

Bob Walton

by his granddaughter, Tina Kelly

Bob (Albert Edmund) Walton was born in 1915 just around the corner from Victoria Coach Station in central London. He was a city boy, growing up in the very heart of the capital. An early memory was of being nearly run over by a chauffeur driven car carrying none other than King George V and Queen Mary.

Bob's first job after leaving school was at the Royal Dental Hospital where he was required to take care of monkeys which were used in dental experiments. He disliked this so much that he quickly left, and instead took an apprenticeship with British Acoustic Films (BAF). I am not sure of the exact year when he joined BAF, so do not know if he worked at their premises in Argyll Street, London, but he certainly worked at their factory in Woodger Road, Shepherd's Bush, West London. The job was perfect for Bob - his father was a lithographical printer, and the family were keen amateur photographers who took early family photos with a homemade pinhole camera, developing them at home.

In the late 1930s Bob met and fell in love with Betty, who had come to London from Wales to find work, and in common with many young couples at the time they got married quickly when war broke out. During the Blitz of 1940 their home was bombed and completely destroyed. They lost almost everything, only managing to salvage a few possessions. Betty went back to her family in South Wales, but Bob had to stay in London because of his job. He lived in a bomb shelter on a platform in the underground as many homeless Londoners did at the time.

Later that same year BAF moved their operation from London to the relative safety of the countryside, acquiring the old Wintle's brewery building in Mitcheldean. At the time BAF were still producing projectors, which were used in part to entertain the troops.

Bob found lodgings for himself and Betty with a farmer and his wife in Hope Mansell, a hamlet between Mitcheldean and Ross. The move was a shock for a couple used to the amenities of central London. When they first arrived in Hope Mansell they had to walk several miles from the main road to their new home. After a while Betty got tired, sat on her suitcase, and told Bob that he would have to get a taxi! However they soon settled into country life, helping with milking and fruit picking. There was no running water at the farm, so Bob used his technical skills to install a pump.

In 1942 representatives from the army visited BAF's factory in Mitcheldean looking for people with engineering skills who would volunteer to form a new unit - the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME). Bob was a precision fitter and joined up as a private. Betty returned to her family in Wales. By the end of the War Bob had been promoted to sergeant. He was offered further promotion to commissioned officer rank if he would stay in the army after the war. Bob was keen, but Betty had had enough of living apart and wanted him home, so he returned to his old job with BAF.

Initially Bob and Betty moved into a prefabricated bungalow in the village of Pontshill not far from Hope Mansell. BAF helped to pay for some council houses to be built in Eastern Avenue, Mitcheldean on condition that their employees would be the first tenants. Bob and Betty moved into number 4 with their daughter, Veronica, in 1947.

BAF became part of the Rank Organisation in 1948, and continued to make cine projectors and cameras. Bob worked in the machine shop. By the mid 1950s he was foreman of the drilling section alongside Jock Currie, who was foreman of the milling section and Tommy Knight who was foreman of the hobbing section. All three of them had originally worked for BAF in London - Bob and Tommy Knight were good friends who used to go cycling together all over the south-east of England before the War. Harry Saunders was in overall charge as manager of the entire

machine shop, and when he retired Bob became the manager. In the late 1950s or early 1960s Bob and a few colleagues attended a conference in Bristol. Unfortunately, I do not know what the conference was about - it may have been some sort of management training.

Bob became a founder member of the Long Service Association and attended its inaugural dinner at the Bradley Court Hotel in 1953. In 1956 he took over as Treasurer, a position which he was to hold for ten years. He particularly enjoyed the 3rd Annual Dinner in 1956, which was attended by one of the Rank Starlets, the actor Beverley Brooks, whose nickname was 'Bubbles' and who later married the newspaper magnate, Lord Rothermere. Bob got her to autograph his menu, and had his photo taken with her. In 1964 Bob completed 25 years service and was given his award by John Davis, the Chairman of the Rank Organisation - a framed certificate, silver cigarette box and gold tie pin. In 1971 he was one of the guests at the party to celebrate Fred Wickstead's appointment as Vice President of Manufacturing and Logistics, a promotion which required the latter to move to the US.

By the time that Bob retired in 1975 he had clocked up 36 years with BAF and its successor companies. Ranks had become a family affair - Betty worked on final inspection for 21 years, Bob and Betty's daughter, Veronica, worked for a few years in production control, and her husband, Roland Burford, also worked at Ranks variously as an operator on the drilling section of the machine shop and in Polish and Plating.

Bob and Betty continued to be enthusiastic members of the Long Service Association until their deaths in the 1990s.



Bob (third from left at back) with other BAF employees at Woodger Road in 1939/40.



BAF children's Christmas party 1949
Above - Bob's daughter, Veronica, 4th row from back far right
Below - Veronica 3rd row from left at front



BAF/Ranks children's Christmas parties early 1950s

Top - Veronica 2nd right

Middle - Veronica 2nd row from right, 3rd right

Bottom - Veronica back left

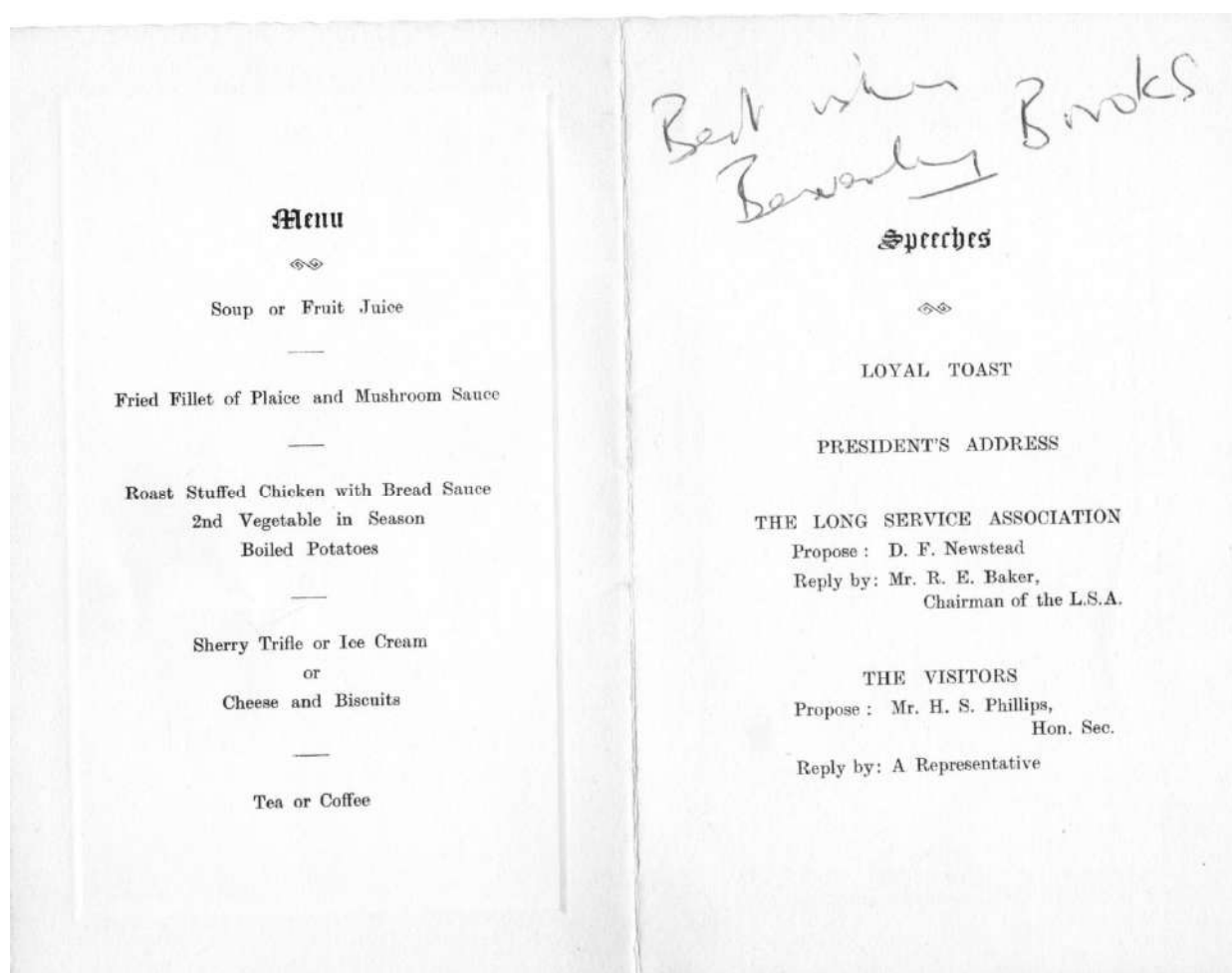


Long Service Association dinner at Bradley Court Hotel, Mitcheldean in 1950s

Front row L-R: Bob ?, Frank Sekinger, Bob Walton, Les Bell

Middle row L-R: Albert Palmer, Bob Thomas, Albert Wing, Les Tuffley

Back row L-R: Dick Paine, Reg Arnold, Arnold Gaylard, Bill Stern



LSA Menu 1956 autographed by Beverley Books



Bob, fifth from left (seated), at the Bristol conference.



A Management Team photo thought to be pre 1958

Bob is second from the right on the second row from the back



Bob (left) receiving his 25 year service awards from Sir John Davis (right) in 1964



Betty fifth from left



Bob, third from left seated at the table, at Fred Wickstead's leaving party in 1971.



Bob's son-in-law, Roland Burford, third from right c. early 1970s.



Betty with Bob Baker



Long Service Association dinner late 1980s or early 1990s
Bob and Betty 3rd and 4th from right



CERTIFICATE OF MERITORIOUS SERVICE

PRESENTED TO

Albert Edmund Walton

BY THE RANK ORGANISATION

IN RECOGNITION OF TWENTY-FIVE YEARS
LOYAL AND DISTINGUISHED SERVICE IN THE

Rank Mitcheldean Plant

AND AS A TOKEN OF APPRECIATION AND
GRATITUDE FOR DUTY WELL AND FAITHFULLY
CARRIED OUT

John Davis

CHAIRMAN