

Speech from Veronica Reed, MVA President 2021

Good Afternoon to you all.

Firstly, I would like to apologise to you for not being with you today. Unfortunately, the pandemic has meant we have all had to make some changes which include dates in our diaries and difficult decisions had to be made.

I feel very honoured to be your President for 2021 and I hope that next year I will be joining you all for dinner in much more settled times.

My Service at The Marconi Company & Marconi Social Club.

I started my employment in the Marconi Company in 1965, at SQG (Small Quantity Group), Widford Site 1, working in Production Control. This site worked on Outside Broadcast Vans and Radar Equipment. My mother was a signwriter here and my grandfather was working in the WIP stores, which meant that there were three generations of one family at Widford at the same time. I then moved to New Street where I worked in Change Note Control.

I left the company when I had my family in 1972, and eventually joined the Marconi Athletic & Social Club as a part time receptionist in 1987. At this time, the club was very busy. The membership was in the hundreds, comprising mostly of Marconi staff and their families, with a few associate members.

The club boasted many activities, and had six Squash Courts; six Grass and four Hard Tennis Courts; three Football Pitches; two Cricket Pitches and Hockey. There was a Snooker Room, Three Bars, Ballroom, Pool Room and Kitchen. Off-site there was the Sailing Club, Angling Club, Rifle and Shooting and Outdoor Bowls.

In the early 1990's I became the manager of Social and Entertainment.

In my role as Social and Activities Manager I was responsible for the arranging of Wedding Receptions, Dinner Dances, Discos Stag and Hen Nights. And of course, the Marconi Veterans Re Union Dinner.

The Stag and Hen nights were the scariest of all- often I would be pacing up and down the car park waiting for the strippers to arrive, with a hall full of 300 men or ladies waiting for a good night out- many of whom had knocked back a few drinks and were getting a little loud. Thankfully the artiste would eventually arrive, and the show would go on; and a good time was had by all.

The Veterans Re-union dinner was not too difficult as most of the work was done by the Veterans Committee, although I did have a few disagreements as to how many people could be sat at a table! There were also disputes over how many tables you could get into a hall, but I am pleased to say that we always managed to work things out in the end. I also had the great pleasure of meeting Princess Elettra Marconi Giovanelli when she attended one of the veterans' dinners.

I also met with other personalities from TV and stage. These include Mike Reid from EastEnders fame, Cockney duo Chas and Dave, and The Glen Miller Band (which was headed by the nephew of the great Glen Miller).

When Gerry Wignall departed from the club, Peter Wright became the manager. He had been working at the club founding the Over 50s daytime club. Peter introduced extra activities

Speech from Veronica Reed, MVA President 2021

including Short Mat Bowls, Tea Dances, Day Trips, and Holidays in the UK and abroad. Monthly theatre trips to the top West End Shows were also very popular.

The amount of work required to arrange these trips could be daunting at times- coaches and Hotels had to be booked, tickets had to be purchased and then sold.

West End Theatre tickets always had to be purchased in advance, sometimes 6 months ahead and if they were not all sold, we did not get a refund- so it became common place that I could be found outside a London theatre touting tickets before a show! Usually it was only ever a couple of tickets when someone couldn't make it at the last minute. I must admit this was not one of my favourite jobs but if I was successful, I could give a member a refund.

The holidays were very popular, and we often took two coaches amounting to 100 people. We went to Ireland, Scotland, Cornwall, Blackpool, Yorkshire, Germany and even Egypt. I did not go to Egypt, but I think that was the only one I missed. I was never off duty as it was my responsibility to make sure everyone was having a good time. This was no mean feat, believe me!

These new activities were required due to the demise of the Marconi Company and membership was now open to all.

After Peter Wright retired, we had another ex-footballer as manager for a short period of time. This was Ralph Coates. I continued with all of the activities by myself during this time. It was also during this time that BAE became the owners of the club. When Mr Coates left I became the manager.

Then the long round of meetings started regarding the new club being built. I sat in on virtually every one of these. The first thing that happened was that the Football and Cricket was moved to West Hanningfield Road, with a lovely new club house/sports pavillion which has up-to-date changing and shower facilities and bar area. This was always very busy at weekends, and I often went over to help. It was on one such occasion that I had the pleasure of making a bacon sandwich for Sir Geoff Hurst, World Cup hero from 1966.

The new club in Beehive Lane was finally completed in November 2012 a decade after it was first mentioned by BAE. One of the first functions to be held was a Conservative Party Dinner with a guest speaker. No one was to be told who that speaker was. I was told as I had to meet with some very high security personnel.

The staff got very suspicious when the sniffer dogs appeared. That guest speaker was of course Theresa May- she was The Home Secretary at the time. There were that many police in the building, all plain clothed- it was unreal.

Not that long after we also had the privilege of being the host venue for the BBC programme Question Time with David Dimbleby. The programme went out live from the club. I was very lucky to meet and have my photograph taken with both Theresa May and David Dimbleby, and I can honestly say that they are both very nice people.

I decided in 2019 that it was time for me to retire and to have some leisure time for myself, but I have many happy memories of my time at Marconi and Marconi Social Club.