Dear Everyone,

*Ici nous allons encore*, as Mr Semmens never taught us to say. This year we have contributions from several faithful correspondents and a couple of new contacts and we even have not one but two girls for Page Three. Bring this issue to the next reunion, get them to autograph it and in years to come it will be worth serious money on Floggit!

Our two new contacts are Lesley Baker and John, now Jon, Laver. Lesley has known about us for a while but is only recently well enough to feel up to writing so it is doubly good to hear from her. Jon was found in outer space by John Hodgskin as the story tells.

John M' has evidently had a very exciting year. Not content with an earth-moving encounter with Pearl he has recently made contact with Earth from half-way up a ladder and cracked a hip in the process. Maybe we will get the full story next year.

I am sorry to have to report that David Salter has died, apparently quite suddenly. He caught up with the 49ers last year and had a piece in last years' newsletter.

Now that we are all super-sensitive about personal data I should tell you what I intend to do about it. I have probably the complete list of all known 49ers both postal and e-addresses, as well as phone numbers. I do not think I should pass this on to anyone who asks for it but I am happy to forward any messages and leave it to the recipient to reply if he or she wishes.

Several people have never offered any information about their doings. I will keep them on the list and forward mail if necessary. Who knows? One day they might tell us about their knighthood, or their prison sentence! If you are in contact with any of them do apply a bit of pressure to get them to confess. By the way, I had no response to the request for names for the team photos. Is our collective memory that bad?

I hope you find this fun reading. Try it as an alternative to the Queen's Speech on Christmas Day; it will be more exciting. With good wishes for a Joyful Christmas and a Peaceful New Year

JR
Our roaming correspondent has just extinguished the volcano.
Here they are: memories and confessions for 2010. Happy reading.

Pearl Rider (Jemison-Smith)

My news for 2010 is not exactly exciting, no trips or falls!!!. I have been in the process of getting a divorce after 33 years, not at all fun, still I am hanging in there. I am so grateful for my health, - mostly good, my mind,- mostly clear, my wonderful friends and family, my home and garden and my 12 year old Jaguar that is keeping me poor. No memories or funny stories of HCHS. I did go there didn't I? LOL. Sending love to all the fellow classmates and wishing everyone Happy Holidays and a healthy New Year.

Pearl mentioned in her covering letter that her grandson Scott had just finished training to become an embassy marine guard and will be stationed in the US Embassy in Cairo! She gave this photo the title “My Grandsons”, apparently she has three.
Greetings from Taupo NZ where we are into our summer and it's time to go swimming in the lake which makes a refreshing change from the hot pools at the leisure centres.

Uppermost in most people's minds at this time is the mining tragedy in Greymouth in the South Island. We are getting hourly reports and it does not sound good.

I would love to get home to England one more time so I keep on buying Lotto.

Hilary also included a card showing a platform from which people do bungee jumps. This is a nearby attraction and they occasionally go to watch. She says it is scary enough watching, let alone giving it a go. At $120 a go that seems an easy decision.

And these are Hilary's memories:

It seems so long ago but I remember endless hockey matches, which I loved, even in the freezing cold.

The Choral Society and singing a solo (A Little Child on this Earth has been Born) We sang the Magnificat, very difficult for young voices.

Mr Leadbetter and obnoxious physics – (not what most people remember him for, JR)

"Baggy" Allen and her healthy hints

The gorgeous Dilly Milly Meacock crying her eys out at the death of the King

Mr Thompson who I thought looked like a Roman God

Mr Hicks(?) who knitted while he told Gill England and myself the facts of life

Colleen Cook, the secretary, whose brother Bill married my sister. Colleen is still alive but not in good health

I hope everyone has a Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year
How time has flown since our newsletter! I hope you are all well as we are and still enjoying life. I am feeling rather bored at present as our caravanning has come to a halt till next year. We had an interesting year. Last December, en route to Vilanova, we were seriously mugged on toll road outside Barcelona by five young men, who forced us to the side of the road. We nearly lost our caravan and Ford transit but I hung on bravely to my seat and belt while David tried to beat them off. They got my bag with EVERYTHING in it. Stupidly I had everything in there- lesson learnt!! We survived but are not going there this winter, hence the boredom.

We are visiting Paris from 22/12 on an eight day coach trip. Do fellow Forty-niners remember our school trip there? Great fun! Philip Skeens accompanied us. We then have four weeks planned in January and February of 2011 to Cyprus. It will be nice to see the "ruins".

From February to May this year we had there months in New Zealand; a great time, but not as exciting as our trip to Australia. Once again we hired a campervan and visited both islands, also Stewart Island off southern end, a hairy boat ride from the mainland. Two oceans meet there and its always bad, but was extra rough when we visited. We took a trip through the rain forest to a beach and watched four wild kiwis feeding on beach in the moonlight. One was pregnant and the egg was visible bulging in her chest. These kiwis are different from the mainland ones and are quite large. Most NZers never see one, so we felt highly privileged.

Our flight in an 8-seater plane over Mount Cook was not enjoyed quite as much as I was terrified, but the scenery was superb. We met a lovely couple onboard the plane and I am in touch with them by email regularly. We also walked on White Island (with guides), a living erupting volcano (see the photo), very smelly, hot and steamy!! We watched whales and dolphins from boats; on one trip we had approximately 300 dolphins - some with young, - swimming round our boat, so close you could touch them except that it is not allowed. They looked right into our eyes, so graceful. The water was freezing and rough, I was considered too old to swim with them. The young women in the water said we saw more from the boat, but it was a once in a lifetime experience for them. While on east coast of South Island,
camping three metres from the sea, we were woken at 6 a.m. one morning and had to move the camper up into the nearest small town, as a tsunami was forecast. The hospitality of the local fire-station was really great, - so were the hunky firemen. They do not have a system like ours in UK; they are all volunteers. Luckily the day passed with only a foot higher tides, but further up the coast there was a little flooding. While in this area we had a wild walk along a beach and came upon huge sea-lions sleeping in the dunes. We had to be very careful because they are quite dangerous. We took a high wire gondola ride in Queenstown, also another one near Christchurch, scary!! I did chicken out of the balloon ride, my courage failed me there. But we saw so many wonderful sights, birds that NZ people never see on Stewart Island and in a special reserve on North Island, all so tame you could almost touch them. The huge flightless birds were really strange, walking round the picnic tables, no feeding allowed. We saw 90+ fairy penguins come ashore after a day fishing in the ocean. The babes were outside the nests, waiting for their supper. The noise they made was unbelievable, all fat and fluffy.

I did not get to snog a Maori they were not very friendly, but saw some magnificent male legs in short shorts!! They wear their shorts all year round on North Island, very laid back country, interesting and scenically beautiful in places. I don't think we will go back, I cannot face the plane journey. David caught a water infection on way home and nearly died, so most of the summer has been spent getting him fit. W are both fatter than last year's re-union, and I have a lot more wrinkles, which can be seen clearly on the photo taken on White Island with the volcano spewing out hot mist!!

Some HCHS Memories:-
Miss Wolf (later Mrs Francis) urging me on every PE day to get over "The Box", I never once got ON it! I could climb the rope to the ceiling, my only claim to fame sportwise! I was rubbish at sport.

Mr Weaver with his tales of his past life, very entertaining, especially how he met his wife. I always enjoyed his history lessons.

Scary Mr. Baldock when we were at the Towers,

Mr. Jennings also scared me.

The Choral Society.

Mr Cook, he was quite 'cute' for a teacher.
Miss Allen with the frogs for a reproduction lesson; nasty things, jumping everywhere, but a good excuse for us all to mess about.

Pat is still in contact with Caroline Faint who is struggling with Parkinson's Disease, and finds it difficult to remember things from the past. Carol lives by herself which must be very difficult. Pat says that they chat from time to time by phone about their many years out dancing, sneaking into the jug and bottle of pubs for a Babycham, (until caught by her older brother), flirting on Dovercourt seafront, even in winter, and many other happy memories. Carol wishes everyone a Happy Christmas and would like to hear from anyone. Her phone no. is 01363 773141, address 21 Greenway, Crediton, Devon EX17 3LP. (I have permission to give this info.)

Liz Peck (Elizabeth Walters)

Thought I'd better do an email on Turkey before the next holiday!! That will be end of July to Oberammergau and the Rhine, by train.

I just loved what I saw of Turkey but it was all a rush as it was organized, primarily, for Cousin Ann, from New Zealand, to go to Anzac Cove on the Gallipoli peninsula. We were away seven days and were travelling four of those. We flew to Istanbul and did what the guide books tell you and took the metro and the tram into the city. It worked like a dream. Our hotel, booked by Trailfinders, was in a great position, near the ferry across the Bosphorus and close to The Blue Mosque, the Aya Ssophia and Topkapi Palace. We managed a "there and back" trip on the ferry on the first evening. Then, on Day 2, we visited the three sights and the Spice Bazaar. We met an Australian young lady, married to a Turkish man who kept a souvenir shop, who told us the best places to eat.

Day 3, off we wnt to Canakkale by bus. What a long journey! We should have pre-booked the bus, but the hotel and the info. place said there was no need. This resulted in us being at the bus station, over on the north side of the Bosphorus, by 8.30 am, only to be told no bus until 12 noon. Anyway, the bus was fine ..two drivers and two attendants who gave us tea, water and cake on the way. Tea being black but Liptons. Actually, I developed a taste for Turkish "Cay", served in
glasses. This seems to be delivered to all workers by waiters from cafes, every half hour. The hotel in Canakkale was fine (booked on internet).

Day 4 was our "Hassle Free Tour", led by an Australian who enjoyed telling everyone how useless the Brits were. I'm sure the British in charge DID make stupid decisions but could have done without being told, but I was the only Brit on the bus. We only visited the Aus. and New Zealand monuments in the centre of the peninsula. Long hot day (35deg C).

Day 5 We relaxed a bit and walked around the town. Then, Day 6, back on the bus. One of the drivers was the same as when coming and he shook my hand and said how lovely to see us again. Back to same hotel as before where we had a better room. When we had left the hotel, I'd said "See you in 3 days" and the receptionist had said, with a smile "Insh Allah", so his wish was granted. I found that, other than shopkeepers and waiters, very few spoke English but everyone was helpful, friendly and polite. I did find, by chance, one man who spoke French.

Friends of my sister, who have been to Turkey 43 times and have just retuned from a week there doing bus trips, to far flung places, said that the temp was 45 deg when they were south. They don't do "seaside". Teatime now, Elizabeth

Liz again!

Since Turkey I have been to Oberammergau for a week, by train, with the firm Treyn. As the Passion Play only happens every 10 years, I thought I'd better go this year. When we were a caravanning family living in Germany, we visited the village at a non-play time so it had been lurking in my mind for years to go. As we stayed in Partenkirchen for two nights and bussed in to Ober for lunch and the performance, we also had time in the week to go to other places- the Rhine valley and Remagen (of bridge fame). The play was overwhelming, as you would expect... 100's of the residents take part every day for months. I don't know who minds the babies!

August was busy as my eldest was getting married and middle daughter and family came over from America for a couple of weeks. In November, Alice (a friend) and I booked to have four nights in Seville, four nights in Cordoba and four nights in Granada. We booked flights
and hotels with Trailfinders, as usual, and took local buses between towns. We walked our feet sore but it was great.

Nothing for January, as yet! I have this wish to go to France again but, who knows?

Lesley Baker  (Lesley Oakley)

Sorry not to have contacted you earlier, but I have been seriously ill with meningitis and septicaemia since November and can only now see well enough to write. I do not have e-mail but my son-in-law is quite happy to take any messages etc. I have read the newsletter and enjoyed the contributions and photos. My life has not been as exciting as some, but I have enjoyed the journey.

I married a farmer in Ramsey and we had a daughter, who in turn married a farmer's son. My husband was a tenant farmer of Essex County Council but he sadly died in 1978, leaving my daughter and me with an uncertain future. I applied to Essex Council to take over the tenancy in my own right but, not having any female tenants on their books, they were rather reluctant. After a very daunting interview, they decided to give me the chance to run the farm. It was then I found out I did not know as much about farming as I thought, but with help from some good neighbours and much hard graft and anguish I made a go of it.

With a change of Council policy a couple of years ago, I had the chance to purchase the farm as sitting tenant. This all went through OK so I can end my days here on the farm where I have spent most of my working life

Josie Goodwin  (Jo Booth)

Hello everyone, hope you've all had a good year. I guess lots of you have been exploring far and wide, but as I'm not a happy traveller my furthest journey has been to Guernsey- which was lovely. Lots of bee-keeping for us here in Gosport, Alan and I have taken the local Association stall to various Fairs and Days, spreading the word about
bees (and selling our honey). More sunshine this summer so we've harvested more honey.

I found some 'snaps' taken during our last term at HCHS, seemingly it was sunny every day in July 1954! Here's one of Jan Pennick, Hilary Harte, Ann Howlett, Robin Hurst and Margaret Downes playing Monopoly on the hockey field; did we do any lessons at all in the final weeks? Can't believe we were allowed to sit around ALL the time!

Loved the photos of the Choral Society; I fought hard against joining that as I just cannot sing in tune! Of course, Mr. Wellburn won! 'Of course you'll join. You can't do Algebra either but you still go to the class, don't you'. No argument against that!

Hope you're all well, very best wishes for a happy Christmas and a peaceful 2011.

Anne Heath  (Kemp Luck)

Another busy year with exhibitions at the Guildhall and the Harwich Festival. This year we had an exhibition about local schoolchildren who were evacuated in 1940 and had an excellent response from former pupils. Quite a good lot from former High School people with some turning up for the exhibition in person- I have never seen so many elderly folk with sticks surging up the stairs into the Council Chamber where we have the exhibitions! Several mini reunions were taking place and a good time seemed to be had by all. For Heritage weekend in September we also included the centenary of the opening of HCHS-complete with an original programme, several photos, one old school cap and a tie!

In case anyone is likely to be visiting Harwich next year, it is the centenary of the Electric Palace cinema so our Harwich Festival exhibition will cover cinemas in the district over the past 100 years-including not only the Palace but the Empire, Regent and Regal- any memories, photographs, etc. gratefully received. If anyone is interested just contact me and I can provide dates and nearer the time the Festival programme of events...

On the family front, Graham and I celebrated our Golden Wedding in September with a select small group of family and close friends. I used
to think 50 years was a long time, but now it doesn't seem very long at all!

I hope the Egyptian trip will go well - doubtless we will hear all about it from Elizabeth (Peck) in due course.

Joyce Wayland (Gooding)

As a member of Dovercourt Choral Society, I took part in a concert at Snape Maltings, near Aldeburgh, in May. Choirs from Dovercourt, Witham and Ipswich (a total of 150 singers) came together to perform Handel’s *Israel in Egypt*, with the Colchester Philharmonic. That was a fantastic experience. We had two successful concerts during the Harwich Festival of the Arts week, and are now rehearsing for our concert in November which will be opera choruses.

It was my Mum’s 101st birthday in August. She is still fairly “with it” although getting rather forgetful and slightly confused sometimes, but one can still hold an intelligent conversation with her. She went into residential care in February, and is very happy there.

I’m still painting and have been fortunate to sell paintings at every exhibition that I’ve entered this year, so that’s very nice. I’ve also been given a commission which has come about through quite a coincidence. My daughter Mary is a nurse in Truro, way down in Cornwall, and has one of my paintings hanging up in her office. It is of Wrabness Shore with the Royal Hospital School at Holbrook across the river in the background. One of the surgeons saw it and said that was where he went to school and could I do one like it for him! Small world!

I have also been busy doing the usual things such as walking with the U3A walking group and going on trips with the nature and wildlife group, one of which was a visit to Minsmere in April where I heard a bittern booming and some people actually saw it.

For the walk in May, it had been arranged that we would take the ferry across to Shotley but, on arrival at Ha’penny Pier, we discovered that the ferry was undergoing repair. However, a very kind member of the local sailing club happened to have his yacht moored at the pier that morning and offered to take us over. So 14 of us clambered aboard, sitting where we could find a space, and away we went. Good thing the health and safety police weren’t looking. We enjoyed a walk around the
Shotley peninsula, getting back to the jetty at 4pm where, much to our relief, our hero was waiting to bring us back to Harwich.

I’m sure those of you who no longer live here will remember Bobbit’s Hole – the piece of wasteland west of the Royal Oak Public House and opposite the Royal Oak football ground? It was purchased by the Harwich Society some years ago and has been turned into a wonderful nature reserve. A few of us from the U3A Nature and Wildlife group were given a guided tour recently. The pond is still there and, even in the driest weather, water still runs into it continuously from a spring supposedly situated somewhere in the area of Manor Lane, and under both the football ground and the Main Road. We were surprised at the amount of wildlife that is attracted to the spot, including Muntjac deer, believe or not.

Having recently joined the History Group of the local U3A, I am collaborating with three other members, one of them being Elizabeth Walters (Peck), to research into the Anglo-Saxons, and have learnt more in the last month than I ever did with Pop Weaver! (Not his fault, I should add). It’s fascinating.

Season’s Greetings and Best Wishes for a Happy New Year to everyone.

Colin Hines

It is now a little over a year since we moved to Lymington from the St. Albans area. I retired in August, 2008 and we were undecided about our future but did decide that, after living in a house which three children had left, down sizing was a possibility. In July 2009 we thought about the coast, or New Forest and decided to look at Lymington which combines both. After two day's here and looking at a dozen houses we offered on one, put ours on the market, and within five weeks had sold, bought and moved. It was strange for many months as we both seemed to think this holiday must soon finish and we would have to return home.

Much time is spent either walking the coastal path or in the Forest. There are plenty of watering holes in both areas. I also have the use of a R.I.B (rubber inflateable boat), the sort of boat used as an in-shore lifeboat. In a very short time we can be in Yarmouth. Isle of Wight for
lunch. I have never been stopped on the way home and checked for drink driving. We have been very pleased with our move, made many new friends and to date been visited by 14 couples from Hertfordshire.

2010 is the first year in forty that I have not been climbing. Stella claims ignorance when I ask what has happened to all my climbing gear but I have a suspicion that it went to a charity shop like many other things before we moved. It may be a good thing for it was becoming harder in latter years. Does anybody with a knowledge of Geology know if mountains have become steeper during the last ten years, or is it down to climate change, which seems to be blamed for many natural phenomenons? All things considered it has been a very good year for the Hines family.

I do not know about mountains but I do know that miles get longer in direct proportion to the number completed. So the fourth mile is four times the length of the first. JR

John Hodgskin reports that after working in computers for 33 years it took him a few years before he was persuaded to buy one for himself. When he eventually did so he began browsing the internet for lots of topics, including for names he knew years ago. He tried "John Laver" and got a hit in the Friends Reunited website. He contacted JL who responded with a CV which I think was probably only intended to be read by JL. I wrote to JL and invited him to send us a piece and we now have the official version.

Otherwise JH says that apart from getting a new car and this PC in March, I done nothing worthy of report. I am not sure that I believe that but it's good to have just a couple of lines JR.

Jon Laver

Hello 49’ers here’s your missing biography (actually I’m a 51’er- but that’s no excuse!)

The reason that I was uncontactable until only a few weeks ago is simply that at the end of the A-level exams, I went home- to London! During my time in the 6th form, my parents moved from Dovercourt to London, (William Thackeray’s old house, 16 Young Street,
Kensington). So I was in digs to complete my A-Levels. I actually finished them with severe glandular fever (aka “kissing disease”- no I don’t remember which girl gave it to me!) with a high pyrexia. When I managed to get myself home, I was immediately rushed into an isolation hospital for three weeks!

If I’d had more presence of mind, I’d have taken some contact addresses with me when I departed HCHS. As an only child I didn’t make friends easily, so only a couple of people knew how to contact me in London. Thanks to my old friend John Hodgkin, I’ve now been retrieved into the company of 49’ers.

I joined your august company in 1951 from Dunstable Grammar School. I passed the Bedfordshire Scholarship exam (they still had them then!) and went to DGS, the top boys and part-boarding grammar in the area. A school of very long tradition indeed (Tudor stained glass and panelling in the hall) and a terrific “atmosphere”. Dual entry classes, but no such thing as “A” & “B” streams, and the first year did two years of conventional schooling in one. This was hard work, especially Latin, French and German, for six days a week, but was great for exam results.

HCHS came as a terrific shock, gone was the school atmosphere, no more rugby football and there were GIRLS in the same form! I hated it from day one, and never really accepted that I couldn’t go back to DGS as a boarder. Worse still, because of lack of space, I was dumped into the B-stream. Somewhat of a culture shock to say the least. I never really got to like HCHS! The head was a “dinosaur” and few of the staff were any good at teaching. (The editor is not responsible for opinions expressed in this publication, JR)

When I’d moved back to London, I had already decided that I needed to get my National Service out of the way first. I knew that I was immature (that “only child” syndrome again!) and wouldn’t do well at uni unless I matured quite a bit. So I went into the Royal Signals first. Six months and four days at Catterick (that’s six months and two days too long for the place!) for training. I was then posted to the War Office to look after secure communications there. When my CO found out where I lived, he sent me to live at home as it was quicker to be called out from there than from camp! So much for two years National Service!
After doing some part-time work on my maths, I was demobilised and went straight into Imperial College to do an honours BSc, Physics with Electronics. It’s a terrific place to be, and only a short walk from home.

I started work with GEC Hirst Research Centre helping to design a homing torpedo and other military projects. Getting a bit idealistic (“Ah youth! A wonderful thing, but wasted on the young!”) I opted to go into Medical Electronics. Very interesting and worthwhile, but poorly paid. Eventually, I got fed up with commuting between Surrey and central London. As it happens just four miles away there was a world-famous research laboratory belonging to the old CEGB. Hearing about it from a church bell ringing friend who worked there, it sounded pretty good (it was). I successfully applied for a post there, and stayed on the same site until I retired. It was like being well paid to do a full-time hobby!

The CEGB encouraged me to do a part-time MSc to further my career (they were good like that). But in 1999 the GEGB was split up (a privatisation too far, Maggie!) and I ended up with National Grid, nowhere near as happy a place to work in, but I was more or less stuck with it.

By now I was married with three children, but it wasn’t working out at all well. I took up Scouting as a Leader, at least it got me out of the house along with my bell ringing. Having long-term interests in both Astronomy and Geology, I decided to further them by part-time study with the Open University and eventually got an honours BSc in Earth Sciences. I also developed my serious interest in swimming by becoming first an Advanced Teacher, then an ASA Tutor (more excuses to be out of the house!).

The writing was on the wall for the demise of any R&D in National Grid in 2000, so I applied for an early retirement deal. It went through very quickly and generously indeed. Many of my colleagues waited it out and ended up with the statutory minimum deal! One of my last actions was to set up yet another research contract with Cardiff Uni. Eight days into retirement I moved to Cardiff to take up the relevant research fellowship! It also got me out of thirty years of Holy Padlock (the children were all adults by now, so no problems there).

I also became the Open University local science tutor, a fascinating and very rewarding experience. I’m now remarried (Lucy is a radiographer and quite a bit younger than me). The OU has a richly-deserved reputation for re-arranging marriages!
We live on a hilltop in rural South Wales, I still do some tutoring in Physics and Maths for the local A-Level students, the skies are really dark for astronomy, I’m still Scouting (in spite of my age) but a bad back forced me to abandon bell ringing, and I’m afraid that field geology is going the same way soon.

And that, I’m afraid, is all I’m prepared to admit to!

Jon Laver

P S Can you still pick up cordite on the beach?

---

John McManus

Just a line to let you know that I have newly returned from my grand tour of umpteen National Parks in the west of USA. As promised I did meet up with Pearl, who has not changed a bit since we last saw her at the first reunion. We had a couple of very enjoyable evenings out, eating firstly in a real hacienda complete with guitars on the go in the background and secondly in an Argentinian restaurant quite near my hotel. Despite some back problems she was in very good spirits. There will have been a lot of itchy ears as we reminisced wildly over folk at the school and things that happened, many of which should not have done so.

It turns out that Pearl is really very highly thought of in that part of the world, having not only been involved with developing the nursing of the HIV and AIDs folk, but having been lobbying on behalf of the gay communities both at California state level and also in Washington. I gather that she even has park benches dedicated to her, and that is a fair bit of recognition. However, she was not bragging about it, rather than using it to show that she was still very active for good causes, and I am sure she would be well able to argue her corner.

Soon after we separated on the second evening (she drove off in her Mini-Cooper) my travelling companion, a retired Church of Scotland minister, and I had retired to our twin beds (cheaper to share a room by £700 each on this trip) when a double bang rang out. I immediately said "That was an earthquake". We were only a mile or so off the San Andreas Fault, so it would not have been entirely surprising. He claimed that I had fallen out of bed and was imagining things. Almost immediately the phone rang. Pearl on the other end, "Did the Earth
It was a 5.9 quake on the fault but the epicentre was 140 miles away. Somehow it made a very fitting climax to the trip.

**John McManus** responds to a request for more on the headhunters

It was all really the fault of the Nigerians. One of my colleagues while a research student in London had become a bit of an expert on the Nigerian granites and the metal ores associated with them. When the Biafran war broke out he was working in the danger area and was advised to leave, pronto. Jobs were scarce but the state of Brunei advertised for someone to start up a geological survey (Pejabat Kajibumi) He applied and got the job. There are no granite-related rocks or ores in the state, instead it consisted of the sort of rocks I was interested in, so the next I knew was a letter from Bob saying that if I was passing I should drop in and tell him all about sediments. As luck would have it I was due to speak at a conference in Bangkok a couple of months later, and immediately changed plans to pay him a visit.

Brunei is a bit smaller than Essex, had a population of about 180,000, slightly more than Colchester, and was pretty wealthy as Shell was paying oil royalties. Initially we visited all known rock exposures and accessible coasts in the jungle-covered state. At the end of this we decided that oil might be found in ten rock formations rather than the four previously admitted by Shell. A letter was concocted to the Finance Minister indicating that he might contact Shell for their reactions.

The second fortnight we spent in the jungle visiting tributaries of the Temborong River in East Brunei. There was no record of geologists having been into that particular area so we were doing primary mapping. There is nothing more exciting for a geologist than to be the first scientist to meet up with any set of rocks, and these were right up my street. I now know something of how the astronauts felt on touching the moon rocks for the first time. Neck hair standing, tingly spine and rapid heart beat.

Early one morning we set off by small boat through the mangrove swamps, running out of fuel part way, only to paddle round the corner to the nearest filling station on stilts. Everyone's outboards need refuelled in this area. After lunch at an Iban longhouse we travelled upriver in a prau, a boat about the size of a punt, two geologists, support staff of four Ibans and all out gear. Merak, the interpreter, had
been to secondary school, Laju, a heavily tattooed former head hunter and tracker for the army, controlled the boat, and one of the others carried the hammers and specimens and the other looked after the food and drinks. As the monsoon was late the water was still low so we spent time in the water pushing the craft upstream. We covered 20 miles or so that day before the light faded rapidly just as we came up to the base camp established earlier by the team. This consisted of several saplings cut and lashed together to create low platforms, and upright pole frameworks. Transparent tarpaulins were spread over these to keep off water dripping from the tree canopy high above. Although we had brought some supplies we also took carp from the river. The boat was drifted into a deep pool, a pebble spun into the sunlight and once fallen into the water a round, weighted net was thrown after it. Immediately the Ibans jumped in. Bob had no idea what they were up to. Next time I followed them to see them hitting the fish on the head with large pebbles. The fish would have broken the weak net fabric if hauled out alive. My appearance down below caused considerable consternation as they all believed that the orang puttee (white man) could not swim, but thumbs up calmed their worries.

As darkness fell the fish and rice were cooked over the wood fire as the 'croaking' of frogs increased. We settled down for the night. In the morning ants were busy cleaning the interior of my trainers. Thereafter it was pretty much routine albeit exciting surveying. Did we see many wild animals? Monkeys, yes, a few wild boar, huge fruit bats, and many mud skippers on the tidal flats of Brunei Bay, butterflies and pretty spiders in abundance, but my abiding memory is of the durian, a bright green fruit about the size of a small hedgehog, with a pungent smell (gangrenous knees?) which travels for well over a quarter of a mile in the jungle. It is said to be fatal to drink alcoholic spirits within 24 hours of eating the white interior, so we stuck to the more familiar poison.

PS: When we returned to Brunei the Finance Minister informed Bob that Shell had admitted to taking oil and gas from no less than twelve formations, two offshore. They increased their royalties and the Sultan of Brunei is now one of the richest men in the world. Bob was awarded the Order of the Green Elephant (second class) for his efforts. I had a lot of fun.
John aka Steps, aka Steve, Stephens,

Due to the fact that every school I have attended has had so many "Johns" I have always answered to a "nick" name, and for many decades now I have been Steve.

I lived closer to HCHS than anybody but it was not near enough to save me from being 'Dillied' by our English teacher for having cap in hand and not on head on my way to school. Quite right too!! I never understood why our headmaster did not have a hair style named after him, as like so many of the boys I had my forelock cut to an ungraspable shortness.

On leaving school I occupied myself at a local building firm until entering the Civil Service in a National Insurance office in Felixstowe prior to two years National Service in the RAF. Subsequently I took the Customs & Excise entrance examination, for whom I worked sea ports, air ports, hover ports, the Irish land boundary patrol force, international post offices, breweries, bonded warehouses and then excise control of bookmakers, betting shops etc. etc..

During these years I was lucky enough to meet and marry a young lady from Colchester who has travelled all over the kingdom with me for almost fifty years raising a son and daughter- who in turn have also raised a son and daughter each (very sadly my daughter passed away recently)

Following 39 years I took early retirement but found my boredom threshold to be lower than I had realised and took a part-time job as a duty manager at a local country house hotel for six weeks and some six and a half years later retired again.

Away from work I have enjoyed sport and for some years was a football referee in both Kent and Cheshire counties. For a large part of our lives my wife and I have both been cub scouters, cyclists, gardeners, square dancers, caravanners and cruised the UK's canal system.

Like so many, so called nomads, we are now planning to sell up our home in Lancashire's Ribble Valley and move back to Dovercourt. A day dream? We'll see.

With best wishes to all for 2011
I have been hoping Terry Francis would find his way to the computer (ours has broken down) but with no joy. His late mother was always hoping he would find a wife. She had to give up in her 97th year.

In his memorial to his friend Hallam Lord Tennyson included the lines “Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,/ The flying cloud, the frosty light;/ The year is dying in the night;/ Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.” (hymn number 95 in the Methodist Hymnbook) and this sums up our year.

Two days after my delayed spinal surgery I had to return to Norfolk and Norwich Hospital seriously ill with kidney failure. Anne made the 50 mile round trips to visit fearing at one stage that I may not recover. Later I was moved to a local community hospital and, eventually, had a prostate operation at the end of October. I am now beginning to see some light at the end of the tunnel but there is still some way to go.

I was forced to retire from the Town Council on which I had served for fifteen years (Chairman 1998-2001) and the presentation of my certificate for 50 years service as a Methodist Local Preacher has been delayed or should I say put on hold. (The term “Local Preacher” dates back to the original order from 18th-19th centuries and now means accredited but not ordained.)

Back to Terry at present in rather low spirits. His dog of fourteen years had to be put down in September and, as you may have learned from other sources, his beloved Harwich and Parkeston FC is no longer part of the pyramid system, collapsing into junior football last January-i.e. with teams like Bradfield Rovers and Little Oakley.

Terry did manage to attend David Salter's funeral at my prompting. He might have sent you an obituary note if I had failed to survive! He still does the football reports for the Standard- even when he is elsewhere.

We shall look forward to a report on your extended trip to Syria-Mossad will be following your future movements!

With best wishes for 2011.
And finally John Ruffle

My own news is much the same as last year's, plenty of travelling interspersed with gardening and a pretence at work. "Work" in this context is editing the travel diaries of the 4th Duke of Northumberland, a matter of enormous interest to two other people and of infinite boredom to the rest of the world.

I went back to "our" oasis in February along with my son Tim and we had a jolly time flying our camera-carrying kite. With Tim's help we have the system sussed and this time we had some really good shots and I have (almost) earned my keep.

In March Jenny and I took a group of 13 friends to Syria and had a very successful tour. At least they all said they liked it. Syria is a very interesting country with monuments of different types and periods, from Roman cities like Palmyra to Crusader castles, ancient sea ports and the Hedjaz Railway Station. Great stuff for all you U3A historians. I went back again in September, and in October, and in November with three tours arranged by Saga and one of my own making. The Saga tours are short and give just a brief impression but mine was for three weeks, just four of us with a car and driver and plenty of time to stand and stare. With such a small group it is possible to stay in the smaller hotels and there are some very nice ones now, refurbished 16th century houses with all modern conveniences but traditional accommodation.

I found out at last, that the dish which I noticed last year on a menu, Diall Ymeal, is not an invitation to telephone for a takeaway but should be read as Daily Meal, i.e. Dish of the Day! I am still concerned about Stuffed Aboriginies although I am told that that is also a mispelling, of aubergine and I found a variation on Chat o'Brien called Shatoberian.

I am writing this on the fifteenth day of snow and am about to go and clear our front path for the fiftieth time. That just allows me to get the dog out, no chance of using the car. The dog, Oscar, is a new chap, successor to Brown whom Joyce admired. He died at Christmas and the new one is a quite different personality, still very puppyish and having a great time in the snow.

We collected Oscar from Painswick and discovered a whole area of England which we had never visited so why do we go abroad I wonder. We managed our balloon flight at last, having booked it in 2007 and had it postponed umpteen times. It was arranged by Virgin and billed as a
Champagne Flight but we actually put down in a field full of horse offerings, on the edge of an industrial estate, just a few hundred yards upwind from a major tyre fire which had been burning for a week and we had our champagne on the side of the road!

I am also planning travel for next year and am happy to report that John McM and Liz Peck (as was) are signed up to join me. No doubt they will report next year – if they survive. We have a couple of weeks of desert bashing, exploring the oases including Dakhleh of course. Then we move on to camp in the White Desert and a visit to the oracle at Siwa where Alexander was told his fortune but refused to reveal it. If we get an answer we will tell you next year.

Merry Christmas everybody and a happy and prosperous New Year.

Pearl usually encloses a Pearl of wisdom with her e-mails. This one struck me as not entirely thought through:

“Make yourself a blessing to someone. A pat on the back just might pull someone back from the edge.”

Carmelia Alliot