

## BICC Wood Lane Reunion news and gossip - Summer 2013

For the fourth consecutive year a reunion was held at The Bull on the south-east corner of the Westfield Centre (formerly known as BICC Research and Engineering Ltd). The event in 2012 marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the closure of our laboratories. This year was the 25<sup>th</sup> consecutive reunion, and 56 people turned out on 17<sup>th</sup> May for the occasion.

Sadly there were four of our former colleagues known to have passed on since we last met, namely **Elsie Barton** (Library), **George Hamilton** (Physics), **Peter Harvey** (Engineering) and **David Margolis** (Research Manager). All were fondly remembered.

Remarkably the event still manages to find those who had never been before. One such was **Bob Price**, formerly in Engineering, who is now with the Culham Centre for Fusion Energy. Another was **Mayur Patel**, (ex-Chemistry and long term badminton player at Wood Lane) who had been encouraged to join us by **Guy Secrett**. It is a measure of the grapevine effect when you recall that Guy now lives in Australia. He did however attend for the second year running – many thanks Guy, here's a photo to prove that you were there.



From somewhat earlier times we welcomed **Lesley and Dave Power**. Dave worked in Control Engineering (or was it called Instrumentation & Control?) in the days of Alex Taylor, and Lesley was on the old switchboard that used to be found on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of HV 2.

**Celia and Norman Waterhouse** joined us again. Having recalled the Cook Strait cable last year, Norman took us back to the earlier work that resulted in the 1961 HVDC cross-channel interconnect between UK and France. Much attention had been given to the route, the trenching and the mechanics of laying the cable, all of which came within Norman's domain. In an early model of the system eventually used, the cable was represented by a lavatory chain! No doubt there are many other examples in R&D where such improvisation was used. If anyone recalls other examples, please let us know. (Sadly the Bush Telegraph fund was exhausted long ago, so we can't offer a prize for the best story).

It would be wrong to suggest that we have all been in the rudest of health, so it was super to see some who have not had the best of things lately. One such was **Denis Groombridge** who had missed a couple of reunions due to treatment, but is certainly looking contented in this photo. Thanks **Barbara** for looking after him so well!



Another who has progressed well since 12 months ago is **Mike Denton**, who again came over from France – this year with a good head of hair. He can just be seen in the background (right) of the next photo



The foreground, left to right, shows **Maureen Ayres, Annette Robinson and Eileen King** – as if you needed telling!

Turning for a moment to the apologies, there was the usual crop from those on holiday - **Ann Huybrechts** (South Africa); **Roger Seebold** (France); **Steve Frost** (Cycling in Norfolk) and **Jim Hamments** (Thames cruise).

Weddings also featured – **Shirley and Richard Hammond** were at one in Hong Kong, and **Jan and Peter Walters** were in Aldeburgh preparing for their son's nuptials the next day..

**Tess and Stuart Castle** much enjoyed their trip to UK last year, and joining the reunion. Stuart sent word that Christchurch remains in a state of slow post-earthquake rebuilding as his photos show. To the left is the new "cardboard Cathedral" being built as a temporary structure using Japanese technology! The one on the right shows containers piled high in the city to protect building edifices, which can hopefully be used in new structures.



Now a small diversion in the interests of good neighbourliness. Few of us had left Wood Lane before the BBC Television Centre opened on the other side of the road. It opened in 1960 looking something like this.



Earlier this year it closed. 53 years of lifetime. Ourselves? 1934-1987 – 53 years of lifetime. Something of a strange coincidence. If that is not enough, the Evening Standard reported that Zhejiang University of China and Imperial College are to be partners in developing the site, to be named Imperial West, into a £150 million Research Centre supporting the work of up to 3000 scientists. Maybe most of us are too old now to apply, but it's good to think that science may return to Wood Lane.

Returning to those with us on the day, it was good to see **George Bielstein** again, this year accompanied by his wife **Beate**. In the next photo **Michael Pater** is obviously explaining something complex to them, whilst **Roger Hazelden** and **Pat Andrews** listen intently.



Taking into account the partners who have joined our events, the known total over the years is of 200 people having attended at least one reunion.

Moving house is supposed to be one of the most stressful things that we ever do, but it doesn't seem to stop people. Three examples emerged this year, first from **Nick Thearle** who, despite his new home in Liverpool still having the packing cases full, joined us on the day. **Tony Martin** on the other hand is still in the process of moving to Ilkley from Cheltenham. He is now a grandfather (congratulations) and Gloucestershire is a little too far from the family. Finally **Patricia and Geoffrey Layzell-Ward** are going through the stage of trying to reduce the contents of their property in North Wales in order to move to a smaller house. Amongst other things the clear-out has revealed a few Bush Telegraphs not yet on the website. We will load them as soon as we can.

It's always good to receive a bit of news from those unable to come along. One such was **Eleanor Tarbox** who had hoped to attend but a last-minute family matter took priority. She did however send her best wishes and reported that her father **Ron Tarbox**, who many remember as Head of Patents and Licensing, is comfortable in a rest home near Chaldon with a lovely view of the countryside.

Another was **Yvonne Ferrier** who wrote from her hideaway in Chiclana in Spain. She is well and sends best wishes to all who remember her. She hopes that a future reunion will coincide with a trip to UK. Before then she promises to collate some of her less incriminating photos from Wood Lane social events so that they can be shared via **Peter Walton's** Wood Lane website. Do visit the site.

<http://www.woodlanebiccc.co.uk/>

Thanks again Peter for all that you do. The latest addition is the January 1987 internal telephone directory. Check how many of those listed you remember.

Here is Peter enjoying the daffodils of late spring along with **Trevor Carter**, whilst in the background **Andy Platt**, who managed to get down from the Wirral, and **John Vernon** exchange notes.



A full list of this year's attendees and apologies is attached.

One bit of late news that featured strongly in the business sections of the newspapers a few days after the reunion concerned the possible takeover of Balfour Beatty by Siemens. This is definitely one to watch, especially as these things sometimes have pension implications.

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Finally a "Do you remember?"

This fascinating story and request comes from the University of Manchester, and seeks help in research about Britain's first atomic bomb. The writer, Jonathan Ayles, believes that a key component was made at Wood Lane. If anyone has any information, or knows anyone else who may be able to help, please contact Jonathan. Phone, e-mail and postal details are given below.

### **BICC Component Supply from Wood Lane to Blue Danube**

Jonathan Ayles writes as an historian of technology from the University of Manchester. Jonathan is researching the development of Blue Danube, Britain's first atomic bomb. This follows earlier research work on the Ferranti Argus process control computer and the control system for the Bloodhound Mark 2 Guided Missile.

Blue Danube included components from BICC from 1952 onwards. In particular, BICC supplied EHT condensers for the firing mechanism according to government records, and these were incorporated into the firing mechanism.

BICC archives are held by the Liverpool Maritime Museum at their North Street Annexe. A recent visit suggests these condensers (capacitors if you like) were probably made at the Wood Lane Research Centre. At this time, BICC had a tradition of being involved in development of specialised electrical items for the military.

It has been suggested to me that BICC probably had the right combination of know-how in high voltage engineering and the new plastics to make these crucial components. There would have been an emphasis on reliability. These condensers may have been surprisingly large – almost the size of a fountain pen. They would have been supplied onwards to Whitley Electrical in Mansfield at that stage.

I wonder if any of the older members of your association were involved in this work or can confirm this story? Fortunately, material relating to the fuze and firing system of Blue Danube has recently been declassified.

With warmest thanks in anticipation of your help.  
Yours,

Jonathan Ayles

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## 2013 Reunion – Attendees (56)

Pat Andrews  
Maureen Ayres  
Alan Bangay  
George and Beate Bielstein  
Anne Buchanan  
Clive Carroll  
Trevor Carter  
Dennis Cooper  
Sarah Cowper  
Mike Denton  
Michael Fox  
Bob Girkin  
Richard Grigsby  
Barbara and Denis Groombridge  
Mike Hagger  
Roger Hazelden  
Peter Huddart  
Sue Hurst  
Lesley Irwine  
Peter Jennings  
Eileen King  
Sandra McCormack  
Tony Martin  
Barry Mitchell  
Sasha O'Bow Hove  
Mayur Patel  
Michael Pater  
Albert Pinching  
Andy Platt  
Bryan and Pam Pledger  
Lesley and Dave Power  
Bob Price  
Wordy Price  
Peter Revell  
Annette Robinson (née Mattock)  
Guy Secrett  
David Sevant  
Graham Taylor  
Eve Taylor  
John Taylor  
Nick Thearle  
Brian Tilbury  
Maria and John Vernon  
Stefan Verne  
Peter Walton  
Malcolm Ward  
Celia and Norman Waterhouse  
Terry Watkins  
Sandra West  
Chris White

## Apologies

Jon Ballard  
Vic Banks  
Arthur Boardman  
Annette Burgess  
Valerie and Roger Carroll  
Tess and Stuart Castle  
Rob Corne  
Bill Dawson  
Olive Drage  
Norman Fairey  
Yvonne Ferrier  
Chris Finney  
Ian Fordham  
Steve Frost  
Andy Fry  
Don Fry  
Jim Hamments  
Mark Hamlin  
Shirley and Richard Hammond  
Ann Huybrechts  
Alan Hopkins  
Vivien Irish  
George Kitchie  
Maureen and Albert Jackson  
Mike Key  
Barry Lambert  
Geoffrey Layzell-Ward  
Brian McCarthy  
Dennis Nash  
Elizabeth Ness  
Michael Poole  
Peter Raw  
Pedro Perez  
John Reeves  
Roger Seebold  
Viv Semmens  
Roy Spencer  
Glynn Stainthorpe  
Gerry Tan  
Eleanor Tarbox  
Carol Tilbury  
Jerry Turner  
Jan and Peter Walters  
Dick Weeks