

**Royal Naval Association
No. 4 Area.**

**Chairman's Report to Annual General Meeting.
Saturday, 20th January, 2018.**

Good afternoon Shipmates.

As I begin this, my fourth annual report, I can liken the year, from a personal point of view at least, as a bit like the Curate's Egg – good in parts!

Shortly after our successful AGM and Area Meeting hosted by Weymouth Branch in January, I attended a routine check on my heart pacemaker, which had been inserted in 2008. I was informed that I was in 'urgent' need of an upgrade. However, more of this later!

During February, the annual Standard Bearers' Training sessions and Competition were held at Bridgwater, and it was again my pleasure and privilege to present the awards. As usual, the event was superbly organised by our Area Ceremonial Officer, Malcolm Day, and my thanks go to him, the competitors, and to Bridgwater Sea Cadets, who allow us to use their Headquarters free of charge each year. Whilst I appreciate – perhaps more than most – the difficulties and costs of travel in and around Area 4, due to its geography, I would urge more branches to encourage their Standard Bearers to take part. Even if they are unable to make some or all of the training sessions, participation in the competition can only be good for the individual, his (or her) branch, and the RNA as a whole. Standard Bearers are often regarded by the general public as 'the visible face of the RNA'

The first weekend in March saw our annual Reunion at the Durrant House Hotel, Bideford. As usual, the organising committee excelled themselves, as indeed they do every year. This was, I believe, our thirteenth successive year at Durrant House, and to mark the excellent service we continue to receive from the management and staff, it was my pleasure to present a number of them with Honorary Membership of the RNA. Also, as our President David and his wife Monica were unable to attend, it was a privilege to welcome our Guests of Honour, Chaplain of the Fleet Ian Wheatley CB. QHC RN, and his charming wife Deborah. My personal weekend was made when Paddy McClurg drew my ticket out of the Rum Raffle!

Later that month, and on my birthday no less, I underwent the first of a series of tests and examinations for a prostate problem, which fortunately has turned out not to be the dreaded 'C', and in April I was forced to cancel a short holiday, as I received an appointment for exploratory surgery to my knee, (which I had been awaiting for more than a year). One of our number, who shall be nameless to protect the guilty, volunteered to take my place – on the holiday, not the surgery! The pacemaker problem which I referred to earlier, reared its ugly head unfortunately. I was actually on the operating table when the anaesthetist announced that my heart rate had dropped to a very low level, and the pacemaker had not kicked in as it was supposed to, and she wanted to cancel the procedure. The surgeon said it was no problem, as

he could proceed with sedation and a local anaesthetic! Not recommended, as the knee was bent into all sorts of unnatural positions! Result: on crutches, and not permitted to drive for six weeks.

In last year's report I referred to my intention of visiting branches, particularly those in the far west of our Area, who might feel in danger of being isolated because of the geography of the Area. In May I was made very welcome when I attended a monthly meeting at Helston Branch, and Yvonne and I thoroughly enjoyed our visit to Bodmin Branch in June, before Yvonne and I took a holiday at the end of the month.

July was a quiet month, interspersed with hospital visits for various reasons, and in August the annual Croquet tournament took place. For the future this is to be named the Admiral Alec memorial croquet match, in memory of its Founder, Alec Weir, former President of Delabole Branch. The venue was superb, and I believe that the organisers are planning a 'themed' contest at the same venue in 2018.

September saw the Area Meeting hosted by Portland Branch, who again provided an excellent venue, and also provided an entertaining evening for those of us able to stay on.

At last in October I received a date for the replacement and upgrading of the pacemaker. After a two-hour session of the hospital's favourite parlour game – seek the hospital bed – the procedure finally went ahead, taking twice as long as the scheduled time, and requiring the intervention of a second surgeon. Overnight observation and discharge the following morning should have seen the end of it, but 48 hours after going home I woke with a badly swollen arm, and a hand like a boxing glove! Another lengthy spell of inactivity and weeks of being unable to drive! Fortunately, all seems to have settled down at last, and I can look forward in the future to better general health.

Over the past year, some of our Branches have celebrated significant anniversaries and other events. Most Branches will have been involved in events and ceremonies of Remembrance, Armed Forces events, and other Civic occasions, all of which help to bring our Association to the notice of the general public. Whilst the Royal Navy, our principal recruitment target area, continues to shrink in size, we should all be conscious of the need to promote and publicise the RNA, both nationally and locally. There must be many ex-matelots out there, some of whom may not even have heard of us! There will no doubt be a number of events and ceremonies in 2018 to mark the centenary of the end of World War 1, and we should take every opportunity to bring our Association to the fore by taking part.

Regrettably, the Area continues to lose Branches due to diminishing memberships, and the lack of persons willing or able to take office. The latest of these, Bristol, laid up their Standard within the last month. It had been my intention to attend the ceremony, but I had already accepted a prior invitation to represent the Area at the annual Conference of the Cornwall County Royal British Legion. I also believe that Axminster Branch are in difficulties, but are making gallant efforts to survive. I'm sure we all wish them success, and would offer any help that we are able to.

It would be remiss of me to finish my report without paying tribute to the hard work, help and support of the Officers and Committee, each of whom give freely of their time and energies, both for the Area and their individual Branches. Without wishing to be accused of 'favouritism', there are some that I feel are deserving of individual mention. Mick, our Area Secretary, continues to work tirelessly on our behalf. His efforts, and the support that he receives from Jean are greatly appreciated. His connections with the Not Forgotten Association have ensured that many of our members, myself and Yvonne included, have enjoyed attendance at NFA functions, including their annual Buckingham Palace Garden Party.

In September, I received a letter from our National Council Member, Ken Knight, advising that, with great regret, he has decided not to stand for re-election at Conference 2018. I have already written privately to Ken, expressing my personal appreciation and thanks for his work on behalf of the Area, and I know you will join me in wishing him and Pat well for the future.

Finally, one shipmate who, ably assisted by his wife Maureen, is our Public Relations Officer, Dan Sherren. Much of their work may be viewed on the Area 4 website, with reports of events, Branch activities and other items of interest. I would urge you all to encourage your Branch members to view the website at least once each month, and also the main RNA website. Articles of interest may be sent to Dan or to webmaster Chris Hore.

Shipmates, that concludes my report. May I thank you for your support, help and advice, even your criticism during my period in office. Should you choose to re-elect me, I shall continue to serve to the best of my ability in the years to come.

Ron Burdekin
20 January, 2018.