

**Rotary Club of Great Missenden
21 years of Fun, Fellowship and Service**

Fri 28th October 2005

A light-hearted review by Mike Rainford

Mr President, Ladies, Distinguished Guests and fellow Rotarians, to cover 21 years of Great Missenden history in under 15 minutes means I shall have to gloss over some of the fascinating statistics, Treasurers reports and Council minutes I had hoped to include. So I shall concentrate on some personal memories that I hope many of you share.

First of all, we were Chartered in 1984. George Orwell's predictions didn't include us, but now that we have Big Brother and 24/7 TV surveillance, I'm sure his Thought Police will soon be organising a crackdown on us...

Actual 1984 was the year of the Los Angeles Olympics; the invention of GCSE's; and, someone called Prince Henry was born. Whatever happened to him?

Our story begins when Amersham Rotary, having decided to set up an evening club on their patch, invited a number of potential members, several of us ex-Round Table, to a meeting at Peter Meade's house in Chesham Bois. There, Peter and his fellow 'midwife' the late Bill Summers, started the ball rolling, and handed us over to the tender mercies of District Extension Officer Don Sawyer, a local Undertaker of some renown, whose main passion after embalming and Rotary was his historic collection of Meccano.

Our first meetings as the Interim Rotary Club of Gt Missenden were held in the back room of the Chequers in Prestwood. Each week, we dined on piles of sandwiches laid out tastefully on the Pool Table, while potential recruits were brought in to hear the words of wisdom.

We then moved on to the Red Lion in Gt Missenden. Meanwhile, the Chequers back room had been turned into a Chinese Restaurant. After a few meetings at the Red Lion (also with sandwiches), we moved again to the Windsor Lodge Hotel in Little Kingshill. Having left the Red Lion, the pub was converted into an Estate Agency and a Flower shop. A worrying trend was beginning to appear.

The Windsor Lodge, where the carrot was king. Every meal included compulsory carrots. Funnily enough after each winter meeting, I could always find my car, no matter how dark the car park happened to be. One evening, the inevitable happened. The proprietor announced that we would have to go. He was going to pull the hotel down and build houses. Orphans again.

Now by happy coincidence Peter Booth had been secretly negotiating for us to meet in Missenden Abbey, our present home. Even happier (for us anyway) the Abbey had sensibly had their fire before we arrived. Not so the Pavilion at the Bell at Aston Clinton where we had our 10th birthday celebration. That burned down shortly after we were there. Just coincidences, all of them, I'm sure.

So, who are we, in Gt Missenden Rotary, and what have we been doing for the past 21 years?

We now meet on Monday evenings at the Abbey, have a beer at the bar, enjoy an excellent meal, listen to a speaker and/or conduct a certain amount of business, and go home. Woe betide any President who doesn't get us out by 10.00 pm. But that is just the tip of the iceberg. What goes on outside is equally if not more important. You have heard a typical example from Peter, the Run Around the Underground. We do fund raising and community service but try to have fun while doing it.

So a few snippets from the past to jog your memories:

Fund Raising

The reconstruction of the Christmas Float, promoted by Kathy, masterminded by Chief Engineer David Mitchell, almost derailed by the titanic Tabard debacle.

The 48 hour Tesco Christmas Collections, where we fight to cover the prestigious 3am to 5am slot.

The Lands End to John o'Groats cycle ride led by Gavin, sponsored by the Petroleum Jelly Industry.

The Duck Races. 1000 plastic ducks all counted out and all counted back, giving grown men and women a chance to paddle in the white waters of the Chess.

At a guess, we must have raised over £150,000 for charity at today's prices over the last 21 years, and that's not counting our time and donations in kind.

Community Service

Bulb Planting. A springtime festival of Daffodils. We received praise from one Prestwood resident but he also complained about the dandelions we had planted to follow them.

And in Little Missenden, while we were busy planting crocuses in that small semicircle of green in the centre of the village, the Hyacinth Bucket lookalike who bustled out to demand ' what are you doing here ?' Brian Betts looked at her with a straight face and said 'we're planting land mines'. Purple faced she demanded again, 'who gave you permission?' Brian pulled out a letter from a Parish Councillor, she looked at it and exclaimed 'Oh Her!' turned on her heel and stomped back into the house.

Vocational and Yoof

Mock interviews at the Misbourne School. Now adopted as part of the school curriculum for those starting their GCSE years.

Interesting to see the difference between those early unprepared candidates, and the well groomed young people clutching their CVs that we see now.

Must not forget Lighthouse, masterminded by George Rivas from the beginning, where we help in several ways, although this year, given our advancing years, we opted out of our backbreaking heavy table and chair lifting duties. Couldn't face that dark black hut amongst the spiders and mice...

International and Foundation

We have to mention Polio Plus, Rotary's campaign to rid the world of Polio. We have raised 600 million US\$ worldwide, and we are nearly there. Yet a BBC News item I saw a few months ago about the project mentioned our partners WHO, but not a word about Rotary. A silent service I suppose.

We in Gt Missenden have run many projects in Africa, Central America, the Sub Continent and elsewhere. One such project was paying for a Shea Nut Crusher for a village in Ghana. I'll admit that I was not up to speed on uses of crushed shea nuts, until glancing through a celebrity magazine I noticed a quote from Tamzin Outhwaite, one time Soap Star and TV actress. Last thing at night

she always coats herself with African Shea Body Butter. So now you know.

Shoe Boxes. Another George Rivas initiative. Chatting up all the local headmistresses. Several thousand boxes will again be heading up the M6 in a week or so to the Preston Warehouse for onward delivery to families in Eastern Europe.

Rotary the World Over. How many of you remember Tony Shaw's efforts in the early years to get a worldwide celebration on Leap Year day. It was then we discovered that Rotary International was not a particularly nimble organisation. I remember Ralph Davies saying it was easier working for Mohamed Al Fayed and his brother.

Club Service

Tony Shaw again, inventor of the Virtual Visit to another Club. Meeting a couple of Rotarians in a bar, or passing a hotel with a 'Rotary Meets Here' plaque on the wall would be enough to claim an attendance. Creative Attendance Officer J*** L*****, would accept or reject, according to our position on the District Attendance League Table. Neither too high nor too low, so as not to attract attention. (*No one here from District tonight is there?*) Tony would invariably be fined by our watchful Sergeant at Arms, Corporal Booth, but Tony was prepared. He had a budget for such fines. Of all our Presidents, Kathy must have entered the record books. The sight of elderly Rotarians spluttering into their beer when we proudly announced that our President was pregnant was a joy to behold.

Food plays an important part in our meetings. I think President Steve and John Skrimshire are front runners in the race to win the Quail Egg Cup.

Social Activities

I put the annual District Conference in this category. Over the years we have trawled the exotic fleshpots and watering holes of the nation: Eastbourne, Brighton, Bournemouth, Eastbourne, Bath, Torquay, Harrogate, Cardiff, and Eastbourne. Unfortunately I had my back to the bar window when the young Brighton ladies performed for our benefit. You will have to ask George Tyler about that.

Remember the Barn Dances? The early events in Roger Higgs' barn on Quarrendon Farm. The ladies were allowed to use the loo in the farmhouse. Us chaps were directed to a wall behind the cowshed.

Messing about in Boats. The annual trip to the Henley Royal Regatta organised by Stewards Enclosure Booth is a real highlight. After visiting the Pimms Tent and a soporific lunch, it's a real surprise to see boats charging up and down the river.

We have had a few boat trips ourselves. On one memorable occasion we all piled into a narrow boat for a trip along the Grand Union Canal. Unfortunately, being late autumn, darkness fell quickly, and sitting in rows in the cabin I couldn't help thinking that this is what a sightseeing trip along the Bakerloo Line would be like.

Finally, how many of you remember a scatter visit to Princes Risborough years ago, when at the time the Austin Princess car had a variant called 'Ambassador'?

The speaker that evening was showing slides and talking about his time in Central Africa: Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi etc. Towards the end of the presentation the landlord interrupted the meeting; a car was blocking the car park. 'Who's got a brown Ambassador?', he called. From the back, without hesitation, came a voice: 'Malawi!'. It brought the house down.

I'm sorry if I haven't mentioned a particular moment that you enjoyed, but 10.00 pm is approaching.

Thankyou.

Mike Rainford