



BritClub News

Vol 23, Issue 2

A MESSAGE TO THE MEMBERS FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear BritClub members,

With the Coronation party now behind us, we are entering into the dog days of summer. Even with the hot and humid weather ahead, we look forward to our summer club lunches and evening socials!

On the last Friday of each month, we shall have our club luncheon at various venues starting at noon, and regular social evenings on a Thursday mid-month starting at 5:30 PM. I would like to say a special "Thank you" to Linda Mercurio who finds these great venues for us and makes all the arrangements. Keep checking your in-boxes for the invitations.

Our next *major* party will be on November 5th when we celebrate Guy Fawkes at the Siesta Key Beach Pavilion. This was well attended last year with 60 members coming out to kick-off party season once again.

Although it may seem early to think about our annual Christmas Party, this event has to be planned nearly a year in advance- otherwise we'll have nowhere to go! Last year, less than half our members attended the Christmas Party (the lowest attendance ever). A few months ago, a survey was sent to our members to help us plan for Christmas 2023. Of the survey respondents, half prefer to attend an evening dinner party and half prefer a luncheon - with a few opting for both. Complaints about the food and the disco were taken into account and steps are being taken to address these issues. Therefore, this year we shall have live entertainment provided by our favorite British duo "Tony and Tasha. As they are not available on weekends, the Christmas party has been scheduled for Tuesday, December 12th. Now I don't want to sound like a gloomy Gus, but I have to admit that I am a bit concerned about splitting our Christmas celebrations into two separate events, but, based on the survey results, we shall give it a go! Please make note of these two important dates in your calendars:

Tuesday, December 12th: Christmas Dinner Party at the Heritage Oaks Country Club
Wednesday, December 20th: Inaugural Christmas luncheon at the British Open Pub

We shall need to reach a certain minimum number of attendees (well in advance) so that the event will be both enjoyable *and* financially viable. I will send out more information later in the year with details and pricing.

On a more cheerful note, I hope you will enjoy this first newsletter put together by our new Newsletter Editor John Burdette, with photos and contributions from Olga and other members. Also, check out our updated website: <http://www.sarasotabritishclub.com> with thanks to Stevan Collins, Website Liaison.

I hope you have a great summer!

Best regards,

Peter

Peter Stokes, SBC President

RECENT EVENTS

Coronation Celebration:

On Saturday, May 6th BritClub members celebrated the Coronation of King Charles III at the Turtle Beach pavilion on Siesta Key. This once in a lifetime event was kicked off with a short AGM, followed by food, drink and a fun quiz with prizes! As you can see from the photos, all had great fun. God save the King!



British Memorial Service:

Every year on Memorial Day, a service of remembrance is held at the British Plot, Oak Ridge Cemetery in Arcadia. There are 23 gravestones here of RAF personnel who died during training in the early 1940s.

Representing the Sarasota British Club this year was President Peter Stokes, accompanied by his wife Olga. The service was well attended with folks from numerous local social and service clubs from the surrounding area. The following is part of the address made by BritClub member Chris Nind, retired Lt. Colonel of the British Army:

A Memory given on Memorial Day 2023 in Arcadia at the CWGC site in Oakridge Cemetery to the 23 RAF cadets killed between 1941 and 1945 and John Paul Riddle MBE founder of Riddle Field, Arcadia and Embry Riddle Aeronautical University by Christopher Nind, Lt Col Ret, British Army.

“Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few”. These words were part of an address that Sir Winston Churchill gave to the House of Commons in the autumn of 1940. His speech to the nation and the world was explaining that Britain was winning the Battle of Britain and that it would stand firm and never surrender. His speech inspired the young men who are buried here as well as our allies, especially President Roosevelt, who was hesitant to get fully involved in the war in Europe. It also inspired Gen Hap Arnold to push even more to increase the training of US pilots. Winning the Battle of Britain ensured that the UK would not be invaded, but it also increased the pressure on the USA to complete the Lend Lease Agreement. Part of the agreement called for 500 training aircraft as well as pilot training facilities in the USA for RAF cadets. Lend Lease was signed in March 1941 and in May 1941, 99 RAF cadets were given 5 Pounds Sterling to buy a suit so they could travel as civilians to the USA to train as pilots. They sailed to Canada and then boarded a train to Florida. John Broome an RAF cadet on Course 18 at Riddle Field wrote, “We soon learned that train rides took days rather than hours. The train journey from Canada to Clewiston was all it took to convince that we were in a large country. On our train journey to Clewiston we had a pleasant surprise at Lake Wales, Florida. Instead of our customary breakfast on the train, we were greeted by a fleet of cars at the railway station. All fifty of us left the train, piled into various cars and were taken to homes of the local townsfolk for a sumptuous breakfast. Hospitality on the scale was strange indeed to us, but what a warm feeling it generated! We got back to our cars and found in each compartment a sack of oranges—something that we had not been able to enjoy for years. But now we made up for it by eating our fill, and all the time feeling guilty that our loved ones at home were not sharing our good fortune. As our train left the Lake Wales station we waved and thanked our wonderful hosts, but not nearly enough, I am sure. They would never know how much that glorious morning meant to a group of young strangers who were uncertain as to what future mornings would bring.”

The initial training was 10 weeks and began in June 1941, sadly, three weeks after the course started, Charles Russell, known as Beano died from Spinal Meningitis. The wash out rate on the first course was high and so after review by both UK and USA trainers, it was decided to conduct training at one location rather than move students after each phase of training, this gave the cadets a greater sense of security and the success rate greatly improved.

In January 1942 Riddle Field was opened and all RAF training for 5 British Flying Training School (5 BFTS) took place there. Carlstrom field, Arcadia became a US Army flying school as part of the Arnold Plan.

Approximately 4,200 British cadets at 5 BFTS received their wings during the war and that number was higher than any of the other 5 British flying schools operational in the USA during the war. Sadly, 23 cadets did not make it home from 5 BFTS. Nineteen of them died in air accidents, one from a traffic accident, one from drowning and two from illness. These young men wanted to defend their country, but sacrificed their lives in the process.

A quote from Dr. Murray Cash MD, Flight surgeon at Riddle Field.

“The crashes, of course, were a great source of sorrow to me. I gave what treatment I could and then had the more seriously injured cadets flown to the Air Corps hospital at Fort Myers for further treatment. I don’t want to remember—but I can’t forget—the fatal crashes when we would walk out into the swamp areas filled with the tall saw grass, reading what we would find. They were so very young, so very young, and seemingly unafraid. A tragic waste. The other headstone we honor today is to John Paul Riddle. He is the co-founder of Embry Riddle Aeronautic University in Daytona Beach, also was a founder of AVCO, and indeed of American Airlines.

John Paul died in his late 80s and asked to be buried with his cadets. As he had been awarded an MBE by Queen Elizabeth during her reign, he could be buried at a CWGC site. John Paul Riddle was a man of vision, he introduced civilian instructors to train cadets, this was revolutionary, he knew that these men had one thing in common their passion for flying. It worked. He himself had been a barn stormer and World War 1 pilot. He had also been instrumental in encouraging Congress into agreeing Lend Lease and the training of pilots for World War 2. His energy was apparent in getting Carlstrom field operational in 6 weeks and Riddle field from cutting the grass to opening the field operationally in 2 months in the summer. RAF cadet, Leslie Knibbs wrote, “I consider myself fortunate to have been trained in Florida. The great kindness of the people and the way they accepted us was most exceptional, because we were so accustomed to the well-known British reserve. Here we were surrounded by people so open and fun loving, even in time of war. What a change for us! I can still see in my mind’s eye some of the folks that I stayed with and those who invited RAF cadets to parties”.

Today, we still say thank you to the people of Arcadia and Clewiston. They saw the value of supporting their allies in order to win the war. They made young cadets welcome and their actions were a true example of the "Special Relationship".

Finally, a poem by John Maccrea, written in 1915 after the second battle of Ypres for the burial of a friend. After the funeral John Maccrea threw the poem away, but a friend of his picked it up and asked him to keep the poem, John worked on it and in December 1915 it was published in Punch. The poem speaks of the poppy, which is the symbol of remembrance:

*In Flanders Fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*We are the dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie,
In Flanders fields.
Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw*

*The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
we shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields*

(The following are photos of the event)



Passing of a former Brit club member and past President:

Gary Lee, former BritClub member and past President, passed away on June 3rd in Roanoke, VA. Here are some thoughts from David Welch, who knew Gary very well:

I'm extremely sorry to hear of Gary's passing. Gary and Jane were our introduction to SBC. We didn't know them in D.C but had a mutual friend who gave us Gary's contact details when we moved to Sarasota and he was kind enough to ask us to join their table at the upcoming Christmas Party. Gary was certainly a gentleman of the old school. And apart from Club events, we also used to see him in his usher role at the Sarasota Opera. Lovely people and engaging entertainers.

*Condolences to the family,
Hilary & David Welch*



Newsflash: BritClub member turns 100:

On July 12th, 2023 BritClub member George Straschnov, M.D. will be celebrating his 100th birthday! Congratulations to George on being the BritClub's first Centenarian! George has had a fascinating life so far and who knows what other adventures may await? Special thanks to Colette Penn, who has provided the following biography:

George John Straschnov was born on Jul 12, 1923 in Reichenberg, a large city in Sudetenland in the German speaking area of the Czech Republic. As an only child, he lived with his parents on a vast estate with lush gardens. His father, Dr. Otto Straschnov, being a prominent Doctor of Law and an Attorney, provided well for his family and George enjoyed this idyllic world playing with his friends in the gardens.

As George approached school age, his parents had to face the fact that George could not speak Czech, the official language that was used in the schools of the town in which they lived. Dr. Straschnov decided to move his family to nearby Prague, which had German language schools. George attended school in Prague until 1935 when he was 12 years old. At that time, violent civil unrest arose in the Czech republic and George's parents, concerned about his safety, sent him to St. Gallen, a boarding school in the German speaking area of Switzerland, for the remainder of his primary education.

Upon graduating in 1938, George was determined to become a doctor, however, WW2 was looming and Hitler had annexed Sudetenland. George's parents advised him not to come home as it was too dangerous. Fortunately, Dr. Straschnov had a client and friend in Bradford, England named Mr. Ackroyd who was a well-known wool merchant and a widower who owned a large estate not far from the University of Leeds College of Medicine. Mr. Ackroyd's two sons would soon join the British armed Forces, leaving him alone. Dr. Straschnov asked him if he would look after George and attend to his schooling. Mr. Ackroyd was delighted to do so.

When George arrived in Bradford he could not speak a word of English, so Mr. Ackroyd decided it was necessary to send him to a boarding school in Yorkshire for a few years to learn English. At the school, George proved to be a fast learner and was soon able to speak and follow his lessons in English just as well as the other students. After three years he was fluent enough to leave the school and complete his childhood education at Bradford Technical College.

In 1942, George was 19 and had completed his required education. He was accepted into the University of Leeds College of Medicine, where he devoted the next 8 years to learning all aspects of General Medicine. In 1950, he received the qualification of Doctor of Medicine from the UK Royal Society of Medicine.

At this point, the British government insisted that George join the armed forces to satisfy the wartime requirement that all eligible men serve for 2 years, which he had been allowed to delay while in medical school. George joined the army and was given the rank of Lieutenant and Medical Officer. In his 2nd year he was promoted to Captain and Chief Medical Officer.

After his discharge in 1952, George practiced for the next 8 years as a physician and trained at various hospitals in Yorkshire, first in general surgery and then in orthopedic surgery. Finally in 1960, the Royal College of Surgeons certified him an Orthopedic Surgeon.

In 1958, George operated on a young man whose father was an orthopedic surgeon in Detroit, Michigan in the United States. The father was so impressed with George's skill as a surgeon, that he asked George to move to Detroit and become a partner in his practice. George agreed and moved to Detroit, eventually being granted a license to practice as a physician and surgeon by the Michigan State board of Registrars.

George joined his partner and set up a practice in the same medical office building, which was near Annapolis Hospital, where he would do his surgeries. Annapolis was a large hospital and George was on-call 24/7. Between his practices and surgeries, his workload was heavy. When his partner left 3 years later, George persuaded 2 of his orthopedic surgeon friends in England to come and join him.

At this time, George met his wife, Dorothy, who was a gynecologist, practicing in the same medical office building. They married in 1965 and in 1967, their wonderful son, George, was born. They soon found they needed help to look after their son properly, so George asked his mother to come and live with them and help raise their son. She did so gladly and was a treasured member of the family.

By 1980, George decided to dissolve his partnership and move with his wife Dorothy to the Virgin Islands, where they opened a private practice in St. Croix. George and Dorothy took up sailing and eventually took a long journey through the Panama Canal to California and back. For 2 years, George was Commodore of the St. Croix Yacht Club.

In 2000, George and Dorothy decided to end their professional careers and retired to Florida.

Here are 5 questions George is frequently asked by friends:

- 1. To what do you attribute your longevity?** Good medicine (it helps with health problems). I also had good Doctors- they did a good job!
- 2. Have you had any regrets or unachieved desires?** No, I have no regrets. I've had a good life. One thing I would have liked in my early years in Bradford, England was to be good at certain physical activities- especially winter sports such as tobogganing and skiing and also riding. I had very little leisure time because I only spoke German and was working hard in school to learn English so I could go to medical school.
- 3. What was the best decision you ever made?** To become a doctor -no question. I was motivated by my childhood doctor, whom I greatly admired. From the day I was born until I was 12 years old he came to my house whenever I was sick. He was very kind and told me he liked being my doctor. I wanted to be like him and at the age of 7, I decided to become a doctor. I never wavered.
- 4. Why did you decide to become an orthopedic surgeon?** I liked all types of medicine and I learned to do all types of surgery, even plastic surgery, but I enjoyed orthopedic surgery the most. Also, I was inspired and encouraged by my orthopedic teacher. I remember early on he told me that I made "beautiful stitches".
- 5. What was your best achievement?** I succeeded in becoming a successful orthopedic surgeon- capable of doing complex surgeries and bringing patients back to health and their usual activities. I also enjoyed being liked by my patients and fellow physicians; of course, my success also enabled me to have a good personal life.



Annual General Meeting for 2023:

Our club's bylaws require that an AGM be held each year. Since we were getting together for the Coronation party on May 6th, 2023, that provided an opportunity to fulfill this requirement. The following Directors/Officers were appointed:

SARASOTA BRITISH CLUB BOARD OF DIRECTORS FOR 2023

Director and President	Peter Stokes	941-536-4408
Vice President & Membership Director	David Welch	941-210-4455
Director at Large	Paul Wilkinson	240-432-2851
Website Liaison Director	Stevan Collins	941-685-2297
Director at Large	Stewart Green	941-914-2470
Director and Treasurer	Olga Stokes	941-536-4408
Director and Secretary	Christine Green	941-914-2463
Director at Large	Linda Mercurio	941-400-1156
Director and Newsletter Editor	John Burdette	317-246-0029
Director Emeritus	Sandra Cherry	941-921-3162

New members:

Since the beginning of 2023, some 22 new members have joined the British Club. We extend a very warm welcome to all and hope that they will be members for years to come and be able to participate in as many Club events as possible. Not all new members are UK born but all have an interest in all things British.

Jean Baker: Been in Sarasota over 2 years; previously lived in East Africa, Switzerland and Germany.

Robert Baldrey: Originally from Essex, keen Man. Utd fan! In Florida for 3 years. Interested in golf Photography, biking and eating!!

Matt Booker: From Wimbledon/Wandsworth; supports Chelsea (!! Worked in the Bahamas in early 1990s, moved to the USA in 1992.

Patsy Cutler: Emigrated to NYC in 1962 as a nanny, moved to Sarasota from San Diego in 2022. Originally from Harlow, Essex.

Sue & Anthony Illingworth: Snowbirds currently away from Sarasota but will return later in the year.

Michael and Anne Kukla: Met in Cleveland Ohio as Anne says "a long time ago!!"

Peter Mackin: Our newest member, a young 92 y.o! As he says, "Been there, Done that!" From Tottenham, in the USA since 1964.

Gillian & Robert Merritt: Snowbirds from Connecticut, will be back in Sarasota later in the year.

Christopher and Cynthia Nind: Chris is from the Windsor area and spent 26 years in the British Army. Cynthia is from Chicago.

Katherine & Nav Sachdev: Originally from Wales, moved to the USA 27 years ago. Previously lived in New Jersey and Delaware.

Jeri Sedlar & Rick Miners: Authors and speakers. Wrote "Don't Retire, Re-wire" (published by Penguin in its 3rd edition. Rick is an American of British decent from Cornwall.

Nicholas & Jane Steward: Also members of the Caledonian Society. Jane paints in oils, Nick was in financial services. Moved from Salem MA. Both are writers.

Andrew & Karen Truter: Currently living Canada, we shall meet up with them in the winter months.

Domini Wood. Grew up in Hong Kong and trained as a secondary teacher. Moved to the USA in 1998. Loves sailing and martial arts.

We are also delighted to welcome back into membership **Ann and Bill Mitchell**, snowbirds from Scotland who will be back with us towards the end of the year.

UPCOMING EVENTS

December 12th, 2023 Christmas dinner party:

With live band, more information to follow.

December 20th, 2023 Christmas lunch:

Please stay tuned for more details.

From our friends at the St. Andrew's Society:

SAVE THE DATE



Saint Andrew's Society of Sarasota Celebrates Saint Andrew's Day with a Ceilidh and dinner

Thursday, November 30, 2023

Begins at 5.00pm Palm Aire Country Club

5601 Country Club Way, Sarasota

Buffet Supper, Dancing to Macgilliossa Celtic Band and a highland dancing display by Tampa Bay Highland Dancers

\$70.00 per person

Credit Card Bar + Silent Auction + Highland Dress or Jacket and Tie

Celebrate this feast day and begin the holiday season!

FINAL THOUGHTS FROM THE EDITOR

Dear BritClub members:

Firstly, I would like to encourage you all to attend our events. The luncheons and pub nights are good fun but still need more of your support. To those of you who are able to come sometimes but are hesitating, please remember that you are *always* welcome and once you have made the effort you will enjoy yourself and go back home with a big smile on your face.

Secondly, for new members interested in obtaining a Sarasota British Club badge, they are available directly from **Sarasota Trophy, 6601 Superior Ave, Sarasota, FL 34321. Phone 941 921 4339.** Badges can be collected in person (Mon.– Fri. 8.30 – 5pm, Sat .9 am – noon) or shipped to your home for an additional charge

- \$12.50 plus tax for badge with magnet
- \$12.50 plus tax for badge with pin (no magnet)

Thirdly, don't forget that Sarasota British Club is on Facebook! The Club's logo is the profile picture. Check out numerous photos from recent events! (Why not "friend" us for another way of keeping in touch with the Club?)

Lastly, many thanks to the members who have contributed to this edition with photographs and written material.

Your Newsletter Editor,



John Burdette