

A TRIBUTE TO HARRY BOWLER



Harry and Andre at a family wedding

In 1955, as a result of a drive to recruit staff from the UK for the Federal Department of Customs and Excise, Harry and I were amongst a number of us who had been successful in our applications through Rhodesia House in London which is where I met Harry for the first time. I was 17 years old and Harry had just turned 18. We were just young tackers!

Together with a whole lot of others, we were about to embark on the adventure of our lives. A twin-engine Viking (a bit smaller than a DC3) had been chartered to fly us to Salisbury and was waiting on the tarmac of one of London's airports, I cannot remember which. It was a typical October foggy London day and the start of four days of adventure.

The first day took us to Malta I can remember passing Paris, clearly at a fairly low altitude, as we could see the Eiffel Tower protruding up through the fog. We re-fueled in Marseilles eventually landing in Malta in the afternoon. We overnighted in the Phoenix Hotel in Valetta with enough time to explore the immediate surrounds including the famous harbour.

Day two saw us cross the Mediterranean, dropping off at Mersa Matruh in Libya to re-fuel. We saw our first camel there. Then on to Wadhi Halfa in the Sudan, on the Nile, where we were given rooms on a river boat drawn alongside the hotel grounds on the banks of the river. One of the most magic sights of our journey.

Day three saw us continue on our journey, refueling at Khartoum where I can remember the air filled with swirling kites all hawking insects in flight. We threw a few bits of bread into the air where they were immediately swooped upon by the birds. Another stop for re-fueling was Juba where, at that time, the main airport building consisted only of a thatched mud hut! Onward we went finally touching down at Entebbe in Uganda. Overnighing at a very grand hotel there, I cannot remember the name, which was a delight.

Then to day four, the final leg, which after re-fueling in Ndola we made it through to Salisbury where we had all been given temporary housing in some of the barrack rooms at the old airport at Mount Hampden. Smoggy old London was far behind and soon forgotten. Our adventure had started with a bang and it didn't stop there.

After a week at Head Office, Harry and I opted for Bulawayo, our first job had started. I worked with Harry there. We worked together at Beitbridge, back to Bulawayo again, then after a few years while I worked in Tunduma, Ndola and did short stretches in Lusaka, Abercorn and on the Congo border, we met and worked together again in Salisbury.

Harry was a great friend, highly intelligent and astute, always ready for fun and adventure. This brought us to exploring the Matopos Hills, motorbikes, side-cars, tramping and camping around Beitbridge, playing bok-bok in the Beitbridge pub, dogs, fishing episodes on the Limpopo, trying to out-run a very angry Hippo at Chirunda with a very small 13 h.p.outboard motor, catching an enormous Vundu on the Kafue/Zambesi confluence, which we nearly cut free because we thought we had hooked into another angry Hippo, and, not to forgot, some very memorable trout fishing episodes on the Mtenderere and Pungwe rivers in the Inyanga highlands.

But Harry's skills did not stop there. I can still remember, at Beitbridge, everyone being amazed at Harry's discovery of masses of smuggled biltong which had been packed in behind the headlights of a very large farm truck. This was a major problem for us at the time. South African farmers had bought vast properties on the Nuanetsi and other Lowveld river systems which were essentially shooting blocks. This posed an annual problem for us, as in each case when they returned there were attempts to export game products without a permit. Asked how Harry had managed to find this stuff, his reply was simply that he could smell it from behind the head lamps! Harry went on to do some fine work in Customs, particularly in Investigations.

Harry was my best man at our wedding, and for a little while our families and kids grew up together doing trips up to Inyanga and other places. Then life took us into different directions.

Harry will be greatly missed and my condolences go to Patricia, his sister Christine and to Moonyeen and Harry's three boys, Keith, Sean and Roy and to his very many friends, many of whom have already passed away.

I will miss you dear friend, but shall retain those wonderful memories for the rest of my life. Rest in peace Harry!

Andre



*Andre's last day in Customs
Dave Collis, Jean Guernier, Harry Bowler, Patricia Bowler, Andre Guernier and
Trish Collis*