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S61 Chippies and Clankies Mini Reunion 2016 at Balloch, Scotland Report of Proceedings



Loch Lomond, 'The Arrochar Alps', and Ben Lomond
As seen by an extremely tall person standing in Balloch

Why Scotland? Since the 45th anniversary reunion, at Pompey, in 2012, all of our mini reunions have been held in exotic locations abroad. Who could forget the fabulous food, drink, and fun in the sun at Steve Southern's beautiful home in southern Spain; on the Carnival Freedom in the Caribbean, or at Arcachon, the Jewel of the Gironde, in France? Each was a tremendous success, and all who attended came away having enjoyed a fantastic, and unique, experience in the matchless company of their old S61 shipmates.

This year, we thought we'd have a Homecoming, to enable those members who, for whatever reason, are less able to find the time, or perhaps, the inclination, to travel abroad, to join in the fun. Also, to level the playing field a little for the denizens of the far North, who always seem to have the furthest to travel. Apart from Trev Payne, that is, who has travelled half way across the world to attend a number of reunions!

Why Balloch in particular? Easy; because it's uniquely situated on the Bonny Banks, at the gateway to the Western Highlands, and has all the pubs, eateries, attractions and infrastructure needed to facilitate a successful reunion weekend. Full of friendly, welcoming, locals. Oh, and it's where I live!



Inkeepers Lodge – Balloch Hotel
Photo by Phil Mair



Duck Bay Hotel and Marina



The Maid of the Loch, at Balloch

The Cast (aka The Plastered Cast)

Photos courtesy of S61 Official Photographer – Iron Mike Deveria



Steve Barker & Debbie



Pete & Sandra Bellamy



Kev 'Eddy' Calvert & Lorraine



Ron & Angela Clarke



Wally & Wilma Clelland



Bob & Angela Crow



Joe Dagnino & Anne



Mike & Toos Deveria



Alan & Sue Dixon



Gordon & Liz Dunsmuir



Mike & Sandra Hall



Dave Lenton & Carolyn



Mike Morris & Nic



Phil & Shirley Mair



Jeff & Linda Marshall



Trev & Lindy Payne



Steve Southern & Anne



Pete 'Oggie' & Chris Waters



Jim & Sue Watt



Al Trusler



Walt Wright

Mirror, Mirror, on the wall
Who's the fairest of them all?
You are, Dave,
Without a doubt!
Thank you, Mirror,
Over. Out.

Absent Friends

At our dinner on the Saturday night we raised our glasses to all shipmates who weren't able to join us, and gave special mention to those who had planned to come, but who had to cancel due to unforeseen circumstances.

Illness or injury to themselves or their loved ones prevented the appearance, at the dinner, of Keith Brooker, Bob Crow, Steve Last, Brian Lord, Dick Wainwright and Jim Watt.

An Opdef on his boat in France, kept Dusty Miller away, and a Billy Joel concert in London took understandable priority for Pete Allum.

As for Ken Morrison, however; who's vigorous lobbying was instrumental in the mini reunion committee choosing Scotland as this year's venue, you'll never guess what his excuse was. Actually, Ken was unavoidably detained on really important business, and couldn't possibly make it. (I bet Ken edits that last sentence before circulating this ROP – like the Nazi he is!).



The full ensemble, just before the toast to absent friends, on Saturday night. What a turnout!

Overview

The programme for the mini reunion was very simple, and consisted of two events – an ice breaker/PU on the Friday night, followed by an informal dinner on the Saturday night. As usual however, the reunion consisted of a myriad of differing experiences.

The reunion started for me with the arrival of Wally and Wilma Clelland for dinner on Thursday 8th, and didn't end until Phil and Shirley Mair popped in to say their farewells, eight days later. Wally and Wilma had been on the road around the Highlands of Scotland for weeks, and had even taken in the beautiful North Coast 500, Scotland's Route 66, as it is becoming known.

Like Ron and Angela Clarke, Phil and Shirley had decided to make a holiday of the reunion by basing themselves in the area for a week or so, in order to take in all that the surrounding Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, and areas wider afield, could offer.

Other members had to restrict their appearance, like Jim Watt and his wife Sue, who could only join us for the Friday afternoon; Bob and Angela Crow, who could only be with us on the Friday evening, and Steve Barker and Debbie, who were with us only for the dinner on Saturday night.

No matter how long anyone was able to stay, however, their presence was hugely welcomed, and they enjoyed themselves in the excellent company of friends they had known for all their adult lives, and their partners.

Friday Afternoon - at the Balloch Hotel

It was a call from Eddie Calvert that alerted me to the impromptu event that was happening at the Balloch Hotel, in the heart of the resort. This was the lodgings and base camp for the hard core of the reunion goers; Pete and Sandra Bellamy, Eddy and Lorraine, Joe Dagnino and Anne, Jeff and Linda Marshall, Steve Southern and Anne, Oggie and Chris Waters, and the inimitable Walt Wright. What a roll call of characters, and recipe for a brilliant run ashore; and they'd already kicked off!

Into this heady mix had been tossed the social hand grenade that is Al Trusler! Within 5 minutes of me, Carolyn, and Phil Mair arriving, Al had slapped a soggy liplock on me, licked my head, stuck his tongue in my ear, and launched a vicious and totally unprovoked verbal attack on an innocent member of the hotel staff! All done in the best possible taste of course!

It was particularly gladdening to see Jim and Sue Watt. Sue had arrived in a wheelchair, having injured her ankle in an attempt to emulate the tumbelinos of the GB Olympic gymnastics team whilst negotiating the stairs of a double decker bus in Jersey! Sue's injury had forced her and Jim's reluctant withdrawal from the reunion, and yet they had still travelled all the way from Aberdeen just for the afternoon. What a magnificent effort, and what a great way to help get the weekend started. Well done shipmate!



Leave him alone; he's mine!



"That's interesting." (2 second pause) "Did I ever tell you about the about the time I....."



"Haha! He's drinking shandy!"

Friday Evening – at the Queen of the Loch

Friday night is traditionally (yes, we've been going that long!) a glorified PU, when we gather together from the four corners of the land, and beyond, and resume conversations that started any time in the last 20 or 30 years – or more! Our gathering at the Queen of the Loch, a brand spanking new Marston's pub, come carvery restaurant, at the western entry to the resort, proved to be just that, and a night of surprises for me too.



Don't worry Phil; if it's not here by midnight, me and Wally will induce it!"



Top: "The soil discharge was completely solid, so in effect, it were a 23ft long, 6in diameter turd!"

Bottom: "Is that the boys talking about the war again?"
"No, it's just Joe, talking s**t!"

My first, and favourite, surprise was to be greeted on arrival by Bob Crow, and his wife Angela. Bob has been suffering from ill health for some time. Shortly before the reunion, feeling that he would be too unwell to attend, Bob had written to me to withdraw. As it was, Bob got up that morning and, sensing that he was having one of his good days, determined to make the journey from Clackmannanshire to join us. What a terrific attitude, and what an inspiration. It was great to see you both, Bob!

My next surprise was that I'd never seen the place so packed, though we were fine, as we had a large area at one end of the pub booked for our exclusive use. It didn't take long for us to drive out some diners who had spilled over from the main area into an adjoining area that we'd also booked. Joe Dagnino had hardly started on his book of dits, and Pete Bellamy had hardly warmed up by the time the last one had gone!

It was a bit of a surprise to find out that one of the reasons that the place was rammed was that it had been booked by a party of 28, almost as big as ours, for a 21st Birthday party. But no surprise that the family were all Carolyn's; they're everywhere! It was a big surprise, when the ex Grand Master of the local Masonic Lodge came over and serenaded us with a couple of Elvis songs - but no surprise that he was Carolyn's cousin, Ricky! I was most surprised, though, that Mike Morris never joined in with him, Mike being the 'Grand Primo' of the Telford Buffaloes, and who loves nothing more than entertaining a crowd with a good song. They could have been the Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin of Balloch – well, maybe the Eric and Ern - and could have taught each other a few new handshakes while they were at it!

A grand time was had by all, with good food, in large portions; drink aplenty; a great atmosphere, and, best of all, terrific company.



A Scots Toast

Here's tae us, and wha's like us; damn few, and they're aw deid!

Naturally, it was the dynamic duo of Joe Dagnino and Al Trusler who brought down the curtain on the night, as they stomped off into the night, on their knees, performing the Dwarves marching song from Cinderella. Badly. Very badly. Hi Ho!

Al Trusler turned the wrong way when he left the pub, and was half way down the Old Luss Road, heading for the Highlands, before he was fortunate enough to meet a bemused local, who was able to turn him round and point him in the right direction. Al never told us how he thanked his saviour – but it probably involved licking his head!

As for Joe; well! All I can say is that Anne was shocked by how he performed in his drunken state in their room at the Balloch Hotel that night. Joe's a great mate of mine, and I would never, ever, repeat a word of what Anne told me in the strictest confidence. Wild horses and all that. And so I'm not giving anything away when I say that next time Joe stays at my house, I'll be installing photo-luminescent signage pointing to the bathroom and putting locks on all my wardrobe doors! The funny thing is that Joe will have incorporated this episode into one of his dits in a few years time, but it'll be one of us lot that will have been the perpetrator!

Interlude

Saturday morning saw a veritable bomb burst out of Balloch by most of the gang. Me, Wally Clelland, Phil Mair, Trev Payne, Al Trusler and Walt Wright all met at the Tullie Inn, where we watched the mighty Rangers being gubbed by the even mightier Celtic 5-1, in the first Old Firm league game for four years. It made for a sad spectacle as we carried Wally, sobbing, from the pub after the match, though the pain had been lessened by the peculiarly Scottish provision of free Scotch Pies at half time!



Watching the Old Firm game at the Tullie Inn. Shortly before Wally collapsed! You can tell who ate all the pies!



Ron and Angela, who is a very nervous flyer. He told her he was taking her shopping!

Other people went all over the place, as far afield as Edinburgh. Some went to look at old haunts, such as Faslane Naval Base, and the Churchill Estate; The Golden Lion at Stirling; Maggie's in Dunfermline and even good old Caley, over at Rosyth. A few people visited Hill House, Charles Rennie Mackintosh's masterpiece at Helensburgh, while others visited the wonderful Kelvingrove museum in Glasgow.

In the biggest surprise of the weekend, Lorraine managed to pry Eddy's cold, stiff fingers from the bar and get him to take her for a walk in the Highlands, at Ardlui, with no alcohol involved at all! They could have bumped into Steve Southern and Anne, who were doing the same thing.

Joe Dagnino recovered well enough to play a round of golf with Jeff and Linda Marshall, who turned up in matching pink jackets; Joe thought he was up against the Pink Ladies from 'Grease'!

Meanwhile, Al and Sue Dixon, Mike and Sandra Hall, Gordon and Liz Dunsmuir, and Phil and Shirley Mair all managed to take a relaxing cruise on Loch Lomond. I believe they were on one of the last of the summer cruises, before they switch to the Icebreaker!

And surely Ron and Angela Clarke deserve a mention in despatches for black catting everyone by taking a Seaplane ride from the Loch, to take in the breathtaking vistas over the Clyde and the Highlands and Islands. Ron always did have a nose for adventure!

Saturday Night – Dinner at the Duck Bay Hotel

There can't be many settings that surpass the Duck Bay Hotel and Marina, on the western shore of Loch Lomond, with stunning views along the Loch, past Ben Lomond and toward the Highlands. Glorious, and enhanced greatly by the presence of a group of 36 Caledonia Old Boys and their young ladies.

Some younger than others, it would seem, judging by the audible gasp from the assembled throng as Steve Barker walked in with Debbie on his arm. Gordon Dunsmuir thought she was a model! I'm no judge of feminine age these days, the only indicator to me being whether they have tattoos or not, especially those ones they have on the base of their spine. I only saw one of them during the whole weekend, which was when Phil Mair bent over and revealed one which read 'Wide Load!' (sound of two taps on side drum followed by one on cymbal!)

Talking of Tattoos, I loved the fact that Trev Payne has had Lindy's name tastefully inscribed on the inside of his right forearm – presumably so that he can make an ostentatious display of kissing it if he ever wins a game of Boules, or whatever they do for sport in France these days. He's a real romantic, is Trev. Mind you, his left arm's a right mess, with all those crossings out!

Carolyn, being Scottish, has particularly happy memories of being up to her elbows in cash, whilst counting the money that Jeff Marshall and Mike Deveria had collected in buckets for payment of the bill. Iron Mike's memories may not be so rosy though, having been apprehended by the local Gestapo half way across the Loch with one of the buckets in his teeth!

As always, the star of the night was Pete Bellamy, our raconteur extraordinaire, who skilfully and sensitively wove his usual bunch of humorous anecdotes into an affectionate eulogy to the unforgettable Tom Taylor, who, sadly, passed over the Bar on Mayday this year; Tom would have loved it!

Pete's performance was also memorable in that it was the first time I've ever seen an audience rise to make a toast at the end of a speech, only to have to sit back down again when the speaker announces 'Oh, and another thing', having suddenly found the notes on the other side of the fag packet!

It was a great night, which was thoroughly enjoyed by all. I learned a couple of things too. Firstly,

that if you want to increase the takings on food and drink by any group of people, all you have to do is to tell them at the outset that the final bill will be split equally between all persons present; it works a treat! Secondly, that Oggie Waters has a secret Scottish identity! When we were waiting for taxis at the end of the night, along with loads of other people who weren't in our group, one turned up, and the driver shouted "Taxi for McAllister", to which Oggie replied "That's me!", and us S61'ers piled in. Proof!



Wally: Sigh. "Oh, Mike, remember how much fun we used to have in submarines; we were all so, you know, close"

Phil: "I reckon I could have made a good submariner; I just never met the right one!"



Al: (Thinks): Hey, I like this one!

Mike: "Right, who's stolen me bloody pint?"



"What are you on about; last orders? I'm just getting into my stride!"



Mike: "What's the difference between a Duck?"

Nicky: "Oh Christ! Here we go again!"



Now here's a lesson for us all. If you want to look cool, never be in a photo with Steve Southern!



Mike, in all his Knickerbocker Glory!

Sunday – Exodus?

It's amazing! When we first started having reunions, Sunday was basically the day when everyone packed their bags and went home. It has grown to become a vital extension of the reunion weekend, allowing those who can stay to have a gentle wind down over a nice meal together. And so it was, that, on the Sunday evening, in a testament to the staying power of the contemporary OAP, 18 of us sat down for a Last Supper at the Balloch Hotel. And as a great bonus, even Mike Morris was able to tear himself away from the Karaoke and bring Nicky along to join us for a while! I've no idea who arranged it, though I understand that we had Eddy's Lorraine to thank for making sure it all came together properly. She's a real Pro; I mean she's got experience; I mean she's really good at it; I mean – you know what I mean!



This is us studying the script of a little ditty that Phil had written, and wanted us to perform for the staff. Trev's phoning for a Taxi!



It took hours to set up this photo! A head to head, in profile, of Ron And Pete, in tribute to the Loch Lomond Bird of Prey Centre.

Everyone was in good form, and there was no sign of reunion lag. So infectious was the general air of raucous good humour, in fact, that even the staff got caught up in it. Our one man band of a waiter, Scott, was so emboldened that he joined in, and playfully accused the Head Waiter of being a slacker. His Boss, a joyless Scot, was not amused! We did laugh! (I've seen Scott since, at the Lomond Shores. Selling the Big Issue. He remembers us all. He didn't seem happy!)

I was shocked, and Joe Dagnino dumbstruck (yes, it can be done!), when, in a surreal moment, Carolyn and Anne compared videos that they'd made on their iPhones of me and Joe snoring! I was so mortified that I failed to recognise a female voice sneeringly declare "Call that snoring?" - I think it was either Sandra Bellamy or Angela Clarke! Whatever were they implying?

My last image of the night was of Eddy, Lorraine and Al Trusler urging everyone to join them, as they headed off to Al's lodgings to hoover up the contents of the night bar, while us lesser mortals scurried away under the cover of darkness to gulp down a few litres of water and get our weary heads down! It had been yet another brilliant night, and a fitting end to another memorable reunion, full of friendship, joy and happiness.

A Reminder

So that's it, until the next one, in 12 months time, at the Queen's Hotel in Pompey. But it won't be any ordinary one – it's our 50th anniversary, and it's up to us to make it really special. And that means making sure that we all do our bit to ensure that we get the best turn out possible. So if you're in touch with any of your old S61 classmates, give them a call and persuade them to come along to join you at the reunion. Everyone is guaranteed to receive a heartfelt welcome and to spend precious time in the company of rare kindred spirits. Like all these reunions, it'll be a unique occasion – never, ever, to be repeated. And remember; "you're a lang time deid", as they say up here!

So stick it in your diary now, and keep the reunion weekend clear. And please don't ask, like Pete Hedger did, what date it will be on! Details will be emailed to you in due course, so keep a watchful eye on your Inbox.



Recognize this man, from the Queen of the Loch? It's Cousin Ricky.
Ex Grand Master of the local Lodge, in his Elvis Impersonator's rig!

And Finally

To a very special absent friend:

R.I.P. Tom Taylor



Tom at the La Herradura Reunion 2013. How I'll
always remember him – and that hat!