

## Newsletter – Q2 – 2026

### Editor's Welcome

Hello and welcome to Spring! This quarter's edition features three articles :- Ann McNorvell continues her narrative of the Vikings, Chris Belton tells us about Pan Am's Round the World service and Andrew Randall follows the lifeline of a rather beautiful family car.

### Chairman's Report – Peter Smith

With division and conflict seemingly everywhere it's nice to be able to tell you that all is calm in the world of the American Express Retirees Club.

The recent Pompei experience event seems to have been a success, I hope it was a shorter and cooler walk than when I went to the actual Pompei a few years ago. Apart from being crowded with numerous groups of tourists from across the world, ours was one of them, it was a hard walk especially in view of my dodgy knees. The surfaces of the ancient paths were particularly uneven, rutted by ancient wagon wheels, I'm surprised the residents didn't all sprain their ankles. The exhibits are spectacular but much too numerous to visit all of them, I understand that only about half of the town has so far been uncovered.

Unfortunately, our tour took longer than anticipated so we were unable to get anything eat before returning to our cruise ship, so my overriding memory is being hungry. Luckily, we had time at the port of Sorrento before we returned to the boat to grab a coffee and some cake, very enjoyable.

At the time of writing the National Gallery Event on the 24<sup>th</sup> March was under subscribed, hopefully by time this is published that would have corrected itself. Please remember that all our events (excluding closed re-unions) are open to family and friends.

I'm looking forward to the tour of the Amex Stadium in early April, keeping my fingers crossed it doesn't clash with my impending house move. I went on the original tour before the stadium was finished and it was mainly bare concrete and lacked atmosphere, I believe things have changed a lot since then.

There is an article in this issue from Andrew Randall about his adventures with his family car. Andrew's name takes me back to the days of 1976/7 in the founding days of the UK Card Division and Andrew was the Card Marketing Manager, along with John Crewe on the Establishment side under the direction of Hugh Freedberg (decd.) and Terry Arndt (decd.) on Sales. A complete fast moving learning curve for all of us but days fondly remembered by all of us involved. There is a second part of Andrew's car adventures which I believe is going to be published in the monthly eNewsletter. If you don't receive it, you can sign up on the Clubs website, [www.theretirees.co.uk](http://www.theretirees.co.uk) follow the link.

### Events for 2026

#### 23 April The Natural History Museum - Wildlife Photographer of the year

Date : 23 April at 1030

Event : Self-guided walk through the exhibition

Location : The Natural History Museum, South Kensington

Price : £17.50 per person

Meet at 1030 for early morning coffee or 1130 at the exhibition entrance. For those interested, perhaps lunch after the event

Please email **The Events Team** no later than 24 March.

### **21 May - London Walk Undiscovered London, Butlers Wharf and Shad Thames**

Date : 21 May time to be set

Event : London Walk

Location : Bermondsey Tube Station

Price :

Unfamiliar London – memories of the days when Bermondsey was at the heart of the biggest port in the world. Victorian warehouses, old docks – still there but adapting to the 21st Century. See it before it changes.

Please email **The Events Team** no later than 21 April.

Brighton

### **Amex Stadium Tours**

Free or reduced rate tours will become available in 2026 / 2027. More details will become available as soon as we know!

The easiest way to stay informed of these and any other event is to sign up for the monthly e-Newsletter and / or join the Facebook Group. We know that this may not be an acceptable solution to some but it is more frequently updated than the quarterly printed Newsletter. Details further down under 'Information for Readers'.

### **From Ann McNorvell (Editor of the e-newsletter)**

#### **Remembering Leif Ericsson**

It's time to continue with our look at the Viking Age (c. 800 - 1050 CE) which I promised you last quarter.

This quarter's topic is Leif Ericsson, generally held to be the first European to reach the American continent, around 500 years before Columbus, but as I've not looked at this in any depth since university, I decided to do a quick internet search ....

This was not entirely successful as the robots that now run the world 'corrected' my spelling and presented me with a lot of information on the actor Leif Erickson, born 1911 in California! Like Alice, I followed this White Rabbit into Wonderland, or rather memories of my childhood TV viewing and The High Chaparral, starring this Leif as John Cannon, cattle ranching in Arizona, with his dopey son Billy Blue, his beautiful but much younger wife Victoria, and his dodgy brother and brother-in-law, Buck and Manolito.

But I digress ..... back to the Viking Leif Ericsson.

The Vikings came from Norway, Sweden and Denmark (divisions in their infancy at this time). The name come from 'vik', usually translated as 'raider'. They are also referred to as the Norse, Norsemen, Northmen, Danes (in England) and Normans (north France). Despite having little which we would regard as navigational aids - no maps, no compasses, no sextants - the Vikings sailed west from their homelands to Iceland and then Greenland.

Our Leif was of Norwegian extraction, the son of Eric the Red who, for reasons we don't have time for now, was exiled first to Iceland and then Greenland, where he was leader of the Viking settlement. Leif was born c. 970s and died between 1018 and 1025.

Leif's life is recorded in both Icelandic and Greenland sagas. Since these were devised for entertainment as much as information, they are more literature than histories. The circumstances of Leif's voyage to America fall into two camps - either he was blown off course while sailing home to Greenland from Norway or another Viking Bjorn Herjolfsson and his crew became lost, sailed around strange coasts before making it home and Leif merely followed in his footsteps.

Either way, Leif certainly landed in North America, and may have overwintered there before returning home. Although he himself never went back, others did and established settlements, for which archaeological evidence has been found.

It's not clear where the first landing was made, although Newfoundland in modern Canada tends to be the favourite, but it seems clear that later voyages covered the coast from Baffin Island, Labrador, Newfoundland and possibly into the St Lawrence river estuary.

What was the attraction of this new land? The Vikings named it Vinland or wine land for the wild grapes that grew there. There were also wild grains, but most importantly trees! For a seagoing folk, wood was essential for shipbuilding but few trees grew in Greenland and they were small and of little use. Iceland did have substantial woodlands - until the Vikings arrived and deforested the island!

We will probably never know why these early European settlements did not last. Certainly relations with the indigenous peoples, although starting well with trade, quickly deteriorated into armed conflict and at least one settlement was abandoned because of this. The Vikings may never have seen these lands as more than supply stations for the Greenland settlement, whose relatively tiny population had few to spare for permanent colonisation, especially so far from trading partners in Europe.

Next time .... who knows? Perhaps the Normans? Or the Rus?

### **Obituaries**

<b>Mrs Patricia Mary Bridget Wylam</b>	<b>Alexander John Masson</b>	<b>Ms Maria Clara Silva</b>
<b>Mr Raymond Brian Morris</b>	<b>Mrs Alexandra Bradley</b>	<b>Mrs Susan Denyer</b>
<b>Mr Robert Small</b>	<b>Mrs June Beryl Gray</b>	<b>Mrs Barbara Doris Williams</b>
<b>Ms Morag Jean Wright</b>	<b>Mrs Linda Jead Addison</b>	<b>Mr Peter John Soole</b>
<b>Mr Peter Anthony McConnell</b>	<b>Mrs Ellen Webster</b>	<b>Mrs Judith Green</b>
<b>Mrs Leigh Denise Elizabeth Beaver</b>	<b>Mrs Hazel Margaret Walker</b>	<b>Mr David Henry Morling</b>

### **From Chris Belton**



### **Round the World air service**

As a former Pan Am employee (1965-1972), I remain fascinated by the airline. This is a short history of one of its services.

Tuesday 17 June 1947 saw the beginning of an air service that was unique for the next 35 years. This was the Pan American World Airways round the world service, travelling east from New York and west from San

Francisco. To put this epic achievement into context it was only 20 years since Pan Am's first ever flight, the 90-mile journey from Key West to Havana and only 12 years since crossing the Pacific became possible!

From San Francisco a Douglas DC4 (Douglas Commercial) travelled across the Pacific to Calcutta. From New York a Lockheed Constellation also flew towards Calcutta, meeting up with the westbound DC4 aircraft. Then each aircraft returned to their original starting points.

The DC4 was an unpressurised aircraft with just 44 seats with a top speed of 215mph. The Constellation was pressurised, had 55 seats and a top speed of 310mph. These original services landed at Honolulu, Midway, Wake, Guam, Manila, Bangkok, Calcutta, Karachi, Istanbul, London, Shannon, Gander and New York La Guardia.

Initially a weekly service, the following year it became twice weekly. In August 1948 the two services added, Tokyo, Shanghai, Hong Kong, New Delhi, Damascus, and Brussels. In 1949 the service is now three times a week adding Okinawa and Basra in Iraq. Beirut Lebanon was now substituted for Damascus and Gander became just an "operational" stop.

By 1953 the Boeing 317 Stratocruiser was in use across the Atlantic with "berth accommodations available at extra cost" In fact, the January 1953 timetable show several different aircraft types used on the round the world service. The Stratocruiser from New York to London. The DC6 London to Hong Kong which again included berth accommodations. The DC4 from Hong Kong to Manila and the Stratocruiser onwards to Honolulu with "Sleeperettes – fully reclining seats with leg rests".

Rangoon, Burma is added by 1954 and the timetable states "Not everyone has been round the world – yet a round the world ticket costs no more than many ordinary tickets to there and back. The number of world-wonders you can see on a global jaunt is infinite – and stopovers enroute are yours for the asking at no additional cost." It goes on to quote a New York to New York first class ticket would cost \$1790.05 (approx. \$21,000 today). In 1956 the service became daily, adding the cities of Dusseldorf, Munich, Ankara and Teheran.

The next major change came in 1960 following the introduction of the Boeing 707 in 1958. This allowed a "same plane" round the world service. From 1960 until 1982, the daily Pan Am Flights 001 and 002 became a standard feature in the timetables. The cities served now included Vienna, Belgrade, Baghdad and Saigon. The Boeing 747 "jumbo jet" operated the service from its introduction in 1970.

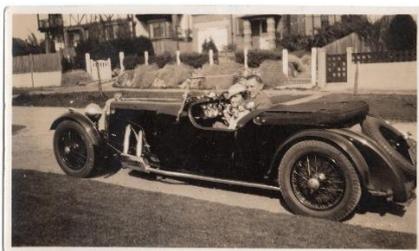
By 1976 Pan Am had debts of almost \$1 billion and began selling assets and reducing operating costs. One outcome was the discontinuation of the round the world service in October 1982. Over its lifetime, the round the world service served 48 different cities.

From propeller aircraft to jets and "jumbo jets", from 40 seats to over 360 seats, from seats with leg rests to sleeper seats and from major places to out of the way places, the round the world service absorbed them all.

For employees, it was just pure travel heaven!

### **From Andrew Randall**

#### **The Story of an Aston Martin**



This the story of a car that was bought by my father in 1954, and has been in the Randall family ever since.

BGF 555 is an Aston Martin Mk II Long Chassis 4-seat Tourer assembled at Aston's Feltham Works in March 1934, one of 45 built of that model of which 33 survive in various states of originality around the world. These were classic 'Bertelli Astons', with cycle wings and the exhaust & silencer system hung on the outside of the car. The engines were designed by Augustus Cesare Bertelli, and the bodies by his brother Enrico.

It was bought from the Feltham Works in early May 1934 by John Bunting-Bunting of Chiswick. The list price then was £640. JB-B was born at Spalding in 1908, the son of a Lincolnshire banker, and educated at Uppingham School and Peterhouse College, Cambridge.

John Bunting bought the car when he was a 26 year old medical student, shortly before his marriage to Constance Irene Parsons at Brighton. She was the daughter of Charles Claremont Parsons, a motor car agent and landlord. They drove in the Aston to their honeymoon in the New Forest. John Bunting owned the car for 3 years during which he drove it over 37000 miles; a lot for those days. He drove the car hard and assertively, as evidenced by the 21 repair bills for it issued by the Feltham Works during that period. John qualified as MRCS/LRCP and became an ophthalmic surgeon. He sold the Aston in 1937. Bunting joined the Army as a medic in 1938, serving with distinction in North Africa, Greece and Burma. On his demobilisation he resumed his career as an eye surgeon.

The next owner was Cecil Stanley Burney of Addlestone, Surrey. Cecil Burney (1884-1964) was then a 53-year old motor engineer and partner with his brother Alex in their firm Burney & Blackburne that built engines for motorcycles and small planes. Cecil had worked for Rudge-Whitworth in Coventry before setting up in business with his brother. During the 1<sup>st</sup> World War he was a motor-cycle dispatch rider with the rank of Captain. Cecil qualified as a pilot in 1929 and was a member of the Royal Aero Club. He kept the Aston for 12 years until he was 65, selling it in 1949 to John Sterland Swallow of Chesterfield.

John Swallow (1923-1999) was a doctor. After military service during the war he was a private physician to Lord Beaverbrook in Jamaica. He kept the car for just 14 months until he got married. John's wife Deirdre remembers the Aston when she was his fiancée. In a conversation with Andrew Randall in June 2013, she said: 'That old thing! It was nothing but trouble; very difficult to start in the wet and always breaking down. John bought it as a 'fun car' but got rid of it because it was too much trouble to cope with'. He sold it in December 1950 to Frank Bell of Sheffield for about £150.

Frank Bell (1919-1977) had joined the RAF when he was 19, initially as a Flight Sergeant rear-gunner in Whitley Bombers. His sister Olive had been killed in the 'Sheffield Blitz' in Dec 1940, and Frank was determined to avenge her. On one mission in 1941 he shot down 3 enemy planes and a 4<sup>th</sup> probable, for which he was presented with the DFM by King George VI. Frank finished the war as a Flight Lieutenant. He left the RAF in 1950 to try his hand at running his father's 2 shops in Sheffield. It was at this stage that he bought the Aston. He didn't settle to civilian life and re-joined the RAF in 1951. His daughter Christine says that her father was very proud of the car, but by 1952 it was in poor condition, having been 'driven into the ground' around Sheffield. In April 1952 the car was sold for £300 to 27-year old Jeffrey Blake.

Jeffrey Blake (born 1925 and still alive aged 100) and his father did a lot of restoration work on the car. Jeffrey was a member of the Sheffield & Hallamshire Motor Club, and did many miles in the Aston on various tours including Scotland and the Isle of Skye, and regular runs between Sheffield and Bournemouth. In 1953 Jeffrey's artist friend Alan Thraves made a painting of the car that still hangs in the Blake's dining room.

## Information for Readers

### Retirees Club Committee - Contact Details

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**Quarterly Newsletter items only;** please email the Editor Jonathan Pontin at the address above.

**NEW RETIREES ONLY** - If you are recently retired and seeing this Newsletter for the first time – welcome to The Retirees Club. You are invited to attend any of our events, and this invitation is extended to your guests. Details of our events together with all other Retiree news can be found on our website [www.theretirees.co.uk](http://www.theretirees.co.uk). Where you can also sign up for the monthly eNewsletter. **PLEASE NOTE THAT YOU MUST OPT IN IF WISH TO RECEIVE A COPY** after receiving your first copy.



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Many Club Members post their comments on the Club and on current events. You too can participate; all you need to do is to register with one of the administrators on the site.

Membership is for anyone who is a current, past employee or who has past connection with American Express.

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