103rd Entry Association

Newsletter

Issue 33
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Editor's comments & Editorial

Seasons Greetings to all, may 2012 bring you everything you wish for and more.

I am sure we all watch TV and particularly the news to which we shake our fists and nod our heads, are we becoming the grumpy old men our Fathers were? We complain about this and that, but only to ourselves and partners, things aren't what they used to be, standards have dropped, what is the world coming to? Here's a sobering thought, if you have money in the bank, a roof over your head and food to eat you are part of only 8% of the worlds population. Doesn't that humble you a bit, it does me. I think the world would be a better place if we all tried to give something back (Not necessarily money) perhaps time or just our thoughts

As I promised in the last edition of your newsletter I have a couple of articles from Ken Bannister and Shaun O'Rouke. It never ceases to amaze me what members of the entry get up to and these two keep that amazement going. What amazing things have the rest of you been up to? Dare we print them? Are they legal? Would they make us smile? Why not share them with us? If you can contribute anything it will be appreciated.

Next edition will have an article by Jeremy (Dinga) Bell which is not to be missed and another piece from Ken Bannister.
BGL

Announcements

Membership - Ian Armitage and Richard (Boot) Hughes have joined the association; Mike Smith has renewed his mandate; John Hastings has been added to the friends of the association due to ill health.

Forget Facebook, there is a social networking site just for Old Haltonians. It can be found on http://oldhaltonian.ning.com/

Dates for your Diary

Next Committee Meetings:-

26th May 2012 at a venue to be decided somewhere near Oxford (ish)
1st December 2012 at Les Shardlows

Next Entry Reunion:

June 2013 at the National Arboretum, Alrewas, Staffs

This article was received from Shaun O' Rouke a year or so ago and is an interesting account of a different way of life from that which most of us enjoy. Thanks Shaun.

I am typing this slowly in a small village about 50 k east of Chiang Mai in Thailand, Google earth position N18 39 57.35 E 99 28 32.54 and as it is raining gently I thought I would start this tale.

I left British Airways after flying with them as a flight engineer for 25 years at the age of 55 and divorced. The world was in a bit of a mess after 9/11 and there was no work around but I had a catamaran so I sailed it across to the Caribbean and spent 6 happy years between Venezuela and the Virgin Islands. This also gave me the chance of land travel in South America. Angel falls and the lower Andes, plus a slow boat from Manaus down the Amazon to Belem on the Atlantic coast, a wonderful experience, especially when watching Brazil play an international game on satellite TV in the ferry roof bar and the desperate actions of the satellite dish tuner team trying to compensate for the boats constant change in course as it navigated down the Amazon. If these guys got it wrong I'm sure they would have been put over the side.

During Hurricane season I would leave the boat and go to Australia and Hong Kong and while in transit I stopped in Thailand. One day the hotel in Bangkok was full so I caught the over night sleeper train to Chiang Mai. I liked it right away the people are so easy going and the ladies beautiful, and there is a lively expat and retired community here so there is always somebody to talk to.

So I met a nice lady and with all Visas fixed we set off to Bangkok to fly to Grenada where I had left the boat. It was not to be, Boongs mother died as we waited at the airport hotel and she went back to Chiang Mai I went on to Grenada and the cricket world cup. I believe in fate and what will be, will be. So I sold the boat and moved to Chiang Mai where I was very taken by the teak wood Lanna style houses in the area. So I decided to build one.

The valley to the east of Chiang Mai is totally unspoilt so we got a location overlooking the national park, plans we had drawn in Chiang Mai and then the builder! Not so easy, as in this area, everything is simple and the deal was I would pay labour and supply wood and nails. The wood we used was teak which grows in teak plantations in this area and is sold as tree trunks at auction and taken to the site and a man comes with a big bench saw and slices it into planks!!!

We used 100 trunks. The project took a year, and for me an experience not to miss but never again.

14 Dec
When I came to the village I knew little of northern Thai village culture and how it revolves around growing rice. As I sit here writing this I can see a group of eight people men and women thrashing the cut rice by hand using long bamboo pole to pick up a small amount of rice stalks and beating it down on an old pallet to release the rice husks onto a large tarpaulin .

These will be bagged up at the end of the day and taken away to the owners house and then used as the rice for the year, any extra will be sold. The owner will either pay them (men 4 pound-women 3 pound) for the day, or will owe them each a days work on their rice field and supply local whiskey and snacks to the team which they consume until dark to great enjoyment. A social occasion as well as work, but it will end soon as the combine harvester is now available and the young do not want farm work.
So now I live like one of Somerset Maugham's rubber planters, with gin and tonic at sundown, and a visit to the club (pub) in Chiang Mai every week to renew supplies. I have now a workshop and as house is finished plan to build something who knows what next, Chiang Mai is close to lots of countries and we have been to Lao, Vietnam Cambodia and Malaysia, but not Burma, so maybe? If you look up the Google Earth position above you will see the house and the photos Boong has taken of the area are there as an overlay.

Cheers Shaun

After that we have another entirely different subject and one that is undoubtedly close to many of our hearts. Thanks for sharing your memories with us Ken

Motorbikes and Me!

I suppose it all started in the mid-1950s when my dad bought a Norton 16H 500cc single cylinder side valve from Dawsons of Nottingham. It was registered as YTO 461 and was soon joined by a Watsonian child/adult sidecar. The total cost was £25 for the motorbike and £20 for the sidecar.. This was our basic family transport for 2-3 years but my brother and I were growing up so dad traded up for a BSA 650cc twin Gold Star pulling a Watsonian double adult sidecar. Regrettably, I have no photographic record of the two outfits.

During our 3 years at Halton, I remember some of the lads having motorbikes but I was never in a position to afford one. The names that spring to mind are 'Digby' Martin, Nat Griffiths and Bill Rawden. If my memory serves me right, Bill used to use his to travel home on leave to York.

I first dabbled in bikes in the 60s when I had a couple of small bikes (I can't remember their names) as well as a Vespa scooter – all ridden on L plates as I didn't bother to take the test.

In the 80s, I was stationed up at Kinloss and bought a Yamaha 125cc and took my test on it just before the introduction of the two part test. I traded up to a Yamaha 250cc twin and then paid £20 for Honda 400 Dream with a seized engine. The bike was delivered in bits i.e. frame, engine, wheels etc so it was a project. I stripped the engine and sent the crankshaft and con rods away to be re-metalled before commencing the rebuild. When they came back, I opened the workshop manual at page 1 and started to build my bike. A few months later it was back on the road.

Fast forward now to the 90s and Doha, Qatar in the Arabian Gulf. I bought a BMW R80 and shipped it back to England on my return in 1997.

I rode that for a while but it was a heavy old bike weighing in at 400kg. I had the misfortune to drop it over on its side a couple of times and it was very difficult to get it back upright without doing oneself a serious injury. In about 2000, I sold the BMW and bought a Kawasaki W650.

A retro bike with a kick start and electric start. It looked like a Triumph Bonneville and was less than half the weight of the BMW – a bonus when you're not getting any younger! I sold the Kawasaki when I moved up to Boston In Lincolnshire in 2005.

During my time in Doha, I visited a friend of mine in Goa and I hired a Royal Enfield 500cc Bullet. It was the first British bike I had ridden after a succession of Japanese bikes and one German one.

I decided then that I wanted a Royal Enfield. The dream came true in 2008 but with a sting in the tail! I purchased a 1962 350cc Royal Enfield Bullet.

It needed some work doing to it the main things being a replacement distributor and carburettor, which made it go a lot better. I didn't really get a lot of use out of it last year and it spent most of it's time in the garage. In December 2009, I decided to try and start it to warm it up and get the oil flowing round the engine. It was not to be!! I kicked it over for quite a while before it spluttered into life briefly and then stopped again. So I thought to myself, 'next kick'! I gave it a really good one and then – disaster. There was no resistance, no compression and my right leg went straight down and I slipped off the kick starter. The pain which shot down my right leg was excruciating to say the least. I was hopping around on one leg thinking 'oh dear, I've hurt my right leg'. I'm sure you can read between the lines as to what I really came out with. As a result of that accident, I tore the muscle fibres in my right calf but luckily I didn't damage the Achilles tendon. My right calf swelled up twice the size of my left one. I couldn't walk properly and spent all of Christmas resting my leg. I did get the bike started eventually when one of my friends – a motorbike owner – started it for me.

It eventually took about four months for my right leg to recover.

I came to the conclusion that I might be getting too old for all this and realised that perhaps I was looking at the ownership of a Royal Enfield through rose tinted glasses. Very reluctantly, I decided that me and the Royal Enfield would have to part company so, very reluctantly, I decided to put her up for sale.

Fast forward again to the Boston Bike Night at the beginning of July 2010. My friend and I went and I drove the Enfield, by this time I had fitted a brand new spark plug and this had cured the starting problems. While we were wandering around, I came upon Jim Allen's stand and he had a few Electra EFI machines. After talking to him at length, I went away with the idea of purchasing a new Enfield Electra. It just so happened that Steve Oliver of Tempest Garage in Stickney, Lincolnshire had taken on a Royal Enfield agency and I was his first customer.

I bought a new Electra EFI from him after he'd brought the demonstrator round for me to test drive. He took my 1962 Bullet in part exchange and then put that on display in his garage. He didn't take long to sell it and it has gone to a good home. As for me, I'm over the moon that I can still own and ride a Royal Enfield.

Ken Bannister

Stop Press

Inevitably in an association like ours there will be casualties in the service of our country and in our case the one and only was Pete Coates who was taken from us in a flying accident back in the 70s. Very recently Petes sister Margaret contacted the Association to say their parents were alive and well and they were all living in Australia.

The following letter was received by Les Garden a few days back from Petes dad who is now 93, but still very much part of the Royal Air Force family. It needs no further comment please read and think about the contents at this family time of the year. BGL

Dear Les

My wife and I, as parents of Peter, who was a member of the 103rd entry at Halton, would like to thank you for all the information that you have sent to our daughter, Margaret, concerning his service during his time at Halton, including the pictures. As ex-members of the Royal Air Force, we can both appreciate the life they all enjoyed in their time there.

My wife was a cine-operator during her war-time service at an OTV station and I was a photographer where we helped train crews to use cameras on their raids over wartime Europe. Today although we now live under the sunny skies of Oz, 'tis for England that we shout as the Ashes come round! So let me thank you again, Les, for the splendid job you are doing with the 103rd entry at Halton, and for the pictures you sent. Is there any way that we can donate to help the work that you are doing?

We had Peter buried in the services section of the grave yard of St Michael and All Angels Church close to Lyneham RAF which we thought would always be cared for and kept tidy by Service Authorities as his loss encouraged us to retire to Oz where our daughter, his sister Margaret, was living.

We thank you again and wish you a very Merry Christmas.

With our kind regards

Bob and Susan Coates

The next Issue of the newsletter will be during June 2012,

Deadline for contributions is 1st May 2012

Contributions, mail or abuse about the Newsletter to
The Editor

Brian Lee
Omaha House
London Road
Ipswich
IP2 0SS

Or e-mail: steam707@hotmail.com

Committee Members:

Les Shardlow, Les Garden,
Chris Wales, Barry Neal
Ken Bannister, Dave Post, Malcolm Watts,
Mick Woodhouse, Brian Lee.