

BICC Wood Lane Reunion news and gossip - Summer 2019

Friday 17th May was a slightly grey day weatherwise, but that did not stop the 52 people who assembled at The Bull from having a thoroughly cheerful approach to the chance to re-engage with former colleagues. It was the 10th successive year of using the pub closest to the Wood Lane site, and Alex and her colleagues looked after us extremely well, though a hiccup on the beer pumps did cause a small frustration at times. The Bull had undergone a re-vamp since the previous year, including an upgrade of the buffet arrangements. By general acclaim that side of the event turned out to be as good, if not better, than any before. Alex even provided “Doggie boxes” to allow us to take away a few items for later.

The short formal part of proceedings allowed us to remember five of our former colleagues who had passed away since we last met. Three of these were ladies, namely:

Barbara Lockwood - Many from the 1960s, especially those from the Chemistry Department where she worked, will remember Barbara as Barbara Westaway or Barbara Smith. She was a keen participant in the social side of Wood Lane, having been secretary for ladies' hockey, and a regular participant in other activities ranging from tennis to bridge. She was also for some time a member of the Editorial Board of the Bush Telegraph. After leaving Wood Lane she firstly worked for the MOD, before becoming a Patent Attorney. Latterly she lived in Yorkshire, keeping fit by playing golf.

Vivien Irish (née Still) died in early March. Although, as with Barbara whom she knew well, her main career was as a patent attorney, Vivien spent time at Wood Lane in the Polymers Department, and went on to marry Freddie, who died back in 2006 – see <http://woodlanebicc.co.uk/docs/Fred.pdf>

Jocelyn (Joss) Arnold - Joss was the wife of Alan Arnold (HV lab) and for some time in the late 60s and early 70s was the canteen manageress following in the wake of Bill Fuller. She and Alan moved to New Zealand many years ago. She died peacefully in February after a long illness.

Whilst many remembered the three ladies, few could recall **Zybszek (Richard) Pialucha**. He was one of the quiet men of Wood Lane, working in the Machine Shop, and subsequently its derivatives, from 1957 until the closure. Clive Carroll did know Rich, as he was known, because his own career began as an apprentice in the Machine Shop. He recalls Rich as a very skilful machinist, and chess player, who was well respected by all his colleagues.

The final remembrance was of **Dr Bob Black**, who actually passed away before our 2018 gathering, but the news did not reach us until much later. His association with Wood Lane went from 1945 until closure. During that time his major contribution was to develop the use of irradiation technology for cables, using the Van de Graff generator. This early photo taken in “Rutherford” shows Bob half hidden behind Frank Walker.



Bob later became personal assistant to the Director of Research, and then our information officer and archivist in the library, a post he held until Wood Lane closed in 1987. In 1983 his "The History of Electric Wires and Cables" was published, most of which had been seen in monthly parts in the Bush Telegraph during the 1970s and early 1980s. His other strong interest was in alchemy. His earlier book "The secret art of alchemy" can often be found via amazon and ebay.

On the day, a number of people spoke of the fact that they felt privileged to have worked for what, at this distance in time, was evidently a special organization. Not just Wood Lane but, at its zenith, BICC. Very few of us now have an everyday connection with the cable industry – **Sasha O’Bow Hove** and **Glynn Stainthorpe** are two – but it was reported that a recent senior governance meeting of the industry’s trade association (BCA) had 24 participants, 12 of whom were ex-BICC. Not everyone’s experience would have been perfect. If you have a story, positive or negative, your recollections would be most welcome.

A sense of attachment certainly prevails when it comes to those attending a reunion for the first time, and especially 32 years after closure. This year we had two newcomers namely **Diwakar Choudhari**, who was a part of the team looking after computer-aided manufacturing, and **Tony Jordan** who was with the Physics Department in the late 70s. Diwakar is seen here talking with, amongst others, **Bob and B Girkin**. By then the buffet was open for second helpings!



Mark Hamlin continued his earlier plea that we should all wear name tags. This had been taken up by **Peter Revell**. He wore one, and supplied a few to former close colleagues. He has kindly offered to make others for future years – but don’t all ask 24 hours before the event. There will be a reminder.

Diana Connolly told us of the joys (!) of trying to sort out years of accumulated papers and books, most of which were from her late husband David's collection. As well as an early copy of the Bush Telegraph, which she will scan for **Peter Walton's** Wood Lane website (<http://www.woodlanebicc.co.uk/> - thanks as always Peter), she recalled David's authorship of a number of books. Amazon Kindle readers should be able to access electronic copies via <https://tinyurl.com/y4huemzw> . By contrast her own "hobby" as a member of The Pylon Appreciation Society brought back memories of the time when BICC at a corporate level decided to demonstrate a public face rather than keeping itself low key. To that end it commissioned a TV advertisement, initially to be shown on Granada in the north-west. It featured the company's involvement with overhead power lines, and showed pylons marching across the countryside. Unhappily for the company, this coincided with an upsurge of public disquiet about such things spoiling historic views. The advert never went nationwide! The photo below shows Diana with **Barbara Groombridge** and one of David's books.



Whilst it would be wonderful if everyone could be present every time, it is much appreciated when those obliged to apologise tell us why and what they have been doing. Into that category came **Ian Fordham** who, in 2017, came down with Marion from their guest house on the Isle of Lewis to be with us. They have now sold the guest house and moved closer to civilisation – North Northumberland! Well, it's all relative! **Jim Hamments** is often in those northern parts for family reasons, but his main message said that he had hung up his sword – fencing. More time now for messing about in boats near his home by the River Thames.

Apologies more on the grounds of health and fitness, or its decline, came from **Sandra West**, who is making a good recovery from a heart operation, **George Bielstein**, who remains in Germany and says that apart from a winter cold his main concern is some loss of balance, and **George Kitchie** who remains at his home, but needs care to enable him to do so. **Brian Tilbury** tries his best to keep a watchful eye on him. Thanks Brian.

More prosaic apologies came from **Dave Green** in Kefalonia, because his new voluntary work is due to start. It relates to the welfare of the loggerhead turtle, and mid-May is when the females start coming ashore to breed. Another ex-pat unable to join us was **Guy Secrett**. He was in the UK, but at a family funeral in Cornwall which took obvious priority. Guy will be back in UK from mid-July until 12 August, and would be delighted to catch up with former colleagues.

Roger Carroll was the only one to make it from outside the UK this year. He drove over from just outside Antwerp early on the day, and returned the same evening. Sadly Valerie was not able to be with him this time. Although having been in Belgium for many years he

still professes a liking for British beer. He has however succumbed to another Belgian passion, and is making his own chocolate.

The north-west contingent included **Jan and Peter Walters, Nick Thearle** and **Andy Platt**. Nick, who started his BICC career at the Telephone Cables Division in Prescot, recalled that many of us are railway enthusiasts. To that end he was delighted recently to learn that the loco that used to operate on the huge site there is extant, and at the Ribble Steam Railway clearly showing its BICC name-plate.



By contrast **Dennis Nash** phoned from Liverpool, having returned there from Spain, and recalled his post-Wood Lane spell at Leigh, and then with Westinghouse. After that he and his wife ran a Montessori school. He is well and sends best wishes to all from the days of Control Engineering.

Lesley Mulhall joined us for a short while, though a recent heavy fall down an embankment and on to a concrete block had given her back a nasty thump. Happily our photo shows that **Clive Carroll** was on hand to give support. **Barry Mitchell** had been excused grand-parental duties and so was also able to join us. Here he is with **Alex Ranicar**.



The general mood was happy and smiling and exemplified by this final group showing **Jan Walters, Graham Taylor, Sue Hurst** and (in front) **Terry Watkins**.



Many thanks again to everyone who attends and all who keep in touch. It is much appreciated. The wish to continue to meet up appears to be strong, so please put **Friday 15 May 2020** into your diary now.

Mike Hagger
29 May 2019

2019 Reunion – Attendees (52)

Andrew Ainger
Maureen Ayres
Anne Buchanan
Clive Carroll
Roger Carroll
John Childs
Diwakar Choudhari
Diana Connolly
Dennis Cooper
Sarah Cowper
Bill Dawson
Steve Frost
B & Bob Girkin
Barbara and Denis Groombridge
Mike Hagger
Shirley and Richard Hammond
Mark Hamlin
Roger Hazelden
Alan Hopkins
Sue Hurst
Peter Jennings
Tony Jordan
Mike Kendle
Charles Largie
Brian McCarthy
Sandra McCormack
Barry Mitchell
Lesley Mulhall (formerly Irwine)
Sasha O'Bow Hove
Albert Pinching
Ray Pinner
Andy Platt
Bob Price
Alex Ranicar
Peter Revell
Eve Taylor
Graham Taylor
John Taylor
Nick Thearle
Brian Tilbury
Maria and John Vernon
Jan and Peter Walters
Peter Walton
Malcolm Ward
Terry Watkins
Chris White
Charles Williams

Apologies

Alan Arnold
Jon Ballard
George Bielstein
Tony Borer
Tony Blythe
Annette Burgess
Valerie Carroll
Tess and Stuart Castle
Rob Corne
Olive Drage
Alan Fenwick
Yvonne Ferrier
Marion and Ian Fordham
Derek Glockner
Dave Green
Richard Grigsby
Jim Hamments
Ann Huybrechts
Pauline Kelly
Mike Key
George Kitchie
Barry Lambert
Geoffrey Layzell-Ward
Eddie Lightstone
Janet Matheve
Les Miles
Dennis Nash
Elizabeth Ness
Michael Pater
Pedro Perez and Anne
Bryan and Pam Pledger
Michael Poole
Ena Prendergast
Peter Raw
John Reeves
Annette Robinson (née Mattock)
Guy Secrett
Roger Seebold
Viv Semmens
David Sevant
Eleanor Tarbox
Maureen Taylor
Carol Tilbury
Sandra West