



Military Survey (Geographic) Branch

Royal Engineers Association

Winter 2024-25 Newsletter – issue 94

ATTENTION ALL MEMBERS

Change of Bank Account to which Subscriptions are Paid - Reminder

This is a reminder to all Life and Full Members* of the Branch that their subscription payment must, with effect from 1st January this year, be made to the new Branch Bank Account – a sub-account of the Central REA Bank. Payments made to the old account will be refused as the account is now closed. Details are given below:

The annual subscription remains at **£8.00** per year, and payment should be made by Standing Order or Direct Bank Transfer to:

Account Name: **RE Association Branch Funds**

Bank: **Lloyds**

Sort Code: **30-11-75**

Account No: **34412560**

Reference: **MSGxxxsubs (xxx = Last 3 digits of your Service No)**

Note: This bank account is being used by multiple REA Branches so the **MSG** identifies our Branch which assists the Fund Manager in ensuring income goes to the correct Branch).

Although the Branch receives a small grant from HQ REA, our main income is from your subscriptions. Without them the Branch could not operate, produce and send out the newsletters, hold the AGM and reunion, nor could it make grants to support those serving.

The switch of the Branch Accounts to Central REA Bank Account enables transactions to be made electronically rather than the more traditional ways (writing cheques with two signatures, etc), reducing much of the workload for the Treasurer, and eliminating the inconvenience of paper.

Members should notice no difference to the operation of the Branch

Whilst not essential, it would help the Treasurer to know who has changed their SO/DD. Please contact him at REA-MilSvy-Treasurer@outlook.com

Lastly, once you have created the new payment arrangement, don't forget to cancel your previous Standing Order/Direct Debit to the Branch.

* Note: All Arms; Widows and Widowers; and Friends and Family Members are not required to pay subscriptions.

SURVEY SQUADRONS' 200th ANNIVERSARIES - CELEBRATIONS

We would hope that all members are now fully aware that between December 2024 and October 2025 13 Geographic Squadron, 14 Geographic Squadron and 16 Geographic Support Squadron will each be celebrating their 200th Anniversaries. We believe that the three Regular Squadrons of any Sapper Regiment each achieving this milestone and within a year is a unique occasion and worthy of celebration.

Those Members who were present at the 2024 AGM/reunion will have heard CO 42 Regt's intention to celebrate the anniversaries with an event at Wyton and we hoped to link in with those celebrations and hold the AGM/reunion there. Unfortunately, the Regt's plans have had to be scaled back, principally, to a single Regimental parade scheduled for THU 12 JUN 25, and a number of smaller Squadron sized events. We will promulgate details of this event when known.

As a consequence of the Regt's revised plans, the Branch has decided to hold a 200th Anniversary Celebration event in Newbury in the summer. Initially, it was intended to incorporate the Branch AGM into the event but this was found not to be practical and so the AGM will be held separately – see elsewhere in this newsletter.

As you will appreciate, we needed to see if there was enough interest to make the event viable and this was done through emailing, not only our members, but also any ex- Military Survey/ex- RE Geo friends and contacts. The responses were very positive and, at our meeting on 13th January it was agreed that the event should go ahead. As a result, the Committee and some co-opted people are now very busy planning and organising the event. The basic outline is as follows:

The Celebration Event

When will the celebration be held? **Saturday 28th June** (Coinciding with Armed Forces Day)

There will be a **Freedom Parade** - Exercising The Corps' right to the Freedom of Newbury with a March through the town to the Market Place; Inspection; Speeches; a Prayer; and a return March. There will be: a band; with a marching contingent from RSMS; one from 42 Regiment - TBC; the Branch Standard and, possibly, other REA Branch Standards being paraded; and a contingent of RE Veterans (NOT confined to members of the REA, or to ex Mil Svy/ex Geo).

The **Reunion/Gathering** for ex Mil Svy/ex RE Geo their wives/partners and guests will follow on after the parade, taking place at Newbury Racecourse. A meal will be provided plus water/tea/coffee. Drinks will have to be at the individuals' expense.

There will be a charge for attending the Reunion/Gathering which we estimated would be £50 per person BUT, in addition to monies from Branch Funds, we are seeking a Grant from HQ REA and also approaching various organisations and companies for grants or sponsorship and so the costs may well be below that.

Now that we have a firm date, we need to have a good idea of numbers and so if you are interested in attending, **please let us know via the proforma on Page 3 of this newsletter** unless you have already done so via email

PLEASE RETURN ASAP and NLT MON 24 FEB 25

(You are not committing to attend at this time but if oversubscribed, preference will be given to those who have submitted a return including those who have responded by email)
SURVEY SQUADRONS' 200th ANNIVERSARIES – CELEBRATIONS
RETURN PROFORMA

From: email:
 Address:
 Postcode: Phone:

	YES	NO
I would like to attend the Anniversary celebration in Newbury		
I will be accompanied by my Wife/Partner/Child/Friend		
I would like to march in the Veteran's contingent		
I will watch the parade from the Market place		
My guest will watch the parade from the Market place		
I/we would like to attend the gathering/reunion at the Racecourse		

A detailed instruction will be promulgated in due course whereupon people will respond to book their place. PLEASE BE AWARE that should we need to limit numbers (due to the capacity of the venue - 400) those who have registered their interest will receive priority.

Please email REA-milsvy-functions@outlook.com Cc REA-milsvy-sec@outlook.com
 Or Post to: Functions Member, 5 School Road, Compton, NEWBURY, Berkshire, RG20 6QU

If you have already sent in this return by email, you do need NOT to send again!

MILITARY SURVEY (GEOGRAPHIC) BRANCH - AGM

The Branch is required to hold an Annual General Meeting which we usually combine with our annual reunion. However, due to the Survey Squadrons' 200th Anniversaries celebrations, the AGM for 2025 will be held as a stand-alone meeting which is being held:

Saturday 5th April 2025 (1045hrs for 1100hrs prompt Start)

Thatcham Rugby Club, Henwick Worthy Sports Fields, Henwick Lane, Thatcham RG18 3BN

Please note that whilst there will not be a formal gathering after the AGM, as is usually the case, the AGM will follow after the regular Armed Forces Veterans' Breakfast which is held monthly at the rugby club (commencing approx. 0930hrs). Members are more than welcome to attend this breakfast and meet old comrades and other veterans in a relaxed friendly atmosphere. **This breakfast will be free for REA Branch Members and 1 guest but must be Pre-Booked** using the return proforma. We would like to encourage as many members as possible to attend, especially those living in the Newbury area. The Rugby Club Bar will open at 1200hrs.

Please complete the proforma at the end of the newsletter send to Mark Kieras (Functions Member) at REA-MilSvy-Functions@outlook.com or by post to: 5 School Road, Compton, NEWBURY, Berkshire, RG20 6QU **not later than Friday 28th March.**

Any member wishing to raise any points for the Agenda is asked to send them to the Hon Sec, Ian Thurgate, either by email at REA-MilSvy-Sec@outlook.com or by post to Secretary, Mil Svy Geo Branch REA, 5 Mersey Way, THATCHAM, Berks, RG18 3DL **Not Later than Fri 14th March**

200 Hundred Years- 13 Geographic Squadron RE

Memories of Serving in 13

Many of our members will remember the Squadron's 150th anniversary, and more will have served with the Squadron at some time. We'd love to hear, and publish, your stories,

memories and recollections of time spent in the unit, especially if you were present or involved with the 150th. Please send them to John Rigby at REA-milsvy-newsletter@outlook.com or the Secretary at REA-milsvy-sec@outlook.com. Here are a few of those sent in so far.....



Falklands OPERATION CORPORATE 13 Map Production Sqn 1st Reaction Force

Whilst sitting in my bunk there was a sharp hurried knock on my door “Geordie, are you in there?”

What's going on I thought and replied “Yes come in.” “You need to get back to work now, the Falklands have been invaded and we need maps immediately!!” That's how it all started for not just me but for photo tech's other printers and print finishers. Names I don't recall.

After hastily getting into uniform and making my way to the print shop in Barton Stacey there was a small group of us discussing why Argentina had invaded the Falklands, where were the Falklands and what was this small band of surveyor's going to do about it?

We were told that tonight we needed to print 3 B1 size map sheets, 30 copies of each and only black outline, blue rivers, and contours. No problem unless you don't have any negatives yet!! These were currently being collected from Guilford and been flown by helicopter to Barton Stacey. The same helicopter would return at 7am to collect the finished maps and we were told fly them to Brize Norton.

Whilst waiting for the helicopter to arrive paper was loaded, printing presses inked up and platemaking at the ready. Everything that could be done in advance was, and the helicopter eventually touched down late into the night. The following hours were a flurry of activity, 9 printing plates made, 30 x 3 maps printed, trimmed, and packed by 07:00 hours. The helicopter returned and off went our contribution to regaining the Falklands. Well, that didn't take too long or require too much effort off to bed.

We had no idea what was to follow that first initial reaction, however it is now well documented elsewhere 24/7 map production, enough maps produced to sink the Falkland's if they decided to drop them on the Falkland's.

My own thoughts about what happened to those initial 90 maps went something along these lines:

In the morning, the prime minister was woken with her cup of tea and after stretching and yawning enquired “Did anything happen last night?” She was informed that the Argentinians had invaded the Falklands, but everything was in hand. Spluttering on her tea she asked, “How is it in hand?” Oh, we got Geordie and some other lads in 42 Survey to print some maps, we then had them flown to Brize Norton by helicopter and are currently flying 30 Marines with the maps down to the Falklands to take it back. “Do you think that’s enough men?” erm possibly not Prime Minister but we didn’t want to disturb you. “Call them back we will need a task force to sort this out” Completely fictional but I always got asked what happened to the maps!! I did however in recent years meet someone from the SBS who was at Brize Norton when the maps arrived, and he informed me that the maps were given to a contingent of SAS and SBS who indeed did use them in the Falklands before the arrival of the task force.

John “Geordie” Hambling served 1975-1989

Childhood Memories of 13 Field Survey Squadron RE in the early 1960s

By Lt Col (Ret’d) James Prain

Many of us in the Geo community recall our military service and the technical activities in which we were engaged. To complement these reminiscences, I would like to recall life as young boy when my father, Major Tony Prain, was second-in-command of 13 Squadron back in the early 1960s.



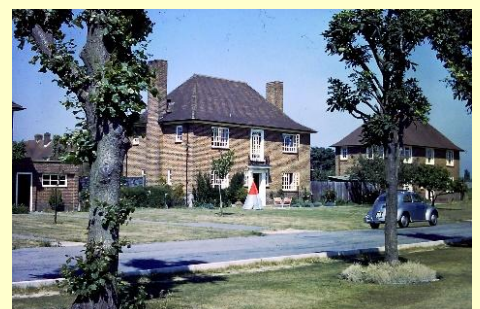
At this time, the Squadron was based in Fernhurst Camp in West Sussex. The camp was on the southern edge of the village and only provided accommodation for the bachelor soldiers and married accommodation for the officer commanding. During this period, this would have been Majors, Willie Ker, Ted Halliday and David Wilson in command.



As there were no other married quarters on site, the married officers and soldiers were housed some 13 miles away in Roussillon Barrack in Chichester. This was a classic Victorian barracks in terms of entrance portico with additional 1930s office and accommodation blocks. At the time the barracks was deserted apart from the Squadron’s families. It subsequently become the depot of the Royal Military Police but today, 2024, the barracks is given over to civilian housing though some of married quarters are still retained by MoD.

The officers’ houses were in Richmond Avenue. As my father was the senior officer on site, he was allocated the colonel’s house. The parade square in the centre of the barrack has been grassed over and was used as a sports field.

Our neighbours were Lieutenant Ian Grant and Captain John Underwood. There was also Major Hough who was connected with Bomb Disposal at Horsham. At the end of the road was



the Sergeant Major's house. Around the corner in Otway Road were the soldiers' quarters.



The married officers and soldiers commuted to Fernhurst daily by Austin Champ and 1 Ton truck respectively. I recall Dad saying he would often stop en-route to buy fresh mushrooms from a road-side vending machine and passed them onto the cookhouse. (I am the one in the cowboy hat!)



We often visited Dad at Fernhurst Camp as it was on the route from Chichester to Guildford and all points north. One of the treats when in Dad's office was to play with beads of mercury on his desk. He kept a small bottle in his desk. This was a memory also shared by David Halliday when we exchanged messages in 2021 following his father's death.

Dad did go away on exercise from time to time. On one occasion the Print Train was set up on Woodbury Common, a small military training area just west of Exeter and used today by the Royal Marine Training Centre at Lympstone.

During our time here, the Goodwood motor racing circuit was in full operation and hence, when the wind was from the east, we could hear the cars quite clearly. Today, its home to the Goodwood Revival and Festival of Speed events.

Dad retired from the Army in 1963. In his final months I remember him talking about the possible deployment on Operation Emily which was involved the field surveying associated with the Thor Missile sites up the east coast. These would have been the UK's ballistic missile defence but the programme was subsequently abandoned. In 1964 the Squadron was deployed to Aden.

To round off the story, I joined Military Survey and was second-in-command of 14 Independent Topographic Squadron in Ratingen in the mid-1980s and Chief Instructor at the Royal School of Survey 1995-98.

13 Squadron Quiz

How much do you know, how much do you remember about 13 Squadron.....

Q1 The formation date of any unit is considered as the date the Royal Warrant for its creation is signed. What was that date for 13 Squadron?

Q2 What was 13 Squadron's title upon its formation?

Q3 The squadron served overseas in the First World War, in which theatre?

Q4 During the Second World War the Squadron was deployed first in North-West Europe and then Syria followed by Egypt and Malta. On 16th July 1943 it moved again to a new country where it operated until after VE and VJ Days. Which country?

Q5 For the period 1951 to 1964, the Squadron was based near Haslemere. What was the name of the Camp?

Q6 The Squadron spent the late 1960s until the mid-1980s stationed near to Andover, at B Camp and then A Camp, Barton Stacey, but what was the name of the camp/barracks?

Q7 The Squadron has had many different titles. For which period was it called 13 Map Production Squadron?

Q8 In late 1977 the Squadron was involved in OPERATION BURBERRY that took it away from its usual occupation of Map Production. What was OP BURBERRY the response to?

Q9 In the 1960s and 70s military vehicles carried a unit identifier plate. At the time 42 Regt's identifier was a blue plate with the number 176 in white lettering. What was 13 Squadron's?

Q10 After many rumours of moves to various parts of the country, the Squadron finally left Barton Stacey and moved in with the School at Hermitage. When did that move take place?

Answers will be given in the next Newsletter.

200 Hundred Years - 14 Geographic Squadron RE

14 Geographic Squadron will achieve its 200th anniversary around the time of our next newsletter. We hope to match the articles we have included (and will carry on) for 13 Squadron with similar ones dealing with 14 Squadron. We'd love to hear, and publish, your stories, memories and recollections of time spent in the unit, especially if you were present or involved with the 150th. Please send them to John Rigby at REA-milsvy-newsletter@outlook.com or the Secretary at REA-milsvy-sec@outlook.com.

The Photo and Print Trees

Along with Bryan Miller, we are in the process of carrying out more amendments and adding detail to both the Photo and Print trees. This would not have been possible without the superb help I have received from numerous individuals but particularly Chris Cleeton, the late Sid Jackson, Frank Johnstone and Ted May. Jon Willey has now volunteered to help with a Repro Techs tree whilst Paul (Scouse) Murray has agreed to help with a Storeman Survey tree, so thank you everyone for their time, advice and help.

After making many more additions to the detail there will be a period of consultation with our Branch Secretary so we can decide whether it would be best to show the trees on the Branch Facebook site or whether to put them on to the REA Mil Svy (Geo) website. In the first half of 2025 I hope to provide the information necessary so everyone can view the trees.

If anyone would be interested in compiling trees for Carto, Air and Field please drop me a message at rea-milsvy-heritage@outlook.com

Nick Collins

Geoff Keeffe – REA Badge of Merit

Members will recall that in the Spring Newsletter we announced the well-deserved award of the Association’s Badge of Merit to Noel Grimmatt in recognition of the outstanding contribution he made to the Branch.

We reported that his was the first such award that the Branch had received which was, and remains, true. However, Noel is not the only member of the Branch to receive the award! Our report in the Autumn edition explained that Tony Webb is also a proud recipient. Publication of the Autumn edition prompted Geoff Keeffe to get in touch to say that he, too, has received the award.

Geoff received his Badge of Merit in respect of his *“many years of meritorious service to the Southampton Branch”*

He was presented with the award during the re-dedication of the Royal Engineers Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum, Arlewas, Staffordshire on 28th May 2019. The presentation being made by Major General (retired) Alastair Dickenson CBE, President Royal Engineers Association.

At the same event Geoff also received the Chief Royal Engineers Award, which on the reverse states *“in Recognition of Outstanding Service”* and was presented by the then Chief Royal, Lt Gen Tyrone R Urch CBE.



Geoff receiving the Badge of Merit Certificate from Major General (retired) Alastair Dickenson CBE,



Geoff speaking to the Chief Royal, Lt Gen Tyrone R Urch CBE.

Geoff recalls: "Over 500 guests were invited to the re-dedication including senior serving personnel, all Commanding Officers and RSMs, and members from Branches of the Royal Engineers Association.

The Service commenced after Standards from some 30 Branches of the REA marched on and were in position, the music being provided by the Nottinghamshire Band of the Corps of Royal Engineers." Following the service, a series of presentations were made, including those to Geoff. Geoff remembers it as "a fantastic day"

Our belated congratulations to Geoff, and "Thank you" for letting us know.

So, we stand corrected..... The Branch has three Badge of Merit holders amongst its membership (past and present) unless, of course, you know different!? As Geoff said when he contacted us..." *You never know, another one may come out of the woodwork at some stage*". We would be delighted to hear from any more

Michael (Mike) Payne – REA Badge of Merit

Having read Geoff's words above the Secretary's grey cells kicked into life and he thought of another likely holder of the association's Badge of Merit..... Mike Payne.

A quick enquiry with Mike and it was confirmed that he is, indeed, a recipient. Mike was awarded his badge in recognition of the work he has done, over many years, for the Reading and West Berkshire Branch. In common with Noel and Geoff, Mike has gone far "above and beyond" what might be expected in the service of the Association and its members, and serving and retired Sappers in general.

Mike was presented with the Badge of Merit by the then Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire, Mrs Mary Bayliss, at the Beating of Retreat held at Hermitage in July 2011.



Mike Payne receiving the Association Badge of Merit from the Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire, Mrs Mary Bayliss, whilst Mark Burrows looks on.

So, yet again, we stand corrected. The total is now 4 Badge of Merit holders amongst our Membership..... unless, of course, you know differently! If you do, please get in touch with the Secretary at REA-MilSvy-Sec@outlook.com

Officers of REA – Other Surveyors holding positions in the Association

It was always recognised that Military Survey punched well above its weight, especially on the sports field, and it appears that the tradition is being carried on within the ranks of the REA. In addition to our Members who have been awarded the Badge of Merit, and who are all filling important positions in the Association, we have several who fill key posts in other Branches:

Roger Sutton is Secretary of the Bristol Branch;

Steve George* is Secretary of the Reading and West Berkshire Branch; and

Mark Davenport is the Standard Bearer for the Manchester Branch.

Tom Benkjer is the Standard Bearer for the Isle of Wight Branch, and recently has been voted in as their Chairman – Congratulations, Tom!

* Steve George wasn't a surveyor but spent a number of years as Clerk and Chief Clerk in 42 Regiment and served us so well he was welcomed into the Mil Svy Geo Branch



Tom Benkjer as Standard Bearer for Isle of Wight Branch

If any other Members are supporting other Branches, we'd love to hear about it. Contact the Secretary at REA-MilSvy-Sec@outlook.com

42 Engineer Regiment (Geographic) - Nijmegen Marches - 2024

A team of 11 soldiers from 42 Engineer Regiment (Geographic) proudly represented their Regiment and country in the renowned Nijmegen Marches 2024. The annual event, known formally as the International Four Days Marches Nijmegen, saw the team from 42 join thousands of participants from across the globe in an intense four-day challenge, covering 160 kilometres on foot through the beautiful, yet physically demanding, terrain of the Netherlands.

The Nijmegen Marches have a long-standing military tradition dating back to 1909, initially designed to test Dutch soldiers' endurance and operational readiness. Today, it brings together both civilian and military participants, with approximately 40,000 walkers from more than 50 nations. While civilians participate in regular attire, military teams march in full uniform, carrying additional weight

(15kg deadweight plus consumables) within day sacks. Military units, especially, view the event as a way to build camaraderie, physical resilience, and cross-cultural ties. For the 42 Regt team, participating in Nijmegen is a badge of honour that showcases their stamina, dedication, and commitment to teamwork.



The Nijmegen team 2024

Preparing for Nijmegen was no small feat for the Regiment. The team underwent weeks of training that started over 6 months before the event. Designed to improve their endurance, build strength, and ensure team cohesion. Members of the Regiment took part in progressively challenging marches, carrying an increased weighted load to simulate the conditions of the actual event. Physical preparation was only part of the process; each soldier worked on honing their mental toughness, knowing that perseverance would be essential when covering up to 40 kilometres each day over four days.

For many, the marches are more than a physical challenge. They're an opportunity to honour the sacrifices of past servicemen and women and celebrate military history and unity. Passing through towns filled with enthusiastic spectators, the soldiers received a warm welcome, with many locals offering cheers, water, and refreshments along the route. These gestures of support kept morale high as they completed the arduous daily routes.

Day 1 known as Day of Elst or Blue Tuesday, took the team out from Camp Heumensoord where the military contingent was staying, up through Nijmegen and across the River Waal on the

Waalbrug Bridge. Then in a clockwise loop to the northern edge of the city. Covering 45 km through the surrounding villages and some very heavy downpours. It was during these heavy rain periods that the team were able to clear some of the civilian traffic that had caused progress to be limited.

Day 2, known as Day of Wijchen or Pink Wednesday, took the team out of Nijmegen and out towards the western edge of the city. The shortest of four days saw the team covering 38 km through more villages, towns and extensive countryside.

Day 3, known as Day of Groesbeek, took the team out of Camp Heumensoord and away from the city of Nijmegen in a southeastern direction towards the town of Groesbeek. The team covered a distance of 41 km and in a change to the other days which involved the team walking on relative flat that the Netherlands is famous for, Day 3 saw the team walking up not just 1 hill but 7 hills as part of the 'Day of Hills' with the highest hill having a peak of 3900 cm. Whilst walking on Day 3 route, the team also spent part of the day walking along the border between the Netherlands and Germany.

Day 4 and the final day known as Day of Cuijk, took the team through Nijmegen and out to the southwestern edge of the city. This was the longest day with a distance 48 km. Despite the increased distance, the team were spurred on especially when crossing the pontoon bridge over River Meuse which had been created by the Dutch Engineers and then 5 km along the Via Gladiola back into Nijmegen which became one big party. During which members of the team got to interact with the local population and enjoy many well earned beers with the locals on the way to the finish line.

At the end of the four days, 42 Engineer Regiment's team crossed the finish line with pride, joining fellow soldiers in a final march-past and medal presentation ceremony in Nijmegen's central area. The soldiers were presented with the coveted Vierdaagse Cross, a symbol of resilience and achievement in the face of adversity.

The Nijmegen Marches continue to be an essential event for military units worldwide, embodying endurance, unity, and international friendship. For 42 Engr Regt (Geo), completing this historic challenge marks another chapter in their service, showcasing the spirit of teamwork and commitment that defines their mission.

LCpl E Pryce, 14 Sqn



Restoration of the Armillary Sphere

In July 2024, Nick Collins from the Mil Svy (Geo) Branch of the REA and the former SMI, Lee Huish, began discussing the old “Survey Sculpture” — an aged and neglected Armillary Sphere that once stood proudly outside the Geographic Engineer Group HQ, Denison Barracks. After 77 Brigade moved into the HQ building, the sphere was removed and stored in the “Rubb shelter,” where it remained for over a decade. Despite numerous efforts to have it relocated and properly displayed outside RSMS, these attempts were unsuccessful.

Finally, at a cost of approximately £3,000, a new stand was constructed outside of the RSMS building front door. Once the stand was in place, it was suggested that the sphere be restored to its former glory. The problem being how to fund the restoration.....



Undeterred, Nick and Lee seized the opportunity to seek funding for the restoration through the Mil Svy (Geo) Branch of the REA, which generously agreed to cover the costs. Plans were set in motion to restore the sphere. Staying true to Sapper ingenuity, a small trailer and an old military mattress were used to safely transport the sphere to A & C Shotblasting in Newbury. In early August, Nick and a small team of ME Geo Sprs under the coordination of WO2(SSM) Luke Ireland, loaded the sphere into the trailer for transport.

The restoration was completed in early October. The Armillary Sphere, now revitalised after sandblasting and freshly powder coated, was finally returned to its home outside RSMS.



Nick Collins, CI RSMS – Lt Col Daz Hembery, Maj Mike Shaw and WO2 (QMSI) Shan Nicholas with the refurbished Armillary Sphere

Unfortunately, despite an appeal for information in a previous newsletter, we have still been unable to clarify the origins of the sphere. It is believed that it was presented in 1980 and was definitely in position for the opening of the new School of Military Survey, rebuilt in that year. Who presented it and how it arrived at Denison Barracks still remains a mystery!

CI RSMS' Award for Excellence to Nick Collins

There was a surprise for Nick Collins after the publicity shot of him and some staff from RSMS with the refurbished Armillary Sphere was taken (see above), for he was presented with The Chief Instructor's Award for Excellence.

Made, deservedly, in recognition of his support to RSMS with the Heritage Project and for the repair and refurbishment of the Armillary Sphere, the award came as a complete surprise for Nick.

We are unsure whether it left him speechless.....



Nick Collins receiving his Award from CI RSMS, Lt Col Darren Hembery.



The Community Centre at Faircross

In an earlier edition of the newsletter, I explained that the Community Centre in the Faircross married quarters area was being put forward for listing as a building of significant historic interest. I would like pass on my sincere thanks to all those personnel who took the time and effort to send in their survey responses to West Berkshire Council.

I am extremely pleased to announce that, at last, the Community Centre has been adopted by West Berkshire Council as a listed building and they have informed the new owners, 77 Brigade, of Denison Barracks. I have spoken to the current Station Quartermaster at the barracks and he fully accepts the process which has been followed to reach this decision. He has pointed out that

in the current climate of economic constraints there is not a lot of money available for maintenance but he will bear the Council's decision in mind when working directly with VINCI who are the contractors that work to Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) with regards to infrastructure within the Station area of responsibility. He confirmed that the Community Centre is on the station radar and DIOs.

Unfortunately, it would now appear that the Community Centre building has now been declared structurally unsafe, so all forms of use of the building have ceased. Clearly this is a worrying development and one which I will monitor very carefully.

Nick Collins

The Chard/Leach BBQ Project

The REA recently provided a brick BBQ for the SLA (Single Living Accommodation) blocks (Chard and Leach) of 14 and 13 Geo Sqns, as there was only a small concrete seating area for socialising during the summer months. This consisted of a flat pack BBQ and was purchased for the benefit of those in the SLA.

This proved to be an interesting and challenging team building activity, providing the opportunity for the Geo Analysts to prove their aptitude for construction-based tasks.

One of the largest challenges was understanding the instructions, which were unfortunately written in Polish. This did not stop the keen builders, as they quickly understood the simple measurements and labelling system provided in the instructions.



We are very grateful to Military Survey Geographic Branch of the REA for their support and for funding the BBQ. It has gifted service personnel an area to cook and socialise with a few beers during the warmer months and has proven a popular spot to escape the stresses of the working week. Due to its exceptionally high quality, it will endure for many years to come.

After any Exercise and Operation there should always be thoughts as to "Lessons Learnt". Those for the Chard Leach Project are:

1. The best experts are the ones not getting involved.
2. Instructions do not need to be in English.
3. Measurements don't need to be exact.
4. Bricks and concrete are very heavy.

Cpl Martin, 14 Sqn

DEATHS OF OLD COMRADES

Don MacKenzie

Geoff Keefe gave us the sad news in December that Don MacKenzie passed away in the early hours of Sunday 1st December 2024 after a long illness. Don was a “Queen Vic’s” boy (Queen Victoria’s School, Dunblane), and then joined the Army as an apprentice, part of 50B group at Army Apprentice School, Harrogate, training as an Air Surveyor.



Don served in most Survey units and also did an exchange tour in Canada. Many Members and their wives would have known Don’s wife, Nan, who unfortunately predeceased him.

Don had a sad childhood.....On 1 July 1940, on the first daylight raid of the war, a German bomber dropped 2 bombs on Wick. Don’s father, a member of a Scottish Regiment, was killed in the raid, and his mother died 3 months later from injuries she sustained in the raid. A memorial garden in Wick contains the names of his parents and all those lost in the raid.

Brian ‘Flab’ Ford when he heard of Don’s death said he was “Sorry to hear of Don's passing. I knew him in Harrogate and our paths crossed several times after Harrogate. Don was a really nice bloke. Most of his group will remember me as 'Flab' Ford but Don, I recall, always called me Brian. Please pass my condolences to those who are able to attend” his funeral.

Guy "Phillip" Robinson

We have been notified by his son, Jeremy, of the sad news that Guy (Phillip "GPG") Robinson passed away on 3rd December. He was 84 years old.

Phillip spent most of his army career with Military Survey retiring as Lieutenant Colonel. He was OC 19 Squadron 1977-79. After leaving the Army his interest in military subterranean works (tunnelling and mining, bunkers etc) led to him becoming an authority on the subject. He was a founder of the Durand Group, an author and was interviewed on, and narrated several television programmes about the First World War.

Phillip's son, Jeremy (Jez) is working on an obituary which we will publish in a forthcoming Newsletter....."Thankfully my father kept everything – all logged and filed – including a daily diary from aged 18 (started at RMAS when he began his journal!) so I have plenty (!) of material, photos, sketches, maps etc. He also had quite a career – Aden, Radfan, Sarawak / Malaya, Singapore, Kenya, Oman, Germany, Cyprus as well as becoming the youngest ever fellow of the Royal Geographical Society aged 25, and then became a leading expert of First World War Tunnels post his career – So the challenge will be keeping it brief!!"

Details of Phillip's Memorial Service have been released just as we go to press and have been circulated via email.

Our condolences go out to Phillip's family.

Graeme "Holly" Hollinshead

We have heard from Ron Birch who, in turn has only just heard that Graeme "Holly" Hollinshead passed peacefully away in a nursing home on 8th April this year.

Graeme was a member of 51B group in Harrogate and was trained as a Field Surveyor. His tours of duty included 84 Field Survey Squadron in Malaya and, later, he was seconded back to 84 in charge of a detachment from 13 Sqn to assist Ron's troop on the Borneo project. He did other tours in 13 Squadron and also RSMS.

Our belated condolences go out to his wife, Melanie, and family.

24243819 Frederick Michael Thomas – Field Survey Technician



Fred was born on the 15th of January 1955 in Westbury, Wiltshire and was from a Service family. His father was in the Army and two of his three brothers were in the Navy and Royal Air Force. Fred had three brothers (Pete, Sean and Mark) and a sister (Karon).

Fred joined at the Army Apprentice College on the 9th of September 1971 (Group 71C) and left the Army in June 1977. After leaving the Army, Fred worked within the oil industry as a Survey Engineer.

In 1991 he was working for Sperry-Sun Drilling Services, who eventually became part of Halliburton and was working in Alaska. During that year he travelled to Trinidad to undertake some training and met his wife, Denyse, who was a teacher. They moved back to Alaska together and were married in Anchorage in July 1992. Later in the 1990's they moved back to Trinidad.

In September 2001 they moved back to the UK and purchased the Slip Tavern at Much Marcle in Herefordshire. Sadly, Fred started to show signs of early onset Alzheimer's disease and in 2017 Denyse decided the family would return back to Trinidad so she and her family could care for Fred. Fred was 69 years old on the 8th of November 2024, when he died of complications brought on by the Alzheimer's. Fred is survived by his wife Denyse and their two sons Michael and Nicholas and Fred's daughter Meghan.

We send Denyse, his sons Michael and Nicholas, and his daughter Meghan, our condolences.

Steve Wilden (Air Svy 71C) had this to say about Fred:

"I have many fond memories of Fred. He was such a good bloke. Whether it was a lairy weekend in France, a visit to a seedy nightclub in Bristol or a pub crawl around Westbury Market Place if Fred was involved you were in for a good laugh. I used to go home with Fred to his parents in Westbury and he'd come with me up to Suffolk. He made a great impression on my parents, especially my dad, in the Red Lion on a Saturday night (my dad liked a pint too). Fred was larger than life and lived his life to the full.

R.I.P. my friend."



Bill Duane, Fred Thomas, Garry Asbery, Tony Cowan, Steve Wilden (laying) – 19 Sqn lines at Barton Stacey 1975/76

Chris Slade (Carto 71C) remembered Fred as follows:

"Fred was a character, always laughing and great company. We really got to know Fred at Chepstow. There are lots of stories about Fred. I remember Fred and I getting caught by our platoon sergeant (Partington, I think), after a night out. We had just drunk a bottle of Bacardi neat and tried to hide as he came in the room. Fred and I were never good at hiding especially when drunk. Whenever we had some time off, a group of us would go out to Bristol or the local hostelrys (Tintern, St Briavels etc). I'm sure we got up to a lot of nonsense, all innocent of course.

Fred was always up for a laugh and was a genuine, honest and true friend. A great loss to all that knew him and especially Denyse and family. RIP Fred"

Martin (Jacko) Jackson (Fd Svy 71C) had this to say about Fred:

"On the first day of or army journey at Chepstow, Fred and I very quickly became friends. Fred was a very approachable person and was pretty much well-liked by everyone he met. As we were both

Field Surveyors, we worked together on many of the training tasks allocated to us, teamwork was always the answer. Fred was quite quickly singled out for his natural leadership skills and after a while he became our section leader and was promoted in the college accordingly. I remember one foggy evening in the autumn, sitting on the window ledge in Fred's own room (the privileges of rank lol) Passing the time, we were chatting while watching the cars driving over the Severn Bridge in the mist. As we were getting closer to the end of our time in training, we pondered over what lay ahead, as you do, and wondered where and what would we be doing in a few years' time. One weekend, a group of five of us had a trip to Paris in Mike's 'Minx', that was a great experience, sleeping in and under the car in a Paris park, woken by the sound of Gendarmes, marching past shrugging their shoulders and wondering what we were up to! We joined the Regiment in '74 and travelled far and wide over the years. Fred had a great sense of humour, a love of life, travel and excitement, we had plenty of that in 19 Squadron! I was deeply saddened on hearing of Fred's passing, our thoughts and prayers are with his lovely family, we will all miss him dearly. RIP my friend"

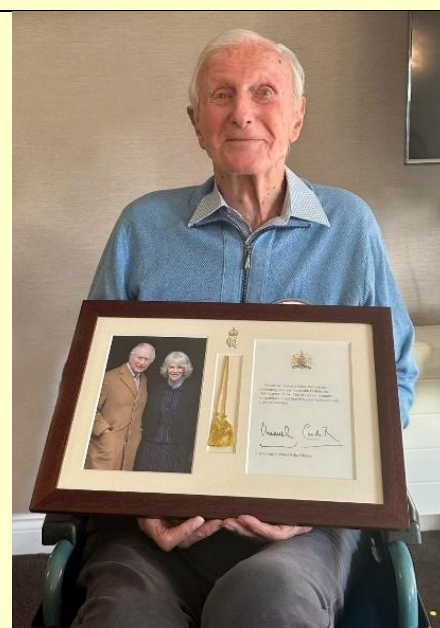
Allan Marles

Nathan Hutchinson has informed us of the sad passing of Allan Marles on Thursday 23rd January.

Allan celebrated his 100th birthday last October and we were very pleased to record the event in our Autumn Newsletter.



Allan and some of his family celebrating his 100th Birthday last October



Allan with his letter of congratulations from the King and Queen

Allan had a very interesting life, both during and after WWII and we had planned to publish extracts from his wartime diaries in this edition of the newsletter. Out of respect we will hold off publication until our Spring edition.

Our condolences go to Allan's family, and amongst those offering their condolences is Ted May, who mentioned Allan as his then OC in his story "The Cyprus Map" also printed in our

Autumn Newsletter. Allan is also remembered by Mark Burrows whose parents were great friends with Allan and his wife, and with whom Mark holidayed on a couple of occasions.

John Elder

Early in the New Year we were informed by his daughter, Jessica, of the sad news that John Elder had passed away peacefully on 18th December. John had a successful career with Military Survey retiring as a Brigadier.

A Memorial Service was held for John on 22nd January and it was pleasing to know that there was a good representation from his old colleagues present.

We hope to publish an obituary in our next newsletter but are pleased to include, below, a picture of John courtesy of 'Willy' West.



*A young Capt John Elder – 2 Tp Comd, 84 Svy Sqn RE
aboard a helicopter Sabah c1968*

David Harris

Bev Hill kindly informed us of the sad news that David (Dave) Harries passed away in late November.

Dave was a Cartographic Draughtsman who served alongside Bev at SMS, and later in 42 Regiment where he was one-time SSM of 47 Cartographic Squadron. Dave and his wife lived for many years in Brampton, possibly a legacy from a JARIC or Wyton posting. We are pleased to report that Cliff Nicklin, our Wyton area rep, was able to attend Dave's funeral, as was Maj James 'Nessie' Smith, 2IC 42 Regt.

Our condolences go to his wife Margaret.

Mary Hiscock

Older members of the Branch may well remember Mary Hiscock, one of the two telephonists who operated the switchboard at Hermitage for many years in the 60's, 70's and 80's, and who passed away in her care home in Newbury in October at the age of 94.

Those were the days when internal and external calls were connected through the camp switchboard and so, even if Mary wasn't recognised 'in the street', her voice was known to many.

The telephone exchange was the central point for communications in the barracks. One would lift the receiver and await the operator's response and then ask to be connected to the required department. Often you'd be asked who you wanted to speak to there and then be told that Sgt So-and-so wasn't there as he'd just gone to the Mess, the SI's office or wherever. There wasn't much that the operators didn't know about – possibly because they could listen-in to any call.....

Mary also utilised another "operator's perk".....when she wanted to speak to her husband, Peter, who was the Housing Warden with FHWS. She would give his extension a long continuous ring..... Whether that meant he answered the phone any quicker, or just braced himself, we aren't in a position to say!

Jackie Stubbing recalls that the Hiscocks drove a Reliant Robin three-wheeler and she, one day, accepted a lift. Both Mary and Peter were large people and the car swayed considerably as it negotiated the country roads around Hermitage.

TOP SECRET World War Two Activity Brought to Light

The importance and secrecy during WW2 of the preparations for the Invasion of France is well documented and publicised. Eight decades later, British and foreign allied services still attend to remember and celebrate those heroes who ventured all. From those ports the Allies would sail for D-Day, delayed by storms until the 6th of June, went thousands of men and ships in tight formation.

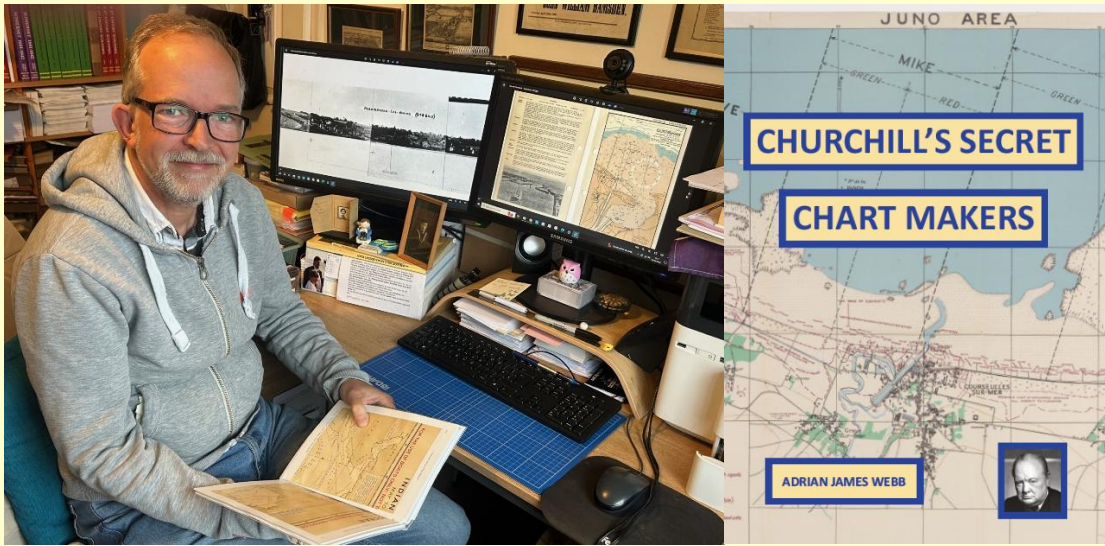
The Hydrographic Department of the Navy was responsible for all the charts and navigational products designed, compiled, proofed, printed and distributed to the Allies. The vital work in Taunton and Bath, without which the invasion would fail, was undertaken in total secrecy. All that outsiders knew was that the buildings used were simply "the Admiralty".

The numbers of charts produced by the Department are staggering, as in 1938 only just over one million (M) were issued, compared with almost seven million in 1944. During the war 30.7M charts and diagrams were supplied to 4,969 vessels from fourteen allied countries, compared with an average of 3.5M over a similar period in peacetime. This increase had a tremendous effect on chart making staff in the Department.

The stories of the Top Secret chart making activities has not been told until the publication of this book – "Churchill's Secret Chart Makers: the Road to D-Day and Beyond in Somerset, 1939-1945". It details the work of the Hydrographic Department predominantly based in Taunton and Bath, with satellite operations in Exeter, Frome, Ironbridge, Armadale, Nottingham and London. Chapters include survey work undertaken by men from Taunton and Bath in the Far East to support Allied operations, the building of a new purpose-built chartmaking factory in Somerset, Top Secret tidal calculations for D-Day, the trials and tribulations of working under Top Secret conditions during

World War Two, select biographies of key members of staff, appendices containing transcripts of key documents in the wartime story, information about graduate cartographers and stories from women who worked in the Department, plus a lot more.

Written by a local historian, Dr Adrian Webb, it brings to light the importance of the work undertaken by the Department. Based on a wide range of sources, including interviews with war-time staff, this fully illustrated hardback book contains 272 pages. It is available at £25 from www.somerset-history.com.



Contributors

Our thanks go to Nick Collins, John Hambling, James Prain, Geoff Keeffe, Mike Nottage, Jackie Stubbing, Ron Birch, Nathan Hutchinson, Bev Hill, Jeremy Robinson, Cpl Martin, LCpl Pryce, Willy West, Tom Benkjer, Steve Wilden, Chris Slade, and Martin Jackson for their contributions to this edition of the newsletter.

The Secretary and Newsletter Compiler are always grateful for contributions and, especially so at this time, any associated with 13, 14 and 16 Sqn. We hope, equally, to recognise 19 Sqn upon its 200th anniversary in due course.

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MILITARY SURVEY (GEO) BRANCH AGM – RETURN

To be held at Thatcham Rugby Club, Henwick Worthy Sports Fields,
Henwick Lane, Thatcham RG18 3BN

Saturday 5th April 2025 (11:00hrs)

Timings.	09:30hrs	Armed Forces Veterans' Breakfast
	1045hrs	Members assemble inside room
	1100hrs	AGM starts
	1200hrs approx	AGM finishes

Dress. Smart casual or better if you wish!

Prior to the AGM, Thatcham Rugby Club will be holding an Armed Forces Veterans' Breakfast (from 9:30am). Members are more than welcome to attend this breakfast and meet other veterans in a relaxed friendly atmosphere. **This breakfast will be free for REA Branch Members and 1 guest if booked on the return.**

It is vital to establish firm attendance figures early and so once again we would request that you return this form as soon as you can to Mark Kieras or email the details requested in the form to: rea-milsvy-functions@outlook.com.

RETURNS MUST BE RECEIVED BY Friday 28th March 2025 LATEST

I am a member – YES / NO

From: Forename: Surname:

Guest:

Do you plan to attend the Veterans' Breakfast:

Tel No: - E-mail:

DO PLEASE REMEMBER THE GEO SOLDIERS SUPPORT FUND

Payment:

Account Name: RE Association Branch Funds
Sort code: 30-11-75
Account no: 34412560
Reference: MSG (last 3 numbers)AGM

Or enclose a cheque payable to RE Association Branch Funds and annotate the reverse with MSG AGM