



Chairman - Mr Keith Andrews, Treasurer - Mrs Margaret Walton, Secretary - Mrs Barbara James  
Committee Members - Ms Angela Lane, Mrs Annette Hughes, Rowford Bowditch, Anthony Truett,  
Richard Gibb

## **BAFEPOW NEWS SHEET FOR FEBRUARY 2026**

### **THE 83RD ANNIVERSARY OF THE FALL OF SINGAPORE**

As we approach this anniversary which is probably the one that receives the most attention for many of us as the start of our father's capture and imprisonment, it is worth remembering that, although the war in Europe had been ongoing since 1939, the war against Japan had actually commenced on 08/12/41 and Hong Kong had fallen on Christmas Day after much loss of lives of both the armed forces and the local populations – Japan had begun its invasion of China in 1937! Churchill was still confident that Singapore was still impregnable and the requests for more equipment and armaments were being denied – the Japanese were still being considered by him as 'silly little bandy-legged yellow men in glasses' who would, if they dared, attack by sea and we were ready for them! How he still believed this after the Japanese progression through China, the attack on Pearl Harbour and the capture of Hong Kong is beyond belief but his sights were set on the battles that were going on in North Africa! Following heavy aerial bombardments on Singapore that had commenced on 08/12/41, the overland invasions started on the southern trajectory on 08/02/42 as the Japanese simultaneously landed in Malaya (Myanmar) and Siam (Thailand). Using the 'blitzkrieg' style of invasions that had proved so successful, they began in earnest to make rapid progress through the jungles and after fierce fighting, Percival finally surrendered on 15/02/42 and the Japanese continued their progress rapidly across Indonesia, the Philippines and the Dutch and French East Indies in the following few days and weeks. And so the horror began for the troops, the internees, the unfortunate local populations and, a little later on, for the Romusha. Within a few weeks the whole region was under Japanese domination and for us who are not only members of BAFEPOW and FEPOW descendants/friends, the history that we learn about together began to unfold. The main frustration that we all share is the lack of public awareness in general that WWII did not only happen in Europe and this was illustrated during our first meeting of 2026 when a young lady from the Holiday Inn got chatting to Martin who brought her over to chat to us as she wanted to know why we came to the Inn twice a month. Her name is Ruth and we made her very welcome and we all explained our FEPOW connections etc and I asked her if she knew that Britain had been at war with Japan. "No, they didn't teach us about that at school!" she said, as I had anticipated. I am now in touch with Ruth and she hopes to pop in and chat with us again. The good news is that the government are proposing changes to the schools' curriculum to include this part of WWII history for the future so our children will learn about it. This is hopefully one of good things that has arisen from last year's VJ80 commemorations and this certainly came across at the reception at Windsor Castle on Armistice Day 2025 where both Prince Andrew and the King's Equerry said that the King is very interested in ensuring that VJ Day receives as much coverage as VE Day does – we know that it should and we will keep on doing our best to keep the momentum going – To Remember Them Is to Honour Them!

### **MEMORIAL SERVICE IN HONOUR OF CAROL COOPER AT WYMONDHAM FEPOW CHURCH**

As included in last month's news sheet's Roll of Honour, Carol Cooper very sadly passed away in November, 2025. As you will know, it was the discovery that a FEPOW diary had been sold at an auction

and it had belonged to a L/Cpl William Smith who had died some years earlier while working on the Thai/Burma Railroad. Carol had been unaware of the diary's existence but she was determined to find the buyer and to get it back. The new owner refused to part with it and it was placed temporarily at the Royal Norfolk Regimental Museum in Norwich. The museum had a copy of the diary transcribed which showed it to be handwritten and it covered the date that William had left for the Far East on 28/10/41 and the last entry was on 08/12/1943 shortly before his death from malaria, cardiac beri-beri, malnutrition and diphtheria. After Carol was involved in a documentary made by the BBC which took Carol to Thailand to follow in her father's footsteps, she became determined to establish a permanent memorial to men like her father who had died in the Far East. With the interest arising from this, Carol and 25 others established a group called 'COFEPOW' which became a registered charity a year later and so began the work to establish the FEPOW Hut and the various monuments relating to the Far East and FEPOW that are within the FEPOW Grove alongside others that commemorate the Burma Star Organisation and the Chindits. Much is owed to Carol, her husband and a very supportive group of her fellow FEPOW descendants from the Norfolk area and we all very much appreciate what they achieved.

COFEPOW is holding the memorial service at the FEPOW Church in Wymondham on Sunday, February 15<sup>th</sup> at one o'clock. It will last for an hour after which COFEPOW will be providing light refreshments. This memorial is open to all COFEPOW members who will need to contact Chris Wills at:- [events@cofepow.org](mailto:events@cofepow.org) or by phone on 0121 244 7263. The church only holds about 200 people and those attending will be presented with a Special Entry Certificate for anyone attending who has a FEPOW relative.

#### INTERESTING NEWS ARTICLE FROM THE DAILY MAIL ON 03/12/2025



At our first meeting of 2026, Angela gave me the above recent cutting from the Daily Mail and it certainly reminded me of my own Dad and the set of false teeth that he was 'very attached to'. Like so many of the FEPOWs Dad had received a number of blows to his face from Japanese/Korean guards with the butt of their rifle for some trivial offense such not bowing low enough to them or not working fast enough. Along with the lack of toothbrushes/toothpaste/tin with a block of solid tooth cleaner like Eucryl many POWs had developed severe tooth decay and oral problems and my Dad certainly had suffered. As both of my parents had false teeth, I never gave much thought while growing up as to why this was. However, I was in my thirties and Mom and Dad were about to go abroad for a holiday and a few months before going, Mom started nagging him to get a new set of dentures and that was when I discovered that the set he wore had been made for him either on his way home from the Far East or on his return and he had never had any problems with them and would have continued to wear them for a good few years more, probably. Mom prevailed and in the end he did give in and a new set was duly made for him. However, I do remember that the old set stayed safely in the bathroom airing cupboard and he possibly was still emotionally attached to them. Reading this newspaper clipping reminded me of this and also of the letter that I have that he sent to his Mom and Dad informing them of his return on the Orduna at Liverpool on 19/10/45 and that he would arrive home by train a few days later. He asked them not to meet him as he would be too emotional and also they might be upset as he had marks on his face – little did he know that his dear Mother had passed away two years previously and

he would return home to be told this by his aunt who was waiting for him to tell him. The old set did, however, remained in the bathroom cabinet almost as if he just couldn't part with them! It's strange how a newspaper clipping like this can trigger memories like this about my Dad's 'gnashers' as they were known as and I would be interested to hear from you if you have similar things that bring back particular memories.

#### **REMINDER OF THE HMS EXETER SERVICE AND GATHERING**

Just a reminder about the above remembrance service and if you are interested in attending, please let Tom know in advance. He can also tell you more about the lunch afterwards and supply the details:- The wreath-laying service will take place at the HMS Exeter Window in the North Chapel of Exeter Cathedral at 11am on Saturday 28th February 2026. If you aren't able to go but are interested in watching the service, it will be relayed by video and also a recording will be available.

The window is dedicated to those that didn't come home, we have come to include those that came home but have suffered and passed since.

Contact details:-Tom Jowett - email :- tomjowett54@gmail.com phone no :- 07802-182710

#### **SPECIAL BOOK LAUNCH AT THE IWM NORTH IN APRIL**

Some time ago our fellow member, Ray Withnall, sent an article for inclusion in the February News Sheet back in 2023 and it contained exciting news about his research for a book that he was intending to write about the 'Tom Boardman's Ukelele' which is on display in the IWM North in Manchester where he is a volunteer. The display cases at the museum are rarely opened so that the objects on display are protected in a sealed environment to protect them from environmental degradation or attack from insect/fungal infestation. However the museum archivists had agreed to the FEPOW showcase being opened just once so that an in depth investigation into how Tom had constructed his ukelele and what he had used. This involved the use of an endoscope to enable the close examination of the interior of the ukelele. The findings of this examination and the story of it's construction along with Tom's own story of his time as a FEPOW have now been told by Ray in his forthcoming book 'The Ukelele Man' which he has written in co-operation with Tom's son, Ron Boardman. The book is available to pre-order from Pen and Sword at the pre-launch price of £17.60 plus post and packaging – it will cost £22.00 after release. Having read Ray's other books, I can say with confidence that it will be an interesting and well written read. There will be a 'Meet The Authors' Day' at the IWM North on Saturday, 4<sup>th</sup> April 2026 where both Tom and Ron will present to chat with folk about Tom, his ukelele and his FEPOW experiences.

#### **WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN READING LATELY?**

For those of us who come to the second of the monthlyBAFEPOW meetings – the discussion group – one of the really good aspects of this meeting is the regular talk about the books we are reading or a subject we want to learn more about and one of us will suggest a book to read or so often Keith will say that he's got a copy and he'll bring it along next time. So many of us have benefitted from this exchange of books and so, while I'm on the subject of books and also our author member, Ray in the previous item, I'll continue on this subject. Ray has been researching the life of Norman Coulson for another book that is in the pipeline and he contacted me to see if I had read a book about Bishop Leonard Wilson that he had come across during his research. It is called 'Bishop Leonard Wilson – Confessor for the Faith' by Roy McKay and I managed to obtain a rather battered ancient copy from Abe books. It only cost me a £1 with £4.95 postage but it was worth it. There wasn't much mention of the FEPOWs but there was mention of the Double Tenth incident and his torture by the Kempetai. The book is a biography about the Bishop's life and so I was a little disappointed as I did think it would include more about his involvement in BAFEPOW while he was the Bishop of Birmingham but it did give a good insight into how he viewed his belief in Christianity, how his time under Japanese captivity had perhaps helped shape his interpretation of doctrines and how he was perhaps well ahead of his time when you see how much has changed since he was a bishop and speaking out on various topics during C of E conclaves, especially about the ordination of women.

Another book that I managed to finish as I had taken a break while VJ80 events etc were taking up quite a bit of time was Liz Carter's 'My Father's Book'. This book has a special interest for our group as Liz's father and his family are Birmingham people so there is an added attraction for reading it to see if there is a mention of anyone linked to BAFEPOW. I do recommend you to read this book – it is beautifully presented and it is good to see how Liz's mother is affected by her separation from her

husband so soon after they were married. Two things I found of additional interest is firstly the existence of a Birmingham group that I hadn't come across before – The Birmingham Prisoners of War Relatives Association and in the book it shows a letter that was sent to Liz's mother in September 1945. The group was situated at 72, Newhall Street and the letter says that there is the hope that repatriated FEPOW may join a new group to be known as 'The Birmingham and District Prisoners of War Association and it says that possibly, Tom Orton, Liz's father, might like to join. It doesn't state whether this group is only for FEPOW so it might have been for all POWs. I wonder if it did get started or if the FEPOW just established their own group as they were repatriated quite some time after European POWs and their experiences were so very, very different. The other item of particular interest is the picture of an item which is headed as 'A Press-Cutting From A Birmingham Local Newspaper. It shows pictures of twenty Birmingham FEPOW who are 'Glad to be free again'. Tom is number seven but then FEPOW number 12 is Les Stubbs, a long time member of BAFEPOW and he served on the committee – his wife, Pam Stubbs was also on the committee and was made president of the group at one time. Les wrote books about Java under the Japanese with Pam and, after his death, she completed the third and final one. The three books are divided into the Navy, Army and Air Force and contain the names of those who were captured and died and have been invaluable for research. 'The Real Tenko' – now this book has been on my Kindle awaiting me to finally download it and set to reading it. I'm not very far through it as I thought I knew what it was going to tell me about and how wrong was I!? It isn't the story of the BBC programme 'Tenko' and the reality of the womens' camps - well not so far it isn't but I have only read 80 pages – it begins with the invasion of and capture of Hong Kong after the Japanese crossed over from their invasion and desolation of the east side of China - Shanghai, Nanking and that part of China which began in 1937. This book so far has been one of the hardest reads I have undertaken and I have read some pretty awful tales of murder, rape, deprivation and cruelty and I thought I was, perhaps, hardened and accustomed to the horrific treatment of prisoners as I have read so many accounts of barbaric incidents. I also thought that I knew about the Fall of Hong Kong but I guess I only knew the basics i.e. what date was the invasion, who were the troops and the volunteer forces who were defending the island and, of course, the fact that Hong Kong fell on Christmas Day 1941. I don't think I had realised that it fell as the result of our surrender – how did I miss that? – probably because we only tend to hear that the surrender by Percival is always of the utmost importance as Churchill ordered him to fight to the last man but Churchill also ordered this for Hong Kong as well and their requests for reinforcements and fresh supplies of equipment and ammunition were denied.

We are so lucky to have such a close and friendly group with so many varied links to different areas that their FEPOW was held in and so much knowledge about it all. The books that we recommend/share are a bit like our own library and without all of this I would have not learnt so much or met such lovely people – but, above all, we do our best to ensure that they are remembered, their experiences are shared and they are honoured.

#### **LET THE BAFEPOW COMMITTEE KNOW WHAT YOU WANT PLANNED FOR 2026**

It won't be long before we, your elected committee meet up to decide what we might do in 2026 as an association. This will include the usual planning for our AGM and the Annual Christmas lunch in December. It has been a while since we had a trip and it would be good to have your feedback about us planning one for this year. We all seemed to very much enjoy our last one which was a visit to the NMA and it included a ride on the land train tour and a meal together. This could be well worthwhile doing again or, as suggested by our committee member, Richard, we could visit Bletchley Park as they were very involved in the surveillance of the Japanese communications although we hear mostly about their work on the German Enigma machine. We could arrange with the museum to have a tour together which concentrated on the Japanese and we could travel together by train as there is a railway station just by the museum.

Please let me have your suggestions, your queries and any relevant feedback about anything you would like the committee to discuss – my contact details are on the last page of this news sheet.

## **HOLOCAUST DAY 2026**

Every year on January 27<sup>th</sup> we in the UK join with other nations to mark Holocaust Day and remember the tragic and horrendous murder and maltreatment of millions of Jewish people by Hitler and the Nazis as part of their plans to exterminate them.

With the awful events in 2025 in Israel and the Gaza Strip and the increase in anti-semitism I still feel it matters that as a group that is committed to remembrance that we acknowledge the oversight that is the complete ignorance of the other holocaust of WWII which I have referred to on page 4. In the past, the MPs for my own constituency (Northfield – Birmingham) have all referred to Holocaust Day in their Facebook posts and have received a reply with a rebuke from myself for omitting the second Holocaust committed by the Japanese against the Chinese from 1937 onwards which should receive equal recognition as an act of genocide.

There was coverage of this on the news on the radio and television and many comments on social media with many commenting that the Romany people and the handicapped people that were also killed should have been also mentioned and I took the opportunity to mention the '2nd Holocaust' that was committed by the Japanese against the Chinese from 1937 onwards.

## **WELFARE GRANTS FOR FEPOW, WIVES AND WIDOWS**

If you need help with a grant towards hospital stays, Nursing Home Costs, alterations to the home, mobility aids etc, then please get in touch with:-

Mr Stephen John, the Java Club by email:- [stephen.su.47@gmail.com](mailto:stephen.su.47@gmail.com)

Mrs Pauline Simpson, NFFWRA by email:- [enquiries@nationalfepowfellowship.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@nationalfepowfellowship.org.uk)

The BAFEPOW news sheet is put together by the association secretary, Barbara James, and, hopefully, it contains items of interest to all members. You are very welcome to suggest future topics or to submit items for future inclusion. You can contact me via email:- [bmjames142@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:bmjames142@yahoo.co.uk) or by phone:- 07954104857



*(Sometimes I run out of space left to include the BAFEPOW badge without putting it alone on the final page as happened last month. This month I decided to put our VJ80 badge back on as it is still very relevant – what do you think? Let me know which one you prefer, please – Barbara)*