

223rd Craft Apprentice Entrant Reunion – 23-25 May 2015

Stalwarts of the 223rd Entry again gathered together for their 2 yearly reunions. The first reunion was held in 2002 and the enthusiasm it engendered has not diminished. The sense of comradeship, pride and effervescent Service humour shines ever brightly. The latest one was held at the Marriott Hotel, Huntingdon, with 24 “Brats” and their long suffering better halves attending the main event on Saturday, with 18 remaining for Sunday’s dinner and Yvonne Rodham’s now legendary quiz. They travelled from all points of the UK and one of the guys made it from Germany, where he has lived since leaving the Service. The comment that one member was from “outer space” was a bit harsh; slightly eccentric would be a more kinder description.

As in previous years, the first task was to get past the bar on check in; which again proved impossible for most. Then it was a mad scramble to get changed in time to be “on parade” at 1930 for dinner. As befitting any good parade, Roy Davidge and Dave Gingell, ex Apprentice Pipe Band, led with pipes and drums. One Brat was late and picked up a Block Surrounds duty for his tardiness. Dinner was excellent but the highlight of the evening was Keith Godden’s welcoming speech; we were all proud that a propulsion apprentice had finally learnt to read and write. Bob and Yvonne Rodham had also arranged a raffle with prizes donated by the guys; £150 was raised, with £75 donated to the RAF Benevolent Fund and the remainder to Cancer Research UK.

Although it was a raucous evening, in relative terms, it was more “genteel” in comparison to the last reunion when we were joined by six members of the local Constabulary.

Sunday started with a “how much you can eat at breakfast competition”, with Ken Ryan showing his class and a capacious lower belly, by consuming cereal, toast, a full English and two bacon butties; but to be fair to him he did have a hang-over. The remainder of the day was free with members dispersing to Cambridge for general sight-seeing, except for a couple of the guys who stayed with one of our Geordie representatives (Steve Blemings) to watch whether Newcastle could stay in the football league, or is that Premier League? It was an emotional afternoon for Steve and I am sure he appreciated the “supporting banter”.

Sunday night's dinner and Quiz Night was enjoyed by all; Yvonne's imagination on setting questions knows no bounds. Despite some gamesmanship by one team (you know who you are!) the rightful winners were eventually proclaimed.

Once again, it was a memorable weekend and we were pleased to see members who attended despite ill health, Haltonian fortitude at its best! We also did take time to remember those who could not attend through illness or other commitments; in particular Bob Wilson who is going through a tough patch at the moment, yet retains his fantastic sense of humour.

As always, we are indebted to Bob and Yvonne Rodham's hard work in organizing the Reunions, keeping us all in contact with each other and for creating and maintaining our website.

Huzzahs to you both from the boys!

Don Tanner
223rd Craft Apprentice Entry
RAF Halton 1971 - 1973