

The Mildenhall Register

15, 90, 149 and 622

Bomber Squadrons' Association



Newsletter
Winter 2009/10



The Commonwealth Window
RAF Mildenhall Chapel

Writing "Under A Bomber's Moon" by Stephen Harris

"*These are the times that try men's souls*", reads the quote from Thomas Paine at the base of the Commonwealth Window in RAF Mildenhall Chapel.

Paine (1737-1809) knew more than most about the price of freedom. From his origins in nearby Thetford, Paine was caught up first in the American Revolution, helping to draft the Declaration of Independence in 1776, then when he went on to fan revolution in France he nearly lost his head in 1793 in the turmoil that followed the French Revolution. The historical upheavals he was part of helped to define fundamental political rights we in Western democracies now take for granted.

How apt, then, that it should be a quote from Paine that sits beneath the green tiki representing those many New Zealand flyers who served at RAF Mildenhall during the Second World War. Their motto in Maori, "ake ake kia kaha" - forever and ever be strong - echoes 149 Squadron's "strong by night" - and embodies the flying kiwis' two strands of heritage: loyalty to Empire on the one hand and, on the other, pride in the society they were building on the other side of the world - a dominion whose many firsts included becoming, in 1893, the first country where women gained the right to vote.

One of those New Zealanders at RAF Mildenhall was my Great-Uncle, Flight Lieutenant Frank Colwyn Jones DFC, known to all as Col. He flew as a navigator and bomb aimer with 149 Squadron, beginning his first tour of operations at Mildenhall in January 1942 and completing it at Lakenheath in October. He was a friend of Mildenhall Register former President Squadron Leader Charles Lofthouse OBE DFC, with whom Col went home on leave and later went to Buckingham Palace when Lofthouse received his OBE in 1943. After then spending just over a year training bomb aimers and navigators, Col was killed in February 1944 over Berlin early in his second tour, with 7 Pathfinder Squadron. His story and that of some of his crews and two of the German night fighters trying to kill them is told in my book *Under a Bomber's Moon*, published by Exisle in October 2009.

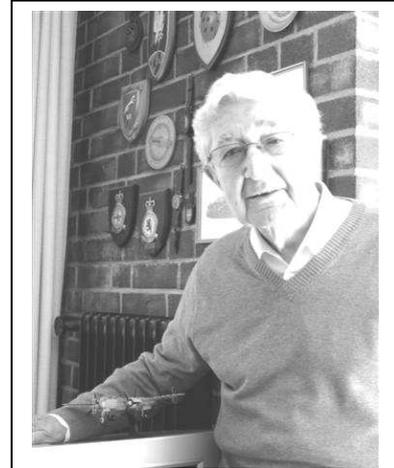


Flt Lt Col Jones DFC, 1943

Danger is never far from the pages as it stalks the airmen of both sides. Col Jones narrowly escaped death several times, once in a Stirling so badly shot up by flak and night fighters it had to ditch in the English Channel, using the moon as a flare path. The rear turret was sheared off by a plunging Messerschmitt,

but the five surviving crew survived 13 hours in an inflatable dinghy. Then, less than three months later, another of Col's Stirlings was mauled returning from Mainz by a Messerschmitt ME110 but managed to struggle back to Kent, where it crashed into housing at Broadstairs, near Manston.

The main German pilot featured in the book, Otto-Heinrich Fries, was shot down four times between August 1942 and the end of the war, but survived into his nineties to tell me his personal story while I was serving as New Zealand's Deputy Ambassador to Berlin. Fries's home was the down the motorway from my own, while Col's grave at the Berlin War Cemetery was just two bus stops from where I lived. Fries survived where most of his friends did not, and so was able to experience the emergence post-war of a Germany that shared the democratic and humanitarian ideals that Thomas Paine had done much to define two centuries before.



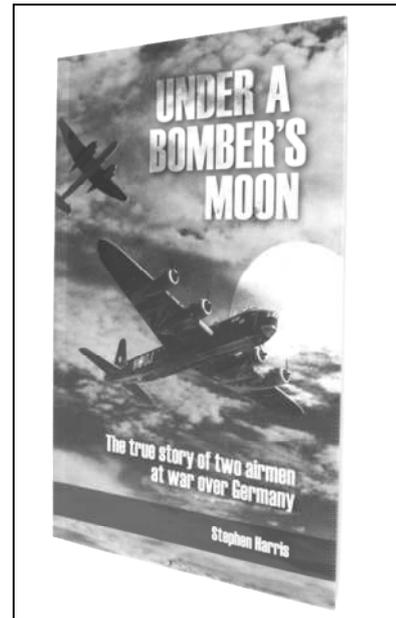
Professor Otto-Heinrich Fries (age 91) in at home in Berlin, Feb 2008

Many of those fighting for the British Empire during the war believed they were defending such ideals, and Col Jones was no exception. Seeing bomb damage at Westminster during his first visit to Blitz-damaged London, in June 1941, he expressed this clearly in a letter to his mother:

"We went past St Margaret's Church and there opposite, or nearly opposite, was Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament. As I left I said to myself that I had been inside the Mother of Parliaments. We gave the world a Parliament, you know; and if Britain fell tomorrow the fact that she has done even that much would make her the greatest of nations."

I saw RAF Mildenhall Chapel's Commonwealth window when attending the Mildenhall Register reunion in May 2008. When I saw the words of Thomas Paine below those in Maori beside the tiki, I recognized the spirit of belonging and homage that Col himself often wrote about to his family. I also felt that the window was a fitting tribute to those of my countrymen who served at Mildenhall, Lakenheath, Newmarket, Feltwell and the many airbases around them. Out of 6000 New Zealanders who volunteered for Bomber Command, 1800 didn't return.

My own personal tribute to my great-uncle Col has been telling his story in *Under a Bomber's Moon*. His is a story typical of many 'colonials' who left their homes and crossed the oceans to fight for the Empire. As such, the story of one man's war and the camaraderie he enjoyed helps to put the collective efforts of tens of thousands of brave men in a scale and context we can better understand 70 years later. As Col Jones himself wrote home, that personal contribution meant little outside the teamwork of his crews:



"I think that the crew of an aeroplane is the best example of democracy one could find.

You get to know each other so well when you fly together. You learn what a man is like when things are sticky. That is when you appreciate his worth."

Visit the book's website: www.underabombersmoon.com

Please note:

Geoff Reynolds is now the Acting Register Secretary and all correspondence should be addressed to him at: 61 Salem St, Gosberton, Spalding, PE11 4 NQ

Chairman's Comments

It was good to see so many people attending the reunion weekend last May, many travelling long distances but none to compare with that covered by Ralph Skilbeck and Eric Willis and his daughter Patricia. All three made the journey from Australia. Eric's reasons for the trip are to be found in an article later in the newsletter whilst Ralph was making his second visit to Mildenhall to honour the memory of his Brother, Fg Off Robert Wesley Skilbeck, RAAF, XV Sqn who was KIA over Germany on 4 Dec 44. It was an honour to meet these two fine Gentlemen from the southern hemisphere and another reminder of the great contribution the Commonwealth made to the war effort. At this year's reunion we hope to have the company of another military representative of a Commonwealth country.

My thanks are due to all who contacted the Register over the year and a special thanks to all who made generous donations to our funds, which help to off set expenses.

The past year has seen your new committee tackling and trying to meet the work previously undertaken by Don Clark, ably assisted by his wife Win, and Fred Coney. Unfortunately none of them are enjoying good health at the present time. Let's hope that they are well enough to attend some of the events at this year's reunion. The Register's web site is now up and running thanks to the hard work of Alan Fraser and a database of members exists thanks to the Herculean efforts of Sue Bridgwater. I want to thank these and all the committee for their sterling efforts over the year.

Preparations are well in hand for the May reunion of which you will read elsewhere. Meanwhile the Committee are examining the possibility of erecting a memorial of some description in the Mildenhall area to honour all those who served at Mildenhall and it's satellite aerodromes during World War 11. Your committee is determined to see the Register go forward into the future with a positive attitude to ensure the memory of those who served and those who paid the ultimate sacrifice are not forgotten. I am always pleased to receive your ideas, comments, suggestions and thoughts about the Register. My address is 29, Brinkley Rd, Dullingham, Newmarket, Suffolk CB8 9UW and tel no 01638507211. Please do not hesitate to contact me.

May I take this opportunity to wish you all, albeit belatedly a very Happy New Year.

Sqn Ldr John Gentleman RAF (Rtd)

A memorable reunion weekend - 15/17 May 2009

The Mildenhall Register's annual reunion weekend was memorable. Members travelled from far and wide to the event, two travelled from Australia, and in all nearly 150 members, relations and friends of the Register visited Royal Air Force Mildenhall over the weekend, where we were entertained royally by the United States Air Force.

The weekend started with the dispersal of people into local hostelries, most staying at the war time favourite of RAF personnel, the Bird in Hand at Beck Row, right outside one of the gates. A relatively early Friday morning start was required, for the Register's members had been invited to the 75th Anniversary celebration of the opening of RAF Mildenhall as an airfield, way back in 1934. King George V opened the base and less than a year later it was the location of the first full scale review of the RAF. During the day we were treated as VIP guests and viewed demonstrations from the USAFE Band, Military Working Dogs and the Fire Department. Also we observed aerial displays involving a Spitfire and a Mustang as well as an air power demonstration of the assets of USAFE. The event ended with an enactment of

the October 1934 England to Australia air race, which took place to mark the formal opening of the station.

In the evening, after a buffet dinner, members gathered for the AGM before celebrating the Base Commander's promotion to General in the bar of Middleton Hall. The AGM meeting minutes will be available on the web site shortly.

The next day saw 40 plus members make a visit to the Lincolnshire Aviation heritage Centre at East Kirkby. The centre was conceived as a memorial to Pilot Officer Christopher Panton and all the 55,000 plus aircrew of Bomber Command who lost their lives in WW II. The main attraction of the Centre is one of the three remaining Lancasters that can taxi under their own power. Veteran members of the Register were able to sit in the cockpit and bring back memories of yester-year. Other attractions included artefacts from crashed aircraft sites, boards showing potted histories of Lincolnshire's bomber squadrons, a NAFFI, the station Chapel, the Control Tower and the Escape Museum. The visit concluded with an airfield tour in a Queen Mary trailer hosted by the loveable, eccentric and knowledgeable Barbara. All agreed that the trip was very worthwhile and want something similar next year!

In the evening we all assembled in the Galaxy Club for the Reunion Dinner, where the guests of honour included the 100th Air Refuelling Wing Commander, Col Eden Murrie USAF and Group Captain Peter Norford RAAF.

Finally we assembled in the base Chapel on the Sunday morning for a truly memorable and moving remembrance service followed by refreshments in the Chapel's hall.

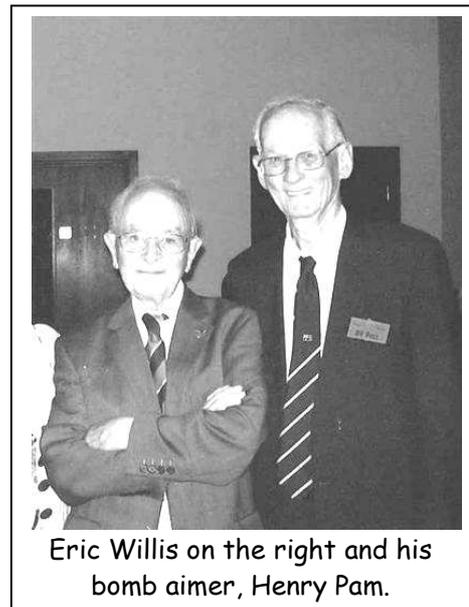
The Register is indeed very grateful to the USAF for entertaining us over the weekend.

Reunited after 64 Years- Eric Willis RAAF & Henry Pam

A couple of years ago my daughter Patricia, gave me a small "Dad" book. It asked you a lot of questions, starting in childhood and onwards through your life so that the family would have a short record of your life. One question really stumped me: It asked, "Dad what was the most impulsive thing you have ever done?" I have never been impulsive and searching my memory couldn't come up with anything, so I gave that question a miss. Earlier, I had received the Mildenhall Register newsletter announcing the celebrations for the 75th anniversary of the foundation of the airfield. I had never been to a reunion, so I thought that would be nice and I could catch up with Henry Pam my Bomb Aimer, but then thought little of it again.

Then one day I was down the street doing the shopping and passed a travel agency. I stopped, thought for a moment, then walked in and asked how much it would be to fly to England on the 10th of May. Given a price, I bought the ticket without consulting anyone, and so began my greatest adventure since the war! Patricia decided to go with me (to make sure I arrived safely!). We flew out of Brisbane at midnight on the night of my wife Audrey's 85th birthday. First leg to Hong Kong, then on to London. It took 6 weeks to sail home when I last left London in 1945, but the return journey only took 23 hours!

We travelled up from London to Mildenhall on the Thursday and checked into the "Bird-in-the-Hand", which we had booked before leaving Australia. Many things were not as I remembered them! On Friday we attended the American 75th celebrations and it was at that dinner that Henry and I met again after 64 years. It was very emotional when he walked up to me and asked Eric? I might not have recognised him at first, but the sound of his voice and the accent brought all the memories bubbling to the surface. It was only a short talk as we were at different tables and we didn't meet again that night.



The following night at the Mildenhall dinner, we were at the same table, along with Group Captain Peter Norford (from the Australian High Commission London). It was truly a memorable night. After coming home from the war, I went back to work on my Father's cattle property and kept in touch with all my crew until after I married and moved to my own dairy farm. Working up to 20 hours a day for the next 13 years didn't leave any time for letter writing and I gradually lost touch with all of them except Henry. We have been in regular contact these past few years and it was truly special to meet up again after all these years at the very place that brought us so close together in such trying times.

Patricia and I had hired a car; we'd arranged to drive Henry home to Somerset after the celebrations. Patricia did all the driving and managed not to get lost! We spent 3 days at Henry's and during the day he showed us the sights of his beloved Somerset, and in the evenings we talked into the wee small hours. Obviously we had both changed a lot in the intervening years, but one of the wonderful things about aircrews was that we seemed to grow together and developed a mateship that the years couldn't diminish. After all the hours sitting down with my son James, over the last few years, going over all the

minute details of my service years, it was a fitting finale to actually sit down once again with one of the fellows who had been a part of it all and share again memories of our youth.

After we left Henry's we went up to Glasgow to visit some of my relatives that I also hadn't seen since the war. We eventually made our way back to London and spent 10 days wandering around the streets. Once I got my bearings, I found that I could remember many of the sights I hadn't seen since the war. The last time I went to Buck House, Winston Churchill and Clement Attlee were speaking to the crowds from the balcony terrace!

I want to thank Howard Sandall for going to all the trouble to make the weekend in Mildenhall such a memorable one for us "old timers". Having Henry there to share in the celebrations just felt like the icing on the cake!

Fg Off Eric Willis RAAF (Rtd)

XV(R)Sqn - Sqn Cdr's Report 2009

I write this update having only been in post for some 3 months, so unfortunately I am relying on significant anecdotal and archival material for much of the content. Obviously, it has been a significant honour and privilege for me to take command of XV(R) Squadron, and in the brief time I have been in charge I have been both astounded by how busy the Squadron has been and impressed that the morale on the Squadron remains so high. Our instructional efforts and ethos remain vital to the front line, and there has been no reduction in the support for the entire Tornado GR4 Force, most notably in its undertaking of operations over Afghanistan.

The inspiring and total commitment of all our people remains incredible; throughout the past year large numbers of squadron personnel have been deployed, away from their families, for many months at a time supporting operations around the world, most notably in Afghanistan on Operation Herrick or in the Falklands; support for Operation Telic ceased in June 09. The Tornado GR4 Force replaced the Harrier GR7/9 aircraft in Afghanistan in April 2009, giving the Harrier air and groundcrews a well earned respite following their 4 year sojourn to Afghanistan. The Tornado Force settled in swiftly at the Kandahar Air Base, having learnt well from the lessons identified by previous roulements; No.12(B) Sqn were the first to deploy, and have now been replaced by No.31 Sqn. The crews fly extensive close air support sorties, providing life saving cover to our troops on the ground and employ strafe gunnery and precision bombing against the Taliban fighters and associated ground targets. The ability to deploy a wide-range of precision munitions at

short notice has been invaluable in supporting the ground offensive, as is the ability to demonstrate an 'operationally low-level show of force'!

All the aircrew that graduate from XV(R) Squadron for the foreseeable future will almost certainly be expected to convert and deploy very swiftly on these demanding operations; to that end, here at RAF Lossiemouth we remain totally focussed on delivering the best possible level of instruction and associated development for the Post Graduate Aircrew under further training (the new official term for Studes!) as they convert to the Tornado GR4. I have been impressed by the attitude and enthusiasm displayed by the students during this phase of their post-graduate flying training and they all remain positive and excited about their future profession, keen to put all training into practice during live operational flying. Obviously, the end-product of the Squadron would not be possible without the wholehearted commitment of all the instructors, engineering support, operations and administration staff.

You will be pleased to note that we have continued to honour our past. We once again paraded the XV(R) Squadron Standard at Odense (Denmark), Gellik (Belgium) and Vraux (France) in what have become most welcome annual fixtures. I am advised that XV(R) Squadron continue to be greeted most warmly and hosted magnificently throughout. Although I have yet to personally attend one of these ceremonies, I look forward to next year's events with relish! As alluded to in the last Squadron Commander's Report penned by my predecessor, we laid up the old XV Squadron Standard in the Church of St Laurentius, Gellik on Sunday 23rd November 2008 in a well received and moving ceremony. Subsequently, XV(R) Squadron formally received our new (the third) Squadron Standard from RAF Lossiemouth's Honorary Air Commodore, His Royal Highness the Duke of York, on Wednesday 10th December 2008. No.14 Squadron also received their new Standard at the same ceremony.

Socially, the Squadron remains very active, celebrating new arrivals and the inexorable rotation of departing colleagues. That said, I have also been delighted to honour members of the Squadron, of all ranks, who have been awarded well deserved medals for active service in ongoing campaigns. Shortly after my arrival I had the opportunity to preside over the annual All-Ranks Dining-In Night on the Squadron, held within one of our refurbished hangars, with a backdrop of Tornado aircraft and in the presence of the new Squadron Standard; a rather surreal yet humbling and uplifting experience. The spirit displayed amongst the Officers and Airmen throughout the evening was fabulous and all those who attended had a splendid night. As has become tradition, and to allow the effects of any possible over-indulgence to wane, the following day we held the annual aircrew verses groundcrew Memorial Golf

Tournament at Hopeman Golf Club for the Sean Cassaybao Trophy; the groundcrew triumphed yet again. We have just held a Squadron Ladies Guest night during which my wife and I, and a significant number of other recent arrivals, were formally Dined-In and we have also made it through the Squadron all-ranks Christmas party! Throughout the past year we have welcomed and hosted a wide range of visitors to the Squadron including DCinC Ops, Air Marshal Iain McNicholl who completed his last fast jet flight in a XV(R) Tornado GR4, having started his RAF career flying the Buccaneer on XV Sqn, AOC 1 Group, AVM Greg Bagwell discussed current operations and the Squadron's role in training personnel for those operations, and the new Tornado GR4 Force Commander, Group Captain Rocky Rochelle. We also managed to get a few of our aircraft away from Lossiemouth during the year, including an air show in Prague, training flights to Malta and a very worthwhile two week detachment to Leeuwarden.

I am fiercely proud of the XV Sqn heritage and I am acutely aware of the debt of gratitude we owe to those who shaped the history of which we are so proud. Therefore, we are always genuinely pleased to host any visits by past Sqn members, either in groups or as individuals, indeed I offer an open invitation in the hope that we can encourage more 'old-boys' to visit this northern outpost of the empire. I consider it vital that we continue to maintain the profile of the XV Squadron amongst the current staff members and transient course members. As the average age of the trainees *seems* to get younger each year, we must all work that little bit harder to ensure that they connect with their provenance and forebears.

To end on a personal note, and on behalf of all current members of XV(R) Sqn, I would like to wish all at the Mildenhall Register and their families a belated very Happy New Year. We end 2009 in good shape and high spirits, looking forward to the challenges that the following year will undoubtedly bring. Aim Sure for 2010!

Brian James Wg Cdr Officer Commanding No XV(R) Squadron

<p><i>Due to space restrictions it has not been possible to print the AGM minutes in this edition. Copies may be obtained from the Secretary.</i></p>
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Programme for Reunion Weekend 14 -16 May 2010

Friday 14 May	18:00	Pre meal Drinks in Galaxy Club
	18:30	Buffet super in Galaxy Club
	20:00	AGM in Galaxy Club followed by a social chat!
Saturday 15 May	09:30	Coach departs the Bird in Hand for visit to Norfolk & Suffolk Aviation Centre stopping en route for Coffee at Methwold Church <i>(Light refreshments available at Centre, Pub snacks available in an adjacent inn.)</i>
	16:30	Coach arrives back at the Bird in Hand
	18:15	Pre dinner drinks in the Galaxy Club
	19:00	Formal dinner with entertainment (provisional)
Sunday 16 May	22:00	Coaches
	09:15	Combined Service of Remembrance, Base Chapel followed by refreshments in Chapel Hall
	11:30	Farewells.

Notes:

- Middleton Hall is closed for renovation hence using the Galaxy Club.
- Please include price of Friday supper (if attending) with cost of Saturday dinner - **cheques please no cash** made out to the Mildenhall Register. Receipts will be issued
- Refunds will be given up to 48 hours before the event.
- Saturday Trip to Aviation Centre free (apart from refreshments) but need to book. Open to all and organised as a result of last year's successful outing!
- Application Form included with this newsletter.



Jack Trend arrives by Staff Car at Meerlo Memorial

Memories At Meerlo

Meerlo is a quiet, little town on the west side of the River Maas, situated to the south east of Verna, near the Dutch /German border, but in the early hours of the morning of 13 Jun 44, the peace in the town was shattered, when a Lancaster bomber fell from the sky and crashed on the town's outskirts.

Activity on the airfield at RAF Mildenhall had been very busy during the day on 12 Jun when fifteen Avro Lancaster bombers of No XV Sqn were prepared for an attack against

Gelsenkirchen, Germany, that night. Armourers loaded the guns and hoisted high explosive and incendiary bombs into the bays of each aircraft, whilst instrument fitters, riggers, airframe mechanics and engineers all checked the relevant parts of each aircraft to ensure all machines were airworthy and fit for air operations.



XV Crew of LM 464 LS-U at Mildenhall March / April 1944
Back Row from left to right
Plt Off Carl Thompson RCAF (Pilot), Sgt Tom Stubbs (MUG),
WO Ron Lemsky RCAF (Bomb Aimer) Pete Burch (not on final raid),
Front Row from left to right;
Sgt Duke Pelham (Flt Eng), Sgt Jack Trend (Wireless Op),
WO Rod McMillan RCAF (Nav),
Sgt Dick Mobbs was the Rear Gunner on the final operation

Having been briefed for the forthcoming operation, the crews sat down to the ritual pre-flight meal before changing into their flying kit. As the night of 12th June began to wane, the silence across the darkened airfield was broken by the sound of sixty Rolls Royce Merlin engines whining into life. Slowly the propellers spluttered, coughed and burst into action, each gaining momentum as the pilot and flight engineer in each aircraft checked the engines. The noise intensified as power was increased, forcing the propellers to rotate faster and faster until, accompanied by a crescendo of noise they reached full power.

Slowly each aircraft began to move, following one another in single file around the track leading to the end of the active runway. Making one final stop for cockpit checks and a further engine test run at full power, each aircraft awaited the signal for take-off. In receipt of a flash of green light from the hand help Aldis lamp in the control caravan, each Lancaster bomber rolled forward in turn and climbed slowly into the night sky.

At 23.15 hrs, having received the signal, Plt Off Carlton Thompson, applied the power, released the brakes and Lancaster bomber, LM465, coded LS-U, lurched forward, gradually built up speed and lumbered into the darkness of the night. All too soon the aircraft disappeared from view, never to be seen again.

As 'Carl' Thompson concentrated on the task of gaining altitude, assisted by Sgt Maurice Pelham, the flight engineer, WO Roderick McMillan, the navigator, began plotting the first course changes, Flt Sgt Jack Trend, the wireless operator, was tuned into his wireless set listening for any possible recall or other messages from ground control, whilst the two air gunners, Sgt Thomas Stubbs and Sgt Richard Mobbs, the mid-upper and rear gunners respectively, peered into the darkness searching. Even at this stage of the sortie there was the possible danger from German night-fighter intruder aircraft, which, shielded by the darkness, could watch the bombers, loaded with fuel, bombs and ammunition, taking off. The final member of the crew, whose main task came into being over the target, was Flt Sgt Ronald Lemsky, the bomb aimer. Although four members of the crew were Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, two were Canadians who had joined the RCAF and one (Carl Thompson) was an American who had also enlisted for service with the Royal Canadian Air Force.

At 01.03 hrs, on the morning of 13th June 1944, a Me.110G German night-fighter from 6 Grippe / Nachtjagdgeschwader 1, piloted by Unteroffizier Gustav Sarzio, crept closer to the bomber. Suddenly, the night sky was lit up by the muzzle flashes as Sarzio opened fire at the Lancaster in his gun-sight. The cannon shells ripped into the four-engine bomber, scoring hits on the starboard inner engine and fuselage. Instantly the bomber was engulfed in flames and the pilot had no option but to order his crew to bale out of the stricken machine.

On hearing the order to bale out, Jack Trend retrieved his parachute, clipped it on to the harness he was wearing, and made his way towards the forward escape hatch. Ahead of him Maurice Pelham and Ron Lemsky were preparing to jump. As he floated down towards the ground Jack was aware that chunks of debris were raining down around him, giving rise to the thought that the Lancaster had broken up in the air, although he had not heard or was aware of an explosion. Fortunately for the townsfolk, the aircraft impacted on farmland just to the west of Meerlo.

Although Jack Trend parachuted safely, evaded capture and was back in England by mid September he later learned, much to his despair, he was the only survivor of his crew.

Saturday, 7th June 2008, dawned bright and dry, the only sound being one or two birds welcoming the start of a new day. There was nothing outwardly to suggest that this was going to be a special day, one that was to be filled with emotion; both happiness and tinges of sadness. Initially the main street in Meerlo was deserted. The car park outside the Town Hall was empty. Suddenly the near silence was broken by the sound of a heavy vehicle engine, and then a World War 11 American Army Truck came into view. As the truck swung into the car park and stopped the sound of other motor engines became audible and three or four military vehicles of the same vintage appeared and joined the truck. Gradually, one or two people began appearing from doorways and side streets and showed an interest in the now gathering fleet. As more vehicles filled the car park, the number of people viewing the spectacle grew.

This gathering was not part of a military vintage vehicle rally. All the drivers had been invited along with local dignitaries and special guests from both Holland and Britain to attend a dedication and unveiling of a memorial to a fallen bomber crew.

The guest list was an impressive one. Apart from various Dutch and English dignitaries the list included families and relatives of the fallen crew and Wg Cdr Mike Saunders Officer Commanding No XV Sqn, with a contingent of Officers, supported by the Squadron Colour Party. The Squadron Historian was also in attendance as were various members of the Dutch archaeological group who had excavated the aircraft crash site. The Guest of Honour was ex Flt Sgt Jack Trend.

Each guest was personally welcomed by the Mayor, in the vestibule of the Town Hall, before partaking of tea and coffee in a large meeting room. Upon being officially greeted, an aide informed the Mayor of each person's credentials or relationship to the fallen crew.

Once the initial formalities were over and everybody had gathered in the meeting room, the Mayor offered a general welcome followed by a short speech. The guests were then invited to climb aboard one of the military vehicles parked outside for the short journey to a spot near the memorial's location. The only proviso to the invitation was that Jack Trend should travel to the site in the American General's Staff car, which was, greeted with a unanimous round of applause.

Having driven in convoy to a point, which became too narrow for the vehicles, the guests vacated the trucks and jeeps etc and formed-up in loose ranks and marched the short remaining distance to the memorial behind a local band.

When all were assembled, with the invited guests seated and other spectators standing nearby, the proceedings officially started. The XV Squadron colour was paraded on, accompanied by the Colour escort. Again the Mayor was first to speak; he then invited certain, pre-selected, distinguished guests to the rostrum to speak. During the speeches, many comments were made relating to the unreserved gratitude of the Dutch people towards the Royal Air Force, the sacrifice made by members of the RAF in general and that of the crew of Lancaster, LM465, in particular.

The final guest invited to speak was Jack Trend, whose mind must have been full of memories at Meerlo. A dignified silence fell as the former wireless operator spoke in reserved tones about that fateful night and his crew. Jack was then invited to unveil the memorial, which had been fabricated from a treated section of the aircraft skin recovered from the crashed site of the Lancaster. As Jack slid the protective curtain to one side, the memorial was seen for the first time by those assembled. Apart from bearing an engraved silhouette of a Lancaster aircraft and the date, 13th June 1944, also etched in the face of the metal were the names of the crew. One can only guess at Jack's thoughts as he gazed upon the memorial in silence.

The ceremony continued with the laying of wreaths, which included tributes from the Mayor, OC XV Sqn, other dignitaries and children from the town. The proceedings culminated with a fly past by a single-engine Fairchild World War 11 aircraft.

Following a photo-call, during which many photographs of both Jack and the memorial were taken, it was time to return to the town centre, by the same mode of transport, where a celebratory lunch was provided.

Martyn R. Ford-Jones with contributions from Jack Trend

'Toying' with Berlin

In the latter half of 1943 the Air Ministry authorized the expansion of Bomber Command to continue with the 'Pointblank' directive of destroying strategic military targets in Germany. Subsequently on 10th August 1943, 622 Sqn was formed from 'C' flight of XV Sqn. Seven crews from XV Sqn were immediately posted to the squadron, although they did not have far to travel, for 622 was to share RAF Mildenhall with XV.

One of the newly trained crews, that initially formed 622 Sqn, was that of Fg Off Toy. Posted into Mildenhall from 1665 HCU, Woolfox Lodge on the 9th August 1943, the crew were, for administrative purposes, temporarily allocated to XV Sqn but transferred the following day onto their new squadron. With a scarcity of aircraft, the crew did not fly immediately with only Fg Off 'Chunky' Toy (as he was affectionately known by the crew), as second pilot to Flt Sgt Batson, seeing any flying in the first week of the squadron's existence. Finally,



Crew mates Ritson, Carter and Toy

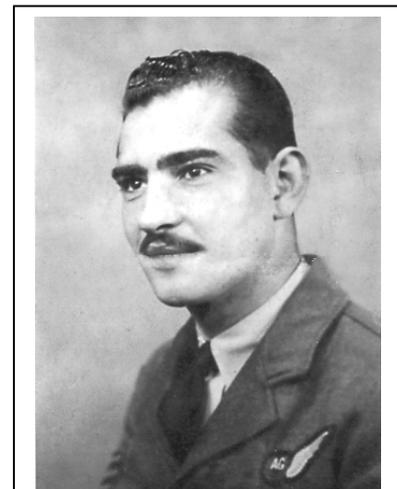
after a number of false starts, the crew flew their first operational mission on 22nd August, dropping mines over the West Friesians. Lasting just over 4 hours, of the 3 aircraft dispatched, HK 816 GI-B flown by Toy and crew was the only one to complete an otherwise uneventful 'gardening' trip, the other 2 aircraft turning back due to Gee failure.

Mine laying operations were always preferable to deep excursions over heavily defended enemy territory and Bomber Command suffered few losses whilst undertaking these missions. The German capital city of Berlin was, at the other end of the spectrum, the most heavily defended target in the world with rings of flak towers around its perimeter. In addition, the crews had to successfully negotiate a six hour round trip in which intense night fighter activity was a very real danger. At the time of the squadron's conception, Bomber Command was participating in what was known later as 'The Battle of Berlin'. Berlin was soon to become a regular destination for the crews of Bomber Command and aircrew would often refer to this target as 'The Big City'. Air Chief Marshal Harris believed that destroying the German capital would seriously dent the morale of the German people and bring home to them the realisation that the war could be brought to them in devastating ways. Harris wanted the assistance of the American 8th Air Force and he stated that together the allies could "wreck Berlin from end to end".

The night of 23rd August 1943 is considered to have been the start of the Battle of Berlin. The order was given mid-morning by Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris for an 'all out effort' and by teatime the bomber crews of 622 Sqn knew that their destination that night would be the feared 'Big City'. Fg Off Toy and crew were promulgated on the battle order to attack Berlin on the night of 23rd August. Taking off at 2030hrs, the crew witnessed several

aircraft being shot down as they cleared the Dutch coast, then flying north of Hannover and they approached Berlin from the southeast. As EH490 GI-F and crew lined up on the green marker flares exploding flak shells jolted and buffeted their Stirling. At 15,000 feet above the city, and identified as being over the target, Fg Off Glen Ritson released the bomb load and 'Chunky' Toy made for the Danish coast. Fg Off Fred Carter wrote in his diary on return to base, "...it was a tough assignment for our first operation...we were the only 'green' crew flying". The 23rd August is significant because Bomber Command lost the highest number of aircraft to date with 56 aircraft going down, 16 of which were Stirlings and 622 Sqn suffered its first loss with Flt Sgt Rollett and crew perishing on German soil. Considered to be a highly successful op on the night, later reconnaissance photos confirmed that most of the bomber stream had turned too early onto their north-easterly bombing run and had consequently bombed the southern suburbs. With airframes once again at a premium, Toy and crew found themselves without an aircraft and on the morning of 24th August and they were assigned six days leave. While away, the Stirling losses continued to mount and on the 27/28th August Bomber Command attacked the city of Nuremberg. 622 Sqn received no casualties on this raid however, the total Stirling losses amounted to 10% of the force.

Whilst on leave in the Medway Towns, Sgt Dick Benham, experienced what it was like to be on the receiving end of a bombing raid. A couple of evenings into his leave, Dick heard Luftwaffe bombers overhead on their way to bomb the nearby Chatham naval dockyards. Urging his family to immediately join him in the Anderson shelter at the bottom of the garden, his younger sister Muriel dawdled on the path looking up at the night sky. Urged again to hurry up by Dick, she replied, "they can't see us, they are too high". Probably remembering his trip to Berlin of only a few days before, he replied sharply "*they can see bloody everything...I know I have xxxxxx been up there*"



Frank Poyser, MUG.
Survived and was reunited
with Dick Benham in Stalag
IVB

The final week of August saw raids on various targets and Berlin was again the target on the night of 31st/1st September. Fg Off Toy and crew had returned from leave to discover they were going back to Berlin and would be flying in the newly arrived Short Stirling EF119 GI-Q. Taking off from Mildenhall at 20:20 hours, 622 Sqn's six heavily laden Stirlings fought to gain height and join the rest of the mixed bomber stream of Halifaxes, Lancasters and Stirlings over the North Sea.

cont.

This time coming in over the Belgium coast, the stream of bombers flew a more northerly course than the week previously. As was his duty on crossing the coast, Dick Benham began throwing out chaff (or Window) in order to blind the ground based radar used by the Germans to guide their night fighters. Flying slow and low, illuminated by the flames spitting from the exhausts of their 4 Bristol Hercules engines, EF199 GI-G was however soon picked up by a marauding night fighter, that proceeded to position itself underneath and slightly behind the bomber. Racked with cannon fire and with its front section set alight, Hauptman Wilhelm Telge of 5/NJG 1, flying a 2-man Bf 110, claimed his thirteenth victim northwest of the Harz mountains at just after midnight. Fg Off Toy knew that they were doomed and ordered his crew to bail out. Smith, Poyser, Benham and Ritson parachuted to safety; however the remaining 3 were to lose their lives when the fully laden Stirling crashed near Wollerhausen, Osterode Am Harz just after midnight, 1st September 1943. Initially knocked unconscious by the chest-mounted parachute pack opening into his face, Sgt Benham drifted down and landed with quite a jolt in a potato field. Burying his parachute immediately, Dick Benham lay down in a furrow until it got light. As he made his way along the field in the early light of morning he was soon spotted by an old man carrying a pistol. Taken into captivity and marched to the nearest police station, Dick was soon reunited with Glen Ritson who had also been recently captured. After the obligatory stay at the Dulag Luft, both were eventually transported to prisoner of war camps, Ritson to Stalag Luft III and Benham to Stalag IVB (where he was reunited with Frank Poyser).



Sgt Benham showing the scars of parachuting out of a stricken bomber at night.

This photograph was taken on 2nd September 1943 on arrival at Dulag Luftwaffe Interrogation camp. When the camp was liberated in April 1945, Sgt Benham managed to grab the photo from the camp admin hut before it was ransacked.

The mission had been disastrous for Bomber Command with a massive forty seven crews paying the price for a disappointing raid and the Stirling loss rate was 16%. This mission was the catalyst for the withdrawal of Short Stirlings from front line service. Harris knew that the Stirling losses could not be sustained and relegated the Stirling to secondary roles. Sgt Benham would remain a prisoner of war until he was liberated by Russian Cossacks on 23rd April 1945.

Howard Sandall Photographs: © A. Marshall 2008

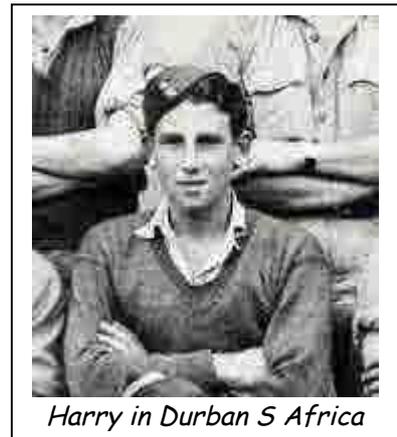
Sgt Harry Rupert Holt's (90 Squadron) story

The Internet is the source of a host of information, including World War 2 stories of individual's memories and experiences. I came across the following story, which was written by Michael Chapman with whose permission I have produced parts of the story. I hope that it might inspire others to record either their stories or those of their relatives and friends.

Michael writes:

Harry Holt (my Uncle) was a quiet un-assuming and hard working man; he rarely (if ever) spoke of his life in the RAF in later life. After his death in New Zealand (he and his wife emigrated there in the 1970's to join their two sons Alan and Clive) Joyce made a trip back to the UK (1997), during that visit I took her to the East Kirkby aircraft museum, it was on that day I decided to try and piece together the complete details of Harry's war record.

Harry was a Bomber Aimer on 90 Sqn based at RAF Tuddenham. On the 10 June 1944 his crew were flying Lancaster (MkIII) WP-H. Serial NE 117. The Pilot was Flt Sgt T A Burnett RAAF, Navigator Sgt C A Page RAF, Wireless Operator WO G K Hartwig RAAF, MUG Sgt. W F Gallivan RAF, Rear Gunner Sgt. D A Mundy RAF and Flight Engineer Sgt. J F Clinton. At 22.45 hrs Harry and the crew took-off on Operation Dreux. The purpose of this operation was to bomb the railway yards at Dreux (West of Paris), France. The crew released their bomb load on the rail yards but a few minutes later they were hit either by Flak or Enemy Fighter aircraft fire. Their Lancaster caught fire and the order to Bail Out was given. The plane crashed into the ground near the village of Grandvilliers 7 km North of Tilliere Sur Avre (West of Paris).



Harry in Durban S Africa

Harry's story is best told by his statement on his return to England. It was as follows:

We took off from Tuddenham at 2300hrs on 10 Jun 44 to bomb DRUEX. We bombed the target but were shot at by a fighter aircraft a few minutes later we were over the village of GRANDVILLIERS. The order was given to bail out. I landed in a field at 0115 hrs (11 Jun) and made for a farm at the edge of the field. I hid in a barn until daylight when I saw the farmer in the yard. I went out and made myself known to him. He took my uniform and mae west and gave me an old

pair of boots, a jacket and a pair of trousers. He told me it was not safe to remain here and advised me to leave at once, as there were many Germans in this area. I made for a wood and hid until dusk, then commenced walking in a Northerly direction until I came to another farm, where I stopped and asked the farmer if he could give me some food. He put me up for the night in a hayloft, and gave me food.

Next morning (12 Jun) he brought me the mayor of the nearest village who made out an identity card for me and advised me to leave as soon as possible.

As I was passing through a wood I met some men cutting logs. I asked them for a drink, first explaining who I was. I told them I was making for CAEN, but they advised me not to go, and one of the men offered to take me to friends of his near ROMAN who owned a farm. This farmer was a member of the resistance movement and I stayed with him for about ten days. During my stay the farmer went to see one of the chiefs of the resistance movement who lived in another village. He brought back with him a photograph of my rear gunner, Sgt. GALLIVAN who was staying at LES MINIERSES, a village about 8 kms, North-east of ROMAN and it was arranged that Sgt. GALLIVAN and I should meet at a given rendezvous a day or two later.

Towards the end of the fortnight we had arranged to meet again, and just as I was setting out a messenger arrived. He said at 0300 hrs on 25 Jun the Germans came with 150 men and a tank and surrounded the house where Sgt. GALLIVAN was hiding. It was set on fire but Sgt. GALLIVAN tried to escape by hiding in a tree, but he was caught by the Germans and taken prisoner. The rest of the people who were all members of the Resistance movement were either caught or shot. After this incident I was advised by my helpers to hide in the woods for a few days. I remained in the woods for two days and my helpers brought food to me. On the third day, one of the helpers brought a friend who said I could go and stay with him.

I was taken to his farm, which was on the outskirts of the village, and I remained there about a week. It was rumoured that the Gestapo were on the lookout for Resistance people, so it was decided it would be better to get away from this area as soon as possible. About 3 Jul four helpers took me by bicycle to the village of LAONS where we stayed for four days in a cafe. The village was full of Germans who frequented the cafe most of the time, so I pretended to be deaf and dumb. As there were so many Germans about as well as Gestapo in plain clothes, we decided to leave LAONS.

On 7 Jul we cycled to the village of DAME MARIE and here we parted as they were going to PARIS and I decided to make for the North of France. I had no maps with me, having left them behind at ROMAN. I walked for some hours and finally reached the town of BRETEUIL. I stopped at a farm and asked for food, but while I was at the gate waiting for the farmer to bring me something to eat I

noticed a boy cycling away from the farm towards the town so I decided to leave at once, as I was rather suspicious of the farmer; I hid in a wood not far away and soon after a car drew up and shots were fired into the wood I remained hidden in a little hut for two days. On 9 Jul I started walking again and reached the forest of BRETEUIL . I met a shepherd on the edge of the forest and explained to him who I was and asked him if there were any Germans in the wood. He offered to take me to his cottage and said he would try to contact the Resistance movement. I stayed with him for 11 days. About 20 Jul he took me to a forest rangers cottage and from here I was contacted by one of the resistance men who took me to NEAULES-SUR-RISLE where I stayed with a friend until the British arrived.

Four members of the Lancaster crew bailed-out safely, unfortunately Sgt Cecil Page and Plt Off Tom Burnett were killed in the crash; they are buried in the Dreux Communal Cemetery, Eure et Loir, France. Harry survived the war and was de-mobbed Class A, he left the RAF with the rank of Warrant Officer. The full story can be viewed at: www.f4bscale.worldwide.co.uk/sgtharry

In praise of Bomber Command

As the horrors of World War Two developed, the aim of the RAF's Bomber Command was to destroy, for the Germans, the means of producing war material and to break the will of their people to continue the fight. To these ends we bombed the factories and those who worked in them as hard as we could. The result was not a collapse of morale, except for a few small instances, as we had hoped and expected. The people reacted much as the victims of the earlier German bombing of English cities reacted - with a thirst for revenge.

So what did all our great efforts achieve? Now that historians have provided us with much detail of those times, we can perhaps conjecture on what might have been the result of not using the bomber offensive in the way we did.

One result quite probably would have been a German victory over Russia. That war was a near-run thing. The two armies were well matched in numbers but the Germans were trained and armed better. The German generals felt that their failure was due to the planned supply of tanks arriving too few and too late. But the war continued and we had to mount the invasion to free mainland Europe. That assault succeeded - but only just. Breaching the German defences was more difficult than we had expected. Hitler, of course, knew the invasion was coming and had planned for a mighty reserve force to be in readiness to throw against us. The destruction, which we had wrought upon manufacturing and communications, resulted in that mighty reserve never being put together. If it had, the invasion of

1944 might well have failed. Then we would have been faced with at least another year of war or maybe just a stalemate.

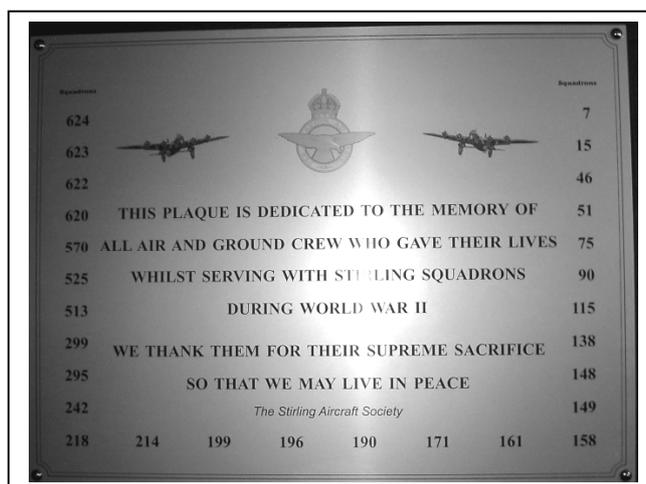
We now know of another of Hitler's plans. That was to destroy London by a massive barrage of projectiles. His plan was to launch a thousand missiles a day: the V1 'doodlebug', the V2 rocket and the V3 super-gun. The V3 super-gun (sited in a bunker near Calais) was not quite ready to use, while production and deployment of the V1 and V2 launchers and munitions dropped way behind schedule. If they had achieved anything like a thousand a day, could London have survived?

It is all a matter of 'what if?' We shall never be sure about what might have happened. However, we can be fairly certain that, in the above scenarios, the destruction caused by the bomber offensive was a major factor. The bomber command campaign was effective and decisive, for which we should all be thankful.

John L. Cox, DFC, Pilot 622 Sqn

Dedication of Stirling Aircraft Society Memorial

On Sunday May 31 2009, Dame Vera Lynn, the Patron of the Stirling Aircraft Society, unveiled a plaque at the Mildenhall Town Museum to commemorate nearly 3,000 people who gave their lives whilst serving with Stirling Squadrons during World War 11. All the Squadrons that were



equipped with the Stirling are depicted around the plaque. Jim Coman (149 Sqn) and the Chairman represented the Register at the ceremony. Details of the Stirling Society can be obtained from www.stirlingaircraft.raf38group.org and also by contacting the Register's Chairman. The Museum is well worth a visit, it is open from Wednesday to Saturday. It is best before visiting to check times on www.mildenhallmuseum.co.uk or phone 01638 716970.

Methwold Historical Society are staging an exhibition on RAF Methwold in the Village Hall on 30 Aug 10. All are welcome, especially ex members of RAF Methwold. Further details may be obtained from Colin Neville 01306-728356.

Don't forget to visit the Register's web site for the latest news at: www.mildenhallregister.stirlingpilot.org.uk

OBITUARIES

We regret to report the following deaths notified in 2009

Fg Off Thomas R (Ray) Allan RAAF of Brisbane Australia, died 4 Aug 08

Cyril 'Mick' Bignall of Gloucs 149 Sqn died Aug 09

Ken Botfield of Cottesmore, died Dec 08

Jim Brown of Chesterfield Derbyshire. 149 Sqn workshop died 28 May 08.

Wg Cdr Cedric F Campbell of Mermaid Beach, Australia, died 30 Apr 08

Sqn Ldr Pat Carden DFC of Burnham, Slough, Berks

Wg Cdr R E Cox RAAF of Melbourne, Australia, XV Sqn died 2008

Ray Crowther of Kenninghall, Norfolk

Stuart C Done of Banora Point, NSW, 622 Sqn died 23 Nov 08

James Doyle of New York, USA, 622 Sqn died 10 Apr 09

William J Ellison of Jimbooma, Queensland, served with 622 and 279 Sqns

E Fish of Burbage, Leics, died 4 Jul 08.

E Fowles of Port Talbot, West Glamorgan, 149 Sqn, died Nov 08.

Anthony Graham of Osbaldwick, Yorks

Sqn Ldr C N Hagues, DFC, AFC of Witney, Oxon. died 13 Mar 09.

John Michael Hamlett of Wilmington, North Carolina. USA died 19 Jan 09.

Richard 'Basher' Hearne DFM of Wolverhampton, XV Sqn died 24 Oct 09

Geoffrey H Hill of Melton Mowbray, Leics, XV Sqn died 6 May 09.

Ken James of Dunstable Beds, died 17 Apr 08.

J A Kemp of Leighton Buzzard, Beds. 149 Sqn Radar Section, died 16 Nov 08.

L J Kemp of Exeter, Devon died 21 Dec 08

R D Kidd of Edinburgh, died 23 May 09

Wg Cdr John C Luker of Runaway Bay Queensland, 149 Sqn, died 30 Aug 09.

John Parfitt of Rednal, Birmingham, died 21 Aug 08

Robert G. Street of Wickford, Essex, died 24 Dec 08.

Leslie G Tutthill of Dover, Kent, died 5 Jan 09.

Alex Wood of Harpenden, Herts died Jun 08

Obituary - Flight Sergeant Richard 'Basher' Hearne, DFM

Richard Hearne, DFM, who on the morning of the last XV Squadron Association Reunion Dinner, decided to rise from his sick bed in order to attend the event at RAF Cottesmore, has died. He passed away at his home during the early hours of the morning of Saturday, 24th October 2009.

Richard, who was affectionately known to his many friends as 'Basher', was born in Manchester on 22nd February 1923. Having completed his RAF training 'Basher' was initially posted, during September 1943, to No.620 Squadron at RAF Chedburgh. However, a month later, his crew was posted to No.1657 Conversion Unit, at RAF Stradishall. Richard's first association with No.XV was when he was posted to the Squadron on 4th November 1943, as a flight engineer on Stirling bombers, the aircraft on which he had completed his training.

Having converted to Avro Lancaster bombers, between December 1943 and January 1944, 'Basher' flew a total of thirteen operational missions on this type of aircraft before his pilot, Pilot Officer Alan Amies, was requested to fly an operation with a novice crew; it was to be a mission from which Pilot Officer Amies and the crew failed to return.

During mid-May 1944, Richard Hearne joined the crew of Flight Lieutenant Oliver Brooks, DFC, with whom he was to fly a further ten operational sorties. A friendship developed between the pilot and the flight engineer which was to last some forty-odd years. When Oliver Brooks completed his tour of operations, 'Basher' still had seven missions to complete before he too was declared 'Tour Expired'. These remaining 'Ops' were undertaken with the crew headed by Squadron Leader Pat Carden, a much respected man and an exceptional pilot. On completion of his 'tour', which totalled thirty operational sorties and 150 operational flying hours, Flight Sergeant Richard Hearne was posted to No.3 Lancaster Finishing School as an instructor. He also served, for a short period in each case, with No.90 Squadron, No.186 Squadron and No.218 Squadron respectively.

On 30th August 1944, Richard Hearne was recommended for the award of a Distinguished Flying Medal, the citation for which read in part, "An outstanding flight engineer who rendered valuable assistance to each of his [three] captains in the completion of each sortie". The award was granted and gazetted on 14th November 1944.

In later years, accompanied by his wife Betty, Richard became an ardent supporter of the Mildenhall Register and the XV Squadron Association. Together Richard and Betty attended all the reunions and other functions, be they in Germany (Laarbruch), East Anglia (Mildenhall, Honington and Cottesmore) or

Scotland (Lossiemouth); distance was never a problem. *'Basher's'* cheery expression and easy-going nature will be missed by all who knew him.

Martyn R. Ford-Jones

Cyril 'Mick' Bignall tribute

On the 27th August 2009 a daily newspaper reported the sad death of Cyril Bignall, ex 149 (East India) Squadron rear gunner, he was aged 92. Although not a member of the Mildenhall Register, John Gentleman and I set about contacting the family to extend our condolences and to find out more about the man the papers were calling 'One of the last Tailend Charlies'. Once in contact with son Christopher and daughter Wendy it soon became clear that 'Mick', as he was known by all and shall be here, was a rather special man all round.

Aged 21, Mick volunteered for the RAF in 1938 to avoid the dreaded call-up and being put in the navy or army. Becoming a clerk and keeping squadron records. Mick obtained a special licence and married his sweetheart Queenie on 12th November 1939. Two days later he was posted to France with the BEF.

As we all know, things didn't go too well for the allies once the German invasion of the Low Countries and France began. Being slowly driven back towards the Channel and squeezed by the advancing enemy forces, there were things that had to be done to prevent documents and any other sensitive paperwork falling into enemy hands. Mick, with a couple of others, 'volunteered' to remain behind and destroy what they could. By the time they finished, it was too late to reach Dunkirk and the comparative safety that its evacuation plans (Operation Dynamo) might provide. Somehow they must have heard about the continuing evacuation plans (codenamed Aerial) that were hastily put in place. They set out to reach the Atlantic coast ports using every and any means at their disposal. Living rough and avoiding discovery they eventually reached the La Rochelle area. Here, along with many other allied troops, they embarked on one of the merchant ships sent into La Pallice. The "SS Thistleglen", a 5000 ton general cargo coaster, eventually brought them safely back to 'Blighty'.

Cyril continued as a clerk until he volunteered for aircrew sometime in 1943. It was during this time that he again showed great courage. Wendy his daughter takes up the story:

"He was in digs in London whilst on a training course; Queenie had gone to stay with him. One night when he and Queenie were forced to head for the shelters by an air-raid. A stick of incendiaries landed close by and Cyril went to help put them out. Having removed the immediate threat he continued to the shelter, but was

refused entry. He continued to help the emergency services for the remainder of that night."

He was selected for air-gunnery training and in March 1944 we found in his log book that he was at No 4 Air Gunnery School (AGS), Morpeth, Northumberland. His first flight being in an Avro Anson [reg. no. MG106] for a 15 minutes air experience flight piloted by W/O Zapela. There followed nearly 16 hours of gunnery training, all in the venerable Anson. His last flight being on the 22nd April 1944.

There are no records of when he was posted to No 84 Operational Training Unit (OTU), but he took up his post there sometime in July, joining 'B' flight. His first flight, in the Vickers Wellington's used here, was on the 28th of that month. It wasn't until the 7th of August that he crewed up with the pilot (F/O Shuster) and presumably, many of the crew with whom he would serve for the rest of the war. Towards the end of the month they were transferred to 'C' flight where they continued training until the middle of September. Again there is a gap before his records continue with flights in a Stirling Mk III at 1657 Conversion Unit (CU), Stradishall from 22nd November to the 6th December 1944.

His training continued until he finally got into a Lancaster Mk I at No 3 Lancaster Finishing School, Feltwell on 14th January 1945. This short conversion course lasted just eight days, with 8 daylight and 4 night-time flights. And so, with 91 hrs of daylight and 57 hrs of night flying training

in his log book he was posted to an operational squadron. Posted directly to 149 (East India) Squadron at Methwold, (code letters OJ) they flew their first operation against Wesel on 4th February 1945. It was a daylight bombing raid of 5hrs 45mins and on return they were diverted to Bottesford (no reason given). Pilot Shuster received notification of his new rank of Flight Lieutenant soon after this. There followed various training and testing flights interspersed with daylight



from left to right.

Back row, Sgt. Ken Humphries, wireless operator; Sgt. George Handy, bomb-aimer; Fg Off "Dicky" Schuster, pilot; Fg Off Ted Rosier, navigator.

Front row, Flt Sgt Cyril "Mick" Bignall, R/G; Sgt. Des Watkins F/Eng; Sgt. Joe (Little Joe) Fitzherbert-Smellie, M/U.

operations; twice to Gelsenkirchen, then Cologne, Wanne-Eickel and Gelsenkirchen for a third time.

Their first night bombing came on 7th March 1945 with an 8.5 hr round trip to Dessau. They continued with daylight ops to Datteln, Buer Gelsenkirchen, Dortmund, Munster, Wesel and Harrendorf. Two more night operations to Nierseburg and Kiel and a daylight 'spam' to Rotterdam completed the crews' offensive flying operations on 30th April 1945. Logged hours were now 181 day and almost 81 night time in total.

With the war ended on the 8th, the remainder of May 1945 saw them take part in two 'Manna' operations, dropping supplies to the Dutch over The Hague and Gouda. There were two POW repatriation flights to Juvencourt (Exodus ops.) The crew were kept on their toes with training and bombing practice. There were flights over war torn Europe too, with the crew going to SW France and Northern Germany twice during June. July saw a continuance of the training and practice with one flight over France and another over Denmark.

In the middle of August 1945 they flew to Vaernes, Trondheim in Norway from where they carried out some flights into the Arctic Circle, around the North Cape and across the Lofoton Islands. They returned to Methwold on the 21st August and that saw the last of their wartime flying. Mick's flying time now totalled 321 daylight and 85 night hours. No longer would he have to be prized from his turret by his crew mates, nearly frozen and too stiff to move. Together they had survived to see the end of the tyranny and war that had devastated Europe and so many lives.

Wendy told me that her father suffered nightmares and flash-backs to the end of his life. She also recalled his story about the time he left his turret to assist the mid-upper gunner who had passed out from lack of oxygen. His mask and tubing had been severely restricted by a build up of ice in them. She also remembered him telling her that he frequently had to be physically removed from the turret by his crew mates and ground crew because of the terrible cold. During one such incident he received a nasty gash to his knee, which caught on the gun mechanisms in the cramped turret.

After a short time in 'Civvy Street' Mick re-enlisted in the RAF. He was again a clerk until he managed to re-enter aircrew training, returning to his old trade as a rear gunner. He joined 97 Squadron at Hemswell where he was to fly in the Avro Lincoln. His first flight being on 8th January 1951. The squadron were involved in tests of the aircraft's abilities and various exercises. In May 1956 he transferred to 199 Squadron, also at Hemswell and still flying the Lincoln in the electronic counter-measures role. There is evidence in the logs that he made some flights to the Middle East via Eastleigh. Finally Mick's flying went full circle as he

finished his days at RAF Shawbury, which was home to the Central Navigation and Control School. He was flying again in the Avro Anson. His last flight is logged on 27th August 1957 when he acted as safety look-out in an Anson during a one hour flight. His two log books now show a total of 1412 daylight and 648 night hours in the air.

Cyril 'Mick' Bignall finally retired from the RAF in 1960. Although an active member of the Royal British Legion and founder member of the Tewkesbury RAFA, welfare officer and latterly their president and other clubs and organisations, he never got round to joining the Mildenhall Register. Wendy thinks he couldn't face meeting the men he remembered as being young.

He left a rather poignant poem; it was read at his funeral, which rather sums this all up. The final line was added by Wendy's husband Les.

"They fly on high, as once did I,
The Lanc, the Halifax, the Stirling too,
My thoughts run riot, I heave a sigh,
Their job is done, I miss my crew,
Skip, Ted, George and little Joe,
Des, Ken, all fine young men,
They are not here, where did they go,
They crowd my dreams, they've got the 'gen',
They know that we will meet again,
And so I breathe another sigh,
Because I am the one who did not die,
And now I know they fly on high,
As long ago, so did I,
And when you read this, so will I".

Geoff Reynolds

Letter from Wg Cdr Glen Campbell - RAAF Glenbrook NSW

By way of introduction I am the son of Cedric Frank Campbell, DFC. It is with sadness that I find I am writing to you at the moment. I perhaps should have written earlier, however, time seems to have "flown" by these past twelve months. Dad passed away on the 30 April 2008. Although he was unwell and we knew that his time with us was limited, it is still a great loss when one's loved one passes away. My mother Betty is still with us and although she has lost her soul mate she has not "thrown in the towel" so as to say. I speak with her daily and she is still as sharp as a tack with an opinion on all topics - particularly politics and how our leaders both achieve and otherwise.

Earlier this year I visited a friend of mine not far from your "HQ", in East Anglia a little east of Norwich, AVM John Howe retired. On driving too and from there I observed the sign to Mildenhall, sadly my program was a little tight and I did not have the opportunity to drop by - perhaps next time.

A Letter from John "Swiftly" Swallow 622 - Canada

Dear John, (Where have we heard that before?)

Good news and Bad news, the "Good" is that I am still alive and kicking. The "Bad" is that the re-union is just out of my reach this year (2009), I put off informing you because I was living in hope that I would make it, Linda is also very disappointed as she was so looking forward to seeing you all again and thinks you are all, very, very special. I think this is only the fifth time I have missed since they started in 1982, It's a long haul if you are not a 100% and if you leave the decision too late you are out of luck regarding accommodation at the Bird or Travelodge, maybe next time.

Is it possible to give a special Hi to my friends; Don Shellock, Arthur Edgeley, John and Elizabeth Cox, the Atkinson family, all the Committee members and let's not forget Taffy and his two girls.

Cheers! You are all the greatest. Take care John, have a good reunion, Will you please convey my best regards to everyone.

A letter from John Crago Australia

Thank you for your letter and newsletter for Winter 2008. I enjoy reading the newsletters - of particular interest was the article commemorating the loss of LS-W the on 22/3/45 which I remember well. As I recall the pilot (F Newton) was an elder brother of Bob, with whom I trained in Australia.

Please give my kind regards to Don Clarke whom we met on our two visits to the reunions. Congratulations on his election as Life President, he has worked so hard for the Register for such a long time.

Best wishes to the new committee for continuation of the newsletters -

Request for help- from Sam Bassford RAF (53-55)

I have been trying to find out more information on my relative, who was a Flt.Sgt. Nav with XV Sqn. I have so far only been able to glean information on where he is buried and date of his death. I would like to know such things as what was he was flying, why they crashed and where. The information I have is:-

Service no.1320866 Flt.Sgt. (Nav.) Eric William Spriggs RAFVR, XV Sqn, died (killed?) 21st.June 1944. Buried at Hounslow, Middx. Cemetery.

Correspondence

Thanks to all who wrote during the past year. I have attempted a brief résumé but please forgive me if you are not mentioned this time.

Do continue to keep in touch!

From XV Sqn:

Mrs Dengate, NSW, Australia, wife of **Frank Dengate**, DFC, **Fred Coney's** skipper writes that as much as they would like to attend reunions they are afraid they are not able to attempt the long flight again. **Jack Trend** provided much material about the Meerlo Memorial (see article). **Mrs Cillia Elford** writes to say that her husband **Norman** is blind due to glaucoma, both enjoy the newsletter and hope one day to send stories of Norman's experiences as a POW, **Alexander Lamb** has poor eyesight and would appreciate phone calls, **G H Broome** would love to attend reunions but at 84 finds the distances just to far so does **John Bishop** (Nav) as he and his Wife have mobility problems and **Victor Bingham** is now housebound. **Frank Chasemore**, Tasmania, Australia, has provided details of his Cousin, **Sgt Dennis Ward**, Flt Eng KIA Aug 44 as has **Brian Parker** of his Brother, **Flt Sgt G Parker** KIA Jun 44. **Arley Armstrong** (MUG) whose pilot was **John Cowell** RAAF informed us of the death of **Fg Off Lee Amesbury** of Connecticut. **J W Smyth** (B19 and Washingtons), **Alan Hayden** (Nav 43/44), **George Burnett**, **A J Chapman**, **John Hebb**, **D R Cox** (Bombing Ldr 44), **Doug Fry** (A/G 43), **Mrs Clare Cox**, Melbourne, Australia, widow of **Wg Cdr R E Cox** RAAF, **Joan Isaac**, niece of **Tommy Jones**, KIA May 44, **Mrs Beazley-Long**, wife of **Alfred Beazley-Long** (Flt Eng), **Mrs Margaret Whitehouse**, widow of **James H Whitehouse**, **Doug Fryer** (AG 1943) **Mrs Lucy Stone**, widow of **Fg Off P Cambers-Jones**, KIA May 44, **Sqn Ldr D A Boards** DFM (43-44), **Lawrence Nottage**, Western Australia, (Dec 44 -Jun 45), **Sheilagh Hills** the widow of **Geoffrey Harrison Hills** (Bomb Aimer) who flew with **Flt Lt Ken Fisher** also wrote. **Bill Golding** (Flt Eng 1947, Lancs & Lincolns) regrets the reunion weekend always clashes with a British Legion Bowls Event with which he is associated!

From 90 Sqn and others:

Mrs Phyllis Burrows writes that "I was the Sec / Typist to Gp Capt's Young & Bachelor and regularly dished out tea at debriefings after ops". **Mr William J H Williams's** sister informs us that **Mr Williams**, who was Station Control Assistant at Mildenhall 41-45, is now partially sighted and would be glad to hear from any old comrades. **Norman Didwell**, 99 Sqn Ground crew at Mildenhall before 1939 reported on 99 Veterans Gp & Association's reunion at Newmarket in 2009, whilst **Mrs Betty George** MBE writes to describe herself as a "Hanger-on to a pilot of

1940!" *one does wonder!* **Alan Cross**, who informed us of the death of **Flt Lt Mickey Morrissey**, served as a radar Wireless mechanic with Canadian 419 Sqn on Wellington 1 & 11 until they formed into 6 Gp and left Mildenhall in Aug 42. **Tony Shallish**, 3 Gp Comms Sqn (1959/60) had hoped to attend the reunion but was prevented at the last minute. **Iris Hillman** WAAF of Australia, spent 2 years as a Signals officer at Mildenhall, now blind but always enjoys the newsletter. **Joan Fitch**, widow of **Arthur James Fitch** wrote, she was a Nurse at Mildenhall. **Roy Copperwheat** is not well enough to attend reunions. We also heard from **Claude Peacock** (Dec 44-May 45), **John Martin**, 90 Sqn and post war XV Sqn, **Thomas Maxwell** DFC, **David Chapple** (90 Sqn) of NSW, Australia, **Mrs Joan Henry**, widow of **George Henry** (Aircrew), **Mrs Iris Wooldridge**, widow of **Harold (Rick) Wooldridge**, **Margot James**, widow of **Ken James**, **Keith Tutthill**, son of the late **Leslie G Tutthill**, **R F Murphy**, **Mrs Peggy Kidd**, Cpl RT Operator 41-45, **Ian Butters**, son in law of the late **Leslie Millett**, **Mr A R Palmer**, twin brother of **Flt Lt W E Palmer**, KIA Jun 44, **Mrs Betty Richardson**, close friend of **Sgt W A Geraghy**, killed in the crash of Lanc ED383 at Lakenheath Feb 44, **Mrs Eileen Silver**, WAAF, who was A/G W/OP at Mildenhall 1948/49 and associated with 149, 35 & 207 Sqns and **Mrs Eileen Ford Allan**, Brisbane, Australia, widow of **Fg Off Thomas Raymond (Ray) Allan** RAAF. **Keith Johnstone**, son of **Maurice Johnstone** writes to say that following a stroke his father is in a care home and he now reads the newsletter to his Father.

From 149 Sqn:

Dennis Mason has provided lots of information of his experiences; he completed 30 ops after volunteering in 1940. **Trevor Jordan** (WOP/AG) and **K W Prestidge** are not well enough to attend reunions and **Howard Briggs** could not attend due to ill health and time spent in hospital. **Flt Lt William Hill** sent details of all the crews he served with in 1940/41. We also heard from **Tommy Knox**, NSW, Australia, **K W Prestidge** and **Jim Smith** (Lakenheath 1943/44) who flew with Tom Danver's crew. **Joanna Perry** wrote about her Father, **Leslie Sines**, Gnd Crew (Fitter) with 149 & 15 Sqns (1939/41) before a posting to Iraq. It was sad to hear from **Mrs J Burke** that **Flt Lt Shoreman** is in a care home, he had flown with Colwyn Jones the subject of Stephen Harris's book mentioned earlier. We were also contacted by **Frank Parker** (Jun-Nov 41) from Winnipeg, Canada, **Stephen Briggs** (Nav) of Liverpool, **Mrs Luker**, Queensland, Australia, widow of **Wg Cdr John Luker** (Nav) author "As it Happens", John died in Aug 09 and took a great interest in the Register in Feb 09 he sent the Secretary an e-mail offering advice on the format of the Register's web site, **Mrs C Kemp**, widow of **Mr J A Kemp**, 149 radar section, Methwold, **Frederick Biggs** (Nav), **Fg Off Michael Tavernor** (Nav), **Vincent Taylor**, **Ivan Beale** who served at Methwold, Tuddenham and Stradishall, **John Mellor** (Signaller) 149 Sqn when transferred to Mildenhall in Feb

45, and then the same crew went to 15 Sqn in May 45. He also served on 35 Sqn from Apr 49 until demobbed Mar 50. **R K Frampton**, who now has severe mobility problems, provided many details of his wartime experiences, **Philip Brown** wrote of his Father, **Jim Brown** who served as an LAC in the workshops from Jan 40 - Mar 41.

From 622 Sqn:

Sqn Ldr Walter wrote to provide a great deal of information on his exploits, **Mrs Gloria Hansford**, widow of **Keith Atherton**, Ground Crew XV, 149 and 622 Sqn writes to say that she has been widowed for a second time, now 83, she was a WAAF wireless operator though not at Mildenhall. **Lincoln Shaw**, a MUG who flew on Operation Nantes 7/8 May 1944 is still a local journalist and has published articles on the Register. **Roy Davie of Vermont, USA** has sent a photograph of himself in uniform with his late wife Betty. He would like to know from where he could obtain a cloth blazer badge with a 622 Sqn emblem. Can anyone help? **Alfred Belson** 622 from Aug 43 and previously XV Sqn writes to say that he is now disabled and unable to attend the Reunion but is keenly interested in the Register. **William Richards** has sent a DVD about his wartime experiences. A letter is on file giving details of **William Lister's** service in **Jack Lunn's** crew. We are informed that **F R Sauntson**, also of 149 Sqn, received the Dutch Thank you for Freedom medal in 2006. **Stan (Nick) Nicholls**, Rear Gunner has sent photographs and press cuttings - he is now rather deaf. We have heard from **Eric Johnson** who was shot down in a Stirling returning from Berlin in Nov 43. He also flew with Wg Cdr Guy Gibson and Flt Lt Ken Denham. **Mrs Eileen Parsons**, widow of **M L G Parsons**, author of "Over Hell and High Water" has written in as have **Walter Milren** of Winnipeg (Aug - Dec 44), **Mrs Anne Doyle**, New York USA, widow of **James Doyle**, **G A K Monother** (Apr 44), **W D Wolfe** who flew a couple of uneventful trips to Potsdam and Bremen in 44, **Reg Heffon of S Australia**, (A/G, Aug -Dec 44), **Michael Coles** (A/G Dec 44), **S A Abbott** (Flt Eng), **Stephen Briggs** (Nav) and **Arthur Bourne** (Nav 44).

Have you considered putting your story into the next newsletter? We would help and would be delighted to hear of your experiences and recollections.

Important: The committee would be very grateful if you would return the application form for the reunion whether or not you will be attending in May. This is to help the Secretary in maintaining his records and to ensure we are sending the newsletter to the correct address.

The Reunion 14-17 May 2009 (i)



The 75th Flight Line: the day started wet!



Ralph Skilbeck, centre, a real character from Australia with new friends on the 75th



On the Queen Mary with our guide Barbara at East Kirkby



Eric Willis and his daughter Patricia in front of the East Kirkby Lanc



John Cox returns to a Lanc after 64 years!



A group photograph on the East Kirby Visit

The Reunion 14-17 May 2009 (ii)



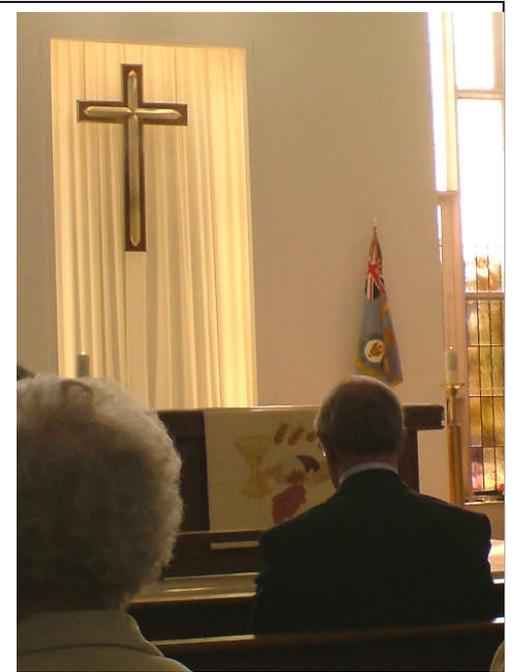
Table No 1 at the Reunion Dinner



At the Remembrance Service.



The Bomber Command Standard is marched in at the Reunion Dinner



The Standard at the Altar during the Sunday Remembrance Service



Members in conversation over coffee after the service



Preparing to say "au revoir" see you next year!



Charlie Woolford and Natalie Ebbs at the RAF Mildenhall's 75th



Jack Trend with XV Sqn Personnel at the Meerlo Memorial



Dame Vera with Jim Coman at Mildenhall Museum

Mildenhall Register Reunion 14-16 May 2009 - Registration Form

The Committee would be very grateful if you would return this form whether or not you intend coming to Mildenhall for this year's Reunion. Your co-operation would help greatly in keeping our records up to date to ensure that our annual Newsletter is sent to the correct address.

Name & Address:

e-mail address (if applicable):

Squadron No and Relationship to it:

I will be / will not be attending the Register's reunion in 2010.

If attending please indicate the events at which you will be present and the number of places required.

- a. **I require an evening meal in the Galaxy Club before the AGM** on
Fri 14th May. Tickets are £12 payable in advance Yes / No No of tickets _____

- b. **I require seats on the coach going to the Sat Museum visit.** Yes / No No of places _____

- c. **I will be attending the Reunion Dinner in the Galaxy Club** on
Sat 15th May. Tickets are £17 payable in advance Yes / No No of tickets _____

- d. **I will be attending the Chapel service** on Sunday 16th May at 9.30hrs
Yes / No No of places _____

Names of People in party:

Car Registration Number:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Continue on back if required

I enclose a cheque payable to the Mildenhall Register for £_____

(This is for the dinner(s) on Friday evening at £12 per head and / or Saturday evening at £17 per head)

Please return by 31 March to :

Geoff Reynolds, Mildenhall Register, 61 Salem Street, Gosberton, Lincs PE11 4NQ