



WSTG Reunion Newsletter



November 2008

www.wstg.co.uk

OUR 2008 PROGRAMME

The committee feel that we have had another quite successful year – well almost! The success of the final event, the Christmas “Get Together”, depends on your support. Please come along.

Our Spring Reunion was very well attended. Moreover, and despite the stormy weather, quite a few hardy souls came with us on the tour of Fort Nelson. Our “detached duty” visit to Chatham Dockyard was fully booked with only four extra “friends and family” filling our 29seater coach to capacity. One of those, Clyff (88), was Chris Arrowsmith’s dad who had worked on HMS Cavalier during her build.

Whilst we did heed the health and safety warning not to run up or slide down the grass banks at Fort Nelson, at Chatham, there was some satisfaction at being able (still) to swing, feet first, through the small circular bulk-head hatchways in the submarine HMS Ocelot, particularly after 10 or 12 years in retirement.

Flushed with an element of success of *all* our outings we are now thinking about visiting the Imperial War Museum early next year as there were many who expressed an interest on the return slips about the choice and dates of visits.

More on
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WSTG Reunion — 29 May 2008

THE SPRING REUNION — NOT QUITE AS PLANNED

The readers who access our WSTG website will have guessed that our Spring event did not quite go to plan. They will have noticed that the date was suddenly changed from Thursday 5 June to the earlier date of Thursday 29 May. This was due to Alexandra Bowling Club hosting a county match between Hampshire and Kent on our preferred date. We then faced the problem of either setting a later date, when some of our supporters are off on short breaks and to garden shows, or deciding to go for it a week earlier when others



Sally Isted, Evelyn Bowditch and Ivan lunch together

may have gone away for the Spring bank holiday week.

As suspected, the return slips were a bit sparse, even though we had made this meeting an open invitation, similar to our Christmas parties. The early forecast given to Sally, our caterer, was of concern, amounting to less than 30 people, but suddenly more slips came in and eventually our numbers were up to 50. This was the best ever for a mid-year event!

We had some surprises too, as with all our reunions. This time Simon Fiddian, whose dad, David, was one of the stalwarts of the Radar Section for some years, managed to join us. Moreover, Bob Rice, who was the resident specialist at Devonport on the early Type 22 frigates came up from Bath. Bob must have felt quite at home at the Alexandra BC, because in retirement he is captain of a bowling club in the Bath area.

We were also pleased to welcome the late Jimmy Johnson’s partner Evelyn. Jimmy, many will recall, worked in WSTG as a comms. specialist for many years. Peter Cox made it again too after missing the more recent functions due to a chest infection.

Ken Hoad joined us once again after missing last year’s event and Ray Callaghan and Mandy told us about the maiden voyage of the liner Queen Victoria which was the best excuse for missing the last WSTG Christmas party!

At this get-together we had two laptop computers



Bob Rice and Chris Arrowsmith, past members of the Devonport team.

running. On one we had the WSTG Website for those who don’t get a chance to see it, and on the other was a very professional Audio Video by Dick Barton of our visit to HMS Belfast.

Our Spring meetings are our low key events. No raffles, just a good buffet lunch, chatter about life and colleagues who were in WSTG, this year’s holidays and, of course, our favourite reunion topic of discussion - the ailments and problems of getting old!

THOUGHTS OF AN EX-PAT WSTG OLD BOY

By Alf Huntley

From an old boy in foreign climes, I would like to say *hola* to all my former friends and colleagues at WSTG. I have been keeping in touch with the old group by using the wonder of the Internet and corresponding with Ron White. Also, a couple of years ago Geoff White and Sylvia paid us a visit and we had a good chat about old times.

Of course, one of the sadder things about living abroad is being unable to attend reunions or pay last respects to our late friends and colleagues, but the WSTG web site keeps me informed.

We decided to move out here about six years ago, after going to an exhibition about life in Spain, followed by a visit to La Manga and a week in Torre Vieja to see what it was actually like. We had previously visited places in Spain when my wife, Rita, was still working as a travel agent, but never thought of living there. I was still working at the LBTS, although I was growing increasingly frustrated with QINETIQ and had thought of early retirement, but I didn't want to leave on reduced terms - until our visit to the Torre Vieja area. We both liked the area and, as a golfer, I had a vision of living on a golf course, lazy evenings on the terrace and windsurfing! Sun, sea and sangria!

We kept returning to that area and generally learning more about it. Coming to just one area was a shock because I'd become used to Rita ferrying me around to exotic places. We liked it so much here that I decided to take the hit and finally

retired early, in January 2002. We found our dream home in 2003 in front of the salt lake in Torre Vieja, with wonderful views across protected land. You may have heard that there is a lot of corruption in the building industry here, with illegal building, subsequent demolition, or huge fines being paid to legalize matters. Good reasons to take time to find the right place.

Once we'd found our villa we had to move quickly. The system here is totally different from the UK. If your offer is accepted, you and the seller have to draw up a contract. We used the same solicitor, which made things much easier, but it is not normally recommended. Once the contracts are sorted out you then both go to a notary and sign up. If you pull out, you lose the 10% deposit and if the seller pulls out he loses 20% - there is no chain to worry about. Our problem was that we hadn't sold up in Purbrook, due to the dreaded house chain, so we had to borrow lots of money and hope our sale went through quickly. Not ideal, but it worked out after seven anxious months.

During this time my health suffered, no doubt due in part to the stresses of moving to a new country and leaving my girls behind. A good reason for choosing Torre Vieja however was that it has the healthiest climate in Europe, due to the salt lakes.

Eventually, in 2004, we drove off down to start our new life in Spain, but despite our background knowledge nothing can quite prepare

you for the realities of life abroad. The bureaucracy is unbelievable. Even before we had bought the house, we had to queue to get a NIE number - a foreigner's number, without which you can do nothing and, later, queue again for the other pieces of paper needed for everyday living. Also, I had to get a Spanish car because you can only MOT a car in the country it was registered. My MOT was due, and so I had to drive the car back to the UK to sell it.

At this time we weren't registered with the Spanish NHS, and I needed an operation. I had to go private, which was a shock to the system and bank balance although it was worth it, as my quality of life improved considerably. We are now with the Spanish NHS, and impressed so far.

After a couple of years in the villa, we decided to have some major work done by Spanish builders. We couldn't believe how hard they worked, and they even finished on time and on budget. We now spend more of our time on the terrace overlooking the lake, with wonderful sunsets and views.

By this time I had joined a golf club and Rita did keep fit and line dancing. I was really shocked at the cost of golf, which was almost twice that of Cams Hall at Fareham! The good side is that for most of the year I play golf in shorts and in sunshine. I am now the handicap secretary for a local golf society. We also eat out a couple of times a week, and so far have worked our way through 130 of the literally hundreds of restaurants within about a 15km radius of us. Our

social life is far better here, though one of the downsides (some might disagree) of living here is cheaper drink and temptation everywhere. We buy our wine from a local *bodega* at 2.30 euros a litre, and it is really good. There is a much more relaxed attitude when living in a warm climate, with shops and bars staying open much later. The Spanish lunch for 2 hours but work 'till 8 or 9 o'clock!

We live about 4km from Torre Vieja; it is a really nice town, with a picture book town square, a magnificent church, and very good shops. At Xmas, in the main square, they build a huge scale model of the Nativity, called the *Belen*. It is a magnificent sight. There are also a number of really nice sandy beaches.

We have been taking Spanish lessons for a couple of years and can get by pretty well, although English is widely spoken. We even have some Spanish friends who we attempt to converse with.

We don't miss the UK at all, except for family and friends of course, but my girls and my little granddaughter come out to stay with us very often, and it gives them a bit of sun as well.

All in all, I can definitely recommend living in the sun. In fact, old neighbours from Purbrook visited us last year and liked it so much that they now live three doors along from us and are enjoying life as much as we are.

**Best wishes to you all
from
sunny Spain**

THE WSTG TRIP TO FORT NELSON 4TH SEPTEMBER 2008

Despite the unseasonable weather 15 brave souls met at Fort Nelson for our guided tour that was to follow a Snack lunch in the café.



Waiting for the mid-day firing.

Our guide proved to be a good investment for such a small fee and used the time before the regular 12 noon gun firing, and lunch, to deliver the health and safety lecture. (A warning not to slide down the grass banks was a big disappointment to those prone to such action!)



Bang!

Brightening weather encouraged our group to watch the firing of the 25 pounder gun, a weapon that had earned its reputation in the western desert and Normandy. It remained in service until 1969.

The light lunch was not quite as planned as the café management had been informed that our party had cancelled their visit. However the bacon butties were such good comfort food Don Meakin went for "seconds"!

Our guide showed an excellent knowledge of the fort's history from the initial worries of Lord Palmerston, who feared attack by Napoleon III on Portsmouth from the land, to the use of the fort during WWs 1&2.

We learnt the various forts were built between 1862 and 1871 using hand made bricks from the Fareham area. The manpower and logistic undertaking was immense and we were assured that invaders would find no part of the fort uncovered by a gun or sharpshooter. The armament comprised nine 64 pounders, eight 7" breach loaders, six howitzers and two mortar batteries; a formidable defence.

The excellent description of the design and building of Fort Nelson was conducted at a lookout point on the ramparts where we could see the likely areas of attack and a protecting ditch, hidden from the attackers. We also observed a fast approaching shower which in spite of our best efforts (not including sliding down the grass banks) caught us all out in the open! Thoroughly soaked but still enthusiastic we assembled in the mortar batteries at the end of the chalk tunnel. Here it was explained how the 13" mortars were manhandled to the firing position and loaded with a bomb set to explode at head height amongst the attackers.

Wide dry moats were protected by more guns which fired along them a shell described as "a bean-can where the beans were lead shot"! We heard how guns were broken down for manhandling into the upper galleries and, along the hand-hewn chalk tunnel, inspected the poorly, but cleverly, lit ammunition stores.

The tour finished with a look at some of the garrison facilities including the "luxury ablutions" with cold water from taps for the other ranks. Our guide deserved his vote of thanks and round of



Only bad weather threatens the defences and our party!

applause as we learnt far more than if we had just ambled around the site.

The futility of this clever defence project and its craftsmanship became apparent almost before the Forts were completed. Napoleon III suffered a devastating defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870/71 and lived in exile in Kent thereafter!

We were to have a further treat that afternoon. No, not another soaking! Visitors were invited to assemble in the theatre for a Battle of Britain narrative. This was a riveting account of one very young pilot's battle experience and reactions in his own words. It was acted out in RAF period uniform with typical bad language where appropriate. A very gripping performance and a fitting end to our visit.

John Henson – founder member of WSTG

It is with great regret that we report the death of John Henson at the age of 85. John died in early March this year, but we only learnt of this sad news from Peter Horrocks, who had tried to make contact with John in May; unfortunately, it was too late for inclusion in our last Newsletter.

John Henson joined the Production Pool (test team) at Portsdown in 1953 and became a founder member of WSTG when Captain J Noel with Bill Middlemas and Les Marks were tasked with amalgamating the Dockyard based test teams into Director General Weapons (Navy) in 1959. We remember John as an operations room/displays specialist on the first County Class destroyers before his transfer from WSTG to further his career in the Bath area early in the 1960s.

John returned to take over WSTG (Co-ord) as a Grade 7 upon the retirement of Les Marks in early 1981. John retired in March 1982.

Footnote: We believe John



*William John Alfred Henson
1923-2008*

would have very much liked to come to at least one of our reunions. He responded to the NLS and flyers with an occasional letter.

WSTG VISIT TO CHATHAM HISTORIC DOCKYARD, 30th SEPTEMBER 2008

By Ivan Winter



The WSTG Visit 30th September 2008

GROUP PHOTOGRAPH by Janet Barton

In November 1981 John Farmer and I were travelling back from a shipyard at Appledore when we heard on the radio that Chatham Dockyard was to close. As an ex Chatham apprentice I can remember this as a sad day, with 400 years of history to be ended.

Although I was fortunate to be involved in the refit of the last warship to leave Chatham, HMS Hermione, in June 1983, there had been an over 20 year absence from the Medway area.

Louis Figueras' suggestion to organise a trip to the heritage centre on the site of the yard was of course greeted with some enthusiasm. Others, ex Chatham apprentices and those with Chatham links reflected my enthusiasm as we were able to fill a 29 seat coach. We set off (early) on the 30th Sept and arrived at 11am passing many familiar landmarks in the Medway towns.

As Ken went off to organise our group tickets there was a chance to look around. First impressions indicated that a major demolition job had been carried out, but old friends could be picked out. The surgery, the main store where the new

apprentice would be sent to collect a set of "left handed screw drivers", the commissioner's house from 1704 and the Admiral's house. In the distance the factory, boiler house and Smithy loomed large, all buildings preserved from demolition due to their unique construction.

Ken and Paul now had our tickets and had booked our slot in the ropery for 13.30. Sensibly it was decided that we should go our own ways as we had different agendas and speeds.



HMS OCELOT

Annemarie and I made for the submarine HMS Ocelot, one of nine built in the yard from the late 1950s. Our guide was full of information on the type and gave us the tour through the boat which was remarkably intact. Annemarie was amazed that men could be asked to live and work in such confined conditions. I was just thankful that I could still swing through a submarine hatch, albeit carefully and somewhat slower than in

1960.

HMS Cavalier was our next port of call where we photographed ex-apprentice Dave and Pauline Lockley on the upper deck. Cavalier has had a few berths since she was preserved but now has a good home and we spent some time wandering through the decks. Much of the electronic equipment in the ops room etc was well remembered from times past.

A break in the restaurant located in the wheelwrights



Louis the Rope Maker

shop was interesting in its own right, being decorated with tools of the trade. Under its floors the timbers of an 18th century ship have been found, and is considered to be the most important find since the Mary Rose.

Our lunch was too leisurely as we had to hurry to the Ropery demo. The Chatham Ropery is unique. Its a quarter of a mile long and dates from 1618. Our lady guide, in period costume, described the working day of the men, women and children who made the ropes for the sailing ships of the day, e.g. HMS Victory. (We were constantly reminded that she was a Chatham built ship, when told we were from Portsmouth). Different types of rope needed by a sailing ship were described including that for flogging! Our guide took the opportunity to get four "active members" of our

group, Ken W, Louis F, Ken Bevis and Geo. Durant to do some rope making as a demonstration for us—another photo opportunity for the onlookers seated on our bales of rope. Although enthusiastically done the rope made was not fit for purpose, but a good first attempt!

Our time was fast running out and a trip to the café for tea and a quick visit to the museum had us back to the coach at 1600 hours. Many will have seen different exhibits. We missed a lot. Maybe next time....

END PIECE: For our oldest traveller to Chatham, Mr Clyffurd Arrowsmith, it must have been a nostalgic day. Having completed his apprenticeship in 1942 at J S White Ltd (I of W), where HMS Cavalier was launched in March 1943, young Clyff was involved with boring out the steam turbines for the ship and manufacturing the tilt rings for the 4.5" Mk 5 Gun Mountings. And earlier, as an apprentice in the tool room in 1937 he had the task of engraving tallies for two Polish destroyers in build. They were GROM and BLYSKAWICA (Thunder and Lightning). However at the outbreak of war they were handed over to the RN and Clyff had to re-engrave all the tallies in English! Grom was sunk in action but Blyskawica is another museum exhibit in Poland, at the port of GDYNIA. Could be a future WSTG Outing here!



HMS CAVALIER