

## Mildenhall Register AGM 17<sup>th</sup> May 2019 8.10pm Held at The Middleton Hall, RAF Mildenhall

- **Present:** John & Jill Gentleman, Smiley & Cherry Mildwater, Geoff & Debbie Reynolds plus veterans and guests.
- **Apologies:** Dave & Sue Maynard, Jim Muholland, Tom Payne Pat and Robin Tuck, Tom Payne, Terry Mobley, Howard Sandall, Martyn Ford-Jones, Atkinson Family, Badol family, Nita and Chris Best, Alan Fraser, Bill Magee.
- **Welcome:** John welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised that it was the 40<sup>th</sup> or 41<sup>st</sup> reunion.
- **Review of last AGM minutes from 11/5/2018:** The minutes were accepted. This was proposed by David church and seconded by Margaret Still.
- **Matters arising:** none.
- **Chairman's report:** John Gentleman read out the following:

Firstly, I welcome you all here to the 41<sup>st</sup> or thereabouts reunion of the Mildenhall Register The numbers attending are disappointing 30 v 42 last year but I'm sure quality more than makes up for quantity! I would like to start by offering the Register's congratulations to Dee Boneham and her being awarded the MBE.

I said in my notes in the newsletter how quickly the past year has gone and so it continues. It seems only yesterday we were sat here at last year's reunion and what a weekend it proved to be. Over the weekend 71 Register members, 14 personnel from 622 Sqn, 4 representatives of Commonwealth Air Forces and 7 USAF personnel experienced an enjoyable weekend which many said was the best yet! Unfortunately the weekend was not such a success financially and it was heavily subsidised something we have had to correct this year. It is a fine balance keeping the planned activities interesting and rewarding against keeping the cost to individuals within reason. We are very grateful to our members who have responded to our appeal for funds and I'm sure the Treasurer will give more details in his report.

But what a year it has been for in addition to the 2018 reunion we have had - the RAF's 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations, the official opening of the International Bomber Command Centre at Lincoln, a remembrance service for the Heligoland raid in Ely Cathedral and events overseas remembering Colleagues lost in WW2 raids. All of which have involved the Register and its members to varying extents. I am sure the Secretary will cover in more detail these various other activities. Unfortunately on a sad note the Grim Reaper has continued to take members which is not so surprising for the youngest of our veterans must now be at least 92 years old!

I want formally to thank the external organisations that help the Register over the year. Here at Mildenhall we receive tremendous support from the team, led by our President Col Christopher Amrhein. The Colonel leaves this month on promotion to General and a new assignment in the USA. For over 10 years we were fortunate to have the aid of Sqn Ldr Rick Fryer, who left the RAF in September and retired to live in France. On behalf of the Register I wish Christopher and Rick well for their and their families good fortune. Rick has been replaced by Sqn Ldr Georgie Graham who has offered his support to the Register and will be present at some events over this weekend. I must acknowledge the contribution of St Johns Church whose congregation at Beck Row are indeed staunch supporters of the Register in the way they open their Church up for our services and the magnificent spread they put on afterwards in the Church hall

The success of any organisation is dependent on the work and activities of its officers and in this respect, I feel the register is well served. It is now over 10 years since the "new " crowd took over. Up until then the Register had been run by the old guard – Frank Cork, Fred Coney and of course the founder Don Clark. Some might remember Frank Diamond, the then Treasurer and his resolution to close down the Register. However, the new committee ensured that the Register survived. Geoff, Smiley and I assisted most ably by our wives, Debbie, Cherry and Jill have worked very well together and I want to thank them

all on your behalf for the enormous effort and time they all put into the successful running of the Register over the past 10 years or so.

Mention must also be made to the work of our Historians in recording the deeds of the squadrons during WW2 and in assisting members in tracing the contribution of their relatives to the war effort. In particular I would mention three of them, Martyn Ford Jones, Alan Fraser and Howard Sandall. I am very grateful to these three for the support and help they have given to me over these past years.

On a personnel note, I, informed the 2018 Annual General Meeting that come May 2019 I would not be standing for re-election to the Mildenhall Register Committee. It was in 2006 that the then Chairman Fred Coney, ambushed me into becoming his deputy and then ensuring that I became acting Chairman in 2008! My Wife and I have greatly enjoyed these past years, attending the various events, meeting a host of such wonderful people and making many new friends. During this period, I like to feel that with my excellent committee we have taken the Register forward. The newsletter has been expanded, a web site and Facebook forum have been set up, the Annual Reunion expanded to provide more activities and excellent relations have been established with the reformed 622 Sqn and the members of St John's Church Beck Row. However, I feel that now the Register is at the cross roads, with the passage of time we are sadly losing our WW2 veterans, attendance at the annual reunion is decreasing and hence decisions as to the Register's future and activities in the years to come need to be addressed by a committee with a fresh Chairman supported by you the members.

Jill and I will not be saying goodbye, we wish the Register all good fortunate for the future and hopefully we will be attending Register events in the future.

- **Secretary's report:** Geoff read out the following report.

Good evening everyone. We are rather light on numbers this year, not just for the AGM, but for the whole weekend, so it's good to have the quality, if not the quantity, in attendance.

It's been a steady year, during which Howard Sandall and I did complete our trip through Holland and Belgium visiting the 622 Squadron graves and other interesting sites related to WW2. He survived my alleged snoring and we are still great friends.

The 'normal' business of The Register continues, with enquiries and contacts from people doing family research from our Association Squadrons and for the bases we cover and even more wider enquiries which I try to get answers to from our historians, files or just by pointing them in the best direction to find the answers that they seek.

Just a few of quick examples: -

We were able to help a blind member who can no longer read the newsletter, and who's very kind friend who used to read it to him also became so sight impaired that the newsletter wasn't of any further interest. By contacting the RNIB, we were able to get an audio version prepared and sent to them so they continue to enjoy the newsletter.

The lady, who was researching a family member. He'd perished when he was detailed to take the place of another crew member in another aircraft. During the research, it transpired that the RAF initially recorded the replaced crew member as having been killed with his crew. However, he was, in fact, in hospital with a broken leg at the time! She is trying desperately to find him or his relatives as she has letters and photographs from him, sent to the relative's parents. They all came from the hospital, so no home address or idea where to look. We are still waiting for answers.

Finally, a man contacted me because he'd seen an entry, via the internet, in our annual Roll of Honour of 2014. He'd recognised the man's name and was convinced he'd worked with him in a Building Society at some stage during their working lives. It wasn't going to be easy to answer that one, but I'm hoping the squadron historian will know more about this man than I and help.

So you can see, it's often varied and interesting holding down this post!

Talking of the internet presence of our Association, Debbie continues to run the website, which is becoming larger and more prominent with each passing month. I'll leave her to expand a little on this shortly.

Facebook, which I jointly run with Dee and an Australian named Andrew MacDonald, has remained fairly static all year, with just over 1000 followers. Regular posts always attract attention and it and the website continue to be a powerful tool for us.

Our current Register membership stands at 463, (-63 down on last year), with just over 100 of these now taking the newsletter by e-mail (up 40). There were many converts this year after our plea and new members are encouraged to take up this option, which offers a considerable saving to us. Sadly, the requested replies to notify us of intentions to continue receipt of the newsletter was poor, with just short of 40% returns. The committee are now faced with the decision to discontinue sending postal newsletters to those we haven't heard from as this does seem a waste of funds.

I believe we still have a future. With continued support from our members and our friends here on base, giving us the opportunity to gather together to remember and honour those who served so valiantly during the war. Sadly declining veteran numbers will see them missing from the reunions and eventually, our membership list. Before I go, I offer a big vote of thanks to my two very hard working colleagues on the committee and especially to John, who will be finishing his tenure as Chairman at this meeting. Also our long suffering wives for providing all the back-up to keep us and The Mildenhall Register going.

- **Treasurer's report** – Smiley advised that Rick Fryer had sent him an email to give everyone present his regards. Smiley & Cherry had been to visit Tom Payne. Mentally he was OK but was now confined to a wheelchair. The Register is doing well financially. The bank balance stands at £10904. There is £3500 to pay for this reunion. There have been good donations eg a warrant officer from 622 squadron has been sending £6.22 per month to the bank account. £1800 had been received from one member over a number of cheques. There have been some small and some tense. We are in a strong position this year which will enable the magazine and website to continue.
- **Website report** – This time last year there had been 3036 hits on the website, the total has grown to 8563 in the past year. The website is very active. People can email the Secretary whilst on the website. These arrive in Geoff's email box and he farms them out to the historians or answers them himself if it is a general enquiry. Geoff receives 2 or 3 enquiries like this each month.
- **2019** – John said we wanted to continue with the reunion but try to keep the costs down. So there will be no open bar. Drinks will be restricted to 2 free drinks each plus there will be wine with the meal. There will be no band this year as the cost was too high. The RAF band were contacted but lost our application. By the time this was sorted out, they were busy elsewhere. They probably would have not charged us. We will see what the costs are for next year. It would be good to at least have background music. Dee said she will ask the Honington regimental band to see if they will come and play. The program for this reunion is:
  - The base tour, this was once again enjoyed by everyone. Bertie Jukes said talking to the grassroots lads was the best part of the day. They were all enthralled to be spoken to by people on the bus as they said they usually get ignored and they liked to hear about WW2 history.
  - Meal & AGM – This has gone well tonight.
  - Maddingly visit Saturday morning – We will arrive by 11am. There will be earphones for all with a one hour guided tour followed by a buffet lunch. A dozen 622 squadron members will join us. We will leave at 2.30pm and be back at the Bird by 3.30pm.
  - Saturday evening – We will meet in the Galaxy Club from 6pm onwards. There will be reps from New Zealand & Australia. 54 of us will sit down to eat.
  - Sunday church service – Wreaths will be laid at 10.45am followed by the church service at 11am. Afterwards there will be refreshments in the church hall.
- **Election of officers:**
  - Treasurer Smiley Mildwater, Secretary Geoff Reynolds and the committee were all willing to serve for a further year. John Gentleman had decided to step down as Chairman and asked if there was any one who wanted to take it on. Bertie Jukes stood up and said he had first met John in 1977. Bertie had been a dentist in the RAF and knew John well. Bertie continued with a very funny speech and at the end said what a good Chairman John had been. Bertie said he wanted to nominate someone to take John's place and that person who had just been awarded an MBE was Dee Boneham. Dee said she would be delighted to accept. All the nominations were seconded by David Jones and Margaret Still. Bill Gould

said Dee would do an excellent job. This was unanimously agreed by all present. John will relinquish his chairmanship after the service on Sunday. John and Jill are happy to continue supporting the Register. The auditor will stay the same.

- **Next years reunion** will take place from 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> May 2020
  
- **AOB:**
  - Debbie said she had some 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary Royal British Legion badges with her. The suggested donation for these is £3.
  - The bar on Saturday is a cash only bar.