

# BFES SCEA Association

## Journal and Newsletter - Spring 2021

Issue 48



Photo: tm

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### From the Chair: Ken Jones OBE

I do hope that all members of our Association have managed to come to terms with the challenges we have all faced because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Equally, I hope you have all now been successful in getting your vaccinations and have avoided any adverse reactions, unlike two members of the committee. I would like to start on a positive note and say how delighted I am by the response to the voucher scheme which we launched, to increase our membership of the Association. To have received in the region of 40 replies has certainly boosted our membership by a significant percentage.

Sue Adams and Christine Ritchie jointly deserve the credit for suggesting that we took this initiative... and moreover Christine has both designed the voucher and attached further copies to an email she circulated to all members in early March. I really look forward to having a chance to meet some of our new members when we hopefully have an opportunity to organise some events later this year. Since the issue of the last newsletter, we have conducted our first ever zoom AGM of the Association which was successful. We have followed this up with a zoom

committee meeting at the beginning of February which will be followed by another one in mid-March. At our February meeting we agreed on three issues which the questionnaire survey had highlighted to which we felt the committee needed to respond.

The first of these has already led to Christine and Hugh Ritchie starting what we hope might be a monthly email to inform members of the Association about pieces of news which might be of interest and which will enable us to be in regular contact.. These will supplement what will be included in our Newsletters.

Another new idea which we would like to initiate is to plan local gatherings of members, based on the distribution map of members which Hugh and Christine compiled and included in the last Newsletter. To follow up on this initiative and so as to conform to GDPR regulations our Membership Secretaries – Hugh and Christine - will use the medium of the monthly e-mail to share with you the development of this idea and later share contact details of a convenor local to you. In the meantime, if you would like to be a convenor in your area, please make contact.

As I indicated in the last newsletter, we were hoping to organise three events this

year. However, given the extended lockdown due to the pandemic, and the anxieties members may still have about coming together at a social function, we were worried as to how well supported such gatherings might be. We have moved the planned April Curry Lunch in Winchester to early August and so that we are totally free of any current governmental restrictions, we decided to move from the 11th to the 23rd of June the planned visit to the Defence Sixth Form College Welbeck. We were also planning on preceding this visit with a dinner on the prior evening at the Quorn country hotel.

I am extremely sorry to inform you that having asked the recently appointed, short term, new Principal to confirm the acceptability of this previously approved visit, I have only today been informed that this visit cannot proceed as it was felt that the risks for the college associated with this visit were too great. Accordingly, I must sadly inform you this planned occasion must now be cancelled.

In view of this great disappointment, I do hope that the levels of infection generated by the Corona Virus will continue to reduce so that we can avoid a further wave of the

Continued overleaf ...

## Remembering Cyprus - Sue Adams

pandemic. This should enable us to come together at the planned visit to the Bovington Tank Museum in early October, which will also be the occasion of the next AGM.

This bumper edition of the Newsletter, for which Tom Nielsen-Marsh deserves great credit, does contain some wonderful contributions from members of the Association. These contributions largely reflect on aspects of their lives and careers and I would like to extend particular thanks to Sue Adams, Lynn Marshall, Dave Arden, Bill Bowen, and Roger Traynor, as their efforts do make for some fascinating reading. I am sure there are other members of our Association who have also had interesting lives and careers and I do urge you please to share these with us, as any contributions would make the work of our superb Editor that much easier.

In the last Newsletter I appealed for other, younger members to step forward to take over as the Chairperson and the Events Coordinator. I find it very disappointing that no one stepped forward to take over either of these two posts. In the end, Mike Chislett, who is a member of the committee and oversees the website, has kindly volunteered to take over as the Chairman for one year, in the hope that someone else will agree to take over next year.

Where the Events Coordinator post is concerned, Bill Bowen was approached by Wally Lewis our archivist, and as of October Bill agreed to work with others on the committee, forming a small subcommittee, to plan and organise events for 2022.

Finally, do enjoy reading this truly interesting Newsletter, and let us all look forward to less restrictive times, so that we can have a chance to meet up with each other again. More than that, I hope all of our members, and their extended families, will have a greater feeling of confidence about the future and, once vaccinated, will feel protected against the risk of being infected by this dreadful corona virus.

**Ken Jones - March 2021**

**Sue Adams** is the Association's Events Coordinator. Sue was headteacher of both Charlottenburg (Berlin) and Blankenhagen (BFG) Schools.

I went to Cyprus in 1966 when my father was posted there. This followed five years of living in Winchester – the longest time I had had in one place after 2 tours in Malta previously. There had been a suggestion of Mauritius but as it turned out, it was to be Cyprus.

Life in Winchester had been very pleasant, I cycled to school each day, had a network of friends and had a Saturday job in Timothy Whites which gave me a taste of financial independence.

There was some excitement about going to another island and I suppose I had thought that it would not be too dissimilar to Malta. The only mention I had heard of Cyprus was to do with Emva Cream sherry in the bottom of the Christmas trifle! This time we didn't go by sea but flew from Heathrow – my first flight in a plane. Landing in Nicosia gave the first glimpse of the country and driving to Famagusta gave an opportunity to see villages and the lay of the land. The occasional sighting of graffiti endorsing the politics of EOKA or ENOSIS could be seen and gave the first tiny hint that politics were not entirely settled in Cyprus.

My father had had to go ahead of us and had been able to organise accommodation and presumably sort out any administration for our arrival.

He had found an excellent



apartment literally on the edge of Famagusta beach with the sea lapping just below the balcony. Famagusta in those days had a beach which was 3 miles of golden sands uninterrupted with few buildings. It did not take long to be in the sea and enjoy the thought that we could do this every day – climate permitting.

Excitement of arriving over, it was time to visit schools. My brother went to the primary school at Ayios Nikolaos (otherwise known as 4-mile point as it was 4 miles from Famagusta) and I went to King Richard school in the Sovereign Base Area of Dhekelia, further away.

First surprise.... It was a mixed school – I had been to an all-girls school. I travelled by bus, starting much earlier in the morning than I was used to as the school operated a half day system to avoid hot afternoons.

I seem to remember settling in quite easily and found my fellow students very friendly. The school comprised of different buildings around tarmac areas and a huge sandy sport area in a wadi below the main school, the odd Carob tree marked the boundary of the school

area. During the summer months it was extremely hot, there was no air conditioning but most classrooms had ceiling fans which helped a little in providing a waft of air.

I can remember some of the teachers – Mr George Bettsworth was the headmaster and Mr Phillips was the deputy. Mr Phillips married the geography teacher (whose name I cannot remember) and gave much rise to chat in the 6<sup>th</sup> Form room! Mr Saville was the English teacher, Mr. Colins - Religious Education, Mr. Thomas, also for English and then memory fades.

I can recall summer months being extremely hot – the school bus stop was at the end of Hippocrates Street, where we lived and just walking probably a couple of hundred yards with a briefcase full of textbooks was enough to make you think of a having a cool dip in the sea as soon as possible. During the school holidays the pace of life was more relaxed but inevitably each day was beach based. This allowed for taking up water sports and water skiing quickly became a favourite past time.

We were fortunate to own a boat and this allowed us to explore the coastline and

go to other areas for swimming and snorkelling. My mother would prepare food for the Hibachi and once the morning swim was over, we could look forward to delicious salad and kebabs. We often went past Ayia Nappa which was then just a small fishing village and also Fig Tree bay which was an inlet with just a fig tree near the shore. A complete contrast to the changes made by tourism later on.

As a family we enjoyed regular visits to a local taverna, and we quickly became very familiar with the delights of Greek food. A mezza was always enjoyed – stuffed vine leaves, tzatziki, halloumi cheese, kebabs, tahini, olives, fresh potato crisps, souvlaki, salads and fresh fruits. What a contrast to the staple English menu. It didn't take long to appreciate this new cuisine.

Given the abundance of grapes grown all over the island, Cypriot wine could also be enjoyed along with a local liqueur made from oranges.

Oranges were widely grown - also lemons. The harvesting of oranges was celebrated each year in local villages with every village displaying decorated displays of oranges, a local band providing music for traditional dances and everyone enjoying the happiness of a good harvest.

It has been said that you can snow ski and swim on the same day in Cyprus. Perhaps this is an exaggeration as snow does not always fall on the Troodos mountains, but one thing is guaranteed – it was always cooler in the mountains. Often in the summer months, families would go to the recreation centre for families serving

with the Forces. The cooler air was much appreciated as was the scenery – no more sea and beach views but pine forests and new villages to explore and enjoy.

It was not uncommon for British families to employ a maid to help with cleaning or ironing – particularly welcome in the heat of the summer months. Our maid was called Koula and lived nearby in Famagusta, though she originated in a village near Troodos where her parents still lived. One summer we were invited to go for a picnic in the mountains near to her village. It was all delightfully al fresco, stopping to buy some lamb from a roadside butcher on the way and then later a flagon of wine made from Koula's parents' grapes. The wine was cooled in a mountain stream whilst a small wood fire was started to later to cook the lamb kebabs. For such an unpretentious outdoor kitchen it was a very enjoyable occasion with much enjoyment of the food and especially to be able to feel cool in the mountain air.

Making your own entertainment was important. There was no British TV although there was an SKC cinema in Dhekelia and BFBS, also situated in Dhekelia, provided a wide variety of programmes for listening. Combined Services Entertainment organised an itinerary of entertainment through the year and I recall one particularly tortuous evening with Frankie Vaughan as the main star of the show. (Each to their own!)

Living in Famagusta was fun. We were next to the beach; local shops were easily accessible, and the Cypriots were very friendly. "You are welcome" was a phrase you heard over and over again in shops whilst we tried to

remember some local phrase in response. We were in the Greek sector and life seemed very safe although on the edge of the Greek sector was the Turkish sector confined in the old part of the city behind the original city walls. There was no evident animosity, but a respectful distance kept between the two communities. The presence of U.N. Forces in watchtowers around the perimeter of the old city serving as observers was again a gentle reminder that things were not entirely settled politically. We were free to come and go to the Turkish sector when we pleased. Part of the attraction was that the architecture was mostly built by the Venetians, who despite many attempts by the Ottomans kept control of the city. One of the main buildings is St. Nicholas Cathedral and given its Christian connection had no use to the Turks later with their Muslim faith – so it was converted to a bar/restaurant. It gave going to church a whole new meaning! The atmosphere of the old city was of course completely different to the expanding modern area of the Greek sector.

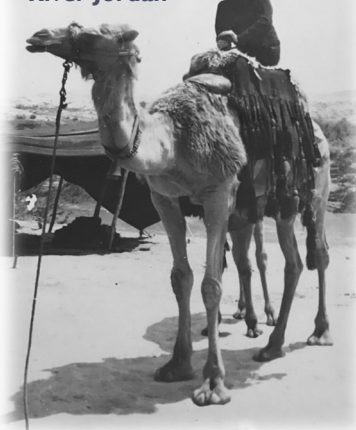
The earlier disappointment of Frankie Vaughan was quickly displaced one afternoon when I returned home from school and found my parents and some friends entertaining Wilfred Bramble (old man Steptoe from the BBC programme "Steptoe and son") on the balcony. Apparently, he was over on holiday and

New material new dress!



Cyprus.

On a camel by the River Jordan





## Remembering Cyprus - continued

somehow met up with people on the beach. I was quite impressed – less so when I was not included in the evening plan for them all to go to the old city for further fun. However, my mother reported the next morning that WB had not stayed with the party long as he disappeared into the dark alleys of the old city accompanied by two young svelte Turkish men ....

Just while I am mentioning famous names, there is another name which absolutely made my father's day. In this instance it was Mandy Rice-Davies (after the Profumo scandal.) My parents had had to go to Nicosia for some reason and were having a coffee in the Ledra Palace Hotel, when I walked Mandy Rice-Davies with her latest beau - probably en route to her nightclub in Beirut.

In May 1967, my mother and I went to visit Jordan with a group organised by the local garrison church. We had a wonderful couple of weeks visiting the many sights and trying to distinguish the many facts from the rather richly embellished commentaries given at religious places. Could I really believe that that was the exact spot where Jesus was born? In those days the Dome of the Rock and the Wailing Wall were all in Jordan and we

were of course fascinating and very busy with so many visitors, so it was with some relief we went to the quieter area of the Dead Sea - and floated. Imagine our surprise after returning to Cyprus that the 6-day war had started, just 24 hours after our return!

There are certain songs that will stay with me forever that I associate with those Cyprus days. In particular the Beach Boys and their surf/sun/beach themes which were the perfect accompaniment for the life I had. Of course, there was other music too – the Beatles were becoming universally popular and it was important to be up to date with the latest craze or fashion. Well, there was no Carnaby Street in Cyprus or BIBA fashion stores but what we did have was an abundance of tailors and dressmakers who could copy any picture you showed them. Material was readily available but not quite in the fashion you might want. This resulted in urgent airmails sent to kind relatives to send out so many yards of Op Art designs or something akin to a Mary Quant. You had to be in fashion!!

In contrast to keeping up to date with pop music, classical evenings were often organised in Salamis. The amphitheatre provided an ideal setting for perfect acoustics – and with a picnic prepared and a glass of wine, a lovely evening could be spent often with a welcome coastal breeze.

There was no green-line division on the island in those days and so travel to Nicosia, Kyrenia, Larnaca or a trip to Kantara mountains was easy. In contrast to today, Kyrenia was in the Greek Cypriot sector. It was not far from Bellapais

Abbey, the setting for Lawrence Durrell's book "Bitter Lemons" in which he writes about the "tree of idleness" – where the men of the village would congregate each day and sit and watch the world go by. This was in fact a familiar scene in most villages. It all seemed so tranquil and that was how it had been for generations and would continue.

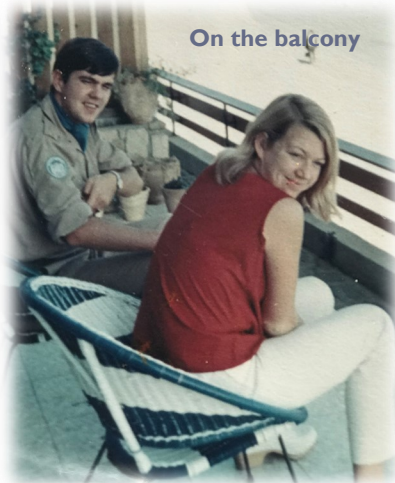
As we know, that was not to be and the sudden Turkish invasion in 1974 changed the island boundaries. Former Greek Cypriot villages and towns were taken over and the Turkish flag hoisted, declaring victory.

I have been back to Cyprus many times and of course it has changed. Tourism has boomed and there is a division on the island with the green line. I cannot visit Famagusta as it is declared to be a buffer zone. Buildings and streets are left emptied and in parts becoming overgrown. It is possible to view Famagusta and the bay from a distance. The last time I went I could see our apartment – the shutters over the windows hanging languidly but the balcony still intact. There were many more hotels and buildings along the beach all looking very forlorn and contributing to the image of it being a ghost town.

It was of course very sad to see such a dilapidated scene and to recall the very happy times I had once spent there. I have no idea if the situation will ever be resolved and that perhaps Famagusta can return to a functioning town again. Who knows? But then again, I never thought the Berlin wall would come down.



Flowers from the Holy Land



On the balcony



Having a ball!

Photos - Author

were able to visit them. Jerusalem and Bethlehem

# Windows of Opportunity: David Arden

## There and Back Again

Reading about the closure of Schools in the last few newsletters and realising how few Schools we have left, set me thinking about the personal opportunities that teachers are now missing. I joined in 1964 at the age of 24 and single and these are some of the opportunities and experiences I encountered over the next 10 years, most of which I certainly wouldn't have experienced in UK. I am sure there are many of our members who could add to this list.

I arrived in Cyprus in April 1964, was picked up from Akrotiri at dawn by Andy Mathieson, my new headmaster, and still remember the drive to Larnaca through groves of orange blossom, a beautiful sight and a wonderful start to my stay there.

Once settled in I started to look for new activities and these started to evolve fairly quickly. I'd been a Scout leader in UK and was contacted by the DC and asked to start a Cub Pack in Larnaca. When this was flourishing I handed it over to a new Leader and became Scoutmaster of 48th 'Dhekelia Group on the Army Base at Dhekelia.

As I had always sung in Church Choirs, I joined the Choir of the Garrison Church in Dhekelia, and eventually took over as Choirmaster. One of the highlights of the year was singing carols around the wards of the BMH on Christmas Day, and even the request for "Doh-A-Deer" by a poor lone occupant of the Children's Ward was happily granted.

Saturday morning was always water-skiing, something I'd always wanted to try; it was organised on the Base by the Royal Anglian Regiment and although it was mainly military personnel, families and civilians working for the services were made very welcome. It took a little while being dragged through the water

before I mastered it but then it really took off. I think we put something like 10p a go in a kitty and that was it! One person who stood out was the wife of the CO of the BMH, a very jolly lady who always brought down a box of thermos flasks of coffee to share with everyone on the beach. She spent many weeks trying to get up on the skis but was very determined, and one Saturday she finally made it and did a circuit, arriving back on the beach to a standing ovation from the rest of us.

In Winter it was snow skiing, again a new venture; we were able to use the Army Ski Centre in the Troodos Mountains and I was taught to ski by a Lance-Corporal Jim Hardy, apparently one of the top Army skiers that year; he was very patient and encouraging and I was soon gently going down the run; later I became more confident and picked up speed! Afterwards it was back to the lodge, a roaring log fire and my introduction to gluhwein, to which I became quite addicted.

Another first was climbing one of the five fingers of Pentidactilas in the Kantara Range with an Army officer; this was new, as previously I had only been potholing. At the top we had a magnificent view of the whole of the island and the icing on the cake was when a huge Griffon Vulture, with at least a six-foot wingspan, went gliding over just a few feet above us. Then another first as we abseiled down the mountain.

Snorkelling was obviously very popular, and I went with some friends to Salamis, the Ancient Roman site, to snorkel off the beach; this was quite fascinating as the rest of the site was under water and you could see the remains of all the houses and even some artefacts, which it was forbidden to remove.

Also for a short time I shared a horse with an RAMC Sergeant, I think I had the front half as it seemed quite

expensive; I managed to do a bit of riding but it finished when he was posted.

In the Summer, School days were from 8 am to 1 pm, and then it was a quick lunch and down to the beach for the afternoon; a friend said to me once "Do you call that working?"

In the Summer holidays most of the time was spent on the beach or touring the island (all free!) At that time most of the island apart from the Panhandle was accessible and within a few hours' drive. So a day in Kyrenia or the Troodos Mountains or Limassol or Paphos was quite possible, although sometimes a short stay was on the cards to explore a bit further.

Despite the relative safety of the island at this time I did manage to get myself arrested at gun point by Greek-Cypriots. My flat mate Bill Wylie ran D of E. at King Richard's School and one evening we took a canister of water to a site just on Sovereign Base territory but not fenced off where they were supposed to camp for the night. As night fell, they hadn't arrived and suddenly we found ourselves surrounded by Greek-Cypriots with rifles who took us back to the village of Pyla. The head man interviewed us and on hearing our story burst out laughing. "We thought you were Turks trying to poison our well, but we didn't shoot you straightaway as you were wearing white clothes!" He immediately sent people off to contact the local shepherds to see if they had seen the party and the Military Police were informed. The party turned up at the Signals Base at RAF Pergamos some twenty miles off course. The irony was not lost on me as in 1958 I would have been on the other end of the rifle during National



Carols at Xmas in BMH Dhekelia 1966



## The Early Days

*On 26th October 1968 following a series of five unofficial Reunions an inaugural meeting was held at the Cora Hotel in London when the formation of an official association was proposed and "it was the almost unanimous wish that a BFES Association be formed". The original Constitution was drafted by Mr Peter Blakey and the production of an occasional newsletter incorporating members news was initiated.*



## Windows of opportunity - continued ...



Teachers' Football Team



Kluang Chuch Choir 1968



Amblers Football Team



Kings School production  
of Mikado 1972

### Service in RAF Nicosia.

I did a trip to Egypt one Christmas with friends and we did the usual rounds of the Pyramids Luxor and the Tombs of the Kings and Queens.

On three occasions my past caught up with me, once in an unusual way. The first time I was on a visit to the Wine Festival at Limassol and standing at a stall getting my wine bottle topped up when I heard a very distinctive West Indian voice asking for a particular wine. I looked round and there was my Jamaican Sergeant from my section when I was in the RAF at Ballykelly. We were both surprised to see each other and chatted for some time.

### The second occasion was

slightly more bizarre. It was the last week of Summer Term 1967 and the School was closing for good; I

was on bus duty and chatting to one of the Greek Cypriot Lefkaritis bus drivers I knew very well; he ran a small café in the evening and my girlfriend and I often visited and were always given a free drink at the start of the evening. The conversation went something like this: -

Driver - "Have you ever been to Cyprus before. Mr. Arden?"

Me - "Actually, yes. I was here in 1958 in the RAF in Nicosia during the E. O. K. A. trouble"

Driver, laughing. "I was in E. O. K. A. then. I would have stabbed you."

Me. Laughing. "No, you

wouldn't I'd have shot you first!"

We both went off into peals of laughter: it's a funny old world.

The final occasion was when I was actually leaving the island. I went down to Akrotiri to get the flight back and stayed in the Officers' Mess where I discovered that the officer who had been Group Scout Leader when I'd helped with Cubs at Ballykelly lived in married quarters nearby. I contacted him and was invited to a party at the Yacht Club that evening. It was fairly late in the night and Brian and I were gently paddling kayaks on the sea when the RAF Britannia roared in overhead and Brian reminded me, I was on it in the morning. Still it was a very enjoyable end to my stay in Cyprus.

My introduction to the Far East in 1967 was also quite spectacular. It was a long flight there on a chartered Britannia which had to continually stop to refuel, but I remember flying over the oilfields with the fires burning like candles on a cake and on arrival over Singapore the pilot circling the island so we could see it all lit up.

My first posting was Terendak Camp a huge Commonwealth Brigade Army Camp (Aussies, Kiwis and Poms); the primary school had over 900 children. I lived in the Garrison Officers' Mess next door to a helicopter pilot and at half term he took me up in the Scout helicopter for my first ever helicopter flight. It was a training flight so first it was a jungle landing. Looking down at the clearing it didn't look big enough for the Scout, however he assured me it was, "However, if I swing the tail too far either way we lose our tail rotor! !" We then climbed and did a throttle back drop. We seemed to be just floating, however on looking down I could see we were heading for a padi field with the farmer ploughing. At that moment he looked up,

dropped the plough and tried to run in the flooded field; we eventually pulled up just above the field, rather too close for my comfort, but he assured me there was still plenty of height.

I joined the Garrison Church Choir and also played a few games in goal for the teachers' football team. At Christmas I was persuaded to take part in 3 Sqn RCT pantomime Dick Whittington, which was great fun; but I also got my second helicopter ride.

I was asked if I would be Father Christmas at the Garrison Christmas Fair; I flatly refused; "But we fly you in by helicopter. "Of course I'll be Father Christmas." So that's how I came to be flying into the games field, dressed as Santa Claus and waving from the bubble of a Sioux helicopter.

I was only there for one term and in January 1968 transferred to Kluang as Deputy Head. Kluang was totally different, a smaller Garrison, very open and full of Gurkhas. I lived in the delightful Gurkha Transport Regiment British Officers' Mess and was made extremely welcome. Most of the British officers were married and usually there were only one or two officers living in; at one stage I was the only living in member and was Messing Member with a cook, waiter and Gurkha barman looking after me. It wasn't lonely as most nights the married members would come in and we had darts and badminton evenings; however, I did have to organise one Mess Dinner Night. One Christmas we formed a football team of British and Gurkha Officers, with me in goal and a planter in the forwards; we called our team "The Amblers" and had some wonderful hard fought games with different sections of the Gurkhas. They were very good at the game but also very fair, never any deliberate fouls. One Gurkha officer I was particularly friendly

## Windows of opportunity - continued ...

with I met 28 years later in Kathmandu when I was on a trek, he was the uncle of our tour leader. (A great re-union!)

When a young subaltern was posted in, he persuaded me to join him every Saturday morning to play basketball with the Gurkhas, a game they really enjoyed and at which they were very skilful despite their size. We would go down at 7, come back around 8.30, shower and devour a full English Breakfast, the only time I have ever enjoyed it.

We also had Hash House Harriers on the Garrison and one week it would be on the Garrison and the next at a Plantation, as the planters used to join in. We occasionally had a Hash Mash where everyone brought along an item of food and it was all cooked together in a dixie (there were some strange mixtures!). Then there was a Hash Mash Pash, same as a Hash Mash but the girls came along, too.

I went in to the Jungle several times with Officers, usually accompanied by a Gurkha or two, and it was then I realised how silently they moved in the jungle. One day one of the Officers, who had an official permit to shoot an elephant asked me if I'd like to join him. Thus, I found myself on the edge of the jungle with a 12 bore shotgun, he had a large rifle of some kind. On inquiring where I should aim if the elephant charged, he said I should run and he would shoot the elephant (too late to back out!). We heard several elephants and caught a brief glimpse of one in the distance, but nothing close enough to shoot. On returning I met the young subaltern and told him where I'd been; he burst out laughing and told me that previously he'd taken Gurkhas along with him, but the last time an elephant had charged, the Gurkhas had run and he'd missed the elephant, hence none of the Gurkhas

would go with him!

I ran Jungle Camps for the School and before each camp I would be taken on the range and fire the Armalite rifle and 9mm Browning Automatic to familiarise myself this added to my weapons training as I'd been trained on the 303 Lee Enfield Rifle and the Bren and Sten guns in the RAF.

Sometimes on a Sunday a group of us teachers, along with an Army friend, would take a picnic, motor down to Singapore, collect a ski-boat from the Naval Base and go over to Seletar Island for the day. There we would ski and swim all day as well as downing a few Tigers and enjoying an excellent picnic. On other Sundays we would drive to Mersing on the coast, hire a fishing boat and go to a small island where we would spend all day swimming and snorkelling, and again downing a few Tigers and the usual picnic!

Again, I joined the Garrison Church Choir and almost immediately became Choir-master; once again Christmas was very memorable. On one occasion we were singing carols around the small BMH when the Matron took us into the Maternity Ward and we sang Away in a Manger to a new-born Gurkha baby. The children were fascinated, and the Gurkha mother looked quite bemused. On another occasion we went out to a Plantation that had a small Church and sang a Carol Service. Apart from the planter and his wife the whole congregation was made up of Tamil Indians. We had a marvellous spread afterwards in the planter's bungalow.

One Summer my sister came out to do her University Thesis on "The Peat Soil of South West Johore" Everyone was very helpful; Planters had holes dug for her and even some of the Gurkhas dug some holes in the jungle. I took about three reels of film of holes with tape measures in

them, I cannot imagine what the film processors thought when they developed them! During this time I made trips to Cambodia and Borneo, as well as breaks in the Cameron Highlands, Frasers Hill, Penang, and the East Coast I also spent a weekend with an officer and his wife who had moved to an Army Garrison in the north. On the Saturday morning when the Garrison was quiet he decided that as I'd lived with the Regiment for some time I ought to drive some of the vehicles. Thus, I did a circuit or two round the Garrison in a Bedford 3 tonner, a Land Rover and a Bedford bus.

Sadly, the Garrison at Kluang closed in 1970 and as Acting Head I was responsible for the closure of the School. The end of a very enjoyable experience.

I was transferred to Highgate Hill School in Kuala Lumpur for my final year in the Far East and again a very different environment. There was no British Garrison, all the service personnel were seconded to the Malaysian Forces, but the School had a large number of children as we had British High Commission, British Council, Australian High Commission children, as well as children from parents attached to Malaysian firms; I even had a Dutch boy in my class.

The staff all lived in flats in various parts of the city, but there was always a good social life. I joined the Selangor Philharmonic Society, a multicultural society which had a wealth of talent from all nationalities. We put on a wonderful production of "Oliver" and even the painting of the scenery was an experience in itself as we did it in the basement of a large convent. The nuns looked after orphan children and it was not long before the children were helping us paint the scenery. As we did it on a Sunday the Mother Superior suggested that we had Sunday lunch there and we gave a donation



### The Early Days

*At the AGM in 1971 it was felt that personal contact was the most effective way of increasing membership and Mr Foot suggested that we open membership to teachers in other Commands. Membership stood at 141. Until this time most Reunions had been evening events but now they were firmly established as lunchtime Reunion and AGM.*



## Windows of opportunity - continued ...

Leaving Germany in 1975 **David Arden** did a stint at Kettering Girls' High School for one term as a temporary teacher of Maths and Geography, very different from Primary but very enjoyable. In January 1976 he became Head of the Village School in West Felton in Shropshire, where he joined the Porthywaen Silver Band, got married and acquired three step-children. He retired in 1998 and spent several years making show jumps. He joined the local Ramblers and became a walk leader as well as coordinator for their footpath maintenance group continuing this with help from other members for ten years. During this time he joined the Welshpool to Llanfair Light Railway, a narrow gauge steam railway, where he's worked on renovating and rebuilding wagons and carriages, but mainly working on the track, becoming Chef and keeping the Track Gang fed and watered;! he now works in the station shops. He has continued travelling and when not visiting his brother in Africa, to places like Botswana and Rwanda. He has also travelled with a company called Explore to more remote places such as Alaska, Tibet and Venezuela. He now tends to do more sedate railway holidays. Living in a small village he likes to walk most days round the country lanes, He also looks after his younger step-daughter's dogs when she is doing her long shifts as a nurse on a Covid Ward. This involves three walks a day so lockdown is far from boring!

towards the upkeep of the Convent. So every Sunday we were treated to an excellent roast served up by the nuns and some of the older children. My most enjoyable role in the performance was playing the leading drunk in the "Oom-Pah-Pah" scene with Nancy. Somebody said, "Type cast".

I was also persuaded by my friend, the late Bill Hopkins, to join the Malaysian Welsh Society Choir as I sang tenor, apparently two nights in a tent on the Brecon Beacons counted as residential qualifications.

Bill and I spent quite a bit of time in the jungle together as well as taking the children into the jungle on a Thursday afternoon, we also spent three nights in the jungle trying to find the source of a jungle river. We slept in hammocks, cooked food over an open fire and hacked our way through the jungle. At one stage as we were about to cross the river on a tree trunk, we spotted a python curled up in the centre. It had spotted us and after a few moments slithered away; also, as the river became just a small stream which we were walking up, Bill trod on the tail of a six foot monitor lizard which was camouflaged by the stony bottom; the terrified creature beat a hasty retreat up the bank. We eventually found what we thought might be the source and made our way back to civilisation.

At Easter I was invited to go to Hong Kong for a re-union with the Gurkha Transport Regiment who had relocated

there; I was the guest of Major and Mrs. Jim Massey. Jim had been a stalwart member of The Amblers, and naturally a game had been arranged; there was also an evening arranged in the Gurkha Lines and I was greeted warmly by many of the Gurkhas who had either driven the School buses in Kluang or played football or basketball.

Whilst in K.L. we had severe floods and the school was closed for a week. I volunteered for the Red Cross and as I had an estate car used it to take supplies to the Merdeka Stadium, where several hundred homeless people were sheltering, and to pick up emergency supplies from the airport as relief planes arrived. One day I was asked to drive a large Holden Estate and take a doctor and Malaysian medic to surrounding kampongs where families were sheltering in Schools; water supplies had been contaminated and they needed to be injected against cholera. The doctor was a very jolly Belgian lady and as she wanted records to be taken she decided it would be best if the Malay medic did the records and I swabbed the arms of the recipients. At one kampong the Headman wanted to show how macho he was by having an injection in both arms, and at another one wanted a painful tooth removed. Whilst driving between two kampongs a rubber tree slowly descended a few hundred yards in front of us blocking the road; however, within minutes locals had appeared from a nearby kampong, one with a chain saw and we were soon on our way again.

My final night in K.L. was spent on stage in a musical called "Cavalcade of Music" which I was co-producing. As soon as the show finished I was whisked off to the airport for the flight to Singapore. The next evening I was on the RAF VC10 flight from Changi to Brize Norton, via Gan and

Akrotiri. The VC10 was a very comfortable aircraft and we took off from Changi in the evening and arrived in Brize Norton the following morning, a much quicker and smoother flight than on the outward journey. After a brief spell at home I flew out to RAF Gütersloh, a very ordinary flight compared to the previous two postings; Trenchard School was actually in the town of Gütersloh next to a park, probably a good thing as Lightnings doing a reheat take-off would drown out the loudest teacher. The School was close to the Army Base at Mansergh Barracks, so all single teachers were billeted there along with all the Officers.

Again I took up some of my previous interests and joined the Choir at the RAF base, and for a time I was persuaded to become Choir-master of the station Roman Catholic Church; I also played a few games of football for the teachers' team and went skiing in the Harz Mountains. I was also invited to take part in the musicals produced at Kings School and was in the chorus of The Mikado and Oliver; however when the next production came along I had changed roles completely.

I came from Kettering, a town with a championship brass band with the grand title of "Munn and Felton's Footwear Band" and often went to hear them in the local park. I was next door to a Kings teacher, Pete Vickers, who played the trombone and one night expressed an interest in possibly learning to play a brass instrument. The following night he turned up with a school euphonium and so began what was to be a lifelong interest. Within a few weeks I was given the music for the next concert and so began a hectic few weeks of fast learning. I think it was probably a case of "all the right notes but not necessarily in the right order!" "Soon afterwards I discovered there





## Windows of opportunity - continued ...

was a voluntary band on the RAF station, mainly RAF personnel except for a trombonist from NAAFI. I was made very welcome, despite having only just started to learn and my playing came on in leaps and bounds. The next two shows at Kings were The Bartered Bride and Oh What a Lovely War and this time I was in the pit orchestra. The RAF Voluntary Band was not very big, but we played at the Station Open Day and were invited to play at the local Rosenmontag Day Parade. We were also invited to play at the local Fathers' Day outing, which was quite an experience with a fair amount of alcohol flowing. We were joined by the RAF Germany Band for a Mess Dinner Night at Gutersloh and played at the occasional Church Service. At Christmas time the whole Band, including the youngsters, piled into an RAF 3 tonner and drove round Married Quarters playing carols. There was a cupboard full of instruments not being used and I was allowed to clean them up and take them to School to teach the children to play. The final outcome was I formed a small Junior Band which played for the last Church Service before I left Gutersloh.

I bought my own euphonium a year after I'd started to learn and which I'm still playing now, as our Chairman will confirm, as we still meet each year when my Band is playing at a traditional Welsh agricultural show just outside the small town of Llanfyllin.

I also did some 22 shooting at the club on the RAF station and took part in a competition against a local German club.

During the summer holidays my parents would fly out on the "Granny Flights" organised by the RAF at Gutersloh and I took them on some memorable holidays to Denmark and

the Black Forest. One Easter Pete Vickers and I went down to Bavaria and spent a wonderful week walking in the snow-covered Alps.

However, the most memorable Easter holiday was when I went to Sennelager and did the Army free-fall parachute course. It started with a chance remark I made in the Mess Bar to the officer who ran the course and a few days later I found all the joining papers in my pigeonhole, too late to back out. The course didn't coincide entirely with the School holidays, but I was told to come over as soon as School finished and do my ground training as The Red Devils would be there, and if I completed the training satisfactorily they would put me out of their aircraft on the way up to do their practice!

So one morning I found myself sitting in the red Islander surrounded by Red Devils; they couldn't have been more encouraging and at 3000 ft I was put out on static line. My log reads "Exit slow, OK, at first, poor landing", I hit the ground like a sack of spuds. I got to know their CO Major Peter Schofield quite well as he was also staying in the Sennelager Mess and he was very encouraging. A day or two later the squaddies on the course turned up and as we were all wearing Army denims, we soon became a friendly group. The staff had been told not to reveal my true identity, and for nearly a week all the lads assumed I was in the Army. However, my cover was blown three times within 24 hours; first of all one of the staff forgot and told me to write the names on the blackboard as I was a teacher, later that afternoon two young boys came over to where we were all sitting, kitted out ready for the Army Beaver to pick us up; I'd taught one of them in Malaya and when I spoke to him he

recognised me and thought I was in the Army. The following morning one of the squaddies, whom I sometimes gave a lift back to Sennelager, came up to me and said he had been round at a friend's house and was looking at his pictures of Malaya. He showed him his daughter's School photo and I was his daughter's teacher. As the course continued, we were all anxious to get on to free-fall, but it wasn't that easy and a few dropped out. After 6 static line jumps, I did 4 static line with dummy pulls and was then considered ready for free-fall.

As it happened the next day the Red Devils had a day off and I found myself sitting once more in the red Islander, but this time with other members of the course to do our first free-fall jump. My log reads "Exit positive, delay, recovery all good" and the icing on the cake was the delight and congratulations of Major Schofield as I had done my first free-fall out of his aircraft. A day or two later he asked me if I would take him and some of the lads to a nearby Night-Club. Thus, I piled as many of the Red Devils as I

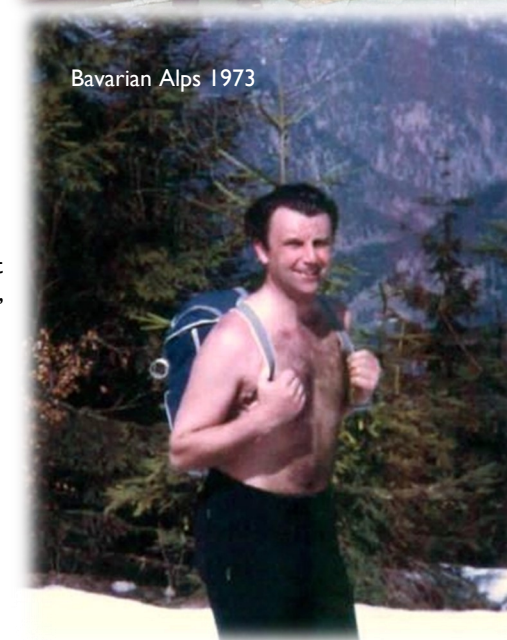
Red Devils Islander 1972



Gütersloh Junior Band 1975



Bavarian Alps 1973



## Windows of opportunity - continued ...

could in my estate car and a good night was had by all. I did three more free-fall jumps and then it was time to go back to School, rather an anti-climax.

Just before the next Summer holiday two of the Kings teachers, Trevor Parsonage and Alan Logsdail called round to see if I fancied sailing for a week round the Baltic coast. As I'd never been sailing before I jumped at the idea, I warned them I'd never done it before but they didn't seem to mind. At our get-together a few days later, I told them I quite enjoyed cooking, which clinched it as neither of them was keen.

The start of the trip nearly turned into a disaster, as a few hours out of Kiel we

were hit by a force 9 gale which tossed our little 24ft yacht all over the place, and to make matters worse we didn't have an engine; however, we were very relieved that a German Navy MTB had spotted us and circled round us until the storm abated. We waved our thanks and when he was certain we were alright he roared off into the distance. The rest of the week was very pleasant, and I was taught to steer the boat and also how to navigate. On the way back to Gütersloh I asked the pair why they came to ask me as neither of them knew me very well before then. They both laughed, "We went through all the teachers we knew and were at a loss when Alan suggested you might be interested, because as you'd been mad enough to go free-fall parachuting you might be mad enough to join us!"

Having been in Service Schools for 10 years I decided it was time to return to U. K. and get a Headship in a village School, which had always been my plan.

So began a round of farewells, including an evening out with the Voluntary Band and being dined out in the Officers' Mess at RAF Gütersloh. Many presents, which are on display in my bungalow, including two tankards, one from the Church of England Choir and one from the Catholic Church Choir, prints of Gütersloh from the Band and many more.

It was a very memorable 10 years and I feel very lucky to have been able to take part in so many different activities. It would never have been the same in UK and it is something which teachers of today will not be able to experience.



Photos - Author

### **Michael (Mike) Metcalfe** 30-07-1947 - 3-12-2020

Association member Bob Steele has reported the death of Mike Metcalf. Mike joined the staff of Victoria School Dortmund in 1972 where he subsequently met his wife Beryl. He passed away suddenly and will be greatly missed and remembered with much affection by all who knew him.

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## On a Visit to Shanghai (2) - Ken Jones

### **The challenges posed by China for both the gappers and myself.**

Given that these young volunteers were going to live in an authoritarian and alien culture I was very careful to warn them about various issues.

1 I told them that in no circumstances should they challenge authority neither in the school nor in the town community where they were living.

2 At all times they should be aware of the absolute authority of the PSB (Public Security Bureau) and any contact with their staff should be avoided at all costs.

3 The boys were advised to avoid any relationship with any of the pretty girls in the senior school as they would view such a relationship as their passport to the UK or Australia.

4 At no stage should they in-

volve themselves in any kind of discussion with their pupils about public protests, communism or the Chinese government.

5 To help them prepare for the culture shock that faced them when they arrived in China, I highlighted the inevitability of the 7 S's  
Spitting - This was to be expected and normal in public places, often accompanied by very loud retching

Staring - Their white faces would always lead to this happening when they were in towns which never saw tourists. Girls with blonde hair had a hard time in this respect as they were the envy of Chinese women.

Shoving - In a crowded situation the Chinese have no concept of "after you" especially when getting into a lift or onto a bus.

Smoking - The availability of

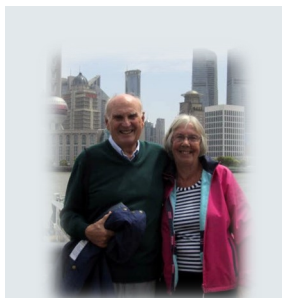
very cheap cigarettes in the country led to lots of smoking in public places.

Shouting - Normal levels of conversation do not apply in China especially when using a mobile phone or dining in a restaurant. I still recall being totally amazed to see a man standing at an urinal with a mobile phone in each hand and shouting away. Truly remarkable!!

Slurping - Dining with the Chinese could be a very noisy experience!

Surprises - The Chinese appear to be incapable of clear forward planning and I warned the gappers to be prepared to accept any changes at the last minute.

The other aspect of the culture which shocked the girls especially, in the country areas where they lived, was that public toilets provided minimal privacy with no doors,



*Ken Jones concludes  
the story of his time  
as manager of the  
Gap Project in  
China ...*



## On a Visit to Shanghai (2) continued ...

walls one foot high and a hole in the ground.

I was always surprised how resilient the gappers proved to be, supporting each other through difficult times. The pairing of British and Australian students worked out well and certainly helped international understanding.

By and large I had a few issues to resolve when I visited them in their placements. One of the more delicate matters to resolve was to advise a gapper on how to resolve the difficulty he was facing of a sixth form pupil making homosexual advances. This had been preceded by him emailing me in advance of my visit to ask for a private meeting with me. Little did I anticipate the reason for his request.

The other kind of advice which I conveyed to the gappers was the need to avoid situations which might lead to the Chinese losing face.

Sometimes the schools tried to not give the gappers the accommodation I had been promised when I made my first visit to assess the suitability of a school for a placement, which was the kind of problem where a loss of face was a real possibility. I had faced a similar problem on my sixth visit to China when one of the hosting provinces decided not to house me in the normal hotel but a vastly inferior and noisy hotel. When I said I found this unacceptable there is no doubt that my working relationship with the designated rep who hosted me did suffer.

### Support network in China

Given the spirited young people who went out to China and the authoritarian regime which dominated their lives, it was important to have the backup of the diplomatic service available if any problems cropped up. This

meant that each year I was expected to meet up with the consuls who covered the provinces I visited. One consulate was in Chongqing and the other was in Guangzhou, which was a much more attractive city to visit. As Chongqing was the city from where the Yangtze River cruises started, I often wondered what the tourists thought about such an unpleasant large city.

Prior to their arrival in China the names of all gappers and their locations were lodged with each consulate. I am happy to say that during my four years I never needed to call on the support of the diplomatic staff for the simple reason that the gappers behaved themselves.

### What challenges did I have to face?

Here I will just touch on a few of the challenges which have lingered in my memory.

1 Given that the provinces and majority of the towns I visited hardly ever saw tourists, my inability to speak Mandarin posed problems and led to a need for frequent sign language.

2 Lots of flying on crowded internal domestic flights was a challenge due to the cramped seating as well as the airline destination boards in the airports being in Chinese, with only the flight number being understandable. Cabin service left a lot to be desired even on long internal flights. Very often I felt that the aircraft were landing at air strips hacked out of a mountain side! Flight delays were often the norm, the most memorable being a 5 hour delay late at night due to the aircraft not being able to depart from the prior destination due to an excessive fireworks display making it dangerous for aircraft to take off. I am not

sure if this was the true reason!

3 Being quite tall and with a white face, I would regularly be stopped in the streets with a request for a family photograph, on one occasion I was sitting in a park and a lady dumped a baby in my lap just to take a photo and did not do a runner! I was also often stopped in a street as someone wanted to try out their English and seek my opinion.

4 Accepting Chinese hospitality at every school I visited was often a real challenge when I was told what I was eating. Such things as fish head soup, snake, dog, yak, donkey, worms, spiders, bees, animal testicles, and varied other internal organs of an animal, which all led to amazingly tasty meals with each province having its own style of cooking. It is astounding that I was never ill after such meals! These meals often ended with the drinking of the Chinese spirit Baijiu with round after round just testing my capacity. I always insisted that the gappers joined us on these occasions as they were the ones who deserved thanks.

5 Surprises hit me very often, as the schools and the provincial education office would often make a last-minute request that took me beyond my terms of reference. The most memorable one of these was a request I received 24 hours before departing the UK for China to give a 15 minute address on "the value of international education" I was given no context nor any idea where I would give this address.

This incident happened in the Yunnan province on the occasion of the merging of three colleges to form a new university in Dali. When I arrived at the venue at 9 am I was stunned to see a massive,

Photos - Author



Ken's Staff Car



The Colonial French Club



Countryside School Buildings in stark contrast to the grand buildings of the schools where the Gappers were placed.



Final handover tour with my successor in a typical conference room with a painting of the school buildings.

We recently heard from Bernard Allen who has promised to write about his and his late wife's experiences in the early years of BFES ...

*My late wife (then Jean Cotterell) taught at BFES Cologne from 1954 to 1958, and lived in the Mess in the Volkspark. I was in the army at Wahn, met her and we married in 1959. She subsequently worked as a teacher in BFES schools in Catterick Camp and Verden.*

*I am currently writing her family history, and, of course, a lot about her time as a teacher - and my own life in Berlin in 1946/47, before any real borders between the Sectors existed.*

*My father finished the war in Berlin and we joined him in February 1946 - I was nearly 12 - and there were no British schools in Berlin at that time, nor any boarding schools in the British Zone. The daughter of another officer and I went for three mornings a week to an elderly German for 18 months; he tried to teach us mathematics (basic), English literature and German history (up to the Franco-Prussian war and no further) in a large German house called the Defra-Schule.*

*For the rest of the time I wandered around Berlin mostly on my own. It didn't do much for my schooling, and I was well behind my peers when I returned to England in the summer of 1957. My father also used to take me in to the Russian sector where, as Mess Secretary, he used to collect the bulk liquor from a dark cellar.*

*And all the nationalities - in uniform - used the same train to go on holiday to Brussels, Paris etc.*

***It may take a while, but I will deliver my story.***

tiered auditorium with 2000 people already there and the stage set with two rows of seats for dignitaries. I was told to go and sit on the stage and duly went and sat on the second row, only to be told no "you sit next to the President in the middle of the front row".

At the end of a very long ceremony, at which I made my contribution through an interpreter, I was pounced on by the Professor of Education who said he wanted me to come to a series of seminars with him to expound on the ideas I had conveyed in my address. This continued after a very long lunch into the afternoon with a number of seminars.

In the evening there was to be a concert which was preceded by the ceremonial lighting of a huge bonfire and I was told my role was to do this jointly with the President of the new university.

After the concert finished, very late in the evening, I was pounced upon once again to be told I had to do an interview with Yunnan television. This in the end was quite amusing as the interviewer and the interpreter, standing each side of me, were about 1 foot shorter than I am, so coping with this and looking at the camera was not easy.

Memorably one of the gappers who was watching said to me "How the hell did you manage that Ken"?

6 The final challenge I want to share with you was the matter of coping with the "ladies of the night"! In the poor towns I visited, a white male, on his own, was fair game, irrespective of age! Having checked into a hotel, I would invariably be joined by a lady in the lift who would say in poor English "I will show you to your room" On the way to the room the regular question was "would you like a massage" to which my firm reply was no thank you and then making sure that my escorting lady did not try to get into the room with me.

The other technique used was

to telephone me shortly after I arrived in my room. Never being sure who was on the phone I always answered the first time and once I heard the familiar offering of "would you like a good massage?" my answer was no thank you I am too tired. This would be followed by one or two further telephone calls which I never answered, and some 20 minutes later there would be a knock on the door. The first time this happened I made the mistake of opening the door and had a real struggle to stop the lady who was standing there coming into my room.

On my last visit to China, I was being accompanied by my female successor, and her hotel room was opposite mine. I had the inevitable phone call offering a massage, which I declined, and as usual this was followed by the knock on the door which this time got louder and louder. The amusing end to all of this was that next morning my successor asked me during breakfast "Ken, who was that lady banging on your door last night" to this my reply was "do not worry Sally you won't have that problem"!

Despite the challenges which came with being the Project Manager in southern China I was lucky to have had this opportunity, as I was having difficulty coming to terms with retirement and furthermore, I had lost both my parents within 19 days of each other.

During the repeated visits I made over a period of four years I saw a country that was changing at an amazingly fast rate, en route to becoming a world power. Added to that I worked with an amazing group of young people, some of whom became so enraptured with China that they are now pursuing careers there. I still have contact with some of the via the medium of Facebook and LinkedIn. More than that I also had insights into parts of the country which I would never have had as a tourist.

These early visits to China

opened doors to the subsequent work I did for a Chinese owned educational trust in Shanghai, for whom I appointed Headteachers. This then led to my wife and I being asked by the wife of one of the leaders to be guardians for their daughter when she came to a boarding school in England. This gave my wife and I a new lease of life watching this young girl, who arrived at the age of 13, develop into a poised, confident young lady who went on to study at Oxford University, an experience she kindly shared with us culminating in us being invited to her graduation ceremony and a reception in Exeter College. We are delighted she has continued to have monthly Skype sessions with us during her time doing a master's degree in the USA which has led to her being offered a post later this year with Deloitte back in Shanghai.

All told, becoming the Gap Project Manager for southern China was a pretty challenging and interesting way to spend my early years of retirement! My final visit to Shanghai was in April 2018 when, along with my wife, we accepted the invitation of Melissa's parents to fly out Business Class and stay for 10 nights in a superb hotel, all at their expense. Knowing my interest in antiques the hotel they had chosen was the one based on the old colonial French Club, an Art Deco gem. As we had refused to take any payment for looking after Melissa for the 5 years she was in a UK boarding school, this was the parents way of saying thank you. The other reason they wanted us to visit was to enable us to meet the extended family, who had heard a great deal about us.

In their view we had been more than just guardians, but had given their daughter an extended family life, through the experiences we had provided. It was a truly amazing last visit to China for me and the very first for Brenda!"



## A Personal Memoir (2): Hemer Primary School

Living in West Germany gave both my pupils and my family many great advantages. Every year we would spend our February half-term on a skiing holiday to the Alps in Austria or Switzerland, as well as Southern Germany. We could get there in a day's drive. Every year too, we took our oldest pupils on a Youth Hostel visit to Holland where we stayed in Arnhem and visited and studied the battle grounds of Operation Market Garden, and toured the canals and sights of Amsterdam. My parent regiment provided the regimental bus - and a driver! We took younger pupils to the nearby Mohnesee Lake (of Dambusters Fame) where the British Army had a sailing club and where they (and me too) learned to sail, as well as carry out environmental studies. Service Children's Schools ensured that pupils could develop the creative arts with the employment of peripatetic music advisors and teachers. Each regiment had its own regimental band with talented musicians, many of whom were parents of pupils at the school.

Each of the regiments on station acted as a parent regiment for one of the schools. Hemer School was initially supported by the Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters. But not for long, as they were about to finish their tour of duty in Germany and return to a new base in Wiltshire. They were replaced by soldiers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Light Infantry (2LI) who were coming from Catterick, North Yorkshire. This gave rise to a particular feature of Service Schools life, where

up to one third of the pupils in this school would leave within a matter of months to be replaced with a new group from an entirely different part of the country. This was very evident in Hemer School with Gordon Highlander pupils. I had very little experience of the Scottish educational system which was quite different in atmosphere and structure from England. However, I found their children to be mainly delightful characters with very supportive families. I did, however, refer one pupil to the Speech Therapy Service to be told that there was absolutely nothing wrong with his speech, 'it's you. You just can't understand a word he speaks, that's all'!

The situation with 26 Engineer Regiment was different. This regiment was based in the nearby town of Iserlohn. Here, there was a 'trickle posting' system whereby the regiment was a permanent fixture on the base, but soldiers were posted in and out of the base on an individual basis.

Consequently there was also a continual change in the make-up of the school's population. (I decided upon a career in teaching when I was 18 years old after having a dream in which I was greeted by a group of children cheering me along the road into school when I arrived on my bicycle). In Hemer, I often cycled to work using my first ever brand new bicycle. As I rode through the quartering area, many of the children would see me, open their windows and cheerfully shout out 'Hello, Mr Bowen'.

I had finally achieved my dream.

The school I led had created a place where the children felt happy, were kept busy, and given a very supportive and stimulating learning environment. In addition, every child felt valued. In time, I successfully applied for a third tour of duty (which would take me to the age of 50.)

Hemer School also housed a Special Unit for up to eight pupils from the whole Dortmund Consortium who had been assessed as having Medium Level Special Educational Needs. The activities of this class were very well integrated within our Infant class department.

Around 1988, 2LI left Hemer, to be replaced by the 3rd Battalion of The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers (3RRF) who became my parent regiment, led by Colonel Andrew Larpent. Around the same time, the Gordon Highlanders were replaced by the 3rd Battalion of The Royal Tank Regiment (3RTR).

Like many primary schools, the highlight of each year was the events surrounding Christmas. Santa Claus arrived at school by a different form of transport each year; one year by horse, another by helicopter, and one time he got stuck on the roof and had to be rescued by the Fire Brigade. I insisted that every child in the school took part in The Christmas Concerts for parents, and I was very pleased with the standards achieved. You can see this in the photographs I have from 1985 'Bethlehem Rock, and from 1992 'Cinderella'.



*Bill Bowen started work as Head-teacher of Hemer School in the New Year of 1984 with very little idea of what was ahead of him. This is the concluding part of his personal memoir ...*



## A Personal Memoir (2): Hemer Primary School

It wasn't all fun living within the military community, however, as we lived constantly with the threat of a terrorist attack from the Irish Republican Army. One soldier was killed outside his quarter in Dortmund, which brought the threat rather too near for the liking of some families and teachers. A British Officer was assassinated in his car as he waited in the queue for the car ferry at Calais. This resulted in the special British Forces number plates being taken from our cars and replaced by special copies of the British style plates being issued to us all together with car tax licence discs to be displayed on our windscreens (although we were exempt from the stamp duty.) We were all issued with under-car mirrors on long sticks to check for terrorist bombs.

At times of the highest alerts, armed soldiers accompanied our children on school bus journeys. As an act of some defiance, I made sure that our caretaker, Helmut Schwarz, raised the Union Flag on the new flagpole that I had requisitioned each morning that the school was in session.

### The Reunification of Germany, and beyond ...

In 1989, amidst great joy and excitement, the Berlin Wall was overrun, and West Germany soon became one country with the East. The threat of a Russian invasion of Western Europe was discovered to have been an illusion. This prompted a review of the role of the British Military across North West Germany in its entirety. The 'Options for Change' review envisaged the creation of a Rapid

Reaction Force of around 25,000 personnel (around half of the then current forces) based in Germany, able to deploy at short notice to trouble spots around the world. Sadly, the station at Hemer/Iserlohn would not be required and would, in all likelihood, be closed down in 1992. There's not too many people around who, like me, are able to claim that 'I lost my job because the Berlin Wall came down'.

However, in 1990, Iraqi forces under Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and in early 1991, a coalition force of British and American Forces defeated the Iraqi army in a short but decisive air and land battle. At this time, half of the fathers of pupils at my school were away on active service in Kuwait. At a briefing given by the Station Commander, we were told that it was estimated that public opinion would not accept a casualty rate of more than 14% of the men fighting. At the next School Assembly that I led, I took a moment of quiet reflection. If that casualty rate was sustained, around fifteen of the pupils gathered in the Hall could lose their fathers by the end of the conflict. In the event, there were very few casualties across the coalition forces, although an armoured vehicle of the 3RRF was destroyed in the most severe 'friendly fire' incident of the campaign and among the casualties then was an uncle of one of my pupils.

### 'Towards Closure'

The First Iraq War delayed the planned closure of the school by a couple of years. During 1993, the school lost half of its pupils. Most of the

staff either returned as planned to the UK, or were redeployed to other schools across Germany. I was the last to be given a new role. I was given the job of taking over Barnes Wallis First School in RAF Bruggen for just one year until it closed in 1995 when I would become eligible for early retirement. In the last year of the school, the camps of the 3RRF and 3RTR closed, and in quick order, the majority of my pupils left too. In June 1994, we held a final Dortmund Area Arts Festival at Hemer School in which we presented a modern version of the story of Peter and The Wolf, in which all remaining pupils at the school took part. Gordon Outhwaite arrived to take the last set of individual photographs of the children and remaining staff. Our caretaker, Helmut Schwarz, joined us for a farewell photograph, He was the only member of staff to be staying on. Gordon also took two special photographs for me; one is with my chain of office as the President of the National Association of Headteachers North-West Europe Branch 1994, and the other is of me sitting alone on the stairs where he had taken the staff photographs for each year that he had visited.

One of my priorities in Hemer School had been to ensure that good teachers were able to develop their career positively and successfully. Bob Steele had left in 1987 to take on the headship of a small village school in Somerset. He had been an efficient, loyal and popular leader in the staffroom and I was very pleased for him. I was very fortunate in securing as his





replacement, Tim Nichol from Lippstadt and he stayed with me for the next seven years, before becoming the SCEA Adviser for Special Educational Needs world-wide, with Bob eventually going on to become head of a large school in Yeovil.

My Head of KSI Jonquil Doodson, came out to Germany as the notional 'Head of Family'; her husband, Andy, as her 'dependant', applied for the job as Caretaker at Summern school. He was successful, but not before having to complete an employment form stating that he was not pregnant at the time!

#### **A Miscellany of Memories:**

Like the time when we filled in the Army Requisition Form for 500 A5 Manilla Brown Envelopes wrongly, and two days later an army truck from the central stores turned up at 7.00am when no-one was about, unloaded 500 packets of 500 envelopes of 'Envelopes, A5, Manilla, Brown, Gummed' onto my school playground and left. We needed around 500 for the year and ended up with 250.000!

Like the Beating of Retreat Ceremony for the Gordon Highlanders when they were granted the Freedom of the Town of Hemer. I was an 'invited dignitary' seated in the town square, when first we heard the skirl of the

pipes in the distance, then the tramp of marching feet, and then the entire regiment cresting the hill above the town, marching as one with their kilts swaying in unison!

Like the final Officers' Mess Ball of the 2LI in Germany when at midnight, standing highlighted on the top of an adjacent barrack block, a lone bugler sounded 'The Last Post'. Just one more 'hair on the back of my neck moment'!

Like the February half-term of 1991, when most US soldiers in Germany were in Kuwait, we were able to book in a week's skiing at the American Forces Recreation Centre in Berchtesgaden, and the bus that took us to the skiing area each day made its way past the desolated ruins of Hitler's summer home, the Berghof.

Like the Parade held to mark the return of 3RRF from Kuwait and the defeat of Saddam Hussein in 'Operation Desert Storm'. I have never witnessed formation marching with such intricacy, precision and absolute timing.

Soldiers performing at their very best.

Like the 1994 Dinner of my Presidential Year of the NAHT (NWE) which we held in the Officers' Mess at Gütersloh, with David Hart, the National Secretary in attendance.

Like the Civil Service Retirement Course back in London which I attended with Derek Ebbage, lately Head of The Havel School, Berlin. We managed to get last minute returns for a performance of 'Cats' the musical; only it turned out to be the 13th Anniversary performance, held in the presence of Princess Margaret and sitting next to me was the actor George Baker, in the seat directly in front of me was the show's director, Trevor Nunn, and in the interval I found myself sharing a glass of champagne with Juliet Mills.

In July 1994 Hemer School finally closed its doors to the children of British Forces personnel with a final complement of just 29 children.

We held a final, emotional closing ceremony before handing over the keys of the building to Herr Wolf, the headteacher of the Freiherr Von Stein Grundschule Hemer, who was transferring his pupils into 'my' larger school building in anticipation of a new influx of pupils from Poland and the Baltic States, now liberated from the communist bloc, and even from Russia itself.



**THE END**



**'School Concert: The Headteacher as 'Fagin'.**

*The pictures in this article are taken from the year books that I compiled showing the School's traditional activities over the previous 12 months. They were displayed for every new family to look at on their first visit to the school. I also made sure that I accompanied the parents and new pupils on a full tour of the school campus. I hope I made them feel welcome and important to me personally. I hope that this is evident in these pictures, but I am sorry for their often blurry character. I returned with my family to the UK on leaving service in Germany and took up an appointment as an Inspector of Schools with Ofsted, eventually becoming a Registered Inspector, at which post I remained for the next eight years. I never worked so hard and intensively in my life as I did whilst inspecting schools, but it was my time over eleven years working in Service Children's Schools that, on reflection, brought me the most reward and satisfaction, the best sense of camaraderie, and the greatest adventure that I could ever have expected from my chosen career.*

## No 6 Civilian Mess, Music, Film & Windsor Boys' School - Roger Traynor

*Roger Traynor is an ex-pupil of several BFES schools in the 1960s and 70s. His late father was stationed with NAAFI in Berlin between 1968 and 1972 and his mother and brother accompanied him. He lived in Dickensweg in Charlottenburg a proverbial stones' throw from the 1936 Olympic Stadium.*

*Roger attended both Charlottenburg and Gatow schools prior to attending Windsor Boys School in Hamm leaving in the Summer of 1972 when he and his family returned to the UK.*

*This the second of a three-part series – the first written by one of our ex-pupils - is his account of his BFES school days during that period and in part of his search (after a Christmas visit all those years ago) to what his father referred to as No 6 Civilian Mess.*

A typical Berlin winter heavy snowfall would transform the area in which we lived and the family Christmases we enjoyed are among my most treasured memories. One in particular stands out. My father's civilian status afforded him access to No 6 Civilian mess, a beautiful old villa. He explained that it was used as accommodation for single or unaccompanied civilians who had been granted Officer status. My father had also been told that the Soviet double agent George Blake had apparently been an occasional visitor in the mid-1950s, prior to his return to London, and eventual imprisonment, in 1959. I was intrigued by this and have had something of a fascination with Cold War espionage ever since.

Around Christmas 1970 I went with my parents to No 6 Mess at the invitation of one of my father's colleagues who was a resident. The building was located in woodland perhaps half an hour or so by car from Dickensweg towards the American Sector, set back from the road and reached via a steep, tree lined avenue. It was already dark when we arrived and as we entered the lobby of this beautiful old house my attention was immediately caught by the most spectacular Christmas tree located under a huge feature staircase. It must have been at least 8 feet tall, dripping with lametta, adorned with what must have been upward of 100 brilliant white candle style lights, dozens of sparkling coloured glass baubles and at the base a small mountain of gaily decorated packages.

After introductions I was given a Coke and ushered into a side room to amuse myself while the adults went about socialising. Just an hour or so later we left for home, but the

memory of this journey in the snow on a cold winter's evening to this place with its intriguing albeit tenuous connection with George Blake, the beautiful tree and the festive buzz remained with me. Life got in the way as it tends to and it wasn't until many years later that I was pleasantly reminiscing with my father when I asked him what, if anything, he could remember about No 6 Mess or the short time we went there together. Unfortunately, he couldn't and neither could my mother. Since losing them both in recent years though, I have found that my fascination with this old building and the special memory it holds won't go away and it is my hope that perhaps someone reading this may be able to offer some snippet of information, however small, regarding it.

Our quarter was within easy walking distance of the 1936 Olympic Stadium, home to West Berlin's Hertha BSC football team and close enough to literally feel the roar of the home crowd whenever their team scored. Overlooking the stadium from the west across the Maifeld linking them both was the Glockenturm or Bell Tower which was open to the public. From a height of some 250 feet, visible in the other direction was the music venue known as the Waldbuhne, created in the style of an amphitheatre and beyond that, the Ruhleben Training Area. The latter I now understand to be something akin to Imber Village on Salisbury Plain although I didn't know much about either at the time.

The Waldbuhne was to have been the venue for a concert to include what would have been one of the very last live performances of Jimi Hendrix in the summer of 1970. Bad weather caused a rethink and he played instead at the Deutschlandhalle, situated a

couple of kilometers away. My brother and I missed Jimi Hendrix, but caught Colliseum, Quatermass, & Juicy Lucy on a great triple bill quite by accident when the band we had booked to see, Deep Purple, had to cancel due to one of the band members suffering an injury or illness of some kind. Other concerts of note included Led Zeppelin just prior to the release of their third album in 1971 and a live stage production of Jesus Christ Superstar, in German, which was much better than it probably sounds.

Closer to home, we had no television and consequently much of our information and entertainment as a family came from the radio through the British Forces Network, known as the British Forces Broadcasting Service during our time in Berlin. In the late 1960s, the service relocated from offices in Spandau to Summit House. In addition to the Eurovision Song Contest, the annual BFBS Wireless for the Blind appeal, weekly, on Sundays, we had the Family Favourites request show. More localised programmes including Around Eight (current affairs I think), serialised drama (Paul Temple) and the Hit Parade were also firm favourites, although I am sure that there were many other programmes worth seeking out. Otherwise it was Scrabble, card games or Monopoly.

I have read that the American actor George Segal was once interviewed by BFBS in Berlin. He was the main male lead in the movie The Quiller Memorandum filmed in West Berlin around 1966. This film and several more like it, Funeral in Berlin with Michael Caine, A Dandy in Aspic with Laurence Harvey and Tom Courtney and to a lesser extent Torn Curtain with Paul



Newman and Julie Andrews serve as excellent snapshots of mid 1960s Berlin and are all recommended.

Back at home, we had no telephone either, a degree of planning being required in order to call relatives in the UK on high days and holidays. My father would need to book a time slot (of around 15 minutes I believe) with the local NAAFI office in Summit House, and we would all travel there in the car to make the phone call. Unimaginable nowadays.

Similarly, the planning required for a trip home to the UK by road was far more involved that it would be today. Dad was not a natural

navigator and would use the **AA route planning service** for holiday journeys to the UK or other favourites such as Italy or Austria. The printed schedule they would provide was exhaustive and needed to be, as travel through the 'corridor' from Berlin to Helmstedt was strictly controlled and it was drilled into us that a simple wrong turn could easily escalate into something unpleasant. Aside from the strict requirement for the correct documentation, road journeys were timed as a means of measuring compliance with the applicable speed limit. More than once we would pass BFG registered vehicles who had gone

galloping off initially only to have to slow to a snail's pace on the approach to the Helmstedt checkpoint in order to come within the time window or potentially face some awkward questions and potentially a swingeing penalty.

My parents would become familiar with this route between 1970 and 1972. My brother and I were then beyond the age limit for local Berlin schooling (because he was ahead of me, he missed Charlottenburg and went straight to Gatow). We were sent to Windsor Boys School in Hamm, BFPO 103 and so began another of the most enjoyable schooling experiences of my life.

*Roger's story of his  
childhood days in  
Berlin and Hamm  
concludes in the  
2021 Summer  
issue.*

## Letter from Berlin - Part 2 - Monika Gruber

In September of that year, after having been rather ill with bronchitis, I was sent to the "Erzgebirge", a mountain range south of Dresden, for health reasons, where my other grandfather, i.e. my father's father from Leipzig, a teacher, was staying with his pupils under the programme of "Kinderlandverschickung" (to save children from the risks associated with the aerial bombing of the cities). My home for most of the next 12 months was a former youth hostel, up on a high hill, in the middle of fields and forests, together with about 40 primary school girls, who were taught by my grandfather, while I had to attend the school down below in the village because I was too young for his lessons. That meant 40 minutes downhill every morning, an hour uphill every

afternoon. Here, too, like in Breslau, war was far away at first. I even went home to Breslau for Christmas '44, which I remember as very peaceful and festive. But it must have been a very sad, desperate time for the grown-ups, because they knew the Russians were moving closer every day. And true enough. Breslau was declared a "fortress" in January 1945 and all civilians had to leave within 2 days. Where to? That was up to you! My family decided they should all go to the Erzgebirge, where I had already returned to after Christmas and where the chances of being overrun by the Russian army were comparatively small, as the Americans were approaching there, while the battles for Berlin, where we still had a flat - if it was still standing, which nobody knew - were

extremely hard with some hundred thousand soldiers and civilians killed or wounded on both sides. We had become refugees in our own country.

Hardly ever have we, the common people, then and now used the politically correct term of "the Soviets, the Soviet or Red Army", for us they were always "the Russians", "die Russen", sometimes "die Ruskis". I do apologize to all readers who know better, for of course the Soviet Army consisted of many nations besides Russians. Stalin himself was not Russian, but Georgian of course.

After the war the Americans became "die Amis", the British "die Tommis", the French "die Franzosen", no nickname for them. Die Amis were considered easy-going, friendly, smiling, always



The Early Days

1970 - The

treasurer reported the ever increasing cost necessitating a review of the Association's sources of income.

1971 - At the AGM it was felt that personal contact was the most effective way of increasing membership and Mr Foot suggested that we open up membership to teachers in other Commands. Membership stood at 141.

1972 - Arrangements were made for 27 members to attend the 25th Anniversary of the founding of BFEG in Rheindahlen, travelling by train and boat via Harwich and the Hook of Holland.

1973 - The AGM and Reunion was held at Eltham Palace - HQ Royal Army Education Corps for the first time - and continued there for a further thirteen years.

## Letter from Berlin - Part 2 continued ...

### Monika Gruber

continues her story of life in Berlin following WW2 in the Summer Issue of the Association Journal and Newsletter.



### The Early Days - 1996

Peggy Burke  
(née Trott)  
former

newsletter and magazine editor taught in Lister School Herford, Antwerp School, Maas First School Laarbruch, and at Hemer and Lemgo Schools between 1971 and 1987.

Here in 1998 she reflects on a visit to Germany.

The last time we had been in Germany was 1991 and we weren't prepared for the rise in the cost of living brought about by inflation in Germany and aggravated for us by the poor exchange rate. DM4.95 (£2) for a loaf of bread!

We started our holiday in Wetter near Dortmund and whilst there we went on a tour of the Sauerland, and in particular **Hemer** and Iserlohn. It seemed very strange not to see any British cars and very sad that 26 Engineers' barracks is now just a pile of rubble.

The little railcar that ran from Hemer to Iserlohn is no more and the railway line is overgrown. How many of us who worked at **Hemer School** remember having to wait for the level crossing gates to go up at 5 o'clock each evening when we were anxious to get home!

chewing gum and putting their feet up on every table they came by.

Die Tommis were less well fed and less noisy than die Amis, all slim and slender, friendly and slightly stand-offish, no wonder though, as fraternization was forbidden, as far as I know.

Die Franzosen had a more difficult standing, since they had suffered a lot in the war from the Germans, had not won the war like Amis, Tommis and Russen and had only come in as Allied Occupiers later than the others. I lived too far away from their sector to actually see them in the streets, but we had friends there, whose villa had been confiscated by the French for an officers' mess. The family was allowed to stay and live on the first floor, while their cook was employed by the French to cook for them. My mother and I went there quite often in the winter, because the house was well heated and there was always something nice to eat, as Anna, the cook, saw to it that some of the food prepared for the French officers landed on the plates of our friends.

While I was still staying up in the youth hostel, my mother and grandmother, when they arrived from Breslau in January 1945, were quartered as refugees in the village below with a woman who was a

convinced Nazi. She still believed in Hitler's "Final Victory", so my mother had to be extra careful not to be found out when she listened every night in bed under her blanket and pillow to the BBC who broadcast in German to tell the Germans the true state of affairs. Listening to the enemy's radio programme was considered undermining people's morale and meant prison, concentration camp or even being shot dead on the spot if found out.

When my mother left us for a few days to locate some friends near Dresden, she happened to survive the Dresden air raid of February 1945. She had been in the station waiting for a train, when the alarm sounded. She boarded one of the empty trains, which she knew would be driven out of town during the raid, and saw from there which hell she had escaped. If she had stayed in the station like hundreds of homeless refugees from Silesia and East Prussia, I would never have found out where my mother had disappeared to.

The 8<sup>th</sup> of May 1945, the end of the war, to me and the other children up in the youth hostel first of all meant we didn't have to run and hide any more when we heard planes approaching. For the area where we were living it meant it became part of

the Russian Zone according to the **Yalta Conference**, though the Americans had originally conquered it. There had not been much fighting, but I do remember to this day watching American planes diving down to fire at the seemingly endless procession of refugees, mostly women, children and old people, from what was then Czechoslovakia along the country road across the valley. When I heard the planes approaching on my way from school up to the hostel, I threw myself flat on the ground hoping they wouldn't notice me. Luckily they didn't. To be fair I must say those American pilots probably only dived down to scare people, not to kill them - at least I never heard of any casualties

In the summer of 1945 my mother decided it was time for us to try to make it to Berlin, one of the reasons being that I was not allowed to go to the village school any longer, because I was a refugee child now and they said there was not enough room for children like me! On yet another daring expedition my mother had already been to Berlin to see whether our block of flats was still standing, our flat still habitable. While she was checking the flat on the top floor, she discovered a dead Russian soldier in one of the corridors. She asked one of our neighbours for help, because if the Russians had



## Letter from Berlin - Part 2 continued ...

found the corpse, they would probably have arrested everybody and destroyed the house. So that night the two of them carried the dead soldier down to the courtyard and buried him there. Luckily they weren't found out, and as far as I know the body was never discovered.

So we set out to Berlin, to our flat, our home now, after Breslau had been lost for ever. There were trains, yes, but no time-tables, let alone reliable ones. You just took the first train going the direction you wanted to travel and then relied on good luck and no Russian intervention (quite often some Russians decided they needed an engine right then and there and took it leaving the train you were travelling in without any chance to move on) and to reach your destination sometime.

Yes, our flat was more or less fit to live in by the standards of that time, though without window panes (we had a 16 m<sup>2</sup> studio window), hardly any tiles on the roof, no water, no gas, rarely any electricity (people of today would get screaming fits I suppose, if they were offered to live under such conditions). But things could be "organized" - the term for getting what you needed from someone, somehow, somewhere. Money wasn't the problem then, "connections" was what counted. Most of it

was illegal but vital if you wanted to survive. That was especially true for food, for what in theory everybody was supposed to get for their ration cards could hardly ever be bought in the one shop where you were registered. Our flat happened to be in the British sector. We realized that the "Tommies" did not have much to give away, as they had ration cards themselves at home. Two streets further down, though, the American sector began and conditions were far better there. We did get enough not to starve, but if you wanted some "luxury" food like butter or sugar and above all coffee, you had to go to Black Markets. They were usually in certain streets, on certain street corners. You ambled along, I always on the hand of my mother as an alibi, which made us look like happy walkers. Then somebody would approach us whispering "Butter?" or "Sugar?". We did not stop but then turned round slowly, if my mother decided she wanted something. We met the same person again and now the price was whispered to her, completely inconspicuously of course. The bargain was then completed in a nearby house and we ambled on. Only sometimes a loud cry "The water is boiling" made everybody run away as fast as they could, because that meant the military police were arriving to arrest as

many Black Market dealers and customers as possible.

Black Markets were only for such "luxury goods" you could carry away more or less unnoticed in coat pockets, under your pullover. Coffee was of course the main product in demand, and you could pay cash or with American cigarettes, which served as unofficial currency before June 1948, when the D-Mark was introduced.

We were still an occupied city then, of course, and had to follow Allied laws and restrictions, one being that every adult Berliner had at all times to carry their identity cards with them to produce on demand. Theoretically you could be shot dead on the spot without that precious paper, which did happen at least once. So it was only natural for everybody never ever to leave your home without your identity card. As far as I know that law was valid until the Allied Forces left Berlin in 1992, though hardly anybody realized it. But to this very day I have a strange feeling, if I find I don't have my "Ausweis" on me.



*Continued on page 19*

*The married quarters all around the school are now occupied by Germans and known as Wohnpark Hemer. The school is still a school but now of course for German children. We then went up to the Harz mountains and spent a lot of time touring the East. It still seemed rather strange to be driving past the remains of the border fortifications.*

*We last visited the Harz Mountains in early 1990 just after 'The Wall' came down and were among the first tourists to go over into the East. Now it is just one big building site with houses and roads being rebuilt.*

*The highlight however was taking the train to the top of the Brocken and looking over to Torfhaus. How many times did we look over from the West and wonder what it was like on the other side?*

*We finished our holiday in Hameln. Little has changed, the soldiers are still there and they still practise their river crossings on the Weser. If you have been back to where you worked why not send in an item for the newsletter.*

*So much has changed in Germany and I know many people would be interested.*

*Peggy Burke (nee Trott)*

## Arriverderci e Grazie - Lynn Marshall



### Focus on

Lynn Marshall was nominated as Association secretary in November 2003 having been a committee member since 2001. Lynn took over from the very famous, able and knowledgeable Peter Hall.

Lynn was born and educated totally in Yorkshire - School in Beverley, teacher training at Ripon College and a BEd degree taken at St. John's, York when it was a part of Leeds University. Lynn started teaching in Driffield and continued her career at St. Lawrence Primary School, York.

Lynn's first SCEA posting was to Sek Kong Primary School on the mainland of Hong Kong where she stayed for eight years having undertaken a stint as acting headteacher. Following the closure of Hong Kong Service Schools Lynn went to Sardinia and took over from George Young as headteacher of Cagliari Primary School, a school for the children of the RAF Fast Jet support unit. Sadly just after having been appointed, parliament published a white paper closing all support units. Lynn was devastated but still took the post and had the most amazing fifteen months on that beautiful island.

On the closure of yet another school Lynn was offered a headteacher post in Germany. Unfortunately there were no available posts so she decided to take redundancy.



Lynn Marshall – Association Secretary since 2003 was Headteacher during the school's last eighteen months and reflected on her time at Cagliari in the 1998 Association Newsletter.

When I look at back I am filled with many happy memories of my time in Sardinia. To most people the mention of Sardinia conjures up thoughts of sand, sea and sun and a host of exclusive, expensive holiday resorts. Yes, the sand, sea and sun are wonderful, but Sardinia is an island of contrasts - there are also spectacular mountains, clear, deserted reservoirs and mountain streams, wild horses and pigs, acres of orange, lemon, grape and olive groves, hundreds of sheep and goats and last but not least the dreaded Piaggio - the three-wheeled carry-all.

I was thrilled to be offered the Headship of Cagliari Primary School in March 1996 after a gruelling day of interviews in Germany. I admit to having had to get out the atlas to be sure of the exact location, but Italy was definitely an attraction, as was the thought of a four-bedroomed villa (a perk of the job). On the interview panel was the Station Commander, Wing Commander Dick Middleton - a lovely man - who spent the evening telling me all about the RAF station with the name no one; could

pronounce unless they lived there. He assured me that the future of the Station, although not entirely safe, was secure for at least the following two years! So I flew back to Hong Kong and began to make preparations with my husband, an ex-RAF navigator who had flown into Decimomannu on a number of occasions, when a phone call from SCE in May informed me that the Station and therefore the School, would be closing in a year's time, following the recent Defence Review. After a period of consideration, we decided to make the best of it and go to Sardinia. We went for a two-week handover visit in June and came back to close the school in Hong Kong.

We arrived in Sardinia in August 1996 to beautiful weather and no luggage. The non-arrival of suitcases is a feature of Sardinian life that we soon got used to and that evening we went to dinner with the Station Commander and his family in borrowed clothes.

It is hard to describe the setup of what was RAF Decimomannu, but here goes. All families lived in hirings along the beach road, which is beautiful. The housing stretched for at least five miles so invariably your next door neighbour was Italian. The NAAFI, medical centre, Hive, library and Families Office was in a complex away from the beach and at least ten minutes by car from the nearest hiring, unless you happened to live in a flat above the complex. The school was about eight miles inland and took between twenty and thirty minutes to reach from the beach road. The RAF camp was even further inland and took about an hour to reach from most

homes.

The British school shared a site with a German school and kindergarten. German built to very high standards, we occupied the majority of it for which we paid rent. The building is two storey - with the German school upstairs and the kindergarten and the British school downstairs. The school was set in a back street in an Italian quarter, and if you didn't know the way was almost impossible to find. There were 75 children in the school and four full-time staff, myself and three teachers. We had an English-speaking Italian secretary called Michelle Gregorini who was an absolute angel, guiding us through the main pitfalls of Italian bureaucracy. The caretaker was German and the cleaner Italian, very cosmopolitan. As with all SCE schools we operated the National Curriculum and ran the school on UK lines.

The greatest difficulty I faced was starting at the school with a completely new teaching force - all the previous staff had left in the summer through forces beyond anyone's control. So not only were we opening the school in September 1996 with new staff, but planning to close it twelve months later, a fact we chose not to think about too much in the first term. It was a happy school, everyone worked well together as a team and we ended the first term with a spectacular Christmas concert which played to a full house and was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone.

Unfortunately, we had set such high standards that everyone was looking to the closure with bated breath. Planning to close the school was strange as the children were all leaving at different



## Arriverderci e Grazie - Lynn Marshall

times - the first children leaving in September and the last child on 12th December. We decided to hold three separate leaving events, the first in October for those leaving that month and then one in November and the final one in December so that children had an event to mark the month they left.

The official station closure was the last weekend in September, although the Station continued to operate until March 1998. The AOC was the guest of honour and Mr Wadsworth was expected to attend but unfortunately had to cancel because of work commitments and sent Ms Jenny Price (SAEO) as the SCE representative. The weekend was a great success with the Beating of the Retreat, the lowering of the flag and the open-air cocktail party, followed by a fun day for families in a local hotel and finally a fly past and parade on the Monday to which all the children were invited. It was a sad time for most of us who had spent our time in Sardinia building relationships and a network of activities with the local Italian community.

The first school closure event was followed a week later by a sports morning enjoyed by all the children and parents and followed by a buffet picnic lunch and afternoon of entertainment provided by the Station community. It was

great fun. We had the Decimomannu line dancers and folk group, two drill sergeants who drilled the parents and children on the playground, two mums who did a makeup routine without being able to see what they were doing to their faces, and a poetry recital. But the highlights of the event were my husband dressed as a ballet dancer and performing to the "Sugar Plum Fairy" and the staff dressed as Spice Girls and miming "Wannabe". To say we were the talking point of the Station for the next few days would be a total understatement.

The second event, for twenty-eight children and their parents was a fun bowl and pizza lunch, and the final event was an early Christmas party for the remaining 11 children with a treasure hunt and presents from Santa. Each child took with them a specially designed T-shirt to mark the closure, a certificate to mark the fact that they had taken part in the closure of the school and a book. Unfortunately, no one from SCE was able to be present at any event but representation from the RAF was very good.

On the final day, 12th December we had two sisters left - the school was empty, everything having been previously packed by us and sent to Naples.

We said our farewells to the girls at lunchtime and then began the sad farewells to each other and not least to Michelle who had worked at the school for eighteen years. She was in tears as was the caretaker. I don't think the reality had sunk in for me until I got home and realised that I had spent eighteen months in my first Headship improving and developing the school and had successfully closed it and in so doing had consigned all my hard work and dreams to memories. The official handover of the school to the German authorities took place on the Monday morning and I thought I was prepared and it was only paper work. But once inside I was so upset that I couldn't wait for the signing to be finished and drove home in tears.

Sardinia was a wonderful experience. I was so sad it had ended so soon, but I wouldn't have changed it for the world and was so pleased that I had seized the opportunity. Our time there was made all the more enjoyable by the support of some wonderful people on the Station, but my main thanks go to Chris and Gill Casely, Shirley Haughton, Sue Young and Michelle Gregorini without whose help and support the school could not have achieved the success it did and could not have closed on such a note of triumph.

Back in Chippenham (what a shock) Lynn took a year out to train as an Ofsted Inspector. Three months into redundancy she was asked to help a friend out and took a temporary teaching post followed by a temporary headteacher post in Corsham Lypiatt Primary School. This little school catered for the children of military parents who had separated abroad. In addition the Local Authority also used the school as a safe haven for the children of women who were in the local domestic violence refuge. Lynn worked there for a term and then took up a permanent post as Headteacher of Farley Hill Primary School in the borough of Wokingham. Another job she loved and where she stayed until retirement in 2013.

Lynn is married to Glyn, has two step children and four delightful but time consuming grandchildren. To fill any spare time she practices yoga, aerobics, sewing, knitting, cake decorating and flower arranging. Most of all she likes to travel - and plan travel - with Glyn.



Photo Lynn Marshall



School Photos George Young



### **The Early Days**

The Association for teachers and officers who worked for British Families Education Service (BFES) since its inception in 1946, certainly goes back to the 1960's.

By 1963 Jack Crump (Chairman from 1981 to 1989) had established annual informal gatherings at the Cora Hotel in London. The Association proper was certainly in existence in 1968 and minutes of meetings go back to that time.

In 1981, Nolan Clamp, then Director of BFES, announced that the title BFES would be replaced by Service Children's Schools (North West Europe) from January 1982. "This News was received with considerable regret!"

The Association followed suit at its AGM in 1982 and became the BFES/SCS (NWE) Association. It was not until the AGM/Reunion Dinner of 1992, that the NWE was dropped from the Association's title so as to reflect the growing interest in joining from teachers who had taught in the more far off commands around the world.

In 1975 Mr Frank Buckley (Chairman) penned "The Origins of the British Families Education Service" and quotes as follows: "Among the guests at the 1971 **British Families Education Service Jubilee Luncheon** were approximately 200 guests, of whom twenty-one were former BFES colleagues and members of the BFES Association (UK)."

The **BFES/SCEA Association committee** held its second meeting via Zoom on **Wednesday 3rd February 2021** at 10am.

Phillip Arrandale joined the meeting as a newly appointed co-opted member.

The main noteworthy items were:

The website is to be revamped over the next few months.

Replacements for the Chair and the Events Member are proving hard to recruit which is very disappointing. An interim plan is being formulated should replacements not be found.

The Christmas voucher scheme to attract new members was most successful.

At the time of the meeting 27 new members had signed up. At publication date this is now 41.

An interim date for the **Curry Lunch at The Gurkha Museum Winchester** has been booked for **Saturday August 7th**. This is a provisional booking and will only take place if COVID-19 rules regarding social distancing are relaxed. We need 50 plus guests to cover costs.

Please contact Jane Tull - [jane.tull@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jane.tull@yahoo.co.uk) (64 Purbrook Gardens - Purbrook - Waterlooville - Hants - PO7 5LD) as soon as possible to signal your interest.

### **The Committee much regrets having to announce the death, from COVID, of**

**Honorary Member Margaret Williams.** Margaret was offered and graciously accepted the Honorary Membership passed to her on the death of her husband in 1997. Margaret taught in Wilhelmshaven, Lübbecke, Rheindahlen, Paderborn and Munster. between 1960 and 1973. She lived in St Austell in Cornwall. Margaret was the Association's last remaining Honorary Member.

## **Hameln re-visited - The Pied Piper**

As with all good tales there are many different theories about the Pied Piper. Some suggest he was a symbol of hope to the plague-hit people of Hameln. He drove the rats away, saving the people from the epidemic.

The **Pied Piper Play** is usually held every Sunday at noon between May and September in the Pferdemarkt in the historic town of Hameln (Hamelin).

Until drawdown Hameln was home to **28 Engineer Regiment**, a number of minor units and to **Hameln and Hastenbeck Primary Schools**.

Occasionally British Forces children were guest performers at the Play.

Resident book reviewer and former headteacher Mike Bennett reflects on the story that made Hameln famous.

Originating in medieval folklore the legend of the Pied Piper is known worldwide and has attracted contributions from such wordsmiths as

Goethe and the Brothers Grimm, but we are more familiar with Robert Browning's poem.

**'Hamelin Town' in Brunswick**

**By famous Hanover City;**

**The River Weser, deep and wide,**

**Washes its wall on the southern side;**

**A pleasanter spot you never spied;**

**But, when begins my ditty,**

**Almost five hundred years ago,**

**To see the townsfolk suffer so**

**From vermin, was a pity'**

The plague of rats was so bad the starving villagers marched on a council meeting and threatened the members with such vehemence that the mayor said he would do anything to free the town and his aptly named Rathaus (town hall) of the problem.

Enter the bedizened Pied Piper.

He gave a convincing spiel describing his successes as a pest exterminator of all kinds of rodent in lands as far away as Central Asia and Indonesia. His fee would be a thousand guilders. The mayor was so desperate that he offered fifty thousand! Content with a thousand, the Piper cheerfully set to work. The melodies from his flute so bewitched the rats with promises of irresistible prandial delights that they swarmed behind him, and as we know were all drowned in the Weser. All except one, who survived to tell the tale.

Assuming they were all dead, the mayor decided he could renege on his agreement.

'Fifty guilders, take it or leave it', he told the Piper. Why is it that politicians of any era flirt with hubris, and rarely deliver on their promises?

This Piper was not to be messed with!

Days later when the adults were in church, he returned and his music so enchanted



## Hameln re-visited - The Pied Piper

the children that they danced gaily behind him to a nearby hill where they disappeared through a gap which closed behind them. All except one. A lame boy (some versions say a blind girl) was left behind and later could relate how the children had reacted to the irresistible tunes played by the Piper, which had promised them the joys of a medieval Never Never Land.

In vain did the parents search for their children, but they and the Pied Piper had gone forever.

That is the precis of the legend according to Browning.

An entry in Hamelin town records dated 1384 reads 'It is one hundred years since our children left'. A 15th century manuscript in the Lüneburg library refers to one hundred and thirty children disappearing on 26 June 1284 after following a piper. So traumatised had the Hamelin citizens been that they had restarted the calendar on that fateful day in 1284. Roger Pilkington author of the successful Small Boat Journeys Through Europe series of books, offers historical hypotheses to the myths which accompany the phenomenon. He dismisses as conjecture that any such Pied Piper was involved as a rat catcher. This task was usually undertaken by magicians casting spells and incantations. He cites as evidence the fact that no existing documents mention rats.

But something happened. There was a Battle of Sedemünder between the armies of Minden and Hamelin, resulting in a heavy defeat for the latter. Sedemünder is now an aban-

doned village close to Hannover. Some records say all the children (young men?) were slain. But the Battle took place in 1259 not 1284. Close enough?

The Black Death, a form of bubonic plague swept through Europe in the 14th century. It can be contracted by the bite of a rat flea. Did the children die from eating poisonous cereals, some form of ergot disease? If so, why did it only infect children?

Perhaps such poisoning resulted in widespread St Vitus dancing which drove the children into such a frenzy that they threw themselves into the Weser and drowned. There is documented evidence of such 'dancing mania' being driven by a succession of pandemics as early as the 11th century.

The subsequent mass hysteria often led to large groups dancing feverishly for weeks before dying of exhaustion. The Pied Piper could have been the leader of a funeral cortege after such occurrences. If so, no mass grave has ever been found.

Maybe he was a recruiting officer during a time of economic depression, his colourful outfit intended to attract young people and move them on to more promising areas of Germany. The Children's Crusade was a popular Christian movement said to have begun in 1212 to regain The Holy Land from the Muslims. However, traditional narratives are often conflated, and it could be that the children were tricked and taken away to be sold into slavery.

Other theories suggest they were swallowed up in a



Photos TNM 1986

Association Members are invited to comment on/add to this article.

Photos especially welcome. Editor ...

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Phillip and Barbara Arrandale.

#### We're on the Web!

<http://www.bfes-scea-association.org/>

swamp or even drowned in a shipwreck in the Baltic Sea. What they were doing there is not known, even if the area where a ship came to grief is the Kophalm, a similar name Koppen, the hillside into which the children are surmised to have vanished.

Another possibility is that they emigrated to Transylvania, a region of Romania. There are certainly enclaves of ethnic Germans still there. Not so many as before the Second World War, it is fair to say.

The BBC Global News website 'The Grim news behind the Pied Piper' offers another probability. It refers to family names around Pregnitz in the Brandenburg area which correspond to those in Hamelin. Pregnitz

was colonized by people from Bremen, down river from Hamelin, after the Wendish Crusade of 1147 which fought the pagan tribes of the Baltic. It is recorded that the area was in need of repopulating after being liberated from the Danes around this time.

There is hardly any limit to the explanations. One must remember that the unwritten literature of a people as expressed in folk memory, lends itself to a Teutonic version of Chinese Whispers. Dates and events might not match up. But don't let the facts spoil the story.

What is not in doubt is that among the attractive Weser Renaissance buildings is a cobbled street named Bangelosestrasse (Boom-boom-less street). This is the

street down which the children are said to have danced on their way to an unexplained (as yet) fate. Despite the German's love of loud musical parades, none is allowed in this street. And if you believe that, you'll believe anything!

'And the better in memory to fix

The place of the Children's last retreat,

They called it, The Pied Piper's Street -

Where any one playing on pipe or tabor

Was sure for the future to lose his labour.

Nor suffered the Hostelry or Tavern

To shock with mirth a street so solemn'

## Association Voucher Scheme and New Members - Christine Richie

It is always a pleasure to welcome new members to our Association and the success of our Voucher Scheme for 2021 resulted in many joining our ranks this New Year. Their combined experiences of working within BFES/SCEA cover the globe from the Hong Kong, across the Mediterranean and into the depths of Germany. Likewise, they represent a diversity of roles within the organisations they served dedicated to the education of Service children. A couple, in fact, were at one time the beneficiaries of that education service themselves. We welcome them all. The Voucher scheme will be open to potential members throughout this year, so if you wish to send a Voucher to friends it is not too late.

### List of new Guest Members:

Malcolm and May Brooke; Christina Burn; Sarah Byrne; Ray and Carol Clarke; Lynne Copping; Mark Cox; Jim Davies; Paul Davies; Sue Day; Madeleine Drew; Maggie Ellam; Robin & Mary Field-Smith; Anne Fletcher; Paul French, MBE; Anne Gibson; Stephanie Harrison; Rita Headington; Anne Hill; Sheila Howard; David Hudson; Sue Hulmes; Jonathan (Jon) Kille; Paul & Susan Illingworth; Hywel & Ann James; Molly Johnson; Rosemary Knight; Karen Ledward; Andrew & Mary Matthews; William (Billy) McKenna; James (Jim) Rhodes; Susan Saunt; Sarah Scarratt; Nicholas Staunton; Marion Tapp; Roger Traynor; Pam Tull; and Lynda Turner.

**We also welcome** as full members **George & Sue Young** - they taught in Fallingbostel, Wulfen, Iserlohn, and Sardinia between 1971 and 1996. They now live in Wiltshire.

Further details of new members will appear in the Summer Issue ...

### Association Membership

Membership of the Association currently costs £15 per year. Membership is open to anyone who has served with BFES, SCEA, SCS(NWE), SCE or latterly is serving with the remaining MOD Schools. The membership year runs from 1st January to 31st December and payment can be made by Standing Order or cheque. Further information and a membership application form is available from the Membership Secretaries - 94 Headcorn Drive - Canterbury, Kent, CT2 7TX.