



Issue 18 The Newsletter of THE ARMOURERS' ASSOCIATION 2011

President:	Mr. E. D. Stratford
Chairman:	Mr. E. Briscoe
Vice-Chairman:	Mr. N. Brown
Secretary:	Mr. R. D. Cotter
Deputy Secretary:	Mr. C. Dennis

57th ANNUAL REUNION

You are invited to attend this year's reunion dinner:

Date: Saturday 03 September 2011
Time: 18:30hrs for 19:30hrs (Bar opens at 17:30hrs)
Venue: The Victory Services Club
The Trafalgar Room
63/69 Seymour Street
LONDON
W2 2HF
Cost: £28.00 per person

(Please make cheques payable to "The Armourers' Association" in Stirling only)

***Travel Note:** The nearest underground station is Marble Arch. Leave by the Oxford St. North side exit, turn right and after walking about 150m turn right into Edgware Road. Turn left into Seymour Street at the first set of traffic lights, approximately 100m. Secure parking is available at Cumberland Place, approximately 400m away. A discount is available to those who stay overnight at the VSC. The congestion charge does not apply at the weekends.*



The Armourers' Association 57th Annual Reunion

Menu

* * *

Curry with condiments

Or

Meat Salad

Followed by

Tiramisu

&

Coffee/Tea/Mints

* * *

Security

Please be prepared to show VSC membership cards or prove identity at the door.

Dress

Gentlemen: Lounge Suits/Jacket and Association tie (available from the Secretary).

Ladies: Appropriate to the occasion.

Guests

Guests are limited to one per member.

LADIES ARE MOST WELCOME

Overnight Accommodation

Accommodation is available at the Victory Services Club for VSC members and non-members attending functions. Those wishing to stay the night should contact the Club.

Reservations: Phone: **020 7723 4474**;

Fax: 020 7724 1134; or e-mail:

res@vsc.co.uk

The cost is approximately £42.95 per night in the Old Club House, for a single standard room including breakfast for VSC members. Non-members are welcome, when attending functions, but must pay at the time of booking. En-suite, double and twin rooms are available.

Membership details are available at their web site: www.vsc.co.uk Single Annual Membership is currently £20.00.

Absent Friends

If you are unable to attend the dinner but would like to pass on a message to your friends please inform the secretary when replying. If you are able to provide up-to-date information for members who are out of touch with the Association please feel free to do so and please pass on the Association's contact details to them.



Assisted Attendance

Thanks to the generosity of our members, the Association is able to offer assistance to any member who is unable to attend the reunion for financial reasons. This assistance extends to all aspects of the reunion including travel, accommodation and the cost of the function. If any member feels they would be better able to attend the function accompanied by a guest, then assistance to defray the costs incurred by the guest will be considered. There is no restriction on the amount, with each request being considered on its own merits.

All Requests Are Treated in the Strictest Confidence

Please write to, or phone the secretary, if you feel we may be of help. This scheme is a reflection of the Association membership who wish to help. Many of the donations received specifically mention the Assisted Attendance scheme. It is felt by all that we would be letting down any fellow member who cannot attend for financial reasons.

Reunion Returns

Numbers attending this year's reunion **MUST** be finalised by **FRIDAY 22nd AUGUST 2011**

Please ensure you avoid disappointment by returning your reply to the secretary as soon as possible. The **MAXIMUM** number we are able to accommodate is 90. Places will be allocated on a **FIRST Come FIRST served** basis; so don't delay your reply.

Reply Form

The Reply Form is attached to the newsletter and in order to save on costs

replies will not be acknowledged unless specifically requested.

Return the forms to:

The Secretary
The Armourers' Association



President's Notes

It's time again to think about our reunion and as usual I would like to add my piece.



First of all I hope that those who attended last year did enjoy themselves and were able to meet old friends and maybe make new. Please don't ignore anyone who appears to be on his own; talk to him, he no doubt has an interesting tale to tell. Last year I wrote about today's soldier-tradesmen, how very professional they are, both in their trade and in their soldiering. I know it was not like that in earlier days.

My subject this year is 'trooping'. I have been struck by the comparison with the rapid troop movements now, with that of a few decades ago. For many years before WW2 there were two main seasons of the year when battalions or reinforcement drafts would be posted overseas to the many large garrisons abroad as well as many smaller outposts of the then, British Empire and protectorates. India, Egypt and the Far East were main destinations. Postings to India and Far East were normally five years, Egypt I think was three and West Africa (known as the white man's grave) was eighteen months. Transport was by



troopships of the Bibby line. Troopships were painted white with a broad blue band around the hull. There were many well-known names bandied about with awful stories about conditions on each. HMTs Oxfordshire, Devonshire, Dilwara and Nevassa among others. They were not large ships probably taking a thousand or more troops. Postings coincided with the trooping seasons usually spring and autumn.

My first experience of trooping, albeit at second hand, came from my father. In 1894 he sailed on the troopship HMT Dilwara to Bombay. His account of his travels came to me when I was a boy, but it was not until I read his written account many years later that I was able fully to appreciate it. My father, a gunner in the Royal Field Artillery, was leaving Hilsea Barracks, the same barracks that my brother and I spent our four-year apprenticeship 40 years later. He was destined to spend 12 years in India. From his account, conditions on board were basic, salt pork and ships biscuits were the main food. Fresh water (desalinated sea water) brackish to taste was in casks guarded by sentries and not available during the day. The Dilwara, with about 1400 troops on board was crowded. Life below decks was pretty uncomfortable. The mess deck was a large open space with long fixed tables and seating. Hooks in the steel of the deck above provided anchorage for the hammocks. When the hammocks were slung they were in close contact with their neighbour and one set swinging would create a chain reaction throughout the deck. The heat below was oppressive, water for washing was seawater and to cater for this, sea soap was issued. Needless to say it did not lather and still left your skin and hair sticky. The

Dilwara was a coal-fired steamship and it was necessary to refuel at Port Said. In port for three days, all hatches were closed except the coal hatches, an endless chain of natives walked up the gangplank with heavy baskets of coal on their shoulders, tipped them down the hatch and then went down the another gangplank to pick up another load. At the end of re-fuelling the ship was covered with a thin layer of coal dust and it was the soldiers' job to make it spick and span again.

Eric Stratford

Chairman's Notes

As we reach the mid-point in the year between re-union dinners, I'd just like to give a quick update on the Association's actions since this point last year. Those of you who are connected to the Internet will, I hope, have visited the website created by Bob Cotter the Association Secretary. The site is small but growing, it's you the membership that have the stories, tales and articles of note that will swell it's content. If you are not 'net savvy' then please write to Bob in the more traditional manner and he'll commit any scribbling's to the ether.



You will also note, that there are still two visits available to take this year; firstly to the West Mercia Police Firearms School and second to the Defence Academy at Shrivenham. The second trip is on a Friday owing to the inability of the Academy to host us on a weekend. I am hoping to secure a trip to the National Firearms Collection at the Royal Armouries, Leeds in 2012. This may be



a better option for those located further north.

As was agreed at the reunion dinner the Association is to host the best trainee Armourers to the dinner. The names have been provided by Roy Parsons at SEME, (I'm sure many of you remember Roy from his fine instruction in Support Weapons at SEME). I have written to both students but have yet to receive replies.

That's enough of my ramblings, clear you diaries and let's be seeing some newer faces at the dinner this year. The Association membership list is approximately 300 names and we get about 50 to the dinner, so that leaves 250 of you hiding in a cellar somewhere...

Andrew Briscoe

Secretary's Notes

It has now been 18 months since I took over as secretary and believe it or not I'm still enjoying it. New members are joining us on a regular basis and at the last count we have added 34 to our membership list. This is mostly due to searches on the web and our Association name popping up in the list.



Association Accounts.

A copy of the balance sheet for the period 1st January 2010 to 31st December 2010 is attached. Please indicate your acceptance, or otherwise, of these figures in the space provided on the reply form.

Association Website

Our address: www.ukarmourers.org.uk

The web site is regularly receiving over 1,000 unique visitors every month and it would be nice to start adding some more armourer related information, but that is dependent upon you providing items to put on the web site. So, come on, let's see what we can make it into.

Association Email Address

Email addresses are available to all of the Association members, so you can have your own unique email address "[yourname](mailto:yourname@ukarmourers.org.uk)"@ukarmourers.org.uk. The uptake has been slow so far, but there are plenty available for all.

Association Shop

The shop can be found on our website and sells Association memorabilia such as Ties, Plaques, Mugs, Glasses and Badges.

Bob Cotter

Visits 2011

This year our Chairman has worked hard to provide us with some interesting places to visit. The following have places remaining, so if you wish to attend let The Secretary know as soon as possible:

11 June 2011:

West Mercia Police, Firearms School

28 October 2011:

Gun Sheds, Shrivenham

London Proof House

Date: 19 February 2011

Host: Richard Mabbitt – Proof Master

On a cold wet Saturday morning members of the Association were welcomed to the London Proof House by Richard Mabbitt, Proof Master, and Stuart Ward, Proof Assistant, both are Association members.

Richard led by giving a brief outline of the history of the Proof House, the Rules of Proof and the Worshipful Company of Gunmakers including how after a large Negligent Discharge in their early years they were moved outside the City Walls. Then, on to the more interesting stuff, GUNS. With their audience very much in mind various British military weapons were brought out including the L1A1 (SLR) and the SA80 and LSW. To be granted a deactivation certificate, Stuart explained how weapons are modified, quite barbaric in the eyes of most Armourers.



Richard showed a couple of shotguns where things had gone wrong, including the end product of having a 20 Gauge cartridge in the bore of a 12 Gauge and then firing a 12G cartridge, not good for the person holding it, and the interesting tale of the pigeon shooter who laid down

his shotgun and on picking it up suffered a burst barrel with the next shot, the investigation produced much pondering and many theories until someone noticed a small amount of fur in the muzzle area, further investigation found it to be the remains of a field mouse, it was assumed that whilst the shotgun was laying down the unfortunate mouse found a nice snug warm hole in which to rest, he won't be doing that again! On to the proof bays where a 12G shotgun was set up for firing, Margaret Sidaway was invited to use the hi-tec remote firing system and duly pulled the bit of string. On to the rooms of court, the posh end of the proof house where a group picture was taken. Richard then did us proud by producing a couple of bottles of bubbly and proceeded to ply us all with it.

A vote of thank was given to Richard and Stuart for giving up their time to deliver an informative and entertaining visit. As seems to be the case in all of these visits time was all too short and a lot of questions were no doubt thought of on the journey home.

Once again our thanks are extended to Richard and Stuart for hosting an excellent morning at their workplace.

Pictures from the visit can be viewed on the Association web site.

Warminster Visit

Date: 16 April 2011

Host: Peter Laidler

Once again I have to thank Peter Laidler and the Curator of the SASC Weapon Collection for allowing us to visit the

Collection. Not for the first time was the Chairman all excited like a child with free rein in a sweet shop!

Peter Laidler talked about different aspects and items in the collection, and didn't repeat himself from what he discussed last time. This is both a measure of the depth of Peter's knowledge and the breadth of the collection.



The pair of rifled flintlock pistols on display in the Pistol Room are among the very few (if any) that can be proved to have belonged to Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. They were given Dr A Arnott, the MO of the 20th Foot, who treated Napoleon during his second exile shortly before his death on St Helena. Dr Arnott passed them to Colonel Sam South, the 20th Regiment's CO. Via Col South's son, Lt Col South, the pistols ended up being presented to the School Of Musketry in 1874. They have been property of the SASC ever since.



The selection of Sten guns in the picture demonstrates the unusual sources of this basic but extremely effective wartime weapon. At the top of the photo is a Lanchester SMG, this was not usually found in Army service but was in widespread use with the Royal Navy who no doubt enjoyed having a weapon with some nice brass on it – note the magazine housing. Next is a Sten Mk1, produced by the Singer Sewing Machine Company. The gun at the bottom of the photo is also a Sten Mk1, this one having been produced in a fridge factory. In the middle are two examples of the Sten Mk2. The Mk2 was the most widely produced version of the Sten, though much rarer was the Mk2 (S), the S standing for Silenced. This particular gun, like many in the collection has a story behind it. The Mk2 (S) pictured was used in the failed assignment attempt on SS Chief of Bohemia, *Obergruppenfuhrer* Reinhard Heydrich, aka 'the butcher of Prague' on 27th May 1942. Unfortunately the weapon jammed during the attack; so it was returned to the factory to determine why.

Peter Laidler has just written a rather large and authoritative book about the Sten Gun. Let's hope he can be



persuaded to offer a (signed?) copy as a raffle prize at the dinner.

For those that missed out, Peter has agreed to host us again at the same time next year.

Self-Loading Rifle



AQMS Clem Hoyle (Hilsea 1935) supervising an A/T Sgt firing an X8E1, on the ranges at Arborfield circa 1959. Joe O'Brien believes that he is the one firing the weapon, but who is the instructor? If anyone can identify him, please contact the secretary with the information.

The following letter was received from **Arthur Maddock (Hilsea 1937)**. He has also provided some drawings, but space doesn't permit publication here. See the web site for more information.

"The rifle being fired by the AT Sgt is in fact the X8E1 (short top cover and iron sights).

In the early fifties a contract was placed with the FN Company in Belgium to produce about 6 or 7 thousand rifles for British troop trials. My memory is getting a wee bit rusty so don't rely on my

figures too much. I think it was 5000 type A and 1000 type B. They were designated X8E1 and X8E2 respectively. A few were also produced with a different change lever permitting the rifle to fire fully automatic, these were designated X8E5. All three types were engraved on the trigger housing with the same change lever settings.

The main trials were completed using the X8E1 and X8E2. For differences see page 13. During these trials it was found that when the rifle was fired on full automatic only the first shot hit the target the remaining shots of the burst went high right which was considered a waste of ammunition. The conditions for this shoot were, 30 yards standing, Fig 11 Target.

The trials in the UK were finished by 1956 and the British specification settled for the L1A1 SLR to be produced by the ROF. At that time I was working at Scales Branch REME at the Royal Dockyard Woolwich. We had just finalised the scales for the SLR when I was put on a draft to form the Commonwealth Brigade Workshop in Malaya. I was just starting to get my knees brown again when the X8 Rifles caught up with me in Ipoh. The troops seemed to believe that the 7.62 bullet would penetrate the average rubber tree and still kill.

Courses on the X8 Rifle were organised at Command Workshop in KL and I was soon on my way down there complete with all my Scales Branch info' which included all the domestic part numbers allocated to the X8. At the end of 1958 I came home to the UK but I left my notes with the Armourer that took over my job at Brigade. So today I have to guess at numbers ordered on that first contract.
IT WAS 55 YEARS AGO"



1896: FORMATION OF THE ARMY ORDNANCE CORPS

By Peter Winfield

(Peter is researching a number of military ancestors from 1750 to date. One of them served in the Corps of Ordnance Artificers in the 1890s)

This is an extract from Peter's research paper, which is to be posted on the Association's web site:

<http://www.ukarmourers.org.uk>

In the last years of the nineteenth century the Ordnance Services were subjected to drastic reforms. In 1893 a War Office committee was appointed to review the system of equipment maintenance. Its recommendations were brought into effect in July 1896, when a new Ordnance Department and Corps were authorised. It brought together a number of units, which had previously been separated. Three of those units are very briefly discussed below.

Corps of Armourer Sergeants

An extract discussing the Corps, from a book identified by John Ashwell (Arborfield 53B), was published in 2008 in issue 15 of the Association News Letter. The Corps is discussed in detail in the research paper.

Corps of Ordnance Artificers

The Corps of Ordnance Artificers was formed in 1882. Although engaged solely on artillery work, they formed part of the Ordnance Store Corps and wore its uniform. They held the rank of Sergeant.

Their numbers increased from establishment strength of 50 in 1882 to 103 in 1892.

Armament Artificers

In 1893 the Corps of Ordnance Artificers was dissolved and its personnel re-designated as Armament Artificers in the Royal Artillery, which uniform was now worn. They, too, held the rank of Sergeant.

Their duties, both at home and abroad, were connected with the repair, etc., of material in charge of the Royal Artillery: the repair, fitting, and maintenance of war department material, including ordnance, and the charge and repair of hydraulic machinery, steam engines, boilers, pumps, and electric lighting machinery used with guns.

Their numbers increased from establishment strength of 113 in 1893 to 142 in 1895.

Inspector of Ordnance Machinery

Armament Artificers were under the orders of Inspectors of Ordnance Machinery.

Formed in 1885, three mechanical engineers were given special commissions in the Royal Artillery with the rank of Honorary Lieutenant. Their task was to maintain the steam-operated mountings of 100-ton guns at Malta and Gibraltar and two 81-ton guns at Dover.

Their numbers increased to nineteen, of whom six were serving in India, by 1896.

Short Bibliography

Forbes, Major General A, *A History of the Army Ordnance Services, Volumes I & II*, London, Medici Society, 1929



Goodenough, WH, & Dalton, JC, *The Army Book for the British Empire*, London, HMSO, 1893

Kennett, BB & Tatman, JA, *Craftsmen of the Army*, London, Leo Cooper, 1970

UK Parliament, Hansard, Commons Sitting of 1882, 1893; 1894

Armourer Sgts



Armourer Sgts Tunic on display in the Sherwood Foresters Regimental Museum in Nottingham Castle.

Records state that it belonged to Armourer Sergeant F. Milner of 2nd. Volunteer Battalion Notts & Derby Regt. 1902 – 1908. He was a highly proficient marksman and the two medals on the right breast are for shooting.

It is believed that Colonels of Volunteer Battalions were allowed to take on their own Armourers trained in the factories where the arms were made. It is possible that Sgt Milner was one of the last of this era.

The tunic shows the Regimental Badges of the Sherwood Foresters (Notts &

Derbyshire Regiment) with the Hammer & Tongs above the chevrons.

Details & photo provided by John Henshaw (Hon Member)

Obituaries

Sadly we must say our last farewell to the following Armourers who have passed on since the last edition of the newsletter.

Roger Carew (Letter from his Daughter)

Nick Farrant (email from Lloyd Le Tiec)

Doug Boucher, Arborfield 43B

Paul Bennett (Cfn Magazine)

Michael (Reg) Penney (Cfn Magazine)

Nick Farrant

Kenneth Farrant writes:

It is with deep regret and sadness that I report the untimely death of my father George Charles (Nick) Farrant.

Nick was born in Lewisham, South London on 10th February 1925, the eldest of two sons; he attended Catford Junior School before moving to the Duke of York military school in Dover as a boarder. It was at this time that everybody called him 'Nick'. At the age of fourteen, Nick joined the Army in 1939 into 'boy service' and trained as an Apprentice Armourer initially in Hilsea, but the area sustained heavy bombing



so was moved to Arborfield to finish his training. On completion of his training Nick signed on for 22 years 'man service' and joined REME. His first posting was to an undisclosed London unit which saw him develop his trade skills working on all sorts of small arms & machine guns. It was during this posting that he met the love of life and future wife 'Trudie'.

In 1944 saw Nick being posted to India and serving on the North West Frontier, now known as Afghanistan. During this long separation from Trudie, obviously the heart grew fonder, so when the opportunity arose for some home leave, Nick & Trudie got married in December 1946. Nick returned to India until his next posting to Singapore in 1948. This time Trudie was allowed to accompany him on this tour, during which time their only son Kenneth was born. They had a long and happy 55 years of marriage together before Trudie passed away in 2001.

After the Far East tour, this saw Nick being posted back to the UK and then had various unit postings around southern England. Further postings saw Nick in (BAOR) Germany stationed in Minden, Hohne, Leibenau, Duisburg and Hildesheim, and then a 'cushy' posting in 1962 to Cyprus followed. This was followed by a very short posting to Wales with a Guided Weapons unit, having no experience of GW equipment he was finally re-posted to Lulworth, Dorset to join the Armoured Trials and Development Unit and worked on the Chieftain tank which was under trials at the time. Nick & Trudie liked the area so much they finally settled in Poole, Dorset. On completion of his military career, Nick joined the Marley Roof Tile factory as the works superintendent and

stayed with them for 23 years until his final retirement.

Nick had many interests and hobbies during his military career such as competitive rifle shooting, swimming, water polo, rugby, Tug of War and he excelled at cooking and his Christmas cakes were legendary.

He was an active and stalwart member of the Bournemouth Branch REME Association and the RBL Broadstone and had great pleasure in attending the Armourers Reunion each year. Clearly, he will be greatly missed by his many friends and particularly his son Kenneth who in later years father and son were inseparable as they travelled the world together visiting many places of interest.

Help Wanted

Mike Homard, who is known to some of you from previous requests, needs any tools; gauges; E.M.E.R's; A.E.S.P's; I.S.P.L's and user handbooks that you might have lying around. In addition, *anything* else related to our respected trade, including ordnance weapon related items, which would all be gratefully received. Please contact the Secretary in the first instance.

Quote Of The Day

Life is like a hot bath. It feels good while you're in it, but the longer you stay in, the more wrinkled you get!

Anon