

OUR 2006 MID-YEAR EVENT



Our mid-year gathering took place on 8 June 2006. This event promised to be a little more popular than in previous years with the numbers booked to attend reaching nearly forty. On the day however with the temperature soaring to well above the seasonal average there were quite a few absentees.

Most of our reunions have been notable for bringing in old WSTG colleagues who we have recently re-established contact with, and this one was no exception. We were very pleased to welcome Bert Norris, Rod Waldron and Gerry O'Gorman.

The very hot day made the event thirsty work and there was the usual chat about the past and present experiences over the buffet lunch. What is encouraging is to see a good attendance of older members. Furthermore it was good to see, for the first time since our 2004 inaugural event, one of our lady ex-employees, Joyce

Baker, turn up for this mid year session. Joyce, was on the switchboard at Milldam for many years and organised a luncheon club in which Ernie Brimecombe was our senior member. She seems to have skilfully avoided inclusion in our group photograph but is shown below.



Some of our colleagues have intimated that for this mid-year event a change of venue would be appropriate. Something different may not be a bad thing unless you need to come by car; that presents no problem at the Alexandra Bowling Club, but parking is more difficult in other areas of Portsmouth. Nevertheless we can discuss making

changes more fully at the Christmas "Do".

Since this last meeting we have met up with Ray Callaghan and Cliff Grainger, once again and put them on our contacts list. Let's hope they and all the rest of you are free to come to

our Christmas Party.

SAD NEWS

It is with regret that we have to report the deaths of David Blowers and Liz McKenzie.

David Blowers was Portsmouth born and started his MoD(N) career as a Dockyard Electrical Fitter Apprentice. He later served some 4 years in Hong Kong Dockyard in the mid 1950's and was an Inspector of Electrical Fitters (PTO3) in Portsmouth Dockyard. His time as an Inspector included a period with the GWSI refit team from where he joined WSTG in the early 1960's. David became a gyro compass and stabiliser

specialist and gave a first class service to many new ships and submarines, including Polaris boats. He was a PTO2 team leader. David left WSTG in March 1982 and spent his retirement years at East Meon where he had lived for some 37 years. Although afflicted with Parkinson's disease, David led a full and active life with regular visits to his son in Singapore.

Many of us met up with David for the last time at our reunion in March 2004 which he attended with his wife Sheila. He had not managed to come to any of our further events, but he had kept in touch since that time by letter or telephone, usually after receiving one of our newsletters.

David's death followed a fall that resulted in a hip fracture and contraction of one of those hospital infections which are so virulent. David was 85 years of age.



David (2nd from the left) chatting with colleagues at our March 2004 reunion

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BERT NORRIS



A most uplifting and pleasant Thanksgiving Service was held at East Meon church on 18th October where David's ashes were interred in the churchyard. Joyce Baker, Ivan Winter, Tony Morriss and Ken Wingate from WSTG attended the service.

Our sympathy is extended to Sheila and David's two sons.

Liz McKenzie joined the Group upon leaving the Wrens during the building of the Type 21's at Yarrow's. She provided a service second to none to WSTG staff and in the words of Dennis Collard, who passed on the sad new, she was "always very helpful, professional and a wonderfully friendly and honest human being".

David Lockley recalls how much Liz supported all of WSTG at Glasgow when he worked with her during his "Part 4 Programme days". He also remembers how Liz almost single-handedly rescued the WSTG portacabin from floods one night, during a typical Scottish storm, saving all the test equipment held on site.

Liz was taken ill in March this year and lost the fight against bowel cancer after only a few months. Her funeral was on 11th October at her family home in the Highlands. Liz was 53 years of age.

If you have news of any of our friends and colleagues which is appropriate for our Newsletters please contact the committee on any of the Tel Nos on the front page or by Email.

Albert William Norris was born in Greetham Street Portsmouth on the 3rd of February 1920. He attended St Luke's school, which specialised in schooling lads for the two important local exams, the Dockyard apprentice entry and the Royal Navy boy Artificers exam. At 16 Bert took and passed the Artificer Electrical exam and started training at HMS Fisgard, Chatham [Benbow entry] where much of his



practical training was carried out in the Dockyard on St Mary's island. Being a keen sportsman he made full use of the sports facilities on the island.

At that time Fisgard was situated on the "Top road" in the Medway towns and as war approached a sense of panic set in that the south east would be subjected to massive air raids resulting in the deaths of thousands. It was decided that the artificers were a precious commodity and they should be moved to a safer place. On the day before war was declared they were assembled and in groups of seven with their heavy toolboxes and driven to Chatham station clinging to a large dockyard steamroller.

Bert said that as they passed through London, on a troop train, the air raid balloons were already flying.

Their destination was Portsmouth where Bert was billeted on HMS Warspite.

The next day war was declared and Bert's pay went from a boy's to a man's i.e. 50pence to £2 and 50pence.

He was a rich man.

After further training in HMS Vernon Bert's next posting, as an electrical Artificer, was to stand by the Fiji class cruiser, HMS Kenya building at Alexander Stephens yard on the Clyde. Bert was to maintain the gyros and asdic equipment; his action station post being three decks down in the bow with, of course, locked hatches above him. Later when degaussing became necessary he had also this equipment to maintain. He said it was at first copper bars taking 200 amps, but later multicore cables taking a few amps were fitted around the upper deck. After work-up

around Scapa the ship's first task was convoy duty to Freetown in Sierra Leone. His run ashore there introduced him to topless ladies with the younger ones shunning all garments. He says that he hurried back to the ship?

Kenya continued to be well worked being involved in the Bismarck action and further convoys.

This included 4 Russian convoys and raids on the Norwegian coast.

On the 4th Russian convoy General Gromoff boarded the ship and in honour of the revolution the hammer and sickle flag was flown at the mast. Bert reckoned this was a one off event.



Bert recalls action against the

German lines and above is the Russian GSM he and many others received, but could not wear officially. Recognition of the convoy veterans has, however, recently been a news item.

The Russian convoys had their own horrors; no life jackets were issued as three minutes in the water meant death. Bert said that most of those rescued lost limbs due to the very low temperature. The problem of ice accumulation at night meant all night chipping ice from the upper decks, but in spite of this work Bert saw a minesweeper "turn turtle" with an estimated 200 tons of ice on her top sides.

More important work was still in store for Bert and his ship. By May 1942 Malta was in extremis. Operation Harpoon was launched from Greenock with six merchantmen and



thirty warships, including Kenya. At their arrival in Grand Harbour only two merchantmen were left with many naval casualties.

Another attempt was made with the famous Pedestal convoy to relieve Malta.

On July 29th 1942 Kenya weighed anchor from Scapa. At Greenock fourteen merchant ships waited for their escorts. A French airliner en route to Algeria betrayed the convoy; HMS Eagle was an early victim. Events followed a familiar pattern with Italian and German aircraft, subs and E boats hitting the convoy. HMS Kenya was hit at dusk when one of four torpedoes hit her bow. She continued to escort the

remaining ships and as we all know the most important one, the Ohio made it to Malta. During these epic actions it is salutary to remember Bert batted down at his action station.



Kenya and Bert's war continued into the Far East with attacks on Japanese territory and convoy duties from her base in Trincomalee to Australia where she stayed for six months. On the 23rd April 1945 she sailed from Colombo



Newly promoted chief artificer

to Chatham to start a long refit.

In 1945 Bert passed his chiefs exam and transferred to HMS Chivalrous



HMS Forth

in build at Dumbarton. Chivalrous was sent on the Palestine patrol, again not a pleasant time for

Bert or any UK serviceman as they were targets for the Jewish terrorists and many lost their lives; the hand grenade tossed into a crowded bar was a favoured attack. To deter action against the ship, lights were rigged around the upper deck, and this attracted sturgeons, which would be shot. Surprisingly all of the caviar ended up in the wardroom.

After two years on Chivalrous he transferred as a Chief Artificer to HMS Forth at Malta. The Forth was a submarine depot ship and Bert spent two and a half years in Malta where his son was born. Bert now decided a change was in order and with the inducement that his war-time service would count on his pension he joined the Admiralty. Initially he worked as a laboratory Mechanic at the Gunnery Experimental Dept at Whale Island. Bert was still on the Reserve list at this time and despite his very active war service he received a re-call for the Korean War! But he now worked as a civilian for the Admiralty and so he obtained exemption. His civil career advanced when he passed the 1952 draughtsman's exam and joined the Carrier section at D.E.E Bath.

In 1954 he passed the inspector's exam and went to Blackheath as an electrical overseer with AREE. Firms such as Muirhead being in his remit. Still with AREE he moved to Newcastle as a PTO 2, working in the factory inspectorate at Parsons, Vickers and others. Bert still has fond memories of

lunches on the firms!

In April 1965 he made move to WSTG joining the Sonar section, its head then being Don Warren.

Bert joined as WSTG entered a very busy period with Leanders, DLGs and Tribals in build at the many commercial yards around the country. Being with WSTG for 16 years he had courses on Sonar 184 and degaussing, enjoyed working with characters such as Jack Banfield, Norman Hickey, Fred Parkman and John Mills, his partner in the sonar section for some years. He is particularly proud of working on the Polaris boats when Norman Gooch was his boss. In 1981 Mrs T decided that 60 would be the retiring age and Bert retired on the 31st May 1981 aged 61.

Bert now 86 has had a long and active retirement with some sad moments, but an interest in dancing has kept him busy.

He runs tea dances at Waterlooville and enjoys weeks at Bracklesham bay with his dancing friends.

He is soon off to Malta with his son who wants to see where he was born.



Bert's medals include the 1939-45 Star, Africa Star, Atlantic Star, Burma Star, the Indian Imperial Star, Palestine 1945-48.

A further decoration will soon be added this group, the Arctic Star. It is the decoration that the Establishment was so keen to avoid and will be worn on the Atlantic Star.

MIKE HOGAN RETIRES



Adrian Wright presenting Mike with his retirement tankard.

On Thursday September 28th colleagues and friends gathered in the Union Inn at Saltash to celebrate the early retirement of Mike Hogan. Mike took the opportunity to leave the MOD on the current early retirement scheme after 30 years in WSTG and a further 3 years in the Commissioning Group.

After his apprenticeship at Devonport dockyard (1966/70) Mike worked afloat as a fitter on a number of weapon systems and, on submarines, he assisted Dennis Gaffney with setting to work TCSS9.

He joined WSTG in 1973 as Resident Officer at Scott's (Greenock) for the Chilean Submarines, working with Messrs Strange, Middleton, Parkman and G Robinson on TCSS. Mike also worked with Ray Walton on the Sonar equipments. At Barrow where he spent a lot of time he worked with Eric Garrett on DCB torpedo control



Mike Hogan & Devonport Lads

systems.

In 1984 Mike left WSTG when the Devonport office closed to work at RNAD Eresettle.

1986 saw Mike back in WSTG this time in the Radio Section where he specialised in submarine communications, again spending time at Vickers Barrow. In 1987 he transferred to Devonport to be part of the Tempest and Communications Section.

More recently Mike has been the Devonport resident specialist in RFA communications and Navigational Aids.

Like most WSTG personnel he has been to many places at MOD(N)'s expense, but Mike is one of only a small group whose duty trips included the Falkland Islands.

Mike is a keen sailor and will no doubt spend much of his retirement messing about on the waters around Plymouth. We all wish him and his wife Sue a long and happy retirement..

Postscript:

Left behind at Devonport when the WSTG office closed was **Bill Searle**. Mike Hogan tells us he is fairly well and they currently use the same local.

In the good old days Bill, whilst on DD at Glasgow, could be found in the "Ruybiat" in Byers Road replying to his mail over a pint!

Give us the gossip - within reason - and we will publish it!

Another Career Profile of one the senior management figures of WSTG

ERNEST Charles BRIMECOMBE was born on 23rd of February 1921 and began his life-long involvement with the Admiralty and MOD(N) with an Electrical Apprenticeship in Chatham Dockyard in September 1936, at the age of 15.

Before leaving Chatham, he became a Draughtsman in October 1941, being involved mainly with High Voltage Shore Equipment. He continued as draughtsman with D.E.E. at Bath from June 1942 and with D.G.S. from January 1946. During these war years at Bath he was employed on Magnetic Minesweeping gear and Ship Production.



Ernie and Rose Brimecombe on the occasion of his retirement

Then a desire for a change in direction brought him to HMS Collingwood at Fareham for 'the Long Radio Course' from August 1950 to May 1951, which prepared him for the job of Inspector in Charge of the Radio Centre at Sheerness Dockyard and promotion to TG-2. He remained at Sheerness until May 1956, with further promotion to TG-1 (Foreman) in July 1955.

On 11th May 1956 he transferred to mobile duties with the Outside Erection Party D.E.E. based in Glasgow until June 1961, and then in Portsmouth. He worked in R.N. ships, on Fire Control Systems such as Flyplane Mk.5, MRS3, and Radar Type 984 and ADA, wherever they were being built. *It was in 1959, during the period that he was based in Glasgow, that the Outside Erection Party became the Weapons Systems Tuning Group (W.S.T.G.)*

In July 1964 promotion to TG'B' came his way and again, a little later in December 1965, to PTO-1. Following promotion he took up the post of W.S.T.G.(Po) or Head of the Portsmouth Office, then based in the Staff Officers Mess in Portsmouth Dockyard, where he continued in office until 1967. He then became W.S.T.G.(R) or Head of the Radio Section with his office at A.S.W.E. One of the many jobs that occupied him here was the Fleet fit of Crypto Equipment with the late Ken Rust. On the 6th of May 1974 he was promoted to PPTO (temporary) and was a substantive PPTO by October. At that time, he took over the post of Surface Weapons Section Head, W.S.T.G.(S) at Milldam House. It was from this position that he retired on the 29th of May 1981.

In his private life his greatest enthusiasm had always been for sailing. He had been an active member of the Royal Naval Sailing Association

since 1968 and helped greatly in the formation of the Portsmouth Offshore Group of The Civil Service Sailing Association. He represented the Civil Service in several offshore races, including two Fastnet races.

Many men who claim to engage in sailing as a hobby would consider it no mean achievement to have built their own boat once, but Ernie Brimecombe had done this successfully no less than three times.

During his service at Bath, from 1942 to 1950, he was a member of the Admiralty Rowing Club, now no longer in existence, and also was greatly interested, and took part in, the local Dramatic and Operatic Societies - accompanied enthusiastically in these pursuits by his wife, Rose, who is herself an accomplished singer, organist and artist.

Ernie remained active in retirement, sailing in his cruising yacht "Chyandra" bought in the late 70's. *Some old S group staff (and wives) may recall a drinks party held on board to celebrate her acquisition.* The couple were also enthusiastic members of the Ramblers Association. In the early 90's they moved to Devon where, for some years, they continued offshore sailing in "Chyandra". Sadly Ernie was taken ill in September 1999 when mesothelioma was diagnosed. Ernie died in the Spring of 2001. Having overcome other health problems earlier in retirement, typical of Ernie, in January 2000 he wrote: "old age is a privilege, but carries its problems." Rose continues to live in Devon in "their little grey home in the West" - as Ernie called their bungalow.