



THE BEVIN BOYS ASSOCIATION

FOUNDED 1989

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NEWSLETTER FOR AUTUMN 2017.

Chairman's Message.

Welcome to the Autumn Newsletter. We have just returned from another very successful AGM and Reunion in Blackheath, London, this time having a coach tour for our day trip.

I would like to thank Harry Parkes BEM, who has stood down as Treasurer and from the committee due to ill health, for all his hard work and advice in the past.

I would also like to thank Margaret Rose for all her hard work, she has resigned from being our Reunion Organiser, but who thankfully has stayed on the committee.

Our committee all work extremely hard for the benefit of you, the members.

Wishing you all a Very Happy Christmas and a Healthy 2018.

Anne. (Lane)

Stop Press. Update from the AGM.

The Secretary presented report (A) The Adoption and Approval of the Amendments to the Rules and Regulations, and report (B) Future of the BBA

After lengthy discussions at two committee meetings, two proposals were put forward.

- i) To continue with the BBA.
- ii) To close or disband the Association.

Proposal i) was accepted by a majority decision in Committee. A minority did declare for ii).

This information has been circulated to all Bevin Boy members and their observations received and noted.

At the AGM an additional amendment was proposed (That all members receiving the Newsletter should be allowed to vote and not just those attending the AGM) Agreed.

A separate voting slip is included in this Autumn Newsletter, giving both proposals, a place for name and postcode and a date for the return of the voting form.

Members are reminded that 'closure' means all activities, including the Newsletter, Remembrance Book and website will cease.

MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY.

I hope everyone had a good summer and was able to benefit from the sunshine. So far, seventy four 90'th or 90 plus birthday cards have been sent from the committee with a couple more to go in the pipeline. The thank you letters and phone calls have been much appreciated.

Where Are You Now?

Ralf Armstrong Race's daughter, Alison is hoping to receive news of Eddie (Welsh or Welch) from Glasgow, who stayed with their family during the war.

Please ring with any information I could pass on.

Virginia Wigham wishes to hear from anyone prepared to give their story as a contribution to the Heritage funded project initiative, taking place in Tavistock.

Please contact her at Life Stories Project Worker, Tavistock Area Support Services, The Anchorage Centre, Chapel Street, Tavistock PL19 8AG Tel 01822 610942 she will be pleased to hear from you Remember to send a copy to Barbara Mc Elroy for our archive at the Imperial War Museum.

The Pit Pony Sanctuary at Pontypridd would be grateful to have any used stamps which could be turned into much needed profit. Trim them to a minimum of 1\4" or 0.5cm of paper around the edges of the stamp , then send to Fforest Uchaf Horse and Pony Centre ,Maendy Road, Penyrcoedcae, Pontypridd. Wales, CF3 7IP. See website www.pitponies.co.uk

Committee and other members continue to tell the Bevin Boys story. Many people are still unaware of their contribution to the war effort.

Emrys Hughes in Anglesey has put his story on the web, whilst his wife Pauline has given a talk to the U.3.A. group in Bangor. I was recently interviewed by Vintage radio, a local station, again concentrating on the Bevin Boys story.

I have had a letter from Lorraine Hitchings. She is a teddy bear historian who writes books and magazine articles, plus lectures on teddy bear history around the country. Her latest endeavour is to research for a book titled "Teddy Bears at War". Any stories or photos of teddy bears which might have meant something to any Bevin Boy at that time, would be of interest to her.

I mentioned my own teddy which is sitting on a chair in the bedroom alongside Gordon's bear. I took him with me when I married at 18years of age. My Mother in law then produced Gordon's bear out of the shoe box where he had lain for many years. I doubt if he had taken him to Burley East or Woolaton colliery where he did his service!!!. Sadly I cannot ask, as he is no longer with me, his bear is better preserved than mine which has little padding ,no squeaker left but sporting two replacement blue button eyes..

If you have any stories however insignificant (as I thought mine was) Lorraine Hitchings wants to read them. Send to her at 317. Bristol Road, Quedgeley, Gloucester, GL2 4QP. Tel 01452 721815 email ginodirectory@googlemail.com

Lastly earlier this year I received a complimentary copy of the magazine "This England" from the editor. In it Max Pudsey had an article on his time as a Bevin Boy. It is an interesting journal, published quarterly for those quote "who love our green and pleasant land" Once again thank you to all who have been in contact by phone or letter often to thank the committee for their work on your behalf.

Best wishes for the year ahead,
Elizabeth Todd. aka Liz.

MESSAGE from the TREASURER.

As you will see Harry has stood down as Treasurer. I would like to personally thank him for his conscientious work for the Association and also to thank him for supporting me during the handover. It is comforting to know that I can ask for his help whilst I take up the reins and I wish him well. I have used his figures for this report. We still send out some 120 newsletters so this money forms the majority of our income although we still continue to receive some donations. The Bigbury Mint donation arrived after the 'end of year' accounting but is £54. Our expenditure did exceed our income this year, particularly as the committee had to meet twice during the year to look at options for the future. However despite this we still have sufficient funds to continue if that is the wish of the members after the postal vote.

Barbara McElroy.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT.

We have again received a great many letters of support and saying how much you all look forward

to reading the Newsletter. Please would you write, telephone or e-mail me, to notify me of Change of Address and/or Telephone numbers and if you hear of any Bevin Boys, members or not, who have sadly passed away. My address and Telephone number is at the top of this Newsletter, e-mail address is alananne2749@gmail.com
If anyone has any memories of their time hey would like published, please send to me.

Anne.

ARCHIVIST

Once again it was a great pleasure to meet up with some of you at the AGM in London. As always you had interesting stories to tell and as usual I learnt more about The Bevin Boy story. I have spent another day recently at the Imperial War Museum working on our archives. There are eight boxes in all and I have now made a detailed inventory of three boxes so still a way to go! We will be putting this on our website so that relatives can look to see if there is anything in the archives of interest. I continue to have phone calls, mainly from relatives asking about fathers, uncles etc. All too often these relatives were unaware of the Bevin Boy history until after that person had passed away and wished they had known. Two lessons to be learnt from this, firstly please make sure you do talk to those nearest and dearest to you. Yours is a unique and interesting story and an important part of our history. Secondly, I feel it would be really useful to create a leaflet about the Bevin Boys that I could send to those who phone. This will be dependant of course on whether the vote is to carry on as an Association, but if we do I will work on this. I would be looking for some good 'quotes' to include and maybe some interesting snippets, so if you can help do contact me.

Barbara McElroy.

Sales.

Total Sales in 2017 are £8.40p. For all Sales, please apply to Mrs A. Lane, address above. All cheques to be made payable to **THE BEVIN BOYS ASSOCIATION**. Please add £1 for the lighter items & £2 for the book, as it is expensive to post.

Blazer Badge @ £10.00 New Blue Enamel Badge @ £2.00

Miners Lamp Keyring @ £5.00 Digging Up the Past @ £10.00

Bevin Boy Banner Postcard, 2 different Black & White postcards of prints from A Bevin Boy Remembers & 2 colour & 2 black & white prints of A4 size from A Bevin Boy Remembers

ALL POSTCARDS & A4 PRINTS @ £0.20 each

Many Thanks to all our 'customers', as always!

Anne.

AREA REUNION's in 2017.

If any Area Representatives would like to send in their accounts of any Reunions or Activities- I would be happy to publish them in the Newsletter.

You may not know, but Eric Johnson has not been so well lately and has asked for someone else to take over as the Area Representative, although he was able to organise his Reunion lunch as usual.

ESSEX & NE LONDON:

The annual meeting of the London and North East Essex Bevin Boy group took place on July 19th 2017 at Mersea Island Vineyard. We had a very sunny and quite hot day welcoming members and their families for coffee and lunch. There were only nine of us but we had a good time catching up with news. Sadly Eric Johnson who has organised this reunion for many years was too poorly to join us but his wife Sheila did pop down and have a coffee with us. A good time was had by all who were able to attend.

Barbara McElroy.

EAST ANGLIA:

East Anglia Bevin Boys met at the Old Rectory, Crostwick, Norfolk for Sunday lunch in June. Sixteen people attended, five of whom were Bevin Boys.

There was much chat and general discussion when I managed to report about the AGM it is

difficult in a public place with other diners listening with interest and as they left the hotel, many shook hands with members to thank them for their time serving their country. A pleasant and valuable meeting hoping to repeat while we are still able to travel. The weekend always coincides with Alf and Margaret Larkin's Wedding Anniversary, so, with their family we were able to make it a joyous occasion. There will be a Sunday lunch in 2018 and the date will be in the Spring Newsletter.

Margaret Rose.

National Reunion & AGM

Twenty four people booked for their stay at The Clarendon Hotel, Blackheath SE3. We had our usual chat, freetime, friendship renewed and much catching up to be done. The General Manager Mr K. Milton was available and chatted to confirm his involvement as our Guest Speaker. Staff were all very pleased to be our hosts again.

On Wednesday nearly a disaster! (I thought) We had a new coach company, the previous one had retired. I was assured our local driver knew the area well and would see that we had a happy outing with no strenuous walks, visits, etc. Our needs were for a scenic route, refreshments and toilet. However, after a few traffic problems, closed off roads the driver failed to find his chosen destination but with outside help, we eventually arrived to an estate controlled by security barriers. By then, some members were getting anxious, the driver returned from making his enquiries to report that the estate had been closed for three years! And no, we had no access to the toilets! The house and gardens were being refurbished to make a Registered Wedding Venue.

Not to spoil the day, but inwardly, in a panic I suggested that the coach driver retrace his route to a lovely traditional Public House The Woolpack. There appeared to be no life going on but a face of horror appeared at the window. I escorted the driver towards "the Face". We were immediately met by the publican and one barmaid with hands in air and on face shaking their heads and saying "No". The driver reported our needs and I was to illustrate the proof. This was a pub in the middle of nowhere seating about forty people. The landlord covered his face with his hands and the driver used me as the helpless(hopeless) leader and assured him that our needs were toilet, sandwich and somewhere to spend an hour. The landlord consulted with the barmaid and we were welcomed with open arms.

Result - toilet facilities, and all we needed for food, hot or cold. A sandwich ordered for one person would have fed three people all freshly made and at a reasonable price.

On our departure the two staff had been well educated about Bevin Boys – Harry had been interviewed and the daughter of the barmaid was going to take the Bevin Boys as her study project. By this time one or two local people had arrived and had their various questions answered concerning Bevin Boys.

After a wonderful lunch break we retraced our steps back to south-east London to visit our planned teatime stop. This was a converted stable where the chef had created wonderful cakes and scones with clotted cream etc. He even sent one or two people away with the 'cake crumb' boxes he had started work at 3 am to especially cook for us all.

Our final stop was home to the Clarendon; still talking about the very old implements which decorated the Tea Room walls.

A happy day which nobody complained about, so, all is well that ends well.

Our AGM for the afternoon of the Thursday followed on from the morning committee meeting when much was discussed. See separate report.

I believe that the spirit of the week helped to make the unity of the AGM. It has been my pleasure and joy to have given members and friends the opportunity to feel that they truly belonged to something very special which they had created – a unique gathering. Thank you for giving me the honour of membership in my role organising the Reunion and access to the AGM. We must say a special thank you to all the staff and General Manager Mr Milton. His talk was encouraging to all and illustrated the truth that from acorns large Oak trees really grow.

Not expected but graciously received, the gift of garden tokens, which I shall save to buy garden furniture when we move to our new home in Norfolk. This will give Geoff and myself

something to remember all the happy times we have spent with the Bevin Boys over the years.

*With Best wishes to you all,
Margaret.*

Visit to Caphouse, National Coal Mining Museum, Wakefield.

Having seen Anne's notice of the National Coal Mining Museum's (England) activities over the Easter period, Nora and I decided to make the trip. The journey took me an hour and a quarter in the car.

On arrival we took the optional underground visit. Eighteen people to a party (including the ladies and children). We were issued with belts, helmets and cap lamps, our guide, Ian, being an ex-miner and very good at his job too. He had been told that I was an ex-Bevin Boy and mining surveyor – we got on well!

We descended about one hundred and fifty metres in the cage to the pit bottom. The visit lasted about one and a quarter hours and traced the history of coal mining from the dreadful days of women and children having to work with the men in appalling conditions, up to modern times. I worked up to the 'eighties' and intense mechanisation etc. That time was far in advance of conditions when I was a Bevin Boy.

'Back op pit' we went to our pre-booked lunch. Sadly only two Bevin Boys, Harry Parkes and myself.

After lunch we took the 'Paddy train' across the site to see the Theatre Royal Wakefield production of a play about Bevin Boys. Actually it was Harry Parkes life story! It was well received and despite the fact that we were outside in some cold damp weather, nobody left, some ladies were visibly moved!

There is plenty to see on the site and for us it was a very enjoyable day. For me a lot of nostalgia!

Phil Robinson.

John Heath's memories of being a Bevin Boy.

Seventy-four years ago, on 2nd December 1943, Ernest Bevin the wartime Minister of Labour and National Service made an announcement in the House of Commons that was to change the lives of many young men, including John Heath. As a result he spent over two years working underground in a Welsh coal mine.

When war was declared against Germany in September 1939, a large number of experienced miners were called up into the Forces, with others leaving to take up work in other higher paid industries. A manpower shortage loomed in the coal industry, then vital for the supply of the nation's power. The only way of overcoming this serious situation was to conscript an additional 50,000 men to work in the mines. Thus were born the "Bevin Boys" – young men who would otherwise have been conscripted into the Forces but who were diverted to work in the nation's mines.

Born in Leicestershire John moved with his mother, father, brother and sister to Llandudno at the age of six months. He and his brother and sister attended Llandudno Grammar School, after which John began work at the local Inland Revenue office. Along with many others in his office he joined the Home Guard and upon receiving his call-up papers at the age of 18 he turned up at the appointed office hoping to join his brother in the Army. Instead he found that he was being sent as a Bevin Boy to Black Park colliery in Chirk, one of the oldest pits in the North Wales coalfield. "If I had not been so polite I would have ended up in the Forces," John recalled ruefully. "I was with a friend and I opened the door of the office to allow him to go first. He got to the desk before me and was allotted to the Forces, I was sent to the mines!"

His first posting was to Yorkshire, for a month's fitness training – a move that spoke of the arduous nature of the work ahead. Along with 14 other Bevin Boys John found himself in lodgings on the outskirts of Chirk, a mile away from the colliery. Somewhat indignantly, even today, John recalls that the treatment of the Bevin Boys compared with those conscripted into the Forces was

poor. "We were paid £3 a week and had to pay rent and income tax! And we had to pay for our work clothing and boots."

John's working day began at 6am with a mile-long uphill walk to the pit in his work clothes. The mine shaft was half a mile deep and the walk to the workings was another quarter of a mile uphill and beneath the River Dee. "The only electric light was at the bottom of the shaft. Thereafter the light was from your lamp. If it went out you were in utter darkness. My job was as a tub-pusher. The tubs were about five feet long, three feet wide and three feet deep. I had to push two empty tubs up to the coal face where the men were working and bring back the two that they had filled. I wore football shorts, boots and a helmet. The miners were working on piece rates, meaning that the more tubs they filled the more they were paid. This meant that I had to work hard to keep them supplied." On one occasion John had a very lucky escape when, as he was pushing the tubs, a huge rock crashed down from the roof, inches from him. His working day finished at 4pm, noon on Saturdays. Some of the boys, who lived in the area, would go home at weekends but John could only afford a trip home every three weeks or so. There were two chapels in the village, a Primitive and a Wesleyan. "Another boy and I used to alternate between the two on Sundays."

During this time John continued his attempts to become an accountant, begun when working with the Inland Revenue. He travelled into Oswestry after work to attend a bookkeeping class. Relaxation came in the form of attending an Old Tyme dancing class in the village, a pastime that he described as "wonderfully energetic". However, even this made inroads into his finances – "It cost 3p to get in."

Salvation came unexpectedly after two and a half years underground. "Much to my amazement – I do not know how it happened – my doctor examined me and certified me as unfit to work down the mine."

However, John was not entirely free. Very soon after leaving the mines he received his call-up papers, passed his medical A1 and was assigned to the RAF, where he worked as an accounts clerk at No. 5 Munitions Unit in Stafford. "It was a holiday camp compared to the mines," John recalled with satisfaction.

It still rankles with John that the work of the Bevin Boys was not properly recognised. "Eventually they were given a place in the march-past at the Cenotaph memorial service. Some of the boys banded together to gain recognition and after a time the Government awarded them a badge to mark their service. John's son applied for one on his father's behalf.

Pauline Hughes, wife of Emrys, has sent this account.

I gave a talk about the Bevin Boys to our local U3A in Bangor some little while ago. The meetings are held in a chapel so I had to be very careful with my choice of words! The whole meeting was given over to different factions of folk who served in the Second World War. A friend of mine, who was a Land Army lady, also gave a talk, along with some gentleman talking about their respective times in the Army, Navy and Air Force. A very interesting morning.

On 7th June 2017, we went along to Heswall on the Wirral to meet up with Liz Todd at The Red Fox for a very enjoyable lunch. There were four Bevin Boys - Phil Robinson, Gordon Waterhouse, Denis Owen and Emrys Hughes together with some of their wives. There were eight of us in total.

Editors comment.

Please note that we do not edit contributions and as some are based on recollections, there may be alternative views and information.

PLEASE NOTE!!

Please don't forget to send your £5 subscription to continue receiving your twice yearly Newsletter in 2018 to Anne Lane.

Cheques payable to The Bevin Boys Association.

