

Research project on the existence of the Bordighera hash house harriers in the period c 1947-1961

Introduction

This is a report on the evidence presented for the founding and existence of a Bordighera H3 in or around 1947 lasting until approximately 1961. It has not covered the re-founding of the 'sometime' hash in 1984, although the conclusions will have an effect on the claims of the reincarnation as the Royal Bordighera H3. It has concentrated on the claim that by being founded in 1947, the Bordighera hash was the second hash chapter to be formed.

According to the story the Bordighera H3 was founded on 2nd April 1947 by Gus Mackay or Mackie, or Mackey, and lasting until approximately 1961. The evidence of its existence is limited and no contemporaneous evidence exists at all. There is much hearsay evidence (and once or twice removed), and much which should be considered rumour, as the story changes depending on who is telling it. I have therefore investigated what evidence does exist in an attempt to substantiate the claims. In researching the name, all variations of Mackey have been searched, along with Gus and variations such as Angus.

My thanks must go to the assistance of the University of Buckingham.

The Claim

Gus was an officer in a Gurka regiment of the British Military. He had run with the Hash House Harriers in Kuala Lumpur before the war as a guest of his brother Rupert Mackey. During World War II while fighting in the battle for Anzio, Capt Mackey was captured and imprisoned in Milan, Italy. After his release, he stayed on in Milan, and eventually settled down with his new wife Anna-Marie in Bordighera on the Italian Riviera and formed the Bordighera H3, with the first run taking place on 2 April 1947. The BH3 was popular with other British veterans that had also settled in the area and enjoyed over a decade of trails, unfortunately and has happened many times the pack drifted away, finally ending sometime in 1961.

On 12 December 1984, The Bordighera H3 was revived during the construction of the Bordighera Arena for Science, Technology, Arts, Research and Development Center, sponsored by Giovanni Paradiso, the grandson of deposed King Emmanuel Vittorio III and also fellow prisoner during the war with Gus, and would now be known as the Royal Bordighera H3. Anna-Marie Mackey, at nearly 70, was still on hand and was made Honorary GM-Hash Mistress. The RBH3 lasted only a short period of time, and conducted occasional runs with the Riviera H3 (France).

On 23 June 1990, Robert "Bwana" Walker, previously from the Mombasa H3 in Kenya, founded the Milan H3 in Milan, Italy. In September of 1991, Bwana visited the Singapore H3 and then went on to Bangkok, where he met the late Hash Historian Tim "Magic" Hughes. Magic explained what he knew of the history of the Bordighera H3, and asked Bwana to see if he could turn up any old information on the BH3 upon his return to Italy. In coordination with Fabio "Fabulous" D'Ambrosio, the Milan H3 "Hash Italian" (an actual committee position), they were able to find some Riviera Hashers with recollection of the temporary rebirth of the RBH3, and eventually tracked down Anna-Marie Mackey, the widow of founder "Gus" Mackey. In a wild turn of events, it was discovered that Fabulous was actually a relative of Anna-Marie. Although she was on in years, it was reported that she could still chug a down-down with the best of them. With the approval of Anna-Marie, the Milan H3 merged with the remnants of the RBH3 forming the Royal Milan & Bordighera H3 in November 1991. Once again Anna-Marie was named Honorable Grand Mistress, and it was agreed that they would hash in Finale Ligure, near Bordighera, every year to keep the tradition

going. According to Bwana, "The reason for 'near' and not 'at' is a long story, which involves and entire hash being stuck on a hilltop in a thorn thicket late at night, local rescue teams and some pretty gory bleeding legs. The terrain there is incredibly rough and thorny, which prompted the then Milan RA "Wild Bill" Ridout to make his personal motto 'Bugger Bordighera!', and avoid setting any trails nearer than 50 Km from it. The 'near Bordighera' became focused just up the coast in Finale Ligure, where Fabulous had a house on a spectacular Riviera hillside. We hashed there every year, and without fail, the ghost of Gus Mackey, haunted us every time, with apparitions on hillsides, all in white, including a white pith helmet and kilt, and playing a white bagpipe. He was also spotted prowling the balconies of the hotel we used, late at night, and once was seen getting out of a smoking grave! The hash became known as the "Ghost on the Coast" and was well attended by hashers from all over the world."

Email dated 3rd September 2013 from Robert David Walker (Bwana)

Regarding the RBH3, it was Magic Hughes who asked me to try to trace it when I visited him in Bangkok in about 1990. He had the evidence of its prior existence, which were some typed newsheets, which unfortunately I did not copy. He gave me a few contacts and phone numbers but most no longer existed. Finally I got hold of one contact, an old British resident of Bordigheira, since retired to France, who gave me some Italian names, but no phone numbers. Fabulous Fabio was the RA of Milan Hash at the time and his family had property near Bordigheira, so he went down there to see what he could find. He went to the physical addresses spoke to a number of people who knew of the hash, all very old, and one of them knew Gus's wife. We informed Magic and Tumbling Bill and with their blessing, and the blessing of the contacts that Fabulous found, we formed the merged Royal Milan and Bordigheira H3 so the name would live on as 2nd oldest Hash. Singapore H3 were not too happy with this and consistently spread the storey that RBH3 had never existed, claiming it was an invention of the dastardly French, although how they would know is beyond me.

Fabulous has long given up hashing, and it is most likely that the ex hashers and contacts he found have by now died, as they were all WW2 types, so I guess that the proof in black and white that you are looking for will probably never be found, unless Tumbling Bill has something from Magic's old records.

Thus ends my last comment on this,

Evidence to the claim

Hand written letter to John Sullivan from Datuk Sir J J Ffitch-Heyes regarding meeting Rupert Mackey in Changi gaol during WWII. This letter was sent to Tiim 'Magic' Hughes and remained in his records. John Sullivan is assumed to be the old British resident mentioned in Bwana's email

Covering Letter from John Sullivan to Tim Hughes

9th August 1990

Dear Magic Hughes!

I do apologize for the delay in replying to your missive. The Royal Bordigheira is located close to the French border nearby Ventimille the Italian town close to the frontier. The founder of the Royal Bordigheira Hash Gus Mackey was POW in Italy during the war and it was during this period that the original RBHHH was conceived. See enclosed photo copy of letter.

Can you throw some light on this?

Hoping to meet soon!

On On

John Sullivan

Typed Letter from Datuk Sir J J Ffitch-Heyes

Datuk Sir J J Fitch-Hoyes

The East India Club

London

12.03.90

Dear Sir

I read with great interest your article on the Royal Bordighera Hash and particularly concerning Gus Mackie. It may be of assistance to your hashers to know how Gus became interested in hashing. This was, of course, through his brother Rupert, who lived in Kuala Lumpur in the thirties working for the old established trading house of William Jacks. Rupert, like so many of the early hashers, lived in the hash house adjacent to the Dog (the Kuala Lumpur club) on the Padang, which still exists to this day in the thriving heart of KL. In the late thirties, Gus serving with the Prince Edwards XII Gurkha regiment in Pahang and Kuala Trengganu would travel to KL for leave and there he joined his brother in the eccentric activity of running through the rubber and then jungle surrounding the capital city. Hashers were, it must be said, very much outcasts of society not being permitted to frequent the dog due to their bizarre behaviour.

In the war Gus fought at Anzio with distinction and it was here that he was taken prisoner, and during his incarnation met Giovanni Paradiso, an officer in the Bersaglieri, who is of course, the grandson of Victor Emmanuel III. Meanwhile Rupert was captured by the Japanese at Johore Bahru, whilst serving with the Straits Volunteer Rifle Brigade and spent most of his interment in Changi Gaol which is where I met him and hence able to add more detail to the remarkable family. Finally I must point out that your remark concerning Anna Maria is not correct. She has not in fact hashed in a wheelchair and whilst unintentional this is in rather poor taste.

Good luck in your hashing activities and as Rupert used to say "On On to the girlie bara sport in the Batu Road".

Yours sincerely

(unsigned)

Datuk Sir Jameson Fitch-Heyes

The original letters from John Sullivan and Datuk Sir Jameson Fitch-Heyes are held in Tim Hughes archive. PDF copies are held by me.

Although no contemporaneous evidence exists to our knowledge, the letter from Sir Jameson upholds the claims that that 'Gus' had hashed with Rupert and had been a POW in Italy, as in the claim. Bwana visited Tim Hughes sometime around 1990 and saw some newsheets about the hash existence. These items have never been discovered in Tim's substantial archive. However Tim was a close correspondent with Dr Gordon 'Prof' Williams and the BH3 was a regular subject in the 1990's and Prof wrote to me shortly before his death "Magic [Tim Hughes] was always suspicious of the evidence". Whether 'the evidence' included extra papers, (that may have come from the same source, John Sullivan), or just related to this letter we may never know. In view of Tim's rigorous archive it would be surprising if, such important document existed, it was not retained.

So, as far as we know, in 1990, when the story emerged, we must assume the evidence that a hash existed in 1947 was a letter from Sir Jameson, sent to Tim Hughes by Sullivan.

The main characters.

Gus Mackey - Searches of war records (Gus and variations, and Mackey and variants) have failed to identify anyone of that name who survived the war and fitted the claim. This includes Prisoners of War in Italy and Germany. (Italy had capitulated by 1944, the time of the Anzio landings so camps were controlled by the Germans). Further searches were made for decorated servicemen and service records relating to Malaya and Italy, without success. Whilst many Gus Mackeys (and variants) existed none could be connected to the story.

Rupert Mackey – No records exist in war records. Again there are a few Rupert but none that fit the story or who can be identified as a prisoner in Changi. The Changi museum are searching their records.

Datuk Sir Jameson J Ffitch-Heyes.- Sir J F-H is an important part of the story as he identifies Gus as brother of Rupert and identifies them. His letter tells of Gus and Rupert hashing together, and Gus being taken prisoner in Anzio and meeting Giovanni Paradiso in the camp. It is the main link between a hash founded in 1947 in Italy and Mother hash. It is also the link between Gus and Giovanni Paradiso thus the Royal claim.

Firstly the letter appeared to have some anomalies.

1. Sir J has misspelt his name as Hoyes not Heyes at the heading of the letter. The O and E are not close to each other on a qwerty keyboard, discounting a mechanical error. It is therefore likely it was an error in knowledge and not a mistake of someone writing their own name. It is likely the name was written by someone else.
2. The address is given as East India Club. If staying at the club when writing the letter he has taken the trouble to use a typewriter but has not used the readily available club headed notepaper, or in fact his own headed note paper. The use of the address would also indicate that any reply to the letter would find Sir J at, or via the club. He would therefore be a member, a reciprocal member, or a regular guest (although a guest, even a regular guest, using the address would be against the rules, and inappropriate). He may also have been an employee of the club.
3. Sir J stated that he was informed Gus was serving with Prince Edwards XII Ghurkha rifles. According to the Gurkha association no such regiment existed as part of the British India Army. This could have been a mistake as a King Edward VII Own Gurka Rifles did exist. "2nd Batt served in Malaya in the late 1930's, but were nearly all taken prisoner in Singapore, and the 1st Batt fought in Italy, but were not at Anzio. It is possible Gus was in Malaya with the 2nd, was transferred before the fall of Singapore to the 1st then fought in Italy. However, they have no record of a Captain Gus Mackey, so this was improbable.

4. It is unlikely that an officer of the Bersaglieri, especially the grandson of a deposed king, would be imprisoned with, or in the same POW camp as junior British officers.
5. The content of the letter is very strange. It is written in an evidential style, although it is meant to be volunteered in response to a missive. Sir J obtained the story from Rupert which he says he obtained whilst they were both in Changi gaol. There is no mention of later meetings; in fact he distinctly says he got the information in Changi. Rupert would have been taken prisoner in 1942 and released at earliest 1945. The conversations must have taken place during this period. Gus was taken prisoner at Anzio. The landings were in January 1944, but he could have been taken prisoner up to six months after. Sir J claims to have information obtained from Rupert relating to Gus in a POW camp in Milan. How did Rupert obtain information from a POW camp in Italy whilst in Changi gaol, in order to pass on to Sir J? The probability is almost zero. He could not have had any information relating to Anna Maria, which supposedly occurred after the war. It could not have been a genuine account.

In view of the letter anomalies we attempted to trace the gentleman. We obtained the following results.

1. The Ffitch-Heyes family is small and not widespread. Members of the F-H family had no knowledge of him, and whilst it is possible another branch of the family may exist the name is so unusual, it is unlikely.
2. Debretts confirm there is not, nor ever has been a knight by the name of Ffitch-Heyes, British, Commonwealth or Honorary (other country).
3. There are no births, marriages or deaths recorded of Jameson Ffitch-Heyes.
4. There are no military or other service records of this man.
5. The East India Club in St James London confirm he was neither a member, reciprocal member or employee of the club. He was not a guest in 1990.
6. Lt.Col Peter Winstanley, who is a leading authority on senior personnel both military and civil and their fate during the fall of Malaya has no record of him.

We can assume that someone who signs off as Datuk Sir Jameson Ffitch-Heyes, in an unofficial letter, is proud of their status and would not be difficult to find, or at least leave a record. We did not find any. We concluded that Sir Jameson J Ffitch-Heyes did not exist.

Giovanni Paradiso- Supposedly the grandson of King Emmanuel III. We followed the line of all five children of the king without tracing this name. However it may have been an 'unofficial' name, an illegitimate son, or a nephew. As this was outside the scope of the investigation it was not pursued.

Summary

It is almost impossible to conclusively prove that something or someone did not exist. It is only possible to say that despite extensive searches there is no trace or evidence. That is the situation here.

The story comprised of a Rupert Mackey hashing with Mother hash between 1938 and 1942, and his brother Gus visiting when on leave whilst in Malaya serving with a Gurkha regiment. In 1943 Gus was deployed to Italy where in 1944 he was taken prisoner, and in the POW camp met the grandson of King Emmanuel III, Giovanni Paradiso. This meeting later facilitated a further meeting in 1984 with the grandson of the former king, thus enabling the BH3 to use the term Royal.

No evidence exists in any records, including those of Mother hash, to substantiate the story of the brothers hashing. No records of the brothers activities during the war exists apart from a copy of a letter by Datuk Sir Jameson Ffitch-Heyes, sent to Tim Hughes in 1990, by a John Sullivan.

There is no record of Sir Jameson ever existing and he could not possibly have known much of the information contained in the letter. Those events did not happen until after Sir J's meeting with Rupert.

We are left with the Fabulous Fabio's evidence which comes down to hearsay. He met so and so and they said. There is no accurate record of his conversations, and we do not know if he was liable to embellish. He was certainly motivated to discover a previous hash. He is no longer available.

Gus Mackey could have existed. Pre-1947 the Gurkhas were part of the British India Army, and British officers were attached to British regiments. Captain Mackey may have been part of another regiment, assigned to the Gurkhas. But even then there would have been some record. Rupert was part of the Straits Volunteers. By the time of, or soon after, the Japanese invasion all Britons had been moved into other full time regiments (e.g. Gispert himself was transferred to the Argyles). Gispert's records exist. Rupert's do not. There is, nor ever has been, a Sir Jameson J Ffitch-Heyes, so the task of trying to put him and Rupert together in Changi was a foregone conclusion. We still await the records from Changi but we are not optimistic!

Of course, as soon as the 1947 hash is put in grave doubt of existence, then the 1984 stories, including the 'Royal' connection must be put in doubt, but that is beyond the scope of this investigation.

Conclusion

As said it is almost impossible to prove something or someone doesn't or didn't exist, but when so many trails are consistently false the probability of a conclusion being correct is quite high. It is with this caveat we draw the following conclusions.

The original Bordighiera Hash of 1947 may have existed but there is no evidence to substantiate that existence, or any reason to even believe it did exist. Bwana says he saw something but cannot recall what it was, and even now it has not reappeared in Tim Hughes archive. It may have been the Sullivan and Sir Jameson letters, or it could have come from the same (now suspect) source. According to Prof, Tim Hughes was suspicious of the evidence. Without doubt Sir Jameson Ffitch-Heyes is bogus and his letter was fabricated, perhaps to fit the story. Some of the hearsay evidence is, at best, highly embellished. At worst it is fabricated; whatever, without support of the F-H letter later evidence falls apart. The embellishment/fabrication appeared to start in 1984 and was continued and extended up to the 1990's with the founding of the Milan H3. I like to think it was for fun, but by who is not within my remit, but I cannot blame others for believing it. Of course, in 1990 no one would have imagined what the internet would bring, with almost instant communication, digital records, all instantly retrievable and sometimes on line. If, at the time of the fabrication, the exponents knew there was anything to suggest the original 1947 hash existed, it must have been quite thin and unable to stand on its own. It has now disappeared into the mists of time, and the fabrication has made it extremely difficult for the hash world to believe that evidence did exist.

Some members of the hashing world have 'faith' that the Bordighiera hash existed. That is fine but 'faith' is not history. They need to go back and produce convincing evidence that is open to scrutiny. Until then I must come to the conclusion that the Bordighiera H3 did not exist; in my opinion this report suggests it was a fantasy and that evidence was manipulated to support the fantasy. Singapore Hash should maintain its position as the second Hash House Harriers chapter.