

103rd Entry RAF Halton

# Newsletter



Issue 49  
February 2020

Now we have had all the excitement of a non Brexit and a general election perhaps we can settle down to the important things of life, a new car or a new home or whatever it is that floats your boat. The past year has been a hectic time politically and a sad time for many of our members with the loss of some of our comrades and one less face at the dinner table. Now is the time to look to the future and focus on our next Entry Reunion in 2021 and the last RAF Halton Reunion in 2020 (Details of both of these events further on in this Newsletter)

*The Entry must thank Ken Bannister and Les Garden for representing us at the RAF Halton Remembrance Day Ceremony held on 5<sup>th</sup> Nov 2019, crosses were laid for those on final posting and for Pete Coates on behalf of his mum and sister in Australia. In most inclement weather the duo did what was needed to remember the fallen ex Apprentices who gave their most precious possession to ensure a better world for those they left behind. Thanks guys for a job well done.*



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Some memories of the Halton experience.

## Sgt Cooke

Having spent the first 13 years of my life as the son of a Station Warrant Officer, a S.W.O. sent in to sort problems out at a series of Royal Air Force stations, I had lived at 9 stations by my 13<sup>th</sup> birthday when my Father resigned his commission after 24 years of service. It was 9 schools in the 13 years and I started at my tenth school in Ashford Kent. (This was the 4<sup>th</sup> Secondary school having not surprisingly failed the 11 plus). *I entered Halton by means of the direct examination scheme.*

I considered myself well versed in the ways of the Royal Air Force and Sgt's, especially drill Sgt's held no fear for me - or so I thought. Then along came Cookie. As an ardent Tottenham supporter myself I quickly found a friend in Cookie, at least that was until one Saturday morning early in '63, when he suddenly kept our room back until 1300 hours on the Saturday, a day that I had tickets for the game at White Hart Lane.

My opportunity for payback came when I was appointed deputy bog cleaner for the common room on the ground floor of A flight. There was of course no accommodation down there but there was a room in the corridor of the 1<sup>st</sup> Floor. After a few nights of using this room it became clear that at bed check time, no-one ever came in to check me. Several unauthorised 36 hour passes ensued. The shame is that, in consideration for whoever followed me and might use the same facility, I could never tell Cookie about my scheme. It would have been marvellous to have seen his face.

## The Brass Band

Members of the brass band were awarded 48 hour passes so naturally I decided to join if I could. I went along with two or three others and we met the bandmaster Mr Jamieson. Having briefly talked to us he allocated us instruments and I was given/chose a Trombone - fabulous. Two practices later he called me aside to be tested and have my membership ( and registration for the 48 hour passes) confirmed. "Play a B flat " he said. Well despite being pitch perfect with my voice (ex Head Chorister of a Parish Church choir of 30+ boys) I had no clue as to where a B flat could be found on the Trombone. I could have hummed one through the mouthpiece but felt certain that would have been noticed. I made a big show of trying to fix the slide in the right position and blew! A perfect note came out that I knew not to be a B flat, however the quality of the tone produced was glorious. OK said Mr Jamieson and I was in. I never knew if he knew it was not a B flat or not.

About two years later, having played in the London Lord Mayors Parade twice as well as at other events, we come to a frosty Saturday morning and practice route lining at Halton. This was to be the pinnacle of my success as a bandsman. Well not success really, more like demise. Coming out of the Senior wings and gingerly marching down the first part of

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the hill, frost and metal studded heels and soles on the boots, Mr Jamieson foolishly called for a change of tune. The card music was held on my trombone by a fearsome spring and with thick woollen gloves on - yes the cards spilled; actually they went up in the air and in trying to catch them the slide of the trombone parted company with the part I was holding, in trying to catch everything that was still in the air as well as the falling slide, as opposed to just picking up what was strewn all over the road, I went base over apex and took three other bandsmen out with me. Resignation came very quickly!

Ah well happy days or that is what we like to say anyway. I hope that this tale has cheered you all.

Best regards to you all.

Mike Lewry

*Thanks Mike, articles like this are always welcome in our newsletter and add some quiet humour to the read.*

*The committee have been informed by his sister that Alan (Willy) Wilson passed away on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September 2019. He had problems with his blood over the years and was found dead in his original home house in Lincoln. Willy was an Nav Inst Fitter and originated from Lincoln.*

*On 8<sup>th</sup> November 2019 Mike Hodgson passed away. We were informed by his daughter Sandra. He had been ill for a short while and had been in Sedgfield Community Hospital, County Durham, where he passed away very peacefully in his sleep. Mike was a Nav Inst Fitter and was last seen at the 2013 reunion.*

Our thoughts are with their Families and Friends

## **The Forthcoming Entry Reunion (2021)**

Recently our Entry Treasurer (Mick Woodhouse) and President (Les Shardlow) visited four possible venues for our next planned reunion. All had to be within easy travelling distance of The Shuttleworth Trust Collection at Old Warden Aerodrome, which had been identified as an interesting place to visit on the Reunion weekend.

It was agreed that The Woodland Manor Hotel at Clapham, two miles north of Bedford was ideal, so their Autograph dining room has been booked for our function on **Sat 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2021**. The building is an old Manor House and has a lovely atmosphere, large enough for any numbers we might amass, but small enough to retain the intimacy of the event. The hotel has thirty four bedrooms, all very nice, spacious, and en suite. The bar is adjacent to the dining room and foyer, we would not have exclusive use of it, but with our expected numbers it is unlikely there would be many other guests. Parking is in the grounds and free. We have reserved twenty five rooms at this year's rates which you can book with the hotel by

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quoting **103 Reunion** and giving a bank card number. You will not be charged until the day before the event and can cancel (unlikely) without cost until then. I recommend you do this soon, and please let me (Mick Woodhouse 07811 401040 or [mickjwoodhouse1946@gmail.com](mailto:mickjwoodhouse1946@gmail.com) ) know so that we have an idea of how many are coming. We expect to have a hot buffet paid for from Association Funds.

The choice of area considered the ease of travel for most of our members and some entertainment for the following day. Bedford is close to the M1, A1 and A6 and the station two miles away has lines connecting it to London, Sheffield, Brighton and presumably all points in between.

We hope to get enough of you interested in going to Old Warden on the Sunday to be able to get party rates on what is a flying day for The Collection. Look them up on <https://www.shuttleworth.org/>

Also within fairly easy reach for any of you making a longer stay are The War Museum at Duxford, The Codebreakers Museum at Bletchley Park and the beautiful city of Cambridge (all recommendations of Mick Bossy and Jess Myers). There is a golf course beside the hotel which gives preferential rates for guests, if interested; anybody fancy arranging a match?

## **Hotel Details,**

### **Woodland Manor Hotel**

#### **Green Lane**

#### **Clapham, Bedford MK41 6EP**

**01234 363281** (Ailish or Freya)

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

Room rates incl breakfast for two - Single £85, Double £95, Premium £105, Suite £135 per night.

If any of you attending on your own would be willing to share a twin room let me know and I will try to put you in touch (we did used to share with fifteen others!).

Your Committee hope that the numbers attending will make it as successful as the last reunion when we had about seventy attendees, and we know our ladies love these things.

I look forward to hearing from you, with any questions or suggestions you may have.

Regards **Mick 07811 401040** [mickjwoodhouse1946@gmail.com](mailto:mickjwoodhouse1946@gmail.com)

## **RAF Halton Apprentices Association (RAFHAA)**

Les Shardlow (our President & the RAFHAA General Secretary) has advised us that the RAFHAA's future was still fluid; however the Reunion at Halton on the 15<sup>th</sup> August 2020 would definitely go ahead. Since this update a concerned group of RAFHAA members had called an Extraordinary General Meeting to discuss the future and, hopefully, (*their words*) overturn the planned closure.

The present HAA Chairman had reminded the HAA of the Council's concern regarding this questioning of the closure of the Association. The Council remains steadfast to deliver the programme presented to Members in the August 2017 Edition of the Haltonian and agreed by those that attended the subsequent AGMs. A survey in March 2019 provided another and final opportunity for the whole membership to decide the future of the HAA, and only 209 of the 2200+ Members consulted felt inclined to keep the Association going after 2020. Members were informed of all this in Issue 79 of the Haltonian.

However, upset by this outcome, a very few long standing members planned to overturn the decision of the vast majority of Members. At the 2019 AGM an attempt was made by this group to disregard the HAA Constitution and force through a motion to overturn the agreed legacy and closure programme. Consequently, the resignation of a number of Trustees (Council Members) occurred, and

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only three now remain in post. When this happens, the remaining Trustees are required to submit a Serious Incident Report to the Charity Commission - which was done in late-September 2019. The Commission has made it clear that the Council actions underway are satisfactory. The remaining Members of Council are working with the Commission to ensure the ongoing arrangements to close down the Charity later in 2020 continue to meet with its requirements, with the Final Reunion and the Laying up of the Standard in August 2020.

The Charity Commission received a complaint regarding the management of the HAA closure - the Commission did not uphold the complaint. The Commission made it clear that it was for the Trustees to determine the way ahead in accordance with the HAA Governing Document.

The EGM was planned to be held in Kermode Hall at RAF Halton, but the Station Commander intervened and cancelled the use of the Hall as the arrangements for the meeting had been "unconstitutional". BUT, the meeting went ahead on the 1<sup>st</sup> February at an alternative location. The minutes run to 13 pages!! The meeting has been summarised, though:

- the long-standing disagreement on Chairman O'Brien's intended closure of the (HAA) has led to resignation of Council members and Trustees leaving only Chairman plus one or two in post. This contravenes the RAFHAA Constitution 2015 para E5.
- the Chairman's refusal to discuss this and other matters at recent AGMs led to members calling for an EGM. The membership properly convened their own meeting with an aim to nominate a new Council & Trustees. 76 members present. Chairman O'Brien refused to attend.
- the meeting heard reports of serious administrative and financial mismanagement. AVM Nick Kurth voiced his concern over lack of transparency of a number of financial transactions.
- a recent ex-RAFHAA Treasurer of outstanding repute said he resigned from the post because of accounting irregularities and the aggressive and autocratic management style of Mr O'Brien. He wrote about his concerns to all Trustees, including the then Chairman Duncan Grant and the then Office Manager, Mr O'Brien. No one replied to his letter. He identified other serious matters and agreed to submit a letter to the RAFHAA Vice-President.
- approaches to the Charities Commission (CC) through Baroness Stowell (Chair CC) remain open.
- the meeting found that the Chairman's management of Halton Heritage matters was unsatisfactory.
- members considered approaching the national Press and the Fraud Squad.
- members volunteered to fund legal action.
- a vote opposing closing the Association was passed unanimously.
- a vote of No Confidence in the present Chairman and Council was passed unanimously.
- a new Vice-Chairman & Council (18 members) and Trustees were appointed unanimously.
- a re-written Constitution has been produced for the new Council to progress.
- Vice-President RAFHAA, Mike Evans was charged with progressing Actions from the EGM Minutes dated 4<sup>th</sup> February 2020.
- the new Vice-Chairman agreed to write to Mr O'Brien saying the present Council was non-compliant and that RAFHAA financial transactions since September were illegal."

So, where does that leave the whole matter? I haven't a clue!! I understand that all the HAA accounts have been fully audited by a professional ACA and sent to the Charity Commission who have not found any

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problems. There is not a penny missing; the monies are all in various investment accounts as is prudent and charged by the Constitution.

WATCH THIS SPACE!!

*Please note - nothing in this article is intended to criticise our President, Les Shardlow as the RAFHAA General Secretary. Quite the contrary, as he finds himself "stuck in the middle of a madhouse"!!*

**Barry Neal, Chairman**

## Notes of a Committee Meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2019

The minutes of the July 2019 meeting were accepted, and the accounts were scrutinised and signed-off by Dave Post. It was agreed that the Committee would review annually each December the donations of £25 each time a member passes away. The date of our next Reunion was agreed as the 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> July 2021 (*see details elsewhere in this newsletter*). A long discussion was held on the future of the RAFHAA (*again, see details elsewhere in this newsletter*). The next meeting will be on the 20<sup>th</sup> June 2020 in Bournemouth.

**Barry Neal, Chairman**

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### **Committee Members:**

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