

The 'New' Terminal 3 Extension

This 'account' is a compilation of the memories of Ted Alderson, Denis Atkinson, Cliff Davies, Mike Millen & Ron Smith.

The architect of the Terminal 3 extension got a prize for a monstrosity which was in fact a hideous building with plain grey internal brick walls. The extension was opened in 1970 but the internal walls, which were hailed as a feature, had to be sealed later because of complaints about dust!

Horrified with the grey, lightless, airless, roofless boxes that were to be the Customs offices in the new terminal, and after much consultation and various meetings, staff representatives were mandated to approach George Morrison, the Waterguard Superintendent, and tell him that whilst staff would man the benches they would not use the offices and would take more frequent and longer 'mitties'. Unfortunately George was on leave and they had to lodge the complaint with his deputy. When they put the 'request' to him he became almost apoplectic and shouted something to the effect that he would have the ringleaders sacked forthwith and 'everyone else involved' moved to the four corners of the kingdom'.

Not every Waterguard Officer was enamoured of Heathrow and as soon as the news was out not only those who had been present at the meeting, but many others, wished to volunteer for the second level punishment! In the event George Morrison and Jim Blunt, the Collector, took over negotiations. The results were that nobody got sacked and nobody got a free transfer. But it was still a rotten place to work!

Also, at this time, 'Sky Marshals' operated on board US airline flights and officers were assigned to ensuring the official custody of an alarming variety of weapons. This and the other diversions demanded the provision of calming measures.

There was so much concern about stress levels amongst staff that an environmental scientist was asked to examine officers working conditions. Shocked at the brightly lit baggage hall, with no natural light, white baggage hall furniture with chrome fittings and the grey desks, cupboards and filing cabinets in the general office, immediate changes were called for. The office furniture was removed to be sprayed in gaudy colours and returned along with a fish tank. The desks were provide with natty new flexie desk lights.

The tank of tropical fish, complete with tropical warm water, plants and bubbles, which required its light and heater to be left on 24/7, was installed at the Department's expense in the Terminal 3 general office, as it was believed that it would have a calming effect on the nerves. The apparatus made a slight hum which was rather annoying during the airports 'silent hours' as it could distract those doing their amendments or slumbering!

After much discussion regarding the correct grade for the feeding of the fish, including a suggestion from one Senior Officer, not a re-badged CPO! that the fish be fed by the shift Duty Staff Officer - 'No way, fish feeding isn't proper work for POs' - and as there were hardly an APOs left - a shift AO was designated who immediately took the matter to CPSA. The matter was resolved before the need to call the RSPCF Inspector! - all staff mucked in. A roster of feeding times which was meticulously observed, along with much over feeding, in which feeders were asked to note feedings.

Anyone seeking to avoid the maelstrom of the baggage hall, could find sanctuary by positioning their chair in front of the tank and focusing their attention on the fish.

The fish tank certainly had its uses. Officers recently refreshed from the centre bar were often seen talking to its contents and once a Senior Officer was seen creeping away having been admonished for interrupting with a request for advice regarding a problem Baggage Hall passenger.

On one evening shift, the Duke and Duchess of Kent were waiting in the concourse for a delayed arrival when some enterprising PO decided that it would be a good idea to invite them into the office. They showed great interest in the tropical fish. They were invited to feed them and sign their names in the 'feeding book'.

The fish tank remained in the general office until comparatively recent times but, over the years, staff probably achieved greater calming success from the bar in the public concourse!