

40/50 REUNION REPORT

THUR 27 MAY

Don & Jeanette Maciver were met by us at Telford railway station, and then taken direct to the hotel; little did we know at the time that their weekend would come to an abrupt and sad ending before it had even started!

During the evening, we visited the hotel bar, just to check on the early arrivals - along with testing the drinks! Ian Duckham, and his dear sister Doreen, were well installed, with Ian looking rather good after recent hospitalisation. Ritchie Stephen, who had already spent a week in London, had come all the way from New Zealand for this 50th reunion. Good to see him and hear his slight southern hemisphere drawl!

Eric May was in animated conversation with Andrew Briers (and anyone who would listen); bemoaning the M6 toll's unmanned payment booths. Eric and Diana Peak, who had travelled from their home in the USA, were using the reunion to visit steam railways. Lloyd Rosentall, along with his wife Anne, said they were continuing to work; this applied to a few of us who attended the reunion - although Dave Lowe said he would be retiring in the next few months.

FRI 28 MAY

An early morning phone call from Don Maciver said that his dear brother, who had been ill for some time, had sadly passed away and they were now heading straight back home. Don and Jeanette managed to get to Inverness, where they had to wait for a flight back to Stornoway on Saturday morning. Our condolences go with them and their family.

THE COSFORD TOUR

Familiar faces started arriving at the long stay Cosford car park to board the coach and minibus which turned up early at the short stay car park. A few phone calls received by Steve and myself indicated some were stuck on the motorway: although Ernie and Hilary Trimble telephoned, they eventually made it and were collected from outside the guard room and marched to the briefing area!

We also had on the minibus four lads from the 311 Cosford Craft Apprentices who had asked prior permission to join our tour. Someone suggested they would need to clean the coach and minibus after us! Mike and Aileen Sixsmith were kindly given permission to travel in their own car as part of our convoy because of Mike's disability. Thankfully, he managed getting around the whole tour.

The tour on the bus took us around Cosford, although much has changed since the 60s, when the camp was mainly wooden hutted. We eventually arrived at Fulton Block for a photographic opportunity outside the Boy Entrants/Apprentice memorial sign, courtesy of Cpl Stinson, who happens to be one of our sons.

We were told that Fulton Block has now got a preservation order on it and remains the biggest brick constructed building in Europe. Fulton Block is now converted to classrooms and labs, although the Messes are still in operation. Apparently, an Army one star, when visiting Cosford, with a future Army move onto the site in mind, said Fulton would make perfect accommodation for squaddies!

Continuing the tour, on the way to being briefed, we passed the parade square, which is now the main car parking area. A few comments were passed about the old DIs turning in their graves and how we never saw our final graduation parade take place on that hallowed square because of the weather. Someone noticed a gathering of crows on the square and I did point out that some of the old boys on the site were convinced these were re-incarnated Boy Entrants who liked nothing better than attacking car wiper blade rubbers in protest at the square being used as a car park - perhaps, added to this, they were now not too happy about the uncertain future of RAF Cosford!

We did pass what was left of the wooden huts, which were close to the new Regiment Flight training complex. It had been proposed by a former Station Commander on our first reunion (40/40) that at least one hut, along with the wooden hutted RC Church, would be moved to the Museum Site on the airfield. This move has still to take place.

We arrived at Hangar 143, which was the old Telegraphist/Photogs training hangar in '60, where we were ushered into the briefing area for a briefing from Sqn Ldr Graham Lee, the Media officer for the Site.

Hangar 143 was completely refurbished only a few years ago, at great cost, and has been designed to the needs of the training carried out in it, an unusual concept that! When the re-furbishment took place, bales of hay were found in the cavity of the wall; this was to add effective insulation to the hanger at little cost!

Graham Lee gave a most comprehensive briefing of the history of Cosford (we are now long established as part of that history!) and how the current organisation fits in with the needs of Aircraft trade groups and the evolving College structure to go forward under the Metrix consortium, which is made up of several companies.

It is planned that Metrix will become responsible for all training at Cosford in 2011, and transfer of the site to former RAF St Athan will take place in 2014. The whole thing is now resting on final (new) Government approval and the Metrix consortium being able to raise the necessary money - a case of watch this space for further developments! It was said the Army (Logistics Brigade) intend to move back from Germany in 2016 and occupy the Cosford site, which by then may have been mothballed for a couple of years - as someone said, a danger here is that the army could elect for somewhere else, leaving Cosford a prime target for selling off. What a sad and depressing thought, as one of the wife's commented.

After the brief, we were split into two groups and were shown the facilities and specific training methods employed in hangar 143 (Avionics), with a tour of hangar 146 (Engines). There were plenty of aircraft to see in the hangers and it was recalled that hangar 146 was the hanger where we had our final graduation parade because of the adverse weather. Incidentally, someone also pointed out this was where we did our Regiment training all those years ago. At one time, this very same hanger served as the National indoor running track for a good few years.

After the tour, we were taken back on the buses to the short stay car park to make our way to the hotel; some of us still had to book in for the first time.

Fri Evening

We mustered (early) in the hotel bar area, meeting and greeting old faces and new arrivals. Much talk was of the Cosford tour and RAF Cosford's uncertain future.

When we all sat down to eat it reminded some of us of the old messing arrangements. We certainly took over the whole place and much laughter and chatter was heard on all tables.

After the meal, some of us headed for the hotel bar, whilst others left early for the 'Odd Fellows' Pub in nearby Shifnal. Talk at the pub centred again on the Cosford Tour, especially mention on the brief about much of the living-in accommodation being en-suite, with cleaners provided. This is a far cry, so the lads from the lines proudly recalled, when there were 20 in a billet - unlike those softies in Fulton!

Eric May appeared to be missing; someone thought they had seen him trying to gate-crash a wedding party back at the hotel! Eric was eventually located, with others, back in the hotel bar and making a request for a beret, from anyone passing! He eventually got that beret, with a yellow disc!!

It had been a long day for many, so an early night was what many headed for - especially for those lucky enough to have a 4-poster bed!

Sat Morning

After breakfast, it was an early start (0930) in order to get to the National Memorial Arboretum, which was about 45 minutes away by the M6 Toll road. The weather was quite awful, with persistent rain throughout our visit. We had already decided to go to the Chapel for the Remembrance Service, followed by a short talk on the Arboretum, which all started at 1100 hrs. The recorded tape of the Service was not available and one of the Friends of the Arboretum delivered it, along with announcing the 2 minute silence. We then had a short talk on the history and future development of the Site, which was rather interesting; especially when we were told the whole concept of the Memorial site was that of one man, a former RN Commander.

Braving the driving rain, (Bob & Sylvia Menzies even purchased waterproof ponchos' from the on-site gift shop) we split up to visit the various memorials. The centre piece undoubtedly being the Armed Forces Memorial Wall showing the names of 16,000 service personnel whose names had been carved into the Portland stone. The names shown were those who had lost their lives since WW2

whilst on active duty. It was quite sobering to see the amount of RAF personnel killed during the 60s when the majority of our entry were still serving. The Basra Memorial Wall was pretty upsetting when you saw the names of those who had sadly lost their lives in a recent conflict, some so young, too

Sat Afternoon

On returning from the Arboretum, most of our group went to the Aerospace Museum at Cosford, although some wife's sneaked off shopping! The experience of aircraft from our time, as one said! the Museum was enjoyed by everyone. The Cold War Museum came in for much praise - we recognised all the

During the afternoon, the tables were decorated by Rose Stinson, Hilary & Ernie Trimble - with me appearing to do the supervision! The group (The Bluebeats) arrived in the late afternoon to set up their equipment. What a find they turned out to be.

Sat Evening

The Bar opened at 1800 hrs, with many electing to wear Black Tie - Peter Lyver thought the Black Tie dress worked extremely well and perhaps could be the arrangement for our future reunions on the Saturday night.

Ernie & Hilary Trimble had kindly agreed to meet the Air Commodore, along with his partner Jane outside the main entrance of the hotel. When things go wrong..... Air Commodore Chris Green and Jane arrived at the hotel (as arranged for 1845 hrs) and came through another entrance that was red-carpeted for a wedding couple who were already celebrating with their quests in another function room at the hotel. The Air Commodore and Jane were much amused about the whole thing and said the red carpet treatment they knew was clearly not for them. The situation was quickly recovered and drinks placed in their hands! How I ran to get Ernie and Hilary back into the hotel, whilst Rose was dropped in it and was left to entertain the Air Commodore and Jane!!

We assembled in our function room (Dobson Suite) at 1930 hrs, awaiting the arrival into the room of our guests of honour. Rev Roger Perry kindly said grace, and then we sat down in readiness for our meal.

The meal was excellent, the seating plan appeared to work - it was difficult to have a seating arrangement any other way in the space available.

I gave the introductory greeting and then Ernie Trimble introduced the Air Commodore, after first presenting Steve Lister with a RAF neck ribbon with suitably inscribed dog tags!

The Air Commodore made a first-class speech: informative, amusing and aimed right for the occasion. Eric May's record for jankers was mentioned in despatches, along with other appropriate remarks for those present - condolences were offered for poor Don and Jeanette's absence.

After the Air Commodore's Chris Green's speech, Steve Lister made a presentation to him, which was a framed Certificate, along with a 40th entry tie. Jane, his partner, was also given a suitable gift. They both later said how touched they were to receive these gifts, and most unexpected.

An appreciation collection was made earlier on for myself and Rose, my lovely wife, without whom I would find it difficult to arrange our reunions. This gift was kindly presented to us by Dave Lowe. We were greatly touched by this kind gesture, but we enjoy organising the reunions, so ensuring the memory of the 40th continues with these worthwhile get-togethers each year.

Music followed and was judged to be outstanding. A few of the 40th group disappeared to our own dedicated bar across from the room to catch up on old times. It would be 0400 hrs before the last person(s) fell out! The Bells, we heard them from upstairs ha ha.

Sun Morning

It was early departure for most of the group, just leaving a handful remaining. Some elected to have a lazy day, with others free ranging to Shrewsbury or Ironbridge. Eric and Diana Peak made use of the time to visit the nearby steam trains at Bridgnorth.

Sun Evening

After the evening meal, it was a question of being confined to the bar for most of those remaining. No late night, most of the group had a long journey ahead of them.

40/50 Summary:

The whole weekend turned out to be exactly what was being celebrated: 50 years since the 40th Entry took that oath at nearby RAF Cosford on the 26th May 1960. Added to this, we have developed a strong bond amongst all those who attend our reunions. We are still conscious that we have not reached everyone from the 40th, but that quest continues.

The Park House Hotel gave real value for money, as judged by many, although there appeared to be a glitch with the way they took an early authorisation from Credit cards indicating a big bill to be paid - this aspect was later resolved.

Next year, the marker has already been put down for Morecambe, with a provisional date of Friday 27th May. Watch the Web Page for a list of those who are interested. It is our intention to book as early as possible as good hotel accommodation is limited and booked very early in Morecambe, according to the local tourist board.

Thanks must go to all those who attended this 50/50 reunion, it was all of you that made the whole weekend super-duper and worthwhile.

Please make time for next year's reunion; where we can all look forward to getting together once again. It is your support that is necessary, with that everything can be arranged on your behalf.

Steve Lister & Dave Stinson
40th