

American Express Retirees Club



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Newsletter - Issue 09 - 2011 - September

Editor's Notes by Peter Smith

This month with a bit of room to spare I have published two contrasting short stories one submitted by Brian Vernon, a slightly sexist and non pc story, don't worry Brian you're not the only one and one by Mabel Waddell which has been a real test for my spellchecker, I hope you enjoy them both.

There are still quite a few to come so I will try to publish a couple more next month including one from our Chairman.

Please note the change to the meeting room location on the 20th October; it's now in the Delliba Room which is still in the same conference area but just down the corridor a little way.

Chairman's Report by Chris Belton



Club Meetings - I was very pleased to hear that the talk by the Governor of Lewes Prison was well attended. Due to a sudden change of my plans, I couldn't make it myself. It is always a concern when asking speakers to attend that there won't be anyone for them to talk to!! As we begin to plan for 2012, perhaps you would suggest speakers or topics that you would like us to arrange. Just let Edie, Peter or me know. The Club is for your benefit, so to some extent, its success is in your hands!!

Christmas Dinner Saturday 21st January 2012 - Not much reaction yet to the Christmas Dinner announcement last month!! If you'd like to attend, let me know and send me your payment of £21.50 per person.

The new American Express Building - It is certainly taking shape now and the changes over the months are striking. For those with internet access the photographs that I have been taking since mid-2011 show just what has been happening. They are to be found at <http://www.theretirees.co.uk/Gallery.htm>

Future Events



Private behind the scenes tour of Preston Manor - September 22nd - This event is fully booked, we hope to bring you a full report in next month's Newsletter.

Not all Germans were Nazi's - October 6th - Opa (Grandpa) and the German Resistance. The fascinating story of an ordinary family's act of resistance in Nazi Germany, thought provoking, humorous and moving by turns, supported by a wonderful collection of slides. Kate is always an impressive and engaging speaker.



Life in the early fairgrounds - October 20th - This is a welcome return by Ted Burst who a couple of years ago gave us a fascinating talk on how the various fairs, events and markets that continue to be held around the country originated. This is a follow on to that talk, bringing us further up to date.

Fifty one years of contraception - November 3rd - Its ok it's not a practical demonstration but more a light hearted look the subject over the years. We are assured there will be a few laughs along the way.



Pleasure ground to bombing ground - November 17th - A wide ranging talk about the local Sussex Downs from a an experienced archeologist who tempts us with the phrase 'lots of things have happened at Devils Dyke that people don't realise!'

How can you resist a teaser like that?

Event Reports - by Peter Smith



Lewes Prison - 1st September - It was nice to see such a good turnout for a talk I originally had my doubts about the number who would attend, although I had booked it, I thought it might be one of those subjects that most prefer to ignore. But I was wrong in two ways firstly on the numbers, strange that so many ladies, the vast majority in fact, came to hear about men being locked up and secondly on the subject matter.

Robin Eldridge, the Governor of Lewes Prison, turned out to be a very entertaining and informative speaker, working from just a few notes with no slides he managed to keep the subject lively and thought provoking. At times the question came thick and fast which generally indicates the involvement of the audience as it was in this case.

Starting with a brief outline of the prison and its role in the community he told us that Lewes is a "local" prison in so far as the vast majority of offenders held there are from Sussex. Currently holding 739; 400 of which are sentenced, serving terms from 2 days to 3 years the remainder being on remand due to the severity of their charge, their danger to the community or the risk of them absconding or in some cases all three. Many suffer from mental health problems some so severe they have to be isolated on a health-care wing. Being a local prison with relatively short term sentences being served, there is a large turnover.

The prison is staffed by 350 staff, half of which are uniformed officers plus 100 others consisting of healthcare, education, probation and pastoral staff.

Some figures were difficult to hear for example that at least 75% of offenders have at some time suffered from substance abuse and that 80% are judged to have some type of mental issues ranging from depression to top line suicidal tendencies. All wings are staffed by 6 uniformed officers at any time of which nearly half the number are female which can help as they tend to have calming effects on some prisoners, although this can also work against them in the case of some cultural differences.

With some wings holding over 190 offenders sharing cells 8ft by 7ft some with separate toilet facilities, a bunk bed and table with two chairs, violence is an ever present risk in such confined spaces, tv's are provided but have to be paid for by the offenders. Robin emphasised that these are not luxurious facilities contrary to many press reports and that life in prison is tough but fair.

He then gave us a brief outline of a typical day for a convicted offender, rise at 7.30am, followed by an outdoor exercise period, which surprisingly is only taken up by a small minority. Some offenders have court appearances to attend others go off for a work period, then a lunch with a lock down followed by a second period of work, then an evening meal a lock down the day ends with one hour of free association on the wing followed by a lock down at 7pm. All meals are eaten in their cells with plastic cutlery which is shared by two offenders, many of which are strangers initially.

The hour ended with us seeing some of the restraints that can be used, handcuffs, belt restraints, articles made into hiding places for mobile phones and weapons etc. and booklets showing ingenious ways of making weapons like knives, coshes etc.

I am sure that everyone there found the topic fascinating as well as informative and hopefully like me the hour just flew by which is always a good sign.

Footnote: Most prisons experience a shortage of volunteer visitors for offenders who do not have any family or friends to visit them. If you are interested in taking on this type voluntary work please contact me via the details in the Newsletter heading and I would be happy to forward your details. Newsletter Editor: Peter Smith.

Short Story - by Brian Vernon

LOST BUT NOT A LOSER - John glanced up from the comfort of his chair. "Where HAVE you been?" The question was directed to his wife Ann who had been missing for over an hour. "I got lost" she replied looking a little sheepish as she stood there hanging on tightly to two rather heavy looking plastic carrier bags. "How on earth did you manage to do that", he asked. Now you may be surprised at the rather unsympathetic response from John, but sitting as he was, in the lounge on a cross channel ferry, getting lost seemed to him to be rather a difficult thing to do.

As always Ann just had to visit the Duty Free shop. The ardent shopper in her meant she was bargain seeking and she usually managed to return, eventually, with a bag or two of drink and cigarettes. This always mystified John since neither of them smoked and he had been teetotal for years. The excuse was always the same, "but it was cheap!" The thing that confused him the most was that upon leaving the shop there was

only two ways to go. The choice was left or right so why did she always appear to make a wrong turn on the short walk back to the ship's lounge.

Now John was not claiming immunity to losing his way when out and about. However with good preparation and the use of maps plus a diligent search with Google guaranteed his safe arrival at his destination. The recent acquisition of a Sat Nav system had made it even easier. Besides a visible map a sexy voiced lady advises him where, when and how soon to turn. Even before the arrival of this piece of technical wizardry Ann was convinced that John had an inbuilt compass. He sometimes thought that this was a back handed compliment and that really Ann was suggesting it was a substitute for a brain.

Nevertheless he was grateful for this new assistance to getting around as the previous arrangement had a severe drawback. You see Ann would act as navigator in those days. Armed with a map on her lap and opened at the right page one would think everything would be perfect. Wrong!! She would hold the map as one would read a book overlooking the fact that it needed to be set. This meant that unless they happened to be travelling North to start with, they were in trouble straight away. Invitations to "take the next turning right" would sometimes mean they would travel in completely the opposite direction. Inevitably getting more and more hopelessly lost.

Since those early days John and Ann had thought it through and long since come to a more sensible arrangement. Let's face it everybody has some skills of which they can be justly proud. So now John always does the driving assisted by the Sat Nav which saves a good deal on petrol, while Ann concentrates on shopping for all those bargains. Frankly between them they are saving an absolute fortune.

Short Story - by Mabel Waddell

Mary - Mary and I met initially, on an excursion arranged by Kelvingrove Art Gallery. Her vivid red lipstick was applied well outside the line of her lips, and her clothes were brightly coloured and randomly selected, one felt, from an Oxfam rail. Her eyes however, under a salt and pepper wiry mop, were bright brown and twinkling, radiating her great capacity for the enjoyment of life.

A chance encounter, one January day in town, led Mary on enquiry, to relate how she'd celebrated New Year. Leaving a social evening at a church in Bath Street, prior to midnight, she felt a reluctance to go straight home on her own, so stopped in for a coffee in an Italian Café. 'The Bells' came, and, charmed with Mary's homely vivacity, the Italian staff gathered round calling, 'Felice anno nuovo' as they toasted the coming year. Mary, raising her coffee cup, to which had been added 'a wee hauf', replied with, 'A guid New Year tae us a' ', while savouring the warm feeling of inclusion.

A little later, refusing the offer of a taxi, she set off down Sauchiehall Street to be overtaken by a riotous group of young Glaswegians who shouted 'Happy New Year - where ye gaun pal'. On learning she was off home to Killermont Street they linked arms with her and insisting, 'It's no safe for an auld wife on her ain' they escorted her home joking and singing together.

Some months later, I learned that Mary had been found dead by a neighbour, sitting in a chair in her living room. A lonely death you might say, but I don't believe that Mary ever was lonely.

Nostalgia Corner

Can you remember yours?

The recent unfortunate events in the news were not only disturbing but brought back a few memories. Tottenham where I was brought up was not exactly a smart neighbourhood, it had its good and its bad, some roads were wide open with big modern style houses, others leafy lanes and a few with old cottages but there were not many of the high rise flats that there seem to be so many of nowadays.

As in other areas there were large department stores, a few privately owned and numerous specialist shops selling practically everything that the locals needed or could afford. Saturday morning was the day when the High Road, from Chestnut Road in the south, where the Police Station is situated, opposite the famous Tottenham Royal, along past Bruce Grove past Scotland Green to Lansdowne Road and further on to White Hart Lane in the north, was crowded with shoppers.

At one end there was a Sainsbury's, one of those old fashioned white tiled stores, where every counter was separate. You had to queue at the cheese counter, then the butter counter (the butter would be cut from a block and paddled into shape and then wrapped in grease proof paper), the bacon counter and then the fresh meat counter. At every stage your bill was scooted up a wire to the accounts office to be added up and

finally when you reached the cashier's desk the completed bill was scooted back down for you to pay, up went the money again and back down the wire came the change. A complete contrast to now where you shop quickly but pay slowly, then it was shop slowly pay quickly.

At the other end to the north was the Co-Op a large multi floored store that seemed to sell everything, from furniture to hardware, the butchers, greengrocers and milk depot were just across the road. Their system was a bit different as they had a vacuum tube to scoot the money etc to the cashier's office. I guess the system first started many years before when not everyone could read and write and the tradition just continued on into the 20th century.

At some stage I think everyone in my family had worked there, my aunt was the accounts clerk in the butchers, my uncle the butcher, I suppose that's how they met. I worked there in the menswear department on a Saturday for a brief period as did most of my friends. The rate if I remember was just 1/1d an hour (that's about 5½ new pence in today's money) with a farthing in the pound commission on sales. With a pair of leather gloves at 1/10d (that's one shilling and ten pence, nine new pence in today's money) and only working 8 hours, I had to sell a few pairs to buy that Ganex raincoat I fancied.

My mum on the other hand was practically management she worked in the dividend (divi) office. Every time you bought something at the Co-Op you gave your divi number over, that was sent to the central office and at the end of the month you got your card marked up with your points and you could use your accumulated divi to buy things in the local Co-Op shops. A bit like loyalty cards nowadays.

It was a bit of shock to see the old Co-Op (it had longed ceased to be and somewhere along the way it became a Carpetland) ransacked and burning on the news, it's now been demolished, more flats I suppose in its place. 150 years of history gone in a few mad minutes.

PS Our divi number 11 35 4 45 can you remember yours?

Computer Corner

Here are a few of the recently discovered viruses affecting computers, so beware.

Diet virus: Your 200MB hard drive shrinks to 80MB and then slowly expands back to 200MB.

British Gas virus: It tells you what a great cheap service you are getting.

NPower virus: It keeps telling you that you're paying too much for the British Gas virus.

Politically Correct virus: Never calls itself a "virus", but instead refers to itself as an "electronic micro-organism."

Arnold Schwarzenegger virus: Terminates and stays resident. It'll be back.

Government Economist virus: Nothing works, but all your diagnostic software says everything is fine.

Local Government virus: Divides your hard disk into hundreds of little units, each of which does practically nothing but all of which claim to be the most important part of your computer.

Gallup virus: 60% of the PCs infected will lose 38% of their data 14 % of the time (plus or minus a 3.5% margin of error).

Adam and Eve virus: Takes a couple of bytes out of your Apple. (PC owners are immune)

House of Commons virus: The computer locks up, screen splits erratically with a message appearing on each half blaming the other side for the problem.

Airline virus: You're in London but your data is in Singapore.

Disaster Appeal virus: Your programs stop every few minutes to ask for money.

Elvis virus: Your computer gets fat, slow and lazy and then self-destructs only to resurface at a multitude of locations across the screen.

Lord Lucan virus: Your programmes disappear and will never be found again.

Quango virus: Runs every programme on the hard drive, but doesn't allow the user to accomplish anything.

Star Trek virus: Invades your system in places where no virus has gone before.

Private Health Care virus: Tests your system for a day, finds nothing wrong, and sends you a large bill.

Quiz (a real stinker this month)

- Which scenario gives you the best chance of survival?
 - With a coin flip five tails in a row or face the guillotine.
 - Roll snake eyes with a pair of dice or bite on a cyanide capsule.
 - With two dice roll seven twice in a row or be hung drawn and quartered.
 - Cut a standard pack of cards and the top two cards are aces or jump off the Eiffel Tower.
- What weighs more?
 - 125 pounds of lead.
 - 60 kilograms of feathers.
- The number of sides in a hexagon multiplied by the number of sides in a pentagon is less than?
 - The atomic number of manganese.
 - The number of years marked by a silver wedding.
 - The number of days and nights rain fell during Noah's flood.
 - The number represented by the first point in a game of tennis.
- W taht era eht tsrif ruof nrebmur ip nettirw cabkdraws?
- If you score (the number of pawns on the board at the start of a game of chess minus the number of clubs in a standard set of playing cards) on a par 5 hole in golf you have made an?
- My friend Hannah loves her name and likes to exclaim "Was it a car or a cat I saw?" In which city was she born and in what US State?
 - Arboles
 - Saxet
 - Cedar Fort
 - Orlando.
- If you laid the Empire State Building on its side approximately how long would it take to walk alongside from the base to the roof?
 - One minute
 - five minutes
 - twenty minutes
 - one hour.
- A game-show host has placed a car behind one of three doors. There is a goat behind each of the other doors. "First you point toward a door," he says. "Then I'll open one of the other doors to reveal a goat. After I've shown you the goat, you make your final choice whether to stick with your initial choice of doors, or to switch to the remaining door. You win whatever is behind the door." You begin by pointing to door number 1. The host shows you that door number 3 has a goat behind it. What should you do (assuming you want the best odds of winning the car)?
 - Switch to door 2,
 - Stick with your choice of door 1,
 - Say it doesn't make any difference.
- Someone that suffers from Apotemnophobia would be upset if confronted by:
 - A slab of meat
 - a spider
 - a one legged woman,
 - a black horse.
- Which city is located in a country that does not share a border with a country with a coastline on the Mediterranean Sea?
 - Berlin
 - Vienna
 - Lisbon
 - Warsaw

And finally

Driving past a farm a man noticed a sign 'Talking dog for sale'. Intrigued he stopped at the gate and spotted a black Labrador on the grass.

"Are you the talking dog mentioned on the sign?" He asked.

"Yes I am" replied the dog much to the man's astonishment.

"That's amazing how long have you been able to talk?" Asked the man.

"Oh ever since I was a puppy, I've always been able to talk. When I was young I was owned by the Prime Minister, he used to keep me under the table so I could listen to other ministers plotting against him. Then I joined the Drugs Squad and used to listen to conversations at the airport and report back, I've had lots of commendations. But I've only been here a short while though, since I retired."

With that the farmer returned and the man asked "How much do you want for the dog?"

"£20" said the farmer.

"That's not a lot for a talking dog" said the man "Why so cheap?"

"Because I'm fed up with all his lies, he's never done all those things he told you. He was born here and never been off this farm." Replied the farmer.

Retiree Contact Club

A message from Neil Merchant who would like to make contact with Rod Brain and Keith Overington in order to arrange a re-union. Please contact the Editor details below, contact information will be exchanged only if both parties agree.

Quiz Answers

1. Don't be misled by the methods used, all of them will result in death, so the question reverts to the best odds in the first part of the option. a) 1 in 32, b) 1 in 36, c) 1 in 36, d) 1 in 220. So your best chance is to attempt to flip five tails in a row.
2. b) 60 kilos x 2.2 pounds = 132 pounds.
3. a) 25, b) 25, c) 40, d) 15 so the answer is c)
4. Reverse the order of the letters and you have. What are the first four numbers in pi written backwards? The answer is 141.3
5. 16 pawns less 13 clubs equals 3. Par 5 less 3 equals 2, which is an Eagle.
6. An easy one, both her name and exclamation are palindromes, ie read the same in both directions so it's Saxet Texas.
7. Most people walk at 3 mph ie approximately a quarter of a mile every five minutes. 110 floors x 10 feet = 1100 feet nearly a quarter of a mile so it would take about five minutes.
8. The answer with the best probability of winning the car is a) Switch to door 2. This is a well-known dilemma commonly called "The Monty Hall paradox" named after the first host Monty Hall from the game show "Let's make a deal". A full explanation is available on-line on "Wikipedia" or on "You Tube" but you will just have to trust me if you do not have internet access.
9. c) The irrational fear of someone who has lost a limb.
10. d) Warsaw. Poland does not share a border with any country that has a coastline on the Mediterranean Sea.

Retirees Club Committee - Contact Details

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(NB. New Retirees only - If you are recently retired and seeing this Newsletter for the first time - welcome to The Retirees Club. You are invited to attend any of our events and this invitation is extended to your guests. Details of our events together with all other Retiree news can be found on our website www.theretirees.co.uk . Remember too that you must "opt in" if you wish to continue to receive the Newsletter in the mail.)

CONTACT ADDRESS FOR RETIREE'S AND RELATIVES

The Retiree Club does not keep any address records. To reduce any delay;

All change of address requests or any other items pertinent to a pension payment must quote a roll number and be referred to The American Express UK Pension Plan, ACS, Newfoundland Court, 31-49 Newfoundland Circus, Bristol, BS2 9AP as an authorized signature is required. Helpline 0870 901 6972. Or e-mail penpayroll@acs-inc.com. (ACS is a Xerox Company)

We regret that The Retirees Club is not able to do this for you.



Retiree Events - These are nearly always held in the Fargo Room at Amex House. This room is situated in the ground floor conference centre in Amex House, immediately behind the Reception Desk where you need to check in. If for any reason the room is changed you will be re-directed by the conference room staff.

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The Chairman,
American Express Retirees' Club
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Donation - 2011



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