



# FRIENDS OF LOCHNAGAR

SPRING NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2017

No. 69

## A WARM WELCOME TO ALL THE FRIENDS

First, a big thank-you to Vice-Chairman Iain Fry who has kindly shared the tasks in writing this 'double' Spring Newsletter. As many of you know Iain increasingly does a huge and vital amount of daily behind the scenes work, as well as often doing the driving on our regular trips to Lochnagar or to official meetings etc. Iain is also behind much of the work for the 20 or so new 'Labyrinth' information panels to be erected in the Spring. We are ever-grateful too for the generous support of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in this project. (See page 2).

It is only thanks to the flexible nature of Iain's 'day-job' that the growing nature of running Lochnagar and the Friends rests on his, and the shoulders of other key, devoted volunteers. As someone remarked a while back, if we were running a commercial 'tourist' enterprise with up to a quarter of a million people visiting a year we would have a full-time staff of at least half a dozen or more. Therefore it is humbling to be reminded how many hundreds of hours of dedicated effort and expertise goes into supporting Lochnagar and making it one of the most visited and appreciated sites, not only on the Somme but throughout France and beyond.

The work of clearing undergrowth (whilst always caring for established trees and wildlife) continues, with two aims. One to make the whole site safely accessible to visitors in all weathers and to gently reveal and protect the host of priceless original features of the 1st July battlefield by way of the exposed shell-holes and battle-scarred contours etc. The second aim is, with its commanding views and raised nature of the site above the surrounding fields, to dramatically highlight the single undisputable fact of the Somme battle – the daunting and unbelievably courageous task of covering such a distance, in such an exposed area, as well as having to advance in the face of devastating artillery and machine-gun fire by brave and resolute defenders.

As we know, there is always a delicate balance between retaining and enhancing the unique 'unspoilt' feel of Lochnagar and crucially keeping the weeds and undergrowth (and the pesky rabbits) under control.

Judging by the growing numbers of visitors and awareness in general, we are succeeding (thanks to you) and in doing so we are sending signals to the public that this place is special and is deeply loved and cared-for by those of us who are briefly its stewards, working to preserve its legacy for the next generation.

In the coming weeks the new Charity (the Lochnagar Crater Foundation) will come into being. It has taken well over a year and a half to finalise (and still awaiting its third application) due to the complexity of Lochnagar being on foreign soil and owned by a Trustee. We will get there in the end, hopefully before long. But what that will do, with its focus on remembrance, peace and reconciliation, is to

significantly help establish the Crater as an internationally recognized site. (There are ancillary benefits such as Gift Aid on all donations etc). Please note however, that this will not affect or alter (but hopefully support) the vital importance of the continuing role of the Friends in helping maintain and preserve Lochnagar, as well as organizing ceremonies etc.

I believe that Lochnagar can play, in the coming months and years an increasing role in highlighting the facts that where once there was unbelievably carnage, suffering and sacrifice between men and nations whose sole aim was the other's annihilation, has now become, in one generation, a place where reconciliation and fellowship between those same peoples is not only commemorated but celebrated.

Each of the Friends can play a growing and vital role of connecting with visitors and sharing with them not only information, but the stories of courage, comradeship and tragedy that took place there. As well as performing that most underrated of qualities – that of simply spending time listening to visitors and empathizing (as the Friends consistently do superbly well). It is always moving to gently engage with them and to hear their own stories of how the war impacted on them, their families and their communities. We know that these simple acts, in such a powerful, poignant and compassionate setting as Lochnagar, can continue to have a profound effect in helping heal the generational wounds of the Great War. Even more so, as so often happens, the visitors have travelled great distances to be there.

We are pleased also to report that our friendly and respectful relationship with the village (helped as always by David and Julie Thomson of No. 56 and Alison and Jon Haslock of Old Blighty) is being consolidated and we have warm and welcoming relationships with many, including the Mayor. But there is always more work to be done (possibly a combined exhibition in the Mairie in 2018?) so thoughts are always welcome.

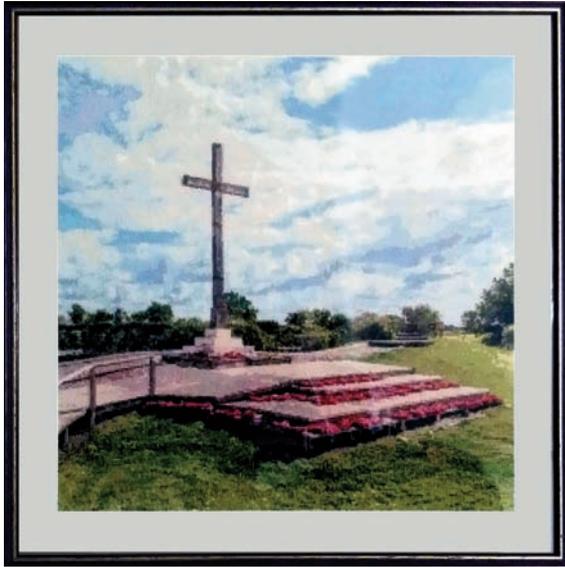
As indeed they are for any aspect of Lochnagar that you think is in need of addressing.

David, Vinny, Richard and David with the new  
'Memorial to the Valiant Women of All Nations'.



## THE NOTTINGHAM DINNER

It's hard to describe the wonderful feeling of once again arriving at the excellent Westminster Hotel and walking into the lounge and seeing so many good Friends there. And of course especially rewarding when, as there always are, we meet new Friends who, for the first time, have travelled up to Nottingham to spend time with us all.



Impeccably organised, as always, by Mick and Kaye Fellows the atmosphere is superb, the hospitality and food first-class and the convivial fellowship of so many dear people is very special. And this year it was made even more memorable by the presentation to myself of two remarkable gifts to mark this unique Centenary year. Sheila Roberts presented me with a spectacular work of art in the form of the Cross at the Crater lovingly recreated in cross-stitch – thousand upon thousand of them, each perfectly building up to make this most treasured of gifts. Thank you Sheila.

And equally spectacular was the second gift presented at the end of the meal which was one of Tim Roger's splendid



TOP: Sheila Roberts' wonderful cross-stitch Centenary gift. MIDDLE: Tim Rogers' beautiful wood-carving Centenary piece. ABOVE LEFT: In the stylish surroundings of the Westminster Hotel, Friends enjoy their dinner. ABOVE RIGHT: David Petch collects the Friend of the Year Award. Joint-winner, son David sadly was unable to attend.

wood-carvings. To see, like Sheila's the work that went into it is a very humbling tribute and a continual reminder what a priceless group of people the Friends are. Thank you both.

Another highlight of this outstanding evening was the presentation of our Annual Friend of the Year Award. As in all year's it was totally deserving, going to stalwart and much-valued Friends David Petch and son David. These two have worked with incredible dedication and have played a key role in getting the Crater looking as good as it is today. Well done, both.

And on that note of dedication beyond the call of duty, can I ask that if anyone has a few days to spare around April (exact dates from David on his email [incomebusy@aol.com](mailto:incomebusy@aol.com)). This is to help with the innovative new weed-killing project to spray the top slopes of the Crater using a machine that David is constructing as we speak. Inspired by local farmers in their fields it is being adapted especially for Lochnagar. If anyone could give David a hand that would be great, thanks.

This year the Nottingham weekend will be on the 28th October and all are welcome to this friendly event (booking form will be in our August Newsletter).

## THE LOCHNAGAR LABYRINTH AND SUPPORT FROM COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

We all know the Crater is far more than simply a hole in the ground. As well as being a huge scar in the landscape and symbol of the violent destructive power of war, it is also now a place of calm and tranquility, drawing in many Pilgrims and visitors where it affords an opportunity, should they wish, to reflect on the past and focus on the future.

For several years Richard has contemplated ways to enhance the positive experience folk take away with them after a visit. Some simply ask for more information about the Crater and the surrounding area, some talk of an almost supernatural atmosphere that permeates, whilst for others it acts as a catalyst to deeper thought.

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Just three of the Lochnagar Labyrinth panels to be erected later in the Spring.

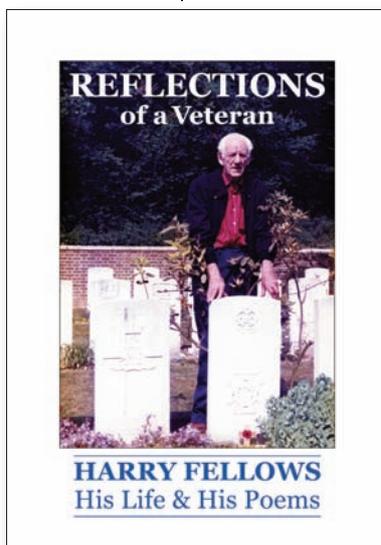
Over the last couple of years we have been thinking how we might best create something that takes these ideas and blends and enhances them as part of our message of Respect, Remembrance and Reconciliation. To this end, we have spent several months finalising what will become The Lochnagar Labyrinth, a pathway of panels, some overlooking the battlefield, with others nearer the walkway or at linked places around the Crater site. Why Lochnagar Labyrinth and not Lochnagar Maze you ask? Well, a labyrinth has only one route to its goal, whilst a maze has many alternatives. As such, we hope any visitor who follows the panels around the Crater will arrive at the end of a metaphorical journey having thought about what they have seen and read.

A casual conversation with a senior member of staff from Commonwealth War Graves Commission some three years ago proved hugely fortuitous. For they offered to fund and manufacture what we created. Since then we have had a number of meetings at their Maidenhead headquarters and despite a forced hiatus due to our commitments in planning for the 2016 Centenary Ceremony, the panels should be in production by the time you read this. We thank Andy Stillwell and Jonathan Barr at CWGC for their enthusiastic support and assistance with the project.

Over the next few months the panels will be installed and unveiled in time for 1st July 2017. *Iain Fry.*

### RE-PUBLICATION OF THE SUPERB HARRY FELLOWS' 'REFLECTIONS'

It is with great pleasure that we can announce that this gem of a book is being republished and will shortly be available. The original was lovingly created by Founding Friend George Heron, supported by son Mick Fellows, as a lasting tribute to this remarkable man, who we always consider to be the 'First Friend'. It is not only the story of Harry's fascinating life but contains a host of his unforgettably moving poems. Aptly named 'Reflections' these are increasingly valued as an impressive insight, not only into his experiences during the war but of his wisdom, compassion and legacy later in life. I thoroughly recommend it. There is a special offer for Friends of £6 per copy, which will include a 25 minute CD of Harry speaking. For copies, please contact George Heron direct on [heron4547@msn.com](mailto:heron4547@msn.com)



With the friendly and supportive Mayor, Christian Bernard.

### VOEUX DE MAIRE 2017

Iain Fry, Clive Gilbert and I were kindly invited to this charming and informal event held in early January in the La Boisselle Mairie each year and hosted by the welcoming Mayor, Christian Bernard. Technically, it is to welcome new villagers

and to update everyone with forthcoming news and events so it was a great honour for us all to be included. Friends Julie and David Thomson, who do marvellous liaison and local behind the scenes efforts for Lochnagar, and the village were there, and it really was a memorable evening.

### RENÉE DISBREY'S NEW ADDRESS

Renée is comfortably settled in her new home and I know would welcome a chat with Friends whether by phone or if you're in the area to drop in. Her contact details are:

Tel: 01494 670662 and address is Bury Lodge Care Home, Room 15, Penn Road, Knotty Green, Beaconsfield, Bucks HP9 2TN. Her email is [Neldisbrey9012@gmail.com](mailto:Neldisbrey9012@gmail.com)

### THE ANNUAL MAY BANK HOLIDAY WORKING WEEKEND

Those keen calendar-watchers amongst us will know the 2017 working weekend is fast approaching. This year it falls between Friday 26th and Monday 29th May, folk generally arriving in the late morning or midday but by no means to a strict timetable! As always, everyone is welcome at this most special gathering which provides such a wonderful opportunity to catch up with old Friends and get to know new ones. Each dedicated to preserving the Lochnagar Crater for now and for the future.

The working weekend has grown from strength to strength over recent years thanks to that selfless dedication shown by the Friends as a whole. So much has been achieved



and it is much appreciated by the huge numbers of Pilgrims and visitors who come. Access for those with impaired mobility is now possible thanks to the ramp, walkway and new wreath-laying area; greater appreciation for what the lads endured back in 1916 has been afforded by the clearing of huge swathes of undergrowth around the edge, and with the creation of battlefield vistas all around the site, in places giving as much as 270 degrees of view across the old British front lines.

This year it would be nice if we can further improve the cleared areas in the hope of encouraging more grass, which in turn will help to show the original 1916 ground and shell-holes which abound everywhere. A more detailed plan of what work seems necessary will be circulated at the beginning of May.

It must be emphasised that everyone has something to offer at the working weekend. It is most certainly not just about the strimming, hedge-clipping, or digging. The Crater is truly awe-inspiring and we always hope to make the experience for visitors and Pilgrims a positive one; a few friendly words often has a profound effect on their appreciation of the place. The warmth and generosity of spirit of the Friends is so often commented upon when folk reflect on their visit to Lochnagar Crater.

And don't forget that as a group, we usually have dinner at Le Poppy in La Boisselle on the Friday evening and then on the Sunday evening, as a wonderful finale to the weekend, a fabulous BBQ, so generously facilitated by David and Claire Disbrey at their Contalmaison farmhouse.

So please do come if you can, and be part of a really super bunch of people. *Iain Fry.*

### **MOTH-WATCH**

Please could we ask that any Friends who are over in the Spring keep an eye out on the hedge (especially on the inside edge) for the distinctive white silky nests of the Processionary Moth. You may recall the caterpillar hairs caused severe allergic reaction in many Friends during the Working Weekend. David Petch will bring his spray out during his imminent trip but if we can all be extra vigilant that would be very helpful. Thanks.

### **SAD PASSING OF A DEAR FRIEND**

I am sorry to inform you of the sad news that Bob Costick, a good Friend of Lochnagar has recent passed away. Our thoughts and condolences go out to devoted wife Colleen. Bob's ashes have been interred in his beloved

Bouzin court. A wise, gentle and ever-gracious man his presence will be sadly missed.

### **THE ANNUAL JULY 1ST DINNER AT THE HOTEL DE LA PAIX**

One of the highlights of the year is always getting together at the Hotel de la Paix on the evening of the 1st July. Of course, it's been a very long and often exhausting day but it's wonderful to relax in the convivial atmosphere of the Hotel. As you will know, it was always the HQ of the original 34th Division Officers' Club and is very special. The booking form is included with the Newsletter. And of course with the euro exchange rate it works out around 25 euros each for the first-class meal, including wine.



And the tradition continues that after the meal, around 11pm, a hardy group walk up to Becourt Wood Cemetery in tribute and memory of inspiring veteran Tom Easton. We have a very short and informal 'service' of reflection, poetry and music. It's a superb and very special end to the day and great to spend it with such dear Friends.

### **MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL PROCEDURE UPDATE**

Friends will have received a Membership Renewal Form in the last Newsletter No 68 back in September 2016. We hoped to streamline the task of updating the membership list for the Membership Secretary by creating a single date each year upon which all renewals would fall due, regardless of what date folk had joined. It was hoped this would coincide with Friend Lynn Felstead taking over the day-to-day running of the membership. Due to circumstances beyond all our control the transition has not yet fully taken place. Our Excel database guru, Friend Sue Riva, who so ably managed the final stages of the Centenary Ceremony ticketing process, is providing administrative help and will continue to offer technical support to us all.

I'm sure Friends will understand and bear with us as this process reaches fruition. We will set 31st March 2018 as the date for all renewals and will send reminders to everyone in February 2018.

It has been a very busy couple of years in the run-up to the 2016 Centenary and the myriad activities associated with planning and organising such a momentous event.

Rest assured, all memberships will remain active throughout this year regardless of when folk think their membership may be due. We will be creating a pro-rata joining fee for new members who join between April 2017 and March 2018 – this will bring all Friends into line with the 31st March 2018 renewal date.

I hope this all makes sense! If Friends have any questions please feel free to get in touch at:

[lochnagarmembership@outlook.com](mailto:lochnagarmembership@outlook.com) or  
[lochnagarcrater@gmail.com](mailto:lochnagarcrater@gmail.com)

*Iain Fry.*



**OUR SCHOOLS PRIZE GOES FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH**

The Lochnagar Competition received many entries during 2016, due to it being the centenary year. The quality was very good, even exceptionally good.

The majority were prose or poetry, plus pictures. Having so many entries, it became necessary for several judges to help choose the prize winners.

Additional prizes were awarded this year because of the high standard. Remarkable entries by two Isle of Man sisters, took first and second in the younger group, making their local radio and newspaper. All winners in the older group came from Manor House School, Surrey.

Handsome certificates, were awarded to individual winners and their schools: all were delighted with their prizes and certificates. *Frances and Mike Speakman.*

Sisters Aalish and Ophelia impressed judges with their writing skills.  
© Isle of Man Newspapers.

**FAREWELL TO DEAR FRIENDS ON THE SOMME**

With their wonderfully convivial and welcoming B&B at Combles, for over a decade Katie and Martin Pegler have been a vital part of the Friends network on the Somme. Whether it's solving a problem, offering support and laughter at times of pressure or just sitting down over a cup of tea they have become a much-loved part of many Friends' trips. However, they both go back much further with myself especially, being the best man at their wedding. So it is with great sadness that they are shortly to leave and move down to gloriously warm, beautiful, historic, peaceful Limousin for the next exciting chapter of their lives. Why they are doing it still remains a mystery.

They are the dearest and best-loved of friends and we shall miss them hugely but of course, wish them well. Their excellent B&B will continue however, in the capable and friendly hands of new owners Christine and Bryan Lightbody and we are sure many Friends will continue to stay there. The website will continue to be [www.orchardfarmsomme.com](http://www.orchardfarmsomme.com) New website contact details for Katie and Martin are [www.maisonvillebard.com](http://www.maisonvillebard.com)

**THE MEMORIAL PLAQUES**

Thanks again are due to Bob and Joy Podesta for their sterling work in coordinating and installing the wonderful Memorial Plaques. These dignified mementoes, often to loved ones or long lost relatives, are much appreciated by the many folk who sponsor them and by the Pilgrims and visitors who visit and read them – they all comment so positively. Thanks once again.

A post-script to this, Bob would be grateful for the names and information of five or ten women who served their country during the Great War, perhaps in roles other than nurses or VADs. We further want to emphasise that the home front was also a place of sacrifice with women serving as munitions workers, railway and bus workers and in roles such as postwomen etc. If possible, email ideas in the next couple of weeks to Bob at [lochnagarplaques@outlook.com](mailto:lochnagarplaques@outlook.com) *Iain Fry.*



## GRATEFUL ONGOING APPRECIATION FOR OUR OFFICIAL WEBSITE AND GOOGLEGROUP

Many people often say to me how excellent our website is – highly informative, easy to access and with every aspect of Lochnagar and the Friends represented. So thanks, as always to Clive Gilbert who with incredible dedication efficiently organizes, designs and updates it whenever needed, assisted when necessary by Peter Reed.

And thanks too to Iain Fry who continues to oversee the highly respected Friends' Googlegroup which helps keep us

all in touch. If you haven't joined already can I recommend it. Just contact Iain on [lochnagarcrater@gmail.com](mailto:lochnagarcrater@gmail.com) and he will organize it all.

## FURTHER THANKS TO OUR VALUED FRIENDS AT DTW1991

I am delighted to say that, for the first time in its history Lochnagar is now fully covered by comprehensive insurance, thanks to the generosity and specialist expertise of Dan Wright and the superb team at Lloyd's Underwriters DTW1991. Thanks to all for making this happen in such an impressively professional way.



CLOCKWISE: Assembling at Ovillers Military Cemetery, with Vin Felstead proudly carrying the Lochnagar Standard. At the Madelon, the 34th Division memorial. Village children sing at the Tyneside Seat. Claudie Llewellyn-Lejeune welcomes us all at the Glory Hole.



## ARMISTICE DAY ON THE SOMME

It must be said that the Armistice Day commemorations at Ovillers and La Boisselle are very special occasions for all who have the good fortune to attend. 2016 was no exception with many Friends having met for an enjoyable dinner the evening before at Corners Pub in Albert where final arrangements for the following day were set.

It is so encouraging that Armistice Day now engages the whole commune of Ovillers La Boisselle and that the number of villagers, Friends, and other visitors who take part seems to grow steadily. Everyone met at the French War Memorial in the centre of Ovillers where all were greeted by Le Maire,

M. Christian Bernard. The weather was cold and bright and sunny as we set off to process the cemeteries and memorials before moving across to La Boisselle to pay our respects there also. At each location a group of schoolchildren from the commune read a short passage as the gerbes and wreaths were laid. These occasions are always so moving especially when accompanied by our wonderful pipers, and this year was no exception. Claudie Llewellyn-Lejeune welcomed everyone as we took a short detour through the Glory Hole (L'Îlot) on our way to the Tyneside Seat.

The traditional Vin D'Honneur at la Salle de Polyvantes took place before our own acts of remembrance at the Crater.



BOTTOM LEFT CLOCKWISE: Ceremony: our superb translator (and troubleshooter) Rebecca Prissette during the Welcome. Exhortations by the Mayor, Marcel Gouw & David Disbrey. Sue Robinson and her Nurses prepare for the unveiling, and the unveiling Ceremony.

Brittany. They joined us in laying a wreath and posy at the memorial stone there. Overall, a rewarding day travelling around with such good people; I would highly recommend it. *Iain Fry.*

### OUR HQ ON THE SOMME – OLD BLIGHTY

Appreciation as always to Alison and Jon for their continued support and excellent hospitality. We look forward to many more wonderful lunches sat round the table with you all. Priceless.

### YET AGAIN, MUCH-APPRECIATED DONATIONS FROM ANGLIA TOURS AND OUR TOUR FRIENDS

Thanks as always to the marvellous Anglia Tours who this year have contributed significant sums to fund the purchase of new equipment etc. And thanks as well of course to stalwart Friends Vic Piuk, Andy Thompson, and Ian Alexander who generously go out of their way to support us with collections on their tour coaches.

### FRIENDS' DINNERS AT THE POPPY

As many will know a much anticipated part of our Working Weekend and our 1st July visits are our enjoyable dinners at the Poppy Restaurant. Originally organised by dear Friend Les Disbrey, this tradition is now being most efficiently carried on by David.

If you wish to book for either, and for details please contact him on [david.disbrey@btinternet.com](mailto:david.disbrey@btinternet.com)

A very warm welcome was extended to all and the break provided an opportunity to sit for a while and chat, mutual friendship helping to overcome any language barrier!

This year as ever, a good number of folk then made their way up to the Crater. Vinny Felstead bore the Lochnagar standard and was joined by other standard bearers from the Commune. A school coach arrived just before the start and their tour leader was immensely grateful that the group of 50 or so young people could attend. Wreaths and gerbes were again laid, and prayers were spoken by our wonderful Chaplain John Pressdee. The ceremony was opened with the blowing of whistles and poppy petals were offered to everyone at the end, these being scattered as an emotive finale to the ceremony.

This year was extra-special as the new granite 'Memorial to the Valiant Women of All Nations', situated opposite the Nurses' Bench, was unveiled and dedicated with Sue Robinson and Suzanna Green from Wenches in Trenches both attending. Their organisation fund-raised for this very worthy memorial, with Vinny doing a superb job coordinating its manufacture and installation on site.

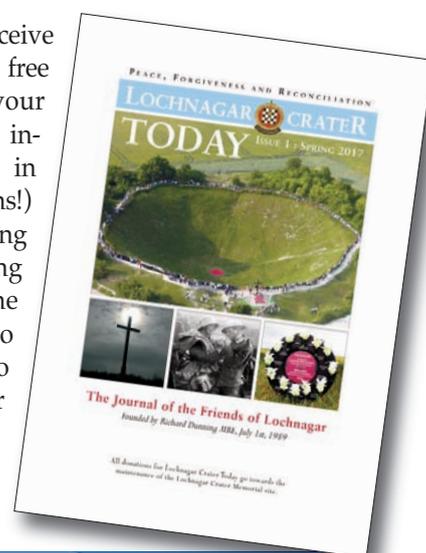
Folk then travelled over to Mametz Wood for a short ceremony at the headstone of 'First Friend' Harry Fellows. Those who have attended will know this is always very moving in truly beautiful surroundings. Summer or winter, Mametz Wood is very special.

We ended our day at the German Cemetery in Fricourt where by chance we met a group of French travellers from

**WELCOME TO  
THE BRILLIANT NEW MAGAZINE –  
LOCHNAGAR CRATER TODAY.  
AND IT'S FREE!**

As you will have seen, included in with your Newsletter is the first edition of our new journal. This is of course, not the successor to New Chequers – that stopped with George Harwood's sad passing. But Editor Rob Kirk, ably assisted by designer/artworker Michael Gilbert has created a superb new magazine that captures not only the history and heritage of Lochnagar but also reflects the fascinating and diverse knowledge and interests of the Friends. That said, Rob is anxious to receive articles, photographs, poems, comments or stories relating both to Lochnagar and its role in the Great War, from 1916 right up to the present day.

Each Friend will receive two a year, completely free and included in your membership. We also intend to sell (or offer in exchange for donations!) copies on our fundraising table at the working weekend and also the end of June, prior to the Ceremony. Cost to visitors will be £3 or 4 euros. So congratulations to both on a magnificent effort.



**AND FINALLY. A WORD ABOUT YOU-KNOW-WHAT**

Receiving the MBE was, I have to say, a surprising and thoroughly pleasurable experience (and speaking as a cynical old adman!). So profound thanks to Clive, Iain, Martin, Tim and all the others who helped make it happen. Three weeks ago I went to the Palace for the Investiture with son Jack, his partner Kit and granddaughter Leila. I was so impressed, not just with the incredible professionalism but just how kind and courteous everyone was. Prince Charles did it and he too was very charming. I managed to ask him (in my minute's chat) when he was going to re-publish his book – The old Man of Lochnagar and he actually laughed and blushed. Sweet really. He had been well briefed and knew of the Crater. After photos in the courtyard we went up to Chinatown for a meal.



Richard and a very proud  
Granddaughter, Leila.

One funny thing happened this week which I would like to share. I had to go for an eye scan at a clinic in Guildford and afterwards I was sorting the paperwork etc with the two ladies in the accounts office there, both on computers. At the end of it I said 'This is a bit embarrassing but I have to tell you. I recently got the MBE and I have been told that it has to be included on all 'official' correspondence.' One of the women looked up and said 'Sorry I didn't catch that' and the other one said 'Mr Dunning is just telling us that has recently been diagnosed with MBE and we should put it on our records.'

And, as always can I express my appreciation for all your support and dedication that continues to help Lochnagar go from strength to strength. Thanks all.

God bless and I look forward to meeting up during 2017 and beyond.

Richard

Richard Dunning, Little Down, Hog's Back, Seale, Farnham, Surrey GU10 1HD.  
Telephone: 01483 810651. Email: [richard.dunning@uwclub.net](mailto:richard.dunning@uwclub.net)