the party. My name is Tim Wyatt from the 99th, Locking." At which point everybody had a good laugh while the Locking contingent cheered above the noise. Immediately after this I was (as was everybody else) presented with an embossed brass dish by our chief guest, Air Vice Marshal J. Wee Rakkody, SLAF. He looked awfully young to be such a rank, but perhaps it is me that is old. We were then all lined up for group photographs. I hope I get one as a souvenir.

The Cultural Troupe returned and put on one of the most stunning dance displays I have ever witnessed. For me this one event was worth all the effort I had put in to get there. When they had finished, plans were already being discussed on how to get the troupe to Earls Court. I hope if they ever do, you will all get a chance to see them.

The ladies of the troupe opened the routine with what I can only call a mesmerizing dance (not like the dodgy night clubs we never admit to having been to). I went to the front of hall to get a better photograph and found myself swaying in time to the dancing and almost forgot to press the shutter. On stepping back most of the ex-pat contingent were on their feet applauding these ladies and a thunderous applause rocked the ballroom when they finished. The men appeared with their devil dance to cast out the evil spirits and the dancing got more involved with members of the troupe flying across the dance floor from all directions.

Later, one of the Sri Lankan ex-apps came across in his wheel chair and said he was in the 93rd Locking. After chatting about old times I remembered I use to play Basket ball against him. From the haze of introductions I remember that from Locking there were three 75th, one 94th, one 93rd and muggings 99th. If I have missed anybody else out please accept my apologies.

The dancing reminded me of the winter gardens all those years ago. Upon mentioning this to one ex-Locking lads, he looked at the chandelier above us and remarked "You never got this quality there, mate."

I was approached by Bill Kelley (ex-55th Halton) who asked me if I would write an article for the Haltonian Journal (didn't they teach writing at Halton then Ed?) as he felt they needed a Locking view of the proceedings. As Bill Kelley was from the most senior entry there, and I was the clearly the junior, I had a photograph taken of us both and accepted his 'offer'.

The buffet dinner was superb with many cruel jokes about where was the orderly officer? All too soon 1:00 am came round and I had to begin my journey home, before the imodium wore off, which I had to take to control a certain medical condition!.

I found my driver fast asleep, after the white shorts, tunic and floating pith helmet remembered where he had put him. On the way back to the hotel we had to brake very quickly when an armoured car suddenly appeared and stopped us for another check. My hotel was next to their Air Force Regiment's barracks and as I approached the entrance we were stopped again. When the corporal saw my RAF tie, official program and brass plate he threw up an immaculate salute and said simply "Thank you for coming, Sir". A fitting end to a wonderful evening.

The trip back to the UK was full of fun. At Dubai we found a stowaway who just happened to be a Tamil. Consequently all the baggage had to come off and be identified and we had to cleared for the third time that day.

Despite the troubles I always felt safe and look forward to the time when I can return, perhaps with my wife. For me, the really dangerous part of the whole trip was the half asleep taxi driver who took me home from Heathrow to Devon. My only wish is that they would stop killing one another and thus allow their superb country to be opened up for tourism. Sri Lanka is a wonderful place, and the people genuinely very friendly.

My wife would like me to return as well, because she needs a necklace to go with the blue sapphire ring and matching ear rings.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to: The Royal Ceylon Air Force Ex-Apprentices Group for the invite and party, Edgar and Madonna Cooray for ensuring I got to the party, My company for creating the problem allowing me to get there, Bill Kelley for the challenge, H.M. Customs and Excise for ignoring me at LHR and Johnson & Johnson for the Imodium.

THE INVITATION TO THE PARTY

Fax to: MR TIM WYATE ROOM 718

ROYAL CEYLON AIR FORCE EX-APPRENTICES GROUP

Welcome to Sri Lanka. Our local group is a mixture of Halton, Locking and Hereford ex-apprentices. You should smell the difference from a distance. We are an example of harmonious ethnic brotherhood. Yet if you should hear a bang, jump into the nearest drain, and pray that you are faster than the speed of sound!!

Some of you will see our handsome faces for the first time, others after many years on Friday 20th February. It will be a two hour "Bullnight", starting at 1930 hrs at a private club called The Capri. If you take a taxi, say its along DHARAMPALA MAWATHA, but if you are in no mood to test our drivers in navigation, just say near Liberty Plaza. We suggest men come in long trousers and open necked short or long sleeved shirt. The ladies need not cover their legs below the knees. Let the starving "Dam Busters" have a juicy feed!! A few other non ex app oldies have also been invited, a pot-pouri of AVMs, SGTS, and LACs. Please try and be nice to them. They were not as fortunate as we were!!

We will give you the Saturday off. On Sunday 22nd you will be picked up at the Mount Lavinia Hotel at 09:30hrs and taken for a ride!! We shall head towards KATUNAYAKE which is 20 miles north of Colombo. If other vehicles don't bash us en route, or if cattle and cyclists let you pass unhindered, you should safely arrive at the Air Force base in about one hour. You will have to form up in threes opposite the main guard room for the FFI, and then will be taken on a conducted tour under armed escort. Look around and see if you recognise your old haunts, the C50 billets, the Sgts mess, the Astra cinema and most popular swimming pool. Thank God, brick walls can't speak!! It will be safe for the boys to come in shorts, no more Kotik, Wijays, and we promise to keep Bucky and Tom on a leash!! We shall then adjourn to the boat club for a few cool beers after which there will be a spread of some local food, with red hot chillies and dynamite sambol for you. We will guarantee, you will not feel the return journey to Colombo!!

You have five days to recover from the Katunayake trip and the Air Force food, until we meet again on Saturday 28th. We the ex-apps and our ladies will assemble at 1930 hours in the Empire Ballroom to await the arrival of the chief guest. A few of the top brass will light the oil lamp, hopefully without setting it on fire. Now be prepared to plug our ears and listen to the boring speeches, after which the roll call will begin. Each ex-app will stand on your chair, cup your hands and shout at about 110dB your number, rank, name and entry, then hobble up to the dance floor, receive your gift, show the two or three teeth we are left with and pose for a photograph. Those who have sufficient strength after all this, can start dancing. The weaker lot can start drinking.

We sincerely thank all of you for coming all these thousands of miles to be with us. We also hope you will take back happy memories of this visit to Sri Lanka, and pray we will meet again soon. Till then Long Live the Ex-Brats.

I learned about life from that ... *by Chris Horn*

Once upon a time at 3 ACC at Hamala, Bahrain I witnessed an act of finely calculated recklessness that taught me that you can get away with almost anything if you go about it (fearlessly) in the right way.

The lesson came from one Jnr Tech Jones (name changed to protect myself) who had an overwhelming desire to not be at Hamala, or anywhere else where service to Queen and Country was expected.

Jones' attempts to put space between himself and his current employer were legion and had landed him in trouble on several occasions. But there is no point in getting older if you don't get craftier, and this time Jones had worked out a beauty.

3 ACC was a smallish unit of about 100 RAF personnel, sharing a few acres of bondu with the army – half an Infantry battalion actually; the other half were elsewhere in the Gulf apparently engaged in a shooting war. Our lot were on R&R.

Unfortunately for us gentler folks, we shared their cookhouse and their meals, a less than satisfactory gastronomic experience. It had to be so, we were told, because when down the Gulf the pongos were dug in doing their stuff, and it would not be fair to let them have it too good on R&R because they might become soft.

Thus the standard lunch (which never varied) was pomme, mashed, runny; Egg, fried, slimy; and a ladle or two of beans, baked, anaemic thrown on for good measure.

To maintain these enviable quality standards a complaints party was always in attendance. This comprised a Company Sgt. Major and the Orderly Bombardier or whatever they called their Cpls. These guys must have been really hard men, because as any one who has had anything to do with Infantry will know, they would have to be hard to stay on top. They certainly looked it as they stood stiffly to attention, barrel chested in their immaculate uniforms – creases so sharp they could cut, and bulled boots which

would have put any AA POP to shame – daring anyone to complain. Also in attendance would be the RAF Orderly Corporal who managed to exude a totally different impression.

On this particular day, yours truly was Orderly Corporal, standing a small but significant distance from, and behind the hard men (I personally think that they resented me even being there). I surveyed the queue of disgruntled diners, shuffling along the servery, creating ripples in a pool of grubby water which always seemed to flood the floor. One by one pongos and airmen alike slunk past the complaints party, deliberately avoiding eye contact with us ... except Jones.

He went out of his way to establish eye contact with the CSM and, rather smartly I thought, marched up to him before coming to a very creditable halt, even by army standards. His descending right foot sent up a plume of water, some of which put a dark stain on the pressed trousers, and the rest formed little rolled up balls on the CSM's boots, like water on a duck's back. Oh God, why me?

Time shifted into slow motion and out of the corner of my eye I noticed that the pongos were silently, slowly melting away like fading shadows. The RAF stood their ground in expectant silence.

"Sir", said Jones, cleverly observing correct protocol, "this food is ... S**T!". With perfect timing the plate of pomme, egg and beans hit the floor, food down.

The resultant mess of lunch and water erupted high up on the immaculate legs of the hardmen, before reaching its apogee and returning groundwards in creamy rivulets.

For a brief second there was complete silence. Knowing looks were exchanged between the RAF onlookers. Fearful looks were exchanged between the army mess servers. The CSM's face went puce and the arteries of his thick bulls-neck stood out in high relief.

Then an amazing thing happened. The hard

men, as one, about turned and marched in perfect step out of the cookhouse. The CSM barked to me "He's one of yours Corporal. You deal with it."

The upshot of Jones' heroic action was that the very next day we were given a separate dining room, a plentiful supply of steaks and other food more suited to an airman's digestion. We were even assigned our very own army cook who was anxious to show us that he was capable of far more than just pomme, egg and beans.

Did Jones get his wish? Not on this occasion. Instead our very nice fatherly Wing Commander CO suggested that he might like to write a letter of apology to the CSM – and he did!

Jones did, however, eventually manage to get away a few weeks later. He succeeded in convincing the authorities that he wasn't totally in possession by breaking *into* the police dog compound. The last we saw of him was in a retreating ambulance.

I have to admit, though, to a sneaking admiration for him in achieving his objectives against all odds!

RAF ST. CLEMENT DANES

Given the forthcoming dedication of the apprentice commemoration tablet (see page 13) I thought it appropriate to include an article on the Central Church of the RAF. For this I am indebted to Cliff Blake of the Cranwell Apprentice Association.

Clement of Rome, a close associate of St. Peter, was Bishop of Rome (Pope) during perhaps 88 - 97 AD. In 100 AD the emperor Trajan had him weighted with an anchor stone and thrown into the sea. Thus he became patron saint of sailors.

King Alfred spent his reign (871 - 899) fighting to stop the ravaging by Danish seafarers. He had forts built and organised a more perma-

nent army and navy. Some pacified Danish settlers congregated between the ruling City of Westminster and the trading City of London. There they built themselves a church, probably in Alfred's time, and having strong ties with the sea adopted St. Clement as their patron saint. Thus they became the St. Clement Danes.

After the year 1022, a stone building replaced the original timber-framed one. Then at various times the church passed through the hands of Westminster Abbey, the Knights Templar, the Austin Friars, and the Bishop of Exeter. In 1660 Samuel Pepys noted "Up early and my appointment to St. Clement Danes to Church."

The structure was not reached by the Great Fire of 1666, but by 1680 had decayed to a state where it needed rebuilding. Now Sir Christopher Wren dropped by, perhaps saying "I'm doing a big cathedral job down the road, and could let you have some material cheap!" So he designed and supervised the new building which was completed in 1682. A steeple was added by Gibbs in 1719.

"Oranges and lemons" say the bells of St. Clement's.

If you sing the old nursery rhyme correctly, you are probably reproducing the tunes played by church bells over old London. A legend about fruit traders having permission to carry their merchandise through church grounds to the market is probably a later fabrication. Even so, each child of St. Clement Danes Primary School still gets an orange and lemon after an annual service. Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709 - 1784) was a regular member of the congregation, sitting in a gallery seat. He was credited by Boswell with saying :- "When a man is tired of London he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford."

His statue now stands outside at the east end of the church where he can gaze down the Strand towards Fleet Street. William Webb-Ellis, who as a schoolboy picked up the football and originated the game of Rugby, was Rector of St. Clement's during 1843 - 1855.

In 1855, road redevelopment meant that most of the church ground was taken, and the church building became marooned on an island in the middle of The Strand, as ever increasing traf-

fic flowed past, first carts & coaches, later cars & buses. On the night of 10th May 1941 enemy incendiary bombs burnt the church to a charred ruin. This was unfortunate, as with the Blitz coming to an end it was one of the last raids. In the 1950's the idea was mooted that perhaps the church could be restored as a memorial to the fighter pilots who had fought to defend Britain from enemy raids. The scheme expanded to include all allied airmen who had fought from the UK itself, and the date was taken back to 1911 to include the 1914-1918 war.

The building has been basically restored to its previous form with the gallery at the sides and rear. The square support columns do obstruct the view for some seats. The new pews are shorter than the previous ones, leaving a wider centre aisle. The ceiling decor is similar, but below the Stuart arms has been added anachronistically in Latin :-

Built by Christopher Wren AD 1682. - Destroyed by aerial lightning war AD 1941. Restored by the Royal Aeronautical Fleet AD 1958

The upper gallery walls and columns appear to have been given a lighter colour finish, but the lower woodwork is still mahogany brown. Above the balcony hang a number of laid-up unit colour standards. Below each lower window is a case surmounted by an eagle and containing a book of remembrance. The 8th and 9th US Air Forces stationed in the UK are included in a shrine. The whole ground floor is in a light colour mostly patterned by around 800 insets of Welsh slate in the shape of RAF unit badges. Many of these are carved with the detail of actual squadron badges. A special inset at the entrance has the badge of the RAF surrounded by eight badges of Commonwealth air forces, while another in the left aisle has the Polish eagle surrounded by sixteen Polish squadron badges. Gifts include: the altar from the Netherlands, the lectern from the Royal Australian Air Force, a chair from Douglas Bader to the memory of his first wife, a chair to Sir Archibald McIndoe and The Guinea Pig

Club, and a processional cross from the Air Training Corps. The organ on the balcony at the rear was a gift from the US Air Force. The crypt is now a simple chapel, with an altar from the Netherlands Air Force, a font from the Norwegians and a candelabrum from the Belgian Air Force. The bells were hung in 1957, the bass bell being named "Boom" in commemoration of "Boom" Trenchard who organised the RAF from its inception.

The Central Church of The Royal Air Force - St. Clement Danes stands where

the eastern end of The Aldwych joins The Strand, midway between Trafalgar Square and St. Paul's Cathedral. Outside the main entrance are the statues of "Stuffy" Dowding and "Bomber" Harris.

At the Christmas Day service 1996 the small choir sang from the gallery at the rear. The service sheet invited all Christians to partake of the bread & wine, or just go up to the sanctuary step for a blessing. However people seemed to follow their home customs.

Where are they now?

Mike Collier (76th) is looking for information on:

589604 Phillips Donald John who was an Air Radar Fitter from the Twickenham area of London and left the RAF as a Cpl.

589562 Storey Michael John who was a Ground Wireless Fitter from the Broomhill area of Sheffield and left the RAF as a Cpl.

Anyone having any knowledge at all please contact Mike on 01386 5533298.

99th Entry

The Quest is on! We want to contact any members of the 99th with a view of starting our own association. A reunion in December is being planned and so far we only have 27 of the 188 who passed out. Please contact any of the 99th in the members list or the editor.

Apprentice Commemorative Tablet

As reported in previous issues of the newsletter, 19 April 1998 will be an auspicious day for all RAF Apprentices. This is the day when an apprentice commemorative tablet, set into the pavement outside St. Clements Dane, the Central Church of the Royal Air Force will be dedicated.

Beside being the RAF Central Church, St. Clement Danes is also a Parish Church, and the dedication service, which will commence at 11am. Parking is plentiful, and those wishing to attend should be seated by 10.45am. Approximately 620 seats will be available for participating apprentice association members and their guests.

The cost of the tablet, plus a donation to the Trenchard appeal fund for St. Clement Danes Church was similarly shared by the associations. We have donated £200.

The actual dedication of the tablet will take place outside the church and a radio microphone link will relay the proceedings to the congregation inside the church.

Preceding the actual Service, which will feature as far as possible ex-App/BEs padres in officiating roles, the Halton Aircraft Apprentice Association Standard bearing the apprentice wheel motif, will be paraded into the church. Associations will be providing a suitable flower arrangement inside the church for the service.

Lord Trenchard and Air Marshal Sir Keith Williamson have been invited to read the lessons.

Members wishing to attend the dedication service should contact the Membership Secretary as Mike West as soon as possible for tickets. At the time of going to press there were still 40 tickets available.

Apprentices on the Net.

As most will know by now, George Burville (90th) has established a very comprehensive and active website dedicated exclusively to ex-apprentices and Boy Entrants from every trade where the Apprentice / BE scheme was applied. Any body with access to the Internet is well advised to take a look. The address is on the front of the members list which was sent out recently.

George has asked us to point out that if you have an Email address, you shouldn't assume that it will appear on his site just because it is published in the members list. Apparently this causing some confusion. Your Email address will only be published on the Apprentice Website if you specifically ask for it.

Flowerdown House

The secretary briefed the Committee at the 17th meeting on the progress of Flowerdown House, the soon to be opened RAFA Convalescent Home in Weston. The opening is now expected to be in the Spring; possibly in June. It has been agreed at a meeting with the RAFA Deputy Director that the LAA would undertake to provide a number of photographs of apprentice activities, suitable framed in the dining room and to provide an appropriate plaque in the reception area which would explain how Weston-super-Mare was associated with Flowerdown in Hampshire.

It was thought that the cost of providing the framed photographs would be about £250, and a similar amount for the plaque, which would probably be in brass. It was suggested that Mr. John Coombs (who many members will remember as a civilian Instructor in 4T Block) could be contracted to produce the plaque. It was hoped that the President, Martin Palmer, could unveil the plaque on the 23 September this year.

Entry Association News

Following the suggestion that we had a section on Entry Association news, we are pleased to take the idea up.

88th

The entry will be celebrating their 40th anniversary by holding a reunion on week ending the 27 June 1998. The venue was undecided at the time of going to press, but it will be somewhere in "Middle England".

Contact is:

Neil Webster, Telephone 01205 820523.
E-mailers can contact Derek Wood (who supplied this information) at "derekwood@clara.net".

99th

Following a record turnout at the recent LAA reunion, when 13 of the Entry met together for the first time since passing out, it has now proposed to form their own association. So far only 27 of the 188 who passed out have been positively located.

The first reunion is being planned at Holme Lacey House Hotel near Hereford over the weekend of 11-13 December.

Contact is:

Chris Horn, Telephone 01934 511465, or
Email "Chris_Horn@compuserve.com".

Old Crocks

Hands up who saw the Antiques Road Show from RAF Locking!

Spot any one you know?

What I want to know is what is our treasurer Tony Horry (76th) doing with £4-6K worth of Chinese plates? Is this a sensible investment of Association funds?

It's true – honest!

My sympathies to all the men with small, err willies who were conned recently, making the originator this scam a millionaire. An advertiser offered a devise guaranteed to increase the size of a man's penis and he offered a full refund if not fully delighted. Thousands of us – I mean them – sent off their cheques, but received an apology by return stating that due to technical difficulties the device could not be marketed. However they did receive a cheque for a full refund as promised. The rub is that the cheques were made out to the recipient personally and were signed "For and on behalf of The Penis Enlargement Company" in large type below the signature. Very few cheques were cashed!

Sent in by Bob Storey (99th)

RAF Locking Closure Activities

All members of the RAF LAA are invited to the following activities held to commemorate the closure of the station:

a). RAF Western Band. Concerts to be held on 19/20 September 1998 at the Weston Playhouse. Tickets £6-50.

Booking Office Tel (01934) 645544

b). Royal Freedom Parade. Limited opportunity to participate. Venue: Winter Gardens from 10:15am.

c). Visit to RAF Locking and training facility. 24 September 1998. 9:00am to 12:00am.

d). Hanger Dance. 24 September 1998 at 7:30pm. Tickets £6:50, includes buffet supper and music. Pass and Car Pass have to be applied for.

Squawks

by Dave Croft (97th)

My thanks to Dave for this article. He says that it was sent to him via a friend, Rick Serdynski, who was himself a F105 USAF pilot during the Vietnam War.

These are actual maintenance complaints submitted by US Air Force pilots and the replies from the maintenance crews. "Squawks" are problem listings that pilots generally leave for maintenance crews.

Problem: Left inside main tire almost needs replacement.

Solution: Almost replaced left inside main tire.

Problem: Test flight OK, except autoland very rough.

Solution: Autoland not installed on this aircraft.

Problem: #2 Propeller seeping prop fluid.

Solution: #2 Propeller seepage normal.

Problem: #1, #3, and #4 propellers lack normal seepage.

Problem: The autopilot doesn't.

Solution: "IT DOES NOW."

Problem: Something loose in cockpit.

Solution: Something tightened in cockpit.

Problem: Evidence of hydraulic leak on right main landing gear.

Solution: Evidence removed.

Problem: DME volume unbelievably loud.

Solution: Volume set to more believable level.

Problem: Dead bugs on windshield.

Solution: "Live bugs on order."

Problem: Autopilot in altitude hold mode produces a 200 fpm descent.

Solution: Cannot reproduce problem on ground.

Problem: IFF inoperative.

Solution: IFF inoperative in OFF mode.

Problem: Friction locks cause throttle levers to stick.

Solution: That's what they're there for.

Problem: Number three engine missing."

Solution: Engine found on right wing after brief search.

RAFLAA 1998 Reunion and AGM Programme

The following programme has been approved for the 1998 Reunion and AGM

22 September	4:00pm	Rehearsal and Brief for members taking part in the Freedom of Weston Parade (if require).
22 September	8:00pm	Informal meet and Greet, Grand Atlantic Bar.
23 September	11:00am	Final Freedom of Weston Parade Royal salute and fly past.
23 September	12:00pm	Annual General Meeting at Dance & Partyscene, Whitecross Road, Weston.

The AGM programme is as follows:

	11:45	Members start to arrive at Dance & Partyscene.
	12:30	Buffet lunch and Bar available.
	14:30	AGM commences / facilities closed down.
	16:00	AGM complete, Tea served.
	16:30	Members disperse.
23 September	7:30 for 8pm	Dinner Dance at Dance & Partyscene. Tickets £12-50 by application.
24 September	10:00am to 12:30pm	Final visit to RAF Locking Training facility.
24 September	8:00pm	Hanger Dance at RAF Locking.

Please send contributions for publication to:

Chris Horn, 464 Locking Road, Weston-super-Mare, North Somerset. BS22 8QX
Telephone: (01934) 511465 Email: Chris_Horn@compuserve.com