

YEOVIL GROUP ROYAL OBSERVER CORPS ASSOCIATION

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Edited and produced by Bill Anderson

CONGRATULATIONS TO ANN SMITH

Ann Smith, who is Yeovil Group's Vice President, has been awarded the ROCA President's Certificate of Commendation for services to Bristol and Yeovil Groups. Air Marshal Cliff Spink presented it to her at the national reunion at Buxton in October.

Ann was a Crew member in the Bristol Ops Room for many years before being appointed a Group Officer in Yeovil Group. She is active in both Bristol and Yeovil Associations and is best known to us for arranging lunches and raffies.

We all offer her our heartiest congratulations.

SEASONAL MESSAGES

From the Chairman of Yeovil ROCA, Hilary Daniel

Christina and I send our very best for Christmas and the New Year. Yeovil Group is still in very good shape, though Old Father Time is having his influence! We look forward to seeing as many as possible of you at our lunches in 2017.

From the President of the ROC Association, Air Marshal Cliff Spink

It is always a pleasure to see so many of the Association at the annual reunion and this year was certainly no different. The lovely hotel in Buxton was an admirable venue for all to renew friendships and the inevitable walk down memory lane. For this, and for all of the other work that John Sharpe and the members of various committees do in keeping ROCA moving forward, I extend my sincere thanks.

As with all my Christmas messages I find myself wondering where the last year has gone. At this time of year we remember with fondness our family and friends and the ones who are no longer with us but whose memory we keep alive in reliving those wonderful days when we shared laughter and comradeship. This has been a year that, with the enormous change that it portends, has been at best unsettling, but I take great strength from the people I meet within the Association who display the strength of character and commonsense which is so reassuring in a slightly crazy world.

I hope that you will be able to enjoy the Christmas season as you would wish and that the coming year brings peace and contentment to you and your families.

My wife joins me in wishing you a very Happy Christmas. Cliff Spink

From the Chairman of ROCA, John Sharpe

Our membership figures continue to show a slight downward motion and this is hardly surprising, but nevertheless some Groups have brought some former colleagues into ROCA. I am sure that if we all took the opportunity to speak to former colleagues about the Association we might be able to boost our numbers even further. Our web site has played a vital part in attracting both former ROC members as well as associates to the Association.

This year has again been a very special one in the history of the Corps and the Association with a number of important anniversaries being celebrated. It is 75 years since the granting of the Royal title by King George VI and in the same year women were admitted into the Corps. It is 30 years since the Association was formed and we also commemorated the standing down of the majority of the Corps on 30th September 1991.

I have just returned from our Annual Reunion at the Palace Hotel in Buxton and this proved to be a really enjoyable event with some 137 members in attendance. It was our first Reunion at this venue and the hotel did us proud and made sure that our 27th Reunion was one of the best ever. Next year we will be returning to Buxton and I hope that numbers will be even higher when news of how enjoyable this year's event was reaches the Groups.

Once again I will be writing on your behalf to Her Majesty, our Patron, to convey our very best seasonal greetings and to assure Her of our continuing loyalty, devotion and gratitude for her patronage.

Finally I would like to take this opportunity to send my very best wishes both for yourselves and your families. I hope that you have a very Happy Christmas and a healthy and prosperous 2017.

John Sharpe has also sent a Christmas card addressed to all members of Yeovil Group.

ROC POST SITES

Following our piece in the September newsletter Neville Cullingford has provided further information about unusual Post sites.

Cromer Norfolk, Coast Guard station roof;	Kidlington Oxford, atop grain silo beside the A34 road;
Headley Hants , Headley church tower;	Devizes Wilts, on shop in Market Square;
Sleaford Lincs, on water tower;	Grundisburgh Suffolk, Burgh mill;
Kingsgate Kent, on small flint-built fort;	Eltham Kent (?), telephone exchange;
New Malden Essex, also on Co-Op building at Morden;	Wolverley Worcs, cricket pavilion;
Aycliffe Co Durham, windmill;	Seil Island Argyllshire, on old British fort, Dunmore;
Whitburn Co Durham, Windmill;	Llantwit Major Glam, on windmill (the only unusual Post site in Wales);
Withernsea/Tunstall Yorkshire, on pillbox;	
Crouch End telephone exchange, resite Highgate Highpoint flats, resite Bowes Park ;	
Hatfield/Welwyn Herts, St Marys church tower.	

There are four more Posts about which, so far, information is scanty;

Stratford London E15, flat roofed building;	Reepham Norfolk, Orlit on a roof;
Hayling Island Hants, on roof of bungalow;	Sennen Cornwall, built in wall.

A SOMERSET WINDMILL

One of the Posts listed in September was Weston-super-Mare as being sited on a windmill after being resited from its original position near the Grand Pier. The Post was opened in 1938 as J2 in Bristol Group but after severe bombing in June 1942 moved to Uphill. In 1953 it became part of Yeovil Group, was resited again to Bleadon in 1957 and went underground in 1959, remaining in use until being stood down in 1991.

Peter King writes to inform us of a book *Windmills of Somerset and the men who worked them* by Alfred Coulthard and Martin Watts which tells us more.

Artillery had been mounted on the hill on the southern edge of Uphill, to the south of Weston itself, against the coming of the Armada in 1588. A map of 1789 mentions a windmill. By 1829, however, it seems to have already fallen out of use, for it was then referred to as "the walls of a windmill". During the Napoleonic wars, it appears that corn had been grown on the steep slopes of Uphill and nearby Brean Down, but with the coming of peace the land probably reverted to pasture and there was no longer any need for a mill to process the grain.

On 10th March 1863 a beacon was built on iron rods laid across the top of the tower to commemorate the wedding of the future King Edward VI.

In 1934 the tower was rebuilt with a castellated top and an iron spiral stair "for use as an observatory" and this was where the ROC was subsequently sited. Given the elevated position on open land alongside the Severn estuary it would have offered excellent views as far as the Mendips, Glastonbury Tor, Exmoor and Cardiff but little protection against air attack.

The book includes a photograph of the ruined tower in the 1930s before it was converted. The tower survives to this day and is open to the public. An information board records its wartime use both by the ROC and the Home Guard.

AIR COMMODORE C.M. WIGHT-BOYCOTT CBE DFC

Air Commodore Michael Wight-Boycott was Commandant of the Corps from May 1961 to June 1964. An item in the Durham ROCA newsletter of September 2016 recounts the following story. On Sunday 17 January 1943, following the great RAF raid on Berlin, the Nazis came to drop bombs on London. Wight-Boycott, in the air for six hours in a *Beaufighter*, tells how he shot four of the raiders out of the sky:

The curious thing about the first one I shot down was that although London was throwing up a terrific amount of flak and there were any amount of searchlights about I don't remember seeing anything of them at all. I was looking up all the time to find the enemy silhouetted against the bright moonlit sky. We'd just popped above a thin layer of cloud and there was a Dornier, a sort of grey colour. I fired a long burst and saw an explosion behind the pilot's cockpit. It seemed to go straight down and I tried to follow, so steeply that my Observer came out of his seat. When the Dornier crashed three white blobs appeared to jump out of the ground. That was Dornier number one. On the next patrol nothing happened at all, except for my Observer complaining about the hardness of his seat.

We got Dornier number two during the second alert. It must have been about four in the morning. He was travelling and jinking violently. He didn't keep a straight course for more than a few seconds at a time. There was no cloud about now and it was a good night for interception and I managed to get in a fairly long burst. He caught fire and slowed up very quickly. I got so close to him that I was caught in his slipstream and rolled on to my back, but I managed to avoid colliding with him. By the time we were right way up again he'd hit the ground.

Then came Dornier number three. Again I got in a long burst amidst ships. There was a yellowish explosion and down he went. As he did so he fired about a second's burst, two streams of red tracer but they came nowhere near us. Number four was a Junkers 88, and the most spectacular of the night. We found him somewhere in the Croydon area.

Continued on page 3.

continued from page 2

My cannon shells set both his engines on fire and flames spread along the wing and back to the fuselage. They lit up the sky so clearly that we could see his black crosses. We saw four of the crew bale out, one after the other. As it went down we could see all the streets lit up and when it hit there was a terrific flash.

Well, that was that. Four in a night. Home we went, pleased but wondering what luck the rest of the squadron had had.

How many members remember the occasion when, as Commandant of the Corps, Wight-Boycott came to Yeovil to present the British Empire Medal to Chief Observer Ivo Peters of the Keynsham Post?

In retirement Wight-Boycott lived in our Group, at Milverton. He died in 1998, at the age of 88.

SUMMARY OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 30th AGM was held on 19th November. The Chairman reported that membership stands at 73. The Treasurer said that the accounts showed a deficit of £90-92, but with a balance of £853-05 he saw no need to increase subscriptions. He asked for, and was given, the meeting's agreement for the usual donations to be given to West Harptree Post and to the ROC Benevolent Fund. Kathie Underwood has resigned from the committee but the remaining officers were re-elected *en bloc*. The draw raised £48.

YEOVIL GROUP'S BANNER

The Group's Banner is kept by Pete Carter, who parades it on various suitable occasions. At the last committee meeting the question of what should happen to the Banner when the Group, at some time in the future, closes down. With the example of the National Banner in mind, which is now laid up in St Clement Danes church in London, it was agreed that it would be appropriate for ours to be laid up in St John's church in Yeovil. Accordingly, your Hon Secretary contacted the Rector at St John's, explaining who we are and the situation regarding the Banner. His reply is given below.

Dear Mr Anderson,

Thank you for your letter of 8th August, concerning the laying-up of the Banner of the local Royal Observer Corps Association.

It seems to me that St John's Yeovil would be a suitable place for the Banner to be laid up when the time comes and I myself would support this. There would be a cost involved, which the Association would need to meet. And we would need to apply for appropriate ecclesiastical permissions at the time (as is the case for any new fixtures in ancient parish churches).

So you can reassure your members that this course of action has my support. I cannot speak for any successor who may follow me, but I have no current intentions of moving!

I suggest that you file this letter from me, and encourage the Association to approach St John's afresh when the time is right, explaining that you have corresponded with me about this matter in 2016.

I hope that is helpful.

Yours sincerely

(Signed by) James Dudley Smith

THE ROC BENEVOLENT FUND

The ROC Benevolent Fund exists for the benefit for those that are in need. That includes members, ex-members and their dependants. For more information go to:
www.rocbf.org.uk

or telephone Basil Wright on 01935 822802

MEMBERSHIP

At the end of 2016 membership of Yeovil ROCA stood at 73, two less than last year. Five have declined to renew their subscription but we have gained three new members, Caris Burt, Ken Thorn and Francis White. Below are the names of current members:

Ian Ackerman	Norah Ackerman	Bill Anderson	Mary Anderson	Heather Bailey
Allan Baverstock	Roger Bromfield	Caris Burt	James Callaway	Jill Carter
Pete Carter	Rex Chapman	Stuart Chislett	David Crisp	Margaret Crouchen
Gladys Dagg	Alec Danby	Hilary Daniel	Douglas Down	Tony Duke
Bill Foster	Chris Halford	Jean Halford	Christine Hamilton	Richard Harper
Ron Heaton	Gerald Hill	Michael Hockley	Betty Hunt	John Hyde
Bill Jones	Mary Kelly	Phil Kelly	Peter King	Bill Kingdon
Sheila Kingdon	John Lake	Roland Millbank	Chris Mitchell	Mike Mockridge
John Mountford	Ivor Mullins	John Norman	Mavis Norman	Betty Nutt
Mike Parfitt	Rose Parfitt	Barbara Perkins	Bill Perry	Primrose Pile
Roger Pile	Bill Pittman	Peter Rice	Irving Roberts	Dave Rogers
Jan Sapiezynski	Wally Shonfield	Chris Shrapnel	Ann Smith	Gordon Smith
Roger Starling	Gill Symons	Ken Thorn	Gerald Tidcombe	Irene Topliss
Kathie Underwood	John Walker	Juliet Walker	Francis White	Allan Woodley
Basil Wright	Jean Wright	Christina Yeung		

The latest figure for national membership is 1,700.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions for 2017-2018 will become due on 1 April. The rate remains unchanged at £5 for ordinary members and £2 for associates. Please send your remittance to W.Anderson, Rocklea, Henley Lane, Butleigh, Glastonbury, BA6 8UA; cheques should be made out to 9 Group ROCA, please; alternatively you can hand it to him at one of our meetings.

Note for Roland Millbank: In case you did not get my 2 emails, thanks for your cheque received 23.9.16.

SOCIAL NEWS

For the 30th Reunion Lunch, held on 17th September, we returned to the Sparkford Inn, after a break of many years. The nine who attended were not disappointed and we may well go there again soon. Thanks to Ann Smith, who as usual made an excellent job of the arrangements.

The Autumn Lunch was held at The Three Wells, where the sixteen present were able to choose a large, medium or small carvery or from the normal menu. It was a bit of a squeeze, but the service was reasonably quick. Thanks to Mike Parfitt, who made the arrangements and kept the staff under control.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

LOCAL

Saturday 11th February, Valentine Lunch 12 for 12.30 at The Sparkford Inn, Sparkford.

Saturday 8th April, Spring Lunch 12 for 12.30 at The Rose & Portcullis, Butleigh.

See separate sheet for booking forms.

NATIONAL

Fri 24-Sun 26 March, Southern Area Reunion, Speech House Hotel, Coleford, Forest of Dean. For details ring Bill Anderson on 01458 850788.

Saturday 13th May, ROCA Day at the National Arboretum, Alrewas.

BEREAVEMENT

Obs Captain Alan Price-Talbot died on 18th October after a long illness. He was a Group Officer in Bristol Group, then Group Commandant and finally Area Commandant. His funeral, in Cardiff, was marked by a large congregation.

THANKS TO THOSE GROUPS WHO SEND COPIES OF THEIR NEWSLETTERS, TO IRENE TOPLISS AND CAROLINE FOR PRODUCING THE ADDRESS LABELS, TO RON HEATON FOR PUTTING THE NEWSLETTER ON THE INTERNET, TO ALL WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED ITEMS AND NEWS, AND ALL WHO HAVE DONATED RAFFLE PRIZES. THE EDITOR WISHES THEM, AND ALL MEMBERS, FAMILIES AND FRIENDS A HAPPY,

☆ HEALTHY AND PEACEFUL 2017 ☆