



# WSTG Reunion Newsletter



November 2013  
www.wstg.co.uk

## Back on Track!

Having pleaded with you, our readers, for some input to our newsletters, we then failed to come up with the next issue in time for our June reunion!

As we get older nothing is guaranteed, but hopefully after some 'diversions' earlier this year, our newsletters will, once again, be more consistent in their issue!

There are some new contributors! Firstly, better pictures by Janet Barton and articles by Colin Parr and Ken Hoad.

These, and more pictures by Janet will be posted

on our website very shortly.

(Janet, however, has no responsibility for the appended captions!)



Some of WSTG's regular contributors - to the Bar !



Julie Collins and Fay Durant



'Starting on the puddings'  
Pat Wingate

## WSTG's Christmas 2012 in pictures by Janet Barton



'Boring Don to death'  
K Wingate with D Meakin



'Hailing from the West'  
S Fiddian and M Fittle



'More travellers from afar'  
M Lovelady and K Voysey



'Lunch is served'  
George and Eileen Scutt



'Down from Barrow-in-Furness'  
R Eves with R Lasseter and T Perkins



'Another WSTG not so tall story?'  
D Sherris, T Mitchell and R Howes

## Radar-the very early days in Portsmouth

By Ken Hoad

*Ken Hoad is one of our 'more mature colleagues' who served most of his Dockyard apprenticeship during WW2. Many of us remember his tales of destruction in Portsmouth Dockyard after a night of enemy bombardment. These range from a landmine hanging on the iconic 'big crane' to the devastation caused to ships berthed alongside, and chaos caused by unexploded bombs! Again in response to our pleas for fresh input Ken penned the following lines which must have been some of the earliest radar tasks carried out by dockyard workers.*

The Royal Dockyards supported a RN organisation known for Portsmouth P RAD O (Portsmouth Radar Office). It was situated not far from the main gate in No1 The Parade, and was my base for 2 years during which time we worked on some of the early 'radar sets'

One in particular, I recall was fitted to an inshore MB in a very confined space behind the bridge. The transmitter was by modern standards very basic comprising Lecher tubes and a Yagi aerial turned by hand via a Bowden cable! The display was an A scan (*range display*) as PPIs (*plan position indicators*) had still to come into service.

The test run down the Solent was 'hairy' as MBs were not designed to amble along! In today's parlance I found myself on a steep learning curve.

The permanent staff in the PRADO were RN personnel complete with a 'Wren' writer and sailors supporting the OIC, Lt Cdr (later Commodore) Armitage. Another officer whose name I have lost in the mists of time was, I believe, a reservist known as the 'Wavy Navy'.

There were two other civilians who joined at the same time whose names will be familiar to ex-Portsmouth dockyard employees. They were Charlie Burges and Bill Shrubsole.

Charlie Burges went on to the post of Foreman in No2 Electrical Shop, where Radio and Radar became fully supported by a large civilian staff, and eventually he became the personnel manager in the Dockyard.

From PRADO I went to Singapore on the first of two tours and also spent time in No2 Electrical Shop. I was recruited into WSTG in 1963.

*Ken was unsure of the date of his first encounter with Radar, but it must have occurred in the late 1940s. ♦*

## Agency Work in the Shipbuilding and Repair Industry

By Colin Parr MBE

*Colin Parr first became acquainted with the MOD(N) as a contractor for ASWE working on ADAWS modifications. He then joined WSTG in the 1960's, eventually becoming a senior technology grade, and 'made his mark' during the Gulf War. Colin's article is extremely detailed. It will therefore continue in the next issue of our Newsletter, but will also appear in its entirety in 'Colin's Page' on our website, wstg.co.uk.*

Within several years of leaving MOD(N) in 1996, I realised that I missed working afloat and the camaraderie that goes with it. I decided to work part time (half a year) locally in ship repair. These parameters limited me to employment as a marine electrical fitter and I was soon on the books of a local Agency.

In the 1990's the agencies were many and immature, only able to provide local personnel with electrical experience. I was contracted to work for the RN in a mixed civilian/RN team on RN ships in DED (*Docking and Essential Defects*). Most of the Agency workers I worked with had minimal ship repair/build and Health and Safety experience. On more than one occasion I saw full safety harness's being worn back to front. I had many jobs in the Yard as an Agency worker.

The advent of the digital age allowed Agencies to have access to a supply of suitably skilled workers from all over the UK. The Agencies were thus forced to reduce in number and consolidate and I found myself working for a

large local professional outfit that looked after their workforce. A local company with major company connections took over the total maintenance of the RFA's and I worked for them, mostly as an Agency worker on a local 'as and when' basis for 5 or so years on RFA *Royal Fleet Auxiliary*) DED's in various ports in Hampshire and Dorset. Most jobs that I was involved with were time limited and thus had mandatory overtime. This attracted the big hitters of the Agency workers who had worked for

giant Multinationals on contracts around the world and on UK and European warships. Some of their home addresses (with token young wives) were fascinating; strange places abroad, many around the Pacific basin and one case 2 hours flight from the nearest International airport in China. They say that they went home once a year.... As an aside, I am told that in some Pacific countries only locals can own property so they, in conjunction with locals, set up bars, clubs and shops where local males and females with the correct skills paid a substantial yearly rent to work out of those places, all excess monies were the club host/hostesses to keep. 'Gold mine stuff' for all involved!

The RFA crew work an on/off routine having a few months at home after each trip. I was again fascinated to discover where they had set up their homes abroad, perhaps not in the same league as the Agency workers, but to go home to Portugal for a few months twice a year seems rather idyllic.

In 2005 the local company took over the outstanding defects on a carrier coming out of refit. The work started alongside locally, but suddenly with the company having a full order book I found myself transferred to their payroll, at sea on the carrier, in charge of 50+ 'company hardcore and big hitter' Agency workers, most of whom I had never met before. I had a list of thousands of minor defects to be corrected and a 10' container full of everything that might be needed on voyage. There is over a thousand compartments on

the carrier and I had to visit each one every day that had a defect to note the progress. Two months at sea were split with a month in Rosyth. Incidentally, just as the carrier left Rosyth I took a plane to Southampton, spent one day at home celebrating my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, then drove to Plymouth and got a ride on a Sea King helo' back to the carrier, all within a space of a few days.

It was a major change for me when in early 2009 the Agency offered me work on one of the new warships that were being built in the Yard. The hull was basically whole and the upper works were in place. There was only a few Agency workers along with a core of ship builders staff on board but over the following months as more L,M and C parts became available for fitting, increasing numbers of Agency personnel were taken on.

Tools for the build were readily available on board and were bar-coded in and out using individual clock cards. Most were battery operated and, charged overnight, they lasted all day.

From my first step in the ship building yard it was evident that Health and Safety was a serious business. Ship building is about no. 6 in the UK's list of most dangerous trades. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Boots, overalls, helmets, safety glasses and ear plugs were mandatory. Boots and overalls for Agency workers, after the first rush, were self supply thus they used what they could get hold of; a multitude of colours and company motifs. When I bought a new pair someone else would always take on my thin old ones.

I, as usual, ended up in the engine rooms. You are either loved or hated. The average Agency worker lasts about 6 months - others years, before finally escaping up into the passage ways or accommodation areas. A constant stream of Agency personnel continued to join both afloat and in the offices. Though they came with

references it was obvious that some did not have any ship building experience and could not be left to work alone. The management eventually realised that not all had the correct skills and stipulated that all Agency workers had to show proof of a recognised apprenticeship and work on ships in the last 3 years. I offered my indentures up for perusal fitted in a polythene bag along with a pair of latex gloves on the grounds that they were so old!

The Agency workers came from all over the UK, a good bunch, hard workers - try anything, and proud of their work. However, with a limited amount of overtime available these weren't the big hitter world travelling workers of 10 years ago. These are products of the shrinking engineering base of the UK, who have to travel to find work to survive. Taking advantage of the 4 day week they live in digs in Portsmouth 3 nights during the week and then travel home. Those living further afield take advantage of the one or so days overtime over the weekend and go home about once every 6 weeks. They rent flats in Portsmouth.

Others like me only worked a part of the year and then, unlike me, travelled the world. Imagine spending 3 months on a beach in Africa or India over Christmas at minimal expense! One Agency man I met was in his mid 50's and owned a small holding in Wales. If moving to an area where the work was on-going for a few years, he bought a little backstreet house on a mortgage, lived in one room, and let the others. When the time came to move on, he let the whole house to pay the mortgage, but would return if there was future work. Adding up all the accommodation he owned he was worth 'millions' - on paper. One middle aged Scot I worked with, played a wind instru-

ment in a Spanish Band in Tossa De Mar! ♦

### Keith Parke 1945-2013



Keith Rodney Parke grew up in Alverstoke Road Fratton and like so many Portsmouth Technical School Boys entered the Dockyard as an apprentice in September 1962. On completion of his apprenticeship he served sometime as an electrical fitter and then as a temporary acting draughtsman before joining WSTG in December 1968. Keith spent his early years in the WSTG radar section where he became a valued team member. He joined the computer section (ADAWS group) in the early 1970's and embarked on a long period of training

At this time Keith was a rugby player and obviously trained hard in all aspects of the sport including 'après rugby'. As a consequence the regular journey to Ferranti's site at Bracknell, where training was carried out on the computer hardware, passed quickly for Keith since he took the opportunity to catch up on some sleep. However his life-style was to change within a year or so because he was diagnosed with diabetes.

On completion of training, Keith worked on the ADAWS computer hardware in the ships under construction at that time and also on DAE (Ikara conversion) in the Leander frigates *Aurora* and *Arethusa* carried out in Chatham and Portsmouth. He spent a considerable time on detached duty on this work, which included, in the early stages, work on *HMS Bristol* and trips to Ferranti's Cairo Mill commissioning site at Oldham.

Keith continued to work for the computer section until April 1983 when he re-signed from MOD(N) and emigrated to Perth in Western Australia.

In the final years of his working life Keith returned to the UK and worked at HMS Dryad in the maintenance section for the ADA user training systems. For those of us who had commitments in HMS Dryad like Rod Howes and Ken Wingate it was the last time we met up with Keith who seemed happy enough with his work there, although his time with WSTG was the favourite topic of conversation.

We re-established contact with Keith when he discovered the WSTG website. He emailed to say that following his retirement from work at HMS Dryad in 2007 he had returned to Australia to be near his family and was living near the Snowy Mountains.



It was announced in the Portsmouth local paper (*The News*) that Keith died on 26 February 2013.

Our sympathy is extended to his family and friends. ♦

### Robert Gordon Bone 1941-2013



It is with sadness that we report the death of our WSTG colleague, Gordon Bone, aged of 71 years, on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2013.

Gordon was born on 31 October 1941 in South Shields. Up on leaving school at the age of 15 years, he secured an apprenticeship with a local electrical engineering firm and joined the MOD not long after he completed his training. Gordon was posted to WSTG in 1970 where he worked in the communications section mainly on VHF and UHF equipment. After some time based at Wallsend/Newcastle Gordon was transferred to the WSTG office at Plymouth, and 14 years later posted to Portsmouth from where he retired from MOD Service.

His final working years were spent in the Trials and Ranges group. Several of his colleagues from WSTG and the Ranges group were present at his funeral service, held at Portchester crematorium, on Monday the 15<sup>th</sup> July 2013.

Gordon frequently attended our reunions, was always good company, and took an interest in our newsletter reports. It was entirely due to Gordon that we were able to provide an obituary in some detail for the late John Brook, for whom he had worked in the Trials & Ranges Group. Our sympathy is extended to Gordon's family. ♦

Our website is located at [wstg.co.uk](http://wstg.co.uk)

**A Picture is better than 1000 words**  
**A Selection of Janet Barton's Pictures from our June 2013 Reunion**



Peter & June Horrocks



Ken Hoad chats with Eileen Scutt



Dick Barton (L) amusing Dave Metherell, Chris Arrowsmith and Terry Perkins



**Not Bored!**  
Ivan Winter reading an article featuring Barry Robertson



Neville Maton, Dave Bishop, Colin Game & Adrian Wright



The 'puddings club' featuring June Horrocks, Trudy Strange, Colin Game and Bob Lindsay



Orion Young pictured with George Scutt



Bob Lasseter, John Couper, Ted Arnold and Ken Wingate

Spring 2014 heralds our 10 years of Reunions at Alexandra Bowling Club. During that time we have been some sad losses, but also happy times, and so:  
**we are thinking about doing something special. next year!**