



Member's Profiles



Graham Jackson

Despite the distractions caused by the duration of Second World War coinciding with my early school years, I somehow managed to pass the eleven-plus and 1946 saw me commence grammar school. During my time there it became apparent that I was more suited to practicalities than academics so, after completion of schooling, I commenced a five-year apprenticeship at an engineering company sited near my home at Tamworth in Staffordshire, which was engaged in producing three-wheeled vehicles, years later brought to public prominence by the antics of Del and Rodney in *Only Fools and Horses*.

As my apprenticeship approached its conclusion the prospect of compulsory military service loomed ever closer. Two years in the army did not appeal and, having always had an interest in ships and the sea, I sounded out Birmingham RN recruiting office who informed me, at that time the minimum period I could enlist for as a direct entry artificer, subject to successful completion of an educational test and practical trade test, was nine years. After much thought and discussion with family and an ex-artificer work colleague I decided to sign up as an Ordnance Artificer. This turned out to be a life-changing decision but one which I have never regretted.

In September 1956 I commenced basic training initially at RNB Portsmouth, then

HMS Excellent at Whale Island for an introduction to ordnance engineering followed by a six weeks leadership course at **HMS Royal Arthur** at Corsham Wiltshire before joining my first ship the Type 12 frigate **HMS Scarborough** in 1957. She was a new ship straight from the builders and in pristine condition, somewhat different to what was to greet me ten years later!!

After a year in Scarborough, mostly spent carrying out trials and exercises in home waters, I returned, initially to Whale Island and then **HMS Vernon** for in-depth training on surface and underwater weapons. On completion of these courses I joined **HMS Dolphin** for three months to familiarise myself with the submarine world before joining the depot ship **HMS Tyne** in July 1959 as a torpedo maintainer. As part of the Home Fleet most of the time was spent around Europe but in February 1960, whilst in Gibraltar, a massive earthquake struck the port of Agadir in Morocco resulting in thousands of fatalities. Tyne was despatched with essential supplies and to provide what relief we could including the construction of wooden shelters for some of the homeless victims.

I left Tyne in January 1961 and joined the submarine torpedo discharge trials team based at HMS Vernon. Each newly built or refitted submarine was required, as part of its acceptance programme, to carry out torpedo discharge trials at the torpedo firing range which was located at Loch Long in Scotland. Our task was to convey ourselves, usually three of us and a Trials Officer, and much trials equipment by overnight sleeper to Arrochar, a village at the head of the Loch, where we were based for the duration of each trial. There, after initial calibration of the



tubes whilst alongside, we joined the submarine each day and proceeded to the range where practice torpedoes were fired from each tube whilst we monitored the tube performance. This procedure was repeated for diving depths from the surface down to the submarine's maximum. It was interesting and satisfying work which I was very reluctant to leave.

My next move in early 1962 was to Devonport to join the Tiger Class Cruiser **HMS Lion**, which was in refit, as one of the many 6 inch weapon's maintainers,. We sailed later that year for the Far East via the Mediterranean where we spent the Christmas and New Year period working up off Malta thus avoiding the UK winter of 1962-1963 which was one of the most severe for many years. After workup we transited the Suez Canal and, on passage to Singapore, met the homeward bound HMS Tiger and relieved her of the duty of Flagship of the Far East Fleet. The rest of 1963 was spent on exercises, ceremonial duties and enjoying the delights of that part of the world, including visits to Japan, Saigon and Western Australia. After a period in home waters I re-joined HMS Vernon and resumed my association with the underwater weapons world.

The following years brought more life-changing decisions in as much that I signed on to complete pensionable service and married Pat, a Plymouth City WPC, whom I had met during my time in Lion.

I joined **HMS Caprice** during the refit of 1967 to be greeted by the Chief OA Bob Coles with the remark "she's clapped out Jacko". As we know this proved to be the case which made the news of details of the forthcoming deployment even more incredulous.

We all have our highlights of that memorable year but for me the visit to Auckland stands out. It was my first ever visit to New Zealand and a relative there took Don Farrow and myself around North Island, including the hot springs at Rotorua. On a personal note our elder daughter was born in May whilst we were on passage from Hong Kong to Japan.



1968 - with Chief Stoker Nick Carter & CERA Paul Hockey



After leaving Caprice in 1969 I joined the Fleet Maintenance Group in Devonport and so began a period of family life. This continued when, a year later, after advancement to Chief OA I joined **HMS Tiger**, which was being converted into a helicopter cruiser. Our younger daughter was born in August 1971 thus completing the family.

After extensive trials and workup it was back again around the Cape to the Middle and Far East as part of a group deployment which included HMS/M Dreadnought. The highlight of the deployment was to be a visit to Sydney to represent the Royal Navy at the opening of the city's new opera house which members may recall was under construction during our visit in 1968. However, Australia's newly elected labour government refused to allow the nuclear-powered Dreadnought entry, and as it was a case of "all go" or "none go" the visit was sadly cancelled.

I resumed my association with HMS Vernon in 1975 having relocated as a family from Plymouth to Portsmouth a year earlier. After a year there, leading the diving equipment maintenance team, I was promoted to Fleet Chief and was appointed to the **Ships Maintenance Authority (SMA)** in Portsmouth Dockyard.

I soon became convinced there that attending an endless series of meetings and circulating paperwork was not for me, so, when an opportunity arose to re-join HMS Tiger I took it and enjoyed a last foray to the Far East. This time we did get to Sydney where we spent Christmas and New Year 1977/1978. I had by this time submitted notice to leave the Service in order to establish myself in a new career. Consequently I left the Service in late 1978 and commenced work as a technical author.

I spent the remainder of my working life employed by several companies producing technical documentation for a wide variety of engineering projects, including Vanguard Class submarines, offshore and onshore oil production installations and desalination plants. Many of these projects involved data gathering site visits to some interesting parts of the world.

Since retiring in 2000 I have enjoyed family life, gardening, sailing my small boat around the Solent and spending time at our holiday apartment in Spain.



Pat & Graham - recent photo

Hates: Dishonesty and deviousness in all its forms.

Likes: Music, real ale and red wine.