



# WSTG Reunion Newsletter



May 2015  
www.wstg.co.uk

## Our December 2014 Reunion

Our last meeting could hardly be called a Christmas Reunion as it just crept into December - on Tuesday 2nd Dec. to be precise!

We sincerely apologise for this early arrangement, which was eventually agreed, taking account of committee members' prior engagements.

Planning the event rather early, and on a Tuesday, meant opening Alexandra Bowling Club especially for WSTG. This had the advantage of using the club and Function Room bars and creating a more intimate arrangement.

Many of you who came along much preferred the layout and thought it was more cosy and friendly and encouraged people not to remain in separate groups. Comments suggested it made for a more enjoyable party and we should try to do this on a regular basis. However, for the June events the club is always open to club member and visiting bowling teams, making it difficult to accommodate any changes.

Some of you also feel that a Christmas Reunion should be later than our usual time. So, do we plan a day in, say, the 3rd week in December and, if possible, with the modified layout.

**You tell us!**

The following photos, taken by Janet Barton capture the 'party mood.' Comments and caption are by the editorial staff!! ♦

### Photographs taken at the Reunion

*JW*



Clockwise from top left: Ron White, Roger Eves, Barry Robertson, Peter Burton, Bob Lindsay, Ivan Winter.



The usual quality raffle prizes: a bottle of 1996 Beaujoulais Nouveau for Trevor Mitchell and Geoff White - crackers as always!



Another lucky winner: L to R, Adrian Wright, Ken Wingate and Ken Bevis.



Fran Hughes chats with Orien Young



L to R: Bob Lasseter, Dave Metherall and Alan Cave.



'On the sauce': Rod, Trev' and Dave!



'Off the sauce': Peter and June Horrocks.

## We gave pole dancing a miss!

On the first reunion held at the Bowling Club in 2004 we asked those present whether, as a Reunion Group, we should consider other activities. Although most were hap-



Part of Explosion's collection of missiles displayed in the main museum.

py to meet up for a drink and a buffet lunch, some colleagues suggested we should, perhaps, have some group outings.

The inimitable Derrick Middleton, in reply to our questionnaire suggested *Pole Dancing!* We were not sure whether he meant that we should take instruction or go to watch 'the experts'! In any event we gave pole dancing a miss!

We have, however, organised a number of outings over the years. A visit to HMS Collingwood was our

first venture followed by a guided tour of Fort Nelson. The more adventurous outings have included visits to HMS Belfast, Chatham Dockyard and the Imperial War Museum.

All have been great value for money, because of Group Concessions, and none more so than our last one in June 2014.

This was proposed by Barry Robertson arising from his recent article in our Newsletter entitled '**Volunteering at the Explosion Museum**'.

Following some negotiation between Barry and Ken Wingate and subsequent co-ordination by Adrian Wright, about 2 dozen WSTG colleagues and friends embarked on a visit to the Explosion Museum at Priddy's

Hard. The day agreed for the visit, 19 June 2014, was a fine hot day that started at 10.30am with coffee in the Explosion Conference Room.

Our programme from then on was quite challenging: the rest of the morning was taken up with a tour of the Reserve Collection not normally open to the public. It comprises early cannon, a Mk 10 mortar with handling gear, various Bofors, Vavasuer mountings, Torpedoes and much more.



MK10 Mortar from the reserve collection

This detailed guided tour, both historical and technical, concluded with a talk on the Polaris Missile including Chevaline, items which are part of the Collection.

A well presented buffet lunch had been set out back in the conference room, which gave us time to talk about the morning tour and to prepare us for the afternoon. This was to include access to a large collection of small arms

again not available for public view.

We learnt of the history, technical advantages and shortfalls of many hand guns, machine guns and other automatic weapons, and were able to handle them!

Our day ended, for those who were not 'too creaky'



Ken Bevis 'takes up arms'

with the tour of 'Explosion' - normally undertaken by the public!

The total cost of our day including drinks and the excellent buffet lunch was just £9 per person. The ice creams that were a necessary 'coolant' on such a fine day were extra purchases from the café!

Great value, and an interesting day thanks to our very knowledgeable volunteer guides Messrs Coker and Dingle and of course Barry Robertson who suggested the visit. ♦ *AGW*

## Sharing the Load

Just a few words on how your committee divides up the tasks necessary to keep the show on the road.

It hardly seems possible that Frank, Ken and I had our first meeting in July 2003. It was a lengthy meeting and many decisions were taken on organising reunions and the future of the archives.

Frank had taken custody of these archives and was keen to ensure they were not binned. Since that meeting the Norman Dibley collection of new build ships photos signed by their first C.O.s have been passed over to the RN museum in Portsmouth by Ken and Ivan and all technical photos taken by WSTG staff such as ship launches, equipment, WSTG in action and the WSTG video have gone to the HMS Collingwood photo collection which is in the process of being put on a 2000 photo database by Collingwood volunteers Ivan and Ted Robinson [ex WSTG contractor]. Copies of all items have been kept for our archives.

We hope by these actions to have guaranteed a viable future for these items whose historical interest increases as time passes.

Following the untimely death of Frank Moore the remaining two committee members decided that a three man committee was essential and we were lucky to recruit Adrian who immediately became our IT specialist. He set up the WSTG web site and has kept it up to date and answered any hits we get on it. The designer of the 670 EW equipment wanted to know how we got on setting it to work. From bitter experience Colin Game was able to reassure him that getting at the upper deck equipment was an absolute nightmare [His exact words have been sanitised].

The committee were aware that Frank had a fairly unusual start in life. Ivan persuaded his wife Linda to recount his

early years and with suitable photos an article appeared in the Newsletter. Born on the Khyber Pass in Afghanistan, travelling through India during the partition, his hobby motor cycle racing at Brands Hatch. I think that's exciting enough to be recorded. The Newsletters were the brainchild of Ken,

who has put a great deal of effort into producing one for nearly every reunion. It takes a great deal of persistence to get people to write up items for the Newsletters but Ken has

been up to the challenge with articles by Trevor Mitchell, Ted Arnold, Dick Barton *et al*. As a committee we realised that many retired members of staff had much to recount on their war records.

Ken and Ivan set up a system that involved sitting down with these veterans of WWII and prising out of them the many stories of courage and danger they had to tell of those times. It proved surprisingly easy. Once they got going it all spilled out. Arctic convoys, battling through the Med to re-supply Malta, the Luftwaffe, U boats, E boats and sinking Japanese cruisers. Wonderful memories of dark times which all appeared in our Newsletter. Copies were always passed on to the families whose usual reply was "We didn't know that about our Dad".

In the early days when we were more mobile visits to HMS Collingwood, HMS Belfast,

IWM, Tangmere etc were enthusiastically organised by Ken. It is never easy to put together these events when costs and an estimate of support need to be considered. Finally the main reason for organising a committee in 2003, the biannual reunions, which continue to be well attended. All



Visit to HMS Belfast in October 2007

three of us are heavily involved. Things may have become routine but still require action to be ready on the day. I hope that this article shows what has been achieved in the last 12 years and that all members of our committee share the load equally.



### Agency Workers in Ship Building and Repair

By Colin Parr MBE

*The concluding part of Colin's article*

The phone call came 2 months later as expected: start tomorrow. 10 of us again that day ready for the obligatory joining routine met the Agencies Rep at Unicorn Gate. More horrors! The joining procedures had changed yet again. Our permanent passes were taken away and we were given an escorted day pass. Under the eyes of the gate guard force, we were led across the road

to the medical centre and given a physical and drugs test. These tests were to be made mandatory for all working in the Yard. 9 of us passed the drugs test, the 10<sup>th</sup> failed. I had not met him before, he had driven from Port Glasgow the day before, and arriving with a splitting headache he had taken Cocodamol! The agencies rep told him in no uncertain terms that he was not considered acceptable for employment; should he wish to complain, the results of a second test of his sample would be available within a week and if it was due to co-codamol he would be taken on. The company would not accept or pay the expenses for his journeys. He was escorted out of the gate. As for me I was exempt the Trade test. I found later that the trade test for the *joiner* in the same group was to drill and tap various threads in 3mm steel plate. My pass was to be returned with the production of two proofs of identity, I had my passport but unfortunately my driving license does not have a photo. The production of my bus pass completed the transaction.

The team leader who I had always worked for in the engine rooms, was an ex diesel submariner of 50 built like a short rugby player. His mandatory medical for sea trials found that he had very high blood pressure; he continued to work and took pills but not long after he didn't come in to work anymore. Just after that the Multinational, made individual initiated blood pressure checks available.

The Multinational since taking over has definitely moved in a positive direction in Health and Safety and the local Management have got to a position where it is beyond reproach in its implementation. For example, for working off of ladders, steps etc. the operator must have 3 points of contact, Foot, Calf and Knee. Of course, to that end step ladders with three rungs were withdrawn! Scaffolding, if it could improve safety was almost always used. Scaffolding however has its problems with clearance on the underside; one always seemed to collide with poles and bolts, and it wasn't the helmet that was damaged but the neck. The wood deals used in the scaffolding were rough sawn so crawling or sliding along them usually introduced splinters, sometimes in the worst of places.

The Multinational in 2012 introduced a boot/overall company onto the site to issue to all and sundry with standard Multinational Logo marked fire-proofed overalls. They are individually bar marked, and it is expected that they are to be changed for clean ones once a week, or sooner. One just had to make sure that the replacement ones had not previously and obviously been worn by painters or welders! Whilst in the boot/overall shop queuing to change my overalls, it was to my, and all others amusement, when the team leader of the boat shop apprentices brought his entire brood in to change their overalls. He was not in a too happy a mood because the entire group, male and female, wore torn, filthy, frayed around the heels, stinking overalls that certainly had

not seen any cleaning for months if ever. Perhaps the apprentices were of the opinion that they were in a hippy commune

Electrical fitters were supplied with multi-voltage probes to be carried and used at all times. Also a thin version of armoured gloves is soon to be mandatory to prevent cuts from the ubiquitous stainless steel banding; some don't readily accept gloves and I watched one lad trying to disk cut the fingers off the gloves. He was not able.

The vessel I worked on for 3 years is certainly at the cutting edge of design and is very compact. To allow access to some of the engine room bilge sections, major pipe work in the section has to be removed. It not difficult to get down through the pipes and fittings but almost impossible to climb out of; one just can't raise the arms, knees and feet and can only be pulled out. As the ship became more alive, the 'breathability of air' in confined spaces became of great concern; it became forbidden to enter such places without a top man (guard) and a lot of paperwork/tallies and individual air monitors. We all attended a one day's course in which we were taught how to be a top man and the use of breathing apparatus. A top man was not there to rescue personnel but to seek specialist help. To that end a rescue section has been set up in the Yard with personnel who seemed to be scrawny ex rock climbers with pony tails and black overalls covered in

hooks and ropes, and on call to rescue any one trapped. They quite rightly control the access of the ambulance service but it is scary.

I have met many female skilled workers amongst the company core workers and the cleaners afloat but I have never met a female Agency skilled worker. My daughter did work however for an Agency on banding the cross passage main cable runs on a carrier alongside in the Yard!

A change to the Health and Safety legislation for shipbuilding requires that all personnel employed, have attended 10 safety courses. To name a few, Confined spaces, labelling of fire extinguishers, manual handling, etc. I didn't complete all mine; standing on ladders and guard rails for too many years I damaged my instep. Health and Safety also relies on one's own assessment of the risk. I had been in the Yard for 46 years and health and safety has come a long way from just being issued with green overalls; I supplied my own boots and flat cap! I wasn't the oldest on the ship. He was 71 and on night shift. Good on the Multinational for employing us.

There won't be many left in the ship building Yard when all the Agency workers have moved on. ♦

## SAD NEWS

### Neville Stanley Maton 1939-2015

*It is with much sadness that we report the sad news of the sudden death of Neville*

*Maton while travelling to Mauritius, his holiday destination on 29 March.*

Neville was born in Portsmouth on 4 December 1939 and educated at Portsmouth Grammar School. He started his career as an electrical fitter apprentice in HM Dockyard Portsmouth in the mid fifties. On completion he worked at HMS Mercury for a short time and then abroad at the Naval Communications Centre in Bahrain. He joined WSTG in 1970 as a teleprinter mechanic and was quickly promoted to diagnostician (Technical Grade 3).



He worked for most of his career in the radio section on V/UHF and message handling systems until 1989 when he was promoted to HPTO and transferred to the Surface Weapons Section. There he became a team leader working on the Harpoon guided missile and GSA8 gun systems. For the last four years of his career he returned to the Radio section working on satellite systems (SCOT). He finally retired in 1999.

Neville was a dedicated family man and had a passion for rugby. In retirement he became a keen walker, photographer and foreign traveller. He was also a volunteer at HMS Collingwood Museum. Neville was well respected by all those he worked with and will be

sadly missed by his many friends and colleagues.

Neville's funeral service and celebration of his life took place at West Vale Crematorium and at the Prince Consort PH at Netley.

We extend our sympathy to his children Deana, Kerry, partner Elizabeth and all his family. ♦

AW

## More Very Sad News

We were very recently informed of the death of Fred Guy following a brain haemorrhage. His colleagues will recall how disappointed he was that he could not make the Christmas reunion because of a serious stroke.

Fred died peacefully on 19 April at the Rowans Hospice. An obituary will be included in our next Newsletter later this year.

His funeral will take place at the Oaks Crematorium, Havant, on Thursday 30 April followed by a celebration of his life at the Crookhorn Golf Club Purbrook.



Fred Guy pictured at the Christmas 2013 Reunion

Fred started his working life as a Portsmouth Dockyard apprentice in 1951 and retired as an SPTO in 1995, having spent many years in WSTG. ♦ AGW