

1969 Reunion - Bakewell Derbyshire - 19th - 21st June 2019

Is it really 5 years since we met in Wells for our 45th anniversary reunion? Time passes quickly when you're retired, so in our 50th year after qualification we met in the Peak District, thanks to the organisation and hospitality of Neil and Penny Spaven, who retired there 10 years ago.

Twenty 69ers and their partners spent a couple of days in Bakewell, the foodie capital of the Peak District. Our base was The Rutland Hotel in the middle of the town. It's a one-time 19th C. coaching inn which has somehow got stuck in the 1980's. However it was very close to Neil and Penny's house where we were royally entertained on the first evening. Local beef and cheese and of course - Bakewell tart, plus a delicious tiered cake made by Janet Moorwood. Thanks to Neil's friends and contacts all 37 of us were able to sit at tables for a 3 course meal in their lovely house by the River Wye, in the centre of Bakewell.

This was an international gathering as we were joined by Ronnie and Marlene Ramsay from Barbados, Anthony and Linda Wild from Australia, Martin Brown from Cape Town and Penny Leggett from Seattle (and Terry and Jean Boyd from N.Ireland). We are pleased they were willing to travel so far for a 'Do'. Sadly the prompt for this reunion was Phil Simmons who died last year. John Garforth from Canada wasn't able to join us as he was entertaining John Lover, another 69er, in Vancouver!

Neil and Penny organised a coach tour of the Peak District on the next day which turned out to be just the right thing for a bunch of 70 year olds. Amazingly we didn't lose anyone at the coffee stop in Castleton or the lunch stop in Buxton. Along the way we took in Chatsworth, Ashford in the Water, for their well-dressing, Monsal Dale and Eyam, the plague village. The weather was 'mixed' that day so our view of Monsal viaduct, from the coach, turned to 60's b&w TV, with poor reception, when the rain arrived. The Monsal trail over the viaduct is along the old Midland Railway line from Matlock to Buxton and is very well used by walkers and cyclists.

Our guide for the day was Ellen Outram, a well known local blue guide, who kept us entertained and well informed through the day. Even us locals learnt new things including a developing controversy about Eyam (pronounced Eeem) where doubt is being cast about whether the disease was bubonic plague, which is spread by rats. It's a long walk from London, especially for a rat, so the legend that the disease came to the village on bolts of cloth ordered by the tailor looks a bit suspect. Ellen also explained the origins of Bakewell Pudding, which was a Bakewell tart gone wrong. People liked it so much they wanted the 'error' repeated so now there are two shops in Bakewell - the Pudding shop and the Tart shop. Inevitably some 69ers couldn't resist the urge to resurrect 50 year-old jokes at Bakewell's expense.

Buxton, the capital of The Peak District, was our lunch stop and a chance to look around a 19th century, purpose-built spa town. Much of it is being renovated including the Circus, a crescent of regency houses - a bit like Bath (or Clifton).

Buxton spa water is well known and thankfully doesn't have the sulphurous taste of the waters in Bath or Harrogate. It is sold around the country but we learnt that if a shopkeeper in Buxton wants to sell it, he can't buy it from the bottling plant, as it has to come via the main distribution centre in Leeds and then the regional wholesale networks - a grand total of 400 miles- so much for 'food/drink miles'. However its free if you take your water bottle to the fountain near the spa centre.

Many of the old spa buildings are being re-purposed including the hot baths which are now a shopping arcade with boutique shops. Retirees develop homing instincts for nice cafes and coffee shops so it wasn't too surprising that half the members of the group individually ended up at the same cafe in this arcade. The more adventurous went to look at The Dome, which is now part of Derby University. This was originally stables and then the Devonshire Royal Hospital. Early in its life the courtyard was covered by a dome larger than St. Pauls (145ft diam.). It's even grander than the Georgian stables at Chatsworth.

The final evening was spent at PieDaniels, the best restaurant in Bakewell. (No, I don't why its called that either) The food was superb and was followed by a raffle organised by Rowan Moorwood, so there had to be a twist. All our place cards had a raffle ticket and the only rule was that you couldn't draw your own number. Inevitably, Neil was asked to draw the first number which was his own, so he missed out on the £25 first prize. However, the twist was that Rowan then went off-piste and awarded prizes based on meal choices. This included local cheese for the couple who both ordered the same dishes and another for being the only person to choose chicken. A further twist was that this was all a distraction leading to the final prize which was 'won' by Neil and Penny. This was a book about Raymond Blanc's Le Manoir restaurant and a 'voucher' for a meal and drinks for two. This had involved a great deal of prior emailing, hoping the email trail didn't include Neil. It was our way of thanking them both for what was one of the best reunions (so far). I don't think we could appreciate the amount of thought and care that went into making it such a success - but we are glad it did! It's a sign of our age that everyone then headed for bed rather than the bar.

Those with shorter journeys home opted for a walk along the Monsal Trail on the final morning. The destination was The Packhorse Inn and lunch at Little Longstone. After 5 miles some of us opted for the bus as our way home but the other seven returned via the banks of the River Wye back to Bakewell.

Over lunch talk turned to future re-unions. We shortened it to 5 year intervals some years ago, when we realised we weren't immortal but this time 2 years was favoured, possibly in another spa town - Cheltenham. Neil and Penny will be a hard act to follow. Neil summed it all up by saying that they wanted to see everyone together and enjoying themselves and he and Penny certainly succeeded. Thank you once again.

John Green

Year of 1969 picture in 2019



Those attending are L to R as follows

John Stone, Terry Boyd, Paul Hughes, Michael Whitehouse, Clive Wilkins, Bob Grocott, Sue Browse, Anthony Wild, Neil Spaven, Anita Hedgcock, Martin Brown, Rob Evans, Denis Hutchinson, Lyn Holding, Roger Hartley, Kate Gunnery, Penny Leggott, John Green, Ronnie Ramsay. (Rowan Moorwood not present)