



# WSTG Reunion Newsletter



May 2007

[www.wstg.co.uk](http://www.wstg.co.uk)

## OUR 2006 CHRISTMAS PARTY

For the third consecutive year we had a very good attendance at the Alexandra Bowling Club for our Christmas "Do". As in previous years we had a few colleagues who for various reasons could not make it on the day, but our numbers were still approaching sixty.

The committee had the feeling it was probably our most successful event so far: the regular supporters being familiar with the venue and our format and the new comers providing the element of surprise and fresh reminiscences. The record for the longest journey made to one of our reunions is now held by Allan Reader and his wife Margaret who came down from Glasgow. That really was a surprise and it was great to see them.



**Allan and Margaret Reader**

Dennis Collard who has recently retired duly arrived. Many of his friends were delighted he had made it at last. Moreover, Dennis surprised us too by persuading Mike Stenson to join him as an unexpected guest.



**Dennis pictured with Gerry O'Gorman**

Half a dozen other colleagues also gave us their unexpected support. We were, of course, delighted to see them all, although we do not recommend that too many make an unplanned appearance as it could embarrass Sally, our caterer. Fortunately, all the committee learnt their planning techniques in WSTG (where very occasionally nobody knew what the hell was happening). As a precaution we did plan in some contingency, and so there was, therefore, food a-plenty.



**Ray Callaghan and Amanda**

Having made contact with Ray Callaghan we were pleased he and Amanda

could make it, despite having to leave early to give grandparental support to one of the seasonal nativity performances. Ray soon had us re-calling old colleagues, although we took a while to put a name to one who had escaped his memory: our late and valued colleague, Ron Dunn.

Another colleague whose attendance we have missed at the last few reunions was Ray Hayhoe. We were delighted to see Ray and Gwenda who is still actively involved in music making in the city. Ray, however, has now retired as a church organist.



**Ray and Gwenda Hayhoe**

Thanks to donations by some of our supporters and a healthy WSTG Reunion Account we were not short of high quality festive raffle prizes. Lucky winners departed clutching prizes such as a Christmas cake, crackers, confectionary and the usual bottles of festive cheer! Our lady's Christmas gift was a selection of tins of quality biscuits, taken home by Glennis Pace who was attending her second WSTG party.

You may note that some of our photographs both in this Newsletter and on the

website are of a much better quality than usual. That is because **Dick Barton** has kindly accepted the task of official photographer.

Our committee also has another member: **Louis Figueras** has now joined us.

It must be said that the Christmas "Do" requires a little more effort to organise and once again we enlisted the help of Anne Marie Winter, Linda Moore and Pat Wingate to deal with the raffle, preparations needed before you all arrive and the other festive finishing touches.

In conclusion we hope most of you had a quick look at our display. It was an opportunity for those without access to a computer to view our website on the laptop and to see our selection of photos of "then and now" together with others we have not published widely before. If you do get the chance, take a look at the website which Adrian updates fairly promptly when we have any news.

## Website Upgrade

Using some of the surplus funds in the WSTG account Adrian has rented more space for our website. We are now able to publish more text and photos than previously, so let us have some contributions from YOU.

**Visit our Website at the new address: [www.wstg.co.uk](http://www.wstg.co.uk)**

## Knocker's Story

I was born in Portsmouth in 1936 and apart from a few weeks evacuated to Basingstoke grew up there.

I joined the navy on 7 January 1952 at HMS Fisgard in Torpoint as an artificer apprentice just short of my 16th birthday. Pay for the first year was ten shillings a week. Life at Fisgard was quite tough, we lived in brick huts with the central heating being two coal bogie stoves, useful for toasting bread and heating up a tin of beans. We worked in classrooms or workshops for 5 1/2 days a week with 2 or 3 evening classes as well learning general subjects and skill of hand as in those days the artificer mended or made a new bit when necessary. An occasional treat would be a Saturday visit to the cinema in Torpoint or perhaps venture to the Plymouth NAAFI club in nissen huts on a bomb site in the town centre. Egg on toast and a tea was 9d. We generally walked to the ferry to save money. At this time it was really still the old Navy; things such as outward bounding had not been invented and most of those in charge had seen war service so, although it was hard going there was no silliness. After 18 months I moved to HMS Collingwood to

continue the apprenticeship and as this was near home I could cycle there for the alternate weekend from Saturday noon till Sunday evening. Until the age of 17 1/2 attending church was compulsory, which limited the weekends a bit. We were allowed duty free cigarettes (300 a month for 7s.) which was the start of the downhill run although we were kept fit here with PT, parades and about a mile walk to the gate and workshops.

On completion of my time in Collingwood I joined my first ship, HMS Plover, built in 1936, with a top speed of 8 knots. It had a coal galley, coal stoves on the mess decks and window

7 year refit and worked on DLMS, crane, arrestor gear and steam catapults. It was all very interesting and where I first came across binary coding, used in catapult end speed recorders. Derek Middleton was the senior Chief EA. My own CEA was Ted Birch who ended up in DTSW as a degaussing officer. This ship was quite interesting; one job entailed having to climb up the funnel casing to the top whilst doing 30 knots, beetroot-like as you got higher and hotter, to sort out the steam siren's electrical control! Another task was to make Ted Birch a birdcage stand, in sections of course! And on one Sunday I spent all day sorting out a bomb lift that was going up and down 8 decks



**HMS PLOVER Coastal Minelayer 800 tons**

boxes with flowers around the bridge!

My first trip was to the Bay of Biscay where I was violently sick for 3 days! As this ship was so old it had 110 V DC mains and very little equipment, so all that gunnery systems theory I had been taught was held in the memory for future use. In 1957 I joined the HMS Victorious at the end of her

of its own accord, I was fit to drop at the end of day!

I next went back to Collingwood for a year's course to convert to an REA. On completion I joined HMS Cassandra which was about to sail for work up. After 6 weeks of fun and games at sea it was off on a month's trip to Singapore. This was the strange world of radio and radar and

various Far East hot spots. Time was spent in Hong Kong where I drank too much and experienced a typhoon while moored to a buoy. Indeed, very rough! We also spent some time on anti-piracy patrols in the Sunda Straights with a quick run ashore in North Borneo. That was rather strange being like a scene from the 1930's with the rich whites in the club, to which we were invited, and the locals in their wooden huts! I found the time in this ship very enjoyable despite drinking too much when ashore! As we were associated with the Daily Mirror - through a writer called Cassandra - they sent Christmas hampers to our relatives while we were away which went down well. They also gave a great party in London before we sailed with photos in the paper. Fame in a sailor suit!

I flew home and returned to Collingwood, teaching 600 series w/t transmitters for a year. Then a drafting to HMS Eagle, as an ADA watch keeper, meant a 9month course at ASWE. There I first met WSTG in the form of Ivor Taylor and Derek Bond. The initial time was spent supporting programmers who never seemed to go home! As the CREA got promoted I then took his place as AICREA after a one week course on Radar Type 984. Again sometime was spent in the Far East, and Mombassa..

Early in 1966 I left the Navy and joined WSTG, my first job

being in Collingwood! The first trip away was to Glasgow, which was a culture shock. I had problems on day one when trying to buy underground tickets, where neither the seller or myself could understand each other. Luckily Peter Horrocks was there to interpret. The next shock was lunch when Joe Cleall led us into a cafe outside the yard gate and we sat at wooden tables on wooden benches, not chairs! When we finished for the day we saw two drunks asleep in the gutter, No mean city in those days!

I continued in the ADA section for some years on DA systems and got promoted to HPTO/PT02 in the process. I thought our greatest achievement was the STW of Birmingham without Ferranti but with no tea breaks! Other sections were horrified. During this time we often went on Sunday excursions with the Seadart team to Llandudno by sea from Liverpool and by rail to Blackpool, Southport, Port Sunlight and Chester. Some thought we were mad. We were also at Oldham during the 3 day week and one Sunday with no power I went on a walk around the town with Rod Howes who kindly explained the word



**HMS Birmingham: No Tea Breaks on here!**

"relic" on a gravestone. You learnt a lot in WSTG! An independent view of my early days in WSTG is at "Ode to Knocker". After a period of time I passed the board for SPTO. Sitting quietly in ASWE I started to hear rumours that I was going to get Ken Wingate's job as Radar Section SPTO; that team were rather worried I might instantly stop all tea breaks and inflict other horrors. Kindly, some said wait and see! I had still heard nothing and when Ken rang to ask when I would take over I phoned Ernie Brimecombe to ask, was it true? His response was instant panic that no one had told me and he was rather embarrassed. In time the post expanded to include stabilisation and then GWS 25 and ultimately GWS 26. I found the latter a nightmare as all work was done on a fixed price contract controlled by the equipment project.. Consequently MRSI took little notice of us and all we seemed to do was take the blame when things did not go to plan. During this

period I was approached with some requests from team members that left me almost speechless: one wanted to go to Chatham to see his friends and the other to Barrow to go fell walking. But there were no ships in either yard. Had my predecessors been running a Travel Agency? After this I managed to pass a board for Grade 7/PPTO at the second attempt and was instantly offered the job as SNO Belfast - and just as quickly declined it. I continued in the same job until one afternoon Tony Morris, Head of WSTG, walked in to tell me that the Controller had decreed that another Grade 7 post was needed and it had been decided that Tony would move onto Ranges and his job "was going". Was I interested? I rushed down the corridor to ask the AD who as usual was writing a long letter. He appeared indifferent so I presumed I was not "flavour of the month". However I then rang personnel who knew nothing about it but in 30 minutes there was a return call to say it was true and that the

Director Pat Bryan was happy to have me start the job on Monday. (Thanks Tony.) After the "writing AD" we had Captain Roger Sharp who was an ex-submariner and supported the whole of Trials and Ranges so well that when he retired the Group bought him a retirement present! Next came Captain Mel Purvis but soon after another change took place that put WSTG with Overseeing staff under a civilian AD, Tony Monks, resulting in a complete change of style. I phoned him before he got promoted into post to seek approval to change our title and signal address which had been dropped, back to WSTG. He agreed so once more people knew who we were. I seemed to spend most of my time saying no to ships' officers who insisted their CO wanted to go to the Med for 6 months of the Part 4 programme and hosting staff audits, and studies by various people to try and shut us down. One who came from BAE turned out to be a retired Captain who was my LO on the Cassandra so he gave us a good report! Strangely, I also had to produce one myself, totally unbiased of course! All seemed to be filed and forgotten. Throughout these last 7 years there was a constant threat of staff cuts. At my first management meeting the AD wanted 20 posts. I resisted and Ranges bore these reductions. Overall

only 4 or 5 posts were lost during my time, which was quite good, remembering the climate during those years.

Retirement came in 1995 and I continued with genealogy, dog walking and general pottering. Uploading the family tree to the mormon website resulted in two letters from Australia from distant connections. All quite interesting as we had sorted it all out before lots of information was on the web, making visits to Record Offices all over the south. I still keep my sea legs working, making an annual trip on the PS Waverley! Ah, happy retirement!

### **Planned WSTG Visits**

In February Ivan and Pat Cross visited the Science Museum (London) using National Express. They had ample time to enjoy the day at a reasonable cost. Following this adventure we plan to visit HMS Belfast in the Autumn. If you would like to join us, please respond on the Fly Sheet. The exact timing will be advised. You will need to book your own ticket on the nominated coach leaving at about 8.00 am.

**A visit to Tangmere Aviation Museum** is also still an option. Following the death of Neville Duke, his record breaking Hawker Hunter Mk3 is on show. Interested? Tick the "flier".

## **Derrick Middleton BEM**

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of Derrick Middleton, aged 86 years. He died peacefully on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2006 following deterioration in his health over the previous month. Derrick's career in the Royal



Navy and with WSTG is covered at length in an early WSTG Newsletter and our website. It is suffice to say in this tribute that Derrick had an exemplary Service and Civilian career.

It was no secret however that Derrick had suffered from a serious depressive illness in later years that occasionally returned, albeit less seriously, to interrupt a retirement full of interest, humour and many new experiences.

He had many friends and acquaintances that spanned all age groups. The late Frank Moore was one of his closest friends and Linda Moore had continued that friendship. Ron Kimber also kept in touch with Derrick and regularly had a pint with him at his favourite hostelry, Wetherspoons, in Fareham.

When we were writing up Derrick's career for the Newsletter, what became obvious was that his mind was still needle sharp and he was still, physically, very active for his advanced years.

## **SAD NEWS**

### **Jim Stephens**

James Andrew Stephens died on New Year's Day 2007 at the age of 78 years. Jim last made contact when he received our first WSTG Newsletter. He very much regretted not being able to attend our reunions due to poor health. Jim started his career as an RN electrical artificer and although we have few details of his naval service he was known to be a keen and skilled hockey player.



Jim Stephens PTO 2 RM 12 Milldam House 18/7/85.

After 12 years service Jim left the Navy. He joined WSTG in 1960 and worked mainly on radar equipments, eventually becoming a PTO2 team leader on Surveillance and Navigation Radars. Jim's career with WSTG spanned many ship classes starting with the build of Leander class frigates and concluding before the completion of the Type 23 frigates. He also did much work on the smaller craft such as those involved in fishery protection and (RAF) target towing vessels. As a team leader Jim was best known for his knowledge of radar links to other systems and his drawings relating to this aspect of weapons system engineering. Jim was also the designer of the WSTG emblem on the 21 years Honours Board.

He retired in the late 1980's. Jim's funeral was held at the Portchester Crematorium on 15 January where sadly Geoff White was the only WSTG representative.

our “flier”