The Reunion Dinner
The Origins of the Reunions

Menu of the first Reunion held to celebrate the wedding of Major Babington, the Squadron CO for 18 months during the First World War 11 February 1918

Menu for the 94th Reunion held as tradition on the first Saturday in June

The Squadron is unique in the Royal Air Force because it is the only one to have held consecutive reunions through years of varying fortunes since the first in 1917.

Reunions are held annually on the first Saturday in June under the banner of the No 46 squadron RFC & RAF Association. The Reunion Dinner is held on the Saturday night, normally in an Officers’ Mess, with a separate function for the Ladies. The preferred dress is Mess Kit or Dinner Jacket although a dark lounge suit is perfectly acceptable.

The cost of running the Association is met from a small additional charge on the cost of the dinner complemented by donations. A separate fund exists to assist members who are in financial difficulty to attend the reunion.

Membership of the Association is open to all who have served on the posted strength of No 46 Squadron; in addition, people who have a close association with the Squadron may also be invited to join. If you would like to join the Association please email the Secretary, Group Captain Dougie Barr, at dougiebarr (@) gmail.com. After each Reunion, a newsletter is produced called “Cheeriooo”; click here to see a copy of the latest issue.
One of the oldest customs of the Officers’ Mess is that of dining-in, ostensibly to drink the loyal toast, and for nearly 95 years the Members of the No 46 Squadron Association have, wherever possible, used this format to celebrate the unique spirit of the Squadron. The proceedings begin about 1 hour before the hour appointed for dinner, normally 8 pm, when all Members, their ladies and their guests assemble in the anteroom for pre-dinner drinks. The Members and their guests circulate as much as possible in the best tradition of friendliness and hospitality. During these pre-dinner drinks the ‘HEALTH AND STRENGTH’ is prepared during which the rather improbable and quite untrue cry of ‘Shhhhhhh ONE, TWO, THREE, Cheerio 46, First Today!’ will be loudly echoed by all Members. ‘HEALTH AND STRENGTH’ is the libation that fortified Squadron crews at their “binges” in the Mess during the First World War. Just before 8 o’clock the Ladies will leave, the gentlemen should take this opportunity to check their position on the seating plan and it may be advisable to ‘ease springs’, as a need to leave the dining room during the meal is considered bad form.

The stewards will only clear away empty plates when the last Member has finished. As already mentioned, it is considered most undignified to leave the dining room while dinner is in progress, but there may be exceptional circumstances when a Member may wish to excuse himself. To do this he must make his way up the aisle between the tables, stand before the President and ask formally to be excused.

No 46 Squadron has a long and unique tradition whereby any Member may ‘take wine’ at any time during the dinner; he does this by banging the table, standing up and announcing “I would like to take wine with all those who ….. e.g. flew Javelins, drank in Rosie’s Bar” etc. Members who accept the offer rise and toast each other. A tradition that began during the Association’s 75th Anniversary is that Members are permitted to sing along to ‘Sussex by the Sea’ whenever it is played by the band, even before the Loyal Toast. It is perfectly acceptable to applaud the Band but this should be done sparingly and with restraint.
At the conclusion of the meal and before any speeches, the Mess staff will clear all plates and glasses other than a port glass. A decanter each of Port and Madeira is then positioned in front of the President and Mr Vice. When the President removes the decanter stoppers, Mr Vice does likewise. The President and Mr Vice then pass the decanters to their left. Each Member then charges his own glass to taste. A steward will be in attendance with a jug of water while the Port is being passed for those who prefer a non-alcoholic drink. Eventually the President’s set of decanters will reach Mr Vice, and Mr Vice’s the President, the stoppers are then replaced. (The decanters should never be passed back to the right). Extra decanters will be placed at regular points around the tables and it is important that these extra decanters are handled in the same way. The tradition that the decanter should not touch the table until it reaches its final destination is obscure and is not followed by No 46 Squadron.

The stage is now set for the loyal toast. The President bangs his gavel and proclaims: “Mr Vice - The Queen”. Mr Vice then rises and replies: “Gentlemen - The Queen.” The assembly rises, and if a band is in attendance the National Anthem will be played. On completion of the anthem, glasses are lifted “The Queen” is repeated by the assemblage and the Port sipped. Seats are then resumed. If there are Members or guests from foreign or Commonwealth countries, toasts will be proposed to their head of state. The President will rise and propose the toast, for example, “Mr Vice - The President of the Federal Republic of Germany.” Mr Vice rises and replies: “Gentlemen, The President of the Federal Republic of Germany”. Again, all will rise, if a band is present it will play the appropriate anthem; otherwise, Members lift their glasses and repeat the toast. If a band is present then, after the loyal toast, the President will ask the band masters to join him and the Chef for a glass of port; this intended as a token of thanks on behalf of the Members.

On completion of the loyal toast, coffee is served and the President recommences the circulation of the Port and Madeira decanters. Members will generally have had no need to touch the Mess silver during dinner; indeed a Member may be fined for so doing. However, if he has a burning need to read a particular inscription, it is generally permitted to touch the silver after the Loyal Toast. The President will usually announce an administrative break; Members who take advantage of the break must return to their seats with alacrity. On the return of all the Members, the President will, in turn, call upon the Secretary to make the Parish Announcements and nominated Members to propose toasts to ‘The Squadron’ and to ‘Absent Friends’. At the end of each proposal, all Members rise and drink the toast, repeating the exultation. Finally, the President will propose a toast to ‘Our Guests’; only the Members rise and drink this toast. To indicate the end of dinner, the President will bang his gavel and stand, the top table will rise and, led by the President, leave the dining room. During the exit, the remaining Members stand until all the top table have left. Other Members may then leave the dining room when they wish and later re-join their colleagues in the anteroom for post-prandial refreshment and reminiscences.

*Bowdlerised and plagiarised from ‘Behind the Hangar Doors’ by Philip Congdon. Sonik Books 1985.*
The Secret of Health and Strength

3 bottles of Port
1/2 bottle of Brandy
1/4 bottle of Crème de Cacao
3 dozen eggs
Nutmeg

Stir together with loud cries of “Cheeeeriooo 46 First Today”; serves 90 approx.
The magic will not work without the cry!

The President and Members request the company of Stuart Donders Esq

at the 92nd consecutive Reunion Dinner of No 46 Squadron RFC & RAF
to be held at
the Officers’ Mess, Royal Air Force Lyneham
on Saturday, 6th of June 2009 at 7 pm for 8 pm.

Pour Memoire
Dress: Mess Kit, Black Tie (with miniatures)
The Squadron has been blessed with some fine silver during its history. The silver is kindly maintained and kept in safe custody by the Officers’ Mess at RAF High Wycombe and is displayed on the dining table at Reunions. Photographs of the silver and other Squadron table decorations are shown below.

- **Javelin** presented by the makers Gloster Aircraft Company
- **Beaufighter. History unknown**
- **Andover C Mk1** presented by the makers Hawker Siddeley Aviation
- **Gloster Gauntlet** presented by Flying Officer N G Cooke
- **The “Chaps” Platter. Presented to the first Secretary of the Squadron Reunions** Chaps Marchant, a pilot on the Squadron during the First World War. He ran 40 reunions.
- **Silver salver** presented by former members to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the formation of the Squadron. 39th reunion Dinner RAF Odiham June 1956.
- **The “Narvik” Flag. Engraved on base “28 Mai 1940—Narvik bys helsen og takk 28 May 1960” which Google translates as: 28 May 1940—Narvik City regards and thanks—28 May 1960”
- **Silver salver with the Squadron crest and signatures purchased at auction. The seller, Mr Charles Clark, says it was wedding present to his mother who married the Sqn CO Wg Cdr Reid in Nov 1942.
- **Cigarette box** presented by Flg Off D C Stone
- **Decanter necklaces** presented to Peter Giffkin’s on his 25th anniversary as Secretary.
- **Corgi Aviation Archive Collector Series AA38105 Sopwith Camel Diecast Model RFC No.46 Sqn, Donald MacLaren, Athies, 1918
- **Corgi Aviation Archive Collector Series AA95205 SE5a presented by the remaining “Old Originals” member of the Squadron at the 42nd Reunion in June 1964.”
- **Silver salver presented by former members to celebrate the 90th birthday of its senior member, Roy Butler. This an exact replica of the aircraft he flew in 1944.”
- **This Dakota KN 442 of No 46 Squadron was flown during the Berlin Airlift by the Squadron Commander, Sqn Ldr (later Gp Capt) Dick Arscott. Dick is a regular attender at Reunions.”

**R.F.C. Aerial Ranges Berc-sur-Mer 1917 – 1918**
Won by A Flight No 46 Squadron R.F.C.