Miniconvention minutes 21.07.2019 10.00 -16.30hrs.

At Royal British Legion, Knowle.

Martin Harrison chairing the meeting introduced President Roger Bragger who welcomed members and several guests.

First talk – 'PRO – Purchase – Research – Outcome' by Paul Handford.

Paul introduced his subject headings by reflecting on the huge changes in the hobby e.g. simply for purchase of medals through 'E-bay' or on-line bidding at major medal auction houses – these methods simply weren't available 20-30 years ago. Similarly, on-line research opportunites abound with availability of digitised information and on-line sources of data e.g. the National Archive – In the 1980's, this would have meant a trip to Kew Gardens to trawl through box files or view microfiched documents.

Paul recommended that the outcomes of your research should always be subject to review – similar to a 'cold case review' as used in the Police service – there is often new material becoming available as well as opportunities to review existing information.

'Outcomes' covered many areas- e.g. how to store your medals with or in a different place to your hard copy data, how to display them, whether or not you clean or fit new ribbons, do you seek publicity about your medals by putting them on a website and what sort of database you may have so that, at least, others may know what you have, what it may be worth or even where you have put it all!!

Often, your purchases can be prompted by helpful messages from fellow collectors or dealers [who know your collecting areas] and through his talk, Paul expressed his gratitude to many who had contacted him about certain medallic items or old photographs!

An example of this was an auction lot of old photographs of 16 SSA [Section Sanitaire Anglaise] whose officer in charge was Lieutenant [Lt] Frederick Hindle and whose medal group Paul already had in his collection – I can only understate Paul's excitement at hearing about the lot from a fellow society member and attending an auction in Eastbourne in 2014! His bid was successful and of the several hundred photographs, many were relevant to other medals he had of volunteer ambulancemen simply as the photos had been annotated.

In 2013, Paul had found a photograph on-line of Lt Hindle meeting King George V and Queen Mary, and although he'd saved the image, he had not identified it's source – subsequentally and frustratingly, he could not relocate the image source.Hindle's other career details included politics where he was [once out of four attempts] elected as an MP, was knighted in 1943 and, later in the 1940's, he became a chairman in the part of the nascent National health Service.

Above: Medal group to Lt Hindle including Trio, Legion d'Honneur 5th class and Croix de Guerre with Stars and Palms

The medal group of Dr G.R. Fox was obtained similarly after a helpful 'just in time' dealer's phone call – Dr Fox had been the Medical Officer [MO] to the Friend's Ambulance Unit [FAU]. En route to France, the Unit was involved in the rescue of personnel from a sinking vessel HMS Hermes. On arrival in France, he visited the injured of various nationalities [including Germans] in the appalling conditions of the 'Dunkirk Railway Sheds'. His Quaker's card showed his service details and locations .

Above: Trio and 'Chevaliers de l'Ordre de la Couronne' [far right] to Dr G.R.Fox.

During 1915, there had been a severe outbreak of Typhoid in Ypres. Dr Fox had helped treat the sick – a picture of Dr Fox and his group was shown outside the famous 'Wooden House' in Ypres. The Wooden House had to be rebuilt because of war damage but Paul was able to locate the new building and superimpose the present day image on the old photograph of 1915. When the FAU was operating from 'Sacre Coeur', they were obliged to leave this building when it became unsafe – Dr George Fox had been the last to leave..He was awarded the 'Chevaliers de l'Ordre de la Couronne' ['Knights of the Order of the Crown] by the Belgian authorities which Paul added to the group.

Next discussed were the medals awarded to William Mordey of British Red Cross and Order of St. John and Jerusalem [BRC and O St.JJ] – He was a conscientious objector – His British War Medal was shown. He too had been awarded the 'Chevaliers de l'Ordre de la Couronne. Mordey had involvement in the design and construction of a hospital in Ypres. His Quaker card indicated 'moved to ARC' ['American Red Cross'].

Above: BWM and Chevalier de l'Ordre de la Couronne to William Mordey.

A Photograph of Baron Clifford and William Rowtree was shown who were both in the FAU. Rowntree and Mordey had been roommates – In September,1916, the FAU Headquarters moved to its second HQ 'Hotel Pyl' at Malo-les-Bains, a suburb of Dunkirk – a photo of this latest HQ was shown before and after it had been hit in an air raid on 11.8.1918 – The bomb destroyed the dormitory area causing the building to collapse - Two personnel were killed – but Mordey was rescued from the debris - His life had been saved by a large wooden chest which prevented him being crushed. This chest is still in ownership of the Cadbury family.

Another conscientious objector featured next – He was Basil Ardley who'd also been awarded the Croix de Guerre. He name and photo was frequently mentioned in the book ' Friend's Ambulance Unit 1914-1919' – Two of his brothers Francis and Alan were also members and featured in the book but both would be killed in action [KIA].

Another medal group took Paul into 'medal collecting uncharted territory' [for him!] as it featured a Queen's South Africa medal [QSA]! These were named to H.S. Cholmeley. He was born in 1857. During the Boer War, he had been a private in the Middlesex Yeomanry. He was wounded in the leg in the action at Senekal in the Boer War 25.5.1900. Four had been killed including Major H.S. Dalbiac their Commanding Officer. The book 'The Story of the 34th Company [Middlesex] Imperial Yeomanry' gave Cholmeley's name and the names of the others injured in the Senekal action, one being a Trooper Webster – When Webster's QSA came to the market, Paul felt that their purchase was an opportunity to do a type of re-unite – not in the usual sense but that of re-uniting medals of soldiers involved in the same action. Cholmeley was a volunteer owner/driver in 1915 at the age 58 years. He was clearly a man of considerable means as when he died in 1931, he left £95,000…

Above left: Montage of items to Cholmeley [QSA and Trio] and Webster QSA – 2 QSAs!

Above right: Trio to Chauffeur Stewart including 'lost ' original photo [!] – see text for explanation.

Chauffeur L Stewart's medals, photograph and cap badge had been bought at auction by another BMS member in 1992 – When the item became available for purchase some years later, the original photograph was not with the group. This emphasised a point made earlier of having good systems to log your medals and what memorabilia go with them so that your family are fully aware. Contact with the family didn't yield the photograph immediately but some eighteen months later and somewhat miraculously, it had been found amongst miscellaneous items by the relatives. The photo was sent on to Paul who was especially excited this time as the photograph had been dated – No doubt, there will many similar instances where such a photograph could have been lost forever…

There was healthy discussion after the talk focussing on just what to do with any large quantity of photographs/certificates/material relating to a single medal or group – some took the view that the owner should 'thin some of it out' – others suggested the opposite that it should all be kept - this could be a significant storage issue of not just space but exactly where in your property, you might want to put it ie not the garage! [NB - This topic arose again in the afternoon session].

Above: Display of all items relating to the first talk.

Other contributions included the idea that, with any medals, part of the interest comes from your story of how you obtained them – the so-called 'medal journey' – Also expressed was the idea that museums aren't good places for large numbers of medals for many reasons - they can be poorly displayed, poorly annotated, or medals may be placed adjacently which are not actually linked being amongst several discussed. However, on a more hopeful note, it was noted that some museums put some of their medals back on the market occasionally. It was suggested that medals in museums weren't 'living' whereas medals being researched were medals that 'came alive'

In summary, medal research might be considered as analogous to potholing – it can open up considerably the deeper you go..! The merits of having your medals on a website could lead to exchange of information but could also identify that you might not be the true owner…

Second talk: 'Black Buck - Less is more' by Wing Commander Steve Mills.

Steve Mills started his talk by showing a picture of a medal pair of a Distinguished Flying Cross [DFC] and a South Atlantic Medal with Rosette and then confirming that this unique combination had been awarded to Flight Lt Martin Withers who flew the first 'Black Buck' mission to the Falklands Islands in 1982.

Britain had designed and produced three V bombers after WWII – these were the Handley Page Victor, the Vickers Valiant and the Avro Vulcan. In this era, the RAF's design specification had been for a bomber capable of flying at 50,000 feet, flying at 500 mph and being able to deliver a 3 ton bomb.

The Vulcan first flew in 1952 and entered service in 1956. The plane was known as the 'tin triangle'. The pilots provided a 'QRA' – Quick Reaction Alert in the event of nuclear conflict. This was part of the 'mutually assured destruction' ['MAD'] policy anticipated in the event of nuclear war. Pilots in the potential nuclear war era had to wear an eye patch which would give protection to one eye in the event of any nuclear explosion and blinding flash.

In 1969, the Royal Navy took over the nuclear deterrent role – Thereafter, the Vulcan had been entering its final years of service when in 1982, the Falklands crisis occurred...The Argentines had invaded the Falkland Islands triggering a military response by Great Britain – Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher reacted by sending the 'Task Force' to retake the Islands.

The Royal Navy and its Sea Harriers were undoubtedly of vital importance in that campaign but would be under threat themselves from Argentine warplanes as Argentina was in control of the strategically important airbase at Port Stanley. To counter this threat, the military strategists worked on an extraordinary long range ground attack mission to bomb the runway at Port Stanley [the 'Black Buck' mission] starting from the base RAF Ascension in the mid Atlantic.

Promoted in 1977 to Air Chief Marshall, Michael Beetham, Chief of Air Staff [whose outstanding RAF career included flying Lancasters in WWII and had become an expert in the air-to-air refuelling the roles of the Victor and Valiant aircraft] had had the idea of the 'Black Buck' missions. The Vulcans lacked the range for such a mission unless they were refuelled several times on such a journey and as Vulcans hadn't used air-to-air refuelling since 1972 – many of the necessary refuelling components were to be found in museums and, in one instance, was being used as an ashtray on a US airbase! The sizeable force to preparing for the raid involved three Vulcans with twelve refuelling Victors were being amassed at RAF Ascension. The Vulcan was normally crewed just by five but a sixth member was needed in this instance – an air-to-air refuelling instructor.

Navigation problems arose as this was an era without GPS – There were no maps of the South Atlantic and crews had to be able to use a sextant to navigate..The Vulcans were to carry twenty-one 1,000lb conventional bombs. Even the conventional bomb carrying racks were difficult to locate – some had to be recovered from a scrap metal merchant to whom they had been recently sold !!

Steve showed a photograph of the cramped Vulcan cockpit with its small windows and consequent poor visibility – The plane had only two ejector seats but did have parachutes for the other crews members – In reality, any evacuation of the Vulcan crew could be problematic. The process of air-to-air refuelling was challenging and technically difficult in the Vulcan due to the poor positioning of the refuelling nozzle and its poor visibility.

Right at the start of the mission, some of the planes became unserviceable: one as a result of the refuelling probe breaking off in a storm; the primary Vulcan's cabin could not be pressurised and so had to turn back leaving the reserve Vulcan flown by Withers to continue. There were calculation errors regarding fuel consumption of the Vulcan flying at the planned altitude and with its conventional bombload. The refuelling Victors could only deliver 7,000lbs of fuel each.

In short, there was uncertainty of whether to continue the mission – Withers consulted with his crew - the mission was to continue.

Steve showed a slide detailing the complex arrangements by the refuelling planes that were needed to get to Port Stanley and back to RAF Ascension. 1,500,000lbs of aviation fuel was used on the mission..

The Vulcan used 'H2S' a WWII radar system on the bombing run where five of the sixteen bombs dropped failed to detonate – Aerial photographs showed one direct hit on the main runway sufficient to make it unserviceable even with attempts at repair for all but small aircraft. The Argentine fighter-bombers couldn't use Port Stanley airbase.

Because of the angle at which the bomb struck the runway, it had left a sixty foot deep crater . Apart from this damage, the Argentines even feared that the RAF could bomb their mainland. [This was a similar fear that the Japanese had experienced after the 'Doolittle raid' by the US Air Force in 1941].

Now on its return from Port Stanley, Withers' Vulcan was short of fuel - this had triggered the scrambling of another emergency refuelling Victor from Ascension. Some fuel leakage during refuelling from this plane, had caused smearing of the cockpit glass but despite this, the Vulcan successfully landed in Ascension some sixteen hours later.

There were four 'Black Buck' ops against Port Stanley airfield in total.

The Vulcans were withdrawn at the end of 1982. Withers flew the last flight and this Vulcan No XM617 is now at RAF Waddington.

There was much discussion after the talk with a point of clarification offered to explain the fact that there had been only one direct hit – this was attributed to a physical build error of 1% when the airbase was built about which the RAF was unaware.

Member Presentations:

Like Father almost Like Son :

This talk had focussed on two pilots with the surname 'Wight' - one first World War and one WWII. Initially, they were thought to be linked and were sold as a father and son set of medals – further research established there were, in fact, two servicemen with the name of 'J.E. Wight' in 1918 – one had been a pilot and the other a technician. The initial link between the two groups was erroneous.. The different pilots surname Wight and their stories in both World Wars were remarkable..

Lt John Eric Wight [RFC and RAF] had a cigarette case the inside of which was engraved with the signatures of squadron members – One was signed as 'Dunc'. In 2004, Further information was to follow the website posting about the medals – This led to our member being offered the photographs and correspondence about J.E. Wight! – One photo showed 'Dunc' sitting on his RE8 biplane [Not much more is known about him!]. Wight wrote regularly to his wife – some of his correspondence recounted the topic of venereal disease [VD] and even details of a visit to the demi-mondes ..! Wight saved his fellow Officers from 'going off the rails' by insisting they leave the scantily clad women and return to base [to quote Wight]..!!

Cigarette Case of J. E. Wight

War and Victory to J. E. Wight

In WWII, Flight Lt R.D.G. Wight had been awarded the DFC during the battle of France where he had shot down 10 enemy aircraft. A matter of weeks later, he was KIA 11.8.1940 leading a group of three Hurricanes against and attacking force of Me 110's during the Battle of Britain. There was documentation on Wight's body when he was washed ashore. This had been returned to Wight's family through the Red Cross. Also established with the paperwork was that Wight had once owned a rare 'Aston-Martin Ulster' car [which is now on the island of Jersey] and that Wight's mother had postcard correspondence from Flight Lt R.G. Ker-Ramsey of 'The Great Escape' fame.

Above: DFC and WWII medals to Flight Lt Wight.

Long Service Medals:

The next presentation featured different long service medals from the 1960's with a focus on Colonial Auxilliary Forces in Rhodesia [later to become Zimbabwe in 1980].

There were British awards to Rhodesian forces, but in 1965, when the Rhodesian Premier Ian Smith declared 'Unilateral Declaration of Independence' ['UDI'], the British awards mostly ceased the following year.

There were still some awards mainly Long Service and Good Conduct [LSGC] issued between 1965-1968 but some of these are not even gazetted. By 1969, Rhodesia was producing its own awards.

A pair to Warrant Officer first class [W/O] Masepu consisted of a Campaign Service Medal [CSM] clasp Malaya and a LSGC with clasp 'Rhodesia' – the LSGC with clasp Rhodesia probably number fewer than twenty in existence – most of the clasps seen will be for 'South Rhodesia' or 'Rhodesia and Nyasaland'

Left: CSM bar 'Malaya and LSGC clasp Rhodesia to W/O Masepu.

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Above: British Empire Medal [BEM] group with CSM clasp ‘Malaya’ and LSGC with bar ‘Rhodesia and Nyasaland’.

Above: Some Rhodesian medals and CSM bar ‘Malaya’.

Epic Action Frankfurt Trench November 1916:

There followed a detailed presentation about the epic last stand of ‘D’ company 16th Battalion [???] Highland Light Infantry [HLI] in November 1916. This had taken place in the battle of the Ancre – near Beaumont–Hamel. The HLI had been formed in Glasgow and recruited from Boy’s Brigade members.

Above: Diagram of the German positions showing 'Munich trench' to the west of 'Frankfurt' trench where the red circle indicates the HLI in Frankfurt trench surrounded by German positions in November, 1916.

Ground conditions were appalling in November, 1916, - 36 casualties were sustained by the HLI just moving to the 'jump off' point. 'Munich' and 'Frankfurt' trenches had been re-taken by the German counter-attack. However, one small section of 'Frankfurt' trench remained in the hands of the 50 able-bodied and 50 injured of the 16th HLI.

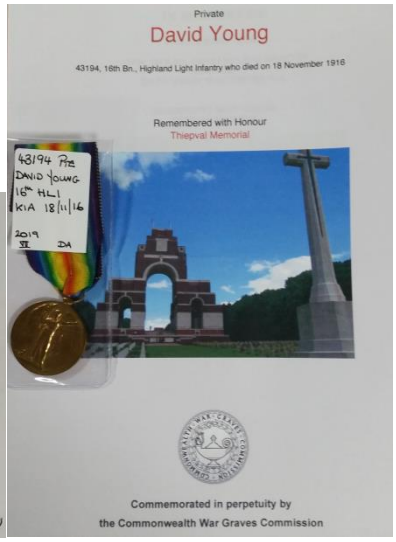
No one including the Germans was aware initially of what had happened.

'D'company held their position for 48 hours but with poor supplies of food and ammunition, one soldier was returned to British lines – attempts were then made to effect a rescue. On Day 2, the Germans were aware of the British in Frankfurt trench. Days 3 and 4, there was airborne reconnaissance activity.

On day 5, a heavy British barrage preceeded the rescue attempt which was unsuccessful and resulted in 300 casualties. Supplies and weapons were being foraged by 'D' Company from the dead of both sides lying nearby. There were now more wounded in Frankfurt trench than able-bodied.

By day 7, the Germans issued an ultimatum – After this was rejected, there followed a German barrage and on day 8, the Germans attacked. Forty-five British prisoners [POW] were taken of whom 30 were casualties.

The defence of Frankfurt trench led to many 'mentioned-in-dispatches' [MID's] and a Distinguished Service Order [DSO] to Lt John Stewart.



Above left: DSO, BWM and Victory Medal with MID Oakleaves to Lt John Stewart, HLI.

Above right: VM to 43194 Private J Young HLI. KIA 18th November, 1916 and image of Thiepval Monument.

Major Sidney Fen Aston MBE [Royal Tank Corps]:

Major Aston had many awards commencing with a Military Member of the British Empire [MBE] and culminating in a double long service award. He was born in 1892. He first entered the army in the Army Service Corps [ASC].

He was made MBE in 1947. For long service pre and post 1940, it was possible for two LSGC medals to be issued as in this case; After 1940, bars for further periods of service were authorised.

Above: Medal group to Major Aston - MBE, WWI trio and MID Oak Leaves, Defence medal, 1939-45 War Medal , Coronation Medal 1937, LSGC Geo V and LSGC GeoVI [bar 'Regular Army'].

A Nice Sort of Guy:

The next group of medals sold with the recipient's miniatures and ARP [Air Raid Precautions] badge were to Douglas Clark. The medals were 1939-45 Star, Defence Medal , 1939-45 War Medal and 1977 Silver Jubilee Medal named to Douglas Clark.

There was little confirmatory information about his wartime experience but he had been an Air Raid Warden in 1939.

Post WWII, as a Labour Party member, he made extensive contributions to local government between 1952-1977.

He been elected Mayor of Haringey in 1973 but in 1963, he had been elected as the one of the last Mayors of Tottenham. During his formal inauguration to this post, his proposer Alderman A. Reed had described Clark as 'A nice sort of guy with forthright opinions who would serve the town well…' Thereafter, local London boroughs including Tottenham were merged into the new entity of Haringey. Our member discovered many photographs in Haringey District Council Offices [where staff had been most helpful] and Clark's name could also be found eventually on a nameboard of previous Mayors on the first floor of the old Tottenham Town Hall buildings.

[Apologies as I have no photographs relating to this item].

Emin [Pasha] Relief Expedition and Royal Geographical Society's [RGS] Silver Medals for Africa :

The initial expedition, sponsored by the RGS, to attempt discovery of the source of the Nile had been started in the 1857 by Speke and Burton – Their expedition started from the East African coast with the intention of trying to discover the reported great lakes of East Africa and possibly the source of the Nile. They became the first Europeans to reach Lake Tanganyika. As Burton had now become too unwell to continue the task, Speke proceeded with the exploration finding a great lake which he named 'Lake Victoria' in honour of the Queen .

Speke's idea that Lake Victoria was the source of the Nile was disputed by Burton. With a second RGS funded exploration started in 1860, Speke and a Captain Grant returned to Lake Victoria . In 1862, Speke, unaccompanied by Grant had determined the Nile's source as an exit from Lake Victoria which he named Ripon Falls.

This particular RGS silver medal had been awarded to one of 'Speke's faithfuls' who had accompanied him through the whole expedition. He was named to Sungoro.

Above left: RGS silver medal to Sungoro [obverse] for discovery of the source of the Nile.

Above right: Reverse of same medal.

After Livingstone's death, Sungoro was also one of six expedition members who accompanied the body back to the African coast.

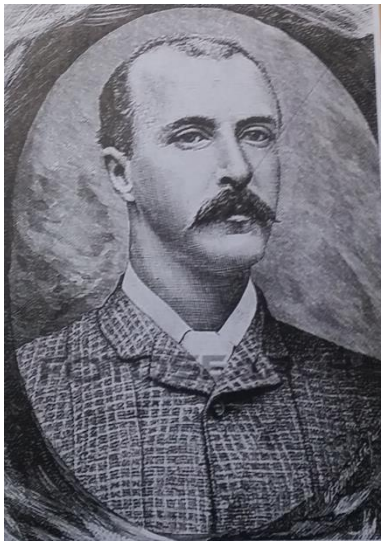
RGS had also issued Livingstone medals.

The RGS Livingstone medal to Wadi Safar [known as 'Safeni'] was shown – This is only one of six known to exist –although thirty-four were known to have been struck – Technically, this was a difficult medal to strike because of the high relief.

Above left and right : Livingstone medal awarded to Wadi Safar.

The Emin [Pasha] Relief Expedition Star was shown as part of the medal group to Captain Robert Nelson a member of this Expedition. This silver star was an unofficial medal produced by the RGS in respect of the mission 1886-1889 led by H.M.Stanley to undertake to discover the whereabouts of Emin Pasha, the Governor of Equatoria.

There was an appalling casualty rate on this expedition with 1000 of 1500 being lost en route to Egypt because of disease and starvation due to inadequate supplies. Also shown were the contemporary sketches Nelson had drawn during the expedition.



Above left: Captain Robert Nelson.

Above right: Medals to Captain R. Nelson – left to right 'High Jump' a school award, South Africa Medal 1879 and Emin [Pasha] Relief Expedition Star.

In 1892, Pasha had been murdered in Uganda.

Gentleman George DCC :

This next talk dealt with an extensive amount of material relating to the career and medals of George Blackborow OBE and QPM [Order of the British Empire and Queen's Police Medal].

The provenance of the medals was the estate of George Blackborow's daughter. Gentleman George had joined the Police in 1927 – He achieved initial fame for the arrests [single handedly and with truncheon..] of three shopbreakers.

Probably not so famous was his short-hand skill as he'd passed the Pitman short hand exam with a writing speed of 80 words per minute [a skill your BMS secretary wishes he had..!].

His certificates, many photographs, newspaper cuttings, handcuffs and many other items were all available with Blackborow's medals – The question of what exactly should happen to this quantity of material had been discussed earlier in the convention and views were again expressed! Blackborow had some life-saving awards as well as the medals and honours shown below which include LSGC, 1953 Queen's Coronation Medal, 1956 Queen's Police Medal [QPM], 1956 Order of

the British Empire [OBE] In 1968, he was admitted into the Order of St John and Jerusalem [for Ambulance Long Service].

His career was incredibly long with 48 years of service : He was a Detective Sergeant with an expertise in fingerprinting in 1937, a Detective Superintendent and joint head of CID in the 1950's. After WWII, he was instrumental in bringing in the German shepherd dog ['Alsatian'] into the Police service.

Above left to right: Medals to Blackborow – OBE, Order of St John and Jerusalem, QPM, Defence Medal, Queen's Coronation Medal and Police LSGC. Far right: a life saving award.

Research:

To link up with some earlier themes, a summary of research resources for military research was presented. Just typing some minimal detail eg surname and number could generate considerable information. Similarly, the same could be said for 'E-bay'.

Further suggestions were made and I place them in order of their mention with no implied importance.

'Dix Noonan and Webb' [DNW] archive section.

DNW search .

Amazon books.

Regimental sites for any digitised information.

Veteran's sites [with nominal medal rolls].

Imperial War Museum [IWM].

Absent Voter's lists [gives addresses and details].

National Archive sites for service records.

Government Wills site: [free to view].

'Find my past'/'Ancestry' geneology site.

Police Gazettes for deserter/absentees list].

BRC Order St JJ – Red Cross enquiry lists.

WWII POW debriefing form.

Pension Cards – gives family details and NOK.

1919-1939 enlistment rolls.

Glasgow or Portsmouth site – fees £30 if not a family member – their fees are refunded if nothing comes out of the enquiry. Regimental Magazines.

School Registers.

Rolls of Honour.

Newspapers.

President's Cup 2019:

We had six entries of very high standard.

Winner of the President's Cup – 'Like Father Almost Like Son'.[see picture below].

Runner-up – RE,RE [Picture below left].

Third Place – 'Heroes of Chernobyl' [Picture above right].

Other entries – 36th Foot Herefordshire Regiment; 'Gentleman George DCC' and 'My First Medals'.

[Pictured below left to right]

Both Martin Harrison and President Roger Bragger thanked all for attending, contributing and making the day so successful.

Chris Davies

BMS Secretary – typed 22.7.19-31.7.19