

1980 Halton Reunion



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1980 Halton Reunion

During the last three quarters of 1980 I was involved with a Gas Turbine Health Monitoring System that my employers were required to install during the build program of the Dubai Aluminium Smelter Construction at Jebel Ali, some 20km West of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In June, Barry Donovan called to say he was stopping over night in Dubai. We met up at the Gulf Air transit Hotel. It was just great for me to know that my pal Barry might from time to time be flying through. I recall going to a most enjoyable Party where a lot of airline crews were present.

Leave

I delayed my planned return to the UK by two weeks in order to fly from Dubai via Athens with Dr. Tom Prockyk. Tom was one of the Software Consultants who had come out to the Smelter to fix some problems. We had a lot of fun in Athens even though the break in our journey was just a night stop over.

I was obliged to deliver my progress report to the Hawker Siddeley Dynamics Engineering (HSDE) Ltd managers on the Monday, which I duly did and then I was free for the next two and a half weeks. I desperately wanted to see my friend Jocelyn but she was on holiday. Following some good advice from her Father I decided to spend some time walking in the hope that I might get some inspiration as to how I might be able to sort out my personal life. I was finding it difficult to accept that I had been told before I left for Dubai, "I'm not going to wait for you to come back". Prior to leave I was finding the adjustment of being on my own, having work colleagues coming out from the UK, talking about their future plans and even my Boss coming out with his family on one occasion, and there was I, ... but anyway, it was my decision to go to Dubai, so I just had to grin and bear it.

Ridgeway Path

Here is the route plan and bookings I made:

RIDGEMAY WALK		22ND TO 27TH SEPTEMBER 80		COST
MONDAY	Drive to LIDDINGTON	NSTEP THE BELL 078379-714		8.50
		Dinner at THE BELL		7.00
TUESDAY	16 miles to WANDSBE	NSTEP THE BEAR 02857-3781		18.50
		Dinner --		7.5
WEDNESDAY	16 miles to STREETLEY	NSTEP HILL HOUSE 04914-2278		5.0
		Dinner at THE SMITH		8.0
THURSDAY	15.5 miles WATLINGTON	NSTEP WILLOW HOUSE 049161-2025		8.50
		Dinner --		8.0
FRIDAY	17 miles WENDOVER	NSTEP SHALERS of WATTON 931-625228		7.50
		Dinner at		9.00
	<u>64.5</u>			<u>88.5</u>
SATURDAY	BUS to SMINDON			
	BUS to LIDDINGTON			
	Drive to AVEBURY			
	Drive to LITON			
RESERVE	October - THURSDAY	STREETLEY		
2 HOURS	4.5 miles to	NORTH WOOD VILLAGE HOTEL		
2 HOURS	2.5 miles to	WALLING FORD		
1 HOUR	1.5 Back to Path			
3 HOURS	8.5 miles to			

I arranged to leave my car at Liddington in a Pub Car Park, stay there on the Monday evening and start the walk to Wendover on Tuesday. Walking the Ridgeway Path was full of surprise but the amazing chance event that met me when I arrived in Wendover on Friday was absolutely priceless !

I used three hostelry's before arriving in Wendover. Tuesday evening I stayed at The Bear Hotel in Wantage. The statue of Alfred the Great in the square outside the Hotel was a reminder to me that I had been and was going to be, in a manner of speaking, walking in the steps of history.



Wednesday: Crossing the A34 to Didcot

Wednesday evening I had planned to stay at the Youth Hostel in Goring but when I arrived there I was put off by the sheer number of noisy walkers, a large party of young German people. I had the idea that I should ring the 'Springs' Hotel at North Stoke. This I did. By the time I arrived, the walk from Goring was another five miles, I was pretty knackered. I was offered the Bridal Suite ... all in pink with a floor level bath and mirrors everywhere!



Thursday: crossing the Thames, looking north from Wallingford Bridge

I passed this superb English thatched Cottage as I entered Wallington.



I arrived at the Well House Restaurant about 17.30 and was shown to my room. In the evening I joined company with some diners who were having a birthday meal and celebration. I enjoyed a superb evening of good food and much laughter. On Friday morning, I noticed an interesting musical instrument, a Harmonium, for sale in an antique shop. I figured I would come back the following week and possibly buy it.



Friday: on the edge of the Chiltern Hills overlooking Wendover

Wendover

I arrived at the Shoulder of Mutton at 1745. On Saturday the plan was to hitch a lift or to use public transport to get back to Liddington to retrieve my car.

Over a glass of something cool at the bar I learned that there would be a Halton reunion the following day. I deduced and observed, whilst dining in the restaurant, that all people in the room were ex Halton Apprentices. I established a rapport with the waitress, who must have been about the same age as me, 35, because during our conversation she remembered the Freedom of Aylesbury parade in 1964. Seemingly she also used to go dancing at Courts in Aylesbury and had danced with many a young AA 'chancer'. It was thought that I would be able to secure a room for the Saturday night in the morning. So I thought no more about accommodation and enjoyed the rest of the evening chatting to the ex Brats. One elderly gentleman, who was there with his wife, was in the 5th Entry. At breakfast on Saturday my waitress friend was very concerned that having checked, the Pub was fully booked. So concerned was she that I recall her saying, "If you can put up with a dog, children and a sofa in the lounge you can sleep at my house tonight if you wish". So, after breakfast duties were finished I was driven to her house in Wendover so that I knew where it was. I was even given a front door key.

These were taken at the junction of the Amersham road and the High Wycombe road:



Yes, it really is you !

The elderly gentleman from the 5th Entry gave me a lift up to 1 & 2 Wings. When we arrived there it would seem that he was expecting a march down to Workshops but there wasn't. At the Airfields there were queues to register one's presence. The guy in the beige suit clearly recognised me and I think he is the son-in-law of a Warrant

Officer both of whom were at Finningley in 1973. The guy smiling at me, George ?, was either doing his HNC at Doncaster Tech or an Open University course when we were both stationed at RAF Finningley.



George ? ex Locking Radio Apprentice with his Father in Law.

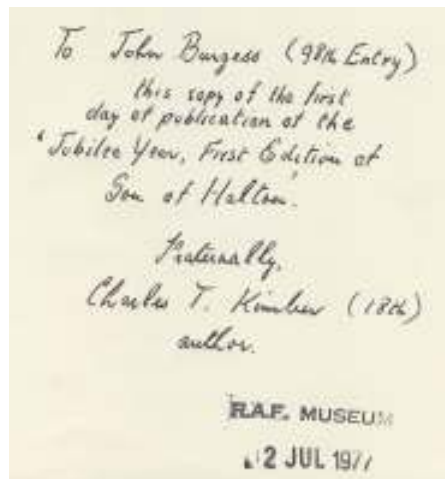
Somewhere in this Hangar, about an hour later, I bumped into Chris Cho-Young. Surprised as I was and indeed, Chris seemed well pleased too, it was amazing for me to be a part of this event. Indeed, an event totally unplanned by me. In fact everything for the past four days had been amazing!

Chris and I attended the Church Service and in some pews behind I spotted Les Bullock, the HSDE Company Secretary, my employer, (he was going to get a lot of flak from me about the way I was subsequently handled on the Dubai project !). We didn't talk about me at that point but I think he knew I was going to have an even harder time when I went back to Dubai. He knew a little about some of my problems and I suspect he understood my vulnerability and position of being the Site Engineer. Les, I think, was in the 35th Entry.

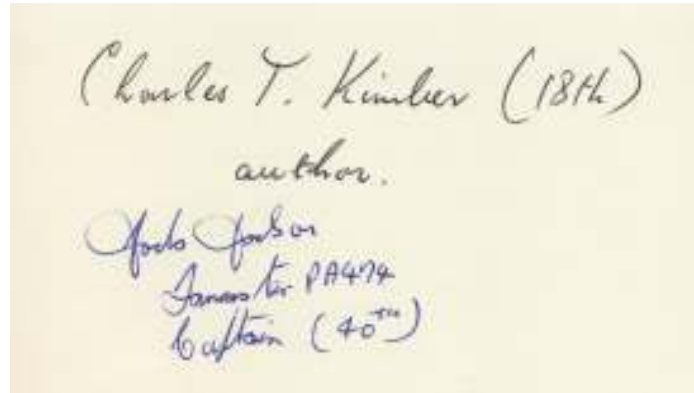
Chris was still a serving Squadron Leader in charge of Education at the No 1 Radio School at RAF Locking at this time and was undecided whether he would continue his career in the RAF. Chris gave me a lift back to my car at Liddington. I figured I would go back to the Shoulder of Mutton in Wendover and continue the celebrations. However, when I arrived at the Pub, being rather tired, I didn't fancy any more talking, so I dropped the front door key off at my waitress friend's house – unfortunately there was nobody in so I had to write a brief note and explain - and then I carried on to my old parental home in Leagrave, Luton.

Son of Halton

I met and talked with Charles T. Kimber at the reunion. I purchased two copies of his book that were signed:



This book, already signed by Charles, was also signed by an ex 40th Entry chap who used to fly Lancaster PA474, at the time of meeting and talking with Charles we were, all three, sharing conversation:



I promised I would call Charles at his home in Sonning to arrange when I would come and see him. I figured on the return journey from Sonning I would go and look at the Harmonium in Wallington.

On the following Wednesday I went to the Kimber residence in Sonning.



There's a lot more I could tell you about Charles and his book, Son of Halton, but suffice to say that I did buy the Harmonium and I did communicate with Charles Kimber when I returned to Dubai.

