

American Express Retirees Club



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Newsletter – Q 4– 2023

Editor's Welcome

Hello again dear readers. I hope you have been able to enjoy the summer. In the UK that would have been wet July, unsettled August and a globally record warm September. In the rest of Europe-hot !

My attempts to get input from anybody has once again failed so the news, once again, is biased toward my experiences. The saddest day this quarter was attending the funeral of Alex Walker. He lived to the grand age of 93 and was able to maintain an active and exciting lifestyle until his nineties. Alex employed me and so gave me the opportunity to develop my career for which I will always be grateful. I have attempted to 'draw' a picture of the man below.

We didn't travel this summer and so I was able to dedicate much of my time to learning, using podcasts as my main source of information. More of that later.

As always, I would love to receive correspondence from you. Something that we can share with our colleagues. Maybe you can give me feedback on the subjects raised in this quarter publication. I would be very interested to know how our readers use their leisure time to learn more about the world we live in.

As always, thanks to our chairman for his submissions, including the quarterly quiz .

Chairman's Report

It's been a busy month all round.

I guess that like many Retirees we wonder how we ever found time to go to work, what with shopping at a variety of supermarkets to get the best prices, balancing our activities with our clubs, you join a club to occasionally play a game of bowls or something similar and you end up being co-opted into various competitions. Then there's the grandchildren, not that I have any, but we do get involved with next-door neighbours' kids. The odd weekend away at Warners and visiting friends, not to mention gardening and house maintenance. It all makes for a busy time and things can slip by unnoticed.

Like ,for those who are signed up for the eNewsletter, this month you will know that I didn't, for the first time, provide a View from the Chair article. Somehow the first day of October just crept up on me. Thankfully, Ann McNorvell our splendid editor, was very helpful and made some excuses for me, so I was determined not to miss this edition of the Quarterly Newsletter. Dealing with a banking issue the other day I was reminded of how all of us, particularly as the years pass and vulnerable to what is termed Senior Moments. A good few years ago, en-route to somewhere, we decided to call in to see some friends we hadn't seen or heard from in a long while, they used to be neighbours and were still in the same house although we moved out of next door a long while ago. Like us they said that they hadn't heard from us either, although we told them we always sent them a Christmas Card, which they hadn't seemed to have received, thinking they had been deleted from our lives, they had stopped sending us a card.

On returning home we realised that at some time we had inadvertently and incorrectly changed their address when updating our address book, hence them not receiving it.

I was reminded of this because our local Post Office has put a post on our village Facebook page saying how many unidentified Christmas Cards they see each year; it runs into hundreds. To try to correct this they have asked everyone to write their house number/name and postcode on the back of every envelope posted, after all the stamps now cost more than £1 each. At least then there's a chance an undelivered post can be returned. I always do this on all business-related envelopes in any case but from now on it will be on letters and cards as well, perhaps it's something we could all do from now on.

Amex Travel (Any Observations?)

Because I used to work for the travel division, I do receive the newsletter. Admittedly I don't actually do any articles myself but over the years I have never seen any mention of our part of the company. Am I right in as no-one from our side has ever taken part or even died?

Thank you for any thoughts.

John Edward King

Obituaries

Mr James Edward Smith on 11 September 2023 who lived in Brighton and leaves a spouse, Karen.

Mrs Joan Emily Bibby on 8 September 2023 who lived in Brighton and was in receipt of a spouse's pension in respect of her late husband Joseph.

Mr Craig Dinsell on 5 September 2023 who lived in New Jersey, United States, and leaves a widow, Sheila.

Ms June Hogbin on 5 September 2023 who lived in Brighton and was single.

Mrs Pamela Ann Burchett on 20 August 2023 who lived in Newhaven and leaves a spouse Raymond.

Mrs Elizabeth Caroline Serpis on 5 August 2023 who lived in West Sussex and leaves a spouse, Ashley.

Mr Henry Hussey on 5 August 2023 who lived in Llangammarch Wells and leaves a spouse, Janet.

Mr Brian Roland Morley on 29 July 2023 who lived in Brighton and was in receipt of a spouse's pension in respect of his late wife Barbara's membership of the Plan.

Mr Jagat Manubhai Patel on 28 July 2023 who lived in Surbiton and leaves a spouse, Hasumati.

Mrs Thelma Rita Stanley on 16 July 2023 who lived in Australia and was in receipt of a spouse's pension.

Further to previous correspondence below, we can confirm that Mr Henry Bernard Smith passed away on 10 July 2023.

Mrs Helen Joy McClymont on 6 July 2023 who was widowed and lived in Wellingborough. We do not have any further information at present.

Mrs Marjorie Ann Merlini on 4 July 2023 who lived in Tonbridge, Kent and was in receipt of a spouse's pension in respect of her late husband John's membership of the Plan.

Mrs Pauline Anne Potter on 15 June 2023 who lived in Lightwater, Surrey and leaves a spouse, Richard.

Mrs Mary Louise Bolton on 9 June 2023, who lived in Iver, Buckinghamshire.

Mrs Josephine Ann Burgess Milson on 13 May 2023 who lived in Oxshott, Surrey.

Mr James Packham on 11 May 2023 who lived in Brighton and was in receipt of a spouse's pension in respect of his late wife Carol's membership of the Plan.

Peter Jackson

This is Fran Jackson, Peter's wife. I am reaching out to you as I would like you to post Peter's passing. I have reached out to a number of our ex-colleagues to notify them, and I would rather the information remain in a closed forum for the moment.

Peter passed away on Friday the 8th of September peacefully after suffering from a long-term illness. The funeral arrangements will be made soon, and I will be setting up a video link for those friends abroad to attend should they wish.

Many thanks, Fran Jackson

Alex Walker (editor)

The sad part about being the editor of our newsletter is that I have to report on details of those colleagues that have died during the quarter.

This quarter is particularly sad in that I notice names of people that I had worked with during my many enjoyable years at Amex. I am going to dedicate this newsletter to a person who was very important in my life. Alex Walker.

I worked in London for the first fifteen years of my working life. Luckily, I was able to join the technology revolution and began my career in computing.

We lived in Chelmsford and so the daily commute meant that I only saw our two young children at the weekend - apart from the goodnight kisses.

My wife noticed an advertisement by American Express, inviting applications for a newly created Systems department, based in Brighton. Ideal for us as a young family, with less commute time and thus more family time.

Alex and Graeme Maclean interviewed me. Alex was his usual self - what you see is what you get !. 'If you join us we will work your 'socks' off but it will be a great experience in a fast-developing business'.

Thanks to Alex's faith in me; I did join the team; I was able to develop my technical and managerial skills; I was able to introduce 'state-of-the-art' techniques, such as structured development; I was able to travel all over Europe as we carried the 'Care' banner into the developing markets; I was able to joining the global management development programme; and, eventually, my family transferred to Italy, where I was able to work with another great management team. All of this because of Alex's enthusiasm, support, and encouragement.

Alex, in those early years, managed an amazing amount of technology change, as we moved the operations activities from paper-based to computer-based services. These were high stress times and Alex stood-up for his team and took the flack whilst allowing his staff to take the accolades. A true, but tough, manager.

Of course, we were full throttle working at making change happen. We never really had time for pleasantries. I remember fondly the 'team building' programmes. A whole group of us were dumped in the middle of nowhere; many uncomfortable tasks were set, scaling cliffs, building rafts and crossing lakes, dynamiting !! In these situations, hierarchy didn't count. It was 'application' that worked. Alex had no problem being part of those events and consequently was strong enough to struggle/celebrate like the rest of the team.

It wasn't till I attended the funeral of Alex at the end of August that I learnt so much more about him- and that is sad. Alex was born on 10th January 1930 in Broxburn, a small mining village near Edinburgh. He was the second of 6 children. The church was an integral part of daily life and it's where Alex developed a passion for singing. He was in a choir that performed Handel's Messiah in the famous Usher Hall in Edinburgh. However, he was best known for impromptu renditions of Scottish Ballads and theme songs from musicals.

He was always 'immaculately turned-out', and even 'cat-walked' for Ralf Lauren's men's wear in his 80's. His early work years were as an engineer with Rolls Royce and that's where, through continued learning, he decided to move into computing.

Rolls Royce eventually moved out of Scotland and so did Alex. In 1976 he moved to Haywards Heath to take up a new post with American Express. He met Susan forty-three years ago which gave him a new lease of life and reward. His role meant that he travelled the 'Amex-world' widely, including to New York, Phoenix, Japan, Florida, Hong Kong. and most of the European centres.

He retired in 1991 and when Sue retired, two years later, they decided to dedicate their lives to dancing around the world ! They celebrated Alex's 80th on board the QM2; and their silver wedding anniversary at Lake Como.

Alex even had time to play golf regularly and continued enjoying that sport till he was 90.

He saw his grandchildren married and welcomed 5 great grandchildren into the family; meeting the newest addition just a week before he passed away.

In his usual understatement way, he recently said ' I have been so lucky. I have seen so many places in the world and done so many things. I have had a good life'.

Alex, you have demonstrated that life is for living and that hard work pays; as does loyalty and love to those around you. Thank you for finding me ! My Family will always be thankful for the chance you gave us to make our way, proudly in this world.

Reunion (Chairman)

The Reunion seems to be coming together nicely but I must admit that Chris Belton and John Lias have done the vast majority of the work. I've been keeping an eye on, with Chris, the incoming attendance fees and I might add, correcting a couple of errors. Plus, I've been getting the items together to produce the name badges for everyone, which is probably a good idea as many of us have changed a bit as we get older, in my case the sprouting of a set of whiskers, plus our names might have temporarily slipped from people's memories. It has been decided to have a list available on the night. The numbers attending are almost spot on the maximum the venue can accommodate, with a few in reserve.

I'm sure the event will be a success and hope that those of you attending are looking forward to it, see you there.

Retirees London Walk – The Unknown East End (Chris Belton)

This was the first Retiree event since well before Covid and I was pleased that despite a potential disruption to national rail services, fifteen people turned up at the meeting point. Thankfully the weather did the right thing for us by not raining – yes, I know we went in July but...

It would be hard to incorporate all that we heard into a readable article and so I'll concentrate on the highlights and indeed the low lights! I have included links to further articles.

We met at Whitechapel Underground Station. There has been a street market of some sort on this site for centuries from a time when the area was mostly fields. As you would expect, it stands on Whitechapel Road and is opposite what is now the Royal London Hospital. Just a few hundred yards from here is The Blind Beggar Pub famous as the place the Krays frequented and the site where Reggie Kray murdered George Connell.

The history of Whitechapel Market — Whitechapel LDN (whitechapellondon.co.uk)

If you think of famous "bells" then Big Ben and the Liberty Bell spring to mind. The Whitechapel Bell Foundry where they were made still stands today, although unused. It was once Britain's oldest manufacturing company and was established in 1570. The outside is looking a bit sorry for itself, but it is hard to escape the scale of what went on there over the centuries.

Whitechapel Bell Foundry - Wikipedia

Lenin, Trotsky, Gorky and Stalin made their mark in rooms further along the road. This was in the early 1900s.

London's role in the Russian Revolution - BBC News

In Atlatl Ali Park is the site of the old Church of St Mary Matfelon, a once whitewashed chapel from which the area gets its name. It was demolished during the second world war after being damaged during the Blitz.

Atlatl Ali Park - Wikipedia

Past the impressive Whitechapel Gallery which is described now as housing "mould-breaking modern art exhibitions!" Then diving down a really narrow alleyway taking us to the site of the Four Per Cent Industrial Dwelling Company. It was established in 1885 "to provide the industrial classes with commodious and healthy dwellings at a minimum rent." At the same time as providing a return on their investment of – yes 4 per cent!

Rothschild family papers | Guide to the Archive (rothschildarchive.org)

Brick Lane is and always has been a melting pot in the East End. It has seen many nationalities come and go and today it is the home of the Bangladesh community. The current Brick Lane Mosque was at one time a Synagogue and a place of Christian worship.

We ended the walk close to Spitalfields Market having passed by what was once the Truman Brewery. Whilst we had been on our feet for some two hours, we hadn't walked all that far. About a mile and a half in total. What we had seen though, took us from the present day back through the ages. A fascinating insight into a part of London that we might know about but not really know.

(Here's a link to the photos Chris took. There were also some others on Facebook.

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/v5DMFZAuQJ8REonn7>)

Event Report (Chairman)

Earlier in September a group of Retirees and partners, eighteen in all visited a local (to me at least) Coffee and Tea Company, Edgacumbes for a short tour and talked about the intricacies of coffee roasting. I personally found it very interesting, and I found out many things that I didn't know. I've always found the smell of roasting coffee very enticing, although for many years I couldn't drink it but over the past few years that has altered and now I really enjoy it, fresh brewed coffee that is, not the instant type. We were given a tour of their small factory and shown how various coffee beans are blended and then roasted. If I remember correctly, it was about a 20-minute process in which the beans turn from green to brown with distinctive aromas at different stages, one being grass, sorry I didn't take notes. They are quickly cooled and then passed to packaging. We were able to taste the results of different blends.

I still love my tea of course, which is my early morning brew. Edgacumbes sell tea but they don't process it but they do carefully select the varieties they sell, my favourite has up to now been their Rusper blend but they have convinced me to try their English Breakfast. A buying visit is scheduled for next week so I will give it a try.

If you are passing by Arundel, they are situated at Ford just a couple of miles to the south and are well worth a visit as they have a café serving of course tea and coffees as well as snacks. Alongside is their retail shop selling a very wide range of their products; you can also visit them online.

PS Other than being a customer of theirs for over 35 years I have no ties to them.

My Latest Sources of Information ! (editor)

A good friend of mine suggested that I might enjoy listening to some podcasts as part of my daily routines. I do try to keep fit at the gym and walking so I felt that being able to listen as I played might be good fun. Wow was I lucky ! My first adventure was into the world as portrayed in 'The Rest is Politics' hosted by Rory Stewart and Alistair Campbell. Listening feels like being a fly on the wall in the lounge where these two formidable characters share their thoughts on current events and their experiences. Easy listening with an amazing amount of insight into current and past events. They have two podcast types, one entitled 'Question Time' where they take questions from the public; the other called 'Leading', where they share time with well-known people of our time-examples, Theresa May, Cathy Ashton (Dealing with Putin and Lavrov), Mustafa Suleyman (Will AI destroy Humanity), Anthony Joshua (responding to failure), John Major, Kate Raworth (Doughnut Economics), etc. Not only am I learning so much more about today's reality , I am also being given a chance to delve into more details on certain subjects of global significance !

I have bought books authored by several of the interviewees. 'The Coming Wave', Mustafa Suleyman - AI, Power and the 21st Century's Greatest Dilemma; 'Doughnut Economics', Kate Raworth, Seven ways to think like a 21st-century economist; 'Politics on the Edge', Rory Stewart, a memoir from within; 'And Then What ?', Catherine Ashton, despatches from the heart of 21st-century diplomacy; 'But What Can I Do?', Alastair Campbell, why politics has gone wrong, and how you can help fix it. My next purchase will be , 'The Abuse of Power', Theresa May, confronting injustice in public life - just published. Regular Podcasts that help me understand more other interests include, 'Russia-Ukraine War Report', daily updates ; 'Flashpoint Ukraine'; 'The AI Podcast'; 'The News Agents' and so many more that can be found by browsing the many apps we can get access to.

Brighton and Hove Football (Chairman)

Many years ago, just after it was built the Retirees Club, on a few occasions were given access to the new Amex Stadium, usually to the private dining rooms on match days and splendid affairs if you like football. Unfortunately for a few reasons and due to their elevation to the Premier League this stopped which is a great pity and I haven't been since as it's a real hassle from where I live.

Last weekend it was my wife's birthday, son number one (there is only one) said he was going to visit. It was a nice thought to visit his mum, we decided, then he told us that he couldn't get to us until the Saturday night, the actual birthday, still never mind a family dinner was still planned. A little later, he asked me if I would go to the match with him at the Amex Stadium on the Sunday,

How could I say no? He had managed to get a couple of tickets via the official season ticket swap site. Mum was to stay home on her own, but she said she had some housework and washing to do plus she would cook a meal for our return and the day after her birthday as well.

Friends advised us to leave early for the park and ride as the match was against Bournemouth, practically a local derby. So off we set only to find that we arrived before the park and ride opened. This meant parking up to wait to park. I think we were about eighth in the queue; it opened up on time at 11am. After parking we got the bus to the match through what was even then quite heavy traffic, has anyone ever given thought to the traffic flows around the stadium I wonder? With the match kick-off at 2pm we had some time to wait. Thankfully we had a packed lunch with us as the kiosk prices outside were pretty steep, but the food did look good. There was a Brazilian Dancing Band there for us to watch which was quite entertaining although I'm not sure most of the dancing girls would have got into a real Mardi Gras and some of the musicians were older than me. Eventually we made our way to the seats and pretty good they were right on the halfway line in the second block up so our view

was very good. Shame really because the game was, certainly in the first half pretty dire, the second half was better with

Brighton eventually coming out 3-1 winners, which I thought was a bit flattering.

I don't know why but I always seem to get the same bloke sitting behind me at every match, you know the one, the one who is the manager's unpaid advisor. He gave advice on every tactical mistake, who should be substituted with whom, what position players should move to, who they should pass the ball to etc. etc. and all of this in a loud voice. Why does he follow me around? After the match we made our way to the buses along with thousands of others, we got off at the same place where we got on and went to walk to our car, now remember we were eighth in the queue, so we started at the bottom. If you don't know where the car park is; it's on one side of Mill Road at Patcham, it's a bit of a long hill and it is turned into a temporary one way. We walked up the hill from the bottom and kept walking, convinced we must have missed our car, fortunately we found it about sixty cars up, now how did that happen?

A lengthy drive home through the traffic to Arundel arriving back at 6pm, a total of eight and a half hours, I enjoyed it but at my age I think I'll stick to match of the day highlights in future. PS the cold roast pork mash and pickles went down a treat.

Quiz (a trendy vegan one and please no discussion about whether they are technically fruits or vegetables)

1. "Allium Sepa" is the latin for what common vegetable?
2. "Arran Pilot", "Pentland Javelin" and "Maris Baird" are all varieties of which vegetable?
3. Which vegetable is named the "love apple"?
4. Of what genus are cabbages, broccoli and cauliflowers, part of?
5. Which vegetables were the first to be canned?
6. "Pepinex" and "Telegraph" are varieties of which vegetable.
7. Former US President George Bush once stated he disliked what vegetable?
8. Which vegetable was once described as "nothing but a cabbage with a college education"? (q. Mark Twain)
9. What is a "White Lisbon"?
10. Which vegetable has varieties of "calabrese" and "purple sprouting"?

Late Summer, one week, trip to Sardinia (editor)

End of September and we had made plans to revisit the Northern part of Sardinia; meeting old friends who are living in Puglia. We flew from Gatwick with Easyjet so travel preparations included weighing, measuring and then separating 10 liquids each as carry-on allowance. That stress out of the way, the journey was smooth, and we arrived in Olbia just before midday on a typical hot day. Immediate change of clothes from tracksuits to shorts.

Car rental went very smoothly; just had forgotten about the £300 removed from a credit card as deposit. The car was in good order with plenty of luggage space.

Our initial road trip took us through the wonderful scenery, including the emerald blue sea, of the Costa Smeralda (rich people's summer playground). The season was over and so there remained a few outrageous yachts awaiting loading on to their winter homes.

Our first night was in Baia Sardinia, maybe an hour north of Olbia. A welcome glass of free prosecco followed by an unexpected bonus was a free yoga session on the beach - painful as I realized just how immobile I am.

Dinner was a traditional pasta dish with clams followed by a slow stroll into the centre and delicious ice cream.

Next stopover was at Castel Sardo. Another very old town on a promontory with its castle and cathedral being the highlights.

Next to Stintino, staying at a three-star hotel where the staff were amazing, the rooms comfortable and the location central. Our lazy day was spent on a special white sand beach, allowing a limited number of guests and which was full. It is called La Pelosa, and costs £3 per day; you need a roll-up mat to lay on the beach and are not allowed to smoke or leave any waste on the sand. Beach police rigorously enforce these rules.

Our return journey took us away from the coast and enabled some cultural excursions.

Firstly, a long, torturous drive at Telti, to a height of almost 500 meters along a winding, dusty, unmade road, very close to the edge. The reward, a magnificent range of rock formations including the famous 'elephant rock' plus amazing views of the terrain below.

Visits to various 'nuraghes', mysterious circular stone constructions built in the bronze age, with the highlight being the 'giants tomb' in the village of Barumini

And our final night staying at the 'agriturismo il Vermicino-Cantina Tani Vini', in Monti, near Olbia.

A magical week.

And Finally

Travelling through heavy traffic from his estate in the Surrey Hills, he finally arrived at his city office parking space, after parking his Porsche he made his way up to his penthouse office by means of the outdoor high-speed lift.

No sooner had he sat at his desk than his private phone rang, it was his company CEO asking for him to go up to his office right away, looking at his Omega he wondered what he was needed for so urgently after all he hadn't even touched his caviar and champagne breakfast

Arriving at his office, the CEO asked Simon how much cash he had in his pocket, "£20" he replied, "just enough for your train fare home then" said the CEO, also informing Simon that the company had gone bust that very morning and everyone had lost their job and that the £500K company shares he owned were now worthless. He also asked for the keys to Simon's company

Porche and the return of his Corporate Amex Gold Card and the key to the executive toilet.

There was nothing else he could do but go home.

Arriving at the station near his home he was forced to walk the two miles home as there was no reply from his wife and he couldn't afford a taxi.

As he arrived at the entrance to his estate he met his butler, who said "I've got some good news and I've got some bad news what do you want first?" "Give me the bad news first," said Simon.

Well said the butler "I'm afraid your prize racehorse and your pedigree Lagotto Romagnolo dog are both dead." "DEAD! How did that happen?" asked Simon.

"Well, the horse died when the stables caught fire"

"Caught fire?" exclaimed Simon "How did that happen?"

"We think it was a spark from the main house when you dog knocked over a fire which burned the oriental rug and caused the house to burn down and the dog died in the blaze"

"Burned down? How are my wife and children?" stuttered Simon.

"Oh, they left hours ago as soon as they heard you were penniless," said the butler.

"That's terrible" replied Simon "but you said there was good news, what is it."

"Well, the Chief Fireman said that because of the heat from the fire there's a good chance of an early crop of daffodils in the Spring" exclaimed the butler.

Quiz Answers

1. Onion 2. Potato 3. Tomato 4. Brassica 5. Peas 6. Cucumber 7. Broccoli 8. Cauliflower 9. A salad onion 10. Broccoli (Alka Seltzer anyone?)

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WE REGRET THAT THE RETIREES CLUB IS NOT ABLE TO DO THIS FOR YOU.

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Newsletters



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Quarterly Newsletter items only; please email the Editor Richard Watkins at the address above.

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