

## **Birmingham Medal Society elects new President.**

At the Birmingham Medal society AGM held on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> April 2018, long standing member and former JP Roger Bragger was elected as President for the next three years, 2018-21.

Roger took over from Philip Wilson, who has been in post since 2015, successfully overseeing the move of the Society to its current meeting location.



### **Presidents Introduction**

Like many boys growing up in the 1940's & 50's, I've always amused myself by collecting things – especially stamps. I became interested in medal collecting and research when I completed a task I had set myself of collecting one of every British stamp ever produced. By 1988 I had got all the different stamps (not bothering with shades, papers or different printers), apart from the 1d red plate number 77 – which proved practically impossible to get hold of, their only being about 20 in existence, so what to collect now?

It was a natural progression from stamps to medals. I started out collecting one of every campaign medal produced for the military and was doing quite well until the dealer I used had not got one that took my fancy. However, I did notice a trio awarded to 'A W Bennett, Royal Warwickshire Regiment and R A F'. What attracted me to the group was a postcard of a YMCA tent with a group of soldiers on it, with Bennett highlighted. The address on the back of the postcard was just around the corner, so to speak, of where I was born. I purchased the group and accompanying documents and went on my way, realising there was more to collecting medals than I had thought – some of them were named, enabling me to research into the stories behind the medals.

As I regularly visited my parents, who still lived in Birmingham, one day I suggested to my wife that we could call on the address to see if anyone remembered the Bennetts. When we got there, the current inhabitant had only lived there a couple of years, so did not know of them. However, he knew that the couple next door had lived there for ages and suggested that they might know of them. I tried next door and sure enough he remembered the Bennett's and knew of a niece that was still alive, Miss Susan Bourne. He got me their telephone number and later that night when I got home I phoned her.

When I explained that I was researching Bennett, she asked how had I got her uncle Bill's medals? I explained that when her uncle died, everything passed to his wife, and when she died, as there were no children, everything went to her sister. As they had no children, they had to decide what to do with everything. Alongside the medals were all his log books, training papers, pay books, etc, etc. The family had offered them to the RAF museum, who were delighted to receive all the paperwork but the medals – no. They explained that they had thousands of those, so they were not interested in them!

The family sold the medals and some of the photographs and other documents, to Formans of

Piccadilly. The proceeds of the sale were donated to the Star and Garter Hospital for limbless ex-servicemen. When I had explained this to her, Miss Bourne became very friendly and invited us to have Sunday tea with her. She said she had some photographs that her Uncle Bill had taken when he was learning to fly and asked if I would like them?

So over to Halesowen we went! When we arrived at her house we noticed a brass plaque by the front door, Miss S Bourne, Teacher of Pianoforte. She answered the door, and as we went in, I noticed on the hall table an identical framed photograph of her uncle Bill to the one that I obtained when I purchased the medals.

In the parlour everything was set up for tea: a three-tier plate arrangement with sandwiches, cakes and biscuits. After tea Miss Bourne took out the photograph album out and I asked if I could call her Susan? "Oh no young man, we have not been formally introduced!" I was in shock and my wife had to bite her lip to stop herself laughing – Miss Bourne was 'one of the old school'.

She kindly let me have the photos, even though I offered to copy and replace them in the album. With the research and medals, I still have to this day as a nostalgic memento of the beginning of my passion for medal collecting. After we left Miss Bourne's home, I commented to my wife that this research business is fantastic and, ably assisted and supported by my wonderful wife, I have done it ever since.

They say that research is never finished and sure enough, one day because all my medals are on my web site, I had an email from a Great Nephew of Bennett who was researching his family tree. He asked if I had seen Bill racing his model car, as Bill held the world record at one stage! He gave me the reference and I now have a Pathe Pictorial colour film clip of Bill in the 60's in a talk I give about him.

Over time, I have helped to reunite groups of medals, helped people learn more about their relatives' lives and awards, and even in one case, to turn someone's life around, when their medals were restored to them. I really enjoy sharing the stories around the medals I collect, by giving talks to various clubs and societies; bringing the medals to life, rather than them sitting in a museum drawer.

For further information on my medals and research, please go to [www.rogersstudy.co.uk](http://www.rogersstudy.co.uk) You will learn more about why I am so fascinated with medal collecting and how honoured I am to become the next President of the Birmingham Medal Society.



**Philip Wilson hands over the Presidency of BMS to Roger Bragger**