

The Retired Prison Governors

In co-operation with: The Prison Governors Association

NEWSLETTER

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THE ROTTEN STATE OF OUR PRISONS



having attended the Prison Governors Association conference last week (11-12 October 2016), I decided that as soon as I had some free time I would write a piece for the newsletter while it was still fresh in my memory. On the day pencilled in to write the editorial I got up to the sight of John Attard, one of the PGA's National Officers, being interviewed live by Louise Minchin on BBC Breakfast, regarding the stabbing of a three prisoners in HMP Pentonville by a fellow inmate the previous day. One man was reported dead and the two other victims were reported as being in a critical condition. In other words they could still die. No staff were injured in the incident but that can hardly be described as a consolation, not least to the grieving family of the deceased who would have expected their relative to return safely to them once his time was served.

At conference, the PGA called for a public inquiry into the declining levels of safety in the nation's prisons. The call, which made the national news, was predictably ignored by the Government. How many tragedies do there have to be before the Government acts? Mr Attard repeated on the BBC the statistics given to the delegates last week. Prison officer grade numbers have fallen by 7,000 since 2012. In the same time frame one third of Governor-grade posts have disappeared. As compared with 2012, violent assaults on staff have increased by 146%, self inflicted deaths have doubled, and instances of serious self harm are up by 10,000. The lame response of the MOJ has been to offer back 400 new prison officer posts and £14 million for the ten most troubled prisons. Given that the NOMS annual budget is now around £1 billion lower than in 2010, there are roughly a similar number of prisoners and that there are less places as a result of the closure of twelve establishments under the Coalition Government, this is a drop in the ocean.

How did we get to the rotten state we are in? Undoubtedly austerity is the principal culprit, although as John Attard pointed out, NOMS is not alone in that. The principal weapon of austerity in the service is "benchmarking." For the uninitiated its' intention is to produce standardised staffing profiles based on the complexity of the prison. Combined with a voluntary severance scheme it delivers savings far quicker than privatisation, a spectre seen by the trade unions as the far greater evil. The principal sounds fine but the practice is based on already-dangerous private sector levels in an environment much harder to manage than a few years ago because of the growth of the gang culture and decline of deference, accompanied by a lack of respect which now sees female officers as fair game for violent assaults by male prisoners. As we have seen this summer the in-charge Governor is no longer 'off limits' either. The first thing that suffers is the normal staff/prisoner interaction that provides dynamic security. Prisoners unable to get their applications dealt with, or just have a chat with staff, will be more likely to resort to violence or self-harm to get attention. Staffing levels are not resilient enough to cope with additional sick leave amongst injured staff and the inevitable extra bed watches that result from fights or self-harming incidents. This affects the regime and access to basic facilities such as the telephone and library. Inevitably there is a reaction and the vicious circle begins again. To make matters worse the drug problem has changed. The drug of choice is now likely to be "spice" which only became illegal in the community in May 2016 but which, unlike cannabis, makes abusers exceptionally violent. It is in many ways the perfect storm.

Another Government weapon for saving money is outsourcing. Its' most recent manifestation has been the privatisation of facilities and Estates Management, known to us old-timers as the Works Department. Like elsewhere in the public service it has been a disaster. Thus in certain prisons, new receptions have been placed in cells lacking one or more of glazing, heating or running water. What on earth happened to decency? It gets worse. Owing to population pressures Duty Governors are frequently leaned on by either Population Management or Regional Office or both to review prisoners assessed as high risk for cell-sharing the previous night, with a view to reducing them to standard risk and doubling them up. Where is the morality in this? This is the road to the first prosecution for corporate manslaughter and for the inevitable scapegoating of an unlucky Duty Governor as senior officials rush to do their Pontius Pilate impression.

While all this has been going there has been a simultaneous attack on pay and conditions. The so-called "Fair and Sustainable" programme to reform pay now sees more than 10,000 prison staff trapped in closed grades with their pay frozen until such a time as the pay of colleagues on new terms and conditions catches up. With public sector pay increases currently capped at 1% that is likely to be a very long wait. Long-serving prison officers and Senior Officers are the main sufferers, as the maximum of new pay rates is some 5k below those with pre-Fair and Sustainable terms and conditions. Thus cutting the public sector pay bill comes with the price tag of demoralising our most experienced front-line staff.

Where are the leaders of the service when all this is going on? I saw Michael Spurr on BBC Breakfast the day after the Birmingham riot. He was perhaps fortunate in being interviewed by Sally Nugent, whose usual brief is sport, rather than Naga Munchetty who has in the past demonstrated her ability to skewer the most slippery politician or civil servant. I am not a member of Michael Spurr's fan club and it's fair to say that is reciprocal, but I do not for one minute believe that he subscribes to the kind of drivel he is forced to spout. There is something unacceptable about politicians dodging their responsibility to face questions from broadcasters on our behalf, and instead passing the parcel to civil servants when it is policy failure we are talking about.

There is so much more I could say and there is a piece specifically devoted to Conference elsewhere in the newsletter. One question to finish: if you could start your time again, would you now join?

PAUL LAXTON, EDITOR

EDITOR'S UPDATE 20 FEBRUARY 2017:

Since I penned the original editorial the Justice Secretary, Elizabeth Truss, has acquired more funds than were available last Autumn. Some 2,500 officers will be recruited by the end of 2018, but this still only restores about 35% of the lost prison officers, and of course it restores 0% of the experience lost.

Ms Truss has also found cash to give pay rises to prison officers in 31 jails concentrated almost exclusively in the south east of the country, 3-5K being quoted in the press. Again there are significant caveats. Only staff who have joined under the 2013 terms and conditions are eligible. It gives nothing to experienced staff in closed grades, and nothing to those whose maximum salary is around 5k per annum less than pre-2013 colleagues if they work in the other three quarters of penal establishments outside the south east. There is nothing for OSG's and nothing for Governor grades. It is a purely market place solution to some very complex problems.

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RPGA: E-MAIL REGISTER

The E-Mail register has been operating for around 13 years and has proved itself to be an effective means of rapid communication between members. It offers updates on current prison service developments and allows members to keep in touch with each other.

Joining the RPGA does not automatically place you on the register. If you would like to join the register then please send an E-Mail from the address you wish to have registered to Harry Brett at harry_brett@sky.com

E-Mail addresses may not be passed to third parties without permission from the person(s) registered to that specific E-Mail address.

Please remember that if you change your E-Mail address you must inform Harry Brett, otherwise you will cease to receive further updates.



Graham Smith "From the Chair"

A belated Happy New Year to you all and I wish you all health and happiness for 2017.

2016 saw the introduction of the Single Tier State Pension which has managed to divide pensioners into distinct groups via 2-tier rates of pension and additionally a complicated "triple lock process". Pressure to place us all on the same rates so far falls on deaf ears. We continue to protest accordingly.

2016 also saw a drop in energy prices but I note they are making the expected 'come back' and we all observe the slow drop in price, along with rapid increases in response to wholesale fluctuations. Energy company profits remain strong of course. To add to the bad news interest rates on our savings have provided little comfort and current ISA rates barely compete with inflation let alone give us additional income. I hope some of you managed to invest in the NSI '65 Plus' Bond earlier in the year. You should ensure your savings are not languishing in a 0.01 % account at your bank and/or building society. Check it soon!

As a BREXIT voter I am pleased that the economy is riding out the initial storm and the critics have gone quiet for now at least. I am hopeful that the future will improve for us as a result of leaving the EU and regaining key decision-making for the UK.

The NHS is having problems with budget management depending on who you listen to and we all have a vested interest in a high-quality NHS and the crucial link to social care. We will keep track of trends during the year ahead.

At the time of writing, your Committee are exploring options for a link between the RPGA and the Civil Service Pensioners Alliance [CSPA]. This is in place of a previous consideration of amalgamation which was not felt appropriate. It is important however that the RPGA have access to informed opinion and a voice through the CSPA on joint issues. We will place our views to the AGM 14th June which I would ask you to please attend as it is the main contact with our members and their views.

Thank you for your ongoing support.

William Alan Brown OBE
33 Lowry Gardens
Carlisle
CA3 0GX

In Loving Memory Of Susan Jane Brown (nee McCullagh)

Formerly Deputy Governor HMP Wormwood Scrubs.
Formerly Governor HMP Haverigg
Formerly Governor of HMP/YOI Thorn Cross.

Dear Harry,

You may not realise that it is 10 months since Sue died.

I have decided with members of my family to raise funds for the Sepsis Trust www.sepsistrust.org to try and help raise awareness of the terrible disease which took Sue from us.

We are organising a walk on The Cross Border Trail Newcastleton on the 28th February 2017 (the first anniversary of Sue's death) and we are inviting anyone who would like to gain their own sponsorship to join us. If you would rather organise your own event I have sponsorship forms I can let you have or you can simply donate to our just giving page

<http://www.justgiving.com/owner-email/pleasesponsor/Alan-Brown-OBE>

<http://www.justgiving.com/remember/404176/Sue%20-Brown>

I do hope the Retired Governors Association feel able to help.

I would appreciate it if you could circulate this letter to retired members and also copy to the Governors Association and ask them to circulate to their members on my behalf.

Williamalanbrown@aol.com

Thanks

Signed

Alan Brown OBE

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Although the newsletter will not hit your doormats until after 28 February I felt it was important to publish Alan's letter. There are around 150,000 cases of Sepsis in the UK each year resulting in around 44,000 deaths, a frightening mortality rate of around 30%. You may have missed the walk, but you will not have missed the opportunity to donate.

MEMBERSHIP REPORT OCTOBER 2016



Membership continues to decline with the total now at 435, a reduction of 10 since February 2016. We are still recruiting new members and welcome Steve Wagstaffe, Paddy O'Rourke, Alan Crighton, Eoin McLennan-Murray, Colin Ward, Adeline McEvoy, Sheila French, Don Webb, Pam Gully and Jenny Mooney, Mrs Larner (Barry's widow), Elsie Palliser (widow of Albert), Philip Phillips, Marie Rys-Reuton (who has re-joined us) and Carole Bartholomew (widow of Roy)

We are sorry to announce the deaths of members - Sue Brown, John Baxter, William McEvoy, Alan Holman, Keith French, Norman Andrews, Larry Stones, Barry Larner, Albert Palliser MBE, Mary Whitty, Roy Bartholomew and Ted Bloor. Our deepest condolences go out to their family and friends. We have also heard of the deaths of ex-governors who I am sure many of you will remember - Phillippa Gale and Alf Cox. Most recently Mary Mole, widow of Bob Mole, passed away aged 88. Our deepest condolences go out to their family and friends.

We have also had a number of resignations - Brian Hinchcliffe, Terry Jackson, Chris Popple, Alexander Cruickshank, Caroline Dodds, Michael Dumbrell, Bill Abbott OBE, Adeline McEvoy, John Gratton, Edward Berry and Kathy McNaughton.

We have also had newsletters returned as the occupants have moved away, Steve Turner and Barbara Dean, so anyone who knows their new address then please let me know and I will put them back on the list.

Just a reminder that if you are not on the Email register and would like to be then please Email me at h_brett@sky.com. You can also contact me on 0161 980 8127 if you have any membership queries I can help with. On that note a special message to Graham Harris, I think you have changed your Email address as the one I have for you keeps bouncing back, so if you wish to remain on the list could you please update me.

One the next page we have re-produced a letter received from MyCSP by the widow of one of our members who died recently in regard to her amended pension as a result of becoming a widow from £17,583.15p to £2,658.49p. This is mainly due to the fact that they married after his retirement and the provision of a Post-Retirement Widows Pension was only introduced on 6th April 1978 and as such only service accrued after that date counted towards a spouse pension. It was felt by the committee that some members may well wish to be made aware of this situation. The names of the widow and her late husband have been redacted.

HARRY BRETT JP

Dear Mrs _

Civil Service Pension Benefits

We have recently received correspondence from Mr Brett regarding your Civil Service dependant pension.

Unfortunately, we are unable to discuss your pension with Mr Brett as we do not have authority to correspond with him.

Should you wish for Mr Brett to deal with your pension or request information regarding your pension, a signed letter of authority can be sent to us giving us permission to correspond with Mr Brett.

We can confirm that the widow's pension rate depends upon when the late Mr _ started contributing towards the scheme. Briefly outlined below is some information regarding contribution rates and significant dates regarding widow's pensions within the PCSPS:

- The first Civil Service widows' pension arrangements were introduced on 14 July 1949.

Cover was:

compulsory for married men whose established service commenced after 14 July 1949
(at a third rate)

optional for married men in post on 14 July 1949;

optional for established unmarried men

- The 1949 arrangements were superseded by the PCSPS on 1 June 1972. The new arrangements were as follows:

Men who had opted out of the 1949 widows' pension arrangements could continue not to provide for a widow's pension

All men in post on 1 June 1972 with earlier service were given the option to provide contributions for any pre 1 June 1972 service at a half or third rate. If member's had already contributed they had the option to increase their contributions to a half rate for service pre 1972

New joiners now had to contribute at a half rate

On 6 April 1978 contributions at a half rate became compulsory for all PCSPS members, including those who opted out in 1949

- A post-retirement pension is based on reckonable service since 6 April 1978. This is paid to a widow who married the member after they left the PCSPS
- A Civil Partner's pension is based on reckonable service from 6 April 1988

As you married the late Mr _ after he left active service of the PCSPS, you are entitled to a Post-Retirement Widows' pension. The introduction of Post-retirement Widows' pension was on 6 April 1978 and only service accrued after this date will be counted towards a spouse pension.

I can therefore confirm that you will receive a full pension amount in line with your late husband pension for 91 days following his death. This is a value of £17,583.15.

From day 92, you will receive a proportion of his pension based on his service history as mentioned prior. The original post retirement pension at Mr _'s retirement was £892.73 and these contributions covered the period 6 April 1978 to 9 November 1983. The value of your Post-Retirement Widows' pension is £2,658.49. This pension will be subject to further pension increases for its duration.

If you have any questions, please let us know.

Yours sincerely,

Pensions Administrator

A SHORT HISTORY OF WORMWOOD SCRUBS 1874-1968

In March 1874, the Directors of Prisons bought about twenty acres of land for £10,000 in an area of brickfields and cabbage gardens on the western outskirts of London. The isolation of Wormwood Scrubs in those days was emphasised by the name of the nearest public house, which was 'The North Pole', while close by was a row of terrace houses called Erubus Terrace. The object of purchasing this land was to build on it by convict labour a large prison to replace Millbank Prison, which had long been condemned.

Wooden hoardings to enclose the site and temporary buildings were erected, and in December 1874, nine convicts moved in. The nearest road was half a mile away and in the extremely cold weather of that winter communication with the outside world had at times to be made by sledges across the snow. The labour force soon rose to 100 and then to 200. The ground contained large quantities of clay and other materials suitable for brick-making, and from these the London stock brick with its yellowish tinge was made. The buildings, which are largely of brick, may thus be said to have risen from the local soil. Other prisons contributed from their resources to the work: for instance, the stone used came from Portland and granite from Dartmoor.

The buildings were designed by Sir Edmund du Cane, who later became the first Chairman of the Prison Commissioners. He abandoned the plan of making the cell blocks radiate from a common centre and created four long parallel blocks running north – south. The advantages which he claimed for this pattern were that all cells had sunlight at some part of the day; there were no dark, dank courts or corners, and cell windows of one block did not overlook the yard attached to another block. The dimensions of the cells were 7 ft by 13 ft, and the total number of cells was 1,387. The prison wall enclosed an area of about fifteen and a half acres. The whole cost of building the prison worked out at £97,000, i.e. £70 per cell. A hospital was also erected.

In 1875 the men rose at 5 a.m. in summer (5.30 a.m. in winter) and worked for four-and-a-half hours in the morning, and four-and-a-half hours in the afternoon (but only three-and-a-half hours in winter), followed by supper at 5.35 p.m. and bedtime at 7.45 p.m. There is nothing to show they were paid for this work; it is merely known that the stokers keeping up the brickyard fires on Sundays were given extra cocoa. Silence was a great feature of the prison regime in the early days. In 1881 it is recorded that 'all prisoners exercised in single file and in silence'. Association was limited to the time spent at labour, 'when silence was as much as possible enforced'. The prison was completed in 1891, a Church of England chapel being one of the last buildings to go up.

In the same year, Wormwood Scrubs was converted from a convict prison into a local prison for both sexes. At that time hard labour for men consisted of oaken picking, mailbag making, making boxes etc. for the Post Office, and for women laundry work, needlework, and repairing. In 1893 'hard labour of the first class consisted of cranks in cells'. As the years passed, the variety of the industries carried on is very striking. In 1899, for example, the lengthy list included ship-fender making, doll dressing, making tin saucers for the G.P.O. and such intriguing items as Irish and Scotch wallets, umbrella boards, and blue moreem and green Tammy bags for the Stationary Office

In 1900 and 1901 the Governor's and the Chaplain's annual reports contained several passages of interest. In his report for 1900, the Governor states: 'During the year the crèche has been instated and is now in full working order. I cannot speak too highly of it and the Medical Officer reports that there is a marked improvement in the condition of the babies'. The Chaplain called attention to 'the large number of prisoners of both sexes who are constantly re-convicted for drunkenness, especially women. I could name a score or women who practically live here.' The average number of women in the prison during this year was 308. For 1901 the Chaplain made some rather cautious remarks about men Visitors, 'The work of gentlemen Visitors is still in its infancy: as regard results, I have no report. Their efforts are mostly confined to lads and young men up to twenty years of age'

In 1902 the last women were moved to Holloway. During the First World War Wormwood Scrubs remained in use as a prison. It is of interest that directly after the end of the war, the Prison Officers' Representative Board, forerunner of the Prison Officers' Association, was established and the first meeting was held at Wormwood Scrubs on 11th January 1919. During the Second World War Wormwood Scrubs was closed as a prison between February 1940 and January 1942, when it was used by the War Office and by the Aliens Branch of the Home Office.

After the war the prison population rose rapidly: the daily average for the four years 1947 to 1950 was 1,179, compared with an average of 800 over the four years before the war. The daily average for 1968 was 1,357

ROLAND DAVIES - THE MAN WHO GUARDED RUDOLF HESS

Hi Grenville,

With your agreement I will forward your reply to Paul for publication in the next RPGA magazine. It is always interesting to hear from colleagues who remember people like him. I have no doubts that there are still few interesting stories around about long retired colleagues and when I uncover another I will share it with colleagues via the RPGA.

Good to hear from you.

With best wishes

john

John R. Berry OBE, MBA, MSc, MA(Ed), PGD Law, Chartered FCIPD, JP.

Assistant Director Wellbeing Solutions

Dear John,

First of all I would like to thank you for satisfying a long-held curiosity as to what happened to Roland after he left Lincoln Prison.

I am referring of course to your very interesting article in the recent RPGA Newsletter.

In the article you mention that you suspect that some retired prison governors may remember him. You are quite correct, for I am one of them.

In November 1973, I was promoted to Assistant Governor 1, and posted to HMP Lincoln from HMBI Feltham, as Deputy Governor.

I was to take over from the current Deputy Governor, whom I was told was at that time, "in Germany."

I assumed that he was on leave, as he was away for two weeks.

At the same time, the current Governor (Stan Mitchell) was also on leave – and Jim Blakey was sent to act as temporary Governor.

For those two weeks, fresh from working in Borstals for the previous 12 years, I wandered around this busy local prison, trying not to get under the feet of those who seemed to know what they were doing – and trying (but I think, failing) to look as though I also knew what I was doing.

In effect I was waiting for the Deputy Governor to return to duty, and hopefully, telling me what my job was.

At the end of those two weeks, the Deputy Governor returned, and introduced himself – "Roland Davies."

He was a little above average height, lean and seemingly fit, for a man who appeared not likely to see his fifties again. Straight in his bearing, and quick in his movements. He was quietly spoken and very self-assured.

During the next approximately two weeks, he attempted to acquaint me with the workings of the prison, and my role within it.

I also discovered that he had not been away on leave, but had been over to Spandau prison, to do what I was doing at Lincoln i.e find out what his job would be when he went there after leaving Lincoln

(continued...)

I was fascinated by this, as, being a “War Baby” I had an interest in the Second World War – and Rudolf Hess was an “intriguing figure,” to me.

Roland wasn't able to tell me much, either because he didn't know, or perhaps the Official Secrets Act (I told myself), so I didn't press him on the subject.

However, he was most helpful regarding my job.

As I stated earlier, my experience in the Prison Service had been almost exclusively to do with the Borstal side. Although I'd had quite a bit of experience in “acting up” to Deputy Governor, and also as governing Governor, but it had always been in a Borstal. Therefore a Local Prison was foreign ground for me.

It may seem strange but the thing which most worried me was to find that a major part of my job would be to check Earliest and Latest Dates of Release of prisoners. Although we had a quite efficient Discipline Office, mistakes could and were sometimes made. The Deputy Governor's role was to ensure that these things were accurate. As someone with no previous experience or training in these sometimes very complex calculations, I don't mind saying even after all these years, this scared the pants off me!

In one of a number of conversations I had with Roland, I made this confession.

He was sitting behind his desk (soon to be mine), smiled – and from underneath a board which he used to rest his writing materials on, he produced another similar sized board – which I had seen before when he was away – turned it over and showed me a piece of written work, containing numerous figures, and written words.

He said, “I was going to destroy this before I left, but if you want it, it's yours!”

He went on to show me how, with this board, he could calculate a prisoner's sentence with pinpoint accuracy – no matter what length of sentence it was. He had made the board himself, and he proceeded to show me how to use it.

For the next few days I sat by his side whilst he used this board to check EDR's and LDR's. He then gave it to me, and got me to do the records check for a few days, whilst he watched me.

What had initially been a mass of figures and letters, became a wonderful aid for me in calculating sentences.

For the duration of my tenure as Deputy Governor at Lincoln (7 years), I owe it to that amazing piece of work done by Roland Davies, and his very generous gift of it to me – which enabled me to calculate sentences with complete confidence. To the best of my knowledge, no mistakes in calculations during that time were ever made.

At the end of his time at Lincoln, we shook hands and wished each other success for the future, and I never saw him again. To hear that he passed on at the grand age of 92 tells me that others may well have been able to make his acquaintance along the way. I would have loved to have been a “fly on the wall” in his chats with Rudolf Hess, they must have been very interesting.

I am so sorry to have taken so long to tell you this “story,” but I am so pleased to be able to report on this brief episode where I was privileged to be able to make the acquaintance of this remarkable man.

Yours,
Grenvil Barnard



Front of Spandau Prison

Computer Corner.

It has been some time now since Mick Roebuck retired from the Committee and a Computer Corner has appeared in the Newsletter, so I thought that I would 'have a go' at producing one, and hopefully we can make it a regular feature if you find it useful. Your feedback would be most welcome and my email address is at the bottom of the item for you to contact me.

I think it is only proper that my first Computer Corner should be about staying safe on the internet. I say this not least because the age group into which most of our membership falls, myself included, is one of the most vulnerable when it comes to being the target for Internet Fraud.

The internet is mostly a good thing, but for the unwary it can be a dangerous place, particularly as it seems that a day does not go by without a new computer-based scam coming to light. However, if you are careful and take the appropriate precautions, then keeping safe on the internet need not be something that prevents you from making good use of what is a very useful tool.

In the following piece I will try to avoid using jargon as much as possible, but where I do I will try to provide an explanation of what it means. For example you will see that I use the term 'App.' or 'Apps.' This is short for application (s) and is effectively the same thing as a programme, however since the rise of i-Phones and Android phones the use of 'App' has become the common term for a programme, even on laptops and PCs.

Anti-Virus and Firewall.

The first stage in protecting yourself on the internet is to have an effective and up to date Anti-Virus and Firewall protection installed. Whilst there are many free programmes (Apps) available for this type of protection, most experts agree that this is the one area where it actually is far better to pay and get the very best level of protection. Many of the computer magazines, and 'Which' magazine, recommend KASPERSKY Internet Protection as a Best Buy. This is a suite of programmes that provide a range of protection, including the ability to switch to a Secure Browser when carrying out any financial transactions on the internet. This means that you are protected from your data being intercepted whilst carrying out financial transactions, ensuring that passwords, user names and bank details cannot be picked up by hackers as all the information is encoded for transmission.

A good anti-virus programme will provide regular free updates as new threats become apparent, (almost every day) and these can be set up to work automatically every time you turn on your computer. In this way your protection is always up-to-date.

Windows has a built in Firewall and this is good, but it does not provide the full range of protection that a specialist programme can provide: a good anti-virus programme will work with the Windows Firewall to provide added protection and you normally do not have to make any adjustments to your system as the anti-virus programme will take care of this. At the moment Kaspersky Internet Protection is available via Computer Active magazine's website for £19.90 for one computer-1-year cover or £34-99 for a 2-year three device package. Copy this link into your search and it will take you to the site <http://store.computeractive.co.uk/>

Malware Protection.

Malware is short for Malicious Software. This is the type of software that carries viruses that will seek to work their way into your system and to install all sorts of nasty items designed to either steal your information, to destroy data and most insidiously, to lock all your data away from you and only release it on payment of a fee. This particular variation is called 'Ransomware' (as your data is effectively held for ransom) but is in reality nothing more than extortion, is illegal and unfortunately is becoming increasingly common.

Malware can find its way onto your computer in a number of ways and not all of it is dangerous in itself, for example a lot of malware simply places unwanted adverts onto your screen and is an annoyance rather than a danger. The main ways it gets on to your computer is via downloaded content, including "Free Programmes". These will often include a range of unwanted extras that will install onto your computer taking up space and worst of all, most of these are automatically set to run every time you start Windows, thereby slowing down your computer, sometimes almost to a crawl.

The first level of protection against Malware is to check that anything you are looking to download is safe. You can do this by using a small application called Virus Total, available through this link; <https://www.virustotal.com/>. You do not even have to download this application, for as soon as you enter the site it offers you the opportunity to use the facility there and then. If you are seeking information on the safety of a site before you download anything from it then enter the url of the site, (URL stands for Uniform Resource Locator and is the bit that begins with http/) and Virus Total will check its' database to determine if any problems have been reported with the site. The app. will usually check with a number of databases and, in general, the lower the number of potential problems returned compared to the number of databases checked, then the safer the site is deemed to be. However, if the site you are checking is very new, the number of databases that may give a return to Virus Total may be quite low so always proceed with caution.

Secondly, if you do download a programme, check very carefully during the installation process that extras are not being installed at the same time, (this is sometimes referred to as "bloat ware" as your system becomes bloated with all the excess bits and pieces).

Most, but not all, apps. Will, at the very least, offer you the opportunity to opt out of the extras but you need to do this as the install progresses, as these extras are usually set to install by default unless you instruct otherwise. This usually involves checking, or un-checking boxes, but please be aware that some unscrupulous providers of apps. use a combination of check and un-check boxes to deliberately to confuse the user.

The reality is that nothing in life is actually free and the software provider is making money from the people who provide the extras, and/or the advertising, and therefore has a vested interest to get it onto your computer.

Avoid downloads from sites such as CNET and TUCOWS as they both have a poor reputation for loading programmes that contain lots of unwanted extras.

Cookies.

In themselves Cookies are not a bad thing but if allowed to build up they can use quite a lot of your hard drive space, and therefore slow your system down.

Cookies are small packages of computer code that are left by websites each time you visit them. They are designed to provide information to the site that allows it to remember you for the next time you log in.

As an example if you use the BBC website and are registered with it you may well have personalised the site to provide you with local news and weather. The fact that each time you log onto the site it knows what area you live in, and therefore what news and weather to show you, is due to Cookies.

However Cookies are also responsible for the fact that you may look at purchasing an item from a site, and even if you decide not to proceed, adverts for the very same item appears on a number of sites that you subsequently visit.

It therefore pays to use an App. to regularly clear your system of both Malware and Cookies. There are several available, but the best free one is called Ccleaner. If you download it from this site <https://www.piriform.com/ccleaner/download> then you should find it to be safe, and free from any nasty extras. In addition it is useful to have a dedicated Malware remover installed and one of the best free ones is called Malwarebytes and is available at <https://www.malwarebytes.com/mwb-download/>

These programmes between them, when used in conjunction with a good Anti-Virus/Firewall, will help keep you safe from the vast majority of the rogue elements which can be found lurking on the internet.

Email.

It is an unfortunate fact that the vast majority of Internet Fraud takes place via the medium of Email. Fraud such as this is usually reported under the general heading of Internet Scams and if you read the news, and sources such as Neighbourhood Watch websites, it is endemic throughout the worldwide web. It is also an unfortunate fact that the vast majority of Internet Scams are simply designed to part you from as much of your money as they can, as quickly as possible.

In order to avoid being caught out there are a number of rules, some of which are very simple and which, if followed, should help keep you safe. It is an indisputable fact, confirmed by every bank/building society, that they **NEVER** send emails to customers asking you for your log-in and security details. Therefore if you receive any such email it is certainly a scam (known as 'phishing') and if you respond with the details being requested, you can almost certainly kiss goodbye to any money you had in that account. Worse still, once they have scammed you in this way they will likely try to come back for more.

If you receive an email, supposedly from your bank, asking you to call them, on a number provided in the email, DO NOT call this number. Check on your bank statement or credit card statement and call the number given there to determine if there really is a problem. Also, if you receive a telephone call supposedly from your bank, do not give any of your security details over the phone until you are absolutely certain that it is your bank that you are speaking to. Some scammers will actively encourage you to call them back in order to prove that they are who they say they are. The trick here is that they are aware that having called you, if you then hang up but they do not, the line is still held open. In these cases, the recipient of the call hangs up on the original call, lifts the receiver and dials without listening for a dial tone, and unfortunately who is there on the other end? None other than Mr/Mrs Scammer. In such cases, either ensure that you have a dial tone before you dial, or use another phone. Remember as well not to call any number that the caller has given you, but use a genuine number provided by your bank on official documentation.

Everything above also applies to any Government Departments, Utility Companies and reputable companies that you deal with. They will never send you an email or call you asking you to provide security information to them. In addition, Microsoft, Google, Amazon and any other computer software companies, do not monitor computers (of which there are hundreds of millions in use) for problems and call users to offer help. If you are called by someone who claims that they have been monitoring your computer and can see that there is a problem, they are lying to you, because they cannot. This is a scam to either get you to part with money for a “software fix” or worse, to try to gain access to your computer in order to steal your data, in particular financial information including user names and passwords. If you receive such a call, even if you do have a problem with your computer, hang up.

Email Attachments.

The other area of danger from emails is that it is the most likely source of viruses usually transmitted by means of attachments. The types of malicious apps. and programmes that can be transmitted in this way are wide-ranging, but include ones that will embed themselves into your computer and log everything that you do for transmission back to the sender (called Trojans), key loggers that record all your keystrokes in the hope of picking up passwords, user names etc. Also included is the already mentioned 'Ransomware'. This works by encrypting all your files so that they are inaccessible, and then sending you a ransom note asking for money to provide the key to decrypt them. Payment is usually requested in BITCOINS, which is an Internet Currency and is untraceable. Average cost at the moment appears to be 1 bitcoin, which is currently worth about £240. Not everyone who has paid subsequently received their data back.

There are a number of steps to employ to ensure that you do not fall foul of a scam via an email attachment. Firstly, never open an email attachment if the email comes from a source that you do not know. Be wary even if it from a known source, as it is possible that someone you know has had their email system hacked and the scammer is now using it to send out malicious attachments. If you are using a good Anti-Virus then you should be able to check your emails and attachments using this. In addition you can use Virus Total to check an attachment to ensure that it is safe. If in doubt about an attachment then better safe than sorry: do not open it and delete the email. If it was from an unknown source then use your email system to mark the email as SPAM and in that way any further emails from that source will always be treated as SPAM and dealt with accordingly.

Backing Up.

Despite taking precautions it may still happen that you pick up a virus, and if you do it will almost inevitably either encrypt your data for ransom, hijack it for some illicit purpose or, simply destroy it. If you are infected in this way it may end up that you have to completely wipe your computer and start again. In this event you will need a good backup to ensure that you do not lose valuable data/information. There are several free backup apps. available, but this is one area where the app. provided in Windows is useful. You can use Windows Backup and Restore to make regular and scheduled backups of your important data so that in the event that something happens to damage or destroy your files you can recover the last backup. This may not restore the latest version of your files but this will depend on how often you back up your data. In order to protect yourself against an attack you should ensure that you keep a backup on a medium that is not normally connected to your computer, or can be removed. This could be on a CD/DVD, a USB drive, (sometimes called a Pendrive) or an external hard drive. In this way even if your computer is infected, your backup remains secure.

STAY SAFE.

Graham Mumby-Croft
graham.mumbycroft@gmail.com

"There is nothing in this world constant but inconstancy"

(Jonathan Swift 1667-1745)

The Prison Service is in a parlous state: heading for disaster. This is an attempt to make sense of why this is so. One has profound sympathy for our colleagues lost in this morass.

It was in a tortuous shopping arcade in Cardigan over the New Year that the idea for this article emerged. Snuggling, hidden away, was a second hand bookshop and, inside, beaming at me was the friendly face of William Whitelaw. So I bought The Whitelaw Memoirs and read them. Naturally, his time as Home Secretary interested me most. Then a pattern in my thinking emerged - that Mrs Thatcher, despite her own well-publicised punitive attitude towards prisons as an essential agent of severe punishment, appointed 5 consecutive Home Secretaries who were senior in the cabinet, sensible, mature, decent men, and 3 of them even outstanding. During this time there were troubles, certainly, and I contributed my mite - but there was consistency, commonsense and humanity. We knew where we stood, what was required and the appropriate response in both good and bad times.

The Service when I was retired in November 1991, I now realise with sad hindsight, was in a golden period from which we have slid into chaos. Consider: the Woolf Report, recently published, was sensible and achievable, a coherent outcome from the tragic Strangeways Riot. The Home Secretary, Kenneth Baker, was a forceful, reforming Minister. The recently-appointed Director, Joe Pilling, an able man with a sound grasp, who knew and was known, and trusted, by the Service. Not least, the prison population was steady at about 40,000. And then there emerged a new Prime Minister, John Major, who promised a more "kindly" rule. So he sacked the Home Secretary, his successor sacked Joe Pilling, to be replaced by "a highly successful television executive with a distinguished career behind him" called Derek Lewis. And the population rose. Then another new Home Secretary was appointed who assured us that "Prison Works", without defining what he meant by that infamous statement.

A pause is indicated for personal experience. The population of Grendon's tenure was interrupted by electrical faults that needed instant and prolonged repair. During 9 months of 1990 a "Diaspora" followed and, when we returned, it seemed to be a good idea to pull everything together by holding an "event". This became a two-day International Conference in August 1991. This month was chosen because we needed a major figure to lead and Professor John Gunn, a leading forensic psychiatrist who had looked after us, was available. Looking back, I now realize there was an element of 'chutzpah' in my actions, as I never sought permission to hold this event. In the Spring it was announced that Kenneth Baker was to be the Duty Minister during the holiday period so he was invited and accepted. Later when Joe Pilling was appointed I rang him and invited him. "Michael," he pleaded, "I would only have been in post for a week, far too soon."

"But that's just what this needs, you discussing your vision and further plans with us".

There was a pause, then another pause, then, "I accept". His contribution was fascinating and the prospect achievable: alas, in the event, aborted.

Present and participating were 140 inmates and as many from outside who paid £117. Included was the Director of Swedish prisons, the Director from the Netherlands Prison Medical Service, my successor Tim Newell and half-a-dozen prisoners from Blantyre House. Kenneth Baker's visit included a tour of the prison and meeting many inmates where he quizzed them about therapy: it was an effective examination. He then joined the Conference, made an impromptu speech and took and answered questions for another 40 minutes. It was a barn-storming, exhilarating performance.

As we were walking along the eternal passages he turned to me and asked, "Governor, why are there not other Grendons?" Not a superfluous question, for two days later, on his return to the Home office, he called up the Permanent Secretary and required another Grendon, but first all the necessary documents about us, happily provided. This was serious was an invitation, from Joe Pilling, for me to join a working party, despite retirement, designing the new Grendon. The following May 1992 I attended a speech by Joe to the 'New Bridge' organisation. Afterward I approached him and asked about this working party. A look of shame. "Sorry," he said "New Home Secretary, we lost out."

With Kenneth Clarke as Home Secretary the post of Director General was advertised and amidst all the dither of a well-advertised selection process, I managed to put my foot in it. Later in the year there was the A.G.M. of NACRO to which I was invited and the speaker was the Home Secretary himself. During questions, up I got and asked when a decision would be made, as my former colleagues were not finding this delay helpful. Kenneth Clarke wittered, Joe was there - which I didn't know - was hurt and embarrassed. I apologised. Unsurprisingly, I was never invited again.

You can follow the experience of Clarke's choice in his own account, 'Hidden Agendas'. A sad and honest book - the perceptive review in the P.S.J compares his experience with that of Alice in Wonderland. An extract reads:-

" Derek Lewis, fresh, eager and trusting from the world of competitive business emphasises how disorientated he feels in this world where words only mean what people say they mean and nothing may be assumed - least of all truth. The motivation of those he bumps into is directed by forces beyond his comprehension. Providing elliptical explanation and evasive support the Permanent Secretary appears and disappears like the Cheshire Cat. Like Alice, Derek wanders through a labyrinth where he scarcely affects what is happening - asking questions and receiving seemingly totally irrelevant or misleading answers." Significantly, the experiment, which was curtailed prematurely but not without financial compensation for Lewis, has not been repeated.

But in all this confusion there is HOPE!

The Perrie Lecture, held at the Prison Service Staff College in March 1993, was entitled, "The Future of the Prison Service" and was given by the rising, inspiring star, the Shadow Home Secretary, Tony Blair himself and in person.

I pluck out one significant sentence:-

"I think there are particular reasons in relation to the Prison Service why privatisation is not the right way we should go. I have to say that I am fundamentally opposed both in principle to the privatisation of the Prison Service and indeed in practise."

The paragraph develops this strongly.

Clear and forthright? Policy for the future? If only.

When Labour came into power, following a rise in the population as a consequence of Blair's published dicta, "Tough on Crime and Tough on the causes of crime" there was a significant increase in the prison building programme. *Every contract to build and organise was awarded to the private sector for profit.* Even when a second Grendon was proposed, the Home Office was forbidden making a bid. It was awarded to an American consortium who had no experience of this kind of regime but which had the 'nous' to select, as the person in-charge, a member of the Grendon professional staff.

Many years later, when Mr Blair was touring the country in his farewell performance, I listened to him at Bristol University. I heard him claim, as an *achievement* for Labour, the increase of the prison population, by then well in excess of 80K.

But, curiously, this is not the worst: that is the abolition of the Lord Chancellorship. On a whim, on the back of a used envelope, Blair changed 800 years of Britain's constitution. He did this to sack a Lord Chancellor but then discovered that this was impossible so ennobled and appointed a barrister whose sole qualification was that they had shared a flat many years ago. The principle of the work and status and stature of the Lord Chancellorship within our unwritten constitution has been abandoned, disastrously.

During Labour's time in power various Home Secretaries came and went, each abandoning the ideas of the predecessor, to the further confusion of our service, until the office itself was declared unfit for purpose. So we are now part of the Ministry of Justice. The Lord Chancellorship aspect is now restricted to a new minister being photographed – giggling - in the Chancellor's robes and then put away until the next time. One recipient, with no qualification or knowledge of the Law, when queried about this, stated it to be an advantage as he could keep an open mind on matters.

Has this reform 'worked'? Under the Prime Minister David Cameron we have suffered an erratic course, so he must take the blame.

My own experience of this occurred when invited to a Conference at Lambeth Palace on the subject of Restorative Justice. To my surprise the Minister of State for Justice, one Crispin Blunt, was an enthusiastic participant. I could scarcely believe this, so sidled up afterwards to test him out. He rang true, he certainly was passionate about it and of a mind to support its implementation. As I left I thought to myself, 'Well, you won't last long.' Tragically, I was right. Soon after, the full ministerial team were sacked and replaced by a punitive gang of minimalist micro-managers.

Well-run prisons with positive regimes were closed, experienced staff made redundant and Governors constrained in their sphere of action. Critical reports from Inspectors were ignored or rubbished. The last action before the election was to lock into inevitability the construction of the monstrous prison at Wrexham. After the election the successor team, amidst acclaim, reversed what it could of its' predecessors crass actions. Now the new Minister is desperately patching up the disaster, by throwing money at it. One example: having lost experienced staff to redundancy, the frantic recruitment of inexperienced staff does NOT replace them. It merely adds a further problem.

We are, alas, getting used to news of suicides, attacks on staff, riots and lock-downs. But, unless experienced, the strain on staff and inmates cannot be realised. I can still recall my experience, when, 2 months after becoming Governor of Chelmsford prison, a riot took place in August 1972, when I was on leave. A rapid return to a locked-down prison found a shocked staff who admitted that they had been frightened. It took nearly 3 years for them to regain confidence. To undergo this feeling the *whole time* must be intolerable.

Summary

The prime lesson has to be that consistency from the Government is absolutely vital: without this the Prison Service cannot achieve any coherence. It will cease to exist as an organisation and become a mere shambles.

The second is to reduce the prison population.

The next, if possible, is to restore the Lord Chancellorship to its' historical position.

The fourth is to return prisons to Government control and terminate privatisation.

Interestingly enough, Tony Blair in his lecture agrees with this last. Accountability to him then was clear, and to me also: as Governor, directly through the Director, to the Home Secretary and so to Parliament. For a privatised Director it is to the firm's C.E.O. and to the share holders. Profit is the judgement of success. This cannot be right and, indeed, as shown in the relevant programme on Panorama, is corrupting.

A final piece of information: if you require up-to-date, factual accurate information on this subject read Private Eye. This current issue No 1435, page 37, a paragraph on private prisons headed Repeat Offenders is certainly worth reading.

Michael Selby

Retired Prison Governors Association

A section of The Prison Governors Association

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(Draft) Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

Held at Newbold Revel

13th June 2016 at 1430hrs

1 Attendees: 18 in total

Committee: Graham Smith (Chairman), Ray London (Secretary), Graham Mumby-Croft (Treasurer), Jan Thompson, Alan Hall, Dave Taylor, Paul Laxton and Jenny Adams-Young.

Members: Les Sunshine, Chris Duffin, Flo Herbert, Dave Percival, Jim Hewitt, Mike Bolton, John Rumball, and John Dring,

Guests: Jacqueline Percival and Pat Hewitt.

2 Apologies:

Apologies notified to the Secretary were from: Harry Brett and Bob Duncan. Committee Members, plus Alan Bramley, Doug Moon, Frank Flynn, George Ridley, David Pike, John Berry, Peter Kitteridge John Marchant, Brenda Brookes, Margaret Brookes, Alan Dunnet, Carole Jones, Mick Poselay, Brian Thurlbon, Harold Prior, Bill Brister, Adelius McEvoy, Sian West and Mick Roebuck .

3 Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 16th June 2015

These had been distributed to attendees prior to the meeting and were agreed nem con as a true record.

Proposed by: John Rumball Seconded by: Chris Duffin.

4 Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

5 Treasurer's Report, including Benevolent Fund

Graham Mumby-Croft gave his Treasurers report.

He stated that the books had been audited for the 2015 financial year and financially the association remains solvent although income was down against the previous year, and expenditure was slightly up, meaning that there was a deficit of expenditure over income of £436.75p for the year. Graham highlighted the fact that this is the second year in a row that there has been a deficit, and although both were quite minor he was of the view that some structural changes needed to be put into place now to tackle the situation at an early stage rather than having to take more drastic measures at a later date. At the end of the 2015 financial year (31st December 2015) the association had a cash balance of £8780.57p in the two current accounts. In the same year expenditure was £6325.71p so the cash balance represents approximately 15-months of operational expenditure. However as Graham pointed out costs are rising, and income from subscriptions is not rising at the same rate and therefore without some remedial action being put into place the cash balance will reduce year on year.

Graham reiterated the fact that his main area of concern was the cost of providing diaries to those members who chose this membership option. As he has highlighted in the past these costs have risen to the extent that subscription rates did not cover the cost of purchase and postage and the association was losing money on every diary provided.

In order to rectify this proposals have been put forward to change subscription rates to ensure that those members who wished to continue to receive a diary can do so, and that subscription fully met the cost of this provision.

In addition he is seeking the authority to review subscription rates every 2-years as an automatic process.

Graham also reported that there had been no payments or grants from the **Benevolent Fund** in 2015 and the account has a current balance of £5553.36

Before the proposals for the future funding of the Association, which had been circulated, John Rumball proposed and Flo Herbert seconded. That a flat rate of £15 pa. and no PGA Diary.

This was defeated by a vote 3 in favour 12 against.

Committee Proposals:

a) The Committee proposes that the cost of annual membership the PGA is set at £13pa for all persons qualifying for full membership, but who do not choose the option of receiving a PGA Diary, and £20pa for those who choose the option of receiving a PGA Diary. New subscription rates to be effective from January 2017. Arrangements for widows / widowers of deceased members to remain unchanged.

This was proposed by the Committee, seconded by Chris Duffin and accepted by a 14 to 1 majority.

As this proposal was passed, accordingly, the second proposal for a Flat rate subscription of £13 and no Diary was not discussed.

The third proposal was that Membership subscriptions should be reviewed Bi-annually.

This was proposed by the Committee, seconded by Chris Duffin and passed unanimously.

The Treasurer will now start a process of contacting all members to advise them to amend their Standing Orders accordingly.

6 Membership Report

In Harry Brett's absence his report was read out. It noted that membership had fallen by 9 from 452 to 443.

There have been 17 new members, 16 deceased, 9 resigned and 1 for who we have no forwarding address.

7 Social Events

During the year Dave Taylor had made an - attempt to organise a social event in the North West. There had been only 5 replies, 3 of those from were from Committee members. Consequently no event took place.

8 Public Service Pensioners Council.

Alan Hall and Paul Laxton had attended the PSPC AGM. Paul reported that:

The meeting commenced at 1.00pm with the usual apologies for nonattendance.

The minutes of last year's AGM were agreed.

The Treasurer, Steve Edwards read his report stating that there was a net loss for the year of £2,828.52, reducing the balance to £12,170.92.

He then went on to say that some of the member organisations had not paid their subscriptions for the previous year. (We were one of those named and shamed) I said that our treasurer was aware of this and had not received the invoice. I feel this was down to a change in the secretarial position and I spoke with her after the meeting and I have now forwarded emails from her to Graham so hopefully this situation is now resolved. Also of note Steve Edwards suggested that if in the unlikely event the PSPC should be disbanded the monies accrued should be divided amongst the paid up members, (another reason to make sure we are up to date with subscriptions.) The AGM approved this unanimously as a constitutional amendment.

The General Secretary, Lisa Ray then gave her report,

Things of note were:-

- 1. A major manifesto promise has already been broken in the delay of the £72K Social Care cost cap. The Executive are continuing to be vigilant and to work hard to protect current and future pensioner interests.*
- 2. She spoke briefly re single tier pensions, saying their main concerns are the level of the pension payable, especially where a member has been opted out of the second state pension, and the exclusion of existing pensioners. The PSPC is therefore continuing to ask the Government to make a commitment to an early review.*
- 3. The PSPC election manifesto included the issue of suspension of dependents pensions on remarriage or cohabitation that still remain in some public sector schemes. Although improvements have been made, the no retrospection policy operated by previous Governments means that many are still subject to these provisions.*
- 4. Television Licences for the over 75s will be transferred to the BBC as part of their funding agreement. The PSPC will seek a meeting with the BBC Director of Strategy to put forward their concerns as there are indications that the BBC will cease to fund the concession after 2020.*
- 5. The PSPC have continued to support the case for uprating the state pensions of those British pensioners who have retired overseas to countries where there is no reciprocal agreement and therefore state pensions are frozen permanently at the amount payable at the time of emigration. PSPC met with PHA Media who represent the International Consortium of British Pensioners campaign on state pension indexation and have agreed to bring the campaign to update frozen pensions from their current level to the attention of politicians and to ask for constituent members support on future lobbying action.*

The meeting then moved on to the election of Officers. No Executive Committee posts were contested so all nominees were elected unopposed.

There then followed a short discussion about inviting a guest speaker to the next AGM.

9 Civil Service Pensioners Alliance

During the year since the last AGM there had been a survey to assess support from RPGA members for the RPGA affiliating to the CSPA. Although there was a small return (37 members), there was a majority of those respondees in favour of affiliation.

However, when the Committee reviewed the responses it was noted that most of those in favour of affiliation were already CSPA members. Subsequently, the RPGA Committee decided against affiliation as our members already have the choice of joining both associations.

The RPGA is still keen to work closely with the CSPA to achieve benefits for all our members and as a core group the CSPA represents the interests of all retired Civil Servants.

The CSPA were notified of the RPGA position. The CSPA are keen to maintain a link with the RPGA. The implications of this link will be explored jointly. In the New Year Graham Smith will report back to the RPGA Committee.

10 Newsletter

Paul Laxton reported that he has now produced his first two Editions of the Newsletter. They have been slimmer than previously, but content has been good.

More contributors are welcome.

11 Website

The website is still being administered by the PGA Office.

12 Election of Officers

As the Chairman was up for re-election, Graham Mumby-Croft took the Chair for this item.

Graham Smith, Ray London, Bob Duncan and Jan Thompson were proposed en masse by Mike Bolton, seconded by John Rumball and returned unanimously.

13 Format for the Reunion Days and Annual General Meetings

Ray London explained that numbers attending the Reunion had fallen considerably over the last few years, whilst the initiative of Speakers has been well received, it is, perhaps time to review the format and venue. Particularly, as it is now quite expensive to use Newbold Revel.

Chris Duffin asked if when considering venues we should look to suitable accommodation for those who want to stay the night before.

It was agreed that the Committee should review the subject.

14 Date for the next Annual General Meeting

No Date was set as it may restrict the Committees review.

Editor Note: The Committee have agreed that the next AGM will be held on Wednesday 14th June 2017.

Venue to be confirmed

From The Treasurer.



As many of you will be aware, as Treasurer, it has long been my particular “hobby horse” to get to grips with the twin issues of subscription rates and the cost to the Association of providing members with PGA diaries. These two things are inextricably linked as the cost of providing a diary is included in the subscription rate of those members who chose to receive one, and for the past couple of years we have been making a loss on every diary we send out.

At the 2016 Annual General Meeting the Committee decided to bite the bullet and put forward a resolution to revise the subscription rates, and to introduce a provision for allowing a review of subscription rates every 2 years. This resolution was passed

Implementation of the resolution began by publishing the details in the Summer Edition of the Newsletter, and soon after this I wrote to every member who was receiving a diary, asking them to inform me if they wished to continue to do so, or reduce their subscription and stop receiving a diary, and either way, to return to me a revised Standing Order Mandate. At the end of August I posted out 260 letters to those members and this included several members living overseas in places including Australia, New Zealand, Cyprus and Spain. As I write this item in the second week of January, I have yet to receive a response from at least 50 members to whom I sent a letter, including all but one of the overseas members.

The second stage of this process was to write to those members who were paying less than the new minimum of £13/year subscriptions, again enclosing a new Standing Order Mandate for return to me. The response to this mail shot was much more positive, and as an added bonus I got to correspond, and in some cases talk to people, that I had not spoken to for over 20 years; in one case I chatted on the phone to Ken Drummond who retired from Strangeways in 1988 and who I last met on the day of his retirement. It is good to know that there are some people who have, or are close to achieving the pinnacle of having drawn a pension for longer than they had to work for it.

The current position is that following this exercise we have reduced the number of diaries that we provide from 260 to 116 for the coming year, although this number is changing all the time as we are still being contacted by people who want to know why they have not received their diaries. This equates to a saving of £170/year just on postage costs. In addition we are now well on the way to achieving a much simpler subscriptions structure based on just two payment levels, £20/year including diary and £13/year without. The next stage of this process is to try to reach out to those members who have not responded to our correspondence in the hope that they will contact me to confirm, and if necessary to revise, their subscriptions to the new rate. Please remember, if you were already paying £13/year subscription, and not receiving a diary, then there is no change in your subscription rate and you really do have to “do nothing”.

When the Committee first discussed the proposal to revise the subscription rates there was a real concern that in contacting members and asking them to revise their subscriptions we would run the risk that many would decide that they no longer wished to continue their membership, or would feel that an increase in subscriptions was a

step too far and would resign. I am happy to say that of all those who have responded to our correspondence the rate of resignation has been very low indeed. In fact we have only lost 4 members during this exercise and only one of those was truly exercised by the increase in subscriptions.

As it is now the end of the financial year for the Association I am in the process of preparing the books to send to the auditor for checking. This is done because technically the RPGA is mandated by the PGA and our finances form part of their accounts: consequently each year I have to send our books to their accountant for checking. It is clear that the exercise to tackle the subscription issue will have an impact on this year's accounts, particularly postage costs, but I am hopeful that this will settle itself out in the coming year. The good news is that we remain solvent and have sufficient cash in hand to cover a year's running costs

You may recall that in an earlier "From The Treasurer" I shared with you my frustration at the service we receive from the Shared Service Centre, who now carry out all of the accounting roles for H.M. Prison Service. I am sorry to report that they have not improved and I am still awaiting an invoice for last year's AGM which was held at Newbold Revel. If their service is true to form I will likely receive an invoice toward the end of March, (some 9 months after the event) together with a snotty note telling me how disappointed they are that I have not paid an invoice which they had not previously sent me. With this in mind, you will not be surprised to learn that we are actively seeking an alternative venue for this year's AGM.

One of the accounts that we run as an association is the Benevolent Fund, which was created when the PGA passed over to the RPGA what was their Charity Fund. At the time it was felt that the RPGA would be in a better position to make use of these funds as our members were more likely to find themselves in a position where financial help might be required.

This fund has been the subject of much discussion at Committee level, particularly in regard to how we use it, and the criteria we apply for making grants. In addition, discussion has taken place about how we could create some income to this account as, with the exception of one small bequest last year, there has been no income to this account since it was originally passed over to us from the PGA.

This fund is not a large one: it currently stands at £5000, and we do not make a great deal of use of it. The last grant was paid eighteen months ago for £500 made to the wife of a member to assist with travel costs whilst he was an in-patient in care. However, the general opinion amongst the Committee is that it is useful to have such a fund available for use and it should be retained. As the fund is small it can only really be used to make one-off grants to assist with situations where no other source of help is available and the situation is temporary, or for a limited time period.

The fund is not a "Social Fund" to assist people who are simply suffering financial difficulties, but rather one to provide temporary support to people who find themselves in a position of needing assistance due to ill health or similar unforeseen circumstances. Each application is treated with the utmost confidence with only 3 people on the Committee being in possession of all the details.

I am therefore using this opportunity to draw your attention to the fund for two reasons: firstly to ensure that you know of its' existence, so that in the event that you, or another member who you may know, find yourself in a position of needing some short-term financial assistance, you are aware that the RPGA may be able to assist. The second reason is to ask you for ideas about how we can generate income for this fund in order to ensure that we have an availability of funds into the future. Using the example of the last grant we made, for £500, we could only provide 10 such grants before the funds were exhausted.

Please be aware that I am not looking to start a fund-raising exercise on this but rather sowing the seeds for ideas, including the thought that if you wanted to help other members in the future, you might consider making a bequest in your will to the RPGA Benevolent Fund.

Graham Mumby-Croft
Treasurer

ARE WE READY FOR THE FUTURE?

John J Ramwell 9th January 2017.

I attended a U3A presentation last week which was led by Dr. Alex McMinn. Check him out; he has quite the pedigree. He was telling us about how we need to sustain our well-being in later life. It was fascinating as well as informative and I take up some of the points he made and, with the help of 'th'internet' I'll share a few of my own.

We all have ambitions and hopes; without them life and the future would have little meaning. My Dad used to say that a man is as rich as the fewness of his wants. In other words, the more you want and cannot have the poorer you are. Expectations of plenty, or at least sufficient, are less likely to be met today than they were yesterday as we clamber down the ladder. We all know it is easier to climb up than scrabble down, even with gravity on side.

I used to visit local colleges to promote youth expeditions for organisations such as Raleigh International. I told my listeners that they needed four ingredients in their lives to succeed:- One: Motivation. Two: Ability and Three: Opportunity. The Fourth: I'll leave you guessing.

If your ambitions are set low and you achieve or even over-achieve then you are fortunate. You will feel fulfilled and have a satisfactory life. You will have self-worth and can anticipate a retirement after work of contentment; content that you have made a difference and meant something. You have been there, have the 'tee' shirt and deserve the fruits of your labours. You will have self worth, one of the important factors in mental health. Your role models may have been many and varied. You will have noticed those around you that have succeeded or are succeeding and they will have inspired you. Perfect.

Essentially, opportunity must come along with your ambitions and ability, otherwise your plans will come to nothing. After the Second World War we had plenty of opportunity as there was a dearth of manpower to rebuild the fractured world we had inherited thanks to Adolph. The point is that a trail of events gave the survivors of WW2 such a basket of opportunities that, given you were in the right place and at the right age, which most of us were, you were able to craft your plans for the future from a low base of being grateful that you had survived. All is relative.

Now move the clock forward today, 2017.

Young people are encouraged to have ambition. They are told by their parents and teachers that they have many advantages such as health, education, a good standard of living, justice. They are told they are inheriting a world of opportunity where their ambitions will, with a little hard work, all come to fruition. They are told that 'they are worth it.' Many have an inflated concept of their own abilities, believe that the world owes them and that the rewards will fall like over-ripe fruit into their hands. Parents, teachers, consumer advertising and society at large encourages this attitude and many kids of today have no understanding of what is entailed in surviving the future, of taking care of themselves, of fitting in and making the most of the world and the society they have been thrust into. Of course, as a species we are very resilient and soon discover just how demanding the big wide world can be and then 're-educate' ourselves to take care of it all.

But raising expectations among the young that are unlikely to be realised is damaging. They very soon find the differences between what they have been led to expect and reality are stark. So there is harm in being told how wonderful everything is going to be. Surely we don't want to hear just how depressing life can be. We want good news and this is fed to our youngsters and students in abundance rather than preparing them for the world they are really going to inherit: a world with far less opportunity than existed in the middle of the 20th Century.

And let's face it, opportunity is usually about money. Millennials are far poorer than their parents. Today's 30-somethings have about half as much wealth as those born in the early '70s had at the same age. Nor do most enjoy post-war perks such as fixed contracts, holiday pay and pensions. The chain of 'go to Uni., get a job, rent for a while, buy your own home and raise a family' has many broken links.

Post graduation, students leave Uni. with average debts of £44,000 against the backdrop of increasing personal and domestic debt of an average of £13,000 per. household. Nationally we are in hock to the tune of debt worth over 80% of our GDP. The pressure on Government to find sufficient funds for our health service, for our schools, our deteriorating infrastructure, for our prisons, etc. is unrelenting and unsustainable. A politician on the radio this morning said we should increase taxation to pay our way out of the current NHS 'crisis'.

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The average wage earner takes home 57.28% of his or her salary. Let's hear it for more tax; I don't think so! In 2005 the UK National Debt was less than £0.5 trillion. But then came the worldwide financial crisis of 2008 and subsequent recession. The National Debt increased rapidly and went over £1 trillion in 2011. At the end of the 2015-16 fiscal year, the National Debt is expected to go over £1.5 trillion. If you want to compare that to the UK's population, then the national debt attributable to every man, woman and child is in the region of £24,900 each.... yes, each! Even servicing this debt takes 8% of our taxes. Of course it can be argued that if we were not spending our children's and grandchildren's inheritance we would not be enjoying the life style we have, or most of us have. Tell me, where are the ethics and morality here?

I mentioned Dr. Alex McMinn at the head of this piece. When he talked to us recently he seemed to spend a lot of his time telling us about advancing technology and how we, society and Government, should be prepared for the changes that are on our doorstep. Some changes for the better and some for the worse; much depending on where you're coming from and going to. He spoke at length about driverless cars. On reflection it makes sense, as this technology is an excellent example of how there will be winners and losers, as well as just how rapidly the changes are coming in. Losers will be those who rely on driving for a living, of whom there are many. Winners will be the elderly who are unable to drive yet will be able to call up a vehicle and punch in a code and off they go. Only recently we were told that driverless cars were twenty years away. Wrong: they are with us now and in experimental use on our roads, so the pace of life and the associated technology is opening up opportunities for some, whilst closing them down for others.

It all boils down to opportunity and here is the nub of the problem for young people. It is all very well believing we will become the stars of the future; that we will win the 'X Factor' and that all we need is a good education and the world is ready for cracking open. Of course there will always be winners and losers: the ratio of one to the other has been favourable for the last few decades but is now changing. Unlike change in the longer term, history, which apart from such huge events as the invasion of the Normans and the Reformation, has changed slowly over time and been fairly easy to digest. Now change is occurring so quickly it is impossible for many to keep up.

But change alone can usually be assimilated; it is the missing opportunities that matter. Takehousing: to get a meaningful family life young people need a home and the current housing crisis is not going to fade in the medium term. Here is an extract from my Sunday paper published yesterday: 8/1/16:-

Youths' fears for future at new high

Almost half of young people doubt their chances of getting a stable job or buying a house.

Young people are feeling gloomier and more concerned about the future than at any point in the past eight years, according to a report by the Prince's Trust. The Trust's Youth Index, which will be released tomorrow, reports that one in four youngsters between the ages of 16 and 25 do not feel in control of their lives and almost half feel that traditional goals such as getting a stable job or buying a house are unrealistic. The annual index has found that living costs, rising house prices and worsening job prospects contributed to the lowest happiness levels for the nation's Millennials since it launched in 2009. The Trust's report, based on a survey of more than 2,000 youngsters in partnership with YouGov, also reported low levels of self-confidence. It says that 45% feel stressed about body image and 37% feel stressed about how to cope at work and school.

Professor Louise Arseneault, mental health leadership fellow at King's College London, said the findings were a sign of a "big shift" in the attitude of younger generations.

"What is worrying is that these things are found in this younger group of people," she said. "Now the younger generation, instead of having dreams of making things different, actually feel very gloomy about the future."

The index will also report that 58% of young people say recent political events make them feel anxious about their future. Anna Gillies, 20, a student at Sheffield University, said last year's political events, such as the Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump in America, had left her and many of her peers feeling the future was "uncertain". "I think the overall consensus among young people is a sense of powerlessness," she said. "It leaves me feeling uninspired about the prospects of not only the country, but also my own personal future." The phrase 'the world is your oyster' seems far from relevant in today's graduate climate." The findings will raise eyebrows among those who have nicknamed Millennials "the snowflake generation" and say young people have never had it so good.

Arseneault said it was not a case of life being more difficult now but there being "less and less stability and security" today. Dame Martina Milburn, Chief Executive of the Trust, said: "This report paints a deeply concerning picture of a generation who feel their ability to shape their own future is slipping away."

The report by the ResPublica Think Tank tells us how 1.2 million people are languishing on housing waiting lists in England, while more than 6 million face tenure insecurity and no prospect of ever buying their own home.

Technology is bringing us a world that is unrecognisable from one generation to another. If my parents returned to Earth today they would only just comprehend the current world. Artificial intelligence, robots, computers and computerisation of our lives, both personal and professional, have brought many assets but also leaves us vulnerable, stressed and unable to cope. Advances in science, particularly medical science, are becoming quite profound. Soon we will be able to consult with a computer module with artificial intelligence, and it will use a combination of visual and voice recognition to more accurately diagnose our condition, and then prescribe targeted treatment that will be more accurate and reliable than the average GP. No more doctor shortages. Artificial Intelligence will be used to construct machines and computers that will go on to produce even more powerful machines and computers so that they may well take over; a concern often voiced by Stephen Hawking. These machines and computers will be unrecognisable and will likely have more relevant titles.

Check this out: <http://cci.mit.edu/publications/CCIwp2009-01.pdf>

So the future is going to lack so many opportunities we have taken for granted. The issue of climate change and pollution is going to place massive restrictions on how we behave. David Attenborough is often voicing his concern about the growing population of the world. In demographics, the world population, the total number of humans currently living as of August 2016, was estimated at 7.4 billion. The United Nations estimates it will further increase to 11.2 billion in the year 2100. The median age of the world's population was estimated to be 30.1 years in 2016, with the male median age estimated to be 29.4 years and female, 30.9 years. Some analysts have questioned the sustainability of further world population growth, highlighting the growing pressures on the environment, global food supplies, and energy resources. Estimates on the total number of humans who have ever lived range in the order of 106 to 108 billion.

The aged population is currently at its highest level in human history The UN predicts the rate of population ageing in the 21st. century will exceed that of the previous century. The number of people aged 60 years and over has tripled since 1950, reaching 600 million in 2000 and surpassing 700 million in 2006. It is projected that the combined senior and geriatric population will reach 2.1 billion by 2050. Countries vary significantly in terms of the degree and pace of ageing, and the UN expects populations that began ageing later will have less time to adapt to its implications.

Population ageing arises from two (possibly related) demographic effects: increasing longevity and declining fertility. An increase in longevity raises the average age of the population by increasing the numbers of surviving older people. A decline in fertility reduces the number of babies, and as the effect continues, the numbers of younger people in general also reduce. Of these two forces, it is declining fertility that is the largest contributor to population ageing in the world today. More specifically, it is the large decline in the overall fertility rate over the last half century that is primarily responsible for the population ageing in the world's most developed countries. Because many developing countries are going through faster fertility transitions, they will experience even faster population ageing than the currently developed countries in the future.

As yet we don't know whether our older populations are living the extra years of life in good or poor health. A "compression of morbidity" would imply reduced disability in old age, whereas an expansion would see an increase in poor health with increased longevity. Another option has been posed for a situation of "dynamic equilibrium". This is crucial information for governments if the limits of lifespan continue to increase indefinitely, as some researchers believe it will.

Research shows that many people are now fully aware of the ageing of the world's population and the implications which this will have on their lives and the lives of their children and grandchildren. Many believe, or at least hope, that immigration may be used as a viable means for countering population ageing, but we are discovering that this will not be the case. As fertility sinks further below replacement level, increasingly higher levels of annual net migration will be required to maintain a target of even zero population growth. In summary (at last!) we have explored the issue of modern living, technology and demographics as forces limiting opportunity for the younger and following generations. We should look at the human costs with a greater awareness. Modern living with its' immediate demands for immediate responses, demands levels of stress and energy that sap the will to live in many at worst, or commitothers to simply give up. Suicide rates among the young, particularly young males, have nearly tripled between the 1960s and 1980s. For example, in Australia suicide is second only to motor vehicle accidents as it leading cause of death for people aged 15–25 and according to the National Institute for Mental Health, suicide is the third leading cause of death among teens in the United States. It is time to take mental health more seriously and I am encouraged to note that our Prime Minister agrees, when she spoke to the Nation yesterday. To do so will cost money, but there is none, and so - if we agree that money and opportunity are synonymous - well, don't hold your breath.

And the Fourth ingredient (as mentioned on the first page, third paragraph) the young people will require as they proceed through lifeLuck. Without Lady Luck on side the other factors count for little. This is my take on it anyway.

I would enjoy and appreciate any feedback.

jjramwell@gmail.com will find me

REFLECTIONS ON THE 2016 PGA CONFERENCE

For the second successive year PGA conference was held at the Radisson Bleu Hotel close to East Midlands Airport. It was no surprise that the NEC chose to return here after the much-improved attendance in 2015 when compared to Buxton. Conference also continued with the new two-day format, which, as I reported last year, actually only results in a reduction of 90 minutes of business time. Again guest speakers were kept to the minimum: the Prisons Minister, the Head of NOMS, and the spokesperson for the Conference charity, this year Guide Dogs for the Blind. Socially the change of format has led to the loss of Duncan Scales' famous quiz and the opportunity for people to visit local pubs, but with only one night away, that only leaves time for the Conference dinner as a social event. Again the dress code was smart casual but, unlike last year, there was no loyal toast and no guest speaker. Speaking personally, I do regret the absence of an after-dinner speech.

Attendance was significantly lower this year, but without falling back to Buxton levels. My delegate list was not entirely accurate but, as close as I can tell, the number of delegates including Scotland, Northern Ireland and HQ branches was in the mid-60s, and total attendance including NEC, Distinguished Life Members, Chair, Standing Orders and Conference scribe was somewhere approaching 90 at its' maximum. However, given the problems the Service is facing and the uncertainties about the future direction of Government policy, you would feel that more branches should have been represented, and there were some big players missing.

I have devoted the Editorial to the state of the nation's prisons so will not dwell further on the debates on the subjects of safety and decency, or more accurately the lack of it. Forty-five resolutions were on the agenda for debate, around a third less than last year, but in terms of manageability within the time frame it made life easier for the Conference Chair, which this year was Phil Taylor OBE. Those of you who can recall last year's Conference Report will remember that the working hours and the general health and well-being of governors was a dominant theme. It was quite clear that Conference still felt that the job was impossible without a commitment to working hours which go unpaid. Resolutions were debated and carried which called for the Government to reinstate Operational Manager posts lost during the benchmarking exercise, and also for the first time that I can remember, overtime payments. Conference also expressed its concerns that the proposed reduction of administrative staffing in HQ by 50% would only result in work being pushed down to establishments and finding its' way on the desks of hard-pressed Governor grades. You would be more likely to see flying pigs than a commensurate 50% reduction in bureaucratic requirements.

The acronyms may change but the gripes about pay, grading, promotion and job evaluation will be eerily familiar. The Job Evaluation Scheme (JES) is as much a running sore as when I was on the NEC. The latest anomaly revealed to delegates was the grading of Regional Health and Safety advisors in the same pay band as In-Charge Governors of our largest and most complex prisons. Those of you who were regular conference delegates will recall Paddy Scriven's annual diatribe regarding sexually-transmitted promotions. I have no doubt that it still goes on and it will not be stamped out until such a time as the Siamese twins of patronage and promotion are separated. However it came as a shock to see a resolution on the agenda calling on the NEC to make it clear that serving prisoners should have no role to play in the selection of Operational Managers.

Clearly some politically correct metropolitan elite clown has floated this proposal. The speaker was very careful not to denigrate prisoners but confined himself to saying that as we would never allow the POA a say in choosing the Governor, it would be illogical to grant prisoners a role in the selection process: one for Richard Littlejohn's column in the Daily Mail, I think.

Conference was also concerned with the future, in particular the Government's reform agenda which dangles the tantalising carrot of greater autonomy for in-charge Governors. This is where the disadvantage of being retired when writing this piece becomes most apparent, as it is impossible to be aware of the minutiae of discussions.

Certainly, from what I can gather, the PGA was energised by Michael Gove's ambitious plans for reform and the prospect of liberation from the stifling hand of Area or Regional Offices. Given Mr Gove's policy of fragmenting the Education Service by promoting the growth of academies separate from Local Authority control (and more pertinently academy chains which equate to de facto privatisation) my first thought is "beware of what you wish for." It remains to be seen if Mr Gove's successor, Elizabeth Truss, is a visionary or a pragmatist. Delegates expressed concern that a reform model that borrowed from Education whereby pay and conditions were devolved to academy Executive Heads would be replicated in the prison system. Although conference supported reform that gives greater autonomy to in-charge Governors, conference was equally clear that PGA members must remain under the Civil Service umbrella and opposed to any notion of local pay bargaining.

Finally, returning briefly to the theme of my Editorial, I wrote this piece shortly after a major prison riot at HMP Lewes, shamefully downplayed again by NOMS. Given that those who do not learn from historical errors are doomed to repeat them, the public inquiry called for by the NEC is only likely to be convened if there is a repeat of the 1990 Strangeways riot. Let us hope that next year's Conference does not follow in the wake of what in 1990 Brendan O'Friel called an "Explosion of evil." The government needs to act now if it is to be prevented.

PAUL LAXTON

Santa Really Does Exist – He is Alive & Well and Lives in Lapland

At 6.45 pm local time on Christmas Night 2016, deep within the Arctic Circle in the small Lapland town of Luosto, I found myself looking up at a cloudless sky. There were more stars than I had ever seen in my life, millions of them; I could see satellites orbiting the earth, shooting stars making their way across the vast expanse, but best of all I watched the ultimate performance that is the Aurora Borealis, as they performed their captivating dance across the night sky, mesmerising me with their graceful swaying and sashaying in green and pink. How lucky was I on this special of special days to see the Northern Lights in such spectacular action?

I must tell you that I was dressed in a red suit, topped off with a red hat with white fur trimmings and a white fur bobble on the end of it. My three-quarter length coat had a white fur band down the centre where it closed, all held together with a broad black belt with an enormous buckle. The white fur on my boots gleamed in the moonlight as I stroked my long white beard, surveying this magnificent scene. There was no light pollution, or very little, which gave the view an aura of wonderment. Of course I wasn't on my own. I had my special elves surrounding me; Noisy Nod with his big bell, Wendy Wood in her beautiful brown costume, Speedy Sam whose diminutive form belied his pace across the snow, Tricky Dicky, who for once was lost for words and dumbfounded at this magnificent sight, and last but not least the beautiful Snowy-Bowie with her wonderful blue costume and matching tall hat. There was also some of my helper elves dressed in their red and green outfits that Mrs. Claus makes for them.

I was particularly tired as I had been all round the world last evening delivering presents to every deserving child in the world – which was every single child. The excess of mince pies, puddings and milk, not to mention the thousands of glasses of sherry and millions of tots of whisky (or whiskey in Ireland) may have contributed to my tiredness but a sight such as I was now stood before was overwhelming.

It is at this point if you are an adult reading this to your children or grandchildren then I must ask you to pause and silently read on to yourselves. I am about to recount my adventures as a mere human filling in for the Big Man in Lapland and I do not want children to know that Santa is not real. As one child asked me, "Are you the real Santa?" I replied, "If you believe with all your heart that Santa is real then yes, I am Santa Claus, but I can only be real if you really believe." And the child in me still believes that.

THE BEGINNING

I had applied for the job of Santa Claus in Lapland my agent sent me in June. Having sent off a photograph to let them know I had all the physical attributes necessary for the job, I waited with anticipation. As June morphed into July and then August brought about the penultimate month of the cricket season, I heard nothing from my agent and therefore forgot all about it. Imagine my surprise when on 24 October I received a phone call from a lady at Canterbury Travel to ask if I was still interested. It is very difficult when you apply for more than a dozen jobs a month to instantly recall the details of a job you applied for some four months previously. My powers of ad-lib have not diminished since negotiating with the POA and I therefore managed to stall the caller until eventually I found my application stored on my computer. The details I had stored were very sketchy and eventually I had to ask her to 'expand' on the job offer. So basically it was from 20 November to 29 December being Santa Claus in Lapland and could I please reply by that evening as they had to book the flight in my name. Her details were as sketchy as mine so I asked her to e-mail more details and promised to ring her back before 5 that evening. This conversation with She Who Must Be Obeyed [SWHOMBO] was going to be a difficult one; the sticking point being the fact that I would be away from home at Christmas. It was not only a sticking point for her; it would be a sticking point for me as well. In nearly 50 years of marriage I have never been away from home on Christmas Day; yes, we have all worked on Christmas Day and/or Boxing Day but not being home at all is different altogether. But we are as a couple nothing if not resolute. In the end the clincher was that we would go to sunnier climes for 10 days in February with the proceeds. I proceeded to fill in the contract details and make a list of what I would need. The average temperature, I researched, would vary between -5 and -40 degrees Centigrade so thermals would be necessary as well as proper outer clothing. These take up a lot of luggage space and therefore I decided that if I wore them to travel in then I could pack the other necessities. I was going to regret that decision.

THE JOURNEY

Armed with my e-tickets, a copy of the contract in my hand luggage and wearing five layers of top clothing I arrived at Manchester Airport at 8 am on 20th November for a 10.15 flight to Helsinki. From there I would catch a flight to Rovinemi Airport, which lies just on the Arctic Circle, and then a 150 kilometre coach ride North to Luosto.

The temperature was fairly mild for the time of year in Manchester; I was wearing a thermal vest, thermal underwear, thermal trousers, thermal socks, fur lined snow boots, a long sleeved polo shirt over the thermal vest, then a pullover, a gilet and a thick arctic coat. I divested at least three layers whilst going through Security, put them on again to walk a few yards, then took them off whilst waiting for the gate to be announced, and then had to put them all on again to march to the gate, which was probably the furthest from the terminal. I was also carrying hand luggage. When I got on the plane there was not enough room in the overhead storage for the two coats as well as my hand luggage so I sat with them on my knee. Lapland is two hours ahead of G.B. and the connecting flight at Helsinki was timed for 4 pm. local time. If I tell you that airport staff chose to travel around Helsinki Airport on motorised scooters, then you will have some idea of how big the place is. Of course the one thing Finland has is an excess of its space, so to make an airport with lots of room is sensible. I had to travel to Gate 23 to catch my connecting flight and I swear that it was almost a mile as it took me almost 17 minutes to reach it.

It was then that the Heathrow, Gatwick and Manchester flights dovetailed into the connecting flight and there was a plethora of what I can only call 'artistes'. The flight to Rovinemi was about two hours and travelled directly North. From there a coach was boarded and I was introduced to the 'other' Santa who had arrived from Heathrow. Arriving in Luosto we were allocated cabins – we all stayed in log cabins – and I found out that I would be sharing a room with the Chef. Sharing a room!! Nobody had mentioned this??!! I introduced myself to Ashley Le Marachel (oh no – not a French Chef I thought – but he was from Southampton) and unpacked. By this time it was nearly 9 pm and we were called to a meeting in the communal lounge. We were told what the rules were and fed and told we needed to be in this same lounge at 8.30 the following morning ready for an outdoor day. The bed was comfortable and having turned in about midnight (the Chef had arrived the week before) I slept really well. All rooms were en suite and I was soon to find out that there were four rooms in this cabin with very good facilities, and these were occupied by the boss, Tara, me and the Chef, the other Santa plus the boss's right hand man and the two Mrs. Clauses.

TRAINING

The first day we were going to experience what the punters, sorry, guests, would experience. The quest was called “The Search for Santa”, and that is how Canterbury Travel advertised their breaks. Typically the sojourns were three, four or five days in length and I will take you through what a three day excursion consisted of. I was really impressed with the professionalism of the tour and how everything fitted into the magical surroundings. Where else would you search for Santa but in Lapland? If you were to paint a picture postcard of Christmas to put on a greetings card then you just had to look around at the trees with frost and snow on to capture that feeling of Christmas.

At this point I must admit that I have always been a bit Bah! Humbug about Christmas, mainly because it has become so commercialised and turned into a stressful, worrying event rather than something that celebrated the birth of Jesus. The significance of the religious aspect seems to have disappeared. I felt Christmas began when the shops shut on Christmas Eve, and everybody settled into a relaxed mode, bar worrying about cooking the dinner and whether the turkey would defrost in time and was there enough sprouts, and where were the emergency chairs in the shed, that sort of thing. But being here, where every day reminded me of a beautiful setting with snow on the ground, and a great roaring log fire indoors, brought back the magic of Christmas. Of course the only thing missing now was my family, and I would miss them terribly when the festive day arrived, but nevertheless I was bathed in the Glory and glow of Christmas as the days ticked by.

So, the first morning we all assembled on the coach, which took us to the Reindeer Farm to meet Asti, who owned and managed the place. He gave us a talk on the do’s and don’ts about reindeer. At this point two things stuck in my mind about Lapland. The first was that the temperature was -18 degrees, but we were clad in thermals and not cold at all. The air is dry, not humid like at home, and therefore the atmosphere and the snow is dry; not great for snowballs but there is plenty of it. And when you walked the snow crunched under your feet. After our talk indoors with Asti we went over to the field where the reindeer were, ostensibly to feed them their food which was in pellet form. The second thing that came to mind was that Reindeer are not as big as I had imagined. Adults stand about 40 inches tall, their antlers of course reach up to give them a stature of over 6 feet (they fall off in the summer and re-grow every year). So, -18 degrees is not as cold as I thought it would be and reindeer aren’t as big as I thought they would be.

After feeding the reindeer we went on a reindeer caravan ride through the forest. Each reindeer has a sleigh attached to them which carried two persons, although in my case Asti said one would be enough for my reindeer to pull. They travel at walking pace whilst you look around and you are travelling in single file one behind the other. It really was magical and the beauty of being in a snow laden forest being pulled by a reindeer was breathtaking. This was the first caravan of the season and one reindeer decided that he didn’t like the harness he was in. There were two or three official Reindeer guides around and one quickly appeared when this particular reindeer started behaving badly. He soon had the harness readjusted, which is what had caused the reindeer to jump about – he was uncomfortable - and we continued on our magical ride through the forest. It was at this point that I regretted leaving my phone in my room. Such beautiful surroundings and an experience such as this deserved to be captured on film, but eventually I had to rely on the guy in front who had accidentally taken a picture of me behind him to capture the scene.

After eating lunch on the coach, which I was to learn was an everyday diet of either a cheese, tuna or ham sandwich on white bread accompanied by either a Twix chocolate bar or a chunky Kit Kat (and the one thing the Finns do not excel at is making bread), we headed for the Husky farm. Two charming Finnish ladies gave us a talk in perfect English about how Huskies adapt themselves to the cold winters here and how their coat keeps them warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Then came the chance to ‘husky mush’. I was given the opportunity to stand on the back of the sled, pulled by Huskies, and travel through the forest for about 5 kilometres. Wow, what an experience! I soon adapted to it; I had done a lot of waterskiing as a youth and adopted the same bent and loose legged approach and it turned out to be magical. And the huskies pulled the sled faster than I thought they would travel; there were eight in each harness and they certainly travelled apace. The brake was a Heath Robinson affair whereby you put your foot on a central bar connecting the sled runners on which you were stood, which dug into the snow and slowed down the dogs. The energy of these animals is inexhaustible and at times even though my full weight, which is considerable, was employed on the brake, they were still trying their level best to run through the forest

FINDING SANTA

It may not surprise you to know that Santa Claus is married (to Mrs. Claus of course) and lives deep in the Arctic Forest. What may be less well known is that he lives in a modern wooden detached home, in which all mod cons are to be found. As for his age well he is older than the trees but not quite as old as the mountains but retains this youthful allure, as indeed does Mrs. Claus. Of course where exactly he lives is a secret known only to elves and helpers, and the only way to reach his house is on a skidoo pulling a sleigh, not dissimilar to the one Santa uses on Christmas Eve, but of course not as magical and not pulled by the reindeer. Do you know the names of all Santa's Reindeer? - all nine of them? Well done; you are reciting them now in your head aren't you?

When the guests arrive in late afternoon on the first day, and I shall describe a typical three-day tour for finding Santa, they are picked up from Rovinemi Airport and transported to Luosto. Just before they arrive in Luosto either Speedy Sam or Snowy-Bowie, or sometimes Tricky-Dicky, Wendy Wood or Noisy Nod will greet them a mile out of town by dancing in the middle of the road as the coach's headlight silhouettes them on the road. The Coach Guide informs the guests that one of Santa's special elves is here to greet them and the elf gets on the coach and greets the guests by sprinkling them with Mrs. Claus's Magic Stardust, which ensures that the magic of their trip lasts them through; it may also help in the search for Santa too! On arrival they are allocated their log cabins or hotel rooms dependent upon where they have chosen to stay and they entertain themselves for the rest of the evening. The second day is spent on the huskies and reindeer as I have described and then a party atmosphere prevails where the special elves join the guests at dinner time whilst the children are being entertained by a professional entertainer.

On the last morning they visit the Elf House and are told that they need to clean up all the wood shavings at Wendy Wood's house and are taken by skidoo and sleigh up to where they think Wendy Wood's house is. All the while they have been given clues to look for in the search for Santa – the White Bear, the Golden Telescope, the Globe – and so their interest is aroused when they arrive at this open plan house – one family at a time – and see a White Bear in the very room downstairs into which they have been shown. A bell rings upstairs and the family is summoned up to find Mrs. Claus going about her daily duties sewing the elf costumes and making cookies for Santa. Mrs. Claus asks the children if they have seen Santa – to which they all reply in chorus (if there is more than one child in the family of course) – NO!! She goes on to tell the family that if they see Santa they must tell him to come home as he hasn't yet had his Breakfast/lunch. All the while she is tidying away Santa's slippers which he has just left lying about for everybody to trip over – typical man – and points out to the children the Golden Telescope with which Santa keeps an eye on all his reindeer.

They are excited to discover the last of the clues and the atmosphere becomes one of giddy excitement for both adults and children alike. Of course they still think they are there to clean up so when Mrs. Claus asks them to say the magic words together, imagine their surprise when a bookcase magically slides open to reveal a hidden staircase with an elf waiting to greet them and guide them down. They then find themselves in an ante room full of presents and two elves ask them to knock on this special door behind which the sawdust they need to collect is hidden. The children knock on the door as instructed and when the door opens there is the Big Man himself, sat on a rocking settee. And what is more magical is that he is reading their letter that they wrote to Santa before they left home! At this point some of the parents collapse in tears as they have been searching for Santa longer than their children! The family spend about 3-4 minutes with Santa and each child receives a present, which the family have brought with them and secretly handed in the night before. They are then invited to be told a special secret by a special elf through another door, and of course that secret is that they cannot possibly tell anyone that they have found Santa – especially those who are still searching.

It really is magical, and just writing about it now brings a tear to my eye. Christmas is a religious festival, but the magic of Christmas is solely for children, although of course it is a time for families, but children are the main focus. I can't tell you the number of times I had to bite my lip to stop me from shedding a tear seeing the wonderment in children's faces. And the tears were not confined to children; in fact more adults shed tears than children. One father gave me a tearful hug and said, "Thank you Santa. It's taken me 40 years to find you but at last I have found you and you are real. Thank you so much." We had a moment together, and with tears in his eyes he waved me goodbye as he went out of the door. That moment alone for me made what I was doing totally worthwhile.

MEMORIES

If you wanted to take a photograph for the front of your favourite Christmas card, then Lapland would be the place to do it. Everywhere you are surrounded by snow and frost on the trees, and believe me there are plenty of trees. Forestry accounts for 28% of the labour market in Finland and there are also 188,000 lakes so there is no shortage of fresh water, although most of the freshwater lakes are frozen over in winter

If you wanted to take a photograph for the front of your favourite Christmas card, then Lapland would be the place to do it. Everywhere you are surrounded by snow and frost on the trees, and believe me there are plenty of trees. Forestry accounts for 28% of the labour market in Finland and there are also 188,000 lakes so there is no shortage of fresh water, although most of the freshwater lakes are frozen over in winter.

It surprised me how people drive cars, coaches and lorries when the roads are thick with snow. This scenario at home would have the nation ground to a halt and accusations of Councils not doing their job would make headlines. But in Lapland people drive normally, well a bit slower, on studded tyres and there are rarely any mishaps. Having said that one of our coaches slipped into a roadside ditch and nearly ruined the schedule for those on board but to my knowledge that was the only mishap. As with living in different and differing climates, you get used to waking up to the same thing every day. In the climate of Australia, Queensland in particular, you wake up to the heat of the sun every day, in the Arctic circle you wake up to snow every day from October to April. And there is not a lot of daylight in the winter either. On the day of the winter solstice the sun rose at 12.01 and set at 13.14 – one hour and 13 minutes of daylight, but then again this is something that you get used to. I'm not saying I would enjoy living in that climate but for the relatively short time I was there I accepted it and appreciated it for what it was.

There were about 60 people working in resort; from the boss down to car and skidoo mechanics, but the majority were hired as elves. We lived in log cabins and the average age of the 'elves' and others was mid-twenties. It is a long time since I have lived and worked in the proximity of so many young people – I thankfully avoided working in Borstals or Young Offender Institution - and when I did I was young myself. To be a couple of years away from being a septuagenarian and surrounding yourself with a younger age group does take some adjustment. The one thing I do not miss now I am home is the constant playing of 'pop' music on mobile devices. And how tired do they get? It seemed as if at every opportunity they grabbed somewhere to lay their head and sleep – the floor, someone's lap, shoulder – but when they were awake they were energetic Duracell bunnies. I found both states equally annoying at first but realised if I was to get anything out of this trip then a quick adjustment was called for.

The vast majority of those involved in being elves were all taken from the entertainment industry; in fact some of them had worked together previously at place like Haven, Butlins and Pontins, or worked abroad as travel guides with travel firms. Some had even worked in Lapland last year and in one case for the last three years. Now it will come as no surprise to tell you that the entertainment industry is over represented by gay men and women. Not being stereotypical but usually with gay men there is certain 'campness' but not always. But this was the case with this particular group and I have never seen so many gay men assembled in one place at anytime; not that it presented a problem. One elf always climbed the magic staircase in Santa's house to greet the guests on the magic staircase with a feather in his hand. As soon as the door opened he pointed his feather at the first adult and said, "Touch the end of my feather and I'll tell you your name." Now we knew their name because we had the flight manifest with passport details removed and their name was as per their passport. The person at whom the feather was pointed touched the end of the feather and 'Mischief', this particular elf would tell them their name. It was a wonderful bit of comedy and surprise and the kids loved it. But these people are entertainers through and through and if there was a particularly attractive woman in the group Mischief would say the usual line, to which the guest would touch the end of the feather, and then he would reply in a seductive tone, "oooh touch it again." One Coach Guide, who I am convinced has a star ridden future ahead of him, was a stand-up comedian. He had been with the company working in Lapland for the last three winters and was the one who trained all the other coach guides. In the communal lounge in the evenings, only in front of the two Santas, one Mrs. Claus, the Irish children's entertainer and the boss, used to sing songs and take us through his stand up routine. He is at present doing the warm-up job for the ITV lunchtime show Loose Women, as well as Jeremy Kyle and has a one-man show touring the UK. His name is Lee Peart so look out for him – he is one for the future.

FAREWELL

So, would I go back again? No; simply because I missed being away from home at Christmas too much. As I have said, Christmas is a time for family and I was absent in 2016. But the experience was wonderful and I met so many great people. The Northern Lights, that phenomenon that appears when solar wind particles collide with air molecules in the earth's atmosphere, transferring their energy into light, was on my bucket list and has now been achieved. To bring so much pleasure to people just by dressing up in a costume in a magical surrounding does wonders for the soul and restores your faith in humanity. We had the Starlight children visit us, courtesy of "When you wish upon a star", and that was an emotional roller coaster. All these children are terminally ill and the Charity gives them the opportunity to experience something magical in the short time they have left. As one 6 year old boy said to me, "I am glad I found you Santa because I won't be here next year" and he broke my heart.

My Finnish has improved as I can now speak three words and I have all those memories to treasure. 'Never go back' has long been a motto I have adhered to and this will be no exception, but what an adventure.

DAVE TAYLOR



Mr and Mrs Claus with Rudolph. His nose only glows when he flies



The view from my breakfast room

YOUR LETTERS

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It has been my privilege to serve as Letters Editor for 17 years now, and my one finger typing must soon come to an end. I will miss it because I always gain so much joy when someone makes contact: as I knew so many colleagues each contact brought back so many vivid memories.

Having intimated this, it provoked a response from my dear colleague of nearly 50 years, **Bill Abbott** who writes, 'I have read the latest Newsletter. I note you are giving up the letters page. I having finally retired from DH/NHS work: decided to cut some strings including the PGA and my custody visiting. Sarah Payne has taken over my NHS role.

I find the magazine reminiscent of the Daily Mail (we would like to have their circulation) and though it is good to hear of individuals I think it is time to move on. I have enjoyed hearing from colleagues as it always brings back happy memories of that person. I did have a health scare in January and there was a lot of tension around moving house. I am now on my fourth move in Liverpool.' He then mentions how special it was at Pollington Borstal, which is where we first met. When we were at Pollington there was a real sense of purpose and we all felt we were actually achieving something and the whole staff were committed.

Another dear colleague from almost 50 years ago is **Danny and Joan Ozanne**, who says he is still paying regular visits to the hospital to check all is well. Joan still suffers from arthritis which makes it difficult to get around. His daughter, Marie, has just retired which makes Danny feel even older, but she has been asked to go back to help out at the school.

I have been in touch with **Marjorie Marchant**, and **Bernard** is not well but is still at home and looked after by Marjorie, who is in good spirits but gets quite tired some days. I still have this image of Bernard being lean, fit and active and have difficulty in realising he is now 89. Marjorie is saddened by the news she reads about Pentonville and says it appears a different place to the happy place we both knew.

He is of course only pipped by **Bill Brister** who is 91 and coping well on his own, though he misses not being able to drive. We chat every so often and he takes a keen interest in what is happening in the Service. He is in touch with **John Sandy** who is well and still undertaking tours of Sandhurst.

Bill, Bernard, Ron Curtis, myself and **Alan Rawson** were all at Dover Borstal together in the sixties. Alan is a family friend and after Jane died, Alan and I had holidays together, mostly to Croatia which we both loved. Despite all those years of friendship it is amazing what you never know about someone, and Alan was never one to hide his light under a bushel. Apparently before they came to Dover from Usk, Alan and Bernard received a Secretary of State's Commendation: it reads:

'The Governor

Would you please convey to Assistant Governors **Marchant and Rawson** the Secretary of State's commendation for the courage and devotion to duty displayed in apprehending two absconders both of whom were armed with loaded pistols and threatened to use them.

Establishment Division 3'

Some people do hide their light under a bushel!

For those who are not on email, sad to hear of the death **Mary Witty** who passed away on the 18th May: the funeral was 13th June. She went into hospital at Christmas 2015. The above was conveyed by **Shelia Blakey**, who has continued with the infusions in hospital every six months and they are reported as clearly helping with her Rheumatoid Arthritis, so generally **Shelia** is fine. **Jim**, on the other hand, who rarely has health problems, has not had such a good year. He was not feeling well for some time, and in September he woke in considerable pain. It was eventually diagnosed as kidney stones, which were due to be dealt with in hospital in the week prior to Christmas. I spoke to Jim and

I spoke to Jim and he was taking it all in his stride: he had to stay in hospital for one night, but all seems to have gone well and he is feeling much better.

Chris and Mary Scott have moved from the West Midlands to a little village called Borough Green in North Kent, with everything available on foot, and should they want to go to Sevenoaks Chris will get bus passes for them both. Chris says the reason for the move is mainly because of health issues and their children want them closer to them. Chris says, 'I have been diagnosed with the onset of Alzheimer's and Mary has had a few falls recently. I'm not very keen on this getting older lark.' (I think a lot of us are with you on that). '**John Alldridge** and I have been seeing each other regularly for years and he was over yesterday saying yet again there is nothing wrong with me, but he will not recognise that he too has dementia. John has a lady friend who keeps a close eye on him to ensure he is ok, and John still goes to the gym twice a week.' He is though going to miss his regular meetings with Chris, but they will continue to meet up but less frequently.

They hope to be able to meet up in due course, but though Chris can drive at the moment, this is under review by the Doctor and it might be he will be advised to give it up. We all hope that Chris and John's health deterioration can be stabilised.

Always good to hear from **Veronica Bird** who remains as busy as ever, caring about certain older ladies and giving innumerable talks to a kind of 'circuit' that has developed. This has led her to be even busier; at one of the talks she gave in the audience was an author, Richard Newman, who approached her afterwards and suggested she should write a book.

Some of you may have read in the press about a book just published called 'A Nun's Story'. It is a very moving account of a young lady who grew up in extreme comfort and wealth and privilege and gave it all up days before her wedding to become a nun at a York convent: it includes the fact that she approached Paul Getty and asked for £500,000 to save her convent from bankruptcy, and he gifted £250,000. She also rescued 300 children from Syria.

The book is ghost written by Richard Newman and he is now working with his team to produce Veronica's book. She states it is very hard work; everything has to be researched and accurate, but very exciting and rewarding.

The official launch of the 'A Nuns Story' book was on Friday 20 January and Veronica was an official guest at the event, which she says went very well and it was even mentioned that she was working on her book with Richard Newman.

The final chapter of the book will ask the question, 'If unlimited finance was on offer, what would you introduce to the Prison Service that would make a profound difference to rehabilitation?' Veronica wishes to make this chapter as positive as possible, so here is your chance to make suggestions. So put your thinking caps on as to what you would recommend and let me know, I will pass them on and Veronica will be able to select those she feels will make the greatest impact. The Service is in a mess, so here is a chance to offer something constructive. **Veronica** also sent in 2 photos of staff at Risely, governors and chief officers, for you to try and identify as many as you can! (see facing page)

Another intriguing story, **Kate Lomax (nee Warburton)**, **Kit Jarman** and myself were all members of the 21st Staff Course in 1964. **Kit** went to university in Belfast, and worked for Mission to Seaman prior to joining the Prison Service. He was not well off and some of his clothing came from the Mission, including an over-large black overcoat, which **Barry Smith** in particular used to tease him about. As it happened, **Kit**, **Stephen Prior** and I were drinking mates in the local hostelrys of an evening. There was clearly much more to **Kit** than the image he projected. He was initially posted to Portland and then moved to Kingston which was then being converted to an all lifer prison. At some point he decided that another career was for him. He had long harboured a feeling that he wanted to go into the Church, and he did. He trained at Wells, but was also now eligible for National Service, so joined the navy as a forces Chaplain and served for 20 years, seeing a good bit of the world and a lot of sea! He says his time in the Prison Service was good training for a Chaplain in the navy. That really was the last we heard of him until Kate went on a cruise. Looking at the books in the ship's library she spotted a copy of Crockfords, the clerical directory of Chaplains, and there was **Kit** with an address now in Scotland. She followed it up and made contact. He invited her up for the New Year and she went.



Kate contacted me and gave me details, and I too have made contact by phone. He now lives in Oban, and formally retired in 2003. He has been seriously ill for the last 4 years with cancer: he is now on the road to recovery, but advises he has to learn to walk again and it is a slow process. It is over 50 years that we not been in touch, but the bonds that we developed with colleagues in the Service then were strong and enduring. We had so much to talk about that the conversation will continue. That epitomises the value and strength of the RPGA. Should anyone else who knew **Kit** wish to be in contact I can give details.

I find rather amazing that I am able to write about so many dear colleagues I have known for over 50 years. Others are **Ron and Sue Curtis**, again from Dover days, and later together at Love Lane Staff College. I still remember vividly 'abscond duty with Ron' when he always opted for a certain location, and would disappear for periods to visit to visit Sue, his young lady who lived just up the lane. **Bill Brister** was in the habit, after his supper, of visiting all the 'abscond' out-posts to check on matters and offer refreshments. I had to pretend that Ron had disappeared for a 'call of nature'. It only reinforces the view that we all joined a Service of quality, and a staff who were committed and a privilege to serve alongside. They are both well but busy with their dispersed family. They visited Simon and Laura in the Netherlands earlier in the year and took the opportunity to stay in Arnhem and visited the Kroller-Muller museum to see the Barbara Hepworth sculptures. They had previously visited the Hepworth Gallery in Wakefield and the Hepworth Museum in St Ives. (continued overleaf)

They also followed some of the wartime history, in particular the Bridge at Arnhem which was fatally 'A Bridge Too Far'.

The height of their travels last year was 5 days in Berlin, where it was unbelievably hot with temperatures in the mid thirties every day, so they indulged in non-stop tourism including a guided evening tour of the Reichstag, the famous Olympic Stadium, Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp and a river trip. After all that they decided that the famous German beer gardens (including the oldest one in Berlin) were indeed a marvellous institution. I must admit Berlin is a magical place to visit; I first went there in the sixties by train with the Anglo-Jewish Society when the Berlin Wall dominated and tension ran high when passing through East Germany and the Guards boarded the train to check everyone's documents. I also have fond memories of attending an opera at what then was the brand new Opera House. I have been back several times: the last was at Winter Fair time, so experienced freezing temperatures. **Ron** has only reminded me, time to go yet again.

Ron reports that the Methodist Church in Oakham is thriving with regular good attendance and a good programme of activities which keeps them both busy. Their Minister of 2 years has happily extended for another three. Sue stills goes with a small group to act out Bible stories in local primary schools, and Ron on average preaches about once a month. Well you do not just get news: you get cultural and historical advice thrown in.

Apologies! Another colleague from Dover, **John and Jean Childs** who report that their family keep them busy, they have had two visits from their son Simon who is still based in Hong Kong, and also two from David who was based in Tokyo but is now in Singapore. Grandson George has spent the last two years cycling across the world on his own in aid of meningitis. He now has a global network of friends.

News from nearer home: the Isle of Wight from **Steve and Lesley Metcalfe** who are both well, Steve says at last he has grown into retirement and gets out in his boat whenever he can. He also spends hours every week playing bridge.

A card from **Angela Burgess and Dave Turner** to say they were both well but beginning to feel their age. Also **Paddy** and **Colin** so we know they are well.

News from **Abi and Zarina Sheikh** of Pentonville days: they are always pleased to hear news of other colleagues. Abi says his health has improved after he persuaded his GP to reduce his medication to the essential ones only. He says it is amazing the improvement in his well-being now that all the side effects are eradicated. Unfortunately, Zarina's back problems have gone from bad to worse. There are days when she can hardly walk or stand longer than 10 minutes. This really troubles him as all the hospital does is to give her more very strong pain killers. But she is a fighter and will not give up, though he has to force her to rest as much as possible. Unfortunately, like him, she likes to keep busy and is very house proud. Abi has been busy in planning and maintaining large gardens in the local community centre; the site is just over an acre with a large beautiful pond but all the surrounding area needing planning and planting. This has taken a long time as it was overgrown with tree saplings, ivy, and huge weeds. It has taken 2 years but is transformed; even now when the weather is good he spends two or three days a week there. Any spare plants from his garden now have a new home! He states he is saddened by what he now reads about Pentonville, especially after all the efforts the then-team put in to make it such a good place to work and run. He graciously says it began to go downhill after I retired as the 'new breed of governors' were more interested in rivalry and upmanship, and being away from the prison on courses.

I note that **Jerry Petherick** is now the Managing Director of G4S Custodial Services. I doubt that explains all the mess they appear to be in, but they are now advertising for a Chief Operating Officer, a further level of bureaucracy, but then Jerry was never one for the nitty gritty!

Thrilled to hear news of **John and Suphatra Ship**, who writes 'Greetings from the faraway Kingdom of Ancient Siam, where I am surprisingly well given my medical upset of a few years back. My specialist continues to say I'm doing well and advises me to see him again in three months, I'm never sure if that is because I really need a check-up or because he wants the £11 consultation fee every 3 months; either way I am feeling good and managing to keep pretty fit. Ice and I, her real name is actually Suphatra, manage to tour the region with frequent trips throughout Thailand and to neighbouring countries. We even managed a couple of trips to the UK last year, also taking in Amsterdam and

and Paris, two cities she has come to love. We have no plans to visit the UK this year, but who knows. We have booked to visit Angkor Wat in Cambodia and the Maldives. The Maldives is actually a belated honeymoon. Oh yes. I forgot to mention that after almost 10 years together we finally got round to formalising things. Things have been somewhat subdued in Thailand since the death of the much loved and revered King Bhumibol Adulyadej over three months ago, the genuine outpouring of grief amongst the Thai people of all ages was quite humbling. Even though the official mourning period of hundred days has now past, many Thai people are still dressed in black. The new King is a bit of an unknown quantity, not a lot is known about him as he spends a lot of his time in Germany, only time will tell. Many expats have taken a massive financial hit following the Brexit vote, most are on fixed or frozen pensions, which have been reduced in value by 20% following the vote, and are still falling. A number of expats have returned to the UK already, and a lot more are considering it. I have confided in a number of close friends that we too are considering upping sticks and returning to the UK, but more for health reasons. We are both torn, we love it here and are not rushing our decision and really have not as yet decided. We wish everyone well and anyone travelling this way; we look forward to you joining others who have popped in for a glass of lemonade.'

My stalwart for contributing fascinating articles, **Mike Selby**, is well and alert as ever. As he says, he was wandering around Cardigan, on the river Teifi and found a second hand book shop, which he browsed and smiling at him was a copy of Willie Whitelaw's Memoirs, which Mike could not resist purchasing. Naturally he looked first at the chapter when he was Home Secretary. Mike states, Whitelaw was tactful enough not to mention the escape of 3 Cat A prisoners (including Tuite of the IRA) from Brixton. However, mulling over Whitelaw's time as Home Secretary, Mike gained an insight into what was right then with our service, and what by comparison, is disastrously wrong now. Mike has pondered and turned his thoughts into a full article which is printed separately on P14.

"I remember Willie Whitelaw well; he came to the Scrubs to report back to a full staff meeting on the outcome of the Official Inquiry into the so-called riot. The Governor, John McCarthy, at a pre-meeting asked if he would like a drink; to which he replied with his usual aplomb and a chuckle, 'Yes, I wouldn't mind a gin and tonic.' John was a bit taken aback; even he did not keep that in his safe! I met him again at the Governors' Conference in Liverpool and we were chatting over an after-dinner coffee. Margaret Thatcher was abroad and he was technically acting Prime Minister. He told me being in Liverpool was convenient as he could go on to his home in the Lake District. I said, 'Did he not need to be nearer the 'seat of power' in his present role?' Again with a chuckle he said, 'Oh no, best to keep out of the way and disappear where she cannot find me too easily!' He was a naturally charming man and a very good Home Secretary who believed passionately in prisons having a reformatory programme; and to that end it was necessary to reduce the numbers sentenced to imprisonment, or to build new prisons."

Roger Outram and **Jill** spent a miserable Christmas as they both had heavy bouts of 'flu; otherwise they are fine and looking forward to their next cruise. I heard from **Paul Wailen** at Christmas. He is well and enjoying life. He went to Slovenia last year with his brother and fell in love with the area which he regards as one of the most beautiful places he has visited He also went to Greece in October for his pre-winter sun. He is contemplating a trip to Malta later this year. We hope to meet up soon.

I am an expert in crashing the IMB office computer at Elmley prison; so then a nice young lady member of staff comes along to get it all going again. Whilst doing so on the last occasion we were talking about how you become a member of the IMB, and then she was interested in my background as a Governor; and somehow how it emerged that I had put together a book on Wakefield and Pentonville. These were intended for the staff of those establishments and they were all given a copy. Her fingers whizzed over the key board and suddenly, there was in a flash a specialist bookseller advertising both books for sale and the prices varied, but one copy of Wakefield was on offer for £228, and for Pentonville the highest price was £145. Do not think you can make bit of real money, as the more that are on offer the more the price will reduce. No guarantee of sale either, as Pentonville is on the internet and you can download for free. It did however cheer me up to see what a value the commercial market had placed on them.

What an interesting world we live in. We have offered you in a short space news, history, culture, geography and politics and your chance to suggest what would really improve the Service. So let us know!

WALTON AT WAR

AN EXTRACT FROM A PAST 'LIVERPOOL ECHO'

One of the safest buildings in Liverpool during the war time air raids should have been Walton Prison. Yet there were several occasions when heavy bombs smashed into the two-foot thick stone walls of the cells and brought terror and death to the prisoners inside.

There was no point in building air- shelters in the prison grounds. The prison itself was a vast shelter. The solid masonry of its walls formed a vast shelter and stout barrier against blast and explosion, and there was the added protection of a high wall surrounding the buildings. Yet on two nights 28 prisoners were killed in their stone cased cells, while ironically though no one on the prison staff was killed, although during the raids, their job was to reassure the prisoners by circulating the landings where the only overhead cover was glass windows covered with wire netting.

On September 18th 1940 there was a night of great bravery at Walton. An hour and a half after the warning a heavy bomb scored a direct hit on 'K' wing. By a streak of fortune only a few men had been put in the cells on the side of the wing which took the impact of the bomb.

The bomb blasted to pieces one-third of the great blocks of masonry in the outer wall and shattered rows of cells on all four landings. Entire cells were demolished and even in cells which escaped complete destruction, the force of the explosion displaced the heavy doors and jammed locks so that they could not be opened with a key. The three-inch gas main was pierced and the whole building filled with clouds of choking gas.

An hour after midnight the 'All Clear' sounded, but the work in K wing was still far from finished ...a quick roll call showed that some prisoners were still missing. During a search among the debris a cry was heard, the leader of the searchers called for silence and again from a huge pile of rubble came a faint cry.

Uniforms and jackets were thrown off and policemen and officers formed a human chain to manhandle huge blocks of concrete and masonry from the heap of debris. The task was a mammoth one, there were hundreds of tons of stonework and rubble and mortar filling almost the entire basement of 'K' wing. Mr J Holt, the Governor, said that it seemed almost impossible that anyone could be alive under that mass of rubble. The hands and arms of the workers were bleeding through clawing away at stones, and their clothing was almost torn from their backs. Finally after four hours, a tunnel was made and down this was dragged a badly wounded prisoner.

For this nights work two policemen received the O.B.E., and the Chief Officer E.A. Bowyer and the Governor Mr Holt were also awarded this medal. Later two more medals were awarded for gallantry, Chief Officer E. Thompson and Mr J. Halliday received British Empire medals.

But this was not the end. On May 3rd 1941 the prison was hit again. This time it received 8 direct hits and 22 prisoners were killed. So bad was the damage that no longer could Walton be considered a security prison and so inmates were transferred to Manchester and later to Stafford.

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HMP Liverpool - with its five landings clearly visible from outside