



The Beachley Old Boys' Association Newsletter

Edition No. 5 - April 1999

1998 REUNION

Celebrating 5 Years of 'New BOBA' & 75 Years of Boys' Training

EDITOR'S UPDATE

How quickly these newsletters come around! Throughout the year I get a steady trickle of items to publish with a flurry on the Reunion weekend when members take the opportunity to give me their contributions. Then in March and April comes an avalanche of items, in all sorts of formats, from the Executive Committee for publication.

This year has been particularly busy, as Ron Marie and I have recently organised the first ever RE Clerks of Works (Electrical) Reunion at Chatham. This was a wonderful weekend, attended by several current BOBA members and many other ex-Beachley Boys.

For the past few years, April has also been the production month for the BOBA accounts for the end of BOBA's financial year. However, I am glad to report that Tony Waite (60C) has volunteered to take over as BOBA Treasurer and he will be formally proposed at the AGM in September.

The BOBA Fund continues to grow in size; we are certainly not financially embarrassed. The fund is now worth more than £24,000 and of this very little is in property etc. Our £15,000 investment in gilts, which was made before gilt yields and interest rates started to fall, has proved very beneficial.

Membership continues to increase with 640 members on the books, of which over 400 are active and up to date with their subs. Our Membership Secretary, Dave Hayward, has worked hard to recruit new members although it is still proving difficult to get anyone after the 1960 groups. Dave has signed up some 50 new members over the last year, much of this due to the advertising he has placed in newspapers, regimental magazines, with local corps associations and on Teletext.

Peter Burrridge has volunteered yet again to organise the Reunion this year. It is Peter who does the bulk of the admin, booking of tickets, liaison with the hotel and many other associated jobs. This is Peter's sixth year in the hot seat and I think you'll agree he has done a super job.

If, like the Executive Committee, you want 'New BOBA' to remain successful, then you can initially help in two ways. First, let your old Beachley Boy friends know that the Reunion is good value - and good fun. Second, make sure you come yourself.

Looking forward to seeing you all again in September.

Dave Chapman
Editor

The annual reunion of The Beachley Old Boys' Association was held over the weekend of 18/19/20th September 1998. The venue was, once again, the Old Course Hotel, Newport Road, Chepstow. This was the 5th year at the hotel which continues to be the only viable venue in the Chepstow area.

After registration in the afternoon, the weekend got under way for most members on Friday evening with a social, dance and hot supper. This was attended by 158 members and ladies with Ron Marie and Alan Ball running the show on the night.

On Saturday morning, Anne Rainsbury from Chepstow Museum brought a wealth of photo files so that members could identify as many faces on the photos as possible. Anne also set up a series of very interesting Beachley display panels which were very popular throughout the morning. Ron Marie also set up a display to introduce the 'BOBA Heritage' project to members.

Now an established Saturday morning (and afternoon) event, the BOBA Golf Championship was contested by 24 members at Dewstow Golf Club near Chepstow. A full report by Ken Standen appears inside.

As usual the AGM was held in St Georges Chapel, Beachley on the Saturday afternoon and was very well attended. The President Col (Retd) Alan Holman and the Chairman, Lt Col (Retd) Syd Thomas were re-elected to serve for another year.

158 members, together with 67 of their ladies, attended the highlight of the weekend, the BOBA Reunion dinner on the Saturday evening. This was a little down on the previous year when 193 members and 73 ladies attended. However, these were more comfortable numbers to seat in the ballroom than when 211 members sat down to dinner in 1996. The President of BOBA circulated among the members at the President's Reception prior to the dinner. Col Holman made another of his informative and funny speeches at dinner.

The Sunday service at St. Georges Chapel was very well attended with a collection of £280 for the ABF being taken. This was followed by Sunday lunch for 49 members and ladies at the Old Course Hotel.

Sated for another year, I went home and had a little 'lie down'.

Peter Burrridge
Reunion Organiser

Remember BOBA membership costs £10 per year with paid-up membership being achieved after payment of a total of £50.
Don't forget to cancel your standing order to BOBA once you become paid-up.

ITEMS FOR PUBLICATION

If you have anything you want to say via the BOBA Newsletter then please send your copy to Dave Chapman at 21 Brynhyfryd Road, Newport, South Wales, NP9 4FX. We are always looking for stories, news, views and letters for publication. You might also use the newsletter to trawl for information on friends with whom you have lost touch. You can also place appropriate adverts free of charge.

Your copy for publication can be handwritten or typed. However, if you are able to send it on floppy disc to be read into Microsoft Word, so much the better. Alternatively send by e-mail to (davec@bryn21.demon.co.uk).

BOBA BENEVOLENT FUND

The Benevolent Fund is available to provide help to ex-Beachley apprentices, or their families, who have fallen on hard times or need a little help over a temporary problem. Please direct any enquiries to the Chairman in the first instance.

After a period of several years when no applications for help were received, the Association was glad to be able to make a grant of £80 during 1998 to assist with medical fees for an ex-apprentice.

BOBA HQ

BOBA's Headquarters are located in The Old School House, adjacent to Beachley Church. Many of the wall-mounted rolls/lists from the College have been fitted in the main room of the building. All the records including nominal rolls and copies of Robot are also available. Access to the HQ is arranged through Derek Knight, (01292 622441).

ARE YOU A PAID-UP MEMBER?



Since the formation of 'New BOBA', membership subscriptions of £10 per annum have been payable. The accounting year runs from 1st April to the following 31st March.

At the AGM of BOBA on Saturday 13th Sep 1997, a proposal to restructure the payment of annual subscriptions was approved by the membership.

It was agreed that a member having paid total subscriptions of **at least £50.00 in total after 31st March 1993**, i.e from year 1994/1995 onwards, would not be required to make any further payment and would become a 'paid-up' member. (This decision could be reversed by the membership at any future AGM should BOBA's finances require it).

Therefore, a member who has paid subscriptions each year since **1994/1995** will have made his/her last payment in the year **1st April 1998 to 31st March 1999**.

A member who wishes to achieve fully paid-up membership, may at any time pay a subscription sufficient to bring his/her total up to **£50.00**, or if this is not convenient, can continue to pay £10 per annum until £50 has been paid.

You will find confirmation of your current subscription status enclosed with this newsletter. Please contact the Membership Secretary, Dave Hayward, in the event of a query.

The Chairman's Jottings.

Anniversaries ! Each year we seem to be celebrating yet another important anniversary – this year it is the 75th Anniversary of the School's arrival at Beachley Camp. On 28th February 1924 Groups 1 and 2 arrived from Aldershot to form the new home of the Army Trades School and thus start some 70 years of apprentice training at Beachley. Just how many young men passed out through the gates over those 70 years is beyond my knowledge but I feel sure that someone can come up with a figure. (A pint on me if you can find out!!)

Change of Treasurer Dave Chapman is standing down after 5 years of very hard and dedicated service as our Treasurer. His work have given us a very sound financial basis and we must all be grateful for his efforts. Mr. Tony Waite of 60C has offered his services and on your behalf I have accepted him onto the Executive Committee.

I would not wish to loose such an experienced committee member and therefore propose that at the AGM, Dave be asked to serve as an 'Elected Vice President'.

The Annual Church Service Two points:- First, medals; I am very happy for you to wear medals for the service. Second, parade, we hope to be able to have a short parade before the Church Service this year and have booked the band of R.Mon.RE(M).

The Reunion Weekend Once again the burden of organisation falls mainly on Peter Burridge. Over the past years he has done a very difficult job extremely efficiently and I would ask you all to support him by returning your forms, with cheques, in good time. I have invited the Commanding Officer of 1st Battalion The 22nd (Cheshire) Regiment as our Guest at the dinner night. We hope that the Mayor of Chepstow will attend the Friday evening function.

Once again the Manager of The Old Course Hotel has changed, Alan and Pauline are returning to Scotland to manage a large hotel. We wish them well and welcome the 'New Man'

New Members The Membership Secretary in

particular, and the committee in general, try very hard to gain new members – I still believe that the best form of recruiting is by YOU, the present membership gaining a NEW MEMBER each year. Give it a try.

Golf Ken Standen is the man to contact for details of the 'Beachley Open'. You will find details elsewhere in this newsletter. Lets have a record entry this year.

I hope that Jo will have had her second hip replacement and be able to attend the Reunion. Until then, look after yourselves and God bless.

Syd Thomas

The Ladies Column

It must be time to start planning for the BOBA Reunion as Syd has just asked me to supply some brief notes for the Newsletter. I trust that you have had a good start to 1999 and that you are already fiddling the 'house keeping' for that new little number to wear at Chepstow – my excuse is that I shall need something for the Millenium !! Anyway go for it.

Very many thanks for all your good wishes for a speedy recovery from the Hip Replacement Op. All went well until the other one started to play hell and I am now waiting to have that replaced – only hope that it will be long before September to give me time to recuperate.

To those Ladies who have not been to a reunion let me assure you that it is a lovely weekend, its great to be able to share fond memories with each other and the chaps, meet your husband's pals and their wives – please try to come along - I'm sure that you will enjoy the experience.

I look forward to seeing new faces and renewing old friendships, joining in the discussions (well gossip) and enjoying everyone's company as we help the boys to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the first arrivals at Beachley in 1924.

See you soon, take care and God Bless.

Jo Thomas.

The Association Tie

Over the years I have taken part in a number of debates concerning the origin of the colours and proportions of the our association tie.

I recall that in 1946 when I parted with the princely sum of five bob to become a life member of BOBA, we were addressed by the School 2I/C, "Tanky" Wells. He informed us that the colours of the tie represented the corps that the School supplied with tradesmen at the time the tie was designed. The red and blue depicted RE, RA and RAOC (the predominant colours), green for RTC (to which "Tanky" of course belonged) and silver (which became white) for RASC.

I think it reasonable that if the colours were intended to represent the Company colours at that time, each would have had equal prominence, whereas the relative size of the colours were meant to be roughly in proportion to the size of the drafts to the various corps.

Why the white (or silver) was changed to yellow in later batches, I don't know - but I can't believe it was intentional. The original tie that I had in 1946 looked to be more silver than white.

Perhaps some pre-war Robot has the answer? Perhaps an old sweat from a pre-war group can produce some definitive evidence before the truth escapes us for ever?

Maurice Murtagh 43B

Neville Adams 44A A Coy

Nev was taken poorly on holiday and died peacefully in hospital on 8th April 1999. He was a great friend from my group. You may recall in last year's newsletter I described how I had found him in Taunton after 53 years. His widow, Mary, said she was so thankful to be able to fulfil one of Neville's wishes last September: that of being among the BOBA old boys after half a century. She was pleased that the remnants of our group gave Nev a rousing boost during that weekend... he was among friends. I guess that's what its all about, old comrades never forgotten.

John Bass 44A A Coy

A Long Shot

Do you remember Charles Craven? He was a carpenter & joiner in 19 Group, D Coy (C & J), who arrived at Beachley in Jan 1929.

He has never been to a reunion and now doesn't feel up to it at 84. He later served in the REs at Chatham, Aldershot, Palestine in 1936, Singapore and Malaya.

He finished up in the APTC. Its a long shot, but Charles would be delighted to hear from anyone who knew him. His address is Charles Craven, 11 Basingbourne Rd., Fleet, Hants.

PEACE AND WAR

May I draw the attention of BOBA members to the publication: "Peace And War 1997" published by the Ex Services Mental Welfare Society, Broadway House, The Broadway, Wimbledon, SW19 1RL. The proceeds go entirely to the charity "Combat Stress".

My own story, "Intruders Into Paradise", is my account of the Japanese attacks on Ceylon and appears on p211 of the 1997 edition. I am busily writing some stories for the 1998 and 1999 publications. (*Received Aug 98 - Ed*).

For a fee of five pounds anyone can enter the competition for best story / article and there are prizes of up to £750. Entry forms can be obtained from the address above and stories must be of a maximum of 1000 words.

I am sure many Old Boys would like to obtain a copy and surely must have some interesting tales to tell.

Having recently celebrated my 79th birthday and 53rd wedding anniversary, it now seems so very long ago since arriving at Chepstow.

J V Lewis 34 Group.

Memories of 54B 'C' Company

Food!

Many will remember the one-eyed ration storeman and his dog who was not averse to raising his hind leg to the many sacks in the store!! Forget about 'E' Numbers! Remember also the Boiler Room attendant who used to boil his yacht sails in the kitchen boiler until complaints were made about the peculiar taste of the vegetables. Finally, memories of a rat being raised on the ladle from the porridge, fortunately I had selected cereals that morning!

Education

Memories of a certain National Service RAEC Sergeant who came in for quite a bit of unwarranted abuse. Many times the classroom keyhole blocked causing him to dash back to fetch the W02, who, on arrival would find a perfectly clear keyhole. Same sergeant, but this time with helpful students who would offer to light the fire in the classroom. Grateful for any assistance, he did not realise that at the other side of the central chimney, the desks/chairs were being chopped up for firewood!! At last he learnt of the dreaded '252' and every day for a while he would laboriously write out charge sheets for nearly everyone of his students, sort them into Companies and at 1630hrs mount his bike with the charge sheets neatly located between the fingers of one hand. The CSMs got so used to this ritual that they would stand on the pavement outside the Company offices to greet said sergeant and collect the 252's for processing (shredding). I have no doubt this poor chap was relieved to complete his National Service.

General Mayhem

Many groups were known to have climbed the chimney, perhaps none with more effect than prior to a Passing Out Parade when a large pair of 'drawers ladies' were raised on the chimney. However, some of the chimney rungs were removed, thereby preventing the immediate removal of said garment until after the POP. I believe it must have been in 1955 when the toilet blocks were at long last undergoing refurbishment, when one morning the parade ground was completely laid out in platoons made up of toilet rolls, whilst the Platoon Commanders were toilet pans. On another occasion, in revenge for the actions of Big Mac, the friendless Provost Sergeant, his scruffy sheepdog, miraculously changed to a blue hue overnight. Somebody must have had an accident with a bucket of Sheep-dip!

Next door to the Guard Room was the Medical Centre. Many will remember the Corporal who had a newspaper cutting about himself stating "Too Big for Overseas" Fortunately they made strong push bikes in those days! If you were caught talking whilst waiting for the MO you were doomed to spending ten minutes polishing the fire bucket which might just have well been chrome plated, such was the shine.

Just along the road at the corner of the Parade Square was the RSM's house, who in those days was fortunate enough to be allocated a batman. Television was a rare commodity in those days so when the R.S.M. bought one he climbed on his roof to mount the aerial and ordered the batman to watch the picture and shout up the chimney when the best picture had been obtained. Unfortunately it was the first television the batman had seen and he got engrossed in the programme and fell asleep leaving the R.S.M. on the roof twisting the aerial in all directions!

Turn left at the RSM's house and the next building you came to was 'Bing' the barber's, who constantly whistled whilst his wife carried out a 'pre-cut' with a basin effect which many an apprentice was left with as their time would run out. It would look all right with a hat on but took on the look of a coconut when the hat was removed.

Out and About

Many apprentices will remember the crews of the car ferries, the Severn King and Severn Queen. The ticket collector would ask where the lads were going and whilst selling tickets to the motorists would arrange lifts which was very useful because if you landed at Aust it was like the 'back of beyond'.

Having not returned to Chepstow for over forty years, I remember the town as it was in the fifties. I remember the cinema, opposite was the Cafe and up the street just before the town arch was the Town Hall. Many of us attended the Saturday Night dances - remember if you stayed to the very end then you walked back to camp!

Finally does anyone still keep in contact with any of the Burmese apprentices who returned to serve in the Burmese Army as Officers?

Bryan C. Laurence 54B 'C' Company

Here is a wonderful poem written by Eileen Andrews and her family for her brother Jack to celebrate his eightieth birthday.

Jack Abbott Group 29C

Eighty Lines for Eighty Years

The second day of August is auspicious it appears
For on this special day Jack Abbott reaches eighty years,
And since he sometimes has been known to try a bit of verse
We thought that we would do the same or maybe worse!
He surfaced in the First World War and we'll be looking back
At Shirley's life, 'though he prefers his second name of Jack'.
His father came from Derbyshire and in the football game
He played for Pompey Football Club and was a famous name.
He'd take his little son there, to scrabble on his knees
For coins thrown on the pitch for worthy charities.
Then to Chesterfield where for some years they did abide
When dad finished playing and switched to the training side.
There is a most important fact we haven't mentioned yet,
His mother was a Portsmouth girl, whose name was Violet.
Jack joined the Army where he came up through the ranks,
The first part of his Army life was spent among the tanks,
And with them out in India he was to serve some years,
He later moved to REME (or the Royal Engineers)
He did his bit for England during World War Number Two
But was in Singapore, just when the Japs came through.
He spent a time quite horrid as a most unwilling guest
Of little yellow men but there we'll let the matter rest.
Eventually freed through Canada he came back home,
Although while in the Army he was destined yet to roam.
Repatriated Jack then met the daughter of a mate,
He thought that she was rather nice and asked her for a date.
His fate was sealed forever: Pat agreed to be his bride:
'Twas in the town of Reading the marriage knot was tied.
While serving out in Kenya with the Army one bright morn
Their only child and beloved daughter, Shirley Jane was born.
Jack also served in Germany and after his demob
Employment in the MOD gave him a civvy job.
In Curridge near to Newbury for many years they dwelt,
But then his dear wife Pat was lost and quite bereft he felt.
He moved north to Knaresborough in Yorkshire so that he
Could live much closer to his daughter and her family.
A post-retirement interest in genealogy
Has caused Jack to research much of his patriarchal tree
And to this end he's often had to travel far and wide,

Unearthing near and distant cousins on his father's side.
No doubt he'll keep in touch with lost relations that he's met
But cupboards opened have revealed no skeletons as yet!
It's not too late however, there's his mother's side to do
Around canals in Wiltshire with some scenic searching too.
Within his granddad flat in Frimley Green Jack now resides,
It's just the job for him and there's his family besides
To keep a loving eye on him and help out if required.
And now he's got the workshop, which for long he had desired.
It's strongly built in brick, we'll call in Workshop Number One
And organising it has given him a lot of fun.
He has a place for everything and all things in their place
And should it get untidy he would deem it a disgrace.
Of Keith and Shirley's children he indeed is justly proud
And pride in ones descendants can most surely be allowed.
There's Katie in the business world and Matthew can be found
At Ford's and with his discount he is good to have around.
When Popski needs new wheels for all his journeys near and far
His grandson will arrange a bargain price for his new car.
Jack's sampled quite a few of Saga's famous holidays
And at the dinner table ladies like his winning ways.
And quite often Jack finds few other men around
And thus surrounded by a female swarm he's found.
Jack keeps in touch with Army chums and thus, heigh-ho,
To Chepstow for the annual Reunion he will go.
He totes his camera round about a-snapping scene on scene
Recording for posterity the places where he's been.
To keep our old canals alive for Jack is now a must:
For long he's been a member of the preservation trust.
The Kennet and the Avon is his local waterway
And in full working order we all hope that it will stay.
In matters musical it is light classics that he favours
And those played on the organ he particularly savours.
Jack loves to do the garden but he mustn't go too mad
Since earlier this year a little healthwise blip he had.
So he must heed his doctor, take it easy and not fret
And then God willing, he may be around for some years yet.
We hope, dear Jack, that you'll enjoy your "eightieth" event,
The party and the barbecue, the fun and merriment.
May each remaining year bring you much joy and
Amongst your family and friends and finally. God Bless.

REUNION OF 50A GROUP

We are trying to organise a reunion for apprentices of 50A Group possibly in the year 2000 when it will be our 50th anniversary. If you are interested, please write either to:

Donald Jacobs
Corona, 8
3204 CL Spijkenisse
Holland

or

John Cox
6 Anderson Close
Woodley
ROMSEY
Hampshire SO51 7UE

"SPIT & POLISH"

I was brought up in a small Lancashire mill and coal mining town to believe that going to Church was meant to be a joyous occasion. It's true that this atmosphere was engendered in various ways.

Probably the most influential were the boy's cricket teams and the Sunday School league football we played on the hard, knee "scarring" cinder playing fields which each neighbourhood had. Of course we were Baptist, Methodist, Wesleyan, C of E, depending upon how good we were or who had the best team to which we aspired. Another influence were the pretty girls, who also went to Church, but did not change their allegiance as we did, and to which we showed off and blushing were forced to kiss at Christmas parties. It was certainly a girl who invented "Postman's Knock." Fortunately, as I got older I realised that that too was a good game.

So you can see that on arriving at Beachley, I was well prepared for going to Church. When Sergeant Redman, our 'Sapper' Wing Sergeant gathered us all together and asked us "what we were," a quick look round at my, gathered, young comrades showed that to be a Baptist was not in the majority. So, I became C of E.

Disregarding any sort of theological preferment, that choice was my major mistake — and it had nothing to do with cricket. This you will appreciate as my tale unfolds.

Our first Church parade was some six weeks after "joining up." No one thought us fit to attend church until then, and anyway it took us that long to get our uniforms and equipment up to scratch.

Even after forty years I can see our two guardians and mentors. They are both as clear to me now as though it was yesterday. First, there was Sergeant Redman. I suppose he must have been about thirty years old. A "dapper", slight man from the "Sappers." Red, apple cheeks, a turned up nose, blue eyes, of very kindly, quiet disposition and always impeccably turned out. His assistant was another NCO, from the Royal Engineers, Lance Sergeant Peabody. He was tall, lean, much younger, with a dark thin moustache. His long legs were encased in perfectly fitting "drain pipes" and, surprisingly for those days, another kindly man - but sharp.

Between them they got us ready to be shown. Taught us how to fall in and march without having our right arms going forward at the same time as our right legs. To salute, to draw our pay, to stand still, to behave as a group. Most of all they taught us how to clean and prepare our kit.

I remember my speciality was the chinstrap. When they were first issued the two pieces of flat leather, from which they were made, were a very light buff colour. The trick was to first remove about twelve inches of concave beading from the joint between wooden walls and roof of the hut. Then by inserting a nail at one end, with which to anchor the strap buckles, a tin of Kiwi Ox Blood and the bone end of your tooth brush plus many hours of patient hard work, the two pieces of leather were turned into a beautiful, dark red with the, now, slightly concave, shape reflecting the shine, so that the strap, when fitted to your peaked hat, glistened brilliantly.

Our boots, though black and heavily impregnated with grease, received the same treatment, further assisted by judicious applications of a hot spoon. They too became mirror finished. I must confess that it was only then I realised there must be different properties in young men's spit. Young Frost's spit always produced a better toecap than mine!

White belts, inherited from some recently departed "draft", were blanched and re-blanched. The merits of bottled or solid whitening being a matter of choice. There must have been frequent "full dress" parades that summer but the one I remember was our first Church Parade.

It was the first time we had actually been on parade with the other lads in "C" Company and, we were determined to live up to Sgt. Redman's expectations. We had all worked very hard on our kit. On a Sunday morning we C of E's, at about half past nine, self consciously left our barrack rooms and grouped on the Company Square, which sloped down to the Wye.

Initially we formed up in groups and then subsequently as a company with shortest in the centre, tallest on the flanks in three long ranks as C Company. This was on the transverse road, which ran parallel to the River Wye on a Chepstow - Beachley point axis. I have purposely glossed over the period of "shortest on the left, tallest on the right, in single file fall in and then number. Even numbers one pace forward, odd's one pace step back" — and so on. You can imagine some of the confusion despite our rigorous and constant practice.

Anyway, it was all accomplished, to much sweat, with some threatening and a good deal of fear. Eventually, our Company Commander (Tank Corps) carried out his very detailed inspection, some boys receiving notice of further requirements and practice during the coming week.

When he came to me he remarked to the Sergeant Major that my chin strap was the best on parade. My little chest swelled with pride.

So, we went to Church and sat to attention. Married families then filed in with their self conscious daughters passing down the long aisle under the bold eyes of some of the senior boys. Soon the Church was full and despite some hundreds of boys, quiet. Then the School Band "struck up" the triumphal march and from the vestry by

the door, strode the rotund, little, martial figure of our Padre, the Reverend Selwyn Cox. A captain then, he always wore very smart leather leggings, which, if you sat at the end, could be seen underneath his surplice.

Without doubt he was always in command of the situation and was the most military of padres I ever came across. It took me quite a long time and three days "jankers" before I learned to salute him and not slide shyly past him as I used to do when I met our civilian Minister in Burnley, before joining up.

I remember the singing was terrific, the Wing Sergeants saw to that. Perhaps it was not 'Welsh choir' standard but the volume of sound always strove to lift the roof.

However, the collection was another story and every Sunday our Padre, without fail, played "hell" with us for our miserly contributions. But, like most of the boys, my two shillings received on a Friday was spent on a couple of postage stamps, a slab of 'Gledale Slab Toffee', green blanco, white blanco, black boot polish, ox blood boot polish, metal polish, writing paper, envelopes, an occasional "Flie" (current) cake from the NAAFI. Heck! did it buy all that? Whatever it bought, there was never any left for Sunday morning.

Anyway, on that first Sunday, before the war, and after dinner, when we were lying on our beds, "snoozing" or reading and I was still basking in Major Well's congratulatory remarks about my 'chinstrap', number eight room's door was rudely burst open and in stalked about a dozen of the Senior Group.

"Where is he?" "Who?", "The kid with the chin strap." Oh! In my innocence and still full of pride I piped up, "Yes it was me." I was happy at this recognition by the "draft" of my startling prowess so early in my Army career.

"Good lad," they said. I bit my tongue as twelve nondescript chinstraps fell on my bed. **"Get these done before next Sunday - or else!"**

Jack Horsfall 44C Group (1939 entry)

Jack has provided several longer stories about his career and wartime experiences which I hope to publish in Echoes in the coming years. Ed

Great War Poets

I must confess that I am astonished to find myself writing on the subject of poetry. I suppose it must be because November 1998 saw the 80th anniversary of the end of the Great War, an event which was honoured by many memorial services--in particular at The Menin Gate, Ypres. At these Services of Remembrance there were quotes (and misquotes) from the Great War Poets. It was the misquotes that really triggered me to pen and paper. Although not the most famous, I wish to write about McRae and Binyon, their words being familiar to us all.

In June 1915 *The Daily Mail* humorously reported "A serious Outbreak of Poets" on the home front and that more poetry had "found its way into print in the last eleven months than in the eleven preceding years".

Things were much the same in the army. According to *The Wipers Times* "Subalterns have been seen with a notebook in one hand, and bombs in the other, absently walking near the wire in deep communion with the muse"!!

Those who have recently visited Ypres will know that the War Museum there is now called **In Flanders Fields Museum**. On entering the museum one is greeted by a large blown up copy of a hand-written verse entitled "In Flanders Fields".

John McRae (1872-1918) was a Canadian Army doctor who knew at first hand the horrors of Ypres by having to deal daily with the terrible consequences of artillery and machine guns.

On 2nd May 1915 McRae's close friend, Lt Helmer, was badly wounded by a shell. Despite his best medical endeavours he could not save his friend. This added agony inspired him to compose "In Flanders Fields" on the day of Helmer's burial.

In Flanders Fields

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

The poem first appeared in the 8th Dec 1915 issue of *Punch* without the poet's name. His identity was revealed in answer to an overwhelming public interest from the UK and US. It became known as the most popular English poem of the Great War. In 15 lines McRae had enshrined the mood of the times. The poem is really in two parts, the first as a memorial to the casualties and the second as a kind of call to arms.

The lines "If ye break faith with us ... we shall not sleep", were used in Canada and UK with telling effect to sell war bonds and to recruit more troops.

The scarlet corn poppy had been a symbol of life but after the publication of "In Flanders Fields", it became a universal symbol of remembrance. In 1919 the British and American Legions adopted the poppy as their memorial flower and, as we all know, it still blooms to this day - thanks to McRae.

John McRae died in Jan 1918 of pneumonia and meningitis and was buried with full military honours in the cemetery at Wimereux, France a few days after he was appointed consulting physician to the 1st British Army.

Contrary to popular belief, **Laurence Binyon (1869 - 1943)** wrote "For the Fallen" in 1914 and not after the armistice in 1918. Binyon never served in the Great War. Published in *The Times* on 21st Sept 1914, it was probably the most successful wartime poem of remembrance. It was set to music by Elgar and is quoted on many war memorials. Verse 4 is frequently spoken as an Exhortation. Craftily, only alternate lines rhyme---giving more poetic licence with the remainder. Sadly, Binyon's fine words are often misquoted by the careless.

Verses 3 and 4 (of 7) are repeated here:

They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted,
They fell with their faces to the foe.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

M Murtagh (43B Group)

From the Hon Secretary

The Army Benevolent Fund.

Those members who attended the service of worship at last year's reunion weekend will remember that a collection was taken during the offertory hymn. The amount raised was £280 and, as always, a cheque was sent to the Army Benevolent Fund. The Association received a letter of thanks signed by Brigadier N M Prideaux, an extract of which read, **"Please will you thank all the members of the Association, not only for this wonderful donation, but also for their continuing support. It is very much appreciated."** The generosity of those who contributed is to be applauded.

Dates, Dates, Dates.

The issue of our Book of Rules last year was a monumental occasion, but as with all such occasions there is always controversy. In this case, the question **"When was BOBA actually formed?"** drew much conversation from the floor during the 98 AGM. The Rule Book says July 1939. Similarly, my copy of the School / College History states that BOBA was formed when Col Shears was Commandant, again in July 1939. However, does any Beachley Old Boy out there have a different date? Answers on a postcard please to the Hon Sec or by hand at this year's reunion.

Calling 65B Group.

Some weeks ago I received a letter from Mr Dave Lowther of 65B Group A Coy. Dave now resides in Tasmania, Australia and would like to make contact with any members from the same group. His address is PO Box 14, Penguin, Tasmania 7316, Australia. He also has an e-mail address, Dlowther@skm.com.au. Dave and I lived in adjoining villages in County Durham and joined Beachley at the same time. I will write and inform him that BOBA is fit and well and will also include a membership form!

Jottings.

Normally in the Newsletter I include a small snippet of Beachley history; therefore not being one to break with tradition:

Did you know? That during one three month period of the Second World War over 500 air raid warnings were sounded, but remarkably the School suffered only one direct hit. This occurred on 9th November 1940. A lone German aircraft dropped a 1,000lb bomb and then strafed the area with machine gun fire, killing one apprentice and severely wounding a member of the staff.

Finally.

It is with great regret that I have to announce the recent death of **Mr George William Gilligan**. Sadly, I believe Mr Gilligan was the last surviving member of No 1 Group, the group that moved to Beachley from Buller Barracks, Aldershot 75 years ago. We must be sure to toast George and the other pioneer army apprentices of his group at this year's reunion.

I will see you all in September at the Reunion. It will be a good one again!

Brian Henderson

**It is with great regret we record below those whose death has
been reported to BOBA since the Reunion in Sep 98.**

299	Capt. Frank King	8 Group	10/98
Non Mem.	Mr I Fellows	42A Group	9/98
Non Mem.	Mr DC Colclough	40 Group	9/98
67	Mr John Spindler	39 Group	9/98
340	Mr John Johnson	Staff	2/99
245	Mr Reg Boorer	9 Group	2/99
341	Mr Frank Collins	42A Group	2/99
72	Lt Col John Hatten	28 Group	2/99
294	Mr HR Chandler	5 Group	4/99
344	Mr Eric Clarke	36 Group	4/99
653	Mr Neville Adams	44A Group	4/99
142	Mr George Gilligan	1 Group	3/99

The Irm-Eye View of BOBA

Irmgard, my wife, made a comment which has stuck in my mind; she made it first during visits to Beachley in 1992 & 93. This was before the school closed, when she was able to get a view of the young Beachley boys who attended church with us old codgers and served us drinks in the gymnasium during those reunions.

"The change, just a few months makes..." she said, as if in awe, "... the poor little ones, fresh away from their loving mummies ..." a sigh "must have been an awful shock for them: deprived of that special home-love and lacking the confidence and air of superiority of their seniors - must have been awful, at first. But look at them now! They have a unique form of charisma; stiff and proud, yet ready to relax for anything and everything. The old boys too. How they are almost in tears, photographing what was THEIR school: their beginnings which is to close and be a nothing. Ah! I know what it is: they have a DOUBLE BACKBONE; one in their back, the other in the brain."

After the very late-finish of our '98 Reunion Dinner' I asked Irmgard "Were you bored?" to which she replied, "Oh no! We had a lot of fun discussing you men. We were singing, 'Why, oh why are we waiting for our dinner' — it was great fun. And how you are all so very different from each other and yet just the same AND so different from non Ex-Boys. Many of you are using a stick and others are hunched over as if carrying a heavy load but even they still exhibit the double backbone. And, of course, still in competition with each other: You can see and hear that. You know, Goethe said, 'Women must pray, whilst men must fight'. Well, it was fun for us to find the words to describe you men as you were obviously competing with each other using words to outdo each other."

What Irmgard said next was not a question - more the word of command: "We shall return for the 1999 BOBA"

John Bass 44A A Coy

CALLING ALL ROBOT MAGAZINES - WHERE ARE YOU?

The following editions of Robot are missing from the archive at the BOBA HQ. Can anyone provide the missing copies? Please let me know on 01934 412986. Thanks. **Ron Marie.**

April 72	Winter 75	Spring 76	Autumn 76	Spring 77	
Winter 78	Summer 79	Winter 79	Summer 80	Winter 80	Year 92

THE 1998 BOBA OPEN GOLF CHAMPIONSHIPS

The "BOBA OPEN", in the form of an 18 hole Stableford competition, took place on the Park Course of Dewstow Golf Club on Saturday 19th September 1998. A commendable turnout of 24 golfers collected on the first tee and after some shaking of heads the leading 3 ball, which included our Chairman, set off at 1108 hrs.

The delay in starting the competition was due to the fact that both the Park and Valley courses were fully booked by local golf societies. The rules of the club mean that golf societies can book without restrictions, whereas mere members are only permitted to book up to seven days in advance. **The remedy is simple: if we are to continue using Dewstow Golf Club we must form a BOBA Golf Society and take advantage of the club rules.**

To this end, you will find a Registration Proforma at the bottom of this page. The format of the **1999 BOBA OPEN** depends on the response of you, the players, regarding the formation of a golf society. Therefore, I would be very grateful for your earliest completion of the proforma, to enable a committee to be formed and the planning to go ahead. I also ask you to pay a £5 joining fee to get the Society under way.

Getting back to the 1998 BOBA Open, the only individual who was affected by the late start was the Chairman who was seen striding across the 10th fairway heading for the AGM! When his card was scrutinised it showed that he had scored 24 Stableford points on the front nine. Handicap Secretary please note!

The Park Course proved to be in good condition considering the heavy usage during the summer season and the results generally indicated a good standard of golf.

After many recounts the following were declared winners:

		Handicap
1998 BOBA Open Champion with 41 points	George Murray	9
1998 BOBA Runner-Up with 38 points	Alan Duncan	26
Best gross par 3's	John Green	9
Nearest the pin	Rick Spalding	28
Longest Drive	Tony Battle	13

The BOBA Trophy, together with the minor prizes, was kindly presented by the President, Colonel A G Holman.

I look forward to seeing you all in September 1999.

Ken Standen

-----Please cut here-----

APPLICATION TO JOIN THE BOBA GOLF SOCIETY

RETURN ASAP TO : Ken Standen, 1 Fairview, High Beech, CHEPSTOW, Mon, NP6 5BX.

I, the undersigned wish to join the **BOBA GOLF SOCIETY** and enclose a £5 cheque as a joining fee made payable to **BOBA**.

Rank / Title Name & Initials: _____

Address: _____

Phone no: _____

Golf Club: _____ Handicap: _____ (please enclose copy of club handicap cert. if available)

Please answer the following questions (golfers only please!)

1. I am available to stand as a BOBA Golf Society Committee Member: **YES / NO**
2. I am able to travel to Chepstow to attend a meeting in the near future: **YES / NO**
(If YES - bring clubs!)

Signed: _____

OUR HERITAGE

An initial Beachley Boys' Heritage layout was set up at the Old Course Hotel on the Saturday morning of the 98 Reunion in conjunction with the very fine Chepstow Museum display of archive photographs spanning the era of Beachley Camp from construction to closure. The interest and talking points generated from members attending was such that the display time was extended.

Both the Chepstow Museum Curator, Anne Rainsbury, and myself wish to thank those members who have returned 'Boy's Own Story' forms and / or memorabilia. To get more of you writing, an abridged proforma is enclosed with this newsletter. I would welcome receipt of even part-completed forms in order to help compile the history.

I am particularly looking for some input from later groups e.g. 1950 to 1992.

In response to last years encouraging interest, I shall again hold the display on the Saturday morning at the Old Course Hotel from 1030 hrs to 1300 hrs with more memorabilia to mark the 75th anniversary of Beachley Camp.

I would welcome the loan of any individual or small group photographs showing the uniform dress of your day. I am also interested in any internal barrack room or workshops photographs.

Note. The BOBA HQ, Old School House, Beachley will only be open after the church parade on Sunday.

Ron Marie

Lt Col Mike Watkins MBE RLC

Many of you will have seen Mike Watkins' obituary in the newspapers in August last year. He was described as a leading army bomb disposal expert who was tragically killed when, pursuing his hobby, a shaft collapsed as he surveyed First World War excavations near Arras in northern France.

He was an intellectual and an enthusiast who dedicated his life to the business of explosive ordnance investigation. He served in Northern Ireland several times and helped to find the explosive source of the Lockerbie disaster. He also served in the Falklands and the Solomon islands clearing WW2 Japanese and US bombs. He was awarded the MBE in 1984 and was twice mentioned in despatches.

He was no stranger to Vimy Ridge. Earlier last year he took part in making safe over three tons of deteriorated explosives which threatened the Canadian War Memorial on the surface above. It was the first such disarming to be carried out in the tunnels since 1918. He saw such work, not strictly his army role, as an important task for future generations to be able to enjoy the famous WW1 battlefield in safety.

He was born in Newport, Monmouthshire in 1947 and joined the Army Apprentices School, Chepstow as an RAOC ammunition technician in 1963.

Mike Watkins was one of Beachley's most renowned men. A sad and tragic loss.

A Snippet from Robot August 1967

Tradition must be a firm base from which to progress, not a tethering post to hold us back ... Recently the College has changed from a nine term to a seven-term timetable....Reductions in the size of the armed forces and ever-increasing specialisation cause some pessimists to foresee the passing of the 'complete' soldier - resourceful beyond the confines of his trade and capable of rising to meet any eventuality. Such pessimists cannot have been to Beachley.

I guess the pessimists were proved right in 1993 - Ed

From the Frying Pan into the Fire

Suela Bay, the Battle for Crete, 1942. I was a sapper with 4th Fd Sqn waiting to blow a road to halt the German advance. They took great advantage of our retreat and the ME109s and ME110s were strafing the road almost continuously. It was no fun finding a place to hide for we had a sheer cliff behind us and sheer drop in front! But someone discovered a culvert under the road where the road angled round - a perfect place to shelter from the attacking planes.

Three of us crawled into the culvert which had an opening about two feet square. I was second in and felt a lot better not having to dodge a 109 with eight machine guns going full blast up and down the road. It felt like heaven - safe at last for the first time in ten days. It was a matter of relaxing and waiting for dark when we could emerge to stretch our aching limbs.

All of a sudden the fellow at the blocked-up end starts to go off his head, screaming and frothing at the mouth, his feet going like a V8's pistons into my face, screaming at me to get out. I inquired what was the matter but all I got back was hysterical screaming, from a maniacal foaming comrade-in-arms wanting to get out. Luckily I had my tin hat on as his ammo boots

beat a tattoo on my head. In desperation I then tried to get the lad behind me, who was just inside the entrance, to get out quick. However, every time he stuck his head out into the open down roared a Messerschmitt. So I had an immovable object on one side and an irresistible force on the other so I am what is known as 'the meat in the sandwich'.

The problem was that the terrified fellow in front of me was looking a terrified snake in the eye at about a distance of one foot! He wasn't very comfortable with this and hence his desire to exit quick. In the end in desperation I put my feet into the back of the first guy and propelled him into the war. On getting out, and into what was now a safer place, I was convinced that facing eight machine guns on a ME109 was mere child's play compared to looking into the eyes of a maniac with a snake at his back.

Bill Copley 37 Group D Coy

Bill lives at Lake Illawarra, NSW, Australia. His story about the Battle for Crete and his part in it are quite lengthy and I was only able to publish a small part of it. Thanks Bill, I hope to use some more of the story next year. Ed.

Bob Jordan

On April 18th this year the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) held a fund-raising event in Beachley Camp. The event took the form of an assault course challenge with twenty teams taking part to raise money for a light-sensitive unit for children. About £6,000 was raised.

One team consisted of Bob Jordan of 71 A Group and other Beachley Boys. Bob is now registered blind after contracting diabetes two years ago and wanted to take part to aid the RNIB who have helped him a great deal. Unfortunately, on the day of the event Bob had trouble with his hands and feet and couldn't tackle the course himself.

I have spoken to Bob and although he lives less than a mile from the Old Course Hotel, he has not been to the Reunion since about 1991 and didn't know that the Association is flourishing. He'll be at the Reunion this year though - so please look out for him. Ed.

**If you have a change of address or phone number or a membership query please contact
Dave Hayward, 14 Ash Grove, Middlewich, Cheshire, CW10 0AQ. Tel 01606 833617.**

THE REMEMBRANCE DAY PARADE AT WHITEHALL SUNDAY 14th NOVEMBER 1999

The Association is hoping to provide up to twenty five members to take part in the Cenotaph Parade this year. If you would like to be one of these members please write to the Chairman, Lt Col Syd Thomas, at the address given in your BOBA Rule Book. **Please do not telephone.** The places will go to the first twenty five applicants. Ed