

THE BLYTHE SAPPERS

HISTORICAL NOTE

**TENTH EDITION**

**1945-2010**

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*Who are the Blythe Sappers?*

This unique society has flourished since its formation at the end of the Second World War. Its membership is limited.

Qualification is, by custom, commissioned service in any past or present constituent part of the Royal Engineers: Regular, Territorial Army, Supplementary Reserve, Army Emergency Reserve, National Service or Engineer and Logistic Staff Corps. All rank and titles are suppressed, each member being known as "Sapper..."

The purpose of the Society has always been to foster good comradeship amongst Sappers, serving or retired, by providing opportunities for getting together and to promote the Esprit de Corps of the Royal Engineers. It has established a tradition of making regular donations to Royal Engineers benevolence and good causes, and in its early days members helped fellow Sappers to find employment on demobilisation.

*Origins:*

In a difficult period of the Second World War at the Devonshire Club, in whose premises the Public Schools Club was also accommodated, a number of members in the bar were seen to be wearing the Royal Engineers tie. When they found that they had all served in the Corps during the First World War, they decided to meet for lunch together about once a month and continued to do so up to the end of the war.

They became known as the "Sapper Set", and from them the Blythe Sappers Society has evolved. The Minute Book shows that the first recorded meeting of the Sappers was held at a luncheon party arranged by Mr. J. Coventon Moth at the Devonshire Club on Thursday, 15th February 1945, and amongst those present was Mr. Ormond Alfred Blyth (Chairman of the Devonshire Club from 1941 to 1946).

At that meeting it was unanimously agreed that Ormond Blyth, who was happy to accept the invitation, should be President of the Society, and that its Headquarters should be at the Devonshire Club. Coventon Moth agreed to act as Secretary from his office at 19 Berkeley Street, W.1.

At a subsequent meeting of the "Committee of the Sapper Set" held on the 1st March 1945, Sapper Fryer was elected as the first Chairman, to be followed by Sapper Coventon Moth, and "thereafter in rotation alphabetically". Sapper Rosborough was appointed Joint Secretary with Sapper Coventon Moth, Sapper Grierson-Carr was appointed Mess President, and it was decided that a letter of invitation should be sent out to "a selected number of potential members" to attend an inaugural luncheon to be held at the Devonshire Club on 24th March 1945.

Among other decisions taken at this meeting were that Ormond Blyth was to be asked to preside at the Inaugural Luncheon and at all future luncheons of the Society; that the Joint Secretaries should also act as Treasurers; that the Committee create a form of Guarantee Fund to defray expenses and any deficit which might arise; that the five original members be Founder Members of the Society, namely Sappers Fryer, Grierson-Carr, Rosborough, Coventon Moth and Westlake; and that the numbers be limited to 50 with an additional 10 per cent of honorary members.

At this same meeting the title chosen for the Society was **THE BLYTHE SAPPERS**, in recognition of the kindness and consideration that members received from their President, Ormond Blyth. The "fostering of good comradeship" was declared to be the general purpose of the Blythe Sappers. On 10th July 1945 the Provisional Committee voted donations to the Old Comrades' Association and the Royal Engineers' Benevolent Society; the first of many such donations.

*Management of the Society:*

The Blythe Sappers' affairs are supervised by the Council, consisting of the Chairman, all past Chairmen, the Chairman Designate, the Honorary Treasurer, the Honorary Secretary and the Honorary Auditor and, by invitation, retiring Secretaries/Treasurers. The Council must meet once a year, but can meet more often if required. It selects and appoints a member of the Society to serve as Chairman for each year; by custom established in the 1960s, Non-Regular ("Gentlemen") and Regular ("Player") Sappers have alternated as Chairmen, when willing and available.

The day to day business of the Society is conducted by a small Management Committee, which meets before each luncheon. This Management Committee currently consists of the Chairman, the Vice Chairman (immediate past Chairman), the Chairman Designate, the Council Link Member, the Corps Link Member (the Regimental Colonel), the Territorial Army Link Member, the Engineer & Logistic Staff Corps Link Member, the Honorary Treasurer, the Honorary Membership Secretary and the Honorary Secretary.

The Honorary Dinner Secretary, who organises the annual dinner, the Honorary Auditor and the Honorary Archivist may be invited to attend certain Management Committee meetings.

*Functions:*

The pattern of functions, which has evolved, takes the form of four luncheons a year, to which members may invite personal guests, whilst the Chairman invites a Principal Guest. The latter is invited to give a talk about his or her own forte; formalities are kept to a minimum.

Members are expected to wear a Corps tie, and "Hurrah for the CRE" is sung as a finale, under the direction of the Musical Director. Guests often express astonishment at the spirited rendering of this anthem!

In the early years these luncheon meetings were held in a variety of places, mostly at the Devonshire Club; then, between 1954 and 2001, at the Charing Cross Hotel. Since March 2002, we have been made most welcome by the Army & Navy Club at 36 Pall Mall, who have set aside a bar before lunch for our use and whose Pall Mall room can accommodate up to 120 members and guests. This room is always enhanced during our luncheons by the portrait of the founding President, Ormond Blyth.

From 1969 until 1994, the summer meeting was held each year on Derby Day - always a Wednesday - and was followed by the draw of a sweepstake on the race, the profits going to charity. Those members able to stay at the end of the function watched the race on a television in the luncheon room. From 1995, the Derby has been run over the weekend of the Epsom Meeting, not on an appropriate day on which to hold a Blythe Sappers luncheon. The 1995 June function was therefore held on the Wednesday preceding the Derby, with the sweepstake draw taking place following the luncheon. These arrangements continue to be followed since then, so that those Members who have been lucky enough to draw horses now have to wait a few days to see if they have been even luckier in winning a prize.

A new departure, in 1982, added an additional function to our annual programme, in the shape of a formal dinner in the Royal Engineers Headquarter Mess at Brompton Barracks, Chatham with orchestral accompaniment and Corps silver glittering on candlelit tables. Personal guests may be invited to this cheerful and most popular occasion, now termed "The Blythe Sappers Guest Night" at which, by tradition, there are no speeches.

*Badge of Office:*

The late Sapper Coventon Moth produced the Chairman's first badge of Office in the early days of the Society. It comprised a red velvet medallion bearing the Royal Engineers Cap Badge (King George VI) and the word "**UBIQUE**" richly embroidered in gold thread. The medallion was supported by a collar of Royal Engineers ribbon and carried on an additional loose collar of "chain, brass, WC cisterns, for the use of". It was proudly worn by the Chairman at all

functions. After some 100 public appearances, when it had begun to show its age, it was gratefully accepted in 1970 by the Royal Engineers Museum, together with a copy of the 1968 History, containing the Roll of Members past and present.

Meanwhile, a handsome new badge was designed and made by Sapper Kirkland and approved by the Society, consisting of a modified Royal Engineers motor car badge, gilded and with a gilt plate fixed below bearing the words "THE BLYTHE SAPPERS Founded 1945". This badge is supported by a simple collar of Sapper ribbon, and has been further embellished recently.

In 1994 the then Chairman, Sapper Realf, donated a gavel for the Chairman's use. The gavel had originally been presented to him at the end of his attachment to the Royal Swedish Engineer Corps in 1954. An anvil for it was made by the Royal School of Military Engineering from wood found in its archives that had, nearly 100 years before, been part of the original pedestal for the "Chinese Dragon" - a famous piece of Corps silver.

#### *Honorary and Associate Members:*

In the course of 60 years, a small number of gentlemen have been elected as honorary or associate members. However in recent years it has been found preferable from every point of view to offer ordinary membership to a very few friends of the Society, whether Royal Engineers or not, who have the interests and the welfare of the Corps at heart and to confer upon them the distinction of "Blythe Sapper".

#### *Blythe Sappers Challenge Cup:*

In 1946 the Society presented the Corps with an inscribed Challenge Cup for Association Football. In the course of time and because of military circumstances it became the trophy for the UK football champions of the Corps. Because the units in BAOR could not compete for the Cup, the Blythe Sappers presented a Shield to serve a similar purpose in Rhine Army. Although there has been a considerable run-down of Corps members serving in Germany, this trophy is still awarded but may in due course require re-allocation to another competition.

#### *Benevolence:*

In earlier times, the Society made gifts of cash to the Royal Engineers Benevolent Fund, and, occasionally, for other charitable purposes. With the institution of the Derby sweep and a more regular cash flow, such benevolence has increased.

Several gifts have been made to the Royal Engineers Museum at Brompton; as well as cash, these have included a worthy Visitors' Book and an Honours Board. Many Service and Ex-Service charities have also benefited. However, in 1991, the Committee decided that the limited surplus funds available each year would be put to better use by encouraging young Royal Engineers to develop their potential by adventure and challenge, rather than making invidious choices between the many competing claims of individual members' favoured causes. With the agreement of the Engineer-in-Chief a special sub-account of Royal Engineers Corps Funds was set up to hold moneys for this purpose called "The Blythe Sappers Fund for Adventurous and Challenging Pursuits". This is funded entirely by the Society.

The Fund was set up in late 1991 using some of the Society's accumulated moneys which the Committee decided were in excess of day to day requirements. In its first fourteen years of operation over £21,000 has been placed into the fund from which individual grants are made on the recommendation of the Regimental Colonel Royal Engineers and the current Chairman of the Blythe Sappers. Whilst the main intention is to encourage young men and women serving on Regular Royal Engineers engagements, officers and members of the Royal Engineers Territorial Army and of The Queen's Gurkha Engineers are not precluded; several grants have already been made to them. Expeditions receiving sponsorship from the Fund have been made to Alaska, Argentina, Bolivia, Canada, Chile, China, the Drakensburg National Park, East Greenland, Ecuador, French Pyrenees, Ghana, Guyana, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Malaysia, Nepal & Himalaya ,

Paraguay, Peru, the Sahara Marathon, and Venezuela.

*Special Anniversaries:*

To mark the Blythe Sappers' Fiftieth Year a special Anniversary Luncheon was held at the Charing Cross Hotel on Thursday 9th March 1995. The Principal Guest was the then Chief Royal Engineer, Sapper Stibbon. A Corps Trumpeter sounded the call to luncheon and later a fanfare as a prelude to the Chief Royal's address. 119 members and their guests were present, which called for a fair bit of Sapper improvisation to fit everybody in but the occasion was an enjoyable and memorable one. A special Draw was held in aid of the Fund for Adventurous and Challenging Pursuits, to which those who attended, and many who could not, contributed most generously; an extra donation of £400 was made to the Fund.

The Millennium was marked by a Celebration Luncheon held at Old Hall, Lincoln's Inn on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> March 2000. The tables in the Old Hall were adorned for the occasion by pieces of Corps Silver that had been brought up from the Royal Engineers HQ Mess at Brompton under special arrangements made by the then Mess Secretary, Sapper Smallman, and, once again, the 120 members and their lady guests were called to luncheon by a Corps Trumpeter. The Principal Guest who once again addressed those present was the then Chief Royal Engineer, Sapper Scott Grant, another Blythe Sapper.

*Personalities:*

Ormond Blyth, a nephew of the first Baron Blyth of Blythwood, though very well disposed towards the Royal Engineers, never served in the Corps; it is sad to relate that he was able to take little part in the affairs of his Society. In 1946 he resigned from Chairmanship of the Devonshire Club, and in March 1947 from the Presidency of the Blythe Sappers, when it was agreed that the appointment of future Presidents should be left open. He died on 16 June of the same year at the age of 67, having devoted much of his life to manifold charitable causes. For the record, the reader will notice that the title for the Society has a different spelling of Blythe from the founding President's surname. This was caused by a spelling error of the latter carried forward over the years and only noticed by the Honorary Archivist in 2004.

After serving as Chairman in 1946-47, Sapper Coventon Moth became Honorary Treasurer and held that office until he resigned at the end of 1956. He remained a Life Member until his death in 1963. Members had presented him with a small piece of antique silver in 1958 as a token of gratitude for his unique services to the Society.

The 'roll call' of Chairmen of the Society is shown at the end of the booklet.

The Honorary Treasurers were:	J Coventon Moth Esq	1947 - 1956
	Lt Col A.J. Lyddon	1957 - 1970
	Lt Col G.W. Kirkland	1970 - 1971
	Brig J. Constant	1971 - 1974
	Capt P.F. Martin	1974 - 1982
	I.A.R. Stewart Esq	1982 - 1986
	Capt G.G. Fordyce	1986 - 1990

In 1990, when Capt Fordyce stood down, the duties were split between a Secretary and a Treasurer.

Honorary Secretaries

Honorary Treasurers

Lt. Col. D.O. Vaughan	1990 - 1993	Lt. Col. F.R. Howell	1990 - 1995
Maj. W.F. Howard-Jones	1994 - 1996	Col. J.C. Peacey	1996 - 2004
S.G.H. Sinclair Esq.	1997 - 2004	Lt. Col. R.F. Wilsher	2005 -
Lt. Col. J.R. McLennan	2005 -		

Following approval by Council in October 2004 of a new post of Honorary Membership Secretary, the 'membership' duties of the Honorary Secretary were taken over by Lt. Col. D.N. Hamilton.

In the early days the Honorary Treasurer had a lady, not a member of the Society, to assist him in his secretarial duties as Honorary Secretary. These were Miss Joyce Ross, 1947 - 1979; Miss Evelyn Steers, 1979 - 1983; and Mrs Janet Hoe from 1984 to 1986, when the post was discontinued. Throughout the existence of the Blythe Sappers three ladies have been Assistant Honorary Secretaries: Miss Marjorie Barnes (later Mrs A.J. Lyddon) from 1947 to 1984, Mrs Carol Parrott from 1984 to 2004.

The other officers of the Society are the Auditor, the Musical Director, the Chatham Dinner Secretary and the Archivist, all of whom are honorary. These posts have been held by:

<b>Auditor</b>		<b>Musical Director</b>	
R Parry Esq	1946 - 1961	Col. W.A. Turner	1946 - 1960
Maj. Gen. B.K. Young	1961 - 1967	[No Musical Director]	1961 - 1968
Lt. Col. G.W. Kirkland	1968 - 1974	Maj. Gen. Sir Gerald Duke	1969 - 1976
Maj. C. Weiss	1975 - 1982	Maj. R.G. Covell	1977 - 1987
Capt. K. Severn	1983 - 1991	Col. J.I.G. Capadose	1988 - 1998
Col. J.C. Peacey	1992 - 1995	Lt. Col. H.T. Realf	1998 - 2006
Lt. Col. F.R. Howell	1996 - 2003	Major E Keeley	2006 -
Lt. Col. R.F. Wilsher,	2004 - 2004		
Col J.C. Peacey	2005 - 2008		
Brig JB Wilks CBE	2008 -		
<b>Chatham Dinner Secretary</b>		<b>Archivist</b>	
Maj. Gen. G.B. Sinclair	1982 - 1989	Maj. W.F. Howard-Jones	1997 - 2003
Col. G.W.A. Napier	1990 - 1994	Capt. R.A. Lloyd-Owen	2004 -
Lt. Col. J.N. Cormack	1995 - 1997		
Maj. R. L. Smallman	1998 - 2001	<b>Membership Secretary</b>	
Lt. Col. D.N. Hamilton	2001 - 2004	Lt Col C Holman	2008 -
Lt. Col. L.S.I. Inge	2005 -		

### *Bringing the Blythe Sappers up to Date:*

Whilst its purpose is not quite as precise as Sapper tradition dictates, the Society has flourished for some 60 years. The world has moved on during that time; the Corps of Royal Engineers has been significantly reduced in recent years and there are now female Royal Engineers officers serving in both the Regular and Reserve Forces. Furthermore all members who saw service in World War 2 are over 80 years of age and the youngest of those who held National Service Commissions over 65. (The last member who saw service in World War 1, Sapper "Tubby" Broomhall, Chairman in 1974, died in 1995.) To meet this challenge, in 1995 the Society charged a Review Committee under the Chairmanship of Sapper "Gus" Sinclair to examine the structure of the Society and to recommend how to take account of the major changes in the Royal Engineers.

The comprehensive recommendations of the Sinclair Committee were accepted and have been incorporated into the running of the Society and in this booklet. From members' point of view possibly the most momentous decision was that women who qualify under our rules might be elected to the Society. It was also decided that members could bring a female guest to a lunch, provided that their guest had an associated professional interest with the Society. The appropriate function for wives (or husbands) or friends of either gender will remain the annual Guest and Ladies Night.

By 1966, as few members were aware of the Society's origins or membership, "A Short History of the Blythe Sappers" was published and further editions were produced at about 5 yearly intervals. This Tenth Edition is being published in our 60th Year and like its predecessors inevitably leaves out a great deal of the activities of the Society and the services of individual members. However much can be found in the well-kept sets of Minute Books held in the safekeeping of our Honorary Archivist, Sapper Lloyd Owen.

*Election to the Blythe Sappers:*

All candidates, other than those officers (regular and TA) currently serving, must have a proposer (who should be either a member of Council or of the Management Committee) and a seconder, who know the candidate personally, and who, between them, are aware of his or her service with the Corps and the individual's present activities. The proposer and seconder should be prepared to answer the following questions:-

1. Will the candidate take an interest in the Blythe Sappers objectives and interests?
2. Will other members enjoy his or her company at these activities?

The procedure should begin with the candidate being invited to lunch by the proposer or seconder and should be introduced to at least two members of the Management Committee. A nomination form should then be submitted to the Honorary Membership Secretary. The candidate's application will in due course be considered at the next meeting of the Management Committee and, if recommended for election, the candidate will be informed. Council members will be informed at their next meeting.

A meeting was held at Minley Manor in October 2003, at which ways of strengthening membership of the Blythe Sappers were discussed, possibly by encouraging more serving officers (regular and TA) to be elected Blythe Sappers. Proposals were drafted, which were subsequently amended slightly by the Management Committee. Accepting that it was necessary for the wellbeing of the Society to ensure that a steady stream of serving officers be elected members, whilst still preserving the traditional balance between "Gentlemen" and "Player" members, Council approved the following proposals in May 2004:

1. The total number of Blythe Sappers should be limited to 300, subject to this number being regularly reviewed by the Management Committee;
2. The Society should remain 'closed', but all serving officers in the Corps should be encouraged to consider membership of the Blythe Sappers on attaining the rank of lieutenant colonel or reaching the age of 40; whichever occurred first,
3. Those who were interested should be given the opportunity to attend a lunch, at their own expense or hosted by a Blythe Sapper, where they should meet a member of the Management Committee before seeking membership;
4. Such candidates would need to be proposed by a member of the Management Committee as part of the nomination procedure; but that each nomination would need to be considered at a subsequent Management Committee meeting to confirm that there was a vacancy; and
5. The current "dining-in" requirement, nomination and election procedure would be retained for all other candidates for election, in effect all those not currently serving.

Council also agreed that the Society should elect a Membership Secretary with close connections to the Royal Engineers to ensure that the new procedure was implemented; and that he should write to all serving officers who had attained the rank of Lieutenant Colonel or reached the age of 40, providing information on the Blythe Sappers, together with information on how to go about attending a luncheon and seeking election as a Blythe Sapper.

It is believed that the revised rules will allow the Blythe Sappers to remain as cheerful as the merry Coventon Moth would have wished. The only subject that they take seriously to heart is the well being of the Corps of Royal Engineers.

September 2010

**"HURRAH FOR THE CRE"**

The words of the anthem to be sung by the Blythe Sappers

GOOD MORNING MR. STEVENS AND WINDY NOTCHY KNIGHT,  
HURRAH FOR THE CRE  
WE'RE WORKING VERY HARD DOWN AT UPNOR HARD,  
HURRAH FOR THE CRE  
YOU MAKE FAST, I MAKE FAST, MAKE FAST THE DINGHY,  
MAKE FAST THE DINGHY, MAKE FAST THE DINGHY,  
YOU MAKE FAST, I MAKE FAST, MAKE FAST THE DINGHY,  
MAKE FAST THE DINGHY PONTOON.  
FOR WE'RE MARCHING ON TO LAFFAN'S PLAIN,  
TO LAFFAN'S PLAIN, TO LAFFAN'S PLAIN,  
YES, WE'RE MARCHING ON TO LAFFAN'S PLAIN,  
WHERE THEY DON'T KNOW MUD FROM CLAY.  
AH, AH, AH, AH, AH, AH, AH, AH.  
OSHTA, OSHTA, OSHTA, OSHTA,  
IKONA MALEE, PIKANINNY SKOFF,  
MA-NINGA SABENZA, HERE'S ANOTHER OFF.  
OOLUM-DA CRIED MATABELE  
OOLUM-DA, AWAY WE GO,  
AH, AH, AH, AH, AH, AH, AH.  
SHUSH.....WHOOW!

**CHAIRMEN**

**OF**

## THE BLYTHE SAPPERS 1945 - 2011

E H. Fryer Esq. (Founder Chairman)	1945
J Coventon Moth Esq.	1946
Brig. A. G. Bonn CBE MC	1947
Col. W. A. Turner MC	1948
Maj. Gen. Sir Covington Cole KBE CB	1949
Maj. Gen. G. S. Szlumper CBE	1950
Maj. Gen. Sir Drummond Inglis KBE CB MC	1951
Maj. Gen. B. K. Young CBE MC	1952/53
Lt. Col. A. J. Lyddon CBE	1954
Brig. L. G. Robertson CBE	1955
Lt. Col. J. F. P. Hoeck MC CdeG	1956
Lt. Gen. Sir John Whiteley GBE KCB MC	1957
Capt. A. K. Dodds MC	1958
Maj. Gen. Sir Douglas Campbell KBE CB DSO MC	1959
Gen. Sir Nevil Brownjohn GBE KCB CMG MC ADC	1960/61
Col. The Rt Hon Lord Mais of Walbrook OBE OSTJ ERD TD	1962
Col. Sir Ralf Emerson CIE OBE	1963
Lt. Col. G. W. Kirkland MBE	1964
Maj. Gen. G. N. Russell CB CBE	1965
Lt. Col. F. E. Griggs TD	1966
Maj. Gen. Sir Gerald Duke KBE CB DSO	1967
Col. P. McA. Sinclair MC	1968
Col. Sir Ralph Freeman CVO CBE	1969
Brig. C. C. Parkman CBE ERD TD	1970
Lt. Col. D. O. May	1971
Maj. Gen. T. H. F. Foulkes CB OBE	1972
Lt. Col. E. G. Goldring ERD	1973
Maj. Gen. W. M. Broomhall CB DSO OBE	1974
Maj. R. G. Covell	1975
Gen. Sir Noel Thomas KCB DSO MC	1976
Col. K. H. Osborne DSO OBE MC TD	1977
Col. H. A. J. Darlow TD ERD	1978
Col. R. L. E. Lawrence OBE ERD	1979
Brig. J. Constant	1980
Maj. J. F. Rusted	1981
Maj. Gen. J. C. Woollett CBE MC	1982
Capt. P. F. Martin	1983
Maj. Gen. R. W. T. Britten CB MC	1984
Col. Sir Alan Harris CBE	1985
Maj. Gen. G. B. Sinclair CB CBE	1986
Maj. J. C. A. Roseveare DSO	1987
Lt. Col. AE. J. M. Perkins	1988
Maj. Sir Eric Yarrow MBE DL	1989
Brig. J. W. Walker OBE	1990
I. A. R. Stewart Esq.	1991
Brig. P. F. Aylwin-Foster	1992
G. C. H. Osborne Esq. DL	1993

THE BLYTHE SAPPERS

Lt. Col. H. T. Realf	1994	
Capt. G. G. Fordyce	1995	
Maj. Gen. P. C. Shapland CB MBE	1996	
D. Dennington Esq.	1997	
Brig. F. G. Barton CBE	1998	
Col. J. P. Taberner OBE	1999	
Col. J. G. Evans CBE TD	2000	
J. G. Charlesworth Esq.	2001	
Brig. W. E. Shackell CBE	2002	
Maj. D. F. James	2003	
Col. R. M. Stancombe	2004	
Capt. M. H. S. Muller	2005	
Prof. J. D. Lewins	2006	
S.G. H. Sinclair Esq.	2007	
Capt. J. H. Fitzmaurice		2008
B. H. Pearce CBE DL	2009	
Maj. Gen. J. D. Moore-Bick CBE DL	2010	
Sir Idris Pearce CBE TD DL	2011	