

# The Reunion on the Rock

## S61 Clankies and Chippies 54th Anniversary Reunion, 9-13 September 2021, at Gibraltar



### Prologue - Sunday 13 September 2020 - Manchester

Eddy groaned, head thumping, as he woke to the unmistakable sound of clogs clattering on the pavement outside the Travelodge; Manchester's premier lodgings. A distant factory siren wailed as he rolled wearily onto his back. A sharp pain between his shoulder blades alerted him to an object which had been lying on the bed behind him. With his eyes straining to adjust to the gloom, aided only by the feeble northern sunlight, filtering through the smoke from a thousand chimneys, he sought to identify the cause of his discomfort. It was a decanter. But how did such a thing get onto his bed?

As he struggled for answers, and the fog around his mind began to clear, a feeling of unease began to grow in the pit of his stomach, as the events of the previous night took shape in his brain. The decanter!

Swept along in the atmosphere of a fantastic reunion, surrounded by adoring friends, and emboldened by a dozen pints of lager, and half a gallon of red wine, he had actually volunteered to host the 2021 reunion, and had boldly announced that the venue would be Gibraltar! His head swam with memories of the catastrophe that had been his previous attempt at organising a mini reunion! And that was in his home town! But Gibraltar! A thousand miles away, in the middle of a pandemic! How could he have been so reckless! And with that, he rolled back over, and fell into a troubled sleep!

### Arrival - Thursday 9 September

If 2020 was the 'Covid' reunion, then this year will be remembered as the 'Covid Pain in the Arse Regulations' one! If ever a diploma is awarded for compliance with overcomplicated instructions, written in obscure and barely comprehensible jargon, and equally tortuous procedures, we will all surely have earned one! Even the class boffin, Jeff Marshall, was exhibiting signs of genuine confusion at one point!

As part of his preparations to host the event, Eddy had visited Gibraltar, on more than one occasion, and had provided some detailed guidance on coping with the labyrinthine rules and regulations, which provided welcome reassurance. That said, I don't think any of us quite appreciated, nor did we enjoy, the extent of the hoops through which we would be required to jump.



Shit! The QR code on my PLF isn't showing my URN!

Added to the Covid related inconvenience was the fact that the timings of flights to Gib from the UK meant that most of us had had to commence our journeys at most ungodly hours that morning. For example, me and Carolyn had set off from our friends' house in Bath at 0345! Fortunately, we bumped into Pete and Sandra Bellamy at Bristol Airport, whose entertaining company ensured that the normal drudgery of air travel was pleasantly transformed.

It didn't help that, upon arrival at Gib, we had to spend about an hour queuing to have our mandatory Covid Lateral Flow tests, before dragging our suitcases across the runway and to our accommodation in the sapping late afternoon heat. (I know! Like Pete and Sandra, we could have taken a taxi, or a bus even. But try telling Carolyn Mad MacMcIntyre that such extravagance is needed!). Worse was to come! We were informed, by text, that Carolyn's test had been invalid, which meant we had to walk all the way back to the airport and repeat the process!

So it was a pretty tired bunch that gathered, for an initial off the cuff meeting, at Bruno's that night, Bruno's being the restaurant where the reunion dinner would be held, two nights later. Carolyn and I met up with Pete and Sandra for a bite to eat at Casemates Square beforehand, where we met, by chance, with Ken Morrison and Kevin Baxter. Ken and Kev seemed unusually tired and emotional, which was unsurprising, once they had explained, largely through the medium of sign language, that they had been drinking since 0500! The last time we saw them, they appeared to be negotiating the price of a taxi to their lodgings with a lamppost!



Pete & Sue Bellamy



Kev Baxter

We could have chosen from the whole gamut of world cuisine that night, but Sandra was adamant that she wouldn't eat anything other than a Burger King meal. Out of curiosity, I asked her why she liked Burger King so much, to which she replied that she didn't, and that she hadn't eaten one for donkey's years! Quite mad; I think it's got something to do with the water down in Cornwall!

When we arrived at Bruno's, we encountered a strange scene. Eddy and Lorraine, Jeff and Linda Marshall, Ron and Trudy Coles, Joe and Cath Gowling, their daughter and granddaughter, and Al Trusler were being regaled by a loud and animated, guru like, figure at the end of their table, who emitted alternating shrieks of laughter and piercing vocals, whilst gesticulating wildly and swivelling his head from side to side as he held his audience, transfixed, in his manic gaze. Even Trudy was struck silent! This was Andy; Joe's Son in Law, who turned out to be a lovely lad, despite having served in the Army. This performance proved to be a one off, too, as subsequently, we hardly heard a word from Andy.



Andy holds court at Bruno's. Jeff, as we love to see him; belly laughing! "So, as I got to my hundredth sit up..."

The rest of the night passed pleasantly, and, when the lights went out, and the chairs had been stacked on the tables, we took the hint and retired - with the emphasis on 'tired' - happily to our separate quarters. It had been a long, but satisfying, day, with much to look forward to in the days ahead!

## Friday 10 September - Gibraltar National Day and Reunion PU Night

Gibraltar National Day exploded in a sea of red and white. Most members of our group did the sensible thing and adopted those colours, as we made the most of our day, viewing the fun and celebrations, prior to the first organised event of the reunion.



Left: Carolyn does 'Steps'

Left Centre: Eddy and Lorraine; early doors, and looking splendid!

Right Centre: Later, at The Horseshoe. Eddy has changed rig; can't think why!

Right: Don't know where this picture came from. Don't care. It's brilliant!

As we all gathered at The Angry Friar pub, on Main Street, at 1900, the remaining members of our happy band made their entrances.

'Iron' Mike Deveria, pedalled over the border to join us, with the lovely Toos trailing in his manly wake, having driven thousands of miles in his Motorhome, down from the far north, where he and his fellow Eco Warrior pals had been erecting straw bale houses on the frozen Tundra. Mike has been living on the continent for donkey's years, and went native long ago. Now a loyal undercover agent for the EU, he had a special mirror on his bike, which he could use in Gib to send signals to his handlers over in Spain.

Keith Brooker introduced Annie, his very own French fancy, who has turned on all the lights in Keith's world. It was wonderful to see how happy they are together. Best of all, Annie has volunteered to act as unofficial guide, translator, and cultural advisor for our 2023 reunion in Arromanches! Oh oui, Annie ! Il est trop tard pour changer d'avis maintenant!



Left: Mike and Toos Deveria.

Centre: Keith Brooker and Annie, our French Cultural Liaison Officer desig.

Right: No Keith; that's not what Annie meant! She was looking for a box of pills!

Steve Southern sauntered down from the Rock Hotel, hand in hand with Anne, to join the throng, the both of them looking as fresh and cool as ever. I mean, look at the photo, below, of all of us chaps, taken a couple of days into the reunion. Steve stands out a mile, looking like Steve McQueen, having wandered onto the set of The Castaways!

As has often been the case, however, in an attempt to come down to the level of us lesser beings, Steve's persona gradually transformed into a one-man train crash as the night went on. A matter of hours after his stately appearance, the ever efficient Anne could be seen picking up the pieces and carting Steve back up to the Rock, where she skilfully reassembled him, ready for an immaculate appearance the next day! What a woman!



Left: There's a lesson here. Never stand next to Steve Southern in a photograph!  
 Centre: Unless you're Anne, of course! Anne and Steve, looking every bit the Posh and Becks of S61!  
 Right: "When I click my finger, you'll wake up, and remember nothing of this conversation".

The last of our regular classmates to be introduced is the one we were probably happiest, and most relieved, to see, namely John Waddington, accompanied by the social equivalent of a platoon of Stormtroopers, the inimitable Di. John has been through the wringer, health wise, in recent years, and in fact we are very lucky not to have lost him. It was great to see, (and hear!), him and Di, in superb form, and on top of their game, making a huge contribution to the weekend! Di's only regret is that, after our reunion dinner finished on Saturday night, she failed to find an open karaoke bar. I think I can safely say that her feelings were not reciprocated by the residents of Gibraltar!

John North made his first appearance at one of our reunions, with his wife, Sue, despite having been an Associate Member since 2017. I'd been led to believe that he would be joining us in Scheveningen, in 2018. I suppose, being a Greeny, he'd had to put it off until we went somewhere easier to spell; you can't get much easier than Gib! John was very welcome, and seemed to enjoy himself hugely.

Making an enormous splash into our reunion was Pete Young. Pete was a classmate of Eddy Calvert throughout his schooldays on the Isle of Wight, and they joined Fisgard together as part of Class S61. Incredibly, Pete dipped back from our lot BEFORE Eddy!! I wonder if there's some sort of plaque with both their names on it at that school! Pete walked miles each day from his home in La Linea to join us, and we're glad he did, as he's full of character and good humour, and we loved having him amongst us. We didn't get to see much of his wife, Sue, though her presence at the reunion dinner, on the Saturday night, was very much appreciated!

Mick Latham joined us for the Friday night only, from his home in South East Spain, accompanied by his wife, Claire. With his famously entertaining and expansive character, Mick represented class S64 brilliantly. Unfortunately, his main achievement of the evening, in collaboration with John North, was to nobble Pete Bellamy so effectively as to render him virtually incapable of speech. The rest of us were thus deprived of the usual 'Pete Bellamy Show', during which everything stops for a while, and Pete takes centre stage and spins his dits! I'm sure that Sandra would have intervened, if only someone hadn't nobbled her first, causing her to get 'tipsy' and lose her glasses. If only she'd been filled in and lost her ID card, she could have been a real OD!



Left: John and Di Waddington. What's not to love about John, eh, Di!  
 Left Centre: John and Sue North.  
 Right Centre: Pete and Sue Young.  
 Right: Joe and Cath Gowling

Sitting with me, Kev Baxter, Mike Deveria, and Ken Morrison, Carolyn noticed how we all leaned in and paid close attention whenever she spoke. She was really impressed with how much more attentive us chaps seem to be these days, until she realised it's simply that most of us are just going deaf!



Left: There's a whole lotta leaning-in going on here!

Left Centre: Somewhere in Blighty, a roadside cafe is missing a few tablecloths!

Right Centre: Is this the moment when Eddy, on the right, realises that his kitty isn't going to cut it?

Right: Mick Latham and John North beginning their hatchet job on an unsuspecting Pete!

A brilliant time was had by all, as we made up once again for lost time, with plenty of good food and drink on tap to accompany the dits, the fun, and the laughter which, as ever, was in super abundance. Even the mass brawl, which erupted over the bill, abated quickly when Eddy announced that he would make up the shortfall in the kitty by taking it out of the money he'd set aside for the tip on Saturday night! Rishi Sunak would be proud of us!



Left: "You're havin' a laugh!" The first first rumblings of trouble; Di sees the bill!

Centre: Eddy trying to raise funds. The shock on Pete and Ken's faces is palpable! "How much!!!"

Right: "Haha! Try getting anything out of us lot!"

Suddenly, our ears were assailed by a stunning barrage of explosions as the whole of Gibraltar was lit up by a fantastic display of fireworks, as a fitting climax to the National Day celebrations. The whole of Gibraltar except us, that is! Our view of the display was blocked completely by the buildings along the opposite side of Main Street. If we hadn't been able to watch the whole thing on the pub's television, we could have been excused for thinking that we were being invaded by the Spanish. In fact, Mike Deveria was on his feet, sensing an EU takeover, and had already got through two verses of 'Ode to Joy', before he realised what was happening, and slumped back in his seat in disappointment!

Sadly, Toos somehow lost her (Dutch) Passport that night, as she and Mike cycled back over the border. Thankfully, Toos was allowed to cross the border without a passport a couple of times on Saturday, so she and Mike were able to attend the reunion dinner.

### **Saturday 11 September - The Reunion Dinner**

Another baking hot day in Gibraltar, during which everyone had the chance, once again, to explore, revisit old haunts, and generally enjoy all the wonderful and varied things that Gib has to offer; The Lord Nelson, The Venture Inn, The Horseshoe, etc., etc.. Seriously, though, there seems to be so much more to do in Gib than there ever was when I spent time there in the Navy. I'd recommend it as a holiday destination to anyone these days.

Come the evening, and we all gathered for the reunion dinner at Bruno's, a splendid and stylish restaurant, overlooking Marina Bay, and one of the most popular venues in Gibraltar for all occasions. A whole wing of the restaurant had been exquisitely prepared and set aside for our exclusive use. Enhancing the glitziness was a life sized model of a horse, covered in thousands of sparkling mirror tiles, looking magnificent, though somewhat delicate; the management obviously felt that we could be trusted to tread carefully around their most cherished objet d'art.



Left: Bruno's, set up just as Eddy had directed, with just a tad of advice from Lorraine, no doubt!  
 Centre: As a girl, Carolyn always wanted a pony. She's Scottish, so that's £25 she was after, not the four legged kind!  
 Right: Pete, looking like someone who's seen a Strippergram approaching; Sandra looking like she's the person who's organised it, and Al looking like someone who thinks this is all going to go horribly wrong!

Soon after we all sat down, we fell silent for the toast to 'Absent Friends'. Somehow, the toast seemed more poignant than ever this year, which may have something to do with the ongoing pandemic, which has touched many of our lives. Foremost in our thoughts, though not related to Covid in any way, was the very sad loss of Wally and Wilma Clelland, and of Al Baker. Wally and Wilma were regular stalwarts of our mini reunions, and had actually booked accommodation at the Rock Hotel for this one too. Al was a true gentleman, and graced many of our reunions with his wife, Christine; in fact, they were amongst 'the Few' who attended the legendary reunion on the Isle of Wight in 2011. Trev Payne was also mentioned, as he, with Lindy, was firmly booked in for this reunion, only to have to cancel at the last moment in order to attend the scattering of his father's ashes in the New Forest. We missed them all.



'Absent Friends'

Thereafter, the evening progressed in much the same way as any dinner involving our lot would, with all the usual banter, boozing, and merriment taking place. However, the food, and the service were of such high quality as to exceed all expectations, particularly as the limited menu, from which choices had been pre booked, had seemed so uninspiring. The staff were superb, and exceptionally attentive. It made for a marvellous occasion.





Left: Billy no mates! Sat between Keith, who has eyes only for Annie, and Mike, who's just found out that Carolyn voted for Brexit!

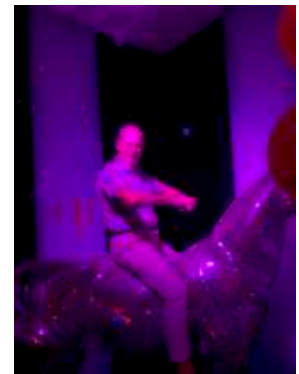
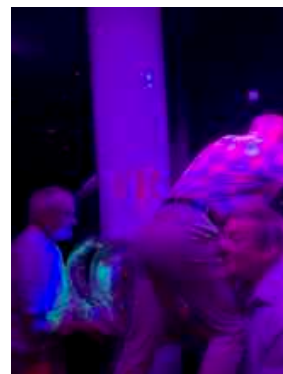
Right: Jeff; attention seeking! Making an announcement that Sandra's glasses had been found!

The impact of the passing of the Port, and the much anticipated ceremonial handing over of the aforementioned sacred decanter, from this year's host to the host of the next mini reunion, in 2023, suffered from some *minor* detractions, however. For a start, the incumbent had failed to bring along the decanter, and had not prepared a speech. No cameraman had been detailed. And, crucially, the host for 2023 was a no show! No worries; the one thing that Eddy *had* organised, naturally, was the port - loads of it! In the most ill disciplined, some might say shambolic, passing of the port that I have ever witnessed, a couple of jugs of port zig-zagged at random across the tables, with a brief toast to the Queen being thrown in, almost as an afterthought. It was great fun!

Right at the top of the list of success stories of the night was a factor that was totally unplanned; dancing! After we'd finished eating, we became aware of a DJ setting up alongside us. And what a clever bloke he was! In a nano second, he had assessed the demographics, and adjusted his intended playlist. Out went Stormzy, and in came the Weathergirls. With Steve Southern and Anne in the van, the S61 crew took the to floor, bustin' all the moves that we'd performed in a thousand dance halls, discos, and living rooms when we were in our pomp - to the extent that they have become ingrained in our muscle memories, and we can do bugga all else! Kindly, the sound of creaking joints was subsumed in the music, as we swirled and swayed and pranced around the floor, like a living exhibit at the Victoria and Albert Museum of Dance. Soon we were joined on the floor by a group of local girls, drawn in by the sheer joy and enthusiasm of it all, and thrilled at the chance to use their phones to virtue signal their respect for the elderly to their social media chums.

Until gradually, and almost imperceptibly, the music changed. As the melody faded, followed by rhythm, human voices, and the sound of actual musical instruments, to be replaced by a wall of pulsating noise, we gradually withdrew, spent, back to our lines, to our badinage, banter and boozing.

Remember that horse? Whilst the rest of us saw it as an ornament, Al Trusler saw it as nothing less than a challenge; to get someone on its back before the night was out. Trouble was, he knew that if he mounted it himself, it would surely break. What he needed was a gullible lightweight to mount the beast, and a muscular henchman to chuck him up there. The disgraceful scenes that followed bear testimony to Al's persuasive cunning, and Ron Coles' brawn. Management was not amused! In hindsight, it's probably a shame that we never all got thrown out, as that would surely have been the basis of a decent dit!



Left: Steve and Anne, cool as ever, and leading the dancing.

Left Centre: The Ice Man himself taking the floor; the incomparable Al Trusler!

Right Centre: I leave you to come up with your own captions as to what Ron Coles is thinking in this Pic!

Right: An old salt thinks he's at Epsom! (Of course, had I been a clanky, the caption would have been: "Ride 'em cowboy")

By about 0130, just as the young Gibraltarians were beginning to hit their stride, the last remaining few of us bade our farewells and began to head, tired but happy, towards the exit. Which was when Eddy had his Epiphany! Eddy had convinced himself over the years that he'd make a rubbish events coordinator. Considering what had been a fantastic evening however, he realised he was actually brilliant at it! And there was more to look forward to the next day! Wha-hey!!



The Last Men (and women!) Standing

Interestingly, we discovered the next day that Linda Marshall is a master\* of parody. We wondered why it had taken, literally, hours for her and Jeff to travel the short distance from the Bruno's to their apartment. Linda's imitation of Jeff's attempts to find a taxi, whilst inebriated, was both cruel and hilarious!

\* Since going to publication, my misogynistic use of a gender stereotype, here, has been brought to my attention. I sincerely apologise, and will do better next time. Yeah, right!

### **Sunday 12 September - A Trog's Eye View of the Rock**

Sunday morning gave us all a chance to recuperate. Or, for some of us, to go to the Covid Test Centre at the airport, for our 48 hour pre departure swabs! We'll look back at all this nonsense and laugh, one day!

Prior to our arrival at Gib, Eddy had given us all the opportunity to book a tour of some of the 34 miles of tunnels that have been carved into the Rock over the years, guided by his pal, Pete; ex Army, now an official tour guide. At 1300, when we mustered, opposite the Rock Hotel, I was amazed to see that the turnout was 100% of those capable of the walking involved. Sadly, Mike and Toos Deveria were unable to come through the border to join us, for reasons I explained earlier.



Cool and the gang again, this time with the babes; our wonderful WAGs

Over the space of 3 hours, we were given a fascinating insight into life inside the Rock, with a gripping and authoritative commentary from Pete. We walked hidden highways, and visited underground hospitals, store rooms, generating stations, living quarters, and much more. I particularly enjoyed the comprehensive overview of the history of the Rock, from the age of the dinosaurs right through to modern times, which was delivered by Pete, with authority and good humour, at the outset. Pete was a thoroughly entertaining Northern lad - think Joe Dagnino without the embellishments!



As we walked up the steep path toward the tunnel entrance, all blowing like bulls, apart from Steve Southern's Anne, of course, who breezed along, Joe Gowling remarked that he wished he'd brought Cath along in her wheelchair, as he felt he could have coped quite easily. Son in Law Andy, walking along beside him, didn't say a word, but gave Joe a look that suggested he knew who would have ended up doing most of the pushing!



Left: Pete in full flow; a humorous and vastly knowledgeable guide, and a great character.

Centre: The Rock has sprung a leak! Chippy!

Right: Inside the old hospital. Ten years of a Labour Government, and all our hospitals would look like this!

On completion of the tour, we said our farewells, before splintering into small groups and wending our separate ways down towards the town. It seems that, in Gibraltar, all roads lead to the Angry Friar, because that's where most of us ended up - whether we intended to or not!

And so we spent another few hours in each other's company, extending the reunion until late on the Sunday. Some of us even met up again later in Casemates Square for drinks, more banter, and food. As most of us were due to fly back home the following day, this could be considered to be the end of the reunion proper.



Left: The Troggs; back in the groove, at The Angry Friar.

Centre: Fish and Chips at Casemates Square. Life doesn't get much better than this!

Right: Keith imparting his considerable gastronomic advice. We ended ordering a bacon sandwich!

Pete Young was with us right to the very end, just as he had been throughout the weekend. I have an image of Pete in my mind, walking back over the runway, into the sunset (alright; it was pitch black, and he was heading North; minor details!). As he nears the border, he looks back over his shoulder; the last man standing, and smiles as he ponders what a great weekend it had been! Then he spits his cheroot onto the runway and walks on!

### **Monday 13 September - The Last Hurrah**

Although almost everyone flew home on the Monday, Pete's walk into the sunset wasn't the end of the weekend for all of us. Me and Carolyn walked to the top of the Rock, where we peered into the mist - thick cloud more like - before visiting St Michael's Cave and walking down the Mediterranean Steps - definitely not for the faint hearted. We then met up with Pete and Sue Bellamy, and Kev Baxter for a most enjoyable final meal at Tramonti's, the Italian restaurant on Casemates Square.

For me and Carolyn, there was also still the enjoyment of travelling back to Bristol with Pete and Sue to look forward to; what better travelling companions could anyone wish for! What a fabulous, and truly memorable reunion weekend it had been, building wonderful memories with truly special company, in the perfect location. And what a resounding success for our Eddy!

Now, where's that bloody Passenger Locator Form?!!