

Statement by OSPA Secretary, David Le Breton, at the OSPA Farewell Event Luncheon on 8 June 2017, before proposing the toast “to OSPA members, past and present, and their memories”.

We are now near the end of OSPA’s Farewell. OSPA will be 57 years old in October. That is more than the 55 years which an HMOCS officer was supposed to live before retirement on pension; so OSPA has served members for longer than a full working career of those days.

Its origins go back earlier than 1960, just as the origins of HMOCS go back earlier than its formation in 1954. OSPA’s four parents were the colonial pensioner associations for Ceylon, Malaya, West Africa and East and Central Africa. These bodies created OSPA in 1960.

The initial purpose of OSPA was quite narrow. It was to persuade the British Government to provide annual pension increases for colonial civil servants after Independence to match those given to other civil servants in Britain. There was strong resistance from the UK Treasury, but OSPA lobbied persistently, with its first Secretary, Mr Walden, spending many hours in the House of Commons, explaining the position to MPs and seeking their support. In December 1962 the Pensions (Increase) Act was passed which gave HMOCS pensioners the same annual pension increases as other UK civil servants. Of course, that applied to widows too.

So the objective was achieved. Should OSPA therefore close down? But in 1963/1964 two newly independent governments in Somalia (incorporating the former British Somaliland) and Zanzibar (after a revolution overthrowing the Sultan’s rule) refused to pay pensions to former officers, despite the agreement that had been reached at the time of Independence. This gave OSPA a new purpose, and there were more pensions issues that arose later.

It took ten years of persistence by OSPA to overcome the reluctance of the British Government to protect the pensions, until the Overseas Pensions Act was passed in 1973. Then there were ten more years of negotiations with the various governments concerned to complete the process.

So by 1979 the question was raised again. “Whither the Association now?” asked the Council chairman. There were two different reasons for continuing. The first concerned pensions which remained OSPA’s prime objective. The second was the wider matter of the records of our service and our reputation. I will come back to that. Relating to pensions, there was a new question of the security of the pensions owed to the people who, although not members of HMOCS, had served the Crown in the colony of Southern Rhodesia before the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in November 1965. That is an issue that still concerns us now, 37 years later. But it meant that in 1980 the headlines in two successive journals were:

“The Association Continueth”
and “From Strength to Strength”.

Then in 1981 there was the first reference to pensions to officers serving in Hong Kong. That took almost 15 years to resolve. Then questions about Central African Federal pensions, an active issue still which OSPA will be taking up shortly with whichever government is elected today. Other pensions matters which OSPA has dealt with are entitlement to War Service Credit; “frozen” State Retirement Pensions for residents overseas; some pensions paid by the Government of Jamaica, and the payment long out of time of arrears of National Insurance Contributions that Colonial officers were never told about.

I now turn to the second category of OSPA’s achievements: to provide the record of our Service in the colonial territories and to uphold our reputation. In 1963 the Rhodes House Library, then part of the Bodleian Library in Oxford, formed the Colonial Records Project to collect documents, diaries, letters and other records about colonial service work. It continued under other titles for

many years. Here today we welcome the Senior Archivist of the Weston Library in Oxford, part of the Bodleian Library, who will be taking more of OSPA's records shortly for adding to the archives – Lucy McCann! *[Applause]*

As well as Oxford University, more records are held at Cambridge University Library, especially those with films or photographs. Sudan records are held at the University of Durham. There are more in Scotland, at the University of Edinburgh, and at Bristol where the City Museum and Archives are a most important location, still deeply engaged in absorbing the collections of the unfortunate British Empire and Commonwealth Museum, but willing to receive fresh material if it fits in with what they already have. So we welcome Jayne Pucknell who has come from Bristol to join us. *[Applause]*

The University of London has been another key centre for recording our colonial history. There was a major conference there in 1999 as part of the great Joint Commemoration that year, attended by The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh in Westminster Abbey. That was followed by two phases of seminars, workshops, and conferences recording OSPA members' experiences, at the Institute for Commonwealth Studies, which published the proceedings. We welcome today Professor Philip Murphy and his colleague Olga Jimenez for their most excellent service in making those functions both possible and memorable. Professor Murphy, and Olga Jimenez! *[Applause]*

There are two more enterprises which will be of first rank importance for researchers and historians for many decades to come. One is the website britishempire.co.uk, inspired and produced so enthusiastically and skilfully by Stephen Luscombe with the help of his wife Cheryl. He has enhanced the articles and book reviews published in all our journals since the early 1980s, increasing their interest and usefulness far beyond what the original text ever did. He is keen to receive any more material about the colonial times from any source. Stephen Luscombe, and Cheryl! *[Applause]*

The other is what we have termed "Project Voices", at the University of Vienna, created by Dr Valentin Seidler, who I expect has even today obtained some more offers of contributions. The importance of this project is that it aims to assess, or evaluate, the work of HMOCS officers, as well as simply to record their experiences. The project receives funding from academic sources in the USA so that gives OSPA a wider international understanding. Valentin Seidler! *[Applause]*

So I now ask you to honour these memories and the people whose lives have brought us all together here. I recall the very apt words from the Gilbert and Sullivan opera "The Yeomen of the Guard", which I sang in as part of the chorus in Dar es Salaam in the very year of OSPA's formation:

"In the autumn of our life,
Here at rest in ample clover,
We rejoice in telling over
Our impetuous May and June.
In the evening of our day,
With the sun of life declining,
We recall without repining
All the heat of bygone noon.

I therefore propose the Toast:

"To OSPA members, past and present, and their memories."