

Observer Lieutenant Tony Whittle



Our friend **Antony Robert Whittle** died in hospital on the morning of 5th April 2020 having succumbed to Corona virus less than a year after the death of his beloved wife Barbara. He was 82. Tony enrolled in the Royal Observer Corps on 25th January 1960 in No 5 Group Watford, serving on C2 Post. Watford Group was closed in 1968 and came under the umbrella of No 7 Group Bedford, the Post becoming K3 and later 52 Post.

Tony was promoted to Chief Observer on 1st January 1976 and Observer Officer to serve as Group Officer on 22nd August 1977, being promoted to Observer Lieutenant on 1st October 1984.

At the stand-down of the Corps Tony transferred to HMS Warrior, the Nuclear Reporting Cell at RAF Northwood, reverting to the rank of Observer on 8th August 1992 until final stand down on 31st December 1995.

Tony was a great supporter of Group events including supporting the Group Golf Tournaments, he won the much prized Shield in 1989. I caddied for him on a couple of occasions, hauling his golf bag across the course and enjoying his banter and expertise with golf.

Mike Quincey gives his memories of Tony:

"I remember Tony from Bedford and later from NRC HMS Warrior. At that time I was regularly running lots of road races and in particular the London Marathon. Each race I did Tony would set up a sweepstake to guess my time with 50% of the money going to the benevolent fund. After the London Marathon Tony accepted the sponsorship money on my behalf as I could not attend."



"I also well remember him regularly taking the winning top score prize for darts at the contest with the Annual ROCA/RAFA Club Windsor Darts Competition. The last match we played my score was 140 and I was feeling very confident. Guess what, Tony finished with 160 on his last throw." Mike Quincey.

(Photograph shows Association President, Air Marshal Cliff Spink, and Norman Greig receiving the cheque from Tony. Immediately behind the cheque, I to r Norman Greig, Cliff Spink, Tony. Photo courtesy of NRC09 Bentley Priory.)

his car to help with the marching. He was a hard task master but it was fun too, the evening culminated in drinks in the Institute Bar.

Gillian writes: "So sad to hear the news of Tony. He was my Group Officer when I was at 47 post and of course, a much valued member of my crew at NBCC Northwood. Many happy memories of drill practice at Wrest Park." Gillian Appleton.

Gillian Woodhead (now Appleton) was Tony's Officer at RAF Northwood having transferred on promotion from NRC09. Gillian mentions drill practices at Wrest Park, I arranged for us to use the car park on several evenings, Tony would march us up and down in preparation for the Stand Down Parade at USAF Chicksands playing CDs from the back of

Tony was keen on trains and had the idea of naming another one 'Royal Observer Corps', paragraphs below are taken from the **ROC Journal of December 1985**, he is to be congratulated on his foresight:

"With the naming , on Platform 11 at Waterloo Station on 30 October 1985 of British Rail Class 73/1 locomotive number 73137 by Air Chief Marshal Sir David Craig, Chief of the Air Staff, Royal Observer Corps is back on the rails after an absence of 20 years. The idea of naming another locomotive Royal Observer Corps was first put forward by Observer Officer A Whittle of No 7 Group Bedford in November 1982. It was taken up enthusiastically by the Commandant of the day, Air Commodore (now Air Vice Marshal) G P. Black who suggested to British Rail that the naming would be appropriate in the year of the 60th Anniversary of the formation of the Corps."

Message from another of Tony's flock, this one from **Rupert Newman** of 47 Post, Markyate.

So sad to hear of Tony departing, he meant a lot to me, he saw me as a new recruit after my ROC enquiry and took my Basic test where he was very helpful on PASSING me and of course was my Group Officer. Wish my name and memories be noted in what capacity is applicable. Rupert Newman.

A message from **Tony Topliss** of No 15 Group Lincoln, Tony made many friends: *"I was most saddened to learn of the passing of Obs Lt Tony Whittle. I did not know Tony well but at each annual reunion where we both attended, we would meet and 'chew the fat' and have a laugh and joke or two. Tony and I met at a Waddington camp – where most ROC friendships are kindled – during a car treasure hunt. We were both credited with equal points in second place and so it was resolved by a toss of the coin – myself coming out the winner and Tony thereafter asking each time we met to have his share/time with the prize which was a table water jug. I will always remember his cheery "hello" on meeting and then the inevitable "see you next year" on parting, I will sadly miss him." Tony Topliss.*

Peter Gisby was a life-long friend of Tony and gives their background: *"I first knew Tony 70 years ago when I joined the Scout Movement as a cub. Tony was doing his National Service in the Air force but came along as a senior scout helper.*

Over the years we became friends, moving through the Scout movement, culminating in being founder members of the team building Hertfordshire's unique Scout Activity Centre at Lochearnhead in Scotland. We spent happy hours as sailing instructors as well as pursuing hill walking. There were many hair-raising adventures: try being called out in the middle of the night to retrieve a yacht drifting across the loch in pitch black darkness.... Interesting!!! We often drove to Scotland for the weekend, usually towing a yacht, such as a Flying 15, up the A1 to base or back to Ware for maintenance.

Later as we married and had families we became involved in the Royal Observer Corps. Tony introduced me in 1960 and I joined him on Hertford Post "Charlie Two". Later when Watford closed due to defence 'cuts' we became Bedford Kilo Cluster. At this time of reorganization Tony and I were transferred to the understaffed Much Hadham Post as Chief and Leading Observers. Tony's drive resulted in full efficiency and 100% attendance at the Master Test the following year.

Tony applied successfully for officer rank and became our Group Officer. I followed Tony as Chief and then Officer status of an adjoining cluster. While working our respective clusters we met regularly at HQ and other social events. The Cold War ended, more peaceful times ensued and the Corps was stood down in 1991.

However Tony and I transferred to the remaining section of the Corps under Military HQ, reporting on Nuclear Activity, Tony at HMS Warrior at Northwood and myself at RAF Brampton. Eventually the RAF took over and we were stood down in 1995.

Tony remained active and was Parade Marshall for the ROCA contingent at the Cenotaph in London for over 16 years, and Group Benevolent Fund Officer until 2019. He enjoyed attending the annual reunions around the country.

Tony was also an active Freemason and I had the honour of being his guest at his installation as Master of his Lodge, while last year he attended mine. Tony already had this year's reunion in his diary plus other events. Tony was my oldest, closest and dearest friend. Peter Gisby.

His funeral was held on Tuesday, 5th May at the Hertford Crematorium where unfortunately, due to the restriction on numbers, only his immediate family could attend. However, due to special dispensation by the Undertakers his great wish to having the gate flag from No 7 Group HQ on his coffin was realized. It is proposed to have a Celebration of Tony's life when current restrictions allow.

Tony had been a member of No 7 Group Association since its' inception serving for many years as the Group Benevolent Fund Officer. As a Group Officer he was well loved by all his Observers, always willing to help when necessary with his inimitable personal touch. As well as his sterling work with the Corps he was always ready for a party with his Observers, often dressing up in whatever the theme of the evening happened to be. Rest in peace Tony, you certainly had a very full life, you are sadly missed.

Edwina Holden

Tony is pictured here behind the cheque

