

newsletter

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SEPTEMBER 2001

OVERSEAS TELECOMMUNICATIONS VETERANS ASSOCIATION

September 2001 Volume 1, Issue 1

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FRIDAY

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N.B.Please! We ask all members to check the expiry date on their Mailing Label and the address. E.G. 5/02 indicates YOUR expiry date is MAY2002

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Stop Press: President Tom advises that Anne Haddad our former Spring St Librarian and Trevor Housley, son of our former G.M. will attend this months get-together. We bid them welcome!

A.G.M. MINUTES..

Members Present:- Ken Arnold, Erik Bachmann, Tom Barker, Ron Beckett, John Bennett, Blemings, David Bourne, Brian Brennan, Brian Calder, David Charrett, Bruce Collett, Henry Cranfield, Gordon Cupit, Brian Curran, Geoff Day, Peter Dean, Bob Dean, John Dennis, Wal Donald, John Eades, Mike Elliott, Eamonn Fitzpatrick, Pam Helps, Allan Rennessy., Jeff Hinwood, Brian Hoschke, Ken Howe, Bill Jolly, Cohn Kelly, Dyret Le Van, Tony Lowther, Ron Lukin, Bob Lions, Charlie Maiden, Noel Martin, Allan Mason, Keith McCredde, Ron McDonald, Horrie McInnes, David Monroe (Guest), Don Montgomery, Brian Nell, Kevin O'Brien, Tom O'Sullivan, Geoff Oldman, Brian Peacock, Stuart Pengilley, Peter Phillips, Mick Quinlan, David Richardson, Peter Roberts, Jim Simpson, Peter Skinner, Barry Stockbridge, RJ Taylor, RAF Taylor, Annette Taylor, Doug Temperley, Ken Theaker, Gareth Thompson, Roger Thompson, Robin Tuckfield, Greg Waller, Phil Wall, Peter Warrilow, George Wolosezuk, Bernie White, David Wills and Brian Woods.

Apologies:-

Peter Bull, Ben McGee, Bob Rnwkins, Chris Vonwiller, Cyril Vahtrick, Darryl Savage, David Izatt, Fred Kannard, George Maltby, Gordon Waterhouse, Greg Martin, Jack Whittaker, Jan Howe, Jim Davies, Joan Wills, John Hodgson, Laurie McIlree, Len Wyld, Maurie Matthysz, Ray Hookway, Robert Orm, Stuart Taylor, Tony Stuart, Trevor Pike and Will Whyte

Minute Summary:

- **Welcome:-** The President, Tom Barker, opened the meeting and extended a welcome to all members attending this, the 45th Annual General Meeting of the Overseas Telecommunications Veterans Association with a special welcome being offered to any new members who were attending for the first time. A special welcome was also given to our Interstate visitors Hoc Blemings and Ron McDonald with a special greeting to Pam Helps. Tom then proceeded to conduct the meeting using a wooden gavel which was presented to the OTVA by Lou Brown in 1989. Tom thought it was the first time it had been used at a A.G.M.

Finances:

Treasurer Bernie White reported that the year 2000/2001 presented our best financial success since those years when the association was spoonfed and OTC was a benevolent brother. Our excess of income over expenditure this year was rather astronomical (\$8727.53) compared to last years (\$2486.52) owing to the fact that we received a substantial donation from the OTC Provident Fund of \$5000.00 when that fund was wound up. We are ever thankful to the ex-members of that fund who were instrumental in arranging the donation..

Putting that donation aside, our normal income increased by \$1241.01 for the year ended 30th April 2001.

Please keep your subscriptions current and attend our quarterly gatherings as often as possible. It is with the help of our present members attending functions and being current with their dues that keep us afloat

Vales: The period *since* our last AGM has seen the passing of a number of our colleagues. Those of whom we are aware of include: Phil Hay, Murray Ewen, Vie Carboon, Mollie Condon, Nell Donoghue, Laurie Endree, Pat Sykes, Cyril Martin and Ken Stone.

Editor's Corner.

For this issue there were several items submitted which unfortunately we cannot print. We cannot copy large portions of a book without the writer/publisher's permission as the laws regarding "copyright" preclude publication without the consent of the author and publisher of the original work.. Whilst appreciating the efforts of those making the submissions we must obey the laws of the land.

An interesting committee meeting on 22/8/01/brought forward several timely issues: The need to review our constitution.. The need to examine membership entry criteria The need to re-activate branches in some states.

At the moment, despite efforts by some, OTVA lacks active groups in Victoria and Queensland. Whilst we are all getting older and some have health problems," wherever there is a will there is a way. "so please get behind those who are making an effort. Christmas is a good time to organize a "Get Together" to start things moving. Once again my thanks to our regular contributors and yes! We do have some material carried over to our Xmas issue. As editor, I am always looking for some comments or suggestions to improve our publication. Due to the widespread geographical nature of our membership it is hard to obtain" vision" of what readers want to read about .Please telephone-write or E-Mail

Sincerely, Henry Cranfield

Cocos Island, Note by Mick Wood

A recently published book 'The Cocos Island Mutiny' has aroused some interest for the handful of OTVA members who had "done time' on Cocos. The author, Noel Cruz acknowledges the assistance direct and indirect provided by three Vets, Maurie Matthysz, Ken Mullen and Edgar Liarcourt in the preparation of the book.

Most cablemen who served on Direction Island were aware of the mutiny in 1942 by an artillery detachment on Horsburgh Island (Direction Island's neighbour but specific details were virtually unknown other than that the ringleaders had been executed until publication of the author's MA thesis (University of NSW)

It is perhaps fortunate that few of the cablemen serving at the time on Direction Island were unaware of a considered option by the mutineers to turn the two six inch guns 2 the cable station to enlist its support and join the Japanese who were expected to land sooner rather than later.

An expectation reinforced by the shelling of the cable station area by a Japanese light cruiser throwing twenty rounds at about a thousand yards range fortunately inflicting only minor damage.

One unexploded shell went through the office walls its path could still be observed some twenty years later.

It is in its way a rather sad book and the tragic circumstances of the mutiny fit well with an earlier description of the dramatic events in 1905

"The drama of history loses nothing by reason of the smallness of its stage." The Cocos Island Mutiny. Noel Cruz. ISBN 18636831001

The Cocos Island Historical Society: by Les Ayres

I have been advised of the formation on the islands of the Cocos [Keeling] Islands Historical Society. Ken Mullen kindly sent me a copy of their inaugural newsletter of last February. The objectives of the Society are to collect, preserve and display historical material on the Cocos [Keeling] Islands. To stimulate public interest in, access to and support for the historical material of the islands. Also, eventually to establish and maintain a museum or another place to display for this material Captain William Keeling is believed to have been the first European to sight the Islands back in 1609 as he was returning from the Dutch East Indies as it was called then. Charles Darwin also visited Cocos in 1836, basing a lot of his theory of coral atoll formations on his observations at that time. In 1857 the Islands were declared as part of the British Dominions. Responsibility for supervision of the Island alternated between the Governments of Ceylon, the Straits Settlements and Singapore. In 1886 Queen Victoria granted all of the Islands, under certain provisions, to John Clunies Ross.

The Cocos Island people who speak their own dialect of Malay, as well as English, are descendants of the original settlers who came to the islands in 1826. They have evolved a unique culture which reflects their original diverse origins and Islamic traditions. As you all may know the Islands have had a lengthy association with telecommunications over the years, with the establishment of the Cable & Wireless station on Direction Islands in the 1800's. Only two of the islands are inhabited now - Home Island where the majority of the indigenous Cocos Island people reside and West Island which houses most of the mainly Australian workers on contract to various government departments. The total population of the two islands is now just around 500 people.

Eventually in 1978 the Government of Australia purchased the majority of the Islands from John Cecil Clunies-Ross for A\$6.25million. In 1979 under a local Government ordinance the Government transferred the majority of land to the Cocos Island Council

On the 4th April 1984 the Cocos Malay residents voted to become part of Australia, and in an Act of Self Determination witnessed by the United Nations it is now administered by the Cocos (Keeling) Islands Shire Council

The Royal Australian Navy's first engagement in battle was near the Cocos (Keeling) Islands in November 1914 when the HMS Sydney was sent to destroy the HMS Emden, a 118 meter German warship independently cruising the British trade routes in the southern oceans. A shore party from the Emden landed to destroy the wireless and cable station on Direction Island. While the landing party was ashore, the HMS Sydney arrived and engaged the Emden. The battle lasted for about 2 hours until the Sydney out-maneuvered and out-gunned the Emden. Badly damaged and sinking, she ran aground off the southern end of North Keeling Island, (now Pulu Keeling National Park) and lay at rest there until 1960 when a Japanese scrap metal company salvaged the metal from the vessel. The remains have since slipped back down the reef, where they now lie in 8 meters of water. The HMS Emden has now been registered as a historical shipwreck. A story from the war-time days has just recently been written and published by Noel Cruz called "Cocos Island Mutiny" in which he reveals the details of the only mutiny that occurred during World War II, when some of the Ceylonese troops manning the 6 inch guns on Horsburgh Island mutinied, intending to hand the Islands over to the Japanese. This action resulted in some of the mutineers being tried and eventually executed. I have since received some membership forms for the Society which I have passed onto the Editor, Henry Cranfield. So if anybody wishes to join they

can obtain a membership form from him or contact the Society directly as below. Cocos [Keeling] Islands Historical Society

c/- Post Office
Cocos [Keeling] Islands WA 6799.
'Phone & Fax 1081 9162 6555

South Australian News from Harry Stone.

The following is a summary of two reports from Harry Stone, Secretary/Treasurer of our S.A. Group. Our thanks to Harry for “flying the flag” and providing the information.. - The following is a report on the annual Xmas gathering of our 5/Aust branch of the OTVA held at the old McLarenVale pub on Thursday 30th Nov 2000.

There were eleven people in attendance comprising seven ex-OTC members and four guests, their names are as follows, Dave Herbert (President) Harry Stone (Sec/Treas), Max Lang, John McGregor, Dick Inwood, Em Barrett, Paddy Wilkinson, Rob Gurr (ex RI) David Banner (ex MM) Harry Krause (Owner/operator of the old VIA coastal radio Station) & his 2I.C. Mike Kay.

A more than adequate lunch was enjoyed by all and washed down with the necessary beverages that South Australia is famous for. Many reminiscences and anecdotes were bandied about the large dining table. Many well known names and never-to-be-forgotten incidents were recalled with some nostalgia. Rob Gurr will no doubt be remembered by most of the old Coastal Radio Staffers, having been connected with that branch of OTC for many years in his capacity as Chief Radio Inspector of the Federal Radio Branch. He spent some time down in Antarctica and remembers most of the old OTC operators and technicians of that most interesting period. He is enjoying good health and spends most of his spare time caravanning with his wife and wishes to be remembered to all those OTC radio men whom he encountered during his career. A suggestion was made to the effect that it might be a good idea to invite those interested Radio Amateurs particularly ex D.C.A operators/technicians to attend our annual Christmas gathering in order to swell our rapidly thinning ranks. They would play no part in the present OTVA system but would be able to attend as guests and with common interests in radio communications it could be a case of “the more the merrier. Our A.G.M. of course would be restricted to OTVA members only. Our next meeting will be the A.G.M. held at the same venue, the old McLaren Vale Pub.

I regret having to advise that Bob Imrie ex CRS Operator OTC passed away on 13th June'01 after a lengthy illness and his funeral service was attended by Dave Herbert (ex Pres,OTVA-S.A) Em Barrett, Paddy Wilkinson and myself on Mon 18th June at Glenelg. His widow Lorraine wishes to be remembered to those OTC Coastal operators with whom Bob and she were associated with for so many years.

Our AGM was attended by six members, Dave Herbert, Max Lang, John McGregor, Em Barrett, Paddy Wilkinson and Harry Stone with apologies received from Dick Inwood. Dave Herbert was unable to re-nominate for the Presidency and as no other nominations were received, it was decided to continue our present system with Harry Stone as Treasurer and leave the President in abeyance. Our financial status is balanced at zero; with no income or expenditures, our biannual meetings are financed by each member paying for their own requirements (grub or grog), thus no subscriptions are required or collected, and it works quite well. Individual members wishing to subscribe to the Newsletter, do so as required.

Our next meeting will be the Xmas gathering of our six surviving members (by the grace of the good Lord of course) at the usual venue of the old McLaren Vale Pub on the last Thursday in November from noon onwards.

Fraternal greetings to all.

WILLIS ISLAND Pt.2 by Arthur Major.

I made it, and it was noon, again. Time for my appointment with the Captain of the Nancy-E. What a strange name for a ship. There was only one individual on my side of the bar. Aged about 30, he wore shorts, thongs and a T-shirt. Standard casual dress in Cairns at any time, I supposed. Turning from his beer he quickly sized me up. "You for the Nancy-E?" "Er yes, I'm waiting for the Captain. He turned to his beer, downed it, then "C'mon, get your stuff. I'll drive the ute round and you can heave you gear into the back."

I'd learnt not to ask too many questions. We drove for no more than about three or four minutes before arriving at a wide, almost empty wharf. There was a solitary ship, which I estimated to be of the order of 2,000 tons, tied up at the southern pier. Kevin, my companion, had indeed turned out to be the skipper and was driving to the other end of the wharf. No questions, I repeated to myself. The ute finally stopped right at the edge.

Looking down I observed, with rising concern, a small pleasure craft of some 36 feet bobbing against a pair of rubber fenders. Its name was stenciled on the upper deck." Nancy-E." Kevin jumped down easily onto the stern platform and turned to me expectantly. I quickly grabbed my bags and dropped them to him. A land rover drew alongside the ute, disgorging a group of large, overalled men. They casually scattered a number of baggage items around to the edge of the wharf. Obviously they, too, were bound for Willis. A few minutes later a thin young man arrived with his baggage, introducing himself as the "met relief." I learned that he was to replace the outgoing solitary weather officer on the island. "But I thought there were two met blokes on Willis" I ventured. "Nope, the Bureau reckon that one man can cover it. They have upped my salary by \$500 a year for the extra work" Later that afternoon a flat-top drew alongside the wharf, loaded with provisions, stores and equipment required for maintenance on the island. Everyone turned-to, manhandling the gear aboard the Nancy. It was 5 o'clock, departure time. Kevin had one seagoing hand, Nevilie, to assist on the voyage. The rest of us arranged ourselves, each claiming bunk-space with a congenial banter. Once aboard, Kevin lost no time in casting-off, quickly pointing the nose of the Nancy to the edge of the breakwater, then setting a course for Euston Reef. At eight knots we should be at Willis in something over 40 hours. Those aboard soon fell into an easy familiarity with each other. We expected the couple of days to be pretty boring and each man was determined to make the best of it. In the event, this voyage was to be much longer, and very hazardous Never before had I had sailed at night in a small craft. The engines were mounted in the main cabin, roaring continuously as the Nancy lunged into the Pacific. Still, as an ex-sailor, I affected to be bored with the whole proceedings. I was used to throbbing engines. The next day was uneventful, with the wind rising just a little. White water in all directions, but Nancy seemed to be taking it in her stride. "Holmes Reef." Kevin pointed to a horizontal yellow line a few miles directly ahead, the surf bringing the reef into easy focus. Kevin steered the Nancy well south of the reef, adjusting to an east-nor-easterly course. "Jesus." The imprecation came from Glen, a Department of Works engineer in charge of the maintenance crew. He staggered onto the fly-bridge as the Nancy pitched and rolled in the rising seas.

“C’mon Glen, you’ve been out to Willis tons o’ times” grinned Kevin. “Not in this bloody tinny I ain’t, an’ I don’t mind telling you I’m none too happy with these rollers.” Glen pointed out into the Pacific where the seas, if not mountainous, could be described as pretty ugly, if you’ll forgive the oxymoron. Kevin did not respond, but we could all sense that he was concerned. We were all concerned. The Nancy was yawing and pitching like a demented steer at a rodeo.. After a few minutes of this punishment Kevin announced that we would return to the reef. No collective sigh of relief; just silent, visible assent that he had made the correct decision.

As we ploughed across the western side of Holmes Reef, a small bay came into view. The Nancy quickly stabilised as we coursed into the bay, dropping anchor in about ten meters of water. “Jeez, that’s better.” Glen had been as anxious as anyone aboard. We were safe now. It was time to haul out some beer from the esky

So, apart from bouncing about in the Pacific, this was turning out to be not a bad voyage after all. We regaled each other with jokes and potted autobiographies. We cursed our respective employers for sending us on such a hazardous enterprise. Eventually we turned-in, to the gentle lapping sound of the lagoon caressing Nancy. Engines stopped.

I couldn’t remember an occasion when I had slept so soundly. Nancy wasn’t moving at all. When I awoke I was alone in the cabin. Being fully dressed, I quickly moved on deck. The others were gazing at the calm water of the lagoon, entranced. Outside the reef an occasional white horse reared its head, only to disappear into the sparkling Pacific.

Kevin was listening to a transistor radio, nodding occasionally. “Not good. Forecast says we~ re in for another bad afternoon. Reckon we’d better hang about, see what gives.” Nothing unusual about that prognosis, I was to learn. Tropical waters normally freshen up as the day wears on, subsiding only at dusk. Best strategy was to wait until dusk then resume our voyage to Willis bland. After all, we had already covered half the distance.

“OK, breakfast.” Neville deftly balanced plates of bacon and eggs, handing them to eager hands, unwashed of course. We made short work of our rations, swilled down with hot tea and padded with some stale brown rolls. A couple of us pulled out novels and settled down to pass the time. Kevin and Neville busied themselves, checking gauges and the trim of the vessel. A few had started fishing from the deck. With much success. In no time they were pulling in huge emperors, sweetlips, kingfish. Then someone caught a massive shark. Straining and pulling alternately on the line against the gunwale we were finally faced with a huge head. “You’ll not get that in” bawled Kevin.

“Here, I’ll shoot the bugger.” Collecting a Lee Enfield from inside the cabin he moved to the side, taking careful aim at the shark’s threshing head, and squeezed the trigger. The poor creature stiffened, then slowly sank as the astonished captor released the line. Kevin casually cut the nylon, then resumed his duties as if nothing had happened.

Throughout the day, a steady stream of edible fish was hauled into the boat. “Fish and chips tonight” laughed Glen. “Fish but no chips” retorted Neville. “No spuds.”

True to the forecast, the seas rose strongly in the afternoon. We continued to drag in the most magnificent fish, more than we needed. Just for the thrill of it. No-one seemed to be mindful of the terrible waste, cruelty, of the senseless overkill.

Fish for dinner, indeed. Neville was an expert cook, taking into account the limited facilities on board he performed like a chef de cuisine. Freshly caught fish, well cooked, is a dish without parallel

Next morning Neville informed us gravely that the fresh food loaded at Cairns was almost exhausted. If we were to sail that night, which seemed increasingly unlikely, we might just have enough for the remaining leg to Willis. "Still," he brightened up, "we can have fried or grilled fish, or I can make fish cakes. We've got some flour from our last trip. It won't be too bad." It was. We were to remain at Holmes Reef for another five days.

At last the seas abated and the forecast looked promising. Six days after sheltering at the reef Kevin deemed it reasonably safe to proceed. He started the engines at dusk and we set sail once more into the Pacific. Without the shelter of the Barrier Reef we could not expect to avoid the long rolling swells of the world's biggest ocean. As expected, the seas slowly abated, although the swell remained strong. The Nancy rode up and down, giving the sensation of being in a non-stop elevator descending, then rising, descending again. Kevin cursed as a full mug of coffee crashed onto the deck. I don't think any of us slept that night. The vessel was woefully lacking in deep-sea navigation equipment. At about ten to four I reminded Kevin that we had a communications sked with Willis. Checking over the radio I found, as expected, that it was fairly basic, designed for limited high-frequency radio telephone (BJI) communication. At 0403 precisely I called Willis Island. No response. I repeated the call. A faint voice competed with the atmospherics. This was no use so I decided to use the microphone switch as a morse key, tapping out the call letters for Willis: VIQ.

I repeated the call, VIQ de VL2344 (call-sign of the Nancy-E). The operator at Willis quickly switched to morse, VL2344 de VIQ. Faint, but readable. Great, we had established contact. The next thing was to take a Direction Finder bearing on Willis. With what? With Kevin's transistor radio.

This was easier said than done, thanks to the constant bobbing and lurching of the Nancy and the poor reception conditions it was impossible to take any meaningful bearing from the Willis transmitter. Someone suggested firing a distress flare. Why not, was the consensus. If we failed to hit Willis we were lost, with no means of communicating with any large vessels, if any were in the area. Big ships at sea normally maintained watch on radiotelegraph frequencies only. We couldn't help feeling that Kevin, with his lack of experience of ocean voyages, knew he was lost. I keyed to Willis that we were about to fire off a flare. It should be visible for many miles on a clear night. In the space of less than two minutes Kevin had fired off a solitary flare. "Any sighting?" I tapped out to Willis. A short pause, then "Nothing" answered the operator. Things were looking serious. We tried the same procedure again, but with the same result. We learned that two of the three men on Willis were staring towards the west, the remaining operator was operating the radio. "This is the last one" said Kevin, his habitual insouciance had disappeared. Each man had his hand, and heart, on the flare. Kevin pointed vertically and fired. Another pause, then "VL2344 de VIQ - think we've got you, very faint and you are way to the south. Going to Fiji?" Willis advised us later that a bonfire would be lit at the southern end of the island to assist our navigation. An old mattress, soaked in diesel fuel, would serve as a spectacular beacon as we drew closer to the island. "Nothing like a good fire to raise the spirits" growled Glen as the glow on the northern horizon confirmed our course. Shortly after 0815 the Nancy dropped anchor just off the southern fringe of the Willis reef. The shoreline was some 400 meters distant and this meant that the dinghy would have to serve as ferry to disembark the men and stores. Quite a long job as it turned out we were met at the beach by the three islanders.

Each man dressed simply in shorts and thongs. The O.I.C., Bill, was probably in his late fifties. Gaunt, bronzed and strangely preoccupied. After a perfunctory greeting he remained at the shoreline, gazing silently at the Nancy while the rest of us hauled the stores and personal baggage onto a small bogey, dragging the goods along an ancient small gauge track to the accommodation.

Eventually a large packing case marked simply "Bill Waters, Willis Island" was lugged ashore. Bill watched as we loaded it onto the bogey, remaining very close as it was hauled up to the main building, carefully shepherding the case into his cabin. We were too busy to speculate about the contents, running the bogey back and forth until the unloading was completed. The Department of Works men worked quickly to finish their various tasks since the Nancy was due to depart the same day. Bill gave the met officer and myself a very basic run down on the various operating and housekeeping procedures. Seemed simple enough.

Start the diesel generators at operating times; every three hours around the clock The food store was adequately stocked with dry and tinned provisions. Some hams had been brought in the Nancy. We hadn't known about this on the voyage but as we prised open the fresh food container a distinct whiff of decaying meat indicated that the can-opener would be very busy during our stay on the island. Late that afternoon Glen indicated that maintenance was complete. Time to go. We shook hands as they squeezed into the dinghy, and they were gone. Our first meal together. Bill had done the honours and covered the table with tinned lambs tongue, prawns, corned beef, asparagus, tomatoes, frankfurts, peas, beans. Just about everything edible that came in a tin was spread across the table. We finished up with tea and coffee. Alcohol was strictly prohibited on Willis. I had brought several cartons of cigarettes. Cliff the weather man, rolled his own. Bill seemed satisfied to talk about his home life. This was to be his last tour of duty, and my first, with OTC. 'Curiouser and curiouser' as Lewis Carroll wrote in Alice in Wonderland.

Arthur Major, ex VIQ VIS VIR VIT VII VZZ (Head Office)

Vales: Eileen Bowker

It is with much sadness we record the passing of Eileen Bowker On 14th July 2001, who from the inauguration of OTC in 1948 was Secretary to the then General Manager J.L Mulholland also Harold White a position she retained through several G.M.s until her retirement in 1976.. Our President Tom Barker, was once in the employ of The NSW Railways and when cleaning up old correspondence came upon a letter from Dr J.J.C.. Bradfield, who was Chief Engineer of the Sydney Harbour Bridge signed per "E.M.B.". Tom put same in his archives and much later during a conversation with Dave Abercrombie our former Chief Engineer who was a "railway buff" produced the letter and Dave noticed the signature which looked familiar. A phone call confirmed that it was indeed Eileen's and that she worked for Dr. Bradfield for 8 years. She subsequently joined the R.A.A.F. Recruiting Depot and after W.W. 2 she joined A.W.A and so to OTC. Known for her efficiency she was well respected by all who came in contact with her and a tower of strength to both OTC's management and its Commission.

We also sadly note the passing of Bob Imrie and Doug Bismire ex C.R.S.