



PROBUS



RECORDER

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CHAIRMAN'S NOTES – *Roger Lester*

What a month we have had!! A very good talk about the Falklands, since when I have joined their [Association](#). Then things took a very sad turn.

We had been out to a Thursday lunch with an old school friend and his wife and got home about 2.30, made a coffee and put the TV on. Then we heard the news about the Queen who, as we all know, died later that afternoon. The whole nation/world, not least the Lester family, went into mourning. So, for 17 days everything seemed to slow down and revolve around the TV.

The State Funeral last week was, as we had all expected, a very moving and solemn occasion. Everything going as if by clockwork and I have to say that the sailors with the coffin on the gun carriage were very smart and did their job magnificently, along with all the Services involved in the ceremonies. The end of the Elizabethan era and the start of the Second Carolean era with King Charles III. We as a Club greeted him with 'God Save the King' at our meeting, having only said 'God Save the Queen' back in July.

Since then about a dozen members have had a very interesting and informative afternoon visit to St Mary's Church here in Gillingham. It was amazing the things we didn't know even though some of us had been there countless times!

I have received the updated details for the Christmas Dinner at the Grange and details will be made available as soon as possible.



WELFARE & SOCIAL

I have been unable to make contact with our esteemed Welfare Secretary and so I suspect that he has taken well-earned leave of absence and is travelling abroad – by rail of course, and possibly even amongst the Swiss Gnomes!

As a result I am unable to provide authoritative information as to any of our members who might need our thoughts and prayers, but if there is anything urgent I will post such information as soon as Roger returns.

Editor

Social Event – Editor

A few of our members had the privilege recently of being invited to attend the 90th Birthday celebration of Peter Marshall, a past Chairman and very long-standing member of our Club. Although he and his wife Rita now live in Torquay, he keeps closely in touch with the Club's progress, and remains a staunch Club Member.

The event was held in Torquay and Peter, apart from keeping his 'audience' enthralled, was presented with a shirt by Tim Tremlett, the Hampshire County cricket manager which was signed by all current members of the Hampshire County team. Good luck for the next years, Peter - a century beckons!!!



Future Club Events - Editor

Tuesday 4th October	<u>Talk</u> – ' <i>Royal Shenanigans in the Georgian Era</i> ' by Mike Rendell
Tuesday 18th October	<u>Talk</u> – ' <i>Tsar Putin</i> ' by Nigel Hawkins *Wives/Partners Invitation Day.
Tuesday 1st November	<u>Talk</u> – ' <i>The German Occupation of the Channel Islands in WWII</i> ' - by James Porter.



REPORTS ON OUR SEPTEMBER TALKS

'THE FALKLAND ISLANDS'

Beverley Verwoert – 6th September 2022

Beverley Verwoert is a native Falkland Islander, descended from one of the early families of British colonists. She came to the UK in 1963 to be educated in Dorset, supported by a Falkland Islands government scholarship. Formerly a teacher, and living in the Bristol area, she is currently the Development Secretary of the Falklands Islands Association. Beverley's mother lives in Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands, and she visits her as often as she can.



The Falkland Islands are a group of islands in the south Atlantic, situated some 400 miles from the southern tip of South America. Forty years ago in 1982, following an invasion by Argentina, Britain despatched a Task Force to fight and enforce British sovereignty over this UK Overseas Territory.

Speaking passionately about the Falklands, its inhabitants and island life, Beverley alluded to their

quiet but heartfelt loyalty to Britain and to the wonderful and rich abundant wildlife of the islands and surrounding seas. She also explained the difficulties still caused by the continuing animosity of Argentina, a country still claiming sovereignty over what they refer to as the Malvinas.

Beverley told us that the Falkland Islands have a rich history of maritime trade, sealing, whaling, and cattle and sheep farming. The English navigator John Davis, aboard the ship '*Desire*' made the first confirmed sighting of the islands in 1592. 1833 saw the re-assertion by Britain of its sovereignty (claimed at various points by the French, British, Spanish, and Argentines). Beverley explained that British colonisation dates back to the 19th century and went on to emphasise the strategic importance of the islands - East and West Falkland, South Georgia, and other smaller islands – pointing out that their location has also allowed the UK to claim a segment of Antarctica. The seas around the islands are highly productive fishing grounds, and there are also large untapped oil reserves.

Although the 1982 Falklands War ended with the surrender of Argentine forces, Argentina has never formally accepted British sovereignty over these islands, and relations remain difficult, in terms of transport, air space and communications links. Beverley's photographs included those of the small



city of Stanley, and of the countryside (known as 'the camp'), and also included of the memorials to British troops who died in the war of 1982 and in the WWI naval 'Battle of the Falklands' between British and German naval forces. British veterans of the 1982 conflict revisiting continue to be welcomed and supported, and there is now a strong military base on the Islands which are used extensively



for military training.

The Islands have become a popular destination for cruise ships, many en-route to the Antarctic Peninsula, and to and from some South American ports.



The Islands are home to a small resident population of under 3,000 (excluding people affiliated to the military garrison), of whom 75% live in Stanley; the result is that the expanse of open countryside and beaches have a thriving and diverse wildlife. More than 220 species of bird have been recorded, such as the black-browed albatross, and five species of penguin; marine

mammals include elephant seals, sea lions, dolphins and killer whales (orca).



Several lodges in ‘the Camp’ provide accommodation away from Stanley. Amongst the Islanders themselves there is a strong sense of community, a manifestation of which is ‘Camp sports week’ which marks the end of the sheep shearing season, and includes horse racing, as well as sheep and dog trials.

Members and their wives and partners enjoyed the talk enormously. Andrew Tinsley proposed the vote of thanks, and we showed our appreciation in the usual way.

Report: Alan Jeffs

‘Grandma Flew Spitfires’ – The Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA)

John Webster, 20th September 2022

John Webster is the secretary of the Air Transport Auxiliary Association. The aim of the ATAA is to keep alive the memory of those who worked in the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA). There is a permanent display at Maidenhead Museum.



The [ATA](#) was set up during WWII; its pilots were not actually part of the armed services; it was a civilian organisation set up to ferry new aircraft and those for repair or post repair, between factories, depots and operational airfields. John explained how women became an essential part of the organisation, releasing male pilots for front line duties in the war against Nazi Germany.

Some of these ladies were already trained pilots (some owning their own aircraft), but others were trained to fly from scratch, previously not even being able to drive a car! The overhead slides of photographs accompanying the talk showed some of these indomitable women in their wartime role.



Initially, ATA pilots were male, and at first the role of the organisation was to transport personnel, mail and medical supplies, but this soon expanded to take over the ferrying of aircraft, freeing up RAF pilots for combat roles.

In late 1939, [Commander Pauline Gower](#) was given the task of organising the women's section of the ATA. The initial intake of eight women were only cleared to fly Tiger Moths, but eventually women pilots were trained and cleared to fly all types of aircraft, including Hurricanes, Spitfires, and heavy bombers. The base for the women's section was at Hatfield, Hertfordshire.

During the war, pilots of the ATA flew 415,000 hours, delivering 309,000 aircraft. Membership of the ATA included some disabled pilots, and many foreign pilots. Men and women came from all over the world to join ATA. Eventually, 25 nations were represented, including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the USA. There were pilots from Chile, Russia and India. The largest contingent from Europe were 17 Poles, including three women who reached Britain after escaping via the Balkans and France. Some of the women pilots became commercial pilots after the war; initial reluctance to accept the role of women was eventually overcome, with the acceptance that these women pilots were just as good in performing their duties as their male counterparts. White Waltham airfield, near Maidenhead (now privately owned) was the home headquarters of the ATA.

There were many notable characters in the ATA – such as **Lettice Curtis**, the first female to fly a four-engine Lancaster bomber. After the War she became a technician and flight test observer at Boscombe Down and took an active part in air racing. Another woman pilot in the early days was **Amy Johnson**, who in the 1930's was the first woman to fly solo from London to Australia; she disappeared over the Thames estuary in adverse weather conditions in 1941.



Somewhat surprisingly, despite the valuable work undertaken by members of this organisation, no medals were given in recognition of this; this was partially rectified in 2008, when a veteran's badge was awarded.



There are 12 known memorials to the ATA, including one in the crypt at St Paul's, and at Hamble, and Smith's Lawn, Windsor Great Park.

John Webster's talk, the overheads and film clips showed us how the work of this organisation made a vital contribution to the war effort in WWII. And the title – well at least two of these women were actually grandmothers! Tom Brain gave the vote of thanks.

Report: Alan Jeffs



ENDPIECE – Editor

Trafalgar Day is celebrated by the Royal Navy on **21st October**, and so I thought I would bring us all up to speed with a tale of life in the modern Navy.

‘Rum, Sodomy and the Lifejacket’

It's almost 200 years since Lord Nelson's famous naval victory over the French and Spanish at the Battle of Trafalgar. To kick-start the anniversary celebrations, an actor dressed as Nelson posed for pictures on the River Thames at Greenwich. But before he was allowed to board a RNLI Lifeboat, safety officials made him wear a lifejacket over his 19th century admiral's uniform.



And so ... Imagine how Nelson might have fared if he had been subject to modern health and safety regulations? You are now on the deck of the recently renamed British Flagship, **HMS Appeasement**.

"Order the signal, Hardy."

"Aye, aye sir."

"Hold on, that's not what I dictated to the signal officer. What's the meaning of this?"

"Sorry sir?"

"England expects every person to do his duty, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, religious persuasion or disability. What gobbledegook is this?"

"Admiralty policy, I'm afraid, sir. We're an equal opportunities employer now. We had the devil's own job getting 'England' past the censors, lest it be considered racist."

"Gadzooks, Hardy. Hand me my pipe and tobacco."

"Sorry sir. All naval vessels have been designated smoke-free working environments."

"In that case, break open the rum ration. Let us splice the main brace to steel the men before battle."

"The rum ration has been abolished, Admiral. It's part of the Government's policy on binge drinking."

"Good heavens, Hardy. I suppose we'd better get on with it. Set Full Sails."

"I think you'll find that there's a 4-knot speed limit in this stretch of water."

"Damn it man! We are on the eve of the greatest sea battle in history. We must advance with all dispatch. Report from the crow's nest, please."

"That won't be possible, sir."

"What?"

"Health and safety have closed the crow's nest, sir. No harness. And they said that rope ladder doesn't meet regulations. They won't let anyone up there until

proper scaffolding can be erected."

"Then get me the ship's carpenter without delay, Hardy."

"He's busy knocking up a wheelchair access to the fo'c'sle Admiral."

"Wheelchair access? I've never heard anything so absurd."

"Health and safety again, sir. We have to provide a barrier-free environment for the differently-abled."

"Differently-abled? I've only one arm and one eye and I refuse even to hear mention of the word. I didn't rise to the rank of admiral by playing the disability card."

"Actually, sir, you did. The Royal Navy is under-represented in the areas of visual impairment and limb deficiency."

"Whatever next? Give me full sail! The salt spray beckons."

"A couple of problems there too, sir. Health and safety won't let the crew up the rigging without crash helmets. And they don't want anyone breathing in too much salt - haven't you seen the adverts?"

"I've never heard such infamy. Break out the cannon and tell the men to stand by to engage the enemy."

"The men are a bit worried about shooting at anyone, Admiral."

"What? This is mutiny!"

"It's not that, sir. It's just that they're afraid of being charged with murder if they actually kill anyone. There's a couple of legal aid lawyers on board, watching everyone like hawks."

"Then how are we to sink the Frenchies and the Spanish?"

"Actually, sir, we're not."

"We're not?"

"No, sir. The Frenchies and the Spanish are our European partners now. According to the Common Fisheries Policy, we shouldn't even be in this stretch of water. We could get hit with a claim for compensation."

"But you must hate a Frenchman as you hate the devil."

"I wouldn't let the ship's diversity co-ordinator hear you saying that sir. You'll be up on disciplinary."

"You must consider every man an enemy who speaks ill of your King."

"Not anymore, sir. We must be inclusive in this multicultural age. Now put on your Kevlar vest; it's the rules."

"Don't tell me - health and safety. Whatever happened to rum, sodomy and the lash?"

"As I explained, sir, rum is off the menu. And there's a ban on corporal punishment."

"What about sodomy?"

"I believe it's to be encouraged, sir."

"In that case ...kiss me, Hardy."