



Falkland Islands Association

Report by the Executive Committee to the Annual General Meeting held at the Union Jack Club, Waterloo, London on 5th December 2009.

Introduction

I am pleased to bring good wishes from Gerald Cheek and all members of the FIA on the Islands.

Welcome to everyone. In particular we welcome Captain and Mrs Thicknesse and very best wishes to them for their time on the Islands.

We are grateful to all the wreath layers. I had hoped that Marine David Barton would be among them, but he is on exercises at present. I have told him how much we admire what he and all of his comrades in the forces of the Crown are doing in Afghanistan. We hope that he will be available to lay a wreath on some future Battle Day to remind the great British public that there are Falkland Islanders in the front line.

I should mention the Cadets from Pangbourne College – unfortunately they are not able to join us at the AGM as they have a busy programme back at the College. Mr Paul Hill who makes all the arrangements for the cadets to attend our ceremony is retiring this year and this was his last Battle Day – we are very grateful to him.

Finally we are very grateful to the RN and the RM for taking part in our ceremony. They too are unfortunately unable to stay on for lunch.

And we thank the Union Jack Club for their services to us today.

We regret death of Lord Buxton: devoted supporter of the Falklands and father of one of our vice presidents, Cindy and we offer our sympathy to her. Colin Wright and Robin Wager represented the Association at his memorial service in Norwich.

Domestic Matters.

Michael Poole moves to Stanley as economic adviser. James Wallace has taken over as Hon Treasurer. Has moved from Vigo in Spain and now lives in Amsterdam, but thanks to Internet is able to operate our accounts. We should congratulate James on his marriage to Annelot (here with us today). Welcome Zorin Zubic as member of committee (and representative of the FIDF). We congratulate him for setting us an example in active living: Duke of Edinburgh award; abseiling down city skyscrapers to collect money for good causes.

I should pay a tribute to our secretary, Colin Wright. He has made all the arrangements for today and they require a lot of work. He has also arranged our two events during the year and generally kept the wheels turning.

Colin arranged visits to Pangbourne Chapel and to the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich. Both very successful but it was sad that there were not more members of the Association present. We are thinking of arranging a lecture by a distinguished naval historian on the 1914 Battle of the Falkland Islands jointly with the SGA. I hope we can count on your support.

The Newsletter

We all continue to be delighted by the quality of the newsletter, both in content, pictures and general presentation. We are very grateful to Sealed PR the company in Stanley which prepares it and for the writing of Lisa Johnston the Editor. We also thank Cindy Buxton who co-ordinates the editorial work at this end and, helped by Colin Wright, steers the proofs through the printers.

We have commissioned SeAled to produce a small leaflet for distribution to cruise ship and other tourists visiting the Islands with the intention of recruiting more members for the FIA. We have a copy of the proof available after the meeting.

The Website

Doug Lapsley at Citrus Media has re-designed our website and overseas members can take advantage of the PayPal system to pay their subscription which means a considerable saving on the charges often imposed by banks for the conversion of foreign cheques or cash. The new Contact Us page has enable two members who had lost touch by changing address without letting us know re-establish contact – one from the UK and one from Canada.

Parliament

This year we have not had a formal meeting with the Falkland Islands parliamentary Group. MPs have been preoccupied with their own concerns

and it seemed more sensible to wait until the General Election is over and rebuild our contacts then although we shall, in the meantime, continue to advise them of any situations arising which particularly concern us.

The South Atlantic Council

After careful consideration we held a meeting with the South Atlantic Council in the Houses of Parliament in February this year. This was a perfectly cordial meeting, but there was little meeting of minds. Like us, the Council deplored the outlook and activities of the current Argentine government but seemed to believe that once there was a change of government in BA there would be scope for negotiations. We made it clear that this was not our view. We were also surprised by how out of touch the SAC were with events in the Islands and with – for example – the preparations, legal, environmental and practical which have already been made for oil exploration.

Past and Present.

I mentioned last year that we were seeking to put right various errors in the first chapter of the official British history of the Falklands War. You will have seen in our April newsletter that Peter Pepper and Graham Pascoe set out their case in full and that they received a very handsome retraction from the author of the official history, Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman – who is now of course a member of the Chilcott Enquiry.

Peter and Graham are working on a booklet called “Getting it Right” based on their presentation at the LSE last year. This is being revised at the moment but should be ready for the 2010/11 summer season.

This detailed research into the early history of the Islands has not really been attempted until now. It is important because the Argentine case is entirely historical and when you look at it closely – as Peter and Graham have done - many of their claims are simply wrong.

Events on the Islands

The most striking event I think has been last month’s general election. The voters made a clean sweep of the previous council and while most of the councillors have previously served on Legco, their experience is not particularly recent. We all wish them well as they confront the various challenges which face the Islands at home and abroad.

With smaller catches, the income from the squid fishery has declined. This has put financial pressure on government with the need for cut-backs. World interest rates are at an all-time low which affects the government’s income

from their very healthy reserves. Tourism will probably be affected by the world economic depression.

But a ray of sunshine among the clouds is the planned arrival in February of an oil-drilling rig, commissioned by Desire Petroleum, but also available to several of the companies with concessions lying north of the Islands. We await the results with keen interest and it is worth remembering that even for the drilling phase, regardless of results, the oil companies will be paying substantial fees to FIG.

I should mention a number of other events:

The opening of Liberty Lodge in February. This provides accommodation for visiting veterans and is largely a result of the enthusiasm of Colonel Tony Davis. Because veterans can now fly south with the RAF on very reduced rates the Lodge should enjoy many visitors. It is a thoroughly worthwhile project, very much in keeping with our objectives.

The visit of the Princess Royal in March. This was an unofficial visit as HRH was on her way to South Georgia, but it gave her an opportunity to visit both the schools in Stanley and enjoy a warm reception from Islanders.

The arrival of the first Typhoon Eurofighters, the RAF's latest, to take over the air defence of the Islands was reported in September by Penguin News. This was something of a scoop because it took another week for the British press to catch up with the story. The Typhoons are very tangible evidence of the government's determination to ensure that the Islands have the most up to date defence. Much noisier than the Tornados, Gerald Cheek tells me, but the sound of freedom is always welcome!

Work began this week at Surf Bay on the clearance of minefields. This was a British government initiative, to meet their international obligations. I think no-one underestimates the difficulty of this task: unless the mines can be totally cleared the exercise has little value.

An event which I mentioned in last year's report, finally took place only two months ago: this was the visit of the Argentine next of kin to the military cemetery at Darwin. There had been so much diplomatic sparring and posturing by the Argentine government, that the actual visits, on successive Saturdays in October, were almost an anticlimax. The Argentine Families Commission behaved sensibly and sympathetically in the planning stage, the arrangements went well and the next of kin were grateful for the sensitive reception they received.

I can understand why those who lived through invasion and occupation in 1982 are very suspicious of any Argentine visitor to the islands. I take a more

positive view, remembering the comments of an Argentine yachtsman who visited in 2006: “after one day I saw that this was not Argentina; after two days I saw it was not even the Malvinas”. Within reason, I think that we shall benefit from Argentines who visit the prosperous and self-confident Falklands of today and go home with a Falklands stamp in their passports.

For we must recognize that the Falklands of today are a stronger and much more flourishing community than they were thirty or even twenty years ago. The population is at its highest level ever and the number of qualified young people steadily increases. Although there are financial problems, they come against a background of remarkable prosperity. Finally, and very important, the commitment of HMG and the British people to self-determination for the Islands has not faltered. It is our resolve in the FIA that this support shall remain steadfast.