



FALKLAND ISLANDS ASSOCIATION

REVIEW OF THE YEAR 2010

INTRODUCTION

Welcome everyone. In particular Col Keeble and thanks to him for laying the wreath on behalf of the Armed Forces. A particular welcome also to former Governor Alan Huckle, just back from a very distinguished tenancy of Government House.

We are grateful once again to the Union Jack Club for their hospitality.

We were all saddened by the death of our Chaplain, the Revd Peter Millam, on 8 June this year. There was a good obituary in the Newsletter – I shall remember his fierce pride in his Falklands ancestry and his determination to be present at Battle Day, despite his failing health. How many of us last year realised that he had come straight to the Cenotaph from his hospital bed and returned to it immediately after the service?

Welcome Revd Dr Stephen Palmer who came from Aberdeen to conduct our brief service, splendid in the scarlet cassock of a Chaplain to the Queen.

We had an additional standard on parade today, that of the HMS Protector Association, and we welcome RSM Colin Hearn, recently retired from the Royal Marines, who brought the cadets from Pangbourne College to act as escort to the Colour Parties at the Battle Day Ceremony.

DOMESTIC

There have been a few changes in the membership of the committee. Zoran Zuvic left us to return to the Islands, before joining the Royal Marines. There will be two new names among those being put to you for election at this AGM: Col Keeble, who needs no introduction, and Mrs Dominique Giudicelli, who was until recently the environmental planning officer in Stanley.

We should congratulate one of our committee members Col Mike Bowles, who has been elected the Chairman of Trustees of SAMA – the South Atlantic Medal Association.

We have had one outing this year. Nineteen members of the Association visited the Merseyside Maritime Museum at the Albert dock in Liverpool to see the exhibition of Shackleton photographs by Frank Hurley and the museum generally. This was an excellent visit, very ably organised by our Secretary Colin Wright. It was a particular pleasure to meet members of the FIA from the North Country who had not been able to make it to meetings in London but who took this opportunity to join us in Liverpool.

Once again I should like to express my thanks, and all our thanks to our honorary Secretary, Colin Wright. He has organised today's ceremony, he organised the trip to Liverpool and he has kept your committee on the straight and narrow throughout the year. We all owe him a debt of gratitude.

I must also mention James Wallace, our Hon Treasurer who despite the pressures of a full time job travelling the world manages to keep on top of our finances, the development of internet banking facilities has been his task possible – also we congratulate him and Annelot on the birth of their son, Lieuwe, in September this year.

THE NEWSLETTER

We are equally in debt to the team who make the Newsletter possible. This year's two issues have been fully up to the high standard set by SeAled PR in Stanley with our editor Lisa Watson. Thanks are due too to Cindy Buxton who gathers the contributions at this end and supervises the printing and distribution of the N/L.

THE ELECTION AND THE PARLIAMENTARY GROUP

Last year was Falklands elections – this year was our turn. The coalition government has brought a change of ministers. The Falklands now come under the portfolio of the Minister of State, Jeremy Browne who is also responsible for Latin America. The other Overseas Territories are the responsibility of the parliamentary under secretary Henry Bellingham.

The All-party parliamentary group is now chaired by Derek Twigg MP, who was a Veterans minister at the MOD during the Labour Government and visited the Islands with the SAMA Pilgrimage in 2007. Our stalwart supporter Andrew Rosindell provides the element of continuity as secretary. We have not yet had a meeting with the group, but hope to arrange one in the New Year.

In October we sent a letter introducing ourselves to the new MPs with a copy of the Newsletter and a similar letter to established MPs. It is a tribute to the well-focused political lobbying done by Sukey Cameron and her staff at FIGO that so many of the new ministers had already visited the Islands on trips arranged for the Falkland Islands Government when they were in opposition.

THE FALKLANDS AND ARGENTINA

The past year has seen a rise in the political temperature in the south Atlantic. The Argentine government which had accepted the presence of an oil drilling rig in 1998, reacted with angry impotence to the arrival of a second rig in Falklands waters in February. There was a flurry of press interest and we found ourselves writing to or for a variety of papers, ranging from the *Western Daily Press* to *Newsweek*. I was surprised by how un-briefed many British journalists were. Few were aware that in 1995 HMG had signed an agreement with Argentina covering oil exploration which, among other things, included setting up an area of shared exploitation along the sea-boundary. Fewer seemed to know that the government of President Kirchner had torn up this agreement in 2007, leaving itself no leg to stand on when drilling resumed. The Argentines have taken various steps to interrupt shipping links with the Islands which are illegal in international law and which have succeeded in irritating their Chilean and Uruguayan neighbours. There has been marginal interference with shipping to Punta Arenas and with fishing.

Both the present and the previous British governments have been robust in their support of Islanders, as have the British media with the perhaps predictable exception of *The Guardian*. One of our members Peter Pepper brought various inaccuracies in a *Guardian* article to the notice of the press complaints commission. After long deliberation, the PCC declined to issue a correction, but we believe it was a useful reminder to the journalist in question that his assertions were being monitored and his assertions were wrong.

Since the election, HMG has been if anything more robust and I find it reassuring that there has been no pressure to reduce the defence of the Islands during the recent defence review. Indeed in discussing the Islands in the context of Anglo-French defence cooperation, Dr Liam Fox, the Secretary of State for Defence, who knows the Islands and is a good friend of ours, declared: "There are those who ask whether we have a plan to retake the Falkland Islands. No, no more than we have a plan to retake Kent, as we have no intention of losing them."

Finally a footnote on dealings with Argentina. Who said last month: "Sure I know negotiations with the Argentines are going to be difficult; you can bet on that and I've known it for quite some time. That's no news, that's life in our corner of the world"?

Not any of the members of the Legislative Assembly. In fact it was an even closer neighbour of Argentina – President Mujica of Uruguay!

OIL EXPLORATION

The various companies with interests in Falklands waters have been using the drilling rig during the year. Some results have been encouraging – others less so. This is a scene which is difficult for an outsider to assess and I was struck that when the Hon. Jan Cheek spoke to our committee in September she was very guarded. The fact is that many of the companies involved are relatively small with all their interests concentrated in the south Atlantic, so that any report or rumour may have a dramatic effect on their share prices. The *Daily Telegraph* recently analysed the share movements of one company and it is a cautionary tale.

I remain relatively optimistic, but it will take some time before any direct return reaches the Falklands treasury. We should always remember that these are Falklands resources: a long time ago – in 1995 – councillors informed HMG in London in a document called the Battle Day letter that they would wish to contribute appropriately to the expenses of defending the Islands if oil revenues materialise. That remains the position.

IN CONCLUSION

In August this year one of our members celebrated her 100th birthday. We believe that Eileen Pickford, now living in retirement in Cornwall with her daughters, may be the longest surviving Falkland Islander, one of five children of Agnes and Edwin Creece, her father being storekeeper to the Falkland Islands Company. Penguin News ran the story and we are unaware of any challengers so far.

Let me mention a couple of events which leave me with a warm glow and I hope will encourage you.

I recently met a couple of officers from the Royal Marines who had just visited the Islands. They had indulged down with the RAF, meaning their fare cost virtually nothing and they had stayed in Liberty Lodge in Stanley – very comfortable. But more than this it was the reception they received from everyone in Camp and in Stanley which really impressed them.

A month ago I was invited to a small reception in FIGO to celebrate the presentation, by the Falkland Islands Philatelic Study Group, of a definitive stamp album containing all the Falklands stamps, to the Stanley Museum. This was collected by philatelists from several countries and represented a very significant gift and a gesture of the affection and the loyalty which the Islands evoke in their friends.

May it always remain so.