



Royal Air Force Locking Apprentice Association

Newsletter

Serial 19

June 1998

Apprentices & Boy Entrants on City pavement – stoned!

Several hundred former RAF apprentices and boy entrants attended the service at St. Clement Danes Church, during which a stone was dedicated to commemorate both schemes. The stone was offered for dedication by Marshal of the RAF Sir Keith Williamson, a former Cranwell apprentice who rose to become Chief of the Air Staff. The service was conducted by the Rev David Mackenzie, resident Chaplain of St. Clement Danes, supported by clergy drawn from ex-apprentices and boy entrants who have taken Holy Orders. The sermon was preached by the Rev Micheal Frere, a former boy entrant.

The stone, which was the brain child of the Federation of Apprentices and Boy Entrants Associations, portrays the 'wheel' and an airman's cap badge. The Federation includes the Cranwell, Halton, Locking, Ruislip

Administrative and Polish Apprentice Associations, as well as the Cranwell, Compton Bassett and Locking Boy Entrant Associations.

After the service, the Federation presented a cheque for £1,000 to Dame Felicity Peake for the St. Clement Danes anniversary restoration appeal.

The LAA was represented at the service and presentation of the cheque by the President, Martin Palmer and the Chairman Joe Holroyd. Other representatives of the LAA at the service included the secretary Charles Hart.

Pictures of the occasion can be found on page 11.

(Article adapted from the feature published in the RAF News, 29 May)

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Editorial

I always leave this bit to last, and I must admit that I didn't think that the moment would ever come this time! But as always McCawber came good, and the necessary articles arrived - some JIT if you know what I mean.

This time there are fewer 'newsy' items, instead we have been blessed with longer, very readable articles which you will enjoy. Thanks to all contributors, who you will note largely represent the 75th and 76th. Perhaps the other (dare I say younger) entries should look upon this as a challenge?

Regular readers might have noticed a steady increasing prominence for the Federation of Apprentice and Boy Entrant Associations. It really does seem that this is the way things will naturally develop (with time taking its toll). Have you any comments or ideas on this? Do you see it as a good thing that we become more closely associated with our sister associations, or do you want to remain completely separate? I would welcome some discussion on this topic.

I have spent a lot of time experimenting with making photos 'printable' with our available technology - scanner, laser printer and photocopier! I think that we can now get acceptable results, and so I would be very interested in photos which might have interest to other members, particularly those bringing back the day to day life as an apprentice. I would undertake to return them as soon as I have had a chance to scan them. Alternatively do what Alex Gumbrecht did and put them on the web.

Finally, at the risk of over-egging it, this is a repeat call for any cartoonists! We need your input.

Thanks once again for the support of those that contribute.

Federation of Apprentice and Boy Entrant Associations Meeting

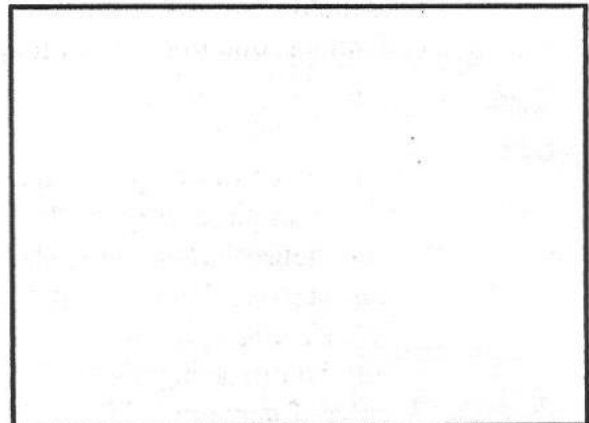
by Charles Hart

This year's annual meeting of the Federation of Apprentice and Boy Entrant Associations is to be hosted at RAF Henlow by Brats 192, the RAF Locking Boy Entrant Association, on Thursday 2nd July.

Federation meetings are now becoming more formal as membership increases. There aren't too many rules to the 'constitution' but agreements are no longer on the nod. Each association has a single vote on decisions. Any subject can be discussed and it is good to hear what similar organisations to our own are doing and how they are overcoming or meeting their problems.

Of particular note was the arrival last year of the Polish Association. We have met them on a couple of occasions now and their stories of how they arrived in the UK and their lives thereafter make for riveting listening. Very few of them elected to return to their homeland after their apprentice training and sadly those who did decide to return were not met with sympathetic treatment by their Government.

A resume of the meeting and what was discussed will be highlighted in the next Newsletter.



Committee Jottings

There are no committee minutes to report this time, but Charles Hart has supplied the following news to keep us up to date on some of ongoing activities.

MEMORABILIA NEWS

A representative from the Association was invited on 22 May to an RAF Locking committee meeting to discuss the retention and disposal of memorabilia when the Station closes early next year. The objectives of the committee were set out by the Chairman in his opening address. They were to establish the scope of the task by identifying all those items that have intrinsic value whether historical or monetary, to complete an inventory of the items and then to make recommendations for their disposal.

The purpose of this first meeting was to establish areas of responsibility, to assign personnel to search areas of the Station and determine ownership. Collection of items to a central location will be carried out at a later stage. These meetings will be held on a monthly basis and if objects of interest arise we will be reporting on 'finds' through future newsletters.

FLOWERDOWN HOUSE

The rebuild of Flowerdown House, the RAFA convalescent home on the sea front at Weston-super-Mare is proceeding fast and is due to finish this month. We still do not know when the home is due to open but it is likely that patients will be staying there before the official opening takes place.

We are currently involved in designing and producing a presentation piece to go in the entrance hall of the house. This will explain to patients the link between Flowerdown and RAF Locking. We shall also, in conjunction with RAF Locking, be displaying some of the ancient photographs of apprentice life at Locking.

RAFLAA AGM AND REUNION

A busy day is forecast for the AGM and reunion to be held on the 23 September. Because it is to be held in midweek to coincide with the Royal final Freedom of Weston we have had to telescope all the events into a single day. The programme is enclosed again for those who may not have seen the March Newsletter. The costs of lunch and tea at the AGM will have to be added to the dinner dance ticket. The total cost is £18-50. If members wish to attend the AGM only the cost will be £6-00 (covers lunch and tea) and those attending the Dinner Dance only will pay the normal £12-50.

The Freedom Parade in which we will have a part is now set in stone and the format has, we believe, been finalised. We also have our 30 volunteers who will take part – a very small part – and so any other names that appear will go on a reserve list. Do make an effort to come down to Weston in midweek. The occasion promises to be a fine one and it will be the last opportunity for many to visit Locking.

Slight cock-up!

As you will see from the above, the tickets for the reunion/dinner dance included with the last newsletter only mentioned the fee for the Dinner Dance (£12-50). It didn't mention the additional fee for lunch and tea (£6-00).

Therefore if you have already sent off your money for the dinner dance and are going to attend the AGM, could you please send off the additional £6 to George Ring using the application form with this issue?

Sorry for the inconvenience.

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Sri Lanka Reunion . . .

I read with interest Peter Platt's letter in the March issue regarding the Sri Lanka reunion. I also read Tim Wyatt's article on the same subject. Both had the number of ex-75th Locking attending the reunion out by one. There were in fact two of us there, Annesley De Soyza and myself. To be fair, at the time Peter penned his letter he didn't know I would make it.

I thank Tim for swelling our ranks and, like Peter, I only wish there had been more. Whilst not quite so forthright, I echo his sentiments about the lack of attendance, although I will agree to differ over his description of the 75th as ...

"the most complete shower that ever fell upon Locking."

I don't know how the lack of communication over this event came about, nor do I care. That's history. The point is that we all enjoyed ourselves so much that we are doing the whole thing again in three years time. So if this letter gets published that's now given fair notice.

I attach a write-up on the Sri Lankan experience which obviously duplicates some of Tim's effort. It does, however, give a different perspective on Sri Lanka and what to expect. The article (with photo) can also be seen at the embryo 75th web-site we have just started putting together at:

<http://www.ftch.net/~empres/75th/>

I will be adding more photos as soon as Annesley De Soyza gets them to me.

Alex Gumbrecht
(ex 75th would you believe)

Alex's article appears on page 6.

Spit on a stick . . .

It was nice to read the article 'Spit on a stick' in issue 17. I have the original cutting from the Weston Mercury when it was placed on the plinth in 1962(?). One of those pictured at the site was my father Billy Mackenzie.

He retired from the Royal Air Force at Locking in 1962. He was an Air Radio Fitter. His last appointment was as Warrant Officer i/c the Airfield Training Facility in the hangar at Weston Airport.

I am one of a unique band in that I started my apprenticeship at Locking, and finished it at Halton, that's another story. (*But one I hope you will tell us — Ed.*) I am a member of both Associations — no comparisons please! I hope to see old friends in September.

I 'won' an original of the 78th Entry photograph when I left in 1955 and I also have a photo of the Apprentices daily kit layout (Johnny Salmon's, 71st).

Eat your hearts out those of you who were not issued with webbing, rifles and bayonets.

Best wishes and thanks for all the good work,

John Mackenzie (78th).

Thank you for your kind comment, but all I do is publish what gets sent in (hint, hint). So thanks for an interesting letter; one that leaves some intriguing questions hanging — any chance of some answers ...?

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SWOman story ...

This started off as a SWOman story, but like so many things in my seemingly rudderless life it drifted on.

In the early sixties I was an instructor at Locking (an honourable profession) and I owned a surplus handed down B R reefer jacket (the warmest coat I've ever owned).

At that time two apprentices got involved with the CND movement. For some reason this upset the authorities.

One event in the ongoing Saga, was on one weekend the CND had a picket line outside the main gates, led by that CND stalwart Pat Arrowsmith.

Being of a naturally 'Trunky' nature I drove in from WsM and entered the camp through the additional security (no firearms on display then).

As I entered the old wooden Sergeants Mess, wearing the reefer jacket, the ante room door burst open and the SWO Jack Winspear was framed in the doorway in an aggressive stance. "Oh its you young Smith, I thought it was one of those ban the bombers" he said as he relaxed.

I was shocked. I'd always thought I was a snappy dresser for that era, with brown suede shoes, Rupert trousers and a multi coloured sports jacket. The reefer jacket obviously had to go.

Shortly after this I was posted to Malta to work at RAF Il Qortin Gozo. As I wouldn't need the jacket for three years I handed it on down.

Out there I was told by Ivor Salter (ex Cranwell App) that Jack Winspear had wrestled professionally around the booths of Singapore in the 1950's under the name of Black Jack. So perhaps I had a lucky escape that day.

The news of untimely deaths is getting a bit much to bear.

I've just heard that Derek (Del) Coucher (75th) has died. Another ex-Ii Qortin man, he was part time presenter with the Malta FBS and very good one.

John Hardwick (71st) RNAF followed a family tradition. His father was a WO in their Air Force. John came over to the UK on a liner, and he'd said they used to dress for dinner every evening. After the three years I believe he returned to NZ the same way. Rip Kirby (72nd) met him in NZ when he went there on one of the V bomber trips. Then John was a Flt. Lt. engineering officer.

Reading of Bill Forbes (76th) reminded me of a story a friend told me about those terrible days of UDI. Said friend was on a mobile radar unit on the Rhodesia/Zambia border. The Rhodesian forces were on the other side of the ravine. The first thing they did in the mornings was to wave to each other. One day the unit had a visit by a General. The Rhodesians got wind of this and for the duration of his visit a Rhodesian Air Force Canberra flew up and down the ravine making a hell of din. Eventually a red faced General gave up in disgust and departed in a huff. I'd remarked at the time, I wonder if any Rhodesian ex apps were involved in that?

Talking of V Bombers. When I visited the recently relocated Strategic Air Command Museum (an absolutely magnificent building) near Omaha, Nebraska, in April, a plaque by the side of an immaculate Vulcan bomber stated that three V bombers were preserved in the USA. Made me wonder how many are preserved in the UK.

John Smith (72nd)

CURRYING FAVOUR

by
Alex Gumbrecht

It all started with a letter from Australia.

Annesley (Des) de Soyza wrote to Peter Platt asking if anyone from the 75th Locking could come to Sri Lanka as a guest at a reunion of Royal Ceylon Air Force ex-Brats. Notice was short. The date was 28th of February, but a few weeks away, the venue the Mount Lavinia Hotel South of Colombo. I received a call from Peter advising that, if I could make it, I was to contact Annesley by email. As I was not long back from a trip to New Zealand I needed another long haul flight like a hole in the head. Nonetheless I decided that this was a one-off chance to meet someone I last saw as a young Sergeant Apprentice just prior to him taking up a cadetship to Henlow. I wasn't going to miss it.

I had also hoped to see 'Diss' Dissanayke who was in the same class as me but ironically he had emigrated to New Zealand only a few months before. I found out while in Sri Lanka that his local nickname was 'Yaka' which means devil or demon - anyone who remembers Diss with his dark complexion, blazing eyes and huge mop of black hair, will understand why.

I knew Annesley fairly well during the years 1953 to 1956. We had competed vigorously for the various Air Ministry prizes of which we both won our fair share, we both attained NCO apprentice early on, and we were both on the boxing team. Mind you, I was just a run-of-the-mill brawler whereas Annesley was one of the best lightweights the RAF ever had. I say RAF because Annesley, although born in Ceylon and schooled in Kandy, had responded to a recruitment initiative by the RAF which was advertising for apprentices in Ceylon at the time. He applied and was the only one out of some eighty applicants that was selected. Later, in 1957, he became a British citizen.

Annesley had conveniently forgotten to include his email address in the letter and there wasn't the time to go around the loop again. Luckily I had Terry (Ginge) Clark's email address in Australia. I asked him to telephone Annesley and within 24 hours my computer mail box showed a message "Contact at last" - it was Annesley. What *did* we do before email??

A hastily arranged trip saw me picking up the ticket at the airport and leaving Gatwick on the 11 hour flight to Colombo International Airport at Katunayke. Once it was known I was coming I received tremendous pre-departure help from the ex-RCyAF guys, in particular Austin de Silva in London and Edgar Cooray in Sri Lanka, both ex-Halton. I had been asked to pick up some extra bottles of Scotch at the Sri Lanka duty-free for the various functions as it would save money. Everyone assured me that customs allowed visitors to bring in as much as they could carry despite the two bottle limit on the declaration form. The man at the Sri Lanka duty-free shop didn't seem to have heard of this concession. He finally relented and sold me the five bottles of Scotch and the bottle of wine I had selected. However when I went to pick up a case of beer as well he became extremely agitated so I left that one alone.

The duty-free man had set the alarm bells ringing. It was with some trepidation that I walked or, more correctly, staggered through the green channel under the watchful eye of the Sri Lankan customs officers carrying 'hand baggage' that by now probably weighed more than my main case. The adrenaline pumped and I mentally resolved that if I ended up in a Sri Lankan jail for the night, Annesley de Soyza would be having the fight of his life as soon as I saw him. It was a non event. Thankfully I was not stopped.

The hotel I had booked in such a rush turned out to be in the boon-docks 10 Km north of Negombo which itself was about 30 Km north of Colombo – entirely the wrong side of Colombo for the Mount Lavinia reunion, or anything else for that matter. To make matters even more complicated the hotel was bounded on one side by the ocean and on the other side by a river. A beautiful place, but it could only be reached via the hotel raft. “Does the raft operate at 3 am or will I have to swim across?”, I wondered, knowing some of the times at which I was likely to return. Annesley cracking crocodile and shark jokes over the Internet hadn’t helped my sense of foreboding.

Next day Edgar Cooray phoned to enquire after my well being and to offer me a lift to the first function, a meet-and-greet session at the Capri Club in Colombo on the 20th. I told Edgar that I had brought in a bottle of scotch and a bottle of wine for the main event but refused payment. I said they were a gift from the 75th Locking (so you guys of the 75th who weren’t there all owe me a beer). I was a bit apprehensive about the Capri Club party because I wouldn’t know a soul there, and being a widower, I was travelling alone. Annesley and his wife, Pam, weren’t due in from Australia in time for this particular event.

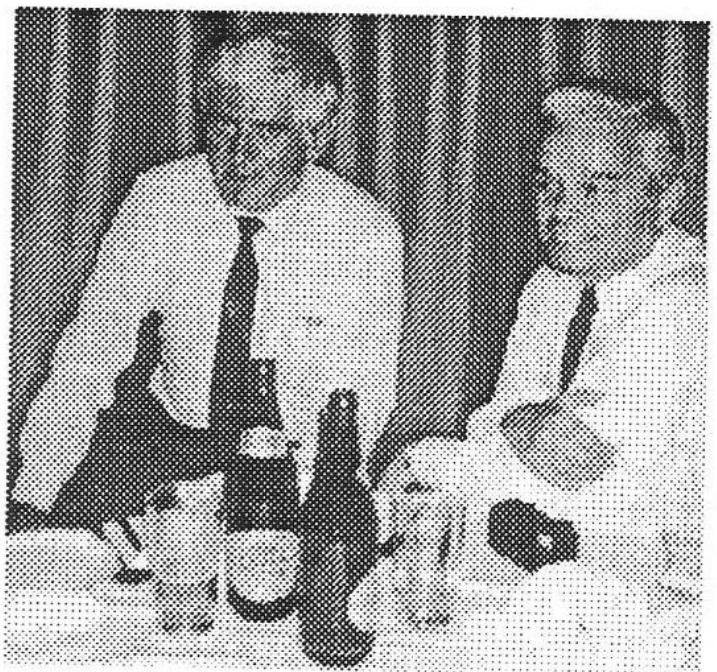
Edgar said to meet up at the Tropicana bar in Negombo at 1700 and I thought that was so we could eat first. Wrong! The 30 Km that might take 20 minutes on UK roads was to take over two hours through Sri Lankan traffic on Sri Lankan roads.

I learned two things about the Sri Lankans that day: To us they seem like complete nutters on the road, overtaking in impossible places like blind bends, horns blaring, engines racing, scaring tourists (and me in particular) to hell, cutting in, cutting out, cutting up. That being said, I never saw one crash or example of road-rage. It’s just that they play by a different set of rules. The other thing I learned is that Sri Lankans are open, friendly and hospitable. I walked into the Capri Club hardly knowing anyone. I walked out many hours later with a host of new friends. It was a splendid evening.

A couple of days later there was another party at the boat club, thankfully this time near Negombo. By now I had spoken with Annesley de Soyza on the phone but today was to be our first meeting in near 42 years. I went direct to the boat club while the Colombo contingent first went for a nostalgic visit to their old RCyAF camp.

Some hours later the coach bearing the Colombo contingent arrived. I recognised Annesley straight away. To my amazement he recognised me. We traded photographs, yarns and copious bull. I was surprised to learn that he had retired from the RAF comparatively early as a Squadron Leader. I had always mentally marked him as a long term man who would stay in until he was an Air Commodore at least.

I gave him a copy of the 75th at Summer camp in 1955 near Taunton in Devon, showing him and I sitting side-by-side as young men. He showed me a photograph of a trophy presentation after a boxing



Alex and Annesley 42 years on ...

tournament where I can be seen in the background nursing an almighty black eye (I won – you should have seen the other fellow!).

I was introduced to Annesley's wife Pam, a dark-haired very attractive lady with a vibrant personality (that description should earn me a home-cooked meal when I eventually make it to Canberra). I also met his brother Milroy (Roy), an equally good looking aircrew type – must run in the family. He had been a Squadron Leader in the Royal Ceylon Air Force and had the distinction of being their first qualified Helicopter Training instructor having trained at the Advanced Helicopter Training School at RAF Ternhill. The whole afternoon was great fun.



Annesley complete with pudding basin haircut receiving his trophy, Alex (circled) with shiner.

As I was alone, and the main reunion dinner/dance wasn't until the 28th, I was asked if I would like to join a party of four taking off early next day on a five day excursion around some of Sri Lanka's tourist attractions. It was another panic job but it all worked out fine.

Next day saw me heading for Kandy in an air-conditioned minibus together with the other members of our group, Norman (Alex) Alexander (70th Halton) and his wife Vera, and Sherlock de Hoedt (72nd Halton) and his wife Barbara. Sherlock and Barbara were Sri Lankan born but have lived for over 20 years in Australia. Norman (but everyone calls him Alex) Alexander was originally from near Southport but was attracted to Australia when he worked there in '61 on Bloodhound. So in 1965 he bought himself out of the RAF to take up a commission in the RAAF. He retired from the RAAF in 1988 as an Air Commodore – seems that buying out was a pretty smart career move. Strange to tell but Alex still has his Lancashire accent intact. His humour is a wicked combination of Northern England and Australian, as I learned to my cost a few times. He and Vera are good company though.

As for the De Hoedts, well Sherlock is one of the world's gentlemen and his wife Barbara is a lady with great humour. My two day stay in Kandy was made all the more enjoyable as they both knew the city. I don't know whether the high spot was the delicious curry rolls from the local bakeries, or the sight of a retired Air Commodore in a sarong (very fetching) which you had to wear to enter the Buddhist temple, or the time I fell down the monsoon drain. Don't get me wrong; I was stone cold sober and I've met monsoon drains before, but usually they are on the outside of the pavement, not between the pavement and the building. As I stood in the dry monsoon drain unhurt but feeling a complete idiot, I became aware that I was not alone. Barbara had followed me in. As the *two* of us clambered out much to the amusement of the locals, I speculated that Barbara had taken hospitality to the extreme in deciding to accompany me.

While mentioning curry rolls I must tell of Sri Lankan curry. Sri Lankan curry is to vindaloo, as vindaloo is to korma. It is hot! Hotter than hell! Eat it and your eyes will water and your nose will run. Your tongue will be on fire! It is also delicious! If you like a good curry, Sri Lanka is the place

to get it. Just observe the local way of eating it - plenty of rice to a little curry, and you'll manage fine. Don't miss it.

After Kandy we went into the mountains to Nuwara Eliya (6500 feet), the coolness being a pleasant change after the heat on the plains where temperatures were hitting an exceptional, even for Sri Lanka, 35 Celsius. Something to do with the El Nino effect I gather. Nuwara Eliya is a beautiful area with the hillsides covered with bright green tea plantations, an area of flowers, craggy rock outcrops and sparkling waterfalls.

Then it was on to Sigiriya, a rock fortress that rises sharply and dramatically straight out of a flat plain. Sigiriya has been declared the Eighth Wonder of the World and with good reason. The ancient Kings of Ceylon lived on a scale comparable to the Pharaohs. Over 1600 steps to get to the top, with thrones and cavern rooms on a scale that rivals those of Egypt. The ancient engineering is stupendous. UNESCO currently employs 850 workers at the site and more spectacular water gardens are still being excavated at the base of the rock.

I must mention a few other places we took in. I made the mistake of climbing up to the world-famous Dambulla Rock Temples. The mistake was underestimating the heat. Wearing my sarong, looking faintly ridiculous, but more fetching than Alex was in his, it was so hot that I would have been quite happy to call it a day after the second temple. To bow out on my guide would have been churlish though. No, I had to see all five temples, some over 2000 years old. Hot maybe, marvellous definitely.

The elephant sanctuary was nature at its best. The first time I had ever seen a whole herd of Indian elephants or been allowed to stroke a one month old baby elephant while the mother stood benignly by. Then there was the visit to the spice garden where you could buy herbal cures for everything from sunburn to arthritis. Alex, who has a magnificent head of bum-fluff, looked totally at peace with the world as the guide massaged a herbal hair restorer into his plate. At the time we said goodbye it hadn't worked. But I expect that by the time I take up his invitation to drop in when I visit Australia, he will have grown some fine flowing locks. So to the night of the 28th February and the Grand Reunion Dinner/Dance at the imposing Mount Lavinia Hotel. I struck a deal with Joseph, a Christian Sri Lankan I had met, for him to run me there, wait, and take me back to the hotel afterwards. Sherlock and Barbara de Hoedt had kindly offered the use



Left to right: Alex, Pam De Soyza, Annesley, June De Soyza

of their room at the hotel so that I could change into collar and tie after my journey. Drinks in Alex's room then it was off to the ball.

We assembled in the courtyard and were preceded up the stone staircase by the Cultural Troupe of the Sri Lankan Air Force, a colourful affair with the striking local dress of its members and the dramatic notes of the drums and long curved brass horns indigenous to the region. There followed a number of varied and interesting short speeches, including one by the Chairman of the Organising Committee, Duncan Perera (70th Halton) who sports one of the most magnificent air force moustaches I have ever seen. The final speech was from the guest of honour, Air Vice Marshall Jayalath Weerakkody of the Sri Lankan Air Force, who pointed out that it was the work of the ex-RCyAF men, especially ex-brats, that had laid the foundations of the modern Sri Lanka Air Force and equipped it to handle the country's present day crisis.

Then it was time to meet all the ex-apprentices present. Each one of us went up to the microphone in turn, called out our entry and station, and were then presented with a brass commemoration plaque by AVM Weerakkody. This plaque now hangs proudly on my wall at home alongside my kukri (souvenir of Nepal), and my two Locking shields. Next, the Air Force Cultural Troupe entertained us with a sensational display of traditional dance, the men whirling and leaping in vigorous unison, the women as graceful in movement as they were beautiful in appearance. Finally it was on with the ex-Brats dance with one of the bands being the Sri Lanka Air Force Pop Group. All in all, the Sri Lanka Air Force did us proud that evening.

There followed a sumptuous meal and when I left at 2 am. The party was still in full swing and, if anything, still hotting up. What a truly memorable evening!

I could not help but notice that Locking ex-apprentices from the UK were well and truly outnumbered by the Halton contingent, something I urge you all to rectify at the next reunion in three years time. The names I can recall beyond myself and Annesley are John Revell, Bryan Studwick, Dr Cash*, Dibble* and Tim Wyatt.

(*I apologise for not remembering all the forenames)

So come on you Locking men, especially the 75th' let's add that touch of class to the next celebration A quick word about the Sri Lanka problem. Don't let that put you off. Stay away from a few areas and your chances of running into trouble are more remote than being run down by a UK bus. To my limited knowledge there has never been a problem south of Colombo and at no time did I personally feel threatened. Neither did any of the 400 British tourists on my flight. Sri Lanka is a jewel in the Indian Ocean not to be missed.

On the day before I left Annesley and Pam de Soyza came to Negombo where we all had a pleasant farewell lunch at a place called Browns Beach Hotel. The seafood in Negombo is some of the best in the world, fresh daily from that town's large fishing fleet. Annesley and Pam had to take a taxi to meet someone at the Airport and they offered to drop me off about a mile from the town. Two tuc-tuc (three wheeler) rides, half an hour, and 170 rupees later I reached my destination, the Tropicana, which turned out to be right next door to Browns Beach Hotel!! So much for my local knowledge!

I left Sri Lanka vowing that I would return. How prophetic. About 2 hours out, somewhere over Northern India, one of our TriStar's engines gave up the ghost. It was back to Colombo for an emergency landing and an extra night at in Sri Lanka. When I said I would return I certainly didn't mean that soon.

I've been to Sri Lanka twice already this year. My third visit is in 2001. See you there!

Apprentice and Boy Entrant Commemoration Stone
19 April 1998



Dedication of the Commemorative Stone



Presentation of Cheque by the Association of Apprentices and Boy Entrant Associations

In the beginning

by Mike Collier, 76th

A few days ago whilst searching for some documents, I came across a few letters in an old folder. Rereading some of the pages triggered some memories of over forty years ago.

The first letter was addressed to my parents, from the officer i/c Records Office detachment, Halton. Paragraph one of this letter reads like an extract from a Readers Digest junk mail circular. "Your son/ward has qualified for the next stage in the selection procedure, and is invited to attend at RAF Halton for medical examination, aptitude test and Selection Board interviews."

Apparently my Birth Certificate and certificate of Moral Character had to be forwarded to Halton ASAP and I had to meet the medical and optical standards contained in AM Pamphlet no. 293.

When attending the Selection procedure I must take with me Form 499, Freedom From Infection Certificate and any Cadet Training Corps documents.

If I was I was in civilian employment, I should not terminate such employment, but was strongly advised to take my employer into my confidence.

There were also travel instructions and a travel warrant. I was to change my warrant at the station of my departure and ensure that I received a Return railway ticket.

I remember very little about getting the requisite paper work together and assume that my long suffering parents tended to that. For me the whole thing was going to be a great adventure. I was barely fifteen years old, from a small rural market town and quite naive. Apart from an odd ATC Summer Camp, I had never been more than a few miles away from home, on my own, in my

life.

When the great day came, I recall being more than a little apprehensive. The ease with which I reached Wendover was something of a surprise, despite having to make my way across London, even though it was only three stops on the underground. From Wendover the RAF system took over and I was soon in the sausage machine of medicals and interviews. However two abiding memories emerge from the mists of time. The first is of the night I spent at Halton. After lights out, there was an almost continuous stream of chatter and jokes. Most of which were couched in rather rich language and to say the very least ribald. Way back in 1954 in my ingenuous world, this was almost unknown. I had only just discovered that girls were more interesting than catapults. It certainly opened a whole new world to me, though I do recall having to stuff part of a blanket into my mouth to prevent laughing out loud, which did not appear to be the thing to do.

The other memory was of an interview with a Squadron leader White, who was later to become my Squadron Leader. He told me that I had not done very well in the Entrance Examination and that my choice of joining the radio trade group was over optimistic. How did I feel about becoming an armourer? As it happened, I knew two lads from my home town who were already at Locking in the 72nd, and this had very much influenced my choice. So gathering all the courage I could muster, I told S/L White, that if I couldn't go to Locking, I would rather go home and pursue some other career. The RAF must have been quite desperate for recruits at the time, for he looked at me rather dubiously and said that he would consider letting me go to locking, but that he

doubted that I would get through the course. In retrospect, digging my heels in at that stage was one of my first steps in growing up. The second letter in my file is dated a few days after my return from Halton and headed JAN 1954 ENTRY OF AIRCRAFT APPRENTICES. Again addressed to my parents, it starts "I am pleased to inform you that your son/ward has been found medically fit and acceptable for enlistment as an Aircraft Apprentice in the RAF, for training in the Radio Trade Group at RAF Locking. If you agree to his enlistment, he should report to the O/C Locking on the 20th January 1954."

This was followed by travel data and route information. The railway warrant in this case was only for a one-way ticket.

There was also a list of notes; civilian documents which I had to take with me. Civilian Ration Book, National; Health Service Medical Card, N.I. Contribution Card, and of course Form 499 – Freedom from Infectious Diseases.

Ominously, there was also a warning to

"bring only a minimum amount of clothing, including night attire, towel, soap and toilet requisites as you will be issued with outfit of uniform, clothing etc. as soon as Attestation is completed."

At this point I was already delighted and considered myself a cut above my contemporaries. Those who had left school a few weeks earlier, when I had left school, were now employed as building labourers, factory workers or farm hands. I was a big fish in a small pond.

Much more confident now after my trip to Halton, the journey to Weston Super mare was quite easy. Then people started shouting at me, I was put into a cold wooden hut with twenty or so strangers, told to send my civilian clothes home, home was 140 miles away and I had signed away 15 years of my life.

It slowly dawned on me that in a matter of 24 hours I had become a minnow in an ocean.

In the next issue we will hear of one man's experiences during the dreaded FFI



That's the way to do it!

President of the LAA Martin Palmer (91st), has just been appointed chief executive of Logistic Support Consultants (LSG), a defence consultancy group. LSG advises the Ministry of Defence about how to drive down costs.

He is seen here taking delivery of his new company vehicle.

In an exclusive interview for the Newsletter, Martin quipped "anyone not making the AGM this year could find me tapping on their front door with this baby!"

Remember, you heard about it first in the Newsletter (unless you happened to see the Sunday Telegraph, 14 June).

A Voice to excite a thousand men

by Peter Platt (75th)

The events described in this entertainment took place in Borneo in the '60s during Confrontation with Indonesia. Confrontation arose following President Sukarno's claim that many indigenes of Sarawak and Sabah had not been consulted as to whether or not they wished to join with Malaya and Singapore in the formation of the Federation of Malaysia. He was, I understand, quite justified in his complaint; very few of the interior tribes – Dusuns, Dyaks, Muruts, and etc. – had been polled, but perhaps Sukarno was interested more in territorial gains than the niceties of democracy. He decided to send forces into Sabah and Sarawak ostensibly to discover the democratic desires of the head hunting tribes. Malaysia set out to confront those forces and asked Britain to honour treaty obligations and send help. Help was rendered by sending me to the Far East!

"So you're leaving us," said young Fred Poynton, newly arrived at the station from a Locking apprenticeship where clearly he'd been a go-getter for he wore pristine corporal stripes: no J/T novitiate for him.

"Eh? - What do you mean?"

"You're posted. Haven't you read SROs?" He smirked superiority – a sprog who crackled with well pressed ambition and would doubtless retire a wing commander to spend his declining years in the golf club reminiscing about the MEAF and Suez – or I suppose, in his case, the Falklands. Well, of course I'd not read SROs – who did? People like Poynton had been created to do just that for you. It was they who caused those woggles of foolscap, suspended by bulldog clip, to curl at the corners, much to the despair of the flight sergeant. "Airman, press them SROs." I went and read SROs just to make sure Poynton spoke truth – and he did. I was indeed posted.

"Where the hell's Labuan?", I asked of a Poynton-like clone avidly reading over my shoulder all the wisdom writ, signed and gestednered by the station adjutant.

"Borneo!", he snarled disparagingly

"Oh! er – thanks" – and didn't dare ask where Borneo was but slipped around to the station education section to dig out the one and only atlas, slightly out of date in that half the world was coloured pink which at least made it easier to find British North Borneo and Labuan.

Labuan means safe anchorage which is what it felt like on landing after having flown there in a Caledonian Airways Britannia. It was an island of some charm sitting in sun kissed blue seas with white sandy beaches fringed by palm. There was no monsoon, and although it rained nearly every day the cloud bursts were predictable so outdoor activities could be planned. It was possible, with some imagination, to describe an unaccompanied tour there as a tropical island camping holiday – with real camp food to boot. After a while though one tired of all these riches and became a little bored – despite the hidden treasures of the education section library and there being a more or less permanent convoy of tankers sailing from Singapore bearing cargoes of Tiger beer.

To be fair, not all found the place boring: I know of one guy from the 69th who later told me he had thoroughly enjoyed Labuan because his wife wasn't there.

This boredom though could become quite oppressive; as a man of action I decided to do something about it.

Now our squadron – 209 – flew Single and Twin Pioneer aircraft into jungle airstrips; the planes were very good at short takeoffs and landings they could land on a pocket handkerchief, we boasted. In fact, they'd been designed for the GPO by Scottish Aviation to land and to take off carrying Royal Mail to all those pocket handkerchief islands which smother the seas to the west and north of Scotland. Post for puffins! Presumably it was felt that the Royal Mail sent this way would be much safer; it wouldn't have to go by sea so wouldn't get wet. Unfortunately, the riveting at Scottish Aviation wasn't too hot and in rain Pioneer aircraft leaked like sieves. The Ministry of Supply, not really knowing what to do with leaking aircraft, quite naturally dumped them on the air force – and in particular on 209 squadron (a fine, squadron) far, away out there in the Far East.

The main function of the squadron at Labuan was to fly our army friends to remote jungle airstrips; really we were practising a form of apartheid – we were separating them from us and dumping them in the jungle the better to lead an heroic life. And in doing this we would freely offer another service. Every night in Labuan it rains and a great deal of this water, as explained, would seep through poorly riveted joints into aircraft panelling. So early in the morning, as the Twin Pioneer rushed down a pocket handkerchief with its cargo of troops, and adjusted attitude for take off, so the Pongos would all be showered. They became sweet smelling heroes, as befits soldiers of the Queen. And sometimes, I believe, our duties actually involved picking up guys from the jungle – those that survived – and bringing them back so they could have a few Tiger beers before being switched back to shower and apartheid mode.

During "Confrontation" Malaysia called upon Britain to honour her treaty obligations. The response was swift and sure. Cpl. Platt was airlifted to Labuan. His Locking apprenticeship equipped him well for his mission . . . to wage psychological warfare on the Indonesian insurgents.

But in this business of Confrontation we also had another subsidiary, but secret, function – which I know I can safely reveal because you've all signed the Official Secrets Act. 209 squadron was involved in psychological warfare.

The psychological warfare we practised had been devised by the USAAF during the last years of world war II: it was used to encourage Japanese soldiers to surrender: the soldiers were marooned on Pacific islands as MacArthur leap frogged his way towards Japan. Large loudspeakers, driven by powerful amplifiers, were strapped to the underbelly of C41s. Japanese speaking American personnel would then advise, with amplified voice, the marooned to throw down their arms and go home. We know the Japanese did throw down their arms but that was probably more to do with defeat or starvation rather than the effectiveness of "voice broadcasts". I believe we had used the technique in Malaya in the '50s but don't know to what effect; certainly the bulk and size of equipment we fitted to the Twin Pins suggested years of that vintage – or perhaps even earlier. But we had progressed beyond the Americans; we did not require Malay speaking personnel – it could all be done on tape.

In callow youth didn't we join the air force to fly? Didn't we apply for aircrew and zoom off to

London environs to swing on ropes cunningly suspended by spring, and fail to learn not to tread on green paint but to tread on black – or was it the other way round? And at the end didn't the adjudicating officer say "Well done, that man, well done", and fail us – well he did me. Stupid man! But now was my big chance.

In this secret warfare, waged against intrepid, infiltrating Indonesians, 209 squadron needed Voice Broadcast Operators (VBOs) – supernumerary aircrew. You didn't have to swing on ropes, nor not tread on black paint. Any fool was accepted – great squadron 209 – and the reward was:

flying suit, bone dome, jungle boots and bullet proof vest. Oh! – and there was flying pay too: 2/6d a day. Yippee! Boredom banished by enablement of more Tiger beer imbibitions! Keep those tankers coming.

There was, however, a serious side to this. The Wilson government, which quite rightly had cancelled the wildly inflationary TSR2 programme, didn't lightly throw half-crowns at slightly aging corporals with a drug habit. Certainly not! The money was paid because the job was dangerous. I'm not saying anything against 209 squadron pilots, you understand – they did a lovely job with their leaky planes. But it was war, and as aircrew I was the sharp end. So I had no compunction whatsoever in saluting for, and accepting, an extra 17/6d each pay day; it was fair reward for risks undertaken. And indeed Cassandra of the 'Daily Mirror' had agreed all this some years previously when he had been given a jolly in a Valiant – that was before the wings had started to drop off. He'd been most impressed; been bedazzled by the brilliance of CRT displays, the flash of the navigator's slide rule, the magnificent effort of the much overworked air electronics officer (Ken Snape asked me to put that bit in), the smooth-tongued chitchat of the smarmy, safely seated ejector-seat pilots (and that bit too), and had written in his column in the 'Mirror' fulsome praise indeed saying "aircrew deserve their pay", describing them – and me too now! – as 'scholars of the air'.

As an aerial scholar I immediately set my mind to mastering the complex operational details of big amplifiers, not to mention the arcane switching sequences required to make lightly grey, standard issue tape-recorders work. In the lulls between visitations to the NAAFI wagon I took on the airs of aircrew and lolled around in chairs in the crew tent wearing a bullet proof vest over flying suit with jungle boots on feet ready to sprint for the Twin Pin should the call come. I modestly forbore to wear my bone dome but would occasionally walk idly around the dispersal area with the thing tucked under my arm. As all aircrew believe, I was wildly popular with the ground crew.

Other than that, nothing much really happened. Oh, we'd have an occasional panic when seats had to be stripped out and I would supervise my junior corporal, Cyril Brown of the 84th, in attaching a couple of streamlined loudspeakers beneath the Twin pin and in fitting big amplifiers and standard issue tape-recorder inside. I would then take charge and test the system, playing one of Brown's tapes full blast through the speakers. The Twin Pin would bounce up and down with the sonic power of Treeny Lopez reflected from the ground until the tower phoned through and told us to put a sock in it. And I continued to drink away my 17/6d each week and, like all aircrew, began to feel I wasn't nearly enough.

This must have gone on for about forty, perhaps forty-five, weeks. In fact, I was beginning to think I'd never have to go through the tape-recorder switch-on sequence in anger. Then it all happened, and I had my one and only operational flight – well, two really, as you shall see.

East is east and west is west and never the twain shall meet. I know exactly what Kipling

means. I, too, cannot understand the oriental mind. Local elections were pending and great rallying speeches, perhaps in the Malayan Churchillian fashion, were to be broadcast by the national network. The Malaysian government was most anxious that the tribes in the interior of Sabah should hear these broadcasts. Clearly, Sukarno's jibe about not polling head hunters was getting through. And this is the oriental bit I can't understand: the government wanted me as VBO to play tapes from the skies over various bits of Sabah where the head hunters lived to tell them that they should listen to forthcoming election broadcasts on the wireless. I kid you not! – I was told that was the message on the tape. I didn't understand it either: I didn't see the need to go to the expense of sending up a Twin Pin to deliver this message; I would have thought it could have been conveyed more cheaply by radio – but perhaps my mind was puddled by Tiger beer.

I asked Brown to fit speakers, amplifiers and tape-recorder to the Twin Pin as I needed to dress. Somewhat later I approached the vibrant aeronautic-electronic-sonic machine in full flying regalia and with quivering courage, for I'd not done this before.

"Where's the loop tape?", I asked.

"Wo' bo' tai'?", queried Brown in his pronounced London accent.

"The one I'm supposed to be playing to the Dusuns, you bloody idiot."

"I dun kno'. Try th' bloody air radia secshun.", said Brown and walked off in a sulk because I'd mentioned his idiocy.

I grabbed the Land Rover and rushed round to ARS – a place I didn't like visiting too often on account of the sergeant wholly in charge: he was a little .. er .. slimey. Yes, slimey. Could he have been an ex-app, you ask? I doubt it – probably an ex-boy! Anyway, I asked the sergeant about the loop tape and he unlocked a steel locker, took out the tape but would only give it me after I'd signed. Clearly the mission was classified.

When I got back to the aircraft pan, clutching the top security loop tape, both pilots were waiting for me, having completed the preflight checks.

"Come on Corp.", they called familiarly, for I was one of them now. "Let's get going."

We bundled into the Twin Pin and were soon taxiing to a point seven eighths along the runway so we could use the remaining eighth for one of our famous pocket handkerchief takeoffs. During this pen-track cruise it occurred to me that the tape had not been checked. I put it on the recorder and ran it through with the big power amps still switched off. I could hear nothing. I turned up the volume control and put my ear to the internal loudspeaker and could still hear nothing. I switched on my mic to speak through the intercom: "Skipper", I uttered in the manner of Ginger addressing Biggles, "I don't think there's anything on this tape."

"Hmm", breathed Skipper. There was then but the briefest nanosecond pause which I instantly recognised as being the only thinking time necessary for a scholar of the air to come to a decision: "We'll carry out orders Corp., and test the full system over the broadcast zone", he announced courageously. And so saying he slammed open the throttles, released the brakes and the aircraft leapt forward; the wheels had made barely two revolutions before we were airborne and crossing the sparkling blue waters of Brunei Bay heading for the lushly green, but forbidding, interior.

At the broadcast zone Skipper's voice crackled over the intercom: "OK Corp., give it a whirl!"

I instantly sprang to action, simultaneously switching the massive power amplifiers from 'Stand by' to 'On', setting the tape in motion, and turning all volume controls fully clockwise:

tape hiss issued from the underslung speakers drowning the mighty roar of the Alvis Leonides engines.

"Home!", said Skipper decisively.

Back at base, we three aircrew approached the sergeant at ARS. "Look here my good man, what mean you by giving my Corporal here a tape full of hiss?", inquired Skipper of the sergeant.

You could see the sergeant didn't like being questioned so incisively; he squirmed, shifting weight from foot to foot, his furtive eyes taking on an oleaginous glaze. It took him quite a few nanoseconds to reply: "Well - er - that's - er - That's what Malay sounds like!", he lied through nicotine stained teeth.

"I don't think so!", interjected the copilot: "When I'm not out here at the sharp end cargin' Pongos into apartheid, and am on a more cushy number back at squadron HQ in Seletar, my wife and I often stroll around the bazaars of Singapore listening to the natives speaking and I can assure you it doesn't sound like hiss."

That stumped the sergeant; his eyes searched the floor for more falsehoods. Quite a few hundred nanoseconds passed: "Cpl. Platt must have wiped the tape", he finally blurted out, an obvious lie which not only attacked my competence as VBO but cast a slur upon the squadron's training programme.

I quietly, but firmly, pointed out to the sod that I had spent hours in the ground crew tent mastering the arcane switching sequence of light grey standard issue tape-recorders and telling him that I was more than competent. "And anyway", I concluded, "aircrew don't make mistakes."

"You aircrew?", sneered the sergeant, his face twisted with malevolence. "You failed at swinging on ropes suspended by springs - you couldn't even swing through trees like a bloody monkey!"

This venomous attack was the sergeant's undoing. He did not know Skipper's full name: Flt Lt Sir Sebastian St. John-Monkey, Bart., AFC, who quite naturally took the sergeant's last words as a personal attack upon himself.

Skipper mastered his rising hackles by dint of great self control. He turned to me, flashing a smile to still my anger, and said quietly "OK Corp., I'll deal with this. You run along to the mess and have your lunch." I knew Skipper would scupper the sergeant good and proper and give him his just desserts, so I saluted smartly, about turned and marched out of ARS.

As I progressed purposefully down the rutted road to Membedai site, where a tin basher hut served as airmen's mess, I mused on the possible fate awaiting the sergeant; busting to J/T and a posting to Saxa Vord would be fair I thought.

I was seated in the mess and had eaten barely four spoonfuls of Compo Irish stew when the chubby form of Brown approached in his stumble-shuffle-manner: "Ey Plat", he articulated as best a Londoner can, "Skip' er wans yer bac' a' th' sqwadn, qwic'!"

Pushing aside the delightful dish from the emerald isle I chased after the shuffling chub of Brown who then drove both of us at high bounce speed o'er the ruts to the dispersal area. Skipper waved delightedly as we approached: "Hello Corp.," he called cheerily, "good of you to come so quickly," and thrusting a tape splicing block into my hand told me to jump in. He fast taxied to the runway end and we were soon winging our way through azure skies clotted

hither and thither with fleecy cloud. Ah! the captivating delights of tropical flight.

No sooner were we across the Bay than we were descending to land on a sixpence at Brunei City: a one tonner was waiting to whisk Skipper, me and tape-recorder to Radio Brunei. There officials hurried us through corridors to a studio where the acoustic might have been dead but that could not be said of a lovely lady seated at a table. The low lighting of the studio was pierced by a wide teeth-white smile: her large brown eyes focused on me (I thought); her lips moved seductively (I thought); her voice was darkly sensuous (I thought):

"You wish me to make another tape recording?", she asked. Oh please, I thought, thinking of the Biblical injunction 'Go forth and multiply'.

"That's right", said Skipper in matter of fact tones that removed virtual from reality. "Go to it, Corp."

"Beg pardon Skipper?"

"Record the lady."

"Oh! Oh, yes!"

It took a little time to set recording levels. The recorder was on the floor and when all was ready I sat at her feet and asked her to read the prepared words. She spoke them beautifully and I couldn't help noticing her dusky breasts quivering briefly each time she snatched breath. A second take was necessary in case levels were incorrect. Skipper wouldn't allow a third.

As we STOL unstuck I busied myself cutting tape and splicing it into a loop. En route for the broadcast zone there was plenty of time to check the loop by playing it more or less continuously through the internal speaker of the recorder. Ooohh! She had a wonderful voice; you didn't need to understand Malay – it just oozed sex. A voice to excite a thousand men.

That was it!

It is amazing how insightful the mind is at altitude. Doubtless, that's why Cassandra had called aircrew 'scholars'; it was the effect of the thin air; it sharpens the little grey cells. Well, my little grey cells were suddenly sharp at 2000ft. I now knew how the tape had been wiped! It was those guys in ARS. I bet it was! They'd erased that lovely voice. Accidentally, of course. Each night they'd borrow the loop and play the tape, fantasising in the dark of their tents. In the excitement of a moment the tape-recorder had inadvertently been knocked to record...

Further thought on this inspired insight was interrupted: "OK Corp., we're there. Roll the tape."

Skipper eased back the throttles and flew slow circles above the broadcast zone.

A voice to excite a thousand men boomed across the jungle.

Afterword

Before sending this for possible inclusion in the 'Newsletter' I passed a draft copy to a friend for comment: if this has entertained, all credit to him for suggesting deletion of the tasteless. His main criticism, however, was that I had written as one in his sixties unchanged from his twenties. He is right. He queried how I viewed those halcyon days from the perspective of maturity: I hadn't considered it. He gave me a copy of "The World Since 1945" by T E Vadney, 2nd Edition, referring me to pp 374-80. Is that really why I drank Tiger beer?

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.

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