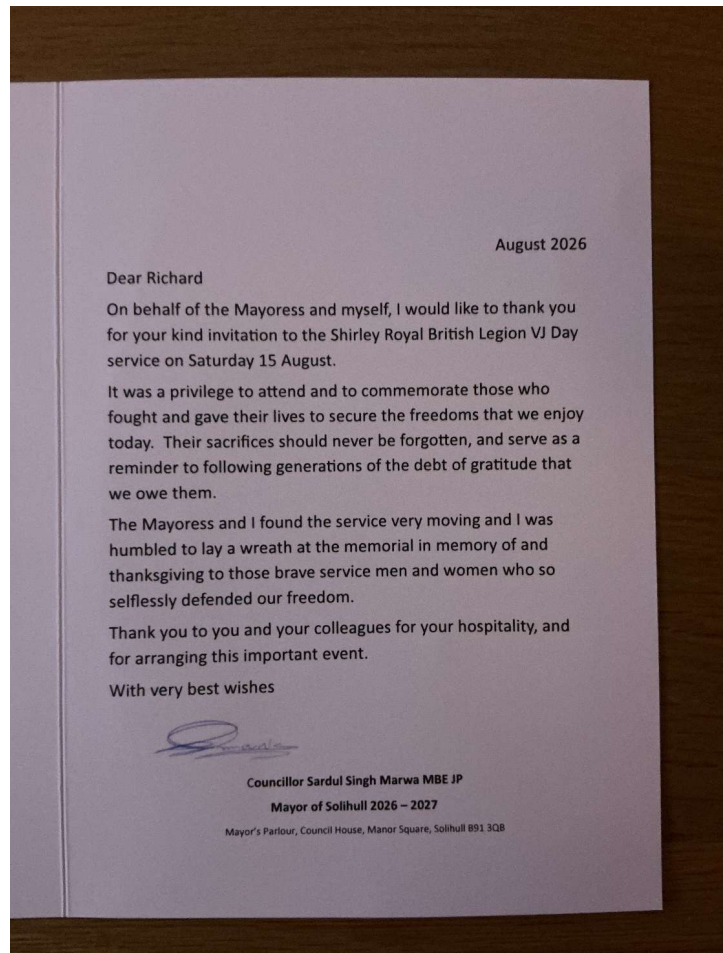


BAFEPOW NEWS SHEET FOR OCTOBER 2026

A WELL DESERVED LETTER OF PRAISE FOR THE VJ DAY SERVICE IN SHIRLEY



It was a very pleasant email that arrived in my inbox soon after VJ Day and, have to say that I thought that it merited opening up this month's news letter. In September's news sheet the photo was included of Richard Coy's son, Freddie and his friend, Jake, taking on the honour of laying a BAFEPOW wreath upon the RBL memorial in Shirley. Richard, grandson of FEPOW Edwin Coy and son of Ann and Ken Coy (our recent Vice-Chairman) has worked extremely hard with some others to organise this remembrance service and he also organises the Sunday Remembrance Service in November when he arranges for the local main road to be closed so that a parade can be held – this is quite an arduous task as I know from the paperwork he sent me for me to organise a similar road closure local to my RBL Club. I think that this letter from the Lord Mayor of Solihull is much deserved by Richard and his fellow RBL members and how good it is to see the Mayor referring to those who, like our FEPOW and the Forgotten Army in the Far East, fought and made sacrifices for King and Country during WWII. His reference to their sacrifices never being forgotten and that the debt of gratitude owed to them should always be remembered and that future generations will hopefully take this on just as Richard has. His mother, Ann, very proudly brought the actual Mayor's letter in to our recent meeting and there was a photograph of the Mayor in all his Mayoral regalia and it is so pleasing to know how he appreciated the service and where he laid a wreath too.

NEWS FROM THE BAFEPOW AGM HELD ON SEPTEMBER 8TH 2026

This meeting was, as usual, held at the Holiday Inn, Birmingham and we had nineteen BAFEPOW members in attendance and we were especially pleased to welcome one of our Australian members, Arlene Bennett, to be with us again on this occasion during her latest visit to the UK and also to Scotland and Ireland.

You might have noticed that the first page of this newsletter does not contain the list of members of the BAFEPOW committee and this is because our chairman, Keith, had suggested that we re-introduce the role of Vice-chairperson that was dropped back in 2022 and so now here is the list of officers and others that represent the association. I have now also been joined by Angela Lane as joint secretaries and we will produce the newsletter jointly but in 2027 the monthly news sheet will reduce back to a quarterly newsletter just as it was prior to the Covid lockdown when we were unable to meet. The date has not been confirmed as yet. All the committee members were re-elected unanimously by those present and Tony Truett was nominated by Keith and elected to be the Vice-chairman. Prior to this Tony had read out the Chairman's report for 2025 -2026 which was a busy year as we commemorated VJ80 and we are all hoping that one day Keith will be able to join us in Birmingham once more – he is much missed from our meetings!

Therefore the officers and members of the BAFEPOW committee are now as follows :-

Chairman – Keith Andrews, Vice-chairman – Tony Truett, Treasurer – Margaret Walton

Secretaries – Barbara James and Angela Lane

Members :- Annette Hughes, Rowford Bowditch and Richard Gibbs

Other items that were on the agenda were discussed including updates to the existing BAFEPOW constitution and the new version will now include an amendment to item 4 that now states that all people who join the association are full members regardless of where they live. Item 6 which listed the officers and members of the BAFEPOW committee now re-includes a vice-chair as explained above. Item 7 concerned the number of committee meetings (not including the AGM) that should be called and since the introduction of the second monthly meeting in 2024, it made it difficult to add a separate meeting in addition to these. It was therefore agreed that the quarterly committee meetings will be held either at the beginning or end of a discussion group meeting and they will be included on the list of future dates for these meetings. By doing this a committee meeting should only take up the minimum amount of time from the discussion group and any non-committee members present will be very welcome to join the committee as a guest but they will not vote on any decisions made by the committee. This concluded the updates to the constitution and members are welcome to apply to the secretary for a copy of the updated BAFEPOW Constitution, as of 2026.

Margaret Walton, treasurer, handed a copy of her financial report to Barbara James for inclusion in the AGM minutes and explained that, instead of handing round a printed breakdown of expenditure in bank statement format, it made more sense to explain it verbally to those present. The bank balance is still in good shape and the main expenditure was for VJ80 in 2025 when a new badge commemorating the event was commissioned and made by the Thomas Fattorini company, Margaret and Keith worked together and commemorated in a booklet all of the FEPOW committee members that had been involved in the setting up and running of BAFEPOW from its beginning until the last one sadly passed away in 2022. This was printed professionally. Postage costs were incurred for the distribution of the badges and the booklet although the majority were handed out to members in person. On September 2nd a VJ80 lunch was held at the Holiday Inn and we had a wonderful time thanks to the Bernie and the great Holiday Inn Staff. We had the privilege of having Ken Tinkler, a Naval veteran as our guest of honour. He had been present as part of the UK boarding party on the USS Missouri when the surrender by the Japanese was signed officially thus ending WWII. He was accompanied by his daughter, Jane. The other main cost was for the wreaths that were laid by some of the members on our behalf at various events throughout the year. 2025 was a very busy year with the VJ80 commemorations taking place and Margaret said that we shall continue to order our wreaths from the Lady Haig Poppy Factory as they are better than the RBL ones and this justifies the extra cost. The account for the financial year from April 2025 to April 2026 was voted for acceptance unanimously.

As part of the finance report, I (BJ) explained that as part of the BAFEPOW commitment to offer and support FEPOW remembrance by using our funds in the form of grants and donations. We were most

fortunate to have our Australian member, Arlene, with us and she then talked about the fund raising that she is involved with to remember those who were murdered on Bangka Island in 1942 after the Japanese captured it and, along with Judy Campbell, whose grandfather also died there and is buried on the island and other family members of those who were killed there, they are raising money for the medical centre there in honour of those who died. Since the AGM, Arlene has sent us a transcript of a speech she made earlier this year when she and Judy attended the annual service of remembrance on Bangka Island and also another held on Radji Beach.

ORATION GIVEN ON THE 16TH OF FEBRUARY 2026 ON THE BEACH, MUNTOK, BANGKA ISLAND INDONESIA

I would like you all to cast your mind back to just a little over eighty-four years ago, in the panic that was Singapore in its final days before the Japanese occupation. Bombs were being dropped, roads were being blocked by abandoned cars and other debris. Usual routes to the wharves were unable to be used.

The last sixty-five remaining AANS nurses were trying to leave Singapore. They eventually found their way on board the SS VYNER BROOKE. They had to abandon sick and wounded soldiers in their care and leave them to fend for themselves in Singapore when they were finally ordered to leave. For those of us who are nurses the choice to leave would be difficult and for those nurses who left on the 12th of February it was no different.

Once on board the ship, at the direction of Matron Olive Paschke and Matron Irene Drummond, the nurses set about organising themselves to care for those who needed it most. The nurses were told that they were under no circumstances to leave the ship before everyone else had been evacuated should anything happen to it.

The ship kept as much cover as it could but that was not always possible. Finally, on the 14th of February, they were spotted by Japanese aircraft. They were bombed and soon after the ship would sink on the Bangka Strait. For those onboard it was unimaginable. Many managed to get into life rafts, some got into life rafts which had been strafed and did not float, some swam away, others caught bits of debris to stay afloat.

Twelve of the nurses died at the time of the bombing or shortly thereafter and a small group of the nurses would float away only to die sometime later from thirst and exposure in the ensuing days.

Twenty-two of the nurses washed up on Bangka Island. Many other civilians and servicemen would make landfall on that beach. The nurses cared for the sick and injured as best they could with what little medical supplies they had. Matron Drummond suggested that a fire be lit on the beach to act as a beacon to those still at sea. With so many people now on the beach and so little food and water available it was decided that a group of men should walk into the town and advise the Japanese of those present on the beach to surrender themselves to the Japanese. Matron Drummond decided that the women and children should also walk into the town. As the group of women and children walked into Muntok they saw the Japanese soldiers along with the party of men walking towards the nurses and the men left behind on the beach.

The Japanese soldiers from the Orita Battalion ordered the men to walk around the bluff. This was done in two groups. The first of the men, who were made up of mostly British and a few New Zealanders were then lined up and were shot or bayoneted. The second group were similarly treated although there were some exceptions. Stoker Ernest Lloyd, a British sailor who had been on The Prince of Wales when it was sunk off Singapore, whispered to those who had lined up next to him that they should make an escape and swim out to sea in order to save their lives. He remarked that he didn't die when the Prince of Wales sank and he wasn't going to die today! Eric Germann was an American who swam away from the beach and survived. A third person died as he tried to escape. Mr Ernest Charles Watson, an Australian judge from Malaya died on the beach at the hands of the Japanese. Corporal Robert Seddon was also a British soldier who had tried to land on the beach but the nurses signalled for him to stay out at sea which he did thus avoiding the massacre.

The Japanese returned back around from the bluff wiping their bloodied bayonets and walking towards the nurses. What happened next was too difficult to comprehend then just as it is now. The nurses were violated. Twenty-two Australian women and one British civilian woman, Mrs Carrie Betteridge, were ordered into the sea by the Japanese who opened fire on them. Matron Drummond's last words to her nurses were, "Chin up girls...I am proud of you...I love you all" What a comfort these

words must have been for the nurses. Mrs Kathleen, another British woman had been on the beach. Too ill to walk in to the sea she was killed by the Japanese.

At the end of the massacre there was only Vivian Bullwinkel left alive. Twenty-one of our Australian Army Nurses had died that day.

Vivian Bullwinkel survived the POW camps and she brought home with her the story of what had happened to her friends. She gave comfort to their devastated families and she gave evidence, if somewhat subdued, to the War Crime Tribunal at the end of the War in Tokyo.

About one hundred ships were sunk in the Bangka Strait on the 14th of February 1942 with possibly thousands of people being killed on them. For many this expanse of sea was their last resting place. For many Muntok became the first place where they would lose their freedom. Thirty-one of the Australian nurses who left Singapore on the SS Vyner Brooke would be joined by Dame Margot Turner who became the Matron of the QAIMNS nurses after the war. Sister Mary Cooper and other British nurses and civilians also became POW's. Some survived the war, Sister Mary Cooper died in Belalau – the last camp that they were in, another eight Australian nurses over the next three and a half years in Muntok and Belalau. Twenty-four of the original sixty-five nurses survived the war.

Today we pause to remember all who were involved in this catastrophe. These war crimes occurred on Monday the 16th of February. Eighty-four years to the day. For some, eighty-four years ago was to be the end of their lives. May the story of our brave nurses never be forgotten by us and may people around the world learn of their stories so that they are remembered.

It is now up to us to remember what happened during World War II to our nurses and countless others and to promote peace and not war.

Here is a photograph of Vivian Bullwinkel

Although Vivian participated in the War Crimes trials post war, she was told not to reveal the full story of what took place on Radji Beach and how awful the nurses were treated by the Japanese troops. It was only in the last few years that she was allowed to divulge that the nurses were physically assaulted and raped by their captors before being ordered to walk into the sea and they were shot and murdered in cold blood. In Australia there is a play on tour about this atrocity. It is called '21 Hearts' and it performs to full audiences at every place it goes to – if only it could come to the UK - I will keep trying even if it is just a recording!



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

PO 3960.001

Arlene's actual talk was very moving and she said that they were hoping to provide more equipment for the island's medical centre including resuscitation mannequins to enable the staff to practice CPR and to pass on the skill to local people too. Some members present were so moved by what took place on Bangka Island that they immediately gave their own personal donations to Arlene who was quite overwhelmed by their generosity. The BAFEPOW committee will meet and agree on a donation and it will be sent Arlene or Judy. There was no other business and so Tony brought the meeting to a close and we all joined in to enjoy a lunch together and enjoying the afternoon to chat and catch up before setting off home again.

Researching Far East Prisoners of War – Part 5.

We have now completed a significant part of our research. We should have a great amount of detail regarding our FEPOW and have recorded our findings on our Record Sheet.

Internet Searches.

Before we continue, I would like to raise your awareness of the potential problems of using the internet for your research. There is a huge amount of information to be found on the internet. Many documents are now available online, and their number is steadily increasing. They are available through free or subscription websites and can be an invaluable source of information for your research. However, because anyone can post information online, I would advise that each piece of data found online must be thoroughly evaluated before it can be considered as part of your research.

Why Evaluate?

Check for:

Authority: Is it a commercial or private website, is it a personal blog?

Accuracy: Are the sources listed to enable you to check or are they just an entry with no back-up sources.

Objectivity: Be careful of the potential for bias or for personal feelings to intrude.

Currency: Is the information current or dated- how old is the data?

Be very careful of data on some commercial websites. Those that allow persons to insert their own data must be treated with extreme caution. It is quite possible that lazy researchers will accept information into websites that bears no resemblance to what can be proven, just the coincidence of having a similar sounding name.

Some websites provide transcriptions of data. Evaluate these carefully to consider possible errors in transcriptions. Never accept a transcription as proof without first checking the original document.

Do not take for gospel any information found on the internet, and never accept information found without supporting sources that you can view and check.

The use of internet sites such as Wikipedia, ChatGPT, Facebook, Instagram etc, can be useful aids to your research. But always remember:

The Internet is a tool – it is not proof!

I would now like to cover some other aspects of FEPOW life. Details we may have already uncovered may lead us towards researching the conditions that our FEPOW lived under.

Treatment of Prisoners of War.

While Japan was a signatory to the 1929 Geneva Convention on the treatment of Prisoners of War, it had never ratified the Convention. Instead, the Japanese developed their own rules based on experiences arising from the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War and their treatment of both military and civilians during the Japanese ‘incursion’ into China from 1937 onwards.

At the beginning of the Second World War, Japan’s invasion of Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore, the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies resulted in the capture of many thousands of allied troops, and though Japan had promised to treat prisoners according to the Convention, in reality the rules were pointedly ignored.

Japanese culture, including the influence of ‘Bushido’, which arose from the traditional warrior class in Japanese society, treated those who had surrendered as dishonourable and not worthy of respect. This led to the treatment of prisoners, and civilian internees, with at best, indifference and, at worst, considerable brutality.

Prisoners were forced into hard labour, many shipped in dangerous conditions to work on war related projects. Over 12,000 British prisoners alone died in these conditions, a death rate of about 25%, seven times the number that died in German camps.



(Copyright: Australian War Memorial, Canberra.)

The Camps.

The capture of so many prisoners by the Japanese caused some initial problems and generally the men were left to their own devices with some working parties being sent out on damage clearance. However, in late 1942 the Japanese High Command was struggling to find enough labour to carry out work in industries or on military related construction tasks. This was to be remedied by employing PoWs and other conscripted native labourers to carry out work replacing Japanese who had been conscripted into the armed forces. Most of this work was helpful to the Japanese war effort and therefore forbidden under the terms of the Geneva Convention and in many instances, prisoners were told that Japan would abide by the convention. However, as Japan had not ratified the convention, the use of POW and forced labour was universal. To accommodate the number of prisoners, camps were quickly formed in whatever buildings and locations that were suitable. When the policy of utilizing PoWs on war tasks was adopted, many prisoners were shipped to areas that didn't have the infrastructure to support large numbers and the prisoners themselves – with varying degrees of success - constructed the camps they were imprisoned in.

The camps were scattered throughout the Far East and the Japanese Islands and a useful source of information as to which camps FEPOWs were incarcerated in, can be found in the Liberation Questionnaires completed by the men on repatriation. The section reproduced below clearly shows the camps, the dates the prisoner was there and the name of the Camp leader. This information can also be found in some Camp Nominal Rolls available from The National Archives or online. (The National Archives are increasingly licensing their data to commercial websites).

These details can lead us towards further areas of research that will add to our knowledge of the men we are researching.

A further excellent source of information about PoW Camps throughout the Far East can be found on the POW Research Network Japan website at: <http://powresearch.jp/en/index.html>. This website gives a great deal of information on various camps, though it requires further research to link the Japanese system of camp naming to the actual camps.

I am not going to go into the details of life in the individual camps. There are too many variations of camp conditions and very many publications are readily available, that will give that information. A quick internet search will lead to several hundred published records of FEPOW daily life.

Hellships

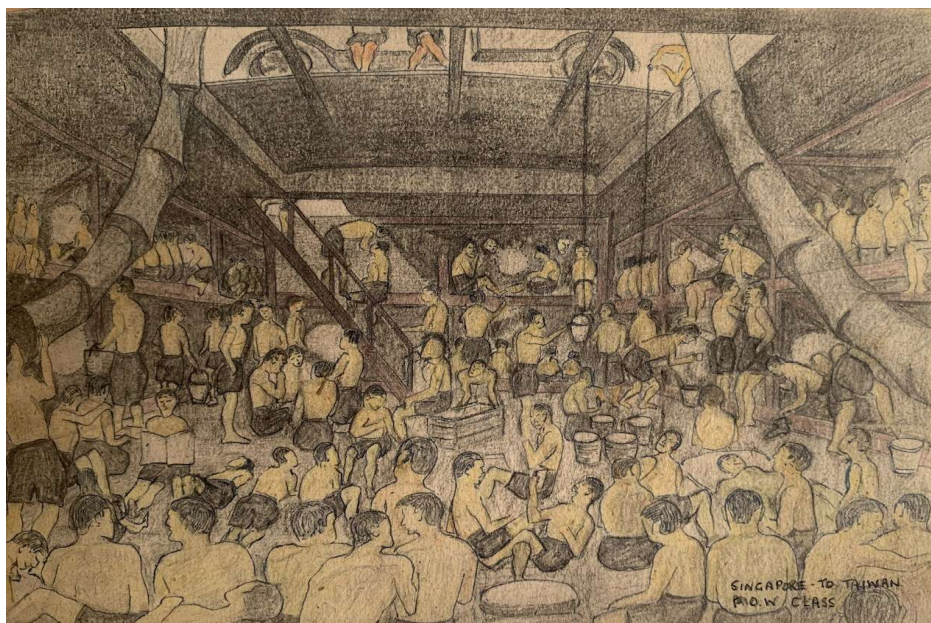
These were Japanese commercial freighters that were repurposed to carry prisoners in transit between camps. So-called because of the inhuman and hellish conditions on board, the Hellships became synonymous with Japanese indifference to the fate of allied prisoners and civilian forced labourers (Romusha) while onboard.

The practice of signing ships carrying PoWs should be indicated by the painting of the Red Cross symbol on the ships. However, this was widely ignored by the Japanese and prisoners were often carried in ships which also carried freight, civilian passengers and Japanese troops.

These then became legitimate targets for Allied submarines, often with tragic results for the prisoners on board.

An estimated 19,000¹ Allied PoW died because of the sinking of Hellships. A further estimated 1,540² Allied PoW died during transit on board these ships mainly caused by malnutrition, starvation and disease. These figures do not include the many thousands of Romusha for whom no records were kept.

A contemporary sketch of Hellship life, Copyright unknown



¹ Source: CWGC

² Source: USN History & Heritage Command

The Railways

As the war progressed, not necessarily in Japan's favour, the military sought ways to move troops and military equipment, firstly in the Burma campaign and later to move essential supplies and troops across Sumatra avoiding an increasingly dangerous sea route. The Japanese solution was to build railways!

These railways were to be built using PoW and civilian forced labourers (Romusha's). Many books and cinema films have been produced about the conditions experienced by the prisoners drafted to work on building the railways. Battling through primary jungle, across valleys and rivers conditions were deplorable and the work exhausting.

The Burma -Siam Railway was known as 'The Death Railway'. It was built as a means of transporting troops and materials to help in the Japanese campaign in Burma, thus avoiding sea routes which were regularly patrolled by Allied submarines. The line extended 258 miles from Ban Pong in Thailand to Thanbyuzayat in Burma and was completed in 1943. There were several camps set up along the length of the railway and the labour force was moved between camps as construction progressed. Nearly 7,000 British PoW died during its construction.

For further information, see: <https://www.tbrconline.com/index.htm>.

Over 5,000 Allied PoWs (approximately 1,000 British) along with over 100,000 native labourers were transported to Sumatra in May 1944 to build a railway between Pekan- Baroe and Morea, also known as 'The Other Death Railway', a distance of some 140 miles through primary jungle, with many wild animals, snakes and challenging terrain of mountains, swamps and rivers to contend with, again as a means of avoiding sea routes that were being targeted by Allied submarines.

The Railway was started from both ends simultaneously, with 17 numbered camps being set up along its route. It was completed on the 15 Aug 1945, the day of the Japanese surrender and was only ever used to bring PoWs back from the camps to Pekan Baroe at the war's end. Over 700 PoW and 20,000 Romusha died during the railway's construction.

The Pekan Baroe Death Railway website at <https://www.pekanbarudeathrailway.com/> is the source of a lot of useful information regarding the Sumatra railway.

To be continued

An Upcoming Remembrance Service at the NMA

Suez Maru Families and Research Association – message from the SMFRA committee

Sinking of the Suez Maru commemoration service at 11.30on 29/11/26 plus a talk afterwards

First, join us as we gather at the Suez Maru Memorial that we built in 2013, to remember the 551 Suez Maru men on the 83rd anniversary of the sinking and atrocity.

After lunch (your self service at the NMA cafe etc, own costs) bring your cup of tea though to the AGM.

SMFRA members (you can also join on the day) are invited to please gather in a private room at the NMA for our first SMFRA Annual General Meeting. We want to hear from as many members and families as possible, so please join us.

After the AGM we will host a slide talk in three parts: the archaeological research of Liang PoW camp; the 2025 trip to Ambon; and the itinerary for the Walking in their Footsteps Ambon 2027 trip for SMFRA members.

Please use the try booking link to register (all the above are free of course). We anticipate the day will finish by 4pm.*

** try booking link here to register.*

<https://www.trybooking.com/uk/events/landing/119983>

Please email us with any questions & please join us for this special day.

Thanks

~ SMFRA committee (Heather, Nicki, Simon, Jacquelyn)

Advance Notice About the Next Remembrance Service for HMS Exeter

Our member, Tom Jowett, has sent the details for the next HMS Exeter Remembrance service in 2027 and the information will go into the December Newsletter but you can request this in advance by contacting Barbara.

Talk by Phil Bradshaw to be held on Monday, November 16th at the the BMI

One of our members, Phil Bradshaw, will be giving a talk on the fascinating stories of four West Midlands who served on field ambulances in the Far East during World War Two. This will take place at the Birmingham and Midland Institute, 9 Margaret Street, B3 3BS. The meeting will start at one o'clock and last for about an hour.

The cost per person is £5 and you can pay at the door or book through Eventbrite – all money goes to the BMI.

WELFARE GRANTS FOR FEPOW AND 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

Mrs Pauline Simpson, NFFWRA by email:- enquiries@nationalfepowfellowship.org.uk

This BAFEPOW news sheet has been 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 or by phone :- 07954104857

