

H.M.S. Phoebe Association



Newsletter

June 2003

Well! here we are again shipmates, another reunion under our belts, an extra special one this time for we dedicated a Memorial Stone, and two Commemorative Seats. It had been touch and go for a couple of months whether we would be able to do it or not, but with the terrific help we had from Councillor Emily Morrell-Cross, and Mike Fox it came to fruition. The seats, and stone, had been placed in position by the council workmen a couple of days earlier. Some shipmates went down to see them on Saturday morning, me included. The photographs opposite (*not included on web copy due to poor quality*) were taken at that time, many more photos were taken at the dedication, these will make their way into our memorabilia, The press did actually turn up and took photos, two of which made it to the local Daily Echo including a write-up. S/m Stan Evans actually got his photo taken on his own beside the Stone. We were lucky, although rain and gales had been forecast for the area, it remained overcast but dry and, being sheltered by the trees and Rhododendron bushes, the wind had little effect on the ceremony. S/m Bob Hobbs was our Standard bearer for the ceremony; S/m Monty Burnet did not feel quite up to it. Bob was joined by three other Standards, the Bournemouth RNA, two from the British Legion and one from the WRNS Association.

The Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer, along with Mike Fox and Councillor Emily Morrell-Cross, waited at the bottom of the town's War Memorial steps to greet the Mayoral Party, then escorted the party to our dedication site.

The Service was ably carried out by the TS Phoebe 'sin-bosun' Ray Merrick in the presence of His Worship the Mayor and the Lady Mayoress, Lil Pavely read a passage from the Bible. The Mayor was invited to speak, and gave a good account of the HMS Phoebe's history, one item was slightly wrong for which I take full responsibility, as it was I that supplied the history. I had told the Mayor that Phoebe was hit by two fish in the second torpedoing, how I did that I do not know - I must have read it somewhere. The Memorial Stone was unveiled by Mr Harold Taylor, a nephew of one of the crew named on the memorial. A Bandsman from the local Salvation Army sounded last Post and Reveille, unfortunately it was the short 'Arouse' bugle call played and not the normal Naval Reveille call we all know. The honour of laying our wreath of poppies was given to me, for which I thank you shipmates. The service ended and everyone gathered round taking photos, the press photographer got a nice group photo. If anyone requires any of the press photos, I have included an order form in with this newsletter, it takes about a week for the photos to be processed and sent back.

I understand the Mayor will be asking the Council for a wreath to be laid at our memorial each year at the same time as a wreath is laid at the town's War Memorial on Armistice Day. Lil and I will be attending this year. (Any other volunteers)??

Quite a few local people had attended the ceremony, and Chairman Pat Willoughby thanked them all. We then followed the Mayor back to the Town Hall.

I had to cancel the light refreshments at the 101 Club earlier in the week, it was not until the Monday before the reunion that I learnt of the cost involved, £50 for the use of the club and £350 for sarnies and dog rolls. £400 seemed a bit too steep, so we chickened out? The Mayor stepped in with a suggestion that he, the Mayoress and Emily, plus the Mace-Bearer serve tea and bickies for all the Phoebe people in the Phoebe room, but I am afraid that also got binned.

However we did get to visit the Phoebe room for an hour, where we were able to talk to the Mayor and Mayoress informally. The Phoebe Room does not have very much in it as regards memorabilia, an HMS Phoebe silver bell that sounds very 'tinny", and just a few photos and some gauges. It could do with a lot more photos, but then it is a committee room and not a museum, I wonder if the Bournemouth Museum has a photo gallery? A lot of shipmates went home after the ceremony. I have heard since that some spent many hours in hold-ups and train cancellations, one couple got home just in time to fall into bed at 2330. It was the same for some shipmates when they came down on Friday. I hope none of those had it again on Sunday.

The committee met on Saturday morning to discuss a couple of items, one being where to go next year, and when - Mar/April/May was decided on. A suggestion had been made to me a while ago that we visit Great Yarmouth, we did investigate that coastline two years ago, but at the suggestion Lil and I investigated again, things may have changed in two years, but again there were no hotels with more than 44 rooms. There was one that had 99 rooms, but it was B&B only, we looked into Lowestoft, Gorleston, and the Holiday Camps. The camps could accommodate us all but there were no private facilities, the smallest campsite had 200 chalets all of which would be sharing the same facilities.

The committee chose to go further north and picked out York or Scarborough. The Commodore hotel we had at Scarborough in 1999 is closed down; there was also the question of hills, and street only car parking. The committee passed the choosing over to the AGM. When asked for a show of hands for Scarborough there were fourteen hands raised, asked if we should try York, there were too many hands raised to count, so Spring 2004 it will be York, (if I can find a suitable hotel). I have already looked on the Internet and found a couple that may suit, but none of the hotels listed say if they have a ball room, also they all put their prices down as "per room' I will have to phone them to see if that includes meals as well, or just the room.

*I would like to know how many rooms I must look for.
It's no good reserving sixty rooms if only forty turn up.
A phone call in the next two weeks to say you will,*

or may, be going would he very handy.

There are plenty of places to visit in and around York. I shall be looking into a couple of coach trips, one to Eden Camp and one to Whitby, or inland to Emmerdale country, of course this is subject to cost, and may mean charging a couple of quid to help out, more about this at a later date, we will get the hotel settled first.

The subject of an increase of fifty pence on the subscription was proposed, but the treasurer stated that the funds were running smoothly, and since the start of the Association the £5 and £2.50 subs had been quite sufficient to keep the Association solvent, there had been a heavier drain on the funds this year due to the dedication but with the donations we had received the funds now show a slight increase on last years accounts, also the takings from raffles and auctions had yet to be taken into account.

The Bride Doll that Lil had made for auctioning, and was sold for £70 is to be paid to the TS Phoebe towards their new HQ building. We have been asked by the Chairman of the TS Phoebe if we could run a coffee morning, or sponsor someone in something to help with their £500.000 New HQ building costs. As much as we would like to, we do not think we can help in that way, it would be different if we were all living in the same town, or even area, but spread all over the country like we are, it is unworkable. We could not expect a person to dig into their pockets for something that is happening miles away in Bournemouth.

Due to the number of complaints about the Russell Court Hotel, and their treatment of us while staying there, I have sent a letter to the AA and RAC informing them of our complaints against the hotel, if they take any notice of it, perhaps the two star rating the hotel has from both clubs will be reviewed.

The complaints were mainly to do with charges that the hotel was trying to put upon us, and the non-conformity with what was agreed when I reserved the hotel last year. It was not until Monday, when settling our bill, that instead of 20 rooms that we had been allocated for Sunday night, it had been changed to ten rooms. I presume that is why so many shipmates were put into the overspill hotel. I did not have this agreement written down, it was a verbal agreement between me and the manager, even so this should stand up as a contract between us. At least we know that we will never stay there again, or recommend it to anyone.

Before I do anything else, Lil and I apologise for not saying good-bye to shipmates when they left either before, or after, the Dedication, we were a bit busy that morning, and my knees were hurting a bit, hence the help to get over the railing to lay the wreath. Our thanks to you for making the reunion, once again, a success. My special thanks are for Sylvia Kent, we did not say good bye to Sylvia and Ken when they left on Sunday morning. Sylvia once again stepped

forward to take down the minutes of the AGM, she does this so willingly, I looked over her shoulder at what she had written. I'm sure she knows what all those squiggly lines and curves are, when she sends me the result it is all written in plain English, and dead easy to copy.

“Thank you Sylvia”

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Before I close this report I must mention the entertainment that the Hotel provided at the weekend, this could not be faulted. I asked for background music for Friday night, the lady organist was quite appreciated by members who danced and sang to the music. Sunday night we had to share the ball room with other guests, but this was no problem, the entertainment was provided by a youngish man who sang to backing music and told not too good jokes, but it was still entertaining and members and other hotel guests showed their appreciation. Saturday night was something special, we had the best entertainment we have ever had, all supplied by one man, and not a young man either. He sang to recorded backing groups, I say sang, well I should say he 'belted out' songs one after the other. The dance floor was never empty, and was heaving with bodies most of the time, after each number he received a standing ovation, he had been booked until 11pm. but he was inundated with so many requests to carry on he did so until 1.30 am. (I think there was a kind of whip round for this extra). He said that we were the best audience he had ever had. But it did not end there. It was arranged for him to come to our next reunion to entertain us again. (Subject to the hotel allowing it) It was a grand evening, I am still getting phone calls from members to say the entertainment was super, and almost made up for the hotel's deficiencies.

WELFARE:

It was with regret that I learned of the passing into deep waters of S/m David Bowler. No one informed us of his death, we could not therefore be at the funeral, we do not know the date David 'crossed the bar' either, the Manager of the Hotel told me on Monday, 19th May that he had been informed of David's death on the 22nd April, and cancelled his reservation, but also told me that he would be claiming from the estate the hotel Booking fee. This was entirely out of order. I phoned David's daughter and told her if she got a bill to send it to me.

Another shipmate had suffered a stroke, I would not have known if I had not phoned him from the hotel when requested to do so by the manager to see if the shipmate was attending. S/m Colin Owen is a new member and this would have been his first reunion. A collection was made to help with his hotel payment, but like beforehand, this payment is at the moment lodged in our account, while we wait to see if the hotel management proceed with their claims, which most of

us feel is disgusting. We hope he is not suffering and will soon be up and about again.

A letter from S/m Albert Morgan's daughter tells me that he is doing well, and soon hopes to be moved from the residential home he is now in. We wish Albert a quick recovery, and hope to see him and his video camera again at a future reunion.

It was really great to see S/m Sid Hall had recovered so well from his stroke, still a way to go, but to see him dancing again made my day.

S/m Harry Blackhurst was taken ill at the reunion, but extra heat in his room soon had him back on his feet. Sorry to hear that wife Claire spent 3 weeks of their 5-week Spanish holiday in hospital, and was also feeling the cold at the reunion.

It was good to see S/m Derek Corby and his wife again, he has not been able to attend a reunion since the last one we had in Bournemouth at the Midland Hotel. He is still suffering from ill health but managed to get here. S/m Bill Gibson said he would try and make it this time, but something must have stopped him. I was hoping to see S/m Tom Bateman as well but he too never arrived. I hope you are okay too, Tom?

We hope some of the Shipmates who could not make it to Bournemouth will be able to make it to York next year, there's almost a year to go, plenty of time to save your pennies up. I have already got 5p saved that I found in the road. I believe in the old saying, "See a pin, pick it up. All day long you'll have good luck". I don't know about good luck, but no ill luck, has come my way from picking up pins, or pennies.

Speaking of which, do you remember the little boys down by the Gosport Ferry, in Portsmouth, diving into that thick black mud searching for the pennies we matelots tossed in for them, we didn't just flick them in, but threw them really hard so they sunk deeper into the mud making the boys, in some cases, duck their heads under. It was a good laugh then, I suppose nowadays it would be classed as abuse. I was hoping to see S/m Eddie Gilbert and Sylvia at the reunion. I hope he is not hospitalised again? S/m Jimmy Dunlop is, I understand, not too well. I am sorry to hear that Jim, the 'Boss' sends her love and hopes you will soon be up and about.

I had a phone call just a few minutes ago from Councillor Emily regarding the conduct of the hotel's management towards our members attending the reunion, and the families of those unable to attend. Emily had a lot to say, too much for me to write down here, but in short the hotel will "have the book thrown at them" not just by Emily, but by the Council and others to do with tourism,

including the AA and RAC. I have now scrapped my letters to these two organisations, letters from other parties will have more strength and effect than mine, Emily said we are not to pay a penny more to the hotel, she will tell me if and when to pay. The last words from Emily were to tell you to - "Watch this space"

We will be receiving copies of letters sent out by Emily and other parties, also replies to such letters for our records.

Palestine Patrol:

A short account from the book by Ninian Stewart, which also includes HMS *Phoebe*.

Probably the most serious incident in the time of the patrols was the interception of the *President Wakefield*, which involved repeated boarding runs by four destroyers, some succeeding to get across just two or three boarders who were isolated, and roughed up by angry mobs. There were serious injuries and an American crewmember of the *Wakefield* died before resistance ceased. The 1,800 immigrants on *Wakefield* were eventually returned to Germany.

Jews at this time were desperate to get out of Romania and Bulgaria before the Russians exerted their authority to stop them, and many immigrant ships now came from the Black Sea. Another factor in this was a tougher attitude in Western Europe. I was surprised to read the extent to which Central European governments, substantial official elements in France, Italy and Yugoslavia, and the United Nations and Rehabilitation Authority openly aided the illegal immigrants in the early days. Later British diplomacy persuaded them that there had to be some control or there would be open warfare in the Middle East.

This was the crux of the problem. Few in the rest of the world, least of all the Americans, accepted what the British were trying to do... we soon had to get out and the war has to be stopped.

In any case it was never a popular role for the Navy so soon after WWII in which the Jews suffered in appalling ways. This was shown in one of *HMS Phoebe's* final roles in the affair. Three times in the spring of 1948 we were used as a transit station in Haifa, transferring immigrants from newly intercepted vessels across to transports that would take them to Famagusta in Cyprus. That involved searching baggage for weapons and DDT spraying them, this was not a straight forward task with some of them still showing defiance, but on the whole was carried out with compassion.

Many immigrants had to be helped, even with babies, and getting the sick and wounded, some seriously wounded, out of the disgustingly crowded, filthy,

stinking and unsanitary holds was difficult and delicate. I can never forget the lowering of a stretcher, with a man who had broken his back, over the side into a lighter. Four of us let out lines to the four corners of the stretcher, endeavouring to keep it level. The man was ghastly terrified at each lurch...and so was I.

There was one curious finale, which seemed that even some Jews approved the British policy in the end. The British mandate finished on May 15th 1948, and on May 13th the *Borea* was intercepted carrying 243 illegal immigrants. HMS Chieftain, her escort, suggested that if she stooled around outside territorial waters for 48 hours she could land where she chose, but her Master unaccountably elected to be escorted in to Cyprus...and her passengers were being dispersed into camps as the British left.

Trawling the internet (www.dumblaws.com) I found the following amusing laws, some are still active, although it would be a bit hard to enforce.

New Jersey -please note S/m Silvester MacDonald:-

- 1 - It is illegal to wear a bullet proof vest while committing a murder.
- 2 - It is against the law to KNIT during the fishing season.
- 3 - The month of May is designated "Kindness Awareness Month"
- 4 - You may not slurp your soup.

English Laws can be funny too:-

- 1 - All males over the age of 14 to do 2 hours of longbow practice a week, supervised by the clergy.
- 2 - Any person found breaking a boiled egg at the sharp end will be sentenced to 24 hours in the stocks.
- 3 - It is illegal to stand within one hundred yards of the reigning monarch when not wearing socks.
- 4 - It is illegal to eat Mince Pies on Christmas Day.
- 5 - It is illegal for a lady to eat chocolates on a public conveyance.
- 6 - Placing a postage stamp that bears the Queens portrait upside down is considered to be an act of treason.
- 7 - In Hereford - You may not shoot a Welsh person on a Sunday with a long bow in Cathedral Close. And in Chester you can only shoot a Welsh person with a bow and arrow inside the city walls after midnight. But in York, Except for Sunday it is perfectly legal to shoot a Scotsman with a bow and arrow anytime. (Just think of what we could do at the reunion next year, it could be quite entertaining).

From Harold Taylor:

In the Gents?

I was barely sitting down when I heard a voice from the other stall saying: "Hi, how are you?"

I'm not the type to start a conversation in the men's restrooms at a motorway service area, but I don't know what got into me, so I answered, somewhat embarrassed, "Doing Just Fine!"

And the other guy says: "So what are you up to?"

What kind of question is that? At that point, I'm thinking this is too bizarre so I say: "Ugh, I'm like you, just travelling east!" At this point I am just trying to get out as fast as I can when I hear another question.

"Can I come over to your place after a while"? Ok, this question is just wacky but I figured I could just be polite and end the conversation.

I tell him, "Well, I have company over so today is a bad day for me!"

Then I hear the guy say nervously... "LISTEN, I'll have to call you back. There's an idiot in the next stall"