

Bradbury Mercury
1960s 16 Signal Regiment Reunion Club



Issue Number 33

Edited by Iain Haldane
www.the-60s-16ers.com

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For those of you that may not have noticed, Glasgow hosted the XXth Commonwealth Games from Wednesday the 23rd of July to Sunday the 3rd of August 2014. This is the Commonwealth Games Logo that was in George Square for the duration of the Games. When we visited this place on Thursday there was a half hour queue just to get to where you could have your photo opportunity. I just stood back and used the telephoto lens.

On Front Page:

George Square, Glasgow.

Commonwealth Games 2014 Logo

Editors Ramble.

First my apologies for the lateness of this edition. I was waiting till the last day of the Commonwealth Games before I published. Before the games I was not sure if it was a good idea. Yes I know that a lot of people put their heart and soul into making this all happen. We had the Games lanes as per the London Olympics, the traffic disruption but then as we are pensioners we no longer take the car into the centre of the city anymore. Cost of parking is getting as bad as London. So far we have heard nothing but praise for the whole experience. I actually went to one of the events, day 2 of the shooting at Barry Budden Camp near Carnoustie. This is quite near, only about 97.7 miles from here. It is quicker to get to Carlisle. A message from the politicians perhaps? Anyway I really enjoyed the whole experience.

What I want to talk about is Carol. I met her not long after I got to 16 Sigs, in April 1969. We always chatted but about what, no idea. And when Rita and I got married in June 1970 she came to the reception when she came off shift. She was working down the Hole that day. After we left Krefeld we lost touch until Cyprus 1982/3, not sure which year. Bill was out doing the equipment checks at 9 Sigs and I invited him round for dinner. He said that Carol and Ema were out for that week, so I invited them also. Drove down to their hotel and collected them. We had a great time. Then we had no contact till I got an email from Carol on a Sunday afternoon in January 2003. She had been looking for 60s-16ers who did not know about the reunions. So we met again that year in Torquay. We have kept in touch till we got the news from Bill this year. She was a very good friend to us, Rita and I will miss her.

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Our Chairperson's Letter

Dear fellow club members, just a few words for our August edition of the Bradbury Mercury. Hope you are all well and are gearing up for the reunion in October.

Welcome to Summer, and what a summer it has been, boiling hot weather and quite a few horrendous downpours and thunder storms, then the sun comes out. It's like living in the Far East with the monsoons, a few of you will remember those days.



It has also been quite a year for sport. It started off with England's rugby tour of New Zealand then Wimbledon and the Cricket test matches against Sri Lanka and now India, at last we won one!!!!. Then the Hockey world cup and of course the magnificent Commonwealth games in Glasgow. Next week is the women's Rugby World Cup in France. Oh, I think there was some other sport going on but can't remember what it was, so cannot have been very big.

Now just a few quick reminders. Firstly, don't forget your costumes for the Halloween event on Sunday at the Hereford reunion.

Secondly, there are two positions on the Committee becoming vacant in October, the posts are, Chairman and Entertainments Co-ordinator. Please think about volunteering for these positions. Last but not least don't forget to bring an item for the raffle.

Charlie. July 2014

Great Wisdom from Military Training Manuals.

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| "If the enemy is in range, so are you." | - Infantry Journal - |
| "It is generally inadvisable to eject directly over the area you just bombed." | - US Air Force Manual - |
| "Whoever said the pen is mightier the sword obviously never encountered automatic weapons." | - General Douglas MacArthur |
| "Tracers work both ways." | - Army Ordnance Manual - |
| "Five second fuses last about three seconds." | - Infantry Journal - |
| "Never tell the Platoon Sergeant ."
you have nothing to do. | - Unknown Infantry Recruit - |
| "Any ship can be a minesweeper. Once!" | - Naval Ops Manual - |
| "If you see a bomb technician running, try to keep up with him." | - Infantry Journal - |

Narrowboat Stealway

A Journey of Commitment

This started as a lot of hair brained ideas do over several pints of good English ale, and developed into lifelong friendships of three very different families.

At the first meeting there were four interested parties but within a short space of time we were three. A good number for the project, because in the event of a disagreement, over what to do, there would always be a two to one majority. It worked exceptionally well. A set of plans were ordered, studied and heads scratched. Although all three of us were fitters and metal workers none had tackled a project like this.



I was a fitter working at the time at the National Tramway Museum as the restoration fitter. Second was Paul, a machinist and general engineering person at his factory. Soon to be known amongst us as “The Eye” for his ability to spot anything out of true or not square.

But first and foremost was Rob an ex farmer turned plant fitter with a barn just big enough to build a boat in. Like most farmers he worked at one pace, very slowly but managed a huge amount of work. Between us we could turn our hands to most things.



So began a task that lasted four years and one week. A commitment of two nights and all day Sunday, every week. The only exceptions were family holidays. For myself and Joyce we decided that the best way to pay our share was to stop smoking. One of the best decisions we ever made.

So the first tranche of money was set aside, and the base plate steel ordered, paid for and laid allowing

work to start in earnest. After welding together three base plates measuring nearly 50 ft. long and 7 ft. wide which, had to be turned over to enable the underside to be welded. A task that tested our abilities to the utmost. But succeed we did.



From then on work on the hull proceeded at a fairly speedy pace. Allowing it to be completed in around 18 months. During this time an engine was sourced from a dumper. It was rebuilt and turned into a very robust and reliable propulsion unit. A gear box was bought and the whole lot installed in the completed hull.

How did we know the hull was watertight you may ask. Easy. If it kept water out, it would keep it in. We filled the hull to well above the load waterline and checked for leaks. None were found. So the water was removed, not as easy as it seems, but empty it we did. Now we were in a position to turn a pile of steel into a comfortable country retreat on the water.

By this time we were in the middle of winter, cold wet and miserable. Therefore the first item to be installed was a potbellied stove, marvellous. First job every working visit light the fire. Ballast was installed, and then floor bearers and finely the floor. We were for the first time able to walk from one end of the boat to the other without the danger of breaking our necks tripping over. We then spent time insulating the boat. We intended using her 12 months of the year meaning it needed to be warm in the winter and cool in the heat of an English summer. We



lined the inside with faced ply on the walls and tongue and groove pine for the ceiling. The whole lot was then varnished. A high point, both literally and metaphorically. That much varnish in a confined space gets you very high. It's nearly as good as five pints of your favourite tippale. We decided the windows were to be of wooden construction with double glazing, for insulation.

As for the layout of the



accommodation, it's a 7ft wide tube, think of a railway carriage and you get the idea. From the rear forward we have the bedroom then the bathroom, then the kitchen and right at front the living room, which could also be converted to a double bedroom. We could sleep four in comfort. For the next 30 months wood was cut, pipes laid, electric cables installed, shower cubicles built kitchens installed, beds designed

and built, furniture made and soft furnishings sourced and fitted.

Finally the day of launch arrived. The crane arrived, hooked up to the boat and hoisted it into the air prior to lowering down onto the lorry. It's not funny looking at 4 years work hanging on the end of a chain and strops that did not look man enough for the job. But soon it was lowered down onto the lorry strapped down ready for the journey to Whaley Bridge where once again it was hoisted into the air and lowered on to the water. Floating at last. It didn't sink; it floated level and at the correct depth. Wonder of wonders we had got it right. A bottle of ale was poured over the bow; we did not want to damage the paint work so we didn't smash the bottle on it.

So the first journey began. All three families were on board for the first trip, about 1.5 miles to the boats permanent mooring at Furness Vale. Everything worked as it should, what a marvellous feeling, Things you had planned years ago coming together and working the way you wanted them to. Over the next few months small problems were overcome. Nothing serious, but little things that we had not thought about. Like the stairs out to the front deck. After a very nasty fall by Joyce resulting in broken ribs the steps were secured with a better latch so they would not move. But all in all a very successful boat.



All that remained was to enjoy her as our holiday home on water. Top speed, 4 miles per hour if you were lucky. As it was said at the time “The fastest way to slow down”. Or the one I prefer ”The best way between two good pubs”. Was it worth the cost in blood sweat money and time? Absolutely yes. It provided us with holidays and weekends for the next twelve years. A retreat from the world where people speak to people. They don’t ignore you, they help you. A way of life the canals promote in people of being a community.

John Hartley

The Catterick Garrison Centenary and History Group has launched their website in preparation of the 2014 centenary.

The group currently holds more than 700 pictures from throughout the history of the garrison which will be uploaded onto the site with accompanying information.

The group also has a You Tube channel, Catterick Camp History, with films from the early 1960s about camp life, and is working towards adding interviews with Catterick residents and former and current personnel.

Group founder and chairman Peter Fowler said: “The launch was a fantastic success, but we are still looking for memories and photos from Catterick to add to our collection.”

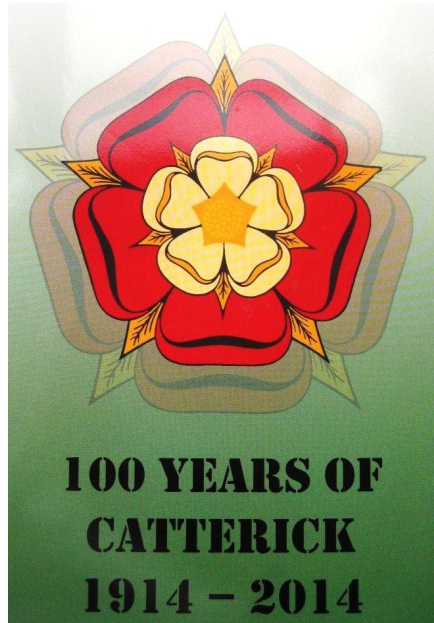
Photographs on the site date back to the construction of the camp in 1914, with the original concept for a temporary camp to accommodate two complete divisions – 40,000 men in 2,000 huts.

The website also includes a timeline of events from the opening of the garrison, recording royal visits and changes at the camp.

Members of the history group are appealing for assistance from serving and former personnel, ex-Ministry of Defence employees and members of the public, for memories and photographs of Catterick Garrison throughout the ages.

Information can be passed via the website or by calling Mr Fowler on 07854-246693.

Proceeds from the website will be donated to service charities.



Going Tidal in Timeless.



We had been planning our trip down the tidal Thames for some months and finally the day was here and we were off on our adventure. Starting from our home mooring in Penton Hook, Chertsey we set off towards Teddington Lock. Teddington Lock is the start of the tidal Thames. The river then passes from Teddington to Richmond. This part of the river is held at a constant level due to the Victorian

engineering of a steel curtain at Richmond Bridge. This keeps the stretch of the river at the same level so the people of Richmond can sail all year long. Richmond Bridge curtain can only be open 2 hours before high tide and then closes 2 hours after high tide.

The first thing we had to do was get through Richmond half lock before the tide came into Richmond. This would give us a head start of an hour on the tides. No problems getting through with Lynden guiding us.

With our passage plan and our friend and engineer Lynden as our pilot we sent off from Teddington to go to St. Katharine's Dock near Tower Bridge. This should take us about 3 hours. We had to get to St Kats before they closed which was 2 hours after high tide at the Tower. This was going to be tight.

The next part of the journey we came across the sailors worse nightmare 'rowers'. But having been warned about them we kept one eye on them and the other eye on the river. As Skip has now had both his eyes done he has earned his nick name of 'hawk eye' this proved invaluable to say the least.

There are 19 bridges from Richmond to Tower Bridge and each has its own quirks. But all was progressing well until Hammersmith Bridge. It was touch and go whether we would make it unde~~st~~ as we are quite high in the water, about 11



foot 6 inches and Hammersmith Bridge is 12 foot depending what the tide is doing. Well Skip did his best and we just made it with about an inch to spare. Onward we went braving the weather, the tides and the trip boats. The latter are really dangerous. Making a cup of tea and bringing up to the rear deck was pretty hard going as the trip boats travel at about 30 knots and you have to get out of their way as they don't care if the mow you down or not. The captain and pilot had the audacity to complain about only getting half a cup of tea. It was bit hairy to say the least. There is no pleasing some people, next time they can get their own tea.

We passed some great London landmarks such as the Palace of Westminster, the London Eye, the Chard and HMS Belfast which is moored by Tower Bridge.

Seeing the London skyline for the first time from the river was just magical. I took lots of photos {although how I did while hanging on for grim death, I'll never know}.

So we arrived at the Tower Bridge and had to wait at St Kats for 5 minutes, until they give us clearance

to enter the lock. This can be quite a wait as it depends on the tides. Guess we were just lucky, or better still we planned it that way. At last we were called forward into the lock, what a great place. There we were right in the middle of London and with our own 3 bed room flat. We were given a berth right

between some of the larger boats. They made us look like their tender. {That's a rowing boat for all you land lubbers}

After showering we all went to explore our surroundings. There are lots of shops and bars and coffee shops. We even walked along the embankment by the Bloody Tower and the Bridge. Got some great photos of HMS Belfast with a 4 mastered rigger moored alongside.



The next morning we were booked on the first lock out of St Kats. So all was prepared and Lynden suggested we go and take a look at the barrier as we were early and the tide was not due in for another hour. So we shot out of St Kats like a cork out of a bottle and made our way to the starboard side of the river. {that's the right hand side} This was where things got really interesting by the minute. We had a police boat doing about 40 knots on one side of us and a very large trip boat doing about 30 knots on the other side of us. This caused a 'v' shaped wave at least 10 feet high {slight exaggeration} maybe only 5 foot wave but it sure felt like 10. I was on the back hanging on for dear life; while we surfed down the wave then Timeless did a side slip and rushed up the next one. What a rush. Can't say I liked that one bit.

We headed on like true sailors passed the West India Docks and O2. It got very bumpy around there. I'm afraid I was heard to say {in a very squeaky voice} 'is it very far to the barrier as I would really like to turn around and go home now'. Skip and Lynden tried to assure me that we only had a bit to go then we would turn around. We could not get near the barrier as we were not going through, so I took photos and we turned around and headed for home.

Going with the tides is great as the tide pushes you along so you don't have to use so much power. The river was now at full flood and we were whizzing along at about 16 knots. That's pretty fast for such a small boat. We were making great time until Hammersmith Bridge. Full tide plus king tide and with us quite high in the water it was touch and go if we would make it under the bridge. Lynden and I took the canopy down and we crawled inch by inch under the bridge. Skip even had to duck down to stop his head from being crushed by a steel beam. We made it with only a hair's width between us and the bridge.

These seasoned sailors made it back to Teddington for the night and a quick pint in the pub.

Great trip and we would do it again. Skip is now planning a trip to Cherbourg. He may well be going on his own as I did not like the lumpy bits never mind the channel.

Rose Harding.

After the Army.

A brief history of Paddy and Family
by Paddy Conroy.

As usual there will be stuff you should take with tongue in cheek.

I previously mentioned I left Krefeld mid 1968 and from there after I had to work! It was non skilled until I had my City and Guilds (Night School). From the cushy Army to actual work plus all the studying, what have I done? Irene (I've finally realised who has the brains in the family) worked in an insurance office in Liverpool. We lived with her Mum for the following 2 years. It was toward the end of 1970 before we had enough savings £1250 (nowadays little more than half weeks wage for our eldest son). Our £1250 paid a deposit £900 on our house, and then the solicitors fee after which there was enough change to buy a bed and a cooker. God knows how we managed for the next 18 months whilst we gradually furnished the nest. Having moved into the House in December we very soon met our first hurdle, January 71 was so cold that we had an indoor water burst 1 metre above the rising main. WE WERE BROKE, I quickly learned to become a plumber although I have to admit It took about 4 failed attempts maybe more and 3 or 4 hours before I succeeded. And this was after night school, a side of the blissful life you married quarter types wouldn't know about. "T.I.C".

However The Rewards got Better and Better



Michael at 15 months.



Paul at 15 months.

And the better didn't stop.



Six years later. N.B. Now we had a settee.
And curtains!



30 years later on top of
Hellvellen

I don't know if it's possible to relate the first 20 years highs and lows of raising 2 boys, especially when they reach the AAA stage in their (I know everything) young lives. AAA being Acne, Antlers and Agro, I do know that for all their early life shenanigans neither Irene or I would change a thing being as they have both turned out pleasant and rounded which believe you me; must be down to Irene.

We, as most parents would be; are quite proud of the boys achievements. They both went to Grammar school. Michael, the eldest, is an Industrial Chemist and heads two sections of Totals laboratories in France one in Lyon and the other one in Le Harve with the head office being in Paris. Lots of travelling, his other half Tiff was a TV reporter/producer with Central and Southern; so some of you may have seen her, she was Tiffany Foster. They have one child Ciarán (photo below on swing), now 3 years plus, born Poppy day at 10am 2010. Which is 111110, for the binary minded. He started pre-school last Oct, before his 3rd birthday. He is now speaking some French and because of school meals he likes garlic. His Mum and Dad's hopes are that he will speak English at home and French outdoors, *they* both speak excellent French. Tiffs degree was in English lit and language, she was schooled privately so Ciarán speaks ever so posh. He comes out with stuff like "do you have a problem Grandpa" or "please put me down I'm not a toy". Jeese me Ma and Da must be spinning. At the age of 3 years and 3 months he started skiing earlier this year. Methinks I'm over enthusing about one of my sons and Ciarán, however the little man is magic. Finally (for now) when he asks for chocolate and can't have any he tells his Mum "she is making him very very sad".

Our second son Paul has also had a varied and interesting life to date. He obtained his A levels but was adamant about not going to Uni; a decision he now deeply regrets. Nevertheless he has worked hard and progressed to a good

position with Waitrose in their head office Bracknell. He is a fitness sort and if he had a bark about him he would definitely have made a first class PTI. The clever lad remains a steadfast bachelor with a different girl friend every so often.

Because of finances our summer holidays from 1973 till 1987 were almost always in the same farmhouse near Abersoch North Wales. One of a few exceptions being Disney Florida when the boys were quite young, after which it was back to the farmhouse which boasted its own private 99% stony beach. This was a very short walk down a steep cliff with Mike, Irene, Irene's Mum and later *both* boys. They needed a gofer, so I was required to attend. Then in the winter of 1987 Irene's Mum passed away. Irene didn't wish to go back to the farmhouse, and so we started to spread our Holiday wings. To begin with it was mostly Europe, Holland, Germany, Spain, Austria and the Canaries with Austria being almost our favourite. Eventually the boys felt they were young men and did not really want to holiday with their Mum and Dad. Irene and I started to experiment with our holidays, California, then the outrageous Las Vegas, plus Frisco. Another year we went to Seattle, Washington State, then up to British Columbia (if we were young enough we would move to Vancouver), what a great place in every respect, actually better than driving down the Rhine Strasse which speaks volumes. However we couldn't afford Canada every year, therefore as Austria was our 2nd favourite and just a tad behind B/Columbia on the Fab Scale. We spent many drive hols through Belgium and down the Rhine Strasse. We never drove more than 2,3 or 4 hours on any one day, stopping for a few days where the fancy took us. Such as Bad Herrenalb in the Black Forest then on to Bodensee and many other superb places before and aft, finally into Austria.

Nowadays we spend our time on the Garden and the allotment plus going to France 3 or 4 times a year where the one and only magic grandson now lives. Will there be enough time to visit the endless number of historic and renown cities and beauty spots that make up Merseyside, Cumbria and Yorkshire? I do hope so.



Posing in the Rockies.



Posing in Gran Canaria

Anderson Shelter.

As some of our members are aware I spend quite some time helping at one of our local primary schools in regards to Gardening. Over the past few months we have been working on a project in line with the social history they are taught that took place during ww2. One of the lessons incorporated the Anderson shelter and one of its uses within schools. A couple of the students uttered it would be wonderful to experience such an event and out of that comment came an idea to actually build one within the school grounds.



Education wise, now the scene is set, children in the classroom 2014 carrying out lesson regarding WW2 the siren goes and the children immediately pick up pens/paper/books etc; leave the room and go straight down into the Anderson shelter and along with their teacher they carry on with the lesson. In my opinion, no better way of learning, this by experiencing such an event!

So back to the project :- We have just about completed the task of building the shelter, although a door is yet to be completed and also a path leading to the entrance. With the help of Dave Walker and Bill White a couple of field telephones are to be added along with the old Don10 to join the classroom with the shelter, and thank you for that guys !





Should any of our members have anything that might adorned the walls within the shelter, of course, applicable to that period in our history , then I would be most happy to relieve you of them.

These are the photographs of the results so far. I apologise prematurely should this bring unhappy memories to Syd, Dave and Bud who actually experienced such times during their schooling.

Remie.



In loving memory of Carol Jean Birch.

Published by the kind permission of the
Reverend Mark Jennings, Minister, Pershore Baptist Church.

Carol was born in Doncaster on the 12 July 1950 and is survived by beloved husband Bill, by dear daughter Ema, by dear granddaughters Alice and Maddie, by brothers Glyn, Peter and Thomas, and by her Dad Dennis. Carol's mum and dad split up when Carol was very young meaning that she went to live with her Geordie Grandma, and when about 8 years old, moved with Mum to be close to Auntie Emma, Carol's mum's sister who lived in the Salford district of Manchester.

Carol was a very clever, intelligent young lady, and earned a place to attend Salford Girls Grammar School, and from there went on to gain a diploma in Art and Design at the prestigious Manchester School of Art, now part of the Manchester Metropolitan University.

In truth, Carol didn't get on with her step dad Alan, and so, in consequence, sought an early escape from Salford and found the cheapest, most effective way to do so was by joining the Women's Royal Army Corp. She got into the Signals, serving as a ComCen Operator. Following basic training in Guildford and trade training at Catterick, her first posting was to HQ at Northwood, then Beaconsfield and thereafter to Krefeld in West Germany where she met Bill, who was serving as a Tech Sergeant with the 16th Signal Regiment.

I asked Bill if it was love at first sight, and well, he preferred to describe it differently (as lust at first sight) and reflects fondly on how very fortunate he was to catch Carol. Apparently Carol thought Bill had the Michael Cain look about him. The feeling is that now, with age, Michael looks like Bill.

There was seriously stiff competition for Carol's affections, with more than 5,000 men and barely 150 women on site, competition would have been fierce, and at 27, Bill felt like an old man and was beginning to settle into the role of relaxed bachelor. They worked in adjacent offices, and Bill, fed up of mess food, and even more so fed up of eating out alone, drew up a list of 10 names of women he'd like to ask to accompany him. The first 6 turned him down, but the seventh, Carol, said yes, and so was born the perfect combination. An avid foodie even then, Bill recalls them dining at the Balkanhutter restaurant, and sharing a Balkan Platter, a huge mixed grill piled high on what could best be described as a turkey size plate.

They courted for about 3 months, and with a certain degree of urgency, were married on the 31 October 1970 at Salford Register Office, the day before the building was knocked down – we are assured that there was no connection with the events of the preceding day. The happy couple honeymooned for a week in London, billeting at the Victory Services Club in Marble Arch. Carol, as was compulsorily discharged from the Army, without any compensation – but Bill's not bitter. Carol and Bill were blessed with their only and much beloved daughter Ema.

Bill wonders how they lasted the 44 years – not believing in mixed marriages – he being from Lancashire and Carol being a Yorkshire lass.

A pocket prayer book for women and girls has been found, inscribed as presented to Carol on the occasion of her confirmation in St Boniface Church, Rheindahlen, on the 13 May 1972 by Alec J Smith the Unit Chaplain.

Carol followed Bill around on various placements until in January 1984 Bill retired after 22 years service and she set about enjoying his forces pension.

In the late 1970's, by this time living in Blandford Forum, Carol enrolled on a TOPS course at Poole and Bournemouth College, and thereafter moved into Financial Services, working for Midland Bank as a secretary to the Manager. In January 1984 the family moved to Pershore, and after a time Managing the typing pool in Cheltenham, and serving as relief secretary to the Manager at Hereford branch, she became secretary to the Manager at Pershore branch. Carol really loved Pershore, and especially adored the walk from home across the Abbey Park to work each day. "Isn't my park lovely" she'd often be heard to say, savouring its sublime beauty through all the seasons of the year. Carol determined to progress her skills and apply her knowledge successfully undertook her Banking Exams, taught for a time by Ann Dobbins. Carol offered the Bank 27 years of loyal conscientious and distinguished service, serving as Branch manager, until she could no longer reconcile the ever greater demands and pressures of sales targets over against her undiminished commitment to the interests and wellbeing of customers and staff alike.

She landed a dream job with H&P Fine Foods – and her role as senior sales representative – or was it chief cook and bottle washer - brought her into regular contact with some of the most highly regarded chefs in Europe. Her specialism was fine cheeses – she was a woman after my own heart. Her patch stretched from Bristol and South Wales up to the North taking in Manchester Airport. Who Carol didn't know, wasn't worth knowing. I've

heard mention of Shaun Hill from Abergavenny, whom she was especially fond of.

She enjoyed a stint working at Pershore Leisure Centre, not least because it gave her the twin perks of free access to the Pool and Gym. The lovely photo on the front of our service order pictured raising money, and not for the first time for a worthy cause. For example, when Ema was 16, Carol had major spinal surgery requiring an MRI scan, and the agony of a trip to London for an MRI scan, she vowed that others should not have to suffer similarly and so devoted the next 5 or more years to raising money for a scanner to be installed at the Worcester Royal. Ironically, it was similar machinery which was used to diagnose the aggressive lymphoma last year.

Carol didn't suffer fools gladly, she didn't suffer them at all! Bill described her as being pathologically honest.

She wasn't remotely materialistic, but she did appreciate many fine things.

Carol loved and was quite an expert in stained glass – who designed it, how it was put up. A beautiful piece hangs in the longue window at Roland Rutter, purchased from an exhibition at Number 8, it is a fitting testimony to her love for stained glass.

Carol loved to travel. There were great holidays to the South of France and to Spain, and the amazing trip to the Sates.

Dare I mention, the early and infamous episode of them going camping across the German Border to Salzburg in a borrowed tent – but of her not checking whether it was all there until literally half way up an alp and finding it was half missing. Half a tent was better than none, but Carol, unlike Ema, never went camping again!

She took an amazing trip the States, driving back from San Francisco to LA and taking in what is known as the Big Stir, a heroic drive down the west coast.

In preparation for her absence, carol baked furiously, spending weeks making Bill meals to enable him to survive whilst she was away. She returned to find that he'd lived on pot noodles and Fray Bentos pies – his defence was that Carol's labelling system wasn't especially effective, and you'd never know whether you'd be pulling a rice pudding or a portion of some casserole out of the freezer.

As we all know, Carol's major passion in life was cookery.

One of the stipulations of the house hunt when moving to Pershore was

for a dining area sufficiently spacious to accommodate their dining room table which, when extended, would seat up to 14, ideal for her many dinner parties. As a family, she always insisted that they ate around the table: food was the gateway to conversation, a convivial avenue for building good relationship, and for 44 years of listening, over and over again, to Bill regaling his many stories. There would always be enough for any random, stray visitors. Even in her much slimmed down library at Roland Rutter, there are literally dozens of cookbooks, many rare and much sought after, which bear eloquent testimony to her culinary focus and delight. Her favourite cook was the colourful character and high influential Elizabeth David.

Carol was a participating member of the prestigious Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery – an international conference for people with a broad interest in food, scholars, enthusiastic amateurs, writers and chefs – the convivial sharing of ideas, rubbing shoulders with the good and the great of the culinary world – all over sharing of excellent food, was undoubtedly right up Carol's street. The result of which upwards of 12 Michelin Star Chefs would not be averse to asking her advice, drawing upon her vast knowledge and expertise. Many of the cheese board selections in their signature establishments would be of Carol's discerning choosing.

Carol was a star on the Wild Food Board, a site offering recipes, advice and chat where she appeared as the French cheese queen. There are many, many comments left on the board which show the affection and esteem with which Carol was held by so many friends and associates.

Carol had completed the research into what was planned to be a three volume series of scholarly books on the fruit for which this area is renowned, the versatile plum. The first would have profiled the British, the second European and the third the Worldwide roots and recipes and the plum. Bill was patiently dispatched to various orchards to aid the research. Sadly this work remains, as yet unfinished.

I feel appropriate to conclude this tribute with words from two of Carol's close friends who both met Carol more than 20 years ago when studying A level English together.

First, Ann Chaplin reflected with these words:

At first I must admit to feeling in awe of her fund of knowledge and sometimes felt a little inadequate. But as time went on I came to see that she was gently encouraging me in my strengths helping me with my weaknesses. Even so, it wasn't until I was diagnosed with breast cancer that I

really came to appreciate Carol's true worth. Yes, I knew she was fun and intelligent, a great organiser, entertainer and provider but she was also so very kind. She was quite simply a true and loyal friend who would drop everything to help even if it wasn't convenient. She can never be replaced, we can only try to keep her memory alive by remembering the many happy and interesting stories we have of her.

And from Ann Taylor:

I first met Carol 20 or so years ago. She was doing A Level English Lit at evening class and a mutual friend, (Ann Chaplin), invited me to join the group in their Christmas celebration of a turkey bap and a mince pie at The Angel. Carol and I hit it off immediately and our friendship developed as we shared the bus journey to and from Worcester to work for a number of years. Over time the pattern developed that I would call in for a drink and a chat on my way to Scottish dancing and often I would find Carol surrounded by cookery books as she planned the menu for her next dinner party. Sometimes she would tell me who she'd invited and say, "Come and join us, they're nice people and you will like them". She wasn't wrong and it was through Carol that I met some really lovely people who are now my friends too. Sadly, I never met any of the celebrity chefs that she got to know during her time at the cheese company in Pershore – no matter, I felt as though I knew them all because she would shamelessly drop their names into the conversation at every available opportunity. Normally, if the phone rang, she would let it go to answer phone and return the call later, unless it was her work mobile when she would break off immediately saying, "I must take this call – it's one of my chefs!"

She joined us in California for my son, Jonathan's, wedding arriving ahead of the group. By the time we got there she had stocked the fridge with food and wine and negotiated the use of washing machine and tumble dryer (laundry privileges) with Marsha the landlady.

Carol leaves a legacy of love and friendship, of boundless generosity and legendary hospitality – as she said on more than one occasion, "Carol Birch never knowingly under-caters".

Just about everyone that you mention her name to will have their own instances of Carol's kindness and helpfulness. For me, she was simply 'always there', with a shoulder to cry on and a cup of coffee (or something stronger!), the loan of cash in a crisis, a hand to hold at the surgery while test results were given and more than once, on Bill's day off, she would volunteer him to provide a lift to where ever was needed.

It has been fun and a great privilege to know Carol. I am glad that she is at rest and that her suffering is over but I would be less than honest if I didn't say that I feel 'robbed' that she has been taken from us so soon.

Lastly Ema's words:

My Mum Carol Birch

My mum didn't like to think people were lonely. All my life I remember her picking up waifs and strays and bringing them home for dinner. In the 70s it was squaddies stationed far from home. They would be invited to spend Christmas Day with us. When we came to live in England it was usually my grandma Alice who stayed with us for weeks at a time although she had a flat in Bolton or my Godmother Marion when she was home on leave and needed somewhere to stay. We moved to Pershore in January 1984 and while it took mum a while to make new friends she did so by inviting people to dinner usually. When she was transferred to the Pershore branch of Midland Bank she got to know her customers and became firm friends with many of them. My mum believed that relationships were the most important thing to treasure in life and she believed that the best relationships were built around the dinner table.

She lived this philosophy and there will be many people here today who came into our family life because of this philosophy. Every mealtime enough food was prepared to feed an extra mouth and it was surprising how often someone would turn up and be invited to stay. To my mum it was never a burden to look after someone. I made a friend once when I did an Alpha course. Winifred had recently relocated from Yorkshire when she had been widowed. I invited her for Sunday lunch at mum and dad's one day. She was hesitant and concerned that she would be an inconvenience. It has never even entered my head that should be the case and Winifred came along as have so many others over the years.

When I was about 11 mum said I have invited some friends for lunch one Saturday. She told me that they hadn't seen each other for years as the friends had been living in Hong Kong. She was worried they wouldn't like each other each anymore and told me 'if we don't get on it will be easy for them to leave after lunch' Nick and Denise arrived and ended up staying until Sunday afternoon! The first of many meals and celebrations together. Mums last job before retiring was the one that gave her the most pleasure. Travelling the country, meeting chefs and selling them her fine cheeses. Of course a perk at home was that there was always cheese in the fridge. She became known as French Cheese Queen.

In recent years my mum discovered the internet and in doing so discovered there was a whole army of people who loved food as much as she did. She made many good friends and regularly travelled miles to share a meal with the other foodies. Often my or dad's services were requisitioned to chauffeur her and I was privileged to meet some of her online friends. In mum's last couple of days many of her close friends and family came to visit her in Pershore Hospital. I listened as they shared stories, mostly of the meals or visits to art galleries and museums they remembered sharing with mum. I was reminded about Aunty Carols Hot dinners. I was reminded about spending the day at Eckington Manor with her grandchildren gutting mackerel, I was reminded of a day at Le Manoir with her very good friends Roger and Helen to celebrate one of my mum's Godchildren graduation from Oxford. I was reminded of endless birthdays and most of all I was reminded how much all of these people loved my mum and how many lives she touched.

I have many, many wonderful memories and each of you will have your own. My mum was proud of me, she was proud of her grandchildren Alice and Maddie and she was proud of her godchildren Anna and Richard. She was thrilled when I met Nick and she gained three grandsons.

The thing is we were all proud of her and we all loved her very much. She will be missed by all of us.



Carol was on shift on the afternoon of our wedding but got off in time to come over to the Four Square Club for the Reception. The two girls with her in the second photo are Dot on the left and Joyce on the right.

The date was June 25th 1970.

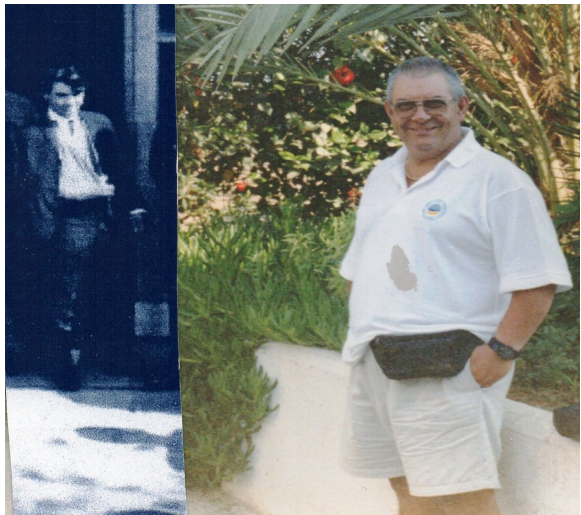
Last year Rita and I arrived at the hotel in Worcester and parked the car in a slot not far from the hotel entrance. As we were walking into the hotel we met a gentleman wearing a RSA Sweatshirt. So being the quiet unassuming person that I am I said hello to him. After introducing ourselves we found out that we had just met Kerry Stylianou. So after a few beers etc we found out that we had been at Catterick at the same time but this was the first time we had actually met. Since then we have been in contact via email and the Comcen. Kerry sent me some photos taken when he met up with Yorky at this year's RSA Reunion at Blandford. I have expanded his words because as Kerry says "Not being a poet or writer".

I left Catterick end of June 1964 & went to 21 Sigs Laarbruch for my ED training. In October 64 I was now a 17 year old Electrician Driver and left Laarbruch to go to 16 Sigs. I was in MT Troop for two months. This is where I met Cpl Layton(Yorky) for the first time. During this time I got fined a day's pay for reversing a 3 tonner unsupervised into the garages, breaking a reversing light in the process. A week after that I was sent to Radio Relay Troop as driver for Lance Corporal Joe Oakley, our troop OC was Lt Peter Crane. I left the Army on May 22nd 1967. Got married May 25th 1968. We have a Son, 2 Daughters and 3 Grandsons' and we are still very happy. I went to the RSA Reunion with 4 members of my local RSA (Sale Branch) also to meet Yorky again. I met a lot of good people there at Blandford, but other than those I went with, Yorky was the only one that I had known before.

The "Then" picture was taken by Bill Jack when I was Best Man at Robert (Paddy) Ford's wedding to Gloria (WRAC) nicknamed "Cleopatra" in 1965.



RSA Reunion Blandford 2014



Then and now.



Commonwealth Games 2014 Glasgow Burger

The words, comments and articles contained in this magazine are written by club members and are for the sole entertainment of club members and in no way reflects, the views or opinions, of the club generally or its officers.

Any items for the February 2015 edition please submit by 31st December 2014



The 1960s 16 Signal Regiment

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