

AREA CONFERENCE AT NORTH MANCHESTER BRANCH OCTOBER 29 2005

The Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Manchester, Councillor and Mrs Afzel Khan opened the autumn Area conference hosted by the North Manchester branch at its headquarters on October 29th. The Lord Mayor spoke of the city's links with the Royal Navy, especially its association with its namesake *HMS Manchester*. The Lord Mayor said he had been honoured to visit the ship recently and was very impressed by what he had seen during his stay in her. He also paid tribute to the various SCC units in the city, reminding us all, they were our future.

Conference then got under way with the Chairman having thanked the Lord Mayor for opening the proceedings.

He also announced that s/m Steve Caulfield of the Pendleton branch had been appointed to the position of National PRO. He asked the delegates to join him in their appreciation of this honour.

Despite a disappointing attendance with only 24 branches represented, - the lowest for over 10 years, the Secretary read the correspondence received during the quarter. This concerned the Area committee decision to appoint on a temporary basis S/m Fielding of the Salford branch as deputy National Council Member due to S/m Atkinson's recent illness. The PRO from Runcorn branch has compared the subscriptions levied by the Federation of Naval Associations with those charged by the RNA. He has also highlighted the salaries of the Headquarters officials in our Association.

Whitehaven branch gave a good account of their activities during the past year including their involvement in the local VE & VJ day celebrations.

Blackpool branch are actively pursuing with the Charities commission their present charity status. Due to reduced turnover in the branch, they wish to revert to the Association's charity number (266982)

Longsight branch are considering decommissioning due to falling numbers and the recent loss of their Secretary and Treasurer, both of whom, have crossed the bar.

St. Helens branch club appears to have been taken over by an unnamed buyer, and although the branch has been invited to continue to hold their meetings there, it is likely, it will cease to be an RNA registered club.

The Area Treasurer gave his report on the income and expenditure for the previous quarter. Area funds remain in a healthy state. There were no matters arising from his report.

The National Council Member (S/m F Atkinson) giving his report on the National Council meeting on September 10th said a greater part of the meeting was taken up by matters of finance, although some important items concerning the International Maritime Federation affairs were also debated – next year the RNA plays host to the IFS and it is expected, that the facilities at *HMS Collingwood* may be utilised during their stay. It is also hoped that many SCC units could benefit with the RNA's association with the IMF by way of courses in sailing etc.

New rules have been announced governing gift aid - it is now easier than ever to join this scheme. If every RNA member took advantage of Gift Aid, future subscription hikes could be avoided.

The NCM concluded his report by giving details of several members of council who had been elected to the various committees. S/m David White (NCM No4 Area) was re-elected as National Chairman, as was the NCM for No11 area elected as Vice Chairman. S/m Atkinson becomes a member of the Clubs committee. He also offered his congratulations to S/m Caulfield, who also joins the National Council as PRO.

The Hazel Grove delegate asked the NCM about the matter of the National President's role in the Association. Had the NCM raised the question why the President chairs National Conference?

S/m Atkinson apologised to the delegate for not mentioning this item in his report. He had duly raised this question during Any Other Business in London. He had received the reply that it was written in the Constitution of the Association that the President always takes the chair at National Conference.

The Secretary said he was dissatisfied with the answer given to the NCM and had written to the General Secretary seeking clarification regarding this. A reply was awaited.

The PRO in introducing his report thanked the delegates for the appreciation shown to him on his appointment as national PRO. He hoped shortly to call a meeting of all the Area PRO's shortly to gain an insight of their ideas for the good of the RNA. He asked for any thoughts on how the association could be improved, especially on the recruitment front. He hoped to be in a position following the PRO meeting in December, to give a more comprehensive report at the next area conference.

Any Other Business raised several issues ranging from why the Veteran's lapel badges were currently restricted WW2 veterans only,

Another delegate raised the issue concerning the Association's Accounts Manager decision to conduct the RNA business from her home address. Was she still being paid London weighting allowance?

The high level of subscriptions again, found its way into the meeting. Members of the Bolton branch feel very strongly on this issue. The question of appointments to General Secretary, and Assistant General Secretary was also raised by their delegate. It was felt these positions could easily be filled from the rank and file of the members at a fraction of the salaries the present incumbents enjoy.

The St Helen's delegate explained the circumstances in which his club ceased trading as RNA registered club. An unnamed buyer has taken control there having paid off several outstanding debts. Its future involvement with the branch remains uncertain.

A call from the delegate representing the South Liverpool for the branches in this area to get together to stem the tide of branch closures with the consequent loss of members was well received by those attending.

The President summing up said just six months ago, he sent to the General Secretary a copy of our Area magazine. With a note saying "I am sending you a magazine that looks like a blue suit with gold badges. The Circular Letter to Branches compared to it, looks like a 'tatty' pair of No.8s" Since then, nothing has changed. Referring to S/m Crute's [South Liverpool] contribution earlier, he recalled that he had obtained a list from the Area Secretary of the poorest attending branches to Area conferences – branches we had not heard from in 4- 5 years or more. He had written to them all. Of the twelve letters he had sent out, he received four replies. The responses he received were as expected – members to old to travel, and transport difficulties, and sometimes, the distances involved to the conference venues. Welcoming the news about the promotion of our PRO Steve Caulfield to national status, the President urged the branches to give him and also, our NCM their fullest support. "If you have an event in your branch, let him know, - he cannot do it all on his own". S/m Harley turned his attention to the remarks made by the Rochdale delegate concerning the Veteran's badge. It was his opinion the award should have been a medal, not a badge. A medal was originally promised, but somewhere along the line reneged on this.

The President also made reference to a request made by the Hazel Grove branch some time ago to our NCM to enquire into the reasons why the Association President takes the chair at national conference, and other meetings of National council. "Here we have an example of trying to push a large rock up a hill." The President commiserated with S/m Atkinson in his attempts to elicit an answer to this question from Headquarters. S/m Harley concluded his address by urging the branches, and the absent ones, to persist in their endeavours to establish the answers to their questions.

The Runcorn branch successfully bid to host the Winter Area conference and AGM on January 28th 2006
The meeting closed at 1553

