

NEWS FROM BORNEO

April 2022



The Fall of Singapore, 15 February 1942

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Hello everyone,

Welcome to News from Borneo for our new members of the Sandakan Family. This year marks a number of anniversaries related to our POWs. First and foremost it is the 80th Anniversary of that momentous event, the Fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942, a disaster of colossal magnitude that saw more than 15,000 Australians become prisoners of the Japanese. At war's end, one third were dead, including all but six of our 1793 Australian POWs at Sandakan. As I am sure you are aware, there was not a single solitary survivor from the 641 British.

The leading photo (above) shows the great pall of smoke erupting from the oil tanks burning at Kranji – deliberately sabotaged to prevent the stocks falling into Japanese hands. The colonnaded, Greek-style building is the City Hall, overlooking the padang, with the spire of St Andrew's, used as a hospital in the final few days, just visible to the right. The low level building in front of the City Hall is the very pukka Cricket Club (taken over for use by Japanese officers), while the clock tower belongs to the Queen Victoria Building. In the background is Singapore's only 'skyscraper', the Cathay building. As the highest building in the city, it had the dubious honour of flying a white flag of surrender and the Japanese ensign to leave no one in any doubt that the war, for us, was over.

Being such a significant anniversary, it was a great pity that covid rained on Singapore's parade. A service, however, was organized, and among the limited number permitted to attend was Paul Elliott (see below), husband of my friend and colleague Di who, you might recall, died from a brain tumour in 2020. She had planned to be in Singapore for this anniversary to honour her father, who was a POW on the railway from May 1942 until war's end. There were three other Australians also present, but Paul was the only one with a personal connection, resulting in several interviews with the press. He laid flowers for our war dead at what was a moving ceremony, during which a bell was rung five times by an Australian Army officer, to signify five years of war in the Pacific. You can watch the service on:

<https://www.facebook.com/battleboxsg/videos/518593712915006/>



Also present was the Japanese Ambassador and Japanese citizens, who, after the wreath laying, placed bundles of brightly coloured origami paper cranes, made by Japanese schoolchildren, alongside the traditional poppy wreathes, as a sign of honour and peace.



After placing the paper cranes at the memorial, the Japanese representatives bowed low, signifying deep respect. The fact that they and the Ambassador attended this service ensured that the story of the fall of Singapore, and the years of death and deprivation that followed, was covered by Japanese media. Although I know that many POW families will never forgive, or forget, these acts of reconciliation serve to help the Japanese public understand the consequences of a war, about which they know very little, including the fact that Australians fought Japan and died. This comes as a surprise as, if they learned anything at all about WW2 at

school, it was that Japan had gone to war to 'liberate' the suppressed Asian people from Colonial rule! If you are not very conversant with the Fall of Singapore, this video is worth watching. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDTjTo5MJIE>

In Sydney, the traditional 8 Division service, which ceased at the 75th anniversary, was revived. No veterans were in attendance, as the few left alive are very elderly, but around 200-300 relatives etc attended. The cenotaph was a riot of (mostly) beautiful Australian wildflowers. Judy placed lilies to remember her father Eric Tomkyns and his comrades, accompanied by a special message. Neil and I and several members of The Family attended and, to prove it, I was in range of a TV camera filming the event. That's me, in the red top and surgical mask, just behind the soldier on the left! To watch the Channel 9 coverage, go to <https://youtu.be/8yi2ZBndfqU>



POW family members in Bathurst, where members of 8 Division trained, marked the occasion by laying flowers at the Broken Blade Memorial, in town. Meanwhile, in Malaya, at the site of the terrible massacre of the wounded at the bridge at Parit Sulong, the local people, who have

organized the total restoration of the buildings in which the victims were held, pulled out all stops to mark the 80th anniversary of that event, with participants dressing in Australian and Japanese uniforms. It was my honour to be the historical adviser and to compose the wording on the story boards for this project, with the commemoration on 22 January and subsequent media attention once again helping to spread the story. A big thank you to the local people, for preserving the (our!) memory. Here in Australia, the occasion passed totally unmarked, but a friend, Garth, who lives in Canberra, made a special trip to the National POW Memorial – the beautiful little chapel crated up and brought from Changi, for re-erection in the grounds of Duntroon Military College.



The Broken Blade at Bathurst (above left) and locals in wartime dress outside the room in the restored building at Parit Sulong, where the POWs were imprisoned before the massacre, and beside the story boards. A large poster, featuring hero and survivor Ben Hackney, is on the outside of the building



The Changi Chapel

Congratulations 1! Tham has been advised that he is to receive an MBE (British award) for his services to conserve Sabah's cultural, historical and environmental heritage. In June he will travel to Kuala Lumpur for the presentation. Heartiest congratulations to Tham for decades of hard work in all these significant fields, especially in regard to his efforts to trace and locate the death march route on the ground, which resulted in the track being opened.

And 2! Speaking of the death marches, Tham's senior guide Maik Miki, who was one of three dedicated jungle experts to help Tham locate the lost track, became engaged recently. Many readers will know Maik, because he accompanied a number of treks back in the early days. He and his fiancé Eva, a nurse, are both Dusun, so I thought you might be interested to see how an engagement is celebrated in two cultures, western and Dusun-style, with traditional costumes and a ceremony that involves the women elders of the village.





And 3! Sandakan Family Member Ian Dunlop, aged 85, is a long-term, and by far the oldest member, of his local surf club, at a seaside town north of Newcastle in NSW. He is also one of our greatest financial supporters of the Scholarship Trust, after visiting Sabah with us some years ago. Ian's enthusiasm for life and his commitment to his local community is inspirational, so it is little wonder that he was featured on the TV news a couple of months ago. Well done Ian! Watch him on: https://m.facebook.com/nbntelevision/videos/old-lifesaver/2081615068626257/?refsrc=deprecated&_rdr



Scholarship Girls: While on the subject of the Sandakan Memorial Scholarship Trust, here is an update on how the girls are doing. Like students, everywhere, covid has paid havoc with their study timetable, sending them back to their villages during lockdowns, but they are now back in Sandakan and back at school. We have 13 girls, aged between 14 and 18, staying at the hostel.

Five of the students (Shirnesa aged 14, Loveviana and Abrienda, both aged 18, and Jikolina and Luan, both 16), come from Kampung Tungkuyan, on the Sugut River, which flows from Mt Kinabalu to empty into the sea north of Sandakan. Marvinia, aged 16, also lives on the Sugut River, at a village of the same name. Errycalyn (18) and Ivy (17) come from Nangoh, a small town on the road leading from Sapi (on the death march route) to Pitas, in the far north

of the state. The home of Irviana, 15, is also along this road, at Bosinti Bahru, on the Tungud River. Joyce aged 16 hails from Telupid, a key site on the death march route and a place that many of you know, while Amanda's home town is Lahud Datu, to the south of Sandakan, and gateway to the beautiful Danum Valley. The villages of Venelia, aged 16, and Roschilla, aged 15, are in the heart of Sabah, at Kuamut and Saugon, surrounded by pristine forestry reserves, complete with elephants. Here are some recent snaps of some the girls.



Senior girls (top left), Maths class and outside the church.

Buy-a-Smile: After many months in limbo, with travel restricted from one area to another, our project has finally been able to get back on track with a much-delayed hare-lip and cleft-palate operation on Saidah, now aged 2 ½, who has been waiting since she was 7 months old. Our friend Willie Teo and our co-ordinator Gary did a wonderful job in making all the arrangements for the operation, which was performed at the hospital in Labuan. The little girl's mother told no one about the surgery so you can imagine the response when she returned home, with a brand new smile. Her mother sends heartfelt thanks to all the 'Orang Putih' (white people) in Australia who made the transformation possible. We were also contacted by Gerry, from the UK, who read about our project on the website and sponsored an operation for a young man whom he knew, from his visits to Sabah. Here are some photos! The after shots are taken immediately after the operation. To see just how good our plastic surgeons are, look at a recent photo taken of Hafiz, now that the healing is complete - absolutely beautiful.



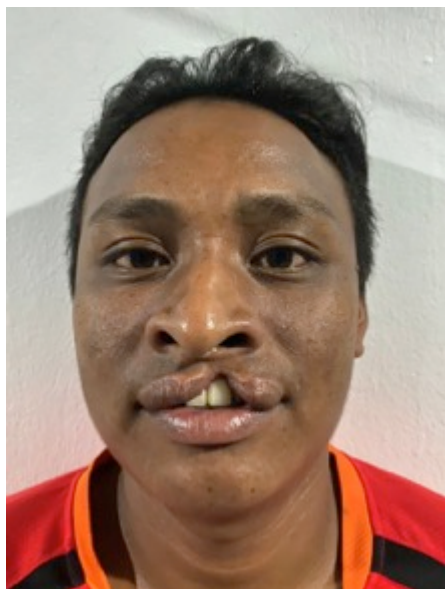
Saidah before



immediately after



a week later



Gerry's friend before



after



Hafiz, completely healed.

Successful grave identification:

I am pleased to report that, after a **very** long delay, due to administrative problems and a change in procedure, there has been movement on a grave identification that I submitted six years ago! While trawling through my voluminous files, in 2016, I noted that one of the POWs found in the POW cemetery at Paginatan, had been buried with his wooden, Japanese-issued POW tag, the only one actually found with remains, although some were found scattered around POW camps. The War Graves units doing the exhumations had no idea that records had been recovered in Kuching, listing the POWs numbers and the names of the prisoners to whom they were assigned. Those who located the records did not know about finding remains with a tag. No one had ever cross-checked the paper work, or collated the results. Consequently, the remains were never identified at the time.

As I had located the paperwork, buried away for years, I was able to establish that the tag belonged to an English POW, Leading Aircraftman John William Augustus Toye, RAF, aged 29, who went on the first march and died at Paginatan, where groups 6-9 were held for about five weeks. I received no notification that my research had actually been accepted as correct,

discovering quite by accident, and to my astonishment, a note on the Commonwealth War Graves website, that *Recent research has shown that Leading Aircraftman Toye is buried here. Currently the grave is marked with a headstone to an Unknown Soldier, but a new headstone bearing his details is now on order.*



Well on reading this I contacted Willie Teo, post haste, who went immediately to the grave I had identified in Labuan Cemetery, 21 D 7, to investigate on my behalf and here is a photo of the new headstone - hot off the press! We have beaten CWGC to the punch! As you can imagine, I am feeling very pleased, but rather bemused that CWGC appears to have taken credit for my digging and delving!

I have several more much-delayed submissions still in the pipeline, which I had to resubmit to the new

assessors and hope that they are equally successful. They are Australian identifications, so are being dealt with here, under a new system.

My grave identifications (more than 40 so far) do not involve my physically searching for remains, just (!) sifting through mountains of documents for clues. However, here is a story, courtesy of our UK family member Claire, about a father who physically looked for his son, an Australian-born soldier, killed in WW I. It just shows what persistence can accomplish!

When Australian-born 2nd Lieutenant Eric Francis Seaforth Hayter was shot through the head and killed in March 1918, while serving on the Western Front with the Royal Field Artillery on the first awful day of the German Spring Offensive, his Dad, Colonel Frederick Hayter, was desperate to know where his boy had been buried. He was assured the exact location of Eric's grave would no doubt become clear once the war was over the battlefields cleared.

The Colonel was not happy and chafed, as he waited in vain for news.

Then, in 1919, he was greatly surprised to receive a parcel in the post from a German soldier. It contained Eric's paybook and a tracing of a map that showed where his body, found with two other English soldiers, had been buried by Germans, who had taken the ground that day, beside a sunken road between the villages of Morchies and Lagnicourt.

The spot was very close to where Eric's 87th Battery had been in action on the day of his death, and Colonel Hayter was not about to let this go.

Setting out on a personal odyssey, he spent long hours on the battlefields in the months ahead, often accompanied by former German soldiers whom he had tracked down - men who had fought Eric around the time of his death. He checked every grave he could find, spoke to everyone who would listen.

He also kept on at the Directorate of Graves Registration & Exhumation (DGR & E), which was at that time in charge of recovering the remains of lost soldiers from the battlefields, identifying and then reburying them in designated cemeteries, established by the Imperial War Graves Commission.

He sent the recovery teams as much information as he could about Eric. Aged 25, he was just over 6 ft tall, with dark brown hair and, very significantly, his back teeth had five gold crowns.



He heard nothing for months but, in the spring of 1920 received a letter from the DGR & E, stating they were fairly sure the grave of an 'unknown' English officer in Queant Road Cemetery was that of his son. Would the Colonel like them to place a headstone with Eric's details over the grave?

However, the Colonel was sceptical. He knew the place where this unknown officer had been found was some way from the spot where Eric had fallen. Refusing to be fobbed off, he wanted proof and made them re-exhume the recently buried 'unknown'. He had no bullet wound through the skull and no gold crowns.

This was the first of many exhumations wangled by Colonel Hayter in his search for Eric.

The following year, on 6th August 1921, twelve graves at Lagnicourt Hedge Cemetery, marked as German, were opened. The Colonel was convinced they were not all German but British lads buried by the Germans after the battle, and he was right. Of the 20 bodies exhumed, five were British.

None of them was Eric Hayter.

All through 1922 and 1923, the Colonel continued to spend long weeks in France, negotiating with a local farmer on places he could dig in hopes of finding his son. Finally, in June 1923, after many false starts and dashed hopes, he asked the farmer if he could buy a small plot of land close to where he believed Eric had died, on which he could erect a monument. The negotiations took months, eventually coming to an irrevocable halt when the landowner refused to budge from the astronomical price he was demanding.

However, the field opposite happened to be owned by a kindly French countess who, on hearing of the Colonel's troubles, offered him small plot for a trifling sum. Six and a half years after Eric's death, in the autumn of 1924, and watched by the Colonel, a contractor began digging the footings for the foundation of the stone memorial.

Three feet down, all work ceased. There was a body.

The regimental buttons and rank badges showed him to be a 2nd Lieutenant with the Royal Field Artillery, but it was the autumn sun glinting on five teeth, crowned in gold, that proved he was Eric.

The Colonel decided that Eric's body should not be further disturbed. A concrete coffin was sunk around the remains, over which the memorial stone was placed. The Imperial War Graves Commission agreed that in this one, and very particular case, the grave would be allowed to remain where it was.

As a journalist writing for the Dundee Advertiser reported, here was a 'story of a father's undying faith, of a strange battlefield meeting and of a coincidence so miraculous that I should hesitate to write of it, were not the facts fully substantiated'.

Report from Tham: With covid putting an end to tourism in Sabah for months, Tham and his senior guide Beverly have been keeping an eye on various sites related to the death march. The historic marker at Paginatan has come to grief, hit by a falling branch from a huge fig tree. Acting on Beverly's advice, I have informed Sabah Tourism and hope that before too long it will be replaced. However, Zudin Platform overlooking the climb up Taviu Hill ("Milulu") and the Tuaty Akai Gallery at Bauto are being well looked after by Sabah Forestry, as the photo of the gallery, below, shows.



'Convict' POW bricks: Aussie larrikinism was alive and well in 1942, when a working party was given the task of making bricks to beautify the Singapore Botanical Gardens, which the Japanese, through a civilian botanist, were actually looking after. As a lasting act of defiance, the Australian POWs marked each brick with a traditional 'broad arrow' to show that, like convicts sent from Britain to Australia, who also made bricks, they were 'detained by the authorities'. Here are the steps they built.



One of the broad arrow bricks, and the POW stairs. Take a look, next time you visit Singapore!

Singapore Far East Moon Memorial Rose: Moving onto other matters botanical, a beautiful rose, developed here in Australia in memory of all WW2 Far East POWs, is now available.



Singapore Far East Moon is a lightly scented bush rose, its yellow blooms symbolising mateship and compassion, its name a reminder that all prisoners and their families looked up at the same bright moon and thought of their loved ones far away. If your family has no marked grave to visit, you might like to plant one of these beautiful roses as a special memorial for your POW.

For mail order to Eastern Australian states, please contact Wagner's Rose Nursery, 20 Koorine Road Kalangadoo SA, 5278 Tel (08) 8739 3321 or email the nursery: hello@wagnersrosenursery.com.au In Western Australia, contact Swiss Rose Garden Nursery, 38 Wollaston Ave, Haynes (Armadale), phone: 08 9399 1880, mobile: 0419 969 302, email: etter@iinet.net.au

The tragedy of war: It is said that the reality of war was brought to Australians in their comfortable lounge rooms via the nightly news coverage of the Vietnam conflict. For those old enough to remember, who could ever forget the sight of that young girl, running naked along the road, with her skin, burned by napalm, flapping in strips? Or the officer casually shooting a civilian prisoner in the head? Thanks to the appalling events in Ukraine, our TV screens are again filled with heartbreaking stories of the death and suffering of innocent civilians, caught up in hostilities.

Back in WW2, there was no TV with its nightly news to document what was happening to the civilian population in Britain. Australians most certainly knew about the Blitz, but reports did not focus on the individual, with newsreels in cinemas covering instead the bigger picture, of smashed homes, burning buildings and ruined cities.

Claire, our UK friend, who has a talent for seeking out stories that are about people, rather than events, sent me a story, set in Durham County in 1942. The anniversary of this awful event is on 1 May, so, with Claire's permission and some slight input from me, the following brings home what war is really all about.

On 30th April 1942, the little mining village of Beamish, County Durham, was as it had always been. Formerly known as Pit Hill, it retained some admirably colourful local names: Hell Hole Wood; a little street by the railway embankment called Peggy's Wicket (although no one remembers why); and the hamlet of No Place, to the south.

However, the following day everything changed.

Just before 3 o'clock that morning, the pilot of a Luftwaffe bomber on his way to destroy Durham Cathedral, became lost in the pre-dawn fog. Looking for somewhere to drop his bombs, and possibly spotting the glint of the railway line that served the nearby colliery, he let loose three 1000-pound bombs on the little village.

The first exploded on impact, damaging some shops and houses on Station Road and catapulting everybody out of bed. The second, fitted with a time-delay fuse of 6 hours, fell on

the railway embankment. However, as no one knew if it had simply failed to explode or if it would go off at any moment, the overhead footbridge, Post Office and nearby houses were roped off and the residents evacuated. Had the bomb disposal team, called first thing the next morning, not been delayed at a level crossing, it would have been blown sky high when the fuse triggered an explosion at around 9 am. As it was, part of the railway was churned up, the footbridge damaged and a water main fractured. Houses and shops, already affected by the first bomb, suffered further damage.

All this caused great excitement in the local area and throughout the day people came from miles around to see what had happened, to check on friends and to hear everybody's near-miss stories. What none of them knew was that a third bomb, also delayed-action, had fallen, unseen, into another building.

The hole it made in the roof was assumed to be caused by the two earlier explosions, so the people of the village and the surrounding area, believing the emergency had passed, spent the day salvaging what they could from the damaged buildings and making sure everyone had somewhere to stay that night.

As dusk approached, workers began lining up at the village bus stop, waiting for the bus to take them home. Children, full of excitement at the brush with Hitler on their doorstep, were still playing in the streets in the early evening light, exploring piles of rubble, watched by two Special Constables, in their early sixties, tasked with the job of trying to keep them from falling into holes and away from unsafe walls.

Just after 9 pm, the last bomb, buried for 18 hours in the foundations of a village shop, exploded, the force of the blast uprooting trees, ripping across the road to the line of people at the bus stop and filling the air with fragments of stone and glass and bodies.

Special Constable Sam Edgell's son, Jack, knew his Dad was on duty and rocketed out of their house towards the scene. He found his father lying twisted on the road, unconscious but alive, his boots blown off his feet. The other Special Constable, Robert Reay, was found dead in the ruins of a nearby house he had been helping to repair.

Survivors searched frantically in the chaos, parents screaming for their children. Miners from the colliery wept as they unearthed two small broken bodies, Clive Lawson aged 9, and 8-year-old Irene Seymour who, at the moment of the blast, had been walking hand-in-hand with her 77-year-old grandmother Mathilda. She too would soon die of her injuries.

Gwennie Hannant, aged 17, had been to the pictures with her boyfriend Jim. His call-up papers had just arrived and were in his pocket. Gwennie was killed outright by the blast; Jim survived with two broken legs. Searchers also found fatally injured ten-year-old Sylvia and her mother Elizabeth, along with another seven seriously injured people. A further 28 suffered lesser wounds.

Hitler tried, as Winston Churchill put it, to break us in our island, to break our spirit, but even on an unimaginable night like this in a tiny, brave, County Durham pit village, he did not succeed. May the brave men and women in the Ukraine find the strength to continue to withstand the onslaught, just as we did 80 years ago, and may they, too, fight their way to victory.

Note from Lynette: Beautiful Durham Cathedral, perched on a hill above the river and a prominent target for German bombers, survived the war. I have learned from a friend, born in

Ukraine, that the morale of people there was lifted considerably when images of our Opera House, flooded in blue and yellow light, were flashed around the world. In case you didn't see it, here it is.



Vale, Sheila Allan: In January, a few days after I dispatched the last News from Borneo, I learned of the death, at the age of 97, of Sheila (Allan) Bruhn, the only Australian woman interned/imprisoned by the Japanese in Singapore. Some of you may have met her, literally, when she attended the unveiling of the Windows of Remembrance in Sandakan, or through her book, *Diary of a Girl in Changi*. Physically tiny, Sheila had the heart of a lion and was not afraid to speak her mind, or to stand up and be counted. Below is a photo I located that shows her, dressed in her nursing uniform, peering over the balcony of Singapore's City Hall as Lord Louis Mountbatten addresses the throng, on 12 September 1945, the day that Japan formally surrendered, in Singapore. Sheila is 2nd to the left of the pillar.



I wrote her obituary, which was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, *WA Today*, *The Brisbane Times* and *Canberra Times*. It is an interesting story of survival. Here is the link, and there are some great pics. <https://www.smh.com.au/national/only-australian-woman-captured-and-interned-by-japanese-in-singapore-20220211-p59vpe.html>

Another anniversary: On 29 May, it is the anniversary of the 2nd death march, which left Sandakan for Ranau with 536 POWs. About 2/3 died on the way, either from illness, malnutrition or murdered by the guards. The total number who went on the marches was just over 1000. The remainder, about 1400, died at Sandakan – a fact that seems to have escaped many people, including prominent journalists, politicians, and others, not to mention people who ‘create’ internet web pages.

Some time ago I was sent a poem, written in 2019, by a 14 year-old boy, Joshua Dyer. It is entitled *One Thousand Men Are Walking*. It is not about the death marches, being set in Europe, but I was so struck by the aptness of the title that I ‘adapted’ it to suit our story. My apologies to the young poet, but I hope he is pleased that he has composed such a universal poem that can be used on more than one occasion, with a bit of tweeking.

ONE THOUSAND MEN ARE WALKING

*One thousand men are walking,
Walking side by side,
Singing songs to stir the soul,
Their spirit as their guide.
They walk towards the morning light
They walk towards the sun.
They smoke and laugh and smile, a lot,
as brothers, joined as one.*

*These men live on forever
in the hearts of those they saved.
A nation truly grateful
for the path of peace they paved.
They march as friends and comrades
but they do not march for war,
stepping closer to salvation,
a tranquil, steady corps.*

*The meadows lit with golden beams
a beacon for the brave,
the emerald grass untrampled
a reward for what they gave.
They dream of those they left behind
and know they dream of them.
Forever in elysian fields
there walk one thousand men.*

Adapted from a poem by Joshua Dyer, 2019 (aged 14)

To end on a high note! Royalty Mark 1:

Sandakan Family member Jenny has for some years been volunteering to serve on Mercy Ships, which provide much needed medical and dental services to people in third world countries. Covid disrupted her trips, of course, but she is now back on track, with a recent stint to Antwerp in the Netherlands to serve on a brand new vessel, *Global Mercy*, the world’s largest hospital ship. (see below) While she was there the Queen’s daughter, Princess Anne, The Princess Royal, paid a visit. Here is a happy snap!



Royalty Mark 2: Since 2005, I have been involved in the restoration of a unique ship, *MV Cape Don*, the only lighthouse supply ship left in Australia. Initially, we had hopes of being able to convert her to a mercy ship (one a lot smaller than Jenny's, being only 2,500 tonnes) because of the good number of cabins (50), two big workshops, a hold, a helipad and a shallow draft, making her ideal for ports in tropical islands. However, due to various reasons this was not possible, and the ship is now being converted to a static Commonwealth Lighthouse Museum and Training Vessel for indigenous youth.

I am actually more than involved, as I am the Patron of the Sea Heritage Foundation, which owns the ship, and *MV Cape Don Society*, the band of volunteer workers, dedicated to the restoration. Our ship, currently moored at the Old Coal Loader at Waverton, in Sydney, has attracted the interest of The Prince's Trust, a charitable body that provides funds for good works, overseen by Prince Charles.

On Sunday 10 April, we hosted a small, private event for Princess Anne, who made a flying working visit to Australia to open the Royal Easter Show in Sydney, to celebrate the bicentenary of the Royal Agricultural Society. The Princess not only has a lifelong interest in lighthouses and lighthouse ships but also inspects being supported by the Prince's Trust. As Patron, I was naturally included in the small group invited to meet her.

It was 53 years since we were last face to face – I was 23, the Princess was 18! The venue was a garden party at Buckingham Palace. In those days, obtaining an invitation was easy – relatively few people travelled overseas and all you needed was a character reference, supplied by one of our diplomats. The number of people invited was much smaller than today and, apart from waving the engraved invitation, complete with Royal Crest, as we entered the palace grounds, security was basically non-existent. Our (chauffeur-driven) car, supplied by Neil's employer, the C B C Bank (now NAB), simply rolled in through the gates, pulled up at the porte cochere in the courtyard (the one that you see the Queen use) and off we went - inside the palace itself and up a flight of grand steps to emerge on the terrace overlooking the back garden. They were the days!



This time the occasion was far more security conscious and far less formal – lots of high level security but no top hat and tails for Neil, or hat and gloves and high heels for me. (see pic at left!)

As HRH wanted to inspect the ship, practicality demanded that it was flat shoes and a 'smart casual' occasion!

As she boarded the ship, the Princess's Royal Standard was run up the flagpole- a first for a merchant ship in Australia. (below left)

We both had an animated conversation with the Princess, but I can't remember exactly what she said to make me look so surprised! (see pic with Neil on next page)





What did you say, Your Royal Highness, that surprised me?

You might find this amusing/amazing/worrying!

The security for the Royal Visit was extremely tight - everything had to be cleared days in advance, anyone allowed to be near the Princess was thoroughly vetted and no press allowed anywhere near the Royal party - apart from the Palace-appointed photographer. The press had to make do with what they could see from public areas.

So, imagine my surprise, when checking an aircraft radar app on my ipad, to see if our pilot son was flying, I zoomed in on Australia on Monday afternoon to spot a very conspicuous plane, all alone over the Coral Sea, off the coast of Queensland and heading on a direct line towards Pt Moresby in Papua New Guinea. I clicked on it to check its call sign – VHVSZ – to find it was a very nifty corporate jet that had left Sydney around midday.

Well, you don't have to be Einstein to work out who was on this jet and, sure enough, TV footage on the news that night showed the Princess emerging from that very same plane. The aircraft stayed there for the duration of the visit. Evidently, for 'security' reasons, the earlier TV news had announced that the plane was about to touch town, a considerable time after it had done so.

This morning (Wednesday 13 April), with the visit over, I was interested enough to see if the plane came back and, sure enough, there it was, having left Pt Moresby shortly after 9 am, heading in a direct line back to Sydney. After noting that it was flying at 10,000 metres and at a speed of more than 800 km per hour, I looked at the trajectory of the flight path and realized that, on final approach, it would be overhead at a fairly low altitude at our place in Sydney's northern suburbs. So, as it got very near, I stood on the lawn and, lo and behold, there it was, right above me. Literally. Perfect symmetry. I took a screen shot from the tracker to prove it - the zoom factor is so good you can see the individual houses on the map.

As was to be expected, no waiting around or circling for this plane at Sydney Airport - straight in for touch down. However, I was amused to see that, on arrival at the private terminal, the

VIP space right outside the doors was occupied by someone else, a much bigger plane, call sign LUN (a case of might is right?), so a bit of a walk to the terminal for our VIP passenger!

The information shown on the app, which included a photo of the aircraft and other data, said 'flight unknown' – well, there are obviously no secrets in this world if you have an electronic device, which is a bit of a worry. (Take note ASIO and MI6.) And all this, on an app, that you can download for free! Isn't technology amazing?

Trips to Sandakan: Despite claims made by Malaysia Airlines in their advertisements, evidently to entice passengers to fly to Sabah this month, due to covid considerations there is NO ANZAC DAY SERVICE AT SANDAKAN THIS YEAR. The decision was made by the Department of Veterans' Affairs on 11 March. Official wreathes will be laid to mark the occasion, but this short ceremony is not open to the public.



I am keeping a watch on the situation over there and hope that the much-delayed tours that have been on the backburner since April 2020 might eventuate in August or November. My yardstick is Singapore Airlines. When flights from Singapore to Kota Kinabalu resume I think it will be time to make a definite move!

I hope by the time we do get into the air, that the situation in the cartoon will not be one of the options!

On that note, best wishes to everyone – stay safe, get your booster jabs and if in doubt, wear your mask. Also, feel free to send me items of interest for inclusion in the next news!

Lynette (and Neil)