



40/53 REUNION REPORT – PAIGNTON

Thursday – with the Advance Party!

We arrived late afternoon to find Don & Jeanette Maclver, along with Ian Duckham and his sister Doreen already seated in the hotel lounge annex having a drink. We were later to find out that Bob & Mandy Killey had arrived early morning; this after leaving Kent at 0200 hrs to miss the traffic!

Mike & Aileen Sixsmith arrived minutes before us, only to find the main lift out of order (awaiting spare parts from Italy), making it difficult for Mike Scooter to be accommodated (only just) in the service lift. Others were soon to arrive, with the Lloyd & Anne Rosentall arriving breathless from Weston Super Mare, with just time to plonk their bags in their room before dinner at 1900 hrs.

The Restaurant Manager kindly arranged for our group to be sitting in a cluster of reserved tables, with ease of access for Mike Sixsmith, who had to negotiate a couple of steps to get to his table – Aileen makes it all look so easy with her cheerful manner.

Dinner, everyone agreed, was excellent and well served. Someone on the next table said they were glad they were not 'Duty Server' for this lot, with another adding: the Plate Wash would be even worse!

After dinner, we retreated to the bar and annex lounge and were entertained by an excellent female singer, and it would be around midnight before we all dispersed, well lubricated, albeit weary travellers!

Friday – with the arrival of the Main Party!

Most of the advance party decided on taking the trip to Dartmouth on the steam train (The Devon Belle). It was bitterly cold, especially when we reached our destination, waiting for the ferry crossing to Dartmouth. It would be a quick cup of tea/coffee in Dartmouth before returning on the next train to Paignton. All in all, a worthwhile trip with lovely scenery along the way, although somewhat spoilt by the cold weather.

Back at the Hotel, Steve Lister had already arrived along with Dave & Joyce Cutbush. Others began arriving shortly afterwards, with all reporting good journeys – not like the journey from Plymouth Station on 3-tonners to Collaton Cross in '61, as somebody remarked at reception!

Gathering at the bar for evening Parade was the usual delight and it was nice to welcome Ken & Sheila Thompson to their first reunion tour.

The evening meal was judged to be good, although for some too much. A comment was made about Compo rations and how good they were, especially on Dartmoor, all those years ago, after a long day trekking. It was agreed that the cheese and biscuits (crackers) were judged to be the best.

Once again, after dinner, we gathered in groups not too far from the bar. Much talk was about the 53 years since we all took the oath to serve Queen & Country. Once again, it would be around 2359 hrs that we all dispersed, knowing we had a full day on Sat.



Saturday – with an agreed itinerary, and Satnav failures!

Most of the group decided to go on the agreed itinerary to Buckfast Abbey then onto Collaton Cross to arrive at Newton Ferrers (Dolphin Inn) for approx. 1300 hrs.

Buckfast Abbey, everyone agreed was a tranquil delight. One of the guides informed us that the Abbey was reaching the time (2018) when it would be celebrating its foundation a thousand years ago. The original Abbey stood for five hundred years before it was closed (the polite version!) by Henry VIII. Monks returned in 1882 and rebuilt Buckfast Abbey on its medieval foundation, finishing the church in 1938. Today, there are 12 resident Benedictine monks, which includes several priests.

After this it was on to Collaton Cross. It was the Dartmoor navigation nightmare all over again! I (with the Terry & Carole Winnett as passengers) ended up going nearly 80 miles out of the way, because of an actual Satnav failure – Ian Duckham and his sister were following and in the end we reverted to Ian's Satnav. Worse was to come, with Vernon & Pat Phillips (passengers John & Sue McIntyre) ending up at a Dolphin Inn nowhere near Newton Ferrers! The landlady was shocked to be told there may be another 30 arriving, before it was finally sorted out!

Many failed to find former RAF Collaton Cross and we all finally limped in to the Dolphin Inn, where parking was a nightmare. The Landlord had been warned of our arrival and had even put on extra staff in the kitchen.

Bob & Mandy Killey decided against the navigation exercise and visited Paignton Zoo, with Dave & Joyce Cutbush going to meet a cousin for their day out.

Sat evening was to be our formal evening, with many of the men wearing either Dinner Jacket or Highland Dress – with the ladies looking wonderful as usual.

We were expecting Barry & Joan Mayne to arrive for dinner, as they had indicated they would attend, but they never arrived.

After dinner, we gathered in the bar and adjacent lounges and Carole Winnett volunteered to sell raffle tickets (all our raffle prizes had been kindly donated by those at the reunion) in aid of Help the Heroes. The final amount made was £173 (thanks to Carole) which is being sent to HTH this week.

Terry Winnett got talking to an old boy, who was himself in the RAF in the 40s and thought it wonderful we could all still meet up (thank goodness for the internet, and Steve), sadly he was only in touch with one of his former colleagues.

Talk was of absent friends, and those, for their own reason, did not attend our wonderful reunions were everybody is made welcome. Much laughter was directed at those who failed today's navigation exercise and the team that arrived at the wrong Dolphin Inn.



Sunday – Early Departures & those still in Transit!

Those of the group staying only the 2 nights left saying their fond farewells, with the promise of returning to future reunions. The rest of us made the most of the day, either wandering around Paignton/Torquay or some taking the steam train trip that the advance party had made. John McIntyre even reported finding another Dolphin Inn!

The evening meal was of the usual high standard and after dinner we mainly assembled in the Lounge. Don MacIver managed to win on the bingo, which made it worth coming all that way from Stornoway! The entertainment was first-class, with the singer establishing that we were a RAF Reunion and playing the appropriate music for us.

It would be gone 2359 before Don, Ian and Myself left for our bed spaces.

Monday – Fond Farewells, with some remaining

We said our fond farewells, gathering in the reception area, although Peter & Mavis Lyver, along with Mike & Aileen Sixsmith would remain for another day.

Overall, this was judged to be an excellent reunion, a first-class hotel with good food and excellent service – not forgetting the secure parking facility outside the hotel. What made it was the whole group (especially the ladies) embracing the reunion weekend completely from the start and keeping the spirit of the 40th well and truly alive.

Many Thanks,

Dave and Steve

P.S. Please select your areas of choice for the next reunion, with the preferred month on the form sent to you by e-mail & return it to Steve.



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