



ROYAL NAVAL ASSOCIATION

Minutes of
87th Annual Conference
and
Annual General Meeting

Held at
The Voco St David's Hotel
Cardiff

Saturday 15th June 2024

Charity Number 266982

Incorporated by Royal Charter

Full Recognition by the Royal Navy

Delegates

Branch	Representative	Branch	Representative
Aldershot	Martin Maguire	Mansfield & District	Andrew Hamilton
Anglesey Branch	Gareth Bean	Merthyr Tydfil	Mike Jones
Ashford	Glenys Goldsmith	Mexborough	Neil Pearson
Aylesbury No1	Glen Beck	Millom & District	Jacqueline Wrennall
Bracknell	Anthony Boddrell	Monmouth	John Clarke
Brixham	Victor Williscroft	Newport	Phil Mountain
Bury	Terry White	Nottingham	Tom Rotherham
Caerphilly	Dave Richards	Oswestry	Mike Evans
Cardiff	Peter Gittins	Paddock Wood	Martyn Evans
Carmarthen	Donald Griffiths	Pendleton	Steve Caulfield
Chester	Fred Pilgrim	Peterborough & District	Paul Godfrey
City of Edinburgh	Karen Elliot BEM	Plymouth	Carl Beeson
City of Glasgow	Brian MacKenzie	Portland	Nigel Rimell
Crosby	John Arnold	Portsea & Portsmouth	Ted Hawkins
Dartford	Ron Dorey	Rayleigh	Michael Burnham
Derby	Lynda Rotherham	Rhondda	Graham Warner
Dorchester	Nigel Rimell	Riders	Mark Low
Eastbourne	Stuart Ramsden	Royston	Graham Parry
Ferndown & District	Ralph Dodds	Salisbury	Jonathan Everett
1 st Garden City Letchworth	Penelope Jarvis	Scarborough	Shaun Brosnan
Folkestone	Timothy Geere	Shrewsbury	Darren Davies
Forth Valley	David Cutler	South Bristol	Adrian Andrews
Gosport	George Hathaway	Southend on Sea	Gary Daisley
Greenford	Ann Foley	Spalding	Yvonne Crawford
Hartlepool	Ian McNay	Spennymoor & Ferryhill	Chris Lewarne
Haven	David Griggs MBE	St Neots & District	Tony Webley
HQ Roll	Richard Crawford	Stocksbridge & Deepcar	Keith Crawford
Huddersfield	Richard Cope	Sunderland	David Staines
Huntingdon & District	Bill Small	Swansea	Colin Johnson
Knowle	Vic Hocking	Tewkesbury	Monica Malpass
Lee-on-the-Solent	Paul Watson BEM	Torfaen	James Attenborough
Leighton & Linslade	Ken Brown	Tyne	Jeff Hughes

Lincoln	Jim Fletcher	West Lothian	Andy Sears
Liskeard	Jerry Fleming	Worthing	Mike Smyth
Llanelli	Christopher Phillips	Wrexham	Kevin Hackett
Maidstone	Stephen Champion	York & District	Patricia Farrington

Present

S/M VAdm D Potts CB – National President/Conference Chair
S/M Cdre M Slawson OBE RN – Deputy National President
S/M A Christie – National Vice Chairman
The Bishop of Swansea and Brecon, Bishop John Lomas
S/M N Purkiss – Chairman Standing Orders/Governance Committee
S/M I Irvin – Honorary National Treasurer
S/M G Williams – Governance Committee
S/M T Day – Governance Committee

NCM's Representing Areas 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, Scottish

In Attendance

S/M W Oliphant – General Secretary
WOI C Robson – Vice President
S/M M Little – Plans Manager
S/M K Aldous – Governance Support Officer
S/M S Bewley – Communications Lead
S/M M Gray – Communications Support/Minutes
S/M D MacAskill - Engagement
S/M S Field – Membership
S/M M Smyth – National Ceremonial Advisor
S/M S Champion – National Standard Bearer
S/M G Apperley – National Welfare Advisor
S/M N Huxtable – Photography
S/M L Ford – Sound Engineer

NOTE: A full sound recording is available of Conference, held in Central Office for historical archive purposes. Copies may be obtained by Areas and Branches if required.

Conference opened at 0900

1. March on the National Standard

National Standard marched on by S/M Steve Champion, National Standard Bearer

2. Opening Prayers

The Bishop of Swansea and Brecon, Bishop John Lomas (former Fleet Air Arm engineer) led the prayers to start the Conference. Referred to Capt Robert Falcon Scott RN departing Cardiff in Terra Nova exactly 114 years ago to the day, and the expedition's Welsh connections.

3. Silent Tribute in honour of those who have Crossed the Bar

4. Greetings in Welsh and English by S/M Dafydd Boyle (Rhondda branch)

5. Opening remarks by the National President NP}

The NP began by congratulating the former National Chairman S/M Keith Ridley on his award of an MBE in the King's Birthday Honours, referring to the enormous amount of effort he put into the role, and acknowledging the support of Keith's wife Maureen.

NP then welcomed delegates and observers to Cardiff, and explained that there were no civic or military VIPs to welcome because of purdah in the run-up to the General Election. He also thanked Area 7 Organising Committee for arranging the Conference weekend in somewhat difficult circumstances beyond their control, involving a late change of venue.

6. Patronal messages and fraternal greetings

NP said he was delighted that King Charles had agreed to be patron of the Association. GS read the letter of acceptance from the King, written by his Private Secretary Sir Clive Alderton.

7. Guests and Presentations

In the absence of guests, two videos were played for Conference.

The first was of 97-year-old S/M Peter Seaborn and his memories of D-Day in frigate HMS Waldegrave, including the observation that an event such as D-Day should not happen again because "as far as I am concerned the whole world should make love and not war."

The second was a presentation on the RNRMC by Chief Executive Andrew Jamieson, the charity being a central source of funding for the Association. Andrew spoke of the value of the comradeship function provided by RNA activities such as Thriving Together and pledged the continued support of the RNRMC for the RNA and its goals.

8. Conference Standing Orders

Chairman of SOC S/M Nick Purkiss pointed out one error in the Conference Standing Orders as circulated – SO9A should be in accordance with Rule 22, not 20.

Proposed by S/M Ralph Dodds (Ferndown)

Seconded by S/M Paul Godfrey (Peterborough)

Standing Orders approved.

9. National President's Address: Vice Admiral Duncan Potts

National President (NP) Vice Admiral Duncan Potts observed that this year was a different AGM and Conference to previous years; after the commemorations of 2022 and 2023 this was a chance to concentrate on ourselves and how we take things forward to make it fit for today and, importantly, for tomorrow, making decisions to shape the future, and that the RNA was no longer an association in decline.

He stated that in 2021 membership was 9,866, but that last month the RNA had issued its 20,000th membership card. He thanked the National Council, supported by Central Office, for their hard work in making the RNA more attractive to younger members..

There were thanks to the Association's sponsors, most notably the RNRMC for supporting the post-subscription financial model and welfare/wellbeing initiatives, also corporate sponsors Pains Boons Lawyers, Pussers Rum and AW Ship Management.

NP said how pleased he was that King Charles has agreed to take on the royal patronage of the RNA, especially as he served in the Royal Navy and is eligible for full membership of the Association.

He thanked Area 1 National Council Member S/M Maurice Foley who was standing down after 21 years, saying he epitomised all that is good about the Association, and also thanked S/M Keith Crawford, who stood down as NCM Area 9 last year due to ill health, for his decades of service, both shipmates receiving a round of applause from delegates and observers.

NP said one of the RNA's 'Seven Cs' is celebration, and the Association was celebrating the award of the MBE in the King's Birthday Honours list to former National Chairman S/M Keith Ridley. NP spoke of S/M Keith's 46 years of membership, making an extraordinary contribution to the RNA and to wider society while seeking nothing in return.

Other items of note were the visit by the Princess Royal to Portsmouth Naval Base, when she officially named Lanyard House, the home of Central Office, and S/M Steve Champion's successful defence of his title as RNA National Standard Bearer; NP also thanked S/M Steve for representing the RNA in Normandy for D-Day 80 commemorations.

Admiral Potts went on to outline some of the issues faced by the RNA, including:

Growth – while the RNA continues to grow and thrive, a larger proportion of members are on HQ Roll – 6,443 out of a total of 20,327, just over 30 per cent. He said many younger serving members were at sea, and it made sense for them to be on the HQ Roll for now, but the other aspect was that the RNA was using younger generation to encourage their seniors into the association – we are constantly battling loneliness, so encourage younger members to signpost 'old Uncle Albert' to a local branch so they can enjoy the dignity of friendship and companionship. NP added that equally we have to make sure we remain relevant and attractive to the coming generations.

Welfare and wellbeing – an aspect of our work regarded as vital by organisations who support the RNA with funds. NP acknowledged some of the RNA's reforms have not been universally well received, but that we operate in an increasingly legislative and regulated environment and we need to strike the right balance when providing support. He added that we are all responsible for each other's wellbeing, and that we need a pyramid with experience at the top to call on, but we still need a shoulder, an ear, and friendship. The GS will lead a meeting next weekend for those in the organisation who are effectively the top tier, an advisory group, to ensure they are all on an agreed page. Welfare and wellbeing is at the heart of what the RNRMC and Greenwich Hospital fund the RNA for; they need data to help inform its decisions and so do we, but the process of providing a business case need not be burdensome.

NP said **Governance** was another aspect at the top of the hoist at the moment, at top level as well as Branch level, and we need to make sure that Branch returns are improved as it is important that they remain on the right side of the law, thus protecting our reputation. He urged delegates to take back to their branches the need to apply the 'Daily Mail' test before any money is spent, and that they are all governed by Charity Commission rules and regulations.

Finances: NP said the Association is keeping its head well above water, but urged branches to remember that charity begins at home when fundraising. Thanks to the RNRMC and other grants the RNA is subscription-free as of three-and-a-half years ago, but members should think about supporting the RNA as well, perhaps through a standing order donation of £1 or £2 per month, or through the RNA Lottery, or by leaving something in their estate, which will help keep the Association financially viable.

Finally, NP said that next year the Association marks its 75th anniversary, and among the plans already made are an exclusive bar at Twickenham for the Army v Navy rugby match – and the RN Rugby Union is making the RNA its sponsored charity next year; there is an RNA charity concert in Portsmouth Guildhall on 22 October with the Royal Marines Band, Fishermen's Friends and, hopefully, a new RNA Community Choir.

NP said the RNA is a proud organisation with a great heritage and a big heart, and he asked shipmates, when considering the motions on the agenda, to consider how it can keep itself relevant. He also urged members to go out and engage with their local communities, not just old oppos but the wider Naval family, including widows and widowers.

10. President's Awards for Recruiting and Gift Aid Returns

Brigg's Dirk for Large Branch Recruiting (31 or more full members) – **Sunderland**

Brigg's Rose Bowl for Small Branch Recruiting (30 or fewer members) – **Woking**

Tasker Bowl (Area with most Gift Aid returns) – **No 6 Area**

Lt Cdr Robert Evans Sherwood DSO RD RNR Memorial Sword (Branch with highest donations proportionate to membership numbers) – **St Neots & District**

Sword of Honour (Area with greatest increase in 2023) – **No 6 Area**

Overseas Branches Recruitment Certificate (Large branch) – **Doha, Qatar**

Overseas Branches Recruitment Certificate (Small branch) – **Japan**

11. Standing Orders Committee

a) Report by Chair SOC

S/M Nick Purkiss announced that there were 72 delegates present.

There have been no changes to bye-laws, but there have been updates to the ceremonial guide and new proposals for standards, and the Association has set up a Governance Committee. He informed delegates that the Charity Commission had been looking at the Association and what it does, as had the Royal Navy, and it was important for shipmates to co-operate in making sure the RNA gets things right, in part because there are huge reputational issues if the RNA messes things up.

b) National Council Elections

S/M Purkiss announced that the following NCMs had been elected unopposed:

Area 2	Dennis Potter (Chatham)
Area 3	Andy Christie (Lee-on-the-Solent)
Area 5	Pete Chivers (Stowmarket)
Area 9	Paul Harries (Spalding)
Area 10	Sterling Simmons (Crosby)
Area 12	Paul Stephenson (Dublin)

Area 4 was contested, and the result was that Warwick Belfitt (Liskeard) was elected

The following Deputy NCMs were elected unopposed:

Area 5	Diana Sadler (Norwich)
Area 10	Timothy Pike (Wrexham)
Area 12	Robert Buchanan (Londonderry)

12. Minutes of 2023 AGM

Acceptance

Proposed by Graham Parry (Royston)

Seconded by Penny Jarvis (1st Garden City Letchworth)

Approved unanimously and agreed as a true and accurate record.

Matters arising – none

13. Annual Accounts for year ended 31 December 2023 – National Honorary Treasurer (NT) S/M Ian Irvin

NT S/M Ian Irvin started by pointing out the differences between company accounts and a charity's accounts. Although a company aims to make a profit, which is not the RNA objective, NT said the two sets of figures are surprisingly similar; if the RNA's income exceeds costs we put funds into our reserves, and we draw on the funds if the opposite is true.

Instead of a company's Board of Directors we have a Board of Trustees, and instead of Shareholders we have Shipmates, bound to each other by shared service in the RN.

Having said that the RNA's accounts are not that simple, and NT is no less cautious in dealing with the figures as it would impact on his own ability to trade commercially.

Ian said he looks for three things.

First, the report of the Independent Accountant to make sure they are comfortable with the accounts – and if they weren't, he said he and the Board of Trustees would need to consider their position.

Second, he "looks over the shoulder of the Executive" – the General Secretary and his team – and challenges, questions and (occasionally) criticises what they do on a day-to-day basis, offering advice without interfering. This ensures major costs are known about well in advance and there are no awkward surprises when the statutory accounts are produced.

Third, NT looks at the Balance Sheet, which summarises the health (or otherwise) of the RNA. The Balance Sheet shows the 'Capital Employed' in a Company, or in the RNA's case, the sum total of the various funds set aside to run the RNA, being, in total (per page 4 of the accounts), £1,648,663.

This, in turn, is balanced off by the Working Capital, or net Current Assets, being £234,801 as at 31 December 2023, plus Tangible and Intangible Assets of £18,538 and Investments of £1,395,324. NT was pleased to advise Shipmates that he is comfortable with the Balance Sheet as at 31 December 2023 and, in his view, the RNA is well placed for 2024 and beyond.

NT said he was also satisfied that the financial information conveyed to shipmates as part of the Trustees' Report correlates with the information contained in the accounts, and thus Shipmates have been made properly and fully aware of the financial affairs of the Association as at 31 December 2023.

NT also thanked Central Office staff, the team at RNRMC and Kevin Cornelius, our Reporting Accountant, for their support during the year.

Adoption of Accounts

Proposed by Anthony Boddrell (Bracknell)

Seconded by Kevin Hackett (Wrexham)

Approved unanimously

[Break 1015 – 1055]

14. National Council's Report to Conference: National Vice Chairman S/M Andy Christie

National Chairman S/M Peter Godwin was unable to attend Conference.

NVC said it was important delegates filled in their survey forms to help the Conference Review Team get off to a good start.

NVC delivered NC's speech, referring to the need for the Association to employ people with the right level of skill and expertise and adding that not all staff are paid for by members – some are funded through other sources.

One example is Sports and Comradeship Co-ordinator S/M 'Scouse' Reeves, who has opened up a new area of support in which the Association can work which is particularly attractive to younger shipmates.

Another with a different skill set is S/M Kate Aldous, who supports S/M Nick Purkiss in the area of governance, including identifying and resolving discrepancies in Branch returns to ensure compliance, and who is doing a fantastic job on behalf of the Association.

The Seven Cs (Companionship, Community, Connection, Compassion, Care, Commemoration and Celebration) is the brainchild of RNA GS S/M Bill Oliphant, supported by Plans Manager S/M Malcolm Little, and as well as capturing the ethos of the RNA is also a benchmark against which the Association is held to account while spending money from other charities.

NVC added that it is important that Branches provide Central Office with evidence of such activities.

NVC finished by thanking the HMS Raleigh Mentoring team, all those on Area and Branch committees for their efforts, and for getting people involved in tasks that further the cause of the Association. He also thanked GS Bill Oliphant, who he said was often overlooked when it comes to thanking individuals in the RNA.

15. Motions of Urgency

National Council motion of urgency

National Vice Chairman S/M Andy Christie proposed that with Area 8 unable to find a suitable location to hold the 2025 Conference, the Conference should be hosted by the National Council who will task Central Office to organise the event at a suitable location.

GS S/M Bill Oliphant outlined the Motion of Urgency, saying that with a key organiser being unwell, and not wishing to place a burden on him, he proposed that the Conference, in the RNA's 75th anniversary year, be held in Portsmouth, as it is easier to organise on Central Office's doorstep. Possible options include a reception evening at the Queen's Hotel, the Conference itself in the Historic Dockyard, with a more informal evening event (similar to Pickle Night) on HMS Warrior, as HMS Victory is in refit.

The Sunday morning service could be held at Portsmouth Cathedral, finishing with a social gathering towards the Square Tower.

Initial thoughts were to hold it over the weekend of 20-23 June, but this would need to be confirmed as it would have to deconflict from other events in the city including Pride Portsmouth, which would affect the availability of accommodation.

Seconded by S/M Ian Irvin (National Treasurer)

No speakers for or against the motion.

Motion approved unanimously

Branch motions of urgency

None

16. National Council motions

Motion One:

That Conference agrees that there is a need to separate the role of National Council and Trustees of the Association and instructs National Council to revert to Conference at the next available opportunity, with proposals to amend the Charter, Rules and Bye-Laws of the Association, to effect the proposed separation of Trustees and National Council duties and any other Associated required changes.

National Vice President S/M Mark Slawson spoke to the proposal, saying that the charity sector had changed a great deal since the RNA's formation in 1950, and that in order to comply with current Charity Commission guidance the Association must change its structure.

This would address potential conflicts of interest and questions of loyalty to be identified and managed, and mean that Trustees can concentrate on strategy and the overall benefit of policies for the Association, while National Council members can devote themselves to operational matters and represent the needs of their own Areas.

S/M Slawson added that Trustees should have the skills, knowledge and expertise to govern, lead and deliver, which are not necessarily found in elected National Council members.

The process requires Conference to approve the work, engagement with the Privy Council and the signature of the King, and then return to Conference with the proposal – a process which could take up to two years. It would also require the amendment and rewriting of the RNA Royal Charter

A working party will be set up comprising DNP, NC, NVC, Head of Governance, NT and two NCMs, communication with Areas and Branches will provide feedback, after which there would be approval of the amended Royal Charter by Conference and final approval by the Privy Council.

NVP S/M Slawson said the Association has to do this, and that Conference can look at the proposal when it is brought before them.

NT S/M Ian Irvin seconded the motion, saying that the Board of Trustees will have a majority of RNA members, and the proposal also allowed rules and bye-laws to be improved during the process of rewriting the Royal Charter.

There were no speakers for or against the motion.

Motion **approved** unanimously.

17. Branch Motions

Motion Two (Lee-on-the-Solent branch):

That a new category of membership be provided for in the Royal Charter, Rules and Bye-Laws, that of Life Associate Membership. It is proposed that Associate Members, who have given sufficient meritorious service to the Association, be eligible to be awarded 'Life Associate Membership' by National Council. As a result, to distinguish the categories, the current Life membership should be referred to as 'Life Full Members'. It is proposed that Life Associate Members shall not be entitled to hold any additional offices or roles, within the Association, than those currently provided for in the rules for ordinary Associate members. That the wording of this motion may be changed as required by the Privy Council.

Speaking to the motion, S/M Soapy Watson (Lee-on-the-Solent and Stubbington) referred to the Treasurer of his branch, a civvy who has been with them for 12 years, explaining that this would be an appropriate way to show appreciation.

The motion was seconded by S/M Ted Hawkins (Portsea and Portsmouth) who reiterated how important Associate Members are for the Association, often working in the background but who are the backbone of the organisation.

One opponent to the motion (S/M Jim Attenborough, Torfaen) asked whether Honorary Membership would fulfil the requirement. Head of Governance S/M Nick Purkiss explained that Honorary Membership had no voting rights and did not allow the member to hold office at Branch level, while GS S/M Bill Oliphant added that he regarded Honorary Membership as being a chance to invite a member of society to take the role of, for example, Branch President, as it is not a subset of branch membership itself.

Speaking for the motion S/M Ann Foley (Greenford) said Associate Members are the lifeblood of the RNA and were needed more than ever, but S/M Penny Jervis (Letchworth) opposed the move, observed that Associate Members like herself are there to support those who serve or have served, and there was no need to change to system.

S/M Andy Christie (NCM 3) said Associate Members, who make up around 50 per cent of membership, do a brilliant job in his branch, but there is nothing further he can do to reflect that, stating they cannot keep giving shipmates more and more Certificates of Appreciation (COAs) – “there’s got to be something else.”

An **amendment** was proposed that would allow Associate Members to become Life Members, and that such a Life Member or a COA holder could stand for the jobs of Chairman or Vice Chairman of a branch, but the amendment failed to win a two-thirds majority and was thus **rejected**.

There was a large majority in favour of the original motion, which was therefore **approved**.

Motion Two subsections (a) to (h), which could only be enacted if Motion Two succeeded, were proposed by S/M Soapy Watson (Lee-on-the-Solent and Stubbington) and seconded by S/M George Hathaway (Gosport), and covered the necessary changes required to the RNA Royal Charter and Rules to put Motion Two into effect. The subsections were voted for as one block, and were **approved**.

Motion Three (Haven Branch):

That the Royal Charter, Rules and Bye-Laws be amended, where necessary, to allow substantive adult uniformed Naval or Royal Marine Senior ratings, and Naval or Royal Marine Officers of the MOD(N) recognised cadet forces (SCC, CCF, VCC) to become full members of the Association. That the wording of this motion may be changed as required by the Privy Council.

S/M David Griggs (Haven) said their Area standard bearer is an SCC officer who travels across the area attending funerals and ceremonies, but there are tasks he cannot do because he is an Associate Member. He added that the Royal Navy accepts them as representatives of the Service, and supports the cadet organisations, and believed the RNA should reach out to those who “who teach our values”. The motion was seconded by S/M Colin Johnson (Swansea).

S/M Vic Williscroft (Brixham) acknowledged the “fantastic” job done by the Sea Cadets, but didn’t want to water down membership of the Association.

S/M John Everett (Salisbury) said the motion would undermine the “tireless efforts” of Associate Members, and if anything the motion should seek to make them Associate Members, not Full Members. Others opposing the motion said SCC officers have honorary RNR status and are not commissioned as such, and that cadets are sponsored by the MOD, not part of it; that the motion would be “a step in the wrong direction”; and that such officers and senior rates are not necessarily military, nor veterans. A proposed **amendment** to cover Sea Scouts as well was **rejected**.

The original motion was also **defeated** in a vote.

(Break for lunch 1220 to 1330)

Motion 4 (Nottingham Branch):

That the Trustees of the Royal Naval Association investigate the abandonment of the system of voluntary membership financial donations which appears not to be working successfully and revert to a system of membership subscriptions. The amount of the subscription, to be proposed by the Trustees and to be approved by delegates at a conference. The Trustees to investigate the proposal and report back at the next RNA Conference.

S/M Tom Rotherham (Nottingham) proposed the motion, saying that while going subscription-free had increased membership, donations in lieu of membership subs had fallen per member of the RNA from £4.56 in 2020-21 to £3.20 per member by the end of 2023, and that it would put the RNA in a precarious position if the RNRMC, which underwrites the financial costs of the RNA, decided to pull out.

The motion was seconded by S/M Andrew Hamilton (Mansfield), who said he would like to see the RNA run as a completely independent financial organisation, which would not be possible without subscriptions. Those opposing the motion cited fears that membership would be adversely affected, while the GS assured delegates there was no five-year timeframe, and that the RNRMC sees the RNA as a success story; the RNRMC gives the RNA £147,000 this year to cover the income formerly raised by subs. NP reiterated that there was no financial ‘cliff edge’.

When asked if the RNA could do without the RNRMC, GS said they provided more than just £147,000 – there was ‘back room’ support for finance, and also support for investments and communications, so independence would be a much bigger undertaking than just replacing a sum of money. He also asked why the RNA would want to be totally independent, when the RNRMC regards the Association as the membership organisation of the Royal Navy.

The motion was **defeated** by a large majority.

Motion 5 (Crosby)

That the Royal Naval Association discontinues its membership of the International Maritime Confederation, with effect from the expiry of the Royal Naval Association's Presidency of the organisation which will take place at the 2025 International Maritime Confederation Executive Committee, the date of which in 2025 is to be confirmed.

S/M John Arnold (Crosby) proposed the motion, saying the RNA had been a member of the IMC for many years and, although the annual fee is not a lot, he asked what the RNA gained from membership other than an annual meeting of presidents (for which he had never seen minutes) and an annual youth sailing camp. He added it would seem the IMC is moribund.

S/M Steve Caulfield (Pendleton) seconded the motion, stating that in discussions at his branch the IMC appeared an enigma, as it was not apparent how much money was spent on it and for what.

GS explained that the IMC was a "sort of NATO of RNAs across Europe" with eight countries involved – UK, France, Germany, Belgium, Croatia, Bulgaria, Italy and landlocked Austria, the last being an historical link with the former Austro-Hungarian empire and navy. GS said the representatives gathered to discuss common issues and to share ideas, such as over how to improve membership, as their problems are not dissimilar to ours. One output is the sailing camps, which were disrupted by Covid, but which helps young people from across Europe to meet each other and create a network of friends that can endure into their future careers. This year, to make sure the opportunity goes to the right children, the Naval Children's Charity is selecting the candidates for the camp at the Royal Hospital School in Suffolk. GS said membership for this year was 500 Euros.

Delegates who opposed the motion cited the need for international understanding and the benefits of comradeship across Europe, with one shipmate dubbing the IMC a "brilliant organisation" that builds bridges; one delegate asked if a twinning programme was possible and another suggested the IMC could be expanded with more members.

S/M Arnold said he was content that if the motion failed, everyone had won as delegates now knew more about the IMC and its potential.

The motion was **defeated** by a large majority.

NP said he noted the need to report back to shipmates on IMC activities, and assured delegates if it no longer provided value for money he would act accordingly. He added that Sweden is in the process of joining, and more like-minded nations were coming together.

Any Other Business

S/M Keith Ridley (NCM Area 6) stated that Lt Col Carl Meyer's orthopaedic surgery service for veterans who come from outside his own Oswestry Health Board may finish by the end of this year. Shropshire funded the gap to allow the service to be offered to veterans outside of Oswestry, but can no longer do so. S/M Ridley said there are petitions supporting the service, and urged shipmates to sign where they can in order to continue the service for veterans from outside the Shropshire area.

NP said that another RNA shipmate who was in the King's Birthday Honours list was WO1 Claire Robson, who received the Meritorious Service Medal; NP said she was "hugely deserving" of the honour, and that "we are all collectively absolutely delighted" that she received it.

GS reminded delegates about the Fireside Chats series on Monday evenings, which – along with Wrexham branch's Saturday evening online Tot Time, which is still in operation – began during lockdown as a means of bringing shipmates together while physically isolated. As the pandemic eased there were plans to end the series, but a housebound shipmate from Cornwall persuaded Central Office to keep it going for the sake of the comradeship it fosters. GS said numbers were falling, and urged shipmates to join in – he assured them that the subjects are interesting, and the talks (generally 40 minutes with 20 minutes for questions and answers afterwards) are well worth trying.

18. RNA Central Charities Fund Conference Raffle Draw

1st Prize (£500): Ticket Number 00756 – S/M Eddie Andrews (Torpoint & Rame Branch)

2nd Prize (£300): Ticket Number 06019 – S/M Linda Davies (Llanelli Branch)

3rd Prize (£200): Ticket Number 04641 – S/M Keith Geddes (Eastbourne Branch)

[Following Conference weekend, Central Office reported that the raffle raised £1,052 profit after the above prizes were paid out, all for the RNA Central Charities Fund.]

19. Closure of Conference

Following the playing of the National Anthem and the Welsh Anthem, the National Standard was marched off.

Conference closed at 1445.