

40/42 REUNION Highlights 16/17 May 2003 by [Dave Stinson](#)

40/42 1961/2003



The old familiar faces (hadn't Dusty Millar lost weight since 40/40, and it suited him) began to appear in the Lounge of the Seascape Hotel even before 1400 hours, the earliest reporting in time. It appeared, some of us had managed to follow the detailed instructions on how to find the Hotel right until the last half-mile, when we got lost! Obviously, our map reading training to get us over Dartmoor in 1961 had gone somewhat rusty? The Hotel car parking was so restricted that it was a case of the early arrivals being blocked in for the rest of the weekend by later arrivals. This did not unduly matter, as our cars became baggage 'not wanted on voyage' until Sunday morning. Those very late arriving (apart from the railway children) had to find themselves nearby alternative car parking. All of them succeeded with this.

It was amazing to see the amount of kit that some had decided to bring along. I am sure it mentioned nothing in the Joining Instructions about a Kit Inspection? It was difficult to recognise those who's first Reunion this would be. It was not until later, when they put on their name badges, that all would be revealed. Mistakenly, I asked, someone standing at the reception desk, handling the name badges, what Squadron he was on. He jokingly said: 'I am maintenance Squadron, always ready for action 24 hours a day.' He turned out to be the Maintenance man, looking for Phil, or his wife Jackie, the Hotel owners, and had been warned of the RAF Reunion and was not quite sure if it meant a lot of work would come his way after it was all over! When he saw we were all re-cycled teenagers he chuckled and wished us a fantastic weekend. I assured him the only problem would be carpet bombing as a result of spilt drinks later on!

Some of us took the opportunity, once booked in, to wander into Torquay centre and around the harbour enjoying the pleasant spell of dry weather. The last time most of us were in town like this was when we were given the day out here, whilst on Summer Camp. One group (2 Sqn) reported they were eyed up most suspiciously by an elderly looking shop-keeper who they thought may have recognised them as those boys in blue uniform, from all those years ago, who had staggered into his outside display of fruit and vegetables after a heavy drinking session of two pints of lager and lime! Somebody else commented on the fact that the fish in the harbour appeared to be so much smaller in size and number, whilst some gulls had become enormous with others having moth-eaten feathers. Some bright Spark (Teleg, naturally!) said we now, too, fitted that description. Several of us tried to hide behind each other trying not to resemble that remark!

The bar was opened at 1730 hrs and it did not take long for the first orders to be placed, after all, most of us had driven a long way and this would be our first real watering hole, so to speak! The evening meal was served at 1830 hrs in the downstairs (steep they were, at that) dining room. After the evening meal most of us retired immediately back to the Lounge, once we had conquered the stairs. Someone was heard to say the last time he climbed such steep steps was when entering a Hastings aircraft in Malta and it took him two attempts then. This, he said, was the result of rubber leg syndrome, caught, so he thought, from a dirty glass the night before when he had his leaving Do! It was at this point that many decided to look at the

memorabilia that had started to accumulate on the display table. A lone voice, from the table, was heard saying he could not find himself on the Sqn group photograph but managed to pick out his son!

Friday evening was to be an informal one and so it rightly proved. The evening entertainment started at 2030 hrs and this was provided by Black Country Man (his description) who, not only sang and played the guitar, but also told jokes and generally made fun of some of us in the room. He turned out to be the ideal choice for the evening and quickly had couples on the dance floor. Our only bedpan mechanic (Bill Avery, along with his lovely wife Janet), turned out to be - surprisingly enough, our star dancer and made Lionel Blair look quite pedestrian. It was really pleasing to see the ladies settling in fast and, of course; saying how young we lads all still looked! Seriously, it was definitely the right decision to include the ladies in our Reunions and long may that format continue. As the evening wore on Eric May kept threatening, between dances and pints, to take one of the two side drums that were on display. These drums were used by the Boy Entrant Bands and are now kept secured at Cosford. They were needed back at Cosford for a medal presentation ceremony on Monday so needed to be returned as issued. The night Porter was briefed later on, about the importance of guarding these drums through the night. Taff Winnett alleges he found the night Porter early the next morning sleeping across them! It was well after 0100 hrs when most of us (apart from those few on Light Duties, who had left earlier) finally got to our allocated bedspace, having long gone past lights out without realising it - Dear old Sergeant Jolliffe must have been turning in his grave?

Saturday morning, at breakfast, saw a few bleary-eyed lads who remembered it was a chargeable offence to miss this meal so had to parade, if only for tea, toast and some sympathy! The planned Coach trip, under its able organiser, Barry Mayne, left just after 0940 hrs and made its way slowly to Dartmoor. Bob and Sylvia Menzies followed us in their 4-wheel drive as they had brought along with them their two dogs - now made honorary canine members of the 40th Entry! Dartmoor, as we drove through it, was overcast and uninviting. This was a real contrast to when we were all last here together for our 3 day trek across it; when many of us got sunburnt and dreamt one day in the future that someone would invent sun blockers! Later, when we stopped at Princetown (with the Prison a little too close for comfort) for a refreshment break (a few headed for the nearest Pub) many echoed the thoughts, ably reflected in Dave Pottage's face, we all felt being once again on Dartmoor. Last time it was in our youth, when the world was our oyster and this time some of us have real problems getting oysters open! However, we all did have that common thread that now appears to bind us together and ensures we are still around to pour and taste the vintage wine - of course, drinking a toast to absent and departed friends from the 40th Entry.

After Princetown, we drove out to the supposed car park that we were all dropped off at to start our 3-day Dartmoor trek in 1961. There was some argument about this being the right location and some thought we had been dropped off, in our teams, at various sites. It was generally agreed, however, that this was the original assembly point for the initial briefing! It was raining when we got off the bus and the only other person to be seen around was the solitary ice cream man in his regulation issue van. Amazingly, the ice cream man turned out to be a former Cosford Boy Entrant from the 16th entry. This was verified when he said he could remember painting the entry sign on Fulton Block! A voice on the coach thought we should be entitled to free ice creams, another said, as we were the Sprogg entry, he would probably want us to sell his ice creams whilst he took a kip in the back of the van.

After this, we made our way to Plymouth City and stopped at the Barbican (harbour area where the old sailing ships tied up and the Pilgrim Fathers left on the Mayflower for America) for a couple of hours. Some decided to look at the local shops or walk further afield. Others quickly found the nearest pub to retire to and enjoy a drink and something to eat. In no time at all, we were all back on the coach for the final leg of the journey back to Torquay. John Cunningham thought, for a while, that Brian Peacock had missed the coach but was soon sighted in Bob Menzies 4-Wheeler. Evidently, he had suffered from Coach sickness on the outward journey, we later learnt. Sadly, we skirted around Newton Ferrers as the roads down to it were said to be most unsuitable for coaches. We slowly made our way back to Base with

several detours and one quick stop. Eventually, we arrived back at the Hotel, albeit a lot later than planned, to change quickly into formal wear for the evening meal and planned night ahead.

It was after the evening meal, whilst still in the dining room, that Steve Lister, the founding father of the 40th Reunions, made a presentation speech for those on the Committee who had contributed in anyway to the whole weekend. Each one of those named received an elegant Boy Entrant Tie-pin. After this, everyone made his or her way up the steep stairs to the Lounge - some now even going two steps at a time! It was nice to see that everyone had made an outstanding effort to dress formally, with the ladies, of course, looking lovely. The evening entertainment was a Disco, provided by a young lad who looked just old enough to be in I.T.S. The evening went well with plenty of dancing along with Dave and Joyce Cutbush kindly selling raffle tickets. The first prize being a glass tankard with the Cosford Crest engraved upon it. It was most noticeable that no one from 1 Sqn won any of the five raffle prizes and this will need to be rectified at 40/44.

During the evening, we had a late arrival, Chris Lewis (has changed his name from Tabb) and his wife Andrea. Chris, who lives in nearby Paignton, only found out about the Reunion several days before - by coincidence, Chris was taking final retirement on Monday. The 40/42 Celebration Cake was kindly cut by our Senior Member present, Ernie Trimble, along with his lovely wife Hilary. We had earlier passed their residential B&B at Princetown and someone commented that they were sure that a notice displayed in the window said special discounts to 40th Boy Entrants! The Disco finished at 2300 hrs to enable us to talk about our two days together and all the other days we had shared long ago. It was not too long before people began to leave in groups as many had a long journey back home, provided they could exit from the Hotel car park. It was strongly rumoured that a billet party was taking place in a nearby room but you had to be the right Squadron to gain admission and have your Permanent Pass stamped.

The following morning (was it Sunday, already?), as our military training dictated, we were well organised before breakfast and cars were being packed with kit ready for the off soon after 0830 breakfast. At breakfast, a Postscript form was given to each table to give everyone the opportunity on commenting on the whole weekend and make suggestions about the venue for 40/44. The consensus, so far, is the Lake District (without the 40th to 49th Entries). Although, having said this, there are still many that have yet to register their wishes. One solitary comment suggested the weekend should be a bit more formal. Perhaps we can come up with a compromise to fit a very small part of the weekend to reflect this on our 40/44? It is felt important, by the Committee, that all voices are heard.

Overall, the weekend was judged to be a complete success and some couples have even asked for this to be done again next year. One idea, now proposed, is to have an informal weekend away next May for those who wish to take part in this new spin-off - Naughty/Forty/Weekend. Of course, they would need to make their own arrangements to meet at the chosen venue, to be decided only if the support is really forthcoming. We all agreed to continue making the effort in contacting others from the 40th who we know are out there and would dearly love to attend 40/44. The success of the whole weekend was only made possible by all who attended. Sadly, although we did try, we were unable to retrieve any monies from the Hotel for last minute cancellations as the whole thing was designed as a package based on a definite 80 attending. In the end, we were left with 63 staying at the Hotel. Even so, it was generally felt that all Reunions should be designed as a package to minimize costs - especially to those who are retired or are very close to that point.

Thanks, once again.
Dave Stinson,
On behalf of the 40th Committee