

# Welcome to the RMSA Spring 2008 Newsletter

## (Web Edition)

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## Filton House– The Old (circa 1910) and the New (circa 1936)

Driving through Filton it is good to see that something is at last being done to restore or renovate Filton House. With only brief periods of working in two of the houses in Fairlawn Avenue, I spent most of my 46 years with the Company in Filton House (old and new). Over these years I collected some history of the new building, including two copies of the house magazine 'Bristol Review' for 1937 and 1958. 1958 was the 20th anniversary of the magazine, so it is possible that publication did not continue during the war years. The 1937 edition contained an article describing the build and design of 'New' Filton House. On reading this article I thought it would be of interest, in view of the 100th anniversary of Bristol Aeroplane Co in 2010.

In 1910 the Old Manor House at Filton served as the Head Office first for the British & Colonial Aeroplane Company Limited and later the Bristol Aeroplane Company Limited. It was an old Georgian private residence and one of its owners was the Shield family - does anyone remember Shield's Laundry opposite Filton House on Gloucester Road? Miss Emma Shield was one of the senior secretaries at Filton who during the war years was in charge of the Head Office typing pool at Towerlease on Durdham Downs, one of the many large properties taken over by the Company during the second world war.

With constant expansion of the Company's business, larger offices became essential and these were started in August 1935 when the contract was signed, the site cleared and levelled and building commenced at the end of September 1935.

The new office block was designed by Mr. Austen Hall FRIBA and had to harmonise with old Filton House. The architect's problem was to put a large modern building in proximity to a much smaller old one without overpowering the original building by its proportions.

The apparent height of the new building was reduced by an offset at third floor level, avoiding a feeling of excessive height. The walls were also broken up by colour, the brick facings were left where accent was required, and the remainder of the walls colour-washed in grey cement to match the old house,

The entrance to the new building was placed in a bold projection from the main block and the Bath stone pillars in the entrance porch, and the continuous sill to the windows of the conference room were surrounded by a figure of Mercury in Portland stone, by Mr. Denis Dunlop, combined to make a simple but striking composition.

The north-east corner of the building presented an unusual problem, as the scale of the elevations change at this point to suit the internal planning and roofs which are at different levels. This is the view you get of the building from Gloucester Road. A tower overcame this difficulty and made a bold and important corner statement. At the base of the tower is a mythological Pegasus, carved in stone by Mr. Dunlop and flanked by pairs of windows. Bath stone being used for the window dressings and Portland stone for the sculpture. A bas-relief of a twin-engine aircraft is sculptured on the north side of the tower near the top. The placing of these figures received very careful thought and served to accentuate the design.

Only at the main entrance was any real decoration undertaken. The Main Conference Hall on the ground floor is approached by a flight of wide steps through glazed swing doors, the walls of the Entrance Lobby is lined with golden Travertine marble to give a sunlit effect.

From the Entrance Lobby is the Main Stairway, the principal feature of which is the window which runs the whole height of the building and lights all the landings of the Main Stairway. The design, by Mr Jan Jutta, was carried out in shades of sepia, yellow and intermediate tones. It illustrates the history and activities of the Company since 1910 and features some of the famous aircraft and engines produced by the Company, as well as introducing mythical figures whose names were adopted for some of its products. All the glass was removed during the war and replaced by boarding. It was good to see it returned.

Old Filton House.



New Filton House

The floor of the Hall, by Mr. Dunlop, in various shades of buff and black terrazzo with German silver and brass motifs, depicts the signs of the Zodiac, Winds and Sun.

The new offices were designed with the most modern practices in 1936. The whole plan was worked out to a basic unit of 15ft which was the span of all the floors. This was sub-divided into units for offices and each contained all the internal services necessary for lighting, heating, power, and telephones. For all internal sub divisions metal screens were used. All screens were a uniform height of 8ft 6ins with panels 3ft 6ins wide which allowed the position of the door to be changed without difficulty. The question of ample natural light received special consideration. Uniform windows were used throughout even the larger windows being built up of small standard sections. All window openings and piers between were 3ft 9ins wide thus avoiding broken bond in the walls, as brick sizes were worked to throughout. Fresh air passed through an air conditioning plant housed in the basement and was washed and warmed to the required temperature controlled by thermostats and was supplied to the largest offices and to all rooms in which a number of people were likely to be together for any length of time. Controllable thermostats were fitted in all the offices and sections.

Cork insulation was provided to all external walls and under flat roofs to maintain a constant temperature in winter and summer. Cork foundations were provided to all machine bases, and cork floors and acoustic plaster ceilings provided to absorb noise. This is important when glass and metal screens are employed to such an extent. The corridor floors were lined with rubber to ensure quietness.

Heating was by radiation from panels in the ceilings, avoiding unsightly pipes and radiators. The panels and pipes were all erected with the constructional steel and concrete. The heating panels were supplied by gas-fired water heaters, two of which each having a capacity of 1,657,000 B.T.U.s per hour in winter and a smaller one, used alone in the summer, of 628,000 B.T.U. per hour. These were situated in a special chamber in the basement, each having its own asbestos-cement flue carried to the top of the building.

The interior design was simple. The importance of well proportioned rooms with ample daylight, comfortable temperature and quietness preferable to all other considerations. The scheme for decoration was based on the colours used in the R.A.F. The metal screens were grey with doors coloured red on the corridor side, the rubber floors being in buff with blue margins, the balustrades were blue and red with an aluminium hand-rail.

The Main Conference Hall was used for meetings of the Bristol Branch of the Royal Aeronautical Soc. and many other purposes. It accommodated 250 people with a separate fire-proof projection room at one end.

The lighting and acoustic qualities were deemed remarkable. The walls were covered with a special porous acoustic plaster and lighting was concealed in the arched ceiling.

The dado and doors were in polished figured walnut with a macassar ebony skirting, and with carved ventilating grilles in walnut. The deep window recesses were decorated with ivory-coloured plaster reliefs, depicting all forms of both natural and artificial aerial transport.

In addition to all the usual departments and services, very large offices were provided for the Planning and Costing Departments. On the top floor there were very splendid dining rooms for the Directors and Senior Executives, with a very well equipped kitchen.

Also on the top floor was the Telephone Exchange with when first built, 10 external lines, and 75 extensions, in addition to 300 lines on an internal automatic exchange.

The first half of the building was occupied in April 1936, the whole being completed in July 1936, including new roads, gardens and boundary walls.

The Basement was home to the Wages Department where all weekly and hourly paid wages were calculated and put into packets for collection and distribution at the end of the week. It was fascinating to watch the staff in this department counting the copper and silver coins with unbelievable speed. The doors to the department had bars and there were inner offices which looked like cages where all the "wheeling and dealing" was done. There were also

Three Strong-rooms with very heavy doors. Only chosen personnel had keys to these. I remember the Service

Department and Stationery Store were here.

The Secretariat had use of Strong Room No.1 in which there was a large safe which contained minute books with minutes of every Board meeting. All minutes were hand-written, starting with the first meeting of The British & Colonial Aeroplane Co. in February 1910. I also remember a wooden propeller was kept in Strong Room No.1, possibly from a very early aircraft. I wonder where that ended up!

I am sure both Filton Houses hold many memories for some of our members. Old Filton House and its 'linoed' floors and brass treads on the stairs, with coal fires in the offices in the winter (original rooms of the old house). Only the Chairman and deputy Chairman and their staff had offices in Old Filton house for a long time.

I hope you will find this article of some interest.

Esme Webb

### RMSA's ANNUAL SHORT BREAK 2007

Ken Tooze gives his view on what it was like.....

It was a Monday morning, late last September when forty of us, set out with Rover European Coaches, on a five day tour to the White Rose County of North Yorkshire.

There was no traffic jams on the journey, so we were in good time for our first visit, Holmfirth near Huddersfield where much of TV's 'Last of the Summer Wine' is filmed. The weather however was a bit damp, and we didn't get much of an opportunity to walk round where it all happens. It had been a long trip from Bristol, and when we got to Harrogate I was pleased to settle in at our hotel the Swallow St. George, and in the evening enjoy, what I thought was an excellent dinner with a good choice menu.

Tuesday morning was spent in Harrogate. Our hotel was in the centre of town, and it was not far to walk to the shops and places of tourist interest. Harrogate still exudes some of the elegance it must have had in the nineteenth century, when it was famous throughout Europe as a Health Spa.

Strolling among well manicured flower beds, part of a nearby open space of some two hundred acres called the Sway, we came across the Old Town Hall, now an art gallery, with some interesting paintings by local artists and included a Turner Seascape this must have been worth a few quid. It was once the Town Hall Theatre patronised by such notables as Oscar Wilde and Lilly Langtree, no less.

In the afternoon we all joined the coach, where regular courier Carol and driver Andy took us to the Black Sheep Brewery at Masham, a picturesque village on the edge of Nidderdale. Mashams' roads were not built for today's coaches, and it was with some skill that Andy, 'shoehorned' us into the brewery park. We were shown round by an enthusiastic guide, who explained to us, the 'ewe-nique' process which produced this 'true true taste of Yorkshire.' Samples-not only alcoholic-were freely available at the finish of the tour. Good stuff.

Knaresborough was our last visit of the day. From the castle, which Oliver Cromwell's men had 'knocked about a bit' in the Civil War, there were stunning views over the town and the Nidderdale countryside. It was time then to return to Harrogate, to 'put our feet up.' Deservedly, I thought.

Rievaulx Abbey, part of a Cistercian Monastery near Helmsley, was our first stop on Wednesday. We were met at the entrance by an English Heritage guide, called Brother Anthony dressed in monkish garb. He escorted us round this impressive monastic site and despite deteriorating weather gave us some history of the Abbey and an excellent description of how hard the devout life was for monks in the Monastery through the ages. After a light lunch in the Abbey tea room we were in a bit of a hurry to get to Pickering to catch the '13.30'.

No need to worry we were in good time. Andy never lets us down and we were on our next visit: The North Yorkshire Moors Railway, and an eighteen mile journey on a steam train from Pickering to Grosmont. Nostalgic things steam trains, and with both Stations recently refurbished in 1930s and 1950s styles respectively, memories of by-gone days can soon be evoked. At Grosmont we boarded the coach to end the day at the resort of Whitby, where for an hour or so a fresh and bracing North Sea breeze whetted our appetites, for the evening meal back at the Hotel

Thursday we had a full day visit to York. The tourist guide calls York, Britain's favourite city. There is much to see and do. We left the coach not too far from the Minster, while some of our party went on a last minute option: a visit to the Yorkshire Aircraft Museum at Elvington, where forty plus aircraft types can be seen, as well as the famous Barnes Wallis Collection.

When looking round a place like York with all the attractions it's hard to know where to start. We had visited the Minster before, so we went to the central area of the City just to look around, there was a Wine and

Food Fair going on, and that was it for us. Oh! Except to have afternoon tea in a Café - not the famous 'Betty's' - crowded with Americans.

We got back to the Hotel in late afternoon to enjoy a final hospitable evening, as each had been all week. I thought it was a good place to stay, the food and service was excellent and there was a swimming pool and Jacuzzi at no extra charge. Great!

On the way home the following day, we visited Haworth near Keighley, home of the Bronte family. Haworth according to the guide book retains much of the character that would be recognised by the Brontes today. I must confess to not having read any of their books, but have seen film and TV versions, of Emily's 'Wuthering Heights' with lovers Cathy and the dark and dangerous Heathcliff, played in one of the films I think, by Laurence Olivier, and Charlotte's 'Jane Eyre'. It's a special tourist spot.

There it is then, the RMSA's 2007 Break. Thanks once again to Dave and Janet for all their hard work. Information this years' break is on page 8. So save up some of your pension and come along, I am sure you will enjoy it.

Ken Tooze

### **Disaster Before D-Day**

No doubt many of our number watched BBC1's Country File on Remembrance Sunday, which featured the disastrous events off Slapton sands in Devon when the Americans were on night exercises, training for the impending invasion of Europe. Apparently, the three miles of Slapton Sands, together with the freshwater ley across the road, closely resembled Omaha Beach on the French coast. Some of my relatives lived in the area where the local people were evacuated for a couple of years prior to D-Day.

One of my uncles' who was a crew member of the old ,slow Royal Navy escort vessels that night told how a Squadron of fast German torpedo boats found and attacked the fully loaded American troop and tank landing craft.

Over 700 soldiers lost their lives and several landing craft and tanks went to the bottom. Some years later a local fisherman got his trawl lodged on something big. It was a sunken Sherman tank.

He subsequently bought it off the Americans for \$50 (apparently to cover the cost of the paperwork) and salvaged it. It now stands as a War Memorial on the sands at Torcross.

My father who served for twenty years in Royal navy had been recalled for service early in the war. He was a Chief Stoker Petty Officer engaged on submarine refuelling.

On demob he and my mother went to live at Blackawton, one of the villages that had been evacuated. He was a gardener at Shepley Court Nudist Colony and always claimed he was allowed to keep his clothes on and never did invite Mother and I to see his gardens.

Stan Lock

## Memories of an Old Sea Dog

The old sea dog in question is Phil Thomas, whose demise was reported in the Autumn issue of this newsletter. That, and reading Clive Leyman's amusing anecdotes inspired me to think of Phil and his teaching me to sail many years ago. Those who remember him will recall that Phil was of a cautious nature which is why the South West Civil Service Sailing Club trusted him to check any new recruits were safe to be trusted with their only asset, an ancient 18 ft National (a sturdy old clinker built wooden sailing boat with an iron centerboard). Yes, we sailed with the SWCSSC rather than Pegasus simply because they had this boat which few if any others wanted to sail. Phil, a resident of Bristol, would call me early on a Saturday morning to check that the weather in Weston was likely to be okay for sailing. I graduated in time to other boats and even to teaching others to sail, all due to Phil's good early grounding. Phil was quite happy to sail with me and few others because, as he confessed, he "wanted to be sure he was with a skipper where he wouldn't have to swim for it at any point!" Sails with Phil were always quite gentle in comparison but not always without incident. Phil was always determined to sail back to our mooring come what may. This was no doubt in part due to the unreliable nature of our outboard motor which had been dropped overboard a few times.

Chris Davies

## A Chance in Many Millions

Reading Ray Foot's piece in RMSA Newsletter Autumn 2007 "A Million to one chance meeting" reminded me of an occurrence of somewhat longer odds, that happened to me.

I was working in 2DO in ISTG as Group leader responsible for Rapier interfaces, which included cables.

My wife had an ageing Aunt living in Macksville NSW Australia. We decided that we would like to visit her, we had been thinking about it for years. We arrived in Sydney and hired a car and drove north. After a couple a days with her, her husband, who did not drive, asked if we would like to be shown around. Of course we said we would.

We set off and were shown the sights. Then he said had we seen a rain forest.

No, we had not, so off to the Weiwei forest. We turned into the forest of very tall trees and drove along a muddy track for several miles, when we came to a clearing where five or six people were staring up one of the trees. Curiosity got the better of us and we stopped and got out of the car and walked over to the group. They were looking at some "Goannas" (large lizards) clinging to the trunks about three metres from the ground. I passed a comment to a man there and he replied with an English accent. I asked him if he was on holiday, he said "No, he had just emigrated here" I asked him where had he lived in England. He replied, Helsby, Cheshire. Oh I said, I was in Helsby a few weeks ago visiting BICC. I worked for BICC he replied. I said, They have been developing some cables for use on the Rapier missile equipment.

Was that contract blah blah, quoting the contract number? Yes, I said. I made those cables for you, that was my last job with the firm he replied.

Yes, it is unbelievable but I swear it is true.

Ron Frost.

### NOTICE TO ALL MEMBERS

If, when you receive correspondence from the RMSA, such as your Newsletter; should you notice any discrepancy in your address or any other details, would you please communicate any such corrections to our Membership Secretary to facilitate correction and update of our records.

THANK YOU

## The Millau Bridge

You have probably all seen the TV program about the building of this spectacular bridge in the South of France, Nothing however, can compare to actually being there, looking at it and driving over it.

This started as a dream for us when we saw the program, but actually became a reality when I went to an old school reunion and discovered one of my classmates (not seen for 48 years) had lived in France for 44 years and was running a B&B in a quaint little village called Bez about 40 minutes South of the bridge. She could not escape us; a visit was arranged and we flew to Montpellier airport with great anticipation.

This is the world's highest bridge.

Here are the facts: First stone was laid 14th December 2001, Viaduct opened to traffic 16th December 2004.

The road deck is 270 metres above the River Tarn; there are 7 support pylons and the tallest reaches a height of 343 metres which is higher than the Empire State building. Bridge total length is 2,460 metres.

Designed by a British architect Sir Norman Foster, and built by the Eiffage Group.

Reason for the bridge:

Route A75 extends from Beziers ( and Barcelona) in the South to Clermont Ferrand ( and Paris) in the North. In the middle at the town of Millau there is an enormous valley into which all traffic descended to cross the River Tarn, it was a huge bottleneck. The building of that bridge across the valley solved the problem and has made a lot of people very happy.

The journey from Montpellier Airport takes about 2 hours.

It is best to drive over the bridge from the North where after the toll gate (cost 7 euros) there is a viewing area. However, the Visitor Centre with all the information is under the bridge on the South side. To get to it, approach from the South and exit towards Millau, but before going into the town, at the roundabout continue on towards Creissels on RD992.

Sheilah Da Silva



## KEEP SOLDIERING ON

John Bartlett's fascinating Military History continues.....

On 05 October 2006 the Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment paraded on College Green Bristol for the last time, to celebrate the granting of the Freedom of the City and County of Bristol. This parade was to honour not only today's soldiers, but also to remember those generations who had served with their predecessor Regiments.

On these ceremonial occasions Battle Honours are carried forward on the Regimental Colours, and also includes parading the Sovereign's Colours.

Emblems of past distinction in the service of our Country are worn on uniforms. On that day in 2006, there was the Backbadge and Presidential Citation of the Glosters, the Brandywine Flash of the Duke of Edinburgh's Royal Regiment (Berkshire and Wiltshire), and the Cross Pattee Badge once worn by the Wiltshires and the rare Chinese or Berkshire Dragon to be seen.

Regiments, you see never die. Names and titles change, new roles evolve, their glorious history though cannot be erased.

The Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment's service to the Crown goes back three hundred and twelve years, and includes over that time, some fifteen different Regimental titles.

Raised as the 28th, 61st, 62nd, 66th, and 99th Regiments of Foot between 1694 and 1760, they saw active service in Spain, West Indies and North America. In 1782, excepting the 99th, they became separate 'County Regiments' and were known as the North Gloucestershire, South Gloucestershire, Hertfordshire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiments respectively, whilst retaining the original Regimental numbers and fought in France, Egypt, India, Russia and Africa.

In 1881 the North and South Gloucestershire Regiments were merged and became the 1st and 2nd Battalions of a new Gloucestershire Regiment. The Hertfordshire and Berkshire Regiments became the 1st and 2nd Battalions of a new Berkshire Regiment, which in 1885 was renamed the Royal Berkshire Regiment. The 99th Regiment of Foot had a rather disjointed albeit distinguished history during this period and eventually was reformed as the 2nd Battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment.

The three Regiments served with great distinction in the Boer War. But it was World War 1 that saw their greatest expansion in manpower, up to forty-nine Battalions; all of them volunteers. Losses were appalling, over 19,800 died. The 12th battalion (Bristol's Own) raised in September 1914 and disbanded in October 1918 lost 765 officers and other ranks. Battle Honours awarded were; the Gloucestershire Regiment 72, the Royal Berkshire Regiment 55 and the Wiltshire Regiment 60.

In World War 2 the three Regiments expanded once more to twenty-six Battalions, to meet the threat. Conscription was introduced to meet the required numbers and losses in active service again were huge; this time some 8,100 officers and other ranks lost their lives.

They had served in every theatre of conflict and were awarded 65 Battle Honours to add to their colours. After the war all three regiments were reduced in size first of all by amalgamating battalions, and in 1959 by merging the Royal Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiments to become The Duke of Edinburgh's Royal Regiment (Berkshire and Wiltshire). These were to serve until 1994 on operational duties in Cyprus and Northern Ireland.

The 1st battalion The Gloucester Regiment (28/61st), in the meantime, were engaged in the Korean War. They had been reinforced by sixty soldiers of the Wiltshire Regiment, forty of whom were National Servicemen, changing their cap badges and fighting as Glosters at the Battle of the Imjin River, holding up the advance of the Chinese 63rd Army, between 22 and 25 April 1951, thus enabling the Allied forces to withdraw and regroup.

At the start of the battle the Glosters were 917 all ranks, by the end they had been reduced to 234.

It was possibly this gallant stand that prompted a government reversal in policy to merge the Glosters and Royal Hampshires in 1959.

However, Regimental mergers were inevitable and in 1994 the Glosters were merged with the Duke of

Edinburgh's Royal Regiment to form The Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment and has served in Cyprus, the Falklands Belize, Bosnia, Kosovo, Northern Ireland and Afghanistan.

After the Defence Review of 2004, the concept of the 'Big Regiment' was introduced to save costs and the Army was reorganised into Regiments comprising five to seven Battalions, this brought the number of Battalions down from forty to thirty-six.

The Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment was merged with the Devon and Dorset Rifles to form 'The Rifles'. A further six battalions of The Rifles were formed from the Light Infantry, The Royal Greenjackets, The Rifle Volunteers and The Royal Rifle Volunteers thus making it the biggest Infantry Regiment in the Army consisting of five Regular and two Territorial Battalions.

They have since seen active service in Iraq and Afghanistan.

There is no doubt this new format in the Infantry will provide a more effective fighting force.

New opportunities for both officers and other ranks to gain new skills and promotions are to be welcomed. It must not be forgotten however, that it has only been achieved by a substantial reduction in the Army's establishment, with the loss of much of the golden history and tradition of predecessor Regiments.

Many people believe the objectives of the exercise could have been achieved with a more sensitive approach.

John Bartlett